



AHU

AHU, two homonymous Avestan terms.

1. “Existence, life.” This word occurs in a range of religious phrases: (a) Both the Gathas and the Younger Avesta contrast *ahu-astvat-* “material existence” (lit., “existence inhering in the bones, bone-existence”) and *ahu- manañhō* “spiritual existence” (see *Yasna* 28.2, 40.2, 43.3, 53.6, 57.25; *Pursišnīhā* 40; *Hadōxt Nask* 2.16.). This contrast has been regarded as imposing a second duality upon that of good versus evil existence; i.e., the world is analyzable into four categories (H. Lommel, *Die Religion Zarathustras*, Tübingen, 1930, pp. 101ff.). (b) The Gathas also refer to “first life” and “second (i.e., future) life” (*paouruyō ahu-* and *daibitya ahu-*; see *Yasna* 28.11 and 45.1). “First life” has been interpreted as present, earthly life (*AirWb.*, cols. 106-10) or as the preexistent state of creatures (Lommel, loc. cit.). (c) The phrases *vahišta- ahu-* and *ačišta ahu-* “best existence” (i.e., paradise) and “worst existence” (i.e., hell) go back to Zarathuštra (*Yasna* 30.4, 44.2) and are quite common in the Younger Avesta. Historically, *vahišta- ahu-* replaced Indo-Iranian **ásu-* (Vedic *asu-*) “existence” (especially “existence in the world beyond,” which is not qualified as good or evil). The distinct “hell” developed from the concept of the space between heaven and earth, the abode of restless spirits without peace. *Vahišta- ahu-* (Middle Persian *wahišt*) survives in Persian as *behešt* “paradise.”

2. “Lord, overlord.” It occurs linked with *ratu-* “lord, judge,” except in *Yasna* 32.11. In that difficult strophe it apparently means “master of the house;” and it is coupled with *añuhī-* “lady of the house.” The word’s meaning is not further narrowed by its etymology: Cf. Hittite *ḥaššū-* “king,” and Latin *erūs*



“lord” (Schlerath in bibliog., p. 146). According to the usual interpretation, *ahu-* indicates “holder of secular power, holder of the jurisdiction of the king [who opens the legal process and executes judgment],” while *ratu-* designates “judge.” But such a distinction rests on abstract principles and alleged parallels from non-Iranian sources, not on the actual Avestan passages. Ahura Mazda is three times called *ahu-* and *ratu-* (*Yasna* 27.1; *Vispered* 2.4, 11.21). Zarathuštra is so called seven times (*Yasna* 19.12, 27.13; *Yašt* 13.91, 92, 152; *Vendidad* 2.43; *Vispered* 2.4). *Yasna* 27.1 provides a significant point in stating that the *ahu-* and *ratu-* were appointed by the community; cf. *Yasna* 29.6. *Ratu-* (q.v.) is attested more frequently, and its specific meaning is more easily ascertained. In the most recent layer of the Avesta, *ratu-* implies the spiritual authority which is attached to every Ahurian creature.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

B. Schlerath, “Altindisch *asu-*, awestisch *ahu-* und ähnlich klingende Wörter,” *Pratidānam . . . F. B. J. Kuiper*, The Hague, 1968, pp. 142-53.