



## JABAL-E SERĀJ

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**JABAL-E SERĀJ**, a small town in the province of Parvān in Afghanistan, located at the mouth of the Sālang Valley in Kabul Kohestān to the north of the city of Charikar (Čārikār). On official maps, the name of the city was also given in the Arabic manner as Jabal al-Serāj. Its geographical location allowed the town to control southern access to the Sālang and Bālgāh passes across the Hindu Kush mountains, thus giving it strategic and commercial importance at the time when the routes were safe and controlled.

Various objects, among them a stone Buddhist relief found in 1913 during construction works, indicate that the place was already settled in pre-Islamic time (Ball and Gardin, I, p. 131). Many more objects date from later periods, when the locality was known under the name of Parvān, or Barvān, Farvān, or Fervān. Ebn Ḥawqal (according to Le Strange, p. 350) mentioned it as a large town with a mosque, and mistakenly reported it to be situated on the banks of the Panjshir River. According to the *Ḥodud al-Ālam* (tr. Minorsky, p. 112) it was “a pleasant town and a resort of merchants,” being “the gate of Hindustan.” The *Ṭabaqāt-e Nāseri* by Menhāj-al-Din Juzjāni mentions Parvān several times, but Henry George Raverty in the notes of his translation expresses doubts that this corresponds to Parvān on the Panjshir River to the north of Kabul (Juzjāni, I, pp. 288, 1042). Zahir-al-Din Bābor (r. 1526-1530, q.v.) described it as one of the fruit-bearing villages on the skirts of the mountains, whose inhabitants produced “cheering wines” and practiced a special method of catching fish in the Sālang River (Bābor, pp. 214-15, 226). He also mentions a “full of difficulties” road that leads through Parvān to the pass of Bālgāh, one



of the seven roads across the Hindu Kush (Bābor, pp. 204-5). During the 19th century, when Kohestān was rather unsafe for most of the time, Parvān was rarely mentioned by Western travelers. Charles Masson (III, p. 166) only referred to it as “a city of great magnitude” in ancient times, where coins were discovered in large numbers.

The city gained new importance under the Emir of Afghanistan, Habibullah (Ḥabib-Allāh, r. 1901-19, q.v.), who shifted the governor’s seat to it. Moreover, he built a palace and a large fortified cantonment nearby (Adamec, VI, p. 274), giving them the name Jabal al-Serāj, which gradually replaced the old name of Parvān. This change of name has produced some confusion about the location of the former Parvān. The new gazetteer even confuses it with Charikar, located 12 km further south (Adamec, VI, p. 639).

Habibullah also initiated the modern development of Jabal al-Serāj by constructing the first (1911-18) waterpower station in the country, fed by the Sālang River, which supplied electricity mainly to the royal palace and to a few small factories in Kabul. In 1938 a small cotton-weaving mill was opened there which used the locally produced electric power and benefited from the traditional cotton crafts of Kohestān. The industrial function of the city grew further when a cement factory was put into operation in 1957. Finally, Jabal al-Serāj became an important transit place in the transportation system of Afghanistan, being the southern base of the new Sālang highway completed in 1964 (Grötzbach, p. 212).

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