

## INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Gatha-Avestan is the language of the oldest part of the Avesta, the holy book of Zoroastrianism. It is the language of the Gathas, a number of hymns from Zarathustra himself.

Zarathustra must be dated between 500 and 1000 BC. We cannot go into the debate on his date. As to the linguistic side, the fact that Gathic is as archaic as Vedic Sanskrit, and much more archaic than Old Persian, a date in the beginning of this period is more likely than one towards the end of it.

Gathic is the oldest form of Iranian. The other texts of the Avesta, in Late Avestan, start centuries later. Avestan is an East Iranian dialect, as opposed to Old Persian, from the inscriptions of the Achaemenid kings, which is a Western dialect.

The Gathas are part of a book of hymns, the Yasna. They comprise Y 28-34, 43-51 and 53. I have included Y 53, though it is clear that it is either of a later date, or in a different tradition. I have also included the material from the Yasna Haptanghaiti (Y 35-41), always clearly marked as such, as it is a somewhat greater text. As this text is not metrical, the important data provided by the metre are absent here. I have not added the material of the other old Avestan texts, because I thought it better to present a homogeneous corpus; and because there is no recent philological treatment of these texts.

The grammar is a historical phonology and morphology; it gives no syntax. Its aim is primarily to present in a systematic way the forms of the language as interpreted in the commentaries of Humbach and Insler.

The historical treatment gives the development from Proto-Indo-European and is primarily a comparison with Sanskrit. There is much that is not given: no chronology for the developments has been attempted, so there is no step by step reconstruction of Proto-Indo-Iranian, Proto-Iranian, Proto-East-Iranian, as this would require a full comparative grammar of Indo-Iranian. This means that there is no systematic comparison with Old Persian. There is no study of the relation with Late Avestan (because there is no up to date description of Late Avestan). Though it is a historical grammar, it is in the first place a descriptive grammar of the language of the Gathas, at least as far as we have it.

As to the text, I have followed the text given by Humbach 1959. The metrical interpretation is based upon the work of Mrs. Monna (1978).

As the metrical interpretation is often of major importance, I give in the first chapter a few points where I deviate from her text, and a discussion of the metrical evidence.

The second chapter gives a reconstruction of the phonemic system. In the morphological part the forms are given in phonemic transcription. This notation differs rather from the traditional forms of the manuscripts. I don't think that this notation will present much difficulty to the reader. In fact it concerns a rather limited number of deviations from the text, which are generally simplifications, except for those strange deformed forms which have to be corrected anyhow. Of course, a phonemic notation is a linguistic necessity, and it facilitates the presentation of the morphology and the historical interpretation very much. A conversion key, in two directions, from the text to the phonemic transcription and *vice versa*, is given at the end of the book, with the indices.