

A HISTORY OF PERSIAN LITERATURE

Companion Volume I

The Literature of Pre-Islamic Iran

Edited by
Ronald E. Emmerick (†) & Maria Macuch



I.B. TAURIS

A History of Persian Literature
Volume XVII

Volumes of *A History of Persian Literature*

- I General Introduction to Persian Literature
 - II Persian Poetry in the Classical Era, 800–1500
Panegyrics (*qaside*), Short Lyrics (*ghazal*); Quatrains (*robâ'i*)
 - III Persian Poetry in the Classical Era, 800–1500
Narrative Poems in Couplet form (*mathnavis*); Strophic Poems; Occasional Poems (*qat'e*); Satirical and Invective poetry; *shahrâshub*
 - IV Heroic Epic
The *Shahnameh* and its Legacy
 - V Persian Prose
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 - VII Persian Poetry, 1500–1900
From the Safavids to the Dawn of the Constitutional Movement
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 - XI Literature of the early Twentieth Century
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Iran, Afghanistan, Tajikistan
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- Companion Volumes to *A History of Persian Literature*:
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 - XVIII Companion Volume II: Literature in Iranian Languages other than Persian
Kurdish, Pashto, Balochi, Ossetic; Persian and Tajik Oral Literatures

A HISTORY OF PERSIAN LITERATURE

General Editor – Ehsan Yarshater

Volume XVII

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Companion Volume I
to *A History of Persian Literature*

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Ronald E. Emmerick & Maria Macuch

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&
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Dedicated to the memory of Ronald E. Emmerick

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The first editor of the present volume, the late **Ronald E. Emmerick** (1937–2001), to whom this volume is dedicated, held degrees from the University of Sydney (BA in 1959) and Cambridge (MA and PhD 1965). He was lecturer in Iranian Studies at the University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies (1964–71) and Visiting Associate Professor of Old and Middle Iranian at the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago. From 1971 until his death in 2001 he was Professor of Iranian Philology at the University of Hamburg. His numerous publications deal with Old and Middle Iranian subjects, especially with the field of Khotanese. Main publications are *The Book of Zambasta, A Khotanese Poem on Buddhism* (1968), *Saka Grammatical Studies* (1968) and *Studies in the Vocabulary of Khotanese* (together with P.O. Skjærvø, 3 volumes, 1982, 1987 and 1997).

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CONTRIBUTORS

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FOREWORD

In the 1990s I gradually became convinced that the time had come for a new, comprehensive, and detailed history of Persian literature, given its stature and significance as the single most important accomplishment of the Iranian peoples. Hermann Ethé's pioneering survey of the subject, "Neupersische Litteratur" in *Grundriss der iranischen Philologie* II, was published in 1904 and E. G. Browne's far more extensive *A Literary History of Persia*, with ample discussion of the political and cultural background of each period, appeared in four successive volumes between 1902 and 1924. The English translation of Jan Rypka's *History of Iranian Literature*, written in collaboration with a number of other scholars, came out in 1968 under his own supervision.

Iranian scholars have also made a number of significant contributions throughout the 20th century to different aspects of Persian literary history. These include B. Foruzânfar's *Sokhan va sokhan-varân* (On poetry and poets, 1929–33), M.-T. Bahâr's *Sabk-shenâsi* (Varieties of style in prose) in three volumes (1942) and a number of monographs on individual poets and writers. The truly monumental achievement of the century in this context was Dh. Safâ's wide-ranging and meticulously researched *Târikh-e adabiyyât dar Irân* (History of Literature in Iran) in five volumes and eight parts (1953–79). It studies Persian poetry and prose in the context of their political, social, religious, and cultural background, from the rise of Islam to almost the middle of the 18th century.

Nevertheless, it cannot be said that Persian literature has received the attention it merits, bearing in mind that it has been the jewel in the crown of Persian culture in its widest sense and the standard bearer for aesthetic and cultural norms of the literature of the eastern regions of the Islamic world from about the 12th century; and that it has profoundly influenced the literatures

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of Ottoman Turkey, Muslim India and Turkic Central Asia—a literature that could inspire Goethe, Emerson, Matthew Arnold, and Jorge Luis Borges among others, and was praised by William Jones, Tagore, E.M. Forster, and many more. Persian literature remained a model for the literatures of the above countries until the 19th century, when the European influence began effectively to challenge the Persian literary and cultural influence and succeeded in replacing it. Whereas Persian art and architecture, and more recently Persian films, have been written about extensively and at different levels for a varied audience, Persian literature has largely remained the exclusive domain of specialists: It is only in the past few years that the poems of Rumi have drawn to themselves the kind of popular attention enjoyed by Omar Khayyam in the 19th century.

A *History of Persian Literature (HPL)* has been conceived as a comprehensive and richly documented work, with illustrative examples and a fresh critical approach, to be written by prominent scholars in the field. An Editorial Board was selected and a meeting of the Board arranged in September 1995 in Cambridge, UK, in conjunction with the gathering that year of the *Societas Europaea Iranologica*, where the broad outlines of the editorial policy were drawn up.

Fourteen volumes were initially envisaged to cover the subject, including two Companion Volumes. Later, two additional volumes devoted to Persian prose from outside Iran (the Indian sub-continent, Anatolia, Central Asia) and historiography, respectively, were added.

Of the Companion Volumes, the first deals with pre-Islamic Iranian literatures and the second with the literature of Iranian languages other than Persian as well as Persian and Tajik oral folk literature.

The titles of the volumes are as follows:

- Volume I: General Introduction to Persian Literature
- Volume II: Persian Poetry in the Classical Era, 800–1500
Panegyrics (*qaside*), Short Lyrics (*ghazal*); Quatrains (*robâ'i*)

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- Volume III: Persian Poetry in the Classical Era, 800–1500
Narrative Poems in Couplet form (*mathnavis*); Strophic Poems; Occasional Poems (*qat'e*); Satirical and Invective poetry; *shahrâshub*
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- Volume XIII: Modern Fiction and Drama
- Volume XIV: Biographies of the Poets and Writers of the Classical Period
- Volume XV: Biographies of the Poets and Writers of the Modern Period; Literary Terms
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- Companion volumes to *A History of Persian Literature*:
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- Volume XVIII: Companion Volume II: Literature in Iranian Languages other than Persian
Kurdish, Pashto, Balochi, Ossetic; Persian and Tajik Oral Literatures

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It is hoped that the multi-volume *HPL* will provide adequate space for the analysis and treatment of all aspects of Persian literature.

The inclusion of a volume on Persian historiography can be justified by the fact that Persian histories like the biographical accounts of mystics or poets often exploit the same stylistic and literary features and the same kinds of figures of speech that one encounters in Persian poetry and belles-lettres, with skilful use of balanced cadences, rhyme, varieties of metaphor and hyperbole, and an abundance of embellishing devices. This was considered to impart a literary dimension to the prose, enhance its esthetic effect, and impress the reader with the literary prowess of the author. The study of Persian historiography should therefore be regarded as a component of any comprehensive study of Persian literary prose and the analysis of its changing styles and contours. Moreover, in pre-modern times, “literature” was defined more broadly than it is today and often included historiography.

As is evident from the title of the volumes, *A History of Persian Literature*’s approach is neither uniformly chronological nor entirely thematic. Developments occur in time and to understand a literary genre requires tracing its course chronologically. On the other hand, images, themes, and motifs have lives of their own and need to be studied not only diachronically but also synchronically, regardless of the time element. A combination of the two methods has therefore been employed to achieve a better overall treatment.

Generous space has been given to modern poetry, fiction, and drama in order to place them in the wider context of Persian literary studies and criticism.

About the present volume

In 1995 I invited, on behalf of *HPL*’s Editorial Board, the late Professor Ronald Emmerick to undertake the planning and editing of the Companion Volume I on pre-Islamic Iranian literatures. He agreed, and the following year he sent me a provisional plan of the

FOREWORD

Volume's chapters and a list of the contributors he had drawn up. As expected, the plan reflected his consistent concern for ensuring that the chapters of the Volume should represent the latest research in their respective fields. The plan was approved with due appreciation and he immediately began inviting the authors and discussing with them the contents of their contributions.

By mid-2001, when the editing of the Volume was in its last stages, as the fate would have it, Professor Emmerick's illness proved fatal and prevented him from bringing the project to fruition. He passed away on 31st of August 2001. Subsequently, I turned to Professor Maria Macuch for completing the task of the editing of the Volume. She graciously agreed, and Mrs. Ann Emmerick was good enough to promptly place the Volume's files at her disposal. Furthermore, Professor Macuch obtained one chapter that was still due, and commissioned another on Christian literature in Middle Iranian languages.

The excellence of this Volume, which brings together between its covers for the first time a lucid state-of-the-art exposition of all the known pre-Islamic Iranian "literatures," is as much due to the sound judgment in planning and the meticulous work of its two editors as to the extensive research and comprehensive contributions of its erudite authors.

Specific details about the volume are covered in Professor Macuch's Preface.

For the selection of the fonts and the attractive layout of the Volume, we are indebted to Claudius Naumann of the Institut für Iranistik, Freie Universität Berlin.

EH SAN YARSHATER
General Editor

PREFACE

The present survey, which follows the concept of the original editor, the late Ronald E. Emmerick, has been conceived as a Companion Volume to the larger *History of Persian Literature*, planned by Ehsan Yarshater and other experts in the field of Iranian Studies. Emmerick not only chose the contributors of the different chapters, but also designed the structure of the volume, distinguishing the literary products of the pre-Islamic era according to linguistic, generic and religious criteria, as will be explained below. It seems therefore appropriate to the present editor to dedicate this work to his memory.

The Iranian literatures presented in this volume are not all necessarily “pre-Islamic” from a strictly chronological point of view. The expression applies exactly, of course, to the age-old Avestan and Old Persian material (discussed in the chapter on Inscriptional Literature), but a great number of Middle Iranian texts surviving to our days came into being after the rise of Islam. They belong, however, not only linguistically to the Middle Iranian period, but are products of religious traditions far older than Islam, covering a rich cultural heritage of Zoroastrian, Buddhist, Christian and Manichaean provenance. Since the bulk of surviving material consists of religious texts or works produced in a specific religious environment, it seemed appropriate in certain cases to discuss the literary output of these communities, written in various Iranian languages, as a unity rather than to disperse the texts according to linguistic criteria. Thus the chapters on Manichaean and Christian literature include works written in different Iranian languages (Parthian, Middle Persian, Sogdian, Bactrian, [New] Persian). In the case of Zoroastrian and Buddhist literature, on the other hand, geographical, historical and linguistic criteria also had to be taken into consideration: Zoroastrian works are discussed

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in the two chapters on Avestan and Pahlavi literature; Buddhist texts are presented in the chapters on Sogdian and Khotanese literature. Planned as a “companion” to the main work on Persian literature, the volume has its focus on creative literature (including translations from other languages) rather than “writing” in general, which would include all recorded information in Iranian languages, even material restricted to a few words and phrases. However, in order not to exclude the bulk of original documents in Iranian languages, which are of eminent importance for our knowledge of the languages and the cultural, political and religious history of the Iranians, even if they hardly have any literary value in the strict sense of the word, a chapter on Old and Middle Iranian inscriptions and epigraphic sources has been included, encompassing Old and Middle Persian material as well as Parthian, Sogdian, Bactrian and Chorasmian inscriptions and those documents, which have come to us *directly* (i.e. not by means of manuscript copies; see p. 73, n. 1).

The main object of the volume is to provide an overview of the most important extant literary sources in Old and Middle Iranian languages, aiming to furnish both the student and the expert specializing in other areas of this vast field with a concise survey of recent research and an extensive bibliography for further detailed study. Needless to say, the task of providing a work which could be interesting to both the specialist and the student is not easily fulfilled, since the latter is in need of far more background information than the expert, who, on the other hand, would prefer more details on the subject matter. The result can only be a compromise, seeking to keep the balance between the information necessary to the student and a detailed discussion of the most important literary aspects and scholarly controversies in recent research interesting to the Iranologist. Since especially texts in Middle Persian, Parthian, Sogdian and Bactrian have been presented in different chapters (as described above), corresponding entries have been included in the Index in order to facilitate the search for works of different provenance written in these languages. The Index also includes all titles and texts discussed in the articles, including inscriptions and epigraphic sources.

PREFACE

A volume consisting of contributions by several different experts does not have the same consistency, evenness and unity as a book conceived by a single author. It has, however, the advantage of profiting from the expertise of many specialists, who have first hand knowledge of the material they discuss. It goes without saying that the contributions also reflect the individual interests of the authors, as may be observed especially in the choice of examples cited from the texts. All articles have excerpts from the original texts in translation in order to illustrate certain details of content and style, the length depending on the aspect the author wishes to demonstrate. Extracts illuminating the structure of a certain text (for example the composition of the Avestan Yasna) will tend to be longer than those striving only to convey an impression of the content or style. Choice of the quotations, including their length, has therefore been left entirely to the authors. Terms and titles in the original languages are given in transcription rather than transliteration (with a few exceptions) in order to facilitate reading the text and follow the general guidelines of the series (Avestan according to Bartholomae; Pahlavi according to MacKenzie). The only divergence from the general guidelines regards the transcription of the long vowels as *ī* and *ū* in Persian (and Arabic) place names and titles occurring in the text (instead of *i* and *u*) in order to avoid confusion, since the distinction between these long and short vowels has to be made in transcribing the other Iranian languages referred to in this volume.

Most of the articles have been written before Emmerick's untimely death in 2001. I am very grateful to the contributors for updating their articles and including recent research as well as for their forbearance with the slow progress of publication. My thanks also goes to Götz König and Tatsiana Stytsko for their invaluable help with proof-reading the manuscript and Claudius Naumann who has undertaken all the work involved in the layout of this volume, while I take full responsibility for possible mistakes and shortcomings.

MARIA MACUCH
Editor

CHAPTER 1

AVESTAN LITERATURE

A. HINTZE

According to tradition the great Iranian prophet Zarathustra, or Zoroaster, as he is usually known in Western literature, inaugurated the religion later known after him as the Zoroastrian religion.* The sacred texts of the followers of that religion are collected in a body of literature called the “Avesta”. The term “Avesta” derives from the word *avastāk* in Pāzand, which designates the writing of Middle Persian in Avestan script. The underlying Middle Persian word is written *ʔp(y)stʔk* in Pahlavi script. It has been interpreted in different ways, the most plausible of which is to transcribe it as *abestāg* and derive it from Avestan **upa-stāyaka-* ‘praise’.¹ The language of the Avesta is simply called “Avestan” because nothing of it has survived outside the Avestan corpus. The Avesta comprises not only the texts in Avestan, but also their Middle Persian translations and commentaries, the “Zand”.² Although the oldest parts of the Avesta were presumably composed in southern Central Asia, or more precisely in northeastern Iran, the dialectal identification of the Avestan language is problematic. It is safe to say only that Avestan is a non-Persian dialect.³ Together with the southwest Iranian language

* Avestan words are transcribed according to Bartholomae’s system with the exception of the following: Amesha Spentas, Gatha, Gathas, Mithra, Zarathustra.

1 Bartholomae 1906, p. 108, cf. Kellens 1987a, p. 239; 1989a, p. 35; 1998, p. 515f. Belardi 1979b summarizes the various interpretations and concludes that MP *apastāk* comes from **upa-stā-ka-* ‘religious knowledge’. See also the summary by Bailey 1985 with a different interpretation and Sundermann 2001c.

2 On the Zand see Boyce 1968b, pp. 35–38; Skjærvø 1994b, p. 203f.

3 Kellens 1989b, p. 35f.; Skjærvø 1995d, p. 159.

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known as Old Persian and a few indirectly attested dialects, Avestan represents the Old Iranian language. Being closely related to Old Indic of the Vedas, Old Iranian is a descendant of the Indo-Iranian or Aryan branch of the Indo-European language family.

The Avesta is by no means a uniform corpus. It includes texts dating from different periods and belonging to different literary genres. With respect to language and content, there are two basic divisions: the first consists of texts composed in a more archaic idiom commonly called “Old Avestan”. The second, usually called “Young Avestan”, is slightly different dialectally, and even more different with respect to its underlying religious system. The Old Avestan texts comprise not only the Gathas but also the *Yasna Haptanhāiti* and two of the sacred prayers. The rest are in Young Avestan, although some of the texts imitate Old Avestan and are therefore called “pseudo-Old Avestan”.⁴

From the point of view of its use, Avestan literature may be divided into two⁵ major groups: (i) ritual and (ii) devotional. Ritual texts are recited by priests during the religious ceremonies in the fire-temple, devotional texts by priests and lay people in any place. The ritual texts include the *Yasna* (‘worship’, abbreviated: *Y*), the *Visperad* (from Av. *vīspe ratavō* ‘all the Ratus’, abbr.: *Vr*) and the *Vendidad* or *Vidēvdād* (from Av. *vīdaēva dāta* ‘law of those who reject the demons’,⁶ abbr.: *Vd*). The devotional texts consist of the *Yašts* (‘worship’, abbr.: *Yt*) and prayers and benedictions collected in the “Little” or *Khorde Avesta*. All the Old Avestan texts form part of the *Yasna*. In addition, there is a small corpus of Avestan literature which has been transmitted outside the canon of the Avesta, mainly as part of Pahlavi texts.

4 Hoffmann/Narten 1989, p. 89. For the justification of using the term “Old Avestan” rather than “Gathic Avestan”, see Kellens 1991, p. 4f. A different terminology was proposed by Gershevitch 1995, p. 3ff., who considers the texts of the older and younger Avesta to be contemporaneous. He uses “Gathic Avestan” rather than “Old Avestan” and “Standard Avestan” rather than “Young Avestan”, cf. Gnoli 2000, p. 23f.

5 Cf. Kellens 1998, p. 479.

6 On the meaning of *Vidēvdād* see Benveniste 1970.

Ritual Texts

Yasna

The *Yasna* is the liturgical text recited during the ritual consumption of the Parahaoma, i.e. a concoction made from twigs of the pomegranate plant (*urvarām*) pounded with the juice of the sacrificial plant, the Haoma, and mixed with sacrificial milk (*jīvām*) and water (*zaovra*). The Parahaoma is prepared and consecrated in the preceding Paragna rite and consumed in the ensuing *Yasna* ceremony during which the 72 chapters of the *Yasna* are recited.⁷ The *Yasna* ceremony is celebrated daily and only by fully initiated priests. As one of the so-called “inner liturgical ceremonies”, it is performed exclusively in rooms called the Dar-e-Mehr, especially set aside for this purpose and usually located inside the fire-temple.⁸

The *Yasna* consists of 72 chapters (*hā* or *hāiti*). The number 72 is represented symbolically by the 72 threads used in weaving the sacred girdle of the Zoroastrians, the *kusti*. These 72 chapters fall into three major divisions: *Y* 1–27, *Y* 28–54, *Y* 55–72.⁹ Between chapters 27 and 55, i.e. at its centre, the *Yasna* includes all the Old Avestan texts which represent the most ancient part of Zoroastrian literature. They consist of the Gathas (Av. *gāθā*- ‘hymn, verse’) which, in turn, are arranged around the ‘worship of seven chapters’, the *Yasna Haptayhāiti* (abbr.: *YH*). The latter, during the recitation of which the transformation of the ritual fire takes place, forms the very centre and culmination of the religious ceremony. The Old Avestan texts are introduced and concluded by two ancient prayers (both in Old Avestan), namely the *Ahuna Vairya* (*Y* 27.13) and the *Aryaman Išya* (*Y* 54.1). Moreover, the *Ahuna Vairya* is followed by two other sacred prayers, the *Ašəm Vohū* (*Y* 27.14), which could be Old Avestan, and the *Yeyhē Hātəm* (*Y* 27.15) in pseudo-Old

7 Modi 1937, pp. 251–302 (on the Paragna ceremony), p. 303 (on the preparation of the Parahaoma), pp. 302–10 (on the *Yasna* ceremony). A detailed description of the *Yasna* ceremony is given by Kotwal/Boyd 1991.

8 Modi 1937, p. 247f.; Boyce 1993.

9 Cf. Geldner 1896, p. 4.

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Avestan.¹⁰ The position of the Gathic hymns and the *Yasna Haptaṇhāiti* in the centre of the entire *Yasna* reflects the fact that the recitation of these texts constitutes the high point of the *Yasna* ceremony.

The Gathas, Sacred Prayers, and *Yasna Haptaṇhāiti*

The Gathas are made up of seventeen hymns arranged by metre into five groups. Each is named, in acronymic fashion, according to the first few words with which it begins. The first Gatha, the *Abunavaitī Gāḍā* (Y 28–34), is named after the *Abuna Vairya* prayer which introduces the entire cycle of Gathas. The *Yasna Haptaṇhāiti* (Y 35.2–41.6) is followed, after a short text in Young Avestan (Y 42), by the *Uštavaitī Gāḍā* (Y 43–46) which is named after the opening word of Y 43.1 *uštā*. The *Spəntā.maiṇyu Gāḍā* (Y 47–50) begins with the words *spəntā maiṇyū*, the *Vohuxšaθrā Gāḍā* (Y 51) with *vohū xšaθrəm*, the *Vahištōišti Gāḍā* (Y 53) with *vahištā īštiš*¹¹ and the *Aryaman Išya* prayer with *ā airyāmā išyō* (Y 54.1). Between Y 51 and 53 a short text in Young Avestan (Y 52) is again interposed.

The metre of the Gathas is determined by the number of syllables. The most basic unit, which recurs in all five metres, is a hemistich of seven syllables. The stanza of the *Abunavaitī Gāḍā* consists of three verse lines, each divided into two hemistichs of 7+9 syllables (schema: 3(7||9)). The *Uštavaitī Gāḍā* is made up of five verse lines, each consisting of two hemistichs of 4+7 syllables (schema: 5(4||7)), the *Spəntā.maiṇyu Gāḍā* of four verse lines each containing 4+7 syllables (schema: 4(4||7)), and the *Vohuxšaθrā Gāḍā* of three verse lines each with 7+7 syllables (schema: 3(7||7)). The stanza of the *Vahištōišti Gāḍā* has a more complex structure consisting of two verse lines of 7+5 syllables followed by two verse lines of 7+7+5 syllables (schema: 2(7||5) + 2(7||7||5)).¹² The latter metre is also adopted by the *Aryaman Išya* prayer (Y 54.1).

10 This prayer, which is an adaptation of Y 51.22, and its Avestan commentary have been analyzed in detail by Narten 1982, pp. 80–102.

11 See Humbach 1991, I, p. 4f.

12 Kellens/Pirart 1988–91, I, pp. 89–93; Kellens 1991, p. 7f.; Panaino 1993–94, pp. 109–14.

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Thus the metrical characteristic of the Gathas is their strophic form. Each stanza consists of a fixed number of verse lines, and each verse line of a fixed number of syllables. The metre determines the number of syllables per hemistich within a verse line, the position of the caesura, and the number of verse lines that comprise a stanza. The fact that the term *gāθā* does not refer to one of the 17 hymns but to the collection of hymns composed in a particular metre suggests that it is a technical term denoting the metrical and strophic form exhibited by each of the five Gathic collections.¹³ The number of stanzas varies between 6 (Y 47) and 22 (Y 31 and 51). The preferred number is 11, found in five of the hymns (Y 28, 29, 30, 45, 50).

Gathic Composition

With regard to both composition and contents, the Gathas are among the most intricate and dense pieces of literature ever composed.¹⁴ Detailed studies on the composition of individual Gathic hymns, carried out by Hanns-Peter Schmidt and Martin Schwartz in particular, indicate that they possess a symmetrical structure. Schmidt has shown that the structural pattern of *Yasna* 49, 47 and 33 is a “ring-composition”,¹⁵ and Schwartz has systematically expanded and elaborated upon this observation.¹⁶ Ring-composition here means the symmetrical arrangement of a hymn in concentric circles around a centre.¹⁷ While Schmidt bases his observations mainly on semantic and lexical correlations, Schwartz adduces a great variety of stylistic features on the phonic, lexical and phraseological levels. He argues that all Gathic hymns, except perhaps Y 44, are ring-compositions of which he distinguishes several varieties.¹⁸ All of them share the characteristic pattern of radial

13 Schlerath 1969.

14 Cf. the characterization of the Gathas by Gershevitch 1968, p. 17.

15 Schmidt 1968, pp. 170–92, esp. p. 187; 1974; 1985.

16 Schwartz 1986, 1991a, 1998.

17 Schmidt 1968, p. 187.

18 Schwartz 1991a, p. 128; 1998, p. 197 with a summary of “Gathic types of symmetrical composition”.

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concentricity in which the stanzas are arranged symmetrically with respect to those at the centre of the hymn. The midmost stanzas again correlate with the first and the last ones, “and frequently condense a major theme of the poem”.¹⁹

Let us take one of the Gathic hymns, *Yasna* 43, as an example. In the arrangement of our extant Avesta, it follows the *Yasna Haptañ-hāiti* and opens the *Uštavaitī Gāθā*. The structure of the hymn is characterized by the recurrent phrase ‘I realize that you are bounteous, O Wise Lord’, which introduces, from stanza 5 onwards, every second stanza (5, 7, 9, 11, 13, 15). Stanza 4, also, begins with a slight variation of this line. Moreover, the second line of stanzas 7, 9, 11, 13, 15 comprises the refrain ‘when he approached me with good mind’. Refrains are characteristic of all hymns of the *Uštavaitī Gāθā*, except the last one (*Y* 46), and bestow a special unity on this Gatha.²⁰ The major theme of *Y* 43 is Zarathustra’s consultation with someone ‘who approached’ him ‘with good mind’:

1. May the Wise Lord, ruling at will, give
Desired (things) to this one, to whom so ever (they are) desirable,
I wish to arrive at strength together with youthfulness,
(And) to grasp truth: Give this to me, O Right-mindedness,
(And) rewards (consisting) of wealth, the life of good mind!
2. The best of all (things) (may be given) to this one here:
May this man obtain well-being in (the domain of) well-being,
(Being) perceptive, O Wise One, through your bounteous spirit
By which you give, together with truth, the blessings of good mind
For all the days along with the joy of a long life.
3. May that man attain what is better than good,
(The man) who might teach us the straight paths of strength
Of (both) this physical life and of (the life of) the mind,
The real (paths), provided with possessions, along which the Lord
dwells,
A zestful (man), one like you, O Wise One, well-acquainted, a
bounteous one.

19 Schwartz 1998, p. 133.

20 Kellens/Pirart 1988–91, I, pp. 15–16.

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4. I shall realize that you are strong and bounteous, O Wise One,
Since through this hand, with which you hold them,
You give the rewards to the deceitful and the truthful one,
Through the heat of your fire which has strength through truth,
When the force of good mind comes to me.

5. I realize that you are bounteous, O Wise Lord,
When I see you as the primeval one in the begetting of life,
When you made actions and words to have their prizes,
A bad (prize) for the bad one, good reward for the good one
Through your skill at the ultimate turning-point of creation.

6. At the turning-point to which you come with your bounteous
spirit,
O Wise One, (and) with rule: there, with good mind,
Through whose actions the creatures prosper with truth,
Right-mindedness proclaims the judgements to them,
(The judgements) of your intellect which nobody deceives.

7. I realize that you are bounteous, O Wise Lord,
When he approached me with good mind
And asked me: "Who are you, to whom do you belong?
How, O zealous one,²¹ do you wish to appoint a day for the
consultation
About your possessions and about yourself?"

8. And I said to him: "Zarathustra, first;
(Secondly,) a real enemy to the deceitful one, as much as I may be
able.
I would be a powerful support to the truthful one
If I acquired the faculties of one who rules at will
While I praise and eulogize you, O Wise One."

9. I realize that you are bounteous, O Wise Lord,
When he approached me with good mind.
To his question: "For whose sake do you wish to know?",
Thereupon (I said): "For the sake of your fire. The gift of
veneration
Of truth, truly, I want to keep it in mind as much as I am able."

21 Humbach 1991, I, p. 153.

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10. But you, show me the truth which I invoke!
Accompanied by right-mindedness, I have arrived.
And ask us about that, about which we asked you.
For what is asked by you is like that of powerful ones,
So that one who is able will make you strong and powerful.

11. I realize that you are bounteous, O Wise Lord,
When he approached me with good mind.
When I was taught by you through your words for the first time,
Trust in mortals appeared distressing to me
(And) to do what he told me (to be) best.

12. And when you told me: “With foreknowledge you are going to
attain truth”,
You did not tell me (things) to which I did not listen.
Let me rise up before there comes to me
Attentiveness (*səraoša*) accompanied by wealth-granting Reward,
Who will distribute the rewards to the parties in strength.

13. I realize that you are bounteous, O Wise Lord,
When he approached me with good mind.
To know the aims of (my) longing, grant me this,
(The longing) for lasting life, for which no one has dared to ask you,
(The longing) for desirable existence, which is said (to be) under
your rule.

14. As a knowing, able man gives to a friend,
(Thus), O Wise One, (grant me) your farsighted support
Which is obtained through your rule on the basis of truth.
I want to rise up against the despisers of your proclamation,
Together with all those who remember your formulas.

15. I realize that you are bounteous, O Wise Lord,
When he approached me with good mind.
An appeased mind is best suited for the proclamation.
A man should not want to satisfy the many deceitful ones,
For they claim all harmful persons (to be) truthful.²²

22 A parallel for the deceitful ones turning the values upside down is found in the Younger Avestan *Tištṛya Yašt*, *Yt* 8.51, where it is said that evil-speaking people call “the bad-year witch” (*pairikā yā dužyāiryā*) by the name “good-year witch” (*buyāiryā*); cf. Panaino 1990a, pp. 75, 139–41 with more examples from the Younger Avesta.

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16. O Lord, this one (here), Zarathustra,
Chooses for himself that very spirit, O Wise One, which is your
most bounteous one.
May truth be corporeal, strong through vitality.
May right-mindedness be in the kingdom which sees the sun.²³
May she give, with good mind, the reward for the actions.

The structure of this hymn is fairly straightforward: it focuses around stanzas 7–10 whose theme is the conversation between Zarathustra and a divine being accompanied by Good Mind (Vohu Manah) but whose identity does not emerge clearly from the text. Right-mindedness (*Ārmaiti*) has been considered,²⁴ or the Wise Lord (Ahura Mazdā),²⁵ or, more likely, the Bounteous Spirit (Spenta Mainyu).²⁶ In the two central stanzas 8–9, Zarathustra introduces himself by name. Moreover, there are lexical correspondences between them and the initial and final stanzas 1 and 16. Stanza 1 and 8 are linked by the adjective ‘ruling at will, ruling as he wishes’, in stanza 1 as an epithet of Ahura Mazdā, in stanza 8 a faculty desired by Zarathustra. Stanzas 8 and 16 are joined together by the name Zarathustra. The second central stanza of the hymn, number 9, matches stanza 1 in so far as a form of ‘to wish’ (*vas*) occurs in both at the end of line c. Stanzas 1 and 16 also have correspondences: both deal with truth, reward, good mind, and right-mindedness. The central part of the hymn marks the watershed, the *peripeteia*, since it apparently alludes to the crucial event of Zarathustra’s calling into the service of his Lord. Thus, an observation made by Mary Douglas with regard to the Book of Numbers in the Pentateuch also applies to the composition of Y 43: “The turn matches the beginning, and so does the very end.”²⁷

The compositional analysis of this hymn could be refined and carried further,²⁸ but let us turn instead to *Yasna* 28, the hymn

23 On these two lines see Narten 1982, p. 115f.

24 Kellens/Pirart 1988–91, III, p. 156.

25 Lommel 1927, pp. 103f., 107f.; Nyberg 1938, p. 217f.

26 Insler 1975, p. 234, cf. Narten 1986, p. 140, n. 13.

27 Douglas 1993, p. 117.

28 See Hintze 2002.

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which opens the entire cycle of the Gathas within the liturgical arrangement of the *Yasna*:

1. With veneration and hands stretched up I ask all (of you) for actions of his help,
O Wise One, first (for the help) of the bounteous spirit, by which you may listen²⁹ through truth
To the intellect of good mind and to the soul of the cow.
2. I want to approach you, O Wise Lord, with good mind
(Entreating you) to grant me the attainments of both lives, of the corporeal and of the one of the spirit,
On the basis of truth, (the attainments) by which one might place one's supporters into well-being.
3. In an unprecedented (way), I want to praise you, O truth, and good mind
And the Wise Lord, to (all of) whom right-mindedness increases (Strength) and³⁰ unfading rule. Come to my calls for support!
4. For the song, I pay attention, with good mind, to the soul
And to the rewards for the actions, knowing of the Wise Lord.
As much as I can and am able, so long shall I look out in the quest for truth.
5. O truth, shall I see you and good mind as I am finding
For the strongest Lord, the Wise One, a walk-way³¹ and hearkening
(Which is) greatest through the following formulation: "May we ward off the noxious creatures with the tongue"?
6. Come with good mind! Grant through truth the gift of long life!
For exalted words, O Wise One, (grant) a strong support to Zarathustra
And to us, O Lord, so that thereby we shall overcome the hostilities of the enemy!

29 On *xšnəvīšā* Mayrhofer 1986–2002, I, p. 441 with references.

30 According to Humbach 1991, II, p. 20, *xšaθrəmcā ayzaonvamnəm* is elliptical for 'X and unfading power'; Kellens/Pirart 1988–91, III, p. 21 add 'strength' (*aojah-*).

31 On Av. *gātu-* and cognates see de Blois 1995, pp. 61–65.

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7. Grant, O truth, this reward, the attainments of good mind!
Grant, O Ārmaiti, strength to Vištāspa and to me!
Grant, O Wise One, and rule through this formula by which we
may hear of your bounties!
8. You, the Lord, O Best One, who is in harmony with best truth,
Do I lovingly entreat for the best for Frašaoštra, the hero, and for
myself
And (for those) on whom you may bestow it for a whole lifetime of
good mind.
9. May we not, by these entreaties, anger you, O Wise Lord, and truth
And best mind, we who are arrayed in the offering of praises to you!
You (are) the swiftest invigorations and the rule over strengths.
10. (Those) whom you know to be just through truth and good mind
(And) worthy, O Wise Lord, to them fulfill their longing with
attainments!
I know swelling, resounding, desirable praises for you.
11. You protect truth and good mind through these for eternity.
You, O Wise Lord, teach me with your mouth to speak
In accordance with your spirit, through which primeval life came
about.

The structure of *Y* 28 is clearly a ring-composition. The 11 stanzas may be grouped into two groups of five stanzas with a central stanza 6. Stanzas 5 and 7, framing the central one, both contain the key word ‘formula, formulation’ (*mąθra-*), while the first (1) and last (11) ones both incorporate the word ‘spirit’ (*mainyu-*), which in stanza 1 is characterized as ‘bounteous’ (*spənta-*). Moreover, there are notable correspondences between the central stanza 6 of *Y* 28 and the two central stanzas 8 and 9 of *Y* 43. Not only does the name of Zarathustra occur in the middle of both hymns, but also *Y* 28.6 ‘come with good mind!’ (*vohū gaidī manajhā*) anticipates the second line of the refrain, *Y* 43.7 etc. ‘when he approached me with good mind’; *Y* 28.6 ‘grant a strong support to Zarathustra!’ corresponds to 43.8 ‘I could be a powerful support’, and both *Y* 28.6 and 43.8 refer to the ‘hostilities’ (*dvaēšā*) which Zarathustra wishes to overcome. There are other additional correspondences between the two hymns, but those mentioned should suffice to

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support the view that *Yasna* 28 points forward to *Yasna* 43 and that, conversely, *Y* 43 takes up the theme of *Y* 28.

As we have seen, the name of Zarathustra occurs not only in the precise centre of *Y* 43, the opening hymn of the second half of the Gathas, but also in that of *Y* 28, the first hymn of the entire cycle. Moreover, his name is also found both in the centre of the concluding hymn of the third Gatha, *Y* 50, and in that of the fourth one, *Y* 51, which constitutes a Gatha on its own.³² Thus, the two initial and the two final hymns of the first four Gathas contain the name of Zarathustra in their respective centres.

Another structural feature shared by the first three Gathas is their conclusion. The final stanzas of the *Ahunavaitī Gāthā*, of the *Uštavaitī Gāthā* and the *Spəntā.maiṇyu Gāthā* conclude with the wish that life may be made wonderful (*Y* 34.15), or that ‘what is most wonderful according to wish’ may be made real (*Y* 46.19, 50.11).³³ The Avestan key word here is *fraša-* which, in the Younger Avesta, forms part of the technical term *frašō.kərəti*, approximately ‘making wonderful’ (vel sim.), denoting the perfecting of the world after the complete removal of evil. The use, at the end of the first three Gathas, of this word, which at least by Young Avestan times is definitely an eschatological term could be interpreted as an iconic expression for the desired and expected final state of perfection.

Correspondences can also be observed between the third hymn of each of the first two Gathas, i.e. *Y* 30 and 45, the famous hymns about the two primordial spirits. Both of them follow a structural pattern in which the singer’s wish to proclaim his teachings (*Y* 30.1, 45.1–6 as a refrain) is followed by his request to be listened to (*Y* 30.2, 45.1) and his message about the beginnings of existence and its primordial principles (*Y* 30.3–6, 45.2–6). The same structure is also found in other Indo-European poetic traditions, especially in Vedic and Germanic poetry, and is therefore most

32 Schwartz 1991a, p. 130.

33 Observed by Molé 1963, p. 181, cf. Humbach 1959, I, pp. 51–52; 1991, I, p. 91f.; Kellens/Pirart 1988–91, I, p. 14. The exact meaning of *fraša-* is debated, its etymology not entirely clear, see Narten 1986, pp. 200–203; Hintze 1994a, p. 106f. In general terms, *fraša-* refers, as it seems, to the “evil-free” condition of life.

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probably common heritage.³⁴ The message of the two primordial spirits, central to Gathic theology, is thus couched in particularly ancient poetic language.

Indo-European Poetic Language in the Gathas

Not only is the language of the Gathas very archaic, but so also is the poetic technique employed in their composition. The Avestan texts are couched in the language of traditional Indo-European oral composition. Features of the poetic art of Gathic composition, such as formulae, rhetorical and stylistic figures, have correspondences in related traditions, particularly the *Rigveda*, the oldest literary document of Indo-Aryan. Moreover, on the basis of comparative evidence, a considerable number of such parallels can be traced even further back to an Indo-European antecedent. The reconstruction is mainly based on a shared lexical inventory of poetic formulae and syntagms.

For example, the question put to Zarathustra in *Y* 43.7: ‘Who are you? To whom do you belong?’ has been recognized as an ancient Indo-European greeting formula by which a stranger is asked to identify himself by giving his own name and that of his father. It occurs, for example, with some variation in Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey* and also in Germanic heroic poetry.³⁵ In the Gathic case, however, only the first question is answered in a straightforward way. The second of Zarathustra’s answers in *Y* 43.8 appears to be puzzling since he does not give his father’s name which was, according to the Younger Avesta, Pourušaspa. Instead, he says that he is an enemy of the daivas and a supporter of the truthful ones. The context, therefore, suggests that, even if the ancient inherited formula is used, the second question is reinterpreted as actually being about Zarathustra’s choice, i.e. about whose side he is on, that

34 Schaefer 1940.

35 Schmitt 1967, pp. 136–38 with references, cf. Strunk 1985, p. 466. Floyd 1992 deals mainly with the Sanskrit and Greek passages (reference kindly provided by F. Vajifdar).

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of the deceitful or the truthful ones.³⁶ The composer of this passage thus employs a traditional formula but reinterprets it by placing it into a new context and filling it with ideas of a new concept. The first question of the greeting formula also occurs in Young Avestan poetry, in the *Hōm Yašt* (Y 9.1, quoted p. 21) and in the hymn to Aši (Yt 17.17, quoted p. 56).

Another instance of the composer of the Gathas drawing on traditional poetic language is the vocabulary of the chariot race. Already in Indo-Iranian ritual poetry, the race of the horse-drawn chariot with a prize at stake furnishes the image which is transposed metaphorically into the sphere of the ritual. The chariot race provides the metaphor for the sacrifice. In the hymns of the *Rigveda*, the sacrificial plant, Soma, pressed through the sacrificial strainer is constantly compared to the horse racing for the prize. In the Gathas, too, there is the image of the race, interpreted, however, in a new way. For example, the winning of the race is a metaphor for the defeat of evil in Y 30.10:

For then destruction of deceit's prosperity will come down,
And the swiftest (steeds) will be harnessed from the good dwelling
of good thought,
Of the Wise One and of truth, (and) they will win (racing for)
good fame.

Not only the image of the chariot-race is employed, but the verb for 'to win', Av. *zā*, which literally means 'to race ahead', evokes the situation in which the one leaving behind the competitors arrives first at the prize at stake, here 'good fame' (*sravah-*).³⁷ Among all the Gathic hymns, the metaphor of the chariot-race is most prominent in *Yasna* 50, the final hymn of the *Spəntā.maiṇyu Gāθā*:

1. Does my soul have anyone's help at its disposal?
Who has been found as a protector of my cattle, or of myself?
Who else than truth and you, O Wise Lord,
(Who becomes) manifest in the invocation, and best mind.

36 Nyberg 1938, p. 218; Insler 1975, p. 63, 234; Humbach 1991, II, p. 138.

37 Hoffmann 1968, p. 283ff. (= 1975, p. 222ff.).

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2. How, O Wise One, could one plead for the joy-bringing cow,
One who wishes her to belong to him, provided with pasture,
One who lives decently through truth among the many who
 block(?) the sun(light)?
I shall (now) sit down in front of them. Accept (me as) the just one.³⁸
3. To this one, O Wise One, shall belong through truth (the herd)
Which one assigns to him with rule and good mind,
To the man who makes grow, with strength of reward,
The nearest herd which the deceitful one wants to partake of.
4. Praising, I want to worship you, O Wise Lord,
Along with truth and best mind
And rule with which one wants to tread the path of strength.
I want to be heard in the House of Welcome before the efficacious
 ones.
5. Therefore, let it be granted by you, O Wise Lord, with truth,
That you are joyful for the sake of your mantrist
With visible, manifest aid
Sent by your hand, with which one sets us in comfort.³⁹
6. The mantrist who raises his voice
Is an ally of truth with reverence: Zarathustra.
The giver of intellect may instruct (me) with good thinking
To be the charioteer of my tongue (and) direction.
7. I shall harness for you the swiftest steeds
Broad(-chested) by the victories of my praise for you,
O Wise One, (and) strong through truth (and) good mind,
(the steeds) with which you win: May you be of help to me!
8. With footsteps which are renowned as those of fat-offering,
I shall approach you, O Wise One, with hands stretched up,
You with truth and with the reverence of efficacious one,
You with the skilfulness of good mind.
9. With this worship, praising, I shall go to you,
O Wise One, with truth, with the actions of good mind.
When I shall rule, at will, over my reward
Then may I be strong in the desire for a generous one.

38 After Humbach 1991, I, p. 183.

39 For Y 50.5–7 cf. Schwartz 1991a, p. 132.

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10. What(ever) I shall do and what(ever) actions (will be done) by
those around here

And what(ever) is worthy, through good mind, of (your) eyes,
The lights of the sun, the leading bull of the days,
(All that is) for your praise through truth, O Wise Lord.

11. Thus I shall call myself the one who praises you, O Wise One,
and be it

As much as I can and am able through truth.

The creator of life shall further through good mind

The realization of what is most excellent according to wish.

The singer wishes to be a good ‘charioteer of the tongue’ (Y 50.6), and his hymn is compared to the steeds racing for a prize (Y 50.7). The image of “yoking” or “harnessing” is also used, in Y 49.9, with regard to the “religious views”, the *daēnās*, which ‘have been yoked to the best prize’. A particularly strong metaphor is provided by the ‘turning-point’ (*urvaēsa*) which, in the chariot race, marks the critical moment when the horse-drawn chariot has to turn around and then race back. The composer of the Gathas transposes this technical term into the religious sphere and uses it as a metaphor for the final point in life when judgment is passed (Y 43.5 and 6, and Y 51.6).⁴⁰

Inherited vocabulary from the horse race also comprises the components of the name of Zarathustra’s patron, Vištāspa, which means ‘whose horses have been let loose (for the race)’. Its Vedic equivalents (Ved. *viṣita- áśva-*) also denote the horses let loose for the race, and indicate that Vištāspa’s name is based on an ancient Indo-Iranian formula. This name, which was probably fairly common, was also borne by another Iranian ruler, the father of the Achaemenid king Dareios, someone most probably different from the Avestan Vištāspa.⁴¹

40 Kuiper 1978, p. 34; Humbach 1959, II, p. 49.

41 See Mayrhofer 1994 [1996], p. 177 with n. 18, with references.

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Problems Related to Understanding the Gathas

The major problem to be faced when interpreting the Gathas is their lack of literary and historical context.⁴² Although these texts are couched in the language of an ancient tradition of priestly oral composition for which there is abundant comparative evidence from related languages, Vedic in particular, ideally an understanding of specifically Gathic concepts should be based on the Gathas themselves. Such a procedure, however, is seriously hampered by the small size of the Old Avestan corpus. To treat the Gathas as their own interpreter, a principle applied, for example, in biblical exegesis, is often simply not possible. Scholars, therefore, resort to the comparative evidence, especially to Vedic, on the one hand, and the later post-Gathic, especially Pahlavi tradition, on the other. Both approaches, however, are constantly exposed to the danger of transposing into the Gathas conceptual frameworks derived from either the Vedic or the Pahlavi texts.

One of the problems is that of the numerous Gathic *hapax legomena* for which no Avestan parallel passages are available to assist in their elucidation. For example, the word *aēuruš*, apparently an epithet of the bull, is attested only in *Y* 50.10. There is, however, comparative evidence in Vedic *éru-*, equally a *hapax legomenon* in the Atharva-Veda. The Vedic word has a sexual connotation but, due to lack of other attestations, it cannot be verified whether this is also the case in the Gathic passage. There are numerous stanzas with words resisting analysis. For instance, *Y* 50.2 contains several expressions not understood at present (*pišyasū, nišqsyā, dāθēm dāhvā*).⁴³ Moreover, even if all the individual words in a stanza can be identified both lexically and grammatically, it is not always possible to combine them into a meaningful sentence, as for example in *Y* 43.10. Lengthy passages which can be understood in a fairly straightforward way, such as e.g. *Yasna* 44.3–5, tend to be the exception, rather than the rule.

For these and other reasons, translations—which are necessarily interpretations—of the Gathas by different authors vary

42 Cf. Boyce 1994.

43 Cf. Kellens 1974, p. 340; Kellens/Pirart 1988–91, III, p. 242.

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considerably, sometimes even to the extent that it is difficult to believe that they render the same original text.

Yasna Haptanhāiti

The *Yasna Haptanhāiti* (*YH*) is neither metrically structured by a fixed number of basically isosyllabic verse lines, as the Gathas are, nor ordinary prose as found in the Younger Avesta, such as e.g. in the *Vīdēvdād*. Stylistically, the *YH* has been characterized by its major editor, Johanna Narten, as liturgical recitation prose close to poetry.⁴⁴ Although she considers the *YH* to be prose, her definition indicates that this is a text which does not fully coincide with one of the constituents of the binary dichotomy of prose vs. poetry. The reason for this is that, on the one hand, no particular metre is followed, but, on the other, both a rhythmical pattern and rhetorical figures have been observed. It seems that the *YH* exhibits a type of literature structured not by a syllable counting metre but by a variety of rhythmic patterns. Both the rhythmic pattern and the rhetorical figures follow an inherited model of traditional liturgical recitation for which parallels in Early Latin and Umbrian prayer and liturgy have been adduced.⁴⁵

The *Yasna Haptanhāiti* is composed with a concentric structure. The three central chapters, *Y* 37–39, are surrounded, on each side, by two initial (*Y* 35–36) and two final ones (*Y* 40–41).⁴⁶ The worship of Ahura Mazdā and his spiritual and material creations is the major theme of *Y* 37–39, which begin and end with his worship (*Y* 37.1–3, 39.4–5). *Y* 38, the very centre of the entire *Yasna Haptanhāiti*, is devoted to the worship of the waters and of powers active

44 Narten 1986, p. 21.

45 Watkins 1995, pp. 229–36. Cf. also the Narten's summary of rhetorical figures, Narten 1986, pp. 21–23. Hintze [2006] argues that the *YH* is not ordinary prose in the sense of unadorned speech. Rather, it is, like Gathas, a poetic text. The difference is that they represent two distinct types of poetry. The poetic form of the Gathas is governed by the rhythm of syllables, that of the *YH* by the rhythm of words.

46 Cf. Kellens/Pirart 1988–91, III, pp. 124–30; Boyce 1992, pp. 89–94.

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during the ritual. The first two chapters, *Y 35–36*, lead towards that central part: After the worshippers have expressed their desire to fulfil what is good, i.e. to worship Ahura Mazdā and care for cattle (*Y 35*), the consecration of the sacrificial fire takes place (*Y 36*). In the concluding two chapters, *Y 40–41*, the worshippers pray to Ahura Mazdā to accept their worship and reward it (*Y 40*), and they declare their desire to praise their Lord forever (*Y 41*).

The second chapter of the *Yasna Haptaŋhāiti*, *Yasna 36*, is of particular interest because it provides the textual foundation for the pivotal role played by the fire in Zoroastrian ritual:

1. Together with the community of this fire here,
We approach you, O Wise Lord, at the beginning,
You together with your most bounteous spirit,
Which indeed spells harm for the one
Whom you consign to harm.
2. You, there, the most joyful one,
May you come close to us for the sake of the request,
O Fire of the Wise Lord!
May you come close to us,
With the joy of the most joyful one,
With the veneration of the most venerating one,
For the greatest of the supplications.
3. You are truly the Fire of the Wise Lord.
You are truly his most bounteous spirit.
We approach you,
O Fire of the Wise Lord,
With what is indeed the most effective of your names.
4. We approach you
With good mind,
With good truth,
With the actions and words
Of good perception.
5. We pay homage, we bring refreshment to you, O Wise Lord.
We approach you with all good thoughts,
With all good words,
With all good deeds.

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6. We now declare, O Wise Lord,
That this light here
Has been of your manifestations the most beautiful manifestation,
Ever since yonder highest of heights
Was called the sun.

In the second stanza of this prayer, the heavenly Fire of Ahura Mazda is addressed and invited to come down to the place of worship. The transformation of the fire takes place between stanzas 2 and 3, because stanza 3 presupposes this process by identifying the ritual fire with the heavenly Fire of Ahura Mazda.⁴⁷ In stanza 4, the worshippers emphasize their reverence and state of purity with which they approach the fire. They praise Ahura Mazda in his most beautiful manifestation of light in the final two stanzas 5–6. Not only the structure of the entire *Yasna Haptaŋhāiti*, but also the internal arrangement of an individual chapter, *Y* 36, follows the concentric pattern according to which the central stanzas are devoted to the major theme, namely the consecration of the transformed fire (3) and the reverence with which it is approached (4).

Authorship of the Gathas

When discussing the question of who composed the Gathas, it should be borne in mind that modern concepts of “author” or “composer” can hardly be applied to the pre-historical oral culture from which the Gathas originate. In such context, “texts”, it has been argued, existed only as events, “as *performances* by *performers*”.⁴⁸ In each performance, a new “text” was created. The Gathas provide evidence for this process when the singer wishes to sing his praise ‘in an unprecedented way’ (*apaourvīm* *Y* 28.3), an expression for which parallels are found in the *Rigveda*.⁴⁹ When composing in performance, a creative activity denoted by the Avestan verb ‘to

47 Narten 1986, p. 26.

48 Skjærvø 1994b, p. 206, with references. On the methodological debate about “context” and “text”, cf. Tully 1988.

49 Humbach 1959, p. 8; 1991, II, p. 20; R. Schmitt 1967, p. 296f. n. 1711.

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weave' (*ufyānī* Y 28.3; Y 43.8), the professional singer drew on an inventory of formulas and metrical and compositional patterns. By combining the traditional constituents in a new way, he created a unique, unprecedented hymn, which would never again be quite identically replicated.

However, the Younger Avesta presupposes that the Gathas were petrified texts, learnt by heart *verbatim* and recited by the priests as they were recited by the prophet Zarathustra. In the *Hōm Yašt*, Zarathustra is conceived as reciting the Gathas while attending to the sacrificial fire and celebrating a *Yasna* ceremony (Y 9.1)⁵⁰:

During the morning watch
Haoma approached Zarathustra
Who was purifying the fire
And chanting the Gathas.
Zarathustra asked him:
"Who, O man, are you
Who are the most handsome I have seen
Of all the material world ...?"

The Avestan verb describing the activity of reciting the hymns is *srāvaya*- which literally means 'to make heard'. That there are five Gathas originally composed by Zarathustra is asserted in a passage from the Young Avestan hymn to Sraoša: 'We worship Sraoša ... who was the first to recite the five Gathas of Zarathustra, line by line, stanza by stanza, together with the explanations, together with the answers' (Y 57.8) and in Y 71.6 'we worship all the five truthful Gathas'.⁵¹ Both the Avesta and the Pahlavi literature are steeped in the belief that the five Gathas are the work of Zarathustra, the prophet and founder of the new religion named after himself.

Thus, already in the Young Avestan period, the Gathas were venerated and considered as the compositions of Zarathustra. While most scholars have accepted this premise, it has been

50 Geldner 1896, p. 28. Translation, with minor modifications, after Josephson 1997, p. 41.

51 Cf. Humbach 1991, I, p. 5.

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challenged and criticized as prejudiced in recent years. Following Darmesteter, Molé, and Kellens/Pirart, Skjærvø maintains that the traditional “theological *a priori*” of Zarathustra’s divinely inspired authorship should be abandoned, the only legitimate *a priori* assumptions being linguistic and literary.⁵² Kellens argues that, with the exception of *Y* 43.5–15, the “I” of the Gathas could not be the prophet because, among other reasons, Zarathustra is addressed in the vocative (*Y* 46.14). In addition, and more significantly, in *Y* 28.6 his name is contrasted with the first person plural pronoun ‘us’, ‘to Zarathustra and to us’, a usage which makes it clear that Zarathustra stands apart from the worshippers, the ‘I’ or ‘we’ of the Gathas: ‘Grant ..., O Wise One, a strong support to Zarathustra and to us, O Lord, so that thereby we shall overcome the hostilities of the enemy’ (*Y* 28.6). Hence it would be difficult, if not impossible, to assume that Zarathustra was the composer. Kellens concludes that the Gathas are the collective work of a religious group, the “Gathic circle”, for whom Zarathustra acquired a status close to divinity as a result of his reform of the ritual.⁵³

Thus, the authorship of the Gathas, and along with it the historical personality of Zarathustra, have been questioned and become the subject of debate. The problem with obtaining clarity on this issue is, once more, the lack of evidence regarding the wider historical and situational context within which these hymns were composed. However, while the Gathas are not conclusive, the *Yasna Haptanhāiti* does contain references to the situational context within which that text was recited, namely when the worshippers, priests as well as lay people, assembled around the ritual fire.⁵⁴ This situation may also be alluded to in *Y* 28.9 ‘we who are arrayed in the offering of your praises’. Zarathustra, as the initiator of the religion, could have been the foremost among the priests. But why then is he contrasted with ‘us’ in *Y* 28.6? In order to solve the problem, it has been suggested that ‘to (me), Zarathustra and

52 Skjærvø 1997b, p. 107.

53 Kellens/Pirart 1988–91, I, pp. 18–22, 32–36; Kellens 1994a, pp. 154f., 155, n. 1.

54 Narten 1986, p. 34.

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to (all of) us' was intended⁵⁵—but this is not exactly what the text says. It is obvious, however, that *Y* 28.6 'to Zarathustra and to us' should be seen in the larger context of parallel expressions in the following two stanzas, *Y* 28.7 'Grant you, O Right-mindedness, strength to Vīštāspa and to me' and *Y* 28.8 'I lovingly entreat you, O Best One ... for the best (things) for Frašaoštra, the hero, and for myself and (for those) on whom you may bestow it for a whole lifetime of good mind'. In addition, the dative of Ahura Mazdā's name is found in the second verse line of the preceding stanza *Y* 28.5 '... as I am finding, for the strongest Lord, the Wise One, a walk-way and hearkening'. Each of the central stanzas 5–8 of *Y* 28 contains, in their second verse lines, a dative: to Ahura Mazdā, to Zarathustra and us, to Vīštāspa and me, to Frašaoštra and me. Thus, at the middle of the opening hymn of the Gathas, the important personages are named explicitly and deliberately.

That 'us' comprises the entire community of the Mazdayasnians emerges from a Young Avestan passage in *Y* 68.12 where a distinction is made between the officiating priest, who is referred to as 'me', on the one hand, and 'us', the Mazdayasnians, on the other. In an invocation, the waters are asked:

Y 68.12 Give, O good waters,
To me, the worshipping priest,
And to us, the worshipping Mazdayasnians,
The students and fellow-students,
The masters and pupils,
The men and women,
The minor (boys) and girls,
And the farmers

Y 68.13 ... the searching and finding of the straightest path
Which is the straightest one to truth
And to best life of the truthful ones,
To the light which offers all well-being.

As in the Gathic stanzas *Y* 28.6–8, there is a distinction between 'us' and the priest. The latter is explicitly identified as the officiating priest, the former as the community of the Mazdayasnians.

55 Humbach 1991, I, p. 118.

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Viewing the Gathic passage in this light, one could interpret *Y* 28.6 as ‘to (me,) Zarathustra and to us’, Zarathustra being the officiating priest and ‘us’ the community of his followers. Two of the most distinguished members of ‘us’, his followers, are named personally in the ensuing two stanzas, while the priest, Zarathustra according to the interpretation proposed here, is then referred to by the personal pronoun ‘me’.⁵⁶

More than anything else, however, *Y* 28.6 may illustrate the difficulties involved in interpreting these texts and in attempting to reach conclusive results. In the final analysis, it must be admitted that, on the basis of the evidence available, it is impossible either to prove or to disprove the identity of the composer of these texts. There is no doubt that Zarathustra was considered to be the author of the Gathas in the Younger Avestan period, and probably also before, though the contexts in which these statements are made are not historical, but ritual and “mythical” (always bearing in mind, of course, that, as C. S. Lewis has argued, there are “true” myths).⁵⁷ Yet, whether it was Zarathustra who composed the Gathas or whether they were later attributed to him, these hymns, if anything, may be regarded as an authentic record of his teachings.⁵⁸

What has become increasingly evident is the homogeneous character of the Gathas, with the exception, perhaps, of *Yasna* 53.⁵⁹ The first four Gathas, and probably also the fifth, are consistent and coherent with regard to language, concepts, and personages figuring in them. Moreover, it is not possible to detect an inner chronology of earlier and later composition. This supports the view that the period over which these hymns were composed encompasses a single human life span.⁶⁰

Apart from the conceptual frame, the homogeneous character of the Gathas is further substantiated by the poetic technique

56 Hintze 2002, pp. 35f., 48–50. Kellens 2002–3b, p. 843f. rejects the validity of *Y* 68.12 as a parallel for *Y* 28.6, but see Hintze [2006] ad *Y* 35.8 no. 1 *ādā* ‘I say’.

57 Lewis 1971, pp. 39–44; 1988, pp. 171–72.

58 Cf. Geldner 1896, p. 29f.

59 Cf. the discussion of Kellens/Pirart 1988–91, III, p. 265.

60 Kellens/Pirart 1988–91, I, p. 16 with n. 24.

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employed. As research into their composition continues, it is increasingly apparent not only that the individual hymns are structured internally but also that the way the Gathas are arranged in sequence is deliberate, with intertextual cross-references both forward and back.⁶¹ Such observations throw light on the highly developed poetic technique and indicate the workings of a master of verbal art. The ever-sensed uniqueness of these hymns, the admiration inspired by them and the attraction they have exerted not only on followers of the religion but also on scholars is due both to the scope they offer for interpretation, and to the poetic genius of their composer.

Authorship of the *Yasna Haptanhāiti*

Although there are correspondences and disagreements between the *Yasna Haptanhāiti* and the Gathas, conveniently listed by Narten,⁶² the major criterion which prohibits a dating of the *YH* much later than the Gathas, is the language: both texts belong to the same stage, Old Avestan. It has been estimated that no more than a few generations, if any, may have elapsed between the composition of the two texts. The divergences between them can be explained on the basis of their different literary genres. One of the results of Narten's seminal study is that the *Yasna Haptanhāiti* and the Gathas are best considered as texts complementing each other, and that there is no evidence against the assumption that they are contemporary compositions, probably by the same author.⁶³

Date of Zarathustra

The question as to when and where Zarathustra lived is perhaps even more debated than that regarding the authorship of the Gathas. While most scholars find a date around 1000 BCE most

61 Schwartz 1991a, 1998.

62 Narten 1986, pp. 29–30.

63 Narten 1986, pp. 35–37.

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plausible,⁶⁴ there are those who argue either for an earlier one between 1500–1200⁶⁵ or for a later date in the 6th century BCE.⁶⁶ Whether Zarathustra composed the Old Avestan texts himself or whether they emanate from a religious circle inspired by him, it is plausible to assume that the Gathas and *YH* are contemporaneous or nearly contemporaneous with him. Therefore, if these texts can be dated, then it should be possible to determine the lifetime of Zarathustra as well.

Even if allowance is made for languages to evolve at a different rate, the close linguistic relationship between Old Avestan and the language of the *Rigveda* is one of the strongest arguments in favour of their approximately contemporaneous dating around 1200 BCE. Relative to Young Avestan, Old Avestan apparently belongs to an earlier language stage. This is suggested by the more archaic verbal system of the latter as well as by a number of phonetic rules such as the hiatus caused by a laryngeal dropped between vowels in pre-historic times. Although Old Avestan is not the direct ancestor of Young Avestan, it has been estimated that some four centuries may have elapsed between the composition of the texts of the older and younger Avesta.⁶⁷

Furthermore, the language of the Younger Avesta represents, more or less, a stage of development similar to that of the Old Persian inscriptions for which an absolute date is available.⁶⁸ In addition, Avestan quotations in such inscriptions provide further support for the view that the Avestan texts were already widely known throughout the Achaemenid Empire.⁶⁹

64 Mayrhofer 1994 [1996], p. 177 with n. 16 with references; Humbach 1991, I, pp. 23, 26f., 30, 49 with references; Kellens 1998, p. 513.

65 Boyce 1992, pp. 27–51, esp. p. 45.; Skjærvø 1994b, p. 201 (1700–1200: Old Avestan period).

66 Gershevitch 1995, 2 referring to Henning's (1951, p. 36) "contemptuous rebuff of the linguistic argument that Zoroaster cannot have lived after the 8th cent. B.C."; Gnoli 2000.

67 Kellens 1987b, p. 135f.; Kellens/Pirart 1988–91, I, pp. 12–13; Herrenschmidt/Kellens 1994, p. 47; Skjærvø 1995d, p. 162.

68 Kellens 1989b, p. 36; Skjærvø 1995d, p. 162f.

69 Skjærvø 1999a; Kellens/Pirart 1988–91, I, p. 40f.