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MONĀJĀT I. IN ZOROASTRIANISM

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DEFINITION

The Arabic word *monājāt* is often translated as “intimate conversation” (Danner and Thackston, p. 181; Wehr, p. 1251: “vertrauliche Unterhaltung”) referring to a Qurʾanic verse (19:52) in which the verb *nājā* describes Moses talking confidentially with God at the Sinai. The Parsi scholar Jivanji J. Modi (1854-1933) gives an illustrative description of the prayer *monājāt* concerning its function for the believer as an outlet of religious emotions: “It is a prayer in which the person praying holds, as it were, a converse with his God and pours forth his own inward personal feelings of devotion and expression of humility” (Modi, p. 135). This definition is valid also for the Islamic ancestors of Zoroastrian *monājāt* and stresses the individuality and intimacy of the prayer which is suited to build up a very close personal relationship to God in the form of a dialogue. In contrast to the official Zoroastrian prayers which are composed in the ancient Avestan language, the language of the *monājāt* is normally the mother tongue of the praying person, Persian or Gujarati, so that the believer is able to follow each formulation of the prayer.

TRADITION

The Zoroastrian *monājāt* tradition probably goes back to the 13th century. First testimonies of Zoroastrian *monājāt* can be found in the works of the Persian poet and translator Zartošt Bahrām Paždu (Dhalla, p. 460) as the *Ardā Virāf-nāma-ye manẓum* (ʿAfifi [Ed.], pp. 1-15, p. 66) and the *Zartošt-nāma* (Rosenberg, ed., pp. 1-2, pp. 78-80 [in the Persian text]). Like the Islamic Persian poets, Zoroastrian writers also used to introduce their literary works with the praise of God and the wish for forgiveness of sins. These doxologies were headlined *monājāt*, and some of them later became independent prayers, leaving behind their literary context. Four Persian *monājāt* are attributed to Zartošt Bahrām, of which two are identical with parts of the doxology of the *Ardā Virāf-nāma*. Early composers of *monājāt* were also the Zoroastrian scholars Šahmard Malekšah (15th century), who wrote a 12-*bayt* prayer, and Mollā Rostam Esfandyār (16th century), who composed one of a length of 25 *bayt*. It was probably the priest Dastur Darab Hormazdyār (17th century) who invented *monājāt* in the second half of the 17th century as a prayer genre in the Indian Zoroastrian community. After him famous scholars like Dastur Darab Pahlan (ca. 1668-1735), Dastur Jamasp Asa (d. 1753), and Mollā Firuz (1757-1830) are known as authors of several prayers, so that it can be assumed that writing *monājāt* became a popular art among the learned priests in India. The 19th century can be regarded as the zenith of the production of *monājāt* in India. Not only the clergy—of whom the most famous representative was Erachji Sohrabji Meherjirana (1826-1900), who composed two prayers—but even lay persons like Sohrabji Jamshedji Jijibhai (1825-1882) appeared as writers of *monājāt*.

From today's perspective the production of Zoroastrian *monājāt* in Iran had come to a standstill between the 16th and the 19th century. It might have been the example of the *monājāt* of the Parsi authors which stimulated two Iranians in the first half of the 19th century to revive this tradition again: Mubad Ḵodābaḵš Farud composed a 87-*bayt monājāt*, and Bahrām Rāvari was the author of a 148- *beyt* one. The *monājāt* of the latter seems to have been very popular in Iran in the past (Šahmardān, p. 409). The development of letterpress printing at the beginning of the 19th century supported the circulation of *monājāt* which were published in the Khordeh Avestā, a popular Zoroastrian prayer compendium. With Bombay being the center of the Zoroastrian press worldwide, the Zoroastrian communities in Iran were also supplied with Khordeh Avesta editions printed in India. In this way some popular *monājāt* of Parsi authors—especially those of Mollā Firuz—were spread in Iran, and the *monājāt* of the Iranian authors Bahrām Rāvari and

Mubad Ḵodābaḵš could reach the Indian Zoroastrian reader.

MONĀJĀT IN INDIA

It seems that the composing of *monājāt* had a lively tradition in India rather than in Iran. In the 19th century, as the knowledge of Persian waned among the Parsis, even a new sub-genre of the prayer appeared with *monājāt* which were composed in the Gujarati language. In contrast to the Persian *monājāt*, which nearly all came from the pen of well-known learned men, the authors of the Gujarati *monājāt* are unknown. Most of the prayers do not have any scriptural base, and their mode of transmission is an oral, family-centered one (Cama, p. 1). The prayers do not follow any strict rules of poetry; their language is simple; and the use of metaphors is rare. They are sung, rather than recited, often accompanied by music. Sometimes composed for festive occasions such as weddings or for the wellbeing of family members, they reflect the thinking, values, and social circumstances of the Parsis in India. But they also serve to transmit the ethical and moral values and concepts of the religion through the generations and help to keep them alive (Russell, p. 54; Cama, p.1). The Gujarati *monājāt* have a strong identity-building and social-binding function in daily religious life (Kreyenbroek, p. 213; Cama, pp. 1-2). One of these popular Gujarati *monājāt* which has its place in the individual devotion is the *Khudāvind Khāvind*, which children use to pray before bed (Russell, pp. 57-58; for a CD-ROM with song, text, and German translation, see Stausberg, III).

Due to modernization, the praying of *monājāt* has lost popularity in the Parsi communities in the last decades. To counteract these tendencies in recent times, some efforts for the revival of Gujarati *monājāt* have been made, such as new musical settings (e.g., *Khushali ne geet ne garba*, audiocassette with *monājāt* distributed by Zoroastrian Studies, Mumbai) and a UNESCO project (UNESCO Project 302 IND 70, entitled “Preservation of Parsi-Zoroastrian Heritage – Campaigns and International Conventions”). Even *monājāt* in English were composed to reach those Zoroastrians who live abroad and do not know Gujarati any more (e.g., “I am proud to be a Zoroastrian” produced as an audiocassette by Zoroastrian Studies, Mumbai).

MONĀJĀT IN IRAN

In Iran the state of the prayer genre reflects even more the influence of modernity on the religious behavior and thinking of the Zoroastrians.

Although some sources show that in the past the reciting of *monājāt* was common on occasions such as pilgrimages (Manekji, p. 43; Boyce, p. 246; Belivāni, p. 37), as well as in the individual devotion (Šahmardān, p. 409), in the second part of the 20th century the popularity of *monājāt* subsided in the Zoroastrian communities in Iran. Today only the elder generation, mostly women, memorize *monājāt* as part of their daily prayers. Some of them report that in their childhood *monājāt* were taught at school, but most of them have learned the prayers from their parents and grandparents. Obviously the responsibility for this informal transmitting line was taken up by the females in the family, so that the carriers of this tradition were mostly women (Schmermbeck, pp. 54-58).

They find themselves often in opposition to the religious establishment, which regards *monājāt* as an illegal invention in the Zoroastrian religion because of their Islamic origin (Dhalla, pp. 496-497; Schmermbeck, p. 60). This modern view on the ritual of praying *monājāt* represents the normative influence of the Avestan literature on all religious ceremonies and customs. The authority of the old texts increased since their translations in Western languages and under the influence of the nascent interreligious dialogue in the 19th century. Trying to define their religion inside a frame which is predetermined by the big monotheistic religions, the Zoroastrians were challenged to give their faith a clear Zoroastrian shape. Rituals like the praying of *monājāt* which are, because of their foreign religious origin, without any use in this respect and which do not have any base in the old texts are rejected by the religious establishment and denounced as being Non-Zoroastrian.

FORM AND CONTENT

Zoroastrian Persian *monājāt* are composed in all classical forms of Persian poetry as well as in prose. Beside the *ḡazal*, the *qeṭʿa*, and the *robāʾi*, the *maṯnavi* is the most popular rhyming form. *Monājāt* which are composed in this multiple-rhyme form often not only contain the praise of God and the wish for forgiveness of sins, but also include hymns to the *Aməša Spəntas* or longer confessions of sins. Formally, Zoroastrian Persian *monājāt* copy their Islamic examples and follow the rules of classical Persian poetry. With regard to content, most *monājāt* also use the traditional images and metaphors of classical Persian poetry, even if they are of Islamic imprint. In some prayers the invocation of God is realized by using Islamic terms such as *elāhi* (Jamasp Asa, M. 3.1; Darab Pahlan M. 19.1-21 [the abbreviation M. marks the number of the *monājāt* and the verse in the edition of Schmermbeck]), *yā rabb*

(anonymous, M. 21, line 6), or *ey ḵalil* (Mubad Ḵodābaḵš, M. 13.82). The believer speaks of himself as a slave of God (*banda* [Jamasp Asa, M. 3.35 and M. 3.120; Bahrām Rāvari, M. 12.25]) and exaggerates his sins in order to show that they remain always little in comparison with God's abundance of mercy: "Even if my guilt is as much as one hundred mountains / your mercy is without limit and end" (Mubad Ḵodābaḵš, M. 13.64). God is not only a just judge (*dāwar-e dādgar* [Meherjirana, M. 8.18]), as it is transmitted by the traditional Zoroastrian texts, he is, more than that, the most gracious and merciful. This is an Islamic idea, which in the *monājāt* is often expressed by the Arabic terms *raḥim*, *karim* (both Mollā Firuz, M. 5.4), and *ḡafur* (Meherjirana, M. 8.4) or with the help of constructions following the Islamic example of *ar-raḥmān wa'r-raḥim* ("the merciful and compassionate") like *baḵšanda-ye mehrabān* (Meherjirana, M. 8.1) or *baḵšanda o baḵšāyanda o baḵšāyešgar* (anonymous, M. 21.11-12). As a *sattār* "veiler" (Hošang Jamasp, M. 10.73)—one of the 99 names or attributes of Allāh—God hides the sins of men, and, in case of remorse, he is *samiʿ* "hearing," *ḵabir* "knowing," and *baṣir* "understanding" (all Meherjirana, M. 8.4). God is regarded as the *ruzi-deh* "provider" (Bahrām Rāvari, M. 12.3]) who always and everywhere takes care of his creatures. Islamic formulas also appear when God's omniscience is described: God has knowledge about everything (*ʿalem ʿalā koll šeyʾ* [Mollā Firuz, M. 5.4]), the exterior and the interior (*ẓāher o bāṭen* [Hošang Jamasp, M. 10.3]), and even about the hidden things (*ḡaybdān* [Mollā Firuz, M. 6.58]).

The Zoroastrian authors regarded themselves as the legitimate heirs of the great Persian literary legacy, no matter whether it is characterized by Zoroastrian or Islamic ideas. Only a few authors such as Zartošt Bahrām tried to give their *monājāt* a more Zoroastrian coinage by avoiding Arabic-Islamic terms, using Zoroastrian theological concepts, and by mentioning Zoroastrian religious names and terms. Others such as Dastur Darab Pahlan and Dastur Jamasp Asa switch between Islamic and Zoroastrian ideas, so that their prayers resemble a synthesis of different pieties. It is noticeable that the wish for forgiveness is often expressed with Islamic terms and images, while passages about death and the hope for the next world take up Zoroastrian theological ideas and concepts.

SOURCES

Approximately from the middle of the 19th century Persian *monājāt* were published in the Khordeh Avestā. The *Avestā bā maʿni* printed 1853 in Calcutta, which includes the *monājāt* of Bahrām Rāvari, seems to be one of the oldest

examples in this respect (for a concise overview of the Khordeh Avesta editions and their *monājāt*, see Schmermbeck, pp. 9-12). The most complete collection of Persian *monājāt* can be found in the Gujarati *Tamam Khordeh Avesta* of Maneksha Jahangir Karani, which was printed for the first time in 1921-22 in Bombay. Although it is written in Gujarati, it contains 36 Persian *monājāt* which are transcribed in Gujarati letters. Most of them belong to the above-mentioned Parsi authors or to the very early Iranian composers like Zartošt Bahrām, Šahmard Malekšah, and Mollā Rostam Esfandyār. In Persian Khordeh Avesta editions the *monājāt* of Mollā Firuz, Bahrām Rāvari, or Mubad Ḵodābaḵš are frequently published. But after the production of the Persian Khordeh Avesta editions moved from India to Iran in the middle of the 20th century, the prayer genre was removed from the compendium.

Some *monājāt* have also been published in other text editions, such as two prayers of Dastur Darab Pahlan in the *Farziât-nâme and Kholâseh-i Din* (Modi, ed., pp. 73-77) or several *monājāt* of Mollā Firuz printed in the *Pand-nāma* (Mollā Firuz, pp. 2-9). In Parsi libraries such as the K.R. Cama Oriental Institute and the Meherjirana Library, there exist a number of manuscripts which have not yet been published (Dhabhar, Katrak).

In Iran as well as in India there were some prayers that were only transmitted orally (Schmermbeck, pp. 56-58; Cama, p. 1). Recently an edition of 23 Persian *monājāt* with German translation was published by B. Schmermbeck.

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