Hanns-Peter Schmidt (1930-2017) Gedenkschrift
xšnaošrahe ahurahe mazdā

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

## Notes

1. Samra Azarnouche: A Third Exegesis of the Avešta? New Observations on the Middle Persian Word *ayārdag*  
   
2. Alberto Cantera: Textual performative variation in the Long Liturgy: the ceremonies of the last ten days of the year  
   
3. Touraj Daryaei: Karəsəspā's Wet Dreams  
   
   
5. William W. Malandra: Artaxerxes' ‘paradise’  
   
6. Antonio Panaino: Temper and self-control in the Persian King’s ideal Portrait  
   
7. Antonio Panaino: The Aveštan Prieštly College and its Instillation  
   
8. Daniel T. Potts: Arboriculture in ancient Iran: Walnut (Juglans regia), plane (Platanus orientalis) and the “Radde dictum”  
   
9. Nicholas Sims-Williams: A Newly Identified Sogdian Fragment from the Legend of Saint George  
   
10. Martin Schwart: A Preliterate Acrostic in the Gathas: Crosstextual and Compositional Evidence  
   
11. Daštur Firoze M. Kotwal: The Zoroastrian Nirangdin Ritual and an Old Pahlavi Text with Transcription  
   
12. Michael Witzel: (On) The reimport of Veda traditions to Kashmir in the early 15th century  
   
   
   
15. Velizar Sadowski: Nominalkomposita, Neowurzelbildungen und zugrundeliegende syntaktische Konstruktionen im Veda und dem Avešta
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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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The Avestan Priestly College and its Installation

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The ceremonies dedicated to the installation of the priestly college have not received in past studies a special attention and the focus on them is a new phenomenon in our studies. In this framework, very important and extremely worth of investigation is Vr. 3,1, which concerns the liturgical installation of the seven assistant priests, whose presence was indispensable only in solemn ritual, while during the standard performance of the Yasna their number was limited to only two priests, the zaotar- and his main assistant. In this passage, the complete group is installed, according to the ritual functions attributed to each one of

1- Long ago I started to discuss the problem of the priestly installation of the seven assistant priests in the framework of the Mazdean ritual, in close connection with the Indo-Iranian and Vedic ceremonial dimension, and with close regard for the theological symbolism strictly connected with the correspondences between priests and divinities appearing in the course of the “sacrifice”. These subjects have been anticipated and presented in a number of lectures (in particular in Wien and Berlin) and papers, two of which should appear in Wien in the prestigious series of the Veröffentlichungen für Iranistik published by the Institut für Iranistik of the Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften (see Panaino in the press a, and b). The present article anticipates some discoveries that will be published there, proposing some additional considerations that I have developed in these years on the same subject.

2- Cf. Darmesteter 1892, I: LXX- LXXII, 452-454.
the seven assistant priests involved in the course of the following solemn liturgy:

(zōτ̰) hāuuanānäm āstāiiia  "I install the hāuuanān- (the Pressing-(haoma)-priest)."
(rāspī) azom visāi  "I am ready!"
(zōτ̰) ātrauuaxšəm āstāiiia  "I install the ātrauuaxša- (the Fire-lighting priest)."
(rāspī) azom visāi  "I am ready!"
(zōτ̰) fraborətarəm āstāiiia  "I install the fraborətar- (the Presenting priest)."
(rāspī) azom visāi  "I am ready!"
(zōτ̰) ābərətəm āstāiiia  "I install the ābərət- (the Bringing priest)."
(rāspī) azom visāi  "I am ready!"
(zōτ̰) āsnatārəm āstāiiia  "I install the āsnatār- (the Washer priest)."
(rāspī) azom visāi  "I am ready!"
(zōτ̰) raēϑβiškarəm āstāiiia  "I install the raēϑβiškara- (the Mingler priest)."
(rāspī) azom visāi  "I am ready!"
(zō) sraošāuuarəzəm āstāiiia  "I install the most talented having the most correct words
dqhiştəm aršuuacstəməm sraošāuuarəza- (the Auditing priest)."
(rāspī) azom visāi  "I am ready!"

The use of the thematic (causative) present (stāiiia-) without ending for the root stā with ā- deserves to be emphasized here; I must also underline that it is attested als in Y. 13.3, where we find another installation formula:

mazištāiš vaēdiiaiš daēnaiiš māzdaiiasnōiš aθaurunō [ratūmä ōmruiiē]
cašānçača aēšąmcī ratūš ōmruiiē
ratūš āstāiia mašāsascā spooŋtq saošiiantascā dqhiştq aršuuacstəməq
aǰīuāmatəm q.šrax’aanumq
mazištq amq ōmruiiē daēnaiiš māzdaiiasnōiš aθaurunqascā raθaēštəscā vāstrīqscā fsuiaŋtō.

"In agreement with the best knowledge of the Mazdean daēnā- I declare the aθaruuan-Priests and those who teach to be the best model(s), and I install as (their) models both the Beneficial Immortals and the gifted Benefit-Providers possessing the (perfect recitation of the) most correct speech extremely strong and most exciting. I declare the aθaruuan-Priests, the Charioteers, and the Husbandmen as the greatest forces of the Mazdean daēnā.-"

4- As recently shown by CANTERA (2016) the presence of the complete college of eight priests was required only in the "solemn" ceremonies.
5- The present article belongs to a wider research project, dedicated to the different priestly functions in the Avestan liturgies and their relations with the pantheon.
6- Cf. KELLENS 1984: 142, 147, n. 4ο.
7- Later interpolation, to be deleted according to KELLENS 2007: 139. I propose to delete also āmruiiē.
Kellens has already remarked that in all the occurrences attested in Vr. 3.1-4, āstāīia, as a thematic present (without ending) of the causative of stā,9 can be both indicative or subjunctive. It seems to have assumed an indirect reflexive value, which, according to Kellens,10 can be translated as follows:

Vr. 3.4: āθrauuanom āstāīia “j’installe le pretre à sa place”

and

Yt. 10.89: yim zaotārom stāiiaata ahurō “lui que Ahura a installe comme son zaotar”.

I would like also to insist on the fact that RENOU11 already stressed the function of the causative stem sthāpay- in Sanskrit with the very pertinent meaning of “appoşier à telle fonction”, very close to the present Avestan usage. Furthermore, JAMISON12 remarks that ā sthāpayati-te in the R̥ gveda and Atharvaveda essentially mean “makes mount, stand” in opposition to the intransitive ā tīṣṭhati “mounts, stand”, but in spite of the fact that four forms are medial, the “underlying voice of the formation was certainly active”.

For its importance I must quote also a brief passage embedded in the Avestan Nērangestān 47.19,13 where a very remarkable reference to the liturgical installation of a priest, named pasuuāzah-, i.e. “the (one) who leads the animal (to the sacrifice)”, specifically charged of the technical performance of the act through which the sacrificial animal was put to sleep:

pasuuāzahom āstāīia
“I install the (priest)-leading the animal (to the sacrifice)”

This short reference is so dense of implications that I dedicated a single article to it,14 and it is only for this reason that such an interesting subject will not be fully developed here. In this article I would simply like to insist on the fact that this additional occurrence confirms the standardization of the formula, and shows that even the priest responsible for the act of killing the sacrificial animal received a specific installation, although it is not clear if it was performed in connection with the passage of Vr.3, or if the official installation was practiced only in proximity of the sacrifice itself (i.e. during the recitation of the Yasna Haptaŋhāiti).15 If the first solution is the correct one, we could suppose that the omission of this priest was due to the fact that only when the ceremony included an animal sacrifice the pasuuāzah- was installed, and then that this part was movable. Of course, this explanation can be accepted only of we suppose that the pasuuāzah- was

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8- 1984: 201.1.1.2.3, in note.
10- Cf. Kellens 1984: 30. § 3.1; 58. § 4.3.1; 71. § 4.4.1; 144. § 6.1.1., 147, n. 40. In Avestan the medial forms of ā-stāīia- and paiti-stāīia- can also have a reflexive value.
11- 1996: 310. § 223c.
14- See Panaino 2017c.
an independent priest, and not one of the already installed seven assistants.

Another point to be underlined before to continue concerns the presence, fittingly identified by Cantera, of a ritual of disinstallation for the seven priests or — more properly —, as suggested by the present author, of “deactivation” of the ritual college, to be performed in correspondence of the recitation of Yasna 58.4-8. What results really embarrassing emerges from the peculiar evidence that this ceremony, based on the principle of an internal recursivity of certain performative actions, was prescribed in the course of the Yasna, and not in the Vispered, exactly as the necessary corresponding element of the initial installation. Also this problem has been discussed elsewhere, although it must be considered in the ideal “economy” of the ritual philosophy hidden behind the Mazdean liturgy.

At this point we can come back to the Vispered and in particular to the Pahlavi version of 3.1:

zōt gōwēd zand ēn
kū hāwānīh ēstēn
rāspīg gōwēd zand ēn kū
ā-m padīrift
zōt gōwēd zand ēn kū
ādurwaxšīh ēstēn
rāspīg ā-m padīrift
zōt gōwēd āburdīh ēstēn
rāspīg ā-m padīrift
zōt gōwēd āsnadārīh ēstēn
rāspīg ā-m padīrift
zōt gōwēd rehwīškarīh ēstēn
rāspīg ā-m padīrift
dānaqtom rāst-gōwišntom
rāspīg ā-m padīrift.

“The zōt says, (and) the explication is this that:
‘Let me install the hāwān-function.’
‘The rāspīg says, (and) the explication is this that:
‘I accept!’
‘Let me install the ādurwaxš-function.’
‘The rāspīg: ‘I accept!’
‘Let me install the āburd-function.’
‘The rāspīg: ‘I accept!’
‘Let me install the āsnadār-function.’
‘The rāspīg: ‘I accept!’
‘Let me install the rehwīškar-function.’
‘The rāspīg: ‘I accept!’
‘The wisest one having the most correct words.’
‘The rāspīg: ‘I accept!’”

On this version too we find the full list of the seven assistants. It is clear that the present ceremony contains a number of crucial evidences and hidden problems. One of them concerns the fact that in the modern ritual performance the text presents a simple bipartition of the sacerdotal roles, currently played by only two priests, the zōt and the rāspīg, as also indicated in the standard edition by Geldner. This reduction was certainly the fruit of a later phenomenon, and does not reflect the original situation for the most solemn

17- See Panaino 2017b.
18- See again Panaino 2017b. Cf. also Panaino 2017a with regard to the problems connected with the conclusion of the liturgy.
19- Dhabhar 1949: 300.
Mazdean ceremonies. A second problem involves the fact that the installation does not take place exactly at the beginning of the ritual, i.e. already during the first chapters of the Yasna itself, but that it occurs in the course of it, although by means of an intercalation belonging to the Vispered. Thus, we must reconstruct the actual dynamic of this ceremony, and the main reasons for this apparently peculiar sequence. Third, as we will demonstrate, it is very improbable that the zaotar- could be always involved as the official installer of that new sacerdotal collegium.

Kellens, who has recently dealt with the intercalation of Vr. 3 and 4 (but also of Vr. 5 and 6), rightly notes that the recitation of Vr. 3.1-5 occurs when the performance of the Hōm Stōm was not yet finished, i.e. between Y. 11, 82 and 9, while that of Vr. 4.1-2 between Y. 11,15 and 16, after Vasasca. He fittingly remarks that the “locuteur” is not clearly specified, although the later manuscripts state that the installation formula should be recited by the zaotar- himself. On the other hand, it is right to question whether this later statement exactly represents the original state of facts, or if it is simply the result of a change, after the already mentioned reduction of the original priestly staff. Then, the focus placed by Kellens on the importance attributed to the last one of the seven priests, the sraošāwarz, who, in fact, is denominates dahištəm aršuuacastəm “the most talented having the most correct words”. This particular emphasis could suggest that it is he himself the one who was originally speaking and who installed the others, and not the zaotar-.

Although the special ritual position assumed by the sraošāwarz- cannot be treated in this occasion, we must observe that Kellens’ proposal raises serious problems and deserves a deep consideration. A pertinent datum may be taken from a statement contained in the Nērangestān 28,41, where it is affirmed that if the zōt does not recite hāuuanānəm āstāiia, it means that the service will not include the kardas belonging to the Vispered or the Bagān Yašt. The same passage presents also the case in which the rāspīg omits by mistake the answer (azəm vīsāi). In that case, the ritual is considered a “lesser service”, and the priest is practically disqualified. We must also remark that Cantera has fittingly observed that the full college of eight priests was compellingly required only in the framework of the “solemn liturgy”, while, as far as it can be deduced from the systematic analysis of the formulas for “taking the wāž” as they appear in the ritual mss, their presence was not at all prescribed in the simpler Yasna liturgy, where just two of them were

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20- We must insist on the fact that also in ancient times it was possible to perform other ceremonies with just two priests, or also with one single priest. Then, the reduction of the number of the priests was de facto a sort of diminutio of level in the prestige and importance of the ceremony, although they were still considered “solemn”.


22- See also Modi 1937: 331.

23- Kellens, ibidem.

24- Kellens, ibidem.

25- The moral importance attributed to the srošəwarz is confirmed in Dēnkard VII, 8, 20, where, in the framework of an apocalyptic contest, after the collapse of the Religion occurred with the fall of the Sasanian Empire, these priests, although guardsians of the faith, will pervert the poor people, who had still preserved right judgments; see Molé 1967: 84-85. A special whip was used by the srošəwarz for castigation; for this reason, he was also named srəsočarnām. See the The Supplementary Texts to the Šāyest n-Ša Yešt, XI, 1-2; XIII, 2; XVI, 5; cf. Kotwal 1969: 22-23, 40-41, 68-69; Kapadia 1953: 122.


28- See Cantera (2016), who demonstrates that the formulas for “taking of the wāž” in Pahlavi wāž girišnīh (i.e. “the taking of the word”) were mostly connected with a change of priest in the liturgical recitation or, most simply, as a change of reciter. I thank Prof. Alberto Cantera for his kindness in putting at my disposal his researches before their definitive publication. For a description of the wāž see Boyce – Kotwal (1971a, and 1971b).
necessary, or in the minor ceremonies, where only one priest might perform his ritual obligations (as it has been previously remarked).

Unfortunately, only four different priests are explicitly mentioned in these formulas (zaotar-, ātrawaxša-, sraošāuuarəza-, and fraboratar-) and, among them, the sraošāuuarəza- and fraboratar- just once each, while, apart from the fundamental zaotar-, it is the ātrawaxša-, who seems to play a very prominent role. I think that CANTERA is certainly right when he presumes that the ritual formulas still preserved in the Av. mss reflect a certain conservatism (as, for instance even in the case of the recitation performed by only two priests, which was known also in the Vedic context), but our confidence in their witness must be tempered by the consideration that, in any case, this is a fundamental material only for a partial reconstruction of the Sasanian liturgy, but still less for a determination of the earlier phases of the Avešan liturgy, in particular if we consider the inevitable phenomena connected with the process of modernization of the Mazdean ceremonies, but also with the inner traditions of the different priestly schools. For instance, the apparently minor importance attributed to the sraošāuuarəza- in the wāž formulary results peculiar, if we think that this priest had fundamental functions and that he also assumed a symbolic prominent role, as representative of the god Sraoša, in his nocturnal protective action, which was extremely significant for the solemn nocturnal liturgies including the intercalation of the Widēwādād chapters. Furthermore, we must observe that the sraošāuuarəza- had a very remarkable role in the Central Asian iconography, where his representations as a winged-priest or bird-priest play a very important symbolic function with direct connection to ritual performances in support of the souls of the death.

Furthermore, it is difficult to be too much confident in these later traditions, in particular with respect to a theoretical reconstruction of the earlier organization of the liturgy, where “earlier” is explicitly referred to the Old Iranian period, in particular to the period in which the fusion of the Old and Later Avešan ritual (and linguistic) traditions was actually realized. In any case, we must also suspect that explicit warnings like the one just mentioned before and concerning the unexpected absence of a priest or even his sudden sleep probably preserve a far memory of a period in which the priestly collegium was actually larger, and the zaotar- himself had his own specialized functions, but not the overwhelming role assumed after the radical reduction of the full staff to only two priests. In other words, the potential mistake committed by the zaotar- could be better understood, if we suppose that, in earlier times, he was not necessarily the unique person in charge of the recitation of the installation formula, or supposing that in certain circumstances this was not his own exclusive duty. On the other hand, it is not clear how the sraošāuuarəza- could install the other priests if he himself had not yet been installed. In other terms, the problem put here in evidence with reference to the case of the zaotar- (who is not mentioned, but whose active role as “installer” has been traditionally presumed) will appear also for this assistant priest as for the other ones. In fact, we should suppose that at a certain point the sraošāuuarəza- installed himself, a solution which would be very peculiar.

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30- See PANAINO (2014-15, with a large bibliography on the subject).
31- I still want to insist that these remarks are not at all a criticism against CANTERA’s researches, which result fundamental for a definitive re-evaluation of the Mazdean liturgy, but they must be framed in my interest for a determination of a new theory of the Avešan ritual and the original symbolic functions of the priestly college. Thus, inevitably my focus goes to the earliest stages of this tradition.
in that way, and which I cannot subscribe at all, unless we do not admit that this or any other priest (then, a zaatar- too) was already installed in the previous ritual, so that he was ready to take part to the starting phases of a new solemn ceremony, as it will better be explained later.

The unclear attribution of the installation’s formula, in fact, would be resolved if we could suppose the presence of another person, working, for instance, like (but not identical to him, because the functions of this figure cannot be sharply devised into the Avestan sources) the Vedic yájamánā-, who selects the priests and “names the deity who performs the ritual function in the divine realm, and then chooses the human in front of him as the human counterpart”. The whole problem should be treated again in the framework of the chronology of the ritual štrata, but now we cannot avoid to note that the insertion of the intercalation of Vr. 3-4 practically establishes that only from this very point of the ritual onward the presence of the complete college was apparently felt necessary (at least in the solemn liturgies), and that this evidence could reveal a juncture between an old ritual and a new one.

This statement should be understood in two ways:

1) in a technical sense, as the re-unification of a preceding ritual, in which the parahtaoma- has been already prepared, but not yet consumed, with the new or incoming liturgy, and,

2) in an historical sense, as the reflex of a point of juncture between different traditions (and, perhaps, also chronologically or geographically different dialects).

The latter suspicion would be strongly confirmed, if one accepts the idea that at least part of Vr. 3, and particularly of Vr. 3,1, were composed in a Middle Avestan dialect.

A prudent solution can be proposed by suggesting that the ritual, taken in its perfect model (which means that this ideal performance could suffer adaptations or varieties due to practical reasons), was actually enacted by two different groups of priests, one who was previously installed, and which is going to finish its ritual job, the second entering in action before the second ingestion of the haoma-. This situation could be compared to a sort of ritual chain, in which the yasna- and the haoma- pressures never stop, but in which one priestly staff consumes what has been prepared by a previous sacerdotal équipe, and prepares the parahtaoma- necessary for the following ritual. This proposal is based on the simple idea that the image of the “perfect ritual” (which should have been necessarily a “solemn” one) was fundamental in the ritual ideology of the Old Iranian priests. This model, in its highest efficiency and sublime harmony in form, time and functions, maintained the cosmic order, so that it cannot really have any interruption. As the world does

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32- The supposition of an auto-installation would require a complex explanatory ritual background, for which I do not see any reasonable piece of evidence.
34- It is also to be considered that other ritual installations were possible and necessary, as for instance, that concerning the priest selected to be the slaughter in the sacrificial animal. Of this ritual we still possess a brief mention in N.47,19, where the sentence pasuudzanghom āštūita “I (ritually) install (the priest) who must lead the sacrificial animal” is attested. See Cantera 2015: 255-257, and Panaino (2017c); cf. Kotwal – Kreyenbroek 2003: 208-210; Darmesteter 1893, II: 122.
36- In the rituals of the Maga and Bhojaka priests of India homa- and parahoma- are frequently mentioned. The main problems concern the relations of this priestly group with the Maga Brāhmaṇas and the date of their presence in India. See Humbach 1978: 249. Cf. von Stietencron 1966: 204, 255, 257, 264, 277, 282.
not stop, so the ritual must go on. This possibility, which, in my opinion, is the best from the liturgical point of view, presupposes a large number of priests, as we can presume for periods in which Mazdeism had a strong community and a secular power, but which was probably current only in the most important temples, and not everywhere. The difficulty in the identification of the installer could be resolved with the supposition that (at least) the zaotar—leading the passed yasna—and his assistants did not abandon the temple, so that they (or some of them) had to remain in a state of absolute purity and liturgical fittingness, waiting for the next sacrifice, which was opened by them, until the “new” (i.e. entering) collegium was installed. This scenario does not exclude other variants, as, for instance, the participation of another priest (in his turn, previously installed during another ritual) working as a sort of yazəmna—representing the sponsor of the ritual, but such an alternative explanation does not compel us to postulate the presence of this additional person in every situation.

Thus, while we leave out for a moment the general problem of the origin and development of this ritual, it is necessary to consider that in Vr. 3.2, also the social classes or the social circles are installed, while in Vr. 3.3, it is the turn of young man, who rightly follows the religious duties, and the lady of the home; in Vr. 3.4, inversely the right woman and the right man, who knows the frauuarānē but not the kaiiaša, are installed. KELLENS, in my opinion, correctly notes that the attributes used in Vr. 3.3 for the man and the lady correspond to those attested in the afterlife framework, and these evidences show the speculative atmosphere of the ritual activity, in which all the persons formally involved in it are imagined to enter another dimension, in which they are (temporarily, i.e. liturgically) transferred to another state, free from the mixture of the living reality.

Again, KELLENS states that in Vr. 3.4, the reference is to the “sacrifiant commanditaire et son épouse”, which, I presume, would be as the yazəmna—and his wife (if or when they were actually present). If this were true, we could suppose that, in these occasions, it was this person (of course, if qualified or a qualified substitute) to perform the installation, and, then, only after Vr. 3.1, the speech was given to the already installed sraošauuarəza—or to the (new installed) zaotar. According to this variety, if it is correct, the “sacrifiant commanditaire” would act, on a formal level, as the one who must choose his priests for the ritual. In Vr. 3.5, all the ratus, the “models”, are installed, so that they correspond to the Aməštə Spəṇtas. The performer (of the recitation) is no more one, at least if we give credit to the verb at the plural here systematically used (āmrūmaide [twice], āstāiiamaide), so that we can guess if this (second and general) installation was performed by the seven priests themselves or by a group of assistants like the upa.sraotar-s, who, contrariwise, are not expressly mentioned here, but which will be priests and assistant priests belonging to the staff involved during the earlier ritual and not yet dismissed.

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37- I will never stop to recall the we must not forget a crude sense of the reality, so that, while we postulate the necessary reconstruction of theoretical or abstract models, we must simply take into consideration the accidents of reality or the existence of practical problems due to an extraordinary high number of variables.


40- This is a very simple option, because it implies that the installer-priest (a zaotar—, an ātrauuaxša— or the sraošauuarəza—), had been appointed by a sponsor in order to lead the new ceremony.
Vr. 3,5: “Then, we designate as your models we install as models (of you), [whoever among the Mazdeans], the Aməṣˇa Spəṇtas and the Saošiiaṇts the most expert performers of the formulas in a right manner, the strongest and the most exciting (?)

We designate (and we install) the priests, the warriors and the husbandmen as the greatest forces of the Daēnā Māzdaiiasni”.

It is remarkable that the “models” (ratuš) of all the Mazdeans, but in particular of those persons involved in the ritual, are the Aməṣˇa Spəṇtas. I think that this reference is not simply a generic reference to all the social circles, which are mentioned in the second part of this passage, but that such a special declaration contains a direct reference also to six of the assistant priests, while the zaotar- and the sraošaaurəza- respectively correspond to Ahura Mazdā and Sraoša. Thus, the (eight) priests, in my opinion, corresponded on the divine dimension to the Aməṣˇa Spəṇtas, Sraoša and Ahura Mazdā, but on the human level they assumed the role of the Saošiiaṇts as well. In this case, the actual reciters of Vr. 3,5 could correspond to both these priests and the yazomna- (and/or the earlier zaotar-).

At this point Vr. 3,6 starts. This passage is practically identical (with minor changes) with Y. 11,16b, but in this case, it is also the ātrauuaxša-, and not only the zaotar-, he who speaks. The antiphonal exchange of formulas between these two priests ends with the definitive and solemn investiture (pronounced by the ātrauuaxša-) of the zaotar-, who finally accepts the responsibility of the recitation and of the sacrifice.

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42- Note that later traditions try to offer an enumeration of the thirty-three ratuš mentioned in the first chapter of the Yasna in connection with the different implements there used; see Desai 1914.
43- See Panaino (in the press, a and b).
44- Cf. Pirart 2006a: 76-77, n. 28; 2006b: 112, n. 34.
45- On this formula, see again the fundamental remarks recently advanced by Cantera (2016).
46- For the analysis of the text see Kellens (2007: 128-129, 131), whose interpretation I have followed in its main lines.
(6) “Let the wise pious ātrauuaxša-, who is here to recite in front of me (the formula) yaḵā ahū vairiiō, pronounce (also the formula) ašā ratuš ašātcīt hacā.

Let the wise pious zaotar-, who is here to recite in front of me (the formula) yaḵā ahū vairiiō, pronounce (also the formula) ašā ratuš ašātcīt hacā.

(7) “You are here, oh āθrauuan, to be our zaotar-.

Let the wise pious ātrauuaxša-, who is here to recite in front of me (the formula) yaḵā ahū vairiiō, pronounce (also the formula) ašā ratuš ašātcīt hacā.

I am here ready to accept, at the risk of a punishment, to serve as the zaotar-, (in charge of) the recitation aloud and with low voice, (of) the intonation and (of) the solemn performance of the Staota Yesnīas”.

Kellen’s has tried to resume the problem of the priests directly involved in these oral performance, as follows:

Le processus ainsi reconstruit rencontre deux difficultés: le bāj adressé au zaotar par le sraošāuuarəza dès Vr3.1. et celui adressé à l’ātrauuaxša en Vr3.7 entre l’investiture donnée au zaotar et son acceptation. Le premier pourrait signifier, soit que le sraošāuuarəza exerce provisoirement, dans l’attente de sa désignation officielle, la charge de récitation du zaotar, soit qu’il charge le futur zaotar de prononcer Vr3.2-5 avant son investiture pleine et entière. De son côté, le second pourrait signifier que le zaotar investi légitime à posteriori la prise de parole de l’ātrauuaxša. Les deux étrangetés sont, d’une manière ou de l’autre, les corollaires de l’énigme fondamentale: le locuteur indentifié de Vr3.1 (il y a, à mon avis, trois possibilités : le commanditaire du sacrifice, le zaotar du dernier sacrifice rendu, le zaotar potentiel du sacrifice à venir). Quoi qu’il en soit, ce petit jeu de relais, voire de cache-cache, entre trois ou quatre personnes souligne la complexité du processus d’entrée dans l’univers sacré. Les dépositaires du pouvoir de parler sont successivement un inconnu, le sraošāuuarəza, responsable de l’écoute, l’ātrauuaxša, responsable des préparatifs, le zaotar, patron définitif du rite des Staotas Yesnīas. On voit ainsi que la brève formule du Y11.16b renvoie de manière succincte et sibylline au processus d’investiture du collège des officiants et que ce processus aboutissait effectivement, au témoignage de Vr4.2, à la récitation du Frauuarānē. Les intercalations du Visprad constituent la mise en situation liturgique de la zone des déclarations.

Toutes les déclarations sont prononcées par un officiant, puis par le zaotar dès qu’il a accepté la charge de diriger la cérémonie (Vr3.7). Elles sont de trois types: d’organisation du rite (Vr3.1-Y11.16 et Y13.1-3), de mise en condition mentale (le bloc fraštuiē – frauurārānē – āstuiē), d’allégeance sacrificielle aux Aməas Spəṇtas (Y11.18, Y13.4, Y14.1, Y15.1)."
My interpretation of the data differs from Kellens’ reconstruction only in some points. I strongly hesitate in attributing an immediate function to the *sraošāuarəza*- before his complete installation, a solution that, in any case, is considered also by the Belgian scholar as an alternative possibility (but it would be sound, if this priest was already installed in a previous ritual). The same difficulty I see in the attribution of any direct performance to the incoming *zaotar*- before his complete installation. “Le commanditaire du sacrifice”, and the “*zaotar du dernier sacrifice rendu*” still remain according to my reconstruction the best candidates, although we cannot be sure about the identity of the ones reciting Vr 3.5, where the actors should be a plurality of persons.

In any case, I must observe following Cantera’s plain explanation of the facts that, after the installation of the priestly college that should have been realized in Vr 3.1-3, and completed in Vr 3.5, this part of the ritual explicitly concerns a change of the reciter. In the present case, the speaker must be doubtless the *ātrauuauxša*-.

In this passage, we note a clear functional usage of the formula for taking the *wāž*. The *ātrauuauxša* takes it before his first exchange with the *zaotar*, and then the *zaotar* takes it back before answering the *ātrauuauxša*. Both the distribution of the formulas and the exchange between the reciters as reflected by the medieval ritual instructions must be as old as the text itself, and not late medieval innovations, since the exchange of reciters is required by the Avestan text itself.

Thus, we may certainly assume that in Vr 3.1, when every priest manifests his presence and accepts his ritual duties, his installation has been fixed (although the identity of the installer is not completely clear and might even change according to the occasions), while the new status of the “installed priests” is now definitively confirmed by a choral recitation of Vr 3.2-5 by all of them together (the *zaotar*- and his seven assistants). As again Cantera fittingly remarks, in Vr 3.6-7 we have the recitation of a new *wāž*, in which the exchange between the *zaotar*- and the *ātrauuauxša*- has been performed, albeit, in my opinion, this ritual is no more essential for the installation, which, as we have seen, was already established and completed. Thus, also the fact that it is not clear whether the recitation of Y. 11,9 was performed by the *ātrauuauxša*- alone or by all the priests together is something that concerns the general economy of the liturgy, but no more that of the installation ceremony.

48- See Cantera 2016.
49- See Cantera 2016: 55, and notes 19 and 20.
Before we conclude the present contribution, it would be useful to observe the enormous difficulty due to the fact that the Avestan liturgy we know represent an evolution, not only with respect to the Old Avestan tradition, but also to the new synthesis emerged after the inclusion of the later (and Middle) Avestan textual strata. In fact, traditions like those preserved in the Nērangestān, or those present in the nērangīs and kirīās inserted in the Pahlavi- and Sanskrit-Avestan ritual manuscripts, in any case of extreme importance, do not always offer a full description of the ritual and of the changes introduced in it, although their witness has never been seriously and properly considered until the radical revision of the problem proposed by Cantera. Furthermore, we have a very superficial image of the varieties of rituals performed in the various occasions (seasonal festivals, solemn liturgies, minor rituals, liturgies requested by a commissioner, etc.), although we know some memories of contrasting or simply diverging traditions still collected, for instance, by scholars as Darmesteter, Boyce, Kotwal, and others, so that we are in trouble when we want really frame the actual performance of the Yasna in the Achaemenian Period, or in the Parthian and Sasanian times.

It is a pity that the Zoroastrian priests did not apparently preserve that kind of large Brāhmaṇical literature, with a careful description of all these ritual varieties and technicalities. We may reasonably presume that the ritual Avestan manuscripts, which were originally preserved, and from which the extant written tradition derives, corresponded to a solemn ceremony, although this was, as we can deduce from some recent details whose importance has been rightly emphasized by Cantera, adapted also for minor rituals. The progressive collapse of the priestly position in society after the Arab invasion, and the reduction of their number, determined a series of changes and modifications, which were in many case unpredictable, so that the theoretical model of the sacrifice suffered a necessary and progressive re-organization, although some formulas, like those for taking the wāž, give us an enormous help in order to comprehend inner features of the liturgy.

When the attending priests finally became only two also in the solemn liturgy, the ritual “disaster” was complete, although the surviving sources still preserved the memory of the earlier actors, whom the rāspīg tries to spiritually represent on the sacrificial area. In a situation like the present one, also the description of the most solemn Mazdean liturgies can inevitably force us to postulate an ideal scenario, and in some cases alternative interpretations could be equally good, because they fit with different situations and correspond to different chronologies or simply answered a multiplicity of problems, we may only try to imagine or frame in their actual complexity. It is obviously necessary to moderate the negative impression connected with the decay of the solemn liturgies considering the fact that the standard ceremony with only two priests had its own dignity and prestige, so that the reduction, although due to a real condition of progressive difficulty, was not too dramatic.

At the very end of this contribution, I must underline that KELLENS has independently emphasized the fact that with the conclusion of the frauuarānē in Y.12 the priest who has assumed the function of zaotar-constitutes his own daēnā-, and all the members of the priestly college become saošiianṭ-s (“celui qui est destiné à gonfler”). The basic idea, which I completely share, is that on the ritual “path” (paḥ-/aduuan-) the individual daēnā- of the saošiianṭ-s (i.e. the priests officiating the liturgy) travels, and that they have as aims

50- Cantera 2010: 31, passim; cf. also Cantera 2012.
51- Ibidem.
52- See the Résumée of KELLENS’ lecture of the 29th January 2012, visible on the web site of the Collège de France.
the final possession of the mižda-, the “prize of victory”. As KELLENS53 again writes:

“saošiânt- désigne dans l’Avesta récent le prêtre dans sa fonction sacrée lorsqu’il s’inscrit dans la continuité sacrificielle qui débouchera un jour sur la fin de temps”.

In this way, the ritual dimension has joined the eschatological one, and the ritual performance of installation has transformed the priests in the saošiânt-s, protagonists of a cosmological action, necessary for the preservation of the present time,54 but also fundamental in order to prepare the final moment of the world, and its restoration. This gives a completely different image of a textual ritual portion like Vr. 3.3-4, which constituted one of the most significant performative moment of the ritual, that of the change of the priestly staff, with a liturgical installation of the new saošiânt-s, whose models were celestial, and whose target was the frašô.kərəti-.

53- Ibidem.
54- For the conclusion of the ritual see again PANAINO 2017a.
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