



ČOĠĀ SAFĪD

ČOĠĀ SAFĪD (Chogha Sefid), site in Kūzestān. Čoġā Safīd is a prehistoric site on the Dehlorān (Deh Luran) plain, dating back to the 8th millennium b.c.e. Excavation of a step trench in 1348 Š./1969 uncovered six archeological phases representing some 1,500 years of occupation (Hole, 1977), but there remain deposits as yet unexcavated, which continue to the end of the 4th millennium.

The site is one of a group of prehistoric mounds on the Dehlorān plain that have been briefly excavated by American archeologists whose research emphasis was on the origins and development of agriculture and animal husbandry. 'Alikoš, Tepe Sabz, Čoġā Safīd, and Tepe Mūsīān (Musiyān; Hole, Flannery and Neely) were dug by teams representing Rice University under the supervision of Frank Hole. Farroġābād (Farukhabad), a 5th- to 3rd-millennium site was excavated by Henry Wright of The University of Michigan (1981). Collectively these sites cover the entire occupation of the Dehlorān plain from its initial settlements as early as the 8th millennium through the early part of the 3rd millennium ([Table 1](#)).

Following the excavations at 'Alikoš and Tepe Sabz, it was recognized that a significant gap existed in the known sequence. Čoġā Safīd, which held the missing phases, was excavated to complete the sequence and provide information on crucial social and economic changes. The most important of these changes were the intrusion into Dehlorān in about 5500 b.c.e. of Samarran people from Iraq and the consequent shift from dry farming to irrigated crops with new hybrid races of cereals (Helbaek) and perhaps to specialized herding (Hole, 1974). With the new people also came domesticated



cattle and dogs, a new variety of buffware ceramics in addition to local styles, and a new form of architecture featuring loaf-shaped mud bricks and floors in herringbone pattern. The ceramics, architecture, and agriculture all closely mimic material found in sites in lowland eastern Iraq: Samarra (Sāmarrā), Tall al-Şawwān (Tell as-Sawwan) and Čoġā Māmī (Oates, 1969; idem, 1987); similar material also occurs as the initial occupation in southern Mesopotamia at Tell al-‘Owaylī (Oueili; Calvet, 1981) and other sites as yet unexcavated (Adams, 1975; idem, 1981; idem and Nissen), and it supplants indigenous ceramics in Kūzestān (Dollfus; Kantor). The penetration into Dehlorān thus appears to have been part of a general expansion by people who were able to exploit intensively locales particularly suitable for irrigation.

Adjunct to the excavation of Čoġā Safīd was a study of the geomorphology and land use of the Dehlorān plain by Michael Kirkby. This study confirmed previous impressions of changing local environments that had been deduced by Hans Helbaek on the basis of plant remains and later palynological study of sediments from ‘Alīkoš, Čoġā Safīd, and Tepe Sabz (Woosley and Hole). In brief, from the time of the first settlements until around 2000 b.c.e. some 5 m of alluvium accumulated; then the present cycle of downcutting began. The period of aggradation, involving widespread flooding, would have been optimal for the establishment of primitive irrigation and also would have enhanced conditions for hunting, dry farming, and especially herding. This rich environment, coupled with the proximity of the plain to the Zagros mountains, permitted residents who engaged in seasonal transhumance to enjoy a relatively high standard of living. Kirkby emphasizes that changes in the plain were progressive, so that villages would have been forced to move at intervals as the local environment became no longer suitable. Such shifts are documented from both ‘Alīkoš and Tepe Sabz.

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Table 1. Phases Excavated at Various Prehistoric Sites on the Dehlorān Plain