



THE ROLE OF AVESTA IN RECONSTRUCTING THE HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY OF ANCIENT BACTRIA

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Article history:	Abstract:
Received: 11 th July 2021 Accepted: 20 th August 2021 Published: 28 th September 2021	Ancient Bactria has an important role in the history of the ancient period of Central Asia. This article contains scientific analysis of data on the historical geography of Ancient Bactria in the Avesta, the oldest written source on the history of Central Asia. Moreover, there is analyzed the geographical localization of the countries mentioned in the Avesta.
Keywords: Ancient Bactria, Avesta, Videvdat, historical geography, Oxus, Arianam vayjo, Gava Suguda, Mouru, Bakhdi, Ahura Mazda, Mithra.	

INTRODUCTION

The Ancient Bactria is a historically settled country, covering the southern part of Uzbekistan, the southern part of Tajikistan, and the northern part of Afghanistan. This region is mentioned in various written sources as Bakhdi, Baktrish, Bactrian, Bactrian, Bakhli, Bakhlika, Tuxolo. In modern literature, it is recognized as Bactria.

In ancient times, Bactria was bordered by the following historical regions: Sogdiana in the north, Arahozia in the southwest, and Ariana in the west. Ancient Bactria included the Amu Darya and its valleys, mountainous regions, and desert areas.

The peculiarity of the ancient Bactrian land is due to its convenient geographical location. First, the region was located on both banks of the Amu Darya, the largest river in Central Asia. This indicates that the country is comprehensively accessible for farming.

MAIN PART

Ancient Bactria was located at the crossroads of trade routes from north to south (from the Great Steppe to the Indian Ocean) and from west to east (from the Mediterranean countries to China). The intersection of these trade routes in the territory of ancient Bactria created the conditions for the comprehensive development of the country.

Researchers note that the middle of the VIII-VI centuries BC was a period of development of the ancient state of Bactria, which may have spread to the territorial boundaries of this large state: Murgab oasis, Hindukush, Badakhshan, Nurata and Bukhara. During this period, Bactria was bordered by the ancient Khorezm state and the Sak-Massagets tribes. [1, p. 73]

The sacred book of Zoroastrianism, the Avesta, gives information about ancient Bactria to us. In the first half of the first millennium BC, the Avesta provides valuable information not only about the way of life, customs, legal relations, procedures, holidays of the peoples of Central Asia, but also about the historical regions that existed in the VIII-VI centuries BC.

The first fragrance of the Videvdat part of the Avesta lists the 16 most beautiful lands and provinces created by Ahuramazda. This list includes the countries and countries that are known and important to the founders of Videvdat. Researcher G.Gnoli cites the connection between the 16 countries and countries mentioned in the first fragrance of Videvdat and the 16 countries listed in the list of "maxadjanapad" - countries in Indian epic literature. [2, p. 104]

Historian M.Witzel localizes the countries listed in the Videvdat on a modern map, noting that their sequence is counterclockwise, and that this is similar to the actions of the ancient Indo-Iranian peoples in the rituals of expelling and purifying various diseases. [3, p. 52]

Many scholars have puzzled as to what the countries mentioned in the first fragrance of Videvdat mean. G. Gnoli notes that the list of these countries and countries represents the areas of spread of belief in Ahuramazda in the IX-VII centuries BC. [2, p. 107] According to another hypothesis, these are the stages of the spread of Zoroastrianism by Zarathustra, and according to another, they are associated with the migration of the ancient Aryans. Another hypothesis is that this list is the provinces of the Parthian kingdom.

The 16 countries and countries listed in the first fragard of Videvdat are:

1. Ahura Mazda created Arianam Vaejo on the Daitia River as the first place for people. Arianam Vaejo is mentioned elsewhere in the Avesta as the homeland of Zarathustra and Zoroastrianism and as the center of the world. In Western literature, Airyanam Vaejo is considered the "legendary homeland of the Aryans" as the land of Khorezm. G. Gnoli and G. Witzel reject this hypothesis and places Arianam Vaejo in the central part of the Hindu Kush, the upper reaches of the Helmand and Hererud rivers.

2. Gava-Sugda is mentioned in Videvdad as the second land created by Ahura Mazda. This region is Sogdiana, located in the valley of the Zarafshan River.

3. Mouru is mentioned as the third country. Mouru (meadow, green area) was the lower part of the Murgab River in Turkmenistan, the ancient land of Margiana, which corresponds to the Mari oasis.

4. Bakhdi province, where the flags are high, is located in the Balkhob oasis. The city of Bactria was its center .[4, p. 49-66]

The Yasht of the Avesta mentions beautiful lands and countries. In addition to the countries mentioned in the first fragment of Videvdad, a list of Aryashayana (Aryan plains) countries is given in Mihr-yasht. This list includes 6 countries in Aryashayana and they are arranged in three pairs:

1. Ishkata and Pourata (avest. Ishkatem "peak", avest. Pauratem - ca "mountain, sansk. Parvati") is a mountainous region in the upper reaches of the Herurid River and a district in the Kokhi-Bobo mountain range in central Hindu Kush.

2. Mauru and Harayu - oasis of Marv and Herat.

3. Gava - Sugda and Khvairizem - Sogdiana and Khorezm .[5, p. 35-58]

In the scientific literature, two lists of the names of the countries known to us through the Avesta are analyzed. All of these lists are Videvdad's first fragment and Mihr-Yasht.

The Videvdad is a part of the Avesta that contains various ceremonial rules. Although the Videvdad section was compiled much later, it also included older parts. The first fragment of Videvdad lists the names of the "beautiful lands" created by the supreme god Ahura Mazda. These are Aryanam - Vaijo, Gava - Sogda, Mauru, Bakhdi, Nisaya (located between Mauru and Bakhdi), Haraiva, Vaikarta, Urwa, Xnenta, Harahvati, Haytumant, Raga, Chahra, Varna, Hapta - Hindu and Rangha. I. Dyakonov analyzed the list of these countries .[6, p. 73]

One of the most controversial issues among scholars is the timing of the creation of Videvdad. It is very important that we focus on this issue. This is because it is easier to restore the geographical image of Central Asia at the time of the emergence of Zoroastrianism when it is clarified in which period the Videvdad, known as the "geographical poem" of the Avesta, was created. The list of lands mentioned in the first fragments of the Videvdad in the scientific literature was compiled after the victory of the Parthian king Mithridates II over the Greco-Bactrian kingdom in the 2nd century BC. I.M. Dyakonov rightly points out that some of the lands mentioned in the first fragment of Videvdad were never part of the Parthian kingdom. [7, p. 137]

Avesta researcher A. Christensen noted that the list later included countries not mentioned in the Mihr-Yasht. Bactria is one of them. [8, p. 164]

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The list of countries listed in the first fragment of Videvdad begins with the provinces of Aryanam-Vayjo and Gava-Sugda.

The localization of Aryanam - Vayjo County is one of the most important issues. Usually, Aryanam Vayjo is recognized as Khorezm, the land of Aryans. However, based on the Avesta description of the climate of the Aryanam-Vayjo region, it is difficult to consider Khorezm as the coldest country in Central Asia.

This definition is more appropriate for the eastern and northeastern Aral Sea region. The Yasht part of the Avesta also helps us to describe the geographical appearance of Central Asia almost 3,000 years ago.

The Yasht part of the Avesta consists of 22 chapters, 10 of which have survived. In the source "Denkard" (Middle Persian (Pahlavi)) dedicated to the history of Zoroastrianism, the names of 22 chapters of "Yasht" are listed. Through the ages, we gain important information about many toponyms, oronyms, and hydronyms during the early spread of Zoroastrianism.

Mihr Yasht also lists the names of six ancient regions of Central Asia. It is noteworthy that not only in the "Mihr Yasht" but also in other "Yasht" the name of Bactria is not mentioned.

I.M.Dyakonov explains that the name of Bactria was not mentioned in "Mihr Yasht" and that it was not part of Aryashayana. In addition, during this period, Bactria did not exist as a separate province, and the Bactrians lived in the valley of the Murgab River and in the plain part of the Haraiva-Mauru union, which was a strong political union adjoining this valley. [10, p. 19]

Gava region in Sughd is one of the regions of the Zarafshan river valley of our country.

An important question is which of the geographical names mentioned in the Mihr Yasht would include the area on the right bank of the Amu Darya. The province of Gava in Sughd may have included exactly this area. The reason given by scientists may be based on information from ancient sources. The border between Bactria and Sughd passed through the Oxus-Amudarya. .[10, p. 25-31] In addition, "the desert between Bactria and the Oxus River was called the Sughd Desert". .[11, p. 5, 12] Based on this information, it can be concluded. In the period of Yaz I, the Sogdians moved from the Gissar mountain range to the north of the Kashkadarya oasis from the Surkhan oasis under pressure from the Bactrians, another Eastern Iranian people. [12, p. 33-38]

The next country to be mentioned in Mihr Yasht is the land of Hvarism. The land of Hvarism is considered the lower reaches of the Amudarya. However, the region of Khvarazmi mentioned in the Mihr Yasht is presumed to be the Great Khorezm that existed before the Achaemenids and is localized with the Akse-Tejen river valley.

According to many scholars, Mihr Yasht dates back to the pre-Zoroastrian period. It lists the names of the Aryan countries. Some of them were part of Aryashayana. [13, p. 49-50]

CONCLUSION

It should be noted that among the names of the countries mentioned in the Mihr Yasht, we do not find the names of Aryanam Vaejo and Bakhdi (Bactria). This issue is the main controversy among scientists.

From the geographical point of view quoted in the Videvdad, which is referred to by European scholars as the Geographical Poem of the Avesta, it can be seen that the borders of Aryanam Vaejo extend as far as the Sughd region.

However, researchers are unable to pinpoint why Aryanam Vaejo and Bakhdi are not included in the list of countries in the Mihr Yasht.

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