



## NISĀYA

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**NISĀYA** (later MPers. *Nisāy*, NPers. *Nesā*, Ar. *Nasā*), the Old Iranian name of several Iranian regions and places, which cannot easily be distinguished from one another. They are mentioned in a variety of sources from antiquity and the Middle Ages, and already Moqaddasi (24.17) listed *Nisā* (*Nasā*) among the names in use for different places (e.g., in Fars, Hamadān, Kermān, Khorasan), although it is quite possible that only some of the later *Nesā* names are connected with OIr. \**Nisāya*-. The toponymic evidence attested includes the following items:

(1) OPers. *Nisāya* (n-i-s-a-y, rendered as El. Nu-iš-šá-ya, Bab. Ni-is-sa-a-a) is found in DB I 58 as the name of “a district in Media,” perhaps not far from Mt. Bisotun (q.v.), where Darius I slew Gaumāta the mage at the fortress of Sikayuvati. A vṛddhi derivation of this Median choronym (district name) seems to be attested in the personal name Aram. *nysy* (i.e., OIr. \**Naisāya*, literally “the Nisaeen”); it occurs as the name of the father of *’trprn* Ātarfarn “the Mede” in BP 5:16 (cf. Kornfeld, p. 109).

(2) The great “Nisaeen plain” (Gk. *Nésaion pedíon*, Herodotus 7.40.3) in Media is often mentioned (see Arrianus, *Anabasis* 7.13.1, and as late as Stephanus Byzantius, s.v., and Suda, s.v. *Nísaion*) as the home of the tall “Median, so-called Nisaeen horses” (Herodotus 3.106.2) so highly esteemed, according to Herodotus (7.40.2-4), Strabo (11.13.7; 11.14.9), and others. The suspicion is natural (though it cannot strictly be proven) that this plain is more or less identical with no. 1 (*Nisāya*). The Greek spelling with *ē* in the best Herodotean manuscripts seems to render OIr. \**i*. It cannot be explained (Marquart,



*Ērānšahr*, p. 72, fn. 1, and Herzfeld, 1968, p. 8) as transferred from the name of the horses, where it would be the reflex of a *vṛddhi* formation \**Naisāya-* (see Schmitt, p. 123, fn. 38). Moreover, the same region seems to be mentioned already in two inscriptions of the Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser III as Ass. *uruNi-šá-a-a*, kur*Ni-iš-šá-a* (cf. Zadok, p. 118b, also for a tentative localization).

Those “Nisaeen horses” were the most nimble and most famous horses of antiquity and are therefore mentioned very frequently in literary sources (see Hanslik, cols. 712 f.): They were used in Xerxes’ army against Greece (Herodotus 7.40.2-4; 9.20) and were later in Antiochus IV’s employ (Polybius 30.25.6 = Athenaeus 5.194e). Alexander the Great is said to have visited this plain on his march from Babylonia to Ecbatana in summer 324 B.C.E. and to have found 50,000 mares still in the royal stud-farm (a mere remnant compared to former times). This “Nisaeen plain” must be sought, neither northeast of Hamadān (as often had been maintained) nor in Khorasan (as Minorsky and Bosworth, p. 966b, have it), but somewhere in the province of Kermānšāhān (see Hanslik, col. 712; Herzfeld, 1968, pp. 15 f.). If one can rely on Diodorus 17.110.5, it was, more precisely, in the *Bagistānē* region, i.e., near Mt. Bisotun. The old name of this plain possibly survived into the Middle Ages, when Yāqut (writing in the 7th/13th century) mentioned “a town in Hamadān” with the name of *Nisā* (cf. Schwarz, *Iran* V, p. 556).

(3) El. *Nu-šá-ya* (i.e., OPers. \**Nisāya*) is mentioned only in PF 1844:7 (see Hinz and Koch, p. 1012) as a village in the area surrounding Persepolis (cf. Koch, pp. 33, 256); it cannot, however, be located exactly. Presumably it may be identified with the town of *Nisā* or *Nisāyak* (?) in Fars, called *al-Baiḏā* by the Arabs, one day’s journey north of Shiraz, which is mentioned by Yāqut (*Boldān* I, p. 791) and other Arab geographers (see Schwarz, *Iran* I, p. 17; Bailey, pp. 309 f.). Again a *vṛddhi* derivation of the toponym is attested as a personal name in Persepolis: El. *Na-a-šá-a-ya* (i.e., OPers. \**Naisāya*) in PF 335:15 (cf. K. Hoffmann apud Mayrhofer, p. 212, no. 8.1252; Hinz and Koch, p. 975), unless it is based on no. 1.

(4) Av. *Nisāiia-* (acc. *Nisāim*; cf. Bk. Pahl. *ns’y*) in *Vd.* 1.7 is listed as the fifth of the excellent countries and specified as situated “between Margiana and Bactria.” This additional remark (cf. also *Bundahišn* 31.12-13), according to the Pahlavi version, means nothing more than that there exists some other *Nisāya* (in any case no. 1), from which it must be distinguished (cf. Nyberg, p. 316). This district was located between Morḡāb Rud and Balk Rud (see already Geiger, p. 72), i.e., approximately in the Fāryāb and Jōzjān provinces of

modern Afghanistan. See also Herzfeld, 1947, pp. 756 f., who identified *Nisāīia*– with both the place called (“middle”) *Nsai* by Ananias (cf. no. 5) and the Parthian royal capital *Nīsaia*/NISA (no. 7).

(5) Gk. *Nisaía* (with several variants, among them esp. *Nígaia*) is the name of a town in Margiana according to Ptolemy, *Geography* 6.10.4; 8.23.6, and Ammianus Marcellinus 23.6.54 (Lat. Nisea); it seems to be associated with no. 4 and/or no. 6, probably in the sense that it was the capital of the district in question. This Margianian *Nisaía* probably is meant also by the province of *Nsai* or *Nsai-mianak* “middle Nisāy” (i.e., Mpers. \**Nisā-i miyānak*, as was conjectured by Marquart, *Ērānšahr*, pp. 78 f.) recorded in the Armenian *Geography* by Ananias of Shirak (Ps.-Mosēs Xorenac’i).

(6) Gk. *Nēsaía* (again with *ē*; see above, no. 2) is mentioned by Strabo 11.7.2 as a district of Hyrcania, which other authorities regarded as an independent unity (ibid.), through which the Ōchus River flows (ibid., 11.7.3); cf. Strabo 11.8.3, where, similarly, it is said to be situated between Hyrcania and Parthia. Presumably this district is to be identified with *Nisiaea* (perhaps to be emended to *Nisaea*) “the famous region of Parthia” (*regio Nisiaea Parthyenes nobilis*) mentioned by Pliny, *Naturalis historia* 6.113. It cannot be decided with absolute certainty (see Sturm, col. 711), whether or not this Hyrcanian or Parthian Nisaia is identical with no. 4 and is related to no. 5 and/or no. 7, i.e., has to be located in Margiana. That thesis is quite imaginable, in view of the varying age of the relevant sources; it may be supported by reference to the fact that the district in question for some time could have (and indeed seems to have) belonged to a state other than the one which ruled the adjacent regions.

(7) Gk. *Nisaia* was, according to Isidorus of Charax 12 (cf. Jacoby, *Fragmente*, IIC, p. 781.15), the name the Greeks used for the town *Parthānisa* in Parthia. This form obviously has to be understood as “Parthian Nisa” and as created ad hoc by way of distinction from other towns of the same name. Since the form of the manuscript tradition is completely isolated, it often has been doubted; and therefore it remains somewhat problematic. Isidorus (ibid.) says also that the tombs of the Parthian kings were at this place, so apparently the Parthian royal city *Nisa* is meant.

(8) Gk. *Nisaîoi* is the name of a people whom Ptolemy, *Geography* 6.17.3, describes as living in the northern parts of Areia together with the *Astauēnoí*. The latter are mentioned by him elsewhere (6.9.5) as inhabitants of Hyrcania;



cf. also the name of the district *Astauēnē* between Hyrcania and Parthia in Isidorus of Charax 11 (cf. Jacoby, *Fragmente*, IIC, p. 781.11). Therefore these *Nisaîoi* actually seem to be the inhabitants of Parthian *Nísaiā/Nisā* (no. 7), as already Marquart (*Ērānšahr*, p. 78, fn. 6) had claimed.

On condition that all the names listed above belong together, continuants of the name Ir. \**Nisāya*- are used both as toponyms proper and as “choronyms” denoting regions or districts. This has consequences for the etymology. In Iran it is common practice that choronyms are narrowed down, as time goes on, to toponyms (see Eilers, 1977, pp. 277 ff.), so it is natural to start from the choronym in the present case also. This form, with its remarkable *s*, long (cf. already Bartholomae, *AirWb.*, col. 1086) has been interpreted as OIr. \**ni-sāya*- “place of lying down, resting-place, settlement, encampment,” derived from the root of Av. *saē/saii* = Ved. *śay* “to lie,” i.e., PIE. \**kei* with prefix *ni-* “down.” (For this combination Bailey, p. 309 referred to Wākī *nəs(ə)y-* and Oss. D. *nissæjun* “to lie down,” whereas Bartholomae, *ibid.*, could only compare the adjectival derivative OIA. *ni-sāy-in-* “lying.”) Such a designation may well be seen in connection with nomadism (see Chaumont, p. 143, fn. 1), but on no account can it mean “low-lying place, valley,” as some authors supposed.

On the other hand Klingenschmitt, p. 21 equated OPers. *Nisāya*- with Munjī *nəsəy* “the shady side of a valley” (cf. already Morgenstierne, pp. 52, 233a, and Yidgā *ničāy*) and implicitly related it to Ved. *chāya-* “shadow” (and Av. \**sāyā*- in *a-saiia-* “without shadow”), i.e., to a proto-form with an initial cluster IIr. \**sc-* (from PIE. \**sk-*). In favor of this one may refer, as Eilers (1987, p. 52) did, to modern continuants of OIA. \**nicchāya-* “shady, shaded (by the mountains).” The outcome of IIr. \**ni-scāya-* would be *-s-* in all Iranian dialects, while in the alternative case (IIr. \**ni-cāya-*), the *s*-forms could not belong to (Old) Persian. Rich toponymic material (including forms based on NPers. *sāye* “shadow”) gathered by Eilers (1987, pp. 61 ff.) can be regarded as evidence for the custom of naming places after their location in the shadow of mountains. But clearly such an explanation is possible only for places, not for larger plains. Therefore it seems appropriate to trace back all the choronyms mentioned (nos. 1, 4, 6) to Ir. \**Nisāya*- “settlement.” One may think of Ir. \**Nisāya*- “shaded (by the mountains),” for dialectological reasons, only in the case of the Fārs toponym (no. 3), although Eilers (pp. 65 f.) denied just this because of the later Arabic name of this village (which in my view refers to other semantic criteria).

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