Monotheism the Zoroastrian Way

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In memory of Gherardo Gnoli (6 December 1937 – 7 March 2012)

Abstract

This article examines seemingly monotheistic, polytheistic and dualistic features of Zoroastrianism from the point of view of the Zoroastrian creation myth. Exploring the personality of the principal deity, Ahura Mazda, the origin of the spiritual and material worlds and the worship of the Yazatas, it is argued that Zoroastrianism has its own particular form of monotheism.

1 Preliminaries

To the contemporary observer, Zoroastrianism offers the perplexing picture of a religion whose followers worship one god, Ahura Mazda, or, in the Middle Persian form of his name, Ohrmazd, and alongside him a host of other sacred beings, or yazatas.1 The latter include not only individual deities, such as Anāhitā (a water and fertility deity), Mithra (the personification of ‘contract’), Ārmaiti (‘right-mindedness’), Aśi (‘reward’), Sraoša (‘attentiveness’) and Rašnu (‘justice’), but also natural phenomena, such as the earth, water, wind, sun, moon and stars. Moreover, the sacred texts, ritual plants (such as haoma) and ritual implements (such as pestle and mortar) are also worshipped. In addition, the good, divine creation of Ahura Mazda has an enemy, Angra Mainyu in Avestan and Ahreman in Middle Persian, the embodiment of Evil, whose sole desire is to bring disorder and destruction to Ahura Mazda’s perfect world. The religion thus seems to involve monotheistic, polytheistic and dualistic features simultaneously.

In the ongoing scholarly debate on the classification of Zoroastrianism according to the terms just mentioned views differ according to which of these features is given most prominence, and usually the labels attached to Zoroastrianism combine two features out of a possible three (or four).2 For instance, Boyd and Crosby’s answer to the question posed in the title of their article “Is Zoroastrianism Dualistic or Monotheistic?, is that the religion starts from a cosmogonic dualism, but over time moves towards an eschatological

1 An earlier version of this article was presented as a paper at Drittes Lindauer Symposium für Religionsforschung and published in German in: Echnaton und Zarathustra, Zur Genese und Dynamik des Monotheismus, edited by Jan Assmann and Harald Strohm, München 2012.

2 The fourth feature which is occasionally adduced by scholars is that of henotheism.
monotheism.³ Schwartz, with regard to the oldest texts of the Zoroastrian tradition, the Gathas, defines the religion as a “monotheistic dualism”⁴ and Gnoli, who considers dualism to be incompatible with polytheism, as a “dualistic monotheism”⁵ while Panaino considers Mazdaism to be synonymous with monotheism because of Ahura Mazda’s sovereign role in the religious system.⁶ By contrast, Skjærvø admits both dualism and polytheism but excludes monotheism.⁷ As far as the Gathas are concerned, Kellens accepts cosmic dualism for the opposition between aša- ‘order’ and druji- ‘deceit’, but not for that between the two mainyus or ‘spirits’ which in his view denote right and wrong human mental forces.⁸ Regarding the terms polytheism and monotheism, Kellens, while emphasizing the pre-eminent role of Ahura Mazda, comments that the two alternatives are “just as absurd as that of the half-full or half-empty bottle”, and rightly notes the inadequacy of any of these terms on its own.⁹

One of the difficulties arises from the fact that the notions of monotheism, polytheism and dualism are defined not on the basis of Zoroastrianism but on that of other religions, in particular the Judeo–Christian tradition. Denoting the worship of ‘false’ gods in contrast to that of the one God of the Jews and Christians, the term ‘polytheism’ has had negative connotations from its earliest attestations onwards. The Greek word πολυθεῖα, from which the term derives, first occurs in the works of Philo of Alexandria (ca. 15 BCE–ca. 50 CE) who uses it polemically in the sense of the ‘idolatry’ practised by non-Jewish people, and Jean Bodin borrowed it in his Démonomanie des sorciers, published in 1580. The expression ‘monotheism’ was subsequently coined as its antonym to denote belief in one single god, and is first attested in 1660 in the writings of the English philosopher Henry More in relation to his own religion, Christianity.¹⁰

Having been defined from the scholarly perspective of the Judeo–Christian tradition since the period of the Enlightenment, the two terms came to constitute a dichotomy of mutually exclusive opposites. Consequently “monotheism” was claimed as the label of the Judeo-Christian tradition and endowed with greater prestige than the “polytheism” attributed to some non-Judeo-Christian religions and perceived as both challenging to and in opposition to monotheism.¹¹ In other words, the emic self-perception of the Judeo-Christian tradition has provided value-laden parameters for the etic scholarly discourse on monotheism and polytheism.¹² In recent decades the suitability of such a monotheism – polytheism dichotomy

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³Boyd and Crosby 1979, where earlier views are also discussed. Stausberg 2002, p. 94 rightly draws attention to Pettazzoni’s observation that dualism and monotheism are not mutually exclusive categories. Cf. also below, fn. 40.


⁵Gnoli 1994, p. 480.

⁶Panaino 2004, p. 32.


¹⁰See Schmidt 1985; Ahn 1993, pp. 5–6 and 2003, p. 1 with references.


¹²Stausberg 2002, p. 92; Ahn 2003. The terms “emic” and “etic” were coined by the linguistic anthropologist Kenneth Pike on the basis of the linguistic terms phonemic and phonetic to denote two different perspectives in the study of a society’s cultural system. The emic perspective arises from studying a religion as from inside the system, the etic perspective as from outside, see Pike 1967, p.37; Gladigow 1988; Headland, Pike and Harris 1990; McCutcheon 1999; Knott 2010. While the emic/etic dichotomy refers to the standpoint, that of insider/outsider focuses on the person who takes a standpoint.
has been rightly questioned on the grounds that it entails categories which are unsuitable for describing religions which the dichotomy classifies as "polytheistic". In this period the term "polytheism" has gradually come to be freed from some of its pejorative connotations, to the extent that a new definition of "polytheism" has been proposed, namely "polysymbolic religiosity". The notion of monotheism, however, continues to be widely circumscribed by the perception of the god of the Jews, Christians and Muslims, one of whose distinctive features is omnipotence. As Alan Williams rightly notes,

it remains questionable how far Western scholars have been able to overcome their own Christian, Jewish, Muslim and other ideological backgrounds in deciding what and how they write about Zoroastrianism and postulates that it is necessary to understand Zoroastrianism, as any other religion, on its own terms and in its own context. The problem of classification is compounded by that of translation, since many standard renderings of Zoroastrian technical terms in modern European languages conjure up images derived from the Judeo-Christian tradition.

An adequate characterization of Zoroastrianism is obviously not possible by imposing terms the contents of which have been defined on the basis of other religions. Rather than asking whether Zoroastrianism is monotheistic or polytheistic – a question the legitimacy of which has rightly been doubted – in what follows I hope to throw light on and suggest an explanation for the mixture of seemingly monotheistic, polytheistic and dualistic features mentioned above, which Zoroastrianism presents to the observer. I shall do so by examining one particular aspect of the Zoroastrian creation myth, namely the well-known concept of Ahura Mazdâ as the maker both of the good spiritual creations and of the material world, and I shall argue that Zoroastrianism has its own particular form of monotheism – which is the Zoroastrian way.

2 The omniscience of Ahura Mazdâ

There is general agreement among scholars that that there is one supreme god in Zoroastrianism, Ahura Mazdâ. From the oldest sources, the Gathas and Yasna Haptanghaiti, to present day religious practice, all worship, both ritual and devotional, is focused on him, albeit on occasion indirectly, as we shall see. The hymn dedicated to Ahura Mazdâ, Yašt 1, offers lists of his names which conceptualize different aspects of his personality. These

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14Stausberg 2002, pp. 92f. with references.
15Kliever 1979, p. 178.
16Williams 2008, p. 130. Cf. also the pertinent comment by Clarisse Herrenschmidt 1987, p. 134 n. 15: “I do not want to prevent anybody from thinking that Zoroastrianism is a monotheism: but I really wish that Zoroastrian monotheism could be conceived without the explicit or implicit comparison with or assimilation to the Mosaic one”.
17To quote Alan Williams again: “... neither the common noun ‘god’ nor the proper name ‘God’ is adequate as a translation of the Pahlavi (Middle Persian) proper noun Ohrmazd (Avestan Ahura Mazda) ‘Wise Lord’; the reason is that the theological character of Ohrmazd/Ahura Mazda does not correspond to that of the God described in Jewish or Christian biblical scriptures, nor indeed to that of the Qur’anic Allah. ... for very similar reasons the Pahlavi common noun yazad is not adequately translated as ‘god’ or ‘God’, nor angel, sprite, daemon, peri, or any other exotic concoction of the thesaurus.” (Williams 2008, p. 129).
names describe him as the truthful creator and organizer of the world, beneficent, healing and protecting, providing prosperity and fertility. He has authority, rules at will, is glorious, powerful and unassailable, but above all, is intelligent, wise, all-seeing, all-knowing and generous. In his edition of this text, Antonio Panaino has shown that the qualities attributed to Ahura Mazda cover the semantic fields of creation and order, protection and benevolence, happiness, wisdom and insight, majesty, glory and splendour. Panaino rightly emphasizes omniscience as his most prominent feature.18

The notion of omniscience is also lexicalized in the name of the god, Ahura Mazda, or Wise Lord. The first of this two-part name, ahura-, is an ordinary substantive meaning ‘lord’. The noun functions as an honorific title and is used of both divine and human beings, just like English ‘lord’ or German ‘Herr’.19 The second part, the noun mazdā-, seems to be equivalent to medhā- ‘wisdom’ in the closely related Vedic language of Ancient India. Such correspondence, however, is only apparent, because in the syllable-counting metre of the Gathas, the Avestan acc.sg. mazdān, which occurs four times there, represents trisyllabic mazdān. By contrast, the Rigvedic acc.sg. medhān is disyllabic. While incorporating the same lexical constituents, namely the IE noun *menos- (the double zero grade of the s-stem *menos- ‘thought’) and the verb *dʰeh₁ ‘to set’, such a metrical distinction indicates that the Av. and Ved. nouns are morphologically different. The Av. divine name mazdā- is a masculine agent noun, a root noun which literally means ‘the one who sets his thought’. By contrast, in Ved. medhā- the same root noun has been extended with the suffix -ā- to form a feminine abstract substantive which as a nomen actionis denotes the action of ‘setting one’s thought’, and as a nomen rei actae what is produced by such an action, that is ‘wisdom’. Incidentally, the feminine abstract noun also occurs once in the Avesta, in the form of the acc.sg. mazdān. At first sight it is indistinguishable from the deity’s name. However, in the context of the Yasna Haptanghaiti (Y 40.1), in which it occurs, the noun cannot be part of the deity’s name, but only the abstract noun ‘wisdom’.20

The meaning of the name of the Zoroastrian god, Ahura Mazda, may therefore be posited as ‘Wise Lord’. The name incorporates the idea of him as an agent who actively ‘sets his thought’, manah-, on something and notices everything. Such a meaning fully agrees with the description of the deity’s personality in the texts. In the Avesta, for example, one of his epithets is ‘all knowing’ (visp̄.vištah Yt 12.1),21 and the Pahlavi sources give ‘omniscience and goodness’ as Ohrmazd’s chief characteristics:

(1) IrBd TD2 2.12–13 Ohrmazd bālistiŋ pad harwisp-āgāhī ud wēhīh

Ohrmazd (was) on high in omniscience and goodness.22

While Ahura Mazda’s personality is primarily circumscribed by the notions of omniscience and goodness, omnipotence, which may be considered to be one of, or even the most salient feature of the Abrahamic god, is not prominent, although it does occur on occasion. Epithets such as ‘ruling at will’, vasāxš̄aiaŋ Y 43.1, indicate that Ahura Mazda is seen as being in

20For further details, see Hintze 2007, pp.284f. with references.
21Cf. also Boyd and Crosby 1979, p.578.
control. Such an attribute, however, may be associated with him not because he is seen as encompassing everything, including evil, as is the case with the Abrahamic god, but for two other reasons. One is his intelligence which surpasses all and by virtue of which he is able to understand everything, including evil. He de facto rules over evil by virtue not of his power but of his intelligence. The second reason is that in the theological system of the Avesta Ahura Mazdā is alone and above all, without either equal or negative counterpart. It is against this background that one needs to see occasional references to the ‘omnipotence (uisp tauvāniš) of the creator Ohrmazd’ in the Middle Persian texts, where Ohrmazd does have a direct opponent, Ahreman.23

3 The origin of the spiritual creation

In addition to omniscience and goodness, creativity is the third most salient characteristic of Ahura Mazdā. His creative, life-giving force has the name spənta- mainiiu-, and it is this energy which has a symmetrical opposite, aŋna- mainiiu-, or ‘destructive force’, the Ahreman of the just mentioned Middle Persian texts. The Gathas present the two forces as mutually exclusive opponents that have nothing in common (Y 45.2) and produce ‘life’ and its negation, ‘un-life’, i.e. bad life or death (gaemca ajiuuttimca Y 30.4) respectively.

In the Gathas Ahura Mazdā is said to be the ‘father’ (ptā) of Truth (aša- Y 44.3, 47.2), of Good Thought (vohu- manah- Y 31.8, 45.4), of the Life-giving Force (spənta- mainiiu- Y 47.3),24 and of Right-mindedness (ārmaiti- Y 45.4), which is described as his ‘daughter’ (dugdā). Ahura Mazdā thus generates them out of himself as his children.25 In the Gathas their relationship is described in biological terms not only by means of kinship nomenclature, but also by the expression ‘birth, begetting, procreation’, Avestan zaŋta-, a noun derived from the root zuŋ ‘to give birth, beget’:

(2) Y 44.3 kasnā zaŋta- * ptā ašahiá paourniio

Who is the primordial father of Truth by begetting?

23 For instance Škand-Gumānīg Wīzar 3.6, cf. Boyd and Crosby 1979, p.579 for an interpretation of the passage. In Y 47.3 line a, all text-critically relevant mss. have the reading tā. Since at three other other Gathic attestations the nom.sg. of pītar- ‘father’ is p(u)ta (monosyllabic), Kellens and Pirart 1988–1991, III p. 215 and II pp.7, 243 interpret the form tā in Y 47.3 at face value as the instr.sg. of the demonstrative pronoun and translate it as ‘comme celui’: ahii maniindu tamīn ahi tā spənta yəd . . . “Tu appartiens à cet état d’esprit et tu es bénéfique comme celui qui . . .”. However, they also admit that the assumption of a rare “instrumental libre” results from “une analyse embarrassée” (II p.6). Although the Pahlavi version of Y 47.3 has no word for ‘father’, Bartholomae’s 1888, pp.54f. and 1904, cols.905, 906 n.4 view is preferable, according to which the form tā is the nom.sg. of pītar- ‘father’. He adduces the preceding Y 47.2c, where Ahura Mazdā is addressed as the father of aša-, as contextual support. Humbach 1959, II p.74 and 1991, II p.192, who also interprets Y 47.3 tā as the nom.sg. of pītar- ‘father’, considers that tā spənta has arisen in this particular collocation from *ptā spənta by dissimulation. Other scholars regard the loss of word initial p- before -t-, which Bartholomae’s explanation entails, as regular. Since it is also found in YAav. tūtria- ‘brother of the father, paternal uncle’, cf. *pānijus- (Hoffmann and Forssman 2004, p.94, §60.f; Mayrhofer 1986, p.138 fn.172), Beekes 1981, p.284 and Tremblay 2003, pp.171f. regard the form tā as reflecting the Young Avestan pronunciation while Tichy 1983, pp.232, 243 n. 17 and 25 suggests that in the OAav. form pālta the initial p- was restored, possibly motivated by the vocative *pitar.

24 Kellens 1994, p.81 fn.27 comments that “Ahura Mazdā ne se débrouille pas mal sexuellement”. Describing this process as “mariage avec soi-même”, he suggests that it prefigures the concept of next-of-kin marriage (1995, p.42f.). In the opinion of Skjærvø 2011a, p.344, in the Old Avesta Ahura Mazdā generated the Life-Giving Immortals as part of “his primordial sacrifice”. In addition to the birth scenario, the Avesta also attests the concept of creation by fashioning (Av. tāl, Bās, etc.) and thinking (Av. main), see Skjærvø 2011, pp.59f.
The answer is, of course, Ahura Mazda. In Y 43.5, the speaker (‘I’) mentions his vision of Ahura Mazda in the begetting of existence:

(3) Y 43.5 spəntəm at ȳβā mazdā māŋghī ahurā
hiat ȳβā ahūṃu ẓagīi darəsət paourrām
Life-giving indeed I think that you are, O Wise Lord,
when I see you as the primeval one in the begetting of life.26

Kinship terminology with regard to his spiritual offspring is also found in the Younger Avesta, where Ahura Mazda is said to be the ‘father and master’ of the Amesha Spentas:

(4) Yt 19.16 ( = Yt 13.83)
γαςὲν̄ ąstì haməm manō
haməm vaći haməm ʃiaəδnəm
hamō pataca fiasəstaca
γō daδhiũ ahurō mazdā
(The Life-giving Immortals) who have the same thought,
the same word, the same action,
the same father and master,
the creator Ahura Mazda.

A ‘second generation’ of spiritual creations appears when in the Younger Avesta Ahura Mazda is presented as the ‘father’ (pitar-) and ărmaiti-27 (whom the Gathas describe as his ‘daughter’) as the ‘mother’ (mātə-) of Reward (aʃt-, Yt 17.16). Reward has Attentiveness (sraoṣa-), Justice (rašnu-) and Contract (miϑra-) as ‘brothers’ (brātər-) and she is the ‘sister’ (xvaŋh-) of the Mazda-worshipping Belief (daēnə- māzdaiiasni- Yt 17.16) and of the Amesha Spentas (Yt 17.2).

A variation of the metaphor that the spiritual creations are the offspring of Ahura Mazda is the description of the Amesha Spentas as the ‘beautiful forms’ or ‘bodies’ (kəhrpasca ... sīnā) which Ahura Mazda adopts:

(5) Yt 13.81 γαςὲν̄ ınte ınna māŋghō spəntō
amūnō ʃaxənxō frádərəsərō
kəhrpasca γā rāδβaiiitii
sīnā aməʃanqən spəntənqən
vərəz càməʃanqən spəntənqən
(Ahura Mazda), whose soul (is) the Life-giving Formula,
white, shining, seen afar;

26The combination of zagh- ‘life’ in Y 43.5 and 48.6 has phraseological parallels in Vedic. Eichner 2002, pp.136–140, who connects Av. ahu-, Ved. āsu- with Hittite hasses- ‘king’ (rather than with the verb ah ‘to be’ as in Mayrhofer 1986–2001 vol. 1, p.147), argues that Hr. āsu- specifically means ‘engendered life’ (“das gezeugte Leben und die durch die Zeugung übermittelte Zeugungsfähigkeit”, p.138) and that the Hr. phrase āsu- jan results from lexical substitution of an IE figura etymologica involving the verb IE *h2ens, which only survives in Anatolian, in particular in Hittite hası ‘to beget’.  
27On ārmaiti- in the wider Indo-European, especially Indo-Iranian, context, see Skjærvø 2002. Schwartz 2000, p.15 suggests that the form ārmaiti-, which replaced *āramaiti- at an early stage in the tradition of the Avesta, shows remodelling analogical on the word *ār- ‘land’ found in Buddhist Sogdian *rō̂ t ‘plot of land’.
and the forms which he adopts\textsuperscript{28} (are) the beautiful (forms) of the Life-giving Immortals, the mature\textsuperscript{29} (forms) of the Life-giving Immortals.

Ahura Mazda is here seen as comprising like a human being, a spiritual part consisting of a soul (\textit{uruua	extbar s}), which in his case is the Life-giving Formula, and a material part, a visible form (\textit{kəhrp-}), the Life-giving Immortals.\textsuperscript{30} The noun \textit{kəhrp-} denotes Ahura Mazda’s visible form in the Yasna Haptanghaiti, where ‘this light here’, which includes the ritual fire inhabited by Ahura Mazda’s heavenly fire, is declared to be the god’s most beautiful ‘body’, or ‘form’:

(6) Y 36.6 \textit{sra	extbar est\acute{a}t t\acute{a} f kəhrp\acute{a}m kəhrp\acute{a}n}
\textit{ānu\acute{a}daiamah\acute{i} mazd\acute{a} ahur\acute{a}}
im\acute{a} no\acute{a}\acute{a}
\textit{bərziz\acute{a}m} + \textit{bərz\acute{a}man\acute{a}n} \textit{anat}
y\acute{a}t \textit{huur\acute{a}d} \textit{ahur\acute{a}}

We now declare, O Wise Lord, that this light here has been the most beautiful form of your forms, ever since yonder highest of heights was called the sun.

Moreover, that all his forms are worshipped is summarized in

(7) Y 71.4 \textit{v\acute{a}sp\acute{a}c\acute{a} kəra\acute{f} ahur\acute{a}le mazd\acute{a} yazamaide}

And we worship each form of the Wise Lord.

Against this Avestan background one may interpret the following passage from the Middle Persian Bundahi\textbar sn:

(8) IrBd TD\textsuperscript{2} 11.2–3 \textit{Ohrmazd az ān ī xwêx xwad\acute{ı}h + kē gē\acute{ı}y rō\acute{ı}nh kīrh ī dām\acute{a}n ī xwêx frāz bē\acute{ı}n\acute{ı}d.}

From his own essence, which is material light, Ohrmazd brought forth the form of his own creatures.\textsuperscript{31}

\textsuperscript{28}The literal meaning of the verb \textit{nā\acute{ı}b\acute{a}ia\acute{s}-} being ‘to mix’, the underlying syntactic structure of the sentence seems to be: ‘and the bodies with which he mixes (his own) are the beautiful bodies of the Life-giving Immortals’. It is then parallel to that of Yt 8.13, 16 and 18, where \textit{nā\acute{ı}b\acute{a}ia\acute{s}-} governs the acc. \textit{kəhrp\acute{a}m} which is complemented by the instrumental \textit{kəhrp\acute{a}}, the latter denoting the body with which the star Ti\textbar strya ‘mixes’ his own. The Yt 8 passages describe how for three times ten nights the star Ti\textbar strya takes on the body first of a 15 year old man, then of a bull and finally of a horse in order to receive and reward ritual worship.

\textsuperscript{29}Literally: ‘grown’, past perfect participle of the verb \textit{və\acute{n̓ıd} ‘to grow’} (Bartholomae 1904, col.1369). The expression could be interpreted as implying the birth scenario in so far as Ahura Mazda’s spiritual creation have ‘matured’ during a period of gestation. For a possible link between this detail and an account in the Pahlavi Rīv\acute{ā}yat of the Dādest\textbar n Ī Dēn\acute{ī}g 46.3, according to which Ohrmazd created the material world out of his ‘body’, see below.

\textsuperscript{30}On the description of Ahura Mazda in anthropomorphic terms, see below.

\textsuperscript{31}B.T. Anklesaria 1956, pp. 14f., chap. 1.44. Cf. Skjærvø 1995, p.272 with fn.25 who connects this Pahlavi myth with various OAv. passages. For the transcription \textit{gē\acute{ı}y} and \textit{mēn\acute{ı}g\acute{ı}y} (rather than \textit{gē\acute{ı}g} and \textit{mēn\acute{ı}g}), see Skjærvø 1995, p.269 fn.15, 2002a, p.30 fn.7; 2009, pp.480 fn.8 and 481 fn.12; 2011, p.63 fn.33.
When seen in the light of the Avestan idea that Ahura Mazda takes on a ‘body’ (kəhrp-) in the form of the Amesha Spentas, the Pahlavi kirb ī dāmān ī xwēz ‘the form of his own creatures’ in the above passage refers to Ohrmazd’s spiritual creation, which elsewhere in the Middle Persian creation myth is described as one occurring in the ‘spiritual’, mēnoyīhā state:

(9) IrBd TD 4.4–5 u-š mēnoyīhā ān dām ī pad ān abzār andar abāyēd frāz bṛēhēnīd
And in a spiritual state he brought forth that creation which is necessary as an instrument.

Thus, in both the Avestan and Middle Persian creation myths all good spiritual or mainiauua-beings descend directly from Ahura Mazda. The notion that they are made of the same substance as the god is expressed in the Avesta by the noun ‘birth, begetting’ (zaθu-) and by kinship terms (‘father’, ‘daughter’) and in the Middle Persian texts by Ohrmazd’s ‘own essence’ (xwēz xwadīh) from which the spiritual creatures are made.

The idea that Ahura Mazda produced the spiritual world out of himself is found in the later tradition as well as in the Avesta and Pahlavi literature. One instance occurs in the manuscripts Pt4 and Mf4, which contain the Avestan text of the Yasna with its Pahlavi translation and commentary. Both manuscripts were presumably written around 1780 and descend from one which was copied by the scribe Hōsang ˙ıSyawaxš ˙ıŠahryār ˙ıBaxtafrīd ī Šahryār in Isfahan in 1495 CE (864 Anno Yazdegerd). The introduction on the first folios not only includes two colophons, one of which is by Hōsang, but also a summary of Zoroastrian doctrine:

(10) Pt4 fol.2v20–3r6; Mf4 fol.2r1–9
ud čiyon ohrmazd ī xwadāy ī mēnōyān mahist ud abzōṅgōtom

pad bun dahišn ud pad dād ud raugh būdan ī dām ī xwēz
ud abāz dāstan ī ēbgat ud petyāng az dām ī xwēz
ud abaydāg kardan ahremen ud dēwān ud har druzīh ud wattrēh
ud kardan ī rist-āxēz ud tan ī pasēn rāy
amahraspand ud hamāg yazad ud dēn ī weh ī mazdešnān
az tan ī xwēz tāṣīd ud ʾifrīd ud pad abēzqāgh frāz bṛēhēnīd

And inasmuch as Ohrmazd, the lord, the greatest and most bountiful of the spiritual beings

— in the primal creation and in his own creation becoming created and current, and in order to keep the enemy and adversary away from his own creation,

32: This is also how Skjærvø 1995, p.269 interprets this particular passage. The noun kirb (the Middle Persian etymological equivalent of Av. kəhrp-) also denotes the ‘form’ of the material creation in its spiritual state, see below.
34: Facsimiles of Pt4 have been published by Arash Zeini 2012 on the website of the Avestan Digital Archive. For those of Mf4 (= D90), see JamaspAsa and Nawabi 1976. The introduction is also found in other mss. belonging to this family, in particular G14, T6, E7, and T54 of the Meherji Rānā Library, Navsari.
and to annihilate Ahreman and the demons and every deceitfulness and wickedness, and to bring about the resurrection of the dead and the future body — from his own body shaped, created and in purity brought forth the Amahraspands and all sacred beings and the good religion of the Mazda-worshippers.35

4 Ahreman and his evil creation

In the Gathas and Old Persian inscriptions the cultic competitors of Ahura Mazdā are the daēnas, the Iranian equivalent of the Vedic ‘gods’ (deva-), rather than Angra Mainyu.36 From a systematic point of view, the latter is the opponent not of Ahura Mazdā, but of Spenta Mainyu. Since the Daivas and their cult are both vehemently rejected and associated with the lie, the Mazdayasian religion exhibits features belonging to what Jan Assmann has described as ‘the Mosaic distinction’.37 The development in the Younger Avesta and subsequent tradition is that the daēnas are ‘downgraded’ and become Angra Mainyu’s evil products and handiwork, the dēws of the Pahlavi texts,38 while Spenta Mainyu is ‘upgraded’ to the extent that he merges with Ahura Mazdā.39 This progression eventually results in the direct opposition of Ahura Mazdā and Angra Mainyu in the Younger Avesta and Ohrmazd and Ahreman in the Pahlavi texts. Such antagonism has at times been misinterpreted by outside observers to mean that the two are on equal footing, and even that Zoroastrianism entails two gods, one good and the other evil. However, such a concept, which would need to be described as ‘ditheism’, does not apply to the Zoroastrian tradition.40

Ahreman’s fashioning of his own, evil creation is described in the Avesta by the verb fraca kərət- (e.g. Y 9.8 fraca kərəntat), literally ‘to cut forth’. The fact that this Avestan verb is the etymological antecedent of the Middle Persian frāz kirēnidan, which is used in this context in the Pahlavi texts, is a further indication of the extent to which Pahlavi accounts are based on Avestan traditions.41 In the Pahlavi texts, Ahreman’s creative activity is described in parallel though negative terms to that of Ohrmazd. While Ohrmazd created ‘the form of his own creatures’ (i.e. his spiritual creations, which include the spiritual forms of the material creations) ‘from his own self’ (az ān ī xwēš xwadīh), from his ‘material light’ (gētī yōsīh), ‘from his own body’ (az tan ī xwēš),42 Ahreman produced his creation (dām frāz kirēnīd) from ‘material darkness’ (az gētī tāṅgīh), eg. in TD2 11.10 and

(11) TD2 12.1–2 az gētī tāṅgīh ān ī asar tāṅgīh dād
az asar tāṅgīh drō-gōwīsīh frāz būd

35 On the form mazdēsēnūn, see Skjærvø 2007, pp.30–33.
36 See Hintze 2013.
37 Assmann 2003.
From material darkness he created endless darkness;
from endless darkness false speech came forth. 43

From the ‘endless darkness’, Ahreman produced the ‘form’ (kirb) of his own spiritual creation:

(12) TD2 12.5–6 az asar i tārīgīh ān tan frāz kirēnūd
u-xwēl tan dām andar ān kirb bē dād
From the endless darkness he brought forth that body
and he created his own creation in that form.44

In the Pahlavi sources the view is stated that Ahreman has no material creation that
would correspond to his spiritual one.45 The Avesta, by contrast, lists the ‘reddish snake’
(Vd 1.2), ‘dragon Dahāka’ (Y 9.8) and ‘corn-bearing ants’ (Vd 1.6) amongst Angra Mainyu’s
material products alongside a host of evils of less material nature, such as undesirable natural
phenomena (winter Vd 1.2 and 19, heat Vd 1.18, death and disease Vd 20.3, 22.2) and those
involving human action (doubt Vd 1.7 and 15, excessive lamentation Vd 1.8 and burying or
boiling corpses Vd 1.12, 16).46 However, although some of Angra Mainyu’s products have
a material form, they all are nothing but negative counter-creations which Angra Mainyu
produces in order to harm Ahura Mazdā’s creatures.47

5 The origin of the material world

The worship of Ahura Mazdā as the creator of both the spiritual and material worlds is
found in the Gathas (e.g. Y 44.3–5) and the Yasna Haptaŋhaiti, from which the beginning
of Y 37 also forms part of the Khorde Avesta as a grace to be said before meals48 and is often
quoted within the Zoroastrian tradition:

(13) Y 37.1 iθā āt yazamaidē ahurām mazdām
yā gāmcā ažmācā dāt
apasā dāt uuniarācā van’hīr
raocācā dāt bīnīmācā
vīspācā vohū
Y 37.2 ahiiā xlaθrācā mazāmācā hauuparag’hāścā
In this way we now worship the Wise Lord,
who has created49 the cow and truth,
(who) has created the waters and the good plants,
(who) has created light and the earth

44The text here follows the ms. TD1 12.3–4 ‘P-ș NPȘH d’m ẞYN ZK klp BR’ YHBWN-t, as does B.T.
Anklesaria 1956, p.16, chap. 1.49. The ms. TD2 has ‘P-ș NPȘSH tn’ d’m W MN klp BR’ YHBWN-t’.
45Shaked 1967.
46Cf. the table in Grenet 2005, p.31.
49On the translation of the verb dā and the disputed question whether Ahura Mazdā ‘arranged’ or ‘created’ the
world, see Hintze 2007, pp.162–167 with references.
and all that is good
Y 37.2 by his rule, greatness and skill.

In one of the oldest Younger Avestan, or rather Middle Avestan (see fn. 50 and 51), texts the worshippers refer to the ‘cattle breeder’ as the ‘father’ of the ‘cow’, of ‘truth’ and of the ‘existence’ of the truthful person:

(14) Y 58.4 βύμα αści a’šāmuč vordθajā vahstitō βūšō carōθamahī
hō pēka gāusča a’šāβhāča a’šāμasci a’š’āunahīača stōiś
hāītiu vaḥhūdā
The cattle breeder is truthful, resistance breaking, best.
We celebrate the cattle owner.
This one (is) the father of the cow and of truth.50
(He is) the real provider of good (things)
for the existence of the truthful male and truthful female one.51

Bartholomae’s 1904, 1029 interpretation that Y 58.4–5 are spoken by the cow is difficult to reconcile with the 1pl. form of the verb. It is more probable that the words are uttered by the worshippers, and that βύμαnt- ‘possessing cattle, cattle breeding’ refers metaphorically to Ahura Mazdā. Such a view is supported by Yt 1.13, where the adj. is one of Ahura Mazdā’s names, alongside the name of the text:

(15) Yt 1.13 βυμα ναμα αλμī
βυšʼō. māṭa ναμα αλμī
I am ‘Cattle Breeder’ by name.
I am ‘Formula of the Cattle-Owner’ by name.

Y 58.4, as well as the Gathas (Y 44.3, 47.2), then presents Ahura Mazdā as the ‘father’ of Truth. The collocation of ‘truth’ and ‘cow’ as Ahura Mazdā’s ‘children’ recalls the expression

50 The word α’šāβhāča, found in the mss. Pt4 and Mf4, is the gen.sg. of the noun α’śa- ‘truth, order’ and represents a form peculiar to this text. It contrasts with Old Avestan α’šāxīτācā and Young Avestan α’šāheca and its presence provides one of the arguments justifying the positing of a distinct language stage, which has been described as ‘Middle Avestan’, see Tremblay 2006, p. 247 and the discussion by Kellens 2007, pp. 104–110.

51 The mss. Pt4 Mf4 of the Iranian Pahlavi Yasna and K5 M1 and F2 of the Indian Pahlavi Yasna have the reading a’š’āunahīača stōi, which is the form edited by Geldner 1889–1896 I pp. 206. Other mss., by contrast, read aš’ā vairišā stōi. The latter reading is supported by the Old Avestan genitive expression vairiš stōi ‘of desirable existence’ in Y 43.13. Moreover, the Pahlavi translation a+hāyīh kāmguñ-iz sti ‘also of the existence of the desires for righteousness’, indicates that the Pahlavi translators interpreted Y 58.4 in the light of the Gathic passage. With reference to the Pahlavi version and since elsewhere in the Avesta the fem. form of aš’āun- is aš’āmī, Pirat 1992, p. 235 with fn. 39 prefers the reading aš’ā vairišā stōi. He translates the last three lines of Y 58.4 ‘C’est le père de la Vache et du Rta, du Rtaev qui est avec le Rta et de la Sti de choix’. The rendering of Tremblay 2006, p. 257 and 2007, pp. 68ff. is similar: ‘c’est lui le père du beuf, de l’Ordre, du fidèle de l’Ordre selon l’Ordre ou de la possession désirable’. Pirat supports the combination of aš’āun- with the instrumental aš’ā ‘truthful through truth’, which his interpretation entails, with a parallel in RV 4.42.4.

The reading aš’āunahīača, the gen.sg. of the fem. stem aš’āunahī-, represents the only Av. attestation of the equivalent of Ved. tvahīt- (Bartholomae 1904, col. 257). Such an interpretation is supported by the common YAv. combination of aš’āun- with sti ‘existence’, although only the masculine form is attested (Bartholomae 1904, cols. 251, 192f.). The usual OAv. and YAv. form aš’āmī- being an innovation, aš’āunahī- is then an archais which has survived in what Hoffmann calls a dialect (Tichy 1986, pp. 100, 104 with references) and Tremblay Middle Avestan, of which Y 58.4 is the chief witness, cf. the previous footnote.
yə gāmcā ažmcā dāl of Y 37.1, quoted above no.13, which presents the pair as the god’s creations.52 In the ensuing invocations the worshippers address the Life-giving Immortals as their own creators, quoting passages from the Gathas to corroborate their requests:

(16) Y 58.5 yaϑā nā dānā amaϑā spəntā
    aϑā nā ṭhāz’dūm ( = Y 34.7c)
    ṭhāz’dūm nā vaŋhauuī
    ṭhāz’dūm nā vaŋ’huṣ
    ṭhāz’dūm nā amaϑā spəntā huxsaxaϑa huxdaxhō
    naϑum ṭaϑ anuϑum yuϑmaϑ vaϑdā aϑā nā ṭhāz’dūm ( = Y 34.7c)
As you have created us, O Life-giving Immortals,
“Therefore protect us!” ( = Y 34.7c)
Protect us, O good (male) ones,
Protect us, O good (female) ones,
Protect us, O Life-giving Immortals of good rule, of good gifts,
“Through Truth I do not know anyone else than you: therefore protect us!” ( = Y 34.7c)

Also in the Younger Avesta, both Ahura Mazdā and the Life-giving Immortals are presented as creators of the material world. In particular, the idea that Ahura Mazdā is such a ‘creator’ (dātar-, his standing epithet) is formalized in his standard address, which is usually abbreviated but occurs in its full form, for instance, in Vd 2.1 and in Yt 1.1:

(17) Yt 1.1 ahura mazdā mainiuϑ spəniϑa
    dātar gaϑanaϑ asteuwaϑinaϑ aϑaum
    O Wise Lord, most Life-giving Force,
    creator of the material world, truthful one!

Ahura Mazdā is here identified with the ‘most Life-giving Force’. Elsewhere, the texts refer to the ‘creations of the Life-giving Force’, spəntahe mainiuϑ dāmaϑ (Yt 10.142), and Spenta Mainyu has the same epithet as Ahura Mazdā, ādhiϑa, meaning ‘the one who has created’, for instance:

(18) Yt 10.143 yō ādhiϑa spəntahe mainiuϑ
    the creator, the Life-giving Force.

It has already been mentioned above, that while Ahura Mazdā is without negative counterpart in the Avesta, spəntahe mainiuϑ has an opponent in aŋra- mainiuϑ-. Both of them create, the good force producing a good creation, the bad force a bad one, as stated, for example, in

52 This and other OAv. parallels to Y 58.4 were noted by Tremblay 2007, p.691.
The passage could be seen as further developing the Gathic idea that each of the two spirits or ‘forces’ (mainiiu) generates handiwork corresponding to its own nature:

(20) Y 30.4 atça hiaat tā hām mainiiu jasaetam paonuuim dazdē gaēmac ajiāitämic yadaa ahpate ahpam ahpus acilō dequmataq an ałāunē vahištəm manō
And when these two spirits initially come together, they create life and unlife respectively and that ultimately the life of the deceitful ones will be very bad, but for the truthful one (it will be) the best thought.

Not only Ahura Mazdā and spēta- mainiiu-, but all the Life-giving Immortals are presented as creating and protecting the material world. In addition to Y 58.5, quoted above no.16, for instance in

(21) Yt 19.18 yōi hōuti āhpōn dāmanqān
yat ahurahe mazdā
dātarasca maraňšтараска
ȳBaraňšтараска aĩšňоňšтараска
nipātarasca nišňaňšтараска
(The Amesha Spentas,) who are the creators and formers, the fashioners and guardians, the protectors and watchers of these creatures of Ahura Mazdā.

While the Avesta provides little further insight into exactly how the material world is thought to have come about, it is clear that it is presented as coming from Ahura Mazdā via

53Similarly Yt 13.76 and Yt 15.43. Cf. Kreyenbroek 1993a, p.99 on these and similar passages.
54On form dādūnə, 3pl.dual opt.pres.act. of the root dā ‘to give; to set’, denoting a repeated action in the past, see Hoffmann 1975, p.610. In the present context the form could emphasize the idea that the two antagonistic forces created their respective creations one by one. Differently Skjærvø 2011, p.61 fn. 24, according to whom the optative implies “a recurrent regeneration of the world, rather than an exclusively primordial act.”
the Amesha Spentas. In this connection one may view the occasional, although, as Narten has shown, in the Avesta not yet systematic, correlation between the material and spiritual creations, in so far as, for example, the earth corresponds to ‘right-mindedness’ (ərmaiti-), the cow to ‘good thought’ (volu manah-), metal to ‘desirable rule’ (xšaθra- vairiia-), water to ‘wholeness’ (haunuiatāi-) and plants to ‘immortality’ (amərtatāi-).

The later full and systematic development of such a correlation, as found in the Pahlavi texts, can be seen as corresponding to the idea, amply attested in the Avesta, that Ahura Mazda made the material world out of the Amesha Spentas, following their generation out of himself.

The notion that the material creation is secondary to and derives from the spiritual one also occurs in the Middle Persian sources. Thus, the Bundahišn states that the spiritual creation is first, and the material one emerges from the Amahraspands:

(22) TD2 14.1–2 mēnōy nazdist gēnī az amahraspandān
The spiritual (is) first, the material from the Life-giving Immortals.

The way in which the material world derives from the spiritual one is described in different ways in the various Pahlavi sources, but all agree that there are two phases, one before and one after the Assault of Evil. According to the Bundahišn, in the phase before such an attack, Ohrmazd made one archetype of each material creation first in spiritual and then in material form.

According to an account preserved in chapter 46 of the Pahlavi Rivāyat of the Dādestān ī Dēnīg, Ohrmazd made components of the material creation one by one out of ‘his own body’ (u-š pas ēk ēk az tan ī xuveh hamē brēhēnid 46.3), the sky from the head and the earth from the feet, just as he had produced those of the spiritual creation out of himself. In preparation for the material creation, he ‘kept them in his body for 3,000 years’ and ‘caused them ever to increase and made (them) ever more beautiful’. Like the spiritual one, which in the Avesta (Yt 13.81, see above no.5) is said to have ‘matured’, the material creation in the spiritual phase of its production is here also seen as having undergone a period of ‘gestation’ before being made in material form. In other words, Ohrmazd was, so to speak, ‘pregnant’, first with the spiritual, and then with the material creation in its spiritual state.

In this connection one may also see the statement of the Bundahišn, that Ohrmazd has the

55Narten 1982, p.147f.
56B.T. Anklesaria 1956, pp.16–17, chap. 1.53. For a Dēnkard passage (DkM 43.11–14) which describes the Amahraspands as the spiritual (mēnōy) counterpart and ‘selfness’ (xunadīh) of the material creations, see Shaked 1971, p.77.
57On the stages of creation see Shaked 1971, p.65f.
58Williams 1990 I pp.160ff., II pp.72ff. and 1985, pp.686, 691. Translating az tan ī xuveh as ‘from the body of his own (making)’, Williams 1985, 684f. interprets the ‘body’ (tan) as that of Gayōnard rather than of Ohrmazd as proposed here. For a passage in the Bundahišn, according to which each part of the human body corresponds to one of the Amahraspands, the soul, perception and other mental faculties to Ohrmazd, the flesh to Wāhman etc., see Shaked 1971, p.82 with fn.75. An Avestan predecessor could be seen in Y 58.5, quoted above no.16, in which the worshippers state that the Amesha Spentas have ‘created us’.
59The Avestan parallel supports Williams’s conclusion that this account, which he characterizes as “étrange without necessarily being étranger”, is rooted in the Zoroastrian tradition, rather than due to foreign influence, as suggested by earlier scholars (Williams 1985, 683–686). Parallels for the concept of a ‘cosmic body’ in accounts of the world’s origin in other Indo-European traditions are then better explained as being common inheritance, rather than borrowings.
motherhood' (mādarīh) of his spiritual creation and the ‘fatherhood’ (pidarīh) of the material one.\textsuperscript{60}

The one representative of each creation, which Ohrmazd had produced, was subsequently polluted and killed by Ahreman. According to one version of the creation myth, related in Bundahišn, chapter 7 (TD\textsuperscript{2} 71.12–73.5), Ohrmazd, in his omniscience, had made one exemplar of each of the seven material creations in the spiritual as well as the material state. Then, following Ahreman’s Assault, he took the (indestructible) spiritual version of each material creation, referred to as its ‘mirror-image’ (ēwēnag) and ‘form’ (kirb), and purified each of them respectively in the sun, moon and stars, that is to say in those celestial spaces which were inaccessible to Ahreman. From the purified ‘blueprint’ he subsequently recreated the material creation in material form, but this time in multiplicity.\textsuperscript{61} It is this ‘post-Assault’ phase of the material creation that the texts offer the greatest variety in the way the creation myth is formulated.\textsuperscript{62}

6 The Worship of the Yazatas

The correlation between the material and spiritual worlds, which, as we have seen, is fundamental to Zoroastrian thought, is based on the idea that the material world derives from the spiritual one, and the latter from Ahura Mazda. Everything that belongs to Ahura Mazda’s spiritual and material worlds is potentially capable of being worshipped (yaz) and is therefore yazata- ‘worthy of worship’.\textsuperscript{63} By contrast, anything connected with Angra Mainyu is a-īesnia- ‘unworthy of worship’. The Avesta describes Ahura Mazda as the greatest and best of all the yazatas (Yt 17.16, Y 16.1). There is in fact a host of unnamed spiritual and material Yazatas, of which the spiritual ones are in their hundreds and thousands, as stated in Yt 6.1:

\begin{itemize}
  \item[23] Yt 6.1 huuraxšāointed amātām rāem
  \item[23] aurmaast yazamaide
  \item[23] āat yat hūršū raaxšnō tāpāieiti
  \item[23] āat yat hūršū raacō tāpāieiti
  \item[23] hišt̄nītī mainiñuāŋhō yazataŋhō
  \item[23] sātōma haṣaŋiōmta

We worship the splendid sun, the immortal splendour who has swift horses.
When the shining sun waxes warm
when the sun, the light, waxes warm,
(then) the spiritual venerable ones are standing up in their hundreds and thousands.
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{60}For this passage, see Williams 1985, p.685; Skjærvø, 2011, p.65; 2011a, p.341; Filippone 2003, p.93f.
\textsuperscript{61}Anklesaria 1956, pp.86–89; for further details, see Hintze 2009.
\textsuperscript{62}For different versions of the creation myth, see Kreyenbroek 1993.
\textsuperscript{63}Cf. Shaked 1971, p.75.
In addition, named spiritual Yazatas include the Amesha Spentas (Vr 8.1, 9.4), Contract (miθra- Yt 10.6, 98 etc.), Hearkening (snaoṣa- Y 3.20), Breaking of Resistance (uωθωγ幺να- Yt 14.1), Dāmōiš Upamana (Y 2.15 etc.), Nairyō. sañha (Ny 5.6 etc.), the Scion of the Waters (apaq napat- Yt 19.52) and Uprightness (arṣī- Y 57.33). Material Yazatas mentioned by name include the Wind (saiiũ- Yt 15.1), Fire (ātar- Y 3.21), the Mountain uṣi. ∂arə (Y 2.14), the Earth (zan- S 1.28, 2.28) and Zarathustra (Y 3.12).64 A Yazata may be praised ‘with a ritual in which his or her name is uttered’ (aoxtō. nāmana yasna),65 but they are all seen as being in relation to Ahura Mazda. This connection is expressed in the formula ńahńiiehe aoxt o. nāmano yazatahe ‘of the sacred being belonging to the Lord, invoked by its own name’ (Y 3.20 of Sraoša, Y 3.21 of Ātar).

The view that anything that comes from Ahura Mazda is ‘worthy of worship’ enables the Mazdayasian tradition to absorb other deities, old (such as Mithra) and new, and incorporate them into its own world and pantheon provided they are subordinate to Ahura Mazda. Thus, for instance, Ahura Mazda enjoins the worship of deities such as Arəduuı Sūrā Anāhitā (Yt 5.1 = Yt 13.4, Y 65.1) and in this way legitimizes the cult of a major goddess alongside himself, without threatening his own primacy:

(24) Yt 5.1 ( = Yt 13.4, Y 65.1)
\[
\text{mnaọt ahurō mazdā spitamāi zaraθuʃtāi}
\]
\[
yazaçša mē him spitama zaraθuʃtara
\]
\[
yan ardũuım sūrqa anāhitqan
\]
\[
parədũ, fɾakqm baʃanzaqan
\]
\[
vidaẽqan ahurō. tkaʃlaqan
\]
\[
yesniaqan ajhe astuuaite
\]
\[
vahmiqan ajhe astuuaite
\]

Ahura Mazda said to Spitāma Zarathustra:

“You may worship on my behalf, O Spitāma Zarathustra, Arəduui Sūrā Anāhitā who is far-reaching, provides healing who is opposed to the demons and follows the teachings of the Lord, who is to be worshipped by the bodily life, who is to be prayed to by the bodily life.”

Rather than being cultic competitors, the Yazatas thus strengthen and support Ahura Mazda.

In the Gathas, Ahura Mazda is described as possessing a body just like human beings: he has ears (Y 51.3 gaŋiša-), eyes (Y 31.13 caʃmañ-), hands (Y 43.4 zasta-), a tongue (hizu- Y 31.3) and a mouth (əh- Y 28.11, 31.3) and he sees, hears, speaks and teaches. His description in anthropomorphic terms is also found in the later Pahlavi texts. Šayast nē Šayast 15.1–4, for example, describes the deity as a person, but nevertheless as an entirely spiritual being,

\[\text{Bartholomae 1904, col.1279; Jackson 1896–1904, pp.640–646. The masc. yazata- is used as an apposition to both masculine and feminine nouns. Skjærvø 2011a, p.346 fn.82 rightly notes that there is no feminine form yazatã.-.}
\]
\[\text{On this expression, see Panaino 1994, p.172f.}\]
and therefore intangible. The text relates that as he was sitting before Ohrmazd to consult him, Zardušt perceived the deity as having ‘a head, hands and feet, hair, face and tongue’ and even as wearing clothes just like human beings. Zardušt then asked to take the deity’s hand, but the god answered that this was not possible because of his nature as an intangible spiritual being (mēnōy ī agrifīār hom hast ī man gīftan nē tuwān ŠnŚ 15.2). Zardušt confirmed that he was aware of this and of the fact that wahman, ardwišt, ˇsahrewar, spandarmad, hordād and amurdād are equally intangible and would become invisible the moment he departed from Ohrmazd’s presence. He therefore asked the god whether after his return to the material world in addition to Ohrmazd and the ‘seven Amahraspands’ he should also worship the ‘person’ (kas) whom he could see and of whom there was ‘something’ (tīs) in the material world. Ohrmazd replied:

(25) ŠnŚ 15.4 Ohrmød guft kū šnawē ī tō gōwam spitāmān zarduxšt kū amā har tan-e dāyag-e xwēzd ī gēţīy dād ēstēd ī īā rāy ān xwēškārīh ī pad mēnōy kunēd pad gēţīy āndar tan ī īy raǔōg kunēd.

Ohrmazd said: “Listen, I tell you, Spitāmān Zarduxšt, that each of us individuals has given his own wet-nurse to the material world, whereby in its body it manifests in the material world that proper function which it performs in the spiritual world.”

The term dāyag ‘wet-nurse’ is a further instance of the use of the vocabulary of biological procreation in expressing the way the world is imagined to have come about. In the present passage it could be another metaphor for the material creation in its spiritual form, which elsewhere is denoted by the term ēwēnag ‘mirror-image’ or kirb ‘form’ (see above). Ohrmazd then states that each of the spiritual beings has its material counterpart:

(26) ŠnŚ 15.5 gēţīy ān ī man kē ohrmazd hom mard ī ahlaw ud wahman gōspand ud ardwišt ātāxt ud ˇsahrewar ayōštust ud spandarmad zamīg ud nārīg ī nēk hordād āb ud amurdād unvar.

“My, namely Ohrmazd’s, material form is the righteous man, and Wahman (is) cattle, and Ardwahišt (is) fire, and ˇSahrewar (is) metal, and Spandarmad (is) earth and the virtuous woman, and Hordād (is) water and Amurdād (is) the vegetation.”

He further explains that by caring for the material creations, their spiritual counterparts are also being looked after and that everyone should learn and practise such care:

(27) ŠnŚ 15.6 kē pahrēz ī īn ī haft hammōxtēd xūb kunēd ud šnāyēnēd ā-s hagrīz ruwān āxwēzh ī ahreman ud dēwān nē rasēd

ku-s pahrēz ī avēşān kard ā-s pahrēz ī īn ī haft amahraspandān kard bawēd ud pad gēţīy hamāg mardām hammōxtan abāyēd.

“The one who learns the care for these seven behaves and pleases well. Then his soul will never be possessed by Ahreman and the dēws.

When he practises care for them, then the care of these Amahraspands is practised. And in the world all mankind must learn (it).”

The rest of this chapter, ŠNŠ 15.7–31, sets out in detail the various ways in which each of the seven spiritual beings is pleased and promoted when its respective material (gēnī) counterpart (hangōšīdag) is well treated. By practising such care, people accumulate good deeds on their individual accounts in preparation for the judgement after death.

The idea that by worshipping the material world one worships the spiritual is also found in the Avesta, for instance in

(28) Yt 6.4 yō yazaite hūvaŋ əyat amāzəm
raēm auriuŋaspəm . . .
yazaite ahurən mazdaŋ
yazaite amāzə spentsə
yazaite haom uumianəm
xīnəntauiiitə višpe mainiānacə yazata gañjiāca
yō yazaite hūvaŋ əyat amāzəm
raēm auriuŋaspəm

The one who worships the sun, the immortal, swift-horsed splendour, . . .
he worships Ahura Mazdā,
he worships the Life-giving Immortals,
he worships his own soul.
The one who worships the sun, the immortal, swift-horsed splendour,
he gratifies all spiritual and material venerable ones.

This attitude of respect and care for the material world is also incorporated in prayers of the Khorde Avesta which are to be recited at the sight of a mountain (namāz kūh, Y 6.13), cattle (namāz gospadān, Vd 21.1–2) and running water (namāz āb, in praise of Ardvisūr Anāhītā). Seeing the sun, the moon, rivers and mountains, having food and drink to sustain the body and medicine against illness, all these are perceived as religious actions in praise of Ahura Mazdā’s presence in the material world. Gherardo Gnoli summarized this concept as follows:

Il pensiero religioso dell’Iran zoroastriano presenta un’ indiscutibile originalità: mentre non si può prescindere dall’idea di un dio creatore onnisciente, l’universo intero si svolge, si sviluppa e s’accresce come una manifestazione della stessa divinità. Da qui il valore sacrale degli elementi del cosmo, la santità del fuoco, della terra, della luce, dell’ acqua.

Homage paid to the material world was perhaps one of the most distinctive markers of the Mazdā–worshippers. In their persecution of Zoroastrians who had converted to Christianity, the mobeds of the Šasanian period demanded from the apostates that they should revert to

68Kotwal and Hintze 2008, pp.32–34. Furthermore, prayers are to be recited when seeing a site for exposing the dead (namāz dādāxī, Y 26.7) and also when entering a village, city or country (namāz šahībā, Y 1.16).
70Gnoli 1963, p.191.
their old faith and prove that they had done so by worshipping the elements, especially fire, water and the sun. Thus, in the Sogdian history of Persian martyrs under Šāpūr II, the great mobed demands from the Christian men:

(29) C2 68R.22–23 n(m)[’]c bṛt’ qw xwr s’ ‘t ẑwîq’
Offer homage to the sun and you will live.71

From the mobed’s point of view such veneration was the ultimate proof of the veneration of Ahura Mazda as the maker of a perfect spiritual and material world, but for the Christian martyrrologists such an action was to be rejected as pure idolatry. Ranging from disputations with apostates of the Sasanian period to John Wilson in the 19th century, the worship of the Yazatas, especially of the material ones, was one of the areas in which Mazdā-worshippers were particularly targeted by polemical attacks72 and described as ‘fire worshippers’.

7 Conclusion

In two fundamental studies of the notions of mēnōy and gēñy in the Pahlavi Texts, Gherardo Gnoli and Shaul Shaked have shown independently that in Middle Persian cosmology gēñy does not exist on its own but derives from a spiritual, mēnōy, prototype.73 Gnoli also rightly argues that Zoroastrian cosmology provides neither room nor evidence for the concept of creatio ex nihilo, which many scholars, including Zaehtner, Moulton and Casartelli, had previously advocated. On the basis of Y31.11, which states that Ahura Mazda creates through his thought,74 Zaehtner 1961, pp.54–55, maintained that “since he (i.e. Ahura Mazda) thinks all things into existence, his creation is ex nihilo”. Casartelli argued that the concept of creatio ex nihilo emerges from a passage in the Bundahišn (IndBd 30.5–6), in which Ohrmazd states that it is more difficult to create something that had not existed before than to resurrect from the dead something that had previously done so. Gnoli objects that, according to the Pahlavi texts, Ohrmazd does not make the material creations out of nothing, but out of their respective spiritual prototypes. The spiritual world, the mēnōy, is like the root, and the material one, the gēñy, the fruit. Just as a fruit cannot exist without the root, so the material, gēñy, world cannot exist without its spiritual, mēnōy, source. From this point of view, therefore, the question of creatio ex nihilo, does not in fact arise.75

While Gnoli’s arguments are convincing, we may even go one step further. For, as we have seen, not only does the material world derive from the spiritual one, but the latter itself in turn derives from Ahura Mazda/Ohrmazd, who is the origin of all that is good (Y37.1, quoted above no. 13). The idea that the spiritual creations descend from Ahura Mazda and thus consist of the very stuff from which the god is made, is of the utmost importance for Zoroastrian cosmology. For it is these spiritual beings, collectively referred to in the

74On the concept of creation by thought, see Skjærvø 2011, p.59 with two more Gathic passages. On other concepts of creation in the Gathas, see above fn.25.
Avesta as \( \text{ama} \dot{\text{s}} \text{-} \text{spənta-} \), that ultimately give rise to the material world. It is in the light of such life-giving, creative function that their epithet \( \text{spənta-} \), literally ‘life-producing’, makes sense.\(^{76}\) Via the spiritual beings, the material thus also derives from Ahura Mazda. Although derived from and secondary to the spiritual world, the material one is therefore as good and perfect as its spiritual counterpart. The positive, or, to use Ugo Bianchi’s terminology, “pro-cosmic”, view of the material world is another characteristic which sets Zoroastrianism apart from most, if not all, other religious and many philosophical traditions.\(^{77}\) Rather than \( \text{creatio ex nihilo} \), Zoroastrianism therefore entails the concept of \( \text{creatio ex deo} \).

The idea that the material world derives from the spiritual corresponds to two features characteristic of Zoroastrian religious practice. The first is the worship of the spiritual and material Yazatas. Since the material world derives from Ahura Mazda, it is in principle as good as the spiritual one and therefore worthy of worship, \( \text{yazata-} \), just like the spiritual world and Ahura Mazda himself. Hence it is perfectly legitimate to worship any of Ahura Mazda’s spiritual and material creations because ultimately they derive from him and comprise his substance. One worships Ahura Mazda by worshipping his creations. The second feature is the prominence of purity laws. Because the material world ultimately derives from Ahura Mazda, it is of the utmost importance to keep it pure. Looking after and maintaining its purity is one way of worshipping its maker. Such care is enacted in daily practice by observing the rules for keeping the creation clean and pure as prescribed in the \( \text{Vīdēvdād} \) and taught in the religious tradition.

In the emic perspective from within the religion’s own textual tradition, Mazdayasnians thus perceive of themselves as worshippers of one god, Ahura Mazda. They affirm themselves as supporters of his cosmic plan especially by worshipping his creations, both spiritual and material and by rejecting the force that destroys them, Angra Mainyu. In the etic perspective, polytheism is absorbed by monotheism within the framework of the Zoroastrian concept of creation. Certain old and new deities are presented as creations of Ahura Mazda and incorporated into the pantheon as \( \text{yazata-} \).\(^{78}\) Their cultic worship is not only tolerated and legitimized but even requested by Ahura Mazda. Rather than competitors, the Yazatas are Ahura Mazda’s supporters, and the more there are, the better. Dualism deals both with the problem of Evil and with Ahura Mazda’s real cultic competitors, the old, Indo-Iranian gods (\( \text{daēnu-} \)), who are declared to be the products of Evil (Y 32.3) and are rejected as ‘deceitful’ (\( \text{druanī} \)) together with their worshippers, the \( \text{daēnu-iāsna-} \). Each of the monotheistic, dualistic and polytheistic features, mentioned at the beginning of this article and which Zoroastrianism presents to the observer, thus represents an essential constituent of the whole system. Taken together, their sum makes a self-contained theology with a remarkable degree of coherence and consistency. Notions of monotheism, dualism and polytheism are so closely intertwined in the Zoroastrian religion that it is difficult, if not impossible to separate them from each other without causing the whole system to collapse.

\(^{76}\) On the meaning and etymology of \( \text{spənta-} \), see Skjærvø 2002a, p. 32 fn.11 and 2011, p.61, fn.25, and Hintze 2007, p.353 (references).

\(^{77}\) Bianchi 1980, p.16; Williams 2008, pp. 132–133.

\(^{78}\) This conclusion comes close to Kellens’ 2012a, p.23 statement: “Mon avis présent est que le processus de monothéisation est réel, mais va de pair avec un processus de théogénèse qui peuple le panthéon de divinités nouvelles et subalternes”. Kellens 2012 elaborates on his views of “théogénèse”.
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