

The Uraśa State and its capital: Some notes

Shakir Ullah / Muhammad Zahoor

Abstract

This article deals with the toponym Hazāra, and its original Uraśā or Araśa, which still survives in the Damtaur or Dhamtaur valley, Abbotabad. The level plain of Dhamtaur valley is locally known as Rush or Arash. The name variants recorded by the ancient writers were: Arash, Arsa, Uraśa and Uragā. It is not unlikely therefore that the original spelling was Aruśa which, in the course of time, changed into Uraśa.

Keywords: Uraśa, Hazara, Pāṇini, Xuanzang, Ptolemy, Mahābhārata, Rājatarāṅgiṇi

1. Hazara's geography

Hazara is a region in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province that falls east of the Indus River. It is located between the latitudes of 88° 45' and 85° 2' in the north and 72° 86' and 74° 9' in the east. It mostly comprises a small area of land wedged between the Indus and the Jhelum. The division's width is 40 miles in the centre and 56 miles at its southern base, with its extreme length being 120 miles. Its southern border is formed by the rivers Murree, Rawalpindi, and Attock. It is divided from District Swabi, District Amb, and, in the northern half, the recently established Districts of Tor Ghar and Buner by the River Indus. The Kaghan mountain separates it from Swat, Kohistan, and Chilas on the north. Azad Kashmir is located to the east (Figs. 1-2).

The Hazara region was a part of Punjab province during the British administration in India, up until 1901, when the western portion of that province was divided from Punjab and constituted as a distinct province called North-West Frontier Province (NWFP), which is now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The region around Abbottabad and Mansehra was incorporated into the Peshawar Division's Hazara district. Furthermore, the Hazara Tribal Agency expanded into the lands to the north of this. The

Hazara area and the Hazara Tribal Agency were sandwiched between the Amb and Phulra princely states. This administrative structure persisted until 1950, when the two little princely realms were combined to form the Hazara district. Under the One-Unit policy, the NWFP province was incorporated into West Pakistan from 1955 until 1970. In 1970, the Hazara district was established as a part of the Peshawar Division of West Pakistan following the dissolution of the one-unit plan in July. Later, two tribal groups and the Hazara District were combined to create the new Hazara Division, which has Abbottabad as its capital. Initially, the Hazara division was divided into two districts (Abbottabad and Mansehra), however within a short period of time, Batagram District and Haripur District were separated from Abbottabad and Mansehra Districts (Jadoon 1977).

Until 1976, Hazara was a district before becoming a separate division. Additionally, in October of the same year, Mansehra received the status of a full-fledged district. It began with the Batagram and Mansehra tehsils. As a result, Abbottabad Tehsil was divided from Haripur Tehsil and turned into a district in July 1991. A separate Abbottabad District was established for the remaining portions of the Abbottabad Tehsil. Similar to this, the Hazara supporters' voice has been calling for a separate province for a very long time. In essence, the provincial Assembly of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa passed a motion on March 21 calling for the establishment of the Hazara as a distinct province. Administrative divisions were abolished in 2000, and the fourth layer of government was erected to replace them. Currently, the Hazara Division comprises the following districts (Fig. 2):

1. Abbottabad District
2. Haripur District
3. Batagram District
4. Upper Kohistan District
5. Mansehra District
6. Kolai-Palas District
7. Lower Kohistan District
8. Torghar District

2. Uraśa as ancient Hazara

Pāṇini places the ancient *Janapada* (state) of Uraśa on the left bank of the Sindhu (= Agrawala 1963: 44). In the English translation of Pāṇini's *Aṣṭadhyāyī*, book IV (= Vasu 1896), this name is variously written as Uraśā

and Usaśā (see pp.685, 695, 729, 781). Ptolemy mentions a country called 'Arsa' and its towns 'Ithagouros and Taxila', placing it between the upper waters of the Bidaspes and the Indus that is, in the Hazāra country (Majumdar 1960: 371).

Christian Lassen (cit. in Weber 1873) was the first to recognize in Urasa the territory of Ptolemy's 'Arsa' and 'Uragā' mentioned in the *Mahābhārata* (ii, 1027) as the name of a country lying between Abhisāri (Kashmīr?) and Simhapura (Salt Range), a slightly corrupted form of the same name.¹

Xuanzang (= Beal 1969: 147) records *Wu-la-shi* (Uraśa) as the name of the country situated to the north-west of Kashmīr and dependent upon it. The king of this region figures under the name of Arsakes in the account of Alexander's Indian campaign (326 BCE). The Kashmīrian king Samkaravarman (CE 883-902) was fatally wounded while passing through Uraśa (Stein 1900: 215-16). From its position recorded by different writers, A. Conningham (1871: 87), concludes that Uraśā may at once be identified with *Varsa Regio* of Ptolemy and with the modern district of *Rash* in Dhantāwar (Damtaur).

As described above, the word 'Urasa' (or whatever its original form) is recorded by ancient writers in different variants. Accordingly, Pāṇiṇi (= Agrawala 1953) identifies the name as Uraśā and Uras, Ptolemy calls as Arsa or Ovarsa, the *Mahābhārata* (= Ganguli 1883-1896) mentions with Uragā, Xuanzang (= Beal 1884) finds it *Wu-la-shi* (Uraśa) and Kalhana reports Uraśā. The diverse form of names indicates that the correct orthography can't be ascertained at this stage of research.

Presumably the original form of the subject name was Aruśā. If so, it suits the peculiar mode of expression prevalent in Hazāra with regard not only to metathesis but also to vowel changes. In certain names the medial *a* in the second syllable is converted into *u* or *o*. Thus, the Arabic word Hazrat is

¹ From Abhisāri could be derived Abisares, the name of a king who sent support to Swat, Assakenians during the siege of Ora (Udegram) by Alexander the Great (327 B.C.). "On this see Eggermont 1970: 114-15. The name of the sovereign is mentioned (apart from Strabo, *Geog.*, XV 28) also on the occasion of the battle Alexander fought against Porus as the latter's ally (*Anabasis*, V 20, 5; *Bibl. Hist.*, XVII 87, 2; 90, 4). As Arrian cites this toponym (*Indica*, IV 12), it is perhaps a reference to the Ousara of Ptolemy (on this see Berthelot 1930: 272); see also Stein 1927: 426; *it can probably be located in Hazara.*"(Olivieri 1996: 57, fn. 18; the italics is ours. for the references cited by Olivieri see the article accessible online at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/29757254>.

generally pronounced as ‘Hazrot’ (further corrupted into Hazro, the name of a village); Aṭak as Attok (written as Aṭtock) and Akbar as ‘Akbor’.

It is interesting to note that Aruśa (Aruśahan) was the name of the most favourite Vedic Aryan god, Indra, the killer of enemies (Monier-Williams 1899: 88), the “who strikes the red (clouds)” (*Rg-veda* x, 116, 4). About 250 hymns of the *Rg-veda* (= Griffith 1895) are addressed to him. He smashes Vṛitra, the demon who holds up waters. It is suggested that the Vṛitra myth came with the Aryans from Kashmir or the north-western countries into the Punjab (Majumdar 1951: 371). The Vṛitra myth continued down to the Buddhist period in the guise of nāga Apalāla, but this theme was amply discussed by Giuseppe Tucci in various articles and notes, and by Olivieri et al. 2006.²

The Xuanzang’s dimension of Urasa, 2000 *li* (or 333 miles) in circuit was measured by Cunningham (1871: 88) as correct. He further remarks, that the length from the source of the Kunaṛ river to the Gandgrah mountain is not less than 100 miles, and its breath from the Indus to the Jhelam is 55 miles in its narrowest part.

3. Historical Accounts

Preliminary excavations of the nature of a trial trench in the Khanpur cave near Haripur, and the surveys conducted by the Department of Archaeology, Hazara University Mansehra, have brought to light new evidence and a number of ancient sites. But detailed investigations of these works are awaited. The first two rays of light piercing the pitch darkness in which the early history of Urasa is enveloped are: the antiquity of Hindko language

² “One of the most interesting legends of Buddhist Swat is that of the naga Apalāla. In the myth (disregarding any detailed exegesis) Apalāla appears as a powerful pre-Buddhist indigenous entity. Originally kept at bay by the payment of regular contributions, the naga guaranteed control of the water. But when the collective contributions were neglected, Apalāla unleashed hydraulic disorder, devastating Swat and causing destruction and famine. It was then converted and placated by Buddha himself, who extended to the river-serpent the right to perform periodic flooding (Tucci 1958a: n. 18). The possible interpretations - beyond the superficial [i.e. “obvious”] coincidence with the Rigvedic myth of Indra and Vṛitra - are various. However, the idea may well be present that efficient hydraulic control and the agricultural potential of the entire valley depended in the past on the work of complex social organisations (from the late Bronze Age on?), while periods of political and organisational crisis may have exposed the communities to disastrous events.” (Olivieri et al. 2006: 132; for the references cited by Olivieri see the article accessible online at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/29757683>).

and the Aśokan Rock Edicts of Mansehra. It is generally believed that Hindko, the language of Hazara, presently under much pressure from Pashto, is a language of the Middle Aryan family, which might have been spoken in the region far before the arrival of Pushto. Since then, Hindko, although has been transformed in the course of centuries, has not only stood fast in front of alien invaders (like Dari, Turkish and Pashto-speakers) but also absorbed them to a great extent. The Pashto-speaking Tarīn tribe, for instance, has completely changed over to Hindko. Secondly, the strategic position of Mansehra, situated as it is almost midway on the route linking Taxila with Kashmīr did not escape the notice of the Mauryan emperor Aśoka (3rd century BCE) who not only installed his proclamations, the Mansehra Rock Edicts, but also dispatched a Buddhist Monk Majjhantika for the propagation of Buddhism in Gandhāra and Kashmir.

Urasa comes in the full light of history in the 12th century when the Kashmīrian poet Kalhaṇa Stein 1900: 218) narrates that the Kashmīri king Saṁkravarma (883-902), while passing through the territory of Urasa was fatally wounded by the arrow of a person whom Kalhaṇa derisively dubs as Śvapāka ('dog-cooker'). Kalhaṇa's frequent references to Urasa suggests that it was closely connected with Kashmir (Stein 1900: 585). In the 11th century, Urasa was occupied by a Kashmīri force (Stein 1900: 585) during the rule of Kalaśa (CE 1063-1089). Saṁgata, the king of Urasa, along with other dependent princes appeared in the court of Kalaśa (Stein 1900: 589). In another reference to Urasa, Harṣas's son Bhoja was married to the princess Vibhavamati, the daughter of king Abhaya of Urasa (Stein 1900: 16-18). In the reign of the Kashmīri king Sussala (CE 1112-20) tribute was levied from the ruler of Urasa (Stein 1900: 574).

In the 12th century Dvitiya, the lord of Urasa, was defeated by Jayasimha (CE 1128-49). After this the name Urasa disappears from historical records. But, in a much-restricted sense, it still exists as the name of a small portion of the Damtauṛ valley.

In the 14th century Urasa came to be known as Pakhli, which owes its origin to the Gibari Sultan Fakhal. Darwezā (1940: 107) records that Sultan Fakhal, conquered the hilly countries of Bajaur, Swat and Kashmīr, while his brother, Sultan Bahram held Tirāh and the Kabul valley from their capital Pāpin near Jalalabad. Behram was succeeded by his son Tumnā, and likewise Fakhal by his son Awais. They continued to rule over these parts until the period of Amīr Tīmūr's invasion (CE 1398-99). Thereafter, they became vassal kings to Tīmūr and his successors. In course of time these local rulers also lost their nominal power in their respective states.

Akhund Darwezā's list of the Gibari rulers shows that Qirān was the last among them to have taken the honorific title *sultān* (king) and that his successors- Bālo, Dāwaryāe, Nazo-all had the comparatively inferior title *malik*. This may be taken to suggest that Timūr's invasion (CE 1398-99) took place during the reign of Qirān and that his great-grandfather, Sultan Bahrām, must have died long before this invasion, perhaps in the year 1350 or little earlier. As Sultān Fakhal (Pakhal), was a brother of Sultān Bahram and is known to have completed his military exploit during the life of his brother, took control of the land of Urasa, we are naturally driven to the conclusion that Fakhal's occupation must be dated in the first half of the 14th century and that this was the time when the term Pakhli (often softened as Pakli) came into vogue.

Abu al-Fazl, the learned vizier of the Mughal emperor Akbar (1556-1605), writes (Jarret 1949: 397) that Pakli is bounded on the east by Kashmīr, west by Aṭak Banāras, north by Kator and south by the tract of country in which the Gakhar tribe dwells. Its length is 35 and breadth 25 *kos*. The emperor Jahangir (1605-1628), Akbar's son and successor, follows Abu al-Fazl in his Tuzuk-I Jahangīrīr (Rogers 1909: 126). Both tell us that Amir Timūr on his way back from Hindustān to Turān placed a body of his soldiery to hold the country of Pakli.

Another change in the nomenclature of the ancient land of Aruśa appeared after Timur's return to Turān. This time the *raison d'etre* was the settling down of the Qarlugh Turks in the *Pakli Sarkar*. One of the *mings* (Regiments) of Amir Timūr's army was composed of Qarlughs. A large portion of them were left in Pakli to hold possession of the land. As the Turkish *ming* consisted of one thousand, Hazār in Persian, the land of Pakli came to be known as Hazarāh. After some time Hazarāh was divided into two parts: 1) Qarlugh Hazarāh and 2) Chachh Hazarāh. It is noteworthy that all this happened not by design but by fault. Neither the Gibari Sultan Pakhal, nor Timur issued any proclamation to change the name from rush to Pakhli or Pakhli to Hazarāh. With the expansion of the Pukhtūn tribes in the region, the Qarlughs were driven out and their land was occupied by the Jadūns or Gadūns.

4. A Final Note on Māngal and Damtaur (Abbottabad)

The celebrated Chinese pilgrim and traveller Xuanzang visited Uraśā and mentioned the existence of a stupa and monastery 4 or 5 *li* (1km) to the south of Uraśā's capital. A recent survey conducted by the writers confirms

the truthfulness of this statement. Much dilapidated remains of a Buddhist establishment at the site of Mochikot were seen at about the same distance from Māngal, the probable capital of Rash (Figs. 3-4).

Damtaur (correctly Dharmtaur i.e., ‘religious enclosure’) is a small *daráh* (valley) enclosed within mountain ranges of Uraśa, in the Abbottabad District. Damtaur is also the name of a village situated on a top of the hill and presently occupied by the Gadūn (Jadūn) tribe. In the west of the village, there are two small rivers coming from the north-east and north respectively. One of these, the Doṛ river flows south of the village, and the other, the Durgun, on the north side (Pl. IIa, b). The former one comes from the Wairan or Bairan Gali side and the latter from Kohistān of the Māngali side. After their junction at this point, the united streams are called as the river of Damtaur. The subject river flows towards west and there it joins another small river known as Siran (Figs. 5-6).

The lands dependent on Damtaur, Damtaur Rujūiyah, Nawan Shahr and Māngal, in the open part of valley are known as the Zamīn-i-Rash or Arash (Fig. 1). Raverty remarks about this name that it is probably derived from the Tājik (Dari Persian) word ‘*rash*’ signifying ‘full of ups and downs’, ‘hills and ravines’, or possibly from the Arabic ‘*rashsh*’, which means ‘gently trickling as water or flowing gently’ (1888: 287-88). If this statement of Raverty is accepted as correct, then it suits the marshy nature of the Zamīn-i-Rash as described earlier. But in this way the toponym ‘Rash’ would have to be mediaeval at the earliest, since we know that Persian and Arabic may have reached Damtaur no earlier than the 10th century. After all, the word Rash could be derived directly from ‘Uraśa’, although we recognize that this hypothesis is purely speculative.³

³ The above interpretation, if accepted, resolves the question as to what was the ‘Enclosure’ meant for. This apparently was the place which housed an object (or perhaps image) symbolically representing Indra. The *Rg-veda* does not unequivocally record that Indra image existed at that early age of Aryan expansion. But something like this, a felish, did exist, for, in the opinion of a Rigvedic poet ten cows were not an adequate price for such an object (or image). This is how the poet interprets it: “Who for ten mileh-kine purchase them from me this Indra who is mine. When he hath slain the Vṛtras let the buyers give him back to me” (Griffith 1895: 218).

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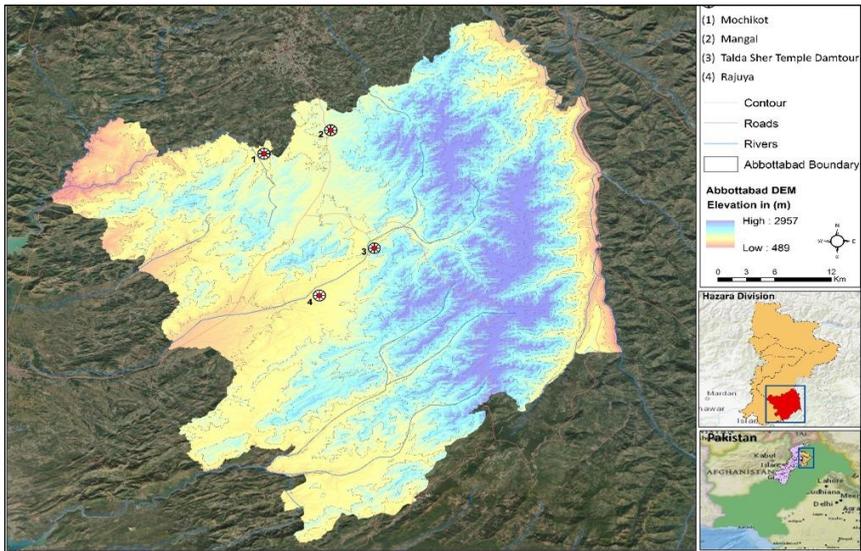


Fig. 1 - Map showing the area of Zamin-i-Rash (Map by Muhammad Zahoor).

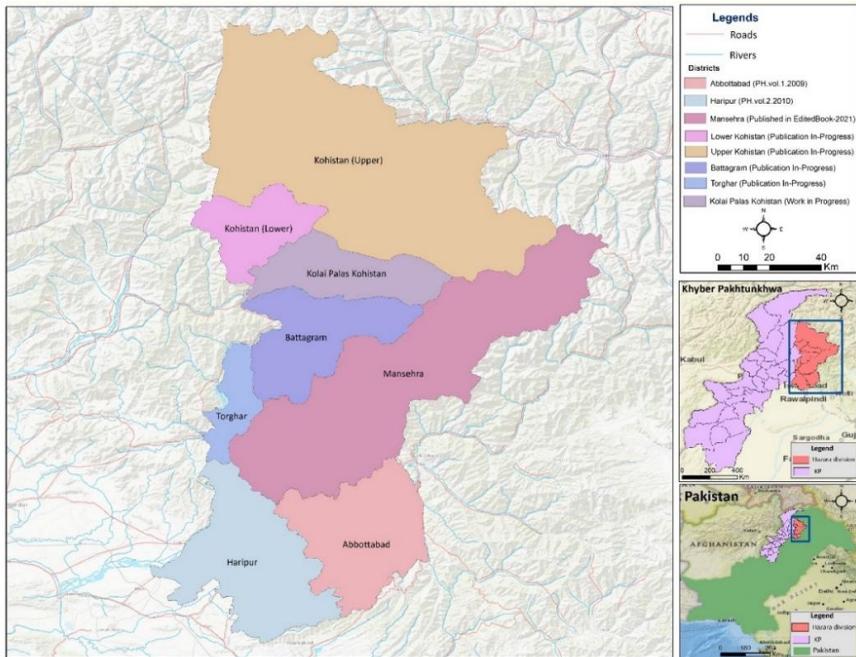


Fig. 2 - Map showing present location Hazara (Map by Muhammad Zahoor).



Fig. 3 - Māngal (Abbottabad); view of Mochikot site with both seasonal streams, Māngal katha from its east and Sherwan katha from west (Photo: GoogleEarth).



Figs 4a-b - Māngal (Abbottabad); showing the stupa wall in diaper masonry and other ruins (Photo by Shakirullah).



Fig. 5 - Damtaur (Abbottabad); A view of the site Damtaur (Talda sher)
(Photo by Shakirullah).



Fig. 6 - Damtaur (Abbottabad); view of the site from south showing both the rivers (khar) Durgun and Dor (Photo by Shakirullah).