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Pahlavi Epistolary Formulae

Abstract: The paper focuses on the Pahlavi text dealing with the correct way to write letters published in: JAMASP-ASANA (ed.) 1913, 132–140. The text contains a series of formulae to be used in letters to various persons. The reading and interpretation of the formulae were translated differently by previous scholars. The key to the understanding of these formulae is the opposition of two terms—*xwadāy* and *bandag*—meaning the addressee and the sender of a letter. The constructions with an attribute compound and its synonym, and a determinative compound and its synonym following these two terms refer to the addressee and the sender respectively.

Key words: Pahlavi, Pahlavi literature, Pahlavi manual of writing letters

The short treatise *Abar nāmag-nibēsišnīh* (“On Letter-writing”)¹ is one of the most interesting texts written in Pahlavi; it contains standardized formulae of greeting, good wishes, and condolences. The very first sentences show how a person should be addressed:² *nūn nibēsihēd pad sazēd-nibištan (ī) nāmag <ī> ō kas kas xwadāyīgān ō ⁺pādixšāyān ud mēhān ud abarmānīgān hamē-pērōzgar ō kardārān hamē-farroxtar ō awēšān kē pad har āfrīn ārzānīg hēnd yazdān-pānag ud ⁺yazd^β-ayār ō az-iš-kēhān anōš ayād ayād[†] 1000 anōš ō ⁺bandagān ud az-iš-kēhān 1000 anōš ayād az anōš⁵ ayād ^{nyk} frāz dāšt ēstēd āzarmīgtom grāmīgtom ō pidar ayāb brādarān ayāb frazandān ayāb ō awēšān kē hāwand ī pid ud brād ud frazand hēnd.*—“Here (‘presently’) it is written how various *xwadāyīgān* should write letters. Rulers, nobility, and the well-born are to be addressed as ‘omnivictorious’, officials as

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¹ JAMASP-ASANA 1913, 132–140.

² The suggested transcription is based on Manichaean texts, with round brackets denoting suggested inserts, and the angular ones, the words resulting from the scribe’s mistakes. The crosses indicate the cases when specific forms have been reconstructed.

³ Sic!—cf. DP and Ta (see JAMASP-ASANA 1913, 132, note 9); other manuscripts suggest *šahr-ayār*. For the ways to read it, cf. the epithet *yazdān-ayār* in “The Admonition of the wise Ošnār”. MS MK, p. 146v, line 13.

⁴ The noun was repeated in MSS MK and JJ (JAMASP-ASANA 1913, 132, note 10).

⁵ MS Ta reads *anōš*; other manuscripts, *anōšag* (JAMASP-ASANA 1913, 132, note 11).

‘omniglorious’, those deserving every praise as ‘protected by gods’ and ‘supported by (lit. "a friend of") a god’, *ō az-iš-kēhān anōš ayād ayād 1000 anōš ō bandagān ud az-iš-kēhān 1000 anōš ayād az anōš ayād* ‘nyk is suggested (while writing). ‘The most respectable’ and ‘the dearest’ for father, or brothers, or sons, or else those who are like a father, a brother, or a son”.

Earlier researchers rendered the passage quoted in more than one way. The initial publisher of this text, Jamshed Tarapore,⁶ suggested the following translation: “Now it is written for fitting letter writing to different chieftains; <...> to those lesser ones blessed memory and 1000 blessings; to servants and underlings, 1000 blessed memories which immortal memory several (with ‘nyk read as *andak*.—*O. Ch.*) possess.” R. Zaehner suggested his own version:⁷ “Now I shall treat of the correct way to write letters to divers persons in high estate, <...>, to such subordinates as have alert and unforgetting minds, to servants whose faithful labours (with ‘nyk read as **anēk*.—*O. Ch.*) cannot be forgotten, and are therefore considered honourable and dear”. In this, Robert Zaehner read the ideogram *LK* (1000) repeated in the phrase twice as *ray*, “fast”, and believed that the words *ud az-iš-kēhān 1000 anōš ayād* following the noun *bandagān* were actually a mistake made by the scribe. Here is the translation by Sh. Shaked:⁸ “Now a letter is written in the correct manner to each one (of the following: to)⁹ lords; <...> to (one’s) servants and subordinates, whose character is of sweet memory, of whose sweetly-remembered [character] a little (with ‘nyk read as *andak*.—*O. Ch.*) is retained which is most honoured and which is dearest”. Shaked believed that the words *ō az-iš-kēhān anōš ayād 1000 anōš* were actually a repetition, followed by *ō bandagān ud azeš-kēhān [ī-š] rag* (for the ideogram *LK*.—*O. Ch.*) *anōš ayyād*, [*kē*] *az anōšag ayyād [rag?] andak* (for ‘nyk.—*O. Ch.*) *frāz dāšt ēstēd*, connecting them with [*ī*] *āzarmīg-tom ud grāmīg-tom*.

Readings of this passage that involve major corrections and translations that assume special deference towards servants can never be considered satisfactory. In order to understand it, we must pay attention to the epistolary formulae to be found in other Iranian sources, as they were all derived from the standards used in Aramaic chancellery. For instance, Sogdian letters obviously distinguish between the nouns *βay—βantak*¹⁰ which correspond to the Pahlavi opposition *xwadāy—bandag* in our passage. These two nouns

⁶ TARAPORE 1932, 15.

⁷ ZAEHNER 1937–1939, 97.

⁸ SHAKED 1979, 254.

⁹ Inserted by Sh. Shaked.

¹⁰ LIVSHITS 1962, 78, 104–105, et al.

indicate the relationship between the addressee and sender, as the former was addressed in Pahlavi as *xwadāy* (“My Lord”), while the latter was referred to as *bandag* (“servant”—cf. today’s “your humble servant”). This sentence of the reference book used the word *xwadāyīgān*, the plural of a substantivized adjective for a special sort of addressee, rulers, the nobility, the well-born, officials, i.e., “those deserving every praise”, as well as addressees “of lower standing” (Pahlavi *az-iš-kēhān*); all these homogeneous objects imply the presence of the preposition *ō*. The words following the noun “lower standing” should contain the formula used in regard to this specific sort of addressees, in just the same way as appropriate formulae follow other titles and ranks. The noun *bandagān* denoted the senders, and the “lowers” (*az-iš-kēhān*) following it indicated that those senders were below the addressees in social standing. In that case, the words *1000 anōš ayād az anōš ayād ’nyk* must have meant the “lower-status” sender, as, according to the suggested model, these were to be the words concluding a letter.

Now let us return to the first formula, the words to be used when addressing persons (*xwadāyīgān*) whose standing is lower (*az-iš-kēhān*) than that of the sender: *anōš ayād ayād 1000 anōš*. This formula contains the adjective *anōš* (“nice”, “happy”, lit. “immortal”) and the noun *ayād* (“memory”, “remembrance”) plus the same construction preceded by the numeral 1000. Together, they form two attributive composites following a model well known in Iranian languages: adjective + noun and noun + adjective, cf. Modern Persian *tangdil* vs. *diltang*, both having the same meaning, “saddened” (lit. “one whose heart is burdened”). These both Pahlavi composites (*anōš ayād* and *ayād anōš*) can be translated as “pleasantly remembered”, i.e., someone who is associated with pleasant memories. The second composite emphasized by the numeral could well mean “pleasantly remembered 1000 times (*ayād 1000 anōš*)”,¹¹ but, as it was addressed to someone of lower standing, one could assume that the numeral was inserted later with the second construction specifying and emphasizing the first one: someone of lower standing (should be addressed as) *anōš ayād* “pleasantly remembered”, (i.e.) *ayād anōš* “remembered pleasantly”. Once the Pahlavi sentence is understood in this way, it becomes logical and devoid of repetitions.

¹¹ The numeral 1000 was typically used in epistolary style as a hyperbole, cf. the Sogdian “old letters”: “ten million greetings (*LP βrywr ŠLM*)” (quoted after: LIVSHITS 1962, 81) and the Sogdian letters from the Mug: “To My Lord ... from his most worthless (lit. “millionth”, Sogdian *100 RYPW myk*) slave...” (ibid., 78–79, 126–127, et al.).

In following, we turn to the formula to be used by senders of lower standing in respect of themselves, *bandagān* ⁺¹² *az-iš-kēhān*. That expression, *1000 anōš ayād az anōš ayād 'nyk* with its two nouns preceded by the numeral 1000 formed yet another composite, but, as it was actually the sender's signature, the composite could not avoid denoting the subject. In Iranian languages, the agent was (and still is) denoted with a determinative composite, its first part being an adjective, the second the verbal stem of the present tense, cf. Modern Persian *xušnavis* "a calligrapher" (lit. "well writing"). In that case, the composite might well mean "remembering with pleasure" and, with the preceding numeral, "remembering with pleasure a thousand times". The question, however, is whether *ayād* could be viewed as the present-tense stem of the verb "to remember", as Pahlavi dictionaries suggest the infinitive *ayāsīdan* has the present-tense stem *ayās-*.¹³ However, a verb *ayādistan* derived from the noun (cf. *kāmistan* "to desire" vs. *kām* "wish") can be found in MS PB containing the text of "Judgements of the Spirit of Wisdom" used by Dastur Peshotan Sanjana,¹⁴ and its existence is further proved by the causative *ayādēnīdan*,¹⁵ as well as by its derivatives, *anayādīh* "forgetfulness",¹⁶ *ayādēnišn* "the process of remembering",¹⁷ and *ayādgār* "memoir".¹⁸ The words following the phrase "recalling with pleasure 1000 times", *az anōš ayād 'nyk*, should, as in the previous case, specify the expression: "(that is) (as it should be written.—*O. Ch.*) about someone remembering with pleasure", which means that no graphical or grammatical objections emerge to reading Pahlavi *az anōš ayādānīg* (cf. the adjectivized participle *arzānīg*, which is similar in structure).

The expression *1000 anōš ayād* can be found in several papyri; in five fragments it is preceded by the preposition *pad*; in other cases, the *pad* (*PWN*) seems to be preceded by a *L* ("lamed") which could be a consonant, a part of the ideogram *L* denoting the preposition of direction *ō*, but that reading should be considered merely as an assumption.¹⁹ According to D. Weber, the expression *1000 anōš ayād* introduced by the preposition *pad* should be

¹² The text contains the conjunction *ud*; Pahlavi manuscripts frequently used the copula instead of the sign employed for *izafet*.

¹³ MACKENZIE 1971, 15; NYBERG 1974, 41; BOYCE 1977, 20.

¹⁴ SANJANA 1895, 15, 21.

¹⁵ "The Book of the Righteous Wirāz", MS K 20, p. 3v, line 15.

¹⁶ "Memorial of Wuzurgmīhr", JAMASP-ASANA 1913, 86, line 9.

¹⁷ "On Letter-writing", JAMASP-ASANA 1913, 136, line 13.

¹⁸ "Memorial of Zarēr", JAMASP-ASANA 1913, 1, lines 5 et al.

¹⁹ WEBER 1984, 37-39.

associated with the addressee,²⁰ but that Pahlavi preposition could also precede the logical subject of an action,²¹ which makes it possible to understand this formula, when used in the present fragments, as a term used in regard to the sender, someone whose social standing is lower than that of the addressee.

Thus this Pahlavi manual starts in the following way: “Here (‘now’), it is explained how various addressees should be written to. Rulers, nobility, and well-born are ‘omnivictorious’, officials, ‘all-glorious’, those deserving every praise ‘protected by gods’ and ‘supported by God’, those of lower standing, ‘remembered with pleasure’, (i.e.,) pleasantly remembered.²² Senders having a lower social standing should (write) ‘remembering with pleasure 1000 times’ about the one who is remembering with pleasure. ‘Most respected’ and ‘dearest’ refer to a father, or brothers, or sons, or those who are like a father, a brother, or a son”.

Abbreviations

DP: MS from D.P. Sanjana’s collection.

JJ: MS from Jamshid Jamasp’s collection.

K 20: MS from the Royal Library in Copenhagen.

MK: MS by Mihraban Kayhosrau (A.D. 1322)

PB: MS from D.P. Sanjana’s collection.

Ta: MS from Tahmuras Anklesaria’s collection (A.D. 1887).

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²⁰ Ibid., 37.

²¹ Cf. *Ardaxšīr ... framūd kū ātaxš kunēd tā dūd pad awēšān aswārān dīdār bawēd*—“Ardashir ... ordered, ‘Burn the fire, so that its smoke could be seen by those riders’”, see: CHUNAKOVA (ed.) 1987, 53.

²² Or “remembered with pleasure 1000 times”.

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