Detail from above the entrance of Tehran's fire temple, 1286/1917–18. Photo by © Shervin Farridnejad
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The 6th volume of DABIR is a Gedenkschrift to honour Hanns-Peter Schmidt (1930-2017), an excellent German scholar of Indo-Iranian studies, who mainly worked on the Vedas and the Gāthās, as well as Indian mythology and the Zoroastrian religion.
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A Third Exegesis of the Avesta? New Observations on the Middle Persian Word ayārdag'

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Abstract
Taking as a point of departure a letter of Jean de Menasce addressed to Moḥammad Moʿīn some seventy years ago, this article traces the progressive advancement of the analysis of the rare Middle Persian word ayārdag, mentioned in three Persian lexicons and two Arabic sources of the 10th and 11th centuries. These sources consider the term as a third exegetical stratum of the Avesta, the first two being the zand and the pāzand. With the aid of Middle Persian sources such as the Dēnkard and the Bundahišn, we will attempt to identify the phenomenon that Muslim authors interpreted as a “third exegesis” and, furthermore, we will propose an interpretation of this word in the sense of “synthesis, abridgment” of a Gāthic nask.

Key Words: Zoroastrianism, Avesta, Commentary, Exegesis, Jean de Menasce, Moḥammad Moʿīn, Abū ʿl-Ḥasan al-Masʿūdī, Middle Persian, ayārdag.

On June 26, 1948, Jean de Menasce addressed Moḥammad Moʿīn, professor of the faculty of literature at the University of Tehran, in a letter which began as follows:

1- I wish to acknowledge the valuable help provided by Dr. Gawin MacDowell with the English version of this paper.
Sir,

I am in the process of reading, in the copy provided by the Société Asiatique, your very beautiful work on the influence of Mazdaism on Persian literature. I am tempted to write a review once when I have finished it, but until then, allow me to draw your attention to a Pahlavi text which you might find interesting and which might induce you to modify the viewpoint that you express on pages 133-134. It concerns the word \( \text{āyārdeh} \) [sic], attested in Asadi and other ancient dictionaries and which you propose to read as \( fargard \) or \( ākard \). Unfortunately, I do not know the book of M. Maškour which you cite in a footnote, but I do know at least one Pahlavi text where the word indubitably exists. It is in \( \text{Dēnkart VIII, iii, 3} \) (Madan 683, 20), where it seems to be said that in the \( \text{Varštmaṇsr Nask} \) all the details of the Gāthic text are revealed, \( \text{vāc [sic, wāzag], zand u āyārtak} \).

I have the impression that \( \text{āyārta} \) is the \( \text{tafsīr} \) Asadi is talking about, the \( \text{zand} \) being rather the Pahlavi translation considered in isolation, without its glosses, but, little by little, would not the tendency have developed of calling the \( \text{zand} \) both translation and gloss? Thus it would explain the relative rarity of the term \( \text{āyārtak} \). I say “relative” because the study of the Pahlavi books is far from complete, and it still holds surprises in store for us. It remains for me to interpret the word etymologically.

In the wonderful book of Bailey, \( \text{Zoroastrian Problems in the Ninth Century Books} \), p. 211, we find a note on the word \( \text{āyārta} \), which is the Pahlavi translation of Avestan \( \text{yaēsh} \), “to boil,” while in Manichaean \( \text{y'ard} \) [sic] signifies “to torment,” or rather, according to the context, “to stir, to agitate, to overturn.” It is not at all unheard of that for a word designating rumination or agitation is used in the derived sense that is required when it comes to a “commentary.” The example of \( \text{xvāstān} \) (YPLH/tn in Frhg. 18,4 ; cf. Bartholomae, \text{Mittelir. II, 26}), in Pahlavi even, for designating the memorized recitation of the Avesta, suffices to demonstrate this.

Until further notice, I would keep conserve the form \( \text{āyārtak} \) just as it has come down to us and as it is attested for us by Asadi and others. 

The year 1948 was a transitional period in the career of the author of this letter. He was about to assume, in March 1949, his position in the Section des Sciences Religieuses at the École Pratique des Hautes Études as the chair of “The Religions of Ancient Iran,” a post which was created especially for him. Although his magisterial work on the polemical treaty \( \text{Škand Gumānīg Wizār} \) (de Menasce 1945) had already appeared, he had not yet taken into account the encyclopedic heft of the \( \text{Dēnkard} \), which would occupy him for the rest of his career. As he specifies in the second part of his letter, he had begun to assemble his lectures which he

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2- Translated from the French. A typed copy of this letter is preserved in the Jean de Menasce collection at the Inštitut des Études Iraniennes (Bibliothèque universitaire des langues et des civilisations, Paris). I warmly thank Farzaneh Zareie, the curator of the Persian collection, for providing me with access to this document.

3- The year 1948 is also when Jean de Menasce publicly expressed his ideas on Zionism and its relationship to Christianity, on which occasion he denounced Christian antisemitism. The animated debates surrounding the creation of the state of Israel (May 1948) led Jean de Menasce, ordinarily favorable to Zionism, to take a position against the colonization and the division of the Palestinian territories and, at the same time, to oppose the ideas of his friend Louis Massignon (see the unpublished thesis of A. Lévy, \text{Jean de Menasce (1902-1973) : trajectoire d'un juif converti au catholicisme}, EPHE, 2016, p. 412-423). This frenetic context did not prevent him from sharing his lexical discovery with his colleague in Tehran.
delivered in 1947 at the Ratanbai Katrak foundation for publication as a book, but this would not appear for another eleven years (1958). Although, it is still valuable as a general introduction to the Dēnkard, this little book hardly touches upon Book VIII, to which the letter makes an allusion. This letter therefore remains the oldest testimony to the profundity of the lexical knowledge and interpretive finesse which its author had acquired about a particularly dry text, which even now remains unpublished.4

No answer to this letter has been found – despite a mutual admiration, the two men do not seem to have developed a regular correspondence – but one can imagine without difficulty the enthusiasm of M. Moʻīn when he read it, since he read it, as he went on to reproduce the observations of J. de Menasce on m.p. ayārdag / pers. ayārdeh at least three times.5 The work which de Menasce had in his hands was none other than the thesis prepared by Moʻīn in 1319-20/1940-1941, The Influence of Mazdaism on Persian Literature, published in 1326/1947 with a preface by Henry Corbin. Despite the promising title and the scope of the textual sources, the work was the target of harsh criticism – among them that the author exaggerated the splendor of Iranian civilization and especially Zoroastrian doctrine to the detriment of Islamic culture – to which the author reacted by editing a revised version with the title Mazdaism and Persian Literature, this time introduced by his own teacher Ebrāhīm Pourdāvoud, under the illusion that the conjunction would help reestablish the equilibrium between these two aspects of Iranian culture or, better, reunite them. The word which is the subject of the present article would no doubt have played a role in this noble enterprise, since that seems to be a terminus technicus of Middle Persian Zoroastrian vocabulary that succeeded in breaching the language of Persian poetry, although the few studies that have been devoted to it until now are principally limited to recording of rare occurrences.

Attempting to make some sense of the terms zand, zand-avestā, and pāzand while simultaneously defending himself against accusations of plagiarism, Anquetil-Duperron discovered the word in two Persian dictionaries of the 17th century, composed in India, Farhang-e Jahāngīrī and Borhān-e Qāte’, but, too occupied with vilifying the linguistic competency of Thomas Hyde, he hardly paid it any attention.6 The modern “rediscovery” of this term is due to the same Ebrāhīm Pourdāvoud, who, at the beginning of his commentary on the Khurdeh Avestā, mentions an isolated verse of the 10th century poet Abū Manṣūr Daqīqī7: “O king! May I finally see the day where, according to my desire, I will recite either the ayārdeh or the khordeh,”8 a verse cited as an example in the oldest Persian dictionary, the Loghat-e Fors of Asadī Ṭusi

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4- This is the period when J. de Menasce, passionate about Zoroastrian apologetics, became interested in the third book of the Dēnkard and published a translation in 1963. His archives, available at the Bibliothèque universitaire des langues et des civilisations (one can consult the inventory that I prepared in 2014: https://f-origin.hypotheses.org/wp-content/blogs.dir/1617/files/2016/06/Fonds-Menasce.pdf) and at the Bibliothèque du Saulchoir, contain an enormous mass of lexical notes, often organized in folders, revealing that, since the 1950s, a vast project was underway for the preparation of a Middle Persian dictionary, for which he had occasionally solicited the aid of two of his students, Aḥmad Tafaẓẓoli and Marijan Molé. His published work has without doubt diverted attention away from the particular interest that J. de Menasce had for Pahlavi lexicography, yet the letter reproduced above seems to be a clue that his enthusiasm developed much earlier in his career, as did his method.


6- Anquetil Duperron 1780, p. 443-444, where the word is transcribed as iardah. See also n. r and s.

7- Pourdāvoud 1310/1931, p. 25 and n. 1.

8- The translation proposed by Gilbert Lazard deserves some attention: “Je me verrai un jour au comble de mes vœux : je lirai, ô roi, tantôt le commentaire de l’Avestā et tantôt le Khurda Avestā” (Lazard 1964, volume 1, p. 153, volume 2, p. 162, section 183), where the verb khāndan is understood in the sense of “read” rather than “recite, chant, say out loud.”
(11th c.), under the entry for the word khordeh, defined as “Commentary (tafsir) on sections of the pāzand, (while) ayārdeh is commentary on the whole.”9

Under the entry ayārdeh in the same dictionary, one reads “The meaning (ma‘ni) of the pāzand, being the explanation (gozāres) of the zand-avestā,”10 followed by a verse of another poet from the Samanid era, Abū Ṭāher Khosravānī: “Behold how many ascetics and solitary monks have become, for his sake, singers of nask and reciters of ayārdeh!” Thus, contrary to what J. de Menasce had written, ayārdeh has a more ambiguous status than “tafsir” or exegesis of the Avešta.

The dictionary Loghat-e Fors informs us of four things:
1. The word ayārdeh was incorporated into the language of Persian poetry at a very early stage, where its ancient meaning of “commentary” seems to be preserved in parallel with the sense of “translation.” We will see further on what might be the nature of the text on which it is commenting or translating, here called pāzand, which itself is of an exegetical nature.
2. The relationship between ayārdeh and khordeh appears to be artificial, since Daqīqī decided to juxtapose them exclusively for reasons of prosody or assonance. Consequently, the definition given by Asadī Ṭusī (the khordeh, commentaries on each of the parts of the text called pāzand, form a combined entity called ayārdeh), is, in reality, nothing but a deduction based on the verse of Daqīqī and the typical meaning of the Persian word khord, “piece, fragment, detail,” without any direct connection to the collection of texts of daily and private rituals that we know as the Khord Avestā, “the little Avešta.”11
3. If there is any basis for Khosravānī’s usage, ayārdeh would be linked to the nasks, the “books” of the Avešta, and would possess, like them, the ritual value of a liturgical text.
4. In the learned and poetic language of the 10th and 11th centuries, Persian does not refrain from employing technical and rare terms of Zoroastrian religious vocabulary, but it also does not bother to transmit the exact meaning. While the primary meaning of ayārdeh has been lost, it nevertheless remains associated with the idea of multiple interpretations of the Avešta.

However, one must be careful not to give accord more importance to the Loghat-e Fors than it deserves, because Asadi, or, at least, the author of the Vatican manuscript,12 had the strange idea to invert the meaning of pāzand and avestā, as indicated by its definitions of the words zand, “commentary on the pāzand,” and pāzand, “the original book (aṣl-e ketāb), of which the Avešta is the commentary (gozāres).”13 This inversion certainly did not espace the notice of the German philologist Paul Horn, the first editor of the Vatican manuscript, who is also the first to connect the dots between ayārdeh in the Loghat-e Fors and two equally mysterious (but illegible) words.

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10- Loghat-e Fors, Eqbāl ed. 1319/1940, p. 475; the Vatican manuscript gives “nature (çeşme) of the pāzand,” Horn ed. 1879, p. 27. Although unclear, Borhān-e Qāte’ seems to partially follow Loghat-e Fors by defining ayārdeh as “Commentary and nature of the zand, called pāzand” (Mo’īn ed., vol. 1, 1376/1997 (6th ed.), p. 192).
11- Against the conclusion of Pourdāvoud (1310/1931, p. 25-26, n. 1), who first attempted to link the words ayārdeh and ardāvirāf before recognizing that the obscure definitions of Asadi were incomprehensible.
12- Containing additions, including some that are certainly later than the time of Asadi, this manuscript is not considered identical to the original dictionary, as explained by Eqbāl (Loghat-e Fors, Eqbāl ed. 1319/1940, p. yy-yy).
13- Loghat-e Fors, Eqbāl ed. 1319/1940, p. 100; Horn 1879, p. 29, fol. 18r.
bārdah/bārzah/yārdah/yāzdah and akardeh (باردا, بارزه، یاردا، یازد). The loss of the initial alef in the first word and the diacritical fluctuations of Arabic have left these words so unrecognizable that they perplexed not only James Darmesteter but also every reader and editor of the two principal works of the great encyclopedist of the first half of the 10th century, Abū ‘l-Ḥasan ʻAlī al-Masʻūdī, namely the Murūj al-dhahab wa maʻā din al-jawhar (Meadows of Gold and Mines of Gems) and his very last work, Kitāb al-tanbih wa ‘l-išrāf (Book of Admonition and Revision), dated to about 95514.

Indeed, the first of these works contains a very interesting notice on the Zoroastrian books, which attributes the zand and its commentary to Zoroašter and the ayārdeh to later religious scholars:

§ 548. The alphabet of the book revealed by Zoroašter does not have fewer than 60 letters; no other alphabet in any other language is composed of such a large number of characters. The details of how the Mazdeans cope with this situation are reproduced in our Akhbār az-zamān and in the Middle Book. This book was written in a language that the Persians could not reproduce, and they could not understand the sense. We will speak later of the (principles) that Zoroašter put into his book, about the commentary and the super-commentary that he made. The entire text is traced in gold letters, comprising 12,000 volumes. It contains promises, warnings, prescriptions, and bans, as well as other legal and cultic (provisions). This book would remain the code of Persian kings until the time of Alexander, who, after killing Darius (Dārā b. Dārā), consigned to the flames a large portion of this work. Later, when, succeeding the leaders of the satrapies, Ardashir, son of Bābek, ascended the throne, he imposed on the Persians the reading of one of the chapters [sūrat] that he called Vendīdād [or Aštād]15. Even today, the Mazdeans confine themselves to recite this chapter.

§ 549. Regarding the original book, it has the name of Avešṭā [Bastāh]. Seeing that the faithful were incapable of understanding it, Zoroašter composed a commentary for them, which he called Zand. Then he wrote a commentary [al-tafsīr] on this commentary and called it Pāzand (bāzand). Finally, after his death, the doctors of this religion gave a commentary [al-tafsīr] on this commentary and a gloss [al-šarḥ] of the preceding texts which they called Ayārdeh.

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14- Horn 1879, p. 27, n. r. Horn rejects the reading yāzdah proposed by Haug (1862, p. 14) and the assimilation of the term with the name of the Yašt on account of their late character compared to other texts of the Avešṭa. James Darmesteter was consulted on this subject by Michael Jan de Goeje, to whom Darmesteter replied, “I do not know what to do about akardeh. The only text I can think of is the Dīnkart, which was composed during the 8th century, concerning documents which, according to the author, were partially destroyed and dispersed by Alexander” (al-Masʻūdī, Kitāb al-tanbih wa ‘l-išrāf, de Goeje ed., 1894, p. 92, n. g). However, in his Zend-Avesta, he reverses his position. After producing the conventional definitions of zand (“Pahlavi commentary”) and pāzand (“transcriptions in pure Iranian and in Zend [Avestan] or Persian characters which were made from Pahlavi texts”), he admits that “the original form and sense of baridah is unknown” (Darmesteter 1892, vol. 1, p. xl, n. 1).

15- “Vendīdād” is the correction proposed by Charles Pellat (al-Masʻūdī, Les prairies d’or, trans., revised, and corrected by Ch. Pellat, vol. I, p. 234, §548, n. 3), who admits to having forced the reading of the manuscripts. It should not be retained because the Cairo manuscript (Abd al-Hamid ed., vol. I, 1377 H./1958, p. 230) gives a form similar to asnād (اسناد, left as it is in the version of Ch. Barbier de Meynard and A. Pavet de Courteille, vol. 3, 1914, p. 125), which one can easily correct to Aštād and understand as Aštād Yašt (Yt. 18), in homage to the goddess of righteousness, Arštāt. Moreover, al-Masʻūdī mentions the text again in his Kitāb al-tanbih (see below). One problem which remains is why the name of this Yašt which, in the extant text of the Avešṭa, comprises only a few passages taken from other Yašts, was recorded by al-Masʻūdī.
The notice found in the work that al-Masʿūdī finished just before his death completes the preceding one on several points: [Zoroaşter] brought to the king [Wištāsp] the book of the Avesta, the name of which received a final kāf in Arabic and became el-Abestāk.16 The number of chapters in this book is twenty-one; each chapter contains two hundred pages. One finds in this book a total of sixty vowels and consonants, each one corresponding to a distinct character. Some of these characters are found elsewhere while others have fallen into disuse, for this script is not unique to the language of the Avesta. Zoroaşter invented this script that the Magi call Din Debîreh, that is, the hieratic script. He wrote his book with golden rods on twelve thousand oxhides and in the ancient Persian language which no one today understands. Only some parts of the chapters have been translated into modern Persian. It is this translation that the Persians have in hand when they read their prayers. It contains only a few portions like Achtād, Djitracht [Čihrdād Nask ?], Abân-Yasht [or Bayân Yašt ?], Hâdûkhî, and other chapters. In Djitracht one finds the stories about the beginning and the end of the world; Hâdûkhî contains exhortations. Zoroaşter made a commentary [šarḥan] of the Avesta that he called Zend, and which, in the eyes of his adherents, was revealed to him by the Lord. He then translated it from Pahlavi [al-fahlawiyya] into Persian. Furthermore, Zoroaşter made a commentary [šarḥan] to the Zend and called it Bâzend (Pâzend). The mobeds and the hirbeds versed in the lore of the religion commented, in turn, on this commentary, and their work was called Bârideh [ayārdah] and, by others, Akardeh [kardeh ?].17 Alexander burned it after he conquered the Persian Empire and put to death Darius.

16- al-Masʿūdī, Les prairies d’or, trans., revised, and corrected by Ch. Pellat, vol.1, p. 293-294, § 548-549 (the words in [] are my additions). Pellat says to adopt the reading ayārdah proposed by Moʿīn (1960, p. 67). One can note that the loss of the initial alef is analogous to that of Avesta, here spelled Bastāh. A summary of this passage on the triad avestā, zand, its commentary, and pāzand, a gloss on this commentary – but without any mention of ayārdah – appears a little farther in the work (p. 222, § 594), where al-Masʿūdī comments on the connection between the Manichaeans and the term zandīq, “heretic.” In the Cairo edition, as in the edition of Beirut, the word ayārdah appears again in the uncorrected form bārdah ( husta) (Abd al-Ḥamīd ed., 1377H./1958, vol.1, p. 233; Abd al-Ḥamīd ed., 1989-1990, vol.1, p. 197).

17- As indicated in a note by the translator, the old Pahlavi ending -k (-āg), present in numerous Persian loanwords in Arabic, led the author to believe that this was the arabicized form (al-Masʿūdī, Le Livre de l’avertissement et de la révision, B. Carra de Vaux trans., 1896, p. 131, n. 1).

18- The concomitance of Bagān Yašt/Yasn and Hādūxī is well-attested in Middle Persian sources, notably in Hūsrav i Kawādān ud rēdag-ē § 9, where they are described as two of the texts that Zoroaštrians must memorize (see Azarnouche 2013a, p. 82).

19- Without explaining these forms, Horn signals the possible parallels between ayārdeh and akardeh along with m.p. kardag, “division, portion,” and Persian khordeh (on which see above), and equally considers a slight graphic transformation which would have resulted in kardeh: ayārdeh>akārdeh>akardeh>kardeh (Horn 1879, p. 27, n. 7). We could add to this last point a subtle graphic parallel between *yārdeh and pāz(n)d which could have influenced or confused the copyists. As for akardeh, without entering into the details, Moʿīn (1960, p. 68) hypothesizes that the graphic alteration took place in the Middle Persian stage, where ayārdag would have been modified to ayardag (yltk) before the γ was taken for a k, leading to “akardag (kltk). Again this hypothesis is the fact that it is generally the reverse which occurs (k is read as γ) and that, in any case, akardag would have been commonly understood in Middle Persian as an adjective signifying “without division,” an oxymoron when it comes to Zoroaštrian texts. Be that as it may, if there was any hesitation about the spelling of the name of the third exegesis, it becomes clear that al-Masʿūdī based his report on a written source rather than an oral one.
son of Darius [Dârâ b. Dârâ].

Without going so far as to evaluate the accuracy and the documentary value of the data in these passages, we can generally note that they retain elements coming (directly or indirectly) from Zoroastrian sources, or else personal observations of the author or one of his informants, including the accurate description of the Avestan script (not specific to the Avesta, since it is also used in the pâzand) and the number of its graphemes (in reality, fifty-three), the distinction of the three linguistic strata, the Zoroastrian topos of the book deposited in the Royal Treasury and destroyed by Alexander, the idea of the revealed zand (hence the Word of Ohrmazd of equal status with the Avesta), but also the question of the multiplicity of Persian scriptures – which we find with more details in another Arabic writer, Ibn al-Nadîm – and a theme that al-Mas‘ûdi develops later in his work, the forgetting of the Avestan language. He also emphasizes that the sacred book of the Zoroastrians has received three different commentaries: The first of these is the book of divine origin, written in Middle Persian, called zand, which Zoroaster translated into Persian; the second is a work of the prophet himself, of which only the name is given, pâzand, but the language and the nature of the book are passed over in silence; and, finally, the third book, a work of the priests, whose double nature can be deduced both by its contents (it is both a commentary and a gloss) and by its name (ayârdeh for some, akardeh for others).

Mo‘în is probably right to see in akardeh an alternate form of kardeh (Middle Persian kardag, “division, chapter”), especially since, as we saw above, the initial alef is generally unstable in Iranian words which the Arab copyists did not recognize. We can even advance the hypothesis that, taking into account its human origin, this third exegetical stratum was designed by the Magi and the priest-teachers (mowbed and hērbed) as a way of making the content of the sacred text more accessible to the general public in the most comprehensible manner, and so, by necessity, in a vernacular language. Within this new stratum, they also would have introduced a flexibility of interpretation which permitted them to adapt the zand or the pâzand to different practical circumstances (for example, in different fields of interaction with their audience, such as law, ritual, or mythology), a flexibility from which derives the irreducibility of the title. Moreover, this interpretation could be consonant with the program initiated by the king Khosrow I, probably after the repression of the Mazdakite movement in the 6th century, which limited the teaching of the zand to children of the sacerdotal class, as the zand was then judged too vulnerable to exegetical distortions for a lay audience. Therefore, laymen would have learned the Avestan prayers and doctrines derived from the

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The passage continues on the theme of the seven scriptures that the Persians used in diverse circumstances.

21- According to the traditional description, pâzand is the transcription of Middle Persian in Avestan characters, overcoming the graphic ambiguity of the Pahlavi script and its use of arameograms. As has been shown elsewhere, pâzand acquired this meaning when the original sense, undoubtedly “commentary or gloss accompanying the zand,” was no longer in usage (see de Jong 2003 and Azarnouche 2014, in particular p. 84-86).


23- Cf. Dēnkard VI.254 (Shaked 1979, p. 98-99): zand pad šabestân čâšišn, “Teach the zand in the household” (that is, school-age children must receive their initiation in the intimacy of the home; šabestân, lit. “harem, women’s quarter,” also housed the children); Zand i Wahan Yasn II.3: bê pad paywand i ašna zand ma čâšid, “do not teach the zand outside your offspring” (Cereti 1995, p. 134, 150); Zand i Wahan Yasn IV.6: ēdōn guft ohrmazd ō spitamân zarduxšt kā be xwāh <ud> warm be kun pad zand <ud> pâzand wizârišn be čâš ō hērbedān ud hāwištān gōw, “Thus spoke Ohrmazd to Zoroaster: Recite (fluidly) and memorize (the Avesta), teach (its) commentaries in zand and pâzand, transmit them to the priest-teachers and to (their) disciples” (Cereti 1995, p. 139, 158, with modifications).
The question that now arises is the following: Was this hierarchical, tripartite exegesis a Zoroastrian reality? It suffices to look at the stratification of Middle Persian translations of the Avesta, where they exist, in order to distinguish at least two layers. The first layer resembles, in most cases, either a word-for-word translation or a phonetic transposition into Middle Persian. Its role is to ensure that each single Avestan word is surely rendered by its equivalent in “zand.” The second layer is sometimes a paraphrase and sometimes an interpretive gloss (occasionally introduced by ay, “in other words,” and occasionally by kū “that is”), and it can be accompanied by individual, subjective comments introduced by formulas such as ast ke edon gowêd, “There is another (commentator) who says (this)...” Still, we cannot affirm that the bi- or tripartite stratification was the norm and, furthermore, the greater part of the translations and commentaries are designated “zand” without distinction. It is therefore tempting to look for this third stratum in non-Avestan texts which were directly dependent on the exegesis of the Avesta. This is the case for the cosmologic treaty Bundahišn, for which the title given in the manuscripts is precisely zand-āgāhīh, “knowledge (according to) the zand,” and presents at least two of the characteristics of ayārdag/ayārdeh, an exegetical function and the fact of being composed by a priest for (probably) a lay audience.

Bundahišn 31, a list of the regions of Erân-šahr, here identified as Erân-wêz, and the plagues Ahriman inflict on each of them, is particular in that it is not only based on a zand (which we possess, since it belongs to the first chapter of the Pahlavi Widêwdâd), but sometimes adds a third interpretive stratum. This provides the opportunity to compare an Avestan text, its zand, and its commentary based on the zand. This third layer seems to have had in some cases a fixed purpose, that of identifying certain regions in the list of toponyms from Widêwdâd 1—no more recognized as the far away countries of Central Asia—as provinces included within Sasanian Erân-šahr (for example, Mesopotamia, Adurbâdagân, Mesene) or former provinces (Armenia or zones prone to Arab attacks). This process would of course legitimize the general westernization of Avestan toponyms in the Sasanian era by providing a textual attestation, but it would also rationalize certain historical developments (for example, the conversion of Armenia to Christianity) by integrating them retrospectively into the sacred corpus. In other words, the adaptation of Avestan toponyms to the world of Late Antiquity must have taken place only through this stage of exegesis.

Bundahišn 31 distinguishes itself in many ways from the parallel passages in Widêwdâd 1, which is clearly indicated when it depends on a different, undoubtedly later, tradition or exegetical school. A passage suggesting a terminus post quem is the one concerning Sogdiana or Gauua, “land of the Sogdians” (Gaum yim suydâ šaiianom, m.p. Gayâ i Sûlig-manišn (ay dašt i Sûlig-manišnîn)), where the author of Bundahišn 31.6 adopts the textual gloss dašt i Sûrig-manišnîh, “the plain inhabited by the Sûrig,” and adds a paraphrase of this gloss, followed by another gloss: kû-š Sûrig padiš mânend i ast Baydâd i bayân-dâd, “where the Sûrig dwell, that is, Baghdad, created by the gods,” which indicates that the exegete interpreted the name Sûrig as referring to the inhabitants of the ancient Āsörîstán (hence Sûrig instead of Sûlig), where one finds, after its foundation in the year 762, the city of Baghdad.

By the same principle, the Avestan Arachosia of Widêwdâd 1.12, whose plague is the neglect of corpses (nasuspaiia), becomes Armenia in Bundahišn 31.23-24, and the plague becomes the “excess burial of corpses”...
(nasā-nigānīh wēš kunēnd), a coded reference to the Christian practice abhorred by Zoroastrianism. The Avestan toponym, *upa aošaēšu raŋhayā*，“above the springs of Raŋhā” (*Wīdewdād* 1.19), which the *zand* ascribes to Byzantium (Hrōm) becomes in *Bundahišn* 31.37-38 “Ōdāy on the Arang, also called Ōdāy of the Arabs,” probably based on one of the identifications of the mythical river Arang with the Tigris. The association of this region with occupied zones or areas periodically raided by Arab tribes is reinforced by the plague which Ahriman inflicts on it: the absence of social or political authority (*sālār*). Still more examples permit us to situate this chapter of the *Bundahišn* within an exegetical tradition that distinguishes itself from the canonical *zand* through complements or additions that anchor the sacred text in the political and geographic realities of the Sasanian period or later. Even if nothing allows us to affirm that this exegetical stratum corresponds definitively to *ayārdag*, it remains undeniable that the *zand* is a stratified system where divergence from the Avestan core results in the practical application of religious thought.

We can also apply another frame of reference to the remarks of al-Mas'ūdī, one that is offered by Islamic tradition. To present Zoroastrianism or the Avesta as a composite mass of diverse elements, contradictory and in a state of permanent mutation, is one way of contrasting them with Islam and its one foundational text, transmitted by a single man during a short period of time. In the words of Guy Monnot, a scholar familiar with polemical arguments, “[l’Avesta] ne pouvait manquer d’apparaître aux yeux des musulmans sous les traits rebutants d’une multiplicité obscure.” On the one hand, there is the multiplicity of books (21, as al-Mas'ūdī notes), but also the multiplicity of languages – including some that are incomprehensible – scriptures, and interpretations. In Arabo-Persian texts, Zoroaster is frequently depicted as a polyglot (his “marvelous work” was in every language) or else as the occasional translator. An enlightened polymath like al-Mas'ūdī assumes neither the language nor the tone of a polemicist, but one cannot exclude that he was influenced by this idea of the “otherness” of Zoroastrians and that he applied, whether consciously or not, the tripartite interpretation of the Qur'an (*tafsīr, šarḥ, ta’wil*) to the Avestan corpus, perhaps to give it a Muslim endorsement.

Seventy years after the letter of Jean de Menasce to Moḥammad Mo‘īn, the “rarity” of the term *ayārdag* is still only “relative,” while “the study of the Pahlavi books” remains “far from complete.”

The only known occurrence until now is the one that J. de Menasce cited from *Dēnkard* VIII.3.3, though it is not very informative on the nature of *ayārdag*:

*Dēnkard* VIII 3.1-4: (3.1) warštmānsr mādayān abar zāyišn ī Zarduxšt ud madan ī-š ō dēn <ud> čē andar ham-dar (3.2) ud *mādag (?) hērbedīh ud hāwištīh ud ahuīh ud radīh ud āst awānīh ī pad-iš

27- For example, in al-Ṭabarī, vol.4, Perlman trans., p. 76-77, where Zoroaster, the court interpreter, translates Hebrew into Persian.
28- One of the studies cited by Mo‘īn, but to which J. de Menasce did not have access, is the very first book in Persian dedicated to the *Dēnkard*, published in 1325/1946 by Moḥammad Javād Maškour. It is a general introduction to Middle Persian literature with a chapter on the *Dēnkard*, its content, its authors and compilers, and its manuscripts. The originality of this little book (166 pages), unfairly ignored, resides not only in its historical approach and its constant recourse to a large number of Arabic sources touching on the history of the Zoroastrian clergy or on the (pseudo-) history of the transmission and conservation of the Avesta, but also in the general overviews it presents, such as the status of Zoroastrians in Islamic sources (*hadīth*) or the history of Western research on the Avesta.
The Warštmānsr (nask concerns) principally the birth of Zarathuštra, his adherence to the dēn (and) that which pertains to this same subject (3.2) and the topic (?) of the qualities of the teacher and the student, the qualities of ahu and of ratu (e.g. political authority and spiritual authority), and faith, (topics) on which (one finds) all the words of the Gāthās recounted in the most summary manner. (3.3) For every subject (there is) the word (of the Avesta), the zand, and the ayārdag, so that it is said, “the Warštmānsr (3.4) (is the nask) which was given forth for any sort of demonstration”30 such that for everything which is recorded in the Gāthās, the Warštmānsr says something about it.31

This excerpt is sufficient to show that Warštmānsr, the third Gāthic nask and the second in the list of twenty-one nasks, plays a particularly important role. Dēnkard IX provides a detailed table of contents for this nask, which indicates that it contains passages about both collective and individual eschatology, fundamental themes which would perhaps necessitate more commentary and super-commentary. Is the rarity of the word ayārdag connected to the particularity of this nask, or, to put it slightly differently, is the type of commentary that ayārdag represents exclusively reserved for Warštmānsr?

J. de Menasce proposed to associate ayārdag with the Middle Persian verbs ayārdidān, “be agitated, seethe,” or ayārdēnīdan, “boil, agitate,”32 based on a metaphorical analogy that works perfectly in the case of xwastañ, “tread, trample,”33 which, when the object is a text, designates a mental exercise for making the text’s recitation more fluid.34

In an attempt to explain the Parthian title of Mani’s book Ārdhang and its “commentary,” Ārdhang wifrās (Sermon on the Ārdhang), conserved in a fragment, W. Sundermann suggested placing in parallel the first part of the word, ārd-, “torment, agitation,” and the Manichaean Middle Persian word ayārdan, which he connects to ancient Iranian *abi-ard-, “to be tormented, to suffer,”35 from which would derive the Middle Persian verb ayārdēnidan, “to boil.” Sundermann associated these forms with ayārdag,36 derived from the present stem of the verb ard-, which would signify “heated discussion, polemic.”37 Hence, Ārdhang and

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30- The expression frāz-gōwišn is in some instances synonymous with srūdan/srāyišn, “ritual recitation,” or “liturgical pronunciation,” and in other instances it is the equivalent of a “pedagogical” recitation without any ritual value. In this excerpt, the citation where it appears certainly comes from the Avesta, and the next phrase, introduced by kū, is the commentary on it, which is a good example demonstrating the nature of the zand.
31- A different translation is proposed by West 1892, p. 12.
34- For an analysis of this technical term for religious learning, see Azarnouche 2013b, p. 185-189.
35- Sundermann 2005, p. 378-381.
36- He became aware of this thanks to the note of Mo’in in Borhān-e Qāte’, which was drawn to his attention by François de Blois.
37- F. de Blois, apud Sundermann 2005, p. 380, echoing the idea already expressed by J. de Menasce.
ayārdag would share, according to Sundermann, the quality of being explanatory commentaries.38

This analysis, while interesting, encounters a few obstacles. The verb “to boil” is in all likelihood a semantic derivation of the base verb “to be in pain, to suffer” (for which the root would be *darH, i.e. *dl-eH1-, “to be in pain,” a root from which also derives Middle Iranian dard, “pain”). The semantic distribution is striking: The first sense is mainly attested in Zoroastrian Middle Persian texts (in the physical sense of the boiling of water and other liquids), while the second is only found in Manichaean Middle Persian texts (suffering of the soul, etc.). I would like to add three remarks to the previous one: 1. It is unlikely that Zoroastrian priests have chosen a term with such a negative connotation to designate a commentary of the Gāthās. 2. Even if the exegetes were in disagreement on interpretive points, their opinions are superimposed on one another without ever being presented as real debates or dialectical arguments that “bubble up.” 3. The verb ayārdan is intransitive; hence, the supposed derivation ayārdag should have a meaning closer to “boiled” or “painful.”

Another proposition – or rather a working hypothesis – would be to see here the common result of these two conditions, “boiling” and “suffering,” that is, the reduction of matter, its withdrawal, its retraction. This would be particularly well-suited for a “commentary” when it abbreviates the original text or presents an outline, just as Dēnkard IX does with regard to Waršmānsr nask. Would not Dēnkard IX.24-46 be the ayārdag of this nask, an “abridgment” which was available at the time of the author as in our own days, and to which Dēnkard VIII.3.3 makes an allusion?

Furthermore, another occurrence seems to support the sense of “abridgment, synthesis,” although it appears in a difficult passage of Dēnkard IV, on the rhetorical attitude to adopt during an interrogation at court. In this passage, it is recommended to submit the arguments of one’s opponents to an examination (abāz-pursīdan) which should be complete though concise (bowandag ud ayārdēnīdārīh, Dēnkard IV.9190), before settling on a decisive response.40

In conclusion, it is worth remembering that the triad wāzag ud zand ud ayārdag of Dēnkard VIII.3.3

38- When he wrote this article, W. Sundermann still denied the identity of the Ārdhang and the Hikōn, without however denying the existence of an illustrated Manichaean book, which would have had the title nigār, “image.” According to him, Ārdhang was used in Iranian in order to designate the Pragmateia, “Treaty.” However, the combined testimony of the ancient sources point to a unique book containing canonical images of the doctrine of Mani, and this book had the Parthian title Ārdhang. Regarding Ārdhang Wifrās, it appears that this was not, strictly speaking, a sermon, but a didactic tool or mnemonic device based on the canonical images of the Ārdhang, to be consulted while delivering a sermon (Gulāsci 2015, p. 8-9, 98-99). I thank Frantz Grenet for drawing my attention to the contribution of Zsuzsunna Gulāsci to this matter, which led Werner Sundermann to reconsider his position (and doubtless to abandon his etymological analysis), without having had time to put it in writing before his death in 2012.

39- The passage (Dēnkard IV.88-91) runs as follows: “88. The speech given in the presence of the lords (xwadāyān) can only be accepted if it is done concisely (ō hangirdīgīh handāxtan). 89. During the interrogation, the role of interpreter/respondent (wizārdārīh) falls on whoever speaks first. 90. He must attentively listen to the arguments and the responses and, in the midst of the debate, he must be able to identify the questions having only one response (wizārišn) and those requiring multiple responses. 91. Completely and concisely (bowandag ud ayārdēnīdārīh), in a comprehensible manner, he must examine (abāz-pursīdan) the words of his opponents (ham-pahikārān) (Dresden ed. 1966, p. 499 (B 333, l.1-16); Madan ed. 1911, vol. 1, p. 426, l. 4-23).

40- Another piece of evidence in favor of the sense “abridgment” can be found in Anquetil-Duperron (1780, p. 444, n.s.: Aïardah... fchareh Zand boud), citing Farhang-e Jahāngīrī. By reestablishing the correct vowels, one can read ayārdeh (afshoreh-ye zand bowad, “the ayārdeh is an abridgment of the zand,” afshoreh signifying “concentrate, extract, juice.” Unfortunately, we do not know what manuscript Anquetil-Duperron used, and this phrase is not found in the standard reference edition (Afifi ed. 1931/1972).
presents an interesting parallel with the three elements mentioned in Yasna 57.8, according to which the god Sraōša was the first to chant the Gāthās of Zarathuštra “linking the verses so that they form a stanza, joining the commentary with (objections and) replies” (afsmanīuuqan vacaštāštiuuaṭ maṭ.āzaintīš maṭ. paiti.frasā)⁴¹. The Pahlavi version, which gives abāg *gaišr, abāg wačast, ud abāg šnāsagīh ī zand, ud abāz-pursišnīhā (ī nērang) “with the verses and the Gāthic stanzas, with the knowledge of the zand and in the manner of an examination (concerning ritual prescriptions),”⁴² glosses the last word with reference to the questions-and-answers of priests in a ceremonial framework. The equation between “examination” and ayārdag suggests that, in other contexts, the latter could be interpreted as the “examination of the zand” and, later, as the zand of the zand, which Muslim authors of the 9th and 10th centuries eventually recorded as the third exegesis of the Avesta.

⁴¹-Kellens 2011, p. 84.
⁴²-Cf. Kreyenbroek 1984, p. 39: “with verse-lines and with verses, and with knowledge of the commentary and with a detailed examination (of the sacred formulas)."
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