

Introduction to Avestan

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The Avestan language

- Language of liturgies and prayers of Zoroastrian religion, in antiquity as today
- Indo-Iranian > Iranian > (geographically) “Eastern” Iranian
- OAv. close to Proto-Iranian
- One of the two Old Iranian (≈ BCE) corpora besides Old Persian
- Middle Persian *abestāg*
- Most commonly accepted etymology: < **upa-stāyaka-* ‘praise’ (cf. Av. *upa.staōimi* ‘I send praises towards’)
- Composition of texts ca. 1000 BCE (?) – 400 CE
- Onset of our written transmission ca. 5th/6th c. CE
- Extant mss. 13th c. +
- Predominantly oral transmission until 18th c. CE
- By speakers of various vernaculars
- Multiple layers of redactional intervention

Zoroastrianism

Distinguished by certain shifts in world-view and ritual practice:

- Partial rejection of Indo-Iranian pantheon (**dai̥wa*- ‘god’ > *daēuuua*- ‘bad god’ > ‘demon’)
- Replaced by newly generated pantheon of deified abstract concepts
- Cosmic “double dualism”:
 - order (*aša*-) – chaos/lie (*druj*-);
 - material world (*astuuant*-, *gaēθiia*-) – world of the mind (*manah*-, *maiñiiauua*-)
- No libations of *haōma*- (cf. Vedic Soma) into Fire (*ātar*-); increasingly central position of Fire cult
- Ritual technique of *daēnā*-:
 - receiving of revelations (*sēṅgha*- ‘teaching’, *dāta*- ‘law’) from the deity Ahura Mazdā
 - in ritual context
 - context for the production of new texts
 - context of their transmission

Zoroastrianism

- Av. *daēnā-* *māzdaiiasni-* (Middle Persian *dēn ī māzdēsn*).
- Emerges in later 2nd millennium BCE from the wider realm of Indo-Iranian religious traditions.
- Possible defining criterion for antiquity: use of ritual texts in Avestan language
- Dominant religion in Iranian-speaking areas up until the rise of Islam
- Then gradual transformation to minority religion in Iran and emergence of a considerable Indian (the “Parsis”) and, from 19th c. CE onward, global diaspora.

THE WILEY BLACKWELL COMPANION TO
ZOROASTRIANISM



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with Anna Tessmann

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Chronological layers

- Old Avestan
 - Gāthās and Yasna Haptanhāiti
 - “Dichtersprache” with signs of deliberate use of diachronic/dialectal variant forms
 - Partly “Young-Avestanised”
- Middle Avestan
 - Some passages surrounding and/or commenting on Old Avestan material
- Young Avestan
 - Majority of the corpus
- “Late Avestan”
 - Grammatically faulty language of the latest editorial layer of the liturgies.
 - To be distinguished from faultily transmitted texts such as Vidēvdād.

The difference between OAv. and YAv. is probably purely diachronic, not dialectal.

A sample: Old Avestan (Yasna 28.11)

Transmitted:

yē. āiš. ašəm. nipāñhē. manascā. vohū. yauuaētāitē.

tuuēm. mazdā. ahurā. frō. mā. sišā. ϑahmāt. vaōcañhē.

maiñiiēuš. hacā. ϑā. ēθāñhā. yāiš. ā. aŋhuš. paōuruiiō. bauuat.

Phonologically reconstructed Proto-Avestan:

yah āiš ərtam **nipāhai** manasca vahū **yauajtātai**

tuuam mazdā ahura fra mā sišā ϑbahmāt **vaucahai**

manjauš hacā ϑbā **āhā** yāiš ā ahuš **parujah** bauat

(1) (You) who protect order through these (hymns),
and good thinking for
eternity,

(2–3) you, O Ahura Mazdā, teach me with your
mouth to speak in accordance
with your force (the words) through which primeval
existence
comes about.

Beginning of the “Greater Frauuarāne” (Yasna 12.6, Middle/Young Avestan)

frauuarānē. mazdaiiasnō. zaraθuštriš. vīdaēuuō. ahura. t̄kaēšō.

staōtā. aməšanām. spəntanām. yaštā. aməšanām. spəntanām.

*ahurāi. mazdāi. vanjhaūē. vohu.maidē. vīspā. vohū. cinam̄ī. ašāunē.
raēuuaitē. x̄arənaŋ̄haitē.*

/frauuarāne mazdaiasnō zaraθuštriš ӯidaiuō ahurakaišō

staūta amərtanām spəntanām yašta amərtanām spəntanām

ahurāi mazdāi vanjhaūe vohuma^{de} vispa vohu cinahmi ərtāu^{ne} raiua^{te}
hūarnaŋ̄hūa^{te}/

I make my choice to be a sacrificer to Ahura Mazdā, in the way of Zaraθuštra, opposed to the demons, following the teachings of Ahura; a praiser of the Beneficent Immortals, a sacrificer to the Beneficent Immortals.

I attribute everything good to Ahura Mazdā, the good one, the assigner of goods, the partaker in Order, the rich one, the glorious one.

Beginning of the “Greater Frauuarāne” (Yasna 12.6)

frauuarānē. mazdaiiasnō. zaraθuštriš. vīdaēuuō. ahura. t̄kaēšō.

staōtā. aməšanām. spəṇtanām. yaštā. aməšanām. spəṇtanām.

ahurāi. mazdāi. varjhaūuē. vohu.maidē. vīspā. vohū. cinamjī. ašāunē. raēuuaitē. xvarənajvhaiṭē.

“Converted” to Sanskrit:

*pravarai *medhāyasnō **jarathuṣṭriḥ videvō asura-...

stotā amṛtānām śvāntānām (?) yaṣṭā amṛtānām śvāntānām (?)

asurāya **medhe vasave vasu... viśvā vasū ... ḫtāv(a)ne revate *parīṇasvate

Long and short liturgies

Long Liturgies

- Basic Long Liturgy (*Yasna*): Young Avestan liturgy designed for daily performance, dedicated to “all the deities”; chapters “*Yasna 0–72*”; includes the Old Avesta at its core (*Yasna 28–54*).
- Solemn LL (*Wīsperad*): *Yasna* with extensions and modifications; especially for seasonal festivals (*Gāhāmbārs*)
- Intercalation Liturgies: *Wīsperad* + inserted *Pargards* (sections) of *Nasks*
- Now preserved:
 - *Wīdēwdād* liturgy (incorporates *Pargards* of the *Wīdēwdād Nask*), still performed
 - *Wīštāsp Yašt* liturgy: only in manuscripts

Short Liturgies

- Large variety of minor liturgies and prayers, dedicated to single deities.
- *Yašts, Niyāyišns, Āfrīnagāns, Āfrīns, Nērangs* ...
- Loosely collected in so-called “Xorde Avesta” manuscripts.
- (Intermediary position between Long and Short Liturgies: *Drōn* ceremonies.)

Genres

In Yasna-Visperad, Yašt:

- Litanies built around “anchor verb” such as
 - *yazamaide* ‘we sacrifice to ...’ — *niuuaēōaiiemi* ‘I invite ...’ — *āiiese* ‘I introduce ...’ etc.
- Mythological and legendary narratives (often inserted into litany frame)
- Praises of deities (*staōman-*, *stūti-*), Requests (*yāna-*), Propitiations (*āfrīti-*)
- “Formulas”, recurring building blocks (“modules”)
- Spells

In Vidēvdād:

- Regulations for religious practice, especially around topics of purity
- Instructions for performance of purification rituals
- Mythological narratives

Nērangestān: Instructions for performance of Long Liturgy (and others)

Hērrbedestān: Regulations for the training and life of priests.

Yasna 16: a litany listing the days of the month

Static Yasna on CAB

The days of the month in the Zoroastrian calendar:

<https://iranicaonline.org/articles/calendars#>

Table 23
THE DAYS OF THE ZOROASTRIAN CALENDAR

Avestan	Pahlavi	Modern Persian
1. Daθušō Ahurahe Mazdā	Ohrmazd	Hormoz
2. Vanhūš Manajhō	Wahman	Bahman
3. Ašahe Vahištahe	Ardwahišt	Ordibehesht
4. Xšaθrahe Vairyche	Šahrewar	Šahrivar
5. Spəntayā Ārmatōiš	Spandarmad	Esfand(ārmad)
6. Haurvatātō	Xurdād	Kordād
7. Amarotātō	Amurdād	Mordād
8. Daθušō Ahurahe Mazdā	Day pad Ādur	Dey be Ādar
9. Āθrō	Ādur	Ādar
10. Apām	Ābān	Ābān
11. Hvaraxšāētahe	Xwar	K'or/Kür
12. Mājhahe	Māh	Māh
13. Tištryehe	Tir	Tir
14. Gāuš	Gōš	Gūš
15. Daθušō Ahurahe Mazdā	Day pad Mihr	Dey be Mehr
16. Miθrahe	Mihr	Mehr
17. Sraošahe	Srōš	Sorūš
18. Rašnaoš	Rašn	Rašn
19. Fravašinam	Frawardin	Farvardin
20. Vərəθraγnahe	Wahrām	Bahrām
21. Rāmanō	Rām	Rām
22. Vātahē	Wād	Bād
23. Daθušō Ahurahe Mazdā	Day pad Dēn	Dey be Dīn
24. Daēnayā	Dēn	Dīn
25. Ašōiš	Ard (Ahrišwang)	Ard
26. Arštātō	Aštād	Aštād
27. Asmō	Asmān	Āsmān
28. Zəmō hudājhō	Zamyād	Zāmyād
29. Māθrahe spəntahe	Māraspand	Māraspand
30. Anayranam	Anagrān	Anīrān

Chronology

Date and place of Old Avesta

Long chronology (e.g. Skjærvø)	1500–1000 BCE
Middle chronology (e.g. Kellens, now most widely accepted)	around 1000 BCE
Short chronology (traditional Zoroastrian view as found in Middle Persian literature (now hardly maintained))	“258 years before Alexander”

Place:

- even less clear than for the YAv. corpus
- no geographical names or features mentioned
- no hints of urban civilization; society of cattle-breeders
- perhaps northern Central Asia (around modern-day Kazakhstan?)

Date and place of Young Avesta

Date:

- 1st millennium BCE
- Basic final redaction of the liturgies (with characteristic morphological faults) during Achaemenid period, after import to South-West Iran

Place:

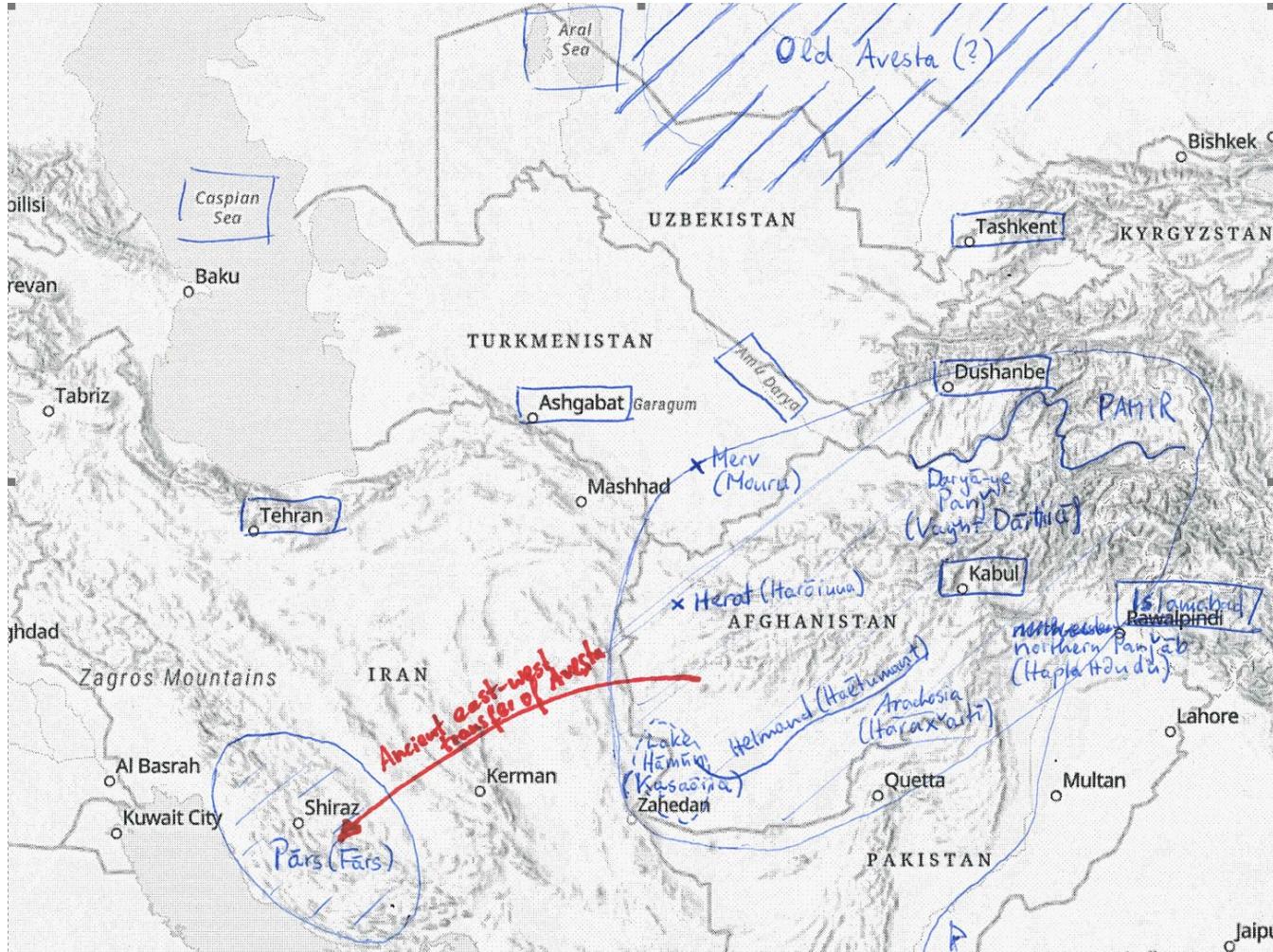
- Mythical geography centered around Pamir area
- Extension westwards to Merw-Hērāt-Sīstan line

Certain YAv. sound changes suggest proximity to more recent Eastern Iranian languages:

- Pretonic *āja > *aja and *āya > *aya
 - PrIIR. *ścājá- 'shadow' > YAv. *saiiā-*, Sogdian *sayā-k*, Pashto *siyā* vs. Middle Persian *sāyag*, Ved. *chāyā-*
 - PrIIR. *nāyājá- > YAv. *nauuāza-* 'boatman' with Sogd. *nawāz* vs. MP *nāwāz*, Ved. *nāvājá-*
- *īy > *y:
 - PrIIR. *jīyā- 'alive' > YAv. *juua-*, Sogd. *zw-* vs. OP *jīva-*, Skt. *jīvā-*
- But not consistent in YAv.; perhaps rather effect of transmission by speakers of Sogd. or similar languages.

Geographical horizon of Young Avesta

(see especially
Vidēvdād 1)



Transmission

Achaemenid Empire (6th-3rd c. BCE)



Beginnings of Avesta exegesis

- Young Avestan era: redaction and focus on analysis/interpretation of older OAv., but also YAv. texts (cf. YAv. glosses).
 - Spread of Avestan liturgies from (North-) Eastern Iran to Persia.
 - Analysis and exegesis continues in local traditions and languages.
 - One line of tradition re-emerges after a gap of several centuries, in **Middle Persian (Pahlavi) language (3rd to 10th c. CE)**.
-

Andrés-Toledo, Miguel Ángel. 2022. Explaining the Avesta: commentaries in historical perspective. *Journal of the K.R. Cama Oriental Institute* 76. 12–41.

Sasanian Empire (3rd–7th c. CE)



Establishment of the “Scholastic Avesta”

Sasanian Era (3rd–7th c. CE): competing views of what comprises the “Zoroastrian Tradition”:

- 1) “Dēn only” (Av. *daēnā-* ‘Vision’): entirety of revealed Avestan texts.
- 2) Dēn + personal religious experience (new revelations).
- 3) Dēn + reason & secular scientific knowledge, including foreign one (Greek, Indian)

Dēnkard (9th c.) reports priestly council at the court of **Šāpūr II (309–379 CE)**: View 1) wins.

- Gathering and organisation of Avestan texts (*abestāg*) to be regarded as canonical.
- **Extraction of “unique” text portions from their original liturgical context**, equipped with systematic Middle Persian translation.
- Collection sealed by an ordeal undergone by the high priest **Ādurbād ī Māraspandān**.

König, Götz. 2022. Überlegungen zur Avesta-Transmission in der Sasanidenzeit. In Farridnejad, Shervin & Daryae, Touraj (eds.), *Sasanian studies. Late antique Iranian world / Sasanidische Studien. Spätantike iranische Welt* (1), 127–156. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.

Canonisation of the Zand

Court of Husraw I (531–597 CE):

- written fixation of the Avestan text (invention of script?) and Pahlavi translation
- canonisation of the interpretations (→ commentary) in reaction to the “Mazdakite heresy”
- work of an anonymous collective
- Av. *srauuā zaraθuštrahe* ‘the words of Zarathustra’ explained as ‘Avesta and Zand’.

9th-c. CE texts:

- claim revealed nature of Zand (e.g. Dēnkard 5.24) and mention its memorisation;
- quote from the same translation as the one we know.

Fate and structure of the “Scholastic Avesta”

- Majority lost, but summaries – based on the Pahlavi versions – preserved in the *Dēnkard* (Books 8 & 9).
- Scattered quotations, also of Avestan fragments, throughout Pahlavi literature.
- First (or last) Nask: *Stōd Yasn Nask* = the core section of the Avestan long liturgy (Yasna).
- The other 20 Nasks:
 - *hamparšti*- ‘question-and-answer’ texts revealed in a conversation between a figure from the “circle of Zaraθuštra” (mostly Z. himself) and Ahura Mazdā
 - To be intercalated into the Long Liturgy.
- Organisational principle: the 3 lines and 21 words of the OAv. *Ahuna Vairīia* formula.

*yaθā ahū vairīō aθā ratuš ašāt cīt hacā
vanhēuš dazdā manarjhō ſīiaōθananām aŋhēuš mazdāi
xšaθrəmcā ahurāi.ā yim drigubiiō dadaž vāstārəm*

Cantera, Alberto. 2013. Talking with god: the Zoroastrian *hām.paršti* or intercalation ceremonies. *Journal Asiatique* 301. 85–138.

Vevaina, Yuhan Sohrab-Dinshaw. 2010. “Enumerating the *Dēn*”: Textual Taxonomies, Cosmological Deixis, and Numerological Speculations in Zoroastrianism. *History of Religions* 50. 111–143.

The 3 sections and 21 Nasks of the “Scholastic Avesta”

Gāhānīg group (7 Nasks)

Stōd Yasn (basic liturgy incl. Gāthās) – Sūdgar, Warštamānsar, Bay (three sets of explanations on the Gāthās) – Spand (life of Zarathustra) – etc.

Hadāmānsrīg group (7 Nasks)

Dāmdād (cosmogony, parts reworked in *Bundahišn*) etc.

Dādīg Nask (7 Nasks)

Vidēvdād (purity laws) – Huspāram (incl. **Nērangestān**) – Nigādom (penal law) – Čihrdād (mythical history of Iran) – **Bayān** (collection of the Yaštis) – etc.

Indirect transmission of Avesta through Pahlavi (Zoroastrian Middle Persian)

- Avestan tradition (*dēn*) as constant reference point for the Pahlavi authors.
- Some texts directly **translated** from Avestan, with **glosses and commentaries**.
- Some rework contents of lost parts of the Avesta.
- Pahlavi as a “mixed” literary language with many Avestan loan words and calques..
- Bilingual presentation of translated text and complete gathering of Av. fragments and loanwords to become available through Middle Persian Corpus and Dictionary project (Bochum/Berlin/Cologne).

<https://www.mpcorpus.org/>

(Attention: currently non-citable beta version!)

Ancient exegesis of the Avesta: Some references

Cantera, Alberto. 2015. Avesta ii. Middle Persian translations. Encyclopædia Iranica Online. (http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2330-4804_EIRO_COM_11588).

Zeini, Arash. 2020. *Zoroastrian scholasticism in Late Antiquity. The Pahlavi version of the Yasna Haptanhāiti*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

“Part IV” in Peschl, Benedikt. 2022. *The first three hymns of the Ahunauuitī Gāθā. The Avestan text of Yasna 28–30 and its tradition*. Leiden – New York: Brill.

Vevaina, Yuhan Sohrab-Dinshaw. 2010. “Enumerating the Dēn”: textual taxonomies, cosmological deixis, and numerological speculations in Zoroastrianism. *History of Religions* 50. 111–143.

Cantera, Alberto. 2004. *Studien zur Pahlavi-Übersetzung des Avesta*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.

König, Götz. 2016. Yašt 3. *Der avestische Text und seine mittel- und neopersischen Übersetzung*. Girona: Sociedad de Estudios Iranios y Turanios.

Elman, Yaakov & Secunda, Shai. 2015. Judaism. In Stausberg, Michael & Vevaina, Yuhan Sohrab-Dinshaw (eds.), *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Zoroastrianism*, 423–435. Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell.

Early transmission effects and redactional manipulation

Evidence for Avesta in Achaemenid Persia

Achaemenid Mazdaism shows similar features to “Avestan religion”, but their identity has been questioned.

Still, there is good evidence that from some point onwards, the Avesta was present in Achaemenid South-West Iran (Persia), and became increasingly influential.

- Old Persian phonetic imprint on Avesta text, especially:
 - Word-internal Av. /i, u/ transmitted as *ii* and *uu* — cf. OP [iy], [uv] for post-consonantal and word-final /i, u/
 - YAv. *vīnāθaya-* ‘destroy’ (= OP *vināθaya-*, Ved. *vināśaya-*), with characteristic OP θ instead of Av. s for Prlr. *ts (Prllr. *č) instead of expected *vīnāsaiia-
- Replacement of early Achaemenid lunisolar calendar by Egyptian solar calendar reflected in the Avestan liturgies (12 months à 30 days + 5 intercalary days).
- Gradual emergence of Avestan day/month names in Western empire.
- Presence in Western empire of distinctly Avestan concepts in onomastics and pictorial representations of cult scenes.

Cantera, Alberto. 2017. La liturgie longue en langue avestique dans l'Iran occidental. In Henkelman, Wouter F. M. & Redard, Céline (eds.), *Persian Religion in the Achaemenid Period / La religion perse à l'époque achéménide*, 21–68. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.



Redactional compound splits (not clearly datable)

frādat_g.gaēθa- /frādad-gaiθa-/ ‘who furthers (*frādat-*) the living beings (*gaēθā-*)’
paiti.jasaiti /pḁti-jasaiti/

Modification of first member:

daēuuō.dāta- ‘established (*dāta-*) by the demons (*daēuuā-*)’
gaēθō.frāðana- + ‘furthering (*frāðana-*) livestock (*gaēθā-*)’,
zruuō.dāta- ‘established by time (*zruuan-*)’

Suffixes:

daēuuō.tēma- /daiuā-tēma-/ (*daiuā-tama-) ‘most demon-like’
pouru.tāt- /poru-tāt-/ (*paru-tāt-) ‘multitude’

Errors:

ahura.tkaēša- (< *ahura-kaiša-) ‘following the teaching (*kaiša-) of Ahura’
**tkaēša-* extracted, e.g., from something like **frādat-kaiša-* ‘furthering the teaching’ vel. sim. ... ?

Dissolution of sandhi

External sandhi mostly dissolved:

e.g. nom.sg. ending of *a*-stems PrIr. *-as > Ved. -ō, -ah, -as

...> PrIr. *-ah > normally OAv. -ē, -ō; YAv. -ō

Av. yō *tataša* ‘who fashioned’

Cf. Rig-Veda ví yás *tastámbha* ‘who stemmed apart’

But occasionally “forgotten”:

nemas^ə. tē ‘reverence to you!’

yas^ə. taxmō ‘who (is) valiant’

Uneven phonetic shape and inconsistency of sound laws

From: Cantera, Alberto & Redard, Céline. 2023. *An introduction to Young Avestan*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.

of *huuar-* “sun”, § 16.2.4). The conditions for the evolution of *a* into *ā* or *ā̄* (which sometimes appears as *ō*) are not clear. After *ii*, we always find *ā* (*mašiiā* from *mašiiā-* “man”, *aīqān*), after *u*, *a* changes to *ā* and the resulting group is *ū* (*hū*). For the rest, there is simply a tendency for *ā* to appear after a labial (*haōmā* from *haōma-*, *aēsmā* from *aēsma-* “dry wood”, *fratāmā* from *fratāma-* “first”, *amā* from *ama-* “offensive force”, *garəbā* from *garəbā-* “womb”, *imā* from dem. pron., *barəsmān*, etc). After *k*, *ā̄* is more common (*yaskā* from *yaska-* “disease”). After *t*, however, we find both (*yazatā* from *yazata-* “worthy of sacrifice; divinity”, *spəntā* from *spənta-* “beneficent”, *zastā* from *zasta-* “hand”, *paiti.vərətā* from *paiti.vərəta-* “enveloped”, but *yaōždātā* from *yaōždāta-* “purified”, *mazištā* from *mazišta-* “the greatest”, *spəntā* from *spənta-* “beneficent”, *pairištā* from *pairišta-* “chosen”, dem. pron. *tā*, etc).

7.1.5 Oscillations of quantity between *i* / *ī* and *u* / *ū*

The quantity of *i* and *u* oscillates in the manuscripts and, in general, the quantity that appears in the manuscripts has little to do with the original quantity. This phenomenon has a relatively arbitrary character. As a result, we can only observe spelling trends. In the manuscripts, we encounter some distributional parameters which are certainly secondary. Thus, for example, the preverb *ni-* always appears with *ī* while the preverb *vī-* always appears with *ī* (§ 7.1.2). Again, a secondary distribution must be attributed to the fact that *u* very often appears as *ū* in syllables with epenthesis, for example, Av. *āstūiti-* “prayer”, Ved. *stutí-*, IE **stuti*; Av. *frasrūiti-* “recitation”, Ved. *śrúti-*, IE **k̥luti-*. However, *uiti* “thus, so” is always written with *u* in Young Avestan, but not in Old Avestan (Y38.4, 39.3, 45.2).

However, in some cases, the original distribution is preserved. The most frequent case is that of the nom. sg. of *i*-/*u*-stems, which appear short (for example, nom. sg. *gairiš* “mountain”, *pouruš* “many”), but as long in the acc. pl. (for example, acc. pl. *gairiš*, *pouruš*). The old difference in quantity is thus preserved: The nom. sg. of *-iš* / *-uš* from *-is* / *-us* and the acc. pl. *īš* / *ūš* from *-īs* / *-ūs* < *-iNs / -uNs.

Alberto Cantera, Céline Redard

An Introduction to Young Avestan:
A Manual for Teaching and Learning

Translated from French into English
by Richard Tahmaseb Nirouman

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**Orthography and recitation in the
Avestan manuscripts**

zur Erlangung des Doktorgrades eingereicht
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The Avestan Vowels

Michiel de Vaan



Amsterdam - New York, NY 2003

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Avesta script

Sasanian transmission and Avestan script

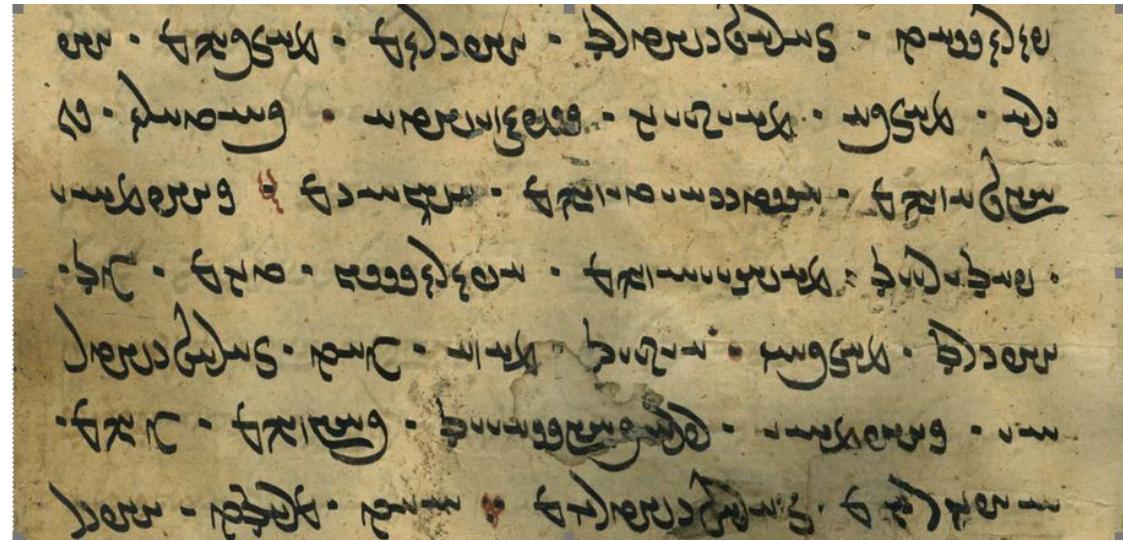
- Our Avestan texts based on the version that passed through the Sasanian-era “bottleneck”:
 - Gathering of Avestan texts and canonisation of the corpus
 - Attempt to propagate one particular school of recitation – invention of script based on late-Sasanian stage of Pahlavi (< Aramaic) script
 - High precision in depicting nuances of contemporary liturgical pronunciation
- Reconstruction of “Sasanian archetype” of texts and their phonetic shape (à la K. Hoffmann) now nevertheless considered infeasible:
 - Earliest mss. (written in India): 13th/14th c. CE
 - Renewed diversification of recitation styles already at full effect
 - Exact inventory of characters and their distribution not recoverable
- Solution adopted by Corpus Avesticum Berolinense: texts essentially edited in their phonetic shape as recoverable from earliest Iranian manuscripts (17th c.)
- Luckily, these happen to correspond quite closely to the presumed “Sasanian” Avestan reconstructed by Hoffmann

Avestan script

Beginning of Vīdēvdād 2

pərəsał. zaraθuštrō. ahurəm. mazdəm. ah
ura. mazda. maiñiiū. spəništa. dātarə. g
aēθanqm. astuuaitinqm. ašāum. kahmāi
. paōiriiō. mašiiānqm. apərəse. tūm. yō.
ahurō. mazdā. ainiiō. mana. yał. zaraθuštr
āi. kahmāi. frādaēsaiiō. daēnqm. yaqm.
āhūrīm. zaraθuštrīm [etc.]

‘Zaraθuštra asked Ahura Mazdā: “Ahura Mazdā, most beneficent spirit, establisher of the living beings with bones, proponent of order (*aša*-)! With whom among the mortals did you first converse, you who are Ahura Mazdā, other than me, Zaraθuštra? Whom did you first show the *Daēnā* (Vision, Revelation, Religion) which belongs to Ahura and Zaraθuštra?”’



© Tehran University Library / Avestan Digital Archive, FU Berlin (Ms. 4000, 17th c. CE)

Avestan script (1): letters taken directly from Pahlavi

MP	Av.
, h	u a
y, d, g	j i
k	g k
t	r t
p	v p
b	z b
m	g m
n, r, w	} n
r, l) r
L ¹	↳ o ²
s	u s
z	z z
š	u ſ

Avestan script (2): modified Pahlavi letters

MP	Av.
y, d, g	ȝ
t	ȝ
p	ȝ
p	ȝ
n, r, w, ' , '̄	}
n, r, w, ' , '̄	}
j (Psalter)	ȝ
s ³	ȝ
' , h	ȝ
' , h	ȝ
' , h	ȝ
c ?	ȝ

Avestan script (3): Pahlavi ligatures

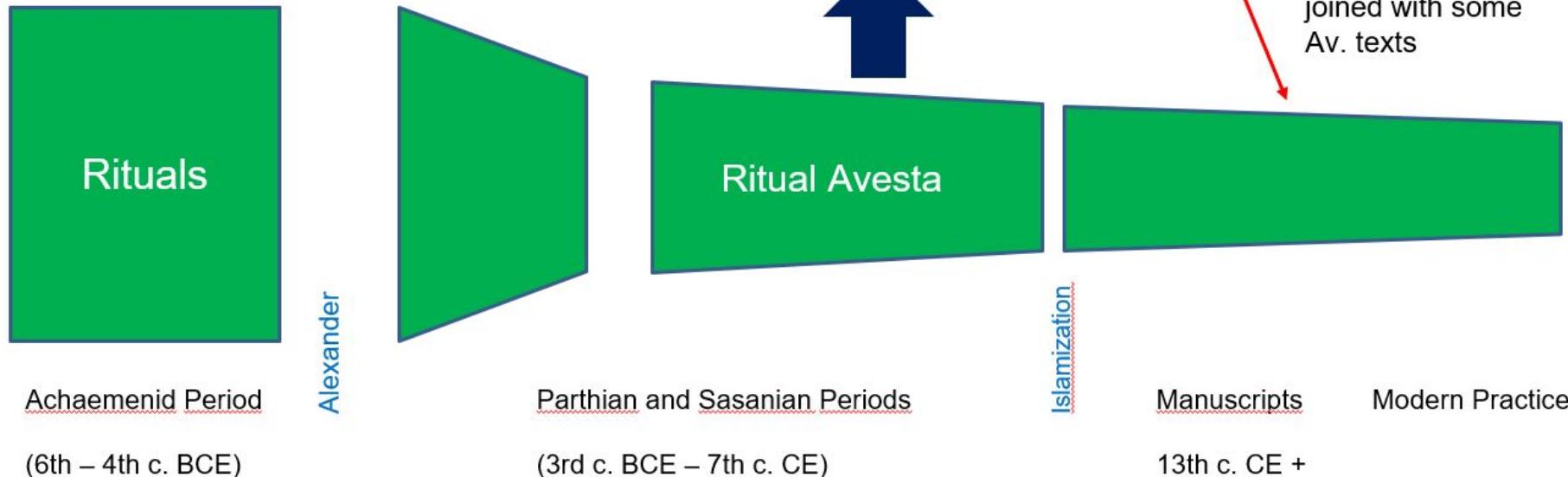
	MP	Av.
'y ⁶		mā
'yw ⁷		eu
		ē
hw		x ^v
gw ⁸		u
yk		u
šy		u
yhr (?)		u

Avestan script (4): Further characters

𐭧	γ	From Middle Persian “Psalter” alphabet
𐭩	d	
𐭪	j	
ԑ	θ	< Greek ε (epsilon)
ܵܶ	â	ܵ < ā > + < θ >
ܵ		modification of { < n >

A bit of (more recent) research history

(scheme after A. Cantera)



Two major Avesta editions of the 19th c.

ZENDAVESTA

OR

THE RELIGIOUS BOOKS OF THE ZOROASTRIANS

EDITED AND TRANSLATED

WITH A DICTIONARY, GRAMMAR &c.

BY

N. L. WESTERGAARD,

KNIGHT OF THE DANEBORG,

PROFESSOR OF ORIENTAL LANGUAGES IN THE UNIVERSITY OF COPENHAGEN,
MEMBER OF THE DANISH ROYAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES AND HONORARY MEMBER OF THE BOMBAY
BRANCH OF THE ROYAL ASIATIC SOCIETY &c. &c.

VOL. I.

THE ZEND TEXTS.



AVESTA

THE

SACRED BOOKS OF THE PARSI

EDITED BY

KARL F. GELDNER

PUBLISHED

UNDER THE PATRONAGE OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR INDIA

IN COUNCIL



COPENHAGEN,

PRINTED BY BERLING BROTHERS.

SOLD BY GYLDENDAL.

1852—54.

Zend Avesta

A

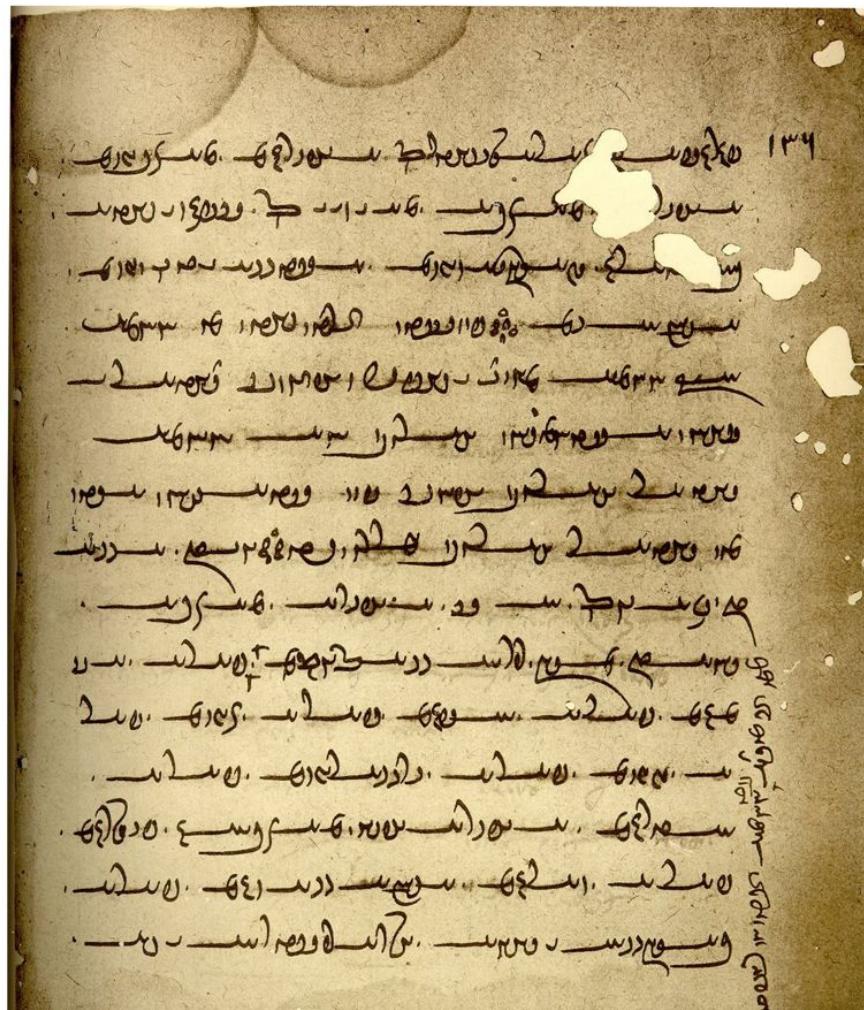
STUTTGART

W. KÖHLHAMMER

1856

19th c. view of the Avesta – dominant until 2000s

- Extant liturgies a patchwork of the debris of “Great Sasanian” Avesta described in Dēnkard 8 (9th c. Pahlavi text)
- Reduction of the liturgies to their unique components forming a “sacred book”
- Edition not of entire liturgies, but of Yasna (basic liturgy) + supplementary portions of text added to Yasna in other liturgies
- Results:
 - loss of occasional small pieces of text
 - lack of awareness of the compositional principles and logic of the liturgies
 - reduction of the corpus to basic set: Yasna, Visperad, Vidēvdād, Yašts u.a.



Y19.1

Manuscript "J2" containing
the Avestan Yasna +
Pahlavi Yasna

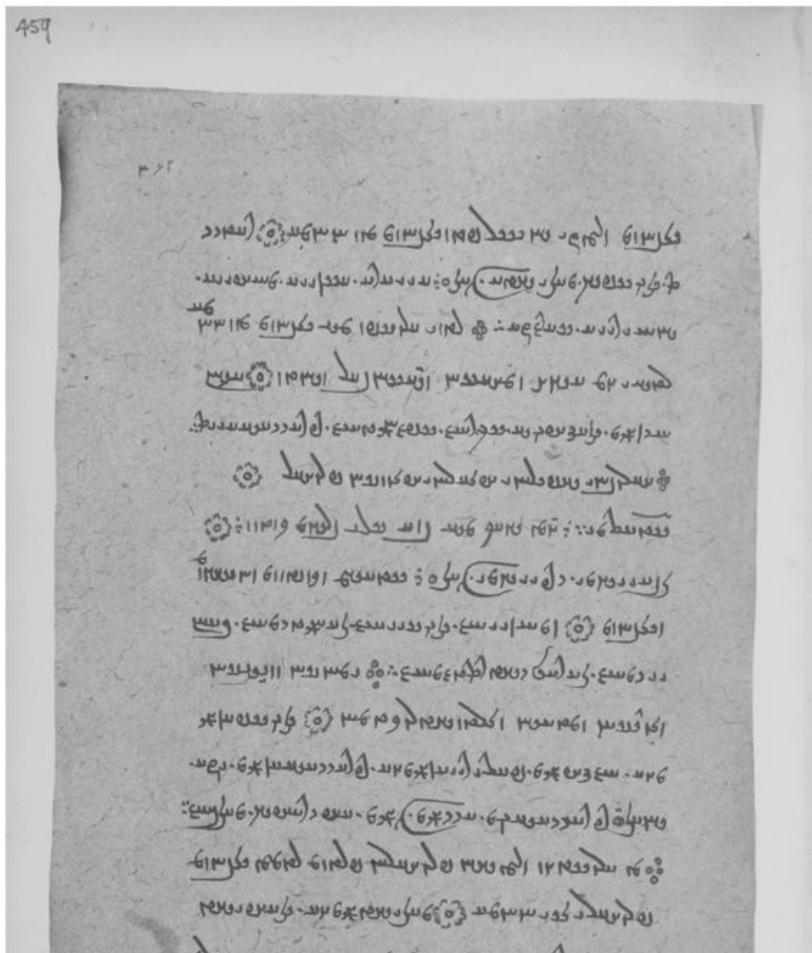
ca. 1323 CE

written in India, by a scribe
from Iran

Y19.2

ultimately deriving from
the combination of an
Avestan and a Pahlavi
manuscript ca. 1000 CE

ca. 380 folios = 780 pages



59.1

59,1

59.1

Manuscript “Pt4” containing the Avestan Yasna + Pahlavi Yasna + Ritual Directions

ca. 1780 CE

written in India

derives from the same first bilingual ms.

ca. 280 folios = 560 pages

59.18

ط. خود دنده لار. چه بخواهد. سلوه بخواهد. ناخداه بخواهد. بی سدنه بخواهد.

کند
پسندید (آرد). دو پلخ خوش شد. قیام سلم و لارا کند. فکر ۱۳۳۱۶

همایه را سی ام اکس سی سی آن بدوی لار ۱۴۳۲

سد ایمه. و ایمه بعده بخواهد. داده ایمه. داده بخواهد. ل (آرد دنده بخواهد) هم

فوج برای سرمه. بخواهد ملتم. بخواهد ملتم. بخواهد کاری از ل کنم

بند سلطان ده: تاک و سو کند راه بدل لار ۱۱۳۱

کرند دنده دنده. دل در بخواهد. سلوه ده فدم سیاه اوایل ۱۱۳۱

افکر ۱۳۳۱۶ ۱۳۳۱۶ ساده دیه. خود دنده سیاه بخواهد دیه دیه. و سی

Late 20th- / 21st-c. revolution

- Study of the Nērangestān (Av./MP treatise on questions of ritual practice) and of ritual instructions in Av. manuscripts.
 - > Structure of liturgies already presupposed by Avestan fragments in Nērangestān;
 - > MSS. allow reconstruction of a complex system of rituals correlating with the calendar and other parameters.
- Built on the same set of basic modules but with multiple ways of combining them.
 - > “Yasna”, “Visperad” etc. modern abstractions
- Attempts to correlate recitation text with progress of ritual actions.

Kellens, Jean. 1998. Considérations sur l'histoire de l'Avesta. *Journal Asiatique* 286. 451–519.

Kotwal, Firoze Meherji & Kreyenbroek, Philip Gerrit. 1992–2009. *The Hērbedestān and Nērangestān*. 4 vols. Paris: Association pour l'Avancement des Études Iranianennes.

Cantera, Alberto. 2014. *Vers une édition de la liturgie longue zoroastrienne*. Paris: Association pour l'Avancement des Études Iranianennes.

Cantera, Alberto. 2016. The ‘sacrifice’ (Yasna) to Mazdā: its antiquity and variety. In Williams, Alan Vincent & Stewart, Sarah & Hintze, Almut (eds.), *The Zoroastrian flame. Exploring religion, history and tradition*, 61–76. London – New York: I.B. Tauris.

Cantera, Alberto. 2020. Litanies and rituals. The structure and position of the Long Liturgy within the Zoroastrian ritual system. In Redard, Céline & Ferrer-Losilla, Juanjo & Moein, Hamid & Swennen, Philippe (eds.), *Aux sources des liturgies indo-iranianennes*. 195–282, 377–400. Liège: Presses Universitaires de Liège.

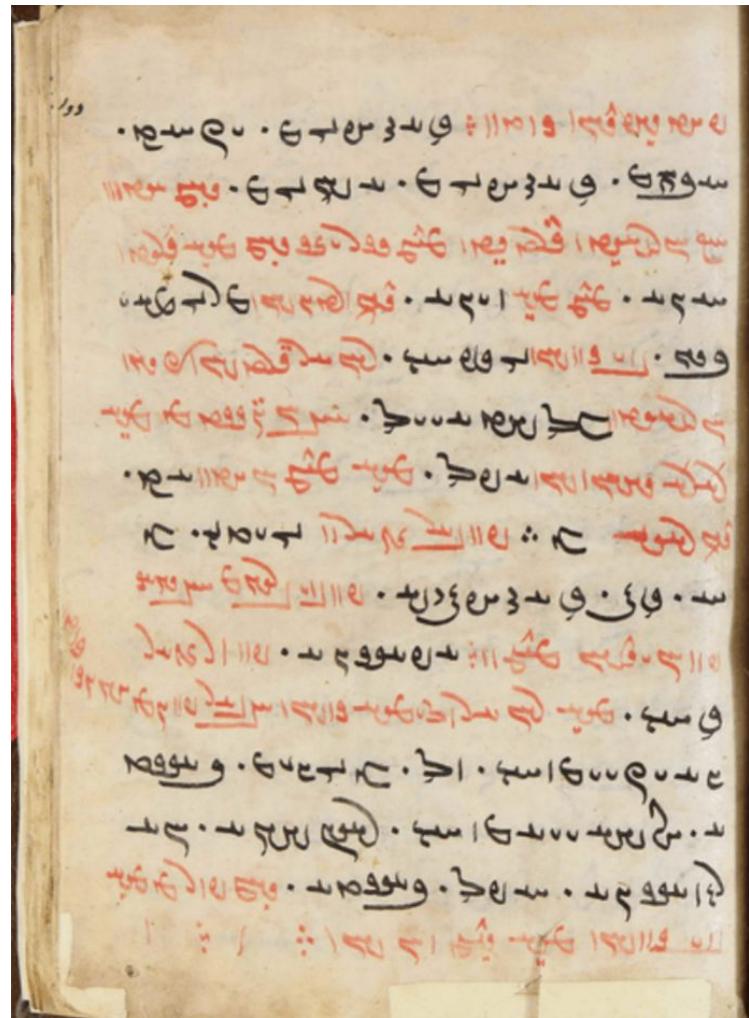
Part of **Yasna 68** in liturgical Visperad manuscript (Iran, 1607 CE)

Middle Persian ritual directions in red.

Picture and transliteration: [Avestan Digital Archive](#)

[CAB Edition](#) (jump to Y.68.16)

The actions can be watched in the [MUYA film](#).



Text and ritual action

Annotated performance of Yasna filmed in Mumbai, 2017 (Multimedia Yasna project, SOAS)

<https://muya-film.soas.hasdai.org/yasna/>

Y.27.1 Pounding of the Haōma twigs; *snaθāi* formula

See also the encyclopedia.

Liturgical vs. Scholastic Avesta

Liturgical (or: Ritual) Avesta

- Collection of liturgies in Avestan language to be recited in rituals of the Zoroastrian religion
- Oldest parts (“Old Avesta”): 1000 BCE or earlier
- Basic redaction of major liturgies probably in the Achaemenid period (6th–4th c. BCE)
- Minor modifications until the modern era; some liturgies still performed today especially among Zoroastrians in India, others abandoned

Sasanian “Great Avesta” (Scholastic Avesta)

- Liturgical texts dissected and re-organised according to content-related criteria + equipped with Pahlavi translation
- 21 *Nasks* (“bundles”)
- Summarised in Book 8 of the *Dēnkard* (9th/10th c. CE)
- *Stōd Yasn Nask* and *Wīdēwdād Nask* preserved completely, also parts of *Bayān Yasn Nask* (in the form of the Yašt collection); only fragments of other *Nasks*

Avestan language: overview

Essential handbooks

Beeke, Robert Stephen Paul. 1988. *A grammar of Gatha-Avestan*. Leiden etc.: Brill.

Cantera, Alberto & Redard, Céline. 2023. *An introduction to Young Avestan: a manual for teaching and learning. Translated from French into English by Richard Tahmaseb Niroumand*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz. [See also the literature listed there, pp. XVf.]

Hoffmann, Karl & Forssman, Bernhard. 2004. *Avestische Laut- und Flexionslehre. 2., durchgesehene und erweiterte Auflage*. Innsbruck: Institut für Sprachwissenschaft.

Kellens, Jean. 1984. *Le verbe avestique*. Wiesbaden: Reichert.

Kellens, Jean. 1974. *Les noms-racines de l'Avesta*. Wiesbaden: Reichert.

Martínez, Javier & de Vaan, Michiel. 2014. *Introduction to Avestan*. Leiden: Brill.

de Vaan, Michiel. 2003. *The Avestan vowels*. Amsterdam – New York: Rodopi.

Dictionaries

Bartholomae's Altiranisches Wörterbuch (1904):

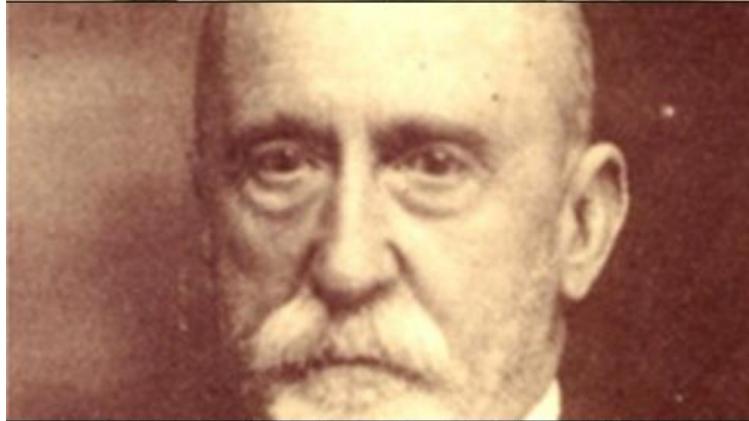
<https://cab.geschkult.fu-berlin.de/exist/apps/cab/pages/tools/bartholomae.html>

For Old Avestan:

Kellens, Jean & Pirart, Éric. 1990. *Les textes vieil-avestiques. Volume II. Répertoires grammaticaux et lexique.* Vol. 2. 3 vols.
Wiesbaden: Dr. Ludwig Reichert.

Beyond this, the best way to go are glossaries of individual text editions.

**"IF YOU WISH TO TREAT WITH ME, GO AWAY,
AND COME BACK WHEN YOU ARE SOBER!"**



**SARUMAN AKA CHR. BARTHOLOMAE
(LORD OF THE RINGS, BOOK 3, CH. 10)**

Linguistic literature

Cantera, Alberto. 2017. The phonology of Iranian. In Klein, Jared S. & Joseph, Brian & Fritz, Matthias (eds.), *Handbook of comparative and historical Indo-European linguistics* (Handbücher zur Sprach- und Kommunikationswissenschaft 41), vol. 1, 481–503. Berlin – Boston: De Gruyter Mouton.

And in the same volume:

Skjærvø, Prods Oktor. 2017. The morphology of Iranian. Vol. 1, 503–549.

Jügel, Thomas. 2017. The syntax of Iranian. Vol. 1, 549–566.

Sadovski, Velizar. 2017. The lexicon of Iranian. Vol. 1, 566–599.

[Also the sections on “Proto-Indo-Iranian” in Vol. 3.]

Kümmel, Martin Joachim. Forthcoming. Avestan phonology. In Keydana, Götz & Dalpedri, Saverio & Skopeteas, Stavros (eds.), *A handbook of Ancient Indo-European grammars*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Peschl, Benedikt. Forthcoming. Avestan morphology – Avestan morphosyntactic structures. In Keydana, Götz & Dalpedri, Saverio & Skopeteas, Stavros (eds.), *A handbook of Ancient Indo-European grammars*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Dialectal affiliation of Young Avestan

Certain YAv. sound changes suggest proximity to more recent Eastern Iranian languages:

- Pretonic *āja > *ajā and *āya > *aya
 - PrIIr. *scājā- ‘shadow’ > YAv. saiiā-, Sogdian sayā-k, Pashto siyā vs. Middle Persian sāyag, Ved. chāyā-
 - PrIIr. *nāyājá- > YAv. nauuāza- ‘boatman’ with Sogd. nawāz vs. MP nāwāz, Ved. nāvājá-
- *īy > *y:
 - PrIIr. *jīyá- ‘alive’ > YAv. juua-, Sogd. zw- vs. OP jīva-, Skt. jīvá-
- But not consistent in YAv.; perhaps rather effect of transmission by speakers of Sogd. or similar languages.

Phonology: vowels

Undoubtedly phonemic vowels in Old and Young Avestan:

/a/ < PIE *e, *o, (*a)

/i/ < *i

/u/ < *u

/ā/ < *eH, *oH, (*aH), *ē, *ō, *o (in open syllable)

/ī/ < *iH

/ū/ < *uH

Phonology: vowels

Previous allophones that became phonemic in YAv. or early during the transmission:

/ē/ [e:] (/e/ [e]) < *-ai

/ō/ [o:] < *-ah < *-as, *-au

/ə/ [ə:] < *-anh < *-ans

/ā/ [ɒ:] < *āh < *-ās

Schwa (ə) commonly appears as allophone of /a/ before nasals. Phonemicity in early stages depends on one's view of *r.

A nasal vowel ą arises before N + fricative: ą became phonemic once N lost segmental status (thus in the transmitted text):

/man-s-ta/ → *mąstā* [mě:sta] 'he thought'

/man-θra-/ → *mąθra-* [mě:θra-] 'formula, mantra'

(also allophone of /ā/ in some contexts)

Phonology: diphthongs

Bimoraic:

PIE **e̥i*, *o̥i* > /ai/ — transmitted as *aē* or *ōi*

YAv.: *ōi* in closed, *aē* in open syllables; OAv.: also sometimes in open syllables

PIE **e̥u*, *o̥u* > /au/ — transmitted as *aō*; in OAv. before final š also as *ēu*

Trimoraic:

PIE **ēi*, *ōi* > *āi*; PIE **ēu*, **ōu* > *āu*

Consonants: general profile within IE

Satem-character (as Indic) (and PIE/PrIIR *s > h):

satəm < PrIIR. *c̥atam < PIE *k̥mtom

azəm < PrIIR. *aj̥ám < PIE *h₁eǵh₂om

hacaɪte < PrIIR. *sačataj < PIE *sekʷe-toj

Aspirated voiced merge with non-aspirated voiced stops:

YAv. *baraⁱti* < *b̥ereti ‘carries’

OAv. *dadāⁱtī* < *d̥ed̥oh₁ti ‘I put’ (Ved. dádhātī)

YAv. *garəma-* < PrIIR. *gʷhormo- (Ved. gharmá-)

Primary and IIr. secondary palatals

Primary palatals (PIE *ḱ, *ǵ, ǵʰ)

> PrIIr. *č, *ǵ, *ǵʰ > Av. s, z

Secondary palatals (PIE *k^(w), *g^(w), *g^(wh) before *e, *i, *l) A

> PrIIr. *č, *j, *jʰ > Av. c, j

Phonology: stops and sibilants

	Labial	Dental	Palatal	Velar
Voiceless	/p/ [p]	/t/ [t]	/c/ [t̥]	/k/ [k]
Voiced	/b/ [b]	/d/ [d]	/j/ [d̥z]	/g/ [g]

Palatal stops (< PIE *k^(w), *g^(w) before palatalising vowels) from some time onward affricates.

	Alveolar	Postalveolar	Palatal
Voiceless	/s/ [s]	/š/ [ʃ-ʂ]	(/ś/ [ɕ])
Voiced	/z/ [z]	/ž/ [ʒ-ʐ]	(*/ʑ/ [ʐ]?)

ś < *c̥j becomes phonemic in YAv.: OAv. /c̥jāta-/ 'at ease' < śiiāta-> > YAv. ſāta-

Transmitted š < post-tonic *-rt- (thus still in the Sogdian transmission of the Ašəm Vohū formula); loaned into Middle Persian first as *hl* (!) later as š.

Phonology: other fricatives

	Labial	Dental	Palatal	Velar	Labialized Velar
Voiceless	/f/ [f]	/θ/ [θ]	(x̄ [ç])	/χ/ [χ]	(x̄v [x̄w])
Voiced	β [β]	δ [ð]		γ [ɣ]	

(x̄ < pretonic *h̄i and x̄v < initial *h̄y secondary)

/f/, /θ/, /χ/ mostly < preconsonantal *p, *t, *k^(w)

but also *p, *t, *k before *H + vowel, hence phonemic

β, δ, γ allophones of b, d, g after voiced sounds (except nasals and voiced sibilants)

(in OAv. allophones of θ, x, f in limited contexts)

Phonology: Glottal fricatives and nasals

	Glottal	Palatalized Glottal	Glottal
Voiceless	$h, \eta h / h/ [h \sim \tilde{h}]$	($\dot{\eta}h / h^j / [\tilde{h}^j]$)	($\eta^v h / h^w / [\tilde{h}^w]$)

PIE *s > generally h

after \check{a} nasalised to $<\eta h>$; in transmitted YAv. also $\eta h < *Nh$ and $\dot{\eta}h < *h\check{i}$ and $\eta^v h < *h\check{u}$

Note that RUKI applies (as in Indic): PIE *s > Prllr. *š > Av. š following *r, *ü, *y, *k, *t̪, *j.

	Labial	Dental	Palatal	Velar
Voiceless	(/m̥/ [m̥])			
Voiced	/m/ [m]	/n/ [n]	(ń [ɲ])	(ɳ, ɳg /ŋ/? [ŋ])

Voiceless nasal $m̥$ suggested by spelling of *hm with letter $m̥$ (but for which date?).

Homorganic preconsonantal nasal sign η .

Allophone \acute{n} of n before /i/.

Phonology: other sonorants

	Labial	Alveolar	Palatal
Voiceless		(/r/ [r̥])	
Voiced	/w/ [w]	/r/ [r]	/j/ [j]

- /w/ spelled v- initially but -uu- internally; same with /j/: y- and -ii-
- (*l, *r >) Prllr. *r <ər(ə)> still phonemic? Possible counterargument from Old Avestan metre (M. Kümmel).
- Devoicing of *r after accented vowel (including ə in ər < *r>) and before voiceless stop: Vrp, Vrk, Vrt → spellings <hrp>, <hrk>, <j>:

*w̥ko- (Ved. vr̥ka-) > vəhrka-

*k(w)rp- (Ved. krp-) > kəhrp-

*ŋ-m̥to- > aməša-

Laryngeal effects (1): Prllr. aspiration of voiceless stops

- ‘path’

nom. *pént-oh₂-s > *pantâ* gen. *pṇt-h₂-és > *paθō*

- ‘companion’

*sékʷh₂oij > *haxa* (Ved. *sákhā*)

- ‘chariot’

*roteh₂- → *roth₂o- > *raθa-* (Ved. *rátha-*)

etc.

Laryngeal effects (2): hiatus in OAv.

PIE laryngeals not visible anymore in the Avestan texts as transmitted to us, but hiatus in the syllable-counting metres of the Gāthās still show their former presence in intervocalic position:

- e.g. nom.sg. *mazdā* < *mazdaH-h < *m₁ns-d^heh₁-s: two syllables
 - gen.sg *mazdā* < *mazdaH-ah: three syllables
-
- 3sg. injunctive aorist *dāt* < *daH-t '(s)he put': one syllable
 - 3sg. subjunctive aorist *dāt̄* < *daH-at '(s)he will put': two syllables

Laryngeal effects (3): Devoicing in YAv.

Table. Alternation of voiced and voiceless stops or fricatives in YAv.

	Pres. ‘to put, to give’		‘great, big’	
	Strong	Weak	Strong	Weak
(Pre-)Proto-Iranian	* <i>dadaH-</i>	* <i>dadH-</i>	* <i>majah-</i>	* <i>majh-</i>
Old Avestan	<i>dadā-</i>	<i>dad-</i>	* <i>mazā-</i>	<i>maz-</i>
Younger Avestan	<i>daðā-</i>	<i>daθ-</i>	<i>mazā-</i>	<i>mas-</i>
(Old) Persian	<i>dadā-</i>	* <i>daθ-?</i>	* <i>madā-?</i>	<i>maθ-</i>
Parthian	?	<i>dah-</i>	?	<i>mas-</i>

Kümmel, Martin Joachim. 2016. Is ancient old and modern new? Fallacies of attestation and reconstruction (with special focus on Indo-Iranian). In Goldstein, David M. et al. (eds.), *Proceedings of the 27th Annual UCLA Indo-European Conference, Los Angeles, October 23rd and 24th, 2015*, 79–96. Bremen: Hempen.

“i- and u-Epenthesis”

Epenthetic *i* inserted before a consonant + *t̄, ī* (and less regularly *ē̄*).

- Affected: *t, d, δ, n, r* (occasionally *p, b, β*)
- For “original Avestan”: probably allophonic palatalised consonants.
- During transmission: depalatalisation and development of a diphthong.

pāt̄i < [pat̄i] < /pati/ ‘against’

yazātē < [jazati:] < /jazaī-taī/ ‘sacrifices’;

pār̄i < [pari] < /pari/

'rinaxti < [rinaxti]

āpi < [api] < /api/ ‘over’

- Blocked by =cā, =cīt̄ in the case of dental stops: *v̄isati=ca* /uisati=ca/ ‘and twenty’ vs. *v̄sāti* ‘twenty’ /uisat̄i/).

Epenthetic *u* before *r* followed by *ū, ū*

hāruua- < [harwa-] /harya-/ ‘whole, all’

“Anaptyxis”

- Anaptyctic schwa inserted in various consonant clusters
- Regular after *r* but also found in other contexts (especially between stops and in clusters of three or more consonants)
- More frequent in OAv. than in YAv.

OAv. dat.sg *f^θōrōi* /fθrai/ ‘for the father’

OAv. nom.sg *dug^θdā* /dugdā/ ‘daughter’

YAv. *dar^θya-* /darga-/ ‘long’

. (they are abundant)

Some post-Avestan vowel changes

- $\theta > i$ in palatal environments

YAv. acc.sg *vācīm* /vācəm/ ‘voice’ (but OAv. *vācəm*)

YAv. acc.sg *mašīm* < /mártiijəm/ ‘man’

- $\theta > u$ in a labialized environment:

OAv. acc.sg *tanūm* < /tanu.əm/ ‘body’

YAv. nom.sg *tūm* for < /tu.əm/ ‘you’ (but OAv. *tuuəm*)

YAv. gen.sg *hū* < **huγū* for /hu.a/ (< /hu.ənh/) ‘of the sun’ (cf. Ved. *suvār-*)

- “Umlaut”

/a/ > e [ɛ] between two palatalized sounds: e.g. *uxšiiētī* /uxšjati/ ‘grows’

/a/ > o [ɔ] between a labial and an allophonically labialized sound (i.e. r, š preceding u): *po^urū* /paru/ ‘much’.

Nominal declension

- Number: singular, dual, plural
- Case: nominative, vocative, accusative, genitive, dative, ablative, instrumental, locative
- Gender (mostly grammatical): masculine, feminine, neuter
- Formal criterion: thematic (stems ending in *-a-*) – athematic (stems ending in *-ă-*, *-ǐ-*, *-ű-*, or a consonant)
- Some special endings in the declension of pronouns.

(Old) Avestan verbal categories

stem/aspect	tense – mood	suffix	endings
imperfective ("present")	unmarked ("injunctive") present indicative subjunctive optative imperative past ("imperfect")	– – -a- -iā-/r- – prefix a- ("augment")	non-present ("secondary") present ("primary") either non-present imperative non-present
perfective ("aorist")	unmarked ("injunctive") subjunctive optative imperative past ("aorist indicative")	– -a- -iā-/r- – prefix a- ("augment")	non-present either non-present imperative non-present
perfect	indicative perfect subjunctive optative past ("pluperfect")	– -a- -iā-/r- prefix a- ("augment")	perfect either non-present non-present

Shifts in the verbal system from OAv. to YAv.

	ipfv. stem	pfv. stem (moribund in YAv.)
+ NPE	OAv. temporally unspecified ipfv. ("present injunctive") >> YAv. simple past	OAv. temporally unspecified pfv. ("aorist injunctive") >> moribund in YAv.
+ NPE	OAv. ipfv. with explicit past tense marking ("imperfect") – very rare	OAv. pfv. with explicit past tense marking ("aorist indicative") – rare ⁴⁹
<i>a-</i>	>> YAv. remote past / pluperfect (rare)	>> unattested in YAv.⁵⁰
+ PE	OAv. ipfv. with present time reference >> YAv. aspectually unmarked present tense	(The pfv. stem is never combined with primary endings, except in the subjunctive mood.)

Participles

- Derived from tense-aspect stem:
 - active ptcp. in *-aŋt-/at-*
 - middle ptcp. in *-mna-, -āna-*
 - perfect ptcp. in *-uuāh-/uš-*
- Derived from root:
 - resultative ptcp. in *-ta-*

Samples from Old Avesta

Y.45.2: The fundamental difference between the two *maińiiu-*

at *frauuuaxšiiā* *aŋhēuš maińiiū pouruiiē*
yaiiā *spańiiā* *uitī mrauuuat yēm aŋgrəm*
nōiṭ nā manā *nōiṭ sēŋghā nōiṭ xratauuō*
naēdā varanā *nōiṭ uxđā naēdā ſiiāōθanā*
nōiṭ daēnā *nōiṭ uruuqnō hacaiṇtē*

at *frauaxšiā* *ahauš manjū paruijai*
iaiāh spaniāh *uti mrauat yam ahram*
naiṭ nā manāh *naiṭ sanhā naiṭ xratauah*
naidā varnā *naiṭ uxtā naiđā čjaūθnā*
naiṭ dajānā *naiṭ ruūānah hacantai*

at ‘then, now, but, next’

fra-vac- (future prs. st. *fra-uuaxšiiā-*) ‘to speak out about’

ahu- (*aŋhu-*) m. ‘existence’

mańiiu- m. ‘impulse, force’, “spirit”

po"ruia- ‘first; what is first’, n. noun ‘foundation, beginning’

ya- (m.-n.) / *yā-* (f.) rel. pron.

spańiiah- comparative of *spəŋta-* ‘bounteous, beneficent’

uiti ‘thus’ (with following direct speech)

mrauu-/mru- ‘to speak’

angra- ‘evil’

nōiṭ ‘not’

nā unclear; particle? du. possessive pron. *na-?*

manah- n. ‘thinking’

sēŋgha- m. ‘pronouncement, teaching’

xratu- m. ‘acument, mental power’

naēdā ‘nor’

var"na- m. ‘preference, choice’

uxđa- n. ‘utterance’

ſiiāōθna- n. ‘action’

daēnā- f. (**daiHanā-*) ‘vision’

"ruuan- m. ‘soul’

hac- (prs. st. *haca-*) middle inflection ‘follow, join, go together’

Y.44.5: Ahura Mazdā as establisher of both light and darkness

<i>taₗ ḡβā pərəsā</i>	<i>ərəš mōi vaōcā ahurā</i>
<i>kā huuāpā</i>	<i>raōcāscā dāₗ təmāscā</i>
<i>kā huuāpā</i>	<i>x'afnəmcā dāₗ zaēmācā</i>
<i>kā yā ušā</i>	<i>arəm.piḡβā xšapācā</i>
<i>yā ḡ manaōḡrīš</i>	<i>cazdōŋghuuantəm arəḡahiiā</i>

ha-, *ta-* (m.-n.) / *hā-*, *tā-* (f.) dem. pron. with weak deixis
 ‘this, that’
ḡβā ‘you’ encl. acc.sg
fras- (prs. st. *pərəsa-*) ‘to ask’
ərəš ‘straightly, truly’
mōi encl. pron. ‘for/of me’ (gen-dat.sg.)
vac- (aor. st. *vaōca-*) ‘to tell, say’
ahura- ‘lord’
ka- (m.-n-) / *kā-* (f.) ‘who, which?’
huuāpah- ‘artisan’
raōcah- n. ‘(heavenly) light’
=cā ‘and’

dā- (= aor. st.) ‘to put, create; give’
təmah- n. ‘darkness’
x'afna- m. ‘sleep’
zaēman- n. ‘awakeness’
ušah- f. ‘dawn’
arəm.piḡβā- f. ‘noon’
xšapan- f. ‘night’
manaōtar-, f. *manaōḡrī-* ‘the one who reminds,
 reminding’ (?)
cazdōŋghuuant- ?
arəḡa- ‘goal, aim, duty’

Y.51.8: the fate of the deceitful and of the maintainers of order

aṭ zī tōi vaxšiiā mazdā *vīdušē zī nā mruiiāt*
hīaṭ akōiiā drəguuāitē *uštā yā ašəm dādrē*
huuō zī mq̄rā ſiiātō *yā vīdušē mrauuaitī*

<i>dar-</i> (pf. st. <i>dādr-</i>)	to fix, to hold
<i>drəguuant-</i>	adherent of <i>druj-</i>
<i>huuō</i>	that one, he (nom.sg.m)
<i>mq̄rān-</i>	possessor of the sacred formula
<i>mrauu-/mrū-, prs. st. mrauu-/mrū-</i>	to speak
<i>ſiiāta-</i>	happy, blissful, at ease
<i>tōi</i>	of/to/for you (encl. gen-dat.sg)
<i>uštī- f.</i>	wish
<i>vac-</i> (future prs. st. <i>vaxšiiā-</i>)	to speak
<i>vīduš-</i>	knowing
<i>nar- m.</i>	man
<i>zī</i>	because; namely; even if

Loc.sg *uštā* ‘at wish, according to wish’ used as an indeclinable (originally exclamative) noun ‘bliss!, hail!'; or *uštā* is nom-acc.pl.n of *uštā-*, resultative participle (“past participle”) of *vas-* ‘to wish’, hence ‘things wished for’

Old Avesta: Text editions / translations

- Humbach, Helmut. 1991. *The Gāthās of Zarathushtra and the other Old Avestan texts*. 2 vols. Heidelberg: Winter.
- Insler, Stanley. 1975. *The Gāthās of Zarathustra*. Leiden: Brill.
- Kellens, Jean & Pirart, Éric. 1988–1991. *Les textes vieil-avestiques*. 3 vols. Wiesbaden: Dr. Ludwig Reichert.
- Kellens, Jean. 2020. *Études avestiques et mazdéennes vol. 6. Lecture sceptique et aventureuse de la Gāthā uštāuuaitī*. Paris: de Boccard.
- Kellens, Jean. 2021. *Études avestiques et mazdéennes vol. 7. Essai sur la Gāthā spəṇtā.mainiiu*. Leuven etc.: Peeters.
- Kellens, Jean. 2022. *Études avestiques et mazdéennes vol. 9. Complémentarité des deux dernières Gāthās (Y51 et Y53-54.1)* (Persika 24). Leuven etc.: Peeters.
- Narten, Johanna. 1986. *Der Yasna Haptarhāiti*. Wiesbaden: Reichert. [Also: Hintze, Almut. 2007. *A Zoroastrian liturgy. The Worship in Seven Chapters (Yasna 35–41)*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.]

Old Avesta: corpus overview

The Old Avesta is embedded into the Young Avestan “Long Liturgy” (Yasna etc.).

Yasna 27.13: *Ahuna vairiia* (*Yaθā ahū vairiā*) formula: the original first stanza of the AG.

Hāitis (“sections”) 28–34: *Ahunauuaitī Gāθā* (AG)

Y35–41: *Yasna Haptanhāiti* (YH) (+ YAv. appendix Y 42)

Y43–46: *Uštauuaitī Gāθā* (UG)

Y47–50: *Spəntamaińiu Gāθā* (SG)

Y51: *Vohuxšaθrā Gāθā* (VoG) (+ YAv. Y 52)

Y53: *Vahištōišti Gāθā* (VaG)

Y54.1: *Airiaman Išiia* formula: formally the final stanza of the VaG, mirroring the Ahuna Vairiia formula.

Old Avesta: internal structure

Older view (e.g. Bartholomae 1905):

- Hāiti as the basic unit intended by the poet
- Hāitis secondarily arranged into Gāthās based on formal criteria (metre).

More recent view (Hintze 2002, Kellens 2007):

- Both Hāti and Gāthā are original units.

Kellens 2013 (etc.):

- Each Gāthā is a self-contained liturgy meant to accompany a short Avestan proto-ritual (Kellens).

Also the entire Old Avesta originally intended as unitary composition (Skjærvø 2015, Hintze)? At least meaningfully arranged by later redactors to tell the history of the world from creation to final renovation (Skjærvø 2007)

Old Avestan corpus available in the present shape to the MAv./YAv. redactors (apparently besides other, now lost OAv. texts).

Collection fixated by the Young Avestan period and integrated + re-used in the context of the “Long Liturgy”.

The Gāthās: what are these texts?

Older lines of interpretation in Western scholarship:

- Texts containing the teachings as well as information about the life of the prophet Zaraθuštra.
- Directed primarily to humans (e.g. Bartholomae 1905: „Verspredigten“, poetic sermons).

Humbach 1959 (similarly Insler 1975):

- Texts directed towards the gods.
- Emphasis on Indo-Iranian liturgical heritage: formal (!) and stylistic agreement with Rigvedic hymns.
- Expression of innovative teachings of historical prophet Zaraθuštra.

Kellens 2013 (etc.):

- Each Gāthā originally a self-contained liturgy to accompany proto-versions of rituals similar as the YAv. ones (incl. Haōma and animal sacrifices).
- “Speculative”, innovative treatment of inherited liturgical schemes.
- Complex poetic techniques: allusive style, “kennings”, ellipsis, concatenation (see also M. Schwartz).
- Zaraθuštra and other persons mentioned are symbolic characters carrying telling names

- Bartholomae, Christian. 1905. *Die Gatha's des Awesta: Zarathushtra's Verspredigten*. Strassburg: Trübner.
- Hintze, Almut. 2002. On the literary structure of the Older Avesta. *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 65. 31–51.
- Kellens, Jean. 2007. Controverses actuelles sur la composition des Gâthâs. *Journal Asiatique* 295. 415–438.
- Kellens, Jean. 2013. Le jour se lève à la fin de la Gâthâ Ahunauuaitī. *Journal Asiatique* 301. 53–84.
- Skjærvø, Prods Oktor. 2007. The Videvdad: its ritual-mythical significance. In Sarkhosh Curtis, Vesta & Stewart, Sarah (eds.), *The age of the Parthians (The idea of Iran, volume II)*, 105–141. London – New York: I.B. Tauris.
- Skjærvø, Prods Oktor. 2015. The Gâthâs as myth and ritual. In Stausberg, Michael & Vevaina, Yuhan Sohrab-Dinshaw (eds.), *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Zoroastrianism*, 59–67. Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell.

The Gāthās: linguistic problems of interpretation

Linguistic problems:

- Rare words
- phonetic deformations
- difficult interpretation of verbal forms
- frequent person switches

Stylistic devices that make the Gāthās a challenging text to read:

- hyperbaton (discontinuous word-order)
- ellipsis of words
- “sleśa” (intentionally ambiguous forms)
- allusion to well-known entities by metaphors.

The Gāthās: extra-linguistic problems

- Compared to Young Avesta, stage of development of the world-view underlying the Gāthās remains elusive
- OAv. core concepts that were going to define also later Zoroastrianism:
 - double dualism (material s. mental world; order/truth vs. deceit)
 - parts of the Zoroastrian pantheon, with abstract concepts as deities
 - central position of deity Ahura Mazdā
- Points of debate:
 - presence of universal eschatology
 - mythical vs. present-tense (“psychological”) reading of many passages

Features of Old Avestan (vs. Young Avestan) — phonology

- (1) In OAv., all final vowels are long (not just in monosyllabic words, as in YAv.). This must be an effect of the specific way in which OAv. texts were recited by YAv. speakers.
- (2) Proto-Iranian *-ah > OAv. -ā (but YAv. -ō). Because the OAv. corpus was transmitted by YAv. speakers, -ā was mostly replaced by -ō. But -ā remains regular in pronouns.
- (3) Different treatment of diphthongs:
 - Proto-Iranian *-ai̯- > Av. -aē-, -ōi- depending on the context, -ōi- more common in OAv.; word-final *-ai̯ > OAv. -ōi (or under YAv. influence -ē), YAv. -e.
 - Proto-Iranian *-au̯- > YAv. -aō-, but OAv. -ēu- (word-finally *-au̯ > YAv. -ō, OAv. -uuō).
 - In all cases, the YAv. diphthongs are also found in OAv. besides the distinct OAv. ones
- (4) YAv. change *-ja# > -e has not taken place in OAv.: gen. sg. of a-stems -ahiiā vs. YAv. -ahe. Under the influence of the YAv. redactors, -ahē is also found.
- (5) Voiced plosives (g, d, b) are generally preserved in OAv., unlike in YAv., where they have turned to fricatives (γ, δ, β) in many contexts (except at the beginning of a word, after n, m and after z, ž)

Features of Old Avestan (vs. Young Avestan) — (morphology)

- (12) Systematic distinction between imperfect stem (“present stem”) of verbs (denotes extended/ongoing action) and perfective stem (“aorist stem”, denotes completed action).
- (13) “Injunctives” (verb forms with “secondary endings” 1sg -əm, 3sg -t etc.) do not necessarily express past tense as in YAv. They are unmarked with regard to tense.
- (14) In OAv., the ablative sg. marker -t only appears in a-stem declension (edning -āt); in YAv. -t is used also in the abl.sg. of other stem types, e.g. u-stem abl. sg. OAv. īuš (= genitive sg.), YAv. -aōt.
- (15) In the 1pl and 2pl personal pronouns, OAv. distinguishes between dat.-abl. nē, vē and acc. nā, vā. YAv. uses nō, vō for both dat.-abl. and acc.
- (16) 3sg masculine personal (or demonstrative) pronoun: YAv. hō < *hah, but OAv. huuō < *hau ‘he, that one’.

The five Gāthās and their metres

- a. Ahunauuaitī Gāthā (Y 28–34): $3 \times (7 + 9 [8/10])$ syllables

yaθā ahū vairiō | aθā ratuš ašāt̄cīṭ hacā (Ahuna Vairiia formula, line a)

- b. Uštauuaitī Gāthā (Y 43–46): $5 \times (4 [3/5] + 7 [6/8])$

uštā ahmāi | yahmāi uštā kahmāicīṭ (Y 43.1.a)

- c. Spəntamaińiiū Gāthā (Y 47–50): $4 \times$ the Uštauuaitī type

spəntā mainiiū | vahištācā manaŋhā (Y 47.1.a)

- d. Vohuxšaθrā Gāthā (Y 51): $3 \times (7 + 7)$

vohū xšaθrēm vairīm | bāgēm aibī.bairištēm (Y 51.1.a)

- e. Vahištōišti Gāthā (Y 53): roughly $2 \times (7 + 5)$ followed by $2 \times (7 + 7 + 5)$

vahištā ūtiš srāuuī | zaraθuštrahē ...

ašāt̄ hacā ahurō | mazdā yauuōi vīspāi.ā | huuaŋhēuuīm

OAv. metre: traditional assumption

- Previous research assumed that heavy and lights syllables should be counted as in Vedic and Greek:
 - Heavy: V.C or V.C.C
 - Light: V.C
- Results in lack of recognisable patterns in the alternation

Elfsilbler

(Avestisch $\times \times \times \times | \times \times \times \times \asymp \asymp \times \|$ $< \times \times \times \times | \asymp \asymp \times \times \times \times \|?$)

Vedisch $\times \circ \asymp \circ | \circ \circ \circ - \circ - \times \|$

$\times \circ \asymp \circ \times | \asymp \circ - \circ - \times \|$

Griechisch $- \circ - \times - \circ \circ - \circ - \times \|$

OAv. metre according to M. Kümmel (1)

- Hypothesis: OAv. syllabification closer to “Sogdian model” than to Vedic
 - VTC (T = obstruent) → counts as one mora (“light syllable”): e.g. $\text{V.} \theta r$, $\text{V.} pt$, $\text{V.} xt$, $\text{V.} str$ usw.
 - VrC , VNC → two morae (“heavy”)
- Results in a much higher number of potentially light syllables in the OAv. corpus
- Emergence of some preferred patterns, e.g. in 11-syllable (4 + 7) line:
 - Closing sequence u u x
 - iambic pattern (u – u –) in four syllables before caesura
- Certain tendencies in the metre become even stronger if the “light” reading of VTC is merely optional

Kümmel, Martin Joachim. 2017. Silbenstruktur und Metrik: Neues zum Altavestischen. In Hackstein, Olav & Gunkel, Dieter (eds.), *Language and Meter* (Brill's Studies in Indo-European Languages & Linguistics 18), 129–157. Leiden – Boston: Boston.

OAv. metre according to M. Kümmel (3)

Y. 44,3 *taṭ. ṯβā. pərəsā. ərəš.mōi. vaocā. ahurā.
 kasnā. zqθā. +ptā. ašahiiā. +paouruiiō.
 kasnā. x^vəng. +strəmcā. dāt. aduuānəm.
 kā. yā. mā. uxšiieitī. nərəfsaitī. ṯβat̄.
 tācīt̄. mazdā. vasəmī. aniiācā. vīduiie.*

ta_μ.t ḡwā_{μμ}. pə_μ.rsa_μ. | ə_μ.rš may_{μμ}. waw_{μμ}.ca_μ. a_μ.hu_μ.ra_μ. ||
 ka_μ.snā_{μμ}. zan_{μμ}.θā_{μμ}. | ptā_μ. ə_μ.rta_μ.hya_μ. pa_μ.rwi_μ.yə_μ.h ||
 ka_μ.snā_{μμ}. hu_μ.wəŋ_{μμ}.h | stra_μ.am_{μμ}.ca_μ. dā_{μμ}.t a_μ.dwā_{μμ}.nə_μm_μ. ||
 kə_μ.h yā_{μμ}. ma_μ.ā_{μμ}.h | u_μ.xšya_μ.ti_μ. nə_μ.rfsa_μ.ti_μ. ḡwa_μ.t ||
 tā_{μμ}.ci_μ.t ma_μ.zdā_{μμ}. | wa_μ.smi_μ. a_μ.nyā_{μμ}.ca_μ. wi_μ.dwa_{μμ}y_μ. ||

VT.C --, √√ | --, -√, √√ ×
 --, -- | √, √-√, -√ ×
 --, √- | √-√, -, -- ×
 -, √- | -√√, -√-, ×
 --, -- | -√, --√, - ×

V.TC √, -, √√ | √-, -√, √√ ×
 √-, -- | √, √√√, √√ ×
 √-, √- | √-√, -, √- ×
 -, √- | √√√, √√√, ×
 -√, √- | √√, √-√, √ ×

V.T.C √-, √√ | √-, -√, √√ ×
 √-, -- | √, √-√, √√ ×
 √-, √- | √-√, -, √- ×
 -, √- | √√√, -√√, ×
 -√, √- | √√, √-√, √ ×

Old Avestan vs. Young Avestan (phonology)

- (6) Frequent lengthening of ə to $\bar{\text{ə}}$. If lengthened or not may depend on the passage at hand, it is not a strict rule.
- (7) A variety of vowels incl. ə , $\bar{\text{ə}}$, i , a , $\bar{\text{o}}$, u can serve as “anaptytic vowels” (vowels inserted into groups of consonants) — in YAv. it is mostly ə and i . Generally, anaptytic vowels are more frequent in OAv. than in YAv.
- (8) Acc.pl. ending of a-stems: Proto-Iranian *-anh > YAv. - \bar{a} , - $\bar{\bar{a}}$, but OAv. - $\bar{ə}ŋ$
- (9) Proto-Iranian *du- > YAv. $\ddot{\text{t}}\text{b}$ -, but OAv. duu- and daib- (before i)
- (10) Different representation of consonant groups involving Indo-Iranian *-s- (Proto-Iranian *-h-):

Iir.	*-asa-	*-ansa-	*-asia-	*-asua-	*-asra-
YAv.	- <i>aŋha-</i>	- <i>aŋha-</i>	- <i>aŋha-</i>	- <i>aŋ^vha-</i>	- <i>aŋ(h)ra-</i>
OAv.	- <i>aŋha-</i>	- <i>aŋha-</i>	- <i>ahia-</i> - <i>áxiiā-</i>	- <i>ahuua-</i> - <i>ax^va</i> ¹⁵	- <i>ngr-</i>

Martínez-Porro, Jaime. 2015. The Indo-Iranian group *sr/a_a in the Avestan manuscripts. *Estudios Iranios y Turanios* 2. 151–162.

- (11) “Bartholomae’s Law” retained more consistently in OAv.:
PIE *h₁e^wg^h-to > Iir. *a^wg^h-ta > OAv. aōg^ədā, but YAv. aōxta ‘said’ with restitution of -ta-.

The Gāthās and Zaraθuštra (1)

Association between Gāthās and Zaraθuštra in Young Avesta:

- Y.57 – “the five Gāthās of Zaraθuštra” first recited in the material world by the god Sraōša:

[sraōšō] yō paōiriiō gāθā frasrāuuaiiāt yā pañca spitāmahe ašaōnō zaraθuštrahe

- Y9.1 (Hōm Stōd):

zaraθuštrēm ... gāθāsca srāuuaiiāntēm

- Specific link with the OAv. *Ahuna Vairiia* formula:

tūm paōiriiō zaraθuštra ahunəm vairīm frasrāuuaiiō

- V.19.10: Gāthic refrain verse (Y44) placed in Z.’s mouth

frāmraōt̄ ašauua zaraθuštrō tat̄ ϑβā pərəsā arš mē vaōca ahura

The Gāthās and Zaraθuštra (2)

But:

- No “author” mentioned in the texts themselves. A figure *zaraθuštra-* sometimes speaks in first person, sometimes is mentioned in the third.
- No explicitly claimed “authorship” in Young Avesta either.
- Z. as a mythical, semi-divine figure that precedes the creation of the material world (Y.19)
- Idea of the “creation” of the Staōta Yesñiia (which include the Gāthās) by Ahura Mazdā: Y55 *yaθa hīš fradaθat mazdā*
- Gāthās themselves object of veneration (e.g., at the end of the recitation of each Gāthā, Vidēvdād 19.38 etc.).
- No mention of Gāthās in Pahlavi passages about Z.

Good summary on the topic: Jamison, Stephanie Wroth. 2007. *The Rgveda between two worlds. Le Rgveda entre deux mondes. Quatre conférences au Collège de France en mai 2004*. Paris: de Boccard.