



BACTRIA II. IN THE AVESTA AND IN ZOROASTRIAN TRADITION

ii. In the Avesta and in Zoroastrian Tradition

In the Avesta Bactria is mentioned only in the list of countries in the first chapter of the *Vendīdād* (Vd. 1.6 and 7). It appears as Bāx'iš (from which Humbach [1966, p. 52] reconstitutes an original form *Bāxδriš in order to explain the western, probably Median, form Bāxtriš), and is qualified as *srīra-* “beautiful” and *uzgərəptō.drafša-* “with uplifted banners.” The names of the two plagues sent to Bactria by Angra Mainyu, *barvara-* (or *bravara-*) and *usaδ-*, are puzzling and the corresponding names in the Pahlavi version are incomprehensible. *Barvara-*, if compared with Sanskrit *barbara-*, *varvara-*, Greek *barbaroi*, might designate non-Aryan peoples (indeed the name Barbar is still applied to some populations and places in Bactria, especially in the mountainous area). *Usaδ*, used in the plural, is considered by Humbach (1960, pp. 38-39) as a graphic corruption of *usij-*, which in Y. 44.20 designates priests hostile to Zoroaster.

In the existing Pahlavi books, Bactria is mentioned in two contexts. In the *Bundahišn* (ed. and tr. B. T. Anklesaria, XI-A, p. 109) the Oxus, together with the Indus, is identified with the *Wehrōd*, the “Good River,” which forms the boundary of Ērānšahr and is conceptually linked with the Avestan *Vanhvī*



Dāityā, next to which the first upholders of the faith performed their sacrifices (meanwhile, the latter's proper Pahlavi transcription; *Dāitī*, is never identified with any real river in the Pahlavi texts). The *Šahrestānīhā ī Ērān* (8-9) associates Bactria with the Kayanid prince Spandyād (Esfandiār) and his victory in the holy war against Arjāsp, king of the Xyōn; he is purported to have built Balk under the name Navāzag (Pers. Avāza, elsewhere identified with the Rū'indež "brazen castle" and the town of Paykand), and to have established a "Wahrām fire" there. Both the Spandyād tradition and the Oxus-Wehrōd identification are found in the Armenian *History of Heraclius* attributed to Sebeos (ca. A.D. 660).

It is highly probable that by the end of the Sasanian period the lost national chronicle *Xwadāy-nāmag* had come to incorporate more substantial traditions on Balk, linking it with the second Kayanid dynasty and with the preaching of Zoroaster under king Goštāsp (Kavi Vištāspa). In fact, from Ṭabarī onwards, the last point is expressed by all the authors whose information is derived from the chronicle (see Jackson, pp. 199-201, 205-19). Some of them consider that Kay Kāvūs had already established the capital at Balk, while the *Šāh-nāma* attributes this step to Goštāsp's father Lohrāsp (called "the Bactrian" by Bīrūnī). The idea that Bactria had been the setting of the prophet's activity was eventually reconciled with the claim by Azarbaijan to be his birth-place; it superseded other eastern traditions (especially those of Sīstān and Sogdiana), transmitted by some Pahlavi sources. This process can be explained by several factors: the long-lasting political preeminence of Bactria among eastern regions; its importance as a scene of the wars with "Turanian" peoples at the end of the sixth-beginning of the seventh century A.D. (reminiscences of these wars color Ferdowsī's account of Goštāsp's reign, and even more the section on Spandyād in the *Šahrestānīhā*); traditions proper to the local clergy, whose intervention is shown by the fact that a genuinely Bactrian name, Lohrāsp, was substituted for Aurvaṭ.aspa, the Avestan name of Vištāspa's father.



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