



# MITHRA I. MITRA IN OLD INDIAN AND MITHRA IN OLD IRANIAN

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## MITHRA

### i. MITRA IN OLD INDIAN AND MITHRA IN OLD IRANIAN

The name of the Indo-Iranian god Mitra (Vedic Mitra, Avestan Miθra, Old Persian Mitra, Miθra instead of the genuine OP form \*Miça) is based on the common noun *mitrá* “contract” with the connotations of “covenant, agreement, treaty, alliance, promise.” This meaning of the common noun was recognized in the 19th century and codified by C. Bartholomae (*AirWb.*, col. 1183), who, however, took the god Miθra as an Aryan sun deity without clarifying the relation between the common noun and the name. A. Meillet (1907) rectified earlier interpretations, such as the idea that Mitra represents light or the sun considered as a moral being, which would make the common noun derive from a function of the god (for a discussion of these views, see Schmidt, 1978, pp. 344 ff.). Meillet showed that the abstract meaning of the common noun largely agrees with the character and functions of the god. Mitra is thus the personification and deification of the concept “contract.”

Meillet used an etymology (derivation from an Indo-European root, \**mei* “to exchange”) which is only one of several possibilities, none of which can be



proved. L. Gray (1929, pp. 96 ff.) argued for a derivation from the root \**mē* “to measure,” assuming that Mitra was the designation of the sun as the “measurer” of the day and that the ethical aspects accrued to him secondarily (quoted with approval by Gh. Gnoli, 1979, p. 727). Though Miθra is closely associated with the sun in the Avesta, he is not the sun (cf. Boyce, 1975a, p. 69), and the Vedic Mitra is not either (cf. Gonda, 1972, pp. 54-61). The identification with the sun occurs in both, Iran and India, only later. The virtual identity of the Avestan Miθra with the sun was, however, argued for by H. Lommel (1962), but refuted by I. Gershevitch (1975, pp. 75 ff.). A completely different interpretation is offered by G. von Simson (1997, pp. 22 ff.) who deduces from *Yašt* 10.13 and 95 that Miθra is both the morning and the evening star (Venus), while in the Veda Miθra is supposed to be the morning star and Varuṇa the evening star (pp. 8 ff.).

The range of meaning of the common noun is best exemplified by two Avestan passages, viz. *Vendidad* 4 and *Yašt* 10.116-17. In *Vd.* 4.2 we find a scale of *miθra* and the punishments for breaking them. The first two in the list, a *miθra* concluded by word and one by handshake do not tally with the other four, viz. *miθra* of the size of a sheep, an ox, a slave, and a land. As Lüders (1917) has shown, the list of the last four closely agrees with Indian ones which refer to the punishment of a king who breaks his promise to reward a person: relatives of the king will be killed. Also in *Vd.* 4.5 a broken *miθra* does away with relatives. It has been long recognized that in this context *miθra* means “contract” or “promise,” which is the narrowest connotation of the term. *Yt.* 10.116-17 gives a list of the degrees of sanctity of different *miθra*: between friends it is 20-fold, 30-fold between fellow-citizens, 40-fold between partners, 50-fold between husband and wife, 60-fold between fellow students, 70-fold between disciple and teacher, 80-fold between son-in-law and father-in-law, 90-fold between brothers, 100-fold between father and son, 1,000-fold between two countries; 10,000-fold is the *miθra* of the religion (because the breach would amount to apostasy). The inclusion of natural relationships in this list makes it impossible to take *miθra* here in the sense of “contract.” The sense of “alliance” is more appropriate since an alliance can include an involuntary relationship which is binding (cf. Brereton, 1981, pp. 27 f., contra Thieme, 1975, pp. 24 f.). “Alliance” is the more encompassing sense, and it is the sense which is predominant in the *Mihr Yašt* and frequent also in the Veda. In particular, the fact that in later Sanskrit *mitra* means “friend” and in New Persian *mehr* means “love, friendship” has led some scholars to reject Meillet’s thesis. E. Herzfeld (1947, p. 467) assumed the virtual identity of *miθra* with the



later Sanskrit and New Persian meanings. Though admitting the connotation “contract, promise” in certain contexts, he defined *miθra* as “the moral obligation on which the society was founded.” *Yt.* 10.116-17 can support this definition, but the claim that Mitra was not a pale personification of the abstract “contract,” but “the friend,” is hardly convincing, since “contract, alliance” is very well suited to be the moral foundation of society whose welfare depends on peace, on people getting along with each other. A view similar to Herzfeld’s was expressed by W. Lentz (1964, 1970), who argued that a more general definition like “piety” would also do justice to the religious aspect. J. Gonda (1972, 1973) insisted on Vedic *mitrá* “friend, friendship,” not “contract, contract-partner,” and stressed the god’s benevolence and helpfulness (for more detailed discussion of these views, see Kuiper, 1973, pp. 227 ff.; Thieme, 1975, pp. 24 f.; Boyce, 1975a, p. 26; Schmidt, 1978, pp. 351 ff.).

The expression for concluding a contract in Avestan is *miθrəm kar* (*Vd.* 4.3), in Vedic *mitráṃ dhā* (*Rgveda* [*RV*] 10.108.3). In Avestan there is also the expression *miθrəm fras* “to mutually ask a promise from each other” (*Yt.* 10.2), which has a parallel in Vedic *sám pras* “to come to an agreement” (*RV* 1.165.3; 4.18.2; see Thieme, 1975, p. 27). To break a contract is in Avestan *miθrəm druj* “to deceive a contract” (*Yt.* 10.45) or *miθrəm jan* “to smash a contract” (*Yt.* 10.2; cf. 10.82, *miθrō.zyā* “violating the contract”); both expressions are known in Old Indian, though not in the *RV* (cf., however, *dróghamitra* “whose contract, promise is a lie, deception,” *RV* 10.89.12). The demon Namuci addresses Indra, by whom he has been tricked, as *mitradruh* and *mitrahan* (*Maitrāyaṇīya saṃhitā* 4.3.4). Although in later Sanskrit *mitra* is generally only “friend,” the older meaning may have survived in the *Mahābhārata* (Mehendale, 1988). Also in Middle and New Persian Zoroastrian sources *mihr* is still understood as “contract, promise” (see Schmidt, 1978, pp. 351, 377).

There are quite a number of close agreements in the vocabulary used in connection with the Avestan *Miθra* and the Vedic *Mitra*. This shows that, not only the name, but also many of his characteristics are inherited from Indo-Iranian. The vocabulary listed here is not exclusive to *Mitra*, but is shared with other gods, in particular with *Varuṇa* and the *Ādityas*, to whom *Mitra* belongs. It is legitimate to include them here because the *Ādityas* are a close-knit group (cf. Thieme, 1975, p. 29). The Avestan references are to the *Mihr Yašt* (*Yt.* 10), the Vedic ones to the *Rgveda* (*RV*).

*Miθra/Mitra* is worthy of worship (*yesnya*, 10.5; *yajñiyá*, *RV* 9.77.5). He is characterized by riches (*raēvant*, 10.78; *revánt*, *RV* 8.47.9). *Mitra* is of the



breadth of the earth (*zəm.fraqā*, 10.95) and goes around the edges of earth and surveys every thing between heaven and earth, Mitra has breadth (*sapráthas*, RV 3.59.7) and reaches around heaven and earth. Miθra/Mitra is honored with obeisance (*nəmah*, 10.6; *namasyà*, RV 3.59.4). He rescues his worshippers from anxiety (*qzah*, 10.22-23; *ámhas*, RV 3.59.2). He is wakeful (*jagauruuah*, 10.7; *jāgrvās*, RV 1.136.3), without sleep (*axvafna*, 10.7), as the Ādityas are (*ásvapnaj*, RV 2.27.9). The dwellings of the deceivers of the treaty are destroyed (*frazinte*, 10.38), while the person who exerts himself in his obligation to Mitra is not destroyed (*ná jiyate*, RV 3.59.2, cf. 10.152.1). Miθra is called upon for mercy (*marždikā*, 10.5) and is very merciful (*huvāmarždika*, 10.140), Mitra and Varuṇa are called forgiving (*mṛḍáyant*, RV 1.136.1), but more often Varuṇa alone is asked for mercy. Miθra can be angry (*zarəmna*, 10.47), and so can Mitra (*jujurāṇá*, RV 10.12.5). Miθra is the punisher (*acaētar*) of the deceivers of the alliance (10.26), Mitra, Varuṇa and Aryaman are the punishers (*cetár*) of untruth (RV 7.60.5). Miθra protects the country which takes a firm position in the good care (of him and the contract) (*yātayeiti*, 10.78); inversely, Mitra lets the people take a firm position (*yātayati*, RV 3.59.1) in keeping their contracts. He cannot be tricked (*aḍaoγəmna*, 10.24); the Ādityas are frequently called so (*ádabdha*, e.g., RV 1.24.13, 2.27.3 and 9, 7.60.5). Miθra has watchers and is himself a watcher (*spas*, 10.45, 46); Varuṇa has watchers (*spas*, RV 7.87.3; 9.73.4).

The Avestan hymn to Miθra starts with the statement of Ahura Mazdā that he created Miθra and made him as worthy of worship and prayer as himself (10.1). Then it is stated that a knave who deceives a treaty destroys the whole country, killing the truthful as much as a hundred sorcerers would. This is immediately followed by the injunction not to break a contract, whether concluded with a deceitful person or a truthful follower of the good Religion, for the contract is valid for both (10.2). Miθra, when deceived by the lord of the house, or the clan, or the tribe, or the country, smashes their respective domains (10.18; cf. 83-87). The treaty between countries is dominant in the hymn. Miθra aids those who are true to the treaty and punishes those who break it. He grants swiftness of horses and progeny to those do not deceive him (10.3). He robs the treaty-breakers of the vigor of their arms, the strength of their feet, the light of their eyes, the hearing of their ears (10.23; cf. 49). The arrows, spears, sling-stones, knives, and maces of those who enrage Miθra become ineffectual (10.39-40). He is a warrior driving a chariot. His main weapon is the mace (10.96, 132), but he also uses arrows, spears, hatchets and knives (10.102, 129-30). The really bloody work is done by Vərəθrayna, Miθra's



companion, who in his manifestation as a boar kills at one blow, knocks the opponent down, smashes his vertebrae, the pillars of life and the springs of life, cuts everything to pieces, mingles bones, hair and blood (10.72; cf. 127 and Gershevitch, 1959, pp. 166 ff.). To those who are faithful to the treaty Miθra brings rain and makes plants grow (10.61); this refers to the ruler, since the welfare of a country depends on his moral behavior (cf. Thieme, 1975, p. 32). Miθra provides (to the lords) great houses with busy women and fast chariots, with rugs and cushions, cattle-herds and slaves to the truthful one who worships him, regularly mentioning his name (10.29, 31). But also the pauper following the doctrine of truth, but deprived of his rights, and even the maltreated cow invoke him, and he comes to their assistance (10.84-87). Miθra is ever wakeful, without sleep (10.7) and as such the enemy of sloth (10.97, 134); he has a thousand ears and ten thousand eyes and watchers on every height and every outlook (10.45). He is watching also in the dark (10.141). Miθra catches also the person who thinks that the god does not see all the evil and deceitful deeds (10.105). He is the first god to approach across the mountain-range Harā in front of the sun; from there he surveys the whole land of the Āryans (10.13). Haoma worshipped him on the highest peak of the mountain range Harā (10.88). The *Aməša Spəntas* consider Miθra as the overlord (*ahu*) and judge (*ratu*) of the living beings (10.92). Miθra is the beneficent protector and guardian of all creatures (10.54; cf. 103). He is the lord of the country (10.78, 99) and the lord of the country of all countries (10.145). As such he is wicked and very good to countries and men and rules over peace and war (10.29). He grants peaceful and good dwellings (10.4). He is the one who draws the borderlines (10.61) to prevent conflict between neighbors. He smashes the heads of the demons (*daēuua*, 10.26), who are afraid of him (10.97, 99), and is the foe of the supernatural witches (*pairikā*, 10.26). Miθra and Ahura strike down the evil sons of those who offer heavy libations (10.113), possibly bloody ones like the daēvic Viiāmburas (*Yt.* 14.57). On the other hand, Miθra seems to have been worshipped with sacrifices of small and large cattle, birds and fowls (10.110). According to Gershevitch (1959, p. 271), however, Miθra is worshipped together with the animals (rejected by Zaehner, 1961, p. 117; Boyce, 1975a, p. 151, n. 23). Miθra's most frequent epithet "characterized by wide cattle-pastures" (*vouru.gaoiioiti*) reflects his concern with peaceful conditions: cattle can only graze freely when there are no raids by neighbors with whom no treaty exists.

In stanzas 53-55 Miθra complains to Ahura Mazdā that, though he is the beneficent protector of all creatures, men do not worship him with worship



mentioning his name (*aoxtō.nāmana yasna*) as other gods are worshipped. If men would worship him in this way, he would come to them. The same is said of the star Tištriia (Sirius; *Yt.* 8.10-11), who is defeated by the demon Apaoša “Dearth” because he was not properly worshipped until Ahura Mazdā himself worshipped him (8.23-25). Miθra shares the epithet *aoxtō.nāman* “whose name is mentioned” with Tištriia “Sirius” (*Yt.* 8.11), Sraoša “Obedience” (*Yasna* 3.20), Ātar “Fire” (*Vispered* 9.5), Vanant “Vega” (*Yt.* 21.1), and a god who is not identified (*Y* 22.27). The complaints of Miθra and Tištriia indicate that they were ignored in earlier worship which followed the practice in the Gāθās of Zaratustra, where none of the traditional pagan gods is mentioned. J. Kellens (1976, pp. 128 ff.) assumes that the gods addressed by name were the *Aməša Spəntas*, the Waters, and the Frauuašis (see *FRAVAŠI*); and according to him (1976, p. 130, n. 22) the epithet *aoxtō.nāman* properly belongs to Ātar and Sraoša, who are deities in the Gāθās. He surmises that the name of the old Persian month Anāmaka “nameless,” December-January) refers to Miθra. If, however, Mitra was connected with the middle of the year already in Indo-Iranian (see Schmidt, 1978, p. 378), this conflicting claim is improbable. It is more likely that the month of the winter solstice was considered as inauspicious, and accordingly the nameless month may be connected with the late Sanskrit *anāmaka*, a designation of the intercalary month which was added at the winter solstice and in which no religious ceremonies were performed.

The *Ṛgveda* has only one hymn to Mitra, which originally must have consisted of two (3.59.1-5 and 6-9). It was for a long time considered pale and insignificant, but P. Thieme (1957, pp. 38 ff.) has shown that it quite clearly reflects the main characteristics of the god. Mitra makes peoples take a firm position (*yātayati*) in their relationship to each other, viz. stick to their agreements (1, 5); cf. 5.65.6, where Mitra and Varuṇa make people take a firm position and lead them together, from which it appears that they prevent a conflict. Mitra supports heaven and earth, observes the settlements without blinking (3.59.1). Whoever exerts himself in the commitment to Mitra shall enjoy refreshments, is not killed; no anxiety reaches him (3.59.2); the worshippers who abide by the commitment to Mitra want to be without illness, rejoice in invigoration (through rain, cf. 7.64.2), stand with firm knees (without fear, cf. 7.82.4, where Indra and Varuṇa are firm-kneed in the promotion of peace) on the earth and will be in the favor and receive the benevolence of Mitra (3.59.3). Mitra, worthy of worship and friendly, has been born just now as a king, leader of good rulership, i.e., he manifests himself in



Agni, the fire (3.59.4; cf. 5.3.1, Thieme, 1957, pp. 49 f.) into which the oblation for Mitra is poured (3.59.5). Mitra keeps and supports the settlements; his help has winning power (3.59.6); he reaches around heaven and earth with his fame (3.59.7); for him the five peoples have put reins on themselves (by avoiding conflict and keeping the peace), and he supports the gods (3.59.8). Among gods and men Mitra has just now created refreshments (rain, cf. 3.59.3) for the worshippers (3.59.9).

To supplement the statements of this hymn, some significant traits may be quoted from other hymns. The relationship between gods and men is viewed under the aspect of contract (e.g., 10.100.4, 1.120.8-9; cf. Schmidt, 1958, pp. 37 f.). The connection of Mitra and *mitrá* “ally or mediator” with peace is rather frequent (2.4.3; 11.14; 4.33.10; 7.82.5-6; 8.31.14). As guest and ally among men Agni mediates between them and the gods (2.4.1). Agni makes husband and wife unanimous like a well-established ally or mediator (5.3.2). Agni has taken seven steps for truth, generating Mitra an alliance for himself (10.8.4). Alliances were concluded by taking seven steps in front of the fire, a practice continued in the marriage ritual to the present day (cf. Lüders, 1959, p. 38; Thieme, 1957, pp. 49 f.). The bridegroom is called *mitrá* (5.52.14, 10.27.12). Identified with Mitra, Agni fixed the two worlds apart and made the darkness pregnant with light (6.8.3). Savitar, the god Impeller, dwells together with the rays of the sun, encompasses the night from both sides, and becomes Mitra (5.81.4). Agni, the embryo of the waters, was placed among the human clans, making the contracts (between gods and men?) successful by the truth (3.5.3; cf. Thieme, 1975, p. 38); when he is kindled he becomes Mitra (3.5.4). In the Avesta Miθra is not attested as a mediator, but he occurs as one in Pahlavi sources (cf. Schmidt, 1978, p. 377) and in Plutarch’s *De Iside et Osiride* 46 where he is the mediator (*mesítēs*) between Horomazes and Areimanius (see Belardi, 1977, pp. 32 ff.).

The main difference between the Vedic Mitra and the Avestan Miθra is that the former lacks the martial qualities almost completely. These are in the Veda taken over by the warrior god Indra. It is Indra who has the power over the alliances he is the foremost lord over the alliances (1.170.5). He is the avenger who crushes those who deceive the institutions of Mitra and Varuṇa by deceiving an ally, who is asked to sharpen his weapon against those without *amíttra* “without contract, treaty” (10.89.8-9). Indra is the god who most frequently takes action against those who are *amíttra*, i.e., have either refused to make peace or do not recognize the god Mitra. Indra purifies the two worlds



by the truth (*rtá*), burning the deceivers (*drúh*), who do not recognize Indra (*aníndra*), and the *amíttra* lie caught, slain and smashed (1.133.1). The opposition between Mitra and Indra is defined in 7.82.5: Mitra befriends Varuṇa through peace Indra makes martial ostentation with the Maruts (7.82.5). There are, however, a few cases in which Mitra and Varuṇa do use weapons. They use snares (7.63.3) and arrows (e.g., 8.100.3, 5), which are magical ones supposed to punish the violators of truth and contract. Martial characteristics, however, can be seen in their mounting a chariot (5.63.1) and when their chariot harms the person who is acting falsely (*Atharvaveda* 4.29.7). It is uncertain whether these isolated instances are a survival of an original Indo-Iranian trait or whether they are coincidental. At any rate, additionally, the weapons of both Miθra and Indra are actually magical, because they work through those of their protégés. Miθra is a spiritual, supernatural (*mainiauuu*) god, and so also are his horses, chariot, and weapons.

The Avestan Miθra is accompanied by Verəθrayna, the god Victory, who slays the enemies (*Yt.* 10.70-72; cf. 127), doing what Miθra does himself throughout the hymn. In *Yt.* 14.47 Verəθrayna brings disease and death to the person who deceives Miθra and abandons (the judgment of) Rašnu. Since Verəθrayna corresponds to Indra it may be asked whether it was originally he who did the fighting for Miθra, and Miθra then usurped his role, or whether in India Indra usurped Mitra's role. Given the general character of each god, the former solution seems more likely (for the opposite opinion, cf. Thieme, 1975, p. 31). R. C. Zaehner (1961, pp. 109 f.) believed that Miθra's aggressiveness must be borrowed from a daēvic source: Indra and Sarva, relegated to status of demon, "take their revenge by insinuating their unlovable characteristics into the personality of Mithra, while Indra transforms himself into Verethraghna." This turns the more likely development on its head. It is rather Indra Vṛtrahan who replaced the Indo-Iranian \*Vṛtraghna in India.

Sraoša "Obedience" assists Miθra in battle together with Rašnu "Judge": Miθra chases the enemy armies hither, Rašnu chases them thither, and Sraoša chases them everywhere, i.e., he scatters them (*Yt.* 10.41). He participates in Miθra's fight against the evildoer along with Nairiō.sarṇha, the messenger of the gods (10.52). He drives on Miθra's right and Rašnu "Judge" on his left (10.100). Later Rašnu drives on Miθra's right and Razištā Cistā on his left (10.126, for an interpretation of this change of position, see Gershevitch, 1959, p. 39). Sraoša has many traits in common with Miθra, and the Srōš Yašt (*Y.* 57) is probably



largely dependent on the Mihr Yašt (see Kreyenbroek, 1985, p. 166 and p. 93 contra Kellens, 1979, pp. 714 f.).

Once, Miθra is virtually identified with Rašnu (*Yt.* 10.79-81; see Gershevitch, 1959, p. 223). In his own Yašt, Rašnu is present at the oath ceremony or ordeal (*varah*), which takes place before the fire and with other ritual requisites (*Yt.* 12.3). He comes to help the innocent, but destroys the thief who has perjured himself (12.5-8). In *Vendidad* 4.54-55 a suspect is made to drink the golden oath-water, which brings out the truth by causing jaundice (cf. Schwartz, 1989) if he knowingly perjures himself by contradicting Rašnu, the judge, and deceiving Miθra, the contract or promise. In that case, he is severely punished. Here we find Miθra connected with the oath, a feature which is also known from foreign sources. According to Xenophon (*Cyropaedia* 7.5.53), Cyrus the Great swore by Miθra, and so did Artaxerxes II (Plutarch, *Artaxerxes* 4) and his brother Cyrus (Xenophon, *Oeconomicus* 4.24).

Aši “Reward” guides the chariot of Miθra (10.68), and she is a constant companion of Sraoša, as appears from his epithet *ašīia* “accompanied by Aši” (see Gershevitch, 1959, p. 194).

Ātar, the god Fire, also belongs to the companions of Miθra. He grants the straightest path (of truth) to those who do not deceive the contract (*Yt.* 10.3). The blazing Fire which is the Kavyan Fortune (*xvarənah*) flies in front of Miθra (10.127; see Gershevitch, 1959, p. 278) and probably brings the Fortune to the ruler who keeps his promises, as Miθra himself bestows riches and fortune (10.108). The association of Miθra with fire can be deduced from later Iranian and foreign sources, in particular from the fire ordeal which is to verify the truth of sworn depositions (see Boyce, 1975b; 1975a, pp. 35 f.). According to M. Boyce, in the Avesta this connection extends to the celestial fire, the sun (1975a, pp. 28 f.). In India Varuṇa’s abode is in the water (Lüders, 1951, pp. 12 f.), and he is present in the oath and ordeal water (*ibid.*, pp. 28 ff.). Alliances (*mitra*) were concluded in front of the fire (*ibid.* pp. 38 f.). In Iran Miθra has taken over the administration of oaths and verifies them by the fire ordeal.

Miθra’s association with the sun is clearly defined in *Yt* 10.13: He is the first of the spiritual gods to rise over the mountain range Harā before the swift-horsed, immortal sun. In the Avesta there is no identification of the two; the *Xoršēd Niyāyeš* is recited in daily prayer together with the *Mihr Niyāyeš*, only in late Pahlavi texts is the sun called God Mihr (Boyce, 1975a, p. 69). The long arms of Miθra, with which he catches the liar whether he is in the east or west,



at the source of the mythic river Rañhā or the middle of the earth (10.104), have been compared with the arms of the Vedic Savitar, who instigates sunrise and sunset (Kellens, 1979), but from this it does not follow that Miθra is the sun. The identification of Miθra with the sun is first explicitly attested in a Greek source: Strabo (first century B.C.) states that in their worship the Persians call the sun Miθra (*Geographica* 15.13.732). Such an identification may also be reflected in the sacrifice of bulls to Zeus and horses to the Sun reported by Xenophon (*Cyropaedia* 8.3.11-12), Zeus standing for Auramazdā and the Sun for Miθra. However, Curtius Rufus (*Historia Alexandri* 4.13.12) has Darius III invoke the Sun, Miθra, and the Fire before the battle. It appears that in Achaemenid times there was no consistent identification of Miθra with the sun. The Mesopotamian sun-god Šamaš, who was venerated as judge and lord of justice and righteousness, may have influenced the identification, although it is doubtful whether Miθra borrowed his position as divinity of the seventh month from Šamaš, as Gnoli (1979, pp. 733 ff.) suggests, since the Vedic Mitra holds the same position.

Daēnā Māzdayasniš “Mazdayasnian Religion” paves the paths of Miθra’s chariot for good travel (*Yt* 10.66). The paving of paths is actually the task of Razištā Cistā, the goddess of the ways (*Yt* 16), who in the Mihr Yašt is called the likeness or alter ego of the Mazdayasnian Religion (10.126). Kellens (1994) has pointed out similarities of Daēnā and Razištā Cistā with the Ṛgvedic Uṣas “Dawn,” who also paves the ways. In *Yt* 13.94-95 the spreading of the Religion is synchronized with Miθra’s pacifying the countries. In Miθra’s soul there is a pledge to the Religion, according to which pledge the seed of the religion is distributed over all the seven climes (*Yt.* 10.64). This reminds one of the covenant of the Mazdayasnian Religion (10.117, cf. Gershevitch, 1959, pp. 212 ff.).

There are other minor deities in Miθra’s entourage: Pārəndi “Plenitude” (10.66), Həm.varəiti “Valor” (10.66), θβāša “Firmament” (10.66), the Frauuašis (10.66,100), Arštāt “Justice” (10.139). Also the waters and the plants (10.100) fly all around him, which indicates that he has power over them, granting them or taking them away. Rāman Xvāstra “Peace providing good pasture” does not occur in the Mihr Yašt, but is elsewhere consistently mentioned after Miθra Vouru.gaoiiaoiiti “Contract providing wide pasture,” obviously because of their identical function; the former seems to be a double or aspect of the latter.

The dual compound *miθra ahura* (*Yt* 10.113, 145) or *ahura miθra* (*Yasna* 1.11, 2.11) is generally understood as referring to Miθra and Ahura Mazdā. Boyce



(1975a, pp. 41 ff. and 1975c), however, has argued that here the Ahura is rather Apam Napāt “the child of the waters,” who in the Avesta is the only divinity to share the title Ahura with Mithra and Ahura Mazdā and whom she takes as the counterpart of the Vedic Varuāṇa. Since her arguments are summarized supra (see APAM NAPĀT), they need not be discussed here. They remain controversial (cf. Wright, 1977, p. 633; Findly, 1979, p. 167; Kellens, 1994b, p. 31). Boyce later also interpreted *pāyū(cā) θwōrəštārā* “the protector and the creator” (Y. 42.2, 57.2), which had previously been taken as Miθra and Ahura Mazdā or as Miθra and Spənta Mainyu (Gershevitch, 1959, pp.54 ff.), as Miθra and (\*Vouruna) Apam Napāt (apud Kreyenbroek, 1985, p. 78).

Zaraθuštra does not mention the god Miθra nor any other god of the “pagan” religion. It has been generally assumed that he repudiated them altogether. Lommel (1944-49; 1962; 1964, pp. 161 ff.) believed he had found the reason for Zaraθuštra’s hate of Miθra in his bull-slaying, which we know only from the later Roman Mithras mysteries, but which Lommel tried to prove to be Indo-Iranian by adducing the Brāhmaṇa legend in which Soma (Avestan Haoma) in the form of a bull is killed by the gods, including the at first reluctant Mitra. His hypothesis was accepted by several specialists in the Mithraic mysteries (e.g., Vermaseren, 1963, p. 17; Merkelbach, 1984, pp. 13 ff.), but rejected by the Iranist Gershevitch (1957, pp. 64 f.; 1975). More recently it was supported by B. Schlerath (1987, 1988) with rather strong arguments which are, however, valid only for the Indian evidence.

That Zaraθuštra had a particular dislike for Miθra is, however, unlikely, because he once used the common noun (Y. 46.5), which he could have avoided by using a quasi-synonym.

Zaehner (1961, pp. 84 ff.) J. Duchesne-Guillemin (1962, pp. 99 ff.), and Boyce (1975a, pp. 214 f.) have argued that Zaraθuštra did not condemn blood sacrifices as a whole, but only particularly violent ones. Possibly these were of the type the Viiāmburas practiced (Yt. 14.57).

G. Dumézil (1945) tried to interpret Zaraθuštra’s divine entities, the later Aməša Spəntas, as substitutions for the pagan gods: Vohu Manah “Good Thinking” = Mitra, Aša “Truth” = Varuna, Xšaθra “Rule” = Indra, Ārmaiti “Devotion” = Sarasvatī, Hauruatāt and Amərətātāt “Health and Immortality” = Aśvins (Nāsatyas). This is fitted into Dumézil’s trifunctional ideology: Varuṇa and Mitra represent mystical sovereignty, Indra combative power, Sarasvatī and the Aśvins fecundity. Dumézil’s interpretation has been accepted by



several Iranists, in particular Duchesne-Guillemin (1962, p. 201) and G. Widengren (1965, pp. 200f.), but rejected or ignored by others.

Boyce (1969, pp. 17 ff.) argues that in the Indo-Iranian tradition a priest could address in his hymn a single deity, mentioning in it only those other gods closely associated with him, which did not imply the rejection of the other gods. Similarly Zoroaster addressed his hymns to the great god Ahura Mazda, mentioning, besides him, only the entities closely associated with him. He did not repudiate the other gods. Later Boyce (1992, p. 56 with n.15) interpreted the Gāthic *mazdāscā ahurānhō* “Mazdā and the (other) Ahuras” (Y. 30.9, 31.4) as referring to Ahura Mazda, Miθra, and Aṣam Napāt, while generally it has been taken as Ahura Mazda and the Aməša Spəntas. It is true that the Aməša Spəntas are never called Ahuras, but, if Boyce were right, a dual and not a plural would be expected.

Kellens offers a novel interpretation. According to him, in the Gāthās of Zoroaster all the supernatural entities who vie for the worship of men are subsumed under the term *hant* “being” (attested only in the gen. pl. *hātqm*) and the relative phrase *yōi hanti* “who are” (1989; further developed, 1994, pp. 97 ff., esp. 107 and 117). They are the Aməša Spəntas, the gods (*baga*, a word not attested in the Gāthās), and the false gods (*daēuua*). Miθra would then be one of the gods who does not receive individual worship, but who is not repudiated.

Cyrus, the founder of the Achaemenid empire, was presumably a follower of the Zoroastrian religion; at least circumstantial evidence shows that his actions were in agreement with it (see Boyce, 1988, pp. 26 ff.). Duchesne-Guillemin (1974, pp. 17 f.) suggested that Cyrus adopted the great god of the Medes, Miθra. However we do not know that Miθra was the great god of the Medes. And the interpretation of the rosette on Cyrus’s tomb at Pasargadae as a symbol of Miθra on the basis of the comparison with the lotus on which Miθra stands on the Sasanian rock relief at Tāq-e Bostān (see [MITHRA. ICONOGRAPHY](#)) is hardly convincing. Boyce (1982, p. 57) takes the rosette as a symbol for the Aməša Spənta Amərətātāt “Immortality” and the immortality of the king’s soul. She also argues that there were no cults which exalted Miθra as supreme god (Boyce and Grenet, pp. 471-73, 482; 2001, p. 243).

Darius worshipped Auramazdā together with all the other gods (*baga*), but did not name any of them. Miθra was apparently not individually worshipped, since he is absent in the Persepolis fortification tablets which know of local



sacrifices to minor Iranian gods (see Koch, 1991, pp. 91 ff.). With Artaxerxes II, Miθra and Anāhitā replace all the gods as companions of Auramazdā. It can be argued that Darius's devotion was still close to that of the followers of the Gāθās of Zaratustra, while Artaxerxes II followed the more popular trend, represented in the Yašts, which dedicated individual worship to the gods by addressing them by name. Artaxerxes III has, beside Auramazdā, Miθra Baga, generally translated "Miθra, the Baga," but Boyce has "Miθra and the Baga = Apām Napāt" (1981, with further arguments, 1990; 1992, passim; 1993; 2001).

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