

# mahdi

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## Middle Persian & Pahlavi script

### A Tiny Introduction

Sep 15, 2022 • Reading time: 13 minutes • [raw](#)

[Middle Persian](#), the successor of [Old Persian](#) from [Achaemenid Empire](#), was used by the [Sassanian Empire](#) of Iran, and is the ancestor of Modern Persian, which is currently the official language of Iran, Afghanistan and Tajikistan. This language has been written using multiple scripts, including [Pahlavi script](#), [Manichaean script](#) and [Pazend](#). This blog post is the most brief introduction to Middle Persian using Pahlavi script, a script derived from [imperial Aramaic](#).

This language is written and read right-to-left, however in this blog post because the main body of text is English, the text is aligned on the left-side.

This blog post requires a browser that supports custom fonts, since I am using the [Khusro Pahlavi font](#). If you cannot see this blog post properly, a PDF version of this blog post is available [here](#).

## Alphabet

There are 14 primary letters in Pahlavi Vendidad, some of which are used for multiple sounds. First, let's look at each letter of the alphabet individually. The content of this section



𐭥𐭥𐭥𐭥 (pûsar mâtar), and it is the rule that a 𐭥 (zak) or 𐭥𐭥 (zak-î) is added before the two words, so: 𐭥𐭥𐭥𐭥𐭥 (zak-î pûsar mâtar)

3. It is also used as a rendering of Avesta relative pronouns 𐭥𐭥𐭥, 𐭥𐭥𐭥, 𐭥𐭥𐭥, who, which and what.

𐭥 / 𐭥

Sound: s

Modern Persian equivalent: س

Notes:

1. The 𐭥 form of this letter is used when it is the final word of a simple word, or when that simple word is part of a compound word, e.g. 𐭥𐭥 (râs), 𐭥𐭥𐭥 (vînâs), 𐭥𐭥𐭥𐭥 (vînâs-kâr)
2. The 𐭥 form of this letter is also used when before 𐭥, 𐭥, 𐭥, e.g. 𐭥𐭥 (sût), 𐭥𐭥𐭥 (asmân)
3. The 𐭥 form of this letter is also used to represent the numerical cipher 40, forty 𐭥𐭥𐭥 (chêhal); چهل

Examples:

1. 𐭥𐭥 (dîv): satan, Dev, a demon, an evil spirit; دیو.
2. 𐭥𐭥𐭥 (srôsh): one who obeys or hears; the name of the angel who protects mankind by night and day against the attacks of the Daevas, and guards the souls of the dead for the first three nights. He may be compared with Gabriel of Semitic mythology, as a principle messenger of God. He is always styled as 𐭥𐭥𐭥𐭥𐭥 (srôsh-î-ahlôb): holy srosh; metaphorically means “obedience”, “humility”.; سروش.
3. 𐭥𐭥𐭥 (spâhân): The city of Ispahan, former capital city of Iran; اصفهان.

𐭥

Sound: š (sh)

Modern Persian equivalent: ش

Notes:

1. In Indian manuscripts this letter is generally given as DE</span>, which can be read as š, dâ, gâ, jâ, yâ, ih.

Examples:

1. 𐭥𐭥 (šûi): a husband; شوئی، شوهر.

2. 𐬰𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬎 (šôstan): to wash, to cleanse, to purify; شستن.
3. 𐬰𐬀𐬎𐬎 (šikôh): pomp, grandeur, majesty, dignity; شکوه.

## 𐬀

Sound: a, â, kh, h

Modern Persian equivalents: آ، خ، ه

Notes:

1. Can be used as a prefix, denoting “not” or negation, e.g. 𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬎 (a-vînâs): sinless.

Examples:

1. 𐬀 (hû): a prefix indicating “good”, “well”; opposite of 𐬀𐬎 (dûš) bad
2. 𐬀𐬎𐬎 (hû-mat): good thought
3. 𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬎 (aîrân): the home of the Aryans, the Iran proper; ایران.
4. 𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬎 (aêtih): existence, being; هستی.

## 𐬁

Sound: b, ê

Modern Persian equivalents: ب، ی

Notes:

1. Can be added to words to mean “one”, e.g. 𐬁𐬎𐬎 (mart-ê) a man; مردی.
2. Does not combine with any succeeding letter, and only combines with preceding 𐬀, 𐬁, 𐬂, 𐬃.

Examples:

1. 𐬁𐬎 (bûn): basis, root, beginning, bottom, foundation, extremity, end, origin; بن.
2. 𐬁𐬎𐬎 (bôî): to smell, fragrance, smell, perfume, scent; بو، بوی.
3. 𐬁𐬎𐬎𐬎 (ham-bast): bound together, connected together; همبست.
4. 𐬁𐬎𐬎 / 𐬁𐬎 (brâtar / brât): brother; برادر.






## 𐬂

Sound: r, l



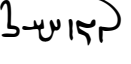




Modern Persian equivalents: ر، ل



## Notes:

1. Sometimes l is written as  to distinguish it from r, specially in Pazend.
2. At the end of some Semitic words it is written as , e.g.  (akhar).
3. Used as the numerical cypher for number 20 (li = bist);  بیست.
4. Used as the first person singular pronoun (li=men): I, me, my, mine;  من.

## Examples:

1.  (rûi): face, feature, countenance;  رو، روی.
2.  (levîn-û-âkhar = pêš-pas): more or less, before and after, first to the last;  کم و  
بیش، پیش و پس، اول تا آخر.
3.  (rat): lord, master, spiritual chief, principal, a Dastur or high priest;
4.  (lagh / ragh): the numerical cypher for 1000; one thousand;  هزار.

**S**







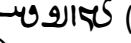








Sound: z

Modern Persian equivalents: ز

## Notes:

1. Does not combine with any preceding letter but combines with all succeeding letters.

## Examples:

1.  (zan): a woman, a female, a wife;  زن. The word is probably from the corresponding  زادن or  زائیدن (to give birth) from Avesta.
2.  (zand): great, vehement, powerful;  زند.
3.  (zîvandakîh): Abstract; life, existence;  زندگی.
4.  (zar): gold;  زر.
5.  (zak): A semitic particle, extensively used in Pahlavi and signifying a Demon.  
Adjective and pronoun singular & plural: that, that one, also used in third personal pronouns: he, she or it, sometimes as a relative pronoun: that, which, who. The word is of frequent occurrence and invariably replaces Iranian word  آن (ân). Also, as explained before,  زک and  زک are used in the beginning of a genitive construction where the izafat "ر" is dropped and the thing possessed or qualified is placed after the possessor or the qualifying adjective, e.g.  زک-î-li-môrv (zak-î-li-môrv): my bird.

**و**

Sound: k, rarely g and y

Modern Persian equivalents: ک، گاهی گ، ی

Notes:

1. Generally used as a sign of past participle at the end of a verb in preterite form, e.g. 𐭥𐭥𐭥𐭥  
برده (brde) or کرده (krde).
2. It is also used as a diminutive suffix, e.g. 𐭥𐭥𐭥𐭥 (pûsarak) پسرک.

Examples:

1. 𐭥𐭥 (kanû): now, at present, yet, still; کنون.
2. 𐭥𐭥𐭥𐭥 (kûtak-khrat): short-witted, foolish, silly; کوتاه خرد.
3. 𐭥𐭥𐭥𐭥 (kînîtan): Denominative verb from 𐭥𐭥 (kîn) malice; to bear malice to, to take revenge on; کین گرفتن.
4. 𐭥𐭥 (kakâ): a tooth, teeth; Semitic equivalent of 𐭥𐭥𐭥𐭥 (dandân) دندان.
5. 𐭥𐭥 (kam): less, little, small, a few, scarce, deficient; کم.
6. 𐭥𐭥𐭥𐭥 (katak-banûk): the mistress of the house, mater-familias. کد بانو.
7. 𐭥𐭥𐭥𐭥 (katak-khûtâi): the master of the house, pater-familias, a chief. کد خدا.

## 𐭥

Sound: m

Modern Persian equivalents: م

Notes:

1. Does not combine with preceding 𐭥, 𐭥, 𐭥, 𐭥, 𐭥, 𐭥, 𐭥
2. Even in its combined form, it keeps its full form, and it combines with all succeeding letters except 𐭥

Examples:

1. 𐭥𐭥 (mûy): hair; مو، موی.
2. 𐭥𐭥 (mang): a narcotic drug made from hemp-seed, hen-bane, a drug used for abortion, Cannabis Sativa; منگ، بنگ، بنج.
3. 𐭥𐭥𐭥 (mînôy / mînûg): spiritual, heavenly, invisible, a spirit, a spiritual being; مینو، مینوی.
4. 𐭥𐭥𐭥𐭥 (mâhmân): a guest, a visitor, one who is entertained; as adjective satisfied, pleased, gratified, agreeable, welcome; مهمان.
5. 𐭥𐭥𐭥 (Mitra): the name of an Yazat: Meher Yazad; presiding over light, also over faith, friendship and contracts; مهر.

## 𐭥

Sound: t, d

Modern Persian equivalents: ت، د

Notes:

1. Does not join any succeeding letter, and does not join with preceding ا, ر, و, م, ل, ن, ز
2. Always appears whole in any formation.

Examples:

1. 𐭌𐭎 (tan): body, person, the corporal body as distinguished from 𐭌𐭎𐭏 the spiritual body; تن.
2. 𐭌𐭎𐭏 (tanand): a spider, a cobweb; تننده، تنندو.
3. 𐭌𐭎𐭏𐭎 (tôjîtan): to atone for a sin, to expiate, to undergo punishment, to plunder, to assault; توزیدن.
4. 𐭌𐭎𐭏𐭎𐭎 (tûbânkar): rich, powerful, able, opulent, competent; توانگر.
5. 𐭌𐭎𐭏𐭎𐭎𐭎 (khûn-tachišnîh): flowing out of blood.

## 𐭌

Sound: pa, pha (if initial, also: cha, ja, za)

Modern Persian equivalents: پ، ف (اگر در ابتدا، همچنین: و، چ، ت، ز)

Notes:

1. Appears either as a whole, or as 𐭌 when joining the previous letter.

Examples:

1. 𐭌𐭎 (pavan = pa, pat): a semitic particle, used extensive as a preposition with meanings: to, by, from, through, according to, in, into, on, upon, with, among, about, at, for, as, as to, as if. It corresponds to Modern Persian پ، بر. It is the prefix for instrumental & genitive cases. e.g. 𐭌𐭎𐭏𐭎 (pavan-âkhar = pa-pas): in the end, at last; پا پس.
2. 𐭌𐭎𐭎 (pûst): the skin, a hide, a covering, a coating; پوست.
3. 𐭌𐭎𐭎 (frâz): A preposition with the meaning of: forth, further, forthwith, on, upon, above, upwards, aloft, back, down, after, again, opposite, contrary, before, near, forward, together; فرا، فراز.
4. 𐭌𐭎𐭎𐭎 (frazand): an offspring, child, son, progeny; فرزند.
5. 𐭌𐭎𐭎𐭎𐭎 (patmân): measure, standard, regulation, moderation, plan, design, rule, proportion, estimate, compact, agreement, (golden) mean, metrical measure; پیمان.

## 𐭪

Sound: ch, if initial: j, if medial or final: ch, j, z, zh, p, f, v

Modern Persian equivalent: چ، اگر ابتدا: ج، اگر میان یا انتها: چ، ج، ز، ژ، پ، ف، و

Notes:

1. Does not combine with any of the succeeding letters
2. Combines with preceding 𐭪, 𐭫, 𐭬 as 𐭪𐭫, 𐭪𐭬, 𐭪𐭭

Examples:

1. 𐭪 (cha): an enclitic particle, meaning: and, also, likewise, even, too, yet, else, always, added to the word it connects; when it follows a word ending in a consonant, the vowel (i) is conveniently added to the consonant, e.g. (nari-cha), (kasi-cha); sometimes the vowel (a) is added to the consonant (hasta-cha).
2. 𐭪𐭫 (chand): how much, how many, how long, of what length or duration, some, any indefinite quantity; چند.
3. 𐭪𐭬 (chînâr): the poplar tree, plane tree, the sycamore; چنار.
4. 𐭪𐭭 (chûnîh / chêgûnîh): abstract noun from 𐭪𐭮 (chûn): quality, qualification, description, whereabouts, peculiarity; چگونگی = کیفیت.

## 𐭫

Sound: gh

Modern Persian equivalent: ق

Examples:

1. 𐭫 (lagh / ragh): the numerical cypher for 1000; one thousand; هزار.
2. 𐭫𐭮 (magh): a pit, a hole, a row or line of stones on which a “riman” or “contaminated” person sits successively during the ceremony of purification; مغ، مگاک.
3. 𐭫𐭯 (mogh / magh): a magi, a mobed, one who practises magism; مغ.
4. 𐭫𐭰 (aghriya / aghrâya): this word is derived from 𐭫𐭱 meaning: top, head, summit, pertaining to top, pertaining to summit, topmost, of the first quality, the principal one.
5. 𐭫𐭲 (vaghtân): a head (of a good being), as opposed to 𐭫𐭳 (kamâr) head of an evil being.

## Letter mixes

The table below shows how different letters mix together (Kapadia, 1953):



14	13	12	11	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
𐭪	𐭫	𐭬	𐭭	𐭮	𐭯	𐭰	𐭱	𐭲	𐭳	𐭴	𐭵	𐭶	𐭷
𐭪𐭮	𐭫𐭮	𐭬𐭮	𐭭𐭮	𐭮𐭮	𐭯𐭮	𐭰𐭮	𐭱𐭮	𐭲𐭮	𐭳𐭮	𐭴𐭮			𐭷𐭮
𐭪𐭯	𐭫𐭯	𐭬𐭯	𐭭𐭯	𐭮𐭯	𐭯𐭯	𐭰𐭯	𐭱𐭯	𐭲𐭯	𐭳𐭯	𐭴𐭯			𐭷𐭯
𐭪𐭰	𐭫𐭰	𐭬𐭰	𐭭𐭰	𐭮𐭰	𐭯𐭰	𐭰𐭰	𐭱𐭰	𐭲𐭰	𐭳𐭰	𐭴𐭰			𐭷𐭰
𐭪𐭱	𐭫𐭱	𐭬𐭱	𐭭𐭱	𐭮𐭱	𐭯𐭱	𐭰𐭱	𐭱𐭱	𐭲𐭱	𐭳𐭱	𐭴𐭱			𐭷𐭱
𐭪𐭲	𐭫𐭲	𐭬𐭲	𐭭𐭲	𐭮𐭲	𐭯𐭲	𐭰𐭲	𐭱𐭲	𐭲𐭲	𐭳𐭲	𐭴𐭲			𐭷𐭲
𐭪𐭳	𐭫𐭳	𐭬𐭳	𐭭𐭳	𐭮𐭳	𐭯𐭳	𐭰𐭳	𐭱𐭳	𐭲𐭳	𐭳𐭳	𐭴𐭳			𐭷𐭳
𐭪𐭴	𐭫𐭴	𐭬𐭴	𐭭𐭴	𐭮𐭴	𐭯𐭴	𐭰𐭴	𐭱𐭴	𐭲𐭴	𐭳𐭴	𐭴𐭴			𐭷𐭴
𐭪𐭵	𐭫𐭵	𐭬𐭵	𐭭𐭵	𐭮𐭵	𐭯𐭵	𐭰𐭵	𐭱𐭵	𐭲𐭵	𐭳𐭵	𐭴𐭵			𐭷𐭵
𐭪𐭶	𐭫𐭶	𐭬𐭶	𐭭𐭶	𐭮𐭶	𐭯𐭶	𐭰𐭶	𐭱𐭶	𐭲𐭶	𐭳𐭶	𐭴𐭶			𐭷𐭶
𐭪𐭷	𐭫𐭷	𐭬𐭷	𐭭𐭷	𐭮𐭷	𐭯𐭷	𐭰𐭷	𐭱𐭷	𐭲𐭷	𐭳𐭷	𐭴𐭷			𐭷𐭷
𐭪𐭸	𐭫𐭸	𐭬𐭸	𐭭𐭸	𐭮𐭸	𐭯𐭸	𐭰𐭸	𐭱𐭸	𐭲𐭸	𐭳𐭸	𐭴𐭸			𐭷𐭸
𐭪𐭹	𐭫𐭹	𐭬𐭹	𐭭𐭹	𐭮𐭹	𐭯𐭹	𐭰𐭹	𐭱𐭹	𐭲𐭹	𐭳𐭹	𐭴𐭹			𐭷𐭹
𐭪𐭺	𐭫𐭺	𐭬𐭺	𐭭𐭺	𐭮𐭺	𐭯𐭺	𐭰𐭺	𐭱𐭺	𐭲𐭺	𐭳𐭺	𐭴𐭺			𐭷𐭺

## Phrases & Words

### Ahura Mazda / Ohrmazd

𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬎 (Aûhr-mazd): The Supreme Creator, Lord Ormazd, of Zoroastrian philosophy. Formerly read as Anhômâ.

### Aharman / Ahriman

𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬎 (Aharman) اهرمن، اهرمن، is the destructive / evil spirit in Zoroastrianism. The name is traditionally written upside down.

### Ethical Pillars of Zoroastrianism

The three ethical pillars of Zoroastrianism, mentioned in Yasna Haptanġhāiti 𐬵𐬀 𐬵𐬀 𐬵𐬀 (Y. 35.4) are rendered in Pahlavi as such:

𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬎 (humînišn): good thought (منش نیک)

𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬎 (hukûnišn): good deeds (کنش نیک)

𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬎 (hugôîšn): good speech (گویش نیک)

𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬎 (ahlâyîh = aša): abstract noun for (ahlôb) righteous, i.e. truth, righteousness, holiness, sanctity.

## Common Persian Names

𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬎: name of the angel of victory, popularly known as Behram Yazat; also the name of the 20th day of the Zoroastrian month, over which Behram Yazat presides; the planet Mars is also known by the same name; بهرام.

𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬎 (srôsh): one who obeys or hears; the name of the angel who protects mankind by night and day against the attacks of the Daevas, and guards the souls of the dead for the first three nights. He may be compared with Gabriel of Semitic mythology, as a principle messenger of God. He is always styled as 𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬎 𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬎 (srôsh-î-ahlôb): holy srosh; metaphorically means “obedience”, “humility”; سروش.

𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬎 (Marva): name of the third of the goodly created places by Ahura Mazd according to Vendidad I: the modern “Marv”, “Margvan” of the classics; مرو، مهرو.

𐭎𐭓𐭕 (mahest): the greatest, the grandest, the highest, the longest; میهن.

𐭎𐭓𐭕 (mînôy / mînúg): spiritual, heavenly, invisible, a spirit, a spiritual being; مینو، مینوی.

𐭎𐭓𐭕 (frakh / frakho): prosperous, auspicious; فرخ.

## Additional resources

- [Avestan Digital Archive](#): a search engine for manuscripts
- [Avesta - Zoroastrian Archives](#) - has some of the texts and other resources related to Avesta and Zoroastrianism
- [Introduction to Pahlavi by Prods Oktor SkjÆRVØ](#)

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