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NOTES ON THE PERSIAN WORDS IN THE BOOK OF ESTHER

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UPON reading the Book of Esther we are struck by the presence of Persian loan words and proper names. We are safe in saying that the etymological meaning of many is rather apparent, while in the case of others, we may etymologize and yet during our investigation feel that we are on uncertain ground. The task is especially difficult in the case of proper names, since in most instances we do not know of any other characters bearing these appellatives. Now the fact that we do not find these names in Persian literature, or on the monuments, does not justify us in lightly assuming that the author of the Book of Esther simply coined them in order to give his narrative a Persian atmosphere. It is also noteworthy that we have no means of knowing how much allowance to make for the corruptions that may have taken place in the pronunciation or writing of loan words or foreign names by the Hebrews. Naturally the subjective element will prevail in all etymologies, and most of all is this true, when we have no tangible basis of comparison. Our interest in philology, however, has led us to make an honest and impartial attempt to study the Persian words in the Book of Esther.

Scheftelowitz's dissertation, *Arisches im Alten Testament*, is well known, and we do not hold his work in light esteem. We believe, however, that he has by no means made the final contribution to the subject. Justi's *Iranisches Namenbuch* is valuable, and for the literature on the matter and the various individual words we refer the reader to Paton's *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Esther*. Although a great

deal has been written on this subject, we feel justified in once more opening the question of some of the Iranian words in the Book of Esther.

11, **𐎧𐎠𐎧𐎡𐎴**.

Old Persian *xšayāršan*, *xšaya* + *aršan*.

Avestan and old Persian *aršan*, 'man, male, hero.'

Av. and OP. *xšaya*, 'ruler, prince, king'; cf. Sanskrit *kṣi*, 'to rule,' *kṣaya*, 'dominion.'

Xšayāršan, therefore, means 'the chief of rulers.' In this connexion cf. Skt. *ksayādvīra*, 'ruling men'; Skt. *rājarṣabha*, *rāja* + *rṣabha*; *rṣabha* means 'bull, male, chief'; *rājarṣabha*, accordingly, means 'the chief of kings.'

The loss of the final *n* in *xšayāršan* is facilitated by the fact that the nominative singular is *xšayāršā*.

11, **𐎧𐎠𐎧** means India, for which the Sanskrit is *Sindhu*. This appears in Old Persian as *hiⁿdav* and in Avestan as *hindav*, *həndav*; we also meet Av. *us. həndava*, 'situated beyond India.' The form *həndav* is secondary; *i* before a *nasal* plus a *consonant* frequently becomes *ə*; cf. Reichelt, *Avestisches Elementarbuch*, 131, 2. The *ə* is an obscure sound and consequently is dark rather than light; that explains the **י** in Hebrew, which used *həndav* as the basis of **יִיִן**; *nd* by assimilation became *dd*, **י**.

The nominative singular of *-au* nouns ends in *-uš*, the accusative in *-um*, and the instrumental in *-u*; final **י**, therefore, accurately represents the class of nouns to which *həndav* belongs.

12, **𐎧𐎠𐎧**.

Av. *vas*, 'to wish, desire'; past participle *ušta*; the feminine of the past participle is *uštā*; with the feminine ending *ī* instead of *ā* we have *uštī*, which is represented letter for letter by **וִשְׁתִּי**. In other words she was 'the desired one, the beloved.' We must remember, however, that, with the exception of **י** 'and', a Hebrew word cannot begin with a vowel letter. For this reason the original pronunciation was lost, and the *pathah* crept in. Since we can explain the form as a past participle in Avestan, it hardly seems wise to make it modern Persian *vāštī*, 'beauty,' nor to consider the name as a corruption of Avestan *vahišta*, *-ā*, 'the best.'

For initial -י — ū-, cf. **יְשׁוּעָה** — Ostanes, Sayce & Cowley, *A. P. A.*, F line 13; **יְשׁוּעָה** — *Orophius*, Sachau, *A. P. O.*, plate 59, no. 10.

1 10, **יְשׁוּעָה**.

For the solution of this name I am indebted to Professor James A. Montgomery of the University of Pennsylvania, who takes it to be a good Semitic word from the root **יָשַׁע**; the Aramaic Haphal (passive) participle is **יְשׁוּעָה**, 'trusty, eunuch.' The Hebrew took this word as a basis, and treating it as a quadriliteral, put it into the form of a Pual participle, **יְשׁוּעָה**. The word, therefore, means 'eunuch.'

1 10, **בִּזְוָה**.

Av. *biš*, 'twice'; Av. *bižvat*, 'twice' (Latin *bis*); from the latter Avestan word we get *biž*. In Avestan we also find *bi-zangre*, 'biped'; by wrong division we have *biz*. *Dā* is the root 'to give.' The spirant *z* or *ž* would tend to make *d* a spirant; therefore **ב** without the *dagesh*.

biž-dā, **בִּזְוָה**, accordingly, means 'a double gift' or 'giving double.'

1 10, **תְּרִבּוּנָה**.

Scheftelowitz suggests Av. *kahrpuna*, the name of some demoniac animal. But since **כ** has no *dagesh*, it is not likely that *p* is represented by **כ**. We prefer the following: Av. *kaurva*, 'bald, without hair'; in compounds it occurs as *kaurvō-*; Av. *nar*, 'man,' in the nominative singular is *nā*. *kaurvō-nā*; the Hebrew accent falls on the last syllable, which would reduce *au* to *ä*.

תְּרִבּוּנָה, 'the bald man'; cf. *Calvus*, *Calvinus*.

1 10, **בִּגְוָה**.

Old Persian *baga*, Avestan *baya*, 'lord, God';

baga + dā, 'the gift of God'; cf. *Theodotus*, *Theodore*. *Justi* agrees with this etymology.

But this is also possible: Av. *baga*, *baya*, 'lot, portion,' especially 'good fortune';

baga + dā, 'giving good luck'; cf. *Eutyches*, *Fortunatus*; Modern German, *Glück*.

1 10, יָנַר.

Old Persian *Ja^atar*, Av. *jantar*, 'the smiter, the slayer'; cf. middle Persian *žatār*.

יָנַר, 'the smiter, the slayer.'

1 14, כַּרְשָׁן.

Av. *karš*, 'to draw a furrow, to plough'; Av. *karša*, 'furrow'; Av. *nar*, 'man' in the nominative singular is *nā*.

כַּרְשָׁן stands for *karš(a) + nā* and means 'the ploughman.'

1 14, שֵׁנָר.

At first sight one thinks of Avestan *xšaθra*, but this necessitates the loss of initial *x*; this would be quite possible, but in יָנַרְשָׁן the *x* is retained by the introduction of the prothetic and anaptyctic vowels. We should expect to find the same phenomenon here.

Let us consider the following: *šay*, 'to dwell'; Av. *šōiθra*, meaning in the Gāthās 'region, district' and in the later Avestan 'dwelling place.' שֵׁנָר has the same Ablaut as we see in *šay*.

According to this etymology שֵׁנָר might mean 'the dweller'; perhaps it had the same connotation as the Modern German *Landsmann*, 'one who comes from the same country or even the same region or district.'

1 14, מָרְסָן.

Scheftelowitz, p. 58, says: "Eranisches š wird im Hebräischen und Aramäischen nie zu *s*." On the same page, however, he notes that in late Assyrian and Babylonian *s* and *š* were confused. In Pāli and Prākṛit Sanskrit *ç*, *ś*, and *s* all became *s*. So Iranian *š* here became *ס*. Cf. Av. *marša-van*, the name of a demon, meaning 'causing forgetfulness.' The name is written as one word, but the division is indicated above in order to show the component parts.

מָרְסָן, accordingly, appears to be *marša*, 'the forgetful one.'

1 14, מָרְסָנָר.

This seems to be the same name as the preceding; Justi also compares it with מָרְסָן.

Av. *marša + nar*, 'man'; nominative singular, *maršanā*.

The name seems to mean 'the forgetful man.'

1 14, מַגָּוּ.

In verse 18 this name is spelled מַגָּוּ.

Scheftelowitz cites Sanskrit *mumucāna*, 'cloud'; this, however, is found only in the Sanskrit lexicographers.

We would suggest the following line of development: Old Persian *magav*, 'Magian'; late Avestan *moγu*, 'Magian'; in the Gāthās *magavan*, 'belonging to the Magians' is found.

Take the form *magavan*; under the influence of a word like *moγu*, with the diphthong in the first syllable, we could have metathesis of the *a* and the *au*; the result would be *maugān*. With reduplication we would have *memaugān*; if the reduplication represents emphasis, the word means 'a thorough Magian, a real Magian.'

We may, accordingly, suppose that מַגָּוּ was the 'Magian.'

1 20, מַגָּוּ.

Zinkel, *Untersuchungen über den Prediger*, 1792 (cited by McNeile, *Eccles.* p. 42) suggested the origin of this word from φθέγμα. This is repeated independently by Torrey, *Ezra Studies*, p. 177. This derivation appears improbable. Lagarde in his *Armenische Studien*, 1825, also cites Greek φθέγμα. He, however, in addition quotes (*l. c.*) Armenian *paigam*, 'word'; Persian *paigām*, *paigām*. By way of comparison with the Hebrew, Gesenius-Buhl gives Biblical Aramaic מַגָּוּ Judeo-Aramaic מַגָּוּ; Syriac مَغَاوَة.

Evidently the word was widely used in the various languages; it is apparent that it is cognate with the Sanskrit *prati-gam*, 'to go towards, go to meet', Avestan and Old Persian *paiti-gam*, 'going towards, turning one's self towards, directing one's self.' When we direct ourselves toward a person, we address him or direct the word toward him. Cf. the Modern Spanish *dirigirse*, 'to direct one's self,' *i. e.* 'to write to, address.' An analogy is also found in the English 'direction' in the sense of 'an order.'

Bartholomae in his *Altiranisches Wörterbuch* does not cite the meaning 'to speak,' nor does he record Av. *paiti-gāma* which Scheftelowitz so confidently quotes.

The Aramaic מַגָּוּ must go back to a noun **paiti-gāma* which meant 'word, address, communication' and probably

arrived at such a signification through the line of development suggested above.

When the king addresses the people, he issues a *decree*; that is what the word appears to mean.

2 3, מִן־הַ

Cf. *H-yias*, an officer of Xerxes (Herodotus, IX, 33); in the later Avestan we meet *hugav*, the name of a believer, signifying 'having beautiful cows.' This is the derivation given by Scheftolowitz.

This etymology, however, is not conclusive; it is difficult to reconcile *u* with *ē* and *av* with *ē*.

We might suggest the following as more plausible: Avestan *haēk*, 'to sprinkle'; Av. *haēcat*, 'sprinkling.' This would make מִן־הַ signify the 'sprinkler.'

3 1, מְתַן־הַ

Avestan *hama*, 'equal'; Av. *dātar*, 'the giver,' in the nominative singular is *dātā*.

The name seems to mean 'the equal giver.'

3 14, מְתַן־הַ Cf. 8 13.

With this word let us compare Biblical Aramaic מְתַן־הַ, Judeo-Aramaic מְתַן־הַ, Syriac مَتْنِ. Lagarde in *Armenische Studien*, 1838, defines *patcên* as '*copia della lettera, dell' editto.*' This is the meaning that we are trying to establish for מְתַן־הַ.

According to Bartholomae, Av. *paiti-sayhəm* is an absolutivum signifying '*contradicens*'; Av. *sqh*, is defined as '*pronuntiare*'; Av. *sqhpaiti*, however, means '*beschwören, bannen, widersprechen.*' These do not help us in finding the meaning that we desire or need in our context.

Avestan *səngha*, *sənyha*, *sayha* means '*pronuntio, announcement, teaching, statement.*' We notice also that Av. *paiti* Old Persian *patiy*, as an adverb signifies 'again, a second time'; Cf. *πρός* (West Greek dialects *πρότι*) meaning 'in addition to.'

Therefore *paiti-sayha* could mean 'what is stated or announced a second time.' In other words by such a line of development the word came to mean 'a copy.'

4 5, **הַחַטִּי**.

Av. *hant-*, *hat-*, *hāt-*, present participle 'being'; as an adjective it means 'good.'

Here we have *hat* plus the suffix *ka*; the word signifies 'the good one.' Cf. the Modern English name Good and the German Guth, Gut.

5 10, **הַזָּרְשָׁת**, also 5 14; 6 13.

Av. *zaršayamna*, 'having the feathers ruffled.' Cf. Sanskrit *hrs*, 'to stand up, to bristle, to be joyful.' It could thus have a wide application of meanings; it could signify 'the ruffled one,' 'the joyful one,' 'the one with dishevelled hair.' It certainly would be more picturesque to have it signify 'the woman with the unkempt or dishevelled hair.' German *strob(e)lig*, *strubb(e)lig* refers to unkempt hair, and in Pennsylvania-German *Strubbelkopf* or simply *der Strubbel* may be applied to one who has dishevelled hair. From the Avestan present middle participle of the causative, quoted above, we can derive the root *zarš*, 'to bristle, to stand up straight' (of hair).

9 7, **הַפְּרַשְׁנָה**.

According to Justi this name occurs on a seal in Phoenician characters. Avestan *frašna*, 'question'; cf. Sanskrit *praçna*, 'question'; *frašna + dāta*, 'given to questions.'

The name, therefore, appears to mean, 'the inquisitive one.'

9 8, **הַפּוּרָה**.

Av. and Old Persian *parav*; Av. *pauru*, *paouru*, *pouru*, 'much, many, rich'; *pauru + dā*, accordingly, means 'giving much, the liberal one.'

9 8, **הַדָּלָה**.

Av. *adara*, 'the one below,' 'the one coming from below, from the lowland', i. e. from the West. *R* and *l* are often confused, and so we can explain the **ל** in the Hebrew.

Adara + ya or *adalya* may mean 'the Westerner'.

9 9, **הַמְּשֻׁבָּה**.

The endings of the superlative in Avestan are *-ama*, *-ma* or *iš-tha*; it seems that we have in this word a double superlative.

Old Persian, Av. *parā*, 'before' in the sense of time or place; Av. *fra* in composition.

פָּרָאִים therefore, seems to be *para + ma + istha*, 'the very first.'

9 e, אַרְיִי.

Av. *ṣay*, 'dwell, abide'; *ariya + ṣay*, 'dwelling among the Aryans.'

Av. *sāy* means 'to lie, recline.' It is possible that the two roots were confused in this word, and that the compound finally means 'dwelling among the Aryans.'

9 e, דִּי.

Avestan, Old Persian *dā(y)*, *dādī*, *diḍy*, 'see';

Avestan *dā(y)*: *dī*, 'look, glance (noun)'; the compound *ariya + dā(y)* or *ariya + dī*, therefore, means 'having the glance of the Aryan' or 'looking at the Aryan.'

9 e, אַרְיִי.

Avestan *vayav*, *vaya*, 'air, atmosphere'; Av. *zan*, 'to bear, give birth to,' of which the past participle is *zāta*. The name clearly signifies 'the son of the atmosphere.' In this connexion we may compare the Old Persian *vahyaz-dāta*, the name of the Persian who revolted against Darius I. This is hardly the same as אַרְיִי.

For similar names, cf. Sachau, *A. P. O.* (Index p. 278): אַרְיִי, אַרְיִי, אַרְיִי.