



## BĀḲṬAR (CARDINAL DIRECTION)

---

**BĀḲṬAR**, designation of the “west” in Modern Persian, but its Pahlavi equivalent *abāxtar* means “north,” probably borrowed from Parthian (cf. Man. Parth. *abāxtar*, see M. Boyce, *A Reader in Manichean Middle Persian and Parthian*, pp. 115-16); the Manichean Middle Persian word for “north” is *abarag* (ibid., pp. 62, 65, text y 4.14). It is derived from Av. *apāxtara* “north.” In the Zoroastrian cosmogonical division, the northern part (*nēmag/kanārag* “side”) is called *abāxtar*, which is under the superintendence of the star Haptōrang “Ursa Major” (*Bundahišn* 2.7). The Zoroastrians also supposed hell to be located in the north, where Ahreman and the demons reside (*Vd.* 7.2, 8.16, 19.1; *Hādōxt nask* 2.25; *Bundahišn*, loc. cit.; *Dēnkard* 7.4.36, 7.6.7, *Dādestān ī dēnīg* 33.5, etc.). It is, therefore, maintained that during the religious ceremonies one should not point the tips of the *barsom*-twigs toward the north (*Šāyest nē šāyest*, ed. Kotwal, 14.2 and p. 107); no one is allowed to throw any food or flower or to pour out water or wine to the north during the night (*Šāyest nē šāyest*, ed. Tavadia, 10.7, and ed. Kotwal, 12.18; *Šad dar-e natr*, ed. Dhabhar, 30; *Dēnkard* 9.19.2).

According to the Pahlavi and Arabo-Persian books and the geography of Moses of Khorene, the Iranian empire was divided, on the pattern of the four cardinal points, into four parts or sides (*kustag*, *sōg*, *kanārag*, *nēmag*, *pāyḡōs*; see Christensen, *Iran Sass.*, pp. 352, 370ff.; V. G. Lukonin in *Camb. Hist. Iran* 3/2, pp. 732; C. Brunner, ibid., pp. 747ff.). This division seems to be more



mythological and mental rather than real and administrative (see Gignoux, *AION* 44, 1984, pp. 555ff;). Whatever the case, the northern part in this division is called *abāxtar* in Pahlavi (*Mādayān ī čātrang* 26, in Pahl. Texts, p. 118), *bāxtar/βāxtar* in Arabic sources (Mas'ūdi, *Tanbīh*, p. 31; Ebn Rosta, p. 103). As the north was believed by the Zoroastrians to be the abode of the Evil Spirit (Ahreman), the word *abāxtar* was generally replaced by the name Ādurbādagān, Arab. Āḍarbāyajān, the most famous province of the northern part of the empire (*Šahrīhā ī Ērān*, ed. Markwart, par. 58; Gardīzī, p. 21, K̄vārazmī, *Mafātīḥ*, p. 115; Ebn K̄ordāḍbeh, *Masālek*, p. 118), or by Kapkoh “Caucasus” (Moses of Khorene, see Markwart, *Ērānšahr*, pp. 17, 94). The same religious belief probably motivated the author or the scribe of the Pahlavi treatise *Sūr saxwan*, par. 12 (ed. Tavadia, *Journal of the K. M. Cama Oriental Institute* 29, 1935, pp. 33, 64, 65) to delete the title *abāxtar spāhbad* “commander-in-chief of the north,” when enumerating the four commanders in chief of the Sasanian empire.

There is a confusion as to the usage of *bāktar* in the early New Persian literature. It is rarely used in its original meaning “north” (*Tārīk-eSīstān*, p. 23; *Šāh-nāma*, Moscow, V, p. 157 v. 1271; IX, p. 195 v. 3131, p. 204 v. 3271), but generally signifies “east” (*Moqaddama-ye Šāh-nāma-ye abū-manšūrī* in *Hazāra-ye Ferdowsī*, Tehran, 1944, p. 139; *Šāh-nāma* III, p. 197 v. 3008; V, p. 285 v. 832; VII, p. 84 v. 1421) or “west” (*Šāh-nāma* I, p. 18 v. 78; VI, p. 177 v. 191, p. 188 v. 376; VII, p. 224 v. 89, p. 232 v. 232, etc.). There is a unique example recorded by Bīrūnī (*Āṭār*, p. 217, 1.72), quoting Zādūya as his source, in which *abāxtar* (written *afāhtar* i.e. *aβāxtar*) is used in the sense of “south.” It is apparently a lapsus either by Bīrūnī or by the author of his source. The above-mentioned variety of usage may be due to the different literary and geographical traditions. After the northern region of Iran had ceased to be called *abāxtar* and *k̄varāsān* (Pahl. *xwārasān*) “east” became the name of the eastern province in the early Islamic period, the word *bāktar* was gradually used for the “east” and later on for the “west.”



---

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

---

See also K. Inostrantsev, "Arabisch-persische Miszellen zur Bedeutung der Himmelsgegenden," *WZKM* 25, 1911, pp. 91-97.

A. Kasrawī, "Čār sū," *Peymān*, 1312 Š./1933, pp. 1-2, repr. in Y. Dokā', ed., *Kārvand-e Kasrawī*, Tehran, 1352 Š./1973, pp. 391-99.

E. Pūr-e Dāvūd, "Čār sū," in *Hormazd-nāma*, Tehran, 1331 Š./1953, pp. 389-402.

D. Monchi-Zadeh, *Topographisch-historische Studien zum iranischen Nationalepos*, Wiesbaden, 1975, pp. 164ff.

*Search terms:*

□□□□ bakhtar baakhtar