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# ON MITHRA'S PART IN ZOROASTRIANISM

By MARY BOYCE

One of the great problems in the study of Zoroastrianism has been to determine what were the new elements in Zoroaster's teachings—elements which roused such bitter hostility among his own people that he was driven to seek exile and to find his first converts among strangers. It is a problem because, through comparison with the Vedic religion, it has been possible to establish a good deal about the religion of the Iranians before Zoroaster, and naturally even more is known about the religion of the Zoroastrian church after him ; and the two are remarkably and disconcertingly similar, as if the second were in many respects a natural development of the first, without any break in continuity, whereas neither is very fully or clearly reflected in Zoroaster's own highly complex *Gāthās*. Western scholars have fairly generally sought to explain this apparent anomaly by postulating that in many points of doctrine the religion of the Zoroastrian church is not in fact that preached by its prophet ; they suppose, that is, that the followers of Zoroaster fairly rapidly betrayed his teachings and evolved a syncretic religion in which they reverted to many ancient beliefs and observances which he himself had denounced.

This interpretation has been strongly challenged by the late and much regretted M. Molé, in his massive work *Culte, mythe et cosmologie dans l'Iran ancien*.<sup>1</sup> In this book Molé summed up the above theory in the following terms : ' Trois phases s'y dessinent. Polythéisme du type védique au point de départ ; condamnation violente de ce polythéisme par la réforme zoroastrienne ; sa restauration partielle par un syncrétisme bâtard triomphant. Thèse, antithèse, synthèse. Habile schéma dialectique ! ' <sup>2</sup> In criticizing this ' habile schéma ' Molé maintained that there was too much of a tendency among Western scholars to see Zoroaster in the light of a modern idealization, as someone practising a purely intellectual religion and rejecting all existing observances. As he justly says : ' Ce culte sans rituel, sans sacrifice, cette adoration purement mentale telle que l'on se plaît à la reconstruire pour le zoroastrisme primitif, cadre mal avec tout ce que nous savons du contexte religieux du premier millénaire avant notre ère '.<sup>3</sup> He further pointed out that the postulated ' syncretic ' system showed a remarkable continuity with the old polytheistic one, and argued that it was strange that it should have been carried out ' avec une connaissance profonde tant de la structure interne du panthéon " païen " que du principe qui avait motivé sa condamnation. En effet, l'identité d'Ahura Mazdā avec Varuṇa admise, le système de l'Avesta non-gāthique apparaît comme une transformation du système aryen à partir du principe même de la doctrine gāthique '.<sup>4</sup> He further stressed those results of modern scholarship which have established more and more links between the *Gāthās* and Vedic religion. As he roundly puts it : ' Il est certain que tous les éléments de la doctrine gāthique sont présents dans

<sup>1</sup> Paris, 1963.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, 17.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, 4.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, 18.

la religion védique . . . . Sans doute, le système gâthique en tant que système ne se retrouve pas dans l'Inde ; il reste qu'il représente un développement conséquent des tendances qui y sont latentes'.<sup>5</sup> He adds : ' nous ne voulons pas nier . . . que les Gâthâ ne présentent une conception plus élevée de la divinité, plus épurée en tout cas, que la plupart des hymnes rituels du Véda dont on sent la proche parenté avec elles ; mais cette différence ne nécessite pas l'intervention d'un réformateur individuel et conscient à un moment déterminé de l'histoire '.<sup>6</sup>

Broadly speaking, then, Molé's own thesis is that there was in fact no reform of the old Iranian religion by Zoroaster, but instead a steady uninterrupted development of that faith ; and that there was possibly no historical Zoroaster at all. On this latter point his book is, however, far from clear ; for unfortunately, after a lucid and striking preamble, he enters that curious world dominated by the ' trois fonctions ', in which men and gods, history and myth merge in a misty twilight of correspondences, and precision and clarity are lost.<sup>7</sup> Thus for most of the book Molé treats Zoroaster as a myth. ' Le représentant mythique de la royauté est Yam, celui de la Religion (du sacerdoce), Zoroastre le Spitamide.'<sup>8</sup> Zoroaster, as a mythical figure, was ' le premier prêtre, le premier guerrier, le premier agriculteur ', with a ' polyvalence fonctionnelle'.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, Gayōmard, Zoroaster, and Sōšyans form a ' series ' of ' trois Hommes Parfaits ' <sup>10</sup> ; but ' l'Homme Parfait . . . est surtout Zoroastre, le Sauveur préexistant, archétype de l'humanité qu'il sauvera'.<sup>11</sup> His appearance in the *Gâthās* is as such an archetype. ' Il n'est pas question de la révélation d'une nouvelle religion, ni d'un message apporté aux hommes.' <sup>12</sup> Yet somehow Molé manages to reconcile these statements with the likelihood that at some undetermined place and time this archetypal Zoroaster was also born, as a prophet, upon earth ; <sup>13</sup> but this he regards as a wholly unimportant fact in the history of the religion which attached itself to his name. This religion, inevitably, he considers to be tripartite. There was the ' Gathic ' religion, sacerdotal, and ' corresponding ' to Zoroaster. This was esoteric, a cult for initiates. ' Issu d'un office du renouvellement du temps et indissolublement liée à lui, la doctrine des Gâthâ place le renouveau de la vie et sa préservation au centre de son intérêt.' <sup>14</sup> Then there was the ' royal ' religion, ' corresponding ' to Vištâspa (also treated as a figure of myth) or to Yima. This religion, exemplified in the Younger Avesta and the Old Persian inscriptions, was polytheistic, and had ' la fonction sociale'.<sup>15</sup> Thirdly, there was the general plebeian religion, also polytheistic, whose independent existence might not be suspected but for Herodotus and ' quelques textes pehlevi'.<sup>16</sup> All these religions, Molé maintained, were ' également légitimes et orthodoxes ' <sup>17</sup> ; and all had an unbroken continuity

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, 5–6.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, 6.

<sup>7</sup> It is much to be regretted that J. Brough's brilliant demonstration of the weakness of the evidence for the tripartite system (' The tripartite ideology of the Indo-Europeans : an experiment in method ', *BSOAS*, xxii, 1, 1959, 69–85) has not been more effective in checking this type of schematic interpretation.

<sup>8</sup> *op. cit.*, 58.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*, 466.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, 485.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, 521.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*, 530.

<sup>13</sup> See *ibid.*, 522, 530–1.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*, 24.

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*, 27.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*, 74.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, 85.

with the remote Indo-Iranian past. Why they should all three have attached themselves to the name of Zoroaster is never clearly explained ; but this appears to be attributed to Zoroaster's postulated 'polyvalence fonctionnelle' as a figure of myth. What remains wholly obscure is why and when these three separate religions, held to be common to the Iranian peoples as a whole, should have united to evolve a single canon of scripture, composed entirely in an otherwise unknown language of north-eastern Iran.

These abstract speculations, bewildering in themselves, lose all validity if tested against the realities of the Zoroastrian faith. Firstly, there is no trace in Zoroastrianism of esoteric teachings, of 'une doctrine des mystères'. It is true that priests and the laity live their slightly separate lives, and that Avesta is not to be taught to the unworthy ; but 'l'initiation des adeptes', to which Molé repeatedly refers, is the investiture with the *kustī*, which is common to all Zoroastrians, men and women, priests and the laity. As for mysteries, there is not a single religious ceremony, not even the most sacred, to which laymen are not welcomed by the celebrating priests. It is only non-Zoroastrians who are excluded ; within the faith all may participate. The whole of the Avesta was, moreover, translated during the Sasanian period into the current vernacular, and priests laboured at its exposition in that generally-understood tongue. Neither at that or any other period is there evidence for a threefold division within Zoroastrianism, other than what can be procured by the arbitrary juxtaposition of different types of composition, from different periods and regions, and of utterly dissimilar authorship.

The Zoroastrian tradition is firm that the Zoroastrian church is one, and that it was founded by Zoroaster, who was a great prophet but a mortal man, living at a particular time in history. All the marvellous legends of his birth and life have not obscured this basic tenet. The day of Zoroaster's death is remembered each year in Iran and India, on Rūz Khoršēd, Māh Dai, and a *bāj* (i.e. the *drōn* ceremony) is then solemnized in his honour. This service is celebrated for him as for a righteous man who has died, an *ašō ravān* ; and since no Zoroastrian act of worship may be offered to a human being, however holy, the service is celebrated with the *xšnūman* of Ardā Fravaš, but with a special intention (*nāmēštī*) for the soul of Zoroaster (*Zartušt Spitamān ašō frōhar*).<sup>18</sup> This liturgical fact is of primary importance as evidence for Zoroaster's human existence. If his own followers have resisted the pious temptation to make their prophet divine, there seems little justification for *juddīns* to do so.

Yet however little one may be prepared to accept Molé's thesis, that Zoroaster was a mythical figure 'corresponding' vaguely with a tripartite religion, nevertheless the premises on which he bases this thesis seem sound, namely that Zoroastrianism shows a striking continuity with what can be deduced of the pre-Zoroastrian religion, and that even in the *Gāthās* 'il n'y a pas

<sup>18</sup> See J. J. Modi, *The religious ceremonies and customs of the Parsees*, second ed., Bombay, 1937, 346. When in the Avesta (*Yt.*, xiii, 89) Zoroaster is hailed as the first priest, warrior, and farmer, it is explicitly said that it was as a corporeal being that he fulfilled these roles.

de rupture avec le monde indo-iranien'.<sup>19</sup> If while rejecting the deductions one approves the premises, then it becomes desirable to draw fresh deductions from these. In doing so it seems reasonable to the present writer to accord a greater respect than has been offered of late to the traditions of the Zoroastrians themselves; for, to adapt the words of a Christian apologist, there is 'the *a priori* consideration that it is more likely that a spiritual and highly ethical movement such as the [Zoroastrian] church should be established upon that Church's true witness to and understanding of its founder than the reverse'.<sup>20</sup> There appears indeed a basic improbability in the theory that such a religion, which has survived for at least two and a half millennia, keeping a lofty ethic and spiritual values intact, should have in its early history a development which has been called 'das böse Kapitel der Verfälschung des Zarathustraglaubens'.<sup>21</sup>

The Zoroastrian church undeniably preserves the teachings of its prophet within a liturgical framework embodying Old Iranian religious beliefs; and the ancient cult of Fire and the *haoma*-ritual are continued at the centre of its observance. The veneration of Fire is mentioned in the *Gāthās* themselves; and of the *haoma*-offering, which forms the main act of Zoroastrian worship, it has been justly said that 'it seems contrary to the evidence of the history of religions that a cult which had been fervently denounced by the founder of a religion should have been adopted . . . by that founder's earliest disciples'.<sup>22</sup> Zoroaster's supposed denunciation of this cult, and also of animal sacrifice, has been deduced partly from certain obscure passages of the *Gāthās*, which may well, however, represent an attack by the prophet on abuses of cult, linked with *daēva*-worship, rather than on the observances themselves.<sup>23</sup> The theory of his rejection of old rites and doctrines rests in the main, however, on negative evidence, having been postulated largely to explain the hostility which, it is evident from the *Gāthās*, he evoked among his own people; for it has been assumed that this must have had a solid cause, such as the repudiation of beliefs and practices to which they were strongly attached. The testimony of other religions shows, however, that a prophet can awake anger and resentment in his own community simply by claiming to be a prophet, i.e. a man with a special relationship with God. No actual attack on existing doctrines is needed to provoke animosity and a desire to depress pretension. This particular chain of evidence in the *Gāthās* is not, therefore, sufficient to establish a breach by Zoroaster with the religion of his forefathers; and there is little other positive evidence on which to base the assumption.

The strong probability, supported by the testimony of his own church, and

<sup>19</sup> op. cit., 525.

<sup>20</sup> J. W. Bowman in A. S. Peake, *Commentary on the Bible*, [new ed.,] ed. M. Black and H. H. Rowley, London, 1962, 641d.

<sup>21</sup> W. Hinz, *Zarathustra*, Stuttgart, 1961, 103.

<sup>22</sup> R. C. Zaehner, *The dawn and twilight of Zoroastrianism*, London, 1961, 85. H. S. Nyberg, *Die Religionen des alten Iran*, tr. H. H. Schaeder, Leipzig, 1938, 287, had earlier pointed out: '... der Haoma-Kult [sitzt] . . . tief im Zoroastrismus, ist . . . innig mit ihm verwachsen'.

<sup>23</sup> See Zaehner, op. cit., 84-8; Boyce, 'Ātaš-zōhr and āb-zōhr', *JRAS*, 1966, 110.



not contradicted by the *Gāthās*, is that in fact Zoroaster, himself a priest and born into what time has shown to be an immensely conservative religion, rejected little if anything of existing doctrines, but instead offered, positively, a powerful new spiritual and ethical message, conceived within the framework of prevailing orthodoxy, whereby he raised the concept of Ahura Mazda to still loftier levels, and laid a greater moral responsibility upon the individual man.<sup>24</sup> The quality of his vision and the force of his preaching were evidently sufficient to make those who listened to him call themselves his followers; but there is no evidence that he sought to move any but *daēva*-worshippers to reject beliefs which they had previously held. There is accordingly no solid ground for postulating a synthesis with the 'old' religion after Zoroaster's death, or for supposing a betrayal of his message by his own church, however little they, any more than, say, Christians or Buddhists, may have succeeded in fully grasping or practising their prophet's noble teachings.

In order to try to establish this strong probability more firmly, let us consider a particular Iranian doctrine which is generally held in the West to have been rejected by Zoroaster, namely the doctrine that Mithra existed, that he was a great and good god, and that he was to be worshipped. Most Western scholars have held that Zoroaster denied the existence of Mithra,<sup>25</sup> or was vehemently opposed to his cult,<sup>26</sup> or tacitly ignored it.<sup>27</sup> The reasons for this

<sup>24</sup> This theory presupposes, what most Iranian scholars have come to accept, that Ahura Mazda was already the 'god of the Iranians' before Zoroaster lived. There are, of course, dissentients from this view; see J. C. Tavadia, *ZDMG*, c. 1, 1950, 238–41; Hinz, op. cit., 91 ff. On the question of the *daēvas* see, most recently, W. B. Henning, 'A Sogdian god', *BSOAS*, xxviii, 2, 1965, 253–4; E. Benveniste, 'Hommes et dieux dans l'Avesta', in G. Wiessner (ed.), *Festschrift für W. Eilers*, Wiesbaden, 1967, 144–7.

<sup>25</sup> K. Barr, *Avesta*, Copenhagen, 1954, 208, held that in Zoroaster's vision Ahura Mazda united the divinities Varuṇa and Mitra, and that Mithra had therefore no remaining entity according to his teachings. Nyberg, op. cit., 101, argued that Mithra was a god of the night, and that, since Zoroaster attributed this role to Ahura Mazda, Mithra had no place 'im ursprünglichen Pantheon der Gathagemeinde'. (On the theory of Mithra as *Nachtgott* see I. Gershevitch, *The Avestan hymn to Mithra*, Cambridge, 1959, 36–8.) Zaehner, op. cit., 71, stated that 'Zoroaster did away with all personal gods except Ahura Mazdāh himself and the Holy Spirit'.

<sup>26</sup> This interpretation has been put perhaps most strongly by H. Humbach and by W. Hinz. In his *Zarathustra*, 75, Hinz wrote: 'Mit diesem uralten Gott der Iraner und Inder und mit dem ganzen, den Mithra umgebenden Götterkreis hat nach seiner Berufung Zarathustra den Kampf aufgenommen'. In 'Der iranische Mithra als Daiva', *Paideuma*, vii, 4–6, 1960, 257, Humbach wrote: 'Der Daiva par excellence aber ist . . . für . . . Zarathustra ohne Zweifel Mithra gewesen'.

<sup>27</sup> H. Lommel, *Die Religion Zarathustras*, Tübingen, 1930, 277, says of the *yazatas* in general: 'Die konkreten Götterpersönlichkeiten . . . hat Zarathustra verschwinden lassen'; and he speaks of the prophet's turning from 'dem alten, aus der heidnischen Naturreligion stammenden Volksgott Mithra' (ibid., 77). Gershevitch finds it 'unbelievable that Zoroaster should have regarded . . . Mithra with the detestation usually imputed to him by modern scholars' (op. cit., 48), but he too thinks that Zoroaster found it necessary to exclude him from his own religion. J. Duchesne-Guillemin, in his more recent writings on the subject (see, e.g., his latest work, *Symbols and values in Zoroastrianism*, New York, 1966, 35), contents himself with saying that Zoroaster ignored Mithra. This is a factual statement as far as the *Gāthās* are concerned; but it is difficult to grasp its implications, unless, with Molé, one believes that the Gathic religion reached only an inner circle, and that its followers were indifferent to the beliefs of the many. A prophet with a universal message must have some attitude to a god worshipped by those among whom he preaches, whether it is rejection or acceptance.

consensus of opinion are numerous and varied, and may be briefly summarized here.

Firstly, there is the general tendency, which affects opinion about Zoroaster's attitude towards almost all *yazatas*, to regard those parts of the Avesta which are composed in the later, 'younger' Avestan dialect as accretions to the 'pure' religion of the *Gāthās*.<sup>28</sup> This tendency is due, however, to assumptions not relevant to an oral literature; for, as is well known, two processes, memorization and improvisation, play their part in such literature. 'Sometimes the exact words of a poem may be remembered for hundreds of years, even when the language has become more or less obsolete and unintelligible. Sometimes only the barest outline . . . may be preserved. All possible varieties between these two extremes are found.'<sup>29</sup> The most striking example of memorization among the oral literatures of the world is provided by the Vedas. 'Yet in the Mahābhārata ancient India shows traces of a tradition which must have been almost as free as that of the Russians and the Yugoslavs; and even in Vedic literature there is some evidence that complete rigidity had not always prevailed.'<sup>30</sup> In Avestan tradition the two elements exist in very different proportions from the Vedic. In it strict memorization appears confined to the holiest texts of all, the hymns of the prophet, the *yenhē hātqm* prayer, and parts of the *Yasna Haptanhāiti*. Otherwise improvisation seems largely to have prevailed, that is to say, the texts were inherited, and partly memorized, but were rehandled afresh by generation after generation of priests, changing therefore in literary and linguistic form with changes of the living language and culture, until such time as Avestan came to be treated as a dead church-language, and full

<sup>28</sup> This theory has been put with mathematical clarity by Gershevitch, *op. cit.*, 9: 'The Avesta is a collection of sacred writings belonging to two religions, which are conveniently referred to as Zarathuštrianism and Zoroastrianism. The former is the doctrine preached by Zarathuštra . . . the latter . . . an Iranian religious *κοινή* which includes Zarathuštrianism and began to be formulated in Avestan language in the second half of the fifth century B.C.'. The use of the terms Zarathuštrian and Zoroastrian was first proposed by Lommel, *op. cit.*, 8-9, but with caution and a stress upon the elements of continuity linking the texts. In suggesting these terms as useful, Lommel wrote of the Younger Avesta (p. 9): 'Vielmehr wird es manchmal so sein, dass dunkle Hinweise auf solche systemartige Zusammenhänge in den ältesten Texten wirklich vorhanden sind, aber bei isolierender Betrachtung der Gathas nicht verstanden werden könnten, sich jedoch aufklären, wenn wir sie eingliedern in das aus zusammenfassender Betrachtung sich ergebende Lehrgebäude. So wird sich erkennen lassen, dass manches bei Zarathuštra schon ausgebildet oder vorgebildet war, was uns erst in den späteren Quellen mit voller Deutlichkeit entgegentritt. Man soll nämlich auch nicht glauben, das alles das, was aus der nachzarathuštrischen Literatur den sinnvollen Zusammenhang einer Weltanschauung erkennen lässt, nur Zutat, im Grunde also nur Missverständnis der eigenen Religion sei. Trotz mancher Verknöcherung, Veräusserlichung und Verflachung ist den Anhängern des Zarathuštra denn doch der eigentliche Gehalt seiner Lehre nicht so bald entschwunden'. Benveniste, in *Festschrift für W. Eilers*, 147, has stressed how much, in language and terminology, 'les Gāthās ont agi sur la rédaction de l'Avesta ultérieure'. Gershevitch has refined further on the use of the terms Zarathuštrian and Zoroastrian in his article 'Zoroaster's own contribution', *JNES*, xxiii, 1, 1964, 12 ff.; although he stresses there the steadfast preservation of Zoroaster's ethical teachings, despite postulated changes in doctrine.

<sup>29</sup> H. M. and N. K. Chadwick, *The growth of literature*, Cambridge, 1932-40, III, 867.

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*, III, 867.

memorization was used to preserve all sacred texts. The Avesta need not, therefore, be dismembered on the basis of the difference between Gathic and Younger Avestan dialects. There were probably two processes at work to produce this difference within a single sacred tradition of the Avestan-speaking people. Dialect differences between Gathic and Younger Avestan (more radical than can readily be explained as purely historical developments) are not necessarily divisive as far as this religious tradition is concerned. A shift of the high kingship from one part of Aryana Vaējah to another would suffice to account for such a change in those texts not fully preserved by memorization.<sup>31</sup>

Apart from this general consideration there are a number of special reasons for the hypothesis that Mithra in particular was rejected by Zoroaster. Firstly, the existence later of a distinct Mithraic religion in countries to the west of Iran has predisposed scholars to assume a distinct ancient worship of this god existing in Iran itself, which could be separated from that of Ahura Mazda. There is, however, no evidence to support this assumption; for a reference to the worship of Mithra without an immediate reference to that of Ahura Mazda cannot be taken as proof of it. Thus, for instance, if of the inscriptions of Artaxerxes II we possessed only Hamadān B, where he invokes Mithra alone (*Mitra mām pātuv*), there might be a temptation to say that this king belonged to a 'Mithragemeinde'; but in others of his inscriptions the name of Ahura Mazda also appears, standing first, *hya maθišta bagānām*.<sup>32</sup> Another argument adduced from western Mithraism is that its dark cults were general to all worship of Mithra, and must naturally have been repudiated by Zoroaster. It is, however,

<sup>31</sup> The discussion of the composition of the *yašts* by A. Christensen, *Les Kayanides*, Copenhagen, 1932, 10 ff., is partly invalidated by his using criteria more proper to a written than to an oral literature; and the same criticism, to a lesser degree, applies, in the present writer's opinion, to the analysis of the *Mīhr Yašt* by Gershevitch, *AHM*, 22 ff. For although Dr. Gershevitch is plainly right in deprecating an attempt 'to carve up the hymn into layers', yet equally plainly an ancient hymn, transmitted by the dual processes of improvisation and memorization, has different strata, even though it reaches us in the form of a unified composition. Thus, to take one small example, the late Professor Henning held that the words *zarōiš ayaθhō frahixtəm* (*Yt.*, x, 96, 132) meant 'cast in the yellow metal', i.e. bronze; and he believed that this phrase had become fixed with regard to Mithra in the Bronze Age, when bronze was 'the' metal. The Iranian Bronze Age is generally considered to have drawn to an end c. 1000–800 B.C. Fine bronze mace-heads have been found, e.g., at Marlik, and other contemporary Iranian sites; see E. Negahban, *A preliminary report on Marlik excavation*, Tehran, 1964, pp. 21, 32, figs. 57–9. (For a discussion of other interpretations of the *yašt* passage see Gershevitch, *AHM*, 245.) It seems more likely that this and other ancient elements in the *Mīhr Yašt* (whose existence, of course, Gershevitch fully recognizes) were preserved in the flow of an uninterrupted tradition, rather than that their presence results from a deliberate synthesis, made consciously in a work composed at a particular point of time. The theory of a single religious tradition compassing the change from Gathic to Younger Avestan while there were still kings in Aryana Vaējah requires of course the postulate of a date for Zoroaster considerably earlier than the rise of the Achaemenians; but this earlier dating has recently been urged on varied grounds by a number of scholars, among them K. Barr, I. M. D'yakonov, F. B. J. Kuiper, and I. M. Oranskiy.

<sup>32</sup> It is evident that Mithra-worship was strong among the Iranian peoples to the north-east of Iran proper (see, most recently, H. von Stietencron, *Indische Sonnenpriester*, Wiesbaden, 1966, 232 f.); but even here, where there seem to have been cults where Mithra was the chief god, it cannot be established that he was ever worshipped alone. On this point see further F. B. J. Kuiper, 'Remarks on "The Avestan hymn to Mithra"', *IJJ*, v, 1, 1961, 56.



generally agreed that the worship of Mithra in the west became blended with the worship of other gods, and his cult with the rites of other cults. It is not sound, therefore, in the absence of supporting evidence, to deduce the elements of the Iranian worship of Mithra from those of Mithraism.

In the light of Mithraic practices the argument has been put forward that animal sacrifice was particularly prominent in the cult of Mithra; and since this rite has been thought, though on no good evidence, to have been repugnant to Zoroaster,<sup>33</sup> this has been one special reason advanced for the prophet's putative rejection of the god. In fact animal sacrifice was especially enjoined in Zoroastrianism for the six annual festivals of the *gahāmbārs*, which are dedicated to Ahura Mazda. It seems possible, moreover, that the western Mithra's role of tauroctonous deity was actually derived from that of Haoma, the divine sacrificer, a *yazata* whose place is at the heart of the Zoroastrian cult.<sup>34</sup> It is impossible, therefore, to deduce anything about a hostility to Mithra from the facts of animal sacrifice. Yet another reason advanced for the putative rejection of Mithra has been his character as god of war, which has been held not to harmonize with Zoroaster's own teachings. Yet the *Gāthās* themselves contain nothing to suggest that the prophet was against the taking of arms in the cause of righteousness; and Mithra's general character, as god of justice and good faith, accords admirably with Zoroaster's tenets.<sup>35</sup>

Then there is the argument *ex silentio*, since Mithra's name does not occur in the *Gāthās*.<sup>36</sup> This argument can carry little weight, however, when one

<sup>33</sup> See Zaehner, *op. cit.*, 87; Duchesne-Guillemin, *La religion de l'Iran ancien*, Paris, 1962, 99 f.; Boyce, *JRAS*, 1966, p. 110 with n. 3.

<sup>34</sup> See Boyce, 'Haoma, priest of the sacrifice', *W. B. Henning memorial volume* (in the press).

<sup>35</sup> This fact has been recognized by Gershevitch, who would plainly like to reconcile prophet and god. He points out (*AHM*, p. 33, n.): 'That the Iranian Mithra's warlike character is derived from his "force de punir" was clearly seen by Meillet' [see A. Meillet, *JA*, x<sup>e</sup> Sér., x, juillet-août 1907, 154], and states (p. 49) that 'as guardian of the contract, an aspect of the Truth on which Zarathuštra laid great store . . . Mithra had every claim to Zarathuštra's affection'. See further his p. 67. Molé (*op. cit.*, 21) does less than justice to these statements by Gershevitch, when affirming his own conviction that 'le caractère fondamental [de Mithra] allait très bien avec la conception gāthique'. Hinz, on the other hand (*op. cit.*, 74-5), stresses *Yt.*, x, 29: 'You, Mithra, are both wicked and most good to countries . . . both wicked and most good to men' (*tūm akō vahištāša miθra ahi daiṣhubyō akō vahištāša . . . mašyākaēibyō*). He imagines the priest-poet to have felt 'ein Gefühl des Schreckens . . . vor dem "bösen" Gott . . . Beschwichtigend, mit falschem Zungenschlag, preist er ihn schnell als den "Besten"'. Aber Mithras dämonische Wirklichkeit, seine menschenverderbende Bös-heit vermochten noch so viele schönfärberische Strophen nicht ganz zu verhüllen'. That there was awe and some dread in the worship of Mithra, as in that of Ahura Mazda, or of Jehovah, none would deny; but the 'wickedness' of v. 29, as Gershevitch suggests (*AHM*, 53), may well be no more than Mithra's fearsomeness for sinners; so also P. Thieme, 'Mitra and Aryaman', *Trans. of the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences*, xli, 1957, 27-28, 51-54; Benveniste, 'Mithra aux vastes pâturages', *JA*, ccxlviii, 4, 1960, 429.

<sup>36</sup> Few would accept the hypothesis of H. Humbach (*OLZ*, lv, 9-10, 1960, col. 514; *Paideuma*, vii, 4-6, 254) that in *Y*, xlvi, 5, *urvātōiš vā . . . miθrōibyō vā* an aversion from Mithra is indicated, the word *miθra* having been put in the plural so that the prophet might avoid soiling his lips with what, in the singular, was also the name of this god. The very fragility of this argument is an indication of the lack of real evidence for Zoroaster's rejection of Mithra. [Professor Humbach has since said in conversation that he made this point in the light of the generally-held belief in Zoroaster's rejection of Mithra, rather than as an argument which could have independent force.]

considers the nature of the *Gāthās*, and of the Indo-Iranian tradition of sacred hymns in which they were composed. In this tradition a priest addressed his worship to a single deity, mentioning in it as well usually only those other gods most closely associated with him. This does not, as the Vedic hymns well show, imply rejection of the other deities in the pantheon. Zoroaster directed his hymns to the great god Ahura Mazda, to whom he offered his own devotion ; and he spoke in them only of him, and of the beings most closely associated with him, through whom he acted, namely Sraoša, Spenta Mainyu, and the Ameša Spentas. Similarly in the *Mihr Yašt* by far the greater number of verses are directed to Mithra alone ; and the other gods invoked are only those who are associated with him—Ahura Mazda himself, Rašnu and Sraoša, Aši and Nairyō.səṇha, as well as that other god of war, Vərəθraϥna.<sup>37</sup> There is no mention of other great *yazatas*, such as Tištrya and Vayu, Vanant and Aredvī Sūrā ; but this is no ground for supposing worshippers of Mithra to have rejected these deities, or for holding that each *yazata* had his exclusive following. The evidence both from India and Iran is against any such deductions. A close analogy to the *Gāthās*, in which Zoroaster offers his worship explicitly to Ahura Mazda, is, moreover, provided, as has often been remarked, by the inscriptions of Darius the Great, where only Ahura Mazda is named in veneration. There, however, he is regularly spoken of with the formula ‘ Ahura Mazda, who is the greatest of the gods ’ (*Auramazdā . . . hya maθišta bagānām*). He is also invoked ‘ with all the gods ’ (*hadā viθaibiš bagaibiš*) ; and there occurs too the famous phrase ‘ Ahura Mazda, and the other gods who are ’ (*Auramazdā . . . utā aniyāha bagāha tyaiy hantiy*). Despite this evidence, attempts have been made to establish that Darius was a monotheist, as has been maintained for Zoroaster also. The fact is, however, that no Iranian of old can be shown to have practised a rigid monotheism, which is evidently not in accord with the spirit of Indo-Iranian religion. This religion, as Kuiper has observed, appears represented in historic times, not by a number of radically divergent faiths, but rather by various regional forms, structurally related, which need to be studied as coherent systems if a deeper understanding of them is to be gained.<sup>38</sup> The character of every known Old Iranian religion appears polytheistic ; and no declaration of the existence of one God, and one God alone, can be found in any source, not even in the utterances of Zoroaster.

With regard to Achaemenian beliefs, the likelihood is, as Molé has said, that the invocation of Mithra and Anāhitā by Artaxerxes II is not a sign of the introduction of new cults, but rather ‘ la formulation explicite de ce qui était compris auparavant dans la formule de “ tous les dieux ” ’.<sup>39</sup> The expression ‘ the other gods who are ’, used by Darius, has been compared with one in the Gathic verse Y, LI, 22, which W. B. Henning translated<sup>40</sup> as follows : ‘ At whose sacrifice

<sup>37</sup> On the association of these and other minor gods with Mithra see Gershevitch, *AHM*, 58–60, 193–5. <sup>38</sup> See Kuiper, *IJJ*, v, 1, 1961, 56. <sup>39</sup> *op. cit.*, 33.

<sup>40</sup> Verbal communication, in 1945. For other interpretations see, most recently, following Lommel, Gershevitch, *AHM*, 165 ; Humbach, *Die Gathas des Zarathustra*, Heidelberg, 1959, I, 48–9, 156, II, 101. For some penetrating observations see Nyberg, *op. cit.*, 270.

Ahura Mazda knows the best for me according to righteousness. Those who were and are, those I shall worship by their names, and shall approach with praise' (*yehyā mōi ašāt hačā vahīštəm yesnē patī vaēdā mazdā ahurō yōi ānharəčā hēntičā tą yazāi x'āiš nāmēnīš pairičā jasāi vantā*). The associated prayer, *yēnhē hātəm*, has for *yehyā* . . . *yōi ānharəčā hēntičā* . . . the words *yēnhē hātəm* . . . *yānhəmčā tāsčā tāsčā yazamaidē* 'of whose of the beings . . . and of whom we worship the male and female ones'. In the exposition of this great prayer in *Y*, XXI, 2 it is stated that it is addressed to the Amēša Spentas 'the holy Immortals'. This need not necessarily apply, however, to *Y*, LI, 22, with its wholly masculine pronouns.<sup>41</sup> There it is possible that *yazatas* in general are meant, as opposed to the *daēvas*, worship of whom was the worst thing. Whether this is so or not, worship and invocation by the prophet of divinities other than Ahura Mazda, however subtle the doctrine of their relationship with the supreme god, is not consonant with a theory of his strict monotheism; and the correlative theory, that he rejected all lesser *yazatas* because he was a monotheist, lacks validity. Since there is no denunciation by Zoroaster of Mithra, or of any other *yazata*, there is accordingly no positive evidence on which to establish their rejection by the prophet, but only a doubtful inference drawn from silence, a silence which seems more probably that of acceptance rather than rejection, an acceptance of the traditional beliefs and forms of worship of the religion into which he was born. The *Gāthās* show plainly that when Zoroaster wished to reject or denounce, he did so vigorously and with deep feeling; and since Mithra's worship was traditionally so closely associated with that of Ahura Mazda, had he himself rejected it, its explicit denunciation would surely have been natural.

Finally, to the argument *ex silentio* from the *Gāthās* has been added an inference drawn from those verses in the *Mīhr Yašt* where the god is represented as saying: 'I am the beneficent protector of all creatures, I am the beneficent guardian of all creatures; yet men do not worship me by mentioning my name at their sacrifice, as other gods are worshipped with sacrifice at which their names are mentioned. If indeed men were to worship me by mentioning my name at their sacrifice, as other gods are worshipped with sacrifice at which their names are mentioned, I should go forth to righteous men . . .' (*azəm vīspanəm dāmanəm nipāta ahmi hvapō, azəm vīspanəm dāmanəm nišharəta ahmi hvapō, āt mā nōit mašyāka aoxtō.nāmana yasna yazənte, yaθa anye yazatānhō aoxtō.nāmana yasna yazənti. yeidi.zī.mā mašyāka aoxtō.nāmana yasna yazayanta, yaθa anye yazatānhō aoxtō.nāmana yasna yazənti. frā nuruyō ašavaoyō . . . šūšuyəm*).<sup>42</sup> These words have been taken as an appeal to men to worship Mithra despite his supposed rejection by Zoroaster;<sup>43</sup> but it is difficult to see how they can be made to bear this interpretation, since according to the syncretic

<sup>41</sup> There is a full discussion of the significance of the pronouns, and of the passages themselves, by Gershevitch, *AHM*, 163–6. On *Y*, LI, 22 see also Hinz, *op. cit.*, 106.

<sup>42</sup> *Yt.*, x, 54–5.

<sup>43</sup> See Gershevitch, *AHM*, p. 19 with n.

theory all *yazatas* (other than Ahura Mazda and his Aspects) had been rejected by the prophet. It is not the worship of Mithra alone which is held to have been denied. The second part of the above passage (from *yeiḏi.zī.mā* . . .) is indeed to be found also in *Yt.*, viii (vv. 11, 24), attributed to Tištrya; but perhaps is there merely imitative of the *Mihr Yašt* verse. The Vedic Mitra too, it has been pointed out, is to be worshipped 'particularly by being called by his name';<sup>44</sup> but the two striking points about the Avestan passage are the statement that the god is not being so worshipped, and his desire to be invoked as other *yazatas* are. It is possible, however, that the significance of this is contrary to what has been suggested, and that the intention was in fact to persuade worshippers not to exalt Mithra unduly, against the spirit of Zoroaster's teachings; not, that is, to invoke him merely as Ahura, Lord, like the supreme god known as Ahura Mazda, the wise Lord, but to pray to him as other lesser gods are prayed to, *xšaēš nāmānīš*, with his proper name, since great though Mithra is, and an Ahura, yet in Zoroaster's religion he is no more than are the 'other gods'. It is in fact notable that Mithra does not accuse men of failing to offer him worship, but only of failing to worship him *aoxtō.nāmana yasna*. In support of this interpretation is the fact that of all the gods invoked in the *Sīrōze*, there is only one whom the Zoroastrians call upon there as *aoxtō.nāmanēm yazatēm*, and that is Mithra. The Pahlavi translation and gloss runs: *guft-nām yazad, ku-š nām pad ēn dēn guft ēstēd* 'the god of spoken name, that is, his name is spoken in this religion'. The same phrase with its gloss occurs in *Mihr Niyāyišn*, 10. The natural interpretation would seem to be that the Zoroastrians were conscious that in this respect their faith differed from others (such as that which gave rise to Western Mithraism), in which Mithra was himself the Lord, too exalted for his name to be generally spoken. If this interpretation is correct, then the Zoroastrian priests, far from compromising their prophet's teachings by *Mihr Yašt*, 54-5, were in fact steadily reinforcing his doctrine of the one supreme God, Ahura Mazda, unique in his greatness and Lord therefore even over the mighty Mithra.<sup>45</sup> It may well be that this sense of the exaltation of Ahura Mazda, and of the absolute subordination to him of all other gods, was one of the most striking elements of Zoroaster's preaching.

Thus of all the arguments brought to establish Zoroaster's rejection of Mithra, there is none which seems in itself cogent, and their cumulative effect is therefore no more decisive. Let us accordingly turn from them to consider what are the facts about Mithra's part in Zoroastrian tradition, and in the living Zoroastrian church.

One of the factors which has caused Zoroastrianism to be treated as if it

<sup>44</sup> See Thieme, *op. cit.*, 59.

<sup>45</sup> For the *Sīrōze* passage (*Sīrōze* 1, 16) see B. N. Dhabhar, *Zand-i Khūrtak Avistāk*, text, Bombay, 1927, 170, transl., Bombay, 1963, 325. For the Pahlavi of *Mihr Niyāyišn*, 10, see *ibid.* text, p. 23, transl., pp. 40-1. In general the expression *aoxtō.nāmana* is used liturgically in all 'lesser' *xšnūmans*. The implication of *Y*, v, 3 is presumably different, referring to the reverent appellation of Ahura Mazda, rather than to the mystery of the supreme God's unknown personal name.

were separated into disjunct periods, instead of being, like other great religions, an organically developing whole, is the different character of the material for each stage of its history. Firstly, there is the formal division of Gathic and Younger Avestan texts; then the difference between the Avesta as a whole and Pahlavi literature. It happens that our evidence for the older period comes almost wholly from liturgical texts (if one excludes the controversial evidence of the Achaemenian inscriptions); whereas for the Sasanian period it is derived largely from secondary theological writings, expository, analytic, or narrative. It is important, however, once these facts are recognized, not to allow one's understanding of the history of the faith to be biased by them; not, that is, to permit oneself to think that worship played a smaller part than theology in Sasanian Zoroastrianism, simply because of the character of the sources. This point seems self-evident, but it has in fact been largely disregarded.

There is no dispute over the fact that Mithra had an important place in Zoroastrianism as it is embodied in the Younger Avestan texts. There is the irrefutable testimony of his own *yašt* and *nīyāyišn*, together with his frequent invocation in the general liturgy of the *yasna*, and the mention of his name in other *yašts*. In all these sources his worship is, naturally, associated with that of Ahura Mazda as the supreme god. The history of the faith in the subsequent Parthian period is regrettably ill-documented; but the evidence of the Manichaean texts, although it belongs chronologically to the Sasanian epoch, shows that the worship of Mithra, within the framework of the Zoroastrian religion, was a powerful living force among the Parthians in the third and fourth centuries A.D.; and that this worship was then still characterized by many of the elements to be found in his ancient *yašt*.<sup>46</sup> This accords with the fact that a number of personal names compounded with Mithra's occur on ostraca from Nisa, whose inhabitants were demonstrably Zoroastrians.<sup>47</sup>

When one comes to the Sasanian period, it is fairly generally held that the worship of Mithra and the other great *yazatas* became less prominent; for the theory is that Ardašīr's reform led to the Zoroastrian church recovering to a large extent at this time from its supposed previous lapse into what has been called a 'mixed' or 'loose' religion. 'The Sassanians . . . reacted violently against the . . . religious syncretism that had characterized former regimes.'<sup>48</sup> It is odd, however, that no one holding this theory seems to have tried to reconcile it with the fact that Ardašīr's own father, Pāpak, is said to have been in charge of a temple of Anāhid at Staxr;<sup>49</sup> and that this great *yazatā*, so often associated with Mithra, remained highly honoured by Ardašīr himself<sup>50</sup> and by his descendants.<sup>51</sup> The priest Kardēr, who was prominent through the first seven Sasanian reigns, and who is held to have contributed greatly

<sup>46</sup> See Boyce, 'On Mithra in the Manichaean pantheon', in W. B. Henning and E. Yarshater (ed.), *A locust's leg; studies in honour of S. H. Taqizadeh*, London, 1962, 44–54.

<sup>47</sup> See, e.g., M. Sznyceer, 'Nouveaux ostraca de Nisa', *Semitica*, xii, 1962, 105–26.

<sup>48</sup> Zaehner, *op. cit.*, 179.

<sup>49</sup> Ṭabarī, ed. Nöldeke, 4.

<sup>50</sup> See *ibid.*, 17.

<sup>51</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 4, n. 2.



to defining orthodoxy at this period, himself succeeded to Pāpak's dignity as guardian of the Anāhīd shrine at Staxr.<sup>52</sup> Narseh in his inscription at Paikuli invokes 'Öhrmazd and all the gods, and Anāhīd who is called the Lady' (*Öhrmazd ud wispān yazdān ud Anāhīd ī Bānūg nām*);<sup>53</sup> and Šābuhr II sent back trophies of war to hang in Anāhīd's shrine at Staxr.<sup>54</sup> Šābuhr is further recorded as having required a Persian general suspected of Christian leanings to offer worship to the Sun, Moon, and Fire, as well as to the great god Zeus, and Nānai, the great goddess of earth, i.e., presumably, to Mihr, Māh, Ādur, Öhrmazd, and Anāhīd.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, his successor, Ardašīr II, is depicted at Tāq-i Bustān receiving the diadem of kingship from (presumably) Öhrmazd; and behind him there stands a figure with rayed nimbus who is evidently Mihr. Nothing in all this suggests even the mildest reaction by the royal house against a putative religious syncretism, or the veneration of the great *yazatas*. The Christian Syriac sources, moreover, attest the dominant part played by worship of the Sun, i.e. Mihr, in Sasanian Zoroastrianism; and this is substantiated by the number of personal names compounded with Mithra's which appear on seals of the period (some of which, demonstrably, belonged to Zoroastrian priests).<sup>56</sup> The use made of Mithra's name by Manichaean missionaries also shows the importance of the *yazata* in the Zoroastrianism of Sasanian Persia.

The evidence of the Sasanian inscriptions and seals, of Syriac and Arabic writers, and of the Manichaeans, is borne out by that of the Zoroastrian books themselves; for Mithra appears just as prominently in them and in the post-Sasanian religious writings as is to be expected from his place in the Avesta. Thus in the *Greater Bundahišn* it is stated that 'Mihr . . . was created by

<sup>52</sup> See, e.g., his inscription on the Ka'be-yi Zardušt, ed. W. B. Henning, *Corpus inscriptionum iranicarum*, Part III, Vol. II, plates, portfolio III, plates LXXV–LXXVI, l. 8; M. Sprengling, *Third century Iran, Sapor and Kartir*, Chicago, 1953, 47, 51. M.-L. Chaumont, 'Le culte de la déesse Anāhītā', *JA*, CCLIII, 2, 1965, 167–81, has recently stressed the importance of the cults of Anāhīd and Mihr for the early Sasanian kings. Yet she still writes (p. 169) of 'le mazdéisme réformé et épuré de l'Iran des premiers Sassanides'; and she supposes (p. 172) that Kardēr accepted this particular honour 'comme le couronnement de sa carrière', while in his 'orthodoxy' regarding Anāhīd, whom he thus served, as little more than a *dēw*. Such an interpretation obliges one, however, to attribute a degree of spiritual dishonesty to this great prelate which seems unjustified. Nor is there evidence for doctrinal schism at this time between rulers and priests; on the contrary, the unity of church and state is a well-established Sasanian concept.

<sup>53</sup> Paikuli (Pahlavi), l. 10; ed. Herzfeld, p. 98.

<sup>54</sup> See Ṭabarī, ed. Nöldeke, p. 4, n. 2.

<sup>55</sup> See G. Hoffmann, *Auszüge aus syrischen Akten persischer Märtyrer*, Leipzig, 1880, 29. The especial veneration of Anāhīd and Mihr by the Sasanians in Pārs is an admirable example of Iranian religious conservatism, since these are the only two *yazatas*, under Öhrmazd, who were explicitly honoured by their predecessors the Achaemenians. For more details concerning the veneration of Mithra and Anāhītā by the Achaemenians see F. Cumont, *Textes et monuments figurés relatifs aux mystères de Mithra*, Brussels, 1899, I, 229 f.

<sup>56</sup> The relevant passages from Syriac sources have been brought together by A. Christensen, *L'Iran sous les Sassanides*, second ed., Copenhagen, 1944, 143–5. For Sasanian seals see, most recently, A. D. H. Bivar, *Catalogue of the western Asiatic seals in the BM. Stamp seals*, II. *The Sasanian dynasty*, London, 1969. As well as personal names compounded with Mithra's, there is the inscription on the BM seal no. 120334, 'pst'n 'L mtry, as a variant of the common 'pst'n 'L yzdy/yzd'n.

Ōhrmazd the most glorious of the spiritual *yazads* ' (*Mihr . . . frāz dād Ōhrmazd x<sup>w</sup>arraḥōmandtom az mēnōgān yazdān*) ; <sup>57</sup> and that his ' duty is to judge the world truly ' (*x<sup>w</sup>ēškārīh wizīr ī gēhān pad rāstīh kardan*).<sup>58</sup> Manuščīhr stresses that it is Mihr's especial duty to watch over men in this world, and to keep account of their actions here, whereas in the future existence it is the creator Ōhrmazd who will take final cognizance of these, when the last account is made.<sup>59</sup> This statement, made in the ninth century A.D., accords closely with *Yt.*, x, 92, where Mithra is said to be regarded as ' the temporal and religious judge of living beings in the (world of) creatures ' (*dāmōhu ahūm ratūmča gaēthanqm*).<sup>60</sup> Mithra's watchfulness over the world is not held to be carried on with indifference. Of the five most beautiful things created by Ōhrmazd, one is said to be ' when Mihr of the wide pastures goes to a country and makes friendship (among its people) ' (*Mihr ī frāx<sup>w</sup>-gōyōt ka ō deh rasēd, andar deh mihryārīh kunēd*).<sup>61</sup> As *yazata*, his desire is to promote what is good. Yet in his quality of ' the most just ' (*Mihr dādwartar*)<sup>62</sup> he is still *akō vahištašča . . . mašyākāēibyō*.<sup>63</sup> He keeps a daily record of men's sins,<sup>64</sup> and is their impartial judge at the Činvat Bridge. Those who have taken a false oath, or otherwise done wrong, he punishes strictly,<sup>65</sup> both at the individual judgment and also at the end of the world,<sup>66</sup> when he will smite the Evil Spirit.<sup>67</sup> The Evil Spirit will appeal to him to uphold the ancient contract between Ōhrmazd and himself, for even the powers of darkness acknowledge Mihr's unswerving equity ; but the divine contract which the great *yazata* guards will by then have run its course. In the present time his perfect equity makes Mihr protect even lost souls from injustice ; for thrice a day he brandishes his great mace over Hell, so that from dread of it the devils below dare not inflict punishment on the

<sup>57</sup> Ch. xxvi, 74 ; ed. T. D. Anklesaria, Bombay, 1908, 172.11–12 ; transl. (with emended reading *frāz*) by B. T. Anklesaria, *Zand-ākāših*, Bombay, 1956, 223.

<sup>58</sup> *ibid.*, xxvi, 70 ; ed. T. D. A., 172.1.

<sup>59</sup> *Dādīstān ī dēnīg*, xiii, 3 ; ed. T. D. Anklesaria, Bombay, 1903, 30 ; transl. by E. W. West (as xiv, 3), SBE, xviii, 33. The passage can fitly be taken in conjunction with *Y*, XLVI, 17 where Ahura Mazda himself is said to be the judge between righteous and sinner. Zaehner (op. cit., 56) has argued from this that the prophet's zeal was so great on behalf of Ahura Mazda, ' whom he regarded as the one true God who would brook no rival ', that he banished from his own tenets the doctrine regarding the judges Mithra, Sraoša, and Rašnu. This latter doctrine evidently belongs, however, to a detailed exposition of the faith, whereas the prophet's own vision swept him on to speak only of Ahura Mazda as the ultimate ruler of men's destiny ; cf. *Dd.*, xxx, 10 (ed. T. D. A., 60 ; transl. West, 66) ; *āmārgar Ōhrmazd, Vahman, Mihr, Srōš ud Rašn*. *Harw ēwag pad x<sup>w</sup>ēš hangām hamē pad rāstīh āmār kunēd* ' the judges (are) Ōhrmazd, Vahman, Mihr, Srōš, and Rašn. Each one always judges rightly at his own time '.

<sup>60</sup> See Gershevitch, *AHM*, 119 with commentary, 240–2.

<sup>61</sup> *Pahlavi Rivāyat accompanying the Dādīstān ī dēnīg*, ch. x, 1 ; ed. B. N. Dhabhar, Bombay, 1913, 31.13–14 ; transl. H. P. Mirza, Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 1940, 190.

<sup>62</sup> *Šāyest nē-šāyest* xxiii, 3, ed. M. Davar, Bombay, 1912, 109 ; West, SBE, v, 405.

<sup>63</sup> *Yt.*, x, 29, see above, p. 17, n. 35.

<sup>64</sup> *Dd.*, xiii, 3 (Dhabhar, 30 ; West, 33).

<sup>65</sup> *ibid.*, cf. *Mēnōg ī Xrad*, ii, 118–20 (ed. West, Bombay, 1871, 9) and *passim*.

<sup>66</sup> *Dēnkard*, ix, 39.9 (38.9), ed. D. P. Sanjana, xviii, 30, D. M. Madan 857.10 f. ; transl. West, SBE, xxxvii, 277–8. For Mithra's part at the individual judgment cf. *Vd.*, xix, 28.

<sup>67</sup> *Zand ī Vohūman Yasn*, ed. B. T. Anklesaria, Bombay, 1957, vii, 31, 34 (pp. 66, 67).

damned other than is their due (*Mihr-i farāx-gōyōt har rüz-ē se bār gurz bar sar-i dūzax mī gardānad, ke az bīm-i ān gurz-i Mihr-ized pādefrāh bar ravānhā-yi dūzaxiyan kam-u-biš nē mī tavānand kardan*).<sup>68</sup>

Lists of the 30 divinities for whom the days of the month are named occur in various places in Pahlavi literature, sometimes in invocation, or with brief laudatory phrases,<sup>69</sup> sometimes in connexion with other lists.<sup>70</sup> In these mnemonic catalogues Mihr occurs far down among the *yazatas*, following, not only the six Amešaspands, but also such lesser divinities as Xwar and Gōš. This apparently humble position accorded to him may have encouraged some in the belief that Mihr had lost much of his eminence by the Sasanian period; but in fact, as the Zoroastrian priests of to-day explain, Mihr's place in the list of *yazatas* is second only in dignity to that of Ōhrmazd himself. Ōhrmazd stands at the head of the divinities of the first half of the month, and Mihr, as lord of the sixteenth day, is at the head of those of the second half.<sup>71</sup> Similarly, Mihr, as lord of the seventh month, is at the head of the divinities presiding over the second half of the year.<sup>72</sup> He thus retains completely his old proud position of eminence among the *yazatas*.

The lists of divinities belong distinctly to the scholastic tradition of the Zoroastrian church; but even in the theological writings of the Sasanian period

<sup>68</sup> Shapur Bharucha's *Rivāyat*, see M. R. Unvala, *Dārāb Hormazyār's Rivāyat*, Bombay, 1922, I, 257.5-7; transl. by B. N. Dhabhar, *The Persian Rivayats of Hormazyar Framarz*, Bombay, 1932, 260.

<sup>69</sup> e.g. *Šnš.*, xxii, xxiii.

<sup>70</sup> e.g. *GBd.*, xvia.

<sup>71</sup> This explanation was given me by Ervad Dr. Firoze M. Kotwal of Navsari, on the authority of his late grandfather, Ervad Pirojshah Adarji Kotwal (d. A.D. 1943); and, coming as it does from a reliable Zoroastrian source, it seems preferable to that suggested by Cumont, *TMMM*, I, p. 230, n. 1, 303, namely that since Mithra was the *μεσότης*, inhabiting the Middle Zone between Heaven and Hell, the sixteenth or middle day of each month was given to him. The importance of the assignment of the sixteenth day, 'als zweitwichtigsten', to Mithra has already been noticed by Humbach, *Paideuma*, VII, 4-6, 255. Nyberg, *JA*, CCXIX, juillet-sept. 1931, 128 ff., earlier pointed out that the arrangement of the days of the month suggested the importance of the first (Ōhrmazd), ninth (Ādar), sixteenth (Mihr), and twenty-fourth (Dēn). Ervad Pirojshah Kotwal, whose authority is cited here, was a dedicated *yōzdaθragar*, who passed most of his days celebrating services in the Vadi Dar-i Mihr of Navsari. As head of the Kotwal family he was the hereditary authority on rituals in Navsari; and he has left behind him, not only oral explanations, but also written notes for other priests on matters of tradition and observance. His explanation of Mithra's place among the *yazatas* is approved by Dastur Khodadad Neryosangi of Sharifābād in Iran, who, though now a parish priest (*hūšt-mōbed*), is also a trained *yōzdaθragar*, who has spent his whole life as a practising priest. The purest living Zoroastrian tradition is undoubtedly to be learnt from such *yōzdaθragars*, who have had small contact with *juddīns*, and who are wholly unconcerned to justify their faith to them, willing though they may be to expound it. Some Western scholars, used to a dependence upon written authority, remain sceptical about the antiquity of even this innermost Zoroastrian tradition; but a hereditary priesthood, strictly trained in the performance of precise and detailed rituals, of whose value its members are profoundly convinced, can be an admirable instrument of conservation.

<sup>72</sup> With regard to the months there is, however, the problem that, though Mithra has what appears to be his proper place with the seventh month, the month of Ahura Mazda, i.e. Dai, is the tenth and not the first. Previous explanations of this have recently been cast into doubt by E. J. Bickerman, see his article 'The "Zoroastrian" calendar', *Archiv Orientalní*, xxxv, 2, 1967, 197-207. On the position of Mithra's *yašt* as tenth among the 20 see Duchesne-Guillemin, *La religion de l'Iran ancien*, 124.

exhortations to worship Mithra and other *yazatas* are not lacking. In the *Mēnōg ī Xrad* it is said that thrice each day, prayer and praise are to be offered to Khoršēd and Mihr (*har rōz se bār padīra Xaršēd u Mihir . . . ēstād namāz u stāišn kunešn*) ; <sup>73</sup> and in the *Dēnkard*, in a list of the chief supplications of the Good Religion, taken from the *Sūdgar Nask*, the following stand first : ' every night to Mihr, once for the destruction and diminution of Wrath in the whole world, and a second time for that of Sloth ' (*abar Mihr hamāg gēhān harw šab ēšm ēwag, ud bušāsp II jār (y'wl), pad wināsīdan ud kāhīdan*). <sup>74</sup> From these two passages it appears that formerly the *Mihr Niyāyišn* was held to be a desirable part of each of the five daily prayers which make up the orthodox Zoroastrian's basic religious obligation (his *bandagī* or *farziyāt*). <sup>75</sup>

Further, with regard to the actual veneration of Mihr in the Sasanian period, it is known that the *yazata*'s ancient feast, the *Mihragān*, was observed annually by king and commoner, and that it was one of the two greatest occasions of the religious year, for which it was the emerald to the ruby of Nōrūz, since ' these two days excel all other days in the same way as these two jewels excel all other jewels '. <sup>76</sup> It was the custom on that day, in the dwellings of kings, that at dawn ' a valiant warrior was posted in the court of the palace, who called out at the highest pitch of his voice : " O ye angels, come down to the world, strike the *dēws* and evil-doers and expel them from the world " '. <sup>77</sup> This straightway links the festival in spirit with the *Mihr Yašt*, and its worship of the *yazata* who crushes demons (*kamərəδō.ʃanəm daēvanəm*), <sup>78</sup> and at whose coming ' all supernatural demons and . . . evil-doers are moved by fear ' (*fratərəsənti vīspe mainiyava daēva yaēcā . . . drvantō*). <sup>79</sup>

There is in general ample evidence that, as one might reasonably expect, the Zoroastrianism of the Sasanian period is essentially the Zoroastrianism known to us from the Avesta, with theological developments. It is not surprising, therefore, that there should be no trace of change at this time in the devotion offered to Mithra. The religion of this epoch has been in turn preserved with

<sup>73</sup> *MX*, liii, 4 (ed. West, 50).

<sup>74</sup> *Dk.*, ix, 22.1 (21.1), ed. Sanjana, xvii, 58–9, Madan, 815.4–6 ; transl. West, SBE, xxxvii, 219 ; cf. *Yt.*, x, 97 (*miθrəm . . . yahmaʃ hača fratərəsənti aēšmō duždā pəšō.tanuš, yahmaʃ hača fratərəsənti būšyasta darəyō.gava*). Since the second recital of the *Mihr Niyāyišn* by night must be in the Ušahin Gāh, Lommel appears justified in his comment on these Avestan words (see his *Die Yāsts des Awesta*, Göttingen and Leipzig, 1927, 65), that Bušyasta is here the demoness of slothful sleep, extending into the light of day. See further Benveniste, ' Deux noms divins dans l'Avesta ', *RHR*, cxxx, 1945, 14–16. Otherwise Thieme, op. cit., p. 30, n. 16.

<sup>75</sup> It is one of the six basic obligations of the faith to recite the *Khoršēd* and *Mihr Niyāyišn* together thrice daily, in the three daylight *gāhs*. The only restrictive injunction is that these two *Niyāyišn* should not be recited in the presence of fire (see Unvala, op. cit., i, 325.19 ; Dhabhar, op. cit., 304). Formerly it was evidently considered desirable to recite the *Mihr Niyāyišn* in the night *gāhs* as well, Mihr being ever-vigilant and the great protector against demons ; but presumably the close association of the *yazata* with the sun led in course of time to the present observance, which is that the *Mihr Niyāyišn* is recited only by day.

<sup>76</sup> Al-Bīrūnī, *The chronology of ancient nations*, ed. E. Sachau, 222 ; transl., 208.

<sup>77</sup> Loc. cit. ; the term ' angels ' is evidently an Islamic substitution for the invocation of Mithra.

<sup>78</sup> *Yt.*, x, 26 (Gershevitch, *AHM*, 87).

<sup>79</sup> *Yt.*, x, 68 (Gershevitch, 107).

remarkable fidelity by the existing Zoroastrian church (for it was, after all, to maintain the faith of their forefathers that the Zoroastrians endured exile and persecution).<sup>80</sup> There is no break, therefore, in continuity when we come to consider Mithra's place in the actual worship of the Zoroastrians to-day.

It has long been noted, as a perplexing anomaly, that the one common and general term for Zoroastrian places of worship is *Dar-i Mihr* or *Bar-i Mihr*, the Gate or Court of Mithra. When a priest's son is initiated in his turn as priest, i.e. when he has undergone the *nōzād* (Irani) or *nāwar* (Parsi) ceremony, then he becomes an associate or *hamkār* of the *Dar-i Mihr*.<sup>81</sup> He goes there for his initiation carrying a ceremonial ox-headed mace; this represents the mace which Mithra wields against demons, and it is a symbol of the fight which he himself is about to take up, as priest, against the powers of evil.<sup>82</sup> The initiation ceremony lasts four days, on each of which the candidate celebrates a *yasna* and *bāj*, with different dedications. At each service the mace lies on the ground inside the *pāvī*, between the *ālāt-xwān* and the *āfrīnagān* of the Fire, its head toward the south, and the ox's face turned toward the east, the quarter of the rising sun.<sup>83</sup>

By far the greatest number of acts of worship which are celebrated by the *hamkār* priests within the *Dar-i Mihr* are, and ritually can only be, solemnized in the *Hāvan Gāh*, i.e. the first division of the day lasting from dawn until noon. Furthermore, all great rituals, even those performed at night (the *Vendīdād* and *Nīrangdīn*) must have their 'amal in the *Hāvan Gāh*; that is to say, the priests who celebrate them must have the ritual power conferred by a *yašt-i virāste* (the *moti khub*) performed in the *Hāvan Gāh* of that same day.<sup>84</sup> The reason for

<sup>80</sup> The strength of the Parsi tradition is well known. For some striking instances of the strength of the Irani tradition see *JRAS*, 1966, 105–12, and particularly p. 108, n. 3; *BSOAS*, xxxi, 1, 1968, 52–68, and 2, 1968, 270–87, and particularly 281–2.

<sup>81</sup> This is on the authority of Ervad Pirojshah.

<sup>82</sup> This also is on the authority of Ervad Pirojshah, confirming what is said by J. J. Modi, op. cit., 193–4. The ox-headed mace is also of course associated in legend with Farēdōn (Thraētaona), who appears wielding it on amulets of the Parthian and Sasanian periods (see A. D. H. Bivar, 'A Parthian amulet', *BSOAS*, xxx, 3, 1967, 518 ff.); and Zoroastrian priests sometimes refer to their own maces as *gurz-i Farēdōn*. There is in fact a link between Mihr and Farēdōn, perhaps because both are great destroyers of demons; and in Sasanian, as in living Zoroastrian, tradition, Farēdōn is held to be the founder of the *Mihragān* (see al-Bīrūnī, loc. cit.). This tradition presumably developed because in religious and epic tradition Farēdōn is regarded as a mortal man. Thus, though he is still often invoked by Zoroastrians for help against sickness, religious services may not be dedicated to him, but only solemnized for his sake (*nāmēšī*), with the *xšnūman* of Ardā Fravaš (cf. above, p. 12). In *Yt.*, xix, 36–8, Mithra as *yazata* is linked with the mortal heroes Thraētaona and Kərəsāspa. As a warrior-king, therefore, who conquered a great *druj*, Farēdōn was evidently held to have established a feast in honour of the warrior-*yazata* Mihr, who, it is clear from al-Bīrūnī, was believed to have given him divine aid in overcoming Dahāk. The special significance of the *Mihragān* as a festival for young men (see *JRAS*, 1966, p. 107 with n. 3) is thereby explained, since through Farēdōn's victory the annual sacrifice of youths to Dahāk was ended. (This detail is on the authority of Dastur Khodadad.)

<sup>83</sup> Details from Ervad Firoze.

<sup>84</sup> On the *moti khub* see Modi, op. cit., 140, and further apud Boyce 'Rapithwin, Nō Rūz, and the feast of Sade', *Festschrift F. B. J. Kuiper*, The Hague, 1969, p. 205, n. 36. For the above facts of ritual observance I am indebted to Ervad Firoze.



this is that the ceremonies of the Hāvan Gāh are under the jurisdiction of Mithra, and all the great religious offices need the power of his protection.<sup>85</sup> Mithra's rule over the Hāvan Gāh is established by the liturgy of the *yasna* itself; for regularly, there as in minor rituals, when the Hāvan Gāh is invoked, Mithra is also called upon, with his *hamkār* Rāman. It is in the Hāvan Gāh (*hāvanīm ā ratūm*) that Zoroaster himself is described as performing an act of high worship (Y, IX, 1); and according to the text as it is invariably recited, Mithra was then invoked in greeting to him (*Miθrō zyāt Zaratuštrēm*).<sup>86</sup> In *Vendīdād*, iii, 1, the first of the most fortunate places upon earth is said to be where the just man performs the rituals, bearing fire-wood and *barsam*, milk and the mortar, and invoking as he does so Mithra of the wide pastures, with Rāman. Mithra's protection of the Hāvan Gāh is stated in the *Dēnkard*, on the authority of the *Sūdgar Nask*, and in the *Bundahišn*<sup>87</sup>; and in the liturgy of the *Hāvan Gāh* itself Mithra is repeatedly invoked.

Apart from the *pāw-mahal* ceremonies, for which a link with Mithra is a ritual necessity, there is a strong preference for celebrating the 'outer' liturgical ceremonies (i.e. those not necessarily performed in the *Dar-i Mihr*) also in the Hāvan Gāh. Thus if a devout Parsi family wants a *jašan* ceremony performed in their home, they will if possible ask the priest to come in the Hāvan Gāh. In the Yazdī villages such ceremonies are often of necessity solemnized in the Aiwisrūθrem Gāh, because during the daylight hours the men are at work in the fields; but during the *gahāmbār* festivals, when only essential tasks are performed, all religious ceremonies are celebrated in the Hāvan Gāh, as the best and most fitting time.

The *Dar-i Mihr* is a place, not only for performing the most sacred rituals, but also, on occasion, for *sōgand xordan*, taking the most solemn oaths 'in the presence of Mithra, Judge of creation' (*δāmext Miše patīc*).<sup>88</sup> Arbāb Jamshid Sorushian tells,<sup>89</sup> on authority of elders of the Kirmānī community, from whom he heard of it in boyhood, that there, if a dispute arose between Zoroastrians, it was taken before the *anjoman*; and if, after the most earnest efforts, the parties to it failed to agree, then as a last resort one of them might be required to take an oath on the matter in the *Dar-i Mihr*. The oath-taking was

<sup>85</sup> That the importance of performing ceremonies and also obtaining 'amal in the Hāvan Gāh is due to the need for the protection of Mithra is on the authority of Ervad Pirojshah. *Dastur Khodadad* concurs.

<sup>86</sup> For the invocation of Mithra with the Hāvan Gāh see, e.g., Y, I, 3; II, 3; III, 5; IV, 8; VI, 2; VII, 5; LXVI, 2. On the words *Miθrō zyāt Zaratuštrēm* see apud Gershevitch, *AHM*, 269.

<sup>87</sup> *Dk.*, IX, 9.7 (8.5), ed. Sanjana, XVII, 15, Madan, 793.13–15; transl. West, SBE, XXXVII, 183–4. In this passage, attributed to the eighth *fargard* of the *Sūdgar Nask*, the names are given of the five *yazatas* who have jurisdiction over the ceremonies of each of the five *gāhs*. This accords, naturally, with the invocation of these *yazatas* in the *yasna* and minor services; cf. also *GBd.*, iii, 22. It has been suggested that Mithra's especial protection of rituals was one factor in aiding the transfer to him in Mithraism of the animal sacrifice, see Boyce, 'Haoma, priest of the sacrifice', in *Henning memorial volume*.

<sup>88</sup> *Vessantara Jātaka*, ed. Benveniste, Paris, 1946, II. 1205–06; for the interpretation see Gershevitch, *AHM*, 34–5 with 240–2.

<sup>89</sup> Verbal communication in 1963.

made a very solemn occasion, intended to instil awe. All the priests and leading *behdīns* of Kirmān gathered in the hall of the *Dar-i Mihr*. Fire was brought in an *āfrīnagān*, and sandalwood was offered to it; and Avesta was recited as a preliminary to administering the oath. It was generally believed that if an oath were then falsely sworn, the swearer, as *miθrō-drūj*, would die. This is in perfect accord with the beliefs of the ancient Iranian world.<sup>90</sup> Dastur Khodadad Neryosangi confirms that the same custom prevailed among the Zoroastrians of Yazd. Similarly the elders of Navsari recall justice being solemnly administered among Zoroastrians there in the *Vadi Dar-i Mihr*.<sup>91</sup>

As well as placing their religious services under his care, and making him the ultimate resort of justice, the Zoroastrians, priests and laymen, offer Mithra direct worship through his *yašt* and *niyāyišn*. He is also still honoured among the Irani Zoroastrians by two great annual feasts. One is his own festival, the ancient *Mihragān*, a five-day celebration and still one of the chief occasions of the religious year, dedicated to him as *Mihr-i Irān-dāvar* 'Mithra, Judge of Iran'.<sup>92</sup> The other is another most ancient feast, that of *Sade*, which is in honour, it seems, of Rapithwin,<sup>93</sup> but which is celebrated outside the shrine of Mithra, lord of the Sun.<sup>94</sup> In almost every old Zoroastrian centre in Iran, in Kirmān, and in Yazd and its villages, there exists a shrine to Mihr; and there are shrines to others of the chief *yazatas* also, to Vahrām and Tīr, Srōš and Aštād.<sup>95</sup> The pious visit these shrines regularly on the feast-days of the *yazatas*, kindling fire there, lighting candles, and making other small offerings while they pray. Sometimes on these occasions a *gahāmbār-i tōjī* is celebrated at the shrine,<sup>96</sup> or acts of charity are performed there, such as the distribution of food (*āš-i xairāt*) to the pious and the poor. An individual worshipper may visit the shrine whenever he wishes, to pray for the *yazata*'s intercession, to take a solemn vow,

<sup>90</sup> On instances of ancient swearing of oaths by Mithra see Cumont, *TMMM*, I, 229; Henning, *BSOAS*, xxviii, 2, 1965, 248. On *miθrō-drug* see Gershevitch, *AHM*, 153; Thieme, *BSOAS*, xxiii, 2, 1960, 268. The full ritual of administering the oath, with the drinking of *sōgand*, and the Avesta to be recited, is given in the longer version of the *Sōgand-nāme* preserved in the *Rivāyat* of Shapur Bharucha, see Unvala, op. cit., I, 51.4 f., transl. Dhabhar, 46, end, f. In the *Sōgand-nāme* the kinds of sin (contract-breaking, fraud, and theft) which constitute *mihr-drūj* [sic] are listed, and the importance of preventing them is stressed, since the gate of heaven is closed against the man who commits *mihr-drūj* (see Unvala, op. cit., I, 47.3–5, Dhabhar, 41). Dastur Khodadad states that in Yazd the oath-taking at the *Dar-i Mihr* concluded with this formula, also used at the marriage ceremony: *Dādār Ōhrmazd u Mihr u Srōš u Rašn rāst be šumā gavāh bāšand. Āzar-Xordē* [sic] *u Āzar-Gušnasp u Āzar Burzēn-Mihr be šumā gavāh bāšand. Frōhar ī Zarādušt Asfantamān be šumā gavāh bāšad. Har kasī ke hāzīr and, be šumā gavāh bāšand. Man ke fulān mōbad-am, be šumā gavāh hastam.*

<sup>91</sup> Information from Ervad Firoze.

<sup>92</sup> See A. V. Williams Jackson, *Persia past and present*, New York, 1909, 372.

<sup>93</sup> See *Festschrift F. B. J. Kuiper*, 201–15.

<sup>94</sup> See *ibid.*, 213, 214.

<sup>95</sup> Gershevitch, *AHM*, 286, rightly emphasizes the vitality of the conception of Aštād, the hypostasis of Justice. She is one of the most venerated *yazatas* in living Zoroastrianism, and there is evidence of her similar importance in Sasanian times, see *BSOAS*, xxxi, 2, 1968, 280–2.

<sup>96</sup> i.e. a 'gahāmbār' observance apart from one of the six great *gahāmbārs*, often, as the name indicates, performed in expiation; but now the term is used generally in Iran for all such minor *gahāmbārs*.

to make a thank-offering or simply to pay his devotions. On great feast-days, such as the six *gahāmbārs*, women and girls often visit all the shrines of a village in succession, praying and making offerings of candles and flowers at each.

The shrines of Mithra are undoubtedly among the most beloved ; and his pervading influence is strongly felt in daily life.<sup>97</sup> It is said that if Mithra does not abide with a man, then that man will lack affection (*mihr*) in his heart, and will be cold and useless in his dealings with others.<sup>98</sup> The *yazata* is held to watch over men by day and night ;<sup>99</sup> and all are conscious that at the end they must meet him face to face at the Činvat Bridge, on the fourth day after death. This encounter takes place in the *Hāvan Gāh*, the time of Mithra's special jurisdiction.

Taken out of their religious context the above facts might possibly seem to supply argument for the syncretic school of thought, suggesting perhaps too powerful and pervasive a part for Mithra, a usurpation by him of the place which in Zoroaster's own teachings should be that of Ōhrmazd. This is, however, not so. The Parsis steadily maintain that the *yazatas* of their faith are more properly to be compared with the saints of Roman Catholic Christianity than with the virtually autocratic gods of a pagan pantheon ; and the justice of this strikes constantly home when one lives among Zoroastrians. Thus, although there are shrines to *yazatas*, there are no shrines to Ōhrmazd ;<sup>100</sup> and this for the same reason that there are no shrines to God the Father in a Catholic country. He is too great, too sovereign for men to trouble him with their small personal petitions, their votive offerings and acts of penitence. The prophet himself spoke with Ahura Mazda. Darius the Great sought his help in guiding the destiny of Iran. Lesser men in humility turn rather to their chosen *yazata*.<sup>101</sup> They

<sup>97</sup> In the Persian *Rivāyats* it is enjoined that a thank-offering should be made yearly to Mithra, on the day before the *Mihragān*, for three years after the birth of a son ; see Unvala, op. cit., II, 70-1 ; Dhabhar, op. cit., 436 ; and cf. Anquetil du Perron, *Le Zend-Avesta*, II, 551. On the recital of the *Mihr Niyāyišn* to the *yazata* for his help in time of sickness see Unvala, op. cit., I, 286.4 f., Dhabhar, op. cit., 279.

<sup>98</sup> This is on the authority of Dastur Khodadad.

<sup>99</sup> In Karachi a Parsi lady mentioned to me in conversation that she had found one of her small grandchildren fibbing, and had admonished him to remember that Meher was watching him and would know the truth. The Parsis do not have shrines to the great *yazatas*, but they offer them devotion none the less.

<sup>100</sup> This must be qualified, since there now exists in Sharīfābād a shrine to Dādvar-Ōhrmizd, one of the five shrines in the village, and the smallest of them all. Between 30 and 40 years ago Mundagar-i Rustam Abadian (who died in 1966) set aside this little building as a holy place, because of a dream he had dreamt. For years it was known simply as the Pīr-i Mundagar, or Pīr-i Mund, and was the subject of some gentle mockery. Mothers would scold bad children with the threat : ' I shan't take you to any of the shrines, not even to the Pīr-i Mund '. But gradually, devotions offered there gave the little building an increasing sanctity ; and a few years ago a pious *behdīn* pressed for adopting its present dedication. No priest would have initiated this dedication, which is not in the tradition of the faith ; but it has been quietly accepted as expressing a true desire to honour the Creator.

<sup>101</sup> During the marriage ceremony in Iran husband and wife choose their own special protector from one of three *yazatas*, Mihr, Vahrām, and Aštād. The special devotion of the Achaemenian and Sasanian royal houses to Mithra and Anāhitā may be considered in the same light, even if on a more exalted level ; thus it is evidently as protector that Mithra stands behind Ardašīr II at Tāq-i Bustān, for example.

remain nevertheless as much conscious of the power and pre-eminence of Ōhrmazd as a Catholic Christian, invoking a saint for aid, is of that of God.

In the case of Mithra, the Zoroastrian priests express his subordination to Ōhrmazd vividly when they say that Mihr and Khoršēd are the two eyes by which Ōhrmazd surveys the world; although again they emphasize Mithra's relative greatness by saying that, whereas Khoršēd presides only over the sun itself, Mihr presides over the radiant light of all the luminaries of the sky. Hence he is much greater than Khoršēd, and is invoked before him even in the *Khoršēd Niyāyišn*.<sup>102</sup> Nevertheless, mighty though he is, his place is far below the throne of Ōhrmazd.<sup>103</sup>

The supremacy of Ōhrmazd, the Creator, is never lost sight of, and the Zoroastrian constantly re-dedicates his life to him as his God. The basic act of religious observance is the *padyāb-kustī*, i.e. the re-tying of the sacred cord after ceremonial ablutions. The first words uttered in this, as in so many religious acts, are *xšnaoθra ahurahe mazdā*. These are followed by the *ašəm vohū* prayer, and *kəm.nā mazdā*; and the *kustī* itself is re-tied to the Pazand *namāz-i Ōhrmazd-i xodāy*, the ritual ending with the confession of faith, *jasā.mē avanhe mazda*. The *padyāb-kustī* is the preliminary, not only for all private prayer, but for all liturgical ceremonies; so that every religious act, to whomsoever it is dedicated, is first devoted to Ōhrmazd. A number of *yasna* and other ceremonies are of course wholly dedicated to him.<sup>104</sup> Mithra's part in protecting the religious services, and in acting as Judge here below, can thus be seen in perspective as that of a powerful *yazata* who is, nevertheless, only the servant of the Most High. It seems, moreover, probable that the reason why the place of worship is named in honour of him rather than for Ōhrmazd is that Ōhrmazd

<sup>102</sup> cf. *Khoršēd Niyāyišn*, § 5 (Y, LXVIII, 22): *nəmō Miθrāi . . . nəmō Hvarə.xšaētāi . . . nəmō ābyō dōiθrābyō yd Ahurahe Mazdā* 'homage to Mithra, homage to the Lord Sun, homage to these two eyes of Ahura Mazda'. The passage has generally been otherwise interpreted (i.e. that the 'eyes' are the Sun and Moon), but the traditional priestly explanation fits the context admirably.

<sup>103</sup> These traditions concerning Mihr and Khoršēd are on the authority of Ervad Pirojshah; and they explain why Mihr is both held to accompany Khoršēd by day (*Xaršēd u Mihir . . . pa agnīn rawēnd* 'Khoršēd and Mihr travel together', *MX*, liii, 4), and is also regarded as being present in the night sky. The tradition clarifies a number of points, and does away with the need to follow Darmesteter in postulating a journey back by Mithra from west to east after dark has fallen. Mithra, the ever-vigilant, is present wherever and whenever there is light in the sky, sunlight or moonlight, starlight or the dawn. Henning, who did not accept the theory of Mithra's backward journey, translated *Yt.*, x, 95, literally as follows: 'Mithra of the wide pastures . . . who, having the breadth of the earth (*zəm.fraθd*), goes, touches after sunset both ends of this broad, round earth . . .', taking this to mean that by the time the sun has set Mithra *has* touched both horizons. Similarly Thieme, op. cit., 32. (For other interpretations see Gershevitch, *AHM*, 38 ff.) Since Mithra presides over all luminaries, it seems possible that he is in fact properly to be associated with the *haxəδra-*, *yašt asti haxəδranəm vahištəm antarə mānhamēca hvarəca*, *Yt.*, vi, 5, see Gershevitch, *AHM*, 227-8. On Mithra as the god of Light see further Kuiper, *IJJ*, v, 1, 1961, 46, 55. It is noteworthy that in the *Mihr Niyāyišn* (§12) Mithra is worshipped, not with the sun alone, but with 'the stars, the moon, and the sun'.

<sup>104</sup> In the *Phl. Riv. Dd.*, ch. xviii (ed. Dhabhar, 51.11-13) Ōhrmazd is represented as himself enjoining this on the prophet: *yazišn ī Dādār Ōhrmazd kardan, ēē pad ēn harw kas ham-dādistān, ku yazišn ī Dādār Ōhrmazd ē abāyēd kardan* 'Perform the *yasna* of the Creator Ōhrmazd, for all are agreed upon this, that the *yasna* of the Creator Ōhrmazd should be performed'.

himself is held to be so exalted that men are not worthy to make a place for him with their own hands.<sup>105</sup> It has been suggested that the mountain shrines of Yazd may have been places where men went up to worship Ōhrmazd on the hills of his own creation, with living rock for altars.<sup>106</sup> This may possibly further explain the conflict between Greek reports and old Persian practice, between the absence of temples and the restoration of *āyadanā*.<sup>107</sup> The Iranians may have permitted temples and shrines to lesser *yazatas*, but never have built them for Ōhrmazd himself.

This may also help to explain the perplexing religious history of the Parthian period. Here the puzzling anomaly is that the Parthians appear to have been in the main Zoroastrians,<sup>108</sup> and indeed the chief transmitters to Sasanian Persia of the Zoroastrian traditions of north-eastern Iran.<sup>109</sup> Yet the archaeological evidence for the period suggests a heterogeneous polytheism with strong Greek and Semitic influences. The worship of the supreme God Ōhrmazd, oral and without temples, must be expected, however, to leave few tangible traces; and the Iranian *yazatas* were evidently identified, in representations and dedications, with gods of the Greek pantheon. This would not make their veneration less real, any more than the identification, for example, of Teutonic deities with those of the Romans weakened the worship of the northern gods. One must also assume, of course, that a number of Semitic cults, and some genuine Greek and even Egyptian worship, flourished under the Arsacids, particularly in the western parts of their wide domains. No single religion dominated Iran to the exclusion of all others even in the much more closely consolidated Sasanian Empire. It seems reasonable, however, to assume from the evidence that Zoroastrianism was the chief faith of Iran under the Parthians as it was under their successors, and that there was religious continuity in both the north and the south of the land.<sup>110</sup>

Let us, however, return to consider Mithra's part in living Zoroastrianism, and his relationship with Ahura Mazda. The central act of Zoroastrian worship

<sup>105</sup> No Christian church, to my knowledge, is ever dedicated to God the Father. A dedication to the Trinity is the nearest approach.

<sup>106</sup> See *BSOAS*, xxx, 1, 1967, p. 42, n. 41, p. 43.

<sup>107</sup> See Benveniste, *The Persian religion according to the chief Greek texts*, Paris, 1929, 22 ff. The only *āyadana* whose dedication is known is an *'yzn nnystkn*, a 'temple of Nanai', among the Parthians of Nisa, see I. M. D'yakonov and V. A. Livshits, *Dokumenty iz Nisy*, Moscow, 1960, 24; cited by R. N. Frye, *The heritage of Persia*, London, [1963], 201. Permanent sanctuaries are of course an essential feature of Zoroastrianism, with its cult of the ever-burning Fire.

<sup>108</sup> See, most recently, the English translation, *The letter of Tansar* (Rome Oriental Series. Literary and Historical Texts from Iran, 1), 1968, intro., 7, 11, p. 22 with n. 2, and cf. above p. 21, n. 46. The Zoroastrian tradition of the preservation of the Avesta and Zand by Valaxš the Arsacid remains the strongest single piece of evidence for Parthian Zoroastrianism; and it is well supported by the testimony of the Nisa ostraca. Bickerman, op. cit., 205, surmises from the Nisa material that it was the Parthians who introduced the Zoroastrian calendar to the rest of Iran.

<sup>109</sup> See 'Zariadres and Zārēr', *BSOAS*, xvii, 3, 1955, 471 ff.; 'The Parthian *gōsān* and Iranian minstrel tradition', *JRAS*, 1957, 12.

<sup>110</sup> The burial customs of the Parthian, and to a lesser extent, of the Sasanian period continue, however, to present a problem.



may be held to be the *yasna*, offered daily in the Hāvan Gāh. Every *yasna* has its accompanying *bāj* (i.e. *drōn*) ceremony. A *bāj* may be celebrated independently of the *yasna*, but no *yasna* is solemnized without its *bāj*. This short service is thus of primary ritual importance.<sup>111</sup> With only two exceptions, every *bāj* has an Avestan liturgy in which the *xšnūman* begins with a dedication to Ōhrmazd, which (if the *bāj* is not being consecrated wholly to him) is then followed by a dedication to the particular *yazata* to whom the act of worship is offered. Thus, for example, the 'lesser' *xšnūman* of a *bāj* of Rašn and Aštād begins *xšnūmaine ahurahe mazdā raēvatō x<sup>w</sup>arənənhatō* 'to the satisfaction of Ahura Mazda, the splendid, the glorious'; and then there follows the particular dedication to Rašn and Aštād themselves: *rašnaoš razištahe arštātasča frādaṭ. gaēθayā varadaṭ. gaēθayā . . . aoxtō. nāmanō yazatahe*. The 'greater' *xšnūman* follows the same pattern, except for different grammatical inflections. Ordinarily a *bāj* of Mithra would have a similar dedication; but there is one occasion in the year when it is recited by some priests without it, and that is, when it is solemnized on Rūz Mihr of Māh Mihr, the holiest day of the *Mihragān*. On this occasion only, the preliminary dedication to Ōhrmazd may be omitted, and the lesser *xšnūman* then begins immediately with the words *xšnūmaine miθrahe vouru. gaoyaoitiš . . .*<sup>112</sup> The festival of Mithra has its own special character in other respects also. The six *gahāmbārs* are also five-day festivals. Each is dedicated to Ōhrmazd, as the High Lord (*raθwō bərəzatō*). Their celebration is one of the six obligatory duties of Zoroastrianism, and they are fully kept still in the Yazdī villages. Because they are one of the essential observances of the faith, they are often endowed,<sup>113</sup> and they are usually kept with full ritual and feasting only when there is such an endowment. There is no especial religious obligation to observe the *Mihragān*, and the Parsis have in fact ceased to do so in the last century or so.<sup>114</sup> No endowments are ordinarily made for it.<sup>115</sup> Yet in the most traditionalist and orthodox villages of Yazd every family keeps this feast with full religious and social observances. It remains, with *Nōrūz*, a jewel of the religious year; and the general rejoicing is linked with a deep spirit of devotion. Possibly in this festival, with its special *bāj* liturgy, there survives a stubborn testimony to a remote past, perhaps before Zoroastrianism

<sup>111</sup> On *bāj* ceremonies in general see Modi, op. cit., 336 ff.

<sup>112</sup> This fact of ritual is recorded as an Irani practice by Dastur Erachji Sohrabji Dastur Meherji Rana in his nineteenth-century Gujarati work *Purseš pāsox* (published Bombay, 1941). My attention was drawn to it by Ervad Firoze Kotwal, when we were working together in 1967; and we both subsequently made further inquiries. Ervad Firoze, writing from India, states that, though the Bhagarias and some others recite the *bāj* of Mihr on Rūz Mihr, Māh Mihr with the *xšnūman* of Ōhrmazd, there are some Parsi priests who omit this dedication then. On the other hand, Dastur Khodadad Neryosangi says that in Yazd the *xšnūman* of Ōhrmazd is recited even at the *Mihragān*. Its omission on this occasion by Irani priests is therefore presumably Kirmānī practice.

<sup>113</sup> See *BSOAS*, xxxi, 2, 1968, 277 f.

<sup>114</sup> Its observance was indicated by Anquetil du Perron, op. cit., 551.

<sup>115</sup> There are some exceptions nowadays, due to the increased mobility of the population. Thus in Mazra' Kalāntar there is a celebration of the *Mihragān* which is endowed by a villager who has gone to live in Bombay.

reached Pars, when Mithra was regarded as an Ahura in his own right, of equal stature with his *dvandva* brother, Ahura Mazda.

Again, this striking fact of the *Mihragān* liturgy might possibly be taken as proof that Mithra's place in Zoroastrianism was secondary, part of a later development; but there is one other *yazata* whose *bāj* is recited without the initial dedication to Ahura Mazda, and that is Sraoša. The *bāj* of this *yazata* is performed more frequently than any other, for it is celebrated in every *gāh* during the three days after a death, on every anniversary ceremony, and on many other occasions; and the preliminary devotion to Ahura Mazda is always omitted. Sraoša has many striking links with Mithra,<sup>116</sup> and this liturgical omission may possibly have its origin in this fact; but no one can maintain that Sraoša has not a place in Zoroaster's original doctrine. It cannot, therefore, be argued from the omission by some priests of the dedication to Ahura Mazda on the one occasion of the *Mihragān* that Mithra himself was alien to Zoroaster's system.

There is, moreover, another interesting point of liturgical practice in connexion with the *Haft Amešaspad Bāj*. Ordinarily a *bāj* may be celebrated in any one of the five *gāhs*; but this particular *bāj* may be solemnized only in the *Hāvan Gāh*; and accordingly in its liturgy the *xšnūman* of the last of the Ameša Spentas, Aməretāt, is always followed immediately by that of Mithra, lord of the *gāh*.<sup>117</sup> This suggests an especial closeness between the worship of Ahura Mazda with the six Ameša Spentas and the protective power of Mithra. It is presumably this especial protection by Mithra of the worship of Mazda which caused it to be said: 'Whoever does not believe in the religion of the Mazda-worshippers, and does not also perform the rituals according to the precepts of the Good Religion, that man becomes remote from Mihr Yazad' (*harw kē abar ēn dēn ī mazdēsnañ āstwānēh nē dārēd, ud kunišn-iz pad framān ī dēn ī weh nē kunēd, ān mard az Mihr Yazad . . . dūr bawēd*).<sup>118</sup>

It is a striking fact that the present Zoroastrian veneration of Mihr, as protector under the Creator Ōhrmazd, is wholly consonant with what is regarded as the oldest allusion to Mithra in the Avesta. This is in the early post-Gathic text *Y*, XLII, 2, in the expression *pāyūčā θwōrəštārā yazamaidē* 'and we worship the two, the protector and the fashioner'. This expression is repeated in *Y*,

<sup>116</sup> See Gershevitch, *AHM*, 193, with references. The omission of the dedication to Ōhrmazd from the *Srōš Bāj* is justified in the following words in the *Phl. Riv. Dd.*, ch. lvi, 3 (ed. Dhabhar, 166-7): *abāriḡ abāḡ Ōhrmazd yazišn, bē az Srōš, čē Srōš xʷadāy ud dehdēd ī gēhān ast. ēd rāy judāihā abāyēd yaštān* 'Worship should be offered the other (*yazads*) together with Ōhrmazd, except Srōš. For Srōš is lord and master of the world; for this reason he should be worshipped separately'. It seems reasonable to suppose that it is as Mithra's vice-regent that Srōš is accorded this special position. It is hoped to consider this point in greater detail in a subsequent article.

<sup>117</sup> Information through Ervad Firoze. The same liturgical prescriptions, namely celebration only in the *Hāvan Gāh*, with invocation accordingly of Mithra, apply also to the *Sirōze Bāj*, but to no other.

<sup>118</sup> Pahlavi *Vištāsp Yašt*, 52, see *Zand-i Khūrtak Avistāk*, ed. Dhabhar, Bombay, 1927, 211.12-15. The word *kunišn* could also be rendered as 'actions'. There does not appear to have been a technical term for 'rituals' in Middle Persian.

LVII, 2 : *Sraošəm . . . yō . . . yazata pāyū θwōrəštāra* ' Sraoša, who worshipped the protector (and) fashioner ' ; and here the *dvandva* is glossed in Pahlavi by *pānag brīngar Mihr* ' the protector, the fashioner Mihr '.<sup>119</sup> It is held that the Sasanian commentator was guided by a sound tradition, even if he missed the grammatical force of the duals, and that the expression refers in fact to Ahura Mazda the Creator, and to Mithra the protector.<sup>120</sup> Doctrinal fidelity in the cult of Mithra can thus be demonstrated over a period of at least 2,500 years.

Close doctrinal fidelity by the Zoroastrian church can be established in other respects also ; and the veneration in which it holds its prophet is shown in many ways. Yet by the syncretic theory one is asked to believe that profound respect for Zoroaster, and a proven tradition of immense conservatism and loyalty, can both be reconciled with an early, radical betrayal of Zoroaster's own teachings ; and that in the case of Mithra, the prophet's disciples, although scrupulously preserving his own words and his moral teachings, so far rejected his doctrines that they put their worship of the god whom he preached, Ahura Mazda, under the protection of a god whom he denied, or even abhorred. To establish the syncretic theory against such opposing considerations would require very strong evidence indeed ; and in fact, as we have seen, there is no real evidence for it at all. It is reasonable, therefore, to reject it, and to accept instead the testimony of the Zoroastrian church, unchanged and harmonious at all known periods of its history. From it one can deduce that Zoroaster held to the basic theology of the old Iranian religion, with all its *yazatas*, and that his reform consisted largely in reinterpreting its beliefs at a nobler and subtler spiritual level, in the light of an intensely personal apprehension of the supreme God, and of the struggle to be waged between good and evil.<sup>121</sup>

The immense help given over the last century and more by comparative philology for the better understanding of the Avesta, and the great advances made, have led perhaps to a touch of hubris in the West, to an assumption that on all points *juddīns* can interpret the Good Religion better than its own adherents ; but this is a sweeping assumption, and the study of other religions suggests that it is unlikely to be true. Plainly there have been considerable theological developments in the course of the long history of Zoroastrianism ; but there is little sign of those radical breaks and changes in doctrine which have been so widely postulated by Western scholars.

<sup>119</sup> See Gershevitch, *AHM*, 54.

<sup>120</sup> So Darmesteter, *Le Zend-Avesta*, I, p. 360, n. 5, followed by Bartholomae. Gershevitch himself (*AHM*, 55–7) sees in *θwōrəštār* a reference rather to Spenta Mainyu. On the concept of protection inherent in Mithra's fixed epithet of *vouru.gaoyaoiti* see Thieme, *BSOAS*, XXIII, 2, 1960, 273–4 ; Benveniste, *JA*, CCXLVIII, 4, 1960, 421–9.

<sup>121</sup> This ancient unity of Zoroastrianism was adumbrated by Nyberg in *Die Religionen des alten Iran*, where he suggested that the putative syncretism was carried out, not in later ages, but by the prophet himself in his own lifetime.