

The language of the Šāhnāme in historical and dialectal perspective

The Šāhnāme is not only the most important of Persian epics and a monument of Iranian national tradition and culture, it is also of paramount importance for the history of the Persian language. Linguists generally prefer prose works when investigating a certain language and its grammar, because the language of any epic or poetic work may be affected by stylistic and metrical peculiarities. A living popular epic like the Šāhnāme, however, should rank next to prose works in usefulness for linguistic purposes.

Most Iranians know that the language of the Šāhnāme belongs to a very early phase in the history of (New) Persian, earlier than that of "classical" poets such as Ḥāfez and Sa'ādī. Although more educated Iranians are certainly able to read and understand the Šāhnāme (henceforth Šn.), they do have problems understanding certain archaic words and constructions. This is no surprise given the long period of 1000 years that has elapsed since the Šn. was composed. Iranians are less aware that the language of the Šn. is not only archaic but does also show some dialectal peculiarities in comparison to modern Persian. Some words from the Šn. that seem to be archaic today, are in fact loans from other Iranian languages or local varieties of Persian.

The aim of this paper is to examine the historical and dialectal evolution of New Persian, and to determine the Šn's place within this evolution. For the sake of analysis, it is necessary to separate the historical from the dialectal factors; later it will be seen that historical and dialectal factors sometimes act in combination and cannot be clearly separated from each other.

The historical perspective

With respect to the historical development of Persian, the first thing to emphasize is its *continuous* character. Chronologically, the language of the Šn. (10./11. cent. A. D.) would take approximately an intermediate position between the Middle Persian (Mp.) of the 3rd and modern New Persian (Np.) of the 20th century. The advent of Islam in Iran certainly caused a major *cultural break* in Iranian history and also had a heavy influence on the Persian language. But this influence was *gradual*, and even the intrusion of so many Arabic words into Persian was a gradual process that took centuries to reach its peak. The vocabulary of the Šn. still had many fewer Arabic loan words than that of later literary works. In many ways, the vocabulary of the Šn. resembles more that of Mp. than that of modern Np., e.g.:

	Mp.	Šāhnāme	modern Np.
Words that are obsolete today:	xīr "thing"	(= Mp.)	(obsolete)
	ēdar "here"	(= Mp.)	(obsolete)
Words that changed their meaning:	šahr "country"	(= Mp.)	"city"
	vēža "pure, holy"	(= Mp.)	"special"

These changes are well-known, as well as the fact that some phonological developments that place Mp. in opposition to Np. had not yet, or only partly, taken place at the time of the Šn., e.g.:

Mp. abā "with", abar "upon" >	Šn. (a)bā, (a)bar >	Np. (today) bā, bar
Mp. andar "in", hamē "always" >	Šn. (an)dar, (ha)mē >	Np. dar, (verbal prefix) mī-
Mp. šēr "lion", kōr "blind" >	Šn. (idem) >	Np. šīr, kūr (<i>majhūl</i> vowels) ¹

¹ This applies to the Persian spoken in (most parts of) Iran only. In Afghanistan and Tajikistan, the *majhūl*-vowels are still distinguished from the *ma'rūf* ones to this day.

It is less generally known that the intermediate position of the language of the Šn. (between Mp. and 20th cent. Np.) can also be seen from most other areas of grammar. Two examples should serve to demonstrate this:

The expression of reflexivity

Mp.	Šn.	Class.-Pers.	Np.
tan I xwēš / xwēštan > xwēštan >		xwēštan / xwad >	xod (direct object)
xwēš >	xwēš >	xwēš / xwad >	xod (possessive)

Modal verb constructions

full infinitive >	short inf. >	short inf. / ke + aorist >	(ke +) subjunctive
(e.g., bāyad raftan	bāyad raft	bāyad raft / bāyad ke ravad	bāyad (ke) beravad)

The case of reflexivity is a particularly convenient grammatical feature in examining the continuity in the evolution of Persian. Mp. *xwēštan* was gradually replaced by *xwad* (later *xod*) beginning only after the 10th century A.D. It is possible to trace in statistical terms exactly how this took place. Similarly, the evolution of the Np. modal constructions (from *bāyad raftan* to *bāyad beravad*) has developed only during the Np. period. The schemata above are simplified; as I have discussed both features in a forthcoming publication,² I will not go into detail here.

Other features that exemplify historical-linguistic continuity include the word order of noun phrases (H = head, M = modifier [i.e., genitive or adjective attribute]):

Mp.	M-H	or	H (I[g]) M
Šn.	M-H	or	H-i M
Np. (today)		only	H-e M

The Ezafe construction, which is the only productive way to form a noun phrase today, was already wide-spread in Mp.³ But the older reverse construction still occurred with about the same frequency in the Šn.⁴

The constituent order of nominal compounds is connected to the word order of Noun Phrases. Please observe the following possessive compounds ("Bahuvrihis"):

Mp.	M-H	(weh-dēn "having the good religion")
Šn.	M-H	(taham-tan "having a strong body" [epithet of Rostam])
Np. (today)	M-H / H-M	(siyāh-pūst "black-skinned" / kalle-pūk "empty-headed")

² "A Linguist's Fresh View on 'Classical Persian'", to be published in the *Proceedings of the 4th European Conference of Iranian Studies (held in Paris, 6-10 September 1999)* (In the series *Cahiers de Studia Iranica*, Paris).

³ The word order of Mp. noun phrases has been treated by Mary Boyce, "The use of relative particles in Western Middle Iranian", *Indo-Iranica. Mélanges présentés à Georg Morgenstierne à l'occasion de son soixante-dixième anniversaire*, ed. G. Redard, Wiesbaden 1964, p. 28-47, and by Christopher J. Brunner, *A syntax of Western Middle Iranian*, Delmar 1977, p. 10ff. Both provide ample examples but not a comprehensive analysis of the various possible NP constructions of Mp. A quick view on a selection of Inscriptional and Manichaean Mp. texts of the 3rd century shows that in that period, the M-H and H-M constructions occurred with about the same frequency. ManMp. examples (adj. only): M-H *wuzurg šādth* "great joy", H I M *kār I wuzurg* "great work", H-M *bōzegar wuzurg* "great saviour".

⁴ Examples: M-H *nārasīda turunj* "unripened lemon", *tēra šab* "dark night", H-i M *šab-i tēra* "dark night", *Bahrām-i nēw* "the brave Bahram". Cf. Np. today: H-e M *šab-e tārīk* "dark night". In Np. today, M-H is possible only in poetic or archaizing usage.

In both Mp. and the Šn., there were only head-final Bahuvrihis.⁵ They continue to be productive to this day, but recently a new Bahuvrihi type with reverse constituent order (the *kalle-pūk*-type) has become very productive in Np (apparently starting from the substandard language). Both Ezafe constructions and nominal compounds show that the language of the Šn. shows a stronger affinity to Mp. than to modern Np.⁶

Summing up the points made so far, the language of the Šn. represents a historical stage of Persian that appears to be in many respects - lexical, phonological, morphological, syntactical - closer to the Mp. of the 3rd century than to the Np. of the 20th. Nevertheless, it is undoubtedly justified to call the language of the Šn. "New" rather than "Middle Persian". This is due mostly to extralinguistic factors, namely to the cultural shift and to the break in literary tradition that the Arab invasion brought about, and to the fact that the Šn. constitutes one of the first links in a new and continuous literary tradition, the Persian-Islamic one.

The dialectal perspective

The place of the language of the Šn., in the history of Persian, corresponds more or less to what one would expect from the outward chronological data. The question of *dialectal* features of the Šn., by contrast, is very complex and contains a number of unresolved problems. Any investigation into the dialectal characteristics of the Šn. should still start from Wolfgang Lentz' pioneering study.⁷ Lentz showed that many Np. words (especially those that occur in the Šn.) cannot be properly derived from Mp. or Old Persian (Op.), and therefore must be loans from some other Iranian language(s) or dialect(s). Lentz identified Parthian as the main source from which Persian had borrowed these words. He called the "Parthian" loan-words "northern" in the sense that West Iranian languages are said to be divided into two subgroups, *northwestern* and *southwestern*. A simplified tree diagram may serve to show the dialectal evolution of Western Iranian:

	Proto-Iranian		
	West-Iranian		East-Iranian
	SW-Ir.	NW-Ir.
ca. 500 B.C.	Old Persian	("Median")	
ca. 300 A.D.	Mp.	Parthian	
900 A.D. -	Np.	Kurdish	Gtlakī Tālešī etc.

⁵ With very few exceptions, e.g. *tan-d(u)rust* "healthy" in Mp. and Šn.

⁶ Please note that the syntax of compounds may differ from that of the NP's in a given language. Compounds may mirror syntactic rules of the earlier stages of a language, which have become "frozen" into lexical rules.

⁷ "Die Nordiranischen Elemente in der neupersischen Literatursprache bei Firdosi". *Zeitschrift für Indologie und Iranistik* 4, 1926, p. 251-316.

Although Parthian is certainly a good candidate for such a source language, I think "Parthian" as a blanket term covering most NW elements in Np. has been used too widely and uncritically since Lentz' investigation. Cross-linguistic borrowing has been wide-spread among Iranian languages and dialects from earliest times.

The NW-Iranian loanwords that entered Persian may be classified into several chronological layers. I will propose a four-fold classification here, and illustrate each class with a selection of some typical examples:

1. NW loanwords (to Persian, attested in the Šn.) from the pre-Achaemenian period :⁸
 buzurg "big" < Mp. wuzurg < Op. vaz(a)rka "id." (NW because of -z-)⁹
 mihr "love; sun" < Mp. mihr "id." < Op. Miθra- "(the God) Mithra" (NW -θr-)
 šāh "king" < Mp. šāh < Op. xšāyaθiya- "id." (NW -θ(i)y-)
 farr "glory" < Mp. farr < Op. -farnah- "id." (NW-"Median" f-)¹⁰

2. -- from the pre-Sasanian (or pre-Arsacid?) period:

asp "horse" < Mp. (< NW) asp, but Op. asa- "id." (NW -sp-)
 šahr "country" < Mp. šahr "id.", but Op. xšaša- "kingdom" (NW -θr- > -hr-)
 zar(r) "gold" < Mp. zarr, but Op. daraniya- "id." (NW -z-)
 diz "fortress" < Mp. diz, but Op. didā- "id." (NW -z-)
 zabān "language" < Mp. i/uzwān "id.", but Op. hizan- "tongue" (NW -zb-/zw-)

3. -- from the Sasanian period:

bāy "garden" < ZorMp. (NW) bāy, but ManMp. (SW) bāw (InscrMp. bāy)
 hēzum "firewood" < ZorMp. ēzm, but ManMp. ēmag (Av. aēśma-)
 zamistān "winter" < ZorMp. zam(estān), but ManMp. damestān (Av. zayan-)¹¹
 pizišk "doctor" < ZorMp. bizišk, but ManMp. bišehk (Av. baēšaza.kəš-)¹²
 ranj "toil" < ZorMp. ranj, but ManMp. ranz
 bāzū "arm" < ZorMp. bāzā, but PsalterMp. b'dwk

4. -- from the post-Sasanian period:

žarf "deep" < Pth. žafr, but Mp. (Zor./Man.) zofr "id."

⁸ There are also (many fewer) early loans from SW to NW, one more prominent of these being *dast* "hand" (cf. Av. *zasta*- "id.") which has also spread to East Iranain languages.

⁹ Np. *zūr* "deceit" (< Mp. *zūr* < Op. *zūrah*- "id.") is another NW loan from that period, with -z- ~ SW⁷, -d-, but (by chance?) it does not seem to occur in the Šn.

¹⁰ *Farnah*- is not attested as an Op. appellative, but only as the 2nd element of the Median personal name *Vi^hdafarnah*-. It must have been borrowed still in the pre-Mp. period because it shows the Mp. sound change -rn- > -rr-. An alternative, inner-Persian explanation for the *f*- of this much discussed word has been given by P. O. Skjaervo, "*Farnah*-. mot mède en vieux-perse?", *BSL* 78, 1983, p. 241-259.

¹¹ The "corrupt" ZorMp. writing *dmyst* ^h (transcribed *zmyst* ^h) is usually considered a scribal error (see D. N. MacKenzie, "Notes on the Transcription of Pahlavi", *BSOAS* 30, 1967, p. 20, fn. 12). As there seem to be only three ZorMp. words with an initial *z*- that are regularly "miswritten" *d*- (besides *zamestān*: *zamīg* "soil", *zamān* "time"), the first two of which have replaced NW *z*- for SW *d*-, one may ask if ZorMp. *dmyst* ^h and *dmyg* are really "corrupt", or if they could not represent an early-Mp. linguistic reality where (as with "winter" in ManMp.) the NW loans with *z*- had not yet entered Mp.

¹² ManMp. *bišehk* is from **bišāδka*-. ZorMp. *bizešk* (cf. Pth. *bizešk*) is due to metathesis of *š/z*, the *p*- of Np. *pizišk* is dissimilated from *b*-.

mury "bird"	< Pth. mury,	but Mp. (Z./M.) murw "id."
tuxm "seed, family"	< Pth. tuxm,	but Mp. (Z./M.) tō(h)m "id."
durōγ "lie"	< Pth. durōγ,	but Mp. (Z./M.) drō(w) "id."
yōγ "yoke"	< NW (Pth.?) yōγ,	but Mp. (Z./M.) jōγ "id."
barzan "quarter"	< NW (Pth.?) barzan,	but Mp. (Z.) wālan "id."

NW words that have (partly) been replaced by SW forms in later Np.:¹³

burz "high"	< Pth. burz,	but Mp. bālā "id." (Np. today bāla)
pūr "son"	< Pth. puhr,	but Mp. pus(ar) "id." (Np. today pōsar)
arj "worth"	< Pth. arj,	but Mp. arz "id." (Np. today arz-eš etc.)

The 1st layer of loanwords are already attested in the Op. inscriptions and must therefore have been borrowed in pre-Achaemenian, or at least in very early-Achaemenian times. The source of these loans was presumably "Median", but our knowledge about this language is still so faint and speculative that we should put it in quotation marks.¹⁴ The 2nd layer still has Persian (i.e. SW) forms in Op. but NW forms in Mp., so they could well have been borrowed during the Parthian (i.e. Arsacid) reign of Iran. The 3rd layer of loanwords was borrowed at the beginning or during the Sasanian period, because they have the NW form in Zoroastrian, but still the SW form in Manichaean Mp.¹⁵ Interestingly, ManMp. seems to be less strongly influenced by Pth. than ZorMp., although its dialectal basis was geographically closer to Pth.¹⁶ The fourth layer of loanwords, more numerous than the other three, do not show NW forms in any known variant of Mp., and therefore probably entered Persian in post-Sasanian times.

What can possibly be the role of Parthian (Pth.), as a source language, in all these loanwords? Apparently, the first layer of loanwords cannot be from Pth., since the Parthians did not appear on the W-Iranian scene before the 3rd century B.C. For the 2nd layer, Parthian may well be the source. But some words point to a quite early date of borrowing. NW *asp* "horse", e.g., existed already in Op. in compounds like *huv-aspa-* "having good horses".¹⁷ *Zarr* "gold" must have been borrowed before the change *-m- > -rr-* took place in Persian.¹⁸ As for *šahr* "country; (later:) city", Armenian *ašxarh* "world;

¹³ Besides the three NW words *burz*, *pūr* and *arj* the SW equivalents *bālā*, *pusar* and *arz* do also occur in the Šn.

¹⁴ Lentz had already called some of the loans "Median" and so detached them from the other ones chronologically (loc. cit., e.g. p. 260, 287), but he did not chronologically distinguish any of the other loans. James Russell has suggested that some of these loanwords (e.g., *mīhr*) may indeed be not from Median but Avestan. This seems to be well possible for words from the religious sphere like *mīhr*. However, since Avestan cannot be clearly distinguished from Median in terms of phonology (both languages represent largely the same conservative stage as opposed to the Op. sound changes), this is difficult to prove or disprove.

¹⁵ Apparently, at the beginning of the Sasanian period (3rd cent. A.D.) not all regional variants of Mp. had been influenced by NW/Pth. to the same degree.

¹⁶ If, with Henning ("Mitteliranisch", *Handbuch der Orientalistik*, Erste Abt., IV. Bd.: Iranistik, 1. Abschnitt: Linguistik, ed. B. Spuler, Leiden-Köln 1958, p. 97) ManMp. indeed represents the form of Persian that was spoken at the court in the capital Ktesiphon.

¹⁷ This is why Lentz, loc. cit., p. 278, calls it a "Median" loanword.

¹⁸ Cf. Pth. *zarn* "gold". We are not able to date this sound change, but the occurrence of the same change in East Iranian Khotanese could point to a relatively early date, when the Khotanese speakers were still in closer contact with Persians.

country" shows that it may be a quite early *Kulturwort* from the political sphere.¹⁹ These words may have been borrowed in pre-Parthian, if not late Achaemenian times.²⁰ For the 3rd group of loans, Pth. influence is still possible. But for the larger last group, it is problematic. During the 3rd and 4th centuries A.D., Parthian lost its function as an official language of the Sasanian empire. Afterwards, its use was again restricted to its home province Parthia (in NE Iran).²¹

Some words show a mixed SW/NW form in Šn. and ZorMp., as opposed to a "pure" SW form in ManMp., e.g. Šn. *durust* "right" < ZorMp. *drust*, but ManMp. *drist*, Pth. *društ*; Šn. *jāvēd* "eternal" < ZorMp. *jāvēd*, but ManMp. *jāydān*, Pth. *yāvēdān*. These forms have been explained as "NW forms in SW pronunciation".²² But it would also be conceivable that they derive from yet another dialect, lying somewhere between Mp. and Pth., and thus between SW and NW.

There are several reports that provide useful information on the linguistic situation in Iran at the end of the Sasanian empire (7th cent. A.D.), the most well-known of these being that of the Arabic historian Ibn al-Muqaffa'.²³ It says that in NE Iran, Parthian (called *Pahlavi* by Ibn M.) was still spoken, but "Dart Persian" was also spoken there. Reports from the 10th century mention only "Dart Persian" as the language of NE Iran. It seems that towards the end of the Sasanian empire, Pth. was already declining and restricted to folkloric usage, and soon after the Arab invasion it became extinct as a *living linguistic unit*. It certainly lived on in local dialects for a while, but among the modern NW-Iranian dialects of today, there is no single one that could be called a descendant or even a close relative of Parthian.

The post-Sasanian loanwords in the Šn. must have entered Persian approximately during the 8th or 9th centuries. If they are from Pth., then "Parthian" must be understood here as a group of dialects, rather than as a unified language. It is probable that still at that time, there existed wide-spread and popular literary traditions in dialects, i.e. also in "Parthoid" dialects. Indeed, had these traditions not been wide-spread and popular, it would hardly be conceivable that they should have influenced Persian so heavily.

It is possible that a strong Pth. literary tradition had developed, during the Arsacid and Sasanian reigns, that continued to be transmitted into the Islamic period, maybe into Ferdowsi's time. The two Mp. texts *Draxt ī Āsūrīg* and *Ayādgar ī Zarērān*, that have preserved Pth. lexical elements, would then be traces of this tradition. I think, however, that lively literary traditions in other dialects probably coexisted and competed with the Pth. one. The local *Fahlaviyyāt* dialect poems, which are attested in various regions of central and NW Iran from about the 13th century A.D. onwards, would be later examples of these.

¹⁹ It is the only Iranian loanword in Armenian (known to me) where the *x-* of an original Iranian **xš-* is preserved (if with metathesis), cf. other words like Arm. *šnorh* < Iranian **xšnaoθra-* "gratefulness", which must have been borrowed after the Iranian change **xš-* > *š-* had taken place. The InscrPth. spelling *hštr* (= /šahr/) seems to reflect a stage of Parthian before this change.

²⁰ Even if the source language was Parthian, it was not the Parthian that we know from the 3rd cent. inscriptions and Manichaean texts.

²¹ Only in Central Asia was it still used as a missionary language of Manichaeism in later times.

²² E.g., Lentz, loc. cit., p. 286.

²³ See G. Lazard's comprehensive study "*Pahlavi, Parsi, Dari: Les langues de l'Iran d'après Ibn al-Muqaffa'*", *Iran and Islam* (FS Minorsky), Edinburgh 1971, p. 361-391.

One should also ask if the NW loanwords in the Šn. may be attributed to dialects/languages other than Pth. It is difficult to answer this question because we have no information about the predecessors of the modern NW-Iranian languages and dialects (such as Kurdish, Baluchi, or Gīlakī). On the basis of the present data, one can at least not exclude the possibility that the loanwords originated from Pth. or Parthoid dialects, but they could also be from the dialects of the Semnān region or from some central plateau dialects. The word for "son" makes it only possible to exclude a number of dialects like Tāleši and Zazaki, as possible sources for the NW elements:²⁴

Pth.	Šn.	Semnānī	Natanzī (CD)	Gīlakī	Tāleši	Zaz. ²⁵
"son" puhṛ	pūr/pusar	pīr	pūr	pəsər	zœ	lāž

There must still have been Parthoid dialects around the time the Šn. was written, which looked quite different from the predecessors of modern dialects like Semnānī and Gīlakī. This is already clear from the fact that most NW dialects of today have preserved a system of at least 2 cases, while Pth. had given up all case distinctions.²⁶ A glimpse of what these dialects looked like may be gained from a dialect that was spoken by the religious group of the Hurūfīs in Gorgān, in the 14th century, of which we have some knowledge. In this dialect, the verb "to come" was *ās-* as in Pth. (< **ā-i-sa-*, with inchoative *-sa-*), while in all NW dialects of today it is *āy-* or the like (< **ā-i-*, e.g. Semn. *-y-*, Bal. *āy-*, Kd. (*h*)*ē-*).

So far, I have only discussed lexical issues. I will now in passing raise the question (that was not asked by Lentz) how the *grammar* of the Persian in the Šn. relates to that of other Persian texts from the same period. Some grammatical characteristics of the Šn., as compared to ENp. (= Early New Persian) prose works from about 950-1050 A.D., would include:²⁷

	ENp.	Šn.
1. Personal suffixes attached to prepositions	seldom	only with <i>bar</i> , <i>pēs</i>
2. <i>mar</i> without <i>-rā</i>	seldom (not as case prefix)	never
3. Certain prepositions:		
- <i>bā(z)</i> as "back to"	often	never
- <i>ba(δ)</i> as comitative "with"	often	seldom
- <i>zī</i> "towards"	only in mss. from E. Iran	occurs
4. Present perfect of type <i>kardastam</i>	only in mss. from NE. Iran	occurs

²⁴ Although Gīlakī shows a SW (loan) form here, one should not exclude it as a possible source language, because it may still have been "more NW" in the 8/9. centuries.

²⁵ Like with the word for "son", Tāl. and Zaz. have another etymon for "daughter": *kine* resp. *keyn-*.

²⁶ In most contemporary NW dialects, there is a masc. obl. ending *-ī* < OIr. **-ahya*. The Mp. forms *duxī/duxtar* (Rct./Obl.) "daughter" may be reflected in Šn. *duxī(ar)* (= Rct. = Obl.) "id.", where the oblique ending *-ar* had lost its case function but had not yet been fully generalized (as it would be in later Np.). Alternatively, the forms without *-ar* could show an influence from Pth. *duxī* (Rct./Obl.), or from dialects like Natanzī *dot* (for the Mp. oblique ending *-ar* after relation terms, see N. Sims-Williams, "Notes on Manichaean Middle Persian Morphology", *StIr* 10, 1981, p. 165-176, and P. O. Skjaervo, "Case in Inscriptional Middle Persian, Inscriptional Parthian and the Pahlavi Psalter", *StIr* 12, 1983, p. 47-62; 151-181).

²⁷ The list is based on Lazard's *La langue des plus anciens monuments de la prose persane*, Paris 1963.

I cannot go into detail here, but the schema makes it clear that the Šn. shows some grammatical peculiarities as compared with prose texts from the same period, and at the same time it shares a number of features with mss. that were written in NE-Iran (Transoxania). Persian was not yet dialectally standardized at that time, and many mss. showed dialectal peculiarities, to varying degrees, of the regions where they were written or copied.

The Present Perfect

I would like to take only one point here, No 4, and discuss it in greater detail, because it leads to a more general point. Studying the present perfect in a text sample from the Šn. of about 700 verses,²⁸ I realized that the two types of present perfect (*karde'am* vs. *karda'stam*) are not distributed homogeneously. The dialectal present perfect in -ast occurs only in the direct speech parts of the text:

	Direct speech		Framework story	
	simple	with -ast	simple	with -ast
1 Sg. rafta'am (4x)	--	--	--	--
2 Sg. rafta'1 (4x)	raftast1 (1x)	--	--	--
3 Sg. rafta (15x) ²⁹	raftast (9x)	rafta (~ 15x)	--	--

The fact that forms like *kardast* occur in direct speech only, may have an important methodological implication. I think that the framework story and the direct speech parts of any literary work should generally be studied separately at first, because they represent two different kinds of text which may have different authors and different ways of transmission. This is obvious in modern Persian belles lettres, where the author often chooses colloquial registers when one of the acting persons speaks. In the case of the Šn., the *raftast*-forms of the direct speech parts may also represent a colloquial register or give a dialectal nuance.³⁰ If there were indeed minstrels reciting the Šn., they might have tried to recite the direct speech parts in a more lively manner, attributing an individual way of speaking to some of the more prominent acting persons.³¹

One must certainly try to verify such a hypothesis with the aid of other texts. So far, I have had time to do so with only one other text, Nežāmo'l-Molk's *Siyāsatnāme*. Having read ca. 20 pages (the passage that relates Mazdak's revolt), I indeed made a remarkable discovery. The present perfect (*rafte ast*) occurs from time to time, but only in direct speech parts, and largely irrespective of aspect, while in the framework story the preterite (*raft*) is used throughout, as the narrative time.

²⁸ The greater part of Rostam and Sohrāb, vol. 2, pp. 117-173 of Dj. Khaleghi-Motlagh's new edition (Costa Mesa 1990).

²⁹ The characteristic 3 Sg. present perfect *rafta*, without the copula *ast*, occurs seldom in ENp. prose texts. It may be a stylistic or metric feature of the Šn.

³⁰ After preparing this paper, I came across the article by A. N. Boldyrev, "Perfekt II v novopersidskom literaturnom jazyke", *Izvestija Akademija Nauk Sojuza SSR (Otdelenije literatury i jazyka, 1946, tom V, vyp. 6)*, in which the author already saw that in the Šn., *raftast*-forms occur only in the direct speech parts. Boldyrev favors the colloquial explanation for it.

³¹ Alternatively, there may have been *raftast*-forms also in the framework story, but have been replaced later by copyists. A copyist may "emend" the framework story according to what he feels is "correct language", but leave the direct speech passages (which he feels are spoken by another person) untouched.

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This seems to indicate that in 11th century A.D. Persian, the present perfect was the "general" past tense of everyday speech, while the preterite had the same function for more formal speech. This would not exclude the presence of an aspectual distinction, but the question whether the *speech act* was a formal one (from the narrator) or an informal one (from an acting person), may have been more important.

Applying this to the Šn., it could mean that the usage of present perfect forms in the framework story of Rostam and Sohrāb argues for this framework story to be of spoken origin, as well. Ferdowsī, then, would not have taken it from a written source. I am aware, of course, that this can only be one argument for such a hypothesis, which must be fleshed out with all possible historical and philological evidence.

Summary

By way of summary and conclusion, I would like to emphasize the following points. Firstly, I tried to show that the language of the Šn. should be seen as one instance in a continuous historical development from Mp. to Np. Secondly, I tried to discuss the "Parthian" dialectal elements in Np. in a new light. The historical viewpoint that I added to the dialectal issue, the stratification of the loanwords into 4 chronological layers, showed that we should be more cautious when we use the term "Parthian" in this context. Then, I looked at the dialectal relation of the Šn. to other Persian texts of the time. By so doing, I came across an interesting methodological distinction between the direct speech and framework story parts. Although I cannot claim to have solved any of the vexing problems attached to the text and transmission of the Šn., I hope I have raised some interesting questions, and shown that linguistics may be able to contribute to their solution.