

The Landscape of Dasht-e-Kawir is one of the most wonderful views on earth.

Dr. Mahdavi, M., Associate Prof., Dept. of Geography, University of Tehran.

چکیده

قسمت اعظم فلات مرکزی ایران که اسماً به نام دشت کویر نامیده می‌شود بین قوسهای جنوبی البرز شمالی و ارتفاعات خرقان، ساوه و تفرش در غرب و جنوب غربی، کوههای طبس تا سبزوار در شرق و ارتفاعات تفرش و کاشان، انارک و جندق در جنوب قرار دارد. این منطقه به وسیله ارتفاعاتی به حوضه آبایی تقسیم گردیده که دو حوضه دشت کویر در مغرب و مسیله در مشرق، از مهمترین آنها محسوب می‌گردد.

تئوری‌های مختلفی در مورد تشکیل و به وجود آمدن دشت کویر وجود دارد. دشت کویر اگر چه خود به علت شرایط خاص طبیعی مساعد زیست گیاه و جانور نیست ولی در حاشیه آن که عموماً به وسیله بیابانهایی احاطه شده است سکونتگاه‌های انسانی به صورت پراکنده و گاه متمرکز دیده می‌شود.

در گذشته دشت کویر به جهت اینکه راه مهم کاروانرو که احتمالاً از شاخه‌راههای ابریشم می‌توان از آن نام برد از داخل این دشت می‌گذشته، مورد توجه بوده است. دو راه در دشت کویر از جنوب به شمال امتداد داشته که یکی از خور و عروسان به طرود و دیگری از جندق به معلمان می‌رسیده است. ناصر خسرو در سفرنامه خود می‌گوید که این راه مهم از یزد شروع می‌شده و از خرائق، مفاظق، جرمق و جندق به دشت کویر می‌رسیده و پس از عبور از دشت کویر به معلمان در شمال دشت کویر و سپس از طریق سمنان به روسیه می‌رفته است.

مناظر زیبای دشت کویر را فقط می‌توان در دشت کویر دید و افراق نیست اگر گفته شود به زیبایی مناظر ماه بیشتر شباهت دارد تا کره زمین. این مناظر شگفت‌انگیز با شبهای فوق‌العاده زیبا و پرستاره عظمتی خاص دارد. سرابهای اغواکننده در روزهای آفتابی انسان را در میان دریایی بیکران رها می‌سازد. تپه‌های ماسه‌ای را به صورت معلق در می‌آورد. سکوت محض کویر را فقط در کویر می‌توان دید، محیط طبیعی علی‌الظاهر عاری از حیات است، نه گیاه نه جانور و نه حشره.... این

همه جذابیت و زیبایی در دشت کویر موهبتی است که باید آنرا سپاس داشت و از آن به نحوی
مطلوب متمتع گردید.

Abstract

The Dasht - e - Kawir (great kawir) in the center of Iran, is a collection of basins, which in general is divided into two main Hydrographical basins, Between them there are stretches an extensive area, which covering a lot of anticlines and several smaller basins. Physical features in the arid central basins of Iran are exteremely diverse and many have individual persian names.

One of the Eruopean researchers, says, "kawir denotes an expanse of slime or mud viscous rather than free flowing with frequent salt efflorescence, or continuous thick layers at the surface." There are several theories as to formation of the Dasht-e-Kawir.

Dasht-e-Kawir is bordered by the marginal villages and towns, which there are many similarities in these area. The Sar-Kawir area in the north and Biabanak area in the south of the Dasht-e-Kawir, have been important in the past, because there are on the caravan routes loading north and south.

Naser Khosrw, the famous Iranian traveller said in his book, "this important route starts from Yazd and passes Khranq, Mafazaq, Jarmaq and Jandaq, (in the south) and after passing the Great Kawir it reaches Sar-Kawir (Hosainan) in

the north and from there the Semnan route goes on towards Russia."

The Biabank area is connected by two desert routes to Sar-Kawir in the north.

The land scape of the real desert can be seen in this ways, and it is one of the most wonderful views on earth. The sky is magnificent at night, dark and covered with bright stars. In the warm sunny days between 10 a.m. - 4 p.m., usually nothing can be seen beyond 20 meteres distance because of radiation reflection from the salty land, within the Dasht-e-Kawir there are no work resources and it is almost impossible to find any form of vegetation or animal life. Silence often dominates the desert. The kawir spreads itself out, more and more dominating.

The landscape with its brown, dark, yellow and with strip sand flats. In fact the Dasht-e-Kawir is like a sea, Jandaq is a halting place on the souther side. For a traveller on the way to the desert and Hosiainan in the northen. They are like coast towns on a landlocked sea.

The interier of the Iranian highlands encloses a central area of irregular shape consisting of very large number of basins which Dasht-e-Kawir or Kawir -e-Bozorg (great kawir) is a collection of these basins (Fig. 1). Bobek (1959) has described this in his research in the Dasth-e-Kawir.

"The great kawir is divided into two main hydrography basins, a western one and an eastern one. Between them there stretches an extensive area mainly composed of erosional surfaces covering a lot of anticlines, and including several

smaller basins partly independent partly attached to the eastern basin by various water courses."

The large eastern basin is divided into the north eastern or Kal-i-Shur Basin and Kal-i-Dastgan Basin. The western basin, which is named Masileh is the lowest of all since its level does not appear to reach much more than 700 m.

Physical features in the arid central basins of Iran are extremely diverse and many have individual Persian names.

One of these "Dasht" is described by Deh Khoda(2) as "an extensive level area". It is not, in fact, a firm and dry desert, although some Eruopean researchers have understood this to be so. Kawir is a large or small basin which is usually swampy or composed of lakes, the run off being dissipated by infiltration into the ground and evaporation from the lakes or swampy areas. If it is salty, the kawir is generally called Kawir-e-Namak, or Kawir-e-Shur, and the clay salty or mud viscous Kawir is generally named Dagh Fisher (1968)(3) says "Kawir denotes an expanse of slime or mud viscous rather than free - flowing with frequent salt efflorescence or continuous thick layers at the surface."

There are several theories as to the formation of the Dasht-e-Kawir. One of these, expressed by Bobek (1959)(5) and supported by others, suggests that the Dasht-e-Kawir as well as other smaller kawirs, should be considered as the last remains of former lakes.

The Dasht-e-Kawir occurs between 32°50' N, 36°70' N latitude and 50°59'E longitud. The extent of the Dasht-e-Kawir is about 29700 km²(6) and is bordered by the marginal villages and towns. Eleven cities and towns are located at the edge of Dasht-e-Kawir-Qom, Varamin, Garmsar, Semnan, Damgan, Sabzevar, Kashmar, Ferdos, Tabas, Aran, and Kashan. Most of the villages in each part of

the kawir are located close together forming a group that is called Manzomeh(7) (system), in which the major village is usually the administrative centre. The Abuzaid-Abad area and its adjoining village is good example of a Manzomeh. During my field observations, I had the opportunity to observe most of the areas and villages in the margin of the Dasht-e-Kawir. Two Manzomeh which attracted me in the margine of the Dasht-e-Kawir are as follows:

1. The Sar-Kawir area in the north of the Dasht-e-Kawir.
2. The Biabanak area in the south. (Fig. 2). The many similarities in these areas, e.g. climate, soil conditions, water supply system agricultural activities, ownership, carpet weaving, population distribution etc. The outline of the two areas is discussed very briefly in the following pages.

Biabanak

Biabanak is the name of a area. According to the country administration, Biabanak is a part of Isfahan Ostan (country) whose centre is Khur.

In Biabanak there are 23 villages and 132 Mazreahs (hamlets).

In the old documents of the region, the name of the area is written as Jandaq va Qoraeh Sabeh (Jandaq and the location of seven villages).

These major villages are - Baiazeh, Mehrijan, Garmeh, Ordib, Iraj, Farokhi and Khur.

There is a depression in the south of Biabanak named Gude-e-Jigark, about 20 km long and 12 km wide. This is surrounded by low mountains, the brownish colour of which probably gain the depression its name, as the local word for liver is Jigark.

There are 11 deserted villages in this depression, in which only 38 households were living. The deepest part of the depression becomes a lake in the rainy season,

a marsh in the beginning of spring and a salty flat plain in the summer. An aerial photograph or a map of the area shows plenty of villages but it should be noted that most of them are uninhabited, or have only a few residents. For example 41 Mazreahs of Jandaq has a population of only 100.

This area was important in the past because it was on the caravan routes leading north-south. Hedin described these in his book (1910)(8).

"North-going caravans are usually laden with silk, cotton, and wool, henna and other dye-stuffs, Indian tea, cinnamon, pepper and other spices, etc. These travelling in the opposite direction carry sugar, naphtha, oil, Russian-cloth, iron and various groceries to Yazd.

Naser Khosrw (1350-1971)(9) the famous Iranian traveller said in his book.

"This important route starts from Yazd and Passes Khranaq, Mafazaq, Jarmaq and Jaudaq, and after passing the Great Kawir it reaches Hosainan, and from there the Semnan route goes on towards Russia."

The extent of Biabanak, according to a calculation which was carried out by the author was 8,000 km². The density of population of the area was about one person per $\frac{1}{2}$ km². It is clear that the severe environmental conditions do not allow for population growth in the region.

Across the Dasth-e-Kawir

The Biabanak area is connected by two desert routes to Sar Kawir in the north. The first one is named the New Route and it has been used by caravans in the past. This track is 148 km long and goes through the centre of the Kawir. This track starts from the Aroosan (a small village at the south edge of Dasht-e-Kawir),

after passing the salt lake (10 km wide) connected to Trud in the north. Hedin in 1909, Dr and Mrs. Gabriel in 1933 used this route. Hosain Shaibani, now an old man, led the Gabriel's caravan through the desert, and has many recollection of his travels with Dr. and Mrs. Gabriel. The second route is named the Old Route, and is 124 km long. It starts from Jandaq in the south and after Passing through the centre of the desert, joins Moaleman in the northern part of the Dasht-e-Kawir. I was also fortunate enough to travel this way twice, in April and November 1977 and June 1991.

This route used to be travelled by caravans in 72 hours, and before it has been built can be covered by land rover in 14 to 18 hours without stopping. On this route there are four Huoz (water reservoirs), now destroyed. These Huozes were named Manzel (rest-house). On most of the Iranian caravan route in the past there was at every 6 Farsakh (36 km) a Manzel or Caravan Sara (the house of caravan) for rest, and the number of these Manzel provided a good method of measuring distance. The Manzels of this desert route from south to north are Huoz-e-Dahaneh. Huoz-e-Char, Farsakh, Bar Andaz-e-Sar Namak and Houz-e-Aqa. On this route the distance between the Manzels has been reduced from 6 to 4 Farsakhs because of difficult desert conditions.

To cover this route by car took approximately 16.00 hourse before it has been built. The landscape of the real desert can be seen in this way and it is one of the most wonderful views on earth. The desert sky is magnificant at night, dark and covered with bright stars. In the warm sunny days, between 10 a.m. - 4 p.m., usaually nothing can be seen beyond 20 metres distance because of radiation reflection from the salty land.

Within the Dasht-e-Kawir there are no work resources and it is almost

difficulty to find any form of vegetation or animal life, apparently not even any insect life. Silence often dominates the desert. The kawir spreads itself out, more and more dominating the landscape with its brown, dark yellow and white strips and flats.

Hosain Shabani, the leader of the Gabriel caravan said to us that if rain falls for an hour, it is mipossible to conceive of anything more exhausting and wearisome than walking through the mud. One sinks in up to the knee at every step.

He said that the kawir is like a sea, and that it is a serious undertaking to venture over it. Hadin (1910) says in his book.

"Jandaq is a halting place and point of departure on the southern side for a traveller on the way to the desert and Hosainan in the northern. They are like coast towns on a landlocked sea."

Sar Kawir

This district is located in the north of Dasth-e-Kawir.

Hosainan is the first village in the western part of this area, and is connected by the desert route to Jandaq on the southern side of Dasth-e-Kawir. There are villages and 30 Kalatehs (hamlets) in this area. The villages are located on the edge of kawir, but most of the kalatehs are located on the slope of the northern mountains. The major villages of the area are spread out in a line from west to east.

Trud being the last village, According to the government administration, the western villages are a part of Semnan and Trud is a part of Damghan. These villages are from west to east-Hosainan, Moeleman, Siany, Mahdi-Abad, Bidestan, Setveh and Trud.

Fig. 1 IRAN

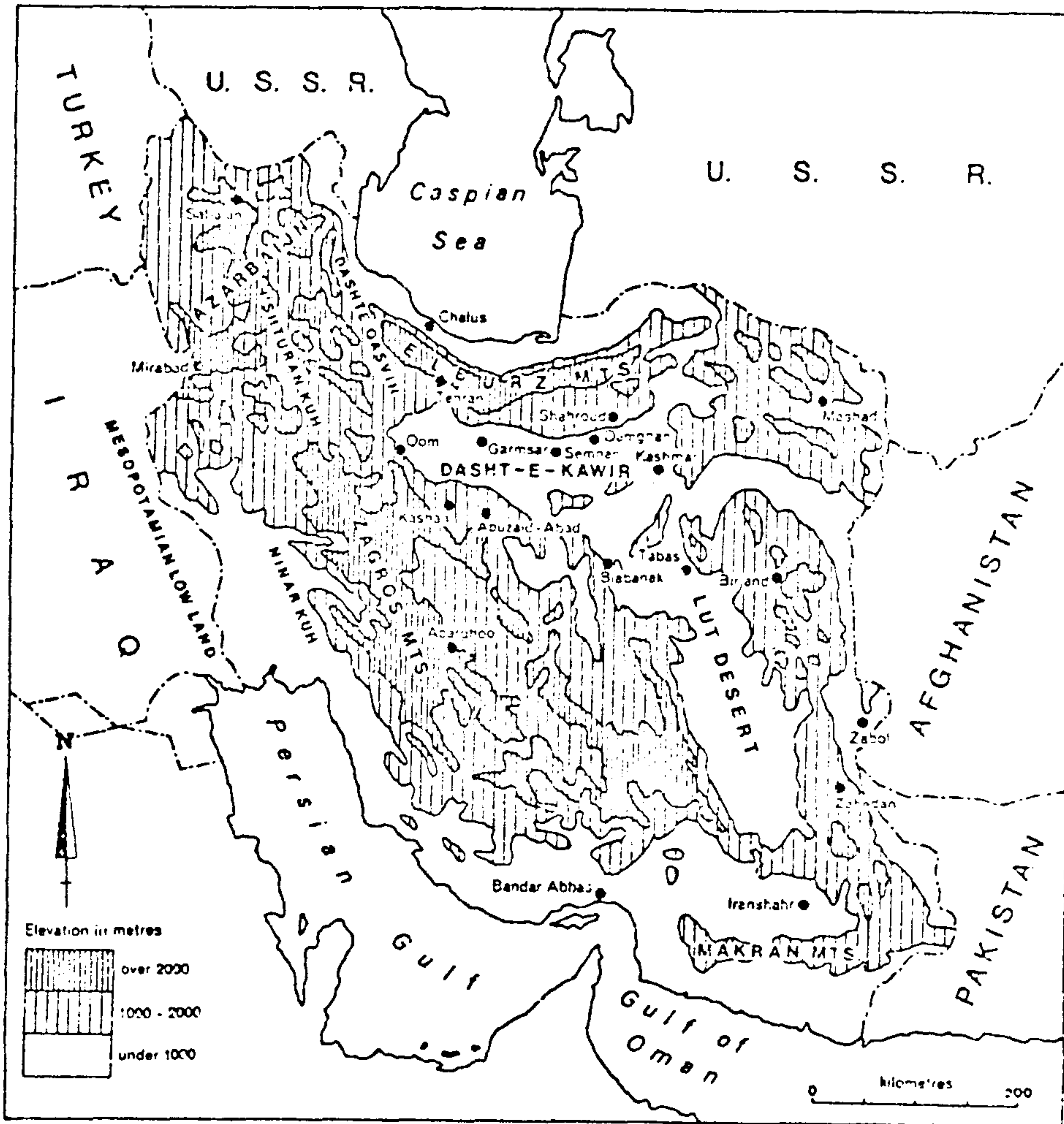
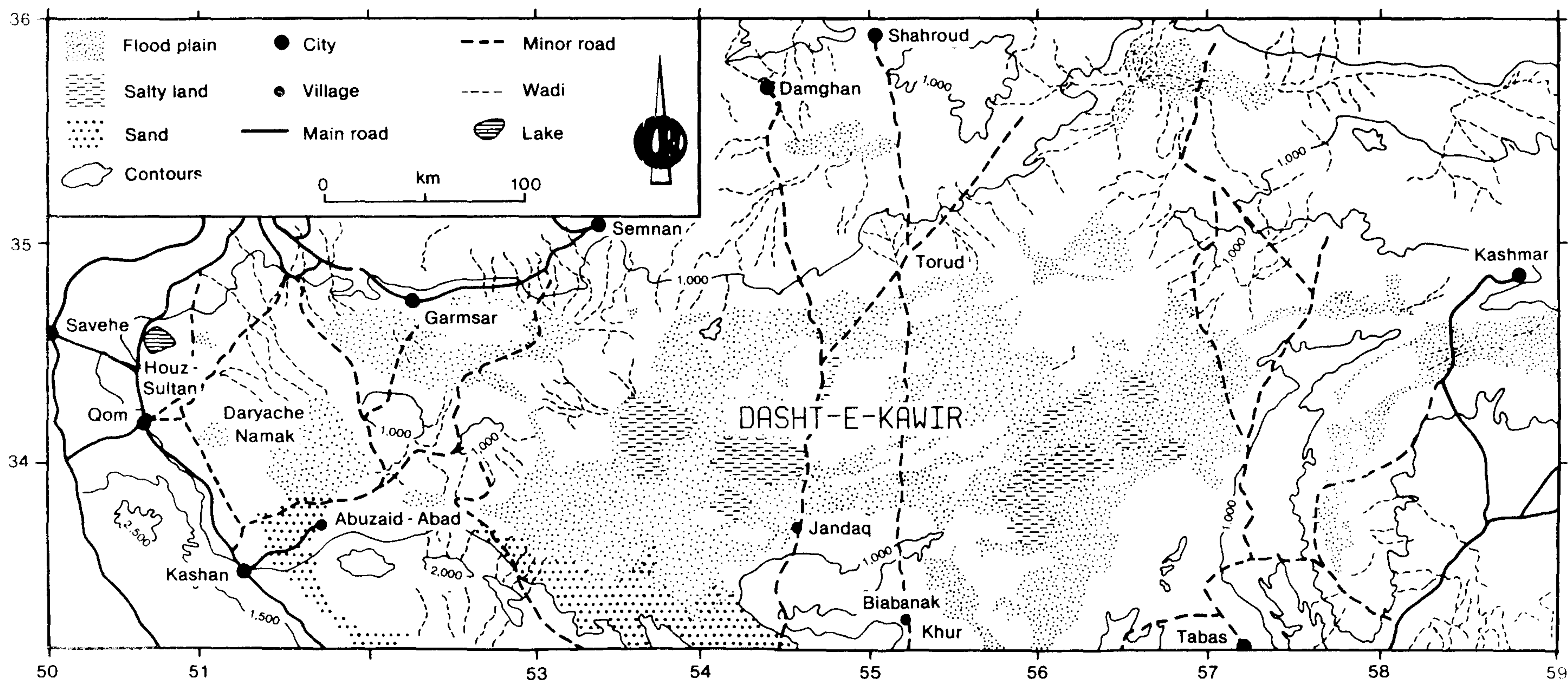


FIG 2 THE DASHT-E-KAWIR AND ITS MARGIN



References

- 1: Bobek, H, (1959), The Great Kawir of central Iran, Arid Zone Research Center, University of Tehran.
- 2: Deh Khoda, A.A. (1972), Loghat-Nameh (Dictionnare Encyclo Pedigue). No, 181, Uni of Tehran, P.1.
- 3: Mahmodi, F, (1976). The Geomorphology of Iran (In Persain), Uni of Tehran, P, 87.
- 4: Fisher, W.B. (1968), The Cambridge History of Iran, The Land of Iran, Vol, I, P, B.
- 5: Bobek, H, (1959). OP. Cit, P, 2.
- 6: Symap-Computer Calculation.
- 7: Vadiee, K. (1973), Manzome-Mohamod-Abad. (In Persian), Uni of Tehran, P, 5.
- 8: Hedin, S, (1910). Overland to India. Macmillan and Co, London, P, 318.
- 9: Naser Khosro, (ed. Dabir Siagi) 1971, Safarnameh.
- 10: Hadin, S. (1910), Op, Cit., P, 318.