

Light, Time, Motion and Impulse in the Zoroastrian Pahlavi Texts

Antonio Panaino
University of Bologna

The Iranian world, in particular in its earliest attested Religious tradition, the Zoroastrian one, had the merits to set the divine category of Time (Av. *zruuan-*, *zr* 𐬯𐬀, m.) in a sort of para-philosophical way distinguishing between an “eternal time” (*Zruuan- akarana-*; Pahl. *Zurwān akaranag*) and a “limited time” or more literally a time “having a long dominion” (*Zruuan-darəyō.xʷaδāta-*; Pahl. *Zurwān dagraṇd-xwadāy*). This well known distinction was strongly expanded in the framework of a theological tradition, which gave enormous relevance to the cosmologic role of time in the process of liberation of the world from evil. In particular, one of the most important steps in the history of ideas of Zoroastrianism concerns the progressive elaboration, already visible in the Young Avestan sources, of an archaic form of millennialism or chiliasm, which imagined the conflict between the highest divine powers (Ahura Mazdā and Angra Mainiiu) framed in a period of 12,000 years, of which 6,000 were imagined as “mental” (i.e. *mēnōg*), other 6,000 as “living” (*gētīg*). The complex dialectics between these main phases (with their sub-articulations) is the temporal theatre of the conflict against the forces of evil, i.e. Ahreman, who is compelled to invade a space-temporal dimension in condition of a patent ontological inferiority.

The intellectual complexity of these speculations has been focused recently by Sacha Stern, who underlined the independence and the originality of Time as a special category in ancient Iran in a way that does not find fitting parallels in the Mesopotamian area, and that can be partly compared only to some Indian doctrines about Kāla (but sometimes demonized), while the potential connections between the Iranian thought and the Greek one, in particular with regard to the function and meaning of Plato's Αἰών, represent independent, but strictly related, problems, which show the comparative importance of the whole subject, and its many potential ramifications.

In the present lecture I will analyse some philosophical problems emerging from the late Zoroastrian tradition, which have never been properly discussed, such as:

- a) the relation between time and motion;
 - a1) how did the constellations move on in the primordial phase of the creation if the world was in a state of immobility?
- b) the relation between the eternal time of Ohrmazd and the time of the earthly conflict;
- c) the relation between Ohrmazd's light and time; the heaven as a temporal mantle of god.
- d) Ahreman's relation with time;
- e) the origin of the motion of the stars and the luminaries; divine (started by the frawahr) or ahremanic?
- f) an Iranian echo of Philoponus' elaboration of the impulse theory?

These and other similar subjects will be framed in the intercultural context of the Mazdean philosophical and theological speculations at the light of the internal evolution and of the attested sources.