



ĒRĀN-WĒZ

ĒRĀN-WĒZ, the Middle Persian designation of the territory of the Aryans. It is the development of an OIr. **aryānām waijāh* (cf. the similar Man. Sogd. and probably Parth. *ry'nwyjn*, i.e., *Aryānwēžan*; Henning, pp. 55, 73). Differing only in the use of the genitive plural 'of the Aryans' for the adjective 'Aryan,' it corresponds to the Avestan *airyanəm vaējō*. This is first used in the *Yašts* to name the place where Zaraθuštra, 'famed therein' (*Y.* 9.14), sacrificed to Arədvī Sūrā (see [ANĀHĪD](#)) and other divinities (*Yt.* 5.104; 9.25; 17.45). It is described more fully in the first chapters of the *Vendidad*. **Ahura Mazdā** tells Zaraθuštra that he created it "the first and best of places and habitations" but that Anra Mainyu (see [AHRIMAN](#)) had made as its bane 'the red snake and the demon-created winter' (*Vd.* 1.2). If Ahura Mazdā had not made less pleasing places satisfying to their inhabitants "all material creation would have come to *airyanəm vaējō*" (*Vd.* 1.1). In view of this desirability of the country, the statement in *Vendidad* (1, 3) that "There are ten months of winter there and two of summer and (even) those are (too) cold for water, for earth, for plants. It is the middle and the heart of winter, and (when) the winter ends there are many floods," seems clearly to be a late and inappropriate interpolation. It was there too that Ahura Mazdā summoned Yima (both also said to be "famed therein") to a meeting to instruct him to build a shelter in which to protect good men, animals, and plants from the winter (*Vd.* 2.20 ff.).

In the Pahlavi books the legend is elaborated. In Ērān-wēz the first cattle were created (*GreatBundahišn*, 13.4; *Zādspram*, 3.50). Through it run the rivers Dāitī (Av. *Dāityā*), which contains more noxious creatures (*xrafstars*) than any



river—a statement probably based on the mistranslation of *raoδita* “red (snake)” as *rōdīg* “riverine” in the Pahlavi version of *Vendidad* 1.2—and Dāraja (Av. *Drājā*), on whose banks was the house of Pourušaspa, father of Zaratuštra (*Great Bundahišn* 11 A. 7.29). There Zaratuštra first revealed the Good Religion (*Great Bundahišn* 35. 54).

By late Sasanian times Ērān-wēž was taken to be in Western Iran: according to *Great Bundahišn* (29.12) it was “in the district (*kustag*) of Ādarbāygān.” But from *Vendidad* 1 it is clear that it has to be sought originally in eastern Iran, near the provinces of Sogdiana, Margiana, Bactria, etc., listed immediately after it. “The conviction that the country of the speakers of the Avestan language was **Chorasmia** has been steadily growing since 1901, when Marquart first voiced it. It rests on the two highly probable assumptions that when Avestan writers mention the country Aryana Vaējah they mean their country, and that Aryana Vaējah is at least partly identical with . . . Chorasmia . . . [then including] the provinces of Marv and Herat” (Gershevitch, p. 10).

The meaning of *vaējah* is uncertain, but Benveniste (pp. 265 ff.) convincingly derives it from the root *vaig* “move rapidly, spread” and gives it the meaning “stretch.” Its full sense is then to be gained from its constant collocation with the words *vanhuyā dāityayā*, i.e., “the Aryan stretch of the good Dāityā,” the river Oxus (see **ĀMŪ DARYĀ**). If this is correct, the term must have been coined expressly to denote the land occupied by the Iranians which borders the great river; i.e., it was not originally a movable term for all Iranian-held territory, like *airyō.šayana* (*Yt.* 10.13), but a description of a particular geographic area occupied by the Mazdayasnians (Zoroastrians) of the Younger Avestan period.

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