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PARADISE

PARADISE, the concept of.

General premises. The concept of “Paradise” as a prime spiritual place, usually considered the final abode of the souls in the afterlife, is to be distinguished from a physically walled garden (q.v.) or large protected area full of amusements. The term Paradise was actually widespread in the European languages via Latin *paradīsus*, a loanword from Greek παράδεισος (*parádeisos*), although its diffusion was culturally underpinned by the pertinent eschatological use assumed by the Biblical Hebrew *pardēs*. But all these terms, starting from the Greek one, ultimately derive from an Old Iranian stem, **paridaiza-*, “a (garden) surrounded (**pari°*) by walls (**daiza-*),” probably of North-Western derivation, and formally corresponding to OPers. p^a-r^a-d^a-y^a-d^a-a-m^a, **paridaidām* (from a stem *paridaidā-*, m., but later OPers. **pardaida-*/**pardēda-* > early MPers. *pardēd*). These kinds of garden assumed a remarkable importance in the Achaemenid Empire (q.v.) after an earlier Babylonian tradition, and around which Greek writers left many details (Panaino, 2012 and 2016 with bibliography; cf. Schmitt, p. 225). A similar compound occurs also in YAv. *pairi.daēza-*‘enclosure made of walls around’ (Vd. 3.18; 5.49; Panaino, 2016), but its functions do not seem to have been particularly positive, being a place of seclusion. It is clear that, in some religious traditions such as the Jewish and Western Christian ones, the eschatological meaning of the word Paradise derived from the idealized image of such a physical garden, as a metaphoric reference to a marvelous, resting place. But in the Iranian framework, this particular semantic extension did not

play any relevant influence, and the the terms referring to the final abode of the souls in the afterlife were differently imagined and named, even by Christians.

In Zoroastrianism. The idea of a "paradisiacal" abode for the souls of the dead is certainly known in the Zoroastrian literature since the composition of the *Gathas* (q.v.), where it is called *dəmāna- garō* 'the House of Welcome', and is opposed to the image of Hell (q.v.), the *drūjō dəmāna-* 'the House of falsehood' (Y. 46.11; 51.14). Paradise is referred to in Later Avestan as *garō nmāna-*, m. (but in the *Gathas* the sequences can differ: *garō dəmānē* [Y. 51.15]; *dəmānē garō* [Y. 50.4], with *dəmānē* [Y.45.8] as the loc. sing. of OAv. *dəmāna-*, n., "house;" YAv. *nmāna-*; Skr. *mā́na-*, meaning "the house of the song of welcome" (Kellens, 1974, pp. 27-29; Kellens and Pirart, p. 238, s.v. *gar-*, n. f., "chant de bienvenue," with reference to Skr. *gír-*), and not simply "the house of the song" (*AirWb*, cols. 512-13). This YAv. syntagm was soon treated as a compound and, thus, via univerbation, continued in MPers. *garōdmān* (q.v.; Nyberg, II, p. 81).

Other terminology for Paradise. The Zoroastrian Paradise was eventually called in Avestan *vahišta- ahu-*, 'the best existence', a denomination well preserved in Middle Persian as *wahišt* (and from Modern Persian onwards as *behešt*; Nyberg, II, p. 201). A lexical correspondence is attested also in Sogdian *wištmāx* (Gharib, p. 415, no. 10236), while Sogdian *wištmāxcīk* is apparently attested only in Manichean sources (Gharib, p. 415, no. 10238, but see also *wəštmax*; Gharib, p. 427, no. 10520). The *wahišt* is the abode of Ohrmazd; it was frequently located above the fourth heaven, that of the infinite lights (*raocaˆ anaγra*; Panaino, 1995; 2019, pp. 66-67). Some Middle Persian sources distinguish between *wahišt* (or *pašom axwān* 'the excellent existence'; Hultgård, p. 29), as the lowest part of the paradise, and *garōdman*, as the highest one, encompassing the sphere of the sun, and the infinite lights. With regard to the Achaemenid framework, Martin West (p. 56) explained the reliefs of the rock tombs of Darius I (q.v.) and his successors at Naqš-e Rostam (q.v.) as referred to the ascent of the king to the moon, the sun, and, of course, the paradise of A^{h}uramazdā (see AHURA MAZDĀ).

Inevitably, the rationale of Paradise is functional to different conceptual and symbolic needs, being strictly involved in the dynamics of individual destiny (Kellens, 1987; 1988; 1994; Gignoux, 1997, p. 8) as well as in the more elaborated sequence of human eschatology at the end of limited time (for an up-to-date synthesis, see Agostini). In the later Zoroastrian theological

system, Paradise is a definitive eternal abode, which will forever host the souls of all the dead, including those previously punished within Hell, although this particular doctrine is probably later and connected with the doctrine of the final apokatastasis or regeneration of the cosmos (Panaino, 2021). Men and women have access to it without distinctions; actually, any human being, male or female, presents a multiple articulation of his/her spiritual ipseity, with a masculine soul (*uruuan-*) and a feminine one (*daēnā-*), which finally meet together in the afterlife (Pavry; Kellens, 1995; Panaino, 1998; Piras). In particular, the *daēnā-* (see DĒN), as a feminine soul-vision, embodies a visible manifestation of human behavior on earth. She is beautiful if the dead person was righteous, dreadful if the dead person was a sinner. The *daēnā-* must not be confused with a dead female, because this component of the individual ipseity is presumably shared by men and women as well, being simply a part of the whole spiritual identity (Panaino, 2017).

A special bridge gives access to Paradise; it is named *cinuuatō pərətu-* or *cinuuaṯ.pərətu-*, f. (MPers. *činwad puhl* [q.v.]; Nyberg, II, p. 55; Hultgård, p. 30), which widens or narrows as a blade under the feet of the one who steps on it, according to his/her merits (see ČINWAD PUHL). Christian Bartholomae (q.v.; *AirWb*, cols. 596-97) explained this designation as the "Bridge of the Separator," but *cinuuaṇt–* could otherwise be connected with the verbal root *cin* 'to build, to pile' (Kellens, 1988, p. 332), meaning the "Bridge of the Compiler," with reference to its builder. But other options are possible, such as the "Ford of the Accountant," if, as suggested by P. O. Skjærvø, it refers to the gathering of the "records" of good or bad deeds (Skjærvø, 2013, p. 319). Only after this crucial crossing can the soul reach its destination, paradise, hell, or the intermediate place (see HAMĒSTAGĀN).

Yima's ' vara-' and the Indo-Iranian background. The existence of a special refuge, where Yima (see JAMŠID i. Myth of Jamšid) would escape with part of humanity when, for the first time, the winters and winds brought by Aŋra Mainiiu (see AHRIMAN) and the demons, arrived on the earth (Vd. 2.25-33), can be considered as a sort of anticipated paradisiacal resting place, although it is not a definitive abode for humanity. The *vara-*, m., "enclosure" (Skr. *vála-*), was probably located underground, although the stars, the sun, and the moon can be seen (Vd. 2.39-41) in their rising and setting. The *vara-* seems to be like the ark of Noah, where the best part of the living world was saved, but it is also a dimension without suffering and demons. Various scholars have suggested direct comparisons with the Noachite myth (cf. e.g., Spiegel, p. 479),

but on the highly uncertain grounds. Clearly, the *vara-* resembles a place of resistance and defense against demonic aggressions. It is necessary to recall that, according to a later Avestan source (*Aogəmadaēčā*,par. 28; JamaspAsa, pp. 30, 61), Aŋra Mainiiu's dwelling is eventually located into (another?) *vara-*. Bruce Lincoln (p. 3) mentions also "the cave" of Lie (*gərəδa-*, m.; Vd. 3.7), a subterranean enclosure contaminated with death and putrefaction, "whence all demons issue." Such a reference puts the representation of some places called *vara-* in an ambiguous position, in particular if we consider that in the Rigveda the function of the *vála-* is negative as well (Malandra, p.178; cf. Jackson, pp. 71, 75). The comparison of the cycles of Avestan Yima with that of Old Indic Yama gives ground to a common Indo-Iranian background about afterlife and immortality, although this matter is deeply complex. In fact, the idea of an eternal abode of the souls has been developed in the course of time, and it cannot be established *a priori* for the earliest periods of the Indo-Iranian cultural tradition without caveats (Bodewitz).

External influences. A very intricate matter concerns the possible impact of the Zoroastrian tradition regarding the future life and the judgment of the soul on the Hebrew world and its vision of the afterlife (Panaino, 2004), a subject that has given rise to a number of controversial issues. Certainly, the impact of the Achaemenid Empire might have favored the direct knowledge of some typical Mazdean ideas about the afterlife, whose importance was well preserved in Middle Persian Zoroastrian literature, especially in the *Ardā Wīrāz Nāmag* (Gignoux, 1984; Vahman), a text dedicated to the voyage of "Ardā Wīrāz" (q.v.) throughout Paradise, Hamēstagān, and Hell. The potential comparison of this book with Dante's *Divina Commedia* has attracted the attention of many scholars (recent discussions in Rossi; Panaino, 2008). Although this and other Middle Persian sources (Gignoux, 1997, pp. 8-12) concerning individual and universal eschatology are a later production of the Zoroastrian community, already in the 3rd century CE, the High Priest Kartir (q.v.) described "paradise" (*wḥšty*) and "hell" (*dwšḥwy*) in his inscriptions (Gignoux, 1974; 1991, pars. 73-99, 102 [dwšḥwy], 105 [(wḥ)št(y)]; 2001; cf. Skjærvø, 1983; Grenet; Hermann, MacKenzie, and Howell Cadelcott, pp. 59-61, 66-72).

In Manicheism: In Manichean sources of Central Asia we find a number of terms for Paradise, e.g., MPers. *bārist*(*bʾryst, bʾryst, bʾrst*), a superlative stem meaning "the highest (place)," "heights" (Durkin-Meisterernst, pp. 104-5); also Parth. and MPers. *padišt* (*pdyšt*) 'place, home' (Durkin-Meisterernst, p. 273)

and *wahišt* and *wahištāw* (*whyšt, whyšṯ* ; *whyšťw, whyštw*) ‘paradise’ (Durkin-Meisterernst, pp. 341-42), the latter of clear Zoroastrian origin. Sogdian has *βaγestān* (Gharib, p. 101, no. 2567; p.103, no. 2609; Sims-Williams, p. 53), “place of the Gods,” but also *r(u)xušna-γarδmaň* (Gharib, p. 341, no. 8480); and *r(u)xušna-γarδmaňcīk* in secular sources (Gharib, p. 341, no. 8481; cf. *ru/oxšna-γarδmaň*, Gharib, p. 345, no 8572). A similar compound occurs also in Manichean Sogdian (Gharib, p. 346, no. 8605: *roxšna-γarδ(a)maň*; Sims-Williams, p. 167). In this case we can see again a Zoroastrian background, from the Avestan adj. *raoxšna-* ‘bright, luminous’, plus the sequence *garō.nmāna-*.

According to the Manichean Sogdian cosmological texts, Paradise is at the top of the universe, below which there are the palaces of the sun and the moon. Below their level, ten circles of the heavens or firmaments (conceived as walled enclosures) were placed. An enormous Column of Glory passing through the firmaments extracts all the light rising from the earth and makes the moon grow for fifteen days, while later this light ascends to the sun, finally entering a New Paradise or New Aeon, where it is stored (Henning; Gulácsi and BeDuhn, pp. 58, 72).

In Iranian Christianity. Christian sources in Middle Persian and Sogdian belonging to the Church of Persia (Benveniste, pp. 85-91; Widengren, pp. 14-15) did not use the Iranian term *pardēz* as the normal designation for their “paradise,” but have adopted the same terminology as the Zoroastrians (Benveniste, p. 87; Gignoux, 1997, pp. 3-15). In Sogdian, we found *uštmāx* (Gharib, p. 79, no. 2008; Sims-Williams, p. 208), which corresponds to Avestan *vahišta- ahu-* ‘the best existence’ (Yt. 12.36; Goldman, p. 202), but not *pardēz*, which, in any case, was known to Christian Sogdians as the usual designation of a “garden” (Gharib, p. 285, no. 7103; Sims-Williams, p. 139). This choice could be due to the force of a long tradition and shows the cultural links of the Iranian Christians to their ancestral religious background. It is a matter of debate as to whether that term still preserved negative implications (Hultgård, p. 8) as in the Avestan lexicon. New Persian *pālīz* (see BĀḠ) refers only to a very modest kind of garden (Duchesne-Guillemin, p. 138). Thus, while this Iranian term had an enormous success outside of its borders, it did not gain any additional speculative or eschatological implication in its homeland. Also in Armenia (see ARMENIA AND IRAN ii: The Pre-Islamic Period), where the massive conversion to Christianity had a profound impact, the word *partēz* was not used for the Christian “paradise,” which was called *draxt*, i.e., with another Iranian term, but designating a tree, and more

precisely the date palm (q.v.). This association is very important, because in the Iranian framework, the date palm is the protagonist of an enchanting dialogue of Parthian origin, surviving in Middle Persian as *Draxt ī Āsūrīg* (q.v.), "The Assyrian/Babylonian tree" (Cereti, pp. 185-86 with detailed bibliography).

In Armenian sources, "Paradise" and "Hell" were also designated as *anoyšk'* (cf. MPers. *anōš/-ag* 'immortal', and *džoxk'*, < cf. MPers. *dušox* 'hell'). Interestingly, according to the *Ardā Wīrāz Nāmag* (chap. 10), arriving in Paradise, the righteous Wīrāz receives a drink, called *anōš* (Gignoux, 1984, pp. 57, 162). Nevertheless, the image of the garden was kept in Christian Sogdian, but with a different denomination, *βōstaň* (Gharib, p. 115, no. 2928; Sims-Williams, p. 57), "garden; paradise" (cf. MPers. *bōyestān* 'garden [of flowers]' with reference to the perfume, [2] *bōy*). Also in this case, the attested terminology is not completely extraneous to the Zoroastrian world; in fact, the image of the garden of Paradise (Hultgård, pp. 30-32) appears in some Middle Persian sources such as *Wizīdagīhā ī Zādspram* (*bōyestān*, 30.52, 55, 59; Gignoux and Tafazzoli, pp. 108-11) or *Bundahišn* (*bōyestān kirb*, 'the form of the garden', 30.15; Pakzad, p. 347), although these passages contain later speculations about the afterlife. The Zoroastrian paradisiacal dimension was announced by a fragrant, sweet-smelling south wind, while stench was, on the contrary, considered a mark of hell (Panaino, 1998).

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