

From the **Fihrist of al-Nadīm**

The first section of the first chapter of the book of Nadīm describes the languages of various peoples, their types of script and forms of calligraphy.¹ His remarks on Persian languages and writings are based on the authority of Jahiṣyārī and Ibn al-Muqaffā' (Dādveh), the famous Pārsī scribes, and also on the testimony of Emēd, the well-known Pārsī high priest.

Discourse about the Persian (types of) script

It is said that the first person who spoke Persian was Gayōmard², whom the Persians call Gil Šāh, that is 'King of Clay'³. He was their "Adam", father of mankind.⁴

It is said that the first person who wrote Persian was Bēvarasp⁵ son of wnd'sp⁶, known as Dahāk⁷, the master of Až-dahāk⁸.

It is said that Frēdōn ī Āspiyan⁹, when he divided the earth between his sons, Salm and Tūz and Eraj¹⁰, assigned a third of the inhabited land to each one of them as a share and wrote a deed for them. Emēd the high-priest told me that the deed is with the king of China, conveyed with the Persian treasures to him at the time of Yazdegird – it is God who knows.

It is said that the first person who wrote was Jim Šēd¹¹ son of Vīvanghān¹² who lived in Asān, a district of Tustar (Šūstar). According to the Persians when he ruled the world, and the Daēva¹³ and men yielded to the authority of him, and the Evil Spirit¹⁴ also submitted to him, whom he commanded to make manifest what had in his mind, and (the Evil) taught him writing.

¹ . *Kitāb al-Fihrist*, G. Flügel, I-II, Leipzig, 1871, 2-21.

The Fihrist of al-Nadīm, B. Dodge, I, New York, 6-40.

محمد بن اسحاق النديم، كتاب الفهرست، م.ر. تجدد، تهران، ۱۳۶۶، ۷-۳۶.

² . جيومرت (Av. gaya- marōtān-).

³ . الكل شاه ومعناه ملك الطين (corr. ger-šāh 'king of mountain').

⁴ . Gayōmard was the primal man ; and the first man was Mašya (Pers. mahlī/mard).

⁵ . بيوراسب < *baēvarə.spasan-.

⁶ . ونداسب < aurvaṭaspa- ? (Βανάδασπος) Ḥamza : ارون داسب < *vanataspa-.

Aurvaṭaspa was the « father » of Vīštāspa.

⁷ . ضحاک (Pers. dahāk, Av. dahāka-).

⁸ . اجدهاک (Pers. azdahāk, Av. aži dahāka- ; aži- 'dragon').

⁹ . افریدون بن اثفیان (Av. θraētaonəm āθβyānəm).

¹⁰ . سلم < sairima- ; طوج (طور) < *tūr(a)ca- ; ایرج < *airyaēca-.

¹¹ . جم الشید (Av. yima- xšaēta-).

¹² . اونجهان (Av. vīvaṅhant-).

¹³ . الجنّ.

¹⁴ . ابليس.

I have read this in the handwriting of Jahiṣyārī in his Book of Vizīrs¹⁵ that: Before the reign of Kay Vištāsp¹⁶ son of Luhrāsp¹⁷ there were few books and epistles, and people could not expound their discourses and express their intentions in clear words.

One of the sayings of Jim Šēd preserved (in memories) and recorded (in books): From Jim Šēd son of Vīvanghān to Ādurbād¹⁸, I order you to run the seven continents. Carry out this (order), and your policy should be that which I have ordered for you!

From those (sayings) of Frēdōn son of Āspiyān Purgāv, to ...¹⁹: I have bestowed on you a land²⁰ in Dumbāvand.²¹ Receive this and make a throne of silver gilded with gold!

From those (sayings recorded, there is this): From Kay Kayus²² son of Kay Kavād²³ to Rustam: I have exempted you from the bondage of servitude²⁴ and made you the ruler of Sagestān²⁵. Do not bond anyone to servitude, and rule Sagestān as I have ordered you!”

When Vištāsp became ruler (<of the Aryan lands>), writing was used more extensively. Zardušt son of Spitam²⁶, master of the religious law of the Magi, appeared, and revealed his wonderful book in all languages. And those who began to learn writing and scribing and became well skilled increased.

‘Abad-Allāh ibn al-Muqaffa’ said thus: “The languages of the Persians are the Pahlavīg, the Darīg, the Pārsīg, the Xūzīg, and the Sūrāyīg (Syriac).²⁷

The Pahlavīg (Parthian) is related to Pahlav (Parthia)²⁸, the name which applies to five region: Spāhān, Ray, Ahmadān, Māh ī Nihāvand, and Āḍarbāyagān.²⁹

¹⁵ . محمد بن عبدوس الجهشياري في كتاب الوزراء .

¹⁶ . (guštāsp/ bištāsp, Av. vīštāspa-). بشتاسب / كشتاسب .

¹⁷ . لهراسب (Av. aurvaṣpa-).

¹⁸ . (؟ ادرياذ اني) ادرياذاني .

¹⁹ . Manuščihr ?

²⁰ . Pedīšx^vār?

²¹ . اني قد حيوتك ببر معه (/ حيوتك ببرمعة) دباوند .

²² . (Av. kavi- usan-/ usaḍan-). كيقاوس .

²³ . (Av. kavi- kavāta-). كيقباذ .

²⁴ . العبودية ≈ Syr. ܒܢܢܘܬܝܬܐ ≈ Pers. bannagīh ‘bondage ; servitude ; hierodulic status’.

²⁵ . سجستان (OPers. saka-).

²⁶ . زرادشت بن اسپتمان (Pers. zardušt ī spitāmān, Av. zaraθuštrō spitāmaō

‘Zaraθuštra of the family Spitāma’).

²⁷ . الفهلوية والدرية والفارسية والخوزية والسريانية .

²⁸ . فهله (OPers. parθava-).

The Darīg was the language of the cities of “Madā’in” (Tēsifōn). It was spoken by those who were at the king's court, and its name refers to the presence at the court.³⁰ Among the languages of the people of X^varāsān (‘orient’) and the East the language of the people of Baxl (Bactria) dominates it.

The Pārsīg³¹ is the language spoken by the priests (mubed), scholars (hērbed)³², and their like; it is the language of the people of Pārs (Persis).

The Xūzīg³³ is the language spoken by the kings and nobles in privacy, at the time of play and entertainment, and with their entourage.

The Syriac³⁴ is the language of the people of “Sawād”³⁵; and they wrote epistles in one type of language, the Persian Syriac.”

Ibn al-Muqaffa‘ also said that: “The Persians had seven types of handwriting:

One of them is the script for religion called Dēn-dibīrīh³⁶ with which they write the Abēstāg³⁷, and this is an example of it.³⁸

Another script is called Vis-dibīrīh³⁹. It has 365 letters, and is used to write physiognomy, divination, purling of water, ringing in the ears, signals with the eyes, nodding, winking, and the like. [This script has not fallen into the hand of anyone, so that none of the children of Persia write with it today. I asked Emēd the high-priest about it. He said: Yea, it is used for “transcription”, as there are in Arabic script transcriptions⁴⁰.]

Another script is called Gaštag⁴¹. It has 28 letters, and is used to write contracts, advice notebooks⁴², and land transactions. The rings in Persia are engraved with this script, and also embroidery on garments

²⁹ . اصفهان والرى وهمدان وماه نهاوند واذريجان .

³⁰ . Pers. dar ‘door ; court’, darīg ‘of the court; courtier, court dignitary’.

³¹ . Pers. pārs ‘the province of Persis ; Persia’, mardōm ī pārs (Arab. اهل فارس), pārsīg ‘Persian’.

³² . الموأبدة والعماء .

³³ . Pers. xūz/ hūz ‘Elam, Susiana’ (OPers. hūja-, hūvja-), xūzīg ‘Elamite, Susian’ (OPers. hūjiya-, hūvjīya, Armen. xuzik).

³⁴ . السريانيه (ܣܘܪܝܝܐ).

³⁵ . السواد here corresponds to Sūrestān (cf. X^vārazmī).

³⁶ . دين دفريه .

³⁷ . الوستاق .

³⁸ . The example is missing.

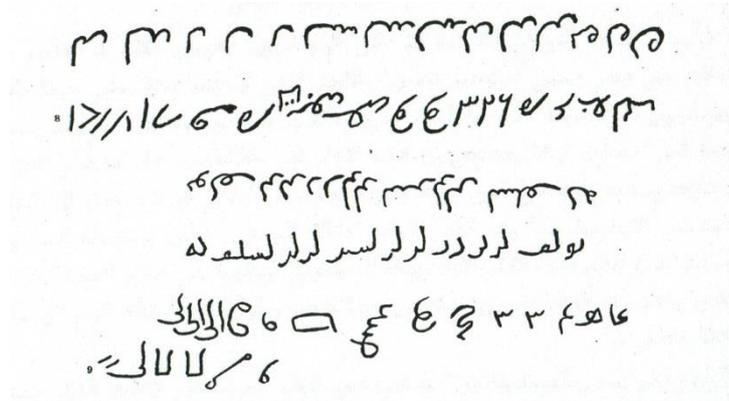
³⁹ . ويش دفريه (Av. vispa- ≈ OPers. visa-).

⁴⁰ . Arab. الترجمة ‘translation ; interpretation ; enigma’.

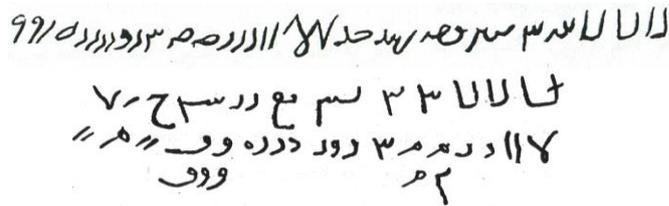
⁴¹ . الكشج / الكشج (≈ vaštag).

⁴² . المورية .

and rugs, and dies for gold coins and silver coins. The following is an example of it.



Another script is called Nēm-gaštag⁴³. It has 28 letters, and is used to write on medicine and philosophy. The following is an example of it.



Another script is called Šāh-dibīrīh⁴⁴. It was used by the Persian kings to communicate between themselves, keeping aloof from the vulgar. They prevented the other people of the kingdom from using it, lest some other than a king might get informed of the secrets of kings. It has not been preserved for us.

The script for writing epistles (treatises)⁴⁵ is just as the tongue speaks, without dots. Some of (words) are written in the first Syriac language (Aramaic)⁴⁶ spoken by the people of Babylon, but are read in Pārsīg (Persian).⁴⁷ It has 33 letters, and it is called both Nāmag-dibīrīh⁴⁸ and Hām-dibīrīh⁴⁹. It is used by all classes of the kingdom, except the kings only. The following is an example of it.

⁴³ . نيم گاشج / نيم گاشج (≈ nēm-vaštag).

⁴⁴ . الشاه دبيرييه .

⁴⁵ . كتابة الرسائل .

⁴⁶ . لغة السريانية الاولى .

⁴⁷ . According to Išō‘dād of Marv (9th century), the Pārsīg is “the most difficult (language), because it is thought and written in Mesenian (مسنين), and is read in Persian.” *Commentaire d’Išō‘dad de Merv sur l’Ancien Testament*. I. Genèse, I.-M. Vosté & C. Van den Eynde, Leuven, 1950, 6.

⁴⁸ . نامه دبيرييه .

⁴⁹ . هام دبيرييه .

موسس سدر
موسس سدر

Another script is called Rāz-dibīrīh⁵⁰. It was used by the kings to write secrets and transmit them to any other nation they will. It has 40 letters and sounds, with a definite form for each letter and sound (/ consonant and vowel). There is nothing of the Nabataean language (/ no Arameogram) in it. The following is an example of it.⁵¹

They have another script, called Rāy-dibīrīh⁵², with which they write on logic and philosophy. It has 24 letters, and also dots. It has not been preserved for us.

They have a kind of spelling which they call *uzvārišn*⁵³, with which they write characters connected as well as unconnected, and it consists of about a thousand words (which are put together), in order to distinguish those which are similar. For example, if somebody intends to write *gōšt*, which is “meat” (اللحم) in Arabic, he writes BSR⁵⁴, but reads it *gōšt*, according to this example: 

And if somebody intends to write *nān*, which is “bread” (الخبز) in Arabic, he writes LHM⁵⁵, but read it *nān*, according to this example:



And in this manner they treat all things that they intend to write, except those things which do not require such a substitution, being written just as pronounced.”

...

Discourse about the Manichaean script

The Manichaean script is derived from Persian and Syriac. It is derived by Mani whose religious doctrine is a combination of Mazdeism (المجوسية) and Christianity. Its letters are more numerous than the Arabic letters. Their Scriptures (اناجيل) and law books are written with this script. The people of Transoxiana and Samarkand write the religious books with this script, and thus it is called the Script of Religion.

⁵⁰ .راز سهريه/ زار شهريه .

⁵¹ . The example is missing.

⁵² .راس سهريه/ راس شهريه .

⁵³ .زوارشن .

⁵⁴ . [BSR^{Y'}] (Aram. bisrā) .

⁵⁵ . [LHM'] (Aram. lhmā) .

Discourse about sharpening pens

Nations are different in the manner of sharpening their pens. ...

The Persians fringe the nib of the pen; the scribe frays it either against the floor or with his teeth, so as to write more elegantly. Sometimes they write with the lower point of an unsharpened cane, and call this reed *xāma*⁵⁸. The ...⁵⁹ which are the books of the religion⁶⁰, the *siyāg* (السياق), etc., are written with it. ...

Discourse about varieties of leaves⁶¹

... The Persians used to write on the hides of buffaloes, cows, and sheep. ...

⁵⁸ .خاما .

⁵⁹ .هماه دنياب .

⁶⁰ .كتب الديانة .

⁶¹ .الورق (Pers. varg).