

## Preface

Toward the end of my late studies, as a result of the war, in Munich (1946-1951), under the supervision of young Karl Hoffmann (1915-1996) I came into contact with the Gāthās of Zarathushtra (“Zarathustra/Zoroaster”), the core of the Old Iranian *Avesta*. Initially, Hoffmann based his grammatical analysis and interpretation of their content quite naturally on the scholarly tradition codified in Christian Bartholomae’s *Altiranisches Wörterbuch* (1904) that still continues to have an influence today. However, he began to doubt their reliability more and more, and by 1950 it became clear to him that this tradition required a complete revision. A major role in this was played by the futility of his attempts to apply the results of his research on the morphology and syntax of the Vedic Sanskrit verb to Bartholomae’s translations of the texts of the oldest record of the Old Iranian sister language. Hoffmann shied away, it is true, from the necessary revision of the academic tradition, but he did take a benevolent attitude to my decision to devote myself to this task. In this connection, apart from discovering innumerable linguistic and philological problems, I became increasingly interested in an appropriate appreciation of the Gāthās, not just as a document of religious, but also as one of intellectual and social history, an appreciation which presupposes the attempt to ascertain its formal characteristics as a work of an in part very traditional poetry.

With Part A of the present study, it is first intended to make the well-known difficult access to the Gāthās, as the earliest testimony of the Mazdayasnian Religion, easier, however, the main focus lies on what has previously been taken little into account. We take a look at the antagonists, spiritual and material, including also the rivals, of the prophet in his social environment, who were striving, just as he was, for the favor of Ahura Mazdā, and our special interest concerns the later development of Mazdaism in its eastern areas. In Part B we present the text in stanzas, together with revisions of the English translation in *The Gāthās of Zarathushtra* (1991) and of the German one in *Die Gathas des Zarathustra* (1959). Part C has been deliberately kept very concise.

In the long period of the development of this study, I at first just asked my colleague Klaus Faiss for help with the formal arrangement, but in the long term he was unable to resist the interest in the subject matter of the research and, in spite of his numerous other tasks, he made himself deeply familiar with the problems involved. His competent and selfless support ultimately also gave me the strength, despite my advanced age, to contribute my share to the conclusion of the work.

It is one of Hoffmann’s numerous merits to have introduced a transliteration system of the Avesta alphabet that allows to correctly and unambiguously reproduce the details of the often varying spellings of the manuscripts. It would have been useful to replace several of his characters by more easily available ones, but we preferred to keep to the

typeface that has become customary in the past decades – with one exception: We have decided to render Avestan *ii* as <iy> or <y>, *uu* as <uv> or <v>, which seems to be more understandable also to the non-initiated than the pure transliteration. In the English translation pluralic *you* is expressed by <yōu>.

Spring 2010

Helmut Humbach

Our sincere thanks go to Dr. Susanne Ziegler, who, with tireless commitment, took care of the computer processing of the text versions that are characterized by numerous, but necessary changes. We thank the Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag, Wiesbaden, for the publication of this book.

Spring 2010

Helmut Humbach  
Klaus Faiss

