



DĪVĀN I. THE TERM

i. THE TERM

Dīvān is a Persian loan-word in Arabic and was borrowed also at an earlier date into Armenian. It is attested in Zoroastrian Middle Persian in the spellings *dpyw'n* and *dyw'n*. It has long been recognized that the word must go back to some derivative of Old Persian *dipi-*, (inscription, document), itself borrowed, via Elamite, from Akkadian *ṭuppu* and ultimately from Sumerian *dub* (clay tablet). Compare also Persian *debīr* (scribe), Middle-Persian *dibīr*, from **dipī-var-*. Armenian *divan*, which occurs already in the translation of the Bible, could in theory represent an Arsacid Parthian **dēvān*, but such a form would be most difficult to explain, as it is hardly imaginable that *dipi-* should have become **dē-*. But the Armenian form could equally well be a later borrowing from Sasanian Middle-Persian *dīvān* (with *-ī-*), which (following Bailey) could continue an earlier Middle-Persian **diβi-vān*, from the adjective **dipi-vān-* (relating to documents) with contraction of *-iβi-* to *-ī-*. In this case, must one assume that the word was borrowed into Armenian after the Middle-Persian shift of post-vocalic *-p-* to *-b/β-* (i.e., not before the 3rd century) and, moreover, that the correct Middle-(and early New-)Persian form is *dīvān*, not **dēvān*. To be sure, there is an often quoted fanciful etymology (e.g., in Aṣma'ī, apud Jawāleqī, p. 70), according to which the Persians called the chancery *dīvān* because they considered the bureaucrats to be devils (*dēvān*), – a variant of this says that it was because they were crazed (*dēvāna*); either version seems to presuppose the pronunciation *dēvān*, but one need not attach much importance to this obviously facetious story. It does, however, seem that,



probably as a result of this sort of popular etymology, there was a secondary pronunciation *dēvān*, which still survives in Tājikī. (For the treatment of the Iranian vowels in Armenian loan-words see [ARMENIA AND IRAN iv](#)).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

(For the cited works not given in detail see “Short References.”) H.W. Bailey, in *BSOS* 7, 1933, pp. 76-77.

Horn, *Etymologie*, p. 119.

Hübschmann, *Persische Studien*, p. 60.

Idem, *Armenische Grammatik*, pp. 143-44.

Abū Manṣūr Jawāleqī, *Ketāb al-mo‘arrab men kalām al-‘ajamī*, ed. E. Sachau, Leipzig, 1867.

Nyberg, *Manual II* p. 64.