



CATTLE

CATTLE. The word “cattle” has no precise equivalent in Iranian languages, in which bovines are commonly designated by the words for “cow,” “bull,” and “calf,” for instance, Persian *gāv* (cow), *gāv-e nar* (bull), *gūsāla* (calf), *varzā(v)* (working ox) and Pashto *γwā*, fem. *γwāya*.

i. General.

ii. In Zoroastrianism.

i. General

Several of the earliest known centers of domestication of the ox (*Bos taurus* < *Bos primigenius* “aurochs”) were located on the Iranian plateau; in Iraqi Kurdistan in particular this animal was domesticated in about 7200 b.c., later than the dog, the sheep, and the goat but much earlier than the horse (Epstein and Mason, I, pp. 244-57). As with the gayal (*Bos frontalis*) of northern India (Simoons), it is probable that the first efforts at domestication of the ox in the Near East were prompted more by religious than by utilitarian concerns: At first, it must have served as a symbolic sacrifice in place of its wild counterpart, the largest and most powerful beast known. This religious function is clear from many Iranian reliefs on which the bull is placed next to the lion. The raising of oxen for meat and leather seems to have developed only later (Brentjes, pp. 43-78).



Oxen were probably also the first animals to be exploited for work. Beginning in the 4th millennium b.c. they were harnessed to carts and plows (Bishop, p. 1938; Haudricourt and Delamarre, pp. 69-71), and in the 3rd millennium they were used throughout the Iranian world both for riding and as beasts of burden. According to de Planhol (1969, pp. 298-321), current use of the ox as a mount represents a survival from the cultural level that prevailed before the diffusion of equines; only infinitesimal traces remain in the most remote regions of the Zagros, on one hand, and Baluchistan, on the other. The use of oxen or other cattle for labor has, however, remained common, explaining the general use of the terms *gāv* (cow) and *joft-e gāv* (pair of yoked cows, yoking of two cows), or more simply *joft* (= *kīš* “plow”) to designate a unit of arable land surface (though there are many regional variants): 1 *joft* = 1 *kīš* = 2 *gāv* = 120 *man* (Digard, 1981, pp. 81-82, 233). In the well-known system of dividing crops between landowner and sharecropper, the unit of measure is always a yoke (Lambton, pp. 306-17).

That cattle raising flourished in Iran in the Middle Ages is indirectly suggested by the work of archeozoologists who believe that certain species of African zebu (*Bos indicus*) must have been imported from southeastern Iran and southern Pakistan in the 2nd/8th and again in the 6-8th/12-14th centuries (Delort, p. 292).

On the other hand, in contemporary Iran cattle raising is no longer more than a marginal and relatively unproductive activity, as beef is much less appreciated than mutton or lamb (Nyrop, pp. 352-55). The coastal regions of the Caspian and especially Gilān, with a total of 1,830,000 head of cattle, about one third of the total in Iran (*Statistical Yearbook*, pp. 203, 246), are the only parts of the country where specialized cattle breeders are found; they are the *gāleš*, a social and occupational group that summers with its herds on the Alborz piedmont and is clearly distinct from the *čūpān*, sheep and goat herders, on one hand, and the rice growers of the plain, on the other (Bazin, II, chap. VII; Pour-Fickoui and Bazin, pp. 25-80). Everywhere else (especially among the nomads, who are essentially sheep herders), individual families keep small herds of cattle, each consisting of only a few units (usually of mediocre quality), for meat and agricultural labor.

In fact, the cattle herds of Iran have shown a clear and steady decline: 6 million head in 1962-63, 5.6 million in 1972-73, 5.3 million in 1976-77 (*Iran Almanach*, p. 216). These figures reflect two developments: the progressive replacement of oxen by agricultural machinery for plowing, threshing and the



like and the concentration of milk production in a small number of modern units with higher yields. The latter development, dictated primarily by the necessity of supplying the large cities with milk (Aziri), has, however, not been as well planned as it should have been. Instead of seeking to improve indigenous types by judicious crossbreeding (as was done with the Tarentian cow in India, for example), agricultural authorities imported more than 5,000 Holsteins at great expense. Although they are certainly good milk producers, their size and food requirements are totally unadapted to Iran (Sattari, pp. 11-15).

In Afghanistan, by contrast, the total number of cattle remained relatively stable at 3.6-3.7 million head between 1967 and 1970 (*Survey of Progress*, p. 22), but obviously the situation has changed since then. The cattle of Afghanistan vary between two distinct types: Those in the eastern Hindu Kush are good milkers but small (related to the north Indian type) and suitable only for light work (light pulling and hauling, threshing, etc.); on the other hand, in northern and western Afghanistan the cows give little milk, but the bulls are excellent work animals (Dupree, p. 49).

Aside from oxen, the existence of the Asian buffalo (*Bubalus bubalis*) in Iran (Pers. *gāv-mīš*) and Afghanistan (Darī = Pers.; Pashto *mayk*, fem. *mayka*) and of the yak (*Poepagus grunniens*, Kirghiz *kotoz* from Old Turk. *qoduz*) in Afghanistan merit special mention.

Because of the unique characteristics of the buffalo (*gāv-mīš*), its distribution and breeding have been more thoroughly studied and are consequently better known, even in the Iranian world, than are those of the ox (Cockrill). The buffalo thrives in hot climates but likes to spend several hours a day in the water. This ecological characteristic partly determines its geographic distribution, on the banks of large rivers and in marshy areas, but cultural factors also play a role, though they remain little understood. For obvious reasons the best region for raising buffalo in Iran is Kūzestān, where the arrival of the beast is linked with that of the Zoṭṭ, “gypsies” deported from northern India to the marshes of lower Mesopotamia in the 1st/7th century (Westphal-Hellbusch and Westphal). Today the distribution of the buffalo in this region coincides with that of the Arabic language, for it is also found at high altitudes in the Zagros, along the Kārūn river, wherever groups of Arabic-speakers have been integrated into Lorī-speaking tribes. On the other side of the Zagros, notably in Farīdan and Čahār-Maḥāl (q.v.), the buffalo was formerly found only among Armenian villagers, who used it for farm work



until the beginning of the 14th/20th century. These animals were most often raised by the Arabs in Kūzestān and driven north by the migrating Baḳtīārī (Digard and Karimi, pp. 3-17). Another example, marginal but nevertheless significant, occurs in Gilān, where the raising of buffalo is limited to northern Ṭāleš, the southern shores of the Anzalī lagoon, and the area around Čam Kāla east of the Safīdrūd delta. It is linked to the presence in these regions of isolated bands of Kurds and is perceived as a “Kurdish specialty,” though no tendency toward such specialization is visible among the Kurds in Kurdistan or those settled at different points in the Alborz northeast of Kalkāl or in Kalārdašt (Bazin, 1988). Despite its unrivaled ability to adapt to very high temperatures, the buffalo, like the ox, is losing ground in Iran: 260,000 head in 1962-63, 240,000 in 1972-73, 230,000 in 1976-77 (*Iran Almanach*, p. 216).

In Afghanistan hardly any buffalo are found, except in the regions around Jalālābād and Qandahār, where they are used especially as draft animals. In the 14th/20th century Pashtun migrations northward have also contributed to the establishment of several buffalo herds in the Qaṭaḡan-Kondož region (Dupree, p. 49). The Afghan buffalo herds were estimated at 35,000 head in 1970-71 (Cockrill, p. 508).

In contrast to the buffalo, the yak (Kirghiz *kotoz*) is adapted to the cold and high altitudes typical of central Asia and the Himalayas (where it exists in the wild); in Afghanistan it is confined to the Pamirs, where it was imported by the Kirghiz in the 13th/19th century. There were about 3,500 head at the beginning of the 1350s Š./1970s (R. Dor, personal communication). Yak breeding remains exclusively in the hands of the Kirghiz, who rely on the animals for milk and wool, beside exploiting them for working and riding. The Kirghiz of Afghanistan know how to crossbreed the yak and the ox, but in practice they rarely if ever do it (Dor, 1976, pp. 126-32; Naumann, p. 249-53).

See also dāmdārī; [domestic animals](#).

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(Jean-Pierre Digard)

ii. In Zoroastrianism

Archeologists have established that the peoples living on the Inner Asian steppes in the mid-second millennium b.c., among whom it is reasonable to seek the ancient Iranians, were primarily stockbreeders, tilling the soil only to a very limited extent. At a site which has been identified as probably an Iranian one, by the Sintashta river in the south Cheliabinsk region, on the eastern flank of the central Urals, the inhabitants kept, around 1500 b.c., sheep, a few goats, cows and horses to pull chariots (Gening). Other sites have yielded the bones of camel and pig. The Avestan term for domesticated animals collectively was *pasu* (Skt. *paśu*, see Mayrhofer, *Etymological Dictionary* II, pp. 239-40). The people must have depended mainly on their livestock for nourishment (meat and milk), as well as for clothing and other domestic needs; and they evidently lived closely with them and were conscious of mutual dependency, looking on their community as one of cattle and men together. Zoroaster prays for moral effectiveness, "in order to prosper our cattle and men" (*pasuš vīrāng ahmākəng fradaθāi.ā*, Y.45.9), and in the Old Avestan Y. 58.6 the worshippers declare that they devote to the Holy



Spirit “cattle and men” (*pasūšvīrāng*), that is, their whole community. In *Yt.* 13.12 “cattle and men,” *pasu vīra*, are together declared to be the “best of species” (*sarədanəm vahišta*).

Although the putatively Iranian steppe dwellers kept more sheep than cows, early Avestan texts show that it was the cow (*gav-*) which was regarded as the chief representative of the *pasu*. That this was traditional is proved by the similar Indo-Aryan esteem for the cow. There are several Avestan passages in which *gav-* is used very much like *pasu* in those just cited. Zoroaster speaks of the reward to be given those “in the community of the milch cow” (*gəuš vərəzəñə azyā*, *Y.* 34.14). In *Yasna haptanḥāiti* the worshippers describe themselves as “those who live with the cow” (*yōi gəuš hača šyeinti*, *Y.* 37.2); and Mazda-worshippers are similarly identified in the probably ancient confession of faith, the *Fravarānē* (*Y.* 12.4). These passages, it has been justly said (Narten, 1986, p. 176), are to be taken literally, although complex symbolic and metaphoric meanings must be assumed together with the concrete ones. This was salutarily insisted on by Cameron, who was, however, unduly dominated by his sense of the humdrum nature of what he called the “barnyard cow.”

Basically, esteem for the cow among the Indo-Iranians can be attributed to the fact that before the relatively late domestication of horse and camel bovines were their largest and most valuable domestic animal. A cow or bull (*gav-* is masculine or feminine gender) was therefore traditionally the best offering men could make to the gods, and the *gav-* became the representative blood sacrifice, referred to in liturgies (e.g., *Y.* 11.7) and in fixed dedicatory formulas. *Gəuš hudā* (> *gōšōdā*) “beneficent cow” gave its name to the portion of meat consecrated in the daily *yasna* (Darmesteter, I, p. lxvi) and was probably used generally, in ritual contexts, “for sacrificial offerings of animal origin” (Narten, 1982, p. 146). *Gəušjīvya* (> *jīvām*), perhaps literally “cow needful for life” was used for the milk for the *parahaoma* (Darmesteter, loc. cit.; on the meaning of *jīvya* see Narten, 1982, p. 141); and *gav-* alone can also, in a ritual connection, stand for this (*Y.* 10.13). The Persian word for meat, *gōšt*, has been derived from *gəušhudā* (Humbach, 1977, II, p. 24 with n. 31, p. 29, Nachtrag); and this is evidently connected with the fact that Zoroastrians ate the meal of domestic animals only when these were sacrificed with due rites. This custom was maintained in traditional Zoroastrian centers in Iran down to the middle of the 20th century (Boyce, *Stronghold*, pp. 98, 244). *Hudā* is an Old Avestan form, which has led Humbach (1977, p. 28) to trace the formula *gəušhudā* to Zoroaster’s own time. Allusions to blood sacrifice undoubtedly occur in the



Gāθās (Humbach, 1957-58; Boyce, *Zoroastrianism* I, pp. 217-18, 227), and the lament of the cow in *Y. 29* is because it is threatened, not with death in the sacrifice, but with cruelty during its life (Duchesne-Guillemin, 1980, p. 65). Only one category of cow was not sacrificed, the *agənyā* “(she who is) not to be killed” (Narten, 1970; 1986, pp. 232-37). This term probably meant a cow in calf, the prohibition being to protect her unborn offspring, and also a milch-cow, who would have been suckling her calf. In the latter sense it would, it seems, have been a synonym for *azī* (on which see Narten, 1986, loc. cit.). The sacrifice of both continued to be forbidden in modern times (*Persian Rivayats*, ed. Unvala, I, p. 263; tr. Dhabhar, p. 264). A calf itself would never be sacrificed, since no immature creature might be offered, but the sacrifice of cows and bulls, as an especial cult-offering, was continued by Iranian Zoroastrians down to the latter part of the 19th century; the Parsis gave it up when they settled among Hindus in the 10th century, offering thereafter mainly goats (Boyce, 1966, pp. 105-06; 1967, p. 42).

The offering of a smaller animal instead of a bovine was already an old practice, the chief surrogate being the sheep. This was called *anumaya* “bleater,” but in Young Avestan the old generic term for cattle, *pasu*, came also to be used specifically for it (together with goats), evidently as the most numerous and hence representative of the Iranians’ livestock. They then applied the term *staora* to large cattle-bovines, horses, camels, and eventually the donkey (when they acquired this animal after migrating south). The earth under Yima’s rule is thus said to have been full “of small cattle and large cattle and men” (*pasvaṃčā staoranvaṃčā mašyanvaṃčā*, *V. 2.8*). All were held to be creatures of Vohu Manah/Bahman (q.v.), and hence ritually “clean” and acceptable for sacrifice, but each was evidently dedicated by standard Avestan formulas as *gav- spənta-*, the “holy cow,” as if it were indeed a cow, the ideal offering. The following is an example of such a dedication, used for the sacrifice at the fourth day after death, the *čārom*: “We send forth, O holy cow, O beneficent cow (*gao spənta gao hudā*), your consciousness and soul among the nearest created lights” (*Pursišnīhā*, ed. and tr. JamaspAsa and Humbach, pp. 52-53). The priests presumably customarily asked the laity for the “*gaospenta*,” and this term came in time to be used as a name for the animal most regularly produced, i.e., the sheep (Pers. *gōsfand*).

The above dedication expresses the Zoroastrian belief, clearly attested in the *Gāθās* (*Y. 29*), that cattle, man’s fellow creatures, also have souls; cf. a passage, probably also associated with the blood sacrifice, in *Yasna haptanḥāiti*, in



which the worshippers reverence together “our souls and (those) of domestic animals” (*ahmākānġ . . . urunō pasukāma*, *Y.* 39.1; see Narten, 1986, pp. 249, 252). The rituals of sacrifice protected, it was held, the creature’s soul, ensuring, as the *čārom* dedication indicates, that it was released to mount upwards and (according to one interpretation) be absorbed into the *Gāuš Urvan*. Hence performance of these rituals were part of man’s duty of care for Bahman’s creation. “With regard to every kindness which men practice in the house, nothing is more incumbent on them than this, that they keep full-fed the cow or fowl or domestic cattle . . . And when they kill anything they must consecrate its head” (*Šad dar-e Bondaheš* 26.3-5; on the last words see Boyce, 1970, pp. 70ff.). If the ritual is not performed, this is a sin which goes to the slayer’s account (*Persian Rivayats* I, pp. 263-64; tr. Dhabhar, p. 264). A passage datable perhaps to the 2nd century b.c., occurring in a Jewish pseudepigraphon, the *Second Book of Enoch*, has been identified as of Zoroastrian inspiration. This again links care for animals with correct sacrificial procedures and declares: “every kind of animal soul will accuse the human beings who have fed them badly. He who acts lawlessly with the soul of an animal acts lawlessly with his own soul” (*2 Enoch* 58:6-59:1; tr. F. I. Andersen in Charlesworth, ed., p. 184). Of this passage it has been said that it embodies “very ancient Zoroastrian doctrine. To protect and foster the clean animals of Ormuzd was for Zoroaster as strict a command for the believer as was a right attitude toward men In our passage, injustice to the souls of animals created by God actually ranks before injustice to men. That is an idea wholly impossible for Israel, but not striking on Iranian soil” (Otto, p. 199).

Of large cattle both the camel (*uštra*) and the horse (*aspa*) figure in the *Gāθās*, and their importance in the prophet’s community is shown by the fact that their names form, respectively, part of his own name (*Zaraθuštra*), and those of his father (*Pourušaspa*) and great-grandfather (*Haēčaṭ.aspa*). Zoroaster uses in metaphor the swiftness of chariot-horses (*Y.* 44.4; 30.10); and in one verse (*Y.* 44.18) he asks how he himself may obtain the reward of ten marcs with a stallion and a camel. This, it has been persuasively argued, represented a priestly due that would also have been a token of acceptance of his teachings (Lommel, 1955). Elsewhere the prophet seeks for another man both an immaterial reward and that of two milch cows (*gāvā azī*, *Y.* 46.19). In accordance with pastoral tradition, awards and payments were reckoned in cattle, and this usage is recorded also in the Young Avesta. A *Vidēvdād* passage lists a scale of payments due to a priest for performing a ritual cleansing: these, on a descending scale according to the social position of the person



cleansed, were a male camel, stallion, bull, milch-cow, two other kinds of cows of lesser value, and finally a lamb (V. 9.37-8; cf. V. 7.41-43).

The male [camel](#) is praised for its strength and spirit in the *yašts* (Yt. 14.11-13; Yt. 17.13); but, although evidently highly valued, it figures much less in the Avesta than the horse and never as a sacrificial beast. The Bronze Age warriors whose priests presumably composed the verses that lie behind the oldest parts of the *yašts* depended on horses to draw their war chariots and to ride (for the riding of horses see, e.g., Yt. 10.11, 20; Yt. 5.4, 112). There is a spirited description of horses pulling a war chariot (Yt. 17.12), and reference also to chariot-racing (Yt. 5.50), an activity which seems to have inspired several of Zoroaster's own metaphors. The *yazatas* (divine beings) too came to be thought of as riding in chariots, and there are poetic descriptions of their supernatural horses (e.g., Yt. 10.68, 125; Yt. 5.13, 113). The much-prized horse figures as the first of the animals which the warriors, seeking boons, offered to the divine beings, in a recurring formula of epic extravagance: "(He) sacrificed a hundred stallions, a thousand cows, ten thousand sheep" (*yazatas . . . satəm aspanəm aršnəm hazanrəm gavq...m baēvarə anumayanəm*, Yt. 5.21). Actual horse sacrifices are recorded in the Achaemenid period, notably a monthly one for the soul of Cyrus (Arrian, *Anabasis* 6.29.1.4ff.), and others devoted to the sun, "under the notion" (Herodotus, 1.126) "of giving to the swiftest of the gods, the swiftest of all mortal creatures" (cf. Xenophon, *Cyropaedia* 8.3.24). Horses were also sacrificed to waters (Herodotus, 7.113), with which wild horses were probably associated (through the poetic concept of waves as water-horses) long before the horse was tamed. [Apam Napāt](#) has the epithet "of swift horses" (*aurvaṭ.aspa-*), and it is as wild stallions that the rain-giving Tištrya and Apaoša (see [apōš](#)), spirit of Dearth, fight by Lake Vourukaša (Yt. 8.20ff.).

This probably represents an old nature myth (see Lommel, tr., pp. 48-50), but there was a creation myth about the bull which was much more important to the Iranians and which was evidently one factor which kept the *gav-* as the chief species of cattle for Zoroastrians, even after events had changed most Iranian stock breeders into farmers and greatly reduced the number of cows which they kept. The original bull myth (as it can be reconstructed from Zoroastrian sources) appears to have been that, after they had created the world, the gods sacrificed the first man, the uniquely created bull (*gav-aēvō.dāta-*), and the original plant, so that from them came all races of men and all kinds of creature and plants. In Zoroastrianism it is [Ahriman](#) who kills



rather than sacrifices; but the *yazatas*, having taken up the bull's seed to be purified in the moon, then still caused all other creatures to spring from it, so that in Zoroastrianism also the uniquely created bull is the mythical first animal (*Bundahišn*, tr. Anklesaria, pp. 80-81, 6E; pp. 86-89, 7.4-9; Boyce, *Zoroastrianism I* pp. 138-39). The recitation of the *Māh yašt* is dedicated “for the satisfaction of the moon having the seed of the bull and of the uniquely created bull (and) of the bull of many species” (*mānhahe gaočīθrahe gəušča aēvō.dātayā gəušča pouru.sarədayā xšraoθra*, *Yt.* 7.0). The uniquely created bull is similarly revered in the *Māh niyāyišn* recited thrice monthly (*Ni.* 3.2, 9). It appears to be an essentially Zoroastrian myth that at the end of time another bull, named Haḍayans, will be sacrificed to yield a mystical communion meal whereby all the blessed will be made immortal in the resurrected body (*tan ī pasēn*; *Bundahišn*, tr. Anklesaria, pp. 288-91, 34.23; *Zādspram*, ed. Anklesaria, 35.15). *The myths of these two bull sacrifices clearly helped to keep the offering of a gav– significant and highly meritorious.*

A still more effective aspect, from this point of view, of the cosmogonic myth was that the world was held to be made in seven separate “creations,” sky, water, earth, plants, animals (represented by the *gav– aēvōdāta-*), man, and fire. This belief was almost certainly pre-Zoroastrian (see Boyce, *Zoroastrianism I*, p. 146), but Zoroaster incorporated it into the heart of his religion by linking the seven creations with the seven great *Aməša Spəntas*. (Narten, 1982, has sought to show that this vital correspondence was not part of Zoroaster's own teachings, basing her case on the lack of a systematic exposition of it in the *Gāθās*, but see the review by Boyce.) In this set of correspondences the beneficent animals were assigned to the guardianship of Vohu Manah (Wahman, Bahman). They included harmless wild creatures, birds and fishes (all of which should be consecrated by a hunter as he killed them), but domestic cattle were felt to be the most important, and especially their primordial representative, the *gav-*.

One important factor in the meditations which led Zoroaster to link good thought or purpose (*vohu manah*) with the cow seems undoubtedly the social conditions of his day. The *Gāθās* show that he himself witnessed violent assaults on the pastoral way of life by marauding war-bands (see [avestan people](#)). The members of these bands, themselves “non-herdsmen” (*avāstrya-*, *Y.* 31.10), preyed on their fellow tribesmen, living “from injury to the cattle and men of the not-deceiving herdsman” (*vāstryehyā aēnaṅhō pasəuš vīrāaččā adrujyantō*, *Y.* 31.5). Quietly grazing cattle could thus come to represent peace



against strife, law against lawlessness, fertility against destruction, communal living against selfish greed, and so the cow took on a moral dimension. The harsh reality of a cattle raid has been seen to underlie the metaphysical profundities of *Y. 29* (Lincoln, pp. 149f.; but further Boyce, 1987, pp. 525-26), and the joint plight of the poor man wronged and the stolen beast is vividly expressed again in *Yt. 10.84-85*, where the *driyu-*, “faithful to Truth” (*ašō-ṭkaēša-*) but “deprived of his rights” (*apayatō havāiš dātāiš*), laments to the heavens together with the helpless cow, driven away captive “towards the abode of the Lie.”

One of Zoroastrianism’s strengths has been that its doctrines, for all their archaic complexity, demand of its adherents direct daily action on several levels; and care for domestic animals, both as an expression of *vohu manah* and as a means of honoring the great Aməša Spənta Vohu Manah, has been engrained in Zoroastrians down the generations. This duty is clearly formulated in the following Pahlavi text: “He who wishes to please Wahman in the world . . . he should please beneficent cattle (*gōspand ī hudāg*) . . . He should keep them in a pleasant, warm place . . . In summer he should store straw and corn, so that in winter they need not be kept in the fields . . . He should neither take them away from their young nor keep the young from (their) milk. Since beneficent cattle are his (Wahman’s) counterpart in the world, he who pleases . . . beneficent cattle . . . the Best Existence . . . will be his” (*Šāyest nē šāyest*, suppl., 15.9-11). This doctrine was transmitted, by precept and practice, throughout the community down to modern times (when urbanization reduced the range of its practical application), and zeal added particular observances. Sometime after the creation of the Zoroastrian calendar the custom evolved of refraining from offering blood sacrifice, if possible, on the four days dedicated to Bahman and his fellow *yazatas* Māh, Gōš Urūn, and Rām (on the ritual problems which this sometimes created see Boyce, 1970, pp. 77-78; *Stronghold*, p. 89 n. 47). The very pious abstained from eating meat throughout the month of Bahman. It was held to be especially meritorious then to give food to cattle, and in Gujarat Hindus would drive their cows into Parsi streets and villages to have them fed. Zoroastrians are, however, essentially practical, and there is no prohibition in their religion against putting animals to work, only against overworking them. It is thus incorrect to deduce that in central Iran Zoroastrian farmers do not plough with cattle because for them “the bovine is a sacred rather than a laboring animal” (Wulff, p. 260). The reason is rather that the clay soil there would impact under the heavy tread of hooves (see Boyce, 1969, p. 127). Cows and



bulls are regularly used by them as pack and riding animals, for turning millstones and for threshing. (On the careful tending which they and other livestock receive see *ibid.*, p. 131.)

There is another, important, reason for the continuing prominence of the *gav-* in traditional Zoroastrian life. As a very old and conservative religion Zoroastrianism has kept some strikingly archaic observances, among them the use of cattle urine (*gao-maēza*, *gōmēz*) as a cleansing agent. Similar practices were widely followed in the world, because of urine's ammonia content, and there was a specific Zoroastrian reason for persisting with the use of *gōmēz* in that it was held to deal powerfully with uncleanness before use was made of the good creation of water. Thus in the *barašnom* first *gōmēz* and then sand are applied and only lastly water. *Gōmēz* was used thus daily in ordinary life (see, e.g., *Persian Rivayats* I, pp. 310-15; tr. Dhabhar, pp. 294-99; M. N. Dhalla, pp. 28-29, 48, 188-90), and, although in theory the cleansing could be performed with the urine of any of Bahman's creatures (*Persian Rivayats* I, p. 311.16, tr. Dhabhar, p. 295), only bovine urine is known to have been used. This meant that cows and bulls remained necessary to the life of the community. Further, consecrated *gōmēz*, taken from bulls only, was imbibed ritually for inner cleansing. The ceremony for consecrating it, the *Nīrangdīn* (from which it takes its usual name, *nīrang*, to distinguish it from unconsecrated *gōmēz*) is a long and costly one, and a number of bulls are used therefore to provide adequate *gōmēz* for it. In Navsari, for example, in the last century 25-30 bulls would be tied up the evening before in the courtyard of the Vadi Dar-i Mihr. Nowadays eight is the usual number, and they are brought into a covered room at one end of the building (information from Dastur Dr. F. M. Kotwal). In Yazd there were two such rooms, the "Bull Halls," at one side of the Gahāmbārḱāna (see Gropp, p. 276 with Abb. 9). The Parsis also make use then of the *varasya*, the pure white sacred bull kept at a number of their major fire temples to provide hairs for the ritual *varas*. By custom the *varasya* is present during the whole *Nīrangdīn* ceremony. These bulls are revered, and form the focus for a continuing respect for the *gav-*. The institution of the *varasya* is unknown in Iran; but there the milk for the *parahaoma*, and also for a ritual lay libation to water (see *āb-zōhr*), is still regularly taken from a cow (rather than a goat, as by the Parsis). In old religious centers in India and Iran there is thus daily familiarity still with "large and small cattle."

Generally, however, matters have changed. Reformist Zoroastrians have long since abandoned the use of *gōmēz* and *nīrang*, and most Parsis do not even



know that their forbears practiced animal sacrifice, while throughout the community urbanization is extinguishing the long, complex tradition of a religious regard for cattle and the sense of a duty to care for these creatures of Bahman.

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