

INTRODUCTION

OLD IRANIAN LANGUAGES

Old Persian and Avestan, both spoken several centuries before our era, are the two oldest Iranian languages known.

Old Persian

The extant Old Persian texts all date from the 6th to the 4th century. They are written in a cuneiform script, probably invented under Darius for the purpose of recording his deeds. It was the first cuneiform script to be deciphered and provided the clue to all the other cuneiform scripts. The Old Persian language as we know it from the inscriptions (5th-4th cents.) was already about to change to Middle Persian.¹ It is therefore probable that Old Persian had already been spoken for a few centuries before this time, that is, throughout most of the first half of the first millennium B.C.

Avestan

The other extant Old Iranian language is Avestan, the language in which the most ancient Iranian religious texts are written, the Avesta. The Avesta is collection of miscellaneous texts first compiled and committed to writing in the mid-first millennium of our era. Before this time it had been transmitted orally by specially trained priests. This text corpus was subsequently, after the Muslim conquest, considerably reduced in volume.

The extant texts of each part of the collection go back to a set of single manuscripts dating from the 11th-12th centuries. Our earliest extant manuscripts date only from the latter half of the 13th century, although most of them are of much later date. This situation always has to be kept in mind when we discuss the Avesta and the Avestan language.

While both history and linguistics indicate that Old Persian was the language spoken in modern Fars in southern Iran, the language of the Avesta must have belonged to tribes from northeastern Iran. The Avesta contains a few geographical names, all belonging to northeastern Iran, that is, roughly the area covered by modern Afghanistan plus the areas to the north and south of Afghanistan. We are therefore entitled to conclude that Avestan was spoken primarily by tribes from that area. Only once is a possibly westerly name mentioned, namely *Rayā*, if this is modern Rey south of Tehran, which in antiquity was regarded as the center of the Median Magi, but this identification is not compelling.²

Median and Scythian

Beside Old Persian and Avestan other Iranian languages must have existed in the 1st millennium before our era. Of these Median, spoken in western Iran and presumably “official” language during the Median period (ca. 700-559), is known from numerous loanwords in Old Persian. Old northwestern languages, probably spoken by the Scythian Alan tribes are known from early inscriptions and personal and place names. In addition the Scythian tribes in central Asia must have spoken variants of Iranian that differed from Old Persian and Avestan. A few names of Scythian gods are mentioned in Herodotus’s *Histories*, as well as the Median word for “dog,” *spaka*.

Old and Young Avestan

We distinguish between texts in “Old Avestan” (OAv.) and texts in “Young(er) Avestan” (YAv.).

The Old Avestan texts comprise the *Gāthās* and the *Yasna Haptaŋhāiti*, both of which are contained in the section of the Avesta called the *Yasna*, as well as various fragments scattered throughout the *Yasna*.³

¹ See Skjærvø, 1999 [2002].

² See Skjærvø, 1995 [1996].

³ See Pirart, 1992.

INTRODUCTION

The Young Avestan texts are the other texts.

Among these we must distinguish between genuine, old Young Avestan texts, that is, texts written in a consistent, correct language, and texts in late Young Avestan, compiled at a stage when Young Avestan was no longer a living language and the authors and compilers only had an incomplete knowledge of it.

The texts contain no historical allusions, so they cannot be dated exactly, but Old Avestan is a language closely akin to the oldest Indic language, that found in the oldest parts of the R̥gveda, and should therefore probably be dated to about the same time. This date has been much debated, but it seems probable—on archeological, as well as linguistic grounds—that the oldest poems were composed in the first half of the 2nd millennium B.C.E.

Compared with Old Avestan, Young Avestan represents a radically changed form of the language. The verbal system of Old Avestan is still based upon the opposition between present ~ aorist ~ perfect known from Vedic and Homeric Greek, whereas in Young Avestan the aorist and perfect have both become relatively rare, and the verbal system is based upon the opposition present ~ imperfect-injunctive. Thus, Young Avestan is linguistically close to Old Persian, and we may assume that it too was spoken in the first half of the 1st millennium, perhaps through the Median period, i.e., roughly the 10th-6th centuries. Such a dating, on one hand, accounts for the absence of references to western Iran in the texts (with the possible exception of Median Raṣā); on the other hand, it provides the necessary time span for Avestan to go through an “intermediate” period after the Old Avestan period before it developed into Young Avestan.

THE AVESTA

The writing down of the Avesta

The Avestan texts known to us today represent only a small part of the oral traditions that were committed to writing in the Sasanian period (224-651 C.E.): as little as one-fourth has been conjectured. Sometime during this period a phonetic alphabet was invented, which was used to write down in minute detail the known texts.

At this time, all the available Iranian alphabets were consonant alphabets descended from Aramaic⁴ (except the Bactrian, which was Greek), which were quite unsuitable for recording a largely unfamiliar language. A new alphabet was therefore invented based, apparently, on the cursive Pahlavi script of the Zoroastrian literature, but with the addition of earlier forms of some letters, taken from the script found in the *Pahlavi Psalter*, a Middle Persian translation of the *Psalms of David* found in Chinese Turkestan.

It must be kept in mind that our earliest mss. are all, probably, over 500 years younger than the “proto-manuscript” of the Avesta, what K. Hoffmann called the “Sasanian archetype.” Thus, we do not know exactly what forms the letters had. Script tables in modern textbooks and grammars are often based upon type-set fonts made in the 19th century and do not necessarily represent the script in actual mss. A glance at some of the available facsimilies also shows that the script varies considerably with time and scribes. A paleography is therefore needed.

The Arsacid archetype and the Andreas theory

Much was made earlier in this century of a supposed Arsacid (Parthian) text of the Avesta, written in a usual Aramaic consonantal alphabet under the Arsacids (ca. 250 B.C.E. - ca. 240 C.E.). A theory was developed by F. C. Andreas that unusual or unexpected spellings in the transmitted text reflected erroneous vocalizations on the part of the Sasanian transcribers of the Arsacid text and that a correct understanding of the Avestan text could only be obtained by imagining what the consonant text had been like.

It has been proved, however, that the “aberrant” orthography of the Avesta reflects a wholly consistent phonological system, and the theory of an Arsacid Avestan text has now been abandoned. Thus, G. Morgenstierne (1942) showed that the system of “epenthesis,” for instance, is internally consistent and

⁴ See Skjærvø, 1996.

must therefore be a genuine linguistic phenomenon, and, instead of regarding it as a purely graphic phenomenon, Morgenstierne interpreted the “epenthetic” *i* and *u* as signs of palatalization and labialization of the consonants they preceded.

Nevertheless, it is possible, and even likely, that there existed local (oral) translations of the Avestan text in the Arsacid and earlier periods as it did in the early Sasanian period. Thus, it is not impossible that the indigenous tradition contained in the Pahlavi encyclopaedia the *Dēnkard* about the Avesta contains some truth (Shaki, 1981): namely that after Alexander had destroyed or dispersed the text written in gold on bulls’ hides (if true, then conceivably the Old Persian[?] translation and commentary kept at Persepolis), it was then reassembled, presumably on the basis of oral traditions and, perhaps, surviving manuscripts, under Walāš, one of the Arsacid kings, again under Šāpūr I (240-272 C.E.), and finally under Šāpūr II (309-79 C.E.).

The zands

It is important to realize that already by the Young Avestan period the *Old Avesta* can no longer have been well understood and was in need of translation and commentary, and we actually do find in the extant Avesta commentaries in Young Avestan on Old Avestan texts. Only the commentaries on the three holy prayers have been preserved (Y.19-21), but there also existed commentaries on the remaining Old Avestan texts, some of which have been preserved in Pahlavi translation in the ninth book of the *Dēnkard*, which contains Pahlavi versions of Avestan commentaries on the *Gāthās* (see West, *Pahlavi Texts* IV, pp. 172-397).

Similarly, as the Avestan texts were adopted by other Iranian population groups than those who had originally composed them, commentaries and translations into local languages became a necessity. Thus we can safely assume that there were at one time early Bactrian, Parthian, Median, etc. versions of the texts. If, by the Achaemenid period, the Avesta was in Persis such a tradition of local versions and exegesis in local languages must have been established there too.

Whether any of these “local versions” were ever written down we do not know—though it is possible—but the transmission of the holy texts, like that of the secular literature that has not survived, must have been fundamentally oral. We can easily imagine that instructors taught the texts to the students by reciting the original text in small portions and adding the translation and the commentary as they went along. This is what we see in our extant manuscripts of the Avesta.

By the Sasanian period the Avestan text itself was largely incomprehensible to the reciters, but translations into the spoken languages had already been made, which must have been current as early as the 3rd century C.E., when one of the *nasks* of the Avesta was quoted by the high priest Kerdīr in one of his inscriptions. The *nasks* of the Avesta are also referred to in a Manichean text, dating from the 3rd-4th century. In another Manichean text the five *Gāthās* are mentioned by name.

It is quite probable that the Middle Persian translation of the Avesta with commentaries and additional material (the *Avesta* and its *zand* > the *Zand-Avesta*) had already been written down by this time, but probably not the Avestan texts themselves, and when Mani, for instance, talks about the books of the Zoroastrians he is likely to refer to these translations and commentaries.

Corruption of the Avestan text

The manuscripts of the *Avesta* all go back to single manuscripts for each part (*Yasna*, *Yašt*s, etc.), which the colophons permit us to date to around 1000 C.E. For some parts of the text, we have manuscripts from the 13th-14th centuries, for others the tradition does not go beyond the 16th-18th centuries.

We should also remember that the proto-text of our *Avesta* is based on “final performances.” The question of *how* the Avestan texts were committed to writing once the alphabet had been invented around 500 C.E. has not to my knowledge been raised, but is of paramount importance for understanding the state of the text. There are, in fact, only two possibilities (or a combination of them): either a person who knew the text was taught the alphabet and wrote down what he knew, or a person who knew the text dictated it to

someone who knew the script. Either procedure would obviously influence the recorded text adversely, as with both procedures the fluency of the recitation would be interrupted. On the other hand, dictation would give the reciter time to remember more text than he might otherwise include during a recitation.⁵

The text is an “edited” text and does not in every detail reflect a genuine linguistic system. During its 1000 to 1500 years of oral transmission, the text was standardized, and, once written down, it was modified by scribes who spoke dialects with phonological systems fundamentally different from that of the originals (see Hoffmann 1970, Skjærvø 1994, Kellens 1998). Thus, the OAv. texts contain many YAv. elements and the YAv. texts contain both OAv. (“pseudo-OAv.”) elements and phonetic features introduced from the scribes’ languages (incl. Gujerati). This makes it almost impossible to determine which of the sound changes we observe in our extant texts already belonged already to the original language.

Features ascribed to “editorial” interference include the “repetition of preverbs in tmesis” in the *Gāθās*; the use of final *-ō* in first member of compounds (see Lesson 20); the restoration of non-sandhi forms in sandhi (Lesson 6); the graphic splitting up of consonants (*gaṭ.tōi* for **gatōi*, *aēšam.mahiiā* for **aēšamahiiā*); and detachment of endings (OAv. *gāuš.āiš*, *drəguuō.dabīš*, *gūšō.dūm*; YAv. *uziō.rəntəm* for **uziār°*). Some of these peculiarities may be the results of memorization techniques, others may be due to scribal idiosyncrasies.

Some morpho-syntactic peculiarities of YAv. may have been caused by wrong restorations of abbreviations (cf. the frequent *y° = yazamaide*). The most probable cases are the following: gen. sing. *zraiiā vouru.kašaiia* (Y.65.4 = Yt. 5.4 = Yt. 8.31), possibly for *zra° vouru.ka°*, instead of the regular *zraiiaghō vouru.kašahe*; the use of them. dat. for gen.: *ažōiš dahākāi* (V.1.17); etc.

It is important, however, to realize that corrupt text does not necessarily imply corrupt language. Young Avestan must have ceased being a spoken language probably some time in the (pre-)Median period, when the texts were “crystallized,” that is, no longer linguistically updated from generation to generation. Thus, they were orally transmitted for at least a thousand years before they were written down, which, obviously, gave ample opportunity for them to be changed, especially by the less well trained reciters. In fact, we see that the most corrupt texts are those that were presumably recited most often.

The corruption affected both grammatical forms and the text itself. Grammatical forms were in particular exposed to analogy, for instance, the athematic nom. plur. ending *-ō* is frequently replaced by the thematic ending *-a*, athematic verbs are thematized, ablaut is lost, but these are not necessarily features of the language, but more probably of the recitation. Often whole phrases (e.g., nouns plus adjectives) were lifted out of their actual context and inserted elsewhere without appropriate adjustment; very often phrases in the nominative plural are used where the accusative would be expected.

Young Avestan dialects?

Various phonological and morphological features of YAv. have been ascribed to dialect differences; thus, J. Schindler interpreted the different treatments of final **-aṅh < Iir. *-ans*) in terms of dialects, and K. Hoffmann ascribed features such as *h_u > x^v* instead of *huu-* (H-F, §6.2) and *VβV > V_uV* (H-F, §63cg) to an Arachotian dialect. The alternation of *VδV ~ VθV* in *daδā- ~ daθā-*, etc., corresponds to Man. MPers. *day-* ~ Parth. and mod. Pers. *dah-*. As long as we have no exhaustive study of the manuscripts and individual scribal habits, such theories remain hypothetical.

⁵ The problems are described by Lord, 1960, pp. 124-138, especially 126-27; 1991, pp. 38-48.

HISTORY OF THE IRANIANS AND THE AVESTA

ca. 3000	Proto-Indo-Iranian?
2700-2200	Proto-Iranian?
2200-1700	Proto-Avestan (end of Indus civilization ca. 1900).
ca. 2100-1750	“Bactrian-Margiane Archaeological Complex.”
1700-1200	Old Avestan period.
1200-900	Transition period: crystallization and canonization of the Old Avestan texts.
?	Movement of the Persian and Median tribes into central and northwestern Iran.
900-600	Young Avestan (geographic horizon: from Choresmia to Sistan/Helmand basin). First mention of the Persians (9th cent.) and Medes (8th cent.) in western Iran.
700-400	Old Persian (Darius at Behistun, 520-519 B.C.E.).
400-ca. 100 B.C.E.	Transition period.: post-Old Persian/proto-Middle Persian.
100 B.C.E.-200 C.E.	Early Middle Persian.
200-500/600 C.E.	Middle Persian.

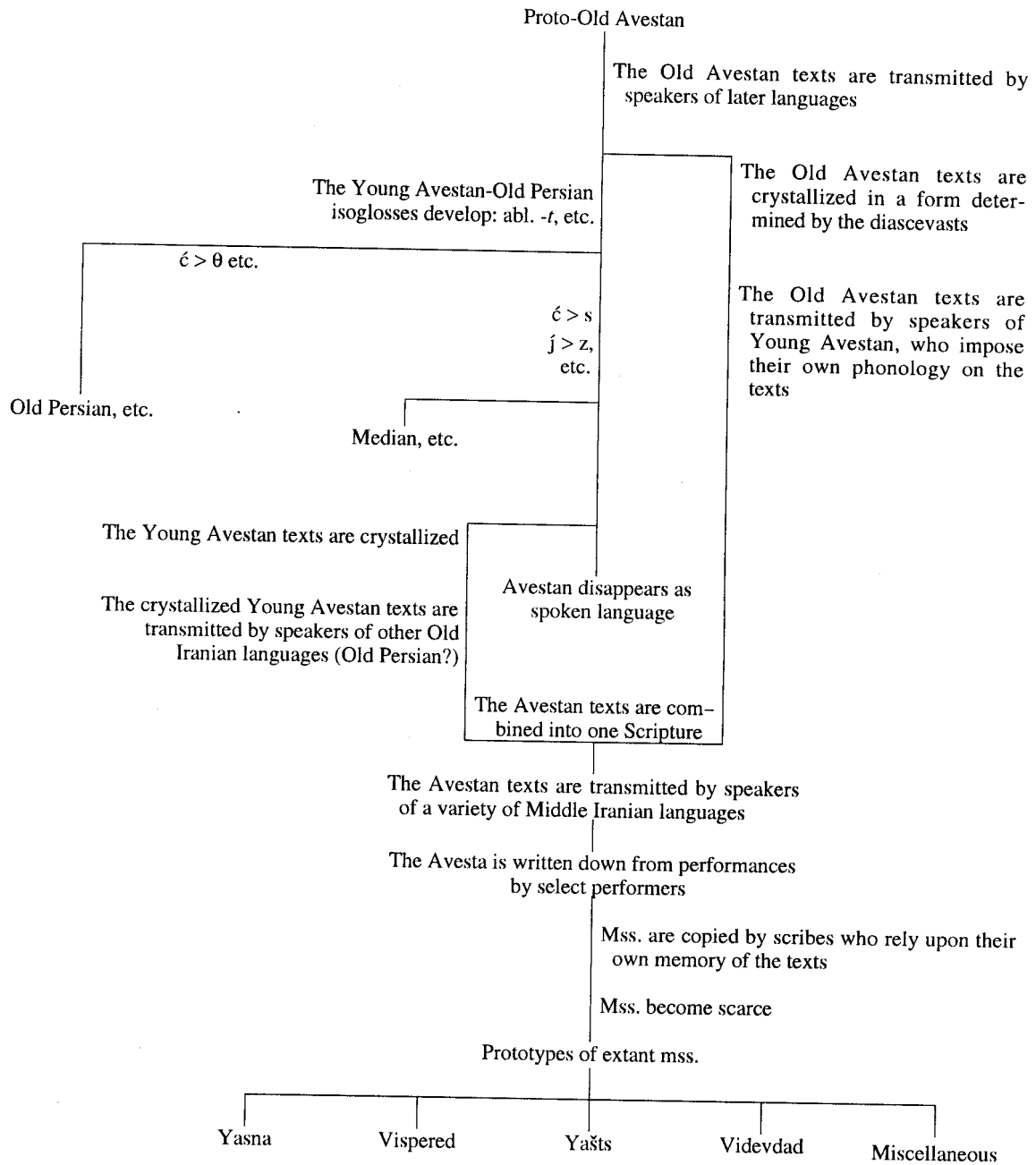
The history of the text, as envisaged by Hoffmann (1970), Kellens (1998, p. 513),⁶ and myself, is approximately as follows:

- Composition of texts that were to lead to the Old Avestan texts, constantly linguistically updated (recomposed) in performance (mid-2nd mill. B.C.E.).
- Composition of the Young Avestan texts, constantly linguistically updated, etc. (end of 2nd/early 1st mill.).
- Crystallization of the Old Avestan text as unchangeable with introduction of editorial changes (early YAv. period?).
- Crystallization of the Young Avestan text as unchangeable (1st half of 1st mill.?).
- Canonization of select texts (under the Achaemenids?).
- Transmission of the entire immutable text with introduction of linguistic novelties and changes made by the (oral) transmitters (up to ca. 500 C.E.), with several attempts at “reassembling the scattered scriptures” (?).
- Creation of an unambiguous alphabet in which the entire known corpus was written down to the extent it was deemed worthy.
- Written transmission of the text influenced(?) by the oral tradition; copying of manuscripts contributes to deterioration of the text.
- The Arab conquest causes deterioration of the religion and its texts; ca. 1000 C.E. there is only one single manuscript in existence of each part of the extant *Avesta*, from which all our extant manuscripts are descended.

⁶ Kellens lowers the dates by a few centuries and introduces additional details.

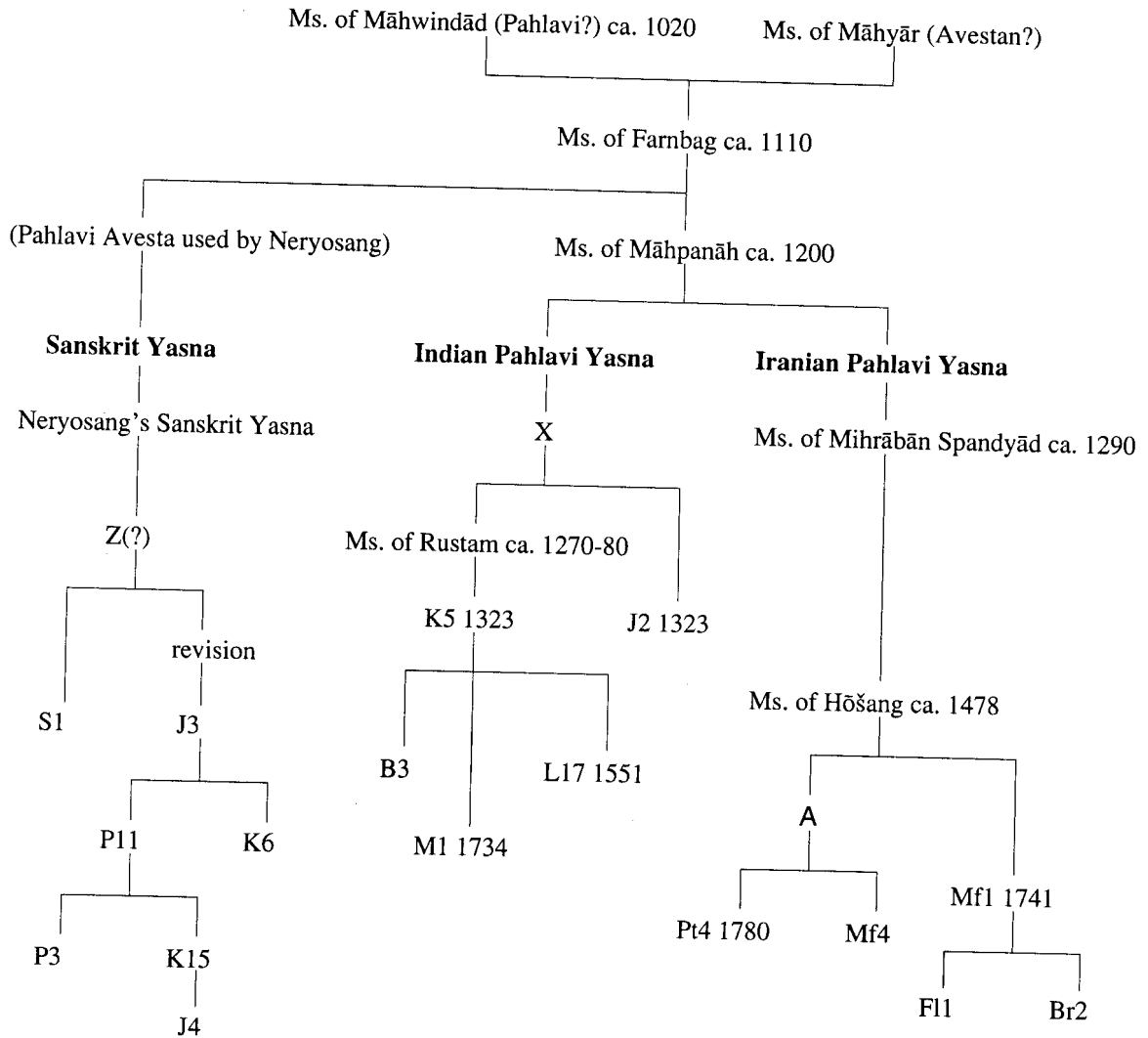
INTRODUCTION

THE TRANSMISSION OF THE AVESTAN TEXTS AND LANGUAGES



THE MANUSCRIPTS

PAHLAVI YASNA



YASNA SADE

Group A

C1 bef. 1700
K11 1647
Lb2 1660

B3 old but poorly written, worthless
L20 modern

Group B

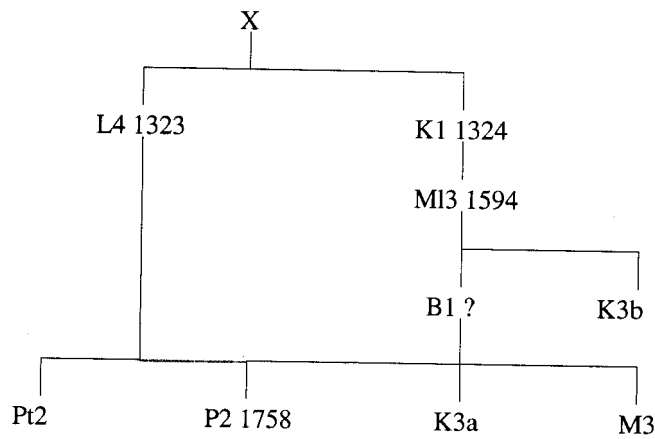
H1 old, correct, best YS ms.
J6 c. 1600
J7 not old
Jm1 badly wr'n
L13 nicely wr'n
O1 1735
P6 relatively old but worthless

THE MANUSCRIPTS

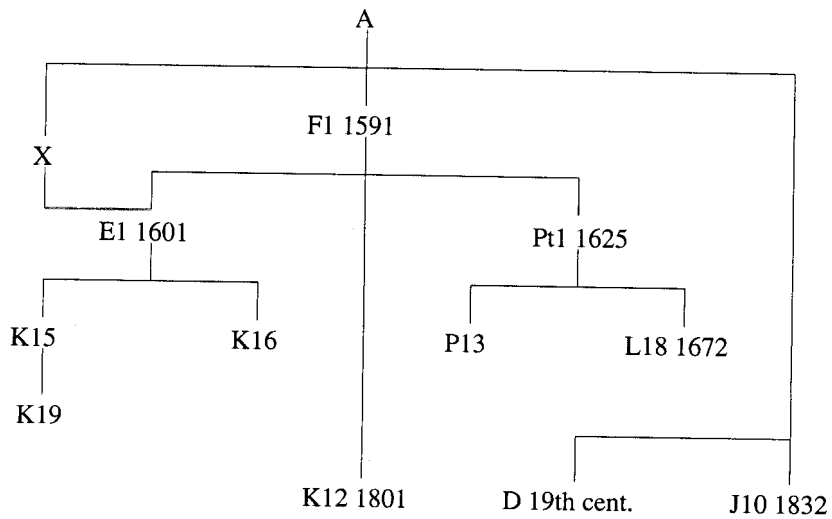
XORDE AVESTA

Persian		Indian		
		SXA	BhXA	
F2				
K36	1704	Jm4	1352	L9
K38	1814	J9	1400+	Mb2
Mf3		H2	1415	
K18a		Lb1	1672	
K37	modern	Lb2	1660	
		Mb1	1689	
		O3	1646	
Pd		L11	1723	

PAHLAVI VIDEVDAD



YAŠTS



THE AVESTAN TEXTS

Contents of the Avesta

According to the tradition, under Khosrow (531-579), the Avesta was divided into 21 books, or *nasks*, the contents of which are given in the *Dēnkard*, a Pahlavi text compiled in the 9th century. From this it appears that only one of the books have been preserved virtually complete: the *Videvdad*; of most of the others only smaller or larger parts are now extant. The loss of so much of the Sasanian Avesta since the 9th century must be ascribed to the effect of the difficulties that beset the Zoroastrian communities after the Muslim conquest of Iran.

The *Avesta* is traditionally divided into several parts:

The Yasna

A miscellany of texts recited during the *yasna* ritual, among which are:

Hōm-yašt (Y.9-11), prayer or hymn to Haoma;

Frauarāne, the Zoroastrian profession of faith (Y.12);

Bayān yašt, a commentary on the sacred prayers (Y.22-26);

three sacred prayers (Y.27): *Yeŋhe hātəm*, *Ašəm vohū*, *Yaθā ahū vairiō* (*Ahunwar*);

the *Gāθās* (Y.28-34, 43-51, 53): poetry ascribed to Zarathustra in Old Avestan;

Yasna Haptanhāiti (Y.35-41): Old Avestan composed in an archaic kind of metrical prose;

Srōš-yašt (Y.57), hymn addressed to Sraoša, god of obedience and judge in the hereafter;

Āb zōhr (Y.63-72)

Vispered (Vr.): a miscellany of ritual texts, mostly invocations;

Yašts (Yt.): collection of hymns to individual deities:

Yašt 1-4 to Ahura Mazdā and the Aməša Spəntas;

Yašt 5 to Arəduuī Sura Anāhita, the heavenly river and goddess of the waters;

Yašt 6 to the sun;

Yašt 7 to the moon;

Yašt 8 to Tištriia, the star Sirius, who controls the weather and the rain;

Yašt 9, *Gōš yašt*, to Druuāspā;

Yašt 10 to Miθra, god of contracts and agreements, of dawn, etc.;

Yašt 11 to Sraoša;

Yašt 12 to Rašnu, judge in the beyond

Yašt 13 to the Frauuašis, tutelary deities and warriors, probably the personified faith (cf. *frauarāne*);

Yašt 14 to Vərəθraγna, god of victory who manifests himself in 10 different incarnations;

Yašt 15, according to its title dedicated to Rām, but actually about Vaiiu, the personification of the space between heaven and earth, who has two sides, one good and one evil;

Yašt 16, *Dēn yašt*, to Cistā;

Yašt 17 to Aši, the goddess of good fortune and protectress of the family;

Yašt 18 *Aštād yašt*;

Yašt 19 according to its title dedicated to the genius of the earth but actually about the Kavian *xʷarənah* (royal Fortune);

Yašt 20 to Haoma;

Yašt 21 to the star *Vanant*.

Xorda Avesta (XA.) “little *Avesta*”: a miscellany of hymns and other ritual texts, among which are:

The *Nyāyišns* (Ny.) “prayers” to the sun, Miθra, the moon, Arəduuī Sura Anāhita (the waters), Ātaš ī Bahrām (the fire);

INTRODUCTION

The *Sīrōzas* (S.), invocations of the deities in charge of the 30 days of the months.
The *Āfrīnagān* (Ā.), various invocations.

Videvdad (V.) (also *Vendidad*) literally “the law(s) or regulations (serving to keep) the demons away”;
mainly a collection of texts concerned with purification rituals. It also contains some mythological material:

chap. 1: contains a description of how Ahura Mazdā created the various provinces of Iran and how the Evil Spirit, as his countercreation, made a scourge for each province;

chap. 2 contains the myth of Yima, the first king, who built a fortress to house mankind during a coming winter;

chap. 19 contains a description of the struggle between Zarathustra and the Evil Spirit;

Hādōxt nask (HN.): a text about the fate of the soul after death;

Aogəmadāeca (Aog.): an eschatological text;

Ēhrbedestān and *Nīrangestān* (N.): religio-legal texts;

Pursišnīhā (P.): a collection of questions and answers regarding religious matters.

The following three are late compilations but contain some fragments not found elsewhere:

Āfrīn-e Payyambar Zardošt: Zarathustra’s advice to Vištāspa;

Vištāsp yašt: Vištāspa’s words to Zarathustra;

Vaēθā nask.

There are numerous *Fragments* from extant and lost Avestan texts quoted in the Pahlavi translation of the other Avestan texts and in Pahlavi texts. Of special interest is the so-called *Frahang ī ōim ēk* (FO.), which is a Vocabulary of Avestan words and phrases with their Pahlavi translation. The first entry is Avestan *ōim* = Pahlavi *ēk*, whence the name.

BASIC RELIGIOUS TERMINOLOGY

In the Zoroastrian (Mazdaiian) religion, as seen in the *Young Avesta*, the universe is divided into two opposed and constantly battling camps, those of good and evil, order and chaos, life and death, light and darkness. In addition, the universe is divided into two spheres: “that of thought” (*manīiauuua*), that of the divine beings, and “that of living beings” (*gaēiθiia*), that of humanity and other living beings (*gaēθā*).

The ordered universe was established (*dā-*) by Ahura Mazdā, the Wise Lord, at the beginning of (limited) time. Its inherent principle is Order (*aša*), which is manifested in the light of day, the diurnal sky, and the sun. The principle of Order applies to both the world of thought and that of living beings. In the former it applies to the cosmic processes, established and upheld by Ahura Mazdā; in the latter it applies to the behavior of men, both in daily life and in the ritual. All entities in the universe, including mankind, that conform to this principle are said to be upholders/sustainers of Order or “Orderly” for short (*ašauiuan*).

When Ahura Mazdā and the other immortal gods rule the world according to Order, it is full of life and fecundity. The terms for this are derived from the root *span*, which literally implies “swelling with vital juices.” The good deities in the world of thought, first of all Ahura Mazdā, are all “life-giving, (re)life-giving” (*spənta*), that is, they are responsible for maintaining the universe in its pristine state, as originally established by Ahura Mazdā himself. The term is frequently rendered in Western literature as “beneficial” or “holy,” but the latter is a very imprecise term and should be avoided. Humans contribute to this maintenance of the Ordered universe through their behavior and their rituals. At the end of the final battle the final revitalizers (*saošiiant*) will stand forth and by their victory over the forces of Evil will render existence “juicy” (*fraša*), that is, full of fertile, juices, like it was in the beginning, a state commonly referred to as the “Juicy-making” (*frašō.kərəiti*), commonly rendered as Renovation.

BASIC RELIGIOUS TERMINOLOGY

A link is provided between beings in the worlds of thought and living beings in that they all have a model or prototype in the world of thought, the *ratus*, a category of entities reminiscent of the Platonic *ideas*. Thus, the divisions of the year, which recur ever anew, all have their unchanging Models in the world of thought. Altogether there are thirty-three Models (see the litanies in lessons 10-13).

With Ahura Mazdā there are several other divine beings, referred to as “life-giving/life-giving immortals” (*amaša spənta*), of whom there are either innumerable ones or six (seven) (the Vitalizing/Life-giving Immortals). All the beings of the world of thought are deserving of sacrifices,⁷ “worship-worthy” (*yazata*-).

The most important of the immortal gods are:

Arəduuī Sūrā Anahitā, literally “the unattached lofty one, rich in life-giving strength,” name of the heavenly river

Aši, goddess of the rewards.

Ātar, the Fire, son of Ahura Mazdā

Miθra, solar deity, god of contracts and agreements; fighter of the forces of the Dark Side; clears the way for the sun to rise.

Sraoša, deified “readiness to listen” to the gods; he is in charge of the “rewards” (*ašiiia*) given to the souls of the dead; he is the main opponent of Aēšma “Wrath.”

Rašnu: god of straight and correct behavior, in the beyond the judge who weighs the deeds of the dead on a balance.

Tištīria: the Dog Star, Sirius; god of the seasonal rains.

Vaiiu: name of the god of the intermediate space, through which the soul and *daēnā* of the dead must travel.

Vərəθraγna, god of defense against and victory over the enemies of Order.

The seven Life-giving Immortals are Ahura Mazdā plus the following six:

Vohu Manō, Good Thought (of gods and men, especially the poet-sacrificer, opponent of the Evil Thought). He also represents animals.

Aša Vahišta, Best Order (the cosmic Order, opponent of the cosmic Deception, the Lie). It also represents the heavenly fire, the sun, which is its visible mark.

Xšaθra Vairiia: the Well-deserved Command, the royal command of Ahura Mazdā (produced as a reward for the successful sacrifice), enabling him to overcome those possessed by the Lie. It also represents metals.

Spəntā Ārmaiti, Life-giving Humility; daughter and spouse of Ahura Mazdā, deity of the earth, also personified spousal and filial devotion and submission, as well as patience in carrying all things on her. Her name is often rendered as Rightmindedness and similar.

Hauruuatāt: Wholeness (principle of not suffering defects, illnesses, etc.). It also represents the waters.

Amərətātāt: Immortality, Undyingness (principle of not dying untimely). It also represents the plants.

The opponent of Ahura Mazdā is the Evil (literally, “dark, black”?) Spirit (*Agra Maniiu*), whose creations and followers tell lies about Ahura Mazdā and his Ordered universe. They are therefore said to be “filled with/possessed by the Lie, Lieful,” (*druuant*), and the principle of the universe of the Evil Spirit is called the Deception or the Lie (*Druj*). When Ahura Mazdā established the Ordered universe, sunny and healthy, the Evil Spirit in turn polluted it with all kinds of evil things, darkness, death, sickness, etc.

The agents of the Evil Spirit are the old (Indo-Iranian) gods, the *daēuuas* (Old Indic *deva* “(good) god”).

⁷ The term *sacrifice* is used throughout this book without necessarily implying *immolation* of a sacrificial victim; rather it is used to denote ritual offerings to gods and other entities in the divine world. See, e.g., Henninger, 1987, esp. pp. 544-45. The verb *yaza*- implies worship of the gods, consecration of the elements of the ritual, and the offering up the elements of the ritual to the gods as gifts.

INTRODUCTION

Others are:

Aēšma “Wrath,” the principal opponent of Sraoša. Wrath probably personifies nocturnal darkness and the night sky, and his “bloody club” may refer to the sunset, in which the sun seems to be sinking into blood.

Nasao, the Carrion demoness, the greatest polluter of Ahura Mazda’s world.

Bušīqastā, the demoness of sloth, with long fingers, who says “there will be another (day).”

The creative forces in the universe, of both gods and men, are called *maniius*, (active) mental forces, (poetic) inspiration, especially the Forces of Order and the Lie. The word is commonly translated as “spirit.” The creative force of the upholders of Order, especially that of Ahura Mazda, is the (re)life-giving force, the life-giving inspiration (*spənta maniiu*), a concept which in the Young Avesta became a deity in its own right, closely associated with Ahura Mazda. The (mis)creative force of the Lie is the destructive force/inspiration (*agra maniiu*), which became the name of the Evil Spirit himself. The entities in the universe that possess this force make up the world of thought/spirit (*maniiuuu*).

Both Ahura Mazda and the Evil Spirit have their agents among the humans. Ahura Mazda’s principal agent, the first human to “praise Order,” “discard the *daēuuas*” as not worthy of sacrifice, and “sacrifice to Ahura Mazda” was Zarathustra, the first human poet-sacrificer. Later poet-sacrificers imitate Zarathustra in order to perform a successful sacrifice.

The purpose of the Avestan sacrifice, as reflected in the *Yasna*, is to regenerate the *ahu*, the living existence, after periods of darkness, sterility, and death (night, winter). During the ritual, the sacrificer constructs a microcosmic model of the cosmos as it was ordered by Ahura Mazda the first time: the first *ahu*. For this, all the models, or prototypes (*ratu*), of all the ingredients of the first *ahu* are invoked, invited, and ordered. The *haoma* sacrifice is performed, apparently in order to regenerate Zarathustra in the personality of the current sacrificer. Once that is done, the sacrificer recites the *Gāθās*, as they were first recited in the world of the living by Zarathustra, in order to smash and remove evil from the cosmos. The divine “readiness to listen,” Sraoša, is praised in order to strengthen him in his battle against the forces of darkness, embodied in Aēšma, Wrath. The heavenly waters are invoked, as the birth waters of the new existence about to be born, and the sun, which is about to be born out of the world ocean as the symbol of Ahura Mazda’s Order.