

THE ZOROASTRIAN MYTH OF THE ORIGIN OF HUMANITY AND ITS INDO-EUROPEAN CONNECTIONS

Abstract. The texts that have come to us pertaining to the so-called Avestan period, which represents the oldest stratum of the Zoroastrian religion, do not deal with the myth regarding the origin of Mankind. We only find a few brief mentions of Gaiia Marətan ('mortal life'), but which make it clear that this figure was regarded as the progenitor of the human beings (eg. *Y* 26.5, 10, 23.2, *Yt* 13.87, 145). It is in the works pertaining to the Middle Persian or Pahlavi period where we first find a systematic and full description of the origins of Humankind. As it is known, regardless the late date of its composition (c. IXth c. AD), these works collect and gather materials, beliefs and doctrines of much older times, and that is why they are essential for the reconstruction of the original Avestan doctrine. The main sources at our disposal for knowing the myth of the creation of Humanity are the *Bundahišn*, the *Dēnkard*, the *Pahlavi Rivāyat* accompanying the *Dādestān-ī Denig* and the *Dādestān-ī Denig* itself.

According to these sources, Gayōmard (=Av. Gaiia Marətan) is the result of the union between Ohrmazd (=Av. Ahura Mazdā) and his daughter Spandārmad (Av. Spenta Ārmaiti), the beneficial Spirit of the Earth. Gayōmard, along with the primordial Bull and Plant, belongs to the first creation of Ohrmazd. The three of them die as a consequence of the attack of the Evil Spirit, Angra Mainyu, which introduces death and corruption in the originally perfect creation of the supreme god. This Gayōmard has a Vedic counterpart in the figure of Mārtāṇḍa, the last of the Adityas.

After Gayōmard's death, its mother Spandārmad collects and saves part of its seminal fluid, from which after forty years a rhubarb plant will grow. From this plant will evolve the first human couple, the twins Mašīa and Mašīānag, both names deriving from the same IE root as *marətan-*, meaning 'mortal'. As a result of sexual intercourse, the couple will give birth to several twin couples, which in their turn will produce progressively more human beings. These incestuous unions constitute the ideological justification of the so much discussed Mazdean institution of the next of kin marriage (Av. *xʷaētuuadaθa*, Pahl. *xwēdōdah*).

Yima (Pahl. Jamšēd), is another mythical figure closely related to the origins of Humankind and which is regarded as the first king in the Avestan literature. His name is formed upon an IE root meaning 'twin' and also has a Vedic counterpart in Yama, who rules the Underworld after being the first one to have die. Among the many myths related to Yima, the one regarding the construction of the *vara* stands out: Yima builds this place after the advice of Ahura Mazdā, to preserve the good living beings of the harsh winters the god is about to produce to reduce the population of the Earth.

Therefore, what we find in the Zoroastrian works is a mix of several myths of diverse date, belonging to the Indo-Iranian period or even before, which were modified and adapted to the Mazdean doctrinal framework. In this communication we will discuss those myths and will explore its connections with other Indo-European traditions, as well as its significance for the Zoroastrian religious beliefs.

Key words: Gayōmard, twins, Yima, origin of Mankind, Indo-European mythology

Reference Works

-Cereti, C. (2015): "GAYŌMARD (ARTICLE 2)", in: Encyclopaedia Iranica Online, © Trustees of Columbia University in the City of New York. Consulted online on 30 May 2022 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2330-4804_EIRO_COM_11836>

-Christensen, A. (1918-1934): *Les types du premier homme et du premier roi dans l'histoire légendaire des Iraniens*. Stockholm

-Daryaei, T. (2022): "Eating meat: the sin of Zoroastrian primordial heroes and villains"; Caseau, B. & Monchot, H. (eds.): *Religion et interdits alimentaires. Archéozoologie et sources littéraires*. Leuven (237-242)

-Hoffmann, K. (1957): "Mārtānḍa and Gayōmart"; *Münchener Studien zur Sprachwissenschaft* 11 (85-103)

-Williams, A. V. (1990): *The Pahlavi Rivāyat accompanying the Dādestān ī dēnīg*. Copenhagen