WAS THERE GEOGRAPHICAL SCIENCE IN SASANIAN IRAN?*

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The study examines the extant Sassanian material relating to geographical knowledge, trying to answer the question whether Iranians of the Late Sassanian period possessed the notion of “geographical science” comparable to that of their Byzantine neighbours or their Islamic heirs. Geographical traditions found in several texts, both in Avestan and Pahlavi, are studied and compared, in order to reach the conclusions, whether the actual geographical knowledge was systematised. It appears that there was much diversity in geographical views in various periods of Sassanian history; the views on geography were generally geopolitically motivated; there was a gap between the learned traditions and real geographical knowledge; Sassanian geographical attitudes were characterised by Iranocentrism and little interest in real geography; Sassanian Iranians did not develop a geographical science, and much of what we are left with is rather geographical mythology.

Key words: Sassanian geography; Bundahišn; Vemedād; Ayādgār-i Jāmāspīg; administrative division; Iran and China; Iran and Turks; Iran and India.

Much work has been done in the fields of the historical1 and mythical2 geography of Ancient and Sassanian Iran, but the purpose of this paper is to deal with the question whether Iranians of the Late Sassanian period had what we could designate as “geographical science,” i.e., how did they perceive their own country and the world surrounding it? Sassanian Iranians naturally knew a great deal about their own country and the lands outside Iran.3 The question I want to examine is whether this actual knowledge was systematised and seen as worthy of study, as was the case in the Greek-speaking world, or, later, in the Islamic world.4

* This study is based on the paper read at the 4th Conférence européenne d’études iraniennes, September 2000, Paris.

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1 See, e.g., Justi (1869); Tomasek (1883); Geiger (1904); Gnoli (1980).

2 On the concept, cf., e.g., Corbin (1977).

3 On such actual geographical knowledge, see Utas (1976); Cereti (1994).

4 My own interest in Sassanian geography was motivated by two different reasons: firstly, by my research on the Arabic and Persian geographers who wrote on the khazars and related topics,
We will first turn to three versions of one geographical tradition found in the much-discussed first *fragard* of Vendidad\(^5\) [= Vd], or Widēwdaē, a late Avestan text; this tradition is preserved in the Avestan original and in two Pahlavi versions, namely in Pahlavi Vendidad [= PhlVd] and in Bundahišn [= Bd] 31.\(^6\)

The order of the lands listed in this Avestan text, with their Pahlavi equivalents as listed in the Pahlavi *Zand* of Vd, is as follows:

Vd 1 and PhlVd 1:  
glosses in PhlVd 1:

1. Airiiana Vaējah  
   Ėrân Wēž  
   *cē az kišwar ō kišwar bē pad parwānāgīh ī Yazadān šudān nē tuwan.*  
   “for it is impossible to travel from one *kišwar* to another but by guidance of the *Yazatas,*”\(^7\)
   *hast kê Hetōmandiz rōd gōwēd,*  
   “there is even one who says, it is the River Hetōmand.”\(^8\)

2–3.\(^9\) Airiiana Vaējah Vaujuhi Dāttīāa  
   Ėrân Wēž Wēh Dāytyā  

4. Gauua Sugdō.śaiiana  
   Gayī Šūrg-mānīšn

5. Mōuru  
   Murw\(^10\)

6. Bāxōī  
   Bahl / Balx

cf. Shapira (forthcoming/1), and secondly, by my work on Bundahišn, the Middle Persian compendium of traditional lore.

\(^5\) See Christensen (1943); Molé (1951); Humbach (1960); Gnöl (1980, *passim*). See now Cantera Giera (1998).

\(^6\) It is evident that Chapter 31 of the Iranian Bundahišn has the first *fragard* of the Pahlavi Vendidad as its source, cf. Christensen (1943, *passim*); Boyce (1968, p. 19); MacKenzie (1989a, p. 548).

\(^7\) There is a practically identical text in Bd 8(11).4: *az kišwar ō [kišwar] jūd pad parwānāgīh ī Yazadān warzāwandīh ṭā šudān nē šāyēd,* “it is impossible to travel from one *kišwar* to another except by the guidance and miraculous power of the *Yazatas,*” and from the context there we can identify Ėrân Wēž, “the Iranian Homeland” in our passage in PhlVd 1.1 with X’anırah, the central inhabited continent of the Ancient Iranian worldview.

\(^8\) The River Hētōmand (Hilmend) is said to be in Sagesṭān. It was connected with the deeds of Frāṣyāb (Bd 11.12, 32).

\(^9\) This and the next passages belong to the “second redaction”, cf. Christensen (1943, p. 23ff.)

\(^10\) Cf. the remarks of Christensen (1943, p. 15); cf. also Shapira (1998, Vol. I, Introduction, p. xlvi, and note 195). It should be noted, however, that the *Zandist* was transcribing the Avestan form, ignoring the existing Middle Persian one. This was how the mistakes arose, necessitating the glossing work of later copyists who had no Avestan original before them.

As has been observed, the order of enumeration of the lands in this Avestan source is as follows: NE > S > W > N. The work of the Zandist made the order of the list chaotic, due to his identifications of some of the Avestan lands with more fa-

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11 Written in Avestan characters.
15 Avestan: “at the source of the Râhâ River;” cf. also Yt 12.18, for which no Pahlavi version exists; most scholars read in PhilVd 1.19 Arangistân (dāχ Y ı̄ngystûν Y hwun), where I read (after Marquart (1901, p. 165) and Christensen (1943, p. 58) Arwetân (the w is from Aramaic, BēhūArbâhū); the text has, actually, Sermâhd, while one MS, DDJ, glosses it as ı̄rstan Rûm (بِستان مروین, sic!), cf. Dastoor Hoshang Jamasp (1907, pp. 18–20, note 2). MacKenzie (1989a, pp. 548b–549a) noted that Avestan Râhâ / Pahlavi Arang was identified with Pahlavi Arwand, properly Orontes, but confused with the Tigris. Cf. Shapiro (1998, Vol. I, Chapter 2, pp. 66ff.).
16 Cf. Christensen (1943, p. 53); compare now Gnoi (1989, pp. 45b–46a): if one would map the localities according to Gnoi’s identifications, the result will be basically the same. The theory that Yd I conserves the names of some Western lands in boustrophedonic order [cf. Nyberg (1938, pp. 324f.)] has no foundation, see Gnoi (1980, pp. 59f.), and Gnoi (1989, p. 44a).
miliar – and important – Western lands, such as Syria (instead of Sogdiana 17), Mēšān (instead of Uruuā), Ādurbadagān and Ray (instead of Ragā), Padišxwārrog, Daylam / Gēlān, Kirmān (instead of Varomā yim ḍahrū, gaoṣa), and Bēth-ʾArbhayyē 18 on the Byzantine frontier (instead of Upa aōdašū raŋhaūdā); in addition, two localities seem to be identified with their namesakes in the Iranian West (Nīsā and Raya). However, the tendency to draw a concentric ring was preserved: it is worth noting that the Zandīst began from the mythical Iranian homeland and finished in Pārs, the heartland of the Sasanian Empire (thus providing us with the clue enabling to date the Zandī).

This tendency to draw a concentric ring is even more clear in the second list which represents the order of the lands according to Bd 31 (this list is based on PhlVd, not on the Avestan Vd):

1. Ērān-Wēz
2. Dašī19 1 Sūrīg-mānīn, ku-š Sūrīg padiš mānīnd ī hast Baydād ī Bayān-dād 20
3. Balx
4. Marw
5. Nisāy ī andarag Marw ud Balx
6. Ḥarēw
7. Kābul […] ī hast Kābulstān
8. Mēšān
9. Xmān ī Gurgānīg-mānīn
10. *Armān 21
11. Hēdōmand […] Saṅistān
12. Rāg […] ī hast Ādurbadagān
13. Wahār […] ī hast Ī Mazūn 23

17  Sahrīrān 5 (cf. note 27 below) seems to identify Sogd with Samaraqand, see Markwort – Messina (1931, p. 9).
19  Why Gāy of the version of PhlVd became changed to dašī? It may be a scribal error, as in the Pahlavi writing both words have some similarity; it may be translation, as Gāy in Avestan means Gau or plain (cf. AHW 509a); the possibility that dašī is the hewārīn of an (unattested) Aramaicogram, *G[AY]/T[AY], compare Hebrew g-, “valley”, is purely speculative.
20  This is the “a right” etymology, on the popular level. Cf. Shaked (1985).
22  Cf. Zand ī Wahman Yasn 7.7, where the reading is, however, highly uncertain: awē Kay ka sīh sālag bāwēd [hād bād kē āwām guft] pad āmar drafš spāh, spāh ī Hindāg ud Čenīg ul grīft drafš hēnd ī [cē drafš ul gīrēnd]; abrāstpag drafš hēnd, abrāstpag zēn hēnd, pad tāzīn ud tāzīnd tā Wehrōd [hād bād kē Bumē deh guft] tā andarag bār ī bahr ī bhrān, Spītāmān Zardu/xíst!, “When the Kay will be thirty years of age [there was someone who mentioned the time], the armies with innumerable banners, the Indian and the Chinese armies having up-raised banners [for they will raise the banners aloft], having erect banners, having erect weapons, they will make razziahs unto Wehrōd [there was someone who said it was the Bumē village] upto the interior of the shore of the sea of *Bahrian (?), O Spītāmān Zoroaster!” Cereti (1995) read here Balx (*Balx ī būmīg!).
23  See note 13 above.
13. Warī cahār-gōš [...] hastī Dumbāwand
14. Haft Hindūgān
15. *Odag Arand [...] hunušakī Tāzīgān Ödag [...] Tāzīg abar mānēnd
16. Pārs

This is basically the same list, but disconnected from its Avestan original – or from its learned Pahlavi rendering, which abounds with glosses – it has become an independent document. First of all, the order: instead of the concentric movement of the Avestan list (though with some deviations in the Pahlavi version), which began from NE (Ērān Wēz) and ended in N, we have here the movement inside Ērān Wēz, which is thus identified with the Iranian Empire, and in a broader sense, with the X’aniarah clime, or continent, at whose centre, in Pārs, the list is coming to its end. This was achieved by converting an out-of-hand gloss (Pārs) of PhlVd into an integral part of the new text and by omitting any connection of Ērān Wēz with the Dāitītiā River. Ironically, the pure land of the pre-Avestan Iranians, Suryōa, became Sasanian Mesopotamia and Dījāzīra, Dašt-i Sūrīg Mānīš, which was, together with Mēşān (also mentioned in the text), the “non-Iran” for the Kings of Ērān and non-Ērān. Moreover, instead of the old Iranian Caxra, Oman (Mazūn) appeared in the list, and finally, the Arabs were introduced, having been begotten by a combination of an untranslated Avestan word (taožīiāša), similar in sound to the Pahlavi for “Arabs”, and Arvestān ū Hrūm (“Roman Arabia”), which is Bēth-’Arbāhōyē in Northern Mesopotamia. What we have in this list is actually a list of provinces of the Late Sasanian Empire, not geography. This list appears to be close in character to that found in the composition of a post-Sasanian date known, in the extant recension, as Sāhrestānīḥā Ī Ērānāshār [Sahrārān]. Before we turn to the list of Sahrārān, I would note that the compiler of the Bd list was tied to identifications of places found in his source, without a possibility to add entirely new items for which his Zand had no authority; the situation of Sahrārān is different – there the author was interested in founding-legends connected with particular towns and localities.

II

The order of the enumeration of the four great vice-royalties in Sahrārān is said to be crisscrossed, East > West > South > Ādurbādāgān (NW): 29

24 “The 16th best created is *Odag Arand, Ödag being the evil offspring of the Arabs. [...] The Arabs live there,” see Shapiro (1998, Vol. I, Chapter 2, pp. 66ff.).
26 On this term, cf. Gignoux (1987, pp. 30–31); Gnoli (1985); Gnoli (1986), and the bibliography given there.
27 Editions and translations: Markwart – Messina (1931); Markwart (1938, passim); Kasumova (1994).
28 The only exception being the reference to Armenia, which could have been caused by a scribal confusion.
29 I give here a partial list.

First, one notes that the region of Nēmrōz, designated by the word for “South,”39 comprised, in fact, much of Iran, from Madā’īn / Maḥōzē (Ctesiphon),40 via Isfāhān, Farāh, up to Kābul, down to the Indian Ocean, and then to the Sasanian possessions in Arabia and Yaman. As we can see, this list is arranged on the basis of the quadrupartite division of the Iranian Empire, which was made under Husraw I (531–579), but with many post-Sasanian additions and, perhaps, with some errors in the lists of the towns located in the four vice-royalties.41 According to Arabic

30 See Kiā (1958); Kiā (1975); Utas (1976, p. 116); Tafazzoli (1990, pp. 47–48).
31 Šahrērān 10 & 47 are aetiological legends on the density of the Jewish population in X’ārazm (Kāt) and Susa, cf. Zand (1988, pp. 8–9) [Hebrew].
32 This place was said to be located on the SE side of the Caspian, cf. Marquart (1903, p. 489). However, the locality with the same name is well known on the Western side of the Caspian, near Darband, and it is plausible to suggest that on our list it was displaced.
33 The list of Šahrērān in the West (Urūhā = Edessa, Syria, Yaman, Africa) probably reflects conditions of the early 7th century, cf. Morony (1982, p. 6).
34 Which is al-Hīra on the War i Tāzīgān (the Persian Gulf, cf. Markwart – Messina (1931, p. 67).
35 On the last names, among them Africa, cf. Markwart – Messina (1931, pp. 82–83). As to Yaman, Kūfāh, Madīna (and, most probably, Makkā), it seems to be a post-Islamic gloss, cf. Samrān below. Compare note 33 above.
36 Harax’aīt, cf. Markwart – Messina (1931, p. 84). Note that here it was not identified with Armenia.
37 = Himyar, compare Yaman above; see Shapiro (forthcoming2), “Between Himyar and Māzandarān: Pahlavi traditions of Husraw Anōṣūrwan’s Wars”. Markwart – Messina (1931, pp. 101–102) explained the name of the Himyarite king appearing in the text under consideration and written Mōṣūr as Mansūr; I would guess this could be a corrupt form of *Masrūq.
38 Bagdād, already mentioned in this Western section as Ctesiphon, is out of place in the Northern section; it seems that Baydaḏ, as the capital, finishes the list, similarly to the position of Pārs in earlier Sasanian lists.
39 This administrative meaning of the word should be kept in mind while dealing with some apocryphal passages, in which the redeemer is said to come from “Nēmrāz”. This vague term can mean “from Pārs”, or “from Kābulstān”, or even “from Arabia”.
40 The region of the “West” had a common border with the Nēmrōz-unit in Madā’īn / Maḥōzē.
authors, Husraw I Anōšurwān (531–578) divided Iran into four big units, not of the same size: 42 East, North, South, West. Al-Yaqūbī 43 and al-Thaʿālibī 44 listed them as follows: Xurāsān; Kuwar al-Jabal (Media, etc., including Isfahān); Fārs with Kirmān and Ahwāz; al-ʿIrāq up to al-Yaman and the Syrian border 45 (or Xurāsān; Xurbārān / Maghrib; Nīmūz / Fārs; Ādābarjān / Kuwar al-Jibāl).

This order reflects the importance given to the Eastern and Northern borders in the time of Husraw I. No connection to the learned traditions of the Zandists could be seen here. Another list, dating from the first third of the 7th century, 46 is found in the so-called “Armenian Geography”, or Aixarhae ʿoyc, 47 by Anania of Širak, which is the most comprehensive description of the Late Sasanian Empire. The actual description of Iran divided into four appears only in the Long Version (29). 48 There the order is against the clock: West, South, East, North (kʿustī *Xbharan, 49 kʿustī Nīmōj, 50 kʿustī Xorasan, kʿustī Kapkoh 51), and again, this order seems to be based mostly on the political, and not on the geographical considerations.

42 In this respect, a note should be made in passing: in Mazdak’s theology, a description of which survives in Sahāstānī’s Arabic, the word xusraw appears, with the meaning of “king”, see Shaki (1985, pp. 532–533). This usage looks strange, as Husraw I Anōšurwān was the king who executed Mazdak soon after he rose to power, and one would speculate that this word was perhaps provoked by the phonetically similar word kūzsī appearing in the same sentence. However, the same description of Mazdak’s theology has only one spāḥbed instead of the four in the Husraw’s times. We may combine these facts and guess that this piece of Mazdak’s theology was written after Husraw ascended to the throne, but before his break with Mazdak and the establishment of the four spāḥbed-ships?
44 Zotenberg (1900, p. 609); cf. Brunner (1983, pp. 748ff.).
45 al-Thaʿālibī called the four units rubʿ; the Pahlavi term was kustag or pādgost. The Middle Persian pādgost, “one of the four parts of Erānsahr after Anōšurwān”, was happily translated as aqtār al-mamlaka (*sahhr-pādgostān) in Marvādī’s Marvīj al-Dkhahab, ed. de Meynard and de Courteille (1914, Vol. II, p. 152); the Arabic aqtār, Plural of qār, “region, zone, quarter” [see Wehr (1976, p. 774)] seems to be borrowed from the Latin (via Greek and Syriac) for “quarter”; this Arabic word has no Semitic etymology (the Hebrew qōter, “diameter”, is a medieval borrowing from Arabic). The Arabic of the (spurious) throne speech of Ardashir has […] lqāmat al-ʾaggal waʾirdrā al-fasl wa-tašīṭ al-māʾār waʾimārat al-bilād wa-raʾraʾa bi-lʾihābd wa ramān aqtār al-mamlaka, which may be tentatively reconstructed in Pahlavi as follows: *paymān-ʾāxistant ud dād-ravanūt (ravēngān/dād-rahvēngān) ud kirbaq-pāddāyavastud ud sabhr-ābdūh ud mardom-xurramān ud abāz-wirāstān I sahr-pādgostān.
47 Marquart (1901); Hewsen (1992).
50 Including two islands, Ger and Mēšmanxik, in the Persian Gulf, Xužhrestān, and Spahl and Debūhēl, taken from the Indians. It should be noted that Yaman is absent from this list. In the period when the text was composed, Yaman was not under Sasanian rule.
51 i.e., the Mountain of Kāf, Caucasus; it included, i.a., Armm, Varjan, Ran, Balasakan, *Si-sakan [Siwkik], cf. Hewsen (1992, p. 234).

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A much earlier list, from the third century, is found in the description of the Sassanian Empire in Sāhpuhr’s inscription at Ka’ba-ye-Zardusht [= ŠKZ].

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III

It should be added that there was another geographical tradition current in Sassanian Iran: according to Kramers, Yāqūt tells that Ardašīr I drew a map of the world, and


53 Cf. Hwen (1992, pp. 229ff.).

54 Mingrelia or Sinitc?; according to Skjaervo (1983, P. 3.2, p. 126, with bibliography), not Mingrelia.

55 See Gnoli (1998, p. 3).


57 Back (1978, p. 287): “die ganze Elburzkette (= Tabāreṣṭān und Gēlān).”


59 Note that the order is different than that of the ŠKZ. Note also that Xūzestān, Asūreṣṭān and Mēšān appear on the list of “Iran”, cf. Gignoux (1971, pp. 89–90).


62 Kramers (1938, p. 64a).

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a similar tradition was told by [Pseudo-]Ṭūsī\(^{63}\) in ʿAjāʾīb al-Makhlūqāt about Kubād. In fact, Yaʿqūb’s text says: “it was told of Ardašīr that he said that the Earth is divided into four parts;\(^{64}\) one part is the land of the Turks, and it is located between the West of India up to the East of Byzantium; one part is the West, namely what is between the West of Byzantium up to Egypt [al-Qibṭ] and Barbary (Somali); one part is the land of the Blacks [al-Sūdān], and it is located between Barbary (Somali) up to India; one part is the land which belongs to Persia [al-Fārs]: what is between the River of Balkh up to the outskirts of Ādharbaydān and Persarmenia [al-Armaniyya al-Fārī-siyya], then up to the Euphrates, the Arab Desert up to Oman and Mukrān, then up to Kābul and Ṭakḥarestān [...].\(^{65}\)

Here we have a fourfold division of most of the inhabited world (except China and India), with Iran at the centre, which is described in the following order: NE > NW > SW > SE.

\(^{63}\) Gharāʾīb al-Mawṣūdāt waʿAjāʾīb al-Makhlūqāt (ed. Sutūde, 1345/1966), said to have been penned by Ahmad Ṭūsī, should be attributed correctly to Najīb Hamadānī, see Smirnova (1993, p. 27ff).

\(^{64}\) Many res gesta of Anōšurwān were ascribed to Ardašīr, see, e.g., the case of “The Letter of Ṭansar.”

\(^{65}\) Muʿjam al-Buldān, see von Wüstenfeld (1866, pp. 16–17); cf. also Dimašqī, ed. Mehren (1866, p. 18); Maqrīzī, Le Caire (1911, Vol. I, p. 33 [17]).

\(^{66}\) Like, e.g., DkM 25.13. […] ciyān kēt i Yūsī i az Ḫrōm ud hān i Mūsā azī-za Xazarān ud hān i Mānī az-īz Turkistan tagīḡū ud cērīh tīn pēi bōd bē纽带 o wadaqūh āndar hamahlān abgand han i Mānī az Ḫrōm fūṣī[q][f]āyūhīz anāfī, “[…] like the faith of Jesus from Byzantium, and the faith of Moses from the Khazars, and the faith of Mani from the Uigurs took away the strength and the vigor they had previously possessed, threw them into vilness and decadence amongst their rivals, and the faith of Mani even frustrated the Byzantine philosophy,” cf. de Menasce (1945, pp. 239–240); Molè (1967, p. 237). This passage was seen as reflecting the Uigur Manicheism, cf. de Menasce (1945, p. 240), and as one of the few non-Muslim sources to make note of Khazar Judaism, see Golden (1984, p. 140, note 38); cf. also Shapira (forthcoming/1).


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Bd 31. Some geographical information is also found scattered elsewhere, e.g., in Bd 14 and 14B, “On the negroes”, but it is outside of our inquiry here.68

Bd 8 (11), “On the nature of the lands,” is the only chapter that provides a short exposition of the traditional Zoroastrian concept of seven kīswars, and is not merely a list of names. According to Kramers in his above mentioned classical article in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, the seven climes of the Muslim geography were perhaps influenced by Persian seven kīswars, with the map of al-Ma’mūn divided into seven aqālim, six of which surrounding a seventh, the whole being surrounded by the encircling ocean.69 This is indeed the world-map described in Bd 8 (11).

Bd 9 (12), “On the nature of the mountains,” also contains mythical information,70 with a few later additions, such as the mentions of Pārs (Bd 9.12, 24, 40), Sāgestān (Bd 9.18), Hrōm = Byzantium (Bd 9.92), Kābul and China (Bd 9.3, 25, 39), Ādurbādān (Bd 9.29), Turkestān and Spāhān and Kirmānšāhān (Bd 9.3, 43–44), and Mt. Baqar (the Brazen City) and its stronghold used by Frāsāyāh and where *today* (imrōz) Sād Rām Pērōz71 has built a myriad towns (Bd 9.3, 23).

Bd 10, “On the seas,” describes at length the mythical ocean Frāx̄kard, quoting an Avestan verse as its authority (Bd 10.6), and enumerates three salt seas (zrēyīhā ī sūr), and 23 small seas. Of the three principal salt seas, one (Pūtīg, the Persian Gulf) is described at length in a mythical vein. Clear identifications are provided for the two others (Bd 10.14–15): zrēh ī Kamrōd hān ī pad Abāxstar, pad Tabarestān wīderēd; hān ī Syāḥ-būn pad Hrōm, “the Sea of Kamrōd, which is in the North (the Caspian), is that which passes to Tabarestān; the Sea of Syāḥ-būn (the Black Sea) is in Byzantium.” Here the compiler failed to make any mention of the Mediterranean, of which he naturally knew well; there is, of course, the possibility that he regarded the Black Sea and the Mediterranean as one and the same.72 The same chapter makes an explicit mention by name of only one of the 23 smaller salt seas, namely the 20th, Kyānseh cīyōn pad Sāgestān (Bd 10.16), though large salt lakes are abundant in Iran.

Bd 11, “On the rivers,”73 describes the mythical, so to speak, “flumenology”, providing 4 Avestan quotations (Bd 11.1, 3, 6, 7), and presenting in the end (Bd

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68 See Shapira (forthcoming)/3, “Zoroastrian Sources on Black People”.
69 Kramers (1938, pp. 63a, 64a). Compare above (notes 62, 65), on the “Ardašīr”’s map, on which Iran is also at the centre.
70 Based on Yt 19, of which no Zand is extant, cf. MacKenzie (1989a, p. 549a).
72 However, the normal Pahlavi name for the Black Sea was not Syāḥ-būn, cf. Freiman (1930). So, was this Syāḥ-būn the Mediterranean? In should be remembered that Greeks, Arabs and Turks called the Mediterranean by the name “White Sea”.

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11.8) the list of the 25 (though they are said to be 18) rivers between the Arang and the Weh rivers. 74

Bd 11A (20) goes in further details of the list, introducing material which cannot be Avestan. Thus, Arang is said to pass through *Sūraḵ būm kē Šām-iz 75 x’ānēnd ud pad Egiptos būm kē Misr-iz x’ānēnd bē widerēd u-š ānōh rōd ū tāq. 76 Spitoiš x’ānēnd, “the land *Sūraḵ (Syria) which is also called Šām and it passes in the land Egypt which is also called *Misr, and there they call it the swift (< *Nil) river Spitoiš (< *Egyptus)” (Bd 1A.1), 77 the Euphrates and Tigris on the border of Byzantium […] in Āšūrestān (Mesopotamia) [wimand ī Ḥrōm pad Āšūrestān] are mentioned (Bd 1A.3–6); with a pseudo-Avestan quotation praising the Euphrates, 78 with the Caspian (Kāspīg; not Egypt!) 79 mentioned in Bd 11A.26. 80

The order of the rivers given in Bd 11.8 and Bd 11A are different, with the latter list containing a river not mentioned in the former.

Bd 11 C (21), “The dissatisfaction of the Arang, Marw and Hilmand rivers,” is of mythical character and adds nothing to our study.

Bd 12 (22), “On the nature of the lakes,” where 9 lakes are enumerated; it is said that (Bd 12.3) that Lk. (war ī naï) Čečast is in Ādurbādāgān.

Bd 29 (29), “On the chieftainship of the continents,” has mythical material interspersed with some later interpolations, such as Dašt ī Tāḏīqī, Sagistān, Kābūlestan, Turkeštān, Čenestān, the identifications of Ėrān-Wēž with Ādurbādāgān, and with Yima’s vara said to be located in the middle of Pārs. 81

74 Arang rōd, Weh rōd, Diglat rōd ku Daštār-iz x’ānēnd, Frāṭ rōd, Dāštār rōd, Dargām rōd, Zan rōd, Harēvāv rōd, Marvō rōd, Xēšōmand rōd, Aṣāḵēr rōd, Watašēnē rōd, Zīmūnd rōd, X rōd, Xgand rōd, Baxt rōd, Mēhrān rōd ku Hindāqān rōd-iz x’ānēnd, Spōd rōd, Tord rōd ke Kōr-iz x’ānēnd, Xarēvāv rōd ke Masrāqān-iz x’ānēnd, Aras rōd, Turmēd rōd, Wandasēš rōd, Darājār rōd, Kāṣag rōd, Sēd rōd, Paydāḡmhēhān [rōd] ī Čhrōmēhān āb Mūkrestān rōd.

75 Or: kē-š Āmī-z x’ānēnd, “which they call Amī”, *Amul[-Daryā].

76 *Nil (عر) > nyw (ا) > TB (عر) > tk (عر)?

77 This passage can be dated by the period before Husrau II; cf. interesting remarks in Shahbazi (1990, p. 214).

78 Four quotations at all are found in this chapter.


80 Using this opportunity, I’d like to suggest, with reservation, two possible identifications of hydronyms appearing in Bd 11A.19–20 that eluded me earlier (see Shapiro 1999–2000, p. 144): Tord rōd kē Kōr-iz x’ānēnd az zēh Sirāb bē ayēd ud o zēh ī Gurgān rēzēd. Žwāb (?) hān rōd ī az Ādurbādāgān bē ayēd ud pad Pārs o zēh rēzēd (cf. note 74 above), “the river Tord which they also call Kōr (Kura, Mīkvār), comes from Sirāb and pours into the Lake of Gurgān (the Caspian). Žwāb (?) is that river which comes from Ādurbādāgān and pours in Pars into the sea.”

The name of the Lake of Sirāb does not, apparently, mean “well-watered place”; ṣōr here might mean “tired, disgusted; garlic”, and could rather refer to the salt lake of Van; another possibility is to compare the hydronym to the Turkish name of the lake Çıldır, located near the source of Kura, whose name is connected in Turkish with the notions “to become crazy, disgusted”; or should one emend to *Sīr-āb, “salt water”? As to the problematic Žwāb, could this be emended to *Zāb?

81 Of interest is a possible (though problematic) reference to Turks, found in Bd 29.8: Šām rāy gōwēnd ku: aḥōš būd, pad hān ka-š xurr-mēnēd Dēn ī Mazdāesnān, Turk ē kē Nāyōn x’ānēnd ku xvaft ēstūd, pad tēr bē wināst, “Of Šām they say that he was immortal, at the time when he scorned the Mazda-worshiping Religion, a Turk called Nāyōn slew him with an arrow, when he was
Bd 32, “On the abodes which the Kays made with splendour, which are called wonders and marvels,” contains only mythical traditions; among these, only one new notion is worth noting, that one of the abodes of Dahāg was in Babylon, another in Sambarān, i.e., in Himyar, and another one in Hindūstān, i.e., in non-Iranian lands, while that of Jám / Yima was in Pārs, i.e., in Iran par excellence (Bd 32.4, 7, 8).

To sum up, these “geographical” chapters are, with the exception of Bd 8 (11), merely lists, like Bd 31, and it is plausible to suggest that the format of the list of the Avestan lands derived from the Zand of Vd 1 served as the pattern for other lists as well.

VI

Bd 14 does not belong to the “geographical” chapter in the proper sense of the word, but it contains a tradition bearing on our discussion of Sasanian geographical perceptions (Bd 14.36–39): it is said there that nine of the 15 “sorts”, sardag, born of Šyāmag and his spouse Wašag, crossed the ocean Frāḵ’ kard from the central kišwar Xʿanirah, wherein we live, to the other six mythical kišwars, borne on the back of the Bull Srisōg; six other sardags remained in the kišwar Xʿanirah; from these sprung the Arabs, Iranians, Māzandarānīs; it is stated that those in Iran and non-Iran, Byzantium (Salm dah hast i Ḥrōm), Tür, China (Sēn dah hast i Čenestān), Dāy-dah, Sind, and even those who are in the other six kišwars – all are the descendants of Frāwag son of Šyāmag son of Mašyā. All these 15 sardags, the descendants of Frāwag living in the seven kišwars, and another ten sardags, which are fabulous creatures (such as “those with eyes in their breasts, those who have wings like bats, wark-ṣaṭm, īwag-pay, hān-iz kē dar dārēd ciyōn šabāg, etc.”), but also monkeys, are said to descend from Gayōmard.

Only later, two new “sorts” sprang, due to the mixture caused by the Adversary, namely the “Negroes” and another “sort”, designated by the word that some scholars read as “Slavs”.83

81 Nāyōn means “prince” in Mongolian, and this word was borrowed by Turkic and Persian (cf. Burhān-i Qāf: was Turkān milûk-o-salāṭīn rá bi-dān nām xʿānand, “Turks call by this name their kings and rulers”). Another possibility is to emend Nāyōn and to read the Turkic word *tōyīn, “a Buddhist priest”, cf. Clausen (1972, p. 568a): “a high official”; cf. Doerfer (1963–1975). In both cases, the Bd passage therefore should be of a post-Sasanian date.

82 Aklesar (1956, pp. 268–269), read its name as Korēnd Dūṣīt / Kvirinta Duzita [TD2 = Anklesaria (1908, p. 209 l. 8); cf. TD2, Anklesaria (1908, p. 211 l. 3 (Bd 32.15), where the same word is used (kūrīd)], was translated in Aklesaria (1956) as “was just-like a crane (kūrīgīn)”.

83 The text [Bd 14.39 (TD2, Anklesaria (1908, p. 107 l. 11–13)] is as follows: did pad wāḥān ī petāvarag, gumēzišniḥ bād ciyōn Zangīg kē ābīg ud zamīgīg bāvēd ud zamīgīg kē āb ud zamīgīg har dā zīwēd, “again, because of the Adversary, the Mixture occurred, such as Zangīg (Black Africans), who are (those) of water and (those) earth, and zamīgīg, who live in both water and earth.” The word in question could be read as gilābīg ("of clay and water"), so Aklesaria (1956, pp. 134–135), or as Saglābīg, so Moncchi-Zadeh (1975, pp. 98–99 and note 9). The problem is that though Sasanian Iranians were aware of the Black Africans, it remains highly uncertain whether they could have any knowledge of Slavs, so if the passage under consideration dates to the Sa-

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VII

As we have seen, the Bd material provides no stuff which could be seen as something similar to geographical science, even in the loosest sense: all we have is mythology, i.e., the *geographia sacra* of the “Old Country”, with some more recent additions (whose aim was to sanctify the Erân Wêzh / X’anirah of the day, i.e., Sasanian Iran), and lists of provinces or towns. There is, too, “The Wonders of Sîstân”, a valuable example of a short collection of local traditions, whose genre is perhaps somehow connected to the Arabic and Persian *madh* or ‘ajâ’ib literature of the later date.

However, it is wrong, in my opinion, to state that the Late Sasanian Iranians knew no geography. In fact, we have a striking example of it in the Pahlavi *Ayâdgâr î Jâmâspîg* [= AyJ]. In form, this is a revelation similar in many respects to that found in Zand î Wahman Yasn [ZKY]. It is impossible now to dwell upon the differences of structure and genre, though they are of importance.

I will say only that among the abundant eschatological material found in AyJ, some purely geographical chapters are found, and I think their inclusion into the framework of this particular composition was meant to provide a “scriptural” legitimisation for the geographical science as such.

AyJ 4.41–45 retells the story of the division of X’anirah among Frêdôn’s three sons, with Erêh getting Iran and India, Tôz getting Turkestan, and Salm getting Byzantium. This story has numerous parallels, of course, but here we will note only that in our case the date is clearly Sasanian, for in the post-Sasanian versions Arabs are associated either with Salm (because of the words *musulmân, Islâm*) or with Tôz (because of the word *tâzcûn*), but here are no Arabs yet.

AyJ 5 provides some information about the people who dwell in the six other *kišwars*. They are said to confess the religion of the forefathers, i.e., the religion of Gayômard and Syâmag, and to sacrifice to Srôsh.

sanian Period, the reading “Slavs” is impossible. But, if this passage dates from the post-Sasanian period, which is plausible, Slavs could be mentioned and the description of their ways of life in places abundant in water, provided by the Zoroastrian compiler, fits well the contemporary descriptions of the Eastern-European tribes, among them Slavs, Rus’ and others, which are found in Arabic geographical works of the 9th–10th centuries. Another relevant passage is found in the Pahlavi *Ayâdgâr î Jâmâspîg* [AyJ] 10 [see Messina (1939, pp. 53–54, translation: p. 104); cf. Appendix], where the word looking like *saglâhîg* was taken by the editor as referring to Cylon (*Sîlân*); but cf. Monchi-Zadeh (1975, pp. 98–99 and notes 8–9). However, Bd 14B depicts the “Negroes” as descendants of humans and demons and even mentions them in Southern Iran; here I trace a reference to the Zîmî revolt of 868–883 in the marshes of Southern Irãq under the guidance of al-Barqûqî, “the veiled,” and as such, the passage is clearly a post-Sasanian date; the same may be deduced also regarding our “Slavic” passage. On a Persian etymology of *saglîh* found in Gardîzhî, cf. Martinez (1983, p. 125). As to these “Negroes”, see Shapira (forthcoming/3): Zoroastrian Sources on Black People.

84 Cf. West (1916); Utas (1983); cf. also Utas (1976).
85 See Messina (1939).
86 For Zand î Wahman Yasn, see Cereti (1995).
87 As in *Abîth î Sîstân* 4.

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People of the strange “sorts” already mentioned in the context of Bundahišn are described at some length in AyJ 9. This tradition ultimately goes back to Classical geography, and must be an import from Greek or Syriac sources.

If in AyJ 10 the Pahlavi text spoke of Cylon, as Messina believed, then the source should also be Classical (compare Anania of Širak, where the arrangement of material is similar).

AyJ 12.2–7 depicts the land of Māzandarān; in the Late Sasanian period this country was still non-Iranian and hardly Zoroastrian at all, the description seems to derive from a lost Nāsk quoted in Dēnkard IX.10, for which our AyJ provides valuable textual variants.

But the most interesting and real-geographical information is found in AyJ 8, which deals with the Turks, Chinese, Arabs, Berbers, and in AyJ 12.8–16, which treats of the Turks [see Appendix]. Though short, these texts on the Turks and the Chinese read like the descriptions of Muslim geographers (e.g., Gardīzī91 or Marwāzi92) of the same peoples.

We should remember that our knowledge of many aspects of the Sasanian civilisation is, and will remain, limited. Nevertheless, it seems to me safe to state that the Sasanian Iranians did not develop a geographical science which can be compared to that of the Greek- and Arabic-writing authors. It seems that even the actual geographical knowledge of their own country that the Sasanian Iranians possessed was barely systematised, and was rather treated in accordance with geopolitical and/or religious attitudes, characterised by Iranocentrism.

Appendix

AyJ 8.1. pursīd Wištasp šāh ku awēsān mardomān ī pad Hindūgān ud Cēnestān ud Turkestān ud Tašīgān ud Barbarestān jud jud ād ud rāvišn cē, u-šān zīwandāgīh ud nēwagīh cīyōn, ka mērēnd ṣāk abgānēnd u-šān ruwān ṣāk šāvēnd, “The king Wištasp asked: ‘those people who are in India, China, Turkestan, Arabia and Berberia, what are their respective religious and behavior, and their ways of life and qualities? Where are they thrown when they die, and where do their souls go?’”

2. guft-iš Jāmāsp i bēdāxš ku Hindūgān šahr wuzurg, hast ī sard, hast ī garm, hast ī tār, hast ī hušk, hast ī dār ud draxt, hast kē dašt ī saxt hast kē wyāb, “Jāmāsp the vice-roy said to him: ‘India is a vast state. In some places it is cold, in some places it is hot, in some places it is wet, in some places it is dry, there are trees and shrubs, there are heavy deserts where one goes astray.’”

90 In fact, Turks are dealt with in AyJ 12, cf. below.
92 See Minorsky (1942).

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3. hast käš-săn zwišnīh az brinj, hast kä az šīr ī gāw, hast kä <az> tohmīhā x'ārēn, “There are some whose living is on rice, there are some whose living is on cow-milk, there are some who eat <from> fruits (or, eggs).”

4. u-sān kēš ī dād ī ravišn was, ud hast ī pad nēmag ī Öhrmazd, ud hast ī pad nēmag ī Ahriman ud jādūgīh āškārag kunēnd, “Their faiths and religions and ways of life are multiple. There are some who are in the (half-)lot of Öhrmazd, there are some who are in the (half-)lot of Ahriman, and they practice witchcraft publicly.”

5. ud ka mērēnd, hast kä andar zamīg nīgān kunēnd, ud hast kä ī āb ābūgānēnd, ud hast kä pad ātā[xy]š bē sōzēnd, ud āhrw kē nē hudēn ī Dušax šavēnd, “When they die, there are some who bury (their dead) in the earth, and there are some who throw (their dead) into water, and there are some who burn (their dead) with fire, and everyone who is not of the Good Religion goes to Hell.”93

6. ud Čenestān šah rashur uzwur ī was-zarr ud was-māsk ud was-gōhr, mardomān īs andar bawēnd kirrōg ud nēzūmān ud bārīg wēnsīn ēstād bawēnd, But paristēnd, ka mērēnd, druwand hēnd, “The state of China is vast, having much gold, much mucus, much jewels, and the people who live in it are artisan and dextrous and of thin complexion, they worship Buddha, they are unrighteous in their death.”94

93 Our text speaks, however, of an ambivalent attitude toward the inhabitants of India, some of whose religious practices were indeed sometimes resembling those of Zoroastrians, due to the common ancestry and the later Iranian impact. But sometimes these were just the opposite of the Zoroastrian cult. It would be interesting to trace the history of Zoroastrian attitudes to Indian religions up to our days [cf. Hinnells (1994)]. It is not necessary to presume that hudēn in India meant specifically “Zoroastrian”; the term may refer to the Hinduized Magi of Mithra who settled in India, cf. Humbach (1978). As to the supposed statements about Zoroastrians in India and in Turkestān, it should be remembered that the Iranian, Median pre-Zoroastrian cult of Mithra xšabapati was known in Egypt [on a Mythraion used by Persian soldiers at the end of the Achaemenid rule, if not later, see Boyce (1982, pp. 186 & 265)] and the Near East, including Phoenician cities of the mainland, Cyprus and Carthage, it is quite possible that Alexander used this cult in his propaganda against the Achaemenids, the stubborn Mazdeans [see Bivar (1994, p. 69); cf. Bivar (1975)].

The Indians and Chinese were both held in great esteem by the Iranians of the Late Sasanian period. Indian wisdom was transferred into Iran as part of the project of assembling the dispersed Avesta, and many “secular” works were translated as well, so, Kalīlah wa-Dīnah, Ṭafīf-Nāmah, Sindbād-Nāmah were translated circa 550, i.e., about the time when the Avesta was codified. On Indian motifs penetrating Greece and Syria via Sasanian Iran, cf. Shaked (1984, pp. 49–50); see now de Blois (1990).

94 This is a fitting description of pre-T’ang China (except, of course, the idea that the Chinese go to Hell, and therefore have no hope of salvation), since Li Shi-min (the Emperor Tai Tsung, the founder of the T’ang Dynasty, 618–907) opposed Buddhism and promoted the teachings of Confucius, and in 624 the great debate against Buddhism was held at the royal court, recorded by Fu I (555–639). Buddhism became popular in China only after the fall of the Han Dynasty in the 3rd century AD, although the penetration of this religion began as early as the 1st century from Tibet. Later, the Parthian and Kushan Iranians played an important role in bringing the Buddhist gospel to China, a Parthian prince Arāš (An Shih-kao, An Shi-gao), a Sogdian K’ang Seng-hui and a Parthian merchant An Hsiān (Xuan) among them. In the 4th century Buddhism became the state religion of China. At the end of the same century, Chinese Buddhism penetrated Korea, and about 552, this religion appears in Japan, via Korea. When the Zoroastrians first appeared in China in the early 6th century, their religion was spared from the general persecution of foreign religions (Watson 1983, p. 554). However, in the Huichang (841–846) epoch many sects were suppressed in China. All this perhaps indicates a pre-T’ang date.
7. Tāzīgān ud Barbarestān šahr garn ud hušk wypadn, něst bar ud āb tang ušān x'arišn šihr ud xrafstarān ud mūs ud mārs ud gurbag, róbāh ud kafšihr ud ābārīh az ēn ēwēn, uzdēs paristēn ušān zīwišn az uštr ud cahr-pād, any ciš nēst, “The land[s] of Arabs and Berbers is a hot and dry desert, it has no fruits and water is scarce, and their food is milk and xrafstras (noxious creatures) and mice and snakes and cats, foxes and hyenas and others of that kind, they worship images/statues and their living is on but camels and quadrupeds, having nothing else.”

AyJ 12:8–9: Turkestān wuzurg gyāg ud hamāg sārd, wēšag bawōd, ušān draxt į barwar ud mēwag īx'arišnīg ud “any ciš nihang. Hast az avēšān kē Māh paristēnd ud hast kē jādāg hēnd, ud hast ī Weh-Dēn hēnd, “Turkestān is a vast place and all of it is cold, it is forests, they have few fruit-trees and edible fruits and [other edible] things. There are some among them who worship the Moon and there are some who are sorcerers, and there are some who are of the Good Religion.”

AyJ 12. 15: Warz ī ābādānīh kunēnd. ka mērēnd ā wēšag abganēnd, ud hast ī ī Wahisūt ud hast ī ī Dušax' ī Hamēstagan sawēnd, “They till the land. When they die, they throw (their dead) in forests, and there are some who go to Paradise, and there are some who go to Hell and the mixed place.”

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95 In my opinion, it is fairly clear that this description of Arabia is of pre-Islamic origin; the importance of uzādēs (which might indicate both pagan and Christian objects of worship) for this dating is uncertain, but the tone is not hostile. We are told nothing about *dād ī wād ī Tāzīgān,* “the evil Arab religion”, which means Islam, and Berberia could have been mentioned only during the short period of the Sasanian occupation of the Western outskirts of Siwah and Fayoum. However, Messina (1939, p. 162, note 1), was of the opinion that by Barbarestān here Eastern Africa (Somaliland) is meant; in the last case, the date could be the last years of the reign of Husrāu I and later (577–). For Barbarestān in the East of Iran, compare Monchi-Zadeh (1975, pp. 88–91); cf. Bivar (1985, pp. 25–42).

96 According to Boyce (1987, p. 127), it is interesting to note that “there were Zoroastrians among the Hindus, AyJ 8.4–5, and Turks, AyJ 12.9”. However, compare Shapiro (forthcoming/1).

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