Research Article

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Dēnkard III Language Variation and the Defence of Socio-Religious Identity in the Context of Early-Islamic Iran

Abstract: The aim of the present paper is to illustrate as a case study, the linguistic and stylistic peculiarities characterizing the third book of the *Dēnkard*, one of the most authoritative texts in Zoroastrian Pahlavi literature (9th-10th CE). The analysis will consider these features as part of a coherent system, styled to serve the dialectic strategies pursued by the Zoroastrian high priests in response to the pressures their own community was facing in the early Islamic period. In order to provide a more comprehensive overview on DkIII language distinctiveness, the research will underline the outward/inward dynamics, addressing both the relation of this theological dialectic with the surrounding socio-cultural environment and the leading-role claims of a group within a politically subordinated community.

Keywords: Middle Persian, Pahlavi Literature, Iranian Philology

1 Introduction

In tune with the present volume, seeking to integrate linguistic data concerning a specific text within the socio-cultural dynamics of the period in which a specific textual production flourished, may yield extremely interesting elements for scholars aiming to survey the development of broader acculturation processes. Within Iranian history, the early Islamic period offers a very rich field of investigation for sociolinguistic studies; the abundance of sources in our possession is in fact due to the activity of the multifaceted constituents of that society, while the presence of various and interacting agents offers a remarkable opportunity to adopt multiple point of views. In this epoch, subsequent to the political affirmation of Islam, different ethno-religious and confessional groups confronted dialectically in order to define their identity and doctrinal boundaries. Given this scenario, the focus of this paper will be on a Zoroastrian theological work which, by virtue of the uniqueness of its language, could help to outline the multilayer strategies deployed by the leadership of an ethno-religious group that played an active role in the cultural dialogue of this period. Different but correlated perspectives will be adopted here, which can be distinguished in terms of:

a) a survey of the internal features structuring style and composition of the text (emic perspective)
b) positioning these characteristics within the cultural-historical context that surrounded the living community and in which the text operated (outward perspective)
c) positioning the characteristics of this and correlated Pahlavi texts according to the social dynamics involving from within the living community (inward perspective).

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Dēnkard III (hereafter DkIII) is the longest extant theological exposition in Zoroastrian Pahlavi literature in Middle Persian (9th-10th CE), attesting to the development that dualistic thought went through in the early Islamic period[1]. The entire *Dēnkard*, originally composed of nine books, had at least two different major redactions made by Ādurfarrbay ī Farroxzādān (mid-9th) and Ādurbād ī Ēmēdān (beginning or second half 10th), both of whom were Leaders of the Zoroastrian community (*hudēnān pēšōbāy*)[2]. Although it is difficult to distinguish one hand from the other it can reasonably be argued that DkIII is the part which shows the hand of the later theologian most clearly; however, in this kind of compilations oral and written material possibly coexisted within a rather fluid process of composition. Nevertheless, the adaptation of older material to both a consistent style and dialectic is a sign of major, substantial redaction[3]. Therefore, even agreeing, from a general point of view, with Vevaina (2015: 213) when he highlights, «our inability to adequately locate these (*i.e.* Pahlavi) texts in their respective sociocultural contexts – pre-Islamic or early Islamic –», we may nonetheless tentatively advance some considerations concerning the role their content and language had, as a living tradition, at the time of their redaction or final fixing. The approach is in any case promising, especially for those texts attributed to datable scholar-priests and which show points of contact with the coeval context.

a) The emic perspective: DkIII language and style

The French scholar de Menasce (1958) was among the first to analyse systematically the complexity and primary characteristics of the language of DkIII[4]; he recognized its social and historical value, underlining the stylistic consistency of the composition with the philosophical purposes of the authors. More recently, starting from these assumptions, other scholars (e.g. Shaki 1970; Belardi 1990; Cipriano 1994; Josephson 2002) and particularly A. Williams (2005), surveyed different topics related to the language structure of DkIII. These studies showed the systematic organization of the language and the precision of its vocabulary, as well as the sophisticated nature of the rhetorical devices and other stylistic features. In addition, the style presents a more sophisticated combination of assertively-stated and dissertatively-stated expositions than other Pahlavi works. In fact, the DkIII stands out for the intensity of both its sentence patterns and vocabulary coherence; an aspect that makes it a masterpiece of compositional skill in Pahlavi literature.

Along with the extensive use of learned and archaizing words cast in the Avestan tradition and its Middle Persian translation-*cum*-commentary (*zand*), the distinctiveness in both DkIII vocabulary and style is nonetheless evident. Its language is in fact marked by the pervasiveness of long abstract compounds, selective addition of morphological elements, emphasis on nominalization, semantic extension and a use of rhetorical devices creating regular patterns in the composition schemes (iterations, antithesis, synonyms, parallelism). These features are combined with recurrent topicalization emerging from the exposition[5]; a device thought to highlight key terms or locutions that govern the meaning and the disclosure of the argumentation. The emphasis on the substantive, nominalized forms, is an overall distinctive characteristic

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1 The *Dēnkard* has been the object of several studies; for a broad outline see Gignoux 1994; Cereti 2001; Macuch 2009, with previous bibliography, and the most comprehensive de Menasce 1958. The only complete translation of the third book is by de Menasce 1973.

2 For detailed accounts of the 'redactors' lives see, among others, de Menasce 1958: 9-12; 1975: 544 ff; Amouzgar/Tafazzoli 2000: 16-17; Gignoux 2001: 31. The date of the last redactor is uncertain. According to the meagre data available, modern scholars have proposed basically two different dates: the turn of the 9th-10th century (e.g. Boyce 1968: 44) and the second half of the 10th century (e.g. Tavadia 1956: 50), see also de Menasce 1958: 10-11 and here below. The last DkIII chapter (420) provides some information, even if set in an ideological perspective, regarding the activities of the two theologians.

3 The modern concept of author is of course inappropriate here since, just as it is in other ancient traditions, the main focus of the writer consisted in engaging and arranging the past authoritative tradition; for the context of Pahlavi literature see Vevaina 2010: 211. Whatever 'fixing' a text might be, it could consist of different degrees of ideological orientation (e.g. through selecting passages and topics) and even of more intensive manipulation (e.g. reshaping the language, extending or functionally arranging the old statements, etc.).

4 See also Bailey 1943 and Zaehner 1955.

5 Here in the sense of intentional and focal positioning of lexical items within both sentences and composition.

among Pahlavi texts (Williams 2005: 393; 2012: 147)[6]; however, in the case of DkIII this feature can structure the conceptual and linguistic pattern of single chapters. As pointed out by de Menasce (1958: 73), the author fabricated his innovative vocabulary in two ways: he created new terms utilizing suffixes for distinguish specific functions of the same word or implementing specialization of the existing synonyms. Several chapters are therefore shaped after the semantic nuances of single lexical items or sets of them that take on a technical connotation. DkIII 397, for instance, exploits the semantic nuances of different terms indicating cognitive processes or faculties, setting them in a hierarchical scale, e.g. *dēn dānāgīh srūd* "religious knowledge by chanting/hearing", *abardar xradīh* "superior wisdom", *frazānagīh* "insight", *abzār āgāhīh* "powerful awareness", *šnāsagīh* "sensible knowledge", *dānāgīh* "aknowledgment", *agāhīh* "perception", *andešišn* "cogitation", *wišt-ōšīh* "loss of consciousness"..etc. (B. 292-293; de Menasce 1973: 354-355). Thus in DkIII the onset of a specialized technolect highlights a reflection on the old Middle Persian lexicon and its function[7], the intensity of which is clearly detectable in chapters 194 and 253, for example. The former is focused on the terms *bawišn*, "first essence/germination"[8], *bawišn-rawišnīh*, *bawišn-astišnīh* and *stī*[9]. Explanation of the specific technical meaning of these concepts is given intrinsically within the chapter through metaphors accompanied by interpretation of quotations from the religious tradition (*dēn*)[10]. As noted by de Menasce (1973: 407), in this case the intertextual reference is attributable to the summary of the *Bag Nask* given in Dk IX 50.29 (Madan II 1911: 883-884) where we have the sequence: *būd-astišnīh*, *stī-rawišnīh*, *bawēd-astišnīh*, "the past existence, the progress/maturation of the material existence, the existence that will be". A similar progression of the creation process is also the key concept in DkIII 194, with the passing of the essence from an archetypal and spiritual state (*mēnōg*) to its material completion, expressed here by the term *stī*, "corporeal existence". The intermediate passages of *bawišn-rawišnīh* and *bawišn-astišnīh* indicate specific stages in which the maturation of the essence manifest itself[11]. Therefore, the terminological implementation in DkIII not only shows the authors intention to enhance the vocabulary inherited from the past but also the effort to elucidate it to their audience. Chapter 253, on the other hand, is of an epistemological nature, being structured on a complex lexical variation of the theme *dān-* "to know"; all the derivatives here have a technical sense that goes far beyond the common use of *dān-*[12]. At the end of this chapter the allusion to the Muʿtazilite view (de Menasce 1973: 415) casts this argumentation in a specific historical context. Both the variations of DkIII 194 and 253 in arranging a technical terminology show great skill in manipulating Middle Persian; the theologians involved with the redaction of the text, started from the ground of the old, authoritative tradition and went on to adapt the language in response to the stimuli deriving from the intellectual scenario of their own age.

Regarding the style of the composition, the parallelism, identified by Josephson (2002)[13] in the Middle Persian prose is systematically used in DkIII; it creates close cohesion in the argumentation with the repeated use of syntactic constructions. It is indeed so prevalent that, quoting Josephson (2002: 67), «the

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6 Williams stresses that this mode of expression distinguishes Zoroastrian rhetoric from that familiar to the monotheistic rivals; an aspect that in the historical reality of the early Islamic milieu contributed most to defining the intellectual and cultural identity of this community (see Williams 2012: 146 ff.).

7 The redactor himself is aware of the register of this composition; in some occasions he marks a style-shifting to a lower register using locutions as *pad ēwāz ī gēhān / pad gēhānīg ēwāz* "in the mundane language" (DkIII 263, 365), *pad ēwāz ī mardōm* "in the popular language" (DkIII 365) or *pad ēwāz ī šahr* "in the language of the reign/city" (DkIII 181, 225).

8 On the richness of DkIII vocabulary related to 'being' and 'becoming' see de Menasce 1958: 71-72. Cf. also the terms *hambawišn* «co-devenir, co-création», *hambawišnīh* «qui est le term du processus indiqué par hambavišn» and *hambawēnīdan* «produire une coexistence, concrèer» (de Menasce 1958: 72). In our chapter *bawišn* assumes the connotation of a technical term and may corresponds to the Arabic philosophical term *kaun* and the Greek γένεσις (Nyberg 1964-1974 II: 45; Shaki 1970: 292).

9 For the same terms see also DkIII 123 and Shaki 1970.

10 In the title there is a reference to a multilayer hermeneutic process: *pad abestāg paydāg čārišn az nigēz ī weh-dēn* "through the means of the Avestan revelation, according to the exposition of the Good-Religion" (B. 161, l.17).

11 M. Shaki (1970: 282) translates these terms as «the movement of being» (*bawišn-rawišnīh*) and «the actualization of being» (*bawišn-astišnīh*). The compund *bawišn-rawišnīh* can perhaps be understood as an intrinsic determinant cause that is inherent to the nature of the subject.

12 An interesting example is the passage in B. 206 l.17-19 in which occur the forms: *dānāgīh, dānišn, dānāg, dānist, ān ī dānīhēd, dānistag, xwadīg-dānāgīh, akanārag-zamānīg-dānāgīh* (de Menasce 1973: 260).

13 This study is based mainly on DkIII evidence.

natural flow of phrases within the clauses is disrupted». Despite this only apparently negative opinion of its style[14], the DkIII composition structure once again highlights the grammatical awareness of its authors, who were able to exploit at best Middle Persian morpho-syntactic components to serve the rhetorical aims of the text. The rhetorical effects did not aim to describe the doctrine in a narrative fashion but, rather, to excerpt key concepts that provided a rational representation of it.

In fact, these features permeate the entire composition organically, also having a specific function because the redactors shaped language and style in order to connect them with the Zoroastrian dualistic doctrine (Williams 2005: 390 ff.). High percentages of verbal and substantive causative[15], spatial and dynamic metaphoric schemes, as well as polar alternation of sequences of antithetical terms or sentences are all intentional devices that mark the style and the syntactic order of the text, structuring a semiotic code governed by a cognitive bipolarization between positive and negative elements[16]. In other words, language and doctrine conflated into a consistent exposition. In DkIII the Zoroastrian cosmic and ethic dualism assumes a sort of plastic form rendered, either visually or aurally, by the text composition itself. In this perspective, the text engages with the doctrine as close reflection of it[17]. Likewise, style and language become manifest reification of the supreme cognitive principle, the so-called *āsn-xrad*, "innate/congenital wisdom"[18], the spiritual faculty that guides the religious authorities in their hermeneutic efforts and teachings. In fact, in the text it is frequently repeated that the *āsn-xrad* discloses the true Revelation, with which it has a symbiotic relation (DkIII 52, 122, 313, 342, 346). In chapter 313 it is stated that the speeches of the Mazdean Revelation (*dēn māzdēsn gōwišn*) are substantially accordant with the *āsn-xrad*, just as the speeches characterized by the *āsn-xrad* (*āsn-xradīg gōwišn*) belong to the Mazdean Revelation. The *āsn-xrad* is in fact one of the pivotal items of the DkIII theology, being the divine gift allowing for perfect vision of the real things and the understanding of God Himself (e.g. DkIII 77, 106, 258, 294). Within this work, the role and functions of the religious principle of *āsn-xrad* stand out more effectively in the chapters devoted to apologetic argumentations; there they guide the disclosure of a rational polemic (de Menasce 1958: 18). Moreover, according to Zoroastrian Pahlavi doctrine, the principle of divine wisdom is also a cosmological reality through which the god Ohrmazd arranges his creation in preparation of his victory over Evil[19]. The cosmological function of the *āsn-xrad* (e.g. DkIII 292) is combined with its role within the sacred history of the material world, where its acceptance, assertion and dissemination determine the trend of the epochs with the alternation of positive and negative periods (DkIII 122, 286). It thus assumes a concrete dimension

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14 Similar negative judgements of the stylistic pattern also emerge from the analysis of de Menasce (1958: 76 and 77) and Shaki (1970: 278), while a contrasting opinion was expressed by Williams (2005). The DkIII schematic structure and rhetoric give the composition a certain rhythmic cadence that has its own aesthetic reasons (Williams 2005: 394). Furthermore, the pervasiveness of rhetoric and fixed forms helped memory retention, a skill often highly praised throughout Pahlavi literature (Bailey 1943: 162) and necessary to support the aural dimension the DkIII teachings possibly had.

15 DkIII is characterized by the extensive use of the suffix *-āk* for agent nouns of verbal derivation and the verbal morpheme *-ēn-* for the causative and transitive denominative verbs (verbs built from nouns). The broad use of the causatives corresponds to the intention of achieving greater efficacy for exhortative argumentations and avoiding going astray with metaphors or long periphrases. Thanks to these devices, in fact, it was possible to compact the primary concepts and adhere to the central core of meaningful lexical items (Williams 2005).

16 See also Williams 2012: 146. The same could also be said of a fourfold set arrangement of antithetical couples, characteristic of DkIII exposition, which seems to be an original development of the Aristotelian tenets originally based on a triadic structure (Shaked 1987: 232). The scheme mirrored in the text composition is thus given by two categories of modes or orientations/inclinations matched with two ethical categories, forming contrasting negative/positive couples of terms or assertions. See Shaked 1979: xli and the example from DkIII in the appendix of Shaked 1987: 233 ff.

17 This intention is explicitly stated in the last chapter of the third book (420), where Ādurbād ī Ēmēdān, says that he named the work "The *Dēnkard* (the Acts of Religion) of one-thousand chapters" to stress the kinship with the religious Revelation. A further internal reference to the nature of the book arrangement (*ārāyišn*) and injunctions (*wērāyišn*) is made in chap. 299, which mentions as sources the sacred Revelation, the ancient sages (*pōryōtkēšān*) and the acknowledged priests (*hērbeds*) of the time.

18 The term is of Avestan origin, *āsna-xratu-* (Bartholomae 1904: 341; Piras 1996). In respect of his works on *Dēnkard*, de Menasce (1958: 18 f.; 1973) translates it as «l'intellect». It represents the capacity to see and understand beyond the experience of the senses; it is in fact the gift of Ohrmazd for discerning good from evil (e.g. DkIII 294) (Williams 2012: 149).

19 As for instance is stated in *Dādestān ī Mēnōg ī Xrad* (MX 1.49).

that accounts for historical contingencies. At the same time, the *āsn-xrad* was also crucial on a practical and collective level because it guided interpretation of the *pēšōbāy* in respect to the religious practices and judgments, which played a huge role in the life of the Zoroastrian community[20].

Presumably, neither DkIII exegesis nor apologetics were limited to the consumption of Zoroastrian theologians but also had a practical influence in the orientation of the living community, being shaped as the binding and authoritative thought of religious leaders. Due to its schematic and concise form, it can be safely assumed that the DkIII offered practical support for aural teaching and dialectic, being also integrated in 'everyday' use through oral or narrative extensions. Certainly, what could appear clumsy in the DkIII at first sight obscure and barren, takes on within a Zoroastrian perspective a degree of doctrinal perfection mirroring and reproducing the processing of superior wisdom and the true Revelation. From the theologians' view point, the text and its language thus had the purpose of sustaining progress in the material world of these divine gifts with the consequent enlightening of the community of believers. On the other hand, through imitation of the Revelation tenets, the peculiar language of DkIII became a tangible manifestation of them as well as a sign of religious affiliation in respect to interfaith confrontations. The effort to render the language pure and perfect from a doctrinal point of view can be compared, in fact, to what in other texts is insistent care over ritual purity, a feature that deeply influenced the life of the community and its distinctive identity. Both the endeavours, in fact, aimed at fighting the negative influences of evil in the age of mixture (*gumēzišn*), and thus struggling against historical contingencies (Williams 2012: 147)[21].

On the whole, the features of DkIII language draw upon theological reflection concerning the sacred tradition and serve for both hermeneutic and apologetic purposes. The indissoluble network of connections between exegesis and apologetics is the structure upon which the author's language and intention lie[22]; a feature broadly shared in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, shaping theological thought as well as the textual compositions of different religious traditions[23]. In DkIII, in fact, almost all the chapter titles end with the statement *az nigēz ī weh-dēn* "from the exposition of the Good Religion" (de Menasce 1958: 17-18)[24], followed by the particle *hād* which instead, as an incipit, opens the actual argumentation and extended discussion on the topic[25]. The consistency of these terms implies a mode of exposition and possibly reference to a technical process of interpretation recognized and accepted within the circle of Zoroastrian theologians. Taken together, all these elements place this written source within the stream of the ancient scholastic tradition but also relate it with the living tradition surrounding our author/s. Being, in fact, the product of institutional representatives, i.e. the leaders of the Zoroastrian community (*hudēnān pēšōbāy*) under the Caliphs' dominion, the DkIII prompts us to associate its features also with the outer socio-cultural environment.

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20 See DD int. 23-25 and also DkIII 52.

21 More generally, some implications related to the sphere of ritual purity may have regarded part of the ideological concepts concerning the use of Middle Persian. In a period of linguistic transition toward the New Persian system, both Pahlavi vocabulary and writing must have been perceived, from a Zoroastrian point of view, as a sign of non-contamination by external agents, i.e. in this case Arabic loanwords and handwriting.

22 The miscellaneous chapters, apparently haphazardly arranged, express a consistent theological view the disclosure of which follows a subtle logic. Although it remains hard to grasp for modern readers, the arrangement of the 420 DkIII chapters may depend on hermeneutic methods focused on the sacred tradition, whose rationale is yet to be fully understood. Nevertheless, it is possible in some cases to detect key words or concepts connecting groups of chapters and interweaving cohesive sections (Menasce 1958: 14-15).

23 In a series of noteworthy studies, Vevaina (2010, 2012, 2015) shed light on the characteristics of the hermeneutical endeavours made by the Zoroastrian doctors, see also Skjærvø 2010.

24 For a list of the few chapters that omit this sentence, see de Menasce 1973: 10, n.8. The reference could allude to both the *zand* and the various *čāštag*, *i.e.* the acknowledged opinions and teachings of authoritative Zoroastrian scholars (Macuch 2009: 132-133).

25 For the technical use of this particle in the Zoroastrian exegetical process see, Skjærvø 2010: 182 ff. In the DkIII occurrences *hād* may be translated as "It is said that:". This is a usual form of reference within Pahlavi literature, whose adherence with passages from the *zand* has never been analysed systematically (de Jong 2009: 36). Perhaps, the main difference distinguishing the DkIII from the proper exegetical texts of the Avestan books (i.e. the *zand*) is the more abstract approach to the topics shown by the former as compared with a more casuistic and concrete fashion shown by the latter. For intertextual techniques and references within Pahlavi literature, see de Jong 2009 and Vevaina 2010.

b) The outward perspective: the defence of cultural borders

The period in which the *Dēnkard* theologians flourished coincides with a great cultural vitality that forged the Islamic oecumene. Fostered by the patronage of the ʿAbbasid court and political-elite members, a pivotal movement of translation was systematically fostered, encouraging the recovery and reworking of the cultural heritage of the past (Gutas: 1998). Transposition and translation from different languages (i.e. Greek, Syriac and Middle Persian) into Arabic became professional and prized competencies exercised by the numerous intellectuals converging towards the ʿAbbasid capital, Baghdad. In this 'linguistic laboratory' reflections on the adaptation of terms and concepts, mainly of an abstract and philosophical nature, in the new language contributed to developing a highly technical terminology and dialectic that entered deep within the fabric of Islamic society. The phenomenon stimulated a wide and transversal range of reactions; intellectuals associated with different doctrines or currents, and operating with heterogeneous linguistic media, strove to enhance their own expressive proficiency in order to shape philosophical or theological arguments in tune with the surrounding cultural environment.

Since the excellent essays on the *Dēnkard* by de Menasce (1958; 1973), which clearly point out the connection between the apologetic tension of this work and the external pressures of a dominant monotheism, it has long been fully recognized that this work is in fact a product of a «Persian milieu already largely Islamicized» (Gignoux 1994). However, not always have the consequences of this last and similar statements been thoroughly explored or taken into consideration when approaching the *Dēnkard* itself or more in general other Pahlavi material of the same epoch[26]. The fact that Pahlavi literature is set within and forms part of an Islamicized milieu has often been underestimated both in the field of Iranian Studies and in other disciplines that focused mainly on the early Islamic period. This latter issue, regarding the marginalization of the Zoroastrian element, is largely due to the fragmentary state of Pahlavi texts editions and lexicographical tools, but also to the mainstream opinion considering these texts as merely the residual fossils of a past lore. This oblivion partially affected the contextualization of our textual production within the life-span of final redactors or recipients, and consequently the understanding of Zoroastrian participation in broader social phenomena that in one way or another influenced both the content and language of these works. In fact, beyond the generic observation arguing the collation and 'archiving' of the old communal lore, deeper explanations regarding the historical motivations or the material conditions of the Pahlavi literature output have yet to be fully explored. Comparison with the responses that other long-standing traditions, such as the Jewish and Christian traditions, gave to the powerful rise of Islam and the birth of a new intellectual scenario may in fact help to highlight intertwined patterns of reaction and acculturation. In the early ʿAbbasid era both Jewish and Christian circles were receptive to the stimuli of the intellectual context, adopting a number of schemes prompted by the dominant thought system of their time, the Islamic *kalām* and in particular by the Muʿtazilite school. Starting from the 9th century, Christian theologians from Iraq composed apologetic works in Arabic, engaging in dialectic confrontation with their opponents on the most debated topics of that time (Hoyland 1997; Keating 2006; Husseini 2014)[27]. Likewise, various different Jewish scholars of that time updated their philosophical tools, adopting a dialectical reasoning close to the Muʿtazilite model (Wolfson 1979; Goodman 1995; 1999). In both cases, however, the connection with the past religious lore and textual tradition is always evident, and the basic tenets of the 'orthodox' faith were never abandoned. As for the other religious systems, for Zoroastrianism it was not so much a matter of innovation as, rather, renegotiation of a deeply rooted heritage. If a new approach was taken to fit in with a changed historical and intellectual environment, also the language conveying these apologetic argumentations may have been reshaped following the same path. Basically, even if the

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26 For an interesting change of perspective see more recently e.g. Williams 2012 and de Jong 2016.

27 They were affiliated to all the main groups of Oriental Christianity. The discussion over the Trinity offers a remarkable example of the interfaith disputation in the ʿAbbasid era. This topic figures at the centre of Christian apology because it was consistently the object of Muslim polemicists' confutations; see also Wolfson 1976: 310 ff.; Hoyland 1997: 502 ff.. The same topic was contested by coeval Zoroastrian theologians (DkIII 40; ŠGW XV), showing that they, too, followed in the main trends of their time. On the other hand, the Christian polemicists like Abu Qurra (d. ca. 820) give us external confirmation of the active presence of the Zoroastrians thinkers, accounting the Magians among the participants in the debate context of the early ʿAbbasid era (Hoyland 1997: 511).

theologically treated concepts were already well established within the older tradition, they became, in the early Islamic environment, the core of controversial disputes and interfaith confrontations based on common patterns of dialogue.

Thanks to the connections with the past, Middle Persian figured, for 9th-10th centuries Zoroastrian high priests, as the privileged means to convey religious knowledge, despite the fall of the Sasanian Empire and the dramatic changes involving spoken language and writing[28]. In fact, the use of the Middle Persian system symbolized continuity with an authoritative past and the sayings of the ancient doctors. As a brilliant example of such a continuum, the *Dēnkard* was compiled by redactors (Ādurfarrbay and Ādurbād) having the office of *hudēnān pēšōbāy*, Leader of the Faithful. According to its final redactor, it was deposited in the archive (*diwān*) of this office court (*dar*) (DkIII 420), very plausibly located in the ʿAbbasid Baghdad (de Jong 2016)[29]. The seat of the ethno-religious community leaders had in fact to be established close to the central power[30]. The possibility that this work was accomplished in the institutional and cultural centre of that time by two influential members of a recognized, but subordinated community, demands a perspective that also takes into consideration circumstantiated, local factors. Actually, only a recent study of A. de Jong (2016) casts light on the environment in which this work was forged. Identification of the *Dēnkard* birthplace helps us towards a better evaluation of all the dynamics that may have influenced the authors' thought, highlighting the active role the Zoroastrian leadership had within the cross-cultural interplays at the very epicentre of Islamic society. Since the proximity to the highest political authority, the Zoroastrian high priests of Baghdad were pivotal in orientating the cultural directions of the Zoroastrian communities living under the rule of the ʿAbbasid dynasty. All too often it is tacitly assumed that in the early Islamic period the centre of Zoroastrian textual production and cultural activities was limited to the region of Fārs in south-west Iran; contrariwise, the *mowbeds* of Baghdad also contributed as major agents of these dynamics. This latter group was in fact the foremost interface with central political authorities and the heterogeneous protagonists involved in the cultural agora located at the centre of the Islamic Empire. A clue to the interaction between the *pēšōbāy* and the administration of the Muslim rulers in matters of official approval procedure may be offered by a passage reported in the second Epistle of Manuščihr (EM II,1.13). Although the passage remains rather obscure it mentions the example of an edict issued by the *pēšōbāy* Zardōšt ī Ādurfarrbay, son of Ādurfarrbay ī Farroxzādān, and approved by Muslim authorities (Kanga 1957: 376 ff.; de Menasce 1958: 11-12). A parallel procedure of approval, from centre to periphery, is accounted in the later *Rivāyat ī Farrbay-Srōš* (1008 CE) where is reported the collaboration between an imperial official (*mard ī sultānīg*), namely Abū Miswar Yazdān-Pādār ī Marzbān from Baghdad, and the *hudēnān pēšōbāy* for a calendar reform (de Blois 2003; de Jong 2016). Likewise, according to Bīrūnī's *Chronology* (Sachau 1879:

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28 The language in which the *zand* is composed was perceived as closely associated to the sacred Revelation (de Jong 2009). According to DkV 24.12, for instance, the language of *zand* is the means to disseminate and explain the Revelation contained in the sacred Avesta (Amouzgar/Tafazzoli 2000: 83).

29 That the *pēšōbāy dīwān* was in Baghdad is confirmed by the oldest colophon of the *Dēnkard*'s manuscript B written by the copyist Māwindād Naremāhān in 1020 CE (Sanjana 1928: 95, II 67; de Jong 2016). Unfortunately, historical data are scanty; according to the Pahlavi text *Gizistag Abāliš*, Ādurfarrbay ī Farroxzādān was involved in a religious disputation at the court of al-Maʾmūn, see n.36. Even Muslim authors like Masʿūdī, Yāqūt and Bīrūnī offer some traces of the active presence in Baghdad of the chiefs of the Zoroastrian community, see here below. The latter in his *Chronology of Ancient Nations* mentions an Ādurbād *mowbed* of Baghdad (Sachau 1879: 200), thus the Zoroastrian higher authority in the Caliphal capital, who could indeed correspond to our second *Dēnkard* redactor. The institution of the *hudēnān pēšōbāy* appears characteristic of a post-Islamic conquest reorganization of the hierarchical leadership of the ethno-religious community, while all the figures that we know holding the office belonged to the same priestly family (Boyce 1979: 153 f.). Unfortunately, we do not know precisely when or how the office was established. The first *pēšōbāy* recorded is Ādurfarrbay ī Farroxzādān himself, while the specific title seems to recall the Caliphal appellative "Commander of the Faithful" (Ar. *Amīr ul-Mumanīm*). The praxis for which the heads of the confessional communities borrowed the official title on the model of that employed by the sovereigns was already a pattern in the late Sasanian Empire. The Caliph al-Maʾmūn and his religious policy seem to have been key factors in the formation of this institution (Chacha 1936: 4,n.1; Anklesaria 1969 II: 11), while the city of Marw might have been a key scenario for the early relationship between the first ʿAbbasid dynasts and Zoroastrian priestly clans (Gutas 1998: 49-50).

30 ʿAbbasid policy seems in this case to follow the Sasanian pattern. The leaders of the recognized religions were primal interlocutors and mediators between the communities and the central power, a fact that must have also required specific physical proximity.

36) the Caliph Mutawakkil (847-861 CE) summoned the *mowbed* (i.e. the representative of the Zoroastrian community) to question him about the calendrical customs of the ancient kings and particularly the new-year day intercalation[31]. In this perspective, the proximity of the *pēšōbāy* to the institutional and administrative poles implies the active participation of the Zoroastrian community referents in major acculturation processes. Thus, the legal and doctrinal opinions of these Zoroastrian leading figures influenced not only the development of their own religious group but stimulated debate with the influential circles of their counterparts. This kind of participation was in fact a broader phenomenon that lays behind a process of mutual influences, which finds reflection in the textual output of the leading religious figures operating in this cross-cultural agora (Amir-Moezzi/Schmidtke 2009). The interaction with contemporary trends can be observed in the apodictic argumentation of DKIII; here several chapters are closed with a paragraph that in contrastive function reports the erroneous thoughts of scholars of other doctrines (*kēšdārān*), denouncing the inconsistency of their religious views. In almost all the cases, reference is to Muslim theologians[32] (de Menasce 1958: 19; 1975: 556), and, more generally, it attacks the principles of monotheism. Although dogmatically oriented, these confutations establish a (fictitious) dialectical interaction with external opinions, thus breaking out of an otherwise self-referential thought system. This is a rhetorical device that takes the recipient out of the absolute and atemporal truth of the *Dēn* in order to lead him/her to the pernicious reality of historical time. In chapter 147, for instance, a specific confutation, based on logical and epistemological tenets, is made against Muʿtazilite ideas on rejection of the divine attributes (de Menasce 1973: 400)[33]. Epistemology was indeed a harsh battleground at that time and proved to be an important point of contact between DkIII thought and the basic principles of Muʿtazilism (e.g. DkIII 253, 294). The rise of new and dominant intellectual tendencies in ninth-century Islamic society triggered new responses, also within the Zoroastrian intellectual community, calling for appropriate reaction on the same dialectical, and consequently also linguistic, levels.

Two centuries after the fall of the last Sasanian king (651 CE), Islam was no longer the religion of the foreign conquerors but began to become deeply rooted in the Iranian social matrix[34] (Bulliet 1979; Morony 1990; Choksy 1997, Bowen-Savant 2013). Consequently, in this period increasing apostasy accelerated the decline of the Zoroastrian community even in its local strongholds while, inversely, acceptance of a new religious system accelerated a process of cultural transformation among the Iranian population, involving

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31 Still the same calendrical topics are introduced in the long chapter DkIII 419 (see Boyce *apud* de Menasce 1973: 374-379) which almost sounds like the recording of the *pēšōbāy* answer.

32 The apparently neutral term *kēšdārān*, lit. "those who hold the doctrine" is systematically employed in a contrastive way to denote the non-Zoroastrian doctors (de Menasce 1958: 22); for the occurrences of the term in DkIII see the index in de Menasce 1973: 434; for its negative connotation see also Williams 2012: 148. Although never directly mentioned, possibly in order to avoid retaliation, Muslims were in fact the main target. Recurrent topics in the Zoroastrian polemic against Islam are: prophetology, the eternity of hell and justification of evil presence in the world, free will and the faculties of God (de Menasce 1958: 19 ff; 1973; Williams 2012: 144; 148). Furthermore, Bausani (1957) detected in DkIII 208 two quotations from the Quran, evidence that the Zoroastrian theologians had at least a basic knowledge of the scriptural tradition of their opponents. The DkIII uses a large set of denominations to indicate other doctrinal positions, from the most generic *ag-dēnān*, "those of bad religion" (possibly referring to the Islamic neo-converts) and *ahlamōgān* "heretics", to the more specific terms for Jews (*jahūdān*), Manichaeans (*zandīg*), sophists (*sōfistāg*) and materialists (*dahrīg*); the last term based on what the Arab heresiologists called *dahriyya* (de Menasce 1945: 77 ff.). The Arabic term *dahr*, originally meaning "time" was later used for "eternity"; belief in the eternity of the material world is in fact a characteristic attributed to this group and even the Jewish polemic against it shows selective use of the same term (Wolfson 1979: 151 ff.). The *Dēnkard* form is rendered with the Middle Persian suffix for adjectives formation (*-īg*).

33 It was one of the most challenging and debated topics developed by this Islamic philosophical movement. In DkIII the polemic against Muʿtazilite thought can also be found in chapters 138 and 172, where it includes the topic of God's will (*kām*) and command (*framān*). Similar arguments are also present in ŠGW XI, 93-102 (de Menasce 1945: 132-135, 159-160) and DkIV 75 (de Menasce 1945: 159). For a more detailed survey of the interactions between Zoroastrian and Muʿtazilite tenets see de Menasce 1973: 14 ff. Points of contact with Muʿtazilite thought are detectable in the overall flavour of DkIII, such as the attempt to conciliate Faith and Reason through logical speculation on action and movement categories, hermeneutic and epistemological processes or the function of the Intellect and the transmission of the true tradition. Discourse on God's attributes (see Wolfson 1976) also reverberated in Jewish works of the same epoch, and the ideas of a number of Jewish scholars show strong analogies with the positions of Muʿtazilism (Wolfson 1979: 1 ff.).

34 Here by the inclusive term of Islam is meant all the different groups that contributed greatly to the spread of this religion among the local populations (Morony 1990).

revision of identity, memory and social affiliation (Bowen-Savant 2013). It was in this period of cross-communal debate that the interest in philosophical, theological and scientific matters kindled interfaith as much as intra-communal competition. The leading actor in this arena was Muʿtazilism, a school of the Islamic ʿIlm al-kalām, originating in Basra and Baghdad, whose primary intent was to defend and assert the principles of the Islamic faith (Frank 1978). Its rise marked an outstanding improvement in rational logic and dialectic in Arabic, while the organization of discourses and rhetoric was one of the major goals of the Muʿtazilite doctors[35]. Apologetics was not confined to the written form; indeed, we are informed that inter-confessional public or private disputations were popular at different levels of ʿAbbasid society (Choksy 1997: 31)[36]. According to the Arab Christian scholar Jāḥiẓ, for instance, all the Muslims were particularly active in the field of theological disputations (Hoyland 1997: 457). Behind literary stereotypes, this statement might mean that the social base of people interested in these matters extended, involving a larger number of individuals seeking to defend their religious choices. The propagation of Muʿtazilism in the 9th century marked a watershed within the intellectual development of the early Islamic oecumene, triggering in different groups and individuals a series of reactions in either direction; acceptance or refutation. In each case, however, the Muʿtazilite approach fixed the criteria for dialectical debate. These cultural dynamics stimulated the phenomenon aptly described by Goodman (1995; 1999) with the definition of 'crosspollination'[37] or 'whirlpool effect' by Stroumsa (2008). These terms refer to a prominent feature of the Medieval Islamic world that saw the circulation of ideas in a unique and inclusive intellectual community. All the literary outputs of the three great monotheisms show in fact a high degree of parallelism in this epoch, as Wolfson pointed out in 1979[38]. Although more sharply separated from the other faiths by doctrine and language, even Zoroastrianism played a part in this intellectual scenario.

In a broad sense, the trends of the interfaith theological debate set by the socially-dominant Muʿtazilite thinkers followed the principle of the Aristotelian logic relying on a «dialectical reasoning based upon categorical definitions» (Hoyland 1997: 456). It was this approach that offered a common ground for setting a dialogue despite the discordant dogma of each tradition and the consequent confessional divide (Hoyland 1997: 456). This aspect may explain the lively interest of DkIII in developing a number of argumentations after an Aristotelian manner (de Menasce 1958; Shaked 1987: 224). The contact between Aristotelian thought and Zoroastrian theology might of course be a heritage from the Sasanian era when the ideas of Greek philosophers penetrated Iranian culture through both Greek and Syriac sources (Bailey 1943; Shaki 1970;

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35 An interesting definition of the contemporary Islamic philosophy was made by al-Fārābī (IX-X AD) in the *Iḥṣāʾ al-ʿulūm*: «L'art du kalām est la capacité qui permet à l'homme de faire vaincre les doctrines et les obligations dont la declaration officielle remonte au fondateur de la communauté, et de dénigrer toutes les theses qu'on y oppose» (Monnot 1974: 143).

36 At the Caliphal court, this practice was called in Arabic *munāzarāt*, "disputation" (Keating 2006: 24-32); it became a literary topos reflected in sources of different traditions and epochs, see e.g. Ibn Qutayba, *ʾUyiin*, 2.180-81 (Hoyland 1997: 44 and 459 ff.). Within Pahlavi literature the *Gizistag Abāliš*, narrating the exploit of Ādurfarrbay ī Farroxzādān in a disputation at the court of al-Maʾmūn, is a good example that denotes the correspondence with a widespread motif in Islamic society (van Ess 1976 and 1992: 203-204). Despite the fictional aspects of these narratives, the historical and contextual setting must have had some reliability; likewise, even though the polemical arguments conveyed by these texts were primarily aimed at intra-communal consumption, a part of them seems to rely on real debates (Hoyland 1997: 19). For parallels to the *Gizistag* context, see also the public disputation faced by the Imām al-Riḍā in the presence of al-Maʾmūn against the representatives of four religions, reported by Ibn Bābūya (Monnot 1974: 116). In this last source, the Zoroastrian representative is defined as *al-hirbadh al-akbar*, the "supreme *hērbed*" (Monnot 1974: 117). The presence of all the official heads of the other religious communities also attests to the rank the Zoroastrian scholar had at the Caliphal court. Along with the *Gizistag* also the fifth book of the *Dēnkard* shows the *pēšōbāy* Ādurfarrbay in a dialogue with believers of other faiths, see Amouzgar/Tafazzoli 2000: 17-18. This motive was commonly applied to create edifying narratives upon leading figures of different communities, while the polemical genre itself had a highly conventional character of its own (Monnot 1974: 31).

37 This concept is now a landmark for studies on early Islamic civilization and leads the methodological approach beyond the borders of disciplinary divides; for an up-to-date bibliography see Amir-Moezzi/Schmidtke, 2009.

38 More than one-way influences it is a matter of contact and sharing of a common context.

Shaked 1987)[39]. However, the revisiting and recasting of the past knowledge to serve an apologetic and polemic purpose may depend also on the contingent issues in which the two Zoroastrian scholars were involved. i.e. dialectical confrontations with the Muslim *kēšdarāns* and Iranian new converts.

Within the Islamic world, grammar was the first field of learning to see substantial enhancement since the beginning of Arab conquest; this in turn influenced the development of other fields, and in particular the *kalām* (Frank 1978: 10). Soon, thanks to speculation on its linguistic features, Arabic achieved status in the fields of natural science, philosophy and theological matters. Its expressive excellence was widely and long recognized, while, at the dawn of Classical Persian literature (10th century), many of the early intellectuals of Iranian origin praised the authority of Arabic in those fields (Lazard 1975: 631), borrowing the technical terminology they needed[40]. However, Muslim Iranian literati also prompted active reflection on matters involving their own native language as in the case of Avicenna, Ismāʿīlī thinkers and the tenth-century Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī whose philological efforts, focused on the rendering of the proper pronunciation of the Persian loanwords that entered into literary Arabic (Modi 1931: 276). In the context of the early Islamic period, in fact, speculation about language and philosophical terminology coincided with a period of linguistic formation and transition that involved both Arabic and, shortly after, New Persian; a transformation that favoured a critical approach toward the linguistic instrument, exerting a substantial influence on literary forms and the mode of expression of each single discipline (Afnan 1964: 29)[41].

Such a vibrant background gives us a second key to understand the DkIII variations, its vocabulary and rhetorical scheme. In a context of philosophical and linguistic research, the DkIII theologians asserted the intrinsic potential of Middle Persian within the field of abstractions and conceptual terminology. For instance, the insistence on verbal and nominal constructions to indicate categories of action and movement may be due to the involvement of the Zoroastrian theologians in an intellectual context where the atomistic physic of Muʿtazilite thinkers stimulated the elaboration of a specialized vocabulary. Faced with the Muslims and the apostasy process, trained theologians required skills and variegated competences, including command of logical exposition or use of proper philosophical terminology. Evidently, the vocabulary of DkIII deals with a specific need felt among the Zoroastrian scholar priests of that epoch: the desire to express appealing argumentation that entered into multidisciplinary confrontation with other doctrinal systems[42]. In this respect, DkIII language represents one of the major attempts to address this issue. It could be regarded as a functional instrument shaped by scholars who updated the conservative, but from a Zoroastrian perspective pure and still authoritative, Middle Persian in order to defend both conceptually and practically the religious identity of their own group[43]. The participation along with Muʿtazilites and other heterogeneous intellectuals in Baghdad society forced the Zoroastrian thinkers to reinforce some intrinsic traits of their cultural heritage, recasting them with rational exposition and precise terminology.

In every respect, the pressure exerted over the Zoroastrian community must have been variegated; alongside social concern, Islamic proselytism was conducted mainly through oral preaching, while only

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39 The assimilation of Aristotelian or pseudo-Aristotelian works continued with great intensity in the Islamic epoch with their translation into Arabic. Since the ʿAbbasid takeover of power (mid-8th), this intertwined phenomenon of translation and transposition had its epicentre in Baghdad and saw widespread dissemination in that urban context (Gutas 1998). This may have facilitated access, especially by prominent members of that society, to both the original sources and their translations or however the related philosophical topics were conveyed along manifold channels.

40 Contrariwise, Avicenna acknowledges that in the field of logic his mother tongue has some advantages over Arabic (de Menasce 1958: 77). Avicenna's *Dānishnāma*, "the Book of Knowledge" is the first systematic attempt to compose a philosophical treatise in New Persian (Afnan 1964: 63). In this work the philosopher seems deliberately to reduce the percentage of Arabic loanwords, trying to express the key concepts with innovative Persian forms.

41 In this complicated scenario, the Muslim philosophers of Iranian origin gave an essential contribution to the formation of an abstract and conceptual terminology in Arabic, a tendency that could have been favoured by the legacy of the characteristics of their mother tongue (Afnan 1964: 31).

42 See the epistemological chapters as e.g. 126, 132 based on logic, and above all chap. 253 where reference seems to address the Muʿtazilite view.

43 Iranian neo-converts to Islam were often the fiercest opponents of Zoroastrianism as well as the liveliest promoters of proselytization (Choksy 1997: 80). The DkIII polemic itself could have offered the dialectical argumentation addressing this topic.

the intellectuals of the *kalām* undertook a more sophisticated critique[44]. A clear example of the latter is offered by the Muʿtazilite ʿAbd Al-Jabbār, a Muslim Iranian thinker writing in Arabic who flourished under Buyid patronage between the end of the 10th and the beginning of the 11th century. Drawing upon the predecessors of his school, Jabbār devoted a number of dialogues to the confutation of dualistic positions[45] (Monnot 1974). His style is characterized by a strict structure in which logic rules the polemical argumentation; analysing the lexicon of the first section of Jabbār's *Mughnī* with a statistical methodology, Monnot (1974: 34) noticed a considerable frequency of adjectives expressing sensorial qualities, verbs of motion and above all abstractions[46]. Moreover, in these dialogues the Islamic thinker fabricated his own dualistic vocabulary using a selective terminology to distinguish a group of antithetic couples that aimed to reproduce the theological thought of his opponents (Monnot 1974: 35)[47]. Indeed, these couples and the causality process linked to them tally well with the language of the theological Pahlavi books, and especially with the exposition of DkIII, in which such contrapositions profoundly characterise the style of composition. A further point of contact between the two works is that both level their criticisms mostly at abstract concepts or tenets[48], while the insistence on the radical independence of the two Principles and their opposite roles as prime causes are the guidelines of apology and polemic in both DkIII and *Mughnī* respectively. These kinds of engagements suggest that on both sides there was, at least at the higher level of speculation, a good degree of awareness regarding discourses and the rhetorical devices used by the opponents. This implies mutual exchange and active participation in an intellectual dialogue played on the common ground of dialectical praxis and topics.

The DkIII theologians' polemic against Islam was not concentrated in one direction only; indeed, some arguments seem also to be addressed against minority currents within the world of Islam. This could be the case with some arguments addressing the Shīʿites, a group at that time experiencing a remarkable process of ideological formation. More specifically, it is still the discourse on the innate-intellect, the Zoroastrian *āsn-xrad* and Shīʿite *ʿaql*, that provides a promising area for comparison (Amir-Moezzi 2007: 20 n.13). In both systems, DkIII and the rising Imamate theology, this principle had an essential role, while the religious semantic value of the related terms is fully apparent. The spiritual and metaphysical functions of this principle, which can be rendered as «hiéro-intelligence» (Amir-Moezzi 2007: 27), join the two doctrines, distinguishing them in respect of the theological view of the Islamic *kalām*, in particular Muʿtazilite, which emphasized the rational aspect of the *ʿaql* (Monnot 1974: 10). However, in both systems, Zoroastrian and Shīʿite, a progressive overlapping of this concept with that of dialectical reason can be noted. For the old Shīʿite thinkers, *ʿaql* is a doctrinal dogma on which a substantial part of the Imamology is based (Amir-Moezzi 2007: 15 ff.). In the early Shīʿite texts, in fact, *ʿaql* is conceived in an epistemological and ethical dimension. This sort of «hiéro-intelligence» is a divine gift enabling recognition of the signs of God, understanding of his word and pious submission to divine authority (Amir-Moezzi 2007: 17)[49]. Shīʿite *ʿaql* also had a cosmologic projection in the strife characterizing the material world, since it is opposed, in a contrastive function, by the spiritual principle of ignorance. It is thus worth noting a parallel contraposition in DkIII, where in several chapters the beneficial effects of *āsn-xrad* are confronted by the negative action of

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44 For an exhaustive study on the Islamic heresiography see now van Ess 2011. The maturation of the Islamic heresiography in the 9th cent. was a substantial element in kindling the interfaith challenge.

45 Distinguished as dualists (*al-thanawiyya*) and Magians (*al-majūs*) (Monnot 1974: 43).

46 A statistical analysis of DkIII language is still a desideratum; however, these features distinctively characterize the Zoroastrian text, too (de Menasce 1958; Williams 2005).

47 In his criticism Jabbār rejects the deterministic necessity of these antithetical couple and dissolves their causal connections (Monnot 1974: 50, 140).

48 In describing this aspect of Jabbār polemic, Monnot (1974: 139) states: «ce principes abstraits, ou plutôt déracinés de l'humus mental òu ils prenaient vie, constituent la cible du muʿtazilite, tout armé de dialectique». Alongside this, also themes like the non-corporeal existence of the Evil being and the matter of eternity/non eternity distinction of the two prime Principles come in for Jabbār's polemic and may be appropriately compared with the arguments treated in the Pahlavi books.

49 See e.g. DkIII 294 for the *āsn-xrad* conceived as the faculty/instrument that preserves the ability to have knowledge of the divine. For other functions of this principle within DkIII, see above and de Menasce 1973.

waran[50]. On the other hand, the frequent confutation in DkIII concerning the belief that God created both *waran* and supreme wisdom may oppose the cosmogonic myth reported by the Shīʿite texts on the origin of the Creation in which the intellect/ignorance pairing is personified by two principles sharing the same divine source (Amir-Moezzi 2007). Moreover, the *ʿaql*, like the *āsn-xrad*, is also a key concept that defines the hierarchical organization of the group of the believers, because it is the primary faculty in guiding religious wisdom, authoritative teachings and interpretations[51]. This aspect shows a further tendency reverberating in that period[52], focused on the intra-communal debates aroused around the sources of legitimation for interpretation of the sacred tradition (Ar. *tafsīr*). The endeavour to restore and collect dialogues, sentences and teachings of religious and spiritual authorities with the aim of shaping the orientation of the group and defining its leadership is a transversal matter, particularly felt in Shīʿite circles[53], but which also emerges from several Pahlavi texts of the same period.

As a whole, thus, the DkIII shows an adaptive strategy to cope with manifold polemical issues; it provided a more systematic and renovated linguistic instrument through which Zoroastrian scholars could cast their own arguments in a challenging fashion. The struggle against a changing and hostile environment is a motive that emerges in different measure and modes within all Pahlavi literature; the strategy adopted by the Zoroastrian theologians to tackle adversities must in fact have been multifaceted, contributing largely to defining a new idea of Zoroastrian identity within an age of transformation. So far, the case of DkIII offers a specimen of the interactions involving a subordinate community and the dominant culture, with polarized tendencies focused on integration in a wider cultural debate and resistance to assimilation. DkIII's apologetic efforts are better understood if we take into account the broader historical frame of early Islamic Iran. This Zoroastrian theological text fits in with a momentum of dramatic development of the Iranian social fabric (e.g. Choksy 1997; Bowen-Savant 2013). Tracing out a roughly simplified scheme, we can see that after an initial 'colonial' phase characterized by a marked division and disconnection between a foreign ruling class and the majority of the native submitted population, an integration/assimilation process was slowly coming into effect and subsequently kindled by the socio-political aftermaths brought out by the ʿAbbasid revolution (mid 8th). With the ongoing phase of 'post-colonialism',[54] the new interplay between central power and periphery fostered a broader participation of Iranian-Muslim converts in

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50 See DkIII 76, 122, 226, 228. Generally speaking, MP. *waran* means "lust, desire, concupiscence" (Nyberg 1964-74 II: 203); DkIII circumscribes it as a more specific term indicating a deceptive sensitiveness or a defective perception that dims the rational and intuitive faculties of humans (de Menasce 1958: 22).

51 For this topic in the Zoroastrian context see below. Shīʿite *ʿaql* induces the *al-ruʾya biʾl-qalb*, "the vision through or within the heart" (Amir-Moezzi 2007: 23), a sort of spiritual technique to reach a higher wisdom achievable through mystic contemplation and recitation of prayers handed down by a chain of spiritual masters (Amir-Moezzi 2007: 132). A number of passages from DkIII (106, 210, 250, 313, 346, 405) merit deeper comparison with the relevant Shīʿite tenets in order to evaluate whatever points of contact there may be on these specific topics between the Imams and *pēšōbāys* circles. In particular see chap. 397. Here possession of the *āsn-xrad* (*āsn-xradōmandīh*) is equated with the existence of the soul-eye (*gyān-čašm*), whose highest power is achieved through the union with the religious knowledge gained by hearing/recitation (*dēn-dānāgīh srūd*); this meditative/cognitive process brings the following boons: a supreme wisdom (*abardar xradīh*), insight (*frazānagīh*), vision of the spiritual world (*mēnōg wēnišnīh*) (B. 292-293; de Menasce 1973: 354). In a number of these and other chapters, the compound *gōšosrūd*, «acquis par audition» (de Menasce 1973), belonging to the vocabulary of the Pahlavi *zand* (Dhabahar 1949: 201; Kapadia 1953: 69), refers in my opinion to a specific technique of meditation based on the recitation (MP *srūdan*) and consequent listening to/internalization of the sacred texts. On the traces of an esoteric teaching within Pahlavi tradition, see Shaked 1969. The combination of sight and hearing faculties in governing the religious-mystical enlightenment is already pivotal in the earlier Zoroastrian tradition, see Piras 1996: 13-17.

52 The Muʿtazilite tendencies toward a rational approach and the scepticism over the communal-centred religions challenged the traditional sources of religious authority (Crone 2006: 25-26); a circumstance to which also Zoroastrian leaders must have reacted through reinforcement of the justification concerning their authoritative claims and discourses.

53 The oldest compilations of imamate dogmatic tradition known today are ascribed to al-Ṣaffâr al Qumî (d. 903 CE) and al-Kulaynî (d. 940 CE) (Amir-Moezzi 2007: 41).

54 For definition and application of this modern-history concept to the reality of 10th century Islam and especially Iran, see Crone 2006: 9 ff..

the cultural and decision-making process[55], while as from the second half of the ninth century new Iranian and Islamicized dynasties took over power in the lands east of Baghdad. The local power-balance between confessional communities shifted irreversibly. The conversion process eroded the role of the Zoroastrian high priests as intermediaries between the Islamic authorities and the local Iranian population, undermining their effective power and influence. This transitional period inevitably led to social tensions, but it also saw more in-depth cross-cultural and inter-confessional exchanges. Moreover, it roughly overlaps with the blossoming of Zoroastrian Pahlavi literature and consequently with an apex of the Zoroastrian clergy's linguistic creativity. What we know about Zoroastrian cultural opposition and reaction is mainly represented in Pahlavi books, through both their contents and their stylistic and linguistic features[56]. By the end of this phase the social 'inversion' had almost entirely come about: the Muslims became the majority community throughout Iran, new balances and a new social order were set in new forms; from the 11th century onward the negotiating capacity of the Zoroastrians became seriously limited.

It is during the critical 'post-colonial' phase that a process of self-conscious definition involving the subordinated communities' identity knew substantial development. In the wake of that process the DkIII redactors, alongside other intellectuals of different affiliation, far from being passive users of the literary proficiency inherited from their forerunners, struggled to preserve their native cultural capital from the overwhelming pressures of the contemporary society. Resistance to assimilation was also stressed through linguistic choices, which conveyed substantial aspects of communal distinctiveness.

In ʿAbbasid Iran, the resistance to socio-cultural assimilation took different forms, often shaped after a native fashion, a trend recently analysed in an exhaustive study by P. Crone (2012). In this framework, also idioms could have been perceived as a means of cultural opposition, as, for instance, was for the case of the heretic Bihāfarīd[57] or later Western-Iran Shīʿite groups. As cultural crosstalk spread even alternative groups within Islam, as the Ismāʿīlī Shīʿites, developed their own apologetic argumentations. In some cases, these opposition groups shaped their new technical terminology after a native matrix, drawing on the Middle Persian heritage (Lazard 1975: 632)[58]. Indeed, before the final affirmation of New Persian, the old literary language must have still had some, albeit limited, functions as language of

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55 The well-known movement of *Shuʿūbiyya*, which originated in ʿAbbasid Baghdad (Choksy 1997: 79), is an evidence of the cultural forms these social aspirations took and of the pride in resuming the native Iranian tradition. Despite its 'national' contents the *Shuʿūbī* literary output was composed in Arabic and Islamic faith was never questioned. For an outline of the *Shuʿūbī* movement and its relationship with the dynamics of 'decolonization' see Crone 2006: 14 ff. Some themes of the DkIII, however, may be seen in dialogue or competition with the contemporary *Shuʿūbī* movement, such as the use of a consistent terminology linked to Iranian self-representation.

56 We have few and controversial traces about the direct involvement of Zoroastrians in violent resistance (Crone 2012). Coexistence and in different cases cooperation characterized the political relations between Zoroastrian clergy and Muslim authorities (Choksy 1997).

57 Bihāfarīd (mid-8th), an Iranian trader not linked with the Zoroastrian priestly class, tried to promote a personal view of Zoroastrianism, borrowing several elements from Islam (Crone 2012: 144 ff.). Bīrūnī tells us that he wrote a doctrinal book in Persian (Sachau 1879: 193); we do not know whether he used Middle Persian, a different Eastern Iranian idiom or some form of New Persian (Crone 2012: 148), but he was certainly aiming to attract the Iranian people of Khorasan. Zoroastrian high priests of the region, complaining of the threat posed by Bihāfarīd to their religious order, requested the help of the Arab governor ʾAbū Muslim (Sachau 1879: 194). Some historical sources report in fact how the Zoroastrian clergy cooperated on several occasions with the Islamic authorities to eradicate popular religious phenomena, which attracted the social base of their power, prompting alternative interpretations of the native Iranian religion.

58 The effort in establishing a distinctive philosophical terminology in Neo-Persian can be seen in two Ismāʿīlī thinkers Yaʿqūb-i Sajestānī (fl. 971 CE) and later Nāṣir Khosrow (b. 1004 CE) (Afnan 1964: 69 ff.). The language of the former is characterized by abstractions either new or drawn from an earlier heritage, much as Avicenna did: see above n.40.

communication among learned Iranians of different regions (Lazard 1975: 599)[59]. According to the linguistic scenario portrayed by Lazard (1975: 596; 1987: 170-171) the south-western spoken dialects of that time were still fairly close to late Sasanian Middle-Persian. The language of the Pahlavi books was thus simply the stately and archaizing form of the ordinary language, reserved for religious purposes and writing (Lazard 1995: 11). By the 10th century on, the use of literary Middle Persian, coupled with its archaic script, was increasingly defining affiliation to Zoroastrianism in a broader, social semiotic system, while at the same time it marked membership of a close clerical elite in a narrower semiotic system.

c) The inward perspective: preservation/assertion of social privilege

The interplay between the Zoroastrian community and its neighbours helps us to understand the external motivations connected to the DkIII variations. However, a broader approach to this topic leads us to adopt a perspective that includes intra-communal dynamics, in order to clarify to what extent the text composition and its distinctive style rely on the inner transformation of the Zoroastrian social structure. In fact, functional style-shifting in DkIII may also reflect increasing differences within the Zoroastrian social hierarchy, in a period in which Middle Persian literary mastery became even more indicative of social affiliation and status. As mentioned above, according to the sources at our disposal both the *Dēnkard* authors had the office of *hudēnān pēšōbāy*. They were officially recognized as leaders of the Zoroastrians, while the patronage the Caliphs accorded to them must have influenced the power balance within the community itself. The *pēšōbāys* stock as well as individuals associated with this family played a decisive role in the composition and dissemination of the Pahlavi books (Boyce 1979: 153). The bulk of the existing texts is in fact associated with both the spiritual and religious authority of redactors, compilers or even copyists, affiliated with this lineage[60]. Though far less well-known than Ādurfarrbay, the second redactor of the *Dēnkard*, Ādurbād ī Ēmēdān, also belongs to the same family group[61], whose forefather is assumed to be the famed fourth-century, Sasanian theologian Ādurbād ī Mahrspandān[62]. Actually, almost all the high priests mentioned in the Pahlavi texts can be traced back to a few (if not one) clans geographically located

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59 Early Islamic Iran was characterized by a great variety of local dialects. From 10th-century Western Iran there are traces of the literary use of the local idiom, named in Arabic *fahlavīyāt*, which is a rendering of the Persian term *pahlavī*, in this case used with its geographical connotation (Tafazzoli 1999). It is possible that under the Buyid dominion this idiom competed, for literary purposes, with the New Persian flourishing in the eastern regions. In this perspective also the use of writing in Middle Persian by the still influential Zoroastrian priests of Western Iran may have slowed down the westward dissemination of New Persian (Mottahedeh 2012: 157). In fact, in some regions not yet involved in the New Persian 'revolution', those who wished to write in their own idiom without resorting to Arabic used their own traditional systems of writing, i.e. Pahlavi, Hebrew, Syriac (Lazard 1995: 12). The graphic aspect of the writing was itself part of religious affiliation and cultural identity, being a distinctive social marker. Both Jews and the Christians still used in early Islamic Iran varieties of Middle Persian characterized mostly by different alphabets. Again, in the mid-11th century CE the Persian Gorgani after complaining about the incomprehensibility of Pahlavi, mentions some antiquarians of the city of Isfahan that enjoyed reading it (Lazard 1971: 366-367).

60 A lineage of this high-priest family (*dūdag ī mowbedān*) is included in *Bundahišn* 35 (Anklesaria 1956: 305). The list, however, raises some issues since some of otherwise well-known figures of this lineage are not listed in this passage (Anklesaria 1964: i ff.). A detailed survey of the kinship relations among the leading Zoroastrian figures of the early Islamic period and the hierarchical positions they held within the community is still to be undertaken; for a tentative reconstruction of the *pēšōbāys* lineage see Anklesaria 1969.

61 According to Modi (1931) and Tavadia (1956: 50) his father was the *hudēnān pēšōbāy* Ēmēd ī Ašwahištān (fl. mid-10th), a fifth-generation descendant of Ādurfarrbay, to whom are attributed the answers of an important *rivāyat* concerning legal and ritual matters (de Menasce 1962: 72; Cereti 2001: 153). According to Yāqūt, Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī met the Grand *mowbed* Ēmēd once (Modi 1931: 277), possibly in Baghdad during one of the travels undertaken by the Muslim historian, as I am inclined to assume, also in consideration of the content of this passage, but cf. Modi 1931: 287 f.; see also de Jong 2016. A note in Masʿūdī's *Tanbīh* introduces an *Ēmēd son of Ašwahišt as the current (345 AH/957 CE) head of the Zoroastrian community (Carra de Vaux 1897: 149; de Menasce 1962: 72). See also the *mowbed* Ēmēd mentioned by al-Nadīm (Dodge 1970 I: 25). Masʿūdī's note also records that Ēmēd's predecessor, a certain Isfandiyar bin Āzarbād bin Ānmīd (MP. Spendād ī Ādurbād ī Ēmēd), was executed in Baghdad by the Caliph al-Rāḍī in 325 AH (937 CE). The patronymic of this latter *pēšōbāy* has thus suggested a different date for the *Dēnkard* redactor Ādurbād ī Ēmēdān (de Menasce 1958: 10; Boyce 1968: 44).

62 Membership of the authoritative lineage of leaders started with Ādurbād ī Mahrspandān as stated in the *Dēnkard*'s colophon written by its first copyist (Sanjana 1928: 95-96, ii 67).

in Baghdad, Fārs and southwestern Iran[63]. Thus, there was a close network of households forming an inner circle, which manipulated the circulation of texts and delivered religious injunctions, holding leadership of the community and intermediating between Zoroastrians and the central Islamic power. According to the Middle Persian *Rivāyat* of Farrbay-Srōš (1008 AD), the *pēšōbāy* arranged the appointment of religious authorities in the lands under his broad jurisdiction[64](Anklesaria 1969: i 149; ii: 126-127). Thus, the *pēšōbāy* could rely on a network of lieutenants (*rads* and *mowbeds*) associated with his authority and deployed over the territory[65]. Supposedly, the delivery of the *Dēnkard*, mentioned in DkIII 420 to the eminent believers of the country followed this network. If this is the case, the text was conceived as a sort of *Ēwēn-nāmag*[66], i.e. a book containing regulations and instructions[67], which introduced from the central court of the *pēšōbāy* the doctrinal guidelines, which the local religious authorities had to conform to. From other Pahlavi texts, we learn that the first redaction of the *Dēnkard* made by Ādurfarrbay exerted a huge impact over other theological works. This is the case of *Škand Gumānīg Wizār* and *Dādestān ī Dēnīg*, where the authors paid explicit homage to that sage and his work[68]; likewise, the affinity of motives and language these later works share with the *Dēnkard* apologetics point in the same direction. This data fits well with an interesting passage in which Manuščihr, the leader of the Zoroastrian community of Fārs and Kermān at the end of the 9th century CE[69], gives us a glimpse into the family-run system characterizing the decision-making process within the court of the *hudēnān pēšōbāy*[70] (EM. I, 3.10). The connections among the three Pahlavi theologians, Ādurfarrbay, Manuščihr and Ādurbād ī Ēmēdān were not only intellectual but also social;

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63 The passage in Bd 34.55, preceding the list of the historical high-priest lineage, mentions the mythical ancestry of all the high priests of Fārs claiming a common ancestor, the legendary Kayanid king Manuščihr (Anklesaria 1956: 301). The passage demonstrates part of the ideological bonds sustaining class identity and kinship affiliation within the Zoroastrian priesthood in early Islamic Iran.

64 Actually, we do not know its real extent, although a passage in Masʿūdī's *Tanbīh* reports that at that time Ēmēd son of Ašwahišt was the «Mobed des Perses (i.e. the Iranians) pour la terre du Jabal de l'Iraq et les autres pays de l'Ajami» (de Menasce 1962: 72). The same is said of his predecessor, see also n. 61.

65 In the *Rivāyat ī Farrbay-Srōš* the *rads* (spiritual leaders), which seem to possess a higher authority, are assigned to regions (*kust*), while the *mowbeds* are in charge of a *šahr* (i.e. in this case a city district); for the association between *mowbed* and *šahr* see also DD 43 (Kreyenbroek 1987a: 186) and Kreyenbroek 1987b: 161. These data seem to be confirmed by the official title of the high-priest Manuščihr, *rad* of Fārs and Kermān (DD 94.13; EM III.1). In this case the jurisdiction deals with a very large territorial unit with a still populous Zoroastrian community. DD int.8 alludes to the same hierarchical order, saying that in several regions (*kustag kustag*) *rads*, *mowbeds* and *dastwars* are still operating (Jaafari-Dehaghi 1998: 32-33). The same structure of religious/ juridical authority occurs in the *Rivayāt* of the *pēšōbāy* Ēmēd ī Ašwahištān (REA 5.10-11). See also the *Selection of Zādspram* (23.5), which probably refers to Sasanian institutions and lists the *mowbeds* in charge of a province (*awestām*) and, on a higher level, *rads* in charge of a region (*kustag*) (Kreyenbroek 1987b: 152). Moreover, DD 45.5 states that the commander (*framādār*) of the priestly class of Fārs (i.e. Manuščihr himself) had authority over the provincial *mowbeds* of Fārs (*awestām mowbedān ī Pārs*), see Kreyenbroek 1987b: 160. see below n.69.

66 Reference to a work by Ādurfarrbay ī Farroxzādān with this title appears twice in the *Dēnkard*, see DkIII 142 and DkIV (B. 318; de Menasce 1975: 544). Similarly, DD 87 mentions an *ēwēn-nāmag* without naming the author but quoting in the same passage a decree of Ādurfarrbay himself (Tafazzoli 1984). Moreover, a Middle Persian *Rivāyat* attributed to him contains precepts and legal matters (Anklesaria 1969), while other citations of his teachings are included in some sections of the *Dēnkard*, as well as other Pahlavi texts.

67 In this way Masʿūdī's *Tanbīh* (Carra de Vaux 1897: 149) describes the *Āʾīn-nāmeh* of the old Iranian tradition; according to the Muslim scholar the text was also linked with priestly authority. On the same book also Al-Nadīm's *Fihrist* and Ibn Qutaiba (de Menasce 1975: 544).

68 See DD 88.8 and ŠGW 4.107, 9.3, 10.56.

69 According to his third Epistle he was operating around 881 CE (Kanga 1951: 194), in his other work (DD 94.13) he mentions his official title in extenso as *pārs ud karmān rad ud asrōnān pēšag framādār*, "*rad* and chief of the priestly class of Fārs and Kermān". This post is confirmed throughout his works in slightly abridged forms (DD 45.5; EM II.9.12; EM III.1), see Dhabhar 1912; Kreyenbroek 1987b: 160; Jaafari-Dehaghi 1998. The attribution to Manuščihr of the office of *hudēnān pēšōbāy* belongs to the pioneering works of West (1882: xi) and Dhabhar (1912: 3). It is based, I think, on an erroneous interpretation of DD 45.5; compare this passage to DD int.10-11. Anyway, his high status within the Zoroastrian hierarchy as well as his awareness of belonging to the family holding the leadership is unquestionable, see e.g. DD int.20 and EM I.3.10.

70 In this case that of his father Juwān-Jam, see Kreyenbroek 1987b: 155.

all of them ran, or had a close connection with, the office of *hudēnān pēšōbāy* and all belonged to the very same household[71].

The well-known content of DkIII 420 provides, instead, a more narrative basis for the legitimation of *pēšōbāy* authoritative teaching, connecting the myth of the historical transmission of the sacred Avesta with the endeavours of Ādurfarrbay ī Farroxzādān and those who inherited his literary legacy. According to this narration, the collection and compilation of a chain of religious texts, undertaken by the historical figures mentioned in this chapter, bring real benefits to the world and enhance the history of the community. In this framework, the final Ādurbād ī Ēmēdān's redaction of the *Dēnkard* is conceived as the last link in this chain. The alleged lineage linking the latter Pahlavi scholars to the figure of Ādurbād ī Mahrspandān had, in fact, a specific function, since the ancestor was the highest model of spiritual authority in Zoroastrian lore[72]; he was the one reputed to have established an orthodox canonization of sacred books and to have outlined their correct interpretation[73]. The character of the forefather embodies functions and qualifications this family group ascribes to itself, projecting in the past the supreme authority the *pēšōbāy*'s stock had over religious and moral matters[74]. The current *pēšōbāy* exerted his competencies in matter of contradictions within the tradition itself, i.e. within opposing opinions of ancient sages or schools of interpretations (*čāstag*) (e.g. Dk III 16); consequently, the believer must follow the judgement of his coeval guide. As mentioned above the *pēšōbāy*'s ability in interpreting religious lore is fostered by a perfect association with innate wisdom (*āsn-xrad*)[75], while his opinions, along with those of the ancient sages, form the primary source of religious and legal knowledge (Vevaina 2015: 231). Therefore, membership of such a lineage circumscribed the rightful depositaries of the authentic tradition. Regarding the delivery of injunctive opinions or prescriptions, the term *dastwar* indicates in Pahlavi texts a status, namely that of a high priest possessing and exerting authority (*dastwarīh*) in religious matters (Kreyenbroek, 1987b: 154). In this phase of the Zoroastrian religion, in fact, the *dastwars* appear to be the guides of the living communities attracting groups of believers with their teaching and wisdom. The often-mentioned obligation of *dastwar dāštan*, lit. "having a *dastwar*", requires every believer to choose a religious authority and follow his teaching and judgements (Kreyenbroek 1994: 7 ff.; Vevaina 2015: 230). Likewise, Dk III 97 stresses the importance of relying on a good *dastwar*, while Dk III 332 confirms the *dastwar*'s ability in directing the good choice[76]. Taking into account this evidence, the terms *dastwar* and *dastwarīh* concur to define status and function possessed in different degrees by the priestly hierarchy engaged with territorial offices like that of *pēšōbāy*, *rad* and *mowbed*[77]. This kind of obligations governed the believers' affiliation to and reliance on outstanding figures charged of

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71 For Manuščihr's blood relationships and his belonging to the stock of Ādurfarrbay ī Farroxzādān see Kanga 1951; Boyce 1979: 153; Kreyenbroek 1995; Jaafari-Dehaghi 1998. Despite the uncertainties regarding his *pēšōbāy* status, Manuščihr was one of the four sons of Juwān-Jam, Leader of the Faithful after his father Wahrāmšad. According to the Pahlavi jurisprudential treatise, the *Mādayān ī Hazār Dādestān*, Manuščihr's grandfather Wahrāmšad was an authority in Zoroastrian law (Jaafari-Dehaghi 1998: 24).

72 In an ideological perspective Ādurbād ī Mahrspandān is part of the spiritual/prophetic chain descending from the god Ohrmazd and passing through the Bounteous Immortals, Srōš, the prophet Zardušt down to the *dastwars* (priestly authorities) of the Age (Kreyenbroek 1994: 7); a connection that defined the line through which religious and spiritual authority was transmitted. In the perspective of 'crosspollination', this subject represents one of the most promising fields of investigation, especially in comparison to the matter of spiritual authority within the Shī'ism of the origins. The matter of the spiritual authority handed down to a group circumscribed by lineage (the descendants of 'Alī) and the consistent interpretation of the hidden meaning of the sacred book (Ar. *bāṭin*) is central to Shī'ite doctrine and may find several points of contact with concepts preserved in Pahlavi books like DkIII and DD.

73 For a survey of sources related to this figure, see Tafazzoli 1983 and Cereti 2001: 182-185. His moral teachings are also cited by Muslim writers (Shaked 1979: 297-300) who evidently interacted with Zoroastrian priestly circles linked to that tradition.

74 E.g. the fifth counsel of the Sasanian king Husraw in DkIII 201 urges the believers to follow the teaching of the disciples of Ādurbād ī Mahrspandān in matters of rituals, worship, laws and customs. Even in this case the passage may be understood as a projection into the past of current aspirations.

75 The *āsn-xrad* is quoted as the principle of the wisdom (*dānāgīh*) that sustains law (*dād*) (DkIII 292; B. 230-232), while the authoritative judgments (*dādestān*) is an offshoot (*padzāyīh*) of it (DkIII 52; B. 32-33).

76 See also DkIII 14 (B. 10-11), where the *dastwar* is metaphorically defined the soul's physician (*ruwān bizešk*) because following his orders (*framāyišn*) is a basic means to attain salvation in the afterlife.

77 See above n. 65.

spiritual authority. In this framework, even the mode of composition and expression of religious teachings or opinions should have been forged within criteria of language and style in conformity to a codified system and authoritative sources.

In the wake of the Islamic conquest, the clergy had to redefine not only the distinctive boundaries of the Zoroastrian community but also its internal organization, negotiating new relations with Zoroastrian laymen. Therefore, casting themselves as the shield of the good believers showing off intellectual competencies in defending the doctrine from external attacks became a strategy to ensure a leading position. The intentional adoption of a sophisticated dialectic satisfied the needs to update doctrinal discourses as well as to engage the traditional principles of the faith; but in some ways it also aimed to assert the leading group's prestige and legitimacy. In the very same period the irreversible decline started seriously to affect the economic resources of the Zoroastrians, destabilizing pious institutions and the hierarchical structure of the community (Kreyenbroek 1987a; 1987b; Williams 2012: 142). The inner social and economic stratification swiftly dwindled, making the distinction through the so-called intellectual capital more significant. From the same perspective, the sustainability of a highly-trained clergy and elaborate rituals also depends on the available revenues, while in periods of crisis there is a greater need to make the social cost burdening the community ideologically acceptable. The condition of impoverishment is witnessed by a number of Pahlavi sources, which inform us about the difficulties in providing adequate wages to trained priests able to perform the traditional rituals properly[78]. Therefore, competition to seize the available revenues must have been fierce (Kreyenbroek 1987a 191)[79], while high-priest families still involved in the profession were reluctant to lose their economic privileges in favour of lower-class priests or even outsiders[80].

In this scenario, the high-priest Manuščihr defended the old priestly tradition using in his writings, namely the *Epistle* and *Dādestān ī Dēnīg*, an extremely elaborate composition[81]. He displayed a somewhat hermetic language that has various points of contact with that of DkIII; the similarity with that book is also highlighted by the presence of long compounds, abstract terminology, use of parenthetical sentences in which the verb is often omitted, repetitions and rhetorical devices (Dhabar 1912: 16-18; Kanga 1951: 192-193; Boyce 1968: 43; Jaafari-Dehaghi 1998: 25-26)[82]. In order to preserve social prestige, doctrinal authority, and control over religious practices, teachings and revenues, the highest sacerdotal class may have tried to set forms of intellectual restrictions stopping outsiders by reasserting and implementing the literary proficiency they inherited. The hermeneutic methods applied in either oral or written form, and reworked for instance in compositions like DkIII, DD and EM, fixed the patterns of an authoritative and exclusionary dialectic manipulated by a small group of kindred decision-makers in order to define its own dominant position within the community[83]. In our texts, the interpretative process is repeatedly referenced to the

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78 Several passages of DD and EM cast light on the issues concerning the redistribution of the scarce resources (Kreyenbroek 1987a); they urge commoners to give a wage proportioned to the religious mastery of the expert priests, justifying it as a pious merit. Concern over the lack of trained priests for the completion of rituals emerged explicitly also from the *Rivāyat i Ēmēd i Ašwahistān* (de Menasce 1962: 79-80).

79 See DD 87.

80 On the evidence of DD 82 we have a clue as to how a ritual performance was arranged (Kreyenbroek 1987a: 188-189); a highly-trained priest took the commission and shared the wage with low-ranking priests who performed the ritual while he supervised its appropriate performance according to the purity laws. Economic issues could have affected this chain, undermining the role of the former and favouring low-ranking priests with direct access to the source of income.

81 In analysing the DD text, Jaafari-Dehaghi observes that its language differs from that of other Pahlavi works, pointing out the complex and contrived nature of its style. He adds: «it would seem to be the case that this language is more complex in proportion to the difficulty and theological abstractness of the subject under discussion» (Jaafari-Dehaghi 1998: 25). A similar opinion is also expressed by Kreyenbroek (1995: 172). Manuščihr's style shifting may mark the function of the texts and its connection with the interpretative techniques used by highly-trained scholars, in a manner comparable to that shown by DkIII theologians.

82 According to West (1882: xvii), the complexity of Manuščihr's writing and vocabulary can be compared only with that of DkIII and *Selection of Zādspram*, the cosmological essay written by Manuščihr's brother. Moreover, Manuščihr mentions Ādurfarrbay in both his writings (DD 88,8; EM I, 3.9; II, 1.13).

83 Describing economic issues, DD 43 explicitly links mastery in the field of religion to priestly individuals of high birth and rank (*mard ī abarmāndīg*, lit. "man of inheritance/heritage"), see Kreyenbroek 1987a: 186 and n.11.

old, authoritative tradition of the so-called *pōryōtkēšān*[84] "the ancient sages"; this practice, however, is not confined to the constraints of erudition, for it also had indeed practical consequences since the rules and practices of the living community were set according to the interpretation of the old religious tradition and were legitimated by these kinds of references[85]. Manuščihr (e.g. DD int. 20) explicitly associates these old authorities with the wisdom held by religious guides of his time and family (Kreyenbroek 1995: 171)[86]. The control exerted by a close group of 'scholar-priests' over the exegetic technique, its linguistic expression and technical vocabulary, also including memorization of textual sources[87], can thus be transposed even in terms of possession of power and social exclusion. The related skills formed a criterion of distinction; in a period of transformation, they concurred to define a specific elite circle and functioned as an instrument at the expense of alternative groups[88]. One of the apocalyptic prophecies in the *Zand ī Wahman Yasn* (IV, 39-40) foreshadowing the approach of the doomed century[89] reflects the current and ongoing tensions between two classes of Zoroastrian priests, the *hērbed* and the *hāwišt*[90]; in the passage they are in fact supposed to discredit each other (Cereti 1995: 155-156). A similar opposition emerges from several chapters of DD (e.g. 56 and 88, see Kreyenbroek 1987a/b) where Manuščihr warned the "disciples" (*hāwišt*) about their ritual commitments and the appropriate wage rates. Such insistence could reveal how in a period of economic constraints the priests of lower rank or training offered ritual performance at a lower cost.

In an initial stage of training the young priests learned the Avestan texts serving for an appropriate worship, but just a few of them reached the highest level of training, becoming specialized in theological matters encompassing the study of the Middle-Persian interpretation of the Avesta (*zand*) and achievement of the dialectical proficiency. Repeatedly Manuščihr asserts the high standard of learning that professional priesthood must command (Kanga 1951: 193; Kreyenbroek 1987b: 156), while the requirement of *zand* knowledge was stressed as a means to achieve the status of *hērbedīh*. Moreover, he explicitly stresses the gap between priests who know only the ritual texts to be recited and those who are acquainted with the *zand* (Shaked 1969: 191; Kreyenbroek 1987a: 195 ff.). From these statements we understand that the scholar-priests based justification of their religious authority on access to the meaning of the Revelation in both its oral and

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84 The term is an Avestan loanword literally meaning the "first/former teachers". The *pōryōtkēšān* function within Pahlavi texts is that of an inspired class of priests that established the customary rules and the doctrinal orientation of the community; the bulk of teachings and religious statements was associated with their authority. The DkIII 227 draws the conceptual line connecting the *pōryōtkēšān* to the current theologians, passing through the knowledge of the divine law, the transmission of the law, and the exercise of earthly authority; see also DkIII 161 and Cipriano 1994: 38-39.

85 Within the sphere of the self-regulated autonomy granted by the Islamic authority, intra-communal jurisprudence was based upon religious traditions. By far the majority of the DkIII chapters start with a locution (*az nigēz ī wēh dēn*) that was key to set the theologian's arguments within a ratified tradition, while its reiteration contributes to promoting that doctrinal exposition as a canonical model.

86 Likewise, DD int. 23 describes the two sources leading to an accurate interpretation of the Revelation; the first source is the exegesis carried out by the present Leaders of the community (*dēn-pēšōbāy*) who possess the faculty of *āsn-xrad*. The second source is based on the tradition belonging to the Ancient Doctors (*pōryōtkēšān*) and earlier Leaders (*pēšēnīgān ī pēšōbāyān*) (Jaafari-Dehaghi 1998: 36-37).

87 The art of memorization included not only the ritual sections of the Avesta but also its complementary Middle-Persian commentary/translation (*zand*) and is highly praised in the Pahlavi books (Bailey 1943: 158 ff.). The Pahlavi texts fully recognize the limitations of the written form as compared with the living spoken word while the teaching drawn upon the *zand* was basically delivered through speech (Bailey 1943: 162-163). Its dissemination underlies a hierarchical divide within the Zoroastrian clergy, while esoteric/initiating conceptions were associated with it (Shaked 1969).

88 In his Epistles, Manuščihr frequently warns against non-qualified interpretation of the scripture, i.e. he moves against hermeneutic processes not based upon the recognized tradition which his group controlled (e.g. EM I,3).

89 According to Zoroastrian doctrine, the sacral history of the material world is subdivided into millenarian cycles; at the end of Zarathustra's millennium a series of apocalyptic events will mark the beginning of the apocatastasis process. Part of the apocalyptic texts is based on *ex-eventu* prophecies whose events mirror historical contingencies the Zoroastrian community experienced at the time of the final redaction of these texts.

90 At this time the *hērbeds* were skilled priests specialized in hermeneutic technique and teaching, also regarding matters addressed to laymen. The term *hāwišt*, lit. "disciples", was also used in a stricter sense to denote a class of priests involved with worship and rituals. Kreyenbroeck (1987b: 158-159) stresses the latent antagonism in the Pahlavi texts between these two priestly classes, see also Shaked 1969: 201 ff.. It is possible that in this period of clerical reorganization the members of the *hērbed* class tried to extend their influence over the Zoroastrian community.

written form. According to Dk V 24.12, being acquainted with the *zand* is fruitful for dispensing wisdom to the believers[91], while on the other hand the ZWY (II.1-4) indicates that its knowledge must be handed down only among high priests and their offspring[92]. The idea that the dissemination of the sacred corpus must be somewhat restricted, especially regarding the source of its intelligible interpretation, the *zand* (Shaked 2003: 66; de Jong 2009: 40; Vevaina 2015: 230), also characterizes some chapters of the gnomic text *Dēnkard* VI (Shaked 1979: xxxii)[93]. A noteworthy passage in the later Zoroastrian Neo-Persian text known as *Şaddar Nasr* (chap. 99) records that learned priests were forbidden to teach [*sic est*] *pahlavi* to commoners, and outside the high-priests circles and the family (*nasl*) descended from the Prophet Zarathustra (Shaked 1969: 191-92 n.44). Though here the term *pahlavi* may metonymically refer to the *zand*, the ambivalence of its use rests on the fact that the old Middle Persian language and its script were conceptually bound to the intellectual capital secured by the commentary literature and that consequently they were perceived as the key to access that source of truth and authority[94].

Summing up, having the means of access to the *zand* knowledge/power must have repercussions on extensive sectors of communal life. Dialectical prowess as well as literary proficiency in that field can thus be seen as a claim to affirm and justify the leading position of a close group within its community. Within the socio-economic transformation affecting Zoroastrianism in that period the challenge of competing claimants for religious authority and communal leadership must have been harsh and multifaceted, involving a broad range of strategies. Mastery in Middle Persian composition can thus be accounted as one of the means through which a hegemonic ideology was unfolded. In his seminal study on the esoteric trends in Pahlavi texts, Shaul Shaked (1969) underlined the hierarchical degrees in religious wisdom closely connected with knowledge of the *Avesta* and *Zand*. This domain distinguished religious experiences as well as the inner hierarchy of Zoroastrian clergy. The phenomenon must have involved the root of doctrinal thought along with its modes of verbal expression. As pointed out by P. Cipriano (1994), strict hierarchical and hegemonic ideology is one of the most pervasive concepts conveyed by DkIII in both content and language[95], an aspect evident also in its peculiar style and vocabulary. Several chapters (e.g. DKIII 212)[96] trace strict distinctions between the ruling class and subordinate groups in terms of rank ordering. Authority is conceived as an innate quality of the former and obedience is a moral duty of the latter[97]; lexical lists of opposed attitudes and behaviours stress the gap, while loyalty to the appropriate social position sanctioned by the traditional class division is highly praised. Cipriano rightly pointed out the Sasanian derivation of these concepts, as well as the consistency of style, formulas and terminology through which they are expressed. However,

91 See also DkIII 204. According to Sh. Shaked (2003: 73) «(the *zand*) seems to have been the main channel by which the learned priests communicated the knowledge of the scriptures to the public».
92 The passage ascribes this statement to the Sasanian king Husraw Anuširwān (531-579 CE) in response to the heresiarch Mazdak (Cereti 1995: 150; Vevaina 2015: 230), cf. DkV 22.7. The occurrence may also sound like an etiological motif to justify and sanction the fact that this kind of knowledge was restricted to a group sharing a lineage of authoritative ancestry. Likewise, also Islamic authors noted the restrictions in the matter of teaching the *zand* (Shaked 1969: 187 ff.).
93 E.g. DkVI c 28 and 254.
94 Such a consideration on Pahlavi script may of course be due to a late evolution attaching an esoteric meaning to the old writing system. However, chap. 98 of the same work applies far less strict restrictions to the teaching of the Avesta characters, which through the guidance of priests can be disseminated among the common believers (Dhabhar 1909; West 1885: 359-360); a control that seems to correspond to similar precepts within Pahlavi texts. Unfortunately, the date of composition of this work remains obscure; a reference to it as an already old text is made in the *Şaddar Baḥr-e Ṭavīl*, composed in 1531 (West 1885: xxxvii) or 1605 CE (Dhabhar 1909: vi n.4). In any case, its composition must predate that of the *Şaddar Nazm* (1496 CE), i.e. the versification of the *Şaddar Nasr* content (West 1885: xxxvii; Dhabhar 1909: viii) a circumstance revealing that at that age the *Şaddar Nasr* was already rooted in the Zoroastrian tradition, having gained a prominent position in the corpus of religious texts.
95 The interest shown by DkIII in the dynamics involving religion and historical society also offers a case study for socio-political investigation. It is in fact a further point of contact with the dominant culture of early Islamic age, since the Muslim *mutakallims* paid great attention to the social and political implications connected to the religion system (Crone 2006: 7). DkIII attempts to cast, within an organic system, the interplay between religion, state, history and society, following a dynamic and 'atomistic' thought that shares analogies with Muʿtazilite atomistic physics.
96 For a collation of excerpts concerning this subject-matter, see Cipriano 1994.
97 The social and ethical superiority of the priesthood (*āsrōnīh*) is explained, for instance, in DKIII 42 also with para-etymological considerations (Cipriano 1994: 29).

she accounted this work as merely a flat restatement of the late Sasanian ideology[98], without taking into consideration any social or historical background closer to the theologian's experience, nor even considering the possibility of a functional reuse of the old ideology. On the given evidence, it is instead clear that the DkIII theologians intended to address contemporary recipients, mainly for intra-communal or Iranian-oriented consumption[99]. Even when using old materials, the focus of the *pēšōbāys* and their dialectical dissertations were always targeted in response to the needs imposed by ongoing social transformations.

2 Conclusions

During the 9th-10th centuries CE the coexistence of several pressures spurred the DkIII theologians to exploit the multi-functionality of the linguistic instrument at their disposal, adopting a strategy that combined conservative and innovative trends. This effort aimed to implement the argumentative functions of Middle Persian language in the arena of interfaith controversies as well as strengthening an exegetic method applied to the sacred tradition. The Zoroastrian theologians used the literary Middle Persian as an apologetic tool shaping a distinctive and technical vocabulary, which can be accounted amongst the intellectual responses made by a subdued, waning community against an assimilation process. In fact, DkIII theological terminology and dialectic contributed in defining the border of the communal identity and may be investigated as examples of dominant/subordinate and integration/reaction dynamics. The attribution of our works to the highest rank in the Zoroastrian priestly hierarchy and the participation of the community Leaders in the intellectual environment of the ʿAbbasid Baghdad facilitate our comprehension of the characteristics of DkIII language and thought. Thanks to the proximity to the epicentre of the cultural debate and production, the DkIII theologians were attuned and receptive to the main cross-communal trends and transversal trajectories of that time. The organization of language and style was thus adjusted to fit in with the tendencies of the coeval intellectual dialogue and respond to the concern of Muslims and neo-converts. On the other hand, analysis of a minority literature suggests reconsidering inward dynamics. In a community impoverished by societal transformations, DkIII and other Pahlavi theological texts can be accounted among the strategies followed by a leading group of high-priest families that struggled to preserve their position and prestige. The use of distinctive linguistic features on which they based the canonical hermeneutic of the sacred text is a sign of social inner dynamics and part of the hegemonic ideology established by individuals sharing official status and blood relations. Proficiency in fabricating Middle Persian compositions along with knowledge of the sacred commentary corpus (*zand*) were competencies that could be exploited to issue authoritative opinions, which actively influenced the cultural and social orientations of the living community. The literary output of this circumscribed group mirrors the priestly hierarchical structure of that time and justifies within the community the exercise of religious authority by spiritual leaders and their courts. In a broader sense, resuming a historicistic perspective on the Zoroastrian Pahlavi texts may prove to be a profitable challenge for modern scholars, because this literature, as well as its redactors and recipients, represented a constituent part of the then-current cultural context and society. In the attempt to accomplish negotiation between the cultural memory and historical contingencies, Zoroastrian theologians answered the anxieties of their community with reassertion of a still authoritative heritage. Such a perspective may shed some light on the complex interplay at work in early Islamic society opening up scope for both fruitful sociolinguistic analysis and comparisons with different textual evidence.

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98 This is a main-stream opinion about Pahlavi texts, see e.g. Jaafari-Dehaghi (1998: 24): «The DD belongs to a group of Pahlavi texts which appear almost wholly Sasanian in its content and references».

99 The group included new Muslim Iranian converts still familiar with Zoroastrian thought. A note on the circulation of the *Dēnkard* is made in the last DkIII chapter (420), where it is stated that copies were sent to the foremost believers of that time and for the benefit of the awareness of the Zoroastrian community, as well as relief for the souls of the other Iranians (B. 317-318; tr. de Menasce 1973: 380).

Abbreviations

Ar.	=	Arabic
B.	=	*Dēnkard* Manuscript B
Bd	=	*Bundahišn*
DD	=	*Dādestān ī Dēnīg*
DK	=	*Dēnkard*
EM	=	*Epistles of Manuščihr*
MP.	=	Middle Persian
MX	=	*Dādestān ī Mēnōg ī Xrad*
ŠGW	=	*Škand Gumānīg Wizār*
ZWY	=	*Zand ī Wahman Yasn*

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