

The Role of Mount *Albourz* in Comprehensive Planning of Tehran

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Abstract | Mountains have played a prominent role in ancient civilizations and rituals and have always been admired by people but they deserve more attention in Iran due to a topography specific to this country. They were of considerable importance to such an extent that civilizations such as Elamite and Sumerian built their ziggurats resembling a mountain like Chogha Zanbil. Albourz as the most magnificent and highest mountain range is located in the north of Tehran. Being a vital natural element determining the limits of Tehran, these mountains are regarded as one of the factors constructing the identity of the city. Today, a merely physical consideration of these mountains has caused that there is not a good relationship between the city and the mountains, but these mountains as the most important urban edge of Tehran naturally can play a key role in identity construction and development of a good relationship with the city. With regard to the importance of Albourz and its massive impact on the city, the present article aimed to examine the role of these mountains within the urban planning of Tehran through the main document of the comprehensive plan adopted in 2007. The data have been collected based on qualitative research and the case study.

Keywords | Albourz, Mountain, Tehran, the Comprehensive Plan of Tehran.

Introduction | Mountains fill humans with wonder; meanwhile, people have found them the best shelter from the danger of wild animals. Primitive men would dig big holes inside mountains to live there. In fact, mountains were acted as a ladder for them to reach the summit of them and dominate Nature. Due to the fact that mountains were located at the top, they were the source of rivers, the position of sunrise, gods, reception of revelations from God, and the relations of God with the Prophet. On the other hand, height symbolizes ascension and spirituality, and humans believe that a mountain represents perseverance, ennoblement, exaltedness and strength. Mountains used to be the source of light from humans' viewpoints. In fact, humans used to assume them their god. Furthermore, a mountain was the primary creature which conversed with humans through echoes.

Mountains used to have a very important place in Persians' lives to such an extent that most of religious ceremonies took place in mountains. Thus Persians have always placed a ritual value on mountains. Albourz, the most impressive mountain in Iran, used to be the place of God and linked God and people together due to its exaltation.

Throughout history, a variety of complex relationships have been between men and mountains. In fact, mountains were considered of paramount importance from many aspects by people, but as a whole, they could be classified under two aspects in terms of importance for men: Natural, and Historical and Mythological. The present research focuses attention on the historical and mythical aspect of mountains especially Albourz. In the past, Albourz had a close relationship with its hillside residents and all the people in Iran and was a real blessing for them to such an extent that over the years, its high position for people were represented more in Persian literature, mythology and history; however, for the time being, it can be seen that there is not a strong relationship between men and this historic mountain. Furthermore, the city could not have developed a good relationship with this mountain. Lack of such a relationship between Tehran and Mount Albourz may result from many reasons, but some of them can be sought out in the comprehensive urban planning document. Hence, this paper aims to give full consideration to the role of Albourz Mountain range in the present comprehensive plan of Tehran, a completed version of the last two plans, in order to find out to what extent the aforementioned relationship relates to the urban planning of Tehran. To do this, the historical and mythological role of Albourz is examined in the present comprehensive plan of Tehran.

Mountains in humans' mind and life

A mountain is considered a point where the sky and the earth cross each other; the point where the celestial axis

crosses, and it is surrounded by sanctity. A mountain is close to the sky which makes its sanctity twofold: on the one hand, it has spatial symbolization denoting exaltedness like 'high', 'vertical or upright', 'superior', etc. and on the other hand, it is the place of geographical manifestations of divine, for this reason it is the dwelling place of gods. In most of mythologies, there is a holy mountain like Mount Olympus which is the home of gods, and some spaces have been allocated in the highest parts for worship of gods of heaven.

Reaching the summit of a mountain is the man's dogged determination opposing the force of gravity, which is an accomplishment for him. Furthermore, being at the top of a mountain, a man's field of vision grows. Similarly, men experience the same sense of accomplishment in morality, ethics, arts, and mental works. Ascending the tops of mountains was not as impossible as reaching the sky for primitive men, however, it was a demanding work anyway, and although the higher parts of mountains seemed not completely unknown, they were hard to be visited; they also differed widely from the familiar sites in which primitive men hung around. Hence, it was often imagined in mythology of different tribes that great gods had been on their thrones at the top of mountains.

Architecture of mountain-like buildings stemmed from the belief that the summit of mountains had been the closest point to the sky and men had attempted to build their homes on the highest part of cosmic mountains to make reaching to the sky possible. In fact, ziggurats, pyramids, tombs and tower-like buildings, domes, and tall multi-story temples were symbolic of mountains and heaven. Chinese poets believed that the peaks of mountains piled one upon the other not only to the clouds, but to heaven. Some held the view that primary mountains appeared after storms and the fall and decay of the nature. Some mountains have been seen as cosmic mountains, central to an entire worldview; others have been distinguished as places of revelation and vision, as divine dwelling places, or even as geographical manifestations of the divine (Mei, 1989).

In his book *Images and Symbolism: Studies in Religious Symbolism*, Eliade believes that the peak of cosmic mountain is not only the highest point in earth but also the navel of the earth, i.e. a point where the Creation began. Moreover, he speaks of decoding of axis mundi incorporating symbols of three supplementary and unified categories:

First, a sacred highland is located in axis mundi where the earth and the sky link. Secondly, every temple or palace and to a large degree every sacred city and royal palace is identified with the sacred highland, thus moved to a central position; finally, since temples and sacred cities are places where the celestial axis crosses, therefore, they also connect heaven, the earth and the Underworld. In this regard, cosmic mountains as the world center and the link between the earth and heaven are central to the order and

stability of the cosmos (Elliade, 1996).

According to Persians' beliefs, sacred Mount Albourz is located in the world center and linked to the sky. "Mount Albourz is the pillar of heaven, and the sun, the moon, and the constellation are turning on a pivot" (Razi, 1967: 146). As mentioned before, on the other hand there are a large number of mountatins which don't play an important role in original cosmogony but have been the places where the great relationship between a human and God forms. Adam's Peak (Sri Pada) in Sri Lanka which is held to be the footprint of Adam in Islamic tradition, the footprint of Buddha in Buddhist tradition, that of Shiva in Hindu tradition, and that of St. Thomas, one of the Apostles, in Christian tradition, Mount Uhud in which the Prophet Muhammad heard Wahy (the message of God) and Mount Sinai where Moses visited God, are among the eminent mountains regarding Wahy (Elliade, 1996).

Herodotus writes about Persian people' worship in the the Archaemenid Empire: worship took place not in large temples but in open space and at the summit of the mountains. Persians used to reach the peaks of the mountains and do acts of generosity for the sake of Ahura Mazda. Moreover, they felt presence of Ahura Mazda in all the sky, and did acts of generosity for the sun, moon, earth, water, fire and winds in the mountains (Qorshi, 2010).

A mountain is of utmost importance through the eyes of Islam and it has been mentioned many times in the Quran, as follows:

- "And hath cast into the earth firm hills" (The Qur'an, Luqman 10), in this verse, mountains are considered as anchors;
- "And he hath cast into the earth firm hills that it quake not with you, and streams and roads that ye may find a way" (The Qur'an, An-Nahl 15);
- "Have We not made the earth an expense?", "And the high hills bulwarks" (The Qur'an, Al-Naba 7.8);
- "And hath given you places of refuge in the mountains" (The Qur'an, Al-Nahl 81).

Mount *Albourz* in Persian Thought

Iran has always faced a shortage of water, and due to the presence of water in hillsides, they have been proper places for life. Sources of water including rivers, springs and qanats had been located in mountains. Furthermore, mountains had played the role of a shelter for building cities and villages, hence it is seen that most of them have been created in hillsides. Mountains have played a prominent role in ancient civilizations and rituals and have always been admired by people but they deserve more attention in Iran due to a topography specific to this country.

Ancient Persians thought of the world as round and flat and the earth, the moon and constellations in a tranquil state which was shattered by the entry of evil into the

universe. Suddenly, the universe was renovated, causing mountains to grow, rivers to run and moon and the constellations to revolve (Hinnells, 2007: 22). Mountains were of great benefit to Ancient Persians. In the Manag-ī Khrad (Spirit of Wisdom), Dānāg poses a question, "why have mountains been appeared?" and this question is answered, "Some mountains in the world provoke winds and some prevent them, some are the places of rain clouds and some imprison the Satan and some protect the creatures of Ahura Mazda" (Afifi, 1995: 592).

In Bundahishn, it is written about Mount Albourz that, "the chief mountain which rose was Izadi Albourz which took eight years to grow; for two hundred years it grew to the star station; for two hundred years it grew to the moon station; for two hundred years it grew to the sun station and for the final two hundred years it grew to utmost limit of the sky (Dadegi, 2001: 71).

Moreover, based on an ancient belief, birth of Mehr was the result of a lightening between two rocks in Mount Albourz (Javadi, 2007:16). Based on Mehr Yasht, when dawn breaks every day, Mehr with its golden chariot arises out of a ritual mountain called 'Albourz' and traverses the sky and inspects the Aryan tribes lest they become perverse and renege on a promise. Hence, Mehr controls the promises and it never sleeps to carry out such a task well, which makes it an open-eyed god for ever. In subsequent times, Mehr mixes with the sun which is a golden object seeking the sky (Mousavi, 2009: 115).

Moreover, in Zoroastrianism (the dominant religion of Ancient Persians), mountains were so sacred that they were worshipped. It is related in Avesta, the primary collection of religious texts of Zoroastrianism, that, "Oh, Haoma! I worship clouds and rain that grow thee at the pinnacle. I praise this pinnacle where thou have grown (Doustkhah, 1991:144). Furthermore, it is related in Great Bundahishn that, "these mountains have created to feed Atorbans, Arteshtarans and Esterioshan (Pourdawoud, 1968: 404).

As I highlighted previously, mountains can be classified as Cosmic Mountains and Mountain of Revelation and Vision. In this regard, Mount Albourz is categorized under both of them. On the one hand, having placed in the center, Albourz is regarded as a cosmic mountain. The roots of this mountain have spread under the earth, holding it together, and from these roots have grown all the other mountains. In the middle of the earth stands Mount Tera, the peak of Albourz, and from there to heaven stretches the Chinvat Bridge over which all souls must pass at death on their journey to heaven or hell. Arezur ridge on the rim of Mount Albourz is the gateway to hell where the demons discourse (Mousavi, 2009: 115). From the other hand, Mount Albourz is the place where wisdom and myth are linked, therefore it can be referred that Albourz is classified as a mountain of revelation and vision.

Albourz is the home of the wise and also Simurgh in Persian mythology. Zal has grown there. Its height represents the connection to the sky (the home of heavenly forces of the divinity). Zal grows up in Mount Albourz in order that its wisdom wouldn't be implicated in acquired values of society, but to come back to the society, it is certain to descend from the peak (Mousavi, 2008: 200).

As the authors of Yashts described the Mount Albourz, it can be inferred that Albourz is not a geographical mountain but a heavenly one and the symbol of heaven. The home of Sraosha is clearly visible from the summit of Albourz that around which the sun, moon and the constellations revolve (Mohassel, 2012: 125).

In addition to Albourz as the most magnificent mountain in Iran, other mountains also contained such sacred mythologies. For example, in Ancient Persians' belief, Mount Sabalan was the place where Zoroaster received divine inspiration, and Takht-e Suleyman Massif was the home of Solomon, a king of Israel. Even those less important mountains on hillsides of which villages have been formed contain their own mythologies. All in all, this shows the special place of mountains among Ancient Persians.

Mount Albourz & Tehran

The relationship between Tehran and Mount Albourz can be divided into three stages in the passage of time: in the early stage, the mountain was regarded as a shelter and also a water supply for the city, and there had been a strong mental relationship between people and the mountain. As the next stage, the city tended to extend through the mountain and there was still a strong relationship between them. As the final stage which relates to the present time, Albourz' values have been ignored by the residents, and the city and its residents have destroyed the mountain, trespassed the limits of the mountain, and an unfriendly relationship has been developed between the city and the mountain.

Pictures and paintings inserted in travelogues are a testimony to recognition of Tehran through Mount Albourz which has been one of the most important urban

edges in giving identity to this city. An edge is a physical quantity and an element of urban landscape which portrays a mental image of a line which is visible to the naked eye in the citizens' minds. Edges can be long signs that due to the difference with the surrounding environment are taken into account as a turning point too (Yarahmadi, 2010). In fact, being effective in marking the main frontage and stretches which determine the skeleton of the city, edges play a major role in creation of a continuous entity and restoration of natural, historical and artificial identity of the city. It is certainly true that Mount Albourz is one of the most important landscape edges of Tehran which have been disappeared in this city due to lack of attention to indices of identity. In terms of relation between Tehran and Albourz, Anne Sgard comments that, "Mountains of Tehran could not be seen in the first two days of visit. The scattered trees, magnitude of the city and major commercial centers made the first perception of the city while there was an uncertain logical connection between the city and mountain. Having stayed for two days, from the tall buildings and urban air pollution, the mountains seem to appear that look much closer than it is assumed. These mountains are at their starting point and the city has come to invade them. There seems that the mountains and foothills have been eaten by the city" (Hojjati, 2014).

Mount Albourz in Tehran Planning

In the previous section, the importance of the mountain and different relationships between the mountain and the humans were discussed, now it is attempted to categorize the issues addressed in the comprehensive plan concerning the mountains in the north of Tehran. Generally, a brief summary of references to Northern mountains of Tehran have been provided in sections: Organization of construction and development of Tehran, Analysis of existing facilities and hardships, Analysis of structural conditions, Location designs, Organization of townscape, Structural design of Tehran, Limits of Tehran, and Structural idea of development and organization of

Table 1: The Mount *Alborz* in the comprehensive plan of Tehran.
Source: Author.

Organization of Construction and development of Tehran, Spheres of organization	Organization of National Valuable spheres	Tehran's natural fabrics such as river valleys and highlands (foothills)* require organization with regard to existing problems and destroying trend. *A discrete system of natural urban spaces having high potential to enlarge public spheres
		The presence of Albourz Highlands in the north of the city
Analysis of existing facilities and hardships	Advantages (potentials)	The presence of water in river valleys and streams as the valuable open and green spaces in nature such as Kan, Farahzad, Darakeh, Darband, and Dar'abad
	Disadvantages (limitations)	Excessive Constructions and increase of density as well as Invading the limits of highland and causing harm to natural environments and valuable landscapes
		Excessive development of high-rise structure building (specially in terms of location) and gradual erosion of gardens
Analysis of structural conditions	Analysis of existing trends and tendencies	Progressive reduction of quality in urban environment in terms of residence possibility, activity, healthy and sustainable life

		Persistence in destruction of valuable natural and urban fabrics in the city
		Unsustainable spatial system and lack of sustainable environmental development due to the low efficiency and "destruction of natural resources" of a perfect city
Location designs Highland organization planning	Organization of Northern highland	Observing the limits and scrutinizing physical dimension of the northern boundary of the city through the natural factors as the vivid and certain edge for the city
		The creation of intermediary space between urban nature (recreation areas in the north of Iran) and Central Albourz foothills nature through the creation of green belt in the north of urban edge in the form of a green zone of trees and shrubs for wide protection and recreation
		Determining and defining the physical limits of northern city proper of Tehran (highlands' protection zones) with defining its northern boundary in compatible with Central Albourz Ridgelines and determining the southern limits of it with the Green belt (suburban highland zone) to protect ecosystem of Central Albourz, valuable recreation areas and mountain sports.
		The creation of intermediary space between urban environment of Tehran and legal boundary of north of Tehran as the concentrated recreation area by developing proper activities for tourism and spending spare time specially in the river valleys and limitation of residence uses in highlands' interurban zone
		Determining wide physical totality of highland in the north of Tehran including highlands' protection zone, suburban and interurban highlands zones with defining a unified and high managements system for the mentioned limits and planning, performance, maintenance and transference of this "natural heritage" to the future generation
Organization of townscape	Quality improvement of urban environment in Tehran	Spread of exuberance in urban environments by protecting and equipping natural zones and open and green spaces: Organization of highland and foothills around the city by creating green belt, equipping river valleys, and participating in the course of utilization of highlands
	Urban nature	Mountains and highlands, a range of northern highlands as one of the spheres and elements of nature and open and green spaces which must be organized to spread exuberance in urban environment
	Distinctive zones and identity symbols in the city	Mount Damavand (requires protection and preservation of corridors and visual paths leading to Damavand's landscapes
	Natural urban symbols	Albourz mountain range in the north of the city
	Distinctive zones and identity symbols in the city Visual values	Main western-eastern corridors having a perspective towards Damavand's landscape
		Main northern-southern corridors having a proper and spectacular view towards Albourz foothills in the north of Tehran
		A continuous landscape of Mount Albourz from the perspective of western-eastern highways:Hemmat, Resalat, Karaj Freeway, Karaj highway, Fath Highway and Azadegan Ring Road
		Panaromic zones with a wide view of Albourz peaks to the city (requires not an obstruction of landscape by constructions
Structural design of the city	Recognition of structural components of the city	Albourz Highlands in the north are formed as one of the most important natural elements in constitution of spatial organization in Tehran
City proper and limits of Tehran	City Proper	Northern drainage basins of Tehran (Albourz Ridgeline) Northern drainage basins of Tehran between two drainage basins of Karaj Dam and Latyan-Northern Highlands
	City Limits	From the north, limited to the height of 1800 meters on the far northwest of the city to the Kan Watercourse and limited to the height of 1400 meters from Kan Watercourse to the far West of the city
Structural idea of development and spatial organization of the city The general rules and the basics of development idea	The basics of development idea	Utilization of Albourz hillsides as the northern boundary of residence, activity , and the continuous axis of recreation
		The prohibition of development of residence and activity in northern-eastern city proper and stabilization of performance of northern and eastern highlands for recreation, tourism, and protection of Natural sources

spaces in Tehran, as follows in table1.

The results of the above tables show that there are many references to the northern highlands of Tehran in the comprehensive plan of Tehran. As a whole, these references can be put into different categories. Significance of the recreation and tourism potentials of the mountain is much highlighted in the plan to such an extent that improvement of public spheres which are among the

functions of recreation areas is dealt with in this category.

In some sections, the mountain has been introduced as the city proper and limits of Tehran. In other sections of the plan, in which Tehran's river valleys are under consideration, Tehran' northern highlands have been taken into account as the beds of river valleys. In the rest of the plan, the strategy of intervention in how to utilize the mountain lands with the aim of producing exuberance in

the urban environment and enhancement of urban quality has been developed. Furthermore, in the other section, Mount Damavand and Albourz mountain range have been

Conclusion | The analyses of the role of mountains in the present comprehensive plan of Tehran reveal that two physical measures have been adopted in order to prevent invasion of the limits of the highland, as follows: no right to construct at the level above 1400 meters in some areas and above 1800 meters in other areas, and creation of a protection green belt in the highland. There have been widespread criticisms of both measures. Regarding numbers 1400 and 1800 which were first propounded in the comprehensive plan approved in 1968, it is worth saying that it's not clear why such numbers have been chosen, which confirms the physical view towards the mountain. The other strategy which is tree planting and creation of a protection belt in order to encounter urban invasion to the mountain's city proper due to lack of adaptation of trees to the area's climate and the need to perennial irrigation, has been criticized by the many.

Recent studies show that with the coming of technology, symbolic and mythological and sometimes ecological characteristics of the mountain, and interactions of a thousand years between humans and mountains have been forgotten; in this regard, mountains are merely taken

considered as the distinctive natural and identity symbols of the city.

into consideration as the natural phenomenon in the comprehensive plan and at best only a natural environment, while based on the issues under consideration they were not just a physical landscape and nature for ancient Persians. From the other hand, as outlined in the present research, mountains are not only important in terms of natural aspect, but also in terms of historical and identity aspects. This importance is manifold for Mount Albourz but it is less considered in the comprehensive plan; however, a brief discussion of Mount Albourz and Damavand as historical, mythological and identity-establishing elements is provided in the section of natural identity-establishing elements in Tehran, and a few strategies have been proposed. In the section of analysis of this plan's trends, it is mentioned that Tehran is a city devoid of any consistency and empty of identity and cannot play its national role as a capital, which shows that identity potentials of the mountain have not been well used. The mountain as the most important natural edge of Tehran has many potentials and it seems that a landscape approach to the mountain that is the same both mental and objective approach to this important natural element is the best approach to interaction of a mountain and a city.

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