



SAHAND MOUNTAIN

SAHAND MOUNTAIN (Kuh-e Sahand), With 3710 m the third of the great volcanoes in the volcano province of Eastern Anatolia and Northwestern Iran, the other two being Ararat and Sabalān (qq.v.). In its geological history and structure comparable to the Kuh-e- Sabalān, the Kuh-e Sahand marks the southern fringe of the highly active volcanic-tectonic geological province of West Azarbaijan (Harrison, pp. 132, 156). It is, therefore, a major cause of earthquakes with often disastrous effects on rural and urban settlements, especially on big cities like Tabriz, in which almost all monuments have been destroyed by large-magnitude earthquakes in the last centuries. Another negative effect of the comparatively young geological history of the Sahand and its environs is the salinization of the surface waters descending from the mountain and causing their brackish mineralization. While some of the springs are used for medical treatments, their water quality is limited for human uses as drinking and sometimes even as irrigation water.

Similar to other volcanoes in the mountainous regions of Iran's northwest, climate and vegetation are favorable compared to most other parts of the country, although it may sometimes be extremely harsh. High altitude, long and snowy winters, and comparatively moderate summerly temperatures make the Kuh-e Sahand and its surrounding foothills a densely populated rural area. Xavier de Planhol (1958, 1960, 1966) has devoted a number of studies to the economy and settlement of this region with special reference to their settlement history. Unlike the Kuh-e Sabalān, where nomadism plays a major role, the Kuh-e Sahand is a predominantly rural area with agriculture



and a village-based animal husbandry. While permanent rural settlements can be found up to a height of approx. 2,500 m, the higher portions of the mountain are used by villagers in the form of transhumance, sometimes even in its inverse form. Here the flocks of sheep and goats move up to higher parts of the mountain in the summer; in winter at least some of them used to migrate down to the snow-free mountain forelands.

De Planhol (1966, p. 303-7) describes the Kuh-e-Sahand as a typical example for the juxtaposition of Iranian and Turkish modes of rural production and lifestyles. Pointing to the fact that the rural environments of Anatolia and northwestern Iran are similar, de Planhol argues that the slow encroachment of Turks and/or Turkish-speaking populations on traditionally Persian territory has led to a very characteristic vertical ethnic differentiation and juxtaposition of ethnicity, language, and lifestyles in the massif of the Kuh-e-Sahand. Thus, the high and cut-off valleys of the volcano maintains an Iranian mountain way of life “despite the fact that we are here in a Turkish-speaking area” (de Planhol, 1966, p. 304). Besides, agricultural production and irrigation techniques, as well as specific aspects of mountain pastoralism, are “typical Iranian,” although the Kuh-e-Sahand and the neighboring regions “have been Turkified linguistically.” Nevertheless, the toponymies of topographically important locations have preserved their Iranian linguistic origins. On the whole, about 75 percent of the village names in the Kuh-e-Sahand are Iranian. Thus, the Kuh-e-Sahand is an interesting example for the continuity and perseverance of traditional settlement and rural life over centuries in northwestern province of Azarbaijan, in spite of historical and cultural colonization and transformation by a Turkish population.

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