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THE WORD *SLKWN* IN THE MIDDLE PERSIAN TEXT OF *DRAXT-Ī-ĀSŪRĪĠ*

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The present study deals with the discussion about the word “ ” (*slkwn*) in the Middle Persian text of *Draxt-ī-Āsūrīġ*. Scholars which examined the text were unsuccessful in recognition of the origin and derivation of the word and were misled into making corrections of the form based on the sentence context and giving equivalents of “head downwards / headlong” (سرنگون – واژگون in Persian) in the translation of the word. This study indicates that the word is now used in some languages and dialects belonging to Northwestern Iranian languages (Talysh, Tati of Khalkhal, Gilaki, and dialect of Damavandi) and is observed in some Persian documents including some couplets of Naser Khosrow, an ancient Persian text belonging to the 15th century AD, *Borhān-e qāte*, and Rashidi Dictionary as well as a well-known story in Persian dialect of the south of Khorasan. The evidence shows clearly that the exact meaning of the word is “سروته” in Persian as “upside-down” and contrary to prior scholars’ opinion. Thus, the word has been written correctly and needs no correction.

Keywords: Talysh, Parthian, Middle Persian, Early New Persian, *Draxt-ī-Āsūrīġ*

1. Introduction

Draxt-ī-Āsūrīġ is probably a text composed in the Parthian language originally but it was changed to Middle Persian language in later times during the Sassanid’s domination. This subject was discovered by

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Bartholomae for the first time [Bartholomae 1922]. The text of *Draxt-ī-Āsūrīg* is written in Book Pahlavi script and consists of 120 verses [Tafazzolī 1995, 547] but it still has some words and syntactic structures that belong to the Parthian language [Tafazzolī 2010, 257].

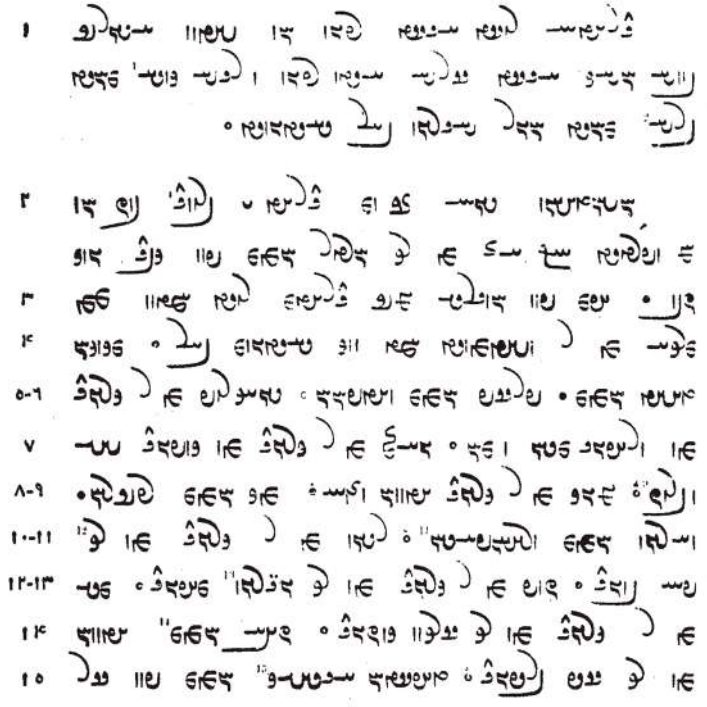


Fig. 1. *Draxt-ī-Āsūrīg*, verses 1–15 (after [Jamasp-Asana 1913, 109])

One of the Parthian words in *Draxt-ī-Āsūrīg* derivation of which is not known for scholars and its reading and meaning is based only on conjectures and suppositions is *𐭠𐭥𐭥𐭥*. This word has been used in the thirteenth verse of this text (Fig. 1):

myh MN L krynd MNW LK kwčynd
mēx az man karēnd kē tō kwčynd
“They make pegs of me which hang¹ you”

¹ Scholars are not agreed on the derivation and conception of this verb.

It is clear that its transliteration is *slkwn* but scholars have made a lot of assumptions on its transcription, meaning, and derivation. These assumptions are based on the conception found in the sentence. Indeed, the context of the sentence is probably about hanging the goat, most scholars interpreted the word *slkwn* as “upside-down, head downwards”, or “headlong” (واژگون / سرنگون in Persian).

2. Past Viewpoints

These viewpoints are as follows:

1. Anklesaria takes the latter from the following word to , and reads it as ‘sarkūnak’ meaning “headlong” (after [Unvala 1923, 646]).

2. Unvala understands this word as ‘sarākūn’ with the explanation that it consists of two words: ‘sar’ – “head” and ‘ākūn’ of MP ‘ākūstan’ – “to hang up” [Unvala 1923, 646].

3. Benveniste reads it as ‘sarkūn’ without any translation [Benveniste 1930, 194].

4. Shaki elucidates that the word *slkwn* is evidently a defective *slnkwn* (sarnigūn) “upside-down” [Shaki 1975, 66].

5. Brunner translates the word into “upside-down” without any transcription [Brunner 1980, 291].

6. Navvabi divides the into ‘sar’ “head” and the word ‘kūn’ [Navvabi 2007, 47]. Also he believes that the word ‘kūn’ is the scribe’s fault and it belongs to the first part of the next word .

7. Maciuszak says, “In the previous verses, the palm-tree spoke about the parts of the goat’s body: legs, neck, so perhaps here we have: sar (ud) kūn ‘head and rump’” [Maciuszak 2003, 162].

8. Bahār reads the word as سرکونگ (sarkūnag) in the meaning of سرنگون “upside-down” [Bahār 2012, 111].

9. Asha like Shaki reads the word as ‘sarnigun’ and interprets that as “head downwards” [Asha]².

As these viewpoints show, none of the scholars have found any evidence of the word *slkwn* in Iranian languages and these assumptions are only guesses. However, fortunately, in the texts of Early

² Asha uploaded this article in his site as “The verbal contest between a goat and a Babylonian date-palm” but the article does not have any date or the name of the magazine.

New Persian and the several other Iranian languages and dialects, there are some evidence helping us to find out the derivation and components of the word.

3. Some Evidence of Northwestern Iranian languages

Since the text of *Draxt-ī-Āsūrīg* has some Parthian words (and syntactic features), it is an acceptable approach to use Northwestern Iranian languages to discover the meaning and derivation of its unknown words. One of the most significant Northwestern Iranian languages that is spoken nowadays is Talysh. This language consists of the three dialects (northern, central, and southern) which are spoken in Iran (in the western region of Gilan province and some districts in the province of Ardabil) and the south of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

In Talysh language we can find some Parthian words which have been used in *Draxt-ī-Āsūrīg*. For instance, the words ‘wāš’ – “fodder” and ‘bašn’ – “top/peak” [MacKenzie 1971, 17–88] have remained with the same meaning in Talysh (bašn is pronounced as baš in Talysh) as well as the word *slkwn*. In Talysh, particularly in southern and central Talysh, the word *slkwn* is applied with a slightly different pronunciation as in Fuman as well as Masal ‘sarəküne’, in Shanderman ‘sarəküne’, in Khāshabar³ ‘sarəküne’, and in Asalem⁴ ‘sarokune’. As we see, this word consists of two parts. The first part is ‘sar’ and the second part ‘kune’. The first part ‘sar’ in Talysh and most Iranian languages means “the beginning or top” and the second – **kun** implies “bottom and the end of something”. In addition to the meaning of a body part “rump” (as well as in many other Iranian languages). For example, in Talysh ‘pā kuna’ means heel of the foot and “üškuma kuna” means the bottom of the elbow [Rafiee 2007, 34–208]. These words do not refer to the organs of the body, therefore Maciuszak’s view is incorrect. In fact, these two words mean the beginning and the end of something, and their combination makes an adverb of manner. In Talysh we must add the vowel *a* (or its changed forms *ə*, *o*, or *u*) between two main parts in order to combine two words and making an adverb of manner. So, sarəkune

³ These places are in the south of Talysh; Fuman is the southernmost and Khāshabar is the northernmost.

⁴ Asalem is in center of Talysh.

in Talysh is an adverb of manner which means precisely in Persian “sar o tah” سروته (“upside-down” in English). Some other evidence of applying the word *slkwn* in the other Northwestern Iranian languages is as follows: In Tati of Khalkhal *sarkūna* [Me’rāji Lerd 1388, 151] and in Damavandi *sarākunā* [Teymurifar 1983, 69] as well as in Gilaki.

4. Some Evidence of the Early Persian Texts

Fortunately, the word we are looking for has remained in three verses of Nasser Khosrow’s (1003–1088 AD) poems, which are as follows:

سر به فلک برکشید بی خردی مردمی و سروری سراکون شد
*Sar be falak bar kešid bixeradi mardomi o sarvari sarākun šod*⁵.
“Insipience soared into the sky superiority and humanity were
sarākun (upside down)”.

پنجاه و اند ساله شدی اکنون بیرون فکن ز سرت سراکونی
Panjāh o and sāle šodi aknun birun fekan ze sarat sarākuni [Nasser Khosrow 2014, 381].
“You are now about fifty years old, take out **sarākun** (misfortune) from your head”.

از بسی ژاژ که خایید چنین گم شد راه بر خلق ز بس نحس و سراکونی
Az basi žāž ke xāyid čonin gom šod rāh bar xalq ze bas nahs o sarākuni [Nasser Khosrow 2014, 367].
“Because he said so many useless words people lost their way due to bad luck and **sarākuni** (misfortune)”.

This word originally means upside down, but in these poems, it had been found some semantic expansion as “misfortune” and “misery”.

By researching in the dictionary of Rašidi⁶ [1998, 845] and Dehkhoda [1998, 13553], we can detect the first verse as evidence of the word سراگون “sarāgun” meaning upside down and the other two verses as evidence of the word سراگونی “sarāguni” meaning reversal. Indeed,

⁵ After [Dehkhoda 1998, 13553]. This transcription agrees with New Persian in Iran.

⁶ In Persian “Farhang-e Rašidi”.

this word has been written in some dictionaries with letter *g* گ, because its derivation was not clear for the authors, and they probably changed that under the influence of the word سرنگون “sarnigun”⁷.

In the following, we introduce three other pieces of evidence of Persian language which demonstrate the word سراکون has been used in New Persian even centuries after Naser Khosrow, and its correct form must be written with letter *k*, not *g*.

a) In the dictionary of *Borhān-e qāte*⁸, which is referred to by Dehkhoda himself, the word “sarāgun” سراگون was explained with this sentence, *Bā kāf bar vazn-e Falātun⁹ be ma’ni-ye sarnegun bāšad ke sarāzir ast*, its meaning is that this word must be written with letter *k* and it means “upside down”.

b) In the book titled *Dah Resāle dar Tirandāzi o Kamāndāri o Jangāvāri* (Ten Treatises on the Shooting and Archery and Warfare) [1397, 37], there is a part which was written in the Fifteenth century AD. This part is about wrestling techniques and one of those was named سراکون “sarākun”¹⁰. The sarākun technique is described with this sentence:

”آن که پای او را در میان پای خود بگیرد از بالا دست در شیب کمر بند او بگیرد، بنشیند و بیندازد“

Ān ke pāy-e u rā dar miyān-e pāy-e xod begirad az bālā dast dar šīb-e kamarband-e u begīrad, benešīnad o biyandāzad

“He who holds the foot of the competitor in the middle of his own foot, (he) grabs the slope of the competitor’s belt from above, (he) sits and throws (the competitor)”.

c) In some southern parts of Khorasan particularly in Ferdows County, there is a common tale¹¹ in which the flea is baking bread but suddenly the flea itself falls into the oven. In the rest of the tale, when other animals and plants hear about the accident, their appearances change terribly. For instance, Crow’s feathers fall. In the following,

⁷ Dehkhoda himself said that this word was written with *k* in Naser Khosrow’s poems published in Tehran.

⁸ Author Mohammad Hoseyn ibn Xalaf Tabrizi (the 17th century AD).

⁹ Plato.

¹⁰ I owe Dr. Ahmad Reza Qaemmaqami and Dr. Milad Azimi for finding this evidence.

¹¹ I owe my friend Abbas Riyahi (from Ferdows) for telling this tale.

the wheat is bent by hearing what happened. This event is described with this sentence: “gandom sarekun” (wheat sarekun (upside-down)).

These evidences convince us to accept that the word *sarākun* سړاکون was known and used in New Persian such as in Northwestern Iranian languages and its correct form in New Persian is “sarākun” with the letter *k*, not *g*. This is the same word applied in the text of *Draxt-ī-Āsūrīg* and its meaning is upside-down “sar o tah” سروته in Persian as most scholars guessed from sentence context but it has been correctly written and the corrections made by scholars are not based on any evidence. The word “slkwn” is made up of two main parts. The first part is *sar* “beginning” and the second part is *kūn* “bottom”. The vowel *ā* (or other forms of that like *a*, *o*, *u*) observed between the two main parts in all the evidence (including Persian, Talysh, Gilaki, and Damavandi) plays the role of a conjunction and it is comparable with the word *sarākūft* (= *sarkūft*) “rail” in New Persian.

5. Transcription of the

To transcribe the written form in the Pahlavi text, three points must be considered:

a) In most of the evidence obtained from modern Iranian languages, a vowel is found between the two main parts, “sar” and “kun”. So, I do not accept the reading “sarkun” as very accurately.

b) In the Pahlavi script, the long vowel *ā* is usually written, while the short vowel is generally (not always) written if it appears before *h* or at the beginning of the word.

c) In Middle Persian, contrary to the pronunciation of New Persian, there are words with no trace of recording long vowels. For example, the followings can be mentioned:

New Persian	Middle Persian	Manichaean Middle Persian	Transcribed by MacKenzie
<i>āmuxtān</i> – آموختن	hmwxtn	hmwxtn	hammōxtan
<i>xāndan</i> – خواندن	aramaeogram	xwnd(n)	xwandan
<i>hamwār</i> – هموار	hmwr		hamwar
<i>farāmušīdan</i> – فراموشیدن	frmwšytn		framōšīdan
Comparable to “zārī” زاری	zryk	zryg	zarīg

Therefore, the evidence of existence of a long vowel in New Persian cannot definitely suggest that this word should be read with a long vowel in the text of *Draxt-ī-Āsūrīg*. It also cannot raise the question that if these two words are the same, why there is a short vowel in Middle Persian while the vowel in Modern Persian is long. For the last two reasons, I prefer the short vowel in transcription. Given the above three points, because this vowel is not written in the *Draxt-ī-Āsūrīg* manuscript (), reading *sarakun* seems more accurate than *sarākun* or *sarkun*.

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H. Acefi

СЛОВО *SLKWN* У СЕРЕДНЬОПЕРСЬКОМУ ТЕКСТІ *DRAXT-Ī-ĀSŪRĪG*

У цьому дослідженні надана дискусія щодо слова “ ” (*slkwn*) у середньоперському тексті *Draxt-Ī-Āsūrīg*. Вчені, які досліджували цей текст, не мали успіху у визначенні походження та деривації цього слова, вони були введені в оману, вносячи виправлення форми на основі

контексту речення та даючи еквіваленти перекладу слова як “головою вниз / з головою” (واژگون – سرنگون у перській мові). Пропоноване дослідження вказує на те, що це слово зараз використовується в деяких мовах і діалектах, що належать до північно-західних іранських мов (талишська, татська з Халхала, гілякська та діалект Дамаванда), і спостерігається в деяких перських документах, включаючи окремі куплети Насера Хосрова, давнього перського тексту, що сягає до XV ст. н. е., словники *Borhān-e qāte* та Рашиді, а також відома історія на перському діалекті півдня Хорасану. Докази чітко показують, що точне значення слова “سروته” перською мовою є “догори ногами”, і, всупереч думці попередніх вчених, це слово було виписано правильно та не потребує виправлення.

Ключові слова: талишська мова, парфянська мова, середньоперська мова, рання новоперська мова, *Draxt-ī-Āsūrīg*

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