

NEWSLETTER

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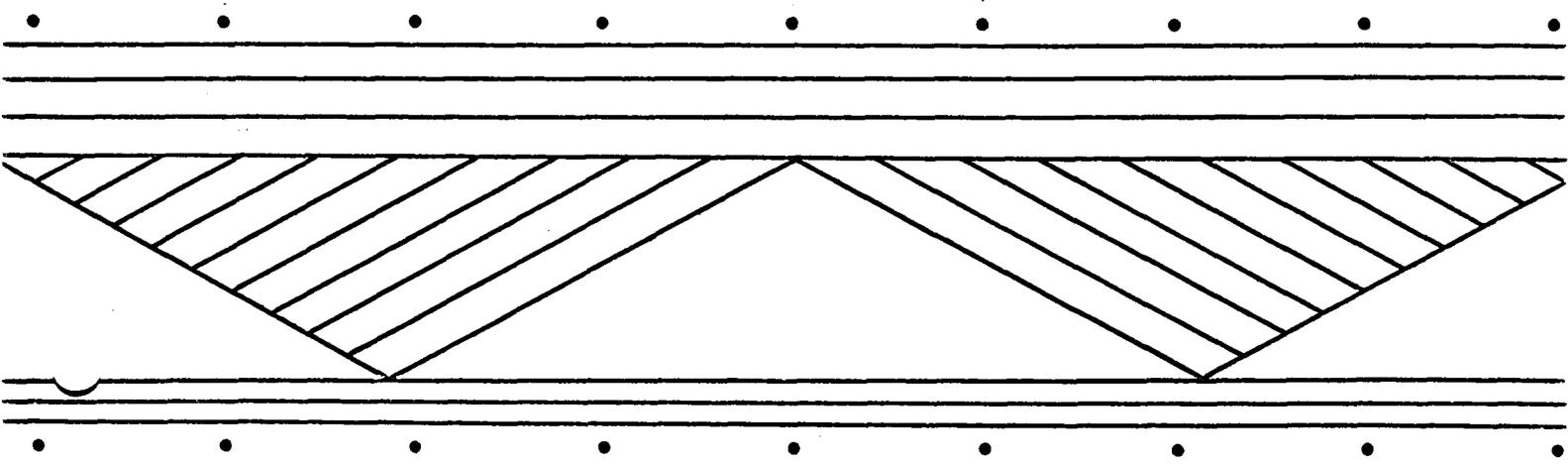
HOUSTON ARCHEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

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" - the fact remains that more complex societies, involving an ever greater subdivision of labour and social function, could only emerge because certain groups of prehistoric men transformed the basis of their food supply and crossed the threshold of systematic agriculture and stock-raising. How far modern man is right to equate greater complexity with progress, in any absolute sense is a question for philosophers. One certain way in which he has advanced over his primitive forebears, let alone over other animals, is in his capacity to range widely over time. He betrays his superiority as much in his quest for his own prehistory as in his exploration of outer space and his plans for his own future."

-- Grahame Clark



The Newsletter is published four times per year by the Houston Archeological Society. Contributions of news items, short articles and information of archeological significance should be sent to the Editor - Alan R. Duke, 1706 Oaks Drive, Pasadena, Texas 77502.

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Front Cover

This quotation is from Grahame Clark's "The Stone Age Hunters". McGraw-Hill, N.Y. 1967. Professor Clark attempts to show how a study of surviving or recently surviving peoples can provide important information on how our ancestors lived.

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Past and Future Programs

November 1968 - Jay Sharp discussed "Surveying and Mapping Archeological Sites".

December 1968 - Discussion of the current excavations of the Houston Archeological Society and on the possibility of further survey work in the Livingston Reservoir area.

January 1969 - Mrs. Lydia Skeels, currently studying at Rice University, discussed her current work on the ethnohistory of Texas Indians. Mrs. Skeels has a Masters degree in Archeology from the University of Calgary, Canada.

February 1969 - To be announced.

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Activities of HAS Members

As a matter of information for HAS members who are not members of the TAS, Lou Fullen was elected a director of the Texas Archeological Society for 1968-69. Charlie Chandler was elected Regional Vice-President (Region No. 5) of the TAS at the same time - a post previously filled by Lou. Looks like the HAS is well represented in the TAS.

Livingston Reservoir Site Survey

Twenty members of the HAS met with Dick Hsu, Survey Archeologist for the State Building Commission, on Saturday morning, January 18th at Cold Springs High School for a training session and briefing prior to starting another site survey of the Livingston Reservoir. After lunch, the actual survey was started along the south edge of the lake. The ground was wet and the air foggy and it was not possible to work too far into the flood plain but the hillsides were covered well and two sites were found and recorded during the afternoon.

Sunday, the turn-out was not as large but an additional five sites were located. Bill and Louise Caskey, who hold the undisputed championship for locating sites in the Reservoir area, found three of these sites even though they arrived late and could not locate the main group.

The following members braved the elements (mud and fog) to participate in the survey: Ann Childers, Kerza Pickworth, the Medlins, Fullens and Chandlers, Wayne Meddley, the Rockfords, Kay Evans, the Caldwelles, Jay and Steve Sharp, the Chriscos and the Caskeys.

Anyone who did not attend the initial survey sessions and who desires to participate in the survey should contact Lou Fullen at 479-3748. He will advise areas to be covered. Site survey forms are available from Lou or Charlie Chandler. Surveys can be made at your convenience - either during the week or on a week-end. The time is short - the Reservoir is filling fast and there is much work to be done!

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Letter from Leakey

Your Editor received a letter recently from Dr. Louis B. Leakey outlining the many activities under way at Olduvai, Lake Rudolf, Fort Ternan, Rusinga and other African sites. Apparently a number of the new discoveries from these sites will be covered in publications during 1969.

Dr. Leakey has permitted his name to be used in establishing the recently organized L.S.B. Leakey Foundation for Research Related to Man's Origin. The new American Foundation has dedicated its existence to assisting research related to man's origin.

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Excavations in Iran

Dr. Frank Hole and family have been in Iran since last Fall and we were happy to receive the initial account of his work over there. Frank will remain in Iran until September 1969 and hopefully will be sending us further information on his very important investigations. Here is a four page resume of archeology in Iran ---

NEWSLETTER

Rice University Archeological Project in Iran

November 15, 1968

We have just completed six weeks of work at Chagha Sefid (White Fort), an archeological site situated about 1-1/2 miles south of the town of Deh Luran. It is still premature to discuss all of the implications of what we have found but I can give a brief review of the way things look now. A more elaborate discussion must wait until we have had time to analyze all of the data. At the moment we are innundated by potsherds and must stay up late at night just to get them all marked and our bags emptied for the next day's work.

At Chagha Sefid we are attempting to fill a gap in the chronological sequence for the area that we set up after our last season's work at Ali Kosh and Tepe Sabz. The gap, which falls between 5000-6000 BC represents a time when a host of agricultural innovations arrived in the Deh Luran plain. For example, irrigation agriculture, domesticated cattle and dogs, and better strains of grain were introduced into the local subsistence. In addition striking changes in pottery indicated more sophisticated techniques of manufacture and firing. The agricultural changes meant that the people had a more dependable and abundant source of domesticated food. The time of the Sabz Phase, beginning somewhat before 5000 BC is when the agricultural base on which the civilizations of Mesopotamia grew was established. It is our purpose in digging this season to discover the sequence leading up to the well-established agriculture of the Sabz Phase.

Our work in 1963, which defined the Sabz Phase left blank any possible transition leading to it. The next earlier phase we had found, the Mohammad Jaffar, was clearly not directly transitional to the Sabz. This raised the possibility that the local tradition was interrupted by an incursion of people bearing new agricultural techniques and new skills in making pottery. If this were the case we should have to look elsewhere for the story of the development of agriculture during this critical period.

Using our knowledge of the kinds of artifacts found in the Mohammad Jaffar and Sabz Phases, we postulated what transitional material would look like. We then looked for such material in our surface collections from sites in the Deh Luran plain. Chagha Sefid seemed to be the most likely site in which to dig, for it had artifacts that fitted our postulated types. Immediately upon our arrival here we went again to Chagha Sefid and carefully examined the surface for pottery and other artifacts to see if we could find places on the site that should be tested. A site the size of Chagha Sefid has a lot of material in it that is of no concern to us and we wished to avoid as much of this later material as possible. We selected two eroded areas that had abundant pottery for our initial test pits. Our choices proved good for we hit early material immediately below the surface.

To begin, Jim Neely and I dug 3 x 5 meter pits just to see what was in the site. Since both pits hit early material we continued them. Jim's pit was taken down only a short way (about 2.5 meters) before it hit the Mohammad Jaffar deposit which we had not expected to find in the site. This then gave us a good stratigraphic link with the as yet unnamed phase that follows Mohammad Jaffar. In the meantime I opened up another pit and immediately found early material of a type different from what Jim was finding and numerous rock founded houses with paved courtyards. In view of the easy

accessibility of the architecture I enlarged the pit to 5 x 6 meters and will open up much more before we are finished. The several layers of houses were built on top of a rich midden chock full of pottery, bones, labrets, figurine and a new kind of artifact that has not been seen before.

The midden shows a development of pottery and may prove to contain two or three recognizable phases. At the bottom of the midden we have apparently hit the Mohammad Jaffar Phase with its very characteristic soft pottery with designs painted in red ochre. Again we seem to have managed to obtain a stratigraphic link with the Mohammad Jaffar Phase. As a consequence we should have the early end of the development we sought very neatly defined. A description of the details of this development will have to wait until the artifacts have been studied but it will contain a number of surprises for those who have worked in southwest Iran.

In addition to the pottery we are of course getting many more kinds of things. Of particular interest to us are the fine radiocarbon samples that will help us date the new phases as well as the Mohammad Jaffar, and carbonized seeds that will tell the story of developing agriculture. In the spring Jane Renfrew will come to Iran to study the seeds. We also have splendid collections of animal bones which even to my unpracticed eye show clearly a trend toward the greater use of domesticated sheep and goats as time passes. Cattle may also be present and if so it will be interesting to see if the significant changes in agriculture arrived with them.

Our problems at present are to link our new phases with the Sabz Phase which is apparently only lightly represented on Chagha Sefid and to open up extensive areas of houses where these can be obtained with a minimum of effort. If time permits we will also dig through the Mohammad Jaffar midden to see if we find the same sequence as at Ali Kosh. The probability is that we will find still earlier pottery if the sequence in this area parallels that found in mountain valleys of west Iran. It now appears that Chagha Sefid had a larger early occupation than any other site we have found on the Deh Luran plain and it would be reasonable to expect to find earlier material than Mohammad Jaffar in this favorable location.

The complexity of material from our new finds is surprising and certainly suggests that the sequence we set up previously, especially for the pre-Sabz Phases may be too simple. This points up clearly the importance of continuing work in a relatively small area like the Deh Luran Plain. There is little doubt now that we will have to revise our chronology somewhat because the changes of phases probably occur more rapidly than we had expected.

The work so far must be termed very successful. In fact we are getting more and better material than we had expected. With another six weeks or so of digging ahead of us we can confidently expect to solve many of the problems we had outlined prior to digging although it seems equally clear that we will raise new ones that require further work.

While the digging continues at Chagha Sefid, Jim Neely has begun his survey of sites in and around Deh Luran. His major interest is in irrigation features and how they relate to settlement pattern but he is also gathering basic data that will be of value in planning future work. For example, he has definitely identified a site that has a link between Sabz Phase and our early material. We will make a small test in this site, probably later this month.

Jim is working out the system for doing the surface survey that we will follow when we move from Deh Luran for the second phase of our operations-- an intensive survey in Khuzistan proper. He is working chiefly with Elizabeth Carter, a graduate student at the Oriental Institute who has an independant project that overlaps with ours. Her expertise on later periods complements our own interest in prehistoric sites. Jim has also been working part of the time with Nathalie Berset, a student at the College de Fracce who divides her time between work on the Chagha Sefid ceramics and survey.

At Chagha Sefid I have been working with Bonnie Laird, a Rice student. In the evenings we all work on the enormous job of processing the artifacts. The procedure in outline is that Barbara directs the washing of all the bags of artifacts as they come in from the field. In the evenings we sort the pottery, bones, chipped stone and other artifacts and mark them, resorting pottery as we go along. The bones are bagged awaiting the arrival of Jane Wheeler while the remainder of the things will be studied while we are here. We are unable to do much final analysis while the dig is going but heavy rains which seem imminent may delay us long enough to do some catching up. In any case, we have set up the project so that final processing can be done after the survey if necessary. The basic recording is done immediately but we are too short-handed to do much more.

Our domestic arrangements would seem too good to be true to those who have been to Deh Luran before. We are comfortably housed in a large native compound surrounded by a high mud wall. After some extensive rennovation we now have houses for everyone, a lab, dining room and a large storage building. Although we have no refrigeration we do have a fine stove run on bottled gas that is a considerable improvement over the old kerosene burners we have used in the past. Technology and modern times have left us somewhat at a loss, however. For example, we were unable to find a refrigerator run on kerosene and we have not been able to locate an oven to use with the kerosene stove Henry Wright left us. Ovens are not available for the table top variety bottled gas stoves. Moreover, we had to search high and low to buy even used pressure lanterns. New ones are just not available. Electricity is available in Deh Luran and we are wired but the supply is unpredictable and runs only in the evening if at all. It is clearly impractical to count on it and the power is so low the bulbs just sort of glow.

After a comedy of trying to find a cook we landed one 30 minutes before leaving for Deh Luran. Parvis is a very bright young man who is doing well in the kitchen with constant supervision from Barbara. Unfortunately for us he will be inducted in the Army at the end of the year. Our domestic staff also includes rustic Rustam who once boiled tar for a living but now feeds his family on the proceeds derived from working for us. He has a donkey that hauls our drinking water and makes one run a day to the site to pick up pottery and grinding stones. He is extremely useful because he knows exactly what we want around the house, having worked for us previously. Farhan is another native of Deh Luran who has worked for us since our first trip here in 1961. His chief duties are to wash sherds, keep the lanterns working, fill the shower tank with salt water that usually runs through our yard and keep the compound clean. We also have our landlor Vali, who has supervised the construction and rennovations. His skills with mud and his interest in working it are impressive. When Barbara is not tutoring our children in their lessons she has the unenviable task of supervising the work around the house. This includes getting the meals prepared, having the water pumped through the filters, seeing that the laundry gets done, and who knows what all. Only one who has lived here and understands the complications of getting even the simplest task accomplished can appreciate her full-time job.

November 22, 1968

The preceding was written a week ago. Since then we have gone through the first major rain of the season. The rain was anticipated but its volume was not. The day of the rain I decided to take a trip to the big cave in the mountains behind Deh Luran to inspect its potential for excavation and for a picnic on our day off. Although the morning was threatening we set off for the brief excursion anyway because spare time is a commodity we lack entirely. We scrambled to the cave in a light shower, did our surface pick up of artifacts and then headed up the canyon to see the sites when the rain stopped. Before long, however, it began to rain buckets and we decided to return with all possible haste before we would be unable to drive back to town. By the time we had regained our Land Rover, we were all thoroughly drenched and cold and every rivulet, stream and river between us and town was raging with water. The usual route was completely impassable so we drove, most of the way in 4-wheel drive, up and down the steep hills at the foot of the mountains searching a way back. It took us about two hours to get back to the road and just as we were about to get on it a deep water course bogged us down. Out we got in the downpour and after much digging and dropping rocks under the wheels we got across and back to our compound which by this time was a sodden mess. Fortunately we have dry houses but our yard and much of our equipment was a mess. The rain continued for the remainder of the day and effectively put us out of commission for work for a day.

The next day the sun shone and we managed to dry our gear and patch the leaks. The following day we went back to the site. The rain damage from this storm was much worse than we have found in our previous excavations that have been exposed for 5 years. Water was standing in the bottom and thick layers of mud covered everything. It took us the better part of one day just to clear an area to work in and the deep pit was unfit for work for three more days. Since then the days have been warm and sunny and we have just completed another 5 days of good digging. An idea of the size of the ran can be gained from this statistic. A lake some 5 feet deep and 3/4 mile long is still standing around Mussian, a large site near here.

As I write this the clouds are building up again. Tomorrow early I will go to town to mail this letter and buy supplies. Hopefully it will not rain before my return or my trip to town will be longer than expected because the Daiwarij River cannot be forded for several days after a heavy rain.

Time passes much more quickly here than we imagine. We make trips to town about every two weeks but we are so fully occupied that the end of the fortnight comes with some surprise. With the new road and bridges in the trip is much less onerous than previously yet it takes an overnight trip to accomplish anything in town. There are always things to be made in the bazaar, a trip to the bank, buying groceries and the like, all of which tasks take much longer here than they would in the States where one stop shopping has become routine.

So much for this letter which has been written in bits and pieces and as with most of our activities here, in haste. We are looking forward to the coming of the remainder of our field crew by the end of the year. Before we have had time to think about it Christmas will be upon us and the digging should be about over. In another month or so or when something worth reporting happens I'll write again.

Frank Hole