

On the literary structure of the Older Avesta

ALMUT HINTZE
School of Oriental and African Studies

*To Johanna Narten
on the occasion of her 70th birthday
on 5 October 2000.*

Introduction

The religion of pre-Islamic Iran, Zoroastrianism, is rightly regarded as one of the oldest, or indeed the oldest religion inaugurated by a prophet. Like other religions, it emphasizes the importance of the prophet's words, which are believed to be preserved in the Zoroastrian sacred scriptures, the Avesta. Owing to their age, these texts not only constitute the oldest documents in any Iranian language, but they also number among the oldest literature in any Indo-European language.

These texts have survived to the present day thanks to the efforts of Zoroastrian priests, who transmitted them from generation to generation first in a purely oral tradition and then, probably from the late Sasanian period onwards, in written form as well. Indeed, to this day, memorizing and reciting the texts forms part of the daily devotional practice even of Zoroastrian lay people. Substantial parts of the Kusti prayers, for instance, are passages from the Avesta.¹

The prominence of the Avesta in priestly and devotional practice is even more remarkable when one considers that, as a language, it ceased to be spoken long ago, and is now little, or, at best, imperfectly understood. And yet, in order for a Zoroastrian to pray in an effective manner, he or she must do so in Avestan. One of the reasons for this is that spiritual power is believed to be inherent in words uttered in that language,² because it was in Avestan that the prophet of Ancient Iran, Zaratuštra, received his revelation and formulated it for his followers.

Of course, we know today that not all of the extant Avesta was composed by Zaratuštra. But the view that he is the author of the Gathas goes back to the Avesta itself. The Younger Avesta refers to 'the Gathas of Zaratuštra' (Y 57.8), and even at that time they were five in number (Y 71.6). Both the Avesta and the Pahlavi literature are steeped in the belief that these five Gathas are the work of Zaratuštra, the prophet and founder of the new religion named after him.

When in the nineteenth century Martin Haug made his ground-breaking discovery that, rather than the entire Avesta, only the Gathas were likely to have been composed by Zaratuštra, he did not take into account the Yasna Haptañhāiti (YH), a worship text consisting of seven chapters. Indeed, in general, this text was regarded as being considerably later than the Gathas, and was thought to be close to the rather monotonous *yazamaide*-litanies of the Younger Avesta. As a result, both Zoroastrian and Western scholars have focused on the Gathas as the only 'words of the prophet'. It was only in 1986 that the German philologist Johanna Narten published a monograph on the Yasna Haptañhāiti showing conclusively that its language is the same as that

¹ Cf. Boyce, 1992: 83–7.

² For example, a power to smite evil, as exercised when saying the Kusti prayers.

of the Gathas, and arguing that the minor lexical differences between them can best be attributed to their different literary styles: while the Gathas are hymnic poetry, the Yasna Haptañhāiti is liturgical rhythmic prose.³ It seems that the YH exhibits a type of literature structured not—as the Gathas—by a syllable-counting metre but by a variety of rhythmic patterns. Both the rhythmic patterns and the rhetorical figures follow an inherited model of traditional liturgical recitation for which parallels have been found not only in Vedic, but also in Early Latin and Umbrian prayers and liturgy, Old Irish invocation and Old Hittite funeral verses.⁴

Most importantly, Narten has suggested that Zaraθuštra is probably to be regarded as the author not only of the Gathas, but also of the YH, and that in any case the YH must be considered as an authentic document of the earliest form of liturgical worship in Mazdayasnanism. It originates either from the prophet himself or from the circle close to him in both space and time.

Not only are the Gathas of the same, Old Avestan, dialect, but so too are the Yasna Haptañhāiti and two holy prayers, the Ahuna Vairya and the Airyaman Išya. This small body of literature—seventeen hymns, two prayers and a short liturgical text—constitutes all that has survived in the language likely to have been spoken in the days of Zaraθuštra. The Old Avestan texts comprise, as Mary Boyce has put it, ‘a single solid rock’ within the Yasna liturgy. Only two sections in Younger Avestan, Y 42 and 52, have been added in the later period, together with one initial stanza at the beginning of the YH (Y 35.1) and two at the end (Y 41.7–8).

The idea that Zaraθuštra is the author of the Yasna Haptañhāiti has been gaining ground since the 1930s. It was suggested briefly by the Danish scholar Kaj Barr, although we do not know the reasons for his conclusion. Later, Ilya Gershevitch thought it possible ‘that at least some of its chapters (perhaps Y 35, 36, 40, 41) were community prayers which Zaraθuštra himself had composed’.⁵ Johanna Narten reached similar conclusions, basing her arguments essentially on language, idiom and theological ideas. In her Columbia lectures, Mary Boyce, too, put forward the view that Zaraθuštra could well be the author of the YH. This would be indicated by: the literary presentation of the YH as part of the very small Old Avestan corpus; by its huge importance, comparable to that of the Gathas; and finally by the fact that the YH seemed designed to meet the needs of the young Zoroastrian community for a fixed form of formal worship.⁶

However, the broader implications of these conclusions have not yet been fully appreciated. If the Yasna Haptañhāiti gives us an idea of Mazdayasnan worship at the time of Zaraθuštra, how does the extant arrangement of the sacred texts relate to this? The Old Avestan texts are arranged in such a way that there are two sacred prayers, one at the beginning and the other at the

³ Terminologically to be preferred is Watkins’ (1995: 276) distinction between ‘two styles of liturgy, metrical hymnic and non-metrical rhythmic/syntactic’, both of equal antiquity and different from narrative prose as a literary form.

It is indicative that earlier editions of the oldest Avestan texts, such as those by Humbach, 1959 and Insler, 1975, contain the Gathas only, while those published after Narten’s 1986 edition, in particular Kellens and Pirart, *TVA* and Humbach, 1991, include in addition the YH and the holy prayers.

⁴ Watkins, 1995: 229–38, 276. Cf. also Narten’s summary of rhetorical figures, *YH* 21–3

⁵ Gershevitch, 1968: 18.

⁶ Boyce, 1992: 87–9. Kellens (1991: 19f., 66f.) and Kellens and Pirart, 1989: 39, accept that the YH is more or less contemporaneous with the Gathas, and conclude that the minor lexical, grammatical and ideological differences and the lack of Zaraθuštra’s name in the YH would prove (‘démontrent’) that the YH does not originate from the same religious milieu as the Gathas but comes from a different Mazdayasnan school, of which Zaraθuštra was not the initiator (‘chef de file’).

end, framing one Gatha, the YH, and four more Gathas. Is such an arrangement deliberate? Or is it a purely mechanical one, in which seventeen Gathic hymns are arranged schematically into five groups according to metre? Finally, how old is it?

In what follows, I will approach these questions from three different angles. First we shall examine the Younger Avestan evidence for the extant arrangement of the Older Avesta. Second, we shall look at the compositional structure of the Gathas to see whether there is any internal evidence indicating that the present sequence was the original one, as laid out by their author. Third, we shall investigate the ritual meaning of the position of the Yasna Haptaṅhāiti amidst the Gathas.

1. *The YAv. evidence for the arrangement of the OAv. texts*

The concentric structure of the Old Avestan texts is perhaps the most salient feature of their arrangement. The Yasna Haptaṅhāiti is inserted between the first Gatha, the Ahunavaitī, and the second, the Uštavaitī Gatha.

1.1. *Visperad*

One of the Younger Avestan texts, the Visperad, contains evidence indicating that, by the time of its composition, the Gathas were already arranged in the sequence in which we have them today. In the first chapter of the Visperad, Vr 1.4–8, prayer and worship are dedicated to, among others, the venerable Old Avestan texts. The latter are listed individually, starting with the Ahuna Vairya, the Aša Vahišta and Yeǰhē Hātām-prayers (Vr 1.4), followed by the Ahunavaitī Gatha, the Yasna Haptaṅhāiti (Vr 1.5), the Uštavaitī, Spētā.mainyu (Vr 1.6), Vohuxšaθrā and Vahištoišti (Vr 1.7) Gathas, and ending with the Airyaman Iša-prayer (Vr 1.8). This list agrees exactly with the sequence in which the Older Avestan texts are arranged in our extant Yasna.⁷ One might object here that such a list could be composed at any time, since it consists of repeated formulas in which only the names of the individual texts are substituted and which could therefore have been easily recorded at any time. However, the fact that the same order is also found in other passages, not only of the Visperad, but also of the Videvdad, indicates that the order of the list is meaningful.

1.2. *Videvdad*

In chapter x of the Videvdad, Zaraθuštra asks his god, Ahura Mazdā, how he can ward off the ‘the demon of the corpse’, the *nasu*, which, coming from a dead body, pollutes the living ones. Ahura Mazdā’s answer is that he can do so by reciting those verses from the Gathas which are to be recited twice, three and four times (Vd 10.2). When Zaraθuštra asks which those verses are, Ahura Mazdā quotes them one by one. The verses to be recited twice are Y 28.1, 35.2, 35.8, 39.4, 41.3, 41.5, 43.1, 47.1, 51.1 and 53.1 (Vd 10.4), those to be recited three times are Y 27.14, 33.11, 35.5 and 53.9 (Vd 10.8) and the ones to be recited four times are Y 27.13, 34.15, 54.1 (Vd 10.12).

The fact that the sequence in which the stanzas are referred to coincides exactly with that of the extant Yasna is important for our argument here. This is all the more striking since the verses quoted from the YH, namely Y 35.8, Y 39.4, Y 41.3 and 5 in Vd 10.4 and Y 35.5 in Vd 10.8, are not initial stanzas,

⁷ Cf. Kellens, 1996: 98f., 100f.: ‘l’Avesta ancien de l’auteur des premiers chapitres du Visprad est très exactement celui de la Vulgate, avec la position centrale du Yasna Haptaṅhāiti, la mise en exergue des trois prières introductives et celle en point d’orgue d’une quatrième.’

unlike Y 35.2 and most of those from the Gathas (except Y 33.11 in Vd 10.8 and Y 34.15 in Vd 10.12). Rather they are internal verses, and hence less prominent. Moreover, in accordance with the liturgical instructions given in the manuscripts, these stanzas are indeed to be recited twice, three and four times when the Yasna ceremony is celebrated, a practice which also survives in contemporary ritual.⁸ This suggests that the composer(s) of this Videvdad passage had the text of the Yasna in mind, and that such a text was apparently the same as that which is recited today. Quoting passages from the Older Avesta in this order is only understandable if, by the time this chapter was composed, the order of the Yasna liturgy as we know it today was already in existence. Therefore, we can conclude that the arrangement of the Old Avestan parts of the Yasna at the time of the Videvdad must have been the same as that in our extant Yasna.

The sequence in which Gathic stanzas are mentioned in the Visperad and Videvdad suggests that by the time these Younger Avestan texts were composed, the Gathas, YH and holy prayers were arranged according to a concentric pattern, with the Yasna Haptaṅhāiti preceded by the Ahunavaitī Gatha and followed by four more Gathas. The whole arrangement is introduced and concluded by two of the most widely used prayers, the Ahuna Vairya and the Airyaman Iša. By the time the Videvdad passage mentioned above was composed, the other two sacred prayers, the Aṣəm Vohū and the Yeṛjhē Hātām, whose language is not unequivocally Old Avestan, had already been inserted between the Ahuna Vairya and the first hymn of the Ahunavaitī Gatha.⁹

1.3. *Scholarly debate about the arrangement of the Gathas*

However, we may wonder how much older than the Younger Avestan period this arrangement might be. Could it possibly go back to Old Avestan times, and perhaps even to the composer himself? The only clue available comes from the Gathas themselves. Does the compositional structure of the Older Avestan texts provide any internal evidence to show that the actual sequence was intended from the outset?

The question of the arrangement of the Gathas has been much debated. Some scholars, e.g. Duchesne-Guillemin,¹⁰ maintained that the sequence in which the Gathas have come down to the present day is not original, while others, e.g. Marijan Molé, have attempted to justify the existing order as authentic.¹¹ Following Molé, Kellens concludes that each of the five Gathas forms an organic whole. The subdivision into Hāiti, however, would be the work of an ‘arrangeur’ who subdivided this ‘unité organique’ according to a numerical principle.¹² Helmut Humbach has observed that because of their ‘extraordinary complexity’, Y 28.1 and 51.22 could have been designed as the opening and concluding stanzas of the first four Gathas. He infers that ‘it is therefore not impossible that the purely formal arrangement of the hymns according to their respective metres reflects the original order of composition as planned by the prophet himself’. However, in contrast to Kellens, he does not find ‘thematic, moral or other progression’ in the development of thought throughout any given Gatha.¹³

⁸ Oral communication by Dastur Dr F. M. Kotwal. Also, according to Nērangestān, ch. 16–18, these stanzas are to be recited two, three and four times respectively, see Kotwal and Kreyenbroek, 1995: 99–101.

⁹ On the holy prayers, cf. below section 2.4 with n.29.

¹⁰ Duchesne-Guillemin, 1953a préface, 1953b.

¹¹ Molé, 1963. Cf. Kellens, 1991: 58f.

¹² Kellens and Pirart *TVA* 1, 16; Kellens, 1991: 57–9 (=2000: 80–83).

¹³ Humbach, 1991 r: 5. Cf. 1959 i, 13–5.

2. Cross-references between the Gathic hymns

Leaving aside the debate about the question of a linear development of thought, let us see whether there are any stylistic features which might suggest that the sequence of the Old Avestan texts as they are arranged in the Yasna liturgy follows a structural principle. Of particular importance for our question are cross-references not only between the individual hymns of a single Gatha but also from one Gatha to another.

Such cross-references would strongly support the view that the Gathas are the work of an individual, rather than of an anonymous collective. The latter has been suggested by some scholars, in particular Jean Kellens. He argues that, with one minor exception (Y 43.5–15), Zaraϑuštra could not be the ‘I’ of the Gathas because in the vast majority of the sixteen¹⁴ attestations of this name, the speaker (‘I’) switches to the third person: ‘il cesse de parler de lui-même à la première personne dès qu’il prononce son nom’.¹⁵ It would, moreover, be strange that Zaraϑuštra, if he were the ‘I’, should address himself in the vocative (Y 46.14). Since there are more vocatives of other names in the following stanzas (46.15–17), it would seem rather that the singer addresses a list of (somewhat remote?) characters of the Gathic world, beginning with Zaraϑuštra and continuing with the Haēcaṭ.aspa Spitāma (Y 46.15), Frašaoštra (Y 46.16) and Dəjāmāspa (Y 46.17). As the text gives no indication that, after addressing Zaraϑuštra in the vocative, the word was passed on to him again, Kellens rules out the interpretation that five other attestations¹⁶ of Zaraϑuštra’s name are pronounced by the prophet himself. Arguably Kellens’ strongest argument¹⁷ is that there are three passages where Zaraϑuštra’s name is contrasted with ‘I’ or ‘we’, particularly in Y 28.6 ‘to Zaraϑuštra and to us’.

While not questioning the role of Zaraϑuštra as the founder of the religion bearing his name, Kellens separates the founder of the religion from the composer(s) of the Gathas. In his opinion, the Gathas are neither the work of Zaraϑuštra nor that of an individual, but rather the collective ‘emanation of the mentality’ of a religious group, the ‘Gathic circle’, for whom Zaraϑuštra was already somewhat remote and had acquired a status close to divinity as a result of his reform of the ritual.¹⁸

However, the argument that Zaraϑuštra cannot be the author because the ‘I’ switches to the third person when mentioning Zaraϑuštra’s name is not conclusive. There are parallels in the R̥gveda, which Kellens does not discuss: the Vedic singer, too, refers to himself in the third person, mentioning his personal name, and switching quite freely to the first or second person. The name of the composer of a given hymn is usually clearly indicated. For example, at the beginning of his hymn, the singer Vasiṣṭha exhorts himself to extol Indra with praises, reassuring himself that Indra will listen to the hymn ‘of one such as me’ (my italics in the translation):

¹⁴ Kellens, 1991: 62 (=2000: 85) and Kellens and Pirart, *TVA* I, 17 refers to only fifteen attestations. However, in Kellens and Pirart’s list, *TVA* II, 321, one passage, Y 43.16, is missing. Of the sixteen Gathic attestations of Zaraϑuštra’s name, six are in the nominative (Y 29.8, 33.14, 43.8, 43.16, 50.6, 51.15), three in the genitive (Y 53.1, 53.3, 54.1), four in the dative (Y 28.6, 46.19, 49.12, 51.11), two in the accusative (Y 46.13, 51.12), and one in the vocative (Y 46.14).

¹⁵ Kellens and Pirart, *TVA* I, 18.

¹⁶ These are two attestations of Zaraϑuštra’s name in Y 46.13 and 19 (in Kellens and Pirart, *TVA* I, 18, line 11, from below, ‘43.13,19’ must be an error for ‘46.13,19’) and three in Y 51, which is parallel to Y 46, see on the parallel structure of the two hymns (Hintze, 2000: 46–8 and 46 n.97).

¹⁷ Kellens and Pirart *TVA* I, 18: ‘Il ya a plus grave encore ...’, Kellens, 1991: 63: ‘Enfin et surtout ...’, 1994: 155 n.1.

¹⁸ Kellens and Pirart, *TVA* I, 18–22, 32–6; Kellens, 1994: 154f.

RV 7.23.1 *úd u bráhmāṇy airata śravasyéndraṁ samaryé mahayā vasiṣṭha / ā yó viśvāni śavasā tatānopaśrotā ma īvato vácāṁsi //*

The formulations rose up, desiring fame. Extol Indra in the contest, *O Vasiṣṭha!* The one who has spread out with might over everything listens to the words of *one such as me*.¹⁹

It would be paradoxical to claim that the vocative *vasiṣṭha* in pāda b would not refer to the same person as the *ma īvato* ‘of one such as me’ in pāda d. In the final stanza of the same hymn, the singer switches to the third person plural, mentioning again the name of the family whose name he bears, and then to the first plural:

RV 7.23.6 *evéd indraṁ vṛṣaṇaṁ vājrabāhuṁ vasiṣṭhāso abhy ārcanty arkaiḥ / sā na stutó vīravad dhātu gómad ... //*

Thus *the Vasiṣṭhas* praise with praises Indra, the bull, who holds the club in his arms. Being celebrated, he shall bestow *on us* abundance of heroes, abundance of cows!

Even if one allows for the view that ‘us’ in pāda c could also include the patron on whose behalf Vasiṣṭha performs the ritual, it most probably includes the singer too, although he has, in pāda a, just referred to himself in the third person. After all, if the speaker wants to identify himself, one way to do so is by using the third person.²⁰

Moreover, there is one Gathic attestation, Y 46.19, eliminated by Kellens as ‘passage obscur’,²¹ where the ‘I’ identifies himself as Zaraṅuṣtra:

Y 46.19 *yē mōi aṣāt haiṅīm hacā varāṣaitī / zaraṅuṣtrāi hīiaṭ vasnā fēraṣōtēmam*

Who, on the basis of truth, will make real for me,
Zaraṅuṣtra, what is most wonderful at will.²²

2.1. The name of Zaraṅuṣtra

I shall discuss Kellens’ main argument—the expression ‘to Zaraṅuṣtra and to us’ in Y 28.6—in section 3.2. below. Let us now return to the question of cross-references between Gathas. There is indeed evidence indicating that the sequential ordering of the Gathas is deliberate, with intertextual cross-references both forward and back.²³

Let us take, for example, the name of Zaraṅuṣtra. His name occurs exactly in the middle of the eleven stanzas of Y 28, the first hymn of the entire cycle:

¹⁹ On the syntactic function of the agent noun *upaśrutár-* cf. Tichy, 1995: 190: ‘In zeitstufenlosen Aussagen mit Bezug zur 1. Person bezeichnen Bildungen wie *dātár-* eine situationsgebundene Wirkung des angerufenen Gottes, die speziell den Menschen zugute kommt, die während der Rezitation des Liedes versammelt sind. Auf diese Weise gibt der Dichter zu erkennen, daß er auch und gerade in der aktuellen Situation mit der betreffende Wirkung rechnet’.

²⁰ There are numerous other instances in the RV where the singer addresses himself, giving his own name in the vocative and exhorting himself to praise the divinity, e.g. RV 8.75.6 *tāsmāi nūnām abhidyave vācā virūpa nītyayā / vṛṣne codasva sustutīm //* ‘Now incite the praise for this heavenly bull through your own speech, O Virūpa!’. Self-address is particularly common in initial stanzas, e.g. RV 5.52.1 *prā śyāvāśva dhṛṣṇuyārcā marúdbhīr íkvabhīḥ / ‘O Śyāvāśva, sing courageously together with the singing Marút!’; 7.88.1 prā śundhyūvaṁ vārunāya prēṣṭhām matīm vasiṣṭha mīlhūse bharasva / ‘Bring, O Vasiṣṭha, a shining, dearest hymn to bounteous Varuṇa!’.*

²¹ Kellens, 1991: 63 (=2000, 86).

²² Kellens and Pirart (*TVA* 1, 164) interpret the enclitic *mōi* not as a dative, agreeing with *zaraṅuṣtrāi*, but as a genitive, and translate: ‘Celui qui accomplit au bénéfice de Zaraṅuṣtra mon (acte) culturel harmonieux, qui est très plantureux ...’, rendering *haiṅīm* as ‘culturel’.

²³ Schwartz, 1991, 1998.

Y 28.6 *vohū gaidī manahā dāidī + ašā + dā darəgāiū*
ərəšuuāiš tū uxδāiš mazdā zaraθuštrāi aojōnghuuat rafənō
ahmaibiiācā ahurā yā daibišuuatō duuaēšā tauruuaiāmā

Come with a good mind! Grant through truth the gift of long life!
 For exalted words, O Wise one, (grant) a strong support to Zaraθuštra
 And to us, O Lord, so that thereby we shall overcome the hostilities of
 the enemy!

It is also found in one of the two central stanzas of the opening hymn of the second Gatha, which consists of 16 stanzas:

Y 43.8 *aṭ hōi aoji zaraθuštrō paouruuīm*
haiθiō duuaēšā hiiat isōiā drəguuāitē
aṭ ašāunē rafənō xiiēm aojōnghuuat
hiiat ā būštīš vasasə.xšaθrahiā dīā
yauuat ā θβā mazdā stāumī ufiācā

And I said to him: ‘Zaraθuštra, first,
 A real enemy to the deceitful one, as much as I may be able.
 I could be a powerful support to the truthful one
 If I acquired the faculties of one who rules at will
 While I praise and eulogize you, O Wise one.

Moreover, Zaraθuštra’s name is also found both in the centre of the concluding hymn of the third Gatha, Y 50 (11 stanzas), and in that of the fourth one, Y 51 (22 stanzas), which constitutes a Gatha in its own right:²⁴

Y 50.6 *yē mąθrā vācim mazdā baraitī*
uruuaθō ašā nēmanhā zaraθuštrō
dātā xratēuš hizuuō raiθīm stōi
mahiā rāzēng vohū sāhīt manahā

The mantrist who raises his voice
 Is an ally of truth with reverence: Zaraθuštra.
 May the giver of intellect teach (me) with good thinking
 To be the charioteer of the direction of my tongue.

Y 51.11 *kē uruuāθō spitāmāi zaraθuštrāi nā mazdā*
kē vā ašā āfraštā kā spəntā ārmaitiš
kē vā vaṅhēuš manahō acistā magāi ərəšuuō

Which (is the) man (who) is an ally to Spitāma Zaraθuštra, O Wise one?
 Or who has consulted with Truth, with whom (has consulted) Bounteous
 Right-mindedness?
 Or which lofty one has made himself known for the gift of a good mind?

Y 51.12 *nōiṭ tā īm xšnāuš vaēpiiō kəuuinō pəratō zəmə*
zaraθuštrəm spitāməm hiiat ahmī urūraost aštō
hiiat hōi īm caratascā aodərəščā zōišənū vāzā

That Kavi Vaēpya did not welcome him, Zaraθuštra Spitāma, at the bridge
 in winter,
 But blocked him when he had arrived there,
 When (he blocked) him and his two draught beasts shivering from travel
 and from cold.

²⁴ Schwartz, 1991: 130.

Thus, the two initial and the two final hymns of the first four Gathas have the name of Zaratuštra at their centre. This is unlikely to be by chance. It is more probable that the name of the prophet was deliberately placed at the centre of the opening and concluding hymns in order to underline his central and decisive role. If such is the case, Y 28 and 43 must always have been the opening hymns of the first two Gathas and Y 50 and 51 the concluding ones of Gatha 3 and 4 (the latter, however, consisting of one hymn only).

2.2. *The teachings of the two primordial spirits*

Correspondences can also be observed between the third hymn of each of the first two Gathas, i.e. Y 30 and 45, the famous hymns about the two primordial spirits. Both of them follow a structural pattern in which

1. the singer's wish to proclaim his teachings (Y 30.1, 45.1–6 as a refrain), is followed
2. by his request to be listened to (30.2, 45.1), and
3. by his message about the beginnings of existence and its primordial principles (Y 30.3–6, 45.2–6).

The teachings of the two primordial spirits, central to Gathic theology, are thus placed in two corresponding hymns of the first two Gathas and exhibit a parallel structure.²⁵

2.3. *'Making life excellent' (fraša-)*

Another structural feature shared by the first three Gathas is their conclusion. It has long been noted that their final stanzas contain the wish that life may be made excellent (Y 34.15), or that 'what is most excellent according to wish' may be made real (Y 46.19, 50.11).²⁶ The key Avestan word here is *fraša-*, which by Young Avestan times definitely belongs to the eschatological vocabulary. There it forms part of the technical term *frašō.kərəti*, roughly 'making excellent' or 'wonderful' (vel sim.), which denotes the perfecting of the world after the complete removal of evil. The use of this word at the end of the first three Gathas could be interpreted as a stylistic feature in which the poetry itself symbolizes, in an iconic manner, the desired and expected final state of perfection.

2.4. *The Holy Prayers*

Scholars have noted that the Ahuna Vairya prayer is in reality the first stanza of the first, Ahunavaitī Gatha (Y 28–34), and the Airyaman Iša prayer the final one of the last Gatha, Y 53.²⁷ This is indicated in their metre; the Ahuna Vairya is composed in the metre of the Ahunavaitī Gatha, and the Airyaman Iša prayer in that of the last, Vahištoišti, Gatha. Moreover, the name of the Ahunavaitī Gatha derives from the Ahuna Vairya prayer. This suggests that the Ahuna Vairya has always been the opening prayer of the Old Avestan texts as arranged in the Yasna liturgy, and the Airyaman Iša the last, concluding, one.

²⁵ The same structure has also been found in other Indo-European poetic traditions, especially in Vedic and Germanic poetry, and is therefore most probably from a common heritage, see Schaefer, 1940.

²⁶ Observed by Molé, 1963: 181; cf. Humbach, 1959 I: 51–2; 1991 I: 91f.; Kellens and Pirart, *TVA* I: 14. The exact meaning of *fraša* is debated and its etymology is not entirely clear, see Narten, *YH*: 200–03; Hintze, 1994: 106f. In general terms, *fraša-* refers, so it seems, to the 'evil-free' condition of life.

²⁷ Kellens, 1996: 101 n. 44; Kellens and Pirart, *TVA* III: 14f. and 277. The other two prayers are later additions: see Kellens, 1994: 119–21.

The other two holy prayers, the Aṣəm Vohū and the Yeṛhē Hātaṃ, are composed on the basis of the first stanza after the Yasna Haptaṅhāiti, Y 43.1, and the last stanza of Y 51, Y 51.22, respectively. This indicates that the stanzas on which the two later holy prayers are based had their respective initial and final position at the time these prayers were composed.

2.5. *The Gathas as oral compositions*

Although it is possible to cite more examples of cross-references between Gathas, the four mentioned above should suffice to support the view that a deliberate poetic craft is at work, cross-referring between hymns and thus recalling central themes at pivotal points. Key words in prominent positions, such as Zaraṅuštra's name in the central stanzas of four out of five Gathas, or the reference to 'making life excellent' at the end of the first three Gathas, must have had some function for the listeners. Expressing notions central to the message, they probably served as signposts.

The poetic device of placing the major theme in the middle of the hymn belongs to the technique of ring composition. This denotes the symmetrical arrangement of a hymn in concentric circles around a point,²⁸ whereby, as Mary Douglas put it with regard to the Book of Numbers in the Pentateuch, 'the turn matches the beginning, and so does the very end'.²⁹ This implies, moreover, that the stanzas ascending from the beginning to the centre and the ones descending from the centre to the end constitute matching pairs. For example, in a hymn comprising eleven stanzas, stanza 1 corresponds to stanza 11, 2 to 10, 3 to 9, 4 to 8, etc. This stylistic device is called parallelism and it is a common feature of ring composition.

Detailed studies on the composition of individual Gathic hymns, carried out in particular by Hanns-Peter Schmidt and Martin Schwartz, indicate that they possess such a symmetrical structure. Schwartz has convincingly argued that most, if not all, Gathic hymns are ring compositions. They share the characteristic pattern of radial concentricity in which stanzas are arranged symmetrically with respect to those at the centre of the hymn. The middle stanzas correlate with the first and the last, and, in the words of Martin Schwartz, 'frequently condense a major theme of the poem'.³⁰

The technique of ring composition belongs to the culture of oral poetry in which the entire Avesta is deeply rooted. Moreover, the care with which signposts are placed supports the view that initially the Gathas were composed in order to be understood. Only in the later, post-Gathic, period did the language fall out of use and gradually become obsolete.

2.6. *Yasna 28 as an example of ring composition*

Let us take one of the Gathic hymns, Yasna 28, as an example. This opens the entire cycle of the Gathas within the liturgical arrangement of the Yasna. It consists of eleven stanzas:

1. With veneration and hands outstretched I ask all (of you) for actions of his help,
O Wise one, first (*pouruuīm*) (for the help) of the bounteous spirit

²⁸ In such a way that 'the poem, as it draws near its close, turns upon its tracks and retroverses step by step various elements of its previous course', see Schmidt, 1968: 187.

²⁹ Douglas, 1993: 117.

³⁰ Schwartz, 1998: 133.

(*spənta- mainiiu-*), by which you may listen through truth
To the intellect of good mind and to the Soul of the Cow.

2. I want to surround you, O Wise Lord, with good mind
(Entreating you) to grant me the attainments (*āiiapta-*) of both lives, of the
corporeal and of the one of the spirit,
On the basis of truth, (the attainments) by which one might place one's friends
into well-being.

3. In an unprecedented (*apaouruuīm*) (way), I want to praise (*ufiānī*) you,
O truth, and good mind
And the Wise Lord, to (all of) whom right-mindedness (*ārmaiti-*) increases
(Strength) and unfading rule (*xšaθra-*). Come to my calls for support!

4. For the song, I pay attention, with good mind, to the soul
And to the rewards (*ašī-*) for the actions, knowing of the Wise Lord.
As much as I can and am able (*yauuat isāi tauuācā*), so long shall I look
out in the quest for truth.

5. O truth, shall I see you and good mind as I am finding
For the strongest Lord, the Wise one (*ahurāi səuuīštāi ... mazdāi*), a
pathway and hearkening
(Which is) greatest through the following formulation (*mąθra-*): 'May
we ward off the noxious creatures with the tongue!'

6. Come with good mind! Grant through truth the gift of long life
(*darəgāiiu-*)!

For exalted words, O Wise one, (grant) a strong support to
Zaraθuštra (*zaraθuštrāi*)
And to us (*ahmaibiiācā*), O Lord, so that thereby we shall overcome
the hostilities of the enemy!

7. Grant, O truth, this reward (*ašī-*), the attainments (*āiiapta-*) of good
mind!

Grant you, O Ārmaiti, strength to Vištāspa and to me (*vīštāspāi ...
maibiiācā*)!

Grant you, O Wise one, and rule through this formula (*mąθra-*) by
which we may hear of your bounties (*rādah-*)!

8. You, the Lord, O Best one, who is in harmony with best truth,
Do I lovingly entreat (*yāsā*) for the best for Frašaoštra, the hero, and
for myself (*narōi fəeršaoštrāi maibiiācā*)

And (for those) (*yaēibiiāscā*) on whom you may bestow it for a whole
lifetime (*vīspāi yauuē*) of good mind.

9. May we not, by these entreaties (*yāna-*), anger you, O Wise Lord, and
truth

And best mind, we who are arrayed (*yōi ... yōiθəmā*) in the offering of
praises (*dasəmə stūtəm*) for you!

You (are) the swiftest invigorations and the rule (*xšaθra-*) over strengths.

10. (Those) whom you know to be just through truth and good mind
(And) worthy, O Wise Lord, to them fulfil their longing (*kāma-*) with achieve-
ments (*āpana-*)!

I know swelling, resounding, desirable praises for you.

11. You protect truth and good mind through these for eternity,
You, O Wise Lord, teach me with your mouth to speak

In accordance with your spirit (*mainiiu-*), through which primeval life (*anhuš pouruiō*) came about!

The 11 stanzas may be grouped into two groups of five with a central stanza 6. Stanzas 5 and 7, framing the central one, both contain the key word ‘formula, formulation’ (*māθra-*), while the first (1) and last (11) each incorporate the word ‘spirit’ (*mainiiu-*), which in stanza 1 is described as ‘bounteous’ (*spənta-*). Stanzas 2 and 10 correspond with each other insofar as their middle lines contain the words ‘*āiiapta-*’ ‘attainment’ and ‘*āpana-*’ ‘achievement’ respectively, boons which the worshippers hope to obtain through worship. Line 2a refers to the act of worship (‘I want to surround you’) and so does line 10c (‘I know swelling, resounding, desirable praises for you’). Correspondences such as these indicate that the structure of Y 28 exhibits parallelism and ring composition.

2.7. Yasna 43 as a second example of ring composition

A second example of ring composition is Yasna 43. In the arrangement of our extant Avesta, Y 43 follows the Yasna Haptaṅhāiti and opens the Uštavaitī Gatha. The structure of the hymn is characterized by the recurrent phrase ‘I realized that you are bounteous, O Wise Lord’. This introduces every other stanza from the fifth onwards (5, 7, 9, 11, 13, 15).³¹ Moreover, from stanza 7 onwards, the refrain is followed by the second line ‘when he surrounded me with good mind’.³²

1. The Wise Lord, ruling at will (*vasə.xšaiias*), may give
Desired (things) to this one, for whom (they are) desirable, to whomsoever.
I wish to arrive at strength together with youthfulness,
(And) to grasp truth: Give this to me, O Right-mindedness (*ārmaite*),
(And) the rewards (*ašiš*) (consisting) of wealth, the life of good mind!

2. The best of all (things) (may be given) to this one here:
May the man obtain well-being (*xvāθrəm*) in (the domain of) well-being
(*xvāθrōiā*),
Perceptive, O Wise one, through your bounteous spirit
Through which you give, together with truth, the blessings (*māiā-*) of good
mind
For every day along with the joy of a long life (*darəgō.jiāti-*).

3. May that man attain what is better than good,
(The man) who might teach us the straight paths of strength
Of (both) this physical life and of (the life of) the mind,
The real (paths), provided with possessions, along which the Lord dwells,
A zestful (man), one like you, O Wise one, well-acquainted, a bounteous
one.

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

5. I realized that you are bounteous, O Wise Lord,

³¹ Stanza 4 also begins with a slight variation on this line.

³² The theme of this hymn is Zaraθuštra’s consultation with this person.

When I saw you as the primeval one in the begetting of life,
 When you made the actions and words to receive their prizes
 (*mīzdauuqñ*),
 A bad (prize) for the bad one, good reward (*aṣīm*) for the good
 one
 Through your skill at the ultimate turning point of creation.

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

7. I realized that you are bounteous, O Wise Lord,
 When he surrounded me with good mind (*hiiaṭ mā vohū
 paivī.jasaṭ manaḡhā*)
 And asked me: ‘Who are you, to whom do you belong?
 Why, O zealous one, do you wish to appoint a day for the
 consultation
 About your possessions and about yourself?’

8. And I said to him: ‘Zaraḡuṣtra (*zaraḡuṣtrō*), first,
 A real enemy (*duuaēšā*) to the deceitful one, as much as I
 may be able (*hiiaṭ isōiā*).
 I could be a powerful support (*rafəñō xiiēm aojōnghuuat*)
 to the truthful one
 If I acquired the faculties of one who rules at will (*vasa-
 sə.xšaḡrahiā*)
 While I praise and eulogize you, O Wise one.

9. I realized that you are bounteous, O Wise Lord,
 When he approached me with good mind.
 To his question: ‘For whom do you wish to discern?’,
 Thereupon (I said): ‘For your fire (*ḡḡahmāi āḡrē*). The gift
 of veneration
 Of truth, truly, I want to have it in mind as much as I shall
 be able (*yauuat isāi*).’

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

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

12. And when you told me: ‘You are going to truth in foresight’,
 You did not tell me unheard (things),
 To rise up before that came to me
 Harkening accompanied by wealth-granting Reward (*aṣi-*),
 Who will distribute the rewards (*aṣiṣ-*) to the parties in strength.

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

14. As a knowing, able man gives to a friend,
 (Thus), O Wise one, (grant me) your foresightful support
 Which is obtained through your rule on the basis of truth.
 I want to rise up against those who scorn your proclamation,
 Together with all those who remember your formulations (*mašra-*).

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

16. O Lord, this one (here), **Zaraθuštra**,
 Chooses for himself that very spirit (*mainiu-*), O Wise one, which is your most
 bounteous (*spənta-*) one.
 May Truth be corporeal, strong through vitality.
 May Right-mindedness (*ārmaiti-*) be in the kingdom which sees the sun.
 May she give, with good mind, the reward (*ašī-*) for the actions.

The structure of this hymn is fairly straightforward: it centres around stanzas 7–10 whose theme is the consultation between Zaraθuštra and a divine being accompanied by Good Mind (Vohu Manah). In the two central stanzas, 8 and 9, Zaraθuštra introduces himself by name. He declares his opposition to the deceitful one, his desire to be ‘a powerful support for the truthful one’ and his readiness to praise the Wise Lord were he to be provided with the ability of someone ‘who rules at will’ (8b–d). In addition, the two central stanzas 8–9 are circumscribed by the expression ‘as much as I am able’ (*hiiaṭ isōiā* 8b;³³ *yauuaṭ isāi* 9d). While Zaraθuštra’s name is the key word of stanza 8, Ahura Mazda’s fire is that of stanza 9: Zaraθuštra wishes to serve it to the best of his ability. Here we may find a reference to the Yasna Haptaṅhāiti, Y 36.3, where Ahura Mazda descends in the most beautiful of his shapes, the fire, to be present in the ritual fire (see below, section 3.1).

The central stanzas (7–10) are surrounded, on either side, by four stanzas, 3–6 and 11–14. Stanzas 3–6 deal with doctrine. The introductory stanza 3 mentions a man who may come close and teach the paths ‘of strength’ (*sauuah-*) along which Ahura Mazda dwells. The two central stanzas of that section, 4 and 5, summarize the contents of the teachings concerning the ‘rewards’ (*ašī-*) which Ahura Mazda holds in his hand and distributes according to the quality of a person’s words and actions ‘at the utmost turning-point of creation’. Stanza 6 explains in greater detail what happens at this ‘utmost turning-point’: Ahura Mazda comes there, his creatures prosper because of their (good) actions, and Ārmaiti announces the judgements (*ratūš*) to them.

The theme of stanzas 11–14, which follow the central part, is dispelling Zaraθuštra’s doubts. He is encouraged to rise and preach the new doctrine, described in stanzas 3–6, with the help of the aspects of his god. Stanza 11 expresses Zaraθuštra’s doubts about whether he would be able to teach people

³³ This is the interpretation of the form by Insler, 1975: 236; cf. also Schwartz, 1991: 130. Humbach, 1991 II: 139 and Kellens and Pirart, *TVA* II: 233 consider the form to be an optative of *isa-* from *iš* ‘to seek’.

wish for truth & rewards	1	16	wish for truth & rewards
wish for welfare	2	15	peace of mind
doctrine about the rewards	3	14	Z. stirred up to practise
	4	13	desire for re- wards
	5	12	Z. stirred up; rewards
	6	11	Z. doubts
	7	10	
Zaraθuštra	8	9	The fire
Consultation			

FIG. 1. The structure of Yasna 43.

because he did not trust in them. In stanza 12, *Zaraθuštra* is stirred up: he is told to rise before the rewards are distributed, i.e. presumably before the time of ‘the utmost turning-point’ has come. In stanza 13, *Zaraθuštra* has recognized the goals of his desires (*kāma-*), and is the first to have dared to ask for them. These goals consist of what is obtained with the good rewards: ‘lasting life’ (*darəgahiia yaoš*) and ‘desirable existence’ under Ahura Mazda’s rule. In stanza 14, *Zaraθuštra* asks for Ahura Mazda’s foresighted help (*rafənah-*) so that he may rise up and preach the new teachings.

There are, moreover, correspondences between the first and final two stanzas. The hymn opens with words which are recalled by one of the holy prayers, the *Aṣəm Vohū*. Stanza 1 expresses the wish for truth and the rewards which *Armaiti* will distribute, and stanza 2 the desire for lasting welfare (*x^vāθra-*). The last two stanzas are about *Zaraθuštra*’s practice of the new faith. Having acquired an ‘appeased mind’ (*tušnā maitiš*), he is now able to speak out against the deceitful ones (43.15). Finally, stanza 16 declares explicitly that he, *Zaraθuštra*, has chosen (*var*) the way of the most bounteous spirit. The hymn concludes with the wish that truth may become corporeal and strong and that *Armaiti* may distribute the reward in Ahura Mazda’s sun-like kingdom. Thus the first and final stanzas are linked by, among other key words, the reference to the rewards which *Armaiti* distributes. Stanzas 2 and 15 by virtue of the reference to a person’s condition: ‘welfare’ in stanza 2 and ‘appeased mind’ in 15.

The structure of the hymn can be represented as shown in Figure 1.

As we have seen, there are clear signs that ring composition circumscribes the first and final stanzas and the two central ones in a variety of ways. However, Y 43 does not appear to entail a straightforward ring composition running through from stanza 1 to 16 with inverted correspondences, such as e.g. 3 corresponding to 14, 4 to 13, etc. Such parallelism is counteracted by the refrain which, from stanza 5 onwards, structures the hymn into a linear sequence of strophic pairs. There are correspondences between the two halves. In particular, their central stanzas, 4–5 and 12–13, conform to each other in so far as they deal with rewards (*ašī-*). While stanzas 4–5 propound the doctrine about the rewards, stanzas 12–13 deal with its impact on *Zaraθuštra*’s life.

1 wish for truth & re- wards	8 Consultation 'I am Zaraθuštra'	9 Consultation 'for your fire'	16 Zaraθuštra chooses; wish for truth & re- wards
2 wish for welfare	7 Consultation	10 Consultation	15 peace of mind
3 A man may teach us the path of salvation	6 Ārmaiti proclaims the judgements	11 doubts	14 Z. stirred up into practice
4 Doctrine about re- wards	5 Doctrine about re- wards	12 stirring up of Z., re- wards	13 rewards are the goal of his desire

FIG. 2. The structure of Yasna 43.

Both are surrounded by three stanzas on either side. Thus, the two halves of the hymn may be considered to be ring compositions in themselves, while they pivot around the central part of the hymn, stanzas 7–10. Therefore, the hymn is rather like a diptych hinged on two matching ringed panels, 1–8 and 9–16. This can be represented as shown in Figure 2.

The model portrayed in Figure 2 does not contradict that of Figure 1 but rather refines it. Both are based on the same internal structure of the hymn. This analysis, which is based on the content of the hymn, could be carried further and refined on the lexical and phonic levels. For the time being, however, it should suffice to illustrate the elaborate nature of the compositional pattern of a Gathic hymn.

We are now in a position to compare Y 28 and 43. Both of them are 'initial' hymns: while Y 28 opens the entire cycle, Y 43 is the first Gathic hymn recited after the YH. When comparing them, we discover notable correspondences between the central stanza 6 of Y 28 and the two central stanzas 8 and 9 of Y 43. Not only does the name of Zaraθuštra occur in the middle of both hymns, but Y 28.6 'come with good mind!' (*voḥū gaidī manarḥā*) anticipates the second line of the refrain, Y 43.7 etc. 'when he surrounded me with good mind' (*voḥū pairī.jasaṭ manarḥā*);³⁴ Y 28.6 'grant a strong support to Zaraθuštra!' (*zaraθuštrāi aojōnghuuṭ rafənō*) corresponds to 43.8 'I could be a powerful support' (*rafənō xiiōm aojōnghuuṭ*),³⁵ and both Y 28.6 (*daibišuuatō duuaēšā tauruuaiāmā*) and 43.8 (*haiθiiō duuaēšā ... drəguuāitē*) refer to the 'hostilities' (*duuaēšā*) which Zaraθuštra wishes to overcome. Additional correspondences exist between the two hymns, but those mentioned should suffice to support the view that Yasna 28 points forward to Yasna 43 and that, conversely, Y 43 takes up the theme of Y 28.

3. The position of the YH amidst the Gathas

Such cross-referencing between the Gathas indicates that the actual sequence of the hymns is not fortuitous, but has come to us in the way it was originally intended. If this is so, however, the question arises as to how this arrangement of the Gathas relates to the Yasna Haptaḥāiti, which is placed in their midst. The compositional structure of the central, Old Avestan, part of the Yasna

³⁴ Both expressions contain forms of the same verbal root *gam* 'to come, to go'.

³⁵ A correspondence such as this supports the view that the 'I' of the Gathas is Zaraθuštra.

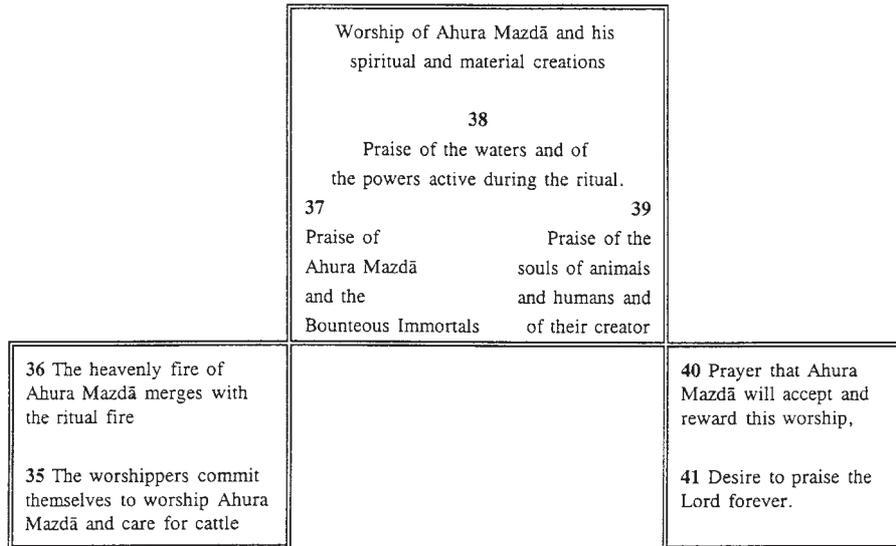


FIG. 3. The structure of the Yasna Haptaṅhāiti.

has often disconcerted scholars, who have found it difficult to account for the presence of what was deemed to be a later text, which interrupts the flow of these most exalted and sacred utterances.³⁶ As a result of Johanna Narten's ground-breaking work, however, it has become clear that the Yasna Haptaṅhāiti and the Gathas are best considered as complementary texts, the divergences between them being explained on the basis of their different literary genres: while that of the Gathas is metrical hymnic, that of the YH is non-metrical rhythmic liturgy. There is no evidence to contradict the assumption that the YH was composed at the same time as the Gathas, and by the same author.³⁷ If so, i.e. if the YH and the Gathas originate from the same author, say Zaratuštra, then it appears less surprising that, in the liturgical arrangement of the texts, the YH is inserted into the Gathas.

But why? The answer proposed here is that it took place because the YH is the liturgical centre of the entire ceremony, and has probably always had this function.

3.1. *The YH as the liturgical kernel*

The Yasna Haptaṅhāiti has also been recognized as a composition with a concentric structure. (See Figure 3.) Two initial (35–6) and two final (40–41) chapters flank the three central ones, Y 37–9 whose major theme is the worship of Ahura Mazdā and his spiritual and material creations.³⁸ Y 38, the very centre, praises the waters and powers active during the ritual. This is anticipated in the first two chapters, Y 35–6: after the worshippers have committed themselves 'to do what is good', i.e. to worship Ahura Mazdā and care for cattle (Y 35), the consecration of the ritual fire takes place (Y 36). In the

³⁶ The Younger Avestan portions inserted in between Old Avestan texts, i.e. Y 42 and 52, cannot be accorded the status granted to the YH, because they are texts recited, at least partly, in praise of the preceding Old Avestan ones and are thus similar to the Visperad portions.

³⁷ Narten, *YH*, 35–7. See also p. 32 n. 3 above.

³⁸ Cf. Kellens and Pirart, *TVA* III: 124–30; Boyce, 1992: 89ff.

concluding two chapters, 40–41, they pray that Ahura Mazda will accept and reward their worship, and declare their desire to praise the Lord for ever.

Moreover, the YH contains references to the actual situation in which it is recited. This is when the congregation is assembled around the ritual fire which constitutes the focus of the worship. The second chapter of the Yasna Haptaṅhāiti, Yasna 36, marks a particularly important moment during the ceremony: the heavenly fire, the son of Ahura Mazda, is summoned to approach and merge with the ritual fire.

In the second stanza of this prayer, the heavenly fire of Ahura Mazda is addressed and invited to come down to the place of worship:³⁹

Y 36.2. May you, there, the most joyful one,
Come close to us because of the prayer,
O Fire of the Wise Lord.
May you come close to us,
With the joy of the most joyful one,
With the reverence of the most reverent one,
For the greatest of the prayers.

This process must take place between stanzas 2 and 3, because the latter presupposes it by identifying the ritual fire with the heavenly fire of Ahura Mazda:⁴⁰

3. You are indeed the Fire of the Wise Lord.
You are indeed his most bounteous spirit.
We approach you,
O Fire of the Wise Lord,
With what is the most powerful of your names.

In stanza 4, the worshippers emphasize the reverence and purity with which they approach the fire:

4. We approach you
With good mind,
With good truth,
With the actions and words
Of good perception.

They praise Ahura Mazda in his most beautiful manifestation of light in the final two stanzas 5–6:

5. We revere, we invigorate you, O Wise Lord.
We approach you with all good thoughts,
With all good words,
With all good deeds.
6. We proclaim, O Wise Lord,
That these lights
Are your most beautiful shape of shapes
Since that highest of heights
Was called the sun.

Thus, not only the structure of the entire Yasna Haptaṅhāiti, but also the internal arrangement of an individual chapter, Y 36, follows the concentric

³⁹ The following rendering of Y 36 is an adaptation of the German translation of Narten, *YH* 40f.

⁴⁰ Narten, *YH* 26. According to the Pahlavi tradition, *ātar- spāništa-* (Y 17.11) is the name of the fire which burns in Ahura Mazda's house, the *garō dāmāna-*. Cf. Bartholomae, *AirWb.* 1619.

pattern according to which the central stanzas are devoted to the major theme, namely the identification of the ritual fire with the Fire of Ahura Mazda (stanza 3) and the reverence with which it is approached (stanza 4). Yasna 36 thus signifies the turning point of the ceremony. Henceforth, Ahura Mazda is actually present in the most beautiful of all his shapes, the fire.

Because of both the importance and extreme purity of this moment, in which the worship offered to Ahura Mazda culminates, the Yasna Haptañhāiti is the liturgical centre and highlight of the entire ceremony. However, from this point of view, we should no longer say that the YH is inserted into the Gatha, but rather recognize that the Gathic hymns are arranged around it so as to protect this purest and most sacred middle. They thus flank the very centre of the entire ceremony in which Ahura Mazda comes down and is present in the fire. The sacred prayers at the beginning and end provide further protection for the purest of all moments, as do the later additions in Younger Avestan.⁴¹

The concentric arrangement of the Old Avestan texts thus appears to be an intrinsically liturgical one. There is no other explanation for the YH being surrounded by the Gathas except that the YH has always been at the centre, constituting the liturgical kernel around which Zaraθuštra's hymns have been grouped.⁴²

3.2. *The Old Avestan liturgy*

These observations lead to the conclusion that the way in which the Old Avestan texts are arranged within the Yasna is the original one, being deliberate and as intended from the beginning. An internal structure can be detected both in the composition of each individual hymn and in the way the hymns follow one another. Moreover, in its function as the liturgical kernel, the Yasna Haptañhāiti takes its appropriate place in between the Gathas. The entire ceremony opens and concludes with prayers.

Both the Gathas and the Yasna Haptañhāiti contain references to the situational context within which these texts are recited: it is when the worshippers, priests as well as lay people, assemble around the ritual fire in praise of Ahura Mazda and his creations, as it says in Y 28.9 'we who are arrayed in the offering of your praises'.⁴³

There is one Gathic passage which suggests that Zaraθuštra was the officiating priest. Ironically, this very passage was used by Kellens as the main argument to support the opposite view that Zaraθuštra cannot possibly be the author of the Gathas. The expression in question is the words 'to Zaraθuštra and to us' in Y 28.6:⁴⁴

Grant ... O Wise one, a strong support to Zaraθuštra and to us, O Lord,
so that thereby we shall overcome the hostilities of the enemy.

⁴¹ Such symmetric protective text composition of the Yasna liturgy was noted by Windfuhr, 1984: 147–49. A parallel between the concentric arrangement of the Yasna liturgy and the layout of the Barašnūm-Gāh is drawn by Choksy, 1989: 27f.

⁴² Cf. Narten, 1982: 136, who interprets the arrangement of the YH amidst the Gathas as an indication that the YH was the kernel of the ritual. That the position of the YH in between the Gathas reflects something original has been cautiously suggested by Narten, *YH* 35 and 152f. with reference to Y 30.2 *parā mazā yāñhō* 'before the great imploration' which she suggests could point forward to the YH recited after the Ahunavaiti Gatha. This kernel is referred to in the Avesta as *Staota Yesnya*. Originally it must have consisted of the Old Avestan texts only. Evidence for this is found in the Pahlavi translation of Y 55.3, where 'these five' refers to the five Gathas just mentioned, and 'those seven' to the seven chapters of the YH. The two holy prayers were considered as forming part of the first and last Gathas, see Boyce, 1992: 98 n.18 with references.

⁴³ Narten, *YH*: 34.

⁴⁴ The entire stanza is quoted above p. 40.

Kellens argues that the fact that *Zaraθuštra*'s name is here contrasted with 'us' makes it clear that he stands apart from the worshippers both in terms of time and of space. The 'I' or 'we' of the Gathas could therefore refer only to the actual worshippers, but not to *Zaraθuštra* himself. Hence, Kellens argues, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to assume that *Zaraθuštra* was the author of the Gathas.⁴⁵

However, the words in Y 28.6 'to *Zaraθuštra* and to us' should not be interpreted in isolation, but must be seen in the larger context of the surrounding stanzas. For not only stanza 6, but all four central stanzas of this hymn contain similar expressions in their second verse line: 'to Ahura Mazda' (28.5b), 'to *Zaraθuštra* and us' (28.6b–c), 'to *Vīštāspa* and me' (28.7b), 'to *Frašaoštra* and me' (28.8b). Thus, in the middle of the opening hymn of the Gathas, Yasna 28, the important characters of the Gathic world are named explicitly and deliberately.

Moreover, the Younger Avesta offers a hitherto unnoticed parallel which casts light on the meaning of the Gathic expression 'to *Zaraθuštra* and to us'. In Y 68.12, which forms part of the 'Ritual of the Waters', the *āb zohr* (Y 63–9), we read 'to me, the worshipping priest, and us, the worshipping Mazdayasnians'. Here we find an opposition of 'me', on the one hand, and 'us', on the other. Each of them is unequivocally identified as the priest, on the one hand, and the community of the Mazdayasnians, on the other. To make it even clearer, the following lines enumerate who is included amongst the Mazdayasnians:

Y 68.12 *dāiata vaŋ^hhīš āpō*
māuuaiiaca zaθre yazəmnāi
ahmākəmcā mazdaiiasnanəm frāiiazəmnənəm
hašəmca hāuuīštanəmca
aēθrapaitinəmca aēθriianəmca
narəmca nāirikanəmca
apəənāiūkanəmca kainikanəmca
vāstriūuarəzanəmca

Y 68.13 ... *razištahe paθō aēšəmca vaēdəmca* ...

Y 68.12 Grant, O good waters,
 To me, the worshipping priest,
 And to us, the worshipping Mazdayasnians,
 The students and fellow-students,
 The masters and pupils,
 The men and women,
 The minors and the girls,
 And the farmers

Y 68.13 ... the searching for and finding of the straightest path ...

This passage clearly shows that there was a distinction between 'me', i.e. the priest who recites the texts, and 'us', that is the Mazdayasnians, and that they all worship together. Exactly the same pattern underlies the Gathic passage which, accordingly, can be interpreted as:

Y 28.6 'to (me,) *Zaraθuštra* and to us (the Mazdayasnians)'.
Zaraθuštra is the officiating priest and 'us' refers to the entire community of

⁴⁵ Cf. Section 2 above.

his followers, all of whom are assembled around the ritual fire. Two of the most distinguished members of ‘us’, his followers, are named explicitly in the following verses, Vištāspa and Frašaoštra (Y 28.7–8), while the priest, Zaraθuštra, according to the interpretation proposed here, is then referred to by the personal pronoun ‘me’.

That Zaraθuštra was a priest himself emerges not only from the Younger Avesta, but is also suggested by another passage in the Gathas, where the speaker, ‘I’, refers to himself as a *zaotar* (Y 33.6). Being a priest, it was in Zaraθuštra’s training, office and calling to compose hymns and liturgies and recite them while performing the ritual. Since it is beyond doubt that there are new ideas pervading the Gathas, it is to be expected that such new beliefs would be matched, on the ritual side, by an outward formal counterpart, i.e. by a new ritual in which appropriate liturgical texts reflecting and expressing the new religiosity would be recited.⁴⁶ It is, therefore, reasonable to assume that with the new religion named after its founder a new form of ritual also began. I suggest that not only all of the Old Avestan texts but also their very arrangement as transmitted in the Yasna liturgy is the original one and derives from the author, Zaraθuštra, himself.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there is evidence to indicate that the Older Avesta is not, as Kellens and Pirart maintain, the ‘emanation’ of an anonymous collective body of priests, but the work of an individual. This is suggested by the homogeneous character of the Gathas with regard to language, concepts, and characters figuring in them. Apart from the conceptual frame, the homogeneous nature of the Gathas is further substantiated by the highly developed technique, which indicates the workings of a master of the poetic art.

As research into their composition continues, it is increasingly apparent not only that the individual hymns are structured internally by parallelism and ring composition, but also that the way the Gathas are arranged in sequence is deliberate, with intertextual cross-references both forward and back. The Gathic hymns are arranged in concentric circles around the Yasna Haptaṅhāiti which marks the liturgical highlight of the entire ceremony.

Among all the Old Avestan texts, the YH is the text of praise *par excellence*. It is exclusively devoted to the praise and worship of Ahura Mazdā and his spiritual and material creations. Since the evil forces and the struggle against them are not even mentioned, the YH evokes and anticipates, so to speak, the creation in its perfect state when it is free from evil, that is *fraša*, and united with Ahura Mazdā in eternal bliss.

The Gathas and the holy prayers flank the very centre of the entire Old Avestan ceremony in which, in Y 36, Ahura Mazdā’s heavenly fire comes down and is present in the ritual fire. The significance of this moment appears to have been known also to the priests of the Younger Avestan period. For when they further enlarged the Old Avestan kernel of the Yasna liturgy and added more texts in Younger Avestan, they arranged it in such a way that Y 36–7 constituted the exact centre of the 72 chapters of the entire Yasna. In this way they underlined the significance of that crucial moment during the ceremony, thereby applying the same principle of ring composition which constitutes the compositional pattern of the Old Avestan liturgy.

⁴⁶ Cf. Boyce, 1992: 87f.

REFERENCES

- Boyce, M. 1992. *Zoroastrianism. Its antiquity and constant vigour*. Costa Mesa, California/New York: Mazda Publishers (Columbia Lectures on Iranian Studies 7).
- Choksy, J. K. 1989. *Purity and pollution in Zoroastrianism. Triumph over evil*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Douglas, M. 1993. *In the wilderness. The doctrine of defilement in the Book of Numbers*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press (Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, Supplement Series 158).
- Duchesne-Guillemin, J. 1953a. *Ormazd et Ahriman. L'aventure dualiste dans l'antiquité*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- Duchesne-Guillemin, J. 1953b. 'L'Ordre des Gāthā'. *La Nouvelle Clío* 5, 31–7.
- Geldner, K. F. 1896–1904: 'Awestaliteratur', in W. Geiger and E. Kuhn (ed.), *Grundriss der iranischen Philologie* vol. II, Strasbourg: Trübner, 1–53.
- Gershevitch, I. 1968. 'Old Iranian literature', in B. Spuler (ed.), *Handbuch der Orientalistik* vol. I.IV.2.2. Leiden and Cologne: Brill, 10–30.
- Hintze, A. 1994. *Der Zamyād-Yašt. Edition, Übersetzung, Kommentar*. Wiesbaden: Reichert (Beiträge zur Iranistik 15).
- Hintze, A. 2000. 'Lohn' im Indoiranischen. *Eine semantische Studie des Rigveda und Avesta*. Wiesbaden: Reichert (Beiträge zur Iranistik 20).
- Humbach, H. 1959. *Die Gathas des Zarathustra*. 2 vols. Heidelberg: Winter.
- Humbach, H. 1991. *The Gāthās of Zarathustra and the Other Old Avestan Texts*. In collaboration with J. Elfenbein and P.O. Skjærvø. Part I: Introduction—text and translation. Part II: Commentary. Heidelberg: Winter (Indogermanische Bibliothek: Reihe 1, Lehr- und Handbücher).
- Insler, St. 1975. *The Gāthās of Zarathustra*. Tehran/Liège: Brill (Acta Iranica 8).
- Kellens, J. and Pirart, E. V. *TVA=Les textes vieil-avestiques*. Wiesbaden: Reichert. Vol. I: Introduction, texte et traduction, 1988. Vol. II: Répertoires grammaticaux et lexique, 1990. Vol. III: Commentaire, 1991.
- Kellens, J. 1991. *Zoroastre et l'avesta ancien. Quatre leçons au Collège de France*. Paris: Peeters (Travaux de l'institut d'études iraniennes de l'Université de la Sorbonne nouvelle 14).
- Kellens, J. 1994a. *Le Panthéon de l'Avesta ancien*. Wiesbaden: Reichert.
- Kellens, J. 1994b. 'Le rituel spéculatif du Mazdéisme ancien', in C. Herrenschildt and J. Kellens, 'La question du rituel dans le Mazdéisme ancien et achéménide'. *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions* 85, 47–56 (English translation in Kellens, 2000: 99–112).
- Kellens, J. 1996. 'Commentaire sur les premiers chapitres du Yasna'. *Journal Asiatique* 284, 37–108.
- Kellens, J. 1998. 'Considérations sur l'histoire de l'Avesta'. *Journal Asiatique* 286, 451–519.
- Kellens, J. 2000. *Essays on Zarathustra and Zoroastrianism*. Translated and edited by P.O. Skjærvø. Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers (Bibliotheca Iranica: Zoroastrian Studies Series, No. 1).
- Kotwal, F. M. and Boyd, J. W. 1991. *A Persian offering. The Yasna: a Zoroastrian High Liturgy*. Paris: Association pour l'avancement des études iraniennes (Studia Iranica, cahier 8).
- Kotwal, F. M. and Kreyenbroek, P. G. 1995. *The Herbedestān and Nērangestān*. Vol. II: Nērangestān, Fragard 1. Paris: Association pour l'avancement des études iraniennes (Studia Iranica, cahier 16).
- Modi, J. J. 1937. *The religious ceremonies and customs of the Parsees*. Bombay: Society for the Promotion of Zoroastrian Religious Knowledge & Education, 1922, 2nd. edition 1937, reprinted 1986.
- Molé, M. 1963. 'L'ordre des Gāthā', in *Culte, mythe et cosmologie dans l'Iran Ancien. Le problème zoroastrien et la tradition mazdéenne*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 176–89.
- Narten, J. 1982. *Die Aməša Spəntas im Avesta*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.
- Narten JH=J. Narten, *Der Yasna Haptahāiti*. Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1986.
- Nyberg, H. S. *Die Religionen des Alten Iran*. Trans. from Swedish by H.H. Schaefer. Leipzig, 1938, reprinted 1966.
- Schaefer, H. H. 1940. 'Ein indogermanischer Liedtypus in den Gathas'. *ZDMG* 94, 399–408 (= R. Schmitt (ed.), *Indogermanische Dichtersprache, Wege der Forschung* 165. Darmstadt: Wiss. Buchgesellschaft, 1968, 61–71).
- Schmidt, H.-P. 1968. 'Die Komposition von Yasna 49', in J. C. Heesterman *et al.* (ed.), *Pratidānam*. Studies presented to F. B. J. Kuiper. The Hague/Paris, 170–92.
- Schmidt, H.-P. 1974. 'Associative technique and symmetrical structure in the composition of Yasna 47', in R. N. Frye (ed.), *Neue Methodologie in der Iranistik. Festschrift für Wolfgang Lentz*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 306–52.
- Schmidt, H.-P. 1985. *Form and meaning of Yasna 33*. With Contributions by Wolfgang Lentz and Stanley Insler. New Haven, CT: American Oriental Society (American Oriental Society, Essay Number 10).
- Schwartz, M. 1991. 'Sound, sense, and seeing in Zoroaster: the outer reaches of orality', in *International [Indo-Iranian] Congress Proceedings, 5th–8th January 1989*, K. R. Cama Oriental Institute, Bombay. Bombay, 127–63.
- Schwartz, M. 1998. 'The ties that bind: on the form and content of Zarathustra's mysticism', in F. Vajifdar (ed.), *New approaches to the interpretation of the Gāthās*. Proceedings of the First Gāthā Colloquium, W.Z.O., Croydon, 1993. London, 127–97.
- Tichy, E. 1995. *Die Nomina agentis auf -tar- im Vedischen*. Heidelberg: Winter.
- Watkins, C. 1995. *How to kill a dragon. Aspects of Indo-European poetics*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Windfuhr, G. 1984. 'The Word in Zoroastrianism', *Journal of Indo-European Studies* 12, 133–78.