

Borders

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Additional Considerations about Ved. *Síndhu-*, Av. *Hiṇdu-/Həṇdu-*

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Abstract In a very important article Paul Thieme demonstrated that Ved. *Síndhu-* was a nominal *-u-* formation, based on a non-attested present stem **sinadh-/ *sindh-* derived by a root *sidh* (usual present stem *sadha-*). Then, **sindhú-* would mean ‘warding off, keeping away’, while the corresponding substantivization as *síndhu-*, m./f., (with the stress on the root) meant ‘he/she who wards off, keeps away’, i.e. ‘natural frontier’. Notwithstanding the evident absence of a present stem like **sinadh-/ *sindh-*, the reconstruction suggested by Thieme is still the most reasonable in the light of the R̥gvedic passages where the older interpretation of *síndhu-* just as ‘river’ or ‘ocean’ results patently far-fetched or simply impossible. In any case, for the Avestan corresponding form, *hiṇdu-/həṇdu-* (O.P. *hindu-*), no good Iranian or Indo-Iranian (independent) etymology seems to be recognizable, and it is presumable, as normally stated, that this one was a very early loanword in Iranian, just meaning not ‘India’, but ‘(natural) frontier’, and thus referring to barriers or obstacles as big and large as a river or a large basin of water (lake, sea or ocean). Here some problems connected with this interpretation of the linguistic data are analyzed, with special regard for the Indo-Iranian and Avestan mythology.

Keywords Frontier. Avestan. Vedic. Indo-Iranian. Indus.

In a very important article Paul Thieme demonstrated that Ved. *Síndhu-* was a nominal *-u-* formation, based on a non-attested present stem **sinadh-/ *sindh-* derived by a verbal root ²*sidh* (usual present stem *sadha-*) (Thieme 1970, pp. 447-449).¹ Then, **sindhú-* would originally mean ‘warding off, keeping away’, while the corresponding substantivization as *síndhu-*, m./f., (with the stress on the root) meant ‘he/she who wards off, keeps away’, i.e. ‘natural frontier’. In spite of the evident absence of a present stem like **sinadh-/ *sindh-*, the reconstruction suggested by Thieme is still the most reasonable at the light of few R̥gvedic passages where the standard interpretation of *síndhu-* just as ‘river’ or ‘ocean’ results patently far-fetched or simply impossible. Thus, we can assume that only later it assumed the current values of ‘river’ (f.) and ‘sea, ocean’ (m.).²

1 Cf. also Mayrhofer 1976, p. 468 and 1996, pp. 729-730 (with additional bibliography on the subject), substantially supportive of Thieme’s analysis.

2 On the difference of gender see Thieme 1970, p. 447 n. 3, after Lüders 1951, 1, pp. 129-131.

In any case, for the Avestan corresponding form,³ *hiṇdu-/həṇdu-* (O.P. *hiⁿdu-*),⁴ no good Iranian or Indo-Iranian alternative etymology seems to be recognizable,⁵ and it is presumable, as normally stated, that this one was an ancient 'loanword' in Iranian, the meaning of which, just at the time of its acquisition, was not yet that of 'India', but still that of '(natural) frontier', thus referred to barriers or obstacles as big and large as rivers or wide basins of water (lake, sea or ocean) (Thieme 1970, pp. 448-449; cf. Karttunen 1995).

It must be considered that in the case of Av. *hiṇdu-/həṇdu-* Thieme did not properly like the denomination of 'loanword'; actually, he preferred to define it as an 'adaptation', and this because the Iranians, «when hearing the Indian name *Sindhu-* transposed it into sounds fully meaningful to an Iranian ear, as they transposed *Saptá Sindhavas* 'the Seven Rivers, the land of the Seven Rivers' (RV 8.24.27) – later (in the epic) simply *Sindhavas* 'the country between Indus and Sutlej' – into *Hapta Hindū* (sic) Vd.I.19» (1970, p. 450). This, however, was a minor problem, because in any case such a word entered the Iranian linguistic area from an Indo-Aryan speaking domain, while Thieme's dominant interest was clearly to solve a problem of linguistic chronology connected with such a loan or adaptation. In fact, according to an earlier remark made by Pisani (1962, p. 44) and later developed by Szemerényi (1966, pp. 192-193), the Iranian change *s > h* should have taken place «only after the Indus river and its Indian name *Sindhu-* had become known to Iranian speakers». But, while Szemerényi used this datum in order to show the lateness of that isogloss, which should be dated not before 1000 BCE – in another article Szemerényi preferred a period later than the eighth century BCE because of the argument that the name of Susa was in OP. *^hUjiya-*, etc., where initial *s > h* (Szemerényi 1966; contra Pisani 1969, p. 351 n. 1) – Pisani was convinced that such a linguistic phenomenon was older (chronologically earlier than the Aryan assibilation of Indo-European palatals) (see also Gusmani; 1972; cf. Boccali 1981, pp. 14-16), so that the presentation of the scholarly discussion in the brief article of Thieme did not properly describe the status of the debate in its whole complexity. In fact, it seems that both scholars agreed on the later dating of this linguistic change, while they strongly criticized each other in a number of articles.⁶

3 Bartholomae 1904, p. 1814. The orthography with *-ə-* instead of *-i-* is discussed by Bartholomae in note.

4 Brandenstein, Mayrhofer 1964, p. 125; cf. Kent 1953, p. 214. In Old Persian it is attested also *hiⁿduya-* '(Man) of Sind', 'Indian'.

5 On the contrary, Brunner (2006, p. 7) is convinced that the explanation given by Thieme (1970) supports the existence of an Indo-Iranian etymology, which is not true.

6 See Szemerényi 1966, 1968; Pisani 1967, 1969, p. 351. Cf. also Hintze 1998.

The etymological reconstruction and in particular that of the semantics to be originally ascribed to Ved. *síndhu-*, «certainly cannot be used to date the Iranian replacement of an older, inherited, *s* by *h*», as Thieme rightly underlined in conclusion of his article (1970, p. 450). I absolutely share his point of view, because an ancient word denominating ‘barrier, obstacle’ might have been adopted and then adapted, when Proto-Iranians and Proto-Indians were still moving towards their definitive historical locations.

What has to be additionally remarked concerns the evident fact that also in the Iranian framework we can reconstruct a reasonable chronology for the semantic development assumed by that interesting Iranian word of foreign origin. In Old Persian, *hiⁿdu-* or *Hindu-⁷* actually refers to a country (*dahyu-*),⁸ i.e. ‘India’, probably so named after the river, although a certain reminiscence of the earlier meaning of ‘extreme border’ could have been preserved in DPh 4-8, where king Darius I clearly mentioned the extreme cardinal points of his realm:

[(...) *θāti Dārayava.uš xšāyaθiya: ima xšačam, taya adam dārayāmi, hacā Sakaībiš, tayaī para Sugdam, amata yātā ā Kūšā, hacā Hindaū, amata yātā ā Spardā (...)*].⁹

King Darius says: This is the kingdom that I hold, from the Scythians who are beyond Sogdiana, thence unto Kūš (Nubia); from Sind, thence unto Sardis (Lidia).

This statement implies that after some centuries one of the lands located on the eastern frontier of the Iranian *plateau* was just named ‘Hindu’. But which was the ‘Avestan’ situation? I think that the *conspectus* of the sources needs a new examination. In the oldest passages where the stem *hiṇdu-/həṇdu-* occurs, it can be referred to a frontier, located farther with respect to the point of observation of an Iranian speaker. This is patent in Y. 57, 29:¹⁰

7 Mayrhofer remarked that O.P. *hiⁿdu-* was not a direct loanword from Indo-Aryan languages, but an adaptation of an already Iranianized word (1971, p. 51 n. 41). Cf. Eilers 1977, pp. 288, 293.

8 In DPe 17-18, it is placed between Arachosia and Gandara; cf. Kent 1953, p. 136; Schmitt 2009, p. 118.

9 Transcription according to Schmitt 2009, pp. 119-120; cf. Kent 1953, pp. 136-137.

10 Cf. Kreyenbroek 1985, p. 55: «if (an evil-doer) is by the eastern frontier, he is caught, if he is by the western one, he is struck down». Cf. Dehghan 1982, p. 49: «sei es an der östlichen Grenze, wird er ergriffen, sei es an der westlichen, wird er niedergeschlagen».

*yaṭciṭ ušastaire hiṇduuō āgəuruuiete*¹¹
yaṭciṭ daošataire niyne [...].¹²

Pahl. Translation: *kē pad ošastar hindūgān gīrēd ud kē-z pad dōšastar nē zanēd* [*ud kē-z bē zanēd ā-z rasēd*] [...].

Av. Text: [...] that which he (Sraoša) seizes in the eastern frontier/limit, that which he slays in the western frontier/limit.¹³

Pahl. Tr.: the one that seizes Indians in the East, and the one, too, who does strike in the West [and the other one, who does strike, that also reaches its mark] [...].¹⁴

It is patent that *ušastaire hiṇduuō* cannot be interpreted as ‘eastern India’, as Bartholomae presumed, but that it concerned a general denomination of an ‘eastern frontier’. Actually, there is no reason to presume that a sinner might try to escape to eastern India in order to avoid Sraoša’s (or Miθra’s) punishment. In the second verse-line *yaṭciṭ daošataire niyne*, one should suppose an ellipsis for *yaṭciṭ daošataire <hiṇduuō> niyne*. Then, the expression in its totality simply evokes locations as far as possible with respect to the Iranian homeland, where an impious man could try to escape, although Sraoša should be able to find and slay him. Unfortunately, the Pahlavi translation of this passage is of minor interest, because the later scribe has not properly understood the text. Furthermore, on the meaning of the adj. *ušastara-*,¹⁵ ‘towards the dawn’, ‘eastern’, as well as on that of *daoša(s)tara-*, ‘towards the evening (i.e. west)’, ‘western’,¹⁶

11 Reading according to F1 and Pt1; see Kellens 1984, p. 127, who follows Lommel 1922, pp. 203-204; cf. again Kellens 1984, p. 178 n. 3.

12 It is to be noted that these two verse-lines occur also in *Yt.* 10, 104 (cf. Gershevitch 1967, pp. 124-125, 253); Markwart, presumed that these lines (as those of *Y.* 57, 29) should belong to a lost Avestan text about rivers (1938, p. 133).

13 See now Kellens 2011, p. 96 «celle qu’il saisit à la limite du levant et celle qu’il abat à la limite du ponant». Thieme translated this passage as follows: «even when he (a man) is in the East of the [eastern] frontier [of the inhabited world, or, of the Aryan country] he is seized [by Sraoša], even when he is in the west [of the western frontier] he is slain» (1970, p. 449). It is clear that Thieme took *hiṇduuō* as a genitive, but, as explained by Humbach, this is a locative sg. (1959, p. 21); cf. also Dehghan 1982, pp. 94-95.

14 Text and translation according to Kreyenbroek 1985, pp. 54-55, for the commentary on the Pahlavi text see again Kreyenbroek 1985, p. 94.

15 Bartholomae 1904, p. 415.

16 Bartholomae 1904, p. 674. Cf. Dehghan 1982, p. 96 n. 13.

there is no discussion,¹⁷ so that we may conclude that both adjectives do not refer to the opposite sides of India, but simply to the farthest eastern and western frontiers.

In *Yt.* 8, 32, we find a particular mountain, which is located in the centre of the Sea Vourukaša; it was named *Us.hiṇḍauua*:-¹⁸

<p><i>us paiti adāt hištaiti</i> <i>spitama zaraθuštra</i> <i>tištriio raēuuā xʷarənaŋvḥā</i> <i>zraiiŋhaṭ haca vourukašāt</i> <i>us adāt hištāt</i> <i>satauuāēsō raēuuā xʷarənaŋvḥā</i></p>	<p>From this moment, Spitama Zaraθuštra, the bright <i>xʷarənah</i>-endowed Tištriia rises again from the Sea Vourukaša. From this moment the bright <i>xʷarənah</i>-endowed Satauuāēsa will rise</p>
<p><i>zraiiŋhaṭ haca vourukašāt</i> <i>āṭ taṭ dunmṇ hqm.hištənti</i> <i>us hiṇḍauuat</i>¹⁹ <i>paiti garōiṭ</i> <i>yō hištaite maiḍim</i> <i>zraiiŋhō vourukašəhe.</i></p>	<p>from the Sea Vourukaša. Then, the mists will gather on Mount <i>Us.hiṇḍauua</i>, which stands in the middle of the Sea Vourukaša.</p>

Thieme assumed that the original meaning of the name of this mountain cannot be that of 'situated beyond India' (as again it was stated by Bartholomae),²⁰ but that of 'beyond the natural frontiers', with a close reference to the mountain range encircling the Sea Vourukaša, according to the ancient Iranian cosmography. On the other hand, this solution is puzzling, because the same mountain, according to *Yt.* 8, 32, is not located 'beyond' the Sea Vourukaša, but it should stand exactly in its centre. So, if we maintain the basic meaning of *us°/uz°*,²¹ i.e. 'up', as most presumable, *us.hiṇḍauua*- could simply mean 'up(permost)-barrier'. A similar suggestion was already expressed by Bailey, when he proposed a translation of that name as «high place» or «with up-soaring height» (1975a; 1975b). In my commentary to the *Tištār Yašt* I rejected this interpretation, because the meaning assumed by Bailey seemed too close to that of *Av. gairi*-, m. 'mountain',²² but, on the other hand, there is no semantic reason against the possibility that a mountain was de-

17 For the adversative function of *-tara-* see Debrunner in Wackernagel - Debrunner 1954, p. 603; cf. also Benveniste 1948, pp. 118-119.

18 Text and translation according to Panaino 1990, p. 56. In Pahlavi this name appears as *Usind, Usindam, Usindum*; see Bailey 1975, p. 611.

19 I prefer this reading based on the MS J10 rather than *us.həṇḍauuat* in Panaino 1990:56.

20 Cf. Bartholomae 1904, p. 409. See also Markwart 1938, pp. 132-133.

21 Cf. Bartholomae 1904, pp. 404-405.

22 Cf. Panaino 1990, p. 119, and Gnoli 1980, pp. 55-56 n. 245. On the mountains in Avestan literature and Mazdean sources and their mythology see Panaino 2010.

nominated as ‘The Up(per)-Barrier’,²³ in particular a mountain’s peak that dominated the centre of the Sea Vourukaša (cf. Gnoli 1967, p. 29), where the mists gathered before the arrival of rains.

The textual data attested in *Vd.* 1, 18 and its Pahlavi commentary present an additional number of interesting problems and they need a more detailed discussion.

Vd. 1, 18: *pañcadasəm asaḡḡamca šōiθranamca vahištəm frāθβərəsəm azəm yō ahurō mazdā yō hapta.həḡdu. āaḡ ahe paitiiārəm frākərəḡtaḡ aḡrō mainiiuš pouru.mahrkō araθβiiāca daxšta araθβīmca garəmāum.*

I who am Ahura Mazdā sharpened the fifteenth one, the best one among the places and the lands, Hapta.həḡdu. But, Aḡra Mainiiu (being) very mortiferous fashioned its (antagonistic) calamity, irregular menses and abnormal (or ‘unsuitable’) heat.²⁴

An Avestan quotation is embedded in the Pahlavi translation of the same passage; it runs as follows:²⁵

*u-š haft-hindūgānih ēd kū sar-xwadāy haft ast: ēd-iz rāy nē gōwēm kū haft rōd čē ān-iz az abestāg paydāg: **haca ušastara hiḡduua auui daošastarəm hiḡdūm.** ast kē ēdōn gōwēd har kišwar-ēw ēk ast.*

Its being *Haft-Hindūgān* is this that it has seven lords. For this reason, I do not say that (it means/has) ‘seven rivers’! Because that is clear from the *Avesta*: [*haca ušastara hiḡduua auui daošastarəm hiḡdūm*]. There is one who says thus: «Every climate is one».

In the first chapter of the *Widēwdād*, where we find a description of the Ahurian lands, the reference to *Hapta.həḡdu*- doubtless concerns northern India, more precisely the Puñjāb.²⁶ We must remark that this region was

²³ Although Gnoli (*ibidem*) rightly criticized Bailey’s interpretation of *saptá síndhavas* as ‘The Seven High Places’, I must remark that in the case of the Pahlavi gloss to *Vd.* 1, 18, where the denomination of *haft hindūgānih* is explained with reference to its ‘seven captains’ (*ēd kē sar-xwadāy haft ast*), we must consider that this source clearly reflects a later development of the meaning attributed to *hapta.həḡdu*-, so that it cannot be taken as a compelling representative of its earlier semantic value; furthermore, my revision of the interpretation of the meaning of *us.hiḡdauua*- is based on the presence of *us*°. Then, it does not concern the simple form *hiḡdu-/həḡdu*-.

²⁴ See also Panaino 2009, p. 193.

²⁵ See Dehghan 1982, p. 95. Anklesaria 1949, pp. 19-20; Moazami 2014, pp. 40, 41.

²⁶ Gnoli 1967, pp. 68, 76-77; 1980, pp. 47-48, 50-53, 63-64, with a detailed discussion of the geographical, historical, and religious problems connected to this passage of the *Widēwdād*.

regarded as belonging to the best (*vahišta-*) countries created by Ahura Mazdā, and inhabited by Aryan peoples. In this case it is difficult to believe that its essential meaning was still that of 'frontier'. Furthermore, in the Avestan quotation of the Pahlavi *Widēwdād*, *hindūgān* is interpreted as 'chief, lord' and not as 'river'; then, it seems that the Avestan sentence could be even understood as «from the (land of the) eastern lord towards (the one of the) western lord», and no more as «from the eastern frontier to the western frontier», as translated by Anklesaria (1949, p. 20), based on the traditional correspondence between Skt. *sindhu-* as 'river', Av. *hiṇdu-* and Pahl. *rōd* 'river'. In any case, that neither 'chief' nor 'river' were the original meaning is shown by the passage of Y. 57, 29, *yaṭciṭ ušastaire hiṇduuō āgəuruuiete yaṭciṭ daošataire <hiṇduuō> niyne*, attested also in *Mihr Yašt*, st. 104.²⁷ In my opinion, the quotation *haca ušastara hiṇduua auui daošastarəm hiṇdūm*, is based on these traditions, although the passage, as it appears in the Pahlavi *Widēwdād*, is not attested otherwise in the extant Avestan tradition. In spite of the later gloss of the Pahlavi scribe, it is probable that in Sasanian and later times, both Y. 57, 29 and Yt. 10, 104 were interpreted at the light of the equation between Skt. *sindhu-* as 'river' and Pahl. *rōd* 'river'. But this is, of course, what we must expect after so many centuries. However, we must insist on the fact, already underlined by Gnoli (1967, pp. 76-77; 1980), that there is no reason to consider the correspondence between Hapta.Həṇdu and Saptá Síndhavas as being based on a common ancestral mythical geography.

Dehghan noted that in general *Hindūgān* should not properly mean 'India', but it must be referred to the 'Indus river' (1982, p. 95, with reference to Humbach 1973), as in the *Ir.Bd.* 11, 8: [...] *ud mihrān rōd kē hindūgān rōd-iz xwānēnd* [...] «[...] the river Mihrān [which] they also call the river Hindus [...]».²⁸ On the other hand, we have seen that in the Pahlavi translation of Y. 57, 29, *hindūgān* is used with reference to the 'Indian people', and that *Hind* and *Hindūg* are common designation for 'India' and 'Indian(s)' (the second both as adjective and substantive) (MacKenzie 1971, p. 43; Nyberg 1974, p. 100).

It is important to recall that, according to Humbach, the Pahlavi explanation of the *Widēwdād* passage in 1, 18, was based on a wrong identification of *Hapta.həṇdu-*, which was current among eastern Mazdeans (1973, pp. 51-52). This mistake is already emphasized by al-Bīrūnī in his book about India (*Ketāb taḥqīq mā le'l-Hend men maqūla maqbūla fi'l-'aql aw marqūla* «The book confirming what pertains to India, whether rational or despicable»), where it is stated:

27 Gershevitch 19, pp. 125, 126: «if (the violator is) by the eastern river he is caught, if (he is) by the western (river) he is struck down». Cf. also Kellens 1979.

28 See Pakzad 2005, pp. 149-150. Cf. Anklesaria 1956, pp. 106-107.

As the name 'union of the five rivers' [i.e. Panjāb] occurs in this part of the world, we observe that a similar name is used also to the north of the above-mentioned mountain chains [i.e. Hindukush], for the rivers which flow thence towards the north, after having united near Tirmidh and having formed the river of Balkh, are called the 'union of the seven rivers'.

The Zoroastrians of Sogdiana have confounded these two things; for they say that the whole of the seven rivers is Sind and its upper course Barīdiš (Al-Bīrūnī, ed. Sachau 1887, p. 130: tr. by Sachau 1888 [= 1910], 1, p. 260).²⁹

But we must also observe that Gnoli rejected the association of *Hapta. həndu-* with a mountainous region located at north-east of the Hindūkuš (1980, p. 53 n. 231). In fact, the mistaken denomination is attributed only to the 'Zoroastrians of Sogdiana', not to all the Mazdeans. Furthermore, the mention in the Avestan passage of an «unsuitable» or «abnormal heat» as the main negative character of the corresponding Ahrimanic contra-creation (*paitiiāra-*) does not seem to fit with a mountainous country, in spite of the fact that this phenomenon could be in part of symbolic nature.³⁰

Finally, it is interesting to note again that the name of the 'Land of the Seven Rivers' was not only connected with the presence of 'seven lords' (although no pseudo-etymological game of popular origin seems to me possible in this case), but also with the image of the seven 'climes' (*kišwar*) of the world (as noted by Brunner 2006, p. 7), so that each *kišwar* should have its own chief. I must recall that in the case of names presenting the numeral seven as the first member of the compound a certain preference for popular etymology is attested also in the name of one very important Avestan constellation: *haptōiriṅga-*, m., 'the seven signs' (or, perhaps 'the seven penises' (cf. Skt. *liṅga-*) (Kellens 2010, p. 756 n. 21). Its Pahlavi denomination, *haftōring*, was interpreted in *Ir.Bd.* 2, 9 (see Pakzad 2005, pp. 38-39), as *haft rag* 'having seven veins/cords', each one in connection with one of the corresponding seven *kišwar* of the earth, in the framework of an astral cosmology that, in its turn, is of Indian origin.³¹

29 On this passage see Markwart 1938, pp. 94-96, 132-133. Cf. Dehghan 1982, p. 95.

30 On the other hand, we must consider that in the case of Raḡhā, the Ahremanic counter-creation is that of the 'winter created by the demons', which seems to have a climatic and geographic correspondence in the *realia*; see Gnoli 1980, pp. 52-53. For a general discussion of these problems also with regard to the studies offered by various scholars on the subject and by Monchi-Zadeh (1975) in particular, see again Gnoli 1980.

31 On this subject see Panaino 1998, pp. 71, 77, 99, with bibliography.

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