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ŠKAND GUMĀNĪG WIZĀR

ŠKAND GUMĀNĪG WIZĀR (Doubt-dispelling exposition), a Middle Persian Zoroastrian text written by Mardānfarrox son of Ohrmazddād in the ninth century. Its author mentions the *Dēnkard* compiled by Ādurfarrbay ī Farroxzādān as one of its sources, but does not quote the later compilation of the *Dēnkard* by Ādurbād ī Ēmēdān, and this may lead one to date his work more precisely to the second half of the ninth century.

The *Škand gumānīg wizār* may well be considered a "key text" in Near Eastern religious history (Sundermann 2001, p. 325), and it clearly provides the best example of Zoroastrian polemical skills applied to the refutation of the tenets of other religions current at the time. In fact, the *Škand gumānīg wizār* can be assigned to that same apologetic genre to which belong also the first three preserved books of the *Dēnkard*. Here, however, reason prevails over myth and the author's argumentations are detailed and rational (Cereti, 2001, p. 79).

The entire text is permeated by the life experience of its author: in the first chapter Mardānfarrox presents himself as a man in search of truth, who, after a long search which led him to study other religions, eventually came to the conclusion that he could well find what he was looking for in his own faith, Zoroastrianism. Given this context, Mardānfarrox's aim in writing the *Škand gumānīg wizār* is to prove the dogmas of the Zoroastrian faith true, as well as to criticize the contradictions and inconsistencies of other creeds. Jean de Menasce, the author of an unsurpassed edition of this text, rightly says that Mardānfarrox provides us with a book describing the theology and apologetics of Mazdean dualism in the latest stage of its historical development (de

Menasce, 1945, p. 14), that is to say, before its slow decline, which led it to be today the religion of a small minority. Quite clearly, the *Škand gumānīg wizār* is addressed to the Mazdean community, and in particular to those who were tempted by other doctrines then current in Iran—chiefly, those of the three great monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The sixteenth chapter, against the Manicheans, reveals that the latter religion, as well, was striving to gain new converts still in the ninth century.

Among the authorities explicitly mentioned by the son of Ohrmazddād we find an *Ādurbād ī *Yāwandād, one Rōšn son of Ādurfarrbay, author of a text *Rōšn nibēg*, and the well-known Ādurfarrbay ī Farroxzadān, who was the first compiler of the *Dēnkard*.

Moreover, the *Škand gumānīg wizār* is not only important for its religious contents, but also for its linguistic peculiarity, being one of the main surviving witnesses for the use of Pāzand. In fact, the older codices contain only the Pāzand text and the Sanskrit version, which both may be assigned to the celebrated medieval copyist and translator Nēryōsang, a fact that well explains the exceptionally good quality of both versions. All manuscripts presenting the Pahlavi version of the first part of this work are secondary. However, some errors found in the Pāzand and Sanskrit versions can only be explained through the existence of a Pahlavi *Vorlage* (West, 1885, p. xxviii; de Menasce, 1945, p. 159). What is preserved in our text is, therefore, an important testimony of the use of Pāzand, and Sanskrit, to render clear, in an Indian context, the Pahlavi text, which was by then obscure to most of its readers.

Manuscripts. The manuscript tradition is rich, but unfortunately only partially studied. The best description of existing codices is still that by H. J. Jâmâsp-Âsânâ and E. W. West found in their 1887 edition of the text. There the two authors made use of various manuscripts, all ultimately deriving from codex AK, a manuscript which came down to us heavily mutilated. In fact, when AK was seen by Jâmâsp-Âsânâ and West, it was in the possession of Dastur Hoshangji Jamaspji in Pune and consisted of 77 folios, amounting to roughly the first half of the text. The acronym AK by which it is still known today is due to the fact that it was thought to have been written by Âsadîn son of Kâkâ, as stated in a Sanskrit colophon contained in the late codex JE. However, this same colophon is also found in another manuscript, AK_2, which was send by Dastur Jamaspji Minocherji of Bombay to Münich when Jâmâsp-Âsânâ and West's edition of the *Škand gumānīg wizār* was nearly in press. It contains the

same Sanskrit colophon found in JE, which assigns it to the hand of Âsadîn son of Kâkâ, who wrote it on day Šahrevar of the month Wahman, Saṃvat 1625, Saka 1491, corresponding to 23 September 1569. A comparison of AK_2's handwriting with that of the famous codex F_1 allowed the authors to establish that this was the manuscript to be assigned to the hand of Âsadîn, and not AK, thus affirming an earlier dating for AK (Jâmâsp-Âsâna and West, 1887, pp. xxxvii-xxxviii). This led the two authors to assign AK to the end of the fifteenth century. Two other modern, but important codices of the *Škand gumānīg wizār*, both containing the complete surviving Pāzand text, are JJ, then kept in Naosari, and dating to 1768; and JE, kept in Dastur Hoshanji's private library, and copied in 1842. Several other manuscripts were known to Jâmâsp-Âsânâ and West; none of them is complete. According to these two authors: "The manuscript AK is the ancestor of all the other manuscripts examined. It contains the Pâzand-Sanskrit text prepared by Nêryôsang, and, if not the work of Âsadîn Kâkâ, it was probably written at the latter end of the fifteenth century. From an early copy of AK appear to have descended the original of JJ, and, at later dates, AK_2, MH_{19}, K_{28}, with the original of PA_{18}, L_{15}, and a predecessor of R. From a later copy of AK have descended PB_3 and L_{23}. While JE is evidently derived from some copy of AK_2; and X and Bm may have come from a copy of K_{28}" (Jâmâsp-Âsânâ and West, 1887, p. xxvii). Other manuscripts were known to de Menasce (1945, p. 14), who, however, did not use them in his edition of the *Škand gumānīg wizār*, which relies on the text established by Jâmâsp-Âsânâ and West. These are MF_{24} (Dhabhar, 1923, p. 22), F_{34} (Dhabhar, 1925, p. 22), E_{31} (Dhabhar, 1925, p. 70), T_{48} I-II (Dhabhar, 1925, pp. 126-27) and P Suppl. Persan 1186.

The book contains sixteen chapters, the last of which is incomplete. The first chapter acts as an introduction, rapidly describing Ohrmazd's creation of *mēnōg* (spiritual existence) and *gētīg* (material existence) as well as of the omniscient *Dēn* (Religion), which he compares to a great tree. Mardānfarrox here describes himself as a man who has traveled lands and seas in search for truth, and has studied many different religions and doctrines. He further states that he has written this book, not for the sake of the wise and learned ones, but rather for the profit of students and novices, so that they may understand the truth of the Good Religion (*Wehdēn*) and the misery of its adversaries.

Aside from the first chapter, the book can be divided in two main parts: chapters 2-10, aimed at proving the truth of the Zoroastrian faith, and chapters

11-16, being polemics against Islam, Judaism, Christianity, and Manicheism. The first part of the book expounds the Zoroastrian dualistic doctrine, attempting to prove the necessity of the independent existence of the evil principle. This touches on the central issue of dualism, since, if one does not want to consider Evil as a simple lack of Good, he consequently has to assume the existence of another, and independent, principle. Zoroastrianism has solved this problem by postulating the existence of the Adversary, Ahriman, and by imagining a material world, *gētīg*, which is the instrument created by Ohrmazd to bring about the destruction of Evil. While defending and explaining the basic tenets of the Zoroastrian faith, the author necessarily criticizes those who believe in the existence of only one principle.

More in detail, chapters 2-4 consist of answers to the questions of Mihrāyar ī Mahmadān (cf. *ŠGW* 2.1 *daraa i fradim awar pursašni ə- ucaṇd i hamə- pə-rōžgar mihir aiiār i mahmādą).* According to de Menasce (1945, p. 36), the very name of this character or rather his patronymic, reveals that he belongs to the Muslim faith—a hypothesis which seems to be confirmed by the contents of some of the questions that he asked. However, this position is not shared by Jâmâsp-Âsânâ and West (1887, pp. xvi-xvii), according to whom both Mardānfarrox and Mihrayār son of Mahmād are Zoroastrian laymen; they further argue that the latter's patronymic may well be explained by the fact that his father converted to Islam after the son had grown up. This solution is not very satisfying, though one should also mention that in this context the epithet **hamē *pērōzgar* "Ever victorious" preceding Mihrayār's name would fit better a Zoroastrian than a Muslim. Chapter two focuses on the Evil Assault, chapter three on the existence of two distinct principles, while chapter four describes the structure of the cosmos according to Zoroastrian doctrine, answering a question about who was the creator of the cosmic spheres. Quite interesting is the mention, found in *ŠGW* 4.106-107, of the writings of *Ādurbād ī *Yāwandān and of the *Dēnkard* called *Hazār darag* written by Ādurfarrbay ī Farrozādān, leader of the Faithful.

Chapter five is a chapter against the atheists and on the different methods by which one can acquire knowledge. Chapter six is against Dahrīya (see DAHRĪ), whereby the author does not seem to refer to a specific sect, but rather more in general against skeptics, materialists, and hedonists, who believe only in the existence of *gētīg* and not of *mēnōg*, and who accept as sole principle unlimited Time, though they should not be in any way confused with the Zurvanites (see ZURVANISM). Chapters seven and eight attempt to demonstrate the existence

of the evil principle, while chapter nine discusses the anteriority of the Adversary. *Ādurbād ī *Yāwandān and Ādurbād ī Farroxzādān are once again mentioned as authorities, and here the latter is considered to be a disciple of the former (*ŠGW* 9.1-3). According to de Menasce (1958, pp. 11-14; 1973, p. 413, cf. Cereti, 2001, p. 57) chapter nine of the *Škand gumānīg wizār* is entirely taken from the *Dēnkard*, where it would find its place as *Dk*. III.239a. Unfortunately it is missing from all *Dēnkard* manuscripts. Chapter ten deals with the theology of monotheistic faiths, which, according to the author, also explains dualism, since in it the need of an independent evil principle emerges clearly. In §§ 61-62 Mardānfarrox briefly refers to his religious quest. Interestingly in §69 the Sasanians are referred to as **Bayān Xwadāy*.

The following chapters, being accurate criticisms of other faiths current at the time, clearly show that Mardānfarrox ī Ohrmazdādān possessed a deep knowledge of the religions whose tenets he sets forth to criticize. Chapters 11-15 are detailed and informed polemics against monotheistic faiths. Chapters 11-12 are specifically aimed at criticizing aspects of the Islamic doctrine, both some tenets specific to the Muʿtazilite School and some other doctrines typical of Ašaʿrite orthodoxy. Chapter eleven is the longest and, according to de Menasce (1945, p. 125), the least well composed in the whole work; in the opinion of this same author it is, however, the most interesting. In § 280 the Muʿtazilites (*muθzalī*) are explicitly mentioned. Chapter twelve deals with the allegation that dualism diminishes God's omnipotence and glory, stating that God's wisdom and nature is lessened by those who make him the author of Evil rather than by those who conceive him to be the ultimate source of all which is good, the paladin of the cosmic battle against the Adversary. Here, §1 informs the reader that the subject matter of this chapter is taken, once again, from the *Dēnkard*. According to de Menasce (1945, p. 172), §§ 2-30 probably go back to the Hanbalite *ʿaqida*, though he does not completely rule out the possibility that here also the reference may be to Ašaʿrite doctrines. Chapters 13-14 criticize aspects of the Judaic faith, though the arguments employed show no originality, and at this stage of research it is not possible to determine in detail whether they were influenced by polemical works belonging to other religious traditions. Chapter thirteen focuses on the genesis of the material world and on the pre-existence of light: if light did not exist before creation, what was God's nature? Another aspect criticized by Mardānfarrox is the duration of the act of creation: if God created everything *ex nihilo*, by the power of his Word, why did he need six days to do so? And why did he create Adam and Eve, and the Garden of Eden, and the Tree of

Knowledge? Chapter fourteen focuses on what to a Mazdean eye appear to be negative aspects of the omnipotent divinity of Judaism, such as his wrath and his vengefulness, and it narrates a story of a visit paid by Adonaī to an ailing Abraham (§§ 40-49), which seems to have been pieced together from different *midrašim* (Gray, 1940, p. 563; de Menasce, 1945, p. 203).

Chapter fifteen argues against the principles of the Christians, and here also the author takes profit from Muslim polemics, which, in their turn, profited from Jewish and Manichean apologetic texts. Citations from the New Testaments are all taken from the Syriac Pešitta, though possibly through an intermediary similar to the much later Persian *Diatessaron* (de Menasce, 1945, p. 209) discovered and published by G. Messina (1951). The Christians are called *Tarsā* in §1, where reference is made to three different sects, all deriving from the common roots of Judaism, which were identified by de Menasce (1945, p. 222) with the Melchites, the Jacobites, and the Nestorians. Among the subjects treated are Mary's Immaculate Conception, the Trinity, and man's free will. St. Paul is mentioned in § 91, where he is called *Pāvalōš yašq̇. Dastūr* (their Dastur Paulus).

Chapter sixteen, unfortunately incomplete, counts among the most interesting passages in the entire *Škand gumānīg wizār* and indeed among the most informative ones in the entire Pahlavi literature. Its interest lies in the fact that it contains a polemic against Manicheism, which is a dualistic religion, sharing many aspects of its theology with Zoroastrianism, but radically differing when it comes to the ontological nature of Evil. It was already de Menasce (1945, p. 11) who hinted to the possibility that Mardānfarrox may have been fascinated by Manichaeism in his earlier days, and in fact his close acquaintance with Mānī's creed is proved by his detailed knowledge of the technical vocabulary of that faith, as shown by W. Sundermann in 2001 (see also Cereti, 2005). This makes all the more important the contribution of the *Škand gumānīg wizār* to our knowledge of eastern Manicheism in the early Islamic period.

A great part of this chapter deals with cosmology and more specifically with the cosmos in its primordial state. Mardānfarrox attacks the Manichean doctrine— apparently similar and yet so different from the Zoroastrian one—of the two principles and the three times. It criticizes the idea that *gētīg* was created by the Evil principle and discusses the three great periods of cosmic history: initial separation; mingling and warfare; and final separation, characterized by the triumph of Light. Unfortunately, only his critique of the initial period has survived. It deals with the concept of the infinite and argues

against the Manichean view that in the beginning the two principles were contiguous, whereas Mazdean cosmology postulates the presence of void between the realm of Light and that of Darkness.

The earliest translation of the *Škand gumānīg wizār* was authored by West and printed in the Sacred Books of the East in 1885. Two years later, in 1887, Jâmâsp-Âsânâ and West published an edition of the Pāzand, Sanskrit, and Pahlavi versions of this text. It should be underlined that Dastur Jâmâsp-Âsânâ had prepared the Pahlavi and Pāzand texts for publication already twenty years earlier, though much of his work had to be redone because of the fast progress characterizing Pahlavi studies in the second half on the 19th century. In 1913 S. D. Bharucha published Nēryosang's Sanskrit text as found in Jâmâsp-Âsânâ and West's edition, in the fourth volume of his *Collected Sanskrit Writings of the Parsis* with only minor changes. Two years later, in 1915, Christian Bartholomae described manuscript MH_{19} (now M_{64}), noting some corrections to Jâmâsp-Âsânâ and West's apparatus. In 1945 Jean de Menasce's new translation of the Pāzand and Pahlavi texts of the *Škand gumānīg wizār* was printed. Although this work markedly improves on West's previous translation, its contribution to our understanding of the religious issues underlying Mardānfarrox's work is even more important, since the French author, thanks to his exceptional knowledge of religious and theological issues, was able to contextualize the different chapters of our work. Zoroastrian polemics against Manicheism are the subject of a recent doctoral dissertation, defended by D. Taillieu in Leuven in 2004 (unpublished). The same author has more recently published a glossary of *ŠGW* 10.58-60 and 16, as well as of *Dēnkard* III.114, 150, 200, and 272 (Taillieu, 2006). S. F. Thrope has dedicated his PhD dissertation to the study of the Zoroastrian critique of Judaism in the *Škand gumānīg wizār* (Thrope, 2012).

Individual chapters have been the subject of articles by several authors. Just to mention a few, chapters 1.1-6, 2.3-5, 3.1-7 and 8.1-14 were translated by M. Boyce (1984, pp. 101-4); chapters 6.1-34 and 16.53-11 were edited and translated by R. C. Zaehner (1937-39, pp. 878-79 and 888-89), who also translated chapters 4.63-80 (Zaehner, 1956, pp. 49-51), 8 (ibid., pp. 59-66), and 1.11-30 (ibid., pp. 86-87). Chapters 13 and 14 were published by J. Darmesteter (1889). Chapter 16 was first translated by C. Salemann (1904) and subsequently, only for §§ 1-52, by A. V. W. Jackson (1932). More recently, C. G. Cereti has translated into Italian the entire chapter 16 (Cereti, 2006, pp. 241-45), re-edited chapters 1.35-38, 10.33-61 and 16.1-2, 4-9 and 51-111 (Cereti,

2005), and studied the chapters on Christianity and Judaism (Cereti, 2014). A. Panaino has discussed the text of Our Father found in the *Škand Gumānīg Wizār* (Panaino, 2000 and 2007), while E. Raffaelli has analyzed the astrological chapter, chapter 4 (Raffaelli, 2009).

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