



PERROT, JEAN

PERROT, JEAN (b. Besançon, France, 10 June 1920; d. Paris, 26 December 2012; [Figure 1](#)), French archeologist and the last director of the Délégation Archéologique Française en Iran (1968-83).

Jean Perrot was born in a small village near Besançon in eastern France. His parents were both schoolteachers, and he was the eldest of five boys. On finishing secondary school, he was awarded a grant for a field trip to Madagascar. The boat that he took for the trip passed through the Suez Canal, giving Perrot a chance to have a close view of the landscapes of the East. This voyage left a deep impression on Perrot, initiating an interest in the East and its history.

In 1939, Perrot moved to Paris to attend École Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs. Shortly thereafter, in pursuit of his interest in the East, he took courses in Oriental archaeology at the École du Louvre with André Parrot and René Dussaud. He also attended similar courses at the École Pratique des Hautes Études. In 1945, he was granted a scholarship from the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres to study archaeology at the École Biblique et Archéologique de Jérusalem in Palestine. Père Roland de Vaux was his primary supervisor in Jerusalem, but later on René Neuville, the French consul general in Jerusalem, advised him to focus his research and fieldwork on prehistory. Neuville, an excellent amateur pre-historian who had long been excavating in Palestine, taught Perrot rigorous courses in methodology, which at that time were by far unknown to Oriental archeologists. In 1947, Perrot returned to France and joined the Centre National de la Recherche



Scientifique (CNRS). Throughout his career Perrot kept his affiliation with the CNRS, where he organized human and material resources needed for the expansion of archeological research in the Middle East.

He was in charge of a great number of excavations in Palestine/Israel until 1968, mostly on sites dating to the Upper Paleolithic and Neolithic, the millennia preceding and following upon the domestication of animals and plants. His most important scientific contribution of those years concerns the modalities of that process. In order to widen his knowledge and improve his methods, he returned to France in 1950 and took courses with the eminent scientists André Leroi-Gourhan, prehistorian and anthropologist, and François Bordes, an expert in the typology of stone tools.

Following up chance discoveries, Perrot started in 1956 excavations at Mallaha in northern Israel at an open-air site dating from the 8th millennium and preceding the invention of pottery, as well as excavations on 4th-millennium sites (Chalcolithic). His publications caught the attention of the archeologist Robert John Braidwood, who invited him in 1958 to take part at his seminar at the [Oriental Institute](#) in Chicago. From the beginning of their long-lasting friendship, Perrot learned in particular that it was important not to limit his field of research only to one site, but to take into consideration a whole region, as Braidwood did in Anatolia and later on in the Zagros. He also became committed to the idea that the archeologist must not only work in the field to provide the specialists with samples to be studied in the laboratories, but also must bring out into the field geologists, physical anthropologists, botanists, zoologists, etc. This was perfectly reflected some years later by the creation by Perrot and Bernard Vandermeersch of the journal *Paléorient*, as was immediately acknowledged (Braidwood).

Perrot applied those methods first at Mallaha, where he would show that human sedentariness was not linked to agriculture and to the raising of animals, but preceded those major phenomena by several millennia. Concerning the subsequent periods, the excavations at Munhata in the Jordan valley, between 1962 and 1967, were of prime importance as they exposed four successive phases belonging to the Pre-Pottery Neolithic B (PPNB), between 6500 and 5500 BCE. Those activities were supplemented by excavations on 4th-millennium sites that illustrated the way of life and the movements of the pastoral population in the Negev desert and along the Palestinian coast (Perrot, 1968).



Based on this comprehensive experience and on the numerous reports of his own digs as well as those of his colleagues from Israel and the United States, Perrot wrote a first synthesis that would long remain unparalleled, and a comprehensive book on that subject (Perrot, 1968; idem, 1978; Dollfus and Vandermeersch). He kept interested in those matters throughout his life (e.g., see Perrot, 1983; idem, 2000). In order to create a framework for his research and to raise funding, he founded the Mission Archéologique Française en Israël; he then was joined by a team from the CNRS and was entrusted with the shaping of the Centre de Recherches Préhistoriques Français de Jérusalem (www.crfj.org), a joint venture of the CNRS and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; the Jerusalem center slowly grew and incorporated students and young researchers in prehistory, before it also took in others of more recent periods and other fields.

Perrot's main period of activities in Iran started in earnest in 1968, five years before he had the opportunity to visit the excavations of Frank Hole at 'Alikoš in Dehlorān and those of Roman Ghirshman in Susa. Ghirshman invited him in 1963 to do soundings on the 'high terrace' of 4th-millennium Susa; however, the interlude was short, as the methodology observed by one completely differed from the technique used by the other. Ghirshman followed the traditional method, although in a much more exact way than any of his predecessors since Jacques de Morgan, whereas Perrot used modern methodology. Nevertheless, when Ghirshman retired, Perrot was entrusted, in 1967, with the direction of the excavations in Susa. Ghirshman continued to dig elsewhere in the region until 1972, namely, at Masjed-Soleymān and [Bard-e Neshandeh](#).

As the head of the [Délégation Archéologiques Françaises](#) (DAFI), an institution which had in fact been limiting its work in Susa and in Susiana, Perrot radically transformed the functioning and the methods of the mission. Ghirshman's team used to comprise just an architect, an epigraphist, Père Marie-Jean Steve, and sometimes an assistant; from 1970, Perrot's team grew very quickly to about a dozen members, then to several dozen, with each member specializing in one of the periods of Susa's five millennia of occupation. The teams in charge of an excavation area annually spent two or three months in the field, sometimes more. According to need, experts might stay for shorter terms; there were geologists, experts in lithic tools, geophysicists (a novelty in Iran), botanists, and zoologists. Perrot was on the spot, but he used to delegate the direction of the excavation areas, including



the writing of reports and articles, to the archeologists, even to the youngest.

Perrot was, above all, interested in the beginnings of man's sedentariness; in a program extending over ten years (1969-79) he adapted his objectives to the special case of Susa (see [SUSA i](#)). Susa and its surroundings provided an exceptional opportunity for the study, in Susiana, of the history of occupation since the 8th millennium, then, towards 4000 BCE, the birth of the town of Susa and its development until the historical epochs ([Elamite](#), [Achaemenid](#), [Parthian](#), [Sasanian](#), Islamic) and down to its abandonment in the 13th century during the [Il-Khanid](#) period. Perrot, a scholar of the prehistory epoch, noticed that his predecessors, except Ghirshman, had neglected the last two millennia of the town's life; so he focused his scholarship on these, as well as on the ancient periods, in programs of several years' duration (Perrot et al., 1978; idem, 1985). With regard to the millennia preceding the foundation of Susa, the sites Tepe Jaffarabad (Ja'farābād) and Tepe Jowi (Jovi), which, before World War II, had been sounded without the use of any strict methodology, were carefully examined. The beginnings of Susa in the 4th millennium revealed aspects, not well understood until then, of early documents of accounting, then of writing that were contemporary with but different from those of neighboring Mesopotamia (Perrot, 1998).

Leaving aside the end of the 3rd and the 2nd millennium, which had been widely studied by Ghirshman, Perrot's program began at the Neo-Elamite epoch of Susa and provided information that since the 1980s has proven to be of the highest importance in studying the formation of the Achaemenid Empire. It was precisely that period which interested Perrot during the last years of DAFI in Iran, and also in the last years of his life. The palace of [Darius I](#), despite its fame in the historical texts and the discovery of architectural elements such as the capitals of columns and the friezes of polychrome glazed bricks that had been taken to the Louvre towards the close of the 19th century, was still very little known. Built with fewer stones than [Persepolis](#) and badly excavated by former field directors, the palace was like a puzzle with many pieces lacking. Perrot accepted the challenge and began researching the existing hints. Due to his painstaking way of digging and to his intuition, the plan of the palace was completed in 1978, after important new elements that had been looked for were discovered. At the entrance to the palace, the Gate of Darius was brought to light. It evoked the gate at Persepolis and finally provided the clue to how the palace was accessed. With the statue of Darius, the first Achaemenid sculpture in the round had been discovered, which was

made even more fascinating by texts in the three cuneiform languages of the empire and in Egyptian hieroglyphs (see DARIUS iii). The statue had been made in Egypt and might have been placed near Darius's canal, but was later brought to Susa by Xerxes I (Figure 2). On the base, the peoples of the empire were represented in their respective costumes and each given their proper name; in this way it was possible to confirm the occasional hypothetical identifications in Persepolis.

Perrot researched the relationship between the town and the palace of Darius. He discovered that the access at the gate consisted of a bridge made of mud bricks and that the bridge had been preceded by another monumental gate on the Ville Royale tell (Perrot, Ladiray, and Vallat). Beyond that, he explored the enclosure of Susa at the periphery of the tells and corrected its rather imaginary course proposed by Marcel Dieulafoy, the first French excavator at Susa in 1885-86 (Dieulafoy). Yet another palace was discovered by chance outside the town and excavated in those years, probably a pleasure palace erected by Artaxerxes II (see SUSA iii). Ghirshman had explored the Seleucid, Parthian, and Sasanian epochs, but Susa lived on for another six centuries, a long period poorly documented archeologically. Perrot's program was sure to include the Islamic period by a stratigraphic excavation on the Apadana tell and by extensive excavations on the tell of the Artisans, where he determined the ground plan of an 8th-century mosque—a plan including a courtyard in front of the prayer hall—and a *kānaqāh* of the late 10th century (Kervran and Rougeulle).

Perrot initiated deep-reaching changes in the functioning of the archeological mission. Jean Perrot and Firuz Bagherzadeh, the new director of the Iranian Centre for Archeological Research, very soon agreed to dispense altogether with the partition of finds, a procedure followed since the law of 1930 and belonging to a bygone epoch. Together with Bagherzadeh, Perrot decided to turn Susa into a training ground for Iranian students and young archeologists, the future directors of Iranian missions. Their cooperation with the Iranian institutions and archeologists was exemplary. Perrot also welcomed students from Europe and the United States in his team at Susa. The “castle” that Jacques de Morgan had built in 1897 had to be remodeled in order to house the annual mission, which might include up to 40 participants.

Perrot's bibliography concerning Iran does not reflect his activities as the director of a large archeological mission. He put great trust in the members of his team and very soon let them publish under their own names. He also



devised the media needed to publish the research outcome; for example, the *Cahiers du Centre de recherche français de Jérusalem* for Palestine archaeology, as well as the collections of the *Cahiers de la DAFI*, fifteen volumes of which appeared (1971-87) during and after the excavations in Susa and the neighboring sites, besides the large number of articles published in national and international journals. In 1973, with the aid of Werner-Gren Foundation, Perrot founded *Paléorient* as an international journals dedicated to the prehistory of the Near East, and he functioned as its co-director until 1994. In order to make the excavation results known to a wider public, together with members of the Susa mission, he published articles in the French magazine *Archeologia* and in special issues of the *Dossiers d'archéologie* (see Bibliography). After his retirement, he directed a dozen issues of that magazine on subjects dealing with the Near East, and he wrote on Near East prehistory. He also wrote in *Paléorient*, often in collaboration with Yusuf Majidzadeh, on the discoveries at [Jiroft](#) (Perrot, 2006; Perrot and Majidzadeh, 2003a-b, 2004, and 2005). He felt bound to publish his fruitful research on the palace of Darius. In 2010, he edited *Le Palais de Darius à Suse*, which contains chapters contributed by him. An English version, translated by Gérard Collon, was published a few months after Perrot's death (Perrot, 2013a); there appeared, also posthumously, a slim personal volume on the same subject for a wider audience (Perrot, 2013b).

As a prehistorian, archeologist, builder of research institutions, founder of publication series, Perrot put all his energy in the service of Near Eastern archaeology. He taught and trained many French archeologists. With elegance and generosity he entrusted his young colleagues at an early age with the responsibility for their research in the field as well as its publication. From the 1970s, he took part in the evolution of Iranian archeologists, and until his death he took an interest in the future of the new generation. He published his memoirs of fifty years of archeological research (Perrot, 1997).

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