



ALBORZ I. THE NAME

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i. The Name

The more ancient name of the range is not known; perhaps, however, the Assyrian name Bikni designated Mt. **Damāvand**, the volcanic cone (5,600 m) northeast of Tehran. In the Sasanian period part of the region may have been known by the Middle Persian *Padišxwār-gar* (F. Spiegel, *Erânische Alterthumskunde* I, Leipzig, 1871, p. 61.1.). Ferdowsī in the *Šāh-nāma* refers to the Alborz mountains as though they lay in India.

The earliest form of the name (Av. Harā bərəzaitī, Mid. Pers. Harborz) denotes in the Avesta and in Zoroastrian writings not the existing range, but a mythological mountain chain fulfilling a cosmological function at either end of the world. Through it the sun enters and departs each day; around its highest peak (*taēra-*, *tērag*) circle the stars (*Yt.* 12.25). In *Yt.* 10.50 and *Yt.* 12.23 the towering, luminous Harā mountains and their many outcrops are the abode of Mithra, “where neither night nor darkness, neither a cold nor a hot wind, neither harmful pestilence nor the *daēva*-created pox (rules);” while the Haraitī range is described as the place “where no mists rise.” The Harā appears in *Yt.* 15.7 in the image of a fortress “held together by iron clamps.” At what point the name of this mythic primeval range came to be applied to the mountains we nowadays know as Alborz is an open question. To begin with, any huge chain of mountains was probably given the name “Alborz.” In the work of Ḥamdallāh Mostawfī (8th/14th century) the name is already



established. The highest (volcanic) peak of the Caucasus is also called (with a sound metathesis) Elbrus (5,600 m., the same height as Damāvand). An obviously secondary derivation is found in the mountain name Alborz, near the village Pāznūya (from *pā-zīnūya* “at the foot of the pass”) in Jahrom, Fārs (see Razmārā, *Farhang* VII, p. 45).

The name of the range probably means “high watch/guard,” a common designation all over the world for mountains and high places. Av. *harā-* (fem. “watch, guard, defence,” not attested as an appellative) is from the OIr. *har-* “to pay attention to, watch over, protect” (*AirWb*, col. 1787), I.E. ²*ser-* (Lat. *serv-are*; see J. Pokorny, *Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, Berne and Munich, 1959, p. 910). The epithet *bərəzaitī* is **br̥zatī*, feminine from OIr. **br̥zant-* “high;” the equivalent in southwest Iranian is **br̥dant-*, which in New Persian produces *boland* after regular sound changes. Cf. NPers. *bālā* (“high”) from *bālā’* (“height”) from **bard-*; NPers. *barz/borz*, “mound” (frequent in toponymy); further OInd. *br̥hant-* (“high, majestic”), German Berg, Burg, Burgund (IE. *bheregh-*, Pokorny, pp. 140f.).

The feminine gender is surprising, for it does not occur in other mountain names among the Indians and Iranians; these are normally masculine. Linguistically too, then, the name Alborz is unusual. The Pahlavi orthography *hlbwłš* (with *š* for the phoneme *č’*) demonstrates a secondary back-formation (*z* to *’*) such as often happens phonetically in the northwest (e.g., Kurdish dialects; cf. NPers. *dež* “castle,” side by side with *dez*, from **dizā-*). *Haraitī* denotes the same mountain range and is either an abbreviation of *Hara bərəzaitī* or represents straightforwardly “the one who keeps watch” (fem. of *harant-*, active present participle). The name of the Hamadān massif Alvand (Elvend, etc.) may well contain the same element *harā/ā-*, i.e., **haravant-*, “furnished with watchers” in the sense of “protecting.” But Alvand as a name given to several rivers (see [Orontes](#)) is derived from *arvant-* (Av. *aurvant-* with epenthesis), “quickly (flowing);” note *ašta-aurvantō* (“the eight runners”) in *Yt.* 19.3 (horses or river sources?).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

See also *AirWb*, cols. 200-01, 959-60, 1788.



W. Eilers, “Der Name Demawend,” *Archiv Orientální* 22, 1954, pp. 313.23, 324.72, 326.79, 374.72.

Unacceptable is the comparison with Av. *harāta*-, “well nourished, thick” made in W. Brandenstein, “Bemerkungen zur Völkertafel in der Genesis,” *Sprachgeschichte und Wortbedeutung; Festschrift Albert Debrunner*, Berne, 1954, p. 64.