

*Yuhan Sohrab-Dinshaw Vevaina*

“ENUMERATING  
THE *DĒN*”:  
TEXTUAL TAXONOMIES,  
*COSMOLOGICAL DEIXIS*,  
AND NUMEROLOGICAL  
SPECULATIONS IN  
ZOROASTRIANISM

In 1630 at the advanced age of 67, Henry Lord, a “sometime resident in East-India, and Preacher to the Honourable Company of Merchants Trading thither,” published *A Discovery of Two Forreigne Sects in the East-Indies, viz. The Sect of the Banians, the Antient Natives of India, and The Sect of the Persees, the Ancient Inhabitants of Persia. Together With the Religion and Manners of each Sect. In Two Parts.*<sup>1</sup> Lord, the Chaplain of the East India Company, learned about the Zoroastrian community in India—the Parsis—by his acquaintance with a Parsi priest via an interpreter. Having spent five years in Surat in Gujarat, Lord’s descriptions and analyses are often cited as some of the earliest and most detailed European accounts of Zoroastrianism in the subcontinent. His sixth chapter dealing with the Zoroastrian scriptures is particularly fascinating:

This article is a substantially modified version of part 5 of my doctoral dissertation, “Studies in Zoroastrian Exegesis and Hermeneutics with a Critical Edition of the *Sūdgar Nask* of *Dēnkard* Book 9” (Harvard University, 2007). Versions of this article were delivered at the American Oriental Society and the Council of the Corpus Inscriptionum Iranicarum in 2008. I would like to thank Melissa Haynes, Stephanie Jamison, Bruce Lincoln, Prods Oktor Skjærvø, Michael Stausberg, and Miguel-Ángel Toledo for their insightful comments and suggestions on earlier drafts. For the sake of consistency, I have normalized the transcriptions of the published editions. All translations are mine unless otherwise stated.

<sup>1</sup> Note the lack of fixed spelling conventions in “ancient” and “antient.”

They affirme then that this booke contained in it three feuerall Tracts. The firft whereof treated of that which wee call Iudiciall Astrologie, foretelling the euent of things to come, by iudgement of the starres, which by them is called *Aftoodegar*.

The second did treat concerning phyficke or the naturall knowledge of things with their causes, and the cures of the diseases to man.

The third was called *Zertooft*, because *Zertooft* was the bringer thereof, and this contained their Law and matters that concerned Religion; which bookes according as their matter was diuers, fo they were deliuered to men of feuerall studies and learning.

The firft of these bookes called *Aftoodegar*, which treated of iudiciall astrology, was committed to their *Iefopps*, or wife men, which are knowne by the name of *Magies*.

The second, which treated of phyficke, was giuen to their phyfitians to instruct them in that science.

The third, which contained their law, and matters of religion, called *Zertooft*, was deliuered to their *Darooes* or churchmen, that they might know how to worshippe God themselues, also instruct others in the knowledge of the same worshippe; of such three tracts did this booke or volume consist.

These tracts were likewise diuided into certaine chapters, whereof seauen were contained in the wiseman's, or *Iesopp's* booke, seauen in the phyfitian's booke, and seauen in the *Daroo's* or churchman's booke.<sup>2</sup>

Since its inception as a field of study, the dominant discourse in scholarly writing on the Zoroastrian textual heritage has revolved around the language of the lacuna. Scholarly estimates suggest that 75 percent of the Zoroastrian religious texts in Avestan that existed in the ninth century CE—two centuries after the Islamic conquest of Iran in 651 CE—are no longer extant today.<sup>3</sup> Such a dramatic reduction in the size and scope of the Zoroastrian scriptural legacy has elicited a great deal of interest on the part of the philologists. Since Harold W. Bailey's classic work on the traditional accounts of the history and transmission of the Zoroastrian religious corpus,<sup>4</sup> many scholars of Zoroastrianism have addressed the relationship between the earlier (second to first millennium BCE) Avestan and later (third to eleventh century CE) "Book" Pahlavi (Zoroastrian Middle Persian) corpora.<sup>5</sup> Concurrently, scholars have also

<sup>2</sup> Henry Lord, *The Sect of the Persees, the Ancient Inhabitants of Persia* (London: T. and R. Cotes, 1630), 336.

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., Jacques Duchesne-Guillemin, *The Religion of Ancient India*, trans. Kaikhusroo M. JamaspAsa (Bombay: Tata Press, 1973), 22.

<sup>4</sup> See the chapter entitled "*Patvand*" (Pahl. *paywand* "connection, lineage"), in Harold W. Bailey, *Zoroastrian Problems in the Ninth-Century Books*, 2nd ed. (1943; repr., Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), 149–76.

<sup>5</sup> For the classic works on the transmission and reception of the Avesta, see Karl F. Geldner, "Awestaliteratur," in *Grundriss der iranischen Philologie*, ed. Wilhelm Geiger and

addressed the vexed issue of the “lost” Avestan texts summarized in *Dēnkard* book 8, conventionally referred to as the “Table of Contents” of the Sasanian-era Avesta.<sup>6</sup> Rather than pursue this question regarding the

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Ernst Kuhn (Strassburg: von Karl J. Trübner, 1896–1904), 2:1–54, in particular, 17–25; Martin Haug, *Essays on the Sacred Language, Writings, and Religion of the Parsis*, 4th ed. (London: Kegan Paul, 1907), 126–34; François Nau, “Étude historique sur la transmission de l’Avesta et sur l’époque probable de sa dernière rédaction,” *Revue de l’histoire des religions* 95 (1927): 149–99. See also Jacques Duchesne-Guillemin, “La fixation de l’Avesta,” in *Indo-Iranica: Mélanges présentés à Georg Morgenstierne à l’occasion de son soixante-dixième anniversaire* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1964), 62–66; Geo Widengren, “Holy Book and Holy Tradition in Iran: The Problem of the Sassanid Avesta,” in *Holy Book and Holy Tradition: International Colloquium Held in the Faculty of Theology University of Manchester*, ed. Fredrick F. Bruce and Ernest G. Rupp (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1968), 36–53; Almut Hintze, “The Avesta in the Parthian Period,” in *Das Partherreich und seine Zeugnisse*, ed. Josef Wiesehöfer (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1988), 147–61; Karl Hoffmann and Joanna Narten, *Der Sasanidische Archetypus: Untersuchungen zu Schreibung und Lautgestalt des Avestischen* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1989). For more recent scholarship, see Dan Shapira, “Studies in Zoroastrian Exegesis: *Zand*” (doctoral dissertation, Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1997); Jean Kellens, “Considerations sur l’histoire de l’Avesta,” *Journal Asiatique* 286 (1998): 451–519; Shaul Shaked, “Scripture and Exegesis in Zoroastrianism,” in *Homer, the Bible, and Beyond: Literary and Religious Canons in the Ancient World*, ed. Margalit Finkelberg and Guy G. Stroumsa (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 63–74; and Alberto Cantera, *Studien zur Pahlavi-Übersetzung des Avesta* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2004). For surveys of Pahlavi literature, see Edward W. West, “Pahlavi Literature,” in *Grundriss der iranischen Philologie*, ed. Wilhelm Geiger and Ernst Kuhn (Strasbourg: von Karl J. Trübner, 1896–1904), 2:75–127; Mary Boyce, “Middle Persian Literature,” in *Handbuch der Orientalistik* 1.4.2.1 (Leiden: Brill, 1968), 32–66; Carlo G. Cereti, *La Letteratura Pahlavi: Introduzione ai testi con riferimenti alla storia degli studi e alla tradizione manoscritta* (Milan: Mimesis, 2001); and most recently, Maria Macuch, “Pahlavi Literature,” in *The Literature of Pre-Islamic Iran: Companion Volume I to a History of Persian Literature*, ed. Ronald E. Emmerick and Maria Macuch (London: I. B. Tauris, 2009), 116–96.

<sup>6</sup> The *Dēnkard* comprised nine books of which only books 3–9 are extant. Books 3–5 focus on apologetics and also include etiological narratives about the transmission of the Zoroastrian scriptures; book 6 is devoted to moral wisdom and advice literature (*andarz*); book 7 to the life and legend of Zarathustra; book 8 is the “table of contents” of the Sasanian-era *dēn* in Avestan with its Pahlavi translations and commentaries (*Zand*); and book 9 contains three commentaries (*nasks*) on the Old Avesta (see below). The compilation of the *Dēnkard* was begun by Ādurfarrōbag, son of Farroxzād, a leading high priest who had a religious debate with Abālīs, a heretic, in the presence of the ‘Abbāsīd Caliph ‘Abd-Allāh al-Ma’mūn (AH 198–218/813–833 CE). The work was finally completed by another priest, Ādurbād, son of Ēmēd, who reconstructed the partially destroyed work compiled by Ādurfarrōbag and who then transmitted it to his son, Zardušt. For *Dēnkard* book 8 see Edward W. West, *Contents of the Nasks: Pahlavi Texts*, Sacred Books of the East 37 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1892), xxxviii–xlvi and 1–171. See also Jean de Menasce, *Une encyclopédie mazdéenne: Le Dēnkard; Quatre conférences données à l’Université de Paris sous les auspices de la Fondation Ratanbai Katrak*, Bibliothèque de l’École des hautes études: Séction des sciences religieuses, vol. 59 (Paris, 1958); Mansour Shaki, “The *Dēnkard* Account of the History of the Zoroastrian Scriptures,” *Archiv Orientalní* 49 (1981): 114–25; Philippe Gignoux, “Dēnkard,” in *Encyclopædia Iranica*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater (Costa Mesa, CA, 1994), 7, no. 3:284–89; and Cereti, *La Letteratura Pahlavi*, 41–78. The only complete editions are those of Dhanjishah Meherjibhai Madan, ed., *The Complete Text of the Pahlavi “Dinkard”* (Bombay: Society for the Promotion of Researches into the Zoroastrian Religion, 1911); and Behramjee Sanjana and Peshotan Sanjana, eds., *The “Dinkard”: The Original Pahlavi Text*, 19 vols. (Bombay: Dufur Ashkara Press, 1874–1928). The only complete translation is by Sanjana and Sanjana, which is highly conjectural in places and largely dependent on the

scope of “lost” Avestan literature, I will instead focus on a particular cluster of interpretive practices used by the Zoroastrian interpreters of Late Antiquity to schematize and interpret the twenty-one *nasks* “bundles”<sup>7</sup> enumerated in *Dēnkard* book 8. As Michael Stausberg has so perceptively pointed out, the twenty-one *nasks* of the *dēn*<sup>8</sup> cataloged in *Dēnkard* book 8 are an attempt at classifying the entire religious tradition and not specifically the Avestan corpus as has been commonly assumed by the previous generation of scholars.<sup>9</sup> Stausberg suggests that any attempt at comparing the extant Avestan corpus with the contents of *Dēnkard* book 8 in Pahlavi is rather futile and that the attempt itself demonstrates the tendency of Iranists to equate the contents of *Dēnkard* book 8 with the entire “original” pre-Islamic textual tradition in Avestan.

Since little work has been done on the taxonomic and symbolic interpretations of the Zoroastrian interpreters with regard to their sacred corpus,<sup>10</sup> I have conceived of this article as part of the movement in the study of religion to develop more nuanced readings of traditional hermeneutics. I believe that the Zoroastrian hermeneutic tradition as found in Pahlavi literature offers a new data set and a rich source for those interested in extending the comparative hermeneutics of old textual traditions in new

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translations of West. Neither is a critical edition. Madan is a typeset copy of the famous “B” manuscript republished by Mark J. Dresden, *“Dēnkart”: A Pahlavi Text; Facsimile Edition of the Manuscript B of the K. R. Cama Oriental Institute Bombay* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1966), and Sanjana and Sanjan does not provide a critical apparatus.

<sup>7</sup> Conventionally translated as “books,” presumably after books of the Bible.

<sup>8</sup> Conventionally translated as “religion,” following its usage in the Islamic period where Arabic *dīn* denotes a “judgment or retribution; a custom or usage; or religion.” With regard to the semantic range of the Arabic term, the entry “Dīn” in the *Encyclopedia of Islam* states “The first refers to the Hebraeo-Aramaic root, the second to the Arabic root *dāna*, *dayn* (debt, money owing), the third to the Pehlevi *dēn* (revelation, religion). This third etymology has been exploited by Nöldeke and Vollers. We agree with Gaudefroy-Demombynes . . . in not finding it convincing. In any case, the notion of ‘religion’ is by no means identical in Mazdaism and Islam.” Louis Gardet, “Dīn,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., ed. Peri J. Bearman, Thierry Bianquis, Clifford E. Bosworth, Edouard J. van Donzel, and Wolfhart P. Heinrichs et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 2:293. For the concept of *dēn* in Zoroastrian literature, see Marijan Molé, *Culte, mythe et cosmologie dans l’Iran ancien: Le problème zoroastrien et la tradition mazdéenne*, Annales du Musée Guimet, Bibliothèque d’Études 69 (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1963); Mansour Shaki, “Dēn,” in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater (Costa Mesa, CA, 1994), 7, no. 3:279–81.

<sup>9</sup> He cites the late Mary Boyce and Jacques Duchesne-Guillemin in Michael Stausberg, “The Invention of a Canon: The Case of Zoroastrianism,” in *Canonization and Decanonization: Papers Presented to the International Conference of the Leiden Institute for the Study of Religions (LISOR), Held at Leiden 9–10 January 1997*, ed. Arie van der Kooij and Karel van der Toorn (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 257–77; see, in particular, 264–66.

<sup>10</sup> One notable exception being Gernot Windfuhr, “Cosmic Numerology in Zoroastrianism: The Four Sacred Formulas,” in *Philologica et Linguistica: Historia, Pluralitas, Universitas; Festschrift für Helmut Humbach zum 80. Geburtstag am 4. Dezember 2001*, ed. Maria Gabriela Schmidt, Walter Bisang, Marion Grein, and Bernhard Hiegl et al. (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2001), 563–71.

directions. Like many others, my approach to Zoroastrian hermeneutic praxis was inspired by Jonathan Z. Smith's contention that

Where there is a canon, it is possible to predict the *necessary* occurrence of a hermeneute, of an interpreter whose task it is continually to extend the domain of the closed canon over everything that is known or everything that exists *without* altering the canon in the process. It is with the canon and its hermeneute that we encounter the necessary obsession with exegetical totalization.<sup>11</sup>

My discussion of this "necessary obsession with exegetical totalization" is equally a response to a question posed by Laurie L. Patton in her 2005 book on early Indian sacrifice: "How do other religious traditions, as they systematically reflect on their foundational texts, create imagined realities that link mind and action, interpretation and behavior, and religious apprehension with practical life?"<sup>12</sup> Two definitional questions relevant for the present study are: What generally constitutes a "foundational text"? and Is it appropriate to use the term "canon" in the context of discussing the orally composed and largely orally transmitted sacred corpus of Zoroastrianism?<sup>13</sup> By "foundational text" I mean a text (whether written or oral) that is viewed as being a constant point of reference for the "tradition" and one that is regularly mobilized in a variety of novel ways by interpreters working within that tradition who view it as the ultimate source of sacral knowledge and authority. In discussing the Vedic texts of Ancient India, Brian K. Smith has attempted to broaden the definition of the term "canon" to encompass "a finite set of texts, oral or written, which are regarded as foundational and absolutely authoritative." Smith goes on to add that "constructing a mechanism for its transmission, and establishing a means for its infinite interpretability (so that it

<sup>11</sup> Jonathan Z. Smith, "Sacred Persistence: Towards a Redescription of Canon," in *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 48.

<sup>12</sup> Laurie L. Patton, *Bringing the Gods to Mind: Mantra and Ritual in Early Indian Sacrifice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 10.

<sup>13</sup> For the importance of orality for studying Zoroastrian literature, see Philip G. Kreyenbroek, "The Zoroastrian Tradition from an Oralist's Point of View," in *K. R. Cama Oriental Institute Second International Congress Proceedings (5th to 8th January 1995)* (Bombay: K. R. Cama Oriental Institute, 1996), 221–37; also Prods Oktor Skjærvø, "The Importance of Orality for the Study of Old Iranian Literature and Myth," *Nāme-ye Irān-e Bāstān: The International Journal of Ancient Iranian Studies*, 5, nos. 1–2 (2005–6 [2007]): 1–23. The importance of orality for understanding the Pahlavi corpus was stressed as early as 1931 by Henrik S. Nyberg in a series of lectures in Uppsala (only published in 1958 in Bombay), "Sassanid Mazdaism according to Moslem Sources," *Journal of the K. R. Cama Oriental Institute* 39 (1958): 1–63. See, most recently, Albert de Jong, "The Culture of Writing and the Use of the Avesta in Sasanian Iran," in *Zarathushtra entre l'Inde et l'Iran: Études indo-iraniennes et indo-européennes offertes à Jean Kellens à l'occasion de son 65<sup>e</sup> anniversaire*, ed. Éric Pirart and Xavier Tremblay (Wiesbaden: Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 2009), 27–41.

will be perpetually ‘relevant’) generate the conditions of possibility for what we call a ‘religious tradition.’”<sup>14</sup> In addition, Jonathan Z. Smith has suggestively noted that the essential features of canonicity are limitation and closure.<sup>15</sup> It should be noted that in Pahlavi literature we seldom find explicit references to canonizing or decanonizing specific texts in the conventional—Western academic—sense.<sup>16</sup> A notable example that problematizes the use of the term “canon” for Zoroastrian literature is found in *Dēnkard* book 4:

His majesty, king of kings, Ardašīr, son of Pābag [r. 224–240 CE], guided on the straight path by Tansar [(Tōsar), the High Priest], asked that all those scattered teachings be brought to the court. Tansar took charge: some he accepted, and some he left out as non-authoritative. And he issued the following order: “As far as we are concerned, any exposition that differs from that in the Mazdayasnian *dēn*, but which provides awareness and knowledge, is not inferior to it.”<sup>17</sup>

In this passage we can clearly perceive some sense of limitation being imposed but, crucially, not one of closure. What we do typically find in Pahlavi interpretive literature is J. Z. Smith’s “obsession with exegetical totalization,” that is, attempts to extend the *dēn* to include all forms of knowledge in this world as well as that one and the one in between. I would also like to point out that due to their being schematized, the twenty-one *nasks* in *Dēnkard* book 8 were, to some extent, viewed as a limited and closed group by the Pahlavi interpreters. I should also state that an analysis of this complex epistemo-hermeneutical project of classifying and schematizing the twenty-one *nasks* of the *dēn* undertaken by these interpreters is valuable for the study of Zoroastrianism not simply for what it says about how Zoroastrians in Late Antiquity understood their ancient inherited lit-

<sup>14</sup> Brian K. Smith, “The Veda and the Authority of Class: Reduplicating Structures of Veda and *Varna* in Ancient Indian Texts,” in *Authority, Anxiety, and Canon: Essays in Vedic Interpretation*, ed. Laurie L. Patton (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1994), 67, and *Classifying the Universe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 288; also see the valuable comments of William A. Graham, *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 52–53.

<sup>15</sup> Smith, *Imagining Religion*, 48. See also David Carpenter, “The Mastery of Speech: Canonicity and Control in the Vedas,” in *Authority, Anxiety, and Canon: Essays in Vedic Interpretation*, ed. Laurie L. Patton (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1994), 19–34.

<sup>16</sup> An underappreciated point made in Stausberg, “Invention,” 257–77; in particular, see 261–67.

<sup>17</sup> “ōy bay ardaššahr šāhān šāh ī pābagān pad rāst-dastwarīh tansar ān-iz hammōg ī par-gandag ud hamāg ō dar xwāst tansar abar mad ān ī ēk frāz padīrīftan ud abāriḡ az dastwar hišt ud ēn-iz framān dād kū frāz ō amā har nigēzišn anī bawēd az dēn mazdēšn čē nūn-iz āgāhīh ud dānišn aziš frōd nēst.” After Prods Oktor Skjærvø, *The Spirit of Zoroastrianism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011). For rather different translations, see West, *Contents of the Nasks*, 414; and Shaki, “The *Dēnkard* Account,” 115 and 118–19.

erature but also for the opportunity it provides us to study a cluster of hermeneutic practices that strongly argues for a Zoroastrian theory of knowledge. This Zoroastrian theory of knowledge manifests itself in numerological speculations that homologize the sacred corpus with the cosmos, textual taxonomies based on this sacred corpus similarly equate scripture with ritual praxis, and forms of social criticism based on idealized—inherited—social roles are, in turn, equated with these taxonomies of scripture.

Central to both the Zoroastrian hermeneutical and Western philological projects on the Zoroastrian corpus is the polyvalence of the Pahlavi term *dēn*, which is used in Pahlavi literature for both the concept of the sacred tradition and the sacred corpus. The Zoroastrian interpreters organized and schematized the *dēn* based on a parsing of the *Ahuna Vairiia* or *Yaθā Ahū Vairiīō* prayer<sup>18</sup> (Pahl. *Ahunwar*, *Yasna* 27.13) into twenty-one words. The *Ahuna Vairiia* was and still is the most sacred utterance in Zoroastrianism and is the opening strophe of the Old Avesta,<sup>19</sup> a collection of texts performed as part of the *Yasna* ritual, which contains the five *Gāθās*, sacred poems traditionally ascribed—by most philologists and modern Zoroastrians—to the prophet Zarathustra himself.<sup>20</sup> My primary focus in

<sup>18</sup> More properly a *maθra-*, the Avestan (etymological, not necessarily semantic) equivalent of the Vedic *mantra-*. Paul Thieme suggested that a “mantra has an effect . . . that is conditioned less through its content than its form, a form that must be safeguarded through scrupulously correct recitation.” (“Sie hat Wirkung, die sich bei früheren Gelegenheiten bewährt hat und die bedingt ist nicht so sehr durch ihren Inhalt als durch ihre Form, die in peinlich korrekter Aufzählung gewahrt werden muß.”) Paul Thieme, “Vorzarathustrisches bei den Zarathustriern und bei Zarathustra,” *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 107 (1957): 69.

<sup>19</sup> The Avesta falls into two chronological layers: Old Avestan and Young(er) Avestan. The Old Avesta, occupying a ritually central position in the *Yasna* liturgy (“sacrifice,” cognate with Sanskrit *yajña-*), comprises three prayers: the *Ahuna Vairiia* or *Yaθā Ahū Vairiīō* (*Yasna* 27.13), the *Aṣəm Vohū* (*Y.* 27.14), and the *Yeiñhē Hātəm* (*Y.* 27.15); the five *Gāθās* (*Y.* 28–34, 43–46, 47–50, 51, and 53); the *Yasna Haptañhāiti* (*Y.* 35–41); and a fourth prayer at the end of the fifth *Gāθā*, the *Ā Airiīōmā Išiiō* or *Airiīaman* (*Y.* 54.1). For a description of the Avestan corpus, see Jean Kellens, “Avesta,” in *Encyclopædia Iranica*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1988), 3, no. 1:35–54. For the Old Avesta, see Almut Hintze, “On the Literary Structure of the Older Avesta,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 65, no. 1 (2002), 31–51; and Prods Oktor Skjærvø, “The Antiquity of Old Avestan,” *Nāme-ye Irān-e Bāstān: The International Journal of Ancient Iranian Studies*, 3, no. 2 (2003–4): 15–51. See most recently, Almut Hintze, “Avestan Literature,” in *The Literature of Pre-Islamic Iran: Companion Volume I to A History of Persian Literature*, ed. Ronald E. Emmerick and Maria Macuch (London: I. B. Tauris, 2009), 1–71.

<sup>20</sup> For skeptics regarding Zarathustra’s historicity, see Molé, *Culte, mythe et cosmologie*. More recently, see Prods Oktor Skjærvø, “The State of Old Avestan Scholarship,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 117, no. 1 (1997): 103–14, and “Zarathustra: First Poet-Sacrificer,” in *“Paitimāna”: Essays in Iranian, Indo-European, and Indian; Studies in Honor of Hanns-Peter Schmidt*, ed. Siamak Adhami (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2004), 2:157–94. Most recently, see Jean Kellens, *La quatrième naissance de Zarathushtra* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2006).

this article will be on passages from *Dēnkard* books 8 and 9 that suggest that the twenty-one words of the *Ahuna Vairiia* are an encapsulation of the twenty-one *nasks* that are themselves seen as an encapsulation of the *dēn*, the entire sacred tradition.<sup>21</sup> My close reading of these *Dēnkard* passages focuses on the epistemo-hermeneutical complex that schematizes the twenty-one words of the *Ahuna Vairiia* and twenty-one *nasks* into three groups of seven. These textual taxonomies, in turn, are understood as representing three fields of knowledge—Lord’s three tracts—referred to by the Pahlavi interpreters as the *gāhānīg* (Gathic), the *hādāmānsrīg* (literally “with *māθras*”), and the *dādīg* (Legal). I argue that these numerological speculations and commentaries on the corpus that constitute this *Listenwissenschaft*<sup>22</sup> are encapsulated in the Pahlavi compound *dēn-ōšmurišn* (also phrases like *ōšmurišn ī dēn*) conventionally rendered as the “study of the Religion.”<sup>23</sup> I suggest that, in contexts specifically relating to the Zoroastrian sacred corpus, we should translate this compound as the “enumeration of the *dēn*” and that we should conceive of this multi-valent term—*dēn*—as signifying the entire religious tradition of Zoroastrianism as represented by its corpus of sacred texts, both in Avestan (*abestāg*) and in Pahlavi (*zand*), the *Zend-Avesta* of older publications.<sup>24</sup> I also show how these Pahlavi texts correlate a wide array of textual, social, and religious phenomena through a series of equations and homologies that are strikingly similar to homologies in the Brāhmaṇa texts of ancient India that likewise correlate the three spheres of the cosmos: the societal microcosm, the ritual mesocosm, and the divine macrocosm.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>21</sup> See Molé, *Culte, mythe et cosmologie*, 61–71, in particular.

<sup>22</sup> A term first coined by Albrecht Alt, “Die Weisheit Salamos,” *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 76 (1951): 139–44. See Jonathan Z. Smith, “Sacred Persistence,” 47: “This is a science which takes as its prime intellectual activity the production and reflection on lists, catalogs, and classifications, which progresses by establishing repetitions.”

<sup>23</sup> Compare West, *Contents of the Nasks*, 9, where the phrase is translated as “reckoning of revelation.” In Molé, *Culte, mythe et cosmologie*, 63, it is translated as “le texte de la Religion.” Stausberg, “Invention,” 265, translates it as “religious tradition.” Shaul Shaked translates (*Wiždagihā ī Zādspram* 23.2) *dēn-ōšmurišn* “they confess the religion,” in “Towards a Middle Persian Dictionary,” in *Iran: Questions et connaissances; Actes du IV<sup>e</sup> Congrès européen des études iraniennes organisé par la Societas Iranologica Europaea; Paris, 6–10 Septembre 1999* (*Studia Iranica* 25), vol. 1, *La période ancienne*, ed. Philip Huyse (Paris: Association pour l’avancement des Études iraniennes, 2002), 131. Cantera, *Studien zur Pahlavi-Übersetzung*, 14, translates the sequence “*ōšmurišn ī dēn māzdešn bazišn sē*” as “Drei (sind) die Teile des Studiums der mazdayasnischen Religion.”

<sup>24</sup> For the *zand*, see Shaul Shaked, “The Traditional Commentary on the Avesta (Zand): Translation, Interpretation, Distortion?” in *La Persia e l’Asia Centrale da Alessandro al X Secolo* (Roma, 9–12 Novembre 1994) (Rome: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 1996), 641–56. See also Cantera, *Studien zur Pahlavi-Übersetzung*, 1–13.

<sup>25</sup> For the *adhidevatā*, *adhiyātman* (*adhipuruša*), and *adhiyājña* system of exegesis that divides the cosmos in ancient India, see Michael Witzel, *On Magical Thought in the Veda* (Leiden: Universitaire Pers, 1979), 8, and see also “Vedas and Upaniṣads,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Hinduism*, ed. Gavin Flood (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 81.

Like their Brahmanic counterparts, these symbolic interpretations of the corpus based on the use of homologies served as the building blocks of the Zoroastrian epistemo-hermeneutical project. I also suggest that Zoroastrian modes of interpretation, at least as we find them in *Dēnkard* books 8 and 9, are fundamentally intertextual<sup>26</sup> and associative in nature, and I argue that these homologies allowed the Pahlavi interpreters to equate all religious and social phenomena with the diverse textual materials found in the Zoroastrian sacred corpus, the *dēn*. In a nutshell, everything can and is to be found in the *dēn*.

THE AHUNA VAIRIIA AS THE “ENCAPSULATION” OF THE ZOROASTRIAN TRADITION (*DĒN*)

The twenty-one words and three “measures (of time)” (Pahl. *gāh*)<sup>27</sup> of the *Ahuna Vairiia* or *Yaθā Ahū Vairiīō* at the beginning of the Old Avesta are understood by the Pahlavi interpreters to be the fountainhead of the Zoroastrian sacred tradition:<sup>28</sup>

(1) *yaθā* (2) *ahū* (3) *vairiīō* (4) *aθā* (5) *ratuš* (6) *ašāt* (7) *cīt* (8) *hacā* (9) *vaṇhēuš* (10) *dazdā*  
 (11) *manaṇhō* (12) *šiiəoθənanəm* (13) *aṇhēuš* (14) *mazdāi* (15) *xšaθrəmcā* (16) *ahurāi*  
 (17) *ā* (18) *yim* (19) *drigubiīō* (20) *dadaṭ* (21) *vāstārəm*.

Inasmuch as (a new Existence) is a worthy reward (by the example of the first new) Existence, thus (its) Model (is) just in accordance with (Ahura Mazdā’s) Order. (The Model) of good thought (and) of the actions of the (new) Existence is (always) established for “Mazdā” [i.e., “the all-knowing one”], and the (royal) command for (him as) “Ahura” [i.e., “lord”], whom one shall (thereby) establish as pastor for the poor.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>26</sup> For the first application of “intertextuality” to Zoroastrian texts, see Yuhan S.-D. Vevaina, “Relentless Allusion: Intertextuality and the Reading of Zoroastrian Interpretive Literature,” in *The Bavli in Sasanian Iran: Proceedings of the Talmud in Its Iranian Context*, UCLA, May 6–7, 2007, ed. Carol Backhos and Rahim Shayegan (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 208–34.

<sup>27</sup> Conventionally translated as “verse line(s),” which obviously do not exist in oral poetry but are better understood as measures of time or rhythmic units.

<sup>28</sup> In order to get twenty-one words, one must count one of the enclitics <sup>o</sup>-*cīt* or <sup>o</sup>-*ca* as words as well as the <sup>o</sup>-*ā* (which in modern Parsi pronunciation is treated as an individual word and falls after the caesura). For the metrically “correct” version see below:

“*yaθā ahū vairiīō # aθā ratuš ašāt-cīt hacā*  
*vaṇhēuš dazdā manaṇhō # šiiəoθənanəm aṇhēuš mazdāi*  
*xšaθrəmcā ahurāi.ā # yim drigubiīō dadaṭ vāstārəm.*”

<sup>29</sup> After Prods Oktor Skjærnø, “The *Gāθās* and the *Kusti*,” in *One for the Earth: Prof. Dr. Y. Mahyar Nawabi Memorial Volume*, ed. Mahmoud Jaafari-Dehaghi, Ancient Iranian Studies Series 4 (Tehran: Center for the Great Islamic Encyclopedia), 117–33. For the major translations of the *Ahuna Vairiia* in the twentieth century, see Helmut Humbach with contributions by Prods Oktor Skjærnø and Josef Elfenbein, *The Gāthās of Zarathushtra and the Other Old Avestan Texts* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1991), 1:4–6. Humbach collects the nine

This grammatically challenging and highly elliptical text is understood as encapsulating the entire sacred tradition within its three measures. In *Dēnkard* books 8 and 9 the *Ahunwar* is presented as the hermeneutic key to the understanding of this taxonomic ordering of the *dēn*. For example, in *Dk.* 8.1.5, the *dēn* is divided into three fields of knowledge based on the three measures of the *Ahunwar*:

The divisions of the “enumeration of the Mazdayasnian *dēn*” are three: the *Gāθās*, which are the highest knowledge and activity in the Realm of Thought (Pahl. *mēnōy*); the Law, which is the highest knowledge and activity in the Realm of Living Beings (Pahl. *gētīy*); and the *Hādamānsrīg*, which is the highest knowledge and activity of what is between these two.<sup>30</sup>

The connection with the *Ahunwar* is stated explicitly in *Dk.* 8.1.19 (see the appendix for abbreviations):

Since the three *gāhs* of the *Ahunwar*, which are the foundation of the “enumeration of the *dēn*,” are an example of the three divisions of the “enumeration of the *dēn*,” thus He reveals that these three divisions are the three parts of what are the 21 words, as it is evident that the omniscient Creator (himself) fashioned one utterance [*nask?*] from each single “word.”<sup>31</sup>

When taken together, these two passages suggest that the Pahlavi commentators directly associated the three measures of the *Ahunwar* with the three textual divisions: the *gāhānīg* texts (Gathic), the *hādamānsrīg* texts (Ritual-Scientific[?], literally “with *māθras*”), and the *dādīg* texts (Legal). Moreover, this threefold identification based on the three measures of the *Ahuna Vairiia* is also explicitly related to the deictic division of the cosmos into three realms: the Realm of Thought (*mēnōy*, i.e., the Gathic), the Realm of Living Beings (*gētīy*, i.e., the Legal), and that which is between

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major philological translations spanning from 1906 to 1988, which all read quite differently. Humbach himself has produced three translations of the *Gāθās* since 1959, all of which have different renderings of the *Ahuna Vairiia*. See also his *Die Gathas des Zarathustra*, 2 vols. (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1959); Helmut Humbach and Pallan Ichaporia, *The Heritage of Zarathushtra: A New Translation of His Gāthās* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1994).

<sup>30</sup> “ōšmurišn ī dēn mazdēs̄n bazišn sē gāhān ī ast abartar mēnōy-dānišnih <ud> mēnōy-kārīh ud dād ī ast abartar gētīy-dānišnih ud gētīy-kārīh ud hādamānsrīg ī ast abartar āgāhīh ud kār ī abar ān ī mayān ēd dō.” Compare Molé, *Culte, mythe et cosmologie*, 62–63; and Cantera, *Studien zur Pahlavi-Übersetzung*, 14.

<sup>31</sup> “čīyōn ahunwar ī dēn-ōšmurišn bun sē-gāhīh ī sē-bazišnīh ī dēn-ōšmurišn ud nimūnag ōwōn wist-ēk-mārgīh ī sē wist-ēk-bahrīh ī ēn sē bazišn nimāyēd čīyōn paydāg kū brēhēnid ōy ī wisp-āgāh dādār az har mārg-ēw sraw ī ēw.” Compare Molé, *Culte, mythe et cosmologie*, 62 and 64.

the two (i.e., the texts “with *māθras*”). This strategy of schematizing the cosmos in deictic terms on the basis of the twenty-one words of the *Ahunwar* and its three measures also extends to the sacred corpus of the twenty-one *nasks*. We find precisely the same division of the twenty-one *nasks* and their association with the three measures of the *Ahunwar* prayer in *Dk.* 9.2.19: “About the division of the twenty-one *nasks*, also from the first, second, and third measures (*gāh*) of the *Ahunwar*.”<sup>32</sup> *Dēnkard* 8.1.12 lists the order of the twenty-one *nasks*, which we can correlate with the three measures and the twenty-one words of the *Ahuna Vairiia*:<sup>33</sup>

<u>First Measure (<i>gāh</i>):</u>	<u>Second Measure (<i>gāh</i>):</u>	<u>Third Measure (<i>gāh</i>):</u>
yaθā = S[t]ūdgar <sup>34</sup>	hacā = Bariš	xšaθrəmčā = Nikātum
ahū = Warštmānsr	vaṇhəuš = Kaškaysraw	ahurāi = Duzd-sar-nizad
vairiio = Bag	dazdā = Wištāsp Sāst	ā = Huspāram
aθā = Dāmdād	manaṇhō = Waštag	yim = Sakātum
ratuš = Nāxtar	šiiəoθənanəm = Čihrdād	drigubiio = Widēwdād <sup>35</sup>

<sup>32</sup> “abar bazišn ī naskān wist ud ek az-iz fradom ud dudigar ud sidigar gāh ī ahunwar.”

<sup>33</sup> The table is based on one found in Bamanji N. Dhabhar, *The Persian Rivayats of Hormazyar Framarz and Others: Their Version with Introduction and Notes* (Bombay: K. R. Cama Oriental Institute, 1932), 3–4. For a discussion of the names of the twenty-one *nasks*, see Cantera, *Studien zur Pahlavi-Übersetzung*, 13–20.

<sup>34</sup> *Sūd-gar* may mean “the benefit-maker.” In the Pahlavi apocalyptic text *Zand ī Wahman Yasn* (1.1) and the later New Persian *rivāyats* (“correspondences” between the Zoroastrian priesthoods in Iran and India) it is called *Stūdgar* or *Istūdgar* “the praise-maker” (presumably) by popular etymology. In *Dk.* 8.1.12, the *Sūdgar* is listed as the first of the *gāhānīg nasks*, and its contents and style are briefly described in *Dk.* 8.2.2–4. The résumé of this *nask* is found in *Dk.* 9.1–23. The *nasks* are listed in the same order in the Persian *rivāyat* of Bahman Punjya, but in the later Pahlavi text, the *Wizirgard ī Dēnig* and the Persian *rivāyats* of Kama Bohra, Narimān Hoshang, and Dastur Barzoi, it is listed second, with the *Stōd Yasn* (*Av Staota Yesniia*) listed first. See Dhabhar, *The Persian Rivayats*, 1–4; and Carlo G. Cereti, *The “Zand ī Wahman Yasn”: A Zoroastrian Apocalypse*, Serie Orientale Roma 75 (Rome: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1995), 171. See, most recently, Yuhān S.-D. Vevaina, “*Sūdgar nask* and *Warštmānsr nask*,” in *Encyclopedia Iranica*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater, online version, at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/sudgar-nask-and-warstmansr-nask>.

<sup>35</sup> Only the *Widēwdād* (in Avestan and Pahlavi) appears to be fully preserved. The other *nasks* are now mostly “lost.” Pahlavi résumés of the first three Gathic *nasks*, the *Sūdgar*, the *Warštmānsr*, and the *Bag*, survive in *Dēnkard* book 9. Two *fragards* (sections) of the *Hādōxt Nask* survive in Avestan and Pahlavi. In addition, we have fragments from the other *nasks* in Avestan or in their Pahlavi versions. See Arthur Christensen, *Les Kayanides*, Det Kgl. Danske Videnskaberne Selskab: Historisk-filologiske Meddelelser 19 (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1931), 2:46–48, for passages in the *Bundahišn* that are ascribed to these “lost” *nasks*. Of the three *nasks* of *Dēnkard* 9, only one *fragard* in the *Warštmānsr nask* (*Dk.* 9.46) has an extant Avestan source text, for which, see Yuhān S.-D. Veviana, “Resurrecting the Resurrection: Eschatology and Exegesis in Late Antique Zoroastrianism,” *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 19 (2009): 219–27.

ašāt = Pāzag<sup>36</sup>      aṅhəuš = Spand      दादाꞑ = Hādōxt  
 cīt = Raθβišṭāiti      mazdāi = Bayān Yasn<sup>37</sup>      vāstārəm = Stōd Yasn [Yašt]

*Dēnkard* 8.1.9–11, however, enumerates these twenty-one *nasks* slightly differently in terms of this tripartite textual taxonomy:

<u>7 Gāhānīg nasks:</u>	<u>7 Hādamānsrīg nasks:</u>	<u>7 Dādīg nasks:</u>
Stōd Yasn [Yašt]	Dāmdād	Nikātum
S[t]ūdgar	Nāxtar	Duzd-sar-nizad
Warštmānsr	Pāzag	Huspāram
Bag	Raθβišṭāiti	Sakātum
Waštāg	Bariš	Widēwdād
Hādōxt	Kaškaysraw	Čīhrdād
Spand	Wištāsp Sāst	Bayān Yasn

The fluidity of these textual taxonomies is expressly acknowledged in *Dk.* 8.1.13: “All three are in all three. In the Gathic are the Hādamānsrīg and the Legal. In the Hādamānsrīg are the Gathic and the Legal. And in the Legal are the Gathic and the Hādamānsrīg.”<sup>38</sup> Rather than view these taxonomies as representing discrete differences in textual genres—as older scholarly literature largely assumed—the *Dēnkard* itself suggests that they should be thought of as overlapping fields of knowledge. By each field of knowledge being contained in the other, the fundamental coherence of the sacred corpus and the tradition is reified. In the very next section (*Dk.* 8.1.14) the Pahlavi interpreters immediately proceed to elaborate on their earlier statement:

Each one (of the three textual divisions) is essentially and principally contained in itself and the second division that is introduced is (likewise) contained in it. And its meaning is in the Realm of Thought and the Realm of Living Beings, and in the Realm of Living Beings and in the Realm of Thought, and that which is between the two is (in) both.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>36</sup> For the reading of this form as “sheep’s breast,” see Prods Oktor Skjærvø, “Hairy Meat? On *Nērangestān*,” in *Shoshanat Yaakov: Ancient Jewish and Iranian Studies in Honor of Professor Yaakov Elman*, ed. Steven Fine and Samuel Secunda (Leiden: Brill, in press).

<sup>37</sup> See Philip Kreyenbroek, “The Term *Bagān Yasn* and the Function of the *Yašts* in the Zoroastrian Ritual,” in *One for the Earth: Prof. Dr. Y. Mahyar Nawabi Memorial Volume*, ed. Mahmoud Jaafari-Dehaghi, Ancient Iranian Studies Series 4 (Tehran: Center for the Great Islamic Encyclopedia), 81–94.

<sup>38</sup> “andar har sē har sē ast andar gāhānīg hādamānsrīg ud dādīg ud andar hādamānsrīg gāhānīg ud dādīg ud andar dādīg gāhānīg ud hādamānsrīg.”

<sup>39</sup> “jud jud ān ī xwad mādayānihā ud mādagwarīhā [ud] mehmānīg ud ān ī did bahrīh <ī> andar āwurd mehmānīg u-š čim andar mēnōy ud gētīy ud andar gētīy ud mēnōy ud andar ān ī mayānag ī har dō har dō ast.”

Despite each being contained in the other, the Pahlavi interpreters clearly state that each field of knowledge is “contained in itself” (*xwad* . . . *mehmānīg*; literally, “the state of being a guest [of] oneself”). The Gathic *nasks* comment on the *Gāθās*, thus allowing for a proper understanding of these transcendent texts as representing *that* world, the Realm of Thought, the word beyond material existence, which is the eschatological goal of all Zoroastrians.<sup>40</sup> The Legal *nasks* represent *this* world, the Realm of Living Beings and all that is required for a properly functioning society, for only by scrupulously living by the Law in this world can a person hope to attain that one.<sup>41</sup> The *Hādāmānsrīg nasks*, representing the intermediate space between the two fields of knowledge and the two realms they represent, serve as the ritual mesocosm (Lord’s “phyficke”), which links the legal-societal microcosm with the ideal macrocosm of the next world through ritual recitation of *māθras* that accompany the other two fields of knowledge.<sup>42</sup> This deictic division of the corpus-cosmos itself represents an encapsulation of Zoroastrian views on cosmogony, cosmology, and cosmography. Since it is found at the beginning of the Old Avesta, the *Ahunwar* is often described as the source of all knowledge by the Pahlavi interpreters. We find it stated in *Dk.* 9.2.2:

The first section is the *Yaθā Ahū Vairiō*, since the *Yaθā Ahū Vairiō* is at the origin of the *dēn*. And how the *nasks* have been fashioned from it, that which—because (it is) above the first six (forms of) knowledge, and the highest of the other individual (forms of) knowledge—has thus been revealed by him [Ohrmazd] to be in its own (proper) place [i.e., at the beginning of the Old Avesta and at the beginning of *Dēnkard* book 9].<sup>43</sup>

<sup>40</sup> See Shaul Shaked, “The Notions *mēnōg* and *gētīg* in the Pahlavi Texts and Their Relation to Eschatology,” *Acta Orientalia* 33 (1971): 59–107.

<sup>41</sup> For the legal *nasks*, see Maria Macuch, “On the Legal Nasks of the *Dēnkard*,” in *Religious Texts in Iranian Languages: Symposium Held in Copenhagen, 2002*, ed. Fereyduh Vahman and Claus V. Pedersen (Copenhagen: Det Kongelige Danske Videnskabernes Selskab, 2007), 151–64.

<sup>42</sup> With the exception of the Avestan text known as the *Wištāsp Sāst* (primarily consisting of eight sections of quotations from the *Widēwdād*), none of the *hādāmānsrīg* texts are extant, making it particularly difficult to draw conclusions regarding their contents and usage beyond the short descriptions in *Dēnkard* book 8. We do, however, have the compound in Avestan (*Wisprad* 13.1): *zaraθuštrəm haða.māθrəm yazamaide* “We sacrifice to Zarathustra together with his (and/or Ahura Mazda’s?) poetic thought (*māθra*).” The phrase is also found in the *Widēwdād Sade*; see Nils Ludwig Westergaard, ed., “*Zendavesta*” or *the Religious Books of the Zoroastrians* (Copenhagen: Berling Brothers, 1852–54), 485.

<sup>43</sup> “fradom fragard yatā-ahū-wēryō čiyōn yatā-ahū-wēryō pad bunih ī dēn u-š brēhēnidagih ī naskān aziš kē ka abar šaš dānišn ī fradom ud abardom ī abārig dānišnihā ēdōn-iš pad gyāg ī xwēš nimūd.” It is not entirely clear whether the text is referring to the first six Gathic *nasks* with the highest being the *Stōd Yasn*, which presumably contained the *Gāθās*, or if this is a reference to the division of the three measures of the *Ahunwar* being further subdivided into six half-measures. For the latter we have *Wižidagihā ī Zādspram* 28.2: “ud pas baxšihist ahunwar ō šaš ī nēm-gāh xwānēnd.” (“And then the *Ahunwar* was divided into six, which they call ‘half-gāhs.’”)

The notion that the *Ahunwar* represents the entire tradition is also repeated in *Dk.* 9.2.17: “And about how He [Ohrmazd] spoke to Zarathustra, the best of creations, the ‘words worthy of being enumerated,’ (*i.e.*) the *Ahunwar*, which is an encapsulation of everything.”<sup>44</sup> Zādspram, a Zoroastrian high priest and theologian from the late ninth century CE in Sīrjān, in Iran, associates the three divisions of the *dēn*, the twenty-one *nasks*, and the *Ahunwar* in explicit terms (*Wizīdagihā ī Zādspram* 28): “Regarding the three divisions of the *dēn*, which are the ‘all-inclusive,’ the ‘middle,’ and the detailed’—whose divisions are singular and uniform<sup>45</sup>—are none other than the *Ahunwar*, the symbol (*nišān*) of the *nasks*.”<sup>46</sup> Here, Zādspram uses the term *hangirdīg* “all-inclusive” (translated by me as “encapsulation” elsewhere in this article), corresponding to the *gāhānīg*, which encompasses the other two; *mayānag* “middle,” corresponding to the *hādāmānsrīg*; and *gōkānīg* “detailed,” corresponding to the *dādīg*. We find a similar sentiment in *Dk.* 8.46.1: “The sacrifice of the *Gāθās*, since it is the first offspring of the *Ahunwar*, the seed of seeds of the ‘enumeration of the *dēn*,’ by encompassing the *Gāθās*, every word within it is a foundational word.”<sup>47</sup> Here, we clearly see that the Pahlavi interpreters viewed the *Ahunwar* as foundational—the origin of all other words—and as encompassing both the *Gāθās* as a specific text and the *dēn* as an all-encompassing corpus of twenty-one *nasks*, which is itself isomorphic with the entire sacred tradition. This notion that the *Ahunwar* is an encapsulation of the entire tradition is again stated explicitly in *Dk.* 9.57.11: “And this, too: the words of Ohrmazd [= *Ahunwar*] are taught by him who teaches how to receive, memorize, and speak the *dēn*. And also because this (*dēn*) (is) an ‘enumeration’ of that encapsulation [= *Ahunwar*].”<sup>48</sup> The notion that a single text may signify an entire tradition is attested in other Iranian religious traditions as well. In his discussion of the importance of the *Ahuna Vairiia* in Zoroastrian literature, Edward G. Browne cited a fascinating Islamic parallel from the Shi‘ite tradition ascribed to ‘Alī:

All that is in the *Qur‘ān* is in the *Sūratu’l-Fātiḥa*, and all that is in the *Sūratu’l-Fātiḥa* is in the *Bismi’Illāh*, and all that is in the *Bismi’Illāh* is in the *Bismi’Illāh*

<sup>44</sup> “ud abar dahišnān ī weh abāyišnīg-ōšmurišn saxwan ahunwar hangirdīgih <ī> hamāg <ī> ō zardu(x)št guft.”

<sup>45</sup> Literally “of the same form, appearance.” Compare WZ. 32.1, where it is said that the good ones have a *hambrahmagih* (someone of the same appearance) in the Realm of Thought (*pad mēnōy*).

<sup>46</sup> “abar sē bazišn ī dēn ī ast hangirdīg ud mayānag ud gōkānīg kē-š baxšišn ēk-ristag hambrahmih kū xwad ast ahunwar nišan ī naskān.” Compare WZ. 1.21: “pad ān ristag ud brahm” [in that way and manner] (Bailey, *Zoroastrian Problems*, 161; see n. 4).

<sup>47</sup> “yašt <ī> gāhān čiyōn fradom zahag ī ahunwar tōhmagān tōhmag ī dēn-ōšmurišn u-š pad parwastārīh <ī> gāhān hamāg andarōn mārīg bun-mārīg ast.”

<sup>48</sup> “ud ēn-iz kū-š saxwan ī ohrmazd hammōxt bawēd kē padrišn ud ayādih ud guftārīh <ī> dēn hammōzēd ēd-iz rāy čē ēn ōšmurišn ī ān hangirdīgih.”

of the *Bismi'llāh*, and all that is in the *Bismi'llāh* of the *Bismi'llāh* is in the point which is under the *Bismi'llāh*, and I am the Point which is under the *Bismi'llāh*.<sup>49</sup>

COSMOGONY AND PRAXIS: THE RITUAL AND THEOLOGICAL  
EFFICACY OF THE *AHUNWAR*

Unlike the Islamic tradition, for example, for their first two millennia, the Avestan texts were not read and studied by theologians from books but were performed by priests as the key verbal (oral/aural) component of ritual praxis and recited by members of the community as a fundamental part of devotional life. The résumé of the *Sūdgar Nask* in *Dēnkard* book 9 enumerates the number of times the *Ahunwar* should be recited on particular occasions both in specified ritual contexts and daily life (*Dk.* 9.2.4–16):

One when one wishes to say something; one when one wishes to ask for something; one when one goes to work. Two when one wishes to make a blessing. Four when (it is) for the Profession of the Models (and) the performance of religious festivals. Five when (it is) for the banishing (lit. carrying off) of the Lie.<sup>50</sup> Six when (it is) for strength; six when (it is) for victory in battle. Seven when (it is) for sacrificing to the (seven) Bounteous Immortals and when one wishes to perform a *Yasna* for the Life-Giving Immortals. Eight when (it is) for sacrificing to the Frawahrs (Pre-existing souls) of the Righteous. Nine when one wishes to sow seeds in the earth. Ten when one wishes to release the males (to breed with the females). Eleven when one goes to seek a wife. Twelve when one goes on top of a mountain. Thirteen when one wishes to go to a (particular) town. Twelve when one goes where there are no roads; (and) when one wishes to go across water; and about where the *Yaθā Ahū Vairiīō* was spoken first in order to smite the demons.<sup>51</sup>

This last reference is an allusion to the very first recitation of the *Ahunwar* when it was used as a cosmogonic prayer by Ohrmazd (Av. Ahura Mazda), who first recited it as a weapon to subdue the Foul Spirit prior to

<sup>49</sup> Edward G. Browne, *A Literary History of Persia* (1902; repr., New Delhi: Goodword Books, 2002), 1:98 (I have taken the liberty of standardizing his diacritics). Browne does not cite his source but in recent times the authenticity of this passage has been called into question by none other than Ayatollah Khomeini: "I wonder whether this report is mentioned in any authentic book." [http://www.al-islam.org/LWM/khumayni\\_4.htm](http://www.al-islam.org/LWM/khumayni_4.htm).

<sup>50</sup> Compare *Widēwdād* 11.3 for an Avestan reference to reciting the *Ahuna Vairiia* five times.

<sup>51</sup> "ēk ka-š čiš kāmēd guftan ēk ka-š čiš kāmēd xwāstan ēk ka o kār šawēd. dō ka-š āfrīn kāmēd kardan. čahār ka o rad-franāmišnih yazišn ī gāhānbār. pañj ka o druz bē barišnih. šaš ka o amāwandih šaš ka o perōzgarīh <ī> kārezār. haft ka o ān ī amahraspandān yazišn ud ka yazišn ī amahraspandān kāmēd kardan. hašt ka o ān ī ahlawān frawahr yazišn. nō ka-š tōm o zamīg kāmēd abgand. dah ka-š gušn kāmēd hištan. yāzdah ka o zan-xwāstan šawēd. dwāzdah ka-š pad kōf-ēw ul āxēzēd šud. sēzdah ka-š o rōstāg-ēw kāmēd šud. dwāzdah ka aberāh bē šawēd ēk ka-š pad ān ī ābān widarg bē kāmēd šud ud abar kū pad zanišn ī dēwān fradom yaθā ahū vairiīō guft."'

his creation of the world. In the first chapter of the Pahlavi encyclopedia, the *Bundahišn* “Creation,” Ohrmazd recites the *Ahunwar* to incapacitate the Foul Spirit (*Bdh.* 1.29–31 [15–16]):

Then Ohrmazd recited the *Ahunwar*, *i.e.*, he said forth the 21 words of the *Yaθā Ahū Vairiō*, and he showed the Foul Spirit his own final victory, the undoing of the Foul Spirit, the annihilation of the demons, the Resurrection and the Final Body, and the freedom of opposition for the Creation for ever and ever. When the Foul Spirit saw his own undoing together with the annihilation of the demons, he was stunned and lost consciousness. He fell back to the darkness. As it is said in the *dēn*: “When one-third was spoken, the Foul Spirit passed out due to bodily fear, when two-thirds was spoken the Foul Spirit fell to his knees, when it was all spoken, the Foul Spirit became undone.”<sup>52</sup>

This cosmogonic recitation of the *Ahunwar* closely parallels what Barbara Holdrege has suggested for the Vedas, “the cosmogonic process is described as a two-stage process in which an unmanifest state of undifferentiated unity gives rise to a manifest state of differentiation through a series of discrete speech-acts.”<sup>53</sup> This latter point is precisely what we see here in the *Bundahišn* narrative, where the three measures of the *Ahuna Vairiia* are “discrete speech-acts” that serve to incapacitate the Foul Spirit. After temporarily subduing his adversary, Ohrmazd creates the two realms: the *mēnōy* (the Realm of Thought) and the *gētīy* (the Realm of Living Beings). This use of the *Ahuna Vairiia* as a weapon against Evil is repeated by Zarathustra at the dawn of the “Zoroastrian Millennium” (Pahl. *zarduštān hazangrōzīm*). In the *Zamyād Yašt* (*Yašt* 19.80) in Young Avestan, the *Ahuna Vairiia* is recited by Zarathustra to rid the earth of demons, who, before then, circulated openly in full view of everyone: “Then a single *Ahuna Vairiia* of yours (Ahura Mazdā), which Zarathustra, sustainer of Order, recited . . . drove all the demons underground (making them) deprived of sacrifices and prayers.”<sup>54</sup> The Pahlavi version of this section of the *yašt* is found in *Dk.* 7.4.63, where we see the Pahlavi interpreters explicitly glossing the *Ahuna Vairiia* with the term *dēn*: “The

<sup>52</sup> “pas ohrmazd ahunwar frāz srūd kū-š yatā ahū wairyō wist-ek mārīg bē guft u-š frazām-pērōzih ī xwēš agārīh ī ganāg mēnōy ud abesihišn ī dēwān ud ristāxēz ī tan ī pasēn ud apetyāragīh ī dām tā hamē hamē-rawišnīh bē ō ganāg mēnōy nimūd. ganāg mēnōy ka-š agāragīh ī xwēš abesihišn ī dēwān hammist did sturd ud abōy būd abāz ō tam ōbast. ōwōn čiyōn pad dēn gōwēd kū-š ka ēk-ēw guft būd ganāg mēnōy az bīm tan andar uzid ka-š dō bahr guft būd ganāg mēnōy pad šnūg andar ōbast ka-š bowandag guft būd agār būd ganāg mēnōy.”

<sup>53</sup> Barbara Holdrege, *Veda and Torah: Transcending the Textuality of Scripture* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1996), 49.

<sup>54</sup> “āat tē aēuuō ahunō vairiō yim ašauua zaraθuštrō frasrāuuaiiat . . . \*zōmarəguzō auuazat vispe daēuua aiesniia auuahmiia.” See also *Y.* 9.15.

running about in full view of the demons before Zarathustra (existed) in the world. The breaking of their (bodily) frames thereafter by Zarathustra's recitation of the *dēn* [= *Ahunwar*]."<sup>55</sup> This event is also alluded to in *Dk.* 9.2.18, where we learn that each word of the *Ahunwar* incapacitates a demon: "And about how, by saying forth in pure thought, every single word of the *Ahunwar*, one demon is rendered powerless and there (will be) protection of body and property from the Adversary."<sup>56</sup> In the *Bundahišn* (1.50), we find that the *Ahunwar* gains its ritual and theological efficacy from its status as being both a primordial text and an encapsulation of all of Zoroastrian cosmology:

From the endless form the *Ahunwar* appeared, the Spirit of the *Yaθā Ahū Vairiīō*, from which the establishment and the end of the creations is revealed, that is the *dēn*, since the *dēn* was established together with the establishment of the Creation.<sup>57</sup>

As we see from the passages above, the three measures are seen as having eternal validity. The *Ahunwar* is seen as an encapsulation of Zoroastrian cosmology and is coequal with the *dēn*, encompassing both the sacred corpus and sacred tradition. It is recited by Ohrmazd prior to the dawn of creation and so possesses eternal, transcendent authority, and, crucially, through this epistemo-hermeneutical project of schematizing the *dēn*, its sacral efficacy is continually renewed and extended to a multitude of human endeavors, both ritual and domestic.

#### VEDIC *BANDHUS* AND PAHLAVI HOMOLOGIES: THE SOCIAL POWER OF ASSOCIATIVE THOUGHT

As is well known, correspondences between the literary structures of the sacred corpus, the performative structures of ritual praxis, and the ordering structures of cosmogony and cosmology are also a distinctive feature of Vedic religion. Numerous passages in the *Brāhmaṇas* make homologies (Skt. *bandhu*- "a bond, a tie") between the human, natural, and divine orders. In Vedic epistemology, a *bandhu* is a metaphysical connection that

<sup>55</sup> "wēnābdāg-dwārišnih ī dēwān peš az zarduxšt andar gēhān . . . škast kālbod ī-šan pas pad frāz-srāyišnih ī zardu(x)št dēn."

<sup>56</sup> "ud abar pad frāz-srāyišnih ī frārōn-menišnihā ahunwar har māriḡ-ēw dēw-ēw āgārihēd ud pāsbanīh ī tan ud xwāstag az petyārag."

<sup>57</sup> "az a-sarag kirbag ahunwar frāz būd mēnōy ī yatā-ahū-wēryō kē-š bē dahišnih ud frazām ī dām aziš paydāg ast dēn čiyōn dēn abāg dām-dahišnih dahihist." For a slightly different text and translation, see Anders Hultgård, "Creation and Emanation: Zoroastrian Reflections on the Cosmogonic Myth," in *Studies in Honour of Shaul Shaked*, ed. Werner Sundermann, Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam 26 (Jerusalem: Institute of Asian and African Studies, Hebrew University, 2002), 95–96.

links homologous structures in the universe.<sup>58</sup> Michael Witzel summarizes Karl Hoffmann's views on the structure of "magical thought" in the Brāhmaṇa texts and the epistemological principle on which this system of homologies is based:

Any entity, whether a god, or supernatural force, an object or being of nature, of culture, and especially anything said, enacted or used during a ritual, can—according to the examples in the texts—be identified with another entity provided both have something, i.e. one attribute, one characteristic, in common.<sup>59</sup>

According to Witzel, the basis of these identifications is the notion that partial identity means complete identity.<sup>60</sup> Klaus Mylius, in his work on the Brāhmaṇas, furthermore argued that these identifications are not made without a deliberate choice but according to a system designed to systemize objective reality.<sup>61</sup> Barbara Holdrege particularly emphasizes the importance of ritual for such identifications: "The sacrificial order is pivotal to the Brāhmaṇa's system of correspondences, for the regenerative power of the sacrifice is held to be the essential means of enlivening the connections between the human, natural, and divine orders."<sup>62</sup> In their discussions of these traditional homologies and their connections with the *varṇa*<sup>63</sup> system of ancient India, Barbara Holdrege and Brian K. Smith cite a number of Vedic texts to correlate the social sphere with a variety of classificatory categories, including the gods, space, time, flora, fauna, and scripture. The following triadic structures are often correlated in the Brāhmaṇa texts: the three *vyāhṛtis* (sacred utterances): *bhūh*, *bhuvah*, and *svah*; the three *Vedas* (*trayī vidyā* "threefold knowledge"): *Ṛg-Veda*, *Yajur-Veda*, and *Sāma-Veda*; the three elements: fire, wind, and sun; and their presiding deities: Agni, Vāyu, and Sūrya/Āditya.<sup>64</sup> It is beyond the

<sup>58</sup> William K. Mahony, *The Artful Universe: An Introduction to the Vedic Religious Imagination* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1998), 310; also see Jan Gonda, "Bandhu in the Brāhmaṇas," *Adyar Library Bulletin* 29 (1965): 1–29; Witzel, *On Magical Thought*, 7; Laurie L. Patton, ed., *Authority, Anxiety, and Canon: Essays in Vedic Interpretation* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1994), 8, and *Bringing the Gods to Mind*, 20.

<sup>59</sup> Witzel, *On Magical Thought*, 6, summarizing Karl Hoffmann's views from 1968, reprinted in his *Aufsätze zur Indoiranistik*, ed. Johanna Narten (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1975–92), 1:206–7.

<sup>60</sup> Witzel, *On Magical Thought*, 12.

<sup>61</sup> Klaus Mylius, "Die vedischen Identifikationen am Beispiel des Kauṣītaki-Brāhmaṇa," *Klio* 58, no. 1 (1976): 146.

<sup>62</sup> Barbara A. Holdrege, "Veda in the Brāhmaṇas: Cosmogonic Paradigms and the Delimitation of Canon," in *Authority, Anxiety, and Canon: Essays in Vedic Interpretation*, ed. Laurie L. Patton (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1994), 49.

<sup>63</sup> In Sanskrit the term *varṇa* means "color" in the sense of "characteristic" or "attribute." In Smith, *Classifying the Universe*, 3, the term is translated as "category" or "class."

<sup>64</sup> Holdrege, *Veda and Torah*, 56.

scope of this article to cite all the different schemas and variants that are found in the texts, but one example should be illustrative. In the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (11.5.8.1–4) we find the following passage:

In the beginning, Prajāpati was the only one here. He desired, “May I be, may I reproduce.” He toiled. He heated up ascetic heat. From him, from that one who had toiled and heated up, the three worlds—earth, atmosphere, and sky—were emitted. He heated up these three worlds. From those heated (worlds), three lights (*jyotis*) were born: Agni the fire, he who purifies here [i.e., Vāyu the wind], and Sūrya the sun. He heated up these three lights. From those heated (lights), three Vedas were born: from Agni, the *Ṛg-Veda*; from Vāyu, the *Yajur-Veda*; and from Sūrya, the *Sāma-Veda*. He heated up those three Vedas. From those heated (Vedas), three essences (*śukras*) were born: *bhūḥ* from the *Ṛg-Veda*, *bhuvah* from the *Yajur-Veda*, and *svah* from the *Sāma-Veda*. With the *Ṛg-Veda*, they performed (the ritual action which) concerns the *hotṛ* priest; with the *Yajur-Veda*, that which concerns the *adhvaryu* priest; and with the *Sāma-Veda*, that which concerns the *udgāṭr* priest.<sup>65</sup>

Smith analyzes the triads found in the Brāhmaṇa literature and conveniently provides us with the schema shown in table 1.<sup>66</sup>

A further textual correlation is also made with the poetic meters (*chandas*): the *gāyatrī* (eight-syllable verse line), the *triṣṭubh* (eleven-syllable verse line), and the *jagatī* (twelve-syllable verse line).<sup>67</sup> Smith also cites a variety of Brahmanic examples to show how Vedic taxonomies correlated the three Vedas with the three social classes: the Brahmins (priests), the Kṣatriyas (warriors), and Vaiśyas (herdsmen). So we find in *SB* 2.1.4.11–13:

Prajāpati generated this (world by saying) “*bhūḥ*,” the atmosphere (by saying) “*bhuvah*,” and the heavens (by saying) “*svah*.” As much as these worlds are, so much is this all. . . . Prajāpati generated the *brahman* power (by saying) “*bhūḥ*,” the *kṣatra* power (by saying) “*bhuvah*,” and the power of the *viś* (by saying) “*svah*.” As much as the powers of the *brahman*, *kṣatra* and *viś* are, so much is this all. . . . Prajāpati generated the Self (*ātman*) (by saying) “*bhūḥ*,” the human race (by saying) “*bhuvah*,” and the animals (by saying) “*svah*.” As much as these Self, human race, and animals are, so much is this all.<sup>68</sup>

In this passage the three utterances—representing the three Vedas— are correlated with the three *varṇas* and also with cosmological and

<sup>65</sup> Smith, *Classifying the Universe*, 63.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 291.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 304.

<sup>68</sup> Brian K. Smith, “Canonical Authority and Social Classification: Veda and *Varṇa* in Ancient Indian Texts,” *History of Religions* 32, no. 2 (1992): 112–13.

TABLE 1

World	Deity/Element	Veda	Essence	Priest	Sacrificial Fire
Earth	Agni/fire	<i>Ṛg</i>	<i>bhūḥ</i>	<i>hotr</i>	<i>gārhapatya</i>
Atmosphere	Vāyu/wind	<i>Yajur</i>	<i>bhuvah</i>	<i>adhvaryu</i>	<i>āgnīdhriya</i> or <i>anvāhāryapacana</i>
Sky	Sūrya/sun	<i>Sāma</i>	<i>svah</i>	<i>udgātṛ</i>	<i>āhavanīya</i>

ontological triads. All these homologies, Smith argues, are the building blocks of the Vedic epistemological system.<sup>69</sup>

I believe we have essentially the same epistemo-hermeneutical project in the *Dēnkard* and the other Pahlavi texts. The “triadic equations” that homologize textual taxonomies with the three categories of people are also found in *Dk.* 6.206:

They held this too: “People are of these three kinds: one, the Gathic ones; one, the Hādāmānsrīg ones; and one, the Legal ones. The association of the Gathic ones is with the gods, (and their) separation is from the demons and devils. . . . The association of the Hādāmānsrīg ones is with the Righteous, and their separation is from the wicked ones. . . . The association of the Legal ones is with Iranians, and their separation is from non-Iranians.”<sup>70</sup>

In yet another passage in *Dēnkard* book 6 (6.70), such an association is made between the sacred corpus, three kinds of people, and three types of rewards or punishments:

They held this too: “Apprehension about the Realm of Thought protects the Gathic ones from wickedness; and apprehension in the Realm of Living Beings protects the Hādāmānsrīg ones from ill-fame; and fear of being punished and persecuted by the ruler protects the Legal ones from sin.”<sup>71</sup>

<sup>69</sup> For the classical works on this “ritual science” in the Brāhmaṇas, see Hermann Oldenberg, *Vorwissenschaftliche Wissenschaft: Die Weltanschauung der Brāhmaṇa-Texte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1919); also see Stanislaw Schayer, “Die Struktur der magischen Weltanschauung nach dem Atharvaveda und den Brāhmaṇa-Texten,” *Zeitschrift für Buddhismus* 6 (1925): 259–310; and, more recently, Albrecht Wezler, “Zu den sogenannten Identifikationen in den Brāhmaṇas,” *Studien zur Indologie und Iranistik* 20 (1996): 485–522.

<sup>70</sup> “u-šan ēn-iz ōwōn dāšt kū mardom ēn 3 ēwēnag ēk gāhānīg ēk \*hādāmānsrīg ēk dādīg \*ān ī gāhānīg hamih abāg yazdān <u-š> wizīdagīh az dēwān ud druzān . . . ud ān ī hādāmānsrīg hamih abāg ahlawān u-š wizīdagīh az druwandān . . . ud ān ī dādīg hamih abāg ērān u-š wizīdagīh az anērān.” After Shaul Shaked, *The Wisdom of the Sasanian Sages (Dēnkard 6)*, Persian Heritage Series 34 (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1979), 78–81.

<sup>71</sup> “u-šan ēn-iz ōwōn dāšt kū andēšīšn ī mēnōyīh az druwandīh gāhānīgān ud ān ī gētīyīg az duš-srawīh hādāmānsrīgān ud tars ī az puhl ud pazd ī pādīxšay dādīgān az wināh bē payēnd.” After Shaked, *Wisdom*, 24–25.

In chapter 36 (36.26) of the *Dādestān ī Dēnīg* “Religious Judgments,” written by Manuščihr, son of Ĵuwānjam, the high priest of Kerman in the late ninth century, we find a list of heroes, helpers of the *dēn* and the three eschatological sons of Zarathustra who will serve as the three final Revitalizers:

And He (Ohrmazd) arranged that in various times they should arise and come to the world clothed in their own nature . . . one of superior *dēn* like Ādurbād, a *mānsrīg* one like Hušēdar, a legal one like Hušēdarmāh, a Gathic one who brings (all things) to a close like Sōšāns, amongst those many powerful ones, performers of glorious deeds, bearers of the *dēn* (and), organizers of the good, who (work) for the destruction of the Lie and (uphold) the will of the Creator.

Here we find the three textual taxonomies being associated with the three eschatological sons of Zarathustra who will each appear in the final tri-millennia of the world. These Revitalizers with a number of helpers (including certain culture heroes and monarchs from the *Šāh-nāma*, such as Kay Husraw) will defeat Evil once and for all thus allowing for the Resurrection of humanity (*rist-āxēz*) and a return to a pristine state of existence, the Renovation (*frašgird*, Av. *frašō.karəti-*), when disease, aging, and death will no longer occur.<sup>72</sup>

Like the *varṇa* system, based originally on “color,” in *Bundahišn* 3.4–6, we find equations being made between specific social groups, their tutelary deities, their functions, and the color of their garments:

And he (Ohrmazd) himself donned a white garment and had the \*appearance<sup>73</sup> of High Priesthood [Av. *āθrauuān*]. For all knowledge is with the high priests, who teach people, and everybody learns from them. And Ohrmazd’s proper function was also to establish the Creation. The Creation can be established with knowledge. Therefore he donned the \*appearance of those who possess knowledge, that is, that of the High Priest.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>72</sup> For universal eschatology in the Pahlavi texts, see Shaul Shaked, “Eschatology and the Goal of the Religious Life in Sasanian Zoroastrianism,” in *Types of Redemption: Contributions to the Theme of the Study-Conference Held at Jerusalem 14th to 19th July 1968*, ed. R. J. Zvi Werblowsky and C. Jouco Bleeker (Leiden: Brill, 1970), 223–30, *Dualism in Transformation: Varieties of Religion in Sasanian Iran* (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1994), 27–51, and “Eschatology: i. In Zoroastrianism and Zoroastrian Influence,” in *Encyclopædia Iranica*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1998), 8, no. 6: 565–69.

<sup>73</sup> On the terms *brahm* and *brahmag*, see Walter B. Henning, “Bráhman,” *Transactions of the Philological Society* 1944 (1945): 108–18.

<sup>74</sup> “u-š xwad paymōzan ī spēd paymōxt ud \*brahmag ī āsrōnih dāšt. čē hamē dānāgih abāg āsrōnān kē ō kasān nimūdār har kas aziš hammōxtār hēnd. ohrmazd-iz xwēškārīh dām-dahišnih būd. dām pad dānāgih šāyēd dād. ēd rāy brahmag ī dānāgān paymōxt ast āsrōnih.”

The Good Wāy donned a gold and silver, diamond-studded garment, variegated, and multicolored (and had) the appearance of warriors, for he was to go after the enemies to smash the Opposition and protect the Creation. As it is said: “Wāy’s proper function is that he removes the Opposition that is in both creations, both the one that the Beneficial Spirit and the one the Foul Spirit established, so that when they start the battle, then Ohrmazd’s Creation will be increasing, while he will destroy that of the Foul Spirit.”<sup>75</sup>

From Time he fashioned the firmament, Zurwān of long rule, of good body, the distribution of fates. And he donned a dark blue garment. He had the appearance of the Husbandmen, for his proper function is like that of husbandmen to cultivate herds and to deliver (crops?) appropriately.<sup>76</sup>

We see that, in both the Vedic and Zoroastrian texts, the intermediate space was associated with the warriors and was under the aegis of the deity Vāyu/Vaiiu,<sup>77</sup> the god of the intermediate space. While this form of deictic cosmology is most likely of Indo-Iranian origin, the more intriguing question is whether these taxonomic schemas that associate textual phenomena such as verse lines (measures) or meters with the tripartite social divisions were also perhaps inherited?<sup>78</sup> I believe they are, and I speculate that comparative Indo-Iranian hermeneutics will be a highly fruitful area of inquiry in the future. What is not speculative, however, is the social dimensions of this classificatory system, in which certain groups—the Hindu and Zoroastrian priests—were and still are accorded special rights and privileges, which could then be represented as fundamental to the primordial and universally applicable social and cosmic order. Bruce Lincoln articulates the social dimensions of this “tyranny of taxonomy”:

<sup>75</sup> “wāy ī weh jāmag ī zarrēn sēmēn gōhr-pēsīd ud hargōnagān was-rang paymōxt brahmag ī artēštārīh čē abar raftār az pas dušmenān pad petyārag zadan dām pānagīh kardan. čiyōn gōwēd kū wāy ān ī andar har dōnān dām petyārag bē barēd xwēškārīh \*kē-š dād spenāg mēnōy kē-iz ganāg mēnōy pad ēn kū [kē] ardīg sar bē kunēd dām ī ohrmazd hamē abzāyēd ān ī ganāg mēnōy abesihēnēd.”

<sup>76</sup> “az zamān brēhēnīd spīhr ī zurwān ī dagrand-xwadāy tan nēk \*baγōbaxtih. u-š paymōzan ī xašēn paymōxt. brahmag ī wastaryōšīh dāst čē-š xwēškārīh ōwōn čiyōn wastaryōšān gēhān warzīdan.” For the text, see Peshotan K. Anklesaria, *The Codex DH: Being a Facsimile Edition of “Bondahesh,” “Zand-e Vohuman Yast,” and Parts of the “Denkard,”* Iranian Culture Foundation 89 (Tehran: Iranian Culture Foundation, 1971), 16; cf. also Ahmad Tafazzoli, *Sasanian Society* (New York: Bibliotheca Persica, 2000), 1; and R. C. Zaehner, *Zurvan: A Zoroastrian Dilemma*, 2nd ed. (New York: Biblio & Tannen, 1971), 322 and 333.

<sup>77</sup> The Avestan form with a short vowel is due to the linguistic shortening of long vowels before the sequence -ii- in Avestan. For Vāyu/Vaiiu in the Indo-Iranian tradition, see Stig Wikander, *Vāyu: Texte und Untersuchungen zur indo-iranischen Religionsgeschichte* (Uppsala: Lundequistska Bokhandeln, 1941).

<sup>78</sup> For the later—post-Sasanian—reception of this “ideal” social structure in the works of the Muslim historians, see the chapter entitled “The Muslim Reception of Iranian Models,” in Louis Marlow’s *Hierarchy and Egalitarianism in Islamic Thought*, Cambridge Studies in Islamic Civilization (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 66–90.

Taxonomy is thus not only a means for organizing information, but also—as it comes to organize the organizers—an instrument for the classification and manipulation of society, something that is particularly facilitated by the fashion in which taxonomic trees and binary oppositions can conveniently recode social hierarchies.<sup>79</sup>

I would like to add to Lincoln's "taxonomic trees" and "binary oppositions" a third type of schema: "triadic structures." Not only do these triadic structures encode social divisions, but in both the Vedic and Pahlavi texts, they also point to the deictic division of the cosmos, thus making the social structures truly "natural."

Like its Vedic counterpart, the dominant mode of transmission of the Avesta was the oral tradition (despite the existence of Old Persian cuneiform from the sixth century BCE onward). This oral tradition was under the exclusive control of a small but authoritative group, the Zoroastrian priests who subtly exercise their social power in a number of passages in Pahlavi literature. All the Pahlavi texts that have survived from antiquity appear to have been redacted by male priests for the priesthood. Popular forms of religious practice are primarily known to us from foreign sources such as the classical authors, the Armenian, Syriac, and Jewish traditions, and, of course, later Islamic authors. Seemingly heterodox interpretations are found in the Pahlavi texts, but they most often merely serve as foils for the dominant priestly "voice" that sought to promote a deeply conservative and strongly didactic message. We find, for instance, in *Dk.* 9.9.4: "And about him for whom not having a priest (lit. 'authority,' *dastwar*) (as is prescribed) by the Law and who does not have the possession of any of the Good Works that he does, he will not arrive to the Best Existence."<sup>80</sup> This passage makes it abundantly clear that it is absolutely necessary to have the support and mediation of a priest in order for one's Good Works (*kirbag*) to count toward the next world. Similarly, in *Dk.* 9.13.2 we find, "And about how he who does not speak the *mānsr* (Av. *maθra*) according to a priest (*dastwar*) does not enumerate the *mānsr* purely."<sup>81</sup> Here we find the intimate link between spiritual authority and correct religious praxis that is so characteristic of the relentless drive of the Pahlavi texts

<sup>79</sup> Bruce Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society: Comparative Studies of Myth, Ritual, and Classification* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 137. For "our" readings of these texts, see his thesis on method, in *Theorizing Myth* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 150–51, and "How to Read a Religious Text: Reflections on Some Passages of the Chāndogya Upaniṣad," *History of Religions* 46, no. 2 (2006): 127–39, in particular 131–33.

<sup>80</sup> "ud abar ōy kē dastwar nē dāštan pad-dād nē xwēših ī ēč kirbag ī kunēd ud nē rasēd [ī] ō ān ī pahlom axwān."

<sup>81</sup> "ud abar nē abēzag ōšmurdan ī mānsr kē mānsr nē pad-dastwar gowēd."

to continually justify and defend the normativity of Zoroastrian priestly power, privilege, and culture.<sup>82</sup>

Based on the various texts surveyed above, we can observe a cluster of homologies in Pahlavi literature that equate a wide range of textual, cosmological, and, just as importantly, social phenomena (see table 2).

Here we see a system of associative thought similar to that in the Brāhmaṇas, but with some important differences. Besides the inherited triad of priests, warriors, and herdsmen that we saw in the *Bundahišn* passage, the two passages in *Dēnkard* book 6 homologize society according to the twenty-one *nasks*. We find the Gathic people associated with the gods and opposed to the demons and fearful of the next world. The Hādāmānsrīg people are associated with those who are Righteous and opposed to those who are evil and fearful of infamy. And finally, the Legal people are associated with Iranians and are opposed to non-Iranians and fearful of both punishment and persecution by the ruler. When the text was finally redacted in the early Islamic period, or when it was read by Zoroastrians in the subsequent centuries, they might well have understood these references to “non-Iranians” as specifically referring to the Muslim rulers of Iran and the social crises and economic anxieties they were then suffering.<sup>83</sup> I would argue that one of the chief features of these homologies is their polyvalent power to not only signify the different realms of the cosmos but also to signify differences in social structure as well as changing social realities. By creating and developing these homologies the Zoroastrian interpreters understood their sacred texts as being infinitely interpretable and fundamentally relevant for any and all historical circumstances, thus believing them to be fundamentally transhistorical and ultimately transcendent truths.

#### DĒN-ŌŠMURIŠN: “ENUMERATION OF THE SACRED CORPUS”

Having surveyed the various textual taxonomies presented in *Dēnkard* books 6, 8, and 9, and having compared them with the system of *bandhus*

<sup>82</sup> See, e.g., the passages in Philip G. Kreyenbroek, “On the Concept of Spiritual Authority in Zoroastrianism,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 17 (1994): 1–15.

<sup>83</sup> Various historical processes ultimately contributed to Zoroastrian communities becoming minority groups in Iran. These processes took centuries and involved conquest, resettlement, and conversion. See Jonathan P. Berkey, *The Formation of Islam: Religion and Society in the Near East, 600–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). See also Michael G. Morony, “Religious Communities in Late Sasanian and Early Muslim Iraq,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 17, no. 2 (1974): 113–35, and *Iraq after the Muslim Conquest* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984). For the treatment of Zoroastrians by Muslims and in the Islamic tradition, see Jamsheed K. Choksy, *Conflict and Cooperation: Zoroastrian Subalterns and Muslim Elites in Medieval Iranian Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); and Yohanan Friedmann, *Tolerance and Coercion in Islam: Interfaith Relations in the Muslim Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

TABLE 2

<i>Ahunwar</i>	<i>Nask</i>	Cosmos	Revitalizers	Moral Triads	Opponents	Fears
1st <i>gāh</i>	<i>Gāhāniḡ</i>	<i>mēnōy</i> (macrocosm)	Sōšāns	Good thoughts vs. evil thoughts	Gods vs. demons	Next world
2nd <i>gāh</i>	<i>Hādamānsrīg</i>	Intermediate space (mesocosm)	Hušēdar	Good words vs. evil words	Righteous vs. evil ones	Infamy*
3rd <i>gāh</i>	<i>Dādīg</i>	<i>gētīy</i> (microcosm)	Hušēdarmāh	Good actions vs. evil actions	Iranians vs. non-Iranians	Judgment

\*Slander is one of the worst sins in Zoroastrianism, as one can see from *Mēnōy ī Xrad* 2.8–12: “Do not commit slander, so that dishonor and sin may not come upon you! For it is said: ‘Slander is more grievous than witchcraft.’ And, in Hell, every demon moves forward, (but) the demon ‘Slander’ moves backward, because it is such a grievous sin” (spazgih ma kun kū-t dusrawih ud druwandih awiš nē rasēd. čē guft ēstēd spazgih garāntar kū jādūrih. ud andar dōsox har druz dwārišn ō peš ud druz ī spazgih garān-wināhīh rāy dwārišn ō pas).

in Vedic India, one has to ask whether these classificatory processes and hermeneutical modes are referred to explicitly in the Pahlavi texts. I believe that the compound *dēn-ōšmurišn(ih)* and phrases like *ōšmurišn ī dēn*, which I have translated as “the enumeration of the *dēn*,” signify just such an epistemo-hermeneutical project. The first member of the compound, *dēn-* is a complex theological term whose basic definition can be derived from the Avestan and Pahlavi texts as being a person’s “religious view(point),” that is, the totality of a person’s thoughts, words, and deeds embodied as a woman who comes to each person when they die.<sup>84</sup> As the Avestan term *daēnā-* is etymologically derived from the verb *day-/dī-*, which, in the Avesta refers to “seeing” in(to) the other world, it must originally have denoted a kind of “vision” faculty. Since it also appears in human female form to guide the soul of the dead, it seems to refer to the faculty that allows humans to see and be seen in the other world.<sup>85</sup> It is worth noting that in the context of the debate over the range and evolution of the semantics of the term *daēnā-/dēn* and the meaning the word has taken on in modern times, Iranists typically render it as “religion” in the post-Avestan—Pahlavi and Persian—contexts.

The second member of the compound *ōšmurišn* is a verbal noun from the verb *ōšmurdan*, present stem *ōšmar-* (*ōšmur-*). The exact semantics

<sup>84</sup> See Marijan Molé, “Daēnā, le pont Činvat et l’initiation dans le Mazdéisme,” *Revue de l’histoire des religions* 157 (1960): 155–85; Fareyduun Vahman, “A Beautiful Girl,” in *Papers in Honour of Professor Mary Boyce II*, ed. Jacques Duchesne-Guillemin and Pierre Lecoq, *Acta Iranica* 25 (Leiden: Brill, 1985), 665–73.

<sup>85</sup> Jean Kellens states: “This soul is not only defined by its name as ability to see, but also has an intimate and multilateral relationship that is active, passive, and causative, with the act of seeing, which is expressed by the verb *cit* ‘to notice.’ The *daēnā* is seen, sees, and causes to see.” Jean Kellens, “The Speculative Ritual in Ancient Iran,” in *Essays on Zoroastrianism and Zoroastrianism*, trans. Prods Oktor Skjærø (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2000), 106.

of this multivalent verb are difficult to pin down precisely, but among suggested—contextual—translations we find “to enumerate; to compute; to reckon; to consider; to recite; to study; to practice or to be devoted to (the religion).”<sup>86</sup> Its Avestan cognate, *aiβi.šmar-*, is attested just once, in the hymn (*yašt*) to Vərəθraϑna, the deity of war, but, unfortunately, its meaning is less than clear (*Yašt* 14.34): “if I become reviled and defamed,”<sup>87</sup> for which the Pahlavi translation in the Xorde (“Little”) Avesta has “(he) who is a superior and clear teacher and is a producer of a superior number (of those who hate).”<sup>88</sup> The Arameogram that is used to spell the Pahlavi verb is MNYTN- from the Aramaic root *mny* “to count, enumerate,” and this verb’s New Persian descendent, *šomordan*, present stem *šomār-*, also means “to count.” Thus, “to count, enumerate” in some fashion seems to have been the original meaning of the Pahlavi verb as well.<sup>89</sup> Its use may also be profitably compared with that of its Sanskrit cognate *smṛ-* “to remember,” also a cognate of Latin *memor* “to remember” and *memoria* “memory.” From the Sanskrit root, we have the action noun *smṛti-*, which Indologists have traditionally understood as referring to “remembered” or traditional lore, as opposed to *śruti-*, which literally means “hearing” and denotes divinely revealed texts. Sheldon Pollock, however, has argued that the dichotomy typically suggested by the western Indologists between “revelation” and “tradition” is largely untenable. Based on his reading of the Pūrva-Mīmāṃsā school, Pollock suggests instead that *śruti* refers to extant Vedic texts “heard” in recitation, whereas *smṛti* is rather an open-ended category encompassing any teachings or practices relating to *dharma* that have been “remembered” from lost Vedic texts.<sup>90</sup>

This dimension of “remembering” the tradition, especially of “lost” texts, accords well with the passages of the *Dēnkard* and other Pahlavi texts on the twenty-one *nasks* of the *dēn*. It is crucial of course in an oral tradition, where nonremembrance essentially means generational loss. It is my contention that the compound *dēn-ōšmurišn* refers, therefore, not just to a textual “study” of the *dēn*, but rather, I believe, it encodes the entire epistemo-hermeneutical complex of memorization, ritual perfor-

<sup>86</sup> See Shaked, “Towards a Middle Persian Dictionary,” 131.

<sup>87</sup> “yat bauuāni aiβi.sastō aiβi.šmarētō.”

<sup>88</sup> “kē bawēd abartar ud āškārag hammōxtēnīdār ud āmār ī abartar warzīdār.”

<sup>89</sup> For example, WZ. 3.57: “az ham sardagīhā čiyōn pad dāmdād gugān ošmurd u-m andar nibēg ī tōhmag-ōšmārišnīh hangirdīg nibišt ud ēn gyāg hangirdīgīh-ēw ast ī nimāyīhēd.” [From these very types, as was enumerated in detail in the *Dāmdād* (*Nask*) I wrote a summary (about them) in the ‘Book of the Enumeration of the Species,’ and this place (in the text) is a summary, which is shown.]

<sup>90</sup> For a survey of the various definitions assigned to these two terms by Indologists, see Sheldon Pollock, “‘Tradition’ as ‘Revelation’: *Śruti*, *Smṛti*, and the Sanskrit Discourse of Power,” in *Lex et Literae: Essays on Ancient Indian Law and Literature in Honour of Oscar Botto*, ed. Siegfried Lienhard and Irma Piovano (Alessandria: Edizioni dell’Orso, 1997), 396–402.

mance, and numerological speculation on the sacred corpus. In my opinion, the wide semantic field and diverse epistemo-hermeneutic practices encompassed by *dēn-ōšmurišn* crucially included the schematizing of the twenty-one *nasks*, thus making them isomorphic with the twenty-one words and three measures of the *Ahunwar*. As the opening prayer of the Old Avesta and the most sacred utterance in Zoroastrianism, the *Ahunwar* “naturally” and traditionally came to symbolically represent an encapsulation of the entire Zoroastrian sacred tradition, the *dēn*.

The triadic relationship between the hermeneutic practice of “enumerating” the twenty-one *nasks*, delimiting the sacred corpus, and all the while doing so with the blessing of the Sasanian state is notably found in *Dēnkard* book 4.20:

Šābuhr [Shapur II, r. 309–379 CE<sup>91</sup>], king of kings, son of Ohrmazd [Hormizd II, r. 303–309 CE], brought everything that was said up for discussion and examination in the dispute with all of the countrymen regarding what constitutes the contamination of the waters [i.e., heresy]. After Ādurbād [the *mowbedān* mowbed “high priest”] escaped unharmed by the word of the ordeal [of pouring molten metal on his chest as a sign of fidelity to the faith<sup>92</sup>], he said this too (in debate) with both those (regular) heretics [*jud-ristagān*, literally “those with different ways”] and “Nask-enumerating” heretics [*nask-ōšmurdārān*<sup>93</sup> -iz ī *jud-ristagān*]. And he also said: “Now, if we have seen in *this* world (*gētīy*), that a person does not leave the evil tradition (*ag-dēnih*), then we will work on him diligently (to see that he does).” And he (Ādurbād) did likewise.<sup>94</sup>

This passage is particularly significant since we find a reference to “‘Nask-enumerating’ heretics” (*nask-ōšmurdārān . . . ī jud-ristagān*) as well as the related practices of corpus mapping, maintenance, and

<sup>91</sup> For the lengthy reign of Šābuhr II, see the chapter entitled “Šābuhr II and the Sasanian Rulers in the Fourth Century,” in Touraj Daryaee, *Sasanian Iran (224–651 CE): Portrait of a Late Antique Empire* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2008), 43–57

<sup>92</sup> See *Ardā Wirāz Nāmāg* 1.10: “tā ān ka zād hufraward anōšag-ruwān ādurbād ī mahraspandān kē padīš passāxt ī pad dēn kard rāy widāxtag abar war rēxt.” [until that (age) when the blessed Ādurbād, son of Mahraspand, of immortal soul, was born, who, in the ordeal which he performed for the sake of the *dēn*, poured molten copper on (his) breast.] Compare the translation of Bailey, *Zoroastrian Problems*, 152. Also compare the translation of Gignoux, who, contra Bailey, reads “qui [est rapportée] dans le *Dēnkard*,” in Philippe Gignoux, *Le livre d’Ardā Wirāz: Translittération, transcription et traduction du texte pehlevi* (Paris: Editions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1984), 146. See also Maria Macuch, “Die Erwähnung der Ordalzeremonie des Ādurbād I Māraspandān im Ardā Wirāz Nāmāg,” *Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran* 20 (1987): 319–32.

<sup>93</sup> Differently Shaked, *Dualism in Transformation*, 101 n. 13, where he reads the compound as *nask-ōšmurān*. However, Madan, *Dinkard*, 413 has “wnsk ʾwsm̄l ʾn-z.”

<sup>94</sup> “šābuhr ī šāhān šāh ī ohrmazdān hamāg kišwarīgān pad pahikārīšn abān āhōg kardan hamāg gōwišn ō uskār ud wizōyišn āwurud pas az bōxtan ī ādurbād pad gōwišn ī passāxt abāg hamāg awēšān jud-ristagān ud \*nask-ōšmurdārān-iz ī jud-ristagān ēn-iz guft kū nūn kamān pad \*gētīy ī bē did kas-iz agdēnih bē nē hišt tā-š abar tuxšāg tuxšēm hamgōnag kard.”

commentary, which, like all hermeneutic endeavors, are always political in nature. Besides the numerous political ramifications, a natural question raised by my claims regarding the *dēn-ōšmurišn* compound (and others like the *nask-ōšmurdārān*) is this: just how far back can we trace this epistemo-hermeneutic complex? It is safe to say that the twin notions of memory and recitation of the *Ahuna Vairiia* are found much earlier than Pahlavi literature. For example, we find two such references in a Young Avestan commentary on the *Ahuna Vairiia* in *Yasna* 19.6 and 19.11:

And whoever in this life, O Spitama Zarathustra, \*enumerates my Section of the *Ahuna Vairiia*, or \*enumerating it holds it firmly (in mind), or holding it firmly (in mind) makes it heard, or making it heard, sacrifices it—even three times across the Bridge to the Best Life, I shall convey his soul, I, Ahura Mazdā, up to the Best Life, up to Best Order, up to the Best Lights.<sup>95</sup>

And this word (*ahuna Vairiia*) has also been said forth to us to be taught and enumerated “steadfastly by each and every one among those who are: according to the Order that is Best.”<sup>96</sup>

In addition, the phrase *dēn ošmurdan* in Middle Persian is attested much earlier than Book Pahlavi and the *Dēnkard*.<sup>97</sup> It is already used more than half a millennia earlier by the Zoroastrian high priest Kerdīr in the mid-third century CE on his inscription on the structure known as the Ka‘be-ye Zardošt at Naqš-e Rostam in Pars province: “and many \**rad-passāgs* [rituals] were taken and the *dēn* was much enumerated in various ways.”<sup>98</sup> Moreover, in the inscriptions of Kerdīr at Naqš-e Rostam and Sar-e Mašhad, Prods Oktor Skjærvø restored the word *nask*: “and in the way he

<sup>95</sup> “yasca mē aētahmi aṅhuuō yaṭ astuuaiṅti spitama zaraθuštra baṅam ahunahe vairiiehe marāt frā vā marō drənjaiiāt frā vā drənjaiiō srāuuaiiāt frā vā srāuuaiiō yazāite θrišciṭ tarō pərətūmciṭ hē uruuānəm vahištəm ahūm frapāraiiēn azəm yō ahura mazdā ā vahištāt aṅhaot ā vahištaēibiiō raocēbiiō.” Compare the first three lines of the Pahlavi version with its exegetical glosses: “kē andar ān ī man ox ī astōmand spitāmān zardu(x)št baxtārīh ī ahunwar ošmurēd {kū oh \*abespārēd}. frāz ān ī ošmurēd dranjēnēd {kū warm bē kunēd}. ud frāz ān dranjēnēd srāyēd {kū yašt bē kunēd}.” [Whoever, with my material existence, O Spitama Zarathustra, enumerates the section of the *Ahunwar* {i.e. he transmits it}. Enumerating it, he speaks it forth {i.e. he memorizes it}. And speaking it, he recites it forth (i.e. he performs the ritual).]

<sup>96</sup> “aētaṭca nō vacō frāuuaoce sixšaēmcā hišmāirīmcā yaθana kahmāciṭ hātām ašāt haca yaṭ vahištāt.” Compare the first two lines of the Pahlavi version with its exegetical glosses: “ēd- iz gōwišn amāh frāz guft {dēn mähwindād ēn fragard guft}. kē hammōxtēd {kū warm bē kunēd} ošmurēd {kū andar yazišn-ēw oh gōwēd}.” [These words too were spoken forth to us {the dēn; Mähwindā d [a commentator] spoke this section}. He who teaches it {i.e. he memorizes it}, he who enumerates it {i.e. within a ritual he thus speaks it}.]

<sup>97</sup> Our earliest colophon of the *Dēnkard* is from 1020 CE in Baghdad.

<sup>98</sup> “KKZ 15: W KBYR ltpsʔk OHDWN W KBYR dny MNYTN gwnky gwnky; ud was rad-passāg grift ud was dēn ošmurd gōnag gōnag.” Compare the text and translation of David Neal MacKenzie, “A Zoroastrian Master of Ceremonies,” in *W.B. Henning Memorial Volume*, ed. Mary Boyce and Ilya Gershevitch (London: Lund Humphries, 1970), 264.

shows [in the *n*]ask.”<sup>99</sup> As Skjærvø points out, although there is no direct evidence that the Avesta was written down by this period, it is quite possible that the accompanying Pahlavi translations and their commentaries had been written down already in the third century CE.<sup>100</sup> Skjærvø’s emendation has been largely accepted,<sup>101</sup> and so, we can, perhaps, say that we not only have a reference to the *nasks* in the Zoroastrian tradition as early as the third century CE but, just as crucially, a reference to the “enumeration of the *dēn*.”<sup>102</sup>

This, in turn, raises the question, just how far back can we trace the concept of a *nask* of the Avesta? Avestan *naska-*, the pre-form of Pahlavi *nask*, is found just once in a tantalizing passage in the Young Avestan *Hōm Yašt* (*Yasna* 9.22):

Haoma bestows on those fleet (horses) that run in pairs around the race course strength (of endurance) and strength (of body). To those in labor the Haoma gives radiant sons as offspring, as well as Orderly (sons as) progeny. Also, on those who sit in their houses (Av. *kata-*) “querying the *nasks*” (*naskō.frasāṅhō*), Haoma bestows life-giving wisdom and learning.<sup>103</sup>

The Pahlavi version of *Yasna* 9.22 is just as illuminating:

Hōm makes the teams of fleet ones work hard {i.e. the horses} and he grants them power and strength {i.e. the warriors}. Hōm gives to those who have given birth radiant sons and righteous children. To those who sit \*at home [literally, “house”] occupied with learning the *nasks* {with attending the *hērbedestān*}, Hōm gives bountifulness and intelligence.<sup>104</sup>

<sup>99</sup> “KNRm 53, KSM 29: ZK <w>gwn cygwn <PWN n>sky nm’dty; ān <ōw>ōn čiyōn // <pad n>ask nimāyēd.” After Prods Oktor Skjærvø, “‘Kirdir’s Vision’: Translation and Analysis,” *Archaeologische Mitteilungen aus Iran* 16 (1983): 276.

<sup>100</sup> Prods Oktor Skjærvø, review of Karl Hoffmann and Johanna Narten, *Der Sasanidische Archetypus*, in *Kratylos* 36 (1991): 107.

<sup>101</sup> But see the comments in Cantera, *Studien zur Pahlavi-Übersetzung*, 150–51; and the note of caution in de Jong, “Culture of Writing,” 36. See Skjærvø’s response in his review of Cantera in *Kratylos* 53 (2008): 1–20, in particular 18.

<sup>102</sup> Since the word is also attested in the Manichean texts describing the meeting between Mani and Warahrān II, this reading is probably correct. “This too the king spoke to our father: This *nask*[. . .].” See Werner Sundermann, *Mitteliranische manichäische Texte kirchengeschichtlichen Inhalts mit einem appendix von Nicholas Sims-Williams*, Berliner Turfan-texte 11 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1981), 72.

<sup>103</sup> “haomō aēbiš yōi aruuauṅtō hita taxšənti arənāum zāuuarə \*aojasca baxšaiti haomō āzizānāitibiš daḍāiti xšaētō.puθrīm uta ašauua.frazaiṅtīm haomō taēcīṭ yōi kataiīō naskō.frasāṅhō āṅhəntē spānō mastimca baxšaiti.”

<sup>104</sup> “hōm awēšān kē arwand hēnd ā-šān ān ī frahaxt tuxšāg kunēd {asp} u-šān zōr ud ōz baxšēd {artēštārān} hōm āzādān-iz bē dahēd ān ī rōšn pus ān ī ahlaw frazand hōm awēšān kē kadagīg pad nask frāz-hammōxtišnih nišīnēnd {pad hērbedestān kardan} ā-šān abzōnīgih ud frazānagih pad nask frāz-hammōxtišnih nišīnēnd {pad hērbedestān kardan} ā-šān abzōnīgih ud frazānagih baxšēd.” Compare the translation in Judith Josephson, *The Pahlavi Translation Technique as Illustrated by Hōm Yašt* (Uppsala: Uppsala Universitetsbibliotek, 1997), 64–65.

Here we see that, in the Avestan text, “querying the *nasks*” appears to be an oral process that took place at home. The Pahlavi gloss, however, suggests that it actually takes place in the priestly school (Pahl. *hērbede-stān*), but it provides no clue to what is meant by Avestan *naska-*. The most tempting etymology suggested for Av. *naska-* is from a pre-form *\*nad-ska-* from a root *\*nad-* “to tie, to bind, to connect” and perhaps meant a “bundle” or “sheaf.”<sup>105</sup> This suggests, to me, the notion of “counting” especially in a preliterate period. Perhaps in the Zoroastrian hermeneutic tradition counting the knots on bundles served as a metaphor for classifying the *nasks* into three different fields of knowledge. Ultimately, we have no way of knowing precisely how early the *nasks* came to be associated with the twenty-one words of the *Ahuna Vairiia* and were classified into three fields of knowledge based on its three measures. If my interpretation of the Pahlavi compound *dēn-ōšmurišn* is correct, what we can then say is that this epistemo-hermeneutical complex of enumerating the sacred corpus—memorizing the received tradition through recitation and counting, speculating numerologically on the myriad connections between things, homologizing the various realms of cosmological and social existence to the sacred corpus, and ultimately classifying this sacred corpus based on the *Ahuna Vairiia*—may well have been underway by the third century CE.

#### CONCLUSIONS

While commenting on an earlier version of this article, Bruce Lincoln raised the question of whether the *Ahuna Vairiia* provided a template from which the twenty-one *nasks* were an expansion or whether that template was used to organize and schematize already existing Avestan texts or tracts, thus giving them a shape and structure that finally acquired the status of “canon.” The fragmentary nature of the Avestan and Pahlavi corpora and our inability to establish absolute time lines for Zoroastrian historiography do not, unfortunately, allow for an unequivocal answer. What one can say, however, is that the well-known Zoroastrian triad of “good thoughts, good words, and good deeds” (well-known in the Pahlavi triad: *humat—hūxt—huwaršt*) was notably understood by the Avestan interpreters as being encapsulated in the three measures of the *Ahuna Vairiia*. This particular interpretation is surely an old concept and can be clearly seen in the Young Avestan interpretations of the Old Avestan *Ahuna Vairiia* in *Yasna* 19.16,<sup>106</sup>

<sup>105</sup> This might provide an Iranian cognate of Latin *nōdus* “a knot” and, perhaps, *nexus*, the past participle of the verb *nectere* “to bind, connect”; see Manfred Mayrhofer, *Etymologisches Wörterbuch des Altindoarischen*, 3 vols. (Heidelberg: Winter, 1996–2002), 2:32.

<sup>106</sup> Y. 19, 20, and 21 are Young Avestan commentaries on the *Ahuna Vairiia*, the *Ašəm Vohū*, and the *Yejhē Hātəm*, respectively, the three prayers preceding the first *Gāthā*. They are the only examples of Young Avestan commentaries on the Old Aveta that are akin to what we find in the later Pahlavi literature.

And this word (*i.e.* the *Ahuna Vairiia*), uttered by Ahura Mazdā, contains three \*measures,<sup>107</sup> four professions, five models<sup>108</sup> (as) a \*record of the gifts. Which (are) its \*measures? The well-thought (thought), the well-spoken (word), the well-performed (action).<sup>109</sup>

Thus, the *Ahuna Vairiia* remains a constant point of reference for the Zoroastrian tradition, and in this passage we see it containing both textual and social phenomena in both the Avestan and Pahlavi versions. This Young Avestan “Brāhmaṇa” suggests that it encodes the then-prevailing(?), later idealized, societal structure by referencing the “four professions” that are enumerated more fully in the following strophe in *Yasna* 19.17, where it asks:

Which (are) the professions? The Priest, the Warrior, the Husbandman, the Artisan, which are the daily (tasks to be) pursued by the Orderly Man: thinking true [literally “straight”] thoughts, speaking true words, performing true actions, enumerated according to the Models, promoting the *daēnā*, “by whose actions the herds are being furthered through Order.”<sup>110</sup>

As we can see from these two Young Avestan strophes, the numerological interpretations of the *Ahunwar* in the various Pahlavi texts surveyed above appear to have their roots in exegeses of the *Ahuna Vairiia* in the Young Avestan period, that is, over a millennium earlier. The “natural” social structure is reified in these strophes by suggesting that they are encoded in Ahura Mazdā’s first utterance. In addition, we see the “exegetical totalization” and the equating of the measures of this *mąθra* with correct ritual behavior “enumerated according to the Models,” as well as the practice of “promoting the *daēnā*.”

The *Ahuna Vairiia*, like the three Vedas in the Indic tradition,<sup>111</sup> thus plays a multifaceted role in the Zoroastrian hermeneutic tradition. It serves as the foundation of Ohrmazd’s creation and as the divine blueprint for Zoroastrian cosmology; it represents the primordial speech-act and is the foundational text of Zoroastrianism.<sup>112</sup> It was then and is now the most sacred utterance for Zoroastrians and is still recited daily by the laity for

<sup>107</sup> The Pahlavi *Yasna* has *paymān* “mean, measure,” whereas the Pahlavi *Wisprad* has *gāh*.

<sup>108</sup> The Pahlavi *Yasna* has “5 *radih* {mānbed wisbed ud zandbed ud dahibed Zarduštōm}. [5 (types of) Models {Lord of the House, Lord of the Village, Lord of the Tribe, Lord of the Land, the most Zoroastrian one}.]”

<sup>109</sup> “aētaṭca vacō mazdaoxtēm θri.afsmēm caθru.pištrēm paṅca.ratu rāiti.haṅkərəθēm kāiš hē afsmām humatēm hūxtēm huuarštēm.”

<sup>110</sup> “kāiš pištrāiš āθrauaa raθaēštā vāstriiō fšuiiḡs hūitiš vīspaiieirina hacimna naire ašaone arš.manajha arš.vacanḡha arš.šiiiaθna ratuš.mərəta daēnō.sāca yejhe šiiiaθanāiš gaēθā aša frādənte.”

<sup>111</sup> We also have the Buddhist Pali canon and its division of texts into groups of three, the *Tripitika* “three baskets.” I must thank Stephanie Jamison for bringing this to my attention.

<sup>112</sup> I have adapted these four roles from Holdrege, *Veda and Torah*, 60.

everyday living and by Zoroastrian priests as an integral part of their ritual practice. The foundational and primeval status of the *Ahuna Vairiia* as a cosmogonic text was first established tautologically when Ohrmazd recited it before the creation of the world. Except for the seven *amāža spəntas* “the Life-Giving Immortals” and the *Ahuna Vairiia* itself, nothing existed before Ahura Mazda created the world.<sup>113</sup> As the *fons et origo* of the Zoroastrian tradition, the *Ahuna Vairiia* therefore serves as the perfect candidate for the schematizing of both the sacred texts and society. Like its earlier Vedic counterpart, the Pahlavi epistemo-hermeneutical project was based on uncovering the myriad “connections” or “homologies” that tied together components from different realms of reality, thus reinforcing the totality of the sacred tradition, the *dēn*. I would emphasize that what is being schematized here is not merely a collection of sacred texts passed down from the earliest periods of Zoroastrianism but, rather, multiple forms and complex modes of inherited Zoroastrian culture that are symbolically represented by the twenty-one *nasks*, which are limited in number but infinitely interpretable, continuously productive, and perpetually relevant. The Zoroastrian interpreters, like their Vedic counterparts, ultimately ordered their society through a series of homologies that made their most sacred utterance, and hence their sacred corpus, continually “significant” for all dimensions of legal, religious, and social life.<sup>114</sup> This epistemo-hermeneutical practice of enumerating the *dēn* and all its “natural” connections in the three realms reified the transcendent nature of the *Ahuna Vairiia* and, by extension, the Old Avesta, thus allowing for the survival of Zoroastrianism both in the heyday of the Sasanians and during the challenging early years of Islamic rule in Iran.

Exactly a millennium after Muhammad’s conquest of Mecca in 630 CE, Henry Lord described the Zoroastrian scriptures as “the first whereof treated of that which wee call Iudiciall Astrologie, foretelling the euent of things to come, by iudgement of the starres, which by them is called *Astoodegar*.”<sup>115</sup> This reference to the first of the three “tracts” of the Parsi scriptures as *Astoodegar* is clearly the Persian form (with prothetic vowel) of the name of the first of the seven Gathic *nasks*, the *S[t]ūdgar* found in *Dēnkard* book 9. Lord also stated that “these tracts were likewise diuided into certaine chapters, whereof seauen were contained in the wifeman’s, or *Iefopp*’s booke, seauen in the phyfitian’s booke, and seauen in the *Daroo*’s or churchman’s booke.” An “enumeration of the sacred corpus” indeed!

Lord ended his work with *The Author’s Conclufion to the Reader*,

<sup>113</sup> See *Y.* 19.1–4, 8.

<sup>114</sup> See Yuhan S.-D. Vevaina, “Scripture versus Contemporary (Interpretive) Needs: Mapping the Contours of Zoroastrian Hermeneutics,” in *Shoshanat Yaakov: Ancient Jewish and Iranian Studies in Honor of Professor Yaakov Elman*, ed. Steven Fine and Samuel Secunda (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming).

<sup>115</sup> Lord, *Sect of the Persees*, 336.

Such in fumme (worthy reader) is the religion which this sect of the *Perfees* professe: I leaue it to the censure of them that read, what to thinke of it. This is the curiositie of superstition, to bring in innouations into religious worlhippe, rather making deuises of their owne braine, that they may be singular, then following the example of the best in a solid profession. What seeme these *Perfees* to be like in their religious fier? but those same gnats, that admiring the flame of fier, surround it so long, till they prooue *ingeniofi in suam ruinam*, ingenious in their owne destruction.<sup>116</sup>

It was this very impulse “to bring in innouations into religious worlhippe” through a series of homologies that is so characteristic of the Zoroastrian epistemo-hermeneutical project and, for that matter, all hermeneutical endeavors. Lord saw these Zoroastrian interpreters as gnats to a flame, thus “ingenious in their owne destruction.” I would contend that it is precisely this hermeneutical ingenuity that has allowed the Zoroastrian tradition to continue to be relevant and meaningful for its followers in its fourth millennium.

### Harvard University

#### APPENDIX

##### ABBREVIATIONS

Av.	Avestan
<i>Bdh.</i>	<i>Bundahišn</i>
<i>Dk.</i>	<i>Dēnkard</i>
KKZ	Kerdīr, Ka ‘be-ye Zardošt
KNRm	Kerdīr, Naqš-e Rostam
KSM	Kerdīr, Sar-e Mašhad
OAv.	Old Avesta
Pahl.	Pahlavi
Skt.	Sanskrit
<i>ŚB</i>	<i>Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa</i>
<i>WZ.</i>	<i>Wizīdagīhā ī Zādspram</i>
<i>Y.</i>	<i>Yasna</i>
YAv.	Young Avesta

##### SIGLA

[ ]	Deleted in the text
< >	Added in the text
( )	Added in the translation
{ }	Pahlavi Gloss
*	Emended or problematic form
#	Caesura

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 342.