

## 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*.

**O**n 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:

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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 *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 *Dēnkard* VIII, iii, 3 (Madan 680, 20), where it seems to be said that in the *Varštmanšr Nask* all the details of the Gāthic text are revealed, *vāc* [sic, *wāzag*], *zand u āyārtak*.

I have the impression that *āyārtak* is the *tafsīr* Asadi is talking about, the *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 *zand* both translation and gloss? Thus it would explain the relative rarity of the term *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, *Zoroastrian Problems in the Ninth Century Books*, p. 211, we find a note on the word *āyārtēnītak*, which is the Pahlavi translation of Avestan *yaēš-*, “to boil,” while in Manichaean *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 *xvaštan* (YPLH/tn in *Frhg.* 18,4; cf. Bartholomae, *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 *āyārtak* just as it has come down to us and as it is attested for us by Asadi and others. [...]²

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.<sup>3</sup> Although his magisterial work on the polemical treaty *Škand Gumānīg Wizār* (de Menasce 1945) had already appeared, he had not yet taken into account the encyclopedic heft of the *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

2- Translated from the French. A typed copy of this letter is preserved in the Jean de Menasce collection at the Institut 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, *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.<sup>4</sup>

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. Moʿīn 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.<sup>5</sup> The work which de Menasce had in his hands was none other than the thesis prepared by Moʿīn 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 had a role to play 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 are principally limited to recording of rare occurrences.

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

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 Tafazzoli 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.

5- Moʿīn 1338/1959, p. 205-206 ; Moʿīn 1960, p. 67-68 ; *Borhān-e Qāteʿ*, Moʿīn éd., vol. 1, 1376/1997 (6th ed.), p. 192, n. 3.

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’Avesta et tantôt le Khurda Avesta” (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.”

(11<sup>th</sup> c.), under the entry for the word *khordēh*, defined as “Commentary (*tafsīr*) on sections of the *pāzand*, (while) *ayārdeh* is commentary on the whole.”<sup>9</sup>

Under the entry *ayārdeh* in the same dictionary, one reads “The meaning (*ma’nī*) of the *pāzand*, being the explanation (*gozāreš*) of the *zand-aveštā*,”<sup>10</sup> 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 “*tafsīr*” or exegesis of the Avesta.

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 *khordēh* 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 *khordēh*, 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 *khordēh*, “piece, fragment, detail,” without any direct connection to the collection of texts of daily and private rituals that we know as the *Khordēh Avestā*, “the little Avesta.”<sup>11</sup>
3. If there is any basis for Khosravānī’s usage, *ayārdeh* would be linked to the *nasks*, the “books” of the Avesta, and would possess, like them, the ritual value of a liturgical text.
4. In the learned and poetic language of the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> 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 Avesta.

However, one must be careful not to give accord more importance to the *Loghat-e Fors* than it deserves, because Asadī, or, at least, the author of the Vatican manuscript,<sup>12</sup> had the strange idea to invert the meaning of *pāzand* and *aveštā*, as indicated by its definitions of the words *zand*, “commentary on the *pāzand*,” and *pāzand*, “the original book (*ašl-e ketāb*), of which the Avesta is the commentary (*gozāreš*).”<sup>13</sup> This inversion certainly did not escape 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,

9- *Loghat-e Fors*, Eqbāl ed. 1319/1940, p. 486 ; Horn ed. 1879, p. 26. Note that the terms studied here are all, except *zand*, absent from the Lahore manuscript (Mojtabāyī ; Sādeqī ed. 1365/1986).

10- *Loghat-e Fors*, Eqbāl ed. 1319/1940, p. 475; the Vatican manuscript gives “nature (*čegunegī*) 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’in 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 *ardāvīrāf* before recognizing that the obscure definitions of Asadī were incomprehensible.

12- Containing additions, including some that are certainly later than the time of Asadī, this manuscript is not considered identical to the original dictionary, as explained by Eqbāl (*Loghat-e Fors*, Eqbāl ed. 1319/1940, p. yv-yh).

13- *Loghat-e Fors*, Eqbāl ed. 1319/1940, p. 100 ; Horn 1879, p. 29, fol. 18r.

*bārdah/bārzah/yārdah/yāzdah* and *akardeh* (يارده، اکرده). 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 10<sup>th</sup> century, Abū 'l-Ḥasan 'Alī al-Mas'ūdī, namely the *Murūj al-dhahab wa ma'ādin al-jawhar* (*Meadows of Gold and Mines of Gems*) and his very last work, *Kitāb al-tanbīh wa 'l-išrāf* (*Book of Admonition and Revision*), dated to about 955<sup>14</sup>.

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

§ 548. The alphabet of the book revealed by Zoroaster 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 Zoroaster 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 (Dârâ b. Dârâ), consigned to the flames a large portion of this work. Later, when, succeeding the leaders of the satrapies, Ardashir, son of Bâbek, ascended the throne, he imposed on the Persians the reading of one of the chapters [*surat*] that he called Vendîdād [or Aštād]<sup>15</sup>. Even today, the Mazdeans confine themselves to recite this chapter.

§ 549. Regarding the original book, it has the name of Avestā [*Bastāh*]. Seeing that the faithful were incapable of understanding it, Zoroaster 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 Ayārdah

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 Yašts on account of their late character compared to other texts of the Avesta. 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 8<sup>th</sup> century, concerning documents which, according to the author, were partially destroyed and dispersed by Alexander" (al-Mas'ūdī, *Kitāb al-tanbīh 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- "Vendîdād" is the correction proposed by Charles Pellat (al-Mas'ūdī, *Les prairies d'or*, trans., revised, and corrected by Ch. Pellat, vol. 1, p. 204, §548, n. 3), who admits to having forced the reading of the manuscripts. It should not be retained because the Cairo manuscript ('Abd al-Hamīd éd., vol. 1, 1377H./1958, p. 230) gives a form similar to *asnād* (استناد), 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-Mas'ūdī mentions the text again in his *Kitāb al-tanbīh* (see below). One problem which remains is why the name of this Yašt which, in the extant text of the Avesta, comprises only a few passages taken from other Yašts, was recorded by al-Mas'ūdī.

(*Yārdah*). [...] <sup>16</sup>

The notice found in the work that al-Mas'ūdī finished just before his death completes the preceding one on several points:

[Zoroaster] brought to the king [Wištāsp] the book of the Avesta, the name of which received a final *kāf* in Arabic and became el-Abeštāk.<sup>17</sup> 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. Zoroaster invented this script that the Magi call Dīn Debīreh, 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 ?], Abān-Yasht [or Bayān Yašt ?],<sup>18</sup> Hādūkht, and other chapters. In Djitracht one finds the stories about the beginning and the end of the world; Hādūkht contains exhortations. Zoroaster made a commentary [*šarḥ<sup>an</sup>*] 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-fahlawīyya*] into Persian. Furthermore, Zoroaster made a commentary [*šarḥ<sup>an</sup>*] to the Zend and called it Bāzend (Pāzend). The *mobeds* and the *hirbeds* versed in the lore of the religion commented, in turn, on this commentary, and their work was called Bārideh [*ayārdeh*] and, by others, Akardeh [*kardeh* ?].<sup>19</sup> Alexander burned it after he conquered the Persian Empire and put to death Darius

16- al-Mas'ūdī, *Les prairies d'or*, trans., revised, and corrected by Ch. Pellat, vol. 1, p. 203-204, § 548-549 (the words in [ ] are my additions). Pellat says to adopt the reading *ayārdah* proposed by Mo'in (1960, p. 67). One can note that the loss of the initial *alef* is analogous to that of *Avestā*, here spelled *Bastāh*. A summary of this passage on the triad *aveštā*, *zand*, its commentary, and *pāzand*, a gloss on this commentary – but without any mention of *ayārdeh* – appears a little farther in the work (p. 222, § 594), where al-Mas'ūdī 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* (بارده) (Abd al-Ḥamīd ed., 1377H./1958, vol. 1, p. 230; 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-Mas'ūdī, *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 Hādōxt is well-attested in Middle Persian sources, notably in *Husraw ī Kawādān ud rēdag-ē* § 9, where they are described as two of the texts that Zoroastrians 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 *khordēh* (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. r). We could add to this last point a subtle graphic parallel between *\*yārdeh* and *pāza(n)d* which could have influenced or confused the copyists. As for *akardeh*, without entering into the details, Mo'in (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 *y* was taken for a *k*, leading to *\*akardag* (*'kltk*). Against this hypothesis is the fact that it is generally the reverse which occurs (*k* is read as *y*) 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 Zoroastrian 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-Mas'ūdī based his report on a written source rather than an oral one.

son of Darius [Dâra b. Dâra].<sup>20</sup>

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 *pāzand*) 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-Nadīm – and a theme that al-Mas‘ūdī 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, *pāzand*, but the language and the nature of the book are passed over in silence;<sup>21</sup> 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 (*ayārdeh* for some, *akardeh* for others).

Mo‘īn is probably right to see in *akardeh* an alternate form of *kardeh* (Middle Persian *kardag*, “division, chapter”),<sup>22</sup> 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 *pāzand* 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 6<sup>th</sup> 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.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, laymen would have learned the Avestan prayers and doctrines derived from the

20- al-Mas‘ūdī, *Le Livre de l'avertissement et de la révision*, B. Carra de Vaux trans., 1896, p. 131-133.

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

21- According to the traditional description, *pāzand* 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, *pāzand* 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).

22- Mo‘īn 1338/1959, p. 205; 1960, p. 68.

23- Cf. *Dēnkard* VI.254 (Shaked 1979, p. 98-99): *zand pad šabestān čāšišn*, “Teach the *zand* in the household” (that is, school-age children must receive their initiation in the intimacy of the home; *šabestān*, lit. “harem, women’s quarter,” also housed the children); *Zand ī Wahman Yasn* II.3: *bē pad paywand ī asmā zand ma čāšēd*, “do not teach the *zand* outside your offspring” (Cereti 1995, p. 134, 150); *Zand ī Wahman Yasn* IV.67: *ēdōn guft ohrmazd ō spitāmān zarduxšt kū be xwāh <ud> warm be kun pad zand <ud> pāzand wizārišn be čāš ō hērbedān ud hāwištān gōw*, “Thus spoke Ohrmazd to Zoroaster: Recite (fluidly) and memorize (the Avesta), teach (its) commentaries in *zand* and *pāzand*, transmit them to the priest-teachers and to (their) disciples” (Cereti 1995, p. 139, 158, with modifications).

*zand*—but not the *zand* itself—which were adapted for any given situation.

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 *ašt kē ēdōn gōwēd*, “There is another (commentator) who says (this)...”<sup>24</sup> 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 Ērān-šahr, here identified as Ērān-wēz, and the plagues Ahriman inflicts 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 *Widēwdād*), but sometimes adds a third interpretative 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 *Widēwdād* 1—no more recognized as the far away countries of Central Asia—as provinces included within Sasanian Ērān-šahr (for example, Mesopotamia, Adurbādagān, 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 *Widēwdād* 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” (*Gāum yim suydō.šaiianəm*, m.p. *Gayā ī Sūlīg-mānišn* (*ay dašt ī Sūlīg-mānišnih*)), where the author of *Bundahišn* 31.6 adopts the textual gloss *dašt ī Sūrīg-mānišnih*, “the plain inhabited by the Sūrīg,” and adds a paraphrase of this gloss, followed by another gloss: *kū-š Sūrīg padiš mēnēnd ī ašt Baydād ī bayān-dād*, “where the Sūrīg dwell, that is, Baghdad, created by the gods,” which indicates that the exegete interpreted the name Sūrīg as referring to the inhabitants of the ancient *Āsōristān* (hence *Sūrīg* instead of *Sūlīg*), where one finds, after its foundation in the year 762, the city of Baghdad.

By the same principle, the Avestan Arachosia of *Widēwdād* 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”

24- On the translation and exegesis of the Avesta, notably the grammatical and lexical aspects and the different types of borrowing, see Cantera 2004, p. 240-341. The author clearly distinguishes between gloss and commentary, and when the latter exceeds 100 words, he designates it an “excursus” (see p. 244-268).

(*nasā-nigānih wēš kunēnd*), a coded reference to the Christian practice abhorred by Zoroastrianism. The Avestan toponym, *upa aodaēšu rayhayā*, “above the springs of Rayhā” (*Widēwdād* 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.”<sup>25</sup> 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)<sup>26</sup> or else as the occasional translator.<sup>27</sup> 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’wīl*) 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.”<sup>28</sup>

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) *waršt mānsr mādayān abar zāyišn ī Zarduxšt ud madan ī-š ō dēn <ud> čē andar ham-dar* (3.2) *ud \*mādag (?) hērbēdih ud hāwištih ud ahūih ud radih ud āstawānih ī pad-iš*

25- Monnot 1974, p. 78.

26- Ibn al-Nadīm, Tajaddod trans. 1343/1965, p. 21.

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.

*hamišť hangirdīgtar gōwišn ī gāhān (3.3) abar harw čiš wāzag ud zand ud ayārdag-iz čiyōn ān ī gōwēd kū warštmānsr (3.4) kē pad harwisp frāz-gōwišnīh frāz dād estēd kū harw čē pad gāhān guft estēd ā-š pad warštmānsr čiš abar gōwēd<sup>29</sup>.*

(3.1) 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<sup>30</sup> such that for everything which is recorded in the Gāthās, the *Warštmānsr* says something about it.<sup>31</sup>

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 *ayārdīdan*, “be agitated, seethe,” or *ayārdēnīdan*, “boil, agitate,”<sup>32</sup> based on a metaphorical analogy that works perfectly in the case of *xwaštan*, “tread, trample,”<sup>33</sup> which, when the object is a text, designates a mental exercise for making the text’s recitation more fluid.<sup>34</sup>

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,”<sup>35</sup> from which would derive the Middle Persian verb *ayārdēnīdan*, “to boil.” Sundermann associated these forms with *ayārdag*,<sup>36</sup> derived from the present stem of the verb *ard-*, which would signify “heated discussion, polemic.”<sup>37</sup> Hence, *Ārdhang* and

29- Dresden ed. 1966, p. 302 (B 529, l. 7-12); Madan ed. 1911, vol. 2, p. 680, l. 17-681 l. 1.

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.

32- MacKenzie 1986, p. 15.

33- MacKenzie 1986, p. 96.

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.<sup>38</sup>

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-eHr-*, “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 *Waršt mānsr 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 ayārdēnīdārīhā*, *Dēnkard* IV.91<sup>39</sup>), before settling on a decisive response.<sup>40</sup>

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 *niqār*, “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 hangirdīgih 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 (*wizārīšn*) and those requiring multiple responses. 91. Completely and concisely (*bowandag ud ayārdēnīdārīhā*), 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. 4-20).

40- Another piece of evidence in favor of the sense “abridgment” can be found in Anquetil-Duperron (1780, p. 444, n. s: *Aīardah... fchareh Zand boud*), citing *Farhang-e Jahāngirī*. By reestablishing the correct vowels, one can read *ayārdeh* (*a*)*fshoreh-ye zand bovad*, “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. 1351/1972).

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” (*afsmāniuuqŕ vacaštaštiiuuqŕ maṭ.āzaiŕtiš maṭ. paiti.frasā*)<sup>41</sup>. The Pahlavi version, which gives *abāg \*gaiθr; abāg wačast, ud abāg šnāsaḡih īzand, 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),”<sup>42</sup> 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 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries eventually recorded as the third exegesis of the Avesta.

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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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