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## **Middle Persian *Mādīgān ī Yōšt ī Fr(i)yān* as a Magical Text?**

### ABSTRACT

The Middle Persian *Mādīgān ī Yōšt ī Fr(i)yān* is considered to be, first and foremost, a literary vision of the Zoroastrian warfare of good versus evil. Secondly, it is a report from an examination resembling van Gennep's rite de passage. The weapon, used during this religious duel by a pious youth – Yōšt ī Fr(i)yān, and his adversary – the sorcerer Axt, are thirty six enigmas. That is why, we may suppose, that originally *Mādīgān ī Yōšt ī Fr(i)yān* was a magical text that was later deprived of this feature. Analysis of the *Avesta* and some other Middle Persian works leads us to assume that some reasons why this magical nature was removed stem from the fact that the Zoroastrian orthodox clergymen used to associate magic with the sin. Both heroes mentioned in the *Avesta* must have played a significant role in the pre-Zoroastrian folklore and their incorporation into Zoroastrianism was possible at the cost of removing some magical features of the myth, at the cost of emphasising the demonic character of Axt and finally, at the cost of shifting the duel from a magical level to a religious one, by changing the spell into a riddle.

### KEY WORDS

Riddle, magic, duel, evil, good

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In antiquity, if Zoroastrians were known for anything, it was the Magi's purported use of magic.

S. K. Mendoza-Forrest, *Witches, Whores and Sorcerers*<sup>1</sup>

The question raised in the title of this paper came to me while I was searching in the *Mādīgān ī Yōšt ī Fr(i)yān* for any remains of the rite of passage. Naturally, different episodes depicted in this Middle Persian text were recognised as magical by some Iranists, like Pierfrancesco Callieri, who suggests that the *Mādīgān ī Yōšt ī Fr(i)yān* gives us evidence of widespread magic among the Zoroastrians.<sup>2</sup>

Writing about magicians, sorcerers and witches in ancient Iran, the so-called cradle of magic, is a quite complicated task for at least three reasons. Firstly, the term 'magic' was defined differently over hundreds of years.<sup>3</sup> Sec-

<sup>1</sup> S. K. Mendoza-Forrest, *Witches, Whores and Sorcerers. The Concept of Evil in Early Iran*, Austin 2012, p. 21.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. P. Callieri, *In the land of the Magi. Demons and Magic in the everyday life of pre-Islamic Iran*, "Res Orientales", No. 13: *Démons et merveilles d'Orient*, ed. R. Gyselen, Paris 2001, p. 17, 19.

<sup>3</sup> Etymology and evolution of the term 'magic', e.g.: ibidem, p. 13–15; J. N. Bremmer, *The Birth of the Term 'Magic'*, "Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik" 1999, Vol. 126; S. K. Mendoza-Forrest, op. cit., p. 21–22; D. Hammond, *Magic: A Problem in Semantics*, "American Anthropologist" 1970, Vol. 72, No. 6. Magical features of Zoroastrianism, e.g.: J. P. Asmussen, *Some Remarks on Sasanian Demonology*, "Acta Iranica", Vol. 1, Tehran–Liège 1974; A. Carnoy, *La magie dans l'Iran*, "Le Muséon" 1916, Serie 3, Vol. 1, No. 2, p. 1; L. H. Gray, *The Parsī-Persian Burj-Nāmah: or, the Book of Omens of the Moon*, "JAOS", Vol. 10, London 1909–1910; L. J. Frachtenberg, *Allusions to Witchcraft and Other Primitive Beliefs in the Zoroastrian Literature*, Bombay 1911; W. B. Henning, *Two Manichean Magical Texts, with an Excursus on the Parthian ending –ēndēh*, "BSOAS", Vol. 12, London 1947; K. E. Kanga, *King Faridūn and a few of his Amulets and Charms*, [in:] *Cama Memorial Volume*. Bombay 1900; A. Krasnowolska, *Fargard 21 jako tekst magiczny* [unpublished MA thesis], Kraków 1972; eadem, *Une formule magique*, "Studia Iranica", Vol. 48: *Mythes, croyances populaires et symbolique animale dans la littérature persane*, Paris 2012; B. Lincoln, *Cēšmag, the Lie, and the Logic of Zoroastrian Demonology*, "Journal of the American Oriental Society" 2009, Vol. 129, No. 1; J. J. Modi, *Two Amulets of Ancient Persia, two Papers read before the Anthropological Society of Bombay in July-October, 1900*, Bombay 1901; idem, *The Persian Mār-Nāmeh or, The Book for Taking Omens from Snakes*, [in:] *Anthropological Papers (mostly on Parsee Subjects) read before the Anthropological Society of Bombay*, [Pars 1], Bombay 1911; idem, *Omens among the Parsees*, [in:] *Anthropological Papers...*, op. cit.; idem,

only, relations between magic and official Zoroastrianism were always a complex matter. Thirdly, Zoroastrianism, as Ilya Gershevitch writes, has never reached any syncretic form, but it must have been always a juxtaposition of different Iranian beliefs that could be divided, finally, into two categories: the official religion of the Achaemenian (6th–4th BC) or Sasanian (3rd–7th AD) courts and the popular religion(s) of their subjects.<sup>4</sup> Even today, it has two – Iranian and Indian – versions.

To make our subject clear, and to avoid any ambiguity, in this article, I observe the commonly accepted idea of magic as an attempt to interface with the forces of good and evil. Thus, following the arguments of Bronisław Malinowski, magic must be understood as an integral part of human activity, forming together with religion an inseparable *magico-religious* integrity,<sup>5</sup> opposing Geo Widengren's conception of religion and magic, as two coexisting but separate phenomena.<sup>6</sup> While Edward E. Evans-Pritchard advocates a clear distinction between magic and religion,<sup>7</sup> Andrzej Szyjewski emphasises that magic, as a constituted element of traditional cultures, helps us to understand their belief systems. Without being acquainted with magic, it is impossible to understand religion.<sup>8</sup> Mostly for that reason, I would not separate magic from religion and *vice versa*, but rather combine them and refer explicitly or implicitly to some sort of continuum.<sup>9</sup>

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*Charms or Amulets for some Diseases of the Eye*, [in:] *Anthropological Papers...* op. cit.; idem, *A Few Parsee Nīrangas (incantations or religious formulae)*, [in:] *Anthropological Papers read before the Anthropological Society of Bombay*, [Pars 3]. Bombay 1924; idem, *The Religious Ceremonies and Customs of the Parsees*, Bombay 1937; A. Panaino, *A Few Remarks on the Zoroastrian Conception of the Status of Angra Mainyu and the Daēvas*, “Res Orientales”, No. 13: *Démons et merveilles d’Orient*, ed. R. Gyselen, Paris 2001; idem, *Two Zoroastrian Nērangas and the Invocations to the Stars and the Planets*, [in:] *The Spirit of Wisdom. (Mēnōg ī Xrad). Essays in Memory of Ahmad Tafazzoli*, eds. T. Daryaei, M. Omidsalar, Costa Mesa 2004; idem, *Lunar and Snake Omens among the Zoroastrians*, [in:] *Officina Magica: Essays on the Practice of Magic in Antiquity*, ed. S. Shaked, Leiden 2005; S. K. Pekala, *Evil and How to Combat Evil. Magic, Spells, and Curses in the Avesta* [Ph.D. thesis, Harvard University], Cambridge 2000.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. I. Gershevitch, *Old Iranian Literature*, “Handbuch der Orientalistik”, Leiden–Köln 1968, p. 18–19.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. B. Malinowski, *Magia, mit, religia*, Warszawa 1987.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. G. Widengren, *Fenomenologia religii*, tłum. J. Białek, Kraków 2008, p. 13–30.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Theories of Primitive Religion*, London 1965, p. 33.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. A. Szyjewski, *Etnologia religii*, Kraków 2008, p. 90.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. also D. Hammond, op. cit., p. 1349.

Talking about magic in the Zoroastrian world, we always travel between two spheres: various popular Zoroastrianism(s) based, among other things, on some magical practices inherited from pre-Zoroastrian polytheistic beliefs, and Zoroastrianism based on the written Middle Persian texts originating from the sacred *Avesta*. This stratification of religion had crucial consequences in the fact that the spread of magical practices among ordinary worshippers on one hand, and the magical elements to be found in these texts on the other, refer to two different levels of religiosity.

Finally, writing about magic in Zoroastrianism, we must bear in mind that this religion is of a highly dualistic nature,<sup>10</sup> and that it used to serve humans as a holy weapon against Ahriman and his evil-doing creations: *dēw*<sup>11</sup> ‘demon’ and *xrafstar* ‘demonic beast, predator, vermin and pest’<sup>12</sup> or his various followers: *ǰādūg* ‘sorcerer,’ *kundag* ‘magician, soothsayer’ or *parīg* ‘witch,’ but also as a weapon aimed at visible remains and traces of Ahriman’s malicious activity in perfect Ormazd’s world, especially disease, drought or famine.

The belief that the world created by Ormazd is a stage where a constant battle takes place between good and evil was the cause of Zoroastrians conviction that any kind of fight with the forces of evil as one of the fundamental tasks of every follower of Zarathustra’s teaching. Thus, at the end of the *Mādīgān ī Yōšt ī Fr(i)yān*, added supposedly by an anonymous writer, we find that anyone who reads this text behaves as if he prayed at the same time, performs good deeds as if he killed snakes and, moreover, all his sins are forgiven:

Whoever shall read this tale together with his servants, and shall say one Yatha-a-hu-vairyō [one of the Zoroastrian prayers – M. K.] at the end, the good work, in his soul, is such as though they should kill a snake with the *nirang* of the *Avesta*; the spiritual life, in his soul, is such as when he offers up the prayers of the recited *Gathas* [religious chants – M. K.] for three years; and there was a *dastur* [one of the Zoroastrian priests – M. K.] who said, that there is no spiritual life at the end of one year’s sin of non-worship. Completed in health, pleasure and joy. May Axt, the sorcerer, be destroyed, with all the demons and demonesses and sorcerers and witches.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Cf. e.g.: J. de Menasce, *Note sur le dualisme mazdéen*, [in:] *Études Carmélitaines* [n° sur «Satan»], Paris 1948.

<sup>11</sup> Since in the article I use Middle Persian and Avestan terms, to avoid misunderstanding, I mark only Avestan ones with Av.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. e.g.: M. Boyce, *A History of Zoroastrianism*, Vol. 1: *Handbuch der Orientalistik*, Köln 1975, p. 298–301; M. Moazami, *Evil Animals in the Zoroastrian Religion*, “History of Religion” 2005, Vol. 44, No. 4, p. 303ff.

<sup>13</sup> *Mādīgān ī Yōšt ī Fr(i)yān – The Book of Arda Viraf*, trans. M. Haug and E. W. West, Bombay–London 1872 [reprint 1971], 5.1–6.

A human being created by Ormazd gained the most valuable gift – free will – and could independently decide about his life and one of two paths that he would like to follow. Nevertheless, an independent decision forced him to stand shoulder to shoulder with Ormazd or Ahriman in this two-dimensional, black-and-white world.<sup>14</sup> His engagement in this holy struggle required his action to the best of his ability, and usage of magic that had to be tolerated, or even channeled, by the Zoroastrian orthodoxy of that time. We must bear in mind that the anonymous authors of the *Avesta* considered themselves to be ardent enemies of the *dēw*-worshipping sorcerers on one hand and, at the same time, they considered their own magico-religious practices as existing within the framework of beneficial behaviour, on the other.<sup>15</sup> To distinguish between these two forms of magic: Zoroastrian and non/anti-Zoroastrian, we should apply the ethnographic terminology of good/white versus evil/black magic, or the terminology proposed by Evans-Pritchard in his famous *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic Among the Azande* (1937) – (positive) sorcery and (negative) witchcraft.

One of the features of white magic is attacking an enemy with words and actions resembling his own, following a widely popular conviction that we can beat our enemies with their own arms. That is why, Yōšt ī Fr(i)yān uses the same weapon as his mortal adversary Axt – riddles, to defeat him successfully:

Afterward, Yavisht i Friyan said thus: The thirty and three enigmas, asked me by thee, are all truly explained; now I ask thee three enigmas; if thou givest no answer, I will slay thee immediately. And Akht, the sorcerer, said thus: Ask, so that I may explain.<sup>16</sup>

Even if Yōšt ī Fr(i)yān's three questions are, just like most of Axt's riddles, of a religious nature, the sorcerer, who knows the answers to his own puzzles, cannot respond to the youth correctly; he asks his master, Ahriman, for help, but it turns out that the Snide Spirit is ignorant, refuses to support him, and without remorse, leaves him alone on the battlefield.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Cf. e.g.: J. Duchesne-Guillemin, *Ormazd et Ahriman. L'aventure dualiste dans l'antiquité*, Paris 1953.

<sup>15</sup> A. Szyjewski (op. cit., p. 93) writes that every society creates its own vision of good and different sorts of evil searching any opportunity to attack it. It means that the distinction between good and evil, in this case, is highly subjective.

<sup>16</sup> *Mādīgān ī Yōšt ī Fr(i)yān*, op. cit., 4.1–3.

<sup>17</sup> M. Weinreich, *No Help for Evil Axt. Ahriman's Image and the Advent of Frašagird in the Story of Jōišť ī Friyān*, "Orientalia" 2011, No. 13.

Do all these mentioned things allow us to recognise the Middle Persian *Mādīgān ī Yōšt ī Fr(i)yān*<sup>18</sup> as a magical text? This short text lacking artistic virtues and aesthetic values has several thematic layers organised around an old kernel – a single myth recorded cursorily in the *Avesta* (*Yašt* 5.81-83). As we can read there, Yoišta Fryāna is going to stand before Axtya who will ask him ninety-nine questions. In order to give only the right answers and to defeat Axtya, the youth offers Ardəvi Sūrā Anāhitā one hundred stallions, one thousand oxen and ten thousand lambs as a sacrifice, asking her help and support. While, in the Middle Persian text we read that the sorcerer Axt puts pious Yōšt ī Fr(i)yān to the test of thirty-three riddles under a simple condition: If the youth does not answer all the questions properly or replies wrongly, he will pay for his mistake with his head. The same went for the sorcerer.

Since we can treat this myth as a description of the previously mentioned constant battle between good and evil that will end with the victory of Ahura Mazda/Ormazd, it is natural that the sole victor might be Yoišta Fryāna/Yōšt ī Fr(i)yān. Some researchers are unanimous that Yoišta Fryāna/Yōšt ī Fr(i)yān and Axtya/Axt are members of the same early Zoroastrian society, and represent two opposing groups of followers of the holy Order and the cursed Disorder or, in other words, the new post-reformed and the old pre-reformed beliefs. James R. Russell writes that

[...] to the end of the Sasanian empire, and even later, the worship of *dēws* as gods by non-Zoroastrians, together with the propitiation of the *dēws* as demons by nominally Zoroastrian practitioners of black magic, persisted throughout the Iranian world, despite the best efforts of kings and clerics to eradicate it.<sup>19</sup>

This myth proves also that in ancient Iran the tradition of the repeated rite of offering existed during the fight of two groups that could not have rejected

<sup>18</sup> Cf. M. Haug, *Essays on the Sacred Lanugauge, Writings, and Religion of the Parsis*, London 1878, p. 107; J. C. Tavadia, *Die Mittelpersische Sprache und Literatur der Zarathustrier*, Leipzig 1956, p. 107–108; A. Tafazzoli, *Tārix-e adabiyāt-e Irān piš az eslām*, Tehrān 1376hš, p. 251–225]; M. Weinreich, *Die Geschichte von Jōiš ī Friyān*, “Altorientalistische Forschungen” 1992, Vol. 19, no. 1, p. 44–101; M. Haug, E. W. West, *The Book of Arda Viraf*, Bombay–London 1872, p. 26–316; M. Ğa’fari, *Mātikān-e Yošt-e Feriyān. Matn-e pahlavi, āvānevis, tağome, vāženāme*, Tehrān 1365hš; J. B. Karani, *Ar-davirafnama te Sathe Goshte Friyan*, Bombay 1885; Mokri, *Dāstān-e pahlavi-ye Yošt-e Friyān*, “Mehr” 1952, no. 8, p. 348–352; B. Qeybi, *Dāstān-e Yoišt-e Friyān*, Bielefeld 1988; R. Abrahamyan, *Arta Viraf Namak, Joušti Frian*, Yerevan 1958.

<sup>19</sup> J. R. Russell, *Zoroastrianism in Armenia*, Cambridge–London 1987, p. 438.

the challenge.<sup>20</sup> S. K. Mendoza-Forrest suggests, that the apparent evidence of a possible survival of such a cult indicates that these passages were aimed at real people rather than imaginary demonic cults.<sup>21</sup>

What do we know about Yōšt ī Fr(i)yān or Axt? To be honest, almost nothing! Traditionally, there is a strong conviction that Yōšt ī Fr(i)yān is the pious, youngest (Av. *yoišta-* ‘der jüngste’<sup>22</sup>) member of a Turanian kin Fryāna,<sup>23</sup> while Axt (Av. *axtya-* ‘Liedern, Schmerz, Krankheit’<sup>24</sup>), called *ǰādūg*, is rated among the most dangerous enemies of Zoroastrianism. A Middle Persian epithet-*invective* *ǰādūg* attributed to Axt does not have to be understood only in its basic meaning ‘sorcerer’ but also more widely as ‘non-Zoroastrian,’ ‘someone who follows a wrong or another religious path,’ ‘someone who worships the old idols-*dēws*.’

If we accept that *ǰādūg* is someone who rejects the religion revealed by Ahura Mazda/Ormazd to Zarathustra, we must count him as being among the cursed *dēw*-worshippers. Hence, we must answer the question: Who is the only legitimate performer of sacrifice – a Zoroastrian represented by Yoišta Fryāna/Yōšt ī Fr(i)yān or a non-Zoroastrian represented by Axtya/Axt? Admittedly, the authors of the *Avesta* must have considered themselves as the only legitimate performers of sacrifice and, at the same time, they must have considered other sacrificers, who rejected Ahura Mazda/Ormazd, to have been deceived by Angra Mainyu/Ahriman and to be usurpers of their rituals. Not wonder why Yoišta Fryāna calls Axtya an ‘evil-doer’ or ‘offspring of darkness,’ and Yōšt ī Fr(i)yān – *ǰādūg*.

Zoroastrians thought that those deceived sacrificers, even if were using similar tools,<sup>25</sup> were incompetent and evil-oriented – that they were promoting the Disorder and producing the opposite of the desired result, because their prayers were inefficient. A good example of such a situation is an

<sup>20</sup> Cf. I. Milewska, *Zagadki z Mahabharaty*, “Cracow Indological Studies” 2004, Vol. 6. When *Yudhiṣṭhira*’s companions rejected *yakṣa*’s invitation to a riddle-contest, they simply “died”.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. S. K. Mendoza-Forrest, op. cit., p. 99.

<sup>22</sup> Ch. Bartholomae, *Altiranisches Wörterbuch*, Berlin 1961, p. 1299.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. P. Davoud, *Turan*, “Journal of the K.R. Cama Oriental Institute”, No. 28, Bombay 1935, p. 23.

<sup>24</sup> Ch. Bartholomae, op. cit., p. 51.

<sup>25</sup> Plutarch in his *De Iside* (45–47) writes that the Persians made offerings to Ormazd and Ahriman, for whom they were pounding a herb *omomi*, invoking darkness and mixing the herb with the blood of a slaughtered wolf. We can assume that this offering was an inversion of an offering to Ormazd when holy *haoma* was used.

offering of the three-headed dragon – Aži Dahāka, rejected by Ardəvi Sūrā Anāhitā:

To her did Azi Dahāka, the three-mouthed, offer up a sacrifice in the land of Bawri, with a hundred male horses, a thousand oxen and ten thousand lambs. He begged of her a boon, saying: “Grant me this boon, O good, most beneficent Ardvi Sūra Anāhita! that may make all the seven Karshvares of the earth empty of men.” Ardvi Sūra Anāhita did not grant him that boon, although he was offering libations, giving gifts, sacrificing, and entreating her that she would grant him that boon.<sup>26</sup>

and a similar one of Thraētaona, who successfully begged her help to defeat that evil dragon. All these things came to pass because everyone was involved in the conflict between Ormazd and Ahriman. A microcosmic rivalry between good and bad sacrificers over the performance of the sacrifice mirrored the macrocosmic struggles between good and evil. But, what makes one sacrificer “good” and the other one “bad” lies only in the opinion of the sacrificer.

Mary Boyce calls the duel between Yōšt ī Fr(i)yān and Axt “a contest of wit”, because it is unimportant who is physically stronger, but who is wiser and cleverer.<sup>27</sup> The defeated Axt, who threatens the compatriots of the youth with a myriad army, must accept the power and right of the arguments of the victorious Yōšt ī Fr(i)yān, and not his strength.<sup>28</sup> In their duel, which I would like to understand as a struggle between new-reformed and old/pre-reformed religion, a material weapon was replaced by a mental *frašn* (Av. ‘question’) that must here be of an additional magico-religious nature, especially that in the *Yasna* 57.24 the Avestan expression *āhūiriš frašnō* means ‘the Revelation of Ahura.’<sup>29</sup>

It is hard to answer the question, whether *frašn* could mean just ‘spell,’ because the *Avesta* does not give us any unambiguous answer. Nevertheless,

<sup>26</sup> *Avesta, Yašt – The Zend-Avesta*, trans. J. Darmesteter, [in:] *Sacred Books of the East*, No. 23, Oxford 1882 [reprint 2007], 5.29-31.

<sup>27</sup> M. Boyce, *A History of Zoroastrianism*, op. cit., p. 107.

<sup>28</sup> This affirmation of the mind could be an echo of early Indo-Iranian distinction between the *asuras* (Av. *ahura-*) possessing mental power – *māya*, and *devas* (Av. *daēva-*) owning physical might. Russell (op. cit., p. 438) suggests that Zarathustra, who was a priest himself, could have worshipped both the *ahuras* and the *daēvas*, but in the course of time, he realised the *ahuras* were morale due to their mental power, and the *daēvas* – amoral due to their physical might.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. A. V. W. Jackson, *Avestan Reader. First Series. Easier Texts, Notes, and Vocabulary*, Stuttgart 1893, p. 81.

by analogy with the Indian tradition of poetic agons (αγων), sacred by nature, I suggest that the competition between<sup>30</sup> Yōšt ī Fr(i)yān and Axt might be such a kind of magico-religious oratory contest resembling Avestan *yāh-* ‘verbal contest, the art of oratory.’<sup>31</sup> Their competition would not only be a test of religious knowledge, but also its proper and effective use.

The basic tool of every magician and sorcerer is a spell, of course, because the power to be found in the spell is of great importance for the effectiveness of its activity. The spell, according to Malinowski, consists of three elements: (1) the emotional involvement of speaker, (2) an unambiguously defined aim, and (3) mythological allusions.<sup>32</sup> It is a well known fact as well that spells must be supported by divine might, because only the help of the invoked god can support a fighting worshipper. Among polytheistic pre-Zoroastrian Iranians, each god and goddess was involved in this operation and responsible for particular elements of it. This pattern had been partly preserved within Zoroastrianism, what we can see when Yoišta Fryāna prays to Ardəvi Sūrā Anāhitā, announcing the aim of his prayer:

To her did Yoishta, one of the Fryanas, offer up a sacrifice with a hundred horses, a thousand oxen, ten thousand lambs on the Pedvaepa of the Rangha. / He begged of her a boon, saying: “Grant me this, O good, most beneficent Arđvi Sura Anahita! that I may overcome the evil-doing Akhtya, the offspring of darkness, and that I may answer the ninety-nine hard riddles that he asks me maliciously, the evil-doing Akhtya, the offspring of darkness.” / Arđvi Sura Anahita granted him that boon, as he was offering up libations, giving gifts, sacrificing, and entreating that she would grant him that boon. / For her brightness and glory, / I will offer her a sacrifice.<sup>33</sup>

The youth knows that the goddess might guarantee him success, because as the goddess of water Ardəvi Sūrā Anāhitā bestows fertility on one hand,

<sup>30</sup> Cf. C. Galewicz, *Kwestia turniejów poetyckich w dawnych Indiach, czyli o niebezpieczeństwach komparatystycznego podejścia do tekstów Rgvedy*, [in:] *Problemy teoretyczne związków literatur i sztuk Orientu i Zachodu*, ed. T. Cieślukowska, “Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego” 1992, No. 1306, “Prace Historycznoliterackie” nr 79; F. B. J. Kuiper, *The Ancient Arian Verbal Contest*, “Indo-Iranian Journal” 1960, Vol. 4, No. 4; K. Rakowiecka-Asgari, *The Remains of Riddle Competitions in Ancient Iranian, Greek and Indian Literature*, [in:] *Proceedings of the Ninth Conference of the European Society for Central Asian Studies*, eds. T. Gacek, J. Pstrusińska, Newcastle upon Tyne 2009; eadem, *Myśl nieoswojona oswaja świat. O kulturoznawczej roli zagadki w starożytnej Eurazji*, Kraków 2011, p. 99–108.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. J. Kellens, *Essays on Zarathustra and Zoroastrianism*, Costa Mesa 2000, p. 11–12.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. B. Malinowski, op. cit., p. 384; A. Szyjewski, op. cit., p. 96–97.

<sup>33</sup> *Avesta, Yašt*, op. cit., 5.81–83.

and is also hailed as the mythical river which she personifies, on the other. We know that there is a mantic link between water and wisdom, and priests and their novices were praying to Ardəvi Sūrā Anāhitā for knowledge. She helps Yoišta Fryāna, just like Neryosang who mediates between the youth and Ormazd, and delivers to him the answer to one of the questions from God.

The quoted passage is not the only magical expression that we can find in the story of Yoišta Fryāna/Yōšt ī Fr(i)yān, since the insult shouted by Yōšt ī Fr(i)yān towards Axt every time he answered the question of the sorcerer, might be understood as a *quasi*-spell (or curse) cast on Axt to kill him:

Yavisht ī Friyan said thus: Mayst thou be in misery whilst living, felon and wicked tyrant! and fall to hell when dead.<sup>34</sup>

This antagonistic, even aggressive, tone of Yōšt ī Fr(i)yān's curse stems, of course, from orality, which is strongly entwined in human life and its problems. The everyday struggle, in our case, the micro and macrocosmic struggle between a good sacrificer (Yōšt ī Fr(i)yān – Ormazd) and an evil one (Axt – Ahriman), transforms into a mental “combat” of wit necessary to solve these riddles. Since we are dealing here with combat, wounding or killing an evil sorcerer-sacrificer cannot be understood as bad or a deed worthy of condemnation. Quite the reverse: it is a good deed because in this way due punishment can be meted out.

Axt, called simply *gādūg* ‘sorcerer,’ uses all his knowledge of (black) magic to cheat and defeat Yōšt ī Fr(i)yān. Nevertheless, the youth with the support of Ormazd and his seven saintly incarnations – Amahraspandān – uncovers Axt's fraud. He agrees to enter Axt's dwelling only if the sorcerer gets rid of *nasā* – dead human matter, here understood as, for example, hair- and nail-cuttings etc., which have been hidden by Axt under the carpet:

And Yavisht ī Friyan came to the residence of Akht, the sorcerer; and because Akht, the sorcerer, had the dead matter of men under the carpet, he went not in. And he sent a message to Akht, the sorcerer, thus: You have the dead matter of men under the carpet; and when I come in, the archangels [the seven Amesha Spentas] are with me, in that place where the dead matter of men exists, and into which I come; then my archangels withdraw from protecting me, and afterwards I shall not be able to explain those enigmas which thou askest me.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>34</sup> *Mādīgān ī Yōšt ī Fr(i)yān*, op. cit., 2.3.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*, 1.14-19.

Interestingly, according to the New Persian *Zartušt-nâme*, Zarathustra was accused of sorcery by his enemies precisely because they had secretly placed hair, nails, blood, and similar impurities in his room.<sup>36</sup>

To understand both episodes of the *Mādīgān ī Yōšt ī Fry(i)ān* or the *Zartušt-nâme*, we should look at them from three points of view: (1) the problem of purification, (2) criminals of a corpse-abusing nature, and (3) the magical usage of artefacts.

We can assume that the codification of purification rites characteristic to Zoroastrianism served, above all, to free worshippers from visible or invisible contamination that evil brings to the body. Although, complex purification rituals might derive from ancient magical prescriptions, their final spiritual purpose, and lack of any secrecy, differentiates them from magical rites. In the Avestan *Widēwdād* we find detailed regulations related, among other things, to the elimination of hair- and nail-cuttings:<sup>37</sup>

Then thou shalt dig a hole, a disti deep if the earth be hard, a vîsti deep if it be soft; thou shalt take the hair down there and thou shalt say aloud these fiend-smiting words: “Out of him by his piety Mazda made the plants grown up.” Thereupon thou shalt draw three furrows with knife of metal around the hole, or six furrows or nine, and thou shall chant the Ahuna-Vairyā three times, or six, or nine.<sup>38</sup>

For the nails, thou shalt dig a hole, out of the house, as deep as the top joint of the little finger; thou shalt take the nails down there and thou shalt say aloud these fiend-smiting words: “The words that are heard from the pious in holiness and good thought.” Thereupon thou shalt draw three furrows with knife of metal around the hole, or six furrows or nine, and thou shall chant the Ahuna-Vairyā three times, or six, or nine.<sup>39</sup>

These complex practices are justified by the fact that the hair and nail-cuttings are, according to Zoroastrianism, dead and, as a result, religiously polluted parts of a person’s body.

Surprisingly, this conviction is alive even today, and forces the worshippers to be very careful while paring and shaving. Boyce writes that the Zoroastrians living in Sharifabad and Mazra’ Kalantar near Yazd believe that:

<sup>36</sup> Cf. M. Moazami, op. cit., p. 310.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. K. M. Jamasp-Asa, *The Ritual of Hair Trimming and Nail Paring in Zoroastrianism*, “Acta Iranica” 1981, No. 21.

<sup>38</sup> *Avesta, Widēwdād – The Zend-Avesta*, trans. J. Darmesteter, [in:] *Sacred Books of the East*, No. 4, Oxford 1887 [reprint 2005], 17.5.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibidem*, 17.6.

“If nail-parings were allowed to fall on the ground, they would be seized by demons and made into swords to slash their owner with in the hereafter.”<sup>40</sup> What is more, they were looking at their Muslim neighbourhoods paring their nails and shaving their beards in lanes outside their houses with abhorrence.<sup>41</sup> While Russell suggests that the Armenians used to collect nail-parings, hair-trimmings, and even teeth that felt out and put them in holy places such as cracks in a wall of a church under the influence of Zoroastrianism.<sup>42</sup>

The purification practices can be better described as remains of practices of evil-contagious magic. Looking back to the magical practices of the Assyrians, we find evidence of the use of hair, nails or other material parts of the person against whom incantations and spells were used, to enhance their efficacy by contact.<sup>43</sup>

Axt commits not only a sin of pollution, but also one of corpse-abusing. He was one of these *dēw*-worshippers gathering in towers of silence by midnight who were described as cannibals eating human flesh just like people who cook and eat religiously accepted food:

Ahura Mazda answered: ‘Those Dakhmas that are built upon the face of the earth, O Spitama Zarathustra! and whereon are laid the corpses of dead men, that is the place where the fiends are, that is the place whereon the troops of fiends are [...]. On those Dakhmas, O Spitama Zarathustra! Those fiends take food and void filth, (eating up corpses) in the same way as you, men, in the material world, eat cooked meal and cooked meat. It is, as it were, the smell of their feeding that you smell there, O men!’<sup>44</sup>

But, the most important thing is that *nasā* can be used as a magical object, and, as we know, even a chance touch of any artefact endowed with magical might can do harm to an innocent human. But, those artefacts were obligatory during magical acts:

The tricks of the Magi are ineffective since they are not able to call down the gods, or speak with them, whether they try with lamp, bowl, water, glove, or any other thing.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> M. Boyce, *A Persian Stronghold of Zoroastrianism*, Lanham–New York–London 1975, p. 107.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. J. R. Russell, *op. cit.*, p. 457.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. P. Callieri, *op. cit.*, p. 16–17.

<sup>44</sup> *Avesta, Widēwdād*, *op. cit.*, 7.56-57.

<sup>45</sup> P. Vasunia, *Zarathustra and the Religion of Ancient Iran. The Greek and Latin Sources in Translation*. Mumbai 2007, p. 120.

Yōšt ī Fr(i)yān attacks his enemy with a weapon resembling the weapon used by Axt – questions – and in the end, when Axt fails to solve his three riddles, the youth plunges a knife into the sorcerer's body, reciting *nērang* 'religious formula.' Yōšt ī Fr(i)yān's killing of Axt can be understood not only as an act of destroying the demon that possessed Axt's body, but also as an act of healing an ill patient:

And after that, Yavisht ī Friyan destroyed Akht the sorcerer at once with the *nirang* (religious formula) of the barsom-gathering knife, and destroyed the demoness in his body.<sup>46</sup>

Religious *nērang*s used by worshipers as talismans or even as medications<sup>47</sup> belong to a good but, first of all, protective kind of magic tolerated by the Zoroastrian orthodoxy, due to the fact that this sort of magic was taught by Ormazd to Zarathustra who became *mąθraq* (Av. 'someone who chants *mąθras* (positive magical formulas)').<sup>48</sup> This magico-religious power hidden within the *Gāθās*, traditionally linked with Zarathustra, was later ceded to Zoroastrian sacrificer-poets who could use it to combat evil, just as their prophet did. Zarathustra, armed with Avestan *mąθra*, became not only the first human sacrificer-poet, but also the first magician instructed by Ahura Mazdā – the primeval sacrificer-poet-magician in one person – how to defeat Angra Mainyu, who was also trying to become a sacrificer-poet and magician. In the *Avesta* we can find a myth concerning a struggle between Zarathustra who threw *mąθra*-stones towards Angra Mainyu.<sup>49</sup>

Up started Zarathustra, forward went Zarathustra, unshaken by the evil spirit, by the hardness of his malignant riddles, swinging stones in his hand, stones as big as a house, which he obtained from the Maker, Ahura Mazda, he the holy Zarathustra.<sup>50</sup>

or *mąθra* used to smash *daēvas* (*Yašt* 4.2-3). If we take into consideration the fact that the prophet fights with *mąθra*-stones against Angra Mainyu, who is seducing him with riddles, we can assume that *frašn*-riddles could mean here 'spell, curse.' This metonymical shift *mąθra* :: stone and *frašn* :: riddle

<sup>46</sup> *Mādīgān ī Yōšt ī Fr(i)yān*, op. cit., 4.27.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. A. Krasnowolska, *Une formule magique*, op. cit., p. 67–94; A. D. H. Bivar, *A Parthian Amulet*, "Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies" 1967, Vol. 30, No. 3.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. G. Widengren G., *Die Religionen Irans*, Stuttgart 1965, p. 29.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. M. Molé, *Some remarks on the nineteenth fargard of the Vidēvdāt*, "Rocznik Orientalistyczny" 1953, Vol. 17.

<sup>50</sup> *Avesta, Widēwdād*, op. cit., 19.4.

is a characteristic feature for magic which, according to Michał Buchowski, is based on metonymy just like the myth is based on metaphor.<sup>51</sup>

As I have already mentioned, the youth fights with the sorcerer using riddles, but finally reaches for a *nērang* and a knife. The use of a medical artifact – a knife – together with a religious spell to slay the demon residing in Axt's body must be understood here in terms of the fight against Ahriman and healing a diseased human being. Yōšt ī Fr(i)yān behaves like a doctor; he cures the sick Axt possessed by the *dēw*.

In the *Widēwdād* we can read that when Ahura Mazda created his world, the jealous Angra Mainyu came up with an incredible number of diseases – 99,999, to ruin its perfection:

Ahura Mazdâ said to Spitaama Zarathustra: / I, Ahura Mazdâ, who set in place good things, / when I made that house, beautiful, luminous, visible afar, / going up, going far away, / then the villain looked at me, / then the villain mage against me 99 diseases, 9,900, and 90,000, / he, the Evil Spirit full of destruction. / So may you heal me, Life-giving Sacred Thought, / you of great munificence!<sup>52</sup>

This means that disease has its source in Ahriman alone and being diseased means that one has been possessed by a demon bringing that particular illness. According to the *Bundahišn*, when Ahriman entered into the world of Ormazd, attacking each part of it with disease, he caused pestilence and pollution at the same time. Nevertheless, Ormazd – the primeval sacrificer-poet-magician and medic – knew how to counteract Ahriman's pollution. He could not prevent Ahriman from killing the first cow-ox, but he could give it something that would limit its pain:

Before his [Ahriman's – M. K.] coming to the ox, Aûharmazd ground up the healing fruit, which some call 'bînâk,' small in water openly before its eyes, so that its damage and discomfort from the calamity might be less; and when it became at the same time lean and ill, as its breath went forth and it passed away, the ox also spoke thus: 'The cattle are to be created, and their work, labour, and care are to be appointed.'<sup>53</sup>

This medical art was taught by Ormazd to Zarathustra and Frēdōn who worked wonders with *afsōn* 'incantation,' *nērang* and *darmān* 'remedies.' Thus, Thraētaona/Frēdōn, linked with Thrīta (*Yasna* 9.7) – one of the first

<sup>51</sup> Cf. M. Buchowski, *Magia i rytuał*, Warszawa 1993.

<sup>52</sup> *Avesta, Widēwdād*, op. cit., 22.1-2.

<sup>53</sup> *Bundahišn – Pahlavi Texts*, trans. E. W. West, [in:] *Sacred Books of the East*, No. 5, Oxford 1880 [reprint 2003], 3.18.

priests of the Haoma representing life and health – also became a part of the magic-medical anti-disease activity of the Iranians who used different kinds of formulas, incantations and amulets to tackle numerous evil-source situations.<sup>54</sup>

That is why medicine and medical treatment were linked with both religion and protective magic from the very beginning not only in ancient Iran, but also in other parts of the world, like in Greece where *pharmakon* ‘philter, medicine’ and *pharmakeus* ‘sorcerer’ have common roots. The conviction that pharmacological power is hidden behind the sacred word is visible in the Avestan noun<sup>55</sup> *baēšaza* ‘doctor’ and *bišaz* ‘cure’ which are derived etymologically from the Indo-European *\*baha/bhās* ‘to speak,’ just like the Russian *врач* ‘doctor, physician’ that comes from the verb *вырaти* ‘to speak.’ Medical treatment was understood as performed with *maqθra*. Hence, as we can read, the best and the most effective kind of treatment is *maqθrō.baēša-za* (Middle Persian *mānsar-bēšāziškīh*) ‘cure by a sacred word or a prayer’:

If several healers offer themselves together, O Spitama Zarathushtra! namely, one who heals with the knife, one who heals with herbs, and one who heals with the Holy Word [*maqθra* – M. K.], let one apply to the healing by the Holy Word: for this one is the best-healing of all healers who heals with the Holy Word; he will best drive away sickness from the body of the faithful.<sup>56</sup>

Since any disease is caused by demonic possession, it must be treated first of all by an exorcism. In the *Avesta* we can find some good examples of exorcism thrown like a weapon against a disease:

I drive away Ishire and I drive away Aghuire; I drive away Aghra and I drive away Ughra; I drive away sickness and I drive away death; I drive away pain and I drive away fever; I drive away Sarana and I drive away Sarastya; I drive away Azana and I drive away Azahva; I drive away Kurugha and I drive away Azivaka; I drive away Duruka and I drive away Astairya; I drive away the evil eye, rottenness, and infection which Angra Mainyu has created against the bodies of mortals.<sup>57</sup>

Interestingly, an example of *quasi*-medical treatment appears in the *Mādīgān ī Yōšt ī Fry(i)yān*. When Axt asks Yōšt ī Fry(i)yān, what is the coldest thing in this world, the youth gives him quite a surprising answer:

<sup>54</sup> Cf. P. Callieri, op. cit., p. 20.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. J. N. Bremmer, op. cit., p. 5.

<sup>56</sup> *Avesta, Widēwdād*, op. cit., 7.44; cf. J. de Menasce, *Le troisième livre du Dēnkard*, Paris 1973, chap. 157; N. B. Sabouri, *Pezeški be revāyat-e ketāb-e sevvom-e Dinkard*, Tehrān 1390hš/2011, p. 29–74.

<sup>57</sup> *Avesta, Widēwdād*, op. cit., 20.9.

The twenty and third enigma he asked, was this: What is the colder? Yavisht i Friyan said thus: Mayst thou be in misery whilst living, felon and wicked tyrant! and fall to hell when dead, for it is not so as thou thinkest, but so as I know; and it is thus thou thinkest, that the snow is colder which remains on the mountain, and the sun never warms it; but it is not so as thou thinkest, for the mind of a wicked man is colder. And a token of it is this, that thou, Akht the sorcerer, hast a brother who is wicked; and as many handfuls of poison as reside in his heart, thou art not able to melt, not with the sun and not with the fire; and when I take it in the palm of my hand, it will melt. Then Akht, the sorcerer, ordered them to bring and slay his own brother, and to take away the poison from the heart; but he was not able to melt it, not with the sun and not with the fire; and Yavisht i Friyan took it up in the palm of the hand, and melted it.<sup>58</sup>

Yōšt ī Fr(i)yān replies quickly to Axt, pointing to a substance called simply *zahr* ‘poison’ hidden in the heart of Axt’s brother. The sorcerer commands his brother to be killed, and his heart to be removed. Only Yōšt ī Fr(i)-yān is able to melt that *zahr*. To understand this question and answer, we should remember that both the heroes think about two different remains of Ahriman’s presence in this world. Axt associates Ahriman’s pollution with snow and brings to mind the cold used by him to ruin the perfect world. Cold forced Yam-*ādam-e šiw zwīn* ‘person beneath the earth’ to build the underground *war* where people, animals and plants could safely survive the winter. Meanwhile, Yōšt ī Fr(i)yān thinks about the internal, evil might existing in a human’s body. His opinion of this is not groundless. Firstly, it refers to the character of their conflict – mental and spiritual. Secondly, as Bruce Lincoln writes, in Middle Persian texts we can discover a consistent tendency of writers to think about Ahriman and his *dēws* as spiritual (*mēnōg*) creatures, or as evil and destruction-oriented forces, whose non-being (*nēstīh*) stemmed from the fact that neither Ahriman, nor the *dēws* had any material substance (*gētīg*) of their own. Thus, when they wanted to take any physical action, they had to possess the bodies of humans, who – by virtue of the good acts of creation of Ormazd – possessed both *mēnōg* and *gētīg* forms.<sup>59</sup>

In the *Wizdagīhā ī Zādspram* (14.1-5) we read that the demon of fever and pain wanted to possess the pregnant mother of Zoroaster to kill the unborn prophet. A messenger of Ahura Mazda advised her against going to a wizard called Storkō ‘impudent,’<sup>60</sup> but rather to come back home, wash her hands

<sup>58</sup> *Mādīgān ī Yōšt ī Fr(i)yān*, op. cit., 3.5-11.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. B. Lincoln, op. cit., p. 53–54; A. Panaino, *A Few Remarks...*, op. cit.

<sup>60</sup> His name resembles the names of some *dēws*: *Zarmān* ‘old age, decrepitude,’ *Astwiḥād* ‘the onset of death,’ *Nas* ‘post-mortem decay, bodily corruption,’ *Niyāz* ‘need, want, scarcity,’ *Āz* ‘greed, appetite’ or *Waran* ‘desire, lust.’

with cow's butter over the fire, burn some firewood and incense for herself and the child in her womb. Thanks to this she became well, and no demon could possess her anymore because of the sacred power within her. This sacred warmth of the prophet's mother is in opposition to the non-sacred poison of the sorcerer's brother. It represents a good force, while *zahr* stands for evil power. In one of the *rivāyats* we read that *dēws* contain poison in their bodies:

Then Ušēdar will say: "With the sharpest and broadest blades find a means (to destroy) that demon of great strength." And then men will slay that demon, with whip and dagger and mace and sword and lance and arrow and other weapons. And for one *parsang* around, poison from that demon will envelop the earth and plants and they will burn.<sup>61</sup>

Removing of *zahr* from the heart stands for the removal of Ahriman's disease. What is more, even if some references to medical knowledge:

The ninth enigma he asked, was this: In how many months do the elephant and the horse and the camel and the ass and the cow and the sheep and woman and the dog and the pig and the cat give birth? Yavisht ī Friyan said thus: Mayst thou be in misery whilst living, felon and wicked tyrant! and fall to hell when dead, for the elephant gives birth in three years, and the horse and camel and ass give birth in twelve months, and the cow and woman give birth in nine months, and the sheep gives birth in five months, and the dog and pig give birth in four months, and the cat gives birth in forty days.<sup>62</sup>

and medical treatment can be found in the *Mādīgān ī Yōšt ī Fr(i)yān*, in this case *karda-bēšāzišnīh* 'surgery with a knife,' it is still hard to unambiguously claim that *Yōšt ī Fr(i)yān* is a *bēšāzišk* 'a doctor,' or a student of medicine. Admittedly, we can claim that purity on the microcosmic level of the sacrifice and the healing represented by the operation carried out on Axt's brother are necessary for the health of the universe. From that point of view, the youth-*bēšāzišk* strengthens the macrocosmic health with his magico-religious might.

To summarise, magic and religion merge together, because both phenomena constituted elements of traditional cultures. Magic helps us to understand systems of belief, just like religion helps us to fathom systems of superstition. To understand the *Mādīgān ī Yōšt ī Fr(i)yān* – a religious text, we

<sup>61</sup> *The Perisan Rivayats*, trans. E. B. N. Dhabhar, Bombay 1932 [reprint 1999], 48.6-7; cf. J. de Menasce, *Le troisième livre du Dēnkard*, op. cit., chap. 102, 105.

<sup>62</sup> *Mādīgān ī Yōšt ī Fr(i)yān*, op. cit., 2.49-51.

need to explore its magical features as well. Although, the question of magic in pre-Islamic Iran has become an object of scientific studies, nevertheless some work still needs to be done. Let this article be a small contribution.

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