

Avestan Quotations in Old Persian? Literary Sources of the Old Persian Inscriptions

PRODS OKTOR SKJÆRVØ

1. Introduction¹

Since the middle of the last century the existence of lexical formulaic parallels in the old Indo-European languages has been common knowledge.² These formulas are assumed to be descended from corresponding ones in the Indo-European proto-language — rather than being borrowings between languages — and together make up a poetic repertory for which the term “indogermanische Dichtersprache” was coined by J. Wackernagel in 1932. In this paper I investigate formulaic parallels in the Old Persian inscriptions and the Avesta in order to determine whether the former may contain “quotations” from the latter. By “quotation” I do not refer to quotations from *written* texts — a written text of the Avesta did not yet exist in Achaemenid times — but to the use of formulas from an oral Avestan tradition in southwestern Iran in the early Achaemenid period (ca. 550 to 400 B.C.E.).

- 1 Acknowledgements: Joshua Katz, Stephanie Jamison, and Rahim Shayegan read early drafts of this paper, making numerous corrections and invaluable suggestions. Steven Cole provided — on short notice — the Ancient Near Eastern material. My gratitude to them all is profound. — In the five years that have passed since this article was submitted, my views on some points of detail, such as translations of certain Avestan terms, may have changed — Note: An asterisk is used in Old Persian texts with mostly restored words to avoid extensive use of square brackets, e.g., **Ahramazdā* instead of [*A/hu[rana]zdū*]. Lightly restored words (1–2 signs missing) have not been marked. In Avestan texts an asterisk indicates restored forms not actually attested in the manuscripts (etymological *ṛh* and *ṛh* have been restored throughout). An asterisk in the translation indicates hypothetical meaning. A dagger in the Avestan texts (e.g., †*tā*) indicates corrupt manuscript readings.
- 2 On the history of the researches see Watkins, 1994, chapter 1.3. For a collection of earlier studies see Schmitt, ed. 1965.

For centuries, scholars have discussed whether the Achaemenid kings were “Zoroastrian” and have argued for or against on the basis of the information in the Achaemenid inscriptions about the Old Persian religion, among the key elements of which are the following: Ahura Mazdā was the creator³ of the world and the personal protector of Darius and his family; the Achaemenid kings can therefore be said to have been Mazdayasnian,⁴ “worshippers of (Ahura) Mazdā.”⁵ We find an opposition between “truth” (*hašiya-*), “true” (*rāsta-*) and “falsehood, deception” (*drauga-*, *miθah-*), “false, deceiving” (*draujana-*). The goal of man is described as acting in such a way that he becomes happy while alive and, when dead *artāvan-*. This term originally meant “part of” or “acting according to the Order (OPers. **qrtam*, Av. *ašəm*, OInd. *ṛtām*)” imposed on the universe by Ahuramazdā,⁶ but here seems to mean “blessed” in the sense of having been admitted into the happy abode of Ahura Mazdā (cf. Boyce, *History* II, 1982, pp. 176-77).⁷ Both Darius and Xerxes proscribed *daiva*-worship and proclaimed that (only) Ahuramazdā should be worshiped (*DB* 5.15-17, 31-33, and *XPh* 35-41). The condemnation of the *daēuuas* is commonplace in the Avesta, where special terms were used for the worshippers of Ahura Mazdā or the worshippers of the *daēuuas*: *mazdaiiasna-* and *daēuuaiiasna-* (also *daēuuaiiāz-*, cf. Vedic *deva-yāj-*).

In addition to these basic correspondences provided by the Old Persian texts, the descriptions of Herodotus and other classical authors of the religions of the Medes and Persians provide further points of similarity.

On the other hand the differences we can detect in their religions on the basis of the two corpora (notably certain omissions in Old Persian⁸) can easily be explained by the different nature of the texts.

The religion of the Avesta is not that of the Indo-Iranians, and probably not even that of the proto-Iranian community. In fact, some of the other Iranian religions described by Herodotus, for instance that of the Scyths, are

³ My use of “create” here is only a convenience, and it should be kept in mind that at least the original meaning was “establish, place,” see Kellens, 1989.

⁴ The word *mzdysn*, either an appellative or a personal name, is attested in an Aramaic document from the end of the 5th or beginning of the 4th cent. (Porten-Yardeni, I, 1986, p. 56, A4.2).

⁵ By Old Iranian grammar a double name such as Ahura Mazdā cannot be used in compounds, e.g., “created by Ahura Mazdā”; instead, only one element can be used, so we find *ahuraδāta-* or *mazdaδāta-* in this sense (see now Panaino, 1992). Similarly, double names cannot be used in *dvandvas*, hence for “Ahura Mazdā and Miθra” one would have to say *Ahura Miθra*.

⁶ In the *Avesta* the name is in two words: Ahura Mazdā, in Old Persian one: A(h)uramazdā.

⁷ I shall translate Avestan *aša-* as “Order” (i.e., the correct—harmonious—order of all its constituent parts imposed on the universe by Ahura Mazdā); *ašauuan-*, Old Persian *artāvan-* as “follower of Order”; Avestan *druj-* and Old Persian *drauga-* as “Lie” (i.e., the Evil Spirit and his denial that Ahura Mazdā’s Order is the correct order); and *drəguuant-/druuant-*, Old Persian *draujana-* as “follower of the Lie.”

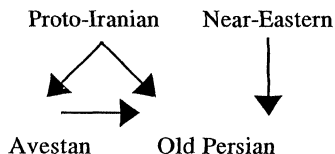
⁸ See, e.g., Duchesne-Guillemin, 1962, pp. 165-70.

quite different, and according to Darius himself (*DB* 5.31-32) the Pointed-hat Sakas did not worship Ahuramazdā. The great similarities between the Old Persian and Avestan religions therefore clearly point to a close genetic relationship; there is no historical evidence whatsoever for a religious reform under the Achaemenids; and so it would be a plausible conclusion that by the 6th century the Avesta was known in western Iran⁹ and that from Darius on, at least, the Avesta was bodily in Persis (cf. Boyce, *History* II, 1982, pp. 7-9 and p. 39, conclusion).

These arguments are unfortunately not conclusive in themselves, however, and what one needs is obviously a clear reference to the Avesta in Old Persian. The material presented in this article does not contain such a "clear reference." It does, however, show that there are passages in the inscriptions that are so close to Avestan texts as *almost* to rule out coincidence.

Since the Avesta is never mentioned in the Old Persian inscriptions we can only argue on the basis of similarity—or identity—in form and contents between Avestan and Old Persian texts. Such similarities, however, may be the result of common descent, "borrowing," or even chance, reflecting "universal habits of thought and speech" (as put by S. Jamison). The most serious problem is therefore how to find objective criteria for recognizing inherited formulas as opposed to "quotations." The method adopted here is heuristic: I analyze the parallels—discussing the texts from the point of view of contents and form, or "themes" and "formulas"—to discover patterns.

It is also well-known that many literary formulas in the Old Persian inscriptions have Ancient Near Eastern models. Thus, Darius's description of the usurper Gaum'ta the Magian (*DB* 1.35-71) has been shown by Bickerman to have numerous parallels in the Ancient Near Eastern literature. The complete literary heritage of the Achaemenids is therefore the sum of their Iranian heritage and the influences they were exposed to after their ancestors separated from the other Iranians. We shall therefore see that we find Near Eastern themes in Near Eastern or Iranian form, Indo-Iranian themes in Old Persian form, and, perhaps, specifically Avestan themes in Old Persian form, schematically:



⁹ Note the "Zoroastrian" names in the Aramaic documents: A3.10 (end 5th-beg. 4th cent.) *spntdt* = Spantadāta, Av. Spəntō.dāta, and *ʾrmttydt*, *ʾrmntydt* = Ārma(n)tidāta- < Av. Ārmaiti- (Porten-Yardeni, I, 1986, p. 48); A4.2 *mzdysn*, name or appellative (ibid., p. 56), B3.4 *bgzwšt* = Bagazušta, *mtrdt* = Miθradāta son of *mtryzn* = Miθrayazāna, and *zmšp* = Žāmāspa (Porten and Yardeni, II, 1989, p. 64).

The discussion will proceed as follows:

2. The early Iranians and their literature.
 - 2.1. Chronology of Old Persian and Avestan.
 - 2.1.1. Old Persian.
 - 2.1.2. The time of the Avesta.
 - 2.1.3. The place of the Avesta.
 - 2.2. The "Old Persian" Avesta.
 - 2.2.1. The Avesta in western Iran.
 - 2.2.2. Different kinds of texts.
 - 2.2.3. Dialect differences.
 - 2.3. Quotations from the Avesta in Middle Iranian.
 - 2.3.1. Quotations from the Avesta in the Sasanian inscriptions.
 - 2.3.2. A quotation from the Avesta in Sogdian.
3. Literary Sources of the Old Persian inscriptions.
 - 3.1. Ancient Near-Eastern themes.
 - 3.1.1. Victory over numerous opponents in one year.
 - 3.1.2. Comparison with ancestors and predecessors.
 - 3.1.3. New records.
 - 3.1.4. Building inscriptions.
 - 3.1.5. Origin of the royal power.
 - 3.1.6. The succession.
 - 3.1.7. Ahuramazdā's supportive function.
 - 3.1.8. Ahuramazdā's remunerative function.
 - 3.1.9. Protecting the king's records to obtain Ahuramazdā's favor.
 - 3.1.10. Obedience by day and night.
 - 3.1.11. Crossing rivers.
 - 3.2. Inherited themes.
 - 3.2.1. The Law of Ahuramazdā and the king.
 - 3.2.2. Ahuramazdā's protective function.
 - 3.2.3. The king's protective function.
 - 3.2.4. Magicians and sorcerers.
 - 3.2.5. Treat well, punish well.
 - 3.3. Possible instances of quotations.
 - 3.3.1. Old Persian names.
 - 3.3.2. Ahuramazdā's creative function.
 - 3.3.3. Ahuramazdā's greatness.
 - 3.3.4. The king and Ahuramazdā.
 - 3.3.5. Evil = bad smell.
 - 3.4. Probable instances of quotations.
 - 3.4.1. The correct worship of Ahuramazdā.
 - 3.4.2. The king's function of reestablishing (political) order.
 - 3.4.3. The king's "socio-legal" responsibilities.
 - 3.4.4. The goal of the good Mazdayasnian.
 - 3.4.5. Staying on the straight path.
 - 3.4.6. The king as keeper of truth and punisher of falsehood.
 - 3.4.7. The battle against the Lie.
 - 3.4.8. The king's "esthetic" function.
 - 3.5. Avestan-Old Persian words in Elamite?

2. THE EARLY IRANIANS AND THEIR LITERATURE

Following is a brief outline of the history of the Iranian languages and literatures needed as background for the following discussion.

The extant literary heritage of the early Iranians consists of the Avesta and the Old Persian inscriptions, but that there was much more to the (oral) literature of the early Iranians than this is seen from the allusions to mythical and legendary stories in the Avesta and from the Iranian epic traditions, one culminating in the Persian *Book of Kings* by Ferdousi (ca. 1000 C.E.) and another seen in the Ossetic epic about the Narts. There is also evidence for Iranian literature in the oldest period in the works of the classical authors (see Boyce, 1957, pp. 19-20).

The Old Persian inscriptions are official records of the Achaemenid kings

written on rock and other permanent material in cuneiform script. The most substantial inscriptions are from the reigns of Darius I (522-486 B.C.E) and Xerxes (486-465). Those of Artaxerxes I (465-425/6), Darius II (424-405/6), Artaxerxes II (405-359), and Artaxerxes III (359-338) rarely go beyond some standard formulas.

The Avesta, the sacred books of the Iranian Mazdayasnians (Zoroastrians), is the only old Iranian literary corpus aside from the Achaemenid inscriptions. It consists in large part of ritual texts accompanying the sacrifice, such as the *Yasna* (Y.), *Vispered* (Vr.), etc. Other important texts are the *Yašts* (Yt.), which are hymns to individual deities, and the *Videvdat* (V.), a collection of rules for religiously correct behavior recounted within a mythological and legendary framework.

2.1. CHRONOLOGY OF OLD PERSIAN AND AVESTAN

While the Avesta was for a large part composed before the Achaemenid period, the extant text is found in manuscripts none of which antedates the 13th century C.E. The actual dates of composition of the Avestan texts therefore remain a hotly debated problem in Iranian studies, and for the purposes of this paper I need to explain my own standpoint. My principal argument is based on the comparison between the linguistic stages of Old Persian and the two Avestan dialects.

2.1.1. OLD PERSIAN

Already under Xerxes (486-465 B.C.E.), but especially his successors, the inscriptions show that the Old Persian language was on its way to becoming (proto-)Middle Persian. Profound changes in phonology and morphology are evidenced by the fact that the scribes no longer knew how to spell the endings of nouns and verbs, use of wrong case forms, etc. (e.g., XPh). If we give Old Persian half a millennium in which to flourish we can therefore give it a time frame of ca. 900 to 400 B.C.E.

We do not know when the Middle Persian language known from the Sasanian inscriptions of the 3rd century C.E. was born, and the date suggested in the table below is hypothetical. By the first Islamic (7th) century Middle Persian had already changed to New Persian, and the date of the change lies somewhat before that. The transition period to modern Persian was much shorter than that between Old and Middle Persian because the linguistic changes involved were fewer.

| | |
|-------------------------|---|
| ca. 900-400: | Old Persian period (earliest inscription, Darius at Behistun, 520-519 B.C.E). |
| 400 B.C.E.-ca. 100 C.E: | Transition period. |
| 100-ca. 500 | Middle Persian period (earliest inscriptions ca. 224 C.E.; some earlier coins). |

The written tradition of Old Persian no doubt exercised a conservative influence, so the spoken language may already have started changing under the first Achaemenids.¹⁰

2.1.2. THE TIME OF THE AVESTA

The Avesta falls into two chronological layers, one Old Avestan, and one Late or Young (Younger) Avestan. Old Avestan is grammatically very close to the language of the Rigveda, the oldest religious texts of the Indo-Aryans, while the grammatical structure of Young Avestan differs markedly and is rather close to that of Old Persian (see Kellens-Pirart, I, 1988, pp. 12-13). These comparisons provide the only clues to the dates of the Avestan texts, as no part of the Avesta (or the Rigveda) contains references to known historical events. Young Avestan may thus be dated approximately to the same period as Old Persian, while Old Avestan must have been spoken several centuries before that. We should probably add at least two to three hundred years for the transition period between Old and Young Avestan, which gives us a total of ca. 800 years for the period from the end of the Old through the Young Avestan period. This gives us the following chronological framework (if we assume that Young Avestan was much more conservative than Old Persian, we may shift it down a century or two, but little is changed thereby):¹¹

- 2200-1700: Proto-Avestan (dialect of Proto-Iranian after the break-up of Indo-Iranian unity; end of Indus civilization ca. 1900 and coming of the Indo-Aryans?)
- 1700-1200: Old Avestan (time of composition of the *Yasna Haptanḡhāiti* and the *Gāthās*,¹² as well as other literature, part of which must survive in Young Avestan form in the Avesta; composition of the Rigveda and incipient canonization of the texts; kingdom of the Indo-Aryan Mitanni in northern Mesopotamia; reign of the Hittite king Hattusilis ca. 1300; development¹³ and (some degree of) standardization of the Mesopotamian epics; flourishing of Mycenaean civilization).
- 1200-900: Transition period (canonization of the *Old Avesta*; development of a "Zoroastrianized"¹⁴ religious literature in eastern Iran, some of it preserved

¹⁰ In Akkadian, Elamite, and Greek transcriptions of Old Persian words the diphthongs already appear monophthongized, e.g., OPers. *A^huramazdā*, Akk. *ú-ra-ma-az-da* beside *a-ḫu-ru-ma-az-da*?, Elamite *u-ra-maš-da*, Greek *Ōromasdēs*.

¹¹ This is not the place to provide all the evidence and arguments. The table is meant just to give some idea of the historical context of the Avesta.

¹² After this was written I noticed in Jackson, 1899, p. xi, that F. G. Ayuso, in his *Los pueblos Iranios y Zoroastro*, Madrid, 1874, p. 14, suggested that Zarathustra lived "in the Vedic period, B.C. 2000-1800"!

¹³ By "development" I mean the recasting of the inherited myths and legends into their local forms and by "canonization" the fixation of the text in a form no longer to be changed. On the problem of "canonization" in cuneiform literature see, e.g., Rochberg-Halton, 1984.

¹⁴ Much of the *Young Avesta* is written in the form of answers given by Ahura Mazdā to

in the *Young Avesta*; canonization of the Rigveda, composition of the post-Rigvedic texts: *Atharvaveda*, *Brāhmaṇas*, etc.; development of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* from ca. 13th cent.¹⁵).

900-400: Young Avestan (composition and canonization of the Young Avestan corpus in eastern Iran and gradual spread westward; composition of the *Upaniṣads*, the beginning of Middle Indic literature; the Buddha ca. 400; composition and partial canonization of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* and the earliest Hesiodic poems by 8th cent.; classical Greek literature).

The “Proto-Avestan” period, in this scheme, would correspond chronologically to the period of the “Bactrian-Margiane Archaeological Complex” (BMAC), which has been dated to ca. 2100-1750 B.C.E. (Hiebert-Lamberg Karlovsky, 1992; Hiebert, 1994, pp. 139-64). It may therefore well have been during this archeologically distinct period that the specifically Iranian “variant” of the Indo-Iranian religion was fully developed, in which the Lord Wisdom, Ahura Mazdā, came to occupy the place of highest god, a development commonly attributed to the religious reform of the prophet Zarathustra.

I shall not discuss here the theories according to which Zarathustra and the Old Avestan texts are assigned to the mid-1st millennium B.C.E., based mainly on the dates given by the classical authors (e.g., Gershevitch, 1964, p. 12). Those who adhere to such a chronology will have to explain, *inter alia*, how the Old Avestan language remained virtually unchanged from the time the Iranian language family separated from the Indian in the 3rd millennium B.C.E. and why there are no western Iranian elements in the Avesta (see below). If one were to accept such a late date for the Avesta the premises of the present discussion would, of course, change completely.

2.1.3. THE PLACE OF THE AVESTA

The sound system of the Avestan languages agrees with those of northern and northeastern Iranian languages against that of Old Persian, but it is not possible to connect the Avestan languages with specific later Middle or Modern Iranian languages or dialects. Fortunately, the Avestan texts contain geographical names that can be identified, ranging from Chorasmia in the far north to Arachosia and the Helmand basin—perhaps even the Indus valley—in the east and Hyrcania—perhaps also the Sarmatian Scythians—in the west.¹⁶ There are, however, no clear references to any localities west or southwest of these areas, including Media and Persis.¹⁷

questions asked him by Zarathustra.

¹⁵ On the Homeric epics see Kirk, 1975.

¹⁶ *Yt.* 10.14: Herat, Margiana, Sogdiana, Chorasmia; *V.* 1.1: Sogdiana, Margiana, Bactria, Herat, Arachosia, the Helmand river, etc.; *Yt.* 19.67: lengthy description of the Helmand river system; and *Yt.* 13.143: the lands of the Ariias, Tūriias, Sairimas, Sāinus, and Dāhis.

¹⁷ On Avestan Rayā- see Gnoli, 1967, pp. 65-80, and 1985; Boyce, *History* II, 1982, pp. 8-9; K.

Although this evidence is very limited I think it is a plausible conclusion that Old Avestan was the language spoken by the Iranians from about the time of the end of the BMAC in the areas of Chorasmia, Sogdiana, Margiana, and Bactria—as reflected in the *Mihr yašt*—and that the people who spoke Young Avestan originally lived north of the Hindu Kush in Margiana and Bactria but later traveled south into Arachosia and Sistan—as reflected in the other Young Avestan texts mentioned.

The evidence of the 6th-5th century Elamite administrative and economic documents from Persepolis indicates lively traffic among Susa, Persepolis, and Arachosia (Hallock, 1969, pp. 404-409 et passim), and according to Hoffmann (1979, p. 80) Arachosian religious officials are seen in the Persepolis reliefs. Finally, from the colophons of our earliest manuscripts of the Avesta it appears that there was considerable scribal, and therefore also religious, activity in Sistan in the early Muslim period,¹⁸ which no doubt continued an old tradition.

2.2. THE “OLD PERSIAN” AVESTA

Whether parts of the extant Avesta date from after the westward move, that is, were composed in Media or Persis, is uncertain, although possible and even plausible. The Avesta shows no sign of western influence, however, in either the geographical nomenclature or other respects. Even the major litanies do not exhibit any revealing Persian influence: for instance, the old Farmer’s calendar of the Avestan people, consisting of a natural six-fold division of the year (*Y.* 2.9, etc.), was not replaced by the Farmer’s calendar of the Persians (Kent, 1953, pp. 160-61) although they contain many similar elements. Instead, sometime in the first half of the Achaemenid period the Avestan calendar was introduced and replaced the local ones; by 490 it was in place in Anatolia.

2.2.1. THE AVESTA IN WESTERN IRAN

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

Hoffmann is inclined to accept the Median identity of *Rayā zaraθuštri-*, see Hoffmann-Narten, 1989, p. 90. [See now also Skjærvø, 1994, 1995.]

¹⁸ According to the colophon of a manuscript of the *Videvdad* (Jamasp, 1907, p. x) it was copied from a now-lost manuscript written by Ardašēr Wahman at the order of Māhdād Ādurweh in Sistan for Māhyār Māhmīhr from India in 1185, which itself had been copied from manuscript written by Ēhrbed Hōmāst Šādān-Ohrmazd in Sistan. It is quite possible that much of the Younger Avesta was shaped in this area.

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 tr. West, IV, 1892, 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.¹⁹

2.2.2. DIFFERENT KINDS OF TEXTS

Even if the Old Persian authors knew the Avesta, they might not use actual Avestan formulas and style in the royal inscriptions, however. There are various reasons why we should expect differences between the realization of related formulas in the Avesta and in the Old Persian inscriptions.

The Avesta is devoted to the praise of Ahura Mazdā and his work, as well as to that of other deities, and the gods are therefore the main agents throughout the text. In the inscriptions, however, the kings portray themselves as carrying out the will of Ahuramazdā and are therefore themselves the main actors; Ahuramazdā, with few exceptions, acts only

¹⁹ If Bartholomae is right, the *Young Avesta* contains two texts that may refer to this practice, *Vispered* 14.0-1: *Ahunauaitīm Gāθəm ašaonīm ašahe ratūm yazamaide maṭ.āfsmānāqəm maṭ.vacastaštim maṭ.āzaiñim maṭ.pərəsuuim maṭ.paiti.pərəsuuim maṭ.vāyžibiāca paṭbiāasca* "We worship the *Ahunauaiti Gāθā*, follower of Order, Model of Order, with verses [see Kreyenbroek, 1985, p. 80], with strophes, with explanations, with *questions, with *counter-questions, with words and feet," and *Srōš yašt* (Y. 57.7-8): *Sraošəm yazamaide yō paoiriio Gāθā frasrāuaitat ... āfsmānuuqən vacastaštiuuaṭ maṭ.āzaiñtiš maṭ.paiti.frasā* "We worship ... *Sraoša*, who was the first to proclaim the *Gāthās* ... with verses and strophes, with explanations, with *counter-questions." Bartholomae understood the expressions "with phrases," "with strophes," "with words and feet" to refer to the text itself and its different component parts (*haṇdāta*-), *maṭ.āzaiñtiš* as "mit der Auslegung" and referred to the *Bagān yašt* (Y. 19-21), *maṭ.pərəsuuim* "with questions" as referring to now-lost prose passages that provide the connections between the separate parts making up the single *Gāthās*, while the extant text would represent the answers—*maṭ.paiti.pərəsuuim*, *maṭ.paiti.frasā*—to these questions. The terminology may, however, refer to the structure of the *Gāthās*, which contain both *frasā*—"questions" and mythological "examples," e.g., references to Yima.

through the kings. Thus to the Avestan formula **made by (Ahura) Mazdā** there corresponds in the inscriptions **made by the king by the greatness (*vašnā*) of Ahuramazdā**.

The inscriptions of Darius have a primary political content, and his and his successor's use of religious terminology must have been intentional and political. In the same way that the first Sasanian kings Ardašēr and Šāpūr combined *their* claims to the throne with religious propaganda, Darius combined *his* political claim with a claim to proclaiming the real religion as revealed to him by Ahuramazdā. Thus, even passages with primarily religious content are to be understood in the perspective of the king's divine duty to execute the divine directives revealed to him and by which he himself strictly abides as a model for future kings and commoners.

The Avestan texts are mostly metrical and as such contain formulas with fixed meter and structure, while the Old Persian inscriptions, like the Sasanian inscriptions, are apparently in prose and as such can take greater liberty with inherited formulas. Thus we cannot expect complete parallelism between the Old Persian and Avestan formulas expressing related ideas.

2.2.3. DIALECT DIFFERENCES

Of the numerous parallels between the Avesta and the Old Persian inscriptions some agree in both linguistic form and meaning, but others only in meaning. It is not always clearly said that since Old Persian and Avestan are different languages with their own vocabularies, which do not always overlap, we should not expect complete formal agreement between their texts. Just as Kerdīr quoted the Avesta in Middle Persian (see [2.3.1]), Darius, when including references to the holy text, would do so in Old Persian, using Old Persian vocabulary and morphology. The relationship in comparative poetics between the underlying "theme" and its surface realization as a linguistic "formula" is discussed in Watkins, 1994, chapter 1.2, whose definitions of "theme" and "formula" are worth quoting: "the formula [is] the verbal and grammatical device for encoding and transmitting a given theme or interaction of themes ... That is to say that *theme* is the deep structure of formula."

We need therefore not be overly concerned that no Old Persian etymological equivalent of Avestan *yazata* is found in Old Persian, for instance. As the *daēuuas* were relegated to a different level from the gods that were to receive worship and in return benefit the worshippers, a new word for "god" was needed (cf. Kellens, 1994, pp. 20-26); while Avestan chose an old Indo-Iranian word meaning "(a being) worthy of worship," Old Persian chose to use *baga*, originally meaning "assignment, allotment" and then personified "assigner" (i.e. of good things—primarily to the worshiper; cf. OInd. *bhága-* and *Bhága-*), as in *Auramazdā vazārka haya maθišta bagānām* (DPd 1-2) = *Ahurō Mazdā yō mazištō yazatanam* (Yt. 17.16), quoted in [3.3.3]. Thus, Ahura Mazdā is called *baga* in Y. 70.1:

təm **bayəm** tēm ratūm yazamaide yim
Ahurəm Mazdām daδuūāghəm rapantəm
taršuuāghəm vīspa vohū

We worship him as the **baga** and **ratu**,
him, **Ahura Mazdā**, who has created (us),
who supports (us), who has fashioned all
good things.

Among other surface, lexical, differences between Avestan and Old Persian we may point out the word for “good,” which is *vohu* in Avestan, but *naiba* in Old Persian. Note Xerxes’s use of *vasiy* and *naiba-* in *XPg* 3-5 (below [3.4.8]) instead of Darius’s “Avestan” *paruv* and *fraša-*, and cf. *XPa* 13-20:

vasiy aniyašciy **naibam** křtam ... **taya**
adam akunavam **utamaiy** **taya** **pītā**
akunauš tayapatiy křtam vainataiy
naibam **ava** **visam** **vašnā** **Auramazdāhā**
akumā ... **mām** **Auramazdā** **pātuv**
utamaiy **xšačam** **utā** **taya** **manā** **křtam** **utā**
tayamaiy **piča** **křtam** **avašciy** **Auramazdā**
pātuv

Much else **good** was made ... **which I**
and my father made: but whatever is
seen as **good**, **all that we did by the**
greatness of Ahuramazdā. King Xerxes
says: May Ahuramazdā protect me and my
realm and that which I have done, and
that which my father has done, that too
may Ahuramazdā protect!

Compare the use of *vohu* in a passage from the hymn to Anāhitā (*Yt.* 5.89):

azəm **bōiēt** ...²⁰ **nipaiēmi** **vīspa** **vohū**
mazdaδātā **ašaciθra**

So shall I protect all those good things
created by (Ahura) Mazdā that *contain
the seed²¹ of Order.”

We may conveniently display the “deep-structure theme” and the “surface formulas” in a table:

| | DIVINITY | PROTECT | ALL | THAT | GOOD | MADE BY (THE GREATNESS OF) AHURA MAZDĀ |
|--------|--------------------|---------------|---------------|-------------|---------------|---|
| OPers. | <i>Auramazdā</i> | <i>pā-</i> | <i>visa-</i> | <i>ava-</i> | <i>naiba-</i> | <i>vašnā Auramazdāha kar-</i> |
| Av. | (<i>Anāhitā</i>) | <i>ni-pā-</i> | <i>vīspa-</i> | <i>ta-</i> | <i>vohu-</i> | <i>mazdā-δātā-</i> |

The same relationship between linguistic form and meaning is found in the case of Old Iranian and Old Indic, note for instance “offspring,” which is **tauman-* or *taumā-* in Old Persian, *frazaiñti-* in Avestan, and *prajā-* in Old Indic (see the examples quoted in [3.1.9]).

²⁰ Corrupt; mss.: F1 *bōiēt tum*; *baoiδatəm* J10; *baoiδatəm* K12.

²¹ The exact meaning of *ciθra-* here is not known: “appearance, splendor” or “seed, origin.” See the discussion in Gershevitch, 1967, pp. 213-14. Note also OInd. *tvīši-* “brilliance (of the sun)” as “semen” in *RV* 1.71.5 (Jamison, 1991, p. 296).

2.3. QUOTATIONS FROM THE AVESTA IN MIDDLE IRANIAN

An analogy to what we may expect if there are Avestan "quotations" in the Old Persian inscriptions is furnished by quotations from the Avesta in two Middle Iranian sources: the Middle Persian inscriptions of the Sasanian high priest Kerdīr (ca. 270 C.E.) and a (presumably Manichean) Sogdian text.

2.3.1. QUOTATIONS FROM THE AVESTA IN THE SASANIAN INSCRIPTIONS

In an article published in 1983 I showed that an Avestan text was quoted in one of the inscriptions of Kerdīr (*KSM* 29), where I was able to restore a fragmentary word: [...]sky, as *nask* (Skjærvø, 1983, p. 276), that is, the Middle Persian term for a book of the Avesta, known also from Pahlavi and Manichean texts.²²

Kerdīr did not quote the actual Avestan text, obviously because nobody would have understood it. The Avestan quotations in the inscription of Kerdīr are also not completely identical with the Middle Persian (Pahlavi) version of any *extant* Avestan text. There can be several reasons for this, for instance that the actual text Kerdīr quoted has not survived or that the extant Pahlavi versions may no longer be identical with those of the third century. Nevertheless, Kerdīr's text corresponds closely to the Pahlavi translation of *Videvdad* 19.28-30, which contains a description of the fate of the soul after death (see Skjærvø, 1983, pp. 290-91).

If there are Avestan "quotations" in the Achaemenid inscriptions we must therefore expect them to be at least partially "translated" into Old Persian and adapted to the style of the inscriptions, as well as to their particular purpose. We can gain some idea of what the Old Persian versions of the Avesta may have been like by comparing the Middle Persian (Pahlavi) versions. It is evident that the Pahlavi translations neither reflect Avestan syntax faithfully nor do they always render the word meanings correctly. One way to account for these differences is to assume that respect for the holy texts delayed the process of adding commentaries and translations, so that by the time it started, the texts were no longer completely intelligible. This is a typical feature of oral literature, see, e.g., Nagy (1990, p. 29): "Since, however, epic

²² It is found in a fragmentary passage from Mani's last interview with King Wahrān, Kerdīr's benefactor, in which the king refers to the *nask*, presumably meaning his own holy book, as opposed to Mani's heretical writings (Sundermann, 1981, text no. 4a.15 lines 1004-09), and several times in the Parthian *Gyān wiḫrās* "Sermon on the Soul" referring to the *Gāthās*, e.g., "And in the *nask* it (i.e., the Living Air or Ether) is *called the *Ahunauuaiti Gāthā*" (Sundermann, 1997, pp. 76-77). On the sacred books of the Persians cf. Mani's statement, contemporary with Kerdīr, that the Persians had books written by the followers of Zarathustra (*Kephalaia*, ed. Polotsky, p. 7.30-33).

deliberately resists change in order to preserve the *ipsissima verba*, the linguistic innovations that do occur in its *Dichtersprache* will not keep apace with the linguistic innovations of the everyday language from which it evolves." We see it in India and Greece, where by the time of the Indian commentators and the Alexandrian grammarians the languages of the Rigveda and the Homeric poems were no longer well understood. Changing societies with new interpretations of the religious texts, as well as genuine misunderstandings and deliberate changes, must also have contributed to the widening gap between the originals and the translations. Over the centuries this became a cumulative process, and it is indeed quite surprising that the Pahlavi versions are as faithful as they are.²³ Already in Achaemenid times, however, many texts, especially the Old Avestan ones, cannot have been correctly understood, as pointed out above.

2.3.2. A QUOTATION FROM THE AVESTA IN SOGDIAN

A genuine Avestan text—the *Aṣəm vohū* prayer—transliterated into Sogdian characters, was discovered by I. Gershevitch (apud Sims-Williams, 1976, Appendix). The language of the prayer seems to have been influenced by Old Sogdian, but on the whole it is probably a faithful rendition of the Avestan text as it was recited in Sogdiana. Similarly, still today, this prayer is recited among Zoroastrians world-wide, in all kinds of local accents.

3. LITERARY SOURCES OF THE OLD PERSIAN INSCRIPTIONS

In the following the corpus is divided into four sections: Ancient Near Eastern themes, inherited themes, possible instances of quotations, and probable instances of quotations.

²³ It is sometimes assumed that the Pahlavi version of the *Avesta* was made and added to the Avestan text in the Sasanian period (thus Boyce, 1968, p. 34), which would account for the lack of comprehension on the part of the translator, especially of the *Gāθās*. The Pahlavi translations are relatively faithful to the originals, however, and since the Avestan and the Middle Persian languages were too dissimilar for mutual, or even one-way, comprehension, we must conclude that the Pahlavi version is based on a long tradition of having contemporary versions of the holy texts accompanied by commentaries. Exceptions are "popular" texts, such as those collected in the *Khorda Avesta*, which exhibit Modern Persian features in both morphology and syntax (e.g., the appearance of the present participle in *-endag* and periphrastic constructions containing this participle that are completely absent in the *Pahlavi Yasna*) and are the result of more recent changes. As for the Pahlavi translation of the *Gāθās*, it sets them in a ritual context, and there is little, if any, trace of any "historical" interpretation of the Avestan text in it, which is why it is commonly rejected as having no value. With the progress in our understanding of the *Gāθās* a re-evaluation of the Pahlavi translation is needed.

3.1. ANCIENT NEAR-EASTERN THEMES

This first group contains examples of clearly Near Eastern themes in the Old Persian inscriptions. What is important to note is that even when the Old Persian authors had Near Eastern literary models they often used these as a basic framework for expressing fundamentally Iranian religio-political ideas, and the actual formulas are therefore frequently Iranian and Indo-Iranian.

No doubt further parallels can be found. Note, for instance, that Darius's self descriptions in DN_a and DN_b have parallels in Mesopotamian texts from at least as far back as the end of the 3rd millennium in the hymns of Šulgi, king of Ur (2094-2047 B.C.E.; see ed. Castellino, 1972) to Ashurbanipal, king of Assyria (668-627 B.C.E.; ed. Lehmann-Haupt, 1892²⁴).

3.1.1. VICTORY OVER NUMEROUS OPPONENTS IN ONE YEAR

Darius sums up his activities in the first year of his reign as follows at the beginning of column IV of the Behistun inscription (DB 4.3-7): *θātiy Dārayavauš xšāyaθiya ima taya adam akunavam vašnā Auramazdāha hamahqyāyā θarda pasāva yaθā xšāyaθiya abavam XIX hamaranā akunavam vašnā Auramazdāha adamšiš ajanam utā IX xšāyaθiyā aqarḃāyam* "(Thus) says Darius, the king: This is what I did by the greatness of Ahuramazdā in one and the same year after I became king. I made 19 battles. By the greatness of Ahuramazdā I smashed them, and I seized 9 kings."

This is a Near Eastern literary topos, found from the earliest period onward, cf.:

From the reign of Narām-Sîn (2254-2218 B.C.E.): "Narām-Sîn, the mighty, king of the four quarters, **victor in nine battles in one year**" (Frayne, 1993, p. 112 and passim).

Puzur-Inšušinak, ruler of Susa and Elam (2nd half of 22nd cent. B.C.E.): "(These cities and) Šu'akiri **in one single day** he subdued under his feet" (Gelb-Kienast, 1990, p. 324); "At that time I defeated with weapons, **eight times in the course of one year**, the totality of the land of Sumer and Akkad which had become hostile against me" (Frayne, 1989, p. 376).

From the treaty between Šuppiluliuma, king of the Hittites, and Šattiwaza, king of Mittani: "(I took prisoner) all of them with their countries and with all that they owned and brought them to the Hatti land. Because of king Tušratta's presumptuousness **I raided all these countries in a single year and conquered them** for the Hatti land" (Goetze in Pritchard, ed., 1955, p. 318).

Adad-nirārī III, king of Assyria (810-783 B.C.E.): "**In (my) first year** I made the land of Amurru and the Hatti land in its entirety kneel at my feet; I imposed tribute and regular tax for future days upon them" (Page, 1968, p. 143).

²⁴ I have been able to use a translation by S. Cole of the untranslated texts in this edition.

3.1.2. COMPARISON WITH ANCESTORS AND PREDECESSORS

In *DB* 4. 50-52 Darius says: *θātiy Dārayavauš xšāyaθiya tayaiy paruvā xšāyaθiyā yātā āha avaišām avā naiy astiy kartaṃ yaθā manā vašnā Auramazdāha hamahqayāyā θarda kartaṃ* “(Thus) says Darius, the king: “**The previous kings while they were (kings/alive) have not done as much as I by the greatness of Ahuramazdā have done in one year.**”

This too is a Near Eastern literary topos, found from the earliest period onward, cf.:

Ninurta-kudurrī-ušur, governor of Suhu and Mari (ca. 770 B.C.E.): “I won a battle like no one before <among my fathers>. My fathers had smitten the enemy ten times, **but they did not achieve as much as I. In one single victory I surpassed my fathers**” (after Cavigneaux-Ismail, p. 348).

Nabonidus, king of Babylonia (555-539 B.C.E.): “What from old times king after king had not built, **what none of the previous kings had built** for Šamaš, such a splendid house—I built Ebarra for Šamaš, my commander, in the most magnificent manner” (after Langdon-Zehnpfund, p. 265).

From colophons on tablets from the library of Assurbanipal in Niniveh (668-627 B.C.E.): “Assurbanipal ... who got a clear eye, the most exquisite of the art of writing, **like no one among the kings before me** had learnt this art” (after Hunger, 1968, p. 98 and passim).

3.1.3. NEW RECORDS

Darius’s description of his invention of the Old Persian script in order to record his deeds has Near Eastern models, cf. *DB* 4.88-92: *θātiy Dārayavauš xšāyaθiya vašnā Auramazdāha ima dipiciṣam taya adam akunavam patiṣam ariyā utā pavastāyā utā carṃā gra[x x āha pat]iṣam[c]iy [x x x]fām akunavam ... utā niyapai[θiya u]tā patiyafrasiya paišiṣā mā[m]* “(Thus) says King Darius: By the greatness of Ahuramazdā, **this inscription that I made,** in addition [it was] (in) Aryan and ... on both clay and parchment ... **And it was read before me.**”

With this cf. from colophons on tablets from the library of Assurbanipal in Niniveh (668-627 B.C.E.): “The wisdom of Nabû, the cuneiform signs, **I wrote on tablets**, checked and collated (them) and erected them in my palace for me to read or **to have them read before me**” (after Hunger, 1968, p. 98 and passim).

3.1.4. BUILDING INSCRIPTIONS

Building inscriptions are common in the Ancient Near East in all periods; and no examples need be quoted here.²⁵

²⁵ [For a Middle Persian building-completion/repair inscription, see Frye-Skjærvø, 1996.]