

Siavash SORAGHI* (Isfahan of Art University, Isfahan, Iran)

Mohsen ZEYNIVAND** (University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran)

The Susa salvage project in 2019, southwestern Iran

<https://doi.org/10.34739/his.2022.11.04>

Abstract: *The World Heritage Site of Susa constantly encounters challenges in the development and expansion of Shush city. In 2019, a salvage archaeological project was undertaken to counter the construction of a transportation underpass in the vicinity of world property. The results showed that this section was related to the industrial activities of the Parthian and Sasanid eras and probably a cemetery of the Islamic era.*

Key words: Iran, Susa, Urban Archeology, World Heritage, Artisans' City

Introduction

Susa is the most important ancient site in southwestern Iran, which has been settled continuously from the late 5th millennium BC to the 14th century CE. As a political and religious center, this extraordinary site has always played a noteworthy role in cultural developments and exchanges of much of the Near East.

In addition to historical texts,¹ our knowledge of Susa is based on findings of the French commission in the late 18th and 19th centuries.² The French greed for ancient monuments and objects of Susa, entitled *The scientific project of French commission in Iran*,³ kept them in Susa for about a century until the revolution in 1978.

The presence of plenty of workers related to excavation and continuation of activities in Susa contributed to forming a village with a gradually increasing population in the vicinity of Daniel's tomb after about six centuries of desolation. As a result, Shush city was formed, and the city's development narrowed the scope

* ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1574-9703>. siyavash58@gmail.com; Department of Archaeology

** ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5705-4729>. zeynivand@gmail.com; Department of Archaeology (Corresponding Author).

¹ Potts, 2018.

² Carter, 1992.

³ Chevalier, 1992.

of the ancient site. The ancient Site of Susa has been recently recorded as a UNESCO World Heritage with the number 1455.

Acceptable world property for this area is 350 hectares, including four main sections: Acropolis, Royal City, Apadana, and Artisans' City [Fig. 1]. Meanwhile, the national property has been considered to be more than the world property, and it is announced about 700 hectares by Iranian Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism. The reason for the contradiction between the world and national property is the development of Shush city and the destruction of the main parts of the ancient site [Fig. 2]. However, an area the size of 600 hectares which involves parts of national property and also some residential parts of the city has been designated as a buffer zone by UNESCO.

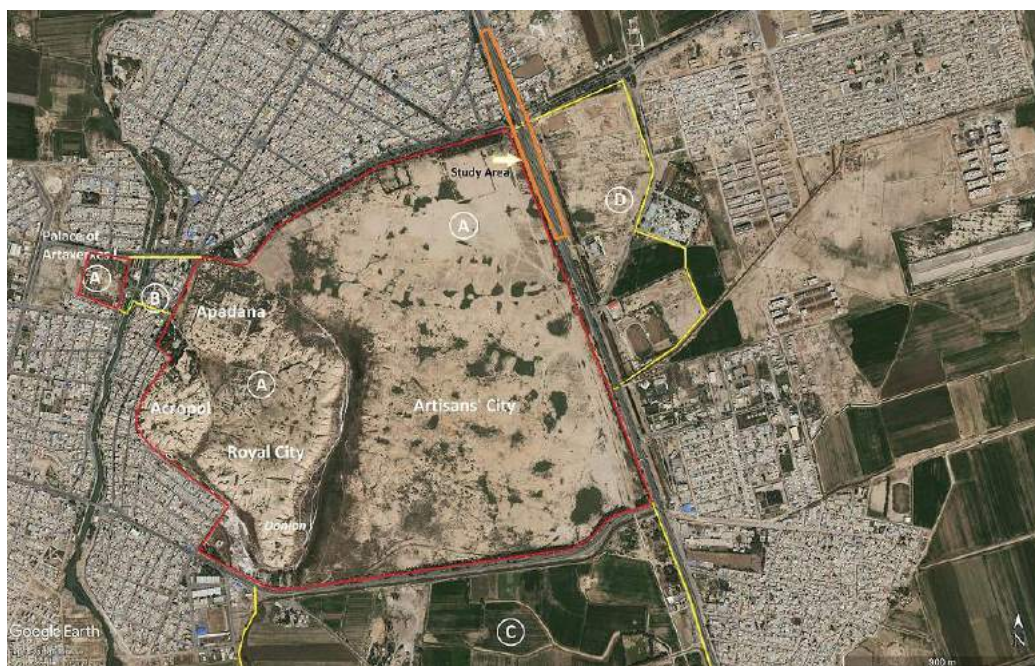


Fig. 1. Satellite images of the Susa (© Google Earth 2019)

Recent challenge

In 2018, authority figures of Susa decided to construct a one-kilometer-long underpass on the Andishmak-Ahwaz transit road in parallel with the world property. Formerly, there was a twenty-year-old concrete bridge that had been obliterated. The upper path in the northeastern part of the ancient property site of Susa and the border between World property and the D section is counted as national property [See Fig. 1]. Owing to this fact, this was a new challenge for the site, and the Iranian Ministry of Cultural Heritage did not allow the program to be operational.

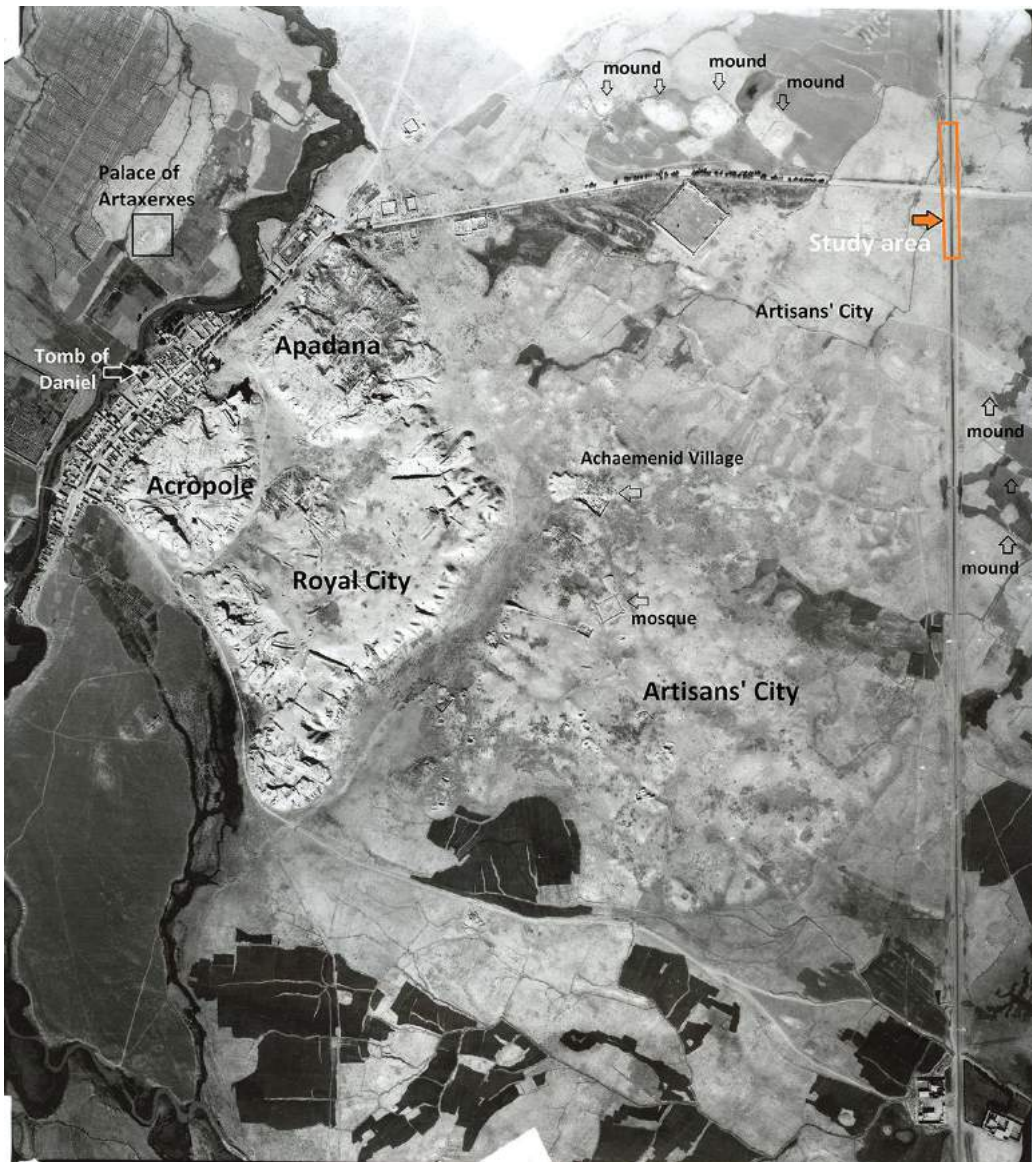


Fig. 2. Satellite images of the Susa in 1957 (© Iran National Cartographic Center)

The municipality members and other authority figures of the city proceeded unwisely to dig down a channel into the transportation path, which was quickly encountered by the archaeological communities and the Association of Cultural Heritage Lover's reaction. Eventually, the Iranian Ministry of Cultural Heritage and the Iranian Center for Archaeological Research planned a salvage excavation project to acquaint public opinion, especially authority figures and residents of Shush city, to be capable of making the best decision in this regard.

Fieldwork

A salvage project of an archaeological excavation called the underpass of Susa started to be operational in early 2019. The study area was destroyed by about 0.5 to 1.5 m relative to the adjacent lands and surface of the asphalt road next to the study area due to the digging mechanical machinery and foundation of the asphalt road. Meanwhile, three channels were dug down with a depth of approximately 2 meters and a width of just over one meter by the same shovels in the southern part of the upper path. However, the study path was divided into three regions: southern, central, and northern.

In the aggregate, 29 test trenches were created over 75 days within the study area, including 1s to 17s trenches in the southern, 1c and 2c trenches in the central and finally 1n to 10n trenches in the northern area [Fig. 3]. Measurements of the test trenches are usually 2×2m. However, these measurements have been extended in certain circumstances.

The depth for obtaining monuments is between 15 and 170 cm. In the upper layers of 1, 2, 3, and 10 southern trenches, evidence of industrial activities related to glass blowing was discovered. Based on the cultural findings, it is more likely that glass-blowing workshops played a crucial role in the industry in the late historical era of this part of Artisans' city [Figs. 4-5]. Previously in part of the Royal city, the glass blowing industry had been discovered in the Islamic second and third centuries.⁴ Additionally, evidence of other industrial activities such as sugar-making,⁵ pottery, and textiles⁶ has been discovered in various parts of the Islamic era Susa. Brick structures with the nature of waterways (4s), wall debris (12s-8n), paved area (14s-15s), and possibly sandy foundation (7n-9n) were discovered in some trenches [Figs. 4B-C].

Moreover, brick floor debris, in situ, and a large volume of slag associated with industrial activities were discovered in the 10s trench, which appeared afterward; this site was abandoned in the Islamic era, and two corpses were buried, and that gave rise to be damaged parts of the mentioned site [Fig. 4A]. Other evidence related to the cemetery could be observed from human burial in 2s and 9s trenches, as well as a human jar burial in Northern 8 trench. The direction of human burial is Western-Eastern, and the face of the corpses is towards the North [Figs. 4A-B]. Considering the direction of human burial as well as references to the presence of multi-religious communities, including the Muslim, the Jewish, the Zoroastrian, and the Christian⁷ in Islamic era Susa, it seems that this area belonged to non-Muslims. However, some Islamic graves with unusual Southern-Northern directions involving a muddy plaque

⁴ Rosen-Ayalon, 1972.

⁵ Kervran, 1979.

⁶ Hardy-Guilbert, 1985.

⁷ de Tudele 1734; Ghirshman 1952; Hardy-Guilbert 1985.

in the Arabic language (Part of the Quran) have been identified along the *Donjon* Area of Royal City.⁸



Fig. 3. Aerial Photo of excavated zone (aerial photograph by A. Bavarsaei)

⁸ de Mecouenem, 1947.

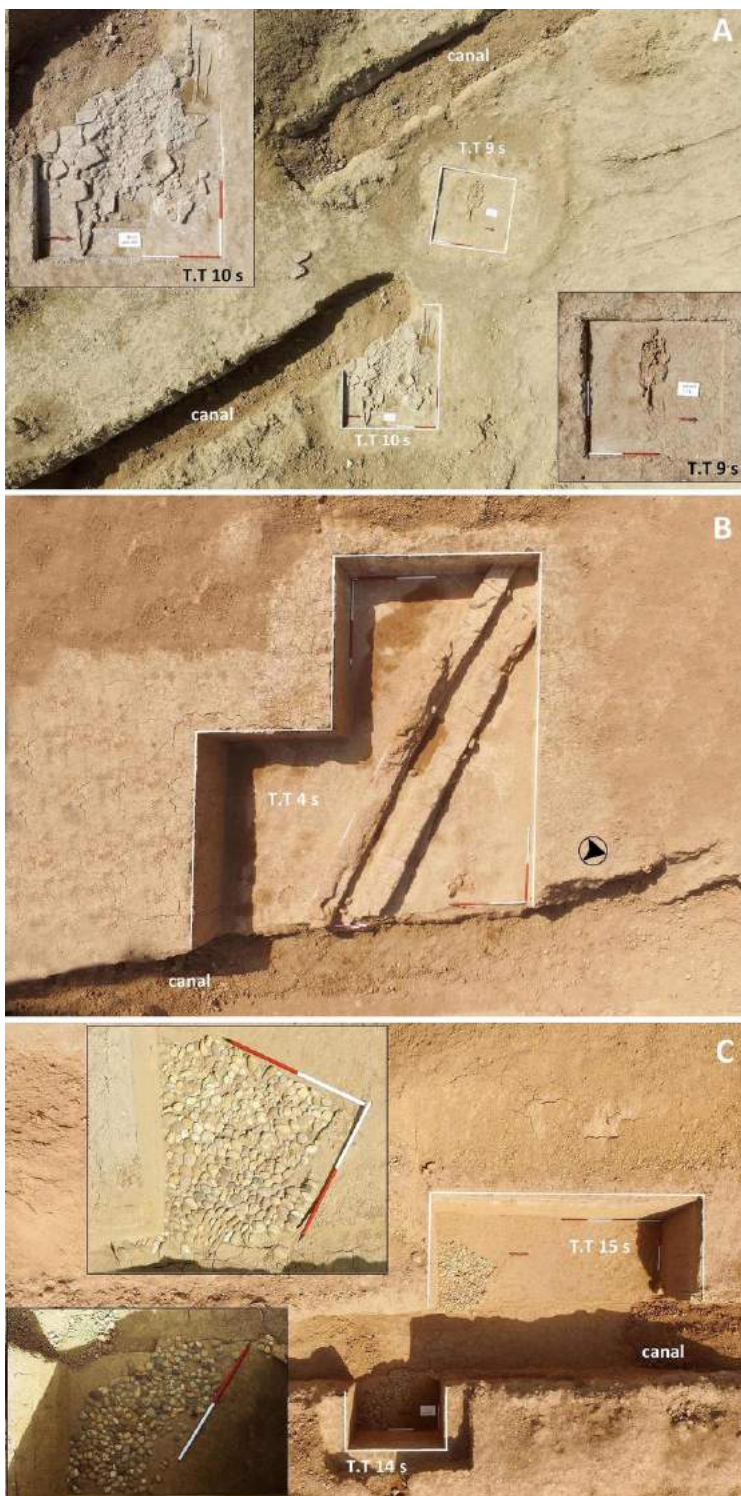


Fig. 4. Aerial Photos of some southern test trench A. T.T 9s & 10s; B. B. T.T 4s; C. T.T 14s & 15s (aerial photographs by A. Bavarsaei)

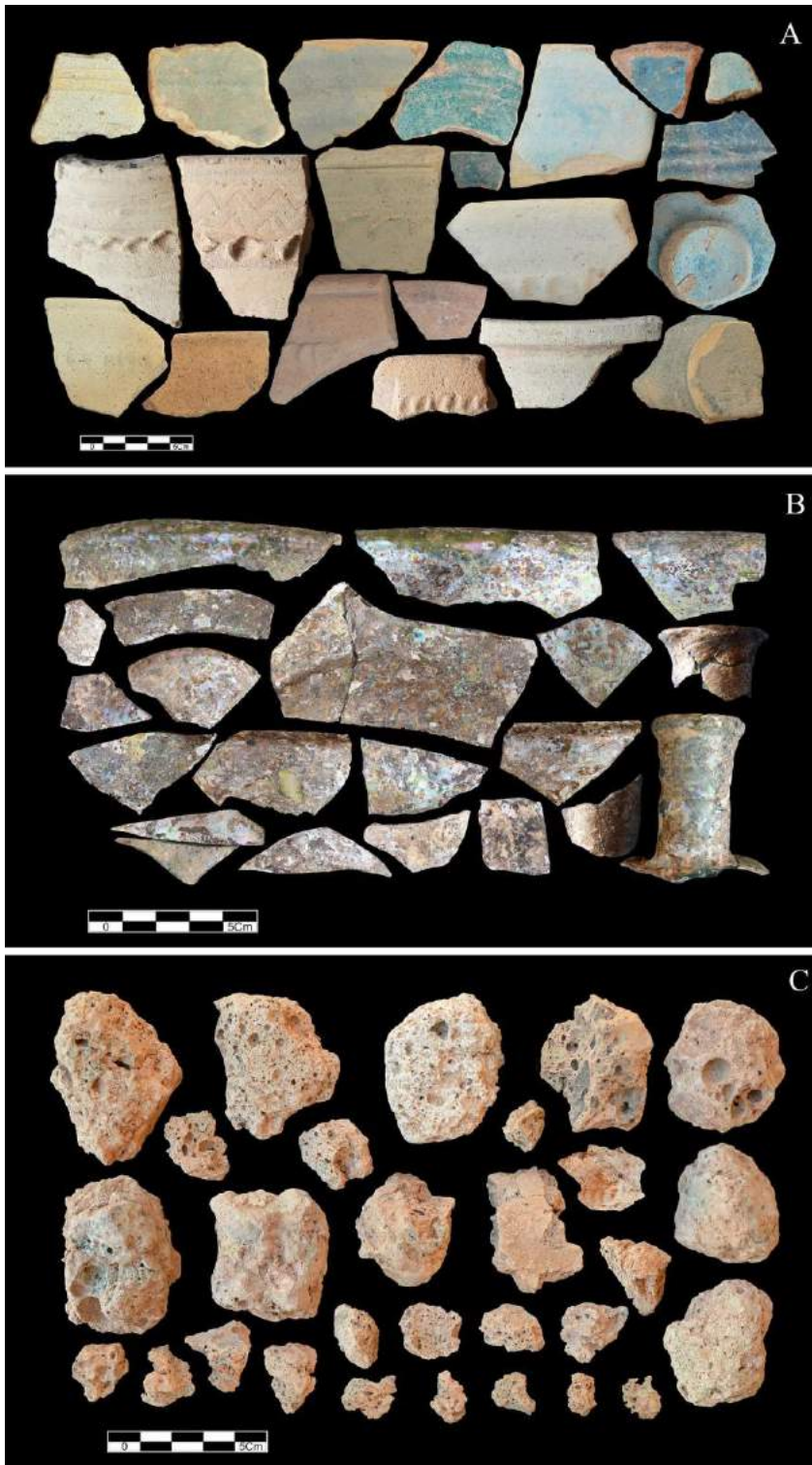


Fig. 5. 2019 excavated finds material A. Parthian & Sasanian & late Islamic periods potsherds of southern area; B. glass vessels fragments; C. slags (Photo by M. Zeynivand)

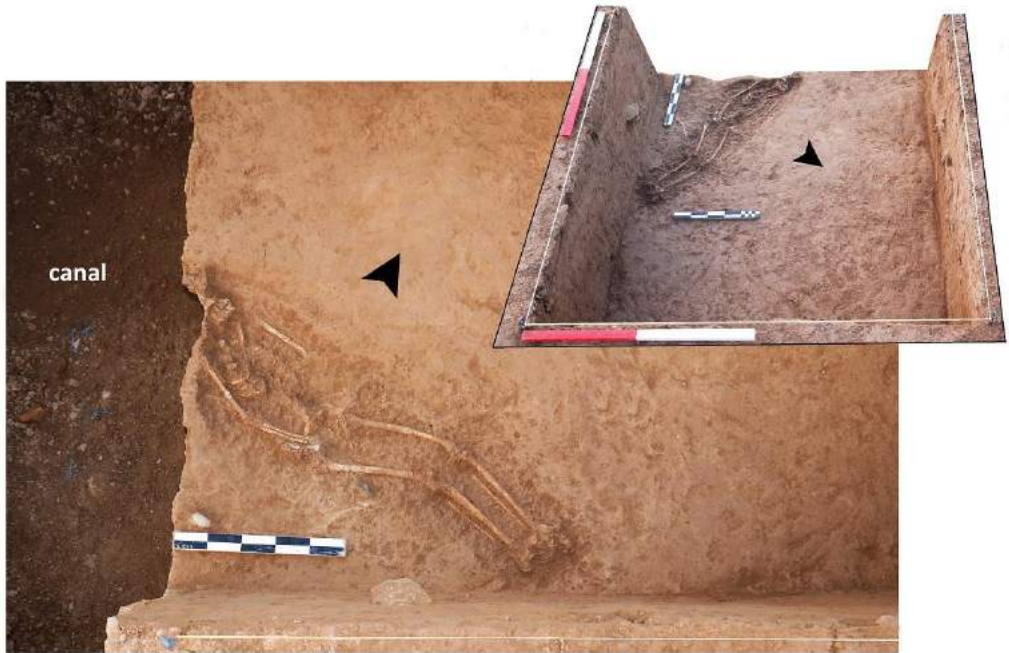


Fig. 6. Human burial of test trench 2s (photo & edit by F. Sharifi)

Conclusions

According to the results, it could be noted that evidence and deposition of human activities were existed in southern part of study area from Parthian until Islamic eras, which is precisely situated between world heritage A property and national D property, and cultural monuments related to historical and Islamic eras were also existed in central part and most of the northern part, which were unfortunately demolished due to the foundation of the asphalt road and concrete pillar of a bridge, therefore architectural and cultural materials debris belonging to the historical era (Parthian and Sasanian) were revealed only at the end of the northern part. Research in the proposed area for construction of transportation underpass illustrates that this area is debris of the Artisans' city, which was the center of industrial activities, especially glass blowing workshops at the end of the historical era, and it was used as a cemetery in the Islamic era (non-Muslims). By virtue of the results, some affiliated organizations to the Iranian Cultural Heritage were taken necessary awareness and transparency to inform relevant authority figures about the destruction of World Heritage of Susa, and ultimately construction of underpass was discontinued.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank Dr. Ruholah Shirazi, Director of the Iranian Center for Archaeological Research (ICAR), and Dr. Siamak Sarlak (ICAR). We are also grateful to Bijan Heydari of Director Susa World Heritage Base (SWHB) and his colleagues Mehdi Omidfar, Loghman Ahmadzadeh & Abbas Bavarsaei for their support. We thank the excavation team, particularly Dr. Meisam Nikzad, Dr. Nowrooz Rajabi, Dr. Fereshteh Sharifi, Mostafa Rashidi Arzandeh and Faezeh Dadfar.

Bibliography

- Carter, E. (1992) 'A history of excavation at Susa: personalities and Archaeological methodologies', in *The royal city of Susa: ancient near eastern treasures in the Louvre*, eds. P. Harper, J. Aruz, F. Tallon, New York: The Metropolitan museum of Art, 20-25.
- Chevalier, N. (1992) 'The French scientific delegation in Persia', in *The royal city of Susa: ancient near eastern treasures in the Louvre*, eds. P. Harper, J. Aruz, F. Tallon, New York: The Metropolitan museum of Art, 16-19.
- De Tudèle, B. (1734) *Voyages de Rabbi Benjamin, fils de Jona de Tulède, en Europe, en Asie et en Afrique, depuis l'Espagne jusqu'à la Chine où l'on trouve plusieurs choses remarquables concernant l'histoire et la géographie, et particulièrement l'état des Juifs au 12e siècle traduits de l'hébreu et enrichi de notes & de dissertations historiques & critiques... par J.P. Baratier*. Amsterdam: Aux dépens de la Compagnie.
- Ghirshman, R. (1952) 'Cinq campagnes de fouilles a Suse (1946-1951)', *Revue d'Assyriologie* 46: 1-8.
- Hardy-Guilbert, C. (1985) 'Contribution à l'analyse du tissu urbain de Suse à partir du IXe siècle', *Paleorient* 11.2: 101-113.
- Kervran, M. (1979) 'Une sucrerie d'époque islamique sur la rive droite du Chaour à Suse. Le matériel archéologique' *Cahiers de la Délégation Archéologique Française en Iran* 10: 177-237.
- Mecouenem, R. de. (1947) 'Contribution à l'étude du palais achéménide de Suse', *Mémoires de la Délégation archéologique en Iran* 30: 1-119.
- Potts, T.D. (2018) 'Elam region: Elam in western scholarship from the Renaissance to the late 19th century', in *The Elamite World*, eds. J. Álvarez-Mon, G. Basello, Y. Wicks.; London & New York: Routledge, 11-26.
- Rosen-Ayalon, M. (1972) 'Niveaux islamiques de la «Ville Royale»', *Cahiers de la Délégation Archéologique Française en Iran* 2: 169-201.

To cite this article: Soraghi, S., Zeynivand, M. (2022). The Susa salvage project in 2019, southwestern Iran. *Historia i Świat* 11, 71-79, DOI: 10.34739/his.2022.11.04



© 2022 The Author(s). This open access article is distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution (CC-BY) 4.0 license.