



KABUL I. GEOGRAPHY OF THE PROVINCE

Kabul is part of a system of high level basins, the elevation of which varies from 1,500 to 3,600 meters, extends—geographically speaking—beyond the administrative borders of the present-day province and includes large parts of the neighboring provinces Parvān and Kapisa on its northern flank. Drained by the Panjšēr in the north and the Kabul river in the south, the Kabul-Panjšēr basin epitomizes a tectonic depression zone framed by high mountains of old rugged crystalline and metamorphic Paleozoic rocks. The mountain ranges surrounding the basin are the southern slopes of the [Hindu Kush](#), reaching an average altitude of 5,000 meters in the north and east, and the Paḡmān chain with an altitude of about 4,000 meters rising to the summit of the Taḡt-e Turkoman (4,696 m) in the west and southwest. The average elevation of the basin ground filled with probable Neogene and Pleistocene sediments is about 1,800 meters. Having been deeply cut into the terrestrial sediments interspersed with layers of clay, marl, and sandstone, the river system carved out deep and narrow gorges difficult to pass. These ravines form considerable barriers impeding the regional traffic on the one hand, but on the other hand they played an important role in the settlement history of the region (see ii, below). The area of Kabul is bounded by the hilly tracts of Meydān Wardak Province in the southwest and the Lōgar valley in the south.

The Kabul-Panjšēr basin divides up into five distinct geographical zones: first, the Kabul basin, bound by lower mountain chains of Precambrian gneisses,



including the plain of Deh Sabz in the north; second, the Kōh Dāman (“mountain skirt”), comprising the foothills between the Kayrkāna pass in Kabul and the mouth of the Ġorband river; third, the Parvān-Kapisa plain, watered by the Panjšēr and the Ġorband rivers; fourth, the Kōhestān, located at the northern and northeastern margins of the basin; and fifth, the Sāfi mountains, separating the city of Kabul and the eastern Kōh Dāman from Kōhestān.

The basin of Kabul is dominated by the Kabul river and a mountain range running in a northeast-southwestern direction. Coming from the southwest, the river breaks through the mountain chain and forms an impressive valley, which narrows further down in the ravine of Deh Mazang between the Kōh-e Asmā’i (2,110 m) in the north and the Kōh-e Šēr Darvāza (2,222 m) in the south (see [KABUL RIVER](#)). The core of the city is directly located between the southern bank of the Kabul river and the Kōh-e Šēr Darvāza. While the Kabul river protects the city on its northern side, the hills on the left bank of the river and the marshy tracts stretching to the east up to the Tapa-ye Maranjān form additional barriers. To the north and northeast the city is bounded by the Tapa-ye Bibi Mahru, the hill of Kulula Pušta, and the Tapa-ye Šahrārā. Beyond these hills an area of marshland extends toward the airport. A similar swamp marks the eastern limits of the urban outskirts, describing a wide sweep between the Maranjān hill and the eastern slope of the Kōh-e Šēr Darvāza. Between the Tapa-ye Maranjān and the marshland situated off the hill and the Bālā Hešār, a passage opens up toward the Lōgar valley.

On its western side the Afghan capital is flanked by the densely populated valley of Čārdeh. The valley is enclosed by the hills running from Ābšahr to the Sorḡ Kōtal in the north; by the Kōh-e Asmā’i and Kōh-e Šēr Darvāza in the east; by the Kōruḡ mountain in the south, and in the west by the Kōh-e Čungur and a spur that slopes down from the ridge east of the Sorḡ Kōtal. In the opposite direction, the Tang-e Ġāru (see also [KABUL RIVER](#)) and the Lataband pass mark the eastern end of Kabul. The gorge of Tang-e Ġāru extends about five miles below Pol-e Čarḡi to a point above the village of Gogamand, or for about a distance of nine and a half miles. With steep cliffs towering at some points perpendicularly up to a height of 5,000 feet above the river, the Tang-e Ġāru is nowhere more than 100 yards in width, and in some places not more than 20 yards. An alternative route bypassing the Lataband pass runs directly through the gorge. The Lataband pass connects Kabul with the city of [Jalālābād](#) and the eastern border with Pakistan. It reaches a height of 7,950 feet at its summit



and is covered with masses of snow in winter, so that the Tang-e Ġāru is often used alternatively for transport and traffic.

Separated from Kabul by a ridge of lower mountains but geographically belonging to Kabul proper, the area of Kōh Dāman extends to the north and forms, together with the Parvān-Kapisa plain, the so-called Šomāli (“northerly”). From Kabul, the Šomāli plain is accessible through a set of passes piercing the mountain north of Kabul. First, it can be entered via the Kōtal-e Siāh Bini in the southwest; second, through the Sorḡ Kōtal stretching from Arḡandeh toward the Kōh Dāman through the Paḡmān valley; third, via the Kōtal-e Ḳayrḡāna, which provides at the present the most frequented access route from the north to Kabul. The Kōtal-e Māmā Ḳātun and Kōtal-e Zemman are less frequented, while the Rāh-e Gusfand (“sheep path”) is easier to pass through a gorge to the north (Adamec, 1985, p. 445, citing an 1880 report).

With a length of about thirty miles and a width varying from four to twelve miles, the Kōh Dāman forms a long stretch of land extending along the foot of the Paḡmān range, which makes up its western boundary toward the [Helmand river](#) valley; its southern limit is marked by a low range jutting out nearly at right angles from the Paḡmān mountains, separating the Kōh Dāman from the Čārdeh valley. Loosened by the winter frost, much debris, splintered rocky fragments from the granite peaks above, and heavy boulders are strewn over the plain on the base of the Paḡmān. The average elevation of the Kōh Dāman proper is about 5,000 feet. At the town of Čārikār the area of Kōh Dāman merges with the Parvān-Kapisa plain, which is bounded by the Kōhestān and the Parvān valley to the north. Here the three rivers Ġorband, Panjšēr, and Parvān (also called Sālang river) issue from the mountains and water the Šomāli plain. On its northern margins some flat-terraced undulations add a further picturesque dimension to the kaleidoscope of the basin. On its eastern side, the plain is bounded by the Rēg-e ravān (“moving sand”), a stretch of sand dunes adjoining the Panjšēr river. The Kōh Dāman is filled with large alluvial deposits of enormous extent, especially in its southern part. In the north, these deposits level off and take the form of rather small foothills near Istālif. This is the result of diminishing water capacities of the rivers and mountain creeks coming from the Paḡmān range. The water level improves just at Čārikār, which is watered by the Ġorband River (Grötzbach, 1990, p. 208). Because of its extraordinary fertility Kōh Dāman, as well as the entire Šomāli, is considered the “Garden of Kabul.” The area is famous for its great variety of fine grapes and vineyards. Besides, apricots, peaches, apples,



walnuts, and pears are cultivated in numerous orchards.

The mountainous area of Kōhestān, also called Kabul-Kōhestān, forms the northern edge of the Kabul-Panjšēr basin in a horseshoe made up by strongly intersected mountain spurs. Leading over to the Hazārajāt (see [HAZĀRA](#)) and northern Afghanistan respectively, the Ġorband and Parvān valleys provide the most important arterial roads, ending with the Šēbar and the Sālang passes. The most prominent valleys to the east are Tagāb (Tagāo) and Nejrāb (Nejrāo) traversed by the rivers of the same name. This region consists mainly of faulted, dissected limestone massifs with some intrusive epliolites bordered by gneisses and igneous cliffs in the east (Dupree, 1973, p. 12).

The Nejrāb valley is said to be an extremely narrow, remote corner which is famous for its grapes and mulberries. In its upper part the valley branches out in several steep side valleys and glens. The Kora Kandāb pass connects Nejrāb with the head of the neighboring, more open Tagāb valley, through which the Tagāb river runs from north to south. Tagāb is a very fertile area and produces pomegranates for the Afghan capital (Adamec, 1985, pp. 604-6).

Climate. Afghanistan's capital is known for its favorable and mild climate, because the average elevation of the Kabul-Panjšēr basin reduces the dry, arid climate typical for this degree of latitude. The main rainy season is in spring and early summer. Short and hot summers, with possible abrupt fluctuations in temperature of twenty degrees C from day to night, are characteristic for the area. Even in July the average low may drop to 14.4 degrees C. The average temperature during summer (June, July, and August) usually exceeds 30 degrees C. Since Kabul and parts of eastern Afghanistan are located at the margins of the monsoon zone, the trough of the summer monsoon reaches Kabul at the end of July or beginning of August and leads to a considerable increase in humidity. During summer and autumn the phenomenon of *kākbād*, a dusty whirlwind, is very common in the afternoon. Harsh winters with frequent snowfall creating thick blankets of snow were typical in the past. In recent years drought has caused reduced snow accumulation in the lower parts of the Kabul valley. However, masses of snow frequently block the Sālang high road even in spring. In higher altitudes, many mountain ranges in the vicinity of Kabul are snow-covered until May or June.



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