The Poet's Craft: poetic composition in Standard Avestan

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It is my purpose here to show how the poets who created the poetry of Standard Avestan[1] practiced their craft. I shall first discuss the importance of literacy and orality to an understanding of the problem of poetic composition; then I shall describe how the poets regarded their vocation as a craft; and finally I shall explore a number of types of examples which show, in a variety of ways, how the poets created verse. Owing to the almost total silence of the ancient Iranian poets who created the verses of the Yašts, on the subject of how they regarded their calling, one must rely heavily upon evidence of the closely related Vedic texts, especially the R□g Veda. However, I do so only to shed light on the Yašts through the more abundant testimony of the Indo-Aryan sources.

From the first time in the early 19th century that Indologists began to form a reliable and accurate appreciation of the fabulous capacity of pandits for memorization of vast amounts of text, it has been a matter of generally accepted dogma that the principle vehicle of textual transmission and preservation has been the oral tradition. That is, Sanskritic learning, encompassing religious poetry, philosophical aphorisms, descriptive grammars, legal texts and so forth, in a word the intellectual, scientific culture of a classical civilization, all this owes its creation, transmission and preservation not to books or manuscripts, rather to a remarkable ability to remember the spoken word. Especially remarkable is the R□g Veda, the most ancient monument of Indo-European hieratic poetry,[2] spanning a time frame from ca. 1300-900 BCE. In this context I am not interested in the rich religious and mythological content of the Vedic hymns; instead, I wish to focus attention on the questions of composition and transmission, especially in how they relate to the use of written texts and to writing itself.

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[1] I follow I. Gershevitch (*Iran* 33, 1995, p. 3f) in coining Standard Avestan (SAv) for what has traditionally been called Younger Avestan, while retaining the traditional Gathic Avestan (GAv) in favor of the recently popular Old Avestan for the language of the Gathas and the Yasna Hapta□ghait>.

[2] I follow the community of opinion which places the composition of these hymns during an extended period of time, roughly, from ca. 1300 to 900 BCE. While the life of Zarathuštra may well fall within this time frame, I am not convinced that he was not active closer to the rise of the Median and Persian empires, though, indeed, his Gathas appear to be as archaic as anything in the R□g Veda.

In the Preface to the first edition of the R☐g Veda dated October 1849, F. Max Müller wrote of the relatively small number of manuscripts he was using for his critical text:

> "It was not necessary for an editor of the Rig Veda to collate a greater number of MSS, or to classify them according to their age and origin. I have seen nearly all the MSS of the Rig Veda which exist in Europe, and I feel convinced that no use can be derived from them as manuscripts, because all of them are but transcripts, more or less carefully executed, of one and the same text."

Müller also noted the care with which the MSS had been corrected by the Brahmins so that they accord to an astonishing degree with the entire commentary tradition going back at the very least to the middle of the first millennium BCE. The reason the MSS are "mere transcripts" and the reason the Brahmins could correct them in the event of scribal error, are that there is, indeed, "one and the same text" which exists not on pieces of palm leaf, but in the memory of the Vaidik priesthood.

Like ancient India of the Vedic Aryans, ancient Iran knew poetry closely related in

form and content to that of the R☐g Veda. In all likelihood its mode of transmission was originally the same too. Such ancient Iranian poetry as we now possess comes to us primarily in manuscripts which, at this point in time, lack the backing of a tradition of oral transmission like that which supports the Vedic MSS. The Avestan MSS are very faulty. They reveal, beyond a fairly unschooled scribal tradition, corruptions that must have entered at various times over the last two and a half millennia. Whereas the Avestan poetry must have been once very similar to its Vedic counterpart,[3] the historical circumstances impinging on it led to different forms of composition and transmission, in which literacy played a crucial role.

Literacy among the Iranians and Indo-Aryans

It is an incontestable fact that none of the separate Indo-European peoples who began their historic migrations into the centers of the ancient established civilization around 1500 BCE, were literate in any sense of the word. On the one hand, there is no common word for writing or script in Proto-Indo-European, and, on the other, wherever Indo-European peoples settled in the ancient world, the scripts they eventually came use were based either on western Semitic scripts (e.g., Greek, Indian Brahmi), cuneiform syllabaries (e.g., Hittite, Old Persian) or some

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[3] There are poetic phrases which can be read back and forth between the two with only minor changes.

other borrowed form of writing (e.g., Linear B). Nor was writing a skill initially coveted by Indo-European speakers. Only after a period of assimilation (in India and Iran this lasted about 1,000 years) did they come to use writing, and then only for business and administrative purposes.

There is little certainty regarding the date that the Aryans began to enter the Panjab. On the basis of Near Eastern chronologies and of the relative chronologies which one can set up for the various Vedic texts, one can be sure, I think, that the Indo-Aryans arrived in India sometime after the Indus Valley Civilization had collapsed. If there were still a literate tradition alive at that time, it had no affect on the invaders, nor could it have long survived, for it has disappeared completely without leaving so much as a trace. The entire Vedic corpus may be searched in vain for a word for or even an allusion to writing. The first mention of writing in

India seems to occur in a s□tra of P□n□ini (3.2.21) in a list of compounds having -*kara*- 'making, doing' as final member where *lipi* and *libi* (v.1. *livi*) are given. The traditional commentaries give *libikara* the meaning 'scribe', whilst *lipikara* can mean 'anointer, painter, scribe.' The reason for the various meanings is that Old Indian *lipi*- 'smearing, anointing' derives from a verbal base *lip*- 'to smear, anoint.' However, this properly formed feminine noun was confused at some point in history, with a loanword *lipi*- 'inscription, script.' In his great Behistun inscription of 519 BCE, Darius refers to "this my writing" *(ima dipi-mai* DB 4.89) where *dipi*- *is* neuter noun. Elsewhere he uses *dipi*- as a feminine noun meaning 'inscription.' Thus DB 4.42 "Thou whoever might read this inscription afterward: may what I have done convince thee!";[4] and a few lines later in reference to "much else" he had done, Darius states that "that was not written in this inscription".[5] Now, this *dipi*- f./n.[6] became a common word throughout the Achaemenid empire. In accordance with regular phonetic changes this would have been pronounced in eastern Iran as *_ipi*, with eventual shift from _ to *l*[7] and, in this form passed into

Old Indian as *lipi,* though the Prakrit inscriptions of Aṣoka (mid 3rd century BCE) show both -*dipi* and *lipi.*

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[4] *tuwam ka tya aparam im□m dipim patipr□s□hi tya mana kr□tam warnawat□m +w□ m.*

[5] *awa ahy□y□ dipy□ nai nipištam* (1.47)

[6] Itself most directly a borrowing from Elamite *tippi,* Old Elamite *tuppi* 'inscription'.

[7] Cf. Sogd □□□ and MPers *pil* 'elephant'; Av. *Druw□spa* Kuš□no-Bactrian APOOACIIO

Obviously, if OInd *lipi-* 'writing' is a loanword taken from Achaemenid imperial usage, it cannot have been incorporated into the vocabulary of Indo-Aryan speakers in northwestern India until after 519. This, then, provides us with an early date for the introduction of writing into the subcontinent. In terms of oral literature, this means that the composition of texts prior to the end of the 6th century was necessarily oral. That is, as much as a millennium, but probably 700 or 800 years had already elapsed by the time writing be considered as even a possibility for the transmission of the earliest Vedic hymns, though realistically, this could hardly have happened until after the invention of the Brahmi script in the third century.[8]

The reader will have probably already anticipated the lines of analysis for the question of literacy in ancient Iran. As we have just seen, Old Persian, the language of the Persian great kings, is preserved in contemporary inscriptions. There is disagreement among scholars whether Cyrus used the OPers cuneiform script or whether, as I believe[9], it was an invention developed at the command of Darius. Even if Cyrus did use it, the date would not be pushed back appreciably farther. In any case, the cumbersome cuneiforn script was never used to conduct imperial business in Old Persian. Aramaic was both the lingua franca of the empire and the language of normal government transactions.[10] Royal *farm☐ns* were given in Persian, then circulated throughout the empire in Aramaic copies which were then read out into the local languages by scribes in the provinces. The basic reason for this complicated system is simple. Aramaic was a literate language, Persian was not. Not withstanding the pompous inscriptions, the Achaemenid great kings were, probably, illiterates.

Avestan, the only other attested Old Iranian language, like Vedic, possesses no word for script or writing. It is an eastern Iranian language whose literature knows nothing of western Iranian geography or of the Achaemenids. The script by which it is preserved in manuscripts is a late Sassanid invention, a fully phonetic script fabricated out of Pahlavi (ZorMPers) and Psalter (ChrMPers) scripts, both of which are, in turn, adaptations of the consonantal Aramaic script. I believe that there were earlier attempts to write Avestan in Sassanid Pahlavi script; some have argued that

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[8] See recently, Oskar von Hinüber *Der Beginn der Schrift und frühe Schriftlichkeit in Indien,* Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1990; Harry Falk *Schrift im alten Indien,* Tübingen: Günter Narr Verlag, 1993; also Richard Salomon *JAOS,* 115, 1995, pp.271-279.

[9] Following Walter Hinz *Neue Wege im Altpersischen,* Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1973, pp. 15ff.

[10] The Fortification and Treasury Tablets show that Elamite usage persisted in P☐rsa proper.

there was a written Avesta perhaps as early as the Arsacid (Parthian) Vologases I (ca. 51-80 CE). No one knows how to date the Avesta with any accuracy. Scholarly opinions on the date of Zarathuštra range over a period from ca. 600 BCE to 1700 BCE, for example. Although the Vendidad, a later Avestan text, seems to presuppose a Hellenistic system of measurement, it can be demonstrated that the writing of Iranian languages (other than OPers discussed above) is such a late development that literacy cannot have been a factor in Avestan composition except in Arsacid and /or Sassanid redactions of inherited textual materials.

Oral Composition

Since the pioneering studies of Parry and Lord[11] on Yugoslavian oral epic traditions a great deal has been written on the question of orality and literacy in respect to the Homeric epics. While these studies have much to contribute to our understanding of oral composition in general it is important not to lose sight of the fact that they deal with epic, a literary genre very different from hymns of praise composed in the Indo-Iranian priestly traditions.

The R☐g Vedic hymns and the Gathas of Zarathuštra are very similar in many respects, though one that stands out is brevity. They are what we might call lyric poems, normally not much more than 20 verses long. There are good reasons for their brevity; and, these reasons, coupled with the brevity itself, will show why an original oral composition of this sort could become immediately a text, that is, a fixed composition, and be transmitted as such for thousands of years in a manner

inconceivable for epic. The Yašts also are like the Vedic *r☐c*-s and the Gathas in various respects, but brevity is not one of them. This is because the Yašts are, for the most part, not the homogeneous creations of single poets, but latter day compendia of earlier poetic materials pertaining to the various deities.[12]

Yugoslav epic singers maintained that they faithfully sang the same song at each recitation, and, although significant variations almost always occurred in fact, to the poets' minds novelty was a betrayal of the tradition. I have no reason to doubt that the same opinion would have been expressed by the ancient Indian bards. One indication of this is the anonymity of the Indian epics. Even though they are

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[11] See especially Albert B. Lord *The Singer of Tales,* Cambridge (Mass.): Harvard University Press, 1960.

[12] A very different view of the poetic unity of the Yašts is held by P.O. Skjærvø *Die Sprache* 36, 1994, pp.199-243.

ascribed to Vy□sa or V□lm□ki, the personality of the bard is never in evidence.[13] By contrast, poets frequently refer to themselves in the first person and/or by name in the Vedic hymns. So RV 1.32.1 ascribed to Hiran□yast□pa begins "I shall now proclaim the heroic deeds of Indra;"[14] and by the same poet in 1.33.2 "I fly unto the irresistible giver of wealth like a hawk to its usual dwelling, praising Indra with superlative hymns, (him) who is to be invoked by the singers on their way."[15] Referring to himself in the second person, the r□s□i Vasis□t□ha begins RV 7.88.1 "O Vasis□t□ha, bring to Varun□a, the Rewarder, a pure dearest hymn!"[16] and again in 7.89.1 he addresses the god directly "May I not go to the house of clay, o King Varun□a! Mercy, you of good rule, have mercy!"[17]

It is unnecessary to multiply examples. A random selection of Vedic hymns will reveal that most are addressed directly to a god or gods by an individual for himself or on behalf of his patron or community. That is simply the nature of the hymns dictated by the context.

The testimony of the Vedic poets makes it clear that novelty and spontaneity were important for the success of a hymn. For example, in a hymn to Indra-and-Agni the poet Kutsa says, "I have heard that you are more generous than an unworthy son-in-law and even than a bride's brother, and so, with the offering of some to you, o Indra and Agni, I am begetting a new hymn of praise."[18] Vasis□t□ha addresses

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[13] The Mah□□□□□□□□, especially, is at great pains always to specify the speaker or narrator. On this narratological problem see C.Z. Minkowsky *JAOS* 109, 1989, pp.401-420.

[14] *idrasya nu v□rí□n□i pra vocam....*

[15] *upéd aham dhanada□m apratitam□ jus□t□h□m□ na vasatím□ pat□mi / índram□ namasyann upamebhir arkaír yah□ stotr̥bhyo havyo asti ya□man //*

[16] *pra sundhyuvam□ varun□□ya pres□t□h□m□ matím□ vasis□t□ha mil□us□e bharasva /*

[17] *mo s□u varun□a mr□nmayam□ gr□ham□ r□jann aham□ gamam / mr□l□a□ suks□atra mr□l□aya //*

[18] RV 1.109.2: *asravam□ hí bh□rida□vattar□ v□m□ víj□m□tur uta sy□la□t / atha □ somasya prayat□ yuvabhy□m índr□gn□ stomam□ janay□mi navyam //*

the same two deities in a similar idiom, "may you two take pleasure today in my newborn hymn" *(stọmam...nạvaj□tam* RV 7.73.1). Often the comparative degree *nạv□yas-* 'newer, very new' is used. Vasis□t□ha declares in 7.35.14, "May the □ dityas, Rudras, (and) Vasus take pleasure in this brand new hymn being made by me!"[19] Or, the poet may choose the superlative (*nạvis□t□ha-*) as in 8.20.19, "O Sobhari, with your newest song serenade the youths, the bulls, the pure (Maruts), as a ploughman (sings) to his bullocks."[20] Sometimes, instead of 'new' (*nạva-*) the hymn is proclaimed by the poet to be 'unprecedented' (*ạp□rvia-*),[21] an expression which is also used by Zarathuštra *apaourw□m (*aparwiam).[22]* In all these cases and some two score others the emphasis is expressly on the novelty and uniqueness of the composition. The deity does not take as much pleasure in some worn out old hymn which the poet has dredged up from his memory for the occasion, as he does in a new hymn made to duly honor him as an exalted heavenly guest.

Whereas bards who recite epic are capable of composing verse on the spot, in contrast, the composition of a hymn may have been a long process. RV 7.103, one of the so-called satirical or humorous hymns, is dedicated to the Frogs who miraculously reappear at the onset of the monsoon after lying dried up in the baked mud for a year. Here the croaking of the various species of frogs is likened to the Brahmins reciting hymns at the sacrifice. In vs 8 we find, "The soma-inspired Brahmins creating a hymn of a year's duration (in formulation) have just created speech."[23] That is, the frogs have maintained silence for a year while composing

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[19] *□ditya□ rudra□ vạsavo jus□anta idạm brạhma kr□yạm□n□am□ nạv□yah□ /*

[20] *yu□na □ s□ụ nạvis□t□hay□ vr□s□n□ah□ pavaka□n□ abhí sobhare gira□ / ga□ya ga□ iva cạrkr□s□at //*

[21] Thus, RV 6.32.1. *ạp□rvi□ ... vạc□m□si*; 8.66.11 *ạp□rvi□ ... brạhm□n□□*; 10.23.6 *stọmam ... ạp□rviam.*

[22] Although most translators have taken □□□□□□□□□ adverbially, *e.g.,* H. Humbach/ P. Ichaporia *The Heritage of Zarathushtra,* Heidelberg: Winter, 1994, p. 23, "as never before," J. Kellens/E. Pirart *Les textes vieil-avestiques* I, Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1988, p. 105, are correct in seeing that in □□̣□□□, one must understand 'un (chant) sans précédent".

their *brahman* = croaking, just as a poet might spend a year's time, or at least a long period, in silence while composing his *brahman.*

Nowhere does there exist a manual on how to compose *r□c*-s, but imbedded in the hymns themselves we catch glimpses of what the poets saw as their task. RV 10.119 is another of the satirical hymns. It is dedicated to a quail (*laba*) a ridiculous fluttering bird who has undergone a metamorphosis as the result of

drinking soma, and has become a great hawk (*śyena*)*,* god Agni's theriomorphic manifestation. Seized with megalomania the little quail believes it has surpassed heaven and earth in greatness (vs 8), yet the onomatopoetic refrain[24] of the hymn

kuvit somasy□p□m íti "For sure I have just drunk soma," reminds the hearer of its humble nature. It is well known that some was used to inspire poetic and spiritual insight. In the Quail-hymn we are told by the bird, "The poem just now came to me like a lowing (cow) to her dear calf";[25] "As a carpenter the chariot body, I bend around the poem with my heart".[26]
There are two images here which express quite different conceptualizations of poetry. The one, that poetry is a cow *(dhenu), is* found in both the Veda and in Zarathuštra's Gathas.[27] The other, which I will consider here, is that poetry is made, fashioned, constructed in the way a carpenter makes a chariot.

Over a century ago James Darmesteter first noted what he termed "une métaphore grammaticale de la langue indo-européenne."[28] In Avestan there occurs a nominal compound *wacas-tašti*- lit. 'a construction of speech,' a technical term in the

liturgical vocabulary referring to either a hymn (*g□+□*) as a whole or to the

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[23] *br□hman□a□sah□ somíno va□cam akrata brạhma kr□n□vạntah□ parivatsarin□ am /.*

[24] As taught by Paul Thieme, though I have not seen it in print.

[25] RV 10.119.4 *ụpa m□ matír asthita v□ṣra□ putrạm iva priyạm /.*

[26] RV10.119.5 *ahạm tạs□t□eva vandhụram□ pạryac□mi hr□da□ matím /.*

[27] See S. Insler *The G□th□s of Zarathustra* (Tehran-Liège: E.J. Brill, 1975) pp. l41ff. and H.-P. Schmidt *Indo-Iranian Journal 21,* 1979, pp. 104-113. See also my "G&<uš uruuan" in *Encyclopaedia Iranica.*

[28] *Études iraniennes* II, Paris: F. Vieweg, 1883, pp. 116-118.

strophes of which it is composed. He drew attention to the frequent use of the Vedic verb *taks*□- 'fabriquer' with a variety of synonyms meaning 'hymn, poem, song of praise etc.' (*stoma-, stutí-, vacas-, dhi-, mantra, matí-, manman-, brahman-*) as direct object. RV 6.32.1, for example, has *vac*□*msi* □*sa*□*...taks*□*am* "j'ai fabriqué de mes lèvres ces paroles," where, as in the Avestan compound, one finds the syntagme *vacas- taks*□- (Av *taš-*). The same syntagme is found in Greek. Pindar (Pyth III 199), refers to Nestor and the Lycian Sarpedon as □□□□□...

□□□□□□. Although Indo-Europeanists have written extensively on **wekᵘos *teks-* and other metaphors for poetry and its composition, to my knowledge, no one has grasped the true significance of all this in regard to the specifically oral nature of Indo-European composition. Here I shall limit my exposition to the Indo-Iranian materials, and at that, mostly the R□g Veda.

Returning to the Quail-hymn, recall that the bird referred to himself bending the *mati* with his heart in the same way that a carpenter would bend the curved chariot body. Elsewhere a poet says, "I bend the much invoked Indra with (your?) song, just as a carpenter (bends) the belly (of a wheel made) of good wood,"[29] here indicating the mirror image of the creative process upon the listener. Another poet says, "For him (Indra) I put together the hymn *(stomam)* just as a carpenter (puts together) a chariot for him who wants it."[30]

Among the most frequently employed verbs meaning 'to create, compose (a hymn)' *k*□*r-* 'to make' and *taks-*□ 'to fashion, craft, build' stand out. Again and again we find expressions like this: "I, the Vipra, have fashioned this hymn for you, o Mighty (Angi), as a wise carpenter a chariot".[31] In one hymn the poet compares himself to the heavenly carpenters, the R□bhus: "The R□bhus fashioned a hymn for Agni; we have just addressed a great hymn to Agni".[32] Sometimes *kr*□- and

[29] RV 7.32.20 *a*□*va índram*□ *puruhutam*□ *name gira*□ *nemím*□ *tas*□*t*□*eva sudruvam //*.

[30] RV 1.61.4 *asma*□ *íd u stomam*□ *sam*□ *hinomi ratham*□ *na tas*□*t*□*eva tatsin*□*ya /*.

[31] RV 5.2.11 *etam te stomam*□ *tuvij*□*ta vípro ratham*□ *na dhirah*□ *suap*□ *ataks*□*am /*.

[32] RV 10.80.7 *agnaye brahma r*□*bhavas tataks*□*ur agním*□ *maha*□*m*□ *avoca*□*m*□ *suvr*□*ktím /*.

taks□- are used side by side, as in 10.39.14: "We have just made a hymn to you, o Aśvins, we have fashioned it as the R□bhus a chariot."[33] The Avesta, in addition to the compound *wacastašti-,* preserves a single occurrence of the finite verb in this idiom. In Zarathuštra's Gatha, Y 29.7, we find "Ahura Mazd□ fashioned a manthra..." (□□□□□) parallel to RV 7.7.6 *mąntram...ątaksan* and 1.67.4 *ta □s□ta□n mąntr□n ąśamsan.*

From these examples, we can see that the poets regarded poetic skill as a craft. The poet worked with the building material of words and meters as a chariot maker worked with wood. If we wonder why the analogy is always a chariot, the answer is simple. Chariots were used only by warriors, that is, the noble elite. Since they must have been difficult (hence expensive) to make, they were prestigious possessions. By analogy, then, hymns were also difficult to make and hence necessarily prestige constructions of the mind, of great value to the patron for whose benefit they were recited at the sacrifice. There is another, closely related reason why the analogy of the chariot was preferred. One of the favorite metaphors for poetry itself was the chariot which transported the mortal to the realm of the gods.

In an age long before Henry Ford there were no assembly line techniques for building chariots. Just as a chariot took time and skill to complete, so too the hymn was long in production, even if, as the repetitions of phrases and formulae in the R □g Vedic and Avesta corpora show, the poet-carpenter had frequent recourse to the parts bin.

I have already noted a major difference between the Vedic *r□c*-s and Zarathuštra's Gathas on the one hand, and the Yašts on the other, namely, that the Yašts are, for the most part, compendia. One result is, I would suppose, that the personal interjections we might have anticipated are absent from the Yašts, except for recurrent formulae such *X* □□□□□□□□□ or □□□□□. So, we do not have any direct testimony of the Yašt poets on how they conceived their art; yet we do have the fragments of their compositions which can reveal to us the practice of their craft.

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[33] RV 10.39.14 *etąm□ v□m stǫmam aśvin□v akarma ątaks□□ma bhr□gąvo ną rątham /.*

The Poet's Craft

As any even amateur carpenter knows measurement is the foundation of good craftsmanship. This too is the rule for the poetry of the Avesta and Ṛg Veda. There was no such thing as free verse; rather the structure of poetry was defined by syllables, lines and verses. In the case of the poetry of the Younger Avesta, in contradistinction to that of the Gathas and the Ṛg Veda, there has been considerable disagreement over just what these basic structures are. The two prevailing views are those most clearly articulated by K.F. Geldner[34] and by W.B. Henning.[35] The former view is that the basic unit of this poetry is the line of eight syllables, the latter that it is a line of three stress accents with no other restrictions on the number of syllables. Space does not permit me to prove the basic correctness of Geldner's analysis, yet I beg the reader's indulgence in allowing me to proceed with my subject, whose understanding depends upon the following assumptions: (1) where verse can be identified in the Yašts, the basic unit is what I shall call a pāda composed of eight syllables; (2) unless they are isolated, pādas form lines of 16 syllables with a caesura after the first eight; however, (3) the structure of the 16 syllable line was so fundamental that poets composed lines with pādas of 7-9 and 9-7; (4) the standard verse consisted of four pādas, with variants of 3 and 5. These verses are familiar in the Vedic anustubh, gāyatrī and paṅkti respectively. While there do appear to be vestiges of other meters, the evidence is too fragmentary to contribute to the present discussion. Whereas quantity is an important element in Vedic poetry, especially in the creation of cadences at the ends of pādas, Standard Avestan verse seems not to have been governed by rules requiring fixed sequences of long and short syllables.[36]

In spite of being relieved of the obligation to produce regular cadences, the Avestan poets still had to craft their compositions within the framework of syllable count. Working in an inflected language, they were faced with the problem that as words are inflected the number of their syllables often changes. This could have the advantage of affording greater flexibility in piecing together words to fit metrical slots, yet it also created problems for which the poets required strategies. In what

[34] *Über die Metrik des jüngeren Avesta* Laupp:Tübingen, 1877.

[35] "On the disintegration of the Avestic Studies" *TPS*, 1942, pp.40-56.

[36] A fact that is lamentable, in that if quantity were governed by rules we would have a criterion for assessing the accuracy of the Vulgate tradition of marking vowel length.

follows I shall address the situation with examples that illustrate the use of epithets and the relative pronoun.

1. Epithets: When Avestan epithets are studied from the point of view if their use in verse, they appear to follow a fairly regular pattern of adjustments necessary to meet the requirements of meter. One of the most striking examples is □□□□□-□□□-□□□□□□□- **(mi+ra- wouru.gaoyaoiti-)**.[37]

a) When Mithra is mentioned in the Avesta his name is normally followed by his standing epithet spelled in the Vulgate **wouru.gaoyaoiti-**. What is peculiar about this is that in the nominative and accusative the name and epithet are joined by the izafe **y¤** and **yim** respectively, while in the dative and genitive the izafe is lacking, as also in the vocative. Now, if we count the number of syllables, the situation becomes quite clear; the total is always eight:

> nom. **mi+r□ y□ wouru.gaoyaoitiš** / □□□□□̣-
>
> ace. **mi+r&m yim wouru.gaoyaoit□m** / □□□□□□̣-
>
> dat. **mi+r□i wouru.gaoyao(i)&<e** / □□□□□□̣-□□□□□□□□□□
>
> gen. **mi+rahe wouru.gaoyao(i)t□iš** / □□□□□□□□̣-□□□□□□□□□
>
> voc. **□i mi+ra wouru.gaoyaoite** / □□̣-□□□□□□□□□

Of note is Yt 17.16, where the izafe is absent in the nominative because the missing syllable has been made up with copula °**ca**, just as the deficient syllable in the vocative is always made up with the particle □**i**. Thus,[38]

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[37] In what follows the Vulgate will appear in **bold** the reconstructed text in *italics*.

[38] In the examples which follow I give the reconstructed original form rather than the Vulgate spelling, since, in many cases the Vulgate tends to obscure the underlying metrical structure. In general I follow the system of normalization used by Benveniste, for example, in *Vr□tra et Vr□+ra)na*, Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1934.

□□□□□□□-□□̣-□□̣-□□□□□□□□□□

b) Both Ap□m Nap□t and Hwar (Xšaita) take the epithet *arwat-aspa-*. In the case of the former, we find in the nominative,

□□□□̣-□□□□□

However, in the accusative □□□□□□□□ gains an extra syllable. The poet's strategy in Yt 19.52 was to place name and epithet in separate lines of an anustubh,

□□□□□□□□̣ (9+7)

□□□□□-□□□□□̣-□□□□□

The problem posed by *huwar- xšaita-* found a different solution. As western Iranian tradition of □□□□□□□□ suggests, □□□□□□- *was* a standing epithet of the sun. Thus, we find

□□□□□̣-□□□□□ *8*

Yet, in hypermetrical situations the epithet is deleted. Where *arwat-aspahya* gains a syllable, the expected □□□□□□□□□is dropped. Since one syllable has been gained but two lost in the process, the missing syllable could be restored with the addition of the izafe *yat*. Thus, Yt 10.13,

h□ yaté aunvaté.aspahe 7-8 □□□□□□̣-□□□□□□□□

At Yt 10.19 □□□□□- has yielded its place to the relative pronoun even though the case is nominative.

Thus,
□□□□□□̣-□□□□□̣

The epithet □□□□□-□□□□- occurs also, not as an epithet of a deity, but as the name of Wist□spa's father.

The genitive in Yt 5.105 is treated in the same manner as that in Yt 10.19 with the insertion of an izafe. Thus,

□□□□ꞏ-□□□□□□□
□□□□□ꞏ

The common epithet □□□□□□□□□- has four syllables and is usually applied to disyllabic nouns. This allows, in most instances, room for case endings and/or filler words. Compare, for example, the
following:

□ᵖ□□□□□-□ꞏ (ace. sg. n., Yt 13.65)
□ᵖ□□□□□□-□ꞏ (instr. sg. n., Yt 10.67)
□□□□ꞏᵖ□□□ꞏ (ace. sg. n., Yt 14.2)
□□□□ꞏ (dat. sg. m., Y 10.17
□□□□□□ꞏ (gen. sg. f., Yt 15.27)

But where the poetic construction makes it impossible to join the epithet with its noun in the same p□da, the epithet is moved to the next one. Thus, in Yt 8.33 we find

□□□ꞏ

yet, in Yt 14.2, in accordance with the repeated formula of that Yašt,

□□□□□□ꞏ+□□□□□□□□ꞏ

See also Yt 14.27 and the defective Yt 15.56. For monosyllabic nouns we have, for example, Yt 8.2

□□□□-□ꞏ

and Yt 13.53,

□□ꞏ

It is interesting to note that no trisyllable noun takes this epithet.

By contrast, the epithet □□□□□□□□□-, having five syllables, affords much less metrical leeway, and this factor alone, apart from theological considerations, may be responsible for its very limited use as epithets of Zam (Earth) and Wr□+ra)na. In reference to Zam, the only occurrences are in the accusative; thus, Yt 13.9,

  □□□

and Yt 5.63, 85,

  □β□ □□□□□□□□□□

and Yt 6.1; 7.3; 19.48,

  □□□ *pati* □□□□□□□□□□

With Wr□+ra)na the occurrences are limited to the nominative

  □□□□□□□□

and the accusative

  □□□□□□□□□

The genitive does appear, but in a nonmetrical context (Yt 8.12).
Frequently the change of case will result in the addition or deletion of epithets, as we have already observed in the case of *huwar-* (*xšaita-*). I offer a few further examples of this procedure. In the nominative we find with Aišma the epithet □□□-□□□□□□-, along with his standing epithet □□□□□-□□□-. Thus, Yt l9.95,

  □□□□□-□□□□□□□□□□

whereas □□□□□□□□□- disappears from occurrences of the accusative, instrumental and genitive (cf. Yt 19.46; Y 10.8; 57.32) where a superfluous syllable

would result. Similarly, in the nominative Ahra Manyu takes the standing epithet □□□□-□□□□□-; for example, Yt 10.97

□□□□-□□□□□

whereas with the genitive we find, Yt 13.78

□□□□□□□

So also, in the nominative we find

□□□□□-□□□□□-□□□□

but in the genitive his family name is substituted, for example, Yt 13.61

□□□[39]

As it is hardly my intention to give an exhaustive account of Avestan epithets here, I wish merely to stress that the investigation of the use of epithets reveals that their selection in a particular context may be determined as much by metrical considerations as by semantic ones, and, that within a verse the placement of an epithet is often determined by metrical requirements.

2. The relative pronoun: In Avestan the relative pronoun *ya-* has two separate functions: (1) it introduces a relative clause subordinate to the main clause of the sentence, (2) it is used in a manner similar to the izafe of Middle and New Persian, that is, it *(a)* links a noun (usually a proper name) to an adjective (usually an epithet), *(b)* it immediately precedes a proper name, *(c)* it introduces an elliptical relative clause containing the genitive of possession. Although it is clear that the izafe constructions have grown out of the relative clause, the examples which follow will show the extent to which the genuine relative and izafe differ. The examples will show that in a genuine relative clause the position of the relative is always at the beginning of the clause and that in the vast majority of cases it stands at the beginning of the p□da, an important criterion for setting metrical and

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[39] In the R□g Veda compounds with *aṣva-* as final member and a thematic stem as prior member show an alternation of hiatus and sandhi, for example, *r□jra□ṣva-* beside *r□jra-aṣva-*, though in most cases hiatus is the rule.

syntactic boundaries. In the case of the izafe, the examples will show that its use was optional, that is, the decision whether or not to use the izafe was determined by the requirements of the meter.

a) The relative *ya-* when used to introduce a relative clause, with only a few exceptions, stands at the very beginning of the pāda which initiates the relative clause. Further, the relative clause almost always follows the main clause, whether in the same stanza or verse, or, as is more often the case, in a preceding stanza or verse.

(i) By far the most common position of the relative clause is following a stanza or verse of the type *X (accusative) yaza-* which frequently introduces a *kardah.* Here I give only a few examples.

Thus: Yt l0.22

□□□□□□̃
………………………
□□ß□□□□□□□̣

Yt 8.41

□□□□□□□□□…□□□□□□□□□□
□□□̣

Yt 8.45

□□□□□□□□□…□□□□□□□□□□
~
□□□□□□□̣

Yt 10.44

□□□□□□̃
………………………
□□□□□̣-□□□□□□̣

Yt 10.95-97

□□□□□□◌̃

……………………......

□□□□□□◌̣-□□□□□

Yt 13.33

◌̃... □□□□□□□□□□

□□□◌̣

It is worth noting that in these cases the relative is almost always used if the verse contains a verb, whereas if the verse contains only adjectives the relative is usually (but Yt 13.33) not used, as, for example, Yt 10.25

□□□□□◌̣.·.

□□□□□□◌̣-□□□□□□◌̣

□□□□□-□□□□□□□◌̣+□□-□□□□□□◌̣-□□□□□□

□□□□□-□□□□□□◌̣

(ii) There is nothing remarkable about the general use of *ya*- apart from the observation that it is normally placed first in the p□da. Again, only a few examples will suffice to illustrate the usage. Thus, Yt 13.12

◌̃
·

□◌̣

Y 57.29

□□◌̣+□□□□□□◌̣+□□◌̣

Y10.3

□□□□□◌̣-□◌̣-□◌̣

with incongruence of gender and number, Yt 10.28

□□̣-□□

□□□□-□̣

b) The use of the relative pronoun in a manner similar to the izafe in Western Middle Iranian and New Persian is widespread in the Yašts.

(i) Most commonly the izafe is used to join a noun or pronoun with an adjective. The majority of such cases involve a proper name and an epithet.[40] In a few cases a noun is joined to a proper name. The izafe takes the case of the noun only in the nominative and accusative, while for all other cases the neuter □□□ is used even though the adjective is properly declined. Since the use of the izafe was not obligatory, most cases of noun + adjective being without it, it is clear that its use was dictated, at least in part, as a strategy used by poets to accommodate the meter. Thus, in the case of Mithra already noted, we find

□□□□□̣-□□□□□□□□ (nom.)

□□□□□□̣-□□□□□□□̣ (acc.)

but in the genitive, where an extra syllable has been added with the ending °*ahya,*

□□□□□□□□̣-□□□□□□□□□

without the izafe. Similarly, we find in Yt 17.17

□□□□̣

but in Y 57.3 the syllable accounted for by □□ has been taken by °*ca,*

□□□□-□□̣ □□□□□□̣□□□□□□□□

As names and epithets have already been treated, I shall give examples of noun + adjective. In Yt 5.92, a passage which is not in good order metrically, there occurs the hypermetrical p□da

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[40] See also under "Epithets" above 2.1.

□□-□□□□□

where □□ appears to be added to an already metrical p□da without compensatory deletion of the □□.

In the accusative we find in Yt 5.53

□*ß*□

For cases other than the nominative and accusative, I cite the following examples: Y 9.27

□□□□□□-□□-□□□□□□□□□(dat.)

Yt 13.42

□□□□ (abl.)

Yt 10.94

□□□□□ (gen.)

and in a trist□ubh fragment, Yt 13.91

□□□□□□-□□ (gen.)

The following are examples of noun/pronoun + name:

Yt 12.4

□□□□,

Yt. 8.54

□□□,

Yt 8.12

□□□□̣-□□□□□□.

(ii) Often, instead of the izafe appearing between noun and adjective, it is placed before the noun. Thus, in Yt 5.17, 25, 104 respectively we find □□□ followed by

□□̣

□□̣

□□̣

Further, Y 57.24

□β□̣

and Y 57.29

□□□□□□□□□□□̣

(iii) Avestan shows two constructions using the possessive genitive: (1) the genitive either precedes or follows the noun possessed, e.g., □□□□□□□̣ (Y 10.8) and □□□□□□□□□̣, (2) the genitive is separated from the noun/pronoun possessed by *ya-* which agrees with that noun/pronoun in case gender and number.

In such cases the relative pronoun can appear in the middle of a p□da. It is easy to see that this type of construction developed out of the normal relative clause, yet I think it would be wrong to view it as a proper relative clause for several reasons. In many cases it would form an imbedded relative clause which Avestan otherwise avoids. Further, it is very close to the izafe of case relationship common in Western Middle Iranian, where izafe constructions are distinct from relative clauses. Finally, when viewed in the light of Avestan meter, this genitive izafe appears to be yet another strategy for meeting the requirements of the prescribed number of syllables per line. Yt 10.20

□□□□-□□□̣-□□□□□'□□̣-□□□□□̣   (9+7)

shows that □□□̣-□□□□□'□□̣is not really an imbedded relative, but rather a means of adding another syllable, when it is contrasted to Yt 10.37

> □□□□̣-□□□□□□̣

or Yt 10.26, □□□□□□□□□̣-□□□□□□. However, in Yt 10.33 the izafe becomes necessary since □□□□□̣ has only seven syllables; thus,

> □□□□□□□□̣

Similarly Yt 13.61

> □□□ß□□□□□□□□□□̣

There are two cases where the construction is: pronoun + *ya*- + noun (gen.) + noun. Thus, Yt 17.5 (cf. Y 10.8)

> □□̣[41]

and Y 10.15

> □□̣

A very curious reversal of the normal word order, noun + *ya*- + noun (gen.), is found at Yt 13.154,

> □□□□□□□□̣

What this entire review of the relative reveals is that, on the one hand, the Avestic poets were constrained by rules of word order when it was a question of employing a genuine relative clause. In comparison with the use of the relative in Vedic verse, where no such rules governing word order applied, the Avestic canons of composition left the poet no room in which to maneuver. On the other hand, the optional izafe construction offered the poets great flexibility for configuring a proper p□da. While it may be true, as observed at the beginning of this section,

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[41] Note that the PhlG1 to Y 10.8 has exactly the same construction □□̣.

that the Avestic poets did not need to conform their verse to rules of syllable cadences, nevertheless they did not allow themselves total freedom in respect to word order. Why? I think the answer is to be found in the analogy with cadence rules of Vedic verse where the aesthetic flow of the verse, particularly the anus□t □ubh, depends on a relatively free beginning followed by a fixed concluding cadence. In the verse of Standard Avestan, it seems that the poets, once they had allowed themselves such flexibility in the izafe relative construction, sensed an aesthetic need for a fixed order of the genuine relative as a counterbalance.

There are, of course, other strategies which the Avestic poets used to accommodate the metrical rules. What I hope to have illustrated with these sorts of examples is the manner in which the poets show us in their compositions how they worked with and manipulated vocabulary and grammar to craft their verses.