



HAFT KEŠVAR

HAFT KEŠVAR (seven regions), the usual geographical division of the world in Iranian tradition. Ancient Iranians, who may have believed in a tripartite division of the earth (see IRAJ), developed an orderly picture of the world, envisioned as vast and round and encircled by a high mountain (*harā bərəzaitī*, see [ALBORZ](#)).

According to this tradition, the world was divided into seven (circular) regions (*karšvar* < *karš-* ‘to plough’; *AirWb.*, cols. 458, 459, hence a tract of land bordered by a ploughed line, see Pur(-e) Dāwud, 1974, p. 111; Pah. and New Pers. *kešvar*, var. *keškar*; Manich. Parth. *kišfar*, see *Mir. Man.* III, p. 43). These were imagined as separated from one another by forests, mountains, or water, six flanking a central one called in Avesta *Xvaniraθa-* (MPers. *Xwanirah*, New Pers. *Ḳoniras*, Arabicized *Honi-rat/Ḳonāras*, probably *Xvaniraθa-* ‘self-made, not resting on anything else’, see Gershevitch, p. 176), which equaled in size all the rest combined and surpassed them in prosperity and fortune (Geiger, pp. 300-303; Boyce, *Zoroastrianism* I, pp. 133-34; Pur(-e) Dāwud, 1974, pp. 112-14). Originally only this continent was inhabited by man and the fabled home of the Aryans (*Airyō.šayana-*) was located there (*Yt.* 10. 13 with *Bundahišn* 14. 38, tr. Anklesaria, pp. 134-35), but the *Čihrdād nask* (q.v.) had described how men propagated and scattered into other regions and formed different races and rites (*Dēnkard* 8.13.2-3 with Christensen, 1917, pp. 13, 119). Sovereignty over all the seven regions was claimed by Iranian hero-kings (*Yt.* 19. 26, 28, 31; Bahrām son of Mardānšah, apud Ḥamza Ešfahāni, pp. 23-25; Ṭabari, I, pp. 17, 170, 175, 179; for Sasanian period see *Nāma-ye Tansar*, p. 28; *Šāh-nāma*, ed.



Moscow, VII, p. 164 v. 169, p. 172 v. 297, p. 180 v. 444). Hence, several expressions denoting “king of the seven regions” came to be used as synonyms for “king of Iran” (Bartholomae, pp. 19, 26; Widengren, p. 250; the notion permeates in Persian literature). The concept of the “seven regions” had Indo-Aryan roots (Geiger, pp. 302-3) and despite some claims (e.g., Herzfeld, pp. 684-85), was independent of Mesopotamian world view (Boyce, *Zoroastrianism* I, p. 134, n. 29), which pictured the earth as forming the middle level of the cosmos and consisting of a highly civilized core surrounded by four regions inhabited by savages with negative characteristics (Glassner, pp. 820-21).

The Iranian concept is alluded to in the *Gāthās* of Zoroaster (*Y.* 32.3, tr. Insler, p. 45) and fully attested in the Avestan hymn to Mithra (*Yt.* 10.12-16, 67), which describes the god as surveying at dawn the “whole *Airyō.šayana-*” and flying “over all regions (*vīspāhu karšvōhu*),” namely, *Arəzahī-* (Pahl. *Arzah* ‘east’), *Fra-daδafšu-* (Pahl. *Fradadafš* ‘southeast’), *Vīdaδafšu-* (Pahl. *Wīdadafš* ‘southwest’), *Savahī-* (Pahl. *Sawah* ‘west’), *Vouru.barəštī-* (Pahl. *Wōrūbaršt* ‘northwest’), *Vouru.ǰarəštī-* (Pahl. *Wōrūǰaršt* ‘northeast’), and the splendid region of *Xvaniraθa-* (*Xvaniraθa- bāmī-*) in the center (Gershevitch, p. 81; for orientation see Henning, 1940, pp. 28-29 [repr. in idem, 1977, II, pp. 29-30]; contra Nyberg, pp. 400-401 and Schwartz, p. 643). The system influenced Zoroastrian eschatology (cf. Christensen, 1931, pp. 153-55). A spiritual leader watches over each region (*Bundahišn.* 29.1-4, tr. Anklesaria, p. 253), and the six comrades of *Astvat.ərəta* (q.v.) mentioned in *Yt* 19. 97, will, according to *Dādestān ī Dēnīg* (XXXV, 4-6) rise with him to fulfill his mission in the six regions surrounding the *Xvaniraθa-*. Remarkably, they bear names symmetrically corresponding with those of the six kešvars (Darmesteter, pp. 206-8; Boyce, *Zoroastrianism* I, p. 284). According to the *Māh ī Fravardīn rōz ī Hordād* (ed. and tr. Markwart, pp. 742-55, esp. p. 747), the hero Sām will rise again, kill Aži Dahāka (see [AŽDAHĀ](#)), and assume the rulership of the seven regions, but he will deliver it to Kay Kōsrow, who shall rule for fifty-seven years and then will turn the sovereignty to Vištāspa.

HAFTVĀD).

The Parthian and Sasanian empires were also divided into provinces and principalities with no evident regard to the “seven regions” system. The later Sasanians had adopted the (Greek) division of the world into four quarters (see *Nāma-ye Tansar*, p. 40, tr. p. 63; Ebn Faqih, p. 197) and administered Ērānšahr in four geographical sections (*kōsts*) of the north (*abāxtar*, identified as Ādur-bādagān), east (*xwarāsān*), south (*nēmrōz*) and the west (*xwarwarān*).



The application of the geographical directions likewise influenced the doctrine of the seven-fold division of the earth (for a detailed and well-documented discussion see Pur(-e) Dāwud, 1952). Thus the *Bunda-hišn*, while admitting that “there are 33 kinds of land” (8.1), coordinates the seven regions with the four cardinal points, placing one in the east, one in the west and a pair in both north and south (8.2-7). The same is done by Ḥamza Ešfahāni (pp. 4-5) and *Tāriḳ-e Sistān* (p. 23).

Similarly, the prologue to the *Šāh-nāma* of Abu Maṣūʿur Moḥammad b. ‘Abd-al-Razzāq (q.v.) gives the following report (Qazvini, pp. 42-44), from a source datable to about 620, when Sasanian troops had conquered Egypt (Shahbazi, 1990, p. 214): “the earth is divided into four directions (*čahār-sūy*) from one end to the other, and (also) into seven parts (*haft bahr*), each part of which they called a *kešvar*. The first is Arzah, the second Ša-bah, the third Faradadafš, the fourth Vidadafš, the fifth Vurubarst, the sixth Vurujarst, (and) the seventh, which is the center of the world, Ḳoniras-e bāmi (splendid Ḳoniras), and it is the one wherein we are, and the kings called it Ērānšahr.” The same text then enumerates the countries of the world, from China to the Byzantine Empire, in accordance with the four directions, and again comes to Ērānšahr, claiming that it “is from the river of Egypt [the Nile] to the Āmuya” and “surpasses in every art the other kešvars surrounding it” (Qazvini, pp. 44-49). Another elaborate “Iranian” scheme of the “seven kešvars, similarly arranging known nations into six connected circles surrounding the central Ērānšahr was given by Abu Rayḥān Biruni, together with a sketch map, both reproduced by Yāqut (*Boldān* I, p. 27). The *Ketābal-tafhim*, attributed to Biruni, and the anonymous *Mojmal al-tawāriḳ* (ed. Bahār, pp. 478-81) give a simpler version of the scheme.

Plate III. The Seven Climes (early Islamic adaptation of the Ptolemaic view).

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