



# CHANGE AND CONTINUITY IN THE ZOROASTRIAN TRADITION

AN INAUGURAL LECTURE  
DELIVERED ON 22 FEBRUARY 2012

BY

**ALMUT HINTZE**

*Zartoshty Professor of Zoroastrianism  
in the University of London*



SOAS, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON  
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Dedicated to the memory of the brothers  
Faridoon and Mehraban Zartoshty,  
to that of Professor Mary Boyce  
and of an anonymous benefactor.



## **Table of Contents**

Preface by the Director of SOAS	5
Preface by the President of the Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe	7
Change and Continuity in the Zoroastrian Tradition	11

## **Preface by the Director of SOAS**

The links between SOAS and the Zoroastrian community reach right back to the early years of SOAS. In 1929 a consortium of Zoroastrian benefactors from Bombay funded the 'Parsee Community's Lectureship in Iranian Studies' at SOAS on an annual basis. The post was first held by Harold Walter Bailey and, after Bailey's appointment to the Chair in Sanskrit at Cambridge University, by Walter Bruno Henning. It lapsed in 1947 after Henning's promotion to Reader.

Among the pupils of W. B. Henning at SOAS were two young scholars who were to become leading Iranists of the next generation, Ilya Gershevitch and Mary Boyce. The former took up a post at Cambridge, but the latter stayed at SOAS, where she became lecturer in 1947. When Henning accepted a Chair at the University of Berkeley in 1961, Mary Boyce succeeded him as Professor of Iranian Studies, from which she retired in 1982. Thanks to the appointments of A. D. H. Bivar in 1960, Nicholas Sims-Williams in 1976, Philip Kreyenbroek between 1988-96, John R. Hinnells between 1993-98, Almut Hintze in 1998 and Sarah Stewart in 2008, SOAS has developed an unrivalled tradition of teaching and research in Iranian Studies and Zoroastrianism, of which it is immensely proud.

In the 1990s, a group of scholars at SOAS, including the late Mary Boyce and John Hinnells, undertook to find ways of endowing a chair in Zoroastrianism at SOAS in order to protect the study of this religion and its languages from the vagaries of public funding and economic pressures and thus ensure its teaching and research in perpetuity. Helped by members of the local Zoroastrian community of London, the SOAS scholars joined efforts not only with the brothers Faridoon and Mehraban Zartoshty, the well-known Iranian Zoroastrian philanthropists, but also with an anonymous benefactor from Iran. As a result, SOAS prides itself in having the first endowed position in any western university to be permanently dedicated to the study of Zoroastrianism.

The endowment of the Chair in Zoroastrianism at SOAS is a great example of the fruitful collaboration between an academic institution and members of the Zoroastrian community. But this is not the end of the collaboration but the beginning of an even deeper and even more fruitful relationship. The Zartoshty Brothers have gifted money to the Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe for grants to be made to Zoroastrians to undertake postgraduate study at SOAS, and several students have already benefited from the Zartoshty scholarships, which were often supplemented by grants from the Soudavar Memorial Foundation. The Zartoshty Brothers have also donated funds to the Zoroastrian Studies Scholarships appeal of SOAS. SOAS is also proud of its Dasturji Sohrabji and Shirinbanoo Kutar Memorial Fund which was set up through the good offices of the World Zoroastrian Organisation (WZO) and has enabled SOAS since 1998 to hold a public annual lecture in memory of Dastur Kutar. And so we will continue, together, to develop teaching and research in Zoroastrianism, and to encourage the younger generation to pursue their studies in this fascinating and enlightening area.

Paul Webley

February 2013

## **Preface by the President of the Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe**

The endowment of the Zartoshty Chair in Zoroastrianism at SOAS is the fruit of decades of excellent relationships between SOAS and the Zoroastrian community. My predecessors Mr Shahrokh Shahrokh, Mr Rusi K Dalal and Mr Dorab E Mistry of the Zoroastrians Trust Funds of Europe (ZTFE) played an important role in the negotiations between SOAS and our benefactors the late Zartoshty Brothers, Mobed Faridoon and Mobed Mehraban, to establish the first permanent Chair in Zoroastrianism in the world. It is therefore appropriate that this inaugural lecture by Almut Hintze, Zartoshty Professor of Zoroastrianism at SOAS is jointly published by ZTFE and SOAS.

Established in 1861, the ZTFE is the oldest religious voluntary organisation in Britain of South Asian origin. For its sustainability the ZTFE has always relied on Zoroastrians volunteering their services and donating generously, thus allowing the ZTFE to meet its objectives as laid out in its constitution. From the outset, one of the objectives of the ZTFE is to advance the study and dissemination of knowledge and understanding of the Zoroastrian faith, which led our Founder President Seth Muncherji Hormusji Cama to sponsor the first English translation of the Avesta in 1864 by Arthur Henry Bleek, from Professor Spiegel's German translation.

Professor Almut Hintze is the first holder of the Zartoshty Chair in Zoroastrianism at SOAS. Her inaugural lecture on 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2012 attracted people from both the academic and the Zoroastrian community and marked how the two work together in academic affairs. However our links with SOAS go back many decades. They began during the presidency of Sir Mancherjee Merwanjee Bhownagree, KCIE, with the establishment of the "Parsee Community's Lectureship in Iranian Studies" in 1929. The fundraising of this lectureship was spearheaded by the Zoroastrian scholar priest Shams-ul-Ulama Dr Sir Jivanji Jamshedji Modi, then secretary of the Bombay Parsee Punchayat, who in conjunction with Bhownagree persuaded benefactors of our Association including Lady Frainy and Sir Dhunjibhoy Bomanji, Kt, Ratanbai Edulji Bamji (sister of the industrialist Jamsetji



N Tata) and the Chairman of the Tata Group Sir Dorab Jamsetji Tata, to make generous donations for an initial period of five years. This enabled SOAS to appoint the noted Sir Harold Walter Bailey as lecturer, to be followed by Walter Bruno Henning in 1936. The Zoroastrian community continued to fund the Parsee Community's Lectureship until the outbreak of the Second World War. During the war years it became increasingly difficult for the Zoroastrian community to fund the lectureship due to their substantial contribution made towards the war effort, in excess of seven million pounds. As a result our Association nearly went bankrupt. Funding for the lectureship ceased altogether following Indian independence in 1947 because of tight controls on currency movement imposed by the Indian Government. The Parsee Community's Lectureship lapsed, but SOAS continued to fund teaching and research in the Zoroastrian religion and Iranian languages.

Following the departure of Henning to accept a Chair at the University of Berkeley in 1961, Mary Boyce was appointed Professor of Iranian Studies, a post from which she retired in 1982. Due to cuts in public sector funding during the 1990's, the future of Zoroastrian studies at SOAS caused concern for scholars including Professors Mary Boyce and John R Hinnells, who explored ways to endow a chair in Zoroastrianism at SOAS, in order to ensure its teaching and research in perpetuity. Professor Boyce first met the Zartoshty Brothers in Iran in 1963, when she spent a year with Zoroastrian families in Yazd and Kerman. Apparently, the late Mobed Mehraban J Zartoshty agreed within a few minutes to fund a chair in Zoroastrian studies at SOAS when Professor John R Hinnells put the question to him at a meeting in Mumbai in 1996.

The Zartoshty Brothers epitomised Zoroastrian values of keeping one's word, of generating wealth through entrepreneurship, and of donating excess wealth to charity during one's lifetime. They are rightly described as the greatest Zoroastrian philanthropists in our times, although they were certainly not the wealthiest Zoroastrians of our times. However, in terms of the proportion of their wealth which they gave away in their own lifetime, they have no parallel! London was the biggest beneficiary of their charity. At the ZTFE, their donations made up the lion

share to purchase and renovate the Grade II\* listed Zoroastrian Centre for Europe, Harrow, inaugurated in June 2005 by Mobed Mehraban J Zartoshty. To ensure that Zoroastrians benefit from the Zartoshty Chair at SOAS, they endowed the 'Zartoshty Fund for Zoroastrian Studies' at the ZTFE to fund Zoroastrian students to study their religion and its languages at SOAS.

In the past the community funded Zoroastrians to undertake postgraduate study in Zoroastrianism at SOAS. Noted amongst such postdoctoral researchers are the late High Priest Dastur Dr. Hormazdiar K Mirza during the tenure of Professor Walter Bruno Henning, the late Ervad Dr Peshotan K. Anklesaria, and the High Priest Dastur Dr Firoze M Kotwal during the tenure of Professor Mary Boyce. Thanks to the generosity of the Zartoshty Brothers, the ZTFE are proud to fund Zoroastrians students, once again, to study their religion and relevant languages at SOAS including the Nayab Dastur Dr Jamasp K Dastur JamaspAsa, the recently designated High Priest of the Anjuman Atash Behram, Mumbai. The ZTFE manages the only officially designated Zoroastrian place of worship in the UK, which initially enabled interaction between Professors Boyce and Hinnells and their students with Zoroastrian practitioners especially with the High Priest of the Zoroastrians of UK and Europe, the late Dastur Dr Sorabji H Kutar. The Zartoshty Chair once again ensures that students of Zoroastrianism at SOAS visit the Zoroastrian Centre to witness how Zoroastrian priests and worshippers practice their faith.

At this juncture it is important also to acknowledge the role and generosity of the late Professor Mary Boyce in ensuring the continuation of teaching of Zoroastrianism at SOAS in perpetuity. Her inspiration, determination and generosity must always be remembered. The publication of Almut Hintze's inaugural lecture is thus just the latest in a string of collaborations between academia and the community. May the collaboration between SOAS and ZTFE continue for many years to come! *Athā zamyād, yathā āfrīnāmi.*

Malcolm Minoos Deboo  
February 2013



**CHANGE AND CONTINUITY  
IN THE ZOROASTRIAN TRADITION**

BY

**ALMUT HINTZE**





Lord Bilimoria, Professor Webley, colleagues and friends, ladies and gentlemen,

### **1. Evolutionary and revolutionary models**

The Zoroastrians' love for superlatives – the first, the oldest, the best, the smallest – is not least inspired by some basic facts relating to their religion. Going back as far as the second millennium BCE and rooted in Indo-Iranian pre-history, Zoroastrianism is one of the most ancient living traditions, although its community today is microscopically small – an estimated 130,000 adherents world-wide. Most of them live in India, particularly in Mumbai and Gujarat, where they became known as “Parsis”, because they originally came from Persia. They had started to leave Iran for India in the 7th century of the Christian era after the last Zoroastrian empire, the Sasanian state, had succumbed to Arab Muslim invaders. Between 10 to 30,000 Zartoshties are estimated to be living in Iran today, with the rest in a global diaspora, especially in the English-speaking world, the oldest centre being here in London.<sup>1</sup>

Characteristic of the Zoroastrian religion are two towering figures: the god Ahura Mazda, usually translated as ‘Wise Lord’, and the man Zarathustra, to whom Ahura Mazda revealed the Mazda-worshipping, or Mazdayasnian, religion. As the name suggests, the focus of this religion is the worship of Mazda. To this day, such worship typically takes the form of priestly and lay rituals in which the performance of precisely prescribed actions accompanies the recitation of texts composed in an ancient Iranian language called Avestan. The most important ritual, and the core of all the other major priestly rituals, is called “Worship”, or Yasna. The text recited during the Yasna ceremony consists of seventy-two sections which have at their centre seventeen hymns, the Gathas, and a liturgy in seven sections, the Yasna Haptanghāiti. Since the language of this composite centre is more archaic than that of the surrounding material, scholars distinguish it from the latter as the Older Avesta. The Younger Avesta is not only linguistically more recent, but is also evidence of a more advanced stage of the religion's development. It is comprised of invocations, hymns and purity laws composed at different periods of the oral tradition. These Younger Avestan texts reached the petrified form in which they

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<sup>1</sup> The text printed here is, with minor changes, that delivered orally on 22 February 2012.

have come down to the present day some time between 1000 and 500 BCE. The Gathas and the Yasna Haptanghāiti must be older. Composed probably between 1500 and 1000 BCE, they constitute the oldest extant witness not only to the Zoroastrian religion but also to any Iranian language.

Up to the present, no other texts of the Zoroastrian tradition are held as dearly as the Gathas by both priests and laypeople. Even today most Zoroastrians will know at least some stanzas by heart in the original, Avestan, language as they recite them in their daily prayers. Moreover, the Gathas and the Yasna Haptanghāiti served as sources for many of the Younger Avestan liturgical compositions and are frequently quoted verbatim to give greater authority to the later, Younger Avestan, words. A connection between Zarathustra and the Gathas emerges from the fact that he features in them as *the* major human character. Moreover, on two occasions the speaker, the “I”, identifies himself by name as Zarathustra.<sup>2</sup> Such a connection is reinforced in the Younger Avesta which mentions ‘the five Gathas of Zarathustra’ and represents him as reciting them while performing the (Yasna?) ritual.<sup>3</sup> Thus, not only the Gathas but also the later tradition links these hymns to Zarathustra. Furthermore, the Younger Avesta presents Zarathustra as the individual to whom Ahura Mazda communicated the Mazda-worshipping religion, the *daēnā- māzdaiiasni-*, so that he could pass it on to the rest of humanity. The figure of Zarathustra thus connects the Mazdayasnian religion with the Gathas, and the latter, together with some other texts, are perceived as the divinely inspired vehicle of the Mazdayasnian Religion, which Ahura Mazda set forth in order to protect ‘the world of truth’ (Yasna 55.3), as illustrated in the following diagram:



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2 The passages are Y 43.8 and 46.19, on which see Hintze 2002, 35–36.

3 For references to the relevant text passages, see Jamison 2007, 23f.

According to tradition, the Gathas are connected with Zarathustra who brought the *daēnā māzdaiiasni* to humankind, thus marking the beginning of this religion. Those who have accepted it declare themselves to be ‘Mazdayasnian Zarathustrians’ (Y 12.1). Such a perception of Zarathustra’s foundational role which the texts present from an insider’s point of view has inspired foreign fascination with the Iranian prophet from the ancient Greeks of the 5th century BCE to Friedrich Nietzsche and beyond,<sup>4</sup> and has led external observers to regard Zoroastrianism as a prophetic religion which was started by Zarathustra. This model has been described as “historical”, and many scholars have accepted it as providing a likely scenario for how the prehistoric beginnings of the Zoroastrian tradition could be imagined.

In recent decades, however, an alternative model, which has been referred to as “mythological”, has been gaining ground amongst scholars. According to this view, Zarathustra neither composed the Gathas nor was a historical person. The Mazdā-worshipping religion thus has no known beginning at a certain point in time through the intervention of an individual. Instead, it is argued that it evolved organically over a long period out of the prehistoric Indo-Iranian religion. In this process, the Gathas gradually cohered over time in the anonymous, collective mentality of the priests and eventually crystallized and petrified into the compositions which have come down to the present day, while at the same time being handed down from one priestly generation to the next in the oral tradition. The figure of Zarathustra, in turn, is seen as the product of priestly cosmological speculation, according to which his arrival and that of the Mazdā-worshipping religion marks the mid-point of cosmic history.<sup>5</sup>

It emerges from the summary of the two models that what is at stake here is how we should imagine the genesis of this religion. Was there really ever a religious reformer, or prophet, a person as real as you and me, as the tradition would have us believe, a human being who claimed to have received a divine revelation and

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4 Cf. Boyce & Grenet 1991, 368–371; Beck 1991; Stausberg 1998 I 10–13; Rose 2000 and 2011, 233–242.

5 For references, see Skjærvø 1997, 103f.; Jamison 2007, 21f. with fn.4; Stausberg 2008, 570–572. For accounts of the debate surrounding the figure of Zarathustra, see Kellens 2006; Skjærvø 2011, 76–89.



initiated a new tradition? Or is the figure of Zarathustra an invention of that tradition, a fiction projected back into the past and produced by anonymous priestly liturgical and cosmological speculation? At first I was tempted to adopt the current terminology and refer to the former model as “historical” and the latter as “mythological”. On reflection, however, such terminology seems to be inadequate because in fact “myth” plays a major part in both. Moreover, both models draw on the notion of “history”, the difference being that the former allocates historical reality to both Zarathustra and the tradition, while the latter does so *only* to the tradition, represented by the priests, the so-called “poet-sacrificers”.

It therefore seems to me that the contrast between the two models in fact consists not in “history” versus “myth”, as is widely claimed, but rather in the way the growth of the Zoroastrian tradition is perceived. The second model operates with the assumption of a gradual but continuous development at the point where the first postulates a break in the tradition, a fundamental and, presumably, sudden change brought about by an individual. I therefore prefer to call the first model, perhaps somewhat pointedly, “revolutionary”, and the second “evolutionary”. There are parallels to both in other religions. The first, “revolutionary” description applies to those traditions which were started off by individuals. They include Buddhism (Siddhārtha Gautāma), Christianity (Jesus of Nazareth) and Islam (Muhammad). Examples of the second, “evolutionary” model are harder to find, but include Hinduism (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Models for the Genesis of the Zoroastrian Tradition**

	<b>Model 1 “historical”</b>	<b>Model 2 “mythological”</b>
<b>Perception of Zarathustra</b>	real person	product of priestly cosmological speculations
<b>Composer of Gathas</b>	Zarathustra	anonymous priests over a period of time
<b>Perception of the genesis of the tradition</b>	revolutionary	evolutionary
<b>Examples from other traditions</b>	Buddhism (Siddhārtha Gautāma) Christianity (Jesus of Nazareth) Islam (Muhammad)	Hinduism

Regardless of this difference, however, change and continuity play an important part in all religions, and also in both models. The traditions just mentioned which were started off by individuals, did not emerge out of nothing, but have their roots in their respective historical ancestors, of which they continue many features. In some of the more recent instances, such as Buddhism and Christianity, the historical ancestors are even documented and it is therefore possible to study the relationship between the older and younger religions. In the case of Zoroastrianism, we are in the fortunate position of having the evidence of a sister belief system, the Vedic religion of Ancient India. Thanks to this comparative evidence we are able to identify some of the features which the two traditions share in common and which are therefore likely to be archaisms, inherited from their common, Indo-Iranian ancestor. We are thus able to know a little about the prehistoric world from which Zoroastrianism emerged. However, it is the innovations which serve, so to speak, as index fossils or isoglosses, for identifying features peculiar to Zoroastrianism.

But the question remains: how did the innovations of Zoroastrianism come about? Did they evolve organically out of the Indo-Iranian ancestor, or did an individual intervene? Or should we consider a combination of the two models and assume that some innovations already in process were accelerated by an individual? If you are now hoping that the ultimate answer will emerge from this lecture, I am afraid I will have to disappoint you. While the notions of “myth” and “historical reality”, “fiction” and “truth” are subject to extensive and ongoing theoretical debates, the nature and age of our source material, some of which takes us into Central Asia of the second millennium BCE, simply do not allow us to be certain one way or the other. Some of you might be inclined to interpret such lack of proof as revealing a weakness of our discipline, but we will do better if we turn it into a virtue and regard it as an opportunity for applying certain transferable, sought-after skills in which students of the humanities are trained. For in the absence of even the possibility of verifying or refuting our results, we have to examine our sources like detectives looking for clues which might enable us to argue in favour of the probability and plausibility of one theory over against the other.<sup>6</sup>

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6 Cf., with regard to the origins of Old Persian, the comment of Skjærvø 2003–4, 36 with fn.64.

Most of recent scholarship on our problem has focused on archaisms in the Zoroastrian tradition, that is to say on features which it shares with the Vedic religion and which go well with the evolutionary model. However, in order to find out about the more probable scenario which will account for the growth of Zoroastrianism, we need to look at the innovations. For it is not continuity, but change which requires an explanation. In this talk I propose to focus on one particular, well-known innovation which is central to and distinctive of the Zoroastrian tradition: the rejection and eventual demonization of the old Indo-Iranian gods, the *Daivas*, and the concomitant elevation of Ahura Mazda as the only god to be worshipped.

## 2. The rejection of the *Daivas*

In Indo-Iranian prehistory, the word for ‘god’ was *\*dajūá-*. The noun characterizes the gods as the ‘heavenly ones’ and lives on as *devá-* in the closely related Vedic and Hindu culture and in many other Indo-European languages, such as Latin *deus* and the adjective *divinus*, from which we get the English *divine*. In all Indo-European languages except Iranian, *\*dajūá-* means ‘god’. But in the Zoroastrian tradition, *daēuuā-* has the opposite meaning. In the Gathas it signifies a ‘false’ or ‘fake god’, while in the Younger Avesta, in addition, a ‘demon’.<sup>7</sup>

The *daivas* are a major concern in the Gathas. One of the seventeen hymns, Yasna 32, is virtually entirely devoted to this theme.<sup>8</sup> In the opening stanza three constituents of ancient Iranian society, namely the family, the community and the entire Aryan tribe, ask Ahura Mazda for his gift of ‘bliss, happiness’. In this request they are joined by a fourth group, the gods of old, the *daēuuā*:

Yasna 32.1 <i>axiiācā xʷaētus̥ yāsaṭ</i>	<i>ahiiā vərəzəñəm maṭ airiamnā</i>
<i>ahiiā daēuuā mahmī manōi</i>	<i>ahurahiiā uruuāzəmā mazdā</i>
<i>θβōi dūtāq̥hō āñhāmā</i>	<i>təñg dāraiiō yōi vā daibišəntī</i>

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7 For a discussion of the demonisation of the *Daivas*, see Herrenschildt and Kellens 1993; Kellens 1994, 11–34, cf. 1997, 289f. Amir Ahmadi has recently completed a PhD thesis on *The Daēvas and the Daēva Cult* at Monash University, Australia.

8 Schwartz 1998 offers a detailed study of the composition of this hymn.

The family asks for his (happiness), the community together with the Aryan tribe (asks for) his (happiness),  
in my manner the (fake) gods (ask for) his (happiness), for the happiness of the Wise Lord:

“We want to be your messengers in order to restrain those who are hostile to you.”

In the verses which follow, Ahura Mazda speaks and responds to the requests. First he addresses the family, community and Aryan tribe, accepting their ‘right-mindedness’, *ārmaiti*:-

Yasna 32.2 <i>aēibiū mazdā ahurō</i>	<i>sārəmnō vohū managhā</i>
<i>xšaθrāt hacā paitī.mraoϑ</i>	<i>aṣā huš.haxā xʷənuuātā</i>
<i>spəntəm və ārmaitīm</i>	<i>vaŋʰīm varəmaidī hā nē aṅhaϑ</i>

The Wise Lord, uniting himself with Good Thought  
(and) in the good company of sun-filled Truth, answered them according to his rule:

“We choose your life-giving, good right-mindedness. She shall be ours.”

But the next verse rejects the fourth group, the Daivas:

Yasna 32.3 <i>aϑ yūš daēuuā vīspāṅhō</i>	<i>akāt managhō stā ciθrəm</i>
<i>yascā vā maš yazaitē</i>	<i>drūjascā pairimatōišcā</i>
<i>śīaoməm aipī daibitānā</i>	<i>yāiš asrūdūm būmiā haptaiθē</i>

But you, (fake) gods (*daēuuā*), all of you are seed from Bad Thought,<sup>9</sup>  
and (so also is the one) who greatly worships you. (Seed) from Deceit and Pretension

(are), moreover, the repeated actions for which you are known in the seventh part of the earth.

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9 On the meaning of *ciθra*- and the syntactic interpretation of the ablative *akāt managhō*, see Hintze 2009, 58.

These lines are perhaps the strongest expression in the entire Avesta of the outright rejection first, of a whole set of deities, the Daivas, second, of those who worship them and, third, of the ritual practices by which such deities are venerated. Thus, the gods, their followers and the associated cultic and religious practices are here declared to originate from ‘Bad Thought’.

To ensure that the rejection is wholesale and complete, the Daivas are comprehensively referred to as *daēuuā vīspāhō* ‘all the Daivas’. It has long been recognized that the expression corresponds, although in an inverted word order, to the Vedic *vísve deváh* ‘all the gods’<sup>10</sup> in the tradition of Ancient India, which shares a common heritage with the Iranian people, for example:

Rigveda 6.52.7 *vísve devāsa á gata śṛṇutá ma imám hávam* |  
*édám barhír ní šīdata* ||  
 O all gods, come here, listen to my call!  
 Sit down on this sacrificial straw here!

In the Gathic hymn, by contrast, not only does the old word for ‘god’, *\*daiuá-*, have a negative meaning, but the gods of old, the Daivas, are declared to originate from ‘Bad Thought’. Thus, in contrast to the pre-historic Indo-Iranian religion, where the *\*daiyas* are the gods, in the earliest sources of the Zoroastrian religion, the Gathas, the Daivas are the products of Evil, of ‘Bad Thought’. They are thus subordinate and secondary to that destructive force.

### 3. The downgrading of the Daivas

The downgrading of the gods of earlier generations and their subordination to another force, that of ‘Bad Thought’, forms part of a system in which everything that exists is aligned either with the camp of good or with that of evil. These two distinct groups are mutually exclusive and diametrically opposed to one another. At the apex of the good camp is the god Ahura Mazdā. By ‘birth’, as the Gathas put it, he brings forth out of himself spiritual qualities such as ‘creative force’ (*spənta-mainiiu-*), ‘truth’ (*aša-*), ‘good thought’ (*vohu-manah-*) and ‘right-mindedness’ (*ārmaiti-*). In a second stage of creation he makes the material world out of such spiritual qualities. Both the spiritual and the material worlds thus ultimately

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10 Humbach 1959 II 31f.

originate from Ahura Mazdā and are therefore perfect and wholly good. His material creation is called the world of ‘truth’, *aša-*, and anyone who supports it is *ašaauan-* ‘truthful’. Moreover, everything and everyone belonging to Ahura Mazdā’s world is ‘worthy of worship’, *yazata-*. This includes pre-Zoroastrian deities such as Mithra, Anāhitā, and Haoma, who have now been incorporated into the good camp.<sup>11</sup>

None of the Yazatas is a cultic competitor of Ahura Mazdā. Rather the opposite is the case: the cult of any Yazata supports and strengthens Ahura Mazdā. Furthermore, not only is the cult of a Yazata legitimate, but Ahura Mazdā demands that each of them be worshipped. For example, at the beginning of the hymn to Mithra, the god ‘Contract’, Ahura Mazdā enjoins his cult:

Yasht 10.1 *mraoṭ ahurō mazdā spitamāi zaraḍuštrāi*  
*āaṭ yaṭ miθrəm yim vouru.gaoiiaoitīm*  
*frādaḍam azəm spitama*  
*āaṭ dim daḍam*  
*auuāntəm yesniata*  
*auuāntəm vahmiata*  
*yaḍa maṃciṭ yim ahurəm mazḍam*

Ahura Mazdā said to Spitāma Zarathustra:  
 “When I set forth Mithra of wide cattle-pastures,  
 O Spitāma,  
 then I made him  
 as much worthy of worship  
 as much worthy of praise  
 as myself, Ahura Mazdā.”

The Indo-Iranian deity Mithra is aligned with the good camp and his worship legitimized by and subordinated to Ahura Mazdā. Just as the Daivas originate from and are subordinated to Bad Thought, so Mithra, and any other Yazata originates from and is subordinated to the greatest and best of all of them, Ahura Mazdā. The Yazata-system thus enables the religion to absorb both old and new deities and

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11 For further details, see Hintze forthcoming a.

perpetuate their cultic worship without threatening the supremacy of Ahura Mazda. Indeed, the more Yazatas there are, the better, as they all strengthen Ahura Mazda and simultaneously weaken the evil camp.

The genesis and structure of the evil camp is formulated in parallel, but negative terms. At its apex is the ‘Destructive Force’ (*agra-mainiiu-*). From a systematic point of view, however, Angra Mainyu constitutes the negation not of Ahura Mazda himself, since he does not have a negative counterpart, but of his creative, life-giving force, *spənta-mainiiu-*. Angra Mainyu produces out of himself bad qualities such as ‘deceit’ (*druj-*), ‘bad thought’ (*aka-manah-*), and ‘arrogance’ (*tarəməiti-* or *pairimaiti-*). Evil forces are described as ‘unworthy of worship’ (*aiiesniia-*) and those who associate themselves with them are ‘deceitful’, *druuənt-*. In addition, the Daivas are associated with the bad camp, and they include some gods inherited from Indo-Iranian times, such as Indra and Nāṅhaiḍya. They are the products of Angra Mainyu, who is the Daiva of Daivas (see table 2).<sup>12</sup>

There is no evidence in the Zoroastrian tradition that the Destructive Force, Angra Mainyu, was ever a cultic competitor of Ahura Mazda. He is but an enemy who counteracts everything Ahura Mazda does and who needs to be destroyed. Furthermore, already in the Gathas the Daivas are described as ‘obnoxious creatures’, *xrafstra-* (Y 34.5), and the tendency to downgrade and belittle them as nasty and detestable ‘demons’ whom no sensible person would ever consider worshipping continues in the Younger Avesta and later in the Pahlavi literature.

Yet, the downgrading of the old, Indo-Iranian gods as products of that Destructive Force could be interpreted as a device to weaken and incapacitate Ahura Mazda’s real competitors, namely the old Indo-Iranian gods, the *\*daiuvas*. For our sources provide evidence that the Daivas were indeed serious cultic competitors for Ahura Mazda not only at the time of the Gathas, but also later on in the history of the Zoroastrian tradition.

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12 The terminology of the Gathas seems to be less fixed than that of the Younger Avesta. For instance, in the Gathic verse Y 32.3 the destructive force from which the Daivas originate is denoted by the expression *aka-manah-* ‘bad thought’, while in the Younger Avesta it is consistently *agra-mainiiu-*.

**Table 2: The Worlds of Good and Evil**

<b>EVIL</b> daiva-, ayesnya-	↔	<b>GOOD</b> yazata-
		<b>Ahura Mazdā</b> ↓
<b>spiritual world</b>	↔	<b>spiritual world</b>
<b>Destructive Force</b> <b>(angra mainyu)</b> ↓	↔	<b>Creative Force</b> <b>(spenta mainyu)</b>
Deceit ( <i>druj-</i> ) Bad Thought ( <i>aka-manah-</i> ) Arrogance ( <i>tarōmaiti-</i> ), etc. Pre-Zoroastrian deities, e.g. Indra, Nāghaiṭya, etc.	↔ ↔ ↔ ↔	Truth, Order ( <i>aša-</i> ) Good Thought ( <i>vohu-manah-</i> ) Right-mindedness ( <i>ārmaiti-</i> ), etc. Pre-Zoroastrian deities, e.g. Mithra, Anāhitā, Haoma, etc.
		↓
		<b>material world</b> human beings fire animals plants earth water sky, sun, moon, stars etc.

#### **4. Mazdayasnas and Daivayasnas as competing sacrificers**

In addition to the two camps, *daēuua-* and *yazata-*, the Avesta also distinguishes between two groups of people: those whose *yasna-* is for the Daivas, the *daēuua-īiasna-*, and those whose *yasna-* is for Mazdā, the *mazda-īiasna-*. A cognate of Vedic *yajñá-* ‘sacrifice, worship’, the Avestan word *yasna-* is inherited from Indo-Iranian times. By contrast, the compound *daēuua-īiasna-* and its Vedic counterpart *deva-yajñá-* are probably independent formations because they represent different



types of compound. While the Vedic noun denotes the ritual and means ‘sacrifice to the gods’, Avestan *daēuua-yasna-* is an adjective and describes a person as someone ‘whose sacrifice is for the (false) gods’. It was possibly formed to replace an earlier inherited *daēuuaiiaz-* ‘worshipping the (false) gods’, which corresponds to Vedic *devayāj-* ‘worshipping the gods’.<sup>13</sup> The compound *mazda-iiasna-*, however, has no equivalent in Vedic. Being characteristic of the Zoroastrian tradition, it is a more recent formation, and was probably formed on the model of *daēuua-iiasna-*. That this happened at an early stage in the history of the Iranian language is suggested by the archaic derivational mechanism by means of which the adjective *mazda-iiasna-* produced the adjective *māzdaiiasni-* ‘belonging to one whose worship is for Mazdā’.<sup>14</sup> Both Daiva-yasnas and Mazda-yasnas perform cultic worship, but the *yasna-* of the former group is directed towards the old gods, the Daivas, while that of the latter is for Mazdā. It is not the *yasna-* as such, but its recipient that constitutes the distinctive, and contrasting, feature of the two groups.

There is one Avestan hymn, that to Anāhitā, in which the deity is recipient of sacrifices not only of Mazdayasnas, but on four occasions also of Daivayasnas.<sup>15</sup> For example, the Mazdayasna Vištāspa offers to Anāhitā sacrifices of ‘a hundred stallions, a thousand bulls, and ten thousand sheep’, just like his arch-enemy, the Daivayasna Arəjaṭ.aspa:

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13 Benveniste 1970. That *daēuua-yasna-* possibly replaces the older *daēuuaiiaz-* was suggested to me by Bernhard Forssman in a letter dated 25 March 2012.

14 Benveniste 1970, 9. On the formation of *māzdaiiasni-*, see below, fn. 18.

15 They are the Dragon Dahāka (Yt 5.28–31), the Turanian Frangrasyan (Yt 5.40–43), the sons of Vaēsaka (Yt 5.56–59) and Vaṇdarəmaini and Arəjaṭ.aspa (Yt 5.115–118).

**Table 3: Competing sacrificers: Yt 5.108 and 116**

	<b>Good (mazda-yasna)</b>	<b>Evil (daiva-yasna)</b>
<b>Wor-shipper</b>	Yt 5.108 <i>taṃ yazata</i> <i>bərəzaidiš kauua vištāspō</i>	Yt 5.116 <i>taṃ yazata</i> <i>vaṇdarəmainiš arəjaṭ.aspō</i>
<b>Place</b>	<i>pašne āpəm frazdānaom</i>	<i>upa zraiīō vouru.kašəm</i>
<b>Ritual</b>	<sup>x</sup> <i>sate</i> [ = Yt 5.21 <i>aspanəm aršnaṃ</i> <sup>*</sup> <i>hazaṅre gauuṃ</i> <i>baēuuarə</i> ] <i>anumaiianəm</i>	
<b>Wor-shipper</b>	Yt 5.108 Kavi Vištāspa of high insight worshipped her	Yt 5.116 Vaṇdarəmaini (and) Arəjaṭ.aspa worshipped her
<b>Place</b>	in sight of the Water Frazdānava	by the Lake of Wide Bays
<b>Ritual</b>	at (the sacrifice of) a hundred stallions, a thousand bulls, ten thousand sheep. <sup>16</sup>	

The tradition tells us that the Mazdayasna Vištāspa accepted Zarathustra's teachings, became his royal patron and provided decisive support for the new religion by fighting and winning battles. By contrast, Arəjaṭ.aspa and other Daivayasnas try to obstruct the spreading of the new religion. Vištāspa implores the deity to grant him success in his battles against the Daivayasnas, and in particular victory over Arəjaṭ.aspa and other enemies, while Arəjaṭ.aspa, in turn, as he sacrifices to the same deity in the same manner, wishes to defeat Vištāspa and smite the Aryan people:

16

On the locative forms in this stanza, see Hintze 2007, 182f.

**Table 4: Competing wishes: Yt 5.109 and 117**

	<b>Good (Mazda-yasna)</b>	<b>Evil (Daiva-yasna)</b>
<b>Wish</b>	<p>Yt 5.109 <i>āaṭ hīm jaiḍiiat</i>  <i>auuaṭ āiiaptəm dazdi mē</i>  <i>vaṅ'hi səuuište arəduui sūre anāhite</i>  <i>yaṭ bauuāni aiβi.vaniiā</i>  <i>təḍriiauuəṇtəm duždaēnəm</i>  <i>pəṣanəmca daēuuaiiasnəm</i>  <i>druuaṇtəmca arəjaṭ.aspəm</i>  <i>ahmi gaēḍe pəṣanāhu</i></p> <p>And he implored her:  “Do me that favour,  O good, most strong Arədvī Sūrā Anāhitā,  that I will overcome  Təḍryavaṇt of bad belief  and Pəṣana whose worship is of the Daivas  and deceitful Arəjaṭ.aspa  in this world’s battles!”</p>	<p>Yt 5.117 <i>āaṭ hīm jaiḍiiat</i>  <i>auuaṭ āiiaptəm dazdi mē</i>  <i>vaṅ'hi səuuište arəduui sūre anāhite</i>  <i>yaṭ bauuāni aiβi.vaniiā</i>  <i>taxməm kauuaēm vištāspəm</i>  <i>aspāiiaodō zairi.vairiṣ</i>  <i>yaḍa azəm nijanāni</i>  <i>airiianəṃ daxiiunəṃ</i>  <i>pəṇcasaynāi sataynāiṣca</i> etc.</p> <p>And he implored her:  “Do me that favour,  O good, most strong Arədvī Sūrā Anāhitā,  that I will overcome  swift Kavi Vištāspa  (and) Zairi.vairi who fights on horseback;  that I will smite  of the Aryan people  their fifties and their hundreds, etc.”</p>

Of course, the goddess does *not* grant any of the wishes of the bad ones, but *does* grant those of Vištāspa:

**Table 5: Different results: Yt 5.110 and 118**

	<b>Good (mazda-yasna)</b>	<b>Evil (daiva-yasna)</b>
<b>Granted?</b>	<p>Yt 5.110 <i>daθaṭ ahmāi taṭ auuaṭ āiiaptəm</i>  <i>arəduuī sūra anāhita</i>  <i>haḍa.zaoθrō.barāi arədrāi</i>  <i>yazəmnāi jaiḍiiantāi</i>  <i>dāθriš āiiaptəm</i></p> <p>Arədvī Sūrā Anāhītā, the giver of the boon,  gave that boon to him,  as he was offering up libations,  as he was worshipping effectively,  as he was imploring.</p>	<p>Yt 5.118 <i>nōiṭ ahmāi daθaṭ taṭ auuaṭ āiiaptəm</i>  <i>arəduuī sūra anāhita</i></p> <p>Arədvī Sūrā Anāhītā  did not give him that boon.</p>

The two sacrifices are carried out in exactly the same way, and some of the words of the sacrificers' prayers are even identical, but the former is successful and the latter is not. Here ritual success is determined neither by the form and manner in which the sacrifice is performed, nor by the recipient, but by the purpose of the ritual.<sup>17</sup> As in the other three unsuccessful attempts of this hymn, the suppliant's wishes are directed against Ahura Mazdā's plan to establish the *daēnā-māzdaiiasni*- in the world. For the three enemies of Vīštāsra are identified by their attributes as belonging to the bad camp:

Yt 5.109 *təθriiauuantəm duždaēnəm*

*pəṣanəmca daēuuaiiasnəm*

*druuantəmca arəjaṭ.aspəm*

Təθryavaṅt of bad belief

and Pəṣana whose worship is of the Daivas

and deceitful Arəjaṭ.aspa.

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17 In addition, that the Daiva-worshippers also performed rituals that were detestable to Anāhītā emerges from another passage in the same hymn, which states that the 'deceitful Daiva-worshippers' offer their libations after sunset (Yt 5.94), while she instructs Zarathustra to offer his libations during the day, 'from sunrise till sunset' (Yt 5.91).

## 5. The good and the bad *daēnā*-

The Avestan word for ‘belief, religion’, *daēnā*-, literally means ‘perception’, or ‘vision’. Although the verb *dī* corresponds to Vedic *dhī*, and both mean ‘to see in one’s mind’, ‘to see with an inner eye’, the noun *daēnā*-, from which we get New Persian *dīn* ‘religion’, is confined to Iranian. Like *mazdaiiasna*-, it is a Zoroastrian technical term and denotes the way a person interprets the meaning and purpose of his or her life: There is a good and a bad *daēnā*-. Worshippers of Mazdā are *hudaēna*- ‘of good belief’, and their *daēnā*- is *māzdaiiasni*-, that is ‘the belief which belongs to a person who worships Mazdā’.<sup>18</sup> The expression entails an individual person.

By contrast, an anonymous group is implied by the equivalent negative term, the *daēnā*- ‘of those who worship the Daivas’, the *daēnā daēuuaiiasnanam*. It applies to people like Arəjaṭ.aspa who are therefore *duž.daēna*- ‘of bad belief’. They are evil and deceitful, that is *druuapt*-, because of their *daēnā*.

## 6. Mazdayasnas and Daivayasnas in daily life

In addition to Daivayasnas and Mazdayasnas offering up competing sacrifices to the same deity with diametrically opposed requests, the texts also present the two groups as living in close proximity to one another. In the Younger Avestan ‘Rules for keeping away the Daivas’, the Vīdēvdād,<sup>19</sup> Zarathustra asks Ahura Mazdā whether Mazdāworshippers aspiring to become surgeons should test their surgical skills first on Mazdā- or on Daivaworshippers. The answer is:

Vīdēvdād 7.37 *āaṭ mraoṭ ahurō mazdā*  
*daēuuaiiasnaēibiiō pauruuō āmaiiaiiānta*  
*yaθā mazdaiiasnaēibiiasciṭ*  
*yaṭ paoirīm daēuuaiiasnō kərəntāt*  
*auua hō miriiāite*  
*yaṭ bitīm daēuuaiiasnō kərəntāt*

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18 On the meaning of *daēnā*- see Hintze 2007, 58–60. The term *māzdaiiasni*- is a form based on the adjective *mazda-iiasna*-. It is formed with the lengthened grade of the first term of the compound and the suffix *-i-* at the end, see Wackernagel & Debrunner 1954 §190a, pp. 303–304.

19 On the meaning of Vīdēvdād, see Cantera 2006.

*auua hō miriāite*  
*yaṭ θritīm daēuuaiiasnō kərəntāṭ*  
*auua hō miriāite*  
*anāmātō zī aēšō yauuaēca yauuaētātaēca*

Then said Ahura Mazdā:

Let them first try out their skills on Daivaworshippers,  
rather than on Mazdāworshippers.

If for the first time he operates on a Daivaworshipper  
(and) he dies because of that,  
if for the second time he operates on a Daivaworshipper  
(and) he dies because of that,  
if for the third time he operates on a Daivaworshipper  
(and) he dies because of that,  
then as a result such a person will be unfit for ever and ever.

The text then goes on and states that if, despite having failed the three tests, the aspiring surgeon still operates on a Mazdāworshipper and harms his patient, then such a person is liable for deliberate bodily injury. Only if three Daivaworshippers survive the operation, may the candidate operate on Mazdāworshippers:

*Vīdēvdād 7.39 yaṭ paoirīm daēuuaiiasnō kərəntāṭ*  
*apa hō jasāt*  
*yaṭ bitīm daēuuaiiasnō kərəntāṭ*  
*apa hō jasāt*  
*yaṭ θritīm daēuuaiiasnō kərəntāṭ*  
*apa hō jasāt*  
*āmātō zī aēšō yauuaēca yauuaētātaēca*

If for the first time he operates on a Daivaworshipper,  
(and) he survives,  
if for the second time he operates on a Daivaworshipper,  
(and) he survives,  
if for the third time he operates on a Daivaworshipper,  
(and) he survives,  
then as a result this one will be fit for ever and ever.

Vīdēvdād 7.40 *vasō pascaēta mazdaiiasna*  
*vīmāδasciṭ vīmāδaiiaṇta*  
*vasō kərəṇtu mazdaiiasna*  
*vasō kərətu bišaziiaṭ*

At will shall they subsequently  
attend as physicians to Mazdāworshippers,  
At will let them operate on Mazdāworshippers,  
at will let him heal by means of the knife.

The passage shows that the life of a Daivaworshipper is considered to be of little value, and serves at best for experiments. Moreover physically harming another person is prosecuted only if the victim is one who worships Mazdā rather than Daivas. The teaching is given divine authority by means of the literary form in which all the Avesta is couched, that is the question and answer mode of dialogue between Zarathustra and Ahura Mazdā.

### **7. Daivas as Ahura Mazdā's cultic competitors: Xerxes' Daiva inscription**

Evidence of conflict and competition between Mazdā- and Daivaworshippers is found not only throughout the Avesta but also in a non-religious source from the early fifth century BCE, the so-called Daiva inscription by the Achaemenid king Xerxes I, who ruled the Persian Empire from 486–465 BCE. The inscription exists in three versions, Babylonian, Elamite and Old Persian. It was found at Persepolis in 1935 and is a major witness for the Daiva-cult in Zoroastrian Iran, independent of the Avesta. In this inscription Xerxes proudly records that he destroyed Daivas' places of worship in the lands which formed part of his vast empire, and that he replaced their worship with that of Ahura Mazdā:

XPh 35–41 *utā antar aitā dahayāva āha yadātaya* (36) *paruvam daivā ayadiya; pasāva vašnā* (37) *Auramazdahā adam avam daivadānam* (38) *viyakanam utā patiyazbayam: daivā* (39) *mā yadiyaiša; yadāyadā paruvam daivā* (40) *ayadiya, avadā adam Auramazdām ayadaiy* (41) *artācā brazmaniy.*

And among those countries there were (some) where (36) formerly the Daivas had been worshipped. Afterwards by (37) the will of Auramazdā I destroyed that place of the Daivas,<sup>20</sup> (38) and I gave orders: “The Daivas (39) shall not be worshipped any longer!” Wherever formerly the Daivas (40) had been worshipped, there I worshipped Auramazdā (41) in accord with truth in the ritual.<sup>21</sup>

As in the Avesta, in the Daiva inscription the Daivas are Ahura Mazdā’s direct cultic competitors. Xerxes presents himself as the royal defender of Ahura Mazdā’s cult, just as Vīštāspa does in the Avesta.

### **8. Summary of evidence discussed for the Daiva cult in Iran**

So far we have seen that even at the time when Zoroastrianism was well established in Iranian lands, the Daivas were not merely vile demons but also real gods who received cultic worship. We have found traces of the old meaning ‘god’ in the Avestan expression *daēuua-iiāz-*, which is inherited from Indo-Iranian, and the more recent *daēuua-iiāsna-*. It is very unlikely that a *daēuua-iiāsna-* should worship an evil being such as Angra Mainyu or any of his creatures. Rather, it denotes a person who worships the old gods, the Daivas. The four episodes in Yašt 5 in which Daivayasnas sacrifice unsuccessfully to the Yazata Anāhitā suggest that Anāhitā is, like Mithra, a pre-Zoroastrian goddess who came to be incorporated into the Yazata camp. The episodes illustrate that the success of the ritual is determined by the sacrificer’s *daēnā*, the ‘belief’, that is to say whether the worshipper believes in the Daivas or in Mazdā.

The episode which we discussed of Daivayasnas serving as ‘guinea pigs’ for aspiring Mazdayasnian surgeons suggests that Daivayasnas and Mazdayasnas lived in close proximity to one another. It also illustrates the Mazdayasnian perception that the value of a Daivayasna’s life is negligible. Such an estimation is based on the view that Daivayasnas support the evil camp.

Furthermore, in Xerxes’ inscription we have seen evidence for the Daivas as cultic competitors of Ahura Mazdā even in historical times, the 5th century BCE. The

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20 On the term *daivadāna-*, see Gnoli 1993.

21 On this formula see Hintze forthcoming b.



existence of Daiva establishments, *daivadānas*, which Xerxes razed to the ground, indicates that the worship of the pre-Zoroastrian gods continued in Iranian lands. The evidence of the Daiva inscription is particularly valuable for the religious history of Iran because it is a historical monument from outside the religious tradition of the Avesta. Its mindset, however, and even some of its wording is fully in line with the Avesta.

### 9. \**daiyá*- ‘god’ in Sogdian onomastics

Evidence for the old meaning of \**daiyá*- as ‘god’ also survives in some Sogdian personal names.<sup>22</sup> Such names must have been formed at a time when \**daiyá*- meant ‘god’ at least for those who formed them. The people who did so could have been what the Avesta calls Daivayasnas who lived, as we have seen, alongside Mazdayasnas. Of particular interest is the name *dyw<sup>3</sup>štyc* [δewāštīč] given to a king who ruled at Samarkand in the eighth century of the Christian era and whose archives of legal and economic documents were found at the castle on Mount Mug, east of Samarkand.<sup>23</sup> That the meaning of the name had become opaque to the Sogdian speakers of the eighth century, and probably long before, emerges from its non-onomastic function in the form of the adjective *dyw<sup>3</sup>štyc*, for the adjective’s meaning has undergone demonization: it means ‘devilish’, ‘Ahrimanic’ and functions as the antonym of *’xwrmztyc* ‘Ahuramazdean’.

### 10. Zarathustra curbs the Daivas

While Kavi Vištāspa and Xerxes appear from our sources as those who fight with Daiva-worshippers and defend the cult of Mazdā against that of the Daivas, Zarathustra is the one who takes on the Daivas directly. In the Zarathustra myth the Daivas are presented as beings hostile to Ahura Mazdā’s creation. They have always been around and, being the issue of Angra Mainyu, have always been bad. The Gathas relate that in primordial times the Daivas were given the choice between the life-giving and the destructive force. They chose the latter:

Y 30.6 *aiiā nōiṭ ərəš višiiātā daēuuācinā hiiat īš ā.dəbaomā  
pərəsmanōṅg upā.jasaṭ hiiat vərənātā acištəm manō  
at aēšəməm hēṇduuārəṇtā yā bəṇaiiən ahūm marətānō*

22 Henning 1965, 253f.; Lurje 2010, 188–191.

23 Marshak 1994.

Between these two (forces), the (fake) gods indeed failed to discriminate rightly, because  
as they were deliberating with one another Deception came over them so that they chose the worst thought.  
Thereupon they rushed into violence (*aēšma-*), by which they sicken the existence of the mortal.

Before Zarathustra was born there was no way of keeping the Daivas under control. They went about unrestrained and violently attacked human beings. One particular aspect which the Avesta highlights and which is also found in later representations of *dēws*,<sup>24</sup> is their lascivious behaviour with one another. Moreover, they assaulted and raped women:

*Yašt 19.80 vaēnəmnəm ahmaṭ para daēuua pataiiən  
vaēnəmnəm maiiā frāuuōiṭ  
vaēnəmnəm apa.karšaiiən  
jainiš haca mašiiākaēibiio  
āaṭ tā snaoδəṇtiš gərəzānā  
hazō niuuarəzaiiən daēuua*

Before his time the demons used to rush about in full view,  
their pleasures of lust used to take place in full view,  
in full view they used to drag  
the women away from their men;  
and the demons used to subject to violence  
those crying and screaming (women).

*Yašt 19.81 āaṭ tē aēuuō ahunō vairiio  
yim aṣauuanəm zaraṭuṣtrəm frasrāuuaiiat  
vi.bərəṭβəṇtəm āxtūirīm  
aparəm xraoḏdiēhiia frasrūiti  
zəmarəgūza auuazaṭ  
višpe daēuua aiiesniia auuahmiia*

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24 In particular in illustrations of *Šahnāme* manuscripts of the Safavid period, as Christine van Ruymbeke kindly pointed out to me.

But a single Ahuna Vairya prayer  
which truthful Zarathustra recited  
divided four times into sections,  
the (last) section with louder recitation,  
drove underground  
all demons, which are not to be worshipped, not to be prayed to.

Here and elsewhere Zarathustra's weapon against the Daivas is the Ahuna Vairya prayer. The latter in fact constitutes the first stanza of the first Gatha. Thus, here, too, the Gathas are connected with the figure of Zarathustra. In the course of the tradition this prayer came to be regarded as the holiest of all Zoroastrian prayers as it encapsulates all the knowledge of the Avesta, i.e. of the *daēnā- māzdaīiasni-*. Ahura Mazda recited it in between making the spiritual and the material creation (Yasna 19.1–4).

The texts tell us that Zarathustra was 'born' the son of Pourušaspa and that the Daivas dreaded him. They realize their defeat at the moment of his birth since they say:

Vīdēvdād 19.46 *zātō bē yō ašauua zaraḍuštrō*  
*nmānahe pourušaspahe*  
*kuua hē aošō viṇḍāma*  
*hāu daēuuanam snaθō*  
*hāu daēuuanam paitiārō*  
*hāu druxš.vīdruxš*  
*niiāncō daēuuaiiāzō*  
*nasuš daēuuō.dātō*  
*draogō miθaoxtō*

Born indeed (is) truthful Zarathustra  
of the house of Pourušaspa!  
How shall we procure his destruction?  
He (is) the weapon against the Daivas,  
He (is) the antagonist of the Daivas,  
He (is) the Deceit-free one against Deceit.  
Vanished are the Daiva-worshippers,

(vanished is) the Decay made by the Daivas,  
(vanished is) the false-speaking Lie.

Zarathustra is thus the arch-enemy of the Daivas because he curbs their unrestrained rule. It is with his birth that the Daivas withdraw, run away, hide under the earth.

### **11. The perception of change from the internal and external perspectives**

When studying Zoroastrianism, and indeed any religion or cultural system, it is important to distinguish between the internal and the external point of view. The internal perspective arises from studying a religion as from inside the system, as from the point of view of a member who upholds that system. The external perspective, by contrast is that of the outside observer.<sup>25</sup>

The internal perspective, as expressed in the Zarathustra myth, divides the time continuum into a period before and one after Zarathustra. His birth constitutes a watershed which marks the turning point in cosmic history. The Daivas have always been bad, and their badness constitutes an unchanging continuum. But they were powerful only at the time before Zarathustra. They lost their power when Zarathustra brought the weapon in the form of the Mazdā-worshipping religion for fighting them successfully. The change here consists in the Daivas losing their power, as illustrated in Table 6:

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25 Headland, Pike & Harris 1990; Knott 2010.

**Table 6: Internal perspective of change**



Contrary to what the Zarathustra myth would have us believe, from the external perspective, the Daivas cannot always have been bad for on the basis of the comparative evidence we know that in Indo-Iranian *\*dajūá-* must at one stage have meant ‘god’. From the external point of view, we observe that the Daivas were ‘gods’ in Indo-Iranian, but were rejected and demonized in Iranian. Because of the positive meaning of *\*dajūá-* in all non-Iranian languages, their demonization must have happened after the Indo-Iranians had split into two separate peoples, a process which archaeological evidence and relative chronology indicate to have happened around 2,000 BCE. The external perspective therefore postulates a semantic redefinition of the meaning of *\*dajūá-* at some point after the breaking up of the Indo-Iranian community, as illustrated in Table 7:

**Table 7: External perspective of change**

Semantic development of *\*dajūá-* in Iranian

**Indo-Iranian**

Irr. *\*dajūá-* ‘god’  
Daivas are good

**Iranian**

Av., OP *daiva-* ‘false god, demon’  
Daivas are bad

**Change: Daivas become bad**

While both perspectives envisage a change for the worse affecting the Daivas, they define its substance differently. From the inside perspective the change consists in the Daivas losing power while from the outside point of view *dajūá-* changes its meaning from ‘god’ to ‘false god, demon’. The Daivas lose prestige.

## 12. Myth and historical reality

As to the question how the change came about, the inside perspective attributes it to Zarathustra and also offers a reason why it happened: it was due to the arrival of a new religion, the worship of Mazdā.

From the external perspective, we have to account for how and why the meaning of *\*daiuá-* changed from ‘god’ to ‘false god, demon’. The explanation of how such a semantic redefinition came about is the bone of contention between the revolutionary and evolutionary models presented at the beginning of this lecture (above p.16 with Table 1). The revolutionary model attributes the change to Zarathustra and explains it by the introduction of the new religion, thus appropriating answers to the questions “how?” and “why?” from the inside perspective. By contrast, the evolutionary model assumes that the meaning of *\*daiuá-* gradually changed from ‘god’ to ‘demon’. Instead of a sudden change, a gradual one is thus assumed, but it is hard to account for such a leisurely development (see Table 8).<sup>26</sup>

**Table 8: Change of the perception of the Daivas  
in the internal and external perspectives**

Change	Internal perspective	External perspective	
		Revolutionary model	Evolutionary model
What?	Daivas lose power	Daivas lose prestige: god → demon	
By whom?	Zarathustra		Priestly collective
How?	Sudden, deliberate		Gradual, organic
Why?	New, Mazdā-worshipping religion		?

Although *\*daiuá-* has a negative denotation throughout virtually the whole of the Iranian- speaking world, the assumption of a gradual change of *\*daiuá-* from ‘god’ to ‘demon’ could be supported by reference to its occasional positive meaning in Sogdian onomastics together with the Avestan and Old Persian evidence that the cult of the Daivas continued in Iran and competed with that of Mazdā well into

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26 For attempts, see Kellens 2006, 153 (“accident de langage”) and Skjærvø 2011a, 334.

historical times. Moreover, the Avesta attests to the gradual spreading of the Mazdyasnian religion among the Iranian people and to missionary activity by the Mazdā-worshippers.<sup>27</sup>

However, not only the fact that the gods of old are rejected, but especially the vehement way in which this is done and the uncompromising attitude, which does not tolerate the Daivas, points toward a major, indeed violent break in the religious history of the Iranian people. The rejection and demonisation of the Daivas and their cult in the Avesta has all the features which characterize a monotheistic movement whereby the elevation of one deity, in our case Ahura Mazdā, is concomitant with the rejection of all other gods.<sup>28</sup> The internal perspective tries to deal with the fact that once upon a time the Daivas were gods by representing them as having always been bad and by making them the products of Bad Thought. That this was a struggle emerges from the way, as we have seen, in which Daiva-worshippers are represented in the Avesta and in the Xerxes inscription. The rhetorical question, whether the Daivas have ever been 'of good rule' (Y 44.20), also points to a struggle and betrays an earlier positive perception of the Daivas. From the outside perspective, therefore, the repudiation of the former gods and the accompanying exaltation of Ahura Mazdā make a sudden and deliberate, rather than a gradual and organic change more *probable*.

Proponents of the evolutionary model have criticized adherents of the revolutionary one for borrowing the figure of Zarathustra as religious innovator from the inside perspective.<sup>29</sup> It is true that the Zarathustra myth is unavailable as a source for the outside perspective as long as myth is defined as pure fiction, as a set of unexamined assumptions. But as soon as one allows for the possibility that factual material may over time acquire elements of fiction and be gradually transformed into myth, then myth may in fact encapsulate historical experience and truth. The Zarathustra myth then acquires explanatory force for the outside perspective of how and why the Daivas were demonised, and the figure of Zarathustra becomes pivotal again.

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27 Hintze 2009a.

28 Cf. Assmann 2003.

29 Cf., for instance, Kellens 1987, 240f. (= 2000, 2f.).

We have thus finally arrived at Zarathustra. And with him at the Older Avesta, the Gathas in particular. Recent research has revealed the sophisticated poetic devices and compositional structure of the Gathas, their personal character and tone, and evidence for an individual speaking with religious authority and charisma to a degree which is unparalleled by the Rigveda.<sup>30</sup> Just listen to this:

*Yasna 45.3 aṭ frauuaxšiiā aṇhəuš ahiīā pouruuīm  
yaṃ mōi vīduuā mazdā vaocaṭ ahurō  
yōi īm və nōiṭ iḍā maḍrəm varəšəntī  
yaθā īm mənāicā vaocacā  
aēibiīō aṇhəuš auuōi aṇhaṭ apəməm*

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.

Further study of Old Avestan poetry, on the one hand, and, on the other, of myth and historical reality in relation to the Zarathustra legend could throw further light on the origins of the Zoroastrian tradition, but this will be the topic of another lecture. Tonight I have deliberately steered away from the contested figure of Zarathustra, and instead focused on the substance of the most important change which marks the Zoroastrian tradition off from its Indo-Iranian ancestor: the demonization of the gods of old and the elevation of Ahura Mazdā as the only god to be worshipped.

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30 Jamison 2007, 17–49; Hintze 2013.



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