

## The Avesta periods of the year

The annual rites of the Avesta were organized with six solar dates which were originally determined by the annual risings and settings of some “chief” stars and formed the solar model of the year. These dates were called *yāiryāēibyō ašahe ratubyō* ‘the periods of the year, (the periods) of Order’.<sup>1</sup> It seems that the Pārsīg term *gāhāmbār* (from Av. *gāθā-* & *\*bāra-* ‘occasion’) had been chosen to distinguish the “period” (*ratu: gāhāmbār*) of the year from the “period” (*ratu: gāh*) of the day. The calendar of *gāhāmbārs* had been given in the Avesta *nask Pahag*.<sup>2</sup> Some Avesta fragments concerning the calendar have survived in a few manuscripts of the Zand of the *Āfrīnagān ī Gāhāmbār*. In these fragments, we find the days of the months corresponding to each *dies solemnes*, and time-spans between each two consecutive annual feasts. These periods of the year are also related to the six periods of creation. The last redactors of the Zand have failed to furnish the correct meaning and the original time of the *Gāhāmbārs*.<sup>3</sup> And the new interpreters of the Zoroastrian calendar have based their arguments on these late and partially incorrect redactions.

The first *gāhāmbār* according to the A3 is *Maiḍyōi.zarəmaya*, on the day *Daθuš* (15) of the month *Aša Vahišta*. There is a general agreement that the first month of the year was *Fravašinam* (Pers. *Fravardīn*); and it originally was the first month of spring. Then the month after it, i.e. *Aša Vahišta*, was in the middle of spring. This has influenced the significance (and even etymology) of the word *maiḍyōi.zarəmaya*: ‘mid-spring’. *Manušcihr* took *zarəmaya* as the Avesta name of the month corresponding to *Taurus*.<sup>4</sup>

In the Avesta *zarəmaya* indicates a special season, and by extension it is used to indicate a year.<sup>5</sup> For example, in the *Hērbedestān* it is said that a student should study for a period of three *zarəmaya* (that is, three years) the *Orderly Wisdom*.<sup>6</sup> In the *Vidēvdād* it is said about him who does not put on the sacred thread for three *zarəmaya*. The glossator of this passage attributed to *zarəmaya* the meaning of ‘year’ (*sāl*).<sup>7</sup> However, the modern redactors of the Avesta and Zand have translated *θri.zarəmaya-* as ‘three spring

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<sup>1</sup> . Y 1.9 speaks of *yāiryāēibyō ašahe ratubyō* before the enumeration of the periods of the year, and of *sarədaēibyō ašahe ratubyō* after. The relation of *yāiryā* and *sarəda* is like that of *ayara* and *asnyā*. Cf. Y 1.17 *raθβam ayaranamca asnyanamca māhyanamca yāiryanamca sarədanamca*.

<sup>2</sup> . Cf. Dk viii M 682 *pahag mādayān ... abar gāhāmbār kū hān šaš gāh kay gired ud kay bē sazīhed hanzaman ī gāhāmbār ...* ‘The Pahag contains particularly ... about the *Gāhāmbārs*, i.e., when (each of) the six dates begins, and when the assembly will end, etc.’

<sup>3</sup> . See A3 Z; Bd I.

<sup>4</sup> . DD 30.13 *dudīgar māh ī az sāl ka mihr ped gāv axtar baved ... hān māh dēnīg zarəmaya xvānīhed*.

<sup>5</sup> . Just like *zyam-* ‘winter; year’ (*θrisatō.zyam-* ‘300 winters’ = ‘300 years’); *aiβi.gāma-* ‘winter; year’ (*hazayrəm aiβi.gāmanam* ‘for a thousand years’).

<sup>6</sup> . H 12.2 *θrizarəmaēm xratūm ašavanəm aiβyānhaḥ: si-zarmēm xrad ī ahlavān abar bē gired*.

<sup>7</sup> . Vd 18.9 ... *yō θrizarəmaēm ratūm aiβyānham nōiḥ aiβyāsti ...: kē si-zarmaē(m) radīh ebyāhen nē ebyāhenēned [kū si sāl šabīg kustīg nē dāred.] ...*

seasons'.<sup>8</sup> Even though a word for “spring” existed in Avesta<sup>9</sup>, the period of spring was so short in the Avesta homeland, that the word for “spring” could not be used instead of “year”. We know that the two words for “winter” were used to indicate a year; it is also possible that there were two words for “summer”, which by extension were used instead of “year”: *ham-* and *zarəməya-*. Then, *maid̥yōi.zarəməya-* means ‘mid-summer’ (or, mid-year’). This is in agreement with this thesis that the month Daθuš (Paers. Day) formed originally the beginning of the year in spring. According to Bērōnī who had access to a number of books of the Magi (*Zādveḥ, Xvaršēd, ...*)<sup>10</sup> concerning the calendar of Persian feasts, the (Old) Persians had indicated their four seasons by their months<sup>11</sup>:

- Fravašīnaṃ was the first month of summer ;
- Tištrya (Pers. Tištar/ Tīr) was the first month of autumn<sup>12</sup>;
- Miθra (Pers. Mihr) was the first month of winter;
- Daθuš was the first month of spring.

This confirms that Aša Vahišata was the second month of summer, and *Maid̥yōi.zarəməya* fell on the fifteenth day of that month.

As regards the literal meaning of the word *zarəməya-*, according to the Zand of the A3, it signifies “the dwelling of the world of life”, “a fortification for men”<sup>13</sup>; and according to the Bundahišn, “the house of the sun and the moon”, and “verdancy”.<sup>14</sup> As we notice, the exegetes have confused the word *zarəməya-* with another word, *zairimya-/ Skt. harmiyá-* ‘large/ fixed house, mansion, covered building, palace’.

The adjunct to *Maid̥yōi.zarəməya* was *payah-* ‘milk-giving’<sup>15</sup>. For the Avesta people the best ghee was that of the season of *Zarəməya*.<sup>16</sup> Some acquaintance with the pastoral life in the north-east of the Aryan land is sufficient to conclude that it denotes summer.

The second *gāhāmbār*, *Maid̥yōi.šəma*, is on the day Daθuš (15) of the month Tištrya. The word *maid̥yōi.šəma-* has been translated as ‘mid-summer’. However, even if we take Tištrya as the first month of summer, the fifteenth day of this month cannot be the middle of that season. The

<sup>8</sup> . See K.F. Geldner, “Vendidād, Fargard XVIII”, *Avesta, Pahlavi, and Ancient Persian Studies in honour of ...* P.B. Sanjana, Strassburg, 1904, 202: “... der während eines Zeitraums von drei Lenzen die heilige Schnur nicht umlegt ...”; B.T. Anklesaria, *Pahlavi Vendidād*, Bombay, 1949, 350.

<sup>9</sup> . Cf. F8 *vañri: vahār*.

<sup>10</sup> . For example:

"وقد وجدنا كتاب زادويه بن شاهويه وكتاب خرشيد بن زيار موبذ اصفهان و كتاب محمد بن بهرام بن مطيار، تشتمل من هذه المعاني على شيء فيه غنية، وليس فيه اختلاف اختلال؛ فقلنا نحن ما فيها الى ما اثبتناه هاهنا، وركبنا بعضها ببعض، وجمعنا اكثر ما قيل فيها." الاثار الباقية، ٩، ١.

<sup>11</sup>

"ان الفرس حين كانوا يكيسون سنهم، يعلمون الفصول الاربعة بشهورهم، لتقارب الامر بينهما. فكان فروردين ماه اول الصيف، وتيرماه اول الخريف، ومهرماه اول الشتاء، ودى ماه اول الربيع." الاثار الباقية، ٩، ٢.

<sup>12</sup> . Even now, in Munji, the word *tīra-mā* (lit. ‘the month Tīr’) is used to indicate autumn.

<sup>13</sup> . A3 Z.7 *u-š mēdōzarmīh ēd kū-m mānišn ī gēhān pēdāg bē kird abāg-drubūštīh mardōmān ī-m dāmān rāy kird*.

<sup>14</sup> . Bd 22 *u-š nām medyōzarm, u-š vizārišn ēn kū māništ ī mihr ud māh, ud zeryōnīh ō pēdāgīh mad*.

<sup>15</sup> . Cf. Vr 1.2, 2.2.

<sup>16</sup> . Cf. Aog. 16, Hn 2.18 *zarəməyehe raoynahe* (rendered by *medyōzarm rōvn* MX 2.156, DD 30.12, *rōvn ī mēdōzarmīg* Dk viii M 755).

second part of the word, °šama- < ham-a- means ‘year’<sup>17</sup>, and *maid̥yōi.šama-* is thereby connected with the year in the middle, and means ‘mid-year’, and denotes an autumn festival –as we said, Tištrya was the first month of autumn. The adjunct to this gāhāmbār, “auspicious for reaping”<sup>18</sup>, reminds Virgo/ Spica, a representation of the female reaper.

The third gāhāmbār, Paitiš.haya, is on the day Anayranam (30) of the month Xšaθra Vairya. This day originally coincided with winter solstice. The very name of this festival, *paitiš.haya-* ‘connected with the bringing in of the crops’, and its adjunct, *hahya-* ‘of the corn/ crops’<sup>19</sup> (Skt. *sasyá-* ‘fruit, crops’) imply that it was the proper time for storing corn and fruit. For the Magi, the storage of good works was for preparing oneself for death<sup>20</sup>, just like the storage of crops and fruits for preparing oneself for winter.<sup>21</sup>

The fourth gāhāmbār, Ayāθrima, is on the day Anayranam (30) of the month Miθra. The word *ayāθrima-* is derived from \**ayāθra-* (< \**ā-īāθra-*) ‘coming towards, arrival’. The adjuncts to Ayāθrima are *fraourvaēštrima-* ‘time of the return’, and *varšni.haršta-* ‘(time) when the he-goats (or, other male animals) are released (for mating)’.<sup>22</sup> It is interesting to note that this time of releasing the he-goats or the males corresponded to the zodiacal sign Capricorn (*vahīg* ‘he-goat, kid; Capricorn’).

The fifth gāhāmbār, Maid̥yāirya, is on the day Vərəθrayna (20) of the month Daθuš. It originally denoted a spring festival. *maid̥yāirya- sarəda-* simply means ‘the mid-year of the year’.<sup>23</sup> To take *maid̥yāirya-* as ‘mid-winter’ and to translate *sarəda-* as ‘cold’ is arbitrary.<sup>24</sup> Av. *sarəda-* is connected with *sarəd-* ‘year’ (OPers. *θard-*, Pers. *sāl*). It is possible the *sarəd* originally denoted a season.<sup>25</sup> But this season could only be ‘summer’, as we see in Ossetic *særd/ særdæ* ‘summer (Khot. *pa-sālā* lit. ‘near to summer’ = ‘springtime’, Pašto *p-sarlay* ‘id.’, Pers. *absāl/ afsāl* ‘id.’).

The sixth gāhāmbār, Hamaspaθmaēdaya, is on the last day of the five additional days of the year, Vahištōišti Gāθā. In the Nīkātama nask it is said that these five days are added to the month Spəntā Ārmaiti.<sup>26</sup> Hamaspaθmaēdaya is the time of the summer solstice. The adjunct to it is *arətō.kərəiθina-* ‘characterized by the fulfilment of the duty’.<sup>27</sup> It denotes the fulfilment of the year; for this reason, the next day is called \**navasara(a)d* ‘new year’ (Sogd. *n’wsrδyc*, Armen. *nausard* ‘first month’), Pers. *nōg-rōz*. The sacrificial Text of the Fravaši speaks of the Fravaši who

<sup>17</sup> . Av. *ham-* m. ‘summer; year’ ≈ Skt. *sāmā-* f. ‘year, half-year, season’.

<sup>18</sup> . Cf. Vr 1.2 *maid̥yōišəmahe vāstrō.dātainyehe*, Vr 2.2 *maid̥yōišəməm vāstrō.dātainīm*.

<sup>19</sup> . Vr 1.2 *paitišhahyehe hahyehe*, Vr 2.2 *paitiš.hahīm hahīm*.

<sup>20</sup> . Cf. MX 2.96-97.

<sup>21</sup> . Cf. Āfrīn ī Myazd: *vas-hambār bed cōn zimestān*.

<sup>22</sup> . Cf. Vr 1.2, 2.2, Y 1.9, 2.9.

<sup>23</sup> . Cf. Vr 1.2, 2.2.

<sup>24</sup> . Avesta possesses an adj. *sarəta-* which means ‘cold’.

<sup>25</sup> . Cf. Skt. *śarāt-/ śarād-* f.

<sup>26</sup> . Cf. VD 18 (Fr. 21).

<sup>27</sup> . Cf. Vr 1.2, 2.2.

descend and come to their respective houses at the period of Hamaspəθmaēdaya, and here they move about for ten nights.<sup>28</sup>

We notice that the period from the summer solstice to the winter solstice was then 180 days, and that between winter and summer solstice 185 days. This relation belongs to the last century of the second millennium B.C.

| The calendar of Gāhāmbārs |                  |     |                |                        |
|---------------------------|------------------|-----|----------------|------------------------|
|                           | period           | day | month          | tim-span               |
| I                         | Maiḍyōi.zarəmaya | 15  | Aša Vahišta    | 45 days from VI to I   |
| II                        | Maiḍyōi.šəma     | 15  | Tištrya        | 60 days from I to II   |
| III                       | Paitiš.haya      | 30  | Xšaθra Vairya  | 75 days from II to III |
| IV                        | Ayāθrima         | 30  | Miθra          | 30 days from III to IV |
| V                         | Maiḍyāiryā       | 20  | Daθuš          | 80 days from IV to V   |
| VI                        | Hamaspəθmaēdaya  | 35  | Spəntā Ārmaiti | 75 days from V to VI   |

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<sup>28</sup> . Yt 13.49.