
‘Do ut des’: *Patterns of Exchange in Zoroastrianism.*

A Memorial Lecture for Ilya Gershevitch.

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The pervasive and central theme is: *do ut des*. This aspect clings to the routine and the mass religious behaviour of all peoples at all times and in all religions.

(Max Weber, *Economy and Society* vol. I, p. 424)

I Introduction

Exchange and reciprocity are central concepts in all forms of human society. Based on a system of mutual obligation, they denote any activity in which valuables are circulated between individuals or groups of people. In the religious sphere they include the transfer of both material and immaterial goods between human and spiritual beings. As outlined by Marcel Mauss in his *Essai sur le don*, the classic work on the total system of reciprocity, such exchange is governed by the principle of the gift entailing the counter-gift.

Concepts of exchange and reciprocity are also traceable, by means of the oldest extant texts, in the culture of the early Indo-Europeans. In this lecture I propose to discuss some of their aspects which are found in the earliest literary document of the Iranians, the Avesta, the sacred texts of the followers of Zarathustra. The lecture has three parts. First, on the basis of the Avesta and the Rigveda I shall briefly outline the Indo-Iranian ritual involving a triangular configuration of patron, priest and god engaged in gift-exchange. Second, by investigating the contexts of the much disputed, but for our purposes important, Gathic word *maga-*, I shall highlight some aspects of the Old Avestan ritual governed by the same triangular pattern of ritually enacted gift-exchange. Finally, I shall discuss the Gathic evidence for exchange and reciprocity in a non-ritual, religious context. I shall conclude that there are, in the Gathas, two distinct, but interpenetratory, exchange patterns: first, the inherited Indo-Iranian triangular model underlying the ritual activity and governing the relationship between Zarathustra and some of his contemporaries and, second, a new pattern without Indo-Iranian antecedent, of a two-way relationship between any human being and Zarathustra's god, Ahura Mazda.

2 Exchange in Indo-Iranian Culture

Early Iranian culture is deeply rooted in and emerged out of its Proto-Indo-Iranian or Aryan ancestor. While the material culture of the latter appears to be traceable in the Andronovo-civilization,¹ the language and conceptual world of that pre-historic stage is only accessible to us by way of scholarly reconstruction on the basis of a systematic comparison of the earliest Iranian and Indo-Aryan linguistic documents. Yet reconstructed Proto-Indo-Iranian has a great explanatory force because it provides a backdrop against which the Avesta and Veda may be viewed and their archaisms and innovations identified.

The sources of our knowledge about the earliest Iranian and Vedic languages and ideas are exclusively religious and to a large extent poetic. This does not mean, however, that such texts were detached from peoples' practical daily lives. On the contrary, it has been convincingly argued that poetry and religion were central to Indo-Iranian society and culture. Poetry was not, as Calvert Watkins has put it, a "frill", but a necessity of life, a necessary condition for existence. It is probably no accident that the vast majority of the earliest surviving texts are religious poetry. In the oral culture of the Indo-Iranians, a deliberate effort was made to preserve them because they were particularly valued in society as well as being central to its own intellectual and spiritual inheritance.²

It has long been observed that Indo-Iranian poetry cannot be separated from the society in which it operated. The composer of texts, the poet, did not function in isolation; he had a patron, and the two were in an exchange or reciprocity relationship. The latter, however, was not two-way, but a three-way relationship between gods, patron and poet. The poet offered poems to the gods, who then bestowed wealth of all kinds upon the patron and the latter in their turn upon the poet. All three participants were interdependent: the gods required the poet's praise, the poet needed the patron to employ and pay him, while the patron needed both the poet to interact with the gods, and the latter to renew his prosperity. The ordinary man was not able to enter into a direct relationship with the deity, but had to hire a priest who, by performing the ritual, could do so on his (the patron's) behalf. Only the poet-priest was in a position to interact with the gods, so that the latter might confer on the patron what he desired. This network of relations, which entailed a moral and ideological necessity, may be represented in the following way:

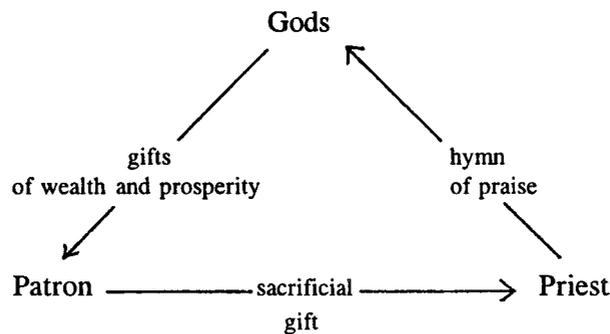


Fig. 1.

¹ Cf. Mallory, 2002.

² Watkins, 1982, p. 105.

There were thus three parties involved in the Indo-Iranian sacrifice: the patron, the priest and the gods. The patron acted as donor of the sacrifice for the performance of which he hired the priest; the latter carried out the sacrifice for the benefit of the gods; they received the sacrifice and came down to the sacrificial place in order to enjoy the offering. Being guests, they brought with them various gifts of hospitality which were bestowed on the host, the patron, who, after completion of the sacrifice, was obliged to remunerate the priest for his services.³ The task of the poet was to arouse and attract the deity's interest in entering into the transaction. By employing the poetic skills in which he had been trained, he alone was able to coerce the divine into such reciprocal relationships with human beings. That goal was achieved by means of a good hymn of praise, which would attract the god's attention and invite them to leave their heavenly dwellings and come down to the place of ritual worship. Most of the Rigvedic hymns are invitations of this kind. At the sacrificial place, the gods would enjoy the offering which consisted of food and drink. Both priest and patron hoped, indeed expected, the gods to provide riches and well-being in return for the hospitality which they enjoyed.

The sacrifice was conceived as an act of hospitality in quite a physical sense. The ritual fire, represented by the god Agni, prepared for the gods a broad path on which they would travel when coming down to the place of sacrifice and when returning back to heaven. This emerges, for example, from

RV 7.38.8 *asyá mádhvaḥ pibata mādāyadhvaṃ tṛptā yāta pathibhir devayānāḥ*

“Drink from this sweet drink and get drunk! Having enjoyed it, return on the paths on which the gods travel!”

The gods came on their chariot and brought with them many gifts, which they hoped to bestow on the one providing the offering. The ritual precinct was prepared so as to welcome them. They had a special seat which was comfortably laid out with sacrificial straw, the *barhīś-*, as referred to, for example, in

RV 1.117.1 *mádhvaḥ sómasyāśvinā mādāya pratnó hótā vivāsate vām/*

barhīśmatī rātír víśritā gír iṣā yātaṃ nāsatyópa vājaiḥ//

Y 2.7 *ahmīia zaodθre barəsmānēcā*

“The old priest invites the two of you, the two Aśvin, for the intoxication. The gift rich in sacrificial straw has been spread out, and the hymn as well. Draw near with strength, O Nāsatya, and with prizes!”

“At (the place of) this libation and sacrificial straw:

The sacrificial straw also figures in the Zoroastrian ritual where it forms part of a common formula of liturgical invocation, for instance in

ušahinəm ašauuanəm

I invite with reverence,

³ The triangular model also seems to underlie Pindar's poetry of praise studied by Leslie Kulke, 1991. The patron would be represented by the aristocracy, the poet by Pindar, and the slot of the gods would be filled by the victorious athlete. The goods circulated are the praise offered by the poet to the victorious athlete, who bestows fame and prestige on his civic community represented by the aristocracy. The latter offers the payment to the poet as remuneration for the praise poetry.

aṣahe ratūm āiiese yeṣti

Uṣahina, the truthful one, the Ratu of truth.”

Even in contemporary Zoroastrian ritual, the *barəsman-*, consisting either of twigs or of metal sticks, is laid out on the ritual precinct before the chief priest, the *zaotar-*. After completion of the sacrifice, the patron was obliged to pay the priest. However, in the Vedic hymns this is not described as a payment, but as a gift, the Vedic term for which is *dákṣiṇā*. At the end of the hymn, the singer usually expresses his desire for a generous remuneration and praises the patron who has given the *dákṣiṇā-*, for example in

RV 10.62.11 *sahasradá grāmañīr má riṣan mánuḥ súryeñāsyā yátamānaitu dákṣiṇā/*

“The giver of a thousand (gifts), the leader of hosts, Manu, shall not be harmed. Taking its place next to the sun, his sacrificial gift shall come.”

The *dānastutis* or ‘praises of the gift’ which the patron gave to his priest-poet, incorporated in the hymns of the Rígvēda, record such rewards or fees. However, the poets tended to exaggerate them, sometimes fancifully, speaking of thousands or even myriads of cows.

For instance, in RV 8.46.22, the poet rejoices in the reward he has received for his service:

RV 8.46.22 *ṣaṣtīm sahásrāśvyasyāyútāsanam úṣṭrānāṃ viṃśatīm śatā/*
dāśa śyāvīnām śatā dāśa tryāruṣṭīnāṃ dāśa gāvām sahásrā//

“I have won sixty thousand horses, a myriad (cows), twenty hundred camels, ten hundred dark brown (mares), ten (hundred) three-reddish (mares), ten thousand cows.”

A good hymn of praise, the gift of the poet to the gods, obligates the deity to bestow as a counter-gift goods desired by the patron, usually fertility, long life, wealth and prosperity. It was by way of interaction with the gods that the patron renewed his life force and prosperity. The ideological basis for the extraordinarily high valuation accorded to the poet by society was that he was the professional of the spoken word, the word by which he alone was able to interact with the gods. As Enrico Campanile has put it, the poet was “the preserver and the professional of the spoken word. It is he who is by definition competent in all the areas where the word is, or is considered to be operative”.⁴ The priest was the most important professional in Indo-Iranian society, a learned man of high social standing, similar, perhaps, in modern terms, and at least in some societies, to a scholar.

Zarathustra was also one of those singers, since in one Gathic passage (Y 33.6) he refers to himself as a chief priest, *zaotar-*. In such a capacity, his position in society must have been similar to that of a Vedic priest, a *hótar-*, and he would have learned from childhood how to compose hymns in praise of the gods. Committed to *aṣa-* ‘truth’ or ‘rightness’, he was a master of the spoken word, and therefore in need of a patron.

3 The triangular pattern in Zoroastrian ritual

Let us now investigate the extent to which the Old Avestan ritual is governed by the aforementioned Indo-Iranian triangular pattern of ritually enacted gift-exchange. There is one Avestan term that appears to play a key-role in the Gathic perception of ritual: *maga-*.

⁴ Campanile, 1977, p. 32; English translation quoted by Watkins, 1982, p. 106.

This noun is central to Avestan ritual terminology not only because it is relatively well attested, but also because it was to provide the name of the Zoroastrian priestly class of the *magi*, and later the *mobeds*. We shall first survey the various uses of the Vedic cognate *maghá-* and then the contexts of the Gathic word *maga-*. We shall see that Vedic *maghá-* is a technical term for the ‘gift of reciprocity’, while Avestan *maga-* denotes, in a metonymic transposition, the ritually enacted exchange of gifts of reciprocity. Accordingly, *magu-* refers to a priest engaged in ritually enacted gift-exchange (*maga-*).

3.1 Rigvedic *maghá-*: Exchange in Vedic ritual

In the R̥gveda, the neuter noun *maghá-* denotes the gift given by the *maghávan-*, who may be either a god or a patron. *Maghá-* refers to both the gift given by the gods to the singer, who performs on behalf of the patron, and that given by the patron to the singer. In most cases, *maghá-* is given by the gods, in particular Uṣas (5.79.4), the Marut (7.57.6), the Áśvin (10.73.4), Mitra and Varuṇa (1.151.9), but most often (17 times) Indra, for example in:

RV 1.11.3 *pūrvīr índrasya rātáyo ná ví dasyanty ūtáyah/
yádī vājasya gómata stotf̥bhyo mámhate maghám//*

“The gifts of Indra (are) many, his helps do not diminish, when he bestows on the singers the gift of the prize rich in cattle.”

Furthermore, in at least seven passages *maghá-* refers to the gift which the patrons give to the priests for performing the sacrifice, for instance in

RV 3.53.7 *viśvāmītrāya dádato maghāni sahasasāvē . . .//*

“While they [the Ṃgiras] give gifts to Viśvāmītra at the thousandfold pressing (of Soma)”

and in

RV 5.30.12 *ṛṇamcayāsya práyatā maghāni práty agrabhīṣma n̥tamasya n̥mām//*

“We have received the gifts offered by Ṛṇamcaya, the most manly of men”.⁵

Moreover, as observed by H.-P. Schmidt, 1991, (p. 221), *maghá-* denotes the gift offered by human beings to the gods in at least one passage in which Agni is asked

RV 6.12.2 . . . *havyā maghāni mānuṣā yájadhyai//*

“to sacrifice the libations, the human gifts”.

The most important characteristic of both gods and patrons is their generosity in giving *maghá-*. Many hymns culminate in the praise of this quality, for instance

RV 4.17.8 *hánta yó vṛtrám sánitotá vājāṃ dātā maghāni maghāvā surád̥hāh//*

⁵ In RV 5.30.12, *maghá-* has the same attribute *práyata-* (‘offered’) as *dákṣiṇā-* in the compound *práyata-dákṣiṇa-* (‘who has offered the *dákṣiṇā-*’), an attribute of the patron.

“[Indra,] the slayer of Vṛtra, the winner of prizes, the giver of gifts, the wealthy, rewarding one.”⁶

RV 8.54.5 *yád indra rādho ásti te māghonam maghavattama/
tēna no bodhi sadhamādyo vṛdhé bhāgo dānāya vṛtrahan//*

“O Indra, together with your generous gift, O most wealthy one, be our drinking-companion for prosperity, be a dispenser of the gift, O slayer of Vṛtra!”

It emerges from this survey that semantically Vedic *maghá-* forms part of the vocabulary of institutionalised gift-exchange between god, patron and priest. It denotes a ‘gift of reciprocity’⁷ given by any of the three parties involved in the exchange. Both gods and patrons possess a large amount of *maghá-* and are therefore described as *maghávan-* ‘richly provided with *maghá-*’. The purpose of the singer’s hymn is to stimulate and encourage each of them to give generously: the gods to give *maghá-* to the patron, and the latter to give *maghá-* to the priest. It is through the spoken word, the hymn, that the priest-poet sets the circulation of goods in motion.

3.2 Avestan *maga-*: gift-exchange in Gathic ritual

Let us now see what the Gathas tell us about the ritual perceived as an exchange of gifts. One of the central terms for the ritually enacted circulation of gifts is, I think, the hotly debated Avestan word *maga-*, referred to by Ilya Gershevitch as “the horribly controversial noun”. In a masterly and refreshingly humorous article, punningly entitled “A helping hand from Central Asia”, he gives a useful summary of “the tortuous history undergone by the term *maga-* in twentieth century Gathological thinking”.⁸ Although the noun *maga-* is relatively well attested, six occurrences altogether⁹ but, alas, only in the Gathas-, virtually every aspect of it is disputed: its identity with Vedic *maghá-* gift, its gender, i.e. whether it is masculine or, like the Vedic noun, neuter, and, above all, its meaning. In fact, the latter is even more open to speculation if Av. *maga-* is etymologically separated from Vedic *maghá-*. Apart from Old Avestan *maga-*, there is also a Younger Avestan masculine noun *maga-* meaning ‘hole’, attested only in the Videvdad and usually considered as an etymologically unconnected homophone.

Bartholomae (AirWb. 1109f.), who thinks that Avestan *maga-* is etymologically unrelated to Vedic *maghá-*, postulates a meaning “Bund, Geheimbund”, which he understands in the sense of Latin *societas* as referring especially to the Zoroastrian community. Ilya Gershevitch posits a meaning ‘vow’, denoting “a solemn undertaking entered into by free human will”,

⁶ As noted by Hoffmann, 1967, p. 167 and Tichy, 1995, 251f., the acrotone agent nouns in this passage denote well-known characteristics (“Beeigenschaftung”) of Indra. Their function is equivalent to that of verbal forms in the injunctive mood.

⁷ Molé, 1963, 158ff., Schwartz, 1985, p. 484.

⁸ Gershevitch, 1996, pp. 60–68, esp. pp. 61–63, 66ff.

⁹ There is some dispute as to whether there are five, six or seven attestations of *maga-*. Bailey, 1970, 33f., followed by Gershevitch 1996, 64ff. eliminates one in Y 53.7 by preferring the reading *magāuš* (from the stem *magu-*) which occurs in the ancient Pahlavi Yasna manuscript K5 against *magām* found in most other good manuscripts and edited by Geldner, *Avesta* I 190. According to the latter’s edition, *Avesta* I 171, there is an additional attestation in Y 48.10 *mūθrəm ahiiā magahiīā* (Schwartz, 1985; H.-P. Schmidt, 1991, pp. 229–231), but here the reading *madahiīā* is better attested (Bartholomae, *AirWb.* pp. 1110, 1114; Kellens, *WZKM* 78, 1988, p. 300) and probably *lectio difficilior* (Gershevitch, 1996, pp. 63f.).

namely “that of acceptance of Ahura Mazdāh’s revelation to the prophet”. He bases his semantic conclusions on Y 53.7, where *maga-* appears to denote the vow given in the wedding ceremony.¹⁰ Benveniste, who equally rejects the etymological identity of the Avestan and Vedic nouns, interprets Avestan *maga-* as a term for the spiritual content of Zarathustra’s teachings.¹¹

However, the strongest argument in favour of the etymological equation of the Vedic and Avestan words is not so much that it is phonologically straightforward, as that there are a number of phraseological parallels. For example, the expression

Y 46.13–14 *rādayhā . . . mazōi maḡāi*

‘with generosity . . . for the great gift’

consists of the same lexical components as

RV 1.122.8 *māhimaghasya rādhas*

‘the generosity of the one who gives great gifts’.¹²

Those who assume that Av. *maga-* belongs etymologically with Ved. *maḡhā-* start from the meaning ‘gift’, which the noun has in Vedic. It could refer to the revelation of the Mazdayasnian religion by Ahura Mazdā to Zarathustra, as suggested for instance by Messina,¹³ or be the gift offered to the deity by human beings, as proposed by Molé.¹⁴ Helmut Humbach argues that *maga-* denotes not only the sacrificial offering, but also the act of hospitality offered by the patron to the priest and by the priest to the deity during the sacrifice. The noun refers “to the sacrificial ceremony and to the payment for it by its sponsors”.¹⁵ Humbach’s interpretation comes closest to what will emerge from the following study of the contexts of *maga-*, namely that the latter is a term for the ritually enacted gift-exchange.

The Old Avestan contexts, in which *maga-* occurs, imply that the noun refers to the actual situation in which Zarathustra finds himself. This is indicated both by the fact that persons who belong to Zarathustra’s environment are named individually (Y 46, 51 and 53) and by the gifts being listed (*rāiti-*, Y 29.11, 33.7).¹⁶ In Y 53.7, a stanza to whose understanding Ilya Gershevitch has contributed significantly in the article referred to above (n.8), the ‘prize’ (*mīžda-*) for the *maga-* is mentioned, thus evoking the actual situation in which the hymn is recited:¹⁷

Y 53.7a *aṭcā vō mīždam aḡhaṭ ahiīā maḡahiīā*

“And the prize for this gift-exchange will be yours . . .”

¹⁰ Gershevitch, 1996, pp. 66, 67f.

¹¹ Benveniste, 1938, 15: “l’enseignement religieux à répandre oralement”, cf. Messina, *Orientalia* 8, 1939, 205f.

¹² On the phraseological parallels, see Schlerath, *OLZ* 57, 1962, p. 579; Schwartz, 1985, p. 482; Kellens, 1987, p. 248; H.-P. Schmidt, 1991, p. 220f., pp. 233–236; Mayrhofer, *EWAlia* II 289 with references.

¹³ Messina, 1930, pp. 67–75, esp. 71ff.; cf. also Schlerath, *OLZ* 57, 1962, p. 579; H.-P. Schmidt, 1991, p. 221.

¹⁴ Molé, *Culte* p. 157, who considers that in Y 29.11 *maga-* could also denote the gift which is given by the deity.

¹⁵ Humbach *Gāthās*² II 245; 1952 [1957], pp. 19–20; *Gathas* I 67.

¹⁶ Cf. Schwartz 1985, p. 482.

¹⁷ For a discussion of the philological details of the Avestan passages quoted below, see Hintze, 2000.

as long as one remains ‘most faithful’, *zrazdišta-*. However, the text continues indicating that ‘woe’ (*vaiiōi*) will be the last word of those who violate the system of gift-exchange (*maga-* Y 53.7d). Thus, the contravention of *maga-* will lead to a terrible end. Y 53.7 is one of the final stanzas in the entire cycle of Gathic hymns, and it is perhaps not by chance that *maga-* occurs here twice, thereby reinforcing the importance of abiding by the rules of gift-exchange.

The noun is also found at the beginning of the Gathas, in Y 29.11, in the context of a verb of hospitality, *paiti.zan* ‘to recognise, acknowledge, welcome’:

Y 29.11 *kudā ašm vohucā manō xšaθrāmčā at mā mašā*
yūžəm mazdā fraxšnənē mazōi magāi.ā paiti.zānatā
ahurā nū nā auuarō šhmā.rātōiš yūšmāuuatəm

“Where (are) truth, good mind and rule? Welcome me soon,
 O Wise One, in foresight for the great gift-exchange!
 Now, O Lord, (come) down to us on account of our offering to those such as you!”

Like its Vedic equivalent *prāti-jñā* (e.g. RV 3.45.4; 7.54.1), *Av. paiti-zan* has a technical meaning in the context of the institution of hospitality in so far as the singer asks to be recognised and accepted (*paiti-zan*) by the deity in response to ‘the great *maga-*’.¹⁸ The gifts (*rāiti-*) are prepared in order to attract Ahura Mazda’s attention and invite him to come to the place of worship. An exchange of gifts (*rāiti-*) is also alluded to in Y 33.7. As in Y 29.11, Ahura Mazda, but also the divine beings Truth and Good Mind, are invoked and invited to draw near. The singer stresses to the wealthy patrons, the *magauuan-*, that he is renowned for being able to bring about the divine presence:

Y 33.7 *ā mā āidūm vahištā ā.x^oaiθiiācā mazdā darāšatcā*
ašā vohū manayhā yā sruuie parō magaonō
āuuīš nā aṅtarō hēṅtū nēmax^oaitiš ciθrā rātaiiō

“Come hither to me, O you best ones, (come) hither, O Wise One, in person and boldly, together with Truth (and) Good Mind, (a process) for which I am renowned before the wealthy ones! Let splendid gifts inspiring reverence be manifest among (all of) us”.

The context of this stanza suggests that splendid gifts (*rāiti-*) are exchanged between all parties involved (the singer, the patron and the divine beings) as a result of the divine presence. Thus, in both Y 29.11 and 33.7, Ahura Mazda is called upon and invited to come to the place of worship in order to set in motion the exchange of gifts. The manifestation of the divine presence is an event which will actually take place at a later point in the Yasna ceremony, namely during the recitation of the Yasna Haptaṅhāiti. Thus, Y 29.11 and 33.7 point forward to that event. It occurs during Y 36, when the heavenly Fire of Ahura Mazda is addressed and invited to come down, a process which, as the text suggests, must actually take place while this chapter is being recited. Ahura Mazda thus becomes visible in the most beautiful of his forms, the light as concentrated in and embodied by the ritual fire.¹⁹ We may conclude from Y 29.11 and 33.7 that the ritual is set in a context of mutual welcoming: the divine beings are received by the worshippers and the latter pray that their offerings and

¹⁸ Cf. Schwartz, 1985, 487f.

¹⁹ Narten, *YH* 26; Hintze, 2002.

praises may be accepted by the divine beings and appropriately rewarded. Thus, a ritually enacted gift-exchange takes place between human and divine beings. Y 29.11 and 33.7 testify to the roles of the deity and the priest during this event. Let us now see what the occurrences of *maga-* tell us about the role of the patron.

3.3 *The patron in the Gathic ritual gift-exchange*

So far the scholarly debate on the meaning of *maga-* has concentrated on the difficult stanza in the wedding hymn, Y 53.7, where the word occurs twice. It has even been claimed that this was the only attestation that could offer any definite insight into the meaning of both *maga-* and *magauuan-*.²⁰ However, such opinion prevents us from appreciating the evidence not only of Y 29.11 and 33.7 discussed above but also of two hymns which I think are particularly important with regard to the meaning of *maga-* and the role of the patron. The ones in question are Y 46 and 51, which, as observed by Helmut Humbach, exhibit a parallel structure.²¹ The context of both suggests two things: first that Kavi Vištāspa plays a positive key role for the ‘great *maga-*’ and, second, that the latter is contravened by Kavis and Karapans (Y 51.12–14). Whether an action is for or against *maga-* is determined by whether or not Zarathustra is pleased (*xšnu-*) and whether or not someone is his ‘ally’ (*uruuadā-*). The Kavis and Karapans contravene *maga-* because they do not fulfil either of these requirements, while Kavi Vištāspa and his companions do. Further, by so doing, we read in Y 46.13, a man will obtain fame (*srauuah-*) and Ahura Mazda’s blessings:

Y 46.13 *yā spitāməm zaraθuštrəm rādayhā*
marataēšū xšnuš huuō nā fərasrūidiāi ʔərəθβō
aṭ hōi mazdā ahūm dadāṭ ahurō
ahmāi gaēθā vohū frādaṭ manayhā
təm vā aṣā mēhmaidī hušhaxāim

“Worthy of being renowned amongst the mortals is that man who pleases Spitāma Zarathustra with generosity:

The Wise Lord gives him life,
 he furthers his livestock through Good Mind.

We consider one of you to be a good companion of Truth.”

While this stanza states in a more general way the beneficial consequences for any man who “pleases Zarathustra”, the following one, Y 46.14, raises the question as to who is an ‘ally’ (*uruuadā-*) of ‘the great *maga-*’ (*mazōi magāi*). A positive answer is given immediately. The ally is Kavi Vištāspa:

Y 46.14 *zaraθuštrā kastē aṣauuā uruuadō*
mazōi magāi kē vā fərasrūidiāi vašī
aṭ huuō kauuā vištāspō yāhī
yāngstū mazdā hadəmōi minas ahurā
tēng zbaiiā vaṭhāuš uxδaiš manayhō

“O Zarathustra, who is your truthful ally
 for the great gift-exchange? Or who wishes to be renowned?”

²⁰ Insler, *Gāthās* 1975, 157f. followed by Gershevitch, 1996, 66f.

²¹ Humbach, 1952 [1957], pp. 19–20.

This one here, Kavi Vīštāspa, (wishes to be renowned) at the pleading!²²
 Those whom you, O Wise Lord, foster in their seat,
 those I invoke with words of Good Mind.”

As in Y 46.14, so also in Y 51.11 the same question is put: who is an ‘ally’ (*uruuadā-*) of Zarathustra and who is suitable for *magā-*:

Y 51.11 *kē uruuadō spitāmāi zaraθuštrāi nā mazdā*
kē vā aṣā āfraštā kā spəntā ārmaitiš
kē vā vaṅhēuš manayhō acistā magāi ərašuuō

“Which man is an ally of Spitāma Zarathustra, O Wise One?
 Or who has consulted with Truth, with whom (has consulted) Bounteous Right-mindedness?
 Or which lofty one has made himself known for the gift-exchange of Good Mind?”

In contrast to Y 46.14, where the question is immediately answered positively – Kavi Vīštāspa is Zarathustra’s ally and pleased him (*xšnu-* 46.13) in Y 51 the answer to this question is delayed until stanza 15, where it is confirmed that Kavi Vīštāspa and his entourage will be Zarathustra’s allies. But before that, in Y 51.12, Zarathustra gives a counter example of someone who had rejected him by refusing to offer hospitality. Kavi Vāēpya, another ruler, ‘did not please’ (*nōit . . . xšnāuš*) Zarathustra:

Y 51.12 *nōit tā īm xšnāuš vaēpiō kouūnō pərətō †zimō*
zaraθuštrəm spitāməm hiiat ahmī urūraost aštō
hiiat hōi īm caratascā aodərəscā zōišənū vāzā

“With this (*magā-*), Kavi Vāēpya did not please him, Zarathustra Spitāma, at the bridge in winter after he had arrived there, but obstructed him and his two draught beasts shivering from travel and from cold.”

Y 46.13-14 and Y 51.11-12 correspond with one another in a chiasmic manner: Y 46.13 agrees with 51.12, and Y 46.14 with 51.11. The correspondences are created by lexical repetitions:

Y 46.13 *spitāməm zaraθuštrəm . . . xšnāuš*
 “he pleased Spitāma Zarathustra”

is taken up by

Y 51.12 *nōit xšnāuš . . . zaraθuštrəm spitāməm*
 “he did not please Zarathustra Spitāma”.

Moreover, Y 46.14 and 51.11 are connected in so far as both stanzas ask: who is Zarathustra’s ally for the gift-exchange? The question

Y 46.14 *zaraθuštrā kastē aṣauuā uruuadō mazōi magāi*
 “O Zarathustra, who is your truthful ally for the great gift-exchange?”

²² On *yāh-* see Narten, *YH* pp. 149–155 who, however, thinks that in Y 46.14 it could have a non-religious, profane meaning and alludes to the request (‘Bittrede’) put to a worldly ruler during an audience (*ibid.* 153f.). Humbach 1952 [1957], 18 Anm.17 rightly points out the close semantic relationship between the nouns *yāh-* and *magā-*, cf. especially the expression Y 30.2 *parā mazō yāṅhō* ‘before the great entreaty’, which, as suggested by Narten *YH* 35 and 152f., could point forward to the *Yasna Haptaṅhāiti*.

is equivalent to

Y 51.11 *kō uruuatō spitāmā zaraθuštrāi nā . . . maqāi*
 “which man is an ally of Spitāma Zarathustra . . . for the gift-exchange?”

Thus, matching phrases, expressing identical thought-elements, are placed in a reciprocal relationship²³ across the two Gathas. The correspondences may be represented as summarised below in Fig. 2. Moreover, it is unlikely that they occur by chance or are without significance. The use of stylistic devices, such as a cross arrangement, or chiasmus,²⁴ over different Gathas, points to a skilful poetic mind at work composing these hymns and deliberately utilising poetic techniques for the purpose of conveying the message. The artistic accomplishment of the poetry suggests, furthermore, that the composer was in full command of the language which he employed. Far from being an archaic idiom, already fossilised and no longer spoken or understood, the Old Avestan language appears to have been for the composer a living means of communication, one which he could mould and adapt to his needs.

In stanzas 15–17 of Y 46 more people are mentioned by name. They are the members of the Haēcataspa Spitāma-family (15), Fōrašaoštra Hvōgva (16) and Jāmāspa Hvōgva (17). All of them are invited to come to the place where Zarathustra praises their generosity “in verses and not in non-verses” (*afšmānī sēnghānī nōiṭ anafšmān* 46.17a–b). In the final stanza of this hymn (Y 46.19) the singer identifies himself explicitly as Zarathustra and states that he has earned his reward or prize (*mīžda-*) which consists not only of “higher existence” (*parāhūm*), but also of two milk-giving cows:

Y 46.19 *γō mōi ašāt haiθīm hacā varəšaiī*
zaraθuštrāi hiiat vasnā fōrašōtəməm
ahmāi mīždəm hanəntē parāhūm
manō.vistāiš maṭ vīspāiš gāuuā azī

tācīt mōi səs tuuəm mazdā vaēdištō

“(You,) who, on the basis of truth, will make real for me,
 Zarathustra, what is most wonderful at will,
 for this one here who deserves higher life as a prize,
 (and) two milk-giving cows together with all things seen by the mind:
 you, O Wise One, seem to me to know these (things) best”.

This stanza suggests that here, at the end of the hymn, the singer mentions his reward, the sacrificial gift which is due to him when the ritual is completed.

Y 51, in contrast, explains in more detail what happens to those who do not offer hospitality to Zarathustra: deceitful people, such as Kavi Vaēpya, miss the straight path, and their souls will tremble when, after death, they arrive at another bridge, namely the Cinvat one:

Y 51.13 *tā drəguuatō maradaiī daēnā +ərəzaoš haiθīm*
yehiiā uruuā xraodaiī cinuuatō pərətā ākā
x^v āiš šīiaoθanāiš hizuuascā ašahiīā nasuuā padō

²³ Cf. Lausberg, *Literary Rhetoric* 414.

²⁴ Lausberg, *Literary Rhetoric* 322 with n.2.

Parallel and Chiasitic Structure of Y 46 and 51

<p>Y 46.13 <i>yā spitāmam zaraθuštrām rādaphā marataēšū xšnāuš huuō nā fərasrūidiitai *arəθβō aṭ hōi mazdā ahūm dadāt ahurō ahmāi gaēθā vohū frādāt manaphā tām vā ašā mēhmaidī hušhaxdāim</i></p> <p>Worthy of being renowned amongst the mortals is that man, Who pleases Spitāma Zarathustra with generosity. The Wise Lord gives him life, He furthers his livestock through Good Mind: Through truth, we consider one of you to be a good companion.</p>	<p>Y 51.11 <i>kā uruuθō spitāmāi zaraθuštrāi nā mazdā kā vā ašā aṭfrašta kā spəntā ārmaitiš kā vā vaphəuš managhō acisiā magāi ərašūuō</i></p> <p>Which man is an ally to Spitāma Zarathustra, O Wise One? Or who has consulted with Truth, with whom (has consulted) Bounteous Right-mindedness? Or which lofty one has made himself known for the gift-exchange of Good Mind?</p>
<p>Y 46.14 <i>zaraθuštrā kastē ašauuā uruuθō mazōi magāi kā vā fərasrūidiitai vašit aṭ huuō kauuā višāspō yāhi yāngstū mazdā hadəmōi minas ahurā tāng zbaitā vaphəuš uxδāiš managhō</i></p> <p>O Zarathustra, who is your truthful ally for the great gift-exchange? Or who wishes to be renowned? This one here, Kavi Vīstāspa, (wishes to be renowned) at the pleading! Those whom you, O Wise Lord, foster in their seat, those I invoke with words of Good Mind.</p>	<p>Y 51.12 <i>nōit tā im xšnāuš vāēpiō kauūinō perətō zamō zaraθuštrām spitāmam hiiat ahmī urūraost ašit hiiat hōi im caratascā aodarəščā zōišanū vazā</i></p> <p>‘With this (maga-), Kavi Vāēpyā did not please him, Zarathustra Spitāma, at the bridge in winter after he had arrived there, but obstructed him and his two draught beasts shivering from travel and from cold.’</p>

Fig. 2.

“Therefore the vision (*daēnā*) of the deceitful one will miss the reality of the straight (path). When seeing (its own vision) at the Bridge of the Separator, his soul will tremble, having disappeared from the path of truth because of his own actions and (the words) of his tongue”.

After death, the soul of every person has to cross that bridge while contemplating his or her own inner vision, the *daēnā*. Someone who behaved like Kavi Vaēpya during his lifetime will produce a bad and ugly *daēnā*, and when, after the death of his body, it is seen by his immortal soul, the latter will tremble with fear, and miss the path. The question raised in stanza 11, as to who is an ally of Zarathustra, is answered negatively in stanza 14. The Karapans – i.e. the priests who do not follow Zarathustra or practice his teachings – are not his allies. Therefore, they are destined to end up in the House of Deceit:

Y 51.14 *nōit uruuāθā dātōibiiascā karapanō vāstrāt arəm*
gauuōi arōiš ā.sēndā xʷ aiš šīiaoθanāišcā sēnghāišcā
γō īš sēnghō apəmēm drijō dēmānē ādāt

“The Karapans (are) not allies in agreement with the laws of pasture.
 In their own actions and proclamations (they are) ill-disposed towards the cow of the pious.
 Such proclamation will ultimately land them in the House of Deceit”.

People such as Kavis and Karapans are deceitful because they neither abide by the laws of Ahura Mazdā nor live in agreement with the requirements of a peaceful pastoral existence as advocated by Zarathustra. They advocate a different way of life, and therefore Zarathustra predicts that ultimately their souls will be destined for the House of Deceit.

A positive answer to the question about Zarathustra’s ally, *uruuāθa-*, asked in stanza 11 is eventually given in Y 51.15. Although the word *uruuāθa-* is not explicitly mentioned here, it is implied that those who are generous with their gifts (*magauuan-*) are his allies. Zarathustra assigns them a ‘prize’ (*mīšda-*) in the ‘House of Welcome’, the *garō dāmāna-*, where Ahura Mazdā dwells:

Y 51.15 *hūiat mīšdēm zaraθuštrō magauuabiō cōiš parā*
garō dāmānē ahurō mazdā jasat paouruiō
tā vō vohū manayhā ašāicā sauuāiš ʷəuuīšī

“In the House of Welcome, the Wise Lord arrives first
 at the prize which Zarathustra has assigned to the generous ones.
 With Good Mind, these (things) have been assigned to you and to Truth through strengths”.

Just as in Y 46.15–17, the verses Y 51.16–19 enumerate Zarathustra’s allies by naming them individually. They are Fərəšaōštra Hvōgva (17), Jāmāspa Hvōgva (18), Maidyōimāḡha Spitāma (19), and above all Kavi Vištāspa, who has obtained understanding through the rule of *maga-*:

Y 51.16 *ṭam kauuā vištāspō magahūā xšaθrā ṇasat*
vayhūš padōḡiš manayhō ṡam cistīm ašā mantā
spəntō mazdā ahurō aθā nō sazduīai uštā

“Through the rule of gift-exchange (and) on the paths of Good Mind,
Kavi Vīštāspa obtained this insight, which the bounteous Wise Lord
has devised through Truth. Let it be proclaimed to us as desired!”

Thus, Y 46 and 51 suggest that there are two important, indeed decisive prerequisites for a successful give-exchange, *maga-*: the first is that Zarathustra is welcomed and remunerated by the patron, and the second that the latter directs his own thoughts on the path of Good Mind. This means that he has accepted Zarathustra’s teachings.

The patron is dependent both on the deity to give the gifts and on the poet to cause the deity to do so. By contrast, the poet is in a position of power with regard to the gods, because he is able to coerce the divine by means of his poetic skills; but he is entirely dependent on the patron’s good will and generosity when it comes to the remuneration for his services at the end of the ritual. The poet raises the question of an ‘unpaid song’,²⁵ as implied at the end of the Gathic hymn Y 44:

Y 44.18 *taṭ ̥β̥ā p̥r̥asā ̥r̥as̥ mōi vaocā ahurā*
kaθā aṣā taṭ m̥z̥d̥m hanānī
dasā aspā + ar̥ṣ̥nuuait̥s̥ uṣ̥tr̥m̥cā
h̥iiaṭ mōi mazdā ap̥iuuait̥ hauruuātā
am̥ratātā yaθā hī + taibiio d̥ayhā

“I ask you this, tell me truly, O Lord:
How shall I win through truth this prize
consisting of ten mares with a stallion and a camel,
(the prize) which has been made known to me, O Wise One, together with Wholeness
and Immortality, just as you have assigned the latter two to yourself?”

Y 44.19 *taṭ ̥β̥ā p̥r̥asā ̥r̥as̥ mōi vaocā ahurā*
yastat m̥z̥d̥m han̥antē nōit̥ d̥ait̥
y̥d̥ īt̥ ahmāi ̥r̥as̥uxdā nā d̥aitē
kā īm̥ ahiia + māēniṣ̥ aṣḥaṭ + paouruiiē
v̥iduuā auuam̥ yā īm̥ aṣḥaṭ ap̥mā

“I ask you this, tell me truly, O Lord:
If someone does not give that prize to the man
who has deserved it through the correctly uttered word,
which punishment for that will reach him first,
as I know the punishment which will reach him last?”

If we interpret these verses in the light of what has been said above, the poet is asking about the punishment due to the patron who does not reward the priest for his services. If the patron does not give the fee, a basic social order is disturbed, and the circulation of goods is blocked.

²⁵ The Greek expression ἀκέλευστος ἄμισθος ἀοιδά ‘an uncommissioned, unpaid song’ is found in Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 979; cf. Watkins, 1982, p. 106.

4 The bipolar exchange pattern between human being and deity

Apart from the just described exchange pattern, which forms part of Zoroastrian ritual thought, there is another, moral aspect to exchange: not only priests and patrons, but all human beings are involved in an exchange relationship with the deity. Zarathustra coined a special term denoting the reward which Ahura Mazda gives to any human being. It is the Avestan word *ašī-*. Perhaps the most striking verses illustrating this are those of Y 43, where we read:

Y 43.4 *aṭ ʔβā m̄n̄ghāi taxm̄m̄cā sp̄əntəm mazdā*
hīiat t̄ā zastā yā tū hafšī auuā
yš dā ašīš dr̄əguuāitē ašāunaēcā
ʔβahiitā garəmā ād̄rō ašā.aojajhō
hīiat mōi vaṅh̄dūš hazō jimat̄ manajhō

“Then I shall realise that you are strong and bounteous, O Wise One, since through this hand, with which you hold them, you give rewards to both the deceitful and the truthful one, through the heat of your fire (which is) strong through truth, as the force of Good Mind comes to me”.

There is retribution as well as reward, and both the deceitful and the truthful ones will receive what they deserve at the hands of Ahura Mazda. That the deceitful will be treated differently from those who are truthful, is stated clearly in the following stanza:

Y 43.5 *sp̄əntəm aṭ ʔβā mazdā m̄n̄ghī ahurā*
hīiat ʔβā aṅh̄dūš zq̄d̄ōi darəsəm paouruuīm
hīiat dā šīiaod̄anā mīšdauuṅ yācā uxδā
akēm akāi vaj̄ hīm ašīm vaṅhaouuē
ʔβā hunarā dāmōiš uruuāēsē ap̄ōmē

“I realise that you are bounteous, O Wise Lord, as I have seen you as primeval in the begetting of life, when you made actions and words to receive their prizes, a bad (prize) for the bad one, a good reward for the good one through your skill at the most distant turning point of creation”.

In a vision, as expressed by the verb ‘I have seen you’ (*darəsəm*) in line (b), Zarathustra perceived Ahura Mazda in his primeval state, creating life. He made human life in such a way that actions and words would receive a ‘prize’ (*mīšda-*). This is presented here as a law of nature, because it was organised in this way by Ahura Mazda right from the beginning. Since language and planned action characterise every human being – and indeed human beings only – this implies that every person is going to receive such a ‘prize’, whether they want it or not. In this sense, nobody can escape it, because all human beings speak and act. What is novel here is the idea that there are just deserts attached to – or inherent in – whatever words are said or deeds performed: there will be a bad prize or retribution for those which are bad but a reward for those which are good.

In the last line of Y 43.5 the allocation of the prizes is said to take place “at the most distant turning point of creation”. This refers to a future event. If so, the stanza embraces two extreme points in time, the beginning, when life was created, and the end, when the ‘prizes’ will be distributed. And in between, the quality of human beings’ words and deeds determine what kind of ‘prize’ they are going to receive. The following stanza elaborates on the distribution of the prizes:

Y 43.6 *yahmī spəntā* θβā mainiū uruuaēsē jasō
mazdā xšaθrā ahmī vohū manayhā
yehiā šīaoθanāiš gaēθā ašā frādəntē
aēibiō ratūš sənghaiū ārmaitiš
θβahiū xratōuš yəm naēciš dābaieiū

“At the turning point to which you come with your bounteous spirit,
 O Wise One, (and) with rule: there, with good mind
 by whose actions the creatures prosper with truth,
 Right-mindedness proclaims the judgements to them,
 (the judgements) of your intellect which nobody deceives”.

It is at that most distant turning point of creation, when Right-mindedness will pass judgment. Such a judgement – or verdict – resulting in two kinds of *ašī-s*, or reward, presumably one good and the other bad, is mentioned in Y 51.5:

Y 51.5 *vīspā tā pərəšas* yaθā ašāt *hacā gam vīdat*
vāstriō šīaoθanāiš ərašuuō *haš huxratuš* nəmaghā
γē dāθaēibiō əraš ratūm xšaiūš ašīuuā cistā

“Asking about all this, how the herdsman finds the cow on the basis of truth,
 being upright in actions, of good intellect in reverence,
 (the herdsman,) who, being able, has rightly recognised, on behalf of the just people, the regulation
 about the two rewards”.

The following stanza of the same hymn tells us more about this regulation:

Y 51.6 *γē vahiiō* vaḡhəuš *dazdē yascā* hōi vārāi *rādat*
ahurō xšaθrā *mazdā aṭ* *ahmāi akāt* ašīō
γē hōi nōit vīdāitī apəmē aḡhəuš uruuaēsē

“The Wise Lord (is the one) who assigns what is better than good and who will make his will succeed through his rule. But (he will assign) what is worse than bad to the one who does not worship him, at the most distant turning point of life”.

Ahura Mazda will give “what is better than good” to those who help to make his plans succeed, but “what is worse than bad” to those who fail to worship him. Thus, here, we find another allusion to the idea that Ahura Mazda rewards the truthful ones, but retributes those who are deceitful. Moreover, this stanza indicates when this is going to happen: “at the most distant turning point of life”, an expression similar to that encountered in Y 43.5 “at the most distant turning point of creation”. In both passages, reward and retribution are distributed by Ahura Mazda at that moment: In Y 43.5 a ‘bad *mīžda-*’ to the bad one, but a

good *ašī-* to the good one; in Y 51.6 “what is better than good” to Ahura Mazda’s supporters and “what is worse than bad” to those who do not venerate the Wise Lord. While “the most distant turning point of creation” appears to refer to the conclusion of cosmic history, “the most distant turning point of life” could well indicate the end of the individual life, when a person’s soul has to cross the Cinvat Bridge. We have already seen what happens to those patrons who refused hospitality to Zarathustra. According to the interpretation proposed here, these two Gathic passages could attest the concept of two judgements, one individual and the other universal.

5 Conclusion

It has been argued that a triangular relationship, consisting of patron, priest and god, appears to have been a constituent part of Indo-Iranian ritual thought, providing the framework in which exchange could operate. We found this pattern in the Gathas when studying the contexts of a central term of Avestan ritual, *maga-*, which belongs to the vocabulary of the gift-exchange taking place between the three parties involved. The circulation of gifts is blocked if one of the parties does not pass on the goods. In particular, as we saw in Y 44, the poet is concerned that he may not receive his sacrificial fee, his *mīžda-*, and he threatens that the patron who does not pay his priest will be punished both at the time and in the distant future.

Furthermore, we found evidence for Zarathustra’s actual situation by comparing two Gathic hymns, Y 46 and 51. Zarathustra is in need of being pleased (*xšmi*) by an ally (*uruuāθa-*), who professes his teachings. That ally is Kavi Vištāspa and his entourage, but not the other Kavis and Karapans. We saw the fate which Zarathustra anticipates for those who refuse to please him, and thus infringe the rules of *maga-*: when arriving, after death, at the Bridge of the Separator, their souls will tremble on seeing their own horrible vision, their *daēnā*, and they will end up in the House of Deceit, uttering the word *vaiiōi*. By contrast, those who act in agreement with *maga-*, the *magauuan-*, will receive their ‘prize’, *mīžda-*, in Ahura Mazda’s House of Welcome.

The latter prediction implies that the Gathic exchange system not only involves the circulation of both material and immaterial goods during one’s lifetime. There is also an eschatological dimension in so far as complying, or otherwise, with the rules has an impact on what happens to the human soul after death. Moreover, it is not just those involved in the ritual who are affected by the system of eschatological exchange, but everyone. We saw in Y 43, that each person’s words and actions are linked to a *mīžda-*. This means that everybody determines what prize they will receive, whether a good or a bad one, by the quality of their own words and deeds.

The Gathas are renowned for their intricacy and density. Nevertheless, it emerges from what we have discussed that there are two interpenetrating patterns of exchange. One is the triangular constellation of the Zoroastrian ritual, inherited from ancient Indo-Iranian times and consisting of three involved parties: patron, priest and god. Some of the participants in the Gathic exchange system are mentioned by name: there is Zarathustra, the priest; there are persons accompanying him, in particular his patron Kavi Vištāspa and Kavi Vaēpya, who did not please Zarathustra; and there is Ahura Mazda, the deity invoked and invited to be present in the ritual, and bestowing prosperity and well-being. This triangular relationship

also persists in present day Zoroastrian ritual practice in so far as priests perform rituals at the request and on behalf of members of the laity, who pay for them. The second, bipolar pattern underlies the exchange taking place on the spiritual, ethical level, which, however, permeates the first one. The spiritual exchange pattern is what we may consider as Zarathustra's own and new message culminating in the idea that it is not only priests and patrons who are involved in a continuous exchange with the deity, but also each individual, men and women alike, by the way they think, speak and act.

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