



AYĀDGĀR Ī ZARĒRĀN

AYĀDGĀR Ī ZARĒRĀN “Memorial of Zarēr,” a short Pahlavi text which is the only surviving specimen in that language of ancient Iranian epic poetry. It is preserved in a unique manuscript, written in A.D. 1322. The chief editions are those of J. M. Jamasp-Asana, *The Pahlavi Texts Contained in the Codex MK II*, Bombay, 1913, repr. Tehran, [1971-72], pp. 1-16; Pagliaro, *Il testo pahlavico Ayātkār-i Zarērān*, Rome, 1925; and D. Monchi-Zadeh, *Die Geschichte Zarēr’s*, Uppsala, 1981 (reviewed by D. N. MacKenzie, *IJ* 27, 1984, pp. 155-63). For other editions, translations, and commentaries see Monchi-Zadeh’s edition and MacKenzie’s review, pp. 9-10 and p. 163 n. 1.

The *Ayādgār ī Zarērān* celebrates an event in the early history of Zoroastrianism. Wištāsp, having accepted the “pure religion of the Mazda-worshippers” (*dēn ī abēzag ī māzdesnān*), is challenged on this account by Arjāsp, lord of the Hyōns. The wise Jāmāsp foretells that Wištāsp’s brother Zarēr and many others of his kin will die in the coming encounter. Nevertheless battle is joined. Zarēr, after fighting heroically, is foully slain by a Hyōn, Wīdrafš the sorcerer. His son Bastwar, forbidden by Wištāsp to go to the battle-field because of his youth, flouts this command, finds his father’s body, and utters a moving lament over it. He slays many Hyōns in revenge, and shoots an arrow through Wīdrafš’ heart. His cousin Spandyād, Wištāsp’s son, ends the battle by capturing Arjāsp, mutilating him, and sending him abject away.

There are numerous traces in the Pahlavi text of an older Parthian version, with Parthian words, phrases and grammatical usages scattered through it (for



these see most fully MacKenzie, loc. cit.). Parthian, and other apparently archaic, certainly obscure, elements are most concentrated in passages of reported speech, notably par. 92, Bastwar's incantation over the arrow with which he is to shoot Widrafs; par. 41, an oath-taking formula; and pars. 84-87, Bastwar's elegy for his father. C. Bartholomae (*Zur Kenntnis der mitteliranischen Mundarten IV*, Sb. Heidelberger Ak. d. Wissenschaften, 1922, 6. Abh., p. 22) suggested that this elegy might come from an epic poem. Subsequently E. Benveniste ("Le mémorial de Zarēr," *JA*, 1932, pp. 245-93) argued convincingly that virtually the whole *Ayādgār ī Zarērān* is a heroic poem, a Sasanian adaptation of an Arsacid original, although his attempt to reconstruct a series of regular six-syllable lines has had to be abandoned in the light of subsequent work (initiated by W. B. Henning) on Pahlavi verse. (For a survey of this see S. Shaked in *W. B. Henning Memorial Volume*, London, 1970, pp. 395-405. For some further remarks on the metrics of *Ayādgār ī Zarērān* see B. Utas, "On the Composition of the Ayyātkār ī Zarēran," in *Acta Iranica* 5, 1975, pp. 399-418; and G. Lazard, "La métrique de la poésie parthe," in *Acta Iranica* 25, 1985, pp. 371-99).

Avestan allusions to the struggle of Vištāspa and Zairivairi (whose name, irregularly, developed into "Zarēr") against the "wicked Arəjat.aspa" (*Yašt* 5.108, 112, 117, cf. *Yašt* 19.87) establish the antiquity of this story of "Vištāsp's battle" (*razm ī wištāspān*, *Ayādgār ī Zarērān*, par. 39). Bastwar also appears in the Avesta, as Bastavairi (*Yašt* 13.103); and various well-known Avestan characters have a part in the *Ayādgār ī Zarērān*, namely Spəntōdāta, Jāmāspa, Hutaosa, and Humāy. It is reasonable to assume that Vištāspa's victory was first celebrated at his own court by minstrel lays in the Old Avestan tongue; and that because that victory was linked with the survival of the faith, it continued to be celebrated at Zoroastrian courts and castles down the ages, passing presumably through a Younger Avestan transmission into various other Iranian languages, until Parthian minstrels finally taught it to Sasanian singers (see M. Boyce, "The Parthian *Gōsān* and Iranian Minstrel Tradition", *JRAS*, 1957, pp. 10-45; "Zariadres and Zarēr," *BSOAS* 17, 1955, pp. 463-77). The tale became part of the materials amassed by Persian priests for the Sasanian royal chronicle, the *Xwadāy-nāmag*; and partly on the basis of that work, partly perhaps from a still living oral tradition in north-eastern Iran, Daqīqī turned it into rhymed verse in the tenth century A.D. His poem was incorporated by Ferdowsī in his *Šāh-nāma* ed. Borūkīm, VI, pp. 1497ff. Monchi-Zadeh (op. cit., pp. 75-121) has re-edited Daqīqī's lines, with a textual commentary. For a systematic comparison of Daqīqī's version with the



Ayādgār ī Zarērān see A. G. and E. Warner, *The Shāhnāma of Firdausi* V, London, 1910, pp. 24-7; and for some further details B. Utas, art. cit. Other versions of the story are to be found in Ṭa'ālebī, *Histoire des rois des Perses*, ed. and tr. H. Zotenberg, Paris, 1910, repr. Tehran, 1963, pp. 262ff., and Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīk al-rosol wa'l-molūk*, ed. M. J. de Goeje, 1, Leiden, 1879, pp. 676ff., on which see Monchi-Zadeh, op. cit., pp. 10-11. The last-named version, which is the shortest, is the closest of these later renderings to the *Ayādgār ī Zarērān*. The *Ayādgār ī Zarērān* records the battle as the event of a day; and it is predominantly a celebration of the deeds of Zarēr and his son. The *Šāh-nāma* describes a prolonged campaign, and gives accounts of letters, speeches, and single combats at greater length. Moreover, it attributes the killing of Wīdrāfš not to Bastwar (“Nastūr” in Daqīqī’s rendering) but to the more famous Esfandiār (Av. Spəntōδāta, Pahl. Spandyād).

Despite the religious connection which evidently secured the story its immensely long survival, the interest in religion in the *Ayādgār ī Zarērān* is perfunctory, and the material and its handling belong essentially to heroic epic. As is usual in oral tradition, the incidentals of the tale have been changed to suit changing conditions, and the taste of successive audiences. The original lay presumably celebrated a battle between tribal chieftains, well before the Iranians adopted writing; but in the *Ayādgār ī Zarērān* Arjāsp sends a letter to Wištāsp, and Zarēr dictates an answer to the chief scribe, *dibīrān mahist* (par. 9), whose name appears as *pl'hym*. (Former editors have interpreted this as Ebrāhīm, taking the name to refer to the early employment of Semitic scribes by Iranians; Monchi-Zadeh, op. cit., p. 53, emends to *pls'm*, i.e., Aparsām/Abarsām.) Descriptions of embassy and formal audience, and the titles of courtiers and court officials are details likely to have interested aristocratic listeners, while the battle itself has been developed from a local encounter between chariot-fighters of old to the clash of imperial armies, with huge numbers engaged, and Wištāsp holding a great military review in which war-elephants and mail-clad cavalry take part. Despite such anachronisms, suited to the Arsacid and Sasanian periods, the *Ayādgār ī Zarērān* retains the conventions of heroic epic, with rich hyperbole, fixed epithets, and an abundance of similes and formal repetitions. It thus attests, in both subject-matter and treatment, the long cultivation of Iranian minstrel poetry.



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