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ZOROASTER II. GENERAL SURVEY
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ii. GENERAL SURVEY

"Zoroaster" is the name generally known in the West for the prophet of ancient Iran, whose transformation of his inherited religion inaugurated a movement that eventually became the dominant religion in Iran up until the triumph of Islam. Many of the topics dealt with in this article have already been presented in the many volumes of the Encyclopaedia Iranica. At times the views expressed here on these often difficult matters are in harmony with those of other contributors, at times at variance. While the present contribution is intended to present comprehensive treatment of Zoroaster, the reader should consult the many cross-references in order to find often more detail than can be included in a summary article, to appreciate certain differences in approach by various scholars, and to access the rich bibliographical references which would be redundant to reproduce here.

The name. The name Zoroaster derives from Greek Zōroástrēs. In his own Gathas he refers to himself as *Zaraθuštra*, and this is the form of the name used throughout the Avesta. There has been considerable discussion concerning both the form and meaning of the name (see ZOROASTER, THE NAME). Uncontroversial is recognition of the name as a compound whose final

member *uštra-* is the common word for 'camel.' But, what sort of camel(s)? The prior member *zaraθ* ˚ appears to be a present participle with *θ* for expected *t̰*, which is the normal spelling of word-final *tin pausa*, irrespective of whether the word is verbal or nominal. Among the Western Middle Iranian languages are found Pahl. *zltw(h)št*, MMPers. *zrdrwšt*, and NPers. *Zardušt*, all of which have been thought to derive from **Zarat-uštra*, with regular voicing of the intervocalic stop *t*. However, Parthian has *zrhwšt*, and the Eastern Iranian language Manichean Sogdian [SogdM.] has *zrwšc*. As Gershevitch (1995) showed, the starting point for all forms of the name must be **zarat-*. If the derivation is a present participle of the verb *zar–* 'to be, become old' we can compare the Old Indian evidence, where numerous compounds, including some proper names, have *jarat/d-* as prior members. In Old Indic *jara-* does occur in compounds, but only as final member. Further, I count eighteen Avestan names that are compounds whose prior members are present participles ending is ˚*aṯ* ˚. These facts militate against assuming that there were actually two etymologically distinct forms of the name current in ancient Iran, namely, **Zarat-uštra-* and **Zara-uštra*. The latter, which is the basis of Gr. Zōroástrēs, owes its form to a common phonetic development within Old Persian, whereby word final *tin pausa* disappears. That is why Darius I's name is *Dāraya-waʰuš* and not **Dārayaδ-waʰuš* (*cf.* Av. *Dārayaṯ.raθa-* nom. pr.). In Parth. *zrhwšt* the *h* may derive from *θ* or be a non-etymological prothetic *h/x*. The latter, being suggested by SogdM. *xwštr* 'camel', would be possible if first Parthian had borrowed OPers. **zara-uštra–* and then changed to *ʰušt*. The word for 'camel' is not attested in Parthian, nor is prothetic *h*. The Sogdian form of the name is problematic. According to Gershevitch, an Old Sogdian **Zaraθuštra-* would have passed into Middle Sogdian as **Zarθušc*, not as attested *Zrušc*. This indicates that *Zrwšc* was borrowed, probably from Parthian, whose medial *h* would have disappeared.

Still, through all this, it remains to explain the *θ* of the Avestan name. Gershevitch proposed that this was actually an Old Sogdian (Zaraθuštra's native language; see below) name, originally **Zarat-huštra-*. The sequence *th* would have gone to *θ*, and it was as such that he became known. Of, course this is pure guesswork, as neither **huštra-* nor *th* > *θ* has any verification for hypothetical Old Sogdian. Since *θ* > *h* is well-attested in Parthian (e.g., the present stem *dh-*, Av. *daθa-*), *Zrhwšt* can be derived safely from **Zarθušt*. That is, Parthian assumed the Avestan pronunciation, as did also Sogdian, by whatever route the name took. Why did the dental *t* not enter Middle Persian as a fricative? Perhaps it did. In Middle Persian the normal outcome of *θ* is *h*.

However, where the spelling is historical, Pahlavi uses *t* to represent *θ*, as it lacks a separate sign for *θ*. Perhaps the name did come into Middle Persian at first as *zltwšt* /Zarθušt/; subsequently the *t*, rather than > *h*, was treated as a dental stop that developed the pronunciation *zard*° on the false analogy of words like *zlt* /zard/ "yellow," *slt* /sard/ "cold," *dlt* /dard/ "pain." As for the *θ* itself, one may guess that it is nothing more than final *t* becoming a fricative. If the name of the prophet were no longer felt to be a compound, then the unvoiced dental fricative would have been written as *θ* rather than the normal *t̲*.

Finally, what is the meaning of *zarat̲*? The obvious candidate is "old, aging," thus *Zaraθuštra-* "whose camels are old." However, to some sensibilities this would be an inexplicably inappropriate name, especially in comparison to his father-in-law *Frašaoštra-* "whose camels are wonderful." Also found in the *frawaši* (see FRAVAŠI) lists of *Yt.* 13 are *Wohuštra-* "whose camels are good" and *Arawaoštra-* perhaps "who has snarling/bellowing camels."

Zoroaster's date and place. "When and where Zaraθuštra lived, one does not know." Those words of H. Lommel (1930, p. 3) ring as true today as they did when he wrote them. Despite many attempts to situate Zaraθuštra in historical time and geographic place, all we have are possibilities that may strike one as more or less reasonable.

Date. Controversy over Zaraθuštra's date has been an embarrassment of long standing to Zoroastrian studies. If anything approaching a consensus exists, it is that he lived ca. 1000 BCE give or take a century or so, though reputable scholars have proposed dates as widely apart as ca.1750 BCE and "258 years before Alexander." In order to present the matter in an orderly fashion I shall (1) give account of the facts offered by our various sources, then (2) proceed to a presentation of the various theories.

(1) The sources. Since there are no events mentioned in the entire Avesta which can be linked to any historically verifiable chronology, the only arguments made on the basis of the extant Avesta necessarily are founded on assumptions such as those regarding glottochronology or the reliability of genealogical sequences or the place of Zaraθuštra and the Gathas within the corpus of Standard Avestan texts or even a sense of what may seem reasonable to an individual scholar. These arguments ultimately boil down to a judgment that for such-and-such to have occurred so-and-so many years must have elapsed.

There are Iranian sources outside the Avesta that offer dates for Zaraθuštra. They are contained both in the Pahlavi books and in Arabic and Byzantine sources which drew on Sasanid traditions. In order to evaluate these sources, it is necessary to appreciate that they are dependent on Zoroastrian ideas about time and chronology. Unlike dynastic chronologies, where time is reckoned by regnal years, Zoroastrian chronology is based on a cosmic calendar that is essentially mythological. According to the myth, history unfolds from the beginning in a series of four ages each of three-thousand years. Time will cease at the end of the twelfth millennium with the Frašegird (see FRAŠŌ.KƎRƎTI). Given this model, events, whether legendary or historical, were placed within the millennial continuum of cosmic history in such a way that the modern critic must pay attention to the necessity imposed on the Sasanid chronographers to fit "history" within the parameters of the cosmic calendar.

The Pahlavi *Bundahišn* Chap. 36 is "On the calculation of years of the time of 12,000 years" and lays out world history according to the 4 x 3,000 year scheme. However, these 12 millennia, it becomes immediately apparent, are conceived on the model of the year as it passes through the 12 signs of the zodiac, beginning with Warrag/Aries and concluding with Māhīg/Pisces. Only with the 3rd age does the history of the material world (*gētīg*; see GĒTĪG AND MĒNŌG) commence. Its first millennium begins with the creation of the first mortal, Gayōmard (see GAYŌMART), and concludes with Jamšēd (see JAMŠID), the first king; its second millennium is dominated entirely by the evil dragon Dahāg (see AŽDAHĀ); its third millennium begins with the defeat of Dahāg by the hero Frēdōn and concludes with Wištāsp, last of the Kayanid dynasty, up to the time of his conversion. The 4th age commences with the conversion of Wištāsp by Zardušt, and its first millennium appears to conclude with (the Sasanid dynasty of) of Ardašīr. The dynastic chronology of this millennium is given as: Wištāsp (post-conversion) 90, Wahuman ī Spanddādān 112, Humāy ī Wahuman duxt 30, Dārāy ī Cihrzādān 12, Dārāy ī Dārāyān 14, Alaksandar 14, Aškānān 284, Ardašīr 460. The sum of years from Wištāsp up to Alexander = 258 years, and this "258 years before Zardušt" was taken in our sources as the established date for Zoroaster. Note that the title of *Bd.* 36 given above is according to the Indian *Bundahišn*; the Iranian *Bundahišn* adds "year of the Arabs" implying that the author was drawing on histories in Arabic sources (Christensen, pp. 50-51). It is curious that, after giving "460 years until the brood of Arabs usurped (the) throne," the author adds "to the Persian year 447; it is now the year 527 of the Persian year." Noteworthy also is that the

total sum of years = 1,016, rather than the even 1,000 each of all previous millennia. As scholars have pointed out, the period for the Arsacids (Aškānān) was drastically truncated ostensibly to accommodate the millennial ideology. Compounding the problems in this regnal/dynastic chronology is the presumption that its creators were also confronting the problem posed by having to square the millennial calendar of Zoroastrianism with historical time reckoned according to the Seleucid era, beginning 312 BCE (for a discussion of the "traditional date" see Shahbazi, 1977; Boyce, 1992, pp. 20-21).

Classical sources also give chronologies for Zoroaster (see ZOROASTER: AS PERCEIVED BY THE GREEKS). While Herodotus (ca. 480-424 BCE) never mentions Zoroaster, a contemporary, Xanthos of Lydia, is cited by Diogenes Laertius (3rd century CE) as placing Zoroaster's date 6,000 years before Xerxes' Greek campaign. If this date has a basis in Persian informants, it probably represents a confusion on Xanthos's part over the last two ages of 3,000 years of the Zoroastrian world calendar. Plutarch assigned a date of 5,000 years before the Trojan war.

(2) The theories. On the face of it, the most reasonable date is the one offered by the Pahlavi tradition, namely, "258 years before Alexander." Reasonable, it seems, because it gives a precise reckoning that is not outlandish, such as the Greek 6,000 years, and fits in well with the established dates for the rise of the Achaemenid empire. The "258" has been espoused by various Iranists over the years, though none so vigorously as W. B. Henning (1951, pp. 35-42) and, subsequently rallying to his defense, I. Gershevitch (1995). However, the context in which this dating occurs (see above) hardly inspires confidence in respect to its historicity (see Shahbazi, 1977). This does not mean that Zoroaster did not live just prior to the rise of the Achaemenid dynasty under Cyrus the Great (549-530 BCE), only that the traditional date cannot be employed to establish when Zoroaster lived.

Once relieved of the necessity of accepting the "258" date, scholars have been free to speculate on a wide range of possibilities, though serious proposals must fall within the range of the mid-second millennium to the early 6th century. Early dating is bounded by the very approximate dates of the oldest hymns of the Ṛgveda; late, by the Achaemenid empire. The basic reason for accepting the Ṛgveda as a limit, vague as its dating is, is that, once one crosses that boundary, one enters a realm of unbridled speculation. The Achaemenid empire sets a limit of a different sort. Since within the entire Avesta not a single Achaemenid king is mentioned, and since the geographical locus of the

Avesta is eastern Iran, the inference is drawn that most of its texts were composed outside the temporal and geographical sphere of the empire. The case is even more compelling if Darius I can be regarded as a convert, though, in any event, the calendar reform, probably during the reign of Artaxerxes II (404-358 BCE) (see Boyce, 1982, pp. 243-46) suggests a prior period of time during which Zoroastrianism gradually became accepted.

Place. There is really nothing in the Gathas which might give a clue where Zoroaster lived or the areas in which he was active. In the Avesta, the geography of the *Vendīdād* and of the *Yašt*s make it clear that these texts locate themselves in eastern Iran. Even though there are later traditions which place him in Azarbaijan and Media, it is more reasonable to locate Zoroaster somewhere in eastern Iran along with the rest of the Avesta. Further, the two Avestan dialects belong linguistically to eastern Iran (for details, see AVESTAN GEOGRAPHY; Boyce, 1992, pp. 1-51). Inconclusive arguments have been made for Chorasmia (Henning, 1951, pp. 42-45) and Sogdiana (Gershevitch, 1995, whose arguments are based on the slimmest of evidence), while Boyce's attempt to place him on the Inner Asian steppes of Kazakhstan prior to the migrations onto the Iranian plateau was motivated by misguided ideological considerations (see Malandra, 1994). Perhaps we are safe in placing him somewhere in the northeast, rather than in the southeast in Sistān.

Zoroaster in history and legend. The position taken in this article is that there are really two Zoroasters. The one is a flesh-and-blood historical figure: the author of the Gathas, the great reformer of ancient Iranian religion, and the most skilled poet of pre-Islamic Iran, whose name became identified with the religious movement he founded. The other is a mostly legendary personage celebrated in the Standard Avestan texts and the Pahlavi books, and accorded a certain awe by various Classical authors. However, there have been attempts to situate Zoroaster exclusively in the realm of legend.

In the late 19th century J. Darmesteter (III, 1893, pp. lxxv ff., lxxxv ff.) tried to demonstrate that the Gathas were a creation of the 1st century BCE at the earliest on the grounds that the ideas which they express were inspired by Neo-Platonism. For Darmesteter, Zoroaster was simply a legendary figure whose story is told in the Pahlavi sources and who only provided an ancient authoritative name to the linguistically anachronistic writings. While not denying that Zoroaster may have been an historical figure, Darmesteter relegated him to the domain of legend and thoroughly cut him off from authorship of the Gathas. Although Darmesteter's ideas were immediately

rejected, attempts to separate Zoroaster from the Gathas have resurfaced. In his 1963 voluminous work on ancient Iranian ritual, M. Molé took up the problem of Zoroaster in history, declaring that "Zoroaster the Spitamid remains totally unknown to us" (p. 271). For Molé Zoroaster is entirely the creation of myth and legend. On the one hand, he stated clearly in the Preface to his book that it was "far from us to want to deny the historical reality of the Iranian Prophet and of his entourage; but that reality only appears to us transformed in conformity with a ritual schema" (p. vii). On the other hand, when he denied that the opening words of *Y.* 46 ("What land to flee to? Where should I go to flee? From my family, from my clan they banish me") "can in any case be interpreted in the sense of a historical event" (p. 273), one wonders who, in Molé's mind, composed words like this. Was it Zoroaster creating his own ritual-symbolic fiction? or someone else? A generation later there came the categorical denial of his very existence as the author of the Gathas by Kellens and Pirart (I, 1988). Kellens' ideas about Zoroaster have been embraced by the prominent scholar P. O. Skjærvø.(1997, p. 105) who wrote in his review: "As far as I am aware no Western scholar since [Bartholomae] has made any attempt to present *arguments* for the historicity of Zaraθuštra. It is just accepted. When pressed for arguments, at most scholars refer to the "common opinion." But of course the common opinion is only as good as its foundation, which in this case is nonexistent!" M. Stausberg (2004, p. 203) could write in a general handbook on ancient religions: "It is not clear when Zaraθuštra lived (if there ever was such a person)."

The presuppositions that formed the basis of Darmesteter's theory about the dating of the Gathas and their fictional relationship to Zoroaster, were so errant that it was easy for scholars to dismiss his theory out of hand. As for Molé, we can say that his work on the legend of Zoroaster was exemplary (see below) and that his speculations on the place of the Gathas within the Yasna were so conceptually flawed that we need not consider them further. For Kellens the crux of the argument against Zoroaster being the author of the Gathas is the occurrence of his own name in the Gathas. The starting point for the argument is *Y.* 46.14:

"O Zaraθuštra,
who is thy righteous ally
for the great *maga*?
Or, who wants to be praised?
So, it is he, Kawi

Wištāspa, at the contest.
But those, O Mazdā,
whom Thou *settled in (Thy) abode, O Ahura,
I shall invoke
with the words of Good Mind."

Here the reciter of the stanza, speaking in the 1st person singular, poses a question to Zoroaster, and Kellens concludes that "it is perfectly improbable that he poses a question to himself" with his own name in the vocative. As soon as it is granted that Zoroaster cannot be the speaker in 46.14, then in all cases in the Gathas where Zoroaster is in the 3rd person he cannot be the speaker either. How could, for example, the first person plural voice of 28.6 ask Ahura Mazdā to "give… support to Zaraθuštra and to us" if the creator of the stanza were Zoroaster himself? And once these occurrences are eliminated, all the others fall like dominos. The only logical conclusion to be drawn, therefore, is that some important person named Zaraθuštra figures in the Gathas, though not as their author. If the author is not Zaraθuštra, then who? "The Gathas do not present themselves as the labor of one man, but as the expression of an entire religious group. They are not the work of one personality, but the emanation of a mentality" (p. 20). This mentality, we are asked to believe, belonged to a sort of priestly guild, whose almost exclusive concern was the proper performance of ritual and which may have deputized one of their number more skilled as a poet than the others to compose some hymns to accompany the ritual.

This argument begins with what appears to be a perfectly logical deduction and concludes in fantasy. To begin with the fantasy, we know absolutely nothing about Indo-Iranian priests crafting sacred poetry in this way. In fact, the evidence of the Rīgveda is that individual poets laboriously fashioned (note the preponderance of the verb *takṣ-*) their hymns. Further, the subjective experience that most students of the Gathas have had is, despite all the obscurity of these hymns, the passionate expression of an inspired individual in dialogue with God, other divine entities, and his community. It is hard to imagine how the emanation of a mentality could have produced the Gathas, let alone inspire Iranian peoples over many centuries even to the present day.

Be that as it may, many arguments stand or fall on their premises. The basic premise here is that it is "perfectly improbable" that a poet would address himself by name in the third person. Consider evidence from the Rīgveda. There is a series of hymns in the 7th maṇḍala traditionally ascribed to the *ṛṣi*

Vasiṣṭha. These are highly personal compositions in which the poet rehearses his intimate relationship with the high god Varuṇa, who in many ways bears a striking resemblance to Ahura Mazdā (see Boyce, 1975, pp. 31 ff.). In these hymns the voice shifts back and forth among first, second, and third persons, though all the while it is clear that the author remains Vasiṣṭha. RV 7.88 opens with the 2nd sg. imperative: *váruṇāya matíṃ vasiṣṭha… bharasva* "O Vasiṣṭha, bring a hymn to Varuṇa!" But, immediately in the next verse the voice is 1st person: *ánīkaṃ váruṇasya maṃ si* "Me thinks it is Varuṇa's countenance." Verse 3 shifts to the 1st pers. dual: *ā´ yád ruhā´vaváruṇas-ca nā´vam* "when (I) and Varuṇa would mount the boat," *prá yát… īráyāva* "when we would go out," *ádhi yád… cárāva* "when we would go upon," *īnkhayāvahai* "we would rock." In verse 4 there is another shift to the 3rd person: *vásiṣṭham ha váruṇo nāví ā´dhād ṛṣiṃ cakāra…* "Varuṇa placed Vasiṣṭha in the boat; he made him a seer." RV 7.89 is the anguished lament of Vasiṣṭha suffering from dropsy. It begins: *mó ṣú varuṇa mṛnmáyam gṛháṃ rājann aháṃ gamam* "O King Varuṇa, may I please not go to the House of Clay." Vv. 2 and 3 continue in the 1st person, but in 4 the poet shifts to the 3rd person: *apā´ṃ mádhye tasthivā´ṃ sam tṛṣṇāvidaj jaritā´ram* "Thirst found the singer standing in the midst of the waters." In verses such as these it would make little sense to see the work of some anonymous emanation of a group mentality. The employment of different voices is part of the skillful poet's craft. Returning to the Gathas, we can be confident, therefore, that when we find Zaraθuštra referred to in the 2nd or 3rd person, it is not some other poet or guild of poets invoking his name; rather, it is Zaraθuštra himself employing traditional poetic conventions which were also the inheritance of the Vedic ṛṣis.

Since Zaraθuštra was the real person who composed the Gathas, we must use these sacred poems as our source for understanding Zaraθuštra and his religious vision. (See especially the comprehensive interpretation of the Gathas already given by H. Humbach under GATHAS i. TEXTS)

The Gathas offer scant information about the life of the prophet (see Boyce, 1975, pp. 182-89). He belonged to the Spitāma family. (See Mayhofer, 1979, p. 77 for the correct explanation of the name, "having shining [white] (aggressive) power." Note that at *Y.* 51.11 the name should be read with hiatus as *spita-amāi*, for which compare *wīšta-aspa-*.) The names of his parents, Pourušaspa and Duγδōwā (see DUGDŌW), are preserved only in later Avestan and Pahlavi sources. Zaraθuštra had several daughters, though only the youngest, Pourucistā, is mentioned. She is identified in the "wedding" hymn (*Y.*

53) by two family names. The one, *haēcaṯ.aspanā* "of the H. family," would be the name of her mother's family; the other, *spitāmī* "(girl) of the Spitāma (family)," would be the name of her father's family. Allied by marriage, the Spitāma and Haēcaṯ.aspa families must have maintained close ties to Zaraθuštra, as he addresses them in the same breath: "O Haēcaṯ.aspids, I shall speak to you, o Spitāmids!" (*Y.* 46.15). Another important alliance was with the Hwōgwa family. According to the tradition Zaraθuštra's third wife, Hwōwī, was the daughter of Frašaoštra Hwōgwa (mentioned six times in the Gathas). Frašaoštra's brother was Jāmāspa, to whom Zaraθuštra may have given his daughter. Together these two men were among Zaraθuštra's early and influential converts. In addition to Pourucistā, the tradition credits Zaraθuštra with having three sons, Isaṯ.wāstra by the first wife, Urwataṯ.nara and Hwarə.ciθra by the second (for his mythological sons, see below).

In the course of his activities Zaraθuštra made enemies to whom reference is made frequently in the Gathas. Prominent among them were the *karpan*s and *kawi*s. The former were priests who conducted rituals in ways antithetical to Zaraθuštra's vision. The latter are hard to identify. In the singular the word appears as a princely title (the Kayanids of Iranian legend). With the plural Zaraθuštra cites them as accomplices of the karpans (*Y.* 32.14; 46.11) who, through their dominion (*xšaθra*), corrupt the righteous and pervert the sacrificial rites involving the slaughter of the Cow and pledging aid to Dūraoša (who is either Haoma himself or an aspect of his). Vedic *kaví* means approximately "poet." From the meager contextual evidence of the Gathas, one may conclude that the karpans and kawis were the elites of society who controlled sacred and temporal power. Although Zaraθuštra condemns them for their misdeeds, it is not because of the inherent evil vested in the titles, but because "they squandered the *karpan*ship and the *kawi*ship" (*karapō.tåscā kəwītåscā*, *Y.* 32.15). Apparently, Zaraθuštra's position within his own society became so precarious that he was forced to flee. *Y.* 46 contains a résumé of his flight, stanzas 1-2:

What land to flee to?
Where should I go to flee?
From (my) family
and from (my) clan they banish me.
The community to which
I belong has not satisfied me,
nor have the Drugwant

rulers of the country!
How Thee
can I satisfy, O Mazdā Ahura?

I know the reason why
I am powerless, O Mazdā:
because of my paucity of cattle
and that I am few in men.
I lament to Thee.
Take heed of it, O Ahura!
Granting support,
as a friend would give a friend,
Look upon the power
of Good Mind through Truth!

That satisfaction spoken of in stanza 2 is both the maintenance of the priest by his patrons and the priest's ability to make the requisite offerings to the god(s). But, in stanzas 13-14 Zaraθuštra identifies his true patron as the one "who bounteously gratified Spitāma Zaraθuštra among men." And to the question posed to himself, "O Zaraθuštra, who is thy righteous ally?" he responds, "So, (it is) he, Kawi Wištāspa at the contest." P. O. Skjærvø (1997) has shown how the expression of Zaraθuštra's complaint is part of a genre shared by the poet/priests of the Rīgveda, yet draws the conclusion that it could have no basis in historical reality because it is a mere literary convention! It is like supposing the sack of Jerusalem in 586 BCE never took place on the grounds that Biblical lamentations draw on an ancient Near Eastern literary tradition of lament for the destruction of a city. Be that as it may, Zaraθuštra regarded securing the patronage and protection of Wištāspa as a pivotal accomplishment.

Before that event Zaraθuštra suffered various wrongs at the hands of his opponents. In *Y.* 44.18-19 he vents his anger over the withholding of his stipend (*mīžda*) "ten mares with a stallion and a camel." Elsewhere, it is their violation of the laws of hospitality. At *Y.* 51.14:

The karpans are not allies,
contrary (as they are) to the laws of pasturage,
intolerant of the stranger's (+*arōiš*) cow,
through their very deeds and proclamations,
a proclamation which, in the end,

will place them in the House of the Lie

Humbach (1959, II, pp. 90-91) was on the right track in citing RV 10.27.8 (on which, cf. Thieme pp.12-13):

gā´vo yávaṃ práyutā aryó akṣan
tā´apaśyaṃ sahagopā´ś cárantīḥ
hávā aryó abhítaḥ sám āyan
kíyadāsusvápatiś chandayāte

The cows of the stranger ate the cowherd.
I saw them grazing together with their barley.
Shouts of the stranger did, indeed, around.
How long shall the owner (of the field tolerate these (cows)?

In this RV passage and *Y.* 51.14 the problem is either the grazing rights of a stranger or his right of passage. In the RV the cows have trespassed, testing the tolerance of the owner of the field; in 51.14 the Karpans do not tolerate (+*asəṇdā*) any stranger's cow in their field, in violation of law.

Beyond that there is little of a biographical nature that one can glean from the Gathas. The gaps are filled in the later tradition. (see below under "Legend")

One of the most important of Humbach's contributions has been his attention to the place of the Gathas within the context of the sacrificial ritual (see further under YASNA). The fact that Zaraθuštra identifies himself as a sacrificial priest, *zaotar*, and makes references to the ritual context of some Gathas puts the matter beyond doubt. However, there are problems with the ritualist approach. It is not at all obvious that some of the Gathas have any ritual context at all. For example, the "Cow's Lament" (*Y.* 29) deals with the question of the source of Zaraθuštra's authority as a poet who can give voice to his Vision (*daēnā*) which is the source of divine revelation and who can exercise adequate power to advance that Vision. An analogy can be drawn with the Rīgveda. In that massive collections of hymns most are connected in one way or another with the ritual. The hymns of praises to the various deities were certainly composed for recitation in the worship of the specific deity at the sacrifice; yet, most are not linked in any particular way to the ritual performance. Hymns like those of Vasiṣṭha cited above, are personal expressions of the poet's relationship to the god. The commentator Sāyaṇa, who carefully noted the ritual context of each hymn, for these has *gato*

viniyogaḥ (“gone is the (ritual) application”). The danger is that when the ritual application of the entire collection of Gathas is sought obsessively, one can become deaf to the spiritual and ethical dimensions of the poetry. So, for example, Kellens’ understanding of *daēnā* in certain contexts as “une abstraction rituelle” (Kellens and Pirart, II, 1990, p. 252) or his translation of *šyaoθana* as “acte (rituel)” (ibid., p. 323) neatly sidestep these dimensions. Another problem with the ritualist approach, as exemplified in the poorly conceived work of M. Molé (1963), is that the *Yasna* and its accompanying ritual are the products of developments of the ritual which took place long after Zaraθuštra’s time. We know next to nothing about what rituals Zaraθuštra performed or about how he performed them. We cannot be sure even whether he banned the use of *haoma* that is so central to the *yasna*.

Ethics plays a predominant role in Zaraθuštra’s thought. The starting point is the myth of the Twin Spirits (*Y.* 30.2-6; 45.1-2). For Kellens and Pirart (III, p. 48), *Y.* 30.4 was a crux for proclaiming “there is no “myth of the two spirits.” Yet they failed to notice that *jasaētəm* is preterite, rather than injunctive, and ignored S. Insler’s defense (1975, p. 166) of Bartholomae’s positing *dazdē* as 3rd dual perfect. Compare *Y.* 29.1 *kahmāi mā θβarōždūm* “for whom did ye shape [aorist] me” and the answer in 29.6 *θβā... θβōrəštā tatašā* “the shaper did fashion [perfect] thee” (tr. Insler, p. 31). Moreover, we must recognize Zaraθuštra’s genius in taking a well-known ancient amoral myth about primordial twins, one of whom butchers the other and from his body parts creates the world (see Lincoln), and transforming that myth into a fundamental paradigm about choosing good over evil. The texts are *Y.* 30:

(2) Hear with (your) ears the best (tidings)!
Regard with a clear mind
the two choices subject to discernment
—each man for himself—
before the great *contest,
being aware to address us!

(3) Now, these are the two original Spirits
who, as Twins, have been perceived in a dream.
In both thought and speech,
in deed, both the better and bad.
Between these two, the pious,
not the impious, will choose rightly.

(4) Furthermore, it was that the two Spirits
confronted each other; in the beginning they created
for themselves life and non-life.
And as in the end there will be existence,
the worst for the Liars,
so Best Mind for the Righteous one.

(5) Of these two Spirits
the Liar chose the worst course of action.
The most beneficent Spirit (chose) Truth,
(he) who is clothed in the hardest stones,
and (those) who propitiate Lord
Mazdā, believingly, with true deeds.

(6) Between the Two they did not choose rightly
even the Daiwas, in that delusion
came upon them as they were taking council,
so that they chose the Worst Mind.
Then, together they ran to Wrath
with which mortals infect life.

and *Y.* 45:
(1) Thus I shall proclaim.
Now hear, now listen,
those (of you) who are nearby
and those who are seeking from afar!
Now keep ye in mind this,
for it is all clear!
“Let not for a second time
the one of bad doctrine ruin existence,
through (his) evil choice,
the Drugwant who has chosen through his tongue!”

(2) Thus I shall proclaim
the original two Spirits of existence.
Of the two, the very beneficent
would have spoken thus to the evil one:
“Neither our minds
not our pronouncements nor our intellects,
nor yet our choices

nor our words nor yet our deeds,
nor our visions
nor our souls are in agreement."

For Zaraθuštra, the effects of what happened *in illo tempore* permeate the present; and so he exhorts his people, the righteous followers of Truth (*ašawans*) not to let existence be ruined a second time by the follower(s) of the Lie (*drugwant*s; see DRUJ).

Part and parcel of Zaraθuštra's ethical vision was the belief in rewards and punishments in the afterlife (see extensively under ESCHATOLOGY). Although it is impossible to know whether or not it was his innovation, Zaraθuštra was the first in recorded human history to articulate a clear theology of a heaven for the righteous and a hell for the wicked. For example, *Y.* 31.20:

He who shall come to the Ašawan,
to him belongs heavenly splendor instead of lamentation.
A long time of darkness,
with bad food, the uttering of 'woe!',
o Drugwants: to this existence
'your *daēnā* shall lead you on account of your own deeds."

Here the *daēnā* (see DĒN) is the personified aggregate of one's deeds described in the later tradition as a beautiful maiden for the righteous and an ugly hag for the wicked. She conducts the soul (*urwan*) onto the Cinwat bridge (see CINWAD PUHL), where it will pass on to Paradise, called the Best (*Y.* 46.10), the House of Good Mind (*Y.* 32.15), and the House of Song (Garō Dəmāna, *Y.* 45.8; 50.4, 15; see GARŌDMĀN), or fall into the dark abyss of Hell, "for ever and ever guests in the House of the Lie" (*Y.* 46.11; also 51.14), also called House of Worst Mind (*Y.* 32.13).

What is not explicit is whether, beyond individual eschatology, Zaraθuštra had a theology of world history that would terminate with the establishment of a paradisiacal state, which in later Avestan texts is called *frašō.kərəti* "making marvelous." As A. Hintze has shown (see FRAŠŌ.KƎRƎTI), Zaraθuštra's use of *fraša–* and *ākərəti-* with *ahu–* "existence" is not inconsistent with Standard Avestan usage, and, that his vision of existence transformed through the triumph of Truth foresees, at the least, such a transformation within his own life, if not at some time in the more distant future. In any case, passages such as *Y.* 50.11:

Let the Creator of existence
promote through Good Mind
the making real what, according to (His) will,
is most wonderful (*fərašō.təməm*)!
contain the idea that the end will repeat the primal creation,
while *Y.* 43.5 extends the idea of the end to entail judgment:
Holy (*spəntəm*), then, Thee
do I consider, O Mazdā Ahura
in that I see Thee
as the first in the birth of life,
in that Thou dost assign
deeds and also words which entail recompense,
the bad (recompense) to the bad,
the good reward to the good,
through Thy skill
at the final turning point of creation

A term used in later texts in connection with the conclusion of history is *saošyant*. A future active participle, it means "who will bring about benefit, i.e., benefactor." In two passages (*Y.* 48.9, 53.2) the *saošyant* appears to be Zaraθuštra himself. In the somewhat obscure *Y.* 45.11 the *saošyant* is a future one (*aparō*). The three remaining passages (*Y.* 48.12, 34.13, 46.3) present *saošyant*s (plural) as acting in the future. The only solid conclusion we can draw is that Zaraθuštra considered himself to be *saošyant* and believed that there would be others in the future. Is this merely the kernel of a concept that developed later? Was Zaraθuštra a monotheist, dualist, or polytheist? These are questions which seem to be as old as the appearance of Zurwanism (on which, see DUALISM and EVIL i.), perhaps already in the Achaemenid period, and remain the subject of lively discussion today among both scholars and Zoroastrians. Labels can be misleading, and depending on what one means all three labels can be made to apply to Zaraθuštra's theology. There is nothing in the Gathas to suggest that dualism was primordial, as expounded in the orthodox (non-Zurwanite) creation theology of the *Bundahišn*. Rather, dualism is the outcome of the choices made by the Twin Spirits (see above), who are best understood as themselves creations of Ahura Mazdā. In *Y.* 44.3-5, Zaraθuštra asks rhetorically:

(3) This I ask Thee,
speak to me truly, O Lord!

Who through his generative power
is the original father of Truth?
Who fixed
the path(s) of the sun and the stars?
Who is it through whom the moon
waxes, now wanes?
Even these, O Mazdā,
and others I wish to know.

(4) This I ask Thee,
speak to me truly, O Lord!
Who supports
both the earth below and the heavens
from falling down?
Who the waters and plants?
Who to the wind
and the clouds doth yoke the two steeds?
Who, O Mazdā
is the creator of Good Mind?

(5) This I ask Thee,
speak to me truly, O Lord!
What artificer
created days and nights?
What artificer
created sleep and wakefulness?
Who is it through whom
dawn, midday and evening (come to pass),
which remind
the conscientious (man) of his duty?

The strong implication is that Ahura Mazdā is the supreme deity who has created and ordered the cosmos. Yet, it is clear that He is not alone in the universe. The group of divine abstractions or entities (the Aməša Spənta of later Avestan texts)—Aša (Truth), Spənta/Spəništa Mainyu (Holy(est) Spirit), Wohu Manah (Good Mind), Xšaθra (Dominion), Ārmaiti (Right-mindedness), Haurwatāt (Wholeness; see HORDĀD) and Amərətāt (Immortality; see AMURDĀD)—function as autonomous modalities of Ahura Mazdā's nature which have absorbed functions of a number of the traditional deities. While this can be seen as a step toward monotheism, Ārmaiti, as Ahura Mazdā's

daughter (*Y.* 45.4), is a thinly veiled member of an older divine household. The Indo-Iranian demiurge, θβōrəštar, appears in the "Cow's Lament" (*Y.* 29) as a fully independent deity, as do the collectivity of Ahuras in other passages. Indeed, Zaraθuštra frequently moves back and forth between "Thee" and "you" when addressing either Ahura Mazdā or the deities. In the end, it is pointless to try to assign a label to Zaraθuštra's theology, for he was an inspired prophet, not a systematic theologian.

Zoroaster in the Avesta outside the Gathas. The Gathas provide no link to any known dateable event, unless one should accept the generally rejected view of Herzfeld that the Wištāspa whom Darius names as his father was the very same person as the *kawi* Wištāspa named by Zaraθuštra as his royal patron. Even though the Gathas cannot be placed with confidence at any particular point in time, they bear witness to an individual and his community who were flesh-and-blood people. This is in marked contrast with the Zaraθuštra of the Standard Avestan texts.

As noted above, in terms of the world calendar Zaraθuštra's life straddled two cosmic periods, his conversion of Wištāspa marking the beginning of the first millennium of the 4th age. The previous age began with the first mortal, Gayōmard. The *Frawardīn Yašt* (*Yt.* 13.87-94) presupposes this chronology and makes an implicit claim that Zaraθuštra is the second "Adam." Thus, vs. 87 states: "We worship the *frawaši* of righteous Gaya Marətan (Gayōmard), who was the first to hear the mind and teachings of Ahura Mazdā, from whom (Ahura Mazdā) fashioned the families of the Aryan peoples, the seed of the Aryan peoples." This is followed immediately by the worship of Zaraθuštra's *frawaši.* In the series of stanzas Zaraθuštra is proclaimed to be the first priest (*āθrawan*), warrior (*raθaēštā*), and commoner (*wāstryō.fšuyant*), a clear indication that, like primordial Gaya Marətan, he too embraced the totality of Aryan society (see AVESTAN PEOPLE); he is also hailed as the first teacher of the Ahuric religion and repudiator of the *daēwa*s. Moreover, at his birth and growth there was a rejuvenation of the cosmos. *Yt.* 19.81 states that through his correct recitation of the sacred *ahuna wairya* prayer, he alone drove all the *daēwa*s underground, repeating, one may infer, the first recitation of that *mąθra* by Ahura Mazdā that caused Ahriman to swoon prior to the material creation (following the cosmogony of the *Bundahišn*). This is repeated in the *Hōm Yašt* (*Y.* 9.14-15), where Zaraθuštra 's birth concludes a series beginning with Yima, the first king, and continuing with Thraētaona (Frēdōn) the slayer of Aži Dahāka, and the brothers Urwaxšaya and Kərəsāspa, all well-know

characters of myth and legend. The list of supplicants who petition Anāhitā for success in the *Abān Yašt* begins with Ahura Mazdā asking that he "instigate righteous Zaraθuštra, son of Pourušaspa, to think according to the Religion, to speak according to the Religion, to act according to the religion" (*Yt.* 5.18). After a series composed of legendary heroes and villains (*Yt.* 5.21- 83) and an interruption (*Yt.* 5.84-102), the list resumes with Zaraθuštra asking with the identical formula of Ahura Mazdā, that he instigate Kawi Wištāspa to think according to the Religion, etc." He is followed by Wištāspa, Zairi.wairi (Zarēr), and the villain Arəjaṭ.aspa (see ARJĀSP), all prominent in the legend of Zaraθuštra. *Yt.* 5, therefore, is consistent with the idea that Zaraθuštra occupies a place in cosmic time and at the beginning of a new age, which he initiates with a repetition of a divine act.

For the compilers of the Avesta, Zaraθuštra was the conduit of revelation from Ahura Mazdā and other deities. Thus, like Moses in Leviticus, didactic passages, in which laws and ritual instructions are given, are introduced with a common formula: Zaraθuštra asked Ahura Mazdā... Ahura Mazdā said to Zaraθuštra ... Of course, these revelations can lay no claim to historical experiences, being as they are simply framed in a fiction that lends ultimate authority to the ruling.

The legend of Zoroaster. The legendary biography of Zardušt/Zaraθuštra is given extensively in the seventh book of the 9th-century *Dēnkard*, with briefer references in *Dk*. 5 and the *Pahlavi Rivāyat Accompanying the Dādestān ī Dēnīg* 47. Texts, translations and commentary were published by Molé (1967; in English, the old translation of West). Beyond these texts there is a paucity of references to Zardušt in the Pahlavi Books, and his name is absent from the Sasanid inscriptions, even of Kardēr.

Dk. 7 begins the legend with a genealogy of the revelation and propagation of the Dēn, starting with the Amahrspandān and Yazdān in the spiritual state (*mēnōg*), then with Gayōmard in the material (*gētīg*). He is followed by a list of legendary notables, 20 in all including Gayōmard, with Zardušt as last of "historical" figures, himself followed by the three future saviors of his own seed, Ušēdar, Ušēdarmāh and Sōšyans. Noteworthy is the situation of Zardušt within the cosmological calendar. Chap. 2 details the creation (*dahišn*) of Zardušt out of basic elements of the *yasna*. His *xwarrah* (see FARR[AH]) was first created in the *mēnōg* and subsequently transferred to the *gētīg* as it passed down through the various celestial stations to the fire in the house of Zōiš and thence into his daughter Dugdōβ, the future mother of Zardušt. His

frawahr (*frawaši*) was fashioned in the *mēnōg* by the Amahrspandān at the end of the 2nd world age, just prior to the Assault (*ēβgad*). The *frawahr* had human form and was in the likeness (*hankirbīh*) of an Amahrspand. In the transfer to the *gētīg*, the *frawahr* was placed in a stalk of *hōm* (see HAOMA), which was brought to a bird's nest on Mt. Asnawand 330 years before the end of the 3rd world age. Eventually Purušāsp found the *hōm*, brought it home, and gave it to his wife, Dugdōβ. Finally, Zardušt's bodily substance (*tan-gōhr*) passed to the two Amahrspandān, Amurdād and Hōrdād in a cloud whose rain passed into plants. The plants were eaten by cows which Dugdōβ milked. After combining milk and *hōm*, she and Purušāsp drank the mixed drink and in this way the *xwarrah*, *frawahr*, and *tan-gōhr* of Zardušt entered his parents. In spite of interventions by the *dēw*s, Zardušt is conceived and born. The stuff of the rest of the story of his life fits within the literary genre of the romance, where miracles and fantastic events abound. While the conversion of Wištāsp and the conflict with Arjāsp occupy a prominent place in the narrative, there is almost nothing of substance beyond some names which might have an historical basis. According to the tradition, Zardušt died at the age of 77, killed by a hostile priest (*karb*) named *Brādrēs.

Conclusion. It is difficult to apply a label to Zaraθuštra according to a phenomenological typology. For want of a better word I have used "prophet," though he cannot be equated neatly with the Biblical *nābī'*. Attempts to portray him as a shaman (Nyberg) or as a political operative (Herzfeld) have been shown to be in error (Henning). Nevertheless, it is inescapable hermeneutically that every exegete will tend to understand Zaraθuštra through a lens of his own life situation. The fascination of a great religious thinker is that each generation will strive to achieve an understanding that may always remain just out of reach.

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