

Della Burke '25
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MUSEUM FIELDWORK

CHESHMEH ALI

ARCH 425: Praxis III Independent Study

Cheshmeh Ali: the site and material

- Dates to the Transitional Chalcolithic Period (c. 5300-4300 BCE)
- Located in Iran's Tehran Plain
 - A part of the larger site Rayy
- Excavated in the 1930s by Erich Schmidt
- Ceramic material is characterized by painted black or brown decoration on red ware of varying shades
 - Painted decoration is usually geometric, stylized, or related to animals or plants
 - Depictions of "floral scrolls" and ibexes are frequent among the material
- Cheshmeh Ali-style ware
 - Found at sites across the Tehran Plain and beyond
- Scholarship on Cheshmeh Ali is limited



Responsibilities in the Near East Collections

- Inventory
 - Cross-checked object IDs and field numbers
 - Identified sherd types
 - Wrote descriptions of sherds
- Photography
 - Photographed over 300 vessels and sherds, all of which were previously not photographed or digitized
 - Shot on photography
 - Well-suited for complete vessels and large sherds, especially those with raised elements and curves
 - Shot down photography
 - Well-suited for sherds
- Overarching intention: ensure the Cheshmeh Ali material is accurately recorded, represented, and digitally accessible to researchers and visitors of the Penn Museum's digital collections

Peruse Cheshmeh Ali material in the online collections here!



From the Archives

- Photographs of Cheshmeh Ali artifacts on display in Iran at the house where Erich Schmidt and his colleagues gathered (as seen above)
- Photographs of individual artifacts taken in Iran, many of which are in the Penn Museum today
- Field log, financial documents, applications, maps, and telegrams

Research Focus

- My research centers on three questions:
 - What are the interactions between vessel/sherd motifs and forms?
 - Is there a shared vocabulary of motifs and forms across sites from the Transitional Chalcolithic?
 - And, considering these, what can be deduced about social complexity?
- I am also thinking about:
 - Scholarship and interpretations of the material
 - Comparative sites and the reach of Cheshmeh Ali ware

Culminating Project

- Creating a Scalar "book," in which I will organize and present my research and analysis
- This format encourages me to play with ways of communicating academic content to different audiences



All images courtesy of the Penn Museum

Bibliography

