



INDIA II. HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY: THE ANCIENT FRONTIER WITH IRAN

The geographical borders between the Iranian plateau and the Indian subcontinent are well defined by a number of marked features, such as mountain ranges, which represent the western limits of the Indus River valley. From a historical and cultural perspective, however, the term “border” must be seen as indicating a vague interface that involves a whole region, which can be called the “Indo-Iranian frontier.” Because numerous passes from the Bolan to the Khyber facilitate the crossing of the mountain barrier between Iran and India, these can be considered not as mere boundaries but as symbolic points that characterize this frontier region from south to north. The area of the Indian subcontinent west of the Indus, reflecting its frontier character, historically was governed more often by Iranian dynasties than by Indian ones. At the same time the eastern extent of the Iranian plateau was also deeply permeated by Indian cultural traits (as, e.g., in the westward expansion of Buddhism). Thus the cultural relationships between India and Iran must always be understood as an intense phenomenon of exchange and osmosis (see Foucher, 1942, p. 188).

The people that lived in the regions of this Indo-Iranian frontier in ancient times are known to us by their mention in the list of the Achaemenid administrative districts, or “satrapies” (Gk. *nomoi*), preserved by Herodotus



(3.89-94); before him, information was provided by Hecataeus of Miletus, who mentioned the Indian population of Gandara and the city of Kaspapyros (Jacoby, *Fragmente* I, frag. 294-295). The easternmost satrapies were VII, XVII, and XX of the list: satrapy VII included the Sattagydoi, Gandarioi, Dadikai, and Aparytai peoples; XVII was formed by the Parikanioi and the Asian Ethiopians; while satrapy XX was that of the Indians, “the people by far the most numerous of all of the men that we know.” Herodotus (3.98-106) provides us with an interesting description of India, including the part which was not subject to Persia, that illustrates the limits of the ancient Greeks’ geographical knowledge of the subcontinent before direct contact was established with Alexander’s expedition.

The information provided by Herodotus finds clear confirmation in the inscriptions of the Achaemenid kings (DB, DPe, DSe, DNa, DSaa, XPf), where we find toponyms such as *Ṫataguš*, *Gandāra*, and *Hinduš*, which are also used to identify their respective populations. The geographical name *Maka* is to be excluded from this list; contrary to its earlier identification with the coastal Baluchi region of *Makrān* (still followed by Lecocq, 1997, p. 52), it was located within the Arabian peninsula (de Blois, 1989) and thus lay outside the Indo-Iranian border. *Hinduš* may be identified with the middle and lower Indus valley, excluding Gandhara (Bernard, 1987, p. 186), although it has been proposed (Briant, 1982, p. 204) to identify it with the late Achaemenid “Indians of the Mountains” mentioned by Arrian (3.8.4). *Gandāra* certainly included, not only the plain of Peshawar, but also the entire valley of the Kabul river as far as its confluence with the Indus. In fact, in the Babylonian and Elamite versions of the Bisotun inscription, the toponym *Gandāra* is replaced with *Paruparaesanna*, which corresponds to the *Paropamisadae* of the classical authors, who meant by it the region that had the high valley of Kabul as its center. It is noteworthy that the city of Kaspapyros/Kaspatyros (cf. Daffinà, 1983), located in *Gandarikē* by Hecataeus, came to be associated by Herodotus (3.102 and 4. 44) with *Paktyikē*, the border region north of “all the other Indians” (3.102). It is probable that the two toponyms “*Paruparaesanna*” and “*Paktyikē*” refer to the same area. The latter probably is derived from an Iranian ethnonym (cf. Herzfeld, 1947, p. 182); but, in spite of phonetic similarities, they cannot be linguistically identified with the modern ethnonym “*Pukhtūn*.”

As to the other peoples of satrapy VII, scholars still disagree on the location of *Ṫataguš*, which corresponds to Sattagydia of the ancient Greeks (cf. Lecocq,



1997, pp. 146-47). Recent archeological investigation at the city of Akra near Bannu (Khan et al., 2000) tend to confirm the location of this region between the mountains of Gandhara to the north and Arachosia to the south (Fleming, 1982), rather than being the Multan area of the southern Punjab (Vogelsang, 1990, p. 98). The Dadikai seem to correspond to the Darada people, who are mentioned along with the Gandharans and Kashmirians in the Puranic descriptions of India (Tucci, 1977, p. 11). The proposal that the Aparytai are eponymous ancestors of the Afridi Push-tūns (Caroe, 1958, p. 37) remains to be proven.

Information about the people that lived along the Indo-Iranian border in the third century B.C.E. also comes from the edicts of the Mauryan king Aśoka. The fifth edict gives a list of people, including the Yona (cf. OPers. Yaunā “Ionians”), Kambojas, and Gandharans; and in his twelfth edict appears the compound name Yonakambojesu. There is little doubt as to the identity of the Gandharans or as to that of the Yona. The latter were the Greeks of Asia, to whom was directed the Greek version of the king’s edict, which was discovered at Kandahar by the Italian expedition conducted by IsMEO. The Kambojas have been identified variously with the people that lived on the left bank of the Kabul river or, more specifically, with the people for whom the Aramaic version of the edicts of Aśoka had been written (U. Scerrato, in Pugliese Carratelli and Garbini, 1964, pp. 14-15). The linguistic particularities of such versions suggest that people who spoke an Iranian language are involved (G. Garbini, in Pugliese Carratelli and Garbini, 1964, pp. 59-61; Bailey, 1971). This confirms what can be seen from the characteristics of their religion, which had been transmitted from Indian Buddhist sources (Benveniste, 1958, p. 47).

An illustration of the dynamics of the Indo-Iranian frontier region is the case of Arachosia (q.v., OPers. Harauvātiš). The manner of dress of its inhabitants, as represented in the Achaemenid tomb reliefs, appears to link it to the other satrapies of eastern Iran, such as Aria and Drangiana (Tourovets, 2001, p. 225). Yet other cultural traits link it to India, to the point that its inclusion in the Achaemenid empire has been interpreted as an Indian penetration toward the West (Vogelsang, 1985). Of particular interest is the use of the name “white India” to describe Arachosia by the first century C.E. Greek writer, Isidorus of Charax (q.v.; *Parthian Stations*, par. 9; Walser, 1985, pp. 154-55). The interconnections of the Iranian plateau and the Indian world within this area is confirmed by a series of archeological evidences, ranging from fragments of



the edicts of Aśoka, written in Greek and Aramaic (Pugliese Carratelli and Garbini, 1964), to the Buddhist complex located in ancient Kandahar dating to the third century C.E., even though that region was probably never a stable part of the Kushan empire (Ball, 1996, p. 398). Moreover, two Achaemenid inscriptions from Susa (DSf and DSz; see Lecoq, 1997, pp. 236 and 244 respectively) mention Arachosia, along with Ethiopia and Hinduš, as a region from which ivory originated; this suggests that Arachosia was also a place for the commercial exchange of Indian ivory (Vogelsang, 1987, p. 186).

For the Sasanian period the trilingual inscription of Šāpur I on the walls of the Ka'ba-ye Zardošt (q.v.) indicates the limits of the expansion of the Sasanians toward the Indian subcontinent. In par. 3 are mentioned sequentially the regions of Tūrān, Makurān, and Pāradān, which appear to correspond to present-day Baluchistan (Chaumont, 1975, pp. 130-37); then come “Hindestān and Kušānšahr up to Paškibūr” (Peshawar?). This list corresponds strikingly to the above-mentioned Achaemenid satrapies (Honigmann and Maricq, 1953, pp. 98-110; Huyse, 2000, I, pp. 22-23). In fact, a son of Šāpur, Narseh, carried the title, “king of Hindestān, Sakastān, and Tūrān as far as the edge of the sea” as well as, “king of the Sakān.” Likewise, in the inscriptions of Paikuli, authored by the same Narseh, there appear the names of the kings of Kūšān, Pāradān, and Makurān (Humbach and Skjærvø, 1983, Part 3.1, pp. 70-71; Part 3.2, pp. 122-25). The title of Sakānšāh is also mentioned in the two fourth-century C.E. inscriptions from Persepolis (Henning, 1963, pls. 85 and 87; Frye, 1966; Azarnoush, 1986, pp. 223-28). On the other hand, the late Sasanian text *Šahrestānihā ī Ērān*, according to which the Indo-Iranian border lies in the “region of the south” (*kust ī nēmrōz*), mentions only the toponyms of Kābul, Zāwalestān (Zabulistan, the area of modern Ghazni), and Raxwat (Arachosia) (Gyselen, 1988; Daryaee, 2002, pp. 47-48); thus the political influence on India then was reduced to the more western region of the frontier. However, we have late Sasanian clay impressions of seals of an *āmārgar*, as well as of an *ostandar*, of Sind (q.v.), a term that in this period could indicate a single province or a broader area (Gyselen, 1989, p. 65; 2002, pp. 27, 169).



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