

Cyrus & Zarathushtra.

Many people have wondered whether Cyrus was follower of Zarathushtra.

There is no direct, conclusive, evidence that he was.¹ But I think there is strong circumstantial evidence. I would like to give you a few highlights of his life, and show you how they parallel and echo the Gathas, and other ancient Zoroastrian texts, prayers and a ceremony. Taken individually, each piece of evidence might be deemed coincidental. But taken together, I find the weight of the evidence persuasive. Judge for yourself.

You may wonder: Why is this important? What difference does it make? Well, I think Cyrus's life has some valuable things to tell us for our own times ~ things which Zarathushtra taught, which we have come to doubt.

Cyrus did not live in the same time period as Zarathushtra.² The ruler Vishtaspa, who befriended Zarathushtra, was not the Vishtaspa who was the father of Darius the Great. How do we know?

Because an Avestan text tells us that Zarathushtra's king Vishtaspa, was the son of **Aurvat-aspā**, of the Naotara family.³ Whereas the Behistan Inscription of Darius tells us that his father Vishtaspa was the son of **Arshama**, of the Achaemenian family.⁴

But Zarathushtra and Cyrus did share a common tribal and linguistic ancestry ~ which scholars call Indo-Iranian.

Today, except for the Cyrus Cylinder and a few inscriptions, we do not have any accounts of Cyrus that were written when he was alive ~ neither from Persian, Babylonian nor Greek sources. Even the earliest, were written centuries after Cyrus, and give us conflicting accounts of his life, his battles, and even his death.

But these sources generally agree that he created an empire,⁵ of approximately 22 diverse nations,⁶ stretching from certain Greek states in the west (by the Mediterranean Sea), to the borders of northwest India in the east; and from the Caucasus Mountains, the Black Sea, the Caspian Sea, and the Aral Sea in the north, to parts of Arabia in the south, and that he administered his colossal empire, skillfully, and beneficially, for about 30 years, from roughly 559 to 529 BCE.

To figure out what Cyrus's beliefs may, or may not, have been, we have to explore available evidence with an open, inquiring mind ~ including a healthy skepticism. But cynicism is not the same as critical thinking. And stating opinions and speculation, as though they are facts, does not serve the truth. Both these drawbacks are abundant in today's scholarly literature.

It has been argued that the Achaemenians kings were not followers of Zarathushtra because Zarathushtra's name is not mentioned by Cyrus or any of his successors.⁷ But there is at least one piece of direct Greek evidence which does so.

A Greek text, *Alcibiades I*, was authored by Plato (or possibly one of his students). Plato lived during the reigns of the Achaemenian kings Darius II and Artaxerxes II. In this text the education of an Achaemenian prince, is described in part as follows.

"... he is handed over to the royal schoolmasters, ... The first instructs him **in the magianism of Zoroaster, the son of Oromasus** [OP *auramazdah-*], ...

... the second who is **the justest** teaches him **always to speak the truth;**

the third or most temperate, forbids him to allow any pleasure to be lord over him, that he may be ... a freeman and king indeed ~ **lord of himself first**,... " Plato, *Alcibiades I*, B. Jowett translation.⁸

True, Plato massacres the name *auramazdah-*, and inaccurately identifies Zarathushtra as His son. But that just reflects the Grecian mind-set in which many Greek heroes were said to be the offspring of various Greek deities. In fact, Xenophon claimed that Cyrus himself was descended from the Greek deity Zeus.⁹

Now you may object, that just because Persian princes 5 generations after Cyrus were taught Zarathushtra's teachings does not prove that Cyrus was taught these teachings. But most of the writings about Cyrus were written around this same period, and one of them, a couple of generations earlier ~ writings which record the high value placed on **truth**, in Cyrus's life as well.¹⁰ And Plato's words "**lord of himself first**" as a quality taught to the princes is very close to the way in which Zarathushtra uses the word 'lord' (*ahura-*) in the Gathas. I have footnoted some quotations.¹¹

In Zarathushtra's teachings, *asha-* has been translated as 'truth'. More accurately, it is '**the true (correct) order of existence ~ an order of existence which is wholly good (*asha- vahishta-*)**, which includes both factual truths (such as not telling lies), as well as the truths of mind/heart/spirit ~ all that is good, beneficial, right, just. With that understanding, let us use the short hand '**truth**' for *asha-*.

Truth (*asha-*) is a core teaching of Zarathushtra. It is the Divine way of being. Truth is equated with a beneficial way of being (*spenta- mainyu-*). And for mortals, truth is the path to the Divine.¹²

Even Younger Avestan texts remind us,

'(There is) one path, that of **truth**, all others (are) non-paths.'

aevo pantau yo ashahe vispe anyaesham apantam.

Yy72.11; *Visperad* 24.3; my translation.

The qualities mentioned by Plato that are taught to an Achaemenian prince ~ **truth**, being **temperate** ~ are also defining qualities of Zoroastrianism in a later Pahlavi text (I have footnoted some quotations).¹³ So these qualities were central to Zoroastrianism both before and after the Achaemenians.

Cyrus Cylinder.

It has been argued that the Cyrus Cylinder is proof that Cyrus could not have followed Zarathushtra's teachings because it states that he worshipped the Babylonian deity Marduk. But that is not accurate. Translations differ. Irving Finkel, Curator of the Cuneiform Collections at the British Museum,¹⁴ in his entire translation of the Cyrus Cylinder, does not once state that Cyrus worshipped Marduk. It is a question of opinion regarding how the applicable words are translated. Here are just 2 examples comparing the Finkel and Michalowski,¹⁵ translations.

Curator Finkel: "... Marduk, the great lord, ... I every day sought him out **in awe**. ..."

Michalowski: "... Marduk, the great lord, ... I was daily endeavouring **to worship** him. ..."

Curator Finkel: [Referring to Marduk] "... Cyrus, the king **who fears you**, ...".

Michalowski: "... Cyrus, the king **who worships you**, ... "

Cyrus Cylinder, britishmuseum.org.

It was a feature of early Achaemenian rule, to hold the deities of subject nations in respect, and to support such deities.

In his Behistan Inscription, Darius the Great wanted (in part) to impress on the peoples of many nations that he had divine approval and authority to rule Cyrus's Empire. The Old Persian version of the Behistan Inscription mentions only the name *auramazdah* as the deity responsible for Darius's victories and kingship. But the Babylonian version of that same Behistan Inscription credits the deity Bel (Marduk) ~ not *auramazdah* ~ as being responsible for Darius's victories and kingship.¹⁶

This Babylonian version was written for a Babylonian audience. So Darius had to use the name of their own deity, to effectively communicate his intent ~ that he had Divine approval to rule their nation, Babylon. And that is precisely what Cyrus did in the Babylonian Cyrus Cylinder.¹⁷

In the same way, Xenophon, who wrote about Cyrus for a Greek audience, never once mentions *auramazdah*. He has Cyrus using the names of Greek deities such as Zeus, Hera, Hestia, etc.¹⁸

But proving that Cyrus was not a worshipper of other deities does not necessarily prove that he followed Zarathushtra's teachings. So let us look at some evidence ~ qualities and activities of Cyrus which echo Zarathushtra's teachings.

Establishing peace. In the Gathas, Zarathushtra repeatedly condemns predatory violence and cruelty. He describes good rule as the rule of truth, its good comprehension, its beneficial embodiment in thought, word and action. A rule that creates peace. For example, he says,

"Lord, grant ... strength and the rule of truth and good thinking, by means of which one shall create **peace** and tranquility. ..." Gathas, Yasna 29, verse 10, Insler 1975 translation.

"... let a man create tranquility for the peacefully dwelling settlements ..." Gathas, Yasna 53, verse 8, Insler 1975 translation.

Now, it may seem laughable, to think that Cyrus valued peace, when he conquered,¹⁹ 22 nations.

But we need to understand his thinking based on the realities of his time period, in which nations were essentially tribes ~ small and large, settled, nomadic, and mixed ~ who thought nothing of raiding or invading neighboring tribes for food, loot, or territory ~ looting domestic animals, weakening their enemies by destroying people's homes, property, and unharvested crops (which caused famine). Even in Younger Avestan texts, we see evidence of repeated, intermittent warfare.²⁰ In those times, a prosperous, happy society could exist, only under a rule that was strong enough to enforce the peace in a just, beneficial way.

I think that is what Cyrus envisioned ~ becoming a ruler who was strong enough to put an end to all the fighting and looting, back and forth, and establish a universal, beneficial, peace in as wide a region as he could ~ a universal peace in which trade, commerce, farming, the arts, could thrive, generating economic prosperity for himself and his subjects.²¹

Ambler summarizes Xenophon's views²² as follows,

"The general picture is of Cyrus bringing order into a world that is badly out of kilter. ..." Ambler 2001, Introduction, pp. 4 - 5.

This idea is corroborated in what happened in certain Greek cities, and also in the way Cyrus turned enemies into friends, examples of which I have footnoted.²³

And it is also corroborated in the way he tried to avoid bloodshed, exemplified in his conquest of Babylon. The priests of Babylon's chief deity Marduk were angry with the Babylonian king who had replaced Marduk, with other deities. Cyrus used their anger to his advantage, so that after an initial battle in the outskirts, his troops were able to enter Babylon peacefully, with the goodwill of Marduk's priests.

In the Cyrus Cylinder, he states,

"... My vast troops marched peaceably in Babylon, and the whole of [Sumer] and Akkad had nothing to fear. ... and I have enabled all the lands to live in peace."

Translation by Irving Finkel, at britishmuseum.org. The word in square brackets is the translators effort to fill in an illegible or damaged part of the text.

Some scholars have blown off these statements in the Cyrus Cylinder as 'just politics'. Of course they were politics. An effective ruler has to consider political realities. But anyone who has read Machiavelli, or has studied history, knows, that effective politics can be based on cruelty, deceit, terror, despair, enslavement. Whereas Cyrus's politics were based on winning the loyalty of his

subjects by using his great military power to establish peace, and **protect** them from intermittent predatory warfare.

It is interesting that the territories of Cyrus's empire were called satrapies by Herodotus, the Old Persian word for which (*xshachapaavan*) meant "**protector** of the realm".²⁴

In a Gatha verse, Zarathushtra uses rhetorical questions to describe the qualities of Divine good rule (which man must implement), the very first of which is protection instead of injury, as well as truth and its components.

"Where shall there be **protection** instead of injury? ...

Where **truth** which attains glory ? ...

Where, [*mazda*- 'Wisdom'], through Thy **rule**?" Gathas, Yasna 51, verse 4, Insler 1975 translation.

As Stronach 1978 said,

"... For the first time on such a wide scale, great power was used to **protect**, not degrade, the human condition." p. 292.

Centuries before the Pax Romana, Cyrus created and maintained a (more or less) universal peace, throughout a multi-nation empire for roughly 30 years.

Let us next consider,

The **freedom to choose** ~ an essential element of Zarathushtra's thought, without which the perfecting of existence, cannot be brought about.²⁵

True, Cyrus did not give his subjects the freedom to choose another ruler. Nevertheless, there are three aspects of his rule which reflect this teaching. They are **freedom from slavery**, **religious freedom**, and **cultural freedom**. Let's first consider,

Freedom from slavery. In the Gathas, "**bondage**" is an evil.

An allegorical lament is made to the Divine,

"... **the cruelty** of fury and violence, **of bondage** and might, holds me in captivity..."

Gathas, Yasna 29, verse 1, Insler 1975 translation.

Cyrus did not enslave conquered peoples.

The Bible records that he freed the Jews who were enslaved in Babylon, allowing them to return to their homeland. And the Cyrus Cylinder enumerates many other peoples who had been enslaved in Babylon, whom Cyrus also freed and resettled in their own countries.²⁶

It has been argued that Cyrus's purpose in releasing these slaves was not humanitarian, it was to weaken powerful opponents ~ the owners of such slaves. But if that had been Cyrus's intent, he could have weakened his opponents even more effectively, by taking over their slaves as his own property. This he did not do.

Religious freedom. It is true that Zarathushtra condemns the predatory and cruel practices of the religions of his culture. But in the Gathas, the 'enemy' is not another named religion, deity, or tribe. The 'enemy' is always a wrongful, harmful, way of thinking, speaking and acting.²⁷

There is a later Zoroastrian code of instruction for the priesthood, which states that a man who converts to the Religion of Goodness (the Zoroastrian religion) should not force his wife to convert. He should not stop supporting her, or strike her, or divorce her because she refuses to convert.²⁸ Her religious freedom was respected.

In one of the Khordeh Avesta prayers, the Divine is called the '**Tolerant-One**', and the purpose of religion is 'for information and guidance' ~ not compulsion.

It says,

"Homage to the all knowing **tolerator** ['**Tolerant-One**'], who sent through Zarathushtra ... teachings of religion for the people of the world so that they may have **friendship**, ... For the information and guidance of all men who are, who were, and who will be hereafter ..."
The *Doa Nam Setayeshne*, Sethna translation.²⁹

Cyrus not only tolerated the different religions of his subjects,³⁰ he **befriended** them. He returned to the Jews their gold and silver temple vessels, and decreed that the cost of rebuilding their temple would be borne by the royal treasury.

The Cyrus Cylinder states that he did the same for the deities of many other tribes, which were borne back to their proper abodes; and Cyrus replaced their ruined or desecrated temples with permanent sanctuaries.³¹

His religious (and racial) ecumenism is exemplified in his Pasargadae palace, which contains the remains of carvings having religious significance for Assyria, Nineveh and Babylon.³²

Which brings us to,

Cultural freedom and justice. Cyrus established an administrative system in which each region he conquered was free to live in accordance with its own culture. The regions were ruled by governors ~ men whom he trusted (often Persians, or Medes). But under his governor, each region was run by local administrators who understood, and were a part of, its culture; while the armed forces that Cyrus stationed in each region to ensure the peace, reported directly to Cyrus. So, in effect, he governed each province with a system of checks and balances that respected cultural differences and minimized the chances of unjust rule. This brings us to the overall defining quality of Cyrus's reign:

*Generosity, and a beneficial rule.*³³ There are many accounts of Cyrus's generosity, and that he ruled in a way that benefited his subjects.³⁴

Xenophon summarized it as follows,

"And who, besides Cyrus, ever gained an empire by conquest and even to his death was called 'father' by the people he had subdued? For that name obviously belongs to a benefactor rather than to a despoiler." Xenophon, *Cyropaedia* Book VIII, chapter 2, § 9, Miller translation 1914, pp. 335, 337.³⁵

In fact, Xenophon traces this quality ~ a beneficial rule ~ to the laws of the Persians.

He says,

"He [Cyrus] was, moreover, educated in the laws of the Persians. These laws do not seem to begin where they begin in most cities, but by **caring for the common good**." Xenophon, *The Education of Cyrus*, Book I, chapter 2, § 2, Ambler translation 2001, p. 23.

Generosity, beneficence, is a central feature of Zarathushtra's thought, and specifically, of 'good rule' (*vohu xshathra-*) ~ a Divine quality that man should emulate.³⁶

For example, he speaks of,

"... the **beneficent man**, ... He serves **truth**, during his **rule**, with **good word and good action** ..." *Gathas, Yasna 31, verse 22*, Insler translation, 1975.

And the Avestan *Zamyad Yasht* shows (with repeated examples) that the kingly glory ~ the divine authority to rule ~ stays only with a king who is truthful, beneficial.³⁷

Let us now consider a less known parallel between an activity of Cyrus and Zoroastrian beliefs. It may, or may not, be coincidental. Decide for yourself.

Planting and irrigation. Cyrus planted extensive gardens, in and around his palace Pasargadae, which were watered by 1,100 meters of man-made water courses ~ some constructed to irrigate the garden while others were decorative, indicating that water was valued for itself.³⁸

And he likely started the process of building the dams and irrigation systems which increased productive lands for orchards and farming ~ an activity expanded by later Achaemenian kings.

Henkelman says,

"A series of dams in the area north of Pasargadae; rock-cut canals between Pasargadae and Persepolis; and sluices and extensive canals in the Persepolis plain all attest to a massive investment of energy and organizational power to bring the Achaemenid heartland under cultivation." Henkelman 2013, p. 528.³⁹

You may question: How in the world are gardens, land cultivation and irrigation related to Zoroastrian beliefs? Oddly enough they are. Let me show you, step by step. It is part of the requirement that Zoroastrians care for the environment.

In the Gathas, the nature of the Divine is expressed in 7 qualities (later called the amesha spenta).⁴⁰ In later texts, these Divine qualities were thought of as personified beings.

Now, each of these 7 divine qualities is linked with various aspects of the material existence,⁴¹ three of which are relevant here.

~ beneficial embodied truth,⁴² (*spenta- aramaiti-*), is linked with the material symbol **earth**;

~ completeness (*haurvatat-*) is linked with the material symbol **water**; and

~ non-deathness (*ameretat-*), is linked with the material symbol **plants**.

These 7 divine qualities are also the path to the Divine. And the *Ashirwad* part of the Zoroastrian wedding ceremony, demonstrates that this path includes not only the qualities represented by the amesha spenta, but also caring for their material symbols;⁴³ an idea that is also reflected in a Pahlavi Fragment text.

The priest says,

"... Here is some advice fundamental to our religion. Hear it and in your own lives practice it so that it may be the source of happiness to Ahura Mazda and of good fortune (to you). ... "
Ashirwad, Shahin Bekhradnia translation

"... The law and custom of Holy **Sevandarmad** [Avestan *spenta- aramaiti-* 'beneficial embodied truth' ~ linked with **earth**] ... Be kind and friendly towards each other ... and like the **earth**, be productive and bountiful. Keep the **earth** clean and well watered ..." *Ashirwad*, Shahin Bekhradnia translation

"... The law and custom of Holy **Khordod** [Avestan *haurvatat-* 'completeness' ~ linked with **water**] ... Out of barrenness create fertility and produce happiness. Since **water** is the source of fertility and prosperity, keep **water** clean ... Dig **canals** and turn dry land into productive land. ..." *Ashirwad*, Shahin Bekhradnia translation

"... The law and custom of Holy **Amordod** [Avestan *ameretat-* 'non-deathness' ~ linked with **plants**] ... create cultivated land. Plant **trees** and **plants**. Do not cut down young **trees**. ... Give **herbs** and medicines to the needy ...". *Ashirwad*, Shahin Bekhradnia translation.

True, we do not know if this Pazand⁴⁴ Zoroastrian wedding ceremony is the Pazand version of an earlier wedding ceremony which existed during Achaemenian times.⁴⁵ We do know that when the Pazand/Pahlavi texts were written, Zoroastrians had very little memory of Achaemenian kings, and what little they had was in some respects historically inaccurate.⁴⁶ We also know that certain Pazand/Pahlavi texts do indeed reflect the more ancient teachings of the Gathas and other Avestan texts which predated Achaemenian times. So I do not think it probable that the advice given in this ceremony was patterned after Achaemenian land cultivation practices. It seems more likely that it expressed ancient Zoroastrian teachings, which themselves were reflected on a larger scale in Achaemenian practices, especially since so many other tenets of the religion are reflected in Cyrus's rule, and in the rule of some other Achaemenian kings.

Which brings us to the last piece of evidence. Cyrus's tomb is a modest structure, built of massive stone blocks, located on the grounds of his palace Pasargadae.⁴⁷ There is only one pictorial carving on this tomb.⁴⁸ It is the full face of a flower ~ resembling a multi-petalled lotus (a water plant),⁴⁹ ~ located on the highest part of the tomb, facing the front.⁵⁰

So we have to wonder: Why did the king of a 22 nation empire select one flower for the only carving on his tomb? It must have had some significance in his mind ~ a significance that would have been recognized at least by his family and tribe.

We do not know for certain what Cyrus had in mind. It is possible that he just loved flowers. But in Zoroastrian texts, plants are the material symbol of a non~mortal existence (*Av. ameretat-* 'non~deathness').⁵¹ I speculate that Cyrus chose this flower carving for the top of his tomb, as a symbol of non~deathness ~ that death is not the end, that (as Zarathushtra taught) man can strive to attain completely, the qualities of the Divine, which include not only good rule, but also an existence that is not bound by mortality (*ameretat-* 'non~deathness').⁵²

Which brings us to our conclusion. What can Cyrus teach us that has value today?

In our cynical world, we have come to believe that 'good' is not powerful; that what is amoral, expedient, self-serving, without regard to how many people get hurt, is more effective in creating power, wealth and economic prosperity. Zarathushtra teaches the exact opposite. He teaches that (in the long run) happiness is achieved only when we are in sync with truth (*asha-*); and that good rule ~ a rule that understands truth, a rule that is in sync with truth ~ brings prosperity.

"...happiness has been lost to the deceitful who violate truth [*asha-*]..." Gathas, Yasna 53, verse 6;

"... truth [*asha-*] which prospers the creatures,..." Gathas, Yasna 33, verse 11;

"...the rule of good thinking, through the actions of which the creatures allied with truth [*asha-*] do prosper..." Gathas, Yasna 43, verse 6;

Insler translation 1975.

Now of course, being prosperous depends on many factors, such as having the necessary skills to bring about a desired end.

But Cyrus's life is proof that this teaching works! He exemplified this teaching in the arena of military and political governance ~ creating a strong, beneficial, truthful (*ashavan*) rule throughout a vast empire, which brought happiness and prosperity to himself, and to his subjects.

Similarly, the life of the late J. N. Tata (a Zoroastrian in India) is proof that this teaching works in our own times, in the arena of business and industry. He too was strong ~ overcoming many hurdles. And his business philosophy included doing what was right, beneficial, ~ for his employees, his suppliers, his customers, and the communities in which his businesses operated ~ creating a financial empire, that brought wealth to him, prosperity to others, and advanced [the common good](#).

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¹ According to Kent 1950 pp. 107, 116, only one inscription (a tri-lingual inscription called CMb by scholars) in Cyrus's palace, Pasargadae, mentions *auramazdah* ~ not in the Old Persian part (which is fragmentary) but in one of the other languages. Stronach 1978 mentions that based on the Akkadian version of CMb "it is evident that Darius placed an inscription on something." (pp. 97 - 100). Unfortunately neither Kent nor Stronach gives a translation of the non-Persian part of this inscription which contains the name *auramazdah*.

For many years, scholars generally believed that all Old Persian inscriptions in Pasargadae were placed there later by Darius the Great (who was one generation younger than Cyrus), because scholars held the opinion ~ expressed as fact ~ that the Old Persian script was invented by Darius for the purpose of recording his victories in Old Persian part of the Behistan Inscription.

But a few years ago, a clay tablet was discovered in Persepolis on which a routine commercial transaction was recorded in the Old Persian cuneiform script, the contents of which have been only partially decoded, but which demonstrates that Darius could not have invented the script to record the Old Persian part of the Behistan Inscription Stolper & Tavernier, 2007 pp. 11 - 16. Nevertheless, other arguments have been made by scholars, casting doubt on the authorship of the CMb inscription. So it cannot be stated with certainty that Cyrus authored the CMb inscription which names *auramazdah*. In the Gathas, the names for the Divine which Zarathushtra uses (in descending order of frequency) are *mazda*- 'Wisdom'; then *ahura*- 'Lord'; then *mazda- ahura*-; and least frequently *ahura- mazda*-. However, by the time of the Younger Avestan texts, the name had become standardized as *Ahura Mazda*; and by the time of the Achaemenian inscriptions, the Avestan *ahura- mazda*- had evolved to a one word name *auramazdah*-; detailed on my website <https://gathasofzarathushtra>, in *Part Three: Evolution of the Name(s) Ahura, Mazda*.

References in these footnotes to chapters in Parts One, Two, Three, Four, etc. are all to my website <https://gathasofzarathushtra.com>, (the address of which I will not keep repeating in these footnotes).

² The archeological, textual and linguistic evidence pertinent to Zarathushtra's date is laid out on my website in Part Four entitled *Zarathushtra's Date & Place*.

³ The *Aban Yasht* (Darmesteter translation) SBE Vol. 23, pp. 77 ~ 78; Humbach 1991 says that in Pahlavi texts also, the Vishtaspa who befriended Zarathushtra was identified as a member of the Naotara family. Vol. 1, p. 12, § 3.2.1.

⁴ Old Persian and Avestan share a common ancestral language. However, Avestan is approximately 500 years older than Old Persian (according to verbal advice from Professor Emeritus Elizabeth Tucker of Oxford University). The Younger Avestan texts are full of the names of Indo-Iranian and Iranian rulers and heroes, but they do not mention the name of any Achaemenian kings, which corroborates Professor Tucker's statement that the Avestan texts are centuries older. In my opinion, Avestan may have been understood in Achaemenian times, but it was no longer a language in everyday use. Returning to the meanings of the two names, Arshama and Aurvat-aspa (each of whom had a son named Vishtaspa), these names, and their meanings are completely different.

Arshama is Old Persian. Kent 1950, in his Lexicon, says it means 'having the might of a hero', and derives from *arsha*- 'male hero, bull' + *ama*- 'offensive power', ('offensive' as in the opposite of 'defensive', not 'offensive' as in 'disgusting').

Aurvat-aspa is Avestan. Skjaervo 2003 in his on-line *Young Avestan Glossary* says that *aurvat-aspa* means 'having fleet horses'. (Although *aspa*- literally means 'mare').

There are no capital letters in either Avestan or Old Persian.

⁵ For the last 2 centuries, modern scholars have called the empire Cyrus created, the Achaemenian Empire, because Darius, in his Behistan Inscription, states that he shared a common ancestor ~ Achaemenes ~ with Cyrus. The Old Persian form of the name is *haxaamanish* which means 'having a friendly mind'. Kent 1950, says (in his lexicon) that the name derives from OP *haxaa* 'friend' + *manish* 'mind' p. 212. Today some scholars are of the opinion (which they state as fact) that Darius lied, and that there was no common ancestor. I disagree, for reasons that (to me) are inescapable, but are beyond the scope of this lecture.

⁶ Cyrus left no (surviving) inscriptions itemizing all the nations in his empire. But I agree with Mallowan 1985 (CHI p. 397) that we can surmise the extent of Cyrus's empire based on the Behistan Inscription of Darius I (the Great), which itemizes the nations which he secured under his rule, numbering 23 nations in all ~ 22 if we exclude **Egypt** which Cyrus's son Cambyses had conquered, after Cyrus's death, but before Darius's Behistan Inscription).

The Behistan Inscription was made within the first two years of Darius's reign. In addition to putting down 19 rebellions in the first year, Darius does not mention conquering new regions. So if we exclude **Egypt**, Cyrus's empire would have consisted of the 22 other nations (or tribal regions) itemized in the Behistan Inscription which itemizes them as follows (words in square brackets and green font have been added by me as explanations),

"...Persia, Elam, Babylonia, Assyria, Arabia, **Egypt**, (those) who are beside the sea, Sardis, Ionia, Media, Armenia, Cappadocia, Parthia, Drangiana, Aria, Chorasmia, Bactria, Soghdiana [**the land of the Sakas**], Gandara, Scythia [**excluding the Massagatae Scythians who lived to the east of the Aral Sea**], Sattagydia, Arachosia, and Maka [**in the Arabian peninsula**]: in all XXIII [23] provinces." Behistan Inscription, Column 1, lines 12 ~ 17, Kent 1950 translation, p. 119.

⁷ The argument that Zarathushtra's name does not appear in any Achaemenian inscription, and that therefore Cyrus and the Achaemenian kings could not have been Zoroastrians, overlooks the fact that until modern times, the practitioners of the religion never called themselves by Zarathushtra's name. The earliest name of the religion was *mazdayasna*- ('Wisdom-worship'), and later, it also was called 'the religion of goodness' (*din-i behi*). Ancient Greeks sometimes called the religion 'magianism'. It was only about 200 or so years ago, that European scholars discovered the religion and called it 'Zoroastrianism' from the Latin version of its founder's name ~ Zoroaster, which derived from the Greek Zoroastres, Vasunia 2007 p. 52.

⁸ B. Jowett translation (original in 1804) *The Works of Plato, Plato's Dialogues, Alcibiades I*, p. 309.

⁹ Miller 1914, *Xenophon, Cyropaedia II*, Appendix p. 457.

¹⁰ Xenophon, *Cyropaedia*, Book I, ch. 6, § 33. See also the excellent article by Andrew G. Nichols 2016, (although, with respect, I occasionally disagree with him).

Xenophon in his *Cyropaedia*, details how the education of Cyrus and other Persian princes placed a high emphasis on justice. In the Gathas, justice is a quality that is implicit in the true (correct, good) order of existence (*asha*) 'truth' for short.

In the *Ashirwad* part of the Zoroastrian wedding ceremony, the priest gives advice to the brides and grooms getting married, one of which is that they should be just ~ even to enemies. "... Deal with your enemies according to justice. ..." from the *Ashirwad*, translation by Shahin Bekhradnia.

¹¹ Plato's statement that an Achaemenian prince is taught to be 'lord of himself first', is close to another idea we see in the Gathas, which today, under the influence of other religions paradigms regarding the nature of the Divine, we have largely forgotten, although Zarathushtra says so more than once. It is how Zarathushtra uses [lord \(ahura-\)](#), as being [lord of one's self first](#). It is a component of Wisdom's good rule ~ a rule whereby the Divine is [Lord \(ahura\)](#) of the qualities that make a being divine, ~ a beneficial way of being, which is the truth (correct) order of existence, its comprehension, its embodiment in thought, word and action, its rule ~ qualities that are also the path to the Divine, which man should choose, with each thought, word and action. Here are 3 examples of how Zarathushtra uses [Lord \(ahura\)](#) ~ one of the names of the Divine in the Gathas.

"... the very [Wise Master \[ahura- 'lord'\] of good thinking ...](#)" Gathas, Yasna 30, verse 1, Insler 1975. The word which Insler has translated as [Master](#) is [ahura-](#) 'lord'.

"... Thou art the [Lord \[ahura-\] by reason of Thy tongue \(which is\) in harmony with truth, and by reason of Thy words stemming from good thinking ...](#)" Gathas, Yasna 51, verse 3; Insler 1975;

"... [Lord \[ahura-\] of the word and deed stemming from \[vohu- mainyu- '\(a\) good way of being'\] ...](#)" Gathas, Yasna 45, verse 8, Insler 1975.

This notion of ruling oneself in a good way, evolved, over the centuries into the notion of [moderation](#) ~ one of the defining qualities of Zoroastrian beliefs in ancient texts (quoted in a ft. below). Plato calls it being [temperate](#), a form of self control ~ which is implicit in the meaning of [moderation](#). More examples of how Zarathushtra uses [ahura-](#) 'lord' are found in the following chapter on my website in *Part One: The Nature Of The Divine*.

¹² Detailed in the following chapters on my website:

In *Part One: Truth, Asha;* and *The Nature Of The Divine*, and

In *Part Two: A Question Of Reward & The Path*.

Parenthetically, Eudoxus, who was a disciple of Plato, is reported to have said that Zarathushtra's thought was the "noblest and most useful" of the schools of philosophy, (Humbach, 1991, Vol. 1, p. 24), which indicates that in Plato's time period, the Greeks were aware of at least some of Zarathushtra's spiritual philosophy.

¹³ In addition to truth/justice, Plato's *Alcibiades I* mentions teaching Achaemenian princes to be [temperate](#). One of the meanings of being [temperate](#) is [moderation](#) in all things. And Xenophon in his *Cyropaedia*, specifically states (with regard to the education of Cyrus and Persian boys) "They also teach the boys [moderation](#)." (Book 1, Ch. 2, Wayne Ambler translation 2001, p. 25).

Although the Avestan equivalents for '[temperate](#)' and '[moderation](#)' may or may not be mentioned specifically in the Gathas, the concept is implicit in the notion of good rule (which in the Gathas, means, first ruling one's self, (quotations have been detailed in a footnote above), and in the Gathas, good rule is the rule of the true (correct, wholly good) order of existence ([asha-](#)) ~ 'truth' for short.

And [moderation](#) has consistently (throughout its long history) been a standard teaching in Zoroastrianism ~ even when I was a child in India.

[Truth](#) and [moderation](#) are mentioned more than once in the Pahlavi text Dinkard 6, said to be a collection of the words of Zoroastrian sages. This Pahlavi text ~ dated to about the 9th (?) century CE, was written more than 1,000 years after the Achaemenians (and a couple of centuries after the Arab invasion of Iran). Zoroastrians at that time had very little memory of the Achaemenians as the Pahlavi texts themselves demonstrate (detailed in a Table in Part Four of my website in the chapter *Zarathushtra's Date & Place*). Their recollection of the full framework of Gatha teachings was far from perfect (they no longer understood the grammar and vocabulary of the Avestan language). But

they had a very clear memory that [truth](#) and [moderation](#) were key features of Zarathushtra's teachings. Here are a few examples. This translation of Dinkard 6 is by Shaul Shaked 1979, in his book *Wisdom of the Sasanian Sages*, (Westview Press, Boulder Colorado). In these examples, Shaked translates the concept of 'moderation' (or being [temperate](#)) as "[measure](#)". And in the first quotation I understand 'Discernment' to be 'good thinking' ~ which in the Gathas is the comprehension of truth. The word 'They' refers to un-named Zoroastrian sages.

§ 99 "They held this too: Be very diligent with regard to these three things; [Truth](#), the [Measure](#), and [Discernment](#). Turn away strongly from these three things: [lie](#), lack of discernment, and [lack of measure](#)." p. 39;

§ 245 " They held this too: [Excess](#) and tyranny are the adversary of rulers. ..." p. 97;

§ D1c "That man has a happy place who has recited these five *gathas*, and ... who has five things: character, wisdom, peace, [measure](#), and law. That is [measure](#): A man who does not commit [excess or deficiency](#) ..." p. 177;

§ E18 "It has been said: Eating with [measure](#) is best for the body. Speaking with [measure](#) is best for the soul." p. 193.

¹⁴ Given verbatim at the British Museum website.

¹⁵ Translation by Piotr Michalowski, published in *Historical Sources in Translation: The Ancient Near East*, pp. 428 - 429; ed. Mark Chavalas (Blackwell, 2006); and also posted on the British Museum website.

¹⁶ Henkelman, 2011, *Cyrus the Persian & Darius the Elamite: A Case of Mistaken Identity*, p. 578, at academia.edu.

¹⁷ This must have been a common way of referring to deities based on the audience ~ Babylonian names for a Babylonian audience, Greek names for a Greek audience ~ because in a Sasanian rock relief carved (around 224 CE) at the much earlier Achaemenian site of royal burials, Naqsh-e Rostam, we have a trilingual inscription in Pahlavi, Parthian and Greek. The Pahlavi and Parthian inscriptions identify a human form on horseback, giving the ring of authority to rule, to Ardashir I (the first Sasanian king), in the following words:

"The image (is) this of Hormizd, the god." Schmidt translation, 1970, *Persepolis III*, p. 123
(Schmidt does not give a transliteration).

The Greek version of this same trilingual inscription reads,

"This is the image of the god Zeus." Schmidt translation, 1970, *Persepolis III*, p. 123.

The Sasanians had long forgotten Zarathushtra's thought in which there are no physical images of the Divine as even Herodotus states, and Thieme and Moulton confirm, (detailed in a ft. in my website in *Part One: The Nature of the Divine*).

¹⁸ Xenophon also mentions 'Mithras' once as an exclamation "By Mithras, ..." in connection with recounting a string of military victories (Book 7, ch. 5, § 53). In Avestan *mithra-* means 'contract'. In Younger Avestan texts Mithra was a martial deity, and may have been known as such to a military genius like Xenophon who lived at the time of Artaxerxes II ~ the first Achaemenian king whose inscriptions mention not just *auramazdah-* but the deities *mithra-* and *anahita-*. One inscription of Artaxerxes II mentions *mithra-* alone, without *auramazdah-*. "May Mithras protect me"; Kent 1950 p. 155. In the Younger Avestan texts, the worship of the Lord, Wisdom, was syncretized with the religions of other Indo-Iranian deities, (such as Haoma, Mithra, etc.). But I think that during YAv. times and also later, during Achaemenian times, the priests of the pre-Zarathushtrian, Indo-Iranian deities, competed

with each other for followers, but that Ahura Mazda was so popular that they all used His name as the prime deity. I hope to lay out the facts (and opinions) which underly these conclusions in a chapter in *Part Four* of my website, entitled *The Syncretization* which I have not yet completed and uploaded.

¹⁹ It is not possible to know today, to what extent Cyrus was the aggressor in some of these battles. For example, according according to Herodotus, it was the Lydian king Croesus who initiated battle against Cyrus possibly to enlarge his own realm (Brosius 2000 p. 13). Cyrus defeated Lydian king but (according to some sources) treated him well.

According to some sources, Cyrus invaded Media which was ruled by his grandfather, Astyges (Mallowan pp. 404 - 405). But according to the Babylonian chronical dated some centuries after Cyrus at probably the 3d to 2d century BCE (britishmuseum.org), it was king Astyges of Media who initiated a war against Cyrus which resulted in Cyrus acquiring Media (Brosius 2000, p. 8). This is indirectly corroborated, because Strabo (approx. 64 BCE ~ 21 CE) a Greek historian and geographer, reports (roughly 500 years after Cyrus) that Cyrus built his palace, Pasargadae, on the field on which he defeated his first opponent Astyges, the king of Media. (Stronach 1978, pp. 280 - 281). But there is no dispute that Pasargadae was built on a field that was a part of the Parsa lands (not Median lands), indicating that the Median king invaded the territory of the Parsa, where he was defeated (at Pasargadae). But (as many sources agree) Cyrus treated his grandfather, the defeated Median king, well.

The Babylonina version (in which Cyrus was not the aggressor) is consistent with Cyrus's character. As a youngster growing up, Cyrus had spent some time in his grandfather's Median Court. He was friends with many of the children of the Median nobility, knew their parents, and was probably related to many of them through his mother (Xenophon, Book I, Chapter 3 et seq., Ambler 2001 translation, p. 28 et seq.). Astyges had a reputation for being unjust and cruel. If Greek historians are to be believed, he (supposedly) killed the son of one of his nobles, and then invited the father to dinner, at which he served the dead boy's cooked flesh to his father as the main course. Whether this was just malicious gossip, or true, we have no way of knowing. But based on the characters of Astyges and Cyrus, I am inclined to think that Astyges feared Cyrus's rising star, and decided that a pre-emptive strike might get rid of any threat the popular Cyrus posed to Astyges's rule, and therefore (as the Babylonian Chronicle says) it was Astyges who invaded Cyrus's kingdom. The Median nobles and generals may have thought this reprehensible and, preferring Cyrus (whom they knew well, and who was related to many of them) to the tyrannical Astyges, went over to Cyrus's side. But we have no way of knowing for certain, whether Astyges invaded Cyrus's kingdom, or whether Cyrus invaded Astyges's kingdom.

²⁰ In the Aban Yasht Yt. SBE 23, pp. 58 ~ 71 (Darmesteter translation), various named heroes and tribal rulers ask the goddess Anahita for help in winning battles, and defeating specified enemies. For example,

"To her did Haoshyangha, the Paradhata, offer up a sacrifice ... saying: 'Grant me this, ... that I may become the sovereign lord of all countries ...!' Yt. 5.21 ~ 22 (p. 58). An identical request is made by:

"Yima Khshaeta, the good shepherd" (Yt. 5.25 - 26, p. 29);

"the great, most wise Kavi [king] Usa" (Yt. 5.45 - 46, p. 65;

"the gallant Husravah, he who united the Aryan nations into one kingdom" (Yt. 5.49 ~ 50, pp. 65 - 66);

"To her did the valiant warrior Tusa offer worship ... saying: 'Grant me ... that I may overcome the gallant sons of Vaesaka, ... that I may smite the Turanian people in their fifties, their hundreds, ... and their thousands ... and their tens of thousands ... and their myriads of myriads.'" Yt. 5.53 - 54 pp. 66 - 77);

"To her did Ashavazdah, ... and Thrita ... offer up a sacrifice ... saying: Grant us this, ... that we may overcome the assemblers of the Turanian Danus, Kara Asabana, and Vara Asabana, and the most mighty Duraekaeta, in the battles of this world." Yt. 5.72 - 73, pp. 70 - 71).

In the Farvardin Yasht, the fravashis [celebrated here as the spirits of those of "high renown" who have departed this life] are invoked for assistance in winning battles. Here are some examples of how they are described,

"... smiting in battle, most strong, shield-bearing and harmless to those who are true, whom both the pursuing and the fleeing invoke for help..." Yt. 13.35 p. 188)

"... who form many battalions, girded with weapons, lifting up spears, ... who in fearful battles come rushing along where the gallant heroes go and assail the Danus ... There you destroy the victorious strength of the Turanian Danus ... " Yt. 13.37 p. 189

"... who rout the two wings of an army standing in battle array, who make the centre swerve, and swiftly pursue onwards to help ... destroy the doers of evil deeds." Yt. 13.38, p. 189.

²¹ Xenophon recounts that Cyrus instructed his troops as follows,

"If we conquer, we must guard against turning to plunder, which has overturned the fortune of many who have conquered." Ambler 2001 translation p. 121.

On the other hand, the *Babylonian Chronicle* says that when Astyges (King of Media) "mustered his army and marched against Cyrus ... for conquest," Astyges's army mutinied and handed Astyges over to Cyrus who thereupon marched to the royal Median city of Ecbatana. "Silver, gold, goods, property, [... illegible ...] which he carried off as booty (from) Ecbatana, he took to Anshan. ..." (Column II, Brosius 2000 p. 8). It does not seem credible to me that if the Median army came over to Cyrus, he would loot Ecbatana, one of the principle cities of Media ~ especially when he returned to the Jews in Babylon their gold and silver temple vessels to take back with them to Jerusalem. So in describing the 'booty' the author of the *Babylonian Chronicle* may simply have inserted details which were the norm in the Babylonian culture.

The *Babylonian Chronicle* also states, that Cyrus did battle by the Tigris river "against the army of Akkad. The people of Akkad retreated. He carried off the plunder (and) slaughtered the people. ..." and a few days later entered Babylon "without a battle". (Column III, Brosius 2000 p. 8). Unknown whether here, the "people of Akkad" who retreated and were slaughtered were the armed forces that engaged Cyrus in battle, or unarmed civilians. Again, there is no other account (of which I am aware) that Cyrus slaughtered civilians, and to do so would have been out of character with his other actions reported in multiple sources.

²² Many scholars regard Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* as a work of fiction (while believing Herodotus who was never in any part of Parsa/Fars and did not have access to the Achaemenian court). They express the opinion, (stated as fact) that Xenophon used Cyrus to project Xenophon's own views on being an ideal king.

At times, Xenophon may indeed have used Cyrus as a vehicle for expressing some of his own ideas (and the facts he recounts are indeed sometimes inaccurate ~ as are some of Herodotus's facts). But as Mallowan has pointed out, Xenophon's picture of Cyrus could not have been painted had there not been in existence a credible memory of such a Cyrus; (CHI Vol. 2 1985, p. 417).

In light of the fact that Xenophon (and other Greek writers) called the Persians "barbarians", I think Cyrus's success in creating, and successfully ruling, a 22 nation empire, intrigued Xenophon, and (being a thinking man) he wanted

to understand how Cyrus accomplished it. I find more credible Xenophon's own reason for writing the *Cyropaedia*. Describing Cyrus's vast and diverse empire, he says,

"(5) He ruled these nations even though they did not speak the same language as either he himself, or one another. Nevertheless, he was able to extend fear of himself to so much of the world that he intimidated all, and no one attempted anything against him; and he was able to implant in all so great a desire of gratifying him that they always thought it proper to be governed by his judgment. He attached himself to so many nations that it would be a task even to pass through them no matter which direction one should begin to go from his royal palace, whether towards the east, west, north or south.

(6) So on the grounds that this man was worthy of wonder, we examined who he was by birth, what his nature was, and with what education he was brought up, such that he so excelled in ruling human beings. Whatever we have learned, therefore, and think we have perceived about him, we shall try to relate." Book I, chapter 1, §§ 5 - 6. Ambler 2001 translation, pp. 22 - 23.

In evaluating Xenophon's access to information about Cyrus, we should remember that Xenophon was a highly placed mercenary of Cyrus the Younger (an Achaemenian prince, and son of Darius II), and I think it likely that Cyrus the Younger would have known many stories and sayings of Cyrus the Great, which were told and re-told in his family and among the Parsa tribes down through the generations, which Xenophon was able to hear. Cyrus the Younger was roughly 6 generations younger than Cyrus the Great.

In a society in which literacy was not universal (such as the Parsa tribes), information ~ especially about a famous person ~ was transmitted in the form of stories and songs from generation to generation. These may have been embroidered, while still being true in essentials. Just as a fisherman who caught a Goliath Grouper might brag that his fish weighed 400 pounds, when it weighed much less. But the underlying story of catching a big fish would still be true.

In a related way, in an age before personal computers and iPhones, my mother-in-law told me stories of her grandparents and great-grandparents, who came over from Ireland, and even earlier ancestors, as well as stories of her own courageous mother-in-law and her husband's ancestors. These stories spanned 5 + generations (including me). And I told some of them to my then 7 year old grand-daughter (who is 2 generations below me ~ making the time lapse 7 generations (including me) ~ which, (if she ever remembers them) she may tell to her future kids (making it 8 generations).

²³ Mallowan in the *Cambridge History of Iran*, corroborates this idea (that Cyrus envisioned creating a mutually beneficial peace which included diverse lands and peoples) with the example of certain Greek cities. He states,

"It was entirely owing to the imaginative insight of Cyrus that ... Iran was for the first time brought into a close political relationship with the rich trading cities of the East Greek world and in touch with her merchants and bankers, many of whom were ready to accept Persian suzerainty rather than the cut-throat and spiteful competition of rival Greek cities, and for that reason, Miletus, with its powerful fleet, ... welcomed Persian intervention and did nothing to support Greek resistance." Mallowan 1985, p. 418.

Xenophon tells a story which illustrates how Cyrus turned enemies into friends. He states that a large force of Assyrians decided to attack Media, whose king (according to Xenophon) was then Cyaxares [possibly Cyrus's uncle ~ his mother's brother] and at the Median king's request, Cyrus came to his defense, but the combined Median and Persian forces were no match for the size of the Assyrian forces. Cyrus learned that the king of Armenia owed tribute in money and soldiers to Media. Cyrus not only defeated the Armenian king, but turned him into a friend and supporter (in part by not enslaving his family and peoples), and in the process, Cyrus persuaded the Armenians and

their bitter enemies the Chaldeans, to arrive at a mutually beneficial peace, whereby the Chaldeans rented certain unused lands from the Armenians (which the Chaldeans could farm), and the Armenians rented a certain mountainous area from the Chaldeans to pasture Armenian goats, which increased the prosperity of both the Armenians and the Chaldeans ~ to the satisfaction of both those tribes and their rulers ~ so that both became friends and supporters of Cyrus ~ and in turn provided money and soldiers for his campaign to defend Media from the Assyrians. Xenophon, Book II, chapter 4 et seq. Book III, chapters 1 ~ 2. Ambler translation, 2001, pp. 80 et seq., and pp. 85 ~ 100.

²⁴ Brosius 2000, p. 73, her comment below § 127.

²⁵ Detailed on my website in *Part One: The Freedom To Choose*; and *Part Two: Asha & The Checkmate Solution*.

²⁶ Cyrus Cylinder, translated by Irving Finkel, Curator of the Cuneiform Collections of the British Museum, from the British Museum website.

²⁷ For example, referring to those who save or benefit society, Zarathushtra says,

"Yes, those men shall be the saviors [*saoshyant*] of the lands, namely, those who shall follow their knowledge of Thy teaching with actions in harmony with good thinking and truth, Wise One [*mazda* 'Wisdom']. These indeed have been fated to be the expellers of fury." Gathas, Yasna 48, verse 12 Insler translation 1975.

What is expelled here is not another religion. It is fury, wrath, rage ~ a wrongful way of thinking.

²⁸ S. J. Bulsara 1915 *Aerpatastan and Nirangistan*, p. 40. This text states that if a man converts to the religion of goodness, and his wife refuses to do so, the man should not stop supporting her, nor strike her, nor forsake her treacherously, nor should she pass from the condition of being his wife (i.e. he should not divorce her). Now it is true that this text also states that such man should not sleep with his non-Zoroastrian wife, and at first I thought (indignantly!) that this was indeed a subtle form of coercion. But (on cooler reflection) that may not have been the intent. The priests may have had another reason for so advising, because in the average (non-royal) family, it was the mother who was responsible for raising the child and in the process would have imparted to the child her own religion (well do I recall my mother teaching me to memorize the Ashem Vohu and the Yatha Ahu Vairyo). And the priests may not have wanted the children of a convert (to Zoroastrianism) to be taught another religion. But this text also has some reprehensible things which are not consistent with Zarathushtra's teachings ~ a common occurrence in the history of all religions ~ indicating the fallibility of human nature.

²⁹ Sethna 1980 reprint, *Khordeh Avesta*, p. 63. Dastur Kanga, in his *Khordeh Avesta* (1995 English reprint) p. 51 first asterisk ft., explains that this prayer is in Pazand, and that the original Pahlavi version of it is found in the *Dinkard*, a Pahlavi (Middle Persian) text. This prayer was recorded in Pazand after the Arab invasion of Iran. But the Khordeh Avestan prayers may have been around during Sasanian times. Unknown whether the Pahlavi (Middle Persian) form of the Khordeh Avestan prayers were originally in Old Persian (the language of Achaemenian times).

Now it is true that in later times, certain Zoroastrian kings and priests did not allow their subjects religious freedom. But these actions were contrary to Zarathushtra's teachings.

³⁰ Mallowan, *Cambridge History of Iran*, Vol. 2, pp. 412 et seq.

³¹ Stronach 1978 pp. 292 ~ 293, from the Cyrus Cylinder.

In fact, Cyrus even treated the defeated Babylonian king's own imported deities with respect, sending them back to their original places. In the Cyrus Cylinder, Cyrus recounting all the deities whom he allowed to return and whose shrines he rebuilt, Cyrus states,

"... From [Shuanna] I sent back to their places to the city of Ashur and Susa, Akkad, the land of Eshnunna, the city of Zamban, the city of Meturnu, Der, as far as the border of the land of Qutu ~ the sanctuaries across the river Tigris ~ whose shrines had earlier become dilapidated, the gods who lived therein, and made permanent sanctuaries for them.

... and the gods of the land of Sumer and Akkad which Nabonidus ... had brought into Shuanna, ... I returned them unharmed to their cells, in the sanctuaries that make them happy." Irving Finkel translation britishmuseum.org.

It has been argued that Cyrus's support for these religions was simply a clever political calculation made to win the loyalty of the people he conquered thereby securing his throne. Cyrus's actions doubtless secured their loyalty to him. But this could not have been a major motivating factor, because the many small tribes mentioned in the Cyrus Cylinder, (and the Jews, as mentioned in the Bible) were not at that time powerful components of Cyrus's empire.

³² Mallowan, 1985, pp. 393 et seq.

It has been argued that Cyrus could not have been a Zoroastrian because, while he had symbols of many other religions carved in various places in his palace, Pasargadae, there are no Zoroastrian symbols there. This argument overlooks the fact in early Zoroastrianism, there were no images of the Divine. Moreover, there are two structures in Pasargadae which scholars think were fire stands. Excluding Cyrus's tomb, there is one other carving in Pasargadae which I think has Zarathushtrian roots (representing an artist's conception of the kingly glory ~ the Divine authority to rule ~ but to establish that would require many links of evidence which are beyond the scope of this paper.

³³ I am often amazed at the parallels between Cyrus's rule, and the United States. For example, (in addition to Herodotus's well known description of Cyrus's messengers, which was adopted by the US Postal Service when it was founded), President Eisenhower (previously one of the leading generals in World War II and in an age before intercontinental ballistic missiles), was concerned that the US was so large a country, that if it should be attacked with military force, it would take a long time to move armed forces and military supplies from one part of the country to another (e.g. from California to Massachusetts). So he came up with the idea of building a national system of (federally created and funded) highways, to facilitate the rapid movement of armed personnel and supplies ~ a system of highways that actually had the effect of enabling non-military activities ~ trade and travel throughout the US ~ which increased economic prosperity (without it, the automobile industry would never have grown to its present proportions). Well, more than 2,000 years earlier, Cyrus did the same thing, with (somewhat) the same results. He established a system of roads to enable his messengers and troops to travel quickly and efficiently to and from different parts of the empire. But this system of roads was not restricted to royal use. It was open for commerce and trade between various parts of his empire, which increased the trade and economic prosperity of all the nations under his rule (just no auto industry).

³⁴ Xenophon, writing 5 generations after Cyrus the Great states "... even now Cyrus is still described in word and song by the barbarians [i.e. the Persians] as having been most beautiful in form and most benevolent in soul .." Book I, chapter 2, § 1, Ambler translation p. 23. Xenophon also states,

"... And an argument of his [Cyrus's] is remembered that says the functions of a good shepherd and a good king are similar, ... So it is not to be wondered at, if in fact he was of this judgment, that he competed to be superior to all human beings in **service**." Book VIII, chapter 2, § 14, Ambler 2001 translation, p. 243.

This calls to mind a Gatha verse about Jamaspa's understanding of good rule (Jamaspa was the prime minister of King Vishtaspa),

"Glorious Jamaspa Haugva (has displayed) this understanding of His power: 'One chooses that rule of good thinking allied with truth in order to serve ...' Gathas, Yasna 51, verse 18, Insler translation 1975.

The many qualities and activities of Cyus's rule (as reported by Xenophon) which parallel and echo the Gathas and other Zoroastrian texts, corroborate the idea that Xenophon's work on Cyrus was not a work of fiction, but rather was an attempt to discover the factors that enabled Cyrus to be so successful.

³⁵ Miller's translation has the Greek on one page and the English translation on the next page, so his English pages skip a page number.

Herodotus also states that Cyrus was regarded as a "father" ~ but to the Persians (Mallowan 1985, p. 399), whereas Xenophon states that he was called 'father' by "the people he subdued".

Stronach 1978 says,

"By the time of his death in 530 B.C. Cyrus the Great had changed the face of the civilized world. ... his judicious treatment of the many separate peoples under his rule almost certainly brought into being a new, more benevolent concept of human government." p. 285; ["new" for the history of those times, but not 'new' to followers of Zarathushtra's teachings ~ witness the Zoroastrianized story of the legendary Indo-Iranian king Yima, discussed below].

³⁶ Zarathushtra's perception of good rule, is discussed in detail on my website in *Part One: Good Rule, Vohu Xshathra & Power*.

³⁷ The *Vendidad (Videvdāt)* is a later text written in grammatically faulty Avestan (Zaehner 1961, p. 162), indicating that it was written after the priests were not longer fluent in Avestan. It is a horrible text (in fact, it contains so many contradictions, that I think it represents a collection of different texts). In one of its few good parts, it tells the Zoroastrianized story of a legendary Indo-Iranian king, ~ in Avestan Yima son of Vivanghvant; in Indic texts Yama son of Vivasvat Mills SBE Vol. 31, p. 232, ft. 2. Yima/Yama is Jamshid in the Shahnameh. Why do I say this story is 'Zoroastrianized'? Because the Indic texts about Yama make no mention of Ahura Mazda or this Zoroastrian story, in which the Lord Wisdom asks Yima to rule His worlds, in words that echo the idea of good rule expressed in the Gathas.

"... make thou my worlds thrive, make my worlds increase: undertake thou to nourish, to rule, and to watch over my world." *Vendidad*, Ch. 2, § 4, Darmesteter translation, SBE Vol. 4, p. 12.

These words describe well the way Cyrus ruled. And as a member of the Indo-Iranian Parsa tribes, Cyrus would doubtless have been aware of the legend of Yima.

³⁸ Stronach 1978 (pp. 107 ~ 112) describes, and has drawings of, Cyrus's gardens in Pasargadae. They were laid out in large rectangular blocks of spacious, well watered grounds, with 2 little pavilions. Among the stone water-courses were beautiful stone basins, "usually hewn out of one stone over 1 m square." [Unknown to me whether Cyrus had these stone basins filled with lotus plants]. Other conduits or channels were made of brick and pottery. The water channels describe a more or less symmetrical pattern which (Stronach thought) must have determined the former position of the paths, the trees, and planted areas within the garden. Stronach notes that the water conduits of

Pasargadae were discovered by 3 successive archeological excavations ~ first by Ali Sami in 1950, then by Stronach in 1963, and then by the Iranian Archeological Service in 1971. p. 107, ft. 1.

³⁹ And not just the Achaemenian heartland, but "even outlying regions were brought under cultivation by the Achaemenians and were still blooming in the later fourth century" CE, as recorded by Arrian, a Greek historian, philosopher and military commander who served the Roman Emperor Hadrian. The quotation is from Henkelman 2013 p. 529.

⁴⁰ The 7 qualities of the Divine (the first 5 of which mortals have incompletely and in the Gathas are capable of attaining all 7 completely) are Zarathushtra's path to the Divine. They are:

1. A beneficial way of being (*spenta- mainyu-*), which comprises
2. The true (correct) order of existence ~ a wholly good order of existence (*asha- vahishta-*),
3. Its good comprehension (*vohu- manah-*),
4. Its beneficial embodiment in thought, word and action (*spenta- aramaiti-*),
5. Its good rule (*vohu- xshathra-*),
6. Its complete attainment (*haurvatat-*), resulting in
7. Non-deathness (*ameretat-*) a state of being not bound by mortality.

These English definitions are founded on linguistics, and also fit each use of these words in the Gathas. But there is much disagreement. The Avestan language has not yet been decoded completely, and eminent linguists (even those who are Indo-Iranian philologists) are in substantial disagreement about the meanings of many of these 7 divine qualities.

Each of these qualities ~ their meanings, the opinions of linguists, and how these are used in the Gathas (context) ~ are detailed in chapters 1.3 through 1.9 in *Part One* of my website.

But if you would like a less detailed, more simple, explanation, you will find it in the CZC ZOOM Seminar "Liberating Zarathushtra's Relevance", Session 2 "Who is 'God'? " at <https://www.czc.org/philosophy>

⁴¹ In the Gathas some of these links between divine qualities and material symbols are expressed, others are both expressed and implied, and some are only implied, and the linking is kaleidoscopic. In the later texts, each of these links is expressed, but in a rigid ~ one to one ~ way. To show you how these links work, in the Gathas truth and good thinking are (expressly) linked with the material symbols 'light/fire'. This is easy to understand. Truth and its comprehension, enlighten. So Wisdom (*mazda-*), who personifies the comprehension of truth, is an enlightened (or light-filled) state of being. In fact, in the Pahlavi *Bundahishn* one name of the Divine is 'Endless Light'. Now, fire is the only form of light that man can make. And in more than one later text, the paradise that man can attain is called Endless Lights (*anaghra raocha*). Think about that for a minute (or 2 ... or 3 ...).

These links between divine qualities and their material symbols are detailed in the following chapters in my website. In *Part One: The Fire In All Things*; In *Part Two: Light, Glory, Fire*; and *The Puzzle of the Cow & Its Network*; and *Earth, Water, Plants*; and *Molten, Glowing Metal*; and *A Question of Immanence*.

⁴² The Avestan word *aramaiti-* has not yet been decoded with any degree of certainty, and linguists are in wide disagreement regarding its meaning. It has variously been translated as right-mindedness, divine wisdom, satisfying intention, piety or respect, faith and devotion, fittingness, submission and humility, and serenity, stability and tranquility. As Thieme (Insler's teacher) has pointed out, many of these translations have no relevance to the Divine. Yet, *aramaiti-* is clearly a quality of the Divine (in the Gathas) and one of the amesha spenta (in later texts). The only

definition of *aramaiti*- which fits all of the ways in which it is used in the Gathas, is '[truth embodied in thought, word and action](#)' or '[embodied truth](#)' for short, detailed on my website in *Part One: Embodied Truth, Aramaiti*.

⁴³ The priestly advice given in the *Ashirwad* part of the Zoroastrian Wedding Ceremony, is very, very, long, repetitious (and very preachy). It also mixes and repeats certain good qualities and activities under more than one of the 7 qualities of the Divine (later called amesha spenta). Here, I have selected only those parts that are relevant to Achaemenian land cultivation and irrigation.

⁴⁴ Pazand is essentially Pahlavi (Middle Persian) written more or less in Avestan script (with the addition of some ideograms etc.) .

⁴⁵ There is some evidence from Greek sources (which I have not studied), that certain Achaemenian rulers after Cyrus, demanded earth and water to indicate submission from certain Greek states which the Achaemenian rulers wished to incorporate into their empire. There has been much debate regarding what the symbolism of this demand for earth and water signified. Did this symbolism originate with Assyrian rulers? Did it have significance for the Greeks? The Persians? What did this symbolism signify when earth and water were used by a Sasanian king in making a demand for submission from Armenia? These questions have engaged the minds of many academicians for some time (Rung 2015).

There is no dispute that this symbolism was used in connection with asserting secular rule. I therefore do not think it reflected Zoroastrian religious beliefs. All countries, kingdoms, city states, comprise earth and water (usually rivers, lakes; and some lands are bordered by seas). The Greek states (to whom certain Achaemenian kings sent this demand for earth and water) lived on the Mediterranean Sea. I am inclined to think (tentatively) that this symbolism ~ demanding earth and water ~ from a country a king wished to incorporate into his empire, was intended simply as a symbol of the entire realm (whose submission the king desired) ~ land, rivers, seas, (earth and water).

⁴⁶ Detailed on my website in *Part Four* is a chapter entitled *Zarathushtra's Date & Place*, which has a table comparing historical facts regarding Achaemenian kings, with the knowledge of the existence and names of Achaemenian kings shown in Pahlavi texts, which demonstrates how little knowledge the Pahlavi texts had, of the Achaemenian kings. All surviving Pahlavi texts are believed to have been written after the Arab invasion of Iran, although some texts contain clear expressions of Zarathushtra's teachings (while many others do not!).

⁴⁷ Stronach 1978, p. 24, references Strabo, who states that when Alexander came upon Cyrus's tomb, it was located in a "paradise" ~ a garden or park. Brosius 2000, conjectures "an Old Persian word **pairi- daeza-*, which means 'walled space';" and tells us that "the word was translated into Greek as *paradeisos* and is first used by Xenophon." p. 69.

Kent 1950 in his lexicon shows an Old Persian prefix *pariy-* meaning 'around, about', showing that it derives from Avestan *pairi* (p. 195). In Avestan, one of the meanings of *pairi* is 'encircle'.

And Reichelt 1911 shows that the YAv. compound word *pairi.daeza* means 'enclosure(s)'.

I think perhaps that the Achaemenians' intended meaning for the Old Persian equivalent of Av. *pairi.daeza-* may have been an enclosure of trees, flowers and plants ~ what today we could call a gardens, or park. I respectfully disagree with Brosius that it means 'a walled space'. So far as I am aware, there is no archeological evidence that any of the Achaemenian gardens were walled enclosures. Although I could be mistaken.

⁴⁸ Stronach 1978 shows many masons' marks (which are pictorial ~ not in letters or script) on some of the stone blocks of Cyrus's tomb (Plates 17 and 18) but these are not carvings. The only one carving on the tomb is the full faced flower at its highest point.

⁴⁹ We cannot be certain what type of flower it is that appears at the top of Cyrus's tomb. The carving has greatly deteriorated. The flower drawing (in Stronach's book which shows the original lines and the artist's reconstructed lines), resembles the multi-petalled lotus flower which grows in Iran to this day (although it equally could be some other type of flower). A lotus is a water plant. So the lotus would combine the material symbols of the last 2 Divine qualities

~ [completeness](#) (the complete attainment of the true (wholly good) order of existence) linked with [water](#) and
~ [non-deathness](#) (a state of being not bound by mortality) linked with [plants](#).

⁵⁰ In Stronach's wonderful 1978 book on Pasargadae there is a lovely drawing on p. 36, which reconstructs this much damaged carving. When I first looked at this drawing, it seemed like a flower, but then it seemed like a stylized fire burst, but then again like a flower. Did Cyrus commission the artist to create an enigmatical flower/fire carving? I haven't the foggiest idea. We *can* state with certainty that he did at least intend a flower ~ a material symbol of non-deathness ~ and possibly a lotus (a water plant). If the flower is a lotus, and if the artist intended a lotus/fire carving (a lot of 'ifs' !) then we have multiple dimensions of symbolism in this one carving ~ dimensions representing truth/fire (an enlightened state of being), the potential for its complete attainment (*haurvatat*~ water) and the resulting non-mortal state of being (*ameretat*~ plants) ~ qualities of the Divine which man is capable of attaining. It is not without interest that Zarathushtra's Gathas are full of multi-dimensioned verses.

Stronach 1978 also has a drawing of a green stone lid that has been recovered from the ruins of Pasargadae (from the Tall-i Takht), which has a similar (but far from identical) somewhat rigid flower on it ~ but with no enigmatical qualities, Figure 98, pp. 226 - 227. Stronach dates this green stone lid to the late Achaemenian (or post Achaemenian) period "not later than 280 B.C.", pp. 226 - 227. Whether it was an attempt at copying the flower on Cyrus's tomb, or a popular pre-existing design, we do not know.

⁵¹ The notion of non-deathness in Zarathushtra's thought is not the same as the English 'immortality' (although *ameretat* is usually so translated by eminent linguists) because 'immortality' is inherent. It does not have to be earned. No matter how 'evil' a person may be, his soul is deemed 'immortal' (by those who believe in an afterlife). Whereas in the Gathas, non-deathness is earned. It is also given by the Divine to us, and we give it to the Divine ~ (think about that for a moment!). The evidence underlying these conclusions is detailed on my website in *Part One: Completeness & Non-Deathness, Haurvatat, Ameretat*; and in *Part Three: Chinvat, The Bridge of Discerning*.

⁵² Detailed on my website in *Part One: Truth, Asha; The Nature Of The Divine; Completeness & Non-Deathness, Haurvatat- Ameretat;* and *Joy, Happiness, & Prosperity*; and in *Part Two: A Question of Reward & The Path*.

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