Mirosław Michalak
University of Warsaw, Poland | miroslaw.michalak@uw.edu.pl

Reconsidering a Paragraph of the Pahlavi *Vidēvdād* and Its Translation

Abstract This study offers a detailed re-examination of a passage from the second fargard of the Pahlavi *Vidēvdād* (Vd. 2.6), which recounts the episode of Yima receiving two mysterious implements from Ahura Mazda. The paper analyses the Avestan and Middle Persian terminology (*suβrā-*, *aštrā-*, *sūrāgōmand*, *aštar*), the interpretative challenges they pose, and their various renderings in past scholarship. It argues that the aforementioned passage of the *Vīdēvdād* has been frequently misinterpreted due to insufficient attention to the Middle Persian *zand* and—in one case—to the heterographic structure of the Pahlavi text. The study identifies the term mtl'k as an overlooked aramaeogram corresponding to *pēsīdag* ('gilt, adorned'), thus clarifying the phrase *pēsīdag dastag* ('with a gilt handle'). Drawing on philological, textual, and comparative evidence, the article concludes that the two objects in question should be interpreted not as weapons or musical instruments but as pastoral tools—specifically, a goad and a whip—fitting Yima's function as a herdsman-king. The analysis also situates the narrative within broader Iranian ritual and mythological traditions, including parallels with Herodotus' account of Xerxes' ritual acts at the Hellespont.

Keywords Avestan, Middle Persian, *Vidēvdād*, *zand*, Yima, aramaeograms, Zoroastrian literature, textual criticism

1 Introduction

The Pahlavi literature had been written, commented and shared for a long period of time. After collapse of the Sasanian Empire, however, it was gradually becoming limited to the Zoroastrian community separated from the Islamic mainstream. The situation had deteriorated partly due to the loss of greater part of the written Pahlavi legacy during early Islamic era and, on the other hand, due to new circumstances of the Iranian people who by the 9th and 10th century found their new cultural identity within the Caliphate. From that point onward, the Pahlavi literature and its language became that of a minority.[1] Therefore, Zoroastrian leaders of the Islamic era resorted to Pahlavi in their literary activity not in order to communicate with the common

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[1] For overviews of the Middle Persian literature see Tavadia (1956); Boyce (1968); Klíma (1968); Cereti (2009); Macuch (2009); Andrés-Toledo (2015); Daryaee (2018).

lore of Iranian past—actually, it was an effort to preserve the communal tradition of Zoroastrianism. The result is the limited textual corpus which has been preserved and is available today. It is almost entirely religious, with vocabulary focused on theology, rituals, religious law, cosmogony, eschatology, myths. Therefore, it lacks richness and diversity of some other dead languages like Greek, Latin, and Sanskrit.

The major part of Zoroastrian textual corpus consists of Middle Persian translations from Avestan, in many cases preserving the Avestan grammatical or lexical features, including phrases, collocations, loanwords, calques, and Pahlavi transcriptions of Avestan words. The unique phenomenon of intertextual relation between Avestan and its Middle Persian translations and commentaries is attracting growing interest of scholars.[2]

As some parts of the Avesta are known only through its Pahlavi translation, hence there is no opportunity of taking advantage of the original text in order to establish the correct shape or meaning of words. And, of course, their context. Reconstruction of large spectre of various contexts of Middle Persian is only partially possible, given that they are largely dependent on older contexts of the Avesta which are also obscure. Dependence on Avestan source material—particularly in relation to Middle Persian translations of Avestan texts—carries significant implications for both researchers and translators. This paper focuses on the textual situation in a section of the second *fargard* of the *Pahlavi Vidēvdād*, which presents the story of Yima in Middle Persian translation accompanied by the Avestan text and explanatory glosses. Accordingly, all direct source references will pertain to the Middle Persian text. The Avestan version will be cited solely for illustrative purpose and to preserve the coherence of the argument. Textual-critical details, however, will not be addressed. Some scholarly interpretations and findings concerning the meaning of selected Avestan terms and their renderings in academic studies and lexicons will also be reported. Both manuscripts and printed editions of the *Pahlavi Vidēvdād*—primarily the 2014 edition by Moazami (2014) whose work is based on manuscripts (mainly K1 and L4) and partly on Jamasp's edition—will be consulted. Other editions will be referenced only occasionally, chiefly for supplementary or contextual purposes.

2 The text and its context

The *Vidēvdād* (*Vendīdād*) is among the most extensively studied texts in the Avestan corpus. Several factors contribute to this. Most notably, it is the only part of the Avesta that has been preserved nearly in full as it was edited during the Sasanian period. What survives is not only the Avestan text itself but also a Middle Persian translation and commentary, as well as a summary in Book VIII of the *Dēnkard*.

Furthermore, the *Vidēvdād* belongs to the category of legal Avestan texts (*dādīg*), which are of enduring importance for linguistic, doctrinal, and historical research. It also contains rare narrative material, which is particularly valuable for scholars

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[2] Among others Josephson (1997); Cantera (2004); Zeini (2020).

studying Iranian mythology and epic traditions. As a result, the *Vidēvdād* has drawn considerable scholarly attention, leading to numerous editions, translations, and glossaries (Sanjana 1895; N.M. Kanga 1900; Jamasp 1907; Anklesaria 1949; Kapadia 1953; Moazami 2014; Andrés-Toledo 2016; Redard 2021). The story of Yima, which forms the second *fargard* of the *Vidēvdād*, is a significant narrative episode in the Avesta and has long attracted the interest of scholars. Consequently, this particular chapter has been published and translated separately on many occasions—in both its Avestan and Middle Persian forms, or in one version alone—often independently of full editions of the *Vidēvdād* (Moghaddam 1363; Moazami 2002; Bāgheri Hasan Kiādeh and Rouholamini Hoseini 1393; Molāyi 1402).

One of the many challenges encountered by researchers and translators appears in the brief sixth paragraph (Vd. 2.6), which consists essentially of a single sentence:

2.6 (A) *āat̰ hē zaiia frabarəm azəm yō ahurō mazdå* (B) *suβrąm zaranaēnīm aštrąmca zaraniiō.paēsim* (Geldner 1896: 7–8)

2.6 (A) ADYN' OL OLE zdȳ pr'č YBLWN-t L MNW 'whrmẕd HWE-m (B) swl'k'wmnd ZHBA-yn' W 'štl-č Y ZHBA-yn' psyd [*matl'k dstk']³

2.6 (A) *ēg ō ōy zay frāz burd man kē ohrmazd ham* (B) *sūrāgōmand zarrēn ud aštar-iz ī zarrēn-pēsīd [*mutallā dastag]* (Moazami 2014: 48)⁴

2.6 (A) Then I who am Ohrmazd, brought him the tool, (B) a *golden pick and a goad adorned with gold [having a *gilt handle] (Moazami 2014: 48).

3 Lexical evidence and interpretative problems

The main difficulty concerns two Avestan terms—*suβrā-* and *aštrā-*—along with their Middle Persian equivalents *sūrāgōmand* (swl'k'wmnd) and *aštar* ('štr). While we can now read, transliterate, and vocalize these words without issue, their precise meanings remain uncertain. We can infer their function from the context: Yima uses them in actions described in the text, and they are noted for being made of gold or gilded (*zarrēn* and *zarrēn-pēsīd*), which suggests they may be royal insignia. However, their

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3 Manuscripts of Pahl.Vd.: L4 (4600), f13r-f13v; MI3 (4615), f14r-f14v: pr'č YBLWN-x₁; F10 (4670), f14r: pr'č YBLWN-x₁, mwtl'k bstk (corrected into mwtl'k dstk), NP gloss on the margin: mdr'k, the text abounds in NP glosses; G28 (4680), f11r: swl'k 'wmnd (written separately) Y zdȳ ZHBA-yn', few NP glosses; T44 (4700), f16r: swl'k 'wmnd (written separately) Y ZHBA-yn', the text regularly accompanied by NP glosses between the lines; G34 (4710), f18r: pr'č YBLW N T'' LMNW (written in a confusing manner), swl'k 'wmnd (written separately, with a stroke over the letter 'l' as a pronunciation guide), mt-l'k dst (written with a hyphen, missing the ending letter 'k'), the text abounds in NP glosses; B1 (4711), f17v: pr'č YBLWN-x₁, NP glosses; Bh11 (4712), f21r. All these manuscripts are available on-line at *Avestan Digital Archive*. Accessed 22 September 2025. https://ada.geschkult.fu-berlin.de. See also *The Zoroastrian Middle Persian Digital Corpus and Dictionary*. https://www.mpcorpus.org. PV-K1–02, Section 2.6, Sentence 135; Ms. of the Pahl.Vd. dated 1859, Columbia University N.Y., Cat. No. X892.5Av3 S4, f10v. Accessed 22 September 2025. https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id = nnc2.ark:/13960/t1ph1c67f&seq = 1.

4 Moazami's transcription has been slightly modified here. I have added *ī* after *aštar-iz* in accordance with the manuscripts.

exact use is still unclear. The generic term used to describe them is ambiguous: the Avestan noun *zaya-* and its Middle Persian counterpart *zay* can mean either tool or weapon (Bartholomae 1904: 1666).[5] In the first part of the narrative—where Yima receives authority from Ahura Mazda to care for creation—these objects seem to be used to expand the earth three times to accommodate a growing population (Vd. 2.10, 14, 18). But the verbs describing their use (e.g., to pierce, strike, or rub the earth) are vague and open to interpretation. In the second part of the story, during the onset of a deadly winter, one of the items (*suβrā-/sūrāgōmand*) is mentioned twice: once in connection with sealing a protective shelter (MP *war*), and once with bringing inhabitants into it (Vd. 2.30, 38). However, the syntax here is ambiguous and allows multiple readings.[6]

Because the *Vidēvdād* has been translated many times, a variety of interpretations of these terms exist. The Avestan *suβrā-* has been translated as spear,[7] seal, signet ring,[8] ring,[9] arrow,[10] notch or ploughshare,[11] pick or spike,[12] trumpet, horn[13] or just implement.[14] The Middle Persian *sūrāgōmand* is usually rendered as crown or ring,[15] ring,[16] hollow object.[17] Its literal meaning in *zand*—having a hole or perforated—suggests it could be a wreath, diadem, ring, signet, or even a musical instrument (flute, horn). However, scholars still disagree on the exact nature and meaning of this object.

A similar issue arises with the second object bestowed upon Yima by Ahura Mazda. However, the relationship between the Avestan term *aštrā-* and its Middle Persian counterpart *aštar* differs remarkably from that between *suβrā-* and its translation as *sūrāgōmand*. In this case, we are dealing with a straightforward linguistic transposition from Avestan to Middle Persian, involving morphological adaptation of the lexeme to suit the structure of the target language.[18] This would appear to

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[5] Cf. Reichelt (1911: 272). For Middle Persian see MacKenzie (1986: 98).

[6] Mss. of Pahl.Vd.: L4 (4600), f22r, f25r; MI3 (4615), f23v, 27r; F10 (4670), f23v, f27r; G28 (4680), f19r, f22r; T44 (4700), f26r, f29v; G34 (4710), f28r, 32r; B1 (4711), f30r-f30v, 35r; Bh11 (4712), f39v, f44v-f45r; PV-K1–02, Sec. 2.30, Sent. 235, Sec. 2.38, Sent. 264—*MPDC*; Pahl.Vd. 1859 Columbia, f17v, f20r-f20v. See also Molāyi (1402: 78–79).

[7] 'eine goldene Lanze' (Spiegel 1852: 71, 72).

[8] 'un sceau d'or' (Darmesteter 1892 2: 21, 22, 23); 'a golden ring' (Darmesteter 1880 I: 12, 13, 14, 15).

[9] 'anneau' (Christensen 1934: 15, 16, 46); 'bague' (Christensen 1934: 17, 18).

[10] 'Pfeil' (Bartholomae 1904: 1583); 'Pfeil' (Wolff 1910: 320, 321); 'arrow' (Reichelt 1911: 139, 269).

[11] '*sufār / sufāl be ma'ni-ye surāx va dahān-e tir yā "sopār": āhan-e sar tiz barā-ye šiyār kardan-e zamin*' (Moghaddam 1363: 67); '*sufār*' (Moghaddam 1363: 91, 92, 93, 94).

[12] 'pick' (Moazami 2014: 49, 51, 53); '*sok-e zarrin*' (Molāyi 1402: 30, 33, 37, 41).

[13] 'le cor' (Lecoq 2017: 284, 876, 877, 878, 881, 883).

[14] K.E. Kanga 1900: 528–529.

[15] 'a crown (or a ring)' (N.M. Kanga 1900: 17); 'ring' (N.M. Kanga 1900: 18, 19).

[16] 'lit. with a hole; hence, a ring' (Jamasp 1907 2: 221).

[17] 'hollow (-implement)' (Anklesaria 1949: 18, 20, 22, 24); 'hollow golden <instrument>' (Moazami 2002: 66, 67, 68, 70, 72).

[18] It is noteworthy that a similar practice is commonly employed by contemporary translators of Middle Persian texts into New Persian (Kłagisz 2015).

make the matter simpler. Yet even here, the precise meaning and function of the object remain ambiguous. The Avestan term *aštrā-* has been variously interpreted as: spike,[19] sword,[20] poniard,[21] whip, horsewhip, knout,[22] whip,[23] an oxgoad or whip,[24] scourge,[25] goad.[26] Translators of the Middle Persian *zand* largely align with these, offering similar renderings such as: dagger, sword, javelin, poniard, and whip.[27]

As evident, interpretations and translations of both terms vary, and none can be regarded as entirely definitive. Nevertheless, some stand out as particularly accurate and convincing. Below are a few of the most compelling interpretations.

H.W. Bailey (1943: 219–224) offers an in-depth analysis of the possible meanings of both terms, drawing on the linguistic context to investigate the functions their referents may have served. The sentence quoted above from Vd. 2.6 serves merely as a starting point—a simple statement not devoid of ambiguity. Hence the necessity of turning to a more explicit context, which Bailey finds in Vd. 2.10, 14, and 18. In these sections, the two objects received by Yima from Ahura Mazda are accompanied by the verbs *aiβifšuuaṯ* and *sifaṯ*, indicating actions performed with their aid. These actions relate to driving cattle and are translated here respectively as 'to drive' and 'to strike' (*hō imąm ząm aiβifšuuaṯ suβriia zaranaēniia auui dim sifaṯ aštraiia* 'He drove on this earth with the golden suwra, he struck upon her with the whip' Vd. 2.10) (Bailey 1943: 227).[28] This interpretation is justified by the fact that one of Yima's roles—though largely overshadowed in extant narratives by his kingship—was that of a herdsman. However, in the mentioned paragraphs, it is not cattle but the personified earth, Spənta Ārmaiti, that is urged three times by means of both instruments to exhibit a specific behavior: the expansion of her surface (Bailey 1943: 219–221). On the other hand, in Vd. 2.30 and 38, *suβrā-*, according to Bailey, was used by Yima to drive the seed of men and women (also personified) into the interior of the *var*. In this case, Bailey assumes that the form *varəfšuua*, which elsewhere in Vd. 2 consistently appears as a locative noun, should instead be understood as a verb meaning 'to drive (in)'. To support this reading, he engages in a kind of deconstruction and then reconstruction

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[19] 'Stachel' (Spiegel 1852: 71, 72).

[20] 'une épée' (Darmesteter 1892 2: 21, 22, 23); 'a poniard' (Darmesteter 1880: 12, 13, 14,15).

[21] 'a dagger, a poniard' (K.E. Kanga 1900: 69).

[22] 'Geisel, Peitsche, Knute' (Bartholomae 1904: 263).

[23] 'a whip used in connection with *Sraosho-charana* in religious castigation for driving away noxious animals' (K.E. Kanga 1900: 69); 'Peitsche' (Wolff 1910: 320, 321); 'whip' (Reichelt 1911: 139); 'goad, whip' (Reichelt 1911: 220).

[24] '*gavāz (šallāgh?)*' (Moghaddam 1363: 47); '*aštar*' (Moghaddam 1363: 91, 92, 93, 94).

[25] '*tāzyāne*' (Molāyi 1402: 30, 33, 37, 41).

[26] 'aiguillon' (Christensen 1934: 15, 16, 46); 'the goad' (Moazami 2002: 66, 67); 'goad' (Moazami 2014: 49, 51, 53:); 'aiguillon' (Lecoq 2017: 284, 876, 877, 878).

[27] 'a sword (or poniard)'; 'poniard' (N.M. Kanga 1900: 18, 19); 'dagger, sword, javelin, poniard' (Jamasp 1907 2: 34); 'poniard' (Anklesaria 1949: 18, 20, 22, 24:); (i) 'dagger, sword, poniard, a weapon'; (ii) 'a whip used with sraocha-charana i.e. an implement for bodily anguish and torture' (Kapadia 1953: 249).

[28] I have changed Bailey's transcription of Avestan in order to avoid inconsistency and incompatibility with other quotations from the Avesta.

of the text (Bailey 1943: 222–224). While the argument in relation to Vd. 2.10, 14, and 18 is convincing, the construction referring to Vd. 2.30 and 38 remains debatable. Nonetheless, the translation of *suβrā-* as 'goad' is well substantiated. As for the term *aštrā-*, Bailey considers the matter definitively resolved in favor of the meaning whip (Bailey 1943: 220–221). This interpretation is now widely accepted, and MacKenzie (1986: 13) also provides this meaning in his dictionary.

J. Kellens follows a similar line of inquiry in his 1974 publication on Avestan roots, where he analyzes the term *varəfšuua*. He likewise argues that in Vd. 2.30 and 38 the term should be understood as a verbal form. However, he also points out certain inconsistencies and, at times, the arbitrary nature of Bailey's interpretations (Kellens 1974: 358–361). With regard to the term *suβrā-*, Kellens accepts Bailey's interpretation as the stick used to drive cattle: 'le bâton (à mener le bétail)'. The term *aštrā-*, on the other hand, is rendered by Kellens alternately as whip ('le fouet'), following Bailey's reading, and as spear ('la pique') (Kellens 1974: 195, 320, 358 n. 1). In his later works, however, Kellens revised his position and adopted the interpretation proposed by J. Duchesne-Guillemin, who translates *suβrā-* as horn ('le cor') (Kellens 1984: 270; Kellens 1988: 329, 332. n. 1).[29]

The first scholar to propose that the term *suβrā-* might refer to a musical instrument was the Iranian researcher Š. Hedāyati. In a 1971 (Hedāyati 1349) article devoted entirely to the terms *suβrā-* and *aštrā-*, he presents arguments identifying *suβrā- / sūrāgōmand* as a horn (*nafir, gāvdom*). Beyond extensive textual analysis drawn from the Avestan corpus—including the use of specific verbs that describe the function of the object—Hedāyati also cites evidence from the *Wizīdagīhā ī Zādspram*. In this text, there is an allusion to Yima's *sūrāgōmand* in the context of Sōšyāns using the *gāwdumb* to resurrect the dead. He further draws a parallel with Indian mythology, where Yama is described as possessing a reed flute (Hedāyati 1349: 116). Additionally, Hedāyati turns to the *zand* tradition, where the verb *suft*, used in Vd. 2.10, 14, and 18, is glossed in Middle Persian by the compound *frōd garzīd* (Hedāyati 1349: 117; Jamasp 1907 1: 27–28). The verb *garzīdan*, meaning to complain or to lament, is interpreted by Hedāyati as referring to the production of sound (*nāle, sedā*) by a musical instrument, such as a horn (Hedāyati 1349: 117). A central element of his argument is based on the verb *garzīdan*, which appears in a gloss accompanying the *zand* text. However, this line of reasoning is problematic. The word in question appears in this form in the edition by H. Jamasp, which serves as the textual foundation for Hedāyati's analysis (Jamasp 1907 1: 563). The verb, however, although attested in the extant manuscripts of the *Pahlavi Vidēvdād* (including Vd. 2.10, 14, and 18) in two spellings glčyt and klčyt,[30] beyond any doubt has another meaning in this context. As a Pahlavi gloss to a passage in Vd. 18.4 suggests, *garzīdan* or *karzīdan* stands

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[29] Cf. Duchesne-Guillemin (1979: 539–549).
[30] Mss. of Pahl.Vd.: L4 (4600), f15v; Bh11 (4712), f23r. *Avestan Digital Archive*; Pahl.Vd. 1859 Columbia, f12v.

here for the act of wielding. The whole sentence says: *aštar mārɣen kū ōh garzēd ast kē ēdōn gowēd ay ōh wizārēd anaybyāst pad dēn* ('A whip for killing snakes which he, ungirdled in Dēn, is said to wave (?) or—according to some—to wield').[31] In some manuscripts the corresponding verb appearing in Vd. 2.10, 14, and 18, is not glčyt and klčyt but dlyt', representing the verb *darīd* (*darīdan*—to tear down or to rend).[32] The same reading is found in the editions by Sanjana (1895: 14–15, 18), Anklesaria (1949: 20), N.M. Kanga (1900), and Moazami.[33] The form '*darīdan*' should therefore be considered relevant for this passage. This assumption significantly alters the interpretative context of Hedāyati's reasoning.

With regard to the noun *aštrā*-, Hedāyati argues that although the term appears elsewhere in the *Vidēvdād*—specifically in the compound *aspahe-aštrā*—as a designation for an instrument of punishment (whip), this does not exclude the possibility that in the second *fargard*, it may serve a different function, namely, that of a musical instrument (Hedāyati 1349: 108, 115, 118–119). In this context, he unequivocally claims that *aštrā*- refers to a type of musical instrument. Consequently, both objects bestowed upon Yima are understood as signaling devices, intended to summon or direct nomadic communities, particularly during their migrations.

However, this interpretation is built on weak foundations, relying almost entirely on conjecture, as no primary sources explicitly support such a reading of the term (Hedāyati 1349: 117–120). Hedāyati's hypothesis is later echoed by M. Bahār, who reinforces the idea of *suβrā*- as a sound-producing horn by referencing a passage from the *Bundahišn*. In chapter XXIV of that text, during the description of the mythical three-legged donkey emerging from the sea *Frāxkard*, there is a mention of its golden horn, referred to as *sūrāgōmand* (Bahār 1362: 178–179).[34] Another Iranian scholar, A. Tafazzoli (1355: 48–50), in 1976 expanded upon the interpretations of his predecessors by introducing new textual evidence from Book IX of the *Dēnkard* and from al-Muqaddasī's treatise *Kitāb al-badʾ wa-l-tārīḫ*. These sources refer to a magical object described in Middle Persian as *sūrāgōmand ī zarrēn* and in Arabic as *mašāra wa-hiya minfaḫa min ḏahab*—a golden wind instrument allegedly used by Zahhāk to lure individuals who possessed attractive young women or desirable goods. In the Arabic text, the verb *nafaḫa* (to blow) is employed, prompting Tafazzoli to interpret Zahhāk's object as a wind instrument, most plausibly a horn. Nevertheless, in the conclusion of his article, Tafazzoli expresses caution. He argues that the Avestan term *suβrā*- should not

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[31] Mss. of Pahl.Vd.: L4 (4600), f243v; K1 (4610), f196r; F10 (4670), f254r; G28 (4680), f234v; T44 (4700), f283r; G34 (4710), f255v; B1 (4711), f360r; Bh11 (4712), f208v—*Avestan Digital Archive*; PV-K1–02, Sec. 18.4, Sen. 2979—*MPDC*; Pahl.Vd. 1859 Columbia, f206r. For the meaning, etymology and use of the verb *wizārīdan* see Mansuri (1384: 491).

[32] Mss. of Pahl.Vd.: G28 (4680), f13r—*Avestan Digital Archive*; PV-K1–02, Sec. 2.10, Sen. 146, Sec. 2.14, Sen. 161, Sec. 2.18, Sen. 175.

[33] '*kū-š abar pad frōd-darīd*' (Moazami 2002: 59); '*kū-š abar frōd-darīd*' (Moazami 2002: 60); 'he tore it down' (Moazami 2002:67, 68); Moazami (2014: 50, 51, 52, 53).

[34] '*ān ēk srū zarrēn homānāg sūrāgōmand u-š hazār srū abārig aziš rust ēstēd*' (Pakzad 2005: 271 [24d.15]).

be linked to any kind of sound-producing instrument, noting that such associations only appear in the writings of later translators and commentators of the Avesta, who were likely influenced by contemporary legends attributing a miraculous horn to Yima (Tafazzoli 1355: 49). This conclusion is challenged by Duchesne-Guillemin (1979: 539–549), who presents an extensive argument in favor of interpreting the object as a horn. Like Hedāyati, he considers it highly plausible that the instrument used by the Avestan Yima is related to the term *ṣūr*, mentioned multiple times in the Quran, which denotes the horn whose sound will summon the dead at the end of time for the final judgment. Moreover, Duchesne-Guillemin argues that the Quranic *ṣūr* is a direct borrowing from the theoretical Middle Persian term *sūr*, itself ultimately derived from the Avestan *suβrā-* with the same meaning (Hedāyati 1349: 121–122; Duchesne-Guillemin 1979: 545–549). He reviews the arguments put forth by the three aforementioned Iranian scholars and engages with the primary sources they cite, adding further evidence from the Middle Persian text *Husraw ī Kawādān ud rēdag-ē*, where the name of a musical instrument appears in the form swl'cyk (Azarnouche 2013: 56 [text § 62], 142 [comments]).[35] Duchesne-Guillemin reads this as *sūrācīk* and proposes linking this name, along with *sūrāgōmand*, to the Avestan *suβrā-*, the Sanskrit root *śumbhati*, and the Persian verb *suftan* (to pierce).[36] Lecoq also translates *suβrā-* as horn, although he offers no justification for this choice other than the fact that, like the goad, it belongs to the standard toolkit of a herdsman—hence his view of Yima as a shepherd-king.[37] He translates *aštrā-* as goad but also allows for the alternative translation—whip. He interprets it as an object used in combat, but also as a tool employed by priests (*āθrauuan*) and for the administration of punishment.[38]

4 Remarks on the presented interpretations

The analyses presented above reveal two distinct methodological approaches. The first, exemplified by Bailey and Kellens, centers exclusively on the Avestan text, deliberately disregarding the Middle Persian *zand*, which—allegedly being the product of a misinterpretation of the original Avestan by its translators—is considered to obscure rather than clarify the meaning (Bailey 1943: 222; Kellens 1984: 358 n. 1). This idea has been entirely dismissed by modern scholarship, particularly due to the recent research made by J. Josephson (1997: 153–165), A. Cantera (2004: 3–13), and A. Zeini (2020: 291). Subsequently, the *zand* is no more deemed in opposition to the 'genuine' Avesta (*abestāg*) but is perceived as its inseparable and valuable part.

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[35] The editor translates the Pahlavi term *sūrāzīg-srāy* 'le joueur de flûte de fête (?)' and does not make any decisive conclusion concerning its meaning and etymology.

[36] Duchesne–Guillemin (1979: 544) The Indo-Iranian root 'śumbh-' parallel to Middle and New Persian 'sumb-'/'suft-' was noticed by Bailey (1943: 221). Cf. Kellens (1974: 358 n. 1); Mansuri (1384: 392–393).

[37] 'Yima est donc un rois pasteur' (Lecoq 2017: 876 n. 6). Kellens (1984: 269–272) categorically rejects the interpretation of Yima as a royal figure, a view most notably advanced by Christensen.

[38] '"aiguillon" ou "fouet", utilisé à la guerre (voir Yt. 10, 113), c'est aussi un instrument de l'*āθravan* (V. 14, 8; et du faux *āθravan*, V. 18, 4) et un châtiment (V. 3, 36 note; 4, 11, etc.)' (Lecoq 2017: 876 n. 6).

The second approach, advocated chiefly by Hedāyati, Bahār, and Duchesne--Guillemin, incorporates the *zand* into the interpretative process, treating the Middle Persian translation as a valuable clue in resolving the semantic ambiguities of the two terms (Hedāyati 1349: 116–117; Bahār 1362: 178). While in the broader context of Middle Persian translation studies the second approach may seem inherently more pertinent, in this specific case, the insights of Avestan scholars prove instrumental in accurately interpreting the *zand*. At the same time, the *zand* certainly can shed light on uncertainties concerning the meaning of individual lexemes as well as the cultural codes embedded in the text.

The hypotheses outlined above, though more persuasive and better substantiated than alternative, mostly outdated interpretations, are not without their shortcomings. In the arguments put forward by Bailey and Kellens, one notable point of contention lies in their inconsistent treatment of the lexeme *varəfšuua*—interpreted in some instances as a noun, and in others as a verb. Additionally, Kellens offers two divergent translations for the term *aštrā* ('le fouet' and 'la pique'), which may raise concerns regarding conceptual coherence. Nevertheless, the evidence presented by both scholars remains generally credible and methodologically sound.

In contrast, the interpretations proposed by Hedāyati and Bahār warrant attention for their reliance solely on the Middle Persian *zand*, particularly in support of their thesis that the item in question was a musical instrument. Duchesne-Guillemin, on the other hand, acknowledges that according to the prevailing scholarly opinion, the Avestan *suβrā-* should have yielded **subr* or **surb*, by analogy with *abra-* > *abr* ('cloud'). Nevertheless, he proposes an alternative sequence of phonetic transformations: *suβr* > *suwr* > *sūr*, supporting his view with the alleged shift from *gabr* to *gawr* (Duchesne-Guillemin 1979: 544). This argument, however, has significant weaknesses.

First, the proposed phonetic sequence lacks any attestation in the sources, and no analogous developments are known that might lend it credibility. Second, the forms *gabr* and *gawr* are not linked by a diachronic relationship; rather, they coexist in New Persian, with the latter representing merely a phonetic variant of the former (Shaki 2000). Duchesne-Guillemin also interprets the New Persian word *sornā* (or *sornāy*) as a compound *sūr-nāy*. Rejecting the explanation found in traditional Persian lexicography—according to which the term refers to a wind instrument used to enhance festive gatherings—he argues that the word should be understood as a combination of trumpet and flute, with *sūr* representing a reflex of the Avestan *suβrā-*.[39] However, no such meaning of *sūr* is attested in either Middle Persian or New Persian. In both languages, the word refers exclusively to a 'banquet' or 'feast'. The entire line of reasoning rests on the a priori assumption that *suβrā-* denoted a musical instrument. This hypothesis draws, in part, on Indian tradition, in which Yama is described as the possessor of a flute. In that tradition, Yama is above all a royal figure, whereas in the Avestan context, his counterpart Yima has an equally important pastoral function

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[39] 'un instrument combinant la trompette et la flûte, le *sūr* et le *nāy*: *sūrnāy*' (Duchesne-Guillemin 1979: 544).

(Bailey 1943: 220–221). Duchesne-Guillemin also appeals to this pastoral dimension, arguing that a shepherd's natural attribute would be a wind instrument, such as a pipe or horn.[40] His argument further relies on a passage from a *zand* text, and several analogies drawn from later Middle Persian and Arabic sources. Apart from *Husraw ī Kawādān ud rēdag-ē*, these are predominantly late sources such as the *Dēnkard* and the *Wizīdagīhā ī Zādspram*. Moreover, many of the lexemes he invokes to support his claims originate in New Persian and cannot plausibly be connected to the Avestan language.

5 Functional interpretation and comparative perspective

There remain, of course, other contexts that have yet to be examined in relation to the *fargard* of the *Vidēvdād* under discussion. A particularly compelling analogy is provided by Herodotus, who in his account of Xerxes' army crossing the Hellespont (Dardanelles), describes the Persian king's command to have the sea whipped as punishment for a storm that had destroyed the bridge constructed by the Persians across the strait (Herodotus 2015: 7.35). T. Daryaee (2016: 4–9) drew attention to this passage from Herodotus, arguing that the conduct of the Persian King of Kings described here is a deliberate repetition of Yima's gesture, assuming Xerxes' familiarity with the mythological narrative motifs of the Avesta. Daryaee focuses on the use of the whip as an instrument of control, in the sense in which Yima employs it upon the earth to enforce his will (Daryaee 2016: 6). The symbolic meaning of this ritual was evidently lost on the Greeks. This is reflected in Aeschylus' *Persians*, where the act is portrayed as a manifestation of youthful arrogance, a sacrilegious offense against the sanctity of the Hellespont, and a hubristic belief that a mortal could exercise dominion over all the gods, including Poseidon himself (Aeschylus 1903: 743–750).[41] The incident is thus interpreted as an expression of hubris—the excessive pride and overreach characteristic of Xerxes in Greek moral and literary tradition. Daryaee also draws attention to this, making an analogy to a similar trait in the figure of Yima, who as a result of his improper conduct, loses his royal glory and power (Daryaee 2016: 7).

It should be noted, however, that the whipping was accompanied by the symbolic act of chaining of the waters and their branding by men designated for the task. Herodotus also records the words that the executors of this 'punishment' were instructed to pronounce on Xerxes' orders—directly addressing the waters of the Hellespont with reproaches for the unjust harm they had inflicted upon the king.

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[40] Daryaee (2016: 6) apparently accepted the reasoning promoted by Duchesne-Guillemin, as in one of his papers he translated the Avestan term *suβrā-* as trumpet. A similar translation occurs in PV-K1-02, Sec. 2.6, Sent. 135—*MPDC*, where *sūrāgōmand* has been translated as Blashorn.

[41] Cf. Herodotus (2015: 7.19, 1); Haubold (2012: 15–16). Here, the Achaemenid relationship with the sea is situated within a narrative derived from ancient Mesopotamian tradition, beginning with Sargon of Agade. The interpretation of classical Greek texts serves to highlight the response to Persian imperial ideology, particularly regarding the conquest of 'overseas' territories.

If we move beyond the Greek framework of interpretation, Herodotus' account reveals not only Xerxes' repetition of Yima's gesture, compelling the sacred earth to submit to his will in the sense of a 'cultural trick', as Daryaee puts it, but also an echo of the ritual dialogue between the ruler (and guide) and the personified forces of nature. This presents a compelling functional parallel to Vd. 2.10, 14, and 18. In both cases, we find the same ritual components: the use of specific objects and direct verbal persuasion addressed to a personified entity. In the *Vidēvdād*, Yima addresses Spandarmad, the earth-spirit; Xerxes, by contrast, addresses the 'bitter waters' of the Hellespont. In both instances, the act is magical rather than devotional. It does not involve supplication to a deity whose favor may or may not be granted but instead constitutes a performative act of compulsion intended to produce a desired outcome. Thus, neither in Herodotus' narrative nor in the *Vidēvdād* text should these actions be construed as expressions of irreverence toward sacred natural elements. On the contrary, the instruments and gestures described by Herodotus can plausibly be reinterpreted not as tools of punishment, but as pastoral implements: a whip for driving, fetters for binding, and a brand for marking livestock. By the time of Xerxes, the ritual's original symbolic meaning may well have become obscured or recontextualized.

Nonetheless, when read through the lens of Iranian ritual tradition, Herodotus' account offers a complementary and highly relevant framework for understanding the ritual logic of Vd. 2.10, 14, and 18:

> 2.10 (B) *hō imąm ząm aiβišuuaṱ suβriia zaranaēniia auui dim sifaṱ aštraiia uitiiaojanō friθa spəṇta ārmaite fraca šuua vīca nəmaδaŋha barəθre pasuuąmca staoranąmca mašiiānąmca* (Geldner 1896 Vend.: 8, 9; Jamasp 1907 1: 27, 29–30, 31)

> 2.10 (B) *ōy ēn zamīg abar suft pad sūrāgōmand zarrēn* (C) *u-š be ān ī suft pad aštar [kū-š abar pad frōd darīd]* (D) *u-š ēdōn guft kū dōšarāmī kun spandarmad [kū dōšarāmīhā dāmān rāy kun ēn tis] frāz raw [kū wēš be dārāš] be hunąm [kū yašt be bāš] barišn ī pahān stōrān ud mardōmān rāy [kun ēn tis]* (Moazami 2014: 50)[42]

> 2.10 (B) He pierced this earth with the golden goad, (C) he pierced it with the whip (he tore it down); (D) and thus he spoke: o Spandarmad! do a favor [i.e. do this with affection for the sake of creatures]; go forward [i.e. expand], be esteemed (of good name) [so you may be worshipped] for carrying the small and large cattle and men [do this].

Furthermore, the seemingly remote analogy from Herodotus' *Histories* reinforces Bailey's argument that the primary role of the Avestan Yima is that of a herdsman and breeder. It also supports the interpretation of the term *aštar* as a whip. This reading fits well with Bailey's broader hypothesis concerning the personification of

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[42] Mss. of Pahl.Vd.: L4 (4600), f15r-f15v; G28 (4680), f13r-f13v; Bh11 (4712), 22v-f23r—*Avestan Digital Archive*; PV-K1–02, Sec. 2.10, Sen. 146, Sec. 2.14, Sen. 161, Sec. 2.18, Sen. 175—*MPDC*; Pahl.Vd. 1859 Columbia, f12v-f13r.

the earth in paragraphs Vd. 2.10, 14, and 18, and of the 'seeds' or 'germs' in Vd. 2.30 and 38. The pastoral—rather than martial—function of the two objects given to Yima by Ahura Mazda is further suggested by the accompanying classificatory noun: Avestan *zaya-*, Middle Persian *zay*. Although often translated as either instrument or weapon, there is substantial evidence in favor of the former. In his dictionary entry for *zaya-*, Bartholomae lists both meanings, but illustrates the sense 'instrument' using a passage from Vd. 2.6 rather than interpreting it as a weapon (Bartholomae 1904: 1666; Reichelt 1911: 220).[43] While Lecoq, citing the *Mihr Yašt*, proposes that *aštrā-* may denote a goad or whip used in battle ('aiguillon' or 'fouet' utilisé à la guerre), the context of the *Yašt* does not clearly support a direct association with weaponry. Rather, it appears more plausibly to refer to a whip used to drive horses in a chariot, emphasizing its functional role in control rather than combat.[44] Weapons are in fact referenced frequently throughout the Avesta, especially in texts where types of arms are listed in succession (e.g., in the *Ohrmazd Yašt*, *Mihr Yašt*, *Fravardīn Yašt*, and *Vidēvdād*). Notably, however, neither *suβrā-* nor *aštrā-* is ever included in these enumerations.[45] In contrast, a Middle Persian gloss on Vd. 2.7 makes the nature of the object unmistakably clear, referring to it explicitly as a tool—*abzār* (2.7 (A) '*kē ǰam būd barišn ī xwadāyīh [kū-š xwadāyīh ēdōn nēk pad ān abzār tuwān kardan]*').[46]

6 The new reading of a term from the Pahlavi gloss

In the sentence from Vd. 2.6 cited at the beginning there remains one term whose meaning has yet to be clarified with full certainty. As it appears solely in the Middle Persian gloss, the ambiguity cannot be resolved through comparison with the Avestan text. The term in question is *mtl'k and is attested in this form in all manuscripts of the *Pahlavi Vidēvdād*, the only alteration being Ms. F10 (4670) f14r, which has mwtl'k and a NP gloss on the margin: mdr'k. Already in the 19th century, Darmesteter recognized the difficulty in interpreting this word and proposed an emendation to mtrk, translating it as seal. He considered this a Middle Persian equivalent of the Avestan *suβrā-* and interpreted *dastak* as referring to the handle of the instrument *aštrā-*.[47] This interpretation was later adopted by N.M. Kanga, who, however, retained the original spelling and read it as *matrâk*, likewise translating it as seal (N.M. Kanga 1900: 17). The same

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[43] Moazami (2014: 66) translates the Middle Persian term *zay* as instrument.

[44] Yt. 10, 112–113. Lecoq (2017: 451); Geldner (1896 Visp. & Kh. Av.: 149–150).

[45] Yt. 1. 18; Yt. 10, 39–40; Yt. 13, 72; V. 17. 9–10. Geldner (1896 Visp. & Kh. Av.: 64, 134, 184; Vend.: 111); Lecoq (2017: 327, 427–428, 499, 1012).

[46] Mss. of Pahl.Vd.: L4 (4600), f13v; MI3 (4615), f14v; F10 (4670), f14r; G28 (4680), f11r; T44 (4700), f16r-f16v; G34 (4710), f18r-f18v; B1 (4711), f17v-f18r; Bh11 (4712), f21r—*Avestan Digital Archive*; PV-K1–02, Sec. 2.7, Sent. 135—*MPDC*; Pahl.Vd. 1859 Columbia, f10v-f11r; Moazami (2014: 48).

[47] '[...] MTRAK, corrigé en MTRK, sera le persan *muhra* »sceau«' (Darmesteter 1892 2: 21 n. 7).

approach is evident in the TITUS digital project, which provides unannotated versions of the text (with the option of consulting MacKenzie's dictionary for individual lexemes). The editors, following Darmesteter's logic, have emended the transcription to *muhrāg*.[48] Similar method is adopted by the editors of *The Zoroastrian Middle Persian Digital Corpus and Dictionary*, in which the reading is *muhrāg ī dastag* [sic] and has been translated as die Scheibe des Griffes, however, it lacks transliteration.[49] Other scholars, by contrast, have not modified the spelling and have restricted themselves to transcribing and translating the term as it appears in the manuscripts. For example, Jamasp offers the transcriptions *matrâk* and *mûtrâk*, translated as polished, enameled, gilt, and adds speculative Arabic equivalents without vocalization—mṭrʾ and mṭlʾ (Jamasp 1907 2: 158). Kapadia reproduces both the transcription and translation given by Jamasp in full (Kapadia 1953: 426). Anklesaria, meanwhile, provides the variant *matrâ*, translating it as [made] of gold (Anklesaria 1949: 18). Moazami initially accepted a modified version of Jamasp's reading, transcribing the term as **matrāg* and interpreting it as having a *polished handle (Moazami 2002: 58, 66). In a later publication, however, she revised both the form and the interpretation to **mutallā*—having a *gilt handle (Moazami 2014: 48, 49). Bāgheri Hasan Kiādeh and Rouholamini Hoseini offer yet another reading. Retaining the original form mtl'k, they transcribe it as *madrāg* and translate it as golden or gilded (Pers. *talāyi*, *motallā*) (Bāgheri Hasan Kiādeh and Rouholamini Hoseini 1393: 48, 64, 105).

All the aforementioned authors appear to treat the attested form in the manuscripts as a phonetic representation of an Iranian lexeme or as a direct loanword. To date, no one has recognized the term under discussion as an aramaeogram, nor has any attempt been made to retrieve and interpret the underlying Middle Persian form concealed within the heterographic notation. In reality, however, the term mtl'k is an aramaeogram, and the failure to identify it as such—repeatedly reproduced in scholarly literature—is surprising. Even more striking is that several editors and compilers of dictionaries or glossaries correctly identify the meaning of the word while ignoring its form, which should have prompted further investigation. Leaving aside Darmesteter's arbitrary emendation and inaccurate translation, it becomes evident that H. Jamasp was the first to propose a semantically accurate interpretation. Nonetheless, subsequent authors merely reiterated his interpretation while preserving his erroneous transcription—some reproducing it verbatim, others introducing only minor phonetic modifications. Only M. Moazami made a substantial revision, replacing *matrāg* with *mutallā* in a later publication. Although Jamasp did not elaborate on the basis for his translation, it is reasonable to infer that, by

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[48] *Thesaurus Indogermanischer Text- und Sprachmaterialien (TITUS)*. Accessed 20 May 2025. https://titus.uni-frankfurt.de/indexe.htm?/index.htm.

[49] Ms. K1 (PV-K1–02), sec. 2.6, sent. 135—*The Zoroastrian Middle Persian Digital Corpus and Dictionary (MPCD)*. Accessed 22 September 2025. https://www.mpcorpus.org.

including two Arabic equivalents in his glossary, he may have intuitively recognized the Semitic origin of the term. Of the two Arabic forms he suggests, only mṭlʾ is contextually appropriate. Contrary to the readings proposed by Jamasp and later scholars—including Moazami's revised version—the form is not a single, unified phonetic structure. Rather, it is a heterogram combining an Aramaic root with an Iranian suffix, forming an adjective (originally a past participle) used attributively with the following noun *dastag* (handle). The entire expression should be read as MTLA-k dstk, meaning gilt (or adorned) handle.

However, even turning to Aramaic does not immediately resolve the ambiguity. Although the form MTLA is attested in the Middle Persian heterogram lexicon *Frahang ī Pahlawīg*, its Iranian equivalent is given as *wārān*, meaning rain. The vocalized Aramaic form in this case is *miṭrā*, which is incompatible with the context under consideration.[50] It was likely this dictionary entry that influenced Jamasp to suggest the Arabic alternative mṭrʾ, since in both Aramaic and Arabic the root mṭr refers to rainfall. He may also have had the Semitic root ṭrw in mind, though like mṭr, and consequently mṭrʾ, it is contextually inappropriate and does not support the proposed translation. When we consider the second Arabic form suggested by Jamasp—mṭlʾ— the only Semitic root that plausibly applies is the triconsonantal root ṭly, which conveys the meaning to adorn or to overlay (with metal), especially in the sense of gilding. In Arabic, this root gives rise to the derived passive participle and adjectival form *muṭallā*, meaning gilded or decorated (with a precious metal), most often gold. In Aramaic, this same root appears in nouns such as ṭly and ṭlyyh, denoting an unclear category of precious object. These terms occur in both the Babylonian Talmud and the Palestinian Talmud, which are written in the dialects of Aramaic used respectively by Babylonian and Galilean Jewish communities. In one instance, ṭly is explicitly used in a context associated with gold, in the expression b-ṭly dhb (with gilded/golden ornament) (Kaufman et al.).

Accordingly, the correct transcription of the Aramaeogram with the suffix -k should be *pēsīdag*, where *pēsīd* represents the proper reading of the Aramaic heterogram MTLA, and -*ag* is its Iranian morphological component. The full expression MTLA-k dstk should thus be transcribed as *pēsīdag dastag* and translated as (with) a gilt handle. The form *pēsīdag* is attested in other Middle Persian texts—most notably in the *Bundahišn* and the *Pahlavi Vištāsp Yašt*—where it carries the meaning adorned, decorated, or inlaid with precious stones. It is therefore a recognized and lexicographically recorded term within the Middle Persian corpus.[51] In contrast, the aramaeogram

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[50] MṬRʾ / Regen / *vārān* (Junker 1955: 31); MTLʾ / *miṭrā* / *vārān* / rain (Nyberg and Utas 1988: 1 (entry I: 16) 62).

[51] '*zamān ī mān abganīhēd brīn pad zamān pēsīdag frāz škihēd*' (Pakzad 2005: 18:); (*ārāste*) (Bahār 1345: 36); *pysytk* / *pēsītak* (*gouhar-nešān*) (Bahār 1345: 145); *pēsītak* (*ārāyeš šode, zinat šode, mozayyan, gouhar-nešān*) (Faravashi 1358: 461). Mss.: GBd 1.43 – DH_162r_18, sent. 83; GBd 1.43—TD1_004v_17, sent. 82; GBd 1.43—TD2_10_13, sent. 85; Pahl. Višt. Yt. F12a – PVyt vyts_ch4_st9 sent. 149: '*pad harwisp pēsīdag*'—*The Zoroastrian Middle Persian Digital Corpus and Dictionary (MPCD)*; F12 (5310), Navsari, f29v—*Avestan Digital Archive*.

MTLA appears to be a hapax, attested only once in the extant textual tradition. Thus, the sentence of Vd. 2.6 in its Middle Persian recension should be presented—with transliteration, transcription, and translation—as follows:

2.6 (A) ADYN' OL OLE zdȳ pr'č YBLWN-t L MNW 'whrmẕd HWE-m (B) swl'k'wmnd ZHBA-yn' W 'štl-č Y ZHBA-yn' psyd [MATLA-k dstk']

2.6 (A) *ēg ō ōy zay frāz burd man kē ohrmazd ham* (B) *sūrāgōmand zarrēn ud aštar-iz zarrēn-pēsīd [pēsīdag dastag]*'

2.6 (A) Then did I, Ohrmazd, brought him the implements: (B) a golden goad and a gilt whip [with an adorned handle].

7 Conclusion

To conclude, a thorough re-examination of the primary sources leads to the following observations concerning the translation of Vd. 2.6:

I. There is sufficient textual evidence to support the conclusion that weaponry does not belong to the semantic field of the terms *suβrā-/sūrāgōmand* and *aštrā-/aštar*.

II. On this basis, two plausible interpretations remain for the term *suβrā-/sūrāgōmand*: a cattle-driving implement or a musical instrument. Among these, Bailey's interpretation—as a tool used for driving cattle—appears the most substantiated and thus the most compelling. A close reading of the Middle Persian version of the Yima narrative further supports the rejection of the musical instrument hypothesis, particularly when considering the verbs *suftan* (to pierce, perforate) and *darīdan* (to tear, rend), which clearly favor an implement associated with physical action. The use of term *zaya- / zay* in Vd. 2.6 ultimately excludes the musical instrument.

III. With regard to the term *aštrā- / aštar*, two main interpretations have been proposed: a whip or a sharply pointed implement (such as a goad or spike). The use of the verb *suftan* in Pahl. Vd. 2.10, 14, and 18 may be seen as a clue supporting the latter interpretation. However, the broader textual and comparative context favors the meaning whip. In particular, the reference to Herodotus' account of Xerxes' crossing of the Hellespont, along with the verb *darīdan*—which may apply specifically to the noun *aštar*—strengthens this reading. Within this framework, the whip appears as an emblematic attribute of the warrior-king riding in his chariot.

IV. The term found in the gloss to Vd. 2.6 is an aramaeogram with an Iranian suffix—MTLA-k—which has not previously been recognized as a heterogram. Its correct Iranian equivalent is *pēsīdag*, making it possible to read the gloss as *pēsīdag dastag* and translate it as—with an adorned handle.

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ORCID

Mirosław Michalak https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2609-4418

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