

Old Persian *fraša* and *vašna* : Two terms at the Intersection of Religious and Imperial Discourse*

Among the most common, and most discussed formulae in Achaemenian royal inscriptions is the phrase *vašnā auramazdāha* “by the Wise Lord’s will”¹ (Akkadian *i-na šilli šá ʿú-ri-mi-iz-da*, Elamite *za-u-mi-in ʿU-ra-mas-da-na*, Aramaic *bīlh zy ʿhwrmzd*).² It recurs

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¹ The generally accepted etymology takes **vašna-* to be a nominal derivative in *-no-* from the Indo-European verb **wek-* “to will, to wish” (Avestan *vas-*, Sanskrit *vas-*; cf. Old Persian *vasiy* (adv.) “at will, greatly.” For details, see Julius Pokorny, *Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch* (Bern, Franke Verlag 1959), p. 1135 or Manfred Mayrhofer, *Kurzgefaßtes etymologisches Wörterbuch des Altindischen* (Heidelberg, Carl Winter 1956–76) 3, p. 170. Other analyses have been advanced by Oswald Szemerényi, *Iranica V*, in: *Monumentum H.S. Nyberg* (Leiden, E.J. Brill 1975), pp. 325–343, and Wojciech Skalmowski, *Old Persian vaz-raka-*, in: *A Green Leaf: Papers in Honour of Professor Jes P. Asmussen* (Leiden, E.J. Brill 1988), pp. 39–42.

² The terms in all four languages do not correspond precisely, suggesting that scribes had some difficulty locating parallels for the Iranian term within the extant ideology and vocabulary of these other languages. Thus, for instance, Akkadian *šillu* (also written ideographically as GIŠ.MI) means, most literally “shadow, shade of a tree, shaded place.” By extension, it came to denote the instruments through which shade is created (“awning, covering”), and by further extension still “protection, aegis, patronage” (i.e. the capacity to create comfort and security in a potentially difficult world). In this last sense, it is often used to denote the support a deity affords to a king, as when Gilgamesh asks the god *Šamaš* to bestow his “protection” on him (*ši-il-[I]am šuku[n elija]*) or when Esarhaddon represents himself as the person “to whom (the great gods) have extended their lasting protection, in order to calm their divine hearts” (*ša ... ana nuḥḥi libbi ilū tišunu ... GIŠ.MI-šū-nu dāri itrušu elišu*). See A. Leo Oppenheim, et al., *Assyrian Dictionary* (Chicago, Oriental Institute, 1956–), 16, p. 189–192. Elamite *za-u-mi-in* is translated “exertion, effort” (“*Mühewaltung*”) by Walther Hinz and Hildemarie Koch, *Elamisches Wörterbuch* (Berlin, Dietrich Reimer 1987), p. 1286, consistent with the rendering of *adam hamataxšaiy* (“I exerted myself”) by *za-um(?) -ma* at DB 1.68. Elamite thus signals a more active work of intervention on the Wise Lord’s part, while the semantic range of the Aramaic is similar to that of the Akkadian.

throughout the extant corpus, but it is Darius (from whom most of our inscriptions derive) who uses it most often: 36 times at Bisitun, and 23 times elsewhere, for 75% of all occurrences. Of his successors, only Xerxes uses this formula with any frequency (13 times, 17%), and it shows up a total of 8 times (10%) in the inscriptions of all others, ranging from Ariaramnes to Artaxerxes II (the last of whom accounts for half of these). Scholars have rightly stressed the way it was used to legitimate Achaemenian rule in general,³ and along these lines, it must be regarded as one of the more ideologically significant and historically consequential phrases in the history of diction. Most specifically and most critically, through the repeated and emphatic deployment of this phrase, Darius was able to redefine the extraordinarily suspicious events of his ascension to the throne as nothing less than divine election and the acting out of God's will in history.⁴

Closer investigation of the ways in which Darius and his successors used this formula yields a more nuanced understanding of the semantics and pragmatics of Achaemenian propaganda. Toward this end, in the first section of this paper I will examine the verbs that occur in connection with the formula, in order to ascertain what precise actions the Achaemenians sought to authorize by invocation of "the Wise Lord's will." In the second section, I turn to the uses of an Avestan cognate (*vasna-*) that has received surprisingly scant attention. I then pursue some lines opened up by these investigations to explore the significance of a term in Old Persian (*frašā-*) that has been much less well understood than its Avestan cognate.

³ See, inter alia, Gregor Ahn, *Religiöse Herrscherlegitimation im achämenidischen Iran* (Leiden, E.J. Brill 1992), pp. 3, 88, 196–199, et passim; Peter Frei and Klaus Koch, *Reichsidee und Reichsorganisation im Perserreich* (Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1984), p. 65; Gherardo Gnoli, *Politique religieuse et conception de la royauté sous les Achéménides*, in: *Commémoration Cyrus: Hommage Universel* (Leiden, E.J. Brill 1974), pp. 164–165.

⁴ Within a large literature on Darius's accession and the events of 523–522 B.C.E., see M.A. Dandamaev, *Persien unter den ersten Achämeniden* (Wiesbaden, Ludwig Reichert 1976); E.J. Bickerman and H. Tadmor, *Darius I, Pseudo-Smerdis, and the Magi*, *Athenaeum* 56 (1978), pp. 239–261, and Clarisse Herrenschmidt, *Les historiens de l'empire Achéménide et l'inscription de Bisotun*, *Annales Économies Sociétés Civilisations* 37 (1982), pp. 813–823.