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History and Coinage of Elymais During 150/149-122/121 BC

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The satrapy of Elymais, comprising the southern and western portions of ancient Elam (roughly the present day province of Khuzistan in south-west Iran), came under Seleucid jurisdiction after Seleucus I Nicator (312-281 BC) returned from Egypt and captured Babylon at some point in time during 12/13-19/20 May 311 BC.[1] Seleucus then re-named Susa, the chief city and capital of the satrapy, Seleucia on the (river) Eulaeus (the Assyrian Ulai)[2] and began striking coins there in c. 311 BC, initially in the name of Alexander III of Macedon and then for himself as ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΣΕΛΕΥΚΟΥ.[3]

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1. The latest extant contemporary Babylonian record under Antigonus Monophthalmus is BM 40882 = Kennedy 1968, Pl. 11, no. 50. It is dated day 12, month II, year 7 (of Antigonus) = 12/13 May 311 BC. The earliest document confirming Alexander IV and signalling the end of Antigonus' authority in Babylonia is BM 22022. This was compiled on 19.II.6 of Alex[ander] = 19/20 May 311 BC. The latter date may therefore be taken as the *terminus ante quem* of Seleucus' arrival at Babylon.

2. Hansman (1967) identifies Eulaeus with river Karkheh. According to Diakonoff (1985: 1, n. 1), the ancient Eulaeus was the modern Sha'ur plus the lower part of the Karun river. Briant (2002: 381) writes that Nearchus, commander of the Macedonian fleet, agreed to a rendezvous at Susa with Alexander. Guided by a Persian pilot, he sailed up the Pasitigris (Karun) as far as Ahwaz and then took the Eulaeus up to Susa.

3. Cf. Le Rider 1965, Newell 1978, Houghton 1983, and Houghton and Lorber 2002 for

secrets imparted to initiates. No written literature of the cult, except for a few fragmentary inscriptions, lines of hymns, and maybe a catechism, is known to have existed. The mysteries were so well guarded that much about Mithraism remains a mystery still. The signification of the scene on the Portland Vase is unknown. The figure on the bottom, perhaps warning one not to divulge its meaning, would have been invisible himself when the vase was standing. The silence of the great work of art is figurative and literal; but at least, in contrast to the guarded refusals to speak, the silence that is better than a lie, the defiant stillness, the submissive quiet before the decrees of time, this last variety of Iranian religious silence is that of immortal beauty, of eternal truth, and of peace.

to stand independently.[10] This would appear to have been cut, with some attention to the centering of its subject, from another work of cameo glass: it

Base of the Portland Vase

portrays a young man in typically Iranian dress holding his index finger to his lips, probably enjoining silence. The most common figure of this kind for the place and period is Mithra, the Zoroastrian divinity who in the early centuries of the Christian era became the focus of an extremely popular Roman religion. Much of the attraction of Mithraism lay in its secretive aspect, its mysteries: the rites of initiation hidden from outsiders, and the

10. See Robin Brooks, *The Portland Vase*, New York: Harper Collins, 2004.

the rhythmically powerful Avestan triad *humata huxta hvaršta*, "good thoughts, good words, good deeds", in particular, was employed ritually to induce a trance-state in which the ancient Iranian visionary, such as the righteous man Vīrāz or the high-priest Kartīr might pass safely into the Otherworld, to seek advice and help to be brought back to the community of the faithful.[9] Such practices belong to the general category of religious practice called shamanism: the latter term, which is very useful, has been rather unjustly rejected by some students of Iranian religion on the grounds that in Central Asia it is a Turco-Mongol, not Iranian phenomenon – which is not the case – or that it is a phenomenon of "primitive" peoples – a characterization which is meaningless. Since mantras as metalanguage fulfill the conditions of absolute truth and reality, annihilating the distance between signifier and signified, they are the stuff of both prophecy and magic: Zarathuštra calls himself a *manthran-*, a "mantrician". The Iranian **manthra-kara-* "mantra-maker" gives us both Buddhist Sogdian *mārkarē*, a magician or soothsayer, and Christian Armenian *margarē*, a prophet: Isaiah, the paraphraser of the *Gāthās*, after a long detour acquires Zarathuštra's title in the Iranized, Indo-European Armenian language of the fifth-century translators of the Bible.

I will conclude with a consideration of one of the most famous poems to deal with silence, here as an aspect of immortal beauty and stilled time, one of the masterpieces of Classical art – and their unexpected Iranian connection. It is very likely that the English poet John Keats saw one of the treasures of the British Museum, the Portland Vase, a Roman work of glass in cameo technique, before he wrote his "Ode on a Grecian Urn", text (8). The theme of silence pervades the poem – of music that is purest when unheard. The famous declaration "beauty is truth; truth, beauty" could well paraphrase the Avestan *aša sraēšta*, "O Truth, who art the most beautiful." Some lines may refer to directly to the vase; those about the sacrifice of a bovine evidently do not. In ancient times the original, rounded base of the Portland Vase was cut off and replaced by a flat roundel enabling the object

9. See J.R. Russell, "Kartīr and Mānī: A Shamanistic Model of Their Conflict," *Iranica Varia: Papers in Honor of E. Yarshater*, Acta Iranica 30, Leiden: Brill, 1990, pp. 180-193; *idem*, "A Parthian Bhagavad Gītā and its Echoes," in J.-P. Mahé and R.W. Thomson, eds., *From Byzantium to Iran: In Honour of Nina Garsoian*, Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996, pp. 17-35; both repr. in *AIS*.

Charles Newman wrote, "... we must either confess with Pascal and Rousseau that we are trapped within language and dignify silence as the only nobility, or reassert our faith in the very plasticity of life, in its metalinguistic possibilities, as did Nietzsche and William James."[8] Let us examine Mandelstam's poem on silence, and explore some of the possibilities of metalinguistics.

One of the poems in *Kamen'* is text (7), "Silentium", a response to the earlier poem of Tyutchev. The poem is an incantation summoning Creation to reverse itself, for word to revert to sound, for the goddess of love, Aphrodite, to return to the sea-foam that engendered her. Now, if one recalls the collocation of stone and heaven, the earthly mirror, counterpart, and partner of the blue firmament, with its echoes and thunder, is the wine-dark (or, as Mandelstam sees it, lapis-black, encoding the name of a stone into the water!) sea, with its murmurous roar. In Genesis, the breath of God moves over the waters; in the Iranian *Bundahišn*, the crystalline egg of the heavens is made first, and the second creation is the sea, filling half of it. The pure sound is the music of the primordial pair. So the silence enjoined by Mandelstam, in distinction to that of Tyutchev, is not radical quiet, but the stilling of empty words so that true words, musical ones, may be heard. Mandelstam turns back the history of the human predicament, reversing age and corruption and the very cycle of time. The sounds he seeks are expressive yet pre-linguistic, but one recalls that those sounds, the poem itself, are all his. Yet these words, carved from the *akmē* of truth, must somehow be separated from usual speech. They are, self evidently, not nonlinguistic, since they are audible meaning itself; and they are not pre-linguistic either; so one may only call them metalinguistic. In Indo-Iranian the term for such words is Sanskrit *mantra-*, Avestan *manthra-*: locutions that are the direct, true, unmediated embodiment in sound of a thought that is a spiritual reality, pure meaning. The proof that mantric speech is different from the everyday sort that causes problems and has to be stilled sometimes, is that there is no evil mantra and you cannot tell a lie by means of a mantra.

The most commonly known Indian mantra, *Om*, is not a word in strict sense; but the entire Avestan scripture is *manthra*; and I have suggested that

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8. Intro. to E.M. Cioran, *The Fall into Time*, Chicago: Quadrangle, 1970, p. 31.

The Zoroastrian doctrine of silence has as its main concern the avoidance of participation in a lie: one must say nothing, if one knows it is certain one's words will be distorted. This concern, which we have explored through the texts of the Avesta, its interpreters, the Hebrew Bible, and a mediaeval Persian ode, can logically reflect a deeper anxiety: any word, once pronounced, is susceptible to misinterpretation, whether intended or not, by its receptor. Authorial intention is bedevilled by a radical handicap – from the point of view of an author who has a definite message he wishes to communicate, it is frustrating that the text he produces must acquire a being of its own which becomes the business of readers with their own purposes and predispositions. So it is better to say nothing – the counsel of the Russian poet Fyodor Tyutchev, in his poem "Silentium!", text (6). Or else one must find a way to say what is so solidly real that it resists distortion.

The Symbolist movemeht in the late nineteenth century sought to employ language, color, and music to bring aesthetic perception to a threshold of vision of great and powerful realities beyond the present and visible; to realities of which everything here in the world is but a hint, a symbol. But what if allusion itself is fated to become illusion? In that case the Symbolists' desire to transcend appearance and get at the truthful kernel of things is served worst by the very method they have invented to arrive at their goal. And an additional fault of this approach is that their method is inadequate, in its vagueness, to give a clear account even of earth's appearances and sense-impressions. Several Russian poets, some of them Symbolists themselves, reacted to the Symbolist movement by forming a new school and theory of poetry they named Acmeism. *Akmē* is a Greek word for the stony pinnacle on a mountain, the hard essence of something. As an Indo-European word it is cognate, as Omri Ronen has observed, to Indo-Iranian *asman-*, "heaven" (the sky was anciently thought to be made of rock crystal), and to the Russian word for stone, *kamen'*, which is, on the synchronic, poetic level, itself nearly an anagram of *akmē*. The Acmeist poet Osip Mandelstam entitled his first collection of poems *Kamen'*; and both that word and *akmē* appear together on the title-page. These poems were to exemplify the craft of expressing correctly and fully the immanent essence of what really exists, in clear, intricate, classical language, with the precision of a sacred text and the full-body musicality of pure sound.

more Zoroastrian sort of silence, that of wary caution and proud refusal? The final line sharpens the dilemma: "Whom do you ask what has happened to the cycle of time?" (The Persian *mī porsī*, "you ask", is cognate to Solzhenitsyn's Russian imperative, *prosi*, above!) If by the latter the transition from youth into age is meant, then the silence the poet enjoins upon his complaining self can be understood as the submissive, Moslem sort: as a man ages, the ways of his youth and the pleasures he enjoyed all go away, and he crawls towards death in a world that has become strange and unkind. Such is fate or divine decree; and what good does it do to question it? But what if the divine secrets are of another kind altogether? Remember that the Zoroastrian interpreters of the *Gāthās* saw in the admonition to be silent counsel for the oppressed in the time of an eschatological tyranny. Zoroastrian eschatological teaching is replete with cosmological secrets: let us consider some of this eschatology.

The Zoroastrians measure the age of the universe with mathematical precision: Ahreman invaded the physical universe at noon on Nō Rūz – in the Zoroastrian calendar, the day of Ohrmazd in the month of Fravardīn of the year 6000 of *Bundahišn*, Creation. The period of *Gumezišn*, or Mixture of good and evil in conflict in which we live, commenced, with an exact duration of another 6000 years, till the cyclical course of the vernal sun moves again into the house of the Ram[7]: apocalypse, and the *dawr-i rūzigārān* of Hāfiz. By this understanding of the "cycle of time", one is to be silent because the apocalypse is underway and there is nothing for it but *tušnāmaiti, tušt mēnišnīh* – silent thought, *xāmōšī*. Well, which revolution (of time), then, is it? The great Russian Anarchist Emma Goldman once said in a slightly different context, "If I can't dance to it, it's not my revolution." The double-meanings and ambiguities of Persian poetry are not schizophrenic incommensurates, irreconcilable assertions of Zoroastrianism vs. Islam. They are, when one considers the mystery of life in which all our blinding theologies are constructs, a game of hide and seek, of link-and-bobolink, in which it is not the fact of silence but the varieties of silence that bring aesthetic perception, the only honest revelation possible. Everyone can dance to Hāfiz's revolution of time.

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7. See J.R. Russell, "The Book of the Six Thousand: An Armenian Magical Text," *Bazmavēp* 147.1-4, Venice, 1989, pp. 221-243; and "On Mysticism and Esotericism among the Zoroastrians," *Iranian Studies* 26.1-2 (1993): 73-94; both repr. in *AIS*.

We may perhaps interpret in the light of the Iranian moral and political exegesis of silence the famous ode of Hāfiz, text (5), which laments in apocalyptic tones the disappearance from society of the essential good qualities that bind men together – friendship, faithfulness, kindness (*mehrbānī*, which contains the name of the great Zoroastrian divinity Mithra), and courage – and the eclipse in nature of the joys and beauties that parallel them: the traditional Iranian pleasures of convivial polo-playing and wine-drinking, and the sounds and scents of spring (the time of Nō Rūz, the Zoroastrian New Year). The poet mentions repeatedly *šahr-e yārān*, the Realm of Friends or Lovers: *šahr* is of course the descendant of Avestan *xšathra*, cf. Ahura Mazdā's spirit of righteous sovereignty, Xšathra Vairya, Desirable Dominion, Persian Šahrevar; and Persian *yār* comes ultimately from Old Persian *hadibara-*, Middle Persian *hayyār*, literally "helper", from which we have also the reflex *'ayyār*. That is not a word but a world: it means a strong man who defends his fellows against the wicked whilst adhering to the heroic code of free and valiant spirits who drink deep and love more deeply still. It has been possible – and, at times in recent Iranian history, even perilous – to read the poem in such a way that the words *šahr-e yārān* are run together as *šahriyārān*, "kings", making the ode a political expression of nostalgia for the native monarchy of the nation.

There is a belief still held by some Zoroastrians of the region of Yazd that the son of Yazdegerd *šahriyār*, the last of the line of Sāsān, wanders the hills in the shape of a gazelle, waiting for the moment of restoration; and a crown in a local fire-temple is kept for him. In Arabic literature, instead of the theme of the once and future king, the "sons of Sāsān" appear as itinerant mendicants of unusual talents, perhaps remotely akin to the type of the Wandering Jew. Such a disparaging permutation might well be expected, with the pen in the hand, as Sa'dī said, of the enemy. The ode of Hāfiz does not depend on verbal ambiguity; but the shadow of a second meaning enriches its possibilities. In the final couplet, though, the poet's self-admonition, "Hāfiz, nobody knows the divine secrets, be silent!" is indeed surprising: how could the various failures of society and manners catalogued above be divine secrets? Surely they are human failings. *Xamūš*! Silence! here really can be meditative, apophatic – the inscrutable ways and baffling decrees of a transcendent, Moslem God are past human understanding and must be accepted in humility. Or, if the ode is political, are we back to a

thought", that is, to refrain from speaking to them, whilst keeping in mind that the enemy is to be fought when the time comes. Three reasons are given. First, one is to impress upon one's memory (thus I understand Phl. *dαxšag* and *(h)ōš*) the nature of one's adversary and one's duty to resist him. That way one will not lapse into complacency, passivity, or acceptance of tyranny, but will be ready to fight when the occasion at last presents itself. Second, one is not to speak to the wicked, lest one's words be received as propitiation and appeasement, and thereby enable miscreants to feel at their ease. Third, one must refrain from speech lest one's words be corrupted by an evil interlocutor – twisted around to mean their opposite. The Pahlavi interpreters thus focus upon the use of silent thought as a kind of passive resistance when no other form is possible, rather than its personification or role. It is for them an ethical and moral strategy to be employed in the cosmic conflict – in the *Dēnkard*, significantly, Yasna 43.15 is cited in the context of a larger discussion of eschatology, specifically of the oppressive tyranny that is to be one of the signs of the end of days – rather than an aspect of divinity or a meditative practice. Silence is politics by other means.

In this context, where silence is actually a rather eloquent social strategy, one may cite the reflection of Michel Foucault: "Silence itself – the things cne declines to say, or is forbidden to name, the discretion that is required between different speakers – is less the absolute limit of discourse, the other side from which it is separated by a strict boundary, than an element that functions alongside the things said, with them and in relation to them within overall strategies. There is no binary division to be made between what one says and what one does not say; we must try to determine the different ways of not saying such things... There is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses."[6] The strategies of silence are familiar to any creative spirit imprisoned in tyranny. The Russian writer Isaac Babel, attending the first congress of the Union of Soviet Writers at Moscow in 1934, put it succinctly: he boasted he had become "a master of the genre of silence." Alexander Solzhenitsyn expressed in a potently triadic form his defiant counsel for silence against the régime: Не верь, не бойся, не проси! "Do not believe them, do not fear them, and do not ask anything of them!"

6. *The History of Sexuality*, I, New York: Random House, 1980, p. 27.

presently) an epithet of God Himself. In most translations of the *Gāthās*, then, a spirit herself named Silent Thinking, or another divinity who has this quality, conveys a message that is "best" to Zarathuštra. This message is the admonition not to propitiate the wicked, and so on.

P.O. Skjærvø[4] understands the passage quite differently: when Ahura Mazdā envelops (*pairi-gam-*) the Prophet in the spirit of Vohu Manah, Zarathuštra is elevated to such a state by this divine visitation of ecstatic insight that "silent thinking" comes *as* the best (*vahištā*). Other translators understand the latter word, as we have seen, as "the best *things to be said*": viz., the doctrine not to propitiate the wicked.

For reflection upon the passage within the evolving Zoroastrian tradition itself, let us turn to texts (3) and (4): the first, from the Pahlavi Zand, provides a translation and commentary on the passage; and the other Pahlavi text, the *Dēnkard* ("Acts of the Religion", an encyclopaedic compilation of the ninth century A.D.), enlarges upon it further. Isaiah and other foreign writers seem to have culled from the *Gāthās* the more easily accessible messages; but the Zoroastrians themselves naturally address the entire text. In both Pahlavi books, *tušt mēnišnīh*, understood to mean "silent thought" (another Middle Persian word for "silent", *xāmōš*, was to become the common one in later New Persian) does not suggest the practice of meditation, nor has it to do with any form of apophatic theology; it is that proverbial discretion that is the better part of valor – the intentional choice to refrain from speaking out loud. It has something of the religious force of *taqiya* in later Islam, though Zoroastrians cannot dissemble by lying.

Zoroastrianism is not a quietist or introspective faith: the Pahlavi credal prayer *Nām stāyišn* ("Praise (is meet) to the Name (of Ohrmazd)"):[5], authorship of which is attributed to the fourth-century high priest Ādurbād ī Amahraspandan, enjoins *razmīg ayōzišnīh padērag dēwān*, "armed striving against the demons." Accordingly, the Zand and *Dēnkard* explain Yasna 43.15 to mean that good men who find they are not in a position to oppose the wicked in the proper manner – by force of arms – are to maintain "silent

4. Eastern Iranian Civilization course book, Harvard Univ., 2005, p. 39.

5. See J.R. Russell, "The Do'ā-ye Nām Stāyišn," in R. Emmerick, D. Weber, eds., *Corolla Iranica* [Festschrift D.N. MacKenzie], Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1991, pp. 127-132, esp. p. 128 n. 5, repr. in J.R. Russell, *Armenian and Iranian Studies* [*AIS*], Harvard Armenian Texts and Studies 9, Cambridge, MA, 2004.

correspondences to easily accessible passages in Yasna 44, for instance, in Deutero-Isaiah. But the Jewish encounter with Iranians – and thus, most likely, with Zoroastrianism – goes back before Cyrus to the preceding dynasty of the Medians, though. I have suggested, for instance, that Ezekiel's evocation of the resurrection of the dead, not only reflects the idea, but also reproduces the details, of Zoroastrian eschatological doctrine. His book predates Deutero-Isaiah, and he, too, mentions Persia by name. In the case of Proto-Isaiah here, I would suggest a paraphrase and very Iranian-flavored elaboration of the more accessible section of our passage, Yasna 43.15 – the warning about wicked men who call the good evil. The idea of the latter is sufficiently important within Zarathuštra's doctrine, moreover, to be repeated: in Ys. 32.10, a man of evil doctrine – perhaps Yima/Jamšīd after his corruption by evil – is accused of various perverse actions and beliefs, among which is calling the just men wicked.

Interpretation of the middle part of the verse, which is not quite as clear, depends upon how one interprets the sense, syntactical place, and action of an Avestan common or proper noun, *tušnāmaiti-*. The literal meaning of the word poses no problems: it is a compound of *tušni-*, an adjective meaning "silent" (there are plenty of cognates in kindred Indo-European tongues, including, for example, Russian ТУШИТЬ, "extinguish"), with the base *man-* "think".[2] Notable amongst parallel Avestan formations are proper nouns: the name of Ahura Mazdā's beneficent spirit of the earth, *ārmaiti-*, "right thinking", mother of mankind, and her demonic opponent, *Tarōmaiti-*, "contrary thought". The word for "silent" is as receptive to compound formation as *man-*: it forms another compound in Avestan: the *fravašis*, or protector-spirits, are called *tušni-šadhō*, "sitting in silence" (*Yašt* 13.29). Hermann Lommel argued that *Tušnāmaiti* should be taken as a synonym of ārmaiti ("neben Aramati noch ein zweites Wort für dieselbe Geistermacht," *Die Religion Zarathuštras*, 1930, p. 62); but Mary Boyce[3] sees no foundation for this suggestion and considers Tušnāmaiti a separate divinity in her own right. The goddess does not reappear in scripture; but the word is, at least, used as the proper name of a Zoroastrian woman in *Yašt* 13.139. In his translation of the Hymns, Stanley Insler makes "the meditative one" (which is not quite the same thing as "silent thinking", but more on that

2. See Robert S.P. Beekes, *A Grammar of Gāthā-Avestan*, Leiden: Brill, 1988, p. 105.

3. *History of Zoroastrianism*, I, Leiden: Brill, 1975, p. 228 and n. 139.

[Truth] acquire a material body." The hymn combines cosmological teachings with ethical ones.

Text (1), Yasna 43.15, is, like so much of the text of the *Gāthās*, partly very clear, partly subject to greatly divergent interpretation. Let us consider the first and last strophes, which are lucid enough, and treat the vexatious middle subsequently. The verse begins with God visiting the Prophet through the spirit Vohu Manah, "Good Mind/Intention"; and it concludes by warning that one should not offer propitiation or satisfaction (the base *xšnu-* essentially implies an act of friendly reciprocity) to the followers of the Lie, since they will, as liars, call the *ašavans* – the truthful and righteous – evil. It is typical of mendacious people to pervert language by calling one thing its opposite. My favorite example of this is a bridge that the totalitarian régime of the former East Germany cut in two and then renamed Brücke der Einheit, the Bridge of Unity. One danger honest people face in associating with liars is the risk of having their own words and intentions correspondingly twisted.

The Hebrew prophet Isaiah in text (2) appears to echo this ethical concern of the Avestan passage, embellishing it with examples in the repetitive style typical of Biblical poetry but with the cosmological, oppositionalist features specific to Zoroastrianism: good-evil, dark-light, sweet-bitter. Isaiah's evocation of drunken, violent men recalls the passages in the Avesta on the killers and persecutors of men and animals; and the mention of rewards, too, recalls the cosmological passages of Yasna 43, in which Zarathuštra declares that Ahura Mazdā ordained recompense for the good and the wicked. It is generally accepted by scholars that the texts attributed to a single Isaiah belong actually to two or three different authors: the so-called Deutero- or Second- Isaiah acclaims the Achaemenian king Cyrus, who ended the Babylonian captivity and enabled the Jews to return to the Land of Israel, as God's anointed, or Messiah. But Cyrus reigned well over a century after the events mentioned in the early chapters of the book, so the latter have to belong to a different, earlier author (unless, of course, one chooses to believe that there was one Isaiah, who as God's prophet could foretell the future). The subject peoples of the Persian Empire probably learnt something of Zoroastrianism by word of mouth from Iranians; and the Achaemenians paraphrased passages of the *Gāthās* in their decrees and inscriptions, which were transmitted in various languages besides Old Persian. Prof. Morton Smith and others have adduced precise

the northeast of present-day Iran. The surviving Zand is in Middle Persian, or Pahlavi – the language of the Sasanian dynasty in Iran (226-651 A.D.). Much knowledge of the grammar and meaning of Avestan had been lost even by then; but the traditional memory and understanding of the faith is of course of intrinsic value, and the Hymns themselves are the essence and foundation of the Zoroastrian faith.

With chapter 43 commences the Uštavaitī Gāthā, so named after its first word, *uštā*: "May Ahura Mazdā, the Wise Lord, who rules at will, grant wishes (*uštā*) to him – to whoever has wishes." The Prophet, after this affirmation of God's power to bestow joy and benefit, asks to be shown the way to the abodes of truth where the Lord dwells. A number of passages then commence with the phrase, *Spəntəm at thwā mənghī*... "Holy did I know you to be, O Ahura Mazdā, when..." and review what the Prophet has seen, starting with a vision (*darəsəm*, "I beheld") of Creation at which God ordained fitting recompense (*mižda-*) for good and bad actions and words (*uxdhā*), to come at the world's turning-point (*urvaēsa-*). The Prophet recalls how God asked him who he was and he replied that he was Zarathuštra and declared his will to oppose followers of the Lie.

One must recall here that Zoroastrianism, uniquely among the great faiths, is dualistic: God, Creator of Truth, life, and joy, is wholly good, and His universe is under assault by an independent, alien, and entirely destructive spirit, Angra Mainyu (in later Persian, Ahreman), who in opposition to Ahura Mazdā has made the Lie, death, and sorrow. The two primordial spirits are inherently unequal: God creates and foresees, but His demonic adversary is capable only of malign response and afterthought. Nonetheless, Ahura Mazdā's power is limited by the logic of His nature: He is good, yet a radical evil acknowledged to have no part in His plan exists; it would not, were He able to destroy it. This oppositionalism is crucial to Zoroastrian cosmology: all the day used to be luminous, till Ahreman's darkness caused night; the seas were mild and sweet, till he made them cold and bitter; and the world was at peace before he introduced oppression and violence.

Zarathuštra continues in the hymn, recalling how his message was not at first received by men: he asks Ahura Mazdā for the support a friend (*frya-*) gives to a friend. In an apparent reference to the apocalyptic doctrine of an incarnate Savior, the Prophet proclaims, *Astvat Ašəm hyāt*, "May Aša

second appears to be a paraphrase of its more accessible part, in an early part of the Biblical book of Isaiah – with some embellishment that is also Iranian in flavor. I follow then the development of the translation and exegesis of the entire Gāthic passage – the Zoroastrian commentators were of course obliged to address what seem to us the obscurer parts of the text, not just the easy bits – in two books: the *Zand*, or translation and interlinear commentary; and a work partially reliant upon the latter called *Dēnkard*, or Acts of the Religion. The discussion moves nearly half a millennium from the latter, ninth-century, book to a famous ode of Hāfiz, where silence and ambiguity appear in a strikingly similar context as political strategies, though of course in a much changed social and religious milieu in which quietist silence, or submission to divine will, are alternate readings. The Zoroastrian counsel of silence, despite its clear limitation within the circumstances of apocalypse, reflects nonetheless a fundamental unease about language itself: the inherent capacity of language to misrepresent thought rather than to convey it. I shall consider in this light, very briefly, the idea of *mantra* in Indo-Iranian thought and two texts by Russian poets who thought deeply about silence, word, and sound. The conclusion brings us to a surprising confluence of poetry, of our own English speech, and yet another form of Iranian religious silence – or at least, an Iranian counselling it.[1]

The five great, revelatory Hymns, or *Gāthās*, of the righteous Zarathuštra, the Prophet of Iran, are found at the heart of the seventy-two-chapter text of the *Yasna*, or liturgy of consecration and offering, that is performed by priests every morning. The Yasna in turn is a part of the Zoroastrian scripture, the Avesta, of which there exists an interlinear translation and interpretive commentary called the *Zand*. The language of the Scripture, named after the book, is Avestan, an ancient eastern Iranian language cognate with the oldest Sanskrit of the Indian Vedas: the *Gāthās* are in the oldest form of this language, and are now imperfectly understood. The Prophet lived, most probably, in the second millennium B.C. and far to

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IV.
Who are these coming to the sacrifice?
To what green altar, O mysterious priest,
Lead'st thou that heifer lowing at the skies,
And all her silken flanks with garlands drest?
What little town by river or sea shore,
Or mountain-built with peaceful citadel,
Is emptied of this folk, this pious morn?
And, little town, thy streets for evermore
Will silent be; and not a soul to tell
Why thou art desolate, can e'er return.

V.
O Attic shape! Fair attitude! with brede
Of marble men and maidens overwrought,
With forest branches and the trodden weed;
Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought
As doth eternity: Cold Pastoral!
When old age shall this generation waste,
Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe
Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say'st,
"Beauty is truth, truth beauty," – that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

The Harvard scholar of psychology William James wrote famously of the varieties of religious experience: this essay considers the varieties of the use and understanding of silence, in pre-Islamic Iran and in subsequent Iranian religious thought as it evolved out of the Zoroastrian heritage and at times at variance with it. Though the consideration of the topic was at first motivated by the reflection that religious speech has become rather obtrusive in this era, and the virtue of silence accordingly deserves some attention, it turned out that the famous *tušnāmaiti* passage of the Hymns of Zarathuštra does not have to do with introspection of the quietist variety generally understood in the study of mysticism. It is more in the nature of counsel of passive resistance – and at that, of such resistance as last, not first, resort, in a time of apocalyptic conflict. The first text to be considered, then, comes from the *Gāthās*. The

(8) John Keats, "Ode on a Grecian Urn"

I.
Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness,
Thou foster-child of silence and slow time,
Sylvan historian, who canst thus express
A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme:
What leaf-fring'd legend haunts about thy shape
Of deities or mortals, or of both,
In Tempe or the dales of Arcady?
What men or gods are these? What maidens loth?
What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?
What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?

II.
Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard
Are sweeter; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on;
Not to the sensual ear, but, more endear'd,
Pipe to the spiritual ditties of no tone:
Fair youth, beneath the trees, thou canst not leave
Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare;
Bold lover, never, never canst thou kiss,
Though winning near the goal – yet, do not grieve;
She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,
For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!

III.
Ah, happy, happy boughs! that cannot shed
Your leaves, nor ever bid the Spring adieu;
And, happy melodist, unwearied,
For ever piping songs for ever new;
More happy love! more happy, happy love!
For ever warm and still to be enjoy'd,
For ever panting, and for ever young;
All breathing human passion far above,
That leaves a heart high-sorrowful and cloy'd,
A burning forehead, and a parching tongue.

Как кристаллическую ноту,
Что от рождения чиста!

Останься пеной, Афродита,
И, слово, в музыку вернись!
И, сердце, сердца устыдись,
С первоосновой жизни слито!

Translation (JRR)

Osip Mandelstam, "Silentium", 1910

(From the book *Stone*, with author's correction of 1935, in Osip Mandelstam, *Poems and Prose*, Library of the Poet Series, Moscow, 2001, pp. 27-28.)

She is not yet born;
She is both music and word,
And, therefore, of all alive
The link that cannot be broken.

Peacefully heaves the breast of the sea,
But the day is madly bright;
The foam's pale lilac
In its vessel lapis-lazuli-black.

Let my lips obtain
Muteness primordial
Like the note of crystal
That from birth is clean!

Remain as foam, Aphrodite;
And, word, into music return!
And heart, in front of heart, feel shame,
Fused with first principle of life!

Let them wake and walk
Wordlessly, a starry night:
Admire them. Be still.

How can the heart express itself?
How could another understand?
Will he grasp your principle of life?
Thought once expressed in words is a lie.
Groping to extract, you pollute the spring.
Be nourished by it, and be still.

Be capable within yourself alone to dwell:
A whole world exists within your soul
Of mysterious and enchanted thoughts.
The outward din would deafen them;
The daylight, drive them all away –
Heed their singing, and be still!

(7) Осип Мандельштам, «Silentium», 1910 г.

(Из книги «Камень», с версией автора 1935 г.: Осип Мандельштам, *Стихотворения, Проза*, серия Библиотека Поэта, М., 2001 г., ст. 27-28)

Она еще не родилась,
Она и музыка, и слово,
И потому всего живого
Ненарушаемая связь.

Спокойно дышат моря груди–
Но, как безумный, светел день,
И пены бледная сирень–
В черно-лазуревом сосуде.

Да обретут мои уста
Первоначальную немоту,

Hāfiz! Nobody knows the secrets of the Divine, be silent:
Whom do you ask what has happened to the revolution of time?

(6) Федор Тютчев, «Silentium!», 1830 (?) г.

(Ф.И. Тютчев, *Стихотворения*, серия Заветная Лира, М., 2003 г., ст. 73-75.)

Молчи, скрывайся и таи
И чувства и мечты свои—
Пускай в душевной глубине
Встают и заходят оне
Безмолвно, как звезды в ночи,—
Любуйся ими— и молчи.

Как сердцу высказать себя?
Другому как понять тебя?
Поймет ли он, чем ты живешь?
Мысль изреченная есть ложь.
Взрывая, возмутишь ключи,—
Питайся ими— и молчи.
Лишь жить в себе самом умей—
Есть целый мир в душе твоей
Таинственно-волшебных дум;
Их оглушит наружный шум,
Дневные разгонят лучи,—
Внимай их пенью— и молчи!..

Translation (JRR)

Fyodor Tyutchev, "Silentium!", ca. 1830

(F.I. Tyutchev, *Poems*, Intimate Lyre Series, Moscow, 2003, pp. 73-75.)

Be silent, hide yourself, conceal
Your feelings and your dreams:
In the depths of your soul

Tābish-i khūrshēd u sa'y-e bād u bārān-rā che shud
Shahr(-)i( )yārān būd u khāk-i mehrbānān īn diyār
Mehrbānī key sar āmad, shahr(-)i( )yārān-rā che shud
Gū-ye tawfīq u karāmat dar miyān afkanda-and
Kas ba miydān dar na-mē-āyad, sawārān-rā che shud
Ṣad hazārān gul shikōft u bāng-i morgh-ē bar na-khʷāst
'Andalībān-rā che pīsh āmad, hazārān-rā che shud
Zuhra sāz-ē khush na-mē-sāzad, magar 'ūdash be-sukht
Kas na-dārad zawq-i mastī, mey-gusārān-rā che shud
Hāfiz, asrār-i ilāhī kas na-mē-dānad, khamūsh
Az ke mē-pursī ke dawr-i rūzigārān-rā che shud

Translation (JRR)

I see friendship in no one; what has become of the friends?
When did the end come for friendship, what has happened to the lovers of friends?
The water of life has turned torpid; where is Khizr of auspicious step?
Blood has dripped out from the rose's stem; what has happened to the winds of spring?
Nobody declares that the friend, friendship's right has kept:
What state has befallen the perceivers of right; what has happened to the friends?
No ruby has been taken from virtue's mine – it's been years!
What has become of the sun's heat, the striving of the wind and the rain?
These parts were the Realm of Friends [or, had Kings – JRR], the Lovers' Land.
How did that compassion come to an end; what has become of the Realm of Friends [or, of the Kings – JRR]?
They've thrown the ball of fidelity and generosity into the midst of the field:
But no one comes out into the arena; what has become of the horsemen?
A hundred thousand roses bloomed, but the bird's call has not arisen:
What has befallen the nightingales, what has become of its thousand tunes?
The morning star does not play his sweet melody: has his lyre burnt?
No one has the taste for intoxication; what has happened to those who drink deep of wine?

(4) Dēnkard (DkM 664-665)

(=*Dēnkard* book 7, chapter 8, lines 37-38; see also the tr. by M. Molé, *La légende de Zoroastre selon les textes Pehlevis,* Travaux de l'Institut d'Études Iraniennes de l'Université de Paris, 3, Paris: Peeters, 1993, p. 87.)

Rēš wattar srāyēnd pāhlom kunišn ō mardom apaymān-kušišnīh, kē az ān ī wattar kunišn urwāhmanīh gōwēnd. ān-iz marnjēnēnd ān ī mēnōgān axwān, marnjēnēnd ān ī xwēš ruwān, marnjēnēnd astōmandān gēhān, awēšān xrōsišn dahēnd ō ruwān. Dēn-iz abar če ewēnag rāyēnīdan ī hudēn mardom abag wattarān ī hamzamānag. Ud ēn-iz gōwēd ku Zarduxšt pursīd az Ohrmazd ku: čē ēdōn ō awēšān framāyēm kē nē pad dār sneh tuwānīg hēnd, ku-šān abzār nēst, awēšān nē spāh ud nē abar-pānag u-šān was bēšīdār. Guft-aš Ohrmazd ku, awēšān tušt-mēnišn mard waxšēnišn daxšag ī pad ōš kē nē ast pad spāh tuwānīg hēnd u-šān was bēšīdār.

Translation (JRR)

The greatest evil wound that can be done to men is that endeavor against right measure when one calls the worst action a delight. Such people ruin the spiritual worlds, ruin their own souls, ruin the material cosmos, they cause their own souls to cry out. The Religion teaches the manner by which men of the Good Religion [Zoroastrianism] should conduct themselves in confrontation with the wicked. It says this, also: that Zarduxšt asked Ohrmazd, "How now am I to instruct them, who have no skill with the sword – that is, they have no weapon – those who have neither army nor defense but many attackers." Ohrmazd said to him: "They should be men of silent thought, cultivating a sign of memory in their consciousness, when they are not empowered by an army and have many attackers."

(5) A Ghazal of Hāfiz

Yārī andar kas na-mē-bīnam, yārān-rā che shud
Dōstī kay ākhir āmad, dōst-dārān-rā che shud
Āb-i ḥaywān tīra-gōn shud, khizr-i farrukh-pay kujā-st
Khūn chakīd az shākh-i gul, bād-i bahārān-rā che shud
Kas na-mē-gūyad ke yārī dāsht haqq-i dōstī
Ḥaqq-shināsān-rā che ḥāl oftād, yārān-rā che shud
La'lē az kān-i moruwwat bar-na-yāmad, sāl-hā-st

abzōnīg ēdōn tō
mēnīd hē Ohrmazd
ka ō man
Wahman be mad.
dæxšag pad ōš
ōy tušt mard
(kē hukun abāg wadtarān tušt abāyēd būd)
mēnišnīg wæxšišn
*(ku zūd zūd ayād kunišn ku nēm pad dæxšag estād pas ka tis *šāyēd kardan kunēd).*

**ma mard was*
druwandān hād čegāmize šnāyēnīdār
(ēd ku pad rāmišn nē abāyend kardan)
kē ēdōn tō harwispīn
ahlæwān pad anāg dārēnd
(ku-tān pad čēr dārēnd).

Translation (JRR)
Thus I thought you holy, Ohrmazd
when Wahman came to me.
A memory-sign in the consciousness of him, the silent man
(That is, a doer of good in the midst of evil men should be silent.)
should be cultivated mentally.
(That is, the doing will come very fast: half of the doing is in the remembering [to do]. Then, when he is able to do it, he acts.)
Let not a man propitiate
the many followers of the lie at all,
(That is, they should not let them abide in tranquillity.)
Since they consider you, all the
righteous, as evil.
(They regard you as imperious.)

(H. Lommel) "... Zufriedener Sinn lehrte mich, das Beste gern zu tun. Nicht soll man gegen viele Lügner gefällig sein, denn diese nennen alle Wahrhaftigen böse."

(M. Boyce) "... The best Tušnāmaiti taught me to proclaim: Let a man not be desirous of pleasing the many wicked..."

(P.O. Skjærvø) "Thus, I now think of you as life-giving, O Mazdā Ahura, when he surrounds me with good thought, silent thinking benefits my hearing as the best: May no man/hero be someone who wishes to please the many possessed by the Lie. For they claim that all the evil ones are sustainers of order."

(2) Isaiah 5.20-23

Hōy hā-omrīm lā-ra' ṭōv ū-la-ṭōv rā',
sāmīm ḥošekh lə-ōr və-ōr lə-ḥošekh,
sāmīm mar lə-mātōq ū-mātōq lə-mār.

Hōy ḥakhāmīm bə-'ēnēhem və-neged pənēhem nəvonīm.

Hōy gibbōrīm li-štōt yāyin və-anšē ḥayyil li-msokh šēkhār.

Maṣdīqē rāšā' 'eqev šoḥad və-ṣidqat ṣaddīqīm yāsīrū mimenū.

Translation (King James Version)

Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!

Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!

Woe unto them that are mighty to drink wine, and men of strength to mingle strong drink:

Which justify the wicked for reward, and take away the righteousness of the righteous from him!

(3) Pahlavī Zand: Yasna 43.15

(Text: Ervad B.N. Dhabhar, ed., *Pahlavi Yasna and Visperad*, Pahlavi Text Series, publ. by the Trustees of the Parsi Punchayet Funds and Properties, Bombay, Shahnamah Press, 1949, pp. 184-185.)

Nāme-ye Irān-e Bāstān 4/2 (2004-5): 3-25

The Varieties of Religious Silence in Iran

James R. Russell
Harvard University

Texts discussed in this paper

(1) Yasna, Gāthā Uštāvaiti, Hā 43.15

Spəntəm at thwā
mazdā mənghi ahurā
hyat mā vohū
pairi.jasat mananghā
daxšat ušyā
tušnā.maitiš vahištā
nōit nā pourūš
drəgvatō hyāt čixšnušō
at tōi vīspəng
angrəng ašaonō ādarə

Translations

(S. Insler) "Yes, I have already realized Thee to be virtuous, Wise Lord [Mazdā Ahura], when he attended me with Good Thinking and revealed – he the meditative one [*tušnā.maiti-*, lit., "silent-thinking" JRR] – the best things to be said: A man should not wish to satisfy the many deceitful people, for they say that the truthful [pl. of *ašavan-*, "righteous man" JRR] are all bad."

Persian Section

In the Name of God

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