

Tomasz GACEK (Kraków)

### THE ARTIFICIAL MEANINGFUL TOPONYMS IN THE MIDDLE PERSIAN LITERATURE

Although there is a considerable number of works dedicated to Middle Persian onomastics in general, the author of the present article has not come across a paper dedicated to the problem of artificial meaningful toponyms in the Middle Persian literature (henceforth LAMT), that is the names which were created purposely for the sake of a given literary work in such a way that there is a relationship between their meaning (some aspect of their meaning – cf. below) and the contents of the text, so that they convey some additional message to the reader, apart from fulfilling the regular onomastic role. This additional message is so important, that, contrary to the typical proper nouns, the LAMTs are normally translated, when the whole text is.

It is impossible to discuss this matter without some introductory remarks of a theoretical nature, as the problem of the meaning of proper nouns, which is crucial for considerations on this subject, is very complicated. The first question is whether proper nouns possess any meaning at all and what kind of meaning it is (as compared with the meaning of appellativa). A long-lasting discussion on the meaning of the proper nouns has continued not only among linguists but also among philosophers and logicians. Some support the view that proper nouns possess meaning, while others reject it.

It seems that this argument has emerged as a result of a different understanding of the term “meaning”. This notion is so complex that it escapes any consistent definition. In fact it is used to name a number of different psychological and linguistic phenomena. As a result, instead of a single definition, we are forced to describe a number of different aspects of “meaning” and one has to bear in mind that this list is certainly not complete. Among the most important aspects of meaning we should mention:

– **designation** (i.e. drawing one’s attention towards specific classes of objects<sup>1</sup>),

---

<sup>1</sup> STJ, pp. 650-652. The term “meaning” is often understood as a synonym of “designation” – see Matthews, 1997, p. 94.

- **denotation** (“the relation between a lexical unit and whatever objects, etc. it is used to refer to”<sup>2</sup>),
- **reference** (drawing one’s attention towards the content of the notion in question, i.e. towards the complex of features shared by all its designates,<sup>3</sup> cf. connotation),
- **lexical meaning** (also: potential meaning; understood technically: the one to be found in a dictionary, emerging from the designation<sup>4</sup>),
- **etymological meaning** (the meaning resulting from the diachronical analysis of the word’s morphological structure<sup>5</sup>),
- **structural meaning** (resulting from the formative structure of a word, being a counterpart of the etymological meaning in the field of synchronic research),
- **contextual meaning**<sup>6</sup> (“the relation between an utterance and the situation in which it is used”<sup>7</sup>),
- **motivational meaning** (appearing where the connection between the real object and the very chosen language symbol is regularly motivated by some of the characteristics of the previous one, be it objective or subjective<sup>8</sup>),
- **“demonstrative meaning”** (relation – based on an arbitrary association – between a language form and the real object it points to; see below).

As has already been said, the given list is not complete, and other aspects of meaning may be found, some of them quite important, with no relevance, however, for our discussion.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Matthews, 1997, p. 91, where a good example is given, too: “*bull* denotes a class of animals”.

<sup>3</sup> STJ, pp. 650-652. In other words, **reference** may be called “the **semantic meaning** of the word ... i.e. the mental content which is thought of by the speaker when using a word or expression as a semantic symbol and / or is called forth in the mind of the listener” (Pei, Gainor, 1954, pp. 183-184). Some authors distinguish the reference on the level of *langue* (a “catalogue” of characteristics of a given object) and the reference on the level of *parole* (always an individualised mental representation – this could be seen as the result of the specifying influence of the context and consituation (STJ, pp. 650-652)). Apart from that, different definitions of reference are to be found, e.g.: “the relationship between a referent (e.g. a concrete entity or an abstract concept) and the symbol which is used to identify it (e.g. a verbal sound sequence or a graphic sign sequence)” (Hartmann, Stork, 1972, pp. 193, 138-139).

<sup>4</sup> STJ, pp. 650-652.

<sup>5</sup> See EJO, p. 644.

<sup>6</sup> Or: situational meaning.

<sup>7</sup> Hartmann, Stork, 1972, pp. 138-139.

<sup>8</sup> E.g. the Polish toponym *Złote Góry*, the name of a particularly fertile area of land (and this feature is the basis of motivational meaning in this case), has the etymological meaning ‘the Golden Mountains’ (Kornaszewski, 1986, p. 7).

<sup>9</sup> See e.g. STJ, pp. 650-652; Hartman, Stork, 1972, pp. 138-139.

What is particularly important is the fact, that in the case of a specific word, some aspects of meaning may be absent (motivational meaning being an excellent example). Moreover, there seems to be a systematic difference between common and proper nouns as far as the presence of certain aspects of meaning is concerned. Some aspects of meaning are typical for common nouns and they do not appear in the case of proper nouns. The latter are identified not on the basis of comparing their features with some “catalogue” (see the referential meaning), but according to an arbitrary association. Therefore, they do not have designation<sup>10</sup> and they are also deprived of lexical meaning. On the other hand, the mentioned phenomenon of the identification of an object on the basis of an arbitrary association should be understood as some type of meaning. In fact, it is the most important aspect of the meaning of proper nouns and it is specific for this part of lexis.<sup>11</sup> We will call it the “**demonstrative meaning**” in the present article. There are other types of meaning specific to proper nouns, apart from the demonstrative meaning, motivational meaning being the best example. We should add here that proper nouns may possess etymological and structural meaning, just as the common nouns do.

As it has already been stated, the special position of the LAMT derives from the certain intellectual tension (or: relationship) between the contents of a literary work (and – inside it – the object indicated in the sense of the demonstrative meaning by a LAMT) and some aspect of its meaning (usually the etymological, structural or motivational one).

Research on the LAMT in Middle Persian texts is difficult for a number of reasons: First of all, we may hardly ever be sure – in the case of a literature and culture so distant in time – whether a certain toponym is indeed literary (i.e. appearing only or primarily in literature) and artificial (that is, purposely created to be used in a literary work). Even when we are dealing with a hapax, we are still not entitled to formulate arguments *ex nihilo*, as we are aware of the fact that the extant texts of Zoroastrian literature are only a part of the original corpus. Thus, our conclusions will be inevitably of a conditional nature. Nevertheless, the author of the present article believes the subject is worthy of research.

For the sake of the present paper two examples of probable Middle Persian LAMT have been chosen.

---

<sup>10</sup> Esp. as they do not form classes, at least not in the same sense as common nouns do.

<sup>11</sup> Or – broadly speaking – of the elements of the deictic subsystem of the lexis, as opposed to the semantic one.

### Šahr-ī Frašn-wizārān

The first example is the form ⟨štr' Y plšn' wc'l'n'⟩ *šahr-ī frašn-wizārān*. The form in question appears in *Mādiyān-ī Yōwišt-ī Fryān*, the MP text referring to the story of a riddle-contest between a good Zoroastrian *Yōwišt-ī Fryān* supported by *Ohrmazd* and *Amšaspandān* and the sorcerer *Axt* backed by the demons and *Ahriman*. Its etymology and word-formational structure are quite clear. It is one of the MP toponyms consisting of a generic noun (like *zrēh* ‘sea, lake’,<sup>12</sup> *dašt* ‘plain’,<sup>13</sup> or – just as in this case – *šahr* ‘country, land; city’,<sup>14</sup> cf. *Zrēh-ī Fraxwkard*, *Dašt-ī Pēšānsē*, *Šahr-ī Xyōnān*) followed by a determining element, forming together the so called izafet construction (New Persian *ezāfe* < Ar. *’idāfa*). This determining member is often unanalysable, however, in this case, it is a compound of a type which is wide-spread both in Middle and New Persian, consisting of a nominal element (*frašn* ‘question’,<sup>15</sup>) and the present verbal stem *wizār-* of the verb *widāstan*, which – in this context – has the meaning ‘to answer, to solve’. Thus, the compound as a whole stands for ‘question-answerer, riddle-solver’ or rather – as it appears with the plural suffix *-ān* – ‘riddle-solvers’ and the form *šahr-ī frašn-wizārān* could be translated as ‘The Land of Riddle-Solvers’ or ‘The City of Riddle-Solvers’.

Let us consider now the relevant passages of the *Mādiyān-ī Yōwišt-ī Fryān*:

**Fragment No. 1** (at the beginning of the text):

*ēdōn gōwēnd kū andar ān zamān ka axt-ī jādūg abāg 7 bēwar spāh ō šahr-ī frašn-wizārān šud u-š drāyīd kū šahr-ī frašn-wizārān pīl-xwast kunēm*<sup>16</sup>.

So [they] say that in the time when *Axt* the Sorcerer with an army of seventy thousands (seven myriads) went to the Land of Riddle-Solvers, he said<sup>17</sup>. “I will have the Land of Riddle-Solvers destroyed by [my] elephants!”

**Fragment No. 2** (*Axt* requires to be given men of an age not exceeding 15 years. He asks them riddles and kills everyone who is not able to solve them. Then a man appears who tries to defend the land.):

<sup>12</sup> D. N. MacKenzie, 1971, p. 99.

<sup>13</sup> D. N. MacKenzie, 1971, p. 25.

<sup>14</sup> D. N. MacKenzie, 1971, p. 79.

<sup>15</sup> D. N. MacKenzie, 1971, p. 33.

<sup>16</sup> Transcription based on M. Ja’fari, 1987, p. 20.

<sup>17</sup> The verb *drāyīdan / drāyistan* is used only when referring to daevic (demoniac) beings.

*ud pas andar ēn šahr-ī frašn-wizārān mard-ē būd, mahraspand nām, u-š ō axt-ī jādūg guft kū šahr-ī frašn-wizārān pīl-xwast ma-kun ud ēn mardōm-ī abē-wināh ma-ōzan, kē andar ēn šahr-ī frašn-wizārān mard-ē ast yōšt-ī friyān nām kē dād frēh az 15 sāl nēst ud harw ān frašn-ī tō az ōy pursē u-t be wizārēd*

And then, there was a man in the Land of Riddle-Solvers, by the name of Mahraspand, and he said to Axt the Sorcerer: “Do not have the Land of Riddle-Solvers destroyed by the elephants and do not kill those innocent men, for there is a man in the Land of Riddle-Solvers by the name of Yošt-ī Friyān, whose age does not exceed 15 years and he will resolve every riddle you ask him.”

Of course, it is not entirely sure whether the form in question is a proper name or a common one. However, as has been demonstrated, its structure resembles typical Middle Persian toponyms. Moreover, it seems to be a perfect example of the LAMT, as the relationship between its etymological meaning (the Land of Riddle-Solvers) and the contents of the text (riddles asked by Axt the Sorcerer) is too strong to be a coincidence.

### Dašt-ī Nīšānag

Another form which may be interpreted as an example of LAMT is *dašt-ī nīšānag*, which appears in the apocalyptic text known as *Zand-ī Wahman-Yasn* (or *-Yašt*). Here the situation is even more unclear, as the reading itself is disputed. Mohassal has *⟨dšt nk nyš'⟩*<sup>18</sup> in transcription: *daštāg nīšānag*,<sup>19</sup> which should possibly be corrected to *\*⟨dšt Y nyš' nk⟩*. Such a reading is supported by the transliteration in the Titus project edition *⟨dšt Y nyš' nk⟩*.<sup>20</sup> Thus, the form seems to have the etymological meaning of ‘the plain of omen’. On the other hand, Kasheff seems to suggest that what we have here is in fact *dašt-ī Nihāwand*.<sup>21</sup>

If, however, the reading *dašt-ī nīšānag* is right, this would be another example of a Middle Persian LAMT. Its structure is similar to that of the form *Šahr-ī Frašn-wizārān* with the noun *dašt* ‘plain’ as its first element instead of *šahr*. However, the determining member is not a compound here, but a noun: *nīšānag* most probably derived with the suffix *-ag* from *nīšān* ‘sign, mark,

<sup>18</sup> Mohassal, 1370 HŠ, pp. 126 and 130. – In fact, the two forms are given by Mohassal separately, as there is no original text in extenso in his translation, only a vocabulary.

<sup>19</sup> Mohassal, 1370 HŠ, p. 66.

<sup>20</sup> J. Gippert, 2002.

<sup>21</sup> M. Kasheff, 1987, p. 680.

banner, omen'.<sup>22</sup> The suffix *-ag* (early Middle Persian *-ak*) has a lot of different functions.<sup>23</sup> The author of the present paper believes that in this case it does not change the meaning of the base form (like in the case of *čār > čār-ag*, *kām > kām-ag*<sup>24</sup>). Being merely a sophisticated synonym for *nīšān*, the form *nīšānag* is not very common, nevertheless it is attested in another Middle Persian text *Wi-zīdagīhā-ī Zādspram* (WZ, 29, 10) and in other parts of *Zand-ī Wahman-Yasn* (ZWY, 6, 3; 6, 4).<sup>25</sup>

Let us now analyse the relevant fragments:

**Fragment No. 1** (Ohrmazd informs Zarathustra about three great battles to come at the end of the world):

*ud sidīgar ka hazārag-ī tō sar bawēd, spitāmān zarduxšt, ka ān har(w) sē ō ēd gyāg rasēd: ud turk ud tāzīg ud hrōmīg.*<sup>26</sup>

And the third [eschatological battle will take place] when your millennium comes to its end, o Zarathushtra of the Spitama family, when all these three [peoples] come to one place [to fight]: the Turks, the Arabs and Romans.

**Fragment No. 2** (the vision of the three battles is repeated in the next chapter of the ZWY):

*Pad Arwand bār sē kārēzār kunēnd [...]*<sup>27</sup> *ēk pad Spēd-razūr ud ēk pad Dašt-ī Nīšānag.*<sup>28</sup>

On the banks of [the River] Arwand they will fight [*lit.* make] three battles: [...], one in Spēd-razūr and one in the Plain of Omen.

The form in question is clearly used as a toponym. It is literary, in the sense that it is used in a literary work (and one single text it is – to the author's best knowledge, it is not known from any other source). And it is most probably artificial, as here, just like in the case of the previous example, the relation

<sup>22</sup> D. N. MacKenzie, 1971, p. 60; H. S. Nyberg, 1974, p. 142.

<sup>23</sup> V. S. Rastorgujeva, 1966, pp. 29-30.

<sup>24</sup> V. S. Rastorgujeva, 1966, p. 29.

<sup>25</sup> Instances found in the Titus project database [[http://titus.fkidg1.uni-frankfurt.de/database/titusinx/titusinx.asp?LXLANG=922&LXWORD=ny6101\\*nk&LCPL=1&TCPL=1&C=H&T=0](http://titus.fkidg1.uni-frankfurt.de/database/titusinx/titusinx.asp?LXLANG=922&LXWORD=ny6101*nk&LCPL=1&TCPL=1&C=H&T=0)].

<sup>26</sup> ZWY 6,10. Transcription based on Mohassal (M., 1370 HŠ, p. 66) with corrections.

<sup>27</sup> The reference to the first of the great battles seems to be erroneously omitted in this passage.

<sup>28</sup> ZWY 7,12. Transcription based on Mohassal (M., 1370 HŠ, p. 69) and Gippert, 1997.

between its etymological meaning ('The Plain of Omen') and the contents of the texts is too obvious to be a result of coincidence.<sup>29</sup>

### Conclusion

It seems that, despite a lack of absolute surety, we are able to indicate examples of literary artificial meaningful toponyms in Middle Persian texts. They are certainly worth analysing not only as a sophisticated literary device, but also from the etymological point of view. They give us a rare possibility to view the understanding of etymology held by Middle Persian authors.

Tomasz Gacek  
Instytut Filologii Orientalnej UJ  
al. Mickiewicza 9/11  
PL – 31-120 Kraków

### Bibliography

- J. Gippert (ed.), *Zand-ī Wohuman Yasn*, on the basis of the edition by C. Cereti entered by D. Durkin-Meisterernst, Münster, 1997; TITUS version by Jost Gippert, Frankfurt a/M, 28.2.1998 / 22.6.1998 / 26.9.1999 / 1.6.2000 / 24.11.2002, available online at: [<http://titus.uni-frankfurt.de/texte/etcs/iran/miran/mpers/zwy/zwy.htm>] (cited as J. Gippert, 2002)
- Z. Gołąb, A. Heinz, K. Polański, *Słownik terminologii językoznawczej*, PWN, Warszawa 1970 (STJ)
- R. R. K. Hartmann, F. C. Stork, *Dictionary of Language and Linguistics*, London 1972
- M. Ja'fari, *Mātikān-e Yošt-e Fryān, matn-e pahlawi, āwānewisi, tarjome, wāž-e-nāme*, Sāzmān-e Enteshārāt-e Farohar, 1365 HŠ
- M. Kasheff, Arvand-rūd, [an entry in:] *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, Ehsan Yarshater (ed.), vol. 2, Encyclopaedia Iranica Foundation, 1987
- M. Kornaszewski, W sprawie klasyfikacji nazw terenowych. Uwagi i propozycje, in: *Onomastica*, XXX, 1986
- D. N. MacKenzie, *A Concise Pahlavi Dictionary*, London 1971
- P. H. Matthews, *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Linguistics*, Oxford, New York 1997

<sup>29</sup> What we cannot exclude is the possibility that an existing (either in reality or literature) toponym has been taken because it suited the context so well.

M. T. R. Mohassal, *Zand-e Bahman Yasn, tashih-e matn, āwānewisi, bargar-dān-e fārsi wa yāddāsthā*, Mo'assese-ye Motāle'āt-o Tahqīqāt-e Farhangi, Tehrān 1370 HŠ

A. Pei, F. Gaynor, *A Dictionary of Linguistics*, New York 1954

K. Polański (ed.), *Encyklopedia językoznawstwa ogólnego*, Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, Wrocław – Warszawa – Kraków 1995 (EJO)

V. S. Rastorgujeva, *Srednepersidskij jazyk*, Moskva 1966