

How Not to Tell a Passive: The Case of Old Persian manā krtam
Reconsidered

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HOW NOT TO TELL A PASSIVE:
THE CASE OF OLD PERSIAN manā krtam RECONSIDERED
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This paper takes a fresh look at the argumentation which has led traditional Indo-Europeanists to a characterization of the Old Persian (OP) participial construction exemplified by tya manā krtam 'what I have done' (lit. 'what of/to-me (is) done') as either an "active perfect of possessive expression" (Benveniste (1952)), or as a participial passive (Cardona (1970)), by placing the problem in a broader comparative and typological perspective.

The anatomy of this controversy is instructive in raising some general questions concerning the definition of the category passive in Indo-European (IE), and in pointing out the lack of explicit syntactic criteria for identifying participial passives as such. It is shown that upon closer examination the arguments presented by both lines of interpretation highlight the impossibility of adequately characterizing the syntactic pattern Passive Participle plus (BE) in Old Persian (and Indo-European in general) in terms of the accompanying oblique arguments alone. This, in turn, permits a general reconsideration of the notion 'passive agent' in IE and the syntactic-semantic properties underlying the passive periphrasis Participle plus BE.

Section 1 presents the attested OP examples of the syntactic pattern under examination; section 2 reviews the traditional controversy and the arguments which have been used for and against their passive interpretation; and section 3 redefines the OP construction as passive on the basis of comparative evidence and universal properties of passive structures.

1. The OP construction involving the passive participle formed with the reflex of the suffix *-to consists of a surface subject which agrees in number/case/gender with the passive participle, plus an optionally expressed copula BE and an oblique (OBL) case argument.¹ Thus a literal rendition of tya manā krtam 'what I have done' is 'this(tya) of/to-me(manā) (is) done(krtam)'. Because of the limitations of the corpus, the attested usable examples of this controversial syntactic pattern show little variation, and are illustrated by the following formulaic sentences.²

- (1) tya manā(OBL) krtam utā tyamaiy piṣṣa(OBL) krtam
'that of/to-me (is) done and that of/to-my-father (is) done'
- (2) utāmai(OBL) vasiy astiy krtam
'still of/to-me much is done' (with the enclitic =mai instead of the full pronoun manā)
- (3) avaišām(OBL) avā naiy astiy krtam yaθa manā(OBL) ... krtam
'of/to-them is not done as much as of/to-me ... done'
- (4) avaθāšām(OBL) hamaranan krtam
'thus of/to-them battle (is) done'

- (5) tyataiy(OBL) gaušayā [xšnūtam]
'that of/to-you by-your-2-ears (is) heard'

In addition to these non-finite forms, OP (following a common Indo-Iranian trait) displays an inflectionally formed passive with imperfect force (cf. example (6) below) which shows the suffix -ya as its characteristic marker. This ya-passive may be expanded by the preposition hačā 'from' governing the ablative (ABL). It was this difference in the expression of the passive agent (oblique case vs. hačā+ABL) that led Benveniste to dispute the passive status of manā krtam.

2.1 The traditional view that the Old Persian type manā krtam is a passive construction³ was contested by Benveniste (1952) who posed the following questions which are still with us (:154)⁴.

By what criterion do we recognize that this construction is passive? Can we consider that a construction in which the actor is in the genitive-dative and the verb is represented by the verbal adjective is by this very fact to be defined as passive? In order to produce irrefutable proof, it would be necessary to find this construction in an utterance whose passive nature is confirmed by the use of a verbal form of the morphological class of passives. We have then to inquire how a verbal form provided with marks of the passive was constructed in Old Persian and, especially, how the form of the agent was then expressed.

He proves the non-agentive status of the genitive-dative manā (and therefore the non-passive force of the participial construction as well) by showing that in the ya-passive (whose syntactic function is indisputably passive) the agent is expressed by the prepositional phrase hačā+ABL. Compare

- (6) tyašām hačāma aθahya 'that which by-me was-commanded them'

On the basis of this demonstration, he concludes that (:155)

This suffices to ruin the traditional notion that the perfect tya manā krtam is a passive expression. The difference in the case form of the pronoun, manā on the one hand, hačāma on the other, shows that the perfect must be interpreted in a category of its own, and that it is in any case distinct from the passive.

Taking the oblique form manā as the defining property of the periphrasis Benveniste proceeds to assess the manā krtam structure as "an active perfect of possessive expression" -- of/to-me is done = I have done -- exactly parallel to the Old Persian possessive structure like

- (7) utātaiy(OBL) tauhmā vasiy biyā 'and may you have much seed'
(lit. 'of/to-you much seed may-be')

where a genitive-dative pronoun atay plus the auxiliary BE (biyā) is used to express the possessive relationship. The possessive interpretation gained wide acceptance and remains predominant even today.⁵

Cardona (1970), on the other hand, argues that Benveniste's definition of the OP participial periphrasis as possessive is not valid and that manā krtam is actually passive (as it had been traditionally assumed). He, too, demonstrates his thesis focusing on the expression of the passive agent and presents the following example (8) of a 'real' ya-passive which, instead of the expected hačā+ABL complement, contains the very same oblique phrase that the problematic periphrastic structure does, namely a genitive/dative case of the enclitic pronoun =šam 'of/to-them' (as in the examples (3) and (4) above):

- (8) avaiy ūvjiyā arikā āha utāš^šam auramazdā naiy ayadiya
'The Elamites were faithless and Ahuramazda was-not-revered
by-them' (lit. of/to-them)

This illustration, as Cardona puts it "supplies a criterion by which A (viz. manā krtam H.S-H.) can be called a passive construction". Thus, by showing that the oblique case pronoun may accompany a ya-passive, he claims to have produced what Benveniste considered as the "irrefutable proof" for also defining the participial construction as passive. Moreover, in keeping with the assumption that 'agentive' phrases exclusively define a passive structure as such, Cardona proposes a tripartite system for the expression of the passive category in Old Persian which he illustrates with the following OP sentences rendered into Latin (L) with parallel passive structures:

- | | | | |
|------|---|---------|---|
| (9) | participial
passive+gen/dat | Type A. | tya <u>manā</u> krtam(L 'quod <u>mihi</u>
factum(est)')
'that which (is) done <u>by-me</u> ' |
| (10) | <u>ya</u> -passive
<u>+hačā</u> +ABL | Type B. | tyaš ^š am <u>hačā</u> ma aθahya(L 'quod
illis a <u>me</u> imperabatur')
'that which was-commanded to-
them <u>by me</u> ' |
| (11) | <u>ya</u> -passive
+gen/dat | Type D. | utāš ^š am ..naiy ayadiya(L
'neque <u>illis</u> colebatur')
'and he was- not -revered <u>by-</u>
<u>them</u> ' |

Note that the pivotal element in Cardona's analysis of the OP passives is the type of agentive complement used. In fact his classification results in a bifurcation of the ya-passive (and the Latin r-mediopassive) on the basis of the two possible complements that may accompany them. He posits a type B for the ya-passive constructed with hačā+ABL (10) and a distinct type D

for the same ya-passive whenever used with an oblique case (11). He compares the situation in OP to that in Latin where there are also two passives (the participial and r-passive) which also display a variety of agentive complements⁶, and he concludes that "Similarly, once the comparison of the Old Persian construction D and A has established that the latter is a passive construction, type D is plausibly explained as resulting from the spread of the syntax of type A to sentences where finite passive forms (of R-ya stems) were used."

2.2 The review of this traditional controversy illustrates the difficulty, if not absurdity, that a definition of passives may encounter under the premise that agentive phrases constitute an intrinsic part of a 'true' passive. It also elicits some of the typical and recurrent questions with which a viable characterization of the category passive must come to grips in Indo-European: Is the presence of an agentive phrase a necessary or sufficient criterion for identifying a construction as passive? How can we tell a passive agent from an oblique argument? What does a 'true' passive look like and how do we know when we have one? Why are there two or more passives and passive agents within one and the same language?

Though the optional presence of an independent oblique case or a prepositional phrase, identical to the semantic (or underlying) subject of a corresponding active sentence, is often taken implicitly or explicitly as diagnostic for passives, on a closer examination, this procedure is misleading and inapplicable to IE for the following well-known reasons.⁷ In the first place, overtly expressed agents are extremely rare or non-existent with passive sentences in the earliest attestations of Indo-European, and one cannot talk sensibly of the existence of an agent deletion rule unless there are other more numerous typical instances in which an agent surfaces.

Furthermore, even when passives are expanded by an adjunct that leads to an agentive interpretation (as in the case of OP and Latin) it is not possible to decide unarbitrarily which one of the attested prepositions or independent cases is the 'real' agent and whether it can or should be treated differently⁸ from its non-passive uses within the same language. In fact all the prepositions and cases that have served in IE at one time or another to elaborate passive sentences maintain intrinsic semantic content and can always be equated with meaningful elements within the same language. Typically they denote origin, cause, means, instrument, personal interest or involvement, and can be accounted for by the very same structure (or rule) one must independently postulate in their grammar for their general usage. Although these passive complements may all 'translate' into English with BY, this should not be taken as evidence for treating the diversity in meaning and shape of passive 'agents' as being the

'accidental' output of a transformational or relational change; internally to their grammars they have different semantic consequences which follow from (and can therefore be explained with reference to) their 'active' and historically prior adverbial functions.

Another consideration that precludes the treatment of passive 'agents' in terms of a demoted underlying subject is the sheer multiplicity of means for expressing agency within the same language.⁹ Note that this variety in the expression of passive 'agents' is not governed by either the morphological or semantic type of the passive they accompany. In other words, it is not the case that, say, medio-passives select one group of agents while another type of agent is used with participial or reflexive-passives. For all these reasons, the fact that there are many ways in which IE passives can be expanded, should not be taken as evidence for assuming a priori that passivity is equivalent to a rule of subject demotion. Rather, I would claim that taking the 'agentive' phrases at face value sheds light on the syntactic behavior not only of the passives but also of the agentive phrases themselves by postulating unifying sources for the various oblique complements.¹⁰

Placing the OP controversy in the context of the general characteristics of IE passive agents noted above, the assessment of the syntactic status of manā krtam appears to be ill-defined by the advocates of both positions. For there is no justification whatsoever in assuming that the passive or non-passive meaning of the periphrasis Participle-to plus (BE) is derived from the inclusion of the oblique case alone; neither the oblique case nor the prepositional phrase introduced by hačā+ABL can serve as the point of departure in defining the passiveness of manā krtam or the inflectional ya-passive. By taking the agentive phrases as a mechanical device for identifying passives, both analysts have mistaken a symptom for a cause and created a pseudo-problem which, in turn, clouds the syntactic properties underlying the pattern V-ed plus BE. Although the passive interpretation of manā krtam is a justifiable historical inference, it cannot be supported by the kind of evidence and the reasoning underlying Cardona's demonstration. In a sense he is right for the wrong reasons.

To begin with, sentence (8) which is the crucial and single example that Cardona uses for establishing the fact that a dative/genitive may accompany the real ya-passive too, is interesting, in my view, not for providing the 'irrefutable evidence' for interpreting the OP participial construction as a passive, but for showing that the analysis of the latter cannot be based solely on the existence of the oblique arguments. In fact, the very presence of the genitive/dative form in a variety of functions within OP¹¹ -- possessive (7), ya-passive (8), and participial (1) to (5) -- seems to me to be one of the reasons for questioning its intrinsic 'agentive' function and rejecting its heuristic value in

the syntactic assessment of the periphrasis under examination.

The very fact that the oblique case is interchangeable with hačā+ABL in the use of the ya-passive is an additional piece of evidence that the genitive/dative form does not constitute an intrinsic part of either the ya-passive or the participial one, and that their characterization should appeal to different syntactic properties. Cardona, however, takes this free distribution of the oblique case and the hačā+ABL as necessary and sufficient grounds for recognizing two distinct types of ya-passives (cf. type B and D in (10) and (11)). Such an approach pushed to its logical conclusion and applied to well-attested languages which display not two but a wider range of apparent passive agents can easily lead to a reductio ad absurdum by imposing an unwarranted proliferation of putatively distinct passive patterns in order to account for the diversity in form and meaning 'agentive' phrases show within one and the same language.

Once the focus of the problem is taken from the agentive phrase as the essence of the phenomenon and the right questions are asked, the OP development becomes clear. The key to an understanding of the problem at hand is the realization that the syntactic pattern Passive Participle plus BE (an instance of which is the OP construction) embodies some universal passive properties and can be defined as passive in its own right. Thus Cardona's notion that the OP periphrasis is a real passive can now be demonstrated with reference to both comparative IE evidence as well as to a general theory of passives.

3.1 The reflexes of the nominalizing suffix *-to (as in OP krtam) have been employed par excellence in forming the so-called 'perfect passive participles' which, when combined with an auxiliary verb BE or BECOME, independently developed into passive constructions in a number of IE daughter languages. Since the periphrasis containing a participle-to is amply attested outside OP, it seems worthwhile to first turn to the cognate structures and examine their syntactic function in the rest of the daughter languages.

To begin with, the OP manā krtam has exact counterparts within Indo-Iranian. Both in Vedic (12) and Avestan (13) this periphrasis when used with transitive verbs has a clear passive meaning. Compare:

(12) RV.1,110,1a (Debrunner (1954:582))

tatām me āpas tād u tāyate pūnah
'my work (has-been) done and is-being-done again'

(13) Vidēvdāt 3.21 (Reichelt (1909:329))

yezica hē anya aya šyaōna fravaršta paitita hē čīda
'and if other crimes (have been) committed by him, then the penalty for them (is) paid'

Unlike OP, these branches of Indo-Iranian employ an instrumental form of a nominal to expand their passive constructions, though non-instrumental 'agents' are also found sporadically (in the genitive, dative, and ablative cases).¹² However, the instrumental agent rarely appears with the participial passives and the notion of the passive agent in general plays a marginal role in the expression of passive voice. The cognates from within Indo-Iranian come in support of the passive (rather than the possessive) interpretation of the OP periphrasis and confirm the view that such an interpretation should not rely on the oblique argument.

Outside Indo-Iranian the construction involving the participle in -to with transitive verbs always serves a passive function as well. This is attested in Italic (cf. (9) L mihi factum est 'This has-been done by-me (Dative)'), in Celtic (cf. Old Irish -breth '(he-was)brought'), while in Germanic (restricted to the 'weak' verbs), Slavic and Baltic the to-participle co-occurs with passive participles showing the nominalizing suffixes *-mo and *-no.¹³ Note that when viewed comparatively no particular type of oblique complement can be singled out as bound to the to-participial passive. However, the presence of the genitive/dative form manā in OP can scarcely be considered an anomaly in view of the fact that both genitive and dative cases are possible complements of passive constructions (participial or otherwise) in a number of IE languages. An independent genitive is found in Lithuanian, Armenian, Tocharian, and marginally in Vedic and Avestan as a later innovation. If manā, on the other hand, represents an original dative, Old Persian would simply parallel the dative (dativus auctoris)¹⁴ attested in Latin (cf. (9)), Greek, Germanic, and Indo-Iranian.

The diverse possibilities in the expression of the 'agent' with the to-participial passives belie the claim¹⁵ that possessive periphrases can be distinguished from passive ones on the basis of the case of their oblique complement. Rather, their difference in this respect lies in that in possessives the oblique argument is intimately linked with the auxiliary BE to form a stative locution functionally equivalent to the verb HAVE.¹⁶ In the case of the participial passives, on the other hand, the oblique argument -- qua agent -- is neither obligatory nor fixed and the essential part of the periphrasis consists of the auxiliary BE combined this time with a participle of the main predicate of the sentence.

Thus judging from the combined testimony of Indo-Iranian, Italic, Celtic, Germanic, and Balto-Slavic, Old Persian conforms to the pan-Indo-European usage in employing the Participle-to plus BE as the main predicate of a 'passivized' sentence, and the passive analysis of manā krtam is a legitimate interpretation. Moreover, such an analysis restores the unity of the Indo-Iranian

development and integrates it into the parallel evolution of Participle plus BE within the other IE languages.

But this leads to a broader question: what makes the configuration Participle plus BE apt for expressing the passive category? In a somewhat paradoxical fashion, just because a participle plus an auxiliary BE/BECOME is the typical IE passive structure, its implications for a universal characterization of passivity have been ignored.¹⁷ The choice of a nominalized structure accompanied by the at the time current form of the verb BE for the realization of 'passivization' has been taken as an accomplished fact of IE grammar, too obvious for explanation. Is the fact that the IE languages arrived at this particular pattern, via independent innovations, an accidental inner-IE development, or does it 'mean' something about the expression of passive notion in general?

The nature of this pan-IE passive construction, I would claim, becomes clear if one thinks of it not as the mere output of a transformational or relational change of a corresponding active sentence; rather, such passives must be viewed as the surface realization of a distinct passive underlying representation (which involves a nominalized clause with unspecified subject embedded to a stative-existential BE) along the lines introduced by Langacker and Munro (1975) for Uto-Aztec and Yuman, and by Statha-Halikas (1977) for Indo-European (cf. Figure 1).

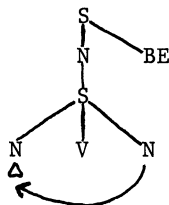


Figure 1.

Under this characterization of the passive notion a) embedding to a stative-existential BE, b) unspecified semantic subject, and c) topicalization (or 'foregrounding') of the semantic object constitute a cluster of mutually independent passive properties rather than a 'fixed' structure. The agentive phrase is regarded as a peripheral, non-intrinsic part of the passive structure per se, and whenever it occurs, it is derived from an external source such a conjoined clause. A principal difference between this and other non-transformational treatments of passives (cf. Hasegawa (1968) , and R. Lakoff (1971)) lies in the recognition of 'prototypical' passives (with all the proposed passive properties present) as well as semi-passives whose underlying structure includes one or two of these properties.¹⁸

Turning now to the question posed by Benveniste in the beginning of section 2, I would claim that the proposed definition of passives supplies criteria for arriving at a principled assessment of the passive status of OP manā krtam. I take the presence of a stative auxiliary BE (astiy), the overt nominalization of the main predicate into a participle (krtam) and the function of the semantic direct object as the surface subject of the sentence (tya) (cf. examples (1) to (5)) as evidence for treating the OP pattern as a canonical stative-passive with the syntactic-semantic properties outlined above.

This conclusion provides a rationale for the behavior of the agentive phrases, the restriction of manā krtam to the perfect tense, and the replacement of the main predicate of the 'passivized' clause by a cluster of BE plus a nominalized form of this same verb. But it also paves the way to an understanding of the further syntactic and morphological evolution of this construction in Middle Persian (Pahlavi) and Modern Persian¹⁹, and the affinity among passive, perfective²⁰, and possessive structures.

FOOTNOTES

1. Due to syncretism the distinction among the original oblique cases is lost in OP, and both genitive and dative have merged as a single oblique (or genitive-dative) form.
2. The OP sentences are from Benveniste (1952:53-54).
3. Geiger (1893) refers to it as passive.
4. Page references to the English translation of Benveniste (1952) in Problems in General Linguistics (trans. by M.E. Meck) Univ. of Miami, Press.
5. Anderson (1977) bases his analysis of Pashto upon the possessive interpretation of the OP, and he remarks (fn. 7): "The difficulty with this (viz. the passive interpretation H.S-H.) is that passive agents in OPersian generally appear in the instrumental, or in a prepositional phrase with the ablative, rather than in the genitive-dative. The latter, on the other hand, is typical for possessive constructions."
6. On the basis of the alternation of agentive phrases, Cardona (1970) recognizes the following competing constructions in Latin.

A	(1) Participial passive + <u>AB+ABL</u>
	(2) Participial passive + <u>DAT</u>
D	(1) <u>r</u> -mediopassive + <u>AB+ABL</u>
	(2) <u>r</u> -mediopassive + <u>DAT</u>

 Actually simple ABL, DE+ABL, EX+ABL, PER+ACC can also be added to Latin passives (cf. Ernout (1908)).

7. This was sensed very accurately by several traditional analysts; cf. Kuryłowicz (1973a), and Meillet (1921:196) who observes: "Le vrai rôle du passif est d'exprimer le procès là où l'agent n'est pas considéré Si, près d'un passif, on marque l'agent, c'est comme un point de départ de l'action, non comme un agent proprement dit: le latin occiditur a Marco « il est tué par Marcus » signifie proprement: « il est tué » et « le point de départ de ce fait est Marcus » ; les expressions analogues du slave et du grec le montre tout aussi clairement."

Cf. Chantraine's (1963:180) remarks on Homeric Greek: "On pourrait penser que la valeur passive d'une forme est définie par la présence d'un complément d'agent. Mais ce critère n'est pas valable. D'une part, en effet, des compléments d'agent sont attestés avec des verbes qui n'appartiennent pas au système passif; ainsi Z 453 avec μίνειν. D'autre part, avec un verbe « passif », l'emploi d'un complément d'agent est rare, et d'ailleurs exprimé par des procédés divers.

8. Either as the output of a transformational operation (postposing of the preverbal NP) or as chômeur.

9. In classical Greek, for instance, the repertory of apparent agents includes the prepositions hypó, ek, pros, pará, diá, apó and the simple dative. Cf. also footnote 6 for Latin.

10. I assume that each oblique complement (marked by either an oblique case ending or a preposition) has a single general 'core' meaning represented by an abstract predicate, from which all its contextual and specialized interpretations can be derived.

11. Cf. also manā pita 'my father' and sentence (6) in which the indirect object 'to-them' shows the genitive-dative enclitic pronoun =šam. The functions of the 'agentive' preposition hačā 'from' are summarized by Kent (1953:87): "It governs place-names as the starting-point from which there is motion or action (DB 3.80) or extension (DPH 5,7) or separation (XPH 16); names of persons of whom fear is felt, from whom commands proceed (=agent), from whom rebellion takes place, from whom something is taken away (DB 1.61); adverbs of time as starting-point; names of persons and things and abstracts from which protection is to be given (DPd 16f, etc.)."

12. Cf. Jamison (to appear) for an overview of the agentive phrases and her remark (:4): "When the past participle appears with an agent, it very seldom carries the verbal notion of the sentence. In other words, it is not often used to form the predicate of a complete clause but is embedded in a sentence already containing a finite verb."

13. The IE participial constructions are discussed in detail in Statha-Halikas (1977b).
14. See Seiler (1973) for a discussion of the dative-agent.
15. Cf. Benveniste (1952:155): "We have two exactly superimposable expressions, one possessive, *manā puṣṣa astiy, and the other in the perfect, manā krtam astiy. This complete parallelism reveals the meaning of the Persian perfect, which is possessive. For just as manā puṣṣa astiy 'mihi filius est' is equivalent to 'habeo filium', so manā krtam astiy is to be understood as 'mihi factum est,' equivalent to 'habeo factum'." And Anderson's (1977: 341) remark: "Within the indo-Iranian branch of Indo-European, we find both of these sources employed as perfects: the passive in Indic, and the possessive in Iranian. In individual cases, it is often quite difficult to be sure which of the two possibilities is at the root of a given language's perfect forms, on internal evidence alone. This is because the only ultimate difference between them is that S_t will appear in (the reflex of) the instrumental if the construction was originally passive, but in (the reflex of) the dative or genitive if it was originally possessive."
16. For the semantics of possession see Benveniste (1960), and Langacker (1975).
17. To be sure, Hasegawa (1968) and R. Lakoff (1971) treat BE as a main verb with a complement clause.
18. The applicability of this framework to IE is demonstrated in Statha-Halikas (1977) and (to appear).
19. Along the lines proposed by Watkins (1969).
20. Langacker and Munro (1975:824) for the relationship between passives and perfectives.

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