



BIDAXŠ

BIDAXŠ, title of Iranian origin found in various languages from the first to the eighth century.

Forms. From Georgia the following forms are attested: 1. *pyṭḥš* in an inscription on a tombstone from Armazi, first century (see Apakidze et al., pl. 61, pp. 72-73; Altheim and Stiehl, 1961, pp. 173-75); 2. *bṭḥš*, *pitiáxou* (Greek script, genitive form), in a bilingual inscription on a tombstone from Armazi, 2nd century (see Apakidze et al., 1958, pl. 60, pp. 69-72; Lang, in *ET*², p. 417 with references; Altheim et al., 1949, pp. 1-5); 3. *pitiáxē* (Greek script, dative form) inscription on a seal (see Apakidze et al., 1958, pl. 45.1, p. 128) and on a silver bowl from Armazi (*ibid.*, pl. 55.1, pp. 60-63); 4. *bṭḥšy* (Mid. Pers. script), on a silver bowl from Armazi, probably 3rd century, (*ibid.*, pl. 49.1-4, pp. 552-53; Henning, p. 354); *bytyḥš* (Aramaic script); silver bowl from Bori (Tsereteli, pp. 53f.; Altheim et al., 1949, pp. 9-14).

Inscriptions in Aramaic script from Hatra from the 1st-3rd century: *bṭḥš'*, on a statue (Safar, p. 42 no. 143; Caquot, p. 259); *pdḥš'*, on a memorial inscription (Safar, p. 37 no. 127; Caquot, p. 256).

From Iran: 1. Mid. Pers. *bṭḥšy*, Parth. *byṭḥš*, Gk. *bídix*, *pituaxou* (genitive), adjective *bṭḥškn*, Parth. *byṭḥškn*, Gk. *pitiksignan*, 1. in the inscription of Šāpūr I on the Ka'ba-ye Zardošt, written in 262 (Back, 1978, p. 152; Gignoux, *Glossaire*, pp. 20, 50; Maricq, pp. 64-73); 2. Mid. Pers. *bṭḥšy*, Parth. *byṭḥš*, in the inscription of Narseh I at Paikuli, written between 293 and 296 (Humbach and Skjærvø, p. 90); 3. Gk. *pituaxēs* in Procopius, *Bellum persicum* 1.13.16, 14.32, 38, wrongly



understood as proper name, early 6th century (Justi, *Namenbuch*, p. 254).

From Armenia: 1. *bdeašx*, commonly used by the historians Agathangelos, Faustus, etc. (Hübschmann, *Armenische Grammatik*, pp. 119f.); 2. Gk. *pitiáxēs*, seal inscription (Markwart, *Ērānšahr*, p. 169).

Furthermore the title is attested in Latin of the 4th century as *vitaxa* (Ammianus Marcellinus, 23.6.14); in Greek in the 5th/6th centuries as *bístax* for **bítax* (Hesych, ed. K. Latte, I, Copenhagen, 1953, p. 328.32); as an Alan title *itáxēs* (Gk. script), a.d. 716 (Markwart, p. 178); in Georgian as *pitiaxši/patiašxi* (Hübschmann, p. 120); in Syriac as *pṯḥš'*, *pṯkš'* (Brockelmann, p. 564) and *'pṯkš'* (Hoffmann, p. 34 nn. 274f.); and in Pahlavi as *bythš* (Bailey, pp. 55, 64, Nyberg, *Manual II*, pp. 47f.),

Etymology: It is commonly assumed that the word is of Iranian origin, but the etymology is controversial. The solution of the problem hinges on the question of whether *p-* or *b-* is the original initial. If *p-* is originally a derivation from a compound containing OIran. *pati-* is likely. Etymologies built on this assumption include the following: Markwart at first connected *bidaxš* with the Old Persian name Patixéithēs (Greek) but later decided against this connection (*Ērānšahr*, p. 178). Altheim (1949, p. 5 and passim) suggested a derivation from **patixšāyaθiya*, in which he was followed by Harnack; however, the expected Middle Persian and Parthian form would be **pā/ādi(x)šāh*. Derivation from **pati-* + **āxš-* “to supervise” (cf. Av. *aibi-āxš-*) or **axš-* “eye” (Av. *aš-* “eye,” daevic) was proposed by F. C. Andreas (< **pati-āxš-tar* “supervisor,” apud Christensen, p. 11 n. 3, 113), Pagliaro (< **pati-* “lord” and **axš* “eye,” i.e., “the eye of the king,” corresponding to the title recorded in Greek: *'ophthalmòs tou basiléōs*; 1929, p. 165, 1954, p. 145), Bailey (< **pati-ā/āxša*; p. 64), Eilers (< **pati-axš-*, 1962, pp. 209-11 and cf. 1940, pp. 26 n. 1, 120). However, none of these proposals explains why the initial *p-* has not survived in the Iranian forms.

A second series of etymologies assumes that the initial *b-* is original and are therefore more likely to be correct: Nyberg derived the word from **bitiyaxša* (< **bitīya*, “second,” cf. Parth. *bidīg*; 1946, p. 237 n. 2) followed by Henning (*Mitteliranisch*, p. 62 n. 2). However, Nyberg’s later explanation of the entire compound as “the second eye” (of the king) is not convincing (*Manual II*, p. 48). Frye proposed **bitīya-xšāyaθiya*, without, however, explaining the extreme reduction of the last part of the word (1962, p. 354). A decided improvement was Hinz’s etymology (OPers.) **dvitiyaxšaya* “second ruler,” i.e., “vice king” (pp. 149-53 with linguistic remarks by W. P. Schmid p. 153 n. 22), accepted by



Szemerényi (pp. 361-66). On the basis of these suggestions the following development can be proposed: **bitīyaxš* > *bidyaxš* (Arm. *bdeašx*) > *bidixš* (Gk. *bídix*) > *bidaxš* (Pahl. *bythš*). The forms with initial *p*- can be explained as analogical formations with words in **pā/āti*- (e.g., *pādixšāy* “ruler, authoritative”). If Hinz’s theory is correct in all points then what was originally an Old Persian title was adapted to the Parthian sound system and preserved in the titlature of the Arsacid administration. This hypothesis would agree with the fact that the title is mainly attested in documents from this period. However, the postulated Old Persian form must not be taken to prove the existence of a corresponding title and position in the Achaemenid empire.

Function. The inscriptions from Armazi in Georgia are from a cemetery for *bidaxšes* and their relatives. In the bilingual text (no. 2) the title is rendered by Aramaic *rb trbš* “*major domus*” and Greek *epítropos*, a title at that time corresponding to that of a Roman provincial governor. The bowl inscription (no. 4) lists a dynasty of three *bidaxšes*, whom Henning (pp. 354-55) identified with the *bidaxšes* of the early Sasanians discussed below, which would imply that the *bidaxšes* were Georgian *majores domus* and Sasanian *epítropoi*. However, first, Henning’s reading of the inscription is controversial (rejected by Chaumont, pp. 105-08; doubted by Skjærvø in Humbach and Skjærvø, p. 159 with reference to oral communication from Ph. Gignoux; accepted by Harmatta, pp. 252-56). Second, there are problems of chronology, as the series of Sasanian *bidaxšes* goes back to Ardašēr I, who did not rule Georgia. This weakens Henning’s hypothesis that in the third century *bidaxš* ordinarily meant *bidaxš* of Georgia. What remains clear is that in the second century the *bidaxšes* functioned as a kind of *major domus* at the Georgian court and that there could be several *bidaxšes* at the same time, e.g., a “small *bidaxš*.”

The Armenian historians describe the *bidaxšes* (*bdeaxšk*) as lords of the marshes (*sahmanakał*), and the “great *bidaxš*” as a high position at the court, hereditary in the family of the rulers of Arzanene (Chaumont, in *EIr.* II/4, p. 437). Sources mention the existence about a.d. 300 of “four” *bidaxšes* or *sahmanakats* and the positions of the “great” and the “other” *bidaxšes*, but they are unclear about the relationship between these titles (see Markwart, *Ērānšahr*, pp. 165-79 and, differently, Pagliaro, 1954, pp. 143-44).

In the Sasanian inscriptions, the lists of dignitaries under Ardašēr I and Šāpūr I in the inscription on the Ka’ba-ye Zardošt (ŠKZ) mention as the highest dignitary after the members of the royal house (before the representatives of



other noble families) under Ardašēr I: a certain Ardašēr, the *bidaxš* (Mid. Pers. l. 29, Parth. l. 23, Gk. l. 56) and, under Šāpūr I: Šāpūr, the *bidaxš* (Mid. Pers. l. 31, Parth. l. 25, Gk. l. 61), as well as two dignitaries in less prominent position: Kardsraw, the *bidaxš* (Mid. Pers. l. 33, Parth. l. 27, Gk. l. 64), Ardašēr, the son of the *bidaxš* (Mid. Pers. l. 34, Parth. l. 28, Gk. l. 66). Among the dignitaries who acclaimed Narseh listed in the inscription of Paikuli we find a Pābag, the *bidaxš*, in a similar position (text pars. 16, 32). This *bidaxš* is preceded by a *hargbed*, which led Szemerényi (1975, pp. 362-63) to conclude that the *bidaxš* had been degraded during the 3rd century; however, this conclusion fails to take the low position of the *bidaxš* Kardsraw in ŠKZ (see above) into account. The fact that the title could be given to a person of foremost rank indicates that the bearer of the title, perhaps a member of the royal house, functioned as a kind of vice-king or grand vizier of the realm. This early Sasanian and perhaps Arsacid sense of the title may have been preserved by Hesych (5th/6th cent.), who defines *bístax* as the Persian word for “the second (after) the king,” and in some Pahlavi texts where the title is attested: In the *Ayādgār ī Zarērān*, which reflects a Parthian tradition, and in the *Ayādgār ī Jāmāspīg*, Jāmāsp, the wise counselor of King Wištāsp, is called *bidaxš* (Nyberg, *Manual II*, p. 27; Bailey, 1930, p. 55 par. 2).

In the 4th century the title could also designate the military governor of a province according to Ammianus Marcellinus (23.6.14), who equates *uitaxae* with *magistri equitum* “masters of the cavalry.”

The word may survive in some geographical names such as [Badakšān](#) (Eilers, 1962, p. 210) and in Arabic *fattāš*, *taftīš* (ibid.).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

F. Altheim, H. Junker, and R. Stiehl, “Inschriften aus Gruzien,” *Annuaire de l’Institut de philologie et d’histoire orientales et slaves* 9, 1949, pp. 1-25.

F. Altheim and R. Stiehl, *Supplementum Aramaicum. Aramäisches aus Iran*, Baden-Baden, 1957, pp. 74-79, 88.



Idem, “Die zweite (aramäische) Inschrift von Mchet‘a,” *Forschungen und Fortschritte* 35, 1961, pp. 172-78.

Idem, *Die aramäische Sprache unter den Achaemeniden*, Frankfurt am Main, 1963, pp. 83-85, 248-50.

A. M. Apakidze et al., *Mtskheta. Itogi arkheologicheskikh issledovanii . . .*, Tiflis, 1958.

M. Back, *Die sassanidischen Staatsinschriften*, Acta Iranica 18, Tehran and Liège, 1978.

H. W. Bailey, “To the Zamasp-Namak I” *BSO(A)S* 6, 1930, pp. 55-85.

C. Brockelmann, *Lexicon Syriacum*, Halle, 1928.

A. Caquot, “Nouvelles inscriptions araméennes de Hatra VI” *Syria* 41, 1964, pp. 251-72.

M. L. Chaumont, “États vassaux dans l’empire des premiers Sassanides,” in *Monumentum H. S. Nyberg I*, Acta Iranica 4, Tehran and Liège, 1975, pp. 89-156.

A. Christensen, *L’empire des Sasanides*, Copenhagen, 1907.

W. Eilers, *Iranische Beamtennamen in der keilschriftlichen Überlieferung I*, Leipzig, 1940.

Idem, “Iranisches Lehngut im arabischen Lexikon. Über einige Berufsnamen und Titel,” *IJ* 5, 1962, pp. 203-32.

R. N. Frye, “Some Early Iranian Titles,” *Oriens* 15, 1962, pp. 352-59.

Idem, *The History of Ancient Iran*, Munich, 1984, pp. 107, 218, 225, 295, 299, 306.

J. Harmatta, “Inscriptions de vaiselle de l’époque sassanide et post-sassanide,” *AAASH* 21/1-4, 1973, pp. 245-66.

D. Harnack, in F. Altheim, and R. Stiehl, eds., *Geschichte Asiens im Altertum*, Berlin, 1970, pp. 528-37.

W. B. Henning, “A Sassanian Silver Bowl from Georgia,” *BSOAS* 12, 1961, pp. 353-56.



- W. Hinz, *Altiranische Funde und Forschungen*, Berlin, 1969.
- G. Hoffmann, *Auszüge aus syrischen Akten persischer Märtyrer*, AKM 7.3, Leipzig, 1880.
- H. Humbach and P. O. Skjærvø, *The Sasanian Inscription of Paikuli III/1: Text and Translation*, III/2: *Commentary*, Wiesbaden, 1983.
- V. G. Lukonin in *Camb. Hist. Iran* III/2, 1983, pp. 736-37.
- A. Maricq, “Res Gestae Divi Saporis,” *Syria* 35, 1958, pp. 295-360, repr. in *Classica et Orientalia*, Paris, 1965, pp. 37-101.
- H. S. Nyberg, “Quelques inscriptions antiques découvertes récemment en Géorgie,” *Eranos* 54, 1946, pp. 228-43.
- A. Pagliaro, “Mediopersiano *bitaxš*, armeno *bdeašx*: [ho ophthalmòs tou basiléōs],” *RSO* 12, 1929, pp. 160-68.
- Idem, “Riflessi di etimologie iraniche nella tradizione storiografica greca,” *Rendiconti della Reale Accademia dei Lincei*, classe di scienze morali, storiche e filologiche, ser. 8, 9, 1954, pp. 133-53.
- F. Safar, “Ketābāt al-Ḥažr,” *Sumer* 18, 1962, pp. 21-64.
- O. Szemerényi, “Iranica V,” in *Monumentum H. S. Nyberg II*, *Acta Iranica* 5, Tehran and Liège, 1975, pp. 313-94.
- G. V. Tsereteli, “Èpigrafičeskie nakhodki v Mtskheta—drevneĭ stolitse Gruzii,” in *Vestnik drevneĭ istorii* 2 (24), 1948, pp. 49-57.