



ČAŠMA(-YE) 'ALĪ

ČAŠMA(-YE) 'ALĪ, lit. “fountain of ‘Alī,” the name for various natural springs in Iran, the two best-known of which are located near Dāmḡān and Ray respectively.

Čašma 'Alī near Dāmḡān. A rather large fresh-water spring is located at the base of a hill about 24 km north of Dāmḡān. The water from this and several similar springs, supplemented by that from numerous *qanāts*, serves the domestic and irrigation needs of Dāmḡān and surrounding villages. At the mouth of the spring is a dark stone slab with a depression that local people believe to represent the hoofprint of the horse of the fourth caliph, 'Alī (35-40/656-61). In 1217/1802 Faṭḥ-'Alī Shah built a fine residence on the west side of the spring, with a garden and a mosque at its south end. Water from the spring flowed through a channel along the central axis of the garden. The construction of a number of *qanāts* in the last century has, however, substantially reduced the amount of water flowing from Čašma 'Alī (Dehḡodā, pp. 222-23, s.v.).

Čašma 'Alī near Ray. A natural spring on the southern side of a granite outcrop located at one end of a rocky spur of the Alborz chain that stretches southwest into the plain of Ray is also known as Čašma 'Alī. The plain lies 1,200-1,800 m above sea level and receives an average annual rainfall of 250 mm.

Before the introduction of technology that permitted drilling of deep wells Čašma 'Alī was one of the most important sources of water for both domestic use and irrigation in the area. The water from this spring and local *qanāts*



irrigated many lush gardens and orchards, as well as cultivated fields between Tehran and Ray. The famous Šafā'īya garden and a tomb tower (*Borj-e Toğrol*), built in 534/1140 but popularly connected with the Saljuq sultan Toğrol I (r. 429-55/1038-63), are located near Čašma 'Alī. On the rock face above the mouth of the spring Fath-'Alī Shah had reliefs of himself hunting and holding audience with his courtiers carved in 1248/1834, following the practice of Achaemenid and Sasanian kings.

This spring has attracted settlement since prehistoric times. The earliest traces were found in a mound beside a rock outcrop immediately north of the spring. The site was excavated for three seasons between 1934 and 1936 under the direction of E. F. Schmidt, sponsored by the University Museum of the University of Pennsylvania and the Boston Museum of Fine Arts (Schmidt, 1935, 1936). An occupation sequence extending from the 6th millennium b.c. into Islamic times was uncovered, but the results were never published; the excavation field records and archeological materials are now divided among the archives of the two sponsoring museums and the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.

Although a French expedition visited the site briefly at the beginning of the 20th century (Pézard and Bondoux, pp. 55-56), the name Čašma 'Alī first appeared in the archeological literature in a survey of prehistoric Iranian chronology by Donald E. McCown (pp. 1-12). He divided the archeological materials from the basal levels of the mound into two main phases, the earlier one with two subphases: IA Lower, IA Upper, and IB, corresponding to Sialk (Sīalk) I-III (ca. 5500-4000 b.c.; cf. Ghirshman, pp. 72-79).

On the basis of comparative evidence from more recent surveys and excavations at Tepe Zagheh (Zāğa) and Tepe Ghabristan (Qabrestān), south of Qazvīn, Yousef Majidzadeh (1976; 1981) has revised the chronology of the central plateau, replacing the former confusing sequence based on names of disparate sites with a more general sequence: the Archaic and Early, Middle, and Late Plateau periods. Čašma 'Alī IA Lower and IA Upper thus belong to the Early Plateau period and Čašma 'Alī IB to the Middle Plateau period.

The evidence from the central plateau shows that by the late 5th millennium b.c. the inhabitants of this region had developed a homogeneous culture, based on farming and animal husbandry, that continued almost without interruption for three millennia. Originally they lived in small houses of pisé with mud-plastered floors; later the walls were made of mud bricks containing



finger imprints to help mortar adhere more firmly. They were often plastered and painted red. The inhabitants buried their dead under the floors of their houses; the skeletons were covered with red ocher. Infants were sometimes buried in small jars.

The artistic and technological capabilities of the prehistoric inhabitants of Čašma 'Alī are reflected in their pottery. The first settlers produced a soft, straw-tempered, light-buff ware, with either matte or shiny surfaces decorated with simple geometric motifs. A red variant of this ware was also produced and came to predominate in a later period. Another, finer type of red ware was grit-tempered, slipped, and burnished, and its surface was decorated with black paint. All these types of pottery were hand-shaped, rather than turned on a wheel. The straw-tempered red ware developed into the classical Čašma 'Alī pottery, with a distinct reddish-orange body, coated with slip, and often burnished and elaborately decorated over its entire surface in black or dark brown. Motifs included geometric designs, plants, and a variety of animals: long-legged birds (cranes?), onagers, goats, dogs, fish, and rare human figures.

At Čašma 'Alī and some contemporary sites in the central plateau there seems to have been a cultural break in the early Middle Plateau period, characterized by finds of nonindigenous pottery (the so-called “plum ware”; Majidzadeh, 1976). This interruption appears to have been brief and confined to a limited area, as the culture of Čašma 'Alī IA Upper continued in IB at Čašma 'Alī itself and at sites like Hissar (Ḥeṣār), Sialk, and Ghabristan. Regular concentric striations on the pottery of this period are evidence of the introduction of the potter's wheel. Unlike the earlier red ware, the IB vessels were painted only on the upper parts, and high ring bases were usually decorated with groups of three or four vertical lines. The repertoire of geometric, vegetal, animal, and human motifs was larger, however. They were always painted in dark brown; black or reddish colors resulted from uneven firing.

Above the prehistoric levels at Čašma 'Alī materials dating to the early Iron Age (1200-1000 b.c.), as well as a large building, perhaps a temple, of the Parthian period were found. A city wall of the Islamic period follows the crest of the hill; Moḥammad-Ḥasan Khan Ṣanī'-al-Dawla E'temād-al-Salṭana (pp. 236-42) speculated that the Raybandī castle built by the 'Abbasid caliph al-Mahdī (r. 158-69/775-85) must have been located here and identified it with the medieval castle of Ṭabarak. Later occupation levels have been dated to the Saljuq period by coins of Ṭoḡrel I; the last occupation seems to have been in the Timurid period (771-899/1370-1500), as indicated by coins of Šāhroḡ dated



836/1432-33).

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