

Manušcihr and the tradition of the Magi¹

According to the tradition, the oral transmission of the Avesta was ever accompanied by the written text corpus of the Avesta preserved in the Treasure of the kings and in the Castle of the archives of the Aryan land. The downfall of the Achaemenian kingship led to a lot of damages to the Mazdayasnian religion through the plunder and destruction of the palaces and libraries and massacre of the priests who were the repositories and communicators of the sacred wisdom. In the Arsacian period, some priests well-versed in phonetics fashioned anew an Avesta alphabet (Pers. *dēn-dibīrīh*) for reassembling the remains of the Avesta. They included the systematic provision of symbols for sounds peculiar to Avesta language, and especially the provision of symbols for vowels. The written corpus, the so-called “Sasanian archetype”, was presented by Tōsar to the founder of the Sasanian kingship, Ardsasēr.

A number of literati who have paid attention to the language, writings, and religion of the Parsis have doubted whether their sacred texts have been written even in far later times, before the end of the Sasanian period. For example, Abbé François Nau, basing his arguments on the Christian Syriac material, advanced this thesis – called “revolutionary” by Henrik Samuel Nyberg² – that the Avesta was taught by oral instruction and was not written with the Avesta

¹ . *Journal of the K. R. Cama Oriental Institute*, 70, 2010, 33-44.

² H.S. Nyberg, “Sassanid Mazdaism according to Moslem sources”, *Journal of the K.R. Cama Oriental Institute*, 39, 1958, 22.

alphabet until after 630 A.D., on the eve of the Arabic invasion³. Jean de Menasce has indicted that the Syriac text which is about Jesus Sabran, and Nau has made it the pivot of his translation, can be translated differently.⁴ Recently, Philippe Gignoux has resurrected the Nau's denial of the Mazdayasnian evidences by referring to a Manichaean text.⁵ If we carefully examine the text in Parthian, *rāhān Wifrās* 'the instruction of the ways', we easily notice that he has given a free (and intentionally incorrect) translation (by omitting words).⁶

Already, in the nineteenth century, Martin Haug regretted that: « ... those scholars who make so much fuss about the all-importance of Parsi tradition, adhere to it only in minor points, such as the meanings of certain words, but abandon it altogether as regards the most important questions, such as the age of Zoroaster, the composition and preservation of the sacred books, the age of the Pahlavi language etc. Instead of paying, in this respect, the slightest attention to the traditional reports, they maintain, that, for instance, the Zand-alphabet is of Post-Christian origin, and that the Zand-Avesta, as we possess it now, was not written before the time of the Sasanidæ, and had been preserved for many centuries exclusively by memory, opinions which

³ F. Nau, "Étude historique sur la transmission de l'Avesta et sur l'époque probable de sa dernière rédaction", *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 95, 1927, 149-199, "L'époque de la dernière rédaction de notre Avesta", *Journal asiatique* 21, 1927, 150-156.

⁴ P. de Menasce, « Autour d'un texte syriaque inédit sur la religion des Mages », *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies* 9, 1937-39, 587.

⁵ Ph. Gignoux, *Les quatre inscriptions du mage Kirdīr*, Paris, 1990, 30-31. For the Manichaean text, see W. Sundermann, *Mitteliranische manichäische Texte kirchengeschichtlichen Inhalts*, Berlin, 1981, 86-7.

⁶ I have already discussed this text and Gignoux's translation, see *Ādarbād son of Mahrspend. New lights on his life and on some of his works* (in Persian), Ermān, 2002, 207-9.

are laughed at and ridiculed by every Parsi priest (and I think justly) as absurdities. »⁷

In the middle of the twentieth century, Harold Walter Bailey found a second, concurrent tradition of the edition of the Avesta in a passage of Manuščih'r's first epistle to the good (Mazdayasnian) of Sīragān. Then, he proposed to put the recording of the Avesta in written form about the middle of the sixth century A.D.: A new alphabet was invented, the Avesta alphabet, out of the Pārsīg letters. With the carefully-forged instrument of the new alphabet, the Avesta texts were set down in their late Sasanian priestly pronunciation, and the canon of the 21 books of the Avesta was finally established by an assembly presided over by the high-priest Veh-Šābuhr.⁸

Bailey's finding met with large acceptance among scholars such as Mary Boyce⁹, Anahit Perikhanian¹⁰, and even among Parsi priests like

⁷ M. Haug, "Introductory remarks", *An Old Zand-Pahlavi Glossary*, edited by Hoshegi Jamaspji, Bombay, 1867, XIII-XIV.

⁸ See H.W. Bailey, *Zoroastrian Problems in the Ninth-Century Books*, Oxford, 1943, V. *patvand*.

⁹ M. Boyce, "Middle Persian Literature", *Iranistik. Literatur*, ed. B. Spuler, HdO 1.4.2.1, Leiden, 1968, 33-4.

¹⁰ A. Perikhanian, *The Book of a Thousand Judgements*, Costa Mesa, 1980, 418: "Vehšāhpuhr: magupatān magupat, editor of the Canon of the Avesta in the reign of Xusrav ī Anōšakruvān."

M.F. Kanga¹¹. Hormazdyar Kayoji Mirza wrote the history of the oral and written transmission of the Avesta texts according to that view.¹²

Bailey based his argument on the deciphering of the phrase 𐬀𐬎𐬌𐬎𐬎𐬀 (𐬀𐬎𐬌𐬎𐬎𐬀), 21-*ān bazišnīhā* ‘twenty-one divisions’, and remarked thus: In the 21 divisions we may perhaps see the twenty-one “*bazišn bahr* called *naska*” of the Dēnkird.¹³

This deciphering is wrong, and his remark is not sound. Even if we amend 𐬀𐬎𐬌𐬎𐬎𐬀 into 𐬀𐬎𐬌𐬎𐬎𐬀 /*bazišnīhā*/, the word *bazišn* ‘division’ is used for the triple division of the Avesta, that is, theological, liturgical, and legal, and not for the twenty one books of the Avesta.¹⁴ We should read the statement of the Dēnkird viii M 677-678 thus:

u-š ād hend bazišn bahr vīst-ēk ī xʷānīhend nask.

‘There are twenty-one parts of the divisions which are called Book.’

Indeed, the divisions (*bazišn*) of the Avesta are three, and each division contains seven parts (*bahr*), and each part contains a number

¹¹ M.F. Kanga, “Epistle I, Ch. IV of Manuščihir Gošnjamān. A critical study”, *Indian Linguistics*, 27, 1966, 45-57: “Manuščihir here cites the example of Vehšāhpuhr of immortal soul, the magupatān magupat of the Emperor Husrav, son of Kavāt, who published the twenty-one divisions of the religious scriptures in such a way that the magian priests became unanimous and abided by them.” 46-47.

¹² H. K. Mirza, *Ancient Iranian Systems of writing*, Bombay, 1979.

¹³ Bailey, op. cit. 174.

¹⁴ Even if we hold that *bazišn* was used for book (/ *naska*) in the Dēnkird, the phrase in the epistle of Manuščihir would have been 21-*ān bazišn(ān)*.

Here is the fourth chapter of Manuščih'r's first epistle to the good people of Sīragān, against the judicial decree of Zādsprahm, regarding the ceremonies of purification and other matters (NM 1, 4).²⁰

<nāmag ī mānuščih'r, ēk, cahār>

1. u-m ⁺vistāxīh²¹ ī abar nibēsišn²² ī andar ōn abardazišnīh mādayān az ham cim. ašmāh kē-tān yazadān pās^ebānēnānd šōyišn ī ped bar^ešnūm az kirdag bē nē hiled.

2. cōn pēšēnīgān guft ested kū: ka az kār hilīhed harv āb ātaš urvar mard ī ašōg gōspend ud harvisp dām ī ohrmazd bēšīd ud kāst ud šēbēnīd²³ baved.

3. cōn gōbed ped dēn kū ōy tan ī rist kē-š nasuš abar dvārīd ested

anusō zī spitama zaraθuštra aēša yā paiti.irista avaṭ hvarə ā.tāpayeiti anusō hāu mā anusō ave stārō: cē a-hunsandīhā, spitāmān zardušt, hān kē abar-rist ā-š hān <ī> x^varšēd abar tābed, [ōn] a-hunsandīhā <hān ī māh> [ēdōn] ahunsandīhā avēšān stārag.

xšnāvayeiti zī spitama zaraθuštra aēšō nā yō yaozdāθryō yaṭ aētəm paiti.iristəm frā.nasūm kərənaoiti: <cē> šnāyēned, spitāmān zardušt, hān mard ī yōzdāhr ka hān <ī> abar-rist ā-š frāz-[⁺az-]

²⁰ Cf. Bamanji N. Dhabhar, *The Epistles of Mānūshchīhar*, Bombay, 1912, 17-24, E.W. West, *Pahlavi Texts*, II, SBE 18, Oxford U.P. 1882, 292-98, M.F. Kanga, op. cit.

²¹ -𐭅𐭆𐭇𐭈 W, BK

²² -𐭅𐭆𐭇𐭈 Dhabhar, 𐭅𐭆𐭇𐭈

²³ 𐭅𐭆𐭇𐭈

*nasuš*²⁴ *kird* [*kē rīman būd ēsted*], *šnāyēned ātaš*, *šnāyēned āb*, <*šnāyēned zamīg*>, *šnāyēned gōspend*, *šnāyēned urvar*, *šnāyēned nar ī ahlav*, *šnāyēned nārīg ī ašōg*, *harv do*, *cōn-š abestāg*: **xšnāvayeiti āt(a)rəm**.

4. *ka yōždāhrgar nē baved hamāg yazadān az gētīgīg<ān> bēšīd a-h^ušnūd bavend*. *yōždāhrgarān ī dēnīg ī dānāg kār ī yōždāhrgarīh*, *cōn-šānaz pōryōdkēšān ped kirdag aviš mad*, *nūn-z abāz nē dāštan*, *u-š nē vizūdan*, 5. *frārōn dAd kirbag (nē) vardēnīdan*, *jādag ī nē drust nē <pedīriftan> + abārōn*²⁵ *dād nē pedīriftan*, *kār aziš nē kirdan*, *abēr dānāgīhā drust-xradīhā handēšīdan*, *u-tān pediš abardarīhā stāyišn burzišn ud spās ud āfrīn x^vēšīg*.

6. *cē guft ēsted kū: ped hamāg kār ud dādestān kirdan ud dāštan ī pōryōdkēšān az harv tis-ē meh māyagvardar*, *ud harv hān raftan kirdag kē az avēšān andar āmad ēsted ī ped rāst dastvarīh pōryōdkēšān āšnāg būd hend*.

7. *bē anī-ēvēnagīh <ī> (tāštīg-dānišnīhā ud rōšn-būzišnīhā ped pēdāgīh) ī az dēn ud cāštag ī dastvarān bē āvarīhed enyā vardēnīdan nē dastvarīhā*. *ōy mo_g-mard kē-š vizīr ī +pānzdah*²⁶ *ped nām nibēsihed*, *cōn* *سلاخوون*²⁷ *ud* *سوسوسوون*²⁸ *ī ham nibēsišn nē* *سوسوون*²⁹ *ī abāg dēn*, *cē-š* *سوسوون*³⁰ *nē +būdan rāy ped ōy vizīrīh nē abē-gumān hom*.

²⁴ *سوسوون-سوسوون-سوسوون*

²⁵ *سلاخوون*

²⁶ *سوسوون*

²⁷ For *سلاخوون* /*xrustagīh*/ ‘hue and cry’ rendering Av. *xraosya*, cf. Vd 13.9.

²⁸ +*a-pēšēnagīh*? Cf. N 85.

8. *u-š andar-z nibišt pēdāgēnīd ud vizīd kū jār-ē dā yōzdāhrgar rased ī āgāh-nīrang, kē ōn šōyed cōn ped dēn [pēdāg] guft ēsted ōn šust<an>.*

9. *az ēn ōn sahom kē rāy az hān cōn yōzdāhrgar ī xūb-šustār nūn-z ast, hān ī-š azēr nibišt, rōšn (+frārōn ud) +rāst³¹ kū nē-z vizīrēnīd hēh ped hān ī kam-būzišnīh andar hān nibišt(ag) pēdāg, nē vābar-gōbišn hēh.*

10. *cē agar ōh-iz ōy ped abardarāhā āgāh-dēnīh ud frazānag-dānišnīh, rāst-dastvarīh, meh-pōryōdkēšīh stūdag pēdāg az hāmīš +nūnīgān³² dastvarān frāzīg-tāyag būd hē, ēg-iz abāg mo-mardān <ī> āvām frazānagān ohrmazd mubedān ī pēš būd hend nē hāvand hē. 11. ud ka-z hamāg abestāg <ud> zand varm, ud abardum āgāh-mānsr zarduštrōdum mo_g, ped ohrmazd mobedīh agrī, ud gēhān-virāy hudēn kay ped dehān dahyubedīh < > mad ēstād ×hēnd, 12. ēg-išān ped dād kirdag vardēnīdan, ayāb jud az uskār ud ham-drenzišnīh ud ham-dādestānīh ī mo_gān ī dēn sarān sālārān ham-dādestānīh ī cašmag vehān x^vad-sahišnīhā nē pedīrišnīg nē uspurīg +hēnd.*

13. *bē vābar gōbišn hān ast būd baved ī-šān ped hudāg-vyāxanīh³³, rāst-pehikārišnīh, bavandag-zōrīg-uskārišnīh abāg mehān mo_gān uskārd ēsted, 14. az-iz cāštag ī rāst dastvarān ped vēš-gugāyīh būzišn ī ēvarīg ō hanzamanīgān ī šahr šahr nimūd frāyist muvmardān*

²⁹ *ham-jōgīh?*

³⁰ *pēšēnag?*

³¹ 𐭠𐭣𐭥𐭥𐭥𐭥𐭥𐭥 /frArAst/? 𐭠𐭣𐭥𐭥𐭥𐭥𐭥𐭥

³² 𐭠𐭣𐭥𐭥𐭥𐭥𐭥𐭥 (Fars. اکتونيان)

³³ 𐭠𐭣𐭥𐭥𐭥𐭥𐭥𐭥

dādestān-šnāsān ^{+ī}³⁴ *kustag kustag pediš xustōgēnīdan āvaštāg ī*
^{+hāmšahr}³⁵ andar harv cahār pāygōs abar kird hē.

15. *u-š hangōšīdag pēdāg az-iz hān ī anōag-ruvān ve_hšābuhr ī*
mubedān mubed ud anī-z ohrmazd mubedān ...³⁶ cāštāg ī aziāān pas-
iz kirdag pediš nē vardēnīdan, gō_bišn ī anī dastvar pediš nē
agērēnīdan, 16. bē hān ī-šān ped ēvarīh pedīrift az gō_bišn ī abārīg
dastvarān ped abardar dāštan, kirdag ^{+ud}³⁷ anī ēvēnag gō_bišn nē
vardēnīdan dādīg sahist.

17. *ōn būd cōn hān ve_hšābuhr ped hanzaman ī anōšag-ruvān*
husrav ī šāhān šāh ī kavādān rōšn-būzišnīhā ōn nimūd <ī> mo_gān³⁸
pediš ēstād hend, u-šān nibišt āvašt kū ōn būd cōn vizīrēnīd. u-šān
pas hān and vizīr ī ōy ōn nimūd <ī> ^{+mo_gān} pediš hamdādestān būd
hend.

18. *ped māyagvarīh ēvar-pāyagīh andar kirdag ī ōstīgān dāštan,*
ud abārīg ī-š guft ōn dāred cōn abārīg gō_bišn <ī> ēk ēk az avēšān
dastvarān.

‘1. My impertinence as to write in such a state of imperfection is
owing to the same reason. You –whom may the Yazata protect! –

³⁴ 𐬀

³⁵ 𐬀𐬀𐬀𐬀

³⁶ 𐬀𐬀𐬀𐬀 BK /*guft*/, 𐬀𐬀𐬀𐬀𐬀 MR

³⁷ 𐬀

³⁸ 𐬀𐬀𐬀𐬀

ought not to abandon from (ritual) bath with the Barəšnūm ceremony³⁹.

2. As the ancients have said that, when it shall be forsaken from use, every water, fire, plant, truthful man, holy cow⁴⁰ and all the (artistic) creatures⁴¹ of Ahura Mazdā are afflicted, diminished and confused⁴².

3. As it is said in the daēnā (Avesta and Zand) as to the dead body⁴³ on which the carrion⁴⁴ has rushed:

«Unwillingly⁴⁵ indeed, O Spitama Zaraθuštra, does the sun shine upon him who is indirectly defiled (by *nasuš*), unwillingly the moon, unwilling the stars. »⁴⁶

«He propitiates indeed, O Spitama Zaraθuštra, that man who is to be purified, when it makes him (who is) indirectly defiled free from *nasuš*. » He propitiates the fire, he propitiates the water, he propitiates the earth, he propitiates the cattle, he propitiates the plant, he

³⁹ Cf. Vd 9. Av. *barəšnu-* m., *barəšnūm* ‘top’, Pers. *barəšnūm* ‘(nine-day) purificatory ritual bath’, *ped barəšnūm šōy-* ‘to wash according to the formalities of *barəšnūm*, cf. ZVY 4.29, ŠnŠ 2.6.

⁴⁰ Primal creations, viz. Āp, Ātar, Urvarā, Nar ašavan, Gao Spənta.

⁴¹ Pers. *dām*, Av. *dāman-* nt.

⁴² *šēbēn-īd*. Pers. *šēb-*: *šift* ‘to be confused; be stirred up (water)’, *ha_mšēbēn-* caus. ‘to shake’.

⁴³ Pers. *tan ī rist*, cf. Vd 6.27 *iristqm tanūm: ō ōy rist tan*. Av. *irista-tanū-* f. ‘corpse’ rendered by *rist-tan*, cf. VD 12.

⁴⁴ *nasuš* from Av. *nasu-š* ‘carrion, corpse’, contamination; the demon of carrion’, Pers. *nasā(h)*, Parth. *nasāv*.

⁴⁵ Av. *anusō* rendered by *ahunsandīhā* ‘discontentedly’, cf Y 57.18.

⁴⁶ Vd 9.41.

propitiates the truthful man, and he propitiates the truthful woman, both of them, as (it is said in) the Avesta: «*xšnāvayeiti ātrəm (...)*»⁴⁷

4. When there is no purifying agent⁴⁸, all the Yazata become grieved and dissatisfied from the worldlings. The religious and wise purifying agents ought not to withhold, even now, the work of ensuring purification, just as it has come to them in usage from the teachers of old⁴⁹, and they ought neither to diminish it, 5. nor to change the laws and good works in accordance with the ritual models⁵⁰, nor to accept a share which is not proper⁵¹, nor to follow the laws which are not according to the models⁵², nor to act upon them⁵³, (but) to ponder very wisely and with sound wisdom, and thereby the more excellent⁵⁴ praise, esteem, gratitude, and blessing will be your own.

6. For it is said that: in all ritual and legal acts it is much more essential than every thing else to do and hold (them according to the norms of) the teachers of old, and to follow every norm which has been introduced by them, the teachers of old, who were acknowledged for true guidance.

⁴⁷ Vd 9.42.

⁴⁸ Pers. *yōždāhrgar*, Av. *yaoždātar*- m. 'the one who purifies', cf. Yt 10.92, *yaoždāθrya*- adj. '(who is) to be purified', cf. Vd 19.33.

⁴⁹ Av. *paoiryō.ḥkaēša*- m. cf. Y 1.18. Cf. also Petit 1.3 *kird ī pōryōdkēšān*.

⁵⁰ Pers. *frārōn* 'righteous; upright; direct' rendering Av. *raθβya*- adj. 'regular, model'.

⁵¹ Or: a cause which is not just. Pers. *jād(ag)* 'lot, share; legal share; cause, case; heritage', Av. *yāta*- nt. 'share, portion'.

⁵² Pers. *abārōn* 'reverse, inverse, irregular' rendering Av. *a-raθβya*- adj.

⁵³ *kār aziš nē kirdan*. Cf. VAM 1 *kār aziš kuned*.

⁵⁴ *abardarīhā*. Cf. Dk vi M 461 *ast ī mehīhā ud ast ī abardarīhā*, AV 2 *abardumīhā*.

7. Except another rule which may be introduced with certain knowledge and with lucid argument, through the revelation of the *daēnā*, and the teachings of the religious authorities, otherwise it is not authoritative to change. That Magian man (i.e. Zādsprahm) in whose name the decree of the fifteen (-fold ablution) is written, as the ... of this writing is not in accord with the religion, since it is not ⁺ancient, I am not without doubt as to his decree.

8. And in his writing, moreover, he declared and discerned that: «Once until a purifier arrives, who is acquainted with the ritual, who washes just as said in the *Daēnā*, (one is) to wash thus. »

9. From this (statement) it thus seems to me that, since the purifying agents who give ablution properly exist even now, (and) what is written below, it is clear and true that, neither it should be decreed –this is manifest owing to little “argument” in that writing –, nor his statement may be valid.

10. For, it is manifest that even if he had been praised for his superior knowledge of the religion, sagacious erudition, true (religious) authority, and great orthodoxy⁵⁵, and he had been prior in strength⁵⁶ to all the present-day (religious) authorities, then too he would not have been equal to the Magians, the sages of the period, the

⁵⁵ *pōryōdkēših* ‘first teaching’, cf. Av. *paoiryō.ṭkaēša-* m. ‘first teacher’.

⁵⁶ *frāzīg-tāyag*. Av. *fra-tu* ‘to be able, have strength’, cf. Y 9.29 *fratuyā*; Parth. *tāvag* ‘strong, able’, cf. M580 (Man.) ‘wṭ byd ’w’ gwn m’ nh’ g’ hynd cw’ gwn ky(c) t’ wg cy ny ’mwxtg u ny ’bdyn bwṭ kw cy[š] pt ’b’ myḥ ’c kyc ’st’ n(’h); Pers. *tāyag*, cf. DD 0.11 *dēn-pēšobāy ī⁺frāzīg ... cē-m stāyišn hān kāmag ī ped x’ēš pāyag ud tāyag ud vimand*, DD 30.2 *peymān ud pāyag ud tāyag*. For prep. *frāzīg*, cf. DD 43.15-16 *frāzīg-hunarīh ud frāzīg-vehīh*.

high priests of Ahura Mazdā⁵⁷ who had flourished before. 11. Even when (both) had come, (vis.) the supreme Magian knowing the entire Avesta and Zand by heart, acquainted with the Formulas⁵⁸, the most like that of Zaraθuštra⁵⁹, the foremost in the priestship of Ahura Mazdā, and the king⁶⁰, world-regulating, of the good religion⁶¹, (the best) in the lordship of the lands, 12. even then to change the norms of ritual practice would not be acceptable nor perfect by law (enactment) or according to their own fancy without deliberation, colloquy, and common consent of the Magians who are the heads and leaders of the religion and without the common consent of the notable laymen⁶².

13. But a valid statement is, was and will be that which is deliberated by the great Magians with munificent eloquence⁶³, equitable disputation, and completely-powerful deliberation, 14. and also according to the teachings of the true high-priests, with much evidence and conclusive argument, it is shown to the councillors of each province, to convince chiefly the magians of each region, who are well-versed in judgements, the seal of the whole country⁶⁴, in all

⁵⁷ *ohrmazd mubedān*. Cf. Kirdīr II.5 *u-m kird nām kirdīr ī ohrmazde mo_gbed*, Dk iv M 413 *u-mān ohrmazd mubed hān x^vand x^vānem kē mēnōg-vēnišnīh andar amā^xpēdāgēned*.

⁵⁸ Pers. *āgāh-mānsr* rendering Av. **viduš.mqθra-*.

⁵⁹ Av. *zaraθuštrō.təma-*.

⁶⁰ Pers. *kay* < Av. *kavi-*.

⁶¹ Pers. *hudēn* < Av. *hu-daēna-* adj. ‘whose daēnā is good’.

⁶² *cašmag vehān*. Pers. *cašmag* ‘notable’, cf. Purs.EA 5.13 *meh ud cašmagdar ud husravdar*.

⁶³ Pers. *hudāg-vyāxanīh*. Cf. AfZ 3 *hudāḡhəm vyāxanəm bavāhi yaθa urvāxša(ye)he*.

⁶⁴ *hām-šahr*. Cf. T III 260 b II (Man.) *hāmšahr uš-ī-bām bavān*.

