

# The Avestan Yasna: Ritual and Myth

## *Prods Oktor Skjærvø*

Sacrifices<sup>1</sup> in ancient times were commonly patterned on primordial sacrifices performed by gods and men, often in cosmogonical and eschatological context. The myths of the primordial sacrifice and sacrificers provided the rationale for current-day sacrifices.<sup>2</sup> Here, I shall discuss the Zoroastrian *yasna* from this perspective.<sup>3</sup>

The *yasna* sacrifice is celebrated daily and serves the purpose of renewing the *daily* existence, that is, the removal of darkness and the return of the sun. Its model is Ahura Mazdā's primordial sacrifice in the world of thought, by which *he* established the ordered cosmos. In Iran, we find Ahura Mazdā (the All-knowing ruling Lord) himself repeatedly sacrificing in the *Avesta*<sup>4</sup> and the Pahlavi texts. According to the *Bundahišn*, for instance, Ohrmazd performed a sacrifice in the world of thought to establish the creation:

*Bd.3.20-21*

*ohrmazd abāg amahrspandān pad rabihwin (gāh) mēnōy yazišn frāz*

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1. Note that the term *sacrifice* is used here without the necessary implication of *immolation* of a sacrificial victim; rather it is used here to denote ritual offerings to gods and other entities in the divine world. See, e.g., J. Henninger, "Sacrifice," in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. M. Eliade, London, vol. 12, 1987, pp. 544-57, esp. the definitions pp. 544-45. See further below on the verb *yaza-*.
  2. See, e.g., M. Molé, *Culte, mythe et cosmologie dans l'Iran ancien. Le problème zoroastrien et la tradition mazdéenne*, Paris, 1963, pp. 126-32, for instance (p. 132): "The supreme divinity offers the sacrifice to create the world and thereby establishes an archetypal act. Since then, every sacrifice will be a recreation of the universe..."
  3. For reasons of space limitations, it has not been possible to include a full philological apparatus.
  4. Ahura Mazdā sacrifices with libations to his companion deities in order to be granted his wishes or responding to their call for sacrifices: to Anāhitā for her to allow him to make Zarathustra follow His Daēnā (*Yt.5.17*); to Tištriia (*Yt.8.23-25*) and Miθra (*Yt.10.53-54, 56*) in order to invigorate them and make them benevolent toward men; to Miθra for no explicit reason (*Yt.10.123*); and to Vaiiu for ability to overcome the Evil Spirit and to annihilate his creations (*Yt.15.2-3*).

*sāxt<sup>5</sup> andar yazišn kunišn dām hamāg bē dād abāg būd frawahr ī mardōmān ...*

At Midday, Ohrmazd together with the Life-giving Immortals prepared the sacrifice in the world of thought. During the performance of the sacrifice, the entire creation was established. The *fravashis* of men were with him.

At the end of the world, he will again sacrifice to establish the perfect world:

*Bd.34.29-30*

*ohrmazd ō gētīy šawēd xwad zōd srōš-ahlīy rāspīg ud ēbyāhan pad dast āwarēd. ganāg mēnōy ud āz pad ān ī gāhānīg nērang zad abzārīhā wasīyār*

Ohrmazd goes down into the world, himself as libating priest and Srōš-ahlīy as auxiliary priest, bringing the sacred girdle in his hands. The Foul Spirit and Āz will be greatly and exceedingly smashed by the magic power of the *Gāθās*.

It was also by this sacrifice that Ohrmazd became ruler of his creation and received many of his other characteristic qualities, whereby was able to overcome – at least temporarily – the forces of chaos, represented by darkness and death, and to establish order, represented by light and life:

*Bd.1.34*

*ohrmazd pēš az dām-dahišnīh nē būd xwadāy ud pas az dām-dahišnīh xwadāy ud sūd-xwāstār ud frazānag ud jud-bēš āškārag ud hamē-rāyēnīdār ud abzōnīg ud harwisp-nigerīdār būd*

Before the establishment of the creation Ohrmazd was not ruling Lord, but, after the establishment of the creation, he became ruling Lord, profit-seeker (Av. *səuuišta* “richest in life-giving strength”), foreknowing, harm-discarding, apparent (Av. *haiθīia* “true, real”), ever-arranging, increasing (Av. *spənta*), and all-observing (Av. *vīspā hišas*).

5. Mss.: TD1, p. 33: *mynwy Y ycsn' pr'c sht'*; TD2, p. 38 *mynwd Y ycsn' pr'c s'ht'*; DH, p. 19 *mynwy ycsn' pr'c s'ht'*; K20, fol. 91r *g's mynwd ycsn' pr'c s'ht'*.

This is not the whole story, however; Ahura Mazdā is also said to have given *birth* to the first ordered cosmos, the new state of existence, the *ahu*. In the *Gāθās*, he is said to be the birth father of Order,<sup>6</sup> as well as of Ārmaiti, which we know also represents the earth, *and* of Good Thought, which I believe also represents the luminous cover of the sky:

*Gāθā* 3, 48.6<sup>7</sup>

*aṭ axiiāi ašā mazdā uruuarā vaxšaṭ  
ahurō aṅhāuš zaθōi pauruiiehiā ...*

Thus, for *her* the All-knowing One by (my/his) Order shall (now) make plants grow, (he), the Ahura, *at the engendering/birth of the first ahu*.

*Gāθā* 2, 43.5

*spəntəm aṭ θβā mazdā mēḡhī ahurā  
hiiaṭ θβā aṅhēuš zaθōi darəsəm pauruuīm  
hiiaṭ dā śiaaoθanā mīzdauuəṇ yācā uxδā ...*

Thus, I (now) think of *you* as life-giving,<sup>8</sup> O All-knowing Lord, / as I (now) see you *at the engendering/birth of the ahu*, when you established, / *for the first time*, actions as fee-earning, as well as (the words) that are to be uttered...

*Gāθā* 2, 44.3

*... kasnā zaθā ptā ašahiiā pauruiiō ...*

What man/hero (is), by (his) engendering, *the first father of Order*?

*Gāθā* 1, 31.8

*aṭ θβā mēḡhī pauruuīm mazdā yazūm stōi manəḡhā  
vaṅhāuš patarēm manəḡhō ...*

Thus, I (now) think with (my) thought of *you* (as) *the first*, O All-knowing One, yet youthful / *father of good thought* ...

6. See Skjærvø, 2003, for a discussion of the meaning of *aša-*, and Skjærvø, 2002a, on Ahura Mazdā and Ārmaiti.

7. I have included the number of the *Gāθā*, since it is often of interest to see *where* certain themes occur in the *Old Avesta* and how they are distributed throughout the five *Gāθās*.

8. The root *spā-/sū-/sau-* (*spənta-*, etc.; *sūra-*; *sauua(h)-*, *saošiiant-*, etc.) properly refers to “swelling,” that is, in religious context, to nature swelling with (the juices of) life. I render words containing this root by means of “(re)vitalizing, life-giving.”

Gāθā 2, 45.4

*aṭ frauuaxšiiā aṅhēuš ahiiā vahištəm*  
*ašāt hacā mazdā vaēdā yē īm dāt*  
*patarēm vaṅhēuš varəzaiiaṅtō manəḥō*  
*aṭ hōi dugədā hušiiəoθanā ārmaitiš*

Thus, I shall proclaim the *best* (announcement) of (= about?) this state / in accordance with Order: the All-knowing One, knows (him) who established it / (to be) *the father of the good thought* which invigorates (you), / while *his daughter* (is) *Ārmaiti of good actions*.

Moreover, according to the Pahlavi texts, such as the *Pahlavi Rivayat* and the *Bundahišn*, once he had assembled all the elements of the new world, he kept them inside himself like a foetus, nurturing it until it was born as the worlds of thought and of living beings:

PR.46.1-3<sup>9</sup>

*ēd kū āsmān čiyōn az čē kerd estēd. abzār būd ī čiyōn xwarg ī ātaxš ī*  
*pad rōšnīh pāk az ān ī asar rōšnīh bē brēhēnīd. u-š hamāg dām ud*  
*dahišn az ān bē kerd. ud ka-š bē kerd būd ā-š andar ō tan burd u-š sē*  
*hazār sāl andar tan dāšt u-š hamē abzāyēnīd u-š weh hamē kerd*

About this matter: how and from what was the sky made? – The tool was something like a cinder of fire of pure light, which he fashioned from the Endless Light. And he made all the creations and creatures from it. And when he had made it, then he brought it into (his) body. And he kept it for 3000 years in the body, making it grow and making it better.

Bd.1.58-59

*dām ī ohrmazd pad mēnōyīh ēdōn parward kū \*tarrīhā estād, amenīdār*  
*agrīftār arawāg čiyōn šusr homānāg... nūn-iz pad gētīy pad ān*  
*hangōšīdag andar aškomb ī mādar hambawīhēnd ud zāyēnd ud par-*  
*warēnd. ohrmazd pad dām-dahišnīh mādarīh ud pidarīh ī dahišn ast. čē*  
*ka-š dām pad mēnōy parward ān būd mādarīh ka-š bē ō gētīy dād ān*  
*būd pidarīh*

Ohrmazd's creation was nurtured in the world of thought in such a way that it was in \*moisture – unthinking, untouched, unmoving –

9. See A. V. Williams. *The Pahlavi Rivāyat Accompanying the Dādestān ī Dēnīg*. 2 vols. Det Kongelige Danske Videnskabernes Selskab. Historisk-filosofiske Meddelelser 60: 1-2. Copenhagen, 1990, pt. I, pp. 60-61, pt. II, p. 71.

like semen ... Still, in the world of living beings, they are formed in the womb of the mother and are born and nurtured in that way. And by the establishment of the creation *Ohrmazd is father and mother of the creation*, for when he nurtured the creation in the world of thought, that was being its mother, when he put it into the world of living beings, that was being its father.

Once the cosmos was established, however, the forces of *evil* attacked, and the world fell back into chaos. In order to help living beings in their battle against evil, it was arranged for *Zarathustra* to be born and become the first *human* sacrificer. *Zarathustra* was able to re-establish Order in the cosmos for as long as he lived, and, ever since his death, this task is performed by human sacrificers, whose task is to *assist* Ahura Mazda. They do so by replicating the primordial sacrifice and, by *their* sacrifices, put Ahura Mazda *back* in command and provide him with the elements needed to *re-order* the world.

### **Purpose of the yasna sacrifice: birth of the ordered cosmos**

The sacrifice is therefore a process of reconstruction and multiple births, and in the rest of this presentation, I shall discuss in brief detail the role of the sacrifice as an ordering process, the birth and function of *Zarathustra*, and the role of the *fravashis* (pre-existing “souls” of living beings) in the birth of the cosmos.

The purpose of the sacrifice is to dispel the forces of evil, of darkness, destruction, and death, and *re-establish* the world as Ahura Mazda first ordered it, full of light and life, fertility and growth. In the *Gāthās*, this is expressed by the image of *Ārmaiti*, the earth, *seeing* Order, that is, Ahura Mazda’s beautiful sky, with the sun in its middle, whereby *she* becomes able to produce all living things, which are her works (*šiiəθ-na*):

*Gāthā* 3, 48.11

*kadā mazdā ašā maṭ ārmaitiš / jimaṭ xšaθrā hušəitiš vāstrauuaitī ...*

When, O All-knowing One, will *Ārmaiti* come together with Order / (and) command, (she) who gives good dwellings and pastures?

*Gāθā* 2, 43.16

*astuuat ašəm xiiāt uštānā aojōnhuuat*

*xʷəng darəsoi xšaθrōi xiiāt ārmaitiš ...*

May Order have bones (and) through (my/his) life breath<sup>10</sup> (be) strong! / May Ārmaiti be in command (and) in full sight of the sun! ...

Note that, in India, the new day is *generated* by Indra's sacrifice:

*RV.2.21.4*

*anānudó vṛṣabhó dódhato vadhó gambhīrá ṛṣvó ásamaṣṭakāvyaḥ*

*radracodáh śnáthano vīlītás pṛthúr índraḥ suyajñá uśasaḥ svàr janat*

He who cannot be pushed back, the male, the weapon against the obstinate, profound, capacious, whose poetic art can never be reached and matched, / who impels the slow, who crushes, fortified, broad, *Indra with his good sacrifice has generated/engendered the dawns, the sun.*

The interaction between the human and divine spheres needed to bring this about takes the form of a permanent cycle of gifts exchanged between gods and men that started when Ahura Mazdā ordered the cosmos, giving all good things to man,<sup>11</sup> and which will end only at the end of the world. In the sacrifice, everything that god gave to men is offered up to him as gifts, including their bones and life breath, crucial ingredients that must be added to the cosmic foetus before it can be born as a functioning living entity.

*Gāθā* 1, 31.11

*hiiat nē mazdā pauruuīm gaēθāscā tašō daēnāscā*

*θβā manajhā xratūšcā hiiat astuuantəm dadā uštānəm*

When, O All-knowing One, you for the first time fashioned for us herds and vision-souls / by your thought, as well as (our) guiding thoughts, when you would place (in us) life breath with bones...

10. I assume *uštāna-* is < \**ušta-* “invigorated” (< \**vaz-*) + \**Hna-* “breath.”

11. Cf. the Achaemenid formula: *baga vazarka Auramazdā haya imām būmim adā haya avam asmānam adā haya martiyam adā haya šiyātim adā martiyahayā* “the great god is Ahuramazdā, who established this earth here, who established yonder sky there, who established man (in his place), who established happiness for man.”

Gāθā 1, 33.14 (cf. 2, 43.16, above)

*aṭ rātaṃ zaraθuštrō tanuuascī xʷaxiiā uštanəm*  
*dadāiī pauruuatātəm manaḡhāscā vaḡhēuš mazdāi*

Thus, Zarathustra is giving as gift the life breath of his own body, even, / (as) the foremost share (of his sacrifice) and (the gift) of (his) good thought to the All-knowing One...

*Yasna Haptaḡhāiti 37.3*

*tēm aṭ āhūriiā nāmēnī mazdā varā spəntō.təmā yazamaidē*  
*tēm ahmākāiš azdabīšcā uštānāišcā yazamaidē*

Thus, up to *him* we sacrifice (his) Ahurian names: / O “All-knowing One,” O “good one,” O most “life-giving one”! / We are sacrificing (them) to *him* together with *our* bones and life breaths.

Once the sacrificer and his assistants have provided god with all the necessary ingredients, in appreciation of their gifts to him, god causes the rebirth of the cosmos as a counter gift of the same (or greater) exchange value:

Gāθā 1, 34.15 (cf. Gāθā 2, 46.19)

*mazdā aṭ mōi vahištā srauuāscā šiiəθanācā vaocā*  
*tā tū vohū manaḡhā ašcā išudəm stūtō*  
*xšmākā xšaθrā ahurā fərašəm vasnā haiθiiēm dā ahūm*

O All-knowing One, thus say *my* poems conferring fame and (*my*) actions (are) the best! / (Say), you, (that my) repayment (in the form) of praises (is best) on account of that good thought (of mine) and the Order (of my ritual). / You (now) establish by *your* command, O Lord (and you others, this) *ahu* (as) Juicy<sup>12</sup> in exchange value, the *true* one.

Gāθā 3, 50.10-11

*aṭ yā varəšā yācā pairi.āiš šiiəθanā*  
*yācā vohū cašmaṃ arəjaṭ manaḡhā raocā xʷəṅg ...*  
*aṭ və staotā aojāi mazdā aḡhācā*  
*yauuaṭ ašā tauuācā isāicā*  
*dātā aḡhēuš arədaṭ vohū manaḡhā*  
*haiθiiā varəštəṃ hiiat vasnā frašō.təməm*

12. Since one of the goals of the sacrifice is to make Order “full of swelling” (Gāθā 4, 51.21: *ašəm spənuuat*), I assume *fraša-* (if connected with OInd. *pṛṣ-* and if this is “liquid strengthening” of some sort) means “full of the juices of life and vitality.”

Thus, the actions that I shall (now) perform, both (those) that you have wished for / and (those) that (our) eyes on account of (our) good thought deserve (to see, are the bringing back of) the lights of the sun. ...

Thus, I shall declare myself as your praiser, O All-knowing One (and you others), and I shall be – / to the extent I by the Order (of my ritual) can and am able – / the establisher of the (new) *ahu* \*successfully by (my) good thought! / On account of (my) true (utterance) let what is most Juicy in exchange value be produced!

What is born from the foetus that grew in the divine womb is the new *ahu*, “state of existence” or “(new) life,” a fully grown living being with bones and life.

### The introduction to the *yasna*

This purpose of the *yasna* is stated clearly in its introduction, which has the following elements:<sup>13</sup>

It begins with the “profession of faith,” the *Frauarāne*, in which the sacrificer takes sides for Ahura Mazdā and his creation against the *daēuvas*, or “old gods.” Then, three entities are introduced, for whose benefit the sacrifice is performed, namely, the two daily *ratus* of *Hāu-uani* (“time of *hauuana* ‘haoma-pressing’,” preceding dawn), and that of *Sāuuuāṇhi* (“time of *sauuah* ‘life-giving strength’,” following dawn), as well as the fire, son of Ahura Mazdā, that is, the sun. There follows the *Frastuiiē* “I say forth in praise,” in which the dichotomy of “praise” versus “blame” or “scorn” is established: by his good thoughts, etc., the sacrificer establishes good thoughts, etc., as praiseworthy, but bad thoughts, etc., as blameworthy and to be left behind. Then the Life-giving Immortals are specified as the recipients of the sacrifice, presented as a *gift* (*fārā vā rāhī* “I have now given you”) of the sacrificer’s own body and life breath; and there follows the praise of Order, the object of the sacrifice, and a list of entities for whose benefit the sacrifice is performed, all associated with the sun: Ahura Mazdā (father of the cosmic Order and the heavenly fire) and the Life-giving Immortals (his chil-

13. See also Kellens, “Commentaire sur les premiers chapitres du Yasna,” *JA* 284, 1996, pp. 37-108.

dren); Miθra (who prepares the path for the sun); peace with good pastures (the outcome of the sacrifice); the radiant sun, good Vaiiu (which the sun travels *through*); the fire, son of Ahura Mazdā; Mount *Ušidarəna* “Crack of Dawn” (presumably the mountain out of which the sun reappears); and, finally, all the gods in the world of thought and that of living beings, as well as the fravashis of the upholders of Order (as birth assistants). Then the hope is expressed that, through the satisfaction of Ahura Mazdā and the scorn of the Evil Spirit, “the most perfect *ahu* may be produced as a worthy exchange gift”; and, finally, the *Ahuna vairiia* prayer is recited for the victory of Ahura Mazdā and the protection of his ordered cosmos.

We see that all these elements target the production of the new day, which is the rebirth of Ahura Mazdā’s ordered cosmos.

### The Zarathustra myth

In the cosmological myth, Zarathustra is born in order to perform the sacrifice in the world of living beings. According to the *Gāθās*, he was chosen by Ahura Mazdā to perform *his* sacrifice among mortals. In the only extended mythological passage of the Old Avesta, *Yasna* 29 (at the beginning of the *Gāθā* collection, only preceded by an introduction), we find ourselves in the period after the first attack upon Ahura Mazdā’s newly ordered cosmos. The situation of living beings is summed up in the plight of the cow that is caught in the clutches of the powers of evil, foremost of whom is Wrath. She is complaining to the inhabitants of paradise, who ask Ahura Mazdā what he has in mind for the cow. The problem turns out to be the lack of a *ratu*, a prototype, for the cow, which would protect her and provide the model for a happy life for living beings. The solution is simple. Ahura Mazdā points out that he already has the ingredients of the sacrifice and that all that is needed is someone who can take them down to the world of the living. It is pointed out that such a one exists, namely Zarathustra, who is there among them. *He* is ready to do what is needed, namely, sing songs of praise for Ahura Mazdā and his companions:

*Gāθā* 1, 29.8

*aēm mōi idā vistō yē nē aēuuō sāsna gūšataē  
zaraθuštrō spitāmō huuō nē mazdā vaštī ašāicā  
carəkərəθrā srāuuaiieḡhē ...*

This one (here is the one) found by me who alone listens to our ordinances, / Zarathustra Spitama. For us, O All-knowing One, and for Order, *he* wishes / to make heard poems of praise...

Zarathustra then conquers the forces of evil by reciting the holy texts and performing the sacrifice and *re*-establishes Ahura Mazdā's rule in the worlds of gods and men, as told in the *Avesta*, where Zarathustra's function as praise singer is often mentioned; according to the hymn to the fravashis, he was the *first* to praise Order and blame the old gods. Zarathustra's activity, in turn, serves as a model for every human sacrificer also to praise and take sides for Ahura Mazdā, but blame and cast aside the old gods:<sup>14</sup>

Yt.13.89

*yō paoiriiō stōiš astuuaiθiiā staoṭ aṣəm nāist daēuuū  
fraorənata mazdaiiasnō zaraθuštriš vīdaēuuō ahura.ṭkaēšō*

... he who was the first of the (temporal) existence with bones to praise Order and blame the old gods, to choose to sacrifice to Ahura Mazdā in the tradition of Zarathustra, discarding the old gods and holding the \*teaching about(?) Ahura (Mazdā).

Y.11.17

*aibigairiiā daiθe vīspā humatācā hūxtācā huuarštācā  
paitiriciīā daiθe vīspā dušmatācā dužūxtācā dužuuarštācā*

I determine as worthy of songs of praise all (thoughts, words, acts) well thought, spoken, performed.

I determine as worthy of being cast aside/left behind all (thoughts, words, acts) badly thought, spoken, performed.

Y.12.1

*nāismī daēuuō  
frauuarānē mazdaiiasnō zaraθuštriš vīdaēuuō ahura.ṭkaēšō  
staoṭā aməšanəm spəntanəm yaštā aməšanəm spəntanəm*

I blame the old gods.

I choose to sacrifice to Ahura Mazdā in the tradition of Zarathustra; to discard the old gods and hold the \*teaching of Ahura (Mazdā),

14. On the myth of Zarathustra, see also Skjærvø, "Zarathustra: First Poet-Sacrificer"; on the concepts of praise and blame, see Skjærvø, "Praise and Blame in the Avesta."

(to be) a praiser of the life-giving immortal (gods), a sacrificer to the life-giving immortal (gods).

Two aspects of the birth of Zarathustra according to the myth must be emphasized: according to the *Dēnkard*, Zarathustra was incarnated in the world of living beings when his fravashi was sent down to earth and came to his parents via the *haoma*:

*Dk.7.2.47*<sup>15</sup>

*ān hōm ud pēm ka hagenēn gumēxt ud ō ohrmazd niwēyīd estād pōrušāsp dugdōw frāz xwārīd. ud ēdar hangerdīgīh ī būd xwarrah frawahr ud tan gōhr ī zarduxšt andar 2 \*pid*

When that *hōm* and milk were mixed and it had been announced to Ohrmazd, (then) Pōrušāsp (and) Dugdōw drank it. And here the complete assembly of the fortune, fravashi, and body substance of Zarathustra (was) in his two parents.

Thus, both the fravashi and the *haoma* were crucial elements in the making of Zarathustra. Given the central functions of the *haoma* and the fravashis in the *yasna*, one of the effects of this sacrifice, as proposed by Marijan Molé, is therefore to *re-engender* Zarathustra in the persona of the current sacrificer. Note that the terms *niwēy-* and *hangerdēn-* are the Pahlavi renderings of *niuuaēδaiia-* and *hankāraia-* (on which see below), which shows that we are dealing with a (prototypical) sacrifice.

### The myth of the fravashis

Let us therefore now turn to the myth of the fravashis. In *Yašt* 13, the fravashis are described as having assisted Ahura Mazdā during the establishment of the cosmos and as having shown their paths to the heavenly waters, which they helped release:

*Yt.13.1-2*

*mraoϑ ahurō mazdā spitamāi zaraθuštrāi  
aēuua tē zāuuarə aojasca x<sup>v</sup>arəno auuasca rafnasca  
framrauua ərəzuuō spitama*

15. See M. Molé, *La légende de Zoroastre selon les textes pehlevi*, Travaux de l'Institut d'études iraniennes de l'Université de Paris 3, Paris, pp. 22-23.

yaṭ ašaonəm frauuašīnəm uγranəm aiβiθūrānəm  
 yaθa mē jasən auuaīhe yaθa mē barən upastəm  
 uγrā ašaonəm frauuašaiiō  
 āḡhəm raiia x<sup>v</sup>arənaḡhaca vīdāraēm zaraθuštra  
 aom asmanəm yō usca raoxšnō frādərəsrō

Ahura Mazdā said to Spitama Zarathustra: So I shall proclaim to you,  
 O upright Zarathustra,  
 the power and strength, the munificence, the help and support  
 of the fravashis of those who uphold Order, strong, unshakeable  
 when they came to my help, when they brought me assistance,  
 the strong fravashis of those who uphold Order.  
 By their wealth and munificence I held out, O Zarathustra,  
 yonder sky (which is) above, luminous and visible afar,

Yt.13.53-54

ašāunəm vaḡ<sup>v</sup>hīš sūrā spəḡtā frauuašaiiō yazamaide  
 yā apəm mazdadātānəm srīrā paθō daēsaiieīnti  
 yā para ahmāt hištəḡta fraḡdātā afrataṭ.kušīš  
 hamaiia gātuuō darəḡəmcit pairi zruuānəm  
 āat tā nūrəm frataciḡti mazdadātəm paiti paḡtəm

We sacrifice (to) the good life-giving fravashis of the upholders of  
 Order, rich in life-giving strength,  
 who show (their) beautiful paths to the waters established by (Ahura)  
 Mazdā,  
 which before this stood set forth (in their places), (but) not (yet)  
 flowing forth,  
 in one and the same place for a very long time.  
 But now those flow forth along the path established by (Ahura) Mazdā.

They also act as birth assistants, notably of human children, when the  
 constituents of the body are placed inside the “covering”:

Yt.13.11

āḡhəm raiia x<sup>v</sup>arənaḡhaca vīdāraēm zaraθuštra  
 azəm barəθrišuuva puθrē paiti.vəḡətē apara.iriθiḡtō ā dātāt vīdātaot  
 viiāhuua uruuat caēm  
 astica gaonaca drəβḡdaca \*uruθβaḡca paidiiāsca frauuāxšasca

By their wealth and munificence, I held out, O Zarathustra,  
 the sons in the wombs, enclosed and not dying beforehand until the  
 determined untying (of the bones),

I \*assembled in the coverings \*in right order<sup>16</sup>

the bones and the hairs, the \*muscles, the intestines, the sinews and the limbs.

The word “covering” (*viiā-*) has far-reaching implications: etymologically, it appears to mean something braided or woven, that is, a tissue or fabric serving as a covering, which, in the context of birth, is likely to refer to the amnion, or caul, which contains the foetus.

The word is also found in the context of the star Satauuāēsa, who, released by the fravashis, pushes the heavenly waters through the *viiās*, where the verb “release” (*harz-*) is that typically used of releasing male animals in to the flock of females (*varšniharšta-*),<sup>17</sup> as well as of the release of semen (V.15.7):

Yt.13.43

*tā harəzənti satauuāēsəm antarə zqm asmanəmca*

*\*fraṭ.āpəm<sup>18</sup> zauuanō.srūtəm taṭ.āpəm uxšiiat.uruuarəm*

They release Satauuāēsa between heaven and earth, / who \*fills the waters when hearing the invocation, who makes the waters fall, who makes the plants grow.

Yt.8.9

*ātaṭ tā āpō frašāuuaiieiti \*satauuāēsō auui \*haptō.karšuuairīm <zqm><sup>19</sup>*  
*viiāhuua yaṭ jasaiti srīrō*

Thus Satauuāēsa pushes those waters forward over the <earth> with its seven continents, / when he comes among the coverings, beautiful ...

The *haoma*, too, is associated with the rain myth,<sup>20</sup> and the verb used for filtering the *haoma* is *pairi.harz-*, also from *harz-* “release”:<sup>21</sup>

16. *caīia-* “gather together” in groups or layers? – \**r-unt*, put together and connected in rows?

17. Cf. S. Wikander, “Ein Fest bei den Kurden und im Avesta,” *Orientalia Suecana* 60, 1960 (publ. 1961), pp. 7-10; G. Asatrian, “Armenian, *xoygotowt’iwn* (Tracing Back an Old Animal-breeding Custom in Ancient Armenia),” *Iran & Caucasus* 2, 1998, pp. 63-65.

18. The manuscripts have *taṭ.āp°*, but Yt. 10.61 has *fraṭ.°* in the same expression.

19. The manuscripts have *sāta°* and *°karšuuairīš*.

20. In India, the connection between the rains and the *soma* is trivial, as is that with dawn; see, e.g., Bergaigne, *La religion védique d’après les hymnes du Rīg-Veda*, Paris, 1878-97 (repr. Paris, 1963), vol. II, §§ III-IV, pp. 30-42 (waters), 42-43 (dawn).

21. Yet another derivative is *upa-harz-* in *upaharštaiiaē°* “in order to let (the haomas) flow” in Vr.9.3. The same multiplicity of references is seen in OInd. *szj-* “release.”

## Y.27.6

*haoma pairi.harāšiiēnte*

the *haomas* are about to be *released* through (the filter) ...

The *earliest* occurrence of the term *viiā-* is in the third *Gāθā*:

*Gāθā* 3, 48.7

*nī aēšəmō nī.diiātqm paitī rəməm paitī.siiōdūm*

*yōi ā vaṇhāuš manāḥhō dīdraγžō.duiiē / ašā viiqm ...*

Let *wrath* be tied down! Cut back obstruction / you who wish to (stretch) hither (and) hold firmly *the \*covering of good thought* / through Order! ...

Here, the action of stretching out the *viiā* of good thought depends on that of tying down Wrath, which, in my opinion, is the principal representative of chaos and probably embodies the dark sky,<sup>22</sup> while the “covering of good thought,” in this context, probably refers to the bright covering of the sky, as I have argued in a forthcoming work.

The more exact nature of the fravashis is revealed by a special formula applied only to them:

## Y.17.18 (= Y.26.1, 59.18, 71.22)

*ašāunqm vaṇ<sup>v</sup>hīš sūrā spəntā frauuašaiiō*

*staomi zbaiiemi ufiemi yazamaide*

The good, life-giving fravashis of the upholders of Order, rich in life-giving strength, I praise, I invoke, *I weave*. We offer (them) up in sacrifice...

Here the verb *ufiemi* literally means “to weave.” The only attestation of this verb outside of this formula is at the beginning of the *first Gāθā*, where the sacrificer states his purpose to *weave* Ahura Mazda and his companions, presumably into a poetic web depicting their heroic deeds, as well as into the well-structured tissue from which the macrocosmic Order will be born:

22. Cf. the following Manichean passage from the hymn Sadwēs and Pēsūs (Boyce, “Sadwēs and Pēsūs,” *BSOAS* 13, 1951, p. 912): M741R (3) *cyhrγ sdwys rwšn • nm ʔyd ʔw hw šmg ...* (6) *šfrsyd hw šmg tʔryg...* “Sadwēs shows (his/her) bright appearance to that Wrath ... that dark Wrath is shamed...”

## Gāθā 1, 28.3

*yē vā aṣā ufiānī manascā vohū apauruuīm / mazdāmcā ahurəm ...*

I who want to weave with Order you (all) and the good thought that had none before it, / as well as the All-knowing Lord, (into my poetic web)...

Thus, the function of the fravashis in the sacrifice, during which they are mentioned about 150 times,<sup>23</sup> I think, is to help weave the micro- and macrocosmic tissues, through which they conduct the heavenly birth waters needed for the rebirth of the Ordered cosmos.

As for Zarathustra's fravashi, it is invoked repeatedly throughout the first part of the *yasna* in connection with the *haoma* and the *parahaoma*, which shows that the link that we saw in the *Dēnkard* between *haoma*, fravashi, and Zarathustra is already Avestan:

## Y.3.2

*haoməmca para.haoməmca āiiese yešti xšnūmaine zaraθuštrahe spitāmahe aṣaonō frauuašē*

By (my) sacrifice, I muster the *haoma* and the *parahaoma* for winning the favor of the fravashi of Spitama Zarathustra, upholder of Order.

## Y.6.18-19

*haoməmca para.haoməmca yazamaide*

*zaraθuštrahe spitāmahe ida aṣaonō aṣīmca frauuašīmca yazamaide*

We sacrifice (to) the *haoma* and the *parahaoma*. / Here we sacrifice (to) Spitama Zarathustra's, upholder of Order, reward and fravashi.

It is also invoked in a clear reference to Zarathustra's first sacrifice in the world of living beings:

## Y.16.2-3

*zaraθuštrahe aṣaonō frauuašīm yazamaide ... aṅhuiiaoš aṣacinaṅhō*

*pauruuā dātā dāmaṅ aṣaonīš daθušō ahurahe mazdā ... yazamaide*

We sacrifice (to) the fravashi of Zarathustra, who upheld Order ... seeker of the (first) *ahu*, lover of Order.

We sacrifice (to) the Orderly creations established before (the others), (those) of Ahura Mazdā, who has established (everything).

23. According to Boyce ("Frawardīn yašt," in *Encyclopaedia Iranica* X/2, New York, 2000, p. 198), "[n]o act of worship takes place, therefore, without their invocation," and (p. 199): *Yt.*13 "is the most frequently recited, after that to Ohrmazd."

### The *yasna* sacrifice, part 1

Let us now return to the progression of the *yasna* sacrifice to see how the sacrificer prepares the rebirth of the ordered cosmos.

To make his *microcosmic* representation of the divine ordering of the *macrocosm*,<sup>24</sup> the sacrificer assembles the *ratus* – models or blueprints – of all the ingredients of the first creation. These actions are described by formulas<sup>25</sup> that contain verbs in the present indicative in its *performative* function, used to describe the ongoing actions of the sacrificer. There are three types of actions:

1. the elements of the sacrifice are “introduced” by name and “presented to” the gods: *niuuāēdaiemi* (Y.1) and *āuuāēdaiimahī* (Y.4);

2. the elements are ordered: *haṅkāraiiemi* (Y.1), possibly referring to the elements being *assembled* while being *counted in* or *accounted for*; – *āiiese yešti* “I am mustering by my sacrificing” (Y.2-3; also Y.14.3, Y.22, Y.23), with *āiiese*<sup>26</sup> probably for *āiiasa-* from the root *yam* “seize,” that is, “grasp firmly, attach”; – *pairi.dadāmahī*, literally “to place all around,” that is, in their specific places (Y.4); – *ašaiia dadāmi* “I am placing in Orderly fashion,” that is, to obtain a perfect order (Y.7); – and *ratūš āstaiia* “I am *setting up* (as) models,” i.e., in their places (Y.13);<sup>27</sup>

3. the elements are sacrificed (Y.6, etc.): by the verb, *yaz-*, which is ambiguous, as it can mean both “sacrifice *something*,” with the accusative of the direct object, and “sacrifice *to somebody*,” with the accusative of the goal of motion; thus, most of the ingredients of the sacrifice are obviously offered up in sacrifice, but the deities are most probably sacrificed *to*, and I think the main reference of the verb is to the action of actually *sending* the sacrifice on its way.

Interestingly, terms corresponding to *āiiese yešti* and *pairi.dā-* are found in RV.10.130, a hymn in which the sacrifice is *woven*:

24. See, e.g., J. Brereton, “Sacred Space,” in *The Encyclopaedia of Religion*, vol. 12, pp. 526-35.

25. Cf. Kellens, 1996, pp. 38-42.

26. Suggested by comparison with *āiieze* from *āiiaza-*; derivation from *āiiasa-* “to ask for,” is unlikely, since there is no other example of medial long *ā* > *e* in this phonetic environment (the *ā* needs to be followed by a nasal, e.g., *hācaiene* < *\*-iiāne*).

27. Cf. Yt.10.89 *yim zaotārəm staiiata ahurō mazdā ašauua āsu.yasnəm bərəzi.gāθrəm* “(Haoma) whom Orderly Ahura Mazdā installed as libator with fast(-speeding) sacrifice, with high(-reaching) songs.”

## RV.10.130.1

*yó yajñó viśvátas tántubhis tatá ékaśataṃ devakarmébhīr áyataḥ  
imé vayanti pitáro yá āyayúḥ prá vayápa vayéty āsate taté*

The sacrifice stretched out with threads in all directions, \*attached with (to?) a hundred and one divine actions, / these fathers are weaving (it) who have come and are here. They sit by the stretched-out (web), (saying): “Weave forth, weave back!”

## RV.10.130.3

*kásīt pramá pratimá kíṃ nidánam ... paridhīḥ ká āsīt  
... yád devá devám áyajanta víśve*

What was the measure? What was the \*pattern? What was the fastening thread. ... What was the \*enclosure/frame!... when all the gods sacrificed the god?

It is therefore possible that the Avestan terminology refers to the organization of the various elements in the way a loom is set up for weaving, which agrees with the use of *ufiia-* “to weave” that we just discussed.

Thus, in these first chapters of the *yasna*, all the basic elements of the ordered cosmos are named and put in place, in the same way that Ahura Mazda originally construed the cosmos by producing all its elements and placing them in their appropriate places. Note especially that, in *Y.13.4* (with *pairi.dā-*), the sacrificer presents the life breath of his own body to the Life-giving Immortals. This is naturally followed by a reference to the cosmogonic sacrifices of the two spirits and of Ahura Mazda and the promise to repay Ahura Mazda for all the good things he has given humans, and, in *Y.13.7*, the three *fravashis* crucial to the making of the first *ahu* in the world of living beings are sacrificed (to): that of the cow/bull, that of Gaiia Martān, and that of Zarathustra:

## Y.13.4

*pairī vē aməša spəntā huxšaθrā hudāṇhō dadəmi  
tanuuascīṭ xʼaxiiā uštanəm pairī vīspā hujītaiiō  
iθā mainiiū mamanāitē iθā vaocātarē iθā vāuuəzəzātarē*

I place all around for you, O Life-giving Immortals, who bestow good command and give good gifts, / the life breath of my own body, even, as well as all good gains. / Thus the two spirits have ever thought, spoken, and performed.

## Y.13.7

*gəuščā hudān̄hō gaiie.xiiācā maraθnō ašāonō frauuašīm yazamaide  
zaraθuštrahe spitāmahe ida ašāonō ašīmca frauuašīmca yazamaide*

We sacrifice (to) the fravashi of the cow giving good gifts and of Gai-ia Martān, who upheld Order. / We sacrifice here (to) the reward and fravashi of Spitama Zarathustra, who upheld Order.

### The *yasna* sacrifice, part 2

After the sacrifice has been properly structured and its elements sacrificed, its principal purpose is spelled out in *Yasna* 8: it is to make Ahura Mazda ruler of the cosmos. This is accompanied by the offering and consumption of the sacrificial food, the *miiazda*, after which the sacrificer expresses several wishes, namely, that Ahura Mazda may be in command and that the waters may put the man who upholds order in command, but the one possessed by the Lie out of command; that he, the sacrificer himself, in the persona of Zarathustra, may induce all social leaders to accompany his *daēnā*; and that the entire ordered cosmos may be comfortable and free from oppression by the forces of evil:

## Y.8.5-6 (= Y.11.12, 22.3, 52.5, 60.8)

*vasasca tū ahura mazda uštāca xšaēša hauuanəm dāmanəm  
vasō āpō vasō uruuarā vasō vīspa vohū ašaciθra  
xšaiiamnəm ašauuanəm dāiiata axšaiiamnəm druuantəm  
vasō.xšaθrō hiiāt ašauua auuasō.xšaθrō hiiāt druuā  
gatō hamistō nižbərətō haca spəntahe mainiiəuš dāmabiō  
varətō auuasō.xšaθrō*

May you, O Ahura Mazda, have command at will and wish over your own creations! / Place at will, O waters, at will, O plants, at will, O all good (things) whose seed is from Order, / the upholder of Order in command, the Lieful one out of command! / May the upholder of Order have command at will! May the Lieful one *not* have command at will! / (May he be) gone, discomfited, removed from the creations of the Life-giving Spirit, / restrained, with no power at will.

## Y.8.8

*rauuasca x'āθrəmca āfrīnāmi vīspaiiā ašāonō stōiš  
qzasca dužāθrəmca āfrīnāmi vīspaiiā druuatō stōiš*

I invite free space and good breathing space of (= for) the entire (temporal) existence of the upholder of Order. / I invite narrowness and bad breathing space of (= for) the entire existence of the Lie.

This should probably be seen in connection with a myth found in the *Pahlavi Rivayat*, according to which Ohrmazd made food offerings (*myazd*) when he established the world of living beings, when he put the “soul” in Gayōmard (often identified with the Avestan “man who upholds Order”), when Zarathustra was born, and when Zarathustra received the *dēn*:

PR.16b.1-5<sup>28</sup>

*ka-m gēhān dād ā-m mēzd-ēw bē kerd ka-m gyān ō gayōmard dād ā-m mēzd-ēw bē kerd ka tō zarduxšt az mād zād hē ā-m mēzd-ēw bē kerd ka-t dēn az man bē padīrift ā-m mēzd-ēw bē kerd... čē paydāg kū mēzd-ēw pad sē mard ā-š bēwar frawahr ī ašōʾān bē awiš rasēnd zarduxšt ēn pursīd az ohrmazd kū mēzd-ēw bē ō yazdān rasēd ā-š daxšag čē ud ohrmazd guft kū ēk daxšag ka wārān abāyēd andar mēzd wārān bawēd*

When I established the world of living beings, I made a food offering. When I put the soul in Gayōmard, I made a food offering. When you, Zarathustra, were born, I made a food offering. When you received the *dēn* from me, I made a food offering. ...For it is revealed that, when one food offering is made by three men, then 10,000 fravashis of the orderly come to them. Zarathustra asked: “What is the sign that a food offering has reached the gods?” Ohrmazd said; “One sign is that, when rain is needed, there will be rain in one food offering.”

The hymn to Haoma then introduces the *haoma* and Zarathustra as sacrificer and is, logically, followed by the *Frauarāne*, in which the sacrificer repeatedly states his side in the cosmic duality and his function as praiser and sacrificer in the tradition of Zarathustra:

Y.12.6

*aθā aθā cōiṭ zaraθuštrō daēuuāiš sarəm viiāmruuīta  
vīspaēšū frašnaēšū vīspaēšū hañjamanaēšū*

28. See A. V. Williams. *The Pahlavi Rivāyat Accompanying the Dādestān ī Dēnīg*. 2 vols. Det Kongelig Danske Videnskabernes Selskab. Historisk-filosofiske Meddelelser 60: 1-2. Copenhagen, 1990, pt. I, pp. 86-89, pt. II, p. 31.

*yāiš apərəsaētəm mazdāasca zaraθuštrasca  
aθā azəmcīṭ yō mazdaiiasnō zaraθuštriš daēuuāiš sarəm vīmruiiē  
yaθā anāiš viiāmruuītā yō ašauuā zaraθuštrō*

And thus, again and again, Zarathustra would forswear the company with the old gods,

in all the conversations, in all the meetings

in which they discussed, (Ahura) Mazdā and Zarathustra.

And thus do I, too, as a Mazdaiiasnian in the tradition of Zarathustra, (herewith) forswear the company with the old gods,

like *he* would forswear them, Zarathustra, upholder of Order.

The first litany focused on the fravashis is *Yasna* 23, which opens with the fravashis' cosmogonic functions; then the *haoma* plants and the other ingredients of the sacrifice are presented to Ahura Mazdā; still more fravashis are listed, while the preparation of the *haoma* sacrifice continues with new references to the sun, as well as a strophe dedicated to the good Vaiiu, straightest Cistā, and the Mazdayasnian Daēnā:<sup>29</sup>

#### Y.25.5

*vaēm ašauuanəm yazamaide  
vaēm uparō.kairīm yazamaide taraδātəm aniiāiš dāmaṇ  
aētəṭ tē vaiiō yazamaide yaṭ tē asti spəntō.mainiiaom  
razištəm cistəm mazdaδātəm ašaonīm yazamaide  
daēnaṇ vaṇ<sup>h</sup>hīm māzdaiiasnīm yazamaide*

We sacrifice to Vaiiu, upholder of Order.

We sacrifice to Vaiiu, whose work is above, set beyond the other creations –

to this of yours we sacrifice, O Vaiiu, which you have of the Life-giving Spirit.

We sacrifice to straightest Cistā, upholder of Order, established by Ahura Mazdā.

We sacrifice to the good Daēnā of those who sacrifice to Ahura Mazdā.

We are, in fact, approaching the core of the *yasna* sacrifice, which is the recitation and sending off of the Old Avestan texts. Since the new *ahu* is not yet born, the sacrifice has to travel through the spaces currently oc-

29. Vaiiu had already been invoked in similar terms in Y.0.9 and Y.22.24 in conjunction with the sun.

cupied by darkness, that is, the dark Vaiiu, where it needs the guidance of Cistā and the Daēnā.

The principal invocation of the fravashis in the *Yasna* comes in *Y.26* (repeated in *Y.59*), from which note the following passage, which refers to the constituents of the human person and to the first and last sacrificers in the world of living beings:

*Y.26.4-5* (= *Y.59.21-22*)

*ida ašaonəm ašaoninəmca ahūmca daēnəmca*  
*baodasca uruuānəmca frauuašīmca yazamaide*  
*yōi ašāi vaonarə*  
*gəuš hudāhō uruuānəm yazamaide*  
*yōi ašāi vaonarə*  
*gaiiēhe marəθnō ašaonō frauuašīm yazamaide*  
*zaraθuštrahe spitāmahe ida ašaonō ašīmca frauuašīmca yazamaide*  
*kauuōiš vištāspahe ašaonō frauuašīm yazamaide*  
*isaṭ.vāstrahe zaraθuštrōiš ašaonō frauuašīm yazamaide*

Here we sacrifice – of the male and female upholders of Order – the *ahu*, the vision-soul,

the consciousness, the breath-soul, and the fravashi,  
 (of those) who have ever won for Order.

We sacrifice the breath-soul of the cow that gives good gifts.

(We sacrifice the fravashis of the following ones) who have ever won for Order:

We sacrifice (to) the fravashi of Gaiia Martān, who upheld Order.

Here we sacrifice (to) the reward and fravashi of Spitama Zarathustra, who upheld Order.

We sacrifice (to) the fravashi of Kauui Vištāspa.

We sacrifice (to) the fravashi of Isaṭ.vastra the Zarathustra-son.

*Yasna 27*, which follows, introduces the *Old Avesta*. *Yasna 27* begins with a text to eliminate the forces of evil and to make prosper the life-giving deities:

*Y.27.1-2*

*aētaṭ dim vīspanəm mazištəm dazdiiāi*  
*ahūmca ratūmca yim ahurəm mazdəm*  
*snaθāi aṅrahe mainiiūš druuatō snaθāi aēšmahe xruuī.draoš*  
*fradaθāi ahurahe mazdā raēuuatō x<sup>var</sup>ənəṅ<sup>h</sup>atō*  
*fradaθāi aməšanəm spəṅtanəm*

*fradaθāi tištriieheca stārō raēuuatō x<sup>v</sup>arənaŋ<sup>v</sup>hatō*

*fradaθāi narš ašaonō*

*fradaθāi vīspanəm spəntahe mainiiēuš dāmanəm ašaonəm*

This (we do?), for him to be established  
 as the greatest *ahu* of all and (its) *ratu*: Ahura Mazdā,  
 for the striking of the Lieful Evil Spirit, for the striking of Wrath with  
 the bloody club,  
 for the furthering of Ahura Mazdā, wealthy and munificent,  
 for the furthering of the Life-giving Immortals,  
 for the furthering of the star Tištriia, wealthy and munificent,  
 for the furthering of the Man upholding Order,  
 for the furthering of all of the Life-giving Spirit's Orderly creations.

Then, the *haoma* plants are strained and the *parahaoma* mixture of *hao-*  
*ma*, milk, and water is prepared. Also, the role of the *haoma* is stated  
 explicitly: it is the *haomas* that put Ahura Mazdā back in command and  
 provide the basic pattern for the ordered cosmos:

Y.27.6

*haoma pairi.harəšiiēnte mazda.xšaθra aša.ratauuō*

*vaŋhuš sraošō yō ašahe hacaite mazaraiia*

*hōca ida yōiθβā astu*

The *haomas* are about to be filtered, containing the (royal) command  
 of (Ahura) Mazdā, containing the models of Order. / Good *Sraoša*,  
 who is followed by \*Ašī who bestows riches [cf. Y.43.12] – / let him  
 too have taken up his position here.

*Yasna 27* also contains the three most powerful Zoroastrian prayers, in-  
 cluding the *Ahuna Vairiia*, by means of which Ahura Mazdā and  
 Zarathustra overcame the Evil Spirit.

With the recitation of *Y.27*, all the ingredients – the *haoma*, the plant,  
 the milk, the water, and the barsom – have been assembled for the re-  
 birth of Zarathustra, and the Old Avestan texts, which now follow, con-  
 clude with the praise of Zarathustra's successful sacrifice, dire curses  
 against the forces of evil, and a prayer to divine Airiia-man to come and  
 heal the world, as he does in the conclusion of the *Videvdad*.

### The yasna sacrifice, part 3

The *Gāθās*, having been recited, are now on their way up to Ahura Mazda, carrying with them all the elements of the new living entity to be born and providing protection:

Y.55.1-2

*vīspā gaēθāsca tanuvasca azdābīšca uštānqasca  
kahrpasca tāuuīšīšca baodasca uruuānəmca frauuašīmca  
pairica dadəmahī āca vaēdaiiamahī  
āat dīš āuuāēdaiiamahī gāθābiiō spəntābiiō ratuxšaθrābiiō ašaonibiiō  
yā nō hənti gāθā harəθrauuaitīšca pāθrauuaitīšca mainiiuš.x<sup>v</sup>arəθāsca  
yā nō hənti urune uuaēm x<sup>v</sup>arəθəmca vastrəmca  
tā nō hənti gāθā harəθrauuaitīšca pāθrauuaitīšca mainiiuš<sup>v</sup>arəθāsca  
tā nō hənti urune uuaēm x<sup>v</sup>arəθəmca vastrəmca  
tā nō buiiqñ humiždā aš.miždā ašō.miždā  
parō.asnāi aṅ<sup>v</sup>he pasca astasca baodaṅhasca vī.uruuišītm*

All (our) livestock(?) and bodies and bones and life breaths and forms and strengths and (our) consciousness and breath-soul and fravashi we place all around and make them known. / Then we make them known to the life-giving *Gāθās*, upholders of Order, whose command is according to the models. / The songs which are our guardians and protectors and food in the world of thought, / which are for our breath-soul both food and clothing, / those songs are for us the guardians and protectors and food in the world of thought, / those are for our breath-soul both food and clothing. / May they bring us good rewards, great rewards, the reward of Order, / for a new *ahu* in days to come, after the wrenching apart of bone(s) and consciousness!

There follows an invocation of Sraoša and a long hymn to him. The implication is clear: for the holy texts and the sacrifice to pass through the intermediate space, currently occupied by the forces of darkness, Sraoša is needed. This deity, who is said not to have slept since the creation, protects the world of the living against the forces of evil:

Y.57.17

*yō nōiṭ pascaēta hušx<sup>v</sup>afa yaṭ mainiiū dāmaqñ daiδītəm  
yasca spəntō mainiiuš yasca aṅrō*

who has never slept since the two spirits established their creations:  
the Life-giving Spirit and the Evil one.

He is therefore, next after Ahura Mazdā himself, the obstruction-smasher, *vərəθrajan-*, par excellence, as already implied in the *Gāθās*:

*Gāθā* 2, 44.16

*taṭ θβā pərəsā əraš mōi vaocā ahurā*  
*kē vərəθrēm.jā θβā pōi səṅghā yōi həṅtī*  
*ciθrā mōi daṃ ahūm.biš ratūm cīzdī*  
*aṭ hōi vohū səraošō jaṅtū manaḡhā*  
*mazdā ahmāi yahmāi vašt kahmāicī*

I am asking you this: tell me straight, O Lord! / Who (is) the obstruction-smasher (fit) to protect by *your* announcement (all those) who are? / Let brilliant (assistances/gifts?) be given to *me*! Assign, O healer of the *ahu*, (him as?) the model (protector?)! / Thus, let Sraoša (readiness to listen) come to *him* on account of (my/his) good thought, / O All-knowing One, to *him*, to whomever you wish!

He smashes Wrath and the other forces of darkness, pitting his own fearless cudgel (*darši.dru-*) against the bloody cudgel (*xruui.dru-*) of Wrath, dealing him wounds that make *him* bleed in return for the bloody destruction he has wrought upon Ahura Mazdā's cosmos:

Y.57.10

*yō driṡaošca drīuuiāasca amauuaṭ nmānəm haṃ.tāšti*  
*pasca hū frāšmō.dāitīm*  
*yō aēšməm stərəθβata snaiθiša vīxrūmaṅtəm x<sup>v</sup>arəm jaṅti*

who timbers the strong home of the poor man and woman / after the sun has set, / who, with (his) stunning weapon, strikes Wrath (inflicting it) a bloody wound.

But Sraoša (“listening”) was also the first sacrificer in the world of thought to sacrifice to Ahura Mazdā; he was the first to sing (“make heard”) the five songs of Zarathustra; and he used the holy words as weapons:

Y.57.2

*sraošəm ašīm ... yazamaide yō paoiriiō mazdā dāmaṡ*  
*frastarətātṡ paiti barəsmən yazata ahurəm mazdaṃ*

We sacrifice to Sraoša of the Rewards ... who, as the first of Mazdā's creation, / at the barsom spread out, sacrificed to Ahura Mazdā.

## Y.57.8

*yō paoiriō gāθā frasnūuuiat̄ yā pañca spitāmahe aṣaonō zaraθuštrahe*  
 who was the first to make heard the *Gāθās*, the five of Spitama  
 Zarathustra, who upheld Order.

The hymn to Sraoša therefore also recalls *his* primordial acts, now repeated by the current sacrificer.

As the *yasna* approaches its end, the words and actions become increasingly aggressive, and numerous spells are invoked against the powers of darkness.

There follows the principal prayer to the fire, son of Ahura Mazdā, with requests for rewards, and the principal libation of the waters. Thus, the intention of the sacrifice becomes increasingly clear: it is the release of the birth waters, the delivery of the cosmic foetus, and the birth of the new *ahu*, the cosmic Order that contains the heavenly fire, the sun.<sup>30</sup>

Y.65 contains a long hymn to the waters, which is *directly* followed by a request for the fravashis to come, apparently in their function as conveyors of the birth waters (Y.65.6).

Toward the end of the *yasna*, the invocations become gradually stronger, and there is an accumulation of expressions referring to life and growth, on one hand, and to the removal of evil and darkness, on the other hand:

## Y.71.17

*varəzəmca haomanəhəmca yazamaide*  
*haomanəhəmca varəzəmca yazamaide*  
*paitištātē təmañhəm paitištātē \*xšiiasca amiiuuuiiāasca*  
*dasuuarəca baēšazəmca yazamaide*  
*fradaθəmca varədaθəmca yazamaide*  
*paitištātē axtinəmca astarəmanəmca*

We sacrifice the invigorant and the possession of good thought.

We sacrifice the possession of good thought and the invigorant,  
 for withstanding darkness, for withstanding weeping and \*illness.

And we sacrifice \*fitness and healing,  
 and we sacrifice furthering and growth  
 for withstanding agues and \*paralyses.

30. Compare the combination Ahura Mazdā, Anāhitā, Miθra in the late Achaemenid inscriptions and in the Sasanian period. In a relief at Tāq-e Bostān, Mihr is standing on a lotus leaf, symbolizing his rebirth from the waters.

The prayer from Y.8 that Ahura Mazdā may be in command is repeated, as well as a prayer to see god through Order, his newborn child:

Y.71.30 (= Y.60.12)

*aša vahišta aša sraēšta darəsāma θβā  
pairi θβā jamiiāma haməm θβā haxma*

Shall we see you (Ahura Mazdā), through best Order, through most beautiful Order? / May we circumambulate you! (May we come) to share company with you

The *Yasna* comes to a close with the re-establishment of the sovereignty of Ahura Mazdā in the re-Ordered cosmos and the guidance of Zarathustra in the world of the living (Y.71.28).

The *Ahuna Vairiia* and the other holy prayers are then set in motion between earth and heaven for a last time to remove whatever evil and darkness still remains:

Y.72.1 (= Y.61.1)

*ahunəmca vairīm fraēšiiāmahī aņtarəca zqm aņtarəca asmanəm  
ašəmca vahištəm fraēšiiāmahī aņtarəca zqm aņtarəca asmanəm ...*

We send forth the *Ahuna Vairiia* between heaven and earth,  
and we send forth the *Ašəm Vohū* between heaven and earth...

Power and strength for Ahura Mazdā is once more invited. Again, all the divine aids of the sun are invoked, as well as the sun itself, the fire of Ahura Mazdā, and the fravashis of the upholders of Order; the victorious powers, peace with good pastures, the good Vaiiu, and, finally, the firmament and endless and limited time, crucial elements of Ahura Mazdā's creation, which has now been re-established with the help of the sacrifice:

Y.72.9-10

*jasa mē auuañhe mazda amahe hutāštahe huraodahe  
vərəθraγnahe ahurađātahe  
vanaiñtiiāasca uparatātō rāmanasca x<sup>v</sup>āθrahe  
vaiiaoš uparō.kairiiehe tarađātō aniiāiš dāmañ  
aētaṭ tē vaiiō yaṭ tē asti spəñtō.mainiiaom  
θβāšhahe x<sup>v</sup>adātahe zruuānahe akaranahe  
zruuānahe darəγō.x<sup>v</sup>adātahe*

Come to my help, O Mazdā,

(for the help of?) the well-fashioned, well-shaped Force,  
 the obstruction-smashing Strength established by Ahura Mazdā,  
 the victorious Superiority, peace with good pastures,  
 Vaiiu, whose work is above, set beyond the other creations,  
 this of yours, O Vaiiu, which you have of the Life-giving Spirit,  
 of the speedy one (the firmament), which has its own law, of boundless time  
 (and) of time which long has its own law.

We have seen a number of myths in this survey, of which the following were the most important: 1. the creation myth, involving Ahura Mazdā's sacrifice by which the cosmos was brought into being and ordered; 2. the myth of Zarathustra as the first human sacrificer to *re*-perform the primordial sacrifice and *re*-order the cosmos after the attack of the Lie, which plunged it back into chaos; 3. the myth of the fravashis as assistants in the cosmogony; 4. Sraoša's battle with Wrath, representative of darkness and chaos; and 5. the myth of the gift exchange, which links the human and divine spheres and by which humans aid the gods by reinvigorating them, returning them to power, and enabling them to overcome the powers of evil and chaos.

This brief overview obviously does not address all issues in the *Yasna*, not even all issues associated with the topics and texts mentioned here, but the interaction between myth and ritual is clear and warrants further study.

Many issues connected with the ideas presented here are discussed in Skjærvø, "Rivals and Bad Poets: The Poet's Complaint in the Old Avesta," in *Philologica et Linguistica. Historia, Pluralitas, Universitas. Festschrift für Helmut Humbach zum 80. Geburtstag am 4. Dezember 2001*, ed. M. G. Schmidt and W. Bisang, Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2001, pp. 351-76; "Ahura Mazdā and Ārmaiti, Heaven and Earth, in the Old Avesta," *JAOS* 122/2, 2002, pp. 399-410 (Festschrift for Stanley Insler); "Zarathustra: First Poet-Sacrificer," in *Paitimāna. Essays in Iranian, Indian, and Indo-European Studies in Honor of Hanns-Peter Schmidt*, ed. S. Adhami, Costa Mesa, 2002, vol. II, pp. 157-94; "Praise and Blame in the Avesta. The Poet-Sacrificer and his Duties," *JSAI* 26, 2002, pp. 29-67 (studies in honor of Shaul Shaked); "Truth and Deception in Ancient Iran," in *The Fire Within. Jamshid Soroushian Commemorative Volume*, ed. F. Vajifdar and C. Cereti, Tehran, 2003, pp. 383-434; "Smashing Urine: on Yasna 48.10", in M. Stausberg, ed., *Zoroastrian Rituals in Context*, Numen Book Series, Studies in the His-

tory of Religion 102, Leiden and Boston, 2004, pp. 253-81; “Poetic and Cosmic Weaving in Ancient Iran. Reflections on Avestan vahma and Yasna 34.2” in D. Haug and E. Welo, eds., *Haptačahaptāitiš. Festschrift for Fridrik Thordarson*, Oslo, 2005, pp. 267-79; *Weaving a World of Thought: The Myth of the Fravashis and the Old Iranian Ritual*, Paris (forthcoming); “The Videvdad: Its Ritual-Mytical Significance,” in Vesta Sarkhosh Curtis and Sarah Stewart, eds., *Birth of the Persian Empire*, London and New York, 2006, pp. 105-41.