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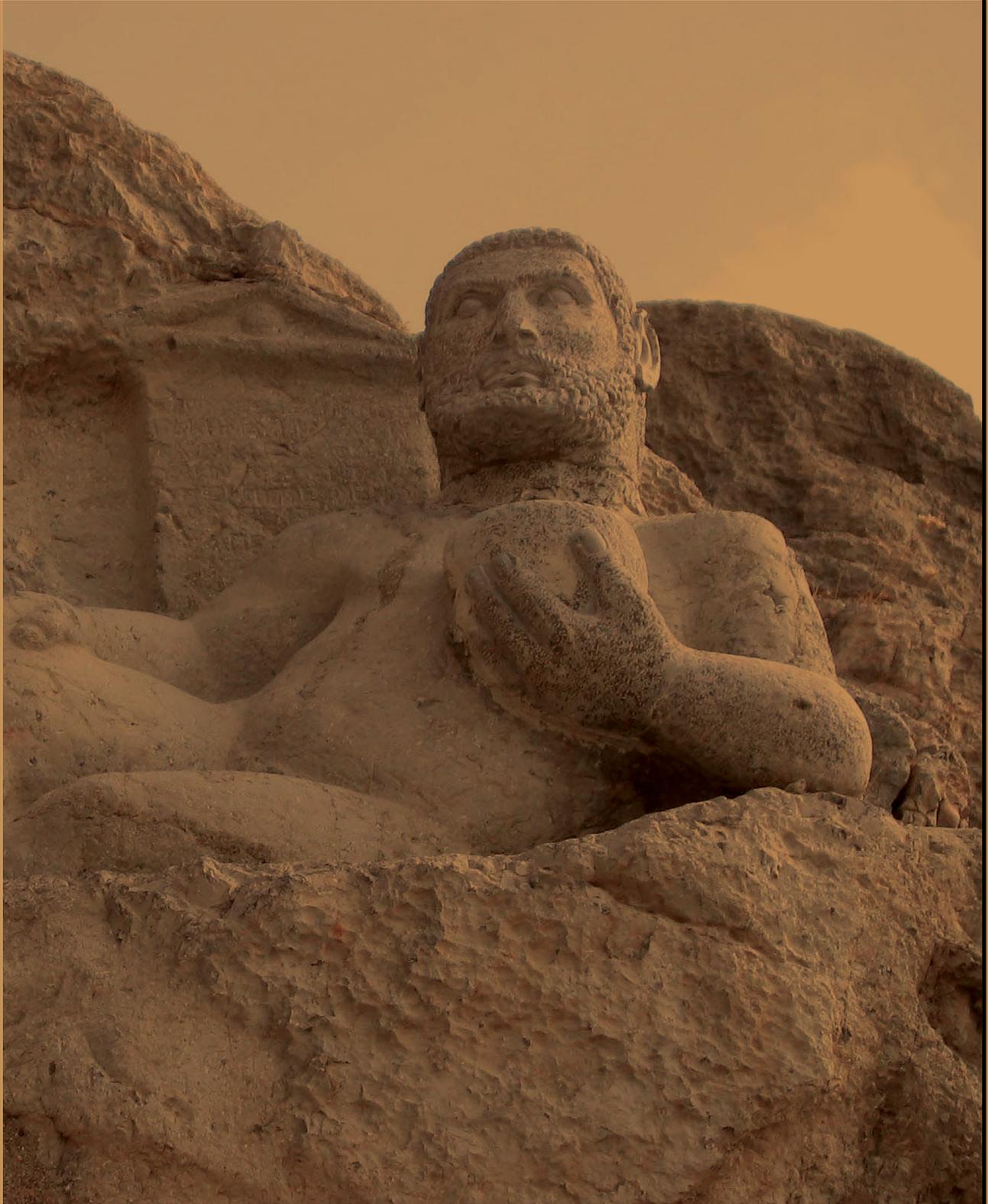
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Detail from above the entrance of Tehran's fire temple, 1286š/1917–18. Photo by © Shervin Farridnejad

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Special Issue: Hellenism and Iran

Notes on the Pahlavi Archives I: Finding **Haspīn-raz* and the Geography of the Tabarestan Archive

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(Princeton University)

In the cache of documents that forms one of the most exciting discoveries of Middle Iranian studies in the last few decades, much information still lies hidden and out of reach.¹ Apart from the amazing efforts of Philippe Gignoux and Dieter Weber in deciphering these documents, the fundamental studies of Maria Macuch on the legal context of some of the documents remains the most important studies of their contents.² Decoding the legal meaning of the Tabarestan texts, a collection of Middle Persian documents from the late seventh century, is indeed central to their study and the first foray into understanding them beyond their immediate philological intricacies. The present short note too aims to be the first in a series

1- My fascination with the geography of the region, apart from childhood memories, comes from one of the many stimulating and adventurous trips that I had the honour of participating in, courtesy of the incomparable late Iraj Afshar. This one in 2009, I accompanied Afshar and the late great Prof. Manoochehr Sotoodeh, alongside my friend Touraj Daryaei, in a trip to the Mazandaran, Golestan, and N. Khorasan provinces during which I learnt much about the local topography and archaeological remains. Additional information provided generously by colleagues Mr. Shervin Bavand of Sari and by the archaeologist, Dr. Saman Towfiq (Qaren), to whom I am indebted for their local knowledge of the geography of the region. I dedicate this note and the subsequent ones on the matter to the memories of Iraj Afshar and Manoochehr Sotoodeh.

2- See Macuch 2016, 2017, and 2019 and upcoming publications on the subject.

making some contribution to these studies, particularly within their geographical and historical context. The following will argue that the geographical context of the documents is not the area of Dailaman, or the region of Rūdbār, as it has been suggested. Rather, it seeks to locate it further east, in either of the two villages called Esperez/Espūrez, in the region of Savādkūd or around the city of Sārī, within the area of the control of the Ispahbeds of Tabaristan, at least one of whom is regularly invoked in these documents.

I. The Village of Haspīn-raz

I.1. In his original study of the Tabarestan archives, Ph. Gignoux read the name of the village referred to in most of the documents as Askēnrad (ʿskynlt̄). He considered this village as the residence of the family (*la famille*; Pahl. *dūdag*) of Sarw ī Sarān.³ However, the emergence of administrative bullae from the first Islamic century, naming Dēl-ī Dēlān as the territory of a Mowbed (maguh/Mugh), quickly altered the latter reading. It was indeed soon established that Sarw ī Sarān/Dēl-ī Dēlān is not a family, rather an administrative district in Tabaristan, and that *dūdag* needed to be read as *tasūg*, a “quarter” of a region.⁴ Gyselen placed this district on the western end of Tabarestan, although she also states that the region might be the same as Rōyān-ud-Zalēxān, also known from the administrative seals. This, in fact matches the written sources more closely, as the western parts of Tabarestan are called Rūyān by latter historians.⁵

Furthermore, the reading of the name of the village Askēnrad has been corrected by Weber, now rendering it as *Haspīn-raz.⁶ This suggests that Haspīn-raz is a village in the quarter (Gyselen’s *canton*) of Dēl-ī Dēlān. A typical passage runs as follows:

“...az garzišn ī mardān ī Yazd nām ud zan-ēw Duxtx^u uaših nām tasūg ī Dēl ī Dēlān az Haspīn-raz deh...”

From the complaint of the people of Yazd by name and one wife Duxtx^u uaših by name, (whose) quarter is of Dēl ī Dēlān, from the village of Haspīn-raz...⁷

Weber’s correction of the reading by Gignoux is quite convincing and must now be adopted as the better reading, as he clearly demonstrates. A comparison of different occurrences of the name with similar words also confirms the reading. In Weber’s own words, “the initial characters (sic.) is identical with those of the word *aspast* ‘clover, lucerne’ and that the final character looks more like a (-c) than a (-t).”⁸

Dēl ī Dēlān, as the name of the quarter, is occasionally altered with Dēl Dēlān,⁹ which appears to be a truncated form. Despite the common occurrence of the word *tasug* ‘quarter’, the name Dēl-ī Dēlān is also qualified commonly with the word *deh* ‘village’ or is preceded by *xānag* ‘house’ (e.g. Tab 2B or Tab 18, ln. 3). In Weber’s interpretation, however, this has to be seen as the name of the district, and he explains that

3- Gignoux 2012, 36.

4- Gyselen 2012, 117.

5- Gyselen 2019, 66; Owliollah Amoli 1348.

6- Weber 2016a, 124.

7- Tab. 1A, Weber 2016, 123, lines 3-5.

8- Weber 2016, 124.

9- Tab. 1B, Weber 2016, 124.

despite the occurrence of other descriptive terms for this name, it should be seen as the *district* where Haspīn-raz is located.¹⁰

I.2. As for the location of the district and the village, Weber suggests a location in the historical area of Dailam(ān), based on the assumption that *Dēl ī Dēlān* represents an earlier form of Dailam. He also uses the internal evidence of the documents and the mention of olive trees to conclude that the area must be close to Rūdbār, the only olive growing region in modern Iran.¹¹ Rūdbār, known as Rūdbār-e Zeytoon “the Olive Riverine” to distinguish it from Rūdbār-e Alamut, is in the Gīlān province of Iran, between Qazvin and Rasht (the capital of the Gīlān province). It is also well located in the historical region of Dailam(ān) and to the west of the district of Royān.

While the reading of Prof. Weber are indeed indisputable in our current state of knowledge and expertise of Pahlavi cursive, his geographical interpretation are left to further scrutiny, as he himself generously suggests.¹² In this case, the first issue we face in identifying the location of Haspīn-raz is the interpretation of *Dēl ī Dēlān* as Dailam and locating the entire archive in Dailam, to the east and south of the Gīlān province. Dailam, in fact, is attested before the end of the seventh century as a name for the region and the people, for example by Prokopios, where he reports *Dolomitai* amongst the soldiers of Khosrow I in Lazica.¹³ Other examples of the presence of the name of the region and the people can be found in world of Polybius and Ptolemy,¹⁴ confirming that the end of the seventh century would have been too late for the occurrence of an earlier form, *Dēl ī Dēlān*.¹⁵

Additionally, considering that the entire archive is dotted with the name of Tabarestān¹⁶ (indeed the word is the eponymous title of the entire archive), it seems superfluous to point out that Dailaman is not the same as Tabarestan, and it has not really been counted as part of Tabarestan in various geographical treatise. In fact, Tabarestan refers to the area further east, in the east and southeast of the modern Iranian province of Mazandaran whose capital in the Islamic period was Amol.¹⁷ Consequently, it would be prudent to look for the location of both **Dēl ī Dēlān* and **Haspīn-raz* further east than Dailaman and in the area of Tabarestan. My suggestion for the ‘problem’ of the occurrence of olives in the documents, taken as a sign for locating the documents in the region of Rudbar-e Zeytoon, is perhaps too simple. The fact that the tiny modern Iranian olive industry has been made limited to the area of Rudbar is not an indication that olives can only grow there, but is a function of the early 20th century agricultural policies. In absence of good archaeobotanical and pollen studies of the matter, however, I can only point out that there are two villages named Zayt “olive” within 20 kms radius of Sari, the capital of Mazandaran.

10- Weber 2016, 126. I am skeptical of this suggestion and in a further note shall lay down my reasons for it.

11- Weber 2017, 131-132.

12- Weber 2017, 132.

13- Procopius, *de Bello Gothico* 4.14.5-7, 4.14.9.

14- Minorsky 1931. 2.

15- Perhaps an interesting occurrence of the name, shortly before the date of the Tabarestān archive, is in the tale of Mar Yohanan of Dailam. In his *vitae*, which in fact survives in Sogdian, the famous Mesopotamian monastery founder is kidnapped and carried away to Dailam by brigands from that region (Sims-Williams 1994).

16- An example is Weber 2017, 141, where the word is written as *Tabūrestān* (tpwrst'n'), reflecting the earlier form Tapūr.

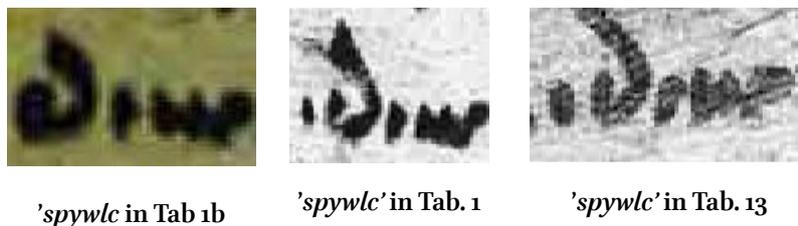
17- Le Strange, 370.

I.3. A clue as to the location of the documents is provided by further documents, for example Tab. 15, where an Spāhbēd resident in a place read as Halīg, is mentioned.¹⁸ Spāhbēd is, of course, the military title of the rulers of one of the four quarters of the Sasanian Empire.¹⁹ Additionally, in the form of Ispahbed or Isfahbidh, it is a common title for the local rulers of Tabarestan in the early and medieval Islamic period. Descended from pre-Islamic nobility of the Sasanian period, these Ispahbeds belonged to one or two clans and dominated the politics of Tabarestan, particularly its highland region, for hundreds of years. The centre of their power, particularly in the earlier period of their history and during the rule of Dabuyid Ispahbeds, was in the region of Perīm (sometimes Ferīm) in the southwest of the modern province of Mazandaran.²⁰

The mountainous area around Perīm is known as Savādkūh and up to the early 20th century, it was mostly dominated by local strongmen who identified themselves as members of the Bavand tribe. The name Bavand, of course, is reminiscent of the medieval family of Bavandids whose Ispahbeds, including the famous Shah-ghazi Rustam, held sway in the same area in the pre- and post-Mongol period. The area is also home to the remnants of two famous towers, known as *Borj-e Lājīm* and *Mil-e Rādkān*, which preserve bilingual Arabic (Kufic) and Middle Persian (Pahlavi) inscriptions to this day.²¹

Consequently, it seemed logical to look for the area of Dēl ī Dēlān and the village of Haspīn-raz in this area. This tendency is strengthened by the information from a local scholar who had previously reported the finding of several documents in the area through unofficial finds by the local mountaineers. These includes a discovery in 2019 of several Pahlavi documents, similar in style and bearing seals, in a cave less than two kilometres from the famous Cave of Ispahbed Khurshid, in the eastern part of Savādkūh in the Mazandaran province. Sadly, given legal constraints and lack of archaeological evidence, one cannot use this evidence for the present purposes.

I.4. The name of the village of Haspīn-raz is transliterated as *hspynlc* or *hspynlc'* in various documents and is rather consistent in its form. Considering Weber's suggestion that in the name of the village "the initial characters (sic.) is identical with those of the word *aspast* 'clover, lucerne,'" one might conclude that the name written as Haspīn-raz can equally be read as Aspīn-raz. The meaning of Haspīn-raz is expressed by Weber in this way so: "possible interpretation as 'vineyard of repose' seems to indicate the pleasantness of the place," and is obviously speculative based on the reading. The problematic medial n in *hspynlc* is quite similar in form to a w, as occurs in words like *bwn* (*būn*) or the Arameogram *PWN* (*pad*) throughout the archive. So, we might be allowed to read the name as *'spywlc*. The rest of this investigation, then, might justifiably be a geographical one, looking for the location of the village in the area of Tabarestan.



'*spywlc*' in Tab. 1b '*spywlc*' in Tab. 1 '*spywlc*' in Tab. 13
 Fig. 1: Different occurrences of '*spywlc*(') in the Tabarestan Archive

18- Weber 2017, 145 lines 3-4; Macuch 2017, 180. Weber 2017, 145 lines 3-4; Macuch 2017, 180.

19- Gyselen 2001.v

20- For an overview of the history of the region, see Madelung 1975.

21- Cereti 2018.

I.5. Starting from the reading *'spywlc*, we are faced with two possible candidates in Tabarestan. One is in the area of Savādkūh, as mentioned before. This is the area where the Mountains of Qarēn and Šervīn are located and also where the centre of the power of the Ispahbeds of Tabarestan was located. In the western part of Savadkūh, 30 km from the above mentioned cave and 60 km from Sārī, the capital of Mazandaran, lies the district of Valūpay, 'Left side of the river,' occasionally called Alāšt, after a major village.²² Within this mountainous district lies a small village known locally as *Esperez*, placed like so many others around it on top of a hill overlooking shallow valleys leading down to Firūzkūh, the closest major town. The official designation of this village is Sepīd-rīz (alt. Sefīd-rīz), a seemingly hyper-corrected, indeed translation, of the name *Esperez*.²³ In the latest statistics of 1385 AHs (2006 CE), the village had 27 inhabitants and had but a few animals and no modern farming machines. The village's small size and isolated position makes it an unusual place for the survival of such an archive, although it might at the same time justify the preservation of the collection.²⁴ The particle *Espe/Espi* in the local Tabari dialect means "White" and is common in the area. Additionally, *rez* might mean "small, cut up into pieces" (cf. NP *rīz* "small"). Thus the name *Esperez* appears to have been translated into Persian as "Sefīd-rīz" with the same meaning. Presence of many local villages with the first particle *Espe-*, such as *Espekala*, confirms the original form *Esperez*, as does the naming in modern resources such as Google Maps.

A second candidate for the location of *'spywlc* is the village whose name is often written as *Espoorez/Espūrez*, to the southeast of Sārī, the capital of the Mazandaran province. Unlike *Esperez*, *Espūrez* is located on a flat plain, less than 5 km from the Tajen River, and is practically a suburb of Sārī. It is known to have been on the road from Sari to Gorgan and next to the Safavid royal road or the Shah Abbasi Road that went from Sārī to Ašraf (Mod. Behšahr).²⁵ Based on the geographical dictionary published by the Geographical Office of the Iranian Armed Forces (1370/1991), the village has 120 families who are engaged in farming, horticulture, animal husbandry, and bee-keeping.²⁶ The village has several types of trees, although olive trees are not part of them. Perhaps more significant is that the locals pronounce the name of the village in an identical way to the name of the village in Savādkūh, as attested by Sotoodeh.²⁷

22- The importance of Alāšt is a modern development, as the village was the birthplace of the first Pahlavi king, Reza Shah, and benefited from special attention, contributing to its development, in the 20th century.

23- Anonymous 1370: 33 & 34.

24- Anonymous 1370, 33.

25- Sotoodeh 1366.IV.1, p. 569.

26- Anonymous 1370: 31.

27- Sotoodeh 1366.IV.1, p. 569, note 80. This is additionally confirmed by Mr. Shervin Bavand who lives in Sārī and knows the village intimately.



Image 2: Map of modern eastern Mazandaran (historical Tabarestan)

In this case then preferring either Esperez/Sefid-rez in the highlands of Savādkūh or Espūrez/Esperez in the lowlands of Sārī is a matter of matching the data in the documents with the geographical realities of the region. Two points might be raised here briefly. One is that the lack of any mention of Sārī in the documents makes the choice of Espūrez a little less likely. The second is that the seat of the Ispahbeds of Tabaristan was traditionally located in the highlands where putting up defence against the invading armies was much easier. In fact, the seat of the Ispahbeds was usually in Prīm (written Firīm in Arabic sources), the piedmont region of eastern Savādkūh. Perhaps a further investigation into the Pahlavi documents, particularly into the toponyms mentioned in Doc. Tab. 24 can help us narrow down these choices. At present, this paper would like to submit the reading Esperez (with possibly an older form Espūrez) for what is transliterated as *'spywlc* in the Tabarestan Archive.

Conclusion

The study of the content of entire Pahlavi Documents collection, including the earlier collection from Qom and the present collection from Tabarestan, requires much study by a large group of scholars from various different fields. This would require the publication of the entire collection, allowing scholars to study them as a whole and within their historical, geographic, and social contexts. While we are still in the stage of ascertaining the reading of the documents and solving palaeographic and philological questions, however,

it is not a bad practice to engage in deeper study of their content.

The present note, part of a planned and progressing set of studies, makes some simple suggestions about the possible reading of one of the toponyms mentioned in the Tabarestan Archive. A study of the geographical context of the documents can help us with greater accuracy in the future studies of the archive, and even with better readings of the difficult sections of each document. Among other things, fixing the provenance of the document collection in the south-eastern extremes of the Alborz range will help us in understanding the place of the region, and the context of the archive, within the greater early Islamic political sphere of Khurasan. I hope that by continuing these series of note, I can make a small contribution to the larger field.

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