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THE SECOND ELYMAEAN INSCRIPTION
FROM BARD-E NEŠANDEH

I

At the Ier Congrès International des Etudes Iraniennes held in Teheran in September of 1966, professor R. Ghirshman, director of the Missions archéologiques françaises en Iran, gave me at that time for study and publication the photo of an Elymaean inscription (Fig. 3) from Bard-e Nešandeh. Returning to Hungary still in 1966 I could recognize in the text of the hardly decipherable inscription the words *kbnškyr mlk'* «king Kabneškir». I immediately informed professor Ghirshman about the result of the preliminary study of the inscription. He wrote to me in his letter of the 17th December 1966 from Susa as follows: «La deuxième inscription a été plutôt grattée que gravée sur la paroi du grand escalier Nord qui mène sur la terrasse. au milieu de laquelle se trouve le temple.»¹

A few years later, in 1973 on the occasion of the colloquium «La Collection des sources pour l'histoire de l'Asie Centrale préislamique» held in Budapest, Professor Ghirshman handed over to me the autograph of the inscription, prepared by Mme Ghirshman in Bard-e Nešandeh on the basis of the original (Fig. 1). On the basis of the autograph and the photograph I could prepare the preliminary reading and interpretation of the inscription still during the stay of Professor Ghirshman in Budapest. So at his departure I could already put it at his disposal. The further study of the inscription has led to the elaboration below.

II

The inscription consists of 3 lines, which according to the observation of Professor Ghirshman have not been incised but rather scratched on the uneven surface of the side wall of the big north-western stairs.² The characters are

¹ Cf. J. HARMATTA: *Elymais történetéhez* (The history of Elymais). Ant. Tan. 21 (1974) 25.

² In the final publication of the results of the excavations R. GHIRSHMAN changed the designation «grand escalier Nord» for «escalier Nord-Ouest», Terrasses sacrées de Bard-è Néchandeh et Masjid-i Solaiman. I. Paris 1976. 19.

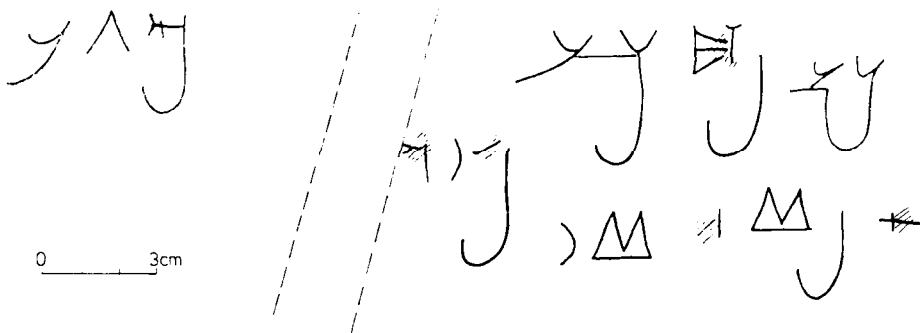


Fig. 1. Autograph on the scratched inscription of Bard-e Nešandeh (by Mme Ghirshman)

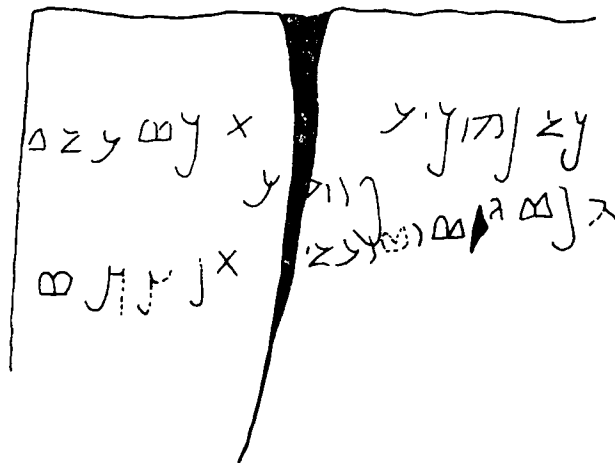


Fig. 2. Drawing prepared with copying on the scratched inscription of Bard-e Nešandeh

hardly discernible on the photograph, so that without the autograph prepared by Mme Ghirshman it would have been difficult to get a reassured reading. In connection with the latter, at any rate, it should be taken into consideration that Mme Ghirshman did not know the script and thus she could not observe accurately all letters or the whole shape of the letters. The stone on which the inscription was scratched, was broken into two and part of some characters has disappeared in the perpendicular crack. The reading of the inscription (Fig. 3) is as follows:

line 1	<i>kbnškyr</i>	$r^m[l]k'$	$r^r b'$
— 2		$pw^r š^r$	
— 3	$r^g n'$	$g'w$	$wr^r by^1$
			$mn^r ht^r$

III

Line 1. The reading of the word *kbnškyr* is quite sure, that of the word $r^{\text{m}}[l]k'$ is evident, while that of the word r^{b} is probable. The photograph does not render possible to ascertain, whether the line continued also after the word r^{b} . However, the fact that the autograph of Mme Ghirshman after the k' r does not show any more character, definitely contradicts that still something should have followed after the word r^{b} .

Line 2. It is striking that this line consists only of one word and that this word stands not at the beginning of the line, but in the middle thereof. This can be explained only by the assumption that the scratcher of the inscription left out the word by mistake and he inserted it later. Thus line 3 indicated in the transliteration was originally line 2, what is indicated also by the fact that the line begins immediately below line 1 and bends down only there, where later the word *pwšr* was inserted. The autograph does not indicate the r of the word *pwšr*. This, however, can be seen clearly on the photograph. The left part of letter $š$ of the word *pwšr* has disappeared in the fissure of the stone.

Line 3. This line, as has been mentioned, starts immediately under line 1, and the first 4 characters were scratched in horizontally. However, from the fifth character the line is slanting to the left. The lower part of the first g has disappeared, the second g , however, can be seen clearly enough. In the word *g'w* between the g and the ' on the photograph a small dip can be observed. Hereafter there are hardly discernible letters. Between the w of the word *g'w* and the stem of the p of the word *pwšr* reaching downwards a faint w is discernible, then after the stretching down stem of the p the dim outlines of an r and a b can be seen and at the edge of the fissure perhaps a y is discernible. Then after the fissure the letters *mn* can be observed rather clearly, thereafter the upper part of an h and then the upper part and the left stem of a t , and finally at the edge of the photograph the dim outlines of an ' can be seen.

IV

Line 1. *mlk' rb* «great king», as the title of the kings of Elymais has not been known so far. According to the data known so far only the title *mlk* «king» was borne by the rulers of Elymais.

Line 2. The interpretation of the verbal form *pwšr* encounters certain difficulties. Here we have to do obviously with the Aramaic verb *pšr* of Elymais, which is the equivalent of Talmudic Aramaic *pšr* Pa. «make loose, liberate, exempt (of tax, of debt)».³ The only question is, how to explain the presence

³ For linguistic data see the following works: W. GESENIUS — E. BUHL: *Hebräisches und aramäisches Handwörterbuch über das Alte Testament*.¹⁷ Leipzig 1921. — L. KOEHLER — W. BAUMGARTNER: *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti libros*. Leiden 1958. — J. LEWY: *Neuhebräisches und chaldäisches Wörterbuch über die Talmudim und Midraschim*. I—IV. Leipzig 1876, 1879, 1883, 1889. — E. S. DROWER — R. MACUCH: *A Mandaic Dictionary*. Oxford 1963. — H. DONNER — W. RÖLLIG: *Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften*. I—III.

of the *w* in this verbal form. Considering the rather close connections to be observed between Elymaean Aramaic and Mandaic, we can compare the Elymaean Aramaic verbal form *pwšr* with the verbal forms *nwqr* and *ywqr* of the Mandaean roots *nqr* and *yqr*, which came into existence in an analogical way (partly under the influence of the *aφ'el* forms).⁴ Since *pšr* is a root ending in *r* just like *nqr* and *yqr*, we can presume that the form *pwšr* also came into existence similarly to the verbal forms *nwqr* and *ywqr*.

Line 3. The word *gn'* can obviously be connected with the Old Hebrew word *gn*, New Hebrew *gn*, *gnh*, Imperial Aramaic *gn*, Talmudic Aramaic *gyn'*, *gynl'*, *gnl'*, Mandaic *gynl'*, Nabataean *gny'* (Plur. emph.), Palmyraean *gny'* (Plur. emph.) «garden». In the inscription this word may very likely indicate the «sacred garden» that is the sacred area of the deity, or the sacred terraces unearthed in Bard-e Nešandeh, together with the other sacred premises belonging to them. This explanation is confirmed by the attribute of the word *gn'*. This is the word *g'w* (cf. Old Hebrew *g'w* «sublime, grand, superb»), what defines the meaning of the word *gn'* «garden» more accurately. Thus the «sublime garden» can obviously relate only to the sacred area of Bard-e Nešandeh. As regards the syntactic structure of the phrase *gn' g'w*, it is undoubtedly striking that the attribute *g'w* stands in status absolutus instead of status emphaticus. This phenomenon is not unknown in Mandaic either,⁵ the connection of which with Elymaean Aramaic is indisputable. Obviously, we have to do here with a Hebraism — this explains the lack of the article standing behind.⁶

The verbal form *rby* can be compared with the Talmudic Aramaic verb *rby* Pa. «increase, raise, consecrate a temple or its cultic requisites, raise to the rank of a sanctuary».

The form *mnht'* is the status emphaticus of the word *mnhh*, which can be regarded as the equivalent of Phoenician *mnht* (st. abs.), Punic *mnht* (st. abs.), Imperial Aramaic *mnhh* (st. abs.) «sacrificial gift (stele, sanctuary and its equipment, vegetable offering)».

In the light of these remarks the text of the inscription can be interpreted as follows:

- Line 1 Kabneškir, the great king
 — 2 exempted (of the tax)
 — 3 the sanctuary area and increased the sacrificial gift.

Wiesbaden 1962–1964. — C. BROCKELMANN: *Lexicon Syriacum*. Berlin 1895. — CH. F. JEAN — J. HOFFLIZER: *Dictionnaire des inscriptions sémitiques de l'ouest*. Leiden 1965.

⁴ R. MACUCH: *Handbook of Classical and Modern Mandaic*. Berlin 1965. 249.

⁵ R. MACUCH: *op. cit.* 389.

⁶ Since between the *w* of the word *g'w* and the subsequent phrase *urb'g'y* there is sufficient space for an ' , we can eventually reckon also with the possibility that originally *g'w'* was scratched on the stone, the second ' , however, has blurred in the course of time. Examining the photograph under a strong magnifying glass, in the place mentioned we can really observe the faint outlines of a letter ' . On the drawing of the inscription prepared with copying, I have indicated this.

V

The text of the inscription does not contain a dating. However, on the basis of the forms of the characters used, its age, to a certain extent, can still be determined. If we compare the forms of the characters of the inscription of Bard-e Nešandeh with the letter forms of the inscriptions⁷ and coin inscriptions⁸ of Tang-i Sarvak, Tang-i Butān and Ḥong-e Kamālvand, we can establish that they are nearest to those of the inscriptions of Tang-i Sarvak. On the basis of the similarity to be observed between the character forms of the Elymaean Aramaic alphabet used in this inscription of Bard-e Nešandeh and those found on the inscribed monuments of Tang-i Sarvak, this scratched text dates back to a later period of the development of Elymaean alphabet. If we presume it correctly that the angular ' of the inscription discussed, from the typological point of view, must be later than the round ' of the inscriptions of Tang-i Sarvak, then we can put the scratching in of this inscription to the second half of this late period, viz. to a time after 150 A.D.

VI

In connection with the historical interpretation of the inscription, first of all we must draw the attention to a series of special features. On the basis of its text, this inscription could be regarded as a royal edict, its scamped execution, however (it was only scratched in), excludes this assumption. Further, the mentioning of king Kabneškir in the inscription is also striking. All kings of Elymais bore the name Kabneškir from 147 B.C. to about 75 A.D. Hereafter, however, the name Kabneškir alone does not occur as the name of a king of Elymais. According to the coin inscriptions as from 75 A.D. up to the beginning of the 3rd century A.D. Vorōd I, Fraāt, Vorōd II, Kabneškir Vorōd and Vorōd III follow each other. Thus the last king, who bore the name Kabneškir alone, reigned about 75 A.D. However, from the palaeographic point of view, the inscription obviously cannot be traced back to this period.

The use of the title *mlk' rb'* «great king» is also surprising in the inscription, because up to now we do not know any source, according to which the kings of Elymais would have used this title in the 1st and 2nd century A.D. In connection with the use of the title «great king» reference used to be made to the coin inscriptions of two kings of Elymais,⁹ who issued their coins in

⁷ The inscriptions of Tang-i Sarvak have been published by W. B. HENNING: *The Monuments and Inscriptions of Tang-i Sarvak*. AM 2 (1952) 151–178, those of Tang-i Butān by A. D. H. BIVAR—S. SHAKED: *The Inscriptions at Shāmbār*. BSOAS 27 (1964) 265–290, and the inscription of Ḥong-e Kamālvand by W. HINZ: *Zwei neuentdeckte parthische Felsreliefs*. *Iranica Antiqua* 3 (1963) 170 ff.

⁸ For the coin inscriptions see CHR. AUGÉ—R. CURIEL—G. LE RIDER: *Terrasses sacrées de Bard-è Néchandeh et Masjid-i Solaiman. Les trouvailles monétaires*. Paris 1979. V—XVI. t.

⁹ CHR. AUGÉ—R. CURIEL—G. LE RIDER: *op. cit.* 53, 57.

question in 147 B.C. and in 62/61 B.C., respectively. Of them the coin inscription of the latter, however, does not contain the title «great king», since its correct reading is as follows: βασιλέ(ω)ς καπνασκήρου τοῦ ἐγ βασιλέως καπνασκήρου.¹⁰ The other ruler is the founder of the Kabneškir dynasty, one of whose inscriptions in Aramaic language is known from Bard-e Nešandeh. He really issued such coins, on which he bears the title «great king». The inscription of these is as follows: βασιλέως μεγάλου καμνισκείρου [σω]τήρος¹¹ The issue of these coins can be dated to 147 B.C., when Kamniskereis occupied Susa. Since in his inscription written in Aramaic, which cannot be dated to an earlier time than 151 B.C.,¹² Kamniskereis only bears still the title *mlk'* «king», it seems to be doubtless that he could have assumed the title «great king» only on the occasion of the occupation of Susa, immediately before the issue of his coins. Thus the title «great king» was borne by only one king of Elymais, viz. Kamniskereis Soter, founder of the dynasty, who, however, lived at least three and a half centuries earlier than the date of the Elymaean inscription of Bard-e Nešandeh discussed.

As can be seen, we find quite a series of contradictions, if we compare the single elements of the inscription from the viewpoint of the content to the historical facts ascertained with surety. At any rate the aim of the preparer of the inscription is clear: referring to those privileges, which had been granted to the cultic place by Kabneškir, «the great king» — who can be only the first king of Elymais, the founder of the dynasty —, he wants to ensure the exemption from taxation of the sanctuary area, and eventually even its royal sacrificial gifts, for Bard-e Nešandeh. In the historical motivation of the privileges an excellent parallel is furnished to this by the letter of Darius I to Gadates, the governor on the privileges of the Apollon temple of Magnesia, the inscribed copy of which incised in stone in Greek language was prepared about the middle of the 2nd century A.D.¹³ nearly six centuries after the donation of the privileges.

The objective of the inscription — to ensure a historical basis to the maintenance of the privileges of the sanctuary — obviously furnishes an explanation of the contradiction to be observed between the single elements of its content and the historical facts. Its text was scratched on the wall of the north-western big staircase very likely at the end of the 2nd century A.D., or a little later, surely in such a historical situation, in which the privileges of the sanctuary area of Bard-e Nešandeh were endangered. Obviously, the preparer of the inscription wanted in this situation to revive the tradition.

¹⁰ G. LE RIDER: *Suse sous les Séleucides et les Parthes*. Paris 1965. LXXII. t. 13.

¹¹ CHR. AUGÉ — R. CURIEL — G. LE RIDER: *op. cit.* 53.

¹² J. HARMATTA: *Elymais történetéhez (The History of Elymais)* Ant. Tan. 21 (1974) 32.

¹³ L. BOFFO: *La lettera di Dario I a Gadata*. Bull. d. Ist. d. Dir. Rom. «V. Scialoja». Vol. LXXXI. 267 ff.

according to which Kabneškir I, the «great king», founder of the dynasty, rescuer of the Elymaean sanctuaries, exempted the sacred area from taxation and increased the royal sacrificial gifts.

Thus, if the fragmentary inscription of Bard-e Nešandeh, which contained the edict of Kabneškir I on the regulation of the cult, was the expression of the flourishing of the place of cult and of the greatness of Elymais, then the inscription scratched on the side wall of the north-western big staircase undoubtedly indicates already the decline of both of them. At the same time however, this inscription indisputably shows that the memory of Kabneškir I, founder of the kingdom of Elymais and reorganizer of the cult of Bard-e Nešandeh, and the tradition according to which he exempted the sacred area from taxation and increased the quantity of the sacrificial gifts were preserved even after three and a half centuries. Therefore, it is a valuable testimony of the continuity of the historical tradition and historical consciousness in the territory of Elymais.

Budapest.