



ANTHROPOMORPHISM

ANTHROPOMORPHISM in Iranian religions. Ahura Mazdā in the gāthās was conceived of, although invisible and immortal, as of human form, with eyes (Y.31.13), hands (43.4) and tongue in the mouth (31.3); but he was of gigantic size since he, or his Salutary Spirit, was said (30.5) to be clad in the firmest stones (the firmament). Nevertheless, he was prepared to be represented on Achaemenian reliefs or seals as a human bust on the winged solar disc.

The Aməša Spəntas, though abstract, must also, since begotten by him, have been thought of as anthropomorphic, and were ready to be depicted as such on Sogdian ossuaries of the 8th century A. D. (Grenet, 1986). Aša has hands (44.14) and in the Haptanhāiti (37.4) is bright, and the most beautiful of the Aməša Spəntas.

In the Younger Avesta Ahura Mazdā wears a star decked robe made by spirits (Yt. 13.3). Mithra (Yt. 10) rides on a horse-drawn chariot and is armed with arrows; but he has a thousand ears. Drvāspā also has horses and chariot, and Ušah “Dawn” makes horses run swiftly. Anāhitā (Yt. 5) is a fair maiden, strong, beautiful, high-girt and straight, shod with gleaming golden shoes and with golden bands, etc. The fravašis (Yt. 13), high-girt and with metal helmets and shields, are obviously conceived of in human form. Vərəθraϥna (Yt. 14) is capable of assuming the form of a bull, a white horse, a camel, a wild boar, etc., but also that of a handsome youth or of a warrior. Sraoša (Y. 57, Yt. 11) offers prayers, spreads the barəsman, chants the gāthās, and bears an uplifted weapon. Tištrya (Yt. 8) appears during the first ten nights of the month as a young man (but during the second ten as a bull and during the third ten as a



stallion). Parəndi on a swift chariot comes with Aši and Rātā to accompany Tištrya. The haoma, when personified (Y. 9) is addressed by Zarathustra as a man; *kō narə ahi* (what man art thou?) The daēnā (Haδōxt Nask) appears to the soul of the departed either as a damsel or as a hag. This anthropomorphism made it easy to adopt, during the reign of Artaxerxes II, under Greek and Babylonian influences, the usage of making statues of gods. Anāhitā's description in Yt. 5 partly refers to a statue.

In the Parthian period were sculpted in Commagene statues or reliefs of Ahura Mazdā (Zeus), Mithra (Apollo, Helios, Hermes), Vərəθrayna (Ares, elsewhere Herakles) as well as of a personification of Commagene.

Under the Sasanians Ahura Mazdā is represented on horse-back, almost a mirror-image of the king. Mithra is depicted at ʿTāq-e Bostān standing on a lotus flower and holding the barəsman; Anāhitā carries an ewer. Ahriman is depicted at Naqš-e Rostam under the feet of Ohrmazd's horse, as a man with little horns.

Kuṣāna coins follow the Greek practice of representing the gods in human form. Ohrmazd appears either on foot or on horseback. Farrō "glory" can assume the form of a bird, a deer, or a young man. Aθšō "fire" is a bearded deity, clothed in chiton and himation, with a garland in his right hand and thongs in his left, and with flames rising from his shoulders. Yima and Rišti (Grenet 1984, 253, sq.) appear on coins. Of the main Aməša spəntas, Xšaθra Vairya is represented. He, with the other five principal ones, is depicted on Sogdian ossuaries of the 8th century A.D. (Grenet, 1986). Apm Napāt is depicted as a young man on a Pendjikent fresco (B. Maršak, paper to the Académie des Inscriptions, 30 March 1990, CRAI, 1990, Janvier-Mars, 286-312). According to the Š nē Š 15, 1-3 and DD 40, 1-2 Ahura Mazdā is visible in human form, though intangible.

The word *handācak* in the first sentence of *Bundahišn* 189, 3 sq., "the body of a man is a *handācak* of the world," meant literally "measure," a meaning still alive in the Modern Persian *āndāzā*. Translated into Greek this would give *métron* and would, therefore, be reminded of Protagoras' celebrated sentence in Plato's *Theaetetus*, 170 d., *pañtōn chremátōn métron 'ánthrōpon*. Since this sentence, diversely interpreted, was often quoted throughout Antiquity, it may very well have been known to the Iranians.

The microcosm idea can be combined with that of man as an image of God.



According to *Dēnkart* 321, 34, “all creatures are mirrored in man, who is the symbol (*daxšak*) of Ohrmazd.” The creation of the world is said to have proceeded in successive stages, one of which was a cosmic man. The intermediate stage between Infinite Light and “all the creatures” was a form of fire (*asrōk karp* or *ātaxš karp*). Within this form of fire, which was bright, white, round and manifest afar, God created the entity called Man: *’andar ’ān asrōn karp dāt martōm ’xvanēhīt stig*. And this was Gayomart, the Primeval man. (*Dātestan of Denik*, Quest 63). According to *Bundahišn* 21, 6, Gayomart was as broad as he was high, which can hardly mean anything but that he was spherical. In this he imitated the sphericity of the “form of fire.” In the Pahlavi *Rivayat* (Dhabhar 127-37) the world is created from the body of a giant. It is probably, as Zaehner has shown (*Zurvan*, 136 sq.) that this doctrine was borrowed from the famous Indian Puruṣa-myth. This is evidently the case with the slightly different doctrine which divides the body of man “between the four castes on earth: priesthood (corresponded) to the head, warriorhood to the hands, husbandry to the belly, and artisanship to the feet.” This text occurs, in two slightly different versions, in *Dēnkart* 429, 5-10 and in *Škand Gumānik Vičār* I, 20-5. In the first one explicit reference is made to foreign sources, Indian and Greek. The Indian origin is borne out by the passage in the *Puruṣasūkta*, RV X, 90, 12: “His mouth was the Brahman; his two arms were made the warrior; his two thighs the vaiśya: from his two feet the śūdra was born.” The length of time between the Vedic hymn and the Pahlavi treatises has unnecessarily embarrassed Zaehner (*Zurvan* 138), for the doctrine was current in India.

A term occur in the other Pahlavi version (*ŠGV* I, 10) to describe man as *gēhān i kōtak* “microcosm” seems to point to Greece. It is not at all excluded that borrowings from both quarters should have concurred in enriching the Iranian doctrine of the Man-World relationship.

It may well be that Mazdeism influenced the Muslim theory of the Perfect man. The latter, however, seems to have originated chiefly in Gnosticism and Neo-Platonism, while, on the other hand, it could claim merely to interpret a Koranic message which said, in patent imitation of the Genesis, that God made Adam “in his image.” This was the cornerstone, the orthodox foundation on which the theologians have built. According to Ġazālī, summarized by Anne-Marie Schimmel (1955, p. 146), “the human forces are arranged parallel to the heavenly spheres: the heart corresponds, as centre of the lordship of God, to the divine throne, the brain to God’s pedestal, the senses to the angels, the



nerves and limbs to the different heavens, etc.”

The doctrine of the Perfect Man does not appear until al-‘Arabī, although the Brethren of Purity (*Ekwān al-ṣafā*), in the ninth century, therefore at the time of the Pahlavi treatises, professed the microcosmic function of man. And this is how a *hadīth qodsī* (quoted by Schimmel, p. 15) expressed the God-Man-World relationship: “O man, I created thee for my sake, and I created all things for thy sake.”

It is from ‘Abd-al-Raḥim al-Gili that the doctrine of the Perfect Man received its classical form. “Only the Perfect Man,” Schimmel writes (p. 152), “displays the sum of the divine attributes and carries in himself the prototypes of all things material and spiritual . . . So are God and the world but aspects of one reality, which unite in the Perfect Man.”

The frontier between gods and men, although real, in Zoroastrianism, was not impassable. As the gods could appear in human form, so men could, under certain conditions, become Gods (Humbach, 1988).

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B. Marshak in the text.