3.5. The Zoroastrian long liturgy. The transmission of the *Avesta* (AC)

The problems involved in the edition of Avestan texts have been discussed recently by West (2008), Hintze (2012b), and Cantera (2012b). The present case study concentrates upon the edition of the so-called ‘long liturgy’ (for an overview of the Avestan tradition see General introduction § 3.3).

The Zoroastrian ‘long liturgy’ in reverence of the god Ahura Mazda has been celebrated in the form in which it appears in the manuscripts (or in a similar form) since Achaemenid times (c.550–330 BCE) and continues to be celebrated today among the Parsees, the Zoroastrians in India. Throughout the centuries this liturgy has been one of the most characteristic features of the Zoroastrian community.

The liturgy of the ceremony in question was composed at different stages in eastern Iran, before the Achaemenid times. The liturgy was exported to western Iran, the centre of the Achaemenid power, probably during the Achaemenid reign. The version of the liturgy that appears in the manuscripts represents the western Iranian transmission, where Avestan, the language in which the recitative was composed, was not the performers’ native language. Centuries of transmission in western Iran, preceding the beginning of the written transmission, have obviously left some traces in the linguistic form of the recitative.

There are different variants of the ceremony. The most basic one is the daily ceremony, known as the *Yasna*. For more solemn celebrations, an extended form (the *Yašt i Vispered*) is used, which includes some additional ritual actions and texts as well as variants of some parts of the *Yasna* ceremony. The *Yasna* is the basis for a series of liturgies (‘intercalation ceremonies’), in which other texts are intercalated between the central texts (the *Gāthās* and the *Yasna Haptāŋhāiti*). The central texts are composed in Old Avestan, an older layer of the Avestan language.

*The Great Avesta*, the hyparchetypes and the Ritual Avesta

In Sassanian times there were two different collections of Avestan texts: (1) the *Great Avesta*, a scholastic collection of all known Avestan texts at Achaemenid times and (2) a series of recitatives of some rituals still celebrated in the Avestan language. This distinction has only recently been given serious consideration (Kellens 1998). However, it has enormous consequences for the editorial practice of the Avestan texts, especially for the edition of the long liturgy. Another important distinction to draw is that between manuscripts produced for liturgical and for exegetical purposes (see also General introduction § 3.3).

The editorial practice of the Avestan textual heritage has always assumed that there was continuity between a Sassanian ‘archetype’ written down at the time of the invention of the Avestan script (see General introduction § 3.3) and the extant manuscripts. The obvious discrepancies between the contents of the assumed archetype of the *Great Avesta* and the texts contained in the manuscripts have been explained recurring to the hypothesis of a series of shorter hyparchetypes, to be dated around the tenth century, which were regarded as being nothing but fragments saved from the *Great Avesta*. Karl Hoffmann believed that he had provided a decisive philological argument for the hypothesis of the hyparchetypes (Hoffmann 1969). In *Yasna* 12.3, the manuscripts of the different classes show variant readings that allow us to reconstruct a common reading *ziāiienim* for all of them. This, however, is likely to be a corruption of *ziienim*: an early scribe mistakenly wrote *ziā*, noticed his error, marked *iīā* with deletion dots and continued writing the rest of the word (iienim). Later copyists failed to note the deletion dots and hence wrote *ziāiienim*. Since this corrupted form appears in the *Yasna* manuscripts as well as in the other witnesses of the long liturgy, and in liturgical as well as in exegetical manuscripts, this seems to imply that all manuscripts of the long liturgy (of every type and origin) go back to a single hyparchetype. Similar arguments were brought forward by Humbach (1973) for the collection of short liturgies as well as for the *Vidēvād*, a collection of prescriptions for keeping the demons away. Thus the linearity of the transmission seemed to be granted.

The first direct consequence this view of the transmission has for the editorial praxis is the preference for the exegetical manuscripts above the liturgical ones. Since the descriptions of the *Great Avesta* in the Pahlavi literature are based upon the Pahlavi translation, it has been assumed that the codices of the *Great Avesta* contained the Avestan text along with its Pahlavi translation. Accordingly, the exegetical manuscripts were considered to go back more or less directly to the Sassanian archetype, and were taken to be the source of the liturgical manuscripts. The liturgical usage of these texts was believed to have been secondary, and accordingly, the liturgical manuscripts were deemed secondary as well. Therefore, the editions were based mainly upon the exegetical manuscripts.
The liturgical manuscripts attest to different variants of the long liturgy, compiled for different purposes and dates. Actually, only the daily ceremony is included in complete form in the exegetical manuscripts. Other variants of the long liturgy that exist include only the sections that do not appear in the daily ceremony and therefore needed a translation. Thus, the exegetical manuscripts of the solemn ceremony (Visperad) include only a selection of fragments of the complete liturgy, which do not form a coherent text. Nevertheless, our editions of this ceremony are based on the exegetical manuscripts, and therefore contain just the fragments included in them, without indication that they are fragments disseminated in different sections of the ceremony. By consequence, some modern translations render these fragments as if they together formed a coherent text, and not as different alternatives or extensions of some sections of the Yasna.

A further consequence of the dependence of the available editions from the Pahlavi manuscripts is that the ritual instructions have been discarded in the editions. The liturgical manuscripts include— together with the recitative in Avestan language—ritual instructions in Pahlavi, Persian, or Gujarati which are essential for understanding the course of the liturgy. Cf. figs. 3.3.5.1–2 which contrast a section of the beginning of the long liturgy as it appears in Karl Geldner’s 1885–1896 edition and in an edition based upon the liturgical manuscripts.

A new edition of the long liturgy must therefore be based primarily upon the liturgical manuscripts. It must reproduce the ritual variety, including the different variants pertaining to different types of ceremonies, different days and celebrations, and indicate the different options for the mobile sections that alternated in every performance (Cantera 2010). Accordingly, numerous sections of the text must be represented in several variants. Each variant must have a special numeration and be edited in such a way that the correspondence with the sections in other variants of the liturgy is recognizable. I have published on-line provisional versions of each variant of the liturgy (<http://ada.usal.es/pages/completeceremonies>) and created a synoptic table of the correspondences (<http://ada.usal.es/pages/table>). Former editions (as well as the recent revised editions of Geldner’s text) provide only the standard version of the daily ceremony without any other variant, mainly due to their dependence on the exegetical manuscripts that include only the standard daily ceremony.

The ritual character of the manuscripts challenges their supposed dependence on a single archetype as well. For centuries, these ceremonies had been orally performed and transmitted. The priests knew them by heart, since the use of manuscripts was not allowed during the performance. The invention of the Avestan script provided a new, complementary tool for learning the recitatives and ritual instructions. Our manuscripts are thus guides for learning the right performance of the liturgy. Based on their own liturgical knowledge, many priests created new manuscripts at different historical stages. In fact, as late as the sixteenth century, new manuscripts were copied not only from older written sources, but as well directly from the ritual practice and knowledge of the scribe. For instance, the non-dated manuscript 231 (Pune, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Bh5) shows clear traces of having been recorded directly from the actual recitation, as we can see from the differences that exist in an Iranian manuscript originating from a written source (Y1.3):
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certain readings became fashionable and spread from manuscripts of different types to other types over thousands of kilometres (Cantera 2012a, 304 and following). Similar processes can be assumed for older times and could be responsible for wrong readings shared by all manuscripts, like \[\text{LLnLLHQU已经开始} \] in \text{Satna} 12.3, an error that was first produced in the written transmission, then entered the ritual practice and is indeed the form recited today (for another obvious example cf. Cantera 2012a).

There was thus a reciprocal influence between the written transmission and the ritual practice. Since the text copied from a manuscript (often drawn up in its turn by the scribe’s own quill) had previously been acquired and learnt by heart, either completely or at least partially, and recited daily over years by the scribes, unconscious influences were unavoidable. Furthermore, the aim, when copying a manuscript, was not to produce a faithful copy of a given original, but a trustworthy guide to the performance of the ritual. In this way, manuscripts were consciously adapted to the current liturgical practice. This adaptation concerns small changes in the recitative and in the ritual, as well as in the phonetics of the recitation.

The infinite variant readings

The direct influence of the ritual performance on the manuscripts is at the root of the most noteworthy particularity of the Avestan transmission: it does show a great homogeneity regarding the wording (the text of each variant of the liturgy is almost identical in all manuscripts, with only minor differences between the Indian and the Iranian manuscripts), but every single word of the text appears in an almost infinite number of variant readings. Even within the same manuscript, every word will very often be spelt differently in different attestations (see fig. 3.3.5.3).

The choice of the right variant and, generally, the handling of this huge amount of readings of every single word is one of the main difficulties awaiting any editor of an Avestan text. Traditionally, editors have been very selective about the number of readings to quote. The undisputed superiority of Geldner’s edition is hence to be attributed to the fact that his apparatus is much more complete than the one provided by former editors such as Niels Ludvig Westergaard. Nevertheless, Geldner’s apparatus is chaotic, far from being exhaustive, and it does not enable readers to know the exact form they will find in the quoted manuscripts (since he unifies the variants in groups of manuscripts containing similar but not necessarily identical readings).

Most of these variants are minimal and do not change the understanding of the text. Nevertheless, they are important for a linguistic analysis. Therefore, simply to dispense with quoting all these minor variants cannot be the right solution. The most convenient method seems to be setting up a typological classification of the variants that allows us to accumulate them in different apparatuses. There are indeed some types of variants that can be put together in apparatuses to be printed separately (at the end of the edition or in a separate volume), namely palaeographic, orthographic, and phonetic variant readings.

Indian and Iranian manuscripts do exhibit both palaeographic (for example, the use of a different letter for \( q \) or for initial \( y \), etc.) and orthographic divergences (such as the different spelling of the diphthongs \( ao \), \( ae \), etc.). These kinds of variants should be included in the apparatus, since the distribution is not constant in all the manuscripts. The majority of readings are phonetic variations. Apart from a certain...
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instability or insecurity concerning the pronunciation of complex consonant clusters, it is obvious that the language spoken by the performers of the liturgy influenced the recitation and, consequently, also its representation in the manuscripts. Thus manuscripts from Yazd and HUPƗQW\SLFDOO\VKRZDFRQIXVLRQ of Ư and nj IURPWKHPLGGOHRIWKHVHYHQWHHQWKFHQWXU\RQ²DGLDOHFWDOIHDW XUHRIWKH<D\GƯGLDOHFW,WLV important to observe that manuscripts whose colophons declare them to be copies from other ones which distinguish the sounds still perfectly may show just this confusion (such as manuscript 4050 = Tehran, HWƗEپƗQH\H0D OHVZKLFKLVGHFODUHG0REHDFRS\IURPPDQXVFULSW 4010 = Yazd, private collection of Vahid Zolfeghari, or another manuscript of the same scribe). Another confusion which can be similarly explained is the occasional use of u for Ɨ in the Iranian manuscripts (Yasna 9.8 instead of GDKƗNΩP: manuscripts 20 = Tehran, 7HKUDQ.HWƗEپƗQH\H0DۜOHV 7HKUDQ<HJƗQHJL/LE UDU\QRVKHOIPDUN 5020 = Yazd, private yasnastafira: 4220, 4420, 4520).

These variant readings provide lots of information about the evolution of the recitation of the liturgy in different areas during the last five hundred years. Nevertheless, if we confine phonetica et orthographica to separate apparatuses, the edition will be more convenient. Compare figs. 3.3.5.1–3 showing Yasna 9.1 in the edition of Geldner and in a provisional edition with separate apparatuses.

The choice between readings and the geographical and chronological scope of the edition

All editors have noticed that the text of the recitatives was influenced by the ritual performance (known as Vulgata recitation), but these influences were considered to be occasional and never systematic. Nevertheless, the ubiquitous confusion of Ưnj in Iranian manuscripts proves that such influences can be systematic indeed. I have recently revealed other instances of an independent, regular phonetic evolution in Indian and Iranian manuscripts (Cantera forthcoming). This concerns disyllabic words ending in ōoiium, which always appears as žǀƯP (ǀƯP acc.sg. of DƝXXD - 'one', KǀƯP acc.sg. of haoiia - 'left', but YƯGǀLLnjP, KDUǀLLnjP, etc.) in India, whereas in Iran they appear as ūLLXPKǀLLXP.

Fig. 3.3.5.2 Cantera’s provisional edition of Y. 9.1.

Fig. 3.3.5.3 Phonetica et orthographica of the first verses of Y. 9.1.
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Although the invention of the Avestan script has slowed down the phonetic evolution of the Avestan recitative of the long liturgy, it has never completely stopped it, and the changes that continued to take place are reflected in the manuscripts, especially in the liturgical but also (although to a minor degree) in the exegetical ones. Thus the Iranian manuscripts show a different text from the Indian ones. Geldner’s edition was based mainly on the Indian manuscripts, but he often used readings from Iranian manuscripts as well. The texts of the old editions and those of the modern ones are frequently a totum revolutum of Iranian and Indian readings.

The Iranian manuscripts usually prove to be more conservative. For instance, the distribution between ś and š (but not š) is still maintained in the Iranian manuscripts of the seventeenth century but already lost in Mihhrābn’s manuscripts from the fourteenth century (500 (J2 = Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Zend d.2), 510 (K5 = Copenhagen, Royal Library, Cod. Iran. 5), 4600 (L4 = London, British Library, Avesta 4), 4610 (K1 = Copenhagen, Royal Library, Cod. Iran. 1)). But their text can by no means taken to be identical with the recitation in Sassanian times. There is no doubt that phonetic, textual, and ritual changes modified the liturgies from Sassanian times to the date of the first Iranian manuscripts (end of the sixteenth century). The differences are not enormous, but undeniable.

Consequently, any editor must determine the geographical and chronological scope of his edition. The editors of the nineteenth century took a different stance on this question, albeit only theoretically: Westergaard wanted to edit the Sassanian Avesta; Geldner, the hyparchetypes of our manuscripts produced some centuries after the end of the Sassanian empire. In fact, both editors assembled almost the same text, mainly based upon the readings of Mihhrābn’s manuscripts, but interspersed with readings of other manuscripts whenever they considered it convenient for philological or linguistic reasons. The number of inconsistencies thus achieved is enormous. Karl Hoffmann tried to rationalize the choice of readings and to avoid inconsistencies. In his view, after a philological and linguistic analysis the editor has to decide which was the original reading in the Sassanian archetype, and to edit accordingly, independently of the testimony of the manuscripts.

Today, Hoffmann’s methodology has been widely accepted because of some obvious advantages. However, it is not without its own difficulties, because the choice of reconstructing a Sassanian archetype free of inconsistencies poses certain problems: (1) the existence of such an archetype is extremely dubious, as was demonstrated above; (2) even if it had existed, it is very unlikely to have been consistent, since it was the result of a long oral tradition (which has survived until modern times); and (3) the exact reconstruction of the Sassanian shape of the Avestan recitation archetype is extremely difficult, if not impossible. We can only trace the history of our manuscripts back to the tenth century. Therefore, the textual-critical analysis cannot provide us with any information about changes that took place between Sassanian times and the tenth century. The dead letters (letters that are still used in the manuscript but not in their original use) are fortunate exceptions that allow us to know some features of older witnesses, but they do not yield the exact shape of the complete recitation. Linguistic analysis can help us only to a limited extent, since we are unable to determine the exact shape of a text at a given time and in a specific place. Therefore, it is more realistic to edit the liturgy as it was celebrated at a time which we can reconstruct through both textual criticism and linguistic analysis. In my opinion, the oldest version of the liturgy we are able to edit is its celebration in Iran between the tenth and the sixteenth century. The data of the apparatuses will then allow us to follow up the ceremony’s history in India and Iran until the nineteenth century.

References