



ZOROASTER I. THE NAME

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The Gathic form and its derivatives. The authentic form of Zoroaster's name is that attested in his own songs, the [Gathas](#), Old Av. *Zaraθuštra-* (Old Avestan [OAv.] and Young Avestan [YAv.] references are fully listed by Schlerath, 1971, pp. 134 f.), on which are based regular derivatives like *zaraθuštri-* "descending from Zoroaster" or *zaraθuštrō.təma-* "most Zoroastrian." Although phonetically an irregular development (see below), the Av. form with its *-θ-* was linguistically an actual form, as is shown by later attestations reflecting the same basis: Man. Parth. *zrhwšt* (*Zar(a)hušt*, with *-h-* from **-θ-*), Man. Sogd. *zrwšc*, *'zr'wšc*, Mazdean Sogd. *zr(')wšc* (*Z(a)rušč*), from which come also Man. Uighur *zrwšc* and Chinese *suo-luo-čie* (cf. the references in Bailey, 1953, p. 40, n. 6). In contrast to these forms, however, the Persian ones, viz. Book Pahlavi and Mid. Pers. inscriptional *zltw(h)št Zar(a)du(x)št* (with *-ušt* from *-uxšt*, which is the regular outcome of **-uršt* < OIr. **-uštra-*) and NPers. *Zartušt*, *-dušt*, *Zarātušt*, *-dušt* (on which are based Syr. *Zardušt*, *Z(a)rādušt*, and Ar. *Zarā'ādušt*) as well as Man. Mid. Pers. *zdrwšt* (*Zar(a)društ* likewise showing metathesis of an original **Zar(a)duršt*) require an earlier form with internal *-t-*, **Zaratuštra-*, the same that underlies Av. *Zaraθuštra-*. (The assumption of a despirantisation of *-θ-* to *-t-* for the Persian forms does not help.) The reflex of a form with either *-θ-* or *-t-* is present also in Aram. *zrtštrš* = **Zaraθ/tuštriš* (proper name or common noun) on a 4th century seal (cf. Schmitt, 1997, pp. 922 f.).



Also quite close to the Avestan form are Skt. *Jarathuśtra-* (in Neriyaśangh's translation of the Avesta) and Byzantine Gk. *Zarathroústēs* (with metathesis only; in Cosmas of Jerusalem [8th cent.], who elsewhere has the variant *Zōrothrystēs*, which is reshaped after the Greek standard form *Zōroástrēs*). From the same basis comes (only with anticipation of *r* and dissimilatory shortening in **Zarathr°*) the form *Zathrāstēs*, the name of "an Aryan law-giver" in Diodorus 1.94.2 (cf. Schmitt, 1996, p. 94; Gnoli, 2000, p. 100). The significant formal changes and reinterpretations involved in the case of Gk. *Zōroástrēs* (and *Zōróastris*) and Arm. *Zradašt*, *Zradešt* will be discussed below, but shorter forms like Gk. *Zarátās*, *Záratos*, *Zarádēs* or Lat. *Zaratus* (see the index of Bidez–Cumont, 1938, p. 389b), possibly contractions of the prophet's name, are not relevant to the study of the name *Zarathuśtra-*.

Etymology. Much has been said about the etymology of the Avestan and in general the Iranian forms of this name as well as about their attribution to certain dialects. The only point universally agreed upon is that the second element is Av. *uśtra-* "camel" (it is found in other anthroponyms also). Since a first element ending in a dental, in this case something like **zarat-*, should as a rule produce Av. **Zaraṭ.uśtra-* or (in continuous writing) **Zaraḍuśtra-*, the irregular development demands some explanation. The phonological or morphological reconstructions thus far proposed to explain *-θ-* are all speculative. These include: an initial laryngeal in **Huśtra-* (Werba, 1982, p. 173), an original **uuśtra-* in the foreign word for "camel," a basic form **Zarati-uśtra-* (with loss of **-i-* in the sequence **-θi-*), and a postulated "OSogd." **Zarat-huśtra-* ("with euphoric *hu*," Gershevitch, 1995, 4a). It is more reasonable to regard the name as reflecting a dialectal origin of not genuine Avestan form, without discounting a purely phonetic explanation of *-θ-*, such as that proposed by Thieme, 1981, pp. 124 f., who reconstructs the form **Zaratruśtra-* by assuming the proleptic addition of an *-r-* and its subsequent dissimilation. But it is still unclear at what stage of the transmission of the Avestan texts the attested form came into being.

In general, OIr. **Zarat-uśtra-* is behind the various forms attested in the Iranian languages (a variant OIr. **Zara-uśtra-* is also postulated solely on the basis of Gk. *Zōroástrēs*). Several interpretations have been proposed for **zarat-*, which is perhaps the zero-grade of **zarant-*. One sees it as **zarant-* "old" (Ved. *járant-*; cf. Oss. *zæronḍ*), and explains it as "with old/decrepit [better: aging] camels." A second interpretation starts from the verbal **zarat-* "moving, driving" (cf. Av. *zarš* "to drag," Bailey, 1953, pp. 36–42), and suggests



“who is driving (i.e., can manage) camels” or “who is fostering/cherishing camels.” A third takes the verbal **zarat-* “desiring, longing for” (cf. Ved. *har* “to like” and, despite its ambiguity, OAv. *zara-*), and give the meaning “who is longing for camels.” A fourth proposal sees **zarant-* “angry, furious” as the base and interprets the name as “with angry/furious camels.” Finally, with the noun **zarant-* “yellow” (parallel to YAv. *zairi-*; cf. Werba, 1982, pp. 184 f.), one has obtained the meaning “with yellow camels.”

The intensive debate of recent time (cf. Mayrhofer, 1977a, pp. 46–53; Mayrhofer, 1977b, pp. 105 f. no. 416; Mayrhofer, 1977c; Schlerath, 1977) has shown that even if the juxtaposition of OIr. **zarat-* and **zara-* is justified, it does not necessarily point to a verbal element **zara(t)-*. Since no verbal root of such a form exists in Iranian, the only interpretation that can be “based on a word well attested, although not in Avestan” (Schmidt, 1980, p. 197), is the one mentioned in the first proposal, “with old camels.” Some of the alternatives, however, may be more plausible for semantic reasons (cf. Mayrhofer, 1977b, p. 106), particularly as “aging,” let alone “old,” may hardly be understood positively (see Mayrhofer, 1977c, p. 89 fn. 22). Thus, in the final analysis the problem remains far from settled. Also the view of Humbach (1991, pp. 8 and 10), that an allusion to Zoroaster’s name may be seen in the collocation of the rather obscure word *zarəm* in Y. 44.17b with the word *uštrəm* “camel” in Y. 44.18c (with the two separated by some 30 words), does not lead anywhere. Several more etymologies have been proposed, some quite fanciful, but none is scientifically based (for references see Mayrhofer, 1977a, pp. 44–53; Schmitt, 1996, p. 93, n. 37).

Greek Zōroástrēs. The relation of the Gk. standard form *Zōroástrēs* to Av. *Zaraθuštra-* (etc.) presents a distinct problem, since a regular rendering of this form would have produced something like Gk. **Zarathóstrēs*. The form *Zōroástrēs* is first attested in Xanthus the Lydian (frag. 32 in Jacoby, *Fragmente*, IIC, p. 758.8) and (Ps.)Plato (*Alcibiades Maior* 122a1). This and its continuants (Lat. *Zoroastres* and the secondary Gk. formation *Zōróastris*, as in Plutarch and others) were often taken as important evidence, because they show no dental and differ in several respects from the Avestan form (for details see Schmitt, 1996, pp. 93–98). Nevertheless, the attempts (e.g., Markwart, 1930, pp. 24–26 and Werba, 1982, pp. 183 f.) to entirely separate Gk. *Zōroástrēs* from Av. *Zaraθuštra-* and derive it from a totally different original form, perhaps reshaped by the magi, have been unsuccessful.

The Greek form seems to have arisen from a reinterpretation based on Greek



folk etymology, since *-astr-* certainly recalls Gk. *ástra* “the stars” and the initial *zōro-* the Gk. *zōrós* “pure, unmixed.” Such a double influence of folk etymology is not very likely, however, particularly insofar as the meaning and usage of *zōrós* are concerned. This is the reason why Gershevitch (1995, pp. 20 f.) and Schmitt (1996, pp. 96–98) dwelt on detailed phonetical explanations. Thus, Gershevitch envisaged a succession of phonetic developments, which led from OIr. **Zara-uštra-* via Gk. **Zaróstrēs* through metathesis to **Zōrástrēs*, merely assuming that at the last stage the common compositional vowel *-o-* was inserted into this trisyllabic form. Schmitt also started from an OIr. **Zara-uštra-*. However, he assumed that it first produced Gk. **Zara-óstr(ēs)* which changed through metathesis into an intermediate form **Zaro-ástr(ēs)*, which provoked the association with Gk. *ástra* (but was not caused by it), resulting through a subsequent formal remodeling after the theonym *Ōromázēs* (internally rhyming with it) in the attested form *Zōroástrēs* (further evidence for the connections between these two names were also given).

Since the reconstructed OIr. form **Zara-uštra-* is merely based on Gk. *Zōroástrēs*, it remains uncertain and unproven, even if it is in line with the common opinion. (The same holds true also for an alleged **Zara-huštra-*, as postulated by Bartholomae, 1895–1901, p. 39, and Schlerath, 1977, pp. 133 f., because this cannot be a regular development of *Zaraθuštra-* at such an early date as that of the first attestations). But if accepted, one still has to justify the reconstruction of the OIr. form **Zara-uštra-* and its relationship with **Zarat-uštra*. There seem to be only two possibilities: either East Ir. **zarat-* was substituted by Northwest Ir. **zara-* (> NPers. *zar*) “old” (so Schlerath, 1977, pp. 129 f.), or **zarat-* was (morphologically?) adapted to **zara-*, (in analogy to such compounds as Av. *Dāraiaθ.raθa-* vs. OPers. *Dāraya-vauš*).

Contrary to Herzfeld (1947, pp. 55 f.) and Gershevitch (1964, pp. 28b and 38ab), the form beginning with **zara-* cannot be understood at all as a genuine OPers. dialectal form. And in the absence of definite proof that the adaptation of the type found in such OPers. compounds as *Dāraya-vauš* or *Xšaya-ršan-* is really a morphological process and not a phonological one (see Schlerath, 1977, pp. 127 ff.), it is not even clear whether the compound in question (**Zara(t)-uštra-*) must be a verbal governing compound rather than a bahuvrīhi beginning with an adjective. As a result, the Greek rendering of the name is also without decisive value for etymologizing the ambiguous Iranian forms of it and does not help to limit the various possible solutions.

It was only from the reshaped Gk. form *-ástrēs* that the conception of an



alleged astral cult of Zoroaster could arise, from which analogous explanations of the name were deduced, such as *astrothytēs* “star-worshipper” proposed by Dinon (frag. 5 in Jacoby, *Fragmente*, IIC, p. 524.3). But those pseudo-scholarly interpretations are without any value.

Armenian evidence. The most important testimonies of Zoroaster’s name in classical Armenian sources, showing the form *Zradašt* (often with the variant *Zradešt*), are the following (cf. Hübschmann, *Armenische Grammatik*, pp. 41 f. no. 74): *Eznik of Kolb* (sect. 192), *Ēlišē* (*History*, p. 162.15, in addition the adjective *zradaštakan* “Zoroastrian,” pp. 19.3; 143.18), and Mosēs Xorenac’i (*History* 1.6, 17–18 pp. 23.15; 55.7; 56.1, 4 f., 14), by whom Zoroaster is introduced as a magus and a king of the Bactrians or Medes. The form *Zradašt*, which is the result of an older form with initial **zur-*, was taken as evidence for a MPers. spoken form **Zur(a)dušt* by Andreas (1910, p. 872), who even went so far as to draw conclusions from this also for the Avestan form. But the suspicion seems to be unavoidable, that the older form with initial **zur-* was simply influenced by Arm. *zur* “wrong, unjust, idle” and therefore the name must have been reinterpreted in an anti-Zoroastrian sense by the Armenian Christians. Besides, it cannot be excluded, that the (Parthian or) Middle Persian form, which the Armenians took over (*Zaradušt* or the like), was merely metathesized to pre-Arm. **Zuradašt*.

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