

PRELIMINARY REMARKS ON MIDDLE PERSIAN <nc> IN THE PAHLAVI DOCUMENTS*

SUMMARY

In the Pahlavi documents we find a sequence of characters that are commonly transliterated as <nc>, representing Middle Persian *namāz* ‘reverence.’ The vocalisation as *namāz*, a word most commonly found in the greeting formulae of letters, is not disputed. The question is rather whether these characters stand for a phonetic, albeit abbreviated, spelling of *namāz* or whether they constitute an abbreviation that developed out of the heterogram <‘SGDH’>.

In light of recent developments in the field and the rather sizeable evidence, I will revisit the arguments brought forward thus far and propose a new interpretation.

Middle Persian (MP) *namāz* <‘SGDH, nm’c’> ‘reverence, prostration, prayer’ is well attested in Zoroastrian Middle Persian (ZMP), Manichaean MP (MMP) as well as Pahlavi documents (PD).¹ Since Hansen (1938: 25), a sequence of characters in the PDs have commonly been transliterated as <nc>, representing *namāz*. The vocalisation of <nc> is not disputed and its syntax in the context of the greeting formulae has been discussed by Weber in a number of publications.² The questions at hand are whether these characters stand for a phonetic or heterographic spelling and whether they represent an

* This article is nothing but a simplistic footnote to Dr. Weber’s tireless efforts in deciphering the Pahlavi documents and I owe him my deep gratitude for sharing with me not only his insights but also his collected evidence for *namāz*, which I have extensively relied upon.

¹ It is also attested in a number of other Iranian languages. In Avestan we find the ntr. noun *nəmah-* ‘homage, reverence’ of the root *nam* ‘to bend’ < IE **némes-*, of which a cognate is also attested in Ved. *námas-* (Hintze 2007: 350). In Bactrian it is known as *vaμωσσ*, *vaμασσ*, *vaμωσσ* ‘homage,’ including the abbreviated forms *va* and *vaμω*, and in Sogdian *nm’cyw* (Sims-Williams 2007: 238). New Persian (NP) continues *namāz*.

² See Weber (1984: 36–39), Weber (2007: 438–439), most importantly Weber (2008c: 805–809) and Weber (2009: 541).

abbreviation. In the following, I would like to offer a short overview of *namāz* in ZMP, before turning my attention to its spelling in the PDs.

Although not noted by MacKenzie (1990) in his dictionary, *namāz* can be compounded with the verb *kardan* ‘to do, make, act, perform’ and its derived forms to convey a meaning semantically closer to ‘to worship.’ In such cases it is semantically closer to NP *namāz xwāndan*:

MX 53 (1) *pursīd dānāg ō mēnōy ī xrad* (2) *kū namāz ud stāyišn ī yazadān čiyōn kunišn ...* (5) *ud hamgōnag padīrag māh ud ātaxš ī wahrām ayāb ātaxš ī ādarōg bāmdād ud nēm-rōz ud ēbārag namāz ud stāyišn kardan.*

(1) *Dānāg* asked *MX*: (2) How is the reverence and praise of the deities to be performed? ... (5) And likewise, they are to be revered and praised in the morning, noon and evening, facing the moon and a *wahrām* fire or *ādarōg* fire.

Similarly, in *Gizistag Abāliš*:³

harw kas bāmdād ka az wistarag abar āxēzed dast nē šōyed namāz (ī) yazad (ud) stāyišn ī yazadān nē kunēd ...

Whoever rises up in the morning from (their) bed (and) does not wash hands, does not worship god and does not praise the deities ...

The almost formulaic expressions *namāz ud stāyišn ī yazadān* (MX 16.54) and *namāz ud paristišn* (MX 1.53) belong to this category and are both used in conjunction with *kardan*. A different meaning is intended when *namāz* is used with the verb *burdan*, *namāz burdan* ‘to pay homage’ (MacKenzie 1990: 57).⁴ Thus, for instance, in *Dēnkard*:

Dk 9.19.9⁵ *ēn-iz kū ka andar ō xānag šawē mēnōy ī xānag ud harwisp ān ī ahlawān stī ī andar ān mān kē hēnd ud būd ud bawēnd namāz barē ud ahunawar gōw*

Also this, that when you go into a house, you shall pay homage to the spirit of the house and all existence of the righteous ones in that dwelling, (those) who are, were and will be and recite the *ahunawar*.

Similarly, in *Wižīdagihā ī Zādsparam*:

WZ 21.11 *zarduxšt namāz burd u-š guft kū namāz ō ohrmazd namāz ō amahr-spandān ud frāz šud pad gāh ī pursišnīgān bē nišas*

Zarduxšt paid homage and spoke: ‘Homage to *Ohrmazd*, homage to the *Amahr-spandān*!’ And he went forward and sat at the place of the inquirers.

³ See K20, fol. 150r, l. 11–12.

⁴ Differently in Sogdian, where we find *nm’c br-/brt* ‘to worship, pray’ (Sims-Williams 1985: 217).

⁵ Text after Sanjana (1922: 46).

The above usage closely resembles Av. constructions with a dative. See, for instance, Y 9.3: *nəmō haomāi* ‘Reverence to *Haoma!*’.⁶ Likewise, PRDd 18f232: *ud zarduxšt bē ō pāy estād u-š bē ō ātaxš namāz burd* ‘And Zarduxšt stood on (his) foot and paid homage to the fire.’ We also find compounded forms such as *namāz-barišnīh* in Dd 38.4. In such cases the addressee can also be a human, with salutation rather than worship as the intended meaning. And it is in this context that *namāz* often occurs in greeting formulae, be it as part of the religious literature or as part of the PDs. In *Nāmag Nibēsišnīh* 28, for instance, we read: *namāz ō zardušt ī spītāmān ī ahlaw-frawahr* ‘Reverence to *Zardušt Spītāmān* of righteous *frawahr*.’ Here, *namāz* lacks a verb and is usually used with the preposition *ō*, a construction frequently found in the greeting formulae of the PDs.⁷ While the syntax of *namāz* is not problematic, it has been debated whether its spelling in the PDs represents an ideogram or an eteogram, possibly an abbreviation.

Hansen (1938: 25) first discussed <nc> in a commentary to fragment p. 8354, considering it an abbreviation for *namāz*.⁸ He ingeniously recognised that the characters in question represented a word used in greetings. His commentary reveals that he first toyed with the idea of a Greek abbreviation, presumably a sign such as χ combined with a mark of abbreviation to represent Gr. $\chi\alpha\lambda\acute{\alpha}\epsilon\upsilon$. But he soon abandoned this idea in favour of *namāz*. He arrived at this reading by comparing the greeting formulae of the Sogdian Ancient Letters with what he had found in the PDs. Although in the end Hansen did not postulate Greek influence, he did propose that the characters represented an abbreviated phonetic spelling: *nūn* and *šādē* for the initial and final characters of *namāz*, respectively. In his view the horizontal stroke indicated the abbreviation.

Nearly four decades later, Harmatta (1974) suggested a reading of the characters as *nāz*, presumably meaning ‘pleasure, enjoyment, coquetry.’⁹ In doing so, he also asserted that the heterogram <‘SGDH’> was not attested in the PDs. Harmatta’s position was convincingly challenged by Weber (1992: 212–214), who upheld Hansen’s vocalisation as *namāz*, but interpreted the spelling differently. In Weber’s view, the characters represented a simplified heterogram: <‘> for the first character of the arameogram <‘SGDH’> and the following two

⁶ For Av. *nəmō*, a nom.sg. of *nəmah-*, we often find *namāz* in the zand: *namāz ō hōm*, but also *niyāyišn*. Other cases, such as gen., voc. and loc. are used in Av. as well. For more on *nəmah-*, see Bartholomae (1904: 1069–1070).

⁷ See Sims-Williams (1991) for Sogdian and Sims-Williams (2007) for Bactrian.

⁸ I was unable to identify this fragment in Sachau (1878) that Hansen refers to.

⁹ MacKenzie (1990: 58) does not have an entry for *nāz* and to my knowledge it is not otherwise attested in MP.

characters representing a simplified <-SGDH>. At the time, Weber drew support from his reading of p. 18 V 13, where, contrary to Harmatta, Weber believed <'SGDH> to be attested. Weber (2003a: 169–170), later revised his interpretation of p. 18 and abandoned <'SGDH> in favour of <NYŠH> *zan*, thus eliminating the only witness for the heterogram in the PDs. Although in a different publication Weber (2003b: 190) asserted again that the heterogram was not attested in the PDs, he still maintained that the characters represented an abbreviation, which developed out of the heterogram <'SGDH> (Weber 2003a: 169). In itself, this view is not problematic as <'SGDH> is well attested in MP literature and could have been simplified in the PDs according to scribal conventions.

Thus far, we have two viable propositions. Firstly, there is Hansen's suggestion that *namāz* is depicted by its first and final characters in phonetic spelling and a horizontal stroke to mark the abbreviation. And secondly, Weber's approach, which transliterates <nc> for the sake of consistency but derives the characters from the heterogram <'SGDH> *namāz*. Both positions raise a number of questions.

As Weber (1992: 212) rightly points out, the abbreviation practice preferred by Hansen (1938), whereby the initial and final characters are written as representatives of the whole word, seems otherwise unattested in the PDs, reducing the likelihood of this reading.¹⁰ However, Weber's suggestion that the heterogram 𐭥𐭮𐭥𐭮 <'SGDH> was simplified to what we find in the documents is challenging as well. The character *sāmek* is rarely simplified to a horizontal line.¹¹ Moreover, the representation of the final and connected *hē* 𐭥𐭮 <-H> by a horizontal line is equally unlikely, as Weber's collected examples for <NYŠH> *zan* 'woman, wife' clearly illustrate (see Weber 2003a: 190).¹²

While Weber (1992: 212) rejects the idea of an abbreviation for *namāz*, he has shown that the scribes preferred simplified forms of certain words. Some such simplifications are <YHB> for <YHBWN-> *dādan*, *dah-* 'to give,' <KN> for <KYN> *gōspand* '(small) cattle, sheep' (Weber 1992: 214), and possibly a vertical line representing <'BYDWN-> *kardan*, *kun-* (Weber 2003a: 171–172). In the *Pahlavi Papyrology Workshop 2010, Rome*, Weber also pointed out such practice for <l'mšn> *rāmišn* 'peace, ease, pleasure.'¹³ In the latter case, the word is not abbreviated but simplified, presumably to facilitate a quicker writing style, especially as *rāmišn* is often used in an

¹⁰ In Bactrian documents, for example, we find $\nu\alpha\mu\omega\sigma\sigma$, $\nu\alpha\mu\alpha\sigma\sigma$, $\nu\alpha\mu\sigma\sigma\sigma$ alongside the abbreviations *va* and $\nu\alpha\mu\omega$ (Sims-Williams 2007: 238).

¹¹ For evidence, see Weber (1992: 225), Weber (2003a: 186) and Weber (2008a: 219–220).

¹² For further examples, see Weber (2003a: 185) and Weber (2008a: 219).

¹³ See Weber (2007: 436) for a collection of evidence.

almost formulaic style in closing formulae.¹⁴ I propose a similar solution here, whereby *namāz* is not abbreviated but spelt phonetically (𐭥𐭮𐭥𐭥 <nm'c>), albeit in a simplified and almost symbolic form. In this reading, *nūn* is depicted by <n> 𐭥, *mēm* 'āleṗ (<m'>) by the horizontal line and the final *ṣādē* by a detached and stylised 𐭥 <c>. The simplification of 'āleṗ to a horizontal line is widespread in the PDs and an almost stylised *ṣādē* can be observed elsewhere too.¹⁵ Altogether, the spelling of *namāz* seems fairly stable across the various documents. Of nearly 60 attestations collected by Dr Weber, only two spellings show peculiarities, which deserve further discussion.¹⁶

The spelling in Doc. 30a R 9 has already been discussed by Weber (2008a: 125–126), who considers the possibility that here the sequence <n'm GBR'> could stand for <*nc GBR'> *namāz-mard*.¹⁷ However, I find Weber's reading as <n'm GBR'> conclusive for various reasons. First, <n'm> occurs also on lines 7 and 12 of this document and in all three instances is written in the same, exceptionally clear style. Second, the context of the letter, although fragmentary, seems to support the reading <n'm> through the two other occurrences of the word and the name <'ṭwr-'whrmzd>. Finally, the sequence *nām mard* is also attested in Bd. 14.33 which could provide further support for this reading: *az ān 6 juxt ēk syāmak nām mard ud zan wašāg* 'Of those 6 pairs one was called *Syāmak*, the man, and *Wašāg*, the woman.'

The rather peculiar spelling in p. 196, 3, however, is difficult to explain. A reading as <n'c GBR'> can be ruled out on the basis that <n'c> does not seem to be attested in MP. One possibility might be to accept a peculiar hand writing or a misspelling. However, I wonder whether we might not have a slightly curious spelling of the heterogram <'SGDH> here.¹⁸

The cursive Pahlavi script, the quick hand of the scribes and the fragmentary nature of many of the preserved documents together make impossible a one-by-one decipherment and reading of the characters, leaving a context-sensitive comparative approach as the only reliable method of reading individual words. One implication of this methodology is that some of the proposed readings may have to remain tentative, perhaps until new material comes to light. Yet the attempt to understand the spellings of words such as

¹⁴ For instance, *namāz ī rāmišn ī panāh* in p. 80 (see Weber 1992: 184).

¹⁵ For both, see the initial <hc> in <hc'l'nwšbht> in p. 80, l. 8 (Weber 1992).

¹⁶ These were brought to my attention by Dr Weber in a personal communication.

¹⁷ On *namāz-mard*, see Weber (2003a: 84) and Weber (2008b: 139, 141).

¹⁸ The question as to whether the heterogram <'SGDH> is attested in the PDs is irrelevant to the discussion of the spelling of *namāz*, and has no bearing on the interpretation proposed above, as both spellings are attested in MP.

namāz is neither futile, nor the hobby horse of a few over-zealous philologists. When accurate readings are not possible due to the peculiarities of the script, the analysis of *pictographical* spellings, short-hands and other scribal conventions are essential for a better understanding of the documents.

Abbreviations

- Bd: *Bundahišn*
 Dd: *Dādestān ī Dēnīg*
 Dk: *Dēnkard*
 MX: *Mēnōy ī Xrad*
 PRDd: *The Pahlavi Rivāyat accompanying the Dādestān ī Dēnīg*
 WZ: *Wizīdagihā ī Zādsparam*

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