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On the Prophetic and Priestly Authority of Zarathustra

Zarathustra, Prophet and Priest

Zoroastrianism is commonly regarded as one of the oldest living prophetic religions. Such view is based on the tradition that the religion was communicated by the god Ahura Mazdā to a person of the name Zarathustra. In this context the term prophet refers to an individual who is presented as the medium by which a deity imparts messages to human beings. The peculiarity of the figure of Zarathustra lies in that the texts present him as a priest as well as a prophet. In a classic study of the role of religion in society, the sociologist Max Weber noted that prophet and priest tend to be figures at variance with each other: The prophet assumes the role of the innovator, while the priest's task is to preserve existing structures. Buddha and Jesus, for example, rose up in protest against the practices and prescriptive regulations of the mainstream established priesthood, who claimed for themselves the prerogative of being the guardians of the religion and of controlling the laity. Zarathustra, too, is depicted in the sources as being in conflict with existing priestly practices and beliefs. However, in contrast to some other religious innovators, his case is different in so far as he is also described as a priest.[1] Zoroastrianism thus constitutes the instance of a religion in which the person purported to have introduced changes and started a new tradition is himself a member of the priesthood which usually represents and safeguards the established religion.

Earlier research on the roles of Zarathustra as both priest and prophet has focused on the various ways in which religious concepts are incorporated in Zoroastrian rituals and vice versa.[2] In what follows I rather propose to investigate the extent to which the texts attach prophetic and priestly authority to the figure of Zarathustra. In this connection, it is not the place here to discuss

the currently debated questions of the existence (or non-existence) of an extra-textual figure of that name, of the identity of the "I" in the earliest sources, the Gathas, and of the origins of the Zoroastrian religion.[3] I am hoping to address these problems elsewhere.

Zarathustra, the Prophet and Visionary

The fusion of the roles of prophet and priest emerges from the one Gathic passage in which the "I" describes himself with the title *zaotar-*. In the more recent form *zōt,* the term denotes the chief priest officiating in the Zoroastrian ritual to the present day. It is a traditional feature of Avestan vocabulary and corresponds in form and meaning to the Vedic word *hótar-*:

Y. 33.6 yəzaotā aṣ̌ā ərəzūš huuō maniiəuš ā vahištāṯ kaiiā
ahmāṯ auuā manaŋhā yā vərəziieidiiāi maṇtā vāstriiā
tā tōi iziiā ahurā mazdā darštōišcā həm.parštōišcā

This one here, I, who (am) the officiating priest, I am longing, through truth, for the straightest (paths) on the basis of best thinking;
On the basis of this (thinking), with that thought by which one thinks that pastoral works are to be done:
With this (thought), O Wise Lord, I am eager to see you and to converse with you.

The chief priest, *zaotā*, here expresses his desire to "see" Ahura Mazdā and "converse" with him. The Avestan verb *həm-pərəs* "to converse" literally means "to ask mutually" or "to ask one another" and here implies the taking place of a dialogue between the god, on the one hand, and the human being, on the other. In the Younger Avesta most, if not all, of the teaching is cast in the literary form of a question asked by Zarathustra followed by the answer given by Ahura Mazdā. The Avesta thus presents the communication of the Mazdayasnian Religion to Zarathustra as having taken place in the guise of a conversation between the human and the divine. The consultation between Zarathustra and his god, Ahura Mazdā, became a topos which produced the literary genre of the so-called *ham-pursagīh*-literature in Younger Avestan and later in Middle Persian.[4] The extent of the latter's debt to the Old Avestan tradition emerges from the fact that in Middle Persian the very name of the genre derives from the same verb "to converse" as the Gathic noun *həm-paršti-* of Y. 33.6. The Gathas mention a particular occasion, when Zarathustra, who identifies himself by name, encountered someone who approached him "with good thought" and asked him who he was and to whom he belonged:

Y. 43.7 spəṇtəm aṯ θβā mazdā məṇghī ahurā
hiiaṯ mā vohū pairī.jasaṯ manaŋhā
pərəsaṯ cā mā ciš ahī kahiiā ahī
kaθā $^{+}$aiiarə daxšārā fərasaiiāi dīšā
aibī θβāhū gaēθāhū tanušicā

I realized that you are bounteous, O Wise Lord,
when he approached me with good thought
and asked me: "Who are you, to whom do you belong?
How do you, O zealous one, wish to appoint a day for the questioning
about your possessions and about yourself?"

The next verse supplies the answer to the questions asked:

Y. 43.8 aṯ hōi aojī zaraθuštrō paouruuīm
haiθiiō.duuaēšå hiiaṯ isōiiā drəguuāitē
aṯ aṣāunē rafənō x́iiəm aojōŋghuuaṯ
hiiaṯ ā būštīš vasasə.xšaθrahiiā diiā
yauuaṯ ā θβā mazdā stāumī ufiiācā

And I said to him: "Zarathustra, firstly,
(secondly,) a real enemy to the deceitful one, as much as I may be able.
I could be a powerful support to the truthful one
if I acquired the faculties of one who rules at will
while I praise and eulogize you, O Wise One."

Ahura Mazdā is addressed in the vocative at the end of this stanza and in the formula which introduces every other stanza from Y. 43.5 onwards, but the individual who approached Zarathustra "with good thought" is spoken of in the third person. In the later, Middle Persian literature, compiled in the early Islamic period on the basis of Avestan texts and traditions, the story goes that the priest Zarathustra went at dawn to the river Dāityā to fetch water for the *haoma*-ritual. He drew some from the middle of the current and as he was returning to the bank, he beheld the endless light of "Good Thought," *vohuman*, who took him into the presence of Ohrmazd and the Amahraspands.[5] Although the narrative is further elaborated, amplified and embellished with details, the story recalls the Gathic verses of Y. 43: Zarathustra communicates with a supernatural being through the medium of good thought. The latter acts as the intermediary between Ohrmazd and Zarathustra and thus serves as the vehicle of communication between the human and the divine. Moreover, according to this more recent tradition, Zarathustra had not just one but several such consultations with Ohrmazd, who imparted his teachings to him during these meetings. These consultations were the occasions when Zarathustra received the Religion, the *dēn ī ohrmazd*.

By means of this encounter, Zarathustra *himself* becomes the agent through whom Ahura Mazdā reveals to mankind "the Mazda-worshipping belief," the *daēnā māzdayasni*. The role of Zarathustra as the bringer of the Mazdayasnian Religion is one of the fundamental tenets of this religion. It is found, for instance, also in one of the colophons of the oldest extant Pahlavi codex, dating from 1322 CE:[6]

> **MK fol. 19 v. 1–4** namāz Zardušt ī Spitāmān kē āwurd dēn ī wēh māzdesnān abēzag rawāg pad ayārīh ī Wištāsp-šāh ud Zarēr ud Spanddād.
>
> Homage to Zarathustra, the Spitamid, who brought the good religion of the Mazdā-worshippers, pure (and) current with the help of King Wištāsp and Zarēr and Spanddād.

Through this revelation received and subsequently passed on to others, Zarathustra's call marks the beginning of a new era, because from that point in history human beings gained access to the Mazdayasnian belief and consequently became equipped with the means of successfully fighting the evil with which the material world is afflicted. The Avesta states that before Zarathustra men and women were helplessly exposed to the atrocities of the Daevas, the demons. But with Zarathustra, the latter were forced to retreat:

> **Yt. 19.80** vaēnəmnəm ahmaṯ para daēuua pataiiən
> vaēnəmnəm maiiå frāuuōiṯ
> vaēnəmnəm apa.karšaiiən
> jainiš haca maṣiiākaēibiiō
> āaṯ tå snaoδəṇtiš gərəzānå
> hazō niuuarəzaiiən daēuua
>
> Before his [i.e. Zarathustra's] time the demons used to rush about visibly,
> their pleasures of lust used to take place visibly,
> visibly they used to drag away
> the women from their men;
> and the demons used to subject to violence
> those crying and lamenting (women).
>
> **Yt. 19.81** āaṯ tē aēuuō ahunō vairiiō
> yim aṣauuanəm zaraθuštrəm frasrāuuaiiaṯ
> vī.bərəθβəṇtəm āxtūirīm
> aparəm xraoždiiehiia frasrūiti
> zəmarəgūza auuazaṯ
> vīspe daēuua aiiesniia auuahmiia
>
> But a single Ahuna Vairya prayer
> which truthful Zarathustra recited
> divided four times into sections,
> the (last) section recited more loudly,
> drove under the earth
> all demons, which are unworthy of worship, unworthy of praise.

The Ahuna Vairya prayer (Y. 27.13), which is in fact the first stanza of the Ahunavaiti Gatha, is perceived in the Younger Avesta as the mantra which encapsulates all the knowledge and power of the *daēnā māzdayasni.* It constitutes the weapon (*snaiθiš-*) for smiting Evil (Y. 57.22, Yt. 17.21). Ahura Mazdā recited it after he had made the spiritual creations and before he made the material world (Y. 19.2–4 and 8), but the mantra was not available to mankind before Zarathustra, who was the first mortal to recite it (Y. 9.14).[7] In the following Gathic passage the poet-priest invokes the authority of Ahura Mazdā as legitimizing his own speech (*mąθrəm*):

Y. 45.3 aṯ frauuaxšiiā aŋhāuš ahiiā pouruuīm
yąm mōi vīduuå̊ mazdå̊ vaocaṯ ahurō
yōi īm vā nōiṯ iθā mąθrəm varəšəŋtī
yaθā īm mānāicā vaocacā
aēibiiō aŋhāuš auuōi aŋhaṯ apāməm

I shall proclaim the principle of this life,
(the formulation) which the knowing one, the Wise Lord, has told me:
those of you who do not put into practice this formulation here
as I shall think and speak it,
to them "woe" will be the conclusion of life.

In this hymn, the poetry of which is particularly close to a traditional Rigvedic composition,[8] the "I" claims divine authority for his own words on the strength of the communication received from Ahura Mazdā. The god revealed to him the "formula" (*mąθrəm*), the "word which is best for the mortals" (*vacā ... hiiaṯ marətaēibiiō vahištəm* Y. 45.5), which he, the poet, now passes on to others. Moreover, he predicts a disastrous outcome to those who refuse to think and speak the mantra exactly like him. It thus appears that we find here the poet's claim of offering a substantively new revelation, "a religious truth of salvation received through personal revelation," one which Max Weber describes as the "decisive hallmark" of prophecy.[9]

In the cosmology of the Younger Avesta and the Pahlavi texts Zarathustra, being the first human to recite the Ahuna Vairya prayer and the bringer of the *daēnā māzdayasni*, marks the beginning of the "Separation" period, in the course of which Evil is gradually contained and eventually removed from Ahura Mazdā's world. The period culminates in the final victory of Ahura Mazdā's good forces over the evil ones and is concluded by the latter's expulsion from the material world. At that future point, referred to in Avestan as *frašō.kərəti* "perfection," Evil will have been defeated once and for all, will retreat "powerless" (*axšaiiamnō* Yt. 19.96) and will never attack again. Moreover, all works of the destructive force, Angra Mainyu, and death in particular, will be

eradicated and, as a consequence, those who have died will be resurrected and restored to perfection.[10]

Zarathustra, the Priest

The earliest historically attested ritual of the Zoroastrian tradition is the one during which the Gathas and the Yasna Haptaŋhāiti are recited. It could be seen as the form of cultic worship which would match the mantra which the Gathic poet claims in Y. 45.3, just quoted, to have received from Ahura Mazdā.[11] Since he is presented as a priest, a form of ritual worship is even warranted, because, to quote Max Weber again, from a sociological and anthropological point of view there can be no priesthood without some kind of cultic worship.[12]

Some Gathic passages suggest that the poet is anxious to praise Ahura Mazdā appropriately. Speaking in the plural form "we,"[13] at the beginning of the Gathas he fears that he might anger Ahura Mazdā with his hymns:

> **Y. 28.9** anāiš vå nōiţ ahurā mazdā aṣəmcā yānāiš zaranaēmā
> manascā hiia vahištəm yōi və yōiθəmā dasəmē stūtąm
>
> May we not anger you, O Wise Lord, and Truth and Best Thought with these pleas,
> we who have taken up our positions in the offering of praises to you!

This passage also contains a reference to the actual ritual situation: The priests have taken up their position in "the offering of praises," an expression which probably means "in the ritual." Later on, at the end of the same Gatha, the singer asks Ahura Mazdā to teach him how to praise him aright:

> **Y. 34.15** mazdā aţ mōi vahištā srauuåscā šiiaoθanācā vaocā
>
> O Wise One, tell me about the best eulogies and actions!

In the ritual, Ahura Mazdā's fire is desired by the worshippers:

> **Y. 34.4** aţ tōi ātrəm ahurā aojōŋhuuaŋtəm ašā usəmahī
> asīštīm əmauuaŋtəm stōi rapaŋtē ciθrā.auuaŋhəm
> aţ mazdā daibišiiaŋtē zastāištāiš dərəštā.aēnaŋhəm.
>
> Through truth, O Lord, we desire your powerful fire,
> the swiftest and strongest, to be a bright help to your supporter,
> But a visible injurer to your enemy, O Wise One, through what is sent by your hand.

Already in the pre-Zoroastrian Indo-Iranian religion and ritual, the fire was of prime importance. It was perceived as a mediator between the human and divine worlds. The ritual fire prepared a path on which the gods could travel

from their heavenly abodes and come down to the place of sacrifice. There was prepared a straw seat on which they could sit comfortably and enjoy the offerings. The gods did not come with empty hands, but brought with them many gifts to bestow on the worshipper in return for the sacrifice offered.[14]

The fire is also the main focus in the ritual to which the Gathas and Yasna Haptaŋhāiti testify, and this is so to the present day. Indeed, Zoroastrians are sometimes referred to as "fire worshippers," but this is mistaken. While they treat the fire with the greatest respect, they ultimately worship Ahura Mazdā who is present within that fire, which is regarded as his most beautiful physical and visible manifestation. In addition to the ritual fire, there is Ahura Mazdā's heavenly fire, which is conceived as his son. In the recitation of the second section of the Yasna Haptaŋhāiti, this heavenly fire is invited to come down (Y. 36.2), its merger with the ritual fire is explicitly stated (Y. 36.3), and the ritual fire is addressed as Ahura Mazdā's most bounteous spirit, *spāništa- mainiiu-* (Y. 36.3) and as the god's most beautiful visible form (Y. 36.6). Such identifications suggest that from that moment of the ritual onwards the worshippers perceive of themselves as being physically in the presence of Ahura Mazdā.[15] The ritual thus anticipates the state of perfection, described in Avestan as *frašō.kərəti* and pertaining to the end of time, when all Evil will be completely removed from the material world. From that point of view, it makes sense that Evil is not mentioned in the Yasna Haptaŋhāiti because it does no longer exist in that special ritual moment. This interpretation derives support from the Gathas, in which the Yasna Haptaŋhāiti is embedded, for the theme of "perfection," *frašō.kərəti*, recurs at the end of each of the first three.[16] This indicates the extent to which theological concepts are enacted in the ritual, one of whose purposes is to strengthen the presence of Ahura Mazdā and his spiritual creations within the material world afflicted by Evil.[17]

The *zaotar* performs no ritual actions while reciting the Yasna Haptaŋhāiti and the following Gathas.[18] Instead, according to the ritual directions given in chapter 47 (65) of the Nērangestān, the *frabārātar*-priest offers the meat of the sacrificial animal, which had been killed at an earlier stage of the ritual during the recitation of Yasna 8.[19] Not only is the Yasna Haptaŋhāiti explicitly mentioned (N. 47.11), but also, as Kotwal and Kreyenbroek rightly note, N. 47.41 describes the recitation of the end of the Yasna Haptaŋhāiti, Y. 41.6 (7), in the same manner as directed by the ritual instructions in the manuscripts.[20] The ritual directions indicate that animal sacrifice formed an integral part of the ceremony. From a doctrinal point of view the ritual provided the only legitimate context in which death could be inflicted on a beneficent animal.[21]

Zarathustra, the Initiator of a Priestly Tradition

zaraθuštrōtəma

The distinction between priesthood and laity is inherited from the Indo-Iranian religion. The priest is the professional of the spoken word and is knowledgeable about the ritual by which he alone is able to relate directly to the deity.[22] As he does so on behalf of members of the community, no congregation is necessary when a ritual is performed, a feature that lives on in present-day Zoroastrian practice. In the Younger Avesta Zarathustra is presented as the prototypical priest who performed the rituals as instructed by Ahura Mazdā:

Y. 65.9 āpō gātauua rāmōiδβəm yauuata zaota yazāite
kaθa zaota xsāta vaca āpō vaŋ^{v}hīš yazāite
kuθra bauuāṯ hitō.hizuuå yezi anarəθe yazāite
kuθra vācō aoi.būta yą hē caxse aēθra.paitiš
kuθra tå friiō bauuąn
kuθra tå išudō bauuąn
kuθra tå rātaiiō bauuąn
yą ahurō mazdå zaraθuštrāi frāuuauuaca
frā zaraθuštrō gaēθābiiō astuuaitibiiō

O Waters, remain at this place as long as the priest worships!
Will the priest worship the good waters with the learned word?
Will his tongue be bound if he worships in an improper way?
Will the words which the teacher has taught him be successful?
What will happen to these services,
What will happen to these offerings of strengthening,
What will happen to these gifts,
which the Wise Lord proclaimed to Zarathustra,
(and which) Zarathustra pro(claimed) to the physical living beings?

The text goes on and recounts Ahura Mazdā's instructions to Zarathustra:

Y. 65.10 auua.jastīm pauruuąm
āpō jaiδiiōiš zaraθuštra
pascaēta aiβiiō zaoθrå frabarōiš
yaoždātå dahmō.pairīštå
imą vacō framrū

You may direct your first request
to the waters, O Zarathustra.
Afterwards you shall offer the libations to the waters,
(the libations) which were purified and selected by a member of the community,
while pronouncing the following words:

Y. 65.11 āpō yānəm vō yāsāmi mazå̊ṇtəm
təm mē dāiiata
yeŋ́he dāiti paiti
vaŋhō nisrīta anaiβi.druxti
āpō īštīm vō jaiδiiāmi
pouru.sarəδąm amauuaitīm
frazaṇtīmca x^{v}āparąm
yeŋ́hå̊ pourūšca bərəjaiiąn
naēcišca aiŋhå̊ yāsāiti
ziiānāi nōiṯ snaθāi
nōiṯ mahrkāi
nōiṯ aēnaŋhe
nōiṯ apaiiatəe

O Waters, I ask you for this great favour,
give it to me,
through the bestowal of which
the highest good, which does not deceive, is bestowed.
O Waters, I beseech you with this
multifarious, strong desire
for successful offspring,
which many will honour
and no one will seek
to damage, nor to smite,
nor to destroy,
nor to harm,
nor to deprive.

This passage presents the idea that the very words of the prayer were taught *verbatim* by Ahura Mazdā to Zarathustra and by Zarathustra to others. In reciting these texts and repeating the same words, the priests do exactly what Zarathustra did and thus reveal themselves to be his direct spiritual descendants.

The name of Zarathustra also forms the basis of the superlative "the one who is most Zarathustra-like," *zaraθuštrōtəma-* in the Avesta and *zarduštrōtom* in the Pahlavi books. In the Avesta, this name denotes the highest level of the social hierarchy, the other four being the house (*nmāna-*), the clan (*vis-*), the tribe (*zaṇtu-*) and the land (*dahiiu-*). In the Pahlavi texts, *zarduštrōtom* represents an ideal spiritual authority, whose *xwarrah* guarantees the proper functioning of the religion (*dēn*).[23] The term seems to incorporate the perception of Zarathustra as the model priest for all succeeding generations of priests who come after him. It is likely that Islam, as it supplanted Zoroastrianism in many areas of the Near and Middle East, was heavily influenced by the Zoroastrian concept of spiritual and religious authority.[24]

Women Priests

Throughout the history of Zoroastrianism women's roles seem to have been more constrained than those of men. Yet, an extraordinary aspect of the religion as it emerges from the Avesta is the view that access to religious education and even priestly roles was open to both genders. The texts honour or "worship" the "belief and choice" of both men and women, and to both is ascribed the ability to become good rulers not only in the temporal sphere, but also in the spiritual one.[25] In other words, being a good ruler or priest depends not on a priestly tradition, but on individual gifts, or, as Max Weber would put it, on charisma.[26] And furthermore, this must have been instituted by means of a man's prophetic authority, against prevailing norms and assumptions about gender roles in a patriarchal society, and therefore it is "charismatic" in its origin as well as practice. Thus we read in the Yasna Haptaŋhāiti:

Y. 41.2 vohū xšaθrəm tōi mazdā ahurā
apaēmā
vīspāi yauuē
huxšaθrastū nā
nā vā nāirī vā
xšaētā
ubōiiō aŋhuuō
hātąm hudāstəmā

May we obtain, O Wise One,
your good rule
for all time!
May a good ruler,
a man or a woman,
rule over us
in both existences,
O most munificent one of those who exist!

In the worshippers' request for a good leader, be it "a man or a woman," the Avestan word *nāiri-* used for "women," refers unambiguously to human beings. Divine women would be denoted by the word *gənā-*.[27] The idea of the equal status of men and women as moral and spiritual agents is deeply rooted in Zoroastrian thought in so far as it pervades the sacred texts and forms a central part of its religious teaching. In terms which to the modern ear sound strangely politically correct, both male and females are explicitly referred to in the Avesta on many occasions, for example:

Y. 26.7 iδa iristanąm uruuąnō yazamaide
yå aṣaonąm frauuaṣaiiō vīspanąm
ahmiia nmāne nabānazdištanąm para.iristanąm

aēθrapaitiṇąm aēθriianąm naraṇąm nāiriṇąm
iδa aṣaonąm aṣaoniṇąm frauuaṣaiiō yazamaide

Here we worship the souls of the departed,
the choices of all truthful persons;
in this house (we worship the choices) of the closest relatives who have passed away,
of the teachers (and) students, of men (and) women;
here we worship the choices of the truthful ones, male and female.

The appointment of both men and women as spiritual leaders appears to have continued for a long time, because in a later Avestan text, Nērangestān 22 (= 40) we find some evidence suggesting that persons of either gender and even minor children could act as chief priests, *zaotar-*.[28] At the time texts in Avestan were composed, the criterion for holding the office seems to have been, at least theoretically, neither gender nor age, but whether or not the candidate had learned the sacred texts by heart and was able to master them. In a similar vein, the Middle Persian text "Allowed and not Allowed," Šāyest nē-Šāyest permits women to hold the office of chief priest, albeit with the restriction to rituals performed on behalf of female patrons:

ŠnŠ 10.35 zan pad zōtīh [ī] zanān šāyēd

A woman is allowed to assume the office of women's chief priest.[29]

That age and gender were not an issue for the duties to be taken on by members of the priestly class (*aθauruuan-*) is suggested by the Avestan version of the first chapters of the Hērbedestān. In Chapter 1 the question of which member of a household should leave home for priestly service (*aθauruna-*) is answered to the effect that, regardless of age, "the one with the highest esteem for truth" should go. In Chapter 5 the question is asked whether the lord or the lady of the house should leave home for *aθauruna-*, and the answer is that either may do so, but that the one who is more capable of looking after their domestic affairs and property (*gaēθā-*) should stay at home.[30]

While some of the texts written in Pahlavi still provide evidence for women taking on religious and ritual duties, and to the present day both boys and girls undergo the same initiation rite,[31] the Zoroastrian texts written in Persian testify to a state of affairs in which the idea of a gender-specific priesthood has been adopted. Women are excluded from even the most basic religious roles, and the priestly functions are monopolized by men, who alone have access to professional training in special schools.[32] In contemporary Zoroastrian practice, priesthood is a male prerogative. The wholesale exclusion of the female gender from the hieratic profession is justified by and based on the belief in defilement originating from menstruation. As Jamsheed Choksy has shown, ritual uncleanness, in turn, is related to religious and cosmic disorder allegedly caused

by female evil spirits such as the Whore, *jahikā*, and the demon of the corpse, *nasuš*.[33]

In the contemporary religious practice of both India and Iran, the priesthood is hereditary, passed on through the male line from father to son.[34] Even if a son does not become a priest, a grandson may do so, but access to priesthood is forfeited if a family has not produced a practicing priest for more than about three generations. In the statistics of the 1980's, however, only one boy in seven from a priestly family became a priest. As the ministry is hereditary, there is not only a shortage of priests in the present but also a real threat of the breakdown of the profession in the future.[35] Under these circumstances, some contemporary Zoroastrian communities are discussing a gender non-specific clergy, and a new course of action is indicated by the Council of Iranian Mobeds of North America who have stated that women are not barred from the office of paramobed.[36] Moreover, in Iran eight women were conferred the title of mobedyar in early 2011 after they had passed the tests set by the council of priests of the Tehran Anjoman-e Mobedān.[37]

Conclusion

This article has argued that the Gathic poet claims two types of authority, priestly and prophetic, and that he legitimizes such claims with the communication and empowerment he has received from Ahura Mazdā. The Younger Avesta presents Zarathustra as the starting point of the priestly tradition which is in the service of the Mazdā-worshipping belief. This idea culminates in the Avestan title *zaraθuštrōtəma* which denotes the priests as representing the pinnacle of the social hierarchy. All religious authority of later priestly generations derives from the perception of themselves as being the direct spiritual descendants of Zarathustra, whose own words they re-enact daily in the ritual.

In his prophetic function, Zarathustra is perceived as the person to whom Ahura Mazdā imparted the Mazdā-worshipping belief for him to pass on to the rest of humankind. Like the priests, all the followers, whether priest or layperson, man or woman, pray in the Avestan language, with the very words which Zarathustra received from Ahura Mazdā and passed on to mankind. By doing so and by confessing themselves as *zaraθuštriš* (Y. 12.1, 8), the followers acknowledge and recognize in Zarathustra the exemplar for man's relationship and attachment to Ahura Mazdā and for the rejection of Evil.

The two roles of priest and prophet are so closely intertwined in the figure of Zarathustra that it is hard, if not impossible, to separate one from the other.

And it is thanks to this dual role that Zarathustra is pivotal for both the priesthood *and* the laity.

Notes

1. Cf. Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology,* vol. 1, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), p. 440f, and Kurt Rudolph, "Zarathuštra – Priester und Prophet. Neue Aspekte der Zarathuštra- bzw. Gāthā-Forschung," *Numen* 8 (1961), pp. 81–116, 81f. On the typology of priest and prophet and for further references see Richard Friedli, "Priesthood. I. Religious Studies," and Bärbel Beinhauer-Köhler, "Prophets and Prophecy. I. Religious Studies," in *Religion Past and Present. Encyclopedia of Theology and Religion*, vol. 10, ed. Hans Dieter Betz *et al* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2011), pp. 364–365 and 441–442; Willard G. Oxtoby, "Priesthood. An Overview," and Gerald T. Sheppard and William E. Herbrechtsmeier, "Prophecy. An Overview," in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York & London: Macmillan, 1987) vol. 11, pp. 528–534 and vol. 12, pp. 8–14.
2. See, for instance, Mary Boyce, "Zoroaster the Priest," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 37, 3 (1970), pp. 23–38.
3. For a summary of the debate and the main issues involved, see Stephanie W. Jamison, *The Rig Veda between Two Worlds* (Paris: Collège de France, 2007), pp. 21–24 and 28–31. For references and discussions of the identity of the "I" in the Gathas, see Antonio Panaino, *Rite, Parole et Pensée dans l'Avesta Ancient et Récent.* Quatre leçons aus Collège de France (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2004), pp. 95–105; Almut Hintze, *A Zoroastrian Liturgy. The Worship in Seven Chapters (Yasna 35–41)* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2007), p. 92 fn.95; Stephanie W. Jamison, "Poetic Self-Reference in the Rig Veda and the Persona of Zarathustra," in *Bulletin of the Asia Institute, Iranian and Zoroastrian Studies in Honor of Prods Oktor Skjærvø,* ed. Carol Altman Bromberg, Nicholas Sims-Williams, and Ursula Sims-Williams 19 (2005), pp. 67–70.
4. On the Avesta, see Almut Hintze, "Avestan Literature," in *The Literature of Pre-Islamic Iran*, ed. Ronald E. Emmerick and Maria Macuch, Companion Volume I to A History of Persian Literature XVII, ed. Ehsan Yarshater (London: Tauris, 2009), p.39f. On *ham-pursagīh* in the Pahlavi texts see Andres Hultgård, "Forms and Origins of Iranian Apocalypticism," in *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East: Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Apocalypticism, Uppsala, August 12–17, 1979*, ed. D. Hellholm (Tübingen: Mohr, 1983, 2nd ed. 1989), pp. 395–398. In the Avesta, another medium of communication between the human and the divine appears to be the dream, if this is what *x^{v}afənā* means in Y 30.3, see Martin Schwartz, "Revelations, Theology, and Poetics in the Gathas," *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 14 (2000), pp. 1–18. Dream visions (*xwamn*), which Zarduxšt then discusses with Ohrmazd, also play a role in the Middle Persian *Zand ī Wahman Yasn* 1.4 and 3.12–14, see Carlo Cereti, *The Zand ī Wahman Yasn: A Zoroastrian Apocalypse*, Rome Oriental Series 70 (Rome: Instituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1995).
5. See Mary Boyce, *A History of Zoroastrianism*, vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1975, second impression with corrections 1989), pp. 184ff.
6. Cf. Jamaspji Dastur Minocheherji Jamasp-Asana, *The Pahlavi Texts Contained in the Codex MK copied in 1322 A.C. by the Scribe Mehr-Āwān Kaī-khūsrū* (Bombay: Fort Printing Press,

1913), p. 17. The entire colophon has been transcribed and translated by Arthur Ambartsumian, "On the Manuscripts of the Pahlavi Work "Ayādgār ī Zarērān," *Manuscripta Orientalia* 15 (2009), pp. 14–15.

7. For more YAv. passages which represent Zarathustra as first human to recite the Ahuna Vairya prayer, see Prods O. Skjærvø, "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: Mazda Publishers, 2003) pp. 163–165.
8. Jamison, *The Rig Veda between Two Worlds*, p. 42.
9. Weber, *Economy and Society*, p. 446.
10. On *frašō.kərəti* see Almut Hintze, "Frašō.kərəti," in *Encyclopedia Iranica,* vol. 10, ed. Ehsan Yarshater (New York: Bibliotheca Persica, 2001), pp. 190–182.
11. On the Old Avestan liturgy, see Almut Hintze, "On the Literary Structure of the Older Avesta," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 65 (2002), pp. 48–50 and p. 32 with n. 6 on divergent views. Cf. Johanna Narten, *Der Yasna Haptaŋhāiti* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1986), pp. 35–37, 276; Boyce, *Zoroastrianism, Its Antiquity and Constant Vigour*, p. 87–89. For a different evaluation of the *Yasna Haptaŋhāiti* in relation to the Gathas, see Martin Schwartz, "The Gathas and Other Old Avestan Poetry," in *La Langue Poétique Indo-Européenne.* Actes du Colloque de Travail de la Société des Études Indo-Européennes, eds. G.-J. Pinault and D. Petit (Leuven: Peeters, 2003), pp. 483–488.
12. Weber, *Economy and Society*, p. 426: "There can be no priesthood without a cult, although there may well be a cult without a specialized priesthood."
13. On the first person reference in Y. 28, see Jamison, *The Rig Veda between Two Worlds*, p. 33f.
14. Paul Thieme, "Vorzarathustrisches bei den Zarathustriern und bei Zarathustra," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 107 (1957), pp. 67–96, reprinted in: R. Schmitt, *Indogermanische Dichtersprache* (Wiesbaden: Wiss. Buchgesellschaft, 1968), pp. 204–241, p. 77ff., Almut Hintze, "*Do ut Des:* Patterns of Exchange in Zoroastrianism. A Memorial Lecture for Ilya Gershevitch," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 14 (2004), p. 29f.
15. Almut Hintze, "On the Ritual Significance of the *Yasna Haptaŋhāiti,*" in *Zoroastrian Rituals in Context*, Numen Book Series vol. 102, ed. M. Stausberg (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2004), p. 294f.
16. Hintze, "On the Literary Structure of the Older Avesta," pp. 38, 50. On *frašō.kərəti* see above n. 10. For an interpretation of the OAv. ritual within the framework of individual eschatology, see Jean Kellens, *Zoroastre et l'Avesta Ancien,* Quatre leçons au Collège de France (Paris: Peeters, 1991), p. 51f.
17. Boyce, "Zoroaster the Priest," p. 24.
18. Firoze Kotwal and James Boyd, *A Persian Offering. The Yasna: A Zoroastrian High Liturgy,* Studia Iranica 8 (Paris: Association pour l'Avancement des Études Iraniennes, 1991), pp. 112–115; Hintze, "On the Ritual Significance of the *Yasna Haptaŋhāiti,*" p. 304f., with n. 17; Panaino, *Rite, Parole et Pensée dans l'Avesta Ancien et Récent*, p. 51f.
19. Mary Boyce, "Ātaš-zōhr and āb-zōhr," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 109 (1966); "Haoma, Priest of the Sacrifice," in *W. B. Henning Memorial Volume* (London: Lund Humphries, 1970), p. 68–70, where Boyce rightly draws attention to the connection between animal sacrifice and *frašegird.*
20. Firoze M. Kotwal and Philip G. Kreyenbroek, *The Hērbedestān and Nērangestān. v*ol. 3, Nerangestān, Fragard 2 (Paris: Association pour l'Avancement des Études Iraniennes 2003), pp. 198–219, esp. 217.

21. Hintze, *A Zoroastrian Liturgy* p. 258f., with references.
22. Hintze, "*Do ut Des*," p. 28.
23. Cf. James Darmesteter, *Le Zend-Avesta*, vols. 1–3 (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1892–1893, reprinted 1960), vol. 1, p. 32, who establishes a correlation between social units and classes of priests, and, especially, Philip Kreyenbroek, "On the Concept of Spiritual Authority in Zoroastrianism," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 17 (1994), pp. 1–15. On the hierarchical structure of the priesthood in Sasanian Iran, see Michael Stausberg, *Die Religion Zarathushtras. Geschichte—Gegenwart—Rituale*, vols. 1–3 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2002–2004), vol. 1, pp. 255–262.
24. Cf. Kreyenbroek, "On the Concept of Spiritual Authority in Zoroastrianism," p. 14f.
25. See Narten, *Der Yasna Haptaŋhāiti*, pp. 181 and 293; Hintze, *A Zoroastrian Liturgy* p. 20; Martin Schwartz, "Women in the Old Avesta: Social Position and Textual Composition," *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 17 (2003), pp. 1–8; Albert de Jong, "Jeh the Primal Whore? Observations on Zoroastrian Misogyny," in *Female Stereotypes in Religious Traditions*, eds. Rai Kloppenborg and Wouter J. Hanegraaff (Leiden: Brill, 1995), pp. 15–41, esp. pp. 23–25; Leon Goldman, "Women in the Avesta," in *Encyclopedia Iranica*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater (New York: Bibliotheca Persica, forthcoming).
26. Max Weber, "Charismatic Authority," in *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, trans. A. M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons, ed. Talcott Parsons (London: Macmillan, 1947), pp. 358–363. Paul Gifford, "Religious Authority: Scripture, Tradition, Charisma," in *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion*, ed. John R. Hinnells (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), pp. 397–410, esp. 406–407.
27. Narten, *Der Yasna Haptaŋhāiti*, pp. 193 and 293.
28. The passage is quoted in Hintze, "On the Ritual Significance of the *Yasna Haptaŋhāiti*," p. 314f. On the Pahlavi commentary, which interprets this passage differently, cf. Albert de Jong, "Review of Kotwal/Kreyenbroek 1995," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1999), pp. 305–306.
29. Cf. Jehangir Tavadia, *Šāyast-nē-Šāyast: A Pahlavi Text on Religious Customs*, Alt- und Neu-Indische Studien 3 (Hamburg: Friedrichsen, De Gruyter, 1930), p. 145. A translation of the full passage is given by Albert de Jong, "Women and Ritual in Medieval Zoroastrianism," in *Ātaš-e Dorun: The Fire Within*, eds. Carlo Cereti, Farrokh Vajifdar, Mehrborzin Soroushian, and Jamshid Soroush Soroushian (Bloomington, Indiana: 1st Books, 2003), vol. 2, p. 150f. and 160f. n.25.
30. Almut Hintze, "Disseminating the Mazdyasnian Religion: An Edition of the Avestan Hērbedestān Chapter 5," in *Exegisti Monumenta, Festschrift in Honour of Nicholas Sims-Williams,* eds. Werner Sundermann, Almut Hintze, and François de Blois (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2009), pp. 171–190. Again, the priests of the Middle Persian period interpreted the passage differently (cf. above, note 28) and allowed only the "master of the house" (*mānbed*) to leave home to pursue religious service, see Maria Macuch, "Disseminating the Mazdyasnian religion: An Edition of the Pahlavi Hērbedestān Chapter 5," in *Exegisti Monumenta, Festschrift in Honour of Nicholas Sims-Williams,* eds. Werner Sundermann, Almut Hintze, and François de Blois (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2009), pp. 251–277. On the difference between *zaotar-* and *aθauruuan-*, see Helmut Humbach, J. H. Elfenbein, and Prods O. Skjærvø, *The Gāthās of Zarathushtra and the Other Old Avestan Texts,* vol. 1, Indogermanische Bibliothek (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1991), p. 4, n. 5.
31. On the initiation ceremony, see Stausberg, *Die Religion Zarathushtras*, vol. 3, pp. 402–415.
32. de Jong, "Women and Ritual in Medieval Zoroastrianism," pp. 147–161, esp. 151ff; Weber, *Economy and Society* vol. 1, p. 488–490.

33. Jamsheed K. Choksy, *Evil, Good, and Gender: Facets of the Feminine in Zoroastrian Religious History* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002), p. 113; Jenny Rose, "The Traditional Role of Women in the Iranian and Indian (Parsi) Zoroastrian Communities from the Nineteenth to the Twentieth Century," *Journal of the K. R. Cama Oriental Institute* 56 (1989), pp. 15–30. During menstruation, women have to keep away from places of worship, cf. *Pahlavi Rivāyat Accompanying the Dādistān ī Dēnīg*, ed. A. V. Williams (Copenhagen: Det Kongelige Danske Videnskabernes Selskab, 1990) vol. 1, pp. 88–89, vol. 2, p. 32; Tavadia, *Šāyast-nē-Šāyast*, p. 152 (Appendix 5.2, n. 7).
34. On the genealogy of the Parsi priesthood, see Firoze Kotwal, "A Brief History of the Parsi Priesthood," in *Irano-Judaica*, vol. 2, eds. Shaul Shaked and Amnon Netzer (Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute, 1990), pp. 217–226.
35. Khojeste Mistree, "The Breakdown of the Zoroastrian Tradition," in *Irano-Judaica*, vol. 2, eds. Shaul Shaked and Amnon Netzer (Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute, 1990), p. 250f. On the question of leadership within the Parsi community, see John R. Hinnells, "Changing Perceptions of Authority among Parsis in British India," in *Parsis in India and the Diaspora,* eds. John R. Hinnells and Alan Williams (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 100–118.
36. Arnavaz Mama, "A Zoroastrian Conclave. Community Leaders from Around the World Met to Discuss the Local Implications of Common Issues," *Parsiana* 25, 11 (June 2003), p. 18.
37. Parinaz M. Gandhi, "Mesdames Mobedyars," *Parsiana* 33, 20 (21 May 2011), pp. 14–20.