



‘ALĪKOŠ

‘ALĪKOŠ, an archeological site dating to the 8th millennium B.C. in southwestern Iran, near the modern town of Deh Lorān, about 80 km west of Dezfūl in Kūzestān (for the name see F. Hole and K. V. Flannery, “Excavations at Ali Kosh, Iran, 1961,” *Iranica Antiqua* 2/2, 1962, p. 100, n. 2). Nearly 150 meters in diameter, the site has a maximum depth of seven meters; it marks the abandonment, disintegration, and rebuilding of a succession of mud houses in a small agricultural village over a period of about 2,000 years. Along with a number of other sites, it was excavated in 1961 and 1963 in order to elucidate the origins and development of agriculture and herding into the 4th millennium B.C.; the evidence from these sites is more complete than for any other comparable area of the Near East. ‘Alīkoš’s importance lies in the abundant evidence it provides for both agriculture and the early domestication of livestock; three cultural phases make up the deposits in the site:

1. Boz Morda phase. The initial village, probably dating chiefly to the 8th millennium B.C., was the first settlement in a region that provided abundant edible wild plant foods, herds of onagers, oxen, and gazelles, and seasonal incursions of migratory birds. The people built small houses of clay and mud bricks and planted fields of emmer wheat (*Triticum dicoccum*) and two-row hulled barley (*Hordeum spontaneum*), both of which are primitive races of the modern domesticates. They also collected large quantities of native wild legumes and grasses to supplement their diet. They herded goats, which showed little evidence of domestication at this early date, and hunted onagers,



oxen, and boars. From a marsh near the site they harvested catfish, turtles, carp, mussels, and water birds. As in the later two phases, the people made cutting and scraping tools of flint and obsidian and grinding stones of local limestone. The floors of the houses were covered with simple reed mats. As pottery was not yet in use, waterproof containers were made either of animal skins or baskets coated with bitumen.

2. The ‘Alīkoš phase (7200-6400 B.C.). Beneath the floors of some of the houses, which were larger and multi-room, are found burials showing evidence of cranial deformation and the use of simple beads and pendants as decoration. Stone bowls, shaped much like later pottery bowls, were numerous and mortars and pestles had been added to the inventory of ground stone. Some 40 percent of the seeds recovered were cereal grains, a dramatic increase from the 10 percent of the Boz Morda phase. The goats displayed flattened horn cores, one of the signs of domestication; fewer sheep were in the herds. The villagers maintained an emphasis on hunting similar to that of the previous phase.

3. Moḥammad-Ja‘far phase (6400-6100 B.C.) Relatively shallow deposits at the top of the mound show some houses with stone foundations and burials in a small cemetery outside the buildings. Evidence indicates changes in the environment, perhaps as a result of prolonged herding and farming; the marshy area had grown dry and woody perennial legumes (*Prosopis*) characteristic of heavily grazed land were now abundant. Both the sheep, now nearly as abundant as goats, and the goats show morphological signs of advanced domestication, but a strong emphasis on hunting wild animals continued. The most notable change was the introduction of pottery, which occurred in three distinct wares, all of which were chaff tempered and fired at a low temperature. Similar pottery is found at the nearby excavated site of Čoḡā Sefīd, also on the Deh Lorān plain, and at Tapa Gūrān and Tapa Sarāb in the mountains.

By the time ‘Alīkoš was abandoned, there were several other small villages on the Deh Lorān plain, but irrigation agriculture and the use of plows drawn by draft animals had not yet been introduced. Although widespread contacts are evident in the presence of obsidian from Anatolia, sea shells from the Red Sea, and turquoise and copper from the Iranian plateau, the villagers of the plain were self-sufficient in foodstuffs and other necessary items. Some form of seasonal transhumance featuring migration into the mountains during the extremely hot summers probably continued to be practiced throughout the



occupation of 'Alīkoš. This pattern of life continued locally for another 700 years before irrigation agriculture and hybrid races of the cereal grains were introduced by people from eastern Iraq. The story of the continued local development and the intrusion by people with irrigation are documented in the reports on Čoḡā Sefīd (Hole, 1977) and Tapa Sabz (Hole, Flannery, and Neely, 1969).

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