



BADAḲŠĀN III. THE NAME

iii. The Name

The area's ancient name is not known. Its later name Badaḳšān is derived from the Sasanian official title *bēdaxš* or *badaxš*, Pahlavi *bythš* in Parthian inscriptions, *bthšy* in Middle Persian inscriptions; Greek *bidix*, *pitiaxou/pituaxou* (genitive); Armenian *bdeašx*; Syriac *paṭaḥšā*, *aṭaḥšā*, from the root of which the Arabic *mofatteš*, meaning "inspector," probably stems. This could well have been the original meaning of a likely etymon **pati-axša* (see also *bidaxš*.)

The patronymic suffix *-ān* indicates that the country belonged, or had been assigned as a fief, to a person holding the high rank of a *badaxš*. In this respect, Badaḳšān resembles other names of countries (or later of cities) based on a personal name or an official title or function, such as Azarbaijan, Isfahan, Kermānšāhān, Tehran, etc. (for details, see W. Eilers, *Onoma* 21, 1977, p. 286).

Badaḳšān was from early ancient times onward the source of the Near Eastern world's supply of lapis lazuli (Sumerian *za-gin*, Akkadian *uqnûm*, in the Islamic languages *lājvard*). This beautiful blue stone was highly valued, the beards of gods were often carved from it, and the chips hewn away in the carving were made into a paste for decorative painting of stone and ceramic objects (Wulff, *Crafts*, pp. 147-48). Since the only lapis lazuli deposits in the ancient world were those in Badaḳšān, the finds of lapis lazuli artifacts give positive evidence of the great antiquity of east-west caravan traffic (along the later "silk road").



Badaḳšān was also famous as a source of rubies. The French “balais” and English “balas,” specifying a variety of ruby (spinel), are traceable to *badaxš*, *d* being changed to *l* in some East Iranian languages.

It has been suggested that Bałasakan, the Armenian name of a district in Caucasia, might correspond to Badaḳšān (J. Markwart, *Ērānšahr*, pp. 17, 279); but the name given to this district in the Sasanian inscriptions on the Ka’ba-ye Zardošt is Balāsakān. In the trilingual inscription of Šāpūr at the same site, *Bythškn* (Parth. = Mid. Pers. *Bthškn* = Greek *Pitixigan*) appears as the patronymic of a certain Ardašīr, no doubt taken from his father’s or grandfather’s official title.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

For a detailed discussion, see W. Eilers, *IJ* 5, 1961, pp. 209ff., 309.

A different explanation of the title is given by H. S. Nyberg in *Eranos* 44, 1946, p. 237, n. 2, and *Manual of Pahlavi* II, 1974, pp. 47f.

R. N. Frye, *Orientalia* 15, 1962, p. 354, and W.-P. Schmid, in W. Hinz, ed., *Altiranische Funde und Forschungen*, 1969, p. 153, n. 22, argue for **bītiya’xšāyaθiya* (Parth.) = **dvitī/īya’xsā/āya-* (Mid. Pers.), which would mean “second ruler,” i.e., a high-ranking minister.

See also O. Szemerényi, in *Monumentum H. S. Nyberg* II, *Acta Iranica* 5, Tehran and Liège, 1975, pp. 363-65.