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**TWO HISTORICAL QUESTIONS RELATING
TO THE ALANS AND THE MOUNTAINS**

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1. Ammianus Marcellinus relates that the Alans (*Halani*), who lived beyond the River Don in Scythia, took their name from some mountains: *in immensum extensas Scythiae solitudines Halani inhabitant, ex montium appellatione cognominati*¹. Corresponding to Ammianus' Alanic mountains we have Ptolemy's Ἀλανὰ ὄρη² north of the Caspian Sea, in other words, as W. Tomaschek wrote³, “der Hugelzug des Mugodzaren in der Kirghisens-teppe”, a natural spur of the southern Urals. H. Humbach⁴, in a thorough study of the historical significance of the name, was careful to point out that references linking the ethnic name Alans to the mountains are not restricted to the instances currently remembered; he quotes for example the Ἀλαῦνον ὄρος in Ptolemy's Geography⁵ and Marcianus of Heracleia's Ἀλανὸν ὄρος⁶.

No one, in my view, has ever given sufficient attention to the relationship between the ethnic name of the predecessors of the Ossetes and the names of various mountains, and no adequate explanation has ever been given, as far as I know, of the absolutely clear and explicit information given by Ammianus.

Following a few brief comments made in 1989⁷ on the relationship between the name of the Alans and the ethnonym *ārya-, I put forward a proposal – hypothetical of course – in an as yet unpublished paper presented on 25 April 1995⁸ at the Forty-third Study Week organised by the Italian Centre for the study of Early Middle Ages in Spoleto, that the Alanic name had been given to mountains in areas previously belonging to the Aorsi “as a result of the remote influence of the concept found in the Avesta that the peak of the *axis mundi* was located in the Airyana Vaējah, the Ērān-wēz of Pahlavi texts – a land more mythical than Nordic”⁹.

Such a solution corresponds to the one offered earlier by E. Meyer¹⁰ and presented again forty years ago by I. Gershevitch¹¹, albeit with one significant difference.

Taking as his basis the identification of the Alans with both the Ossetes and the Aorsi, as put forward earlier by Fr. Hirth¹², and noting how Fr. C. Andreas had demonstrated how Khwārezm was their previous homeland (a conclusion already found in, inter alia, A. von Gutschmid¹³ and J. Marquart¹⁴) and how the latter was nothing else than the Airyana Vaējah of the Avesta (a land of the Airyans with many mythical aspects)¹⁵, Meyer suggested that these were the same people who, appearing from the beginning of the first century BC in new territories, “in denselben Sitzen, die später die Alanen inne haben”, had migrated from settlements east of the Caspian Sea to the Caucasus region¹⁶. For Marquart¹⁷, the presence of the Alans north of the Caspian dated back to somewhere around the middle of the first century BC, based of course on the earliest classical sources relating to them¹⁸. For Gershevitch, who shared the conclusions of W. B. Henning on the Greater Khwārezm¹⁹, the name Airyana Vaējah belonged to an area precisely defined in historical and political geography: it was the State over which Kavi Vištāspa, the prince converted by Zoroaster, reigned²⁰. My view, however, is that it is a mythical country in Zoroastrian cosmology: Airyana Vaējah is the new name given by the Zarathuštrian priests to the “centre” of the earth, an echo from the ancient common Indo-Iranian cosmography. Thus I do not believe the solution offered by Meyer and Gershevitch is acceptable, at least in the terms in which it has been presented. With regard to the idea of Airyana Vaējah, the reader may refer in particular to the study I did on the subject some years ago²¹.

Nevertheless I think we can agree at least in part with the above mentioned solution. The Aorsi probably adopted the new name of Alans because they had come into contact with people calling themselves *ārya-* in Khwārezm and the areas surrounding it. This ethnic name certainly carried great prestige, being linked to the political and religious fortunes of Iranism on the great plateau: “Avestan people”, Medes and Persians called themselves *arya-*, and after the Achaemenian period Ἀριανή and Ἀριανοί were geographical and ethnic names respectively for much of the eastern Iranian world²².

The echo of the Zarathustrian Airya Vaējah tradition was thus able to reach the Aorsi as the new term for an ancient idea in Indo-Iranian cosmography that was not unknown to Greater Iran²³: the cosmic Mountain of the Aorsi, which became an “Alanic mountain” par excellence, followed them in their migrations from the lands north of the Caspian Sea, in all likelihood moving as far as the Caucasus, and its name became superimposed, so to speak, on the name of the people.

It is interesting to note in relation to this another of Gershevitch's hypotheses linking to the *Kaoirisa*-²⁴ of the Avesta (interpreted by Bartholomae, however, as **Karuisa*-²⁵) the name of the mythical dreamland *Kūrīs* in Osse-

tian folklore²⁶, as a *vyddhi* derivative of, say, a region **Kuirisa*-²¹; he saw in this further evidence for his argument concerning possible Zoroastrian elements in the cultural heritage of the descendants of the Alans²⁸. Gershevitch records that the *Bundahišn* gives the *Kwy(y)l's* mountain as *pad Ērān-wēz*²⁹. This hypothesis was perhaps too hastily rejected by G. Dumézil³⁰ and seems to have escaped the recent thorough editor of the *Zamyād Yašt*³¹.

2. The two parallel passages in Šābuhr's inscription of the Ka^cbe-ye Zardošt³² and in the synoptic text of Kerdīr's inscription (in our case Naqš-e Rostam, Ka^cbe-ye Zardošt and Sar Mašhad inscriptions: KNRm, KKZ and KSM) contain the Middle Persian expression *tā frāz ō* (^C*D pl*^C*c* ^C*L*), literally "up to in front of (or facing)". In Šābuhr's inscription it is rendered in the Parthian text as *yad frāz ō* (*H*^N *prhš* ^C*L*) and in the Greek as ἔως ἔμπροσθεν. The Parthian and Greek texts of the royal inscription follow this with a reference to the Caucasus and the Gate of the Alans (not of the Albanians or Albania)³³: *Kāf kōf ud Alānān bar* (*kpy* *ṬWR*^o *W* *ṽnn* *TR*^o); Καπ ὄρους καὶ πυλῶν 'Αλανῶν. Kerdīr's inscription on the other hand omits the reference to the Caucasus and simply has *Alānān dar* (^l*n*ⁿ *BB*^o).

A. Maricq³⁴ did well to give the literal significance of this expression, which he translated as "jusqu'au devant de, jusqu'en face de". However he failed to notice that such a translation conflicted with the interpretation he gave of *ṽnn* as the name of the Albanians or Albania, which occurs again in the form ^l*ny* in KK2 12 (corresponding to the form *rd'n*, a pseudo-historical spelling identifiable in KNRm 39 and in KSM 19)³⁵. In fact he made the mistake of rejecting Henning's impeccable demonstration that the very form of ^l*ny* in KKZ for the name of Albania creates confusion with the name of the Alans³⁶. In any case it is clear enough that in Kerdīr ^l*d'n*/^l*ny* on one side and ^l*n*ⁿ on the other must refer to different ethno-geographic items, in exactly the same way as *rd'n* and *ṽnn* in the Parthian version of Šābuhr's inscription. This has been clearly pointed out not only by Henning, Back, Bailey, MacKenzie, but also by M.-L. Chaumont³⁷ and G. Cereteli³⁸.

Indeed, even the literal translation of *tā frāz ō/yad frāz ō*/ἔως ἔμπροσθεν should have caused Maricq to withdraw his criticism of Henning. In fact the phrase in question would appear to indicate the extreme limits somehow reached by the power of the Sassanians: to say "up to in front (of the Caucasus and up to in front) of the Gate of..." is not to say literally "up (to the Caucasus and) to the Gate of..." The expression means that the Caucasus and the Gate were outside the area controlled by the Persians in the last thirty or forty years of the third century. Thus anyone who wanted to continue following Maricq's and Gignoux's interpretation of *ṽnn TR*^o or *ṽnⁿ BB*^o as "Portes d'Albanie" would find oneself faced with the following problem among other things: while

Albania would be included in Anērān-šahr, which included Armenia and territories to the south of the Caucasus, the pass leading into it – that is to say according to Maricq the Derbend gorge – would be excluded. In fact it is unlikely, in spite of some doubts recently expressed by D. Braund³⁹, that the Sassanians used the name Gate of Albania for the pass that may have marked not the southern but the northern limits of this region, and also that the Middle Persian 𐭠𐭥𐭥 referred to a people or to a country within Anērān-šahr. Šābuhr’s and Kerdīr’s inscriptions offer us the Alans of the Caucasus in the years around 260 to 280 as the barrier beyond which “the horses and men” of the King of kings had not ventured.

NOTES

1. XXXI, 2.13.
2. *Geogr.* VI, 14.3 and 11.
3. *RE* I (2), 1893, 1281.
4. “Die historische Bedeutsamkeit der alanischen Namen”, *Studia Classica et Orientalia Antonino Pagliaro oblata*, III, Roma 1969, 33-52.
5. III, 5.15.
6. II, 39.
7. G. Gnoli, *The Idea of Iran. An Essay on its Origin*, Serie Orientale Roma LXII, Roma 1989, 115 and n. 15.
8. “Il nome degli Alani nelle iscrizioni sassanidi: considerazioni linguistiche e storiche sul tema dell’opposizione tra Iran esterno e Iran interno”, to be published in the Proceedings of the Study Week (20-26 April, 1995) on Caucasus as a cross-roads of cultures from the Mediterranean to Persia (IV-XI centuries).
9. *Ibid.*, [30].
10. *Geschichte des Altertums*, 9th ed. (Unveränderter Nachdruck der zuletzt 1952-1958 bei der J. G. Cotta’schen Buchhandlung Nachf. erschienenen Neuauflage), Essen, I, 2 § 572, 572 n.
11. “Word and Spirit in Ossetic”, *BSOAS*, XVII, 1955, 486 (= I. Gershevitch, *Philologia Iranica*, ed. N. Sims-Williams, Beiträge zur Iranistik 12, Wiesbaden, 1985, 135).
12. *China and the Roman Orient*, Leipzig / München / Shanghai / Hongkong 1885, 139 n. 1.
13. *Geschichte Irons und seiner Nachbarlander von Alexander dem Grossen bis zum Untergang der Arsaciden*, Tübingen 1888, 68 ff.
14. *Ērānšahr nach der Geographie des Ps. Moses Xorenac’i*, Berlin 1901, 156.
15. Gnoli, “Avestan Geography”, *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, ed. E. Yarshater, New York 1987, III/1, 44-47; *Id.*, *The Idea of Iran*, cit, 38-53.

16. Meyer, op. cit., I, 2, § 568, 564. Cf. Hirth, “Ueber Wolga-Hunnen und Hsiung-nu”, *SBAW*, phil.-hist. Kl., 1899, II, 245 ff.; E. Taubler, “Zur Geschichte der Alanen”, *Klio*, IX, 1909, 19 ff.

17. *Untersuchungen zur Geschichte von Eran II*, *Philologus* Suppl.-Bd. X, Heft 1, Leipzig 1905, 83.

18. Seneca, *Thyestes* 627 ff.; Lucan, *Bell. Civ.* VIII, 215 ff. See B. S. Bachrach, *A History of the Alans in the West*, Minnesota Monographs in the Humanities 7, Minneapolis 1973, 4 f.

19. Discussed in my *Zoroaster's Time and Homeland*, Naples 1989, 91 ff., and in my more recent article “More on the Khwarezmian Hypothesis”, *Corolla Iranica, Papers in honour of Prof. Dr. D. N. MacKenzie on the occasion of his 65th birthday ...*, ed. R. E. Emmerick and D. Weber, Frankfurt am Main 1991, 75-78.

20. Henning, *Zoroaster, Politician or Witch-doctor?*, London 1951, 42 f.; Gershevitch, “Old Iranian Literature”, *Iranistik-Literatur*, Handbuch der Orientalistik, 1. Abt., 4. Bd., Lief. 1, Leiden/Köln 1968, 10 f.

21. Op. cit. (n. 7), 38-53.

22. *Ibid.*, 77 f., 106 ff.

23. G. M. Bongard-Levin, È. A. Grantovskij, *De la Scythie à l'Inde. Énigmes de l'histoire des anciens Aryens*, transl. Ph. Gignoux, Paris 1981, 54 ff., 63 ff.

24. *Yašt* 19.6. For the variants see now A. Hintze, *Der Zamyād-Yašt*, Beiträge zur Iranistik 15, Wiesbaden 1994, 86.

25. *Altiranisches Wörterbuch*, Strassburg 1904, 432; cf. Hintze, op. cit., 421.

26. V. I. Abaev, *Istoriko-ètimologičeskij slovar' osetinskogo jazyka*, Moskva/ Leningrad, I, 612 f.

27. Gershevitch, op. cit. (n. 11), 485 ff.

28. For the problem of Zoroastrian elements in the cultural heritage of the Ossetes see the critical observations by É. Benveniste, *Études sur la langue ossète*, Paris 1959, 132 f., and Fr. Thordarson, “Ossetic”, *Compendium Linguarum Iranicarum*, ed. R. Schmitt, Wiesbaden 1989, 487.

29. *Great Bundahišn*, ed. T. D. Anklesaria (Bombay 1908), 79 l.11. For the reading of the *Iranian Bundahišn* see F. Justi, *Der Bundehesh*, Leipzig 1868, 212.

30. “Noms mythiques indo-iraniens dans le folklore des Osses”, *IA*, CCXLIV, 1956, 366 n. 58.

31. Hintze, op. cit., 421.

32. A. Maricq, “Res Gestae divi Saporis”, *Syria*, XXXV, 1958, 306-307, 336-337 (= *Id.*, *Classica et Orientalia*, Paris 1965, 48-49, 78-79); M. Back, *Die sassanidischen Staatsinschriften*, Acta Iranica 18, Téhéran/Liège 1978, 286-287.

33. Back, op. cit., 187 f.; D. N. MacKenzie, “Kerdir's inscription”, in G. Hermann, D. N. MacKenzie, R. H. Caldecott, *The Sasanian Rock Reliefs at Naqsh-e Rostam*, Iranische Denkmäler, Lief. 13, Reihe II: Iranische Felsreliefs, Berlin 1989, 44, 55, 58, 64. See also the

Additional notes by H. W. Bailey to the article “Alans” by V. I. Abaev in the *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, cit., 1985, 1/8, 801-803.

34. *Classica et Orientalia*, cit. 93.

35. According to Henning, “A Farewell to the Aq-Aqatārān”, *BSOAS*, XIV, 1952, 512 n. 4. For the “pseudo-historischen” or “inversen” Schreibungen” see *Id.*, “Mitteliranisch”, *Iranistik-Linguistik*, Handbuch der Orientalistik, 1. Abt., 4. Bd., 1. Abschn., Leiden/Köln 1958, 64 (Parthian), 67 and 69 (Middle Persian).

36. Maricq in E. Honigmann, A. Maricq, *Recherches sur les Res Gestae divi Saporis*, Mémoires de l’Académie Royale de Belgique XLVII/4, Bruxelles 1953, 88 f. Maricq has been followed by Ph. Gignoux: *Glossaire des Inscriptions Pehlevies et Parthes*, Corpus Inscriptionum Iranicarum – Supplementary Series I, London 1972, 15 and n. 7, and 45; *Les quatre inscriptions du mage Kirdīr*, Collection des sources pour l’histoire de l’Asie Centrale préislamique, Série II, Vol. I, *Studia Iranica – Cahier 9*, Paris 1991, 71; “Miscellanea Sasanidica”, *Bulletin of the Asia Institute*, N.S. 4, 1990 (= *In Honor of R. N. Frye: Aspects of Iranian Culture*), 234 f. On this point see my above mentioned article on the name of the Alans (n. 8).

37. “L’inscription de Kartir à la ‘Ka’bah de Zoroastre’”, *IA*, CCXVIII, 1960, 361; “États vassaux dans l’empire des premiers Sassanides”, *Monumentum H. S. Nyberg I*, Acta Iranica 4, Téhéran/Liège 1975, 102 f.

38. “Šāpuris carceris ʾlʾnn TR^{co}”, *TSU Giorgi Axvledians*, Tbilisi 1968, 327-337; “ʾlʾnn TR^{co} dar katibe-ye Šāpūr”, *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* (Shiraz), N.S. 1, 1975, 1-15.

39. *Georgia in Antiquity. A History of Colchis and Transcaucasian Iberia 550 BC-AD 562*, Oxford 1994, 240 n. 16.