



# ARAMAIC II. IRANIAN LOANWORDS IN EARLY ARAMAIC

---

## ii. Iranian Loanwords In Early Aramaic

Speakers of Iranian languages were in all likelihood in contact with Aramaic speakers from the 7th century B.C. onwards in northern Mesopotamia, but this contact has not left a detectable impression. It is with the advent of the Achaemenids to power in the 6th century that a growing number of Iranian loanwords are found in Aramaic. In the Achaemenid period Aramaic was in use throughout the empire as a sort of official language and the Aramaic script was widely employed from Egypt in the southwest to Bactria and Sogdiana in the northeast. Texts were in all likelihood dictated in the native dialects, Iranian and others, written down in Aramaic, and then read out again in the native language at the place they were received. It is therefore not surprising that the Aramaic script, and the scribal practices of the chancery using Aramaic, achieved important status in these areas even after Aramaic had been replaced by Greek.

Many Iranian loanwords found in Aramaic are also found in neo-Babylonian and Elamite administrative and legal texts. It may also be assumed that the Iranian loanwords in Hebrew (primarily in the Book of Esther) entered via Aramaic.



The sources for these loanwords are 1) literary—the biblical books of Ezra (Ez), which quotes many early documents, and Daniel (Dan), which, although redacted in the time of the Maccabean revolt (i.e. ca. 186 B.C.), contains earlier material and is replete with Iranian words and usages; 2) the various collections of letters, contracts, administrative documents, etc. from Egypt (C = Cowley, K = Kraeling, D = Driver); 3) Aramaic inscriptions from Persepolis (B = Bowman); 4) inscriptions from other parts of the empire, primarily from Anatolia. As will be seen below, much of the vocabulary is from the spheres of administration, law, and commerce, but the texts also contain vocabulary from other walks of life. The later the text, the more Iranian words and idioms it will contain. Some phrases are entirely Iranian, and some documents, such as the ship-repair order (C 26) issued by *Aršāma* and the letters sent by *Aršāma* from Babylon and/or Susa (D), are particularly replete with Iranianisms. The Aramaic used in these texts has been called Official or Imperial Aramaic.

In the eastern provinces and the periphery of the Hellenistic world Aramaic continued in use as a written language into the Arsacid and Roman period. Aramaic inscriptions are known from Armenia and Georgia (Mc'xeṭ'a) as well as from such sites as Laḡmān and Qandahār in Afghanistan and Taxila in Pakistan. The Aramaic of these inscriptions was clearly a sort of heterograph; with Aramaic words replacing the language actually spoken by the scribe. Three Aramaic dialects spoken in the Near East during this period have also left us inscriptions that contain Iranian words, primarily Parthian in form. They are a) Palmyrene inscriptions from Palmyra, the important ancient caravan city in the Syrian desert, the written dialect being a continuation of “official Aramaic” with Eastern traits; b) the Hatra inscriptions, from Hatra in northern Iraq, whose dialect shows clear eastern traits; and c) the Syriac inscriptions from the Edessa area (modern Urfa in southern Turkey), the earliest testimony to the Syriac dialect of Aramaic.

The graphic realization of Iranian words in Aramaic in the early period presented few problems, for the Aramaic consonantal shape fit the known and assumed Iranian words; however, the vocalization of Iranian words transmitted in Biblical texts conforms to the patterns of Aramaic and Hebrew, while the consonantal shape remains relatively intact. Iranian *č* is expressed graphically by Aramaic *š*, *θ* by *t* and *xw* at times by simple *h*.

It is not surprising that the number of Iranian words in the administrative and legal fields is relatively large. Among the administrative functions, the



following officials should be mentioned: **'zdkry'** *azdakara* “recorder” (C 17:5); **'drgzr'** *handarza-kara* “counselor” (Dan); **'ḥšdrpn'** *xšaθrapāna* “satrap” (Dan); **'ḥštrpn'** (Xanthos); **'gzbr'** *ganzabara* “treasurer” (Ez); **'pgnzbr'** *upaganzabara* “sub-treasurer” (B pp. 30ff.); **'gwšky'** *gaušaka* “hearer, spy” (C); **'dtbr'** *dātabara* “law officer” (Dan); **'dtky'** *dātaka* “lawyer” (C); **'hdbr'** *hadabāra* “companion” (Dan); **'hpthpt'** *haftaxwapātā* “guardian of the seventh (part)” (K 8:2, 3); **'hmrkr'** *hamāarakara* “accountant” (D); **'prmnkr'** *framānakara* “superior, foreman” (C); **'prsk'** *frasaka* “investigator” (Ez); **'prstk'** *frastāka* “leading official” (Ez); **'prtrk'** *frataraka* “governor” (C); **'prtm'** *fratama* (Heb.) “general” (Dan); **'ptyprs'** *pātifrāsa* “retribution” (C); **'srk'** *sāraka* “chief minister” (Dan); **'tpt'** *tāyupātā* “policeman” (Dan). Such professions as *patikarakara* “sculptor (D)”; *waršabara* “forester” (D) and *nāupati* “(ship) captain” (C) should also be noted.

A variety of items from the realm of realia deserve mention here: **'bšwn'** *abišavana* “pestle” (B); **'šrn'** *āčarna* “furnishings” (C); **'ḥšynpyn'** *axšainafaina* “turquoise” (B); **'stdn'** *astōdāna* “ossuary” (KAI 262); **'trwdn'** *āθrōdāna* “fire altar” (C); **'drḥt'** *draxta* “tree” Sardis (KAI 260); **'hmynk'** *hamyānaka* “necklace, belt” (Dan); **'hndwn'** *handavana* “repair material” (C); **'hnpn'** *hanpāna* “covered passage” (K); **'hwn'** *havana* “mortar” (B); **'nbršt'** *nibrāšti* “lamp” (Dan); **'ndn'** *nidāni* “container, sheath” (Dan; Gen Apoc); **'prds'** *paridaiza* “garden, park” (Enoch); **'prbr'** *paribāra, parbar* “wall” Sardis (KAI 260); **'ptp'** *piθfa* “ration” (C; D); **'wpšr'** *upačāra* “repair (material)” (C 26); **'wpkrt'** *upakarta* “preparation, gathering of material” (C); **'zrnyk'** *zaranyaka* “arsenic” (C).

The following nouns belong essentially to the administrative sphere: **'bygrn'** *abigarana* “penalty, fine” (C; K); **'drng'** *ādranga* “guarantor” (K); **'wdys'** *avadaisa* “protocol” (C); **'zt'** *āzāta* “free” (K); **'zd'** *azdā* “known” (C; Dan); **'dwn'** *advan* “route, (stage of a) journey” (D); **'bg'** *bāga* “portion, domain” (D); **'grd'** *garda* “domestic staff” (D); **'gnz'** *ganza* “treasury” (C; D; Ez); **'dm'** *dama* “domain” (Xanthos); **'dšn'** *dāšna* “gift” (D); **'dt'** *dāta* “law” (passim); **'dwškrt'** *duškarta* “misdeed” (C); **'hd'bgw'** *hadā-abigāva* “with interest” (D); **'hnbg'** *hngyt'* *hanbāga, hangaiθa* “partners (in land or movable property)” (C; K); **'ksntw'** *kasanθva* “decrease” (D); **'nštwn'** *ništavana* “order” (C; Ez); **'srwšyt'** *sraušyata@* “punishment” (D); **'ptbg'** *patibāga* “portion” (Dan); **'ptgm'** *patigāma* “message, report” (passim); **'ptšgn'** *patičagna* (Hebrew **ptšgn** /strong>; Aram. **pršgn**) “document, copy;” **'psšrt'** *pasčā-rāti* “addition to dowry” (K); **'rz'** *rāza* “secret” (Dan); **'ywz'** *yauza* “rebellion” (D).

There are also interesting idioms which consist of a form of the Aramaic verb **'bd** “to do, make” and an Old Persian noun: **gst ptgm** (*gasta patigāma*) **yṭ'bd**



(D) “he will be strictly called to account;” **hdmyn tṭʿbdwn** (Dan) “you will be direly punished;” **hndrz** (*handarza*) **yʿbdwn** (D) “they will give instructions.” There is a group of words used in an adverbial construction: *apatamā(m)* “finally” (Ez); *azdā* “publicly” (Dan); *asparnā* “in full” (D; Ez); (*a*)*drazdā* “diligently” (Ez).

It has been plausibly suggested that the enigmatic **ddymyy** (K 9:3) which follows Aramaic **yhbth lky** “I gave/have given it to you” is a similar declaration in Old Persian *dadāyam ayāy* (for *\*adadāyam \*ahyāi*). In the inscription from Arebsun (KAI 264) the phrase **dynmzdysnš dainā-mazdayasniš** “Mazda-believing,” and in KAI 265, the verbal **mgyš lmtrh** (Greek *emageuse Mithrē*) “acted the *magus* to Mithra” is found. Religious terminology from the Iranian sphere is found in the Aramaic of the recently discovered Xanthos trilingual: **krpʿ karpa** “religious usage, rite” and **ḥštrpty xšaθrapati** “noble, protective spirit,” used for Apollo (lit. “landlord”). In the Taxila inscription (KAI 273) the following religious terms are found: **hwptysty hu-patyāsti** “good obedience,” **hww[rd] hu-varda** “good progress” and **hwnštwn hu-ništavana** “good order” and from Qandahār I **ptytw patiθva** “for redemption (?),” **ptyzbt pati-zbāta** “forbidden,” **prbsty frabasta** “unbridled,” **mzyšty mazišta** “elders, superiors.” The inscriptions from Afghanistan contain other Iranian terms.

A not unexpected source of interesting Iranian words in Aramaic are the Qumran scrolls. The Aramaic texts are written in Standard Literary Aramaic and therefore reflect essentially the Eastern Literary dialect. As well as several Iranian words known from other texts, they contain such words as: (*a*)*sparaka* “buckler” (Gen Apoc.), *daxšta* “desert” (Targ. Job), *naḥšīr* “hunt” (I Q Wars), *naḥšīrūta* “slaughter” (Test. Levi), *\*naiza-ka* (written *nzk*) “spear” (Targ. Job).

Of particular interest are the Iranian titles that have reached us in variant forms. In the inscriptions from Mcʿxeṭʿa in Georgia, the same title is written both **bṭḥš** (I 1.2) and **pyṭḥš** (II 1.2-5). In the Greek version of inscr. I this is rendered *pitiaksēs*. In the Hatra inscription, there *may* also be two versions of this term: **bṭḥš**ʿ (no. 143) and also **pdḥš**ʿ (no. 127). The forms **byṭḥš** (Parthian) and **bṭḥšy** (Pahlavi) are known from Šāpūr KZ while the Greek transcriptions *pitiaksou* and *pituaksou* are also found there, and Ammianus Marcellinus preserves *vitaxa*. On this word see O. Szemerényi in *Monumentum H. S. Nyberg II*, Acta Iranica 5, Tehran and Liège, 1975, pp. 363-65. Another title with slightly divergent spellings is found as **pšgryb**ʿ in the Syriac *Hymn of the Soul* (where it was recognized by I. Gershevitch, *JRAS*, 1954, p. 124) as well as in an Old Syriac



inscription; at Hatra it has the forms **pzgryb'** (185:3) and **pšgryb'/psgrb'** (287:6; 282). It is attested in Man. Mid. Pers. as *ps'gryw* and as a Parthian loanword in Man. Sogd. as *pš'gryw*, and derives from OIr. *\*pasčā-grīva* "behind/instead of the self," i.e. "viceroy" (see Szemerényi, op. cit., p. 365, with references). Among the other civic and religious titles that occur in these inscriptions are **'rgpt'** "city governor" (Palmyra), **mhrqr'** "incantation maker" (Palmyra), **hdrpt'** "fire-priest" (Hatra), and **nhšrpt'** "in charge of hunt" (Hatra). The god Nergal, of Babylonian origin, is given the title **dhšpt'** at Hatra. It is Parthian *\*daxšpat*, known from Syriac *daḥša* and Armenian *dahič*, *daḥčapet*, where it means "chief guard, executioner." This is consonant with Nergal's role as god of the underworld.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Texts of the Achaemenid period: R. A. Bowman, *Aramaic Ritual Texts from Persepolis*, Chicago, 1970 (= B); A. E. Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century B.C.*, Oxford, 1923 (= C); G. R. Driver, *Aramaic Documents of the Fifth Century B. C.*, revised edition, Oxford, 1964 (= D); E. G. Kraeling, *The Brooklyn Museum Aramaic Papyri: New Documents of the Fifth Century B.C. from the Jewish Colony at Elephantine*, New Haven, 1953 (= K); H. Dorner and W. Röllig, *Kanaanäische und Aramäische Inschriften 1*, Wiesbaden, 1962 (= KAI).

The Iranian words in Ezra and Daniel: W. B. Henning, in F. Rosenthal, *A Grammar of Biblical Aramaic*, 2nd revised ed., Wiesbaden, 1963, pp. 58-59.

W. Hinz, *Altiranisches Sprachgut der Nebenüberlieferungen*, Wiesbaden, 1975.

For Xanthos: M. Mayrhofer, "Die iranischen Elemente im aramäischen Text," in *Fouilles de Xanthos. Tome VI. La stèle trilingue du Létôon*, Paris, 1979, pp. 181-85.

The Iranian words in the Job Targum and bibliography for the other words in the Qumran Scrolls: J. C. Greenfield and S. Shaked, "Three Iranian Words in the Targum of Job from Qumran," *ZDMG* 122, 1972, pp. 37-44.

See also J. C. Greenfield, "On some Iranian Terms in the Elephantine Papyri," *Acta Antiqua* (Budapest) 21, 1977, pp. 113-18; "Some Notes on the Arsham



Letters,” in *Irano-Judaica*, Jerusalem, 1982, pp. 4-11.

For Mcʿxeṭʿa: A. M. Apʿakʿije, G. P. Gobejišvili, A. N. Kalandaje, and G. A. Lomṭaṭʿije, *Mcxeṭʿa: arkʿeologiuri kvlevajiebis sedegebi. I. Armazisxevis arkʿeologiuri jeglebi, 1937-1946 cċ ganat ʿxaris mixedviṭʿ*, Tiflis, 1955.

For Afghanistan: H. Birkeland, “Eine aramäische Inschrift aus Afghanistan,” *Acta Orientalia* 16, 1938, pp. 222-23; G. Davary and H. Humbach, *Eine weitere aramäoiranische Inschrift der Periode des Aśoka aus Afghanistan*, Mainz, 1947.

A. Dupont-Sommer, “Une nouvelle inscription araméenne d’Aśoka trouvée dans la vallée du Laghman (Afghanistan),” *Comptes-rendus de l’Académie des inscriptions et belles lettres*, 1970, pp. 158-73.

For Kandahar I see D. Schlumberger, L. Robert, A. Dupont-Sommer, and E. Benveniste, “Une bilingue gréco-araméenne d’Aśoka,” *JA* 246, 1958, pp. I-48; for Kandahar II see E. Benveniste, A. Dupont-Sommer, and C. Caillat, “Une inscription indoaraméenne d’Aśoka provenant de Kandahar (Afghanistan),” *JA* 254, 1966, pp. 437-70.

Palmyra: F. Rosenthal, *Die Sprache der palmyrenischen Inschriften*, Leipzig, 1936, pp. 96-97.

Hatra: F. Vattioni, *Le iscrizioni di Hatra*, Naples, 1981; D. Harnack, “Parthische Titel, vornehmlich in den Inschriften aus Hatra,” in F. Altheim and R. Stiehl, *Geschichte Mittelasiens im Altertum*, Berlin, 1970, pp. 492-549.