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Other Traditions

Avesta — Vendidad

(Fargards I and II)

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Zoroastrian priests

James Darmesteter (1895)

Credits

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About:

The Avesta is the body of scriptures of Zoroastrianism, the ancient religion of Iran founded by the prophet Zarathustra (Zoroaster).

The Vendidad ("the law against the demons") is the part that deals with ritual purity and the struggle against evil, in the form of a dialogue: Zarathustra asks and Ahura Mazda, the Wise Lord, answers.

Its first two chapters (fargards) are the best known. In Fargard I, Ahura Mazda tells how he created sixteen good lands, beginning with the Airyana Vaêgô, the homeland of the Aryans, and how Angra Mainyu, the evil spirit "who is all death", answered each with a plague: winter, the locust, unbelief, witchcraft.

Fargard II tells the story of Yima, the first king: he refuses to be the prophet of the religion, but makes the world grow three times and, warned of a terrible winter, builds the Vara, an enclosure where he keeps the seeds of the best men, animals and plants — a story close to that of the flood.

The Vendidad is still recited in a long night ceremony by Zoroastrian priests, today chiefly among the Parsis of India, descendants of the Persians who fled there from the eighth century onwards.

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FARGARD I

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1 Ahura Mazda spake unto Spitama Zarathustra, saying:
I have made every land dear (to its people), even though it had no charms whatever in it: had I not made every land dear (to its people), even though it had no charms whatever in it, then the whole living world would have invaded the Airyana Vaêgô.

3 The first of the good lands and countries which I, Ahura Mazda, created, was the Airyana Vaêgô, by the Vanguhi Dâitya.
Thereupon came Angra Mainyu, who is all death, and he counter-created the serpent in the river and Winter, a work of the Daêvas.

4 There are ten winter months there, two summer months; and those are cold for the waters, cold for the earth, cold for the trees. Winter falls there, the worst of all plagues.

5 The second of the good lands and countries which I, Ahura Mazda, created, was the plain which the Sughdhas inhabit.
Thereupon came Angra Mainyu, who is all death, and he counter-created the locust, which brings death unto cattle and plants.

6 The third of the good lands and countries which I, Ahura Mazda, created; was the strong, holy Môuru.
Thereupon came Angra Mainyu, who is all death, and he counter-created plunder and sin.

7 The fourth of the good lands and countries which I, Ahura Mazda, created, was the beautiful Bâkhdhi with high-lifted banners.
Thereupon came Angra Mainyu, who is all death, and he counter-created the ants and the anthills.

8 The fifth of the good lands and countries which I, Ahura Mazda, created, was Nisâya, that lies between Môuru and Bâkhtri.
Thereupon came Angra Mainyu, who is all death, and he counter-created the sin of unbelief.

9 The sixth of the good lands and countries which I, Ahura Mazda, created, was the house-deserting Harôyu.
Thereupon came Angra Mainyu, who is all death, and he counter-created tears and wailing.

10 The seventh of the good lands and countries which I, Ahura Mazda, created, was Vaêkereta, of the evil shadows.
Thereupon came Angra Mainyu, who is all death, and he counter-created the Pairika Knãthaiti, who clave unto Keresâspa.

11 The eighth of the good lands and countries which I, Ahura Mazda, created, was Urva of the rich pastures.
Thereupon came Angra Mainyu, who is all death, and he counter-created the sin of pride.

12 The ninth of the good lands and countries which I, Ahura Mazda, created, was Khnenta which the Vehrkânas inhabit.
Thereupon came Angra Mainyu, who is all death, and he counter-created a sin for which there is no atonement, the unnatural sin.

13 The tenth of the good lands and countries which I, Ahura Mazda, created, was the beautiful Harahvaiti.
Thereupon came Angra Mainyu, who is all death, and he counter-created a sin for which there is no atonement, the burying of the dead.

14 The eleventh of the good lands and countries which I, Ahura Mazda, created, was the bright, glorious Haêtumant.
Thereupon came Angra Mainyu, who is all death, and he counter-created the evil work of witchcraft.

15 And this is the sign by which it is known, this is that by which it is seen at once: wheresoever they may go and raise a cry of sorcery, there the worst works of witchcraft go forth. From there they come to kill and strike at heart, and they bring locusts as many as they want.

16 The twelfth of the good lands and countries which I, Ahura Mazda, created, was Ragha of the three races.
Thereupon came Angra Mainyu, who is all death, and he counter-created the sin of utter unbelief.

17 The thirteenth of the good lands and countries which I, Ahura Mazda, created, was the strong, holy Kakhra.
Thereupon came Angra Mainyu, who is all death, and he counter-created a sin for which there is no atonement, the cooking of corpses.

18 The fourteenth of the good lands and countries which I, Ahura Mazda, created, was the four-cornered Varena, for which was born Thraêtaona, who smote Azi Dahâka.
Thereupon came Angra Mainyu, who is all death, and he counter-created abnormal issues in women and barbarian oppression.

19 The fifteenth of the good lands and countries which I, Ahura Mazda, created, was the Seven Rivers.
Thereupon came Angra Mainyu, who is all death, and he counter-created abnormal issues in women and excessive heat.

20 The sixteenth of the good lands and countries which I, Ahura Mazda, created, was the land by the sources (?) of the Rangha, where people live who have no chiefs.
Thereupon came Angra Mainyu, who is all death, and he counter-created Winter, a work of the Daêvas.

21 There are still other lands and countries, beautiful and deep, longing and asking for the good, and bright.

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FARGARD II

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1 Zarathustra asked Ahura Mazda:
O Ahura Mazda, most beneficent Spirit, Maker of the material world, thou Holy One!
Who was the first mortal, before myself, Zarathustra, with whom thou, Ahura Mazda, didst converse, whom thou didst teach the Religion of Ahura, the Religion of Zarathustra?

2 Ahura Mazda answered: The fair Yima, the good shepherd, O holy Zarathustra! he was the first mortal, before thee, Zarathustra, with whom I, Ahura Mazda, did converse, whom I taught the Religion of Ahura, the Religion of Zarathustra.

3 Unto him, O Zarathustra, I, Ahura Mazda, spake, saying: 'Well, fair Yima, son of Vîvanghat, be thou the preacher and the bearer of my Religion!'
And the fair Yima, O Zarathustra, replied unto me, saying:
'I was not born, I was not taught to be the preacher and the bearer of thy Religion.'

4 Then I, Ahura Mazda, said thus unto him, O Zarathustra:
'Since thou dost not consent to be the preacher and the bearer of my Religion, then make thou my world increase, make my world grow: consent thou to nourish, to rule, and to watch over my world.'

5 And the fair Yima replied unto me, O Zarathustra, saying:
'Yes! I will make thy world increase, I will make thy world grow. Yes! I will nourish, and rule, and watch over thy world. There shall be, while I am king, neither cold wind nor hot wind, neither disease nor death.'

7 Then I, Ahura Mazda, brought two implements unto him: a golden seal and a poniard inlaid with gold. Behold, here Yima bears the royal sway!

8 Thus, under the sway of Yima, three hundred winters passed away, and the earth was replenished with flocks and herds, with men and dogs and birds and with red blazing fires, and there was room no more for flocks, herds, and men.

9 Then I warned the fair Yima, saying: 'O fair Yima, son of Vivanghat, the earth has become full of flocks and herds, of men and dogs and birds and of red blazing fires, and there is room no more for flocks, herds, and men.'

10 Then Yima stepped forward, in-light, southwards, on the way of the sun, and (afterwards) he pressed the earth with the golden seal, and bored it with the poniard, speaking thus:
'O Spenta Ârmaiti, kindly open asunder and stretch thyself afar, to bear flocks and herds and men.'

11 And Yima made the earth grow larger by one-third than it was before, and there came flocks and herds and men, at their will and wish, as many as he wished.

12 Thus, under the sway of Yima, six hundred winters passed away, and the earth was replenished with flocks and herds, with men and dogs and birds and with red blazing fires, and there was room no more for flocks, herds, and men.

13 And I warned the fair Yima, saying: 'O fair Yima, son of Vivanghat, the earth has become full of flocks and herds, of men and dogs and birds and of red blazing fires, and there is room no more for flocks, herds, and men.'

14 Then Yima stepped forward, in light, southwards, on the way of the sun, and (afterwards) he pressed the earth with the golden seal, and bored it with the poniard, speaking thus:
'O Spenta Armaiti, kindly open asunder and stretch thyself afar, to bear flocks and herds and men.'

15 And Yima made the earth grow larger by two-thirds than it was before, and there came flocks and herds and men, at their will and wish, as many as he wished.

16 Thus, under the sway of Yima, nine hundred winters passed away, and the earth was replenished with flocks and herds, with men and dogs and birds and with red blazing fires, and there was room no more for flocks, herds, and men.

17 And I warned the fair Yima, saying: 'O fair Yima, son of Vîvanghat, the earth has become full of flocks and herds, of men and dogs and birds and of red blazing fires, and there is room no more for flocks, herds, and men.'

18 Then Yima stepped forward, in light, southwards, on the way of the sun, and (afterwards) he pressed the earth with the golden seal, and bored it with the poniard, speaking thus:
'O Spenta Armaiti, kindly open asunder and stretch thyself afar, to bear flocks and herds and men.'

19 And Yima made the earth grow larger by three-thirds than it was before, and there came flocks and herds and men, at their will and wish, as many as he wished.

21 The Maker, Ahura Mazda, called together a meeting of the celestial Yazatas in the Airyana Vaêgô of high renown, by the Vanguhi Dâitya.
The fair Yima, the good shepherd, called together a meeting of the best of the mortals, in the Airyana Vaêgô of high renown, by the Vanguhi Dâitya.
To that meeting came Ahura Mazda, in the Airyana Vaêgô of high renown, by the Vanguhi Dâitya; he came together with the celestial Yazatas.
To that meeting came the fair Yima, the good shepherd, in the Airyana Vaêgô of high renown, by the Vanguhi Dâitya; he came together with the best of the mortals.

22 And Ahura Mazda spake unto Yima, saying:
'O fair Yima, son of Vîvanghat! Upon the material world the evil winters are about to fall, that shall bring the fierce, deadly frost; upon the material world the evil winters are about to fall, that shall make snow-flakes fall thick, even an aredvî deep on the highest tops of mountains.

23 'And the beasts that live in the wilderness, and those that live on the tops of the mountains, and those that live in the bosom of the dale shall take shelter in underground abodes.

24 'Before that winter, the country would bear plenty of grass for cattle, before the waters had flooded it. Now after the melting of the snow, O Yima, a place wherein the footprint of a sheep may be seen will be a wonder in the world.

25 'Therefore make thee a Vara, long as a riding-ground on every side of the square, and thither bring the seeds of sheep and oxen, of men, of dogs, of birds, and of red blazing fires.
'Therefore make thee a Vara, long as a riding-ground on every side of the square, to be an abode for men; a Vara, long as a riding-ground on every side of the square, for oxen and sheep.

26 'There thou shalt make waters flow in a bed a hâthra long; there thou shalt settle birds, on the green that never fades, with food that never fails. There thou shalt establish dwelling-places, consisting of a house with a balcony, a courtyard, and a gallery.

27 'Thither thou shalt bring the seeds of men and women, of the greatest, best, and finest on this earth; thither thou shalt bring the seeds of every kind of cattle, of the greatest, best, and finest on this earth.

28 'Thither thou shalt bring the seeds of every kind of tree, of the highest of size and sweetest of odour on this earth; thither thou shalt bring the seeds of every kind of fruit, the best of savour and sweetest of odour. All those seeds shalt thou bring, two of every kind, to be kept inexhaustible there, so long as those men shall stay in the Vara.

29 'There shall be no humpbacked, none bulged forward there; no impotent, no lunatic; no one malicious, no liar; no one spiteful, none jealous; no one with decayed tooth, no leprous to be pent up, nor any of the brands wherewith Angra Mainyu stamps the bodies of mortals.

30 'In the largest part of the place thou shalt make nine streets, six in the middle part, three in the smallest. To the streets of the largest part thou shalt bring a thousand seeds of men and women; to the streets of the mid-

dle part, six hundred; to the streets of the smallest part, three hundred. That Vara thou shalt seal up with thy golden seal, and thou shalt make a door, and a window self-shining within.'

31 Then Yima said within himself: 'How shall I manage to make that Vara which Ahura Mazda has commanded me to make?'
And Ahura Mazda said unto Yima: 'O fair Yima, son of Vîvanghat! Crush the earth with a stamp of thy heel, and then knead it with thy hands, as the potter does when kneading the potter's clay.'

32 [And Yima did as Ahura Mazda wished; he crushed the earth with a stamp of his heel, he kneaded it with his hands, as the potter does when kneading the potter's clay.]

33 And Yima made a Vara, long as a riding-ground on every side of the square. There he brought the seeds of sheep and oxen, of men, of dogs, of birds, and of red blazing fires. He made a Vara, long as a riding-ground on every side of the square, to be an abode for men; a Vara, long as a riding-ground on every side of the square, for oxen and sheep.

34 There he made waters flow in a bed a hâthra long; there he settled birds, on the green that never fades, with food that never fails. There he established dwelling-places, consisting of a house with a balcony, a courtyard, and a gallery.

35 There he brought the seeds of men and women, of the greatest, best, and finest on this earth; there he brought the seeds of every kind of cattle, of the greatest, best, and finest on this earth.

36 There he brought the seeds of every kind of tree, of the highest of size and sweetest of odour on this earth; there he brought the seeds of every kind of fruit, the best of savour and sweetest of odour. All those seeds he brought, two of every kind, to be kept inexhaustible there, so long as those men shall stay in the Vara.

37 And there were no humpbacked, none bulged forward there; no impotent, no lunatic; no one malicious, no liar; no one spiteful, none jealous; no one with decayed tooth, no leprous to be pent up, nor any of the brands wherewith Angra Mainyu stamps the bodies of mortals.

38 In the largest part of the place he made nine streets, six in the middle part, three in the smallest. To the streets of the largest part he brought a thousand seeds of men and women; to the streets of the middle part, six hundred; to the streets of the smallest part, three hundred. That Vara he sealed up with the golden ring, and he made a door, and a window self-shining within.

39 O Maker of the material world, thou Holy One! What are the lights that give light in the Vara which Yima made?

40 Ahura Mazda answered: 'There are uncreated lights and created lights. The one thing missed there is the sight of the stars, the moon, and the sun, and a year seems only as a day.

41 'Every fortieth year, to every couple two are born, a male and a female. And thus it is for every sort of cattle. And the men in the Vara which Yima made live the happiest life.'

42 O Maker of the material world, thou Holy One! Who is he who brought the Religion of Mazda into the Vara which Yima made?
Ahura Mazda answered: 'It was the bird Karshipta, O holy Zarathustra!'

43 O Maker of the material world, thou Holy One! Who are the Lord and the Master there?
Ahura Mazda answered: 'Urvatad-nara, O Zarathustra! and thyself, Zarathustra.'

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