CHAPTER 17

Gayömard: King of Clay or Mountain?
The Epithet of the First Man in the Zoroastrian Tradition

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In the Zoroastrian tradition Gayömard is considered to be the first man whose origin can be traced to the Indo-Iranian period.1 By the time the Middle Persian texts were composed, Gayömard had become both the first man and the first king attested in the Sāhmāneh of Ferdosi.2 In this stage of development he also received an epithet which has become a matter of controversy. In several passages in the Middle Persian texts, he is known as gilšāh “Clay King,”3 while in other places, he is mentioned as gəršāh “Mountain King.”4 From the Indic material there is nothing that tells us this figure is connected with a mountain or clay, nor does the Avestan material give any support

2 Khaleghi-Motlagh has suggested that Gayömard was considered a king by the time of the Xwāsidnāmag, “Hamāse Sarāīk Bāstān”, Gol-ranibā-ye Kohan, ed. A. Dehbāšī, Naše-ye Markaz, Tehran, 1993, p. 33. However, in the Bundahīš (Anklesaria, p. 45) we see that Gayömard was not only the first man but also the first king, see G. Widengren, “The Death of Gayömart”, Myths and Symbols Studies in Honor of Mircea Eliade, The University of Chicago Press, 1969, p. 186; also T. Daryaee, “Kāvé the Black-Smith: An Indo-Iranian Fashioner?”, Studien zur Indologie und Iranistik, vol. 22, 1999, p. 12.
3 K. Jamasp Asa, Aogamadačča, Wien, 1982, 83; G. Messina, Ayātkār i Žāmāspik, Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1939, 4.2; Dēnkard (Madan ed.) 29.1; The Pahlavi Rivāyat Accompanying the Dādestān i Dēnig (Nyberg ed.) 95.16; Williams edition, 46.36.
4 Aogamadačča, Pazard edition, 85.
for either of these two epithets. In this essay it is intended to review the material pertaining to the epithet of Gayəmard and to come to a conclusion as to the conceptual evolution of these titles in the Zoroastrian world. I would like to dedicate this essay to my teacher and friend, Hanns-Peter Schmidt, who introduced me to the world of Ancient Iran.

A. Christensen preferred the title of garšāh which was supplied in the Pazard version of the Aogmādataēcī. He believed that the mistake of gilšāh was based on the erroneous reading in the Middle Persian texts of the original epithet of Gayəmard, i.e. garšāh. To my knowledge no one has challenged this assumption in detail and the question has not been discussed adequately. Christensen’s suggestion is supported by several Islamic sources, such as Būrūnī who states: “for this reason Kayumart is called kūšāh (Persian کوشنه) because کوش in the Pahlavi language means (Arabic جبل) جبل ‘mountain’.” Bal'amf supplies a more detailed explanation for the word:

They call him garšāh because the world was in ruins and he was alone in the cleavage of the mountain, and the meaning of gar is mountain and they call him the king of the mountain.

This and other Islamic texts are the evidence in support of the “Mountain King” theory of Christensen. On the other hand, in the Middle Persian texts Gayəmard’s title is written with the ideogram TYNA (Aramaic τνα) which clearly stands for gil “clay.” Furthermore, in the Middle Persian texts he is always given the title of gil and never gar when mentioned. In some of the Islamic material, Gayəmard is also known as the “Clay King.” Several authors give the following evidence: “They call him gilišāh and the meaning of it is king of clay.”

In Mojmal tawārīkh, it is stated: “In the compendium of names and titles, the title of Kayumart has been noted to be gil.”

Since we have evidence for both titles, how can we assign the correct epithet? I believe the answer lies in the Zoroastrian Middle Persian and Islamic texts themselves. In a passage in The Pahlavi Rivāyat Accompanying the Dādēstān i Dēnīg, one comes across a novel story of creation in the Zoroastrian tradition. According to this text, Ohmazd, after establishing the three sacred fires, created humanity in this manner:

uš mardom az ţn gil kēš gayəmard ašiš kard pad šusr ūvēnaq andar ţy spandarmad hīst ţd gayəmard az spandarmad be brēhēndīd uel zād (clayōn mahihī ud mahli-vyanīh rust ēnd).

He (Ohmazd) created man from that clay which Gayəmard was made from. He was set in the seminal form in Spandarmad (earth) and Gayəmard was created and was born from Spandarmad (earth) (as Mahih and Mahli-vyanīh grew).

Three different solutions have been suggested as to the origin of this account of creation. Zaechner long ago commented on this passage that it was very different from the story of creation as found in the Bundahīš, but believed the idea that Gayəmard was made from clay was a confusion on the part of the author. He further stated that “[t]hus it would appear that in the present text the phrase ‘from the clay from which Gayəmard was made’, which seems to make nonsense of the passage.”

He sought in this story the Pūrsa story contained in the Rig-Veda (X.90) and so the influence of India on Persian thought. In order to do this

for the entire story, he had to make the section in which it is stated Gayōmard was made from clay as confusion and “nonsense.” The second suggestion was made by Bailey who believed that the account of the creation was strange enough to have been influenced by foreign sources, but did not state the origin of these foreign sources.12 The third suggestion is by Williams who has also dealt with this story of creation and argues that rather than seeing Indic influence in this story of creation, an “improvisation and extrapolation from orthodox Zoroastrian material within an otherwise orthodox account of the world’s creation” took place.13

Zaehner’s argument notwithstanding, I believe that Bailey and Williams were both correct. I would like to suggest that in this episode we have evidence of a mélange of Perso-Semitic creation myth. While the earlier Zoroastrian texts did not deal with clay as the substance from which the first man was created from, in this ninth century Middle Persian text we see the influence of the Islamic/Semitic tradition. At least in this report, the author must have been aware that in the Semitic tradition Adam was created from clay. It is not surprising that a subaltern religion such as Zoroastrianism at the end of late antiquity would become influenced by a new dominating tradition, specifically at the time when conversion to Islam was reaching its highest point. The Zoroastrian author(s) must have been aware of the Qur’anic statement found in the Sūra of An’ām (VI.2): "Who created you from clay?" He is who created you from clay.14 It is however, also plausible to assign this knowledge of the Zoroastrian priests from the Juedo-Christian contacts in the Sasanian or post-Sasanian period as another possible avenue of transmission. Then in this respect Bailey appears to have been correct in assigning a “foreign” influence on the creation story in the PRDD.

There is ample evidence in the Islamic tradition when the authors discussed Gayōmard, he was equated with Adam or identified as Adam himself.15 Hartman has suggested this identi-

14 al-Isfahani in fact calls Gayōmard جَامِرَمَا، Tajaddud, op. cit., ff. 20.
15 S.S. Hartman, "Les identifications de Gayōmard au temps Islamique”, Syncretism, Based on Papers read at the Symposium on Cultural Con-

munity with regard to the identification. Then who were these Zoroastrians who accepted this idea? I think Williams' suggestion that this is an unorthodox account of creation is correct. I would like to suggest that it is quite possible that the Zoroastrians who accepted this teaching were the Gayōmārians who were active in the early Islamic period and were in constant dialogue with the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim sages. We know that they held Gayōmārd in much esteem and as Sharestānī reports "and the Kayumarthya say Kayumarth is Adam, may peace be upon him." Thus, it may be the Gayōmārhiya that in fact first propped up this story in the Zoroastrian circles, using Zoroastrian and Semitic ideas about man. This was done to better defend their position and make understandable the "first man" and his importance for them to their adversaries. The Gayōmārhiya held Gayōmārd in high esteem (as their name suggests) and saw him as the original prophet, preceding even Zoroaster. Traces of this group may be found in other Middle Persian texts, such as the Zand-i Wahman Yasn, where the cosmic era is given as 7000 years. In other Zoroastrian Persian texts we find that Gayōmārd is equated with Adam. In the Persian version of the Ayādār-i Jāmspīq one reads "first kingship came to Gayōmārd, i.e. Adam," and then Zoroaster was equated with Abraham. This Perso-Islamic symbiosis may have caused the idea that the first man, i.e. Gayōmārd was also born from clay. Then Tabarī's explanation for the title of Gayōmārd as "clay king" is for the very same reason.

20 It is difficult to say if the Gayōmārhiya were a distinct sect or school of thought or not. Molé had already pointed out this matter (1906-61: 14).
23 The 7000 year cosmic era was the belief of the Gayōmārhiya, Darvīsh, op. cit., forthcoming 2001.

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This equation of Gayōmārd with Adam is clear from other Arabic and Persian texts. For example Balʿamī states:

"They call him clay king (الْجَيْل) because he was created from clay and ruled over clay and his partner Hawa was also from clay."27

The reason Gayōmārd may have been given the title of garšāh may be found in the Middle Persian texts. In Middle Persian, gar is written with the two letters gīnīl and lāmēd. Now while gīl is usually written in Middle Persian with the Aramaic ideogram TYNA, there are instances that the word is written without the ideogram, hence written in transliteration with gīnīl and lāmēd as well.28 The authors could have also easily made the mistake, hence the new title of garšāh was born. This may be the source of the confusion, where the readers in later time could not distinguish gīl from gar and hence two stories sprang up over the epithet of Gayōmārd. It is also important to note that the title of garšāh appears only in the Pazand texts which suggest misreading of the Pahlavi versions of the text.29

If we accept this hypothesis, then all the stories which are found in the later Middle Persian and especially the Arabic and Persian texts in regard to the first man's title must be regarded as a creation in the late Sassanian and early Islamic period. Then there was no precedence for this idea and due to the orthographical similarity of the two words and the ever increasing influence of Semitic ideas, especially Islam, these divergent stories came about. Consequently the myth was created that Gayōmārd was made from clay as Adam had been. Of course others took on the tradition of garšāh which was not found in the Persian tradition, nor in the Semitic tradition. Both stories existed at the same time and proliferated among the later Muslim authors and both of the stories were elaborated upon by them. By the

27 Balʿamī, op. cit., p. 113.
time of Aogʊmɑdɑːcɑ, while the Pahlavi texts supplied gilšɑh, the Pehlevi translation had supplied garšɑh thus demonstrating the divergence in the Zoroastrian tradition. None of these traditions were original to Zoroastrianism, but the initial tradition of “Clay King” due to Semitic influence had brought about the epithet of “Mountain King” because of the mistake in reading the Middle Persian vernacular by some Zoroastrian priests.

Shaked has rightly stated that not only the story of Gayōmard’s creation from clay has the feeling of the Semitic tradition, but also what becomes of the first couple, Mašyɑ and Mašyɑne. Their mischievousness also causes the fall from the grace of Ohrmazd, very much similar to the story of Adam and Eve’s fall from the grace of (Hebrew God). 30 Shaked believes that the development of the divergent accounts are the product of popular vs. orthodox Zoroastrianism and that they began to take place already in the Sasanian period. 31 I believe that the development of “les mages semitisés” began in the Sasanian period, but it bore fruit in the early Islamic period. It is this period which saw the intense contact between the Muslim and the Zoroastrian intelligentsia. The author of the Skand I Gumnɑṅg Vičɑr specifically named the Muslim sect of Mu’tɑzilɑ as their opponents. 32 In fact most of the attacks on Judaism in the Pahlavi books are against the Islamic teachings which shared many traits with Judaism. 33 It is not clear how active or widespread the ideas of the Gayōmardīya was in the Sasanian period, but there is evidence of their activity in the eighth century CE. Thus the real age of “les mages semitisés” was in the eighth and ninth centuries CE, when Islam had made its full impact on the intellectual life of Zoroastrianism and its doctrines.

30 Shaked, op. cit., p. 246.
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