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CHAPTER 17

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

Touraj Daryae

In the Zoroastrian tradition Gayōmard 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, Gayōmard had become both the first man and the first king attested in the *Šāhnāme* of Ferdosī.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 *gīlsāh* "Clay King,"³ while in other places, he is mentioned as *garšāh* "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

¹ K. Hoffmann, "Mārtānda und Gayōmart", *Münchener Studien zur Sprachwissenschaft*, XI, 1957, pp. 85-113.

² Khaleghi-Motlagh has suggested that Gayōmard was considered a king by the time of the *Xwadāy-nāmag*, "Hamāse Sarāte Bāstān", *Golranjāh-ye Kohan*, ed. A. Dehbāšī, Našr-e Markaz, Tehran, 1993, p. 33. However, in the *Bundahīšn* (Anklesaria, p. 45) we see that Gayōmard was not only the first man but also the first king, see G. Widengren, "The Death of Gayōmart", *Myths and Symbols Studies in Honor of Mircea Eliade*, The University of Chicago Press, 1969, p. 186; also T. Daryae, "Kāve the Black-Smith: An Indo-Iranian Fashioner?", *Studien zur Indologie und Iranistik*, vol. 22, 1999, p. 12.

³ K. Jamasp Asa, *Aogāmadaēcā*, Wien, 1982, 85; G. Messina, *Ayātkār ī Žāmāspīk*, Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1939. 4.2; *Dēnkard* (Madan ed.) 29.1; *The Pahlavi Rivāyat Accompanying the Dādestān ī Dēnīg* (Nyberg ed.) 95.16; Williams edition, 46.36.

⁴ *Aogāmadaēcā*, Pazand version, 85.

for either of these two epithets. In this essay it is intended to review the material pertaining to the epithet of Gayōmard 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 Pazand version of the *Aogamadaēcā*. He believed that the mistake of *gilšāh* was based on the erroneous reading in the Middle Persian texts of the original epithet of Gayōmard, i.e. *garšāh*.⁵ 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 Bērūnī who states: "for this reason Kayumarth is called *kūšāh* (Persian شاه کوه) because *کو* in the Pahlavi language means (Arabic) جبل 'mountain.'⁶ Bal'amī 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.⁷

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 Gayōmard's title is written with the ideogram TYNA (Aramaic *tn*) 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, Gayōmard is also known as the "Clay King." Several authors give the following evidence: "They call him *gilšāh* and the meaning of it is king of clay."⁸ In *Mojmal tawārīkh*, it is stated: "In the compendium of names and titles,

⁵A. Christensen, *Les types du premier homme et du premier roi*, vol. I, Stockholm, 1917, p. 45, n. 3; also M. Bahār, *Pajūhešī dar asātīr-e Irān*, Āgāh Publishers, Tehran, 1375, p. 189.

⁶A. Bērūnī, *Āthār al-bāqiyah*, ed. E. Sachau, Leipzig, 1878, p. 142; also Tha'ālibī, *Ghurur Akhbār*, p. 2.

⁷*Tārīkh-e Bal'amī*, ed. M.T. Bahar, Tehran, 1341, p. 14.

⁸Ibn Nadīm, *Kitāb al-fihrist*, ed. Reza Tajaddud, Tehran, 1366, p. 20; Mas'ūdī, *Kitāb al-tanbīh wa-al-ishrāf*, ed. M.J. de Goeje, BGA VIII, Leiden, 1894, p. 81.

the title of *Kayumarth* has been noted to be *gil*.⁹

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 Dādestān ī Dēnīg*, one comes across a novel story of creation in the Zoroastrian tradition. According to this text, Ohrmazd, after establishing the three sacred fires, created humanity in this manner:

*uš mardōm az ān gil kēš gayōmard aziš kard pad šuš
ēwēnag andar ōy spandarmad hišt ud gayōmard az
spandarmad be brēhēnīd ud zād (ōiyōn mahliḥ ud mahli-
yānīh rust hēnd).*

He (Ohrmazd) created man from that clay which Gayōmard was made from. He was set in the seminal form in Spandarmad (earth) and Gayōmard was created and was born from Spandarmad (earth) (as Mahliḥ and Mahliyanīh grew).¹⁰

Three different solutions have been suggested as to the origin of this account of creation. Zaehner long ago commented on this passage that it was very different from the story of creation as found in the *Bundahišn*, but believed the idea that Gayōmard 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 Gayōmard was made', which seems to make nonsense of the passage."¹¹ He sought in this story the *Purṣua* story contained in the Rig-Veda (X.90) and so the influence of India on Persian thought. In order to do this

⁹*Mojmal tawārīkh*, ed. M.T. Bahar, Tehran, 1318, p. 417.

¹⁰*The Pahlavi Rivāyat accompanying the Dādistān-ī Dīnīg*, ed. E.B.N. Dhabhar, Bombay, 1913, p. 136.11; Zaehner, p. 362; Nyberg, 95.16; A.A. Williams, "A Strange Account of the World's Origin", *Acta Iranica, Papers in Honor of Mary Boyce*, no. 25, vol. 2, pp. 683-697; idem, *The Pahlavi Rivāyat Accompanying the Dādestān ī Dēnīg*, The Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters, Munksgaard, Copenhagen, 1990, vol. 2, p. 75; Mir-Farkhrāi, *Rivāyat ī Pahlavī*, Tehran, 1367, p. 55.

¹¹R.C. Zaehner, *Zurvan; A Zoroastrian Dilemma*, Biblo and Tannen, New York, 1955 (reprint 1972), pp. 136-137.

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): هو الذي خلقكم من طين "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 that 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-

¹² H.W. Bailey, *Zoroastrian Problem in the Ninth Century Books*, Cambridge University Press, 1943, p. 121.

¹³ A.A. Williams, "A Strange Account of the World's Origin: PrDd. XLVI", *op. cit.*, p. 685.

¹⁴ al-Isfahani in fact calls Gayōmard ملك الطين 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-*

fication may have had a Manichaean origin, although he furnishes no evidence. It is also important to note that not all the sources agree that Gayōmard was Adam. Hartman also believes that the reason for which this discrepancy exists in our Islamic texts is that the Arabs were antagonistic toward this belief and only the Persian Muslim authors made this equation. He tries to seek a "nationalistic" reason for this division, focusing on the Shu'ūbiya controversy in the Abbasid period. He states it was the Arab authors who denied this equation and who were anti-Shu'ūbiya, and the Persian authors who were for such identification were pro-Shu'ūbiya. According to him the reason for this division was that both groups were trying to glorify their genealogy.¹⁶ He uses Goldziher's work as his source of reference for the Shu'ūbiya controversy which saw the Persian cause as a "nationalist" movement.¹⁷ Recent assessment of the Shu'ūbiya has changed some of the basic assumptions as to the nature of the debate during the Abbasid Period. This is because it appears that the controversy was not among the Arabs and the Persians, but largely among the Persians themselves, and there was no set agenda for the debates.¹⁸ Thus Hartman's suggestion is unlikely.

There is another possibility which is to look at the internal divisions within the Zoroastrian theologians of the late Sasanian and early Islamic period. The Zoroastrian Middle Persian sources are not the best place to look for these internal divisions, and it is usually the observers (Christian and Muslim authors) who can provide information in this matter. Mas'ūdī tells us that only a minority of Persians regarded Gayōmard as Adam.¹⁹ This statement in itself reflects divisions within the Zoroastrian com-

tact, Meeting of religions, Syncretism held at Abo on the 8th-10th of September, 1966, Almqvist & Wiksell, Uppsala, 1969, pp. 268-276; examples include Ibn Athīr: وقد زعم أكثر علماء الفرس أن جيومردت هو آدم *Ta'rikh al-kāmil*, Cairo, 1303, p. 17; Tabarī, جيومردت هو آدم *Ta'rikh al-rusul wa-al-mulūk*, vol. 1, ed. M.J. de Goeje et al., Leiden, 1879-1901, p. 155; ابن كيومرت آدم عليه السلام بود *Ta'rikh-e Sīstān*, ed. M. Bahār, 1314, p. 2; Ibn Balkhī, گبران او را آدم عليه السلام گویند *Fārsnāmeḥ*, eds. Le Strange and Nicholson, Tehran, Donyaye ketab, second edition, 1363, p. 9.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 269.

¹⁷ I. Goldziher, *Muslim Studies*, London, vol. I, 1967, pp. 137-163.

¹⁸ R.P. Mottahedeh, "The Shu'ūbiya Controversy and the Social History of Early Islamic Iran", *The International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 7, 1976, pp. 179-180.

¹⁹ Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab*, vol. ii, p. 105.

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 Gayōmarthiya²⁰ who were active in the early Islamic period and were in constant dialogue with the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim sages.²¹ We know that they held Gayōmard in much esteem and as Sharestānī reports "and the Kayumarthiya say Kayumarth is Adam, may peace be upon him."²² Thus, it may be the Gayōmarthiya 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 Gayōmarthiya held Gayōmard 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 ī Wahman Yasn*, where the cosmic era is given as 7000 years.²³ In other Zoroastrian Persian texts we find that Gayōmard is equated with Adam. In the Persian version of the *Ayādgār ī Jāmāspīg* one reads "first kingship came to Gayōmard, i.e. Adam,"²⁴ and then Zoroaster was equated with Abraham.²⁵ This Perso-Islamic symbiosis may have caused the idea that the first man, i.e. Gayōmard was also born from clay. Then Tabarī's explanation for the title of Gayōmard as ملك الطين "clay king" is for the very same reason.²⁶

²⁰ It is difficult to state if the Gayōmarthiya were a distinct sect or school of thought or not. Molé had already pointed out this matter (1960-61: 14).

²¹ T. Daryae, "The Zoroastrian Sect of Gayōmartiya", *Jamshid Ārbab Soroshian Memorial Volume*, ed. C. Cereti, forthcoming 2001.

²² Sharestānī, *Kitāb al-mīlāl wa al-nihāl*, ed. R. J. Nā'inī, Iqbal Publishers, Tehran, 1373, p. 366.

²³ The 7000 year cosmic era was the belief of the Gayōmarthiya, Daryae, *op. cit.*, forthcoming 2001.

²⁴ *Darab Hormazyar Rivāyat*, ed. E.M.R. Unvala, British India Press, Bombay, 1922, vol. II, p. 105; *The Persian Rivāyats of Hormazyar Framarz*, ed. E.B.N. Dhabhar, K.R. Cama Oriental Institute, Bombay, 1932, p. 489. اول پادشاهی بگومرث رسید یعنی آدم.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 245; trans., p. 587.

²⁶ al-Tabarī, *Ta'rikh al-rusul wa-al-mulūk*, ed. M.J. de Goeje et al., Leiden, 1879-1901, vol. I, p. 10.

This equation of Gayōmard with Adam is clear from other Arabic and Persian texts. For example Bal'amī states:

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

The reason Gayōmard 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 gimel and lamed. Now while *gil* 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 gimel and lamed 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 *gil* from *gar* and hence two stories sprang up over the epithet of Gayōmard. 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 Sasanian 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 Gayōmard 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 Bal'amī, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

²⁸ Sh. Shaked, "First Man, First King, Notes on Semitic-Iranian Syncretism and Iranian Mythological Transformations", *Gilgul, Essays on Transformation, Revolution and Permanence in the History of Religions*, eds. Sh. Shaked et. al., E.J. Brill, Leiden, New York, København, Köln, 1987, p. 247.

²⁹ G. Messina, *Ayātkār I Jāmāspīg*, Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1939, p. 39 & p. 89.

time of *Aogāmadaēcā*, while the Pahlavi texts supplied *gilšāh*, the Pazand translation had supplied *garšāh* 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, Mašyā and Mašyāne. 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 *Škand ī Gumānīg Wīzār* specifically named the Muslim sect of Mu'tazila 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 Gayōmarthiya 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.

³¹ Shaked, *op. cit.*, p. 252; for further discussion of the manifestations of the Zoroastrian religion in the Sasanian period among the elite and the masses see, Sh. Shaked, *Dualism in Transformation, Varieties of Religion in Sasanian Iran*, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, 1994, pp. 97-98.

³² J. de Menasce, *Škand-Gumānīk Vičār, La solution décisive des doutes*, Librairie de l'université Fribourg, Suisse, 1945, 280-281, p. 146.

³³ *Idem*, "Jews and Judaism in the Third Book of the Dēnkart", *K.R. Cama Oriental Institute Golden Jubilee Volume*, Bombay, 1969, pp. 45-48.

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