



FIGURE 5.1 *Pope and Schmidt at Tepe Hissar in 1932, photographed by Edward M. M. Warburg (AFTER SURVEYORS, 229).*

Archaeology in Iran and the Experience of Arthur Upham Pope

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While there have been many studies examining the contribution to ‘art history’ of Arthur Upham Pope (1881–1969), this paper will explore the interpretations of the concept of ‘archaeology’ in the 1920s and 1930s as a positive contribution toward his legacy. The career of A. U. Pope in Iran, from 1925 to 1969, encompasses many of the early stages in the development of modern archaeological methodology, especially as distinct from that of art history. The distinction is important and complex; for instance, Richard Ettinghausen (1906–79) has noted the ‘special problem’ afforded the mass of archaeological information. “It was not possible to include all this information, and we chose our examples . . . from among works of some aesthetic or historical merit, leaving to others or to other occasions the task of assessing the immense documentation provided by archaeology.”¹ It is easy to admire earlier times when field scholarship encompassed all aspects of material culture.

Archaeology in Iran began with the French concession from 1900 until 1929 which focused on the ancient site of Susa in the province of Khuzistan. This monopoly began to break down with the rise of Reza Khan (Reza Shah Pahlavi; r. 1925–41) and the advent of Pope in Tehran; the pivotal event was the dramatic influence of Pope’s lecture on the glories of ancient Iranian art and its people in 1925.² The change in governmental policies is well documented, as is the opening for new archaeological ventures and for the personal activities of Pope. The nature of Pope’s conception of ‘archaeology’ in this period may be understood by examining the close and enduring friendship of Pope with Erich F. Schmidt (1897–1964; fig. 5.1). While Pope was establishing himself as a consultant on Iranian art in New York (and elsewhere), Schmidt was studying with the great anthropologist Franz Boas (1858–1942) at Columbia University; there is no indication whether the two might have met there in the early 1920s.

1 See Ettinghausen et al. 2001, VII.

2 The lecture was translated in Persian by Issa Sadiq, “Past and future of Persian art”; a revised version was published as “Persian art and culture” (Pope 1928); see Sadiq 1972, and more generally Grigor 2009.

Schmidt did his dissertation on a sequence of prehistoric pottery in Arizona; there he learned the most modern of scientific excavation techniques, and a wide appreciation of cultural periods, as well as ethnographic observations.

It is not clear how Schmidt came to the attention of James Henry Breasted (1865–1935) who made him co-director of the excavations at Alishar Huyuk and Kerkenes dagh in Anatolia. Schmidt's account of this expedition is equally comfortable with discussions of the prehistoric, the Hittite, and the Roman, not ignoring the most recent Seljuk and Ottoman remains. Upon receiving his doctorate in 1929, he was employed by the University Museum of Pennsylvania to excavate briefly at Fara in northern Mesopotamia and then to move to Iran for excavations at Tepe Hissar near Damghan in northeastern Iran.³ Schmidt established a sequence of early periods at Tepe Hissar from 1931 to 1933. He placed soundings in the citadel and in the courtyard of an early Islamic mosque (the Tari [Tarikh] Khana, fig. 5.2) in Damghan. At the same time, he excavated a nearby Sasanian palace with fine stucco decorations.

Pope in the meantime had used his new influence with Reza Shah to gain entry into mosques and begin the photographic documentation for which he is so famed. When he founded the American Institute for Persian Art and Archaeology (hereafter AIPAA) in 1928, he was also associated with Philadelphia and his institute became a sponsor of the Hissar project. Indeed, it would seem that he intended the AIPAA to become the automatic sponsor of all archaeological research in Iran (not unlike the intent of some more recent national institutes in Middle Eastern countries). Pope states in his announcement of the AIPAA in 1930: "Our knowledge of most of these periods is still painfully meager. [It has] resulted from the excavations of totally unskilled people who have in the process destroyed the evidence that would have been of value to the trained archaeologist."⁴ The model for this new archaeology was no doubt observed in the fieldwork of Schmidt. The architectural survey was the first, and for many scholars the fundamental, contribution of Pope to Iranian art. The recovery of ancient architectural monuments through fieldwork points to a fundamental distinction between art history (focused on individual monuments) and archaeology (perhaps best characterized as the study of cumulative cultural patterns). This wider purpose of archaeology is acknowledged by Pope when he notes, with some frustration, "...excavations undertaken expressly for architectural purposes may yield important information, but as yet the remains of only a very few buildings of interest have been disclosed."⁵

3 See Schmidt 1937.

4 See *Surveyors*, 145–6.

5 See SPA, III, 898.



FIGURE 5.2 *Schmidt's excavations in the Tari (Tarikh) Khana mosque*
(AFTER SCHMIDT 1937, FIG. 9).

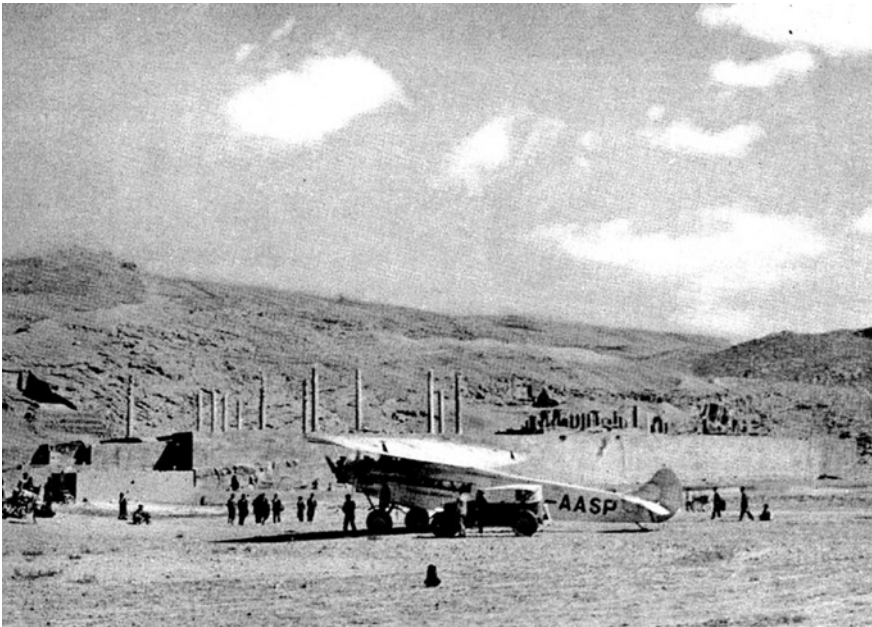


FIGURE 5.3 *Breasted's airplane at Persepolis in 1932*
(AFTER BREASTED 1933, 16).

The AIPAA also sponsored the early excavations of Frederick Wulsin (1891–1961) in 1929–30 at Tureng tepe in northeastern Iran (and published in the *Bulletin of the AIPAA*). During these same years, Ernst Herzfeld (1879–1948) had brief campaigns at Pasargadae and Kuh-i Khwaja; the eminence of this scholar in philology and fieldwork was well established since his work in Mesopotamia and especially Samarra some thirty years earlier. The grand prize within Iranian archaeology was the Achaemenid capital of Persepolis in Fars province. Herzfeld had surveyed the famous site in 1924 for the Iranian government and so, when the ‘restoration and excavation’ of Persepolis was awarded to the Oriental Institute, Breasted appointed Herzfeld as its director (fig. 5.3). Herzfeld’s work comprised clearance of “disintegrated adobé walls” beneath which he discovered “the several pairs of monumental stairways . . . embellished with superb reliefs . . . depicting a *durbar* or procession of tribute bearers.”⁶ Moreover, this imperial art was interpreted as the product of some 3,500 years of cultural development in Iran and, as Charles Breasted expressed it, “. . . the task of recovering the evidence and interpreting it is the responsibility of Western archaeological science.”⁷

The grafting of ‘science’ onto an historical narrative began in this period but had its roots in the earliest archaeological efforts of Pope and other early archaeologists. Field research at Persepolis would grow as a scientific discipline under Schmidt from 1935 through 1937, though the enterprise continued to be validated with the discovery of artistic treasures, whether buildings or collections of artifacts (Schmidt’s efforts in the ‘treasury building’ at Persepolis is perhaps symptomatic of this enduring aspect of research).

While Herzfeld worked for Breasted at Persepolis, Schmidt undertook excavations at Ray, the ancient Rhages immediately south of modern Tehran from 1934 until 1936. Pope expressed great hopes that he would uncover Islamic ceramics and the kilns of their production. For his own part, Pope surveyed architectural monuments in this same region. Thus Donald Wilber (1907–97) recounts how “several days were spent in recording mosques, shrines and tomb towers in the vicinity of Tehran, such as Ray, Varamin and Demavand villages.” He then adds:

Arthur pursued one important scholarly interest. This was his continuing effort to identify centers of ceramic production from the eleventh century on by the collection of sherds from every site and place we visited, in

6 See Breasted 1933, 15.

7 *Ibid.*, 11.

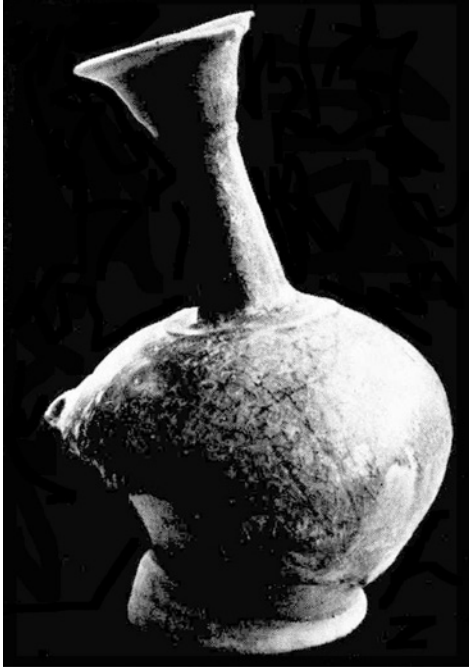


FIGURE 5.4
Ceramic waster from Kashan
 (AFTER POPE 1937A, 165, FIG. 15).

particular sherds that were ‘wasters’ . . . Sherds piled up in his room at the hotel . . . [and later he adds] The rest of us continued our work the following day amid a stream of people bringing in sherds to show Arthur.⁸

Pope was eloquent on the virtues of wasters, spoilt vessels without commercial value and therefore discarded near the production site; this was for him “. . . a cornerstone of archaeological research.”⁹ He would later demonstrate the use of wasters for defining Kashan wares (fig. 5.4).¹⁰ He would continually emphasize that such collections were secondary to “scientifically controlled excavation,” for which he would cite Samarra, Susa, Damghan, Stein’s surveys in Fars, and especially Schmidt’s excavations at Rayy.¹¹

On the value of ceramics, Pope’s strong view was that “utility may have been an excuse, but beauty was their reason and purpose.” The potter’s “. . . wares . . . reached every home, and all save those for the poorest customers

8 See Wilber 1986, 75, 77.

9 See SPA, IV, 1462.

10 See Pope 1937A, 161–6.

11 See SPA, IV, 1462.

had some pretensions to beauty.”¹² This hyperbole may have been truly believed:

“If,” writes Miss Day, “Persia is like other countries in the Near East, unglazed fragments must be strewn over every ruined site and tell.” Well, Persia is not like other countries of the Near East . . . and not one in ten thousand of the surface shards on the main sites is unglazed except, of course, for an occasional run of course kitchen wares or other crudely executed utility vessels.¹³

Certainly Pope had walked across enough archaeological sites to know this not to be true (fig. 5.5); glazed sherds generally account for only 2–5% of the ceramic remains. On the other hand, there was a survey in Jordan which claimed 40% of the sherds were glazed; this might be explained in the sampling technique, that this was percentage picked up.¹⁴ This may be equivalent to Ernst Grube (1932–2011)’s claim that “. . . ninety per cent of Fatimid ceramic wares are decorated with lustre painting,” which may rather be an indication of the proportions displayed in museums.¹⁵ Later, Goode reports that “Pope admonished Schmidt not to be so quick and dogmatic with his opinions regarding the age *and authenticity* of ceramics,” that he should “study [his] ceramics more carefully.”¹⁶

Another example of the influence of Pope on Schmidt was their mutual interest in the problem of Luristan bronzes, which came to collectors’ attention after 1929. Pope used his influence with Iranian officials for permissions, especially for flights into this region, and for raising funds through the AIPAA. Schmidt’s Holmes expeditions, first in 1934–5 and again in 1938, resulted in the immensely successful excavations at Surkh Dum-i-Luri.¹⁷ These seasons of excavations bracketed the program of ‘Flights over the Ancient Cities of Iran,’ actually facilitated by the near simultaneous excavations at Rayy, Persepolis, and Luristan.¹⁸ The Bulletin for 1937 includes Pope’s report on Takht-i Sulayman with Schmidt’s air photo (fig. 5.6), a discussion of historical documentation of

12 See SPA, IV, 1448.

13 See Pope 1942, 190–1.

14 See King et al., 1987, 456–7.

15 See Grube 1976, 126.

16 See Goode 2007, 180 (*italics added*). On Schmidt’s attention to the ceramics from Rayy, one may now refer to Treptow 2007.

17 See Schmidt 1938.

18 See Schmidt 1940.



FIGURE 5.5 *Sorting sherds in the Istakhr excavations in 1937*
(IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ORIENTAL INSTITUTE, UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO,
P. 57947).



FIGURE 5.6 *Airphoto of Takht-i Sulayman by Erich F. Schmidt*
(AFTER POPE 1937B, 74).

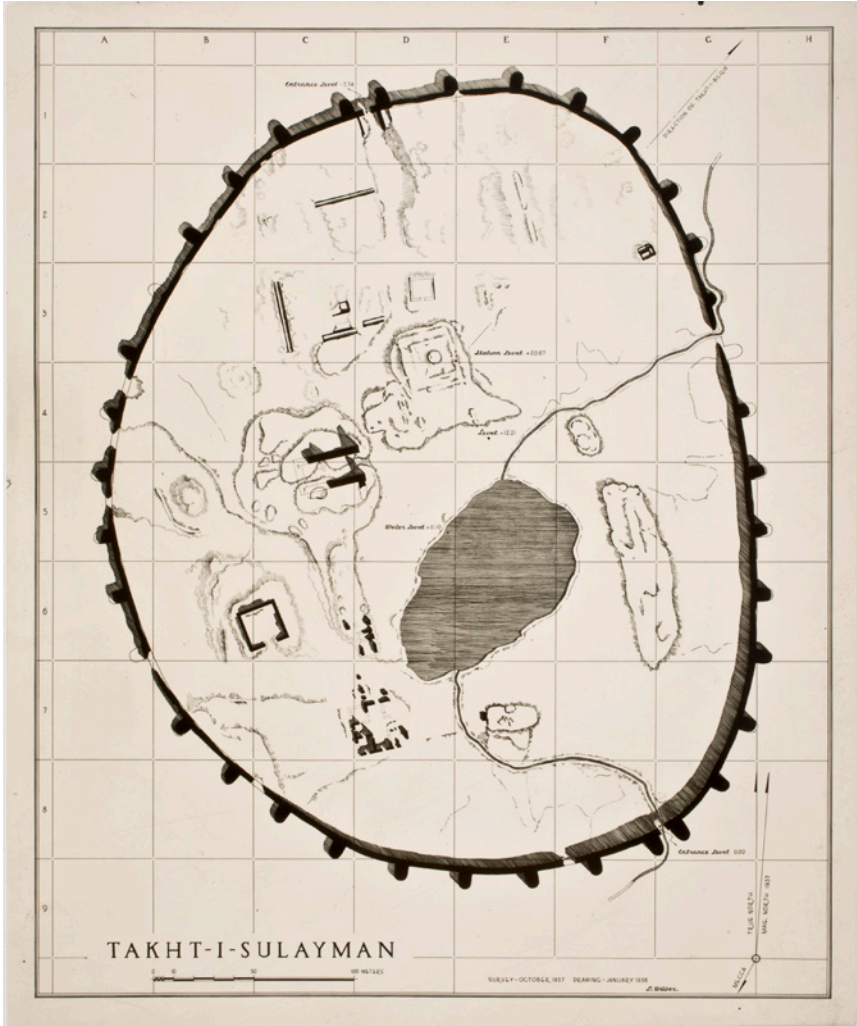


FIGURE 5.7 *Plan of the site of Takht-i-Sulayman by Donald N. Wilber. Digital Images & Slides Collection (FryeTakht-iSul.o8, AKP034), Special Collections, Fine Arts Library, Harvard University*
(IMAGE COURTESY OF SPECIAL COLLECTIONS, FINE ARTS LIBRARY, HARVARD UNIVERSITY).

Shiz by Mary Crane, and Donald Wilber's observations of the Ilkhanid buildings and plan of the site (fig. 5.7); the report reflects a mature synthesis of archaeological information.¹⁹

When Schmidt replaced Herzfeld at Persepolis in 1935 he continued the work on the platform of Takht-i Jamshid, the prehistoric sites of Tal-i Bakun, and Islamic Istakhr that Herzfeld had begun; he was very careful to avoid digging in the same exact areas that Herzfeld had begun. These two archaeologists were worlds apart in background and temperament. Herzfeld was some twenty years the senior and a noted philologist and architectural historian; contemporary art historians, among them Pope, would seem to be considered distinctly 'lesser lights' beside his scholarship.

Schmidt's emphasis on stratigraphic contextual recording brought a totally new scientific approach, as mentioned earlier. This is no better exemplified than by the urban settlement at Istakhr, the Sasanian and early Islamic successor to Persepolis. Here he carefully excavated deep trenches, hoping for a sequence which would tie the Achaemenians to these latter periods (which unfortunately eluded him). Flying over Istakhr, Schmidt used his airplane to map the site and reveal details of its urban organization; the most complete realization of the potential of these photographs would need to wait some forty more years when they revealed outlines of the early Islamic city.²⁰ The site of Istakhr remains unpublished, yet the records are staggering in their complete information; the precise coordinates of every artifact, and even important sherds, remain available for a study of the archaeology of this early Islamic city.

Though Schmidt and Pope seem to have remained good friends and plotted new projects together until the war, he must have been uncomfortable with Pope's repeated statements that should be anathema today. In his introduction to Islamic period ceramics, Pope notes a debt "... particularly [to] M. Rabenou whose participation in excavating at many sites had made it possible for him to provide detailed information which has been repeatedly confirmed."²¹ This remained a key component in Pope's methodology: "Much can be learned from the investigation of sites already commercially excavated, for in these one finds masses of fragments of no market, but some evidential, value."

19 See Pope 1937B and Wilber 1937.

20 See Whitcomb 1979.

21 See Pope in SPA, IV, 1446, n. 1.

As one adept to such associations, he gives strong caveats but concludes that testimony of commercial excavations and dealers provides evidence that “has been underestimated . . . and much neglected.”²²

The *senmurv* (simorgh) of the Art Institute of Chicago might be considered in this context. The piece was acquired and published by Pope as coming from Chal Tarkhan near Rayy.²³ Thompson publishes identical roundels with *senmurvs* from the excavations of the main palace of Chal Tarkhan in 1936.²⁴ She notes that many early stuccoes were acquired by the Philadelphia Museum of Art, among which is a panel with such roundels (fig. 5.8).²⁵ It is curious then that the history of archaeological research in Iran by Ezat Negahban (1926–2009) should list Pope as the excavator of Chal Tarkhan in 1936, though there is no other record.²⁶ In any case, it was Negahban’s initiative during the Fifth International Congress of Iranian Art and Archaeology in 1968 which produced a statement of official disapproval of the trade in antiquities. This led to the end of commercial archaeology and beginning a new phase of modern archaeology in Iran.²⁷

Postscript

To end on a personal note, while I served with the American Peace Corps in Iran, I began working for A. U. Pope in 1968 and lived at the Narenjestan while it was being renovated. Pope referred to me as his ‘archaeological scout,’ sending me to villages to check on information brought to him. One of these tips led to my first published article on Achaemenid remains found near Sivand, north of Persepolis.²⁸ What I remember is a very elderly gentleman, full of charm and grace; his discussions of Iran and its arts were still charismatic. I well remember his explanation of Persepolis as a ‘ritual city,’²⁹ which many now criticize,

22 Ibid., 1463.

23 AIC 1926-1196; see SPA, IV, pl. 177F.

24 See Thompson 1976, pl. IV, 3.

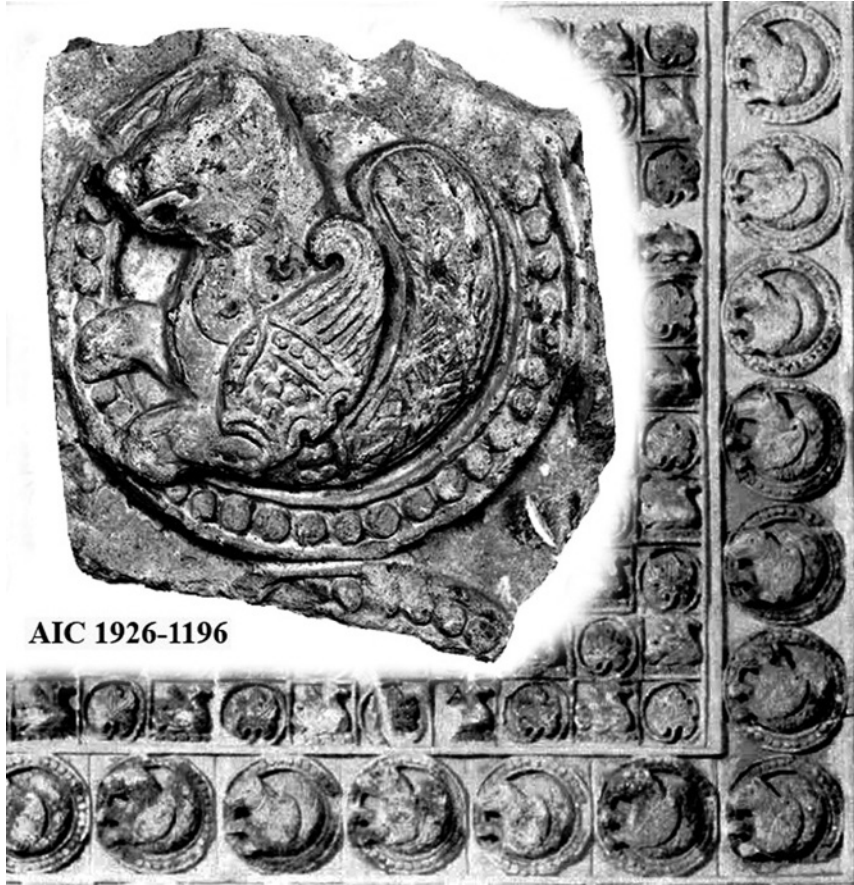
25 Ibid., xi, pl. XXIII, 1, 1929-132-1; she traces other examples in note 40.

26 See Negahban 1998, 487, #39.

27 See Negahban 1969, 10; Pope was present and vigorously opposed this great change in accepted archaeological practice.

28 See Whitcomb 1969.

29 See Pope 1957.



AIC 1926-1196

FIGURE 5.8 *Panel of senmurvs from Chal Tarkhan and the Art Institute of Chicago example*
(AFTER THOMPSON 1976, PL. XXIII.I AND AIC 1926-1196).

though I believe it ought to have been so, on the strength of the rhetoric of Arthur Upham Pope.

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