

INTRODUCTION

1 ZOROASTRIAN LITERATURE

Background

Zoroastrianism, one of the oldest world religions, originated in the second millennium BCE among Iranian tribes in Central Asia. Their religion is commonly called Zoroastrianism in the West, after the Greek form Zoroaster for Avestan Zarathushtra (here: Zarathustra), but also Mazdaism after Ahura Mazdā, their supreme god. Later, after they moved south onto the Iranian Plateau, this religion became that of three great Iranian empires, the Achaemenids (550–330 BCE), the Arsacids/Parthians (247 BCE–224 CE), and the Sasanians (224–650). No longer a state religion after the Arab conquest of Iran, it lost importance, but is still practiced in Iran and in western India (the Parsis), as well as in the diaspora.

Iranians are here defined as speakers of Iranian languages. These include the ancient languages Avestan, Old Persian, Middle Persian = Pahlavi, and others, from which modern Persian (Farsi), Kurdish, Pashto (Afghan), and many others are descended. Their closest non-Iranian relatives are the Indo-Aryan (Indic) languages (Sanskrit, Hindi, etc.). These “Indo-Iranian” languages are in turn part of the Indo-European language family, which includes most of the languages spoken in Europe.

The close relationship between the languages and literatures of the ancient Iranians and Indo-Aryans proves they were once a single people, who probably lived in Central Asia east and southeast of the Aral Sea as far back as the third millennium BCE. While the

Indo-Aryans had long since begun migrating into what is today northern Pakistan and northwestern India, the Iranians remained until splinter groups began moving onto the Iranian Plateau. Ethno-geographical names in the *Avesta* cover the area from the Aral Sea via the Helmand river valley in southern Afghanistan to the area southeast of the Caspian Sea, modern Gurgān [cf. 12:13–14; 64:67]. The Persians and Medes entered the history of western and southwestern Iran in the Assyrian royal annals from the ninth century BCE, and the other Iranian peoples, many known from the *Avesta*, the Achaemenid inscriptions from 520 BCE, and the writings of the Greek historians Herodotus, Ctesias, Xenophon, and others from the fifth century BCE onward.

The *Avesta* and Other Zoroastrian Literature

Zoroastrian literature thus spans over three thousand years. The oldest texts are those contained in the *Avesta*. There is no identifiably historical information in the Avestan texts, but the language and contents are similar to those of the Rigvedic hymns, the oldest of which can be dated to approximately 1500–1000 BCE. It is therefore likely that the oldest part of the *Avesta*, the *Old Avesta* (including the *Gāthās*), had reached its final form by about 1000 BCE and the *Young Avesta* before the Achaemenid period, perhaps during the Median period (ca. 700–550 BCE).

The indigenous history of the *Avesta* is described in the ninth-century Pahlavi texts, among them the *Dēnkard* [1–2; 30:47–48, 40.19], according to which the *Avesta* was divided into twenty-one *nasks* (literally “bundles”?), corresponding to the twenty-one words of the *Ahuna Wairiya* [110:13]. Of the books listed in the *Dēnkard*, only the *Videvdad* is still complete, while others are incomplete or lost. Earlier references to *nasks* are found in the Avestan hymn to Haoma [47; 74; 90; 108; 111] and the third-century CE inscription of the Sasanian high priest Kerdīr (after 276) [85].

The terms *Avesta* and *Zand* and *Zendavesta* were used in the West already in the seventeenth century to refer to the Zoroastrian sacred texts on the model of the Bible and the Koran, but there was never a

single book (or manuscript) with all the texts. Rather, the manuscripts contain only individual texts or groups of texts. These manuscripts are from the thirteenth to nineteenth centuries, the history of a few of which can be followed back to about 1000 CE. Some contain the “plain” (*sade*) Avestan text, others the Avestan texts accompanied by a Pahlavi translation with commentaries, the *Zand*.

Later literature includes the Old Persian (Achaemenid) and Middle Persian (Sasanian) inscriptions, the “Pahlavi (Middle Persian) Books,” and modern literature from Iran and India in Persian and Gujarati.

Early Zoroastrian literature as oral compositions

The Avestan texts were the results of a millennia-long transmission of oral compositions. As time passed and its composers moved from place to place, their language was adapted to the spoken languages, while the contents stayed fairly stable. At some time, however, for some reason, certain texts came to be regarded as sacred and immutable, and, by and by, the Young Avestan-speaking priests no longer understood the compact and allusive *Gāthās* composed in a language long since dead. There must therefore have existed oral translations and explanations of the texts, the *Zand*, which no longer rendered the original accurately and which, over time, became part of a larger exegetical tradition that was transmitted down through the generations and was constantly adapted to new times and places. We see these local traditions surface in the Achaemenid and Sasanian inscriptions.

By the first centuries of Arab domination, a large corpus of oral traditions had been accumulated, which was referred to in the Pahlavi literature as the Tradition (*dēn*). Even after writing became common, the oral tradition was considered superior [cf. 136:12–13], and the authors more often refer to what is “said in the Tradition” than to what is “written”.

There was also an unwritten epic tradition, fragments of which are preserved in the *Avesta* and the Pahlavi books, but which was written down only from the tenth century on in New Persian by Ferdowsi (the *Shāh-nāme* “Book of Kings”) and others [Intro. section 3].

Avestan texts

Excerpts from the following texts are included here:

The *Yasna* in seventy-two sections (*Yasna* 1–72) was mainly recited during the morning ritual (*yasna*). It includes the *Old Avesta*, comprising the *Yasna Haptanghāiti*, the “Sacrifice in Seven Sections” (*Yasna* 35–41) and the five *Gāthās*, “songs”: the “Song of the New Life” (*Yasna* 28–34), “Song of the Wishes” (*Yasna* 43–46), “Song of the Life-giving Spirit” (*Yasna* 47–50), “Song of the Good Command” (*Yasna* 51), and “Song of the Good Ritual” (*Yasna* 53). The first and last strophes of the *Gāthā* collection, the *Ahuna Wairiya* (Pahlavi *Ahunwar*) and the *Airyamā Ishiyō* (*Yasna* 54.1), as well as two short texts based on the first strophe of *Yasna* 43, the *Ashem Wohū*, “Order (is) Best,” and the last of *Yasna* 51, the *Yenghyē hātām*, “of him among those who are,” were considered especially sacred and powerful and were recited throughout the *Avesta* and at all kinds of official and private rituals [110:13–15].

The *Videvdat* (or *Vendidad*) in twenty-one chapters, Avestan *vī-daēwō-dāta*, “the law (*dāta*) for how to keep the evil gods (*daēwa*) away (*vī*),” deals mainly with pollution and purification [chap. 8].

The *yashts* are short and long hymns to individual deities. Some were recited at certain seasonal festivals: the *yashts* to Mithra at the Mihragān festival at harvest time; that to Tishtriya at the Tiragān around mid-summer; and that to the *frawashis*, “pre-souls,” at the Frawardīgān at New Year about April 1 [17:49–52; 136:26, 26a].

The *Khorde Avesta*, “little *Avesta*,” of which most Zoroastrians possess a copy, contains miscellaneous short texts in Avestan, Pahlavi, and Persian, such as confession texts (*patīt*) and prayers recited when tying the *kusti* and before eating and urinating. The *Niyāyishns*, “invocations” to the sun, Mithra, moon, waters, and fire are recited daily or monthly.

Achaemenid-, Seleucid-, and Parthian-period inscriptions

The Achaemenids (the dynasty founded by Cyrus the Great) were, to our knowledge, the first Iranians to use writing, inspired by their literate neighbors, Elamites, Assyrian–Babylonians, and Arameans.

Most of their inscriptions (in Old Persian) come from Iran, but some from as far away as Suez in Egypt. The earliest known is the Bisotun (Behistun) inscription (520 BCE), in which Darius I (522–486 BCE) narrates how he came to power and united the Iranian lands. In his later inscriptions, he talks about his various achievements, as well as his relationship with Ahura Mazdā. His son and successor, Xerxes I (486–465 BCE), followed his father's example, while most of the inscriptions of subsequent kings (e.g., Artaxerxes II, 405–359) contain little more than their ancestry and a list of the lands of their empire. Most of the inscriptions are trilingual in Old Persian, Elamite, and Babylonian, and of the Bisotun inscription there is also an Aramaic version on papyrus. The inscriptions contain numerous Avestan echoes and, probably, more or less direct citations [83].

Coins and a few inscriptions remain from the Seleucid (330–247 BCE) and Parthian periods, as well as from the rulers of Pārs (Greek Persis, modern Fārs, whence *Persia*, *Persian*, and *Farsi*), the homeland of the Achaemenids and the Sasanians.

Sasanian inscriptions

Most of the third- and fourth-century Sasanian kings, beginning with Ardashīr I (224–240), left inscriptions. Ardashīr's son Shāpūr I (240–70) left a long trilingual (Persian, Parthian, and Greek) inscription (260) describing his empire, his battles with three Roman emperors, the fire-temples he founded, and his relationship with the gods [124]. His son Narseh (291–302) left a long bilingual (Persian and Parthian) inscription (293), which narrates how he was chosen king by the dignitaries of the realm in the place of his great-grand-nephew, who, still very young, was, allegedly, under the influence of an evil counselor.

The inscriptions of the high priest Kerdīr, whose career lasted from Shāpūr I to Narseh I, date from the beginning of Shāpūr's grandson Warahrān II's rule (274–91). In them he details his career and beliefs [84; 130] and recounts his visionary journey into the beyond [85].

The Pahlavi books

Parts of the Zoroastrian Tradition were written down from the ninth century onward. The earliest dated text is the *Dēnkard*, “what is done according to the Tradition” (?), in nine books (the extant manuscript begins in book 3). It was begun by Ādurfarnbay, son of Farrokh-zād [1:7], a leading high priest in the early ninth century featured in several Pahlavi texts, among them a narrative of a debate with Abālīsh, a heretic, in the presence of the Abbasid caliph ‘Abd-Allāh al-Ma’mūn (813–33) [135]. The *Dēnkard* was completed by Ādurbād, son of Ēmēd [1:9].

Other named authors include the two late-ninth-century brothers Zādspram, high priest of Sīrgān, a city south of Kerman, and Manushchihr, high priest in Shiraz and Kerman. Zādspram is credited with the *Wizīdagihā*, “Selections” of texts on cosmology, eschatology, and other issues, while Manushchihr wrote several *Letters* to his brother, as well as the *Dādestān ī dēnīg*, “Judgments according to the Tradition” (completed 881). Appended to the latter in the manuscripts is the *Pahlavi Rivāyat*, a collection of information on various topics. The *Bun-dahishn*, “first creation,” texts on cosmology, eschatology, and other issues, was written by Spandiyād son of Māhwindād son of Rustom Shahriyār, about whom nothing else is known.

The old manuscript MK (1322) contains a miscellany of texts, among them the *Book of Deeds of Ardashīr, son of Pābag* [p. 28], the *Memorial of Zarēr* [p. 29], the *Book of Advice of Zarathustra* [92], *The Coming of Shā-Wahrām* [68], and *Some sayings of Ādurbād son of Mahraspand* [94].

Some texts are in question-and-answer form, including several of the above and the *Dādestān ī mēnōy khrad*, “Judgements of the Divine Wisdom” [93] and the *Pursishnīhā* “questions.”

Visions of the beyond, aimed at verifying the contents of the Tradition, include those of Kerdīr [85], Wishtāsp and Zarathustra, and Ardā Wirāz.

Issues of religious and secular law are discussed in *Shāyist nē shāyist*, “What is proper (to do) and what is not” [113], and in the Pahlavi commentaries in the *Videvdad* [114–118], as well as in the *Hērbedestān*,

“handbook for priests,” *Nīrangestān*, “handbook of rituals,” and the law book, *Book of a Thousand Judgements*.

On the translations

Zoroastrianism is known from a period of several millennia, so its world view must have changed over time as the Iranians moved and met other peoples. One problem in interpreting the texts is therefore how to define the central terms in the various periods. Another is the difficulty presented by English terminology that suggests modern concepts that should not be applied to the original texts. I have therefore avoided standard religious terminology, which, I feel, inappropriately suggests similarities with modern religions, as is the case with the translations in the *Sacred Books of the East, Pahlavi Texts* (www.sacred-texts.com/zor) and many modern translations. To achieve this, I have used terminology that will seem unfamiliar to those already acquainted with Zoroastrian literature in translation, but which will, I hope, cause the reader to think about what the terms could have meant to the people who used them. Thus a certain willingness on the part of the reader to be thus steered toward the past is required.

Note, in particular, that the frequent term *sacrifice* does not refer exclusively to animal sacrifice [112–113; 136:23], but also to the ritual consecrating and offering of gifts to gods, including water libations and food offerings [Intro. section 8].

The *Gāthās* are complex poems with multiple levels of reference: the human and divine worlds; the sacrifice, which connects the two; and the world of the poet. What precisely the Gathic poets understood by their terminology very often escapes us. Here, the translations from the *Gāthās* have been fleshed out to be readable (according to my concept), but without necessarily marking added words by parentheses. To understand the translations, the Introduction section 8 should be read first. A not so obvious reference of the important term *manyu* is to the poet’s world, where it may refer to the (divine) inspiration.

Divine names have been translated for the *Old Avesta*, but, for the *Young Avesta*, Ahura Mazdā, Angra Manyu, Sraosha, etc. (Pahlavi Ohrmazd, Ahrimen, Srōsh, etc.) have been kept.

Translations of incongruous-looking Pahlavi terms that render Avestan are sometimes marked by quotes.

The style of many of the Pahlavi authors can be awkward and cumbersome and very difficult to render. Some of the translations here may still reflect the original style to some degree, although I have mostly rendered such texts relatively freely, often leaving out incomprehensible words and passages. Note that explanations of (Pahlavi) translations from Avestan are often introduced by “i.e.,” see, especially, the ritual texts in chapter 8.

2 CREATION AND THE DIVINE WORLD

Cosmic Contrasts and the Two Spirits

In the *Avesta* we see a universe divided between the worlds of gods and living beings and caught up in a battle between good and evil. The other world, that “of thought,” can only be apprehended by thought, while this world, that “of living beings” (Young Avestan *gaēthiya*, Pahlavi *gētīy*) or the world “with bones,” is conceived and born as a living being. The two worlds (Avestan *ahu*) oscillate between the states of good and evil, light and darkness, health and sickness, life and death, and, in this two-by-two scenario, all things in the universe, including gods and men, belong in one or the other camp in the conflict. The return to the state of light and life is effected when, strengthened by the sacrifices offered by humans, Ahura Mazdā regains command of the universe, the good deities overcome the evil ones, and the universe is healed and reborn [107; 110:1–2].

The origins of good and evil are two Spirits (Avestan *manyu* “mental impulse, inspiration”), depicted as “twin ‘sleeps’ (= sleeping things),” presumably twin fetuses embodying contrasting and irreconcilable potentials for good and evil. When these two Spirits “come

together" (in battle), the next existence will be determined [6]. At that point, all beings, including the gods, must declare for good or evil by *choosing* either Order or chaos [6:5], as must every Mazdayasnian by uttering the *Frawarānē* [109], compare *Yasna* 10.16, "I belong to the sustainer of Order, not to the one possessed by the Lie, and that will be so until in the end, when the victory between the two spirits comes about."

Yasht 13 to the *frawashis* contains a brief description of the primordial conflict between them and the final victory of the good Spirit over the evil one [17:12–13], and more detail is found in the Pahlavi texts. A reference to the initial defeat of the Evil Spirit as told in the Pahlavi texts is preserved in the hymn to Best Order: "He fell headlong from under heaven, the most lying of the evil gods, the destructive Evil Spirit. He howled: 'Woe to me! Blast Best Order! He will smite the worst of the illnesses (that I made)'" (*Yasht* 3.13–14).

The good Spirit is "Life-giving" (Avestan *spenta manyu*, Pahlavi *spenāg mēnōy*), a characteristic of all good entities in the world of thought. The underlying idea is "swelling," that is, with the juices of fertility and fecundity, which the Sasanian scholars understood as "making increase" (the translation as "holy" obscures the meaning). Thus, in the *Old Avesta*, the purpose of the battle is to revitalize the world by making it *frasha* "Juicy" [p. 30].

The other spirit is *angra*, which may originally have meant "dark, black." The Sasanian scholars understood his name as the Foul Spirit, referring to the *stench* coming from evil beings (cf. Old Persian *gasta* "foulness" [120:5; 124:2; 129:8]), but also interpreted *angra* as "killing" [71:101]. Here, *angra* is translated as "Dark" in the *Gāthās* and *Angra Mainyu* as "Evil Spirit" in the young Avestan texts.

In the *Young Avesta*, the other world is thought of as controlled by one or the other spirit and is called "that of the Spirits" (Avestan *manyawa*, Pahlavi *mēnōy*).

The two worlds can be simply referred to as "divine" and "human," but the common translation of *manyawa* (*mēnōy*) as "spiritual" should be avoided, as it is likely to evoke ghosts or ancestor spirits. The world

of living beings or “with bones” can be referred to as “material” in the sense of “concrete.”

Order and Chaos

Ahura Mazdā’s first world was an ordered world, where everything was in its proper place. The principle of the cosmic order was Avestan *asha* (or *erta*, Old Indic *rta*), here rendered as “Order,” the literal meaning being probably “something (harmoniously) fitted together.” It was produced by Ahura Mazdā’s thought [7:7], and its visible form is the day-lit sky with the sun.

The texts also suggest that the cosmic order was thought of as a perfectly woven “fabric” (*dāman*). This fabric contained all the original divine “models” (*ratu*, Old Indic *rtu*) for the cyclical recreations of the two worlds [p. 35].

The term *asha* is often rendered as “truth,” but this English word can be misleading, since *asha* never means “truth” in the usual sense, as in he “spoke the truth,” which is expressed by words meaning “straight” or “real.”

The opposing principle is the cosmic deception or Lie (*drug*, *druj*, Old Persian *drauga*), which deceives men and gods as to the true nature of the universe, making them think the wicked are good, and so on: *Yasna* 43.15, “For *they* claim that all the Dark (*angra*) ones are sustainers of Order.” Again, this word is not used in the common sense of English “lie,” although “to lie” is *drujya-*, literally “deceive (by words).” Untruth is expressed by terms meaning “crooked” and “devious” or “unreal.”

Those on the side of Order are called “sustainers of Order,” those on the side of the Lie “possessed by the Lie.” In the Pahlavi texts, I have occasionally used these translations, but also Righteous(ness) and wicked(ness), although the reader should keep in mind the original meanings. For “sustainer of Order,” “living by Order” and similar renderings are sometimes preferable. It may help to think of the cosmic Order as governing everything that functions according to the divine laws of the Ordered cosmos.

Cosmos and chaos are also represented by Good Thought as the sunlit day sky, contrasted with Wrath as the dark, sunless night sky, in which the deities of the good creation are seen as stars battling against darkness: Yasna 48.7, “Let Wrath be tied down and Obstruction cut back, O you who wish to stretch hither and fasten the covering of Good Thought!” (cf. [46:4]).

The pair *asha*–*drug* clearly continues the old Indo-European concept of cosmos and chaos. In Iran, the original state of the universe before Ahura Mazdā ordered it was darkness, implicit in the statement that Ahura Mazdā caused the spaces to be suffused by light [7:7]. Chaos was a subversion of Ahura Mazdā’s cosmos, caused by the supremacy of the powers of evil when strengthened by the sacrifices of those opposed to Ahura Mazdā, including evil poets and sacrificers (the Gathic *kawi* and *karpan*, Pahlavi *kays* and *karbs*).

At the end of time, *asha* will “have bones,” and the cosmos will be permanently ruled by *asha* [p. 29].

Creation

Things come into existence by birth; by being fashioned, as by a carpenter or another artisan; or, simply, by being made. Once produced, things are set in place (*dā*-), which is the most generic Avestan term to denote creation (there is no creation “from nothing”). Evil things are “whittled” into existence, that is, inexpertly fashioned. Since the terms “create” and “creation” today mean different things to different people, it may be useful to think of the Old Iranian creations as artistic creations and Ahura Mazdā as the master artisan, who creates by his artistry [4:1; 5:3], while Angra Manyu’s creations are inexpert and shapeless. Most commonly, it was Ahura Mazdā who set in place the creations [3; 4; 8; 17: 1–11], but the two Spirits and, sometimes, other gods also have this function [17:29, 76]. In *Videvdad* chapter 1, Angra Manyu makes his evil creations (pollution, illnesses, natural disasters, etc.) as Opponents (*paitiyāra*, Pahlavi *petyārag*) of those of Ahura Mazdā.

In the *Old Avesta*, creation by birth, involving father and mother, both cosmic and human, is frequently referred to [8:3; 44:5]. For the bodily constituents, see pp. 30–2.

According to the Pahlavi texts, the history of the world began when Ahrimen threatened Ohrmazd, which prompted him to create the two worlds and assign a temporal duration to them. Once the world of living beings had been born, Ahrimen assaulted it and polluted it with his evil creatures, upon which the creations were set in motion [17:53–57; 24:35; 27:23]. The duration of the created universe is 12,000 years = 3000: creation of the world of thought; 3000: creation of the world of the living in the world of thought (like a fetus), without the Opposition, and its birth; 3000: the Mixture, the world of the living after the Assault, with the Opposition, as a battle field between good and evil; and 3000: return to the origins, without evil [2.4.6–7].

Gods

In the *Old Avesta*, divine beings are referred to as “lords” (*ahura*, Old Indic *asura*), among them the heavenly fire, Ahura Mazdā’s son, but they are mostly anonymous. In the *Yasna Haptanghāiti*, the heavenly waters, as well as various ritual objects of female grammatical gender, are invoked as “Ahura Mazdā’s Women (*gnā*)” and as “ladies (*ahurānī*) of the divine lord” [5].

The Young Avestan term for “deity, god” is *yazata*, literally “worthy of sacrifices” (only male deities), which is an epithet of Ahura Mazdā in the *Old Avesta* (*Yasna* 41.3).

The Old Persian term was *baga* (Pahlavi *bay*) which, in the *Young Avesta*, still probably meant “distributor, apportioner,” said of Ahura Mazdā and the Moon. The stars were set in place by him (*Videvdad* 19.23), as were Ohrmazd’s dwelling [30:50] and the paths of the heavenly bodies [14:35; 17:54]. The Sasanian inscriptions have both *bay* from Old Persian and *yazd* from the Avestan [125; 130:9]. Pahlavi uses *yazd*, while *bay* is used as a title, Lord, Majesty (of kings).

Ahura Mazdā and the Life-giving Immortals are the principal deities and among those most frequently invoked. Only these and Airyaman are mentioned explicitly by name in the *Old Avesta*.

Young Avestan deities are as numerous as the stars [16:1], and several deities are identified with stars, many of the others, no doubt, also with constellations. This led earlier scholars to assume that they were survivals from pre-Zoroastrian times that resurfaced as the Prophet's teachings were forgotten and distorted. There is no textual or historical basis for this assumption, however. A few of them still have their old Indo-Iranian names, but most of the Zoroastrian gods and demons are deified abstract notions, especially emotions. The origin of this nomenclature is no doubt to be found in the macro-/micro-cosmic (ritual) correspondences the ancient (Indo-)Iranians saw in the world.

The Achaemenid kings Darius and Xerxes invoked only Ahuramazdā by name in their inscriptions, while acknowledging there were others [119:62–63; 121:3–4], but later kings also invoked Mithra and Anāhitā [124:2]. Similarly, the early Sasanian kings Ardashīr and Shāpūr invoked only Ohrmazd by name, but also referred to “(all) the gods” [125], and Narseh mentioned Anāhīd and “all the (other) gods.”

Ahura Mazdā

The supreme deity was Ahura Mazdā, literally, “the All-knowing (ruling) Lord,” where *maz-dāh* is an adjective meaning approximately “he who places (everything) in his mind” (not “wisdom,” as commonly rendered). In the *Gāthās*, the two epithets are still independent words, while, in the *Young Avesta*, Ahura Mazdā had become a single name, and it is doubtful whether the original meaning was still known. By the Achaemenid period, the name was one word, Ahuramazdā, which in turn became Middle Persian Ohrmazd, Hormazd, and similar.

Ahura Mazdā ordered the cosmos and upholds the cosmic Order, and he is the benevolent ruler of the ordered cosmos. He is said to be the father of several gods: in the *Gāthās*, Good Thought, Order, and Ārmaiti–Humility; in the *Young Avesta*, all the Life-giving Immortals, as well as several other deities [7:8; 8:3; 9:4; 10:2; 13:2;

19:3]. His abode is the House of Song (*garō-dmāna*, *garō-nmāna*, Pahlavi *Garōdmān*) [19:3; 26:8; 30:16, 34; 61:14; 62:17; 69:39; 82:32; 88:11; 135:9].

Ahura Mazdā also sees to it that his fellow deities, who are all needed for victory over the forces of darkness and the good functioning of the cosmos, receive their share of sacrifices and praise; by sacrificing to them himself, he provides Zarathustra with the model for humans to do likewise [14:1; 15:17–19].

The Life-giving Immortals

Ahura Mazdā was closely associated with the Life-giving Immortals (Avestan *amesha spentas*, Pahlavi *amahrspands*, *ameshāspands* [26:14–22]):

1. Good (Best) Thought (*vohu manah*, Pahlavi *wahuman*, *wahman*);
2. Best Order (*asha vahishta*, Pahlavi *ashwahasht*, *ardwahasht*, *urdwahasht*);
3. Well-deserved Command (*khshathra wairiya*, Pahlavi *khshahrewar*, *shahrewar*);
4. Life-giving Humility (*spentā ārmaiti*, Pahlavi *spandarmad*);
5. Wholeness (*haurwatāt*, Pahlavi *hordad*);
6. Undyingness (i.e.,) (*amertatāt*, *amertāt*, Pahlavi *amurdad*), probably “not dying before one’s time” (rather than “immortality”).

The six were probably brought into existence by Ahura Mazdā’s primordial sacrifice: Good Thought (~ the sunlit sky) was the ordering principle which brought forth Best Order (~ the sun and the sunlit spaces); the Well-deserved reward for this creation was the royal Command; his daughter, Life-giving Ārmaiti-Humility (~ the earth), was also his consort, who, together with her father and spouse (as god of heaven), brought forth Wholeness and Undyingness (~ water/rain and plants).

In the *Young Avesta*, the six are normally listed as a group, which often includes Ahura Mazdā and is then referred to as “the Seven Life-giving Immortals.”

The six also represent man, fire, metals, the earth, water/rain, and plants, respectively, who are also their helpers [26:14–22], and their names are sometimes used alone to refer to these elements [cf. 12:125; 57:37].

Avestan *ārmaiti* is rendered here as Humility, that is, as an obedient spouse and daughter (also, *humility* is from Latin *humus* “earth”). The literal meaning may be “thinking in right measure,” contrasting with “thinking beyond the right measure, disrespect, scorn” (*tarōmaiti*, Pahlavi Tarōmad). The common rendering as “right-mindedness” may produce wrong associations.

Instead of Well-deserved, *wairiya* is often rendered as (something) “to be chosen,” but the word is most common as an epithet of rewards and is never used as a verb.

In Pahlavi, the original meanings of these terms were obviously no longer apparent, and they are left untranslated here.

Airyaman

Airyaman (Pahlavi Ērman) was the god of healing and harmonious unions. He is invoked in the *Airyamā Ishiyō*, the last stanza of the *Gāthā* collection [104] and in the last chapters of the *Videvdad* [p. 36]. He also participates in the Perfectioning of the world [70:18].

Other divine beings

Sraosha (Pahlavi Srōsh), literally, perhaps, “readiness to listen,” the willingness of gods and humans to listen to one another, was already in the *Old Avesta*, apparently, a warrior god with the ancient epithet *verthra-jan* “obstruction-smashing” (*Yasna* 44.16).

In the *Young Avesta*, Sraosha, “with the defiant mace,” is a warrior god, whose main function is to destroy evil gods and other harmful beings, especially Wrath (*aēshma*), who smashes the sun with his “bloody mace” and bathes the sky in blood. The hymn to Sraosha (*Yasna* 56–57) is therefore recited just before sunrise to invigorate him for the showdown with the powers of darkness.

Sraosha was also the first sacrificer and the first to recite the *Gāthās* in the world of thought (*Yasna* 57.8), and, according to the later tradition, he presided over the punishment for sins in the hereafter.

Ashi (also Ashish Wanghwī “good Ashi”; Pahlavi Ard, Ahlishwang, Ashishwang), Sraosha’s companion (*Yasna* 43.12), was goddess of “the sending off,” presumably of the rewards. She was Mithra’s charioteer [12:66–67] and also, apparently, that of Zarathustra in his fight with the Evil Spirit [49:21].

She was closely associated with Sraosha, as his epithet *ashiya* “accompanied by Ashi” (?) implies (Pahlavi Srōsh-ahli, whose meaning was no longer understood, was replaced by Srōsh-ahlaw “righteous Srōsh”). She was often accompanied by Abundance (Pārendī, Pahlavi Pārand) [12:66].

Mithra and Rashnu (Pahlavi Mihr, Rashn) are not mentioned explicitly in the *Old Avesta*, but may be encrypted in *Yasna* 46.5: *MITHRAibyah* . . . *RASHNā* “by virtue of contracts, by straightness.”

Mithra, whose name is distantly related to English *mutual*, was the overseer of obligations inherent in deals and contracts between gods and men, and men and men [12:2–4]. He was invoked by warriors before battle to make him strike fear into the hearts of those who break peace treaties. He would never sleep, had an inordinately large number of eyes and ears, and was able to survey vast areas like a shepherd, as implied by his epithet “having wide pastures” (Avestan *vourugaoyaoti*, Pahlavi Frākh-gōyōd, where the original meaning was no longer apparent). He dwelt in a house fashioned by Ahura Mazdā and the Life-giving Immortals on the top of Mount Harā, the mountain in the middle of the earth (around which heaven turns), which is unsullied by evil (*Yasht* 10.50–51). At dawn, he would go forth from there in front of the sun to clear its path [12:13]. He was identified with the morning star, Aphrodite (Venus), according to Herodotus (1.131).

Rashnu, “the straightener,” was the god of everything straight, including straight (not crooked) behavior and spinning and weaving. According to the Pahlavi texts, he was one of the judges in the beyond [86:117]. See chapter 6. A related deity with unclear function was Rectitude (Arshtāt) [26:22].

Ardwī Sūrā Anāhitā (Old Persian Anāhitā, Pahlavi Ardwišūr or Anāhid) was a female deity identified with the heavenly river, probably the Milky Way. Her hymn is *Yasht* 5. She is named by her epithets “lofty, rich in life-giving strength, unattached” (or: “unsullied”), which qualify an implied noun “water” (explicit in *Yasna* 65.1).

Tishtriya (Pahlavi Tishtar) was the Iranian name of the star Sirius (the Dog Star), who fought drought personified as the demon Apaosha, and the Witch of Bad Seasons, as well as the “witches” who fall from heaven (shooting stars). In his hymn (*Yasht* 8; [14]), his battle with Apaosha to release the waters is described, in which he is aided by the star Satawaēsa (Fomalhaut) [14:9].

Werthraghna (Pahlavi Warahrān, Wahrām) was the victorious warrior god and one of Mithra’s companions [12:66, 70–71], who would smash (-*ghna*) the obstruction or valor (*werthra*) of his opponents (*Yasht* 14). He had ten different shapes, all powerful males: the impetuous wind [14:33–34], a bull, a white horse, a rutting camel, an aggressive male boar, a man of fifteen, etc.

Wāyu (Old Indic Vāyu, Avestan Wayu, Pahlavi Wāy), originally, perhaps, the god of the wind that blows through the space between heaven and earth, was the god of the intermediate space itself [24:5–6], through which the souls of the dead must travel [86:115; 87:23]. Wāyu was therefore associated with inflexible destiny and had both a good and a bad side. *Yasna* 53.6 probably contains an allusion to Wāyu, where the poet tells the rivals that their compositions (differently from the *Gāthās* [111:2]) will be “foul food for you traveling through (or: mounted on) Wāyu.” He plays an important part in Pahlavi cosmogony [24:5–6, 44–45, 53; 26:5, 17; 30:31].

Haoma (Pahlavi Hōm), the deity of the sacrificial drink *haoma*, is not mentioned explicitly in the *Old Avesta*, a fact that was long taken as an indication that (the historical) Zarathustra had banished its use. Haoma’s ancient epithet *duraosha* is mentioned, however, the meaning of which is contested, but later understood as “the one who keeps death away.” He is also, perhaps, encrypted in *Yasna* 29.7 in a list of sacrificial foods: “he, the lord, fashioned the poetic thought of the libation

(*āzuti*) for the cow, as well as the milk (*khshwid*), he who has the same taste (*hazaoshah*), the All-knowing one, as Order,” where HAZAOshah MAZdāh contains *haoma* and *hazaoshah* rhymes with *duraoshah*.

The hymn in praise of Haoma (*hōm-stawan*, *Yasna* 9–11 [p. 2]) is recited during the preparations for the pressing of the *haoma*-plant (Indic *soma*), which occurs at *Yasna* 27 [110]. The juice of the *haoma* had numerous positive effects [108:16–28].

The identity of the original plant is still disputed, but may have changed throughout the history of the Iranian and Indo-Aryan tribes. Today *haoma* is made from the ephedra plant.

The Fire (Avestan *Ātar*, Pahlavi *Ādur*) was the heavenly fire, the sun, son of Ahura Mazdā, but also inherent in the ritual fires.

The divine Fortune or munificence (Avestan *khwarnah*, Old Persian *farnah*, Pahlavi *khwarrah*) is an elusive entity. Its Young Avestan hymn (*Yasht* 19) describes how the Fortune of the Poets (*kawis*) followed the heroes of the first ages and how the “unseizable (?) Fortune,” which, when hidden in the Wourukasha Sea, was desired and fought over by gods, including the two Spirits, as well as by heroes and villains [34; 36; 39]. According to the hymn to the Sun (*Yasht* 6; [16]), when the sun shines, innumerable deities (the stars?) distribute it over the earth for the benefit of living beings.

In the Pahlavi literature, the Fortune is sometimes associated with royalty, but also with birth, notably those of Zarathustra and the mountains [23:5; 57:2–3, 46]. In the Pahlavi texts it is defined as “fulfilling one’s own work,” that is, one’s specific duties according to one’s social position [31:8; 57:5]. The adjective “endowed with Fortune” is rendered here as “Fortunate” or “munificent.” Because it is often associated with luminosity, the word is commonly rendered by the potentially misleading term “Glory.”

The divine “pre-existing soul” or “pre-soul,” *frawashi* (Pahlavi *frawash*, *frawahr*, *fraward*)—fashioned by Ahura Mazdā (or the Amahrspands) according to the Pahlavi texts—enters into the fetus of every individual at birth, where it helps weave the bodily tissues inside which the innards are contained [17:11; 57:14, 46]. At death, they

return to heaven, where, similarly, they assist Ahura Mazdā and the Life-giving Spirit in giving birth to the living cosmos [17:1–4], and they return to earth at New Year to be generously treated and reinvigorated for their participation in the rebirth of the cosmos [17:49–52]. All things in the good creation have a pre-soul, beginning with Ahura Mazdā, the Life-giving Immortals, and the sun, and ending with Astwad-erta, the final Revitalizer [17:80–145; p. 29]. They are depicted as female warriors fighting evil, as well as distributing rain to the fields of their supporters, but there is no reason to regard them as “guardian spirits (or: angels!)” as is often done. Their hymn is *Yasht* 13, and they are frequently invoked in the rituals.

In the Pahlavi texts, the expressions “having a good *fraward*” and “to whose *frawahr* we sacrifice” are used of Zarathustra and other ancient leaders of the Tradition.

The *Daēnā māzdayasni*, the Mazdayasnian Daēnā or Tradition, literally, the Vision(-soul) of those who sacrifice to Ahura Mazdā, is the cosmic Girdle (*kusti*), who is also among the battling gods [12:68, 126; 13:16; 90; 98–101]. The fortress Awareness-of-the-Righteous, made from the Fortune of the Tradition and guarded by *frawashis*, surrounds the sky to contain the forces of evil [29:6a3; 71:100; p. 31].

The Life-giving Word (*manthra spenta*, Pahlavi Mānsr-spand, Mahr-spand) was probably Ahura Mazdā’s (poetic) thought expressed in words. It is identical with his (breath-)soul [17:80] and is also (the courser of?) the chariot of the sun [90].

The Righteous (or Expert) Man and Expert Invitation (Avestan *dahma nar* and *dahmā āfriti*, Pahlavi Mard ī ahlaw and Dahmān Āfrīn) hold up the sky [23:4]. The latter is also the name of a text (*Yasna* 60.2–7) and appears in the shape of a camel (*Pursishnīhā* 31).

The *dāmi* is an elusive Old Avestan entity [7:7–8; 8:4]. If the word is related to Persian *dām* “net,” he may be the Web-keeper (thus here) in charge of the orderly cosmic web; if it is related to Old Indic *dāman* “tether” he could be in charge of the heavenly horses, among them those of the chariots of the sun and Mithra. The *Young Avesta* knows a deity called the One in the likeness of the Web-keeper [12:66, 68,

127]. He is associated with the Expert Man and the Expert Invitation in the *Yasna*.

Other divine entities include several who have hymns dedicated to them, such as the sun (*Yasht* 6) and the moon (*Yasht* 7) and the goddess Druwāspā, “she who has healthy horses *or* keeps the horses healthy” (*Yasht* 9), as well as some who do not, including the Scion of the Waters (Avestan, Old Indic Apām Napāt, Pahlavi Ābān Nāf), deity of the fire in the clouds [14:4, 34; 48:95]; Nairya Sangha, Nairyō-sangha (Pahlavi Nēryōsang), “the heroic announcement,” the divine messenger [17:85; 31:5; 57:21; 62:15; 65:61]; Pahlavi Gōshurūn, the Gathic *gēush urwan*, “soul of the cow (or: bull),” in Pahlavi the soul of the Bull set in place alone, whose complaint to the gods prompted the appointment of Zarathustra [26:17; 28; 132:5]; and others.

Demons

Avestan *daēwa* (Old Persian *daiva*), unlike Old Indic *deva* (Latin *deus*), no longer referred to good gods. According to the *Gāthās*, the *daēwas* lost their divine status when they were deceived and made the wrong choice [6:6]. Thus, the Old Indic *devas* Indra, Sharva, and the twin Nāsatyas are the Young Avestan *daēwas* Indar, Sāuru, and Nānghaithya (Pahlavi Indar, Sāwul, Nānghaith), who try in vain to kill Zarathustra in *Videvdad* 19 [20:6–9; 24:54].

The memory of the good *daēwas* lingered, however [8:20], and their original status apparently survived in the expression “gods and men” (*Yasna* 29.4). According to the *Young Avesta*, the old gods interacted with men until Zarathustra forced them underground [47:14–15].

In order to suggest the gradual demonization of these entities, Old Avestan *daēwa* will be rendered as “(bad) old god,” Young Avestan *daēwa* as “evil god,” and Pahlavi *dēw* as “demon.”

The ruler of the world of darkness is the Dark Spirit [9:2], Angra Manyu (Pahlavi Ahrimen), a name that, like Ahura Mazdā, becomes fixed only in the *Young Avesta*, when the original meaning of the name had probably been lost (here rendered as the Evil Spirit). In Pahlavi, he is called the Foul Spirit (Gannāg Mēnōy) and is said to have

produced, in particular, Akōman (from Avestan “evil thought”), Indar, Sāwul, Nānghaith or Tarōmad (“scorn”), Tawrij, and Zairij to oppose the six Amahrspands [20; 56:43; 95:4–6].

Other demons include Wrath (Aēshma, Pahlavi Heshm), embodiment of the night sky; the evil Wāyu, through whom the souls of the wicked must travel to hell; the Bone-untier (Avestan *astō-widātu*, Pahlavi Astwihād), who separates body and soul [27:24; 30:68; 86:114–117; 92:31]; Akatasha (Pahlavi Aktash), “fashioner of evil things” [20:24–25]; Greed (? Waran) [20:30; 24:47; 80:1b; 95:5]; the female arch-demon Lust (? Āz) [20:31; 27:19]; the demons Drag-off and Drag-away (Pahlavi Frazisht and Wizisht, Avestan Wizarsha), who drag the souls of the wicked off to hell; and others [20:22; 27:19; 30:31].

The Creation of Living Beings

The *Avesta* contains no explicit description of the making of humans. In the *Avesta*, the first two living beings, the first Man, living but mortal (Avestan *Gaya Martān*, Pahlavi *Gayōmard*), and the Bull set in place alone (Avestan *gao* [*aēwō-dāta*], Pahlavi *gāw* [*ēk-dād*]) are mentioned in lists of *frawashis* (*Yasna* 23.2, 26.5, *Yasht* 13.86–87) and in a list of entities to whom homage is paid and sacrifices are offered (*Yasna* 68.22, *Vispered* 21.2), in all of which they precede Zarathustra. The Bull set in place alone is also mentioned in the hymns to the moon, which is said to contain its “seed” (*chithra*; *Yasht* 7, *Niyāyishn* 3).

In the Pahlavi texts, however, we find more detailed stories about the two and their deaths after the Assault and how they became the ancestors of men and domestic animals [23:15, 28, 36–37; 25:12–14; 27:19–26; 29e–f; 31:1–5; 32:9].

The history of mankind in the golden age ruled by Yima is told in the *Videvdad* [18]. Living beings being immortal, to avoid overpopulation Ahura Mazdā sends floods that decimate them, but tells Yima to build a kind of bunker (*wara*), in which specimens of living beings are preserved. According to the Pahlavi texts, the bunker will be opened to repopulate the earth when the world again

suffers depopulation caused by catastrophies during the last millennia of the world [65:56; 67:36].

The mythical setting of these stories is the Aryan Expanse (Avestan *airyanam vaējō*, Pahlavi *Ērānwēz*) of the Good Lawful River (Pahlavi the good *Dāiti*), the first of the lands Ahura Mazdā made (*Videvdad* 1.2) and where Ahura Mazdā [!], the ancient heroes, and Zarathustra all fought the powers of evil [15:17; 18:20; 23:13, 15; 25:12; 47:14; 62:3].

3 MYTHICAL HISTORY AND THE ZARATHUSTRA MYTH

Hero-sacrificers of the First Ages

Several of the longer *yashts* (5, 9, 15, 17, 19) contain lists of characters who sacrificed to the great gods in some specific location, on a mountain or by a river, asking the god to grant him or her a wish. The few who were not granted their wish are the villains in the post-Avestan epic.

The *Avesta* gives few details, but the standard nature of the lists and the character of the scanty references render it likely that we are dealing with ancient Zoroastrian–Iranian epic tradition. Parallel motifs in Indic epics suggest that some of the details go back to Indo-Iranian epic tradition, even to Indo-European traditions.

In the Pahlavi texts, the mythical past has become the mythical history of the kings of Iran from the creation of mankind via the birth and death of Zarathustra during the reign of King Kay Wishtāsp and onward to the historical reigns of the Achaemenids, Arsacids, and Sasanians until the Arab conquest. In the Persian epic, Ferdousi's *Shāh-nāme* “*Book of Kings*,” this mythical history is told in even greater detail. Its central character Rostam, however, is still barely mentioned in the Pahlavi texts [40:10; 68].

The earliest myths

Haoshyangha (Pahlavi *Hōshang*) is the one who preceded all the others (Avestan *para-dāta*, Pahlavi/Persian *pēsh-dād* “set in place before (the others)”). In the *Avesta*, he is said to have ruled over (old)

gods and men in all lands in the seven continents of the earth [12; 12; 23:9], and he was granted the ability to strike down two-thirds of the old gods. In the Pahlavi literature and the Persian epic, he is descended from the first two humans, and, in the Persian epic, his epithet becomes the name of the first royal dynasty.

Taxma Urupi (Pahlavi Tahmōraf) did much the same as Haoshyangha, but, in addition, “rode the Evil Spirit changed into the form of a horse for three hundred years around both borders of the earth” (*Yashts* 15.12, 19.29). In the Persian Zoroastrian literature, this is but part of a longer narrative, which involved his also being swallowed by Ahrimen and then being rescued by Jamshīd (Yima), who pulled him out of the devil’s behind. This caused Jamshīd’s hand to become leprous, and it was not healed until a cow urinated on it, which revealed the healing properties of cow’s urine (Avestan *gao-maēza*, Pahlavi *gōmēz* [116; 135:6; 136:27]).

Yima or Yima khshaēta, “radiant (?) Yima” (Pahlavi Jam and Jamshēd), is related to the Old Indic Yama, who became king of the land of the Fathers (the departed ancestors). The Avestan Yima, however, became the first king of the earth, king of the golden age, chosen by Ahura Mazdā himself [18:4–6]. He sacrificed to the gods to be granted the ability to make living beings immortal and the climate temperate [47:4–5]. He was granted his wish, but, then, in some way, committed a transgression by lying or exhibiting hybris and, according to the later tradition, was cast down from his throne and roamed the earth until he was cut in half by Spitiyura (assisted by Dahāg), a shadowy character mentioned in the *Avesta* (*Yasht* 19.46 and said to be Jam’s brother in the later literature (*Bun-dahishn* 35.3–5)).

Azhi Dahāka, “the Giant (?) Dragon” (Pahlavi Azhidahāg/Azh-dahāg, Dahāg, Persian Zohhāk), is the villain of the first act of the mythical history, who sacrificed for ability to depopulate the earth, a wish that was not granted. The sacrifice was offered in the land of Babri, which may mean “of the beaver,” but was later identified with Babylon, where he is in the Pahlavi tradition. Still later, the Persian

epic made him an Arabic king. Even this late, his serpentine nature was remembered: two snakes grew from his shoulders, which needed to be satiated daily with fifteen male and fifteen female youths, reminiscent of the story of the Minotaur.

Thraētaona (Pahlavi Frēdōn) is the Iranian dragon slayer, who captured Azhi Dahāka, and, according to the Pahlavi tradition [35; 40:2; 41:26; 47:8], chained him in Mount Dumbāwand, Iran's great volcano, modern Demāvand northeast of Tehran. He also liberated two beautiful women, Sanghawāchī and Arnawāchī ("she who utters announcements" and "she who utters faults"?), who, in the later tradition, are said to be Jamshēd's sisters [35]. Thraētaona had three sons, who, according to the Pahlavi tradition, were to divide the earth among themselves after their father's death: Salm got Rome, Tūz Turkestan, and Ērij Iran [40:3; 41:26]. The two elder sons, however, killed the youngest, but were in turn killed by Manushchihr in revenge. Frēdōn became prematurely old for scorning Ohrmazd [62:9].

Thraētaona/Frēdōn was invoked for healing, and his name may be related to that of Thrīta, the first human healer [30:26, 67].

Kersāspa (Pahlavi Karsāsp, etc.; Persian Garshāsp, Sām [Narīmān]) was a curly-headed youth who slayed several dragons, as well as the creature *gandarva* that lived in or by the Wourukasha sea. According to the Pahlavi texts, he lies asleep till the end of time, when he is awakened to slay Azhdahāg, who breaks loose from his bonds. [47:10; 63:61; 67:40–42; 69:31]

The Kawis

A series of characters with the epithet *kawi* (Pahlavi *kay*) are involved in fighting the arch-enemy of the Iranians, Frangrasyān (Pahlavi Frāsiyā[b], Persian Afrāsiyāb), the villain of the second act of the mythological history and a Turian/Turanian, a term contrasted with Aryan [39; 40:5–14].

Eight *kawis* are listed together in the *Avesta*: Kawāta, Aipiwohu, Usan (Usadhan), Arshan, Pisina, Biyarshan, Siyāwarshan [40:11–13; 41:38], and Haosrawah [36].

Kawi Usan (or Usadhan, Pahlavi Kāy-Us, Persian Kāvūs, Qābūs), about whom no details are given in the *Avesta* other than the standard wish to become ruler over the good and the bad, has narratives in the Pahlavi tradition, and the name is closely related to the Old Indic Kāvya Ushan [40:8–12; 41:37].

Kawi Haosrawah (Pahlavi Kay Husrōy, Persian Kay Khosrow) is the last of the old *kawis* [37; 40:14; 41:39]. According to the Pahlavi tradition, he does not die, but lies asleep until the end of time, when he is awakened to fulfill his destiny [41:40; 69:31–33].

Haoma (Persian Hūm) is featured in this tradition as the hero who captured Frangrasyān and brought him to Kawi Haosrawah [38]. Compare the hymn to Haoma (*Yasna* 11.7): “May Haoma not bind you like he bound the villain, the Turian Frangrasyān, in the middle third of this earth, fettered in iron!”

Kawi Wishtāspa and the war against the Khiyonians

The third act of the mythical history features Zarathustra and several characters mentioned in the *Gāthās*, often referred to as “the Gathic circle,” but without details. In the *Young Avesta* and later, they are involved in a battle against the Khiyonians and their king Arjad-aspa (Pahlavi Arzāsp) over the *daēnā* of Zarathustra of the Spitāmas, foremost among them Kawi Wishtāspa (Gathic Wishta-aspa, probably “he who give his horses free reins”; Pahlavi Kay Wishtāsp, Persian Kay Gushtāsp), son of Luhrāsp [2:14; 40:14–16; 41:41; 52; 54; 55].

Zarathustra and the Gathic characters in the Old Avesta

In the *Gāthās*, Zarathustra (“he who has angry or old camels”?) is presented as the first sacrificer in the world of the living and the other named characters as being in Ahura Mazdā’s house [43; 45:14].

We find Zarathustra in the third, second, and first persons, and, if we look at the structure of the *Gāthās*, we see that the most significant third-person references are in the introduction and conclusion of the collection, which suggests that the Gathic poet is telling the story

of Zarathustra, probably an early version of the Pahlavi Zarathustra narrative.

In the introduction to the first *Gāthā*, the narrator introduces the subject of his poems, expecting divine support such as that given to Zarathustra, by which he, too, overcame the forces of evil [42:6] and for which he will later request a reward [103]. Next we are told how Ahura Mazdā chose Zarathustra to perform the sacrifice in the world of the living [42], and, after a while, we see Zarathustra in the process of performing the sacrifice [102].

At the beginning of the second *Gāthā*, Zarathustra in the first person introduces himself as Ahura Mazdā's praise-singer [44:7–8; cf. 59:55–57]. He then imagines himself as the winner of the poetic contest and as receiving his rewards in Ahura Mazdā's House of Song together with Wishtāspa and other poet-sacrificers of the past, including the Huwagwa brothers Frashaoshtra and Jāmāspa (Gathic Frasha-ushtra “the one with fat camels” and Jāma-aspa “the one with scrawny horses”) [45:14]. In the last stanza, the poet expresses the hope for a successful sacrifice, worthy of Zarathustra, and a handsome reward from Ahura Mazdā [45:19]. The sacrificer is now probably playing the role, as it were, of Zarathustra, as does the sacrificer in *Yasna* 8 [107:7].

Toward the end of the third *Gāthā*, the poet again invokes the example of Zarathustra for divine support and rewards [46:12].

In the fourth *Gāthā*, the third-person references to Zarathustra accumulate, as the poet assures us that he is faithful to the example of Zarathustra (*Yasna* 51.11), that he can expect opposition on his (i.e., the sacrificer's) way to the divine presence, as happened to Zarathustra (*Yasna* 51.12), but that he trusts Zarathustra's promise of rewards (*Yasna* 51.15). This *Gāthā* contains a long list of members of the “Gathic circle” following a reference to the “fee” (*mizhda*) promised long ago by Zarathustra and with which Ahura Mazdā comes forward in the House of Song.

In the fifth *Gāthā*, the poet states the obvious: Zarathustra's sacrifice was, as told and praised, the best (*Yasna* 53.1). To succeed, the

sacrificer must therefore follow his example, become a “son of Zarathustra,” as did others, among them Wishtāspa (*Yasna* 53.2). Zarathustra’s youngest daughter, Pouru-chistā (“the one noticed/noted by many”), like her father and Wishtāspa one of the Spitāmas, aids her father in chasing darkness and produce the new dawn (*Yasna* 53.3).

The *Gāthās* come to an end with the descent of Airyaman (*Yasna* 54.1; [104]), who brings support to those with Zarathustra’s good thought.

Zarathustra and the Gathic characters in the Young Avesta

In the *Young Avesta*, we find Zarathustra—often addressed as *spitāma*, “of the Spitāmas,” or “Spitāma-son”—sacrificing, praising Ahura Mazdā, and fighting the evil gods and the Evil Spirit by reciting the sacred utterances [47:13–15; 49:19–20; 56]. He is imitated by the current sacrificer, who also refers to himself as “Zarathustra,” or a “Zarathustra-son” [107:7; 109].

In the hymn to Haoma, his birth is described as the reward his father Pourushāspa (“he who has grey horses”) received for pressing the *haoma* [47:13]. In the hymn to the fravashis, all creatures are said to have rejoiced at his birth, and Zarathustra is presented as the prototype of three social divisions, especially the successful sacrificer [48:87–90]. In several hymns, Ahura Mazdā is portrayed as sacrificing to other deities (including himself, *Yasht* 1.9) to give them the strength to fulfill their cosmic functions, thus providing Zarathustra with the model for his own successful sacrifice [12:119; 15:1].

Zarathustra also appears in the list of mythical sacrificers who sacrificed to obtain certain rewards. Zarathustra’s requests include the ability to make both Wishtāspa and Hutaosā (Wishtāspa’s queen in the later tradition) help his *daēnā* along with their thoughts, words, and deeds [51; 52:26].

Zarathustra’s wife Hwōwī sacrificed to Chistā [53:15] for a good husband, and his mother Dugdōwā is mentioned in an Avestan fragment. There are also references to Zarathustra’s sons, among them the three Revitalizers who will be born from their father’s

semen, preserved at the bottom of Lake Kansaoya [56:5; 63:62; 64:66, 92]. Zarathustra had other sons, as well [65].

Wishtāspā also sacrificed to Druwāspā to let him bring home from the Khiyonians Humāyā [52:32], who, in the later tradition, became Dārāy's mother (see below). Hutaosā, for her part, sacrificed to Wāyu so that Wishtāspa would make her mistress of his house [55].

Zarathustra and the Gathic characters in the Pahlavi texts and later

Here we find a fully developed Zarathustra legend, including the divine plan for him, his miraculous birth, his meeting with Wahman who brought him before Ohrmazd, his enemies, and the birth of his three eschatological sons [57–62]. The assembling of the components of Zarathustra is described as a *yasna* ritual [57:46–47; cf. 105:1; p. 35].

The story of how Wishtāsp received the Tradition (*dēn*) and his battle with the Khiyonians is also narrated in the *Memorial of Zarēr*, a heroic epic-style narrative of the war between Wishtāsp and Arzāsp over the Tradition brought by Zarathustra.

The historical period in the Pahlavi texts

In the Pahlavi texts, the historical dynasties follow after this. Wishtāsp's son Spandiyād's daughter or grand-daughter (daughter of Wahman) Humā becomes Dārāy's (Darius) mother, perhaps because the Achaemenid Darius's father was also called Wishtāspa [119:1; 122–124].

Dārāy is followed by Dārāy, son of Dārāy, and Alexander. These early reigns, too, are by now legendary, strongly influenced by the earlier myths [40:19].

From the 500-year rule of the Arsacid kings, only the memory of a Walakhsh survived in the Pahlavi tradition.

Also from the early Sasanian centuries, few historical facts were preserved [40:20–26]. In *Bundahishn* chapter 33, only Ardakhshahr (Ardashīr) is mentioned from the third century and is followed directly by Shāpūr (II), son of Ohrmazd (II) [son of Narseh], while,

in chapter 35, he is said to be descended directly from his namesake Ardashahr (memory of the Achaemenid Artaxerxes), son of Wahman, son of Spandyād. Elsewhere, however, Shāpūr, son of Ardakhshahr, is also mentioned, and the *Book of Deeds of Ardashīr, son of Pābag* contains the story of Ardashīr and his son Shāpūr, as well as the birth of his grand-son Ohrmazd (I).

4 ESCHATOLOGY AND THE END OF THE WORLD

Zarathustra's revelation initiates the last three millennia and the count-down to the end of the world. His three sons, the Revitalizers (Avestan *saoshyant*, Pahlavi Sōshāns), born from the semen preserved in Lake Kansaoya (Pahlavi Kiyānsī), will appear at intervals of a thousand years each to bring the world closer to the end: Ukhshyad-erta, "who makes Order grow" (Pahlavi Ushēdar); Ukhshyad-nemah, "who makes homage grow" (Ushēdar-māh); and Astwad-erta, "who gives Order bones" (Sōshāns) [63:128–129; 67:43–45]. We may note that, by the traditional count, 2000 CE would be about the middle of the millennium of Ushēdar-māh.

During this time, various disasters will depopulate the world, which will then be repopulated from Yima's bunker [66; 67:36]. Azhdahāg (Dahāg) will run free, but be slain by Kersāspa [67:40, 42; 69:31]. Wishtāsp's son Pishyōtan (Avestan Pishishyaothna) will lead a troop to destroy the idol temples [67:33].

Finally, Astwad-erta, the Saoshyant *par excellence*, will raise the dead [61:6; 70:3, 6–7, 16, 23; 92:15], and they will gather in the Assembly of Isad-wāstra, "seeker of pasture" (Pahlavi Isadwāstar [61:2; 65:56]), another son of Zarathustra [70:10–15]. The heavenly dragon (Gōchihr) will fall down and set the earth on fire [70:17]. Finally, after passing through a river of molten metal, mankind will all be purified of their sins and go to paradise [70:18–19; p. 33].

Sōshāns and his father will complete the chain of sacrifices in the world of the living [69:32–33; 70:23], cf. *Dēnkard* 9.33.5 "At the time of the Perfectioning, Zarathustra, being of the three times, will

act as chief priest (*zōd*) for this whole world . . . and Wishtāsp of the Nōdar family will act as the supervisory priest (*srōshāwarz*)."

Ahura Mazdā will then perform the last sacrifice assisted by Srōsh and so produce the Final Body, that is, the final, permanent existence, and the world will be permanently *frasha* "Juicy," that is, filled with the juices of fertility and fecundity [6:9; 45:19; 61:6; 69:34; 70:29; 71:100; 92:15; 103:15]. [For the later texts, when the original meaning of *frasha* had been lost, I have used the terms Perfect and Perfectioning; Renovation is also commonly used.]

It is unclear how much of the later eschatology is already in the *Old Avesta*, but the daily renewal of the world may have been thought to lead up to a final judgement and a final renewal, when Order would have bones and the world would be permanently *frasha*.

5 BODY AND SOUL

Man's basic bodily constituents and mental faculties are listed frequently in the *Avesta*, although we cannot always identify them. In the *Old Avesta*, they are mentioned as part of the gift exchange between god and man: they were given to man by god and, in their sacrifices, men return the gifts god gave them, but which belong to him.

Man consists of a tangible body and various intangible mental parts. Darius is particularly careful to point out that Ahuramazdā bestowed upon him both good mental and bodily qualities, and the punishments he inflicts consist in taking away the basic bodily functions [76].

Death occurs when consciousness and bones are wrenched apart and the consciousness leaves the body [92:23].

In the *Old Avesta*, two principal constituents of the body are "bones" (*ast*) and "life breath" or "vitality" (*ushtāna*), but there are also others, among them "form" (*kerp*) and "breathing" (*anman*), consciousness (*baodah*, Pahlavi *bōy*), as well as three that are not well understood: *ahu*, which usually refers to the macrocosmos, *gaēthās*, which usually means "living beings, herds," "tissue connectedness,

texture” (*uta-yuti*) and “(tissue) strength” (*tawishī*), which appear to keep the body together [7:11; 103:13–14; cf. 72–73].

Few other aspects of the body are discussed in the *Avesta*. Already in the *Gāthās*, Life-giving Humility is said to purify mortal women after birth (*Yasna* 48.5), and we are told that Ardwī Sūrā Anāhitā purifies men’s semen and women’s wombs for conception, as well as the milk in females [15:2].

Avestan man has three “souls”: the *frawashi*, “pre(existing)-soul”; the *urwan* (Pahlavi *ruwān*), “(breath-)soul”; and the *daēnā* (Pahlavi *dēn*), “vision(-soul)” [7:11; 72–73; 78–79]. Later there is also Pahlavi *gyān* (*jān*) “soul,” without which there is no life [19:7; 26:15; 29e:3; 31:3; 71:100; 87:9; 92:15, 23; 97:13; 135:9; 136:19a, 26].

The pre-soul is made in the world of thought and pre-exists the person, being sent down to the world of the living when a person is conceived to assist in the making of the fetus and at the birth [17:11]. It returns to the other world when the person dies. Zarathustra’s *frawashi* had special importance, and Zarathustra often has the epithet “whose *frawashi* is revered.” In the Pahlavi books, we have more detailed descriptions of the formation of children in the womb [70:5].

The (breath-)soul leaves the body at death and wanders into the beyond to be judged. In Pahlavi, the soul that keeps the body alive is the *gyān*, while the *ruwān* goes into the beyond [chapter 6].

The *daēnā* is what allows man to “see” in the world of thought, but she also appears to the (breath-)soul in the form of a woman representing the totality of a person’s thoughts, words, and deeds in life, which determines how she looks and for which the soul is judged in the beyond [82; 87:15–16, 19–20]. The word is often translated as “religion,” but this only applies to certain uses of *dēn* in the Pahlavi literature and there is no reason to think that the word may have had the modern meaning of religion in the *Avesta* and early Sasanian times. Here, it is left untranslated or rendered as Tradition, that is the (oral) Zoroastrian tradition [pp. 35–6].

Among mental faculties, “thought” or “mind” (*manah*) contrasts with speech and actions and primarily refers to thoughts, but also the mind, where thoughts are made and kept.

The mind contrasts with “wisdom” (*khratu*, Pahlavi *khrađ*), which contains the accumulated “knowledge” or “learning” (Pahlavi *dānishn*, *dānāgih*) and “awareness” (*āgāhīh*) of the world and guides in deciding what to do [76]. It has two components, the wisdom one is born with (*āsna khratu*, Pahlavi *āsn-khrađ*) and the wisdom one acquires through experience, what one has “heard through the ear” (*gaoshō-sruta khratu*, Pahlavi *gōshōsrūd-khrađ*) [13:2; 19:5; 80:56; 97:41; 99:2; 135:9]. See also [45:3–4; 103:14; p. 34].

In the *Young Avesta* and Darius’s inscriptions, we see how removing basic mental and bodily faculties is used as punishment [74–76].

The texts list other faculties, as well, which are at times hard to define. For instance, Avestan and Old Persian *ushi* may originally have meant “ear,” then something like “ability to hear” [74; 76], but Pahlavi *ōsh* (*ush*) appears to mean “intelligence” or “memory” and modern Persian *hūsh* is “consciousness,” which was Avestan *baodah*, Pahlavi *bōy*, homonymous with “smell” (Avestan *baodi*, Persian *bū*).

In the Pahlavi texts, in addition to *ōsh* and *gyān*, there are some new terms that can only be tentatively defined from the contexts: *wārom*, some deep-seated organ, “core,” *okh* (Avestan *ahu* and *ahwā*, the meaning and function of which are unclear), *khēm* “character,” *khōg* “temperament, disposition,” *wīr* “perception,” *gōhr* “essence,” *ēwēn* “(bodily?) frame,” and others [19:7; 79–81; 135:9; see also the references for “souls”, p. 31].

6 DEATH, REWARDS, AND PUNISHMENT

At death, the body dies, but the pre-soul returns to heaven, while the (breath-)soul hovers at the bed of the dead for three nights. Then, at dawn, it starts its journey into the other world, accompanied by its *daēnā* (*dēn*) in the form of a woman [82:30; 85–87]. She takes the soul to the Ford of the Accountant (Pahlavi “Chinwad bridge” or

“passage of lamentations”) [45:10; 82:30; 85–87], where its thoughts, etc., are weighed by Rashn on a perfectly just balance [85:27; 86:119–120]. According to the weight of its good and bad thoughts, etc., the soul will then either cross that bridge, now as wide as long, and go on to the Best Existence [19:5; 60a:1; 108:19] and become “one with Order,” or fall down from it into hell when it becomes as narrow as a razor’s edge.

The souls of the wicked will be tortured in hell until the end of the world, when the dead will be raised and pass through a river of molten metal, which will burn out all remaining sins [70:16–21; cf. 71; p. 29].

As with the eschatology, it is not certain how much of this myth is already in the *Old Avesta*, but see [45:10–11].

Certain persons were able to visit the other world by means of a “twin,” who would travel there to verify the truth of the Tradition [2:22; 136:19c]. Examples include Kerdīr [85].

7 ETHICS

Zoroastrian ethics are simple: what contributes to the future victory of good over evil is to be recommended and rewarded, above all straightness or honesty, truthfulness, generosity, and moderation; what does not is to be avoided and punished, notably crookedness, deviousness, deceit, and miserliness or greed. These basic values are repeatedly stressed and detailed [95; 96; 131:73; 131; 135]. Among the most important values are care of the poor and fairness: treating all the same, whether high or low. The principle of moderation, neither over-doing nor under-doing, is paramount. Opposite these are greed, lust, desire, hate, envy, etc. The most generic terms are *frārōn* and *abārōn*, approximately, “morally good and evil.” Being truthful and honest, in particular, includes abstaining from slander.

Marrying one’s closest relatives (parents, siblings, children) was said to be one of the foremost good deeds (Pahlavi *khwēdōdah*), the model for which was provided by three divine and mythical unions: Ohrmazd and his daughter Spandārmad (the earth), Gayōmard and his mother

Spandārmad, and the two first humans Mashī and Mashiyānī [97]. The historicity of such unions has been much discussed, and, although there is concrete evidence for them, it is not clear to what extent they were practiced in the general population at various times.

At the age of fifteen, a Zoroastrian assumed responsibility for his or her own behavior, when the sacred shirt was donned and the sacred belt fastened for the first time [14:13; 99–101]. By their symbolism, these two make explicit the nature of man as a microcosmic analogue to the macrocosmos [100; 101:9–23]. The shirt represented the sky and Good Thought and the belt the cosmic Girdle, the Daēnā Māzdayasni (Pahlavi Dēn Māzdēsn) [88; 101:14–18, 22].

The totality of a person's law-abiding actions was referred to as "work and law" [31:11; 57:35] or "work and religious acts" [92:50].

8 RITUALS

The Yasna, a Ritual Re-Creation of the World

The *Yasna*, literally, "sacrifice," was the text accompanying the morning ritual (*yasna*), performed to recreate the world of light after a period of darkness. It is formed as a gift-exchange between guest-friends, in which the sacrificer offers up to Ahura Mazdā all that is needed for him to re-produce the new, fertile world, including bones and life breath, in return for which Ahura Mazdā recreates the world and remunerates his sacrificer.

In the *Old Avesta*, it is clearly suggested that the ordering of the universe was achieved by a divine sacrifice, but only the Pahlavi texts mention the primordial sacrifice explicitly. In *Yasna* 29, when Zarathustra is chosen by Ahura Mazdā to be the first human sacrificer, his task is to bring down among the living the ingredients of the sacrifice already fashioned by Ahura Mazdā [43:7].

The regeneration of the sun-lit sky is achieved by the bulls that pull the chariot of the sun across the sky, which are identified with the poet-sacrificer's "guiding wisdom" (*khra*tu), while his rivals only achieve the

opposite effect by their pathetic efforts [45:3–4, cf. 103:14]. When the sacrifice is successful, Order will be revived [44:16].

The Young Avestan *yasna* is a reperformance of the first sacrifices, performed by two priests, the *zaotar* “libator” (Pahlavi *zōd*), the only one mentioned in the *Old Avesta*, and his assistant, the *rāspī* (Pahlavi for unattested Avestan **rāthwiya*, the one in charge of the *ratus*).

The *Yasna* begins with statements affirming the sacrificer’s appurtenance to the good world and his determination to help bring it back, which is followed, in *Yasna* 1–7, by the announcing and assembling (*niwaēdaya- hankāraya-*, Pahlavi *niwēy- hangerd-*), then ordering of the divine model constituents (*ratus*) of the world so as to represent the primordial creation [105].

The models are presented in a relatively fixed list containing the five divisions of the day, beginning with the period preceding dawn, and associated elements, altogether thirty-three. There follow the models of the months (new moon, full moon, the moon of the 23rd day) and the seasons (spring, mid-summer, harvest, fall, mid-winter, New Year); and the years.

The sacrificer then apologizes for any faults made that might antagonize the deities [106].

In *Yasna* 8, the priest states the purpose of the *yasna*, which is to place Ahura Mazdā back in command of the world, and prays for comfort for the good, but discomfort for the wicked [107]. There follow a hymn in praise of Haoma [108] and the *Frawarānē* [109], in which the priest declares for the good powers against the evil ones by praising Order and scorning the evil gods. Finally, he presents to Ahura Mazdā his vision-soul, who will convey his sacrifice up to the divine world and will successfully combat the forces of darkness on the way (*Yasna* 12.9; cf. [17:154; 73]). *Yasna* 26 contains a long invocation of the pre-souls, crucial in the battle against the powers of darkness, as well as in the rebirth of the cosmos.

Yasna 27 accompanies the pressing and offering of the *haoma* juice and introduces the *Old Avesta*, which then follows [110]. Subsequently, the *Gāthās* are praised and sent up toward the divine realm, while

providing food and clothes for the (breath-)soul on its way to Ahura Mazda's abode [111]. These texts were especially effective for fighting darkness and pollution; the *Ahuna Wairiya*, in particular, could send even the Evil Spirit back to hell [24:28–31; 47:13–15; 49:19–20; 56].

Sraosha, the divine fighter against the powers of darkness, is then praised (*Yasna* 56–57). The *Ahuna Wairiya* and other sacred texts are sent up to the divine realm (*Yasna* 61), and the heavenly fire is praised in *Yasna* 62–64, which (originally) coincided with sunrise. The waters are praised, both the cosmic waters out of which the sun is reborn and the heavenly waters, which produce fertility on earth (*Yasna* 65). The forces of good are again praised and so strengthened, while the forces of evil are scorned and rejected, until the cosmos is completely reborn (*Yasna* 66–72), the sacred texts playing a decisive role in overcoming the forces of darkness (*Yasna* 71.6–8).

Important ingredients are the fire, which conveys the sacrifice to the gods; the *haoma* (Pahlavi *hōm*); the *barsom* (Avestan *barsman*), twigs of certain plants [15:9; 114:16; 136:17]; and water for cleaning and for libations (Avestan *zaōthra*, Pahlavi *zōhr*) [15:9; 91–95; 23:12]. Animal sacrifice was also practiced (*ātaš-zōhr*) [112; 113].

The Videvdad, a Ritual Purification of the World

The *Yasna* is also recited in the *videvdad sāde* ritual, a purification ritual recited from midnight till after sunrise, in which another six priests were originally involved, but whose roles are today played by the *rāspī*. Here, parts of the *Yasna* are replaced by a set of texts called *Vispered*, and the *Gāthās* are expanded by the twenty-two chapters of the *Videvdad*.

The *Videvdad* in twenty-one chapters, Avestan *vī-daēwō-dāta*, “the law (*dāta*) for how to keep the evil gods away (*vī*),” contains rules for how to avoid and remove from Ahura Mazda's creation pollution caused by dead matter and bodily refuse and is framed by mythical narratives. Chapter one contains the story of how Ahura Mazda established the lands and how the Evil Spirit fashioned the evils now plaguing them; chapter two contains the story of Yima, first king in

the world of the living, and the Iranian “flood story” [18; p. 23]; chapter nineteen contains the story of Zarathustra’s tryst with the evil gods and the Evil Spirit and how he exorcised them by performing a purification ritual [56]; and chapters twenty to twenty-two contain the story of how, with the help of Nairyō-sangha, the Life-giving Word, and Airyaman, Ahura Mazdā and the world were healed of the innumerable diseases brought upon them by the Evil Spirit.

Other Rituals

Among smaller rituals are the homage (Avestan *nemah*, Pahlavi *namāz*) [19; 101; 136:15]; the offering to certain deities of the *drōn* (Avestan *draonah*), originally parts of the sacrificial animal [112:4; 113], later also bread [136:17]; the *barshnūm*, a stringent purification ritual [116]; and the *sag-dīd*, viewing by a dog [116; 136:28].

9 ON KINGSHIP

The qualities of kingship occupy a central position in Zoroastrian ethics. The Achaemenid kings used the cosmology to define their own divine place in the cosmos as god’s chosen representative in this world [3; 76], and, in both the Achaemenid and Sasanian inscriptions, the relationship between god and king and king and subjects is portrayed as one of mutual ownership, obligations, and indebtedness: the king belonged to god and god to the king [122; 125], the subjects were the king’s bondsmen and would abide by the king’s and Ahura Mazdā’s law [119:8; 83:7=129:7]. Whatever good was done in the empires had the support of god *and* the king and was done for *their* benefit. A good king would keep the realm healthy and make it prosper, while a bad or corrupt king would cause it to deteriorate and be destroyed [119:54–55].

The king’s victory over his enemies, who are also god’s enemies, was regarded as matching god’s victory over the evil one. Moreover, the king set an example for his successors, but also for his subjects in general [119:55, 64; 125]. His work was Perfect (*frasha*), matching that of Ahura Mazdā [76:1; 123; p. 30].

10 DOCTRINAL ISSUES

In the Pahlavi literature, disagreements among scholars, several of them known by name, are commonplace, but even in Young Avestan times, there appear to have been diverging traditions. One, in particular, was learnt by Frashaoshtra from Zarathustra regarding a non-standard order of the invocations in the *Yasna* [127–128]. We know from the Pahlavi literature, in fact, that Frashōshtar was regarded as an early authority [2:14].

In the *Avesta*, especially the *Videvdad*, those who sacrifice to Ahura Mazdā (*mazda-yasna*) are contrasted with those who sacrifice to the evil gods (*daēwa-yasna*) and are sometimes described as second-rate citizens. For instance, learning surgery involved experimenting on *daēwa-yasnas* before being allowed to treat a *mazda-yasna* (*Videvdad* 7).

Later, beginning with the Achaemenid inscriptions, we find statements regarding gods and which gods to worship [129] and, in the Sasanian period, diverging traditions and beliefs.

In the high priest Kerdīr's inscriptions, we have for the first time direct evidence for concerns about the correctness of the Tradition. To obtain confirmation that what was being done was the right thing, Kerdīr staged a trip by his double (twin) into the beyond. He also tells us how he dealt with other religions and non-conformist practices in the far reaches of the Sasanian territories [130:14–18].

The Pahlavi books contain the exposition of the good Tradition and often discuss what is according to the Tradition and what is not. In several texts, we find the Tradition contrasted with other views, notably those of Christians and Muslims [131; 136]. One authority often mentioned is Ādurbād, son of Mahrspand, high priest under Shāpūr II (309–79) [94]. The dispute between Abālīsh (reading uncertain) and Ādurfarnbay, son of Farrokh-zād, is set at the court of al-Ma'mūn (ruled 813–33), son of Hārūn al-Rashīd [135].

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