

Als Herrscher wahrhaft nordischer Prägung hat er sein Volk in einer fremden Umwelt zum Aufstieg und zur Erfüllung einer grossen geschichtlichen Sendung geführt, hat in seiner Person das Bild der führenden Schicht einer neuen Welt gezeigt und seinen Nachfolgern einen Weg gewiesen ... Wenn sich auch die beiden verwandten Kräfte des Ariertums und des Hellenentums in der Folgezeit gegenseitig bekämpften und zermürbten, so trat doch in ihrer schliesslichen Vereinigung, die zugleich ihr Ende bedeutete, das Erbe des grossen Dareios noch einmal strahlend zutage (*ibid.*: 150).

Die Geschichte des Perserbildes während des Nationalsozialismus ist ein besonders lehrreiches Beispiel für die Berechtigung einer von Sancisi-Weerdenburg angemahnten Beschäftigung der Geschichtswissenschaft mit dem Problem '... not only what happened on the various levels of the (Achaemenid, d.V.) empire, but also to indicate where our concepts come from ...' (1987a: 44).

THE RELIGION OF CYRUS THE GREAT

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One reason why the religion of Cyrus the Great is for some still a matter of controversy is probably the holding to earlier assumptions which need to be reviewed in the light of new evidence. Such evidence is not easily assembled, being scattered through archaeological, historical and religious publications; and some of it concerns ritual and devotional practices, which are not aspects of Iranian religion with which many scholars have concerned themselves. They are of especial importance, however, for this particular inquiry; for, though, under Islam, Zoroastrianism is classified as a religion 'of the book', in fact for much of its history its priests scorned the written word, preserving their holy texts through a remarkable and immensely long oral tradition. Some of these texts go back in essence to early in the second millennium B.C., but none was set down in writing before the Sasanian period (3rd to 7th centuries A.D.). As far as is certainly known, no system existed for recording even secular pronouncements in any Iranian language at the time of Cyrus; and no Old Persian inscriptions date from his reign (see Nylander 1968; Lecoq 1974b; Stronach 1985: 848, n. 7). If the question of his religion is to be usefully considered, therefore, it has to be approached with a readiness to extend the field of investigation, not limiting it to texts. Through the accidents of history, however, Zoroastrianism, alone among the higher religions, has been studied chiefly not by its own adherents but by those from other religious traditions, notably Christian, Muslim and Jewish ones; and since these traditions are strongly literate, those nurtured in them have tended to regard written textual evidence as essential for reaching firm conclusions. This feeling is inevitably reinforced for scholars who work in the Akkadian, Egyptian or classical fields.

With a dearth accordingly of generally acceptable data, it becomes necessary to study the religion of Cyrus not in isolation but as part of general Achaemenian religious history, from which contrasts or comparisons can be drawn. Some knowledge of the general Zoroastrian background is also useful, so that problems may be seen in perspective. This paper is accordingly divided into three parts: a sketch of the general background; salient points of Achaemenian religious history in reverse chronological order (since the later stages are not controversial); and the religion of Cyrus himself.

The background

Zoroastrianism has always been almost wholly an Iranian faith, and as such

it played for centuries a powerful and pervasive role in the Near East. Alexander's conquest of the Achaemenian empire brought numbers of Zoroastrian colonists under alien rule, to thrive until eventually Christian and other persecutions were unleashed against them; and in the seventh century A.D. the Arab conquest of Iran subjected the main body of Zoroastrians to Muslim dominance. Since then all Zoroastrians have lived under (to them) infidel governments. In Iran their numbers were gradually eroded, slowly at first, then more rapidly as persecution gathered strength, aided by increasing social disadvantages. Towards the end of the ninth century a small group migrated in search of religious freedom to western India, where they became known as the Parsis (i.e. 'Persians'). The community in Iran suffered greatly through the Turkish and Mongol conquests, and many of its religious writings were destroyed. What survives includes the liturgical parts of the Avesta, the Zoroastrian holy book composed in an ancient eastern Iranian language; and a more extensive secondary literature in Middle Persian or Pahlavi, the language of Sasanian Persia. Most final redactions of Pahlavi books were made as late as the ninth century, when Zoroastrian priests were still able to be active in trying to strengthen their co-religionists' resistance to Islam. There are Pahlavi translations of most of the extant Avesta (as well as of lost Avestan texts); and Zoroastrian priests of later times were in general content to use these for study. Understanding of the Avestan language itself was largely lost, together with the tradition of theological learning (as distinct from basic beliefs), during centuries of bitter poverty and persecution, which moreover reduced the community to tiny numbers.

Modern Western study of Zoroastrianism began in the sixteenth century, and was at first based on classical notices.¹ To these were added in the seventeenth century some accounts by early Muslim writers, and brief reports of the Irani and Parsi communities by contemporary travellers. In the eighteenth century the French scholar Anquetil du Perron studied in India with a Parsi priest and brought back manuscripts and rough translations of the extant Avesta, as well as of one of the theologically most important Pahlavi works, the *Bundahišn*.

Controversy broke out at once about the authenticity of these texts, since their contents did not accord with already established ideas about the teachings of the great Iranian prophet, so much respected in antiquity, namely that he had been a strict monotheist, and that his religion had been almost wholly without rituals. It was not long, however, before Anquetil was vindicated through the new science of comparative philology, which proved that Avestan was a genuine ancient language, closely related to Sanskrit; but as Western

¹ For a lucid and learned account of Western studies, from the 16th to the 19th centuries, see Geldner 1896-1904, II: 40-46; and from a different angle the early chapters of Duchesne-Guillemin 1958.

scholars, using comparative methods, became able to improve on Anquetil's translations, some fell into the trap of supposing that since contemporary Zoroastrians had evidently only an imperfect understanding of their faith's oldest scriptures, the same must apply to their grasp of its doctrine. (Most of these scholars were Protestant Christians, brought up on the concept of scripture as the essential basis for religious beliefs.) A tendency therefore arose with some to despise or ignore living Zoroastrianism. Controversy continued to be vigorous and wide-ranging throughout the nineteenth century, for the importance of the newly available texts attracted numerous scholars, some of the finest calibre.

The oldest part of the Avesta consists of seventeen short poetic works, the Gāthās, attributed to Zoroaster himself; and despite first reactions their genuineness came to be generally accepted, since in the words of one eminent authority, they bring us 'face to face not with the Zoroaster of the legends but with a real person, announcing a new doctrine and way of salvation' (Geldner *Encyclopaedia Britannica* 1859, Vol. 18: 654). They are, moreover, consistently and remarkably close, linguistically, to the oldest form of Sanskrit, that of the Rigveda, whose compilation is attributed to between roughly the 15th and 12th centuries B.C. On this basis Zoroaster himself was early assigned to the 14th century B.C. (Geldner *ibid*: 654). Debate about this dating soon developed, however, through study of Pahlavi texts. The *Bundahišn* itself contains a king-list which shows that Zoroaster's patron, Kavi Vištāspa, was thought to have flourished 258 years 'before Alexander'; and other Pahlavi works record a tradition that the religion suffered a great blow (presumably through the Macedonian conquest) some 300 years after it was founded.² Such a chronology was evidently known in scholastic circles in south-western Iran by the early centuries of the Christian era; and battle has raged over whether it was artificial, the result of mistaken calculations by Persian scholar-priests, or genuine. Upholders of the two viewpoints have in the past been more or less equally matched in weight and numbers;³ but in the last two decades most scholars publishing new work involving this problem have supported an early date, usually around 1000 B.C., with some still arguing for about 1400, or even earlier.⁴

Debate about the content of the Gāthās has been as vigorous and even

² The materials were first assembled and discussed by the great Pahlavi scholar E.W. West 1897: xxvii-xlii.

³ See Jackson 1928: 17 n. 5. After he wrote, the case for rejecting the 6th-century date was strongly argued by Nyberg 1938, ch. 2, and that for accepting it by Henning 1951: 35ff. For additional references see Gnoli 1980: 159ff.

⁴ For bibliographical details see Gnoli 1980, with references, notably, to T. Burrow, I.M. Diakonov and A. Sh. Shahbazi; and add Eduljee 1980; and Humbach 1984: 2-15. Gnoli himself argues for a date 'between the end of the 2nd and the beginning of the 1st millennium B.C.' (*ibid*: 175).

more complex; for since these constitute a small, isolated corpus of archaic texts, they present great difficulties. To obscurities of vocabulary and idiom they add what appear to be deliberate stylistic ones, for they are composed in an allusive esoteric tradition associated, it seems (perhaps since proto-Indo-European times), with mantic prophecy. Most scholars hold that these difficulties are compounded by this ancient poetic form being used by a profoundly original prophet and thinker, who was giving expression to certain wholly new beliefs through this highly formal medium. Scholarly interpretations of what those beliefs were depend a good deal on how much reliance the individual puts on the Zoroastrian tradition (as represented by the later Avestan texts, the Pahlavi books, medieval writings in Persian and Gujarati, and the magisterium of the living faith down to the time when European scholarship and Christian missionary work began to exercise a distorting influence on western-educated, urban Parsis). This tradition is remarkably consistent, and in its light Zoroaster has been seen to have taught a deeply thought-out, elaborate theology, fully adumbrated in the *Gāthās*.⁵ Those who have rejected the tradition as unreliable, and who have therefore sought to study the *Gāthās* independently of it, tend to divide broadly into two groups. Members of one see Zoroaster as an idealised prophet-philosopher, and treat all apparent references to complex doctrines or rituals as metaphorical (e.g. Insler 1975). Members of the other, conversely, stress the ritual element and certain archaic beliefs, seeking to link the *Gāthās* closely with the Vedic world of thought (e.g. Humbach: 1959) or that of modern 'primitive' peoples (Nyberg: 1938). Summing up, a leading authority wrote: "In spite of this healthy divergence of views there are nevertheless certain basic matters on which all but extremists are agreed. We must not lose sight of the essentials in favour of mere details. It is agreed, for example, that Zoroaster was a man of forceful personality, who impressed the people of his time so deeply that his memory was never extinguished; that he was a prophet, if prophet means one who believes himself inspired by a divine being to bring a message to his people; that he possessed moral integrity, preached truth and truthfulness, and abhorred lies, deceit, and hypocrisy; that he had something new to say that was worth both saying and listening to" (Henning 1951: 35).

Since diversity of opinion focussed above all on the *Gāthās* themselves, as long as the sixth-century date for Zoroaster was widely accepted, it affected consideration of his religion at the time of Cyrus. Once a much earlier dating is adopted, discussions about primitive Zoroastrianism become irrelevant to this matter. By the beginning of the Achaemenian period, the faith, it now seems, was already at least 300-400 years old, probably more; and the extant

⁵ Spiegel 1871-78 (II): 171 ("ein System ... dass wir ... für ein sehr durchdachtes und kunstvolles halten müssen").

Avesta was then already essentially in being, though extensions and elaborations to its orally transmitted texts evidently continued as late as the Parthian period, and even on a minute scale in Sasanian times. The Sasanians appear, however, to have added very little, their self-appointed tasks being rather to collect, to consolidate, and to organize through a centralized and newly authoritarian church.⁶

Fortunately there is considerably less controversy about developed than primitive Zoroastrianism. Briefly it is a credal faith, i.e. its adherents are required to make, individually, an exclusive commitment to it in preference to all other religions.⁷ Doctrinally it is a radical dualism, teaching belief in one supreme, eternal being, Ahuramazda, wholly wise and good, increate, but himself the creator of all that is good (including benign lesser divinities); and in his adversary, Anra Mainyu, equally increate, but wholly evil and malign. He too is the creator of lesser spiritual beings, the *Daēvas*, wicked like himself. Ahuramazda created this world perfect, but as a place where good and evil could meet, with the purpose that evil would, in the end, be destroyed. Anra Mainyu in his malignity duly attacked, bringing all the evils we now know. It is the duty of each person to resist these evils, seeking his own redemption and that of the world.⁸ Zoroastrianism is a highly ethical salvation-faith, teaching of heaven and hell, individual judgment at death, and the Last Judgment, with the purging of the world by fire (which will destroy the damned), and the coming then on this earth of the kingdom of Ahuramazda, in which the blessed will live in eternal happiness. It is exacting in observance, with obligatory private prayers to be said five times a day in the presence of fire (the symbol of *aša*, i.e. approximately, of truth, justice and order); a strict moral code; and far-reaching purity laws. The latter have some unusual features, being mainly designed to maintain the purity of the good world of Ahuramazda's creation (seen as consisting of seven parts: sky, water, earth, plants, animals, men and fire, each under a great tutelary being).

None of these doctrines or observances can be held to be simply an

⁶ On this see, e.g. Nyberg's excellent survey (1938: ch. 1, and especially p. 18). Most scholars who write about a new 'orthodoxy' under the Sasanians are using that term loosely, and refer in fact to a new church discipline then, the establishing of a fixed Avestan canon, the encouraging of the foundation of fire temples and other such measures. No one has yet defined any doctrine which can be shown to be new to the period.

⁷ The picture drawn by some scholars of Achaemenian Zoroastrianism as an eclectic faith (with western magi selecting at their own or their patrons' choice elements from the eastern religion to blend with traditional Persian ways and beliefs) does not rest on any sound evidential basis, but is part rather of western attempts to adapt historical Zoroastrianism to preconceptions of what the primitive faith ought to have been.

⁸ These doctrines, which the present writer is not alone in seeing as largely stated or adumbrated in the *Gāthās*, are set out systematically in the Pahlavi books, notably the *Bundahīšn*. Cf. (with bibliography) Boyce 1984: 45ff. Though the final redaction of this Pahlavi work was made in the 9th century A.D., much of it consists of translations of lost Avestan texts, going back therefore in part to pre-Achaemenian times.

inheritance from the old Iranian religion, which, like the sister-religion of Vedic India, was an ethnic one, i.e. a faith into which one is born, without need for credal affirmations. Diverse sources show that this traditional religion was a polytheism in which Ahuramazda would have been no more than a great god among other great gods. (One of the distinctive names Zoroastrians gave themselves, accordingly, was 'Mazda-worshippers', since all their own worship was ultimately directed to Ahura (i.e. 'Lord') Mazda, as supreme God.) Just as the old religion did not recognize one supreme beneficent being, so there is no trace of any ancient belief in a single maleficent being, the source of all evil; nor in any group of wholly wicked gods. And though there were undoubtedly purity laws, there is nothing to suggest any like the peculiarly Zoroastrian ones designed to protect the purity of the 'good creations', e.g. those that guard the purity of fire, which outside Zoroastrianism is generally itself regarded as a purifying agent. Nor is there any indication that fire was used as an icon in the traditional religion, although there was clearly an Indo-Iranian cult of the hearth-fire. The difficulties of distinguishing between Zoroastrianism and the old Iranian religion are thus often exaggerated.

The religion of the Achaemenian kings of Darius' line

It is generally agreed that the evidence is adequate to establish the Zoroastrianism of the later kings of Darius' line; and if this evidence seems nevertheless meagre, it has to be borne in mind that records of all aspects of Achaemenian civilization are regrettably scanty.

It was during the last great Achaemenian reign, that of Artaxerxes III, that Aristotle, seeking to trace the recurrence of truths in human systems of thought, set the Persian magi before even the Egyptians as to antiquity, and recorded their clearly Zoroastrian dualistic belief that "there are two first principles, a good spirit and an evil spirit, one called Zeus and Oromasdes, the other Hades and Areimanius" (*On Philosophy*, Frg. 6 = Diogenes Laertius, *Proem.* I 8,6). It was probably also he who, in the light of this belief in recurrent truths, linked his teacher Plato with Zoroaster, suggesting thereby 'that Plato's doctrine of the Good as a divine and universal principle had been revealed to eastern humanity by an Oriental prophet thousands of years before' (see Jaeger 1948: 133-136). Plato himself, it seems, living at the time of Artaxerxes II, had learnt of Zoroastrian teachings through Eudoxus of Cnidus, who, according to Pliny, regarded the followers of Zoroaster as representing "the most famous and most useful of the learned sects" (*Nat. Hist.* XXX 1,3); and Zoroastrian teachings are linked directly with the Achaemenian court during this reign through the *Alcibiades* (I 121), where it is said that the Persian princes were trained in "the Magian lore of Zoroaster, son of Horomazes". In harmony with this evidence, there are strong indica-

tions that the Zoroastrian calendar (still in use today) was devised in the later Achaemenian period, probably under Artaxerxes II; and that the temple-cult of ever-burning fire (which became and remains the focal point of Zoroastrian devotional life) was established at about the same time (see — with references — *HZ* II: 243ff., 221ff.). There was evidently a link between this temple cult and the use by the Persians of embers from a sacred fire as a palladium borne before an army into battle (Quintus Curtius III 8ff.). This custom is first recorded under Darius III, and was practised also in Sasanian times.

The characteristic Zoroastrian funerary rite, unknown, it seems, in western Iran before the advent of the faith (see *HZ* II: 25-6), is that of exposure of the dead; and this is attested at the time of Artaxerxes II by a rock-cut ossuary (*astodāna*) at Limyra in Lycia, made to receive disarticulated bones (see — with bibliography — Shahbazi 1975: 111-124). An Aramaic inscription establishes the use of this ossuary by four generations of a Persian noble family. In contrast, the bodies of the Achaemenian kings of Darius' line were embalmed and laid in rock-cut tombs, and this used to be considered evidence against these rulers' Zoroastrianism; but it is now known that the Arsacids and the 'orthodox' Sasanians followed similar practices. The royal *khvarenah* or 'glory' was held to be so powerful, it is suggested, that special treatment was given to the royal dead (Calmeyer 1974: 233-6; *id.* 1979: 347-365). The form of sepulture the Achaemenians used conforms closely with the Zoroastrian purity laws, since the corpse was laid deep in impermeable rock, so that no pollution from it could reach any of the pure creations.

These tombs attest the Zoroastrianism of those laid within them still more positively by the carving over the entrance to each.⁹ This shows the dead king standing in reverential attitude before an altar-like fire-holder, on which fire blazes up in a pyramid of flame (with no trace of a sacrificial offering being consumed by it). The fire-holder, consisting of a three-stepped top and base joined by a rectangular shaft, is of a type which, with minor modifications, remained in use under the Arsacids and Sasanians, and can still be seen in Zoroastrian village-temples in Iran today. Above the fire-holder in the tomb carving is the figure in a winged disk, a complex symbol which originated in an Egyptian solar one, and continued to have solar associations in lands outside Egypt (see Frankfort 1939: 209; Seux 1967: 284). There is also a moon symbol (a crescent within the orb of the full moon). In Zoroastrian orthopraxy the fire before which prayers are to be said may be represented by an earthly fire, or the celestial ones of sun and moon¹⁰ — the three 'fires' shown in this funerary carving. There would have been no reason to represent a royal adherent of the old Iranian religion at prayer before fire (see *HZ* II: 51); and the carving has

⁹ For superb photographs see Schmidt 1970.

¹⁰ Cf. living practice; and the Pahlavi text *Mēnōg ī Khrad* (ed. and transl. by E.W. West as *The Book of the Mainyo-i-Khard*, London 1871), L111.

thus a purely Zoroastrian significance. Moreover, since it appears over the tomb of every king of Darius' line, it demonstrates very strikingly a continuity in Zoroastrian belief for all his dynasty. Fire burning in an altar-like holder became the characteristic Zoroastrian symbol, and during the second Persian Empire the Sasanians set it on the reverse of every one of their coin-issues.

There is a variety of other evidence for the Zoroastrianism of all the Achaemenians, apart from the negative testimony (often remarked on) of Greek silence as to any change of belief among the Persian Great Kings. Most of the royal inscriptions are modelled (as far as their religious elements are concerned) on those of Darius I, and so consideration of their important testimony will be left for his reign. For Artaxerxes I Plutarch preserves a scrap of evidence in his account of Themistocles' first appearance at that king's court, with Artaxerxes himself praying that 'Arimanius' would always make his enemies minded to drive away their best men (Plut. *Them.* XXVff.). Further, if the attribution of the fragment in question is correct, Artaxerxes' Lydian subject Xanthus is the first Greek known to have recorded Zoroaster's name, telling how, when storm threatened Croesus' pyre, "superstitious fears fell upon the people...; at the same time ... the sayings of Zoroaster came to their mind. ... The Persians claim that it was from him they derived the rule against burning dead bodies or defiling fire in any way" (*FHG* I, 42, F19; Clemen 1920: 30-1). The story of Croesus' pyre presumably reached Xanthus through popular tradition; but what he (putatively) wrote about Zoroaster's prohibition on defiling fire might well have been heard by him from Iranians in Lydia in his own day. Certainly his younger contemporary, Herodotus, wrote about beliefs and customs of which he had himself learnt from Persians in Asia Minor during Artaxerxes I's reign (I 131ff.); and from his account these appear indeed to have been Zoroastrian ones (described with quite as much accuracy as one is entitled to expect from a Greek gentleman not profoundly interested in religion). His description of sacrifice in high places used to be regarded as non-Zoroastrian, because scholars knew only of Zoroastrian priestly rites; but in fact it accords closely with regular and frequent observances still carried out in old Zoroastrian centres of Iran.¹¹ His identification of the objects of Persian worship as 'Zeus' (i.e. Ahuramazda) seen as the 'circle of heaven', and the sun and moon, earth, fire, water, winds, seems a very fair attempt to render Zoroastrian veneration of the supreme being and the tutelary gods of the good creations. Further, his accounts of the Persians' care not to defile rivers, the Magian funerary rite of exposure, and of the killing of noxious creatures (held by Zoroastrians to belong to Anra Mainyu), are all consonant with Zoroastrian usages recorded down the

¹¹ See Boyce 1977: 175ff.; 241ff. (for communal sacrifices in high places); 61-2; 71-2 (for individual sacrifices there by laymen). On the small divergences between Herodotus' account and what is to be expected of ancient Zoroastrian practice see *HZ* II: 180-1.

centuries and into modern times (see *HZ* II: 182-3), having their basis in radical dualism and the characteristic Zoroastrian purity laws. On the ethical plane, two of Herodotus' observations accord with particular aspects of Zoroastrian moral theology: that the Persians took care not to think what they were not prepared to do (for, according to Zoroastrian doctrine, thoughts also weigh in the scales at judgment day); and that when it came to judging a man the sum of his good deeds was to be set against his offence (Hdt. I 138: see Clemen 1920: 113, 114; *HZ* II: 181) (so that mortal justice mirrored the divine that is to come).

Herodotus has accounts also, at second hand, of various religious practices under Artaxerxes' father, Xerxes, without, be it noted, offering the slightest suggestion of any change having taken place in Persian religion between the two reigns. What he tells of religious incidents during the Greek war would mostly be common to the old Iranian religion and Zoroastrianism (i.e. veneration of a noble tree, sacrifice to the spirits of brave men, libation and offerings to waters (Hdt. VII 31, 43, 54; on the scourging of the Hellespont see Clemen 1920: 80; *HZ* II: 166)); but two incidents are undoubtedly wholly at odds with Zoroastrian teachings, namely the human sacrifices at 'Nine Ways' (VII 113) and at the beginning of the first sea-battle (though the latter, it is suggested, may have been carried out by Phoenicians serving in the Persian fleet (VII 180; see Clemen *loc. cit.*; *HZ* II: 168)). The Nine Ways sacrifice is presumably to be explained as an old pagan rite being practised at a time of stress; and the same explanation can be offered for the sinister sacrifice of fourteen sons of noble Persians by Xerxes' formidable wife Amestris in old age (presumably to attain longer life for herself; Hdt. VII 114; see *HZ* II: 167).

Against these startling lapses is to be set the testimony to Xerxes' own Zoroastrianism provided by the 'Daiva inscription'.¹² In this the king declares that there was an unnamed place in his empire 'where previously Daivas were worshipped, Then by the will of Ahuramazda I destroyed that Daiva-sanctuary, and I made proclamation: "Daivas shall not be worshipped!" Where previously Daivas were worshipped, there I worshipped Ahuramazda.' It is universally agreed that Old Persian *daiva* is the equivalent of Avestan *daēva*; and the natural interpretation of Xerxes' words is that, as a Zoroastrian, he was recording the destruction of an Iranian sanctuary devoted to the worship of those evil gods whom Zoroaster had condemned as afflicting the world and mankind. It has been suggested that rejection of these beings might have been general in the old Iranian religion;¹³ but there is no evidence to support such a conjecture. On the contrary, in the Vedic religion, with which the old Iranian

¹² Xerxes, Persepolis h, see Kent 1953: 150-52; Stronach 1978: 152 (on an exact copy). For references to the large literature on this inscription see Bianchi 1977: 3-30; Gnoli 1980: 77-79.

¹³ Gnoli, having fairly recently given his support to this hypothesis (1980: 199ff.), has subsequently withdrawn it, see Gnoli 1983: 15.

religion has such close links, notable *devas*, such as Indra and the Nāsatyas, are worshipped together with the great Asuras (Av. Ahuras).¹⁴ This is what one would expect of a normal polytheism; whereas the belief that the pantheon, like this world below, is divided sharply between good and evil, with beneficent gods set against malignant ones, appears to be a characteristic part of Zoroastrian dualism. Abjuration of the *daēvas* forms part of the ancient Zoroastrian creed (*Yasna* 12; Boyce 1984: 57-8), and repeated stress on it suggests the importance as well as the difficulty of this rejection for early believers — a rejection which Xerxes thus evidently forced on certain recalcitrant subjects of his. (Had the rejection in fact been 'pan-Iranian' rather than specifically Zoroastrian, no such action would have been called for on his part.) The Daiva Inscription is of considerable importance as showing that the Achaemenians extended religious tolerance only to their non-Iranian subjects, lesser mortals in their eyes who might worship as they pleased, provided they created no civil unrest. That they should have required their Iranian subjects to be of the same religion as themselves is normal; a common faith reinforcing ethnic ties provides a strong base for a ruler.

This is the longest and most original of Xerxes' inscriptions. His others show him following dutifully in his father's footsteps; and he even reproduced exactly one of his tomb-inscriptions, merely substituting his own name for that of Darius (Darius, Naqš-i Rostam b, see Kent 1953: 138-40. For a bibliography for Xerxes' copy see *HZ* II: 177 n. 70). This inscription contains a good deal of religious matter; and Xerxes' re-use of it reinforces a general impression that innovation by him in religious matters is wholly improbable. The chain of continuity thus leads back to Darius himself. His inscriptions are relatively abundant; and in them he regularly attributes his greatness and achievements to the will of Ahuramazda. Although Darius invokes him 'with all the gods', he is the only divine being whom the king names; and this accords with the Zoroastrian doctrine that Ahuramazda is supreme, the one eternal God. Darius further celebrates Ahuramazda, in full orthodoxy, as the being 'who created man, who created happiness for man' (Naqš-i Rostam a 1-5, Kent 1953: 17-8). The last phrase is especially significant, since according to Zoroastrian doctrine happiness has been created by Ahuramazda, pain and sorrow by Anra Mainyu. Dualism also underlies the powerful antithesis recurring in Darius' inscriptions between *arta* and *drauga* (Avestan *aša* and *drug*), that is, between truth and justice, falsehood and wickedness. Much has nevertheless been made of the absence of the names of Anra Mainyu himself,

¹⁴ There is thus no real parallel between Zoroaster's rejection of the war-gods called by him *daēvas*, and the late Rigvedic development by which the term *asura* acquired an evil sense, and came to be applied to demons. The Indian development was a semantic one only, and did not affect the actual gods who had borne the title *asura* since proto-Indo-Iranian times. This has long been recognised, see, e.g. Keith 1925, I: 231-2.

and of Zoroaster. It has, however, to be borne in mind that the Old Persian inscriptions had for models those of Babylon and Assyria; these provided antecedents for a king to praise his chief god, to speak of his own justice, and to castigate the wickedness of rebels and foes. Thus far there were traditional moulds into which to pour Zoroastrian thoughts; but Akkadian culture knew no prophet, the founder of a religion, and no Evil Spirit, the source of all wickedness; and the scribes of the royal inscriptions could not find it fitting, apparently, to break new ground in these respects. The negative tradition thus established held with regard to Zoroaster, whose name is never mentioned in any inscriptions, even in those, whether royal or priestly, of the Sasanian epoch. The striking Zoroastrian doctrine of the Heptad (i.e. of Ahuramazda with the six great beings created by him who guard with him this sevenfold world) could also not be expressed; but this has been seen to be visually implied in the carving set above Darius' tomb, and those of all his successors.¹⁵

Despite the evident firmness of Darius' own beliefs, and his certainty (reiterated in his inscriptions) that he was chosen and supported by Ahuramazda, he was not only tolerant of the religions of his non-Iranian subjects, but made benefactions to them. Thus in Egypt he endowed a huge temple to Amun-Rē at El-Khargeh (see Winlock et al. 1938-1953), and made gifts to the Apis-Osiris cult at Memphis (Posener 1936: 177-8). A statue was erected of him in the Atum sanctuary at Heliopolis, of which a copy has been excavated at Susa; and this bears inscriptions¹⁶ which illustrate strikingly the dichotomy between Darius the Persian Great King, a Zoroastrian, and Darius, Pharaoh by right of conquest in Egypt, and so officially protector of that country's cults. On the folds of the statue's robe is cut, in Old Persian, Babylonian and Elamite cuneiform, the great declaration already partly quoted above: 'A great god is Ahuramazda, who created this earth, who created yonder sky, who created happiness for man, who made Dārayavahu king'; but these lines, oddly placed as they are, were presumably to be found only on the Susa copy. The inscriptions proper to the Heliopolis original are clearly those carved in delicate hieroglyphs at the statue's foot and on the base; and these express quite different sentiments, declaring Darius to be 'he whom Atum, lord of Heliopolis, has chosen to be master of all that is encompassed by the solar orb, for he recognizes him as his son, his steward. ... The goddess Neith has given him the bow which she looses, in order that he may defeat all his enemies.' These inscriptions accord the Achaemenian king a series of traditional Pharaonic titles, including 'perfect god', and declare that the statue was made at his command 'in order that ... his person should be remembered beside his father, Atum ... for the length of eternity'.

¹⁵ Shahbazi 1976: 73; for further bibliography see *HZ* II: 93 with nn.

¹⁶ See the contributions by Vallat (1972) and Yoyotte (1972).

In case Darius' willingness to accommodate himself thus to Egyptian beliefs should be felt to cast doubt on the genuineness of his Zoroastrian faith, it is salutary to remind oneself of the conduct of the Christian British during an early stage of their imperial rule in India: '... the Government believed it to be necessary, for the stability of their position, not merely to recognize the religions of the people of India, but to support and patronize them as fully as the native rulers had done. ... Accordingly ... they took under their management and patronage a large number of Hindu temples. They advanced money for rebuilding important shrines and for repairing others, and paid the salaries of the temple officials. ... They granted large sums of money for sacrifices and festivals and ... on the occasion of the greater festivals ... government officials were ordered to be present and to show their interest in the celebrations' (Farquhar 1915: 9). It is methodically important, in studying the history of Zoroastrianism, not to expect Zoroastrian rulers to be any more logical and consistent, or any less pragmatic, than those of other better documented religions. Darius' descendants maintained his tolerant policy except when, as in Xerxes' reign, it clashed with other political considerations. Notably Artaxerxes I gave silver and gold 'to the god of Israel who lives in Jerusalem', bidding the Jews 'to buy bulls, rams and lambs, as well as the oblations and libations which go with them' (Ezra VII.15, 17); and Darius II contributed to the repairs of Eanna's temple in Uruk, and added to Darius' great Amun temple at El-Khargeh (Cardascia 1951; Kienitz 1953: 73-4). (A pleasing, if humbler, parallel to these benefactions occurred in the nineteenth century A.D., when a wealthy Zoroastrian of Bombay, the Parsi Cowasjee Jehangeer, bestowed a fountain on the new Anglican cathedral there¹⁷).

Religious tolerance is thus yet another element of the general continuity in religious matters which marks the Achaemenian period. Greek testimony confirms the internal evidence that the religion concerned was Zoroastrianism; and this is further corroborated by continuity in doctrine and practice between the Achaemenians and later periods of Iranian history, down to the present day — a continuity that is no more remarkable than that, say, between medieval and modern Christianity, even if the Zoroastrian timespan is longer, and its records far less abundant.

The religion of Cyrus the Great

Darius in his turn deliberately stressed continuity in religious as in other

¹⁷ *Times of India*, April 11, 1863 (cited by C.L. Morris, *Anglo-Parsi Relations*, unpublished M.A. thesis, Manchester 1984: 184). Cowasjee had previously bestowed more than three lakhs of rupees in a few months on two hospitals and a college; but the English journalist thought that the 'comparatively trifling gift' of the fountain showed more than any other act 'the breadth of his liberality and the sterling goodness of his heart' — a comment which illustrates well the psychological value of this type of benefaction.

matters between his reign and that of his predecessors, for it was clearly expedient for him as a usurper to strengthen all possible links with Cyrus, the revered founder of the empire. Whatever the truth of his propaganda about pseudo-Smerdis, it contained the statement that this person, fictive or not, had destroyed places of worship (*āyadanā*). According to Darius: 'The kingdom which had been taken away from our family, that I put in its place; I re-established it on its foundation. As before, so I made the places of worship which Gaumata the Magus destroyed' (Darius, Behistun I 61-64; Kent 1953: 118-20).¹⁸ This can hardly be understood as other than a declaration that he worshipped in the same places (and presumably in the same manner) as Cyrus and his sons.¹⁹ It is further almost certain that Darius himself observed the custom (possibly begun by Cambyses, and duly followed by the later kings of Darius' line) of undergoing a religious ceremony, on assuming the crown, at Cyrus' capital of Pasargadae (Plut. *Artax.* III).²⁰ He also maintained the memorial rites established by Cambyses at Cyrus' tomb, which were kept under his descendants until the Macedonian conquest (Arr. *Anab.* VI 29, 1.4ff.). These rites used to be regarded as evidence against the Zoroastrianism of the dynasty, since they included regular blood-sacrifice, and western idealisation of Zoroaster had led to the hypothesis that he had forbidden this rite. It is now generally agreed that this is not so. Further, it is now known that animal sacrifice for a departed soul was routinely still offered by Zoroastrians in India down to the nineteenth (and locally the twentieth) century, and in Iran generally down to the twentieth century (see Boyce 1966: 106-10; 1977: 157-58, 161).

It is also significant that Darius felt no need to move Cyrus' embalmed body from its chosen resting place; for this mausoleum, though free-standing, met the requirements of the Zoroastrian purity laws as fully as did his own rock-cut tomb. It was all of stone; and the small, thick-walled chamber, with a double stone roof and a narrow doorway with a stone door, was set on a six-tiered platform of massive stone blocks (see Stronach 1978: 24-43, Pls. 19-39). So acceptable indeed was this form of sepulture that a humbler replica of Cyrus' tomb was built in the 5th/4th century at Buzpar in south-western Fars²¹ — possibly, according to one ingenious suggestion, as a mausoleum for Cyrus the Younger (see Shahbazi 1972: 56), a notably pious prince (see *HZ* II: 201, 212ff.).

Near the tomb of Cyrus the Great the remains have been found of two or

¹⁸ On the claim *re* the *āyadanā* see *HZ* II: 88-9.

¹⁹ This point was made long ago by Windischmann 1863: 125. Space forbids discussion here of the scraps of evidence for Cambyses' adherence to Zoroastrianism, on which see *HZ* II: 70-77.

²⁰ On the ceremony see *HZ* II: 90, 209.

²¹ On the date see Nylander 1966: 145; Stronach 1978: 302 (with description of the tomb, *ibid.* 300-302, Pls. 182-5).

possibly three stone fire-holders, almost exactly the same in shape as the object supporting burning fire in Darius' tomb-carving. The Pasargadae fire-holders are of fine workmanship and lack toothed-chisel marks, so that they have been assigned to Cyrus' own reign;²² and their close resemblance to the carved objects shows that this was indeed a genuine fire-holder, i.e. an altar-like stand with a deep hollow bowl in the top to hold an ever-burning fire, and not an actual altar, i.e. a flat-topped stand on which fire could be temporarily kindled to consume an offering. Archaeologists have not found objects like these stone fire-holders at any non-Zoroastrian site. They are in fact characteristic of Zoroastrianism, since a wood fire (and a Zoroastrian sacred fire is always of wood²³) can be kept continually burning only if there is a sufficient depth of hot ash. The raised fire-holder was apparently an Achaemenian invention, i.e. it seems to have been evolved under Cyrus in order to elevate from the hearth the fire before which the Great King prayed daily (see *HZ* II: 51-3). When eventually the temple cult was established, the temple fire was set in a similar holder within the inner sanctuary, to be an icon visible to all worshippers. Cyrus thus appears to have sanctioned the adoption of a devotional usage which has lasted till the present day.

All these data come either from the time when Cyrus had established his empire, or from after his death. There is evidence also from his early days. As has often been remarked,²⁴ names from Zoroastrian tradition are attested in the Achaemenian family from the end of the seventh century B.C.; for Aršama/Arsames, a cousin of Cyrus king of Anshan, (grandfather of Cyrus the Great), who flourished probably around 600, called one of his sons by the name of Zoroaster's princely patron, Vištāspa (Hystaspes), using the Avestan form (the Old Persian would have been *Vištāsa²⁵); and subsequently Cyrus the Great himself called his oldest daughter Atossa, which, it is generally agreed, is the Greek rendering of Hutaosa, the name of Kavi Vištāspa's queen. Thereafter these two names recur in the Achaemenian family. Notably, Darius the Great, son of Vištāspa son of Aršama, called one of his sons Vištāspa; and this second Achaemenian Vištāspa named a son Pissouthnes. This rare name represents, it is held, Avestan Pišīyaothna, that of a son of Kavi Vištāspa. The parallelism thus seems conscious, with princely patrons of Zoroastrianism in the west piously making use of the names of ancient princely patrons of

Zoroastrianism in the east. None of these names occurs among those attested on the Elamite tablets from Persepolis, which now provide a fair sample of those in ordinary use in Persia (Fars) in the early Achaemenian period (cf. Mayrhofer 1973).

Further, there is evidence from the Old Testament. It is generally accepted that 'Second Isaiah', the nameless poet-prophet of the Exile, in declaring that Cyrus would conquer Babylon, uttered this as true prophecy, before Cyrus' victory took place; and it is thought that conviction of the success of the Persian king's coming enterprise was instilled in him by an agent or agents of Cyrus, preparing the way among the disaffected and the captive communities in Babylon (cf. Smith 1944: 32ff.). That such agents were Zoroastrians has been argued from the apparent influence on Second Isaiah of Zoroaster's thought, notably as expressed in one of the Gāthās (*Yasna* 44)²⁶ and in lines in the inscriptions of Darius (E.J. Bickerman apud Smith 1963: 420). It is in the words of Second Isaiah that monotheism is first uncompromisingly and repeatedly declared in the Old Testament; and in a unique passage the doctrine is curiously expressed, in words attributed to Yahweh himself: 'I am Yahweh, unrivalled, I form the light and create the dark. I make good fortune and create calamity. It is I, Yahweh, who do all this' (Is. 45.7).²⁷ This harshly uncompromising utterance was evoked, it has been suggested (Windischmann 1863: 135; *HZ* II: 120), by the Zoroastrian doctrine of radical dualism which Cyrus' agents brought to Babylon together with their political propaganda, a doctrine one aspect of which is expressed by Darius' veneration of Ahuramazda as the one 'who created man, who created [only] happiness for man'.

With these accumulated indications of Cyrus' adherence to Zoroastrianism, the question arises, why should doubt still be expressed about this? Apart from the inescapable lack of textual corroboration, persistent scepticism appears due in part to lingering reliance on data now known not to be cogent (such as entombment instead of exposure of the body, or the offering of animal sacrifice). An example of data of this sort is provided by the text of the Cyrus cylinder, in which, it used to be thought, the Persian king expressed himself in a manner that was not possible for the adherent of an exacting credal religion, allowing his victory over Babylon to be attributed, not to the grace of Ahuramazda but to that of Marduk, and requiring his new subjects to pray for him daily 'before Bel and Nebo'. It is now recognized, however, that the cylinder text was composed by Babylonian priests as local propaganda (see Eilers 1971: 156-166; Kuhrt 1983: 83-97), just as the Egyptian texts on Darius' statue at Susa were composed by Atum's priests for Egyptian eyes. That statue shows, moreover, how (once the Persians began to make use of

²² Stronach 1967: 287; id. 1978: 141, Pl. 107. Unfortunately by an oversight (Professor Stronach's personal communication) the details about the workmanship, and hence the dating to Cyrus' own reign, were omitted from the latter publication; and the general lack of interest in the devotional aspects of Zoroastrianism has led to the importance of these fire-holders being largely overlooked.

²³ Veneration is, however, recorded for ever-burning naphtha fires.

²⁴ For some of the literature see *HZ* II: 41nn.

²⁵ But see Schmitt 1972: 51, who points out that all recorded OP names with the element for 'horse' have the Avestan/Median form *aspa*, not *asa*.

²⁶ See Morton Smith 1963: 415-421, (with bibliography of earlier studies).

²⁷ The translation is that of the Jerusalem Bible (as are other biblical citations below).

writing) such alien religious sentiments, intended for foreign subjects, could be balanced by piously Zoroastrian ones on Iranian soil.

This leaves only one apparently positive argument against Cyrus' Zoroastrianism, that his name is not remembered in Zoroastrian tradition. This argument may seem strong to those unacquainted with the selective and stylised history of the faith that evolved after the Macedonian conquest, which cut a great swathe through the continuity of Zoroastrian tradition. It also split the Zoroastrian community into separate regions, and thus allowed various new traditions to develop which fused local patriotism with religious piety. One of these is the Sasanian Persian one. The Sasanians claimed to be heirs to the Achaemenians; but of those kings they preserved the names only of the first and last Darius (Dārāy), and one or two Artaxerxes (Ardašīr), the first Darius being known to be the son of Vištāspa (Vištāsp/Guštāsp). This Vištāspa was identified, at least by the fourth century A.D.,²⁸ with Kavi Vištāspa, Zoroaster's patron - an identification which had enormous propaganda value, since it made Zoroastrianism by origin a western instead of an eastern Iranian religion, and presented the Sasanians as its hereditary protectors and hence as the rightful rulers of all Zoroastrians, i.e. of all Iran; but it left no place for Cyrus, cousin and coeval of the Achaemenian Vištāspa. So despite the fact that Cyrus was apparently still remembered in popular song in Sasanian Persia (see von Gutschmid 1892, III: 133f.), his name is unknown in the official religious tradition; but since this tradition was evolved centuries after he himself lived, and on the basis of manifestly faulty knowledge, this fact cannot legitimately be used as evidence against his own Zoroastrianism. There is thus no valid evidence of any kind to set against the positive indications that this was indeed his faith.

That the whole Achaemenian dynasty, including Cyrus, was Zoroastrian is no new interpretation, but has been argued intermittently since serious studies of Zoroastrianism began. Opinion has swayed to and fro; but now the data seem adequate for a firm conclusion.²⁹ There is moreover the general consideration that the study of other salvation-faiths shows that religions of this type spread best either at times of stress, or when backed by superior temporal power. Once Cyrus had established the Achaemenian Empire, his successors experienced no profound disasters, and recognized no temporal power superior to their own; and it is difficult to imagine any one of these Great Kings listening to missionaries urging him to abandon the faith of his forefathers. It is in itself much more probable that the dynasty's Zoroastrianism went back to the time when the Achaemenians were no more than petty kings of Anshan, vassals to the Medes, who knew subjection and menace in their own lives, and

²⁸ It is alluded to by Ammianus Marcellinus XXIII 6,32.

²⁹ The most recent work arguing for Zoroastrianism of the whole Achaemenian dynasty, including Cyrus, is that of Gnoli 1985: 41, 53-72.

who witnessed, through fellow-Persians, the ruthless and appalling destruction of neighbouring Elam by the Assyrians. The distressful times of the seventh century B.C. seem exactly a period when a religion offering hope of justice, and of happiness hereafter to redress sufferings here, is likely to have made swift progress among the Persians (cf. *HZ* II: 40).

Anyone seeking to argue against the Zoroastrianism of Cyrus, seriously and with the knowledge needed to weigh the varied evidence, is thus undertaking a difficult task; and he also needs to address himself, again weighing all the evidence, to this basic issue: the Achaemenians being undoubtedly Zoroastrians, since when was this the case?