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Other Toponymic Issues

Historical Geographical Names: Their Role in the History and Identification of the Nations^{*}

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Historical Geographical Names: Their Role in the History and Identification of the Nations

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Geographical names (toponyms) especially those who have carry historical background, are very important in the history and culture of any nation. When those refer to the old nations they belong to the history and civilization of the same nation. Thus they should preserve those as a part of history and cultural heritage. Geographical historical names contain documental character that can help us to clear some historical events which had happened in the history of the nations. Sometimes they help us to recognize some difficulties that we faced. Therefore we should consider that these toponyms are very important. Toponyms such as the names of mountains, rivers, seas, desert and plains, villages, towns and cities and also historical sites and places contains ancient, historical and cultural information which some of these information could not be found in written and unwritten historical resources. Sometimes information goes back to the depth of history and diversity which from those times there are no information available. When we have no documents and information about some places, the name of toponyms help us to discuss, analyze and guess and at last find out the mysterious of the toponyms. This is why historian and scientist always recommend do not change the historical name of toponyms even when it has no meaning for us. The historical toponyms cover different cultural, historical, social and political subjects such as thought, religious believes, myths, the names of the goddess, the sacred tribal manners, the language of customs and behaviors and some other subjects that are not available in resources.

Denominations of geographical names always are the product of the nations and their history and civilization. It belongs to the behavior of the will of the people to the places that they lived in and loved it. The people who lived anywhere, were depended to their homeland. The meaning of the home land and its name is sacred to them always.

In this paper I am discussing about the importance of the historical geographical toponyms in Iran and I will classified and introduced some example of real cases that have had happened in the fate of Iranian nation. But I will try to find some reasonable facts to recommend to the other nations to consider the historical geographical names and preserve them as a cultural heritage and do not try to change the meaningless toponyms.

Key word: Historical geographical names, toponyms, cultural heritage, history.

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The knowledge of geographical names and finding answers to some questions about historical names, is a very worthy efforts.

Denomination of geographical names, is important process of the knowledge of the geography of any country, which is the first step in this regard.

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A lot of Iranian researcher and scholars, as well as other countries Iranist scholars, are actively working on this issues. But, because of the existence of several geographical historical names of Iran, mentioned activities need more cost and time. Although compiling an encyclopedia about geographical and historical names will be a very significant step and useful for geographical web site.

Research on geographical names

The main aim of research about geographical name are based on studies about their scientific contents and using them in the committee for standardization of geographical names (CSGN), as well as other epecialized groups in this field. Explanation of this research has cultural – historical values for the concepts of geographical names, as well as introducing them for those authorities who has responcibilities to geographical names.

In terms of research on geograplcal names of Iran, some valuable works had been done, which some of them are as below:

- Kasravi, Ahmad. *Nam-e shahr ha va Dih haye Iran* (the name of cities and villages of Iran) (in Persia), published in 1929, Tehran.
- Razmara, Ali. *Farhang-e Abadihaye Iran* (the name of villages of Iran) (in Persian), 1953, Tehran, Iranian Armed Force Geographical Organization (this work is under updating),
- Sartip Pur, Jahangir. *Rishe yabi-ye vazzehaye Gilaki va vajhe Tasmiye-ye shahr ha va rusta haye Gilan* (the etymology and denomination of cities and villages of Gilan) (in Persian), 1993 Rasht.
- Ghorshi, Amanollah. *Ab va kuh dar asatire Hend va Irani* (Water and Mountain in Persian and Indian Myth) (in Persia), Tehran 1999.
- Ghorshi, Amanollah. *Gitinamak* (cosmonyms) (in Persian) in two volumes, Tehran 2005.
- Papoli Yazdi, Mohammad Hassan. *Farhang-e Abadiha va Amaken-e Mazhabi* (Gazetteer of villages and religious places) (in Persian), Tehran 1989.
- Bartold, V. V. *Tazkare-ye Joghrafiya-ye tarikhi-ye Iran* (the memento of historial geography of Iran) (Translated into Persian by Hamze Sardadvar), First print 1929, second print in 1969 Tehran.
- Le Strange, Gay. *Joghrafiyaye tarikhiye sarzamin haye khelafat-e sharghi* (the historical geography of Eastern Caliphate) (in Persian), Tehran 1989.

Mainly historical geographical books such as *Hudu – ol-Alam men al-Mashregh el-alMaghrib*, *Almasalek va al-Mamalek* of Khordadbeh and Istakhri, *Ahsan al-Tavarikh fi Ma'refat-ol-Aghalim* of Maghdassi, *Nozhat-ol Ghulub* of Hamdollah Mostofi and some other valuable works of Muslim geographers and historian and so on, can be used in this purpose.

The concepts of toponyms

Concepts and meaning of a lot of geographical names such as ancient, historical and old cities and towns, historical villages, states, provinces and lands, geographical places like mountains, peaks, hills, rivers, plains, deserts, fountains, and so on, contain most valuable rare, unique cultural – historical information, which some of them can be used in protection and reservation of cultural and historical heritage, for using in naming of newly created and constructed places.

The value of this written and oral geographical names, in some extents, are as old as they have been known.

The history of toponyms come back to those periods that there are no historical documents or there are a few information that are out of reach. These toponyms can help to the people and ethnic groups to recognize their home and places in terms of their historical and cultural subjects, religious believes, and mythical custom and ceremonies, which lived there and named these toponyms.

Denomination of geographical places with such name, are the results of the rich cultural concepts and more than other factors which influenced on it, mainly were under the essential interest of human for extension of their cultural values and other prestige and their spiritual and material finding for making them eternal and ever lasting. The people did it from the ancient time, while there were no writing and alphabets, and the knowledge was oral, and did it through methods and tools which were known to the people and were applied. The witnesses proved that denomination, especially naming of toponyms, were the more effective and oldest way and process for this purpose.

When toponyms and persons denominated, it became popular and habitual phrase and lasted long and some time remained permanent. Thus, in fact, concept and contest of toponyms developed and became eternal and it was favorite for related authorities and societies, because their interested sacred things, values and prestige, expand and became ever lasted. Latter these concepts, after appearance of art of drawing transferred to figures over things, and then by discovering of writing, over stones and epigraphs. But the oldest way, was belong to the same naming method, and due to that reason, the concept of toponyms, contain the oldest historical information in terms of historical subjects and also they carry different cultural–social matters which in some cases, we hardly can find any thing like them in written and unwritten sources.

The necessities of toponyms to authorities

Most important issues for toponyms authorities can be conclude as below.

A – the ethymology of toponyms, explanation and finding their concepts, with no doubtl, need different knowledge and specialty. This necessity derived from two factors: First, some toponyms are very old and ancient, as some time even it is difficult to determine their approximate date of invention. And the first denomination of those toponyms revealed to most complicated cultural – social matters of old and ancient societies which many of them are meaningless through long period of time. Second, with the existing of long development of events and basic changes on taught, sacred things, ideology and other cultural and social behaviors, which through the history have lost their utilization and became changed and abandoned evidently, influenced upon toponyms.

B – The studies and surveys prove that incorrect written toponyms in statistics, maps and official document and also their changes, are among basic elements for geographical names anxiety. This is due to the lack of the knowledge of the personnel who are engaged in related works. Thus changing in phoneme and words of toponyms, especially whose who appear to be meaningless, faced with the worst kind of damages and suffers. Those damages are serious and some of them have remained as documents, but wrong.

C – The concepts of some of considerable toponyms especially those who are ancient which became meaningless, belong to the old and ancient times. Those societies have the common origin of ethnic groups which we entitle them such as Arian, Indo-European and Indo – Iranian and their geographical realms called Eurasia, which some of its branches are extended in the territories from India to West of Europe.

D – There are few research and studies about toponyms, and those cover only overall debates not about numerous toponyms which existed.

Initiative of Iranian committee.

In the committee of historical toponyms, established in NCC in Iran we have compiled a four volume geographical encyclopedia about historical toponym including more than 250 article from A to G letters which will be introduced in NCC geographical site.

Recommendations:

1 – the local pronunciation of meaningless historical toponyms are as authoritative document and should be considered and registered according to phonetic methods and be used.

2 – The origin, roots and the cultural base of toponyms, especially their language, ethnic, mythical, custom and other prestige of ancient Arian societies should be studied and their findings especially concepts of toponyms should be compared with meaning less toponyms.

3 – Finding of research and studies of toponyms should be done according to determined scientific methods and be published for criticizing among scientific circles.

4 – Never change the historical meaningless and ancient toponyms, because they may be a part of the history and cultural heritage of a nation.