



## ĒR, ĒR MAZDĒSN

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**ĒR, ĒR MAZDĒSN** (Inscr. Mid. Pers. *ēr* [ʔly], plur. *ērān* [ʔl'n, ʔr'n]), an ethnonym, like Old Persian *ariya-* and Avestan *airya-*, meaning “Aryan” or “Iranian.” There are no sufficient reasons to distinguish sing. *ēr* semantically from plur. *ērān*, the ethnic reference of which is indisputable. The translation of Middle Persian inscription *ēr* as “noble” is therefore untenable (Gignoux, 1972, p. 18; Gnoli, 1986; Gignoux, 1990, p. 46). Middle Persian *ēr* may derive from an Old Iranian epenthetic form, such as Av. *airya-*; in the lexicon of the religious and political propaganda of the Sasanians other cases occur, possibly due to the influence of the Avestan tradition (Gnoli, 1989, pp. 148 ff.).

*Ēr* appears in Šāpūr’s inscription at the Ka’ba-ye Zardošt (ŠKZ, Mid. Pers. l. 24; Back, p. 334). In the Parthian text *ry* and *ry’n* are the forms corresponding to the Middle Persian ones. In the Greek text, besides the gen. plur. *Arianôn*, there is the sing. form *Arian*, which seems to represent, without translating it, an Iranian term (ŠKZ, Gk. l. 42; Back, p. 334), as it is the case with ethnonyms and titles: likewise, in Sasanian inscriptions, Greek *Arianôn éthnos* corresponds to Middle Persian *yr’nštr* and to Parthian *ry’nḥštr* “land of Eran.”

In this inscription and on some coins of Bahrām II (Lukonin, 1969, pp. 104, 177; 1979, pp. 39, 92 n. 4, 116), Middle Persian *ēr* precedes *mazdēsn* (*mzdysn*) or *māzdēsn* “Mazdean” (cf. Man. Mid. Pers. *m’zdys*, Pahl. *m’zdysn*, and Av. *māzdayasna-/ni-* [adj.] “belonging to the Mazda-worshippers,” and Av. *mazdayasna-* “Mazda-worshippers”; *AirWb.* 1160 and 1169), according to a formulaic use of Sasanian propaganda, which connected “Iranian” and “Mazdean” almost as if they were royal titles (the prince Narseh in Šāpūr’s



inscription and the sovereign Bahrām II on his coins). On Sasanian coins, however, *ēr* rarely occurs; the most common formula, in fact, omits *ʔly* in front of *mzdysn*, because its normal reference to the *Erān* (and *Anērān*) sovereigns made it unnecessary (Gnoli, 1989, p. 144).

The similarity of Pahlavi *ēr* (*ʔl*) to Pahlavi *ēr* (*ʔdl*) “down, below; low; under” (MacKenzie, 1971, p. 30), made possible by the lexical collisions caused by Pahlavi writing, suggested a false etymology giving the ethnic name a moral signification, “humble,” well suited to those who were subjects of the legitimate sovereigns, as we read in the *Letter of Tansar* (Boyce, 1968, p. 52; Gnoli, 1985, p. 331).

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