



DABĪRE, DABĪRĪ

DABĪRE, DABĪRĪ (Mid. Pers. *dibīrīh* “script”; Man. Mid. Pers. *Pahlawānīg dibīrī ud izwān* “the Parthian script and language”; cf. Boyce, *Reader*, p. 40; *dabīrī* and variants in Islamic sources [see below]; for the exceptional development of the suffix Mid. Pers. *-īh* into classical Pers. *-ih*, later *-e*, beside regular *-ī*, see Šādeqī, 1990), a term designating the “seven scripts” supposedly used in the Sasanian period (*Mēnōg ī xrad*, ed. Anklesaria, 27.23; *Aogəmadaēčā*, par. 92; Ebn Moqaffa’ apud Ebn al-Nadīm, ed. Tajaddod, pp. 15-16; Ḥamza Ešfahānī, p. 64). The names of these scripts are all known from the Islamic sources, but in Middle Persian only one of them, *dēn-dibīrīh*, is attested; the rest are *wiš/*wis(p)-dibīrīh*, *gaštag[-dibīrīh]*, **nēm-gaštag[-dibīrīh]*, **rāz-dibīrīh*, **nā-ma[g]-dibīrīh/frawarda[g]-dibīrīh*, and **hām/ram-dibīrīh* (cf. Henning, *Mitteliranisch*, p. 72 n. 1; Bahār, *Sabk-šenāsī* I, pp. 77-79).

The Middle Persian term *dēn-dibīrīh* (Mas’ūdī, *Tanbīh*, p. 91: *dīn dabīrih*; Ebn al-Nadīm, ed. Tajaddod, p. 15: *dīn dafīrīh*, Ḥamza Ešfahānī, p. 64: *dīn dafīrih*; ‘Askarī, pp. 181-82: *dīn dawīrī*), literally “religious script” (Markwart, *Ērānšahr*, par. 4; idem, *Provincial Capitals*, par. 4), was the script in which the *Avesta* was written (Ebn al-Nadīm, tr. Dodge, I, p. 24, where the word *westāq* “Avesta” is incorrectly translated “religious devotees”; cf. Ḥamza Ešfahānī, p. 64; ‘Askarī, pp. 181-82); it is called “Avestan script” by modern scholars. In the Zoroastrian tradition the invention of this script was attributed to Zoroaster himself (Markwart, *Ērānšahr*, par. 4; cf. Mas’ūdī, *Tanbīh*, pp. 91-92), but it has now been firmly established that it evolved from the Pahlavi script in the Sasanian period (see *avesta*). According to Mas’ūdī (*Tanbīh*, p. 91; *Morūj*, ed. Pellat, I, p.



270), there were sixty symbols for vowels and consonants, and some of these letters were “repeated,” by which he may have meant to imply that there were similarities between the Avestan script and the various Pahlavi scripts. The same author (*Tanbīh*, p. 91) added that some letters had become obsolete, perhaps a hint of variants or allographs of the Avestan characters. The Avestan script that survives includes fifty-three characters, but variants raise the number to fifty-eight (cf. *avestan language i*, table 2), close to the figure mentioned by Mas‘ūdī.

The second type was called in Islamic sources *wīš dabīrīh* (Ebn al-Nadīm, ed. Tajaddod, p. 15), *wīsf-dabīrih* (Ḥamza Eṣfahānī, p. 65), or **kuš(f) dabīrih* (for **guš(p) dabīrih*, written *ksn/kšt*; Mas‘ūdī, *Tanbīh* p. 92), derived from Middle Persian **wisp-dibīrīh* “comprehensive script” (cf. Mid. Pers. *wisp* “all, every”). The nature of this script is unknown; the descriptions in the Islamic sources are vague and often imaginative. For example, according to Ebn al-Nadīm, it comprised 365 characters, in which works relating to physiognomy, divination, gurgling of water, ringing of the ears, beckoning of the eyes, nodding, wrinkling, and so on were written; he added, however, that it did not exist in his time and that no Persian was acquainted with it. Mas‘ūdī described it as a script with 160 characters, in which the languages of the other nations (cf. Ḥamza Eṣfahānī, p. 64) and the sounds made by cattle, birds, and the like were rendered. It is improbable that a script with so many characters existed; it may have been a collection of signs used for certain notions.

The script probably known as **gašta(j)-dibīrih* (Ebn al-Nadīm, ed. Tajaddod, p. 15, Ebn al-Faḡīh, p. 243: *kaštaj*; Ḥamza Eṣfahānī, pp. 64-65: *kašta-dafīrih*; Ḥamza Eṣfahānī, apud Yāqūt, *Boldān* II, p. 887 s.v. Rēšahr: *jastaq*; Ebn Esfandiār, I, p. 72; *kaṭṭ-e kastaj*; Awlīā’-Allāh, p. 73: *gastaj*) had twenty-eight letters. It was used for recording contracts, registers(?), and land transactions. Seal inscriptions and inscriptions on garments, carpets, and coins were also written in these characters. Ḥamza Eṣfahānī translated the name of this script as *moḡayyara* “changed” but did not describe it; Yāqūt cited his report that in Rēšahr (Rēw-Ardašīr), in the district of Arrajān, books on medicine and astronomy were written in this script (cf. **nēm-gaštag*, below) and that scribes who used it were called *kašta-dafīrān* (Pahl. **gaštag-dibīrān*). Ebn al-Faḡīh mentioned three rock inscriptions in the *gaštag* script at Hamadān, each containing twenty lines. Ebn Esfandiār and Awlīā’-Allāh also mentioned a yellow copper tablet inscribed in *gastaj*, which was found in a green earthenware jar at the gate of Gorgān in the time of Māzyār (9th century c.e.).



In the light of these various descriptions, it may be concluded that *gaštāg* was used for inscriptions; it was almost certainly the cursive Pahlavi script used in official documents, including ostraca, papyri, seals, coins, and inscriptions of the late Sasanian and post-Sasanian periods, rather than the unconnected lapidary script used in early Sasanian documents. The Islamic authors were more acquainted with the former script, which continued in use during the early Islamic centuries.

**Nēm-gaštāg-dibīrīh* (Ebn al-Nadīm, ed. Tajaddod, p. 16: *nīm kaštāj*; Ḥamza Eṣfahānī, pp. 64-65: *nīm kašta-dafīrīh*), literally “half- **gaštāg-dibīrīh*,” was probably a variant of the preceding type. According to Ebn al-Nadīm, it also had twenty-eight characters, and books on medicine and philosophy were written in it. Ḥamza Eṣfahānī translated the name as *al-moḡayyar neṣfohā* “half *moḡayyar* script.”

**Rāz-dibīrīh* (Ebn al-Nadīm, ed. Tajaddod, p. 16: *rāz s-h-rīh*; Ḥamza Eṣfahānī, pp. 64-65: *rāz dafīrīh*), literally “script for secrets,” consisted, according to Ebn al-Nadīm, of forty characters representing vowels and consonants. It was the script for secret correspondence among kings. Ḥamza Eṣfahānī, too, defined it as a script used by kings for writing their secrets and for writing translations (*tarjama*). Ebn al-Nadīm mentioned another script called *rāz s-h-rīya* (i.e., *rāz s-h-rīh*), consisting of twenty-four characters, in which works on logic and philosophy were written (cf. Ḥamza Eṣfahānī’s statement apud Yāqūt, *Boldān* II, p. 887 s.v. Rēšahr); he also described another secret script for kings, *al-šāh* (sic) *dabīrīh* “royal script,” of which no example had been preserved in his time. As Ebn al-Nadīm considered the scripts of the Persians to be seven but gave nine names, *al-šāh dabīrīh* was probably only another name or a variant of *rāz dabīrīh* and *rāz s-h-rīh* in a corrupt form of the latter.

Nāmag-dibīrīh*/frawardag-dibīrīh* (Ebn al-Nadīm, ed. Tajaddod, p. 16: *nāma dabīrīh*; Ḥamza Eṣfahānī, pp. 64-65: *farwarda-dafīrīh*) “script for letters” was used in [correspondence i.](#), according to Ḥamza Eṣfahānī. It seems to have been a variant of the cursive script, specimens of which may be seen in letters written on parchment or papyrus.

**Hām-dibīrīh* (Ebn al-Nadīm, ed. Tajaddod, p. 16: *hām dabīrīh*; Ḥamza Eṣfahānī, pp. 64-65: *ram-dafīrīh*), “script of all” (or **ram-dibīrīh* “script of the people”), was a general script for use among all classes of people in the country. It seems to have been identical with the well-known Pahlavi script. Ḥamza Eṣfahānī added that this script had twenty-eight variants, each with a



particular name, but he mentioned only seven. The same seven names were also given by K̅vārazmī (p. 117-18; cf. Unvala, pp. 16-17): *dād-dafīrih* “script used for judicial decisions and cases,” *šahr-hamār-dafīrih* “script used for the accounts of the country” (cf. the inscription of Narseh at Paikuli: Mid. Pers. l. 16 [pad] *šahr-āmār dibīr*; Parth. l. 14 *pa’ šahr-ahmār dibīr* “scribe of the accounts of the country”; Humbach and Skjærvø, III/1, pp. 42-43, III/2, p. 45), *kadahamār-dafīrih* “script for the accounts of the royal court,” *ganj-hamār-dafīrih* “script for the accounts of the treasury” (cf. Bailey, *Zoroastrian Problems*, p. 230), *āhor-hamār-dafīrih* “script for the accounts of the royal stables” (cf. Mid. Pers. *āxwarr*, NPers. *ākor* “stable”), *ātaš-hamār-dafīrih* “script for the accounts of the fire temples,” and *ruwānagān(-hamār)-dafīrih* “script for the accounts of pious foundations” (cf. Christensen, *Iran Sass.*, p. 135).

Of the seven scripts discussed above *dēn-dabīrīh* is to be identified with the Avestan script and **hām/ram-dabīrīh* with Book Pahlavi. The others were probably only variants of the cursive Pahlavi script, each with a particular name according to its usage.

See also [DABĪR i](#).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abū Helāl Ḥasan ‘Askarī, *Ketāb al-forūq al-loḡawīya*, ed. Ḥ. Qodsī, I, Cairo, 1353/1934.

Awlīā’-Allāh Āmolī, *Tārīk-e Rūyān*, ed. M. Sotūda, Tehran, 1348 Š./1969.

Ḥamza Ešfahānī, *al-Tanbīh ‘alā ḥodūt al-tašḥīf*, ed. M.-Ḥ. Āl Yāsīn, Baghdad, 1387/1967.

H. Humbach and P. O. Skjærvø, *The Sassanian Inscription of Paikuli I-III/2*, Wiesbaden, 1978-83.



K. M. JamaspAsa, *Aogəmadaēčā. A Zoroastrian Liturgy*, Sb. der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften 397, Vienna, 1982.

Abū ‘Abd-Allāh Moḥammad K̄vārazmī, *Mafātīḥ al-‘olūm*, ed. G. van Vloten, Leiden, 1895.

M.-Ş. Kīā, “Gašta-dabīra,” *Irānkūda* 5/1, Tehran, 1334 Š./1955, pp. 57.

M.-J. Maškūr, “K̄atṭhā wa zabānhā-ye Īrān-e bāstān,” *Soḵan* 19/3, 1348 Š./1969, pp. 299-305.

‘A.-A. Şādeqī, “Dar bāra-ye koṭūṭ-e Īrānīān-e bāstān,” *Soḵan* 19/10, 1348 Š./1969, pp. 1037-47; 20/2, 1349 Š./1970, pp. 140-42.

Idem, “Taḥawwol-e pasvand-e ḥāşel-e maşdar az pahlavī be fārsī,” *Zabān-şenāsī* 7/1, 1369 Š./1990, pp. 81-88.

J. Unvala, “The Translation of an Extract from Mafātīḥ al ‘ulūm of al-Khwārazmī,” *Journal of the Cama Oriental Institute* 11, 1928, pp. 1-30.