



GAYŌMARD (ARTICLE 2)

GAYŌMARD, in the [Zoroastrian](#) tradition, a primordial giant, the first man from whom mankind descends. In the [Avesta](#), Gayōmard is shown to be the beginning of this world, just as Sōšāns represents the end, and he is often accompanied by the sole-created Ox (*gāw ī ēwdād*). Moreover, Gayōmard is shown to be the first to accept Ahura Mazda's religious doctrine and the ancestor of humankind. In the Sasanian [Zand](#), Gayōmard is described as created by Ohrmazd, living 3,000 years in peace, and finally dying thirty years after the Onslaught of [Evil](#). Middle Persian literature adds that Gayōmard is the sixth of the seven creations (see [COSMOGONY AND COSMOLOGY i. In Zoroastrianism/Mazdaism](#)). The death of Gayōmard and of the sole-created Ox gives life to the vegetal and animal worlds, as well as to mankind. According to later Iranian tradition, he is the first man and the first king, a powerful civilization hero. In the Young Avesta the name *Gaiia-* is often found coupled with *marətan-* "mortal, human," so that Av. *Gaiia- marətan-* can be rendered as "mortal life" (Mayrhofer, 1979, I/45). Taking together the evidence provided by Pers. Kayumart/t, Gayumart/t, Ar. Jayūmart, and MPers. (Pahl.) g'yw(k)mlt' a pronunciation *Gayōmarθ* can be reconstructed (Cereti, 2004, p. 48); MMPers. *Gehmurd* rests on a different etymology.

Gayōmard, who in the later Zoroastrian tradition is seen as a superhuman, semi-divine character, is most probably the Iranian counterpart of Vedic Mārtāṇḍa, the youngest son of Aditī (RV X, 72.8.9), who came into this world through a miscarriage caused by the other Ādityas, who were jealous of his potential greatness. From this "lump," called Mārtāṇḍa in the Indian tradition,



rose Vivasvant, the progenitor of humankind (Hoffmann, 1976). The Avestan sequence *Gaiia- marətan-*, which later developed into MPers. *Gayōmard*, is evidently an innovation caused by the Iranian tendency to personify abstract concepts (Christensen, 1917, pp. 41 f.).

Not much information is found in the sacred book of the Zoroastrians, although it is clear that the compilers of the Younger Avesta were acquainted with some form of a legend relating to Gayōmard and considered him to be the first man. According to *Yašt* 13.87, Gayōmard was the first to accept *Ahura Mazda*'s teaching and was also the ancestor of the *Aryan* people. In *Yasna* 26.10, the *frauuašī* of all Aša believers (see *AŠAVAN*), both men and women, are praised, from Gayōmard to the *Saošiiaṇt*. The close relation between Gayōmard and the sole-created Ox is attested already in some Avestan passages (cf. Christensen, 1917, pp. 12-15; Bartholomae, 1904, p. 504b).

Books 8 and 9 of the *Dēnkard* provide more information on Gayōmard, showing that the compilers of the Middle Persian Zand had further elaborated his myth. This is additionally shown by the richness of details found in later Pahlavi literature. Not surprisingly, the two works where the most meaningful passages regarding Gayōmard are found are the *Bundahišn* and the *Wizīdagihā ī Zādspram*; both heavily rely on the Middle Persian Zand, and both mainly present cosmological and cosmographical material. Although differing in many details, both these treatises describe Gayōmard as a primordial giant, created at the beginning of the world. According to the *Bundahišn*, Gayōmard is *Ohrmazd*'s sixth creation:

Sixth he fashioned Gayōmarθ bright as the sun, and his height was of four average reeds, his width equal to his height, on the bank of the river *Dāitī*, that is, in the middle of the earth. Gayōmarθ (was) on the left bank, the Ox on the right bank, and their distance one from the other and also the distance from the water of the *Dāitī* was as much as their heights.

(*Bd.* 1a, 13: Cereti and MacKenzie, 2003, p. 44; tr. Anklesaria, pp. 24-25; ed. Pakzad, 1a, 15, p. 30)

The sole-created Ox (Av. *Gauu- aēuuō.dāta-*, MPers. *Gāw ī ēw-dād*) was the fifth creation and also stood on the bank of river *Dāitī*: "Fifth he fashioned the sole-created Ox in *Ērān-wēz*, in the middle of the earth, on the bank of the river



Weh Dāitī” (ibid.) In fact, Gayōmard’s existence runs parallel to that of the sole-created Ox. Both stood on the banks of the Dāitī, where they lived together for 3,000 years prior to the Onslaught of Evil, both eventually fell, due to the pollution brought into material creation by [Ahriman](#), and each is the prototype of his own kind. The sole-created Ox, which is regarded by the majority of texts to be a bull, although some passages, such as *Zādspram* 2, 9 and less explicitly *Bundahišn* 1a, 12, imply that it was a female, died at the moment of Ahriman’s attack, while Gayōmard survived thirty years—a striking number, since it corresponds to [Zoroaster](#)’s age when he first went to converse with Ohrmazd. Fifty-five different types of grain and twelve medicinal herbs rose from the dead body of the Ox, while from his sperm, purified by the light of the moon, a bull and a cow were born, the ancestors of 282 animal species (*Bundahišn* 6E, tr. Anklesaria, pp. 80-81; ed. Pakzad, p. 109). Similarly, at the moment of Gayōmard’s death his sperm fell to the ground and was purified by the sun.

At the time of the Onslaught, Ahriman sent [Astwidat](#), the demon of death, against Gayōmard, but to no avail, since the First Man could not pass away before the conclusion of the thirty years which had been allotted to him. At the end of this period, Gayōmard died, falling on his left side. Metals were born from his body, while his sperm fell to the ground. Nēryōsang, the messenger of Ohrmazd, took two-thirds of the seminal liquid under his protection, and Spandarmad (see [ARMAITI](#)) the remaining third. From the fallen seed, forty years later the first human couple, Mašya and Mašyāne, came out of the earth in the form of rhubarb plants (*Bundahišn* 4, 10-28; 6F, 9, tr. Anklesaria, pp. 48-63 and 82-83; ed. Pakzad, pp. 58-66 and 112-13; *Zādspram* 2, 10-11 and 18-22; 3, 67-76). After Gayōmard’s death, Ahriman attacked the [fire](#), and the cosmic battle began.

Gayōmard’s legend, together with that of his children, was also used to demonstrate the antiquity and sanctity of *xwēdōdah*, the endogamic marriage of the Zoroastrians (see [MARRIAGE ii. Next-Of -Kin Marriage In Zoroastrianism](#)). In fact, Gayōmard was born from a sexual intercourse between Ohrmazd and his own daughter, Spandarmad; later, Gayōmard’s sperm impregnated his own mother, Spandarmad, to give birth to Mašya and Mašyāne, who, coupling with each other, gave birth to human beings. Thus humankind is the product of the three main forms of *xwēdōdah*: those between father and daughter, son and mother, and brother and sister. Particularly interesting in this respect is *Dēnkard* 3, 80, which is confirmed, at



least in part, by *Dādestān ī dēnīg*, 64, 2 (chap. 65, tr. West, pp. 199-200; ed. Anklesaria, p. 127 [chap. 64]). Furthermore, it is noteworthy that Gayōmard is assigned a prominent role in Zoroastrian religion, being the first to accept the Good Religion in its entirety (*Dēnkard* 5, 1, 8, indirectly validated by *Dēnkard* 3, 143, 2).

The Iranian myth on the primordial man presents striking similarities to the Scandinavian origin myth, showing what may well be a common Indo-European background, although A. Christensen (1917, I, p. 37) prefers to reconstruct the transmission of Iranian themes to the Caucasus and from there, through the intermediation of the Ostrogoths, to the Scandinavian people. Particularly interesting is *Bundahišn* 6F, where Gayōmard's birth [horoscope](#) is given, corresponding to the so-called horoscope of the world found in *Bundahišn* 5a (MacKenzie, 1964, pp. 513-17 and 522-23; Raffaelli, 2001, pp. 59-135). This clearly depends on the traditional belief of the Zoroastrians, according to which the world as we know it, that is, the world of *gūmēzišn*, came into being in year 6,000, when the Assault took place (on the Mazdean cosmic period, see Cereti, 2005). According to Christensen (1917, p. 32), in the Younger Avesta Gayōmard is seen as the prototype of humankind. Later, in Pahlavi literature, we find a situation of transition, in which Gayōmard, although mainly described as the first man, begins to take up traits characteristic of the first king. This was a trend that was further evolved in the works of early Islamic historiographers, who were well aware of Zoroastrian tradition, and which found its logical evolution in [Ferdowsi's](#) work. There Gayōmard is depicted as first king, being one of the great heroes of civilization.

In this respect *Aogāmadaēcā* 85-87 is of some interest. This text of uncertain dating (JamaspAsa, 1982, pp. 9-10), sketches Gayōmard's legend, and the hero is called *garšāh* "King of the Mountain" in Pāzand, *gilšāh* "King of Clay" in the late and secondary Pahlavi version, but *mahārājā* "great king" in the Sanskrit version, probably later than the 12th century (JamaspAsa 1982, pp. 46-47 and 80-81). Islamic texts oscillate between *garšāh* and *gilšāh*, and no definitive solution can be proposed, although it seems more probable that the earliest title was *garšāh*. The first member of the compound derives ultimately from Indo-Iranian **gari-* (cf. Av. *gairiia-*, Ved. *girí-*, Khot. *gara-*, *ggari-*, Sogd. *yar*), then changed into *gilšāh* due to the influence of the many Near Eastern traditions according to which man is created from clay (Christensen, 1917, p. 45, n. 3). The evidence provided by the *Dēnkard* (DkM, p. 29, 1-2 = B, p. 12, 4),



where Gayōmard is called *gilšāh* (lit. clay king; Pahl. TYNAMLKA), is not a proof against this hypothesis, since it only attest that this confusion had already taken place in the 9th century (see also JamaspAsa 1982, p. 80, n. a).

Early Islamic historians all know one or more versions of Gayōmard's legend, mainly derived from the *Xwadāy-nāmag*, but they often show interesting variants that attest to the existence of different versions of this narrative, some of which may have been taken from oral traditions. Among the main authors one may mention Ya'qubi (d. 897), Qodāma (d. 922), [Ṭabari](#), [Bal'ami](#), Mas'udi (d. 956), Ḥamza Eṣfahāni (d. 961), K̲w̲ārazmi (ca. 975), Ṭa'ālebi (d. 1038), and [Bīrūni](#) (Christensen 1917, pp. 64-75). When studying the Islamic versions of Gayōmard's legend, one must always take into account that Arab and Persian historians often combine earlier versions of the story or join Iranian themes with legends and stories current in the Semitic world (Christensen, 1917, I, p. 84). However, these authors still told a story that is not too far from what is narrated in the Middle Persian texts. In general, in early Islamic historical literature Gayōmard is still described mainly as the first man, and he often carries the title of *gilšāh* or *garšāh*, although he was also seen as the most powerful of men, reigning over others. It was only with the work of the great Persian epic poet, Ferdowsi that things changed, since his narratives build on more ancient materials. In his *Šāh-nāma*, Gayōmard is the first king, who ruled thirty years:

Crown and throne did he establish, and king was he. When he became lord of the world he built his first dwelling in the mountains, where he held court and he and his people wore leopard skins. He introduced mankind to a new kind of food and a new kind of clothing and reigned thirty years in this world, the sun shining on his throne.

(*Šāh-nāma* I, p. 21, ll. 5-9)

According to Ferdowsi's tale, Gayōmard had a beautiful and brave son, Siāmak, who was killed in an ambush ordered by Ahriman. Thereafter, Gayōmard adopted as heir his own grandson, [Hōšang](#), who one year later led an army of wild animals, birds, and [paris](#) to a victory over the evil militia. Hōšang killed the black [div](#) (demon), son of Ahriman, with his own hands, skinning him and tearing off his head. Having obtained his victory and revenge, Gayōmard died satisfied. The step between first man and first king is



quite short, and, as time went by, Islamic authors tended more and more to consider Gayōmard as the first king, the one who established monarchy among mankind. Ferdowsi goes one step further: his Gayōmard is the first king and a great culture hero, who elevated humankind, teaching men and women to use clothing and find food; he also taught them the Religion (*dēn*) and gave them the first laws (Christensen 1917, pp. 88-90).

In the *Mojmal al-tawāriḡ wa'l-qeṣaṣ*, a work dating from the 12th century, the syncretism between Iranian and Semitic traditions is already very advanced. Later accounts, such as those by Mirkvānd and K̲vāndamir, enrich the legend with much new material, some of which is derived from earlier themes freely reinterpreted; other material is original.

ʿAbd-al-Karim Šahrastāni (d. 1153), author of the *Ketāb al-melal wa'l-neḡal*, in the chapter on the sect of the Zarāduštiya, says that Gayōmard was the first king and reigned in Eṣṭakr—a version of the story which confirms the narrative known from the *Šāh-nāma*. More interesting is the chapter of describing the beliefs of the Gayōmartiya, who are defined as those who believe in Gayōmard's primacy. Here it is said that they believe in two principles, Yazdān and Ahriman, and that the former existed from the beginning, while the latter was created when Yazdān asked himself what would have been the nature of his adversary, had he had one. This thought gave birth to darkness, which was called Ahriman. Remarkably, the opinions attributed by Šahrastāni to this sect remind one of the *Zurwānite* credo, although the latter postulated the existence of a third entity, *Zurwān*, who generated both Ohrmazd and Ahriman (cf. Christensen, 1917, pp. 78-79, 85-86; Hartmann 1953, pp. 92-103). Biruni reports a similar story (Sachau, 1878, p. 99; 1879, p. 107).

To conclude, it can be said that Gayōmard was certainly a central figure in Zoroastrian cosmography and cosmogony, who had roots in the ancient Indo-Iranian past, but whose myth was entirely developed only by the Mazdean clergy (cf. Shaked, 1987, p. 239, n. 3 and pp. 246-52). His legend gradually acquired new traits in the course of the pre-Islamic period and appears fully blown by the end of the *Sasanian* empire. The memory of this character was preserved in Islamic times, although in reputation he could not rank with the most famous culture heroes of Iranian epics and other literature, such as Jam (see *JAMŠID*) or *Ferēdūn*, or popular heroes such as Rustam or *Kay Husrow*. Since he was more a creation of Zoroastrian priestly and religious circles than a hero whose deeds were sung by the minstrels, his importance was bound to



decrease in the new intellectual context of the Islamic period, But the *Šāhnāma* clearly maintains the memory of a prehistoric period when Gayōmard reigned over a people dressed in animal skins and living in the mountains.

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