



HELMAND RIVER II. IN ZOROASTRIAN TRADITION

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According to Avestan geography, the region of the Haētumant River extends in a southwest direction from the point of confluence of the Arġandāb with the Helmand (Gnoli, 1980, p. 66) and since relatively ancient times has had an important position within the Zoroastrian tradition. In particular, this is mentioned in the text of *Yašt* 19.66-69, which contains some strophes dedicated to a celebration of the Haētumant and some of its affluent rivers, such as the *Xvāstrā*, *Hvaspā*, *Fradaθā*, *Xvarənahvaitī*, *Uštavaitī*, *Urvā*, *Īrəzī*, and *Zarənumatī*. These have a number of parallels in both the Pahlavi texts and, especially, in the list of rivers in the *Tāriḵ-e Sistān* (ed. Bahār, 1935, pp. 15 f.; Gold, 1976, p. 12), where the following rivers are mentioned: *Rud-e Hirmand* (the Helmand), the *Ruḵḵad-rud* (the Arġandāb or the *Haraxvaitī* of *Vd.* 1.12), the *Ḳāš-rud* (*Xvāstrā*, the Wādi Nesal or Nahr Nišak of the Arabs), *Farāh-rud* (*Fradaθā*, the *Ophradus* of Pliny, *Natural History* 6.94), the *Ḳošk-rud* (*Uštavaitī*, between the Farah-rud and the Harrut-rud), and the *Harrut rud* (*Xvarənahvaitī*, the *Pharnacotis* of Pliny, loc. cit.). Moreover, the *Zamyād Yašt* (Pirart, 1992; Hintze, 1994; Humbach and Ichaporina, 1998) celebrates Lake *Ḳaṣaoya*; and in the Pahlavi texts the *Kayānsih* (the name formed with the plural word *kayān*, meaning “the *Kavis*” or “the Kayanids”) is the Hāmūn-e Helmand; and also the



Ušaδā mountain can be identified with the Kuh-e K̄vāja. It must also be acknowledged that *Yašt* 19 supplies a singularly detailed description of a specific territory, the only such case to be found throughout the entire Avesta. As seen in the first chapter of the *Widēwdād*, the country of the Haētumant seems to have had a privileged position (*Vd.* 1.13-14); because, compared to the other fourteen countries also mentioned in the text, its description occupies twice as much space, with the exception of Airyana Vaējah (*Vd.* 1.1-2). The identification of these rivers, lakes, and mountains within historical geography has been part of several in-depth studies, especially those of A. Stein, J. Markwart, E. Herzfeld, D. Monchi-Zadeh, and G. Gnoli.

The important role that the Helmand River and its region have played in Zoroastrian tradition is linked to the special connection between them and the *kavaēm xvarənō*, and therefore also to the *xvarənah* (*farrah, farr*) of the *Kavis*, the Kayanids of the national tradition (Gershevitch, 1959, pp. 185 f.). In fact, the Kavyān or Kayān-ian dynasty reigned “there where is Lake Kāsaoya” (*Yt.* 19.66), the point at which the Helmand ends along the southeastern border between Iran and Afghanistan. Not only is Lake Kāsaoya the center of this dynasty’s power with Vištāspa, the protector of Zoroaster, as its last sovereign, but it is also the lake in which the seed of the prophet is cared for and protected by the 99,999 *fravašis* (*Yt.* 19.89-96), from which will be born the three *saošyants* (“saviors”): *Uxšyaṭ.ərəta* (Pahl. *Ušēdar*), *Uxšyaṭ.nəmah* (Pahl. *Ušēdarmāh*), and *Astvəṭ.ərəta*, the *Sōšāns* par excellence. In the eschatological myth there is a correspondence between the sea *Vouru.kaša* and Lake *Kāsaoya* (Christensen, 1931, p. 22; Gnoli, 1977, p. 315; Gnoli, 1980, pp. 132 ff.); and it is significant that the *Zamyād Yašt*, after having celebrated the *kavaēm xvarənō* and all the *Kavis*, (*Yt.* 19.70 ff.), ends with a triumphal celebration of the *frašō.kərəti* and the *saošyant* *Astvəṭ.ərəta*, who was born from the water of the *Kāsaoya* (*Yt.* 19.89-96). This theme has a strong presence in both the Avesta (*Vd.* 19.5) and the Pahlavi literature, in which a kind of spiritualization of the Avestan geography occurs, particularly with fluvial elements, as has been correctly pointed out by J. de Menasce (Gnoli, 1974).

Several pieces of Pahlavi evidence confirm the position of excellence of the Haētumant and its region in the Zoroastrian tradition. Without a doubt, the most important of these is that of the treatise, *Abdīh ud sahīgīh ī Sagistān* (Utas, 1983), which lists the wonders of Sistān, collecting all of those themes already present in the Avesta. Thus we find: the river *Hētūmand*; the *war ī Frazdān*, which may be the Gawd-e Zira (Jackson, 1928, p. 283; Herzfeld, 1930, p. 91;



Herzfeld, 1947, p. 62; Gnoli, 1967, pp. 14 ff.); the lake *Kayānsih*; the mountain *Ušdaštar* (the Kuh-e K̄vāja); *Ušēdar*, *Ušēdarmāh*, and *Sōšāns*; the descendants of the Kayanids; *Frēdōn* and his three sons, *Salm*, *Tūč*, and *Ērēč*, etc.; *Manuščīhr*; *Wištāsp*; *Sēn*, son of *Ahūmstūt* from Bust, etc. (Gnoli, 1989, p. 135).

The Helmand River and its region have therefore played a great role in the entire Zoroastrian tradition (Geldner, 1906, p. 221; Bartholomae, 1924, p. 9). Such a position was not necessarily acquired secondarily, as has been sometimes thought in the past (Nyberg, 1938, pp. 304 ff.; Boyce, *Zoroastrianism* I, pp. 274, 293; Hintze, 1994, p. 21, n. 39). Sistān is part of the vast horizon of the “Aryan lands,” the *airyā daij̄hāvō* of the Avesta, inside of which is also placed Airyana Vaējah. Numerous indications lead to the assumption that in an unspecific but archaic period, probably during the course of the 6th century B.C.E., a process occurred in which the Helmand and other localities of its region were identified with elements of traditional cosmography and mythical geography. This is well demonstrated by the concurrence of these places with the Avestan *Vanuhī Dāityā*—the *Wehrōd* of some Pahlavi texts, as was already pointed out by J. Markwart (1938, p. 122, n. 3; p. 159, note from the previous page; Gnoli, 1967, pp. 13f., 38; 1980, p. 133).

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