xšnaoštara ahurahe mazdâ

Detail from above the entrance of Tehran's fire temple, 1286/1917–18. Photo by © Shervin Farridnejad
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The 6th volume of DABIR is a Gedenkschrift to honour Hanns-Peter Schmidt (1930-2017), an excellent German scholar of Indo-Iranian studies, who mainly worked on the Vedas and the Gāthās, as well as Indian mythology and the Zoroastrian religion.
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Artaxerxes’ ‘paradise’

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Much has been written about the Persian concept and construction of ‘paradise’. In this short article I shall not discuss the ideology of ‘paradise’. Rather, I want to investigate, linguistically, the actual term used by Artaxerxes II. There have been, over the years, various interpretations of the phonetic value of the Old Persian signs which comprise the word. These interpretations have led to etymologies which alter the perspective of how a ‘paradise’ was conceived. I shall examine these interpretations, then offer a novel approach which delves into dialect issues concerning the relationship of the language of the Achaemenid royal inscriptions to Middle Persian.

It has long been recognized that the language of the Achaemenid inscriptions represents an archaic stage of Old Persian, perhaps similar to the English of the King James Bible, deliberately itself archaic or old-fashioned that sets a tone of ancient, hallowed authority. Telltale signs that Old Persian was in transition to early forms of Middle Persian first appear decisively in the inscriptions of Xerxes. Thus, in the “Daivadāna” inscription we find correct niyaštāya beside ništāya`. By the time of Artaxerxes II (404-359) the wording of the inscriptions generally imitates the language of the Darius and Xerxes inscriptions; and when an innovation is required the language deteriorates in respect to the older models. This can be seen readily

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in the inscription which is the focus of this article. The first part of A 2Sd from Susa begins with the short proclamation: "I am Artaxerxes, the great king, king of the earth, son of Darius (II 423-404), an Achaemenid" and then continues as follows:

θāti artaxšaça XŠ wašnā AMhā imām hadiš taya jīwadi prdydʾm adam akunawām AM ’nht uta mʾdr mām pātu hacā wispā gasṭa uta-mai kartam

"Artaxerxes the king declares: by the will of Ahuramazdā this palace, which even as I live, (as) a prdydʾ, I built. May Ahuramazdā, (as well as) Anāhitā and Miθra, protect me from all evil, and what was built by me."

Although hādīš ‘palace’ is recognized as a neuter noun, imāh hadīš in Xerxes, Persepolis c, here we have a switch to the feminine imām hadīš. Further, the relative pronoun tayat is a fossilized case form of the neuter singular and functions like the izafe of Middle Persian without regard for case or gender.

Another peculiarity is the spelling of the goddess’ name. The name only appears first in the inscriptions of Artaxerxes II always alongside of Miθra. At A 2S a and A 2Ha we find the old formula “by the will of Ahuramazdā” to which have been appended ’nht uta mʾdr, a grammatical context where one would have expected the genitive case. Instead, these are fossilized forms showing that the creator of the inscription was at a loss to provide proper case endings.

In a contribution of the Daštūr Kotwal Feštscīft³ I discussed the goddess’ name in some detail. The Greek reflex of the name, Άναïτις shows that it was taken from an Iranian *Anāhitiš nom. sg. of a feminine stem in -ti-. Although in Aveštan the nom. sg. always ends in short a rather than the expected long ā, this may be dismissed as merely the regular shortening of etymological final ā of the Vulgate text, were it not for the fact that in the inscriptions of Artaxerxes II one finds the spelling ’nht without the final ālef which in Old Persian orthography indicates a long final ā. This is in keeping with the general defective state of Artaxerxes’ language. I assume that there was one Iranian goddess *Anāhitī whose early Middle Persian form was *Anāhit, a popular name which was hyperOld Iranianized as Anāhitā, rather than posit with Mary Boyce a Western Iranian *Anāhitī whom the Greeks came to know, as well as an Eastern Iranian *Anāhitā whom we find in the Avešta and the inscriptions of the Zoroaštrian greatking. To be explicit, I believe that the Aveštan Anāhitā was introduced into the canon at a time subsequent to the original name having passed into a Middle Persian form. I must make one further observation. The Pahlavi Zoroaštrian tradition, which is not wholly dependent upon the Avešta, knows the names ’nḥyt / Anāhīd / ’Venus’ and Ardwīsūr, but always keeps the two separate. All of this shows, I think, that the Aveštan goddess of Yašt 5 is a late combination of two (at the least) originally distinct goddesses Anāhitī and Ardwī Sūrā. Whether the latter were originally epithets of a *Harahwatī I do not know; but at least *Anāhitī had nothing to do with IndoAryan Sarasvatī,
as first argued by H. Lommel and later embraced by M. Boyce.4

Returning to the “paradise” word in the Artaxerxes inscription, owing to the ambiguity regarding the vocalization of the Old Persian syllabary there have been differing interpretations offered by scholars. R. Kent5 and most recently C. Herrenschmidt6 understood paradayadām. Accordingly, the word has been parsed as para ‘beyond’ + day(a)dām ‘wall’, that is ‘what is beyond the wall’. Mayrhofer/Brandenstein7 and W. Hinz8 assumed a defective spelling for paridadām or with Hinz paridaisām. Both interpretations agree on some realization of daidā- ‘wall’, but differ on whether the preposition is para ‘beyond’ or pari ‘around’.9

An outlier is the idea proposed by P. Lecoq10 that the reading paradayadaam is a mistake for *pari-adām “j’ai consacré” to pari/vādā- (Av. pairi/vādā- ‘weihen, widmen’). Apart from the problem of emendation, this is an ingenious solution to the ‘paradise’ issue and the syntactic function of the izafe. However, it fails, simply because there is a simpler explanation of the ‘paradise’ word, without emendation.

I believe that the proper point of departure is Av. pairi.daēza- m. This word occurs in a cognate accusative construction at Vend. 3.18

... aēte yōi mazdayasna aif hā zəmō pairi.daēzq pairi.daēzayq
“They who are Mazdeans should build on this ground walls around” (lit. should wall around wall-arounds)

Leaving aside the preposition of our word, it is clear that the correct rendering of °day(a)dām is °daidām where Old Persian regularly gives Old Iranian z as d (ס). That the word shows an acc. sg. fem. ending, instead of masc., is in line with the confused attribution imām hadiš for older ima’hadiš,° imām būmām and imām būmim.

Now, consider what becomes of Old Iranian pari as prior member of a compound. If we review MPers words that derive from pari° the i usually drops out. For example, Phl parwāz (Av pairiwāza-) ‘flight’, Phl parwand (OIr *pairiβanda-) ‘enclosure’, Phl parwār (Av pairiwāra-; but note that Pahlawīg (SKZ) has prybr where the Pārsig has plwʾl) ‘circumvallation; surroundings’, Phl parzēn, MMPers prcyn, JPers przyn, NPers parcin (OIr *pari-cayana-; cf. OInd cáyana-, paricaya-, and thus not parzin with MacK) ‘fence’, Phl parwāl,
MPrth prwrz; (Opers *pari-waṟda-) ‘nourishment, refreshment’. Note that NPers pālēz ‘garden’ < *pardēz, with common development of Opers ard > āl in MPers. It might appear that GrLW παράδεισος can be invoked in support of Opers parad°. However, if one looks under πάρα in Liddell & Scott one notes that pp. 1305-1331 are devoted to words beginning with παρα, while less than half a column have παρδ°, most of which have to do with leopards. The obvious conclusion, I believe, is that Greeks understood, by analogy, that the Persian word was just another case of παρα°.

Although, strangely, a *pardēz is not attested in Middle Persian, prδʾys occurs in the BSogd Vasantara Jātaka (13b) in the context of an enclosure for elephants:

šn pr cʾβ cʾβ zyrnynʾy prδʾys dštʾy «autour de chaque un de ceux-ci était construite une enceinte d'or» (Benv.)

As Benveniste noted in his Grammaire Sogdienne, pardēs is an ancient borrowing from the North-East. This spelling is reflected in Hebrew and Aramaic pardēs; and the final s, as already anticipated, is in Gr παράδεισος. As a LW in Armenian *paridaiza- > partēz. As was the case in Middle Persian, Sogdian words with pr as prior member show a loss of i: e.g., prcʾβt ‘enclosure’, prwʾrt ‘scroll, chapter’ a LW < Skt parivarta- (both SCE). The same phenomenon is repeated in Khotanese: e.g. parbīra ‘round, circumference’ < *pari-barya (cf. Parth prybr cited above). The problem of chronology: In Greek, the word παράδεισος first appears in the Anabasis of Xenophon. This author lived from c. 430 – 354, and wrote the Anabasis describing the events involving the struggles between Artaxerxes II and Cyrus the Younger, the latter dying in 401. παράδεισος occurs again later in his Cyropaedia an idealized biography of Cyrus the Elder.

The word pardēs occurs three times in the Hebrew Bible, all in later Writings. The only occurrence which can be dated with approximate certainty is Nehemiah 2.8. Written in the first person, Nehemiah places his account in the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of king Artaxerxes (לארתחשסתא המלך). Although there are many problems with the received text of Ezra-Nehemiah, at face value this would seem to refer to Artaxerxes I (465-424) whose 20th year would have been 445; however, if to Artaxerxes II, then his 20th year would have been 384. In his account Nehemiah begs the king to write a letter to a certain Asaph, “keeper of the king’s pardēs” (שמר הפרדס אשר למלך) requesting he supply the timbers necessary for construction of roofing for the Temple gate houses, the city walls and a house for himself. In this context pardēs would have to include woods with trees that could furnish many timbers.

A second occurrence is Kohelet 2.8, and reflects the conception of an orchard planted with trees. Enumerating the vanities of human existence, Kohelet says “I laid out gardens and groves (גנות ופרדסים) in which I planted every kind of fruit tree.” The third occurrence is in Šir haŠīrīm. Theories abound concerning the dating of Song of Songs, but at least the verse in question must be situated in the late 5th early 4th century. Here (4.13) the beloved’s privates are likened to “an orchard of pomegranates” (פרדס רIMARY).
These chronologies of both Greek and Hebrew borrowings show that the Old Persian ‘paradise’ became current in these languages in the latter half of the 5th century, not coincidentally, around the time of the Artaxerxes II inscription.

To summarize where all this is leading, I am proposing that Old Persian prdyd>š is neither defective writing of *paradaydām nor *paridaidām, rather is to be read as pardaišām. What this shows is that in Artaxerxes’ day an original *paridaišā- had already passed into early Middle Persian, then to be introduced back into the inscription as a feminine noun. The change of gender is due to the fact that case endings had all but disappeared in contemporary Middle Persian, a development we have noted in the change of original bûmim to bûmām, where MPers bûm was reintroduced by scribes who no longer knew the original štem in -i.17

A problem of phonology remains with the interpretation of Old Persian d where cognate languages show Old Iranian z. Do words like New Persian pālēz and Armenian partēz derive from, perhaps a Median (or Parthian?) *daiza-? or from some realization of OPers δ? Both Hebrew, Aramaic, SogdB and Greek have s. In any case, we are dealing with a word that derives from an Old Iranian *paridaiza-. So the perspective is decidedly not of someone on the outside, beyond (para) the wall, looking in.

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17- Another example of change of gender is A’Pa 22 imam uṣṭašanām, A’Sc 5f [uṣṭa]canām. I am inclined to view the spelling with š as a mistake, perhaps owing to the similarity of the signs for c and š. Thus, orininally us-tacana- n. ‘stairway’ lit. ‘a walking up’, but, in any case, a neuter noun in -ana-.