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ACHAEMENID RELIGION
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The question of Cyrus' beliefs has been linked with that of Zoroaster's date. For those scholars who accepted the so-called "traditional date" of 258 years before Alexander it was not rationally possible to suppose that Cyrus was a Zoroastrian, since this date made king and prophet roughly contemporary; and had the eastern faith been adopted so swiftly in Persia, one would expect some mention of western Iranian peoples and places in its holy texts. It has now been shown (A. Shahbazi, *BSOAS* 40, 1977, pp. 25-35) that this date was in all probability calculated after the establishment of the Seleucid era in 312/311 B.C.; and if the demonstration is accepted, Zoroaster's traditional date ceases to be relevant for determining the faith of Cyrus.

Attention has long been drawn to the testimony of Achaemenid proper names. (See F. Spiegel, *Ērânische Alterthumskunde* I, Leipzig, 1871, p. 700 n. 2; Justi, Namenbuch, s.v.; H. S. Nyberg, *MO* 1929, p. 345; H. Lommel, *Die Religion Zarathustras*, Tübingen, 1930, p. 16. For later works see M. Mayrhofer, *Zum Namengut des Avesta*, Vienna, 1977, p. 10, n. 20). An older cousin of Cyrus, Aršāma (Arsames), fl. ca. 600, called one of his sons Vištāspa (Hystaspes), which was the name of Zoroaster's royal patron; and Cyrus himself gave his eldest daughter the name Hutaosā (Atossa), which was that of Kavi Vištāspa's

queen. Thereafter Darius the Great, son of the Achaemenid Vištāspa, again gave one of his sons this name; and this second Achaemenid Vištāspa had a son called Pissouthnes, a Greek rendering, it seems of Pišišyaoθna. The Avestan Pišišyaoθna was a son of Kavi Vištāspa. This group of family names, when taken together, thus provides evidence that members of both branches of the Achaemenid royal house had accepted Zoroastrianism at least by the early 6th century B.C. and wished to declare their allegiance to it publicly.

For Cyrus further evidence is provided by verses from Isaiah: 40-48, generally held to have been composed in Babylon by an anonymous poet-prophet of the Jewish captivity, known as Second Isaiah. He hails Cyrus as a messiah, a coming deliverer of the Jews; and he celebrates his own God, Yahweh, as Creator in terms new to the Jews but with striking parallels in one of Zoroaster's Gāthās, *Y*. 44 (M. Smith, *JAOS* 83, 1963, pp. 415-21). Together, these facts suggest that Second Isaiah had contact with a Persian propagandist for Cyrus who was a Zoroastrian, working abroad for a king whom he hoped would triumph politically and establish the faith. The influence of Zoroastrian teachings has also been seen in early Ionian philosophy, from before Cyrus' conquest of Ionia (M. L. West, *Early Greek Philosophy and the Orient*, Oxford, 1971, pp. 76f.). This was perhaps the work of Median propagandists for the Persian king; for it has been suggested that the real reason why a large number of Medes went over to Cyrus during his final battle with Astyages was that they were Zoroastrians and ready to support even a Persian rebel if it meant the triumph of their religion (M. Boyce, *A History of Zoroastrianism*, HO 1.8.1.2, II, Leiden, 1982, pp. 43, 47-8).

Against the presumption of Cyrus' Zoroastrianism has been set his active benevolence towards the religions of his non-Iranian subjects, and his readiness to acknowledge their gods. A notable piece of evidence for this is the Cyrus-cylinder from Babylon (W. Eilers, *Acta Iranica* 2, 1974, pp. 25-34); it shows the Persian king acknowledging the support of Marduk, whose great temple, Esagila, he restored. Other local texts show him attributing his triumphs to the moon-god, Sin, or the "great gods" of Uruk; and in his edict preserved in Ezra 4.3-5 he says: "All kingdoms of the earth has Yahweh, the God of heaven, given me . . . He is the God who is in Jerusalem" (E. J. Bickerman, *Studies in Jewish and Christian History* I, Leiden, 1976, pp. 72-108). Cyrus also made a grant of privileges to the priests of an Apollo-shrine in Asia Minor, who had uttered a prophecy favorable to him (S. Smith, *Isaiah Chapters XL-LV*, London, 1944, p. 41 ; F. Löchner-Hüttenbach in W. Brandenstein and M.

Mayrhofer, *Handbuch des Altpersischen*, Wiesbaden, 1964, pp. 91-8). Such conduct cannot logically be reconciled with belief in Ahura Mazdā as God and Creator, who had revealed exclusive truths to mankind through his prophet Zoroaster; but it was plainly impossible for Cyrus to impose his own beliefs on the numerous and ancient peoples whom he had conquered. A historic parallel is provided by the course pursued by the British in the early days of their rule in India, when they too acted deliberately as successors to the former rulers, rebuilding temples, supplying money for sacrifices, and requiring their officials to attend religious festivals (J. N. Farquhar, *Modern Religious Movements in India*, New York, 1918, pp. 8-9). Cyrus lived at a time of ethnic faiths, though Zoroastrianism itself is the oldest of the world religions; his conduct outside Iran appears due to diplomatic pragmatism rather than any lack of personal religious conviction.

Evidence for his own practice of the Zoroastrian faith was found in the 1960s at Pasargadae, in the form of fragments of stone fire-holders, attributable to the earliest period at that site (D. Stronach, *JNES* 26, 1967, p. 287; idem, *Pasargadae*, Oxford, 1978, p. 141). These are the first of a long line of such objects, invariably called “fire-altars” by Western scholars, a misnomer which blurs their true significance. Many ancient faiths had altars on which fire was kindled to make offerings; but the fire-holder is particular to Zoroastrianism. Zoroaster had appointed fire, the symbol of *arta/aša*, as the icon before which each of his followers should stand to pray, five times a day. This observance was distinct from the Old Iranian cult of fire, whose object was simply to gratify the god of the hearth-fire, Ātar, and which could accordingly be carried out by a single representative of each household. In the early period of Zoroastrianism (and indeed down to modern times) the hearth-fire nevertheless still served as the focus for devotions; and it was very probably for Cyrus himself, the first Zoroastrian Great King, that the fire-holder was devised, in order to raise up this icon to a level where royal eyes could rest upon it with dignity (Boyce, *Zoroastrianism* II, pp. 51-53). The Pasargadae specimens, found near the tomb of Cyrus, consisted of a three-stepped top and base, joined by a slender square shaft, with the top hollowed out to hold the deep bed of hot ash necessary to sustain a continually burning wood-fire. This last is the feature which distinguishes fire-holders from altars such as that at the 8th-century Median site of Tepe Nūš-e Jān. (This has been termed a “fire-altar” because of traces of ash round the shallow depression in its flat top; see M. Roaf and D. Stronach, *Iran* 11, 1973, pp. 133-8; Boyce, *Zoroastrianism* II, pp. 36-7.)

Yet another reason for doubting the Zoroastrianism of the Achaemenids has been that the bodies of these kings were embalmed and laid in sepulchres, instead of being exposed according to the prescribed Zoroastrian rite. This is to focus too narrowly, however, for the same is true of the undoubtedly Zoroastrian Sasanian dynasty. Cyrus' own sepulchre seems to have set a precedent for Zoroastrian royal entombment, this being carried out always with the utmost care to avoid contamination of the good creations, i.e. as far as possible in conformity with Zoroastrian teachings. The tomb thus consists of a thick-walled stone chamber with a stone door and double stone roof, raised up on a six-tiered stone plinth (Stronach, *Pasargadae*, pp. 24-43, with plates). Its only ornament is a great rose carved over the narrow entrance, probably as the symbol of Amərətāt, the Zoroastrian divinity who hypostatizes immortality and is lord of plants. A band of rosettes on its door seems to have been the only ornament also of the tower-like Pasargadae building known as Zendān-e Solaymān (Stronach, *Pasargadae*, pp. 117-37 with plates). This, it has been suggested (Boyce, *Zoroastrianism* II, pp. 57-60), was probably a tomb for Cassandane, Cyrus' beloved queen of queens, and for lesser members of the royal family. (For other interpretations, as a fire-temple or repository for regalia, see Stronach, *Pasagardae*.) It too appears to have been built with strict regard for Zoroastrian purity laws, and consists of a single stone chamber raised on a solid stone base high above the good earth, and provided again with a stone door and a double roof of stone.

Another argument against Cyrus' Zoroastrianism has been that there is no mention of his name in Zoroastrian tradition. This is possibly due to difficulties which western magi met subsequently in trying to construct a history of the faith (Boyce, *Zoroastrianism* II, pp. 68-69). With few facts to go on, and no sound historical perspectives, they had to reconcile the existences of Kavi Vištāspa, who "made the faith current in the world;" the Achaemenid Vištāspa, father of Darius; and Cyrus, predecessor of Darius, who had made the faith current in the world which they knew; and they seem to have solved the problems thereby presented by identifying the two Vištāspas, thus creating a composite figure who took over Cyrus' role, so that the Achaemenid patron of the faith was consigned to an inevitable oblivion.

After Cyrus' death his son Cambyses instituted regular offerings to be made for his soul at his tomb (Arrian, *Anabasis* 6.29.1.4f.). These were maintained until the coming of Alexander. It used to be thought that they were un-Zoroastrian, in that they included the daily sacrifice of a sheep. But it is now known that

similar sacrifices were endowed by the Sasanian Šāpūr I and are made for the souls of the dead by traditionalist Zoroastrians in Iran to the present day (Boyce, *Zoroastrianism* II, pp. 70-71). Cambyses is also recorded (Herodotus 3.31) to have made *xvaēvadaθa* unions with two of his full sisters. Herodotus' account suggests that this was the first time that this distinctive Zoroastrian custom was practiced in Persia.

With Darius there is a wealth of monuments and inscriptions as evidence. Among the former the most striking from the religious point of view are his tomb-carvings. The tomb itself, cut high in the cliff of Naqš-e Rostam, kept the embalmed corpse even more sequestered from the good creations than the chamber-tomb of Cyrus. In the sculpture above the tomb's door Darius is shown standing in reverent attitude before a fire-holder of Pasargadae type, on which flames leap up. Overhead is the figure in a winged circle, which here appears to have dual significance, a symbol of both the royal *xvarənah* and the sun; behind it is the Akkadian moon-symbol, a disk with crescent along its lower rim. In Zoroastrian orthopraxy prayers may be said before a terrestrial fire or facing sun or moon. Darius thus appears to have had himself portrayed at prayer according to the widest Zoroastrian prescriptions (Boyce, *Zoroastrianism* II, p. 114). Further, it has been suggested that the six noble Persians carved on each side of this scene, who were Darius' chief supporters, are grouped so as to mirror the six Aməša Spəntas around Ahura Mazdā: the three with weapons to one side, that is, reflecting Aša, Vohu Manah and Xšaθra, the three to the other, weaponless and in an attitude of ritual mourning, the female Ārmaiti, Haurvatāt and Amərətāt (Shahbazi, *AMI* 13, 1980, pp. 122-25). The whole sculpture, with what seems its profoundly Zoroastrian significance, was reproduced over the tombs of all succeeding Achaemenid kings, of whom the later ones are known to have been Zoroastrians. A change of faith in any reign after that of Darius would have been bound to have brought about some change in funerary iconography (as well as some comment by Greeks), so that these facts appear mutually corroborative of the Zoroastrianism of all this line of kings.

Before technical advances in photography made clear reproductions of these funerary sculptures generally available (E. Schmidt, *Persepolis* III, Chicago, 1971), the texts of Darius' inscriptions had been closely scanned for evidence as to his religious beliefs; but they were widely held not to yield decisive proofs, so that scholars remained divided in their interpretations. (For detailed discussions see J. H. Moulton, *Early Zoroastrianism*, London, 1913, repr. 1972,

pp. 39f.; H. S. Nyberg, *Die Religionen des alten Iran*, German tr. H. H. Schaeder, Leipzig, 1938, repr. 1966, pp. 349f.; J. Duchesne-Guillemin, *The Western Response to Zoroaster*, Oxford, 1958, pp. 52f.; reviewed by F. B. J. Kuiper, *IIJ* 4, 1960, pp. 182f.; G. Widengren, *Die Religionen Irans*, Stuttgart, 1965, pp. 142f.) The main difficulty lay in finding facts that would establish Darius' beliefs as distinctively Zoroastrian, rather than simply as those of the Old Iranian religion. The only divinity whom he names is Zoroaster's God, Ahura Mazdā, but he was venerated also, as a great god, in the Old Iranian polytheism; and Darius' invocation of him "with (all) the gods" was held to be un-Zoroastrian on two counts: first it was polytheistic, and second the word he employed for other divine beings was *baga*, used only rarely in the Avesta, instead of the characteristic Zoroastrian *yazata*. Other characteristic Zoroastrian terms such as *spənta* were also lacking, as well as the name Angra Mainyu, and indeed that of Zoroaster himself. Against these apparently weighty considerations it has been argued that Zoroaster preached an original, not a present monotheism, so that to invoke Ahura Mazdā with the lesser divine beings, his emanations, was theologically sound (Boyce, *Zoroastrianism* II, p. 119). Further, it was pointed out (ibid., pp. 122-3) that centuries were to pass before a specifically Avestan vocabulary replaced traditional Persian religious terms; in fact, this probably did not fully happen before religious texts were committed to writing and studied by scholastics in the later Sasanian period. So in the third century A.D. the high priest Kirdēr still called Paradise *bayān gāh* "the place of the *baga*s," and the Sasanian collection of *yašt*s is given the title *Bayān Yašt* "Worship of the *baga*s." Moreover, Zoroaster's name is nowhere mentioned in any Sasanian inscription; and Darius' own failure to refer to Angra Mainyu is the less striking in that the evil one does not appear in the Zoroastrian confessional, the Fravarāne. But both there and in Darius' inscriptions Avestan Drug, Old Persian Drauga figure largely. The lack of verbal acknowledgement by Darius of the essential Zoroastrian doctrine of the divine heptad appears compensated for by the visual allusion to it in the funerary sculpture. (The attempt to interpret the phrase "the other gods who are," D[arius] B[īsotūn] IV.61, as referring to the Amәša Spəntas is not perhaps so convincing; see I. Gershevitch, *JNES* 23, 1964, pp. 16-l8; Boyce, *Zoroastrianism* II, p. 83.)

On the positive side Ahura Mazdā is repeatedly celebrated as Creator, and Creator moreover of what is good—earth and sky, man and happiness for man (e.g. DN[aqš-e Rostam]a 1-3; see Kent, *Old Persian*, p. 137). There is also repeated emphasis on order, that is *arta*/*aša*; and the general ethics of Darius'

utterances are wholly consonant with Zoroastrian moral theology, with their stress on discernment, justice, self-control, and resolution.

In his Bīsotūn inscription (DB I 63-64; Kent, *Old Persian*, p. 118) Darius refers to *āyadanā* "places of worship." Archeologists have failed to find any remains that could be interpreted as those of Zoroastrian temples from the early Achaemenid period; and this accords with Herodotus' statement (1.131) that still in his day (mid 5th century B.C.) the Persians had no temples but worshipped in the open. The *āyadana* were therefore presumably simply sacred places to which there was regular resort (Boyce, *Zoroastrianism* II, pp. 88-89). The attempt to find evidence in the Persepolis Elamite tablets for the existence of 19 fire-temples in Pārs in the early Achaemenid period (W. Hinz, *Orientalia* 39, 1970, pp. 429-30) rested on an interpretation of the word *haturmakša* as "fire-priest;" but the contexts now show that this word in fact describes a man trading in food commodities (R. T. Hallock, *Persepolis Fortification Tablets*, Chicago, 1969). The temple at Dahān-e Ḡolāmān in S.E. Iran has been ascribed to this period (U. Scerrato, *East and West* 16, 1966, pp. 9-30; *South Asian Archaeology* 1977, ed. M. Taddei, Naples, 1979, II, pp. 709-35), but it cannot have been a Zoroastrian one, since receptacles there contain ashes mixed with crushed and burnt animal bones, something wholly against Zoroastrian purity laws. Presumably this was a temple of the local indigenous people, built with Achaemenid approval (Boyce, *Zoroastrianism* II, p. 130). Darius too continued Cyrus' policy of active benevolence to non-Iranian faiths, notably by building a huge temple to Amun-Rē in Egypt (H. E. Winlock et al., *The Temple of Hibis in El Khārgeh Oasis*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1938-53).

Problems concerning Xerxes' beliefs were created by Herodotus' account of incidents during his Greek war. Human sacrifice (Herodotus 7.114) was certainly profoundly at odds with Zoroastrian morality, and presumably represents an ancient pagan custom revived under stress of war (or in the case of Queen Amestris, of old age). The scourging of the Hellespont (7.35), apparently a sacrilegious act against the good creation of water, has been justified on the grounds that this water was "bitter . . . and briny," i.e. as it were polluted. On the positive side Herodotus refers to the king eating only once a day (7.121), a characteristic piece of Zoroastrian self-discipline; and according to later sources he was accompanied on his campaign by Ostanes, the chief magus, whom Greek tradition knew as a Zoroastrian high priest (Diogenes Laertius 2.2; J. Bidez et F. Cumont, *Les mages hellénisés*, Paris, 1938,

I, p. 168). In Herodotus' account of Persian beliefs and practices in his own day (1.131f.) we have the earliest descriptions of the Zoroastrian purity laws in action (killing of noxious creatures, avoiding pollution of water, exposure of the dead), while the sacrifices which he describes, offered in the open and in high places and once thought to be un-Zoroastrian, are now known to accord closely with Zoroastrian lay practices as still maintained today (Boyce, *A Persian Stronghold of Zoroastrianism*, Oxford, 1977, pp. 242f.).

In his "Daiva" inscription (X[erxes] P[ersepolis]h, Kent, *Old Persian*, p. 151), Xerxes himself records how he destroyed a sanctuary of Daivas and established the worship of Ahura Mazdā there. Attempts have been made to interpret this Daiva-sanctuary as one of the two great temples known to have been destroyed by Xerxes, Esagla in Babylon or the Athenian Acropolis; but there is no evidence to suggest that Xerxes ever performed rites of Iranian worship in these two alien places, one of which lay beyond his own borders; and in the light of all the positive evidence now available for the Zoroastrian beliefs of the early Achaemenids, it seems reasonable to take "Daiva" here as the equivalent in his usage of Avestan "Daēva," and to see him as a convinced Zoroastrian, suppressing among Iranians the worship of those warlike divinities who had been denounced by his prophet (U. Bianchi, *RHR* 192, 1977, pp. 3-30).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Given in the text.