

lightly. For light \*put in a door, a window, . . .’ (31) Then Yima thought: ‘How shall I make the “var” of which Ahura Mazda has spoken to me?’ Then Ahura Mazda said to Yima: ‘Fair Yima, son of Vivahvant! Trample this earth asunder with your heels, thrust it apart with your hands . . .’ (32) Then Yima did as Ahura Mazda wanted of him. . . (39) ‘Creator of the material world, just! which will be these luminaries, O just Ahura Mazda, which will give light there in the “\*var” which Yima made?’ (40) Then Ahura Mazda said: ‘Self-governing luminaries, not everlasting. Once (in a year) they are seen setting and rising – stars and moon and sun. (41) And those (in the “var”) regard a year as a day. After every forty years each human pair will give birth to twins, a female and a male; and so with the animal species. And those men lead the best of lives in the “var” which Yima made.’ (42) ‘Creator of the material world, just! Who shall there propagate the Mazda-worshipping religion, in this “var” which Yima has made?’ Then said Ahura Mazda: ‘The raven, O Spitama Zarathushtra’. (43) ‘Creator of the material world, just! Who is the lord and judge of its inhabitants?’ Then said Ahura Mazda: ‘Urvatatnara, O Zarathushtra.’

## 8 A ZOROASTRIAN HERESY: ZURVANISM

*This is the only considerable Zoroastrian heresy, evolved probably by Persian magi in the late fifth century B.C. It was a monism, based on a new exegesis of Y. 30 = 2.2.2.3, whereby Ahura Mazda and Angra Mainyu were seen as twin sons of Time, Zurvan (a minor divinity of late Younger Avestan texts). The earliest reference to it, by the Greek historian Theopompus, shows it linked with a special version of the ‘world year’. The heresy was, it seems, adopted as the true orthodoxy by the late Achaemenian kings, and was adhered to by their Persian successors, the Sasanians; but its teachings have nevertheless to be pieced together from scattered sources. Because the Zurvanites regarded Ahura Mazda as Creator of all things good, under the remote Zurvan, they were able to worship together with the orthodox in full orthopraxy, using the same liturgies; and this seems to have prevented serious schism. The heresy disappears after the tenth century A.C.*

### 8.1 A CITATION FROM THEOPOMPUS (BORN c. 380 B.C.)

Theopompus says that, according to the Magians, for three thousand years alternately the one god will dominate the other and be dominated, and that for another three thousand years they will fight and make war, until one smashes up the domain of the other. In the end Hades shall perish and men shall be

happy; neither shall they need sustenance nor shall they cast a shadow, while the god who will have brought this about shall have quiet and shall rest, not for a long while indeed for a god, but for such time as would be reasonable for a man who falls asleep. Such is the mythology of the Magians. (Trans. J. Gwyn Griffiths, *Plutarch's De Iside et Osiride*, ch. 46, pp. 193–5.)

## 8.2 VERSIONS OF THE MYTH OF ZURVAN AND HIS TWIN SONS

### 8.2.1 From an Armenian source

*This is probably derived from a lost Pahlavi document of the fourth century A.C.*

(1) Behold what (Zardusht) said concerning the begetting of Ormazd and Ahriman. When nothing at all yet existed, neither heaven nor earth nor any other creature which is in heaven or on earth, there existed the great god Zurvan, whose name is to be interpreted as 'fate' or 'fortune'. For one thousand years he offered sacrifice in order that he might perhaps have a son who would be called Ormazd, and who would make the heavens and earth and all which they contain. (2) For one thousand years he offered sacrifice. Then he pondered in his heart and said: 'Shall I truly have profit of these sacrifices, and shall I have a son called Ormazd? Or do I strive thus in vain?' And even while he reflected in this manner, Ormazd and Ahriman were conceived in the womb: Ormazd through the offered sacrifice, Ahriman through the doubt. (3) When he became aware of this, Zurvan said: 'Lo, two sons are in the womb. Whichever of them appears swiftly before me, him I shall make king.' Ormazd, being aware of their father's purposes, revealed them to Ahriman. . . . (4) And Ahriman, having heard this, pierced the womb and came forth and presented himself to his father. And Zurvan, beholding him, knew not who he might be, and asked 'Who are you?' And he said: 'I am your son.' Zurvan answered him: 'My son is fragrant and bright, and you, you are dark and noisome.' And while they spoke thus, Ormazd, being born at the due time, bright and fragrant, came and presented himself before Zurvan. And Zurvan, beholding him, knew that he was his son, Ormazd. And taking the rods which he held in his hand, and with which he had offered sacrifice, he gave them to Ormazd and said: 'Until now it is I who have offered sacrifice for you. Henceforth it is you who will offer it for me.' (5) And while Zurvan was giving the rods to Ormazd and blessing him, Ahriman, having drawn near to Zurvan, said to him: 'Have you not made this vow, that whichever of my two sons shall first come before me, him I shall make king?' And Zurvan, that he should not violate his oath, said to Ahriman: 'O false and injurious one! The kingship shall be granted you for nine thousand years; and I shall establish Ormazd as ruler over you. And after nine thousand years Ormazd shall reign and do all that he will wish to do.' (6) Then Ormazd and Ahriman set to fashioning the creatures. And all that Ormazd created was good and straight, and all that Ahriman made was evil and crooked. (From the

Armenian Christian apologist Eznik of Kolb; French translation by J. P. de Menasce, see Zaehner, *Zurvan*, text F 1.)

### 8.2.2 From a Christian Syriac treatise of the late sixth century A.C.

*The three additional gods are thought to be hypostases of Avestan attributes of Zurvan: arshokara, 'who makes virile'; frashokara, 'who makes splendid'; \*zarokara, 'who makes old'. Zurvan was thus worshipped as a quaternity.*

Zardusht, the Persian magus, he also founded a school in Persia, at the time of king Bashtasp [i.e. Vishtasp]. He drew many pupils to himself, who, being blind in spirit, readily agreed with him in his errors. He taught first of all the existence of four gods, Ashoqar, Frashoqar, Zaroqar and Zarvan; but he did not say what were their undertakings. Then he admitted of two other gods, Hormizd and Ahriman, saying that both of them had been begotten by Zarvan. Hormizd is wholly good; Ahriman is wholly bad. These are the gods who made this world. The good god created the good creatures, and the evil god created the evil creatures. (From the French translation of J. Bidez and F. Cumont, *Les mages hellénisés*, Vol. II, 100; cf. Zaehner, *Zurvan*, 439–40.)

### 8.2.3 From the Second 'Ulema-i Islam, probably twelfth century A.C.

*A Persian Zoroastrian text, see 1.1.1.17.*

(1) . . . Six hundred years after Yazdegird (III) certain learned men of Islam put several questions to one versed in the Religion. . . . They asked: 'What do you say about the resurrection? Do you believe in it or not?' The Mobadan mobad replied: 'We believe in the resurrection. The Day of Judgment shall be.' (2) Then the learned men of Islam asked: 'How has the world been created? . . .'. The religious dasturs of the time replied: '. . . It is thus revealed in the religion of Zardusht that except Time all other things have been created. Time is the Creator. Time has no bound . . . . It has always been and shall ever be. And no one endowed with wisdom will say whence Time has come. Yet despite all its greatness there was none who called it Creator. Why? Because it had not yet made the creation. (3) Then it created fire and water. When it brought them together, Ohrmazd came into existence. Time was both Creator and Lord with regard to the creation it had made. (4) Ohrmazd was bright, pure, fragrant, beneficent, and He had power over all good things. Then when He looked into the lowest depth, He saw Ahriman 96,000 miles away, black, foul, stinking and maleficent. Ohrmazd marvelled, for this was a terrible enemy. When Ohrmazd saw that enemy He thought, 'I must utterly root out this enemy'; and He planned what and how many instruments (were needed). Then He began. Whatever Ohrmazd did, He did with the help of Time. . . . Ohrmazd made manifest Time of Long Dominion, which has the measure of 12,000 years. (5) If someone says, 'Since (Time) possessed all this mastery, why then did it create Ahriman?' we said in the beginning that both Ohrmazd and Ahriman came into existence from Time. Every group speaks of this in a different way. One party says that it (Time) created Ahriman so that Ohrmazd

should know that Time has power over all things. . . . Another says: 'What pain or pleasure has Time from the evil of Ahriman or the goodness of Ohrmazd?' Another group says that it (Time) created Ohrmazd and Ahriman so that it might mingle good and evil, in order that things of diverse kinds might come into existence.' (M. R. Unvala, *Rivayat II*, 80–2; trans. Dhabhar, *Rivayats*, 449–53, and Zaehner, *Zurvan*, 409–12.)

## 9 DOGMATIC PASSAGES FROM NINTH-CENTURY PAHLAVI BOOKS

*Dogmatic works of the Islamic period are characterised by the words 'one must be without doubt', and similar phrases, as the writers strove to stiffen their co-religionists against Muslim proselytising and persecution.*

### 9.1 FROM 'SELECTED PRECEPTS OF THE ANCIENT SAGES'

#### 9.1.1 A brief catechism

*For the opening words of the catechism proper cf. 2.2.9.7.*

(1) In conformity with the revelation of the religion the ancient sages – those with first knowledge of the faith – have said that each man or woman who attains the age of fifteen should know these things: 'Who am I? Whose am I? From where have I come? To where shall I return? Of what stock and lineage am I? What is my duty on earth, and what my spiritual reward? Am I come from the spiritual world, or was I (simply) of this world? Do I belong to Ohrmazd or to Ahriman? To the yazads or to the devs? To the good or to the bad? Am I a human being or a dev? How many are the paths, and which is my religion? Where lies my profit, where my loss? Who is my friend, who my foe? Is there one first principle or are there two? From whom is goodness, from whom badness? From whom light and from whom darkness? From whom fragrance and from whom stench? From whom justice and from whom injustice? From whom compassion, from whom pitilessness?' (2) . . . by the path of wisdom one must know without doubt: 'I am from the spiritual world, I was not (simply) of this world. I was created, I did not (simply) exist. I belong to Ohrmazd, not to Ahriman. I belong to the yazads, not to the devs, to the good, not to the bad. I am a human being, not a dev, a creature of Ohrmazd, not of Ahriman. My stock and lineage is from Gayomard. My mother is Spendarmad, my father Ohrmazd. My humanity is from Mahre and Mahryane, who were the first offspring and seed of Gayomard. (3) And fulfilling my duty and obligations means to believe that Ohrmazd is, was, and evermore shall be, that His kingdom is eternal, and that He is infinite and pure; and that Ahriman will

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