

Review*: Diakonoff/Livshits, Parthian Economic Documents from Nisa**

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This is a short note on Diakonoff/Livshits 1976-2001, a comprehensive edition of the Parthian ostraca from Nisa.

These inscribed ostraca were unearthed in the course of excavations of the ruined sites of Nisa, Old Nisa and New Nisa, from 1948 onward; the excavations were carried out by the South Turkmenistan archaeological expedition. M. M. Diakonoff, I. M. Diakonoff and V. A. Livshits started deciphering the texts on the ostraca, and found that they were written in Parthian. After M. M. Diakonoff passed away in 1954, I. M. Diakonoff and V. A. Livshits (D.-L.) continued the research, and published more than 250 texts in 1960 and 1966 (D'jakonov/Livšic 1960; 1966). Then the plan of publishing all texts discovered between 1948 and 1961 in the series of *Corpus Inscriptionum Iranicarum* started. The first volume of the work, Plates I appeared in 1976, followed by Plates II and Texts I, fasc. 1 (1977) and Plates III (1979). Then the work halted for about 20 years, and re-started in 1998 when Plates IV and Texts I, fasc. 2 were published. In the next year, Plates V, the final volume of plates, appeared (1999). In 2001, when the whole volume of Texts I (fasc. 3 bound with fascies. 1-2) was published, the long termed work had nearly completed. Although Texts II, commentary volume, is still awaited, all the plates volumes and Texts I, treating all documents of the corpus with comprehensive glossary and reverse index, are now available to us. Scholars and students interested in the history of the Arshakids or the Parthian language should appreciate the authors and editors of the work; among them, regretfully, I. M. Diakonoff in 1999 and D. N. MacKenzie in 2001 passed away since 1976.

The great importance of the Nisa ostraca, both for historians on the Arshakids and for linguists on the Parthian language, is best surveyed by Bader (1996). Total 2751 texts from Old Nisa, with one inscription engraved on a jar and 6 texts from New Nisa are included in the corpus; photos of some 1500 texts are in five texts volumes. Most of texts were written for the administration of the delivery of wine with stereotyped formulae. These formulae contain many heterograms (Aramaeograms), to write an Aramaic word and to read it in Parthian. The texts full of heterograms caused some scholars to doubt whether the language of the Nisa ostraca is Parthian or Aramaic; D.-L. clearly showed that the former is the case (D'jakonov/Livšic 1960).

The corpus is not complete, of course. Several texts from Nisa are not included there

(Livshits/Nikitin 1994; Bader 1996: 265), the recent excavations unearthed some texts and the number of these texts will surely increase (see, for example, Morano 1996). The value of this work (Diakonoff/Livshits 1976-2001), however, never decreases.

Below are my notes on it. Since it is far beyond my capability to review this vast work generally, I restrict myself here to the “reading” of the texts. First, I discuss the problematic phrase, *MN NPŠH tyrydt mzn 'sppty HWH*, then look into other points.

The reading and translation of Nos. 1646-1658

The texts Nos. 1646-1658 belong to the category ‘X The receipt of wine “personally from” (*MN NPŠH*): A. From Tīridāt, commandant of horse’ according to the classification of the corpus by D.-L. They transcribe and translate the phrase “personally from Tīridāt” in Nos. 1646-1658 as follows:

... MN NPŠH tyrydt mzn 'sppty || HWH Ḥm...

... personally from Tīridāt, chief commandant of horse, was ... mari of wine...

Their reading and interpretation face several difficulties for *HWH* and for *mzn*.

i-1: Why does this usage of *HWH* “(in this jar) was (... of wine) ” appear only in these documents? It seems very difficult to explain why this *HWH* does not occur in other “*MN NPŠH*” documents or in the usual “*uzbari*” texts. i-2: This interpretation contradicts the phrase ‘*MN ptp̄r*...’ in Nos. 1647-1649, 1652, 1655 and 1656. The “*MN ptp̄r*” phrase, “from the store ... mari of wine poured,” shows that in these jars there *was* (not “*had once been*”) wine when the texts were written.

ii-1: No title including *mzn* is attested so far in Parthian, in Middle Persian or in relating sources. ii-2: Moreover, in Manichaean Persian and Sogdian, *mzn* means “monster” (for *mzn*, see Sundermann 1998: 193) !

For *mzn*, in Nos. 1647, 1652, 1655 and 1656, D.-L. admit the alternative reading *MNW*. It is strange, however, that *tyrydt MNW 'sppty HWH* in some texts while *tyrydt mzn 'sppty HWH* in the other texts. Here I wish to show that the word is not *mzn* but *MNW* for all texts of this type. The text should read as follows:

... MN NPŠH tyrydt MNW 'sppty HWH || Ḥm...

... personally from Tīridāt, who was a commandant of horse, ... mari of wine...

Among Nos. 1646-1658, Nos. 1651, 1654, 1657 ((m)[zn]) and 1658 do not preserve the part which *mzn/MNW* should have been written. Thus it is enough to check Nos. 1646-1650, 1652, 1653, 1655 and 1656 (total 9 texts).

Of these 9 texts, as mentioned above, D.-L. admit the reading “*MNW*” for Nos. 1647, 1652, 1655 and 1656. Checking the photos in Plates IV and collating the ostraca themselves (no photo of No. 1656 in Plates IV), I conclude that, in these four texts, the word is in all

probability *MNW*, not *mzn*. The third letter is most likely not {n} but {w}; and the second letter is rather long, which seems to be {n} (No. 1647 shows a good example).

Of the 5 remaining texts, in Nos. 1649 (photo in Plates IV, the ostrakon not found during my short visit at St. Petersburg), 1650 and 1653 (photos in Plates IV, but nearly illegible; the ostraca themselves, quite faint but still legible), the third letter of the word begins with a round stroke, which belongs to the letter {w}. Thus we can read, in these texts, the word as *MNW*.

Since both the photo and the ostrakon itself of No. 1646 are nearly illegible, it seems very difficult to say that the word cannot be *MNW*.

Thus, the only one ostrakon remains: No. 1648 (No. 672 in D'jakonov/Livšić 1960: 92, without photo). The letters of No. 1648 are very clear. In a first glance, almost everyone may think that the word cannot be *MNW*, but must be *mzn*, since the second letter is rather short, and the third letter is long. Even for this text, however, we can read the word as *MNW*.

i. The letter {n} is usually long, but sometimes rather short (as short as the letter {z}) in the initial and middle positions. {n} of *NPŠH* in the very text No. 1648 is short, and the shape of this {n} is quite similar to the second letter of the word concerned.

ii-1. With a closer look, one can realize that the third letter of the word concerned in No. 1648 clearly begins with a round stroke, which raise the possibility of the letter being {w}. ii-2. The form with a long stroke of {w} is rare, indeed. In the final position, however, almost all letters sometimes have very long strokes, and we can find the long {w}, for example, {W} of *HN'LV* in No. 1426/3/ (Plates III).

Thus there are no obstacles for reading the word in No. 1648 as *MNW*, accordingly, in all texts concerning “*tyrydt... 'sppty*”.

One may ask what about the texts without “*HWH*”: Nos. 1653 and 1654 (for the latter text, it is not certain whether the *MNW* existed in the text). The reason may be explained as follows: i. The scribes might not think it important to distinguish “former *aspəpet*” from “(present) *aspəpet*”, as we sometimes do not “emeritus professor” from “professor”; ii. Of course, the scribes may simply forget writing the *HWH*.

HWH “was” was probably read as /ahāz/, 'h'z in Manichaean Parthian (see Skjærvø 2002: 167, cf. also Haruta 1992: 25, 33 n. 30).

Notes on other readings

Plates I.

- No. 10/2/: for *'pdny*, probably read *'pdnk*. The final letter hardly seems to be {y}.
- No. 38/4/: for *hštrpn*, there remains a little doubt whether the fifth letter is really {p} or not, though *hštrpn* seems visible in No. 37/3/ (D'jakonov/Livšic 1966: pl. VII; Nova 41). See also No. 1998 below.
- No. 134/2/: for *'wzbry 'rthštrkn* <MN *'rtbnwkn*>, read <MN *'rtbnwkn*> *'wzbry 'rthštrkn* QRY. QRY is clear.
- No. 339: for /2/ MN <'tykn> /3/ MN KRM' *wywkrt*, read /2/ MN <'tykn> KRM' *wywkrt*.
- No. 341: for /4/ (KRM' *wywkrt*) LYD /5/ PHT', read /4/ KRM' *wywkrt* /5/ LYD PHT'. All letters are clear. Note also that the third letter of *wywkrt* looks like {y}.

Plates II.

- No. 455/4/: for *wywn*, perhaps read *wnwn*, cf. No. 1538 below.
- No. 645/5/: for *'rtywršš* probably read *'rtyršš*. To read the fourth letter as {w} is less likely, though not wholly impossible.
- No. 748/3/: a faint trace is seen just after (*prdyz*), thus (*prdyzy*) seems preferable.
- No. 805/6/: for *bhtdk*, probably read *bhtdt* [(or *bhtdt(k)* ?).

Plates III.

- No. 1276: for /1/... [y ZYB (?)]/2/ *pryptkny* LYD P(HT)', read /2/ ZYB *pryptkny* LYD PHT'. ZYB is clear.

Plates IV.

- No. 1483/1/: for *'WZBRY*, read *'wzbry*.
- No. 1488/x+2/: for *kwnkn(Q)*, a faint trace is visible between *kwn-* and *-kn*. D.-L. once read these letters as *Kynyknt* (D'jakonov/Livšic 1960: 76, No. 95 [old numbering]/2/) . Of course, the trace belongs to a washed-out text. As for *Q*, it seems more likely that the letter represents {t}, the last letter of a toponym ending with *-knt*.
- No. 1538/4/: for *bwzn*, perhaps read *wnwn*, cf. No. 455 above.
- No. 1546: for /5/ W'YTY *'tyhrw*, read /5/ W'YTY /6/ *'tyhrw*.
- No. 1667/1/: the trace with a long tail seems to belong to the third letter for *rm(yn)*, thus the reading *rm(ny)* seems more likely.
- No. 1671/7/: for *H'Lt*, the usual spelling *HN'Lt* cannot be ruled out.

No. 1686/5/: for *Hm III III*, read *Hm III IIII*.

No. 1781/6/: for *'pdnk*, probably read *'pdny*. Forms of the letter {y} vary considerably; this {y}, too short for {k} in the final position, looks like {w}. A more round shape of {y}, even like that of {b}, is seen in Nos. 782, 803 (both in *'rysht*) and 1716 (the fourth letter of *tyrymtr*).

No. 1998/1/: for *hštrp*, perhaps read *hštrkn*. At least the final letter is {n} or {k}, not the left part of {p}. *Hštrkn*, if correctly read, may be an abbreviated form of *'rt hštrkn*, cf. No. 38 above.

No. 2014/2/: for *PH(T')*, perhaps read *dyz(p)[ty]*.

Plates V.

Nos. 2251/1/, 2351/2/, and probably Nos. 2261/1/, 2337/2/ etc.: for *'TYQ*, read *'TYQ*, though in Nos. 2548-50 and 2554, {t} of *'TYQ* is preferable to {ṭ}.

Nos. 2579/4/: for *Hm III III*, read *Hm III IIII*.

No. 2638/2/: since this text [No. 1760 according to the old numbering] is especially important for the royal genealogy of the Arshakids, here I tentatively present the alternate reading *BR(Y)* for *(ZY)*. For the second letter, {r} seems preferable to {y} (but cf. {y} in No. 1781 above). We should not think, also, that the reading *(ZY)* just before *(pry)ptk* in line 1 has firmly established. The previous reading *np ZY prypk* in No. 2640/2/ is replaced with *npt prypk*; The improved reading *npt* is quite convincing; this poses a doubt whether *ZY* is needed in those phrases. Of course, the reading proposed here, "*Pryp**tk*, son of son of brother of son of *'ršk*", has more difficulties than D.-L.'s "*Pryp**tk*, son of nephew of *'ršk*". I present only one possible reading. I am not certain whether these texts were made for the celebration of the accession of a new king or the funerary rite of a deceased king. My tentative interpretation on No. 2638 is as follows: (1) this is a record of the accession of *Gwtrz* I; (2) *Gwtrz*'s father is *Mtrdt* II (Sachs/Hunger 1996: 436-437, No.-90 'Obv. 31') ; (3) *Mtrdt* II's father is *Pryp**tk* (this text); (4) *Pryp**tk* is perhaps the king who conquered Babylonia in 141 BCE; (5) the name, *Mtrdt* I, generally thought to be the conqueror, was mentioned only in a very few sources (Justinus and Orosius); (6) the account on the conquering of Babylonia in Justinus does not seem perfectly reliable, because Bagasis in Media is related to Mithridates(I) in Justinus XLI, 6 while Ba-ga-a-a-šā, appears not in the description of 141 BCE but in that of 138 BCE and after (Sachs/Hunger 1996: 160-161, 194-195, 216-217 [in Media]); (7) the assumption that *Mtrdt* I was a direct descendant of *'ršk* while *Gwtrz* a descendant of a brother of *'ršk*'s does not account for the importance of *Pryp**tk* explicitly; (8) the exact function of *-k* in

Pryptk should be studied further.

D.-L.'s reading is remarkably correct, but there still remain ambiguous letters in the texts, in particular, letters in the final position. Publication of the plates and texts volumes of the Nisa ostraca enables us to study the palaeography of Parthian scripts in detail; this study, in turn, will become a base for other fields of investigation.

Wine is now delivered to *Mtrdtkrt*, through the pain-taking efforts of the *mdwbrs*, *rzpns* and *rzkrs*, that is, the authors (including M. M. Diakonoff) and editors. Let us thank them again and drink it.

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