



DARBAND EPIGRAPHY I. MIDDLE PERSIAN INSCRIPTIONS

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Pahlavi inscriptions of the mid-6th century CE are engraved on the defensive walls of the city of [Darband](#). The corpus includes 32 inscriptions cut on the northern city wall (22 inscriptions: nos. 1-13, 23-31), Narin-kala citadel (9 inscriptions: nos. 14-22), and on the Kejerli-kala fortress (1 inscription: no. 32). The Middle Persian inscriptions of Darband represent the northernmost extent in the spread of Pahlavi writing.

Prince Dmitrii Cantemir (1673-1723) was the first to pay attention to the ancient inscriptions of Darband. He headed Tsar Peter I's field chancellery during the emperor's Persian (Caspian) campaign (1722-23). At the end of August-beginning of September 1722, during the emperor's visit to Darband, the prince laid the foundations for the study of the epigraphy of Darband. He repaired thirteen medieval inscriptions, including two Pahlavi inscriptions (Cantemir, 1883, pp. 13-18, 20-21, 26; see also: Fraehn, 1828, no. 21; 1846, pp. 297-323), later numbered as no. 7 and no. 17. Several Middle Persian inscriptions (including nos. 1, 3, 8) were discovered by General Bartholomei in



the 1850s (Savel'ev, 1855, pp. 301, 322-23; Dorn, 1871, pp. 15-41; 1872, pp. 369-370; Gadjiev, 2002, pp. 45-47; see also: Khanykoff, 1862, p. 64; 1863, p. 8; Droin, 1898, pp. 8-10). [B. Dorn](#) undertook to read one of the inscriptions (see below, inscription no. 1) and took the penultimate word to be “fire-worshiper” (*aδurpâδan* “Feuervereher”; Dorn, 1872, p. 369). In 1909 Ya. Smirnov deciphered three of the Middle Persian inscriptions (nos. 4, 15 or 16, and 17) (Pakhomov, 1929, p. 10).

In 1928 thirteen early, unknown Pahlavi inscriptions (nos. 2, 5, 6, 9-15, 18-20) were discovered by E. Pakhomov and P. Spassky (Pakhomov, 1929, pp. 10-11). A year later E. Pakhomov published a detailed article with photographs and drawings of the inscriptions, their description and location, and discussed the problems of their dating, graphic character, and structure (Pakhomov, 1929, pp. 3-25). At the same time [H. S. Nyberg](#) published a short article on the translation and classification of the Darband inscriptions (Nyberg, 1929, pp. 26-32). In 1985, five Pahlavi inscriptions (no. 21-25) were found by S. Kasumova, M. Gadjiev, and A. Kudryavtsev (Kasumova, 1987, pp. 102-5; 1988, pp. 88-95). In 1996-97 and 2001 during the field works of the Darband Archeological Expedition (Institute of History, Archaeology, and Ethnography, Dagestan Center of the Russian Academy of Sciences), seven more Middle Persian inscriptions (nos. 26-32) were discovered (Gadjiev, 2000, pp. 116-29).

The Middle Persian inscriptions of Darband were studied by [W. B. Henning](#) (1958, p. 48), K. Trever (1959, p. 346-353), [V. G. Lukonin](#) (1969, p. 45, n. 23), Ph. Gignoux (1972, pp. 15-17, 21; 1988, p. 27), A. Kudryavtsev (1982, pp. 93-95, 168, notes 46, 48), and especially by G. Gropp (1975, pp. 317-31; 1977, pp. 1619-25), S. Kasumova (1979, pp. 113-126; 1988, pp. 88-95), and M. Gadjiev (2000, pp. 116-29; 2002, pp. 42-53). The collection of all currently known Middle Persian inscriptions of Darband (including historiography, translation, interpretation and typology) was published by Gadjiev and Kasumova (2006).

All the inscriptions were written in cursive script close to the Book Pahlavi script and have the vertical format (to be read top to bottom, left to right) that is typical of the Late Sasanian period, particularly for the reign of [Kosrow I](#) Anōšīravān (r. 531-79). They are commemorative inscriptions. The Pahlavi inscriptions of Darband comprise several groups.

Group 1. This is comprised of the inscriptions of Darius, on behalf of whom more than half of all known inscriptions were made. They were cut on the northern wall of the town and present four subgroups: (a) name (nos. 11, 26,



31: *Dariuš*); (b) name and title (nos. 7, 10, 24, 27-29: *Dariuš ī Ādurbādagān āmārgar* “*Dariuš, āmārgar* [chief fiscal officer] of Ādurbādagān”; Figure 1); (c) building data, name, and title (nos. 1, 2, 4-6, 25; for example: *az ēn ābarbar Dariuš ī Ādurbādagān āmārgar* “From this upwards *Dariuš, āmārgar* of Ādurbādagān [made]”; *ēn ud az ēn ābarbar Dariuš ī Ādurbādag[ā]n āmārgar* “This and from this upwards *Dariuš, āmārgar* of Ādurbādagān [made]” (no. 1, Figure 2); *pahnāy čahar ī Dariuš ī Ādurbādagān āmārgar* “Width four [cubits], *Dariuš, āmārgar* of Ādurbādagān”; (d) building data, year, name, and title (no. 3; see below). The study of the location of *Dariuš*’s inscriptions in the system of masonry shows that they were cut after the building of the northern city wall had been finished, and the dated inscription no. 3 fixes the final date of construction, not an intermediate stage of the building work (Gadjiev, 2000, pp. 126-27).

Group 2. These inscriptions, made on behalf of a particular person (the architect), fall into three subgroups: (a) *Mōšīg*’s inscriptions on the citadel wall (nos. 14 [Figure 3], 15, 17, 19, 20, 22: *Mōšīg kard* “*Mōšīg* made”); (b) *Ādurgušnasp*’s inscriptions on the citadel wall (nos. 16, 18 and unfinished 20: *Ādurgušnasp kard* “*Ādurgušnasp* made”); (c) *Rašn*’s inscription on the wall of Kejerli-kala fortress (no. 32: *Rašn ābar* “*Rašn* upwards [made].”

Group 3. These inscriptions contain only one word—a proper name (no. 12: *Narsakan*; no. 13: ...*ēnakan*).

Group 4. An inscription of “technical” content consists of the one word *ūp* [MPers. *āp, āb*] “water” (no. 23) on the northern wall of Darband near the early medieval plumbing of ceramic pipes.

Among the Pahlavi inscriptions of Darband, inscriptions no. 3 and no. 29 have special interest. Inscription no. 29 (*Dariuš ī Ādurbādagān āmārgar*; Figure 3) stands out with its orthographic particularities. Letters *d* (dāleth) and *r* (rēš) in all words have a form that is typical for many Middle Persian inscriptions and legends on Sasanian coins and gems but is not characteristic for the other Pahlavi inscriptions of Darband. This glyptic form makes it clear that the name in the inscription should be read as *drywš* (*Dariūš*; first suggested by Gropp, 1977, p. 1620), not *Barznīš*, as was accepted earlier (e.g., Nyberg, 1929, pp. 26-32). *Dariuš* was an important Sasanian official, head of financial department of Ādurbādagān region (*šahr*), who on behalf of the state and the king of kings (*šāhān šāh*) carried out the supreme efficient management, financing, and control of fortification work.



Inscription no. 3 (Figure 4) contains the date of construction of the northern wall of Darband: *ēn ud az ēn ābar sāl 37 Darius ī Ādurbādagān āmargar kard* “This and from this upwards, in the year of 37, Darius, āmargar of Ādurbādagān made.” Nyberg was first to suggest the reading as “year 700” of the [Arsacid era](#)/553 CE [correctly 453 CE—M.G.] (Nyberg, 1929, p. 29). Later, Gropp assumed that it was “year 700” of the Seleucid era, which yields the date 389 CE (1970, p. 173, 208; 1975, p. 316). But Pakhomov justly criticized Nyberg’s reading and offered another date—“year 37” of the reign of Kōsrow I, that is, 568 CE (Pakhomov, 1930, pp. 14-15). This reading was accepted by Henning, yet he considered “year 27” as another possible reading (1958, p. 48). Most scholars consider this and the other Darband inscriptions to belong to the 6th century (e.g., Trever, 1959, p. 350, 353, Artamonov, 1962, p. 137; Lukonin, 1969, p. 45, n. 23; 1983, p. 683; Gignoux, 1976, p. 304-305; Kasumova, 1979, pp. 123-24; 1987, pp. 94-95). Lukonin first suggested the reading of the date as “the third (*sidigar*) year” of the reign of Kōsrow I, that is, 515 (Lukonin, 1969, p. 45, n. 23). Later he read “year 17” (see Khan-Magomedov, 1979, p. 27; 2002, p. 62), and then he proposed two other versions, “year 9” or “year 18” (see Kudryavtsev, 1978, pp. 256-257, fn. 69; 1982, p. 94). Artamonov and Kasumova supported Pakhomov’s opinion. Direct inspection shows that inscription no. 3 contains no designations for figures “20” and “10” and makes reading such dates impossible. Reading “year 9” cannot be relevant as well. Finally, “the third year”—*ŠNT styk(l)* (*sāl sidigar/sidig*) cannot be considered as correct either, since the inscription contains no literal marking of such a date (Kasumova, 1979, p. 123, fn. 70).

Kudryavtsev drew scholars’ attention to the fact that “year 37” (all the more, “year 18” or “year 9”) might correspond to the long-lasting reigns of not only Kōsrow I (531-79) and [Kōsrow II](#) (590-628), but also to that of [Kawād I](#) (484-531). This means that the beginning of the Darband stone complex construction might have been started under Kawād’s rule, which corresponds to the data of some written sources ([Ebn al-Faqīh](#), [Ṭabari](#), *Darband-nāma*) (Kudryavtsev, 1978, pp. 256-57, fn. 72). During the reign of Kawād, particularly in the period from 508 to 526, when Iran was not at a war state with [Byzantium](#) and regained its control over the eastern Caucasus and Darband, significant fortifying activities were carried out in the region. Yet, the matter at issue is the construction of the long Ghilghilchay (*Ġilgičay/Gilgičay*) defensive wall, reliably identified with the “Apzut-Kawat long wall, [stretching] to the Alminon swamps and to the Sea,” as reported by Anania Širakac’i (Ananias of Shirak, 1992, V.18 [long recension], p. 57; [Moses](#)



[Khorenats'i](#), V.18, 1881, text, p. 27.9; tr., p. 37), which derived its name from that of the ruling Sasanian monarch (MPers. **Abzūd Kawād*, “Kawād increased [in glory]”; Eremyan, 1941, p. 35; Gadjiev, 2008, pp. 9-10; Gadjiev, forthcoming; cf. the coin inscription of Kawād I, *abzōn* “increase”: see [KAWĀD I ii. Coinage](#)).

Correlation of the given dates with the military and political situation in the Caucasus and the Near East in the 6th century shows that, among the suggestions concerning the date in inscription no. 3, “year 37” of *Ḳosrow I*’s reign proves to be the most acceptable one; that is, the northern city wall and the citadel were erected in 568-69 (Gadjiev and Kasumova, 2006, pp. 98-114; Gadjiev, 2008, pp. 1-15). The erection of the grandiose fortification complex in the Darband pass at the end of the 560s was directed against Iran’s new powerful political rival—the Turkic Khaganate/Khanate. The majority of the Arab and Persian authors of the 9th-10th centuries ([Balāḏori](#), [Ebn al-Faḡīh](#), [Mas’udi](#), [Eṣṭakrī](#), [Ebn Ḳordāḏbeh](#), Qodama, [Ebn Rosta](#), Moqaddasi, Ḥamza Esfahāni, and others) also ascribe the construction of the stone Darband defensive complex to *Ḳosrow I*. The Arabic Kufic inscription of 176/792, recently found near Darband, mentions *Kisrā* (Arabic form of *Ḳosrow*) as the builder of the Darband fortifications and corroborates the information of written sources (Gadjiev, Shikhsaidov, 2002, pp. 3-10). According to Mar’āši (15th century), Darband was erected by the governor of Darband, Narse b. Jamasp, by the order of *Ḳosrow I* (Sehir-eddin, 1850, p. 38).

See also: [DĀĠESTĀN](#); [EPIGRAPHY i](#).

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