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DAMĀVAND

Geography

The mountain

Mount Damāvand is a recent volcano with regular contours, part of the traditional landscape of Tehran and the Persian plateau that it dominates. The peak, the highest elevation in the entire Near East (5,671 m), is perpetually covered with snow. In popular culture Damāvand is “the mountain” par excellence, symbolizing the Persian homeland in numerous legends and stories.

Physical geography (see Bout and Derruau). Damāvand is situated in the high Harāz valley of Māzandarān, on a line with the crests of the central Alborz, the peaks of which do not exceed 3,800 m. It is a small volcanic structure only 400 km^2 at its base but owing its extreme elevation to an underlying foundation rising as high as 2,400 m on the side toward Polūr and an additional 1,400 m higher because of the northern lava flows below Ḥājī Delā, for a total of more than 4,000 m (Geological Survey; sheet “Damāvand”). The volcano itself is fairly regular but not symmetrical. The customary ascent is from the village of Reyna, traversing the comparatively gentle southern slope. There is a shelter

in the village and another at an altitude of 4,250 m. The northern side is more inhospitable, with several glaciers on the east and northeast among the rocky arêtes that form the broad Lāndal (or Nāndal) basin; several high-altitude shelters have also been constructed for climbers on that side. To the west and south, in the valleys of the Dalī Čāy, Lār, and Harāz rivers, a series of lava flows and folds (*šāl*) have resulted in an often chaotic kind of plateau topography. The streams, especially the Harāz (known as the Lār above Polūr), which flows around the volcano, play a particularly important role in the morphology of the southern slope of Damāvand. Lava flows have cut the Lār valley and provided the foundation for successive sedimentary deposits that have created broad plains on the interior of the mountain, whereas farther downstream, to the east, the Harāz has hollowed out an enclosed valley in the soft terrain of lias and volcanic ash.

The base of the volcano rests unevenly on a very folded geological substratum of compacted sediments, clays, and often unstable schists composed of lias and resistant Jurassic and Cretaceous limestones. The volcano overlaps the green rocks of the Karaj formation (Tertiary) only north of Lāndal. Volcanic rock has thus enveloped and preserved the very different type of mountain relief that characterized the central Alborz at the beginning of the Pleistocene. The volcanic material, the earliest components of which are alkaline and those from more recent eras acidic, is composed mainly of trachyandesite, andesite, and various types of breccia originating in volcanic eruptions, which also produced ashes and glassy formations; the latter are routinely exploited. The formation of the volcano by lava flows and emission of ashes lasted, with intermittent periods of dormancy, from the end of the Pliocene to the Holocene, that is, to the end of the Neolithic era. At present volcanic activity is manifest only in the presence of warm springs, which have formed travertine deposits, especially in the Harāz valley, where there are also many small geysers near the hot sulfur springs of Ask and Āb-e Garm, which have been in use since antiquity (for traces of Safavid baths, see Sotūda, p. 433) and remain very popular. Close to the summit volcanic emissions have produced sulfur deposits, which were exploited by inhabitants of the region until the beginning of this century. This volcano is one of the manifestations, rather than the cause, of strong seismic forces in the central Alborz, resulting primarily from shifts along the great Mūšā fault, which separates the mountain from the town of Damāvand (Tchalenko et al., pp. 97-115; Berberian, p. 265; see below).

Although the winds are always fierce and snow is possible in every season, the

actual accumulation of snow and ice is too small to be a factor in lowering temperatures. In summer the wind-blown snow disappears very quickly from the southern and western slopes and does not feed the streams as runoff. Beginning in July the glaciers and snowfields above 5,000 m are covered with nieves penitentes (lit. “penitential snows”). Apparently the upper limit of the growing zone is higher on Damāvand than on the surrounding peaks; thorny vegetation (*Astralagus*) is found above 4,500 m. At the base (2,300-2,700 m) of the volcano there are inhabited and cultivated zones. On the lower slopes wide, shallow basins encircled by rocky crests and carpeted with aromatic plants and vast tracts of wild poppies provide pasturage for village flocks (de Planhol) and especially for those of nomads from the Varāmīn plain (Hadāvand) or from Garmsār and Semnān (Alī Kāy, Sangsarī; Hourcade, 1977), whose camps are located up to about 3,200 m. On the northern slopes the cattle herds of the Gāleš, as well as *zeli* lambs from the Āmol region, graze.

History. It is remarkable that, despite its important place in Persian literary and popular traditions, until the beginning of the last century Damāvand was very often omitted from maps (Houtum Schindler, p. 9; cf. Curzon, *Persian Question* I, p. 344); nor was it mentioned by such Western travelers as Jean Chardin or Pietro Della Valle. On the other hand, the fame of the volcano in Persian culture is clear from the myths and legends attached to it. Arab historians and geographers often mentioned Damāvand and the earliest ascents, like that of Abū Dolaf Kazrajī in about 292/905 (Minorsky, pp. 22-23, tr. pp. 54-55) or three centuries later that of Yāqūt (*Boldān* II, pp. 607-08; tr. Barbier de Meynard, pp. 237-38), who reported that he had been unable to reach the summit but gave a description of it from local informants that conforms perfectly to the reality. At the beginning of the 13th century Ebn Esfandīār (pp. 82-83; cf. de Planhol, p. 20) noted that the ascent of the volcano from Ask reportedly took two days. The two earliest ascents made in order to provide a detailed description were undertaken several days apart in September 1837 by the Englishman Taylor Thomson and the French botanist Aucher-Eloy, who had attempted without success to do the same thing two years earlier. In 1843 the Austrian botanist Theodor Kotschy reached the summit, and after 1860 this climb was often repeated by Europeans posted to Tehran, mainly British and Prussians (see de Planhol, p. 19, for the reports of these first climbers, who also made the first geological and geographic studies of the famous mountain).

Starting from the village of Reyna, the normal route follows a ridge along the

southern slope; it is long but very easy. In about 1968 a shelter was constructed at 4,200 m by Federāsīūn-e kūh-navardī-e Īrān (Iranian mountaineering federation). On the more difficult northern side the ascent begins at Lāndal, following the northern arête, which is rocky at first, then buried under snow; it was broached for the first time by the Germans Steinauer and Gorter in 1315 Š./1936. An even more difficult route along the eastern arête was pioneered in 1331 Š./1952 by Kāẓem Gīlānpūr and Bernard Pierre (Bout and Derruau). Since the development of mountain climbing in Persia Damāvand is a frequent goal in all seasons, and a very large number of routes have been opened. Systematic scientific studies are rare, however, and after that of Jacques de Morgan (pp. 155, 120, 133) it was necessary to wait until the French expedition of the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (C.N.R.S.) in 1337 Š./1958 for the first comprehensive study of the volcano (Bout and Derruau). The human geography of the region has been investigated only in Lārījān (de Planhol) and the Lār valley (Hourcade, 1977; idem, 1979).

This mountain was mentioned under several different names in antiquity. The Greeks called it Koronos and the Assyrians Bitnik (Siroux, p. 14). A particularly large number of legends and tales is attached to Damāvand, which is not surprising, as it is at the same time a volcano and the highest elevation in the region. These myths and legends are recorded at length in Arab histories and Persian epic literature, especially the *Šāh-nāma* of Ferdowsī (ed. Mohl, 1878, index, s.v. Damāvand; see ii, below). The popular traditions of the villages around the mountain are filled with similar legends and superstitions (Massé, *Croyances* I, pp. 177 n. 1, 216), of which traces can be found in place names, as in the upper valley of the Lār, where a small ravine sprinkled with marshes, warm springs, and geysers is named Dīv Āsīāb (the devil's mill).

The origin of the word Damāvand has given rise to a number of speculations or legends (Yāqūt, ed. Barbier de Meynard, p. 236; cf. Streck). In an extremely detailed and sophisticated study Wilhelm Eilers (1954, pp. 307-08) demonstrated that the oldest form of the name, attested from the beginning of the Sasanian period, was Dunbāvant/d "the mountain of many faces." It was in this or related forms (e.g., Dombāvend) that the mountain was known in Greek, Armenian, then Arabic translations. The elevation of Damāvand explains its role in many legends and myths customarily attached to mountainous regions in general. After several intermediate forms (including Donyāvand in the spoken dialect) the form Damāvand was established by Ferdowsī, who abandoned the root *donb–* for the root *dama-*, meaning

"snowstorm"; since then this name, evoking snow and wind, has remained attached to this magical mountain, located on the main communications route through the Alborz and dotted with a great many archeological remains (Sotūda, pp. 392ff.): rock carvings at Navā (p. 429), prehistoric tombs, a number of *emāmzāda*s (Siroux, p. 14). Mongol, Safavid, and Qajar rulers liked to establish their summer camps at its base (Calmard).

In the Jabal Bārez near Kermān there is another mountain called Damāvand, a name that, according to Paul Schwarz (p. 252) and Vladimir Minorsky (*Ḥodūd al-ʿālam*, p. 375), has resulted from migrations between the two regions. In fact, according to *Historical Gazetteer of Iran* (Adamec, p. 137), Āqā Moḥammad Khan Qājār deported populations from the Kermān region to the town of Damāvand.

See also ALBORZ.

The town

The little town of Damāvand (4,500 inhabitants in 1335 Š./1956, 15,000 in 1365 Š./1986), the main center of the *šahrestān* of the same name in the province of Tehran (see below), is located at an elevation of 1,900 m on the southern slope of the pass of Emāmzāda Hāšem, between the routes linking the capital to Āmol and to Sārī via Fīrūzkūh 55 km east of Tehran. It is thus, like the volcano, which is not visible from there, situated historically in ʿErāq-e ʿAjamī where this province adjoins Ṭabarestān, Deylam, and Qūmes. Damāvand is laid out in the middle of a very beautiful little valley covered with fruit trees and traversed by the Tār river, which has several times overflowed its banks and destroyed the center of the city; it is a very active commercial and administrative center and a summer resort (*yeylāq*), which has been frequented in all periods by Persian rulers and now by a great many people from Tehran. Several monuments from the Saljuq period attest the age of the town, for example, the funerary tower of Shaikh Šeblī, celebrated for its brick patterning (Stronach and Young), and the mosque, destroyed and rebuilt in 1337 Š./1958 by a pious notable, who preserved only a few elements from the 11th century (Matheson, p. 61). Damāvand was probably a *yeylāq* for Ray, then Varāmīn, when those cities were the capitals of the Mongol rulers, who also had their flocks and camps at the foot of Damāvand in the Lār valley (Calmard). The town of Damāvand was often mentioned by historians, but it was never the site of major events. According to *Nozhat al-qolūb* (ed. Le Strange, p. 162), the town of Damāvand, formerly known as Pešyān, must have

been conquered by the Arabs in about 31/651-52. Yāqūt reported (tr. Barbier de Meynard, pp. 225, 238) that several important personages close to the Prophet or the caliph ʿOṯmān (23-35/644-56) lived there and that it was also inhabited by the poets Mawlā Saʿīd and Sayf-al-Molūk Damāvandī; the later jurist Ḥosayn Mīrzā, executed under Shah Esmāʿīl I (907-30/1501-24), also lived there. The hamlet Šalanba, located south of the present town, was mentioned in *Ḥodūd al-ʿālam* (tr. Minorsky, p. 135) as a town in Deylamān, with a very cool climate, near the mountain of Damāvand; the site of Vīma, mentioned in the same work, seems no longer to exist.

The quiet and charm of the town and of the valley of Damāvand contrast dramatically with the harsh and grandiose character of the neighboring volcano, which is located on the other slope of the pass and is not visible at all from the town. The popular customs and culture of the town of Damāvand are especially rich and are not lacking in legends attached to the volcano, for example the celebration of the death of Żaḥḥāk on 9 Šahrīvar/31 August (Massé, *Croyances* I, p. 163). As in all the valleys of this part of the central Alborz, the main town and the outlying hamlets have numerous *ḥosaynīya*s and *takīa*s, attesting an active tradition of *taʿzīa*. From the ethnolinguistic point of view, the Damāvand valley is in the zone of Tātī speakers encompassing the villages of the southern Alborz piedmont (Teymūrī-Far; Hourcade), whereas in Lārījān and the valleys surrounding the mountain of Damāvand the Gīlakī dialect of Āmol is spoken. Before World War II the town was home to several Jewish families, and, like all other towns in the central Alborz, to Bahais.

Until construction of the Tehran-Āmol road through the Harāz valley in about 1329 Š./1950 Damāvand was located on one of the oldest routes through the Alborz, which had been endowed with numerous caravansaries, bridges, and castles from the Safavid period; the road was restored in 1877-78 by the Austrian engineer A. S. Gasteiger (Gāstager) Khan (Curzon, *Persian Question* I, p. 383) on the order of Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah; a standing portrait of the shah was sculpted in low relief in the Band-e Borīda pass (Siroux, p. 14; Sotūda, pp. 398, 451). Since the development of Tehran caravans no longer pass regularly through this small town but go directly to the capital; travelers stop in Damāvand only in the winter, if there is a snowstorm or while awaiting a propitious moment to undertake the dangerous stretch of the high road through the pass of Emāmzāda Hāšem (2,800 m) and Lārījān without fear of avalanches. Hardly anything remains of the small *bāzār* and the caravansaries

that supported the town before the opening of the modern routes. Nevertheless, agriculture, administration, commerce, and especially the presence of summer people from Tehran provide a certain prosperity. Since 1357 Š./1978 the great hot spring of Čašma-ye ʿAlā has been capped and the water bottled in a modern factory.

The *šahrestān*

The *šahrestān*, 5,895 km^2 with 82,000 inhabitants, is part of the *ostān* of Tehran (in 1355 Š./1976 the *ostān* of Semnān); it comprises the *dehestān*s of Pošt-e Kūh, Fīrūzkūh, Kīlān, Ḥablarūd, Qazqāṇčāy, Jābān, and Ḥūma, as well as the towns of Damāvand and Fīrūzkūh. It thus extends along the southern slopes of the Alborz and Anti-Alborz between Tehran and the passes of Gadūk and Bašm, upstream from Semnān. It is an agricultural region, where fruit (apples, cherries, apricots) is grown, especially along the valleys of the Tār and the Ḥablarūd. The peasant populations speak Tātī dialects upstream and Gīlakī, whereas small groups of seminomadic people of extremely varied origin live in the Anti-Alborz; they were forcibly transported to the region during the Qajar period: On the high pastures of Fīrūzkūh and Qazqāṇčāy the Sangsārī, Arabs iv, Alī Kāy, and Hadāvand, as well as villagers, pasture extensive flocks in summer. The new Tehran-Sārī highway crosses the *šahrestān* of Damāvand, and the trans-Persian railway passes through the majestic Ḥablarūd valley between Garmsār and Fīrūzkūh.

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(Bernard Hourcade)

ii. In Iranian Mythology

Damāvand is the scene of a number of Iranian mythological and legendary events. Gayōmard (NPers. Gayūmarṯ, Kayūmarṯ), the Zoroastrian prototype of human beings and the first king in the *Šāh-nāma*, was said to have resided in Damāvand (Ṭabarī, I, pp. 147, 171; Bīrūnī, *Āṯār*, p. 24; Ebn al-Balḵī, p. 26). The foundation of the city of Damāvand was also attributed to him (Mostawfī, p. 76). Jamšēd was said to have traveled in the air from Damāvand to Bābel (Babylonia), riding in a majestic chariot made and driven by demons (Ṭabarī, I, p. 180; Ṯaʿālebī, *Ḡorar*, pp. 13-14; Bīrūnī, *Āṯār*, p. 216). According to a tradition preserved by Baḷʿamī (ed. Bahār, p. 132), Jamšēd was attacked by Żaḥḥāk (q.v.) in Damāvand. This region also played an important role in the legends of Żaḥḥāk and Ferēdūn. Armāyel and Garmāyel (see armāʾīl), the two

cooks of Bēvar-asb (Żaḥḥāk), were ordered by him to kill each day two young men in order to feed the two serpents growing from his shoulders. They evaded their duty, however, by killing only one and sending the other to Damāvand, thus saving a group of people, who resided there and constituted the ancestors of the Kurds (*Šāh-nāma*, Moscow, I, pp. 52-53; Ṯaʿālebī, *Ḡorar*, pp. 24-26; Bīrūnī, *Āṯār*, p. 227; idem, 1954, p. 263; *Mojmal*, ed. Bahār, pp. 40-41, 462; Gardīzī, ed. Ḥabībī, p. 246; Ebn al-Nadīm, ed. Tajaddod, p. 15; Markwart, *Provincial Capitals*, pp. 15, 68 nos. 28-30). According to a tradition preserved by Ebn Esfandīār (pp. 57-58) and repeated by Maṛʿašī (p. cv), Ferēdūn was born in the village Var (or Varak) in the Lārījān area of Damāvand after his mother had sought refuge on Mount Damāvand. Finally Ferēdūn defeated Żaḥḥāk and sent him to Damāvand, where he was kept in chains at the bottom of a well (*Bundahišn*, TD_2, pp. 80.6-7, 198.6-7; *Ayādgār ī jāmaspīg*, 4.28, pp. 42-43; Masʿūdī, *Morūj*, ed. Pellat, I, pars. 206, 537-38, II, par. 1115; *Mojmal*, ed. Bahār, pp. 41, 462; Mostawfī, p. 83); Ferēdūn appointed guards (*dahāgān negāhbed* "guardians of Dahāg," corrupted as *nekāhīd*Boldān II, p. 545; Qazvīnī, I, p. 159). Ferēdūn's portrait (Pahl. *dēsag*, Ar. *ṣūrat*, *temṯāl*) was displayed on the rock face of the mountain in Żaḥḥāk's view so that he dared not escape (*Zand ī wahman yašt*, 9.13-16, ed. B. T. Anklesaria, Bombay, 1957, pp. 78-79; Ebn al-Faqīh, p. 257; Qazvīnī, I, p. 157; Moses of Khorene, tr. Thomson, p. 126). The famous Ṭāqdīs throne of Ḵosrow II Parvēz (591-628 c.e.) is said to have been made originally by the ruler of Damāvand for Ferēdūn after he captured Żaḥḥāk (*Šāh-nāma*, Moscow, IX, p. 220). The tyrant was to remain imprisoned in Mount Damāvand until the end of the world, when he would release himself but would finally be killed by the Iranian hero Garšāsp (Av. Kərəsāspa; *Bundahišn*, TD_2, p. 198.8-9; *Zand ī wahman yašt*, 9.20-21, ed. Anklesaria, pp. 80-81; *Pahlavi Rivāyat*, chap. 18, no. 25, p. 71; *Dēnkard*, ed. Madan, p. 803.3-7). Garšāsp was said to be lying asleep in the plain Pēšānsē in Kābolestān (*Bundahišn*, TD_2, p. 197.14ff., 198.11; see Monchi-Zadeh, p. 108; Gnoli, p. 38), but, according to another tradition, which reflects a general tendency of the Zoroastrian divines of the Sasanian period to transpose eastern Iranian localities to the west, Pēšānsē was located in the vicinity of Mount Damāvand (*Mēnōg ī xrad*, 62.20, ed. Anklesaria, p. 164; cf. the Pazand version, in which the location is given as *pušt ī Guštāspān* [in Nīšāpūr], rather than Pēšānsē). In local popular belief the volcanic vapor that rises from the mountain is the breath of Żaḥḥāk, the flames his eyes, the dull sounds his groans, and the yellowish water flowing in the streams at the foot of the mountain his urine (Abū Dolaf, p. 22 par. 51; Yāqūt, *Boldān* II, pp. 545, 607, 609; Qazvīnī, p. 158; Bīrūnī, 1355/1936, pp. 103-04). A popular feast is reported to have been held in

the city of Damāvand on 7 Šawwāl 1230/31 August 1815, during which the people celebrated the anniversary of Żaḥḥāk's death (Massé, *Croyances* I, pp. 163-64).

According to one tradition (Baḷʿamī, ed. Bahār, p. 344), the legendary king Manūčehr was born in Damāvand, and, according to another (Baḷʿamī, ed. Bahār, p. 348; Šahmardān, p. 343), Āraš shot his arrow from Mount Damāvand. The mountain was also the scene of an episode in the story of Rostam and Esfandīār, preserved in one of the epistles of the Armenian Grigor Magistros: Esfandīār tried to roll the mountain down on Rostam while he was sleeping, but Rostam woke up and kicked Esfandīār out by the tip of his boot (von Stackelberg, p. 105); in a similar version in the *Šāh-nāma* (Moscow, VI, p. 237) it was Bahman, the son of Esfandīār, who tried to kill Rostam by rolling a rock down a mountain in Sīstān. According to popular belief the White Demon (*Dīv-e sapīd*), who was killed by Rostam, resided in Damāvand, and his daughter still lives there on an inaccessible rock, working with a spindle (Massé, *Croyances* II, p. 414).

Mount Damāvand was believed by some Muslim authors to be the scene of the events in certain Semitic stories. Thus it was related that the demon Ṣaḵr was imprisoned there by Solomon (Abū Dolaf, p. 22 par. 51; Yāqūt, *Boldān* II, p. 607; Ebn al-Faqīh, p. 279; Qazvīnī, p. 158; Ebn Esfandīār, p. 83). Hārūt and Mārūt were said to have been chained in this mountain (*Nozhat al-qolūb*, ed. Le Strange, p. 37). Damāvand has also often been referred to in Persian poetry. In this century Moḥammad-Taqī Malek-al-Šoʿaraʾ Bahār made Damāvand the subject of one of his best-known *qaṣīda*s.

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