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xšnaoθrahe ahurahe mazdā

Detail from above the entrance of Tehran's fire temple, 1286š/1917–18. Photo by © Shervin Farridnejad

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Part III

Special Issue

Of dirt, diet, and religious others: A theme in Zoroastrian thought

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I

IN a recent article, Daryaee (2012) has brought together a number of highly significant texts in which Zoroastrians normalized their own food preferences, while exaggerating, distorting, and stigmatizing those of their ethnic others. To adapt the well-known concept of Benjamin (2003), it is a splendid example of the aestheticization, not just of political attitudes and relations, but of morality, collective identity, and social hierarchy as well. The practice, moreover, is all too familiar, as witness the Anglo-Saxon propensity to mock the French as “frogs,” Germans as “krauts,” Italians as spaghetti- or garlic-eaters.¹

The choice of food as a vehicle for operations of this sort has a certain genius about it. Although groups’ choices of what is – and is not – good-to-eat reflect environmental conditions (climate, soil quality, availability of specific plants and animals), they are also conditioned by the technologies that transform raw materials into cuisine (methods of cooking, spices and condiments, utensils, service equipment, and etiquette). Differences in diet thus reflect – and permit one to theorize – difference between peoples as something initially based in nature, but greatly amplified by the workings of culture. Further, given the ubiquity and crucial import of the homology {Raw : Cooked :: Nature : Culture}, any group can characterize others as less cultured than themselves – i.e. closer to nature, more animal, less human, and less worthy – by denigrating their favored foods and cooking practices.²

When judgements about groups of people are rendered via criticism of their food, it is not just food that is at issue, but more importantly taste and values. Going further still, one can also frame this as a religious issue, as when one defines one’s own diet as pure and someone else’s as polluted, resituating the question on a plane beyond that of merely human preferences. To construe one’s diet as not just “tastier,” but purer and more sacred than that of one’s adversaries, is not as

easy as it might seem. Indeed, it implies a whole cosmology.

II

For the most part, when medieval Zoroastrian authors pick quarrels over diet, they tend to deride Arabs and others for eating lizards, snakes, worms, and/or mice.³ As Daryaee rightly observes, Zoroastrians classified these species as *xrafstarān* (“vermin, noxious creatures”), in pointed contrast to those they categorized as *gōspandān* (“beneficent animals; pacific, productive, domestic creatures”).⁴ Not only did animals of the two types differ sharply in their appearance, habits and habitats, they were utterly different *ab origine*. Thus, *gōspandān* descended from the first animal created by the Wise Lord, second in dignity only to the original human.⁵ Accordingly, their utterly benign nature re-

³These include Ferdowsi, *Shāhnāme* 8:423 in the edition of Khaleghi-Motlagh (1987–2009), Abu ‘Ali Mohammad Bal‘ami, *Tārikh-nāme*-ye Tabari 3:445 in the edition of Rowshan (1380/2001), Nāser-e Khosrow, *Safar-nāme*-ye Nāser-e Khosrow, p. 143 in the edition of Dabir-Sāyāqi (1356/1977), and the *Ayādkār ī Jāmāspīg*, p. 52 in the edition of Messina (1939).

⁴For the fullest discussion of *xrafstarān*, see Greater Bundahišn 22. The species listed include snakes, scorpions, lizards, ants, flies, locusts, frogs, dragons, vipers, tortoises, worms, wasps, mosquitoes, and fleas. The following is presented by way of general description: “Their material being, the light of their eyes, and the breath of their vital spirit are Ohrmazdean and their spirit of sinfulness, and malevolence are that of the Evil Spirit. This is greatly advantageous: When people see them, they kill them or they avoid them. It is revealed that they are not the creation of the Wise Lord, for their hateful form and color are not at all like those of (his) domestic animals (*gōspandān*) or wild ones. The appearance of their scurrying motion and the harm they do at night, for due to their having the same substance with darkness, is proof of their fear, harm, and smiting, and they do not cease from doing harm to the creatures.” (Greater Bundahišn 22.4–6). *u-šan stī ud rōšnīh ī čašm ud wād ī gyāniḡ ī Ohrmazdig az ān ī čiyōn andar gēhān u-š waxš ī bazagiḡ ud wad-kāmagiḡ ān ī Ahreman. ēn-iz meh-sūdīh kū tā ka-šan wēnēnd ōzanēnd ayāb az-iš pahrēzēnd. az-iz ēn paydāg kē nē dahišn ī Ohrmazd hēnd cē-šan ‘a-grāmiḡ kirb ud gōnag ō gōspandān dadān nē homānāg. u-šan dwārišniḡ ud paydāgiḡ ud wizand-kunišniḡ pad šab ham gōhrīh abāg tāriḡiḡ rāy ud pad uz māyišn ī bīm ud wizend ud zanišn ud az wizendkārīh ī dāmān nē estēnd.*

⁵Greater Bundahišn 1.53, 1a.4, 1a.17, 2.9, 3.17, 4a.1–6, 6e.1–6, 13.4–31, Pahlavi Rivāyat accompanying the *Dādestān ī Dēniḡ* 46.15,

¹More broadly on this general theme, see, inter alia, Garine (2001).

²In addition to Lévi-Strauss (1969), also relevant is Goody (1982).

flects the primordial perfection of their ancestor and the absolute goodness of the Creator. Nowhere was this goodness more evident than in the milk of these animals, which conveys the ideal, life-sustaining qualities of moisture, warmth, and light to those who consume it. Numerous texts describe milk as the best of foods, capable of fulfilling all mortal needs and one should also note that, in contrast to most other foods, milk is obtained without causing death to any plant or animal.⁶ Infants subsist on milk alone,⁷ as did the first-born humans.⁸ Souls are greeted with milk (or butter) as they enter paradise,⁹ and when the world's perfection is restored, people will return to an all-milk diet, then renounce food altogether.¹⁰

Xrafstarān, in contrast, are creatures of Ahriman, whom the Evil Spirit produced from his own darkness.¹¹ His purpose in this was as malevolent as Ohrmazd's was benign, for he made the teeming, swarming, gnawing, dark-colored, slimy species which give no milk (flies, mosquitoes, ants, frogs, toads, lizards, snakes, worms, maggots, etc.) to serve as shock troops in his assault on the Wise Lord's good creation.¹² Once created, such species multiply rapidly and contaminate all they contact, reproducing themselves in ordure and rotting flesh.¹³ These animals, then, are the embodiment of the Ahrimanic qualities: malice, envy, ignorance, appetite, greed, immoderation, multiplicity, and an absolute rage for destruction. They are, in brief, the assaultive powers of decay and corrosion, instantiated at the animal level.

It is a truism that eaters remake their bodies – and selves – from the material they have eaten. Accordingly, those who feed on *gōspandān* (above all, their milk) become more Ohrmazdean as a result: benevolent, generous, and life-sustaining. Conversely, those who eat *xrafstarān* become dark, noxious, Ahrimanic.¹⁴ The *Dēnkard* summarizes these dietary principles, without reference to issues of ethnicity.

Concerning food: “The foods that are wor-

46.22-27, Selections of *Zād Sparam* 1.25, 3.50-66.

⁶Greater Bundahišn 4.20-21, *Dādestān ī Dēnīg* 30.13, *Dēnkard* 3.374, 5.14.4, 7.2.40-42, *Mēnōg ī Xrad* 16.4-12, Selections of *Zād Sparam* 30.58.

⁷Greater Bundahišn 15.11, *Dādestān ī Dēnīg* 27.2, Selections of *Zād Sparam* 10.11.

⁸Greater Bundahišn 14.17-20, 34.1.

⁹Greater Bundahišn 30.13, *Hadōxt Nask* 2.18, *Dādestān ī Dēnīg* 30.12-13, Pahlavi Rivāyat accompanying the *Dādestān ī Dēnīg* 23.15-17.

¹⁰Greater Bundahišn 34.2-3, *Dēnkard* 7.10.4, 7.10.8-9, Selections of *Zād Sparam* 34.39-41, 35.15.

¹¹Greater Bundahišn 1.46.

¹²Greater Bundahišn 4.15, *Dādestān ī Dēnīg* 36.40.

¹³*Dādestān ī Dēnīg* 16.10 and 17.2.

¹⁴Note, for instance, that sinners in hell are fed “the filthiest, most polluted food of the foods served in hell. They bring them the poison and venom of snakes, scorpions, and the other vermin in hell.” *bē-š awiš bared remtom* “nasruštartom az xwarišnān xwarišn ī pad dušōx frawārd estēd. āwarēnd wiš ud zahr ī mār ud gazdum ud abāriḡ-iz xrafstar ī pad dušox. (*Mēnōg ī Xrad* 2.190-91).

thy of one's self, proportionately suitable, pure, moderate, *which are productive and advantageous for the world*, and which the body desires are water, plants, edible fruit, and according to ancient laws, meat from the five species of beneficent animals (*gōspandān*) when prepared according to law (except for three birds: the mountain buzzard, black crow, and vulture); also milk from those animals, pure intoxicating drinks, non-intoxicating ones, and other liquids that are acceptable in food. Non-foods are: All that brings sickness back to food, like the flesh of a person, dog, or fox, other corpse-matter, vermin (*xrafstarān*), all bodily refuse, poisons, and everything that is polluted or harmful.¹⁵

III

Beyond the contrast of milk and vermin, there is another argument to which Daryae gave less attention, perhaps because its logic seems self-explanatory. This appears in the first item in the dossier he assembled: a passage from the Rivāyat of Farnbag-Srōš, which he translates as follows.

Question: “What is the judgment in regard to buying bread and meat and other prepared foods from the market of other religions?”

Answer: “(If) food preparation is done by those of other religions, due to having excrement on it or preparing it uncooked, it is unauthorized to eat.”¹⁶

While this translation captures the general sense of the text, there are two points where it could be more literal and more revealing. First, Daryae reads *hixrōmandihā* where the Pahlavi text, as edited by Anklesaria (1969), clearly has *hixrōmandih* (as Anklesaria recognized).¹⁷ The word is thus not an adverb in *-ihā*, but an abstract noun in *-ih* with adjectival extension in *-ōmand*, from

¹⁵*Dēnkard* 5.14.1-6 (Madan 1911:446.13-22, Dresden 1966:348.13-20): *abar xwarišn kū ān ī xwēš arzānīgihā ud niyābag-bahrīhā ud pāk pad paymānag ud kār ud sūd ī gēhān aziš tan-kāmīh hast ī āb ud urwar ud bar ī xwarišnīg ud pad meh-dādestānīh az gōšt ī panj ēwēnag gōspand[ān] + sardag jud az ān se murw ī ast sār ī gar ud warāy ī syā ud dālman ka 'psptwy'k (?) dādihā ud pēm ī awēšān gōspandān ud māyēnišnān ī pāk a-mastihā ud abāriḡ ī pad xwarišn mehmān. an-xwarišn kū harw cē ō xwarišn abāz waštāg čiyōn pid ī mardōm sag ud rōbāh abāriḡ nasā ud xrafstarān ud hāmīst + hixrīhā ud zahrīhā ud hangirdig harw cē rēman ayāb zyāngār.*

¹⁶Rivāyat ī Farnbag-Srōš 25: *pursišn: nān ud gōšt ud abāriḡ-iz xwarišn ī sāxtag ī az wāzār ī jud-dēnān xrid dādestān cē? passox: xwarišn ī sāxtag ī jud-dēnān sāzēnd hixromandihā padīš be awiz-irišnīh ayāb pad a-poxdagīh ī sāxtand nē padixšāy xwardan*, following Daryae's transliteration.

¹⁷The Pahlavi text is given at 1:94, Anklesaria's transliteration at 1:156 (with *hikhr-aumandih*), and his translation at 2:137-38.

the substantive *hixr*. Second, Daryae'e's translation – like Anklesaria's – ignores *awizīrišnīh*, “inevitability, the state in which something is unavoidable.” Taking these points into account and following the word order of the passage more faithfully yields a slightly different translation.

Answer: “Prepared food that people of other religions prepare – inevitably there is the quality of *hixr* in it, or they prepare it in an uncooked state. It is not authorized to eat.”

Regardless of these details, the answer given is clear. The food of religious others is pronounced unacceptable, as it is contaminated by *hixr*, a highly polluted and polluting substance. Daryae'e translates this term as “excrement,” as do many others, including the standard dictionary.¹⁸ If this is correct, those aspects of Zoroastrian cosmology that deal with food, metabolism, digestion, defecation, and the needs of the body are brought into play. Here, several points are relevant.

First, the Wise Lord intended the original human to be perfect: immortal, unaging, not subject to disease or decay, and with no need of food.¹⁹ Only with Ahriman's attack did hunger and the need to eat become part of the human condition, in correlation with and as partial antidote to the onset of mortality.²⁰ The purpose of food, then, is to make life possible in the face of entropy and death, by renewing the body's material substance and supplying the Ohrmazdean qualities on which life depends.²¹ Toward that end, the body converts food into vital energy and organic substance via

¹⁸Thus, MacKenzie (1990:43). The other standard dictionary – Nyberg (1974:100) – has no listing for *hixr*, but renders *hixrih* (*hihrēh*, in his orthography) as “impurity, filth”. With a few exceptions, on which see below, translators follow one or the other of these options.

¹⁹Dādestān ī Dēnīg 36.4: “Thus, the Creator of the world made the spiritual creation pure and undefiled. He made the material creation immortal, unaging, without hunger, without bondage, without sorrow, and without pain. [That remained the state of things] until there erupted in the darkness the Lie of wickedness”... *ōh-iz dādār ī dahišn dād ān ī mēnōg dām abēzag anahōgēnēd ud ān-iz ī gētīgīg dām amarg ud a-zarmān ud a-suyišn ud abandišn abēš ud adard. tā ka candēd andar tom duših [i] druz ...*

Cf. Dādestān ī Dēnīg 36.68, Dēnkard 3.80.

²⁰Greater Bundahišn 7.10: “It says this too: ‘When death came over Gayōmard, first to his right foot, then to his little finger, the Foul Spirit scurried forth. Then he set hunger on his heart. The Wise Lord stood there against the Foul Spirit so that he gave Gayōmard meat and butter to eat, so that the demons would not dismember him through non-eating.’” Note also that Hunger (Suy or Suyišn) and Appetite (Āz) are numbered among the demonic powers created by Ahriman to plague humanity. Cf. Greater Bundahišn 4.19, 5.2-3, 27.33, Dādestān ī Dēnīg 36.39, Selections of Zād Spram 1.30, 34.32-33. Ironically, even Appetite is afflicted by hunger.

ēn-iz gōwēd kū ka ō Gayōmart margīh abar mad nazdist pad ān ī dašn pāy pad ān ī keh angust Gan(n)āg-Mēnōg frāz dwārist pas ō dil gursagīh padīš frāz hišt. Ohrmazd -padirag ī Gan(n)āg-Mēnōg ānōh be estād tā-š gōšt ud rōyn ō Gayōmart xwārenēd kū tā-š dēwān pad a-xwarišnīh nē kirrenēd.

Cf. Dēnkard 3.209, 3.317.

²¹Dēnkard 3.157.8: “Acts of preservation are for the help of one's (bodily) nature as they repel oppression from the Adversary. Preservation is food and drink, in order to join the power that is in food

the process of digestion, which is theorized as a sacred fire that burns in the human stomach. Food is this fire's fuel and continued life, its product.²² Further, in the age of mixture (*gumēzišnīh*) introduced by the Evil Spirit's assault, food – like all matter – is no longer pure, but is adulterated with life-destroying “poison” (*wiš*) along with life-sustaining nutritive content.²³ Foods differ in the proportion of their nutritious and poisonous components and this ratio determines the extent to which they are salubrious and fit for consumption.

Finally, we get to the point of most immediate relevance. The metabolic process of the digestive fire breaks food down into its component parts. Good Ohrmazdean content is converted into blood and circulated through the body to sustain its warmth, life-breath, senses, and vital energy.²⁴ Toxic Ahrimanian substance is expelled by the process of defecation, before it can do grievous harm. As the Bundahišn puts it:

to the power in the elements for help of one's (bodily) nature.” *ud dārišn ō ayārih cihr pad awištāb spōzēnd az hamēstār. ud dārišn hast xwarišn ud xwarišn pad paywastan ī nērōg ī andar xwarišn ō nērōg ī pad amēzišn ayārih ī cihr*

Cf. Selections of Zād Spram 29.4-6 and 30.23.

²²Selections of Zād Spram 3.79: “The Promoter of good is the fire that is in people and animals. Its proper function is to digest food, to heat the body, and to make light stream from the eyes.” *wēh-franaftār ān ī andar mardōmān <ud> gōspandān u-š xwarišn gugār-dan tan + tāftan cašmān rōšēnidan andar xwēškārīh.*

Cf. Selections of Zād Spram 29.5, 30.23, 30.29, Greater Bundahišn 18.3.

²³Dādestān ī Dēnīg 36.40: “At his original assault, the Lie assigned ... the demon Grief to poison foods and to cause death, together with Deprivation, accustomed to secrecy, and fear-producing Terror, which cools the body's heat, and many destructive powers and very destructive demons.” *ud + Zarīz dēw pad xwarišnān zahrenīdan margīh wihānēnīdan abāg Niyāz ī nihān rawišn ud Sahn bīm-kun ud xīndagīh tabišn afsār ud was wināhišnīg + zōrān wināhatārān dēwān.*

Cf. Greater Bundahišn 4.17-18, 16.2, 22.1, 27.10-11, Dēnkard 3.325, 3.317, and Škend Gumanīg Wizār 4.17-19.

²⁴Selections of Zād Spram 29.6: “The stomach is analogous to the cauldron that holds food and water inside. By the fire of the life-breath, they are properly heated. When these are heated to their limit, they are drawn to the liver by a natural force, luminous and powerful. From the liver it is sent by the veins and capillaries to the head and other parts of the body. In the brain, it becomes the eyes' ability to see and the other senses. Hands and feet also receive their strength from it, and the body shoves out that which is unnecessary, by its force of expulsion. The final exhalation of the life-breath is caused by not eating. The fire, which is like the life-breath, becomes weak, with similar cooling of hands and feet, when the fire goes up out of the heart and the whole body becomes cold. The separation of light from the eyes is also analogous to the cooling of the fire.” *cē kumīg homānāgīh hast ī dēg <i> xwarišn ud āb andarōn dārēd. pad + gyānīg ātaxš ēwēnīhā tābihēd. ka ō sāmān ī xwēš mad pad zōr ī cihr ān ī rōšn ī zōrōmand be ō jagar āhanjēd. az jagar pad rāgān ud rāgizagān be ō sar ud abāriḡ tan rawēnēd ud abar mazg ī sar abzōn bawēd wēnāgīh ī cašmān ud abāriḡ šnasagān aziš dast-iz pay aziš zōr padirēd ud ān ī an-abāyišnīg pad zōr ī spōzāgīh [i] ō bēron spōzēd. abdom frāz-widerišnīh ī gyān [i] a-xwardārih + wihān nizārih <i> gyānīg ātaxš az ham be afsardan ī dast ud pāy ud ul + uzidan ī <ātaxš> az dil sard + būdan ī {az} hamāg tan jud + būdan ī rōšnāgīh ī cašmān pad ham homānāgīh ī afsardan ī ātaxš.*

Cf. Selections of Zād Spram 3.79.

Just as in material existence, people commit sins and good deeds and when someone dies, they calculate his sins and good deeds – all those who are pure go to heaven and all those who are liars are thrown into hell. So also when people eat food, all that is good goes to the brain and becomes pure blood. And it arrives at the liver and all the body's power comes into being from it. All the admixture of poison goes from the stomach to the intestine and it evacuates through the seat, which is like hell.²⁵

This passage presents a complex analogy of a sort common in Pahlavi texts, identifying a common pattern in two seemingly distant domains, then working out their parallel details. Starting from the observation that post mortem judgment of souls sends the good ones up and the bad ones down, the stomach is seen to perform a correspondingly vertical act of discrimination, sending the Ohrmazdean parts of food up to the brain in the form of blood, while shoving its Ahrimanic poisons down and out the anus in the form of feces (Table 9). Theorized thus, digestion becomes an eminently religious, cosmic, and moral business. Excrement here figures simultaneously as 1) the material counterpart of a lying, corrupt, hell-bound soul, 2) the antithesis of proper food, and 3) the dark, foul stuff of death and decay.²⁶ And those who would eat excrement, even if unwittingly, not only invert the proper order of digestion, they obstruct the Creator's plans for the cosmos.

There is, however, a problem in connecting this passage too quickly with that taken from the Rivāyat of Farnbag-Srōš. First, the Bundahišn does not use the term *hixr* to denote excrement, neither here nor elsewhere.²⁷ Second, Pahlavi has a number of other words for excrement (*gūh*, *riyišn*, *sargēn*), some of which occur in passages that distinguish this substance from *hixr*.²⁸ Given this, it seems appropriate to reconsider translation of the latter term.

²⁵Greater Bundahišn 28.10: *owōn čiyōn andar gētīg mardōm wināh ud kirbag kunēnd ud ka mirēd wināh ud kirbag amārēnēnd har(w) čē abēzag ō garōdmān šawēd ud har(w) čē druwand ō dušox abganēnd. hamgōnag mardōm-iz xwarišn ī xwarēnd har(w) čē abēzag ō mazg ī sar šawēd ud xōn ī pāk bawēd ud ō jagar rasēd hamāg tan nērōg aziš bawēd. har(w) čē wēš gumēxtag az jumīg ō rōdiš šawēd ī pad nišēm bērōn abganēd ī handāzag ī dušox.*

Cf. Selections of Zād Spram 30.30, where defecation is compared to a broom that sweeps dirt (i.e. useless, unwanted, and polluting matter) out of a dwelling.

²⁶Cf. Dēnkard 3.235, where the stench of excrement is said to derive "from a mixture of poison and dead-matter, and the pollution in it" (*gand az wiš ud hixr abar gumēzigih ud padiš rēmanih*) and Pahlavi Rivāyat accompanying the Dādestān ī Dēnīg 23.35-36, where Ahriman decides that upon their arrival in hell, liars will be fed with "the stench that is freshly shat" (*gand... ī nōg rīd*).

²⁷*Hixr* is attested in two Bundahišn passages only, GBd 5.3 and 11c.2. In both, it denotes something defiled and dangerous, but nothing in either text suggests whether it is a specific substance (and if so, what?) or a general category.

²⁸E.g. Ardā Wirāz Nāmāg 49.1: "And I saw the soul of a man who

IV

Around the turn of the twentieth century, James Darmesteter and Christian Bartholomae, two giants in the study of Iranian philology, sought to establish that Pahlavi *hixr* and its Avestan antecedent (*hixra-*) denoted not excrement *per se*, but something more specific, i.e. ordure and bodily wastes that are particularly runny or liquid in nature.²⁹ In large measure, this view was based on etymological considerations, as the two nouns derive from a verbal root **haič-*, which means "to pour out, moisten."³⁰ Beyond that, their theory drew on passages like the Pahlavi commentary to Vidēvdād 5.1-4, a text that frames a question designed to fascinate the most subtle priestly intelligence. The story begins with a bird that eats the flesh of a dead man, then flies to a tree, where it vomits, defecates, and urinates on its branches. Another man then comes along and cuts down a branch from the tree. Failing to notice its soiled nature, he sets it aflame, thereby polluting the fire. What acts of atonement are prescribed for such an act and such a person?³¹

Appreciating the import of this passage begins with the recognition that it constructs a thought experiment to clarify the difference between two categories and levels of pollution that are often grouped together.³² The first of these is the most contaminating and destructive of all material substances: the flesh of corpses

constantly devoured *gūh* (excrement), *hixr*, *nasā* (corpse-matter), and the *rēman* (filth) of people." *u-m did ruwān ī mard-ē(w) cand kē-šān gūh ud hixr ud nasā ud rēman ī mardōmān hamē jūd*. Cf. Pahlavi Rivāyat accompanying the Dādestān ī Dēnīg 18e.6-8, which similarly differentiates *nasā*, *hixr*, and *sargēn*, ranking their level of pollution in that serial order. Interestingly, dung (*sargēn*) is there said to possess the quality of *hixr* (*sargēn ī hixrōmand*).

²⁹See Darmesteter (1892-1893:2:71n32): "l'impurité liquide du mort ou du vivant", and Bartholomae (1904:1812): "flüssiges Exkrement, flüssige Ausscheidung des Körpers". This interpretation is still maintained in Shaul Shaked's Middle Persian Dictionary Project, ad loc., available at <http://micro5.msc.huji.ac.il/msshaul/mpdp/main.php> (last consulted 20 September 2012).

³⁰The etymology was suggested by Darmesteter (1892-1893:2:71n32) and adopted by Bartholomae (1904:1812). For the fullest discussion of the verb, see Cheung (2007:127-128). Avestan *haēk-* is well attested, occurring with a variety of preverbs and in numerous contexts (for which see Bartholomae 1904:1727-1728). Pahlavi, however, preserves the root only in one compound (*wiš-šinj-* "venom-spurting") and the verb *paššinjān*, *paššinj-* "to sprinkle," derived from *paiti-haēk-*.

³¹For an up to date translation of this passage, along with the Pahlavi commentary, see Skjærvø (2011:226-227). Note, however, that at Vidēvdād 5.1, where Skjærvø translates "It vomits, urinates, or defecates on it," suggesting that only one of these actions took place, the text actually states that all three occurred: *auui dim vanta auui dim irita auui dim patita* ("It vomits on that. It defecates on that. It urinates on that."). The Pahlavi translation preserves only the first of these actions: *abar an wāmēd* ("It vomits on that").

³²*Nasā* and *hixr* are regularly mentioned together, connected by the particle *ud* ("and") to form a two-member set as the most important types of pollution (*rēman* or *rēmanih*). See, for instance, Ardā Wirāz Nāmāg 38.3, 49.1, Bahman Yašt 4.28, Dēnkard 3.183, 5.12.2, Pahlavi Rivāyat accompanying the Dādestān ī Dēnīg 18e.6-8, 46.27

	Ohrmazdean	Ahrimanian
Judgement of the Dead:		
a) State of the soul	Good deeds > Sins	Sins > Good deeds
b) Motion of the soul	Upward ascent	Thrown downward
c) End point achieved	Heaven	Hell
Digestion:		
a) Mixed content of food	All that is good	All poison (<i>wiš</i>)
b) Nature of food component	Nourishing, life-sustaining +Light/+Warm +Moist/+Fragrant	Life-destroying -Light/-Warm -Moist/-Fragrant
c) Motion of food component	Upward ascent	Thrown downward
d) First organ reached	Brain, at top of body	Intestine
e) Material refinement of food component	Blood	Feces
f) Second organ reached	Liver	Anus, at bottom of body
g) Ultimate effects	Production of all the body's power (<i>hamāg tan nērōg</i>), renewal of life	Expelled from body entirely, successful defense of body's health

Table 9: Homology of judgement of the dead and digestion, following Greater Bundahišn 28.10

in the process of organic decay, as a once-vital body moves through stages of rot and putrefaction on its way to non-being. Such substances are called *nasā*, literally “corpse-matter.”³³ Slightly less severe than the pollution of *nasā* was that caused by vomit, feces, and urine (also some other forms of bodily refuse we will consider shortly). Collectively, these second-most-polluting substances were known as *hixr*. Depending on whether the soilage on the tree branch is classified as *nasā* (because it begins with a corpse) or *hixr* (because the immediate contaminating substances are bird vomit, feces, and urine), different levels of atonement would be required to rectify the woodcutter's error. The Avestan text does not give a definitive answer, but worries, rather pragmatically, that if the splotches on the wood are classified as corpse-matter, the world will then be so full of *nasā* as to be unbearably dangerous. The Pahlavi commentary pursues the question, citing the opinions offered by Abarag and Mēdōmah, authoritative sages who founded major schools of Zoroastrian law.³⁴ One thought the twig polluted by *nasā*, while

³³The etymology is from Avestan *nasu-*, cognate to Greek *νεκος*, Latin *necare*, etc.

³⁴Abarag and Mēdōmah were priests (*dastwars*) of the 6th century CE, whose works were frequently cited – occasionally in opposition to each other – by the Pahlavi Vendidad, Nērangistān, Epistles of Manušcihr, and Šāyast nē Šāyast. The two major legal schools of Sassanian Zoroastrianism took their names from these men and Greater Bundahišn 35.53-54 treats Mēdōmah as Zarathuštra's father's brother's son, telling that he received the Good Religion direct from his cousin. Apparently, Abarag and Mēdōmah both wrote authoritative commentaries on the Avesta, neither of which has sur-

his colleague considered it a case of *hixr*: the question really was a conundrum, and intentionally so.³⁵ Most significant for us, however, is the fact that all parties understood not only excrement, but also vomit and urine as forms of *hixr*.

Given that these substances are fluid in nature (note that the excrement in question was specifically avian ordure), plus the etymology from Avestan *haēk-*, Darmesteter and Bartholomae concluded that those things classified as *hixr* were liquid excretions, and that the contrast of *hixr* to *nasā* was built on the opposition of moist to dry. Elegant though it may be, the theory has two flaws. First, *nasā* denotes the fleshy substance of bodies from the moment of death to the point when such matter has been picked clean, leaving only dry bones (which ≠ *nasā*).³⁶ As such, *nasā* always has some

vived. See further Cereti (2001:145–146 & 208) and Macuch (1993:13–14).

³⁵Pahlavi Videvdād 5.1: “A bird flies up from a high mountain to the deep river bed, on a tree. It gnaws the body of that dead man. That bird then flies from the deep river bed to the high mountain. It flies onto a tree, which is hard (like an almond tree) or soft (like a rotten willow). It vomits on that. Abarag called that ‘bodily filth’ (*hixr*); Mēdōmah called it ‘corpse-matter’ (*nāsa*).” *ān murw ul wāzēd, az (ān ī) buland gar, (az abar), ō ān ī zoḥr rōstāg, abar ān wan; ān kirb frāz xwarēd ī ōy rist mardōm; ān murw ul wāzēd, az ān zoḥr rōstāg, abar ō (ān ī) buland gar; abar ān wan wazēd (ī) saxt, ciyōn wan-ē wādām, narm, (ciyōn wēd pūdag); abar ān wāmēd. Abarag hixr guft, Mēdōmah nasā.*

³⁶Dādestān ī Dēnīg 16.9: “Bone, given its hardness, naturally becomes dry when there is no flesh on it and it is no preserver of its own moisture. Then it becomes long-lasting and devoid of fat. In its dryness, it changes from the nature of *nasā* to the nature of *hixr* and is

measure of moisture present and is not defined by the quality of dryness. Second, there are types of *hixr* that go unmentioned in the *Vīdēvdād* passage that are explicitly defined as dry. Particularly telling is Pahlavi Rivāyat accompanying the *Dādestān ī Dēnīg* 55.3.

When some *hixr* falls from one's hand, foot, or limb, if there is no moisture on it, then it is *hixr*; if not, it is *nasā*.³⁷

So flesh and fat are *nasā*, while dry bones, flaked-off skin, hair and nails are classified as *hixr*, falsifying any attempt to define *hixr* with reference to moisture. Influenced by passages like that just cited, Anklesaria (1969) tried the opposite tack, translating *hixr* as "dry dead matter,"³⁸ but that runs into the problem that vomit and urine are included in the category, as are semen and menstrual blood, which show up in lists like the following.

Concerning contact with two forms of deadly matter. One is *nasā* and the other is *hixr*, like menstruation, semen, blood, urine, and other things that come from people, dogs, and other animate creatures, which are pollution and portions of flesh that die while the rest of the body is living.³⁹

V

"Portions of flesh that die while the rest of the body is living" – here we come closest to a viable definition of *hixr*, which was a category not limited to any particular substance, but capacious enough to encompass excrement, vomit, flaky skin, menstrual blood, hair clippings, pus, mucous and others.⁴⁰ What these have in common is also what differentiates them collectively from *nasā* (= dead matter from dead bodies). *Hixr*, in contrast, consists of the dead substances that living bodies reject and expel. Such matter is polluted

consumed." *cē ast pad-iš saxthī ka-š pid tā tarr nē abāg u-š nē bawēd tarr dāštār xwad cihriḡihā huškīhēd ud a-carbišn ud dagr-pattāyīšn bawēd. pad huškīh az nasāyīh be ō hixrīh xwarīhēd.*

Cf. *Dādestān ī Dēnīg* 16.11-13.

³⁷Pahlavi Rivāyat accompanying the *Dādestān ī Dēnīg* 55.3: *hixr-ē az dast ud pāy ayāb az handām be ōftēd ka-š nām-ē padīš abar nē āyēd hixr ud ka nē nasā.*

³⁸Thus Anklesaria (1969), op cit., 2:69, 2:93, 2:99, 2:102, 1:138, and Anklesaria (1949) pp. 48, 93, 95, 105, 120, et passim.

³⁹*Dēnkard* 5.12.2: *ud abar pahikaftagīh ī harw dō ēwēnag murdag ek nasā ud ek abāriḡ hixr ciyōn dāštān ud šusar ud xōn ud mēšag ud xayūg ud abāriḡ ī az mardōm ud sag ud abāriḡ gyānwar ī rēman ud pid <ī> andar zīndagīh bahrihā mirēd.* Sometimes, menstrual blood (*dāštān*) is treated as a "more serious" (*garāytar*) form of *hixr* (*Dēnkard* 5.24.19b implicitly *Dēnkard* 5.19.16), sometimes as a category of pollution unto itself (Selections of Zād Spram 27.4, where *nasā*, *dāštān*, and *hixr* are different subcategories of "destruction" [*wināhišn*]).

⁴⁰For reasonably good discussions of *hixr*, see Boyce (1975:306) and Choksy (1989:78–88).

and dangerous, to be sure, but less so than *nasā*, for in the very moment of defecating, vomiting, or bleeding, e.g., life defends itself against such dangerous stuff and the body remains vital. To put it differently, *nasā* involves the total and absolute negation of life, while the negation associated with *hixr* is partial: dangerous, but not catastrophic. As a concrete measure of their difference, the *Dēnkard* specifies that fire must be kept thirty paces from *nasā* to preserve its purity; for *hixr*, three paces suffice.⁴¹ One might then define *nasā* as "corpse-matter" and *hixr* as "bodily refuse" – not just bodily filth or matter out of place in Douglas's (1966) famous formulation, but, more precisely, those substances that were once part of a living organism, but threatened the well-being of the organism, which consequently sloughed them off and continued to live.

If this is correct, we can return to the Rivāyat of Farnbag-Srōš with increased understanding of what is at issue when the high priest advised Zoroastrians not to purchase foods prepared by those of other religions. Zoroastrians often call their own faith "the Good Religion" (*wēh dēn*), as it provides the requisite means – doctrinal, ethical, and ritual – for frail human subjects to defend themselves against the forces of death and entropy in a world characterized by mixture.⁴² Lacking such resources, non-Zoroastrians consistently fail to take the necessary precautions. Inevitably (*awiz-irišnih*), they let their bodily refuse contaminate the foods they prepare and, indeed, everything they touch.

In the face of this, Farnbag-Srōš urges caution. Beyond his immediate proscription, however, lies a whole system of thought and a polemic subtext. For he implicitly formulates a set of homologic relations that subtly suggest that the relation of Zoroastrianism to all other religions is like that of life-sustaining nourishment to polluting bodily refuse. This is not just a contrast between the body's proper input and output, but a crucially important battlefield for the ongoing struggle of good against evil, life against death,

⁴¹*Dēnkard* 5.19.16. Similarly, when clothing is soiled by *hixr*, one can cut off the affected portion and salvage the rest of the garment. *Nasā*-soiled clothing requires more strenuous treatment. See Rivāyat ī Hēmit ī Ašawahištān 16.6-8.

⁴²*Dēnkard* 3.183: "All of what is conveyed by exposition of the Good Religion is like a remedy, servant, and physician: this is the Mazdā-worshipping religion. And it is revealed that when a person carries *nasā*, *hixr*, and pollution away from the earth, this is a prophylaxis to protect two-thirds of the creatures from sickness... Breath, fire, and the essential foundation of the human body, these are fighters for a remedy and to protect them is the teaching of the Good Religion. To carry off their pollution and defilement, to protect them from illness, to carry off their pollution and stench, these are the healing and soundness of men and cattle." *bār ud hamāg-iz be barēnd az nigēz ī weh-dēn hēd ed owōn cār bandag ud bizešk dēn mādēsēn ēn ī u-š paydāg kū ka mardom nasā ud hixr ud rēmanīh az 'ābest ī zamīg be barēd wizāriḡ pahrextan dō srišwadag xīndagīh az dām ānābīhist-ē... wād ātaxš abar zamīg ud mardom tan bun mād ī nibardār hēnd pad cār ī u-šān pahrextan ī weh-dēn handarz. u-šān abar burdan ī rēmanīh ud ālūd ī padīš wēmārih ud pahrextan u-š be burdan ī rēmanīh ud gand bēšāzišnīh ud drustīh ī mardom gāwān hilēnd.*

Ohrmazd against Ahriman, and – in the last analysis –
“us” against “them” (Table 10).

	Ohrmazdean	Ahrimanian
Nature and effect	Sustains life and well-being	Assaults life and all that is good
Material substances relevant to the body	Food and the living bodily tissues it sustains and renews	Dead and poisonous substances that have entered the body and must be expelled from it (<i>hixr</i>)
Spiritual systems of guidance	The "Good Religion" (<i>hu-dēn</i> , <i>weh dēn</i>) that teaches how to avoid the dangers of pollution	All other religions (<i>jud-dēn</i> , <i>jud-kēš</i>) that are insufficiently attentive to issues of purity, making it inevitable that food will be contaminated with bodily refuse (<i>hixr</i>)

Table 10: Homologic relations implied by Farbag-Srōš's opinion on whether Zoroastrians can buy prepared foods from their non-Zoroastrian neighbors (Rivāyat of Farnbag-Srōš 25)

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