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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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## Avestan *ciθra-*

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The word *ciθra-* can be both adjective and noun in the Avesta. In the Gāthās, however, it is only used as adjective. The only possible exception is Y 32.3. Mayrhofer (*EWA* 1, 542-43) translates Ved. *citrá-* (adjective) as ‘sichtbar, glänzend, hell’, among others, and (noun) as ‘Erscheinung, augenfälliger Gegenstand’. Gāthic *ciθra-* (adjective) means remarkable, splendid, or the like. It is used as a substantive in some Young Avestan passages. In Y 58.1 it means something like ‘characteristic appearance’ (so Pirart 2012, 117). Kellens (2011, 114) translates the word in this passage as ‘signal’. It signals or makes manifest the good quality of the sacrificer’s thought, word and deed. In Y 12.4 it is used in the same way, revealing here the abhorred quality of thought, word and deed of the *daēuua-* worshipper. This cognitive capacity of the term is important. In Yt 5.64 it means appearance or splendour: *raēuuat ciθrəm āzātaiiā* ‘the noble who has an opulent appearance’. One may generally translate the noun as appearance. What is important in this usage (‘appearance’) is that *ciθra-* reveals or signals the nature of the phenomenon, says something essential about it.

In a number of passages (e.g., Yt 22.40) *ciθra-* is normally translated as ‘origin’ or ‘seed’. Hintze (2005, 57) maintains *contra* Bartholomae (1961, col. 586-587) that the two meanings (‘appearance’ and ‘origin’) must be related: ‘the semantic range of the single lemma *ciθra-* could encompass both “appearance” and “seed, origin, descent”’. But why accept the second meaning? Greek *eidos* means both ‘appearance’ and ‘essence’. The connection between the two is the notion of *form* that determines what a thing *is*

and (hence) the way it *appears*. This is, for instance, true in both Plato and Aristotle. In the latter, *eidos* is also used in the more technical sense of ‘type’, Latin *species*, i.e., the form that classifies an instance. ‘Form’ in Plato or Aristotle can be said to be a cause only to the extent that it makes the thing what it is and makes it recognizable as such, i.e., the perceptible thing is the ‘copy’ of the (ideal) form for Plato and ‘embodies’ it for Aristotle. In neither does it have the sense of genetic cause or origin of a career or process. Note the cognitive status of appearance *qua* form in the Greek context. Some similar notion of form (appearance as model) may be assumed for Av. *ciθra-* ‘appearance’ and ‘essence’.

The adjective *afšciθra-* could be translated as ‘containing the essence of water’; it is used in Tīštar Yašt of the star *tištriia-* in charge of the seasonal rain. Similarly, *zəmas.ciθra-* and *uruuarō.ciθra-* are used of stars and probably mean ‘containing the essence of the earth’ and ‘containing the essence of the plants’ (cf. Panaino 2005, 814-815). The idea that ‘essences’ (or models) of terrestrial phenomena exist in the celestial realm is familiar from Plato’s theory. The case of *gao.ciθra-* is more complicated. The adjective is used of the moon. Does it mean ‘having the appearance of the cow’ or ‘containing the model of the cow’? In Yt 7.0 the latter seems to be its meaning: ‘with gratification of the moon containing the model of the animal, and of the sole-created animal, and of the animal of many species’ (Hintze 2005, 61; Hintze has ‘seed’ instead of ‘model’). In Zoroastrian Pahlavi literature, the connection between the moon and the cow seems to be understood in both ways. In *Wizīdagīhā ī Zādspram* 2.8-9 the sole-created cow is said to have been ‘white and bright like the moon’. It is possible that in ancient times the composite image of crescent and full moon was thought to be bovine in appearance, and at some stage this conception was assimilated to the theory of heavenly luminaries containing the models of terrestrial phenomena. In later (i.e., Pahlavi) Zoroastrian cosmogony, the moon (‘containing the model of the cow’) becomes the place where the seed (*tōhm*) of the cow is purified (cf. *Wizīdagīhā ī Zādspram* 3.50: ‘Ohrmazd purified that seed by the light of the moon, and from it prepared many essences (*čihragīhā*) and gave them life-soul, and from there fashioned them [materially] in Ērānwēz’).

Geneally speaking, Middle Persian *čihr* can mean either appearance (splendour) or essence (nature). In *Wizīdagīhā ī Zādspram* 3.4, it means ‘apparition’ (it reveals to Ahriman the end time and the new world), and in 3.43 it seems to mean ‘nature’, although it is hard to make sense of the sole-created cow having ‘vegetal nature’. In *Wizīdagīhā ī Zādspram* 27.4 the ‘essences’ (*čihrān*) of phenomena are said to be made from the four elements air, earth, fire and water. *Wizīdagīhā ī Zādspram* 34.29 is interesting: it seems to give (Aristotelian) formal causality to *čihr*. I cannot go into a detailed discussion of the Middle Persian usages, suffice it to say that there is no need or justification to add ‘seed’ to the semantic range of *čihr* (cf. Soudavar 2006).

Let us go back to the Avestan conspectus. In Yt 22.40 *ciθra-* is the subject with two ablatives as predicate: ‘the essence of the souls (of the *ašavans*) is from the vitalizing intuition (*spēnta- mainiiu-*), from the best intention (*vahišta- manah-*)’. The nature of their souls is from the two divine powers, probably meaning that they take their bearings from the two or instantiate the two. It makes no sense to say that they are descendants of the two. In fact, in none of the YAv. occurrences of *ciθra-* does the meaning ‘seed’ work. Moreover, ‘origin’ or ‘seed’ is not the same thing as ‘offspring’. The latter perspective expresses the issue and not the beginning of a phenomenon or process. ‘X is the seed of Y’ is different from ‘X is the offspring of Y’. Yet this confusion is present in many translations, which again shows the untenability of ascribing to *ciθra-* the meaning ‘seed’.

The combination of *ciθra-* with the ablative case is present in a few other passages, which Bartholo-

mae (1961, col. 587) places under <sup>2</sup>*ciθra-* as ‘Same, Ursprung, Geschlecht’. In Yt 8.4, we find the same construction as Yt 22.40, namely *ciθra-* as subject with an ablative phrase as predicate: *tištrīm ... yaza-maide afšciθrəm sūrəm bərəzañtəm ... yahmāt̄ haca bərəzāt̄ haosrauuāñhəm apqm nafəδraṭ̄ ciθrəm* ‘we worship Tištar who has the essence of water, the heroic, the high ... (we worship) his fame, which is from his being high, (we worship) his splendour, (which is) from the descendant of the waters’. In Yt 13.87, the ablative complement expresses a relation of origination (just as it does in Yt 22.40): *yahmaṭ̄ haca frāθβərəsaṭ̄ nāfō airiianqm daṅ iiunqm ciθrəm airiianqm daṅ iiunqm* ‘from which (i.e., Gaya Martan) Mazdā fashioned the families of the Aryan peoples, the (splendid) appearance of the Aryan peoples’. (If something like ‘seed’ were meant, would it not be in the plural: ‘the families... the seeds...’? And it makes not much sense to say: ‘from which Mazdā fashioned the origin of the Aryan peoples.’) Old Persian *ariya ciça* (DNa 14-15) seems to mean something similar, i.e., Aryan or Iranian splendour. The generally accepted translation as ‘Aryan descent’ (e.g., Lecoq 1997, 219) is based in part on (illusory) Avestan and Middle Persian usages and partly on the supposed parallelism *in situ* between *pārsa pārsahyā puça* (a Persian, son of a Persian) and *ariya ariya ciça* (an Aryan, of an Aryan lineage). But the adjective *ariya* does not seem to have a racial meaning in OP. In DB IV 89 it designates Darius’s language (less likely the script). The comparison with Yt 13.87 suggests a meaning like ‘Aryan splendour’. The shared phrase must be ancient and perhaps idiomatic.

In Yt 13.89 *yō paoiriō ciθrəm uruuāēsaiiata daēuuāaṭ̄ ca haotāt̄ mašiiāaṭ̄ ca* the causative verb (‘make turn’) is in the middle voice, which is peculiar (cf. Kellens 1984, 144). Bartholomae (1961, col. 1533) translates the phrase: ‘der zuerst sein Gesicht abkehrte von...’, perhaps taking account of the middle voice. Pirart (2010, 210) translates it ‘qui fut le premier à frustrer du Signe positif le Hasardeux mauvais Jus et son suppôt mortel’, with the complement in the ablative of separation. This seems right to me, whatever *ciθra-* actually means here, perhaps the ‘characteristic splendour (of good sacrifice)’. Zarathuštra was the first to remove the (supernatural) splendour from the brood of *daēuuas* and their mortal devotees. Hintze (2005, 58) translates the phrase: ‘(Zarathuštra,) who (was) the first to put to flight the offspring (coming) from the evil breed of both *daēvas* and mortals’. As far as I can see, this translation has three problems. First, it is forced to render *ciθra-* as ‘offspring’ instead of ‘origin’ or ‘seed’. Second, *ciθra-* duplicates *haota-* ‘offspring’. Third, the translation of the causative verb (without any suitable verbal prefix like *apa* or *pairi*) as ‘put to flight’ relies on the supposed meaning of the phrase. (The ablative phrase in the singular is almost certainly for the plural.) Moreover, the notion of the ‘offspring of (the evil breed of) the *daēuuas* and their mortal devotees’ is rather obscure. (Even if such a type of creatures, like 1 Enoch 7 ‘giants’, is conceivable in Zoroastrianism, Zarathuštra is stereotypically the first who forced underground the *daēuuas* and not the ‘offspring’ of their supposed copulation with mortal women.) Again, in none of the Young Avestan passages does it make sense to translate *ciθra-* as ‘origin’ or ‘seed’ (or the illegitimate ‘offspring’).

The sole Gāthic passage in which *ciθra-* has been translated as a substantive is Y 32.3a-b *aṭ̄ yūš daēuuā vīspāñhō, akāt̄ manañhō štā ciθrəm / yascā vā maš yazaitē*. Hintze (2005, 58) translates 3aa: ‘But all of you, O false gods, are offspring (derived) from evil thought’. This is the usual translation of the phrase. Aside from the problematic replacement of ‘origin’ or ‘seed’ with ‘offspring’ for *ciθra-*, the sense of the phrase is hard to pin down. If the genetic relation is taken literally (like Ārmaiti is the offspring of Mazdā), then what to do with the mortal worshipper of 32.3b, the *maz-* ‘magnate’? In fact, any concrete sense (like ‘apparition’) would be problematic, since it must be predicable of both the *daēuuas* and the

magnate who worships them. But if one were to make the term an abstract noun such as ‘manifestation’, then the ablative complement is surreptitiously turned into a genitive. This is the problem, for instance, with Kellens’ and Pirart’s translation: ‘Vous, tous les (mauvais) dieux ... vous êtes la manifestation même de la mauvaise Pensée’ (Kellens and Pirart 1981, 119). In his January 18, 2013 Collège de France lecture, Kellens (2013) gives a different translation of Y 32.3a-b: ‘Mais vous, tous les *daēuuas*, et celui qui offer déjà le sacrifice/le grand qui vous offer le sacrifice, vous êtes le signal-lumineux issu de la mauvaise Pensée’. The implied ontology is rather idiosyncratic, and completely unnecessary, since the translation acknowledges that the ablative predicate has the sense of origination, exactly as in Yt 22.40: proceeding from or taking bearings from. The best thing to do with *ciθrām* in Y 32.3 is to make it an adverb, meaning something like ‘characteristically’ or ‘recognizably’. We have seen that it does have this cognitive capacity in other passages.

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