

The Prophet Teaches

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Often enough it happens that adherents or some scholars refer to the Gatha passages with assertion that "the prophet teaches." Without regard to the correctness or incorrectness or fancifulness of the respective translations proposed by those authors, such assertion is basically erroneous. The Gathas are works of an art, the central principle of which is persistent variation, e.g. the lexical and/or syntactical variation of set phrases of ordinary language, like the set phrase, manah – vachah - shyathana `thinking/thought - speaking/word – action/deed. By this kind of technique, which is exact opposite of producing text for didactic purposes, Zarathushtra apparently tries to display his poetical skill in order to please Ahura Mazda and to impress his listeners.

In general, the poetical technique of the Gathas is one essential reason for difficulties met in translating and interpreting them. Although the prose text agrees with the Gathas in respect of phonology, grammar and characteristic features of his vocabulary, it offers but minor problems, being of quite uncomplicated structure.