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**ON THE ETYMOLOGY OF THE AVESTAN NAME
ZARAĐUŠTRA AND SOME OF ITS EPITHETS**

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An entire epoch is linked with the name Zarađuštra, or Zoroaster in the Greek transcription, in the history of Iranian-speaking peoples. In the history of Ancient Oriental culture Zoroaster is known as the founder of one of the most ancient religions, Zoroastrianism, or fire-worship. Zoroastrianism, which arose in hoary antiquity and which lasted right up to the appearance of Islam, was a dominant religion for the Iranian-speaking peoples who lived in the territory of modern Afghanistan, Iran and partially Middle Asia. According to legend Zoroastrianism first evolved in Bactria, or Northern Afghanistan.

The Zoroastrian religious traditions are still kept alive by the so-called Parses who in the past moved mostly to Bombay in India. A small number of them live in Iran. However, some elements of fire-worship are still observed by the most of Iranian-speaking peoples. Thus, the Moslems speaking the Pamir languages still regard fire as something sacred which should not be desecrated.

Avesta, which is a collection of Zoroastrian religious texts, includes the most revered part, the Gathas, sermons in verse and appeals to the supreme deity, Ahura Mazda, or Ormazd in European literature. Legend ascribes the Gathas to Zarađuštra himself.

For nearly a century now the name Zarađuštra has been interpreted as was suggested by Ch. Bartholomae. According to Bartholomae it resulted from the concretion of two stems – *zarant- ‘old’ (Old Indian járant-, Ossetian zãrond) and *uštra- ‘a camel’ Old Indian úštra-)¹. The word Zarađuštra was thus interpreted as ‘one whose camels are old’. We cannot say that specialists have been completely satisfied with this interpretation both semantically and in terms of historical phonology.

In the first place, Ch. Bartholomae’s division of the word Zarađuštra= into zarađ= + uštra= is phonetically somewhat far-fetched. The Old Indian járant- ‘old’, which Ch. Bartholomae believes is reflected in the Avestan zarađ=, could

not have resulted in the Old Iranian *zarað=. The Old Indian adjective suffix =ant is usually reflected in the Old Iranian as *=ant (Cf. the Old Indian brhant= and Avestan bərəzant= ‘big’, ‘high’). Even if we assume that the Old Indian had a variant suffix *=anth, this would inevitably have turned into the Old Iranian *=ant (Cf. Old Indian pánthā = and Avestan pantā= ‘a road’). This phonetic peculiarity was noted at the end of the past century by K. Brugmann². In this division of the name Zardaštra= the first element zarað= remains unclear.

The second consideration, which is no less important, is that we view as absolutely improbable the meaning which Ch. Bartholomae ascribes to the name as ‘one whose camels are old’. For an outstanding person like Zoroaster was among the Ancient Iranians such meaning of this name was to disperse his authority and to belittle his importance as the creator of a new religion. It is doubtful that a man whose camels were old could be revered. In view of all this, we believe that Ch. Bartholomae’s etymology of the name Zardaštra is hardly possible.

The recent achievements in the study of the history of consonantic correspondences of the Old Iranian and Indo-European³ allows us to suggest a new interpretation of the name Zardaštra= and to make some corrections in the interpretation of some of its epithets.

We believe that the Avestan name Zardaštra = could be divided into the following parts: *zara= + =dštra=. Let us begin with the second part, since it is the main. Its root element is *=dš=. Judging by the Pahlavi and New Persian variations of this word, i.e. Zardu(x)št in Pahlavi and Zar(ā)d/tuš/st, Zārd/tu(h)št, Zardučt in New Persian, the root element in the second part could be reconstructed in Old Iranian *=d/t/vuš/s = or *=d/t/dukš=. The alternation of the voiced and voiceless occlusive is possible in the Old Iranian (Cf. Old Persian d/tačara= ‘a palace, a royal residence’). The Old Iranian had also the d/đ and t/đ alternation, cf., e.g. Avestan raod= ‘to grow’ but uruđəm ‘growth’ (I.-E. leudh=, Old Indian rod(h) = ‘to grow’; Avestan tak-, Old Persian đak= ‘flow’ (I.-E. tekū=, Old Indian tak= ‘flow’).

Thus, the Indo-European correspondence of the Old Iranian root *d/t/đuš/s= might have been the root *t(h)ēu=s=, *t(h)ū=s=. This root is found in the Indo-European and it has the following meanings: ‘to be strong, mighty, diligent (physically and spiritually), the reflexes of which are Old Icelandic đjōstr ‘might, rashness’ and Icelandic đusumađur ‘strong, rash, ardent man’⁴, This Indo-European root has a several reflexes in Avesta as well: tav= ‘to be able’, tavah= ‘strength, power’, tāvīši= ‘the strength of the body’, đwaxša= ‘quick, rash, zealous’. It is interesting to note that the form of the comparative degree from the Avestan đwaxša=, i.e. đwaxšišta= ‘the most zealous’, is the epithet of Zoroaster¹.

Thus, the Avestan element = *đuš*= in *Zara-đuš-tra*= is etymologically connected with the Avestan root *tav*= and therefore Avestan = *đuštra*= has the following meanings: ‘adherent, ardent protector, strenuous, strong spiritually’.

As to the first part *zara*= is probably the attribute of the second part. We believe that the Indo-European correlation of it might be the root **gher*= ‘to lighten, radiate, glitter’, Old Indian *hára*= ‘fire, flame’, Russian *zarya* ‘dawn’. The New Persian variants of this name, i.e. *Zarāt/dušt* and *Zarahušt*, allow one to regard the first part of the name as a possessive Genitive, i.e. either as **zarā* Gen.Sg.f. from the stem **zara*=, or as **zarah* Gen.Sg.m.f. of the non-thematic stem **zar*= ‘fire’.

Thus, on the whole the meaning of the Avestan name *Zarađuštra*= could be interpreted as ‘the ardent defender of the fire’, ‘the strenuous protector of the fire’, ‘the adherent of the fire’, or ‘one given the supreme strength to the fire’, ‘the idolizer of the fire’, ‘the sanctifier of the fire’.

This interpretation could be second by the New Persian word-building pattern *zard-sar* ‘a fire-worshipper’⁵, which could be reconstructed in Old Iranian **zarta*=*sara*= or **zartāi* + *sarya*=. The first part of it is a case form of the stem **zarta*= ‘fire’ and the second part is the Present Participle from the root **sar*= ‘to incline, to bend over’ (Cf. Indo-European *kel*= ‘to incline, decline’).

As for the Greek variant of this name, *Zoroaster*, this latter could have evolved from **Zarahwastr*. It is known that in some Iranian languages, particularly Western, the lower pharyngeal *h* often appears in place of the Old Iranian **ǰ*. Therefore, the name **Zarahwastr* could have resulted from **Zaraǰwastra*=, which at the reduced grade was **Zarađuš/stra*=.

In the Avesta is mentioned a number of epithets of *Zoroaster*, one of which is *saošyant*=, which Ch. Bartholomae translates as ‘about *Zaratushtra* as the Saviour’. He derives this word from the Avestan root *sav*= ‘to be fit, to be useful’. Besides this connection of the Avestan *saošyant*= and *sav*= is far-fetched semantically, but it also leaves the sibilant =*š*= unexplained.

Taking into account the possibility of the Old Iranian alternation not only *t/ǰ*, but *t/ǰ/s* (cf. Avestan *tak*=, *sak*=, Old Persian *ǰak*= ‘flow’; Avestan *gaēǰ/sav*= ‘curly-haired’, New Persian *gīsū* ‘a plait’ – Indo-European *ghait*=*ā* ‘curly hair’), we could reconstruct the word *saošyant*= as **t/ǰ/saušyant*=. Grammatically this word is an adjective with the suffix =*yant* from the root, **t/ǰ/sauš*=. If we correlate this root with the corresponding Indo-European root *tēu*=, *tū*=, *tēu*=*s*=, *tū*=*s*= we shall find the meaning which is provided for this word by Ch. Bartholomae, i.e. ‘to save, to rid of’. The truth is that this meaning of the Indo-European root *teu*=*s* has survived only in Greek, i.e. in *δωδω* ‘to save’ and *δωτηρ* ‘the Saviour’.

As it was mentioned above the corresponding Old Indian root *tav=* means ‘to possess power, to be powerful’, while the Avestan *tav=* means ‘to be able to’, *tavah=* ‘power’. There is nothing unusual about this semantic development: ‘to have power, to be powerful’ into ‘to be able to’ and to ‘to save, to deliver’. Similar evolution can be exemplified by the Indo-European *g(h) al=* ‘to be able to’ which in Shughni is reflected in the word *zi=gêr=* ‘to save, to deliver’.

Consequently, the Avestan *saošyant=* ‘saviour, deliverer’ is historically connected with the Avestan root *tav=* ‘to be able to’ and not with the root *sav=* ‘to be fit, to be useful’, as was suggested by Ch. Bartholomae.

In many places of the Avesta the epithet *spitāma=* precedes the name *Zarađuštra=*. Ch. Bartholomae translates this word as ‘the Zaratushtra genus’, i.e. as a common noun. However, it is possible as well that the Avestan *spitāma=* is the superlative of the Old Iranian stem **šwī=* ‘light, clear’ (Cf. Indo-European *ḱuei=*). In this case the word *spitāma=* could mean ‘the lightest’, i.e. ‘holiest’.

The other possible explanation of the Avestan word *spitāma=* could be as follows: **spī=tama=* which could be restored in the Old Iranian as **šwī=tāma=* which means ‘the holy family’ or ‘the holy genealogy’. The first part is the reflex of the Indo-European *ḱuei=* which in turn is the extension of the Indo-European root *ḱeu=* ‘clear, light’. A derivative of the same root is the Indo-European *ḱu=en=* ‘holy’ (Cf. Avestan *spənta=* ‘holy’). The second part could be correlated to the Indo-European **(s)tē(m)b(h)=* ‘genus, tribe’. With the same meaning a reflex of this root can be found in the Yazghulami *xiḡ=tab=* or ‘relatives, kith and kin’. In this case the Avestan *spitāma=* could be interpreted as an adjective meaning ‘noble’, ‘of noble or holy birth’.

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