

The Avestan Priestly College and its Installation

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The ceremonies dedicated to the installation¹ 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.* 3,1,² which concerns the liturgical installation of the seven assistant priests,³ 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.

3- BARTHOLOMAE 1904: 1501. MODI 1937: 316-319; MALANDRA 1985.

the seven assistant priests involved in the course of the following solemn⁴ liturgy:⁵

(zōt) hāuuānānəm āstāiia	“I install ⁶ the hāuuānān- (the Pressing-(<i>haoma</i>)-priest).”
(rāspī) azəm vīsāi	“I am ready!”
(zōt) ātrauuaxšəm āstāiia	“I install the ātrauuaxša- (the Fire-lighting priest).”
(rāspī) azəm vīsāi	“I am ready!”
(zōt) frabərətārəm āstāiia	“I install the frabərətār- (the Presenting priest).”
(rāspī) azəm vīsāi	“I am ready!”
(zōt) ābərətəm āstāiia	“I install the ābərət- (the Bringing priest).”
(rāspī) azəm vīsāi	“I am ready!”
(zōt) āsnātārəm āstāiia	“I install the āsnātār- (the Washer priest).”
(rāspī) azəm vīsāi	“I am ready!”
(zōt) raēθβiškārəm āstāiia	“I install the raēθβiškara- (the Mingler priest).”
(rāspī) azəm vīsāi	“I am ready!”
(zō) sraošāuuarəzəm āstāiia	“I install the most talented having the most correct words
dqhištəm aršuuacastəməm	sraošāuuarəza- (the Auditing priest).”
(rāspī) azəm vīsāi	“I am ready!”

The use of the thematic (causative) present (*stāiia-*) 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 vaēdiiāiš daēnaiiā māzdaiiasnōiš aθaurunō [ratūm⁷ āmruiiē]
cašānqscā aēšqmci ratūš āmruiiē
ratūš āstāiia aməšascā spəntq saošiiantascā dqhištq aršuuacastəmq
aiβiiāmatəmq aš.xrāx^v anutəmq
mazištq amq āmruiiē daēnaiiā māzdaiiasnōiš aθaurunqscā raθaēštāscā vāstriiqscā fšuiiantō.

“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. 40.

7- Later interpolation, to be deleted according to KELLENS 2007: 139. I propose to delete also *āmruiiē*.

KELLENS⁸ has already remarked that in all the occurrences attested in *Vr.* 3,1-4, *āstāiia*, 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: *āṣrauuanəm āstāiia* “j’installe le pretre à sa place”

and

Yt. 10,89: *yim zaotārəm stāiata ahurō* “lui que Ahura a installé comme son zaotar”.

I would like also to insist on the fact that RENO¹¹ already stressed the function of the causative stem *sthāpay-* in Sanskrit with the very pertinent meaning of “aposter à telle fonction”, very close to the present Avestan usage. Furthermore, JAMISON¹² remarks that *āsthāpayati/-te* in the *Ṛgveda* and *Atharvaveda* essentially mean “makes mount, stand” in opposition to the intransitive *ātiṣṭhati* “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:

pasuuāzahəm āstāiia

“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 Haptaṅhāiti*).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 if we suppose that the *pasuuāzah-* was

8-1984: 201, 1.1.2.3, in note.

9- Cf. KELLENS 1995: 64.

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-stāiia-* and *paiti-stāiia-* can also have a reflexive value.

11- 1996: 310, § 223c.

12-1983: 170-171, and. the n. 136.

13- KOTWAL – KREYENBROEK 2003: 206-207; DARMESTETER 1893, II:122.

14- See PANAINO 2017c.

15- See CANTERA 2014: 255-257.

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,¹⁶ of a ritual of disinstallation for the seven priests or – more properly –, as suggested by the present author,¹⁷ 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,¹⁸ 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 3,1:¹⁹

<i>zōt gōwēd zand ēn</i>	“The <i>zōt</i> says, (and) the explication is this that:
<i>kū hāwānīh ēstēn</i>	‘Let me install the <i>hāwān</i> -function.’
<i>rāspīg gōwēd zand ēn kū</i>	The <i>rāspīg</i> says, (and) the explication is this that:
<i>ā-m padīrift</i>	‘I accept!’
<i>zōt gōwēd zand ēn kū</i>	The <i>zōt</i> says, (and) the explication is this that:
<i>ādurwaxšīh ēstēn</i>	‘Let me install the <i>ādurwaxš</i> -function.’
<i>rāspīg ā-m padīrift</i>	The <i>rāspīg</i> : ‘I accept!’
<i>zōt gōwēd kū fraburdārīh ēstēn</i>	The <i>zōt</i> says: ‘Let me install the <i>fraburdār</i> -function.’
<i>rāspīg ā-m padīrift</i>	The <i>rāspīg</i> : ‘I accept!’
<i>zōt gōwēd kū āburdīh ēstēn</i>	The <i>zōt</i> says: ‘Let me install the <i>āburd</i> -function.’
<i>rāspīg ā-m padīrift</i>	The <i>rāspīg</i> : ‘I accept!’
<i>zōt gōwēd kū āsnadārīh ēstēn</i>	The <i>zōt</i> says: ‘Let me install the <i>āsnadār</i> -function.’
<i>rāspīg ā-m padīrift</i>	The <i>rāspīg</i> : ‘I accept!’
<i>zōt gōwēd rehwiškarīh ēstēn</i>	The <i>zōt</i> says: ‘Let me install the <i>rehwiškar</i> -function.’
<i>rāspīg ā-m padīrift</i>	The <i>rāspīg</i> : ‘I accept!’
<i>zōt gōwēd srōšāwarz ēstēn</i>	The <i>zōt</i> says: ‘Let me install the <i>srōšāwarz</i> -function
<i>dānāgtom rāst-gōwišntom</i>	the wisest one having the most correct words.’
<i>rāspīg ā-m padīrift.</i>	The <i>rāspīg</i> : ‘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

16- See CANTERA 2014: 249-255.

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.²⁰ 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,²¹ 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.* 11,8²² and 9, while that of *Vr.* 4,1-2 between *Y.* 11,15 and 16, after *Vasasca*. He fittingly remarks that the “locuteur”²³ 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 KELLENS²⁴ on the importance attributed to the last one of the seven priests, the *sraošāuuarəza*-, who, in fact, is denominated *dqhištəm aršuuacastəməm* “the most talented having the most correct words”.²⁵ 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 *sraošāuuarəza*- 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* 28,41,²⁶ 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.²⁷ We must also remark that CANTERA²⁸ 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

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”.

21- 2007: 101.

22- See also MODI 1937: 331.

23- KELLENS, *ibidem*.

24- KELLENS, *ibidem*.

25- The moral importance attributed to the *srōšāwarz* 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 guardians 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 *srōšāwarz* for castigation; for this reason, he was also named *srōšočarnām*. See the *The Supplementary Texts to the Šāyest nē-Šāyest*, XI, 1-2; XIII, 2; XVI, 5; cf. KOTWAL 1969: 22-23, 40-41, 68-69; KAPADIA 1953: 122.

26- See KOTWAL – KREYENBROEK 2003: 98-99.

27- Cf. KOTWAL – KREYENBROEK 2003: 21-23, 98-99, and in particular the notes 335, 336, 337, 338, 339 at p. 99.

28- See CANTERA (2016), who demonstrates that the formulas for “taking of the *wāž*” or in Pahlavi *wāž girišnih* (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-*, *ātrauuaxša-*, *sraošāuuarəza-*, and *frabərətar-*)²⁹ and, among them, the *sraošāuuarəza-*, and *frabərətar-* just once each, while, apart from the fundamental *zaotar-*, it is the *ātrauuaxša-*, 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 Avestan 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 *Widēwdād* 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.³⁰

Furthermore, it is difficult to be too much confident in these later traditions,³¹ 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 Avestan 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

29- CANTERA 2016: 50, note 4.

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 Avestan 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,³² unless we do not admit that this or any other priest (then, a *zaotar*- 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 *yájamāna*-, 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".³³ The whole problem should be treated again in the framework of the chronology of the ritual strata, 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.³⁴

This statement should be understood in two ways:

1) in a technical sense, as the re-unification of a preceding ritual, in which the *parahaoma*- 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.³⁵

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 *parahaoma*- necessary for the following ritual.³⁶ 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

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.

33- MINKOWSKI 1991: 69, *passim*.

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 *pasuuāzayhəm āstāiia* "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: 206-207; DARMESTETER 1893, II: 122.

35- KELLENS 2007: 101-110; cf. also TREMBLAY 2004.

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 STIETENCROON 1966: 204, 235, 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,³⁷ as, for instance, the participation of another priest (in his turn, previously installed during another ritual) working as a sort of *yazəmna*-, or 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 *kaiiada*, are installed. KELLENS,³⁸ 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, KELLENS³⁹ 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)⁴⁰ to perform the installation, and, then, only after *Vr.* 3,1, the speech was given to the already installed *sraošaūuarəza*- 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 Aməša Spəntas. The performer (of the recitation) is no more one, at least if we give credit to the verb at the plural here systematically used (*ām rūmaide* [twice], *āstāiimaide*), 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.

37- I will never stop to recall that 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.

38- KELLENS 2007: 101.

39- KELLENS 2007: 101.

40- This is a very simple option, because it implies that the installer-priest (a *zaotar*-, an *ātrauuaxša*- or the *sraošaūuarəza*-), had been appointed by a sponsor in order to lead the new ceremony.

*Vr. 3,5:*⁴¹ *āat̄ vō [kascīt̄ mazdaiiasnan̄qm] ratūš āmrūmaide
ratūš āstāiamaide aməšaścā spəntā saošiiant̄asca
dq̄hištā aršuuacaštəm̄q aiβiiāmatəm̄q aš.xrāxʷanutəm̄q
mazištā am̄q āmrūmaide daēnaiiā māzdaiiasnōiš
aθaurun̄q̄sca raθaēštārsca vāstriiq̄sca fšuiiant̄ō.*

“Then, we designate as your models
we install as models (of you), [whoever among the Mazdeans],
the Aməša Spəntas and the Saošiiants
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 Māzdaiiasnī”.

It is remarkable that the “models” (*ratus*) of all the Mazdeans, but in particular of those persons involved in the ritual,⁴² are the Aməša Spəntas. 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 *sraošāuuarəza-* respectively correspond to Ahura Mazdā and Sraoša. Thus, the (eight) priests, in my opinion, actually corresponded on the divine dimension to the Aməša Spəntas, Sraoša and Ahura Mazdā, but on the human level they assumed the role of the Saošiiants as well.⁴³ In this case, the actual reciters of *Vr. 3,5* could correspond to both these priests and the *yazəmna-* (and/or the earlier *zaotar-*).

At this point *Vr. 3,6* starts. This passage is practically identical (with minor changes) with *Y. 11,16b*,⁴⁴ 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.⁴⁵

*Vr. 3,6-7:*⁴⁶ *(zōt̄) yaθā ahū vairiiō yō ātrauuaxšō frā.mē mrūitē
(rāspī) aθā ratuš ašāt̄cīt̄ haca frā ašauua vīduuā̄mraotū (cf. Y. 11,16b).
yaθā ahū vairiiō yō zaotā frā.mē mrūitē
(zōt̄) aθā ratuš ašāt̄cīt̄ haca frā ašauua vīduuā̄ mraotū.
(7) (rāspī) tūm nō āθraom zaotaštē
(zōt̄) yaθā ahū vairiiō yō āθrauuaxšō frā.mē mrūitē
(rāspī) aθā ratuš ašāt̄cīt̄ haca frā ašəauua vīduuā̄mraotū (cf. Y. 11,16b).
(zōt̄) azəm aēta zaota vīsāi štāotan̄qm yesniian̄qm
frasraoθrəmca framaraθrəmca fragāθrəmca frāiiaštīmca.*

41- KELLENS 2007: 128.

42- Note that later traditions try to offer an enumeration of the thirty-three *ratus* 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) *yaθā ahū vairiīō*,
 pronounce (also the formula) *aθā ratuš ašātcī hacā*.”

Let the wise pious *zaotar-*,
 who is here to recite in front of me (the formula) *yaθā ahū vairiīō*,
 pronounce (also the formula) *aθā ratuš ašātcī hacā*.”

(7) “You are here, oh *āθrauuān*, to be our *zaotar-*.”

Let the wise pious *ātrauuaxša-*,
 who is here to recite in front of me (the formula) *yaθā ahū vairiīō*,
 pronounce (also the formula) *aθā ratuš ašātcī 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 Yesnias*”.

KELLENS⁴⁷ has tried to resume the problem of the priests directly involved in these oral performance, as follows:

Le processus ainsi reconstitué 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 inidentifié 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 di rite des *Staotas Yesnias*. 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 *frastuiiē – frauuarānē – āstuiiē*), d'allégeance sacrificielle aux Aməas Spəntas (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 *sraošāuuarəza-* 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 *ātrauuaxša-*. So, in fact, CANTERA remarks:⁴⁸

"*Vr.3.7* is very interesting, since not only ritual instructions and modern practice but also the Avestan text itself presuppose the change of reciter. It cannot therefore be a modern feature of the recitation. The auxiliary priests have just entered the ritual area and assumed their offices. After a double taking of the *wāž* (type 8 *yō ātrauuaxšō ... aθā ratuš ... yō zaōtā ... aθā ratuš*)¹⁹, the *ātrauuaxša* makes his first appearance. He recites the beginning of *Vr.3.7* in which he directly addresses the *zaōtar* (*tūm nō āθraōm zaōtaštē* "You are here, oh *āθrauuān*, for being the *zaōtar*"). Before answering him with the end of *Vr.3.7* (*azəm aēta zaōta vīsāi* "I'm here ready to serve as *zaōtar*"), the *zaōtar* takes the *wāž* from the *ātrauuaxša*: [...]"

"In this passage, we note a clear functional usage of the formula for taking the *wāž*. The *ātrauuaxša* takes it before his first exchange with the *zaōtar*, and then the *zaōtar* takes it back before answering the *ātrauuaxša*. 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,⁴⁹ in *Vr. 3,6-7* we have the recitation of a new *wāž*, in which the exchange between the *zaotar-* and the *ātrauuaxša-* 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 *ātrauuaxša-* 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 *nērangs* and *kiriās* inserted in the Pahlavi- and Sanskrit-Avestan ritual manuscripts,⁵⁰ 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.⁵¹ 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 Brāhmanical 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 KELLENS⁵² has independently emphasized the fact that with the conclusion of the *frauarānē* 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 *saošiant*-s (“celui qui est destiné à gonfler”). The basic idea, which I completely share, is that on the ritual “path” (*paθ-/aduan-*) the individual *daēnā*- of the *saošiant*-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 *Résumé* of KELLENS' lecture of the 20th 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:

“*saošiiant-* 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 *saošiiant-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 *saošiiant-s*, whose models were celestial, and whose target was the *frašō.kərəti-*.

53- *Ibidem*.

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

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