



DĀITYĀ, VAŅHVĪ

DĀITYĀ, (VAŅHVĪ) (lit., “the (good) Dāityā”; Mid. Pers. Weh Dāitī), the name of a river connected with the religious “law” (Av. *dāta-*, Mid. and NPers. *dād*), frequently identified in scholarly literature with the Oxus or with rivers of the northeastern region (Geiger, pp. 32-33). In the Avesta, however, VaŅhvī Dāityā seems to have been particularly identified with the Helmand (Markwart, pp. 120, 122 n. 3, 159 n. 2; cf. Gnoli, 1989, p. 53). Avestan *vaŅhuyā dāityayā* “of the good Dāityā” qualifies *airyana-vaējah-* (see [avestan geography](#); *ērānvēj*); the entire phrase *airyanəm vaējō vaŅhuyā dāityayā* “the Aryan expanse of the good Dāityā” is the original name of the district Airyana Vaējah (Benveniste).

According to the Avesta, the Dāityā river was to be venerated (*Yt.* 1.21). On its banks Zairi.vari offered a sacrifice to Anāhitā (*Yt.* 5.112; see [anāhid](#)) and Vištāspa to both Anāhitā (*Yt.* 9.29) and *Aši* (*Yt.* 17.61). Zoroaster himself honored “the good waters of the good Dāityā” (*Vd.* 19.2). As already noted by Josef Markwart (p. 122), it is possible that VaŅhvī Dāityā was the same river that was called VaŅhvī in the *Tištrya Yašt*, where it was characterized as “famous from afar” (*dūrāt frasrūtəm*; *Yt.* 8.2).

According to the first chapter of the *Vidēvdād*, “the Aryan expanse of the good Dāityā” was the first of the best countries created by *Ahura Mazdā*, and in the *Yašts* it was mentioned as the place where Zoroaster worshiped Anāhitā (*Yt.* 5.17, 5.104) and *Ahura Mazdā* worshiped *Vayu* (*Yt.* 15.2). This country, crossed by the VaŅhvī Dāityā, was also the place where *Ahura Mazdā* gathered the spiritual Yazata (Av. *mainyava-*) and *Yima*, the best men. Significantly, both *Ahura Mazdā* and *Yima* were defined as “famous in the Aryan expanse of the



good Dāityā” (*Vd.* 2.20) and Zoroaster as “famous in the Aryan expanse” (*Y.* 9.14), with the shortened form of Aryans Vaējah.

In Pahlavi texts, the river acquired an increasingly mythical character. New details were added to Avestan reminiscences: The river was defined as the “(spiritual) chief of the running waters” (*tazāgān ābān rad; Bundahišn*, TD₂, p. 121 l. 8). It supposedly flowed from Ērānwēz, “the home of the Aryans,” to the lands of neighboring Gōbedšāh, that is, Gōbadestān (*Bundahišn*, TD₂, p. 87 ll. 7-9; cf. Humbach, 1985; *Dādestān ī dēnīg* 89.4). At the center of the world Gayōmard (Av. Gayō.marətan “mortal life”) and Gāw ī ēwdād (Av. Gav aēvō.dāta “uniquely created bull”) were placed on the right and the left banks respectively (*Bundahišn*, TD₂, pp. 20 l. 14, 21 l. 8). Weh Dāitī also occupied a privileged place in the sacred geography of the revelation and encounters of Zoroaster with Ohrmazd and the Amahraspandān (*Zādspram* 21.5, 22.2, 22.9, 22.12; *Dēnkard*, ed. Madan, 7.3.51, 7.3.54, 7.4.23).

The mythical character of the river was preeminent and can be explained within the framework of the notion of Aryana Vaējah, which the Zoroastrian priests substituted for the traditional concept of a world center with a world mountain, the peak of the Harā (according to the old Iranian cosmology; see [cosmogony and cosmology](#)) or Mount Meru or Sumeru (according to the various Indian cosmographies). The Zoroastrian world mountain Čagād ī Dāitī (“lawful Summit”) or Hukar (Av. Hukairya “of good activity”) was placed, like Weh Dāitī, at the center of the world and defined as the “(spiritual) chief of the summits” in Pahlavi texts (*bālistān rad; Bundahišn*, TD₂, p. 121 l. 11), and the river was closely connected with it (Markwart, pp. 125-26; Gnoli, 1989, pp. 40ff.); both were essential elements in a Zoroastrian myth in which the principal events of sacred history were placed at the center of the world.

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(Gherardo Gnoli)