

A History of Persian Literature  
Volume XVII

## Volumes of *A History of Persian Literature*

- I General Introduction to Persian Literature
  - II Persian Poetry in the Classical Era, 800–1500  
Panegyrics (*qaside*), Short Lyrics (*ghazal*); Quatrains (*robâ'i*)
  - III Persian Poetry in the Classical Era, 800–1500  
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Kurdish, Pashto, Balochi, Ossetic; Persian and Tajik Oral Literatures

A HISTORY OF PERSIAN LITERATURE

General Editor – Ehsan Yarshater

Volume XVII

The Literature  
of Pre-Islamic Iran

Companion Volume I  
to *A History of Persian Literature*

Edited by

Ronald E. Emmerick & Maria Macuch

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## THE LITERATURE OF PRE-ISLAMIC IRAN

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## FOREWORD

In the 1990s I gradually became convinced that the time had come for a new, comprehensive, and detailed history of Persian literature, given its stature and significance as the single most important accomplishment of the Iranian peoples. Hermann Ethé's pioneering survey of the subject, "Neupersische Litteratur" in *Grundriss der iranischen Philologie* II, was published in 1904 and E. G. Browne's far more extensive *A Literary History of Persia*, with ample discussion of the political and cultural background of each period, appeared in four successive volumes between 1902 and 1924. The English translation of Jan Rypka's *History of Iranian Literature*, written in collaboration with a number of other scholars, came out in 1968 under his own supervision.

Iranian scholars have also made a number of significant contributions throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century to different aspects of Persian literary history. These include B. Foruzânfar's *Sokhan va sokhan-varân* (On poetry and poets, 1929–33), M.-T. Bahâr's *Sabk-shenâsi* (Varieties of style in prose) in three volumes (1942) and a number of monographs on individual poets and writers. The truly monumental achievement of the century in this context was Dh. Safâ's wide-ranging and meticulously researched *Târikh-e adabiyyât dar Irân* (History of Literature in Iran) in five volumes and eight parts (1953–79). It studies Persian poetry and prose in the context of their political, social, religious, and cultural background, from the rise of Islam to almost the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Nevertheless, it cannot be said that Persian literature has received the attention it merits, bearing in mind that it has been the jewel in the crown of Persian culture in its widest sense and the standard bearer for aesthetic and cultural norms of the literature of the eastern regions of the Islamic world from about the 12<sup>th</sup> century; and that it has profoundly influenced the literatures

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of Ottoman Turkey, Muslim India and Turkic Central Asia—a literature that could inspire Goethe, Emerson, Matthew Arnold, and Jorge Luis Borges among others, and was praised by William Jones, Tagore, E. M. Forster, and many more. Persian literature remained a model for the literatures of the above countries until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the European influence began effectively to challenge the Persian literary and cultural influence and succeeded in replacing it. Whereas Persian art and architecture, and more recently Persian films, have been written about extensively and at different levels for a varied audience, Persian literature has largely remained the exclusive domain of specialists: It is only in the past few years that the poems of Rumi have drawn to themselves the kind of popular attention enjoyed by Omar Khayyam in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

*A History of Persian Literature (HPL)* has been conceived as a comprehensive and richly documented work, with illustrative examples and a fresh critical approach, to be written by prominent scholars in the field. An Editorial Board was selected and a meeting of the Board arranged in September 1995 in Cambridge, UK, in conjunction with the gathering that year of the *Societas Europaea Iranologica*, where the broad outlines of the editorial policy were drawn up.

Fourteen volumes were initially envisaged to cover the subject, including two Companion Volumes. Later, two additional volumes devoted to Persian prose from outside Iran (the Indian sub-continent, Anatolia, Central Asia) and historiography, respectively, were added.

Of the Companion Volumes, the first deals with pre-Islamic Iranian literatures and the second with the literature of Iranian languages other than Persian as well as Persian and Tajik oral folk literature.

The titles of the volumes are as follows:

- Volume I: General Introduction to Persian Literature
- Volume II: Persian Poetry in the Classical Era, 800–1500  
Panegyrics (*qaside*), Short Lyrics (*ghazal*); Quatrains (*robâ'i*)

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- Volume III: Persian Poetry in the Classical Era, 800–1500  
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- Volume XIV: Biographies of the Poets and Writers of the Classical Period
- Volume XV: Biographies of the Poets and Writers of the Modern Period; Literary Terms
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It is hoped that the multi-volume *HPL* will provide adequate space for the analysis and treatment of all aspects of Persian literature.

The inclusion of a volume on Persian historiography can be justified by the fact that Persian histories like the biographical accounts of mystics or poets often exploit the same stylistic and literary features and the same kinds of figures of speech that one encounters in Persian poetry and belles-lettres, with skilful use of balanced cadences, rhyme, varieties of metaphor and hyperbole, and an abundance of embellishing devices. This was considered to impart a literary dimension to the prose, enhance its esthetic effect, and impress the reader with the literary prowess of the author. The study of Persian historiography should therefore be regarded as a component of any comprehensive study of Persian literary prose and the analysis of its changing styles and contours. Moreover, in pre-modern times, “literature” was defined more broadly than it is today and often included historiography.

As is evident from the title of the volumes, *A History of Persian Literature*'s approach is neither uniformly chronological nor entirely thematic. Developments occur in time and to understand a literary genre requires tracing its course chronologically. On the other hand, images, themes, and motifs have lives of their own and need to be studied not only diachronically but also synchronically, regardless of the time element. A combination of the two methods has therefore been employed to achieve a better overall treatment.

Generous space has been given to modern poetry, fiction, and drama in order to place them in the wider context of Persian literary studies and criticism.

### About the present volume

In 1995 I invited, on behalf of *HPL*'s Editorial Board, the late Professor Ronald Emmerick to undertake the planning and editing of the Companion Volume I on pre-Islamic Iranian literatures. He agreed, and the following year he sent me a provisional plan of the

## FOREWORD

Volume's chapters and a list of the contributors he had drawn up. As expected, the plan reflected his consistent concern for ensuring that the chapters of the Volume should represent the latest research in their respective fields. The plan was approved with due appreciation and he immediately began inviting the authors and discussing with them the contents of their contributions.

By mid-2001, when the editing of the Volume was in its last stages, as the fate would have it, Professor Emmerick's illness proved fatal and prevented him from bringing the project to fruition. He passed away on 31st of August 2001. Subsequently, I turned to Professor Maria Macuch for completing the task of the editing of the Volume. She graciously agreed, and Mrs. Ann Emmerick was good enough to promptly place the Volume's files at her disposal. Furthermore, Professor Macuch obtained one chapter that was still due, and commissioned another on Christian literature in Middle Iranian languages.

The excellence of this Volume, which brings together between its covers for the first time a lucid state-of-the-art exposition of all the known pre-Islamic Iranian "literatures," is as much due to the sound judgment in planning and the meticulous work of its two editors as to the extensive research and comprehensive contributions of its erudite authors.

Specific details about the volume are covered in Professor Macuch's Preface.

For the selection of the fonts and the attractive layout of the Volume, we are indebted to Claudius Naumann of the Institut für Iranistik, Freie Universität Berlin.

EHSAN YARSHATER  
General Editor



## PREFACE

The present survey, which follows the concept of the original editor, the late Ronald E. Emmerick, has been conceived as a Companion Volume to the larger *History of Persian Literature*, planned by Ehsan Yarshater and other experts in the field of Iranian Studies. Emmerick not only chose the contributors of the different chapters, but also designed the structure of the volume, distinguishing the literary products of the pre-Islamic era according to linguistic, generic and religious criteria, as will be explained below. It seems therefore appropriate to the present editor to dedicate this work to his memory.

The Iranian literatures presented in this volume are not all necessarily “pre-Islamic” from a strictly chronological point of view. The expression applies exactly, of course, to the age-old Avestan and Old Persian material (discussed in the chapter on Inscriptional Literature), but a great number of Middle Iranian texts surviving to our days came into being after the rise of Islam. They belong, however, not only linguistically to the Middle Iranian period, but are products of religious traditions far older than Islam, covering a rich cultural heritage of Zoroastrian, Buddhist, Christian and Manichaeian provenance. Since the bulk of surviving material consists of religious texts or works produced in a specific religious environment, it seemed appropriate in certain cases to discuss the literary output of these communities, written in various Iranian languages, as a unity rather than to disperse the texts according to linguistic criteria. Thus the chapters on Manichaeian and Christian literature include works written in different Iranian languages (Parthian, Middle Persian, Sogdian, Bactrian, [New] Persian). In the case of Zoroastrian and Buddhist literature, on the other hand, geographical, historical and linguistic criteria also had to be taken into consideration: Zoroastrian works are discussed

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in the two chapters on Avestan and Pahlavi literature; Buddhist texts are presented in the chapters on Sogdian and Khotanese literature. Planned as a “companion” to the main work on Persian literature, the volume has its focus on creative literature (including translations from other languages) rather than “writing” in general, which would include all recorded information in Iranian languages, even material restricted to a few words and phrases. However, in order not to exclude the bulk of original documents in Iranian languages, which are of eminent importance for our knowledge of the languages and the cultural, political and religious history of the Iranians, even if they hardly have any literary value in the strict sense of the word, a chapter on Old and Middle Iranian inscriptions and epigraphic sources has been included, encompassing Old and Middle Persian material as well as Parthian, Sogdian, Bactrian and Chorasmian inscriptions and those documents, which have come to us *directly* (i. e. not by means of manuscript copies; see p. 73, n. 1).

The main object of the volume is to provide an overview of the most important extant literary sources in Old and Middle Iranian languages, aiming to furnish both the student and the expert specializing in other areas of this vast field with a concise survey of recent research and an extensive bibliography for further detailed study. Needless to say, the task of providing a work which could be interesting to both the specialist and the student is not easily fulfilled, since the latter is in need of far more background information than the expert, who, on the other hand, would prefer more details on the subject matter. The result can only be a compromise, seeking to keep the balance between the information necessary to the student and a detailed discussion of the most important literary aspects and scholarly controversies in recent research interesting to the Iranologist. Since especially texts in Middle Persian, Parthian, Sogdian and Bactrian have been presented in different chapters (as described above), corresponding entries have been included in the Index in order to facilitate the search for works of different provenance written in these languages. The Index also includes all titles and texts discussed in the articles, including inscriptions and epigraphic sources.



## PREFACE

A volume consisting of contributions by several different experts does not have the same consistency, evenness and unity as a book conceived by a single author. It has, however, the advantage of profiting from the expertise of many specialists, who have first hand knowledge of the material they discuss. It goes without saying that the contributions also reflect the individual interests of the authors, as may be observed especially in the choice of examples cited from the texts. All articles have excerpts from the original texts in translation in order to illustrate certain details of content and style, the length depending on the aspect the author wishes to demonstrate. Extracts illuminating the structure of a certain text (for example the composition of the Avestan Yasna) will tend to be longer than those striving only to convey an impression of the content or style. Choice of the quotations, including their length, has therefore been left entirely to the authors. Terms and titles in the original languages are given in transcription rather than transliteration (with a few exceptions) in order to facilitate reading the text and follow the general guidelines of the series (Avestan according to Bartholomae; Pahlavi according to MacKenzie). The only divergence from the general guidelines regards the transcription of the long vowels as *ī* and *ū* in Persian (and Arabic) place names and titles occurring in the text (instead of *i* and *u*) in order to avoid confusion, since the distinction between these long and short vowels has to be made in transcribing the other Iranian languages referred to in this volume.

Most of the articles have been written before Emmerick's untimely death in 2001. I am very grateful to the contributors for updating their articles and including recent research as well as for their forbearance with the slow progress of publication. My thanks also goes to Götz König and Tatsiana Stytsko for their invaluable help with proof-reading the manuscript and Claudius Naumann who has undertaken all the work involved in the layout of this volume, while I take full responsibility for possible mistakes and shortcomings.

MARIA MACUCH  
Editor



# CHAPTER 1

## AVESTAN LITERATURE

A. HINTZE

According to tradition the great Iranian prophet Zarathustra, or Zoroaster, as he is usually known in Western literature, inaugurated the religion later known after him as the Zoroastrian religion.\* The sacred texts of the followers of that religion are collected in a body of literature called the “Avesta”. The term “Avesta” derives from the word *avastāk* in Pāzand, which designates the writing of Middle Persian in Avestan script. The underlying Middle Persian word is written *ʔp(γ)stʔk* in Pahlavi script. It has been interpreted in different ways, the most plausible of which is to transcribe it as *abestāg* and derive it from Avestan *\*upa-stāyaka-* ‘praise’.<sup>1</sup> The language of the Avesta is simply called “Avestan” because nothing of it has survived outside the Avestan corpus. The Avesta comprises not only the texts in Avestan, but also their Middle Persian translations and commentaries, the “Zand”.<sup>2</sup> Although the oldest parts of the Avesta were presumably composed in southern Central Asia, or more precisely in northeastern Iran, the dialectal identification of the Avestan language is problematic. It is safe to say only that Avestan is a non-Persian dialect.<sup>3</sup> Together with the southwest Iranian language

\* Avestan words are transcribed according to Bartholomae’s system with the exception of the following: Amesha Spentas, Gatha, Gathas, Mithra, Zarathustra.

1 Bartholomae 1906, p. 108, cf. Kellens 1987a, p. 239; 1989a, p. 35; 1998, p. 515f. Belardi 1979b summarizes the various interpretations and concludes that MP *apastāk* comes from *\*upa-stā-ka-* ‘religious knowledge’. See also the summary by Bailey 1985 with a different interpretation and Sundermann 2001c.

2 On the Zand see Boyce 1968b, pp. 35–38; Skjærvø 1994b, p. 203f.

3 Kellens 1989b, p. 35f.; Skjærvø 1995d, p. 159.

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known as Old Persian and a few indirectly attested dialects, Avestan represents the Old Iranian language. Being closely related to Old Indic of the Vedas, Old Iranian is a descendant of the Indo-Iranian or Aryan branch of the Indo-European language family.

The Avesta is by no means a uniform corpus. It includes texts dating from different periods and belonging to different literary genres. With respect to language and content, there are two basic divisions: the first consists of texts composed in a more archaic idiom commonly called “Old Avestan”. The second, usually called “Young Avestan”, is slightly different dialectally, and even more different with respect to its underlying religious system. The Old Avestan texts comprise not only the Gathas but also the *Yasna Haptayhāiti* and two of the sacred prayers. The rest are in Young Avestan, although some of the texts imitate Old Avestan and are therefore called “pseudo-Old Avestan”.<sup>4</sup>

From the point of view of its use, Avestan literature may be divided into two<sup>5</sup> major groups: (i) ritual and (ii) devotional. Ritual texts are recited by priests during the religious ceremonies in the fire-temple, devotional texts by priests and lay people in any place. The ritual texts include the *Yasna* (‘worship’, abbreviated: *Y*), the *Visperad* (from Av. *vīspe ratavō* ‘all the Ratus’, abbr.: *Vr*) and the *Vendidad* or *Vīdēvdād* (from Av. *vīdaēva dāta* ‘law of those who reject the demons’,<sup>6</sup> abbr.: *Vd*). The devotional texts consist of the *Yašts* (‘worship’, abbr.: *Yt*) and prayers and benedictions collected in the “Little” or *Khorde Avesta*. All the Old Avestan texts form part of the *Yasna*. In addition, there is a small corpus of Avestan literature which has been transmitted outside the canon of the Avesta, mainly as part of Pahlavi texts.

4 Hoffmann/Narten 1989, p. 89. For the justification of using the term “Old Avestan” rather than “Gathic Avestan”, see Kellens 1991, p. 4f. A different terminology was proposed by Gershevitch 1995, p. 3ff., who considers the texts of the older and younger Avesta to be contemporaneous. He uses “Gathic Avestan” rather than “Old Avestan” and “Standard Avestan” rather than “Young Avestan”, cf. Gnoli 2000, p. 23f.

5 Cf. Kellens 1998, p. 479.

6 On the meaning of *Vīdēvdād* see Benveniste 1970.

## Ritual Texts

### *Yasna*

The *Yasna* is the liturgical text recited during the ritual consumption of the Parahaoma, i.e. a concoction made from twigs of the pomegranate plant (*urvarām*) pounded with the juice of the sacrificial plant, the Haoma, and mixed with sacrificial milk (*jivām*) and water (*zaoθra*). The Parahaoma is prepared and consecrated in the preceding Paragna rite and consumed in the ensuing *Yasna* ceremony during which the 72 chapters of the *Yasna* are recited.<sup>7</sup> The *Yasna* ceremony is celebrated daily and only by fully initiated priests. As one of the so-called “inner liturgical ceremonies”, it is performed exclusively in rooms called the Dar-e-Mehr, especially set aside for this purpose and usually located inside the fire-temple.<sup>8</sup>

The *Yasna* consists of 72 chapters (*hā* or *hāiti*). The number 72 is represented symbolically by the 72 threads used in weaving the sacred girdle of the Zoroastrians, the *kusti*. These 72 chapters fall into three major divisions: *Y* 1–27, *Y* 28–54, *Y* 55–72.<sup>9</sup> Between chapters 27 and 55, i.e. at its centre, the *Yasna* includes all the Old Avestan texts which represent the most ancient part of Zoroastrian literature. They consist of the Gathas (Av. *gāθā-* ‘hymn, verse’) which, in turn, are arranged around the ‘worship of seven chapters’, the *Yasna Haptaṅhāiti* (abbr.: *YH*). The latter, during the recitation of which the transformation of the ritual fire takes place, forms the very centre and culmination of the religious ceremony. The Old Avestan texts are introduced and concluded by two ancient prayers (both in Old Avestan), namely the *Ahuna Vairya* (*Y* 27.13) and the *Aryaman Išya* (*Y* 54.1). Moreover, the *Ahuna Vairya* is followed by two other sacred prayers, the *Ašəm Vohū* (*Y* 27.14), which could be Old Avestan, and the *Yeyhē Hātəm* (*Y* 27.15) in pseudo-Old

7 Modi 1937, pp. 251–302 (on the Paragna ceremony), p. 303 (on the preparation of the Parahaoma), pp. 302–10 (on the *Yasna* ceremony). A detailed description of the *Yasna* ceremony is given by Kotwal/Boyd 1991.

8 Modi 1937, p. 247f.; Boyce 1993.

9 Cf. Geldner 1896, p. 4.

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Avestan.<sup>10</sup> The position of the Gathic hymns and the *Yasna Haptaṅhāiti* in the centre of the entire *Yasna* reflects the fact that the recitation of these texts constitutes the high point of the *Yasna* ceremony.

### The Gathas, Sacred Prayers, and *Yasna Haptaṅhāiti*

The Gathas are made up of seventeen hymns arranged by metre into five groups. Each is named, in acronymic fashion, according to the first few words with which it begins. The first Gatha, the *Abunavaitī Gāθā* (Y 28–34), is named after the *Abuna Vairya* prayer which introduces the entire cycle of Gathas. The *Yasna Haptaṅhāiti* (Y 35.2–41.6) is followed, after a short text in Young Avestan (Y 42), by the *Uštavaitī Gāθā* (Y 43–46) which is named after the opening word of Y 43.1 *uštā*. The *Spəntā.mainyu Gāθā* (Y 47–50) begins with the words *spəntā mainyū*, the *Vohuxšaθrā Gāθā* (Y 51) with *vohū xšaθrəm*, the *Vahištōišti Gāθā* (Y 53) with *vahištā ištīš*<sup>11</sup> and the *Aryaman Išya* prayer with *ā airyōmā išyō* (Y 54.1). Between Y 51 and 53 a short text in Young Avestan (Y 52) is again interposed.

The metre of the Gathas is determined by the number of syllables. The most basic unit, which recurs in all five metres, is a hemistich of seven syllables. The stanza of the *Abunavaitī Gāθā* consists of three verse lines, each divided into two hemistichs of 7+9 syllables (schema: 3(7||9)). The *Uštavaitī Gāθā* is made up of five verse lines, each consisting of two hemistichs of 4+7 syllables (schema: 5(4||7)), the *Spəntā.mainyu Gāθā* of four verse lines each containing 4+7 syllables (schema: 4(4||7)), and the *Vohuxšaθrā Gāθā* of three verse lines each with 7+7 syllables (schema: 3(7||7)). The stanza of the *Vahištōišti Gāθā* has a more complex structure consisting of two verse lines of 7+5 syllables followed by two verse lines of 7+7+5 syllables (schema: 2(7||5) + 2(7||7||5)).<sup>12</sup> The latter metre is also adopted by the *Aryaman Išya* prayer (Y 54.1).

10 This prayer, which is an adaptation of Y 51.22, and its Avestan commentary have been analyzed in detail by Narten 1982, pp. 80–102.

11 See Humbach 1991, I, p. 4f.

12 Kellens/Pirart 1988–91, I, pp. 89–93; Kellens 1991, p. 7f.; Panaino 1993–94, pp. 109–14.

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Thus the metrical characteristic of the Gathas is their strophic form. Each stanza consists of a fixed number of verse lines, and each verse line of a fixed number of syllables. The metre determines the number of syllables per hemistich within a verse line, the position of the caesura, and the number of verse lines that comprise a stanza. The fact that the term *gāθā* does not refer to one of the 17 hymns but to the collection of hymns composed in a particular metre suggests that it is a technical term denoting the metrical and strophic form exhibited by each of the five Gathic collections.<sup>13</sup> The number of stanzas varies between 6 (*Y* 47) and 22 (*Y* 31 and 51). The preferred number is 11, found in five of the hymns (*Y* 28, 29, 30, 45, 50).

### Gathic Composition

With regard to both composition and contents, the Gathas are among the most intricate and dense pieces of literature ever composed.<sup>14</sup> Detailed studies on the composition of individual Gathic hymns, carried out by Hanns-Peter Schmidt and Martin Schwartz in particular, indicate that they possess a symmetrical structure. Schmidt has shown that the structural pattern of *Yasna* 49, 47 and 33 is a “ring-composition”,<sup>15</sup> and Schwartz has systematically expanded and elaborated upon this observation.<sup>16</sup> Ring-composition here means the symmetrical arrangement of a hymn in concentric circles around a centre.<sup>17</sup> While Schmidt bases his observations mainly on semantic and lexical correlations, Schwartz adduces a great variety of stylistic features on the phonic, lexical and phraseological levels. He argues that all Gathic hymns, except perhaps *Y* 44, are ring-compositions of which he distinguishes several varieties.<sup>18</sup> All of them share the characteristic pattern of radial

13 Schlerath 1969.

14 Cf. the characterization of the Gathas by Gershevitch 1968, p. 17.

15 Schmidt 1968, pp. 170–92, esp. p. 187; 1974; 1985.

16 Schwartz 1986, 1991a, 1998.

17 Schmidt 1968, p. 187.

18 Schwartz 1991a, p. 128; 1998, p. 197 with a summary of “Gathic types of symmetrical composition”.

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concentricity in which the stanzas are arranged symmetrically with respect to those at the centre of the hymn. The midmost stanzas again correlate with the first and the last ones, “and frequently condense a major theme of the poem”.<sup>19</sup>

Let us take one of the Gathic hymns, *Yasna* 43, as an example. In the arrangement of our extant Avesta, it follows the *Yasna Haptaŋhāiti* and opens the *Uštavaitī Gāθā*. The structure of the hymn is characterized by the recurrent phrase ‘I realize that you are bounteous, O Wise Lord’, which introduces, from stanza 5 onwards, every second stanza (5, 7, 9, 11, 13, 15). Stanza 4, also, begins with a slight variation of this line. Moreover, the second line of stanzas 7, 9, 11, 13, 15 comprises the refrain ‘when he approached me with good mind’. Refrains are characteristic of all hymns of the *Uštavaitī Gāθā*, except the last one (*Y* 46), and bestow a special unity on this Gatha.<sup>20</sup> The major theme of *Y* 43 is Zarathustra’s consultation with someone ‘who approached’ him ‘with good mind’:

1. May the Wise Lord, ruling at will, give  
Desired (things) to this one, to whom so ever (they are) desirable,  
I wish to arrive at strength together with youthfulness,  
(And) to grasp truth: Give this to me, O Right-mindedness,  
(And) rewards (consisting) of wealth, the life of good mind!
2. The best of all (things) (may be given) to this one here:  
May this man obtain well-being in (the domain of) well-being,  
(Being) perceptive, O Wise One, through your bounteous spirit  
By which you give, together with truth, the blessings of good mind  
For all the days along with the joy of a long life.
3. May that man attain what is better than good,  
(The man) who might teach us the straight paths of strength  
Of (both) this physical life and of (the life of) the mind,  
The real (paths), provided with possessions, along which the Lord  
dwells,  
A zestful (man), one like you, O Wise One, well-acquainted, a  
bounteous one.

19 Schwartz 1998, p. 133.

20 Kellens/Pirart 1988–91, I, pp. 15–16.



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4. I shall realize that you are strong and bounteous, O Wise One,  
Since through this hand, with which you hold them,  
You give the rewards to the deceitful and the truthful one,  
Through the heat of your fire which has strength through truth,  
When the force of good mind comes to me.

5. I realize that you are bounteous, O Wise Lord,  
When I see you as the primeval one in the begetting of life,  
When you made actions and words to have their prizes,  
A bad (prize) for the bad one, good reward for the good one  
Through your skill at the ultimate turning-point of creation.

6. At the turning-point to which you come with your bounteous  
spirit,  
O Wise One, (and) with rule: there, with good mind,  
Through whose actions the creatures prosper with truth,  
Right-mindedness proclaims the judgements to them,  
(The judgements) of your intellect which nobody deceives.

7. I realize that you are bounteous, O Wise Lord,  
When he approached me with good mind  
And asked me: "Who are you, to whom do you belong?  
How, O zealous one,<sup>21</sup> do you wish to appoint a day for the  
consultation  
About your possessions and about yourself?"

8. And I said to him: "Zarathustra, first;  
(Secondly,) a real enemy to the deceitful one, as much as I may be  
able.  
I would be a powerful support to the truthful one  
If I acquired the faculties of one who rules at will  
While I praise and eulogize you, O Wise One."

9. I realize that you are bounteous, O Wise Lord,  
When he approached me with good mind.  
To his question: "For whose sake do you wish to know?",  
Thereupon (I said): "For the sake of your fire. The gift of  
veneration  
Of truth, truly, I want to keep it in mind as much as I am able."

21 Humbach 1991, I, p. 153.

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10. But you, show me the truth which I invoke!  
Accompanied by right-mindedness, I have arrived.  
And ask us about that, about which we asked you.  
For what is asked by you is like that of powerful ones,  
So that one who is able will make you strong and powerful.

11. I realize that you are bounteous, O Wise Lord,  
When he approached me with good mind.  
When I was taught by you through your words for the first time,  
Trust in mortals appeared distressing to me  
(And) to do what he told me (to be) best.

12. And when you told me: “With foreknowledge you are going to  
attain truth”,  
You did not tell me (things) to which I did not listen.  
Let me rise up before there comes to me  
Attentiveness (*səraoša*) accompanied by wealth-granting Reward,  
Who will distribute the rewards to the parties in strength.

13. I realize that you are bounteous, O Wise Lord,  
When he approached me with good mind.  
To know the aims of (my) longing, grant me this,  
(The longing) for lasting life, for which no one has dared to ask you,  
(The longing) for desirable existence, which is said (to be) under  
your rule.

14. As a knowing, able man gives to a friend,  
(Thus), O Wise One, (grant me) your farsighted support  
Which is obtained through your rule on the basis of truth.  
I want to rise up against the despisers of your proclamation,  
Together with all those who remember your formulas.

15. I realize that you are bounteous, O Wise Lord,  
When he approached me with good mind.  
An appeased mind is best suited for the proclamation.  
A man should not want to satisfy the many deceitful ones,  
For they claim all harmful persons (to be) truthful.<sup>22</sup>

22 A parallel for the deceitful ones turning the values upside down is found in the Younger Avestan *Tištrya Yašt*, *Yt* 8.51, where it is said that evil-speaking people call “the bad-year witch” (*pairikā yā dužyāiryā*) by the name “good-year witch” (*huyāiryā*); cf. Panaino 1990a, pp. 75, 139–41 with more examples from the Younger Avesta.

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16. O Lord, this one (here), Zarathustra,  
Chooses for himself that very spirit, O Wise One, which is your  
most bounteous one.  
May truth be corporeal, strong through vitality.  
May right-mindedness be in the kingdom which sees the sun.<sup>23</sup>  
May she give, with good mind, the reward for the actions.

The structure of this hymn is fairly straightforward: it focuses around stanzas 7–10 whose theme is the conversation between Zarathustra and a divine being accompanied by Good Mind (Vohu Manah) but whose identity does not emerge clearly from the text. Right-mindedness (Ārmaiti) has been considered,<sup>24</sup> or the Wise Lord (Ahura Mazdā),<sup>25</sup> or, more likely, the Bounteous Spirit (Spenta Mainyu).<sup>26</sup> In the two central stanzas 8–9, Zarathustra introduces himself by name. Moreover, there are lexical correspondences between them and the initial and final stanzas 1 and 16. Stanza 1 and 8 are linked by the adjective ‘ruling at will, ruling as he wishes’, in stanza 1 as an epithet of Ahura Mazdā, in stanza 8 a faculty desired by Zarathustra. Stanzas 8 and 16 are joined together by the name Zarathustra. The second central stanza of the hymn, number 9, matches stanza 1 in so far as a form of ‘to wish’ (*vas*) occurs in both at the end of line c. Stanzas 1 and 16 also have correspondences: both deal with truth, reward, good mind, and right-mindedness. The central part of the hymn marks the watershed, the *peripeteia*, since it apparently alludes to the crucial event of Zarathustra’s calling into the service of his Lord. Thus, an observation made by Mary Douglas with regard to the Book of Numbers in the Pentateuch also applies to the composition of *Y* 43: “The turn matches the beginning, and so does the very end.”<sup>27</sup>

The compositional analysis of this hymn could be refined and carried further,<sup>28</sup> but let us turn instead to *Yasna* 28, the hymn

23 On these two lines see Narten 1982, p. 115f.

24 Kellens/Pirart 1988–91, III, p. 156.

25 Lommel 1927, pp. 103f., 107f.; Nyberg 1938, p. 217f.

26 Insler 1975, p. 234, cf. Narten 1986, p. 140, n. 13.

27 Douglas 1993, p. 117.

28 See Hintze 2002.

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which opens the entire cycle of the Gathas within the liturgical arrangement of the *Yasna*:

1. With veneration and hands stretched up I ask all (of you) for actions of his help,  
O Wise One, first (for the help) of the bounteous spirit, by which you may listen<sup>29</sup> through truth  
To the intellect of good mind and to the soul of the cow.
2. I want to approach you, O Wise Lord, with good mind  
(Entreating you) to grant me the attainments of both lives, of the corporeal and of the one of the spirit,  
On the basis of truth, (the attainments) by which one might place one's supporters into well-being.
3. In an unprecedented (way), I want to praise you, O truth, and good mind  
And the Wise Lord, to (all of) whom right-mindedness increases (Strength) and<sup>30</sup> unfading rule. Come to my calls for support!
4. For the song, I pay attention, with good mind, to the soul  
And to the rewards for the actions, knowing of the Wise Lord.  
As much as I can and am able, so long shall I look out in the quest for truth.
5. O truth, shall I see you and good mind as I am finding  
For the strongest Lord, the Wise One, a walk-way<sup>31</sup> and hearkening  
(Which is) greatest through the following formulation: "May we ward off the noxious creatures with the tongue"?
6. Come with good mind! Grant through truth the gift of long life!  
For exalted words, O Wise One, (grant) a strong support to Zarathustra  
And to us, O Lord, so that thereby we shall overcome the hostilities of the enemy!

29 On *xšnəvīšā* Mayrhofer 1986–2002, I, p. 441 with references.

30 According to Humbach 1991, II, p. 20, *xšaθrəmcā ayšaonvamnəm* is elliptical for 'X and unfading power'; Kellens/Pirart 1988–91, III, p. 21 add 'strength' (*aojah-*).

31 On Av. *gātu-* and cognates see de Blois 1995, pp. 61–65.

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7. Grant, O truth, this reward, the attainments of good mind!  
Grant, O Ārmaiti, strength to Vištāspa and to me!  
Grant, O Wise One, and rule through this formula by which we  
may hear of your bounties!
8. You, the Lord, O Best One, who is in harmony with best truth,  
Do I lovingly entreat for the best for Frašaōštra, the hero, and for  
myself  
And (for those) on whom you may bestow it for a whole lifetime of  
good mind.
9. May we not, by these entreaties, anger you, O Wise Lord, and truth  
And best mind, we who are arrayed in the offering of praises to you!  
You (are) the swiftest invigorations and the rule over strengths.
10. (Those) whom you know to be just through truth and good mind  
(And) worthy, O Wise Lord, to them fulfill their longing with  
attainments!  
I know swelling, resounding, desirable praises for you.
11. You protect truth and good mind through these for eternity.  
You, O Wise Lord, teach me with your mouth to speak  
In accordance with your spirit, through which primeval life came  
about.

The structure of *Y 28* is clearly a ring-composition. The 11 stanzas may be grouped into two groups of five stanzas with a central stanza 6. Stanzas 5 and 7, framing the central one, both contain the key word ‘formula, formulation’ (*mąθra-*), while the first (1) and last (11) ones both incorporate the word ‘spirit’ (*mainyu-*), which in stanza 1 is characterized as ‘bounteous’ (*spənta-*). Moreover, there are notable correspondences between the central stanza 6 of *Y 28* and the two central stanzas 8 and 9 of *Y 43*. Not only does the name of Zarathustra occur in the middle of both hymns, but also *Y 28.6* ‘come with good mind!’ (*vohū gaidī manarhā*) anticipates the second line of the refrain, *Y 43.7* etc. ‘when he approached me with good mind’; *Y 28.6* ‘grant a strong support to Zarathustra!’ corresponds to *43.8* ‘I could be a powerful support’, and both *Y 28.6* and *43.8* refer to the ‘hostilities’ (*dvaēšā*) which Zarathustra wishes to overcome. There are other additional correspondences between the two hymns, but those mentioned should suffice to

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support the view that *Yasna* 28 points forward to *Yasna* 43 and that, conversely, *Y* 43 takes up the theme of *Y* 28.

As we have seen, the name of Zarathustra occurs not only in the precise centre of *Y* 43, the opening hymn of the second half of the Gathas, but also in that of *Y* 28, the first hymn of the entire cycle. Moreover, his name is also found both in the centre of the concluding hymn of the third Gatha, *Y* 50, and in that of the fourth one, *Y* 51, which constitutes a Gatha on its own.<sup>32</sup> Thus, the two initial and the two final hymns of the first four Gathas contain the name of Zarathustra in their respective centres.

Another structural feature shared by the first three Gathas is their conclusion. The final stanzas of the *Abunavaitī Gāθā*, of the *Uštavaitī Gāθā* and the *Spəntā.mainyu Gāθā* conclude with the wish that life may be made wonderful (*Y* 34.15), or that ‘what is most wonderful according to wish’ may be made real (*Y* 46.19, 50.11).<sup>33</sup> The Avestan key word here is *fraša-* which, in the Younger Avesta, forms part of the technical term *frašō.kərəti*, approximately ‘making wonderful’ (vel sim.), denoting the perfecting of the world after the complete removal of evil. The use, at the end of the first three Gathas, of this word, which at least by Young Avestan times is definitely an eschatological term could be interpreted as an iconic expression for the desired and expected final state of perfection.

Correspondences can also be observed between the third hymn of each of the first two Gathas, i.e. *Y* 30 and 45, the famous hymns about the two primordial spirits. Both of them follow a structural pattern in which the singer’s wish to proclaim his teachings (*Y* 30.1, 45.1–6 as a refrain) is followed by his request to be listened to (*Y* 30.2, 45.1) and his message about the beginnings of existence and its primordial principles (*Y* 30.3–6, 45.2–6). The same structure is also found in other Indo-European poetic traditions, especially in Vedic and Germanic poetry, and is therefore most

32 Schwartz 1991a, p. 130.

33 Observed by Molé 1963, p. 181, cf. Humbach 1959, I, pp. 51–52; 1991, I, p. 91f.; Kellens/Pirart 1988–91, I, p. 14. The exact meaning of *fraša-* is debated, its etymology not entirely clear, see Narten 1986, pp. 200–203; Hintze 1994a, p. 106f. In general terms, *fraša-* refers, as it seems, to the “evil-free” condition of life.

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probably common heritage.<sup>34</sup> The message of the two primordial spirits, central to Gathic theology, is thus couched in particularly ancient poetic language.

### Indo-European Poetic Language in the Gathas

Not only is the language of the Gathas very archaic, but so also is the poetic technique employed in their composition. The Avestan texts are couched in the language of traditional Indo-European oral composition. Features of the poetic art of Gathic composition, such as formulae, rhetorical and stylistic figures, have correspondences in related traditions, particularly the *Rigveda*, the oldest literary document of Indo-Aryan. Moreover, on the basis of comparative evidence, a considerable number of such parallels can be traced even further back to an Indo-European antecedent. The reconstruction is mainly based on a shared lexical inventory of poetic formulae and syntagms.

For example, the question put to Zarathustra in *Y* 43.7: ‘Who are you? To whom do you belong?’ has been recognized as an ancient Indo-European greeting formula by which a stranger is asked to identify himself by giving his own name and that of his father. It occurs, for example, with some variation in Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey* and also in Germanic heroic poetry.<sup>35</sup> In the Gathic case, however, only the first question is answered in a straightforward way. The second of Zarathustra’s answers in *Y* 43.8 appears to be puzzling since he does not give his father’s name which was, according to the Younger Avesta, Pourušaspa. Instead, he says that he is an enemy of the daivas and a supporter of the truthful ones. The context, therefore, suggests that, even if the ancient inherited formula is used, the second question is reinterpreted as actually being about Zarathustra’s choice, i.e. about whose side he is on, that

34 Schaefer 1940.

35 Schmitt 1967, pp. 136–38 with references, cf. Strunk 1985, p. 466. Floyd 1992 deals mainly with the Sanskrit and Greek passages (reference kindly provided by F. Vajifdar).

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of the deceitful or the truthful ones.<sup>36</sup> The composer of this passage thus employs a traditional formula but reinterprets it by placing it into a new context and filling it with ideas of a new concept. The first question of the greeting formula also occurs in Young Avestan poetry, in the *Hōm Yašt* (Y 9.1, quoted p. 21) and in the hymn to Aši (*Yt* 17.17, quoted p. 56).

Another instance of the composer of the Gathas drawing on traditional poetic language is the vocabulary of the chariot race. Already in Indo-Iranian ritual poetry, the race of the horse-drawn chariot with a prize at stake furnishes the image which is transposed metaphorically into the sphere of the ritual. The chariot race provides the metaphor for the sacrifice. In the hymns of the *Rigveda*, the sacrificial plant, Soma, pressed through the sacrificial strainer is constantly compared to the horse racing for the prize. In the Gathas, too, there is the image of the race, interpreted, however, in a new way. For example, the winning of the race is a metaphor for the defeat of evil in Y 30.10:

For then destruction of deceit's prosperity will come down,  
And the swiftest (steeds) will be harnessed from the good dwelling  
of good thought,  
Of the Wise One and of truth, (and) they will win (racing for)  
good fame.

Not only the image of the chariot-race is employed, but the verb for 'to win', Av. *zā*, which literally means 'to race ahead', evokes the situation in which the one leaving behind the competitors arrives first at the prize at stake, here 'good fame' (*sraṇah-*).<sup>37</sup> Among all the Gathic hymns, the metaphor of the chariot-race is most prominent in *Yasna* 50, the final hymn of the *Spəntā.mainyu Gāθā*:

1. Does my soul have anyone's help at its disposal?  
Who has been found as a protector of my cattle, or of myself?  
Who else than truth and you, O Wise Lord,  
(Who becomes) manifest in the invocation, and best mind.

36 Nyberg 1938, p. 218; Insler 1975, p. 63, 234; Humbach 1991, II, p. 138.

37 Hoffmann 1968, p. 283ff. (= 1975, p. 222ff.).



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2. How, O Wise One, could one plead for the joy-bringing cow,  
One who wishes her to belong to him, provided with pasture,  
One who lives decently through truth among the many who  
block(?) the sun(light)?  
I shall (now) sit down in front of them. Accept (me as) the just one.<sup>38</sup>
3. To this one, O Wise One, shall belong through truth (the herd)  
Which one assigns to him with rule and good mind,  
To the man who makes grow, with strength of reward,  
The nearest herd which the deceitful one wants to partake of.
4. Praising, I want to worship you, O Wise Lord,  
Along with truth and best mind  
And rule with which one wants to tread the path of strength.  
I want to be heard in the House of Welcome before the efficacious  
ones.
5. Therefore, let it be granted by you, O Wise Lord, with truth,  
That you are joyful for the sake of your mantrist  
With visible, manifest aid  
Sent by your hand, with which one sets us in comfort.<sup>39</sup>
6. The mantrist who raises his voice  
Is an ally of truth with reverence: Zarathustra.  
The giver of intellect may instruct (me) with good thinking  
To be the charioteer of my tongue (and) direction.
7. I shall harness for you the swiftest steeds  
Broad(-chested) by the victories of my praise for you,  
O Wise One, (and) strong through truth (and) good mind,  
(the steeds) with which you win: May you be of help to me!
8. With footsteps which are renowned as those of fat-offering,  
I shall approach you, O Wise One, with hands stretched up,  
You with truth and with the reverence of efficacious one,  
You with the skilfulness of good mind.
9. With this worship, praising, I shall go to you,  
O Wise One, with truth, with the actions of good mind.  
When I shall rule, at will, over my reward  
Then may I be strong in the desire for a generous one.

38 After Humbach 1991, I, p. 183.

39 For *Y* 50.5–7 cf. Schwartz 1991a, p. 132.

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10. What(ever) I shall do and what(ever) actions (will be done) by those around here

And what(ever) is worthy, through good mind, of (your) eyes,  
The lights of the sun, the leading bull of the days,  
(All that is) for your praise through truth, O Wise Lord.

11. Thus I shall call myself the one who praises you, O Wise One, and be it

As much as I can and am able through truth.  
The creator of life shall further through good mind  
The realization of what is most excellent according to wish.

The singer wishes to be a good ‘charioteer of the tongue’ (*Y* 50.6), and his hymn is compared to the steeds racing for a prize (*Y* 50.7). The image of “yoking” or “harnessing” is also used, in *Y* 49.9, with regard to the “religious views”, the *daēnās*, which ‘have been yoked to the best prize’. A particularly strong metaphor is provided by the ‘turning-point’ (*urvaēsa*) which, in the chariot race, marks the critical moment when the horse-drawn chariot has to turn around and then race back. The composer of the Gathas transposes this technical term into the religious sphere and uses it as a metaphor for the final point in life when judgment is passed (*Y* 43.5 and 6, and *Y* 51.6).<sup>40</sup>

Inherited vocabulary from the horse race also comprises the components of the name of Zarathustra’s patron, Vīštāspa, which means ‘whose horses have been let loose (for the race)’. Its Vedic equivalents (Ved. *viṣita- āśva-*) also denote the horses let loose for the race, and indicate that Vīštāspa’s name is based on an ancient Indo-Iranian formula. This name, which was probably fairly common, was also borne by another Iranian ruler, the father of the Achaemenid king Dareios, someone most probably different from the Avestan Vīštāspa.<sup>41</sup>

40 Kuiper 1978, p. 34; Humbach 1959, II, p. 49.

41 See Mayrhofer 1994 [1996], p. 177 with n. 18, with references.

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### Problems Related to Understanding the Gathas

The major problem to be faced when interpreting the Gathas is their lack of literary and historical context.<sup>42</sup> Although these texts are couched in the language of an ancient tradition of priestly oral composition for which there is abundant comparative evidence from related languages, Vedic in particular, ideally an understanding of specifically Gathic concepts should be based on the Gathas themselves. Such a procedure, however, is seriously hampered by the small size of the Old Avestan corpus. To treat the Gathas as their own interpreter, a principle applied, for example, in biblical exegesis, is often simply not possible. Scholars, therefore, resort to the comparative evidence, especially to Vedic, on the one hand, and the later post-Gathic, especially Pahlavi tradition, on the other. Both approaches, however, are constantly exposed to the danger of transposing into the Gathas conceptual frameworks derived from either the Vedic or the Pahlavi texts.

One of the problems is that of the numerous Gathic *hapax legomena* for which no Avestan parallel passages are available to assist in their elucidation. For example, the word *aēuruš*, apparently an epithet of the bull, is attested only in *Y* 50.10. There is, however, comparative evidence in Vedic *éru-*, equally a *hapax legomenon* in the Atharva-Veda. The Vedic word has a sexual connotation but, due to lack of other attestations, it cannot be verified whether this is also the case in the Gathic passage. There are numerous stanzas with words resisting analysis. For instance, *Y* 50.2 contains several expressions not understood at present (*pišyasū, nišqsyā, dāθēm dāhvā*).<sup>43</sup> Moreover, even if all the individual words in a stanza can be identified both lexically and grammatically, it is not always possible to combine them into a meaningful sentence, as for example in *Y* 43.10. Lengthy passages which can be understood in a fairly straightforward way, such as e.g. *Yasna* 44.3–5, tend to be the exception, rather than the rule.

For these and other reasons, translations—which are necessarily interpretations—of the Gathas by different authors vary

42 Cf. Boyce 1994.

43 Cf. Kellens 1974, p. 340; Kellens/Pirart 1988–91, III, p. 242.

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considerably, sometimes even to the extent that it is difficult to believe that they render the same original text.

### *Yasna Haptañhāiti*

The *Yasna Haptañhāiti* (*YH*) is neither metrically structured by a fixed number of basically isosyllabic verse lines, as the Gathas are, nor ordinary prose as found in the Younger Avesta, such as e.g. in the *Vīdēvdād*. Stylistically, the *YH* has been characterized by its major editor, Johanna Narten, as liturgical recitation prose close to poetry.<sup>44</sup> Although she considers the *YH* to be prose, her definition indicates that this is a text which does not fully coincide with one of the constituents of the binary dichotomy of prose vs. poetry. The reason for this is that, on the one hand, no particular metre is followed, but, on the other, both a rhythmical pattern and rhetorical figures have been observed. It seems that the *YH* exhibits a type of literature structured not by a syllable counting metre but by a variety of rhythmic patterns. Both the rhythmic pattern and the rhetorical figures follow an inherited model of traditional liturgical recitation for which parallels in Early Latin and Umbrian prayer and liturgy have been adduced.<sup>45</sup>

The *Yasna Haptañhāiti* is composed with a concentric structure. The three central chapters, *Y* 37–39, are surrounded, on each side, by two initial (*Y* 35–36) and two final ones (*Y* 40–41).<sup>46</sup> The worship of Ahura Mazdā and his spiritual and material creations is the major theme of *Y* 37–39, which begin and end with his worship (*Y* 37.1–3, 39.4–5). *Y* 38, the very centre of the entire *Yasna Haptañhāiti*, is devoted to the worship of the waters and of powers active

44 Narten 1986, p. 21.

45 Watkins 1995, pp. 229–36. Cf. also the Narten's summary of rhetorical figures, Narten 1986, pp. 21–23. Hintze [2006] argues that the *YH* is not ordinary prose in the sense of unadorned speech. Rather, it is, like Gathas, a poetic text. The difference is that they represent two distinct types of poetry. The poetic form of the Gathas is governed by the rhythm of syllables, that of the *YH* by the rhythm of words.

46 Cf. Kellens/Pirart 1988–91, III, pp. 124–30; Boyce 1992, pp. 89–94.

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during the ritual. The first two chapters, *Y* 35–36, lead towards that central part: After the worshippers have expressed their desire to fulfil what is good, i.e. to worship Ahura Mazda and care for cattle (*Y* 35), the consecration of the sacrificial fire takes place (*Y* 36). In the concluding two chapters, *Y* 40–41, the worshippers pray to Ahura Mazda to accept their worship and reward it (*Y* 40), and they declare their desire to praise their Lord forever (*Y* 41).

The second chapter of the *Yasna Haptaŋhāiti*, *Yasna* 36, is of particular interest because it provides the textual foundation for the pivotal role played by the fire in Zoroastrian ritual:

1. Together with the community of this fire here,  
We approach you, O Wise Lord, at the beginning,  
You together with your most bounteous spirit,  
Which indeed spells harm for the one  
Whom you consign to harm.
2. You, there, the most joyful one,  
May you come close to us for the sake of the request,  
O Fire of the Wise Lord!  
May you come close to us,  
With the joy of the most joyful one,  
With the veneration of the most venerating one,  
For the greatest of the supplications.
3. You are truly the Fire of the Wise Lord.  
You are truly his most bounteous spirit.  
We approach you,  
O Fire of the Wise Lord,  
With what is indeed the most effective of your names.
4. We approach you  
With good mind,  
With good truth,  
With the actions and words  
Of good perception.
5. We pay homage, we bring refreshment to you, O Wise Lord.  
We approach you with all good thoughts,  
With all good words,  
With all good deeds.

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6. We now declare, O Wise Lord,  
That this light here  
Has been of your manifestations the most beautiful manifestation,  
Ever since yonder highest of heights  
Was called the sun.

In the second stanza of this prayer, the heavenly Fire of Ahura Mazda is addressed and invited to come down to the place of worship. The transformation of the fire takes place between stanzas 2 and 3, because stanza 3 presupposes this process by identifying the ritual fire with the heavenly Fire of Ahura Mazda.<sup>47</sup> In stanza 4, the worshippers emphasize their reverence and state of purity with which they approach the fire. They praise Ahura Mazda in his most beautiful manifestation of light in the final two stanzas 5–6. Not only the structure of the entire *Yasna Haptañbāiti*, but also the internal arrangement of an individual chapter, *Y 36*, follows the concentric pattern according to which the central stanzas are devoted to the major theme, namely the consecration of the transformed fire (3) and the reverence with which it is approached (4).

### Authorship of the Gathas

When discussing the question of who composed the Gathas, it should be borne in mind that modern concepts of “author” or “composer” can hardly be applied to the pre-historical oral culture from which the Gathas originate. In such context, “texts”, it has been argued, existed only as events, “as *performances by performers*”.<sup>48</sup> In each performance, a new “text” was created. The Gathas provide evidence for this process when the singer wishes to sing his praise ‘in an unprecedented way’ (*apaourvīm Y 28.3*), an expression for which parallels are found in the *Rigveda*.<sup>49</sup> When composing in performance, a creative activity denoted by the Avestan verb ‘to

47 Narten 1986, p. 26.

48 Skjærvø 1994b, p. 206, with references. On the methodological debate about “context” and “text”, cf. Tully 1988.

49 Humbach 1959, p. 8; 1991, II, p. 20; R. Schmitt 1967, p. 296f. n. 1711.

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weave' (*ufyānī* Y 28.3; Y 43.8), the professional singer drew on an inventory of formulas and metrical and compositional patterns. By combining the traditional constituents in a new way, he created a unique, unprecedented hymn, which would never again be quite identically replicated.

However, the Younger Avesta presupposes that the Gathas were petrified texts, learnt by heart *verbatim* and recited by the priests as they were recited by the prophet Zarathustra. In the *Hōm Yašt*, Zarathustra is conceived as reciting the Gathas while attending to the sacrificial fire and celebrating a *Yasna* ceremony (Y 9.1)<sup>50</sup>:

During the morning watch  
Haoma approached Zarathustra  
Who was purifying the fire  
And chanting the Gathas.  
Zarathustra asked him:  
“Who, O man, are you  
Who are the most handsome I have seen  
Of all the material world ...?”

The Avestan verb describing the activity of reciting the hymns is *srāvaya-* which literally means ‘to make heard’. That there are five Gathas originally composed by Zarathustra is asserted in a passage from the Young Avestan hymn to Sraoša: ‘We worship Sraoša ... who was the first to recite the five Gathas of Zarathustra, line by line, stanza by stanza, together with the explanations, together with the answers’ (Y 57.8) and in Y 71.6 ‘we worship all the five truthful Gathas’.<sup>51</sup> Both the Avesta and the Pahlavi literature are steeped in the belief that the five Gathas are the work of Zarathustra, the prophet and founder of the new religion named after himself.

Thus, already in the Young Avestan period, the Gathas were venerated and considered as the compositions of Zarathustra. While most scholars have accepted this premise, it has been

50 Geldner 1896, p. 28. Translation, with minor modifications, after Josephson 1997, p. 41.

51 Cf. Humbach 1991, I, p. 5.

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challenged and criticized as prejudiced in recent years. Following Darmesteter, Molé, and Kellens/Pirart, Skjærvø maintains that the traditional “theological *a priori*” of Zarathustra’s divinely inspired authorship should be abandoned, the only legitimate *a priori* assumptions being linguistic and literary.<sup>52</sup> Kellens argues that, with the exception of *Y* 43.5–15, the “I” of the Gathas could not be the prophet because, among other reasons, Zarathustra is addressed in the vocative (*Y* 46.14). In addition, and more significantly, in *Y* 28.6 his name is contrasted with the first person plural pronoun ‘us’, ‘to Zarathustra and to us’, a usage which makes it clear that Zarathustra stands apart from the worshippers, the ‘I’ or ‘we’ of the Gathas: ‘Grant ..., O Wise One, a strong support to Zarathustra and to us, O Lord, so that thereby we shall overcome the hostilities of the enemy’ (*Y* 28.6). Hence it would be difficult, if not impossible, to assume that Zarathustra was the composer. Kellens concludes that the Gathas are the collective work of a religious group, the “Gathic circle”, for whom Zarathustra acquired a status close to divinity as a result of his reform of the ritual.<sup>53</sup>

Thus, the authorship of the Gathas, and along with it the historical personality of Zarathustra, have been questioned and become the subject of debate. The problem with obtaining clarity on this issue is, once more, the lack of evidence regarding the wider historical and situational context within which these hymns were composed. However, while the Gathas are not conclusive, the *Yasna Haptañhāiti* does contain references to the situational context within which that text was recited, namely when the worshippers, priests as well as lay people, assembled around the ritual fire.<sup>54</sup> This situation may also be alluded to in *Y* 28.9 ‘we who are arrayed in the offering of your praises’. Zarathustra, as the initiator of the religion, could have been the foremost among the priests. But why then is he contrasted with ‘us’ in *Y* 28.6? In order to solve the problem, it has been suggested that ‘to (me), Zarathustra and

52 Skjærvø 1997b, p. 107.

53 Kellens/Pirart 1988–91, I, pp. 18–22, 32–36; Kellens 1994a, pp. 154f., 155, n. 1.

54 Narten 1986, p. 34.



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to (all of) us' was intended<sup>55</sup>—but this is not exactly what the text says. It is obvious, however, that *Y 28.6* 'to Zarathustra and to us' should be seen in the larger context of parallel expressions in the following two stanzas, *Y 28.7* 'Grant you, O Right-mindedness, strength to Vištāspa and to me' and *Y 28.8* 'I lovingly entreat you, O Best One ... for the best (things) for Frašaoštra, the hero, and for myself and (for those) on whom you may bestow it for a whole lifetime of good mind'. In addition, the dative of Ahura Mazda's name is found in the second verse line of the preceding stanza *Y 28.5* '... as I am finding, for the strongest Lord, the Wise One, a walk-way and hearkening'. Each of the central stanzas 5–8 of *Y 28* contains, in their second verse lines, a dative: to Ahura Mazda, to Zarathustra and us, to Vištāspa and me, to Frašaoštra and me. Thus, at the middle of the opening hymn of the Gathas, the important personages are named explicitly and deliberately.

That 'us' comprises the entire community of the Mazdayasnians emerges from a Young Avestan passage in *Y 68.12* where a distinction is made between the officiating priest, who is referred to as 'me', on the one hand, and 'us', the Mazdayasnians, on the other. In an invocation, the waters are asked:

*Y 68.12* Give, O good waters,  
To me, the worshipping priest,  
And to us, the worshipping Mazdayasnians,  
The students and fellow-students,  
The masters and pupils,  
The men and women,  
The minor (boys) and girls,  
And the farmers

*Y 68.13* ... the searching and finding of the straightest path  
Which is the straightest one to truth  
And to best life of the truthful ones,  
To the light which offers all well-being.

As in the Gathic stanzas *Y 28.6–8*, there is a distinction between 'us' and the priest. The latter is explicitly identified as the officiating priest, the former as the community of the Mazdayasnians.

55 Humbach 1991, I, p. 118.

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Viewing the Gathic passage in this light, one could interpret *Y* 28.6 as ‘to (me,) Zarathustra and to us’, Zarathustra being the officiating priest and ‘us’ the community of his followers. Two of the most distinguished members of ‘us’, his followers, are named personally in the ensuing two stanzas, while the priest, Zarathustra according to the interpretation proposed here, is then referred to by the personal pronoun ‘me’.<sup>56</sup>

More than anything else, however, *Y* 28.6 may illustrate the difficulties involved in interpreting these texts and in attempting to reach conclusive results. In the final analysis, it must be admitted that, on the basis of the evidence available, it is impossible either to prove or to disprove the identity of the composer of these texts. There is no doubt that Zarathustra was considered to be the author of the Gathas in the Younger Avestan period, and probably also before, though the contexts in which these statements are made are not historical, but ritual and “mythical” (always bearing in mind, of course, that, as C. S. Lewis has argued, there are “true” myths).<sup>57</sup> Yet, whether it was Zarathustra who composed the Gathas or whether they were later attributed to him, these hymns, if anything, may be regarded as an authentic record of his teachings.<sup>58</sup>

What has become increasingly evident is the homogeneous character of the Gathas, with the exception, perhaps, of *Yasna* 53.<sup>59</sup> The first four Gathas, and probably also the fifth, are consistent and coherent with regard to language, concepts, and personages figuring in them. Moreover, it is not possible to detect an inner chronology of earlier and later composition. This supports the view that the period over which these hymns were composed encompasses a single human life span.<sup>60</sup>

Apart from the conceptual frame, the homogeneous character of the Gathas is further substantiated by the poetic technique

56 Hintze 2002, pp. 35f., 48–50. Kellens 2002–3b, p. 843f. rejects the validity of *Y* 68.12 as a parallel for *Y* 28.6, but see Hintze [2006] ad *Y* 35.8 no. 1 *ādā* ‘I say’.

57 Lewis 1971, pp. 39–44; 1988, pp. 171–72.

58 Cf. Geldner 1896, p. 29f.

59 Cf. the discussion of Kellens/Pirart 1988–91, III, p. 265.

60 Kellens/Pirart 1988–91, I, p. 16 with n. 24.

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employed. As research into their composition continues, it is increasingly apparent not only that the individual hymns are structured internally but also that the way the Gathas are arranged in sequence is deliberate, with intertextual cross-references both forward and back.<sup>61</sup> Such observations throw light on the highly developed poetic technique and indicate the workings of a master of verbal art. The ever-sensed uniqueness of these hymns, the admiration inspired by them and the attraction they have exerted not only on followers of the religion but also on scholars is due both to the scope they offer for interpretation, and to the poetic genius of their composer.

### Authorship of the *Yasna Haptan̄hāiti*

Although there are correspondences and disagreements between the *Yasna Haptan̄hāiti* and the Gathas, conveniently listed by Narten,<sup>62</sup> the major criterion which prohibits a dating of the *YH* much later than the Gathas, is the language: both texts belong to the same stage, Old Avestan. It has been estimated that no more than a few generations, if any, may have elapsed between the composition of the two texts. The divergences between them can be explained on the basis of their different literary genres. One of the results of Narten's seminal study is that the *Yasna Haptan̄hāiti* and the Gathas are best considered as texts complementing each other, and that there is no evidence against the assumption that they are contemporary compositions, probably by the same author.<sup>63</sup>

### Date of Zarathustra

The question as to when and where Zarathustra lived is perhaps even more debated than that regarding the authorship of the Gathas. While most scholars find a date around 1000 BCE most

61 Schwartz 1991a, 1998.

62 Narten 1986, pp. 29–30.

63 Narten 1986, pp. 35–37.

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plausible,<sup>64</sup> there are those who argue either for an earlier one between 1500–1200<sup>65</sup> or for a later date in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE.<sup>66</sup> Whether Zarathustra composed the Old Avestan texts himself or whether they emanate from a religious circle inspired by him, it is plausible to assume that the Gathas and *YH* are contemporaneous or nearly contemporaneous with him. Therefore, if these texts can be dated, then it should be possible to determine the lifetime of Zarathustra as well.

Even if allowance is made for languages to evolve at a different rate, the close linguistic relationship between Old Avestan and the language of the *Rigveda* is one of the strongest arguments in favour of their approximately contemporaneous dating around 1200 BCE. Relative to Young Avestan, Old Avestan apparently belongs to an earlier language stage. This is suggested by the more archaic verbal system of the latter as well as by a number of phonetic rules such as the hiatus caused by a laryngeal dropped between vowels in pre-historic times. Although Old Avestan is not the direct ancestor of Young Avestan, it has been estimated that some four centuries may have elapsed between the composition of the texts of the older and younger Avesta.<sup>67</sup>

Furthermore, the language of the Younger Avesta represents, more or less, a stage of development similar to that of the Old Persian inscriptions for which an absolute date is available.<sup>68</sup> In addition, Avestan quotations in such inscriptions provide further support for the view that the Avestan texts were already widely known throughout the Achaemenid Empire.<sup>69</sup>

64 Mayrhofer 1994 [1996], p. 177 with n. 16 with references; Humbach 1991, I, pp. 23, 26f., 30, 49 with references; Kellens 1998, p. 513.

65 Boyce 1992, pp. 27–51, esp. p. 45.; Skjærvø 1994b, p. 201 (1700–1200: Old Avestan period).

66 Gershevitch 1995, 2 referring to Henning's (1951, p. 36) "contemptuous rebuff of the linguistic argument that Zoroaster cannot have lived after the 8<sup>th</sup> cent. B.C."; Gnoli 2000.

67 Kellens 1987b, p. 135f.; Kellens/Pirart 1988–91, I, pp. 12–13; Herrenschmidt/Kellens 1994, p. 47; Skjærvø 1995d, p. 162.

68 Kellens 1989b, p. 36; Skjærvø 1995d, p. 162f.

69 Skjærvø 1999a; Kellens/Pirart 1988–91, I, p. 40f.

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### Homeland of Zarathustra

As to the geographical area in which the Gathas were composed, we are even more at a loss than with regard to their date. The Old Avestan texts do not contain a single reference to a geographically identifiable area. The Younger Avesta, in contrast, contains a number of geographical names, all of them, however, confined to Eastern Iran. This has been interpreted as an indication of its geographical horizon.<sup>70</sup> Assuming that the Gathas were composed several centuries before the Younger Avesta, and that the direction of the migration of the East-Iranians into Iran was from north to south, we may surmise that the Gathas were composed somewhere in southern Central Asia. More precise localizations are subject to debate.<sup>71</sup> The memory of a common origin of the Iranian peoples appears to be preserved in the name *airyana- vaējah-* ‘the Aryan rapid’ or ‘spring’ of the Younger Avesta.<sup>72</sup>

### Younger Avesta

Texts in the Young Avestan language constitute about five-sixth of the entire extant Avesta.<sup>73</sup> In contrast to the homogeneous character of the Gathas and the *Yasna Haptaŋhāiti*, the texts of the Younger Avesta are heterogeneous and were certainly composed by different authors in different periods. The major criterion for distinguishing an Old Avestan and a Young Avestan text is the language, although their underlying religious systems differ as well. Within the Younger Avesta, there are some older and some younger parts, of which the former are generally composed in good Avestan.

70 Gnoli 1989; Skjærvø 1995d, pp. 164–66. Grenet 2002a identifies the Afghan part of Badakhshān as the region where the Younger Avesta localizes the birthplace of Zarathustra.

71 The different views are summarized by Gnoli 1989.

72 Hoffmann/Narten 1989, p. 85, n. 32. An attempt to localize this land was made by Witzel 2000.

73 Gershevitch 1968, p. 18.

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By contrast, in the younger parts the grammar has deteriorated, a number of forms being used in a grammatically incorrect way.

### The Younger Avestan *Yasna* and Pseudo-Old Avestan

Some texts of the Younger Avestan *Yasna* are in the so-called pseudo-Old Avestan language. These were composed at a time when Young Avestan had already evolved, but their authors were attempting to imitate Old Avestan. The major device for achieving this was simply that of lengthening word-final vowels. One of the four sacred prayers, the *Yēḥē Hātəm* (Y 27.15), is in Pseudo-Old Avestan, as are Y 11.17–19; 13.1–6 (7); 14.1–2; 42; 56.1–4;<sup>74</sup> 58.1–8 (9)<sup>75</sup> and the Zoroastrian “Confession of Faith”, which constitutes chapter 12 of the *Yasna* (Y 12.1–9).<sup>76</sup> Its name *Fravarānē* ‘I profess myself’ is taken from the first word of the Avestan text which contains two quotations from the Gathas<sup>77</sup>:

1. I profess myself a Mazdā-worshipper, a follower of Zarathustra,  
one who is against the Daevas, a follower of the teachings  
of the Lord,  
a praiser of the Bounteous Immortals (Amesha Spentas),  
a worshipper of the Bounteous Immortals.  
I assign all good (things) to the Wise Lord, the good One, who  
measures out good,<sup>78</sup>  
the truthful One, the wealthy One, the glorious One,  
whatever is best (= Y 47.5),  
whose (is) the cow, whose is truth, whose are the lights,  
whose (is the formula of) “Let the open spaces be filled with lights!”  
(= Y 31.7).

74 Studied by Pirart 1991.

75 Studied by Pirart 1992b.

76 Hoffmann/Narten 1989, p. 89.

77 Cf. the translation of Boyce 1984b, p. 57f.

78 Hintze 2000.

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2. I choose for myself bounteous right-mindedness, the good one.  
    May she be mine!  
I renounce theft of and violence against the cow,  
I renounce the damaging and destroying of Mazdayasnian  
    communities.
3. I grant movement at will and settling at will to those who are  
    honourable,  
to those who live with their cattle upon this earth.  
In front of (the offerings) which have been set up with reverence for  
    truth,  
I avow the following:  
From now on I shall not bring either damage or destruction  
upon the Mazdayasnian communities  
in striving after neither (someone's) limb nor life.
4. I reject the company of the wicked, detrimental, lawless, evil-  
    creating Daevas,  
the most deceitful ones among those who exist, the most stinking  
    ones among those who exist, the most detrimental ones among  
    those who exist.  
(I reject the company) of the Daevas, of the followers of the Daevas,  
    of the sorcerers, of the followers of the sorcerers;  
(I reject the company) of those who attack anyone of those who exist.  
(I reject their company) by (my) thoughts, words, deeds, (and)  
    proclamations.  
I reject the company of any deceitful, inimical one.
5. Thus, thus, as Ahura Mazdā used to teach<sup>79</sup> Zarathustra  
in all conversations, in all encounters  
at which the Wise One and Zarathustra used to converse with each  
    other,
6. Thus, thus, as Zarathustra used to reject the community of the  
    Daevas,  
in all conversations, in all encounters  
at which the Wise One and Zarathustra used to converse with each  
    other,  
(thus) I reject the community of the Daevas,  
as truthful Zarathustra used to reject it.

79 On the optative forms in *Y* 12.5 and 6, see Hoffmann 1976, pp. 616–17.

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7. By the choice of the waters, by the choice of the plants  
by the choice of the beneficent cow,  
by the choice of Ahura Mazdā  
who has created the cow, who has created the truthful man,  
by the choice of Zarathustra,  
by the choice of Kavi Vīštāspa  
by the choice of the two, Fərəšaoštra and Jāmāspa,  
by the choice of each of the Deliverers (*saosyant*), those who make  
real, the truthful ones,  
by that choice and by that doctrine I am a Mazdā-worshipper.

8. I profess myself a Mazdā-worshipper, a follower of Zarathustra,  
having pledged myself to and having avowed the faith.  
I pledge myself to the well-thought thought,  
I pledge myself to the well-spoken word,  
I pledge myself to the well-done action.

9. I pledge myself to the Mazdayasnian religion,  
which causes attacks to cease, weapons to be laid down,  
which is characterized by marriage within one's own family, the  
truthful one,  
which is the greatest, best, and most beautiful one among the  
present and future (religions),  
the Ahurian, Zarathustrian.  
I assign all good things to Ahura Mazdā.  
This is the pledge to the Mazdayasnian Religion.

### Composition of the *Yasna*

The Young Avestan parts of the *Yasna* may be divided into two major sections: those which precede the Old Avestan texts (*Y* 1–27.12) and those which follow them (*Y* 55–72). In addition, two chapters in Young Avestan, *Y* 42 and 52, are inserted into the Older Avestan ones, as is one stanza at the beginning of the *YH*, *Y* 35.1. Conversely, individual Old Avestan stanzas or even entire hymns are frequently repeated amongst the Young Avestan sections. For instance, *Y* 64 is entirely composed of the Gathic verses *Y* 46.3 and 50.6–11, while all of *Y* 47, together with other Old Avestan stanzas, is repeated in *Y* 18 and 68.



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The first part of the Young Avestan *Yasna* exhibits a compositional structure in which liturgical invocations and praises to Ahura Mazdā, the Amesha Spentas and all other good creations and time divisions (*ratu-*) alternate with passages devoted to a particular theme. Thus, the introductory invocations (1–8), including the consecration and consumption of the sacred bread in honour of Sraoša (*Srōš Darūn*, 3–8),<sup>80</sup> are followed by the recitation of the *Hōm Yašt* (9–11), consumption of the Parahaoma, the Confession of faith (12–13), invocations and praises (14–18), the commentaries to the three sacred prayers (19–21), and more invocations (22–27.12).

The latter part following the Old Avestan texts contains mainly praises both to the divine beings and for the life of the truthful Mazdayasnians. Praises of the Gathas and the *Staota Yesnya* (55) are followed by the *Srōš Yašt* (56–57), the “Mantra of the Cattle Breeder” (*fšūšō maθrō*, *Y* 58), a liturgical invocation and praise (*Y* 59, largely repeating *Y* 17 and 26), benedictions of the House (*dahma āfritiš*) (*Y* 60), praises for the anti-demonic power of the sacred prayers (*Y* 61), praise for the fire (*Āteš Nyaiš*, *Y* 62), the ritual of the waters (*Āb Zōhr*, *Y* 63–69), and, finally, concluding praises (*Y* 70–72).

The *Yasna* exhibits a concentric compositional structure. The outer circles consist of liturgical praises to Ahura Mazdā and all his good creations, alternating with texts and praises devoted to special subjects (Haoma, the Creed, the commentaries, Sraoša, the cattle breeder, the houses of the Mazdayasnians, the Gathas, the sacred prayers and *Staota Yesnya*, the fire and waters). The central part clearly comprises the Old Avestan texts, flanked on either side by the sacred prayers and with the *Yasna Haptayhbāiti* at their heart. Indeed, *Y* 36, the second chapter of the *YH* and the one concerned with the transformation of the ritual fire, constitutes the exact centre of the 72 chapters of the entire *Yasna* and thus stresses the significance of that crucial moment during the ceremony. Obviously, *Y* 36 was deliberately placed at the centre of the *Yasna* which therefore

80 Modi 1937, p. 305f.

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must have been arranged as to facilitate this. The method employed involved repeating stanzas or entire sections, thus providing additional chapters. For instance, *Y* 59 merely repeats chapters 17 and 26 (*Y* 59.1–17 = *Y* 17.1–17; 59.18–27 = 26.1–10; 59.29 = 17.19), and the last chapter 72 consists almost entirely of repetitions, including the wholesale iteration of chapter 61. Similarly, the Young Avestan passages *Y* 42 and 52 may have been inserted amongst the Old Avestan texts for the purpose of creating additional chapters.

The division of the *Yasna* into three parts—two Young Avestan parts on either side of the Old Avestan middle part—is based on the language in which the texts are written. The Avesta itself refers to the central portion of the *Yasna* as the *Staota Yesnya*, an expression based on the Gathic words *Y* 30.1 *staotācā ... yesnyācā* ‘praises and worshipful (words/rites)’.<sup>81</sup> However, the *Staota Yesnya* do not coincide with the division based on the language, because they begin and end with chapter 14 and 58 of the *Yasna*.<sup>82</sup> But it cannot be coincidental that here, also, *Y* 36 takes up exactly the precise midpoint, being preceded and followed by 22 chapters on either side.

The central position occupied by *Yasna* 36 applies, of course, only to the *Staota Yesnya* in so far as they form part of the *Yasna* liturgy. In the Sasanian Avesta, the *Staota Yesnya* constituted the first or *Stōt Nask*. There, it seems, they consisted of 33 chapters, in contrast to the 45 in the *Yasna* liturgy. Obviously, some of the chapters which form part of the *Staota Yesnya* in our extant *Yasna* have been borrowed from other divisions, or *Nasks*. For example, *Yasna* 19–21, the commentaries to the three sacred prayers, were originally the first three of a 22– (or: 21– according to the Persian *Rivāyats*) chapter exegetical text constituting, in the Sasanian Avesta, the fourth or *Bay Nask*.<sup>83</sup> Whereas chapters 4–22 have been

81 Humbach 1991, II, p. 46.

82 Bartholomae 1904, p. 1589; Geldner 1896, p. 25f. Considering *Y* 59 as their last chapter (Kellens 1996, p. 95ff.), Kellens 1998, p. 500 sees the 33 chapters of the *Staota Yesnya* in *Y* 27–59.

83 Cf. the table summarizing the contents of the Sasanian Avesta according to the *Dēnkard* by Kellens 1989a, p. 37. The passages of the Persian *Rivāyats* concerning the *Bay Nask* are translated by West 1892, pp. 420, 429, 433, 439. References on the *Bay Nask* are given by Panaino 1994a, p. 174, n. 32.

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lost, the three initial chapters have survived only because they were incorporated, as chapters 19–21, into the text of the *Yasna* liturgy. They are rare survivals of Avestan exegetical literature. *Yasna* 19 contains the commentary to the holiest of all the Zoroastrian prayers, the *Ahuna Vairya*. Out of 21 sections altogether, the first 11 read as follows:

1. Zarathustra asked Ahura Mazdā:

“O Ahura Mazdā, most bounteous spirit,  
creator of the material world, truthful One,  
what was that utterance, O Ahura Mazdā, which you proclaimed  
for me

2. before (the creation of) the sky, before the water, before the earth,  
before the cow, before the plant,  
before the fire, the son of Ahura Mazdā,  
before the truthful man,  
before the obnoxious creatures, demons and mortals (= *Y* 34.5),  
before all corporeal life,  
before all that is good, created by Mazdā, originating from truth?”

3. Then spoke Ahura Mazdā:

“It was that piece of the Ahura Vairya,  
O Spitāma Zarathustra,  
which I proclaimed for you,

4. before (the creation of) the sky, before the water, before the earth,  
before the cow, before the plant,  
before the fire, the son of Ahura Mazdā,  
before the truthful man,  
before the obnoxious creatures, demons and mortals,  
before all corporeal life,  
before all that is good, created by Mazdā, originating from truth.

5. That piece of the *Ahuna Vairya*,

o Spitāma Zarathustra,  
when recited without interpolation, without transposition,  
is for me equivalent to a hundred other Ratus, the Gathas,  
when recited without interpolation, without transposition.  
Even when recited with interpolation, with transposition,  
it is equivalent to ten other Ratus.

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6. Whoever will recall for me in this corporeal life,  
O Spitāma Zarathustra,  
the piece of the *Abuna Vairya*,  
or, recalling, murmurs it,  
or, murmuring, recites it,  
or, reciting, prays it,  
three times shall I, Ahura Mazdā,  
lead his soul  
across the bridge to best life,  
to best life,  
to best truth,  
to the best lights.

7. Whoever in this corporeal life,  
o Spitāma Zarathustra,  
when murmuring for me the piece of the *Abuna Vairya*,  
leaves out  
a half, or a third, or a quarter, or a fifth,  
I, Ahura Mazdā,  
shall keep his soul away from best life.  
I might keep it away as much in height and breadth as this earth here;  
and this earth here has so much height as it has breadth.

8. The utterance containing the words *abu* and *ratu*  
was uttered before the creation of the heavens,  
of the water, of the earth, of the plant, of the four-legged cow;  
before the creation of the two-legged, truthful man;  
before the sun was created in its visible form;  
but (it was proclaimed) after the creation of the Amesha Spentas.

9. Of the two spirits, the bounteous one called into existence  
the entire creation of the truthful one,  
the one which is, the one which is becoming, and the one which  
will be,  
with the *šyaodənanəm*-passage:  
*šyaodənanəm aḥbəuš mazdāi* 'of the actions of life for Mazdā'.

10. This is, among the sayings, the greatest saying  
that has ever been uttered, is spoken out and will be pronounced.  
For it has so much verbal power  
that when all corporeal life learns it by heart,  
by having learnt and remembered it, it will be preserved from dying.

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11. And this our utterance has been uttered  
in order to be learnt by heart and remembered  
by each one of those who exist  
according to best truth.”

The interpretation of the *Abuna Vairya* prayer, as well as that of the *Ašəm Vohū* in *Y* 20, is presented as spoken by Ahura Mazda in response to a question posed by Zarathustra, a literary device particularly characteristic of the *Vīdēvdād* (see below). The ensuing sections 12–14 of *Y* 19 explain the meanings of the individual words of the prayer, and sections 15–21 interpret its function and significance in a broader context. It emerges from this commentary that the pre-eminent role which the Pahlavi accounts of cosmology attribute to the *Abuna Vairya* prayer goes back at least to the period when texts in Young Avestan were composed.<sup>84</sup>

Another chapter of the *Staota Yesnya* of the *Yasna* borrowed from other Nasks is *Y* 57, the *Srōš Yašt* which belonged to the 21<sup>st</sup> or *Bayān Yašt Nask* of the Sasanian Avesta. The same applies to *Y* 9–11, the *Hōm Yašt*, which did not form part of the *Staota Yesnya*. Obviously the *Yasna* liturgy is a text assembled, for liturgical purposes, from the material of various Nasks. The compilers of the *Yasna* deliberately placed the second chapter of the *Yasna Haptaṅhāiti*, *Y* 36, in the centre of the composition, both of the extended 45 chapters of the *Staota Yesnya* and of the whole of the 72 chapters of the *Yasna*. In this way they underlined the ritual high point of the *Yasna* ceremony. The compositional structure of the *Yasna*, with the pivotal point occupied by *Y* 36, supports the hypothesis that the extant *Yasna* received its present form in Young Avestan times. It indicates both a deliberate arrangement and an understanding of the contents of the texts recited.

The Arab writer Mas‘ūdī, who died in 956 CE, provides historical evidence concerning the existence of the *Yasna* in the early Sasanian period when writing: “When Ardašir, son of Pābag, ascended the throne, there developed the custom of reading one of the chapters of the Avesta, which they call *isnād*. Still to this day the Zoroastrians recite this chapter.” It may be assumed that the scripture which

84 Cf. Skjærvø 1989, p. 401.

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Mas'ūdī calls *isnād* in Arabic is a corrupted rendering of *ysn* = *yasna*. Hence, he testifies to the existence of the liturgical *Yasna* both in his own day and at the beginning of the Sasanian period. There is no compelling objection to supposing that our extant *Yasna* is the same as the one of the days of Mas'ūdī and of Ardašir.<sup>85</sup>

### *Visperad*

The *Visperad* (from Av. *vīspe ratavo* 'all chiefs') is a collection of liturgical texts never recited on their own but only as additions to the *Yasna*. The *Yasna* ceremony enlarged by the *Visperad* portions is called the *Visperad* high ceremony. It is especially celebrated at the seasonal festivals, the Gāhānbārs. Whereas the *Yasna* is structured by 'chapters' (*hāiti*), the text of the *Visperad* is divided into 'sections' (*karde*). Their number, however, varies in different editions. K.F. Geldner, following the Bombay Gujarati edition, divides the text into 24 sections,<sup>86</sup> and this has become the standard number.

The major part of the *Visperad*, Karde 5–24, is inserted into the *Staota Yesnya* of the *Yasna* (Y 14–58), the last section, Vr 24, being recited after Y 54.<sup>87</sup> This arrangement may be as old as the Avesta itself, because it is referred to in the *Mibr Yašt*, Yt 10.122: 'Let no one drink from these libations, unless he is apt at (reciting) the *Vispe Ratavo* of the *Staota Yesnya*.'

The *Visperad* is similar to the liturgical invocations and praises that also characterize the first half of the Young Avestan *Yasna* (Y 1–8; 14–18; 22–27.12). Consequently, the sections of the *Visperad* prolong the portions of liturgical praises. In particular, the praises which they contribute refer to those stanzas of the *Yasna* after which they are recited. For example, Vr 13, which is placed after the first three hymns of the *Ahunaavaitī Gādhā*, i.e. Y 28–30, refers to them explicitly:

85 Maçoudi 1863, p. 125; Darmesteter 1892–93, I, p. lxxxviii. Cf. Kellens 1998, p. 479; Shboul 1979, p. 288.

86 Geldner 1896, p. 5.

87 See the synopsis by Geldner 1896, pp. 11–12, and Hintze 2004, p. 302.

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Of the three, we worship the first one, (recited) without interpolation, without transposition.  
Of the three, we worship the first two (recited) without interpolation, without transposition.  
We worship all of the first three ones, (recited) without interpolation, without transposition.  
Of all of the first three ones, (recited) without interpolation, without transposition,  
we worship the chapters, the verse lines, the words and stanzas, the loud recitation, the murmured recitation, the singing and the worshipping.

Likewise, *Vr* 14, which is recited after *Y* 34, the concluding hymn of the *Abunavaitī Gāḍā*, praises that particular Gatha. It is followed by *Vr* 15 praising the ensuing *Yasna Haptaṅhāiti* (*Y* 35–41). *Vr* 16 and 17 also praise it, but are recited after the *YH*. Section 18 of the *Visperad* follows the *Uštavaitī Gāḍā* (*Y* 43–46) and praises it. The same applies to *Vr* 19, recited after the *Spəntā.mainyu Gāḍā* (*Y* 47–50), to *Vr* 20, after the *Vohuxšaḍrā Gāḍā* (*Y* 51), to *Vr* 23, after the *Vahištōišti Gāḍā* (*Y* 53) and to *Vr* 24, after the *Aryaman Išya* prayer (*Y* 54).

*Vr* 20 actually quotes, in stanza 2, the first two words of the *Vohuxšaḍrā Gāḍā* and the *Vahištōišti Gāḍā*. This indicates that the *Vahištōišti Gāḍā* had already been arranged after the *Vohuxšaḍrā Gāḍā* by the time this passage of the *Visperad* was composed:

*Vr* 20.0 We worship the *Vohuxšaḍrā Gāḍā*, the truthful one, the Ratu of truth,  
together with the verse lines, with the stanzas, with the interpretation,  
with the questions, with the answers,  
with the two utterances and with the (verse-)feet,  
well recited when being recited,  
well worshipped by the worshippers.

*Vr* 20.1 We worship the good rule,  
we worship the desirable rule,  
we worship the molten metal,  
we worship the rightly spoken, victorious words  
which slay the demons,

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we worship that reward,  
we worship that health,  
we worship that medicine,  
we worship that prosperity,  
we worship that growth.

*Vr* 20.2 We worship that victory  
which (is gained) between the *Vohuxšaθrā* and the *Vahištōiši*  
by reciting good thoughts, good words, good deeds,  
in order to resist bad thoughts, bad words, bad deeds,  
in order to rectify my wrong thoughts, wrong words, wrong deeds.

*Vr* 20.3 We worship the parts of the *Vohuxšaθrā Gāθā*.  
Of the *Vohuxšaθrā Gāθā*,  
we worship the chapters, the verse lines,  
[= *Vr* 14.4 the words and stanzas, the loud recitation, the  
murmured recitation, the singing and the worshipping].

The *Visperad* is directly dependent on the *Yasna*, its sections praising the verses of the *Yasna* after which they are recited. In particular, the *Visperad* expands on the stanzas of the *Staota Yesnya*. This supports the assumption that the *Staota Yesnya* constitute the kernel of the entire *Yasna* liturgy.

### *Vīdēvdād*

The *Vīdēvdād*, also known as Vendidad due to a false reading, is the third great Avestan text recited during an “inner liturgical ceremony” celebrated only inside the fire-temple, the Dar-e Mehr. As a liturgical text, the *Vīdēvdād*, just like the *Visperad*, is recited not on its own, but in combination with the *Yasna* extended by the *Visperad*. The ceremony which includes the *Vīdēvdād* is called “Vendidad Sade”, ‘pure Vendidad’, because the text appears only in Avestan, without its Pahlavi translation. The Vendidad ceremony is the longest of all Zoroastrian liturgies and commences at midnight in the time division of the *Ušahin Gāb*. The way that the 22 sections (*fragard*) of the *Vīdēvdād* are interspersed with the ones of the *Yasna* and the *Visperad* follows a straightforward pattern: among the



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texts of the Older Avesta, i.e. between *Y* 27 and 55, the fragards of the *Vīdēvdād* are appended in pairs to the kardes of the *Visperad*.<sup>88</sup> The liturgical function was conducive to the *Vīdēvdād* being preserved in its entirety. In the Sasanian Avesta, it constituted the 19<sup>th</sup> Nask and belonged to the *dādīg* group which contained the Zoroastrian law books.<sup>89</sup> The only other Nask, or division of the Avesta, which may have come down complete to present is the first, or *Stōt Yašt Nask*, which contained the Old Avestan texts.

The *Vīdēvdād*, however, does not only have a liturgical function but it represents also the Zoroastrians' law code. It was studied extensively by Zoroastrian theologians who translated it into Pahlavi and wrote commentaries on its text. Its interest for the Zoroastrian community was due to its numerous practical regulations to be observed and applied in everyday life. Most of them are purity laws concerned with chasing away the demons from any of Ahura Mazda's creations, persons or objects which they have polluted. Hence the *Vīdēvdād* is the 'law of those who reject the *daevas*', the law of the enemies of the demons.

The *Vīdēvdād* belongs to a literary genre which may be described as "Frašna literature", characterized by a stylistic device involving the teaching being cast into a catechismal form of instruction given by Ahura Mazda to Zarathustra. Zarathustra asks questions (Av. *ābhūiriš frašnō* 'the Ahurian question'), and Ahura Mazda provides answers and teaching (*ābhūiriš tkaēšō* 'the Ahurian teaching', *Y* 71.12; 57.24). The full formula is: 'Zarathustra asked Ahura Mazda: "Ahura Mazda, most bounteous spirit,<sup>90</sup> creator of the material world, truthful One ..."', followed by the question. Its answer is introduced by: 'Thereupon spoke Ahura Mazda: "...". The full formula appears predominantly, though not exclusively, at the beginning of a fragard. It may be abbreviated to various degrees, leaving out either the first or both clauses introducing the question. The answer, however, is almost always explicitly indicated as being

88 Cf. the table by Geldner 1896, pp. 11–12; Hintze 2004, pp. 300–305.

89 Cf. the table by Kellens 1989a, p. 37.

90 Kellens 1995b argues that the older form of the formula included an instrumental 'creator by means of the most bounteous spirit'.

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spoken by Ahura Mazdā, the only exception being the last two books 21 and 22. In fragard 21, no components of the formula are found at all. Here, the situation underlying all the other fragards may be alluded to, but only by Zarathustra being addressed in the vocative (21.2). In book 22, the Bounteous Formula, Maθra Spənta, speaks (22.6), but 22.19 evokes the image of the two interlocutors, Zarathustra and Ahura Mazdā, conversing with each other sitting under a tree on the top of a mountain. No variation of this pattern of questioning is found in the *Vīdēvdād*. In *Y* 71.1, however, it is Frašaoštra who asks Zarathustra for instruction, and in *Yt* 5.90–95 Zarathustra asks Arədvī Sūrā Anāhitā.<sup>91</sup>

The prototype for the stylistic device of presenting the message in the literary form of a dialogue is actually attested in the Gathas. There are several instances of questions posed to Ahura Mazdā. The most striking one is *Yasna* 44 which is structured throughout by the question ‘I ask you this, tell me truly, O Lord’, recurring as the first line in all but the last stanza.<sup>92</sup> The difference, however, is that only questions are put, without Ahura Mazdā giving an answer, although the latter might occasionally be implied, especially when the question is rhetorical (e.g. in the cosmogonical part *Y* 44.3–5).

This sort of didactic literature contrasts in both form and content with the liturgical genre of praise preserved, for instance, in the *Yasna* and *Visperad*. The literary character of the *Vīdēvdād*, too, is entirely different from that of the Gathas. Whereas the latter abound in variety of expression, the *Vīdēvdād* is characterized by repetition. The stylistic device of the “Ahurian question” and “Ahurian teaching” is exploited in such a way that a given situation can generate a range of possible questions and answers depending on the circumstances.<sup>93</sup> The sometimes rather poor literary merit, however, is frequently counterbalanced by a wide range of insights the *Vīdēvdād* allows into the practical life of Zoroastrians. There

91 On *Yt* 5.90–93, see Oettinger 1985.

92 See Humbach 1991, II, p. 146 with more examples from the Gathas and Vedic parallels.

93 Cf. Geldner 1896, p. 22.

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are interesting examples not only of purity laws, but also of Zoroastrian legislation. For example, *Vd* 15.1–16:

1. “How many are the perpetrated actions  
which the corporeal life perpetrates,  
(actions which have been) perpetrated, (but) not compensated, not  
made good again?

As a result, the perpetrators  
thus become those whose bodies are forfeited.”

2. Then spoke Ahura Mazdā:

“Five, O truthful Zarathustra.

The first of these actions

which the mortals perpetrate (is)

if someone defames

a truthful man

towards one of a different faith, a different doctrine,<sup>94</sup>

he does it knowingly, with deliberation,

As a result, the perpetrators

thus become those whose bodies are forfeited.

3. The second of these actions

which the mortals perpetrate (is)

if someone gives

unchopped bones or hot food

to a dog

guarding the sheep or guarding the house.

4. And if these bones

stick in the teeth,

remain in the throat,

or if this hot food

burns its mouth or tongue,

it could be injured by that.

If it is injured in this way,

as a result, the perpetrators

thus become those whose bodies are forfeited.

94 Panaino 1993 proposes interpreting the two adjectives as indicative of contacts by the Mazdayasnians with religions other than the one of the daeva-worshippers.

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5. The third of these actions  
which the mortals perpetrate (is)  
if someone beats or persecutes  
or shouts at or startles  
a dog with puppies.

6. And if this (dog) with puppies  
falls into a pit or a well,  
or a fissure or down the barrier<sup>95</sup>  
of navigable water,  
it could be injured by that.  
If it is injured in this way,  
as a result, the perpetrators  
thus become those whose bodies are forfeited.

7. The fourth of these actions  
which the mortals perpetrate (is)  
if one discharges semen  
into a woman  
having a period, menstruating, bleeding.  
As a result, the perpetrators  
thus become those whose bodies are forfeited.

8. The fifth of these actions  
which the mortals perpetrate (is)  
if one discharges semen  
into a woman who has just given birth  
—be she breast-feeding or not breast-feeding—  
before her time has come:  
she could be harmed by that.  
If she is harmed in this way,  
as a result, the perpetrators  
thus become those whose bodies are forfeited.

9. The one who goes to a girl,  
may she have a Ratu or may she not have a Ratu,  
may she be engaged or may she not be engaged,  
and makes her with child,  
she, the girl, may not,

95 Kellens 1974, p. 83.

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because of shame before people,  
secretly make the period come,  
secretly (provide herself with) water and plants.

10. And if she, the girl,  
because of shame before people,  
secretly makes the period come,  
secretly (provides herself with) water and plants,  
she is liable for these perpetrated actions.

11. The one who goes to a girl,  
may she have a Ratu or may she not have a Ratu,  
may she be engaged or may she not be engaged,  
and makes her with child,  
she, the girl, may not,  
because of shame before people,  
injure her womb by herself.

12. And if she, the girl,  
because of shame before people,  
is injured by herself in her womb,  
her guilt falls on the family members,  
her injury falls on the family members,  
they shall punish the family members for the injuries of the  
injured one  
with the punishment of deliberate (injury).

13. The one who goes to a girl,  
may she have a Ratu or may she not have a Ratu,  
may she be engaged or may she not be engaged,  
and makes her with child,  
and if she, the girl, says:  
“This man has made (me) the child”,  
and if this man says:  
“Find yourself one of these old women and ask her!”,

14. thereupon she, the girl,  
finds one of these old women (and) asks (her);  
the old one brings  
*Baṇha* or *Šaēta*,  
*Gnāna* or *Fraspāt*,  
or any other of the plants causing abortion:

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“With this seek to kill your baby!”;  
thereupon she, the girl,  
seeks to kill her baby with this:  
Alike are they involved in such action,  
the man, the girl, and the old one.

15. The one who goes to a girl,  
may she have a Ratu or may she not have a Ratu,  
may she be engaged or may she not be engaged,  
and makes her with child,  
so long shall he provide care  
until this child has grown up.

16. If he does not take care,  
whereupon this child  
is injured because of care not provided,  
he shall be punished for the injury of the injured one  
with the punishment of deliberate (injury).

The major part of the *Vīdēvdād*, fragard 3–17, is almost entirely concerned with purity laws, with the protection and purification of Ahura Mazdā’s good creation and the fight against the contamination brought by Aṅra Mainyu’s evil creatures in general and by any kind of dead matter in particular. Evil creatures include not only demons but also a range of animals, called *xrafstra* in Avestan, considered to be obnoxious, such as serpents, scorpions, tortoises, frogs, ants, flies, larvae. The Zoroastrians are encouraged to kill them in thousands (*Vd.*14.5–6).

The first two and last five books of the *Vīdēvdād* include some mythological passages, such as the story of Yima (2), the dialogue between Sraoša and Deceit (Druj, 18), the temptation of Zarathustra and the fate of the soul after death (19), the origins of medicine (20), the healing, purifying and fertilizing actions of the waters circulating between earth and sky and the light issuing from the sun, moon and stars (21), and the healing power of the bounteous formula (Manthra Spenta, 22). Of particular interest for Avestan geography is the first chapter which lists the 16 lands created by Ahura Mazdā and the 16 plagues inflicted on them by Aṅra Mainyu as evil counter-creations intended to mar the initial

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perfection with which the lands were formed.<sup>96</sup> The plagues also give some information about the climactic and geographical conditions of several of these provinces.

There is, yet again, no absolute date available for the time when the *Vīdēvdād* was composed. An indirect clue to its composition in the later Younger Avestan period comes from the sometimes ungrammatical use of language, especially of case forms. This indicates that the development towards Middle Iranian had already started. Since a similar process can be observed in the later Achaemenid inscriptions, the *Vīdēvdād* may be contemporaneous with them. It is, however, likely that it contains an amalgamation of earlier and later textual materials.

Some of the contents of the *Vīdēvdād* are confirmed by the description of the Greek historian Herodotus, who lived in the fifth century BCE. At the end of an excursus on the customs of the Persians (I 140), he relates that the magi would wage a continual war against ants, snakes and all other serpents by killing as many of them as possible. Apart from this, he also mentions that they would expose their dead to the birds and dogs. On the basis of these agreements between the *Vīdēvdād* and the practices of the magi as described by Herodotus, it has been suggested that the *Vīdēvdād* could, at least partly, be the work of western Iranian magi<sup>97</sup> and could, again at least in part, have been compiled in Western Iran.<sup>98</sup> However, magi are not mentioned in this text. It is also difficult to explain how this alleged influence of magi on the composition of Avestan texts could have come about, when the geographical horizon of the Avesta is East-Iranian. In order to reconcile such divergent data, it has been proposed that a group of Magi fled to Eastern Iran after the collapse of the Achaemenian Empire. There, in the east, they would have introduced their own meticulous and rather pedantic purity laws which were eventually adopted by the East Iranian Zoroastrian priests and thus entered the Avesta.<sup>99</sup>

96 Christensen 1943.

97 Christensen 1943.

98 Panaino in Cannizzaro 1990, pp. 280–82.

99 Gershevitch 1968, p. 27.

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However, the agreement between Herodotus and the *Vīdēvdād* is not necessarily secondary. The resistance to and fight against life-damaging creatures, also pervading other texts of the Avesta, is deeply rooted in Zoroastrian doctrine itself and does not require the assumption of a western Iranian import. The law code could well be the product of East-Iranian Zoroastrian theologians and, having grown over many centuries, is probably much older than the text of our extant *Vīdēvdād*. Indeed, the *Vīdēvdād* must have built on established tradition and practice and is likely to be just its final codification.

### Devotional Texts

#### *Yašts*

An important part of the Avesta consists of a collection of 21 hymns, the *Yašts*.<sup>100</sup> These are devoted to a wide though quite heterogeneous range of divinities or divinely revered entities. Some of the latter, such as Haoma (= Vedic Soma; *Y* 9–11,<sup>101</sup> *Yt* 20), Mithra (= Vedic Mitra; *Yt* 10), and Vereθragna (*Yt* 14; cf. Vedic *vṛtrahán-* ‘breaking resistance’) are of pre-Zoroastrian origin. Most of the deities are specifically Iranian, namely Arədvī Sūrā Anāhitā (*Yt* 5),<sup>102</sup> Druvāspā (*Yt* 9) and the concept of the ‘glory’ (*xwarənah*; *Yt* 18 and 19<sup>103</sup>). Several hymns are devoted to natural phenomena, such as the sun (*Xwaršēd*, *Yt* 6), the moon (*Māh*, *Yt* 7), the wind (*Vāyu*, *Yt* 15 = *Rām Yašt*) and the stars *Tīštrya* (*Yt* 8) and *Vanant* (*Yt* 21). Some praise the Zoroastrian concepts of the *Fravašis* (‘choice, guardian angel’, *Yt* 13), *Aši Vañuhi* (‘good reward’,

100 Panaino 1992 provides an excellent survey of the *Yašts* with extensive bibliographical references; only additional references are given below. The composition of all the *Yašts* has been analyzed by Skjærø 1994b, pp. 210–30.

101 Josephson 1997.

102 On this deity and her name, see Kellens 2002–3a.

103 Pirart 1992a; Hintze 1994; Humbach/Ichaporria 1998; Kellens 1997–98.



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*Yt* 17),<sup>104</sup> Sraoša ('attentiveness, obedience', *Yt* 11, *Y* 56–57), Cistā ('insight', *Yt* 16 = *Dēn Yašt*) and Rašnu ('judgment', *Yt* 12). The first four *Yašts* are devoted to Ahura Mazdā (*Yt* 1) and the Amēsha Spentas (*Yt* 2), with special hymns dedicated to Aša (*Yt* 3) and Haurvatat (*Yt* 4). Apart from Druvāspā, whose name occurs elsewhere only once in the *Sīrōze*,<sup>105</sup> all the divine beings praised in the *Yašts* are also found in other texts of the Avesta.

With the exception of *Yašts* 2 and 13, which praise the Amēsha Spentas viz. the 'guardian angels', or Fravašis, as a group, each of the *Yašts* is dedicated to one particular divinity and thus differs from the *Yasna* which is recited to worship the entire Zoroastrian pantheon.<sup>106</sup> Although the *Yasna*, too, stresses the importance of calling upon the divine beings by their own names, each *Yašt* is entirely devoted to the praise of one particular deity who is personally invoked by the explicit and repeated declaration of his or her own name. In particular, Mithra is the 'venerable one (*yazata*) whose name is pronounced', and he asks to be worshipped with "a *yasna* in which his name is pronounced", as does Tištrya.<sup>107</sup> In *Yt* 10.53ff. Mithra complains<sup>108</sup>:

53. We worship Mithra of wide pasture grounds,  
[= stanza 7<sup>109</sup>: Whose words are correct, who is challenging,  
Has a thousand ears, is well-built,  
Has ten thousand eyes, the lofty one,  
Has a broad outlook, is strong,  
Sleepless, (ever-)waking;]  
Who at times complains to Ahura Mazdā  
With hands stretched up,  
Speaking as follows:

104 Skjærvø 1987.

105 Skjærvø 1994b, p. 209, n. 22 on a possible Bactrian connection.

106 Geldner 1904a, p. 10; cf. Panaino 1993–94, p. 108, n. 1.

107 Kellens 1976b, pp. 128–31; Panaino 1994a, p. 172.

108 Translation, with some modifications, after Gershevitch 1959, pp. 100–101 and 88–91.

109 The brackets indicate that these verses lines are repetitions from preceding stanzas.

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54. "I am the beneficent protector  
Of all creatures.  
I am the beneficent guardian  
Of all creatures.  
Yet the mortals do not worship me  
With worship in which my name is pronounced,  
As they worship other venerable ones  
With worship in which their names are pronounced.

55. If indeed the mortals were to worship me  
With worship in which my name is pronounced,  
As they worship other venerable ones  
With worship in which their names are pronounced,  
I would have gone forth to truthful men  
For the duration of a limited time;  
I would have come close (for the duration) of a limited (time)<sup>110</sup>  
Of my own radiant, immortal life."

56. With worship in which your name is pronounced,  
With timely word,  
The truthful one worships you offering libations;  
With worship in which your name is pronounced,  
With timely word,  
O strong Mithra, I want to worship you with libations.  
[= 31 With worship in which your name is pronounced,  
With timely word,  
O strongest Mithra, I want to worship you with libations.  
With worship in which your name is pronounced,  
With timely word,  
O undeceivable Mithra, I want to worship you with libations.]

57 [= 32 Listen, O Mithra, to our worship,  
Gratify, O Mithra, our worship,  
Condescend to our worship!  
Approach our libations,  
Approach them as they are sacrificed,  
Collect them for consumption,  
Deposit them in the House of Welcome!]

110 A different translation of this passage was suggested by Kellens 2000, pp. 128–31.

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58 [= 33 Give us this attainment,  
For which we ask you, O strong one,  
By virtue of the stipulation of the given promises:  
Riches, strength and victory,  
Comfortable existence and truthfulness,  
Good reputation and peace of soul,  
Learning and knowledge of bounty,  
Ahura-created victory,  
The conquering superiority  
Of best truth,  
And the interpretation of the bounteous formula.]

59 [= 34 So that we, being of good mind,  
Cheerful, joyful, and optimistic,  
May overcome all opponents,  
So that we, being of good mind,  
Cheerful, joyful, and optimistic,  
May overcome all enemies,  
So that we, being of good mind,  
Cheerful, joyful, and optimistic,  
May overcome all hostilities  
Of demons and mortals,  
Of wizards and witches,  
Of commanders, seers, and ritualists.]

### Structure of the *Yašts*

All the *Yašts* begin and end with the same invocation formula in which only the name of the divinity being praised is substituted. Internally, most, though not all, *Yašts* are structured by division into “sections”, called *Karde*. The opening formula of each *Karde*, while being the same throughout a given *Yašt*, varies from hymn to hymn. It consists of verses of praise, and includes the name of the divine being to whom the hymn is devoted and a formula of worship. For instance, in *Yt* 5 every *Karde* is introduced by the verse ‘May you, O Spitāma Zarathustra, worship her, Arədvī Sūrā Anāhitā’ (*Yt* 5.1, 10, etc.). Similarly, the final stanza of a *Karde* usually begins with the formula ‘because of his wealth and glory ...’

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(e.g. in *Yt* 5.9, 15, etc.). Whenever these words occur, the listener knows that the Karde is coming to a close. Moreover, it always includes a section from *Niyayišn* 1.16 and ends with the *Yenḥē Hātqm* prayer. Let us take, for example, one of the shorter hymns, *Yašt* 16, called *Dēn Yašt*, which praises Cistā ‘Insight’ and consists of 19 stanzas divided into 7 Kardes<sup>111</sup>:

Karde I 1. We worship the most direct Insight, created by Mazdā,  
the truthful One,  
Provided with good paths, with a good approach,  
Flexible (?),  
Which brings libations, the truthful One,  
Sophisticated, renowned One,  
Efficient, promptly acting,  
Which, standing in a good place, leads a good fight,  
The good Mazdayasnian religion;

2. Whom Zarathustra worshipped:  
“Rise up<sup>112</sup> from your throne,  
Come forth from your house,  
O most direct Insight, created by Mazdā, truthful One,  
If you are ahead,  
Then wait for me,  
If you are behind,  
Then catch up with me!”

3. Thus may there be peace,  
So that the paths may be easy for us to travel,  
The mountains easily passable,  
The forests easy to pass  
The navigable water easy to cross,  
For this splendour, praise,  
Glory and eminence.

4. Because of his wealth and glory  
I want to worship her with audible worship,  
I want to worship her with well-worshipped worship,

111 On this *Yašt* cf. Kellens 1996b, p. 281f. with references; 1992, pp. 601–2.

112 Benveniste/Renou 1934, p. 59 with n. 2; cf. Schindler 1982, p. 202.

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(Her,) the most direct Insight created by Mazdā, the truthful One,  
with libations.  
We worship the most direct Insight, created by Mazdā, the truthful  
One  
With Haoma (mixed) with milk  
[= *Ny* 1.16 With sacrificial grass,  
With skill of tongue and formulation,  
With word and deed, and with libations  
And with correctly uttered words.  
In the worship of which (male) beings  
And (in the worship) of which (female) beings  
The Wise Lord knows what is very good according to truth,  
We worship these male] and female beings.

Karde II 5. We worship the most direct Insight, created by Mazdā,  
the truthful One,  
Provided with good paths, [= stanza 1 ...]  
The good Mazdayasnian religion.

6. Whom Zarathustra worshipped  
With well-thought thinking,  
With well-spoken word,  
With well-acted action,  
And for the sake of that boon

7. That the most direct Insight, created by Mazdā, the truthful One,  
may give him  
Swiftness<sup>113</sup> to his feet,  
Hearing to his ears,  
Strength to his arms,  
Health to his whole body,  
Perseverance<sup>114</sup> to his whole body,  
And that eye-sight<sup>115</sup>  
Of the fish Kara, living beneath the waters,  
Which notices a hair-thin ripple of the water

113 Hoffmann 1969, p. 17, n. 1 [= 1975, p. 258, n. 1].

114 Literally perhaps “fattiness”, Skjærvø 1994b, p. 238; Mayrhofer 1986–2002, II, p. 582 with references.

115 The passages on the faculty to see of *Yt* 16.7, 10, 13 are also found in *Yt* 14.29, 31, and 33.

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Of the Raḡhā whose shores are far,  
The deep one, of a thousand men.  
Because of his wealth and glory  
I want to worship her with audible worship, [= stanza 4 ...]  
We worship these male and female beings.

Karde III 8. We worship the most direct Insight, created by Mazdā,  
the truthful One,  
Provided with good paths, [= stanza 1 ...]  
The good Mazdayasnian religion.

9. Whom Zarathustra worshipped [= stanza 6 ...]  
And for the sake of that boon

10. That the most direct Insight, created by Mazdā, the truthful  
One,  
May give him [= stanza 7 ...] and the eye-sight  
Of the male horse  
Which in a dark night,  
When it rains, snows,  
Sleets and hails,  
Can see from a distance of nine kingdoms  
Whether a horse's hair  
Sticking to the ground  
Is from the back or from the belly.  
Because of his wealth and glory  
I want to worship her with audible worship, [= stanza 4 ...]  
We worship these male and female beings.

Karde IV 11. We worship the most direct Insight, created by Mazdā,  
the truthful One,  
Provided with good paths, [= stanza 1 ...]  
The good Mazdayasnian religion.

12. Whom Zarathustra worshipped [= stanza 6 ...]  
And for the sake of that boon

13. That the most direct Insight, created by Mazdā, the truthful  
One,  
May give him [= stanza 7 ...] and the eye-sight  
Of the vulture with a golden collar,  
Who, from the distance of nine lands,  
Can see (a piece of) flesh of the size of a fist,

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Shining as much as a shiny needle,  
As much as the point of a needle.  
Because of his wealth and glory  
I want to worship her with audible worship, [= stanza 4 ...]  
We worship these male and female beings.

Karde V 14. We worship the most direct Insight, created by Mazdā,  
the truthful One,  
Provided with good paths, [= stanza 1 ...]  
The good Mazdayasnian religion.

15. Whom Hvovi worshipped, the truthful one, knowing,  
Desiring truthful Zarathustra as her good part,  
To think according to the religion,  
To speak according to the religion,  
To act according to the religion.  
Because of his wealth and glory  
I want to worship her with audible worship, [= stanza 4 ...]  
We worship these male and female beings.

Karde VI. 16. We worship the most direct Insight, created by  
Mazdā, the truthful One,  
Provided with good paths, [= stanza 1 ...]  
The good Mazdayasnian religion.

17. Whom the priest who is appreciated abroad worshipped,  
Desiring the memorising for the religion,  
Desiring strength for himself.  
Because of his wealth and glory  
I want to worship her with audible worship, [= stanza 4 ...]  
We worship these male and female beings.

Karde VII 18. We worship the most direct Insight, created by  
Mazdā, the truthful One,  
Provided with good paths, [= stanza 1 ...]  
The good Mazdayasnian religion.

19. Whom the ruler of the land, the lord of the land worshipped,  
Desiring peace for the land,  
Desiring strength for himself.  
Because of his wealth and glory  
I want to worship her with audible worship, [= stanza 4 ...]  
We worship these male and female beings.

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The function of the introductory and final recurrent stanzas, demarcating the beginning and end of a Karde, is to structure the hymn. Moreover, by regularly repeating the name of the particular deity worshipped, the hymn's major theme is constantly recalled. In the oral culture from which the Avesta originates, the recurrent pattern had a mnemonic and structuring function which enabled both singer and listener to remember and recognize demarcation lines.<sup>116</sup> In addition, it provided "a welcome break" during which the performer could think ahead and prepare in his mind the compositional move to be improvised next.<sup>117</sup> The basic units of Kardes could be added to one another as often as required and according to the demands of the occasion. This resulted in the great variation in the length of the *Yašts*: the shortest *Yašt*, the hymn to the star Vanant (*Yt* 21) is made up of only one stanza, surrounded by the introductory and concluding formulae that characterize every *Yašt*. In contrast, the longest one, the hymn praising the Fravašis (*Yt* 13), consists of 157 stanzas divided into 31 Kardes.

As long as the text did not petrify, the recurrent pattern provided the framework within which the priest-poet could improvise his composition. For within the rather rigid structure of the Karde, there is poetic freedom to refer and allude to other subjects as long as they have some relation, however tenuous, to the divinity in whose praise the hymn is recited. Nearly every *Yašt* contains either a story or a reference to a person not found elsewhere. For example, only the *Dēn Yašt*, quoted above, refers to the relationship of Hvōvī to Zarathustra, and thus provides an Avestan antecedent for the Pahlavi tradition according to which she was the prophet's third wife.<sup>118</sup> The seemingly rather repetitive hymn to Rašnu, *Yašt* 12, which is not divided into Kardes, has been recognized as containing materials of interest for Avestan cosmology and astronomy.<sup>119</sup> Even the single stanza constituting the main body of *Yašt* 21 and in particular the way the entire hymn is recited casts light on the role

116 Hintze 1995a.

117 Skjærvø 1994b, p. 207.

118 Boyce 1989a, pp. 188, 285; Skjærvø 1994b, p. 233f.

119 Panaino 1993–94, p. 119; Skjærvø 1994b, p. 224.



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played by an Avestan *Yašt* in devotional life.<sup>120</sup> Pearls of ancient Iranian poetry include, for example, the story of Pāurva floating in the air and unable to land until the invoked Arədvī Sūrā Anāhitā provides him with succour (*Yt* 5.60–66), the description of Arədvī Sūrā Anāhitā (*Yt* 5.126–29), the fight between Tištrya and Apaoša, the demon of draught (*Yt* 8.20–34) and the ten transformations of Vereθragna (*Yt* 14.2–27). There is also the story of Yima and the loss of his “glory” (*Yt* 19.31–38) and the heroic feats of Kərəsāspa (*Yt* 19.38–44 and *Y* 9.11). A sense of humour can be felt in the description of the race between the fire of Ahura Mazdā and the dragon Dahāka (*Yt* 19.45–54) and the three unsuccessful attempts of Fraŋrasyan to grasp the ‘unseizable<sup>121</sup> glory’ (*Yt* 19.55–64). The various allusions to cosmogony in *Yt* 13.1–84,<sup>122</sup> and to the resurrection of the dead and the final defeat of evil in *Yt* 19.88–96 are of interest for Younger Avestan cosmology and eschatology. The hymn to Aši, too, contains several beautiful passages, such as the description of the homes, wives and daughters of those who are accompanied by Aši (*Yt* 17.6–14), Aši hiding under a bull and a ram, her three complaints and Ahura Mazdā’s response (*Yt* 17.54–60), and, among many others, the encounter between Aši and Zarathustra at the end of *Karde* II in *Yt* 17.15–22:

15. “Look at me!  
Turn your mercy  
Towards me, O lofty Aši!  
You are well-made, of good origin,  
You are capable  
Of giving glory to the body at will.<sup>123</sup>

16. Your father is Ahura Mazdā,  
The greatest One among the venerable Ones,

120 Panaino 1989; 1993–94, p. 120; Boyce 1989a, p. 78.

121 Sims-Williams 1997, p. 24.

122 This section provides, according to Kellens 1989a, p. 39, “the only known elements of ancient Mazdean cosmogony”.

123 The translation of this verse is tentative, cf. stanza 22 and the discussion by Benveniste 1935, p. 25f.

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The best One among the venerable Ones;  
Your mother is bounteous Ārmaiti,  
Your brother good Sraoša, provided with reward,  
And lofty (and) strong Rašnu,  
And Mithra of wide pasture grounds,  
Who has ten thousand spies, a thousand ears;  
Your sister (is) the Mazdayasnian religion.”

17. Good Aši, the lofty One,  
Praised among the venerable ones,  
Undejectable from the straightest (paths),  
Halted, (being) on her chariot,  
(And) spoke the following words:  
“Who are you, you, who are calling me,  
Whose voice I have heard as by far the most beautiful one  
Among those who invoke?”

18. Thereupon he said the following:  
“(I am) Spitāma Zarathustra,  
The first mortal  
To praise Best Truth,  
To worship Ahura Mazdā,  
To worship the Amesha Spentas,  
At whose birth and growth  
Water and plants recovered,  
At whose birth and growth  
Water and plants grew,

19. At whose birth and growth  
Aṅra Mainyu ran away  
From the broad round earth whose limits are far.  
Thus spoke he, the evil-creating  
Aṅra Mainyu, full of death:  
“All the venerable Ones could not  
Drive me out against my will.  
But this Zarathustra alone  
Causes me to go away against my will.

20. He slays me with the *Ahuna Vairya*,  
With a weapon as big  
As a stone the size of a cellar.  
He heats me up with the Aša Vahišta

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Like<sup>124</sup> molten metal.  
He makes my retreat from this earth (to be) preferable to me,  
He, who alone makes me go,  
(He,) Spitāma Zarathustra.”

21. Thereupon good Aši, the lofty One,  
Spoke in the following way:  
“Draw nearer to me,  
O upright, truthful Spitāma,  
Lean against my chariot!”  
Spitāma Zarathustra drew  
Nearer to her,  
He leaned against her chariot.

22. She stroked him from above  
With the left hand and the right one,  
With the right hand and the left one,  
Speaking the following words:  
“You are handsome, Zarathustra,  
You are well-built, Spitāma,  
With good calves, long arms.  
Glory has been given to your body,  
And long-lasting welfare to your soul  
As truly as I say this to you.”  
Because of his wealth [= *Yt* 17.3 and glory  
I want to worship her with audible worship  
I want to worship her with well-worshipped worship,  
(Her,) good Aši, with libations.  
We worship good Aši with Haoma (mixed) with milk  
... = *Ny* 1.16 ...] We worship these male and female beings.

Although all the *Yašts* which are structured by Kardes share the same compositional framework, there are, it has been suggested, two basic patterns according to which the main body of the individual Kardes may be arranged: either the pattern consists predominantly of an account of those who worshipped the particular divinity in the past and therefore tells, or rather alludes to, their stories in the third person (‘he worshipped’, *yazata*), or it mainly comprises praises for the qualities of the deity and hence addresses

124 On Av. *mānayan abe yaša* cf. Panaino 1990a, p. 142 with references.

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the deity directly in the first person ('we worship', *yazamaide*, and 'I worship', *yazāi*).<sup>125</sup> The first group, represented by *Yašt* 5, is predominantly "legendary", the second, represented by *Yašt* 10, predominantly "hymnic". The two types may arise from two different modes of hymnic composition.<sup>126</sup>

The *Yašts* of the first group, which, in addition to *Yašt* 5, also include *Yt* 9, 15, 16, 17, 19 and parts of the *Hōm Yašt* in *Y* 9–11, largely consist of narratives taken from the legendary history of Iran, and culminate in Zarathustra, followed by Kavi Vištāspa, worshipping the deity concerned. The individual worshippers are arranged in a fixed sequence although not all of them are always mentioned.<sup>127</sup> What is most remarkable, however, is the fact that the order in which they occur largely coincides with that in the later epic tradition as found in Firdausi's *Šāhnāme*. This indicates that the chronology of Iran's mythical history was fixed at least by the time the *Yašts* were composed. The narrative account in the "legendary" *Yašts* eventually culminates in the point when the actual worshippers themselves request the deity to reward their present worship as generously as that of the past righteous worshippers.<sup>128</sup> At the end of *Yašt* 5, for example, the worshipper prays that Arədvī Sūrā Anāhitā may grant the wishes of the current priest (*zaotar*-, *Yt* 5.130–32). In *Yašt* 17.15, the direct address to deity precedes the list of devotees. After a description of the splendid houses, wives, daughters, horses, camels, silver and gold of those blessed by Aši, Zarathustra, the prototypical worshipper, says: 'look here at me, turn your mercy towards me, O lofty Aši!' Subsequently Aši turns her attention to him, and the situation described in the passage quoted above follows.

The second group of "hymnic" *Yašts* includes, apart from *Yt* 10, also *Yt* 2, 6, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 20, 21, and the "small" and "great" *Srōš Yašt* in *Y* 56 and 57. These *Yašts* predominantly praise the divinity by describing his or her attributes and actions.

125 Kellens 1978; modified 1996, p. 101, n. 46, cf. 1998, p. 498f., n. 73.

126 Skjærvø 1994b, 212ff., p. 233.

127 Cf. the table of Skjærvø 1994b, p. 214; Kellens 1976a, p. 48; Tichy 1994 calls this a catalogue of worshippers ("Adorantenkatalog").

128 On the highpoints of the *Yašts* see Skjærvø 1994b, p. 212.

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It should be noted, however, that the boundary between the two types of hymnic composition appears to be fluid. The *Hōm Yašt* of *Y* 9–11, for instance, is only partly legendary and also contains hymnic portions, some of which constitute the “hymnic” *Hōm Yašt* of *Yt* 20. Another example is the hymn to Aši, *Yt* 17, which is “hymnic” at both the beginning (Karde I–II, 1–22) and the end (Karde X, 53–62), but has a “legendary” section in the middle (Karde III–IX, 23–52). More complex is the structure of *Yašt* 5 where “hymnic” and “legendary” sections alternate. The first four Kardes (*Yt* 5.1–15), Karde 23 (*Yt* 5.101–2) and the last three Kardes 28–30 (*Yt* 5.119–29), which praise the divinity, are of “hymnic” character and alternate with legendary sections in *Yt* 5.16–83, 97–99, and 103–18. The hymn culminates in the encounter and dialogue between Arədvī Sūrā Anāhitā and Zarathustra (*Yt* 5.88–96).

A stylistic feature which cuts across the division of the *Yašts* into “legendary” and “hymnic” poetry is the observation that most of them are cast as spoken by Ahura Mazdā to Zarathustra and thus share the characteristic of the “Frašna” literature represented best by the *Vīdēvdād*.<sup>129</sup> Indeed, the complete formula current in the *Vīdēvdād* occurs both in *Yt* 1.1–3 and in *Yt* 14 at the beginning of nearly every Karde: ‘Zarathustra asked Ahura Mazdā: “Ahura Mazdā, most bounteous spirit, creator of the material world, truthful One, ...”. Thereupon spoke Ahura Mazdā: “ ...”. Moreover, the formula ‘Ahura Mazdā said to Zarathustra’, or variants thereof, and the vocative ‘O Zarathustra’, which only indirectly alludes to the underlying situation, are found occasionally in “legendary” (e.g. *Yt* 5.1, 7, 88, 120; 19.1, 7, 53, 57, 60, 63) and more frequently in “hymnic” *Yašts* (e.g. *Yt* 8.1; 10.1, 121–22, 137–38; 11.1, 4, 6; 12.1–4; 13.1; 18.1).

*Yašts* which cannot be categorized as either “legendary” or “hymnic”, namely *Yt* 1, 3, and 4, exhibit the “Frašna”-formula as well. In addition, from the point of view of content, they are related to the *Vīdēvdād* in so far as they are largely concerned with warding off demons. For example, stanzas 7–13 and 17–18 of *Yašt* 3, which praises the powers of the holy prayers against evil:

129 Cf. also Kellens 1998, p. 509f.

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7. Sicknesses, go away! Death, go away! Demons, go away!  
Adversities, go away! Heretics, opposed to truth, go away!  
Human tyrant, go away!

8. Brood of serpents, go away! Brood of wolves, go away!  
Brood of bipeds, go away!  
Adverse mind, go away!  
Negligence, go away!  
Fever, go away!  
Slanderer, go away!  
Hostile ones, go away!  
You whose glance is malicious, go away!

9. Deceitful word, most deceitful one, go away!  
Prostitute, full of witchcraft, go away!  
Prostitute, abominable one, go away!  
Northern winds, go away!  
Northern winds, disappear,  
And also whoever belongs to that brood of serpents!

10. The one who slays these demons  
By thousands of thousands, by ten thousands of ten thousands,  
He slays illnesses, slays death, slays demons,  
Slays adversities, slays heretics opposed to truth,  
Slays human tyrants.

11. He slays the brood of serpents, slays the brood of wolves,  
He slays the brood of bipeds,  
Slays the adverse mind, slays negligence,  
Slays fever, slays the slanderer,  
Slays the hostile ones, slays those whose glance is malicious;

12. He slays the deceitful word, the most deceitful one,  
Slays the prostitute full of witchcraft,  
Slays the abominable prostitute,  
Slays the northern winds,  
—Northern winds, disappear  
And also whoever belongs to that brood of serpents!—,

13. The one who slays these demons  
By thousands of thousands, by ten thousands of ten thousands.  
The most deceitful one of the demons, Anra Mainyu, full of death,  
Falls prostrate in front of the sky.<sup>130</sup>

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17. Deceit shall completely disappear, deceit shall disappear,  
Deceit shall run away, it shall perish!  
You shall perish in the north!  
You shall not ruin the corporeal world of Truth!

18. Because of his wealth and glory  
I shall worship, with audible worship,  
Best truth, the most beautiful one, the Amesha Spenta, with libations.  
We worship best truth, the most beautiful one, the Amesha Spenta,  
With Haoma mixed with milk  
[ ... cf. *Ny* 1.16 ...] We worship these male and female beings.

### Metre

Passages such as the one from *Yašt* 3 just quoted cannot be regarded as metrical. These are prose with occasional rhythmic spells, akin to the *Vīdēvdād*. Those few verse lines which are made up of eight syllables, such as, for example, the refrain ‘because of his wealth and glory / I shall worship with audible worship ...’ (*Yt* 3.18), are so either by chance or because they belong to the old formulaic stock.

However, *Yašt* 3 can certainly not be considered as one of the most typical representatives of the *Yašts*. Other hymns, in contrast, exhibit a noticeable preference for the eight-syllable verse line, although entire stanzas composed in this metre are not very common. Since this is the only metrical pattern which can be detected—the assumption of a metre based on an accentual pattern is even more hypothetical—it has been suggested that the *Yašts* perpetuate, albeit in a rather distorted way, a poetic genre based on the octosyllabic verse line. In order to explain the numerous metrical irregularities, different chronological layers of the *Yašt* poetry have been distinguished, one of them being pre-Zoroastrian, another Zoroastrian and the third indeterminable. Statistically, octosyllabic verses appear to be particularly well represented in the alleged pre-Zoroastrian parts.<sup>131</sup>

130 On Av. *paurva.naēmāt pataṭ dyaōš* see Kellens 1974, p. 402.

131 Lazard 1984, 1990.

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A further characteristic of the metrical pattern of the *Yašt* is that, unlike the Gathas, there is not a fixed number of verse lines per stanza. The structuring device of the *Yašts* seems to have been the division into *Kardes*, which are made up of octosyllabic verses. The subdivision of the *Yašts* into stanzas, conveniently used for specifying passages quoted from the text, is not found in the manuscripts, and appears to have been introduced by 19<sup>th</sup> century scholarship.<sup>132</sup>

Hence, it may be suggested that the metrical pattern of the *Yašts* was the *Karde*, which consisted of an indeterminate number of octosyllabic verse lines. This somewhat loose pattern gives a considerable amount of poetic freedom to the composer: The *Karde* may be long or short, and as many as desired joined together. Such poetic flexibility could explain why the *Yašts* enjoyed a certain popularity, and continued to be composed and improvised over a relatively long period of time. By contrast, the much more constricted poetic genre of the Gathas did not become productive.

### *Khorde Avesta*

The *Khorde*, or ‘little’, *Avesta* is a collection of devotional texts used by the lay people in everyday life. It includes, among others, two of the most popular *Yašts*, *Yt* 1 to Ahura Mazda and *Yt* 11 to Sraoša.<sup>133</sup>

### *Sīrōze*

The order in which the *Yašts* have been arranged follows the order of the 30 days of the month as they are enumerated in a short Young Avestan text called the *Sīrōze* (‘thirty days’) which exists in two versions, a shorter and a longer one. Each of the 30 days is presided over by a divine being, a certain *yazata* whose name the

132 Panaino 1992, p. 180; Hintze 1995a, p. 277f.

133 Geldner 1896, p. 8.



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day bears and who is invoked on that day by a special formula, collected in the *Sīrōze*. Every eighth day, however, is presided over by Ahura Mazdā and the Amesha Spentas (day no. 1, 8, 15, 23). For example, the formulae for days 15–20 are, according to the longer *Sīrōze*, *S* 2.15–20:

15. We worship the creator Ahura Mazdā, the wealthy, glorious One.  
We worship the Amesha Spentas, the good-ruling, good-giving Ones.
16. We worship Mithra of wide pasture grounds, who has a thousand ears, ten thousand eyes, the venerable one who is invoked with his own name.  
We worship Rāman of good pasture grounds.
17. We worship Sraoša, provided with reward, well-shaped, victorious, who promotes wealth, the truthful one, the Ratu of truth.
18. We worship straightest Rašnu and Arštāt who promotes wealth, who lets wealth grow.  
We worship the well-spoken Word which promotes wealth.
19. We worship the good, strong, bounteous Fravašis of the truthful Ones.
20. We worship well-built, well-grown Strength.  
We worship Vereθragna, created by Ahura.  
We worship victorious Superiority.

The divinities praised in verses 16–20 are, and in the identical sequence, those to whom *Yašt* 10–14 is devoted. Altogether eighteen of the yazatas praised in the *Sīrōze* are worshipped, in addition, by their special *Yašt*.

### *Niyāyišn*

The five *Niyāyišns*<sup>134</sup> (‘prayer, praise’, abbr. *Ny*) praise the sun (*Xwaršēd*, *Ny* 1), Mithra (*Ny* 2), moon (*Māh*, *Ny* 3), waters (*Ardvīsūr*, *Ny* 4), and fire (*Ātaxš ī Wabrām*, *Ny* 5). They largely consist of passages taken from the *Yasna*, including the Gathas

134 Taraf 1981.

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and *YH*. For example, *Yasna* 62.1–10 constitutes *Niyāyišn* 5.7–16. In addition, the entire *Xwaršēd Yašt* (*Yt* 6) and *Māh Yašt* (*Yt* 7) is recited in *Niyāyišn* 1.10–17 and 3.2–9.

### *Gāb*

In Zoroastrianism, the twenty-four hour day is divided into five watches, called *asniia- ratu-* ‘the times of the day’<sup>135</sup> in Avestan, and *gāb* in Middle and New Persian. In each of these watches, an Avestan text, called *Gāb* (abbr. *G*) is to be recited not only in praise of the respective time but also of divine beings associated with it and considered as its co-workers. These texts have been transmitted as part of the *Khorde* or Smaller *Avesta*, and are recited by both priests and lay members of the community.

Each of the *Gābs* is devoted to one of the five divisions of the day, i.e. the morning (Hāwan, G1, from sunrise to midday), midday (Rapithwin, G2), afternoon (Uzayarin, G3, from midday to sunset), evening (Aiwisrūthrim, G4, from sunset to midnight)<sup>136</sup> and night (Ušahin, G5, from midnight to sunrise). The five *Gābs* have a parallel structure and form an interconnected set of texts. For instance, the praise of Ahura Mazda, Zarathustra, the Fravašis, and the Amesha Spentas (*G* 1.3–4) is repeated in every *Gāb*. The constituent parts of the individual *Gābs* are composed with regard to the equivalent passages in the other *Gābs*.<sup>137</sup>

135 The noun *ratu-*, which is probably derived from the root *ar* ‘to fit’ (Mayrhofer 1986–2002, I, p. 257), is very common in the Avesta. Bartholomae 1904, pp. 1498–1502, posits three homonymous nouns *ratu-*. The first one would denote a period of time, the second the ‘judge’, and the third the ‘judgement’. However, as rightly argued by Benveniste 1948, p. 89, they all belong to one single noun *ratu-* denoting the appropriate time, for instance for a religious ceremony, and also both the regulation and the person who watches over the regulation.

136 On the literal meaning of the name *aiβisrūθrima- aibigaiia-* ‘the time of chanting characterized by attentive listening’, see Hintze 2003.

137 Hintze [2005].

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### *Āfrīngān*

The four *Āfrīngān* ('blessing, benediction', abbr. *A*) are recited on different occasions. The first one, *Āfrīngān ī Dahmān*, is spoken in honour of a deceased person, the second, *Āfrīngān ī Gābān*, on the five days intercalated at the end of the year, the third, *Āfrīngān ī Gābānbār*, at the six great seasonal festivals, and the fourth, *Āfrīngān ī Rapithwin*, at the beginning and end of the summer.

### Mixed Avesta-Pahlavi Texts and Fragments<sup>138</sup>

Apart from the liturgical and devotional texts of the canonical Avesta, published in Geldner's classic edition,<sup>139</sup> there is a small collection of non-liturgical Avestan literature, part of which has survived within the Pahlavi corpus. This supplementary body of writings testifies to the wide use of Avestan as a language not only of ritual but also of learning and instruction. The surviving texts and fragments are remnants of the once great corpus of Avestan literature, some idea of the extent of which is given by the Pahlavi summary of the Avesta in the *Dēnkard*. Most of such texts are either accompanied by their Pahlavi translation or are basically Pahlavi texts containing quotations from the Avesta.

### *Hērbdestān and Nērangestān*

The *Hērbdestān* ('precepts for priests') and the *Nērangestān* ('ritual precepts', abbr. *N*) are two separate texts, the former dealing with religious studies, the latter with ritual matters. They are often

138 For a brief characterization and bibliography of editions and translations of the texts, see Kellens 1989a, pp. 40, 43. Supplementary references only are given below.

139 Geldner 1889–96.

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mentioned together, because in the manuscripts the *Hērbedestān* precedes the *Nērangestān*. Both texts are in Avestan, accompanied by their Pahlavi translation, glosses and extensive commentaries. According to the *Dēnkard*, they both belonged to the *Huspāram Nask* which was the third Nask of the *dādīg*-, or Law-book-, division of the Sasanian Avesta.<sup>140</sup>

The *Hērbedestān* is mainly concerned with religious instruction, both of priests and of members of the laity.<sup>141</sup> The *Nērangestān* is a treatise on ritual divided into three books (*fragard*). It incorporates an extensive collection of ritual precepts (*nērang*) in Avestan, also found in the *Huspāram*. In addition, the Pahlavi commentary quotes further Avestan ritual precepts from other Nasks.<sup>142</sup> The *Nērangestān* was intended for fully initiated priests as a guide for dealing with problems arising in ritual practice. The style of the Avestan text may be illustrated by the following passage from chapter 8 of the first *fragard*<sup>143</sup>:

1. He who recites the Gathas while there is an interfering noise of water,
2. or of a river, or of highwaymen, or of robbers,
3. or of lowing livestock,
4. if he can hear (himself) with his own ears, he satisfies the Ratus.
5. If he does not hear (himself) with his own ears, let him produce (the necessary level of sound)
6. if he can produce it. If he cannot produce it,
7. then he satisfies the Ratus if he recites with a medium-loud voice.

*Hērbedestān* and *Nērangestān* are valuable documents testifying to the learned tradition of Zoroastrian scholarship. The fact that they did not have a ritual or devotional function is probably the major

140 The *Dēnkard* summaries are quoted by Kotwal/Kreyenbroek 1992, p. 21f.; 1995, pp. 19–23.

141 This text was edited and translated by Humbach/Elfenbein 1990 and by Kotwal/Kreyenbroek 1992.

142 Geldner 1986, p. 8. The first two *fragard* were edited by Kotwal/Kreyenbroek 1995 and 2003.

143 Translation, with minor modifications, after Kotwal/Kreyenbroek 1995, pp. 54–57.

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reason why these texts are poorly transmitted. There are only two extant manuscripts, both abounding with textual corruptions and scribal errors. Again the written text is based on a long-standing oral tradition.<sup>144</sup> The Avestan passages, which constitute the core of both texts, could have been composed during the Younger Avestan period and might be contemporary with the *Vīdēvdād*. It is likely, however, that the precepts and regulations collected in these texts are based on a long earlier tradition of Zoroastrian religious and ritual practice.

### *Pursišnīhā*

The *Pursišnīhā* ('questions', abbr. *P*) is a Mazdayasnian catechism in Pahlavi, interspersed with 124 quotations from the Avesta. The text consists of 59 questions and answers in Pahlavi. The answers are supported by quotations from the Avesta and their Pahlavi translation. For example, question 5<sup>145</sup>:

Question: Do any of those who stand by the religion of Ohrmazd and Zarduxšt become worthy of Hell, or not?

Answer: No. Because everyone who stands by the religion of Ohrmazd, and everyone who has worshipped Zarduxšt, are all worthy of Paradise. From the Avesta it is evident: With them all, I will cross the Cinwad Bridge. All of them go forth on the Cinwad Bridge (i.e. those who have worshipped Zarduxšt are all worthy of Paradise).

The verse line quoted from the Avesta, 'with them all, I will cross the Cinwad Bridge', is taken from the Gathas, *Y* 46.10. It is followed by its Pahlavi translation and, given here in round brackets, by the commentary in Pahlavi.

144 Kotwal/Kreyenbroek 1992, p. 15; 1995, pp. 13, 19.

145 Translation, with minor modifications, by JamaspAsa/Humbach 1971, p. 15.

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### *Aogəmadaēcā*

The *Aogəmadaēcā* ('we proclaim', abbr. *Aog*) is a Pahlavi liturgy interspersed with ca. 30 Avestan quotations only five of which are paralleled by the extant Avesta. The name of the text derives from its initial Avestan word *aogəmadaēcā usmahicā vīsāmadaēcā*, which is a quotation of the *Yasna Haptaṅhāiti* (*Y* 41.5). The text deals with the importance of being prepared for death. It has been suggested that the *Aogəmadaēcā* was recited as a blessing (*Āfrīn*) in honour of the soul of a deceased person before the dawn of the fourth day after death.<sup>146</sup>

### *Hāδōxt Nask*

*Hāδōxt Nask* (abbr. *H*) is the name of two fragments edited as *Yašt* Fragments 21 and 22 by Westergaard 1852–54, pp. 294–300. The first fragment praises the *Ašəm Vohū* prayer, while the second one is about the fate of the soul after death.<sup>147</sup>

### *Frabang ī oīm*

The *Frabang ī oīm* (abbr. *Fīō*) is a Pahlavi-Avestan glossary and is named after its first Avestan word. Apart from the Avestan words and their Pahlavi equivalents, the text contains also numerous quotations of entire Avestan sentences.

146 JamaspAsa 1982, p. 9f. The Avestan citations have been studied by Duchesne-Guillemin 1936.

147 Translated by Darmesteter 1883, pp. 311–23. Translation of *H* 2 by Kellens 1995a, pp. 54–56, and Piras 2000.

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### *Vištāsp Yašt*

The *Vištāsp Yašt* (abbr. *Vyt*) is an Avestan text consisting largely of quotations from the *Vidēvdād*.<sup>148</sup> It is divided into 8 sections of altogether 65 paragraphs. The *Vištāsp Yašt* is of some ritual importance. It constitutes the *Vištāsp Sāde*, in which, instead of the *Vidēvdād*, the eight Fargards of the *Vištāsp Yašt* are inserted into the *Yasna-Visperad*. An important *Vištāsp Sāde* manuscript is the codex K4, see Geldner 1889–96 vol. I, p. xxxiv.

### *Āfrīn ī Zardušt*

The *Āfrīn ī Zardušt* (abbr. *Az*) is a blessing in 8 paragraphs bestowed, according to tradition, by Zarathustra upon Kavi Vištāspa.<sup>149</sup>

### *Vaēθā Nask*

The *Vaēθā Nask* (*Vn*), whose name is also derived from its first word, is a treatise about the law and religious ethics. The corrupt and poorly transmitted text consists of 116 quotations from the Avesta accompanied by their Pahlavi translation and glosses and a New Persian translation of the central section.<sup>150</sup> However, the *Vaēθā Nask* is suspected of being a modern forgery.<sup>151</sup> Its first editor, Dastur Kotwal, assumed that this text was fabricated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the intention to give the authority of the Avesta to un-Zoroastrian ideas. In contrast, after a re-examination of the text, Humbach/JamaspAsa find parallels between the *Vaēθā Nask* and the Pahlavi and Persian *Rivāyats*. They conclude that the *Vaēθā*

148 Edited by Westergaard 1852–54, pp. 302–12, translated by Darmesteter 1883, pp. 328–45, and 1892–93, II, pp. 663–83.

149 Edited by Westergaard 1852–54, pp. 300–301, translated by Darmesteter 1883, pp. 325–28.

150 On the manuscripts see Humbach/JamaspAsa 1969, pp. 11–16.

151 Kotwal 1966, cf. Boyce 1967 and Khoroché 1972.

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*Nask* could have been composed by “some learned Dastur”, who “[having] been consulted by his congregation on religious problems”, quotes from the Avesta to support his views. They maintain that in fact the passage questioned by Dastur Kotwal, Par. 23–39, does not deal with mixed marriages, but with “questions pertaining to illegitimate intercourse and illegitimate children”<sup>152</sup>:

23. Then Zarathustra asked Ahura Mazdā:
24. “If there should be a man of Mazdayasnian Religion,
25. (and if) he discharges semen into a woman of alien faith,
26. (and) thereby a son is born,
27. if that man possesses wealth, will he give it to the son or will he not give?”
28. Thereupon replied Ahura Mazdā:
29. If there is a man of Mazdayasnian Religion
30. (and if) he discharges semen into a woman of alien faith,
31. (and) thereby a son is expected to be born, one shall not strike his life.
32. If (the son) dies through him by intention,
33. then (this evil deed) makes the man guilty as one whose body is forfeited (*pəšō.tanū*).
34. Thus that man becomes of alien faith.
35. I shall not guide that (man) across the Cinwad Bridge, I who am Ahura Mazdā.
36. If that man possesses wealth,
37. (suppose) he should give half of the share to the son, (and) he should give half of the share to the woman of alien faith,
38. (and) his own people [i.e. family] will not receive (anything),
39. then the man becomes a deceitful one (*druvant*).

The first half of Ahura Mazdā’s answer, (Par. 29–34) corresponds to the section from the *Vīdēvdād* quoted above, p. 44, *Vd* 15.15–16. While it is not entirely clear whether *Vd* 15.15–16 is only concerned with the responsibilities of a man who has illegitimate intercourse with a Mazdayasnian girl, the *Vaēθā Nask* is unambiguously about a Mazdayasnian man who has intercourse with a non-Zoroastrian

152 Humbach/JamaspAsa 1969, p. 57f. Translation, with minor modifications, by Humbach/JamaspAsa 1969, pp. 25–31.



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woman. It deals with his responsibilities towards a child born therefrom and the question of inheritance.

### *Nērang ī Ātaxš*

The *Nērang ī Ātaxš* (abbr. *Any*) is the fragment of a treatise concerning the precepts of the fire cult.<sup>153</sup>

### Other Fragments

In addition, there are smaller fragments of Avestan text passages, sentences, or even just words, quoted in Pahlavi texts.<sup>154</sup> The number of these fragments could be increased considerably if Avestan quotations in Pahlavi books were collected systematically. The interpretation of these fragments, however, is often difficult due to the lack of context. Some of them come from Avestan texts which are otherwise lost. For example, the fragment no.3 edited by Darmesteter and called accordingly “Fragment Darmesteter 3” (FrD.3), studied by K. Hoffmann, runs as follows<sup>155</sup>:

‘He has not won anything who has not won (anything) for his soul.  
She has not won anything who has not won (anything) for her soul.  
Here on earth there is not any prosperity, O Zarathustra, as  
ordinary people call it.’

This fragment contains the vocabulary of horse-racing found also in the Gathas. In particular, the verb for ‘to win’ is, as in *Y* 30.10 quoted above (p. 14), Av. *zā* which means literally ‘to leave behind (one’s competitors), to race ahead’. Moreover, the fact that men and women are addressed explicitly agrees with Zoroastrian doctrine as known from other Avestan texts. Thus, while language and contents have parallels, the fragment itself testifies to an Avestan text otherwise lost.

153 Edited by Westergaard 1852–54, p. 317.

154 See Kellens 1989a, p. 40 with references.

155 Translation by Hoffmann 1968, p. 288 [= 1975, p. 227].

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