



## DEHLORĀN

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**DEHLORĀN** (Deh Lorān), the name of a *šahrestān* (subprovince) in Īlām province in southwestern Persia, and of the main town. The *šahrestān*, which is located on the Iraqi border, comprises four districts (Ḥūma, Ābdānān, Zarrīnābād, and Mūsīān) inhabited mainly by the Lor tribes of Jā'īrvand, Maḥmūdvand, Bāpīrvand, and Dūst-'Alīvand. The Dehlorān plain is bounded on the east and west by the Mayma and Doveyrej rivers respectively and on the north and south respectively by the Sīāhkūh and Ḥamrīn mountains. It is approximately 600 km<sup>2</sup>, including areas on both sides of the flanking rivers, and lies at the base of the Zagros mountains in a semiarid steppe where rain-fed agriculture is possible but unpredictable and trans-humant herders camp over the winter. Rain falls only in the winter, averaging about 350 mm annually. There is seldom frost in the winter, but temperatures can reach 50° C. in the summer. The plain is relatively isolated, being surrounded by arid, dissected, and uninhabited lands. Nevertheless, the plain itself is relatively fertile; its situation between the forested mountains of the Zagros and the well-watered Mesopotamian lowlands is attractive for settlement and seasonal grazing. In the [census](#) of 1355 Š./1976 the population of the *šahrestān* was recorded at 52,295 (9,207 family units, 27,612 men, 24,683 women; Markaz-e āmār; *Farhang*, pp. 23-26; Razmārā, *Farhang* V, pp. 194-95).

The Dehlorān plain is best known for the excavations conducted at several prehistoric sites, which elucidated the origins and development of sedentary agricultural villages and towns in the region, and for surveys documenting the history of settlement into the modern era. As a relatively small and remote



rural area, it has always been affected by political, economic, and technological developments in the adjacent regions of Kūzestān, the Zagros mountains, and Mesopotamia. Beginning as early as the 3rd millennium B.C.E. and throughout its subsequent history it was under the political control of kingdoms in one or another of these regions. Although no cuneiform texts have been found at any of the Dehlorān sites, the most prominent mound, Tepe Musiyan (Mūsiān), is possibly to be identified as ancient Urua, an Elamite city known from Mesopotamian texts (Carter and Stolper, p. 212 n. 275). As early as the 3rd millennium Dehlorān may have been on a trade route linking the Zagros mountains with Mesopotamia; in the 1st millennium the route linking the Achaemenid capitals of Susa and Ecbatana passed through the region (Gautier and Lampre, p. 59; Carter and Stolper, p. 150, including earlier references; for the Persian period, see Olmstead, *passim*).

The plain had a different character when people first established villages there in the 8th millennium B.C.E. Flash floods deposited silt over the entire plain, constantly regenerating its fertility and creating seasonal marshes, which abounded with fish, attracted game and migratory fowl, and provided moist, easily tilled soil for the first agriculturalists. By 4000 B.C.E., however, the marsh had deteriorated to about half its original size (Kirkby), a change reflected in the botanical remains from 'Alikoš and Tepe Sabz, both situated on the edge of the original marsh and abandoned as it retreated (Helbaek; Woosley and Hole). The pattern of settlement implies that villages were moved in response to changing environmental conditions; as long as possible they were situated to take advantage of high water tables, and the villagers did not resort to irrigation for watering crops (Helbaek).

Deposition of silt across the plain continued into the 2nd millennium, at which time it had accumulated to a depth of ca. 4 m. Then rivers began to cut the channels that are apparent today, leaving much of the plain difficult to farm without irrigation (Kirkby). The local inhabitants adapted by moving their relatively small villages and towns as need arose and by practicing transhumant herding. Despite notable fluctuations the population remained relatively low until the Sasanian and early Islamic periods, when every available land surface was farmed, long canals were constructed across the plain, and water-driven mills were strategically located (Neely, 1974). At that time the population may have reached 20,000-25,000 (a density of 75/km<sup>2</sup>). Following this enormous investment in agriculture, which was probably carried out by imperial edict, residents largely abandoned the plain around



1250 C.E., perhaps as a result of environmental degradation and political instability, leaving it in the hands of nomadic pastoralists down to the present (Neely, 1974, p. 36).

In the early 20th century the plain was occupied by two distinct tribal and ethnic groups. Nomadic Lors, speakers of an Indo-European language closely related to Persian, occupied the plain in winter and migrated to mountain pastures in the summer; tribal Arabs migrated between the poor summer pastures in the Tigris river basin and Dehlorān, replacing the Lors there during the summer months (personal observation). From the 18th century Dehlorān was the winter headquarters of the “*wālī* of Pošt-e Kūh,” a tribal leader descended from a *Ḳoršīdī atābeg* originally appointed by the Safavid shah ‘Abbās I (996-1038/1588-1629) in 1004/1596 to govern Lorestān (Amanolahi; Lorimer; Mortensen). The ruins of the fort of the last *wālī*, *Ḡolām-Rezā* (r. until 1304 Š./1925), lie atop *Čōgā Safīd*. In the 20th century a customs post was installed close to the site, near the border crossing at Bayāt. During the 1920s the British exploited a tar seep lying about 6.5 km east of the town and constructed a narrow-gauge railway to move the bitumen to market (local informants; cf. Lorimer, p. 62). At that time petroleum geologists carried out a series of seismic soundings and established the presence of a major oil deposit straddling the international border, but, partly because the neighboring *Ḳūzestān* oilfields are larger, producing wells were never bored. After World War II the tribal inhabitants were settled in villages. The village of Dehlorān, which had a military post, grew into a small town of Kurdish and Lor families. Dehlorān was invaded and taken by Iraqi forces on the first day of the war between Persia and Iraq in 1980.

The first archeological exploration in Dehlorān was conducted by a French archeological mission in 1903 (see [DÉLÉGATIONS ARCHÉOLOGIQUES FRANÇAISES](#)), under the direction of J.-E. Gautier and Georges Lampre, who dug trenches at Tepe *Mūsīān*, Tepe *Ḳazīna*, and Tepe ‘*Alīkoš*. The French encountered difficulties with the local tribes, however, and abandoned further work there.

Exploration was resumed in 1961, when Frank Hole and Kent Flannery did a cursory survey of the plain and dug a sounding at ‘*Alīkoš*. They followed up in 1963 with more extensive excavations at ‘*Alīkoš* and Tepe *Sabz*, a village of the 5th millennium B.C.E.; they also briefly reexamined one of the old French trenches at *Mūsīān*. In 1968 Henry Wright excavated at Tepe *Farroḳābād*, a site occupied in the 5th-2nd millennia. During the winter of 1969-70 Hole



excavated 6th-millennium layers at Čogā Safid while James Neely conducted an intensive survey of sites in the plain and Michael Kirkby studied its geomorphological history. Collectively these projects have elucidated the archeological sequence from the first settlements in the 8th millennium B.C.E. into the modern era. The construction of this sequence, based on limited stratified soundings at several sites and on intensive surveys of the plain, incorporated changes in artifacts, architecture, faunal and floral remains, settlement patterns, irrigation works, and population sizes. As a result Dehlorān is one of the best-known archeological regions of Persia.

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