

Preface

There is no full and comprehensive modern study of Avestan syntax. The description in C. de Harlez's *Manuel de la langue de l'Avesta* (2nd ed., Paris 1882), 112–35, was no more than a rough sketch, and the examples given are almost all from Younger Avestan. Spiegel (1882) and Reichelt (1909) gave more useful accounts, but they again did not distinguish systematically between Old and Younger Avestan, and so far as the *Gāthās* are concerned they were hampered by the fact that comprehension of the texts was more limited in their time than it is now—not that all the obscurities have now been overcome, of course, but morphological analysis has made great advances and much is better understood. A. V. Williams Jackson announced in the preface to his *Avesta Grammar* (1891) that ‘the second volume (Part II), a sketch of the Syntax, with a chapter also on Metre, is already half in print, and is shortly to appear’, but it never did. Berthold Delbrück cited Avestan sporadically in the three volumes of his great *Vergleichende Syntax der indogermanischen Sprachen* (1893–1900), but he was not able to draw on any ample collections of material as he could for Vedic, and he felt that the basic work was still to be done. Christian Bartholomae did not include a chapter on syntax in his account of Avestan and Old Persian in the *Grundriß der Iranischen Philologie* I. 1 (Strassburg 1895–1901), 152–248. The slight work by Maria Wilkins Smith, *Studies in the Syntax of the Gathas of Zarathushtra* (1929), disappoints expectations aroused by its title. In the past fifty years much important work has been done on Avestan phonology and morphology, but comparatively little on syntax. R. S. P. Beekes has nothing to say of it in his *Grammar of Gatha-Avestan* (1988). Jean Kellens and Éric Pirart offer extensive compilations of material on certain particular topics in the second volume of *Les textes vieil-avestiques*, but its value is limited by their idiosyncratic interpretations of many passages. The syntax chapter in the *Introducción al Avestico* by Javier Martínez and Michiel de Vaan (Madrid 2000) is too brief to be useful to any but beginners. Recently P. O. Skjærvø (2009) has published a 150-page survey of the Old Iranian languages (Old and Young Avestan, Old Persian) of which a little over half is devoted to syntax and stylistics: it is good as far as it goes, but only one or two Old Avestan examples are given under each heading.

Old Avestan lends itself to a separate study. The text corpus is clearly delimited, and it is small enough to allow comprehensive treatment, yet large enough to provide adequate documentation of most phenomena. The fact that it comes from a single region and a narrow timespan (probably not more than a single generation), with perhaps only three authors represented, favours sharpness of focus. The fact that it contains only composition of a stylized cha-

racter is a limitation; on the other hand, there is both verse and prose, giving us two different varieties of stylization.

The present monograph is a by-product of my recent translation of the Old Avestan texts (*The Hymns of Zoroaster*, London 2010). It aims at a thorough and systematic treatment of syntax, word order, and stylistic features in these texts. It is a strictly synchronic account, taking no notice of Younger Avestan. I am well aware that most of what I describe is paralleled in and could be amply illustrated from Vedic, but I abstain almost entirely from making the comparisons. I am not concerned to reconstruct proto-Indo-Iranian or proto-Indo-European syntax, though I expect my work will be of some interest to those who are.

All references to texts are to the *Yasna*; those from the *Yasna Haptaṅhāiti* are distinguished by the abbreviation *YH*. I provide translations of all passages quoted except in a very few places where it is unnecessary for my purpose. The translations are based on my own understanding of the texts: some will disagree with them in some cases, but I expect not to the extent of discrediting the principles being proposed and illustrated. For convenience of reference I have attached as an appendix an edition of the texts, punctuated and where necessary emended as I see fit, with a critical apparatus.

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