



ZOROASTER IV. IN THE PAHLAVI BOOKS

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Zardušt is the name of the Zoroastrian prophet in the Pahlavi literature of the Sasanian and early Islamic period. On the form of the name in Book Pahlavi, *zltw(h)št Zar(a)du(x)št*, see [ZOROASTER i. THE NAME](#). For discussions of scholarly controversy over the dating and historicity or otherwise of Zoroaster, see [ZOROASTER ii. GENERAL SURVEY](#).

Although Pahlavi was spoken as long ago as the 3rd century BCE, most of the written works that survive were compiled from older Zoroastrian material in the period after the Muslim conquest up to the 10th century CE. These works are in many cases priestly texts, in terms of their religious content and didactic style: as the first and archetypal Zoroastrian priest, Zardušt naturally figures in such Pahlavi texts. He is the central identity marker of the religious community, who distinguishes it from the surrounding Muslim, Christian, Jewish, and other communities. He is also the hallmark of the veracity and authenticity of the Zoroastrian tradition, lending authority to what is said in his name. The several texts that recount the legends of the biography of Zardušt function as paradigms of perfect behavior (as in the stories of the life of, for example, Buddha, Jesus and Moḥammad) and as narratives of



theological, cosmological, and ritual lore. The main role of Zardušt is the articulation of Zoroastrian teaching, including doctrinal, ethical, philosophical, ritual, and theological traditions. For the modern scholar wishing to reconstruct a historical Zoroaster, however, the evidence of the Pahlavi texts about Zardušt must be used with great circumspection. Nevertheless, for our understanding of the Zoroastrian religion of the Sasanian and early Islamic period, they are of considerable importance. In short, rather than being a historical personage, the Zardušt of the Pahlavi books is a theological and religious figure, whose being, life and teachings are exemplary and definitive for the communities that held him as their figurehead. Even so, as has been pointed out (see [ZOROASTER ii](#)), there is a paucity of reference to Zardušt in many of the Pahlavi books and his name is absent from the Sasanian inscriptions.

E. W. West brought together translations of the Pahlavi sources on the life of Zardušt, principal of which are the *Dēnkard* book VII.1-11 (see [DĒNKARD](#); tr. West, 1897; text, tr., and comm. Molé, 1967) and chaps. 12-24 of the *Wizīdagthā ī Zādspram* (see [ZĀDSPRAM](#); tr. West, 1897, pp. 134-70) based on the Pahlavi version of the lost *Spend* and *Čīhrdād nasks* of the Avesta (see [ČIHRDĀD NASK](#)). These are supplemented by the shorter text of the *Dēnkard* book V.1-4 (tr. West, 1897; text, tr., and comm. Molé, 1967), which summarizes and repeats the account of *Dēnkard* VII except for a few extra details. M. Molé (1967) also includes a section of the text *Wizīrgard ī Dēnīg*, with a genealogy and account of the life of Zardušt, but this text is, according to M. Boyce (1975, 182, n. 3), “known to be a fabrication made in India in the 19th century A.C.” See also Boyce’s footnote on Molé’s work on the legends (*ibid.*, p. 182, n. 4). As West says, “These three narratives appear to be the only connected statements of the Zoroastrian legend that remain extant in Pahlavi” (1897, p. xv). West is confident that the original of the Pahlavi versions was translated from an Avestan text (*ibid.*, p. xviii). He gives details of the passages in other Pahlavi and Pazand texts that deal with the legends of Zardušt (*ibid.*, pp. xviii-xix) with the exception of the (then) unedited *Pahlavi Rivāyat Accompanying the Dādestān ī Dēnīg*, chap. 47, on the episode of Zardušt’s conversion of King Wištāsp (text, tr., and comm. Molé, 1967 and Williams, 1990). West helpfully lists all references to the Zoroastrian legends in the extant Avesta (*ibid.*, pp. xix-xx) and concludes that they present a fairly complete view of the Zoroastrian legends current in Sasanian times. After reflecting on the contents of the later, Persian *Zartušt-nāma*, West spends the remaining 21 pages of his Introduction (*ibid.*, pp. xxvii-xxlvii) compiling a chronology of Zoroastrianism



and dating of Zoroaster based on the millennial system of the *Bundahišn*, and incorporating the information gleaned from the texts on the life of Zardušt mentioned above, though he himself seems to remain sceptical to the end on how historically useful it may be.

For a summary and discussion of texts containing the legends of Zardušt, see also the work of West's contemporary, [A. V. W. Jackson](#), who set out to create a narrative of the life of the prophet based on all available sources (1898). This narrative forms the first part of the book, some 140 pages intended for the general reader; the second part, which is slightly longer, comprises seven appendices, most of which are scholarly essays on the name, date, chronology, and geographical location of Zoroaster. Appendix V is a collection of all the Classical Greek and Latin passages mentioning Zoroaster's name (compiled with L. H. Gray). The works of K. Barr (1952), Molé (1963, pp. 271-83, 348-85; and also 1967, *passim*), and Boyce (1975, chaps. 7 and 11) display a modern scepticism with regard to the historical use of such "legendary" material. J. Rose (2000, pp. 24-31) succinctly summarizes the debates that have ensued in modern scholarship.

One of the most interesting of modern treatments of the legend is that of H. S. Nyberg (1955/1975): it forms the basis of the following résumé of the *Dēnkard* VII account. As the only continuous biography of Zardušt that exists, *Dēnkard* VII must be considered as an independent and unitary text, composed according to a determined principle (Nyberg, 1975, p. 506). It begins with a prehistory going from primordial man and the first king, Gayōmard (see [GAYŌMART](#)), to the protector of Zardušt, Wištāsp. This account is entirely theological and, apart from some inserted details, is devoid of all epic movement; it contains the "natural theology" of Zoroastrianism, the history of the revelation before the full revelation effected by Zardušt. Only then does the "Life of Zardušt," the messenger of the Mazdean religion, begin.

The first section of this "Life" (*Dk.* VII.2) is entitled "Miracles which were produced before he, the most glorious of creatures, was born of his mother." Zardušt had a complicated pre-history before coming into the world. His person is composed of three celestial elements: his *xwarrah* "celestial glory," his *frawahr* "individual spirit," and his *tan-gōhr* "corporeal substance." His *xwarrah* (see [FARR\[AH\]](#)) is supposed to have arisen during the initial divine creative act; his *frawahr* (see [FRAVAŠI](#)) was created 3,000 years before the attack of the evil force against the creation of Ohrmazd; and his *tan-gōhr* was created last. His *xwarrah* was sent down here across the celestial spheres:



from the endless light to the sun, the moon, and the stars, down to the hearth fire of the house of Frahim.rvānān Zōiš, and transferred to his wife, the maternal grandmother of Zardušt, at the moment she gave birth to a daughter who would become the mother of Zardušt; to her was then transmitted Zardušt's *xwarrah*. From this newborn girl came a great radiance, which illuminated everything between the sky and the earth.

Nyberg associates this celestial light with non-Iranian influence: "in all probability the life of Zardušt depends here on the legend of the Buddha" (1975, p. 507). Rose (2000, p. 25) has noticed similarities with several traditions, "Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish and Christian traditions in particular," and notes that, decades earlier, E. W. Burlingame (1920) was claiming that certain elements of the Zoroastrian tradition are "obviously derived from the Buddhist legend" and that the other miracles "bear witness of the Buddhist original." Rose refutes this, referring to the fact that the first miracle in the Zoroastrian account was known to the Greeks long before the first record of the Buddhist legend in the late 3rd century CE (2000, p. 35, n. 85). The account continues to relate that the girl's radiance also struck the eyes of the demons and the priests who are the adversaries of Zardušt in the Gāthic hymns; they then sent three afflictions to where she lived and incited the inhabitants of the country to rise up against her parents. To save their daughter, they sent her to the village of the Spitāmān clan, where she was brought up in the house of Purušāsp, the man she subsequently married. Then the *xwarrah* passed to Purušāsp.

Ohrmazd thus decided, in council with the supreme circle of *amahraspands* (see [AMEŠA SPENTA](#)), to have Zardušt born in ordinary human fashion, instead of sending him to earth as a uniquely divine being. Zardušt's *frawahr*, which had lain dormant in the world of the *amahraspands*, was transported onto the earth and set within a stem of *hōm*, protected by an encircling wall (*Dk.* VII.2.23). The *amahraspands* Wahman and [Ardwahišt](#) charged two birds with carrying the *hōm* with the *frawahr* of Zardušt to a tree. Purušāsp, on a sign from Wahman and Ardwahišt, went to look for the *hōm* and entrusted it to his wife Dugdhōv (see [DUGDŌW](#)) to keep. Only then did Ohrmazd fashion the *tan-gōhr* of Zardušt and entrust it to [Hordād](#) and [Amurdād](#), and to the cloud, which sent it to the earth in the form of rain "quite fresh, drop by drop, perfect and warm, to the delight of cattle and men" (*Dk.* VII.2.38), whence it passed into the grass. Purušāsp herded six white cows with yellow ears on to the grass and had Dugdhōv milk two calfless cows (*awēšān gāwān dō*



azādagān) into whose milk the *tan-gōhr* of Zardušt had entered from the grass. She added water to the milk. The miracle is said to be that they produced milk, but the heifers' own intact state is also highly symbolic. The *hōm* containing the *frawahr* was pounded and mixed in with the milk, and so the three elements of Zardušt were reunited in the house of Purušāsp.

The demons were now alerted to the danger. They launched a powerful assault against the village and destroyed it; but Purušāsp and Dugdhōv, the future parents of Zardušt, survived and together drank of the milk of the *hōm*. Their procreative union was strongly opposed by the demons, but after three attempts they accomplished it, and so the *xwarrah*, *frawahr*, and *tan-gōhr* of Zardušt were reunited in the body of Dugdhōv, and he was born. Thus, prior to his birth, Zardušt's *xwarrah* originates from the primeval creative act of Ohrmazd and descends through the levels of existence and all the elements of creation. The symbolism of the story of Zardušt's creation bears a theological code, but it also alludes to the ritual of the Zoroastrian liturgy. Furthermore, it has been suggested that, through the coalescence of the three elements of his being, Zardušt received his ordination as priest, warrior, and herdsman (Boyce, 1975, p. 278, citing Barr, 1952, alluding to *Yt.* 13.89 and quoting *Zādspram* XI.1-2: "Purušāsp said to Zardušt: 'I thought that I had begot a son who was priest, warrior, and herdsman ...,' to which Zardušt replied: 'I who am your son am priest, warrior, and herdsman ...'").

During Dugdhōv's pregnancy, the demons had made the greatest efforts to do injury to her through illnesses. A voice came from Ohrmazd and the *amahraspands* on high commanding her not to resort to sorcerers' remedies, but to wash her hands and make offerings of meat and butter to the fire for her unborn child (*Dk.* VII.2.54). And so she recovered. Immediately before Zardušt's birth, such a great light came from his mother that the midwives thought that the house was on fire. News of his birth was spread in the language of the animals so that they too would witness his prophetic mission (*waxšwarīh*). After the story of the birth, the genealogy of Zardušt is given, from the clan Spitāmān through Yam and Hōšang back through 45 generations to Gayōmard, the first man: what has been encoded symbolically is now announced literally.

The following section (*Dk.* VII.3) treats of the miracles produced in the period from Zardušt's birth until the conversation with Ohrmazd (*ohrmazd hampursagīh*). The first thing that Zardušt did at birth was to laugh. *Zādspram* (ed. Anklesaria, 1964, VIII.14; tr. West, 1897, p. 142) reports that Zardušt



laughed because Wahman had entered and mingled with his mind. This provoked the astonishment of his nurses and of his parents, and disquiet in the *karb* Dūrāsrav (see [KARAPAN](#), [DŪRĀSRĀW](#)), foremost of the sorcerers against whom the Gāthic hymns directed their most violent attacks. Both he and another *karb*, Brātrōkrēš, became arch-enemies of the child Zardušt. Dūrāsrav succeeded in inspiring fear in Purušāsp, to the extent that he wished to kill his child, but all endeavors proved abortive, thanks to divine intervention, which thwarted such attempts. The last story of miraculous rescue tells of the child being thrown into a lair inhabited by a she-wolf and her cubs (*Dk.* VII.3.15-17); the wolf-cubs had previously been slaughtered so that the she-wolf would attack the child with all the more fury. But Wahman and Srōš enable Zardušt to smite the she-wolf, and they send a ewe into the lair to suckle the child. When Dugdhōv approaches the lair, the ewe disappears, and the mother, who mistakes the sheep for the she-wolf, thinks that the child has been harmed. Her anguish disappears when she finds Zardušt alive, and she pledges never more to lose sight of him. The same story in *Zādspram* (ed. Anklesaria, 1964, X.9-14; tr. West, 1897, p. 146) also replaces the wolf with a ewe. Nyberg (1975, p. 509) comments that this is an Iranian variation of a widespread legendary motif concerning the founders of a dynasty and great prophets, reminiscent of the fate of Romulus and Remus in Livy. Boyce (1975, p. 279, n. 9) concurs, suggesting that the awkwardness of this legend, that required a ewe to suckle Zardušt rather than the *daēvic* wolf, makes it probable that it evolved under the influence of the legend of Romulus and Remus in late Parthian or Sasanian times.

One day, as the child Zardušt plays with other children, Dūrāsrav and Brātrōkrēš seek to terrify them; the playmates run away from Zardušt, who quietly stands up to his enemies. Then, in a banquet that Purušāsp held in the presence of the two *karbs*, he asks Dūrāsrav to consecrate the meal on his behalf. The infant Zardušt is violently opposed to this and desires to conduct the ceremony himself. Purušāsp refuses, but in the end the child prevails over Dūrāsrav, even though the latter curses him, and, after repeated fainting fits, Dūrāsrav is smitten by the divinity and dies a most unpleasant death that ends his line of progeny forever.

After that, the book recites, as if in a hymn, all the perfections with which Zardušt was endowed when he was going to receive the divine revelation. The passage is amplified by a fuller account in *Zādspram* (Anklesaria, 1964, XX-XXI; tr. West, 1897, pp. 155-57). When Zardušt is 30 years old, Wahman comes



to him on behalf of Ohrmazd, near to the sacred river Dāitī (see [DĀITYĀ](#)), to call him into conversation with Ohrmazd. As Nyberg says (1975, 510) the scene seduces, with its starchy style, solemn, hieratic. In three single bounds Wahman traverses the distance between the celestial world and the river Dāitī, where Zardušt is engaged in drawing water infused with *hōm*. In *Dk.* VIII.3.52 Zardušt sees an extremely beautiful man (*pēš kirb kū pad tan čašmtar būd*) approaching from the south, perfect in all respects (*pēš nēk kū pad harw čiš pēš būd*). The fourth bound sets Wahman near Zardušt at the moment when he is putting on his clothes, having taken his right foot from the river. They engage in a conversation (3.56-9): The words of Wahman: “Who are you? from whom are you?” The answer of Zardušt: “I am Spitāmān Zardušt.” The words of Wahman: “For what do you suffer ... for what do you struggle and for what is your desire?” Zardušt says: “My suffering is for righteousness (*ahlāwīh*), and my struggle for is righteousness, and my desire is for righteousness.” Wahman enjoins him to cast off his robe (body?), as it is necessary to go without it before Ohrmazd. They go together to the meeting with Ohrmazd, Zardušt following Wahman. In *Zādspram* (Anklesaria, 1964, XXI.8-22.10) there is a description of Zardušt proceeding to an assembly of the seven *amahraspands* (i.e., including Ohrmazd), in Iran, on the banks of the Dāitī. Having offered praise to Ohrmazd and the *amahraspands*, he sits in the seat of the inquirers and asks Ohrmazd a series of questions, which Ohrmazd answers directly. The format of this *hampursagīh* scene is often repeated in didactic passages of the Pahlavi books. The chapter continues “on the same day,” with a series of revelations of Ohrmazd’s omniscient wisdom. It is the focal point of the portrait of Zardušt in *Dk.* VII. In the *Zādspram* account, Zardušt’s cousin Medyōmāh, who was to become his first convert, features significantly in the story of Zardušt’s encounter with Ohrmazd, but his name is never mentioned in *Dk.* VII.

The following section (*Dk.* VII.4) tells of the first apparition of Zardušt in the world of men after he has conversed with Ohrmazd and proceeds towards the conversion of Wištāsp. As authorized prophet, he presents himself to the world to ask men to praise the *amahraspands* and to dishonor the demons. But he asks them also to practice *xwēdōdah*, that is, the union between near relations (see Williams, 1990, II, p. 10 and II, p. 137, n. 137 for references to parallel passages; see [MARRIAGE ii. NEXT OF KIN MARRIAGE IN ZOROASTRIANISM](#)), and he meets bitter resistance. He then turns towards the strong men of Tūrān, led by Urvātādēng, and he is severely rebuffed by them, such that he calls down upon them the anger and chastisement of Ohrmazd.



He seeks in vain to win over other wealthy patrons, and the assault of evil powers breaks out in full force. The evil spirit, *Ahriman* himself, sends demons to destroy Zardušt, but they fall without force on the ground and injure Ahriman. Zardušt chases him, throwing at him a stone as big as a house. In the episode following the struggle, Zardušt crushes the physical appearance of the demons, with the result that they can no longer circulate around the earth in visible form to play their foul tricks. He achieves this through the most sacred of the prayers, the *yathā ahū vairyō*, and a hymn to Zardušt is interwoven with a eulogy of his feat. This act is reminiscent of Ohrmazd's own chanting of the same prayer in *Bundahišn* I.29-32 that rendered the Evil Spirit unconscious for 3,000 years before the spiritual creation.

Next, Ohrmazd seems to require from Zardušt some explanation of the guilty dealings of men with the demons. The prophet is represented here as a reporter from the human world: the omniscience of Ohrmazd does not seem absolute, at least in so far as evil is concerned. Now, however, Zardušt is himself presented with temptation. He is on the bank of the Dāitī beside the clothes he had discarded before meeting Ohrmazd: a demon (*druj*) approaches him in the form of a beautiful woman in a bodice of gold. She proposes union and collaboration; she says: "I am Spandarmad." But Zardušt replies: "I saw Spandarmad in the full light of day and I saw that she was beautiful from the front and back. Turn around, so that I know if you are Spandarmad." Then the woman replies: "Spitāmān Zardušt, we are of the species that is beautiful from the front but ugly from the back," and she refuses to do as he asked. But after three requests, she obeys and, as she turns towards Zardušt, he sees a swarm of ahrimanic monsters on her inner thighs, of serpents, lizards, toads, and frogs. Then he pronounces the prayer formula *yathā ahū vairyō*, and the demon disappears.

There are many instances in the foregoing of the standard formulae "thus it is revealed" and "as the religion says" which reflect translation from an Avestan original further back in time. In his edition Molé indicated such passages by transcribing them in italic font, whereas the passages of a theological character are drafted in a formal, dry prose. Nyberg (1975, p. 512) noted an epic art in the accounts of Zardušt's childhood and the dangers to which he was exposed: "an intuitive description with repetition of formulaary figures, in the manner of epic." The absence of rhythmic form prevented it from being apparent, and if it had been there at some time, it was effaced in the extant abridgement. Nyberg thought that the episodes of Zardušt's childhood and



also, *par excellence*, the episode of Wištāsp's conversion (*Dk.* VII.4.75-90) retained something of the epic style.

The second great turn in the life of the Zardušt is his meeting with Wištāsp. At first he suffers a series of persecutions by the *kayags*, *karbs*, and sorcerers of Wištāsp's court; they incite Wištāsp to torment him with 31 heavy chastisements, chains and shackles, hunger and thirst, all of which he overcame. This section is cited according to the "words of Zardušt" (*gōwišn ī zarduxšt*), not as normally by formulae introducing a citation from the canon. Wištāsp publicly gives a decision in favor of Zardušt after the miracle when he performed on the horse of Wištāsp. Zardušt is said to have received permission to preach his doctrine, and he overcame the astrologers of Babel with his power, where Dahāg played his evil tricks as chief of the sorcerers. All this is composed in prose.

With the description of the conversion of Wištāsp, Nyberg thought that we enter grand epic poetry, though he admitted he could not discern rhythmic units which coincide with the rhythm of the contents. He provisionally considered these texts as "relatively rhythmic translations of Avestan texts, more especially in that Avestisms are found in great number." Nyberg sets out the translation of this as if it is poetry (1975, pp. 513-15), an excerpt from which suffices to illustrate (*ibid.*, p. 513):

Then to them Ahuramazda the creator says,
to Vohumanah, Ašavahišta and to Fire, Ahuramazda's holy son,
Come down, Amešaspentas, to the house of Lord Wištāspa
of many cattle, famed throughout the world,
so that he may accept this religion
and that he responds to the righteous Spitama Zarathuštra.
When they had heard these words,
the Amešaspentas went to the house of Wištāspa
of many cattle, famed throughout the world.

Nyberg refers to the whole scene as a purely religious epic, which he contrasts



with the next chapter, a résumé in theological prose of the miracles revealed from Wištāsp's conversion until Zardušt's departure for the Best Existence. It may also be compared with the account in the *Pahlavi Rivāyat* chap. 47 (ed. and tr. Molé, 1967, pp. 116-12; comm., pp. 238-51; Williams, 1990, ed., I, pp. 168-73, tr., II, pp. 76-79, comm., II, pp. 212-26). Suffice it to say here that, though the *Pahlavi Rivāyat* account of the conversion of Wištāsp is formulaic and repetitive, and scarcely poetic in style, it contains, as Molé says, "definitely ancient elements that are lacking in the seventh book (of the *Dēnkard*) and whose appearance cannot be due to its influence" (Molé, 1963, p. 276). Such "elements" may derive ultimately from the lost Avestan *Wištāsp Sāst* or from another, unknown Avestan source (see further Williams, 1990, II, p. 214). Molé's commentary on this text also includes a transcription and translation of a Pahlavi version of an Avestan text on the conversion of Wištāsp, included in the *Zand i Khūrtak Avistāk* (ed. Dhabhar, 1927, pp. 181-84; ed. and tr. Molé, 1967, pp. 239-41). This is a lengthy blessing and eulogy of Zardušt upon Wištāsp, and Molé's comment is insightful:

The object of the eulogy ... [is] to wish for the king that his activity be as universal as possible, that it transcend and embody all the aspects of life. Wištāsp will be this ideal king and he will remain so in all Mazdean tradition. ... However, the sense of the [Pahlavi] *Rivāyat* chapter is original, as it is not a matter of a eulogy pure and simple, nor of a benediction, but of an essential element of the apostleship, of an argument used by the Prophet to lead to the conversion of the king" (Molé, 1967, pp. 241-42).

Dk. VII.5 is a short chapter, covering in a few lines all the rest of Zardušt's earthly life (said to be 35 years). There is no mention at all of his decease in *Dk.* VII: he simply disappears from the text in chap. 5.8, in a summary of his medical knowledge and healing. *Zādspram* (Anklesaria, 1964, XXV.5; tr. West, 1897, p. 165) mentions only that "in the 47th year (i.e., since his meeting Ohrmazd) Zardušt, who is 77 years and 40 days, passes away" (*pad 47 sālag[īh] widerēd zardušt ke bawēd 77 sālag 40 rōz*). The tradition that he was assassinated by the *karb* Brātrōkrēš is alluded to in a brief notice in *Dk* V.3.2 and the *Pahlavi Rivāyat* (Molé, 1975, 120-21; Williams, 1990, chap. 47.23). Nyberg (1975, p. 516) speculates that it is possible that the old tradition simply spoke of an ascension of Zardušt. In any case, what is apparent from the lack of reference in these sources to the mode of his demise is that the older tradition was less interested in his physical death than in his life and spiritual significance.



The rest of the *Dēnkard* VII account is concerned with the events before and after Wištasp's death until the coming of the unnamed non-Iranian invaders who put an end to the Sasanian dynasty, which also ends the millennium of Zardušt (i.e., the 10th). The text also accounts for the 11th and 12th millennia and the eschatological roles of Zardušt's three miraculously begotten future sons (see [ASTVATǃRETA](#)) who lead the faithful into the renovation and future existence. This eschatological after-life of Zardušt is the subject of several Pahlavi texts, including chapters 33 and 34 of the *Bundahišn*, chapter 9 of the *Zand ī Wahman Yasn* (Cereti, 1995), and chapter 48 of the *Pahlavi Rivāyat Accompanying the Dādestān ī Dēnīg* (Williams, 1990, and see Commentary, II, pp. 226-38; see also [ESCHATOLOGY i](#)).

Nyberg saw Christian and other influences in the Pahlavi accounts of Zardušt's life in the *Dēnkard* VII such that he announced (1975, p. 517): "Then it is easy to admit that the Life of Zardušt in the *Dēnkard* constitutes a replica of the Gospel, to whose strong power of attraction and the missionary virtue forced the Zoroastrians to react." If this is actually unprovable, then he could be correct in seeing a parallel in "the harmonizing tradition that is represented in the *Diatessaron* of Tatian and which was for a long time, in the Sasanian epoch, spread in the Syrian church." There is, as Nyberg admits, an ancient Zoroastrian stratum to these legends, and texts other than the *Dēnkard* can be shown to have direct connection with Avestan texts that pre-date Christian influence. It may be said, however, that legendary stories appear to have a universally common function, to transmit robust, religiously charged, larger-than-life traditions of their protagonists, to provide exemplars of perfection and embodiments of theological and cosmological narrative for the religious community of the day.

There are hundreds of instances in the Pahlavi texts that refer to the few central, well-known narratives such as have been discussed above, each alluding to, amplifying and even extending aspects of Zardušt's life that are accepted as more or less canonical. He is also, by association, symbolically united with past and future perfect men, such as Gayōmard, Hušēdar, Hušēdarmāh and Sōšāns (see, e.g., the *Dādestān ī Dēnīg* and *Dēnkard* books VIII and IX). Dialogue (*hampursagīh*) between Ohrmazd and Zardušt, based on those of the well-known stories, is a genre all of its own. Sometimes Zardušt asks the questions of Ohrmazd on spiritual, cosmological, and ritual matters (e.g., in *Pahlavi Rivāyat* chaps. 1-3, 6, etc.), and the precedent for this is the original meeting of Zardušt with Ohrmazd, referred to above. Sometimes such



a dialogue is to extol a practice or explain an idea, for instance, truthfulness and charity, wisdom and omniscience, or the fate of the soul after death (ibid., chaps. 10, 22, 23). Ohrmazd's explanation of the absolute need for man to be mortal in this world is a fine example of the creative use of Zardušt's life, in the *Zand ī Wahman Yasn* (Cereti, 1995, chap. 3) and the *Pahlavi Rivāyat* (Williams, 1990, chap. 36), also summed up in the aphorisms of *Dk.* VI.B5 and B6 (Shaked, 1979, pp. 134-35). Again, sometimes a monologue is addressed to Zardušt, as in, for instance, *Dk.* IX.204-7 (West, 1892, pp. 210-11). The dialogue has sometimes a disarming intimacy, such as when Zardušt asks Ohrmazd "Did you ever make an offering?" and Ohrmazd says "I did so, for when I created the world then I made an offering; when I gave the soul to Gayōmard, then I made an offering; when you, Zoroaster, were born from your mother, then I made an offering. When you received the religion from me, then I made an offering" (*Pahlavi Rivāyat*, chap. 16; see also ibid., 8a2-3).

Of all the instances of Zardušt appearing in the Pahlavi texts, one would expect to find those most apparently independent of the legendary tradition in the philosophically and theologically oriented *Dēnkard* book III (ed. de Menasce, 1973). Yet most instances in this book are directly linked to this tradition. For example, *Dk.* III, chap. 184 directly alludes to the story of the conversion of Wištāsp (cf. chap. 420). *Dk.* III, chap. 343 lists the best and worst of men, naming Yam as the best of kings, and Zardušt as the best of priests, and Tūr ī Brātrōkrēš, the *karb* "who made the body of Zardušt perish," as the worst of heretics. The principle of the collaboration of best sovereign governance and best priesthood is several times summed up in Yam and Zardušt (chaps. 129, 227). He is rarely referred to in the aphorisms of *Dēnkard* book VI, however, though there are exceptions at VI.163, 295 and B5-6. In terms of theological characterizations of Zardušt, *Dk.* III, chap. 195 is paradigmatic, wherein Zardušt's ten supreme counsels are presented; in chap. 196 they are contrasted with the ten blasphemies of the sorcerer [Axt](#), which are sacriligious inversions of Zardušt's counsels. A similar contrast occurs between the righteous Sēn and the heretic Rašn Rēš (chaps. 197 and 198) and the righteous [Adurbād ī Mahraspandān](#) and "the accursed" Mani (chaps. 199 and 200).

In conclusion, it may be said that the categories "legend" and "history" are each unsatisfactory in themselves to describe a prophetic and religiously dynamic icon such as the Zardušt of the Pahlavi books. His legendary stories nearly always have a didactic, not merely informative, purpose. Elements are incorporated as a conscious attempt of the tradition to exalt the prophet in the



eyes of those faithful who might be tempted to turn to other religions. Like the *Sira* of the prophet Moḥammad, or the life of Jesus or Buddha, Zardušt is the main artery of the salvation history of the religion that claims him as inspiration. His legends are not *merely* hagiographical or romanticized in the sense historians sometimes dismiss them. Certainly, they are heroicized histories, played out on a stage of cosmic, not mundane, time. There is evidence of influence and development in the stories that make up his religious persona, but nonetheless, Zardušt emerges from the Pahlavi texts as a fully formed prophet, who embodies the ancient wisdom first known in the Gāthās. His life is a paradigm of Zoroastrian religious teaching, from his celestially originating conception, through his struggle against demonic forces in life, to his future eschatological role through his miraculously conceived future “sons” and the faithful he inspires to triumph over evil. He is not himself an object of worship or veneration, but the example to his followers of heroic virtue and uncompromising struggle against injustice and oppression.

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