



DE MORGAN, JACQUES

DE MORGAN, Jacques (b. Huisseau-sur-Cosson, near Blois, 3 June 1857, d. Marseilles, 14 June 1924), French archeologist and prehistorian. He came from an exceptionally gifted family, in which cultivation of humane learning was combined with scientific rigor. His father, Eugène, sometimes called “Baron” de Morgan, an engineer specializing in mineral prospecting, was interested in entomology and prehistory. He initiated his two sons, Henry, the elder, and Jacques, into fieldwork, excavating with them the Campigny fault near Rouen, which had lent its name to the first phase of the European neolithic. Through his father Jacques became acquainted with Gabriel de Mortillet, who was connected with the museum of national antiquities in Saint-Germain and who, during investigations of Merovingian cemeteries, taught him how to catalogue excavated objects. De Morgan wanted to be a professional geologist like his father, and his personal fortune had permitted him to travel and study abroad since his early youth. In 1879 he began to publish the results of his research, illustrated with drawings that were remarkable for their finesse and documentary precision. He received his final training at the École des Mines, from which he was graduated in 1882. He was then appointed to head a survey expedition to Scandinavia and subsequently conducted surveys in Germany, Austria, Turkey, India, and as far away as the kingdom of Perak in what is now West Malaysia. In this last area he took up geography and ethnology, mastering the physical anthropology and language of the Sakai blacks (de Morgan, 1886).

He went next to Russian Armenia, as manager of a copper mine at Akhtala. At



that time he believed that “the Caucasus is of special interest in the study of the origins of metals; it is the easternmost point from which prehistoric remains are known; older than Europe and Greece, it still retains the traces of those civilizations that were the cradle of our own” (Vachon-France) His interest in the eastern origins of civilization eventually led to neighboring Persia. The scientific reports that he wrote upon his return from the Caucasus were published in Paris in 1889-90 (*Mission scientifique au Caucase I. Études archéologiques et historiques. Les premiers âges des métaux dans l’Arménie russe; II. Recherches sur les origines des peuples du Caucase*). Immediately thereafter the French ministry of public education entrusted him with his first official mission to Persia. En route he paused to explore the necropolis at Telovan near Tbilisi, then went on to Tehran, whence he paid visits to Māzandarān, to Gīlān, and farther west to Ṭāleš, in order to study dialects. From Ṭāleš he traveled south across Kurdistan and Luristan, combining both geological and archeological investigations. He was the first to recognize, at Qaṣr-e Šīrīn, the presence of oil in the vast fold system of the Zagros. Although he had undertaken his mission on behalf of the French government, he conducted this survey out of friendship for the Persian government. At first, however, neither France nor Persia was interested, and it was only in 1320/1902 that exploitation began, under the leadership of the Englishman [William Knox D’Arcy](#).

De Morgan’s journey ended in Susiana, where he attempted to retrace the routes of the Assyrian campaigns in Elam. He remained for a long time at Susa (Šūš), from which the expedition led by [Marcel Dieulafoy](#) had departed six years earlier. In the vast field of ruins his curiosity was aroused particularly by the high mound known as the “citadel,” at the foot of which he recovered some flints and some very early potsherds. This discovery must have been decisive in leading him to reopen excavations at the site. Upon his return to Tehran he confided in the French minister, René de Balloy, who was eager to obtain for France a monopoly of archeological research in Persia. It took a little time, however, before these efforts, under de Morgan’s guidance, were successful. In the meantime he published his *Mission scientifique en Perse* (5 parts comprising 10 vols., Paris, 1894-1905), including four volumes of geological studies; two volumes of archeological studies on tombs and other monuments that were still visible; one volume devoted to Kurdish dialects and the languages of northern Persia; one volume of Mandaean texts; and two volumes of geographical studies.



After his return to France, in November 1891, he planned, once he had put his notes in order, to go back to Persia and to pursue his studies in the southern and eastern provinces. Before he could do so, however, he was invited to take over as acting director of the Egyptian antiquities service; he remained in this interim appointment until 1897. De Morgan's talents as an administrator and diplomat ensured his favorable reception by foreign, especially English, Egyptologists. He took up his post in 1892, and during the next five years he founded, with Giuseppe Botti, the museum of Greco-Roman antiquities at Alexandria; saved the temple of Kom Ombo (Kawm Ombū) from destruction; undertook publication of a general catalogue of the monuments and inscriptions of ancient Egypt; and, just before his departure, laid the cornerstone for the Cairo museum of ancient Egyptian antiquities (de Morgan, 1895; idem, 1896). His exploration of the pyramids of Dashur (Dahšūr) brought to light the royal treasures of the Middle Kingdom. But, as always, his primary personal interest was in prehistory, and he can be considered the father of prehistoric archaeology in Egypt. He began excavation of the extremely important Proto-Dynastic site of Nagada (Naqqāda); unfortunately, however, he entrusted the continuation of the work to Émile Amélineau, who proceeded with disastrous clumsiness (for details of de Morgan's career in Egypt, see Vachon-France).

In the meantime, in 1312/1895 Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah (1264-1313/1848-96) had signed a treaty granting to France a monopoly of archeological exploration in Persia. The *Délégation en Perse* (see [DÉLÉGATIONS ARCHÉOLOGIQUES FRANÇAISES i](#)) was then established under the French ministry of public education and fine arts, and its direction was entrusted to de Morgan; he was chosen over Dieulafoy, who never forgave him. De Morgan left Egypt in 1897 with the intention of creating a "French archeological service" in Persia, in order "to investigate these little-known regions from every scientific vantage point." He decided, however, to concentrate most of his own efforts at the site of Susa, in order to further knowledge of Elamite civilization, as opposed to that of the Achaemenid Persians, whom he considered lacking in originality—a debatable judgment, to say the least—and to that of the Medes, who had "never written their history," a conclusion that still stands.

In fact, from de Morgan's own writings it seems clear that he was less interested in Elamite history than in the overall prehistory of the East. In 1902 he declared: "In the Nile valley I developed the conviction that the first civilizations, from which the Egyptian empire arose, came from Chaldea and



that the Mesopotamian plains had therefore been the cradle of human progress. Susa, because of its very early date, provided the possibility of solving the greatest and most important problem, that of our origins. This city, in my view, belonged to that primordial world that had witnessed the discovery of writing, the use of metals, the beginnings of art. If the great problem of origins was to be solved one day, it was in Chaldea, and especially at Susa, that it was necessary to seek the basic elements” (1902, p. 16).

It was probably this primary interest in “origins,” rather than in historical periods, that led de Morgan to decide, before he had even begun to excavate, that he did not “have to deal with well-preserved monuments that require careful delineation; the ruins were amorphous, and the remains of superimposed walls showed traces of a series of total destructions of the city. . . . It was thus necessary to undertake a general exploration of the site, without taking into account the natural strata, which cannot be recovered” (1900, pp. 50-51). He thus divided the enormous mound of the acropolis, which was at that time 30-35 m high, into sections, each 5 m wide and 5 m deep, which constituted the first “level”; below them similar trenches were excavated, constituting the earliest “levels.” From the beginning of his work, then, de Morgan, despite his exceptional cultivation and dedication, condemned the architectural remains at Susa to total destruction for all time; the excavation consisted simply of removing an estimated 2,450,000 m³ of dirt, as in any public-works project. De Morgan imposed his method, backed by considerable means, on a small team, the most competent members of which were two former colleagues from Egypt, Gustave Jéquier, in particular, and J. E. Gautier. For work on texts he had called upon the Dominican father Vincent Scheil, a renowned Assyriologist.

The team began work in December 1897, but it had to contend with attacks by plunderers, who carried out their depredations without restraint in a province that was mostly out of the control of the central government. To ensure the safety of the expedition and its finds, de Morgan built an enormous castle of medieval aspect on the northernmost point of the acropolis. Wanting to obtain as soon as possible an idea of the sequence of periods, he had dug at the southern tip a series of five successive soundings, which revealed at the bottom traces of an archaic civilization with fine ceramics and above it an apparently derivative civilization with “crude” painted ceramics, both from before the historical periods of Elam. His far too brief summary report on this sounding was to be repeated almost without change in the final excavation



report published ten years later (1912).

Meanwhile work in the trenches was yielding impressive results, as masterpieces of Babylonian civilization, captured by the Elamites as spoils of war, began to appear. The victory stele of Naram-Sin and a series of Kassite *kudurrus* (“boundary stones”) were intermingled with masterpieces of Elamite metalwork and sculpture. In 1318/1900 Moẓaffar-al-Dīn Shah (1313-24/1896-1907) signed a supplementary treaty granting to France all the antiquities discovered at Susa. And the discoveries continued, crowned by the appearance of the stele bearing the law code of Hammurabi. They were published, starting in 1900, in *Mémoires de la Délégation en Perse* (M.D.P.).

As work at Susa was carried on in the winter, Henry and Jacques de Morgan used the summers to resume excavation of the late Bronze and Iron Age cemeteries in Tāleš. The publication (“Recherches au Talyche persan,” in *M.D.P.* VIII, 1905, pp. 251-341) shows that, in the field of prehistory, de Morgan was a good archeologist. At Susa, on the other hand, the “investigations” had become tedious, and he often abandoned direction of the work to his colleagues. In 1322/1903-04 the temples of Inshushinak and Ninhursag of Susa were badly excavated; then, in 1324/1906, virgin soil was reached in the necropolis, revealing clearly both the beauty of the archaic ceramics and the presence of copper, which indicated a date later than had been expected. Disappointed, de Morgan had, in addition, to face the hostility of certain colleagues and in France the very unjust accusation of laxity in the financial management of the mission. He thus decided not to return to Susa after 1325/1907. His health shattered, he resigned from the mission in 1912.

He had previously entrusted to the Hellenist Edmond Pottier the task of publishing the pottery from Susa, though the information on periodization that he provided for Pottier was as false as it was sketchy, basically limited to the succession of two “styles” of pottery (“Étude historique et chronologique sur les vases peints de l’acropole de Suse,” in *M.D.P.* XIII, Paris, 1912, pp. 27-103). On the other hand, he devoted himself to synthetic publications, primarily on prehistory but also on oriental numismatics. His major works remain *L’humanité préhistorique* (Paris, 1921) and especially the three-volume *La préhistoire orientale* (Paris, 1925-27), which appeared posthumously. Salomon Reinach was charged with providing, in *Revue archéologique* (1924), a detailed assessment of the career and personality of Jacques de Morgan, who was a great archeologist but made the mistake, characteristic of his time, of undertaking as a prehistorian work on a historical site like Susa. The world



owes to him exceptional collections of artifacts irreparably deprived of their archeological contexts. (For a complete bibliography of De Morgan's publications, comprising more than 130 works, see Vachon-France.)

Figure 1. Principal monograms of the coins of the Arsacids of Persia (de Morgan, *Manuel*, p. 149, fig. 147).

Figure 2. Principal monograms of the coins of the Arsacids of Persia (de Morgan, *Manuel*, p. 150, fig. 147, continuation).

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