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Mary Boyce

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ON THE ORTHODOXY OF SASANIAN ZOROASTRIANISM

By MARY BOYCE

School of Oriental and African Studies, London

It is some time since a book has been published which focuses entirely on Sasanian Zoroastrianism, and one from Professor Shaul Shaked,¹ who has studied the religion at this period for many years, is sure of eager attention. The Sasanian epoch naturally attracts scholars approaching Zoroastrian studies from the Persian or Semitic fields; and the author points moreover to its interest for students of religions more generally, since this was a time when a number of other faiths were jostling for place within Iran, from Judaism, Buddhism and Christianity to the ill-fated but then vigorously expanding Manichaeism, and lesser ones of diverse hues. All this, and 'an openness to Greek scientific and philosophical ideas', made for as 'lively and diversified a period of intellectual and religious activity as could ever be found in ancient Iran' (p. 12).

Pondering then this period with an inquiring and sceptical mind, the author has evolved a partly new version of the history of Zoroastrianism. According to this, the teachings of Zoroaster contributed little to the Zoroastrianism which was the state religion of Sasanian Persia. This S. sees rather (p. 7) as representing a religious tradition which had 'slowly found its own style and way of life' during the many centuries which had elapsed since the time of its nominal founder. Even by the Sasanian period he discerns little evidence that it had acquired a fixed and generally accepted body of beliefs, and so is led to conclude that it was only during early Islamic times, when kings with their power had vanished and a small group of Persian priests 'had the stage entirely to themselves', that the latter were able to impose their own 'code of a monolithic Zoroastrianism' on what was left of the community (p. 98). Only then was a 'strict definition of the limits of orthodoxy' achieved, such as emerges from the ninth-century Pahlavi books; and before then, he maintains, it is not proper to use that term.

The nature of the sources—difficult, meagre, scattered disconnectedly over great stretches of place and time—has given scope for a variety of interpretations of Zoroastrian history; and the idea that even the Sasanians were not truly Zoroastrians has been propounded before. Nevertheless, it is something of a surprise to find a scholar with S.'s well-known liking for balance and moderation—the *paymān* so prominent in his Pahlavi texts—promoting what seems so extreme a view; and it is further disconcerting to find that he himself regards this view as a moderate one, offering a middle way between what he considers to be two real extremes of Zoroastrian scholarship: 'on the one hand, regarding the Gathas as provincial Vedic texts, and, on the other, reading the whole of later Zoroastrianism into them' (p. 27, n. 1). The Scylla and Charybdis between which he thus seeks to steer appear, however, to be phantoms. As to the first, it is hardly just to any scholars of Old Avestan to suggest that they do not respect the Gāthās, or regard them as other than highly remarkable and quite distinctive Iranian texts, even when an approach through Vedic studies creates in them a certain bias; and however much such

¹ *Dualism in transformation: varieties of religion in Sasanian Iran* (Jordan Lectures in Comparative Religion, xvi), 1991, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1994.

scholars may wish to concentrate on the Gāthās alone, none of them wholly refrains from drawing on the later tradition, for the good reason that without it no one would get very far with the complexities of the Old Avestan texts. What it does seem just to reproach them with is using that tradition only sporadically, rather than paying it the respect of considering it as a whole, and with largely ignoring the work of scholars with a different approach. Notable among these is Hermann Lommel, who is widely regarded (despite the philological advances since his day) as the finest interpreter of Zoroaster's thought. But S. himself in this book wholly ignores Lommel; and it is moot whether trying to understand Zoroastrianism without the Gāthās is any sounder than trying to explain the Gāthās without the tradition. Fortunately S., too, finds himself unable to keep strictly to his chosen course; but it is possible to wonder whether in adopting it theoretically he has not been influenced by his own background studies, that is, by Judaism instead of by the Vedas. He here compares (pp. 7–8) the evolution of Zoroastrianism with that of Judaism, whose development from the Israelite religion can be traced as it acquired new doctrines and to some extent a new character; but he ignores an essential difference between the two, that whereas the religion of Israel was an ethnic one, Zoroastrianism is the first of the credal faiths, and as such may reasonably be supposed to owe basic doctrines to its founder. Indeed, since Zoroaster was demonstrably a thinker as well as a priest and prophet, the religion named after him was arguably at its doctrinally most coherent and spiritually most profound at the time of its inception. If the Old Avestan texts offered a comprehensive—and fully comprehensible—exposition of his teachings, concentration on them alone might therefore be in a measure justifiable. But of course they do not.

The other supposed extreme which S. seeks to avoid is that of 'reading the whole of later Zoroastrianism into the Gathas', but this no scholar has ever done. Commonsense would forbid it, for already by the 'Younger Avestan' period Zoroastrianism had clearly undergone developments and suffered accretions of practice and belief. In fact the present writer, who currently represents those scholars whose approach S. thus defines, has contributed as much as any other in recent decades to identifying changes and developments in the faith. Doing so is surely the middle road of Zoroastrian studies, on which most scholars travel together for much of the way. Where she and her distinguished predecessors—Darmesteter and Williams Jackson—finish the journey a little apart is that, having had the great good fortune to encounter Zoroastrianism as a living faith at times and places where the old communal tradition was still strong, they became convinced that within that tradition, despite all developments in rituals and beliefs, there was still a nucleus of coherent and effective doctrines, with their concomitant observances and ethical principles, which can be traced back to the religion's founder. In consequence they maintained that this living testimony makes an invaluable contribution to the understanding of Zoroaster's teachings, especially since so little survives from earlier times to show how those teachings actually shaped and directed people's lives. S. is by no means alone in writing off this approach as over-credulous, for in Zoroastrian studies there is a long history of dismissing later Zoroastrianism—after, say, the tenth century—as unworthy of serious regard. There are complex reasons for this attitude, but it is in the main an unconsidered one, maintained without the re-examination called for by the acquisition of fresh data over the years.²

² However, because of the vigorous work of reformists (largely by origin European-inspired) Parsis began to change their beliefs under Darmesteter's eyes (see H. Massé, 'Rencontres et entretiens de James Darmesteter et des Parsis', *Bulletin of the Iran Cultural Foundation*, 1, 1970,

Happily there is often more agreement among students of Zoroastrianism than the diversity of theories might suggest; and in fact S. makes some admirably illuminating remarks about continuity between the Gāthās and the later tradition, which he relegates to the obscurity of a footnote (p. 27, n. 1). He also (though he muffles this up in rather vague and unusual terms) actually identifies a number of 'Gathic' elements in the Sasanian religion. He says (pp. 7–8) of it and of Judaism that, despite the transformations which both underwent, 'it may be claimed that a certain religious personality—if one may use such a term for a communal experience—remains constant through all these modifications. This personality may be described as consisting of a number of distinct features that do not seem to dissipate or melt away.' One of these features in Zoroastrianism he sees as dualism, 'the strong awareness of the moral split in the divine world, and consequently also in the created world'. He insists (p. 8, n. 6) that this 'cosmogonical dualism' is attested in the Gāthās, despite the denials of Humbach and Kellens; and he agrees with the majority of students of Zoroastrianism that 'it is typical of Zoroastrian thinking of all periods that there was a strong link between the conception of the divine world, with cosmology and the structure of the universe, on the one hand, and the moral obligation of the individual, on the other Dualism cuts vertically through all the layers of existence' (p. 8). Another feature he defines as 'the interdependence of the twin concepts of cosmogony and eschatology'. This (he claims) 'is one of the few clear features of the Gathas', and he deprecates its denial by some modern commentators on those texts (p. 9 with n. 10). A third feature which he apprehends is that of seeing the world as consisting essentially of two aspects or modes of being, one invisible, that cannot be experienced by the senses, the other material and tangible (pp. 9–10).

'This short list of characteristic points' (S. concludes) 'is by no means exhaustive; it nevertheless gives some of the flavour of the Iranian religion, a flavour that is there right from its start' (p. 10). Now the start of Zoroastrianism is with Zoroaster; and what S. calls 'features' of its 'personality' would ordinarily be termed more prosaically its doctrines. Since S. says that those which he names (and which are fundamentally important) do not constitute a complete list of ones to be found both in the Gāthās and in Sasanian Zoroastrianism, it would almost seem, from these early statements, that he has abandoned his thesis before beginning to propound it.

A sense of confusion is not lessened by his treatment—or rather lack of treatment—of the question of the transmission of these beliefs, which, whatever one chooses to call them, is surely a vital matter; for beliefs cannot drift down the generations without believers, especially when they lack the support of written texts. S. does not concern himself seriously with the question of when Zoroaster lived, but since he refers with approval (p. 37, n. 29) to Kingsley's explanation of the origin of the sixth-century date for the prophet,³ it is to be supposed that he himself accepts one of the earlier ones proposed, that is, at a time well before the rise of the Achaemenians. There have this century (largely through the work of archaeologists) been steady additions to the small but solid body of evidence which attests that both the Achaemenians and the Arsacids were Zoroastrians; and this should not in fact be necessary to prove, for the Sasanians themselves never cast doubt on the adherence of both their dynastic predecessors to the same religion as themselves. Even in their hard-

107–19, at 113); and by now even the most traditionalist of Iranian villages have adopted to a large extent reformist views.

³ P. Kingsley, 'The Greek origin of the sixth-century dating of Zoroaster', *BSOAS*, LIII, 2, 1990, 245–65.

hitting propaganda against the Parthians they never suggested that the latter were not Zoroastrians, but claimed only that they themselves were better ones—more zealous, more orthopractic. But S., ignoring all this, says only, with what again appears studied vagueness, that ‘the Achaemenian religion seems to belong to the same broad religious tradition as Zoroastrianism, and the same could possibly be said of the little we know of the religion of the Parthians’ (p. 7, n. 5). If one overlooks the Seleucid interlude, the Achaemenians and Arsacids between them had ruled at times over all the settled Iranian peoples (the Achaemenians with considerable authoritarianism) during seven and a half centuries. If they had not themselves been Zoroastrians, then where and how would Zoroastrian ideas have survived under their sway? And how would those ideas have eventually reached the Sasanians, to be instantly adopted by them and their Persian subjects—indeed, to be adopted then by all the Iranian peoples since, as S. admits (p. 121), already in the early Sasanian period Zoroastrianism was ‘the state religion, commanding the large population of a vast empire’? To leave such questions unanswered, indeed not apparently to consider even that they should be asked, means that S. starts trying to establish his theory of the evolution of a Zoroastrian orthodoxy from a position of grave weakness, with no historical ground under his feet.

The evidence which he has found to support this theory is arranged in five chapters, with some themes recurring through them.⁴ One of these is the character and use of the Middle Persian *zand* or exegesis, with its three parts—translation of the Avesta, glosses and commentaries. It has long been established that, for several reasons, the quality of the translation varies, but that some of it is relatively good. It is also generally thought that the longest of the commentaries, which were developed by generations of scholiasts and were continued to the ninth or even tenth centuries, were based on a written text; and that their length indicates that this text was set down in the Sasanian period, very possibly at the same time as the Avesta. On both these points S. expresses contrary opinions, but without providing evidence to support them. ‘We have come,’ he says (p. 6), ‘to distrust the *zand* as a reliable rendering of lost Avestan passages, as we know that in the extant texts the *zand* often diverges so much from the original as to make the relationship between them tenuous.’ As his basis for this statement he directs the reader to H. W. Bailey ‘on the reliability and coherence of the *zand*’; but in the book cited that eminent scholar expressly limits his observations to the transmission of the *zand*, and says nothing relevant to S.’s purpose. For an analysis of the character of the *zand* Geldner’s magisterial survey has not been superseded,⁵ and it provides no support for a blanket dismissal of its worth.

As to the recording of the *zand* in writing, S. states (p. 119): ‘I do not think it plausible that any *zand* existed in any written form during the Sasanian period.’ All that which has reached us, he maintains (pp. 118–19), is the outcome of ‘activity by one or more groups of people in the ninth and tenth centuries’. For this to be so one would have to suppose that even the longest commentaries had been fully memorized down to that time. In itself such a possibility could not be dismissed, since the trained memories of those who do not rely on written records can be phenomenal; but the likelihood of several hundred years separating the writing down of the Avesta from that of its exegesis is really too remote to be seriously considered. All that S. urges in

⁴ This makes the want of an index (which Professor Shaked tells me is due to an oversight) all the more felt.

⁵ K. F. Geldner, ‘Awestalitteratur’ in *Grundriss der Iranischen Philologie*, W. Geiger und E. Kuhn (ed.), (Strassburg, 1896–1904), Bd. II, 46–52.

support of this idea is that he can find 'not even a hint of a desire' to set the *zand* down (p. 117), as against passages where the oral tradition is praised; but since he assumes that it *was* being set down in the ninth century, and since much of the extant Pahlavi literature belongs in one form or other to that time, it is difficult to see how he can take this silence to prove his point.

S.'s general aim in insisting on the absence of a written, canonical, *zand* in the Sasanian period is to establish a fluidity then, consonant with a lack of an accepted orthodoxy; and he thinks that it was the study by individuals of various oral *zands* which gave rise to religious speculation and 'heresy'. In this he may well be right, even without proving his case against the existence also of an authorized written version. It is of course difficult to discuss heresy without recognizing an orthodoxy, and at one point he is reduced to suggesting (p. 15) that 'paradoxically perhaps, the very fact that heresy and orthodoxy are such obsessive terms for Sasanian writers may prove that the notion of orthodoxy was not yet an established idea with them.' This would be a strange proof indeed; but (setting this awkwardness aside) S. finds confusion in the different treatment by the Zoroastrian authorities of various religious movements. Why, he asks, should Manichaeism and Mazdakism have been bitterly castigated and opposed as heresies, whereas only slight traces survive of controversy over Zurvanite beliefs? In the case of the two former, the answer seems plain: each had its own prophet and its own doctrines, and so could readily be identified as alien; and yet at the same time they appeared as heresies in so far as they borrowed in some measure from Zoroaster's teachings, and probably both presented themselves to Zoroastrians as a reform of their religion, which would naturally arouse in some a special hostility. (Modern Iran provides a good parallel with Baha'ism vis à vis Islam.)

The case of Zurvanism, which arose without known begetter within Zoroastrianism itself, on the basis evidently of a new exegesis of a Gathic verse, is clearly more complex; and S.'s not very systematic treatment of it is in itself a little confusing. On the one hand (p. 119) he seeks to diminish it, saying that the 'existence of a Zurvanite body of doctrines ... is questionable', as is that of a Zurvanite movement 'as an organized heresy'; but on the other he writes (p. 21) of the 'near universal acceptance of Zurvanism' in the Sasanian period, as attested by foreign accounts. From this he argues that it is Zurvanism which should be regarded as 'the orthodoxy of the time', as being the dominant faith. He further claims that since we are in no position to relate any of the 'expressions of Zoroastrianism in the Sasanian period' to the words of that religion's founder, 'it would be wrong for scholars to declare one form of the faith orthodox, that is to say, the correct faith.' But if there is one point which is clear from the Old Avestan texts, and upon which scholars are agreed, it is that Zoroaster worshipped Ahura Mazdā as the supreme Deity, self-existent, eternal, whereas their recorded myths show that the Zurvanites believed that the one eternal, self-existent Being was Zurvān, god of Time and Fate, who begot both Ohrmazd and his twin brother, Ahriman. So if (as seems to the present writer proper) one uses the term 'orthodox' at all periods for the Zoroastrian tradition which preserved at its core the essential teachings of the prophet, then Zurvanism, considered as 'an expression of Zoroastrianism', is unquestionably a heresy, however many Persian kings and prelates embraced it; and it may rightly be so called, simply as a diagnostic term.

Further, the clear and abundant testimony of Muslim writers shows that this heresy still had many articulate adherents in the ninth and tenth centuries—the time when, according to S., Persian priests had at last been able to impose a 'monolithic Zoroastrianism' of their own conceiving on their co-religionists. It was in fact only thereafter, as persecution and poverty took their toll, and

priestly seminaries shrank both in numbers and also presumably in the range of their studies, that Zurvanism withered entirely away; and this is likely to have been largely because it had no support in the rituals and observances which helped sustain the faith. This would seem also to explain why Zurvanism had been able to co-exist with orthodoxy over so many centuries—from late Achaemenian times, a matter by then of some fourteen hundred years. According to well-attested forms of the Zurvanite myth, the work of creating this world and all that is good in it was left by Zurvān to Ohrmazd, with Ahriman producing all that is evil; and both then contend here, exactly as in Zoroastrian orthodoxy. Everything else in developed Zoroastrianism presumably followed; and it would therefore have been possible for Zurvanites to worship together harmoniously with the orthodox, venerating Ohrmazd as Creator and execrating Ahriman, and using unchanged the ancient Avestan texts. Moreover, all could have attended the same places of worship, kept the same religious festivals, sworn the same solemn oaths, and been initiated, married and have had their bodies disposed of according to the same rites. Crucially, there is no acknowledgement of Zurvanism in any of the creeds. The Avestan ones could not of course be changed; but there are Middle Persian creeds and catechisms in the Pahlavi books. Moreover, the important Middle Persian addition to the daily *kustī* prayers, known as the *Ohrmazd xwadāy*—important because, being in the vernacular, it could be understood by all—acknowledges only the orthodox doctrine of Ohrmazd as Lord and his conflict with Ahriman.

No doubt when Zurvanism was first promulgated there was much controversy in the priestly schools, and probably the Achaemenian kings and leading magi used their authority to the full to impose the new teaching; but it seems that those who held by orthodoxy were too many for all to be coerced, and probably long before the Sasanian period an equilibrium had been achieved. Modern times offer what may well be a useful analogy, for the living community is much divided, notably between traditionalists and 'Gāthā-onlyists', as their opponents call them, that is, reformists who seek, like some of their academic counterparts, to understand Zoroaster's teachings from his own words alone. But bitter though the controversy often is, all still go to the same fire-temples, where they are ministered to by the same priests, and worship with the same rites and prayers, members of the two groups being thus indistinguishable; and since there is no preaching in Zoroastrian places of worship, harmony can reign. It seems reasonable, from the evidence available, to deduce a similar position in the past, with Zurvanite and orthodox sharing in all observances without dissension.

It is moreover significant that, despite the apparent dominance of Zurvanism for so long over the Persians and other Iranian peoples, it did not alter the general cast of their minds. There is admittedly a streak of fatalism in the Pahlavi books, one element in that richly varied religious life of the Sasanian period which is a main theme of S.'s book;⁶ but what prevails there, and in Zoroastrian literature and life in Islamic times, is not a doctrine of resignation to the arbitrary decrees of Fate, but the characteristically vigorous one of standing up to what are perceived as deliberate blows from Ahriman, and if possible fighting back. This makes it likely that for most of the community it was always Zoroaster's own teaching of the opposition of Ahura Mazda

⁶ A. Christensen, *L'Iran sous les Sassanides*, 2nd ed. (Copenhagen, 1944), who was the first to demonstrate that the Sasanian kings were Zurvanites, suggested (p. 437) that this fatalistic heresy created a weakness at the heart of Sasanian Zoroastrianism, and that this contributed to decadence and hence to the victory of the Arabs; but the idea of a swift collapse by Persia and rapid general conversion to Islam can no longer be sustained (cf. Shaked, 3).

and his Adversary which was effective, and that an impelling, as distinct from an intellectual, belief in the remote Zurvān was rare.

There remains a difficult problem of terminology, for S. is undoubtedly right in seeing something strange in declaring the Sasanian authorities heretics, when it was they who maintained the ecclesiastical organization and with it the mainstream religion of the land. If, however, as seems likely, their one heretical doctrine came to the fore mainly when they were in disputation with outsiders (that is, as recorded, with Syrian and Armenian Christians and Manichaean missionaries), they can perhaps be accurately described as wholly orthodox and in the main orthodox; but a simple defining adjective to express this is hard to find.

In accepting the Sasanian kings' Zurvanism S. is following, with others, in Christensen's footsteps; but then he sets himself again against common opinion by maintaining that these rulers really had little concern for beliefs of any kind, but simply sought to exert control of all their subjects indifferently, in the religious as in other spheres. He points (pp. 110–11) to their behaviour towards minority religions: that they sometimes intervened in the appointment of the leader of the Christian church; invited heads of minority religious communities to join them on hunting and martial expeditions; employed Jewish and Christian doctors; and are known occasionally to have sent Persian Christians as emissaries abroad. None of this seems of much significance; but he rounds off his case by citing the well-known passage from a Christian Arab chronicle where Hormizd IV is represented as dismissing complaints against Christians by Zoroastrian priests by saying: 'A throne has four legs, and the two inner ones cannot support it without the two outer ones. The religion of the magi likewise cannot stand without opposition' (or possibly, S. suggests, 'counterpart'). As he justly states (p. 112), its source makes this passage unreliable; but he nevertheless uses it to give substance to his conclusion that the Sasanian kings did not act to defend the Zoroastrian faith, and that 'the king's involvement in the affairs of the Zoroastrian church is not much deeper than in those of the other religious communities of the kingdom.'⁷ This conclusion could only be reached, however, by a highly selective use of evidence. It was fire-temples which Sasanian kings founded and endowed, not churches or synagogues; and it was worship in those fire-temples which they sought to regulate by their support for what was evidently an active and effective iconoclastic campaign.⁸ It was kings who unleashed sporadic persecutions of the troublesome Christians; and in the later Sasanian period it was they who authorized an inquisition to reclaim apostates. If such lapsed Zoroastrians proved stubborn after a year-long process of persuasion, the inquisitors were empowered to put them to death.⁹ Heresy within the Zoroastrian community was sternly dealt with, as S. himself elsewhere acknowledges; and he devotes a considerable section of his fifth chapter (pp. 99–103) to a retranslation of the *Dēnkard* passage concerning the transmission of the Zoroastrian holy texts, which chronicles the zealous activities on behalf of the religion of Ardashīr, Shābuhr I, Shābuhr II and Khosrow I. Further, Pahlavi books and early Muslim-Persian literature give a number of instances of the personal devotion and of the pious Zoroastrian practices which were engaged in by these and other Sasanian kings.

⁷ He is therefore opposed to the view, strongly championed by G. Gnoli (notably in his *The idea of Iran*, Serie Orientale Roma, LXII, Rome, 1989), that the Sasanian kings 'promoted the Zoroastrian religion as part of their national perception', see S., 109–10.

⁸ On this see most recently Boyce in M. Boyce and F. Grenet, *A history of Zoroastrianism*, III (Leiden, 1991), 66, n. 71.

⁹ *Dādestān ī Mēnōg ī Xrad*, ch. XV. 16–24; *Tansar Nāma*, ed. M. Minovi, p. 17, tr. Boyce, p. 42.

Despite arguing for a lack of support from the throne for Zoroastrianism, S. stops short of considering Christianity or any other faith to have been a serious rival to the state religion; but he seeks to identify several less well-known contenders. Among these is a 'Persian cult' which he traces from statements made in various Christian Syrian martyrdoms (pp. 90–1). One martyr is represented as declaring defiantly: 'I do not believe in the sun, moon, fire and water.' King Pērōz is said to have issued a decree calling on Christians to regard the sun as god, and fire, water and stars 'as children of the deity'; and before him Shābuhr (II) is reported to have demanded of a group of Christians: 'Who are you to stand against my order, and who abuse the sun, and treat fire with contempt? ... What god is better than Ohrmazd? Which one is stronger in wrath than Ahriman? What sensible human being does not worship the sun?' S. points out that 'the king's words hint at the frightful demonic power of Wrath' (the only evil being named by Zoroaster in the Gāthās), and concludes that 'We are very much on Persian soil' with some of these statements, and that there is accordingly no point in dismissing them as 'inaccurate descriptions of the Persian faith of the period' (p. 91). But why, one cannot but ask, should anyone try to do so? Veneration of the divinities of natural phenomena is a characteristic part of Zoroastrianism, an ancient religion;¹⁰ and it is a duty incumbent on its adherents to offer reverence to the Sun Yazad together with Mithra by recitation of the *Khoršēd* and *Mihr Niyāyeš* three times a day (at the sunrise, noon and sunset prayers); and to the Moon Yazad by recitation of the *Māh Niyāyeš* three times a month (as part of the night prayers). The *Ātaš Niyāyeš*, the prayer to the Yazad of Fire (who is regularly called 'son of Ahura Mazdā') is recited daily in fire-temples and homes; and the *Ābān Niyāyeš* is said frequently in the presence of water, and regularly on the days of Ābān and the *hamkārs* of Ābān. The *niyāyeš* have been repeatedly edited and translated, and Darmesteter (who studied Avestan texts as belonging to a living faith) gave details of the times and manner of recitation of each.¹¹ There are thus no grounds for considering the Sasanian kings' utterances here as other than in accord with Zoroastrian orthodoxy and orthopraxy, as known from the Younger Avesta and practised down to modern times; and this bears out the assumption that Zurvanism existed within, rather than in opposition to, the true faith. This is in fact spelled out in this connection in an Armenian Christian source, according to which an avowedly Zurvanite proselytizer, Mihr-Narseh, was rebuffed with the words: 'We do not worship, like you, the elements, the sun, the moon, the winds and the fire.' But when Syrian Christians characterized the Zoroastrian religion as 'the ancient service of false gods and the elements', Vahram V answered them by saying that 'he acknowledged only one God. The rest were but as courtiers of the King.'¹² – It is a striking instance of continuity in Zoroastrianism that when the Parsis landed in Gujarat, according to tradition their leader described their religion to the Hindu rajah in these terms: 'We are worshippers of God. ... We offer worship to fire and water, likewise ... to sun and moon' (*yazdān parastīm ... parastīš mīkunīm az āteš u āb hamān ... az xuršīd u mahtāb*).¹³

¹⁰ This was emphasized with regard to these Syriac Christian passages by Christensen, *L'Iran*, 145.

¹¹ *Le Zend-Avesta* (Paris, 1892–1893, repr. 1960), Vol. 2, 691–708. The most recent edition is Z. Taraf, *Der Avesta-Text Niyāyīš* (Munich, 1981).

¹² References apud Boyce, *Zoroastrians: their religious beliefs and practices* (London, 1979, revised 3rd repr. 1988), 122–3.

¹³ *Qissa-ye Sanjān*, ll. 165, 170, from the transcription and translation being prepared by Dr. A. V. Williams; cf. the excerpt from the translation by S. H. Hodivala in M. Boyce (ed.), *Textual sources for the study of Zoroastrianism* (Manchester, 1984; Chicago, 1990), 120.

S. also considers the cults of several individual yazads which he holds to have features which set them outside 'correct' Zoroastrianism (one of the terms he uses to replace 'orthodox'). It is clear that the Zoroastrian doctrine that *spənta* (approximately 'beneficent, bounteous') divinities were the servants of Ahura Mazda, aiding him in diverse ways in combating evil, gave scope for venerating beings unknown to Zoroaster himself; but for any such beings to be offered formal worship they had to be assimilated to an 'Avestan' yazata, because all such worship was offered through liturgies accompanied by Avestan texts. Otherwise (as is the case with the divinity Sasan, and others who like him are known only by their names) their cults remained local and in due course disappeared. One of the yazads whom S. considers is Vahrām, god of Victory, whose popularity in the Sasanian and post-Sasanian periods is undoubted. S. admits cautiously that this was probably 'not entirely an innovation', and that 'there is good reason to believe that there was an old tradition of Wahrām as a great fighting figure' (p. 95); but he relies in the main on an article written over fifty years ago by de Menasce (admirable in quality but with a defined and limited scope), and seems unaware of the work done in recent decades on the enormous popularity, in Seleucid times, of Heracles Kallinikos, the 'Victorious', and the clear evidence for the identification of this Greek hero-god with Varahrān at that period.¹⁴ The rise in popularity of the Zoroastrian yazad (for which there is no evidence in the Achaemenian period) began almost certainly therefore then, and continued throughout Parthian times. S.'s study of Anāhīd (pp. 94–5) also shows some curious gaps in knowledge, and is misleadingly presented. There is no yazata 'Anāhita' in 'the Zoroastrian body of scriptures' (by which presumably the Avesta is meant). Formal veneration of Anāhita was offered through her assimilation to the Avestan Arəvi Sūra Anāhita. It continues therefore to this day through the recitation not only of *Yašt* 5, known variously as that of Ābān, Ardvišūr or Anāhīd, but also of the *Ābān Niyāyeš*, which consists of verses from this *yašt*. There is no basis therefore for saying of 'Anāhīd' that 'very little of the official priestly ritual of later times is directed towards her', or that 'her prominence in Sasanian life seems to be in defiance of the canonical religion'. Her absorption into Zoroastrianism undoubtedly took place in the Achaemenian period, so that by the Sasanian one, hundreds of years later, she was fully part of it. Had it been true, one might have used as evidence for the latter part of this statement S.'s claim that a sacred fire to 'Anāhīd the Lady' was founded at Staxr by the Sasanian high priest, Kerdīr (p. 94); but this attribution is an error on his part. The passage of Kerdīr's inscriptions which he cites as authority states unambiguously that Vahrām II simply appointed him to be in charge of this great sanctuary, whose sacred fire was most probably installed in a temple built originally to house one of the statues to 'Anāhita' set up by Artaxerxes II.

S. also considers the worship of Mithra. This, he acknowledges, was regularly offered within Zoroastrianism; but he claims also (p. 92) that 'the religious

¹⁴ For discussion and references see Boyce and Grenet, *Hist. Zoroastrianism*, III, 62–5, 93–4. Shaked (95, n. 73) says that previously (*Hist. Zoroastrianism*, II (Leiden 1982), 222–5) I proposed seeing the name 'Ātaš Bahrām' as 'reflecting the general noun for "victory", unconnected to the name of the deity'. In fact I suggested that at the time of their founding the temple fires were given the Avestan epithet *vərəθraγan-* 'victorious', which in due course, as pronunciations changed, would have fallen together with developments of the substantive *vərəθraγna-* 'victory', and so have become identical with the yazad's name. In later times such a fire is said to be installed *pad warahrānīh* 'victoriously', and is addressed as *pērōzgar* 'victorious'; and there are no rites in its consecration or maintenance to associate it with the yazad Bahrām. For these reasons Dastur Firoze Kotwal has approved this explanation of the name's origin.

reality of the Sasanian period was such that Mihr ... was indeed a central god in the western regions of the Sasanian empire.' For this he offers two pieces of evidence. One is as follows: 'The post-Sasanian Zoroastrian term for a fire-temple is *dar-i mihr* "the gate of Mihr", which is surely a survival from the Sasanian period. In order to understand how this term could have come into being it is necessary to assume that the main worship in many temples was addressed to Mihr, not to Ohrmazd or to the Fire. This is corroborated by the fact that one of the general terms for a temple in Armenian was *mehean*, reflecting Iranian **mihriyān*, again derived from the name of this deity. Most traces of the Mihr worship, which, to judge by the Armenian evidence, must have existed from Parthian times, have disappeared. The fact that there was such worship dedicated specifically to Mihr in the fire-temples seems however irrefutable.' This is a hasty and superficial treatment of a well-known and difficult problem, the more to be regretted because S. seeks to draw such a controversial and far-reaching conclusion from it. (He even adds: 'If Mihr (Mithra) was a prominent Iranian god in the Parthian and Sasanian periods ... the possibility that the Roman Mithras cult had its origins in Iran gains some weight'.) In the first place, it is by no means certain what a *dar-i mihr* originally was. The Pahlavi terms for a fire-temple are prosaic and descriptive, namely *ātaxš kadag*, *mān ī ātaxš*, *xānağ ī ātaxš*, all meaning simply 'house of fire', as does Parsi-Gujarati *agiary*. Within a 'house of fire', that is, essentially, the fire-sanctuary with its surrounding space for prayer, the enthroned sacred fire is an exalted *qibla*, taking the place of the ever-burning hearth fires before which, for centuries before the establishment of fire-temples, Zoroastrians would have said their daily obligatory prayers (as of course most of them continued to do, most of the time, thereafter). The priestly rites for tending the sacred fire are an extension of those for tending a house fire; and worshippers coming to say their private prayers at a 'house of fire' do so with their eyes fixed on the fire, as enjoined by their prophet. There is no question accordingly of acts of worship devoted to a particular yazata taking place within a fire-temple proper. 'Outer' rituals for communal worship and celebration were performed in unconsecrated halls, which, to judge from passages in the *Shāhnāma* (about halls for celebrating the festivals of No Rūz, Mihr and Sada) were formerly, as now, built near, or as part of the complex of, the 'house of fire'.¹⁵ Finally the 'inner' rituals, which have to be performed in strict purity within consecrated enclosures or *pāvis*, were solemnized in the *yazišn gāh*, 'place of worship', possibly called in Old Persian **brazmadāna* 'place of rites'.¹⁶ It is this place, it has been suggested,¹⁷ that was originally called the Dar-i Mihr, because by far the greatest number of 'inner' rituals performed there may only be celebrated in the Hāvan Gāh, that is, the first division of the day from sunrise until noon; and this 'watch' is under the special protection of Mithra, who has accordingly his particular invocation at all such rituals. Even when eventually certain night services came to be permitted (that is, the *Vendidād* and *Nērangdīn*) the priests who solemnized them had to acquire their 'amal or ritual power to do so by performing the appropriate preliminary ceremony in the Hāvan Gāh of that day. Within living memory, accordingly, when a priest had undergone his initiation he was said to have become a *hamkār* (fellow-worker) of the Dar-i Mihr. The fact that the Brahmins

¹⁵ For references see Boyce, 'Iranian Festivals', in *Cambridge History of Iran*, Vol. 3(2), (ed.) E. Yarshater (Cambridge, 1983), 793.

¹⁶ See apud Boyce, *Hist. Zoroastrianism*, II, 184–5.

¹⁷ See Boyce, 'On Mithra's part in Zoroastrianism', *BSOAS*, xxxii, 1, 1969, 26–7, drawing on the authority of Dastur (then Ervad) Firoze Kotwal, and through him on that of his grandfather, Ervad Pirojshah Adarji Kotwal, a noted ritual priest.

did not restrict the solemnization of the *yajña* (their counterpart of the *yasna*) to the forenoon makes it likely that to do so was an innovation in Zoroastrianism; and it has been suggested that this innovation is in all probability to be attributed to Zoroaster himself. Among his people, with no paintings, statues or stained glass, a religious teacher with a new doctrine had only nature to furnish his followers with visible reminders of it; and Zoroaster's use in this way of natural phenomena, partly mystical, partly rational, appears to have been a very important element in giving his teachings their power to endure. His identification of fire as a visible symbol of *aša* (that is, all that is right) is undisputed; and the greatest representative of the 'creation' of fire was the sun. It seems probable, therefore, that restricting the celebration of the *yasna* to the Hāvan Gāh had doctrinal significance, 'since this is the one period in the twenty-four hours when the light and heat of the sun, Aša's fiery orb, is steadily increasing, a symbol of what should be the steady daily increase of righteousness, furthered by the service itself.'¹⁸ Presumably 'pagan' Iranians, like the Brahmins, knew no such restriction, and this may have led Zoroastrian priests, when proselytizing, to stress that solemn worship should be offered only under the aegis of Mithra. It has then further to be assumed that with the foundation of temples, probably from the early fourth century B.C., it became common practice to attach a 'place of worship' to each 'house of fire' and to each image-shrine, for the convenience of their priests; and that this accounts for different terms embodying the name of Mithra, namely Armenian *mehean* (deriving from Old Persian **mithradāna* 'place of Mithra'¹⁹) and another presumably O.P. derivative *mithraion* (uniquely recorded in Egypt) coming to be applied to the whole of a temple complex. It is of course puzzling that no such term appears in any of the Pahlavi books, while Dar-i Mihr became in Islamic times the established word for 'fire-temple'. The wording of the following passage from one of the Persian *Rivāyats*, dated to the middle of the sixteenth century, shows that at that time the Irani priests were using the word for the whole temple complex. The Parsis had written asking 'How should the house (*xāna*) of a Dar-e Mihr be built?' and the Irani dasturs replied that 'The place of fire (*ātašgāh*) should have four doors', and that the 'priests' room for worship' (*yazišn-xāna-ye dastūrān*) should be, as far as possible, 'around and near the fire-house' (*pīrāmun va nazdik-e ātaš-xāna*).²⁰ In one manuscript of this passage the variant occurs of *dar be-mihr*, and this is evidently a unique written rendering of the form used in the Zoroastrian dialect of Yazd and Kerman, namely *darb-e mihr*. At present there are buildings scattered through the Zoroastrian diaspora, in Canada, the United States and Australia, which serve the local community as meeting places and prayer halls (where fire is regularly kindled); and each is called a 'Darb-e Mihr'. This is because they were established largely through the beneficence of the late Arbab Rustam Guiv, who came from the Yazdī village of Taft and preferred this form of the name, familiar to him from childhood. Possibly in early post-Sasanian times some Persian high priest had a similar strong predilection for 'Dar-i Mihr', and so that name became established throughout the diminished

¹⁸ Boyce, *Zoroastrianism: its antiquity and constant vigour* (Columbia Lectures on Iranian Studies, 7, Costa Mesa, 1992), 87.

¹⁹ This is the convincing interpretation of I. Gershevitch, 'Die Sonne das Beste', in J. Hinnells (ed.), *Mithraic Studies* (Manchester, 1975), I, 87. Gershevitch suggested that the Mithra of this compound was the Saka sun god, adopted by the Medes. See contra Boyce in Boyce and Grenet, *Hist. Zoroastrianism*, III, 471-5, 482.

²⁰ *Dārāb Hormazyār's Rivāyat*, ed. M. R. Unvala, (Bombay, 1922), II, 18.1-4; B. N. Dhabhar, tr., *The Persian Rivāyats of Hormazyar Framarz* (Bombay, 1932), 403.—On what follows above see further Boyce, 'Dar-e Mehr', *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, VI, 669-70 (where by an oversight only Meillet's earlier suggestion of an Old Persian **mišryāna* is given as the origin for Arm. *mehean*).

community. This is of course the merest guess, put forward to suggest the sometimes chance nature of developments; and the whole of the above explanation of the origin of the name Dar-e Mihr is necessarily a matter of unverifiable deductions. But it is coherent, it has its basis in Zoroastrian priestly tradition, and it explains how in the past (to judge by the Armenian evidence) the term could have come to be used for any Zoroastrian place of worship, whether image-shrine or fire-temple; it seems therefore to the present writer preferable to assuming that at some stage an independent cult of Mithra infiltrated the Western fire-temples of Zoroastrianism, came to control the worship there, and then vanished without trace except for the legacy of this name.

S. produces what he regards as one more piece of evidence for the existence of such a cult, stating (p. 93) that 'Mihr also quite often appears at the head of a triad of deities consisting of Mihr, Anāhīd and Ohrmazd.' The only reference he gives in support of this is to J. R. Russell's *Zoroastrianism in Armenia*; and this is misleading, for there the author correctly refers (p. 215) to the 'common Iranian triad of Ahura Mazdā, Anāhītā and Mithra, attested since the time of Artaxerxes II' (similarly on p. 244). S. could not in fact have given a primary source for his claim, because none exists. At whatever stage in history and in whatever context this triad is invoked, Ahura Mazdā always stands first, with Anāhita and Mithra in due subordination to him.²¹

Mihr figures in some Muslim-Persian sources as watching over the pact which, according to what S. calls 'classical' Pahlavi accounts of the Zoroastrian creation myth (in the *Bundahishn* and *Wizīdagīhā ī Zādspram*), was entered into by Ohrmazd and Ahriman. By this pact (concluded by Ohrmazd with foreknowledge, by Ahriman in ignorance) the contest between them was to last a fixed number of millennia. Mihr's part here is hardly according to the letter of Zoroastrianism, since by that religion's teachings the yazad is not impartial, but is himself fully committed to the battle against Ahriman;²² but the detail appears to be simply a scholastic development, with Mihr as lord of pacts being assigned by some commentator the guardianship of this particular one. S. sees more significance in the story of the pact itself, since this is made between God and the Evil Spirit, one of whose most cherished vices is *mīhrō-drujīh* 'breaking agreements'. Not only is the pact therefore a strange concept in itself but, he claims, the implication is that the creation of the world results from it, so that without it 'the whole cosmogony would be meaningless' (pp. 13–14); and this indicates, he suggests, deviant ways of thinking even within 'correct' Zoroastrianism of the Sasanian period.

It is perhaps best not to ask why such deviance should still have found a place in texts of the ninth century, when according to S. Zoroastrianism at last acquired an orthodoxy. The larger question is whether this is a useful approach to the commentary part of the *zand* (to which the story must belong), whose authors are often to be seen simply struggling to reconcile new materials with the immutable data of the Avesta.²³ The new material here is the creation of a world chronology, with a fixed number of millennia. This chronology was evolved, it is generally agreed, after Zoroastrian scholar-priests came into contact with priests of Babylonia; and it had to be brought into relationship with the fundamental myth of the great struggle between Ohrmazd and Ahriman, to wage which Ohrmazd created this world. The pact is represented

²¹ The proper name 'Mihr-Ohrmazd' cannot be taken as evidence, because the rule in such compounds is that the shorter component always comes first.

²² cf. Shaked's earlier remarks in 'Mihr the Judge', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, II, 1980, 15.

²³ cf. notably, W. B. Henning, 'An astronomical chapter of the Bundahishn', *JRAS*, 1942, 229–48 at 230 (= his *Selected Papers*, II, *Acta Iranica*, 15, 1977, 96).

as fixing an end to this struggle at the end of the last millennium; and although Ahriman's agreement to it carries with it the anomaly which S. points out, his innate treachery is in fact given no scope. Ohrmazd knows the outcome of their contest, namely Ahriman's total defeat, and as soon as Ahriman has agreed to the pact he reveals this to him. The struggle is nevertheless entered on without regard to this, the story of the pact not modifying essential doctrine in any way; and it is surely best regarded as a piece of *ad hoc* scholastic invention, linking old and new in a way no doubt satisfying to those who thought it out, but of no theological or sectarian significance.

From cosmogony S. proceeds to certain eschatological concepts, which too, he accepts, have their origin 'in the Gathas' (p. 27), that is, in the teachings of Zoroaster. One ancillary doctrine to which he directs his attention is that of bodily resurrection at the Last Day. This was an article of faith in Sasanian Zoroastrianism, and as such duly finds its place in creeds preserved in Pahlavi. It is also questioned and explained in a number of passages in the Pahlavi books. Clearly, as S. says, it was a difficult belief for some to accept in those times; but it is not likely to have been so for Zoroaster's first followers in their remoter day.²⁴ In fact it seems a necessary part of the doctrine that at the end of time this physical earth will be renewed and that the blessed will once more walk upon it, solid flesh on solid ground. (This doctrine is obscured by S., who writes (p. 6), without giving a source, of the world being 'dissolved' at the end of time.) The debate about bodily resurrection illustrates again the difficulty which thinkers among Zoroastrians clearly sometimes found in struggling with archaic beliefs; but their simpler co-religionists are likely (like generations of Jews, Christians and Muslims after them) to have accepted the teaching unquestioningly.

Another doctrine which was of general concern related to the ultimate fate of sinners. Here there was indeed divergence. One school of thought maintained that sinners—those who had been in hell and those still living at the end of time—will all perish in the fiery river of molten metal which will then cover the earth. The other held that the burning metal will purge away their sins, and that after this final agony (physical, because it will be suffered in the resurrected body) they will join the good, to whom the burning metal will feel like warm milk, and all will be blessed and live for ever. As to which of these doctrines was that taught by Zoroaster, S. says only (p. 39), with, as it were, a genial mental shrug, 'I find it personally difficult to decide. ... All that we can tell from the material at our disposal, which is of rather late date, is that two conflicting doctrines are represented side by side.' These remarks create the impression that no arguments worth considering have ever been put forward in favour of one or the other, in fact that no evidence exists on which to base an argument. It is, however, certain that this is a matter, linked with salvation, on which Zoroaster would have given a firm teaching; and Lommel, pondering with his usual penetration the doctrine of the last fiery ordeal, pointed out that the prophet plainly developed this concept from that of the actual ordeal by fire or by molten metal which was a form of ultimate judicial trial among the Indo-Iranians.²⁵ Such ordeals were maintained by the Iranians into historical times; and belief in their efficacy lay in the conviction that if a person required to undergo one were innocent, divine beings would intervene miraculously to save him; but that if he were guilty, he would die from burns in the natural way. It is easy if one approaches Zoroastrian beliefs about the last

²⁴ cf. Boyce in Boyce and Grenet, *Hist. Zoroastrianism*, III, 265 with n. 11.

²⁵ H. Lommel, *Die Religion Zarathustras nach dem Awesta dargestellt* (Tübingen, 1930, repr. 1971), 219–22.

things in the light of Christian or Muslim expectations to assume that a Last Judgement is to precede the fiery ordeal, which will then have a merely punitive function for sinners; but in Zoroastrianism the ordeal *is* the last judgement, and the only one which will be undergone by those still living at the end of time.²⁶ What will then show who are the righteous, who the wicked will simply be who emerge unscathed from the molten metal, who perish within it; and this is borne out by Zoroaster's own words in *Y.* 51.9, with their reference to red fire and molten metal, whose action, it seems, will be 'to destroy the sinner' (*rāšaiienhē drəguuantəm*).

Thereafter this doctrine has been traced in Jewish texts of the Parthian period;²⁷ and it is attested, but in one passage only, in a composite Middle Persian work, the *Pahlavi Rivāyat accompanying the Dādestān ī dēnīg*.²⁸ Another passage in this same work has the kindlier doctrine of universal salvation,²⁹ and it is this which is recorded elsewhere in Pahlavi and later Zoroastrian literature, and which is believed by Zoroastrians today. Exponents of it disregard the fact that some sinners will be involved who have not been judged before, and concentrate on the previous expiatory sufferings endured by most of the wicked in hell. 'They ... say that God will have pity upon the damn'd, and that they shall go into Paradise as having suffered enough.'³⁰ Such a development, namely the softening in later times of the stern doctrine of a religion's founder, has a parallel in Christianity, many of whose followers have come to disregard the uncompromising Gospel teaching of eternal damnation for sinners. It has, moreover, been suggested that one formulation of the modified Zoroastrian belief may indicate a doctrinal as well as a humanitarian basis for it, with the conviction that 'Ahriman could not be allowed the lasting triumph of having diminished the creation of Ohrmazd.'³¹ This may have helped the gentler doctrine to establish itself completely; but it created problems, with its promise of universal salvation; and the dasturs were reduced to declaring that bliss would not be quite the same for all, but that 'men shall have every one their apartment answerable to the degree and quantity of the good which they did in their lifetime.'³² In sum, the evidence points uncontroversibly (or so it seems to the present writer) to the doctrine of the annihilation of sinners being original, and superseded during the course of the Sasanian period by that of universal salvation; and if this is so, it can hardly be said that the existence of these two doctrines shows that there was then 'no unified tradition concerning certain central tenets of the faith' (p. 39). It is rather a matter of evolution within a unified tradition concerning this particular tenet.

From the last things S. proceeds to consider 'man and the divine'; and here he offers an unusual analysis, stating that Zoroastrianism 'shares with Manichaeism the notion that certain aspects of the human person are essentially identical with the divine world, as well as the idea that *the aim of human existence is to try and make this identity a reality, in other words, to try and*

²⁶ This was emphasized by Lommel, loc. cit.

²⁷ See S. Pines, 'Eschatology and the concept of time in the Slavonic Book of Enoch', *Numen*, Supp. xviii, 1970, 78; Boyce and Grenet, *Hist. Zoroastrianism*, III, 393-4.

²⁸ Ch. 32.5 (ed. A. V. Williams, Copenhagen, 1990; text, I, 138/39; tr., II, 59 with commentary, 186).

²⁹ Ch. 48.97 (ed. Williams, I, 188/89; II, 87).

³⁰ J. B. Tavernier, *Collections of travels through Turkey into Persia and the East-Indies* (London, 1684) I, 165; cited by N. K. Firby, *European travellers and their perceptions of Zoroastrians in the 17th and 18th centuries* (AMI Ergänzungsband, 14, Berlin, 1988), 43.

³¹ Boyce, *Zoroastrianism: its antiquity ...*, 170.

³² Tavernier, op.cit., 164 (Firby, loc.cit.); cf. *Dādestān ī dēnīg*, Pt. I, ed. T. D. Anklesaria, *Purs.* 31.13 (16), tr. E. W. West, *SBE*, xviii, 74 with n. 1; and Boyce, *Hist. Zoroastrianism*, I, 243, n. 63 (where the reference is to be corrected).

become divine [my italics]. ... This is an aspect of Zoroastrian faith and practice that has so far received only scant notice, but it is essential for understanding Zoroastrianism' (p. 59; cf. pp. 69–70). To the present writer it seems on the contrary that this interpretation of Zoroastrian beliefs has previously received scant—if any—attention because it accords so little with the facts. In Zoroastrian teaching, each person is created an individual, with his or her individual soul. Each is capable of choice between good and evil; and each has the duty, as declared by Zoroaster, of choosing the good in order both to attain individual salvation and to contribute to the salvation of the world. It is these goals which are set before the believer, not that of becoming, through righteousness, divine. Man has his appointed place in the scheme of things, and it is not as a god. After the end of time, as it is stated in one of the Pahlavi books, when the earth has been renewed, 'then Ohrmazd and the Amahraspands and all the yazads and mankind will be in one place ... and all mankind will be immortal. ... And their work will be this, to behold Ohrmazd and to pay homage. ... Everyone will love others like himself.'³³ There is no merging or assimilation here: all human beings retain their separate identities eternally as God's creatures.

These beliefs are orthodox doctrine; but S., disregarding them, seeks evidence for the existence of what he perceives as different expectations in a particular aspect of Zoroastrian ethical teaching. The righteous man, it is declared in one passage, 'makes this body like a fort, and sets a guard over it, and keeps the yazads within it, and does not let *dēvs* (demons) enter'.³⁴ Another passage runs: 'There is none born of woman over whom these *Mēnōgs* do not struggle: *Vahman* (Good Purpose) and *Akōman* (Evil Purpose), *Srōš* (Obedience) and *Khēšm* (Anger), *Spendārmad* (Pious Devotion) and the demon *Tarōmad* (Arrogance)';³⁵ and the text goes on to illustrate this, declaring, for example, that a man in whom *Vahman* dwells will be ardent in good works, whereas one who has allowed *Akōman* to enter him will be reluctant to perform any. These passages show that 'yazad' was a synonym for a benign *mēnōg*, 'dēv' for an evil one. It has been customary among Western scholars to refer to *mēnōgs* as 'abstractions', and S. continues this usage, speaking of 'using abstract notions to play the part of divine entities' (p. 9, cf. p. 62). This is, however, an outdated approach. The word *mēnōg* derives, as he acknowledges, from Old Avestan *mainyu*, usually rendered in English as 'spirit'; and this has a Vedic equivalent, *manyu*, translated from contexts as 'force, impulse'.³⁶ The existence of these two cognate words shows that there was a proto-Indo-Iranian **manyu* which must have expressed some concept evolved in a Stone Age culture; and the way in which Avestan *mainyu* is used indicates that this concept belonged to animatism—the manner of apprehending the world (widespread in archaic societies) whereby man, conscious himself of being alive, attributed conscious life to all other things, animate or inanimate, tangible or intangible.³⁷ We have already seen how in Zoroastrianism (in many respects a startlingly conservative faith) veneration was offered to the *Mainyus* or *Yazads* of sun and moon, water and fire. Virtues and vices were also thought of as having their inner force or *Mainyu*, which could enter a person and direct his actions; so if, for example, the good *Mainyu* of courage had found its place

³³ *Pahl. Riv. Dd.*, ch. 48.99–102 (ed. Williams, I, 188/89; II, 87–8).

³⁴ *Dēnkard VI*, E34a (ed. Shaked, *The wisdom of the Sasanian sages* (Boulder, Colorado, 1979), 202/03).

³⁵ *Dēnkard VI*, 77–8 (ed. Shaked, op. cit., 28/29).

³⁶ See M. Schwartz, 'The old Eastern Iranian world view according to the Avesta', in *Cambridge History of Iran*, Vol. 2, (ed.) I. Gershevitch (Cambridge, 1985), 641.

³⁷ See Boyce, *Zoroastrianism: its antiquity* ..., 53.

within him, there was no room there for the evil Mainyu of fear. Emotions and qualities were perceived, that is, neither as ‘abstractions’ nor as parts of a person’s own psychological make-up, but as active and independent forces. Over those the individual had some measure of control through exercise of will, in that he could seek to make their entry easy or to bar the way. This was evidently the manner of thinking with which Zoroaster himself grew up, and which harmonized with, or helped to foster, his apprehension of a world divided between good and evil, with man’s duty to choose between them. A remarkable feature of his own new teachings was the doctrine of six great Mainyus, the greatest of the Aməša Spəntas, who dwell always with Mazdā but also enter into those human beings who are worthy, that is, have the wish and will, to receive them. This is the doctrine indicated in the Pahlavi passages cited above, from which S. deduces that, because these divine entities can be present in man, therefore man himself ‘consists of divine elements’ (p. 63). He admits that mēnōgs also dwell in plants and beneficial animals, but maintains that ‘the intertwining of the divine within man seems to be understood to be particularly intimate, and is more often emphasized’ (p. 63). This emphasis is natural, because plants and animals were held to have an innate yearning for the good state in which they were created, whereas man alone has free will, and needs to be taught and exhorted to choose the good. S. cites other texts in attempting to prove man’s potential divinity, but finds none where the imagery is not prosaically that of man as a container (house or fort), which simply receives the good or evil spirits; and the more he pushes a weak case the more questionable his logic becomes. (For example, he says (p. 61) that the ancient expression ‘gods (and) men’, *daēva mašya*, ‘indicates the totality of entities that *belong to the same species* [my italics]’; but he would presumably not claim this for another ancient and structurally identical phrase, ‘cattle (and) men’, *pasu vīra*.)

S. makes discerning observations about the Zoroastrian lists of the invisible components of man, namely the soul (*ruwān*), vital soul (*gyān*), pre-existent soul (*frawahr*) and consciousness (*bōy*), accepting that here the Sasanian priests were working within ‘a solid tradition which derives from the Avesta and which continues the vocabulary of the sacred scripture’ (p. 55). Concerning the Avestan lists he points out, in one of the appendices to his book (p. 135), that each one tends ‘to serve a particular purpose within its individual context, and this determines the selection of terms used. The divergence between the lists should not be taken to represent actual differences in conception.’ It is disappointing therefore to find him taking a quite different approach to the associated Pahlavi lists, saying that they show that in the Sasanian period ‘there were several schools of thought about these questions. As far as we can tell, none of them was considered to be more “orthodox” than the others.’ But organizing and analysing traditional terminology was surely simply a necessary scholastic task, and small variants in different contexts can have little to do with orthodoxy or dissidence.

Why S. is especially interested in these lists is that he finds in ideas about these invisible components further support for his theory of man’s potential to become divine; and he sees all this as providing evidence to show that Muslim mysticism, which developed largely on Iranian soil, owed much to Zoroastrian elements, ‘adapted to the teachings and language of Islam’ (p. 79). In this he acknowledges he is following in the footsteps of Blochet, Schaeder and Corbin; but hitherto, he points out (p. 3), the difficulty has been to find evidence in support of the idea. ‘Now,’ he says (p. 79), ‘that we have some evidence ... for a far-reaching conception of the identity of man with the divine

world, the continuity from Iran to Islam may seem smoother and more natural.' Unfortunately, since (in the present writer's opinion) none of this evidence is acceptable, one has still to remain content, as so often in Zoroastrian studies, with a strong probability. It is widely held that Zoroaster was himself a mystic, as well as a thinker and teacher; and there is no reason to doubt that a strand of mysticism persisted among his followers, very possibly supported indeed by the doctrine of the potential immanence of divine beings in man; but Zoroastrian mystics, like Persian-Muslim ones thereafter, may well have given expression to their spiritual apprehensions in poetry, which would have been lost with almost all the rest of pre-Islamic Persian verse. Much of this verse was exquisitely beautiful, we are told, but it was not written down.

S. joins those scholars—the majority, it would appear—who reject the identification of elements in Zoroastrianism as shamanistic (pp. 49–50); but he links to the idea of mysticism that of a putative esotericism. By this he means that 'there were groups who, while regarding themselves as faithful adherents of Zoroastrianism, held certain ideas that they considered should not be divulged to the general Zoroastrian public' (p. 76). One indication of the existence of such groups he sees in 'the persistent reference in Zoroastrian and Arabic writings to the limitations imposed on disseminating the Zoroastrian scriptures to the common people.' Such restrictions, he shows, applied particularly to the *zand*, which, since it was in the vernacular, could be understood by all, and perhaps misinterpreted (p. 79). Forbidding the *zand* to be made generally available was an authoritarian measure, of which S. observes: 'The notion of preventing access to the religious truths is alien to Judaism and Christianity' (p. 80), thus imputing an unusual obscurantism to Sasanian Persia; but in fact there is a striking parallel in this with the former efforts of Christian authorities in Western Europe to prevent general access to the scriptures by forbidding vernacular translations of the Latin Bible. This did not mean, however, that those authorities were not active in teaching in other ways what they regarded as 'religious truths', and this appears to have been the case also with their Sasanian counterparts. An important piece of evidence of their wish for an instructed laity is the addition (already touched on above) of the Middle Persian section (the *Ohrmazd xwadāy*) to the daily *kustī* prayers, which are essentially in Old Avestan. This section contains simple, clear doctrine and ethics: reverence for Ohrmazd, defiance of his adversary Ahriman, and the resolve to refrain from all bad thoughts, words and acts; and it must have been carefully taught throughout the community by a well-organized body of priests. Another development was the writing of books of general religious instruction in simple Middle Persian. The most important surviving specimen of such a work is the *Dādestān ī Mēnōg ī Xrad* (Judgements of the Spirit of Wisdom), in which a questioner is represented as seeking, amid 'many creeds and beliefs' (*was kēš ud wirrōyišn*, ch. 1.17) the truths of the good religion of the Mazdā-worshippers, and receiving instruction in these from the Spirit of Wisdom itself. The work has a large doctrinal content, and deals also with basic observances (including the duty to pray before the sun and Mihr, the moon and fire, ch. 53); and in general it can be regarded as a Sasanian precursor to the *Saddars*, handbooks of the faith compiled in Islamic times; and since its contents, where these overlap, are the same as theirs, this book alone makes it seem perverse to seek a difference between the orthodoxy of Sasanian and post-Sasanian times—to aim, that is, at denying the one and establishing the other as new.

In sum it seems to the present writer that the valuable part of Professor

Shaked's book lies in details which he has contributed to the study of Sasanian religion, adding thereby to a fuller apprehension of the ferment of religious activity at that time; but that his thesis has not been, and cannot be, upheld, for even a Procrustes at his most determined could not force the facts to fit it in any remotely satisfying way.