

## Half-cursive Writing

### *nēmvaštag-dibīrīh*

▪ *Nēmvaštag-dibīrīh* is one of the different types of writing used by the Persian scribe class to write treatises on astronomy, medicine, and philosophy, etc. –and not the Avesta and its Zand. The word *nēmvaštag-dibīrīh* means, according to Ḥamza, ‘half-changed handwriting’<sup>1</sup>. According to Dādveh (quoted by al-Nadīm) this form of writing, called *nēmvaštag* (Arab. نيم كستج < \**nēm-gaštag*), had twenty-eight letters and was used for medicine and philosophy.<sup>2</sup>

Staxrī (10<sup>th</sup> century A.D.), in his *Ways of Countries*, has an instructive passage about a centre in Persis for handing down of the Perso-Aryan traditional lore. This fortress of writings belonged to the royal branch of the transmission of Aryan learning. The scribes of this centre wrote, in cursive or half-cursive scripts, books on history, astronomy, medicine, philosophy, etc.; they were also charged with keeping the monuments and manuscripts of other sites like a mountain in the district of Šābūr. That centre and this mountain were inaccessible to the Arab-Muslim invaders for a while, and afforded an asylum to the Aryan scribes. However when Yāqūt passed the district of Arragān, the Aryan scribes of Arragān and their works were like a tale of old in the mouth of the people.

Staxrī: “The Gypsum Fortress<sup>3</sup> is situated in the district of Arragān, where there are Zoroastrians and in which the memorials of the Persians and their acts<sup>4</sup> are studied. This fortress is extremely inaccessible.”<sup>5</sup> In another passage he gives some further information: “In the district of Šābūr there is a mountain in which are drawn the portraits of all the famous kings and margraves of Ērānšahr, as well as all the eminent high priests of Fires<sup>6</sup> and great chief Magians, and so on. Their

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<sup>1</sup> . «ومعنى نيم كشته دفيره الكتابة المغيرة نصفها.» كتاب التنبيه على حدوث التصحيف.

<sup>2</sup> . كتاب الفهرست، گ. فلوجل، ۱۸۷۱، ۱۳.

<sup>3</sup> rendering Pers. *diz ī gac*. قلعة الجص .

<sup>4</sup> lit. ‘days’ rendering Pers. *kārnāmag*. أيام .

<sup>5</sup> . « قلعة الجص بناحية ارجان فيها مجوس آياذكارات الفرس وإيامهم تتدارس فيها وهي منبوعة جداً.» المسالك

الممالك، ليدن، ۱۸۸۹، ۱۱۸.

Cf. also Ibn Ḥauqal :

«يسكنه المجوس باياذكارات الفرس وإيامهم يتدارسون فيها علومهم وحي منبوعه رفيعه.» صورة بلاد عراق العجم من

كتاب المسالك والممالك، لابن حوقل، ليدن، ۱۸۲۲، ۲۸

<sup>6</sup> lit. ‘preservers of fire-temples’ rendering Pers. *āsrōnān*. سدنة النيران .

portraits, acts and stories are arranged in chests; and those who live in a locality in the district of Arragān, called the Gypsum Fortress, are charged with preserving them.”<sup>7</sup>

Yāqūt (13<sup>th</sup> century A.D.), in his *Geographical Dictionray*, has preserved this information given by Ḥamza that: Rēšahr, an abbreviated form of Rēv-Ardašēr is a small canton in the district of Arragān. At the time of the Persians, calligraphers (*vaštāg-dibīrān* ‘those versed in lithography and cursive writing’) lived there. They wrote in cursive script. This style of writing was used to write the books on Medicine, Astronomy, and Philosophy. Nowadays there is no one who could write in Persian or in Arabic.<sup>8</sup>

▪ The excavation (in 1904-5 A.D.) of the ruins of Bulayīq, a Christian monastery near the hamlet Bulayīq (China), yielded remains of Christian manuscripts in Pārsīg (“Pahlavi”) and Sogdian, and among other manuscripts the Pārsīg fragments of the Psalms. These fragments are written in a script between the script of the inscriptions (*vaštāgdibīrīh*) and the script of the books (*nibēgdibīrīh*), that is, a half-cursive script. In the Pārsīg version we find arameograms as well as a few Syriac words. The direction of writing is right to left.

The table below shows letters in three forms: unconnected, connected on right, connected on left.

### Table

From left to right: unconnected; connected on right; connected on left; transliteration

د د د

<sup>7</sup> «بناحية سابور جبل قد صوّر فيه صوّر كل ملك و كل مرزبان معروف للعجم وكل مذكور من سدنة النيران وعظيم من موبد و غيره وتتابع صورها ولاء وایامهم وقصصهم فی ادراج وقد حُصّ بحفظ ذلك قوم سكان بموضع بناحية ارجان يعرف بمحصن الحص.» ١٥٠.

“From this information we learn that in one of the castles of Fārs down to the tenth century there were preserved manuscripts written probably in the Pahlavi language containing narratives from Persian history and illustrated with, portraits after the style of the Sasanian reliefs to be found in the rocks in the district of Šabūr.” M. Inostranzev, *Iranian Influence on Moslem Literature*, Bombay, 1918, 20.

<sup>8</sup> «ريشهر: قال حمزة: هو مختصر من ربوآردشير: وهي ناحية من كورة أرجان كان ينزلها في الفرس كشته دفيان، وهم كتاب كتابة الجسوق، وهي الكتابة التي كان يُكتب بها كتب الطب والنجوم والفلسفة، وليس بما اليوم أحد يكتب بالفارسية ولا بالعربية.» ياقوت الحموي، معجم البلدان، المجلد الثالث، بيروت، ١٣٩٧ / ١٩٧٧، ١١٢. نيز نك. معجم البلدان، ع. منزوي، دو، تهران، ١٣٨٣، ٥٩٤.

ر / ل	ر		b
ل	ل	ل	g
و / و	و		d
ه	ه		h
ا	ا		w
ز	ز	ز	z
ح	ح / ح	ح	h
ي	ي / ي	ي	y/j
ع / و	ع		k
د / ط	ط	د	l
م	م	م	m
ن / ن	ن / ن		n
س	س	س	s
ا	ا		,
پ	پ		p
ق / ق	ق / ق		ş/c
ا	ا		r
ش	ش	ش	š
ت	ت		t

Half-cursive script has its proper numbers; the direction of numbers also is right to left. Here is the table of basic letters of which other numbers are built up:

1	ا
2	ب
3	ب
4	ب

5	س
6	س
7	سس
8	سس
9	سس
10	س
20	د
100	و
1000	ط

▪ The Pārsīg text of the “Cross of Harāt”, found a few years ago and brought by antique dealers to Europe, has been written in a script similar to the Pārsīg Pslater.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> . Ph. Gignoux, “Une croix de procession de Hérat inscrite en pehlevi”, *Le Muséon*, 114/3-4, 2001, 291-304.