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Aliy Kolesnikov

**The Zoroastrian Manuscript in the Collection
of the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, RAS
(Short Reference and Structure)**

Abstract: The article introduces unique Persian manuscripts in the collection of the IOM, RAS specially devoted to Zoroastrian matters. In short Zoroastrian scriptures composed in New Persian during the 12th–17th centuries, were not literal translations from the Pahlavi, but free interpretations of the old sources, adapted to the changing circumstances of life.

Key words: Zoroastrian manuscripts, colophon, *rivayat*, Pahlavi, New Persian, *dastur*, *mobad*, *xerbad*

The number of Persianized Arabographical scriptures collected in the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, RAS, in St. Petersburg, amounts to over three thousand Persian and Tajik manuscripts on Islam, on the ancient and medieval history of Iran and countries of Central Asia, on the religion and culture, astrology, medicine and other sciences of Islamic world. Only one manuscript in this collection, according to the *Short Alphabetical Catalog* published in 1964 by a group of Leningrad Iranologists, is devoted to Zoroastrian matters (*Mazdayasna*).¹

This is manuscript C 1869, containing 234 paginated folios with 15 lines of cursive text in *nasta'lik* on each page; page size is 26×15.5 cm, including the area under text proper equal to 19×9.5 cm. The manuscript has a number of faults as follows:

- (a) loss of some sheets of paper after folios 12, 24, 33 and 234 (modern pagination);
- (b) serious damages and tears on folios 226, 227, 228, 229 and 231;
- (c) folios from 64b–66a, 217b–218b and 219a have large gaps and lacunae.

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¹ For details, see: AKIMUSHKIN, KUSHEV and al. 1964, 544–545.

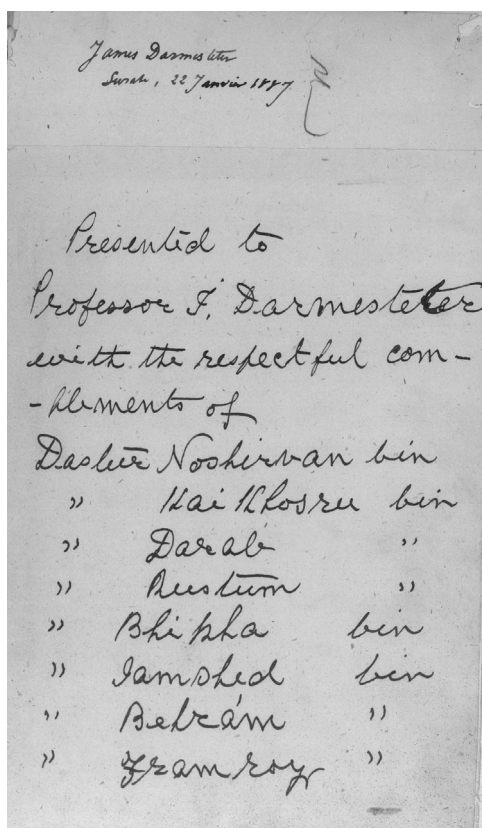
Due to the absence of the last sheets in the manuscript and the lack of the final colophon at the end of the text, the list of shortcomings of C 1869 may be increased. In spite of all that, we can estimate the approximate time of compilation of the manuscript from indirect evidence, specifically from internal colophons attached to three compositions within the Zoroastrian compendium.

The first one (on f. 62a, under the so-called *Tahmuras rivayat*) is written in Pahlavi using New Persian characters and gives the 8th day of 11th month in the year 896 of the Yazdegerd era as the date of its compilation: *andar rōz ī day pa adur ū māh ī wahman ū sāl hašt sad nawad ū šaš pas az sāl ī min be ōy yazdegerd, šāhān-šāh ī šahriyārān...* The second colophon (on f. 153b, after *Ardā Wirāf-nāme*), executed in mixed Arabo-Persian style, indicates the 2nd day “of the old month Mordad” in the same year: *yutatamma tamamat al-kitābu wirāf-nāme az tārīx-e dowwom-e mordād māh-e qadīm-e senne-ye 896*. Lastly, the Letter of Iranian *dasturs* (religious instructors), addressed to Zoroastrian clergy and other sections of their co-religionists in India, was written on the 13th day of the month of Bahman in the year 896 [C 1869, f. 154b].

Thus, all three dates fall within narrow time limits—the 2nd half of 1526 and the 1st half of 1527. Even if we assume, that the compilers had in mind the post-Yazdegerd era (beginning in C.E. 651), the time of compilation becomes 1546–1547. Although all other (undated) compositions inside C 1869 could have been written later, the time span between earliest and latest compilations in one manuscript could not be enough to date C 1869 later than the 1st half of the 17th century. The correctness of our assumption about the time of compilation is borne out by collating manuscript C 1869 with a similar Zoroastrian compendium in the collection of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France. 70 per cent of the compositions in both manuscripts have the same titles and, probably, identical contents. According to *Catalogue des manuscrits Persans* de la Bibliothèque Nationale, published by Edgar Blochet, the gap in time between the earliest treatise (*Ardā Wirāf-nāme*, 1585) and the latest one inside the BNF manuscript *Ketāb-e Jāmāspī* (1617) does not exceed 32 years.²

Among the external features of C 1869, the autograph by James Darmesteter should be mentioned. On a separate leaf, attached to the first numbered folio with the Persian text, at the top of the page a clear calligraphic inscription in black ink can be seen as follows:

² BLOCHET 1905, 169, Nos. 14, 16.



James Darmesteter, Surah, 22 Janvier 1887.

That autograph is supplied with the dedicatory inscription, arranged in a column and made in English by a *dastur* of the Indian Zoroastrians in this way:

Presented to Professor J. Darmesteter

With the respectful compliments of

Dastur Noshirvan bin

Dastur Kaikhosru bin

—“— Darab —“—

—“— Rustum —“—

—“— Bhikha bin

—“— Jamshed bin

—“— Behram —“—

—“— Framroz —“—

The dedicatory inscription, made by *dastur* Noshirvan, mentions seven generations of his ancestors, all *dasturs* as well. The Indian name of the donor was Dastur Noshirwanji Kaikhosru of Surat. The circumstances of the donation were described by the *Parsi* scholar J.J. Modi in his Introduction to the *Jamasp-nameh*. Modi notes, that in January 1887 he accompanied the French professor during his visit to the Parsee libraries in Naosari and Surat, and that this manuscript was then presented by Dastur Noshirwanji to Darmesteter as a souvenir of his visit to Surat (*Surah* in his spelling.—*A. K.*). Modi asserts: “The original manuscript seems to have had no colophon”. On their return to Bombay, Tahmuras Anklesaria “took a copy of that manuscript with permission of Prof. Darmesteter”.³ The later travels of the original manuscript are not clear. Hypothetically, it could have been in the hands of the English scholar Edward W. West in London while he was engaged in producing an essay on the Modern Persian Zoroastrian literature of the *Parsis* for chapter “Pahlavi literature” in the 2nd volume of the *Grundriss der Iranischen Philologie*.⁴ After West’s death, some part of his archives was bought by Academician Carl Salemann (in 1890–1916, Director of the Asiatic Museum in St. Petersburg) from the English Orientalist’s heirs.

As regards the subjects compiled in manuscript C 1869, it is necessary to note that, in the *Short Alphabetical Catalog*, C 1869 is described as a “Compendium of Zoroastrian compositions translated from Pahlavi to New Persian”.⁵ While accepting such a description on the whole, we have to recognize its highly provisional character, which calls for a more precise definition. In fact, that Compendium comprises a dozen and a half large and small treatises. Some of those really represent rough translations from Pahlavi (or more precisely, New Persian versions of the Pahlavi scriptures), while the others are original texts in New Persian composed in a later period. The compositions of the epistolary genre (i.e., letters and messages from Iranian Zoroastrians to their Indian co-religionists) usually contain quotations of long Avestic phrases made in Arabic characters without indication of short vowels and without any translation.

The large compositions within C 1869 are as follows:

1) The *Jāmāsp-nāme* (“The Book of Jamasp”)—a Persian imitation in prose of the Pahlavi and Pazend versions of the *Jāmāsp-nāmāg*, which deals with the predictions of a court sage in the reign of king Wishtasp about the future events in *Eranshahr* and the fortunes of Zoroastrianism (f. 1a–12b).

³ MODI 1903, XXVII–XXVIII.

⁴ WEST 1896–1904, 122–129.

⁵ AKIMUSHKIN, KUSHEV and al. 1964, 544–545.

The composition is undated. In the commentary on my Russian translation of the *Jāmāsp-nāme*, I tried to reveal differences in structure and meaning between all three versions. While translating the *Jāmāsp-nāme*, I collated the text in manuscript C 1869 with the one in the Bodleian library and with the printed Persian version in Modi's edition of the *Jāmāspī*.⁶

2) The *Rivāyat*, or collection of religious traditions, attributed to Tahmuras Anklesaria (f. 13a–64a). There are considerable lacunae at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of the *rivāyat*. The internal colophon is accompanied by a postscript as follows: “The *rivāiyat*, which was first composed in Zend letters [i.e., in Middle Persian], has been rewritten by the scribe in Persian in order that this composition would be understandable for an Iranian reader”.

3) The *Mīnū-ye xerad* (“The Spirit of Mind”)—an abridged Persian version of the original Pahlavi composition known as the *Dādestān ī mēnōg ī xrad* (“Judgements of the Spirit of Mind”) (f. 71b–78a). It has no date.

4) The *Dāstān-e Anūšīrwān-e ādel* (“The Story of Anushirwan the Just”)—the original New Persian treatise, dated by indirect indications to no earlier than the 10th century (f. 114b–128a). By indirect indications I am referring to the putative author of “The Story”, a certain Abu-l-Khayr Amri, who died in the first half of the 11th century. One of the two Abu-l-Khayrs could have been the author: (1) the father of the Sufi poet Abu-Sa‘id b. Abi-l-Khayr, d. in 1049,⁷ or (2) the Christian physician, theologian, philosopher and translator Abu-l-Khayr b. al-Khammar (942 ca 1030), who converted to Islam.⁸ This work consists of three separate parts. The first one consists of a description of a certain Zoroastrian temple complex situated in Pars province. The account of the temple complex reminds me of the description of the ruins of ancient Persepolis in an archaeological work by Donald Wilber.⁹ Abu-l-Khayr Amri (sic!) comes into contact with Zoroastrian priests of the temple and obtains from them the *Farrox-nāme* (“The Book of Luck”). He translates “The Book” from Pahlavi into New Persian, “in order that every reader can grasp the meaning of the scripture and take benefit from its contents”. The second part of “The Story of Anushirwan the Just” retells the narration of the *Farrox-nāme* about the audiences of Khusro Anushirwan with his court advisers from his immediate entourage. The third part relates the legend of a visit by Caliph al-Ma‘mun (813–833) to the tomb of Anushirwan. The unknown author of the Zoroastrian manuscript (19th century), prepared

⁶ SACHAU, ETHÉ 1889: Col. 1115, No. 1955 (Ousley, 44, f. 50a–63b); MODI 1903.

⁷ RYPKA 1959, 216–217.

⁸ MADELUNG 1983, 330.

⁹ UILBER 1977, 33–38.

for Sir John Malcolm, ascribes that visit to another Abbasid caliph—Harun al-Rashid (786–809).¹⁰

A short reference to “The Story of Anushirwan” can be found in a piece of research on the Persian *rivāyats*.¹¹ A Russian translation of the work accompanied by a commentary was published in 2008.¹²

5) The *Ardā-Wirāf-nāme* (“The Book of Wiraf the Just”). A free retelling of the original Pahlavi story about the journey of Wiraf’s soul to the other world and her visit to abodes of Paradise and Hell (f. 130b–153b). The original Pahlavi text of “The Book” had appeared in the late Sasanian period (6th–7th centuries). The New Persian version, judging by the colophon, was copied by a scribe in the first half of the 16th century. Some modern researches have been specifically devoted to examining the numerous differences between the Pahlavi and the New Persian versions.¹³ The main distinctions are obvious: the different composition of both versions, the New Persian version draws attention to more details, more optimistic descriptions and richer vocabulary.¹⁴

6) The *Šāyast—nā šāyast* (“What is Allowed and What is not Allowed” or “How One Ought to Act and How One Should Not”) presents a collection of Zoroastrian traditions and legends, expounding in a popular manner (in New Persian) on cosmography, eschatology, liturgy, ethical instructions and prohibitions, etc. (f. 155b–215b). The initial chapters of the work, which deal with the creation of the Universe and mankind and the creative power of Ormazd, and the last chapters, which tell of the future Resurrection, have something in common with the Pahlavi version of the Indian Bundahišn. Perhaps for this reason the learned Parsis in India gave the *Šāyast—nā šāyast* the alternative title of the *Saddar Bundaheš* (“The Bundahišn of a Hundred Chapters”). The text of the work prepared for edition on the basis of three manuscript copies was divided by the editor into one hundred chapters, each of which addresses an individual subject or problem.¹⁵

The contents of all seven known manuscript copies of the *Šāyast—nā šāyast* are identical, and copies of the New Persian version differ only insignificantly from one another. At the same time, none of them represent a word-for-word translation from the Pahlavi treatise with a similar title, the

¹⁰ RIEU 1879, 49–51.

¹¹ DHABHAR 1932, 585–586.

¹² KOLESNIKOV 2008, 105–124.

¹³ GHEIBY 2001, 3–16; YASTREBOVA 2009, 138–152.

¹⁴ KOLESNIKOV 2012, 405–431.

¹⁵ DHABHAR 1909, XXVII–XXXI.

Šāyest—nē šāyest.¹⁶ Therefore, the New Persian *Šāyast—nā šāyast* deserves keen attention of scholars as an independent historical source, which does not duplicate its Pahlavi predecessor.

7) The long message from Zoroastrian religious leaders of Iran to their co-religionists in India, which contains a lot of advice and instructions on the performance of liturgical and ritual practices (C 1869, f. 219b–234b). When citing passages from Zoroastrian prayers, the authors use the Avestan language transcribed in Arabic letters without indication of short vowels. Such passages cause additional difficulties for translators and researchers of the text.

Manuscript C 1869 also includes about ten short compositions of various genres, devoted to Zoroastrian matters. Some of them deserve special mention, as follows:

a) The Letter from Iranian *dasturs* to the Zoroastrian clergy and other bodies of their co-religionists in India, with enumeration of authors of the letter and names of addressees (C 1869, f. 154a–155a);

b) The *Mār-nāme* (“The Book on Snakes”). Rhyming predictions of the consequences awaiting people who encountered a snake in a dream for all thirty days of the Zoroastrian month (C 1869, f. 216a–217a);

c) A group of compositions entitled *Ma‘nī wa Zand* (“Meaning and Commentary”), concerned with exegesis of the main Zoroastrian prayers, interpretations of the Avestan *nasks* (parts of the Avesta), a narrative about the creation of the starlit heaven, etc. (C 1869, fols. 66b–71a, 78a–81b, 94a–96a, 128b–129b, etc.).

The contents of the scriptures included in the manuscript C 1969 convince me that most of the texts require academic publication with translation and commentary. All the compositions included, both the translations from Middle Persian (Pahlavi) and original treatises in New Persian, originated in the Islamic era, after the conquest of Iran and Central Asia by the Arabs, more precisely, no earlier than the 11th or 12th centuries. An indirect pointer to that time is the inclusion of Arabo-Muslim loan-words in the New Persian texts. Among those lexical borrowings we discern the loan-words of neutral type, to be some sort of synonyms for well-known Iranian concepts, and Arabo-Muslim clichés in the character of compulsory Arabian attributes for the main Zoroastrian God, to make the curious Perso-Arabic amalgam like *Īzad-e ta‘ālā* and *Xodā-ye ‘azza wa jalla*.¹⁷

¹⁶ Cf.: TAVADIA 1930; KOTWAL 1969.

¹⁷ KOLESNIKOV 2008, 92–95, 162–163; <http://www.iranheritage.org/persian-renaissance/absrtacts.htm>; KOLESNIKOV 2013, 515–519.

Under Islamic dominion, Middle Persian (Pahlavi) ceased to be the literary language for the whole Zoroastrian community and yielded its place to New Persian. The sphere of use of Pahlavi narrowed to the Zoroastrian clergy engaged in the copying of and commenting on ancient Mazdayasnian scriptures. As early as in the tenth century, a Muslim geographer stated that, in his time, New Persian was the spoken language in Pars (the central province of Iran) and that Pahlavi was regarded as the language of the former Sasanian administrative office, which needed commentary.¹⁸ So the author of “The Story of Anushirvan the Just” translated “The Book of Luck” from Pahlavi into New Persian in order that the wise book would be understandable and useful for his compatriots.¹⁹ Finally, the 99th chapter of the *Saddar Nasr* instructed *dasturs*, *mobeds* and *xerbeds* not to teach the laity in Middle Persian (Pahlavi), while on the other hand reserving the right to learn Pahlavi for Zoroastrian clergy. The author of the *rivayat* believed this instruction dated from the time of Zoroaster’s personal contact with Ahura Mazda (Ormazd).²⁰

In the Islamic era, most of the Zoroastrian treatises were being composed in classical Persian (i.e., New Persian) to be more accessible to vast circles of ordinary believers.

An attentive look at Zoroastrian scriptures of the 11th to 17th centuries, composed in Eastern Iran and later brought to India in the form of *rivayat*, fortifies our conviction that those compositions had never been word-for-word translations from a foreign language in the narrow meaning of the term, but rather free retellings of original Pahlavi writings in classical Persian or original Zoroastrian treatises written in New Persian.

Some researchers deny genetic ties between the earlier (Pahlavi) and the later (New Persian) compositions dealing with similar problems on the ground of numerous variations found in medieval texts. Meanwhile, the practice of creating the so-called “translations” from foreign texts was by no means rare in Persian classical literature. Everyone engaged in research into medieval Iran knows that “The History of Tabari” by Bal’ami (10th century) was not a simple compilation based on the Arabic text of the *Ta’rīx al-rusūl wa-l-mulūk* chronicle by al-Tabari (9th–10th centuries), but an abridged Persianized version of the primary source, marked by careful editorship with expulsion of doubtful and superfluous information, reiterations, etc. expunged.

¹⁸ MASALIK (Pers.) 1347/1969, 120: پهلوی که به روزگار پارسیان مکاتبات به آن لغت بودی آن را به تفسیر حاجت بود

¹⁹ C 1869, fol. 115b.

²⁰ DHABHAR 1909, 66–67.

In the same way, the Arabic text of al-Istakhri's (10th c.) geographical treatise was thoroughly re-worked in the translation of an unknown Persian interpreter of the 11th or 12th century.

Examples of free translations which incorporated deviations from the literal meaning of the original texts could be prolonged, but there is no need to do so. Other aspects have to be borne in mind. Translators of the ancient treatises belonged to the educated milieu of the Zoroastrian clergy (*xerbeds* and *dasturs*), who knew the long-dead Avestan, the Middle Persian and the living New Persian languages—the latter being enlarged by Arab lexical borrowings and thus accessible for the majority of believers. The interpreters of the ancient texts were, moreover, strong experts in the Zoroastrian doctrine, keepers of traditions and law. They understood the problems of contemporary Mazdayasnians, the evolution of customs and rites in their society.

There is evidence of increased interest in free translations and retellings of the ancient treatises among the Zoroastrian communities in Iran and India of the 12th–17th centuries, in the dissemination of such works in numerous copies, with the text remaining practically unchanged from copy to copy, patent errors by copyists aside. My own experience in research and commentary on the *Jāmāsp-nāme*, the *Ardā-Wīrāf-nāme*, the *Mār-nāme* and the *Šāyast—nā šāyast* has convinced me that textual variations in copies of the above-mentioned compositions have been reduced to a minimum. Therefore, it is necessary to direct our main efforts towards comparison of Zoroastrian New Persian compositions with their Pahlavi prototypes, when such a possibility exists, and towards research on the language and dialectal variants of the late texts, which also deserve detailed analysis.

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