

Theology and Worship in Elam and Achaemenid Iran

HEIDEMARIE KOCH

ELAM

It is very difficult to say anything certain about Elamite religion. Elamite literature is not available and the Elamite language still poses many problems and uncertainties. We do not know anything about Elamite mythology. Our main sources of information are the building inscriptions of the kings and consecration texts. They can indicate which of the gods was important for certain kings and for their policy. Hints concerning the beliefs of the people can be given by all the personal names which are preserved (personal names often contain names of gods). But legal and administrative documents, which also contain many names, are preserved only sporadically. However, although there are many difficulties, it is still possible to gain an impression of the Elamite pantheon if one takes into consideration every occurrence of the gods' names and looks at all the scattered material as a whole.

The Elamites had close contacts with the inhabitants of Mesopotamia over hundreds of years, and for long periods they were ruled by the Akkadians. Elamite kings brought statues of gods back from Mesopotamia as booty. Akkadian and Babylonian princesses came to the Elamite

court as a result of diplomatic marriages. These are the reasons that several Sumerian and Akkadian gods were also worshiped by the Elamites.

Elamite Gods

The earliest attestations of Elamite gods go back to the middle of the third millennium BCE as components of the names of kings. Under the rule of King Lukh-khisshan of Awan, a contemporary of Sargon of Akkad (around 2334–2279), was mentioned a vice-king of Elam, Sanam-Simut. Thus, Simut is the first Elamite god to appear in history. It is striking that he in particular was called in later times “the god of Elam” (by King Shilkhak-Inshushinak I [around 1150–1120]). In another context he was addressed as “the powerful herald of the gods.” Simut was mentioned continuously over the centuries, especially in names of the old Elamite period (up to about the fifteenth century), but he never had an eminent status. His wife was the goddess Manzāt. Her name has been taken as a loanword into Akkadian meaning “rainbow.” Like her husband's, her name occurred in several old Elamite personal names, some of them female. After 1050 she was no longer mentioned as such but rather as NIN-ali (or Bēlēt-āli, “Lady of the city”). One of her

Religion and Science

possible functions was to protect pregnant women, because the votive offerings found in her temple in Dur-Untash (modern Chogha Zambil) show women holding up their breasts. In that case her main opponent would have been the terrifying Lamashtu, who was responsible for puerperal fever and infant mortality. In an incantation text from Uruk, Lamashtu is called "an Elamite." In Elam she functioned as guardian of the temple.

Successor to King Lukh-khishan was Khishep-ratep (about 2330), whose name means "the renowned nourishers." Originally, this must have been part of a much longer name, in which Khishep-ratep took the place of a god-name in similarly constructed personal names. Usually the personal names were constructed as such: "God X loves me" or "God X may protect me/him." When these sentences, used as personal names, became too long, they were shortened—and only the name of the god remained. The plural "p" ending points to a group of gods. And indeed there is known a group of gods for whom king Untash-Napirisha (around 1275–1240) more than a thousand years later built a temple in his holy city, Dur-Untash. They are called Nap-ratep, or "Nourishing Gods."

At the end of the twenty-third century, Eshba (or Eshbum), governor of Susa (biblical Shushan), consecrated a statue of his Akkadian overlord, Manishtushu (around 2269–2255), to the goddess Narunde. She is to be found only in old Elamite times. In Akkadian sources she is called "the sister of the seven demons." There existed two groups of demons, the evil and the good. The good demons were also named the "Seven Wise Men." Their sister was Narunde, who appears in incantation texts as resolved to fight against the evil demons. In most cases she seems to have been triumphant, for she became the goddess of victory. Her accompanying animal is the lion. A list of gods from Mesopotamia, called "An-Anum," mentions a group of "Seven Gods of Elam." Perhaps these are the seven good demons, brothers of Narunde. In Akkadian texts from Old Babylonian times onward, we also find a group of seven (?) "Great Gods of the Sky" called Igigi. This is a hypocoristicon (shortened name or one of endearment) to the Elamite word *igi*, "brother." Igigi also occurs as short name and as component of a theophoric name (com-

posed with name of a god) (*i-gi-gi-tu-ni-iš*, or "Given from [the God(s)] Igigi"). It is tempting to see in all of these terms the same group of gods and their origin is Elamite.

In sum, Simut, "the God of Elam," and the goddess of victory, Narunde, and two groups of gods, the "Renowned Nourishers" (Khishep-ratep) and the "Seven Wise Men" (Igigi), are the first Elamite gods who are traceable in history.

A treaty between the Elamite king Khita and Naram-Sin of Akkad (around 2254–2218) is the earliest document preserved in the Elamite language. At its beginning, thirty-seven gods are called to witness, in first place the goddess Pinengir and the "Divine Good of the Sky" (*ba-ha-ki-ki-ip*). Are these the "Great Gods of the Sky," the "Seven Gods of Elam," the "Seven Wise Men," the brothers of Narunde? It seems likely. Perhaps they can be traced also during the following centuries, when, for instance, King Khumban-numena (around 1300–1275) mentions the "Divine Benefactors" (*ba-ha-hu-ti-ip-pe*) or when King Adda-Khamiti-Inshushinak (around 653–648) cites the "Divine Good" (*ba-ha-ib-be*).

The fact that Pinengir is summoned first in the treaty between Khita and Naram-Sin has led to the assumption that she originally was the main goddess in the Elamite pantheon. Proofs even for an early Elamite matriarchy, perhaps reflecting in heaven the situation on earth, have been derived from that text alone. However, the existence of a heavenly matriarchy cannot be corroborated by other inscriptions. On the contrary it must be noted that, strangely, her name occurred so rarely. Extremely few personal names were composed with her name.

Not before middle Elamite times do we learn anything about her character. King Untash-Napirisha (circa 1275–1240 BCE) consecrated in his holy city, Dur-Untash, a temple for Pinengir, among others, and donated a golden statue to her. In addition he built an *aštam* for her. This is a loanword from Akkadian *aštammu* and means "inn." Such inns served beer, and they functioned as brothels as well. Like the Sumerian Inanna (Akkadian Ishtar), Pinengir was obviously responsible for love and sex life. And like the goddess Ishtar in Mesopotamia, she acquired motherly features during the second millennium, as is demonstrated by the many

terra-cottas with nursing mothers that have been found in her temple in Dur-Untash.

Toward the end of Elamite history, two kings in particular venerated Pinengir. Shutruk-Nakhhunte II (around 717–699) called her “Mistress of the Sky, my god,” and Tempt-Khumban-Inshushinak (around 668–653) also addressed her as “my god.” After that time she was no longer mentioned.

Another goddess, called Kiririsha, the “Great Lady,” is found in an old Elamite incantation text from Mesopotamia, as well as in personal names from the beginning of the second millennium. It has been suggested that at a certain time the name of Pinengir was put under a taboo and that from this time onward, she was called only “Great Lady.” However, this cannot be proven. It is also possible that Kiririsha was her cognomen or that it designated a different goddess right from the beginning. Kiririsha had special connections to the city of Liyan (modern Bushehr) on the Persian Gulf. Perhaps she was a local goddess who gained influence over all the Elamite country. At least in middle Elamite times she existed as an independent goddess beside Pinengir and had obviously acquired much more power than her rival. In the texts she is called “Mistress of the Sky,” “Mother of the Gods,” and “Great Consort.” Kiririsha seems to have been responsible for combat and battle, judging by the votive offerings that have been found in her temple in Dur-Untash, which are mostly battle-axes. Like Pinengir, Kiririsha disappeared in late Elamite times.

Next to Pinengir and the “Divine Good of the Sky” in the treaty with Naram-Sin, there follows the god Khumban. In the Akkadian incantation series *Šurpu*, Khumban is equated with Enlil, “Lord Wind,” the main god of the Sumerian pantheon. He rules over the atmosphere and can bring about disastrous storms against enemies. His father was An (Akkadian Anum), the “Sky,” originally the highest Sumerian god but replaced very early by his son Enlil.

In Elam the pattern was comparable. In *Šurpu* the god Yabru is called the “Anum of Elam.” His name is preserved only in a single place-name (*yà-ab-ru*^{K1}) and in one old Elamite–Akkadian personal name. Presumably he was a very old Elamite god thrust aside by his son Khumban. It might be that Yabru was hidden

behind the common expression Tempt, or “Lord,” which is found in many inscriptions. Tempt was used as a designation for various gods, for instance “a merciful Lord is god Khutran” or “Inshushinak, Lord of the High Town.” But on other occasions it seems to have been the name of a particular god. In such a usage it appeared very often in old Elamite personal names. The legal documents of Susa from the beginning of the second millennium, for instance, include seventy-eight personal names composed with Tempt. On the other hand, names with Khumban occur only three times, and those with Pinengir five times.

Tempt is the Elamite translation of Akkadian Bel. In Mesopotamia, Bēl also appeared as lord of different cities as well as a particular god. In late Kassite times he was often equated with Marduk, the city god of Babylon. The female counterpart was Bēltiya, “My Lady,” who in middle Elamite times was a distinct goddess in Elam, too.

A hint as to the function of Tempt is given in a rather late text, where he is said to let flourish water and earth. Therefore it is possible that the name of the old god Yabru, like those of Pinengir and Khumban, had once been taken under a taboo, and that subsequently he was called simply Tempt, the “Lord.” Since we know so little about this very old god, we cannot say who his consort was. It might have been the goddess of the earth, who is designated in the texts only with the Sumerogram *ki*, but whose Elamite name is *Murun*. As a recipient of offerings, she appeared only in Achaemenid times, and the Achaemenid sources described her in a context combined with the Median gods. But the existence of a mother goddess must be assumed for the earliest times. Possibly the function of the old mother goddess had devolved upon her daughter (?) Pinengir. The son of Yabru and *ki*, the mother goddess “Earth,” was very likely Khumban.

Khumban too appeared very early in Elamite history. It is possible that the name of the first known Elamite king, who must have ruled at the beginning of the third millennium, was derived from Khumban. He is mentioned in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* as Khuwawa. In later tradition he is called Khumbaba. Over the centuries Khumban occurred from time to time as a component of

personal names, but he rarely appeared in the inscriptions of the kings. As with most of the gods, a temple was dedicated to him by the middle Elamite king Untash-Napirisha in his holy city of Dur-Untash. He was next mentioned by Adda-Khamiti-Inshushinak. We find here a phenomenon comparable to what we have seen in connection with the goddess Pinengir. Both are old Elamite gods who initially were at the top of the pantheon but lost influence over time and regained only a portion of their original importance at the end of Elamite history.

There are also parallels from another point of view. At the same time as Kiririsha, a god Napirisha, or "Great God"—very often written ^dGAL—makes his debut. In *Šurpu* he is equated with Ea, or Enki, the "Lord of the Earth," the god of wisdom and incantations, who also sends the streams of sweet water out of the earth. Illustrations depict him with jets of water coming out of his shoulders. It is therefore also possible that the Elamite reliefs, like those in Kurangun and Naqsh-i Rostam, represent the Elamite equivalent of this god, namely Napirisha. It is not certain if Napirisha was originally a taboo-name for Khumban. We could assume a phenomenon parallel to the case of Pinengir-Kiririsha and, presumably, Yabru-Tempt. But Napirisha, too, must have very early been regarded as a separate god. The responsibility for the universe was divided between the two gods. While Khumban ruled over the upper regions of the air, Napirisha was the master of the earth. In the latter function, he rapidly grew in importance and superseded his rival, Khumban. During all periods he must have been a powerful god, and he was still worshiped in Achaemenid times. Napirisha and Kiririsha formed a couple. Temples were often devoted to both of them. In middle Elamite times they were closely connected with Inshushinak, with whom they constituted a triad, the most powerful gods of Elam at that time. The son of Napirisha and Kiririsha was Khutran. His name probably means "Overwhelmer," so he must have been a god of soldiers and fighters.

Let us return to the treaty with Naram-Sin. In the text of the contract, following the enumeration of gods called to witness, five gods are mentioned frequently, always in the same formula: "Nakkhunte loves the king, to Inshushinak he is subject, Siyashum, Napir(?) , and Narunde the

king obeys." Obviously Nakkhunte was the favorite god of King Khita. Nakkhunte is also mentioned in one of the first places among the witnesses. Nakkhunte was the sun-god of Elam. He was equated with the Sumerian Utu and Akkadian Shamash and had the same functions, being, like them, responsible for law and justice. The sun-god was regularly called to witness and was guarantor of the observance of the judgment. In malediction formulas he was asked to refuse the evildoer any offspring.

In Mesopotamian mythology the sun-god was the son of the moon-god, Nanna (Sumerian), or Sin (Akkadian), and the brother of Inanna/Ishtar. He was also closely connected with both of them in his iconography. In Elam the moon-god was presumably Napir, or "the God." If this identification is correct, it would indicate that he once had a very high standing. He is also mentioned in the often-repeated formula of the treaty with Naram-Sin (though in all occurrences partly destroyed). Napir was a component of personal names across the centuries, but not very often. Writing with the logogram ^dEN.ZU occurred much more often.

We do not know much about the goddess Siyashum. She may have been the "Keeper of the Palace of the Gods." Besides having been named in the treaty with Naram-Sin, she was a component of two old Elamite personal names and had a temple dedicated to her by King Untash-Napirisha.

The most important god for King Khita seems to have been Inshushinak, to whom he was subject. And at the end of the treaty, he puts the entire agreement and the statue of Naram-Sin made for commemoration of the event under the protection of Inshushinak. So the importance of this god is apparent in the earliest document in the Elamite language. His name was derived from Nin-shushinak, "Lord of Susa," and so he was the city god of Susa. Therefore Susa must in very early times already have been an extraordinarily powerful city, since its god gained influence over the whole country. For all the Elamite kings as well as for the people, Inshushinak was the most important god. He occurred as a component of hundreds of personal names and was invoked by every king.

In the list of gods, or "An-Anum," he is equated with Ninurta. Ninurta was the city god

of Nippur (modern Nuffar) and was believed to be the eldest son of the god Enlil (who corresponded to Khumban). Ninurta was responsible for fertility and vegetation as well as for the waters abounding in fish. He caused the inundations in springtime that are necessary for an ample harvest. Therefore he was of highest importance for the farmers and was also called "Lord Plough." On the other hand, Ninurta was also leader in battle and a king. He was defender against enemies from without and judge regarding grievances within the country.

All these features fit Inshushinak, too. He had a great variety of functions. He was addressed not only as "Father of the Weak" but also as "King of the Gods." For the general public, Inshushinak was the most important god because he determined its welfare. From the royal perspective, he was guarantor of the king's reign because he fought the king's enemies and supported the king in his wars of conquest. Also, he safeguarded right and order within the country. In the legal documents from Susa from the first half of the second millennium, he was, with the sun-god, the first called to witness. Furthermore both were also responsible for the execution of the judge's decisions and for the protection of votive offerings and buildings.

In old Elamite times, Inshushinak and the sun-god (Nakkhunte, or Shamash) were often accompanied by Nergal. This Sumerian and Akkadian god was ruler of the underworld, meaning supreme lord of the deceased. He caused fever and epidemics and controlled the scorching heat of the sun that ostensibly caused reed fires. But he was also a great warrior. In Mesopotamian mythology Nergal was the brother of Ninurta, to whom Inshushinak has been equated. It seems that in Elam, Inshushinak rather early combined the functions of both brothers in his person. Thus Inshushinak's power, as lord of the underworld too, increased greatly. His symbol was the snake, the animal that, as offspring of the dark earth, demonstrates in a unique way the ambiguous, perplexing (and dangerous) nature of this god.

In middle Elamite texts, Inshushinak appears as judge of the deceased, accompanied by Ishme-karab and Lagamar. Both names are Akkadian, meaning "He Who Grants the Prayer" and "No Mercy," which indicates the disposi-

tion of each. Both occur as components of personal names. It is understandable that Ishme-karab was much more popular. In Dur-Untash he had a temple dedicated to him; it was side by side with Kiririsha and was given comparable votive offerings. In Assyria, Ishme-karab was one of the seven judges, but he was more important in Elam.

The power and importance of the god Inshushinak for all inhabitants of Elam, from the most humble up to the king, is quite clear from the earliest times onward. So it is a striking fact that he disappeared completely in Achaemenid times. It is understandable, however, since as protector against enemies from outside, he had failed. Babylonians and, above all, the Persians, had gotten the upper hand, and the Elamites had become subjects of foreigners. Thus with the decline of the Elamite kingdom, Inshushinak lost all of his influence. In this situation the old god Khumban was able to regain some of his original power, though he had to share his place with the Babylonian weather-god Adad.

Aside from these major gods, there were a great many lower gods who are mentioned only rarely. Among them the god of the river ordeal, Shazi, had a certain importance. His role was passing sentence. He who committed a breach of contract had to go into the waters: "May the god Shazi smash his skull!" In Akkadian sources (often legal documents) Shazi was said to be the son of the river god, but we do not know his name in Elamite.

In surviving texts, the goddess Mashti is once addressed as "Good Mother of the Gods." Mashti has been compared with DIL.BAD, the "Venus Star," but it is more probable that the latter was Narsina in Elamite. King Untash-Napirisha built a temple for Rukhu-rater and Hish-mitek. Rukhu-rater, the "Nourisher of the Legal Offspring," was presumably the same god mentioned in *Šurpu* as Lakhuratil. There he is equated with Ninurta. But Ninurta corresponded otherwise to Inshushinak, as we have seen. Therefore Rukhu-rater may have been a local god with similar functions. Khish-mitek is otherwise unknown. That is also the case with the god Tirutir, or Tirumitir. The deities Upurkubak and Khaterishni formed a couple. Upurkubak is in one text called the "Mistress of the Way of the Nobles." Her partner's name has been

found only recently; it may be translated as "His Love May Become Great."

In addition to the gods, the mythological world of ancient Elam must have been populated by many fabulous creatures, many of them hybrids, half man and half animal. We learn about them only from illustrations, above all on seals. There they are working in the fields or appear as "Masters of Animals" or alternate in their appearance on seals as either subduers of other animals or victims of them. In most cases they behave like men, but in others they function as animals on whose back a god is riding.

A great many gods are known only as components of personal names. We can only hope that future research will throw more light on the fascinating world of Elamite gods.

Priests and Cult in Elam

The primary administrator of the gods on earth was in all periods the king. He was the leading hunter, the first in battle, and the highest priest. In the time of the *sukkalmakhs*, at the beginning of the second millennium, the kings obviously were themselves regarded as divine. (See "Susa and Susiana in Second-Millennium Iran" in Part 5, Vol. II, for further discussion.) We find several names of kings written with the DINGIR-sign that is otherwise the determinative for the names of the gods.

Next below the king was a high priest. We know only his Akkadian title, *pašišu rabû*. It was his duty always to accompany the king, even on his campaigns.

A common priest was called *šatin*. As we can see from early representations, the priests performed the divine services naked. Sometimes they wore long hair, or perhaps wigs; otherwise they had high crowns with horns on their heads. We also meet with priestesses. It appears that their position was quite equal to that of their male colleagues. They sold houses, rented fields, and loaned money that must have been their own. One priestess transferred a certain amount of silver to her nurse. In legal transactions priestesses acted as witnesses. The girls in the "inns" of Pinengir presumably were regarded as priestesses, too. The income of those establishments went to the goddess. The gods and goddesses usually owned large properties. For instance Inshushinak, Shamash, Simut, and

the goddess Upurkubak were landowners who leased their fields and rented grain for their fields' cultivation. ("Renting grain" meant that a certain amount of seed grain was handed over; it had to be paid back with a fixed multiple amount.) They also functioned like savings banks and loaned money. The sun-god seems to have been particularly active in this domain. Thus the priests were not only responsible for their religious duties but also had to be skilled managers of property and funds.

A sculptured bronze plate, dedicated by King Shilkhak-Inshushinak in the latter half of the twelfth century, depicts a ceremony called *šit šamši*, the Akkadian expression for "rising of the sun." In the middle of the plate squat two priests without clothing. One of them is about to pour water over the hands of the other as they perform the purification ceremonies at the beginning of the day. The water may have been taken from the ewer that is standing beside them together with two basins. A table for the offerings is to be seen between two columns. On both sides of the priests are temples. In front of the smaller one extends a holy grove.

High temples were built in the main cities. Usually they were stepped, one block upon the other, the so-called ziggurats. We know them from archaeological excavations—at, for instance, Dur-Untash—and from many illustrations on seals and reliefs. Often they are adorned with large horns. As we learn from the consecration inscriptions, the horns were made of wood or alabaster and were often gilded. Gold was used in abundance. Not only were golden statues set before the gods, but doors, beams, and bricks were gilded. Adding further visual richness, the luster of the gold was combined with bright colors. We get an impression of the play of colors from the many glass rods that once adorned the doors of the temples.

Much more common than the brick-built temples must have been the holy groves. They are mentioned frequently in the texts. The holy precinct was fenced in, and an altar formed the cult center. Several altars or offering tables that have been found had drains for the blood of the victims. Obviously blood offerings were a major element of the Elamite cult. The kings instituted periodic offerings. For instance King Kutik-Inshushinak (around 2250) promised the

god Inshushinak for his temple in Susa each day one ram at the high sanctuary, one ram at the lower sanctuary, singers in the morning and evening, twenty measures of oil to anoint the door, and silver and gold. (Apparently there was more, but here the text breaks off.)

In addition to these regular offerings, the great feasts were of special interest to all the people. The most important of those feasts must have been the *gušum*, which was dedicated to the "Lady of the High City." We are not sure who this lady was. Presumably the feast was a very old tradition and originally may have been established for the old mother goddess. Then it may have been passed to Pinengir and afterward to Kiririsha. At least in middle Elamite times, it is most likely that the offerings were intended for this last goddess. Adult fattened rams were slaughtered in a certain ritual manner and obviously in large numbers because the feast was also called "Feast of the Pouring Offerings." Streams of blood must have flowed down from the altars. This feast always took place at the new moon at the beginning of autumn. In the early period, this was at the beginning of the new year. After the official sacrifices, there must have been a public festival with singers and music. The meat of the victims was roasted, and everyone received a piece of it.

Music was always part of the Elamite cult. We have mentioned already the singers who attended the daily offerings at the temples, and a seal impression illustrating a religious procession depicts musicians with harp, lyre, and flute accompanying the image of a god.

A characteristically Elamite phenomenon was the *kiden*. Every god had his own *kiden*, his special charisma, a boundary of magical protection. This numinous phenomenon found its objective expression in a taboo-emblem. Among its uses was the touching of evildoers with this emblem before they were executed. In many cases they died at the very moment of contact with the emblem as a result of their emotional response. In a wider sense, the *kiden* was also the room in which the taboo-emblem was kept. There witnesses were led before they were asked to take an oath. In most cases it was the *kiden* of Inshushinak, but that of Simut is also mentioned, as well as those of less well known gods such as Rukhu-rater or Kubuzzi. The Elam-

ites believed that a man must die if a god removed from him his protective *kiden*.

ACHAEMENID IRAN

The main source for Iranian theology is the *Avesta*, the songs of the Zoroastrian priests. Its oldest part was formed by the *gāthās*, which are ascribed to the prophet Zarathustra himself. He taught that there is only one god, Ahura Mazda, the "Wise Lord." But, he warned, everyone must beware of the "Lie" or the "Servant of the Lie." Every human being should aspire to come into the eternal kingdom of god, he taught. On the way a person is supported by three archangels: Vohu Manah, the "Good Mind"; Rtam, the "Right Order"; and Armaiti, the "Devotion."

Opinions about the religion of the Achaemenids are still quite divided. The main question is whether they were followers of the prophet Zarathustra. Until now our sole sources on this matter have been the Greek historians, above all Herodotus, who lived in the fifth century at the edge of the Achaemenid empire. The inscriptions of the Achaemenid kings provide some hints about the beliefs of the rulers. From them we learn that for Darius and his successors, Ahura Mazda, the "Wise Lord," the god of Zarathustra, was the highest of gods. (See "Darius I and the Persian Empire" in Part 5, Vol. II.)

In 1933-1934, during the excavations of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago in Persepolis, the capital of the Persian Empire, Ernst Herzfeld found an administrative archive of nearly thirty thousand clay tablets. Six thousand of them are more or less well preserved, but little more than two thousand have so far been published. These tablets are from the reign of Darius I ("the Great") (522-486). They are written in Elamite and constitute administrative vouchers from the heartland of Persia, including the Elamite district (later Elymais) up to the borders of Susa. This new material provides information not only about the economy and administration, but also about the daily life of the inhabitants and their religious environment. Thus with the help of these original sources, we are able to make much more precise statements about theology and cult in Achaemenid Iran than previously.

The Prophet Zarathustra (Zoroaster)

The exact years of the prophet Zarathustra are still unknown, but he appears to have been active about 600 BCE in Bactria (Bactriana), eastern Iran. He lived among the Iranian nomads and their princely leaders, who appear in his songs, the *gāthās*. Zarathustra became a priest and began to teach that there was only one god, Ahura Mazda, the "Wise Lord." Therefore the magicians, the priests of the old Iranian gods, were his greatest enemies.

Ahura Mazda is closely connected with a high personality called "Holy Ghost" or his "Son," who was responsible for the "Right Order" in heaven and on earth. The son is also the judge of the Last Judgment, when the deceased must pass the bridge of decision

and either enter paradise or fall down into hell. From this it is apparent that the teachings of Zarathustra contain many "Christian" beliefs—six hundred years before Jesus was born.

Under the reign of the Achaemenid kings Cyrus "the Great" (559–530 BCE) and Darius I ("the Great") (522–486 BCE), Zoroastrianism became the state religion of Persia. However, before long the evolution of belief had brought about the reappearance of the old Iranian gods. By the time of the Sasanian dynasty (third–seventh centuries CE), whose rulers called themselves Zoroastrians, the religion had altered in many fundamental respects.

State Religion

Some of the tablets are concerned with expenses for offerings. In this context several gods are mentioned, various kinds of offerings are found, and priests with Elamite as well as Iranian titles are cited. At first glimpse the impression (different names of gods and unknown terms) is quite confusing, but one term, (^d*lan*), recurs very often. The DINGIR-sign (^d) indicates that the term is divine. Originally the Elamite word *lan* meant "divine presence," in the figurative sense of "religious cult" or in the concrete sense of "sacrifice." The tablets never say to whom the sacrifice was given. Obviously it was well known to every inhabitant of the Persian Empire and so did not need any explanation. In divine lists the *lan* has the same status as the names of gods. Therefore it is most probable that this special offering was addressed to a particular god.

The *lan*-sacrifice was the only one for which regular rations were expended every month. The amount of the rations differed from town to town, presumably depending upon the importance of the temple or the size of the community. Most common are thirty liters (27 quarts) of grain or flour and ten liters (10.6 quarts) of wine per month. That would be a daily amount of offerings of one liter (1.06 quarts) of flour and one-third liter (0.35 quarts) of wine. In some cases fruits are mentioned instead of wine. On several tablets the expenses for the *lan*-sacrifice are

called "rations of the king." This term occurs only in connection with the special cult offering. Thus the king himself arranged the regular carrying out of this principal sacrifice. Therefore we can conclude that it must have been the sacrifice for Ahura Mazda, the "Wise Lord," because he is the only god emphasized (the one who gave the king his power) in all the inscriptions of King Darius.

The celebration of the *lan*-sacrifice took place over all the heartland of Persia. The *lan* was celebrated in the vicinity of the large cities of Persepolis and Shiraz and to the southeast, southwest, and northeast of Persepolis. Moving from Persepolis westward toward Elam, it was found with decreasing frequency. But in the borderland and between Persia and Elymais, great festivals for certain gods were held, apparently once a year. These festivals, which occurred only in that region, must have had their roots in local traditions. In the Elamite district of Elymais, the *lan* was found only in two places in the border region. Otherwise there is no mention of this special offering. This fact shows clearly that in Achaemenid times, the *lan* was no longer a general expression for sacrifice but a particular offering. And this sacrifice cannot have been dedicated to an Elamite god, because the sacrifice obviously was extremely rare in that region, where Elamites lived as the majority of inhabitants.

The Priests

Various titles for priests are attested in the texts. First there is the old Elamite word *šatin*. Priests with this designation were above all responsible for Elamite and Babylonian gods, though they also worshiped Iranian gods. The second and most common title was *maguš*, the "magician." These Median priests venerated Iranian gods but never Elamite or Babylonian deities. In addition they could sometimes be called *framazdā*, or "outstanding memorizer," which was an honorary title. It occurs only three times in the texts that have been found, and in those cases, it was in connection with old Iranian gods. Several times a magician is called *lan-lirira*, "Celebrator of the *lan*-sacrifice." In such cases he was also responsible for the *lan*. That the administration thought it necessary to emphasize this duty shows clearly that originally the magicians had quite different responsibilities.

The fact that they sometimes also were given the title *ātrvaxša* points in the same direction. This third title, meaning "He Who Lets the Fire Grow," is purely Zoroastrian. A priest bearing only this title was responsible just for the *lan*-sacrifice, which is further proof that this offering must have been for Ahura Mazda. The use of the titles "magician" and *ātrvaxša* side by side for one and the same person indicates that they originally represented different cults. In the time of Darius I, considerations of religious policy obviously induced the magicians to adapt themselves to the Zoroastrian religion by including it in their program. In this early period, however, they could not reach the high position of the purely Zoroastrian priests who functioned also as inspectors in the administration and were called, for instance, to attest the correctness of accounts.

If one takes into consideration all the facts cited, it becomes quite clear that the *lan*-sacrifice was the most important element of the official religion. And it is rather certain that this was the state sacrifice for the god Ahura Mazda, the "Wise Lord." The religious policy of the Achaemenids tolerated several other gods, and they too received offerings from the state. Yet the influence of these gods was of only local importance. To point out the differences of the above-mentioned gods from the official state reli-

gion represented by the *lan*-sacrifice, we will take a closer look at these gods.

Iranian Gods

The Visai Baga Most often mentioned in the administrative tablets from Persepolis is the *Visai Baga*, a group of gods whose name means "All Gods." They appear as early as the Indian songs of the *Rigveda*, where they are called *Vishve Devah*, which has the same meaning. In the doctrine of Zarathustra, the *Devah* were regarded as evil demons, and the gods were now called *bagā*. A memory of this group of gods may have survived among the people. Thus the old group reappeared with a new name, *bagā* instead of *devāh*, and was worshiped once more. Perhaps Darius referred to this special group when he says in his inscription, "Ahura Mazda with all the gods." Though the *Visai Baga* are the most frequently mentioned old gods, in comparison to the *lan* their occurrence is very rare. The tradition of venerating them was preserved in only one region, as they received offerings in eight places in the district situated west and southwest of Persepolis.

Several scholars have proposed to read not *Visai Baga* but *Mica Baga*, meaning "God Mithra." But such a reading is excluded by the Elamite writing. Thus there is no proof that Mithra received any offerings during the reign of Darius. Mithra, who was originally the god of "contract," the literal meaning of his name, later became, as sun-god and victorious god of war, the most favored god in the Indo-Aryan world. His worshipers arranged festivals in dark caves at night, during which they slaughtered bulls and became drunk with *hauma*. This intoxicating drink was made from dried mushrooms; it did not lose its effect until it had passed up to eight or nine times through the human body.

The female counterpart of Mithra was Anahita, the goddess of love and fertility. Zarathustra fought a fierce battle against both of them, and the fact that they did not receive any offerings under the reign of Darius demonstrates that they were outlawed in Darius's time, quite in keeping with Zarathustra's doctrine. Both would regain their former power only after some time had passed, reappearing in the inscriptions of King Artaxerxes II (405-359).

Zurvan, Hvarira, and Naryasanga The old Median god Zurvan appears in the later *Avesta* (texts from late medieval times) as god of infinite time and as father of Ahura Mazda and his evil counterpart, Ahriman. On the tablets from Persepolis he occurs only in connection with three places that lay close to each other. In the same villages, the Visai Baga were also worshiped. And in two places of the same region, offerings were made to Hvarira, the "Genius of Sunrise." In two others we find the veneration of Naryasanga who in the *Avesta* is called the "Messenger of the Gods." The area in which these gods were venerated lay west and southwest of Persepolis, which must have been a stronghold of the old Median gods.

Mountains and Rivers In the same district, mountains and rivers were worshiped as gods. There is no trace of this practice in any other region of the Persian heartland. The reason must be sought in geographical circumstances. In the area in question, southwest of Persepolis, are extremely high mountains and many important rivers. In some instances the same mountain received offerings in two or three villages, so it can be assumed that they must all have been situated in the neighborhood of the mountain. Places in which the same river was worshiped may have been situated farther from each other, but in any case on the same river. The names of the mountains and rivers regarded as gods sound Iranian. Therefore this veneration of conspicuous natural phenomena must have been an old Iranian tradition, but it obviously had survived only in this limited area.

Miždushish, Brtakāmya, and Thaigracish In addition to the Iranian gods mentioned above, only a few additional, and even more poorly attested, gods occurred in the adjacent district to the north. In two places on the Persian highway leading from Persepolis to Susa, just before it reached the border of the Elamite region, we meet the goddess of fate, Miždushish. She was responsible for the welfare of the human beings, and it is therefore astonishing that we do not find her more often. But by Darius's time, all the functions of the old Iranian gods had presumably been concentrated in the one god, Ahura Mazda,

as a result of the teaching of Zarathustra. In one case the goddess Miždushish was celebrated together with the third month, Thaigracish. This name can be translated "(the Month) of the Gathering of Garlic." The fact that the month was also worshiped suggests that other personifications existed too. Indeed names of months were sometimes attested with the DINGIR-sign.

In two other places, the god Brtakāmya, the "Fulfiller of Wishes," is mentioned. But the few old Iranian gods who were to be found here received not regular rations but only cereals, wine, and fruits for a special festival, perhaps held only once a year. Thus we can state that Median or common Iranian gods were still worshiped in Achaemenid times. They received official rations for their offerings, but they were very few in number and restricted to small areas.

Elamite and Babylonian Gods

Because of the Persian king's tolerance, Elamite and Babylonian gods received rations for offerings, too. However, they were venerated only by the Elamites. Therefore they were found mainly in the Elymais and in some isolated places in the Persian heartland. (We should bear in mind that Elamites lived all over the country.)

The old Elamite god Khumban, who was responsible for the atmosphere and for storms, appeared side by side, or with the same amount of offerings, with the Babylonian weather-god Adad. In several places they were worshiped together. On some tablets it is stated that the offerings are destined "for the gods." In one case "the gods" are described as Khumban and Adad. Therefore one can perhaps assume that the scribes always thought of these two when they wrote "for the gods" in an Elamite context. Outside of the Elymaen region, Khumban was worshiped in some places in the Elamite-Persian border region, where he was the only Elamite god receiving sacrifices. He also was associated with just one village in the district southeast of Persepolis. In another place in the same district, the sole appearance of Adad outside of the Elymais is attested. Together with him is mentioned a god Napazapa, who is otherwise unknown but whose name sounds Elamite. Napirisha, the "Great God," rival of Khumban, was venerated in three places in the Elymais and in four places

in the district southwest of Persepolis, which must have been an enclave of his worshippers. A number of other Elamite gods, who cannot be identified, also appeared in a handful of places. Some of them seem to have been responsible for abundance of water and fertility.

Of the highest importance for the Elamites in Achaemenid times must have been the special sacrifice called *kušukum*, in which rams were slaughtered. It may have had its origin in the old Elamite *gušum*, which was celebrated for the "Lady of the High City." As we have learned above, the most important element of this festival, too, was the sacrifice of rams. Yet here, we find a decisive difference. As a general rule, the Achaemenid administration never dispensed animals for offering purposes, only grain or flour, wine or beer, or fruits. However, the slaughter of the rams was obviously very important for the Elamites in celebrating their *kušukum*. Therefore in all known cases where victims were needed, the Elamite priests saved the grain that they had received from the state and bought rams with it. This practice clearly shows that the sacrifice of animals was not intended by the administration.

Outside the Elamites the *kušukum* is mentioned only once, and there the priest received nothing but wine.

Summary

On the basis of the Elamite clay tablets from the archive of Darius I in Persepolis, some fundamental questions of Achaemenid religion can be elucidated. On the one hand, there clearly was a state religion that found its expression in the *lan*-sacrifice. This was the official offering for the god Ahura Mazda, which was arranged by the king himself. The *lan*-sacrifice was the one that occurred most frequently and was the only one celebrated regularly. It was practiced throughout the Persian heartland but occurred at only two places in the Elymais. Aside from the *lan*-offering, some old Iranian, and above all Median, gods were also worshiped, but their influence was restricted to small areas where

they obviously represented remnants of local traditions.

The state distributed offerings for all of them, as well as for Elamite or Babylonian gods, the veneration of whom was centered in the district of Elymais. But while there was considerable religious tolerance, certain basic principles had to be observed. Only grain or flour, wine or beer, or fruits were dispensed, never animals for offering purposes. Thus we can say that, judging by the sources currently available to us, the early Achaemenids must have been followers of the faith taught by Zarathustra and that sacrifices of animals did not comport with their beliefs. In this context, a god such as the bull-killing Mithra was not worthy of worship.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- WALTHER HINZ, *Lost World of Elam: Re-Creation of a Vanished Civilization*, translated by JENNIFER BARNES (1972), "Religion in Ancient Elam," in *The Cambridge Ancient History*, vol. 1, pt. 2, *Early History of the Middle East* (3rd ed. 1971), and *Darius und die Perser*, vols. 1 (1976) and 2 (1979); WALTER HINZ and HEIDEMARIE KOCH, *Elamisches Wörterbuch*, vols. 1 and 2, *Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran, Ergänzungsband 17* (1987); STANLEY INSLER, trans., *The Gāthās of Zarathustra*, *Acta Iranica* 8 (1975); HEIDEMARIE KOCH, *Die religiösen Verhältnisse der Dareioszeit: Untersuchungen an Hand der elamischen Persepolitäfelchen*, *Göttinger Orientforschungen III. Reihe: Iranica*, Bd. 4 (1977), "Götter und ihre Verehrung im achämenidischen Persien," *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und Vorderasiatische Archäologie* 77, no. 2 (1987), *Verwaltung und Wirtschaft im persischen Kernland zur Zeit der Achämeniden*, *Beih. zum Tübinger Atlas des Vorderen Orients*, Reihe B Nr. 89 (1990), "Zu Religion und Kulten im persischen Kernland," in *La Religion iranienne à l'époque achéménide: Actes du Colloque de Liège 11 décembre 1987*, edited by JEAN KELLENS (1991); and *Es kündigt Dareios der König . . . Vom Leben im persischen Grossreich, Kulturgeschichte der Antiken Welt*, Bd. 55 (1992); and URSULA SEIDL, *Die elamischen Felsreliefs von Kuran-gun und Naqš-e Rostam*, *Iranische Denkmäler*, Lieferung 12, Reihe 4, *Iranische Felsreliefs* (1986).

SEE ALSO *Theology, Priests, and Worship in Ancient Egypt* (Part 8, Vol. III); *Theologies, Priests, and Worship in Ancient Mesopotamia* (Part 8, Vol. III); and *Theology, Priests, and Worship in Hittite Anatolia* (Part 8, Vol. III).