

On the Role of the Laity in the History of Zoroastrianism

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ABSTRACT

Although much has been written about both the ancient and the living traditions of Zoroastrianism, no detailed study exists on the role of the laity in the history of the faith. This is perhaps because the surviving religious literature, namely the extant portion of the *Avesta*, is mainly concerned with priestly matters. As a result, the role of the laity has tended to be overlooked, although, at the same time, certain assumptions have been made. This thesis will raise questions concerning these assumptions. It will begin by looking at accounts of the religion by scholars in the field of Iranian studies with reference to the earliest Zoroastrian texts, the *Yašts*, and the *Gāthās* of the prophet Zarathuštra, and show how various views of the laity have been formed. It will also suggest new ways of approaching the Zoroastrian texts from which these accounts have been constructed. The central text of this thesis belongs to relatively modern times; it is the *Ātaš nu Gīt*, or Song of the Fire, which appeared in publication in India in 1879. I have used this text as a means by which to examine lay religious life during the period to which it belongs, and also as a window through which to view the past. This approach is made possible by the fact that the song contains references to past events and to ancient texts. It is quintessentially Zoroastrian in the way in which it is structured: on the one hand expressing certain theological ideas, and on the other, showing a structure which is reminiscent of a number of older Zoroastrian religious texts, including the ancient prayers, or *Niyāyiš*. The *Ātaš nu Gīt* is unique for the reason that it was composed by laymen for use primarily within a lay context, yet over a period of some two hundred years, it has acquired a semi-official religious status. Today, a performance of the song may take place within an *agiāry*, and is commissioned by priestly as well as lay families. The *Ātaš nu Gīt* is, therefore, an ideal text through which to give an account of lay religious life. Through the evidence of oral testimony, it has been possible to substantiate certain religious customs and traditions which are alluded to in the song, but are not described in any detail. Oral testimony is a medium I have used in this thesis to demonstrate the extent to which lay people have been responsible for the development of the religion in recent times in India. It will be shown that the laity has played a more significant role than has previously been assumed by those studying the religion.

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Note on transcription

As this thesis is not concerned with linguistics, transcription has been kept as simple as possible. In transcribing terms and proper names, the only special character used in Iranian words is š. In other cases, kh, th, gh, ng, are used for the sounds often transcribed x, ځ, څ, ځ; and e, ā for the Avestan vowel sounds normally transcribed ə, ą. Given these simplifications, the transcription of Avestan is based on that of Ch. Bartholomae (1904), that of Pahlavi on Mackenzie (1971). For the transcription of New Persian and Gujerati words which are used relatively seldom, simplified forms of accepted systems have been adopted.

Variations in systems of diacritics and spelling adopted by different authors have been retained in full for all quotations.

Abbreviations

Dd.	<i>Dādestān ī Dēnīg</i>
DkM.	<i>Dēnkard</i> (ed. Madan)
Dr Ad.	<i>Drāyišn-ī Ahreman ō Dēwān</i>
GBd.	<i>Greater Bundahišn</i>
Ny.	<i>Niyāyiš</i>
PRDd.	<i>Pahlavi Rivāyat Accompanying the Dādestān ī Dēnīg</i>
QS	<i>Qissa-ye Sanjān</i>
QZ	<i>Qissa-ye Zartuštīān-ī Hīndustān</i>
RV.	<i>Rgveda</i>
Sd.	<i>Sad dar Nasr</i>
SdB.	<i>Sad dar Bundahišn</i>
ŠnŠ.	<i>Šāyest nē-Šāyest</i>
Vd.	<i>Vendidād</i>
WZ	<i>Wizīdagīhā ī Zādspram</i> (Selections of Zādspram)
Y.	<i>Yasna</i>
Yt.	<i>Yašt</i>
ZS	<i>Zoroastrian Studies</i> (Bombay)

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Since Western scholars became engaged in the study of Zoroastrianism, students have tended to focus upon language, texts and priestcraft, and to dismiss the significance of lay participation in religious matters. The likely reason for this is that, in seeking to understand the religion in its older stages, scholars have concentrated on the evidence of texts, and have thus been preoccupied with a literature composed by priests for priests. As a result, awareness of the role of the laity has suffered; laymen were often regarded as the passive recipients of a priestly tradition. This thesis will show that the laity have played a more active and significant role in the development of the religious system than has hitherto been recognised.

I began this study with the aim of producing an account of Zoroastrian lay activity from the earliest times to the modern era. My intention was to use both primary and secondary sources in order to reconstruct a past, by means of the selection and interpretation of evidence, in which it would be possible to define the role played by the laity in the history of the faith. As work progressed, the idea that it would be possible to describe the *actuality* of lay life down the ages became increasingly improbable, both in practical and theoretical terms. Practically speaking, as will be seen below, sources for the study of early Zoroastrianism are meagre and do not yield the sort of information that would permit anything other than a highly speculative reconstruction of lay life for much of the time under discussion. From a theoretical viewpoint, it emerged that there were at least two, possibly more, 'histories' which should be taken into account. The type of history that attempts to reconstruct events, and which is suggested by the title of this thesis, is necessarily dependent, to a greater or lesser degree, upon previous interpretations. This distinction has been referred to as that between 'the past', i.e. that which has gone for ever and which, for obvious reasons, cannot possibly be recaptured, and 'history', which is but one of a series of discourses about the world whose object of enquiry is the past.¹ In this respect, although greater value is attributed to primary, or 'original', sources, both primary and secondary material can only ever show us part of the whole. Since we cannot know the past, in the sense that we can never recover events and situations, then the writing of any historical account must begin with the accounts of others, whether oral or textual.

It became clear, therefore, that the focus of this thesis should shift from the 'past', that is, from seeking to determine what a particular lay community in a particular part of the world, at specific times in a history going back two thousand years, had been doing, thinking, believing, saying and praying. Instead, the focus should be on how the role of the laity has been constructed in the various histories. Such an account involves two

¹ Jenkins 1991: 5.

central issues: first, there is the question of the laity, who they were and what we can and cannot say about lay activity at different times according to the information contained in certain texts. The second issue deals with the broader question of interpretation. While a discussion of the laity deals with the specific, it also raises questions of a more general nature that concern the way in which various categories of information are extracted from texts, and how they are interpreted. The way I shall approach the material, then, is by looking at the historical narratives into which images of the laity have been woven: both from within and from outside the religion.

The corpus of Zoroastrian extant literature concerning the early period is small and has been subject not only to centuries of oral transmission, but, with the exception perhaps of the *Gāthās*, to numerous redactions and translations. For a student who is not familiar with, at the very least, the Avestan and Pahlavi languages, there is the added dependence upon Western philology for the final translation (and by definition interpretation) of these texts. The 'primary' source is thus far removed from its original authorship. I shall simply divide the material into that which can reasonably be called 'Zoroastrian', which can be distinguished by the fact that it is concerned with its own traditions, and that which is 'non-Zoroastrian', that is, the literature compiled by outsiders who look at and try to understand or make assumptions about traditions other than their own.

Both categories of texts are problematic as far as information concerning the laity is concerned. I shall begin by giving a brief outline of the main sources that I have used, and some of the difficulties they present. This section will introduce the central text in this study, the *Ātaš nu Gīt*, and explain its importance to a study of the laity. It will also outline the various themes which have guided my investigation of the Zoroastrian texts, and explain their significance with respect to the song. I shall then discuss the term 'laity' with reference to various religious systems, and look at the ways in which it can be used with reference to Zoroastrian religious literature and within the context of modern Zoroastrian religious observance. The discussion of this term draws attention to the shifts in meaning that occur according to the time and context in which a term is being used; meaning, therefore, is a question of interpretation. This leads into a wider discussion about interpretation and the ways in which the various Zoroastrian histories have been approached by scholars within the field of Iranian/Zoroastrian studies.

Zoroastrian Sources

Zoroastrian religious texts were transmitted orally until sometime during the Sasanian period, possibly as late as the fifth century, by which time their language, Avestan (an eastern-Iranian language), was probably understood only by priests. There was no Avestan script, the Avestan alphabet having been invented especially for the purpose of writing down the sacred canon. The language of the *Avesta* varies in style and

content. Only the *Gāthās*, a corpus of seventeen hymns, are attributed to the Prophet. These belong to an ancient Indo-Iranian tradition of wisdom poetry and are set in an ancient dialect: *Gāthic* Avestan. The remaining texts are in Younger Avestan and represent a number of different historic levels: some of these are in good Avestan whereas others represent a language which was evidently poorly understood. All the Younger Avestan texts have been subject to redactions. While we cannot know the way in which these texts were understood by people in ancient times, we can assume that, from the time Avestan ceased to be comprehensible to non-priests, the exegesis and probably the transmission of these texts were likely to have been the preserve of priests alone. The earliest texts which I have discussed in this work are the *Yašts*, laudatory hymns in praise of various deities belonging to the Indo-Iranian and Iranian pantheons and which pre-date the time of the prophet. At what stage they were assimilated into the canon of the *Avesta* we do not know. The *Yašts* contain short narrative fragments concerning the heroic deeds of mythical and legendary heroes; these stories are never complete, which suggests that, at the time of their composition, people were aware of the events and the people to whom they referred, and, also, that they were intended to be understood linguistically. The prayers, on the other hand, vary from short, *māthric* utterances that were probably recited for their inherent power alone, to the composite prayers which contain some of the early *Yašt* material, together with *Gāthic* verses, and the more difficult *Gāh* prayers, which are long and complex and contain priestly systemisations based upon the five times for prayer. We cannot guess, as far as these prayers are concerned, to what extent people expected to obtain a literal understanding of the words.

Less than one third of the original Sasanian *Avesta* has survived the passage of centuries since the Islamic conquest of Iran in the 7th century A.C. According to the summary of the whole *Avesta* given in the Pahlavi text of the *Dēnkard*, the original canon of the *Avesta* consisted of twenty-one *nasks* or divisions and covered a wide variety of subjects including education and law; however, that which remains is largely to do with ritual. Thus the extant portion is probably the least relevant to non-priestly aspects of religious observance. It has not been an easy task for specialists to reconstruct even this portion due to the poor manuscript tradition: the earliest surviving Avestan manuscript dates back only to the 14th century A.C.

The writing down of the *Avesta* was accompanied by the growth of an exegetical tradition that was composed in the language of the Sasanian period, Middle Persian, or Pahlavi. However, it was not until the 9th century A.C. that most of these writings reached their final form. I have discussed several of these texts, drawing on some which show no sign of Islamic influence, and others which appear to have been composed after the Arab invasion of Iran. I have included the epic narrative *Šāhname* in the Zoroastrian category of source material since, although it was composed in Persian by the Muslim

author Abdul al-Qāsim Firdosī, it draws on the traditions of ancient Iran and shows little sign of contact with Islam.

The final category of texts encompasses both the Iranian and Indian traditions; the *Sad Dar*, or treatise 'on a hundred subjects', for example, draws on the Pahlavi books for much of its content, but is written in Persian and the earliest extant version is thought to have been completed in India in the late 16th century. The Persian *Rivāyats*, which were composed by Iranian priests in answer to questions posed by members of the Parsi community, belong properly to the Indian-Zoroastrian tradition, although the content of these letters reflects much of the material contained in the *Sad Dar*. The *Qissa-ye Sanjān* and the *Qissa-ye Zartuštīān ī Hindustān* are both narrative texts that describe events in Parsi history. The earlier *Qissa*, dated 1600 A.C., begins with an account of the history of the motherland from the time of the prophet until the Arab conquest, then tells the story of the exodus from Iran of the Zoroastrian migrants, and of their subsequent settlement in India. The later *Qissa*, although written down some two hundred years later, and probably for the purpose of drawing attention to a local event, takes up the narrative where the *Qissa-ye Sanjān* ends, that is, with the establishment of the first *Ātaš Bahrām* on Indian soil. This narrative also establishes the roots of the community in Iran by including, by way of an introduction, an elaborate account of the life of the prophet.

It can be seen from the brief outline which I have given of these texts, that each refers back to a past account. In other words, these texts represent a succession of accounts into which are incorporated images and themes contained in older texts. In this way the past is assimilated into a succession of different 'presents', with each new account reproducing an older language and making it meaningful. We cannot map this thematic genealogy in the same way as we might a family tree, because it is fractured and there are gaps. Thus, for example, the *Yašts* represent an assimilation of ancient Iranian material, and are themselves encompassed within the later structure of the prayers (as I shall show in chapter two); however, the imagery and style of the *Yašts* is not repeated until the epic *Šāhnāme*. In the meantime, there was a proliferation of other kinds of texts, which emerged during and after the Sasanian era. The ideas and themes of many of these have also found their way into later accounts. The cosmological and eschatological ideas contained in the Pahlavi accounts of creation, and the prescriptive, dialogic form of the *Dādestān ī Dēnīg*, are but two examples. These distinctive features are echoed in the later texts of the two *Qissas* and the *Rivāyats* respectively.

The final text that I shall discuss provides the focus of this study: the *Ātaš nu Gīt*, or *Song of the Fire*. The printed version of the song, which has been translated for me here by Mrs. Shehnaz Munshi, was published in Bombay in 1879, but it is likely to have been composed as much as a century earlier to honour the founding of the second *Ātaš Bahrām* in India, an event which took place in Navsari in 1765. There are various reasons why this text is so important to a study of the laity. First, it is unique for the reason that it

appears to have been composed by laymen for use by laymen, yet during a period of two hundred years it has evidently been sanctioned by priests and acquired the status of a semi-religious text. Thus, the recitation or performance of the *Ātaš nu Gīt* may take place within the precincts of an *agiāry* and is commissioned by both lay and priestly families. Second, although the version of the song that I have used here is 'fixed' in written form, its compilation bears the hallmarks of an oral text in the way that different layers appear to have been added. I have suggested that two independent structures operate within the text: the first of these pertains to the way in which the author of the 1879 version has organised the material, both recognising its character as an oral text, and at the same time allowing for the addition of new material; the second is a thematic structure that reflects cosmological and eschatological ideas. Also, while the song does make reference to priests, their role is secondary to that of the many different categories of lay people; it also shows the important role played by women in religious life, and to some extent, within society generally. This aspect is in contrast to the other texts examined in this work, which are mainly composed by priests but also revolve around the achievements, exploits and general policy-making which have to do with men; women are rarely mentioned. Finally, the song gives us an insight into some sociological aspects of Parsi society. Important changes occurred in the community, particularly for those living in Bombay, during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. There is much archival and historical documentation about this period from which we are able to give an account of certain events. The song gives us a narrative version of these events, it provides a unique socio-religious commentary and makes us aware of the vitality of different aspects of lay life.

Non - Zoroastrian Sources

The non-Zoroastrian sources that I have used in this work are those which have a direct bearing upon my discussion of the Zoroastrian religious texts. Thus, although I have drawn on texts which belong to the ninth century A.C., my reason for using these has been in order to discuss themes and structures with reference to the *Ātaš nu Gīt*. I have not, for example, drawn on the observations and accounts of the religion by Arab authors after the advent of Islam. The non-Zoroastrian sources upon which I have drawn are mainly modern, historical accounts through which it is possible to look at the various ways in which the Zoroastrian texts have been interpreted from outside the tradition. I shall approach these accounts differently from the way that I deal with the Zoroastrian texts, for it is their character that I am looking at, rather than their content. In a sense, I am subjecting the non-Zoroastrian texts to my own interpretation. Some of the characteristics of the non-Zoroastrian material that I have used have profound implications for the way in which both the histories of Zoroastrianism and ideas about the laity have been conceived.

During the nineteenth century Iranian philological studies became fully established, and new translations and interpretations of the religion began to emerge. Those that I have drawn on in this work belong to different categories, but in general they are representative, to a greater or lesser extent, of a particular world view that I would term both orientalist and rationalist. I use the term orientalism in the broadest sense, described by James Clifford as 'a rather old-fashioned scholarly discipline allied with nineteenth-century philology and concerned with the collection and analysis of texts in Eastern languages'.¹ I have used the translations of E.W. West for most of the Pahlavi works that I have cited in this study, as well as passages from the Persian text of the *Sad Dar*. West's account, in particular, of the difficulties of the latter text gives us some idea of the formidable nature of oriental philological studies, without which we would have no Zoroastrian texts.²

I shall discuss the 'classical-modern' approach to history in the following section of this introduction, but first I shall say something about the way I understand the terms 'rationalist' and 'orientalist' and the relationship of these terms to each other. These terms are important to our understanding of two types of account: first, those accounts of Zoroastrianism that have been constructed by scholars within the field of Iranian studies; second, the various accounts that bear witness to the colonial encounter between the Parsis and the British in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

I use the term 'rationalist' to describe what is perhaps the most distinguishing feature of the orientalist approach to both translation and interpretation, which is that it is scientifically and rationally constituted, and came to replace the more romantic notions about the 'Orient' which preceded its development. Since the publication of Edward Said's book *Orientalism*, the term 'orientalism' has been associated increasingly with the body of academic work that emerged during and after colonial domination, in which the 'Orient' and 'Orientals' were stereotyped and portrayed in ways that reflected the interests of the colonial nation. Said portrays the orientalist self-perception as one of authority and power; it is, according to him, a naturalised supernaturalism:

The modern orientalist was, in his view, a hero rescuing the Orient from the obscurity, alienation, and strangeness which he himself had properly distinguished ... The specific orientalist techniques - lexicography, grammar, translation, cultural decoding - restored, fleshed out, reasserted the values both of an ancient, classical Orient and of the traditional disciplines of philology, history, rhetoric, and doctrinal polemic. But in the process, the Orient and Orientalist disciplines changed dialectically, for they could not survive in their original form ... In short, having transported the Orient into modernity, the Orientalist could celebrate his method, and his position, as that of a secular creator, a man who made new worlds as God had once made the old.³

¹ Clifford 1988: 257.

² tr. by West 1977b: xxxix.

³ Said 1991: 121.

The above passage is typical of Said's polemical views on this subject; I have cited it in order to give some understanding of the processes by which men like Thomas Babington Macaulay came to produce his new education policy in India, which is summed up in his *Minute on Education* written in 1835, part of which I have cited in chapter three of this study. From a different angle, but from the same ethnocentric perspective, the Scottish missionary John Wilson set about studying and refuting the *Avesta* in an effort to convert Parsis to Christianity.

To return to the idea of orientalism as essentially secular, scientific and rational, there are one or two further characteristics which should be mentioned. F. Halliday points to the fact that — for the orientalist — the study of a region is based upon, and to a great extent organised through, the study of its languages and writings, as in the case of classical studies on Greece and Rome, which were applied, likewise, to much of the Islamic Middle East. Thus an 'Arabist' is someone who has studied Arabic; however, he or she is also assumed to have an understanding of Arab society and politics, even something called the 'Arab mind'. Associated with this assumption is the idea that: 'examining the root of, or original, meaning of words was, it was argued, a means of arriving at an understanding of what they meant to Middle Eastern peoples, and the different meanings ascribed to words in the Islamic and Western contexts.'¹ This analysis could well be applied to certain nineteenth- and twentieth-century accounts of Zoroastrian religious ideas. As I shall show, many of the terms which have been translated by Iranists from Avestan or Pahlavi have no equivalent in a modern European language. Much of the debate over the etymology of words is confused with ideas about their meaning, that is, the conceptual notions that are understood when a word is actually used by those who speak, listen to, or read it. In the context of Iranian studies, contemporary meanings have frequently been ahistorically projected back into the quite distinct contexts of the past.

Halliday also draws attention to the orientalist position concerning temporality, in which historical change is never adequately accounted for, and sometimes altogether dismissed. Change which is directed towards the liberal, secular, rational democracies of the West would be considered virtually impossible: 'The function of learning the language is, indeed, to lift a curtain and so to reveal the mysterious but unchanged world behind.'²

One final point to make is the fact that orientalist accounts tend to be anchored to literary, that is, writing, processes of one sort or another. As Said points out, this is to suppress what he calls the authentic 'human' reality that is rooted in the oral encounter and reciprocal speech. Whereas Said is referring here to the absence of experience in the sense of human encounter, there is also the fact that oral texts often require different modes of interpretation from those applied to written texts. As it will be seen from an examination of the *Ātaš nu Gīt*, oral texts often express the immediacy of the oral

¹ Halliday 1993: 151.

² *Ibid.*

encounter and should not be approached with the same expectations that we might have of a text which began as a written composition.

Interpretive accounts of Zoroastrian religious life upon which I have drawn are, for the main part, related to my discussion about the sacrificial ritual as represented in the *Yašts* (chapter 2). Broadly speaking, the scholars whose work I have drawn upon have viewed the rite of sacrifice in the light of the prophet's reform. The debate has centred around the question of whether or not the prophet condemned the rite of sacrifice, and thus whether the *Yašts* represent a denial of his teachings and a return to the earlier Iranian religious system. Two early twentieth-century scholars whose work I cite are J.H. Moulton and R.C. Zaehner, mainly because their accounts reflect, respectively, Protestant and Catholic perspectives. I have also referred to the work of M. Boyce, since she has produced the most comprehensive historical account of the faith to date. Her *Histories* draw upon a wide range of evidence, which, apart from the Zoroastrian texts, includes the observations of classical Greek authors, the Iranian epic material, and the evidence of archaeology, as well as the living tradition in both India and Iran. In a recent article, J. Hinnells suggests that Boyce's work represents the first steps towards post-modernism in Zoroastrian studies. He comes to this conclusion as a result of what he describes as: 'her awareness of the situatedness of herself and others, and the blurring of religious and secular distinctions'. He also notes that: 'she is in conscious dialogue with postmodernist thought in her juxtaposition of the future of the Parsi community with that of the anthropological community, explicitly using the other to look at the self'.¹ At the same time, Hinnells states that in Boyce's work there is a strong element of the meta-narrative, and a conviction that scientific objective history can be written.² It is the latter supposition which I shall look at with respect to the way in which Boyce's account has been constructed. While her *Histories* do not represent, to me at least, a post-modern combined with a scientific objective approach, there are elements belonging to that which I have termed 'classical modernism', and which need to be discussed in the light of the way in which my earlier account of the laity was constructed. First, however, I shall give some idea of what is meant by the term 'laity'.

The term 'laity'

In order to understand the term 'laity' within the context of Zoroastrianism, I shall look first at some of the uses of the term in other religious systems. F. Stanley Lusby has given a summary of the various uses of the term 'laity' from which it can be seen that it is a predominantly Western concept. In the theological and religious traditions of the West, the term 'laity' refers to 'those members of a religious community who, as a group, do not have the responsibilities of fulfilling the priestly functions appropriate to the offices of

¹ Hinnells 1997: 12.

² *Ibid.*, 11.

the clergy or ordained ministers'.¹ The adjective *lay* comes from the Greek *laos* meaning 'of or from the people'. In early Christianity the term was used to denote 'the chosen people of God', and in the New Testament the distinction is made between the Jewish 'people' and their priests and officials. This distinction was extended, with the clergy becoming the vehicle by which grace was transferred to believers; by the time of the Council of Nicaea (325 A.C.), the church was structured according to the clerical order with authority belonging to the bishops and councils, as distinct from the laity. In the Roman Catholic tradition the distinction between clergy and laity is believed to be caused by divine intervention, with priests performing three main tasks; teaching, administering and sanctifying. The terms priest/lay thus correlate to those of church/world. The clergy is ordained to a sacred vocation, while the laity, who receive the sacraments and the teaching and who pursue their work in the world, occupy the profane realm. In ecclesiastical terms, the church, the realm of the sacred, is given priority over the profane; it follows, therefore, that in order to achieve spiritual perfection, one must renounce participation in various worldly pursuits, hence the vows of celibacy, poverty and obedience which are taken by monastics.

A very different approach to the status of 'laity' was adopted by Martin Luther in the Protestant Reformation; he rejected the hierarchical structure of the Roman Catholic Church and insisted upon the equality of clergy and laymen, advocating 'the universal priesthood of all believers', whereby every baptised Christian was entitled to administer the rites of Holy Communion and baptism. In practice, Protestantism has maintained an ordained and trained ministry to undertake teaching, preaching and liturgical responsibilities. However, the principle of the universal priesthood remains, with certain churches of the more radical, 'left-wing', Reformation and dissenting churches giving even greater prominence to the laity.

When applied to non-Western religious systems, notions of 'laity' require some qualification. For example, according to Theravāda Buddhism, in the countries of South-east Asia, there are two orders of laity: those who have never been ordained and those who have been ordained temporarily, prior to taking on the responsibilities, both economic and social, of adulthood. The latter are accorded higher status than the former, and may preside over certain ceremonies which do not require the presence of a practising priest. The laity provide material support for the monastic community, thereby releasing the monks or *bhikkhus* from the struggle of worldly existence. The latter are then free to seek spiritual perfection (liberation) while teaching the *Dhamma* and performing priestly duties such as presiding at ritual and festival occasions. In return, the laity are given the opportunity for earning merit and thus progressing towards fulfilment themselves by assuring a favourable rebirth. In Jainism, rigorous vows are taken by monks and nuns to

¹ Lusby in M. Eliade 1987: 425.

live a life of asceticism. This, together with the practice of *ahiṃsā*, whereby no living creature may be injured, makes the support of the lay community in providing them with the necessities of life indispensable. The laity themselves take vows which recommend the sharing of wealth and the providing of support for the monastic community.

In some religious systems, as Lusby points out, the category 'laity' is not always helpful as a means of illuminating the structures and dynamics of the tradition.¹ For example, amongst the ancient Israelites there existed a priestly group who performed certain functions not carried out by the 'laity'. After the destruction of the Temple by the Romans in 70 A.C. the functions of this group became redundant and the tradition of a rabbinate developed. Though rabbis are scholars of Jewish texts and traditions, they are also learned members of the laity, and so a category of 'laity' as opposed to priests is not applicable here. Likewise in Islamic traditions, although there is a distinction between those who teach and interpret Muslim law and the rest of the community, there is no clergy as such, and therefore technically no laity either, since all are equal in the eyes of God. In the caste system of modern India, on the other hand, which has its roots in classical Hinduism, there is a clear distinction between those who carry out specific and formal religious functions, and those who do not, that is, the laity. However, the caste system, which had assumed a definitive form by the sixth century B.C., divides society into four groups, each of which has its own *dharma*, or duty to fulfill certain social and religious obligations pertaining to that particular caste. Although the *brahman*, or priestly, caste is at the top of the religio-social hierarchy, the other three groups which comprise the laity, the *kṣatriyas*, *vaiśyas* and *śūdras*, are divided according to specifically assigned duties and religious obligations. There is a considerable distance between these castes in social, economic and religious terms. There is thus no simple division between priesthood and laity; rebirth into a particular caste is hereditary and one's place in it dependent upon the *karma* (understood as the law of moral retribution) of a previous life. Each caste or social group, therefore, is informed both by 'religious sanction and metaphysical principle' across cultures.

From the very brief descriptions outlined above it can be seen, first, that 'laity' is not a term with any fixed meaning. The concept varies according to the religious system to which it is applied, and often within that religious system itself. Secondly, where there are no priests, the term 'laity' as such is meaningless; one might just as well refer to the 'community' and the various structures within it. It is important, therefore, to establish what it is that constitutes a priesthood. Again, the category of priest versus layman may change according to historical circumstances within a given religious structure, as in the case of Judaism. Thirdly, since the term 'laity' has developed within the context of Christianity, there are various associations which have become part of the concept within

¹ *Ibid.*, 427.

the Western tradition. For example there is the Catholic idea of 'renunciation', that is, withdrawal from 'lay' life, which is a precondition for those men and women wishing to enter monastic life. Then there is the Protestant view whereby religious hierarchies are regarded with suspicion and there is assumed to be a tension inherent in relations between priesthood and laity. It is such underlying suppositions which are apt to be brought to other traditions by those writing about them from a Western perspective.

Given the fact that the term 'laity' has its roots in the West, one might ask whether it should be applied to a non-Western religious tradition. However, there has to be a means by which to refer to the non-priestly element within a religious community where a priesthood exists. There are a number of religious terms, including 'priest', with European connotations and linguistic derivations which are used cross-culturally, and the best one can do is to demonstrate an awareness of what this implies.

There is no general term for laity in the early Zoroastrian literature. The word *kavi* appears to have been used in a variety of ways: it was a princely title in Eastern Iran, the name of a partially legendary dynasty to which the prophet's patron *Kavi Vištāspa* belonged, and the term may also have denoted a poet-seer, in the same way as the Vedic term *Kavi*. The Avestan word for warrior is *ƙ.athaēšta*, and husbandman, or farmer, *vāstryō. ƙšuyant*.¹ However, we do not know whether these last two functions belonged to discrete or hereditary classes. It may have been the case, for example, that a man could perform the functions of priest, warrior and husbandman.² There are various terms for 'priest' and references to forms of worship which indicate that priests, in the broadest sense of religious specialists acting ritually for or on behalf of a community, were present. The general term for priest is *atharvan*, which in the *Yašts* appears to refer to a priestly teacher (Yt. 5. 86, Y.9.24). The term *zaotar*, which also described the particular type of wisdom poetry (such as the *Gāthās* of the prophet, who refers to himself as the *zaotar*),³ refers in the *Yašts* to the person performing the rituals, the ritual specialist. There is also the term *ratu*, which is often used together with the term *ahu* and refers to one in authority over the community. There is no indication that the priesthood was a hereditary institution, and one can only guess at the extent to which the rest of the community participated in what, later, were solely priestly rituals. Again, it is impossible to draw conclusions as to the relationship between 'ritual specialists' and the 'laity'. From the time that Zoroastrianism reached the west of Iran there are an increasing number of sources available for tracing the development of the priesthood, from the notices of classical authors, to the Pahlavi books and historical writings of early Arab authors. By

¹ Malandra 1983: 18.

² Much has been written about the social divisions of ancient Iranian society. See Lincoln, 1981, *Priests, Warriors and Cattle*, Boyce: 1987, 'Priests, cattle and men' (in which she disputes Lincoln's thesis), Boyce 1970, 'Zoroaster the priest'.

³ For more on the term *zaotar*, see Boyce 1975: 9.

the Sasanian period, there is evidence of a highly organised, hierarchical priesthood.¹ There are few direct references to the laity in Zoroastrian texts, but then the nature of organised religious observance appears to have been very different than, for example, in Christianity. Even after the advent of fire temples there seems not to have been any place in them for priests to 'preach' to the lay community, nor is there the equivalent 'congregational worship' which, if documented, would give much information concerning lay activity.

Zoroastrianism today can fairly be called a non-proselytising religion, with a hereditary as opposed to a vocational priesthood. With reference to the Parsi community, those who believe themselves to have been born into the faith tend not to perceive their community in terms of priest and layman in the same way that a Christian might. Priestly families are distinguished from other members of the laity; according to Dastur Kotwal, who is the High Priest of the Wadiaji *Ātaš Bahrām* in Bombay, they belong to a 'completely separate, watertight compartment'.² Thus, for example, female members are called *oosta*, and male members who do not train for the priesthood are referred to as *oosti*. Everybody else, that is, non-priests, is *behdin*. The priesthood is divided into five different groups, or *tolahs*, corresponding to the division of the community into five parishes, or *panthaks*, in the late thirteenth century. Today, the Sanjāna priests are based in Udvada, the home of the *Irānšāh*, the most sacred of the *Ātaš Bahrāms*; the Bhagarias in Navsari; the Godvaras near Surat; the Bharuchas in Broach; and the Khambatas in Cambay. There are seven high priests or *Dasturs* in India, and eight *Ātaš Bahrāms*, of which four are in Bombay, two in Surat, one in Udvada and one in Navsari. It is the latter *Ātaš Bahrām*, which was established in 1765, which is the subject of the *Ātaš nu Gīt*.

There are few religious observances which are peculiar to the laity alone; while many functions and observances devolve solely on the priesthood, beliefs and practices which are here categorised as 'lay' are almost invariably shared by members of priestly families. For the purposes of this work, therefore, elements of the religion which are the sole preserve of the priesthood have been termed 'priestly', while features of religious life which involve both priests and laity are treated as 'lay'. When looking at 'lay religion' in modern times, we should be looking at the everyday practices of religious life; these may or may not be reflected in the sacred texts, and may or may not be shared by priests.

¹ See Kreyenbroek, 'The Dādestān ī Dēnīg on Priests', in *Indo-Iranian Journal* 30, 1987; and 'On the Concept of Spiritual Authority in Zoroastrianism', in *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 17, 1994.

² This information was provided for me by Dastur Kotwal during an interview with him in England in July 1997.

Interpretations of history

An understanding of the word 'laity' depends upon a knowledge of the context to which it belongs; it becomes meaningful to us only when we have a socio-historical setting in which to place it. We have to distinguish between our understanding of the word within our own conceptual framework, and the meaning we derive from the particular context from which we extract it. In an ancient text, such as a *Yašt*, we can only construct a sense of 'laity' from the small amount of evidence which suggests the existence of another group, priests. These texts cannot be considered within a historical framework, and they have very little sociological content; the images are fragmentary, and there is, therefore, very little evidence for the conceptualisation of terms within the *Yašts*. As we move through successive accounts of Zoroastrianism, conceptualisation becomes easier; there are other sources of evidence beyond the language of the particular text with which we are dealing. From the time that the Parsis established themselves in India, the sociological content of the Zoroastrian texts becomes progressively stronger, and we gain a much clearer idea of the meaning of the term 'laity' within this context.

By looking at terms in this way, that is, by questioning the concept formation of the word and its meaning for us, we place the language of any given text within a wider context, which is both linguistic and sociological; in other words, we do not accept a 'dictionary' account of meaning. What this means is that our concept of something in the present is no longer associated with how a similar term may have been conceived in any past, and it is this way of interpreting things which differs from the classical-modern view.

I have used the term classical modernism to describe the characteristically modern, secular and rationalistic outlook which became an extensive part of European intellectual life in the nineteenth century. The idea that there was something new about the modern world for which there was no historical precedent coincided with the emergence of classical social theory in the works of Marx, Weber, Durkheim and de Tocqueville. Orientalism was another such process which became established at this time as part of the displacement of a generally religious outlook. There are a number of distinguishing features of classical modernism, one of which is its interpretive approach to history. Within the classical-modern framework for interpretation, there is a tendency to assume that terms retain a conceptual continuity, regardless of time and place; in other words, there is some extra-historical reality which constitutes the meaning of a term.

The ahistorical use of terms, and of historical material generally, can be found in various nineteenth- and twentieth-century accounts of Zoroastrian religious life. I shall give one example which concerns the term 'sacrifice' as it appears in a passage from Herodotus. This passage belongs to a much later stage in the religion than that described in the *Yašts*; it is frequently cited, however, because, apart from the royal inscriptions and archaeological evidence, there is little evidence for the development of Zoroastrianism in

the west of Iran other than the through the observations of Greek authors. The following passage has often been cited by students and scholars of Zoroastrianism, a fact which has lent authority to the evidence rather than underline its tenuousness (Herodotus himself never visited Persia). The passage in question is as follows:

As for ceremonial, when they offer sacrifice to the deities I mentioned, they erect no altar and kindle no fire; the libation, the flute-music, the garlands, the sprinkled meal - all these things, familiar to us, they have no use for; but before a ceremony a man sticks a spray of leaves, usually myrtle leaves into his headdress, takes his victim to some place and invokes the deity to whom he wishes to sacrifice ... When he has cut up the animal and cooked it, he makes a little heap of the softest green-stuff he can find, preferably clover, and lays all the meat upon it. This done, a Magus (a member of this caste is always present at sacrifices) utters an incantation over it in the form of words ...'¹

Moulton argued that Zoroaster had banned animal sacrifice, he therefore uses the above passage as evidence of the existence of an 'unreformed Iranian cultus laying their offerings on a carefully strewn carpet of green stalks'. He goes to say that in his opinion, the Magi wished to be part of the Zoroastrian reform, yet at the same time not to give up their own observances as 'sun-worshippers'. In order, therefore, to persuade people to employ them in the performance of such rituals, they adapted the use of the Iranian grass strew by picking up the grass stalks to present to the deity, and holding them up towards the sun.²

Zaehner, presumably with the priestly *yasna* in mind, points out that the sacrifice described by Herodotus differs from any known Zoroastrian rite 'for he explicitly states that they light no fire and pour no libations, whereas the Zoroastrian rite must, from the beginning, have been associated with the sacred fire, and libations have a vital part to play in the Avestan ritual'.³ He concludes, therefore: 'That a Magus had to be present at this sacrifice shows either that all the Magi were not Zoroastrians or that, though Zoroastrians, they were quite happy to officiate at non-Zoroastrian ceremonies'. Zaehner goes on to suggest that there is evidence contained in the *Avesta* which condemns the keeping of the sacrificial meat by the sacrificer for his own purposes instead of offering it to the gods, and that, therefore, the sacrifice described by Herodotus may have been that of *daeva*-worshippers.

Boyce takes this passage to refer to an open-air rite of lay sacrifice such as she has witnessed in Iran in the twentieth century. The inconsistencies she attributes to misunderstandings on the part of Herodotus' informant: 'Thus one would expect the grass to be strewed before the sacrifice was made, and the priest to be present at the sacrifice itself, if not actually to perform it then to bless the creature's spirit before it departs ... There is no reason, therefore, to regard Herodotus' account as other than that

¹ de Selincourt 1968: 68.

² Moulton 1913: 197ff.

³ Zaehner 1961: 166.

of an orthodox Zoroastrian lay observance of his day, such as derived from his Persian friends'.¹

For his part, B. Lincoln makes it clear that his primary goal is the reconstruction of Indo-Iranian religion and that the evidence of later Iranian and Indian development is of interest only insofar that correspondences between the two can aid the reconstruction of this earlier stratum.² Lincoln concludes from the *Gāthās* that the prophet rejected only the sacrifice of cattle as opposed to animals generally.³ Therefore, he regards Herodotus's statement as evidence of earlier Iranian sacrificial practices which, when compared to similar descriptions of sacrifice contained in a Rgvedic verse, supports his hypothesis that cattle form a vital link in the Indo-Iranian priestly cycle.

From the brief outline given above, it can be seen that this treatment of the term 'sacrifice' makes certain assumptions. It assumes a meaning for the word which is undifferentiated whether it is being used in the context of the *Gāthās*, or by Herodotus. Evolutionary ideas are present here in the search for the origins of things; the teachings of the prophet are viewed not as part of, but as the beginning of, a process: they provide a prototype for human behaviour against which all subsequent developments and processes can be measured. In particular, this passage from Herodotus has been used to provide a link between what the prophet is held to have taught, the older religion as represented by the *Yašts*, and, in Boyce's case, Iranian Zoroastrianism in the twentieth century.

One of the central issues which has to be addressed in an account of the laity in history concerns the idea of continuity. In general, I will argue against the modernist approach to continuity which tends towards a sense of changelessness. However, there are certain aspects of religious life, for example those which are to do with doctrine and ritual, for which there is an argument for continuity.⁴ It seems that the important thing is to distinguish between the possible continuity of a particular religious phenomenon, such as an oral text or a ritual, and the meaning attached to it. If, for example, certain prayers are passed down through generations, long after their language of composition has ceased to be used and understood, then this is continuity, of a sort. If we have an early account of the *Staota Yesnya* and it continues to be performed, then this too shows continuity. However, it is not possible to chart meaning in the same way, nor can we know the way in which such rituals and texts were used by the laity at any given time. In the fourth chapter of this study, I have cited the work of R. Loeffler, who documents the world views of a number of men in a Shiite Iranian village. One old man whom Loeffler refers to as 'the hunter' gives the following description of the day of judgement:

¹ Boyce 1982: 180-181 & n.15.

² Lincoln 1981: 50.

³ *Ibid.*, 66 & n.100.

⁴ Boyce 1992: 173.

When we are thus faced with the record of our deeds what can we say? Nothing, we will have no excuse. Our deeds will be our destiny; our deeds will be our companion. We will have to cross the bridge *sirāt*, which is thinner than a razor blade. A good person will go across like lightening, and on the other side there is paradise. He will be given a good place; he will be given a *hourī*, a good beautiful lady; all the best he will be given. Oh paradise! How wonderful, how wonderful! But a sinful person will fall down from the bridge into hell below. There he will suffer God's punishment. Ah, he will be burned, stung, tortured, tormented, and never allowed to rest.¹

If we were to imagine this testimony to be the only shred of evidence we had concerning the religious beliefs of a particular Iranian community, in the same way as Herodotus describes the sacrificial ritual of the magi, then it is quite easy to see why we might conclude that this man was a good Zoroastrian. The reason for making this point is to demonstrate the degree of caution which should be employed in any account of religious observance and/or belief which involves the community or the participants in a religious system; caution with respect to the use of terminology, and caution in the way in which we associate ideas with other ideas, and construct linkages. The reason for this is that it is the laity who are likely to produce change, who adapt and reinterpret religious obligations in ways which are appropriate to their lives.

Themes and description of contents

I have looked at the Zoroastrian texts; ritual, epic and narrative, with a view to establishing a context in which it is possible to talk about the laity. There are four particular themes which appear in varying degrees of prominence throughout the Zoroastrian texts and all of which are present in the nineteenth century text of the *Ātaš nu Gīt*. These themes help to create and develop a sense of context within which ideas about the laity can be located. They are relevant to the song, and also to this work as a whole.

The first theme concerns priest/lay relations; these do not remain static but often the information available pertains to the priesthood, and we can only speculate upon its implications for the laity. The remaining three themes help to fill out the impressions which have been created by the often oblique references to the laity and/or to the priesthood. It not possible to talk about the laity without some idea of what we mean by non-laity: are they a discrete group, and if so what is their function within society at any given time? In the first chapter of this work, we cannot distinguish clearly between the role of priests and that of the laity, indeed they may, to a large extent, have been interchangeable. By the time that the faith enters the Sasanian period, we have evidence of a clearly defined role for priests, and it is in the light of the evidence of priestly texts, and the role played by priests, that we are able to construct an account of the laity. It is not until we get to the text of the *Ātaš nu Gīt*, in chapter three, that it becomes possible to talk

¹ Loeffler 1987: 149.

about the laity as the dominant group. Chapter four continues the account of the laity with the additional evidence of oral testimony from members of the lay community in Bombay during the 1990s.

The second theme concerns notions of orality and temporality, notions which are closely linked in all four chapters of this study. Most of the Zoroastrian texts which are discussed here began as oral texts and, to a greater or lesser extent, retain characteristics belonging to the time before they were written down. One of the distinctive features of such texts is the many different layers which have accumulated over centuries. As new material replaces that which may no longer be relevant, the overall effect is often fragmentary, reflecting a multiplicity of times in what appears to be a haphazard manner. When we have corroborative evidence concerning names, places and dates, as in the case of the song, then we can begin to identify certain structures. In the case of the *Yašts*, however, it is impossible to plot events; there is very little sense of temporality in these texts.

The third theme I have drawn attention to is the idea of religious and/or ethnic identity. In the *Yašts* there are references to the social groupings of family, village, tribe and country¹, and we know that Iranian tribes saw themselves in opposition to the Turanian peoples of the north. This information, however, gives us little sense of the real or conceptual boundaries of the community. Once the faith enters historical time, by which I mean the time for which there are historical records, references to lay life become more contextual and we can begin to talk about the conceptions people may have had. The Pahlavi texts which refer to religious life after the advent of Islam in Iran give us an idea of the ways in which the Zoroastrian community sought to preserve its religious integrity. Ideas of ethno-religious identity are prominent in the song, and reflect various historical circumstances which evidently changed the self-perception of the Parsi community. In chapter four, notions of identity are explicitly portrayed through the oral testimony of certain individuals. In this way, the account encompasses these notions at the general/communal level, and also at the particular/individual level.

The final theme concerns cosmological and eschatological ideas, and is present to some extent in all the texts I have discussed. The Zoroastrian world view is distinctive, and becomes increasingly apparent in the texts which may be said to belong properly to the Zoroastrian tradition, as opposed to the early hymns which do not have a strong Zoroastrian content. Thus, in the *Yašts* there are certain cosmological ideas which were developed in the later texts. In this way, it will be seen that very little material was rejected in subsequent accounts, it was reproduced in a different form and within different horizons. Once we are aware of a Zoroastrian theological system, it becomes easier to identify thematic structures which relate to this theology and which reappear in

¹ Yt. 13.151.

subsequent narratives. These include the Persian *Qissas*, to which I refer in chapter two, and also the *Ātaš nu Gīt*. When we can define and speak about a Zoroastrian world view, it becomes possible to recognise the differences between this and other world views. It is these differences which have to be recognised when attempting to give an account of various terms and concepts belonging to different socio/theological cosmologies.

In the following chapter of this thesis, I shall look at what can and cannot be said about the laity with reference to the *Yašts* and what appears to be the central act of worship described in these hymns, the sacrifice. I shall look at the way in which this subject has been approached by those writing within the field of Iranian studies, and I shall also draw on several accounts, mainly from the field of anthropology, in order to raise new questions with respect to sacrifice as portrayed in the *Yašts*. Various ancient prayers, including the *Niyāyiš* are discussed in this chapter, and it will be seen that these represent a more encompassing sense of time, they provide us with the first example of the process by which older material, in this case from the *Yašts*, is incorporated into a new account.

In chapter three, I shall begin to prepare the ground for the *Ātaš nu Gīt*. The themes which are barely visible in the earlier texts become gradually more substantial in the Pahlavi texts to which I refer. The historical account of the Parsi community is focused directly upon the different times which are represented in the song. I shall speak about those ideas which appear to have come from past accounts, some, as will be seen, from the earliest texts belonging to antiquity. I shall also give an account of certain historical events and ideas which belong to two significant dates with respect to the song: the first is 1765, the date of the founding of the Navsari *Ātaš Bahrām*, and the second is 1879, when the song was published, probably for the first time.

Chapter four contains the full text of the 1879 publication of the song, together with a close commentary on the text. In this chapter I shall also explain the two structures which I suggest are important to our understanding of the way the song works on a number of different levels.

In chapter five of this work, I shall discuss some later versions of the song in order to illuminate the structure of the 1879 version. Much of the character of an oral text is lost, however, when it is read rather than viewed as a performance. The difference between oral and written forms, and also between the aural and visual in terms of the way in which we assimilate texts, has been explored in some depth by Walter J. Ong; I shall discuss the implications of his findings with respect to the nature of orality in the Zoroastrian texts which I have examined. Also, I shall show how oral texts can be brought to life through the evidence of oral testimony; it is with this aim that I have included the oral testimony of a number of informants. Oral testimony provides an opportunity to view religious practice through the eyes of the individual rather than the community or the group.

In the concluding chapter of this study I shall talk about the four themes which I have referred to above with reference to various theoretical works. I shall examine Zoroastrian notions of temporality, the historical accounts and narrative texts with reference to Paul Ricoeur's theories concerning the relationship between fiction, history and time. I shall also outline Gadamer's theory of 'horizons of expectation' in relation to the various horizons, or perceptions through which accounts of Zoroastrianism have emerged, both from within and from outside the tradition. Once we become aware of these distinctions, we are able to recognise their existence in the song. Here, they appear not only as distinct from one other but also as a fusion, the result of which is a new process, a new account. The song also gives us a new perspective on the way in which the laity have adapted various aspects of religious observance to suit their own needs; I shall discuss this aspect with reference to the work of the German theologian Freidrich Schleiermacher. Finally, I shall look at the question of socio-religious identity with reference to the wealthy merchant class, which is so prominent in the third and last phase of the song, in the light of Alexis de Tocqueville's writings on democracy.

It is towards an exposition of the song that the material in this thesis is directed. The ideas and themes which I discuss in the earlier chapters of this study culminate in the song. It is an ideal text upon which to base an account of the laity since it demonstrates an assimilation of doctrine, ritual and observance from a lay person's point of view. The song is linked to earlier texts, and draws upon the past history of the faith; it also suggests various modern processes, such as that of democratisation, which were the result of contact with Europeans. All this is woven into narrative form, but there is much that can be corroborated by documentary and archival evidence belonging to the period of its publication. Most importantly, here we have the laity giving an account of themselves. Oral testimony gives the song its proper context through allowing us an insight into the lives of various individuals. It has not been necessary for informants to give an account of the 'meaning' of various religious activities. The simple descriptions of a *gāhāmbār* or wedding, in which both festive and religious activities are combined, is also part of the essence of the song. The oral testimony I have included in this work highlights the prominent role of women in religious life; this too, is part of the fabric of the song.

This thesis raises questions concerning the various ways in which Zoroastrian texts have been studied in the past. It will say why it is not possible to reconstruct a history of the laity using source material in an undifferentiated way. I propose a new approach which will show how an account of the laity can incorporate events and ideas which go back to the distant past through the medium of a relatively modern text.

CHAPTER 2 ANCIENT RELIGIOUS TEXTS AND THE LAITY

The texts which I shall examine in this chapter deal with an early stage in Iranian religion. They are the *Yašts*, a collection of twenty-one hymns addressed to various deities belonging to the Indo-Iranian and Iranian pantheons and the five *Niyāyiš*, or prayers, addressed to the sun, moon, water, fire and Mithra respectively. I shall also look briefly at some other prayers which are central to Zoroastrian worship and which have their roots in the ancient world.

The *Yašts* have been approached in various ways by scholars from the field of Iranian studies, mainly with reference to the *Gāthās* of Zarathuštra. Much of the material contained in these hymns goes back to a more distant time than that of the prophet's reform, and scholars have been divided in their opinions as to whether or not the contents of the *Yašts* reflect a departure from his reform, which would mean that after his death people returned to the former religious system, or whether they can be reconciled with his teachings. I shall discuss some of these interpretations and also draw on ideas from different disciplines, mainly but not exclusively from the field of anthropology, in order to raise new questions with respect to the subject of lay activity which is poorly documented for the early period. Finally, I shall make some suggestions as to what may and may not be said about the laity according to these ancient texts.

The material in this chapter is diverse, and different kinds of commentary will be employed for the different texts. I shall begin by looking at the *Yašts* in some detail, in particular, the central act of worship which these hymns describe, which is the sacrificial ritual. The commentary for this part of the chapter will focus on the representations of lay participation in religious activity according to the *Yašts*. This will be followed by a discussion of the ways in which various scholars of Iranian studies have approached these texts, and then I shall look at some of the many theories on sacrifice which have been developed by anthropologists. The second part of the chapter will look at the prayers, in particular the *Niyāyiš*; here the commentary will have mainly to do with the structure of the prayers rather than with their content. I shall end with some concluding comments about the various themes and structures which emerge from an appraisal of the *Yašts* and the *Niyāyiš* with respect to the laity; those of especial interest are the themes and structures which appear in later texts, in particular, the *Ātaš nu Gīt*.

Although it is supposed that they are of priestly composition, as far as we know the *Yašts* were never included in the liturgy belonging to the central act of priestly worship, the *yasna*. The texts called *Niyāyiš* addressed to Fire and to the Waters were included in the *yasna* liturgy, and all five prayers came to be part of obligatory worship; we do not know, however, when it was enjoined upon the laity to pray five times in the twenty-four hours. These prayers, or litanies, are made up of fragments taken from the *Yasna* and *Yašts*, and form an important part of the *Khorda Avesta* or prayer book. Despite the fact

that parts of these texts are very old, there has been no debate amongst scholars, such as I have mentioned above with respect to the *Yašts*, as to whether or not these texts belong properly to the religious system which became known as Zoroastrianism. I shall, therefore, look for those elements within the *Niyāyiš* which can be said to represent change; in other words to ask why and in which way these texts became 'Zoroastrianised'.

The *Yašts* are closely linked to the *Niyāyiš*; they are different in form and structure, however, and appear to have been used for different purposes. Before discussing them in detail, I shall outline some of the reasons why both sets of texts are problematic as a source of evidence for the laity in ancient times.

First, there are few sources of information belonging to this time with which to substantiate the material contained in these texts. Those most often cited by scholars are drawn from the ancient Vedic religion which, although sharing a common heritage, had evolved within a different culture, at a different time and in a different place. The earliest recorded evidence of Zoroastrian religious practice, the religion of the Magi, dates from Achaemenian times with the observations of Greek writers such as Herodotus. However, as much as a thousand years separates these sources from the texts which I am about to consider. Finally, there is the evidence of the living tradition which has been used by M. Boyce to trace certain aspects of the religion back to their roots; as I shall discuss further, below, this is not a method which can be applied effectively to a study of the laity because we do not have sufficient evidence of lay religious life for the early period.

The second problem, with respect to these texts and a study of the laity, lies in the fact that, since much of their content is beyond historical consideration, there is very little that can be said about the society to which they refer. The links which have been made with other cultures, in order to place these hymns and prayers within a context, relate mainly to language and do not refer to social issues.¹ G. Dumézil was amongst the first to combine Indo-European linguistics with socio-ethnology to develop the theory of the tripartition of Indo-European society and religion.² While religious structures may reflect certain realities in society, we need evidence both of the society in question and its cosmological ideas in order to make assumptions about one or the other; whereas the structure of society may have changed, the religious system, as evidenced, for example,

¹ Malandra (1983: 5), for example, talks about the process of 'comparative historical reconstruction' by means of comparing the documentation belonging to different cultures. However, he illustrates this idea by reference to various Avestan terms and their equivalent in other languages from the ancient world. These terms refer to cosmological and mythological ideas and do not have much bearing on social issues.

² Dumézil found that the attributes of the three gods Jupiter, Mars, and Quirinus corresponded to the three Indian castes of *rahmin* (ruling), *shatriya* (military) and *vaśya* (working), and also to the legendary division of early Rome into Ramnes, Luceres, and Tities. This structure was also found to pertain to the Teutons in the form of Odin, the sovereign god, Thörr, the war god, and Freya, the goddess of prosperity and fertility. See J. Duchesne-Guillemin 1958: 35-7; C. Scott Littleton 1982: 55ff. Also: 'Le dieux patrons des trois fonctions dans le Rg-Veda et dans L'Atharva-Veda' in the first chapter of Dumézil 1948: 13-26.

by a hierarchy of gods, may have remained conservative. Also, the identification of a society with its pantheon of gods does not tell us about the beliefs and/or practices of various communities over a long period of time. The difficulty of imposing such structures, or indeed any structures, on to societies and religious systems which are beyond the realms of history, is that, in the absence of the known dynamics and changes that occur in documented history, they remain invariable, static and sterile.

The final problem stems from the fact that these texts belonged to a primary oral culture: in other words their early composition and transmission occurred within a society where there was a total absence of the written word as a means by which to communicate and/or record knowledge. The *Yašts* and the *Niyāyiš* were allowed to evolve linguistically, that is, they were not memorised verbatim in the language of their original composition as were the *Gāthās*.¹ By the time they were committed to writing, sometime in the fifth or sixth century A.C., these texts were the product of multiple authorship and belonged to a religious system which had moved a long way from its roots both in time and location. The main characteristic of such composite, oral works is that they are incremental and cumulative; with respect to the hymns or *Yašts*, new stories and ideas, people and places were added to an existing corpus, while other material, presumably, was discarded or simply forgotten once its relevance was lost. The result of this layered type of compilation is that there are often no discernible chronologies within the texts themselves and so we have no means of dating this material (unless events or names can be located in historical time).² The Zoroastrian material contained in the *Yašts* is so closely interwoven with older matter as to make it difficult to guess at what stages sections were added: for example, the Zoroastrian heroes in the *Yašts* are presented as offering prayer and sacrifice to the gods in return for boons in the same way as their pre-Zoroastrian forbears. The prayers, on the other hand, appear to have evolved somewhat differently: they contain structural forms which, I have suggested, may be taken to represent change and can, perhaps, be attributed to a particular time and place.

2.1. The *Yašts*

The laymen referred to by name in the *Yašts* are the mythical and legendary heroes of the Indo-Iranian traditions whose offering, it appears, is normally the blood sacrifice. The boons for which they ask are for a variety of things, particularly military strength. For this reason, the content of the great *Yašts* suggests that in their existing form they belong to a period of conflict, possibly around 1200 B.C. when the Iranian peoples are

¹ Boyce 1984: 1-2.

² Boyce (1975: 271) points to the difficulties of tracing developments in oral texts where new elements are incorporated with older material without showing signs of interpolation.

thought to have begun movement into Iran.¹ However, to judge from parallels drawn with the *Rgveda*, some of their contents can be attributed to a much more ancient time.² This means, in part at least, that the *Yašts* represent the adaptation of an existing corpus of oral religious texts into what is commonly referred to as the Zoroastrian reform, that is, the teachings of the prophet. Although these texts are thought to be of priestly composition, they reflect what appear to be the concerns of the community in general, as expressed through the worship of gods in order that boons may be granted.

The attribution of antiquity to what are commonly referred to as the great *Yašts* is based mainly on the fact that, according to extant texts, they have been preserved in good Avestan.³ The minor *Yašts*, on the other hand, show a degeneration of that language, which scholars have taken as an indication that they belong to a later time, when Avestan was poorly understood and continued to be used only by priests.⁴ Since the *Yašts* are not composed in narrative form, being essentially laudatory poems, references to the mythological exploits of kings, heroes and divinities are oblique: we learn of isolated incidents, fragments of stories, and the picture is never complete. However, apart from parallels which may be drawn between these texts and others of a similar nature, which may share a common heritage but which evolved within a different culture, there are no alternative sources of information with which to substantiate the material contained there.

As will be seen from the passages which I shall cite from the *Yašts*, these texts describe an *idealised* situation, one in which the lay people mentioned are from an elite group, and where an *idealised* priesthood perform *idealised* rituals. How then can such texts be used to help us to understand lay religious life more broadly, and in such a remote period of antiquity?

The way in which the gods are praised according to these texts is through acts of worship, particularly, it seems, the sacrifice. The act of worship itself is preceded by an invocation to the deity to descend and partake of the sacrifice; it is followed by a petition which is made by the worshipper to the deity in question. In an earlier version of this work, I divided the material according to the nature of these petitions; namely, those which appeared to be purely material and therefore self-interested, and others which were non-material and therefore could be interpreted as 'ethical'.⁵ These categories proved unsatisfactory for the reason that there was no means by which to substantiate or develop notions of ethics or morality belonging to such a distant time. In order to investigate the

¹ Malandra (1983: 6) suggests that the migration of Indo-Aryans and Iranians away from the the steppes of Central Asia began around 1500 B.C. Boyce (1992: 44-45) maintains that the major migrations of the 'eastern' Iranians south from the steppes of Central Asia did not begin until 1100 B.C.

² See Boyce 1992: 28, and Lincoln 1981: 52ff. in his section on 'Celestial Sovereigns'.

³ See p.34, n.1.

⁴ Malandra 1983: 27. Boyce (1992: 28, 29) points to the fact that the names and the places referred to in some of the *yašts*, notably Yt. 13 addressed to the *fravašis* of the dead, do not occur in later usage which suggests that they belong to a remote era.

⁵ In this analysis I followed Boyce 1975: 151-153. See also Boyce 1992: 116 and n. 38.

role of the laity according to these texts it seems more appropriate to raise certain elementary questions such as might be asked of an informant and/or text in order to see precisely what sorts of information are contained therein. These might be as follows: a) *what* is the act of worship? If it is a sacrifice, then what is sacrificed? Does the rite include the immolation of a living victim? Can there be a substitute? Further questions follow on from here (which are pertinent to the laity), such as whether or not commensality concludes the ritual and what portions of the animal go to whom; b) *to whom* is the act of worship directed? Is it to a high god, a number of gods, or ancestor spirits? Is it an obligatory or supererogatory rite? c) *Where* is the act of worship performed (the spatial aspect is significant: for example, is the ground on which it is performed made sacred in some way and if so how and by whom)? d) *When* and *for what purpose* is the worship performed? Is it on a *quid pro quo* basis, or is it perceived as an act of homage with no obligations attached? Is it done as an act of thanksgiving? Or is it all of these things? What is thought to be the efficacy (for example, material benefit, a change in status)? e) *By whom* is the act of worship performed? Is the worshipper necessarily a priest, and if so who commissions the act of worship and what is his or her status?

a) *The nature of the worship*

I have mentioned that the central act of worship referred to in the *Yašts* is the sacrifice. While there seems to be agreement amongst scholars over the fact that worship involved sacrifice, there has been debate concerning the exact nature of the sacrifice: whether the various terms used referred to a libation or a solid offering, and furthermore, whether the solid offering necessarily involved the blood sacrifice. The Avestan term for worship is *yasna*, which Malandra translates as 'to worship; to sacrifice'.¹ In his introduction to the *Vendidād*, Darmesteter states that the sacrifice was composed of two elements: offerings and spells.² The offerings consisted of *myazda*, or meat, and *zaothra*, libations; the spells were the prayers such as the *Ahuna Vairyo*.³ Boyce argues that the word *myazda* often referred to the blood sacrifice, but in Avestan usage could be used of both solid and liquid offerings. Likewise the term *zaothra*, which came from the root *zav*, to pour, was also used synonymously with *myazda*. In this chapter, I have used Malandra's translation of the *Yašts*: the word *yasna*, therefore, is translated variously as 'worship' and 'sacrifice'. Where he has used the word 'libation', I have kept the Avestan *zaothra*, since it is debatable whether a libation or oblation is meant.

¹ Malandra (1983:14) goes on to make the point that the common verbal root *yaz-* carries the connotation of worship, especially with reference to prayer; it is usually translated as such even when sacrifice is involved.

² Darmesteter in Muller (ed.) 1980: lxix.

³ The *Ahuna vairyo* prayer is given on p.62, n.1.

Since there are several Avestan terms for priest which are used in the *Yašts*, one of which, *zaotar*, refers quite clearly to the ritual specialist, I refer to all non-priests as laymen or lay women.¹

The first passage I have cited is from the *Ābān Yašt* (Yt. 5), addressed to the Goddess of the Waters, Aredwī Sūrā Ānāhitā. The opening verses of this *Yašt* (1-15) are a dedication to the deity and her various attributes. There then follow individual acts of worship which are mostly presented in a formulaic manner beginning with the nature of the offering; this is followed by a petition on the part of the worshipper, after which the boon is usually granted. After all such acts of worship in the *Yašts* a standard formula (Ny.1.16) is repeated, and this is followed by the *Yenghē hātām* prayer.² I have cited the following passage in full to show the way in which the structure of these acts of worship is presented:

(Yt.5.25) Regal Yima, whose herds are good, offered her, before the peak of Hukairyā, one hundred stallions, one thousand cows, (and) ten thousand sheep.

(26) Then he entreated her: Grant me this boon, O good, most strong Aredwī Sūrā Ānāhitā, that I may become the highest power over all the countries, over *daēwas* and men, over sorcerers and witches, over tyrants, *kawis* and *karapans*, that I may take from the *daēwas* both goods and profit, both flocks and herds, both contentment and renown.

(27) Aredwī Sūrā Ānāhitā then granted him this boon, (she) who always grants a boon to him who offers (her) *zaothras* (who), pious, worships (and) entreats (her).

On account of her *rayi*³ and glory, I shall worship her with audible prayer, I shall worship her with well-recited prayer, Aredwī Sūrā Ānāhitā, with *zaothras*. Thus may you be directed by (this) invocation, thus may you be better worshipped, Aredwī Sūrā Ānāhitā, with haoma (mixed) with milk, with skill of tongue and with thought (*māthra*), and with speech and action and *zaothras* and with correctly uttered words.

Yenghē hātām.⁴

The reference to animals here indicates that it was the blood sacrifice which was being referred to. Sometimes the animals offered up are described in a less poetic way, as in the *Yašt* addressed to Mithra:

(Yt.10.119) We worship Mithra of wide pastures ... worship Mithra, O Spitama; proclaim (him) to (your) disciples. May the Mazdeans worship you with small and large cattle, with flying birds [those which fly as winged birds].⁵

¹ See p.40 under 'By whom is the worship offered?'.

² The *Yenghē hātām* prayer is given on p.64, n.5.

³ Malandra (1983: 188) leaves the word *rayi* untranslated, since he says it is difficult to determine which meaning is intended: 'wealth, opulence' or '*kvarēnah*'.

⁴ Malandra 1983: 122.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 73.

Sometimes animals are not specified at all; the reference to 'the spread *baresman*', that is, the sacrificial strew, however, suggests that it is the blood sacrifice which is being alluded to:

(Yt.15.7) Haoshyangha Paradhāta worshipped him (Wayu) at the peak of Harā, joined with metals (?), on a golden throne, on a golden carpet, on a golden rug, on the spread *baresman*, with hands overflowing (with *zaothras*).¹

Heroes are not always represented as offering animals when worshipping. In Yt.17.24-26, Haoshyangha Paradhāta again offers worship, this time to the goddess Aši, but there is nothing to indicate whether an offering was made except the fact that in the passages already cited the same hero, asking for the same boons, offered animals in sacrifice. Again in Yt.5.77 no offering is specified:

By this truth, by this correctly spoken (statement), O Aredwī Sūrā Anāhitā, (it is the case) that as many *daēva* -worshippers have been slain by me as I bear hairs on my head. So, you leave, O Aredwī Sūrā Anāhitā, a dry passage across good Witawhaitī for me!²

It is possible however that the 'worship' referred to here would have included some sort of gift accompanied by prayer, or 'correctly uttered speech'. As well as the animals there are also libations offered; sometimes these are *haoma*, or *haoma* mixed with milk, and sometimes they are unspecified:

(Y.10.13) Reverence to Haoma, as (it is he who) makes the mind of the pauper as exalted as even (the mind) of the richest! Reverence to *Haoma*, as (it is he who) makes the mind of the pauper as exalted as ... (?) when he attains (?) (his) desires. You make rich in men, very prosperous, (and) very intelligent (him) who regularly partakes of you, O yellow Haoma, mixed with milk.³

Sometimes in the *Yašts* unspecified libations are referred to as being offered by the laity, without the accompanying blood sacrifice.⁴ These libations may have been part of the ritual offerings to water, or they may have been part of a separate rite whereby *haoma* mixed with water was partaken of and/or offered by lay members of the community. Some sort of *haoma* offering may have been made in ancient times by warriors before going into battle (military victory being one of the chief reasons for invoking the gods as the *Yašts* show); in the hymn to Verethraghna worship is offered to the god of victory in return for success in battle:⁵

¹ *Ibid.*, 99.

² *Ibid.*, 125.

³ *Ibid.*, 156-7.

⁴ See also Yt.15.1, Yt.10.4, Yt.17.2, Yt.8.1, Yt.57.3.

⁵ The Persian *Rivāyats* attest the fact that it was customary for Zoroastrians to offer a *yasna* to Haoma for the defeat of a hostile army: 'In order to repel an enemy, one should perform, as an alternative, the *Yasna* of Hōm in the name of Farshosht Khukh.' Dhabhar 1932: 278.

(Yt.14.57) We sacrifice to Werethraghna, made by Ahura. I offer up Haoma, who saves one's head; I offer up the victorious Haoma; I offer him up, the good protector; I offer up Haoma, who is a protector to my body, as a man who shall drink of him shall win and prevail over his enemies in battle;

(58) That I may smite this army, that I may smite down this army, that I may cut in pieces this army that is coming behind me.¹

Animal sacrifice and the *haoma* offering form the essential ingredients of the priestly act of worship - the *yasna* - as ritually prescribed according to the *Nērangestān*. The priestly formula for worship, ending with the *Yenghē Hātām*, occurs frequently throughout the *Yašts*. However, nowhere in connection with offerings of animals or libations is there mention of fire or water. It is to these elements that offerings are made in the priestly *yasna* ceremony. It appears, therefore, that the blood sacrifice referred to in the *Yašts* was an act of supererogation on the part of the laity, not to be confused with that of the *yasna*. As to the format of the sacrificial ritual, we simply do not know. The closest source of evidence for this period belongs to ancient Indian practice; with respect to the Iranian tradition there is nothing until the statement made by Herodotus (for which see my Introduction, p.20).²

As far as the distribution of the sacrificial victim is concerned, there is reference to that portion of the animal reserved for the divinity Haoma in Y.11:4:

The father, righteous Ahura Mazdā, vouchsafed for me, Haoma, as sacrificial portion the jaw together with the tongue and the left eye.

(5) Ye who would destroy me for this sacrificial portion, or would steal (it) ...

(6) In this (his) house, shall be born neither a priest nor a warrior nor a farmer; rather in this (his) house shall be born Dahākas, Mūrakas, and Warshnas of many sorts.³

There is no direct reference to a communal meal at the conclusion of the sacrifice, but evidence that portions of the sacrifice were partaken of by people other than the *zaotar* or ritual priest(s) is contained in Y.11.1:

Verily, three ashawans - the cow, the horse, and Haoma - shout curses. The cow curses the Zaotar: May you be both childless and accompanied by ill repute, you who do not distribute me (when I am) cooked, but fatten me for your wife or your son or your own belly.⁴

¹ tr. Darmesteter 1981: 246 (Verses 57-61 of Yt. 14 are omitted in Malandra's translation).

² In her discussion of the sacrificial ritual, Boyce (1992: 111 & 123, n. 28) draws on the evidence of the *Yašts*, the ancient Indian tradition, Herodotus, and twentieth-century Zoroastrian practice in rural Iran, although, the focus of her investigations is not the laity.

³ Malandra 1983: 158.

⁴ *Ibid.*

b) *To whom is the act of worship directed?*

The recipients of the sacrifices described above are the gods of the Indo-Iranian pantheon who became the principal deities of Zoroastrianism.¹ I have mentioned that the formula for worship most frequently used in the *Yašts* is that of petition/offering/reward. These texts give us far more detail concerning the recipients of worship, the gods, than of those who make the offerings.

There is one long hymn, the *Fravardīn Yašt*, which evidently contains material of great antiquity and is addressed to the *fravašis* or departed souls of the dead. The exact meaning of *fravaši* has been much discussed,² but it is commonly accepted that the word refers to ancestor spirits since in the *Yašt* there is a clear reference to the *fravašis* (in the context of spirits of the dead) returning to their dwellings on earth at the *Hamaspāthmaēdaya* festival. At this time offerings are put out for them by the living for which they are rewarded with strength and prosperity:

(Yt.13.51) Then the man who will worship them with hand(s) holding meat (and) clothing, with Truth-attaining reverence, the strong Fravašis of the Righteous bless (when they) are satisfied, not injured, not treated with hostility.

(52) May there be in this house herds of cattle and (troops) of men, and may there be a swift horse and a sturdy chariot, may the man be steadfast (and) eloquent who, indeed, will worship us with hand(s) holding meat (and) clothing, with Truth-attaining reverence.³

The *fravašis* are also represented as playing a protective role,⁴ both with respect to their own kinsmen and the world in general which is regarded as being under constant threat from the *drug*, or evil principle:

(Yt.13: 67) They fight battles for their own place and dwelling [as (a man) has a place and a house to live in], just as a man, brave warrior, (always) defends (his) well-collected wealth, girded with weapons.

(71) They stand ready as his weapons and armour, support and fortification against the invisible Lie, the concupiscent, deceiving (Lie), and (against) the destructive

¹ The great *yašts*, so called because of their length and the fact that they contain ancient material are: Yt.10, the hymn to Mithra; Yt. 5, the hymn to the goddess of water, Aredwī Sūrā Anāhitā; Yt. 13, *Fravardīn Yašt*, addressed to the spirits of those departed; Yt. 8, the hymn to the god of the rain star Tištrya, and Yt. 19, the *Zamyād Yašt*, addressed to Xwārenah, or the principle of 'Divine fortune'. Other important *Yašts* are those addressed to Aši, the goddess of Fortune (Yt. 17); Wāyu, god of the wind (Yt.15); Haoma, god of the plant haoma (Y. 9,10,11); Rašnu, the Judge (Yt. 12); and Werethraghna, god of victory (Yt. 14). Some of these divinities have no direct counterpart in the *Vedic* pantheon, however their concept is thought to be ancient. Sraoša, for example, the god of hearkening or prayer (Yt. 57 & 11), has been associated with the Vedic Brhaspati. See Boyce 1975: 61.

² See Boyce 1975: 117ff. for the various arguments and references concerning the derivation and meaning of the word.

³ Malandra 1983: 110.

⁴ For the idea of the *fravaši* as 'protector' see Malandra 1983: 103, and Boyce 1975: 118, 119.

conjurer, against the Deceiver, who causes many deaths, Angra Mainyu, as if one hundred, and one thousand, and ten thousand sheaves were threshed ...¹

According to the *Fravardīn Yašt*, the *fravašis* aided Ahura Mazdā in the creation of the world and the maintenance of cosmic order. Without their support he would have been powerless to create the best of the species and: 'Power would have been the Lie's, dominion the Lie's, material existence the Lie's.'² In this role, in common with Tištrya, his *hamkār* Satavaēsa, and Aredwī Sūrā Ānāhitā, the *fravašis* take part in the continual search for water. On behalf of their families and settlements they ensure that water will be plentiful, flowing from its source, which is the Vouru.Kaša sea:

(Yt.13:65) And when the waters, O Spitamid Zarathuštra, flow forth from the Vouru.Kaša sea, and when the Mazdā-created Xwarenah (emerges), then the strong Fravašis of the Righteous issue forth, numerous by the many hundreds, numerous by the many thousands, numerous by the many tens of thousands,

(66) searching for water, each for his own family, for his own settlement, for his own clan, for his own land, saying thus, 'Will our own land decline and dry up?'³

It can be seen from the verses cited from the *Fravardīn Yašt* that the role of the *Fravašis* was threefold: to protect the material world from attack by the *daēvas*, to protect their respective kinsmen and ensure their prosperity in the material world, and finally to aid Ahura Mazdā in the creation of the cosmos. Malandra points out that the idea of creative power emanating from *rayi* and *khvarenah*, 'insight and glory', is a feature of ancient Aryan religious systems.⁴

c) *Where does the act of worship take place?*

In the *Yašts* worship takes place in the open air on a mountain top (Yt.5.45), within sight of a lake (Yt.5.37), or by a river (Yt.5.76). At no time is there mention of a structure or building of any sort. There is no direct evidence as to whether or not the ground for the sacrifice is made sacred, but, again, the reference to 'spread *baresman*' and the fact that deities are invoked and invited to be seated on the strew (Yt.10.32) suggests this might have been case (see below p.43).

d) *The purpose of the act of worship*

The *purpose* of the act of worship, which, according to these texts, appears to be the sacrifice, is perhaps what should yield the most information regarding the laity. In the *Yašts*, sacrifice is offered by individuals and by unnamed groups of people. I have given

¹ Malandra 1983: 112.

² Yt.13:12.

³ Malandra 1983: 111-2.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 103.

an example of the formula for worship, when made by an individual, from the *Yašt* addressed to Aredwī Sūrā Anāhitā.¹

Frequently the boons which are asked for concern what might be termed the daily needs of the community, and those offering worship are not named.² As with individual requests, there is the idea of giving in order to receive. In the hymn to Aredwī Sūrā Anāhitā the abundance of food is among the things specifically asked for:

(Yt.5.130) Now then, O good, most powerful Aredwī Sūrā Anāhitā, I ask for this boon, that I, very beloved (to you?), may win great estates characterised by abundant ripening (of the crops and) large shares, where there are neighing horses, rattling wheels, (and) snaking whips, where there is much to eat, where meats are stored up, where there are fragrant aromas. In the storage rooms I (?) have deposited, as far as one could wish, copiously, all (things requisite) for a good life ... (?).³

The gods are invoked to provide cattle, pasture, water and fodder for the community. Men seek strong, sturdy dwelling places and sometimes luxuriant material possessions.⁴ In *Yašt* 17 it is said that those who are accompanied by the goddess Aši are likely to own beautiful wives, fair maidens, firm-humped and spirited camels, to be brought silver and gold from foreign lands, and splendid tailored clothes.⁵ There are a number of requests for progeny (sons in particular), that they may be noble, healthy, eloquent, fair, clear-eyed, and that they may have good intelligence and save their parents from anxiety.⁶ In Yt.14, verse 28 begins with a general invocation to Verethraghna and then continues with worship offered by Zarathuštra. Verses 30-33 of Yt.14 describe the exceptional powers of sight bestowed upon Zarathuštra by Verethraghna; good eyesight is often perceived to be an attribute of the gods: 'We worship Tishtrya whose eyes are healthy' (Yt.8.12); Ahura Mazdā is called 'Best seer of much' and 'Best far-seer' (Yt.1.12); and Mithra is endowed with a thousand perceptions, he sees all those who lie (Yt.10.107).

The god Haoma is invoked as protector of health, for the plant *haoma* was thought to have medicinal properties (Y.9.17). In Y.9 and 10 there are no references to the animal sacrifice, although it seems clear that a libation containing *haoma* is offered:

(Y.10.2) I praise with speech, O insightful (Haoma), your lower pressing stone which accepts the stalks; also I praise with speech, O insightful (Haoma), your upper pressing stone with (?) which I pound with the force of a man.⁷

¹ See p.31.

² In his study of the African Nuer, Evans-Pritchard terms the sacrifices performed for the benefit of individuals 'piacular', and those which are made on behalf of groups or social segments of the community as 'collective'. See Jay 1992: 27.

³ Malandra 1983: 130.

⁴ See Yt.10.108, Yt.5.101-102.

⁵ Yt.17.10, 11, 13, 14.

⁶ Yt.19.75, Y.9.22, Yt.10.3, 108, 65.

⁷ Malandra 1983: 155. See Y.10.17, where Zarathuštra worships Haoma.

The intoxicating properties of the plant were supposed to heighten battle fury in warriors, hence Haoma came to be asked for victory in battle,¹ and since heroes were said to be born to the first four men who pressed *haoma* for drinking, the god was invoked by, or on behalf of, women:

(Y.9.22) Haoma allots power and strength to the heroes who are driving (their) teams to battle. Haoma gives those (women) giving birth regal sons and righteous progeny ...

(23) Haoma allots a husband (?) and master (?) even to those maidens who have remained long unmarried, as soon as he, having good intelligence, is entreated.²

Women appear rarely in the *Yašts*; when they do occur, requests by women refer to the procuring of husbands and conceiving of offspring (Yt.15.39-41).³

Sometimes the boons which are requested include the immaterial; there are a number of petitions for truth, knowledge, insight, wisdom (Yt.10.33) and for a concept which is more difficult to define, that of *khvarenah*.⁴ In some cases *khvarenah* appears to be simply good fortune, such as the goddess Aši gives to those whom she favours (Yt.17.6).⁵ More often *khvarenah* is seen as a divine grace or glory, sent from on high to great and good men such as Zarathuštra himself, and also to kings.⁶ *Khvarenah* the divinity, unlike other divinities, is not conceived of in anthropomorphic terms but often assumes the form of a bird or beast; more than once it appears as a hawk (Yt.19.36), and in this form can be linked with Verethraghna, the god of victory.⁷ Through being accompanied by *khvarenah* (the quality), either the nation, i.e. the Aryans (Yt.18.1),⁸ or an individual can acquire material benefits. In Yt.19.9, there is a general invocation to the divinity *Khvarenah* followed by a list of heroes and kings, whom *Khvarenah* accompanies, and the various pieces of good fortune which come to them.⁹ There is also a moralising aspect to *Khvarenah*, which is apparent in the myth about Yima who is actually abandoned by the divinity when he lies: 'Then, when he (?) introduced falsehood (untrue speech) to his mind, the *Khvarenah* visibly, in the form of a bird, went forth from him' (Yt.19.34).¹⁰ This is a unique example in the *Yašts* of a gift from the gods (the good fortune granted by *Khvarenah*) being withdrawn, rather than originally withheld.

There is some evidence in the *Yašts* that the laity gave thought to life after death, and that they hoped to attain paradise. There is no indication, however, whether this was

¹ Yt.14.57, see p.33.

² Malandra 1983: 154.

³ See also Yt.13.15, Yt.5.87, Y.9.22.

⁴ For a discussion of the term see Malandra 1983: 88-9, and Boyce 1975: 67-8.

⁵ See also Yt.15.16, Malandra 1983: 99.

⁶ Yt.19.71,79, Malandra 1983: 94-5.

⁷ In Vd.19.37, Verethraghna has the unique epithet *barō.khvarenah*, 'bearing *khvarenah*'. For the association of Verethraghna with the falcon see Malandra 1983:82.

⁸ tr. Darmesteter 1981: 283.

⁹ Malandra 1983: 89.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 91.

considered a temporary or permanent abode in pre-Zoroastrian times. In Yt.15.16, Yima petitioned in the mythical past simply for longevity of life on earth.¹ In Yt.10.31-32 worship is offered to Mithra with the intention, it seems, of winning a place in paradise:

(32) O Mithra, may you listen to our worship; O Mithra, may you be satisfied with our worship, may you sit at our worship. Come to our libations, come to them (which) have been offered, collect them for consumption, deposit them in Paradise.²

There is no indication, however, of whether paradise is attainable by making generous offerings, nor is there any implication of the Zoroastrian idea that good deeds are being stored up in Paradise.

General invocations of the gods include a petition to Rashnu to attend an ordeal by fire. This institution appears to have been an ancient one (to judge from Vedic parallels) which continued to be practised by Zoroastrians. At the ordeal described in Yt.12.5³ there is the usual pattern of gifts and praises being offered to the divinity in order that he may grant a boon, in this case that of making the right decision concerning the person accused of some wrongdoing.

In what are thought to be late *Yašts*⁴, addressed to the sun and moon respectively, requests are made by unnamed worshippers for the preservation of creation:

(Yt.6:3) Should the sun not rise up, then the Daēvas would destroy all the things that are in the seven Karshvares, nor would the heavenly Yazatas find any way of withstanding or repelling them in the material world.⁵

(Yt.7:5) I will sacrifice unto the Moon, that keeps in it the seed of the Bull, the liberal, bright, glorious, water-giving, warmth-giving, wisdom-giving, wealth-giving, riches-giving, thoughtfulness-giving, weal-giving, freshness-giving, prosperity-giving, the liberal, the healing.⁶

Worship offered by named individuals is confined to the offering of gifts and praises in return for specific, personal boons, usually to do with war. In the *Yašts* there are more prayers to the gods for such things as strong heroes and fast horses, for victory in battle and protection from enemies, than there are for any other benefits, material or otherwise, that the gods can give to man. In all the *Yašts* cited so far there are references to war; sometimes the gods are given the attributes of a fine warrior: an epithet for Sraoša is 'victorious' and even his female companion, Aši, is described as being one 'whose (chariot) wheels hum, powerful ... who ... (is) strong' (Yt.17.1). Invocations to the gods concerning warfare are often simply pleas for victory in battle, and for conquering

¹ *Ibid.*, 99.

² *Ibid.*, 62.

³ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁴ I have suggested (see p.76) that these *Yašts* were taken from the ancient *Niyāyeš* addressed to the sun and moon.

⁵ tr. Darmesteter 1981: 86.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 91.

ability; they are made both by individuals and also by unnamed members of the community:¹ In Yt.13, the *fravašis* are invoked in the midst of a battle to come to the aid of their descendants; it is clear that they are thought only to protect those who worship them habitually.

The foes of the Aryan warriors are invariably spoken of, whether demons or enemy tribes,² and often the way in which the enemy is overcome is described:

(Yt.14:62) We worship Ahura-created Verthraghna, who destroys the battle lines, who cuts the battle lines, who tramples the battle lines, who throws the battle lines into confusion.³

Mithra is invoked to ensure that all the enemy weapons: the eagle-feathered arrows, the pointed, well-sharpened spears, the sling stones, the well-drawn daggers, the well-wielded maces 'strike no wounds' (Yt.10.39-43).⁴ Sometimes the purpose of battle is to retaliate against foes (Yt.10.94), sometimes to avenge some injustice, as in the *Yašt* to Vayu (Yt.15.27-28). Sometimes the enemy is seen as an attacker, or as in the *Mihr Yašt*, one who is false to the covenant. In most instances the god's revenge is thought to be a formidable one and the worshippers pray not to suffer it.

(Yt.10:69) May we not here encounter the bludgeoning of the enraged lord (Ahura) whose thousand blows encounter (his) enemy, he who, strong, having ten thousand spies, undecivable, knows all.

(72) who cuts everything up; all at once he mixes together on the ground the bones, hair, brains, and blood of the men who are false to the covenant.⁵

One particular attribute which is often linked with requests for strength and might is the heroes' need for eloquence. It was clearly not sufficient to be victorious in battle, a warrior must also be able to debate in the council hall - another form of contest. Although there is no example in the *Yašts* of a hero seeking the boon of eloquence, this attribute was evidently considered important:

(Yt.13.16) Through their (the Fravašis) rayi and glory, a man is born eloquent, who makes his words heard in verbal contests, whose judgement is sought after, who comes away from the discussion victorious over the defeated Gautama.⁶

Mithra too, in his role as a mighty warrior-god, was thought to possess eloquence (Yt.10.25).⁷ There are also references to 'assemblies' (Yt.8.15, Y.11.2)⁸, which seem to

¹ See also Yt.10.8, Yt.8.12.

² Yt.14.62, Yt.15.24, Yt.5.34.

³ Malandra 1983: 87. See also Yt.15: 24, Yt.5: 34.

⁴ Malandra 1983: 63-4.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 106.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 61. For the importance of eloquence amongst the Aryan peoples see the passage by W.B. Kristensen in Kuiper 1960: 250 & n.55.

⁸ Malandra 1983: 145 & 158.

be an indication that gatherings of men took place for discussion generally, as well as for verbal contests.

It is noticeable that in the *Yašts*, offerings are rarely spoken of as being made in thanksgiving after a boon has been granted, or as acts of contrition. However, there seem to be two kinds of thank-offering. One is that in which the worshipper says: 'If you will grant me such and such, then I shall give you the following', which differs little from the more common: 'If I give you such and such, will you grant me the following?', in that both are a sort of bargain sought between the worshipper and god. The other is a spontaneous thank-offering for something which has not been asked for, a piece of good fortune. The lines in Yt.5.63 where Pāurva the boatman promises to sacrifice to Aredvī Sūrā Anāhitā if she will enable him to descend to earth can be classified as an example of the first type; the vow was forced on Pāurva since he could not sacrifice to the goddess before descending to earth. There does not appear to be any recorded evidence of the second type of offering being made in Iran until much later, in fact until after the advent of fire temples.

The notion of strengthening the divine recipient by an offering seems to have been widespread in ancient times and is evident both in the Rgveda¹ and the *Yašts* (Yt.8:24). Sometimes it appears that offerings were made appropriate to the nature of certain divinities; for example in Yt.5.63, Aredvī Sūrā Anāhitā is offered libations instead of the animal sacrifice. Tištrya too (Yt.8.15), asks only for libations and in return bestows rain. It seems that worshippers generally directed their prayers for particular boons to divinities whose character was in some way connected to the benefit bestowed upon the worshipper; when worshipped, the divinity was able to bestow his or her own particular power. Tištrya, for example, as god of the rain star, is able to cause rain to fall, likewise Aredvī Sūrā Anāhitā, in her role as the river goddess, has the power to make waters flow (Yt.5.4, 5), and also to grant Vistauru the Naotarid a dry passage across the Vītahvaitī river (Yt.5.76, 77); Verethraghna the god of victory who appears in ten different forms, all of them personifying power and strength, grants men victory in battle; Aši, who is described as being 'tall, regal, beautiful,' 'well created' and 'of good lineage' (Yt.17.15), bestows good fortune, and is worshipped as a fertility goddess.²

e) *By whom is the worship offered?*

In the *Yašts*, those who commission sacrifices appear to be lay people, while the person performing the ritual, or anyway part of it, is apparently a ritual specialist, a priest. As to the former, several of the *Yašts* contain lists of heroes and kings, the gifts that they offer and the boons that they ask for in return.³ There are several references to

¹ J. Gonda 1965: 213.

² Malandra 1983: 131, 133.

³ Yt.5, Yt.15, Yt.19, Y.9.

the stratification of society, for example Y.11:6 refers to the priest, warrior and farmer (see p.33), and Yt.13:151 begins: 'We worship the first teachers of the families and of the villages and of the clans and of the countries ...'.¹ However, ordinary people belonging to these groups are not represented as offering worship. No distinction is drawn between the legendary Zoroastrian heroes (Jāmāspa, Kawi Wishtāspa, Zairī.wari) and their mythical forbears (Thraētaona, Kawi Usan, Haosrawah, Tusa, Ashawazdah, Wistauru the Naotariid, Yōishta of the Fryanids): both are presented as offering prayer and sacrifice in exactly the same fashion. Those members of the laity presented as offering sacrifice, therefore, are presumably powerful men, and drawn from an elite group.

There are also specific references to those who may not take part in worship. For example, in several of the *Yašts*, namely those addressed to Verethraghna, Aši, Aredvī Sūrā Anāhitā, and Tištrya, gods impose prohibitions on people who may not be permitted to worship them; these prohibitions vary according to the nature of the god concerned, but it is likely that they refer largely, if not entirely, to the laity (the various handicaps mentioned presumably would have prevented a man practising as a priest). Aši excludes from her worship, for instance, all those incapable of procreation:

(Yt.17.54) ... Let not any (of the following) have a share of these *zaothras* of mine which (men) bring to me: neither a man whose semen is obstructed, nor a woman past the (age of) menstruation, nor a prepubescent boy, nor a girl who has not been approached (sexually) by men.²

With regard to the involvement of priests in the process of the sacrifice, there is no evidence in the *Yašts* of a structured priestly hierarchy (as attested in the later Pahlavi literature). The term *athravan* is an Avestan word for priest which later became a general term for any priest.³ The term *zaotar*, within the context of the *Yašts*, appears to refer to the ritual specialist who was the principal priest qualified to take part in the *yasna*.⁴ It is not clear from the *Yašts* to what extent the laity was dependent upon priests for instruction concerning worship since there is no positive evidence of the laity reciting religious texts. There are two passages which may refer to lay religious education in the *Hōm Yašt*, but both contain words of uncertain meaning:

¹ Malandra 1983: 116. These terms appear to have become epithets which came to be worshipped as divinities in the *Gāh* prayers. See p. 66 and n.3.

² Malandra 1983: 134. See also: Yt.5.2, 93; Yt.14.50, 51, 52.

³ See Yt.5.86 & Y.9.24 (below). In both passages the *athravan* is portrayed as a teacher.

⁴ In the *yašts* the term is used in the context of a ritual specialist. In Yt.10.89 the passage refers to Haoma: 'The promptly sacrificing, loud-chanting *zaotar* performs the worship with a loud voice, as Ahura Mazda's *zaotar*, as the Amesha Spenta's *zaotar* ...' See also Yt.17.61 which appears to refer directly to the sacrifice: '...The *zaotar* should raise (his) voice high, standing behind the *baresman* ...'

(Y.9.22) Haoma allots increment and knowledge even to those who (as) householders¹ (?) devote themselves to the study of the Nasks.

(24) Haoma deposed from power even him, Keresani, who in his lust for power lamented, who (had) said, 'May an *athrawan* from now on not go about increasing (religious) studies in my country.'²

The extent to which priests participated in the two ritual offerings referred to in the *Yašts*, the blood sacrifice and the *haoma* libation, is not clear. It does seem likely, however, that a priest or priests were not only present at the blood sacrifice but participated actively in the sacrificial ritual. In the following passage the priest is presented as standing 'behind' the *baresman*, whereas the animal about to be sacrificed would have been standing on it. The distribution of meat is also shown to be a priestly task, as in Y.11.1 (see p.33):

(Yt.10.137) Hail to the authoritative man - thus said Ahura Mazdā - O righteous Zarathuštra, for whom a righteous *zaotar* ... ? ... learned, who is *tanu.māthra*,³ shall worship with the litany of Mithra at the spread-out baresman. Straightway, Mithra visits the authoritative man's dwelling, if as a result of his (the man's) favour (shown to the priest), it (the litany) is in accordance with the prescription for thinking.

(138) Woe to the authoritative man - thus said Ahura Mazdā - O righteous Zarathuštra, for whom a *zaotar* who is not a righteous man, not learned, not *tanu.māthra*, (shall) worship standing behind the baresman and spreading the baresman fully, even if he performs a long sacrifice.⁴

We cannot tell whether or not a priest was necessarily present when laymen offered the *haoma* libation, although there are various links between the blood sacrifice and the *haoma* libation which make it seem possible that a priest was necessarily present at both. According to a *Yašt* passage, the divinity Haoma, as the divine priest, offers the *haoma* sacrifice, acting as the prototype of an earthly priest.⁵ Also, Haoma was allotted a portion of the blood sacrifice, thus linking the latter with the *haoma* offering.⁶ One could speculate, therefore, that Haoma's earthly counterpart should also preside over both sacrifices, receiving his allotted portion of the sacrificial meal and drinking the infusion of the first preparation of *parahaoma*.⁷

Evidence also suggests, however, that *haoma* was widely consumed and offered by the laity - though not necessarily in conjunction with the blood sacrifice. There are thus two usages of *haoma* attested in the *Yašts*, both of which are likely to have involved the

¹ 'householders' = *katay*: a hapax of uncertain meaning. See Unvala 1924: 35 n.73a, b; cf. Bartholomae 1904: 433.

² Malandra 1983: 154. *Aiwistay* - a study, recitation (Bartholomae 1904: 95). See also Yt.5.86.

³ Kreyenbroek (1985: 174) translates the term *tanu. māthra* as 'having the Sacred Word for body'.

⁴ Malandra 1983: 74-5.

⁵ Yt.10.89-90 Malandra: 1983: 69.

⁶ Y.11.4, see p.33.

⁷ For more detail see Kotwal and Boyd 1977: 28-32; also Boyce 1970b: 63ff.

laity. There is the general drinking of *haoma*, e.g. to strengthen heroes in battle, as in Yt.14.57, 58 (see p.33) where it is consumed while petitioning a god for victory. This usage is difficult to distinguish from that where *haoma* may have been consumed as part of an offering, while perhaps a libation was made at the same time. On the other hand, there is the *haoma* mixed with milk (Yt.10.13) which seems likely to have been part of a priestly preparation made on behalf of the laity (Ny.1.16), and which could perhaps simply be a reference to the *yasna*. There are also references to unspecified ‘*zaothras*’, which may have contained *haoma* being offered to water by both priests (Yt.5.132) and laity (Yt.15.1).¹

Another ritual act which, according to the *Yašts*, takes place at the blood sacrifice is the holding of *baresman*; in Yt.5.98 the *baresman* is evidently being held by Mazdā worshippers generally, for Aredvī Sūrā Anāhitā is described as one: ‘... round whom stood the Mazdā worshippers with *baresman* in their hands. The Hwōwids worshipped her; the Naotarids worshipped her. The Hwōwids asked for wealth; the Naotarids, for possession of swift horses ...’.² The word *baresman* here could refer to the grass strew spread beneath the feet of the sacrificial animal, which according to ancient usage also acted as a seat for the divinity who was thought to descend to partake of the sacrifice.³ It may also, however, refer to the bundle of twigs or rods which came to be held by worshippers, for it is not known when the semantic development took place.⁴ The later *baresman* too was thought to be a powerful agent against all demons, fiends, wizards and witches (*Dīnā-ī Menōg ī Khirad*, LVII:28),⁵ and it played a part in the sacred ceremonial on the day of battle (*Dēnkard* VIII.XXVI.24).⁶

That the unseen presence of the divinity seated upon the strew was seen as the focal point for worship seems evident from the description (in Yt.5.98) of worshippers standing ‘around’ the goddess. The same idea appears in Yt.11.7 where lay people are described as walking round the divinity Sraoša, while worshipping.⁷

The evident involvement according to passages of the *Yašts* of both priest and laity in what are nowadays priestly rituals only, such as the *haoma* sacrifice and the holding of the *baresman*, make it difficult to distinguish there between lay and priestly worship. Only one priest appears among the laity, offering ‘worship’ in return for a boon, and that

¹ In both the *Avesta* and the *Rgveda* the first preparers of *haoma/soma* were said to be the mythical heroes of Indo-Iranian tradition: Vivasvat and Trita Aptya on the one hand, and Vivahvant, Āthvya, and Thrīta on the other. For further parallels between the Av. *haoma* and Vedic *soma*, see Macdonnell 1897: 113-114.

² Malandra 1983: 127.

³ In Sanskrit the strew was called *barhiṣ*; and according to Brahman usage, the officiating priest would take up a handful while reciting the appropriate prayers.

⁴ The concept of flesh and grass being one is probably old, since it is mentioned in the *Aitaraya brahmana*; and it may be that priests took up the strew to symbolise this. See Boyce 1975: 167.

⁵ tr. West: 1977b: 103.

⁶ West 1977d 89. For the term *barsom*, see Mills and Gray 1909: Vol. 2, 42.

⁷ Kreyenbroek 1985: 63, 64.

is Zarathuštra himself (Yt.5.104-105).¹ Various elements distinguish his worship from that of the laity; skill of tongue and correctly uttered words are likely to have been the concern of priests who were trained to know sacred words to accompany rituals.

There is no evidence in the *Yašts* of offerings made to priests by the laity, although the 'favour' shown to the priest in Yt.10.137 (see p.42), implies that some sort of fee was paid for the services of a priest. The Western Middle Iranian word for such payment is *ašōdad*, meaning 'given to a righteous man',² but there is no recorded Avestan term; therefore we cannot tell to what extent priests were dependent upon the laity for their livelihood.

A survey of the *Yašts* with reference to the questions outlined above gives us an idea of the typology of ritual worship according to these texts, which can be summarised as follows. The material of the offerings consisted of libations of *haoma* and milk, and the blood sacrifice; there is no evidence of any alternative or substitute offering. There are indications that the meat of the sacrifice was partaken of by priest and layman (Y.11.1) and that a portion was dedicated to the divinity Hoama (Y.11.4).³ The offerings were made to the gods of the Iranian/Zoroastrian pantheon, inviting them to descend and be seated at the sacrifice. Such sacrifices were also made to ancestral spirits and appear to have been, to judge from the boons requested, acts of supererogatory worship; in other words, these sacrifices do not appear to have belonged to the *yasna*, which, according to the liturgical texts, has always been the central priestly rite of Zoroastrianism. There is no indication that these offerings were made in any fixed place, rather they are described as having taken place in the open air, on mountain tops or by rivers. The sacrifices are represented as being made in order that a boon may be granted, in other words the deity is expected to reciprocate by granting the wishes of the sacrificier, that is, the person commissioning the sacrifice, who is either a king or hero.

2.2. Interpretations of sacrifice

It can be seen from the above survey of the *Yašt* material that these ancient texts are representations of certain idealised terrestrial and celestial situations. Information concerning the laity is characterised in this way and is, therefore, open to very varied interpretation. Scholars from within the field of Iranian studies have studied the *Yašts*, and discussed the nature of what appears to be the central focus of religious activity, namely sacrifice. These accounts express certain ideas about the world which, with

¹ Malandra 1983: 128.

² Boyce 1975: 169, n.151. Vedic *dakṣinā* was the term used for gifts/payment to priests. The custom seems to have existed from the earliest times in the Indian tradition, and became increasingly elaborate (one of the sacred fires of the highest ritual being the *dakṣināgni*), see Keith 1925: Vol. I, 299. Verses especially composed with an eye to expected payment, known as the *dānastutis*, were addressed to kings. Their frequent occurrence in Vedic hymns makes it clear that they were considered important.

³ Y.11.1 & 4 are cited above on p.33.

reference to the subject of the laity, cannot be projected back to such a distant time within the context of the texts which are available. In order to illustrate why this is so, in other words to develop and strengthen the reasons why I consider that certain assumptions cannot be made about lay worship according to the *Yašts*, I shall draw on some different approaches to the sacrificial ritual which belong mainly to the anthropological field. Many theories concerning sacrifice have been developed by anthropologists with reference to various societies at different times; anthropological theory has also been applied to biblical texts,¹ and it is these accounts which help to sort out what can and cannot be said about the *Yašt* material.

The *Yašts* have been viewed by scholars of Iranian studies mainly in the light of their respective interpretations of the prophet's reform as propounded in his *Gāthās*.² In general (with the exception of Boyce), scholars have seen in the polytheism of the *Yašts*, with their emphasis on the ritual of sacrifice in return for boons, a dilution or rejection of the perceived ethical teachings of the prophet on the part of the community, and a return to the religious practices of earlier times. The 'earlier times' which form the backdrop to Zarathuštra's reform have been the subject of various studies, notably S. Wikander (1938), *Der arische Männerbund*, G. Dumézil (1940), *Mitra-Varuna*, and B. Lincoln (1981), *Priests Warriors and Cattle*. Although they present different reconstructions of Indo-Iranian society, these scholars all attest to the existence of warlike bands of young men who take part in cattle-raiding and animal sacrifice and it is against such practices that Zarathuštra is held to have preached.

In particular, the subject of sacrifice has been viewed according to the interpretation of certain *Gāthic* verses, notably Y.32.12 and 13:

(Y.32.12) By reason of that teaching with which they deflected men from the best action, the Wise Lord spoke of bad things for them, for those who have ruined the life of the cow with their habit of pleasure, and because of whom the rich *Karpan* chose the rule of tyrants and deceit rather than truth.

(13) Because of such (evil) rule, the destroyers of this world viewed their riches in the House of Worst Thinking. Also those who complained, in their lust, about the message of Thy prophet, Wise One, a lust which did guard them from the sight of Truth.³

¹ See p.51.

² These hymns, which are attributed to the prophet, are short utterances composed in a traditional Indo-European style of religious poetry. Although the unity of composition has been established for the *Gāthās*, they are full of ambiguities, and the ideas and teachings contained within them are frequently expressed in metaphorical and allegorical terms. For this reason they have posed immense difficulties to the translator. As Innsler has pointed out: 'as long as little certainty exists in the establishment of definite rules for interpreting the various possibilities of syntactic coordination within the special eloquence of Zarathustra's poetry, there can be no assurance that the translation of a given passage approaches the intentions originally formulated by the prophet'. See Innsler: 1975: 2. Boyce (1988: 18) divides the main scholarly interpretations of the *Gāthās* into: first those, such as Innsler, who view Zoroaster as a prophet/philosopher and regard references to doctrines and rituals as metaphorical; second, those, such as Humbach (1959), who link them to the Vedic world of thought through ritual and certain archaic ideas, or Nyberg (1938), who link them with modern so-called primitive peoples.

³ Innsler 1975: 47, 49.

As a result of these verses, some scholars of Zoroastrianism have held that the prophet prohibited, partly prohibited or disapproved of the blood sacrifice. In their view, therefore, the *Yašts* are irreconcilable with the purported teachings of the *Gāthās* concerning sacrifice. Thus Moulton, for example, maintains that 'the religion of the *Yašts* is frankly independent of Zarathuštra and far older than his reform, to which it only yields an occasional lip-service'.¹ In keeping with his own ideological background, as a biblical scholar and Methodist minister, Moulton shows a marked contempt for the priesthood and priestly ritual; he argues that there is no evidence of a sacerdotal caste during the prophet's time and maintains that when this did develop, in the Late Avestan period, it resulted in further corruption of the prophet's teachings.²

With the exception of Zarathuštra's legendary royal patron, Moulton is dismissive of the laity in general, suggesting that they were unable to adhere to, or even to understand the prophet's message:

Like many another religious reformer, Zarathuštra over-stepped the people's capacity. His success was mainly with the court circle, and depended on the fortunate accident that he discovered a monarch of high character and spiritual receptivity. Of really popular elements his religion had few; and as soon as the Founder himself and his royal convert were gone, the religious conditions of the people largely reverted to the previous level. Only the Prophet's name remained, and some of the simpler conceptions of his system, which were preserved by the very fact that they were misunderstood, and could therefore be assimilated to other elements of a practically undisturbed polytheism.³

In contrast to Moulton, R.C. Zaehner, from his Catholic perspective, is less hostile towards priestly ritual. He discusses both the blood sacrifice and the *haoma* cult in some detail.⁴ After citing the Gāthic passages which may be taken to assume that the prophet was opposed to the sacrifice of cattle and the *haoma* rite (Y.44.20, 29.1, 4, 46.4, 32.8, 10, 12), Zaehner concludes that it would be very odd if a ritual so condemned by the founder of a religion should be continued by his followers.⁵ He goes on then to develop his own hypothesis: that it was not the sacrifice itself that the prophet condemned but the fact that the laity partook of the sacrificial flesh. Zaehner suggests that Zarathuštra objected to the cruelty of sacrifice and therefore would not himself have taken part in the immolation of an animal. However, this does not mean that he condemned it altogether, only the way in which it was performed by *daeva*-worshippers which involved the slaughter of cattle in large numbers accompanied by the drinking of large quantities of fermented *haoma* juice. Zaehner emphasises the importance of the *haoma* rite, bringing it

¹ Moulton 1913: 260.

² *Ibid.*: 116 ff.

³ *Ibid.*: 182-3.

⁴ R.C. Zaehner 1961: 38-40 & 84ff.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.85.

into the sphere of his own Catholicism both conceptually and by his use of terminology.

Thus:

Haoma, like the fire, is the son of Ahura Mazda, ordained by the father to be an eternal priest, who as son of God, offers himself up in the form of a plant to his father on high ... The Haoma sacrifice and sacrament, then, is in every sense one of communion. The plant is identical with the son of God: he is bruised and mangled in the mortar so that the life-giving fluid that proceeds from his body may give new life in body and soul to the worshipper.¹

With regard to the *Yašts* it is the apparent polytheism rather than the blood sacrifice that Zaehner perceives as a departure from the prophet's teachings. He maintains that the fact that no Pahlavi translation was made of these texts is evidence that they had fallen into disuse by Sasanian times: 'This excessive aggrandisement of created spirits was not regarded as being consonant with the majesty of God, and the *Yašts* - with the notable exception of those addressed to Sraosha and Haoma - were quietly allowed to fall into disuse'.²

Boyce has written widely on the subject of sacrifice in her *Histories* and in a number of articles.³ She has argued that, far from rejecting the old religion, the inspiration for Zarathuštra's teaching was brought about by meditating upon those rituals and ancient traditions - including the blood sacrifice - with which, as a priest, he would have been familiar.⁴ Boyce draws on the evidence of Gāthic passages which refer to the veneration of fire by means of offerings and prayers in order to demonstrate the prophet's adherence to these rituals.⁵ The sacrificial rituals described in the *Yašts* can, in Boyce's view, be reconciled with the prophet's teaching because they are not representative of the excessive, immoral practices against which he preached. Thus, beginning with the premise that Zarathuštra was not opposed to sacrifice, Boyce uses the idea that the rituals surrounding the slaughter of animals, together with the need of the 'ancient Iranians exposed as they were to the bitterly cold winters of the Asian Steppes' to eat meat, absolved the 'wrong of destroying another creature's physical existence'.⁶ Boyce also draws attention to the symbolism of the blood sacrifice which had been woven into the gospel teachings of the New Testament at a time when such sacrifices were actually part of Temple worship; thus, she suggests, it is perfectly possible for the blood-sacrifice to 'exist at the heart of a spiritual and ethical religion, and co-exist moreover with a compassionate spirit and a profoundly-felt religious symbolism ...'.⁷

¹ Zaehner 1961: 91.

² *Ibid.*, 170.

³ 'Ātaš Zohr and Āb Zohr', *JRAS* 1966; 'Zarathuštra the priest', *BSOAS* 1970a; 'Haoma priest of the sacrifice', *W.B. Henning Memorial Volume* 1970b; 'Priests, cattle and men', *BSOAS* 1987.

⁴ Boyce 1970a: 32-4.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁶ Boyce 1975: 215-6.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 32.

In the Introduction to this study I have discussed ideas of continuity and the sorts of assumptions that have been made about ancient Iranian religious practices. I have also drawn attention to the fact that where there is a scarcity of evidence material is often treated in an ahistorical way; I cited, as an example, the treatment by various scholars of Herodotus' comments concerning the sacrificial rites of the Magi.¹ We do not know when the Zoroastrian elements contained in the *Yašts* were added, and so as far as the laity are concerned, we need to find ways of looking at lay religious life according to these texts without recourse to the prophet's teaching. We cannot use twentieth-century Western notions of ethics and morality in an investigation of this sort, since we have no way of knowing how such concepts were perceived by lay people at that time.² The idea of rejecting empirical individuality in favour of an abstract individuality which should be a guide to moral behaviour belongs to eighteenth-century liberalism, in other words, it is a modern construct.

In studies of Zoroastrianism, much attention has been paid to the subject of the cosmos and the deities within it, both by those scholars who approach their subject from a sociological point of view, and by historians of religion. Cosmological ideas are the focus of Dumézil's discussion of the principle of tripartition in Indo-European society,³ and also of Lincoln's section on Celestial Sovereigns.⁴ Zaehner devotes five chapters out of fifteen to supernatural concepts of one sort or another: (Ch. 4: Mithra; Ch. 5: Mithra, Yima, Mithras; Ch. 6: Fravashi, Vayu, Khwarenah; Ch. 11: Zurvan; Ch. 12: Ohrmazd and Ahriman).⁵ Boyce, also, in the first volume of her *History of Zoroastrianism*, devotes a chapter to 'The Gods of Pagan Iran', and another to 'Ahura Mazdā, Angra Mainyu and the Bounteous Immortals'.⁶ The impression conveyed is that the cosmos is actually *there*, and that it remains to understand and explain people's relationship to it.

In the *Yašts*, the terrestrial and celestial worlds are closely interwoven and it is, therefore, difficult to categorise or separate one from the other. Rather than look to the cosmos as the source of religious constructs it seems more appropriate, in a study of the laity, to focus upon people themselves. This would be the approach adopted by an anthropologist, for whom ritual is not viewed solely as a means of serving God (who therefore must be perceived to exist in some sense), but as something which derives from

¹ See p.20.

² Emile Durkheim pointed to the fact that, during the nineteenth century, European notions of morality were based upon a certain type of individualism which was associated with thinkers such as Kant and Rousseau. Thus he wrote: 'I am sure of acting properly only if the motives which determine my behaviour depend not on the particular circumstances in which I find myself, but on my humanity in the abstract. Inversely, my actions are bad when they can be logically justified only by my favoured position or by my special condition, or by my class or caste interests, by my strong passions, and so on.' See 'Individuals and the Intellectuals' in R.N. Bellah 1973: 45.

³ See p. 27, n.2.

⁴ B. Lincoln 1981: 52ff.

⁵ R.C Zaehner 1961.

⁶ Boyce 1975: Chapters 2 & 8.

within people's beliefs and experience.¹ It is in keeping with this line of enquiry that I have divided the *Yašts* into various categories according to the sorts of questions that might be asked of an informant. I shall now look at some theories of sacrifice, to see whether or not they can lead us to a better understanding of lay participation in what seems to be the central act of worship, that is, sacrifice according to the *Yašts*.²

Little attention has been paid amongst scholars of Zoroastrianism to the various categories of gift/offering/sacrifice, or to the principle of reciprocity. The acts of worship described in the *Yašts* have generally been seen as representative of the simple *do ut des*³ form of gift exchange combined with certain 'higher' objectives.⁴ Various anthropological theories have been put forward regarding the principle of reciprocity, e.g. Firth, 'Offerings and Sacrifice: problems of organisation' (1963), Mauss, *The gift* (1950), Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics* (1972), van Baal 'Offering, Sacrifice and Gift' (1976). These ideas are based largely upon factual evidence in the sense that they are concerned with observable economic transactions between people. Firth, for example, talks about the 'economic control' of the sacrifice with reference to the relation between the sacrifice and what people possess, or the possible changes which people go through, in terms of social status, in order to make sacrifices.⁵ These are not the sort of investigations which we can carry out with respect to the *Yašts* since they do not contain this type of information. However, some of the issues discussed in these works do lead us to question the accepted theories, such as those I have outlined above, concerning the nature of religious life as represented in the *Yašts*.

Sahlins explores the idea of an asymmetrical status relationship or, as he terms it, 'disbalanced reciprocity' in his essay *On the Sociology of Primitive exchange* (1974).⁶ Again, the *Yašts* do not provide the sort of information which would enable us to draw

¹ For the common interests and divergent approaches of anthropologists and theologians on the subject of sacrifice, see the Introduction in Meyer Fortes and Bourdillon (eds.) 1980: 1 ff.

² Much has been written by anthropologists on the subject of sacrifice; the theories offered are usually followed by specific case studies since anthropology tends to concern itself with sacrifice as it is still performed in contemporary societies. As Leach (1976) has shown, though, there is no reason why anthropological theories cannot be applied to purported ethnographic descriptions of rituals taking place in the ancient world as well as to those which can be observed first hand.

³ A theory of the gift propounded by E.B. Tylor (1871), in which sacrifice was viewed as an activity without any moral significance, as a bribe to influence the spirits residing in nature. The more developed ideas of the gift as an act of abnegation or homage, Tylor suggested, belonged to a later stage of religion, although the original idea of the gift as a simple transaction remained. This theory was criticised on the basis that it failed to take into account the perceived relationship between donor and recipient. Henniger 1987: 550; Valerie 1985: 63.

⁴ See Malandra 1983: 14-15; Boyce 1975 152-4.

⁵ Firth (1963:15) describes various ideas (p.12), which he sees as being embodied in a religious offering: status difference, the volitional aspect of acceptance, the emotional attitudes of the offerer. These elements are evident in the *Yašts*: for example, the inferior status of men in comparison to the divine recipients of their offerings, the fact that the gods can, and do on occasion, turn them down (Yt.5.29-31), and the emotional aspect as illustrated by the poetic way in which the gods are praised and their attributes described; however, this is about as far as we can go, we are unable to draw any conclusions concerning the role of the laity on the basis of these observations alone.

⁶ Sahlins 1972.



conclusions about the nature of society on the basis of the requests and petitions which we find there. As we have seen, these are made by an elite group and are for such things as food, water, help in warfare, and certain immaterial benefits, all of which have surely been required by people throughout history. Sahlins does, however, raise an important issue in his work, which is the way in which various forms of exchange operate within tribal societies. In particular, he suggests that it is social distance which conditions modes of exchange. Thus in a tribal society, one can expect to find that forms of reciprocity vary according to kinship distance: the closer the bond of kinship, for example between members of a household, camp or hamlet (cf. the family, village, clan of Yt.13.151), the greater the need for peaceful relations which might be reflected in acts of mercy or compassion; the weaker the bond, for example between tribes, then the more strained relations can be allowed to become. Sahlins goes on to suggest that morality in tribal society can be understood in the same way, that is, sectorally. This idea raises questions with regard to the *Yašts*, for, if society as reflected in these texts resembled that outlined by Sahlins, it is likely that there were no absolute standards; rather, they would have been relative and contextual, especially, as Sahlins points out, in wartime. Thus, it is possible that 'morality' was a question of perspective; in other words, what was an unacceptable action for a person within his or her community, such as the appropriation of goods, was quite permissible when perpetrated on an outsider.¹ We do not know whether or not this was the case with respect to the society in which the *Yašts* were composed, but I make this point in order to show that there are viable alternatives to the absolute standards of morality belonging to the Judeo-Christian tradition.

Of the various types of reciprocity, one feature common to them all and indeed to all types of exchange, is that they are about communication. While Firth and Sahlins examine, respectively, the economic and sociological aspects of sacrifice, others have seen the significance of sacrifice primarily as an act of communication between people and what they perceive to be the supernatural world. The first study of this nature was by Hubert and Mauss, who saw the sacrificial procedure primarily as a mechanism for 'establishing a means of communication between the sacred and the profane worlds through the mediation of a victim'.² Hubert and Mauss's exposition of sacrifice is based on Brahmanic and Biblical texts, and as such represents the views of a priestly elite in societies where sacrifice is a highly developed ritual.³ There is also the idea, implicit in this theory, of the sacred and profane worlds: the sacrificer, sacrificier, place, instruments, victim are thought to be profane and their condition must be changed through the medium of sacrifice.⁴

¹ *Ibid.*, 196-199.

² H. Hubert & M. Mauss 1964: 97.

³ Valeri 1985: 64; Henniger 1987:551; van Baal 1976: 11.

⁴ H. Hubert & M. Mauss 1964: 19, 20.

The problem with this idea with reference to the Zoroastrian religious system is that it is not a concept that can be easily reconciled with later Zoroastrian theology. According to the account of creation contained in the Pahlavi text of the *Bundahišn*, it is clear that the material world is only temporarily marred and will be restored once more to its perfect state: 'spirit reaches deep into matter'.¹ The material world, therefore, is not perceived as 'profane' in the Judeo-Christian sense. We simply do not know, however, whether the authors of the *Yašts* were aware of, or upheld, this doctrine.

Another study which focuses on the idea of communication is the essay by Leach on 'The Logic of Sacrifice' in *Culture and Communication* (1976). Using the same biblical text as Mauss but in a highly schematic way, Leach follows the rationalist/structural approach of Lévi-Strauss, in the sense of looking at the structure of ideas rather than the structure of society. This is an approach which focuses more on what is said than what is done; in other words, it will pay more attention to what is perceived to be the case than what is actually happening, thus Leach replaces 'economic transaction' with 'acts of communication'.² The basic question which Leach asks is, 'What does the killing of animals have to do with communication between Man and Deity or with the changing status of individuals?'.³ The aim of providing an answer to this question is to help differentiate between the visual, verbal, spatial and temporal dimensions of the sacrifice - to 'discriminate between the significant, the accidental and the redundant'.⁴

The *Yašts* do not provide us with a detailed description of ritual in the same way the Hebrew texts do. However, Leach's theory can put the various elements already discussed in a different perspective. For example, what is the significance of the gift here? Is it an expression of a reciprocal relationship or is it a material exchange? Leach suggests two ways in which ritual provides a means of communication between the world of physical experience and the world of metaphysical imagination. In the first of these two models, the two worlds are represented as distinct topographical spaces separated by a liminal zone in which the ritual activity takes place.⁵ These 'zones' could be churches,

¹ Williams 1994: 78.

² See Leach 1976: 5. See also Valeri (1985: 70ff.), who asks the question 'why a representation made in the ritual context is considered effective and not simply fictitious'. Using a model of Hawaiian sacrifice, he views the sacrificial ritual as a 'symbolic action' which cannot be reduced to elements such as gift or communion. As such, it transforms the relationships of sacrificer, god and group by representing them in public.

³ Leach 1976: 81.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ The second model Leach perceives as an 'inversion' of the former, i.e. the Other World is inhabited by immortal, omnipotent gods, who exist perpetually in a time in which past, present and future all coexist simultaneously. This theory has been criticised by Bourdillon (1980: 9-10) as 'gross over-simplification' since to focus, as Leach does, on the differences between the two worlds at the expense of the similarities is 'to distort the place of the "sacred" in the cognitive lives of those who use it, and consequently to distort the cognitive functions of ritual'. My reading of Leach, however, is that he does not exclude the possibility of the Other World as representing an enhanced or idealised replica of the physical world, such as seems to be the conception of the world inhabited by deities in the *Yašts*.

graveyards or shrines (in the *Yašts*, the area made sacred by the sacrificial stew). The person celebrating the ritual, the priest, is situated in the liminal zone not only physically, but also metaphysically, in the sense that he is the means of communication between the two worlds. Both the liminal zone and the liminal person may be put into a particular state of ritual purity in order for the ritual to take place.

The logic by which the killing of an animal constitutes a gift to the gods is explained by Leach in terms of the metaphorical association with the souls of dead people, which are thought to pass from the normality of this world through the liminal zone to become ancestor spirits in the Other World. In order for a gift to be passed to the Other World, therefore, its metaphysical essence must travel the same route; by killing the gift and separating its material body from its 'soul' it is possible to transfer the essence to the Other World. In this respect, it can be seen that it is not the value of gift itself that is important - particularly since the meat of the sacrifice is usually given back to the donor to be eaten in a communal meal - but the act of sacrifice as an expression of a reciprocal relationship. That the donor is a substitute for the object of the sacrifice is suggested by the fact that he 'invariably establishes a metonymic relationship between himself and the victim by touching the victim on the head'.¹ The donor thus creates a 'bridge between the world of the gods and the world of men across which the potency of the gods can flow (toward himself)'.²

There are certain theories concerning sacrifice which do not belong to the field of anthropology, but which should be looked at here since, again, they raise questions which are relevant to the ancient Zoroastrian texts. The first is a series of ideas about sacrifice as a means for controlling violence. Two main exponents of this theory are René Girard, in *Violence and the Sacred*, and Walter Burkert, in *Homo Necans*;³ both scholars maintain that ritual sacrifice is a replacement for the chaotic and aggressive impulses which are part of human nature and therefore endemic to society. Girard adopts a psychological approach, in which the basic rivalry between human beings is a result of what he terms 'mimetic desire'.⁴ The outcome of the ensuing contest, ultimately, is that which constitutes the myth of the primordial sacrifice in which the victim is cast as the saviour and the event of his death as a sacrifice. Sacrificial ritual then is a re-enactment of this prior event in which the victim becomes the scapegoat.⁵ Burkert develops his theory from the behavioural pattern which he sees as belonging to the Palaeolithic hunting

¹ Leach 1976: 89. This fact is recorded in Leviticus, Chapter 3. A similar gesture between sacrificer and victim is the kiss of contrition which was part of Zoroastrian sacrificial ritual and which is described by Boyce (1989: 13).

² Leach 1976: 84.

³ Girard is Professor of French language, literature and civilisation at Stanford University, and Burkert is Professor of Classical Philology at the University of Zurich.

⁴ For a fuller discussion of this theory see Burton L. Mack, 'Introduction, Religion and Ritual', in G. Hamerton-Kelly, 1987: 6ff.

⁵ See Girard, 'Generative Scapegoating', in Hamerton-Kelly, 1987.

culture. Ritual killing, through focusing upon the decisive moment of the hunt, the kill, both dramatised and ensured a controlled enactment of that activity, which again ultimately became part of mythology. 'The myth of the hero, Greek drama, the royal hunt, and the entire range of specialised and occasional rites in later societies - all can be traced back to the basic script of the ritualised hunt.'¹

These theories have been further developed by Heesterman in *The Broken World of Sacrifice* (1993) in which he argues for the 'total subjection of sacrifice to the rule of ritual'.² Using, for the main part, the 'static absolute order of Vedic ritual', but with reference also to Iran and Zarathuštra's reform, Heesterman posits a pre-classical age in which there existed 'a sacrificial cycle of cattle raids, contests and battles marked not only by its violence but also by a sense of paradox of killing for the sake of giving life'. He then goes on to describe how this 'world of sacrifice' came under attack and was ultimately repressed, in various traditions, by the development of the control of ritual. As far as the ancient Iranian scenario is concerned, Heesterman makes similar points to those of Boyce. Thus with reference to Zarathuštra he says:

The strident denunciations that can be quoted in support of Zarathušta's rejection of sacrifice may well have been directed against certain practices associated with or forming the context of sacrifice, and not against sacrifice as such ... What was ruled out was the sacred frenzy of the warrior. The aim was strict control over sacrifice, not its total rejection. On the contrary, reformed and strictly regulated, the sacrificial fire cult was viewed as the pre-figuration of the eschatological renewal. The fury of the contest, on the other hand, was taken out of the cult and elevated to the ongoing cosmic fight of good and evil.³

One of the features of the way in which the ritual control of sacrifice developed in Iran (in contrast to India), according to Heesterman, was that the oblation was restricted to the fat of the animal victim - 'a spiritualized act of tending the fire as distinct from the oblation of meat and other substances' - thus freeing the fire from its burden and making it absolute. The growth of the cult of the temple fire in Iran emphasised its transcendence and at the same time restricted its mobility so that by Sasanian times it was 'strongly embedded in the social, political, and jurial order of the Sasanian empire'.⁴ This theory of the growing importance of fire in the context of the elaboration of ritual offers an explanation for the absence of fire in texts which are thought, for the most part, to pre-date Zarathuštra's reform.

The last study I shall consider on the subject of sacrifice is Nancy Jay's *Throughout Your Generations Forever: sacrifice, religion and paternity* (1992). In her introduction to the book Jay emphasises a point which I have made with reference to all areas of

¹ *Ibid.*, 28.

² Heesterman 1993: 4.

³ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 88.

worship, which is that one cannot talk about sacrifice as invariant across different traditions: "To bring "sacrifice" under our control as a perfectly defined object of analysis, to cut out and classify its constituent elements, is more like doing sacrifice than understanding it."¹ Since this ritual act can only be interpreted effectively within the framework of its own tradition, Jay chooses for comparison only those traditions in which ethnographic description covers both ritual practice and social organisation. The focal point of Jay's study is the idea that sacrifice produces and reproduces forms of intergenerational continuity between males. Thus in agrarian and pastoral societies, families are organised around important productive property such as farmland and herds. Inheritance is an important factor in these societies, and one which is facilitated by the structures of enduring intergenerational continuity. Sacrificial ritual is one of the ways in which these structures are identified and maintained; ancestral cults, for example, invariably involve sacrifice. According to Jay, in societies where there are no elaborate family structures, such as in hunter-gatherer or urban communities, sacrificial traditions are undeveloped. Where families are part of extended kin groups, such as those referred to in the *Yašts*,² sacrificial ritual is a prominent feature. According to Jay's thesis, the object of male intergenerational continuity is that men should be able to transcend the inevitability of being born of women.³ Thus marriage becomes an important socio-religious institution without which there can be no paternal filiation or male line of descent:

The social and religious continuity of the patrilineal family gives males an attenuated form of immortality in the institutionalized succession of fathers and sons. The beasts, recognizing no fathers, have no continuity at all to mitigate individual mortality.⁴

The need to transcend the dependence of men upon the reproductive powers of women is demonstrated by Jay in a number of case studies in which she finds that there is usually an opposition between sacrifice and childbirth which is manifested in a variety of

¹ Jay 1992: xxvi.

² Yt.13.151, Yt.5.6.

³ Jay's thesis is, in part, a refutation of two ideas: the first is the male-oriented notion of gender which is projected by theorists on to their theories of sacrificial ritual; the second is the idea, common amongst late nineteenth-century European scholars, that sacrificial religion was a survival from pre-rational times, and that there was a single religious and social system to be found amongst primitive races all over the world which could be identified by the practice of totemism. Jay cites as an example the work by Frazer, who, in his endeavour to find the origin of totemism, focused upon two cases of food taboos in Melanesia, one of which was initiated by old men, the other by pregnant women. In dismissing the possibility that old men could be the originators of such a primitive system, Frazer concluded that this wholly irrational act must be 'the tap-root of totemism, that is, the sick fantasies of pregnant women'. See Frazer 1910, Vol.II : 107 in Jay 1992: 128-9.

⁴ Jay 1992: 31. Jay notes that men play an equally dominant role in matrilineages as in patrilineages; it is the descent of authority and property which differs. Thus in patrilineages it is from father to son, in matrilineages from uncle to nephew. Both systems connect men with women as childbearers, i.e. they organise intergenerational continuity between men and men despite the fact that it is women who give birth (Jay 1992:35).

different ways. For example, she finds that it is a common feature in a number of unrelated traditions that only adult males are permitted to perform sacrifices. If women do take part they are represented in a non-childbearing state: as virgins, as consecrated unmarried women, or as post-menopausal women.¹ From this point onwards in Jay's analysis, we do not find parallels in the *Yašt* material. We do not know the exact nature of the kinship traditions within ancient Iranian society. In Zoroastrianism, however, while the reproductive effluents of childbirth and menstrual cycles are considered to be pollutants, childbearing as such is not represented as being in opposition to sacrifice. In contrast to Jay's case studies, where women in childbearing roles are excluded from worship, in the *Yašt* addressed to Aši it is those who are incapable of procreation (both men and women) who are prohibited from worship: prepubescent boys, the girls who have not been approached (sexually) by men, and women past the age of menstruation.² Again, the potential dangers of the polluting elements of reproduction are portrayed with reference to men and women alike: 'She, (Anāhitā) purifies the waters, the semen of males, the wombs of females, (and) the milk of females.'³ As Jay points out, kinship traditions are quite as diverse as sacrificial traditions, and it is not possible to create concrete general categories. She offers her general theories, therefore, as abstractions not realities, as lenses through which to view the similarities between different traditions, rather than describing any actual sacrificial practice. It is only possible to develop theories concerning specific forms of sacrificial rites where there is more information available than that provided in the *Yašts*.

With respect to the diverse material which has been brought together here, what conclusions can be drawn? It can be seen that, for scholars of Iranian studies, their work on the *Yašts* involves two stages of interpretation, both of which come from the same ideological source; the first is the translation of the text and the second is the interpretation derived from the translation.⁴

From their different perspectives, both Moulton and Zaehner argue for a return, after the death of the prophet, to the beliefs and practices of the old religious system as portrayed in the *Yašts*. There are two assumptions here: first, that the old religious system had been given up in favour of the Reform, and, second, that the *Yašts* belonged to an early stage in religious development. This evolutionary approach assumes that there is a hierarchy of systems whereby that which is earlier is by definition simpler. Thus implicit

¹ *Ibid.*, xxiii.

² It is interesting to note that in modern times the women performing the song of the *Ātaš nu Gīt* have to be mature, i.e. well into childbearing age.

³ Yt.5.5. Malandra 1983: 120.

⁴ With respect to the *Niyāyiš*, it will be seen that the Zoroastrian translator of these prayers, M.N. Dhalla, who was a Zoroastrian priest, uses the honorific terms 'thou' and 'thee' (Ny.5.15, 16), and words such as 'creepeth', which give these verses a sense of antiquity reminiscent of the bible. Through his use of language, the translator endows these texts with a certain type of meaning which does not come from his own culture.

in these studies is the idea of a unilinear development from the non-ethical to the ethical conception of the prophet's reform.

In contrast to Moulton and Zaehner, Boyce has argued for a continuity of Zoroastrian ritual, observance and doctrine (upheld by the evidence of religious texts), which she believes originated with the prophet and survived, more or less intact, until the disruptive influence of Christian missionary work in India during the nineteenth century (see my Introduction). Both Boyce and Heesterman compensate for the paucity of the Iranian material by drawing on evidence from other traditions, notably those of ancient India, to substantiate their accounts of Iranian sacrificial practice; however, these accounts are constructed in different ways. For Boyce, the focus is upon one individual, Zarathuštra. Thus, meaning is often the result of reasoned speculation about the prophet as a person, and this is the way in which her account is constructed.¹ Heesterman, on the other hand, begins by constructing a theoretical framework and concludes that, for various traditions, the rule of ritual replaced the sacrificial contest in which opponents vied with each other for the god's favour. As far as the Iranian tradition is concerned, he associates the control of sacrificial ritual both with the prophet's reform and also with the growth of the temple cult of fire in Iran. However, archaeological excavation has not revealed evidence of a Zoroastrian temple cult of fire until many centuries after the prophet is thought to have lived, and then in a different location. Heesterman's account, therefore, is based upon the association of events which are distanced from each other both in terms of time and space.

There are dozens of theories about sacrifice which have been developed by anthropologists. I have drawn on a few in order to broaden the field of enquiry with respect to the *Yašt* material, and to raise questions concerning notions of morality and continuity which have been central to the discussion of these texts by scholars in the field of Iranian studies. Those anthropologists whom I have cited above have substantiated and developed their general suppositions with detailed studies of sacrificial traditions within particular societies; these studies have been carried out either by means of ethnographic work or historical documentation. While it can be seen that some of the general theories have been relevant to the *Yašt* material, it is clear that these texts do not provide us with the types of information which would enable us to conduct a 'case study' in the way, for example, Leach uses the Biblical account of Leviticus.

By asking the same questions of the available evidence as an anthropologist might ask of an informant, we can see what *cannot* be said about the *Yašt* material. This brings into focus the dominant interpretations of these texts and the way in which the histories have been constructed; we have seen that where meanings are dependent upon the translation and interpretation of ancient texts, there is often little agreement about what

¹ Boyce 1975: 251: 'He himself acknowledged the power'; 1982: 2: 'It was this pattern'; 1992:76: 'Abandoning the belief'; 107: 'Since the prophet appears'; 184 'Zoroaster himself would plainly'.

constitutes fact. Apart from the paucity of the source material, as I have already mentioned, the *Yašts* describe idealised situations; it is likely, for example, that generally people were unaffected by the activities of kings, heroes and priests. Also, there is likely to have been a difference between the scale of the grand religious practices and the domestic ones, but we do not know what these were.

In what ways can the *Yašts* inform a study of the laity? What can be drawn from these texts which are beyond historical analysis? What are they saying which can add to our knowledge of the laity in the history of Zoroastrianism? Perhaps the most important point to make with respect to the *Yašts* is that here we are talking about poetic religious representations not realities. In other words, all we ever see in these texts are the projected images of religious worship, and we cannot refer to these images as if they represent actual events and people, or even codified beliefs and practices. Although the stories were no doubt based on individual and collective experiences of one sort or another, the composers of the *Yašts* would have needed to organise the material in some sort of permanently memorable form. Walter Ong writes about 'the noetic role of "heavy" figures and of the bizarre' with reference to epic narratives, and draws attention to the fact that oral memory requires people to be larger than life and their deeds 'monumental, memorable and commonly public'.¹

The following chapters of this work will focus upon a text which belongs to the modern era: a nineteenth-century Gujarati song, the *Ātaš nu Gīt*. In telling its story, the song draws on the history of the faith, and the traditions which have developed and evolved at different times during this historical process. Early texts such as the *Yašts* and the *Niyāyiš* form part of this tradition. These are the histories, the kinds of stories that Zoroastrians have told themselves about themselves; it is these texts which they associate with the origins of their religion. What we are looking for then, is evidence of this association. What are the links between the old and the new, and how are they manifested? There are certain themes and ideas which I have mentioned with reference to the *Yašts*, and which I shall explore further since they are the ones which are echoed in later texts.

One such theme concerns notions of orality and temporality. I have mentioned some of the general characteristics of oral texts, and the ways in which they are problematic for a study of the laity.² One of the features of the *Yašts*, and also of later religious texts, is that there is no distinction made between the past and the present time, nor is there any expressed awareness of change. Past events are not classified, or itemised; the past is represented, as in the *Fravardīn Yašt*, as the domain of the ancestors: 'a resonant source for renewing awareness of present existence'.³

¹ Ong 1990: 69-70.

² See p.23 & 28.

³ Ong 1990: 98.

The way in which we are made aware of change in the *Yašts* is through visual representations. For example, in the *Yašt* addressed to Aredwī Sūrā Anāhitā there are two undifferentiated representations of the goddess which may be associated with two different times in the development of her cult. The first of these refers to her more ancient role, both as goddess of the waters and as personifying the river itself: 'who is as great as all these waters which flow forth upon the earth, who forcefully flows forth from Mount Hukairya to the Vouru.kasha sea'.¹ In the second passage, the goddess is portrayed in a similar way to that of a cult statue, finely dressed and adorned with jewellery: 'Above (on her head), Aredwī Sūrā Anāhitā binds a beautiful, well-made, golden diadem (studded) with one hundred stars'² Benedict Anderson talks about the way in which change is apparent through visual and aural representations with respect to medieval Christianity.³ He points out, for example, that it would have been unthinkable for medieval worshippers to portray the Virgin Mary with 'Semitic' features or first-century dress in the 'restoring spirit of the modern museum', since in medieval times people did not conceive of deep divisions between past and present. However vast Christendom was, it manifested itself variously to different communities.⁴

In the *Yašts* there are few references to eschatology, and apart from the reference to paradise in the *Yašt* addressed to Mithra,⁵ we do not know what sorts of notions people held concerning the matter of life after death. Cosmological ideas, on the other hand, are closely interwoven with other material in these texts. I have mentioned that the subject of deities belonging to the Indo-Iranian and Iranian pantheons has been studied in some depth by scholars of ancient Iranian religion. As with other elements of the religion, this aspect has been discussed outside its context. By this I mean that the origins, nature and the changing role of various divinities of the Iranian pantheon have been based upon and/or interpreted according to a number of different factors; these might include, for example, comparison with their Vedic counterparts, or the way in which they were worshipped according to later texts. It is important to note that in the *Yašts* themselves the world is not separated out from the rest of the universe, but viewed as part of the ordered whole of the cosmos. Just as there is no distinction drawn between past and present in the *Yašts*, so there is no evident separation between the various worlds of cosmology, mythology, legend or history. The actors move effortlessly between them in a way which suggests that they were unaware of any such classification. This form of

¹ Yt.5.3, also verse 4, Malandra 1983: 120.

² Yt. 5. 127, 128, *Ibid.*, 129-30. Boyce (1982: 203) has drawn attention to these two descriptions.

³ Anderson 1996: 22. In medieval times, in the reliefs and stained-glass windows of churches and the paintings of Italian and Flemish masters, the shepherds of Christ's nativity might resemble Burgundian peasants, or the Virgin Mary a Tuscan merchant's daughter. Often the patron of the work is shown in the dress of a burgher or noble, kneeling alongside the shepherds in worship.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁵ See p.38.

conceptualisation is not presented as part of a belief system, or act of faith, it is simply a matter of perception.

One of the central themes of this study is the way in which structures operate within certain texts as a means by which to convey Zoroastrian theological ideas. In the *Yašts* there is a dominant structural theme which concerns the way in which worship is offered to the gods. This is commonly referred to as taking place in three stages: first, a deity is invoked and an offering made, usually the blood sacrifice, this is followed by a petition made by the worshipper, and finally the reward is granted by the deity, or in some cases, withheld. When individual heroes are mentioned by name, as in the *Yašts* addressed to Aši, Vāyu and Aredwī Sūrā Anāhitā, the act of worship is presented in a formulaic way, and consists of four stanzas followed by a reference to the sacrificial offering and *haoma* libation which forms part of the priestly *yasna* (Ny.1.16). Some of the names occur in all of these *Yašts*, for example Yima, Thraētona, and Haoshyangha Paradhāta, while there are others who are evidently part of the particular narrative associated with the deity to whom the hymn is addressed. As I shall show, the theme of offering/petition/reward appears throughout the Pahlavi books and it is these actions, when performed by the righteous, which are thought will bring about the final renovation of the universe. There are no explicit references to these theological ideas in the early *Yašts*, but, in those addressed to the sun and moon respectively, worshippers petition for the preservation of creation.¹ Also, the *fravašis* are presented as contributing to the maintenance of cosmic order.² There is a strong sense of the dual nature of the world in the *Yašts*, and of the struggle between good and evil which is taking place in both cosmic and earthly spheres. It is the cycle of reward-bringing action which contributes to cosmic order or *Aša*; this is the link between the two worlds, celestial and terrestrial.

The *Yašts* operated on two levels; on the one hand they were the ritual texts, which we can assume were recited by ritual specialists during the sacrificial ceremony; on the other hand they refer to stories, giving us glimpses of the exploits of past heroes and their participation in worship of the gods. Within the texts themselves, people are presented sometimes in the role of story-tellers and sometimes in the role of participants/performers of ritual. The perpetuation of these stories no doubt served to create a sense of unity within the community. They were passed down from one generation to the next in oral transmission and could not, therefore, have been out of circulation for long. These were tales belonging to a particular group, distinguished from other groups by the deeds of its heroes and the gods of its pantheon. While those who did not belong were not necessarily excluded from worship, their rewards were always withheld.

We cannot tell from the *Yašts* what was the precise role of priests during this pre-historic time. It is quite possible for example, that priests owned property and cattle, and

¹ *Ibid.*

² See p.35.

verse 86 of Yt. 5 indicates that they may have taken part in battles.¹ Also, the *Gāthic* verse (Y.32.12)² refers to 'rich *karapans*' (against whom the prophet preached) which suggests that priests at least had the potential to accumulate wealth. While it seems that for certain acts of worship a ritual specialist was necessary, as I have shown, lay worshippers appear to have taken part in rituals which later became the sole preserve of priests.³ In the *Yašts*, the two terms for priest, *zaotar* and *athravan*, are used in the context of ritual specialist and teacher respectively. The *zaotar* is characterised by his loud-chanting voice (Yt.10.89) and his skill of tongue and thought, *māthra* (Ny.1.16). Both *zaotars* and *athravans* are represented as being learned, or *tanu.māthra* (Yt.10.137 and Yt.5.91).⁴ These references suggest that the religious role of priests was essentially a conservative one: to preserve and perpetuate religious knowledge through the memorisation of ritual, prayers, observance and religious texts, and also to transmit this knowledge to others, both students and lay people generally. The priestly role was also one of performance, for the repetition of the priestly *yasna* as well as other rituals entailed performing rituals as much as reciting sacred formulas.

The *Yašts* do not give us information concerning belief structures; what we can say, however, is that lay people, those were evidently not ritual specialists, are represented as playing an active role in religious observance. These activities evidently included the commissioning of sacrifices, the establishing of sacred sites and the initiation, if not the composition, of religious texts. In general the role of these people, albeit the elite, is shown to be that of reproducing rather than transforming religious practice; by this I mean that they are represented as re-creating, re-enacting and transmitting their religion rather than introducing change. This is not to say that changes were not taking place, simply that these texts portray people in conservative rather than innovative roles as far as their religion is concerned.

2.3. The *Niyāyiš* and other prayers⁵

In this section I shall examine the content and structure of the five *Niyāyiš*. Each of these prayers is an anthology of verses which include short prayers and invocations as well as dedications, praise and supplications. I have selected these particular prayers because, although closely linked to the *Yašts* in form and content, they show signs of the process whereby they became 'Zoroastrianised' in a way which the *Yašts* do not. In this section, I shall focus on those elements which demonstrate this development. There are

¹ 'The *athravans* who memorise (and) the *athravan* students will entreat you for wisdom as well as for beneficent and ahura-given victoriousness and conquering superiority.' Malandra 1983: 126.

² See p. 45.

³ See p.43.

⁴ In Yt.13.99, Kavi Vištaspa is described as *tanu.māthra*, so this epithet was not reserved for priests alone.

⁵ I have given the structures of *Niyāyiš* prayers in the form of a diagram on p.81.

various other prayers which are important to Zoroastrian worship and which contain prominent themes which are also present in the *Niyāyiš*. I shall begin by looking at some of these prayers before going on to discuss the *Niyāyiš* in greater detail.

The Kēm.nā Mazdā

In Zoroastrian worship, as it is performed today, prayers are usually accompanied by devotional acts, and many of these are linked to the cult of the hearth fire. An important feature of Zoroastrian prayers is the fact that they are perceived as having protective powers. For example, the tying and the re-tying of the *kustī* is performed while reciting the *Kēm.nā Mazdā*: as the wearer loses the protection of the cord, he or she recites the prayer.¹ We do not know the exact significance of the sacred cord; in earlier times, it may simply have been a sign of reaching maturity as seems to be implied in certain passages from the *Yašts* where the 'girdle' is worn by men and gods alike.² In the *Avesta*, the sacred cord is referred to symbolically as the spiritual girdle of the divinity Haoma (Y.9.25).³ According to later tradition, the wearing of the *kustī* formed part of the initiation to the faith when a child was invested with the sacred cord for the first time,⁴ and this ceremony was said to continue an existing custom.⁵ It was also worn as a guard against evil and the temptation to sin.⁶ The *Gāthic* verses included in the *Kēm.nā Mazdā* indicate that Fire was seen as a protective agent against evil,⁷ while the verse from the *Vendidad* is clearly directed towards the banishment of the *daēvas*.⁸ Also included in the

¹ The *Kēm.nā Mazdā* is not always cited in Zoroastrian prayer books as part of the *kustī* prayers (see Rustomjee 1959:7ff, also Modi 1922:190, where he says that the *Kēm.nā Mazdā* is recited at the investiture of the sacred thread). However, the Middle Persian prayer *Ohrmazd Khwadāy*, which is recited when a person reties the *kustī*, condemns the *daēvas* in the same way as the older prayer and it seems possible that this prayer was added, almost as a gloss, in the language which people understood.

² Yt.8.14: 'then at the (time) of life when a man first receives the girdle; then at the (time) of life when a man goes about endowed with great physical strength; then at the (time) of life when a man first attains sexual potency'. Malandra 1983:145.

Yt.15.57: 'We worship swift Wayu ... We worship Wayu whose girdle is golden. We worship righteous Wayu ...'. Malandra 1983: 102.

³ Modi 1922:187.

⁴ (Sd.XLVI.1) 'The forty-sixth subject is this, that, when people become fourteen years of age, it is necessary to tie on the sacred thread-girdle, because the high-priests have said that it is likewise necessary to take into account those nine months that they have been in the womb of the mother' (tr. West 1977b: 309).

⁵ (Dd.XXXIX.19) tr. West 1977a: 128-9.

⁶ (Dd.XXXIX.20) 'innumerable people ... wear the sacred thread-girdle, the ceremonial belt of the religion and indication of the creator, on the middle of the body; and it becomes more destructive of the power of destruction, more obstructive of the way to sin, and more contesting the will of the demons' (tr. West 1977a: 129. Also Dd.XXXIX.28).

(Sd.X.4) 'And it may be the whole of the demons and fiends who are made extinct by the glory of wearing the sacred thread-girdle' (tr. West 1977b: 268).

⁷ Y.46.7 and Y.44.16. In a Pahlavi fragment named the *Drāyišn -ī Ahreman ō Dēwān* it is said that the fire of the house 'smites' the *daēvas* (Dr.Ad.1): 'It is manifest that Aharman speaks to the "Divs" every night: '... go into the world ... and go to the dwelling abodes of men and smite all men.'

(3) Then the Yazat Saroš claps the hands to call the cock; when the cock crows the Fire Varharam smites a number of them and the Fire of the hearth smites a number when they kindle it at mid-night.' Anklesaria 1957: 133, 134.

⁸ (Vd.8.21) 'Protect us from the foe, O Mazda and Spenta Armaiti! Begone, daevic Drug! Begone the one of Daeva-origin, begone the one of Daeva-shaping, begone the one of Daeva-begetting! Begone, O Drug,

Kēm.nā Mazdā are short prayers which are part of the profession of faith, the *Fravarānē* (Y.12.8-9); this entire prayer is now also part of the extended *yasna*.

It can be seen that the *kustī* plays a complex and double role in religious observance, for it appears both to indicate status and at the same time to endow status. The investment of the *kustī* for the first time was a sign of a quality, the maturity of the wearer, yet it may also have been thought to induce that same quality. The *kustī* is like the prayers in that it appears to recognise human qualities while at the same time embodying divine qualities. It reflects relations between man and the divine and also makes them possible. In this way the wearing of the *kustī* can be seen as the recognition of the relations of goodness between parts of the cosmos.

The four short prayers

Another prayer which is used to protect the worshipper from evil is the *Ahuna vairya*.¹ The language and concepts of this short prayer are similar to those of the *Gāthās*, which suggests that it dates back to the earliest days of the faith. The significance of the prayer for the Zoroastrian laity down the ages can only be ascertained from the references to it in the Young *Avesta* and later texts; it seems likely, though, that from the time of its composition the *Ahuna vairya* was recognised as a prayer of great potency. It confirms allegiance to the faith, and the opening sentence contains a declaration of truth. In what may be the earliest references to the *Ahuna vairya*, the prayer is represented literally as a weapon against evil:

(Yt.17.20) He smites me with the *Ahuna vairya*, so great a weapon as a stone the size of a house ...

(Yt.19.81) Then alone, the *Ahuna vairya*, which righteous Zarathuštra recited four times with (the proper) pauses and then in a loud recitation, drove down all the *daevas* (so that they became) concealed in the earth, unworthy of worship, unworthy of praise.

(Y.57.21) We worship Sraoša, accompanied by rewards, fair of form, victorious, furthering the world ... (22) to whom the *Ahuna vairya* prayer served as a victorious weapon ...²

In later texts, such as the *Bundahišn*, *Dēnkard* and *Šāyest nē Šāyest*, the *Ahuna vairya* is sometimes referred to as a safeguard against the consequences of actions

crawl away, O Drug, disappear, O Drug! In the north shall you disappear. You shall not destroy the material world of Asha!' (tr. Boyce 1984:58).

¹ Boyce 1984: 56. 'As the Master, so is the Judge to be chosen in accord with truth. Establish the power of acts arising from a life lived with good purpose, for Mazda and for the lord whom they made pastor for the poor.' The exact meaning of the words remains a point of contention among scholars, but it is generally agreed that the utterance is both a 'profession of the faith' and a sacred *māthra* which was and is still thought to protect the worshipper from evil (Boyce 1975: 261).

² Kreyenbroek 1985: 49.

considered to be dangerous.¹ It was also used, it seems, to guard against the evils of pollution. The greatest Zoroastrian ceremony of purification is the *Barašnum-i nuh šabe*.² In chapter 9 of the *Vendidād* this ceremony is described in detail; as the person passes through each of the 9 stations and becomes progressively freer from impurity he or she recites the *Ahuna vairya*. Again, the *Ahuna vairya* is chanted when disposing of hair and nail parings which are dead matter and therefore considered impure.³ The power of the *Ahuna vairya* to repel evil was elaborated upon in Zoroastrian exegesis and in later religious texts; in *yasna* 19.8-10 it is said that Ahura Mazdā pronounced the *Ahuna vairya* before creating the corporeal world, and that after this pronouncement Angra Mainyu was driven away.⁴ In the *Bundahišn* the effect of the *Ahuna vairya* upon Angra Mainyu is described in detail.⁵

A parallel development to the mythology which grew up around this prayer is the link between the *Ahuna vairya* and Sraoša. The association of ideas concerning prayer and this divinity probably goes back to the early days of the faith (cf. Y.57.21, where the *Ahuna vairya* is used by Sraoša as a victorious weapon). It has been pointed out that Sraoša is most frequently invoked when there is danger of pollution or direct contact with evil, and that the power to withstand such contact while remaining undefiled is also to be found, on the material plane, in the properties of *gōmēz* as well as through the recitation of the *Ahuna vairya*.⁶ Thus, in modern usage, the laity have three powerful agents which long seem to have been linked in their fight against evil, namely: the divinity, the substance, and the prayer. The mythology which surrounds the *Ahuna vairya* suggests that it came to be regarded as the original 'Word', the quintessential sacred *māthra* which was pronounced by Ahura Mazdā before he created the world, and was subsequently revealed by him to Zarathuštra.⁷ The *Ahuna vairya* came to be regarded as the prototype of all prayer and, if necessary, its recitation may replace all other acts of devotion.

¹ (ŠnŠ.XII.18) 'The rule is this, that in the night anything eatable is not to be cast away to the north, because a fiend will become pregnant; and when it is cast away one Yatha-ahu-vairyo is to be uttered' (tr. West 1977c: 346).

² This appears originally to have been intended to cleanse a person after he or she had come into contact with a major source of impurity such as a corpse. Later, its performance was prescribed at least once in a person's lifetime, usually at the time of initiation to the faith. See Boyce (1975: 313ff.).

³ (Vd.XVII.4) 'Therefore, O Zarathuštra! whenever here below thou shalt comb thy hair or shave it off, or pare off thy nails, thou shalt take them away ten paces from the faithful, twenty paces from the fire, thirty paces from the water, fifty paces from the consecrated bundles of baresma.'

(6) 'Thereupon thou shalt draw three furrows with a knife of metal around the hole, or six furrows or nine, and thou shalt chant the Ahuna-Vairya three times, or six, or nine.' (tr. Darmesteter 1980: 187).

⁴ tr. Mills 1981: 264.

⁵ (G.Bd.1.21) 'Afterwards, Ohrmazd recited the Ahunvar thus:.. (22) And the evil spirit, who perceived his own impotence and the annihilation of the demons, became confounded, and fell back to the gloomy darkness; even so as is declared in revelation, that, when one of its (the Ahunvar's) three parts was uttered, the evil spirit contracted his body through fear, and when two parts of it were uttered he fell upon his knees, and when all of it was uttered he became confounded and impotent as to the harm he caused the creatures of Ohrmazd, and he remained three thousand years in confusion' (tr. West 1977c: 8).

⁶ Kreyenbroek 1985: 145.

⁷ Such an understanding of the prayer is found in the *Khulāse-i Dīn* of Dastūr Dārāb Pahlān: Zarathuštra, out of desire, asked God questions on various things, small and great. He asked: 'Amongst the creation ---

There are three other short prayers which are associated with the *Ahuna vairya*; the *Ašem vohū*, the *Yenghē hātām*, and the *Airyema išyo* of which only the latter is in Gāthic Avestan. The *Ašem vohū*¹ is said to be next to the *Ahuna vairya* in importance and sanctity and is the second prayer taught to a Zoroastrian child after the *Ahuna vairya*.² It is a *māthra* in praise of Aša and is always referred to as such in Zoroastrian exegesis and religious texts.³ For example, Yt.21.I is a eulogy of this prayer in which it is accredited with a value according to the importance of the circumstances in which it is recited; thus, one *Ašem vohū* prayed when a person eats and drinks is worth ten others, one *Ašem vohū* prayed while drinking the Haoma strained for the *yasna* is worth a hundred others, one *Ašem vohū* prayed when rising from bed, or going to sleep again, is worth a thousand others.⁴ The way in which the *Ašem vohū* is used, that is, its relative value according to circumstance, reinforces the idea that it is the contextual significance of actions which are important, even for actions which have some ontological status of their own.

The *Yenghē hātām* is an adaptation of Y.51.22, a Gāthic verse which refers to the sacrifice.⁵ It occurs at the end of the litanies of the *Yasna*, the *Visperad* and the *Vendidād*, and also in prayer formulas, such as the *Yašts*, the *Niyāyiš* and *Gāhs*, which are used by laymen as well as priests.⁶ The *Yenghē hātām* differs from the above-mentioned prayers in that although it is perceived as a separate prayer, it is never recited separately.⁷ The last of the four prayers, the *Airyema išyo*,⁸ is referred to less frequently than the other three

sky, water, tree, land, cattle, holy men, fire and all other collections of the world, whether in the high heavens or down below, what was it which God created such, as could keep Satan and the *Divs* under His control?' God replied to Zarathuštra: I first recited Ahunavar, and then I opened the gate of creation, because Ahunavar is the foundation of the good religion, and its words are the very essence of what is small and great. He produced the 24 *nasks* from it.' Modi 1924: 95.

¹ 'Asha is good, it is best. According to wish it is, according to wish it shall be for us. Asha belongs to Asha Vahišta' (tr. Boyce 1984:57).

² Modi 1922: 348, 349.

³ (Yt.XXI.I.) tr. Darmesteter 1981:311.

⁴ This kind of evaluation of the prayer is in keeping with the text in which it occurs; *Yašt* XXI is thought to be part of the lost *Hadōxt Nask*, which text itself is exegetical and therefore to all intents and purposes 'priestly'. According to chapter XLV of the *Dēnkard*, the *Hadōxt Nask* was mainly concerned with matters of orthopraxy. See Kreyenbroek 1985: 168, 9.

⁵ 'Those Beings, male and female, whom Lord Mazda knows the best for worship according to truth, we worship them all' (tr. Boyce 1984: 57).

⁶ In the *Dēnkard*, the *Yenghē hātām* is described as a prayer in praise of Ahura Mazdā and the Ameša Spentas, through them, all beings have been brought into existence, and through their especial creations mankind is provided with the right rituals for worship. See Dk.IX, XLIX, (1); Dk.IX, XXVII (1). (tr. West 1977d: 309 & 233).

⁷ In Avestan the word *yasnō.kereti* refers to a section of text ending with the *Yenghē hātām*, although there is some debate as to its precise meaning. In Y.57.22 Darmesteter understands the word *yasnō.kereti* to mean 'performance, conclusion of the sacrifice', and to denote the *Yenghē hātām* prayer. Kreyenbroek (1985: 88, 22 n.2) suggests that the term may be applied more generally: 'originally, however, the word *yasna* meant plainly "worship" and could thus presumably be used of any section of the sacred texts containing such expressions as *yazamaide* "we worship". The word *yasnō.kereti* -/ta - may therefore denote the recitation of such an "act of worship".'

⁸ 'May longed-for Airyaman come to the support of the men and women of Zarathuštra, to the support of good purpose. The Inner Self which earns the reward to be chosen, for it I ask the longed-for recompense of truth, which Lord Mazda will have in mind' (tr. Boyce 1984: 56).

prayers, and rarely in conjunction with them. No exegesis occurs, for example, in the section of the *yasna* known as the *Bagān Yašt*, nor is the prayer included in a contemporary daily prayer book for Parsis.¹ The reason for this may be that the *Airyema išyō* is usually recited by priests; however, the occasions for its recital, such as weddings and times of sickness, involves both priest and laity. Traditionally the prayer is important to lay worship, for it is part of the recital in the *Ašīrwād* or wedding ceremony. Although the divinity Airyaman is not mentioned in the *Gāthās*, this prayer is part of the *yasna* liturgy, following immediately after the *Gāthā* which celebrates the marriage of Zarathuštra's daughter Pourucištā, which suggests that the association between Airyaman and weddings is ancient. The *Airyema išyō* is also referred to in the *Avesta* as a *māthra* against sickness and impurity but we do not know which was thought to be more effective, the recitation of the prayer itself or the power of the divinity which it invoked. As with the *Ahuna vairya*, the *Airyema išyō* was evidently felt to act as a powerful weapon against evil; in Yt.3.5 it is described as the most effective healing remedy² and Vd.XX.12 says: 'May the much-desired Airyaman smite all manner of diseases and deaths, all the Yatus and Pairikas, and all the wicked Jainis.'³ Chapter XXII of the *Vendidād* describes how Airyaman is called from his mansion in the sky by Nairyosangha the messenger, in order to heal the diseases which afflict mankind.⁴ It is evident here that a similar type of ceremony of purification is performed by Airyaman 'in order to cleanse the unclean, that is to say, the sick man, and to restore him to health by virtue of the Nirang and of the holy word.'⁵ The *Airyema išyō* is important doctrinally, for at the end of time it is this prayer which will be recited by the Saoshyants in order to bring an end to evil in the world.⁶ As the prayer which will be recited at *Frashegird*, after which the world will be restored to its perfect state, the *Airyema išyō* is linked to the *Ahuna Vairya*, the first prayer to be uttered before incarnation; in the *Visparad* these two prayers are mentioned in conjunction.⁷

The Gāh prayers

The *Gāh* prayers are part of obligatory worship, the appropriate one being recited with the *kustī* prayers at the commencement of each of the five *gāhs*, or periods of the day. They have thus played an important part in the devotional life of the laity. To judge from ancient Indian usage, it appears that there were once three occasions for prayer. At some stage a third daytime and two night-time *gāhs* were introduced with the creation of five times of prayer for Zoroastrians instead of the original three; Boyce has suggested

¹ Rustomjee 1959.

² tr. Darmesteter 1981: 43-4.

³ tr. Darmesteter 1980: 222-3. Also Vd.XI.7.

⁴ tr. Darmesteter 1980: 232ff.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 230.

⁶ Fragment IV.2, tr. Mills 1981: 390.

⁷ (Vr.XX111.2) tr. Mills 1981: 363-4.

that the purpose of introducing additional *gāhs* was in order to increase the number of fixed times for prayer during which the worshipper was reminded of various tenets of the faith.¹ However, there appears to be no direct reference in the *gāh* prayers to these tenets, nor do the prayers seem particularly appropriate for recitation by the laity: they are long, complex in their construction, and full of speculative systemisations.² Each prayer begins with a profession of the faith followed by an invocation not only of the major protective divinities already referred to, but also of a number of *hamkārs*, or minor divinities, associated with the particular *gāh*. The names of five of these divinities appear to derive from old epithets; they occur in Young Avestan only, and are not mentioned in the Pahlavi, except in an occasional gloss on the *yasna*. These names are as follows: Berejya-, 'the one to be welcomed, in the dawn watch; Savanghi-, 'the one of the morning', in the morning watch; Fradat.fšu-, 'the one increasing livestock', in the noon watch; Fradat.vira-, 'the one increasing men', in the afternoon watch; and Fradat.vispem.hujyaiti-, 'the one furthering all that belongs to the good life', in the first night-watch.³ Unlike the *Niyāyiš*, the *gāhs* have no apparent core of verses which appear suited for use in private devotions. They vary in length between ten and thirteen verses and consist of a catalogue of divinities, beings and objects to be worshipped.⁴

I have not discussed the prayers above with reference to their ethical content or in terms of the meanings which they may have held for the laity in the history of the faith. In the earlier version of this study, I suggested a development whereby the pagan 'truth *māthra*' gave way to the moral teachings of the *Gāthās* as represented by the *Ahuna vairyo* prayer. In other words, there was a development from the pre-Zoroastrian notion

¹ Boyce 1975: 258-9.

² Darmesteter (ZA ii, pp.709, 710) maintains, on the contrary, that the *Gāh* prayers were intended to form a unit, based on the *yasna*, which priests could pray during the twenty-four hours. In the first part of the *yasna*, priests call down the *yazatas* to the offering that is to come: Y.1 3-7, Y.3 5-9, Y.4 8-12, Y.6 3-5, Y.7 5-9. The same set of invocations is made to the spirits of the *gāh*, and then to the ancillary spirits. Then comes the *bāj* which occurs again and again in the *yasna*. The second part of the *gāhs* reviews all the elements of the *yasna*: the gods to whom it is offered, the texts which are its words, the priesthood, the utensils which are used and finally the community which profits by it.

³ Kreyenbroek 1994: 3, n.9. Kreyenbroek suggests that these systemisations were the result of priestly speculation. This is apparent again in *Gāh* IV.1, where the *Zarathuštrōtema*, 'the one who is most like Zarathuštra', is invoked as a divinity. It has been suggested (Mills 1981: 385 n.8) that this term originally denoted the head of a priestly hierarchy. The four other members of this hierarchy are invoked as deities in each of the remaining *gāh* prayers respectively: *nmānya*, 'the one of the house' in *Gāh Ušahina*; *visya*- 'the one of the village' in *Gāh Hāvani*; *zantuma*- 'the one of the district' in *Gāh Rapithwina*; and *dahyuma*- 'the one of the country' in *Gāh Uzayeirina*. It has been argued by Gershevitch (1967: 265), and followed by Kreyenbroek (1994: 2), that (on the basis of a passage from Y.19.18: 'Who are the *ratus*? The *nmānya*, the *visya*, the *Zantuma*, the *daxiiuma*, Zarathustra is the fifth in countries other than Zoroastrian Rāgha. Zoroastrian Rāgha has four *ratus*. Who are its *ratus*? The *nmānya*, the *visya*, the *Zantuma*, Zarathstra is the fourth'), the divinities associated with the *Gāhs* derived their names from priestly titles. Kreyenbroek also makes the point that according to some texts, notably Yt.13.151, members of an ancient priesthood are said to be 'worshipped' according to this five-fold hierarchy, and this provides a parallel for its divinisation.

⁴ In Parsi practice, as reflected in a contemporary Parsi prayer book, the *gāh* prayers consist merely of a short dedication to the divinity of the *gāh* together with the divinised 'epithet' and the divinised *ratū*. This suggests that recitation of the elaborate version of the *gāh* prayers may always have belonged to priestly practice, although it was, theoretically, part of lay observance too.

that truth was potent in itself, regardless of moral or ethical elements, to the concept of revealed truth through the words of the prophet. It is these sorts of evolutionary assumptions which I now wish to avoid, not least because, with respect to the laity, they cannot be substantiated with discussions about belief, meaning, and ideas about morality. We do not know how and to whom the prophet's teachings were disseminated, nor whether (as Boyce suggests) he composed this prayer. We do not know what people understood by 'revelation' at that time, nor to what extent they ever abandoned ideas about the potency of 'truth' as an utterance. As will be shown in subsequent chapters, these are ideas which can only be explored effectively when there is more evidence available.

I have mentioned that parts of the above prayers were added, at some time, to the *Niyāyiš*. Other prayers, such as the *Ahuna vairyo*, provide good examples of the way in which prayers were represented, literally, as weapons against evil. This concept shows how, when the prayers ceased to be understood linguistically, they could still have been perceived as an effective, potent force.

The way in which verses from some of the prayers I have mentioned have been incorporated into the *Niyāyiš* gives these prayers a structural form. I shall examine these structures and also various themes: both those which are reminiscent of the *Yašts*, and those which appear particular to the *Niyāyiš*. It is partly as a result of their structure and partly because of the themes that run through them that I have grouped the *Niyāyiš* differently from the way in which they are numbered in the texts. I shall, therefore, look first at the three prayers addressed to those divinities who represent light phenomena - Fire (Ny.5), Sun (Ny.1) and Moon (Ny.3) - followed by those addressed to the divinity Mithra (Ny.2) and the goddess of the waters, Aredvī Sūrā Anāhitā (Ny.4). In order to make the structures of these prayers less difficult to visualise, I have given them in the form of a diagram on p.81.

The Ātaš Niyāyiš

Parts of the *Ātaš Niyāyiš* appear to be very old and it seems likely that some verses may once have formed an ancient prayer to fire. Apart from the content of these verses and the fact that the ideas expressed in them have parallels in the Rgveda, there are other indications of their antiquity which are to do with the structure of the prayer. Verses 7-16 contain what would seem to be the oldest parts of the *Niyāyiš*, and this section is preceded by the lesser *šnūman* to fire. The *šnūman*, or dedication to a divinity, normally occurs at the beginning of a prayer, and this is likely to have been a priestly addition, since the act of dedicating a prayer or rite appears to belong to the priestly sphere.¹ The

¹ The respective *šnūmans* are in praise of, and describe the attributes of, particular deities. In the Greater *Sirōza* the names of the gods invoked are introduced with the word *yazamaidē*, 'we sacrifice to', and some of the epithets are fuller than in those of the Lesser *Sirōza*.

šnūman to fire is unusually long,¹ and is preceded by a profession of the faith and the *gāh* according to the period of the day (v.4). That the prayer was recited by laymen seems clear, since the only qualification is that the fire must be maintained by 'one of full age'; the fire referred to dwells in the house and 'cooks the evening and the morning meal', which shows that it was indeed the household fire.

(7) Worthy of sacrifice are you, worthy of prayer!
worthy of sacrifice may you be, worthy of prayer in the dwellings of men! ...

(8) Mayest thou be provided with proper fuel: Mayest thou be provided with proper incense: Mayest thou be provided with proper nourishment: Mayest thou be maintained by one of full age! Mayest thou be maintained by one wise (in religion).
O fire, son of Ahura Mazda.

(13) Fire gives command to all for whom he cooks the evening and the morning meal. From all he solicits a good offering, and a wished-for offering, and a devotional offering ...²

There is no closing formula at the end of this prayer, such as occurs in the other *Niyāyiš*. There is, however, a distinguishing feature, namely that those verses which I have suggested belong to the oldest part (verses 7-16) are enclosed by Gāthic verses (Ny.5.1-3 = Y.33.12-14, Ny.5.17 = Y.34.4). The structure in which the core, or focal part, of a text is enclosed by other material is one which is characteristic of Zoroastrian texts. For example, the most sacred portion of the *yasna* liturgy, the *Yasna Haptanhaiti*, was enclosed by the *Gāthās* of the prophet which were set before and after it.³ The four prayers (mentioned above) were recited before and following this section, and, as the Younger Avestan texts were added, they enclosed and kept this ancient portion at the heart of the liturgy. The idea of 'enclosing' the most sacred part of a text also finds expression in everyday acts of religious observance. For example, the custom of 'taking the *baj*' is a way of enclosing or surrounding an act with prayer.⁴

My suggestion that verses 7-16 were once part of an older prayer dedicated to Fire is borne out by the fact that this section has remained intact in versions of the prayer which developed separately amongst the Iranian Zoroastrians and the Parsis in India.

Yasna 62, which is addressed to *Ātar*, corresponds to verses 7-16 of the *Ātaš Niyāyiš* and it seems possible that additions were made to these verses when they came to be recited in Zoroastrian priestly ritual. For example, Ny.5.7 begins with a reference to

¹ Cf. the *šnūmans* to the Sun (Ny.1.10), to the Moon (Ny.3.2), to Water (Ny.4.1) and to Mihr (Ny.2.10).

² Dhalla 1908: 155, 159, 175.

³ It will be seen that this structure has continued to be used in Zoroastrian texts, as one way of incorporating new material. In the song of the *Ātaš nu Gīt*, the compiler of the 1879 text has added the same material at both the beginning and the end of the earlier material.

⁴ Taking the *bāj* involves reciting an Avestan prayer (for example before a meal), performing the act in silence, and then 'leaving the baj' by reciting another Avestan prayer. Boyce 1984: 66.

the hearth fire, but ends with a priestly formula which is more in keeping with *Yasna* 62; in that ritual, an offering of *haoma* is made before the ritual fire during its recital :

Happiness may there be to that man
Who verily shall sacrifice unto Thee,
With fuel in his hand, with the Baresman in his hand,
With milk in his hand, with mortar in his hand.¹

We have no way of knowing when additions may have been made to the prayer; one suggestion would be that this development was linked to the temple cult of fire. The temple fire was tended by priests who, when reciting the traditional prayer to fire, may have added Gāthic verses to it and also, perhaps, the *šnūmman* to fire.

In Iranian manuscripts, those verses which I have suggested are late additions are not present,² although what seem to be the most ancient verses (vv. 7-16), stay intact. This is also true of another text, the Pahlavi *Nērang ī Ātakhš Abrōkhtan*, where an ancient Irani ritual for tending the fire is described.³ There, part of Ny.5.4 is recited, 'Homage unto thee, O Fire of Ahura Mazda, thou good-created, great Angel', followed by Y.33.11, then the opening line of Ny.5.4, 'Propitiation unto Ahura Mazda', then Y.35.2, and finally, when the fire blazes up, verse 1 of the *Niyāyiš* followed by verses 7-16. It is significant that here, as in all the various manuscripts both Indian and Iranian, the core of the prayer always remains; this is a further indication that the extended prayer was a later development.

There are verses in the *Ātaš Niyāyiš* which are very similar to the *Yašt* material both in structure and content. Verse 8 (above) of the prayer describes the offerings made to the hearth fire by the worshipper, several verses then follow in which benefits are asked for in return:

(10) Give unto me, O Fire, son of Ahura Mazda!
Well-being immediately, sustenance immediately;
Life immediately, well-being in abundance;
Sustenance in abundance, life in abundance ...
(11) (Give me) then the manly valour,
Which is ever afoot, sleepless
(For one third of the days and nights),
Watchful (even) while lying in bed.
(Give me) native offspring that give support,
Ruling over the region, belonging to the assembly, thoroughly
developed, possessed of good works, delivering from distress, of good
intellect, that may further my house, village, town, country (and) the
renown of the country.⁴

¹ Dhalla 1908: 155-7.

² See Geldner 1896: xl, xlv.

³ Kotwal 1985: 367.

⁴ Dhalla 1908, 163,169.

Thus, there is the need for sustenance and well-being (cf. Yt.5.130), for 'manly valour' and 'watchfulness' (cf. Yt.10.10), and for progeny (cf. Yt.19.75); likewise the desire to belong to the assembly (cf. Yt.8.15) and to be a good ruler (cf. Yt.10.17,18).

In verses 15 and 16 of the *Ātaš Niyāyiš* various boons are mentioned which will be granted to the worshipper if fire is propitiated:

(15) Then if that one brings unto him either fuel rightly brought, or Baresman rightly spread, of the plant Hadhanaepata,
To him thereupon, in fulfilment of his wish,
The fire of Ahura Mazda

Propitiated, unoffended, gives a blessing:

(16) May a flock of cattle attend upon thee,

A multitude of men upon thee,

And a may an active mind

And an active spirit attend upon thee,

Mayest thou live with a joyous life

The nights that thou livest!

This is Fire's blessing (upon him)

Who brings to him fuel,

Dry, exposed to light,

Purified in accordance with the ritual of righteousness.¹

As a personification of the hearth fire, the ancient Iranian fire-god *Ātar* was seen to dwell in the house; some of what appear to be the oldest verses of the *Ātaš Niyāyiš* are thus addressed directly to the fire itself. Being the centre of domestic and religious life, the personified hearth fire was evidently regarded as being both a protector and friend of the household:²

(14) Fire looks at the hands of all passers-by
'What does the friend bring to the friend,
The one that goes forth to the one that sits still?'

The bond of friendship was no doubt reinforced by the exchange of gifts; the image of mutual friendship is echoed in the *Gāthās* when Zarathuštra addresses Ahura Mazdā thus:

(Y.46.2.) I lament to Thee. Take notice of it, Lord, offering the support which a friend should grant to a friend.³

¹ *Ibid.*, 179,181.

² The role of fire as a protector of the house is attested in an early and relatively little known Persian poem, the *Humāynāme*, which despite its Muslim authorship contains some evidently Zoroastrian elements:

Wisdom causes men to reach god
And it would never let him go astray
Resolve to worship fire
Prepare yourself a place near the fire
One cannot rest at all without fire
Houses are protected by fire.

(tr. Arberry 1963: 13).

³ Boyce 1984: 42.

The belief that prayers and offerings reached the gods through the upward movement of fire seems to have been an ancient one, and it is probably in this connection that Nairyosangha's name appears in the *Ātaš Niyāyiš*, for traditionally he is known as the messenger of Ahura Mazda.¹

It can be seen that one of the central themes of the *Yašts*, that of offering/petition/reward is also present in the *Ātaš Niyāyiš*. A new structure appears in the prayer in which verses are added at the beginning and end of an existing corpus; this is a structure which is characteristic of the way in which Zoroastrian texts are organised and is not one which can be identified in the *Yašts*. The difference between the two texts is that in the *Yašts* the worship is focused upon the sacrifice while in the *Ātaš Niyāyiš* it is centred around the household fire. Whereas the gods of the *Yašts* descended to partake of the sacrificial offering, the prayers were evidently thought to rise up to reach the gods. The *Yašts* may be said to represent worship on a grand scale, the *Ātaš Niyāyiš* is evidently concerned with domestic worship. Fire is mentioned very little in the *Yašts*, and there is no *Yašt* to fire. This would seem to indicate that the worship of fire in ancient times was confined to the cult of the hearth fire. Water, on the other hand, features prominently in the *Yašts* and so the questions remain as to why, in later Zoroastrianism, fire became more important than water, and about the nature of the process by which this development took place.

The Khuršīd Niyāyiš

As with the prayer to fire, parts of the *Khuršīd Niyāyiš* appear to be very old, and it may well be that the *Yašt* addressed to the sun developed from this ancient prayer. *Yašt* 6, addressed to the sun, begins with the verse corresponding to verse 11 of the *Niyāyiš*, the first two lines of which are the greater *šnūman* to the sun. In both cases the lesser *šnūman* comes just before the greater *šnūman*, and in the *Niyāyiš* (v.10) this in turn is preceded by a profession of the faith (Y.12.1) and a dedicatory formula to the *gāh*.

The *Khuršīd Yašt* corresponds with the *Niyāyiš* as far as verse 17, the penultimate verse of the prayer, and it is this section which contains the primary invocation to the sun, forming what seems to be the core of the prayer; the fact that it is introduced by the *šnūman* suggests that verses 11-17 may indeed have formed an original prayer to the sun.

Prominent in this prayer is the idea of the sun as instrumental to cosmic order; verses 13 and 14 describe what would happen if the sun were not to rise, and the sacrifice and worship necessary for its veneration:

¹ Vd.19.34, 22.7. Nairyosangha is also linked with the hearth fire in Y.17.11. His name only appears once in the *Niyāyiš* (Ny.5.6) and this is in connection with fire; by origin he is the same divinity as the Vedic Narāsansa, the concept of the latter having arisen from an appellation of the proto-Indo-Iranian god of fire Agni, conceived as the messenger who goes forth between heaven and earth. See Darmesteter 1980: 231 n.2.

Ny.1.13 If indeed the Sun were not to rise, then the Demons would kill all things that are in the seven regions. Not at all would the spiritual yazatas find support and stability in the material world.

(14) Who so sacrifices unto the Sun that is immortal, radiant, (and) swift-horsed, in order to withstand darkness, to withstand the thieves and robbers, to withstand the sorcerers and the enchantresses, to withstand death that creepeth on ... He propitiates all heavenly and earthly yazatas, who sacrifices unto the Sun that is immortal, radiant, swift-horsed.¹

The concept that the elements of fire and water should be kept free from contamination seems also to have been an ancient one. In the *Ātaš Niyāyiš* fire is said to be maintained in purity by being provided with clean, dry fuel (Ny.5.16 see p.70); here, it is the sun which is seen as the purifying force:

(Ny.1.12) When the Sun rises up, purification comes unto the earth made by Ahura, purification unto the flowing waters, purification unto the waters of the wells, purification unto the water of the seas, purification unto the water that is standing. Purification comes unto the righteous creation, which is of the Holy Spirit.²

An interesting aspect of this *Niyāyiš* is the inclusion of three verses dedicated to Mithra (Ny.1.6,7,15), all of which appear to be old; verse 6 contains an invocation to Mithra which corresponds to verse 7 of the *Mihr Yašt*; verses 7 and 15 continue in praise of the divinity, although the last two lines of verse 15 are unrelated to Mithra and refer to the friendship which exists between the sun and the moon.³

Verse 16 of the *Niyāyiš* contains the priestly formula for worship which would normally be used to conclude such a prayer; it occurs at the end of each *karde* in the *Yašts* and in 4 out of 5 of the *Niyāyiš*, the exception being the *Ātaš Niyāyiš*. Verse 17 is the *āfrināmi*, or blessing, corresponding to verse 7 in the *Khuršīd Yašt*, and it is here that the *Yašt* ends. In the *Niyāyiš*, however, there is a Pāzand addition between verses 16 and 17 which is an indication that the compiler of this prayer in its final form was aware that the concluding verses of the prayer had been added at a relatively late stage. Verse 18⁴ has again been added later and apparently derives from *yasna* 68 which is dedicated to the waters:

(Y.68.10) If any man shall sacrifice to you, O ye good waters, the Ahurian ones of Ahura! with the best and most fitting Zaothras offered piously.

(Ny.1.18) [Whoso sacrifices unto] the Ahurian waters of Ahura with most excellent oblations, with fairest oblations, with oblations filtered by the pious man,

¹ Dhalla 1908: 45, 47.

² *Ibid.*, 41.

³ It is worth noting that parts of Ny.1.7 appear in Yt.19.35 and Yt.10.145, but verse 15 of the *Niyāyiš* does not occur in the extant version of Yt.10. Again, verses 7 and 15, which are devoted to Mithra, do not appear in the *Niyāyiš* addressed to Mithra, yet their antiquity suggests that perhaps they may have once belonged to the hymn in praise of that divinity, but later came to be omitted in one text, while being preserved in the other.

⁴ Verse 18 is missing in some manuscripts.

[give] unto that man radiance ... as I bless. A thousand ... ten thousand of the healing remedies. Come unto us for help, O Mazda! ... of the Time of Long Dominion. [Pazand] The reward of merit ... as I bless.¹

This verse seems oddly placed here, in a prayer dedicated to the sun, and there is no way of knowing when it was added to what may have been the original prayer. The waters are described here as the 'wives of the Ahura' (*ahuraniš ahurahe*), an archaic usage which does not occur in the *Ābān Niyāyiš* nor in the *Yašt* dedicated to Aredvī Sūrā Anāhitā; the fact that it occurs both here and in Y.68 suggests priestly re-handling of what was once a prayer recited by both priest and laity. In the same verse the reference to the 'Time of Long Dominion' may be an indication perhaps of Western Iranian influence by Zurvanite priests.² It is not possible to tell, however, when it became obligatory for Zoroastrians to recite the *Khuršīd Niyāyiš* three times in the day.

As in the *Ātaš Niyāyiš*, it is evident from the *Khuršīd Niyāyiš* that prayers were thought to ascend to the gods:

(Ny.1.1) May this (homage) seek its way so as to reach unto Ahura Mazda, this (homage) unto the Archangels, this (homage) unto the Guardian Spirits of the righteous, this unto Vayu, that follows its Own Law for the Long Period.³

From the above description of the *Khuršīd Niyāyiš*, it may be said that, as with the *Ātaš Niyāyiš*, what has been identified as the core of the prayer appears to be old. Again, what seem to have been additions have been placed before and after the early text.

The Māh Niyāyiš

Some of the concepts expressed in the *Māh Niyāyiš* are recognisable as belonging to ancient times.⁴ In comparison with the *Niyāyiš* looked at so far, the prayer is relatively

¹ Dhalla 1908: 61.

² See Boyce 1982: 237-8: 'Zurvan in Avestan texts'.

³ Dhalla 1908: 5.

⁴ There are striking similarities between the Avestan and Vedic ideas concerning the moon. In RV.VII.55.7, the moon is described as being 'horned' in the sense of resembling (when crescent) the horns of a bull (Doniger O'Flaherty 1984: 289 and with n.6).

In another passage the moon is linked both with the bull and with natural order:

(RV.1.84.15:) Then verily they recognised the essential form of Tvashtar's Bull,
Here in the mansions of the Moon.

(16) Who yokes today unto the pole of Order the strong and passionate steers of checkless spirit,
With shaft-armed mouths, heart-piercing, health-bestowing.

Long shall he live who richly pays their service.

The expression *Tvashtar's Bull* here is in fact an obscure epithet for the sun; it has been suggested that the purport of verse 15 may be that when, after the rains, the bright moonlit nights came, men recognised the fact that the light was borrowed from the sun (Griffiths 1963: vol.1, 108 n.15). In Iranian tradition the bull seems only to be associated with the moon, it is interesting to note, however, that according to the *Rivāyats* the same conclusion had been reached in Iran concerning the relationship between the sun and moon: 'about the waxing and waning of the moon, it should be known that it has no light of its own, but recognises the light of the sun' (Dhabhar 1932: 305). In India the association of the moon with the growth of plants led to its identification with Soma, 'king of the plants' (Griffiths 1963: vol. 2, 269), from whence came the appellation *pavamana*, 'self-purifying' (Basham 1967: 238). Both the purifying

short, consisting of eleven verses, and, unlike the *Ātaš* and *Khuršīd Niyāyiš*, there is no single section here which can readily be distinguished as forming an integral part of an older layer. There are Zoroastrian elements which have apparently been added to some of the verses, but the structure of the prayer suggests that it remained essentially unchanged since its conception; this is indicated partly by the fact the *Māh Yašt* corresponds to verses 1-8 of the *Niyāyiš*, whereas the *Khuršīd Yašt* commences with a verse corresponding to verse 11 of the *Khuršīd Niyāyiš*, that is, where the earlier part of the prayer seems to begin. The prayer opens with the Lesser *Šnūman* to the moon (Sr.1.12) which is another indication that what follows is old (since, in oral transmission, additions are generally made either at the beginning of a text or at the end). Although this dedication is likely to have been added to the prayer in later times, it embodies an ancient myth in which the moon is associated with the Uniquely-created Bull, *Gāv aēvo.dāta*: (Ny.3.2.), 'unto the Moon that has the seed of the Bull. Unto the Bull of many species'. According to the Zoroastrian version of the myth, the bull was killed by Ahriman; part of his seed was taken up to the moon (hence the moon's epithet *gao.cithra*, 'having the seed of the bull') from where, after being purified, some of it fell to the ground resulting in the growth of many different kinds of plants.¹

A striking characteristic of the *Māh Niyāyiš* is the strong impression it gives of the worshipper praying while turned to face the moon:²

(Ny.3.1.) Homage unto the moon that has the seed of the Bull. Homage (unto the Moon) when looked at. Homage with the look.

(Ny.3.3.) Homage unto Ahura Mazda ... Homage with the look.

(Ny.3.5.) Now I look at the Moon. Now I present myself to the Moon. I present myself to the brilliant Moon.³

The phases of the moon are mentioned in verse 4, the last part of which is reminiscent of *yasna* 44.3, where Zarathuštra asks Ahura Mazda, 'This I ask Thee, tell me truly, Lord ... Through whom does the moon wax, then wane?'⁴

Verses 7-10 of the *Niyāyiš* form a familiar pattern of worship; verse 7 begins with the dedication to the moon followed by a list of its particular attributes; these include

properties of the moon and its connection with plants are referred to in the Iranian creation myth; plants are also mentioned in the *Māh Niyāyiš* (verse 6).

¹ Boyce 1975: 139.

² Zoroastrians are required to recite the *Māh Niyāyiš* three times in the month while turned towards the moon. According to the *Persian Farziātnāme and Kholaseh-i Din of D.D. Pahlān* (Modi 1924), the fourth of the six religious duties required of Zoroastrians is that they should recite the *Khuršīd* and *Mīhr Niyāyiš* thrice a day, and the *Māh Niyāyiš* three times during the month. In verse 6 of the prayer three divisions in the month are referred to, the Antaremah, Perenomah and Vishaptatha. In the *Rivāyats*, which refer to six monthly 'pentads', the laity are enjoined to recite the *Māh Niyāyiš* at the time of the new moon, the full moon, and when it wanes (Dhabhar 1932: 284). Zoroastrians may recite their *kustī* prayers during the two night-time *gāhs* while facing the moon, as a form of fire; we do not know, however, when prayers during these *gāhs* were introduced.

³ Dhalla 1908: 85, 89, 95.

⁴ tr. Boyce 1984: 34.

water, warmth, knowledge, wealth, riches, verdure and healing powers. Verse 8 contains the priestly formula for worship, and in verse 9, the moon is blessed. There then follows a verse in which benefits are asked for in return:

(Ny.3.10) Give strength and victory
 Give a satisfactory supply of cattle
 Give a multitude of men,
 Steadfast, belonging to the assembly,
 Vanquishing, not vanquished,
 Vanquishing adversaries at one stroke,
 Vanquishing enemies at one stroke,
 Of manifest help unto the blessed.¹

These boons closely resemble those which are requested by the laity in the *Yašts*.²

The final verse in the *Niyāyiš*, as in the prayer to the sun, is an invocation to the waters to whom healing powers are attributed.

According to this short prayer addressed to the moon, there seems to have been a definite link in people's minds between the moon, bovines and plant life. It is different from the two *Niyāyiš* looked at so far in that it contains references to pre-Zoroastrian mythology, as evidenced by *Rg Vedic* sources.

The *Khuršid*, *Māh* and *Ātaš Niyāyiš* may be grouped together for various reasons. All three prayers are addressed to divinities who represent physical light phenomena, the sun, the moon, and fire respectively, and are represented as personifying those phenomena. In the case of *Hvar Khšaēta*, the 'radiant Sun', and *Māh*, the Moon, these concepts were simple and direct, while the Iranian fire-god, *Ātar*, appears originally to have been a personification of the ever-burning hearth fire, to be found 'in the dwellings of men'.³

It seems to have been an ancient concept that the natural order of things would be maintained by sacrifice and prayer, that the sun would rise every day, the moon would wax and wane, night would follow day and season upon season (see Ny.1.13, Ny.3.4, 6). In Zoroastrianism, fire came to be associated with *Aša*: in verse 17 of the *Ātaš Niyāyiš*,⁴ a Gāthic verse which may have been added to the original prayer, this association is referred to.⁵

A final point to consider when comparing these prayers concerns their structure. It seems that all three contain elements which appear to be ancient, and that the verses in which these occur form the core of each prayer. In all three *Niyāyiš* these sections are

¹ Dhalla 1908: 107.

² There are parallels too in the *Rgveda* where the moon is invoked to provide wealth and cattle, to destroy demons and to grant eloquence to the men in the assembly: (RV.IX.13.9; IX.62.10-12; IX.86.48).

³ See p.68.

⁴ In Wolff (1910: 144) this is verse 18.

⁵ (Y.34.4) 'Then we wish Thy fire, Lord, strong through Truth, very swift, mighty, to be of manifest help to thy supporter, but of visible harm, O Mazda, with the forces in his hands, to Thy enemy' (tr. Boyce 1984: 38).

introduced by a *šnūman* or dedication, which may be priestly additions. There is no knowing at what stage in the history of the faith this development took place, but it seems possible that it happened after the advent of the temple cult of fire; certainly in the case of the *Ātaš Niyāyiš*, this prayer came to be recited during the ritual tending of the temple fire. It is the position of the dedication within the *Niyāyiš* which is an indication of where the original prayer began, for *šnūmans*, being dedicatory prayers, are normally recited before the text of the prayer proper. In the *Ātaš Niyāyiš* the *šnūman* occurs in verse 5, in the *Khuršīd Niyāyiš* in verse 10, and in the *Māh Niyāyiš* in verse 1. The latter two prayers both contain the priestly closing formula for worship at the end of what appears to be the earlier part of the prayer (Ny.1.17, Ny.3.8).

The *Khuršīd* and *Māh Yašts* are short and resemble prayers rather than most *Yašts*. Although it is impossible to say which category these texts belonged to originally, hymns or prayers, the fact that they are so similar in content to the texts of the *Khuršīd* and *Māh Niyāyiš* suggests that they were once lay prayers addressed to the sun and moon respectively, and that eventually they came to be recited as *Yašts*.

The Mihr and Ābān Niyāyiš

The *Mihr* and *Ābān Niyāyiš* have been treated together here for they share a number of characteristics which distinguish them from the other three prayers. Both are addressed to Zoroastrian divinities, whose cults were perhaps especially prominent in Western Iran, and both *Niyāyiš* appear to derive from the *Yašts* to these divinities, whereas in the case of the *Khuršīd* and *Māh Niyāyiš* it seems that the *Yašts* may have developed from the prayers.

Verses 1-9 of the prayer to Mithra are the same as verses 1-9 of the prayer to the sun, with the exception of verse 6 of the *Mihr Niyāyiš*, in which the *šnūman* to the sun is omitted from the beginning of the verse. Verse 10 follows with the profession of the faith, the *gāh* according to the time of day, and the lesser *šnūman* to Mihr. Verses 11 and 12 correspond to verses 144 and 145 of *Yašt* 10; verse 12 referring to the stars, moon and sun, i.e. other light phenomena. In the context of a *Yašt*, the phrase 'trees yielding *baresman*' mentioned here probably refers obliquely to the animal sacrifice:

(Ny.2.12) We sacrifice unto Mithra and Ahura,
The exalted, imperishable, righteous ones.
And the Stars, the Moon, and the Sun,
By means of trees yielding Baresman.
We sacrifice unto Mithra, the lord
Of all countries.¹

The text of the prayer from verse 13 onwards corresponds with that which concludes each *karde* of the *Mihr Yašt* (10.4-6) ending with the priestly formula for

¹ Dhalla 1908: 73.

worship (cf. Ny.1.16, 3.8, 4.9). When viewed together with the other prayers, in the diagram at the end of this chapter, it can be seen that the *Mihr Niyāyiš* has no central core of verses which belong to the prayer alone.

The juxtaposition of the *Khuršīd* and *Mihr Niyāyiš*, and also the fact that they have the first nine verses in common, makes it seem at least possible that the latter prayer was formulated after the faith had reached the West, perhaps as a result of the popularity of the cult of Mithra amongst the Persians, to become almost an extension of the older prayer to the sun.

The prayer to the waters similarly consists mainly of verses from the hymn to Aredvī Sūrā Anāhitā (Yt. 5); the first verse is the lesser *šnūman* to the waters; but here it is not preceded either by the *gāh* prayer or by the profession of the faith. Verses 2-7 of the *Niyāyiš*, 1-6 of *Yast* 5, and 1-5 of *Yasna* 65 are the same. The last two verses of the *Niyāyiš* again conclude with the customary *Yenghē hātām* prayer.

As with the sun, moon and fire, water was thought to have purifying properties, 'She purifies my waters, she [purifies] the seed of males, the wombs of females, the milk of females' (v.6).

In the *Yast* to Aredvī Sūrā Anāhitā, there are verses which may have been added in order to honour a cult statue of the goddess.¹ In the verses which correspond to the prayer, however, there is no such imagery. Here the goddess is simply one with the mythical river, flowing and streaming forth into the Sea Vourukasha (v.5).

It seems that Mithra and Anāhitā were already popular divinities in Western Iran prior to the advent of Zoroastrianism. Once the faith had become established in the West, during Achaemenian times, there is evidence that the cults of these divinities remained prominent. In the inscriptions of Artaxerxes II (404-358 B.C.), the king invokes a triad of divinities, Ahuramazda, Mithra and Anāhitā, whereas previously it was only Ahura Mazda who was invoked by name by the Achaemenian kings in their inscriptions. The religious system which was brought to the west of Iran no doubt underwent considerable change during the process of becoming established in that area. We know very little about this time but it seems reasonable to suggest that the cults of Mithra and Anāhitā, which were popular in the west at least by Achaemenian times, may have manifested themselves in new Zoroastrian prayers which were adapted from what we know to be ancient *Yasts* addressed to those divinities.

Conclusion

The central issue of this study is the laity, and what we can and cannot say about lay activity at various times in the past according to the information contained in various texts. Since there is very little evidence concerning the laity for the ancient period, this chapter has dealt, in part, with the broader issue of interpretation, and questions of a more

¹ See p. 58.

general nature which concern the way in which various categories of information are extracted from texts. Apart from the few obviously Zoroastrian elements added to the *Yašts*, the implied layer of Zoroastrianism is in fact very meagre; a possible reference to hell (Yt.10.32), and to the creations of Ahura Mazda (Yt.13.76). It has been argued by scholars of Iranian studies that the lack of Zoroastrian elements in what appear to be the oldest layers of the *Yašts*, together with what are assumed to be un-Zoroastrian elements such as the prohibitions described in Yt.5, 14, 8 and 17 suggest that these parts of the texts represent the 'pagan' religion as it was before Zarathuštra preached. Alternatively, these elements have been interpreted as a dilution of the Zoroastrian faith through a return to 'pagan' beliefs and practices which he would have rejected. I have not pursued this line of enquiry since it is not possible to relate these texts, chronologically, to the prophet's teachings. I have looked at some different approaches, with reference mainly to the field of anthropology, in order to suggest alternatives to the notions of morality and to the evolutionary approach to religious ideas which is invariably adopted by orientalists. Here it can be seen that, again, there is not sufficient evidence about the laity according to the *Yašts* to form conclusions based upon the anthropological theories which I have discussed, and which are relevant to the subject matter of these texts, that is, sacrificial worship.

It might reasonably be asked why I have included these texts in this study, since so little can be drawn from them with reference to the laity. Their usefulness lies in the fact that, as I have already mentioned, these are the histories of the faith; the themes and the structures which we find in later texts were, in part, developed from and shaped by the ideas and the traditions which belonged to the ancient culture. The focus of this study is a nineteenth-century text, and we are able to draw on a number of additional sources of information in order to substantiate ideas about the laity with reference to that text. There is also information provided by the oral testimony of people alive today whose grandparents were part of the society to which the 1879 publication of the *Ātaš nu Gī* belonged. However, the structure, themes, rituals and references to historical events contained in the song are linked in various ways to the past. This particular past is only available to us through oral texts which were not committed to writing, for the most part, until the ninth century, and most of which are associated with a still more ancient time.

Whereas the *Yašts* are representative of worship on a grand scale and belong to gods, heroes, kings and priests, the *Niyāyiš*, in particular the *Ātaš Niyāyiš*, allude to the domestic side of worship. In the *Yašts*, evil is represented in the form of *daeva*-worshipping enemies, sorcerers and witches, tyrants, *kavis* and *karapans*; these beings are repudiated in battle by strong heroes, i.e. righteous men, and by powerful deities such as Mithra and Verethraghna whose strength is portrayed in warlike terms. In the *Niyāyiš*, the forces of evil are held at bay by the power of prayer, by fire and by the wearing of the *kustī*. It can be seen that power is ascribed in an undifferentiated way to

the Aryan peoples, brave heroes, gods, the fire, the sun, and to truth and purity. It is, therefore, very difficult to extract any one of these elements, for example, 'truth', and to interpret it within the context of Western ideas about morality. What we can say, on the other hand, is that the concept of dualism is prominent in these texts; this is a dualism which does not divide between the sacred and the profane, or the material and spiritual, but between gods and demons, and between harmful and beneficent creations, senses, actions, and thoughts. There is no evidence, according to the early material, that these notions had developed into an organised theological system. There is no doubt, however, that there is a more pronounced layer of implicitly Zoroastrian ideas in the texts of the *Niyāyiš* when compared to those of the *Yašt*s. While we cannot tell when, for example, the explicitly Zoroastrian verses such as those from the *Gāthās* were added, it is the way in which they were added which is significant. The structure of the prayers which emerges as the result of these additions is distinctly Zoroastrian in character; by this I mean the way in which late verses are set before and after what may have been the earlier part of the text, thus, as it were, enclosing or protecting it. In a similar way, the most sacred part of the liturgy is enclosed by Young Avestan texts.

The two themes which emerge as a result of the study of these early texts are, first, the representations of lay participation in religious activity; this is as much as we can suggest, there are no realities. Second, the dynamics of change as represented by the way in which the structure of certain texts can be seen to have developed, thereby acquiring a more Zoroastrian character. In the *Yašt*s, we have representations which are the agents of change; I have given as an example the hymn addressed to Aredwī Sūrā Anāhitā in which the goddess appears both as a divinity of the waters and as a cult statue. I have mentioned that the religious activities of priest and laity in the *Yašt*s is essentially conservative, people are represented as reproducing their religion. In the *Niyāyiš*, on the other hand, there is a more pronounced idea of transformation; people are represented as making additions; re-ordering and changing existing texts, rituals and observances.

From these observations it is possible to add some purely speculative suggestions, again, based upon the re-structuring of the *Niyāyiš*. The first concerns the priesthood, for it was probably priests who were responsible for the final form of these prayers. I have shown that it not possible to determine the respective role of priests and lay people according to the ancient texts; the most one could suggest is that whereas priests are likely to have played an essential role in the blood/*haoma* sacrifice, there is evidence to suggest that the laity also participated in rituals such as the holding of the *baresman*, and the partaking of the *haoma* libation. As far as the *Niyāyiš* are concerned, the verses which were added are ones which in modern usage are part of priestly ritual. With regard to the *Ātaš Niyāyiš* in particular, it seems likely that this was an ancient prayer performed by the householder before the hearth fire. The cult of fire probably came to be emphasised in the Zoroastrian priestly tradition first through the performance of the *yasna*, at which the laity

may or may not have participated; second, through the development of the temple cult of fire which required priests for the ritual tending of the sacred fire. It seems possible, therefore, that the lengthening of the *Niyāyiš* may have coincided with the elaboration of certain rituals; for example, those that developed from the cult of the hearth fire when it became elevated to the temple fire. The additions of the *gāh* prayers are also likely to have been a priestly innovation since these prayers consist largely of priestly systemisations, such as the divinisation of old epithets. The development of the temple cult occurred in western Iran, once Zoroastrian ideas had taken root there, and so it may be that the *Mihr* and *Ābān Niyāyiš* were extended and developed at that time, in response perhaps to the cults of Mithra and Anāhita which were prominent in the west.

<i>Ātaš Niyāyis</i>	<i>Khuršīd Niyāyis</i>	<i>Māh Niyāyis</i>	<i>Mihr Niyāyis</i>	<i>Ābān Niyāyis</i>
1	1	1 Lesser Šnuman to moon	1	1
2	2	2 Propitiation & <i>Gāh</i>	2	2
3	3	3	3	3 Yt.6.1-6
4	4	4 <i>Māh Yašt</i>	4	4 Y.65.1-5
5	5	5	5 = verses 1-9 of	5
6	6 = Yt.10.7	6	6 <i>Khuršīd Niyāyis</i>	6
7	7 verse to Mithra	7	7	7
8	8	8 šnuman	8	8
9	9	9 Ny.1.16	9	9 <i>Yenghē hātām</i>
10	10 Lesser Šnuman to sun	10 Moon blessed	10 Y12.1 + <i>Gāh</i> + L. Šn.	
11	11	10 benefits asked for	11 Yt.10.144	
12	12	11	12 Yt. 10.145	
13	13 Core of prayer		13	
14	14 Yt.6 begins		14 ending of each <i>karde</i> of	
15	15 Verse to Mithra		15 <i>Mihr Yašt</i>	
16	16 Ny.1.16 formula			
17	17 Afrinami or blessing			
	18 Y.68 to the Waters			
	19			

CHAPTER 3 HISTORICAL BACKGROUNDS TO THE *ĀTAŠ NU GĪT* OF 1879

The purpose of this chapter is to prepare the ground for the text which will be the focus of the following two chapters, the *Ātaš nu Gīt*. My investigations in this chapter, therefore, will be guided by the song which is to follow. With respect to the subject of the laity in the previous chapter, my discussion has centred on the texts of the *Yašts* and the *Niyāyiš*, and so thus far it has been possible only to talk about representations or conceptualisations of lay activity. The texts which I shall discuss in the present chapter range from the theological, to the ritual, epic and narrative. The aim of this discussion is to make connections between the various themes contained in these texts and those which we find in the song. The main difference between this material and the sources for the ancient period is that it belongs, for the main part, to historical time. This means that we can begin to gather evidence from outside these texts, evidence which adds substance to their content. As we approach the modern era, sources become more varied and prolific, and so we are able to move, gradually, from representations to realities, from images in texts to a more coherent historical picture. This does not mean that one category of knowledge is used, exclusively, to inform the other; rather, both categories are interrelated in different ways and interact with each other. The way in which this process can work is evident in the *Ātaš nu Gīt*, where we find both representations and realities of individual/communal lay activity in the same text. This raises questions as to how one may have affected the other for, whilst realities are likely to have been informed by representations, representations themselves are informed by experiences as well as by intellectual traditions.

Throughout this chapter it will be necessary to refer to the *Ātaš nu Gīt*, which comes later in this work. The song directs attention to individuals and their activities, to certain places, events and local issues which can be substantiated with reference to historical sources. I have arranged the material in this way, therefore, in order to give some historical background by way of preparation for the song, despite the difficulties of having to anticipate some of the contents of the following chapter.

The *Ātaš nu Gīt* belongs to the Indian rather than the Iranian tradition; it is a Gujarati song which tells the story of the building of an *agiāry* and the enthronement of a sacred *Ātaš Bahrām* within it. Although the song is primarily about lay people and their activities, nevertheless it has acquired a sacralised character. Today, a performance of the song, together with its accompanying rituals may take place within the *agiāry*: it is commissioned both by priestly and lay families and has become part of recognised devotional life. The *Ātaš nu Gīt* bears the hallmarks of an oral text and thus presents similar problems for analysis as the *Yašts* and the *Niyāyiš* in terms of the different layers which appear to have been added to existing material. We do not know when the song

was first written down, nor by whom; however, it was included in a book of Parsi *garbas* and *monājāts* which was published in 1879, and so, unlike the earlier texts, the *Ātaš nu Gīt* can be located in time. While the circumstances surrounding this date need not necessarily be closely associated with the song as a whole, it gives us a starting point from which to examine the material in the light of contemporary sources of the time. From this perspective we can see whether or not there are elements which are related to particular historical conditions. In other words: is this text saying something concrete? how does it respond to the particular pressures of the time? can we find locally circumscribed meanings? These are precisely the sorts of questions which we cannot ask of the ancient texts, for they are beyond historical consideration.

According to popular tradition, the *Ātaš nu Gīt* was composed in 1765 to mark the consecration of the Navsari *Ātaš Bahrām*, the second of its kind to be founded by the Parsis since their arrival in India in the tenth century. The founding of this particular fire, and the events leading up to it are described in a Persian text, the *Qissa-ye Zartuštīān-i Hīndustān*, composed by a member of a priestly family sometime between 1765 and 1805.¹ The second part of this text, entitled *Bayān - ī Ātaš Bahrām - ī Nausari*, closely resembles the song in its references to certain people and historical events; in a sense the *Ātaš nu Gīt* is the lay counterpart of this text, and we can reasonably assume that both texts are referring to some at least of the same events. However, the song also contains later material, reflecting a time which is closer to the publication of the 1879 text, and so we have to allow that it may have been composed with the older material being incorporated anachronistically. However, we have no way of knowing how long this 'older' material had been in existence, for there may have been a 'Song of the Fire' in oral transmission since ancient times. In order to shed light on its temporal origins, therefore, three basic questions should be asked of the text; first, to what extent does the content of the song appear to belong to the period of its publication, 1879? Second, does it contain material which pre-dates the 1879 publication, in other words, belonging to the period of the construction of the *agiāry* in 1765? Finally, are there elements in the song which belong to a still more ancient tradition?

In this chapter I shall organise the material around these three times, beginning with older traditions which, it seems from the song, the laity in the nineteenth century were aware of through the medium of stories and oral and/or written texts. This section will be followed by two more in which I shall look at the historical background of the song with reference, first, to the purported date of its composition, 1765, and, second, to the date of its publication, 1879.

¹ In this text there is a detailed description of the priestly rituals required to establish the *agiāry*, and the account is very similar to that contained in the Persian *Rivāyat* of Kamdin Šapur given in the collection of *Rivāyats* belonging to Darab Hormazdyar (who himself is referred to in the *Qissa - ye Zartuštīān - ī Hīndustān*). See Dhabhar 1932: 63-65.

Within the framework of these three historical phases I shall draw out those elements in which I am interested, both with respect to the song, and to this study as a whole. Broadly speaking, these centre around four themes: first, the question of temporality and the way in which notions of time are presented in oral texts. In this study, the concept of temporality is closely linked to that of orality with respect to the Zoroastrian textual sources. The *Ātaš nu Gīt* is no exception, and it is here, particularly, that we see how the layered nature of an oral composition produces a multiplicity of times. The second theme is that of lay/priestly relations. By the eighteenth century there is sufficient documentation concerning the priesthood for us to be able to form a clearer picture than before as to who non-priests, 'the laity', are, the activities of certain groups and individuals, and their relationship with priests. Third, is the theme of identity, by which I mean the way in which the community perceived or defined itself in social terms, in religious terms, and in relation to the host or dominant community to whom it looked as the centre of secular authority. The fourth theme is that of cosmology and eschatology, which is present in one form or another both in the texts I have already examined and in those to come. As I shall show, cosmological and eschatological ideas are not only present in theological works, but also form a working, structural theme in some later Zoroastrian texts of Indian origin, as well as in the *Ātaš nu Gīt*. There is another, recurring, structural theme which links the terrestrial world to the cosmological world by means of the worshipper and the divine, and that is the cycle of petition, offering and reward.

Although these four themes are present in the texts which I have discussed in the first two chapters of this work, there was no means by which to explore them. I have argued that the lack of evidence concerning the laity for this period means that we cannot suggest a continuity of lay observance, based upon a single system of ritual and/or belief, which can be traced from the modern era back to ancient times. There is, nevertheless, continuity in terms of themes and structures, and this needs to be addressed in some way. An alternative for the term 'continuity' could perhaps be 'genealogy', and so we could refer to a thematic genealogy which would, in a sense, support the continuity thesis without having to assume that certain things were going on at a time when we cannot possibly substantiate such a premise. In other words, all that I am suggesting is that the present is the product of various lineages, and that by studying those lineages we can make careful selections from the past which are of direct relevance to the present.¹ What it does not mean is that we can then make sense of the long distant past by reference to the present.

¹ For a discussion of the use of genealogy as a form of historical description see D.F. Bouchard (ed.), 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History' in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: selected essays and interviews by Michel Foucault*, New York 1977, pp.139ff. See also J. Clifford, *Predicament and Culture*, Harvard 1988, pp. 266, 267 for the way in which Edward Said employs this idea in *Orientalism*.

3.1. Echoes from the past

In the following chapter I shall give the full text of the *Ātaš nu Gīt* in translation, followed by a detailed commentary. It will be seen here that there are references to certain texts and to rituals with which it appears that the laity were familiar. These references are not detailed in any way, and so we have no means of knowing precisely how they were understood by the lay composers and performers of the song, nor the audiences for whom they were intended. We do know, however, from the Persian text *Qissa-ye Zartuštīān-ī Hindustān* that the laity was involved not only in the construction of the *Ātaš Bahrām* but also in finding out about the procedures which were held to be necessary for its establishment. Something should be said, therefore, about the origins of these ideas and rituals, and the ways in which they may have been passed down from a more distant time and place to the Zoroastrian laity in eighteenth-century India.

In this section I will begin by looking at five Pahlavi works: *The Selections of Zādspram*, *The Bundahišn*, *The Dādestān ī Dēnīg*, *The Rivāyat of Emdēt ī Ašavahištān*, and *The Pahlavi Rivāyat Accompanying the Dādestān ī Dēnīg*. The reason for including the first two texts is in order to give some idea of the source material of some of the legends, names and ideas contained in the song. So when I refer, subsequently, to the birth of the prophet, or to the theological concept of the three times, we know the way in which these stories were told, how they sounded, and the sorts of information contained in these texts. The remaining three Pahlavi books give us some idea of the way in which knowledge was disseminated by priests; the dialogic form of question and answer, such as would have taken place when texts were transmitted orally, appears to have been continued in written form. Also, from these texts we begin to see how questions of identity arise when a religion is under threat, and when a community becomes marginalised.

I have included the *Šāhnāme* because it is a text which held especial significance for the Zoroastrians who left Iran, preserving for them an account of their heritage and former glory, to be passed down through generations within the diaspora group. Once the Parsis had a history of their own, the style of the epic narrative was emulated in their own foundation myth, the *Qissa ye Sanjān*. In style and content the *Šāhnāme* is strongly reminiscent of the *Yašts*, echoing many of the themes contained in those texts. Its stories and legends have been passed down in oral transmission to the present day, and its heroes and kings are mentioned repeatedly in the song.

Finally, I have chosen texts which bring us into the sphere of Indian Zoroastrian traditions: the *Sad Dar* and the Persian *Rivāyats*. I have cited passages from the *Sad Dar* in order to show the way in which the structural theme of lay participation and reward is presented here. The *Rivāyats* show us the sorts of knowledge which was sought by those referred to in the song to found an *Ātaš Bahrām*.

As will be shown in the commentary of the *Ātaš nu Gīt*, there are two streams, or themes, of religious practice which run parallel to each other through the text. One of these belongs solely to the priestly sphere, in the sense that it relates to those rituals and ceremonies, such as the *Yasna* and *Vendidād*, which require a ritual specialist, a priest. The other stream includes all those observances in which both priest and laity may participate. The works which I am going to look at below also reflect the interweaving of these two themes, although, with the exception of the *Ātaš nu Gīt* itself and Firdausi's *Šāhnāme*, these texts were composed by priests. In the pre-modern era, priests were the main bearers of knowledge; it was priests also, who were the chroniclers of the communal past, whose task it was to protect, codify and transmit the sacred texts and legal codes of the ethno-religious community. However, the content of these texts, as I have already shown with the *Yašts* and the *Niyāyiš*, often has more to do with lay than priestly matters.

Some Pahlavi texts

Scholars are largely agreed that it was during the Sasanian period, probably in the sixth century, that the canon of the *Avesta* was written down in an alphabet especially devised for the purpose. With the emergence of a manuscript tradition, there also developed a strong exegetical tradition (made possible, perhaps, because texts could now be referred to in written rather than purely memorised form), and this *zand*, or commentary, was written in the Middle Persian or Pahlavi language. This, then, marked a transition from the primary oral culture to which the texts of the *Yašts* and the prayers belonged, to one in which religious texts were written down. We do not know, however, to what extent priestly authority became text-based, nor how this development affected its relationship with the wider religious practices in which the laity participated.

The other development is that from the time that the religion entered recorded history there are references to a clearly defined hereditary priesthood which reached its zenith under the patronage of the Sasanian kings. For the first time, then, we are able to talk about individuals and groups of people as being specifically 'lay', that is, non-priests.

In other respects, the Pahlavi texts are no less problematic than those texts examined in the two previous chapters, the *Yašts* and the *Niyāyiš*, insofar as they are composite works which draw together material from different ages. Broadly speaking these texts reflect three different 'times' in a similar way to the times or periods which I have mentioned above with reference to the *Ātaš nu Gīt*. First, they portray, if only in idealised retrospective, the Zoroastrian religion in what was probably the heyday of its influence and power as the state religion of the Sasanian empire. Second, many of the Pahlavi books are translations and/or redactions of Avestan material, and so date back to the pre-Sasanian era. Finally, the majority of Pahlavi writings did not reach their final

form until the ninth and tenth centuries of the common era. They are representative, therefore, not of a powerful state religion but of a religious minority which was anxious to maintain its ideas and traditions in order to avoid being engulfed by Islam. In this last respect some of the concerns of the priesthood in Iran, as expressed in these writings, are echoed in the later texts which were written after the Zoroastrian diaspora had established itself in India. In Iran, the fortunes of the priesthood diminished rapidly in the centuries following the Islamic conquest of that country, whilst those who chose to settle in India lost not only their autonomy but their homeland as well. In both cases it was the task of priests to defend the faith as well as to instruct their people in order for the religion to survive. In both cases there had been (for different reasons) a dislocation or break up in the means of communication and dissemination of religious knowledge, which resulted in the need to reassert, re-establish and possibly to re-create religious traditions. Texts which reflect a quest for authoritative advice on religious matters survive in the traditions of both populations.

Although, as I have already mentioned, the Pahlavi books were the product of the post-Sasanian period, J. de Menasce, in his comprehensive survey of these texts, divides them into those which could have been known during the Sasanian era and those which bear the signs of contact with Islam. There are two texts I shall mention that belong to the former category: the first of these is the *Selections of Zādspram*, whose author was the brother of Manušchihr-i Gošnjam, who was *Hudēnān pēšōbāy* of Fars and Kirman during the second half of the 9th century. The second text is the *Bundahišn*, or 'Original Creation', in which the author is mentioned by name as one 'Farnbag called Dātakih' and which is dated 1098 A.C. As with the Pahlavi works already mentioned, both these texts draw on ancient sources¹. Although the *Bundahišn* replicates much of the material contained in the older text, it omits the important Legend of Zoroaster, which lives on in a variety of later texts, both religious and secular, including the *Ātaš nu Gīt*.

With reference to their accounts of the history of the cosmos, the *Selections of Zādspram* and the *Bundahišn* appear to have drawn on the same ancient sources. Both texts refer to the time of the perfect creation, *bundahišn*, in its static, or *mēnog*, state, through the time of conflict and the struggle, *gumēzišn*, between Ahriman and Ohrmazd, and finally to the eschatological renewal of the world, *wizārišn*. I have cited the following passages alongside some comments in which I explain the significance of these texts to the text of the *Ātaš nu Gīt*. There are no direct references in the *Ātaš nu Gīt* to the theological ideas contained in the Pahlavi books, although, as I shall show, the song is associated in various ways with the older texts.

The Legend of Zoroaster is contained in the *Selections of Zādspram*, beginning with the birth of the prophet. Since he was born into the time of *gumēzišn*, or mixture,

¹ J. de Menasce 1983: 1190.

the life of the prophet is portrayed as one of conflict. Each of the Ahrimanic forces is presented in equal opposition to Ohrmazd's creations, so Vohuman is sent by Orhmazd to counter the attack of Akōman at the time of Zoroaster's birth, and it is said that there are seven sorcerers present (presumably in opposition to the Ameshaspands):

<p>(WZ.VIII.10) Finally Aharman sent up 'Akōman'; he said, 'Thou, who art innermost, art very invisible; do thou go, for deception, on to Zaratūst's mind; turn his mind towards us who are dīvs'. (11) Aūhrmazd sent 'Vohūman'; against him.</p> <p>(12) 'Akōman' was forward in advance, had come forth towards the door and wished to go in. (13) 'Vohūman' strategically gave back; he spoke to 'Akōman': 'Go in'. (14) 'Akōman' thought; 'I ought not to do a thing which he 'Vohūman' spoke thus to me'; he gave back; 'Vohūman' went in and mingled with the heart of Zaratūst. (15) Zaratūst laughed, for 'Vohūman' is the spiritual gladdener.</p> <p>(16) Seven midwives, sorcerers ('yātūk'), who had sat before him, were afraid owing to the light which was seen blazing in the house, his laughing at birth, which was contrary to the birth of other men, who weep at birth.¹</p>	<p>The birth of the prophet is alluded to in the 1879 version of the song, where it says that the pregnant lady has given birth to seven sons: 'Seven sons were born of her and Dādar Hormazd and Zarathuštra were part of the seven.' Later, it says: 'Seven sons were born from the womb of my Motibai, where my Sohrabji and Zarathuštra abided' (see p.173, line 520). In a later version of the song, which appears to have been adapted to honour the <i>Iranšah</i>, it says that the one who worships the earth will be blessed by <i>Ava Yazad</i> and will have seven sons; this could perhaps refer to the <i>Amesha Spentas</i>, who would be in natural opposition to the seven sorcerers described in the <i>Bundahišn</i>.</p> <p>In this version there is also a reference to the laughter of the prophet at the time of his birth: 'My Hoshanghshah and Zarathuštra laughed', and then, 'Zarathuštra laughed over Nargeshmai' (see p.201).</p>
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The story of Zoroaster's life continues with each chapter describing an event, experience or particular aspect of his character. The way in which the religion is revealed to Zoroaster and his conversations with the Ameshaspands is described in detail; however, the conversion of Kavi Vištāsp is only referred to briefly here. Much is made of this episode in the later tradition and the story is given in full in Book VII of the *Denkard*.

The text of the song which I shall examine in the following chapter contains elements which seem to reflect certain cosmological and eschatological ideas. In particular, it seems that the structure of the song can be interpreted as a source of implicit meaning: a process where the text itself moves through three stages which are analogous to the three stages of evolution according to classical Zoroastrian theology as presented in the *Bundahišn*.² The following passages illustrate the way in which this theology was presented according to the earliest extant sources. The *Bundahišn* opens with a description of the two spirits as being eternally uncreated and continues with Ohrmazd's creation which is described as follows:

¹ Anklesaria 1964: 85-6.

² This idea has been developed by A. Williams in his work on the *QS* (forthcoming). See p.120.

(Bd.I: 8) Aūharmazd, through omniscience, knew that Aharman exists, *and* whatever he schemes he infuses with malice and greediness till the end; *and* because He accomplishes the end by many means, He also produced spiritually the creatures which were necessary for those means, *and* they remained three thousand years in a spiritual *state*, so that they were unthinking and unmoving, with tangible bodies.¹

When Ahriman declared that he would destroy this creation, Ohrmazd knew that if he granted a period of contest then the evil spirit would be defeated. He recites the *Ahunvar* prayer and reveals to Ahriman what he, the Creator, already knows, namely: 'His own triumph in the end, and the impotence of the evil spirit, the annihilation of the demons, and the resurrection *and* undisturbed future existence of the creatures for ever and everlasting'. This has the effect of confounding Ahriman temporarily, during which time Ohrmazd creates the *Amesha Spentas*, followed by the sun, moon and constellations. This is a new period of creation which transfers the *mēnog* world into its *gētīg* state. There follows an account of Ahriman's attack in which every good creation is polluted or spoilt in some way, for every beneficent creation an evil one is brought into being:²

*(Bd.I:20) Aūharmazd also knew this, through omniscience, that within these nine thousand years, for three thousand years everything proceeds by the will of Aūharmazd, three thousand years there is an intermingling of the wills of Aūharmazd and Aharman, and the last three thousand years the evil spirit is disabled, and they keep the adversary away from the creatures.*³

*(XIII: 16) Of the small seas that which was most wholesome was the sea Kyānsih, such as is in Sagastān; at first, noxious creatures, snakes, lizards (vazagh) were not in it, and the water was sweeter than in any of the other seas; later (dadīgar) it became salt; at the closest, on account of the stench, it is not possible to go so near as one league, so very great are the stench and saltiness through the violence of the hot wind. (17) When the renovation of the universe occurs it will again become sweet.*⁴

The doctrine of the three times appears to pertain to the song: the first stage describes the creation of the *Ātaš Bahrām* in which it is constructed, decorated and paid for. This phase of the song describes an idealised process, one in which a perfect House of Fire is created.

In the second phase of the song there are references to historical events, in particular to the conflict between the Sanjāna and the Bhagarīa priests during which the sacred fire is 'stolen'; this is analagous to the time of mixture in which there is the 'intermingling of the wills of Ohrmazd and Ahriman'.

Once the dispute is resolved, the new fire is consecrated and installed in Navsari, and this begins a new era in which many new *agiārys* are founded, and order is restored within the community.

This section of the *Bundahišn* leads into a detailed account of the creation of the material world. In the *Ātaš nu Gīt*, the creation of the *Ātaš Bahrām* is reminiscent of this

¹ tr. West 1977c: 5.

² See Bd., chapters 6-10, tr. West 1977c: 25-32.

³ tr. West 1977c: 7.

⁴ tr. West 1977c: 44-45.

type of description, with its remarkable attention to detail. The song describes the various materials used to build the *agiāry*, together with the different professions of those people involved in its construction. This is followed by lists of all the various gifts which are bestowed upon those involved in the foundation of the sacred fire, and their wives. Thus, we are given a complete catalogue or inventory of everything to do with the *agiāry* and the community which serves it.

In the final renovation or third stage of creation the world returns once more to its original state of perfection. This process is described in chapter 30 of the *Bundahišn*, where it is said that all men will be raised up from wherever it was that they died to be judged according to their deeds:

(Bd.XXX:12) Afterwards, they set the righteous man apart from the wicked; and then the righteous is for heaven (*garōdmān*), and they cast the wicked back to hell.

(13) Three days and nights they inflict punishment bodily in hell, and then he beholds bodily those three days' happiness in heaven.

(14) As it says that, on the day when the righteous man is parted from the wicked, the tears of every one, thereupon, run down unto his legs ... (15) ... for there may be a father who is righteous and a son wicked, and there may be a brother who is righteous and one wicked.

(19) Afterwards, the fire and halo melt the metal of *Shatvairō*, in the hills and mountains, and it remains on this earth like a river.

(20) Then all men will pass into that melted metal and will become pure; when one is righteous, then it seems to him just as though he walks continually in warm milk; but when wicked, then it seems to him in such manner as though, in the world, he walks continually in melted metal.

(21) Afterwards, with the greatest affection, all men come together, father and son and brother and friend.¹

The final phase of the song is about the re-creation of the community; this is the equivalent of the time of Renovation, when both the fire and the song are taken into every house and the members of the household are named. The text of the song celebrates the merit of all those who have brought good fortune to the community either by contributing to the foundation of an *agiāry*, or by commissioning a performance of the song.

Families are reunited when all the various members gather under one roof in order to celebrate the enthronement of the new fire.

This reunion is followed by a *yasna* ceremony after which all men become immortal:

(Bd.27) Afterwards, *Sōshyans and his assistants*, by order of the creator *Aūharmazd*, give every man the reward and recompense suitable to *his* deeds; this is even the righteous paradise (*vahišt*) ...

(28) This, too, it says, that whoever has performed no worship (*yašt*), and has ordered no *Gētī-kharīd*, and has bestowed no clothes as a righteous gift, is naked there; and he performs the worship (*yašt*) of *Aūharmazd*, and the heavenly angels provide him the use of clothing.²

¹ tr. West 1977c: 124-126.

² The ceremony of *Getī-kharīd* is described in the *Rivāyat* of *Dastur Barzu* (see *Dhabhar* 1932: 421), and referred to in Chapter 42 of the *Sad-dar Bundahišn*, where it is said that *Getī-kharīd* means 'that in this

The restoration of mankind is followed by the annihilation of hell and all evil creations, at which point the process by which the world returns to its former perfect state is complete.

Although we cannot know the way in which theological ideas contained in the *Selections of Zādspram* and the *Bundahišn* were taught to lay people over a millennium ago, nor the way in which they were understood by them, nevertheless these texts are important insofar as they contain ideas and structures which have found their way into a variety of different texts of a much later date. Another point of interest, for this study, is the fact that once these texts were written, their contents seem to have remained fixed. As it will be seen, there is very little sign of subsequent theological development based on the interpretation and reinterpretation of these texts to meet the changing needs of the Zoroastrian community.

Pahlavi texts which, according to J. de Menasce, belong to the post-Sasanian period, in that they show signs of contact with Islam include, the *Dādestān ī Dēnīg* which, was composed by the brother of Zādspram. This text comprises ninety-one questions and answers which were put to Manušchihr-i Gošnjam by various laymen among whom only one is named, Ādur-Māhān. The answers are often long and involved and reflect priestly concern for reinforcing aspects of religious teaching which were in danger of being forgotten; for example, forty-one sections are dedicated to a lengthy explanation of the *yasna* ceremony and its proper performance despite difficult circumstances. It is significant here that, as fire-temples were gradually replaced by mosques in Iran, it would have become increasingly difficult for the laity to attend *yasna* ceremonies; when asked where these should be performed Manušchihr replies: 'in the abode of the ever-growing fire, then in the abode of other sacred fires [in the *yazišn-gāh* of the fire temple] then in the abodes of Mazda-worshippers and other good people, and then in other places pronounced clean'.¹

The questions put to Manušchihr fall roughly into one of four categories; death, ritual, everyday life, and the priesthood. In all these areas there are elements which foreshadow themes and structures which appear in the later Parsi material. The idea of eschatological renewal becomes particularly significant in the centuries following the Muslim conquest of Iran. From this time onwards the Zoroastrian community in Iran, and later in India, became a people seeking restoration in one form or another, and the idea of the Renovation finds its way into a variety of texts both oral and written.² All the various

world, the other world is purchased' (*Ibid.*, 534). Modi 1995: 407 describes the ceremony as intended 'for seeking salvation from the sins of the world'.

¹ Dd. XLVIII: 39, tr. West 1977a: 173.

² I suggest (see p.183ff.) that the concept of the Renovation forms an important operational theme in the text of the *Ātaš nu Gīt*. De Menasce (1975: 548) comments on the interest taken, in the post-Sasanian era, in the nature of heavenly bliss, contrasted with the preoccupation with the pains of hell described in popular works of the Sasanian period, such as the *Ardāy Wirāz Nāmag*.

aspects of death are dealt with in the *Dādestān ī Dēnīg*, from disposal of the dead to the abodes of life after death, the question of individual eschatology, and finally the reuniting of body and soul. Regarding the disposal of bodies, it is interesting to note that this seems to have taken place in an unenclosed area, since dogs are mentioned as well as birds of prey.¹ It would seem, then, that the building of *dakhmas* may have been a later innovation designed to ensure that the rite of exposure could continue in the face of Islamic opposition. Presumably, therefore, the rituals for the construction and maintenance of the *dakhma*, together with those for the disposal of the dead within it were added to those rituals and observances already in existence. Eventually this religious practice became part of Zoroastrian tradition, to be continued by the community in India.

The theme of reward-bringing action is common throughout the Pahlavi texts. In the *Dādestān ī Dēnīg*, it is the actions of the faithful which are held to contribute to the final renovation of the universe, and questions 34-37 deal with this renewal and the final resurrection of the body.² Question 36 solicits the longest and most detailed reply of the entire text: ('How shall they produce the resurrection, how do they prepare the dead, and when the dead are prepared by them, how are they?').³

With regard to the subject of ritual and observance, there are two points I shall make which are relevant to an appraisal of the *Ātaš nu Gīt*. The first follows on from the idea of acquiring merit, and relates to the correct performance of ritual in order that it be efficacious. The way in which utterances are sounded and actions performed are of paramount importance according to texts both ancient and modern which concern religious instruction⁴. The question of cleansing is referred to in the *Dādestān ī Dēnīg* with reference to eating and drinking and the taking of the *bāj*; the latter is also the subject of question 79:

(Dd.LXXIX.1) ... What is the decision about water with the word *Itha* and him who shall drink it? (2) When a man has performed his ritual and does not take the prayer inwardly, but drinks water with the word *Itha*, what is the decision about this efficacy of which he takes up one half and abandons one half, how is it necessary, or not, to consider it, and what is the sin of it?⁵

¹ Dd. XVIII. 3, 4. It is stated that after being seen by a dog, a body should be removed to an elevated piece of ground, and secured, in order that dogs and birds would be unable to take the dead matter to an inhabited or cultivated place. Later, the bones should be removed and placed in an ossuary made of stone, elevated from the ground, and roofed over so that the rain cannot touch it. (tr. West 1977a: 43).

² Dd. XXXVI. 2, 3. In the renewed, perfect, world all the various evils are absent; one of these is deformity, which, as in the *Yašts*, is considered a sin: Dd.XXXII.121 'there is no shame, because no deformity' (tr. West 1977a:118).

³ Dd. XXXVII.1. It is emphasised that there is no limit to the number of good works a person may do; if they amount to more than is necessary to gain entry into heaven, then they will simply contribute to the soul's enjoyment thereafter (Dd. XXXVIII.1, 2, 3, 4); (tr. West 1977a: 120-1).

⁴ According to the compiler of the 1879 text of the *Ātaš nu Gīt*, his reason for wishing to write it down was because it was not being sung properly (see p.146).

⁵ tr. West 1977a: 233.

In other words, the enquirer wishes to know what is the punishment for reciting the *bāj* incorrectly, or omitting part of it. There are also questions concerning priestly qualifications; for example, question 44 asks ‘which is the priest’s duty and which is the disciple’s?’, to which Manušchir replies:

(Dd.XLV: 2) ... the priests teach the scriptures, and the disciples learn the knowledge of the religion, that is, the Avesta and Zand ... (6) The more infallible of these is the powerful skill of the priest put forth through the ritual and Visparad, and his skill in the commentary; the skill of disciples in the Avesta is, further, fully understood, and sin recognised as oppressive, through the formulas of the sacred ceremony, ablution and non-ablution, purity and pollution.¹

The second point is that it appears from the *Dādestān ī Dēnīg* that certain rituals and observances are perceived as being important factors in the preservation of Zoroastrian identity.² For example, questions 38 and 39 are to do with the wearing of the *kustī* and *sudre* and the benefit of purification; it is clear that such symbols of the faith are of particular importance in order to distinguish Zoroastrians from Muslims. The Muslim custom of prostration during prayer is deprecated here, and contrasted with the less obvious signs of worship adopted by Zoroastrians: ‘A token and sign of worship is of great use, and a great assistance therein is this belt ... that is tied on the middle of the body.’ (Dd.XXXIX.7).³ Manušchir’s advice to the laity is that it is of even greater importance than before to wear the distinguishing garments of the faith:

(Dd.XXXIX.21) And Ormazd spoke thus: ‘In him who is the guide of a vile religion; whoever it is who puts on a girdle at most thrice in a year, that is, he does not wear a sacred shirt and thread-girdle, and his law also is this, that it is not necessary to wear them’ and when the law of no belting is so grievous that, when that law shall be accepted, it is observed that destruction is strengthened.⁴

Questions concerning everyday life include such matters as trading with the ‘infidel’ (Questions 50, 53), and also family law. The final category of questions addressed to Manušchir refers to the priesthood. Here there are a number of questions concerning priestly fees. Manušchir is asked in question 45 what alternative livelihood a priest might seek if he is unable to make a living, a reflection perhaps of the impoverished state of the priesthood at this time.⁵ The importance of paying the correct fee is repeated by

¹ tr. West 1977a: 152, 153.

²The question of identity is another important theme running through the *Ātaš nu Gīt*; here the Parsi community is in a minority surrounded in the main by Hindus, but by the time of the composition of the song, it had already suffered at the hands of the Muslim rulers in India.

³ tr. West 1977a: 124.

⁴ tr. West 1977a: 129, 130.

⁵ tr. West 1977a: 153. See also (Dd.LXXXI.1) ‘As to the eightieth question and reply, that which you ask is thus: What is the purpose of this ceremony for the living soul, and why is it necessary to order it? ... and what is its great advantage as a good work?’

(Dd.LXXXII.I) ‘As to the eighty-first question and reply, that which you ask is thus; As to a man who shall order a ceremonial and shall give the money and the man who shall undertake his ceremonial and shall take his money, but has not performed the ceremonial, what is then the decision; and what is the decision about the man who ordered the ceremonial?’

Manušchir in a number of his replies; he points out that if expenditure is reduced, then the benefit to the one paying for the ceremony is diminished accordingly.¹

Another text which highlights the struggle of Zoroastrians in Iran to preserve their religious and ethnic identity is the *Rivāyat of Emdēt ī Ašawahištān*. This work consists of a collection of questions by one Ādur Gušasp ī Mihr Ataš ī Ādur-Gušasp put to the author, who was Manušchir's nephew, a *mobađ* in authority over part of southern Iran during the first half of the 10th century. To judge from this text it would seem that in the course of one generation, the differential influence of Islam upon Zoroastrian communal identity and religious duty had become stronger.² For example, family law and the institution of *stūrīh* was evidently threatened by Muslim interference; a number of questions and answers refer to this and to the question of inheritance which was made more complicated by conversion to Islam (questions 1, 2, 4, 7). With regard to purity, the questions range from the sin of adultery with a non-Zoroastrian woman, and the consequences if a child is born as a result of such a union (question 42), to the purification necessary if a Muslim has been down into a well to clean it (question 36). The taking of hot baths — a Muslim practice — is considered particularly contaminating.

The remaining Pahlavi work belonging to this era which is relevant to this study is *The Pahlavi Rivāyat Accompanying the Dādestān ī Dēnīg*. Again, this text is addressed principally to lay Zoroastrians living in Muslim Iran.³ It is a work of unknown authorship which belongs to the first category mentioned above, to those works which show no signs of contact with Islam; however, it is generally acknowledged to be post-Sasanian in compilation.⁴ According to the author of the most recent translation, the *PRDd.* dates from the late 9th or early 10th century. A number of themes in the *PRDd.* are mentioned elsewhere in the Pahlavi books: for example, *khwēdōdah*, eschatology, the conversion of Kāvi Vištāspa, the legend of Kersāsp, and the care and collection of fire. While there is no *Yašt* dedicated to fire, the cult of the hearth fire is quite clearly referred to in the *Ātaš*

(Dd.LXXXIII.1) 'As to the eighty-second question and reply, that which you ask is thus: Is it necessary for a priestly man that he should undertake all the religious rites and other ceremonials, or in what way is it?'

¹ See West 1977a: 207 n.1. The subject of the payment of priests and also the appropriate gifts which should be given to them plays a prominent part in the *Ātaš nu Gīt*. Later, in India, the Zoroastrian priesthood found itself financially impoverished, a state which continues today. In the *Dādestān ī Dēnīg*, Questions 83-88 are about the amount that should be given as gifts to priests, and there are various inducements to encourage the laity to give generously. For example, a wealthy man can save his soul by spending his wealth on good works; it will be recognised by the *Dāenā* who comes to meet him at the *Cīnwad* bridge. He can even share the priest's happiness in heaven if he amasses enough wealth for the priesthood: (Dd. XLIV.21) 'a chief of the priests has spoken thus: "shouldst thou be our father in wealthiness, I am thy protector in body..."' (tr. West 1977a: 151). Again, the concept of salvation for all meant that *all* sins could be atoned for, providing that a person delivered up his body and wealth to the will of the high-priest (see Dd. LXXV.5; *Ibid.*, 223).

² de Menasce 1967: 220ff.

³ Williams 1990: 8ff. Williams points to the strongly dualistic nature of this text, which deals with many problems both of a perennial nature and ones which are particular to the time. 'This duality is perceived in all aspects of life, personal, public and spiritual, and *PRDd.* deals with a range of oppositions. Each chapter ... has one or more of these dualities as its explicit theme.'

⁴ de Menasce 1983: 1186.

Niyāyeš (see p.70). Chapter 37 of the *PRDd.* answers the question 'How should the fire be kept in the house?', which indicates that this cult remained a theme at least in religious texts after the advent of the temple cult of fire.¹

- 37a2 (On) every occasion when firewood is put on to (the fire), thrice it should be well inspected and made clean, and then it should be put on to it [i.e. the fire].
- 37a3 He who sits near it should not then utter a word before the fire, and if he does speak then he should hold something in front of his nose, so that the breath which comes out of his mouth and nose does not reach the fire.
- 37a4 And when it is put to use, whenever its work is done, it should be gathered together.
- 37a5 And they should take the radiance from it back (to the house fire) and restore it immediately; the remainder should be taken to the *Ādurōg* and (then later to) the Victorious Fire.
- 37a6 When a cauldron is put on it the water and meat should be so arranged that they occupy two thirds (of the cauldron), for if (the quantity) is more than that, the water will fall on to the fire, and every time there is a sin of fifty-five drachms; and when, after the food is gone, the cauldron is left on the fire, then there is a sin of one *framān* for it.²

There follows a list of fines to be imposed for the various sins against the hearth fire such as letting it grow cold, or singeing the hair of one's hand. Included in the list are punishments for sins committed against water; for example, if hot water falls upon an injured limb, or if one pours water over another person.³ The covering of the mouth and nose when speaking in the presence of the fire is evidently a priestly injunction (cf. the wearing of the *padām*) which the laity were encouraged to adopt.

The significance of the earlier Pahlavi books for this work lies in their theological content: the story of creation, the doctrine of the three times, and the dualistic imagery of conflict/resolution as portrayed in the account of the birth of the prophet, and the good and evil creations following one after the other. In his introduction to the *PRDd.*, Williams talks about the duality of worldly existence which takes place during the period of *gumēzišn*, or mixture. He gives examples of some of the dualities which are present in all the various aspects of life, whether personal, public or spiritual, and suggests ways in which they may be resolved through doctrinal or ritual prescriptions.⁴ Some of these are particularly relevant to the themes which I have focused upon in this work. For example, in the *PRDd.*, trade and profit are considered worthy of merit, but greed and mean[^]ness are not; the solution to this problem lies in the giving of righteous charity.⁵ Again,

¹ As I shall show in chapter 5, the cult of the hearth fire remains a significant part of lay observance today.

² Williams 1990: 64-5.

³ The inclusion of verses concerning water in a chapter to do with fire is reminiscent of the *Khuršīd Niyayīš*, where verse 18 is dedicated to water.

⁴ Williams 1990: 10, 11.

⁵ This idea finds expression in the later history of the Parsis in India, when we come to the lives of those industrialists who made enormous wealth through business. Many of these men became known as much for their wealth as for their charitable endowments. See J. Hinnells 1985: 261ff.

righteousness solves the problem of eating the meat of *gōspand*, or beneficent animals, because those who are wicked are made to suffer for the sins of the animals they eat.¹ Finally, conversion to, and contact with the Evil religion, Islam, can be avoided through the practice of *khvēdodāh*. It can be seen here, that as well as imparting information of a practical nature, the text also refers, implicitly, to the doctrine of dualism which it incorporates as part of a structural theme.

Other themes which occur in the Pahlavi books, for example the detailed description of the various creations contained in the *Bundahišn*, are echoed in the forthcoming text of the song. It will be seen here that no detail is spared in the account of the construction of the *agiāry*. With reference to those Pahlavi texts which show signs of contact with Islam, their interest lies in the themes contained in the *Ātaš nu Gīt* which relate to the community as a whole. These include: the importance of the correct performance of ritual, the theme of reward-bringing action and the authority of priests in determining what should and should not be done.

The Šāhnāme

Besides the writing down of religious texts, there were other areas of literary activity that developed during the late-Sasanian period. Over the centuries a compilation of myths, legends and historical data had been collected and passed down in oral transmission. Sometime towards the end of the Sasanian era, essential elements of these narratives were collected by the Persian court and written into a great chronicle called the *Khwadāy Nāmag*, or Book of Kings. This work contained a variety of material, including ancient traditions, the history of past dynasties both mythical and historical, Zoroastrian wisdom literature, and legends of local heroes. Some of these, for example the legends relating to Rustam, the prince of Sīstān, who became the champion of the Iranian epic, have been passed down through the centuries to modern times. Although no copies of the *Khwadāy Nāmag* survive, it was translated into Arabic several times, and, through these intermediate texts, formed the basis of the later epic poem by Abū Ḳāsim Firdawsi, which is thought to have been completed in 1009-10 A.C. The genre of Persian epic literature is unknown in Arabic, and so both the form and the subject matter of the Persian *Šāhnāme* appears to have been influenced very little by Islamic ideas and to have remained strongly rooted in Iranian traditions.² With regard to earlier periods, the mythical Pīshdādians and the legendary Kayānian dynasty, the scope for the poet was

¹ In the *Yašts*, we have no way of knowing whether the animals which are offered in sacrifice are considered as *gōspand*, which is why I have avoided discussing the moral aspect of the sacrificial ritual with respect to those texts.

² There had been a long tradition of minstrel poetry in Iran, and poetry of a purely Iranian character continued in oral form for some time after the Islamic conquest. However, much of this material was lost, while the New Persian narrative and lyrical poetry which emerged two centuries after the Muslim invasion owed a considerable amount to the form and content of Arabic literature, which by then was established on Iranian soil. See Lazard, 1975: 611ff.

unlimited. This was a heroic age portrayed in the epic spirit of excitement and colour, with legendary tales and romances interwoven into the fabric of the chronicle. Once the narrative enters the historical era of the Ashkānian (Parthian) and Sasanian dynasties much of the epic spirit is lost; here the king himself is often portrayed as the hero, and the focus shifts from heroic deeds in the battlefield to strong monarchical leadership, and orderly society. While Firdausi would have drawn on ancient oral traditions including the *Avesta* itself for the earlier part of the *Šāhnāme*, the later part would reflect documents and records still in existence from the Sasanian period.

In the first chapter of this thesis I have noted an important structural theme which runs through the *Yašts*. It is a repetitive theme of lay participation and reward which describes the invocation of deities to descend to earth and partake of the sacrifice, the offering or oblation itself is then mentioned, followed by the particular boons which are granted to the worshipper in return. This theme is one which can be identified in the Pahlavi texts, it also occurs in the *Šāhnāme*, as I shall show below, and seems to have persisted down to modern times.¹

According to the *Yašts*, lay participation in worship is represented as taking place in the open air, and is offered by kings and heroes in the hope that boons will be obtained from the *yazatas*. A large number of requests recorded in these texts concern everyday lives; for example, the gods are invoked to provide food and dwellings for the community. There is concern generally for good bodily health; the god *Haoma* is called upon as protector of health, and various other gods are invoked as protectors, not only from disease but also from evils such as Death and Wrath. As presented by the *Yašts*, invocation of the gods is largely the concern of men, be they priests, kings or heroes. Mithra, Lord of the Covenant, is often invoked to help heroes in battle. The gods are also called upon to aid men in the struggle against evil demons, princes and priests (those opposed to the faith). Boons for less-material gains include the possession of *Khvarenah*; truth, knowledge, insight and wisdom are also frequently asked for.

In the *Šāhnāme* the dualistic imagery of the kings and heroes of Iran perpetually at war with a non-Iranian foe, usually the *Tūrānians*, or barbarians from the north, is strongly reminiscent of the *Yašts*.² However, unlike the *Yašts*, which are essentially hymns of praise, the purpose of the *Šāhnāme* is to provide a chronology of events, both those which were perceived as real and those perceived as legendary. Thus, the main theme of the *Yašts*, invocation of the gods, is but a minor theme in the epic. Another

¹ In the first two stages of the *Ātaš nu Gīt* there is a repetitive structure which involves the calling or collecting together of people, followed by an activity such as the building and consecrating of the fire, or the performance of ritual. This in turn is followed by the rewarding of those people. At the same time, a performance of this song is considered to be a meritorious act; it is itself a votive offering designed to bring prosperity to the family who commission its performance.

² See Yt.13.38 and Yt. 5.53,54: 'The brave warrior Tusa worshipped her ... (54) Then he entreated her: Grant me this boon, O good, most strong Aredwī Sūrā Anāhitā ... that I may strike down the Turanian peoples with one hundred blows ...'

difference is that by Sasanian times the temple cult of fire was firmly established, and so worship is often depicted as taking place at a fire temple rather than in the open air. Also, offerings in the *Yašts* are usually portrayed as taking place before an event, whereas in the *Šāhnāme* they are often made in thanksgiving, after the successful conclusion of an event.

The way in which an ancient legend can be adapted to accommodate new material, in this case temple worship instead of open air sacrifice, is aptly illustrated by the legend of Haosravah and Franrasyan. According to the *Gōs Yašt*, heroes are presented as making open-air sacrifices to the *yazatas*.¹ In the later version of the story, as related by Firdawsi in the *Šāhnāme*, the two kings Kay Khusraw and Kay Kā'ūs make their offerings to the sacred fire *Ādur Gušnasp*, installed in its temple:

This counsel they agreed to act upon,
Not swerving either of them from the path,
And, mounting swift as the wind upon two chargers,
Sped to the temple of Azargashnasp,
In white robes, with hearts filled by hope and fear.
Whenas they looked upon the Fire they wept,
As though they were consuming in fierce flames,
Before the Master of the sun and moon;
They called upon the maker of the world,
And showered jewels on the archimages²

When Gudarz discovers the whereabouts of Afrāsiyāb he goes first to offer thanks at the fire temple before informing the kings Kay Khusraw and Kay Kā'ūs.³ Finally, when Afrāsiyāb has been captured, the two kings return to the temple and offer thanks to the fire.⁴

On a subsequent occasion in the *Šāhnāme*, when Šāh Nuširwān (531-579 A.C.) is going to war against Rome, he visits the fire temple first:⁵

He made his entry to the Fane of Fire
With wailing. They set up a throne inlaid
With gold, and spread thereon the Zandavasta,
Wherefrom an archimagus read aloud,
According to the ritual, while priests
And chieftains wallowed in the dust before it,
And rent their skirts. The great men showered jewels
Upon the book and muttered loud thereon.
The Shah approaching offered praise and prayer
Before the Maker of the world, and asked
For victory, for mastery, and guidance

¹ Y.6.17, 18, 21. Darmesteter 1981: 114.

² Warner & Warner 1909: Vol. 4, 258, 259.

³ *Ibid.*, Vol. 4, 264.

⁴ *Ibid.*, Vol. 4, 269, 270.

⁵ This is in contrast to an account by Xenophon which was written before there is evidence of a temple cult of fire. Here, it is recorded that Cyrus the Great returned home to worship in front of the hearth fire before setting out upon a journey: 'When Cyrus had gone home and prayed to ancestral Hestia, ancestral Zeus, and the rest of the gods, he set out upon his expedition'. Fox and Pemberton 1929: 18.

Upon the path of justice. He bestowed
 Gifts upon the mendicants
 Wherever seen. He pitched his tent before
 The fire-fane, and his troops arrayed their ranks
 Upon each side ... ¹

Here we have an unusual reference to the *Avesta* in its written form; however, there is no way of knowing whether this belonged to an original account or represents an anachronism on the part of Firdausi. Later, when the king has received tribute from Rome, he gives thanks before the temple fire.²

With respect to the *Šāhnāme*, there is a recognisable pattern of worship which can be traced back to the very early texts examined in the previous chapters. By worship I mean the way in which people are represented as offering prayers, sacrifice and various forms of wealth to deities, and, in the *Šāhnāme*, directly to the fire temple for the benefit of those priests who tended the sacred fire. Apart from this pattern or structure, and the references to fire temples, there is nothing distinctively Zoroastrian in terms of rituals or doctrine in the *Šāhnāme*. Much has been made of the moral/ethical nature of the more didactic passages in this epic poem; however, these are terms which are difficult to define outside the Judaeo-Christian tradition and even harder to apply to a society which existed over a thousand years ago. There is a sense of dualism, of good versus evil, in the perpetual conflict between Iran and Tūrān, and there is no doubt that wisdom, manliness, honour, freedom and patriotism are considered virtues, but this is about as much as we can say.

Sad Dar and Rivāyats

The text of the *Sad Dar*, or treatise on 'a hundred subjects', can be said to encompass both the Iranian and Indian Zoroastrian religious traditions. While it draws on the Pahlavi books for many of the customs, rituals and priestly prescriptions which it describes, it is not written in Pahlavi but in Persian, and the earliest extant manuscript is thought to have been completed in India in 1575.³ The text of the *Sad Dar* provides us with examples of the sorts of religious observances which are likely to have been expected of both priest and laity at the time of its composition (although we do not know the context in which such information would have been disseminated). It also explains the doctrinal significance of these observances, showing the links which were made, presumably by priests, between ritual practice and observance on the one hand and

¹ Warner & Warner 1915: Vol. 7, p. 250.

² *Ibid.*, 363.

³ The oldest manuscript of the prose *Sad Dar* was given to the India Office Library by Mr J. Romer in 1837. In the last chapter of the text, there are two Persian couplets in Avestan characters which state that the book *Sad Dar* was completed in 1575 by an inhabitant of Bhrigu-Kakkha (Broach). Although it is possible that this colophon could have been copied from an older manuscript, West believes this to be the original manuscript of 1575. See West 1977b: xxxix, xl.

ERRATA

Typographical errors:

- p. 129.3 up for Š ānāme read Šāhnāme
- p. 135.2 for ervads read *ervads*
- p. 135.6 for lead read led
- p.145.2 up read *agnyagāra*
- p.196 para. 2.3 for ‘..studio recording of the song earlier this year’ read
‘..studio recording of the song in the summer of 1997’.

doctrinal teaching on the other. As in the earlier texts which I have looked at, religious activity is closely linked to the idea of reward. Thus the reason for maintaining the household fire and keeping it free from pollution is given as follows:

(Sd.D. XI: 2) Because every time that they maintain a fire properly, which is within a dwelling, every fire which is in the earth of seven regions becomes pleased with those persons, and when they ask a favour, or beg a necessity, it becomes quickly operative ... (4) If any one does not maintain the fire-place properly, if he gives a hundred *dinārs* to the fire Gushasp *there* is no acceptance *of it*, and that sin does not depart from him ... (6) And this is also declared in revelation, that, every time that they do not maintain the fire properly, pregnancy becomes scarcer for the women, fewer male children are born, and honour in the vicinity of the king becomes less for the men, and *there* is no approbation of *their* words.¹

With reference to the disposal of nail cuttings, it is said that the parings should be put into a paper, and that the *Srōš bāj* should be taken. The nails should then be buried in a hole four finger-breadths into the earth, with the soil being replaced on top:

(Sd.D. XIV: 8) For Hōrmazd ... has created a bird which they call *Ashō-zust*, and they call *it* the bird of Bahman. (9) They also call it the owl, and it eats nails. (10) It is altogether necessary that they do not leave *them* unbroken, for they *would* come into use as weapons of wizards. (11) And they have also said that, if they fall in the midst of food, *there* is danger of pulmonary consumption.²

In another Persian work which is similar in form but distinct from the *Sad Dar*³ there is a chapter devoted to the offerings which are made in return for the curing of various ailments:

(Sd.B. 44: 1) About praying for one's wants: What should be asked (from the Yazads and the Amshaspands) and how should one take a vow. (2) When the head aches, I shall make a vow to Beram Yazad that when the head-ache is cured, I shall bestow favour on such and such a needy person. (3) If the hair grows long, I make a vow to the *frohars* of the righteous that I shall recite the *Afringan* (in their honour). (4) If the nose is cured (of its disease), I shall consecrate so many eggs for the sake of the moon. (16) If the belly is cured, I shall send something to the Fire-temple. (18) Praying for (the restoration of) the eye-sight, I shall make an eye of gold and send it (as a present) to Azar Gushasp. (21) If the child is intelligent and of an enlightened mind I shall send a present to Adar Gushasp. (22) When such and such a disease is cured, I shall consecrate a fowl with the Darun of the *Khshnuman* of Ardibehesht Amshaspand.⁴

These are votive offerings made after rather than before the request has been granted as is the case in the *Yašts*; however, the effect is the same: to situate the believer in a virtuous cycle of divine and secular practice.

The religious prescriptions set down in the various versions of the *Sad Dar* form the basis for much of the information contained in the next set of texts for consideration, the

¹ tr. West 1977b: 271.

² tr. West 1977b: 276.

³ This work is referred to as the *Saddar Bundelesh* in the volume of *Rivāyats* compiled by B.N. Dhabhar.

⁴ Dhabhar 1932: 536.

Persian *Rivāyats*, which consist of twenty-one letters written by priests in Iran in answer to questions put by both priests and laymen in India. These texts date from the late fifteenth century and so bring us properly into the Zoroastrian tradition after its establishment in India. The decision on the part of members of the Parsi community to defer to the authority of priests in Iran, nearly six centuries after leaving that country, has been the subject of some scholarly debate. According to West, Parsis were prompted to write to Iran not because of the ignorance of the priesthood, but because the laity were increasingly reluctant to comply with what they perceived as restrictive religious obligations.¹ Writing from a Zoroastrian perspective, some thirty years later, Paymaster suggests that it was as a result of being surrounded by an 'ocean of people following other creeds, speaking other languages, observing other rituals and customs, conscious of a different history and legend' that the Parsis became ignorant of their own religious traditions.² In a recent book entitled *The Death of Ahriman: Culture, Identity and Theological Change Among the Parsis of India*, Susan Maneck has suggested that there had indeed been a deterioration in priestly knowledge, evidenced by the fact that Iranian priests expressed shock at the apparent ignorance of their Parsi counterparts and also by the lack of literature produced by Parsi priests during the early centuries of their settlement in India. Consequently, Maneck sees the communications with Iran as representing a 'final court of appeal, particularly for laymen'.³

Whatever the motivation for the initial exchange of letters, it seems likely that the changing circumstances of both populations over the following two centuries would have meant that continued correspondence was the result of a variety of factors. In any event, if the contents of the early *Rivāyats* are a true reflection of the concerns of at least a proportion of the Parsi population it seems that by the late fifteenth century there was a growing awareness amongst some Parsis that there were distinct gaps in their religious knowledge, regional differences in the practice of rituals, and a diminution of priestly scholarship. We know from the first *Rivāyat*, which is dated 1478 A.C., that Pahlavi had remained the language for commentary and exegesis of religious texts amongst Iranian Zoroastrians. From the same correspondence, however, we learn that priests (and evidently laymen) in India, while knowing Avestan, were no longer familiar with the Pahlavi language by that time. Hence the author of the *Rivāyat* wrote:

I have not written these subjects in the Pahlavi dialect because Nariman Hoshang said and so represented (to us) that the Mazdayasnian Herbads and Behdins of Khambayet, Navsari, Broach, Surat and Anklesar do not know the Pahlavi language ... I have, therefore, written this treatise in Avesta characters.⁴

¹ J.J. Modi (ed.), 'The late Dr E.W. West's letter on the knowledge and learning of the Parsi priesthood of India about four centuries ago', in *Sir Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy Madressa Jubilee Volume: papers on Iranian subjects*, Bombay 1914: 441.

² Paymaster 1954: 66.

³ Maneck 1997:36.

⁴ Dhabhar 1932: 597-8.

The same author emphasises the fact that Pahlavi is the language of ritual, and urges the Parsi community to send over two priests to learn the language and witness the correct performance of rituals. Books were evidently not considered a substitute for priestly instruction:

There is nothing better than this that two Herbads may come over to this side and learn the Pahlavi language, the ritual, (rules about) the Proper and the Improper, because the commentary and the ritual of the Yasna and of handling a corpse or taking ceremonies precaution thereof is (to be found) in the Pahlavi language. It is difficult for us to send instructions thereanent and we do not rely on this (sort of instruction) for if we (such instructions) we are afraid, there will be additions and omissions and these helpless ones will be responsible for the sin.¹ We have no confidence in sending books (under these circumstances).²

While it seems to have been felt that priestly knowledge had lapsed: 'The worst of it is that the Herbads do not well know (how to handle) the apparatus of their craft. (They do not know) likewise the decisions of the arbiters and (the rules of) purity and impurity'³; the laity too seem to have lost some important traditions. It is interesting to note, for example, in the third *Rivāyat* (1511 A.C.), which is addressed to the 'Mobeds, Dasturs, Hirbads, Behdins, the chiefs and the headmen of the country of Hindustan', a reference to the fact that *behdins* in India were evidently unable to recite the *Niyāyiš*:

And you had written in your letter that there were so many Behedins (in India) but they could not recite Nayishes: explain, by letter, why they are unable to recite the Nayishes.⁴

In a later text, the *Qissa-ye Sanjān*, which tells the story of the migration from Iran and settlement of the Parsis in India and is said to have been written down in 1600 A.C., the author refers, retrospectively, to the time of the founding of the first *Ātaš Bahrām* on Indian soil.⁵ He says that:

In those times, men were (deeply) versed in spiritual matters and were able to observe religious precepts on account of their wisdom. In our own age, the Lord only knows what True Religion is; (men do not), and (all religious) action is, (after all), only a matter of personal satisfaction.⁶

¹ See Dhabhar 1932: 601 n.4, where the literal meaning is given as 'the sin will sit on the neck of'. It is noteworthy that such is the importance of the correct performance of ritual, that even if a mistake is due to ignorance on the part of the performer, the sin is still attributed to him or her.

² Dhabhar 1932: 601. The same request is made in the second *Rivāyat*, written some thirty years after that of Nariman Hoshang: 'Again, the drift of it all is to learn the Pahlavi language ... May it be auspicious for those dear ones: we hope that two Hirbads or Behdins may come to Iran and these servants will be in their service, as best they can and will guide the way of those dear ones and two Dasturs will go in their company to Hindustan for the sake of teaching Pahlavi to those dear ones, and the great affairs of the religion will (thus) acquire splendour.' Dhabhar 1932: 608.

³ *Ibid.*, 599.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 609.

⁵ This is purported to have taken place not long after the first settlers arrived on the West coast of India and were given leave to remain in *Sanjān* by the Hindu king Jadi Rana.

⁶ Hodivala 1920: 106.

It should be noted here that this is a remarkable comment. First, it shows an awareness of the past in a distinctly modern way; in the texts I have looked at so far, it is unusual to find comments which are critically retrospective. Second, the author expresses a profound sense of loss, that the authority of tradition has lapsed. There is also the suggestion here of a community which has become fragmented and individualised. If, indeed, this comment belongs to an early version of the *Qissa-ye Sanjān*, then it suggests that at least some within the community felt the need for consolidation. This may have been one of the reasons why it was felt that their story should be written down, thus firmly establishing the identity of the community and its links with a glorious past.

The fact that so little appears to have been recorded during the early centuries of Parsi settlement in India has not been accounted for. The post-Islamic period in Iran was an active one in terms of the writing down and composing of religious texts, and one would have thought that, for those who had re-established themselves on Indian soil, some attempt would have been made to record such knowledge as they had brought with them. The fact that it was not suggests that the transmission of religious knowledge was by no means entirely dependent upon texts. This may also have been the case amongst communities in ninth-century Iran, at the time of the main exodus of Zoroastrians to India. We do not know to what extent traditional methods of teaching the religion were abandoned once the *Avesta* was finally committed to writing during Sasanian times. If we assume that, at least to some extent, knowledge continued to be imparted by the memorisation of oral texts and ritual actions, then this process would have been disrupted for those who became itinerant during the intervening years between leaving Iran and settlement in India. In the absence of written texts, such knowledge as the Iranian Zoroastrians brought with them to India may have been further eroded as groups of people moved away from the main centre of Sanjān. As I shall show with reference to the *Ātaš nu Gīt*, for the laity the learning of the tradition would have involved participation in communal events. It is likely, too, that priests would have relied on communication with other priests in order to keep alive their knowledge of doctrinal and ritual matters. As Walter Ong points out, in a primary oral culture, conceptualised knowledge which is not repeated aloud soon disappears.¹ There is no means by which to record the past, except through the collective, or group memory. The past is re-enacted, or kept alive, by social groups selectively, in other words that which is no longer relevant to the present is discarded. The fragmentation or diminution of groups results in the loss of social memory.

In Iran, Pahlavi remained the language in which religious texts were composed, and presumably taught, for some time after the Muslim conquest. However, its main

¹ Ong 1990: 41.

geographic location was Fars, and eventually Pahlavi seems to have been used only by priests. The new Persian language which emerged, *darī*, or *parsī-i darī* as it was called, although a continuation of Middle Persian, was written in Arabic script, and Iranian priests did not copy or compose religious texts in this language. In India, on the other hand, Persian was associated with the homeland and eventually came to be used as a replacement for Pahlavi in the composition of religious texts. When correspondence between the two countries began in the late fifteenth century, the comments contained in the early *Rivāyats* suggest that for those who had left Iran, the transmission of religious knowledge had been interrupted, and in the absence of a strong written tradition this had resulted in a growing ignorance on behalf of both priests and laymen with regard to their religion.

With reference to the founding of the first *Ātaš Bahrām* in India, the *Iranšāh*, the passage from the *Qissa-ye Sanjān* cited above mentions the fact that it was installed: 'beaming with light, in conformity with the rites (prescribed) in our creed'. This brings us to the question of these rites and what they were, for the Song of the Fire, which is thought to have been composed a century and a half later, makes oblique references to the different fires which it is considered necessary to collect and purify in order to found an *Ātaš Bahrām*.

We know nothing about the establishment of the *Irānšāh*, save what is said in the *Qissa-ye Sanjān* concerning the donation of land by the Hindu *Rana Jādi*, and a reference to the ritual implements which are said to have been brought from Khorasan. At some later date, Parsi priests wrote to Iran for instructions as to the founding of an *Ātaš Bahrām*, which suggests that whatever had been known had been forgotten. The reply which eventually came from the Iranian *Dasturs* was contained in the *Rivāyat* of Kamdin Šapur, which was dated 1558, that is, sometime after the *Iranšāh* had been installed in Navsari.¹ The *Rivāyat* contained directions for the collection and consecration of the fires which were required to establish an *Ātaš Bahrām*. These directions were repeated in the later text of the *Qissa-ye Zartuštīān-i Hēndustān*, indicating that this text drew on the *Rivāyat* for its authority. However, the chain of authority ends there, and we cannot assume that this custom was founded on early Iranian traditions because we have no evidence of such traditions in earlier sources. Also, it is worth noting that by 1558 some eight centuries would have elapsed since anyone in Iran had witnessed the founding of an *Ātaš Bahrām*. In an article entitled 'The Atash-Beherams of India', C. E. Pavry points out that there is nothing in the *Avesta* or in later Pazend works concerning the ceremonies associated with the great fires of the Sasanians.² Furthermore, the *Vendidād* passages which are so often linked to the founding of the *agiāry* fires refer to the purification of

¹ Following the sack of Sanjān, in 1465, the *Iranšāh* was moved to Bandsa, and from there brought to Navsari where it remained until 1742. For the *Rivāyat* of Kamdin Šapur see Dhabhar 1932: 63-65.

² Pavry 1927: 16ff.

fires which have been put to ill-use, not to their being collected for the formation of an *Ātaš Bahrām*.¹ In his introduction to the *Rivāyats* of Hormazyar Framarz, Dhabhar comments that the Indian ceremony for the consecration of an *Ātaš Bahrām* is far more elaborate than that which is prescribed by the Iranian priests.² Modi, citing Dastur Minocherherji Jamaspji Jamaspasana, notes that there had been little similarity in the processes by which the six *Ātaš Bahrāms* in Bombay were established.³

It may be then that the Parsi community in India developed its own ceremonies and customs with regard to the founding of sacred fires. Based upon the information contained in the *Rivāyat*, which was presumed to be the continuation of an ancient tradition, the founding of a sacred fire was an ideal way of expressing religious identity in a way that could be recognised, but not threatened, by those belonging to other faiths.⁴ As we shall see, there was an upsurge in the creation of religious foundations during the nineteenth century, at a time when Parsi cultural and religious identity was threatened both from within the community, and from outside.⁵

In the introduction to the book *The Invention of Tradition*, Eric Hobsbawm makes the point that traditions are invented when changes in society weaken or destroy the patterns for which former traditions had been designed: 'Where old ways are alive, traditions need neither be revived nor invented.'⁶ It should be noted here that the invention of tradition does not mean its replacement so much as the legitimising of certain practices by reference to the past. Thus in the Pahlavi books which reflect contact with Islam, and later in the Persian *Rivāyats*, there is the sense that authority on religious matters has been passed down through generations of priests. Hobsbawm's observations

¹ A point also made by Pavry, 1927: 17-20. See Vd. VIII: 73-80. Again, the bringing of different fires to the *Dāityō-gātu* (Vd VIII: 81-96) for purification does not refer necessarily to the founding of an *Ātaš Bahrām*. Darmesteter 1980: 110-116.

² Dhabhar 1932: xliii.

³ Modi 1995, 200.

⁴ Until this time, it appears that temple worship did not form an important part of lay religious life, hence the fact that rituals surrounding the establishment of an *Ātaš Bahrām* had been forgotten. Writing in 1794, a British soldier, Lieutenant Moore, commented 'they do not think temples, as places of worship, at all necessary, merely as such: they pray in the open air, and make their protestations to the sun, as the grandest emblem in nature of the Deity, whose temple is the universe, and the all-pervading element of fire his only symbol.' See Hinnells, 'The Parsis and the British', *Journal of the K.R. Cama Oriental Institute*, Bombay 1978, p.32.

⁵ The institution or re-institution of religious traditions is discussed in some detail by Steven Vertovec (A.W. Geertz & J.S. Jenson (eds.) 1991: 80) with reference to the revival of the *Yagna* ceremonies amongst the Hindu population of Trinidad. A *yagna* in this context refers to a series of *pujas*, scripture readings and music sponsored by a wealthy individual and lasting at least seven days. While the context of these week-long celebrations bears no resemblance to the founding of an *agiāry*, the observations of Vertovec concerning the creation of religious traditions (referred to by Weber as the 'institutionalization of charisma') are particularly apposite, and equally could refer to developments within the Parsi community in the nineteenth century with regard to certain religious activities. According to Vertovec, various studies have shown that new traditions are sought particularly amongst religious minorities in contexts of rapid social change, especially where such groups are perceived by others as being socially or morally inferior. One of the factors which might precipitate religious renewal is increased secularisation and communal fragmentation. In such circumstances the role of dynamic individuals, amongst other factors, often determines the course of religious minorities.

⁶ E. Hobsbawm & T. Ranger (eds.) 1993: 12.

are made with respect to the British industrial revolution, however the reasons he gives for the invention of traditions during that period in British history can be more generally applied; in particular, those traditions which are born from a desire to establish or give legitimacy to institutions and status to authority, and those whose main purpose is socialisation, in the sense of inculcating beliefs, value systems and conventional patterns of behaviour. Once the establishment of the *Ātaš Bahrām* had been sanctioned by the highest authority on religious matters, which was the priesthood in Iran, the text of the song indicates that the tradition was taken over and developed by members of the lay community, with the idea, presumably, that these things had been done in the past.¹

This section brings us to within a hundred years of the founding of the Navsari *Ātaš Bahrām*, which is the purported date of the composition of the *Ātaš nu Gīt*. We know little about lay activity in Iran at the time of the compilation of the ninth-century Pahlavi books, and early Parsi history is poorly documented. The tracing of specific instances of ritual or observance, such as the ceremonies and customs surrounding the founding of an *Ātaš Bahrām*, which may have taken place over time but which we are unable to contextualise, does not contribute much to our knowledge of the role of the laity in history. I have, therefore, discussed the earlier texts examined in this chapter with respect to themes rather than facts. Those themes I have drawn out are the ones which are relevant to the text of the *Ātaš nu Gīt*. As we approach the modern era in India, texts such as the *Rivāyats* can be used in conjunction with other evidence in order to construct a more coherent picture of lay activity in rural Gujarat. Thus far then, we are still talking in terms of historical precedents rather than continuities, and those precedents are part of what we might call a thematic genealogy.

The idea of giving in order to receive, so prominent in the *Yašts*, recurs again and again throughout the later literature: in the Pahlavi texts which were of priestly composition, and in the epic literature which describes the gifts made by kings and heroes to the fire temples. We will find this theme also present in the *Ātaš nu Gīt*, and in part, it is the reason for the song's existence, for its performance is commissioned in order to make merit. The way in which this cycle works necessarily involves the interaction of the human and the divine, the earthly and the cosmological spheres. From the *Bundahišn*, and the doctrine of the three times contained in that text, it has been possible to identify a structure which appears to have been born out of that idea, and which can be applied to other texts of a much later date (the first of which I shall discuss in the following section). In the song there is only the vaguest reference to the birth of the prophet, which can only be recognised as such by virtue of the existence of extant Pahlavi texts such as the *Selections of Zādspram*.

¹ 19th century conservative romanticism venerated the notion of 'traditions' as time-honoured practices which did not owe their legitimacy to any apparent social institution. However, we do not know whether the Parsis in the 19th century had adopted this view.

The concept of identity is present in some of the most ancient texts, although with respect to the *Yašts*, we do not know to what this refers, whether, for example, it is based on a religious system, or ethnic groupings, or both of these. What seems evident is that questions of identity appear to manifest themselves in times of conflict and persecution, as can be seen from those texts which show signs of contact with Islam. Identity is a prominent theme in the *Ātaš nu Gīt*, and can be identified particularly when that of the Parsi community was under threat as a result of the assimilation of western culture in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

With regard to priest/lay relations, the texts of the *Sad Dar* and the *Rivāyats* give us an idea of the type of religious obligations which were still incumbent upon the religious community at the time of the composition of those texts. Where the song refers to 'books from Iran', we know from other sources what these contained, the date and circumstances of their arrival in India, and the reasons why priests and laymen in India may have sought the advice of priests in Iran. We can also gain some insight into the way in which knowledge was disseminated from the time that the first Zoroastrians established themselves on Indian soil. While Maneck has suggested (see p.101) that the deterioration in priestly knowledge prior to the date of the first *Rivāyat* in 1478 is evidenced by the lack of literature produced by priests during the first centuries of settlement in India, she does not offer any reasons as to why this might have been the case. There seems to be no plausible explanation why, assuming that it would have been difficult for travellers to bring manuscripts from Iran, priests did not set about recording the knowledge they had brought with them, if, indeed, religious knowledge was part of a developed, writing culture. Therefore, it seems likely that doctrine, ritual and observance were still taught by the majority of priests in Zoroastrian communities in Iran without recourse to written texts. This evidently continued to be the case amongst the early Parsi community in India.¹

3.2 The date of the founding of the Navsari *Ātaš Bahrām*, 1765, and its significance for the composition of the *Ātaš nu Gīt*.

The significance of the date of the founding of the Navsari *Ātaš Bahrām*, for the purposes of this work, is that according to oral tradition it is also the date that the *Ātaš nu Gīt* was composed to celebrate and record this event. Between 1765 and 1879, the date of the publication of the song, many changes had occurred within the Parsi community. The *Ātaš nu Gīt* is not a text which can be used to establish or verify facts; rather, it needs to be examined for its ideas, structures and themes. To ignore its historical context,

¹ Ritual was always likely to play a significant part in priestly activity since it was mainly the performance of rituals on behalf of the laity which provided priests with their income. Dhalla points out that one of the characteristics of a hereditary priesthood is that it becomes replete with ritual in order to generate a living for its priests. See Dhalla 1975: 506.

however, would be to limit the discussion considerably, and something should be said, therefore, about the purported time and place of the composition of the song.

The aim of the first part of this section is to give a brief description of the circumstances of the Parsi community in Gujarat in the mid-eighteenth century, before Bombay became the main centre of activity. The main issue will be the activities of the priesthood and their relations with the laity during this period. Although these pertain to a particular locality and time, they have implications with regard to the wider community, and raise questions concerning authority on a more general level. Certain activities, places and events referred to in the song appear to belong to this time, and so the purpose here is to situate the song with reference to evidence from historical accounts. I shall also refer to certain texts of Parsi authorship in order to look at the way in which the Parsi population, in these early times, responded to the authority of the ruling power which was imposed on them from outside their own community.

In the second part of this section, I shall look in some detail at the text of the *Qissa-ye Zartuštīān-ī Hindustān*, which is the most significant Zoroastrian text of the time in terms of its relationship to the *Ātaš nu Gīt*.

Some historical data

There has been controversy amongst scholars concerning the date of arrival of the Zoroastrians in India, but the general consensus seems to be the year AD 936. They settled initially in Sanjān, and from there established themselves in small towns along the western seaboard of Gujarat, and in rural areas. They lived as farmers, small-time merchants and liquor traders. At that time Parsis occupied a similar status to that of Muslims, existing on the periphery of Hindu society; as a result of their economic role, they would have maintained a comparable place to that of the Vaishya caste in the Hindu caste system.¹ By 1600, Navsari, Broach, Cambay and Surat had become established centres of merchant trade. The principal activities of these towns were shipbuilding, shipping, carpentry, and weaving, and those engaged in these activities formed a distinct socio-economic group. Those who were farmers also engaged in the distribution of cash crops such as fruit, and the making of toddy from tapping palm trees, and, as Maneck points out, this involvement in the production as well as in the distribution of goods made them unique among merchant communities in India.² From the early seventeenth century Parsis were drawn into the various foreign factories in Gujarat, particularly that of the English East India Company in Surat. By the end of the eighteenth century, the British had begun to assume military and political power in that town, and relations between them and the Parsis there deteriorated. This factor, together with the continued incursions of Maratha tribes, and a famine in 1790 which affected the whole of Gujarat, caused

¹ See Kulke 1971: 238.

² Maneck 1997: 24.

Parsis from Surat as well as other rural settlements and cities in Gujarat to begin migrating to Bombay.

The sharp increase in economic prosperity amongst Parsi merchants and businessmen from the early seventeenth century onwards was due to a number of factors, not least of which was their flexibility in terms of physical mobility and vocational versatility. Their practice of endogamy and commensality, on the other hand, imposed a state of self-isolation upon Parsis which was in keeping with the caste structure of Hindu society, and so did not incur the criticism or resentment of those belonging to the majority religion.¹ Parsis themselves were not bound by caste to any specific profession,² and engaged in all the various processes of production and marketing as well as dominating those trades most valuable to the European companies. Again, it was Parsis who acted as brokers to the Portuguese, French, Dutch and English. The earliest and best known of Parsi brokers for the East India Companies was Rustam Manock, followed by his three sons, who took the surname of Seth. Rustam was born around 1635 and must have acquired considerable wealth at an early age, since in 1672 he paid the *jizya* tax imposed by Aurangzeb for the entire Parsi population of Surat.³ Apart from his eventful career, Rustam was remembered for his charitable foundations, designing the *baugs* or gardens which were used for religious ceremonies, contributing to the wedding expenses of the poor, and helping to support the priesthood. Rustam's grandson Manakji Seth was also known for his charitable foundations, including an *adarān* fire and two towers of silence; when he died he left a part of his property in trust for the purpose of endowing the charitable institutions he had founded and supported during his lifetime.⁴

Profit and prosperity was, and still is, actively encouraged within the socio-religious framework of Zoroastrianism. Unlike Hindu practice, there was no renunciation of worldly existence, asceticism, or contemplation which would have impeded, at least theoretically, the single-minded approach to business and industry adopted by Parsi laymen during the course of the following century.⁵ Early contact with the British in the eighteenth century was enhanced by the latter's perception of Zoroastrian religious practice and belief. For example, according to Hinnells, the monotheism of the Parsis, together with their lack of idolatry, was more congenial to the post-Reformation Protestant ethic than was the Hindu temple cult with its profusion of images and gods.⁶

¹ Kulke (1974: 239) notes, by way of contrast, that it was the self-isolation of European Jews which contributed to the emergence of anti-Semitic sentiment.

² The only hereditary vocation is the priesthood. The *nasāsalārs*, or corpse-bearers, are treated as a separate class, and segregated from the rest of the community; however, they may resume normal life after undergoing ceremonial purification.

³ Maneck 1997: 92.

⁴ See Karaka 1884, Vol II: 18. The Seth family of Surat are amongst some of the early names of those listed in the song as having founded *agiārys*.

⁵ It should be noted here that the term *behdin* refers to those who are not born into priestly families. Those who do not undergo training to become priests are commonly referred to as *ostā* (fem. *ostī*). Many young men from priestly families became wealthy merchants instead of training for the priesthood.

⁶ Hinnells 1978: 21.

Accounts of travellers to the region, which describe the type of industry engaged in by Parsis and which reflect the activities described in the first part of the *Ātaš nu Gīt*, begin to emerge in the early eighteenth century.¹ Captain A Hamilton, who was in Surat in 1716, writes of the Parsis:

They are very industrious and diligent in their Vocation, and are bred to trades and manuring Ground. They are good Carpenters or Ship builders, exquisite in the Weaver's Trade and Embroidery which may be seen in the rich Atlases, *Bottadaars* and *Jemewaars* made by them, as well as fine *Baroach* and *Nunsaree Baftas* that come from their Manufactories. They work well in Ivory and Agate, and are excellent Cabinet-makers ...²

John Cleland, who worked for the East India Company in Bombay from 1728 until he returned to England in 1741, writes, again with reference to Surat:

The truth is, that the Guzarat-Parsees seem to have entirely forgot their original country; and ... consider India as their proper country... They are most of them an industrious people ... they are the chief supporters of the Surat manufactures, and of agriculture. Numbers of them are also employed in ship-building, and in the distillery-trade ... none or but inconsiderably few of the Parsees, either meddle at all with the government or with the military; submitting quietly to the power that is uppermost, whether Gentoo or Moorish, and consequently for their usefulness and inoffensiveness, generally meet with protection from both.³

The only discordant note here is the fact that the Parsis appear to have forgotten their country of origin, when, in the religious texts of the period, e.g. the later *Rivāyats* and the *Qissa-ye Zartuštīān-i Hindustān*, there is evidence which suggests that the Parsi community still referred to priests in Iran as the definitive authority on religious matters. It is possible that an observer concerned with recording the activities referred to above would not have been made aware of the religious ties between the Parsi community and their homeland. In other respects, this passage supports the premise that Parsis were prepared to go out of their way not to offend those belonging to the dominant faiths of Islam, Hinduism and, later, Christianity.

The Parsi settlers had brought with them no fixed code of law from Iran, and were subject to the jurisdiction of the ruling power. Civil and religious disputes which occurred within the community were settled by the priesthood. Where agreement could not be reached, advice was sought from priests in Iran by way of the *Rivāyats*, and at the beginning of the eighteenth century — when disputes broke out between the Bhagaria and the *Sanjāna* priesthoods — from the local Hindu ruler. Later, certain disputes were submitted for adjudication to the British authorities. It seems that laymen had begun to participate in community leadership in an official capacity from as early as 1642, with the

¹ In the first section of the song there are references to all the people who are called upon to help construct the *agiāry*; these include carpenters, potters, stonecutters, glassmakers, sailors and basket-weavers. There are also references to bundles of cloth, saris and shawls, blankets, *pagris*, and jewellery.

² Firby 1988: 147.

³ *Ibid.*, 149.

formation of a Panchayat, or Council of Elders, in Navsari which included laymen as well as priests.¹

Priestly disputes

With respect to the priesthood, it seems that by the late thirteenth century, priests had divided Gujarat into five *panthaks*, or parishes, with a hereditary priesthood in each. Sanjān, which was the home of the only *Ātaš Bahrām*, remained the foremost parish, followed by Navsari with its Bhagaria priesthood² and then came the parishes of Godavara, Broach and Cambay. According to the *Qissa-ye Zartuštīān-i Hīndustān* this division into priestly districts appears to have been preceded by some friction within the community:

Thus were divided towns and places. All the wise ones of Sanjān did this job so that there would be no more hatred and strife. Thus every town and place was divided and all the *mobed* were free from fear and happy. 'We shall not enter the place of one another and will all be content in our own place'. Every good *mobed* underwrote a treaty in these terms and arrived to his own place.³

Dhalla suggests that amongst the Parsis in India, from quite early on, there had been more priests than the laity could maintain. Consequently, priests were engaged in small time businesses such as weaving and maintaining small shops as well as preparing the food for religious ceremonies. Their wives helped in this work and also wove the *kustīs* for the community.⁴

It was not until the seventeenth century that, for a variety of reasons, differences appear to have arisen between the priests of various *panthaks*. There were certain major disputes which were to have long lasting consequences, most of these concerned the Bhagaria and the Sanjāna priesthods, and one in particular is alluded to in the *Ātaš nu Gīt*.

Until the establishment of the Navsari *Ātaš Bahrām* in 1765, there had only been one such fire in India, which was founded soon after the arrival of the travellers from Iran. This was the King of Kings, or *Iranšāh*. Following the sack of Sanjān in the fifteenth century during the Muslim conquest of Gujarat, the *Ātaš Bahrām* was moved

¹ The panchayat was a Hindu institution by which the collective voice of the community was able to influence village affairs by means of an ad hoc court. The benefit of such a system over that of a formal judiciary was that the members of the panchayat were likely to share the identity and values of those members engaged in a dispute. On the other hand, it was not designed to solve complicated cases, nor did it have the means to carry out its awards. See R. Kumar, 'Rural life in Western India on the eve of the British conquest' in T. Metcalfe (ed.), *Modern India, an Interpretive Anthology*, Toronto 1971, p. 92.

² *Bhagaria* means 'sharer', the Navsari priesthood was named in such a way because they divided the priestly work among them according to a strict rota or pattern. See F.M. Kotwal, 'The Authenticity of the Parsi priestly tradition', in *Journal of the K.R. Cama Oriental Institute*, Bombay 1976, p.26.

³ Cereti 1991: 99.

⁴ M.N. Dhalla, 1975: 506, 507.

first to the town of Bandsa and from there to Navsari.¹ This event seems to have precipitated an increase in the power of the Bhagaria priesthood, and Navsari became the main centre for pilgrimage and learning throughout Gujarat. By 1579 the leading office of *desaigiri*, or revenue-collector, passed from the family of Changa Aša, the layman who had been responsible for bringing the *Iranšāh* to Navsari, to the most powerful family of Bhagaria priests, which was that of *Dastur Meherji Rana*, who himself became the leading priest in Navsari.²

On the 12th of March this year the priests of Navsari drew up an agreement which recognised Ervad Maherji Vachha (the first Dastur Meherji Rana of Navsari) as the head-priest of Navsari. All the Mobeds were required, in terms of this agreement, to ask for Dastur Meherji Rana's consent before performing some important religious ceremonies like '*Sarosh*' and '*Navsod*'. The document was signed by 13 leading priests of the Town of Navsari ...³

During this time, the Sanjāna priests who had remained in Navsari to tend their *Ātaš Bahrām* suffered a diminution of income, since the agreement under which they were allowed to stay forbade them to engage in services for the *behdin*. Dissatisfaction with this arrangement had prevailed amongst the Navsari community since the arrival of the *Iranšāh*. It meant, for example, that a Sanjāna mobed was required to commission a Bhagaria priest to perform the necessary rituals in the event of a death in his family, even though he was properly qualified to perform them himself.⁴ In 1673, the *Behdins* of Navsari determined to choose their own priests for ceremonial work and to pay them as they pleased.⁵ This agreement was overruled in 1685 when a new agreement was drawn up between the Bhagarias and the Sanjānas in which the original arrangement was re-invoked.⁶ Matters came to a head a year later when the growing dissatisfaction of the laity

¹ There has been some debate amongst scholars of Parsi history as to the exact date of the installation of the *Iranšāh* in Navsari. According to the *Qissa - ye Zartoštian - e Hendustān*, this event took place in 'the year seven hundred and eighty five if you recognize the *Yazdagardi* (era)' (Cereti 1991: 102). According to Paymaster, there has been a tradition amongst the Parsis which says that the fire was installed either in 1416 A.C. or 1419 A.C., however, he maintains that these dates do not fit in with dates for the sack of Sanjān, and that the fire could not have arrived in Navsari before 1481 A.C. (Paymaster 1954: 32, 33. Also, Modi in *The Journal of the K.R. Cama Oriental Institute* 1930: 60, 61, and Hodivala, 1920: 115 & n.52.)

² Maneck (1997: 38,39) suggests that this shift in power began when the fortunes of the family of Changa Aša diminished and property already mortgaged to the Meherji Rana family had to be sold to them. Documents showing the transfer of property from Changa Aša's nephew Sheth Dayyan Rana to the father of Dastur Meherji Rana, Ervad Rana Jaisang, are contained in Hodivala 1920: 191-195.

³ From a document entitled 'A.D. 1579 - Agreements Recognising Meherji-Rana' cited in Paymaster 1954: 101.

⁴ With reference to a letter sent in 1650 by the priests of Surat to Dastur Mahrnush Kaikobād in Navsari, Hodivala (1920: 232-236) notes that the respect shown by the author to the Navsari priest was an indication that he was acknowledged, even by the chief priests of other *panths*, to be superior to other leaders.

⁵ On the 8 November 1673, the *behdins* of Navsari agreed that, as they did not like the *Bhagaria* arrangement whereby work was performed on a rota system, they would distribute ceremonial work to whichever priest they pleased. Priestly fees were also to be decided by the *behdin*. Paymaster 1954: 104.

⁶ This document entitled 'A.D. 1685 Division of Panthaks' stipulated that the Sanjān Mobeds were not to perform any ceremonies in Navsari save the 'Boi' in the *Ātaš Bahrām*. Paymaster 1954: 105.

over the extortionate fees extracted by the Bhagarias led them to side with the Sanjāna priests.¹ Riots broke out in which two Bhagaria priests, Ervad Maneckji Behramji Nariman and Ervad Rustomji Shapurji Antia, were beaten to death by *behdins* supporting the Sanjāna priests. Later, the Bhagarias retaliated with the result that six Sanjāna laymen died. Following this incident, an agreement was reached whereby the Sanjāna priests were permitted to perform death and marriage ceremonies in Navsari; however, in 1742 the Bhagarias obtained a ruling from the *Gaekwad*² and the Sanjānas departed from the town with their sacred fire.

It is this conflict which is the primary issue in the *Qissa-ye Zartuštīān-ū Hindustān*. After its resolution, the story continues with the founding of the new *Ātaš Bahrām* some twenty-three years later, by which time the *Iranšāh* had been reinstated in Udwada. Since the song is also supposed to commemorate this event, it is not surprising to find the dispute referred to in that text also.

Another dispute, one which involved the whole community, arose in the seventeenth century, as a result of communication with Iran, when it was discovered that the respective calendars of Iranian and Indian Zoroastrians differed by one month. Any change in the calendar meant a complete change in ritual life, and it was over a disagreement about dates for the celebration of the celebration of New Year that, in 1730, the Parsis divided into two sects: the *kadmis*, who adopted the Iranian version of the calendar, and the *Shahenshahis*, who remained with the Indian version.³ This dispute, which became known as the *Kabisah*, or intercalation controversy, simmered for over a decade, with both priests and laymen becoming involved. Advice was sought from Iran, in the form of twenty questions addressed to the *dasturs* of Yazd, and in 1743 a *rivāyat* arrived supporting the *kadmis* and urging them to persuade the community to adopt the Iranian calendar. The *Shahenshahis* claimed this pronouncement to be a forgery. Matters came to a head in 1782 when fights broke out in Broach, a stronghold of the *kadmi* sect,

¹ Agreements drawn up between the *Sanjānas* and the *Bhagarias* with regard to fees had favoured the latter. In 1543, for example, a Sanjāna priest, Nāgoj Dhayyān, was sent to the town of Daman which was in the district of Sanjān. However, he was obliged to pay one and a half *takas* into the Navsari *pantiala* or general fund, for every marriage ceremony he performed (see Hodivala 1920: 227, and Paymaster 1954: 100). In 1599, an agreement made by the Anjuman of Navsari suggests that the *Bhagaria* priests were prone to taking more than their fair share of the food brought for consecration: 'Whosoever allots the shares of the *Bhagar* shall, after giving his due to the holder of the *Bāj*, take, as his fixed share only 5, five, breads 5, *polis*, 32, thirty two *Daruns*, and 2, two plantains. This much only shall he take and whosoever takes more shall be [punishable as] an offender by the Anjuman.' Hodivala 1920: 230, 231.

² It seems that the *Bhagaria* priests continued to try and prevent *Sanjāna* priests from performing any ceremonies outside their own *panth*. In 1740, a letter was sent by the Navsari anjoman to the *behdins* on the island of Div, which was included in the Navsari *panth*, instructing them not to employ the Sanjāna priest who was there: 'Again, Adhyāru Sohrāb Jāmās is a Sanjānā and is not entitled to anything. Do not get any work (ceremony) performed by him in any case. Do not believe (or act according to) anything he says. You are wise, wherefore should we write more? Let us know if we on this side can do any thing for you, and hereafter entrust every work (ceremony) relating to *Shiāv* and Sarosh, to Adhyāru Sorābji Bahmanji Dāji and do not place any faith in that Sanjānā.' Hodivala 1920: 238, 239.

³ Kulke (1974: 21) maintains that the *kadmis* comprised 7% of Parsis, and the *Shahenshahis* 93%. See also Maneck 1997: 128ff.

and a pregnant woman was kicked by a member of the *Shahenshahis*, and miscarried. The man was tried and later hanged upon which many *Shahenshahis* came to regard him as a martyr and the anniversary of his death was commemorated as a religious festival.¹

During this time, there were other controversies which caused further divisions within the community. As a result of the declining economic situation of Surat, in 1736 the priests of that town forbade the marriage of their daughters to *behdin*. This meant, in effect, that while they were no longer obliged to pay dowries for their own daughters, they themselves could continue to marry *behdin* girls without incurring financial expense. In Surat, many wealthy merchants came from priestly families and so maintained an alliance with the priesthood thus strengthening the position of the latter. This situation caused a great deal of ill-feeling, but it was not resolved for some fifty years, when a commission was appointed by the Governor of Bombay to look into the question of inter-marriage between priests and *behdins*.²

One other dispute I shall mention was over the matter of funerary practices and demonstrates how deep the rift had grown between the two priesthoods, Bhagarias and Sanjānas. While the Sanjāna priests crossed the legs of the deceased and left the mouth uncovered, according to Iranian custom, the Bhagarias laid out their corpses with the legs straight and with a veil covering the mouth. A visiting scholar-priest from Iran, Dastur Jamasp Hakim Vilayati, pronounced in favour of the Sanjāna practice; however, the Bhagarias, followed by the priests of Surat, refused to change their customs concerning the laying out procedures.³

One of the significant aspects of these disputes is that, in matters of controversy, the Parsi community still turned to Iran as the ultimate authority in religious matters. The fact that this authority was no longer accepted unanimously by the Parsi community was due to a number of factors: by the seventeenth century the Iranian Zoroastrian community had dwindled to a small, impecunious minority living mainly in Yazd and Kirman. By this time too, the Parsi priests had acquired a better knowledge of their own religious texts, most of which they had translated into Gujarati, and so were perhaps less willing to accept the authority of their Iranian counterparts. Wealthy merchants, both *behdin* and those from priestly families, began to exert their influence and were not always willing to obey the rulings of the priesthood; this led, more generally, to a decline in the authority of priests. Eventually, as we shall see, the community turned, increasingly, to the jurisdiction of the local ruling power rather than to the priesthood in Iran.

¹ Maneck 1997: 134.

² *Ibid.*, 132-3. See p.127-8.

³ Dastur Jamasp was evidently dismayed by the extent of ill-feeling caused by these minor differences in custom. See Maneck 1997: 131.

Parsis acknowledge other faiths

Certain texts of Parsi priestly composition, which may have started in oral transmission, but which came to be written down during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, contain material which relates to the religion of the ruling power of the time. This material is useful partly because it helps to establish the time of the composition of the text, and also because it shows us the rather artful way in which, it seems, the Parsis acknowledged the religious systems of those upon whom they were dependent.

According to oral tradition, when the Parsis arrived in India, they were reliant on the Hindu ruler Jadi Rana to permit them to stay and to practise their religion. The leader of the Parsis, one Dastur Neryosang Dhaval, is supposed to have presented a document to the Hindu king explaining the Zoroastrian religion; this was in the form of sixteen sanskrit *shlokas*.¹ Scholars have noted² that these verses concentrated mainly on those aspects of ritual which bore similarities with certain Hindu rites and customs. For example, likening the end of the *kušti* to a serpent's head (shloka 3) would seem odd for a Parsi for whom the serpent is an ahrimanic creation, whereas for Hindus, snakes are objects of worship; the reference to ceremonies in honour of the *fravašis* may be seen to resemble the Hindu *śradha* ceremonies; in Shloka 13 the wearing of the *kušti* is compared to the Hindu custom of performing ablutions in the Ganges. Finally, with reference to animal sacrifice, which was still enjoined upon Parsis at that time, it states that if a Parsi should 'accidentally kill even a beast' then they should perform a penance which entailed the use of five products of the cow (Shloka 14). While this must be a reference to the *barešnum*, it is described in such a way as to resemble the *panch-gavya* penance of the Hindus during which the five products of the cow - milk, curd, ghee, urine and dung are eaten.³ Areas in which Parsi and Hindu religious practice diverged, for example the Parsi belief that asceticism and fasting were to be avoided, their code of dress and matters of doctrine, were not included in the account.

The performance of songs seems to have been part of Parsi culture, certainly since the time of these Sanskrit verses; Shloka 4 mentions that the occasions for songs were arranged by women, usually at weddings which took place on auspicious days.

Whose females cause melodious songs to be sung and music (to be played) at auspicious marriage ceremonies which are performed on the lucky days mentioned (to them), whose females apply sandal, fragrance, etc. to their bodies; who are being pure in their dealings; perform ceremonies of various qualities; and who act

¹ Although the earliest extant manuscript dates from the seventeenth century, the style of the Sanskrit suggests that it may go back to the twelfth century (Maneck 1997: 21). While there is some doubt concerning the origin of this particular oral tradition, since neither Dastur Neryosang Dhaval nor the sanskrit *shlokas* are mentioned in the *Qissa-ye Sanjān*, the contents of these verses suggest that they were indeed composed to explain the religion to a ruler who was Hindu.

² Paymaster 1954: 14; Maneck 1997: 21.

³ Paymaster 1954: 14.

up to (are attached to) the delightful Scriptures: - those are we Parsees, noble-born, bold, valiant and very strong.¹

This accords perfectly with the text of the *Ātaš nu Gīt*, in which the performance is commissioned and performed by women on the occasion of a wedding, and where the auspicious days are given both from the Hindu and the Zoroastrian calendar.

By the time of the composition of the *Qissa - ye Sanjān* (1600), Gujarat was under the Muslim rulership of the Mughal emperor Akbar, and Parsis now went out of their way to create a favourable impression with the new ruler. Akbar was served in his court by the leading priest of Navsari, Dastur Meherji Rana², who had been invited to take part in religious debates and inform the emperor of the Zoroastrian religion.³ Much has been made, by Zoroastrian writers, of the successful representations made by Meherji Rana at the court of Akbar. The emperor is said to have been invested with the *sudreh* and *kustī*, and to have established a fire temple at his court. This was put in charge of the court historian Shaikh Abul Fazal, who was commanded never to let it go out. Akbar is also reported to have replaced the Muslim lunar calendar with the Parsi solar calendar, and to have adopted the old Iranian names for the months and days.⁴ While the Muslim ruler may have been moved to adopt various elements of the Zoroastrian religion, the influence, at least superficially, of Islam on Zoroastrianism can be seen in the introductory doxology to the *Qissa - ye Sanjān*, which contains Islamic motifs, phraseology and ideas which derive from the Qur'an. It is a matter of opinion as to how significant these ideas were; whether, as Maneck suggests,⁵ they reflect a real transition from Zoroastrian theological assumptions of dualism to those of Muslim monotheism or whether, as Williams maintains, they reflect only the 'influences and affectations' of another culture in what is essentially a highly structured foundation myth which still today is drawn upon to reinforce a sense of identity amongst modern Parsis.⁶ The point here is that this introduction could only have been composed while Islam was the dominant religion. In this respect, the style differs markedly from that of the text of the *Qissa-ye Zartuštiān-i Hindustān*, which, although supposed to have been composed over a century later, follows on from the *Qissa - ye Sanjān* and incorporates a summary of the narrative part of that text.

¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

² A biographical account of Dastur Meherji Rana is contained in the *Mahyar Name* which was written in Persian verse in 1881 A.C. by Dastur Erachju Sohrabji Meherji Rana, librarian of the Mulla Feroze Madressa and descended from Meherji Rana. See Maneck 1997: 50. Paymaster (1954: 113ff.) also gives some biographical notes.

³ Details of this event are given in the poem composed by Meherji Rana's son Dastur Kaikobad Meherji Rana. See Maneck 1997: 71 n.1.

⁴ See Paymaster 1954: 93-95, and Nanavutty 1980: 47,48.

⁵ Maneck 1997: 61ff.

⁶ Williams, *The Myth of the Eternal Arrival, the Zoroastrian Qissa-ye Sanjān* (forthcoming), p.2.

In 1700 the Emperor of Delhi had conferred upon Tehmulji Rustomji Desai, who was the first of the Mota Desai family of Navsari to become the *desaigiri* of that town, the Chowdhrai of Navsari. At this time Navsari suffered under oppressive Mughal rule until, in 1720, Tehmulji agreed with the Mahratta chieftain Pilaji Rao Gaikwar to bring the town back into Hindu governorship.¹ Both Tehmulji Rustomji Desai and his son Khursedji, who was responsible for initiating the foundation of a new *Ātaś Bahrām* in Navsari, are mentioned in the *Qissa-ye Zart štian- H ndustān*, and in the *Ātaś nu Gīt*. It is noticeable that in neither of these texts is there any evidence of Islamic symbolism or theological ideas.² Insofar as the QZ refers to those in power, it is to praise the beneficence and wisdom of Hindu rulers.³ Thus with reference to the dispute between the Sanjāna and Bhagaria mobeds of Navsari we are told:

(390) In that period, there was in *Naosāri* a good and powerful *rāo* called *Gangāji*. All the *behdin* went lamenting to that wise and good *sardār* ...⁴

Later, a grandson of this governor, Rao Damanji Gaikwar, of the ruling family of Baroda, who ruled in Gujarat between 1732 and 1768 is described as follows:

(460) O friend, know that his name was *Dāmānji* just, of good qualities and of best actions ... All the *Sanjāne* mobed went, they hastened to *rāo Dāmānji*. The *rāo* of good custom was in *Sungar*, he was always in happiness and peace.

When the dispute was finally settled, the Sanjānas departed from Navsari taking the *Irāhšāh* with them; after several years in the town of Bolsar, they finally settled in Udwarda, where another 'good and kind Rāja' by the name of Dorje Sing Rāja helped them.⁵ As far as the Navsari *Ātaś Bāhrām* is concerned, this was enthroned during the governorship of Rao Kerdarji who 'was kind to his subjects and just'.⁶

From the brief look at the above texts it can be seen how different styles, terminologies and references to powerful leaders are assimilated, or abandoned, according to whether or not those in authority were Hindus or Muslims. This may be an indication, perhaps, of the superficial nature of such inclusions, or omissions, as suggested by Williams in his evaluation of the introductory doxology to the *Qissa - ye Sanjān*. With reference to the *Ātaś nu Gīt*, the early part of the text refers to Hindu rather

¹ The only references to this event, that I have found, are very brief: Cereti 1991: 114, n.7, and Paymaster 1954: 130, 131. They do not quite tally with the Gāikwār family tree as given by Modi 1933: 60, in which it seems that Pilāji Gāikwār was the son of Jhinguji or Gangāji Gāikwār, who is also said to have been the Governor of Navsari, presumably before his son.

² Cereti (1991: 103 n. 162) notes, however, that in the text of the QZ there are instances of words which would have come from the language written in the Muslim courts of India.

³ There is one exception where the *Nawab* of Surat (line 350) is described as 'That good and beautiful *Nawab*' (Cereti 1991: 104). According to Modi the name of this *Nawab* was Salābat Khān, and he had come to power as the Mutasaddi of Surat in 1687 (Modi 1933: 53, 54).

⁴ Cereti 1991: 106. Rao Gangaji Gaikwar was the governor of Navsari, brother of Dāmaji I and grandfather of Dāmaji II.

⁵ Cereti 1991:111.

⁶ For some reason Cereti has not included this section of the text in his translation. See Modi 1930: 56.

than Muslim practice, which substantiates the 1765 date given for its composition according to oral tradition. As I have mentioned (p.116), the Hindu calendar is referred to for auspicious days on which a marriage may take place. The juxtaposition of the two calendars serves two purposes: first, since they are in opposition to each other, this is a way of drawing attention to Parsi identity, and second, it serves to acknowledge the religion of the ruling power. There are references to other Hindu customs in the song, such as the calling of the astrologer, and the use of *kum kum*, which had probably become part of Parsi tradition (in the same way as the wearing of the sari), and should not be seen as a deliberate attempt, on the part of the authors, to recognise Hinduism. The final section of the song, which I will discuss with reference to its date of publication, focuses on the wealthy merchants who had made their fortunes as a result of British patronage. Here there are no references to the Hindu calendar, and the worship of Hindu deities is openly condemned (see p.185).

Some reasons for accepting the purported date for the composition of the song

The historical framework which I have described above is confined, in terms of time and space, to the towns of Gujarat during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It will be seen that the early part of the song situates its origins within this framework, rather than the later context of its date of publication. The names, the occupations, the reference to the dispute, and the rituals all point to the likelihood that at least part of the song was composed at the time of, or not long after, the founding of the Navsari *Ātaš Bahrām*. It is likely, also, that members of the laity imagined themselves as part of a localised community circumscribed by various boundaries which were not only geographic: there was the fact that they were members of a minority religion surrounded by Hindus, Muslims and Christians, and there was also the boundary which separated them, both physically and psychologically, from their homeland, Iran. We know from the *Rivāyats*, the *Qissa-ye Sanjān* and the *Qissa-ye Zartuštīān-ī Hindustān*, and the *Ātaš nu Gīt* itself that the Parsis still identified strongly with Iran and looked to Iranian priests as the ultimate authority in religious matters.

With respect to the trades and occupations which are mentioned in what I refer to as the first stage of the song, there are those which seem to belong to the rural rather than to the urban community. Some of these, such as basket-making and coppersmithing, were no longer practised by Parsis in Bombay at all according to the census of 1864, while sailors, potters and masons (also mentioned in the song) were poorly represented there.¹ Thus, while the latter part of the song refers mainly to *agiārys* founded in Bombay, and to

¹ Kulke 1974: 51-55.

wealthy merchants who come from that city, the earlier part seems to be set in a rural town, as is popularly held.¹

There is sufficient historical material surrounding the *Ātaš nu Gīt* to allow us to raise the question whether or not the song is saying something concrete which relates to its time and place of origin. We know from the *Qissa-ye Zartuštīān-i Hēndustān* that a major conflict had erupted between the two priestly groups. This had resulted in the development of a rift between lay as well as priestly members of the community since evidently some members of the Navsari laity began to patronise the Sanjāna rather than their own Bhagaria priesthood. When the conflict was resolved and the Sanjānas left, taking with them the *Irānšāh*, it would have been important for the Bhagaria priesthood to re-establish its authority and what better way of doing this than to found a new *Ātaš Bahrām*? It seems possible, then, that the affirmation of the community expressed in the song refers in the first instance to this conflict: about healing the divisions of the past and establishing a new hierarchy and social order after the 'civil strife' of the dispute. The elaborate procedure for the founding of the new fire described in the QZ may even have been a 'new' tradition created for the very purpose of legitimising the authority of the Bhagaria priesthood.

There is a final point I should like to make which lends weight to the idea that the song originated in connection with a local event. Whereas the Persian texts which I have mentioned above seem to have been intended for wide dissemination (we know for example that the *Qissa - ye Sanjān* was already being used as an historical document by the middle of the nineteenth century), as far as the transmission of the *Ātaš nu Gīt* is concerned, it seems not to have been widely disseminated. While the song appears to have seen itself as representing the community in its entirety the naming of names, all the professions, women and priests suggests an intended inclusiveness - it has, nevertheless, remained part of local tradition. By 1879 there were *ādarān* fires established in many places as far afield from Bombay as Karachi, Calcutta and Aden; however, those mentioned in the song are all in Bombay. Parsis I have spoken to from areas other than Bombay and Gujarat, such as Calcutta, Karachi, Poona and Mysore, have never heard of the *Ātaš nu Gīt*, which suggests either that the tradition has died out in these places, or never existed there.

¹ In a different version of the *Ātaš nu Gīt*, namely the *Shree Iranshah nu Git*, it is interesting to note that the author, who is a layman, mentions that several un-Zoroastrian beliefs have been described in the 'old song' (which we can assume refers to the Navsari *Ātaš nu Gīt* since the latter is addressed to the *Iranšāh* in Udwada). This song (he writes), instead of revering Ahura Mazda and the Ameshaspands, talks about gathering together all sorts of trades people, giving them gifts, washing the feet of the astrologers with milk, and sacrificing a goat for the *Ātaš Bahrām*. With regard to the question of dates, it seems likely that these activities belong to an earlier period when, for example sacrifice, as condoned in the *Rivāyats*, was still openly practised amongst the Parsi community, particularly in rural areas.

Qissa-ye Zartuštīān-i Hīndustān

I have referred to the contents of the *Qissa-ye Zartuštīān-i Hīndustān* in so far as it is relevant to the lay Song of the Fire. Whereas we can only speculate as to the date of the composition of the song, we know that the QZ was composed by Shapurji Maneckji Sanjāna, a member of a priestly family in Navsari who was born in 1735 and died at the age of seventy.¹ There are two important elements in this text which help to shed light on the historical events, the places and some of the rituals referred to in the song: the first is the detailed description of the rituals required to found a fire of the highest order, which appears to have been taken from the *Rivāyat* of Kamdin Šapur.² The second is the dispute between the Bhagarīa and the Sanjāna priests, how it arose and its resolution.³

It is clear that the events, names and places contained in the *Qissa-ye Zartuštīān-i Hīndustān* all belong to a particular locality. That this is the story of a local community, concerned with local affairs, is emphasized by Modi in his commentary on the text. Of the places named in the QZ, apart from the references to the places in the legend of Zoroaster, Bactria (Balkh) and Kashmir, and the places in Iran from which the migrant settlers came and stayed en route for India, Khorasan and Hormuzd, all are in Gujarat.⁴ Thirteen of the names which appear in the QZ refer to characters, both mythical and historical, from the Iranian past, while thirty-three belong to the history of the Parsis in Gujarat.⁵ Thus while the community still identified with its homeland on various levels, the action of the narrative takes place mainly in Navsari and its focus of authority appears to be the Bhagarīa priesthood.

While on one level the QZ operates as a narrative which describes certain events, it appears also to contain a structure which operates on an entirely different level, and it is this structure which I shall examine here. In the same way that a poet is constrained by the language in which he or she may compose, so it seems that in many of their works, both religious and secular, Zoroastrians are constrained by their understanding of cosmological and eschatological mythology. This idea has been explored by Williams in his study of the *Qissa - ye Sanjān* (forthcoming) in which he suggests that the text is based upon a tripartite structure throughout, which, in itself, constitutes an essential, operational theme. Thus he correlates the three stages of the history of the Parsis as recounted in the *Qissa-ye Sanjān* with the Zoroastrian evolutionary process of *bundahišn*, or perfect creation, *gumēzišn*, or mixture, during which there is a period of conflict and

¹ See Cereti 1991: 9. Although the manuscript bears no record of its date and place, Cereti points out that the internal evidence of the text suggests that Sanjāna wrote this when he was no longer in his youth, since he refers to his father's death, nor when he was very young since he asks God not to deprive him of his youth. Thus it seems likely that the text was written around 1765 when the Navsari *Ātaš Bahrām* was founded.

² Cereti 1991: 11.

³ See pp. 179-181.

⁴ Modi 1933: 2ff.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 24, 44.

disestablishment, and *wizārišn*, or resolution (thereafter these three sections are subdivided according to the same tripartite system).

In reflecting upon this idea of *process*, it occurred to me that similar tripartite structures could be applied to the later Persian text, *Qissa-ye Zartuštīān-ī Hīndustān*. The first of these structures, which I will describe in this section, concerns the way in which the text works as a whole. The second structure relates to a theme or sub-plot which tells the story of the two *Ātaš Bahrāms*. The *Qissa-ye Zartuštīān-ī Hīndustān* has links with the *Qissa - ye Sanjān* for the reason that it continues the narrative of the Parsis in Navsari where that text ends. It is also linked to the *Ātaš nu Gīt*, which refers to some of the events, places and people described in the *Qissa-ye Zartuštīān-ī Hīndustān*. I have already mentioned the fact that the doxology which introduces the narrative part of the *Qissa - ye Sanjān*, and which has a distinctively Islamic character, is omitted in the *Qissa-ye Zartuštīān-ī Hīndustān*.¹ Whereas in the *Qissa - ye Sanjān* the reference to creation is in Muslim style and the name of Ohrmazd is not mentioned once in the entire text, in the *Qissa - ye Zartuštīān - ī Hīndustān* the account of creation is entirely Zoroastrian, down to the symbolic representation of the world in its *mēnog* and *gētīg* states. In the latter text, the opening lines are dedicated to Ohrmazd who is first mentioned by name in line 6. The first part of the *Qissa - ye Zartuštīān ī - Hīndustān*, which I suggest is analogous to the cosmological period of *Bundahišn*, or perfect creation, proceeds with a fairly detailed account of the life of the prophet beginning with his birth:

(30) In the moment of birth he was laughing and, because of this, all the *divs* became pale faced. All men were astonished at his laughter, at his *farr*, and at (the beauty of) that face. All the *div* and *šeytan* were worried and cast spells at that good (bestowed with) greatness of soul but these had no effect on the good *Zartošt* because God was his helper and support.²

It can be seen that this passage has come down from the more ancient myth contained in the Pahlavi books as, for example, the account contained in the *Selections of Zādspram*.³ After the creation of the world in six stages, Zardušt remained with Ohrmazd for ten years; he beheld the whole of creation and learned the hidden secrets of the religion. Then Ohrmazd asked him to take the religion and 'spread it in the world of corporeal beings'; he also gave him the following:

The Holy and unique God gave him the twenty one *Nask* from the *Avesta*. (50) Moreover He gave him the resplendent *Ātaš* that burns constantly without fuel, (happy him). Thirdly he gave him a shoot of the cypress of *Kašmīr*. That wise one appreciated these three things. Lastly *Zartošt* was given a resplendent throne set with jewels on which that beautiful-bodied one sat having put on those three gifts.

¹ See p.117.

² Cereti 1991: 91.

³ See p.88. Cereti (1991:12) points out that there is no exact correspondence between this version of the prophet's life and those contained in the extant Pahlavi literature. A similar version is to be found in a late apocryphal work composed in Pahlavi, supposedly not long before the composition of the QZ, the *Wizīrgard - ī Dēnīg* (for which see Molé 1967: 8,9, 122-135).

As he stood by him the Angel lifted the jewel-set throne, put it on his shoulders and brought it down to earth.¹

At this point it seems that the book, the fire, and the plant were in a perfect, static state.² Once Zardušt arrived in the world he recited the *Ahunvar* which temporarily forestalled the demons (lines 55-69). Then he went to the court of Šāh Gostāsp, and instructed him to build a dome for the fire, to plant the cypress tree and to recite the twenty-one *Nask* of the *Avesta*. The Šāh carried out these instructions:

(75) The dome was completed, beautiful and colorful, the *Ātaš* that the Good Prophet had brought from the court of the Pure and Highest Lord, was established there ... (80) As soon as the shoot of the cypress was planted in another place the leaves appeared magically by order of the Lord, Holy Creator ... (84) Then the wise *Zartošt* recited the twenty-one *Nask* of the *Avestā* before the Šāh ...

It can be seen that the dynamics of this action caused the fire to burn in its proper place, the plant to grow, and the religion to begin to be disseminated in Iran. In other words, the *mēnōg*, or spiritual, state of the world was replaced by the material, or *gētīg*, state. Immediately after these events have taken place, the text moves on to Ahriman's attack, which is described metaphorically, in terms of the oppressive and tyrannical reign of Eskandar. From this point onwards in the narrative we have a period of conflict as expressed in a series of misfortunes which befall the community, each of which is followed by a resolution (see the following table).

¹ Cereti 1991: 91, 92. Although this account of the prophet's life is omitted from the *Qissa ye Sanjān*, the story seems to have been in oral transmission at the time of the writing of that text, since Henry Lord states the belief amongst Parsis that Zoroaster brought fire from heaven. See Hinnells 1978: 25.

² See Bd.1, 8, above, p.89.

Conflict	Resolution
(89-95) Eskander conquers Iran: 'that impure king of evil actions oppressed and vexed the pious men as no other king had oppressed and vexed them before in the material world'.	(96-104) Reign of Ardešīr - Šapur: 'by his justice the world again found peace and he freed the country from the hated robberies'.
(105-115) Muslim conquest of Iran: 'from that moment desolation came to Irān ... The dastur and behdin were ruined and a number of them hid because of the religion.'	(116-124) Zoroastrians leave Iran: 'it is better to be far from oppression, we must go to India ... There were many boats and ships at sea that immediately unfurled the sails.'
(125-133) The ship is hit by a storm and those on board pray for their deliverance: 'O Creator of the angels ... Free us from this tempest and, if we survive to this difficulty and storm, will go towards the country of Hendustān and establish an Ātaš Varahrām.'	(134-205) The Parsis are saved from the storm and sail on to the island of Div from where they go to Sanjān. They are given permission to stay by the Hindu king, Jādī Rana, and to establish the first Ātaš Bahrām.
(217-218) Reference to the 'hatred and strife' which preceded the division of the community into five autonomous priestly districts.	(206-223) Division of community into panths: 'Thus every town and place was divided and all the mobed were free from fear and happy. (They said) "We shall not enter the place of one another and will all be content in our own place". Every good mobed underwrote a treaty in this terms and arrived to his own place.'
(224-228) Sanjān 'pawnd' to the Portuguese.	(229-234) Bhagarias of Navsari give the village of Bolsar to the Sanjānas.
(234-270) Arrival of Muslims in India: 'One day the šah said to a Vizir, Alf Xān by name ... "Go to Sanjān with the army, bring forth the army from here, make a great show, start war, take that country from the hands of the Raja!"... on account of this news the Raja fell unconscious and only regained conscience after some hours. Immediately he summoned all the people of the religion, mobad and behdin hurried ready ... in those days the behdin were many and counted themselves and came to a total of so many (that) fourteen thousand were ready to do battle ... The army of the Raja and all the well-famed men were smitten in the war with islam, the town of Sanjān destroyed, fate had turned against so many men.'	(271-332) Behdins flee to Bhārut and from there go and settle in Bandsa with the sacred Iranšāh. After some time a behdin, by the name of Changa Aša, moves the fire to Navsari where it is tended by the Sanjāna priests, in agreement with the Bhagarias: 'Afterwards the pious šah Cāngā summoned there the Bhagariye and then he summoned also the three Sanjān who served the Ātaš Bahrām. Cāngā šah said to the three of them: "... O prudent and virtuous ones, settle here in peace. Know that (even) now that you have come to Naosāri, your district is still that of Sanjān ... I want to avoid war of one with the other ... you must do the work for the Ātaš Bahrām... you must never do any other"'
(332-385) The Sanjānas break the treaty and violence breaks out between the Bhagarias and the Sanjānas in Navsari. The dispute continues.	(385-508) Desai Khuršīd brings about a final solution to the conflict, and the Sanjānas leave Navsari with their sacred fire.

The final part of the text of the QZ is dedicated to the founding of the Ātaš Bahrām of Navsari. In this third section, which I suggest is analogous with the *wizārišn* or time of Renovation, all disputes have been resolved (to the satisfaction of the Bhagarias). This part of the text describes all elements of the community working together, in sharp contrast to the preceding section in which there was civil strife.

3.3 The date of the publication of the *Ātaš nu Gīt*, 1879.

This date is associated with the material contained in the latter part of the song, and brings us to a period in Parsi history whose focus is the city of Bombay. I suggest that the third section of the *Ātaš nu Gīt* represents the *wizārišn*, or third stage in the cosmological process of creation, where there is a symbolic 're-creation' of society. This renewal, or re-creation, is expressed in the long list of names which occurs at the end of the song. These refer to a number of different categories of people: those wealthy Parsi benefactors who have founded fire temples, those who belonged to the *anjoman*, women who commissioned the song to be performed, relations who came to stay at the house where the wedding took place. It is the names of some of these people, particularly those of well-known merchant traders, which relates this part of the song to a specific time, that is, at least a century after the founding of the Navsari *Ātaš Bahrām*, and place, which is Bombay.

The nineteenth century is a period in Parsi history which is complex and well documented. Here, I shall do no more than draw attention to some of the events and circumstances surrounding the growth of Bombay, and look at some of the changes which had taken place within the Parsi community during that time and which are alluded to in the song by virtue of the list of names which belong to this era. There were changes, for example, in the distribution of wealth, in the relations between priests and laymen, in educational opportunities, and in the way some people began to view aspects of religious practice and traditional teaching.

The main events which I shall outline below are anchored to dates, documents and names; however, they should not be viewed as a chronology whereby one event leads to or is the direct cause of the next, for this would be to oversimplify a complex period in Parsi history. I have included this data in order to contextualise the later, historic part of the song: to give some historical background to the names which appear there. The song itself brings to life the historical accounts, so when we learn that the Parsi Panchayat wished to prohibit expenditure on lavish wedding parties, we have some idea of the nature of such events. The Bombay Gazetteer gives the dates of the founding of various *agiārys*, and the song describes, in idealised form, what this process entailed; in other words, we find in the song both realities and representations.

Some historical data

Although, as I have already mentioned, there was an increase in the number of Parsis moving to Bombay from rural areas during the mid to late eighteenth century (see p.109), Parsis had been some of the first Gujaratis to settle in Bombay when it belonged to the Portuguese. After the city was ceded to the British in 1662 it became even more

attractive as a trading centre, a safe haven from the instability of the surrounding area,¹ and a place in which the British had proclaimed religious freedom:² 'There shall be no compulsory conversion, no interference with native habits, and no cow-killing in Hindu quarters.'³

During the nineteenth century, Bombay became a major trading port; her main exports were raw cotton and opium, while imports were those of cotton goods, metals, silk and sugar.⁴ Increasingly, the East India Company came to rely on Indians to facilitate their expanding commerce: 'They needed men to interpret for them, men who knew the complex currencies of the country, men who would advance money to up-country weavers and collect the finished goods, men who would build ships.'⁵ Of the three major commercial communities in the city in the early nineteenth century: the Bania castes of Gujarat, both Hindu and Jain, the Bohras who had converted from Islam to Hinduism in the eleventh century, and the Parsis,⁶ it was the latter who became the most successful during this time.⁷

There were fluctuations in the distribution of wealth amongst the main Parsi trading families during the first half of the nineteenth century; for example, the treaty of Nanking in 1842 meant the demise of the China trade, and the introduction of steam navigation ended the trade for those engaged in the building of sailing vessels. These factors together with the inventions of railways and electric telegraph meant that more direct trade was possible between Europeans and other Hindu populations such as those of Kutch and Kathiawar where education was progressing at a steady rate.⁸ However, these losses were at least partly compensated for by other trading opportunities which emerged, such as the export of cotton to the United Kingdom, which increased dramatically after the outbreak of the American Civil War in 1861.⁹ Also, from 1840 onwards there was a change in the way business was financed. The increase of trade in the preceding decade

¹ See Maneck 1997:162. Surat declined as a commercial centre in the late eighteenth century, and resentment grew amongst the Muslim community there towards the Parsis, who continued to benefit from close ties with European traders. There was rioting in Surat against the Parsi population in the 1780s.

² In 1673, the East India Company had allowed the Parsis to construct their tower ^{of} silence on Malabar Hill, which was to become one of the prime pieces of land in Bombay city.

³ Smith 1963:66. A proclamation concerning the neutral policy of the East India Company concerning religious matters was issued from Bombay castle in 1792. Evidently a European had entered a Parsi tower of silence, and the company decreed that, in future, any unorthodox entry of tombs or temples would result in the company employee being sacked and sent back to Europe, see Hinnells 1978: 6.

⁴ Dobbin 1972: 2.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ For a detailed description of the other commercial groups who were operating in Bombay during this time see Dobbin 1972: 4, 5.

⁷ According to the 1864 census, Parsis comprised only 6.03% of the total population of Bombay city and island. Dobbin 1972: 8.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 17, 131. This upsurge in prosperity from the cotton trade ended abruptly with the end of the Civil War, causing the ruin of some of the great Parsi trading families, such as those of Feramji Hormasji Kama, Rastamji Jamshedji Jijibhai, Kharshedji Furdunji Parekh, K.J. Readymoney, the second Sir Jamshedji Jijibhai and K.N. Kama. This event is commonly referred to as the crash of 1865.

had led to the collapse of the traditional houses of agency; these were replaced by banks with the result that, where, formerly, the financing of businesses had been dependent upon the monopoly of the EIC, the financial aspect of commerce now became increasingly separate and reliance upon banks grew. While this development had an adverse affect on the traditional shroffs (those who provided banking facilities), it brought increased wealth to those Parsi capitalists who had already established firms which combined trade, banking and brokerage. It was these families, including wealthy landlords such as Dadabhai Pestanji Wadia, who dominated the ship-building industry between 1735 and 1885; or merchants of the China trade such as Framji Kavasji Bananji, and Jamshedji Jijibhai, who were actively involved in the founding of the Bank of Bombay.¹

Various factors contributed to the upward movement of Parsis in business and commerce during the first half of the nineteenth century; their professional versatility and lack of caste restrictions, I have already mentioned with reference to the community during the eighteenth century.² While these factors continued to their advantage during the nineteenth century, there were other ways in which the Bombay Parsi community made use of new opportunities to rise to prominence under the British.

As trade and commerce brought increased wealth to the community, so it brought its wealthier members into social contact with Europeans. Writing in 1794, Lieutenant Moore comments:

To their private charity and benevolence, they add all the public show and expense necessary to give dignity to their riches. Some of them have two or three country houses furnished in all the extravagance of European taste; with elegant and extensive gardens, where European gentlemen are frequently invited, and where they are always welcome to entertain their own private parties ... We have seen Parsee merchants give balls, suppers, and entertainments to the whole settlement; and some of them ride in English chariots, such as noblemen in England need not be ashamed to own, drawn by beautiful animals that every nobleman cannot equal in his stud.³

Wealthy Parsis began to adopt European cultural customs:

As an indication of increasing intellectual taste among the Parsis, it may be noted that of late English music has formed one of the amusements of their evening parties, instead of the ugly and absurd 'natches' of native dancing girls, accompanied by musicians who were far from being great masters of their

¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

² Writing in 1818, the scholar and traveller Sir William Erskine confirms this view: 'The Parsis are, however, the most improveable caste in India. Religion and customs supposed to be connected with religion are the great obstacles to the improvement of the Orientals, whether Mussalmans or Hindus. From such restraints the Parsis are remarkably free, they are in every respect much more like the Europeans than any other class of natives in Southern Asia; and being less restrained by ancient and acknowledged law are more prepared to adopt any change of which they see the benefit. They do not attend to learning of any kind, but, take them all in all, they are probably the most vigorous, the most active and intelligent class of natives in all India.' See Hinnells 1978: 37.

³ *Ibid.*, 11.

profession, but who grinned, nodded, and made horrible faces in their excitement, with a view to delude the audience into the belief that they were absorbed in the spirit of their art! The natch, however, is not entirely superseded.¹

Both Parsi men and women took up sports which were popular amongst the English, such as swimming, cycling and, in particular, cricket. As this class of urban Parsis became Europeanised, so they began to distance themselves from the rest of Indian society which they regarded as backward:

The closer union of the Europeans and Parsis is the finest thing that can happen to our race. It will mean the lifting up of a people who are lying low, though possessing all of the qualities of a European race. The complete Europeanisation of the Parsis is now a mere matter of time.²

British officialdom from the Governor down enjoyed lavish hospitality from families such as the Wadias, the Jijibhais, the Banajis and the Readymoneys.³ Such interaction no doubt had its advantages for the Parsi community: 'The monied classes generally are favourable to us, they enjoy a degree of security under our Government which they never experienced under native rule', wrote Lord Elphinstone to Lord Stanley in 1859. At the same time, the British, whose colonial policy involved the patronage of certain minority groups, were also aware of the benefits of such a liaison. With reference to the Bhagdadi Jews of Bombay, Sir Bartle Frere wrote to Sir Charles Wood in 1862:

They are, like the Parsees, a most valuable link between us and the natives — oriental in origin and appreciation — but English in their associations, and, almost of necessity, loyal.⁴

With the rise of the merchant class in Bombay, the influence and authority of the priesthood declined while that of the laity increased. Certain events which highlight this shift occurred over a period of time. In 1778 the Bombay Panchayat had sought the help of the Governor of Bombay and asked for British recognition of its leadership, as well as the authorisation to punish those Parsis who deviated from what was considered acceptable behaviour. Both these requests were granted, with the members of the Panchayat being specifically referred to as laymen.⁵ A major controversy broke out at this

¹ Karaka 1884: 132.

² Kulke 1974: 138 who cites *The Parsi*, Vol I, No 11, p.533.

³ I have mentioned that the early Parsi traders would have ranked in the caste terms of Hindu society with the *vaishiyas*, or third class, after the *Brahmins* and *Kshatriyas*. By the nineteenth century, the economically successful Parsis had moved to first place in the scale of social prestige within the community. See Kulke 1974: 129. The prominent families of Jeejeebhoy, Banaji, Readymoney, Dadysett, and Cama made great fortunes in the opium-trade with China; they were particularly useful to the British in this activity as the British themselves were able to avoid exporting the contrabanded opium themselves (*Ibid.*, 121).

⁴ Dobbin 1972: 23.

⁵ See Karaka 1884: 219. The reply from the Hon. William Hornby Esq. 'President and Governor of His Majesty's Castle and Island of Bombay etc.' was as follows: 'To the Parsis not of the Priest Caste. You are hereby empowered to meet and inquire into all matters that are committed by your caste, contrary to what has been agreed to by the majority of the caste, and to punish the offender agreeably to the rules of

time over the marriage of *behdin* girls into priestly families which the Panchayat sought to prohibit. Again, both sides appealed to the government and the British appointed a commission to investigate the matter. Eventually the argument was settled; the commission took the view that priestly discrimination against marrying into the laity was unfair and ruled in favour of the laity.¹

The Bombay Panchayat consisted of twelve elected members, six of whom were from the priestly class; in 1818 the number of laymen was increased to twelve with laymen always presiding.² From this time, the Panchayat began to deal increasingly with religious issues, and efforts were made to eliminate Hindu and Muslim practices, such as visits to temples and mosques which were prohibited and punished.³ It is interesting to note that these prohibitions were directed mainly at women who were thought to be engaging in 'superstitious and immoral practices'.⁴

In 1823 further regulations were passed which prohibited, amongst other things, the display of wealth at community gatherings such as weddings and funerals. Evidently some women had adopted what appear to be Muslim customs of mourning: after a death, condolence visits were paid to the bereaved family during which women would weep and beat their breasts. These visits would continue for a long time after a person's death, and were strongly disapproved of by the Panchayat. Of greater distaste to Europeans was the practice of child marriage and bigamy, and these too were forbidden.

With the continued growth of business, it became increasingly difficult for the Panchayat to impose its strictures upon the wealthier members of the community. The result was that by 1832 there were those amongst the new generation of Parsis who were no longer prepared to have their personal lives controlled by the Panchayat, and who preferred the British courts to adjudicate their affairs. Thus the norms of social behaviour, law and order became founded, increasingly, upon western models.

Education, and the Reverend John Wilson

One of the main differences between those belonging to the new generation and their forefathers, and which singled them out from other Indian communities, was their English education. While it had been common practice amongst the older elites to employ

your caste, so far as not permitting them to come to your feasts, or beat them with *shoes*, but no other corporal punishment.'

¹ See p.114. For a full account of this dispute see Maneck 1997: 165-6, and Kulke 1974: 63 n.13.

² Kulke 1974: 63, 64.

³ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁴ Maneck 1997: 168. With reference to Parsi women in the mid nineteenth century, Maneckji Nusserwanji Dhalla (who by 1946 was himself a confirmed Reformist) writes: 'A hundred years ago Parsi women worshipped idols and frequented temples. They made offerings on tombs and temples, dargahs and churches. On holi they made "holias" of their sons. During the days of Mohurram they turned them into mendicants, made them recite the Fatwa and follow some customs like fasting, sacrificing etc...In their ignorance they were lured by all sorts of superstitious beliefs - such as black magic, the evil eye, being possessed by the evil spirit, etc.' Dhalla 1975: 82.

English tutors, to send boys to England for their education¹ and to apprentice them to English firms, from the 1820s onwards it became possible for Parsis to attend English-medium schools.² The revival of teaching Indian languages and texts, which had been promoted by Warren Hastings in the late eighteenth century, was actively discouraged by Thomas Babington Macaulay. In 1835 a decision was taken to reduce the grants to existing oriental institutions in order to begin funding a new educational policy based on the English model.³ The tone of Macaulay's arguments is summed up in his 'Minute on Education' written in 1835.

..In India, English is the language spoken by the ruling class. It is spoken by the higher class of natives at the seats of government ... Whether we look at the intrinsic value of our literature, or at the particular situation of this country, we shall see the strongest reason to think that, of all foreign tongues, the English tongue is that which would be most useful to our native subjects.

..The question now before us is whether, when it is within our power to teach this language, we shall teach languages in which, by universal confession, there are no books on any subject which deserve to be compared to our own;..and whether, when we can patronise sound philosophy and true history, we shall countenance, at the public expense, medical doctrines which would disgrace an English farrier, astronomy which would move laughter in girls at an English boarding school, history abounding with kings thirty feet high and reigns thirty thousand years long, and geography, made up of seas of treacle and seas of butter.

..Assuredly it is the duty of the British government in India to be not only tolerant, but neutral on all religious questions. But to encourage the study of a literature admitted to be of small intrinsic value, only because that literature inculcates the most serious errors on the most important subjects, is a course hardly recognisable with reason, with morality, or even with the very neutrality which ought, as we all agree, to be sacredly preserved ... And while we act thus, can we reasonably and decently bribe men out of the revenues of the state to waste their youth in learning how they are to purify themselves after touching an ass, or what text of the Vedas they are to repeat to expiate the crime of killing a goat?

..In one point I fully agree with the gentlemen to whose general views I am opposed. I feel with them, that it is impossible for us, with our limited means, to attempt to educate the body of the people. We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and color, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect..⁴

I have cited this piece at some length because, although it was written with reference to Hinduism and the learning of Sanskrit and Arabic, it is, nonetheless, applicable to the Parsis. The mockery made of the ancient Vedic texts could apply equally to the mythical and legendary stories of the *Yašts* and the *Š̥ ḍñāme*, the ideas of astronomy contained in the *Bundahišn*, the moral prescriptions of the *Dādestān ī Dēnīg*, and Parsi traditions concerning purity and ritual. Moreover western codes of morality,

¹ Kulke (1974: 79,80) notes that a survey of Indians staying in England in 1884 shows that Parsis supplied 24% of the Indian students compared to 20% for Muslims. Of students from the Bombay Presidency alone, 70.4% were Parsi.

² Maneck 1991: 183.

³ Smith 1963: 338.

⁴ W.T. de Bary 1968: 47, 48.

reason and rationality were considered superior to those of Muslims, Hindus and Parsis alike.

The first English school to be attended by Parsis was founded in Bombay in 1825, and organised in 1834 as the Elphinstone College. The School and College amalgamated in 1840 and became known as the Elphinstone Native Education Institution.¹ Apart from the schools founded by the British government there were mission schools, the most famous of which was started by a Scottish missionary, the Rev. John Wilson, who had arrived in India in 1829 in order to begin a programme of missionary work and education in Western India.²

The attitude of the British government towards missionaries had never been clear-cut and had varied according to time and place. The policy of the East India Company, for the main part, had been to discourage missionary activity. However, there were cases where missionaries had been useful to the Company as interpreters, translators and experts on Indian customs. From around 1840 a number of British officials actively promoted the Christian missionary enterprise, and this seemed to have remained the policy of the Company until after the administration of India was taken over by the crown, when a stricter policy of religious neutrality was maintained.³ The climate, therefore, in the late 1830s was ripe for Wilson to embark upon an active campaign to convert Parsis to Christianity. He had noted the proclivity for western culture and education amongst the Parsis, and began his attack on the Zoroastrian religion by publishing a series of articles in the *Oriental Christian Spectator* in which he highlighted the incompatibilities of the Zoroastrian religion with Western thought.⁴ As Macaulay had done with the Vedic texts, Wilson ridiculed the Zoroastrian creation myth contained in the *Bundahišn* and the purity rules of the *Vendidād*. The response from the Parsi community to Wilson's attack was cautious. The editor of the Parsi-owned Gujarati paper *Bombay Samachar* clearly did not feel qualified to debate religious issues with Wilson (as the latter had invited him to do). Then, a *kadmi* priest by the name of Naoroji Dorabji wrote a number of letters to the *Bombay Hurkuru* and *Wurtman* in which, under the pen-name Nauroz Goosequill, he not only admitted ignorance of Zoroastrian eschatology, but also claimed that the *Bundahišn* was not an authentic text since it was blasphemous towards the prophet, Zarathuštra. This statement aroused a heated exchange between Naoroji himself and another priest, Dastur Edulji Dorabji, who refuted the claim that the *Bundahišn* was not authentic. The main point here is that as far as those who were aware

¹Dobbin 1972: 27.

² For a detailed description of the development of Parsi education in Bombay see Hinnells 1978: 42-59.

³ Smith 1963: 195 - 197.

⁴ As Maneck (1997: 236 n.13 & 14) points out, Wilson studied all the native languages he could, including Sanskrit and *Avesta* and was the first English scholar to master the original *Zend Avesta* texts. He was also the first editor of the *Oriental Christian Spectator*, published in Bombay from 1830 until 1862. Its readership included English speakers apart from the Christian community, so for example, at least some amongst the Parsi community appear to have been aware of its contents.

of the controversy were concerned, and Wilson in particular, these public exchanges (enabled by the press) portrayed the Parsi priesthood in disarray, and in ignorance of their own sacred texts.

In 1839, two boys from Dr Wilson's school converted to Christianity; this caused immense consternation within the community and enrolment at the school dropped dramatically, from five hundred to sixty or seventy boys. Some two weeks after his conversion, Dhanjibhai Nauroji, who was living in Dr Wilson's mission house, attended a court hearing in which the Parsi Panchayat demanded that he be returned to the custody of his uncle since he was under age. In a later publication entitled *From Zoroaster to Christ* he described his journey to the court:

When morning broke the whole of Bombay was in an uproar; offices and shops were closed; manufactories were stopped; occupations generally were interrupted; and traffic came to a standstill. Crowds were to be seen running here and there, and places of business were deserted. Following the suggestion of the English papers, the Government had taken every precaution to safeguard the city against a breach of peace ... When our carriage reached the Court House numbers of Parsis sprang forward and surrounded us; some seized the wheels of the carriage; some laid hold of the horses; and one violently wrenched open the carriage window, and began to try and drag me out ... The police constables hastened up also, and saved us from the violence that was threatened.¹

While there is no doubt about the strength of feeling caused by the conversions (very few were made after this time), it is more difficult to assess the impact of Wilson's writings upon the laity in general, since those actively involved in the debate number very few. By the time Wilson made his conversions there were already four Parsi/Gujarati newspapers in circulation, and so it is likely that the majority of people would have been aware of the debate. From early on, there had been public discussion of social and religious conflicts in the Parsi press and disputes were often settled via this medium.²

The theological debate continued until Wilson departed for Scotland in 1842, before which time he published his most comprehensively damning work on the Zoroastrian faith: *The Parsi Religion: as contained in the Zand-Avasta and Propounded and Defended by the Zoroastrians of India and Persia, Unfolded, Refuted, and Contrasted with Christianity*. In this work, Wilson attacked some of the rituals which lay at the very core of lay religious activity, in particular the cult of fire as expressed through prayer and worship in the *agiāry*:

¹ Maneck 1997: 196,197.

² See Kulke 1974: 118ff. By the turn of the century, the Parsi community had an established a press which voiced all the main political and social trends within the community. Kulke outlines the most important of these: the *Bombay Samachar*, which was interested in economic problems, the *Jam-e-Jamshed* newspaper which was community-conscious and traditional, the *Rast Gofar* newspaper, of the Reformists, the *Kaiser-i-Hind*, which put political emancipation before social reform, the *Satya Mitra*, which was the newspaper of the orthodox Parsis, and which opposed all change of a socio-political nature India-wide.

Many of my readers, I have no doubt, will be *astounded* at the blasphemous worship of fire, as set forth in the A'tish Nīāish, which has now been brought to their notice. No translation which can legitimately be made of the Zand, can render this worship in the smallest degree less revolting to the understanding and reason of man. Throughout the whole of the Nīāish, fire is praised and adored as the Son of Hormazd ...¹

Those who serve it, according to its demands, are assuredly, in the grossest and strictest sense of the term, FIRE-WORSHIPPERS. I do not wonder that the intelligent descendants of the Medes and Persians in India, are beginning to revolt from this designation; and I look forward with joy to that day, when the 'sacred fire' shall no longer blaze on their hearths, but to cook their victuals or aid them in their manufactures; and when the fire-temples throughout Bombay and Surat, shall, by their own hands, nerved by the truth and Spirit of God, be levelled with the dust or converted into cotton godowns ...

Not content with dealing out abundance of erroneous *theology* and *philosophy* on the subject of fire, some of the controversialists have tried to bolster up their cause by a mass of absurd *legendary* ...²

It is worth noting here that far from fire-temples being razed to the ground, according the *Ātaš nu Gīt* (and substantiated by records contained in the Bombay Gazetteer) this was a time when a great deal of money was being spent by wealthy Parsi benefactors on the founding of new *agiārys* and on the rebuilding and refurbishment of those already established.

The way in which Wilson chose to deal with Zoroastrian religious texts is illustrated by an analogy he draws between the concluding chapter of the *Yasna* (Y.LXXI) in which all things are invoked and worshipped including, Ahura Mazda, Zarathuštra, the *Amesha Spentas* and their creations — as well as the faith itself and the *Spenta Māthra* — and a hypothetical address which he suggests might be made to a respected Governor of Bombay in order to express the gratitude of the Parsi community for the favours received from his administration. Parts of the address read as follows:

Right Honourable Sir, - We invoke and celebrate thee, because of thy justice, liberality, and bravery. We recognise thee as our good and gracious Governor. Thou are the bravest, and most intelligent of the intelligent of the Sāhebs, who have reigned over us in this great country ...

We invoke and celebrate our own souls, and our own wealth, and our grandfathers' souls, and their wealth ...

We invoke and celebrate lance-corporal Tom, the brave, the master of bravery ...

We invoke and celebrate the chandeliers of Parell-House, and the lamp of Arjun...

We invoke, celebrate and praise the Fort ditch ...

We invoke, celebrate, and adore the Indian Ocean, and the China Seas ...

We invoke praise, supplicate and extol thy riding horses and thy carriage horses, thy dogs, and cows, and goats ...

We invoke, praise, adore, and celebrate every person and thing that exists ...

O Governor of the governed, we praise, laud, and extol thee.³

¹Wilson 1843: 235.

²*Ibid.*, 236.

³*Ibid.*, 266, 267.

Wilson goes on to suggest that were the Mobeds to prepare such an address, not only would they be unable to persuade a single individual to add his signature to the document, but upon its presentation to the governor: 'they would infallibly be shown the door'.¹

The passages I have cited from Wilson's work are, on one level, the religious views of a missionary fanatic. On another level, they reflect the European attitude to Indian culture as expressed in Macaulay's 'Minute on Education' where it can be seen that the same criteria are applied to medicine, astronomy, history, geography, literature and language as well as to religion. Broadly speaking, the commitment to rationality, intellectual certainty and moral purity which had been part of European thought since the middle of the sixteenth century meant that, in all fields, it was assumed that rational procedures were available to anyone who was prepared to dispense with superstition and mythology. In European terms, 'medieval' signified a time before the advent of modern, rational thought, and was applied by Europeans to much of what they found in the civilisations of countries like India. Modernity was perceived as being concurrent with progress and with what Wilson referred to as the 'onward march of the intellect', and it was thought, evidently, that the fruits of such progress as had been discovered in Europe could be applied universally to any civilisation irrespective of time or context.

The Parsis defending their religion in the face of Wilson's attack were placed in an impossible situation regardless of what their priests may or may not have known about their own religious texts. To begin with, Zoroastrianism was, and still is, a non-proselytising faith. This meant that while, as I have shown in the previous section of this chapter, Parsis were happy to present their religion in such a way as to accommodate the sensitivities of those belonging to the majority faith, this did not entail having to prove that their religion was intrinsically superior to another. Also, it is clear from the preface to Wilson's book that he was determined not only to proselytise and convert, but that in order to accomplish this mission it was necessary to present Zoroastrian doctrines and rituals within the framework of Christianity.² Such concepts as original sin were alien to the Zoroastrian religion, and terms such as nature worship, theology, monotheism and dualism held implicit meaning for those belonging to the Judaeo-Christian tradition with which Parsi priests would have been unfamiliar. The nature and the strength of the oral tradition within Zoroastrianism, the intricacies of ritual, the meaning of ritual, the memorisation of texts: these elements were central to the religion and might have been explained to Europeans by priests, but in any case such explanations, for the reasons I have stated above, would have fallen on deaf ears.

¹ *Ibid.*, 267.

² *Ibid.*, 6: 'In the solitudes of Yazd and Kirmān, and in the busy scenes of commerce on the Western shores of India, it (the religion of the Parsis) has still a remnant of adherents, to be reclaimed, it is to be hoped speedily, from the vain traditions received from their fathers, by the still small voice of the Gospel ... It is manifestly desirable, that the Parsi system should be exhibited in the light of Christianity.'

Despite the conversion of the Parsi boys to Christianity, the demand for English education continued, and Parsis began to establish their own English-medium schools. In 1848, Sir Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy opened the first Parsi school, thus laying the foundation for an independent Parsi educational system. The education of women was also given high priority, and in this respect Parsis broke with tradition long before other Indian communities.¹ During the 1870s, instruction was given in English as well as in Gujarati, which, although still spoken in most Parsi families, was no longer the predominant language of culture and education. Persian remained a popular language amongst Parsis, an indication, perhaps, of the links which were still felt to exist with Iran and the community's historic past.² Educational initiatives which had started in Bombay spread to other parts of Gujarat: in 1853 Sir Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy had endowed the first school in Navsari, which was followed by other schools, including the first girl's school, which was established in 1858 and endowed by Dosabhai Framji. These schools taught traditional languages and there was greater emphasis on religious instruction. There was opposition amongst the Parsis of Navsari towards instruction being given in English, as well as to the co-education of boys and girls.

The education of priests also came under review and Madressas were established in order that priests could learn the traditional languages and literature of their religion: for example, the Mulla Feroze Madressa (Bombay in 1854), and the Sir Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy Zarthoshti Madressa (Bombay 1863). During this time the traditional method of learning, memorisation of the *Avesta*, came gradually to be replaced by the study of Avestan and Pahlavi grammar, based on the work of European scholarship in the field of Iranian/oriental studies.³ During the eighteenth century priests were actively involved in the copying and translating of religious texts. A great number of manuscripts were held in the Dastur Meherji Rana Library of Navsari, and the Mulla Firuz Library in Udwada. Many more were held in private collections belonging to priestly families in Navsari, Surat, Broach, Bulsar, Udwada, Bombay and Poona.⁴ The need to improve the education of priests arose, no doubt in part, from a desire to make the Parsi priesthood as learned as the Christian clergy were perceived to be. The result, however, was to produce a generation of highly qualified priests⁵ who were unable to find employment because the positions of dastur and panthaky in all the *agiāryas* was hereditary. Likewise, lucrative

¹ Of the nine girl's schools founded by the Students' Literary and Scientific Society, there were, in 1855, 740 girls attending of whom 475 were Parsis, 178 Marathi Hindus and 87 Gujarati Hindus. In 1857, the Parsi Girls School Association took over the management of schools attended by Parsi girls (Kulke 1974: 84).

² Of the 401 Parsis who were admitted to the matriculation examination in 1889, 337 chose Persian as their second language, 25 Latin, 21 Gujarati, 15 French and 1 for Sanskrit, Marathi and Portuguese respectively (Kulke 1974: 85).

³ Kulke (1974: 95) notes that in 1861, the Parsis wished to make Martin Haug the director of the Mulla Feroze Madressa in Bombay.

⁴ Katrak 1974: 361.

⁵ These qualifications seem mainly to have been language related. It was not uncommon for these *ervads* to know seven languages: English, Avesta, Pahlavi, Pazend, Persian, Sanskrit and Gujarati.

businesses had been reserved by groups of laymen for their own particular priests, so the newly qualified ervads were unable to find jobs in either field.¹

The Western approach to learning, the product of a long literary tradition, was to have a lasting effect upon many educated Parsis' perception of themselves with respect to academic achievement. Merit was only possible within an educational framework which had modelled itself upon European methods of learning and ideas about what constituted knowledge and the criteria for excellence. Thus, Parsis found themselves looking to Europe as a source of authority not only in matters of law, manners and customs, but in order to decipher the languages of their own religious texts. In 1877 the following piece appeared in the *Times of India* with reference to the publication of a Pahlavi/Gujarati/English dictionary:

While the labours of some of our great Danish and German scholars in the field of Oriental learning are known and appreciated, the Parsees are not far behind them in similar pursuits. We do not of course assert that the Parsees have yet produced a Westergaard, a Haug, a Burnouf, or a Spiegel. But we can safely say that the present advanced state of the Zend and Pehlvi literature is in some measure due to the great and untiring zeal of some of our Parsee scholars. The last fifteen years have witnessed a marked improvement in all the branches of Oriental learning. Books that were at one time considered almost sealed up are now read and interpreted with the greatest possible ease. The pure and ancient religion of Zoroaster, which, for ages, lay buried in obscurity and darkness, and which, even up to a very late period was but dimly understood by the Dustoors themselves, is now being gradually brought to light.²

Reform

Once Western scholarship came to play an important part in making religious texts accessible to priest and laity alike, it was inevitable that the interpretation of those texts and the theological ideas of the scholars responsible for their translation would also be regarded as authoritative. Amongst the new generation of English-educated Parsis there were those who sought social and religious reforms.³ These young men, most of whom had been educated at Elphinstone College, and who were sometimes referred to as 'Young Bombay', began to spread their ideas through the Literary and Scientific Society which had been established by students, alumni and teachers from the college. In 1851 the *Rahūmae Mazdayasnan Sabha*, or reform society, was established, and this was followed by the publication of a twice-weekly Gujarati newspaper, *Rast Gofar*, which became the mouthpiece of the reform movement. In 1852 Bombay's first political

¹ Dhalla 1975: 509.

² Taken from the monthly *Newsletter* of The Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe (Incorporated), London October 1997.

³ Kulke 1974: 97-8. Dastur Dhalla became an ardent reformist after his sojourn at Columbia University from 1904 to 1908. The following passage is an example of his newly acquired approach to learning: 'By reading books on anthropology and sociology, I began to examine scientifically, questions relating to superstition, magic, customs, ceremonies, prayer, priesthood, society, marriage and other allied subjects. I studied their origins historically, and, for the very first time I began to see vividly how they have progressed from the primitive stage to their present condition' (Dhalla 1975: 157).

organisation, the Bombay Association, was founded. This provided a platform for the reform movement and a means by which its members could inform the British government of political, social and religious matters.

With regard to religious reform, the movement called for a return to what were perceived to be the only true teachings of the religion contained in the *Gāthās*. This led to the rejection of ritual by the Reformists, and a move away from the learning and reciting of prayers in a language which people no longer understood.¹ Ten years after the establishment of the Reform Society, when Dadabhai Naoroji, who had been its first secretary, gave a lecture in Liverpool, he declared that the difference between the two factions within the Parsi community was as great as had existed originally between the Parsis and the British. Naoroji described a society split between those who were loyal to their customs, and others who were eager to take advantage of European culture. He illustrated these differences with a description of the daily life of a person belonging to the 'orthodox' or 'old class' for whom 'all change is repugnant ... the natural effect of too sudden adoption of a style, hitherto unknown, and forced by English education'. This daily routine he compared with that of someone from the 'young class' for whom all ritual obligations were considered irrelevant to the religion, and some, such as the use of *nērang*, were positively offensive. Naoroji also made reference to those who belonged to a third faction: 'a moderate party, uncertain how to choose ... pressed by the one party to pronounce in their favour, and so strictly watched by the other as to make this impossible'.²

It is this 'third faction' which, in a sense, formed the most significant group, those who did not make a name for themselves either as reformists or ultra-orthodox, but who may have embraced certain liberal ideas, adopted aspects of the European lifestyle and yet continued to practise their religion in traditional ways. The lives of the most successful Parsi men (in terms of achievement) have been well documented. Likewise historians, both Zoroastrian and non-Zoroastrian, have access to documentation regarding the political and social activities of certain groups. As is often the case, it is information concerning those who form the majority, which is hard to find.

When we look to the *Ātaš nu Gīt* for evidence concerning the laity, we find that there is no reference to the ruptures in the community which I have described above with reference to Wilson or the Reform Movement. In fact, this last section of the song describes a state of harmony, almost a renaissance or rebirth of the religion as reflected in the founding of so many sacred fires. The significant point here is that those named in the

¹ In returning to the prophet's teachings as the only authoritative source for the religion, the reformists followed the work of early European scholars, Thomas Hyde and Anquetil du Perron, in believing that the religion as taught by Zoroaster was a monotheism, and devoid of ritual. In 1858 Martin Haug's discovery that the *Gāthas* were indeed the most ancient part of the *Avesta*, and his view that the rituals belonged to a later period served to underpin the reformist view.

² Murzban 1994: 314.

song as having endowed *agiārys* were the very people who had been most exposed to European culture and had adopted many European customs. The names of the foremost leaders of the Reform Movement do not appear in the song. Those who are mentioned, however, include names such as Sir Jamshedjee Jeejeebhoy who initiated major social reforms. Sir Jeejeebhoy was the founder of, amongst others, the first school for girls in Navsari; he also founded two *ādarān* fires, one in Navsari, in 1853, and one in Surat the following year. It seems likely that many lay men and women wished to retain their ethnic, religious and historical identity as Parsis, while at the same time wishing to take advantage of English culture and education, law and business skills. That this ambition was realised by some is borne out by the names contained in the song.

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter, as I have already mentioned, is to put into context the themes, ideas and historical allusions which are contained in the *Ātaš nu Gīt*, but which in the text of the song are presented in an undifferentiated way. In order to be able to recognise the various elements, therefore, it has been necessary to explain and clarify them in advance.

With reference to the concept of temporality, we find in the *Ātaš nu Gīt* a multiplicity of times. In a way which is typical of an oral text, it has been layered in such a way as to make it unlikely that it was composed, in entirety, by a single author. The *Yašts* and the *Niyāyiš* are beyond historical time, and we have nothing with which to compare them in order to determine what, or when, material may have been added. The Pahlavi books demonstrate more clearly the different times to which certain texts, or parts of texts, belong. Those Pahlavi texts which are associated with the period after the Islamic conquest of Iran were composite works organised by a single author. They were not structured in such a way as to allow for the addition of new 'layers'.¹ Also, these texts were intended to be authoritative, and for various reasons were committed to maintaining the tradition. After the disintegration of the Sasanian empire, Zoroastrian scholar priests were obliged to turn their attention to the preservation of their religious heritage. I have referred, in the first chapter, to the 'reproduction' of religious ideas as opposed to their 'transformation'. The *Yašts* appear to belong to the former category, that is, they do not show people engaged in transforming or recreating their religious system. The texts of the *Niyāyiš*, I have suggested, show signs of innovation and change by means of their structure. It seems likely that the post-Sasanian period would not have been a time for innovation; rather, priests were intent upon reminding people of the

¹ It should be noted here that other Pahlavi texts still bear the hallmarks of oral texts. J. de Menasce makes this point with reference to Book VII of the *Dēnkart* whose rhythm, he says, reflects an ancient verse pattern. See de Menasce 1983: 1172.

principles of the Good Religion in the hope of strengthening their resolve against conversion to Islam.¹

The diminution and general impoverishment of the Zoroastrian population in Iran, as well as the dying out of the Pahlavi language, no doubt contributed to the lack of literary activity after the ninth century. However, we do not know how widespread the cultural change from orality to literacy had been, from the time that religious texts were committed to writing, to the time when Islam became established as the dominant religion some three centuries later. The manuscript tradition which developed out of the oral tradition, which involved the copying down of existing manuscripts, or oral texts, did little to develop conceptual or abstract thought. These sorts of knowledge tend to belong to established literary, or writing cultures. It is likely that this was one of the factors which may have contributed to the lack of development of Zoroastrian theology from the post-Sasanian era onwards.² The absence of a developed theology, along the lines of Christianity, was from the point of view of scholars like Wilson, a major weakness in the religion.

As far as relations between priest and laity were concerned, what emerges from a brief look at events of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is that a great part of religious activity was conducted without texts, that is, it was not text-bound. The role of the priesthood during this time appears to have varied according to the different *panthaks* or priestly jurisdictions. The authority of different priesthoods also seems to have fluctuated, and to have been centred around the negotiation and renegotiation of relationships with others in the community, both priests and laymen. Priests were not trained to perform a pastoral role in the way that, for example, Christian clergymen were. Their main function, as far as the laity was concerned, was twofold: first, to perform rituals; second, to teach and interpret the sacred texts, for, traditionally, it was only priests who knew the sacred languages of Avestan and Pahlavi.

The first activity, i.e. the performance of rituals, meant that the priest/lay ratio was of great importance. Disputes arose, it seems, when there was an imbalance in supply and demand. The laity was inextricably involved in these conflicts because it was they who were responsible for the livelihood of the priests; however, they were not always in a position to dictate the terms. As we have seen, there were times when a powerful priestly sect, such as that of the Bhagarias during the middle of the eighteenth century, was able to introduce all sorts of measures to ensure their own economic prosperity.

The fact that priests alone knew the languages of the sacred texts meant that it was they who were expected to be able to defend the faith, intellectually, against the attacks of

¹ With reference to the *PRDd*. Williams (1990: 9) writes: 'A priest's knowledge of Avestan *nasks* and *Zand*, and a command of eloquent Pahlavi style, musters old scriptural authority to urge reader and listener to practical religion, and recounts well-known mythological narratives to provide the traditional context of faith.'

² See p.232 ff. where I discuss this point with reference to the ideas of Walter J. Ong on orality.

missionaries such as Wilson. Until the nineteenth century, priests remained the ultimate authority in religious matters with most of the disputes which occurred being primarily between priests and their respective following amongst the laity, rather than between priests and laymen. The growth in power and status of the Bombay Parsi Panchayat,¹ the ignorance of priests in comparison to the newly educated members of the laity, and the Reform movement (which sought to abandon Avestan as the language of prayer and dispensed as far as possible with ritual) were some of ^{the} factors which contributed to the decline of the priesthood during the nineteenth century.

The leadership of the community was transferred to members of the wealthy elite, most of whom had made a name for themselves through their endowments and charities. It is the names of these people who are listed in the final section of the *Ātaš nu Gīt*. Near the beginning of the list there is the Seth family from Surat, of whom Rustam Manock was the most famous (see p.109). Later names include the Wadia family who made their money from shipbuilding, and the Jjibhais and Readymoneys whose wealth was associated mainly with the China trade. These family names, particularly as a result of the work of individuals like Sir Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy, and Sir Cowasjee Jehangir Readymoney became synonymous with charitable work through the hospitals, schools, libraries and university buildings, as well as the religious foundations, which they had endowed.

I have mentioned that the idea of socio-religious identity is a shadowy presence in the *Yašts*, manifested through the telling of tales which belong to a particular community, tribe or clan. It is a little more focused in the Pahlavi books, which reflect the impact of Islam on the Zoroastrian community in Iran, and becomes clearer still in the text of the *Ātaš nu Gīt*. I have also mentioned the possibility of traditions being revived or re-created, as in the case of the elaborate procedures which were required for the founding of an *Ātaš Bahrām*. When we come to the end of the song, where the names of wealthy industrialists appear in connection with the founding of sacred fires, we can see how these ideas are linked. The threat to Parsi identity posed by the community's rapid assimilation of European culture and learning, together with the imposition of Christianity, evidently created a need for Zoroastrian observances and/or customs which were recognisable to the non-Zoroastrian community and yet could not be challenged in the way that religious texts evidently could. The establishment of *agiārys* gave priests a domain, and, it will be shown in the song, had the effect of bringing people together, since a variety of religious events could be celebrated there.

¹ The *panchayat* was probably at its most influential between 1787, when it was given official jurisdiction, and 1830, when new members (*Akabars*) were no longer elected, but sons of the deceased inherited the position. Thereafter, the authority of the *Panchayat* diminished rapidly.

Kulke outlines four main elements which contributed to the Parsi sense of group identity.¹ In brief these were as follows: first, the religion which they had preserved since ancient times; second, a belief in ethnic identity, for Parsis remained an endogamous group, third, the shared history of persecution and exile from Iran, followed by the settlement in India; fourth, the elite status which had been acquired for the Parsis by virtue of their great wealth and commercial success. If we accept Kulke's analysis, it can be seen that these elements alone were not enough to prevent the community from becoming fragmented. The main problem seems to have been that the Parsis had no institution which bound the community together or represented the community, as a whole, to the outside world. We have seen that from the very beginning there was no formal code of law amongst the early settlers; internal disputes had to be settled as and when they arose by whomsoever was the most powerful authority, be it priest, layman or local ruler. As time went on formal institutions were recognised, for example the Bombay Panchayat (but this was eventually weakened by internal friction). The result of this situation was that there were always a number and variety of allegiances at any given time, with some groups within the community identifying more strongly with the dominant community than others. Assimilation with the British on so many levels drew the Parsi community away from the cultural traditions of Hindus and Muslims with which, as we have seen from the texts mentioned in the second section of this chapter, they were once familiar.

One of the ways in which the Parsi community formed a new sense of identity was by means of communication through the medium of newspapers. From early on the Parsi press had adopted the attitude, characteristic of the West, of using the press as a means by which to voice particular group or individual interests. It was through the press that the ideas of social and religious reform were articulated and debated; it gave the community a sense of itself and a confidence. In his book *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson talks about the fact that the commercialisation of print culture enables people to think about themselves and relate to others in new ways. One of the differences between the new culture and the old was that people had to abandon certain preconceptions about temporality, in particular, the ideas that cosmology and history were indistinguishable, and that the origins of man and of the world were the same. Taken together, these ideas meant that human lives were inseparable from the very nature of things, and they gave meaning to and offered redemption from certain realities of human existence, such as death and loss. The impact of social and economic change, scientific discovery and

¹ See Kulke 1974: 232.

increasingly rapid communication 'drove a harsh wedge between cosmology and history'.¹

We have seen how cosmological and eschatological ideas were expressed with respect to the ancient texts and the Pahlavi books. As Anderson describes above, the creation of the world is presented together with the origins of man as a seamless whole; there is no differentiation between cosmology and history. When we come to the later text of the *Qissa-ye Zartuštian-ī Hindustān*, we see how the overall narrative structure adopts a world view in which human affairs are continually situated within a wider cosmological narrative; there is, as it were, a sub-plot within the same structure. This idea is perpetuated also through the cycle of petition, offering and reward by which righteousness or *aša* is regularly brought into the world. It will be seen that in the song all these ideas are represented in some way; the individual is woven into the community which is then woven into wider cosmologies.

With respect to Parsi community in the mid to late nineteenth century it seems that certain cosmological ideas, rather than being abandoned, continued to exist alongside or even within the new culture which was ushered in with the advent of a print culture and British education. The reason for this may have been that there were a number of processes taking place at the same time, all of which influenced or affected the sense of communal identity in some way. At the same time that Parsi journalism began to dominate the press in western India so too was there an increase in the literary activity of scholar-priests who were engaged in the copying and translation into Gujarati of Pahlavi and Avestan manuscripts. While the Parsi press became an important agent for social change within the community, it also contributed to the dissemination of literature on Iranology. For example, the quarterly *Jarthoshti* published articles on Iranian history, religion, philosophy and culture, and the monthly *Cheragh* of Navsari devoted itself to Zoroastrian ethics, philosophy, customs and history. With respect to literary fields such as poetry and the writing of novels, Parsi publications were mainly in English and a knowledge of European literature was widely cultivated. Oral texts were probably the least affected by Western influence and many of the older customs and traditions were preserved there. We know that songs which may have been in oral transmission during this time continued to play a part in religious and secular life since there is a rich heritage of *garbas* and *monājāts*, of which the *Ātaš nu Gīt* is a prime example. The fact that they were collected and published at this time suggests that the author wished to ensure that this part of Parsi heritage would not be lost, a desire which may have been connected to the wider issue of community identity.

The historical sections of 1765 and 1879 refer to the two dates which are relevant to the text of the song: the foundation of the Navsari *Ātaš Bahrām*, and the date of the

¹ B. Anderson, 1991: 36.

publication of the song. In a sense these two dates reflect two different worlds which relate not only to the song but also to the Parsi community in general. The world of the Parsi population in 1765 was centred in the rural towns of Gujarat, by 1879 it had moved to Bombay, a rapidly developing metropolis. The early Parsi community looked over its shoulder to Iran, advice on religious matters was sought from Iranian priests, and, on the whole, the priesthood, especially the Bhagaria sect, appears to have maintained a strong position of power and authority. Later, the Bombay community turned to the colonial power for its legislation, education, and eventually for rulings concerning religious disputes; in time, the power and authority of the priesthood was eroded by the laity. Until the early eighteenth century, the Parsi community perceived and evaluated itself in ways which were internal to the tradition's own self-understanding, and the influence of Hinduism and Islam was not likely to have affected this. By 1879, the impact of European culture, morality and rational thought had changed Parsi self-perception and we find, increasingly, that Parsis described themselves, their activities and achievements within the framework of a European value system. While some within the community preferred to define their religion within this same framework, others evidently remained part of a more traditional religious system such as we find described in the *Ātaš nu Gīt*.

CHAPTER 4 THE *ĀTAŠ NU GĪT*.

4.1 Introduction to the *Ātaš nu Gīt*

The *Ātaš nu Gīt* or *Song of the Fire* is a Gujarati song which celebrates the founding of an *Ātaš Bahrām*, the highest-grade fire of the Zoroastrian faith. It describes the construction of the *agiāry*, or 'house of fire', and the formation and consecration of the *Ātaš Bahrām* which is installed within it; in a sense, the recital of the song with its accompanying ritual is a re-enactment of this event. The stated purpose of the song is to make merit, and in the text there are frequent references to the families of those who commission its performance for auspicious occasions such as a wedding or a *navjote*. The *Ātaš nu Gīt* is thus more than a simple song of celebration, it is also a prayer, an act of worship and a ritual performance; as such it may be commissioned to take place in a person's house or within the sacred precincts of an *agiāry* and is performed for both priestly and lay families alike. As a religious ceremony it is therefore unique. The *gōyāns*, or singers, are women, there is one leader who sings, or rather chants, the song while the others repeat the refrain - 'O friends let us go to the fire'.

The first part of the song is an invocation to the whole community to take part in the construction of the *agiāry*, and takes the form of a cataloguing of all the different trades and professions. Through this naming of the different professions, for example 'Let us call the son of the mason and get the bricks and sand for the *agiāry*' — the construction of the *Ātaš Bahrām* is described, together with its decoration and garlanding and the building of the inner sanctum, *ijašne gāh*. All participants are rewarded for their work, and then follows the purification and consecration of the fire after which the *yasna* and various other ceremonies are performed. After the completion of the *agiāry*, there comes a reference to socio-historic events, the dispute between the two groups of priests and its resolution in the form, it seems, of a reconstruction of the *Ātaš Bahrām*. The song continues until its conclusion with a long list of names, from well-known Parsis who have founded lesser fires, to those members of the household and their extended families who have commissioned a performance of the song.

The formal cataloguing of all the artisans and tradespeople, priests and members of households is an important feature of the text, for it is the means by which the song assembles the community, both literally and symbolically. A performance of the *Ātaš nu Gīt* is thus not only a ritual re-enactment of the construction of an *Ātaš Bahrām*, but also a way in which Parsi religious identity is re-affirmed. This is a social recreation of the world; the song gives us an insight into both rural and urban life, social events, domestic and priestly rituals, historic episodes, and personalities both real and fictional. The song is perhaps the lay equivalent of the priestly *yasna*; this ceremony represents a ritual recreation of the world through the identification of the ritual implements used in the service with the spiritual and material creations.

The affirmation of identity is a familiar theme in Parsi writings beginning, it would seem, with the popular account of the history of the community contained in the *Qissa-ye Sanjān*. This story gave the Parsis a background: it told them where they had come from and why, it gave them a reason for their present predicament, and a hope in future salvation. The *Ātaš nu Gīt* reinforces that sense of identity; through various references to the Hindu calendar, and to the threat of Parsis being drawn to worship in Hindu temples, the text shows an awareness of the Parsis as a religious minority amongst the Hindu majority. When a Diaspora community has lost both autonomy and homeland, it has been suggested that this double loss conditions its subsequent self-perception as a 'people to be restored'.¹ According to Zoroastrian theology this restoration or resolution takes place at the end of time, when all creation will be restored to its former state of perfection. This state is implicitly referred to in the song - as it unfolds, so the *agiāry* is constructed and the community is re-created.

The song shows an awareness of the differing roles of laity and priest within the community to which it refers; it is the laity who are the benefactors, the builders and the decorators of the *Ātaš Bahrām*, and who endow the establishment and maintenance of all the various *agiārysts*. At the same time, lay people appear to be familiar with the various priestly duties involved in the establishment of an *Ātaš Bahrām*, together with the ceremonies which are performed by priests alone. These include the consecration of *gōmēz*, or bull's urine, in order to make *nērang* for purification purposes; the *nahn*, or ritual bath; the *bōy* ceremony, or ritual tending of the sacred fire within the *agiāry*; the central liturgical rite of Zoroastrianism, which is the *yasna*, and the *jašan*, or celebratory ceremony.

Within the category of 'laity' a prominent role is ascribed to women in the *Ātaš nu Gīt*. This is in contrast to the two popular accounts of the community, referred to in the previous chapter, the *Qissa-ye Sanjān* and the *Qissa-ye Zartuštīān- i Hindustān*. In the former, women are mentioned only with reference to the purity laws,² and in the latter women are not mentioned at all. It is the 'married ladies' who seem to be accorded the highest status in the song and they who are mentioned most frequently in the households where the song is performed. The celebration of a wedding, or a *navjote*, no doubt involved a certain amount of domestic activity and there is a sense in which the song represents a *domestication* of the sacred fire, in that its ritual re-construction takes place in people's homes as well as in the *agiāry*. Today women sing the *Ātaš nu Gīt* while preparing their hearth fires for the name-day feast of fire (*Ādar māhinō nu parāb*) and it is

¹ Smith 1996: 114.

² When the first Zoroastrian settlers seek refuge with the Hindu king Jadi Rana, they are told by him, that their women should adopt the dress of Indian women. The Iranian *mobed* describes the religious obligations observed by his people, amongst which are the purity laws kept by women (Hodivala 1920: 103-4).

in this context that I first became aware of it. It is thus a tradition which has remained linked to domestic worship and therefore to women within the community.

We cannot tell, from the text, whether or not the song was performed on occasions other than for a marriage, or *navjote*, but nowadays it may also be commissioned in fulfilment of a vow, or simply as an act of devotion. The house where a performance is to take place is decorated in a way which is reminiscent of the decoration of the *agiāry* described in the song. Garlands (*torans*), are hung and chalk marks (*rangoli*) are put on the thresholds, the singers are welcomed with the silver tray (*sēs*), and a vermilion spot (*tilah*) is put on every family member in the household. The performance must take place in the presence of an oil lamp (*divo*) and incense (*lōban*) must be burnt. At the mention of Ahura Mazdā, the *yazatas* or the *Ātaš Bahrām*, the singers touch their foreheads in reverence. With the word *nērang*, the palm of the hand is turned upwards; at the mention of *nahn*, hands are swept downwards in a cleansing motion.¹ The recitation of the song has been described by Russell, who notes that no menstruating woman was allowed to touch the book in which the text was written.² It seems that the *gōyāns* learn their repertoire simply by accompanying others, and that learning does not start until well after marriage and childbirth, at around the age of thirty-five.³

The *Ātaš nu Gīt* bears the hallmarks of an oral text, in particular it seems that material has been added at different times, both implicitly and explicitly, to what may have been an original corpus. There are thus various different 'times' which should be considered in order to understand the way in which the song works. I would like to begin by commenting on the nature of the text which was published in 1879, and which has been translated for me here by Mrs Shehnaz Munshi. This will be followed by two sections: in the first I shall deal with the structure of the 1879 text with reference to the various headings, or breaks which may have been inserted by the author of this particular text. In the second section I shall suggest a structure which treats the text as a whole, and which is itself a source of implicit meaning, both with regard to Zoroastrian theological ideas, and priestly ritual. I shall then give the full annotated translation of the song followed by a close commentary of the text. Finally I shall discuss some of the problems of dating the *Ātaš nu Gīt* and make some concluding remarks.

Throughout this work I have used the word *agiāry* instead of fire temple. Dastur Kotwal suggested to me that this term was closer to the meaning 'house of fire'. The term comes from the Sanskrit *agnyāra*, meaning house of fire; in Udwarda, the *Ātaš Bahrām* is referred to as the *Ātaš ni agiāry*.

¹ Rose 1986: 88.

² Russell 1989: 51.

³ Rose 1986: 89.

4.2. The text of 1879

The book which contains the text of the *Ātaś nu Gīt* is entitled *Parsi Stree Garba and Wedding Songs* and was compiled by Sohrabji Hormazji Chikan Chapnar; the date and place of publication is Bombay 1879.

There are certain unusual features about this particular text which should be mentioned here. The first is that the author/compiler states his purpose in committing this song to writing by saying that up until now no one has sung the song well and he wishes, therefore, to produce a text which will be easier to sing. By this he means that the vocalisation rather than the content of the song is at fault. The way in which he corrects this is to write instructions to the singers into the text, telling them when to pause and when to continue with the next word. He also controls the way in which the words are chanted by the addition of vowels, and sometimes whole syllables, to certain words. In this way the author puts his own personal stamp on the final version of the song. There is an element of gender control here in the sense that this is a text and a tradition which, as far as we know, had been the sole preserve of women. Yet for the purposes of its publication, the text is reorganised in ways which, as I shall show, has a profound effect upon the performance itself. Thus, the song is taken out of the predominantly female world to which it once belonged.

I have used the term 'chanted' rather than 'sung' because although the Gujarati word *gīt* is commonly translated as song, there is no fixed melody as such for the *Ātaś nu Gīt*, but, rather, different rhythms and intonations which sound very similar to those used in the recitation of priestly texts. According to Dastur Kotwal, however, the method of instruction I have described above never occurs with respect to priestly texts where both the words and the way in which they are chanted are strictly memorised; he professes never to have seen a text like this one. Whereas priests were entrusted with the memorisation of their texts, and the correct performance of ritual, women, evidently, were not.

The effect of adding vowels to certain words naturally changes the length both of the words themselves and the sentences in which they occur. I have given examples of two sentences from the Gujarati text, showing the way in which the words would be pronounced normally, and then with the addition of extra vowels. The first example is the refrain which is repeated between each line of text throughout the song; it is pronounced in the following way only when the sign *2* precedes it.

šaelri chālōrē ātaś jāie
 šāāēlaarī chāālōrē ātaśaa jāāīē
 O friends let us go to the fire

lāvōre dudhnā tāmrāre šakhi jōšīrānā pagrē dhōvrāvō
 lāāvōrē dudhudhanā tāāmarārē šaakhi jōšīrānā paagarē dhōvarāvō
 Get tumblers full of milk friends, and let us wash the feet of the astrologers

Both at the beginning and the end of the song, the author mentions that this way of reciting the words adds approximately two and a half hours to a performance of the *Ātaš nu Gīt*, and that people might say that he had made it unnecessarily long, which implies that his version had attracted some criticism. The fact that he makes an opening and closing statement, saying much the same thing in both instances, is another point of interest since this is a characteristic which is identifiable in some of the most ancient of Zoroastrian religious texts beginning with the *Gāthās* themselves which enclose the *Yasna Haptanhaiti*. This device is also reminiscent of some of the prayers (discussed in chapter 2) in which additional verses of different authorship, and sometimes in a different language, enclose or as it were wrap around the earlier material.

That the author of these remarks is Sohrabji Chikan, the compiler of the text, is suggested by the fact that he appears to have written himself into the song. The name Sohrabji Chapgar occurs only once, at the end of the long list of people who have endowed *adarān* fires (460). The name Sohrabji, though, occurs a number of times, and seems likely to refer to the same person. At the end of the last section we have the names of the two brothers who, according to popular tradition, composed the song, Dosa and Jeva Bharucha. Then two lines from the end comes the assertion: 'Meherbhai sang it, and Sohrabji wrote it — the one who reads it and has it performed will have good fortune'. Upon further examination, it appears likely that this same Sohrabji was the person in whose house this particular performance was taking place. In what I have termed the third and the final phases of the song, the names of members of the community are given in a series of different categories; for example, the heads of households who have commissioned the song, and those who have consecrated sacred fires. It is noticeable that the name Sohrabji occurs at the beginning of all these sections; thus, he is the first to be named as the father of the sons of the family for whom the song is being sung (357); his name comes first on the list of the men in the family (368); Sohrabji is mentioned as an important merchant (392) and he is the first of those named in the Anjuman of Shandara (Sanjāna). Finally, we are told: 'Here at my Sohrabji's house Dādār Hormazd has come to stay' (518) and that: 'All this happens at my Sohrabji's house' (534). It is also worth mentioning, that, when the women's names are taken (376ff.), a woman by the name of Motibai heads the list and it is possible that she may have been Sohrabji's mother since, at the very end of the song, where it is said that seven sons have been born from her womb 'where my Sohrabji and Zarathuštra abided' (520), Motibai again takes first place amongst the ladies of the house. Whoever Sohrabji was, he evidently wished to have his name immortalised by putting himself in the exalted position of receiving Dādār Hormazd as a visitor to his house, and sharing his mother's womb with the prophet himself.

We do not know whether the author of this text compiled his version from an existing manuscript, or directly from an oral version nor why he felt it was not being

sung properly, and we cannot tell whether the section breaks, fifteen in all, are of his authorship. The interpolations of this author, however, do show the type of changes which can take place when an oral text becomes a written one, and emphasises the fact that oral texts are rarely the product of one author or historical moment, rather they represent a dynamic, living record. If we assume, for example, that some part of this text existed in some form from the time of the founding of the Navsari *Ātaś Bahrām* in 1765, then we must also assume that the text we are about to analyse is probably very different from the 'original' due to the processes it has already undergone. The first and probably the most significant of these is the change from oral to written form, for here there is no doubt that many non-verbal elements of the performance will have been omitted from the written version. The second major process is that of translation, in this instance from Gujarati into English, where the translator is part of the culture of the source language.

4.3. The Structure and Content of the song

Structure A

The structure which has been imposed on the 1879 text, by means of section breaks, is to be examined first in this chapter. These breaks in the text are for directions to be given to the singers, but they also serve to make the content of the song comprehensible to the reader who is not witnessing its performance. Whereas meaning can be conveyed in the performance by ritual gestures or a change of rhythm or tune, these have to be written into the text. It can be seen that, even in a nineteenth-century manuscript, the medium of print created a certain level of expectation in the writer. Writing or print have the effect of separating the word from the living present, they reduce the dynamics of sound to that of space.¹ As Walter Ong points out, the process of transferring speech or song from oral to written text is controlled by certain conscious, articulated rules, and it is worth looking at the way in which the author has organised this text to see whether or not it tells us anything about the song as a whole. The directions tell the singers when to change the category of names they are taking, or when there is a change of subject such as, for example, when they should start singing about the enthronement of the fire. Sometimes, the instruction is simply to indicate a technical change in the way the song is to be chanted.² The breaks in the text are accompanied sometimes by a small decorative motif, sometimes by a large and a small one together; to the reader, these serve to emphasise the significance of the interval, although we do not know whether or not this was the intention of the author. In all there are fifteen breaks, which are as follows:

¹ Ong 1990: 82.

² According to Dastur Kotwal, this will vary depending upon the type of occasion for which the song has been commissioned, for example there will be a different 'tune' for a wedding to that which will be sung at a navjote.

(structure B
see below)

- | | |
|-----------|--|
| Stage I | 1) Take the names of the ladies of the house
2) Change the tune and begin the song
3) Take the names of the marrying couple
4) Change the tune |
| Stage II | 5) <i>large motif</i> - ladies should sing about the installation of the fire - <i>small motif</i>
6) Ladies - up to now you have sung half the song
7) <i>small motif</i> - take the names of the sons, master or mistress of the house for whom the song is being sung
8) <i>small motif</i> - take the names of the menfolk of the family
9) <i>small motif</i> - take the names of the women and their sons
10) <i>small motif</i> - change the tune and sing with a great lengthening of voice (this section begins with the praise of Ahura Mazda). |
| Stage III | 11) <i>large motif</i> - take the names of the head of the family, son or mistress of the house and their sons, i.e. those people who have consecrated a sacred fire - well known Parsis - <i>small motif</i>
12) Take the names of all the <i>agiārys</i>
13) <i>small motif</i> - take the names of the relations of the mistress of the house
14) <i>small motif</i> - lady of the house takes everyone to the <i>agiāry</i>
15) Take the names of the ladies of the house |

It can be seen here that over half of these directions refer to the names of various members of the household where the song is being performed. As such they create *explicit* slots which are intended to take different material/names depending where the song is being performed and for what type of occasion. In this way the text demonstrates a high degree of fluidity, in that it is open to variation, yet at the same time it has to be highly structured in order to allow this device to work. There are two *implicit slots* or occasions where names are mentioned without being flagged by a text break (64-68, 283-288), and it may be that they have become 'fixed', in that, for various reasons, these names have entered the main body of the text. Within these sections, changes of theme or differences in 'time' (where certain names from the historical past are juxtaposed alongside later ones) are sometimes marked by the name of Zarathuštra (69, 418).

The way in which the text focuses on the household in which the song is being performed underlines its importance as an act which makes merit. Whoever commissions this song will be given righteousness, good fortune, prosperity, sons, long life and, ultimately, a place in heaven. It is this aspect which sets the *Ātaš nu Gīt* apart from other joyful songs of celebration and transforms it into a religious act of devotion. As such, it came, presumably, to be the only lay ritual to be performed in the *agiāry*, and so we have the creation of a new tradition.

Another feature of the song which is highlighted by this structure is the participation of women. Today, and within living memory, it appears to be women who commission the performance of the song for an occasion such as a *navjote* or marriage, that is, an event which would normally involve domestic organisation, even if the song itself were

to be performed in the *agiāry*. According to the text, women are involved in all aspects of the performance, the *gōyāns* are female, and therefore the author's instructions are all addressed to the 'ladies', and it is the women or the mistresses of the house who are most frequently mentioned in the naming of households. At the beginning of the song, the first three names to be invoked are those of women; they are asked to undertake essential tasks for the establishment of the *Ātaš Bahrām*: to donate the land, to perform the foundation ceremony and to dig the well (repeated from 408). The sons of righteous women 'are full of good fortune', meaning they bring good fortune to the family and by implication to the community as a whole (376ff.). Women are mentioned alongside men in terms of their accomplishments (485), and it is to the female members of the household that presents are given (489ff.). Although the song may be performed for different occasions, this text is very much oriented towards the celebration of marriage — taking the names of brides and grooms — and to reaffirming the importance of marriage as an institution (538ff.). The survival of an ethnic minority which belongs to a non-proselytising religion is naturally dependent upon regeneration, thus marriage and the birth of sons are important elements of the song.

The way in which the text has been organised according to this structure provides us with certain insights but leaves one particular anomaly unexplained, namely that there appear to be two beginnings, or rather two descriptions of the same process. From the opening call to people to participate in the building of the *agiāry* the song proceeds in what seems to be an orderly fashion through various processes of construction, decoration, payment of artisans and priests, purification of the *hindora*, various religious rituals, and finally to the enthronement of the *Ātaš Bahrām* (242). This latter process then appears to take place again (292-307). With the heading: '*Ladies should sing about the enthronement of the Ātaš Bahrām*', there follows a description of the installation of the fire, the decoration of the inner sanctum, the religious rituals, and the payment of tradesmen and priests. This apparent inconsistency could be explained by the fact that the *agiāry* had been re-built in 1810,¹ which may have led the text to repeat itself, or by the fact that this particular edition was not as rigorous as it might have been, and that this section belongs earlier. In his commentary on the *Qissa-ye Zartuštīān-ġ Hindustān*, Modi draws attention to the fact that, according to that text, Desai Khuršed had prepared a dome in which to house the newly founded *Ātaš Bahrām*.² However, as he says, it is not clear when the fire was installed in the new *agiāry*, because the construction of a building would have been a far more costly and time-consuming procedure than the ceremonies surrounding the preparation of the fire.³ It may be, then, that in describing two different

¹ Hinnells 1985: 290, 'The building of Parsi fire temples 1709-1941', Appendix A.

² Modi 1930: 56. Here Modi refers to lines 708-740, which have been omitted from Cereti's translation.

³ *Ibid.*, 144.

events, the founding of the fire and the building of the *agiāry*, the song has repeated itself. If this were the case, however, it would have been more characteristic of an oral text to have added the subsequent event. In other words, the founding of the fire would have been described *before* the building of the *agiāry*. In the absence of any obvious reason why the text has evolved in this way, I should like to offer an explanation which involves the application of a different structure; one which relates to the way in which the text is organised as a whole.

Structure B

The following exposition of the text involves moving from its surface meaning or function to the interpretation of its structure as a source of implicit meaning. In other words, while on one level the song tells the story of the founding of an *Ātaš Bahrām* and all that this entails, there is at the same time a deeper level of meaning in which the song is itself an expression or affirmation of the faith, a way of consolidating the community and reinforcing its identity as a minority religion. This meaning is conveyed by the way in which the song is structured, implicitly acknowledging both Zoroastrian theological ideas and, it seems, certain priestly rituals.

With reference to Williams' work on the *Qissa-ye Sanjān*, I have already mentioned the way in which the structure of that text can be linked to both the *Qissa-ye Zartuštīān-ī Hīndustān* and the *Ātaš nu Gīt*. I suggested that there were two tripartite structures which could be applied to the *Qissa-ye Zartuštīān-ī Hīndustān*, and I discussed the first of these which refers to the structure of the text as a whole.¹ The second tripartite structure concerns the story of the two *Ātaš Bahrāms*: the *Irānšāh*, which was the first *Ātaš Bahrām* to be established on Indian soil, and the Navsari *Ātaš Bahrām*.

The significant part of the *Qissa-ye Zartuštīān-ī Hīndustān* begins where the *Qissa-ye Sanjān* ends, with the establishment of the *Irānšāh*. There is then a detailed and lengthy description of the quarrel between the Sanjāna and Bhagaria priests which ultimately obliges the Sanjāna priests to remove the *Irānšāh*; at this point it is temporarily 'homeless', leaving the town of Navsari without an *Atāš Bahrām*. After a short while everything is resolved with the establishment of a new fire in Navsari while the *Irānšāh* is enthroned in its final resting place in Udvada. I have suggested that the *Ātaš nu Gīt* is, in a sense, the lay counterpart to the priestly *Qissa-ye Zartuštīān-ī Hīndustān* since both texts appear to be describing the same event,² and so it is not surprising to find that the same structure obtains within the song as in the *Qissa-ye Zartuštīān-ī Hīndustān*. Thus, where in the song there appear to be two beginnings, or two descriptions of the same thing, the consecration of the fire, these can be seen to represent the establishment and then the re-establishment of the sacred fire after an interim period of disruption. Whereas

¹ See p.121.

² *Ibid.*

in the *Qissa-ye Sanjān* the tripartite structure pertains to the 'establishment, exile/transition and re-establishment' of the community as a whole, in the *Ātaš nu Gīt* the role of the community is replaced by that of the sacred fire.

As is often the case, the later text refers to the older one and so in the *Qissa-ye Sanjān* we find the motif for the song in the story of the sacred *Irānšāh*. Here, the 'king of kings', or first *Ātaš Bahrām* to be consecrated on Indian soil, is established soon after the arrival of the Zoroastrians from Iran. Some while later, the fire is forced into exile after a battle in which the Muslim army of *Alf Khan* is triumphant over the joint forces of the Hindu Raja and the Zoroastrians of Sanjān. After several years of itinerancy followed by a brief sojourn in the town of Bansda, the *Irānšāh* is brought finally to Navsari and re-established there. It is this account of the first sacred fire which, in a sense, foreshadows the *Ātaš nu Gīt* in which we have three stages: 1) the creation of an *Ātaš Bahrām*; 2) its removal as the result of a quarrel and the establishment of a new fire; 3) with the establishment of a new fire comes the 're-creation' of society.

These three stages of the song are preceded by a short dedicatory section in which the members of the households in which the song is going to be performed are named. After the third and final stage of the song, these names are repeated in a valedictory section. As we have seen, the author of the 1879 text encloses the whole song with his own commentary.

'Voices'

Before giving the translation of the song, I would like to say something about the different *voices* within the text and the way in which they work. As I have already mentioned, one of the main features of the *Ātaš nu Gīt* is the formal cataloguing of all those who are involved in both the construction and endowment of the *agiāry*. This is the way in which the song effects a re-creation of the community. Also, it promotes a sense of unity, which is particularly important in view of the bitter quarrel which had erupted between the two priesthoods. There are other devices which help to achieve this objective, and which work within the structural framework outlined above. Within the group of *gōyāns*, there is one leader, or individual singer, who chants the text, and the chorus who repeat the refrain. There are thus two 'voices', constantly interacting with each other throughout the song. Although there is a difference between the two voices, the voice that is chanting is always a collective one; in other words, both the voice that articulates the text and the voice of the chorus are represented as 'we' (the only exception to this rule occurs at the very beginning of the first stage of the song, when there are five lines of text in which the first person singular is used). The 'we' of the individual presumably refers to the voice of the community, whereas the group voice of the chorus is calling on everybody to join in going to the fire; the consequence of this device is, in effect, to eliminate the voice of the individual and to create a dialogue between the

community and itself. The communal voice does not permit a dichotomy between the active individual and the passive group — the 'we', or the communal voice of the individual, is constantly being interrupted by the group voice of the chorus. In this way the structure of the song works against the shaping of an individual voice outside the group; it demonstrates the various aspects of the same community, rather than different parts of it - in other words the two voices are but two manifestations of the same thing.

Through these two voices we have the interlacing of the two texts, the refrain plus the text itself. The refrain — 'O friends let us go to the fire' — works on several levels; it is both distinctive and repetitive and has the effect of an insistent call, gathering people together, it is also a device to bring in all the people of the good religion, as it were, under one roof. Within a few lines of the beginning of the first phase of the song this refrain is being repeated between each and every line of text, and, later, between each and every name. 'O friends' means the exclusion of non-friends, those who do not belong to the community — if they are not 'friends' then they cannot be part of this religion. 'O friends' has another function, which is to keep one essential feature of the song in focus, that is, to remind people that they *must* go to the fire. This is the subtle conditioning of the song, which like most religious texts is self-perpetuating. Thus prosperity, happiness, pride and ultimate salvation are all associated with an awareness of going to the fire. The frequent repetition of the refrain also demonstrates the dynamic of a minority mentality, forever repeating its call to gather people together. At the same time it is this particular 'voice' which gives the song a soothing, almost hypnotic character.

In the following translation of the text, I have cited the refrain only in the introductory section of the song. Thereafter, I have marked with an asterisk those lines which are followed by the refrain: 'O friends let us go to the fire'.

4.4. ĀTAŠ-NU GĪT:¹ translation with notes.INTRODUCTORY SECTION OF STRUCTURE B

- 1 Let us all get together and go to the *Ātaš*. All four of us shall sing: ²
 2 *O friends let us go to the fire* [Refrain]
 3 There are garlands around us - all four of us singers asking for (*āšodād*)
 4 Let us sing today (to) Dadar Hormazd.
 5 Tomorrow (we sing) the dedication of Meher Adar (to) Zarathuštra³.
 6 *O friends let us go to the fire.*
 7 [Repeat last two lines - 4, 5 plus refrain]
 8 Let us sing the second dedication of *Meher Adar* to *Ava Yazad* ⁴
 9 *O friends let us go to the fire*
 10 Let us sing today's song at my Shahjibhai's house
 11 *O friends let us go to the fire*
 12 Let us sing today's song at my Bamanji's house
 13 The song for the in-laws we'll sing at my Nauroji's house
 14 *O friends let us go to the fire*
 15 Let us sing today's song at my Shapurji's house
 16 And tomorrow's dedication to *Meher Adar* we'll sing at my Ratanji's house.
 17 *O friends let us go to the fire*
 18 Let us sing today's song at my Meherwanji's house
 19 And tomorrow's dedication to *Meher Adar* we'll sing at my Khurshedji's house.
 20 *O friends let us go to the fire*
 21 Let us sing today's song at my Cawasji's house
 22 Let us dedicate the song for the *navjote* at my Cooverji's house
 23 O friends let us go to the fire
 24 *Let us sing today's song at my Burjorji's house*
 25 Let us dedicate the song for the *navjote* at my Shirinbhai's house
 26 *O friends let us go to the fire*
 27 Let us sing today's song at my Faredoonji's house

¹ The original text is published in Parsi Stree Garba and Wedding Songs, compiled by Sohrabji Hormazji Chikan Chapnar; Bombay 1879. Dr. J. Russell (1989) has cited various lines from this song in the article mentioned below, and he has seen it performed. As far as I know there is no published translation. Shenaz Munshi, who helped Russell in his work on the *Garbas* and *Monājāts*, spent many hours with me, and produced the following 'first draft' translation of the *Ātaš nu Gīt*; she was unable to find, or guess, the meaning of a number of words in what is now old Gujarati. Dastur Dr. F.M. Kotwal of Bombay, and Dr. I. M. Raeside (SOAS) were able to enlighten us as to the possible meanings of some of them. In the text, the square brackets [] refer to the comments of the author; round brackets () to those of the translator and { } to words over which there is some doubt.

² In Bombay today, according to S. Munshi, *gōyāns* normally sing in groups of four.

³ The term 'Meher Adar' is somewhat puzzling; S. Munshi suggests that it is an honorific term used for the worship of the fire, equating Meher Yazad with fire.

⁴ *Ābān Yazad*.

- 28 Let us dedicate the song for the *navjote* at my Dosibhai's house
 29 *O friends let us go to the fire*
 30 Let us sing today's song at my Ramji's house¹
 31 Let us dedicate the song for the *navjote* at my Bamanji's house
 32 *O friends let us go to the fire*
 33 Let us sing today's song at my Dadabhai's house
 34 Let us dedicate the song for the *navjote* at my Faredoonji's house
 35 *O friends let us go to the fire*
 36 Let us sing today's song at my Dinshahbhai's house
 37 The song for the in-laws we'll sing at Jehangirji's house
 38 *O friends let us go to the fire*
 39 Let us sing today's song at my Jamshedji's house
 40 Let us dedicate the song for the *navjote* at my Ardeshir's house
 41 *O friends let us go to the fire*
- 42 [*Take the names of the ladies of the family*]
 43 Let us sing today's song at Bachubai's house
 44 The song for the in-laws we'll sing at Cooverbai's house
 45 *O friends let us go to the fire*
 46 Let us sing today's song at my Pirojbai's house
 47 And tomorrow's dedication to *Meher Adar* we'll sing at my Pannabai's house²
 48 *O friends let us go to the fire*
 49 Let us sing today's song at my Ratanbai's house
 50 And tomorrow's dedication to *Meher Adar* we'll sing at Gulbai's house
 51 *O friends let us go to the fire*
 52 Let us sing today's song at my Rupabai's house
 53 And tomorrow's dedication to *Meher Adar* we'll sing at my Dhunbaiji's house
 54 *O friends let us go to the fire*
 55 Let us sing today's song at my Bachubai's house
 56 And tomorrow's dedication to *Meher Adar* we'll sing at my Mithibai's house
 57 *O friends let us go to the fire*
 58 Let us sing today's song at my Avabai's house
 59 And tomorrow's dedication to *Meher Adar* we'll sing at Soonabai's house
 60 *O friends let us go to the fire*

¹ Ramji is a Hindu not a Parsi name.

² Hindu name.

- 61 *[Change the tune and begin the song]* STAGE 1 OF STRUCTURE B
- 62 Let all four of us get together and construct the *agiāry*.
- 63 There are garlands around us - all four of us singers asking for (*āšodād*) *
- 64 I will ask *Najabai* (fem.) to give the land.
- 65 I will ask *Ruribai* (fem.) to lay the foundation (*tana* ceremony).*
- 66 I will ask *Chandanbai* (fem.) to dig the well.
- 67 I will ask the elder *Narsang* to help in the construction of the *agiāry*, *
- 68 *Mania Sagar* will build the {*hadhuri*} ?
- 69 I will ask Zardušt to cause money to be given to establish the religion, *
- 70 I will ask Šapur Daru to put the *sudre* (on someone) — *sudre kustī, topi, padan*, *
- 71 Zardušt established the religion and maintained (it), (i.e. kept up the good name) *
- 72 Šapur Daru made someone wear the *sudre*, and kept up the name, *
- 73 Call the astrologer and let us find the auspicious moment to purchase the land. Fill the big tray with pearls and welcome the astrologer with this, *
- 74 Get tumblers full of milk and let us wash his feet, *
- 75 Bring boxes for *kum kum* (vermilion powder) and let us spread it on his feet, *
- 76 Bring sandalwood sticks and let us fill (*arrare*) {perhaps means ‘pile it up beside him’}, *
- 77 Let us make a special seat for him decorated with *ghunghariaro* {bells ?}, *
- 78 The Astrologer read the almanac and he determined the auspicious moment *
- 79 He has said that the auspicious moment is a Monday when the Hindu *tithe* is *Satam*. The next auspicious moment is Sunday when the Hindu *tithe* is *Atham* (all this rhymes). *
- 80 The auspicious moment has been determined for early morning. *
- 81 The happy occasion of Shahji’s wedding is about to happen *
- 82 The month is *Bahman* and the day is *Meher*, and the Hindu month is the month of *Šravan*, *
- 83 Let us call the son of the labourer and get the ground prepared, *
- 84 Let us call the son of the *gazdar* (measuring man). Bring a gold and silver measuring rod (*gaj*), *
- 85 Let us measure the land of the *agiāry*. Let us call the son of the goldsmith, *
- 86 Let us bring gold and silver nails, *
- 87 Call the son of the dastur, O friend. Bring a pair of priests (*ervad*), *
- 88 Let us lay the foundation of the *agiāry*, *
- 89 Let us call the son of the blacksmith, O friend. Let us get picks and hoes, *
- 90 Call the son of the basket maker and let us get pairs of *shovan* (baskets), *

- 91 *Chanchvete chambar dharaviere*¹ — Let us put handles on picks. The baskets are full of *ghungar*. *
- 92 Let us call the son of the merchant and get all the wood for the *agiāry* (wood for construction), *
- 93 Bring all these materials at the auspicious moment, *
- 94 Let us call the son of the grass-grower, O friend, and get the beams from him (another kind of basket-maker who makes larger baskets out of bamboo, the cross-beams will be made with bamboo). *
- 95 Let us get the lathes, *pakvasiya*, for the *agiāry*, *
- 96 Let us get the *bahal* (huge beams) for the *agiāry*, *
- 97 Let us get the cross-beams, *
- 98 Let us get the son of the builder and let us get the plan drawn for the *agiāry*, *
- 99 Let us call the son of the painter, and get the paint for the *agiāry*, *
- 100 Let us call the son of the potter and get the bricks and sand for the *agiāry*, *
- 101 Let us call the son of the water bag man (who waters the walls) and let us keep the walls wet, *
- 102 Let us call the son of the labourer, O friend; and let us mix up the sand and the cement, *
- 103 [repeat] the plan drawer, the gold and silver measuring yard, and the cross-beams,*
- 104 Let us fix the doors and the windows for the *agiāry*, *
- 105 Let us fix the window sills, *
- 106 Let us call the son of the carpenter, and let us get the wood sawn, *
- 107 Let us get the outside gate sawn, *
- 108 Let us get the beams for the roof sawn, *
- 109 Let us get the beams for the loft/storeroom sawn, *
- 110 Call the son of the carpenter, O friend. *
- 111 Let us get the cross-beams cut *
- 112 Let us get the door and the windows sawn *
- 113 Let us get the cross-beams of the *agiāry* cut *
- 114 Let us get the mesh (netting) of the *agiāry* *
- 115 Let us get the eaves constructed *
- 116 Let us get the windows made *
- 117 Let us get the supporting beams made, *
- 118 Let us call the son of the labourer and make the foundations of the *agiāry*, *
- 119 Let us dig a well for the *agiāry*, *
- 120 Let us outline the courtyard, *
- 121 Call the son of the mason, and let us fill in the foundations, *

¹ These words refer to implements.

- 122 Let us fill in the foundations and let us make the foundations, *
- 123 Let us construct the walls of the foundation, *
- 124 Call the son of the sailor and let him fix the cross-beams,
- 125 Call the son of the supervisor — let him look after all the material, *
- 126 Call the son of the blacksmith and get the nails for the *agiāry*, *
- 127 Let us call the son of the carpenter and let us get the loft constructed, O friend; the doors constructed, O friend; the window sills, O friend; the cross-beams, O friend; the eaves, O friend, *
- 128 Let us call the son of the mason and let us get the gumbad made for the *agiāry*, *
- 129 Let us make the well. *
- 130 Let us make the outside '*aiwan*' (Gujarati word for verandah — open part at the front or back of a house), *
- 131 Let us give the *agiāry* a white-wash, *
- 132 Let us call the son of the potter and let us bring tiles made of glass (to tile the roof)*
- 133 Let us call the son of the roof builder and get the roof fixed, *
- 134 Call the stonecutter, Patel from Ilav, and ask him to get the stones for the *agiāry*, *
- 135 Call the mason's son '*aradhiana panare jor*' (*pana* = wrench) bring a pair of half-size wrenches, *
- 136 '*Aghiari molajire jhaharavo*' ?? *
- 137 Let us build the ritual place (*ijašne gāh*, with marked areas where priests sit and solemnize the inner rituals), *
- 138 The cross-beams are of gold and the support beams are of silver. *
- 139 The cross-beams have been encrusted with pearls and decorated with gold dust, *
- 140 {'*Patariara pakvasiya*' ?} *
- 141 We have fixed the roof with glass tiles, *
- 142 Let us build arches along the roof (decorative arches), *
- 143 Let us call the son of the gardener and ask him to sow the date palm, *
- 144 Let us sow the pomegranate tree¹, *
- 145 Let us plant jasmine, *
- 146 Let us sow the banana plant, *
- 147 Let us sow the orvar, *
- 148 Call the son of the painter and get the cross-beams painted, O friend. Now paint everything, O friend, paint the gallery ?? *
- 149 Let us call the decorator and decorate the walls of the *agiāry*, *
- 150 Decorate everything, O friend, in between, *
- 151 [repeat] the cross-beams are of gold and the support beams are of silver, *

¹ All the various requirements for the *agiāry* described in the song are referred to by E.D. Drower (1956: 201) in her study of Parsi ritual. She writes: 'Essential to every fire-temple is a court and garden to which there must be easy access from the Yazashna-gah, the path to it being protected by the pāvis. The court must contain a well of flowing water and the garden a pomegranate-tree and a date-palm.'

- 152 Turmeric powder has been drawn in the shape of a moon all over the place,
 153 '{*Šalatane lachea pidhor*'??} *
 154 We have built pillars of sandalwood sticks (*agar*).
 155 We have lined the door frame with the neem tree (thought to have medicinal
 properties). *
 156 The thresholds are decorated with leaves of *parvara* (a kind of tree), *
 157 We have garlanded the *agiāry* with the betel-leaf creeper, *
 158 We have built square-shaped *aiwans*, friends; there are pearls strewn in the
 courtyard, *
 159 We have fixed glass tiles and the eaves of the roofs are decorated with arches made
 of pearls, *
 160 There is sweet rainfall now, *
 161 The courtyard is paved with glass, O friend, — in the direction of the sun *nishar*
 has been started. *
 162 You can hear the sound of the goldsmith working, *
- 163 [At this place the names of the marrying couple shall be taken]
 164 Friend, for my Saporasji,¹ let us have a (silver) tumbler made — for Shirinbai a
 necklace of nine strands. *
 165 Friend, for my *Saporasji* let us have thick necklaces made — and for the new bride
 a pair of anklets (?) *
 166 Friend, for my Maneckji get *veriya* made — and for the new bride a pair of bells² *
 167 Friend, for my Shapurji have thick armlets made — and for my Hirabai a pair of
tiladamni *
 168 Friend, for my Ratanji let us have a *mulkharo* made — and for my Bai (my lady by
 the name of Ai) a pair of bangles *
 169 Friend, for my Nauroji let us have a *varula* made — and for my Aimai a chain and
 thin bracelet *
 170 Friend, for my Sohrabji let us have a *pamari* woven — and for Bachubai a pair of
Karchoki *
 171 Friend, for my Burjorji let us have a *pamari* woven — and for Pirojbai a pair of
jadarvel *
 172 Friend, for my Shapurji let us have a pagri woven — and for Hirabai a pair of
jadarvel *
 173 Friend, for my (?) let us have a pagri woven — and for Gulbai a necklace of nine
 strands *

¹ Saporasji is a term used to denote the bridegroom.

² To be worn like anklets when dancing.

- 174 Friend, for my (?) let us have a pagri woven and for Cooverbai a set of Chinese silk saris *
- 175 Friend, for my Edulji let us have a pagri woven — and for Navajbai a necklace of nine strands *
- 176 Friend, for my Bejanji let us have a pagri woven — and for Soonabai a pair of bangles *
- 177 Friend, for my Pallonji let us have a pagri woven — and for Dhunbai a chain and a thin bracelet *
- 178 Friend, for my Behramji let us have a pagri woven — and for Navajbai a necklace of nine strands *
- 179 Friend, for my Jamshed let us have a pagri woven, and for Ratanbai a pair of bells*
- 180 [*change the tune*]
- 181 Call the son of the banker and get some coins (seals), *
- 182 Get a bag of silver coins, *
- 183 Call the son of the merchant and get pairs of *pagris* and slippers (?) *pamri* {silken, woollen?} *
- 184 Get bundles of *pamri* and cloth, *patuka*, *
- 185 Get bundles of chintz, *chit*, and saris, *chhael* — bring different types of clothing *
- 186 Get bundles of blankets and *dhotis*, *
- 187 Get bundles of shawls, *
- 188 (We shall give) the different clothes to the astrologer, and his wife shall be given a set of *patori* (special kind of sari), *
- 189 (We shall give) the head (supervisor) a set of shawls and slippers *
- 190 (We shall give) the architect/contractor a set of shawls and slippers *
- 191 (We shall give) (his) wife a pair of 'kār chowk' (square? handkerchief for head), *
- 192 (We shall give) the carpenter a pair of *pagris*, *
- 193 (We shall give) the labourers a set of blankets (*gungari*) *
- 194 O friend, we shall ask somebody to give the bricklayer money, *
- 195 O friend, we shall ask somebody to give the blacksmith money — (and) his wife a pair of bangles, *
- 196 O friend, we shall ask somebody to give the potter money. The roof thatcher will be given a set of *pamri* *
- 197 The person with the water bag will be given money, O friend. *Kalphati* will be given a pair of *pagris*. *
- 198 We shall give (cover) the mason with a blanket, O friend, — his wife will be given a pair of saris, (*chael*). *
- 199 We shall ask somebody to give the stone mason, *chalato* a set of chains and a bracelet, O friend, — his wife we shall give a pair of bangles, *

- 200 We shall ask someone to make the gardener wear *varula*, O friend, — his wife too,
we shall give a pair of bangles, *
- 201 We shall deck the goldsmith in fine garments (we shall cover him with good
clothes), O friend, — his wife too, (we shall give) a pair of bangles, *
- 202 We shall make the painter wear a chain, O friend, (and) his wife a set of *chael*, *
- 203 We shall cover the decorator with a silken garment, *
- 204 The Dasturs shall be given a pair of bangles made of gold coins, *
- 205 We shall give the Ervad a pair of rupees, *
- 206 *Fartalone ardhaoni* a pair of coins, *
- 207 Call the son of the astrologer and ask him to see (find) the auspicious moment for
the *agiāry*. *
- 208 O friend, the astrologer has found the auspicious moment, the auspicious moment
is really good, *
- 209 The auspicious moment has fallen on the Sunday (the Hindu *tithe* is *Atam*), *
- 210 The auspicious moment has fallen in the early morning, *
- 211 It has fallen on *Ardebehišt Māh*, *Sroš roj* — in the (Hindu) month of *Šravan*, *
- 212 We will call the son of the gypsy (traveller), O friend, and get wheat, dahl and rice
grain, *
- 213 Get a pair of goats, *
- 214 For the *agiāry* let us find a *Bahrām rōj* *
- 215 Let us call the son of the coppersmith and let us bring copper lamps, *
- 216 Let us call the son of the (person who sells oil and ghee) and let us get a block of
ghee from him, *
- 217 (with this ghee) we will light the lamps of the *agiāry*, *
- 218 From Navsari let us ask them to bring the *Varasya* (the sacred bull used for ritual
purposes), O friend, we shall collect *nērang* from him, *
- 219 This white bull is (born of) a white cow, and we shall collect his *nērang*, *
- 220 Call the son of the coppersmith and let us get big copper vessels, *
- 221 Let us collect the *nērang* in these big copper vessels, *
- 222 The *Varasiya* is fair and he has light-coloured eyes. The Dasturs and *dāvvars* are
good people (*dāvar* is a common surname meaning ‘judge, magistrate, just’), they
will collect the urine,¹ *

¹ The collection of cows or bull's urine, *gômēz*, for consecration (after which it is known as *nērang*), described by the authors, of the song shows a familiarity on the part of the laity with priestly duties. In his description of the consecration of the ritual implements, *ālāt*, used by priests in the *urwīgāh*, Modi refers to the *nērangdīn* ceremony; after performing various purification rituals, the *Barešnum*, the *Khūb* ceremony and the *Gewra* ceremony, the two priests purify two large waterpots, two small waterpots and a cup, all of which are metallic. The collecting of urine must be completed some time before sunset (see Modi 1922: 256, 257).

- 223 Let us wash the *hindhoras* (*khwān*) (the stone seat for the priest within the *pāvi*) (with *nērang*),¹ *
- 224 Let us get the entire *agiāry* washed with *nērang*, *
- 225 Let us make the *agiāry* clean, *
- 226 Take the pomegranate, the date palm, the *urvar*, and the *nērang* and let us give *nahn* to the *ervads*, *
- 227 Let us consecrate the *hindhora* of the *agiāry*, *
- 228 Let us call the son of the coppersmith and let us get the *hāwan* (bell), (and) *kundi* (vessel), *
- 229 Let us call the son of the goldsmith and get a set of chains, *
- 230 (These gold chains) shall be placed in the hands of the *ervads*. *
- 231 Let us begin the work (consecration) of *Srōš*, *
- 232 Let us begin the work of the *ijašne*, *
- 233 Let us begin the *Vendidād*, *
- 234 Let us begin doing the work of the religion, *
- 235 Let us ask the *ervad paša* (title, epithet) to make the *drōns*, *
- 236 Let us consecrate the *hindhora*, *
- 237 Let us ask the Dastur to consecrate the *patru*, O friend (one of the rituals usually connected with *Srōš*). Let us get milk, wine, and pomegranate, *
- 238 Let us do the *jašan* for the *agiāry*, *
- 239 Let the whole *Anjuman* partake of the consecrated food, *
- 240 Let us call the son of the coppersmith, O friend, and let us get benches of copper, *
- 241 Let us call the son of the goldsmith and get silver pots, *
- 242 Let us enthrone the *Ātaš-Bahrām*, *
- 243 4 *Srōšes* are put together (on four consecutive days) and the *Ātaš Bahrām* was consecrated. The fire has been brought and put into the *Agiāry*, *
- 244 Someone woke up early in the morning, rubbing their eyes — the white fire of lightning was seen as if by magic (lit. the unseen fire of lightning is now seen by the person who got up early in the morning).²

¹ This is reminiscent of the *Hōm Yasht*, which describes the purification of the *yazišn-gāh* by Zoroaster: '*Pad hāwan radih (pad hāwan gāh), Hōm abar raft ō Zardušt pad ātakš (gāh) pērāmōn yōjdahrēnīsnih (ka-š ātakš-gāh kāmīst šustan) gāhān srāyīšnih (ka-š an ašem-vohū sē guft kē fravarānē ō pēš).*'

In the lordship of the morning *gāh* (in the *hāwan gāh*) Haoma went to Zoroaster at the purifying round-about of the fire-place (when he desired to clean the *ātakš-gāh*) and chanting the *Gāthās* (when he said the 3 *Ašem Vohūs* which (is) before the *Fravarānē*). (Pahlavi text from Dhabhar 1949, my translation.)

² In his account of the enthronement of the H.B. Wadia *Ātaš Bahrām*, Dastur Kotwal refers to the sixteen different types of fire which must be assimilated in order to create the one *Ātaš Bahrām*, and he lists sixteen representative types which include those of potter, brickmaker, goldsmith, priest, and a fire caused by lightning (Kotwal & Boyd 1983: 295). The *Ātaš nu Gīt* lists many craftsmen who could have provided fires for such a purpose. It should be noted, however, that, according to the *Rivāyats*, the fire of lightning should not be used in the construction of an *Ātaš Bahrām* Dhabhar 1932: 62, 63. See also Modi 1922: 212, 213, where the stages of consecrating an *Ātaš Bahrām* are described as follows: 1) Collection of the 16 fires; 2) Purifications of the 16 fires; 3) Consecration of the 16 fires; 4) Unition of the 16 fires; 5) Consecration of the united sacred fire; 6) Enthroning of the united fire. See also Williams (1990, Vol.

- 245 Let us call the son of the grocer, O friend, and let us get sandalwood, frankincense and *agar* (sticks, sweet smelling, blackish/brown in colour), *
- 246 Let us do the *Bōy* ceremony of the *Ātaš Bahrām*,¹ *
- 247 Let us get sacred books from Iran, O friend; let us ask the Dasturs to recite them,² *
- 248 Begin the work of the *ijašne*, *
- 249 Begin the *Vendidād*, *
- 250 Begin the consecration of Srōš *
- 251 Begin the work of the religion, * END OF STAGE I OF STRUCTURE B
BEGINNING OF STAGE II OF STRUCTURE B
- 252 ‘*Šandarare šajaniani sarkhi che roli*’—these people have stolen the *Ātaš Bahrām*, *
- 253 The entire Anjuman is pondering over this, *
- 254 With what shall we do the acts of the religion, *
- 255 With what shall we do the acts of the *Vendidād*, *
- 256 With what shall we do the acts of the *ijašne*, *
- 257 With what shall we do the acts of Srōš, *
- 258 Where shall we go and see the fire, *
- 259 The Sanjānas (people of Sanjān) were all perturbed, *
- 260 ‘*Šandarare*’ the dasturs {here?} all have a similar type of beard (*dahari*)³
- 261 The Sanjānas threw out (these people)⁴ *

2: 158), who suggests that the five-fold division of fire referred to in PRDd. 18d 2 pre-dates the establishment of temple fires (the *Ātaš Bahrām* in the Pahlavi of Y. 17 being a later addition). One of these fires is said to smite the demon *Spanjagr*, and is referred to in the *Bundahišn* (G.Bd. VI.b.14) as the fire of lightning (*Wazišt*).

¹ The *bōy* ceremony or ritual feeding of the sacred fire takes place five times every day at the beginning of each of the five *gāhs*; although the ceremony varies in length according to the grade of fire, in all cases the *padyāb-kustī* (i.e. the untying and retying of the *kustī*) is performed together with the *kustī* prayers which include the *Khuršīd* and *Mihr Niyāyiš* during the daytime *gāhs*. The priest then goes into the sacred chamber, places one or more pieces of sandalwood on the fire and recites the *Ātaš Niyāyiš*; in the case of the *Ātaš Ādarān* and *Ātaš Dādgāh*, the *Niyāyiš* is recited once, but for an *Ātaš Bahrām* it is recited several times.

² The *Qissa-ye Zartoštīān-e Hendustān* (Cereti 1991: 118) refers to the procedure which should accompany the enthronement of the *Ātaš Bahrām*: ‘Afterwards a holy and beneficent *mobađ*, a pious man who knows the fifteen arts, must recite, together with those *mobađ*, in that same moment, ninety-one *Yazašn* on that fire. Then the *Ātaš* will be completed by means of the *Yazašn*, with that good omen. Afterwards, as disposed, they will perform straightway three *Vendidād* and three *Yazašn* for that *Ātaš*.’

³ According to Dastur Kotwal, neither the *Bhagarīa* nor the *Sanjāna* priests have ever had a particularly distinctive beard. In an account by Geleynssen de Jongh, who was appointed to take charge of the Dutch factory in Broach in 1625, he says of the Persians: ‘The priests are not distinguished from the laymen in their dress, but they wear great round beards, in the manner of the French or the English, which make them more easily recognisable in the street’ (Firby 1988: 187). Later in the account, de Jongh makes the same observations with respect to the Persian community in general: ‘Their stature is much like other people’s, some are tall, others short; they have great round beards, not unlike the French’. (*Ibid.*, 191).

⁴ threw = *kahari* which rhymes with *dahari* (beard).

- 263 The *Ātaš Bahrām* has been consecrated after reciting this ceremony for the thirty-three *yazatas* — the fire has been brought and kept in the town of Navsari, *
- 264 They brought the *Ātaš* and placed it in the *Khuršed Wadi* ¹ *
- 265 It was brought and put in the *Jamšed Baug* (a hall with a building attached, where people can stay for weddings, and so on), *
- 266 The fire was brought and put in the *Desai wadi*, *
- 267 The fire was taken to the village of Baruch, *
- 268 The fire was taken to the village of Udaipūr, *
- 269 The fire was brought to the city of Bombay, *
- 270 In Iran is the big fire, in Navsari is the small fire and in Udvada is the *agiāry*, *
- 271 In the city of Surat is the *agiāry*, *
- 272 [*Repeat ... Bombay O friends ..., Navsari O friends ..., Bharuch O friends ...*]
- 273 All over the country are *agiārys*, *
- 274 Call the son of the grocer and get frankincense, sandalwood and agar, *
- 275 Let us do the *Bōy* ceremony of the *agiāry*, *
- 276 Let us do the consecration of Ardibehišť, *
- 277 Let us begin the consecration of Srōš, *
- 278 Let us begin the ceremony of the *Vendidād*, *
- 279 Let us do the acts of the religion, *
- 280 Let us get somebody to recite the *Vendidād* texts, O friend, let us do the acts of the religion, *
- 281 The thirty-three *rōj* have been remembered (consecrated), O friend; they have done the *gāhāmbārs* in the *agiāry*. *
- 282 We have invoked Dadar Hormazd, *
- 283 We took the name of *Jamšed padšah* (king), *
- 284 We have taken the name of *Rustam pahelvan* (hero), *
- 285 *Dadyseth* has been remembered, *
- 286 We have remembered the *Modi* family, *
- 287 We have remembered *Hormusji Wadia*,² *

consecration of the first of the sixteen fires is described in the *Qissa ye Zartoštīān-e Hendustān*, where it says: 'Then these two *mobad*, being in a state of *payvand* and possessing the benefits of *khub* will dig nine ditches in a place protected and bound' (Cereti 1991: 117). A similar account is given in the *Rivāyat of Kamdīn Šapur*, where it says: '([First] the body of the polluted fire should be made pure and (then) that fire may be collected. It is necessary that the men should dig nine trenches; from one ditch to another, there should be (left a space of) not more or less than one span; (the measure of) the span must be that of a man thirty years old; nothing more nor less is proper..') (Dhabhar 1932: 65).

¹ Khuršed probably refers to Desai Khuršed, see p.180.

² An article in the Bombay Courier of 1830 recorded details of the enthronement of this particular fire in the H.B. Wadia *Ātaš Bahrām* in Bombay; the hall of the *agiāry* was: 'regally ornamented with chandeliers (and) mirrors...' and the sanctuary where the fire was enthroned was 'paved with marblestones, in the middle of which (was) placed a large silver vase of the value of 40,000 rupees'. See Kotwal and Boyd 1983: 300.

- 288 We have remembered *Framji Cawasji*, *
- 289 All these people have done meritorious acts (that is, they have all built *agiārys*), *
- 290 All these people have gone to the House of Song (Paradise). *
- 291 [*Ladies should sing about the enthronement of the Ātaš Bahrām*]
- 292 Let us call the son of the coppersmith and bring the copper benches, *
- 293 Let us call the son of the goldsmith, O friend, and get the silver {?} throne, *
- 294 Get the silver pots, *
- 295 Get the silver roof, *
- 296 Get the silver *toran*, *
- 297 Get the silver beakers, *
- 298 Let us enthrone the *Ātaš Bahrām*, *
- 299 Let us build the roof of the *agiāry*, *
- 300 Let us call for the silver ladle, *
- 301 Let us do the *Bōy* for the *Ātaš Bahrām*,
- 302 Let us get the silver lamps, *
- 303 Let us light these lamps in the *agiāry*, *
- 304 Let us put the *toran* on the door of the *agiāry*, *
- 305 Call the son of the gardener, O friend. Get the full *toran* from the mango leaves,
- 306 The *Ātaš Bahrām* has been born on *Ādur Māh* and *Ādur Rōj*, *
- 307 On *Ardibehišť Māh* and *Srōš Rōj* the *Ātaš Bahrām* was enthroned, *
- 308 [*You have now completed half the song*]
- 309 Call the son of the (one who threads pearls into necklaces), O friend, and let us get the *patorite paatare* (instruments with which to thread the pearls), *
- 310 Let us call the son of the (one who specialises in embroidery with gold and silver thread), O friend, and let us get a gold and silver canopy, *
- 311 Let us put the canopy round the *agiāry* (for people to sit under) *
- 312 For the four brothers have tied the canopy and the *Ātaš Bahrām* (is decorated with it) *bhajere hagioio*, *
- 313 Let us call the son of the (coppersmith) *bhratiya*, O friend, and let us get the huge copper plate, *
- 314 Let us hang this plate from the dome of the *Ātaš Bahrām*, *
- 315 Let us get the *Bōy* ceremony done at the *Ātaš Bahrām*, *
- 316 Let us call the son of the poultry farmer, O friend, and let us get a crowing cock, *
- 317 (With this crowing cock) the *Ātaš Bahrām* will be awakened, *
- 318 Let us call the son of the shepherd, O friend, and let us get a pair of goats,¹ *

¹ This is a clear reference to the blood sacrifice which is no longer recognised by most orthodox Parsis today. The *Rivāyats* refer specifically to the fat of the *gospand* being offered both during the purification

- 319 Sacrifice the goat (at) the *Ātaś Bahrām*, *
- 320 Call the son of the Chinese merchant, O friend, and let us get a lantern, a mirror, and chandeliers, *
- 321 Let us call the son of the merchant, O friend, let us get a pair of carpets, *
- 322 Let us spread the carpets in the *Ātaś Bahrām*, *
- 323 Let us call the son of the gardener, O friend, let us get the flowers, the balls of garlands, *
- 324 Let us get a floral net (made with garlands), *
- 325 Let us get garlands of mango leaves, *
- 326 *O friends let us go to the fire*
- 327 Let us tie the garlands round the *Ātaś Bahrām* *
- 328 Let us call the son of the (person who makes silver vessels) *tamoli* {silversmith?}, O friend. Let us get a pair of *Hara* (sugar containers), and a pair of silver (dishes for betel leaves), *
- 329 Let us call the son of the gypsy *vanjara* (nomadic travellers), O friend. Let us get wheat, *dāl* and *jaggari* (brown sugar from cane), *
- 330 Let us call the son of the grocer, O friend, and let us get dry date, betel nut and coconut, *
- 331 Let us offer all this to the *Ātaś Bahrām*, *
- 332 Let us call the son of the itinerant grocer O friend, and get wheat, dahl and rice, *
- 333 Let us get the *jaśan* done at the *Ātaś Bahrām*, *
- 334 *O friends let us go to the fire*
- 335 Let us call the son of the jeweller, O friend, let us bring a garland of pearls, *
- 336 Let us offer these pearls to the *Ātaś Bahrām*, *
- 337 Let us call the son of the goldsmith, O friend, and let us bring gold and silver flowers, *
- 338 Let us 'welcome' the *Ātaś Bahrām* with the flowers, *
- 339 Let us call the son of the cashier, O friend; let us get a bag of coins, *
- 340 Let us distribute this good offering at the *agiāry*, *
- 341 Let this *aśodād* be distributed to the entire *Anjuman*, *
- 342 The *desai* will be covered with shawls, O friend, and let us give the Dasturs a set of garments, *
- 343 Let us give the *ervads* a pair of rupees, *
- 344 And their wives a pair of *jadarvel* (saris?), *

of the fires for an *Ātaś Bahrām*, and more generally to the *Ātaś Bahrām* once it has been established: 'A male *gospand* (i.e. a sheep or goat) or a female *gospand* not big with young is proper for the offering of *zor* to the *Bahrām* fire' (Dhabhar 1932: 71). The last line of the song refers, presumably, to the commissioning of a sacrifice on the part of a layman: 'Take the incense, do the *kusī*, and make an offering of a sacrificial animal'.

- 364 The Parsis are a meritorious people, *
- 365 You do acts of religion, *
- 366 You do meritorious acts, *
- 367 [*The readers of the song should take the names of the menfolk of the family*]
- 368 My Sohrabji's name is very religious¹, *
- 369 My Burjorji's name is very religious, *
- 370 My Shapurji's name is very religious, *
- 371 My Ratanji's name is very religious, *
- 372 My Nasarwanji's name is very religious, *
- 373 My Feranji's name is very religious, *
- 374 My Cawasji's name is very religious, *
- 375 [*The readers of the song should take the names of women of the house and their sons*]
- 376 The sons of my Motibai are full of good fortune (i.e. they bring it to the family), *
- 377 The sons of my Bachubai are full of good fortune, *
- 378 The sons of my Pirojbai are full of good fortune, *
- 379 The sons of my Dhunbaiji are full of good fortune, *
- 380 The sons of my Gulbai are full of good fortune, *
- 381 The sons of my Meherbai are full of good fortune, *
- 382 [*Change the tune and sing with great lengthening of voice*]²
- 383 The one who goes to the fire agiāry has a beaker in his hand, *loto* (beaker)
- 384 Ahura Mazda is great *moto* (great), *
- 385 *Ātaš Bahrām* is the son of Dadarji (Dadar Hormuzd), *
- 386 He has shown us the way to heaven, *
- 387 He has kept our (good) name in this world, *
- 388 The one who goes to the *agiāry* has a cuckoo {*koel* ?} in his hand — go and wake up the people in the *Ātaš Bahrām* {*Behaje dohoael* ?} *

application of *nērang* (or the unconsecrated bull's urine, *gōmēz*) and is the one referred to here (see Modi 1922: 92-93). Such an observance is in accord with the following precept taken from a Pahlavi text: 'Intelligent men ought to get up at the time of *Hoshein* and, according to the commandment of their religion, to apply the urine of a cow (or such other animal) to their hands and face and then to wash them with pure water. Then according to their custom they ought to put on the sacred vestment and tie round it the sacred string that is connected with the ceremonies or the Mazdiasnian faith' (Sanjāna 1885: 31).

¹ In other words the following people have done many religious acts.

² In the following section I have included some of the Gujarati words in order to show the way in which they rhyme. This is, presumably, a mnemonic device, thus: *loto, motoI; koel, dohoael; phul, bhul; loto, beto; kharak, parakh; sopari, vepari; jahari, vari; chokha, mota; gashea, vashia*.

- 389 The one who goes to the *agiāry* has flowers in his tray (*phul*) — let us go and wake up (the fire, that is, rekindle it). Fire will always break our mistakes (*bhul*) (prevent us making mistakes),¹ *
- 390 The one who goes to the *agiāry* has a beaker (*loto*) in his hand — the *Ātaś Bahrām* will give a son (*beto*) to everyone, *
- 391 The one who goes to the *agiāry* has in his hand frankincense and sandalwood (*tacho*) — go and awaken {the fire?}, the fire will break/destroy (*tasho*) *
- 392 The one who goes to the *agiāry* has in his tray dry date (*kharak*) — in the *tola* from *Šandarar* my Sohrabji is an important merchant (*parakh*), *
- 393 The one who goes to the *agiāry* has a betel nut (*sopari*) in his tray and in the *tola* from *Šandarar* my Burjorji is an important merchant (*vepari*), *
- 394 The one who goes to the *agiāry* has in his tray that (*jahari*), let us tie the floral net (*vari*) on the *Ātaś Bahrām*, *
- 395 The one who goes to the *agiāry* has rice (*chokha*) in his tray; in our religion *Ātaś Bahrām* is the greatest (*mota*), *
- 396 The one who goes to the *agiāry* has sandalwood and *agar* sticks (*gashea*) in his hands — ‘*shoene kaere*’ (at the opportune moment) the father-in-law of the father came (*vashia*) (i.e. the in-laws were welcome), *
- 397 At the opportune moment the brothers of the family came and stayed, *
- 398 At the opportune moment the sons of the family came and stayed, *
- 399 At the opportune moment the brave brothers were welcomed, *
- 400 At the opportune moment the sisters’ husbands came and stayed, *
- 401 At the opportune moment the sons of the sons-in-law came and stayed, *
- 402 At the opportune moment all the in-laws came and stayed, *
- 403 [Welcome all members of the family.]
- 404 [Take the names of the heads of families, sons or mistresses of the house i.e. the actual people who consecrated the fire, well known Parsis]
- 405 The one who goes to the *agiāry* carries with him a ghee lamp — may *Bachubai*’s sons and husband live long, *
- 406 May the father and the brothers of *Shirinbai* live long, *
- 407 The one who sings and gets the song performed will be strong like a stone *
- 408 *Najabai* gave us the land and kept on the (good) name, *
- 409 *Ruribai* had the *tana* ceremony done and kept her (good) name, *
- 410 *Chandanbai* had the well dug and kept her (good) name, *
- 411 The elder *Narsang* built the *agiāry* and kept his (good) name, *
- 412 *Mania Sagar* built the *handhuri*, *

¹ The link between fire and *Aśa* is referred to in the *Gāthās*, where fire is given the epithet ‘strong through *Aśa*’ (Y.43.4), and offerings are made to fire in order to venerate *Aśa*.

- 413 Dorabji Dastur appointed the supervisor and kept his (good) name, *
- 414 Khuršedji Desai spent his wealth and kept his (good) name, *
- 415 Nusserwanji Desai spent his wealth and kept his (good) name, *
- 416 Tehmulji Desai spent his wealth and kept his (good) name, *
- 417 Šapurdaru was instrumental in making the (priest) wear the *sudre* and he kept his (good) name, *
- 418 Zarathuštra kept his (good) name by establishing the religion, *
- 419 Dadi Modi kept his name by enthroning the *Ātaš Bahrām*, *
- 420 Dadi Seth kept his (good) name by enthroning the fire, *
- 421 Hormusji Wadia enthroned the fire and kept his (good) name, *
- 422 Bahamanji Bawa enthroned the fire and kept his (good) name, *
- 423 Faramji Cawasji enthroned the fire and kept his (good) name, *
- 424 Rustamji Desai enthroned the fire and kept his (good) name, *
- 425 Nusserwanji Desai enthroned the fire and kept his (good) name, *
- 426 [*Take the names of all the agiārys*]
- 427 The *Anjuman* kept their (good) name by constructing the *agiāry*, *
- 428 Muncherji Seth kept his (good) name by building the *agiāry*, *
- 429 Banaji Seth kept his name (good) by building the *agiāry*, *
- 430 Dadi Seth kept his (good) name by building the *agiāry*, *
- 431 Maneckji Seth kept his (good) name by building the *agiāry*, *
- 432 Khuršedji Maneckji kept his (good) name by building the *agiāry*, *
- 433 Khuršedji Langara kept his (good) name by building the *agiāry*, *
- 434 Jeejeebahi Dadabhi kept his (good) name by building the *agiāry*, *
- 435 Dadabhi Gamri kept his (good) name by building the *agiāry*, *
- 436 Framroze Phiritana kept his (good) name by building the *agiāry*, *
- 437 Manackji Saher kept his (good) name by building the *agiāry*, *
- 438 Jehangriji Wadia kept his (good) name by building the *agiāry*, *
- 439 Muncherji Wadia kept his name (good) by building the *agiāry*, *
- 440 Soonabai Hirji kept her (good) name by building the *agiāry*, *
- 441 Motibai Wadia kept her (good) name by building the *agiāry*, *
- 442 Hormasji Wadia kept his (good) name by building a *agiāry*, *
- 443 Jamšed Jijibhai kept his (good) name by building the *agiāry*, *
- 444 Aslaji kept his (good) name by building the *agiāry*, *
- 445 Naoroji Narielwalla kept his (good) name by building the *agiāry*, *
- 446 Nahabhai Saplaji kept his (good) name by building the *agiāry*, *
- 447 Cawasji Ashburner kept his (good) name by building the *agiāry*, *
- 448 Shapurji Kapawalla kept his (good) name by building the *agiāry*, *
- 449 Merwanji Patel kept his (good) name by building the *agiāry*, *

- 450 Nusserwanji Karani kept his (good) name by building the *agiāry*, *
- 451 Bamanji Mewawalla kept his (good) name by building the *agiāry*, *
- 452 Hormusji Patel kept his (good) name by building the *agiāry*, *
- 453 Sohrabji Batchagandhi kept his (good) name by building the *agiāry*, *
- 454 Sohrabdaru Thuthi kept his (good) name by building the *agiāry*, *
- 455 Pahalonji Cama kept his (good) name by building the *agiāry*, *
- 456 Sohrabdaru Rangi kept his (good) name by building the *agiāry*, *
- 457 Beheramji Batliwalla kept his (good) name by building the *agiāry*, *
- 458 Jamšedji Sodawaterwalla kept his (good) name by building the *agiāry*, *
- 459 *Ādurān* was built by Merwanji Pande and he kept his (good) name, *
- 460 *Sohrabji Chapgar* counted all the *agiār*ys
- 461 (The) *Anjuman* built a *dādgāh* and kept its (good) name, *
- 462 The *dādgāh* was built by *Sohrabji Readymoney* and he kept his (good) name, *
- 463 *Jamšedji Jeejeebhai* built the *dādgāh* and kept his (good) name, *
- 464 *Meherwanji Pande* built the *dādgāh* and kept his (good) name, *
- 465 *Edulji Soonawalla* built the *dādgāh* and kept his (good) name, *
- 466 *Bahrāmji Sherwai* built the *dādgāh* and kept his (good) name, *
- 467 Six *dādgāhs* were built at their established places, Bombay town has six new *dādgāhs*, *
- 468 There are three kings and three important kings, the city of Bombay has three *Ātaš Bahrāms*, *
- 469 There are thirty-four *patra* (fire-vases) and thirty-four *hindoras*; Bombay town has thirty-four *agiār*ys, *
- 470 Each *agiāry* has its own *dādgāh*, Bombay town has forty *dādgāhs* (34+6), *
- 471 Whoever kept the *Ātaš Bahrām* by doing this act will go to heaven, *
- 472 Whoever built the *Ātaš Bahrām* and worshipped the various deities (*dev-dehara* = Hindu temple i.e. where idols kept), he goes to *garath bhandar*,¹ *
- 473 Destroy the edifice of sins and build a wall based on the good religion, *
- 474 O friend one has seen two paths — one can go wherever ones mind/soul chooses, *
- 475 The lamp is filled with ghee and the pot is filled with milk — the one who sings and the one who gets this song sung, may her husband and her sons live long, *
- 476 The one who sings and the one who gets this song sung, may her brothers and sisters live (long), *
- 477 The one who sings and the one who gets this song sung, may their families live long, *
- 478 The one who goes to the *agiāry* carries rice in his tray, for everyone my Dādār Hormazd is great, *

¹ Dastur Kotwal has suggested that this means literally 'a store of dirty matter' (excrement etc.), from *bhandar* meaning 'store', 'treasury', and *gar*, meaning 'abyss of hell'.

- 479 The one who goes to the *agiāry* carries betel (*paan*) leaves in his tray (and) in the *Anjuman* of *Šandara* my *Sohrabji* gets much respect (*maan*), *
- 480 *O friends let us go to the fire*
- 481 The one who goes to the *agiāry* carries betel nuts (*sopari*) in his tray; in the *Anjuman* of *Šandara* my *Burjorji* is a big merchant (*vepari*), *
- 482 The one who goes to the *agiāry* carries sugar candy in his tray; in the *Anjuman* of *Šandara* my *Šapurji* is a big merchant, *
- 483 The one who goes to the *agiāry* carries dry date (*karak*) in his tray; in the *Anjuman* of *Shandara* my *Ruttonjibhai* is a big merchant (*parak*), *
- 484 The one who goes to the *agiāry* carries rice in his tray; in the *Anjuman* of *Shandara* my *Burjorji* is great, *
- 485 The one who goes to the *agiāry* carries a net of flowers (*phuljari*) in his tray — of all the ladies who are married my *Bachubai* is the most important business woman (*vanjari*), *
- 486 The one who goes to the *agiāry* carries a vermilion container (*pigani*) in his tray, and of all the married ladies my *Pirojbai* is the leader (*thakurani*),¹ *
- 487 The one who goes to the *agiāry* carries flowers in his tray (*phul*), and my *Shirinbai* *Sohvasan*² wears a jewel (*jhul*) in her ear. *
- 488 [Take the names of relations of the mistress of the house]
- 489 Let us make the lady of the house wear 'carchoki' (a kind of garment) *
- 490 Let us give the daughter-in-law a pair of *jadarvel* *
- 491 Let us give the sister a pair of *jadarvel* *
- 492 Let us give the mother-in-law a set of saris *ghat* (thin silk) and *lahi* (figured silk), *
- 493 Let us give the family a pair of *jadarvel*, *
- 494 The one who keeps the fire going shall be given a pair of *alecha*, *
- 495 Let us give the lady of the house a pair of *ghalari* (long earrings or silken shawl), *
- 496 Let us give the favourite daughter-in-law a pair of saris with a dotted design, *
- 497 Let us give the sister and brother's wife a set of chains and bracelets, *
- 498 Let us give the mother and mother-in-law {a pair of ?} bangles, *
- 499 [The lady of the house taking everyone to the *agiāry*].
- 500 Come O lady of the house, let us go to the fire, *
- 501 Come O favourite sons-in-law, let us go to the *agiāry*,
- 502 Come O sisters and brother's wives let us go to the *agiāry*, Come all the in-laws, let us go to the *agiāry*, *
- 503 Come all family members and all the neighbours, let us go to the *agiāry*, *

¹ *thakur* = local leader.

² *Sohvasan* means 'one whose husband is alive'.

- 504 Come all neighbours, let us go to the *agiāry*, *
- 505 Let us go to the fire and take all the treasures (offerings) with us. Our religion is the one which is given by Dādār Hormazd, *
- 506 Our religion is called the Zoroastrian religion, *
- 507 Dadar has given us the Zoroastrian religion — the Parsis are doers of good deeds, *
- 508 The one who got up early in the morning at break of dawn and {rubbed the ghee?} for the fire - he washed his hands from the beaker, *
- 509 The one who got up early in the morning rubbing his eyes and wore his shoes. The one who got up early in the morning and took the nērang from the cow, (such a man has done the deed) according to the religion of Dādār Hormazd. *
- 510 The Parsis are great doers of good deeds, *
- 511 The pregnant lady has given birth to seven sons. Seven sons were born of her and Dādār Hormazd and Zarathuštra were part of her {part of the seven}, ?? *
- 512 In the *Ātaš Bahrām* there is also *Āva Yazad*, *
- 513 They have shown us the way to heaven, *
- 514 May *Meher Yazad* be kind to everyone, *
- 515 May *Bahrām Yazad* help everyone, *
- 516 May *Sroš Yazad* help everyone, *
- 517 May *Āva Yazad* break people's hiccups, *
- 518 Here at my *Sohrabji's* house Dādār Hormazd has come to stay. *

END OF STAGE III OF STRUCTURE B

BEGINNING OF CONCLUDING SECTION

- 519 [*Take the names of the ladies of the house*]
- 520 Seven sons have been born from the womb of my *Motibai*, where my *Sohrabji* and Zarathuštra abided, *
- 521 Seven sons were born to my *Pirojbai*; to my sister *Širinbai* Dādār Hormazd smiled, *
- 522 Seven sons were born to my *Cooverbai*; at my sister *Dinbai's* house Dādār Hormazd lived (he blessed it), *
- 523 This song has been composed by *Dosa Bharucha*, Dādār Hormazd has given him a lot of righteousness, *
- 524 Zarathuštra is the head of our religion, *
- 525 This song has been composed by *Jiva Bharucha*. The *Ātaš Bahrām* is the light (*diva*) of the religion, *
- 526 Whoever sings this song does a meritorious act — and whoever listens to it attentively, *
- 527 Whoever listens to the song of the fire attentively — he will be blessed with virtuous acts, *

- 528 *Gungariaro jahaklone lohara tarivaro* — this person has opened the gates (*baro*) of heaven, *
- 529 As we go round and round (singing) this song wearing bells on our ankles, *
- 530 This person (dancing or singing) will get a necklace made of nine metals, *
- 531 This person will be clothed with pearls, *
- 532 This person will be encrusted with diamonds, *
- 533 These are like waves of the sea, *
- 534 All this happens at my *Sohrabji's* house, *
- 535 My *mae Āva Yazad*,¹ *
- 536 All this to my *mae Širinbai*, *
- 537 *Širinbai* will have this necklace of nine metals round her neck, *
- 538 All our brothers will get married soon (lit. will climb up on horses i.e. join a marriage procession) — *Sohrabji* and *Šapurji* (i.e. may these two get married soon), *
- 539 May the pair *Burjorji* and *Amaša Baiwaji* (also get married), *
- 540 May all the brothers get married soon — the pair *Šapurji* and *Ruttanji*, *
- 541 May the pair *Nawronji* and *Nusserwanji* get married soon, *
- 542 May the pair *Muncherji* and *Linjibhai* get married soon, *
- 543 May *Meher Yazad* bless everyone, *
- 544 To my *Sohrabji's* house, *
- 545 To my *Burjorji's* house, *
- 546 *Meherbhai* sang it, and *Sohrabji* wrote it — the one who reads it and has it performed will have good fortune, *
- 547 Take the *lobān* — do the *kustī*, and make an offering of a sacrificial animal. *

¹mae = mother, here used as a term of endearment.

4.5. Close Commentary of the Text

Introductory comments of the compiler of the 1879 text.

This is for the ladies who sing this Gujarati hymn to the fire. Among our people, it is common for this song to fire to be sung on auspicious occasions, and this is the hymn. How to sing the song:

1. It should be sung, lengthening the utterances gradually and steadily. Where you find a dash (-), you should not stop there, but should complete the line up to the single asterisk (*) and immediately sing the next word. Where there are two asterisks with the figure two in between (*2*), then in that place you should go back and repeat the words between the last dash and the *2*. Where there are certain names (proper names of persons) repeated again and again, there you can substitute these names with the masters and mistresses of the families (in whose houses the song is being sung). Up until now no one has sung the song well, so that people might say that the words have been lengthened unnecessarily, but this is not the case, it is just a device (created by this compiler) in order to make the song easier to sing.¹

2. *Introduction to the song*

The song begins with the an invocation to go to the fire and introduces the ladies in the chorus: ‘all four of us shall sing: “O friends let us go to the fire”’. This is a short dedicatory section which begins with the names of Dadar Hormazd and Zarathuštra, and goes on to name the heads of the families and the ladies of the house who have commissioned a performance of the song. This type of dedication is a familiar opening to many Zoroastrian religious texts, and shows a willingness on the part of the lay composers to observe the accepted form of composition. It is a format which is reminiscent of the *šnumans* which occur at the beginning of the *Niyāyiš* examined in chapter 2, and which, together with the closing formulae for worship, enclose the main body of the prayer. It is also very similar in form to the *pazand* preface, or *Dibācha*, which precedes all liturgical services and which includes the name of the person for whom the ceremony is being performed as well as the names of those who have commissioned its service. This section ends with a direction to the *gōyāns* to change the tune and begin the song.

3. *The building of an agiāry and the consecration and enthronement of the Ātaš Bahrām*

The first stage of the song begins with a call to the ‘four of us’ — presumably the ladies of the chorus — to get together and start the construction of the *agiāry*. There then follow seven lines of text in which it said that various people will be called to perform

¹ This section has been translated by Dastur Kotwal.

certain tasks: the laying of the foundation, the building of the well and the *agiāry*; there is a reference to the family priest (*Šapur Daru*), and to the sacred garments: *sudre*, *kustī*, *topi*, *padan*; and to the donation of money for the establishment of the *Ātaš Bahrām*. These are the only lines in which the lead *gōyān* refers to herself in the first person singular using the future tense. Most of the song is actually included in this opening section, together with the introduction. We have the place where the song is to be performed, the people for whom it is sung, the essential requirements for the establishment of fire, and the name of the prophet and the family priest. This first section is in fact a microcosm of the whole poem. From this point onwards the text and the refrain refer to each other continually; the response to every element of text is 'O friends let us go to the fire'. When reading the text, we are made to become aware of the orientation of the listeners: the audience is, as it were, built in. The text now takes the grammatical form of an invocation (until 149), each line is a call to get people to provide a service of one kind or another in the construction of the *agiāry*.

After naming the family priest (72), the following lines (73-82) concern the time at which the land for the *agiāry* should be purchased, for it is most important that this be an auspicious moment and various honours are accorded to the astrologer. The role of astrology in Zoroastrianism has been somewhat neglected in Western accounts of Zoroastrianism, possibly because a fatalistic approach to life is not thought to accord with the teachings of the prophet. According to Dastur Kotwal, astrologers play an important part today in determining 'auspicious moments' for priestly as well as lay families, and it would be quite normal for a *mobed* to consult an astrologer about his horoscope. In his view this is likely always to have been the case since there is reference to astrology in the Pahlavi books (the Pahlavi word for astrologer is *kundāg*). The juxtaposition of the Hindu calendar with the Zoroastrian one in lines 79 and 82 shows an awareness of the Hindu majority amongst whom the Parsis are obliged to live. The calendars are in opposition to each other, and by referring to them both (again in 209), the song emphasises the distinctiveness of the Parsi religion.

From the subject of time we move to that of place: the ground is prepared by labourers and measured, gold and silver nails are called for; also two priests, for the laying of the foundation (84-88). This rather strange assortment of people and things accords perfectly with the performance of the *tana* ceremony (referred to in line 65). This ceremony is described by Modi for the laying of the foundations for a Tower of Silence:¹ after the preparation of the plot by labourers, two priests perform the *tana*, in which a very fine thread is passed through a carefully positioned number of nails which have been put into the ground in order to mark out the circumference of the Tower. According to Modi's description, this is a very exacting ritual which takes several days, although we

¹ Modi 1995: 230ff.

do not know the form it took for an *agiāry*. It is also appears to have been a major public event which thousands of people would try to attend and which involved the whole community. Since it was considered to be a meritorious act to witness the *tana* ceremony, the arrangement of nails and thread would be left in place for several weeks afterwards so that people could go and throw their gold and silver coins into the excavation.

Following the foundation of the *agiāry* there are 38 lines of text (ending with the building of the *ijašne gāh*) in which the various people/professions involved in the building process are invoked. While this is a way of establishing the community, at the same time it is a device which is employed to include the audience in the performance. Everyone in the audience would be able to identify with one profession or another, emphasising the collective nature of the text; the process of the construction of the building is also the process of the construction of the community. Everyone is free to add their bit to the building of the *agiāry* and at the same time to the song - by the end they are one and the same thing.

In the *Qissa-ye Sanjān*, there is a short section devoted to a description of the foundation of the *Irānšāh*:

That very instant, the Prince issued his commands and gave the Dastur a pleasant site. The Hindu Rana Jādi had the land at once cleared on every side. All the Unbelievers within three Farsangs were removed and no one remained there except the People of the Good Faith. No one dwelt around within three Farsangs of it, and no one stayed there save Zoroastrians (*lit.* men) of knowledge. Round the *Aurvisgāh*, on all sides (stood) Dasturs, every one of whom shone, in virtue of his sanctity, like the sun himself ... The laymen also were preoccupied in the business and provided, out of (their zeal for) the Faith, all various things necessary. The Prince Jādi Rana also sent offerings of every sort. In those days, all the arts and industries (*lit.* workshops) were in the hands of the People of the Good Faith.¹

From this description it is possible to trace ideas which were carried through from the earlier text of the QS to the song. For example, it is interesting to note that despite the fact that the Hindu ruler had the land cleared (presumably by Hindus), no one was allowed to remain on it unless they were of the Good Religion. Here, the demarcation line between Zoroastrians and people of the majority faith is explicitly drawn, whereas in the song we are made aware of a more implicit boundary line between believers and non-believers.

After the building of the *agiāry*, the text moves to the construction and decoration of the *ijašne gāh* and to the planting of the date palm, pomegranate tree, jasmine, banana plant and orvar, that is, to those elements of religious life which will be practised within the *agiāry* (143-147). This is followed by a description of the decoration of the *agiāry* with leaves, garlands of betel-leaf creeper, pearls and drawings of the moon in turmeric powder and it seems likely that these tasks may have been carried out by women. In

¹ Hodivala 1920: 193.

modern times it is customary for women to decorate their hearth fires with a paste made from turmeric powder drawn in the shape of a moon exactly as described in line 152 of the song.¹ These lines (152-159) are recited in the past tense, indicating that the main work has been finished. By the time we reach 'There is sweet rainfall now' (160), the *agiāry* has been constructed, decorated and garlanded.

There is a break in the text here in which the singers are instructed to take the names of the brides and bridegrooms of those for whom the song is being performed. After this section we come to the subject of payment for all the tasks which have been performed in the construction of the *agiāry*. This section begins with various requests for money, and for all sorts of cloth, saris, shawls and blankets. There follows a list of the payments made to all the artisans, the gifts of saris and bangles which are made to their wives, and gifts to the dasturs (down to 206). It is not possible to determine the significance of these payments, why some people are reimbursed with coins and others with clothing or jewellery, but there is no doubt that this is the means by which the song builds the hierarchical structure of the community into the text. The particular payment would accord with the status of the profession.

After everything has been built, decorated and paid for, there begin the various rituals necessary for the consecration and enthronement of the *Ātaš Bahrām*. The astrologers are called again to determine the time of consecration (207), and then follows the collection of *nērang* both for the purification of the whole *agiāry*, and the *hindoras* where the *yasna* will be performed. It is interesting to note here that the laity appears to be significantly involved in activities which belong normally to the priestly domain. Lines 213 to 236 show the laity procuring various things for the performance of a *yasna*, the 'pair of goats' presumably refers to the need for *jīvam*, or fresh goat's milk, then there is the pomegranate, date palm, and *kundi* or vessel for consecrated water. Sometimes priests are deferred to as in 'Let us ask the *ervad paša* to make the *drōns*' (235). The line: 'Let us begin doing the work of the religion' underlines the fact that the laity is familiar with the procedure of the *Vendidād*, *Srōš* and *Yasna* ceremonies. After the communal meal in which the Anjuman partake of the consecrated food, we are told: 'Let us enthrone the *Ātaš Bahrām*', and then: 'The *Ātaš Bahrām* was consecrated. The fire has been brought and put in the *agiāry*.' The remaining lines of this first stage of the song refer to the *bōy* ceremony of the feeding of the sacred fire (246ff.). We are reminded that the *Yasna* is being performed regularly by the repetition of lines 231-233 and 248-251. The song continues: 'Let us get sacred books from Iran, O friend; let us ask Dasturs to recite them' (247). It is possible that these books refer to the *Rivāyats*, in particular to the *Rivāyat of Kamdin Šapur* (see p.104), which is part of the collection of *Rivāyats*

¹ See p.227, n.2

compiled by Darab Hormazdyar, and which, according to is *Qissa-ye Zartoštian e Hendustān*, was consulted prior to the founding of the Navsari *Ātaš Bahrām*:

He took out those exalted volumes that were (written) in *Pazand*, *Fars*, and *Pahlavi*. He saw a volume in the handwriting of *Dārāb* who was a *dastur* wise and of good countenance. The work of the *Bahrām* was done following that volume; all the faithful were satisfied with this ... While the *Dastur* was reading that book all those hearing rejoiced; because of that volume everyone became expert and all the arrangements of the *Ātaš* became clear.¹

We do not know to what extent the teachings of the *Rivāyats* were known to the laity. What does seem likely, however, is that members of the laity would have been aware of the contents of the *Qissa-ye Sanjān* and the *Qissa-ye Zartoštian e Hendustān*, both of which told the stories of events which concerned the community and which have lived on in popular tradition.

By the time we reach the end of this stage in the song, we have witnessed the entire process of the building, decoration and consecration of the *agiāry*. The *Ātaš Bahrām* has been constructed, enthroned and paid for, largely as a result of the activities of lay members of the community. Finally, the most solemn of religious rituals have been performed within it. The text shows an awareness of the concept of time by the way in which it shifts through the different tenses. Starting with: 'I *will* ...' (64), it carries on to 'let us..' (77), and then to the three lines concerning the astrologer (78-80), where we have: 'He *has* said ... The next auspicious moment *is* ... The auspicious moment *has been* determined ...', then: 'we *have* ...' (154), and back again to 'we *shall*' (188). In this way, the song demonstrates the cyclical nature of time within the greater cosmic era of 'limited time'. However, there is also a sense of 'timelessness' about this phase of the song; this could be any *Ātaš Bahrām* real or imagined. We have witnessed an idealised process which begins with Zarathuštra, and which describes the perfect creation of a House of Fire.

4. *The stealing of the old fire and establishment of a new one*

'*Šandarare šajaniāni sarkhi che roli*', these people have stolen the *Ātaš Bahrām*.

The song now moves into real time in the real world which is a place of conflict. Here we have references to historical characters and events (which are documented in other sources), and to geographic locations. There is a change of tone here, which contrasts sharply with the soothing, repetitive quality of the preceding stage which ended with the work of the religion having begun, and with regular performances of the important rituals. Now comes a change of humour from that of joyous celebration to one of consternation, and for the first time direct questions are asked: 'The entire Anjuman is pondering over this ... With what shall we do the acts of the religion ... the acts of the

¹ Cereti p. 117.

Vendidād ... acts of the *ijašne* ... acts of *Srōš* ... The Sanjānas were all perturbed.' This small section consists of ten lines (252-262) and could refer to the confrontation and struggle between the Sanjāna and Bhagaria priests, which is described in full in the *Qissa-ye Zartoštian e Hendustān*. It is useful here to be able to compare the two texts, for it seems likely that they are both referring to the same event. The account given in the *QZ* conveys the impression that there was a good working relationship between priests and laymen with both groups being aware of their rightful duties and obligations. However, we know from the brief account which I have given of some of the events leading up to the founding of the *Ātaš Bahrām* in Navsari that this was by no means always the case. That this relationship could and sometimes did go wrong is what this part of the *QZ* is all about; however, the fundamental disagreement seems to have been between the two priestly sects, each of which had its own lay following. The solution to this quarrel, which had been going on for some time, came with the intervention of one Desai Khuršed, a member of a priestly family who was a leading member of the Navsari community and benefactor of the Bhagaria priests. Desai Khuršed pleaded the Bhagaria cause with the Hindu ruler of Baroda, Dāmānji Rāo:

Also Xoršid spoke with rāo Dāmānji. He went and discussed with understanding. O good natured man, on one side there were all the Sanjāne, on the other there was Xoršid. Between them there was a long debate in front of the good natured rāo Dāmānji, there was enough contending in his assembly and also Xoršid spoke without regards. When the rāo had heard all the circumstances of the two sides, he meditated and formulated a verdict.¹

The verdict was that Sanjāna priests should leave Navsari taking their sacred fire with them.² After this episode, the 'gentle *sardār Xoršid* told to everybody the secret hope' which was that he wished for a new *Ātaš Bahrām* to be established in Navsari. According to the *QZ*, all the *Dasturs* and *Herbads* were in Navsari, together with the *behdin* and *kad-xoda* (heads of villages) to celebrate the *Jašan i Rapithwin*, and it was on this occasion that the idea was discussed. Thereafter letters were written to wealthy *behdin* all around asking for their support, and in due course the replies came with promises of donations. It is quite clear from the *QZ* that while the initiative to found this particular *Ātaš Bahrām* came from within the priestly sphere, it was only through the agency of the laity that this was made possible:

Let us write many letters so that this work or ours may be propagated everywhere there are beneficent *behdin* of good counsel, so that it may be known to them (the situation and condition) that we are building the *Ātaš* in this way. They wrote letters and sent them everywhere ... When all the well-famed *sardār* heard that they were

¹ Cereti 1991: 110.

²The significance of the line 'The Sanjānas threw out these people' (261), which comes at the end of the section (which I have suggested refers to the *Bhagaria/Sanjāna* dispute) does not make sense in this context since it is the latter who were obliged to leave Navsari. Whether, therefore, this line refers to a different time/place is uncertain. See further p.199, where I have discussed the historical nature of this section in more detail with reference to another version of the song.

building a *Varahrām* in *Naosāri* they became happy-hearted and wrote an answer: 'We will send all the expenses needed, and we are always hoping that these efforts of ours will come through in *Naosāri*. Also *Pahruc* and *Uklisar* made the donations in this manner' ... Then came, from all sides, letters of answer (saying): 'This work must be done with a pure heart because if we see this in our days we will rejoice a hundred times in our hearts. That there will be an *Ātaš Varahrām* in *Naosāri* and the *div* will become depictable because of that'.¹

According to the song, it seems that the 'new' fire was established with *paiwand* (262), and then comes a reference to the *Khuršed Wadi*, the *Jamšed Bag* and the *Desai Wadi*. These gardens are all in Navsari and, according to Dastur Kotwal, would have been the places where some of the fires necessary for the founding of the *Ātaš Bahrām* would have been purified. Evidently this procedure requires a large amount of space, since for each of the fires in question nine pits have to be dug (in all ninety-one). This information is substantiated by Modi who says that :

In Navsari are three 'Wadis' or garden-grounds which are known from the names of Desai Khurshedji and his two brothers, Rustamji and Jamshedji. They are known as 'Khurshed wadi', 'Rustam wadi' and 'Jamshed wadi'. Of these three, Desai Khurshedji dedicated the one bearing his name to the public use of the Anjuman at all the festive and public purposes of the Anjuman.²

The next three lines of the song (267-269) say that the fire was taken to the villages of Baruch, Udaipur and Bombay; however, this may mean that fires were brought *from* these places to form part of the Navsari *Ātaš Bahrām*. The text then moves from the past into the present and celebrates the fact that 'All over the country are *agiārys*', in other words, this is the present state of affairs. Lines 274 to 280 repeat the religious ceremonies which are performed in the *agiāry*: the *Bōy* ceremony, the *Vendīād* and *Šrōš*, and include that of the consecration of *Ardibehišt*. Here we see how the new text assimilates the earlier one within its structure; as the song proceeds through this 'historical' phase, the new text is always aware of its relationship with the old text.

The following section is a ritual of remembrance: 'All these people have gone to the House of Song' (283-290). Whereas we have already had one explicit slot for new material (where the text allows for the names of brides and grooms to be taken), here we have an implicit slot, a memorial to the spiritual and physical beings of the distant past, as well as those of the recent past. Thus the text invokes *Dadar Hormazd*, *Jamšed Padšah* and *Rustam Pahlevan*; it then moves to take the names of the founders of the four *Ātaš Bahrāms* established between 1765 and 1879, that is, up until the time of the compilation of our text. These are as follows: 1) the *Ātaš Bahrām* founded by Dady Nuserwanji (Dadyseth) in Bombay on 29 September 1783; 2) the *Ātaš Bahrām* founded by Jaiji Dadabhoy Nusserwanji Mody (Modi) in Surat on 19 November 1823; 3) the *Ātaš*

¹ Cereti 1991: 114-116.

² Modi 1933: 60.

Bahrām founded by the sons of the late Hormasji Bomanji Wadia (Hormasji Wadia) in Bombay on 17 November 1830; and 4) the *Ātaš Bahrām* founded by Framji Cursetji, Rustamji Cowasji and Rustamji Banaji (Cawasji) in Bombay on 13 December 1845.¹

In the text there is now a section entitled: '*Ladies should now sing about the enthronement of the Ātaš Bahrām.*' This is a repetition of the first enthronement starting with a call to the coppersmith to bring copper benches (292 cf 240). There follows the decoration, garlanding and the *Bōy* ceremony. This part ends with the statement that the *Ātaš Bahrām* has been 'born on *Ādur Māh* and *Ādur Rōj*', and was enthroned on '*Ardebehišt Māh* and *Srōš Rōj*', again, the auspicious moment is mentioned. On this occasion the equivalent Hindu dates are not included, which indicates a new sense of confidence. It is no longer necessary to defer to the majority religion.

After the enthronement there is a description of the golden canopy which is to be put over the *agiāry*, and this is followed by a list of the various trades of the lay community. These are somewhat different to those mentioned in the first stage of the song where the occupations are mainly to do with the building of the *agiāry*. Here we have the son of the poultry farmer, the shepherd, and various merchants.

The next line, '(with this crowing cock) the *Ātaš Bahrām* will be awakened' (317), refers, presumably, to the rekindling of the fire by priests. In the song there are plenty of references to the 'ceremony of *Srōš*', and it is not surprising to find that this *yazata* plays an important role in the prayer and ritual of the *agiāry*, since, according to the Pahlavi books, *Srōš* is described as the protector of Fire, both being *hamkars* of *Urdwahišt*.² Here then, we have a link with *Srōš* and his own bird, the cock. The crowing of the cock at dawn also serves to remind people of the *Ušahin-gāh* prayers:

(Vd. 18.22-23) ... then, for the third part in the night, the fire of Ahura Mazda entertains *Sraoša*, companion of *Aši*: 'Help, O *Sraoša*, accompanied by rewards, fair of form...' Then he *Sraoša*, accompanied by rewards, awakens that bird *Paro.dars*, ... Then that bird raises its voice in the powerful dawn.³

Again, in the *Drāyīšn ī Ahreman ō Dēwān* the crowing of the cock is the signal for Fire and *yazata* to combine in the fight against the evil powers of the night:

Then *Srōš* claps his hands to the cock. When the cock crows, the *Bahrām*-fire smites one part and the house-fire, when they kindle it at midnight, (smites) one part; *Srōš* smites all the rest.⁴

After the awakening of the *Ātaš Bahrām* there is a reference to the sacrifice of a goat (319), a ritual which is not recognised by Parsis today, although there is some disagreement as to when it was abandoned (and it seems that even now, it is performed

¹ See the Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency (1901), Appendix 1.

² Kreyenbroek 1985: 118.

³ *Ibid.*: 172 n.39.

⁴ *Ibid.*: 1985: 118.

occasionally, see p.208). We know from the same collection of *Rivāyats* cited above that: 'A male *gospend* (a sheep or a goat) or a female *gospend* not big with young is proper for the offering of *zor* to the Behram fire ...'¹ and also that this collection of *Rivāyats* was referred to by those responsible for the consecration of the Navsari fire. It seems likely, therefore, that animals were indeed sacrificed as part of a *yasna* ceremony performed in the new *agiāry*.

(323-327) These lines describe the garlanding of the *Ātaš Bahrām*, and this is followed by a *Jašan* ceremony and the payment of priests and their wives, again much of the first stage of the song is repeated in the new context.

(346-351) Towards the end of this stage of the song the text begins to prepare for the resolution: the fire is enthroned and religious ceremonies are performed. The fact that *dasturs*, *mobeds*, *ervads* and *behdins* all pray well together within the precincts of the *agiāry* suggests an equilibrium of priesthood and laity.

(352-355) The conflict has been resolved to everybody's satisfaction, there are *Ātaš Bahrāms* established in various different places, now the text reflects on the rewards, both material and spiritual, which will result from such meritorious acts: 'The Parsis are great doers of good acts ... That good act which he has done will have a spin off on the entire *tolah* ... The wealth of that person will be well spent, ... All his wishes will be fulfilled ... He will go to heaven'.

5. *The resolution or re-creation of society*

(356ff.) This stage of the song is about the community. In the first stage society was created in an abstract way with the naming of all the professions. Now this process is repeated; through the naming of individuals, the community is re-established. With the creation of explicit slots for material to be added or changed according to where and for whom the song is being performed, the text shows that it is back in harmony with itself. This is the Resolution, in which the fire, the song and the process are taken into *every* house. The repetition of names is not only a device to identify or recreate the community, but also to root the religion in every single member of each family, thereby making the text relevant to every single name. The text continues to celebrate the merit of the whole community; first, by naming the men in the family who are 'very religious', and then the women who bring good fortune.

(385ff.) Here we have the personification of the Fire; as in the *Ātaš Niyāyīš*, the Fire is referred to as the Son of Ahura Mazda, and it is the Fire which has the power to *break* mistakes (389). At the same time these lines (down to 396) characterise the person

¹ From the *Rivāyat* of Shapur Bharuchi in Dhabhar 1932: 71. Haug, writing not long before the text of the *Ātaš nu Gīt* was published, attests to animal sacrifice being performed by the Parsis at Gāhāmbār Festivals 'until recent times'. See Murzban (second edition) 1994: 391.

who goes to the *agiāry* bearing gifts; after reminding everybody how wonderful the Parsi religion is, they are invited to make offerings.

(397-403) This small section emphasises the bonds of the family, the result of belonging to the righteous community.¹

(405ff.) Here begins a long recitation of the virtuous community. The order of names is illuminating as far as the composition of the song is concerned. After the first two names (*Bachubai, Shirinbai*), who thus far in the song have been mentioned in the 'later' context, the text returns to the opening of the first stage of the song and repeats the list of laymen and women and what they contributed to the founding of the fire: Najabai (land), Ruribai (*tana* ceremony), Chandanbai (well), Narsang (*agiāry*), Mannia Sagar (*hadhuri*). After this come three members of the priestly Desai family - Khuršedji Desai, Nusserwanji Desai and Tehmulji Desai.² Since we know that Khuršedji Desai played a part in the founding of the Navsari fire in 1765, the juxtaposition of these names suggests that those laymen mentioned also lived at that time.

(418) The name of the prophet marks the end of this list of people, and then begins the naming of those leading members of the laity who have founded *agiārys* starting with the four *Ātaš Bahrāms* already mentioned; these are followed by the *adarān* fires, and lastly the *dādgāh* or third-grade fires. It has been possible to identify nineteen out of the thirty-three *Ātaš Adarāns* mentioned in the song from the list of *agiārys* given in the Bombay Gazetteer for 1901.³ Of these fires it is noticeable that, with the exception of one, the *Ātaš nu Gīt* refers only to those established in the nineteenth century, and mainly in the Bombay area. The Gazetteer lists 133 *adarān* fires throughout India, approximately twenty of these were founded after 1879. Some half a dozen are referred to as being 'very old', founded before the eighteenth century and rebuilt several times thereafter. Otherwise, most of these *agiārys* belong to the nineteenth century, which suggests that it was the newly found wealth made possible by commerce which enabled this particular form of 'making merit'. Many of the rich laymen who are named as having founded *adarān* fires are also named in the song as having established *dādgāh* fires.

¹ See p.189-90, where I cite some passages from the *Bundahišn* concerning the doctrine of the three times, and the final Renovation.

² Modi (1933: 57) gives the Desai family tree and a brief description of the leading members of the Desai family, from which it seems that Tehmulji and Nusserwanji were brothers and Khuršedji was the eldest son of Tehmulji.

³ Hinnells (1985: 290-294), has published a comprehensive table of *agiārys*, based upon B.B Patel *Parsi Religious Buildings* (in Gujarati), Bombay 1906, which includes some from the *Parsi Prakash* as well as those given in the Bombay Gazetteer. He does not distinguish, however, between the different grades of fire, and gives only the surnames of the benefactors of the *agiārys*, so it is difficult to match these names with those in the *Ātaš nu Gīt*. Some of the people who are named in the song as having founded *Adarān* fires, such as Jamšedji Sodawaterwalla and Nahanabhai Saplaji, do not appear in Hinnells's table.

Maneckji Seth	Manockji Nowriji Seth,	Bombay 1733
Jeejeebahi Dadabhi	Jijibhoy Dadabhai	Bombay 1836
Jehangriji Wadia	Jehangir Nusserwanji Wadia	Bombay Fort 1830
Muncherji Wadia	Dadabhoy & Muncherji	
	Pestonji Wadia	Bombay Fort 1834
Soonabai Hirji	Soonaiji Hirji Readymoney	Bombay Fort 1842
Jamšed Jijibhai	Sir Jamsetji Jijibhoy	Navsari 1853
		Surat 1854
Aslaji	Aslaji Bhiccaji	Bombay Fort 1846
Naoroji Narielwalla	Nowroji Cawasji Narielwalla	Bombay Fort 1822
Cawasji Ashburner	Cawasji Maneckji Ashburner	Bombay Fort 1832
Shapurji Kapawalla	Sharpuji Sohrabji Kapawalla	Bombay 1857
Merwanji Patel	Merwanji Manockji Patel	Bombay 1808
Nuswanji Karani	Nussarwanji Hirjibhoy Currani	Bombay 1847
Bamanji Mewawalla	Bomanji Merwanji Mevawalla	Bombay 1851
Hormusji Patel	Hormasji Dhunji Pates	Bombay 1834
Sohrabji Batchagandhi	Sohrabji Vachaghandy	Bombay 1858
Sohrabdaru Thuthi	Cuvarbai, widow of	
	Sohrabji Cursetji Thoothy	Bombay 1858
Sohrabdaru Rangji	Sohrabji Hormusji Ranji	Bombay Fort 1868
Beheranji Batalawalla	Chandanbai Byramji Batliwalla	Bombay Fort 1865
Merwanji Pande	Merwanji Framji Panday	Bombay 1865

After naming the founders of all the *agiārys*, the song reiterates the numbers: six new *dādḡāhs* in Bombay, three *Ātaš Bahrāms*, and thirty-four *agiārys*, that is, *adarān* fires (this last figure does not quite tally with the number listed in the song, which is thirty-three). These then were the events leading up to the happy state of the community at the present time, when this text was compiled. Once the Resolution came, *agiārys* proliferated everywhere.

At this point in the song the Hindu religion is finally dispatched (471-474):

Whoever kept the *Ātaš Bahrām* by doing this act '*shahejarie pohori*' will go to heaven ... Whoever built the *Ātaš Bahrām* and worshipped the various deities (*dev-dehara*) he goes to *garath bhabdar*¹ ... Destroy the edifice of sins and build a wall based on the good religion ... O friend one has seen two paths — one can go wherever one's mind chooses ...

Here the song contemplates the religious duty of the good *behdin* and the implications of well-being if the right path is chosen. The next two lines mention the good fortune which will befall those who commission the performance of the song. The text repeats the characterisation of the person who goes to the Fire bringing gifts, and then mentions the rewards which are likely to be forthcoming. Thus *Sohrabji* gets much respect, *Šapurji* is a big merchant, *Burjorji* is great, *Bachubai* is the most important business woman, *Pirojbai* is the leader. The text then returns to the taking of the names of

¹ See p.171, n.1.

the family who commissioned the song and the gifts that they will receive, and then the lady of the house invites everyone to go to the *agiāry*.

The final section of the last stage of the song is a reaffirmation of religious identity: 'Our religion is the one given by Dādār Hormazd ... Our religion is called the Zoroastrian religion', and again we are told that 'The Parsis are doers of good deeds.' All the important *yazads* are invoked to help and be kind to everyone in the community, down to the most trivial requests, such as asking *Ābān Yazad* to 'break people's hiccups'.

6. *Concluding section of the song*

The concluding section of the song repeats the names of the family who have commissioned the song, and who were mentioned in the introduction. Whereas the introduction encompassed the whole song, in the sense that it hinted at that which was to come, the conclusion has a reflexive structure. This is where the song talks about itself, the two brothers who composed it, *Dosa* and *Jeva Bharucha*, and those who were the patrons of the singers. The text contemplates the benefits which are brought by the song to those who commission its performance: 'Seven sons were born to my *Pirojbai*, to my sister *Širinbai* Dādār Hormazd smiled'; to those who participate in the singing: 'Whoever sings this song does a meritorious act ..' and to those who 'listen attentively', the audience: 'Whoever listens to the song of the fire attentively — he will be blessed with virtuous acts.' In other words the whole community stands to be rewarded by a performance of the *Ātaš nu Gīt*.

7. *The concluding comments by compiler of the 1879 text.*

This song is just like the original one. No one sings the song of the Fire properly and no one has written (instructions as to) how it should be sung. We have published this song so that you can sing it at any time, and it takes six and a half hours; and if it is sung in an ordinary way (without the lengthening of the words) then it can be completed in four hours. If you sing by reading the books properly and start it at 2 o'clock, then you can finish it at 8pm, or it may be that some more time may be taken. People might say that we have made it long, but we have not made it long or added anything. If you sing it taking the names of the families slowly, then it will take six and a half hours, otherwise it will be completed in four hours.¹

3.6. Conclusion

With regard to the 'older' traditions which seem to be echoed in the *Ātaš nu Gīt*, I have already referred to various structures and rituals which seem to draw on more ancient material. There is also one particular theme which is too striking to go unnoticed,

¹ This section has been translated by Dastur Kotwal.

and this is the idea of lay participation and reward. In the first two stages of the song we have a repetitive structure which entails the calling or collecting together of people, followed by an activity such as the building and consecrating of the fire, or the performance of ritual, and this in turn is followed by the rewarding of the same people. This structure and theme is one which I have traced throughout this work, beginning with the *Yašts* where we have the calling of the deities to partake of the sacrifice, the offering or oblation itself, and then the boons which are granted in return.

The 1879 version of the song bears many of the characteristics of an oral text. One of the reasons for supposing that the song was not composed in its entirety in 1879 is the way it has been codified or 'fixed' in written form. The content of the song has been 'layered' in a way which is typical of an oral text and it seems unlikely that a single author would have structured it in this way. In oral texts, the concept of time often appears convoluted; as the actuality of one time becomes the memory of another it is often very difficult to determine whether the author of such a text as the *Ātaš nu Gīt* is referring to his own time or the past. For example in the song there seem to be two 'present' times; the text moves from the past into the present for the first time after the *agiāry* has been enthroned (270): 'In Iran is the big fire, in Navsari is the small fire and in Udvada is the *agiāry*.' There then follows what appears to be a second enthronement of the *Ātaš Bahrām*, after which we have the naming of the Bombay *agiārys*; this brings the song up to its date of publication, the 'present'. If the song began its life in celebration of the 1765 *agiāry*, or in memory of that event (but not long after it had taken place), then the 1879 text is the product of some elaboration, and shows the traces of oral tradition in the multiplicity of present time to which it refers.

There are a number of distinctive features about the *Ātaš nu Gīt* which set it apart from other lay texts. As a celebratory song it is recited at festive occasions such as weddings, when there is likely to be a large gathering of people; as a ritual performance it is also enacted to bring merit and may be recited within the *agiāry* as well as in family homes. It is these two factors which have no doubt contributed to the popularity of the song amongst the Parsi community.

It seems that, as with other Zoroastrian texts, the function or purpose of the song operates on two levels: that of content, and structure. As far as the content is concerned, the text tells us about the community, the kinds of professions, the social hierarchy, the different roles of priest and lay person and the way in which they interact and defer to one another. It appears from the song that the laity is well-informed as to priestly duties, but quite willing to leave the ritual side of things to priests, and to defer to priestly knowledge as far as religious texts are concerned. There is no doubt that the lay community control the 'economic' side of this relationship, that it is they who are responsible for all religious endowments and for the payment of those involved, including priests. The song works to publicise the Good Religion by describing and praising certain activities such as the

founding of an *agiāry*, visits and offerings made to the Fire, and the commissioning and performance of the song; in this way it sets an example to the community, suggesting how people should conduct their lives. The references to the Hindu religion serve to remind people that they belong to a minority group and that their sense of identity, as a group, is an important aspect of survival. By the time that this text was published, the ever-present threat of conversion to other faiths had been exacerbated by John Wilson in his attack on the religion and attempt to convert Parsis to Christianity. The strength of the faith is reinforced by endogamous marriage; the song emphasises the importance of the institution of marriage by reference to all the married couples, none of whom have 'married out'. In terms of what we can know about the laity from the content of this text when compared to the earlier texts discussed in this thesis, the significant factor is that there are other sources of information available. These range from government records to the Persian texts of the *Qissa-ye Sanjān* and the *Qissa-ye Zartoštian e Hendustān*. It is sources such as these which substantiate some of the 'facts', the names and events contained in the song.

I have suggested that the structure of the song refers implicitly to Zoroastrian cosmological and eschatological ideas: the process of perfect creation, mixture, and resolution or return to a perfect state. I have also referred to the acknowledgement of priestly ritual, and suggested that the song represents a social re-creation of society which is analogous to the ritual re-creation of the world as enacted during the priestly *yasna* ceremony. Williams and Boyd suggest three ways in which, quite apart from the function and meaning of the liturgy, the ritual space of the *yasna* ceremony and the implements within it are 'a model for a larger reality — a microcosm that refers to a macrocosm'.¹ In the sense that this area is representative of a 'map' of the world, so all acts of purification that take place within it purify and assure the continuity of that world through the preservation of *aša*, or cosmic order. The items within the consecrated space similarly represent each *Amesha Spentas*, and the *yasna* serves to invoke their presence. Finally, the non-verbal aspects of the ritual also convey meaning: 'the shapes of vessels, the bell-like sounds, and the dramatic gestures of the priests are all emotionally expressive as well as referentially significant.'²

There are various elements of the *Ātaš nu Gīt* which are reminiscent of the *Yasna* ceremony. It seems that the performance aspect of the song is central to the way in which it functions as a text: the voices of the leader and the chorus work together and reinforce each other in the same way as those of the chief priest and the assistant priest performing the *yasna*. The gestures and the changes in the rhythm of the chant convey meaning in a similar way to the ritual gestures and intonations of the religious performance. The song characterises the good *behdin* through the various activities described above, the way in

¹ Williams and Boyd 1993: 26.

² *Ibid.*, 28.

which priest and lay person should work together, the ideal of marriage, family life and the birth of sons; the song describes a microcosm, it is a representation of the entire community, the macrocosm.

One of the interesting features of this text is that the structure is at one and the same time a vehicle for change and also for continuity. On the one hand we have ideas which can be identified as being 'Zoroastrian' in the theological sense, and which have echoes in texts which are thought to go back at least to the Sasanian period. On the other hand, the text is structured so as to allow for variation, and for the inclusion of additional material. Then again, there are the changes which have been imposed by the compiler of this text in order that the song may be chanted in what he perceived to have been the correct way.

CHAPTER 5 ORAL TEXTS AND ORAL TESTIMONY

In the last two chapters I have drawn attention to aspects of lay life within the Indian Zoroastrian community in the 18th and 19th centuries. The comments and suggestions I have made are the result of a close examination of one particular text, the *Ātaš nu Gīt*, with reference to other sources both Zoroastrian and non-Zoroastrian. The song provides us with glimpses of lay life by means of its structure and transmission, the activities it describes and the views it expresses. Set apart from other sources, these glimpses derived from the song resemble the representations of lay life discussed in chapter one with reference to the *Yašts* (though there is the important difference that here we have a text which can be located in time), but do not permit any sort of attempt to describe a hard and fast reality. However, the proliferation of Persian, Gujarati and English written material dating from the 18th and 19th centuries in India provides corroborative evidence for events, names and locations referred to in the song, and so to some extent it has been possible to substantiate the picture of the community which emerges through the song.

This chapter brings us to modern times and to sources of information which allow further commentary on the *Ātaš nu Gīt*, together with a more comprehensive picture of lay activity in late twentieth-century Bombay and Gujarat through accounts provided by members of the Parsi community living there.

I will begin by looking at several twentieth-century texts of the *Ātaš nu Gīt*, which, again, have been provided for me by Mrs Shehnaz Munshi, who has translated them from Gujarati into English. The first of these is contained in a book of Parsi *garbas*, or festive songs, and *monājāts*, devotional songs, which were handwritten by either Shehnaz's mother or grandmother in the 1930s. In this compilation there is a short comic *garba* which is commonly sung after the *gōyāns* have finished a performance of the *Ātaš nu Gīt*; this is interesting because it refers to the publication of 1879, and to the compiler of this text, Sohrabji; I have included a translation in this chapter. The second text of the song was handwritten by the lead singer of the last known group of *gōyāns* who perform it in Bombay today. This particular lady died in 1995, and her cousin has become the leader of the group, all four of whom are now over seventy years of age. Shehnaz arranged for the singers to have the song recorded in a studio in Bombay in the summer of 1997, and, after much persuasion, they allowed her to make a photocopy of their text.¹ The final text of the song is a much shortened version, which Shehnaz found written down in one of her song books. It is different from the others in that it is sung specifically as part of the *Varadh bāj* ritual.

¹ The reluctance on the part of the *gōyāns* to part with their text stems from the fact that, first, there was only one copy, second, that the copy was itself perceived to be sacred and should be kept free from all pollution, and third, that photocopying was the equivalent of 'publishing' what to them was essentially an oral text.

Information concerning the way in which certain lay observances, referred to in the song, are carried out has also been provided by Mrs Munshi. These observances are not referred to in the Zoroastrian scriptures, and although many have been documented by J.J. Modi, in many cases modern usage has changed since his publication of *The Religious Customs and Ceremonies of the Parsis* in 1932. A great lover of Parsi *garbas* and *monājāts*, Shehnaz has a huge repertoire of songs, many of which were sung to her by her grandmother when she was a child. One of these, *Nahana ne Navdavva*, is a song for the *nahn* or ceremonial bath, and is strongly reminiscent of the *Ātaš nu Gīt* in the way in which the various members of the family are named and allocated a task in order to decorate the *agiāry*. I have included a translation of this song here (see p.216) to show how certain patterns/structures re-emerge in different forms of oral literature.

In order to put the source of my translation of the Gujarati material, together with much of the evidence concerning modern lay devotional life, into its religious and devotional context, something should be said about Shehnaz Munshi herself. Unlike the textual sources which have been drawn on in previous chapters, this source needs to be investigated in a different way. By this I mean that, in order to understand Shehnaz's ideas and comments, it is necessary to know something of her own religious background, how it was learnt and shaped, and what is her present contact with the religion and interest in religious issues. Shehnaz contributed greatly to my fieldwork in Bombay and Navsari in 1989, and together we set up an oral studies project in 1994.¹ As well as interviewing members of the community, Shehnaz provided me with information concerning her own upbringing and religious education. Recently, she was my guest while on a visit to London, during which time I was able to record a long interview with her; the second part of this chapter, then, will be a biographical section based on this information.

In the final section of this chapter I will look at various aspects of Shehnaz's account of her religious life with reference to material which was gained both from my own fieldwork and from several interviews which form part of the oral studies project. I shall also refer to some theoretical ideas about orality, and to various works in which scholars have used oral testimony as a means by which to explore religious views.

For historians of religion, oral testimony is a relatively new medium through which religious beliefs are being studied. It is a useful means by which to explore certain aspects of religious life which may not be explained adequately either by the socio-religious observations made by 'outsiders' or by that which is accepted as the 'orthodox' tradition, which is usually based upon sacred texts. In Zoroastrianism, where sacred texts remained unwritten for so long, and where oral traditions are still strong, oral testimony may be used to gain insights into the dimension of lay religious views. However, the very act of

¹ This project was organised by Philip Kreyenbroek and the field-work was undertaken by Shehnaz Munshi over a two-year period. Shehnaz and I conducted some twelve interviews together.

interviewing brings a subjective dimension to the evidence, and it is not a resource which can be used in isolation, to quantify or define people's religious feelings, or from which we can make broad assumptions. The way in which oral testimony seems to work most effectively is when it is used in conjunction with other forms of evidence. In this case, for example, I am not asking people how the *Ātaś nu Gīt* fits into their religious lives: rather, the other way round, the interviews are a new source of information which bring to life and give meaning to what the song is saying about the laity, its history, purpose and the way in which it functions.

5.1. Twentieth Century Texts of the *Ātaś nu Gīt*, and a Song

The first of these texts forms part of a collection of songs in Gujarati which have been copied into a writing book belonging to Shehnaz Munshi and which she estimates dates from the 1930s. The handwriting is quite small and very neat, there are few crossings out, and the pages are now yellow with age and in a very fragile state. This copy of the *Ātaś nu Gīt* is an almost exact reproduction of the 1879 text, which means either that the writer had learnt this version by heart — or was writing it down from someone who did — or that she was copying it from the publication itself. I refer to this text here insofar as it substantiates some of the suggestions made in the last chapter about the earlier text. The places where this version (which I shall refer to as the 'Munshi' text) departs from the 1879 publication is when it comes to the listing of proper names, many of which seem to be replaced by new ones. Thus under the various section breaks where there is an instruction to take the names, for example, of the family for whom the song is being performed, presumably these names refer to the time of the Munshi text. For the most part, the names change in the places which I have referred to as *explicit*, beginning with the introductory section in which the singers dedicate the song at different people's houses: 'Let us sing today's song at my Shahjibhai's house.'

At the point where the song takes the names of all the *agiārys*, these remain the same in both texts. This means that even though there were several new *agiārys* by the 1930s, the later version of the song had not been 'updated' in this respect. The name 'Sohrabji' is mentioned in the same places in both texts, with the exception of the line (520) where it says, 'Seven sons have been born from the womb of my *Motibai*, where my *Sohrabji* and Zarathuštra abided.' In the Munshi text, the name *Motibai* is replaced with *Najabai*, and *Sohrabji* with *Jeejibhai*. At the very end of the song, where in the 1879 text it says, '*Meherbai* sang it, and *Sohrabji* wrote it', *Meherbai's* name has been written and then crossed out and replaced with *Najabai*, while *Sohrabji's* name remains. This is an indication, perhaps, that the writer was copying from a text rather than recalling the song from memory or listening to it being sung.

The following lists refer to the names which occur in the 1879 and the Munshi texts respectively. At the very beginning of the song we have names of the men in whose

house the song is performed, followed by the ladies of the family; naturally these names change according to the household to which they belong; however, it seems that there is a particular 'set' which belongs to the 1879 text, and another one for the Munshi text. This could refer to two different versions of the text which had been passed down, or it could, and is more likely to, mean that new names were added and old ones discarded during the sixty years between the publishing of the 1879 text, and the writing down of the Munshi text.

Men of the family		Ladies of the family	
1879 text	Munshi text	1879 text	Munshi Text
Shahjibhai	Shahjibhai	Bachubai	Najabai
Bamanji	Sohrabji	Cooverbai	Hamabai
Naoroji	Maneckshah	Pirojbai	Shirinbai
Shapurji	Jehangirji	Pannabai	Soonabai
Ratanji	Ratanji	Ratanbai	Jivanai
Meherwanji	Rustamji	Gulbai	Cooverbai
Khurshedji	Kai Khushru	Rupabai	Shirinbai
Cawasji	Darabshah	Dhunbai	Manibai
Cooverji	Pirojshah	Bachubai	Baimai
Burjorji	Maneckji	Mithibai	Gulbai
Shirinbhai	Parinmai	Avabai	Meherbai
Faredoonji	Dhunjishah	Soonabai	Gulbai
Dosibhai	Kerban		
Ramji	Ardeshir		
Bamanji	Dhunjishah		
Faredoonji	Dosabhai		
Dinshahbhai	Jijibhai		
Jehangirji	Jamshedji		
Jamshedji	Jehangirji		

There are places in the 1879 text which I have described as *implicit* slots, where names occur, unflagged by a heading, which seem to refer to a more ancient time. Apart from the mythological and legendary figures of the distant past, there are names such as those mentioned at the very beginning of the song which refer to people who were involved in various aspects of the founding of the *agiāry*, Najabai (who gave the land), Ruribai (who laid the foundation), Chandanbai (who dug the well), Narsang (who helped with the construction), Mania Sagar (who built the hadhuri) and Šapur Daru (who put the *sudre* on someone). With the exception of Ruribai and Chandanbai, these names remain the same in both texts, which indicates that they may indeed refer to people who were involved in the building of the original *agiāry* to which the song refers.

The later copy of the *Ātaš nu Gīt* shows that the song does appear to function in the way in which I have suggested previously, it is fluid enough to take new material, even after having been fixed in written form. At the same time it retains a structure which

allows this device to work: certain elements change while others remain the same, thus coherence is maintained and there are *rules* for change.

A discussion of the structure, form and content of the *Ātaš nu Gīt* does not necessarily enable us fully to understand the performance of the song; what actually takes place in people's houses when the *gōyāns* sing the song, the atmosphere and the relationship between performers and audience. In most societies, rites of passage are marked by both religious and non-religious activities; however, these are often kept separate, as in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, and are divided between religious and secular locations. The particular blend of religious observance, the offerings from the *sēs*, and entertainment which is so characteristic of Parsi festive occasions, is well-illustrated in a short, humorous *garba* which describes the *gōyāns* leaving the house in which they have performed. The text of this farewell song follows the *Ātaš nu Gīt* in the book of songs belonging to Shehnaz, and it has been sung after all performances of the *Ātaš nu Gīt* where she has been present. To the observer it evokes the atmosphere of informality, warmth and humour which is not discernible from the text of the *Ātaš nu Gīt* but which evidently prevails on such occasions. The tune is fast and catchy, quite unlike the chanting of the *Ātaš nu Gīt* or the slow melody of the song which Shehnaz's grandmother used to sing while bathing the children.

Farewell Garba

- 1 We are now going back to our homes and we wish you goodbye!
- 2 If we have said or done anything to offend, we ask for your pardon — what more can we say?
- 3 (refrain) we are going back to our homes and we wish you goodbye!
- 4 Give a kick to that man who is sitting in the corner and to the man standing we give our salaams
- 5 (refrain) we are going back to our homes and we wish you goodbye!
(referring to somebody who appears to have been sleeping through all the noise)
- 6 This person who is sleeping, we think he has turned deaf — what more can we say?
(referring to a woman who has been trying to sing along with them)
- 7 Let's lend support to the person (fem) who is trying to sing with us — what more can we say?
- 8 Our neighbours are like our parents and we bid you farewell!
(referring to another woman who has been trying to sing along with them)
- 9 She perhaps has cobwebs in her ears (this person cannot sing in tune with them) — what more can we say?
- 10 (Let people) sing the *garbas* from my book — what more can we say?
- 11 (The one who does this) will be a well-informed person in a short time — what more can we say?
- 12 This new book of *garbas* will be read — what more can we say?
- 13 It will be sold for five rupees each copy — we wish you goodbye!
- 14 This person (whoever buys the book) will have to find out where *Sohrabji* lives — we bid you farewell!
- 15 People just sit and stare at us — what more can we say?
- 16 Unnecessarily they lose their sleep — we bid you farewell!
- 17 If we have said or done anything to offend, we ask for your pardon — what more can we say ?
- 18 Some people stand (and watch the show) and feel tired — what more can we say ?
- 19 We have sung such a lot that we are tired of singing and going round and round — what more can we say ?
- 20 Some people learn new songs from us — what more can we say?
- 21 And such people will be blessed with good fortune (literally their laps will be filled with sweetness) — we bid you farewell !
- 22 We are now going back to our homes and we wish you goodbye !
- 23 If we have said or done anything to offend, we ask for your pardon — what more can we say?

To judge from this song, the *gōyāns* remain very much aware of their audience while performing the *Ātaś nu Gīt*, and are in close enough proximity to it to be able to observe their various responses to the song. For example, the singers notice the person who has fallen asleep (6), and the woman who has been trying to sing along with them (9). At the same time members of the audience appear free to join in if they wish: 'Let's lend support to the person (fem.) who is trying to sing with us..', so this is no solemn performance. The *gōyāns* upbraid those who sleep or who cannot follow the tune of the song, while at the same time compensate for their own critical remarks by apologising for any offence they may have caused the audience (1, 2 & 17). In this way the song alternates between upbraiding the audience and seeking its pardon. In the same manner, it

alternates between a rhetorical question: 'what more can we say?', and a valediction: 'we wish you goodbye'.

The various ways in which ideas of communal solidarity are expressed both in the structure and content of the *Ātaś nu Gīt* has been discussed in chapter 3. In this *garba*, the line 'And our neighbours are like our parents, and we bid you farewell' also serves to bind the community together, portraying it as one large extended family. The same idea is echoed in the *Ātaś nu Gīt* through the use of the personal pronoun when members of the community are named individually: thus 'My Sohrabji', 'My Shirinbai', etc.. Here, the *gōyāns* complain quite openly about the length of time it has taken to sing the song, and the fact that they have had to keep moving throughout the performance. That Sohrabji is mentioned as the person to whom people should go in order to obtain a copy of this new book of songs makes it seem likely that this is the same *Sohrabji Chikan Chapnar*, publisher of the 1879 text. Indeed, the *gōyāns* may be expressing the very complaints suggested by the compiler of that text when he says, 'People might say that we have made it long, but we have not made it long or added anything.' Possibly this *garba* was composed at the same time as the 1879 publication, partly to ensure that people were made aware of this version of the *Ātaś nu Gīt* — and also in the hope that they would purchase the book for five rupees.

The second text of the *Ātaś nu Gīt* which I will look at here is the one which is sung by *gōyāns* today in Bombay. I have mentioned that Shehnaz arranged for a studio recording of the song earlier this year, and that it was sung by four ladies, all of whom were over seventy. The owner of the studio, named Sarosh Babar, recognised the lead singer as one of a group who had performed the *Ātaś nu Gīt* at his own *navjote*. He said that his grandmother had commissioned the song for every major family occasion. Despite the fact that the performance of the song was taking place in a studio, the *gōyāns* insisted that it be accompanied by the customary rituals, with the appropriate offerings being brought on a *sēs* tray. They sang the song sitting down rather than going 'round and round' as mentioned above,¹ and said that they would normally sing the *Ātaś nu Gīt* with another devotional song, *Dadar Hormazd no Garbo*, the whole performance taking about three hours. They were also very insistent about the *aśodād*, or fee, whereby a fixed amount of money was agreed upon in payment for the singing. A further amount could be donated according to the wishes of the family concerned. Shehnaz said she normally gave singers 1000 rupees over and above their fee. The book from which the lead singer read was evidently very precious; it was in fact a diary in which the song had

¹ Shehnaz describes the *Ātaś nu Gīt* as a long *monājāt*, a devotional song, to be distinguished from a *garba* or dance by the fact that all the singers are seated. However, the reference to the singers going 'round and round' in the farewell song suggests that the *Ātaś nu Gīt* may well have been performed as a *garba*, or dance. Another characteristic of the *garba* is that the chorus repeats the refrain (as in the 1879 version of the text of the *Ātaś nu Gīt*).

been written, and was full of pictures of Zarathuštra. It had been put in a plastic cover, then wrapped in layers of newspaper, within another plastic cover.

My interest in this version of the song lies in the fact that it is focused upon the *Ataš Bahrām* in Udwada. It appears to belong to a different oral tradition than the one which resulted in the text of 1879, and which I have suggested goes back to an earlier time, possibly to the founding of the Navsari *Ataš Bahrām* in 1765. The Udwada version differs from the 1879 text in a number of ways: for example, there are fewer headings than in the 1879 text, there are no long lists of names, there is no refrain 'O friends let us go to the fire', nor is there any mention of Sohrabji. However, the overall structure which I have postulated for the 1879 text (structure B) is applicable to both texts. I shall look briefly at the various similarities and differences between the two texts. There is a temptation, when presented with two versions of the same text, to try to establish authenticity for one or the other, to look for historical 'truth'; often, that which can be proved to be of greater antiquity is considered more authentic. This is not a productive line of enquiry as far as oral texts are concerned, where we find different layers, which often reflect different authorship, different locations and a multiplicity of times. It is thus not possible to determine whether the Udwada version of the song, as it is being sung today, pre-dates the 1879 text; both contain material which can be attributed to the 18th and 19th centuries, and which echo a more distant past. The interesting distinction between the two texts is the way in which one has been reorganised, structured and prepared for wide dissemination via the process of publication.

In the Udwada text, the refrain 'O friends let us go to the fire' occurs only twice; this means that the effect of the chorus is lost, and there is no longer the repetitive, insistent call for people to take part in the event. However, the absence of the refrain from between each line of the song has the effect of enhancing its narrative element and making it more coherent as a text which is to be read rather than performed. Here we notice the effect of print in making the text a visual rather than an actual performance medium. In the performance, the refrain has a dramatic effect, and creates the dialogue between the lead singer and the chorus; when inserted between each and every line of the printed text, on the other hand, this dramatic effect is lost. There are parts of the Udwada text which throw light upon various events and ideas which, in the 1879 version of the song, are somewhat oblique. I shall cite several passages from both versions of the song in order to give some idea of how meaning or coherence can be lost when a text is re-organised.

The Udwada text begins with a much shorter introductory dedication than that of the 1879 text. The opening to the song is also different: without the refrain, it is more compact. We have the impression of beginning a story and the textual imagery allows us to visualise what is going on (cf. p.156):

Let us all four together make the *agiāry*
 We shall sing on the auspicious day
 Dadar Hormazd says that I will establish a country/land
 And in that land I will make (people wear the correct *sudre*)
 My land is always prosperous and Zarathuštra says that in my land I will bring the
 good religion
 And in my religion I will make people wear the correct *sudre* and *kuštī*
 Shapur Daru says that he will make everyone wear the *sudre*, *kuštī* and *padam*
 To wear this is very meritorious for our religion
 Our religion is very auspicious and Dadar Hormazd established this place
 And he made a name (for the Zoroastrians)
 Zarathuštra established the religion and saw that it prospered and thus the
 religion's name spread far and wide.

The song goes on to give the names of those who provided the land and the well, and who had the foundation laid and the *hindora* constructed; these are the same people referred to in both the 1879 text and the later copy belonging to Shehnaz. The order of events remains the same, so we move from the astrologer being called to name the auspicious days, which are more numerous in this version and include several *maino* and *rōj* days, plus their Hindu equivalent, to a description of the *tana* ceremony. The song then moves into the long list of the artisans who are called to construct the *agiāry*. Again, without the interjection of the refrain between each and every line, the action of the building process is more clearly defined, and easier for the reader to imagine:

Udwada text	1879 text
Let us call the son of the painter and let him paint the cross-beams of the <i>agiāry</i> and the main beams of the <i>agiāry</i> , and the other sections of the <i>agiāry</i> and all the little sections of the <i>agiāry</i> , and the roof and the windows and the netting and the eaves and the gallery, and every other place of the <i>agiāry</i> , and the staircase.	Call the son of the painter and get the cross-beams painted; O friend, paint the gallery <i>O friends let us go to the fire</i> Let us call the decorator and decorate the walls of the <i>agiāry</i> <i>O friends let us go to the fire</i> Decorate everything, O friend, in between <i>O friends let us go to the fire</i>

There are one or two small details in this first phase of the song which do not occur in the 1879 text, for example a reference to the playing of music on the flute; so far there has been no mention of music as such, nor any musical instrument, despite the fact that the song is performed on festive occasions. Another line mentions that: 'we have also had glass fitted into the courtyard and on the other side we have established a school.' There is no way of knowing though, whether this establishment was for priestly or lay instruction, only that it was included in the compound of the *agiāry*.

Under the heading 'Take the names of the married people', only two are mentioned, Hoshangshah and Daisymai, there then follows the payment of all the various labourers, artisans and priests, and all their wives. Finally, towards the end of this section, we have the first mention of Udwada. The second stage of the song begins with the dispute

referred to in the 1879 text in which it is said that the fire has been stolen and that the *anjuman* are wondering how they will do the work of the religion. I have suggested that this is a reference to the quarrel between the Sanjāna and the Bhagaria priests, which took place in Navsari, and ended with the departure of the Sanjāna priests in 1742. However, in the 1879 text, the line which says 'the Sanjānas threw out these people' does not make sense within the context of the Sanjāna/Bhagaria dispute, since it was the Sanjānas themselves who were forced to leave Navsari, taking their sacred fire with them. When the two texts are compared, it appears that the Udwada version evidently refers to earlier events, as well as to the priestly dispute, and it may be that the reference to priests being thrown out of Sanjān goes back to the time when the five *panths* or districts were created. This event took place some while after the Sanjān settlement was founded, with the result that the Bhagaria *mobeds* and *behdin* became established in Navsari. The fact that the Udwada text has a reference to Iran, indicates that here is a series of historical references, ending with the arrival of the *Irānšāh* in Udwada. In the 1879 text, however, this coherence has been lost:

Udwada text	1879 text
<p>The people of the Ajuman are the same, and they have stolen the fire. The Anjuman is pondering over this and wondering how will they now do the acts of the religion ...</p> <p>Everyone came down from Iran and they arrived in Sanjān and they brought the <i>Ataš Bahrām</i> with them as well as Zarthušt with them, and all this they brought and they kept all this at the village of Sanjān.</p> <p>Everyone has the same beard¹ and from the town of Sanjān these people were thrown away.</p>	<p>These people have stolen the Ataš Bahrām</p> <p><i>O friends let us go to the fire</i></p> <p>The entire anjumn is pondering over this</p> <p><i>O friends let us go to the fire</i></p> <p>What shall we do with the acts of the religion</p> <p><i>O friends let us go to the fire ...</i></p> <p>Where shall we go and see the fire</p> <p><i>O friends let us go to the fire</i></p> <p>The Sanjānas were all perturbed</p> <p><i>O friends let us go to the fire</i></p> <p>The priests (here) all have a similar type of beard,</p> <p>These people threw out the Sanjānas</p>

To judge from the passage contained in the *Qissa-ye Zartoštiān-e Hendustān*, it seems that the division of the community into the various *panths* was the result of friction.² It is not known what had brought this about, but perhaps the number of priests competing to earn a living could no longer be sustained by the population of *Sanjān*. However, it should be emphasised that in the *Ātaš nu Gīt* references to historic events are oblique, and are not presented in any particular chronological order. While one version may refer to the founding of a particular fire, in another certain elements may be added or

¹ With reference to similar type of beard, it is interesting to note the observations made by Geleynssen de Jongh concerning the 'great round beards' of Parsi priests, see p.163, n.3

² See p. 111.

omitted to allow the song to be addressed to a different fire/location/community. These are not texts which can be used to establish 'facts', as can be seen from the second phase of the Udwada song.

This part of the text follows the same format as the 1879 version, with one major difference, which is that the second enthronement of the fire evidently refers to the sacred *Irānshāh* which eventually came to be established in the town of *Udwada*, some two or three years after the Sanjāna priests were expelled from Navsari. In both texts then, the structure remains the same, the song enters a period of 'conflict'. However, in the *Udwada* text this phase, together with its resolution, appears to take place in a different location and to refer to a different fire. It can be seen from the following example that those lines which locate the *agiāry* in *Udwada* replicate lines which refer to an unspecified *Ataš Bahrām*. Thus it seems likely that the *Udwada* version represents an adaptation of another song. As is typical of an oral text, the later material has been added to what seem to have been existing lines:

Let us call the son of the goldsmith and let us bring the crown of silver
 Let us enthrone the *Ataš Bahrām* on the silver crown in Udwada
 Let us bring the silver fire vase and other silver accoutrements and a silver canopy
 for the fire
 And let us have this canopy built over fire in the *Ataš Bahrām*
 Let us have a canopy in Udwada and let us have it all around the fire
 Let us also have this in Udwada
 Let us bring silver trays and a silver mace with the cow's head on it
 Let us bring a silver ladle and let us have the *bōy* ceremony done for the *Ataš
 Bahrām*
 Let us have the *bōy* ceremony done in Udwada
 Let us bring little lights in silver
 Let us get silver garlands tied on the doorways of the *Ataš Bahrām* in Udwada
 Let us call the son of the gardener/florist, let him bring nettings of flowers and let us
 fill the *Ataš Bahrām* with these little flower nets
 Let us fill the Udwada *Ataš Bahrām* with flower nets
 We bow to this *Ataš Bahrām*
 We bow to this *Ataš Bahrām* in Udwada.

After this section, as in the 1879 text, the singers are told that they have completed half the song. There are then 10 lines in which it is said that the *Ataš Bahrām* was enthroned on different *Maino/Rōj* days. Then it says: 'Because we celebrated the *Fravardin Parāb* in *Udwada* the *Fravardin Yazad* comes to our help.' The only *rōj* in the calendar which does not refer to a *yazata* is the *rōj Fravardin*, which is dedicated to the *frawashis*, so it may that these lines refer to a local custom or belief which was current in *Udwada*.

I have mentioned that the *Udwada* text appears more coherent than the 1879 text, partly as a result of the absence of the refrain. An example which occurs in the second

phase of the song is the reference to the cock: here, the more detailed text indicates the religious significance of this bird in the fight against evil:¹

Udwada text	1879 text
<p>Let us call the son of the man who keeps a lot of poultry, let him bring a rooster and let us release this rooster in the <i>Ātaš Bahrām</i> compound where he will play about.</p> <p>Let this rooster be kept in the <i>Ātaš Bahrām</i> compound of Udwada and let him crow in the compound of the <i>Ātaš Bahrām</i> so that people in the <i>Ātaš Bahrām</i> will be awakened; so that in Udwada people will be awakened. As the rooster will crow, so the evil Ahriman will be destroyed</p>	<p>‘Let us call the son of the poultry farmer, O friend, and let us get a crowing cock, <i>O friends let us go to the fire</i> (With this crowing cock) the <i>Ātaš Bahrām</i> will be awakened, O friends let us go to the fire</p>

Again, in the 1879 text it says: ‘The one who takes a *nahn* and goes to the *agiāry*, that good act which he has done has a spin off on the entire *tolah*, O friends ... His wishes will be granted, O friends ...The wealth of that person will be well spent, O friends ...’ The Udwada text reads as follows: ‘The person who goes to the *Ataš Bahrām* after having a *nahn*, his merits are weighed in the scales, his wishes are always fulfilled and his money will always be well spent’. This passage is more explicit: the reference to the scales of justice suggests that people were aware of the doctrine of the end of time and the Renovation. This is not to say that those who listened to the 1879 text were unaware of it, simply that there is no indication either way, according to the text itself.

The last stage of the song, which I have suggested reflects the time of Resolution, follows the same general pattern in the Udwada text as the 1879 version. One difference is that the Udwada version refers to several *agiārys* which were founded after 1879. Some of these appear in the Bombay Gazetteer: for example, *Dinshah Petit* — Udwada, 1891, *Dinbai Petit* — Viara, 1895, Bombay Fort, 1896, and *Coomwarju Umrika* — Bhavnagar, 1891. This shows that the song continued to develop; in other words, new material continued to be added, certainly until the end of the nineteenth century.

There are several interesting details included in this phase of the song. It is said for example that *Ardibehesht* will always be with the person who goes to the *Ataš Bahrām*, and that the one who worships the earth will be blessed by *Ava Yazad* and will have seven sons. It seems here that the ‘seven sons’ could be a reference to the Amesha Spentas. In the 1879 text it says: ‘to my sister *Shirinbai*, *Dadar Hormazd* smiled’; however, here it says: ‘My *Hoshangshah* and *Zarathuštra* laughed’, and then, ‘*Zarathuštra* laughed over *Nargeshmai*, that is, he blessed her. This would appear to be an implicit reference to the legend of the birth of the prophet in which it is said that he

¹ See p.182.

laughed at the moment of his birth, and that this had a disconcerting effect on those demons and sorcerers who were present.¹

With reference to the 1879 text, I have suggested that one of the purposes of the refrain is to emphasise the exclusivity of the Zoroastrian community through the fact that only 'friends' are invited to participate in the performance of the *Ātaš nu Gīt* (see p.153). In the *Udawada* text we are told explicitly: 'We should not talk about our religion to any outsider, to anyone who is not part of the religion. We will talk about our religion to *Dadar Hormazd*. We will talk about our religion to *Zarathuštra*.'

In the passage which refers to *Ava Yazad*, the interpolation of the refrain has the effect of severing the link between the *yazata* and her element. The *Udwada* text, on the other hand, maintains the link in a more coherent way as can be seen from the following passages:

Udwada text	1879 text
<p>The one who has the <i>gāhāmbār</i> festival, her feet always sing to the tune of the bells she will wear around her feet. She will wear a necklace of nine strands. She will always be full of gold, she will always be full of pearls, she will always be full of diamonds, diamond earrings will hang from her ears.</p> <p>The person who goes to the fire temple will be blessed with all this</p> <p>Āva Yazad will also give all this to the person and the waves of the sea are connected with Āva Yazad.</p> <p>Āva Yazad will come to the house of the blessed on the waves of the sea, and just as Āva Yazad is blessed so the lady of the house of my Naurozbhai is blessed</p>	<p>As we go round (singing) this song wearing bells on our ankles</p> <p><i>O friends let us go to the fire</i></p> <p>This person will get a necklace made of nine metals,</p> <p><i>O friends let us go to the fire</i></p> <p>This person will be clothed with pearls,</p> <p><i>O friends let us go to the fire</i></p> <p>This person will be encrusted with diamonds,</p> <p><i>O friends let us go to the fire</i></p> <p>These are like waves of the sea,</p> <p><i>O friends let us go to the fire</i></p> <p>All this happens at my <i>Sohrabji's</i> house,</p> <p><i>O friends let us go to the fire</i></p> <p>My Mae Āva Yazad</p>

After this section, the *Udwada* text ends with a unique passage which is not included in the text of 1879, but is strongly reminiscent of the *Qissa-ye Zartuštīān-ē Hēndustān*:

¹ See p. 88.

Udwada text	<i>Qissa-ye Zartoštiān-e Hendustān.</i>
<p><i>Gustap Padshah</i> came to <i>Zarathuštra</i> and <i>Zarathuštra</i> brought the good religion to <i>Hormazd</i> and told <i>Gustap Padshah</i> to follow the good religion of <i>Hormazd</i>. And there was a tree, a cypress tree which was like the book of the religion which was brought by four angels (<i>fereshtas/yazatas</i>) and this tree has twelve branches and thirty leaves which are linked to the thirty <i>rōj</i>'s of the Parsi calendar. And each leaf has the name of <i>Ahura Mazda</i>, and naturally the <i>Avesta</i> is written on these leaves. And <i>Gustap Padshah</i> has been told to follow the religion of <i>Zarathuštra</i>, and with this cypress tree will spread the acts of the religion and it is very meritorious, it is very spiritual, and <i>Ijashne</i> and <i>Vendidād</i> are being done ...</p>	<p>Then he (<i>Zartosht</i>) said: 'O good natured <i>Šahanšāh</i>, I have brought a shoot of cypress, observe it well, when you will plant it openly in the earth you will understand the miracle ... As soon as the shoot of cypress was planted in another place the leaves appeared magically by order of the Lord, Holy Creator. On its leaves there was written: 'O <i>Šahanšāh</i>, accept the best religion, become aware!' Upon seeing this proof, <i>Šah Vištāsp</i> himself believed in the best religion. Then the wise <i>Zartošt</i> recited the twenty-one <i>Nask</i> of the <i>Avesta</i> before the <i>Šah</i>. Thus the divine religion brought by <i>Zartošt Sfetamān</i> was revealed to all in <i>Irān</i>; all, young and old, became sincerely followers of the <i>Mazdayasna</i> religion.¹</p>

Both this text and the song seem to have drawn on the more ancient material contained in the legendary tales of the *Šāhnāme*. The legend of *Gushtāsp*'s conversion by the prophet includes the following passage according to the *Šāhnāme* :

Zardusht then planted him a noble cypress
Before the portal of the fane of fire,
And wrote upon that noble straight-stemmed tree: ---
'Gushtāsp is convert to the good religion'
Thus did he make the noble cypress witness
That wisdom was disseminating justice.²

The motif of a tree in connection with the conversion of King *Vishtāsp* is also referred to at the beginning of the *Zand -ī Vohūman Yasn* when, in a dream, *Zarathuštra* is shown the trunk of a tree on which are four branches; one of gold, one of silver, one of steel and one of mixed iron. *Ohrmazd* tell him that these represent the four periods which will come, the first being when 'I and Thou will hold a conference of religion, king *Vistāsp* shall accept the religion, the figures of the "divs" shall totter ...'³

There are thus a number of early sources from which the song may have derived its motifs, from the scriptures to the epic literature, or again from a relatively recent text (one that was composed on Indian soil). The way in which religious material permeates the

¹ Cereti 1991: 92, 93.

² A G & E Warner 1910, Vol 5: 4.

³ B.T. Anklesaria (1957: 101). This section is repeated with seven branches of the tree representing the seven periods.

consciousness of the laity is, therefore, not necessarily through formal instruction which anchors it in the scriptures, but through the medium of songs, stories and domestic observances. For example, it seems that stories from the *Šāhnāme* have been told by generations of Parsis; this has endowed this epic narrative, originating as it does in Iran, with a sacred character. Thus when Shehnaz came to the line in the *Udwada* text about the evil *Ahriman* being destroyed when the rooster crowed (see p.201), she pointed out that this referred to the legend in the *Šāhnāme* where *Ahriman* is chained on Mount Damavand.¹ This is the type of connection which is often made by scholars when looking at traditions through the medium of written texts. For example, I have linked the same motif of *Ahriman* and the rooster to various references in the *Pahlavi* books: between *Srōš* the protector of Fire, his own bird, the cock, and the battle against the evil powers of the night. However, these are not necessarily the links which would be made by many lay Zoroastrians. While this may be because they are unfamiliar with the *Pahlavi* books, it is worth noting that these connections are more likely to be made by someone belonging to a literary tradition than by someone from a culture where lay religion belongs primarily to the oral/aural sphere. In the former, there are tools which enable a greater degree of analysis; for example, the simple fact of an index makes it possible to find all texts in which the name *Srōš* occurs. In a predominantly oral culture, the memorising of material does not permit the degree of cross-referencing available to those who study written texts. Walter Ong (whose work I shall discuss in detail below) points out that for fully literate people, it is almost impossible to imagine what a 'primary' oral culture is like — where the expression 'to look up' has no meaning whatsoever. While it is many centuries since Zoroastrianism belonged to a 'primary' oral culture, it seems that some categories of knowledge still remain largely within an oral context.

One final version of the *Ātaš nu Gīt* which I will mention came from another book of songs belonging to Shehnaz Munshi. It is sung in the *agiāry* on the *varadh pattar* day, which is part of the four day wedding celebrations, generally taking place on the day before a wedding. First, women make the *drōns*, and then they go to the *agiāry* for the *varadh ni bāj*, the *bāj* which is done in memory of the departed members of the family. The interesting point about this song is that it is sung as part of a *bāj* ritual, thus promoting it further into the realm of religious texts. Here, the chorus is not 'O friends let us go to the fire', but: 'The month of *Adar* is good — hence it has dawned on this place, the sight of the holy fire is good — the *Ātaš Bahrām* is of noble origin, it grants all our boons — the *Ātaš Bahrām* is of noble origin.'

The song describes the process of making ready the *agiāry* in the same way as the other versions referred to above, it contains new material only in the last section which is as follows:

¹ A G & E Warner 1905:169. Here, *Zahhāk* is fettered to Mt. Damavand.

Hajivao came to the fire — the sight of the fire is good,
 The *Ātaš Bahrām* is of noble origin
 My Hajivao will be blessed with sons, his house will be filled with cows and calves
 The *Ātaš Bahrām* is of noble origin
 (The *Ātaš Bahrām*) blessed him with seven sons, one son sits on (his) lap, one
 stays by his side and one sleeps in the cradle.
 My Burjorji's wish is fulfilled, Bai Pirojbai's great wish is granted. I shall merrily
 play the drums,
 The *Ātaš Bahrām* is of noble origin (repeat chorus)
 The lame will be able to walk; when (you) go home (you will see) that your boons
 are granted,
 The *Ātaš Bahrām* is of noble origin
 My Sohrabji's *ašodād* has been accepted (by the fire)
 Bai Bachubai's great boon is granted. I shall merrily play the drums,
 The *Ātaš Bahrām* is of noble origin
 I will pay obeisance to it. His house will be blessed with cattle,
 The *Ātaš Bahrām* is of noble origin
 The month of *Adar* is noble, hence it has dawned in this place,
 The *Ātaš Bahrām* is of noble origin
 The *Ātaš Bahrām* has granted my boons and the boons of my family
 The sight of the fire is noble, what I seek I shall get, the sight of the fire is noble,
 The *Ātaš Bahrām* is of noble origin .

This version of the song does not refer to the construction of the *agiāry*, but has been adapted so as to be addressed to a fire already in existence. Unlike the 1879 version, this fire has been personified to the extent that it is deemed capable of granting boons; and so the song returns to the familiar rhythm of offerings being made in return for the granting of requests. Here again we have mention of *Sohrabji* thus linking this version with the 1879 text and the Munshi text.¹

5.2. *Shehnaz Munshi* — a biographical sketch

I have already mentioned the reason for including this section in the text of my work, which is to make known the source of the translation of my Gujarati texts. Mrs Munshi is bilingual in Gujarati and English, in both spoken and written forms, and also has a command of the idiomatic nuances of both languages. At the same time she is part of the culture to which the *Ātaš nu Gīt* belongs: it is therefore important to look at her own religious perspective.

¹ The role of this man in the compilation of the 1879 text has been further illuminated recently by a weekly column in the *Bombay Jame* on early Parsi history written by a Mr Mulchand Verma. He says that in those days there was a Parsi named Sorabji Chikander - nicknamed 'Solu Baylo', who was famous for compiling *garbas*; however, he (the author) did not think anyone had cared to write these down. He also says that nearly 275 years ago two Parsi poets from Bharuch, Jivanji and Dosabhai, compiled a song about *Ātaš Bahrāms*. This puts the date somewhat earlier than the date of the Navsari *Ātaš Bahrām*; however, there were no other *Ātaš Bahrāms* in existence in 1722 other than the *Iranshah*. This column appeared on 5 October 1997.

Shehnaz Munshi was born in Bombay, the only child of, by her own account, a very conservative family. She describes her roots as being rural, since both her parents had been brought up in the country. Her father's family came from the village of Tavdi, close to Navsari, and her maternal grandparents from a village called Mandal, about forty miles from Surat. Shehnaz's father was a self-taught engineer, and although they were not well-off, she was well-provided for and says that her parents were very kind. The Shroff family lived as a 'joint family' with Shehnaz's paternal grandparents; Shehnaz describes some of her earliest childhood impressions with reference to her religious background and, in particular, the great love of songs which was instilled in her from an early age.

As far as religious training was concerned, my grandmother was the dominant figure in the family, she was the matriarch and everything revolved around her. From the very beginning, the first lesson we were taught was obedience to the elders, and that one had to follow the religion implicitly, whether one liked it or not. The first prayers I learnt were taught to me by my mother and grandmother, and being the eldest child, I saw all my younger cousins growing up after me and they were also taught under my grandmother's care. What would happen is that she would bathe them, and while giving them a bath, she would sing a song. When putting them to sleep, she would sing a song; on a birthday she would sing a song.

Shehnaz remembers her early religious education as being two-fold, that which took place at home, and the moral instruction which was taught by a priest. Apart from the prayers which Shehnaz learnt by heart, religious observances at home seem to have been centred around the purity laws which were kept by all members of the family, and the activities which surrounded certain occasions such as the celebration of a particular *maino/rōj* or a *navjote*, birthday or wedding.

Purity laws were strictly observed; whenever someone had made a visit to a hospital, or attended a funeral, Shehnaz would take water down to the compound, and pour it on the hands of the person so as to enable them to do their *kustī* before entering the house. Hair and nail parings were always disposed of carefully by all members of the family. Shehnaz remembers the room in her father's house which was set aside for women during menstruation. This was shared by women from different families, all of whom lived in the same building. It was large and had a stone floor; the only furniture was an iron charpoy and stool. Around the iron frame of the charpoy were wound cotton strips which could be removed and washed. There was a drum of water in the room which was filled by someone who was in a 'clean' state. Shehnaz's mother and grandmother were very strict about keeping the purity laws; for example, most large Parsi houses had stone or iron staircases; however, in their house the staircase was wooden

and each time they went up and down it while in a *rīman*, or 'unclean', state, they would sprinkle it with water; the Zoroastrian Iranian and Parsi neighbours would do the same. At the end of a menstruation period the women would rub themselves with *gōmēz* while still in the special room, they would then go to the bath where someone would pour water over them while fully clothed, then they could undress and the clothes would be washed and put away until the next time. When a girl has her first period it is considered a major event; this happened to Shehnaz when her mother and grandmother were away, and she was the only female member in her father's house in Bombay, where she had gone to take an examination. Her grandmother was obliged to cut short her holiday and return home in order to buy everything new for Shehnaz to use during this time (plate, cup, bucket for the bath, etc.); special sweets were made and given to all the neighbours. She was not allowed to travel on the school bus, as her paternal uncle drove and owned the bus and it would have meant polluting a member of the family. Shehnaz had a separate school bag for these times; after six days she would take out all her school books and sprinkle water over them before taking her ritual bath. Shehnaz remembers with great fondness the occasions when she shared these days with her mother, a rare opportunity for them to be together on their own without the household chores and younger children to look after.

Shehnaz attended the J.B. Vachha High school for Girls, which was in the heart of the Parsi colony in Dadar; it was here that she received the more formal religious instruction from a priest, *Dasturji Kutar*. This took the form of stories told to illustrate the basic principles around which one should live one's life, such as purity and truth. She remembers that the concept of *aša* was mentioned often but not really explained, and that the only sacred texts mentioned were the *Gāthās*.

Holidays were spent in her maternal uncle's house in the village of Mandal. Shehnaz observed that religious customs were maintained to a greater extent in the villages: for example her mother would do the *kali chowdas*¹ during the *divali* vacation, which she would not perform in the Bombay house. Also the *rander ceremony*,² which

¹ On *Kali Chowdas* day, one day before *Divali*, Hindus will not allow their children outside as it is thought that there are black magicians about. Both Hindus and Parsis (the aunt remembers her Iranian Zoroastrian neighbour doing this) make soot by inverting an earthenware pot over the fire, when the soot collects they gather it and put it in a box for the babies of the family. Then on *Kali Chowdas* day soot marks are put on the babies' temples and on the soles of their feet and stomach and eyes in order to ward off evil - the idea being that a person will look first at the black mark, which absorbs evil. On this day Shehnaz's Aunt's nephew, who lives on his uncle's farm, takes a drum and broom round the house and barn, banging them together so as to make enough noise to drive the evil away. It is thought that on this day much black magic is practised and Parsis must protect themselves.

² According to Shehnaz and her great-aunt, both of whom had seen it performed, the ceremony takes place in the courtyard of a house after a couple are married. A pot is filled with water, covered with a red cloth and decorated with chains; wheat, rice, other grains and a bundle of pulses are laid beside it and a new sari is put over the top. A song is sung by *gōyāns* during the ritual and no non-Zoroastrians are allowed to be present. This is an entirely lay ceremony and is passed down only through the male members of a family (i.e. it is performed only in their families). The only ritual bearing any resemblance to this description occurs in an account by Seervai and Patel of marriage customs. Seervai & Patel 1899: 234.

was performed once by her grandmother for her uncle who married very late in life. This was in fulfilment of a vow which she had made, promising to do this ritual in the event of his marrying. Animal sacrifice, which is no longer commonplace, and appears to have died out altogether in Bombay, was practised by both Parsis and Hindus in villages when Shehnaz was a child. She remembers being taken to a Hindu shrine about ten kilometres from Navsari, in the village of Tavdi. At the beginning of this century Tavdi had a thriving Zoroastrian community of about two hundred and fifty people who had their own *Ādarān* fire and a *dakhma*, both of which have now lain empty for many years and fallen into a state of disrepair. The origin of the shrine is uncertain, it is named *Jivan Mama* after a much respected member of the laity by that name.¹ Shehnaz remembers that when a child recovered from an illness such as chickenpox, an animal was sacrificed by Parsis at the shrine. This was done after someone in her own family recovered from chicken-pox; the whole family set out for the day, travelling by bullock cart to the *Jivan Mama* shrine where a goat was slaughtered, roasted and eaten as part of a grand picnic. Offerings were made and much of the meat was distributed to the people of the village. There was no priest present, the animal being slaughtered by a butcher; on such occasions, however, Shehnaz's grandmother would take water in a beaker and pour it around the animal, then the *kustī* would be done. Shehnaz thought that sacrifice performed in this way was a beautiful thing, that it brought the family together and was a pleasurable occasion on which to share food, she also noted that there had been no pressure from the Hindu community not to slaughter animals.

Festive occasions such as birthdays and weddings and *navjotes* were celebrated on a grand scale in Shehnaz's household. Everything was done 'properly' - the ceremonial bath, the birthday clothes and the visit to the fire temple. By the time Shehnaz went to college she had seen several marriages performed in the family, and the *navjotes* of all her cousins. She says:

There was so much merriment, that after the whole thing was over, you didn't know what to do for a few days, and it felt terrible. It was because of the level of enjoyment, and the garbas and the singing and the food, and being together.

There were no outings or social events apart from these occasions, and the vacations which Shehnaz spent in her uncle's home in the country. When she was about fourteen, Shehnaz became very fond of one of her first cousins, her maternal uncle's son; she says:

¹ According to one source, there had been a time when there were thefts and robberies in the surrounding villages but Tavdi had remained unaffected, and this was put down to the saintliness of Jivan Mama himself, hence he was propitiated after his death. Another version of the story was that Jivan Mama had indeed been saintly, and everything he said came true. However, when he died he made trouble for people until it was decided by the village elders - mainly Parsi, some Hindu - to build a shrine in his honour.

... because he was much elder to me, I was attracted to him as a young girl. By that time I was showing a great liking for higher studies, and the marks I got, the examinations I did, and the percentages were very good, so everyone had high hopes for me. So because he came from a rural background and was uneducated, and for several other reasons, there was opposition. Initially I tried to resist, but then I was very close to my mother, very very close, and when I saw that I was really giving her a lot of pain, I just dropped the whole thing. And it was at that time that my aunt introduced me to the Bahrām Yašt, because, she said, you are going through a troubled phase and you should recite it every day and ask for his help. She also gave me a line, in Gujarati, to say every day after reciting my prayers, and she told me to bring the image of the Irānšāh in front of my eyes whilst saying it. The line says that the Irānšāh has control over the nine skies/levels, and may its light and glory increase.

Shehnaz attended the Sydenham college which admitted only those who had obtained the highest grades at school. There were five or six girls and four boys who were Parsis in a class of about 100 - 120 pupils, mostly Hindus and Muslims. The college was socially elite and Shehnaz noted that students behaved and dressed differently to that which she had been used to. Although born and brought up in the city, she continued to identify with the village life which she enjoyed during the vacation rather than with the more sophisticated surroundings in which she found herself at college.

When Shehnaz was in her third year (1967), her mother died very suddenly and unexpectedly after undergoing an operation. This was a tragedy and a great loss for Shehnaz since her mother had been a pivotal person in the family, upon whom even her grandmother had depended. This was her first exposure to the after-life ceremonies, and she described the way in which they were performed by her grandmother:

For one year very diligently my grandmother, in the house, offered Satum for my mother. She was very close to my mother and for various reasons she felt that she hadn't treated her as she should have. This made a great impression on me, and I found the way she did it very beautiful, with all the proper things being placed - the fire, the milk the flowers the fruit — and every day for one year she would take a head bath, and we even used to tell her 'look you will fall ill ...'

For the first time in her life Shehnaz found herself turning to her religion with questions which, for the time, remained unanswered:

I remember going to the little fire temple at Lal Baug, and I was beseeching God, 'please let her live, please let her live'. And even on the morning she died I was talking to him wherever he was, and looking at the stars and saying 'please don't take her away';

and yet she was taken away. And I just could not understand it, why should this have happened; because a week before a neighbour had gone through the same operation, and I could see the neighbour moving around happily within eight days, and my mother had to die, and I just could not figure it out. Everyone said you have to reconcile yourself to God's wish, and she was so dear to him, but it didn't make sense. And what I hated the most was that we had lots and lots of condolence visits, and my grandmother thought it was her right to have these visitors come to the house, because within our family she was the matriarch, and so every single day people would come to see her, people would come to stay. I was meant to sit there and be courteous to everyone. And I remember that soon after my mother's death it was my birthday, and one of my aunts gave me a new sari and my grandmother raised hell because I accepted it, she said that if your mother has just died how can you accept a new sari. She made me return the sari, it was as if I had committed a crime. And this lasted for at least a year, there was no chalk, no birthday celebrations, no songs.

Not long after her mother's death, Shehnaz met the man who was to become her husband. He lived with his paternal grandmother whose family had been involved in trade with China. Her mother-in-law did not follow the purity laws, although she said her prayers every day from a big prayer book, and performed the *ādar rōj nu parāb*. The family did not come from a rural background and therefore, according to Shehnaz, had no idea about rituals and ceremonies apart from birthdays and festive occasions such as a *navjote*. With the birth of her first child, Shehnaz spent her confinement in her parent's home, as is usual with the first child. After the completion of forty days confinement and the customary *nahn*, she moved to her uncle's village of Vyara. Shehnaz's grandmother insisted that her uncle should arrange for an animal sacrifice to be performed. This was an entirely Hindu ritual performed by a Hindu priest who first came to the house and did a *puja*, after which everyone, including Shehnaz's husband, Neville, went to the top of a small hill where there was a shrine, and a fowl was slaughtered. Shehnaz observed that this was not a Zoroastrian tradition, and that in rural areas many Hindu rituals had seeped into Parsi culture; for example, even the *rander* ceremony wasn't wholly Zoroastrian since *Rander* was a Hindu deity. After the birth of her son, Shehnaz continued to work full-time as a company secretary and so the baby spent the first three years of his life in her aunt's house; Shehnaz and her husband would visit him every weekend.

After her mother's death, and throughout the early years of her marriage, Shehnaz attended various priestly classes in the hope of finding answers to her questions. In their building there lived a highly respected priest by the name of Dr Minochehr Karkanawalla, who was also an atomic scientist and held a senior position at the Bhaba Atomic Research Centre in Bombay. His lectures were held at *Rustam Baug* and dealt with such subjects as the *Ātaš Niyāyiš*, the *Parābs* and why they should be performed, the question of right

conduct and what one should do in order to be a good Zoroastrian. The answer to these questions (with which Shehnaz was already familiar) was: 'because these things have always been done, they are part of Parsi culture'. Although Dr. Karkanawalla related observances to texts such as the *Denkard*, and the *Dādestān i Dēnīg*¹, which Shehnaz had not heard of before, increasingly, she found even these explanations inadequate. Later, both Shehnaz and her husband attended classes given by Dastur Khurshed Dabu, by then an old man and the high priest at the *Wadiaji Ātaš Bahrām*. Here again, questions were very mundane, there was no theological discussion and few young people attended. In the meantime, the observance of rituals carried on in Shehnaz's household, and every year the family went to Navsari for the family *muktad* prayers in remembrance of her mother.

In 1979 came what Shehnaz described as a major turning point in the development of her religious life, with the arrival in India of Khojeste Mistree from London. Shehnaz did not attend his first public lecture, at which the police had to be called to control the crowds, but she went to the second lecture, which was given by him and Alan Williams, a British academic, and where leaflets were distributed inviting people to submit their names and addresses if they wished to attend a small study group which they wanted to start in Bombay. Shehnaz said that in the first instance she was drawn to the style and content of the talk, and the way in which questions and answers were handled by the speaker:

An entirely new horizon appeared. First of all it was a very charged atmosphere; in recent Parsi history there had never been such an occasion, crowds of Parsis all going to one place, all wanting to listen to this man who was knowledgeable, Oxford-trained and could give them what they wanted in their own language. It was very different from a priest giving a talk, and this kind of impact on the young was tremendous. The reason why he became a controversial figure was due to a coterie of rich Reformists in Bombay, who did not like what Khojeste was saying; for here was a Western scholar who was also their own person [that is, a Parsi] giving a traditional point of view.

When asked what was the essence of Khojeste's particular message and why she found it so appealing and different Shehnaz replied:

¹ These texts had been translated into Gujarati by priests mainly for the benefit of priests, although Doctor Karkanawalla was an Avestan/Pahlavi scholar. According to Shehnaz no lay members of the community would have read them, even in translation. There were a number of books written by the laymen, for the benefit of lay people, which explained religious texts; these often took the form of question/answer and were written from various perspectives; for example, a Khšnumist would interpret the Zoroastrian scriptures in a way which was consistent with Khšnumism. Shehnaz noted that many of these books were preoccupied with death and life after death, and included macabre pictures of the soul departing from the body.

Some of the early talks he gave had a great impact because of the way he presented Zarathuŝtra, this man in remote antiquity. The important thing was that I could now link something which was very remote to my daily life, and for the first time I felt that I was going to get some sort of answer to the question of my mother's death. So I went to the study circle which was given at Mrs Shehnaz Panthaki's house. Everything was different and new. We had lots of question-and-answer sessions taken by Khojeste ... it was normally in the evening and there were so many questions because you have to realise that here was a group of people who had no idea there was a theology and had never found answers even to mundane things like why you can't cut your nails after having a bath, or why you cover your head whilst praying, or why do you have to face a particular direction whilst doing your kustī, or why do bad things happen to religiously minded people ... and he answered all our questions very logically.

Some time after this, Khojeste Mistree was persuaded to start an intensive course to train teachers to teach the religion. Shehnaz was working at Hindustan Lever (a large multinational company) at the time, and taking her company secretary's examination; she was invited to join the course and was happy to be given this opportunity despite the demands it was to make on her time. In her view there had never been anything like this before and certainly nothing which would appeal to 'young, questioning minds':

You might say that Khojeste had personality and, charisma and yes, that is what attracted all us youngsters, but more than that, the important thing was that whatever we asked there was a natural explanation. So it wasn't like the Denkard says this and you should do this, but why is the Denkard saying this, what is the reason, how did the theological development take place. And I remember the first time that we discussed the nature of God, and I came back home and told Neville 'did you know that God is not all powerful?' and he could not understand what I was talking about. And I told him that death is the work of evil, and because this negative force overpowers good at a particular point of time, and because good does not have that strength to defeat evil, that is why my mother went. God did not kill my mother, and so my prayers are not to a god who doesn't listen.

Shehnaz went on to describe how her commitment grew and eventually she was attending three evening classes a week, one of which was a meditation session which she described as follows:

Khojeste was trained in the Beshara school of meditation in England ... so they had a particular type of stool and each one of us had such a stool especially made by a carpenter. And every Wednesday we would sit in a circle and he would light a candle in

the centre, take the loban round and that was the first time he gave us the Ašem Vohu chant with the proper breathing, which I had never heard before. Usually they just recite it which is very different from a chanting (here Shehnaz gave an example of the way in which it is chanted). We would then discuss things that had happened during the week and the topics we were discussing in class and how to relate them to everyday life ... I felt that my perspective had completely changed, but I knew that I could not change my grandmother, who by that time was over eighty years old, or my father or my aunt, and for them it was like 'why are you bothering yourself with this work, it is not good', and many people believe that if you delve too deeply into religion, it might affect you mentally; this is a very strong view that some people have in the community, that you might be possessed by religious fervour, that you may become a fanatic and never do anything else in life. All the alien beliefs that my people had, I knew then that they were not part of the tradition. So that was the effect that Z.S. had.

In 1994 the whole family went to Iran as part of a group visit organised by ZS and led by Khoj ste Mistree. Shehnaz found this a very moving experience for a number of reasons:

I think that whatever has happened in my life after ZS is a kind of baraka, a blessing, or merit, which I have earned. I didn't do any of this with the thought that I would get something in return; but I think I have been rewarded along the way, and I think that Iran was one such reward; because I don't think that we could have gone to Iran on our own. This group became like an extended family with Khojeste leading us, and, again, he opened new doors. It was the first time that we were exposed to these very very beautiful spiritual fires ... And for me it was especially important because we went as a family with only four of us together and Pashna was the youngest in the group and I kept on telling her to realise how privileged she was to get this kind of exposure so early in her life.

I remember that at Naqs-i Rostam we had a heated debate because one part of the group thought that the kings were very cruel, and how could you call them true Zoroastrian kings if this is what they did - they killed for territorial gain; and the other group felt that this was what kingship was all about, this is what kingly authority meant. I remember both the children taking part in the discussion, and when Pashna was asked what her views were she said with great conviction that 'I can now go back and tell my friends when they ask me: "what do you have? what is yours?" I can tell them that this is mine, this is what I have seen - the experience and the heritage, knowing that these are my kings, this is where my people have walked — on this very spot where I am sitting maybe a king went by on his horse.' I felt that too, and with it a very sad feeling that there was only so much left ... that when you saw the ruins at Persepolis (and from art

books we saw what Persepolis had once looked like, with all the hundred columns with the roof overhead), and you felt sad that from that time things have broken down, down, down ... and the responsibility which one has to build it up again. I mean one can't build it up to that sort of splendour, but it heightened the feeling that this has to be preserved.

With regard to the Zoroastrian villagers in Iran, Shehnaz describes them as 'simple folk' — lovely women who wore beautiful, colourful dresses. She remembers one of them, in the village of Cham, narrating the story of the flying fire and showing them the actual tree where the fire had come and sat, and how they had collected it and taken it back to the small fire temple. Some of the women told emotional stories of persecution and how they had been obliged to wear their *kustī* across the arm, and arms were chopped off — Shehnaz was told that there were people there who had witnessed these terrible events. Many of the rituals were performed differently, the *jašan*, for example, she found very beautiful, with the prayers being recited differently from the way in which they are done in India. Songs were an important part of Iranian-Zoroastrian life, the singers were male, however, and would sing sometimes for as much as thirteen or fourteen hours at a time. Shehnaz noted that the songs were predominantly love songs and not like the *monājāts* and *garbas* of the Parsi tradition, which often contain religious material.

The experience of going to Iran had a long-lasting effect upon Shehnaz and left her with a heightened sense of spirituality, which she felt had resulted from this trip; this experience was later to help her through a very serious illness. She says:

I want to go back and thank the Pirs. As you know, throughout my illness, every night that I was at Terrace Cama, Firoza would prepare a bath, and she would give me a little water from Pir-e Sabz, which Khojeste had specially brought for me; and I would sip this water, reciting seven Ashem Vohus and then the Airyema Išyō prayer. And I was told that Khojeste had had a sofra done for me in Iran; and I really believe that this has helped me.

During the last few years Shehnaz has been a key person in a project set up to record and document the oral testimonies of Parsis living both in Bombay and in the rural areas of Gujarat. She said that the interviews which she found most interesting were those conducted in the villages, for here she found people's religious lives to be ritually oriented in a way which was strongly reminiscent of her childhood; there were various rituals, too, with which she was unfamiliar. For example, in Surat she learned that just as there is a sari ritual for a girl when she attains puberty, here there is a similar ritual for a

boy, during which he wears the *pagri* for the first time.¹ Then there is a ritual which is performed in the village of Bajipura on *Bahman mahino*, *Bahman rōj* when farmers rest their cattle and give them a ceremonial bath. This custom is observed by Parsis and non-Parsis alike, despite the fact that it is a Zoroastrian festival. In another village there is a ritual for the earth, but it is done according to the Hindu calendar. There is also a Hindu day for the earth, when people dig a little pit for the earth and offer it all good things. Shehnaz suggested to the villagers that they perform this ritual on *Aspandarmad mahino*, *Aspandamad rōj*, since there is a month and a day dedicated to the earth, and they agreed to do so.²

There were other interviews, with leaders of the Khšnumists, for example and with some of the ultra-orthodox groups, which made Shehnaz feel sad. She said:

These are my people and look where they have gone, why should people want to find meanings in texts which are just not there. On the other hand, I felt that this is what reality is to them, so who am I to question it.

At the end of the interview I asked Shehnaz to describe the way in which the various elements of her religious life fitted together; the prayers and rituals, songs, and the scriptures which, as a child, she had only been dimly aware of:

*... I would say that now, having gone through a structured course in Zoroastrianism, I think the scriptures are very important. Because I am what I am, the prayers come first; from the time I was a little girl, praying every day became part of my being. Now that I know that these prayers are part of the scriptures — the *Yašts*, the *Niyāyiš* — that strengthens my feeling. When I look at the translation of many of the prayers I am reciting, they are like poetry and have no meaning; but it does not reduce the strength of the prayer for me, because what I feel is that these are the holy words, or *manthras*. When I recite the *Khorshed/Mihr Niyāyiš*, what am I doing? I am extolling the Creation, I am saying: *Wow! This is the Sun, this is the Moon and I bow before this good creation of Mazda.**

*The songs are my daily sustenance, if I am happy I burst into song, if I am miserable, I also sing. Although I was aware of the *Ātaš nu Gīt*, the first time I saw it in this kind of detail was when we began work on it together, and again I felt the doors opening out. Every song is full of meaning, religious or otherwise, and this is a sacred*

¹ The particular boy whom Shehnaz interviewed had a very old *pagri*, which he said had been presented to one of his ancestors, Ardeshir Kotwal, by a Hindu king.

² The same villagers also told Shehnaz that they used to be steeped in Hindu beliefs and rituals, keeping pictures of Hindu deities in their houses. There is a strong Pandole base in some of these rural areas, and people from the Pandole group came to this village and told them it was wrong and so they collected up all the pictures and gave them to the local temple.

song because of the ritual: the *gōyāns* come and sit down, there is a *divo*, they do their *kuštī*, there is a *sēs*, there is rice, coconut and flowers. And each line as I began to translate it made me think 'this is what we have, and this is what we must pass on'.

At the end of her account, Shehnaz sang for me some of the songs which she had been taught as a child. One in particular, the *Nahana ne Navdavva*, was so reminiscent of the *Ātaš nu Gīt*, that I felt it should be included, since it demonstrates the way in which the ideas and the structure of the song become integrated in other oral traditions. Shehnaz mentioned that her grandmother had often sung this song while bathing the children, and that she herself sometimes sings it now when bathing her little nephew, Xerxes. It is a song which is sung for the *nahn*, or ceremonial bath, prior to the celebration of a *navjote*, or birthday celebration. Shehnaz also has a slightly different version of the song, which she found in an old handwritten song book; here the song is to be sung at the time of a *nahn* taken prior to a wedding. The *Nahana ne Navdavva* describes the decorating of the Fire Temple in order to make it ready for a special occasion; each family member is allotted a task:

My (take the name of the child) is going for a *nahn*
 The child's father (name) will lead him or her (in a procession) to the *Navjote*
 The child's mother will welcome the child as he or she is led on to the place of the
Navjote
 (repeat first line)
 The paternal grandfather will distribute the *ašodād*
 The maternal grandfather will organise the band for the *Navjote*
 The wells for the *Agiāry* will be constructed by the child's father
 The chowk for the *Agiāry* will be made by the paternal uncle
 The maternal uncle will bring silver ladles (for the fire)
 My *agiāry* will be lined with woven carpets ... by so and so
 Cover the floor of my *agiāry* with silk carpets

The song can continue, with different tasks allotted to different family members. According to Shehnaz, some versions of the song include making and presenting garlands and bouquets, and consecrating the *hindora*. It is interesting to note that in this song, it is mainly men who perform the various tasks. It may be that, previously, men had a larger role to play, even in family-oriented religious matters, but I have suggested (see p.228) that, today, Parsi women appear more actively engaged in religious observances than men .

Summary

From Shehnaz's autobiographical account, it is evident that her childhood memories were happy ones, often associated in one way or another with religious observance. Social life revolved around such religious festivities as the regular celebration of the *gāhāmbārs*, the *parābs*, and occasions such as weddings and *navjotes*. Daily prayers, the keeping of purity laws and ceremonies for the dead brought her into close contact with other members of her family. The keeping of purity laws, which for some Parsi women seem old-fashioned and pointless, for Shehnaz bring back fond memories of the times when she and her mother shared their *rimān* state together. From the way in which Shehnaz described her early life, it appears that religious activity was not book-oriented; in other words, prayers were taught by word of mouth, rituals were absorbed through participation and observation.

For Shehnaz, the death of her mother gave her cause to turn to her religion which, in the past had provided solace (for example, praying the *Bahrām Yašt* and invoking an image of the *Irānšāh*, see p.209). This bereavement, however, raised questions which neither her religion as she knew it nor the priests from whom she sought advice were able to answer. From Shehnaz's account of this period of her life, new interpretations of meaning become apparent. For example, the strong religious sentiment expressed by Shehnaz's grandmother through washing her hair every day. Also, the social liminality imposed upon the household by the grandmother after her daughter's death, which was expressed through the constant stream of condolence visitors, and her refusal to allow Shehnaz to accept the gift of a new sari.

A major turning point occurred in Shehnaz's life with the appearance of Khojeste Mistree, and her subsequent participation and training in Zoroastrian Studies. From this point onwards, the religion which she describes bears some of the hallmarks of belonging to a literary rather than a orally-based culture. In the case of Zoroastrian Studies, the religious education which it offers is, in part, founded upon Western scholarship in the sense that 'classical Zoroastrianism', the teachings of the Avestan and Pahlavi texts, has been interpreted largely by Western scholars and translated by them into various European languages.¹ It was not until Shehnaz joined this group that doctrine and theology were presented to her in a way that made sense. The idea that God may be omniscient but not omnipotent allowed for the fact that, within limited time, he would be powerless to prevent every instance of destruction brought about by evil. From here it followed that while Ohrmazd may not always be able to help, this did not mean that

¹ Khojeste Mistree himself spent his childhood in India but what were perhaps his most formative years in England, and it is probably true to say that English is his first language. The scholarly study of his religion was undertaken at Oxford and London under the supervision of Professors Zaehner and Boyce.

prayers would go unheeded by him. It is noticeable here that the god Shehnaz describes is a personal one, and that communication between herself and God is direct.¹

5.3. Oral testimony and religious beliefs

Here I will look at a few of the interviews which were part of the oral studies project mentioned above.² These were conducted in the same way as Shehnaz's interview, essentially they were biographical accounts with particular reference to religious observance and belief. In this way important events were brought up naturally, as they occurred in the chronology of people's lives.³ I have cited short passages here in conjunction with information gathered during fieldwork in India some years before. I shall also draw on other religious studies projects, outside the field of Zoroastrianism but where oral testimony has been used as a medium through which to gain insights into people's religious lives. I shall use this material to illuminate some of the ideas and experiences expressed by Shehnaz in the shaping of her religious life, and also to show how oral testimony can enhance our understanding of and corroborate evidence contained in the *Ātaš nu Gīt*.

There are a number of studies in which oral testimony has been used as a means of looking at religious beliefs and observances; the distinct advantage of this medium being that it gives us an opportunity to examine the way in which individuals deal with the business of adapting the teachings and accepted norms of their religion to everyday life. Without these accounts we cannot observe this process which is not normally represented by those scholars who study a religion by means of its sacred texts alone. There are two projects in particular which I shall refer to here; the first is the subject of a book by Reinhold Loeffler, entitled *Islam in Practice, Religious Beliefs in a Persian Village*, which was the result of three years of anthropological field research (1970, 1971, 1976) in Southern Iran. Loeffler's expressed intention was to explore the various attitudes of individuals in this large tribal village towards their religion. He looked at the ways in which they made sense of such things as good and evil, fortune and misfortune, life and

¹ Since Durkheim it has been accepted as something of a commonplace that the relationship between people and their god reflects the nature of relationships within the social structure to which they belong; for example, it may be no coincidence that in their approach to divine beings people adopt the same means of communication which reflect the freedom of expression and level of intimacy which exists within their immediate family group.

² In all, sixty-five interviews were conducted, in the main by Shehnaz herself. A number these will appear in a forthcoming publication by Dr. Philip Kreyenbroek. I refer here only to those interviews conducted by both Shehnaz and myself during the time that I was in Bombay to set up the oral studies project in October 1994. The exception is an excerpt which I have cited from an interview with Khojaste Mistree conducted by P. Kreyenbroek and Mrs. Munshi (see p.230). Interviews with Shehnaz's family were part of my own fieldwork and were carried out at different times during visits to Bombay.

³ I should point out here that my gathering of oral testimony has not been within the context of an anthropological survey; in all there are four anthropological studies to which I refer below. These studies were carried out within a very specific geographic location and began with a detailed account of the economic/social structure of the community. The oral studies project from which I have extracted some material was not conducted in this manner; beyond a few details, the social and economic backgrounds of participants are only conveyed through the accounts themselves.

afterlife, status and power, interests and actions. Also, the ways in which they created a feeling of order and justice as well as a sense of personal authenticity, identity, and worth. In all, Loeffler interviewed seventy-five people, drawn from different status groups: landlord, mullah, peasant, trader, teacher, craftsman, worker, youth, and women. The main drawback of this study, from the point of view of analysing religious practice, is the fact that Loeffler was unable to develop the same type of relationships with women as he could with men, whereby they could speak freely; as a result there are no interviews with women included in this study.

Sarah Williams is the author of the second study, entitled *The Problem of Belief: the place of oral history in the study of popular religion*, in which she used oral testimony to complement other sources of information with reference to urban popular belief in the London borough of Southwark. Williams conducted twenty-nine interviews in all, with a view to looking at the way meaning is constructed in people's description of their religious lives, and the way in which they create reality through the use of symbols and images. She writes:

Religious historians have tended to use oral history to support studies of the institutional church and as a tool with which to extract additional factual information on such issues as church attendance, but they have been slow to use testimonies as a means of exploring personal and private dimensions of religious belief.

I found that there were certain parallels which could be drawn between some of the themes which came up in Williams's interviews, and those in which I participated during my stay in Bombay. During the course of interviewing, Williams found that memories were generally expressed in a subjective way, so that connections were made between events, feelings and beliefs, and the emotional atmosphere in which a particular memory was created was often recreated through recollection. Memories of Sunday School, for example, often evoked memories of particular hymns, which, in turn, brought a sense of nostalgia often associated with home and, in particular, the mother.¹ I have already drawn attention to similar themes with respect to Shehnaz's autobiographical account; for example, the various religious events which brought back happy childhood memories.

Fear was another emotion sometimes evoked through individual recollections of childhood. This was often associated with the invocation of evil spirits, and perhaps with death; for example, if a person had been present at a funeral ceremony as a child. I had several interviews with children who had been taught the theological significance of the custom of exposure of the dead, but whose lively imaginations remained firmly fixed on the more macabre aspects of such a process.

Another characteristic which I came to recognise during the course of my interviews, and which Williams also experienced, was the fact that particular events in

¹*Oral History* (1996:32).

people's lives often changed or reshaped their religious beliefs. Here again, I have mentioned the bereavement which Shehnaz suffered, and the new direction which her religious life was to take as a result of becoming involved in Zoroastrian Studies.

For Shehnaz, her introduction to, and understanding of, the scriptures has not led to a rejection of the rituals and observances which she was taught as a child; in fact she has found a link between the two which endows ritual with greater meaning.¹ There are others within the Parsi community, however, for whom 'meaning' appears to exist on a different level. For example, one of the questions we sometimes asked interviewees was: 'were you taught the meaning of prayers?', and although many said no, it was evident that 'meaning', either in the sense of a literal understanding of what they were praying and/or its relation to theology, was not part of their perception of what praying was all about. Several people mentioned the importance of pronouncing the sounds of the Avestan words correctly, and the manner in which the prayer was recited, that is, with the correct breathing.² For those who pray from a book, a translation is often provided alongside the text of the prayer, but this was not mentioned as forming a significant part of the meaning. One might consider here what the content of a *Yašt* or a *Niyāyiš* would convey, the imagery of these ancient hymns and prayers is not easily transposed to contemporary life, nor do they contain much that can be identified as Zoroastrian in terms of doctrine or theology. The most important element, it seems (whether or not a person was praying in a language which he or she understood), was the perceived efficacy of the prayer. There were numerous occasions when people described some event or circumstance in which the strength of prayer alone was seen to have achieved a desired goal. I will give two examples here. The first comes from an account given by Mrs Najamai Kotwal in an interview conducted by Mrs Munshi in November 1994, and at which I was present.³

Mrs Kotwal was born in 1912 and is a member of a priestly family; she married in 1928, at the age of sixteen, and is the mother of Dastur Dr Firoze M Kotwal, who is the High Priest of *Wadiaji Ātaš Bahrām* in Bombay. She describes the rigorous religious education which she received both at home, from her maternal grandmother, and at the Tata school in Navsari, under the instruction of Navroji Kanga (the Avestan was taught by Hormusji Kotwal). All prayers, including the *Yašts*, were learned by heart, and the oral recitation was examined. Mrs Kotwal said she had not been taught the meanings of the prayers, but was quite convinced of the power of prayer:

¹For example the obligation to dispose of nail parings, which are dead matter and therefore synonymous with pollution, and all that belongs to the world of Ahriman.

² It was the pronunciation and method of reciting the *Ātaš nu Git* (in Gujarati) with which the compiler of the 1879 text, Sohrabji Chikanpur, found fault.

³ The interview was in Gujarati and later transcribed and translated into English by Shehnaz Munshi.

I have always received help through the power of prayer. In the past, and still. Prayers with faith. My son was very ill, so I constantly prayed to God. So one day as I looked at the sun while reciting my prayers, I saw an image in the sun ... What I saw was a man with a crown on his head, standing partly inside the sun and partly outside. I said to myself, 'My God, is this God himself?' and I prayed to the image to make my son well soon. Then suddenly the image disappeared. Yes, prayers do have power.

The second example comes from a woman of different age and background who was born and brought up in Bombay. Dr Shirin Mullan was born in 1942 into a *behdin* family; she attended the Princess school in Bombay followed by medical college. She is at present attached to the J.J. group of hospitals in Bombay and is a Professor of paediatrics. The interview was conducted by Shehnaz and myself, in English, in November 1994. While Dr Mullan finds it hard to understand the books she has read about Zoroastrianism, and feels that being full of ritual they cannot enlighten the ordinary lay person, she still believes strongly in the efficacy of prayer:¹

I have seen so many critical cases and when my mind comes to a dead end, if I have done everything and I don't know what more you can do for this dying baby, that time I just stand in a corner and I pray, 'Just give me clarity, if I missed something, please God help me out'. And suddenly I get an idea, 'Why not give this particular drug, or could it be that I have missed this investigation?' And I suddenly ask them, 'do blood tests' ... There have been many instances, not just one or two ... When a baby is on a ventilator, or when there is another critical situation, I pray continuously for two or three hours, Ašem Vohū, Yathā Ahū Vairyō, Kēmnā.mazdā, whatever comes to my mind. I don't know much orally, most prayers I have to read from the book, but these are the kustī prayers which we know by heart. I keep on praying and I keep on saying 'You strengthen my arms'. So many times, with diagnosis, I think it is due to prayers, for medical knowledge is becoming so extensive that it is not possible for one doctor to know everything. And I suddenly get an inspiration, 'Why not open this book, or why not wake up this person and find out?' And I get the answer because I get clarity in my mind when I pray.

Unlike Shehnaz, who has found theological links between the 'old' and the 'new', *i.e.*, between the religion she was taught by her elders (which was grounded in an oral culture) and the questions raised concerning religious beliefs and actions, which belong to a more literary-based culture, and which need to be explained in rational terms, for others there can be conflict between these two elements. This is well illustrated by Dr Mullan's

¹ As seems to have been common amongst the people we interviewed, Dr Mullan was taught her prayers by her mother, and, in her case, her grandmother would listen and correct mistakes.

description of the very strict purity laws which she had to keep as a child, and which as a young woman she found particularly oppressive and hard to reconcile with her medical training. When she sought advice from a priest, Ervad Kutar, on this matter, Dr. Mullan says she was told that there was a 'scientific' explanation for these laws, which was that they were intended to allow women a time of rest. Her grandmother, on the other hand, continued to insist that it was well-known that pickles would turn sour if touched by a menstruating woman, which showed that evil rays emanated from the body at such times.

Insofar as one can draw general conclusions from individual accounts, it seems that for the most part people compensate, in their own way, for those elements in their religion which for various reasons they feel are absent. It is this which gives each account a particularly individual flavour. I am referring here to those, mainly of Shehnaz's generation, within the community who have not rejected what they perceive to be the 'traditional' elements of the faith (the prayers and observances which formed part of their upbringing), but who, in one way or another, have adapted them, or added to them, as and when the need arises. As a result there is a great diversity of religious customs and beliefs, which are often deemed 'unorthodox' by those studying the religion. The difficulty, in my view, is to find agreement both from inside and outside the religion on what constitutes orthodoxy in Zoroastrianism, and how this is distinguished from 'popular' religion. For the older generation, the traditional observances seem to have been accepted without question, particularly in rural areas. There are also a great number of practices which people refer to as being part of 'the tradition', some of these are confined to a particular village or area, and have not been heard of elsewhere, nor have they been documented.¹ One can only speculate as to whether or not such activities would have proliferated if there had been a more developed Zoroastrian theology and/or a more established orthodoxy which was accessible to the lay population.

Where there is consensus over what constitutes orthodoxy, it is easier to identify those beliefs and rituals which depart from it and to classify them as 'popular' religion. If one takes for example the core Islamic rituals, which are usually known as the five pillars of Islam, as being the centre of orthodoxy, one can then look at how and why people may deviate from them (the subject of Loeffler's study). Loeffler describes, for example, how the peasant population of his village have no means by which to make the pilgrimage to Mecca, nor can they pay the obligatory religious alms. Furthermore, being a farming community, they are not able to fast during the month of *Ramadan*, which coincides with a period of particularly demanding physical work. In Loeffler's view, this neglect of orthodox ritual does not render the villagers irreligious, nor do they cease to be 'good Muslims' simply because they have adapted their religion to suit their particular existential

¹ See the long and comprehensive account given by Shehnaz of Parsi religious observances in Kreyenbroek (forthcoming). These include daily observances, observances for auspicious occasions, popular observances, special days, rites of passage and purity laws. See also pp.214-5.

situation. Here, a basic social morality has evolved in place of the ritual criteria which people are unable to meet. It is the way in which this religious system works: 'the innumerable offerings, sacrifices, dedications, contributions, alms, vows, *sufrahs*, invitations and gifts made to obtain favours, ensure well-being, secure protection, avert evil, help the dead, give thanks, or simply show compassion', which becomes clear through the medium of oral testimony. Questions which may be raised as the result of a particular event are invariably worked out within the framework of a person's belief system. This is aptly illustrated in Loeffler's study of a man of about forty-five, well-respected for his honesty who was neither rich nor poor and worked hard in his fields with the help of one of his three sons. When asked about the reasons for his crippled hand he replied:

When I was born — this I think myself; it may not be so with God, but to me it's undoubtedly this — when I was born, my parents, having lost three sons before me, made a vow, saying, 'Oh Sayyid Mahamad, the right hand of this boy will be dedicated to you if he does not die.' This means that whatever my right hand would earn should belong to that Imāmzādah. When I was some twelve years old, my father told me about this and took me on the pilgrimage to Sayyid Mahmad's Shrine. He gave one of the people there a cow to pay off the vow so that anything my right hand would earn from then on we could lawfully keep.

There follows an account of how, some years later as a young man, after having a dream which foretold of some grave misfortune, he met with an accident in which his gun went off and the bullet went through his right hand. He continued:

Now, I believe that the offering my father gave to that man at the shrine was not approved by the Imāmzādah — maybe he was a thief or an adulterer — or that he did not declare he was content with it; or, if he did, that his words, because of his immorality, had no effect on the Imām. If the man had been worthy and said with a truthful heart, 'O God, I pardon the rest', everything would have been all right. To me, this is the reason why the Sayyid Mahamad has done this.¹

Within the sphere of Christian religious practice, Williams found in her study that there were often two narratives which could operate in conjunction with one another as part of a range of beliefs held by each individual. For example, on the one hand, a person would give the reason for baptising a child as part of an orthodox narrative, explaining the validity and efficacy of such an action; on the other hand, they might justify the same

¹ Loeffler 1987: 157.

activity according to different expectations and constraints which were part of a folk discourse. In one interview for example, a women described the combined baptism and churching of her sister and child. Both women were constrained by the fear of their mother's disapproval if they failed to have these ceremonies performed, and walked for hours through the fog of a November night, clutching the newborn baby, in a effort to find somewhere open where they could have these ceremonies performed: 'My Mum once said once you's had a baby, if you hadn't been to be churched she wouldn't have you in her house ... and we knew it... I don't know what she thought of you if you didn't go to be churched ...' At the same time, as Williams points out, even the mother's insistence that social relations could not be resumed until these ceremonies were carried out was prompted by the need to thank God for a safe delivery. Williams also points out that the inhabitants of Southwark 'could insist ... on the regular attendance of their child at Sunday school and still cut off a lock off the head of that same child, place it between two pieces of bread and give it to a passing dog as a cure for the child's whooping cough'.¹ When asked whether her family kept a Bible in the house, one informant replied: 'Oh yes, you had to have a Bible, otherwise you were unlucky if you didn't have a Bible'.²

Throughout the interviews Williams found that these combinations of discourse arose; what she terms 'orthodox narrative' and 'folk' discourse. For example, charms, amulets and crucifixes were often carried for protection against dangerous situations. In one instance, a woman described the way in which she would make a wish using a piece of cork which had been kept in her handbag, along with other amulets and charms, for fifty years: 'This practice of wishing by means of the cork was carried out in association with prayer. When Mrs Telby needed anything she would pray and wish and when she received the object of her desire both God and the cork would be thanked without any sense of incongruity in her mind.'³ At other times what Williams describes as oral folk culture appeared to have no connection whatsoever with religious precepts. For example, a number of interviewees referred to the 'use of coral beads as a cure for bronchitis and the ritual touching of warts with small stones, placing them in a bag and leaving them in the road in the hope that an unsuspecting passer-by will inherit the warts on finding the bag'.

From the very brief look at the above mentioned studies in relation to oral testimony within the context of Zoroastrianism, three points emerge. First, it seems that regardless of whether there is a widely articulated, modern orthodoxy and/or theology (as in the case of Islam and Christianity) or not (as in the case of Zoroastrianism), people are going to respond to questions raised by certain events which occur in their lives, such as

¹ *Oral History* (1996:30).

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

bereavement, illness, misfortune of one kind or another. The way in which they find answers to these questions is often within an identifiable religious structure or framework to which they belong, however marginally. At the same time the way in which people resolve or find solutions to these questions often takes them outside the recognised framework. There are thus often two if not three discourses running through people's descriptions of their religious lives, that which we label 'orthodox', then 'popular', or 'folkloristic', and finally what I would call 'individualistic'; the way in which these discourses are interwoven can best be explored through the medium of oral testimony where individuals can talk about their religion within the context of their own life histories. In this way one discovers that the absence of commitment to orthodox ritual and/or belief does not necessarily coincide with an absence of religious sentiment.¹

Second, the question of orthodoxy is problematic, particularly with reference to Zoroastrianism. There are various customs which have become part of Zoroastrian tradition at some point in its history which support doctrinal beliefs and therefore, presumably, can be considered 'orthodox'; for example the *Adar mahino nu parāb*, which honours fire. The performance of the *Ātaš nu Gīt* was no doubt a 'popular' custom, but one which is now mainstream to the extent that it may be performed within the precincts of a fire temple. Then there is the *Mushikil Asan* ritual, also performed by women, which tells the story of how *Bahrām Yazad* came to the aid of a woodcutter; when *Bahrām Rōj* falls on a Friday, people will go to the fire temple and recite the story there rather than at home. Customs such as the resting of the cattle described by villagers in rural Gujarat are part of what anthropologists would call the 'little tradition'; that is, particular to a locality. Again, however, this custom can be linked to the doctrine of the *Amesha Spentas*. There are certain customs which appear to have no religious content whatsoever, other than the prayers which may be recited at the same time as the ritual is being performed; these are often associated with warding off evil, or with recovery from an illness.² Then there are those customs which appear to be acceptable to one generation, but which are disapproved of and/or discontinued by another (as in the case of animal sacrifice). Some Hindu practices, such as the *puja* described by Shehnaz after the birth of her son, she found distasteful; on the other hand the ritual wearing of a sari for the first time is very

¹ *Oral History* (1996:29).

² Shehnaz remembers one such ritual which was performed for her as a child when she recovered from chickenpox in 1967. This entails marking a square on the wall with cow dung and garlanding it with two garlands made of cotton wool, while marks are made with vermilion powder over the square. The *kustī* is done, and prayers are offered in thanksgiving, then the child sits on a wooden stool underneath the design on the wall. A sweetmeat, *lavaro*, is prepared of grated coconut and rice flour kneaded together and steamed, this is offered to the 'image' on the wall, which Shehnaz thinks was associated with *Jivan Mama* (see p.208, n.1); during this time the *lobān* is done, a *divo* lit, and the child is garlanded. The food is made in the early morning and distributed to the whole neighbourhood.

much a Parsi custom, and indeed Shehnaz has recently celebrated this event with her own daughter.¹

The third point is simply to emphasise the fact that 'meaning' is an almost impossible notion to quantify in relation to observance and belief; it is one which surely fluctuates according to the perspective of participants, their expectations and demands, how they interpret such things as righteousness and morality, and how they respond to religious obligations. Thus while interviewing may provide a medium through which to understand some of the changes which are taking place in contemporary religious life, and possibly a generation or two before, it cannot be used to recreate a context elsewhere, either in time or geographic location.

Oral testimony and the interpretation of texts

I shall look now at the way in which oral testimony *may* be applied to the recent past.² As I have already mentioned, this is not an attempt to create a reality, simply to shed light upon a text, in this case the 1879 text of the *Ātaš nu Gīt*, and to some of the religious activities referred to within it, which are either part of living tradition or have been performed within living memory.³ Although the *Ātaš nu Gīt* has become more significant for Shehnaz in recent years than during her childhood, the words of the song, its imagery and character are more in keeping with her account of religious life during the early part of her life. In Shehnaz's account, we gain a strong impression of the dominant role played by women in religious life, which is reminiscent of the song. Within the song, women are referred to frequently; they are the sole performers, both as leaders and chorus; they are important members of the household; they hold elevated positions within society, and it is women who are represented as organising the building of the *agiāry*; they summon the various craftsmen and see that they are rewarded in the appropriate way. This dominant female role is mirrored 'outside' the text in the sense that it seems always to be women who commission the *gōyāns* for a particular occasion, and pay them, and women who are responsible for the domestic arrangements which are essential to any celebration; it follows that it is women who are largely responsible for keeping

¹ In a study of the Catholic village community in the Nansa Valley of the province of Santander in Spain, the author, William Christian, makes this very same point, that many devotional practices which the clergy complain are deviationist, or folkloristic, were in fact condoned by and even taught by the Church a few generations before. Christian (1972: 94) cites as an example the custom of praying *to* rather than *for* the saints in purgatory. Evidently, in the parish church in San Sebastian there is an alms box for the *animas* in which the villagers place thank-offerings for wishes that have been granted. This custom is no longer sanctioned by official Church policy; however, in a devotional handbook composed in the early nineteenth century there is an explanation as to why it is possible to pray to souls in purgatory, and why such practices will be rewarded.

² Williams's use of oral testimony is within the wider context of a study of urban popular belief in Southwark between the years 1880 to 1939. She uses her interviews, in part, to corroborate evidence gleaned from other sources such as autobiographies, popular ephemera, music hall songs and manuscripts from a collection compiled in 1902 by Charles Booth entitled *Life and Labour of the People of London*.

³ Mrs Kotwal, for example, was born 34 years after the publication of the song.

alive this tradition. To judge from the *Nahana ne Navdavva*, which was sung to Shehnaz by her grandmother, and which she now sings to the younger children, women also made the arrangements for the ceremony which took place in the *agiāry*. Another task which seems largely to devolve on the adult women of the household is the teaching of prayers to children. In Shehnaz's case, also, it was her grandmother who seems to have been responsible for the after-death ceremonies which were performed for her mother, and certainly her grandmother as opposed to her father who played the dominant role in the household thereafter.

One of the aspects of religious life which I have not yet mentioned is the important part played by the sharing and preparation of food. The nature of the food offerings is repeatedly referred to in the song, but it is only through talking to people and being present at gatherings (for example a *jašān*) that one is made aware of the significance of commensality — the sharing of food, and the great array of different dishes which are prepared for different occasions. During the time we were interviewing for the oral studies project in India, Shehnaz and I tended to discourage conversations about food. At the time, it seemed that an endless list of recipes was not going to contribute to our reader's understanding of religious life. It became clear, however, when we asked women to describe the observances around which their devotional lives centred, that the preparation of special foods formed an essential part, often beginning some days before the occasion itself. This was something women felt was an important part of religious life, rather than simply a domestic chore, and they spoke about it with great confidence; it was familiar territory in a way in which the 'meaning' of prayers was not. The preparation of food was, and still is, a way of bringing people together, it expresses the solidarity of the community in the same way as a performance of the song.¹ At the same time the *Ātaš nu Gīt* is itself linked to domestic worship through the *Ādar māhinō nu parāb* ritual in honour of the hearth fire. This was done for me by Shehnaz, in her home, in the autumn of 1989.²

¹ A.V. Williams (1996: 42) notes that according to Zoroastrian religious texts, food which is given auspiciously is considered a transmitter of blessings, while the food of sinners is a curse upon the recipient.

² Two days before the 'birthday' of the fire the kitchen is given a thorough spring cleaning and sometimes whitewashed. The hearth fire, which in Shehnaz's kitchen has been specially built and is not used for cooking, is sometimes kept alight during the whole of *Ādar māh*, otherwise it is lit in the *Rapithwin gāh* of *Dēp-Ādar rōj* and kept alight until the *Ušahin gāh* of *Ādar rōj*, thirty-six hours later. The silver *sēs* tray is prepared, all the items being cleaned with ash from the fire place. The picture of Zarathuštra, near to the fire, is garlanded. The words *Khšnaothra Ahurahe Mazdā* - homage unto Thee, O Ahura Mazdā - are written on the tiles of the fireplace in a paste made of turmeric powder and wheat or rice flour; also a picture is drawn of the tongs and ladle in a mixture of vermilion powder and water on the sides of the fireplace. The vermilion powder is held to represent the sacrificial element; Shehnaz informed me that at weddings in the old days the blood from an animal sacrifice was smeared on the bridegroom's forehead. The turmeric represents the light of the sun. When I saw Shehnaz perform this ceremony, a picture of the fire was also painted on the side of the fireplace. Chalk designs, *rangoli*, are put on the floor around the fireplace, either seven impressions are made, representing the seven *Ameša Spentas*, or nine, representing the *Ameša Spentas* and also Ahura Mazdā and Zarathuštra. The fire is then kindled with sandalwood and those standing before it do the *kustī* and recite the *Srōš Yašt Wadi* (Y. 57), the *Ātaš Niyāyiš*, and the

In some respects lay women appear to have a more prominent role in religious life than men. Much of routine daily life involves activity which is either directly or indirectly linked to religion, whether it concerns the preparation of food, the keeping of purity laws, the *loban* ceremony, the making ready of the hearth fire for a *parāb*, or the teaching of prayers; perhaps as a result of this, it is women who are responsible for perpetuating what might be termed the more traditional religious observances within the community generally. Unless lay men are part of some policy-making body such as the *anjuman*, they do not seem to have a particularly active role as far as religious matters are concerned. Although within the last century there has been a decline in the authority of the priesthood, a diminution of their status within the community, and a drop in their earning capacity, nevertheless, for those who choose to become priests, their role is clearly delineated. Likewise, for those who become leaders within the community (for example, Khojeste Mistree), their role is not without status, and their work has a purpose. Others make a name for themselves by endowing a foundation or becoming the benefactors of a particular project. However, in day-to-day religious observance, the majority of laymen whom I met did not appear to have as substantive a role as their female counterparts.

In her recent anthropological study of the Parsi community in Bombay, Tanya Lührman gives many examples of the dominant role of women in Parsi society, both in the way in which they behave, and as they are perceived by men. She points out that Parsi men play a lesser role than women in religious life, and suggests that this has been a contributing factor to the emasculation of men in general.¹ In Christian's work, on the other hand,² the men in the village of San Sebastian de Garabandal appear to play a dominant role in society while at the same time contributing very little to the religious life of the community.³ It seems, therefore, that the dominant role which may be played by women in religious life does not necessarily go hand in hand with a dominant role in society. Again, Williams found that popular religion was passed down from one generation to the next primarily by women and incorporated by them into a community's or family's sense of past and present identity. She also noted that great importance was

Ardibehešt Yašt; Shehnaz always recites the *Bahrām Yašt* as well. The children present prayed the *Srōš Bāj* and the *Namaskār Cherāg-nō*.

¹ One of Lührman's informants describes the role of her mother in her early religious life in very much the same terms as Shehnaz's description of her grandmother. The father was not 'religious minded', and had little to do with the upbringing of the children. See T.M. Lührman (1996:174).

² See, p.226, n.1.

³ Christian (1972: 32-3) shows the division of labour/activity in a table of five categories ranging from the 'exclusively male', through the 'predominantly male', 'fifty-fifty', 'predominantly female' to the 'exclusively female'. Here, with the exception of the vocation of priest, there are no activities whatsoever assigned to religion in the first three categories. In the remaining two, female, categories are included: go to church, go to shrines, go on promesas (pilgrimages in fulfilment of vows), remember old songs, rosary, church, Sunday communion, tend saints, witches, ring evening bell for animas (service for souls in purgatory).

attached to descriptions by women of the convergence of their own beliefs with those of their mothers.¹

In the *Ātaš nu Gīt*, there are references to various religious practices which are illuminated more fully by the information contained in Shehnaz's account. For example, we are told in the song that a goat is to be sacrificed, and also that someone gets up at the break of day to wash with *nērang*. Although the performance of these rituals is documented in priestly texts,² there is no context in which to bring them to life in the way that oral testimony is able to provide.

I have discussed the subject of identity within the context of the *Ātaš nu Gīt*; the song refers to the community as whole — a diaspora group, a minority religion. In my interview with Shehnaz, the same idea appears, only this time it is on an individual level, expressed through the experiences of one person's life. As Shehnaz became aware of the teachings of her own religion, so she distanced herself from those which she regarded as 'alien'. Learning about the life of the prophet gave her a link between her own life and the remote past; and finally, so did the experience of going to Iran and feeling that this was part of her own heritage, her own people belonged here. It is noticeable too, that Shehnaz refers to 'my people', almost as a term of endearment, in the same way as the *gōyāns* refer to women in the song.

One final, but important, aspect I would like to discuss with reference to the song is the relationship between fire and worshipper. One of the ways in which the two main versions of the *Ātaš nu Gīt* (which I have cited above) differ is that they are addressed to different *Ātaš Bahrāms*. This gives these *agiārys* and the fires within them an individual character which is in keeping with the way in which people themselves tend to refer to certain fires. Zoroastrians deny that they are 'fire-worshippers' and in order to explain the concept of fire as a symbol cite, by way of comparison, Christian worship of the cross.³ While this may be true in theory, it doesn't explain the way in which devotional life centres around one fire rather than another - in this way it is endowed with a 'personality' and moves nearer to being an icon than a symbol. Here I will refer again to Christian's work. This is not to draw a comparison between Parsi and Christian worship so much as to understand the relationship between people and whatever or wherever it is that provides the focus of their devotion. Christian gives a repertoire of the holy figures available to the inhabitants of the valley; these include national shrines, regional shrines, valley shrines, and images in churches. He divides them into two categories: first, the

¹ *Oral History* (1996: 33).

² See Dhabhar (1932: 64, 69, 264).

³ This seems to have been an age-old argument. A.V. Williams (1996:52), cites a passage from the text of the Martyrdom of Mar Giwargis, St George of the Persian Christians, who was born a Zoroastrian. It begins with Giwargis saying to the Persian *Rad*: 'You worship fire and sacrifice to it. How has it given you being since you give life to it with wood and other material which feeds it?' The *Rad* replied: 'We do not take fire to be God; but we worship God through the medium of fire, as, you worship God through the cross'.

saints who are represented by those statues holding fixed positions in the landscape, whether in chapels or parish churches. The location itself, impregnated by the tradition of worship, often confers upon the statue its 'territory of grace'; it is unique, and therefore the devotion directed towards it is also unique. The second category concerns 'generalised devotions', those which takes place in shrines whose location is irrelevant; if they involve an image or a painting, then a similar one will do.

In India, the *agiārys* (to cite one example of a shrine) belonging to the first category are not so much anchored to a geographic location but derive their unique character from a particular history or legend which may be attached to them. Thus while people may refer to the *Udwada Ātaš Bahrām* as being particularly special, it is not so much the *agiāry* itself as the *Irānšāh*, which was founded in a different location as well as being itinerant for some years. The attachment to a particular fire, as opposed to its location, seems also to be the case in the Zoroastrian villages in Iran to judge from the accounts of the Parsis who have visited them recently. These fires are often endowed with a mystical character represented by the stories told about them, for example the 'flying fire' described to Shehnaz by the woman in Cham.¹ While people tend to hold special affection for certain fires (not necessarily the great ones), they will still perform what might be termed 'generalised worship' in any *agiāry*; the important thing being that they are praying before a consecrated fire. The way in which these relationships can work is illustrated by Khojeste Mistree in an interview conducted with him by Shehnaz:

... Some fires make me feel very devotional, others give me a sense of peace and tranquillity . Other fires I feel are genuinely unhappy. They talk to me, the fires, or they communicate with me and I communicate with the fires ... there are certain fires one feels more comfortable with. On a spiritual level I would say that some fires I have now experienced in Iran would be my spiritual beacons. In India, the Poona fire at the Sir J.J. Agiāry Fire is quite special for me, but maybe that is because I grew up in Poona. The Navsari Ātaš Bahrām Fire I feel quite close to as well. The Udwada Fire I am not particularly drawn to — that may sound blasphemous, but it is just not my fire ... But if I have been going to one fire temple quite regularly, I change that on principle. I don't want going to the fire temple to become an unconscious habit. the experience of visiting a fire temple has to be mystical, has to be special.

In the *Ātaš nu Gīt* there is no particular character ascribed to the fire, here both the fire and the *agiāry* are in the process of being created; as yet they have no history.

The samples I have given of some of the interviews show that these are not factual accounts, they are stories: the subjective form that they sometimes take is likely to have an

¹ See p.214.

effect on the way in which the information is perceived and interpreted by the listener or researcher. He or she is also likely to be influenced by various other factors which I will illustrate briefly by way of Lührman's book. Both she and I happened to be in Bombay at exactly the same time, and certainly some of our contacts and experiences with the Parsi community overlapped. However, our impressions could not have been more different. I should mention here that Lührman spent far longer in Bombay than I did, and I am in no position to assess the quality of her research, some of which I have found informative. What Lührman found to be a crisis of identity amongst the Parsis in Bombay she related to the experience of the colonial period and to the 'wrenching process of reorientation to quite a different political order' — hence the title of her publication: *The Good Parsi, the fate of a colonial elite in a post-colonial society*. The point I want to make is not that I agree or disagree with her hypothesis, but that it is sustained to a great extent by her use of language, and indeed the structure of her book. Thus the opening paragraph of the prologue reads as follows:

In the centre of Bombay stands a decaying mansion. Fort House was built as the private residence of Sir Jamshetji Jeejeebhoy, a merchant, the first Indian baronet and one of the most esteemed of nineteenth-century Parsis. In its time it was one of the great town houses and commanded a spacious view of the *maidan*, the great field which opened on to the Arabian Sea ... All that remains of his town house is a facade, the grand scrollwork cracked, a garden of weeds where the piano once stood. Gutted by fire and abandoned by commerce, the facade is an icon of a community in decline.

Here then, in the first few lines of the book we are presented with the hypothesis, the building *is* the community, and its disintegration is echoed in various ways throughout the following pages. To the outsider, here Lührman herself, 'there still seems to be a sense of uncertainty, anomaly, and ambiguity about what Parsi identity should be ... And anomaly brings with it something more profound than simply not belonging: a sense of decay, dissolution, and emasculation.' Much of the imagery contained in the book helps to reinforce this sense of tiredness, sadness and general disintegration; whereas I was struck by the colourful traditional dress of Parsi women and noted that many who had jobs wore Western-style clothes. Lührman writes: 'The women wear dresses from an older world, square tabs on sleeveless dresses or leg-of-mutton sleeves, awkward hourglasses from the fifties ... they will wear saris for a social event, though not for work or a casual evening out.' Again, I have described the atmosphere of warmth and humour (see p.194) which seems to be typical of Parsi festive occasions. Lührman on the other hand finds the 'Parsi-ness' of the Parsis 'not in its quasi-westernised middle-classness but in its style, in a kind of pragmatic jolliness'. Of a particularly scatological passage in a Parsi novel she suggests there is 'a jolly English-matron feel to this humour: direct, naughty, innocent of violence, and essentially untroubled.' The fact that Lührman and I view things through different lenses may be due to a whole host of factors; for

example, my being English and having been brought up in India means that I am unconsciously familiar with, or perhaps fail to question, certain aspects of Parsi life which Luhrman, an American finds quite bizarre. I do not wish to attempt to analyse our differences, but to draw attention to the significance of all the different factors involved in any attempt to gather information with a view to historical analysis. This is an example of the awareness, or lack of it which I have discussed in my introduction and which I have traced through the various accounts written by both Zoroastrians and non-Zoroastrians since the religion was made known in the West.

5.4. Some concluding remarks with reference to the work of Walter J Ong

The material contained in this chapter falls into two categories, oral texts and oral testimony. By oral texts I mean the *Ātaš nu Gīt* and the various other songs which, although in written form, do not seem to have been designed for assimilation into a writing culture; in other words they are essentially transcriptions of oral performance (even the 1789 text which was compiled for publication appears to have been, essentially, an arrangement of oral material). Oral testimony, again, is the transcription of oral material, but gathered in a different way and for a different purpose.

I have discussed the nature of orality in my introduction, and in chapter 1 with reference to the *Yašts* and the *Niyāyiš*. I shall look at it here, with reference to the above mentioned texts and the interviews, in the light of work carried out by Walter J. Ong. One of the main claims of Ong in his work on orality is the fact that the new does not supersede the old, but always builds upon and modifies it. Thus when an oral culture becomes a written and finally a print-oriented culture it develops and is shaped by that which preceded it, as well as by the external influences which may have caused it to change. In a paper entitled 'Walter Ong's Global Vision', Clarence Walhout analyses the way in which knowledge is preserved with reference to the different senses. In literate or chirographic cultures, it is the sense of sight which is emphasised: 'print localizes knowledge in space, giving it a place where it can be stored and consulted ... In an oral culture the sense of hearing more than the sense of sight shapes assumptions about knowledge.' The function of sound is, therefore, very important; many sorts of knowledge which we associate with the written word are in oral/aural cultures dependent upon verbal communication; for example 'history', in the sense of discourse about the past, can only be present in the speech of those living in the present. Verbal communication occurs in a variety of social contexts; both speaker and hearer have to be present, and this brings a sense of immediacy, of present actuality, to the meeting-place in a predominantly oral culture: 'Spoken words are always modifications of a total situation which is more than verbal. They never occur alone, in a context simply of words.'¹

¹ Ong, 1995:101.

With reference again to the senses, Walhout draws attention to the fact that 'sight presents only those surfaces that are immediately present before us and encounters those surfaces by moving sequentially from one focal point to the next'. Sounds, on the other hand, are non-sequential, since we can hear every sound within our range all the time, they come to us simultaneously. The effect of this is to situate us 'in the midst of a world'. It is this world, too, which Havelock (1963) suggests was represented by the poets whom Plato would not allow in his Republic, 'the old oral, mobile, warm, personally interactive lifeworld of oral culture'. It is this world too, which I believe is represented in the *Ātaš nu Gīt* and countless other songs which are passed down in the oral traditions of the Parsi community.

Since sound, and particularly the spoken word, is 'dynamic' in the sense that it is invariably accompanied by action, it follows that in an oral culture words are often endowed with power. This is evident from the material I have cited above with reference to prayer; regardless of whether the prayer is understood in terms of language or content, the *meaning* is to a great extent embodied in the power of the word: these words alone reach god, through them desires may be fulfilled, they are considered meritorious acts in themselves; in other words, they represent or are equivalent to the righteous action itself. From here it is a short step to the idea that words have magical potency, an idea which Ong maintains is closely related to the sense of the word as 'necessarily spoken, sounded, and hence power-driven'. Ong also draws attention to the fact that amongst oral peoples the idea of names, in the sense of a particular category of words, are commonly thought of as conveying power over things. As an example he gives the naming of the animals by Adam in Genesis 2:20, explanations for which 'usually call condescending attention to this presumably quaint archaic belief'. As Ong points out, this belief is not as quaint as it might seem to the literary mind, for without learning an enormous number of names one is powerless to understand all forms of intellectual knowledge. The naming of names is one of the main characteristics of the *Ātaš nu Gīt*, not a conscious device perhaps on the part of the poets, but one which has the effect of creating an identity for each individual and as such empowers the community as a whole. Each name is associated with an action, thereby giving narrative form to what otherwise would be merely a list:

Let us call the son of the labourer and get the ground prepared,
Let us call the song of the *gazdar*. Bring a gold and silver measuring rod
Let us measure the land of the fire temple. Let us call the son of the goldsmith ...

The way in which an oral culture stores material which could otherwise be expressed in writing by a table, list or instruction manual is by linking it to human activity. Ong cites the following passage (previously quoted by Havelock) from the Iliad

in which navigation procedures are part of a narrative presenting commands for specific actions:

As for now a black ship let us draw to the great salt sea
 And therein oarsmen let us advisedly gather and thereupon a hecatomb
 Let us set and upon the deck Chryseis of fair cheeks
 Let us embark. And one man as captain, a man of counsel, there must be.¹

When looking at the two passages in close proximity to each other, we can see the strong oral residue which belongs to the *Ātaš nu Gīt* when compared to a poem which originated in a 'primary' oral culture. Towards the end of the *Ātaš nu Gīt* we have a long 'list' of people who have endowed an *agiāry*. Here again, each person actively participates in the establishment and/or building of an *agiāry*, and as a result of his action he 'keeps his good name'. By contrast the 'list' contained in the Bombay Gazetteer is simply a table which is unconnected to any action. It is not set out in such a way as to facilitate the memorisation of its contents.

It can be seen from the above texts that orally managed language is quite different from the language which we would expect in a written composition. Much of the communicative value of an oral performance such as the *Ātaš nu Gīt* is lost when it is read as a text, without the aural/visual dimension. The same is true of oral testimony, where gestures, intonation, and facial expressions help to shape and give meaning to what is being said. It is these aspects which in turn shape the ideas and the analysis of the interviewer. Again, the interview is part of a 'real' existential present: the interviewee cannot write him or herself out of the text, nor is there any means of erasing the spoken word, the speaker can only add to it by denying or supplementing what he or she has said. The various sounds too become part of the whole experience of the interview; they might be anything from a clock chiming the quarter hour, to a child crying, or as happened to be the case in Bombay, the loud explosions of *divali* fire-crackers. Listening to these recordings is evocative in a way which the reading of field notes would never be. As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the gathering of oral testimony can bring a very personal dimension to the evidence, and it should, therefore, be used in conjunction with other types of sources. At the same time it is the most direct means by which to reach the individual who is otherwise referred to as part of a collective — in other words, it gives 'the Parsis', 'villagers', 'women', and particularly, 'my informant', a voice.

Amongst scholars who have written about Zoroastrianism in India, the lack of 'knowledge' about the religion that appears to exist within the community has been explained as being the result of a number of factors. These range from the fact that the development of Zoroastrian theology was effectively curtailed after the Islamic conquest

¹ *Ibid.*, 43.

of Iran, to the impact of British colonialism in India, the decline of the Parsi priesthood, its failure intellectually to defend the religion against the attack by John Wilson, and, more generally, its being unable to meet the demands of modernity. The idea that the continued oral transmission of texts and religious observance might have had a part to play has been largely ignored. While the Parsi community in India by now belongs to a predominantly literary culture this does not mean that literacy is necessarily thought relevant to all categories of knowledge. It may, for example, be applied in the schoolroom but not be thought relevant to prayer or religious matters generally. There is a tendency to assume that when oral texts are committed to writing their contents become, almost by definition, more accessible, and that people will read them. However, as Ong points out, long after a culture has begun to use writing, it may still not inspire trust, and this we know was precisely the case with Zoroastrian sacred texts before they were finally committed to writing in the Sasanian period. Even then, they were still not part of a 'writing culture' as such, but, as with a large proportion of biblical texts, were based upon an 'orally constituted sensibility and tradition'; and we do not know to what extent methods of transmission may have altered once the *Avesta* was written down. Again, we know that by the seventeenth century most of the Pahlavi texts had been translated into Gujarati, thereby making them available to all members of the community; however, there does not seem to be any evidence that these texts were widely read, other than by priests. By the beginning of the nineteenth century printing was widely used, mainly in the field of journalism, which was dominated by Parsis. Gradually, other publications began to appear, and it has been assumed that lay people began to make use of the new technology, reading and interpreting religious texts for themselves and, as a result, diminishing the authoritative role of the priesthood. While there is no doubt that leaders have emerged who have developed schools of thought based on the written word, I would argue that this has been the exception rather than the rule. Shehnaz, with her musical background and great love of songs, had never read her copy of the *Ātaš nu Gīt*, until it became the object of an academic study, thereby transporting it from one context or category into another.

I suggest that notions of 'theology' demanded by those belonging to the Judaeo-Christian tradition, together with ideas about 'orthodoxy' and 'meaning', reflect expectations which are raised within religious structures that have long been disseminated via the written word. Much of what constitutes Zoroastrian religious observance, on the other hand, continues to be transmitted orally. Zoroastrian theology, in the sense of the religious system which prevailed during the Sasanian era (commonly referred to as 'classical Zoroastrianism'), has been constructed mainly by Western scholars according to the extant religious literature, and regardless of whether or not it is an accurate interpretation, it is hardly going to be part of Zoroastrian tradition.

CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION

The theoretical ideas which I shall discuss in this chapter pertain to the thesis as a whole, and do not necessarily refer to the chapters in chronological order. I shall begin, therefore, by giving a brief summary of the purpose of and conclusions drawn in each chapter of this study.

In the introductory chapter, I discussed certain terms of reference, in particular, the term 'laity', as well as such terms as 'orientalism', 'rationalism', and 'classical modernism' which are relevant to my discussion about the different ways of interpreting history. Here, too, I outlined the source material, both Zoroastrian and non-Zoroastrian.

The second chapter deals with texts which, in part, represent a prehistoric phase in Iranian religious ideas. These texts were included for two reasons. First, they demonstrate how little can be said about the laity. Second, despite my having concluded that it is not possible to construct an account of lay activity contemporary with the ancient *Yašts* and prayers, these texts continue to form part of present-day Zoroastrian history. They have been incorporated, in various ways, into later accounts; they contain a language that people have been using to tell themselves about themselves since the earliest days of the faith. The images, structures and themes which I have traced through later texts, and which culminate in the Song of the Fire, are present, for the first time that we can be aware of, in these texts.

The purpose of chapter three is to prepare the way for the text of the *Ātaš nu Gīt*. In this chapter, the texts I have used demonstrate the way in which earlier material is reproduced in a new account; this entails a 'fusion of horizons', a process which I shall discuss in this chapter. Whereas, in chapter one we saw the effects of orientalist ideas upon those who, for example, translated and interpreted the *Yašts*, in chapter three, we see where those ideas emerged: how orientalism was rooted in the colonial system. The two historical periods which are pertinent to the song give us an example of how a historical account should work; that is, where empirical evidence can be used to substantiate a narrative account, as in the case of the *Ātaš nu Gīt*. Conversely, the narrative itself brings vitality to certain aspects of documentary evidence.

In chapter four, I gave an annotated translation of the song, which was followed by a close commentary of the text. My treatment of the text draws attention to various rituals and traditions which belong to the modern era. Much of this material cannot be projected back to earlier times, as, for example, in the founding of the Iranian *Ātaš Bahrāms*, we do not know the circumstances or ceremonies involved. However, it is material which is substantiated through the oral testimony contained in chapter five. On another level, I have explored the thematic structure of the song, which I suggest is linked to earlier texts. It is, therefore, through structure rather than content that we gain a sense of continuity, or, as I shall discuss further below, a 'genealogy' of ideas. The two structures which I

have proposed for the song are further elaborated upon in the penultimate chapter of this work. Comparison with several other versions of the song shows that the 1879 publication does appear to operate, structurally, in the ways I have suggested.

The four themes which appear in varying degrees of prominence throughout this work, can be viewed from a different angle via the medium of oral testimony. The purpose of gathering such information was, in part, to enable a fuller account of the various lay activities referred to in the song (it was not intended to substantiate accounts of lay activity from the long distant past). The texts, both Zoroastrian and non-Zoroastrian, which I have examined in this work, allow for discussion on a general level. Oral testimony, on the other hand, moves us from the general to the particular. Through listening to, and reading, individual accounts of religious life, it has been possible to define several discourses which may be contained in one account. I have suggested alternative ways to approach lay religion: ones which do not rely upon an accepted or perceived orthodoxy for their authority, and which do not depend upon the written word but take into account characteristics which are peculiar to oral texts.

In this concluding chapter, I shall draw upon various theories of interpretation in order to suggest ways in which we can construct an account of the laity in history with reference to those texts which have been examined in this study. This will involve looking back at previous interpretations of the Zoroastrian texts, and attempting to give a new account which shows a critical awareness of what has been done before.

The 'laity' in 'history'

An account of the laity in history is dependent upon the way in which the past is constructed; or, put another way, upon which view of the past is adopted. It also depends upon what we understand by the word 'lay' and our ideas about 'history'; I have shown that neither term has any fixed meaning, and that in each chapter of this work the meaning of both terms has shifted somewhat and has to be addressed differently.

An investigation of the term 'lay' shows us that its meaning is anchored to religious, historical and sociological circumstances. The reason for the absence of a fixity of meaning is that changes have occurred in the particular social and historical milieus within which this term has been understood. For example, within the context of ancient Judaism the term 'lay' referred to anyone who was not a member of the priestly tribe of Levi; in modern Judaism, on the other hand, the Rabbinate is a vocational rather than a hereditary calling and open to any learned member of the laity; thus the distinction which once pertained between priest and layman is no longer relevant. We cannot tell from the ancient Zoroastrian sources what was the precise status of those who were referred to by the term *zaotar*, or *athorvan*. It is not possible, therefore, to give a clear definition of the term 'priest', let alone that of 'lay', for the early period. All we can say is that there appear to be people who are not ritual specialists who are in a relationship with those who

are. In modern times, the priesthood is a hereditary calling which is passed down through the male line. However, members of priestly families, including women and those who choose not to become practising priests, consider themselves to be from the priestly class and do not refer to themselves as *behdin*. There are thus further ramifications with respect to the concept of laity within modern Parsi terminology.

When we are dealing with texts which extend beyond historical consideration, as is the case of the ancient Zoroastrian *Yašts*, it is impossible to plot the socio-historical circumstances of the people described in these hymns. We cannot, for example, identify the terms denoting 'priest' within the *Yašts*, and assume that certain social arrangements were in place with respect to everybody else, that is, the laity. Different methods of interpretation, therefore, need to be found in order to deal with concept of the laity within these texts than those which can be employed to interpret the term with reference to a modern text, such as the *Ātaš nu Gīt*, where we have a stronger socio-historical context.

With respect to the different ways in which the past has been constructed, I have looked at the historical sensibility of classical modernism,¹ and drawn attention to the fact that this is open to question, precisely because of the ahistoricity of the usage of many terms within it (see my introduction p.20, in which I cite a passage from Herodotus to illustrate this point). The move away from classical modernism means that we no longer connect our conceptions of things (in the sense of the meanings we attach to terms) in the present with our conception of how those terms were used in the past. We do not assume that terms have a continuity which transcends historical conditions. The concepts associated with a particular term do not share an essential core meaning, nor are they part of some historical process of development; their relationship with one another may be purely coincidental, or they may share some historical connections. Terms such as 'lay', 'sacrifice' and 'priest' have no exact equivalent in any of the languages of the ancient Zoroastrian religious texts which I have cited; there are likely, therefore, to be a wide range of possibilities regarding the conceptualisation of these terms. These conceptualisations range from those belonging to the religious tradition itself to those which are the result of the interpretations of people who do not belong to the Zoroastrian tradition. In the first category are conceptualisations which have developed as a result of the term moving through different languages, localities and cultures; also, it may have broadened to include different categories, or become more narrowly defined as some of the functions encompassed by this term are re-appropriated and a new term is created to describe these activities. For example, the general term for priest in the ancient period is Avestan *athorvan*; however, by the Sasanian period there are not only two categories of priest — those who formed part of the administrative hierarchy, and those, mainly scholar-priests, who did not hold public office — but also a number of terms within each

¹ See p.19.

category itself. The second category of conceptualisations has emerged from the fusions which have occurred on the part of those interpreting the religion from outside. This entails the fusion of the meaning of the term from within a person's own tradition with the way in which they understand it to belong in the particular text they are reading. For example, the term 'priest', or 'lay' refers to a particular reality for us, from which it is obvious what we do not know about the realities of this term for others, or in the past. The term 'sacrifice', on the other hand, probably has no reality for most of us; each of our conceptualisations is likely to be different, or at least drawn from a different source.

The view of history adopted by post-structuralists is often one of competing narratives: 'no matter how verifiable, how widely acceptable or checkable, history remains inevitably a personal construct, a manifestation of the historian's perspective as "narrator"'.¹ It is no doubt true that the past can be described in an infinite number of ways, and from our postmodern perspective events only make sense once they are placed within an increasing variety of historical processes which are defined in secular and/or sociological terms. There are, nevertheless, some discourses whose purpose is to make sense of the past which are better suited than others to the analysis of certain types of historical material. One such discourse which is useful with respect to the Zoroastrian texts examined in this study is Paul Ricoeur's discussion of the function of narrative in the interpretation of history. Ricoeur has drawn attention to the role of narrative, symbol, myth and metaphor in contributing to our understanding of the world and of ourselves. While he admits that history is an interpretative process, Ricoeur allows for the existence of a functional unity amongst the many narrative genres, which enables him to discuss the relationship between fiction, history and time. He argues that events only make sense to us by virtue of their temporality, by our sense of their being located in time (and space), by our sense of their really being connected to other events. His enquiry into the reciprocal nature of narrative and temporality leads him to suggest that 'the common feature of human experience, that which is marked, organised, and clarified by the fact of storytelling in all its forms, is its *temporal character*'.² Ricoeur goes on to identify the central characteristic of the act of storytelling, which he describes as *emplotment*, or the construction of a plot. It is this process that enables us to give meaning to events in the world: 'I shall say that the plot is the intelligible unit that holds together circumstances, ends and means, initiatives and unwanted consequences.'³ Where historical narrative merges with fictional narrative is in the imaginative shaping of plots, which documents and archives may authorise, but which they can never contain in themselves. Ricoeur does not deal with texts which lie beyond the realms of historical analysis, such as we encounter with the *Yašts*, where there are few signs of temporality. However, his general

¹ Jenkins 1991: 12.

² P. Ricoeur 'On Interpretation' in K. Baynes, J. Bohman, & T. McCarthy 1991: 358.

³ *Ibid.*, 360.

rule still applies: if we regard these texts as fictional, then we must not say that fiction has no reference, if we regard them as historical, then we must not say that history refers to the historical past in the same way as empirical descriptions refer to present reality.¹

If we apply Ricoeur's general theory of interpretation to this study, we could expect that images of the laity would emerge through giving high priority to the structure of narrativity, and to the apparent consciousness of time and space as expressed through poetry, prayer, epic and song. In fact, when interpreting different outlooks, whether they concern Zoroastrian cosmological and eschatological ideas or the classical-modernist approaches to progress, it may be useful to start by looking at the notions of time and space which are part of that particular view of the world.

One of the ways, then, of making sense of the role of the laity in the history of Zoroastrianism is to extrapolate from the idea that there are different ways of thinking about time and the location of people within it. Each chapter of this work refers to a different phase in the history, and arguably, each of these can be spoken about in terms of the different ways in which thinking about time and space has been approached.

'Horizons of expectation'

The means by which to describe the above-mentioned approaches is well expressed by the term *Erwartungshorizonten*, used by the German philosophers to describe the notion of 'horizons of expectation'.² Toulmin also uses this term in his account of *Cosmopolis*, where he implies that our horizons of expectation are determined, in part, by the way in which we imagine the universe to be organised.³ In other words, our expectations for the future, the changes we wish to make, and believe are possible to make, to the social order are shaped by what has gone before, by the various ways in which we make sense of the past. Toulmin uses the idea of horizons to describe the turning point at which we find ourselves at the beginning of a new millennium. Ideas about modernity, how it was formed, and why the Western imagination appears to have outgrown its general assumptions and world view, will fashion our historical foresight and determine the limits of the new social programme which we believe it is possible to construct. Our sense of cosmic order will shape the sense of order we give to our historical narratives. As Toulmin sets out in his account, we are 'post-modern' in the sense that we no longer share the suppositions that we are part of an ordered and progressive universe. The focus of our attention has shifted from the 'abstract laws of universal application' to an attempt to re-examine the particular, the local. J.F. Lyotard describes the world in which we live as: 'a social formation where under the impact of

¹ *Ibid.*, 361.

² Toulmin 1991: 1. For a discussion of this concept see Gadamer, in K. Baynes, J. Bohman, & T. McCarthy 1991: 339ff.

³ Toulmin 1991: 1-4.

secularising, democratising, computerising, and consumerising pressures the maps and statuses of knowledge are being re-drawn and re-described'.¹ It is from this novel vantage point that we interpret the world.

Gadamer uses the idea of horizons to make the point that we can only interpret history from within an already-existing position, using sources with which we are familiar, and in the light of things which we cannot forget. He rejects the Enlightenment claim to objective knowledge; in other words, the idea that knowledge can be freed from particular perspectives. Gadamer suggests, on the contrary, that it is precisely our prejudices, or pre-judgements which 'constitute the initial directedness of our ability to experience'.² If we allow that interpretation is only going to attempt approximation, that there is no such thing as a fully comprehensive text, then the interests guiding our investigation become important in their own right, as important, if not more so in Gadamer's view, than the interpretation of the content.³ An interpretation is not a reconstruction of what was intended by others, it becomes part of our understanding of things from within our own horizon. Such horizons are not closed to further understanding, or to changes which occur when we come to understand something new for the first time. Throughout this account of the laity, we come across moments when people have incorporated languages from the past into their present. Each time this happens a fusion takes place between the earlier account and the way in which it is conceptualised within the person's own horizon. In other words, the new language has been appropriated. A successful attempt to understand something which we previously did not, occurs as a result of what Gadamer calls a 'fusion of horizons' in which we assimilate what others have said into our own horizons.⁴ Our awareness of the horizons of others, for example those of classical modernists, enables us to give a critical account of their interpretations of the Zoroastrian material.

The 'fusion of horizons'

The ideas which I have outlined above allow for an investigation of the laity within the history of Zoroastrianism to be undertaken from a postmodern perspective, and involve the fusion of a variety of horizons, or rather sets of horizons. The most significant of these are the attempts by Zoroastrians themselves to understand their past, to reflect upon their own traditions. By this I mean that, at certain times during the history of the tradition, it is apparent that older materials have been assimilated into a new account, and that this process has necessarily involved some sort of fusion of horizons. Our account of Zoroastrian attempts at self-understanding will be shaped by at least two

¹ J.F. Lyotard in Jenkins 1991: 60.

² K. Baynes, J. Bohman, & T. McCarthy 1991: 320.

³ *Ibid* p. 332.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 337.

further sets of fusions; one of these is our own, and consists of our conceptualisations of the texts in question. In other words, what is the end result of our matching the words which we read with the concepts which we form? This process of working towards a meaningful interpretation will, in part, be undertaken in the light of another set of fusions: that of the assimilation of Zoroastrianism by orientalism, and, later, by classical modernism. I shall begin by outlining the perspective from which we, as postmoderns, begin our account; then I shall summarise the account given by classical modernism before, finally, giving an interpretation of the Zoroastrian accounts, that is, reflections within the tradition on its own past.

This first attempt to give an account which is from a postmodern, or, more specifically, critical-modern perspective, raises questions about the earlier, that is, classical modern attempt. By being aware of the differences between contemporary horizons and those of classical modernism, this latest attempt to understand the history of Zoroastrianism, builds on the successes and failures of that previous attempt. The main point of difference is contemporary awareness of the historical consciousness of classical modernism and the kinds of effects, or perhaps distortions, that such consciousness had on interpretation. I shall look back at the classical-modern view of the world from the point of view of critical modernism: that is, I have adopted certain modes of interpretation (outlined above) in preference to others.

There are a number of ideas which are distinctive about the classical-modern world view, for example the commitment to rationality, empirical knowledge and reason; the application of evolutionary ideas to cultural systems generally; notions of genetic origins, linearity and continuity; the reference to various privileged centres which make discourse Anglocentric or Eurocentric; the sense of grand narratives of truth, reason and science, and the whole Enlightenment project for human progress and reform. The modern world view extended evolutionist assumptions to religion. It was common in the nineteenth century, for example, to assume a progression from magic to religion. Religion was used to distinguish the rational from the non-rational, the modern from the pre-modern. In particular, non-Christian forms of religion were used in Western representations of non-Western worlds. As Edward Said has pointed out, this representation was as crucial to the West's self-image as it was to the creation of the world in which non-Western subjects have to live.¹ Protestantism diversified and flourished in modern nation-states, such as Britain and the Netherlands in the nineteenth century, and missionary activity amongst non-European peoples was an important feature of European expansion.

Recent, critical-modern views of the world have contrasted, sometimes strongly, with the classical-modern approach. In particular, Foucault's criticisms of the classical-modern understanding of ideas of genealogy and history are, in effect, rejections of this

¹ Said, 1991: *passim*.

kind of assimilation, and would include the assimilation of Zoroastrian religious ideas by orientalists such as I have alluded to in this work. They are also attempts to reshape our ideas about space, time, process and continuity. Foucault tells us what, in his view, genealogy is not. It does not: 'pretend to go back in time to restore an unbroken continuity that operates beyond the dispersion of forgotten things; its duty is not to demonstrate that the past actively exists in the present'.¹ While genealogy is constructive, and may be employed to make sense of the present through selections from the past, it is not a means by which to legitimate the present. In fact, Foucault sees genealogy as a de-legitimisation of the present. He refutes the idea that genealogy must search for the origins of things, that things are at their most perfect and essential at the moment of birth, that everything once had an original identity: 'What is found at the historical beginning of things is not the inviolable identity of their origin; it is the dissension of other things. It is disparity.'² Rather than trace the evolution of events, Foucault suggests that genealogy should attempt to isolate the different occasions when they occur, and define those moments when they are absent. It should look for them in those places where we would not expect to find them, in places which we may feel are without a sense of history, such as, for example, in sentiments, conscience and instincts. It is genealogy in this sense which can be applied to those themes which I have outlined as appearing, in varying degrees of prominence (and sometimes not at all), in an account of the history of Zoroastrianism. It is this type of genealogy which can be used to bridge the gap between the historical and the non-historical. It is also an example of the way in which various processes can help to change our horizons.

A general view of classical-modernist ideas about the world enables us better to understand the second fusion of horizons, those which have been accomplished by scholars of Iranian studies in their accounts of Zoroastrianism. Foucault's account of genealogy helps to demonstrate how the various accounts of Zoroastrianism I have mentioned contain elements which are distinctively modern in the classical-modern sense. In the first chapter of this study, I gave a critique of some of these accounts. My reason for doing this was because there is very little contemporaneous material with which to compare the ancient texts; interpretations are thus dependent to a great extent upon the philological studies of scholars of ancient Iranian languages. The small amount of information we have concerning dates, times and geographic locations comes from this source, which in the case of Sanskrit and Avestan first became a province of European learning in the mid to late eighteenth century. Various characteristics of this scholarship conform to some of the above-mentioned ideals of classical modernism, and more particularly of orientalism, in the sense that Said has described it. The techniques of early orientalists such as Anquetil du Perron and William Jones, in translation, grammar and

¹ Foucault 1996: 146.

² *Ibid.*, 142.

cultural analysis, became a tradition, and more specifically a methodology which enabled the study of these languages and cultures to be rationalised and given a scientific basis. The emergence of philology as a discipline is identified with modernism and, according to Said, provided a substitute for Christian supernaturalism. Citing Ernest Renan, Said writes: 'And what is modern mind ... if not rationalism, criticism, liberalism [all of which] were founded on the same day as philology?'¹

During this century, orientalists have traced much of their intellectual authority back to that of the early orientalists, and in so doing pass on both the riches and the limitations of many of their ideas. I have drawn on several of the grand narratives which have influenced the study of Zoroastrianism in the last fifty years, notably those of Dumézil, with respect to his theory of the tripartition of the Indo-Iranian pantheon and society, Moulton and Zaehner. With reference to the work of Moulton and Zaehner, I have shown that, in order to analyse the material, they have brought it within their own conceptual 'horizons'. That which they find is interpreted from within the framework of their respective Protestant/Catholic perspectives and at the same time related to a traditional account of the religion itself. While both accounts recognise the distinctiveness of Zoroastrian cosmology, there is a tendency, nevertheless, to view the way in which the religion developed as part of a wider process of the development of religion generally, from the primitive or magical to the ethical and moral.

While Boyce is critical of early orientalist interpretations of the religion, much of her work focuses upon ideas of continuity, and, in this respect, can be associated with classical modernism. In particular, she has looked to the oral traditions, as preserved in the living faith, to trace those elements of religious practice which go back to distant times. Broadly speaking, Boyce argues that the Avestan and Pahlavi books uphold and remain true to the teachings of the prophet, as expressed in the *Gāthas*, and that despite the fact that these texts became inaccessible to the followers of the faith, their testimony was preserved in the rituals and observances which continued to be practised down to the nineteenth century. The confusion which arose thereafter Boyce attributes to the 'ruthless self-confidence of nineteenth-century scholars and missionaries'.² Boyce's view of the cohesiveness of religious continuity is strengthened by the fact that she argues her case, as it were, from both ends of the spectrum. She uses evidence gained from living Zoroastrianism to illuminate ancient practice, as well as drawing on ancient practice in order to shed light upon twentieth-century Zoroastrian religious phenomena. This account is constructed from a wide range of empirical evidence, documentation, archival and archaeological material. The narrative element, or the construction of the plot could

¹ Said 1991: 132.

² Boyce 1979: 225.

perhaps be said to centre around the figure of the prophet.¹ It is this element which gives Boyce's account its sense of temporality.

In recent works, some scholars, of whom I have cited Maneck, have argued against the idea of continuity, in terms of doctrine, ritual and observance within Zoroastrianism. Yet at the same time, Maneck admits that 'certainly some continuity does exist or there would be no religion at all to talk about'.² Likewise, the nineteenth-century text of the *Ātaš nu Gīt* — its structures, rituals and the themes to which it refers — did not spring out of nowhere, and so we get back to the question of continuity and what this means. The term 'continuity' is often expressed in direct opposition to that of change, but I would suggest that the idea of uninterrupted sequence or unbroken succession does not in any case imply changelessness, or a state of hyper-stasis. It is possible, even necessary, that continuity can encompass change, providing that there is something which links the different parts of the sequence together. This is where the concept of genealogy is perhaps more appropriate than that of continuity. A genealogy which traces themes of lay priestly relations, orality and temporality, ethnic and religious identities and cosmological and eschatological ideas could support the continuity thesis without assuming a state of changelessness.

The ideas outlined above establish a position from which we can attempt to give an account of the third set of fusions of horizons. This involves looking at the material which belongs properly to the Zoroastrian tradition. The texts which I have discussed in this study bear witness to various moments when the Zoroastrian tradition has given a new account of itself, drawing on older material. What we have continually to ask ourselves is where our conceptual account is coming from, how are we making the text speak to us. In other words, when we read passages from the *Yašts*, what is our process of concept formation? Are we drawing on ready-made contexts in which to insert this material? Is our understanding of a term fixed to a concept which derives from our own particular horizons, and with which we are already familiar, for example 'priest'? or, if it is not a term which is meaningful through our own experience, as for example 'sacrifice', then upon whose account are we basing our conceptualisation of this term? The task here is not to try and reproduce the concepts which were in the authors' minds when they constructed their account, but to make the text meaningful to ourselves. This can be done by giving an account of the conceptual horizons of the language, combined with whatever extra-linguistic evidence we may have such as social relations, practices, historical events etc. The paucity of material for the early period means that when we read fragments of texts belonging the distant past, our conceptual account is extremely limited, nor is it helped in any way by sociological evidence, of which there is virtually none. Once Zoroastrian texts move into historical time, we are able to look at the ways in which these

¹ See p.56.

² Maneck 1997: 8.

accounts deal with their own history, how they effect the fusion of horizons; we are able, increasingly, to place their accounts within a wider context which is both linguistic and sociological.

As far as the early texts are concerned, the *Yašts*, and the *Niyāyiš*, I have argued that it is not possible to talk about these sources within a historical framework. There is no supporting evidence to help us determine whether or not people were participating in religious life in the way they are described as doing according to these texts, and I have suggested that there are various reasons why we should not simply assume that they were. First, the characters, events and religious activity described in these texts are presented in an idealised way. In the *Yašts*, the laity are drawn from an elite group, the mythical and legendary heroes of the Indo-Iranian and Zoroastrian traditions, and are described as making offerings to the gods in return for rewards. In what appear to be the oldest parts of the *Niyāyiš*, the material is reminiscent of, and in parts identical to, verses contained in certain *Yašts*. In both sets of texts we see an *idealised* priesthood performing *idealised* rituals. Second, when attempting to give some account of lay religious life, it should be possible to give some idea of the meaningfulness of various acts. However, the idea of meaning is extremely elusive; we cannot tell, for example, what might have been the changes in meaning as these texts ceased to be understood linguistically by all except priests. Also, perceptions of meaning are likely to have changed from the time when these prayers and hymns became part of the tradition which they represent to the time when they were committed to writing. By then, the people to whom this tradition belonged were living in a different time and place, were subject to the influences of different cultures and spoke a different language. Here we have an example of a fusion of horizons; that is, we know that older material was being encompassed within a new account, thus creating new meanings for the older language through which religious ideas had previously been expressed.

Finally, as is characteristic of oral texts, the *Yašts* and the prayers had probably been developing over a long period of time prior to being written down. During the time that they were in oral transmission, it appears that Zoroastrian material was incorporated into an existing corpus of texts. However, we can only speculate as to when different sections were added. While we can point to images and structures, it is not possible to say much more: these sources are not primary in the sense of giving us an unproblematic representation of history as it really was. Nor are we justified in imposing contemporary categories on to the long distant past, for traditions are lively and dynamic and they have a way of adapting themselves to different circumstances: throughout the long history of Zoroastrian practice there are likely always to have been historical variations and regional diversity. Until Sasanian times we do not have the evidence to substantiate the idea of a Zoroastrian laity belonging to a coherent belief system or theology, and even then there is little indication of the way in which lay people understood such concepts.

Images of the laity have emerged from previous accounts of the *Yašts*, and in order to build on these accounts, it has been necessary to open up new lines of enquiry. The central theme of the *Yašts* is worship and, in particular, it seems, worship which involves sacrifice. In the field of Iranian studies, this form of worship has been examined within a particular context, it has been discussed mainly with reference to the teachings of the prophet. The work of anthropologists, on the other hand, locates sacrifice within a wide range of contexts. Those accounts upon which I have drawn open up new possibilities with respect to the *Yašts*, they suggest that we differentiate between gift, offering and sacrifice; that we explore notions of reciprocity within tribal societies; that we look at our texts with reference to ideas about acts of communication between the terrestrial and celestial worlds; that we think about sacrifice in terms of a cycle of cattle raids, a world of violent action, contests and battles, such as may have existed in India and Iran during the pre-classical age, and which came, eventually, to be sublimated and controlled by ritual; finally, we are invited to view sacrifice as a means by which intergenerational continuity between males is produced and reproduced. The result of these investigations reinforces the limitations of what it is possible to say with respect to the *Yašt* material. We find that however the plot may be constructed, it is not authorised by the fragmented material contained in the texts, nor does the material itself give intelligible meaning to the plot. We are thus unable to place these accounts within a socio-historical context: we have no knowledge of the economic status of the people portrayed in the *Yašts*, nor do the texts provide us with detailed descriptions of ritual, which would help to differentiate between the visual, verbal, spatial and temporal dimensions of the sacrifice. While it is possible that increased ritualisation of the sacrifice resulted, eventually, in its control or sublimation, we do not know why this happened, if it did, within the context of Iranian religious practice. We have no way of interpreting sacrifice with respect to gender since we do not know the nature of kinship traditions within ancient Iranian society.

In view of the difficulties of interpreting these texts, we should not attempt to draw them into a wider process. In other words, we should not try to make the characters, events, gods, rituals and notions of morality/amorality described in these texts belong to a larger system. The most we can say is that they provide short narrative structures which allow for ritual events to take place within a world which is substantially constituted by both good and evil. The images of cosmic process are fragmentary in the *Yašts*; the distinguishing feature being that there is no clear division between myth, legend, history or cosmology. Their value, for the purposes of this study, is the way in which the language of these texts, the images, themes, and structures, is successively incorporated into new sets of horizons. Each time this happens, the account becomes more accessible to us in terms of meaning.

The first example of a fusion of horizons concerns the assimilation of older material into the *Niyāyiš*. This is done in such a way as to give these prayers a structure within

which a more encompassing sense of time and space can be expressed. To a great extent, in the *Niyāyiš* we see *Yašt* material reformed and brought within a system which is clearly Zoroastrian: these texts include passages from the *Gāthās*, and have been arranged in a way which is characteristic of later Zoroastrian religious texts. Beyond looking at their structure, there is not much more we can say about the prayers with reference to understanding the role of the laity. Gadamer would ask us to look at how the account came about; in other words, what were the questions that people were asking themselves which produced the statements, or the contents, of our texts. It is at this point, that he suggests we begin our attempt at understanding: 'The description of inner structure and coherence of a given text and the mere repetition of what the author says are not yet real understanding. One has to bring his (the author's) speaking back to life again, and for this one has to become familiar with the realities about which the text speaks.'¹ This statement draws attention once more to the fact that, where these texts are concerned, there is little sense of the reality Gadamer is referring to, a conceptual reality which is the result of a 'successful' fusion, or process, by which the language of the text can be interpreted by us in a way which is meaningful.

The dualistic imagery of the *Yašts* is maintained in the epic narrative of the *Šāhnāme*, with the heroic deeds of righteous Iranians at war against the wicked *Tūrānians*. The same narrative structure of petition, offering and reward occurs in the *Šāhnāme* as in the older texts; however, there are changes to the way in which this worship takes place which help to locate the later part of the epic in historical time. For example, instead of open-air sacrificial worship, kings and princes are portrayed as making donations to the sacred fires established in fire temples. Often, offerings are made in thanksgiving, that is, after as well as before an event. By late Achaemenian times, society was relatively settled, princes owned not only cattle but gold, silver and jewels, all of which could be given as gifts to the fire temple. Priests responsible for the maintenance of the temple fires no doubt encouraged such donations, and so we find a diversity of wealth, and a structured priestly hierarchy. Here we are able to give a Ricoeurian account in the sense that the narrative plot merges with certain extra-linguistic (beyond the language of the text itself), socio-historical evidence. In other words, the fictional narrative is authorised, to an extent, by the historical narrative.

The temporal frame within which we see lay people represented according to the ancient material does not distinguish between celestial and terrestrial spheres. The idea of cosmological wholeness is represented through the double role of various religious acts, objects, and substances. The wearing of the *kustī*, for example, reflects the relationship between man and the divine: the cord itself possesses agency in the sense that it has the power to protect the wearer against evil; also, investiture with the *kustī* occurs at the time

¹ K. Baynes, J. Bohman, & T. McCarthy 1991: 330.

of a person's maturity, while at the same time possibly defining and declaring that state of maturity. The short prayers were likely to have been understood as *māthric* utterances, pronounced for their inherent power, and the *Ahuna vairya* was thought to be, literally, a weapon against evil. The properties of *gōmēz*, an earthly substance, is associated both with the *Ahuna vairya* prayer, and *Sraoša*; thus the substance, the words and the divinity join together to protect the worshipper from harm and to aid the cosmic battle against evil. In the *Niyāyiš*, images of the sun and the moon portray them as powerful agents, enabling the preservation of cosmic order. In both the prayers and the *Yašts* there is the idea that man contributes to the order of the universe by repeating the cycle of petition, followed by offering, and reward: individuals perform religious acts which bring certain kinds of rewards from the gods (cattle, water, pasture, healthy progeny); in turn, these rewards contribute to the cosmological process. Through this interaction between man and god, goodness is brought into the world.

It is not until the Sasanian period in Zoroastrian history that the texts associated with that era convey a stronger sense of temporality. The Pahlavi books reflect a major fusion of horizons in the sense that, as is the case with the *Ātaš nu Gīt*, they bear witness to three different 'times': the ancient period, in so far as they are representative of older, Avestan material; the Sasanian period, when Zoroastrianism was the dominant religious system of a large empire; and finally, the post-Islamic period, during which time the religion was reduced to minority status. It was in the latter period that the majority of the Pahlavi texts, as we know them, were compiled.¹ Within the temporal frame provided by the texts of the classical period, whether narrative, theological, ritualistic or poetic, the actions of lay people are given religious significance as part of a cosmic process of restoration. Implicit in the various accounts of creation is the dualistic imagery of conflict and resolution: the perfect, static state of the *mēnog* world followed by the attack of the Evil Spirit, after which time the world enters its material, or *gētīg*, state. The theme of eschatological renewal becomes more prominent in the period after the Islamic conquest of Iran and is reflected in the preoccupation with ritual prescriptions concerning death and life after death contained in the *Dādestān ī Dēnīg*. It has been suggested by A. Williams that the theological notion of the three times appears as a working narrative structure in the *Qissa ye Sanjān*.² I have developed this idea with reference to the later *Qissa ye Zartoštian e Hindustān*, and suggested that it appears, in its most recent form, in the *Ātaš nu Gīt*. In all these texts, the idea of restoration, or renewal, is heightened by the fact that since their arrival in India, the Parsis were a diaspora group who had lost their autonomy and their homeland, and felt threatened by the majority religions of Hinduism and Islam.

A discussion about the Zoroastrian conception of temporality brings into focus those classical-modern interpretations of Zoroastrianism which do not allow for historical

¹ See p.9.

² Suggested by A. Williams, see p.120-1.

change. What is striking about the Zoroastrian texts examined in this work is that they place individuals within the context of both social and wider cosmological relations. In this way, their portrayal of social relations is inseparable from that of theological issues. Thus, the individuals and their activities and statuses may vary from period to period, but they are still represented as belonging to an encompassing narrative of cosmological process. Similarly, the 'community' is conceived of in various ways, yet it too seems to belong to an encompassing narrative of cosmological process. Of special significance for the *Ātaš nu Git*, is that various theological, sociological and cosmological ideas are incorporated into the same song. The distinctive, holistic character of Zoroastrian temporality is somewhat resistant to interpretations which seek to abstract and prioritise particular aspects at the expense of others. By this I mean that issues relating to individuals and society, to priests and lay people might be thought of as belonging to categories such as theology, sociology or anthropology. The only way in which we can explore the texts, from the point of view of these disciplines, is by abstracting the relevant references from their context, and constructing a new account. In this way, for example, Dumézil and Lincoln approach the subject of the Indo-Iranian cosmos from a sociological point of view, abstracting notions of the tripartition of the pantheon, and celestial sovereigns, respectively. Zaehner and Boyce talk about supernatural concepts, in particular the deities of the ancient Iranian pantheon, in a category of their own, separate from the discussion of historical events. When presented in this way, such issues can be made to appear persistent and changeless. When looking at Zoroastrian texts, however, we are continually reminded of the fact that while imagery and language are in continuous use this does not imply a continuity of meaning.¹

Although texts which were passed down in oral transmission may have remained more conservative than the societies to which they belonged, we do not know if this was the case, or when or how changes in religious practice took place. Notions of cosmology, theology, and eschatology can be made to appear changeless when they are treated separately from sociological issues, but if, conceptually, the texts themselves do not distinguish between theological and sociological issues, then it does damage to them to abstract from them in this way. Effectively, this treatment of the texts denies that social relations are theological, or that they may have had theological significance.

Interpretive techniques

The question arises as to how we are to make sense of material without recourse to our own categories. How should we attempt to explain theological and sociological issues which occur in texts belonging to a society where these distinctions may have no

¹ See p.48, where I have cited Dumézil (1948), *Jupiter Mars and Quirinus*, IV; Lincoln (1981), *Priests, Warriors and Cattle*; Boyce (1975) *History* Vol.I; Zaehner (1961) *The Dawn and Twilight of Zoroastrianism*.

meaning? Charles Taylor makes the point, along the same lines as Gadamer, that in order to be able to explain such issues, we have first to grasp the self-understanding of the subjects or agents themselves. This does not mean simply to describe people in their own terms, for this would entail using terms which have an exact translation in other languages and/or historical milieus. It is clear, for example, that we cannot tell what people understood themselves to be doing when they performed the rituals we have identified as sacrifice according to the *Yašts*.

Broadly speaking, there are two positions commonly adopted by those seeking to explain the beliefs and/or practices of people belonging to societies other than their own (which, according to Taylor, both fall into the trap of ethnocentrism). The first is the classical-modernist approach which would tend towards ethnocentrism in the sense that an understanding of other cultures would be derived from within the framework of the person's own, perhaps largely European, culture. With reference to early anthropological accounts of religious practice in 'primitive' societies, this approach would take the view that magic, for example, was the forerunner of modern science and technology. Magic was primitive people's attempt to do what we do with science, namely to understand and control the environment. The major difference being that we do it rationally and, therefore, with greater success. On the grounds that activities are essentially the same, and can be judged by the same standards, we can educate others into doing things better. Macaulay's 'Minute on Education' and Wilson's diatribe against 'fire-worshippers' provide us with examples of ethnocentrism at its most extreme. Macaulay's civilising mission is quite clearly undertaken with a view to correcting the self-understandings of the Indian peoples by substituting the values of the dominant culture for those of the less dominant. Terms such as history, morality, and neutrality are used to describe, and so dismiss, the value of Indian literature. Wilson talks about the erroneous theology and philosophy of the *Avesta*, without any attempt to understand what meaning such terms might have held for the Parsis themselves.

The second position is the one adopted by those who hold that certain practices or rituals belonging to another society have no corresponding activity in our own and are, therefore, beyond our means of interpretation. Magical rituals, for example, may have a symbolic or expressive function rather than one which is thought to be instrumental. The point that Taylor makes is that both approaches are ethnocentric, characteristic of our society, in that they assume that certain activities performed by people in other societies belong to one category or the other. The pre-seventeenth-century European world-view would not have distinguished between an understanding of what reality is like, in a rational sense, and an attempt to integrate or be in tune with it, nor are such distinctions part of the self-understanding of other societies/cultures.¹ The way in which Taylor

¹ Taylor 1995, 128.

suggests we should understand the differences we find is by identifying two possibilities: the fusion and the segregation of the cognitive on the one hand and the symbolic or integrative on the other. In this way we are able to describe procedures which can be applied both to our own society and to those we need to understand. This language of 'perspicuous contrast ... forces us to see the separation of knowledge and attunement to the cosmos as something we have brought about, one possibility among others, and not as the inescapable framework of all thought. We are always in danger of seeing our ways of acting and thinking as the only conceivable ones.'¹

An understanding of these categories within our own tradition of interpretation should lead to a better understanding of how they are used in other societies where, for example, theology and sociology may not be distinct and autonomous zones of life. This interpretative view can be applied not only to ideas of temporality in the Zoroastrian texts which have been discussed, but also to our understanding of certain aspects of the oral testimony of chapter four of this study.

The lay response to modernity

On a slightly more sociological note, it seems likely that ideas about temporality which exist in the Zoroastrian texts, which may be expressed poetically or by means of the structural themes to which I have drawn attention, have been sustained to some extent by the respective roles of priest and laity, and the relationship which existed between them. Representations of this relationship show priests as the preservers of the tradition; it was priests who memorised the sacred texts and accompanying rituals, and who interpreted and taught them. When oral texts were committed to writing, it was priests who were the copyists, and who, after the Islamic conquest of Iran, strove to ensure that the religion survived. Their role seems, generally speaking, to have been to teach, perpetuate and preserve. The *Dādestān ī Dēnīg* stresses the importance of the correct performance of priestly ritual. Question 44, in particular, refers to the various functions of priests and their disciples. In the *Ātaš nu Gīt* it says that the person who takes a *nahn* will bring merit to the whole *tolah*, or priestly group. The conservative role played by specialists, the priests, ensured that poetic, thematic and structural forms were reproduced. At least seven centuries separate texts such as the *Bundahišn* and the *Selections of Zādsparam* from the *Qissa-ye Sanjān* and the *Qissa-ye Zartoštian- e Hindustān*. They are separated not only by time, but also by language, culture and geographic location, yet it is possible to trace certain genealogies in terms of cosmological ideas which are common to all these texts.

It seems also to have been part of the role of priests to sanction new material which conformed to the established poetic/structural form. Thus, over a period of some two

¹ *Ibid.*, 129.

hundred years, the *Ātaš nu Gīt* has acquired the status of a semi-religious text in the sense that its performance is commissioned by both priestly and lay families alike, and it may be performed within the precincts of the *agiāry*. The *Ātaš nu Gīt* is unique in that, as a lay composition, it shows us the way in which the laity is able to express itself within the framework of what appears to have been a conservative priestly tradition. It is not a popular text, in the sense of being an alternative to, or deviation from, the accepted religious system. On the other hand, it does not seek to replicate priestly texts. Although, in a sense, the functions of the *Ātaš nu Gīt* are to teach, perpetuate and preserve, those functions are reformed and adapted so that the song makes sense with respect to the lives of lay people. The song highlights various aspects of religious life which are normally ascribed to the priestly sphere and shows how they are exploited and brought into the lives of the laity.

At the turn of the eighteenth century the theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher talked about the theologising role of the religious community; by this he meant that human beings are actively involved in the construction of religious meaning. Religion is a continuous, historical process which is not perpetuated by religious dogma or the veneration of sacred writings, but by participation and dynamic activity. In his *Speeches*, Schleiermacher questioned the distinction between priest and laity which, amongst his German Protestant audience, had been blamed as the source of so many evils; he suggested that there is no such distinction between people, only between office and function. Thus 'Every man is a priest, in so far as he draws others to himself in the field he has made his own and can show himself master in; every man is a layman, in so far as he follows the skill and direction of another in the religious matters with which he is less familiar.'¹ These theological ideas, albeit belonging to the early Romantic school, draw attention to areas of lay life with respect to Zoroastrianism which have not yet been investigated.

Since the Zoroastrian religious texts are of priestly origin, and because until modern times priests were regarded as the repositories of knowledge and wisdom, the role of the laity has often been overlooked by those studying the religion. At other times, changes in religious practice have been attributed to the laity, and have been seen as deviations from priestly orthodoxy. The laity has been accused, variously, of reverting to the ancient Iranian religion which pre-dated the teachings of the prophet, of heretical beliefs, and of popularising elements of the religion in order to suit their own needs or as a result of ignorance. Because the languages of the *Avesta* have not been understood for so many centuries, it is assumed that the laity has long ceased to have any influence over the theological development of the religion, if indeed they ever did have. It is also assumed that since the laity did not have access to literary texts (unless translated into the

¹ Schleiermacher 1958, 153.

vernacular) their knowledge of the religion can only have been partial, at best. These assumptions do not take into account the part played by the oral transmission of texts (once the only means by which the religion became known to the laity), which is still very much part of Zoroastrian religious life. The text of the *Ātaš nu Gīt*, although in written form, is a characteristically oral account. It shows how lay people adapted (rather than popularised) what might be considered predominantly priestly aspects of religious life.

Whereas priestly rituals preserve the role of men in religious observance, the song establishes a role for women; although priests are referred to in the song, women play the dominant part, they are the performers (both the leaders and the chorus) and it is they who commission the song, thereby bringing merit and good fortune to the household. Women make all the domestic arrangements for whatever celebration is taking place in the house, they provide the ritual objects (the *sēs*) which accompany the singers. It is the 'ladies of the house', the married women, who are accorded the highest status, since marriage results in the birth of children and so ensures the continuity of a minority, non-proselytising faith. Whereas the purification of the fires for the creation of an *Ātaš Bahrām* is a priestly task, as is the tending of the sacred fire within the *agiāry*, this whole process becomes, as it were, laicised through the song: a performance of the song brings the *Ātaš Bahrām* into people's homes. The central priestly ritual is the performance of the *yasna*. This service is a ritual re-enactment of the creation of the world through the identification of ritual implements used in the service with the spiritual and material creations. By means of the song, which represents a social re-creation of society, this re-creation is translated into lay terms. Both the *yasna* and the song describe the microcosm which is representative of the macrocosm: in the case of the *yasna*, this refers to the cosmos; in the case of the *Ātaš nu Gīt*, to the community as a whole. In a sense, the song represents the domestication of the priestly ritual of the *agiāry*.

It can be seen that while the structural themes within the song conform to certain traditional forms, sanctioned and perpetuated by priests, the content of the song shows the way in which the laity contributed both to the shaping and the preservation of the Zoroastrian religious tradition.

Ideas about socio-religious identity are brought out strongly in the song, the naming of people and their professions suggests a gathering together of the community, no-one is left out, and no-one from outside is invited in; hence the chorus: 'O friends let us go to the fire ...'. It is the long roll calls which, amongst other things, give the *Ātaš nu Gīt* a strong sociological content and enable us to start distinguishing between representations and realities. The names, places and events referred to in the song, when substantiated by historical evidence, give the song its historicity; without them, it would be little different from a *Yašt*. In other words, the names would have no relevance, we would not be able to distinguish between the mythical and the real. There is no mention of Navsari as such,

so we would have no idea of the location of the sacred fire; the dispute between the Bhagaria and Sanjāna priests would have no historical significance.

A more rigorous sociological notion is that of democratisation, and it is through the roll calls that we gain a strong impression of the democratic character of the building of the *Ātaš Bahrām*. Democratisation, in the sense of the erosion of a formal social hierarchy, is perhaps one of modernity's major constitutive processes, and there are various elements in the song which indicate that the society from which the 1879 publication emerged was part of such a process. By democratisation I mean that which A. de Toqueville referred to as social equality, rather than intellectual or economic equality: a society in which all professions, titles and honours are accessible, at least in principle, to everybody.¹ Although ideas of social hierarchy are expressed in the song through the different payments and rewards which are listed as being given to people drawn from different professions, we are not given to suppose that social divisions are rigid and unable to be transgressed. People from the different professions and trades in which Parsis were engaged, including priests and astrologers, play a part in the construction of the fire. As far as the song is concerned, there appears to be no status differentiation.

With reference to American and European societies in the mid-nineteenth century, de Tocqueville maintained that industrial and commercial activity would be unlikely to re-establish the type of aristocracy which had been known in the past. Moreover, the inequalities in wealth brought about by commercialisation could be reconciled, in his view, with the tendency of modern societies towards equality. The reasons he gave for this were that commercial and industrial wealth was more mobile, and unlikely to enable families to maintain a privileged position throughout succeeding generations. At the same time, wealth acquired by means of commercialisation was likely to be too precarious to form the foundation for a sustained, hierarchical structure. This general view is borne out by the fluctuations in the distribution of wealth of the Parsi merchants and businessmen during the first half of the nineteenth century, the result of a variety of factors ranging from the demise of the opium trade with China, the improvement in communications with the invention of electric telegraph, to the outbreak of the American Civil War.²

This type of 'modern' society is portrayed in the *Ātaš nu Git* by means of the roll call of wealthy merchants and business men. It is clear from the song that these people had risen to prominence by virtue of the particular business in which they were successfully engaged; the song goes on to say that in each case these men 'kept their good name' by founding an *agiāry*. In other words, the giving of righteous charity brings merit both to the individual, to the community and on a cosmological level. Such meritorious acts justify the wealth which may be accumulated by an individual as a result of trade and

¹ Aron 1965; 187,188.

² See p.125.

profit.¹ This characteristically Zoroastrian view does not accord with de Tocqueville's ideas about equality, in which he places materialism in opposition to spiritualism:

It must be acknowledged that equality, which brings great benefits into the world, nevertheless suggests to men ... some very dangerous propensities ... it lays open the soul to an inordinate love of material gratification. The greatest advantage of religion is to inspire diametrically contrary principles. There is no religion which does not place the object of man's desires above and beyond the treasures of earth, and which does not naturally raise his soul to regions far above those of the senses.²

Here we are reminded of Judaeo-Christian notions of sacred and profane, material and spiritual: a world view which associates piety with poverty, and which is quite contrary to the Zoroastrian celebration of all things earthly and material, which, far from being renounced, will one day be restored to their former, perfect state. The fact that modern processes, such as that of democratisation, did not run contrary to Zoroastrian theological ideas served to strengthen the religion's vitality in the face of modern change.

In its structure and themes, the *Ātaš nu Git* provides a classical, poetic account of certain aspects of Zoroastrian religious life. Inserted into this account we find a distinctively modern social process, democratisation. As a result, there emerge in the song what could be said to be rival conceptions of time and space. First, there are those which conform to Zoroastrian ideas of temporality as portrayed in Structure B of the song: the process of the three times, *bundahišn*, *gumēzišn*, and *wizārišn*; the conflict between good and evil as referred to by the reference to *garath bhander*, and *garodman* respectively; the structural theme of petition, offering and reward; and notions of time which are characteristic of texts which begin as oral compilations and are passed down in oral transmission. In this last respect, the *Ātaš nu Git* is unique in showing both a fluidity which allows for additional material, and a structure which ensures that certain parts of the song remain unchanged.

Interwoven with characteristically Zoroastrian notions of time and space, are those which are more secular in character, and which conform to those classical-modern conceptions identified by Benedict Anderson in which deep divisions were created between past and present (see p.58). Anderson outlines the various ways in which these divisions were imprinted upon people's consciousness. In particular, he outlines the effect of the creation of three institutions: the census, the map, and the museum. Between them, these institutions defined the colonial dominion, its subjects, its boundaries, its religions and languages, in a 'totalizing, classificatory grid'.³ In India, religious identities were gradually replaced by racial identities in the census categories. For example, Hindus remained as a separate category until the census of 1871, and Parsis until the census of 1901, where they appeared alongside Bengalis, Burmese, and Tamils, within the broader

¹ See p.95, n.5.

² R.D. Heffner (ed) 1956: 152.

³ Anderson 1991:170.

category of 'Tamils and Other Natives of India'.¹ The evidence of the song shows that amongst Parsis themselves, however, the question of religious identity seems to have gained in significance during the nineteenth century, as demonstrated by the proliferation of *agiārysts* which were founded during this time. While (for reasons I have already given) there was an incentive for wealthy Parsis to sponsor charitable foundations, these did not have to be religious. The fact that so many *agiārysts* and *dakhmes* were founded, as well as schools and hospitals, points to a heightened rather than diminished sense of religious identity.

Some of the terms and ideas which Anderson uses to describe the emergence of the nation state can be applied to the ways in which the Parsi community in the nineteenth century had begun to define itself. First is the idea of a 'community' in the sense of a group of people who, despite their various differences and inequalities, think of themselves as a homogenous group. This is expressed in the song through the communal voice of the chorus, which works with the individual voice of the leader to demonstrate various aspects of the same community, while at the same time giving the impression of a unified whole. The second idea is that the 'community is 'limited' in the sense that it has defined boundaries. The song looks to Iran for the roots of the ethno-religious community to which it refers and it shows an awareness of its history in India through reference to various events. It also looks to the modern community, which it understands in terms of its relations with the surrounding, majority religious and cultural communities. Finally, the community is 'imagined' in the sense that, despite its minority status, its members will never meet or know most of their fellow members; they exist only as images of their communality, and in the style in which they are imagined. Thus, for example, the Iranian community is shaped more by the imaginings of those who live in India than by information about that community which emanates from Iran itself. The song can be seen quite properly as a kind of fusion, in which distinct Zoroastrian conceptions of self-identity are present; what we might call classical Zoroastrian and, more recognisably, secular and modern.

This fusion in the song, the interpretation of social change within classical-Zoroastrian terms, can be extended to a wider sociological fusion: the impact of modern processes, such as those of classical rationalism and democratisation, on the socio-religious structure of Parsi society in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Thus, the song describes an almost seamless integration of the traditional and the modern.

A more complex story emerges from the other sources upon which I have drawn; one in which there is debate and reflection, a wide dissemination of religious ideas, and certain intercultural misunderstandings under modern conditions. While the song shows the resilience of the Parsi community through the way in which Western processes are

¹ Anderson 1991:165.

incorporated into religious life, the reverse is the case when it comes to theological disputes in a rationalist idiom. There were various reasons why, in the nineteenth century, Parsi religious leaders found themselves on unfamiliar ground and unable to defend themselves in the face of Western criticism. In general, these had to do with the particular expectations of the West in its quest to discover the East. Also, as far as Zoroastrianism was concerned, there was the encounter of a predominantly oral, lay religious tradition with one which was essentially literary.

Early orientalist scholars, in particular William Hyde, had embellished the romantic image of Zoroaster which had grown out of accounts of classical Greek authors. Hyde's account portrayed the Zoroastrian religion in a way which would be favoured by Christianity; according to him, the prophet had not only instructed Pythagoras but had prophesied about Christ, and preached a pure monotheism, with Mithra and Fire appearing as minor entities. When the *Avesta* was translated for the first time by Anquetil du Perron, the picture appeared rather different from that which had been imagined: not only were there pantheons of gods, but also their demon counterparts. Moreover, the texts did not contain the expected abstract philosophy, but were full of ritual prescriptions. Upon further investigation, it was found that ritual was indeed a focal part of religious life. This image did not fit in with European scholarly preconceptions: priestly explanations were dismissed as being based upon ignorance, and a process began whereby the religion, in terms of doctrine, was re-modelled by European scholars according to their interpretations of those texts which they had translated.

Another process which began in the early nineteenth century was the translation of Zoroastrian religious texts into Gujarati. These texts were made more accessible to the Parsi laity than ever before with the advent of the Parsi printing press. By 1826 the whole of the *Yasna*, *Visperad* and *Vendidād* had been translated into Gujarati, and by 1863 Gujarati grammars of both the Avestan and Pahlavi languages had been published. That women were likely to have been literate has been established by the fact that instructions to the female performers of the *Ātaš nu Gī* were written into the text, which itself required a considerable amount of deciphering, due to the artificial lengthening of the words. Thus by the time the song was published in 1879, Zoroastrian religious texts were no longer the sole preserve of priests and, in theory, could be read by lay people.

Despite the accessibility of religious texts, however, Parsi priests and laymen were unable to take part in the theological debate which was instigated by the Reverend John Wilson nor to answer his questions concerning the Zoroastrian faith. This suggests that the questions posed by him were unanswerable from within the conceptual horizons of the Zoroastrian tradition at that time. There are various reasons why this may have been the case.

It seems that print was not a medium through which the Parsi laity expected to learn about, and reflect upon, religious matters at the time when missionaries such as Wilson

began their investigations. This may have been because the way in which the laity assimilated the beliefs, rituals and observances that constituted religious life was still largely a matter of oral transmission. It is likely too, that the above-mentioned liturgical texts were associated with priestly ritual rather than viewed as being informative. In fact, the modern Orthodox (as opposed to Reformist) position holds that the *Avesta* should be approached as a rite rather than a doctrine. In common with many of those engaged in missionary projects, Wilson was steeped in philology and linguistics in order to be able to translate, and refute, the texts in question. Thus, his investigation of Zoroastrian religious life was firmly text-based, and wholly referential to Christian dogma. Moreover, his agenda was to convert Parsis, as belonging to a non-modern religion, to Christianity. What we see then, is people attempting to answer questions which they themselves have not been posing, and for which they do not have the conceptual resources to answer; in other words, the forced absorption of the Zoroastrian tradition into a wholly different set of horizons.

From the time that English became the language of culture and education amongst the Parsi community in Bombay, we can see that a certain fusion had occurred between the Zoroastrian world view and that of classical modernism. Throughout the nineteenth century, we are made aware, increasingly, of the democratisation of the religion in the sense that people are making decisions about their own religious lives. The changes in religious views which had been brought about by the Refomists, the 'young class' to which Nauroji referred, had been at the instigation of the laity rather than priests. This movement was the culmination of a process which began with the rise of the merchant class in the eighteenth century, when the influence of the priesthood had begun to decline.

English was the language of the colonial nation and the prosperity of the Parsi community had been due, in part, to the way in which the colonial project had taken shape in India; with the adoption of English, came the absorption of certain classical-modern ideas. One of the consequences of this process for Parsi religious life was the fragmentation of orthodoxy (by which I mean the accepted views of the time), and at the same time a flowering or renaissance of religious life as represented by the number of religious institutions and buildings which were founded during this time of prosperity.

The final assimilation which has occurred within the Zoroastrian fusions of horizons is the absorption of classical modernism by twentieth century-Parsis. This fusion becomes apparent particularly in relation to the lives of lay people who, it seems, have had to wrestle with the ideas which took hold of the temporal imagination of the religion two hundred years ago. They have had to find a way of fusing these ideas with their own horizons of expectation; whatever it is that makes them feel they can be active members of the living faith today. Accounts based on the oral testimony of Parsis living in Bombay demonstrate how this process has evolved, with varying degrees of success. For example, in Dr. Mullan's account of her life as a doctor there is clearly a divide

between that which she regards as scientific knowledge, her medical expertise, and her recourse to prayer in times of trouble. Again, her account of the way in which her family kept purity laws shows the conflict between wanting a 'rational' explanation for the segregation of women and the approach of her aunt who was content to believe in, but not to understand, the more commonplace explanations.

In Shehnaz's account, it is clear that there came a time in her life when she had reason to seek a more meaningful account of life's processes than those which had been provided by her religion thus far. However, priestly explanations proved to be unsatisfactory. Traditionally, priests had been responsible for teaching religious texts to the laity, while much of lay observance seems to have been within the female domain and presided over by the grandmother or matriarch of the family. When the new Madressas were established for the training of priests in the mid-nineteenth century, the focus of learning shifted from the memorisation of texts to the study of grammar in the way that oriental languages were studied by Europeans. While this made priests highly proficient in a number of languages, ranging from Sanskrit and Avestan to Persian, English and Gujarati, it does not appear to have equipped them to meet the changing needs of the laity. In Shehnaz's account, we see a fusion of horizons reflecting, on the one hand, oriental rationalism in the form of language-based European interpretations of Zoroastrian texts; and, on the other hand, her own more traditional world view, which was the product of her upbringing, mainly inculcated by her mother, grandmother, and aunt.

It is clear from oral testimony that fusions of horizons vary from individual to individual, which means that our account shifts from the general, that based upon those fusions we detect in texts which take into account vast areas of time, space, and the people living within these, to the particular. A striking feature of the oral testimony gathered for the purposes of this study is that it substantiates the idea I have already put forward with respect to the *Ātaš nu Gīt*, which is the theologising role of the laity. Schleiermacher elaborates upon this idea in his discussion of religion as belonging to the realm of feelings. His explanation of the function of religion places it within the sphere of one of four human faculties: reason, will, imagination and feeling. To the sphere of reason he ascribes philosophy and science; to will, that of morality; to imagination, art; and to feeling, religion. In this way, he demonstrates that faith and reason are not in opposition to each other because each deals with different issues and addresses different questions. Schleiermacher's theology of feeling focuses upon the individual rather than the universal, since feelings are characterised by individuality and not universality. This makes the idea that religious experience is a matter of dogmas or morality arbitrary, in his view. It is perhaps in this light that we should attempt our understanding of accounts of lay religious life.

The difficulty of such a task lies in the fact that, for the most part, this thesis is reliant upon accounts of religious life which belong to the priestly sphere. It is not until

the later text of the song, together with the evidence of oral testimony, that we can begin to examine the ways in which lay people have shaped their own religious lives. Here, it is possible to see that, for some, faith and reason are not mutually exclusive; that moral precepts — whether imposed from within the faith by priests who teach the rituals and doctrines, or by those interpreting the religion from outside — do not supersede religious sentiment. It is the way in which each individual makes sense of the religious system to which he or she belongs which is part of the essence of lay religion.

The process of modernisation and secularisation is still working itself out within the Zoroastrian community today, and the consequences for the religion appear unpredictable. The *Ātaš nu Gīt* can be seen as a moment in the early history of this process.

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