

NARRATING POWER AND AUTHORITY IN LATE ANTIQUE  
AND MEDIEVAL HAGIOGRAPHY ACROSS EAST AND WEST

FABULAE  
NARRATIVE IN LATE ANTIQUITY AND THE MIDDLE AGES

VOLUME 1

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Narrating Power and Authority  
in Late Antique and Medieval  
Hagiography across  
East and West

*Edited by*

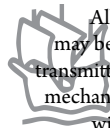
GHAZZAL DABIRI

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**Left cover image:** Detail from 'Sultan Sanjar and the Old Woman', New York, The Met, bequest of Adrienne Minassian, 1994, Accession Number: 1997.295a, folio from a Khamsa (Quintet) of Nizami. Early sixteenth century. Image in the Public Domain.

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D/2021/0095/41  
ISBN 978-2-503-59065-3  
eISBN 978-2-503-59066-0  
DOI 10.1484/M.FABULAE-EB.5.120904

Printed in the EU on acid-free paper.

# Table of Contents

<b>Acknowledgements</b>	7
<b>List of Illustrations</b>	9
<b>Notes on Transliteration</b>	11
<b>Introduction</b> Ghazzal DABIRI	13

## **Part 1**

### Saints at the Courts of Rulers

---

<b>Between Emperor and Caliph: The Representation of Power Relations in the <i>Life of John of Damascus</i></b> Petros TSAGKAROPOULOS	29
<b>The Caliph, the Jew, and the Bishop: Power and Religious Controversy in the Georgian <i>Life of John of Edessa</i></b> Damien LABADIE	43
<b>Whose Dream Comes True? Negotiation of Primacy in the ‘Legend of Theodosius and Theophilus’</b> Maria CONTERNO	59

## **Part 2**

### Authority at the Cross-Sections of Society

---

<b>Getting Naked for God: Social and Juridical Implications of Renouncing Female Vanities in the <i>Vitae</i> of Mystics of Medieval Italy</b> Federica BOLDRINI	71
<b>Zoroaster’s Legend in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages</b> Carlo G. CERETI	85

<b>Who's the Authority Around Here? Zoroastrians as Sites of Negotiation in 'Aṭṭār's <i>Tazkirat al-awliyā'</i> and <i>Ilāhīnāmah</i></b> Ghazzal DABIRI	103
---	-----

### Part 3

#### Mapping the Terrain of Power

<b>Two Churches, Two Saints, One Island: The Narrative Construction of a Conflict between Tamasos and Salamis (Cyprus) through Heracleides and Barnabas*</b> Maieul ROUQUETTE	121
--	-----

<b>Strangers in a Strange Land: Alienation, Authority, and Powerlessness in Georgian Hagiography (Tenth–Eleventh Century)</b> Nikoloz ALEKSIDZE	133
--	-----

<b>State Power, Hagiography, and the Social Shape of the Past: Re-Reading the <i>Gesta Martyrum Romanorum</i></b> Jason MORALEE	153
--	-----

### Part 4

#### Negotiating Power and Authority

<b>Disguising Himself or Describing the Other? Muslim-Christian Encounters and Narratives of Sarı Saltuk in Ottoman Times</b> Sibel KOCAER	167
---	-----

<b>Power and Prophecy in Late Antique Hagiography: The <i>Life of Saint Daniel the Stylite</i></b> Fabrizio PETORELLA	183
--	-----

<b>The Accommodating Queen: The Miracles of the Virgin Mary in the <i>Legenda Aurea</i></b> Jeremiah A. LASQUETY-REYES	197
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<b>Index</b>	211
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## Acknowledgements

The present volume is based on the international conference, 'Narrating Power and Authority in Late Antique and Medieval Hagiography from East to West', that was held in Rome, Italy at the Academia Belgica in February 2018. The goal of the conference was to bring together a diverse group of scholars working on the various hagiographical traditions of the late antique and medieval periods to challenge commonly held notions about how power and authority are articulated and to what possible aims. The conference was generously funded by the European Research Council (Starting Grant n° 337344 *Novel Saints*) with additional support by the Research Foundation – Flanders (FWO), Academia Belgica, Commission Scientific Research (CWO) – Ghent University, and Henri Pirenne Institute at Ghent University.

Many wonderful discussions emerged at the conference, and I wholeheartedly thank the participants for their insightful papers. Various people lent their support during the planning stages of the conference to whom I owe a debt of gratitude: Carlo Cereti, Chantal Verween, Lotte Van Olmen, and Federica Boldrini for going above and beyond to provide logistical support, Jeroen Deploige, the director of the Henri Pirenne Institute, for his encouragement and support, and Marc Van Uytvanghe for his enthusiasm for the conference and its outcomes. My heartfelt thanks go to Julie Van Pelt and Klazina Staat for their moral support in the weeks and days leading up to the conference but also for their friendship throughout my time in Belgium.

Though time and space precluded it, it would have been an honour to publish the entire proceedings of the conference. I wish to express my utmost gratitude to the contributors of this volume for their engaging scholarship and for trusting me with their work. I would like to acknowledge the European Research Council, Ghent University, and Koen De Temmerman and to thank them for the opportunity to dig deeper into the narrative worlds of late antique and medieval hagiographers without which the conference, and, hence the volume, would not have come to fruition. My thanks also go to the editorial board and the anonymous reviewer for their support for the publication of this volume, and Sarah Thomas for her attentive editing. My deepest thanks go to Guy Carney at Brepols for his enthusiasm for the project and for being a superb guide in the process to publication.

Words fail to express the extent and depth of my gratitude to Lizette Gabriel for her unconditional support; to Maria Conterno whose friendship I treasure and for reading an early draft of the introduction and my chapter; to Flavia Ruani whose friendship sustained me during our time in the Blandijn;

to Keisha Newell and Gillian Dwyer Pridgen for lovingly cheering me on; and to Gorgy for the laughs.

My family is my greatest source of strength. I am grateful to them each and every day for all the ways they show their support for me but especially to my parents, Mahroo and Mahmoud, for teaching and showing me and my siblings, Ganary and Iman, that true power lies in being of service to others and the greater good.





## List of Illustrations

- Figure 1. Dieric Bouts, Coronation of the Virgin, Wien, Gemäldegalerie der Akademie der bildenden Künste Wien. c. 1450. Reproduced with the permission of the Gemäldegalerie der Akademie der bildenden Künste Wien. 204
- Figure 2. Jan van Eyck, Virgin and Child with Canon van der Paele, Brugge, Musea Brugge. 1436. Reproduced with the permission of the Musea Brugge, [www.artinflanders.be](http://www.artinflanders.be), photo Hugo Maertens. 207
- Figure 3. Jan van Eyck, Madonna of Chancellor Rolin, Paris, Réunion des musées nationaux – Grand Palais. c. 1430. Reproduced with the permission of bpk | RMN – Grand Palais | Gérard Blot. 208

## Notes on Transliteration

For the transliteration of Arabic, Ottoman Turkish, and Persian, the United States Library of Congress System of Romanization has been adopted, except for words and proper names known commonly in English. The same system has been adopted for Georgian in Nikoloz Aleksidze's chapter while the system in Heinz Fähnrich's *Grammatik der altgeorgischen Sprache* (Hamburg: Buske, 1994) is used in Damien Labadie's chapter. For Middle Persian, the transliteration system in D. N. MacKenzie's *A Concise Pahlavi Dictionary* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971; reprinted with corrections 1986) has been adopted.



## Zoroaster's Legend in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages

The fullest versions of Zoroaster's legend are found in a Middle Persian work, book VII of the *Dēnkard* (*Acts of the Religion*), and in a New Persian poem, the *Zarātushtnāmāh* (*Book of Zoroaster*). Though sharing a number of details, these two books each present a different narrative structure and offer a window onto the social worlds from which they emerge. *Dēnkard* VII places Zoroaster's dialogue with Ahura Mazdā (Middle Persian Ohrmazd)<sup>1</sup> in year 3000 of human existence, in other words, half way between Gayōmart, the first man in the Zoroastrian tradition, and Sōšāns, one of Zoroaster's three future sons who are also eschatological saviour figures, thus making Zoroaster the central pivot of an eschatological drama. Meanwhile, the *Zarātushtnāmāh* does not mention the messengers of Ohrmazd who came before the prophet; it simply traces Zoroaster's lineage back to Frēdōn (New Persian Firaydūn), the mytho-historical king who sets the world aright after slaying the world-destroying dragon, Dahāg (New Persian Zāḥḥāk).<sup>2</sup>

Middle Persian literature preserves other versions of Zoroaster's legend, some limited to one or the other aspect of this narration, some more comprehensive. One episode, the Battle of the Faith between Wištāsp (New Persian Gushtāsp), Zoroaster's royal patron, and Arjāsp, the Turanian ruler who rejects Zoroaster's religion, is found in the Middle Persian *Ayādgār ī Zarērān* (*Memorial of Zarēr*), a text belonging to the epic rather than to the priestly tradition of Middle Persian literature.<sup>3</sup> This episode constitutes the

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- 1 The dialogic form of questions and answers between prophet and God is common in Zoroastrian literature, both in Avestan and Middle Persian texts.
  - 2 On Zoroaster's lineage in Pahlavi books, see Cereti, 'On Zoroaster's Genealogy'. For a bird's-eye view of Zoroaster in the Pahlavi texts, see Williams, 'Zoroaster iv'.
  - 3 Remarkably, *Ayādgār ī Zarērān* preserves passages that witness an earlier Parthian (250 BCE–226 CE) version, especially in direct speech.

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*Narrating Power and Authority in Late Antique and Medieval Hagiography across East and West*, ed. by Ghazzal Dabiri, FABULAE 1 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2021) pp. 85-102

backbone of Wištāsp's cycle as transmitted in the tradition deriving from the Sasanian *Xwadāy-nāmag* (*Book of Lords*);<sup>4</sup> it is attested in, among other texts, Firdawsi's tenth-eleventh-century *Shāhnāmāh* (*Book of Kings*) — enshrined in the section describing the deeds of Shāh Gushtāsp, which contain the verses traditionally assigned to Daqīqī (d. c. 976), the Samanid (819–1005) court poet.<sup>5</sup> However, they are clearly different and largely independent of the legendary biography that is the focus of this paper.

In a posthumous work edited by Jean-Pierre de Menasce, Marijan Molé collected the main Middle Persian passages dealing with Zoroaster's life: *Dēnkard* book VII, *Dēnkard* book V,<sup>6</sup> the *Pahlavi Rivāyat* (exposition),<sup>7</sup> and the *Wizūrgard ī Dēnīg* (*Religious Judgements*), which is probably a late composition.<sup>8</sup> Molé was not the first scholar to gather in a single book a number of Middle Persian texts dealing with Zoroaster's legendary biography. In 1897, Edward W. West had already translated the pertinent parts of *Dēnkard* V and VII as well as relevant passages taken from the *Selections of Zādspram*.<sup>9</sup> The scientific debate on Zoroaster's legend is vast and cannot be summed up here since it intersects the debates on Zoroaster as an historical person, his time and homeland, the genesis of the Avesta, the Zoroastrian holy book, and the dawn of Zoroastrianism itself.<sup>10</sup> However, even leaving aside the studies on Zoroaster's existence and historical milieu that have both been hotly disputed by scholars, one cannot but mention at least two

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- 4 Scholarly consensus traditionally assigns the composition of the *Xwadāy-nāmag* to the reign of Khosro I (r. 531–579), though some scholars have doubted this date or even the existence of a Sasanian *Book of Lords*, which is a chronicle of the history of Iranian kings. See, now, Håmeen-Anttila, *Khwadāy-nāmag*, who argues in favour of dating the Sasanian *Xwadāy-nāmag*, a chronicle of limited extent, to the reign of Khosro I or more probably to that of his grandson Khosro II (590–628).
- 5 Firdawsi, *The Shāhnāmeh*, ed. by Khaleghi-Motlagh, v, 75–268.
- 6 On which see now *Le cinquième livre du Dēnkard*, ed. by Amouzgar and Tafazzoli, pp. 24–33.
- 7 *The Pahlavi Rivāyat*, ed. by Williams, pp. 169–93.
- 8 See *La légende de Zoroastre*, ed. by Molé, 8\*–9\* where the author argues in favour of an eighteenth- or nineteenth-century date for this work, clearly influenced by legendary biographies of Sufi masters.
- 9 *Pahlavi Texts Part V*, ed. by West. On which see now *Anthologie de Zadspram*, ed. by Gignoux and Tafazzoli, pp. 61–87. Minor episodes of the prophet's life are preserved in other Middle Persian books as well. These are all edited and translated, though some may need to be re-edited according to contemporary standards. The 'Vie de Zoroastre' compiled by Abraham Hyacinth Anquetil-Duperron and published in 1771 as a part of his monumental *Zend-Avesta* is also quite interesting because it preserves the memory of Parsi traditional lore before the modernizing impact of western scholarship. See *Zend-Avesta*, ed. by Anquetil-Duperron, I, I i, 1–70.
- 10 For a bird's-eye view, see Stausberg, 'Zarathustra', pp. 69–81. Kellens, *La quatrième naissance de Zarathushtra*, is an interesting and subjective presentation of the history of studies on Zoroaster. Daniel N. Sheffield, 'In the Path of the Prophet', convincingly traces the development of Zoroaster's legend in Islamic Iran and Western India, showing how it intersects with major trends of contemporary intellectual life.

fundamental scholarly works on Zoroaster's life, standing one at the opposite end of the other.<sup>11</sup>

The earliest of the two is Abraham V. Williams Jackson's late nineteenth-century *Zoroaster: The Prophet of Ancient Iran*. The author gathered all available sources in an attempt to reconstruct what he believed to be a veritable biography of this religious leader based on elements of truth, though set in a narrative framework. His painstakingly detailed presentation of Zoroaster's life, albeit to some extent uncritical, is still the most comprehensive available.<sup>12</sup> The author makes it clear from the very beginning that he considers Zoroaster to have been a historical religious teacher and prophet, whose life may be compared to that of other founders of religion, and repeatedly states that there may well be some reality in the various events reported in his biography.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, he believed that the stories that concurred in building the prophet's literary life did not occur in the *Gāthās* (the Old Avestan core of the Zoroastrian liturgy), a position later to be challenged by Molé, whose structuralist approach required continuity between the different stages of tradition.<sup>14</sup>

Completely different and methodologically more mature and complex is Molé's epoch making *Culte, mythe et cosmologie dans l'Iran ancien* which, as just noted above, proposes a structuralist approach to Zoroaster's legend that

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- 11 For a first introduction to the debate on the historicity or lack of historicity of Zoroaster, one may refer to pertinent chapters in Stausberg, Sohrab-Dinshaw Vevaina, and Tessman, eds, *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Zoroastrianism*: Grenet, 'Zarathustra's Time and Homeland: Geographical Perspectives'; Hintze, 'Zarathustra's Time and Homeland: Linguistic Perspectives'; Humbach, 'Interpretations of Zarathustra and the *Gāthās*: A.'; Kellens, 'Interpretations of Zarathustra and the *Gāthās*: B.'; Schwartz, 'Interpretations of Zarathustra and the *Gāthās*: C.'; and Skjærø, 'Interpretations of Zarathustra and the *Gāthās*: D.') as well as to the entries in the *Encyclopædia Iranica* online edition 2009 such as Malandra, 'Zoroaster ii' and Hutter, 'Zoroaster iii', both of which fail to mention Gnoli, *Zoroaster in History*, a work strongly arguing in favour of Zoroaster's historicity. Skjærø's contribution, focusing on Zoroaster's character in the most ancient Avestan texts, builds on Molé's ground-breaking book, *Culte, Mythe et Cosmologie*, which gathers a number of constituent elements of what he believes to be Zoroaster's mythical biography, basically based on ritual aspects, as found already in the *Gāthās*. Interestingly, this narration shares only few elements with Zoroaster's medieval legend.
- 12 Williams Jackson, *Zoroaster*.
- 13 Williams Jackson, *Zoroaster*, pp. 1–9.
- 14 For example when commenting on the conversion of Zoroaster's patron, Williams Jackson, *Zoroaster*, pp. 67–68, concludes: 'In reviewing the accounts of the conversion of Kavi Vishtāspa one can but feel convinced of the reality of the event. It is not easy, however, to decide how much is fiction in the stories that are told. Nor is it easy to determine of how early or how late origin some of these stories are. Several of them appear to be hinted at in the younger portions of the *Avesta*; they hardly would occur in the existing *Gāthās*, for the nature of those Psalms would rather preclude them. Some of them seem to be built on the basis of old allusions which have been interpreted to fit a situation. Several of them strike us to-day as silly, but a number of them as picturesque and as tinged with Oriental fancy. Nevertheless, amid all the dross, grains of gold are undoubtedly to be found; and beneath the blaze of tinsel and the glare of gaudy coloring, a sober shade of truth may be recognized.'

was in line with the prevailing intellectual trends of the time. Molé considered Zoroaster's biography as a symbolic representation of sacrifice and believed that its structure went back, at least in its innermost core, to the *Gāthās* themselves. This approach, according to which the debate about Zoroaster's time and homeland was ultimately irrelevant to the interpretation of the texts themselves, opened the way for a new understanding of Zoroastrian tradition and eventually to the negation of the prophet's existence itself, as proposed many years later by scholars such as Jean Kellens, Eric Pirart, and Prods Oktor Skjærvø, among others.<sup>15</sup>

Considering the complexity of the tradition and the limited space available, here I shall only present the two main surviving books narrating Zoroaster's legendary life, the aforementioned *Dēnkard* book VII and *Zarātushtnāmāh*. Henrik Samuel Nyberg, in a seldom quoted but seminal paper, dates the final redaction of Zoroaster's legend as narrated in the seventh book of the *Dēnkard* to the reign of Šāpuhr II (r. 309–379). And he considered it to be based on more ancient materials.<sup>16</sup> In the following pages we shall try to show that the full-blown version of the legend should be dated to a later period but that Nyberg was basically correct in believing that it essentially belongs to the Zoroastrian cultural milieu of Sasanian times and that the extant medieval version employs earlier material but framed within a new context.

This is not to deny the existence of a legendary life of the prophet in antiquity or at least of traditions regarding some episodes of his life. In fact, episodes regarding Zoroaster were known to classical authors such as Pliny the Elder (23–79) who, in his *Naturalis Historia*, reported that Zoroaster laughed at birth, a tradition widely attested in a number of western and eastern works, including the scholiast to the platonic *Alcibiades*.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, Zoroaster was

15 Molé's view deeply influenced scholars such as Jean Kellens (*La quatrième naissance de Zarathushtra*, pp. 141–43 and 'Interpretations of Zarathustra and the *Gāthās*: B', p. 48), who, however, criticizes it in many of its aspects, and Skjærvø ('Interpretations of Zarathustra and the *Gāthās*: D', pp. 61–63), who more openly admits his debt.

16 In a presidential discourse read at the Nathan Söderblom Society in 1955 and later translated into French by J. Duchesne-Guillemin, Nyberg, 'La biographie de Zarathuštra', p. 517, states, 'Et puisque dans la première partie de l'apocalypse, la série des grands personnages religieux va jusqu'à Āturpāt i Mānsraspandān, le grand-prêtre de Šāpūr II, il n'est trop hardi d'admettre que la biographie de Zarathuštra fut composée précisément sous Šāpūr II [...]. Une telle datation n'est pas contredite par le fait que l'apocalypse, dans sa dernière partie, va jusqu'à l'époque musulmane. Toutes les apocalypses zoroastriennes ont été plus ou moins remaniées et mises à jour après la catastrophe que fut pour le zoroastrisme la chute de l'Empire sassanide [...]. Cela ne dit rien, cependant, quant à l'âge des matériaux utilisés dans cette Vie de Zarathuštra. Il est clair qu'ils devaient être beaucoup plus anciens.' According to J. Josephson, 'The "Sitz im Leben"', pp. 210–12, *Dēnkard* book VII was composed in the eighth century to be performed orally for the Zoroastrian community in a time of growing distress, though the text includes earlier material. Stylistical differences show that it includes material from different epochs of Zoroastrian history.

17 Williams Jackson, *Zoroaster*, p. 27.

known to classical authors as the author of a number of works.<sup>18</sup> However, here we shall not focus on the antiquity of the legend but rather on its arrangement in the books transmitted by the Zoroastrian community; a structure that shows that it could not have been composed, in its present form, before late Sasanian times, namely, the sixth and seventh centuries.

The *Dēnkard*, as noted above, is an early medieval composition and derives from the Sasanian *Zand* (commentary) to the Avesta. Originally consisting of nine books, only seven (III–IX) of which have come down to us, it was first redacted by Ādurfarrbay ī Farroxxādān, a Zoroastrian cleric who lived in the ninth century, and a second one at the hand of Ādurbād ī Ēmēdān, living in the tenth century. Assigning individual books to the pen of one or the other of the two authors is a difficult exercise, but as far as we can judge, book V schematically preserves the work of the earlier scholar, while book VII may well have been written by the later.

*Dēnkard* VII is the first of the three books regarded to be exegetical, aiming at presenting the beliefs of the Zoroastrian community and the contents of the Sasanian Avesta. The very fact that the exegetical part of the *Dēnkard* begins with a life of Zoroaster reveals much about the epoch and the cultural milieu in which this *summa* of Zoroastrian thought was conceived. It suggests that, indeed, it may have been influenced by Christian models, though possibly not the very ones indicated by Nyberg,<sup>19</sup> and perhaps even by Islamic ones, considering that Muḥammad's biography was already being collected in the eighth century as demonstrated by Ibn Ishāq's *Sīrat rasūl Allāh* (*Biography of the Prophet of God*).<sup>20</sup> In fact, the necessity to compose a legendary life of the founder of the religion probably arose from the need to defend the Good Religion from the polemical attacks of other, younger and more aggressive faiths. However, its account is basically based on traditional materials that have been rearranged into a continuous narration and a foreign model cannot be identified, at least not at this stage.<sup>21</sup>

The main source of *Dēnkard* VII is the Middle Persian *Zand* of the *Spand nask* ('book'), though a number of chapters must derive from the *Čihrdād nask* which contains a continuous narration of the history of humanity. Many passages are introduced by a reference to the Avesta and, according to Molé, the language of these passages reveals that they were translated directly from the Avestan language, though one should add the caveat that this may not always be the case. In fact, Molé follows de Menasce in dating the last version of the seventh book of the *Dēnkard* to the tenth century<sup>22</sup> and believes that

18 Stausberg, 'Zarathustra', pp. 71–73 with reference to Vasunia, *Zarathustra*. In general, on Zoroaster in the classical tradition, see Bidez and Cumont, *Les Mages hellénisés* and de Jong, *Traditions of the Magi*.

19 Nyberg, 'La biographie de Zarathuštra', p. 517.

20 On the tradition of the *sīrah*, see Guillaume, 'Introduction'.

21 On shared literary themes in late antiquity, see i.e. Dabiri, 'Visions of Heaven and Hell'.

22 *Une encyclopédie mazdéenne*, ed. by de Menasce, pp. 8–12.

the greatest part of this text consists of quotes from the Middle Persian translation of the *Zand* and are introduced by formulae such as *čiyōn dēn gōwēd* (in the religion it is thus stated) or *čiyōn az dēn paydāg* (thus is it revealed in the religion).<sup>23</sup> However, de Menasce believes *Dēnkard* VII to be an original composition in Middle Persian, though laden with Avestan quotations taken from the Middle Persian *Zand*.<sup>24</sup>

Generally, in the Middle Persian tradition, it is important to note here, Zoroaster's life is set against the background of universal history: the prophet receives the revelation at the beginning of the ninth millennium of the 12,000 years cycle— that is, exactly midway between Gayōmart and Sōšāns.<sup>25</sup> *Dēnkard* VII opens with a paragraph which clearly states its scope:

1) šnāyišn <ī> dādār ohrmazd pad-iz \*spurr-abarīgān \*ī wispāgāhīh pēsīd dēn mazdēsñ andar gēhān. 2) haftom. abar abdih ī dēn mazdēsñ mahišt aštāg spitāmān zarduxšt ud ān čē ōy warzawand pad ohrmazd aštāgīh u-š dēn pad gōwišn ī ohrmazd būd andar wištāsp-šah kišwarīgān wābarīgānīhist, az nigēz ī weh-dēn. 3) bē pēš az ān čē weh-dēn čīhr ud dahišn ud rawāgīh u-š padiriftār ī fradom pad mēnōg ud gētīg ud az ān pas waxšwarān ud frēstagān ud āwurdārān ī andar zamānag tā yašt-frawahr zarduxšt u-šān nihang-ē az gōwišn ud warz kē padīš andar mardom pad waxšwarīh wawarīhist hēnd nibišt čimīg.

- 1) In the world <be it> praise of the Creator Ohrmazd and to the complete superiority of the Mazdean religion adorned with omniscience.
- 2) Seventh, about the miracles of the greatest apostle of the Mazdean religion, Zarduxšt of the Spitāma. How that mighty one, sent by Ohrmazd, was able to prove to Wištāsp's countrymen the truth of the religion, which came from the words of Ohrmazd. From the teachings of the Good Religion. 3) Before this, we shall purposefully write about the nature and creation and diffusion of the Good Religion, the first beings who accepted it in the spiritual and material worlds, and we shall write about the prophets, apostles, and messengers who followed in the time until Zarduxšt, whose *frawahr* (glory) is venerable, a choice (*nihang*) of the words and miracles that proved them true prophets among men.<sup>26</sup>

Looking at the seventh book of the *Dēnkard* in its entirety, one may easily see that, in this work, Zoroaster's life is part of the eschatological history of



23 *La légende de Zoroastre*, ed. by Molé, 2\*-4\*; Molé, *Culte, Mythe et Cosmologie*, p. 276.

24 *Une encyclopédie mazdéenne*, ed. by de Menasce, pp. 63–66.

25 See Cereti, 'Myths, Legends, Eschatologies', pp. 264–69.

26 *Dk VII. I. 1–3; B [469].13–[470].2. La légende de Zoroastre*, ed. by Molé, pp. 2–13; *Dinkard-i haftum*, ed. by Rāshid Muḥaṣṣil, pp. 9–22. Pages from *La légende de Zoroastre* refer to transcription and translation by Molé, pages given for *Dinkard-i haftum* refer to transcription by Rāshid Muḥaṣṣil.



mankind.<sup>27</sup> The first chapter of the book is dedicated to the prophets that came before Zoroaster,<sup>28</sup> and it is followed by chapters on the miracles revealed before the most fortunate of beings was born to his mother;<sup>29</sup> on the miracles that took place between his birth and his first encounter with Ohrmazd;<sup>30</sup> on the miracles revealed between the first and the seventh encounter with Ohrmazd in a period of ten years, his conversion of Wištāsp;<sup>31</sup> on the miracles revealed from the moment Wištāsp accepted the Religion to the death of Zoroaster, which took place seventy-seven years after his birth, forty-seven years after his encounters, and thirty-five years after Wištāsp's conversion;<sup>32</sup> and on the miracles that took place between the death of Zoroaster and that of Wištāsp.<sup>33</sup> Then, a few chapters follow that belong to the eschatological genre and more specifically: on the miracles revealed to have taken place from Wištāsp's death to the end of the Iranian Empire;<sup>34</sup> on the miracles that took place between the fall of the Iranian Empire<sup>35</sup> and the close of Zoroaster's millennium when, thirty years before the end of the millennium, Ušēdar was born of a virgin who became pregnant while bathing in a lake where Zoroaster's seed was kept;<sup>36</sup> on the miracles that took place between the end of Zoroaster's millennium and the end of Ušēdar's and the coming of Ušēdarmāh;<sup>37</sup> on the miracles that took place between the end of Ušēdar's millennium and the end of Ušēdarmāh's time and the coming of Sōšāns;<sup>38</sup> on the miracles that took place from the end of Ušēdarmāh's millennium, the coming of the Victorious Saviour (*Sūdōmand Pērōzgar*), and during the

27 Cereti, 'Myths, Legends, Eschatologies'.

28 B [476]. 12-[477].5 shortly summarizes the contents of the chapters that follow; it is numbered differently by Molé (VII. i. 44-54) and Rāshid Muḥaṣṣil (VII. i. 0-10), who assigns the entire narration about earlier prophets to chapter zero.

29 Ch. II: *La légende de Zoroastre*, ed. by Molé, pp. 14-27; *Dinkard-i haftum*, ed. by Rāshid Muḥaṣṣil, pp. 23-38.

30 Ch. III: *La légende de Zoroastre*, ed. by Molé, pp. 28-41; *Dinkard-i haftum*, ed. by Rāshid Muḥaṣṣil, pp. 39-52.

31 Ch. IV: *La légende de Zoroastre*, ed. by Molé, pp. 42-61; *Dinkard-i haftum*, ed. by Rāshid Muḥaṣṣil, pp. 53-74. On Zoroaster's meeting with Wištāsp as a possible model for other similar meetings between religious leaders and sovereigns, see de Jong, 'The Cologne Mani Codex'.

32 Ch. V: *La légende de Zoroastre*, ed. by Molé, pp. 62-65; *Dinkard-i haftum*, ed. by Rāshid Muḥaṣṣil, pp. 75-78.

33 Ch. VI: *La légende de Zoroastre*, ed. by Molé, pp. 66-69; *Dinkard-i haftum*, ed. by Rāshid Muḥaṣṣil, pp. 79-82.

34 *Ērān-xwadāyih*; Ch. VII, *La légende de Zoroastre*, ed. by Molé, pp. 70-79; *Dinkard-i haftum*, ed. by Rāshid Muḥaṣṣil, pp. 83-93.

35 Clearly to be identified with the Sasanian *Ērānšahr*. On which, see Gnoli, *The Idea of Iran*.

36 Ch. VIII: *La légende de Zoroastre*, ed. by Molé, pp. 80-91; *Dinkard-i haftum*, ed. by Rāshid Muḥaṣṣil, pp. 95-107.

37 Ch. IX: *La légende de Zoroastre*, ed. by Molé, pp. 92-97; *Dinkard-i haftum*, ed. by Rāshid Muḥaṣṣil, pp. 109-14.

38 Ch. X: *La légende de Zoroastre*, ed. by Molé, pp. 98-101; *Dinkard-i haftum*, ed. by Rāshid Muḥaṣṣil, pp. 115-18.

fifty-seven years of the Sōšāns until the final Renovation.<sup>39</sup> Remarkably, the events of the eleventh and twelfth millennia follow the pattern of those which took place in the tenth millennium.

Summing up, Book VII has one chapter on the three thousand years before Zoroaster's birth, four chapters (II–V) on the prophet's life itself, one chapter (VI) on the events that took place after Zoroaster's death but still during Wištāsp's lifetime, one other chapter on the historical events up to the end of the Sasanian Empire (VII), four eschatological chapters (VIII–XI) on the remaining years of the prophet's millennium, and on the three millennia assigned to his future sons, the last one counting fifty-seven years. As we shall see, chapters VII and VIII reveal much about the period in which Zoroaster's legend was written down in its present form.<sup>40</sup>

The *Zarātushtnāmāh*,<sup>41</sup> meanwhile, was written in Ray (a city in north-western Iran) by Kaykā'ūs ibn Kaykhusraw ibn Dārā in the late twelfth or early thirteenth century. Later, in 647 AY,<sup>42</sup> corresponding to 1278 CE, it was copied by Zartusht ibn Bahrām ibn Pazhdū<sup>43</sup> who is traditionally considered to be the author of the text.<sup>44</sup> Its narrative is possibly based on an earlier Middle Persian work<sup>45</sup> but finds no precise correspondence in existing Middle Persian literature. Be that as it may, it certainly preserves ancient lore, though, as we will see momentarily, it is in many respects different from the seventh book of the *Dēnkard*.

After a short introduction (1–3), the poet jumps immediately to describing events preceding Zoroaster's birth (4–5), without noting anything regarding his predecessors. Next, he discusses his birth and the miracles and events that took place in his youth (6–15), his travelling to Iran and reaching the river Dāitī (16–21), and meeting Ohrmazd and the six Amahraspand ('divine entities') in six successive meetings (22–34). He then goes on to discuss Zoroaster's return to this world, his conversion of Wištāsp \Gushtāsp, and the events that follow (35–56). He then concludes with a narration of eschatological events regarding the end of Zoroaster's millennium and the millennia of his three future sons (57–61), which is a revised Persian version of the Middle Persian *Zand ī Wahman Yasn*, a Middle Persian apocalyptic work that was written, in its present form, in early Islamic times.<sup>46</sup> Interestingly, in his description

39 Ch. XI: *La légende de Zoroastre*, ed. by Molé, pp. 102–05; *Dinkard-i haftum*, ed. by Rāshid Muḥaṣṣil, pp. 119–21. Sūdōmand pērōzgar literally means the 'useful and victorious one'.

40 On Zoroastrian eschatological tradition, see Cereti, 'La figura del redentore futuro'. See also Josephson, 'The "Sitz im Leben"'.  


41 For text and translation see *Le livre de Zoroastre*, ed. by Rosenberg and, now, Sheffield, 'In the Path of the Prophet', pp. 249–508.

42 AY, which stands for 'After Yazdegerd', is the calendrical system in use by Zoroastrians which begins with the death of Yazdegerd III (r. 632–651), the last ruling Sasanian monarch.

43 Sheffield, 'In the Path of the Prophet', p. 249.

44 See i.e. *Le livre de Zoroastre*, ed. by Rosenberg, p. xxxiv.

45 Rose, 'Zoroaster vii' and de Blois, *Persian Literature*, p. 174.

46 For an edition of the *Zand ī Wahman Yasn*, see *The Zand ī Wahman Yasn*, ed. by Cereti.

of the seven eras of the world, the author assigns the sixth era, the one made of steel, to the reign of Khosro I, stating that the heretic Mazdak (fl. fifth c.) appeared in this age, without providing the details found in *Dēnkard* VII (on which see below).<sup>47</sup> He then goes on to discuss the era of mixed iron, clearly identified with the onslaught of Islam.

The tripartition of the narration about Zoroaster's life corresponds to the ancient Zoroastrian concept of time, where the prophet is born at the end of the third millennium of human history, half way between the First Man, Gayōmart, who eventually died because of Ahriman's attack, and the future saviour, Sōšāns, who will finally reconduct the world to its pristine purity. The *Dēnkard* preserves a clear memory of Zoroaster's centrality in human history, narrating his life as an eschatological present, preceded by three millennia of human history and followed by the three millennia characterized by the advent of his posthumous children, though already showing less attention to the events that took place before Zoroaster's time. On the contrary, the *Zarātushtnāmāh* has already lost memory of what took place before the prophet's birth and is on its way to separating future events from Zoroaster's legend.

Hence, we may readily observe that Zoroaster's centrality in the eschatological history of mankind, so important for structuralist interpretations of the legend, such as the one put forth by Molé, was still preserved in the seventh book of the *Dēnkard* but was entirely lost in the *Zarātushtnāmāh*. Thus, the *Dēnkard* responded to the challenge posed by the growing diffusion of Christian saints' lives and possibly even to the spread of early Islamic biographies of Muḥammad, maintaining, however, a substantial coherence with ancient Zoroastrian doctrine about time. In the *Zarātushtnāmāh*, however, the prophet's legend already had lost its original arrangement and had taken up a narrative form more similar to that of the later lives of medieval Muslim holy men. Therefore, we can assume that in the years spanning the tenth to the thirteenth century, Zoroastrians had lost the capacity to understand the deeper significance of the traditional narration about the life of their prophet, framing his legend in a structure that revealed the degree of influence that Islamic culture had on the Zoroastrian community. Yet the structure of the *Zarātushtnāmāh*, which also includes chapters presenting the future history of mankind, attests to the fact that a narration about future events was felt to be an essential part of Zoroaster's legend, showing, among other aspects, the importance of eschatological speculation for the community increasingly suffering under the yoke of Islam.

Indeed, while in *Dēnkard* VII the narration runs smoothly and without evident discontinuities in the flow of the story, in the *Zarātushtnāmāh*, the two parts — the life of Zoroaster and those of his yet unborn sons in a future millennium — are clearly separated. However, notwithstanding the presence of a break in narration, ZN 60. 92 clearly shows that the *Mawlūd-i*

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47 ZN 57. 63–65.

*Zarātusht* (Birth of Zoroaster, an alternative name for the *Zarātushtnāmāh*) was considered to be a unitary work by its author.<sup>48</sup> Remarkably, a similar narrative break, marking as if it were a new start, can be detected at the end of chapter I in *Dēnkard* VII, where it separates the narrations about earlier religious characters from the story of Zoroaster's life.<sup>49</sup>

*Zarātushtnāmāh*, ZN 55. 64, reads: *yik fašlī gūyam digar gūsh dār – nigar tā chih gūyad nikū hūsh dār* (listen, I shall tell another chapter, be careful so that you may understand well what it says).<sup>50</sup> These words are followed by a eulogy, and then the narration starts anew in ZN 57. 1–3:

Nikū bišīnaw īn qiššah-yi arjumand — zih-guftār-i ān mawbid hūshmand  
 Bīyāvardah az zand-o-vastā bidar — zih-guftār-i dādār pīrūzgar  
 Nibishtam man īn rā bih-lafz-i dari — kih tā bāshad āsān ču tu binigari

Listen well to this valuable story from the words of that wise Mobad  
 It was taken from the *Zand-Avesta*, from the words of the victorious  
 Creator

I wrote it in Persian words so that it may be easy for you when you  
 read it.<sup>51</sup>

Then follows the long narration about future events, being essentially a New Persian paraphrase of the *Zand ī Wahman Yasn*.

Incidentally, the fifth book of the *Dēnkard*, preserving an older layer of tradition, summarizes the original *Zand* narration in only a few pages. Out of these few pages only two paragraphs speak about future times:

13) abdom az dēwān hāzišn ud +sārēnišn be did widard-az-ōšmār +dēw-  
 yasn hambadīg-kōšišnīhā padīrag ēstād hēnd ud was ardīg ud ōzanišn  
 būd ī abēzagīhā būd kū gumēzagīhā dēn andar gēhān be raft 14) u-š hēnd  
 im dēn <i>abēzag nōg āwurdārān spur rāyēnidārān ušēdar ušēdarmāh  
 sōšāns pad bowandag rawāgīh ī ēn Ohrmazd dēn bawēd harwisp weh  
 dām a-petyāragīh ud hamāg-xwārīh.<sup>52</sup>

13) At last he (Zoroaster) saw that because of the persuasion and  
 provocation of the *dēw* ['demon'] innumerable *dēw*-worshippers  
 stood in violent opposition against him, and there was much fighting  
 and killing. The religion spread into the world, be it in purity, be it in  
 admixture. 14) Ušēdar, Ušēdarmāh, and Sōšāns will be those who bring



48 ZN 60. 92, cf. Sheffield, 'In the Path of the Prophet', pp. 433 and 505: *chaw mawlūd-i zartusht khānī tamām – bih dīl khān bar ū āfrīnī tamām* 'Once you have read the entire *Mawlūd-i Zartusht*, praise him deeply in your heart'. See further n. 25.

49 Dk VII. 1. 44–54, see *La légende de Zoroastre*, ed. by Molé, pp. 12–13 and *Dīnkard-i haftum*, ed. by Rāshid Muḥaššil, pp. 21–22.

50 Cf. Sheffield, 'In the Path of the Prophet', pp. 402 and 493.

51 Sheffield, 'In the Path of the Prophet', pp. 404–05 and 494.

52 Dk v. ii. 13–14; B [341]. 1–7.

this religion anew and fully organize it; with the complete diffusion of the religion of Ohrmazd all good creatures will be free of opponents and completely happy.<sup>53</sup>

The names of the future saviours are known already in the Young Avesta (e.g. Yt. 13. 128–29), and the evidence in *Dēnkard* V suggests that the Sasanian Zand already treated their myth as an extension of Zoroaster's imaginary biography, though flesh was added to the skeletal outlines at a relatively late period.

Can we say something more about the date in which the narration transmitted by *Dēnkard* VII took its actual form? In my opinion, a number of clues found in the seventh book of the *Dēnkard* point towards a late Sasanian date. One is the use of the title *rāmšāh* (a compound joining *rām* 'peace' and *šāh* 'king')<sup>54</sup> for Kay Wištāsp that closely recalls the honorific title *rāmšahr* (also a compound joining *rām* and *šahr* 'country'), carried by the same Kay Wištāsp in the *Ayādgar ī Zarērān*<sup>55</sup> and which is also attested on the coinage of Sasanian kings from Yazdegard I (r. 399–420) to Yazdegard II (r. 439–457), roughly in the first half of the fifth century, thus setting a *post quem* date.<sup>56</sup> The other evidence may be deduced from chapters VII and VIII of book VII of the *Dēnkard* that seem to describe events that took place in late Sasanian times (sixth and seventh century) or in the early Islamic period. For instance, *Dk* VII. vii lists the miracles that took place between Wištāsp and the fall of Iranian kingship. A number of kings are mentioned by name, together with the main religious authorities (*dastwar*) and heretics (*ahlomōγ*)<sup>57</sup> of the late Sasanian period, such as § 5 Wahman ī Spandyādān, § 7 Aleksandar (Alexander the Great), § 12 Ardaxšir ī Pābagān (r. 224–242), § 22 the Mazdakites, and § 26 Husraw ī Kawādān, among others.

Of significance are the paragraphs describing the Mazdakite rebellion, briefly mentioned also in the *Zarātushtnāmāh* 57. 63–65. These are quite realistic and may well derive from some historic chronicle narrating the events up to the early stages of Khosro I's reign:

22) ud \*ēd ī az dēn pētyāragān ahlōmōgān ahlōmōg ī-šān mazdagīg-iz xwānd hēnd čiyōn-išān ēn-iz abar gōwēd kū: ēn ī man dēn pad axw-mēnišnih nigerē, was be nigerē Zarduxšt ka was ahlomōg āgāh ahlāyih-kardārīh ud asrōnih-iz gōwēnd awināhīh [ud] kam āškār <ud> warzīdār hēnd.

53 The transcription follows *Le cinquième livre du Dēnkard*, ed. by Amouzgar and Tafazzoli, pp. 30–31; see also *Dk* v.iii. 3, where the future saviours are once more mentioned.

54 *Dk* VII. 1. 49 (B [476]. 21) **Īmšh**; *Dk* v. 2. 8 (B [340]. 4) **Īmšh**; *Dk* v. 2. 11 (B [340]. 19) **Īmšh**.

55 *AZ* 63, **Īmštr**, see *The Pahlavi Texts*, ed. by Jāmāsp-Āsānā, p. 8.

56 Cf. *Le cinquième livre du Dēnkard*, ed. by Amouzgar and Tafazzoli, p. 112. On the numismatic evidence, see, further, Huyse, 'Die sasanidische Königstitulur', pp. 183–85 and Schindel, *Sylloge Nummorum Sasanidarum*, pp. 183–85, 222, and 255.

57 On the use of *ahlomōγ* in *Dēnkard* VII and on the possibility that it may mostly be used for Mazdakites, see now Timuş, 'Breaking the Rules', pp. 271–94.

23) pad dēn ī mazdēsān ēd kū: pad dēn bē niger u-šān cārag xwād ud kē awēšān čegām-iz-ē pētyārtar būd ēstēnd andar axw ī astōmand ud agriftār ēg hēnd ahlāyih kē az hastān pahlom. ud ēdōn dēn ī mazdēsān: pad tōxmag-<sup>\*</sup>bazišnih baxšēnd, kardārīh xwēšān rāy gōwēnd ud bahr ō xwēšān dahēnd

24) xwarišn fšōnēnēnd<sup>58</sup> (kū xwarišn suy paymān gōwēnd) ud zahagīh gōwēnd [gōwēnd] (kū paywand pad mādarān gōwēnd) ud gurgīh hunēnd<sup>59</sup> (kū tis gurgīhā kunēnd) awēšān sāxtan ī pad kāmāg-rawišnih čiyōn ān ī gurg zahag pas mādar

25) awēšān-iz paywand pad mādarān kunēnd; awēšān narīg ī gōspand xrīnēnd, ān-iz ī zahag (pus) <ud> brād be barēnd ō bār. kū-šān: ašmāh ō hamih dād hēm nē pādixšāy hēd bē pad hamih ēstād. awēšān nē-z <sup>\*</sup>wurrōyēnd war nē ka āškārag abar dahēd (kū be bōxtēd). awēšān pad-iz frazandān družēnd kū-šān mihrōdruz abar rasišn ud pad-iz ān ī xwēš tan.

26) ēdār abar dēn ārastārīh ī anōšāg-ruwān husraw ī kawādān gōwēd kū: pad ān ī awēšān abāz-astišnih mard-ē dād ī ahlaw, anōšāg-ruwān, uzwān-a-jōydār ī dānāg [ī] kē-šān hanjaman az niyōšīšn saxwan (kū ān ī gōwēd pad dastwar gōwēd) ān ka srōšīgīh frāz dahēd (kū wināhgarān pādīfrāh kunēd).

27) bāstān pafšārēd kastārān ōy wīr bīm az ān hanjaman ka az nazdīg pad abganišn abganēd (ku zūd zūd nišast kunēd) az ōy sišd bawēnd dādār, ān-iz ī ahlaw [nūn] mardom čiyōn nūn ka ān ī sišd ī xrad wistard āz ašmāh sišd, spitāmān.

28) anōšāg-ruwān rāy pad wānīdan ī axw ī ahlamōgīh ēn-iz gōwēd kū: harwispīn rāy ō tō gōwom, spitāmān zarduxšt, kū-šān hangām pad ōy kē āškārag mihr-xwābar (ud) druxtārtom, druwandān-iz ahlawān-iz anōšāgruwān āyōxtār dāmān nāf nāf, kē dāmān hēnd ī ahlawān (kū abāz ō kār ēstēd pad kardan ī anōšāgruwān. kē paywastār-kārān rāst passaxw-guftār ān anōšāgruwān).<sup>60</sup>

22) And this (also), among the enemies of the Religion the heretics of the heretics are called Mazdakite, about them it is said: 'Observe my religion mindfully and look after it well, Zarduxšt, when there will be many heretics who will knowingly speak about righteousness and



58 See Macuch, 'Legal Implications', pp. 160–61.

59 See Macuch, 'Legal Implications', pp. 164–65.

60 *Dk* VII. vii. 21–28 B [505].11–[506]. On § 22–25, see Macuch, 'Legal Implications'. See also *La légende de Zoroastre*, ed. by Molé, pp. 74–75; Shaki, 'The Social Doctrine of Mazdak', p. 290 and *Dinkard-i haftum*, ed. by Rāshid Muḥaṣṣil, pp. 88–89; cf. also Timuş, 'Breaking the Rules', pp. 280–86. On Khosro I and Mazdak in Pahlavi books, see Azarnouche, 'La geste zoroastrienne de Husraw', pp. 240–42.

even about the priestly office, they will practice innocence little and it will be hardly obvious (for them):

23) In the Mazdean religion (it is said) that to observe the religion is itself a mean against them, who are the vilest in the tangible and intangible existence. Righteousness is the best of beings. So (says) the Mazdean religion: Within the stock they apportion shares, they say action belongs to their own (followers), and they give portions to their own (followers).

24) Food they fatten (they say that the measure of eating is hunger)<sup>61</sup> descendance<sup>62</sup> they say (i.e. they say lineage is through the mother) they procreate like wolves (i.e. they do things like a wolf). Their doing is according to desire, so as wolves are afterwards children of (their) mother, they calculate their lineage through the mothers. They buy females (as if) sheep, they take the profit of child (son) and brother as well, since (they say), 'We have given it to you jointly, you are only authorized to keep them jointly.' They do not believe in the oath (*war*), not even when it reveals the obvious (i.e. when it saves). They lie even about children: the sin of breaching the treaty (*mihrōdruj*) will fall upon (*abar rasišn*) them, and (upon) their kindred.

26) About the renovation of Religion (brought about by) Husraw of Immortal Soul, son of Kawād, here it says that to send them away He created a righteous man, of immortal soul, with a holy tongue, wise, around whom (people) gathered to listen to his speeches (i.e. what he said he said with authority) when he administered justice (*srōšgīh*) (i.e. when he punished sinners)

27) He always shamed wrongdoers, the man is afraid of that assembly. When he throws down from near (when he quickly associates). They are \*far from him, Creator, even the righteous ones, just as now those \*far (away ones) who spread wisdom are far from you, Spitāmā.

28) About *Anōšagruwān*'s defeating the lord of heresy this also is said: 'About them all I tell you, Spitāmā Zarduxšt, that in their time *Anōšagruwān* will bring together those who are evidently respecting the contract (*mihr-xwābar*) and the worse liars, the evil ones and the righteous ones, (he gave) each to their own family, the creatures that are good creatures (who were back at work thanks to the doings of *Anōšagruwān*. *Anōšagruwān* is responsible for the re-establishment of the correct lineages):

61 See also de Blois, 'Mazdak the Ancient', p. 149, who considers *Dk. VII. 7. 23* to be a gloss of *Vendidād. 4.49*.

62 *Zahagīh* translates to 'matrilineal descent' according to Macuch, 'Legal Implications', p. 158.

Though further work is needed to understand all the nuances in this passage, it is clear that it argues against communality of property and women and criticizes the Mazdakite movement much along the same lines as later Islamic polemicists do. In fact, it may point to the existence of a Sasanian ‘official’ chronicle, or maybe a ‘religious’ chronicle distinct and separate from the royal one that somehow may even have been part of the Avestan *Zand* and which may be the ultimate source utilized by *Ādurbād ī Ēmēdān*.

The eighth chapter of *Dēnkard* VII describes the events that took place after the fall of Iranian royalty (*ērān-xwadāyih*) in the Iranian Empire (*ērānšahr*), but it is very different in style from the passages above. The narration does not derive from an official chronicle, rather, it speaks of a world in progressive decay, where traditional values are abandoned, and ominous events take place. It tells the story of the fall of the Sasanian Empire and of the rise of Islam from the point of view of a Zoroastrian believer who witnesses his world falling apart. In § 4–5, the author describes the decrease of wisdom, the increase of heresy, and the worship of the sacred fire being abandoned; in § 6–8, he laments the increase in the power of the evil religion (*ag-dēnih*), war, and the annihilation of royalty by men set one against the other; in § 13, he speaks about the abuse of the positions of *axw* (lord) and *rat* (spiritual chief) and the unification of kingship and priesthood against the law. In the ninth and tenth century of the millennium, it is noted further, men such as (in § 42) the Kaiser and the \*Khaqan will mix with the good ones (*wehān*) and (in § 45–50) the hero, Čihrōmehān, will challenge the three groups (*azg*) who worship Lie, namely, the Turks, the demons with dishevelled hairs, here identified with the Arabs (*Tazīg*), and the Byzantine (*Hrōmīg*), *Šēdāsp ī Kilisāyīg*.

## Conclusions

Summing up the evidence discussed in this paper, we may first of all affirm that the division of human history in two great periods, the 3000 years from Gayōmart to Zoroaster’s conversation with Ohrmazd and the 3000 years that divide Zoroaster from the final apocatastasis operated by the future Sōšyāns are essential to the narration of *Dēnkard* VII, which divides Zoroaster’s legend in three great periods: before Zoroaster, his life, and events that will take place after the prophet’s death. Zoroaster’s centrality in human history is lost already by the thirteenth century, as witnessed by the narration of the *Zarātushnāmāh*.

Moreover, evidence points towards a relative late date for the creation of Zoroaster’s legend in the form attested in its fullest form in *Dēnkard* VII. The title borne by Zoroaster’s royal mentor (*rāmšāh*) is similar to one of the official titles used by Sasanian kings of the fifth century (*rāmšahr*). Furthermore, *Dēnkard* VII.vii preserves the memory of two great Sasanian kings, the founder of the dynasty, Ardašīr, and Khosro I, son of Kawād (488–531), perhaps the



greatest monarch of the late Sasanian period. As noted above, the passage on the Mazdakite movement is quite realistic and may well derive from an 'official' chronicle while the episodes told in *Dēnkard* VII.viii may well refer to events belonging to the years of the decline and fall of the empire or to the early Islamic period but are narrated in a very different style. Therefore, one may hypothetically date the primary arrangement of Zoroaster's legendary life as found in the seventh book of the *Dēnkard* to the late Sasanian period, surely after Yazdegerd I and probably under Khosro I or soon after. The part dealing with the future trials undergone by the followers of the Good Religion (*wehdēn*) at the end of Zoroaster's millennium was then to be revised, adding the events that followed upon the fall of the Sasanian Empire and the rise of a new religion, Islam.

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