

Mani and the Persian world-years

The Aryans divided the cosmic time into four periods (Av. *ratu*, Skt. *yuga*).

The Indo-Aryans (the Purāṇa) described the four Yugas as the four periods of the Deva; one human year (of 360 days) is one day and night of the Deva. According to the Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa (I.2.29) the first Yuga, Kṛtayuga extends over 4 000 years with a (morning) twilight period (*saṃdhyā*) of 400 years before its actual advent and an (evening) twilight period of 400 years after (*saṃdhyāṃśa*). The three other Yugas, Tretāyuga, Dvāparayuga, and Kaliyuga consist respectively of a period of 3 000, 2 000 and 1 000 years preceded by and followed by *saṃdhyā* and *saṃdhyāṃśa* each extending over a period of 300, 200 and 100 years.

The Perso-Aryans considered the twelve millennia as the bounded time (called in the Avesta *zrvānəm darəγō.x^v aḍātəm*), in contrast to the boundless Time. The bounded Time of the Perso-Aryans is divided into four periods of 3 000 years; the first period is the period “of thought” (Av. *mañyava-*), and the three others the periods of life (Av. *gaēiθya-*). We know that the Millennium of Yima (or, that of Zaratuštra) is divided into three periods of 300 years and a transitional period to the next millennium; this transition period is called, in Avesta, *θbarəsah* (rendered by Pers. *brīn*). According to the Bundahišn, 239-40, when the rule of the millennium came to Capricornus (tenth millennium), Zaratuštra came for prophecy from Ahura Mazdā to king Vištāspa.

Mani followed the Aryan tradition of an aeon of 12 millennia, and fitted it into his own picture of the world. Each millennium has a period of 100 years, but not as the final period of the world-year in the Persian model, but as an additional period; this extra period is called *peyvann/* Sogd. *pacβand* ‘connection’ (≈ Ind. *saṃdhyā*). Mani himself lived in the last millennium, that of Pisces. In the *Šābuhragān*, Mani spoke of himself thus: “Thereupon this revelation has come down, the prophecy in this last age through me, Mani, the messenger of the god of truth to Bbylonia.”¹ In a Manichaean Chinese Treatise, *Moni guangfo jiaofayi lüe* it is said that: “According to the *po-ssū p’o-p’i* calendar, there are since the beginning of the world twelve constellations which govern different eras... In the year 527 of the era

¹ . See

«ثم نزل هذا الوحي وجاءت هذه النبوة في هذا القرن الاخير على يدنى انا مانى رسول الله الحق الى ارض بابل.» يرونى، الآثار الباقية، ٨، ٢٢.

governed by the twelfth constellation called Pisces², Mani, the Buddha of Light was born ...”³. Thus he adopted the Babylonian version of the Seleucid era, which began with April 3, 311 B.C., and identified the years of that era with the years of the last millennium, that of Pisces.

There exists an interesting Sogdian fragment which shows how the Manichaeans adopted the Persian world-year calendar. It seems that the Manichaeans appended the extra periods of the whole Time, to the last millennium. This millennium began in the spring of – 310 (the beginning of the Seleucid Babylonian era) and ended in the spring of A.D. 690. Hereafter the additional period, amounting to 1200 years, began. We know that the extra period of the millennium of Yima was accompanied by harsh and horrible winter; the extra period of the Millennium of Zaraθuštra was called the corrupted Iron Age. The Manichaeans called this additional period *tārāc* in Sogdian, which may have meant ‘darkness’ (or, less likely, ‘plunder’).

A Sogdian fragment, M 767 ii⁴

R

1 iii [z'r] srδδ °° dwlyy ii z'r °° m'sy' gyh
 z'[r] srδδ °° °° c'f šw' ° w'fyδδ rtw
 jmnw ° myyδδ ° m'x °° 'tyy srδδ ° kyštškwn
 °° 'tyy γrf srδyt wβ' kyy xii 'nxrtyh
 'xš'wn s't nyjtyy °° kδdryy t'r'c °°
 xšyyndk °[°] (c)[y](wyδδ) pyδ'r 'fcmbyy 'm'γwn

V

7 p[. .]. (w)tyy 'styy ° pww xyp[δ]'w[nd sr]cyy (/ pr]cyy)
 xrtyy 'styy °° 'nxr(ty)y z'r z'r s[r δy]t °°
 'tyy ms wrg kww m'sy'g prm wyspw
 'nxryy z'r z'r srδδ 'xš'(wn) ptšmyrtyy
 °° tym CC pcβndyy °° vii pxryt(yh) °°
 'tyy vii pxryyt pr 'f[cmb]δδ 'xšwnyt

‘... [at the beginning of the dominion of Capricornus] 3 000 years [remain], of Aquarius 2 000, of Pisces 1000. Much has gone, by so

² . *mo-hsieh* < Parth. *māsyāg* (Pers. *māhīg*).

³ . G. Haloun & W.B. Henning, “The Compendium of the Doctrines and Styles of the Teaching of Mani, the Buddha of Light”, *Asia Major*, III, 1952, (184-212), 190.

⁴ . M 767 is a double sheet in two hands. Hanning has published the second fragment. See G. Haloun & W.B. Henning, “The Compendium of the Doctrines and Styles of the Teaching of Mani, the Buddha of Light”, *Asia Major*, III, 1952, (184-212), 202-4.

many moments⁵, hours, days, months, and years, (the duration of the dominion of the twelve) decreases. And it is many years that the dominion⁶ of the twelve constellations⁷ has totally expired. Now 𐰘𐰆𐰪𐰪⁸ is dominating. For this reason, the whole of the world is ... (? pw' nwttyy 'without protection'), it has been going without a master (or) ... (? prcyy 'support', srcyy 'chieftain').

The thousand years each of the constellations. And, from Aries to Pisces, the dominion of each constellation is accounted a thousand years each, again, a hundred years in connection.

Of the seven planets⁹. And the seven planets (are) the rulers of the world ...'

(Raham Asha)

⁵ . *ratu* = 10 seconds.

⁶ . *exšāvan* ≈ Pers. *x'adāyih*.

⁷ . *anxar* ≈ Pers. *axtar*

⁸ . Henning connected it with Pers. *tārāj* 'plunder, booty'. However one could connect it with Sogd. 𐰘𐰆𐰪𐰪 'darkness'. According to Henning, a derivation from *tār*- 'dark' is less likely. Op. cit. 202.

⁹ . *paxrē* ≈ Pers. *abāxtar*.