

In this paper I shall discuss the usage of three relative pronouns employed in Middle Persian (MP): \bar{i} , $k\bar{e}$, and $\check{c}\bar{e}$. Old Persian of the fifth century BC, the direct predecessor of MP, attests only one relative pronoun *haya-/taya-* (combination of the demonstrative pronoun **ha-/ta-* and the old relative pronoun **ya-*), which is reflected in MP \bar{i} , while the relative pronoun of New Persian (NP) is *ke* obviously originating from MP $k\bar{e}$. NP reflex of MP \bar{i} is *i* generally referred to as *ezāfe*, an enclitic particle just standing between the head noun and the attributive adjective or the noun denoting possessor: *kitāb-i buzurg* “book-*i* big = big book” or *kitāb-i pidar-i man* “book-*i* father-*i* me = my father’s book”. As in other Indo-European languages MP $k\bar{e}$ and $\check{c}\bar{e}$ function as both relative and interrogative pronouns meaning “who” and “what” respectively.

This situation raises a question as to how the three relative pronouns were distinguished in MP. Incidentally, since $k\bar{e}$ and $\check{c}\bar{e}$ were in use from the earliest known text of MP dating back to the third century AD, there is no way to trace the process whereby the two relative pronouns developed from the interrogatives.

It is generally known that $\check{c}\bar{e}$ is selected when the antecedent is inanimate, but the distinction between \bar{i} and $k\bar{e}$ is not entirely clear because both of them seem to be employed irrespective of the animacy of the antecedent. I have surveyed certain amount of texts and compared the two relative pronouns in terms of the nature of their antecedents (animate, definite, etc.) and the complexity of the relative clauses introduced by the two. Curiously, as far as my data are concerned, no discernible difference is observed between the functions of the two relativizers. This discovery of mine is supported by the usage of the relative pronouns in the so-called Early Judeo-Persian (EJP) texts from the eighth to tenth centuries. This variety of NP is known to betray the most archaic features and represents the transitional stage between MP and NP. As one text from around 800 AD recently discovered in Chinese Turkestan shows, *i* or the NP counterpart of MP \bar{i} still functions as a relative pronoun. EJP is also interesting in that it attests fourth relative pronoun *ku*, which goes back to MP $k\bar{u}$, a conjunction introducing the complement clause. Thus, NP *ke* is likely to derive not only from MP $k\bar{e}$ but also from $k\bar{u}$, both of which became unaccented and were subsequently reduced to NP *ke* carrying out the two functions.