

# Middle Persian Names

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# About me

- ▶ Serpent Herald
- ▶ Former Palimpsest
- ▶ College classes in Greek, Latin, medieval Near Eastern history
- ▶ Maintain the Medieval Names Archive
- ▶ Companion of the Order of the Laurel
- ▶ I'm wearing ancient Greek garb today!

# Where can you find these slides?

- ▶ At <https://tinyurl.com/MiddlePersian>
- ▶ At my website, [www.yarntheory.net/ursulageorges/](http://www.yarntheory.net/ursulageorges/) (eventually)

# The Sasanian (or Sassanian) empire

- ▶ 224-651 CE
- ▶ Zoroastrian religion
- ▶ Wars with Rome and Byzantium
- ▶ Ended due to Muslim conquests



Figure: Sasanian empire c. 632

# A common misconception

Some SCA members pursue Sasanian or Zoroastrian personas because they are curious about Persian history but believe Islam is hostile to women's rights.

This is wrong about...

- ▶ Sasanian Zoroastrianism (highly patriarchal)
- ▶ Medieval Islam
- ▶ Modern Islam.



Figure: "Anahita Vessel", c. 300-500 (CC0 1.0 Universal)

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- ▶ Middle Persian
  - ▶ Also called Pārsīg (cf. modern language Farsi)
  - ▶ Or Pahlavi (after its writing system)
- ▶ Parthian
  - ▶ Southern edge of Caspian Sea
  - ▶ Also called Parthawik or Pahlawik (source of the writing system's name!)



# Pahlavi scripts

- ▶ Derived from Aramaic (a Semitic language, like Arabic and Hebrew)
- ▶ Abjad (symbols for consonants and some long vowels)
- ▶ Use **logograms** (Aramaic words standing in for Persian equivalents, such as *MLK* 'malik' for *šah*)

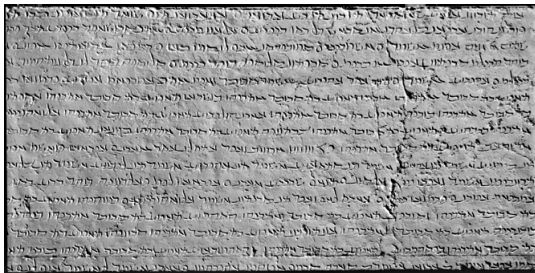


Figure: A Parthian inscription

# Transcription vs. transliteration

- ▶ Middle Persian pronunciation involves extrapolation for both vowels and consonants!
- ▶ Scholarly writing puts the logograms in block caps.
- ▶ We'll use extrapolated Persian **transcription**.

# Middle Persian vowels

ā, a, ē, e, ī, i, ō, o, ū, u

## Long vs. short vowels

- ▶ Long vowels are pronounced for longer (**quantity**).
- ▶ Short e and o are rare.

# Middle Persian consonants

B	As <i>ch</i> in <i>church</i>
Č	
D	
F	
G	
H	As English <i>J</i>  (rare)
Ĵ	
K	
L	
M	
N	

P	Trilled, as in Italian <i>terra</i>  As English <i>sh</i>
R	
S	
Š	
T	
V/W	As English <i>W</i>
X	As <i>ch</i> in Scottish <i>loch</i>
Y	As in English <i>pleasure</i>
Z	
Ž	

# Practice!

Introduce yourself to a neighbor as the *šahanšah*...

- ▶ Ardašīr
- ▶ Šābuhr
- ▶ Ōhrmazd
- ▶ Warahrān

# Some given name etymologies

- ▶ **Theophoric** (*Anāhīd-rāz* 'secrets of Anahita')
- ▶ **Hypocoristic**/nickname (*Ardag* from *Ard*)
- ▶ **Nouns** or animals (*Šabag* 'obsidian')
- ▶ **Compounds** (*Farrox-bandag* 'light-vassal')

# Women's given names

Given name gender can be difficult to determine, but there are some typically feminine patterns:

- ▶ Compounds in **-duxt** 'daughter'
- ▶ Flower, fruit, precious stone etymologies

# Name sources

The **Iranisches Personennamenbuch** series includes several books on Middle Persian (Mitteliranische Personennamen), including:

Philippe Gignoux, *Noms Propres Sassanides en moyen-perse épigraphique* (Band II, Faszikel 2, 1986).



# Sample names

Can you find the pattern in the handout of sample names from Gignoux?

# The relative particle

The relative particle  $\bar{i}$ :

- ▶ Often written using the logogram ZY
- ▶ Ancestor of the modern Persian **ezafe** construction for linking nouns

# Simple patronymics

## Using $\bar{i}$

*Gōharīg  $\bar{i}$  Rōzbih* is Gōharīg (daughter) of Rōzbih

## More complex patronymics

- ▶ Add the suffix **-an** for a son or **-duxt** for a daughter to the father's name or job title
- ▶ Optionally, link to the given name with  $\bar{i}$
- ▶ Patronymic can go before or after the given name!

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## Practice

Let's build some patronymics with feminine *Gōharīg* and masculine *Gulag*.

# Jobs and offices

## Optional $\bar{i}$

- ▶ *Gulag  $\bar{i}$  varāzbed* is Gulag the chief of boars (varāzbed)
- ▶ *Zādōy  $\bar{i}$  durgar* is Zādōy the carpenter
- ▶ *Dād-Ahurmazd dibīr* is Dād-Ahurmazd the scribe/secretary

## title

Titles such as *bānūg* 'lady' follow the same pattern of optional linking  $\bar{i}$ .

# Sample jobs

From the *Concise Pahlavi Dictionary*.

- ▶ dārwāzīg ‘acrobat’
- ▶ kamāndār ‘archer’
- ▶ rāz-kirrōg ‘architect, builder’
- ▶ axtar(ā)mār, starōšmār ‘astronomer’
- ▶ gahbed, gāhbed ‘banker’
- ▶ āhangar ‘blacksmith’
- ▶ puštībān ‘bodyguard’
- ▶ kārawānīg ‘caravaneer’
- ▶ durgar ‘carpenter’
- ▶ paygālgar ‘cup-maker’

# The seven great houses

Aristocratic Sasanian families of Parthian origin:

- ▶ Varāz
- ▶ Kāren
- ▶ Sūrēn
- ▶ Mehrān
- ▶ Spandadāt or Spandyāt
- ▶ Žik
- ▶ Nehābed



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## Practice

Use **ī** to make the names of some people from great families (given name first)!

## Some data sources

- ▶ Kiarash Gholami, Some Inscribed Sasanian Seals and Bullae, *Sasanika* 2018.
- ▶ *Res Gestae Divi Saporis*, a trilingual Greek/Parthian/Middle Persian inscription of Šābuhr (Shapur) (cf. Paul Theelen's text <https://tinyurl.com/Shabuhr>)



Figure: Ka'ba-ye Zartosht

# After the Sasanians

## Changes in...

- ▶ Writing system (switch to Arabic)
- ▶ Religion (gradual conversion to Islam, shift in given names)
- ▶ Pronunciation (e.g. loss of W sound)