PARA-ZOROASTRIANISMS

Memetic transmission and appropriations

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Unlike the other chapters of this volume, this chapter moves beyond the frames of established Zoroastrianism(s). The texts that will be considered here were not written or composed by people born into any ethnic Zoroastrian community, nor were the groups/movements that will be outlined here started by persons born into Zoroastrian communities. Accordingly, they are not generally recognized as legitimate offshoots of institutional Zoroastrianism by established Zoroastrian organizations. Nevertheless, in one way or the other, they raise a claim of ‘Zoroastrianism’, and unlike Zoroastrian institutions in charge of religious boundary-maintenance the History of Religions is in no position to simply deny such claims. Quite the contrary, this chapter proceeds from the assumption that the history of religious ‘memes’ (representations, ideas, names, artifacts, etc.) beyond the communities that may be claiming to legitimately ‘own’ them is a significant (albeit generally neglected) subject area for the non-confessional study of religions (which is itself part of that process of memetic extensions). The present volume provides a good context for delineating this sort of a study since the phenomena described here (in seven sketches) can be fuzzily characterized as ‘memetic migrations’, if not ‘diasporas’.

Following Martin Baumann’s definition, a situation or a group can be classified as ‘diasporic’ in so far as it is characterized by maintaining an identifiable reference to a (real or imaginary) distant geography territory (‘homeland’) and the cultural-religious traditions emanating from it (Baumann 2003: 68). Thus, migration as such does not classify as a diasporic process, but it can be the starting point for the formation of diasporic identities. In both cases, it is people who are moving – some developing diasporic discourses and identities, others not. In the cases that this chapter will examine, however, it is ‘memes’ which are moving – not ‘genes’ or people.

Evidently, religions are based on the communities professing, practicing, and promoting them, but as memetic structures religions at the same time transcend the genetic cohorts propagating them (‘propagation’ is here understood in the horticultural sense of the controlled perpetuation of plants, aiming at an increase in numbers by preserving essential characteristics of the plant in question). When using the term ‘memetic’, I do not wish to subscribe to a memetic theory of cultural evolution and religion (see Dawkins 2006a), but I find the term, originally coined by biologist Richard Dawkins in 1976 (= 2006b), useful for referring to a broad range of cultural phenomena which are replicated in the process of transmission. A ‘meme’ is a ‘replicator’ of cultural information open to mimesis (imitation/variation). ‘Examples of memes are tunes, ideas, catch-phrases, clothes fashions, ways of making pots or of building arches’ (Dawkins 2006b: 192). Successful memes are characterized by longevity, fecundity, and copying-fidelity, but at the same time ‘meme transmission is subject to continuous mutation, and also to blending’ (Dawkins 2006b: 195).

While a religious group can deny membership to persons it regards as not qualified or an institution can deny access to a building under its administration, religious memes easily spread across the boundaries of the communities that claim possession of them, unless they are strictly kept secret or their transmission is restricted by other means such as professional codes. The influence executed by one religion on another is an example of a cross-boundary spreading of religious memes. Some religious memes spread broadly and speedily, in an almost ‘epidemic’ manner (see Sperber 1996), and enrich other meme pools while other memes perish or remain bound to their original meme pools and the gene pool of a given group.

The spread of memes easily exceeds conscious control mechanisms. Memes (as I use the term) are as much conscious as unconscious phenomena. While the physically unbounded spread of memes is the more general case of memetic replication, in religious history there are conscious and even institutionalized attempts at memetic transmission, for instance in the form of mission and proselytizing. On the other hand, the study of missions abounds with examples for (conscious as well as unconscious) mutations of the memes in the process of their eventual adaptation.

This chapter discusses the migration and transmission of memes and their reception, appropriation, elaboration, and transformation by people outside the given established communities of ethnic Zoroastrians, i.e. those ethnic-religious groups (such as the Parsis) sharing (a) a common name, (b) accounts of a common ancestry constructing the group as kinship-community or ‘super-family’, (c) memories of a shared history and origin, (d) elements of common culture including dialect and customs, (e) an anchorage in a specific territory, and (f) a sense of solidarity as for example provided by charitable institutions (criteria adapted from Hutchinson and Smith 1996: 6–7).

This chapter will sketch seven cases of memetic transmission and elaboration beyond the reach of these ethnic communities. One may refer to this process (for which we still lack a proper scholarly term or vocabulary) as the formation of para-traditions, with the prefix para-, as suggested by the
Oxford English Dictionary (http://dictionary.oed.com), to be understood in the sense of ‘analogous or parallel to, but separate from or going beyond’. These memetic reconfigurations are nominally analogous to, but separate from and beyond the ones advanced by the ‘traditional traditions’. As we will see, para-traditions can claim that the ‘traditional traditions’ are truly secondary in the sense of uncommitted to the original – while the ‘traditional traditions’ find the opposite to be true. This raises the issues of authenticity and legitimacy.

The sort of religious identities constructed with the replication and elaboration of these memes beyond the confines of the established ethnic communities are not diasporic in the sense of referring to any ‘original homeland’. At least in some of the cases that will be sketched in this chapter, the process of memetic appropriation may build on a notion of ‘origin’, and their claim for ‘origin-ality’ may stem from this identifiable reference to a distant tradition emanating from a mythical center or point of origin. For several of the cases under consideration here, this point of origin is the name Zoroaster.

The seven sketches outlined in this chapter will be presented in chronological order. While the account starts in antiquity, most of the cases considered here belong to the globalized world of the twentieth century, and their geographical extension stretches from California through Germany and Sweden to Russia. In some cases, the memetic transmission and subsequent reconfigurations occurred without members of the ethnic communities being involved; in other cases we will find extensive overlapping and feedback on the ethnic communities.

Sketch 1: Western Zoroastrian pseudopigrapha

With the spread of the Achaemenid Empire, Zoroastrians migrated from the Iranian mainland westwards to Syria, Egypt, and Asia Minor. Those who settled there probably lived in small communities continuing, as far as possible, Iranian ways for life, including religious practice. Zoroastrian priests accompanied the Achaemenid armies and may well have settled in order to serve their lay clienteles. The presence of Iranians and their religious specialists (with their extended fields of competencies) seems to have paved the way for the spread of Zoroastrian/Iranian memes beyond the communities of settlers. This process, it seems, was speeded up once Greek came to be used as a common language in the Hellenistic age, and it was at this time that a wider circulation of Zoroastrian memes is attested (Boyce and Grenet 1991: 370–1), making an impact on the changing religious landscape of the Eastern Mediterranean. While these memes included complex ideas which in a reconfigured manner found a home in different meme pools, other memes included names only, most prominently the names Mithra(s) and Zoroaster. Both cases imply a radical detachment from the structure of the original meme pool: while the Iranian/Zoroastrian deity Mithra evolved into an eponymous god (Mithras) of a cult subsequently spreading in areas where no Zoroastrians would ever settle, the name (= memetic unit) Zoroaster was used as a projection screen of ascribed authorship to a range of texts on topics including magic, astrology, and mineralogy (Beck 1991; Stausberg in press). While there are traces of Iranian antecedents for some of these texts, other ascriptions were apparently freely invented. It is unclear what composers and readers alike actually connected to that name, i.e. what they ‘knew’ about Zoroaster. Be that as it may, the process of putting texts or fragments under the putative authority of Zoroaster continued and partly intensified down the ages. Most lines of ascriptions eventually dried out, others continued, some misattributions were added, and the reliability of some further ascriptions, namely Gnostic texts, were critically disputed once those treatises came in the midst of diverging religious truth-claims (Stausberg in press).

More than a millennium later, Georgios Gemistos ‘Plethom’ (ca. 1355/60–1452), a Byzantine Neo-Platonic philosopher, made Zoroaster the author of a collection of the so-called Chaldean Oracles. These revelatory-philosophical fragments were quoted by a number of Platonists and Christians from around the fourth century CE onwards. Out of these materials, Plethom compiled a textual corpus consisting of 60 hexameters to which he referred as the Magical Logia of Zoroaster’s Magi. Hence, Zoroastrian authorship was imputed on this newly established corpus, which Plethom went on to elucidate in a brief exposition and a longer commentary. In the latter he drew a line from Zoroaster, whom he (following Plutarch) held to have lived 5,000 years before the Trojan Wars, to Plato and ultimately to himself – the renovator of this line of ‘Hellenic’ wisdom. In a way, the ‘Zoroastrian’ Magical Logia are constructed as a new Sacred Scripture (duly elucidated in commentaries) and in Plethom’s program of spiritual and political innovation Zoroaster takes the place of Moses as the ultimate point of reference (Tambrun 2005; see also Stausberg 2001). Accordingly, he composed a sort of confession of faith in twelve articles entitled Condensation of the Teachings of Zoroaster and Plato which clearly moved beyond the frame of Christianity (Stausberg 1998a, I: 77–80). Plethom’s attempt to rejuvenate the Byzantine Empire from its stasis took the posture of a rehabilitation of the chain of memory and wisdom springing from its remote fountainhead Zoroaster. Hence, Plethom’s vision can be described as a Neo-Zoroastrian/Hellenic project. While this program was buried in the ruins of the Byzantine Empire, Plethom’s Neo-Zoroastrian sacred scripture was effectively transmitted to Italy and all over Western Europe where many intellectuals throughout the subsequent centuries believed themselves to be quoting Zoroaster when citing from one of the numerous (and subsequently considerably enlarged) editions of the Chaldean Oracles (Stausberg 1998a).

The authenticity of the ascription of the Oracles to Zoroaster was increasingly challenged by scholars from the seventeenth century. The growing and
spreading knowledge of Zoroastrian scriptures in the West since the eighteenth century, however, did not prevent authors from inventing their own imaginary Zoroastrian writings (see e.g. Stausberg 1998a, II; Stausberg 1998b). The most influential of these modern pseudographia is Friedrich Nietzsche’s *Also sprach Zarathustra* (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 1883–85). While Nietzsche, who once had been a professor of classical philology, must have had some knowledge about ancient Iranian religious history (see Aiken 2003; Rose 2000: 175–81), his choice of the name Zarathustra for the name of his philosophical protagonist remains somewhat obscure (Birus 2006: 44). Even if some resounding ‘genuine’ Zoroastrian themes (= memes) may be detected by the expert (Rose 2000: 181–2), in this ‘book for all and no one’ Nietzsche’s references to Iran and Zoroastrianism are downplayed by the poet (Birus 2006: 44). Nietzsche himself identified with his protagonist, ‘his son’ (27/4/1883), to a varying degree, first warning the readers against naively identifying the opinions of his Zarathustra with his own views, then, in *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887), announcing a future Zarathustra, a ‘younger, stronger, and godless one’, before finally, in *Ecce homo* (1888), claiming a complete psychological identification between himself and his literary creation (Birus 2006: 44).

In terms of ideology, however, in the very same writing (= *Ecce homo*), Nietzsche argues that he picked the name Zarathustra precisely because the historical ‘singularity’ of ‘that Persian’ was exactly the opposite of his own intentions: it was Zarathustra who according to Nietzsche had first regarded the struggle between good and evil as the main principle of history and had thereby provided a metaphysical foundation for morals. Since Zarathustra had first invented this ominous error and given that Zarathustra was ‘the most truthful and courageous thinker of all’, Nietzsche claimed that he should also be the first to realize this error. ‘Zarathustra’ therefore stands for the self-conquest of morals into its very opposite — the naming reflecting ‘the transformation of the first moralist into the first immoralist’ (Nietzsche 1980: 367). This is the program of a deliberate meme appropriation that by affording an apparent legacy at the same time transforms its alleged historical antecedent and namesake. Accordingly, the three main teachings of Nietzsche’s Zarathustra — namely (1) the Übermensch, (2) the will to power, and (3) the eternal recurrence (see Figal 2006) — do not aim at any mimetic/memetic resemblance to historical and institutional Zoroastrianism, and Nietzsche himself would be the first to stress these differences. This deliberate mimetic/memetic mutation gives shape to a new birth of Zarathustra who would in turn, as Zarathustra, make a long-lasting impact on twentieth-century religious history, and the very name Zarathustra is for a general audience indissolubly tied to Nietzsche.

The global public Nietzschean mimetic appropriation of the name Zarathustra poses a challenge for Zoroastrians. While it provides them with an opportunity to state their case, Nietzsche and his Zarathustra do not match the way Zoroastrians regard their ‘prophet’ and his message. In spring 2006, a struggle for legitimate public representation and ownership of the name/meme Zarathustra erupted in Australia, where Dame Elizabeth Murdoch, the patron of the McClelland Gallery and Sculpture Park, situated 40 km south of Melbourne (www.mcclellanngallery.com), had commissioned a 4-m high bronze male nude figure with reputed Australian sculptor Peter Schipperheyen. The sculpture bearing the title ‘Zarathustra’ was unveiled by Dame Elizabeth on April 1. On his homepage (www.users.bigpond.com/ SCHIP/Zarathu.htm; accessed on July 18, 2006), the artist explains that when selecting a title for the massive sculpture ‘the sheer poetry of this beautiful sounding name totally obsessed me, in my heart a mystique was enveloping the sculpture I was to make.’ Schipperheyen furthermore explains about his studies, starting with reading Nietzsche’s book, but extending to other materials, and the more he learned, ‘the more excited I became, to learn of an individual who lived so long ago whose teachings have been tightly woven into subsequent spiritual traditions including my own’ (= Christianity). The idea of a Zoroastrian impact on Christianity obviously made the name Zarathustra ever the more appealing to the artist who, however, as he explained to me by email (July 20, 2006) wished to create ‘a larger than life figure of an archetypical man in bronze’ representing ‘both the Ancient Persian and the Modern German, whose spirits I feel I intuitively know’, and ‘man as a fundamental paradox’. Schipperheyen’s sculpture thereby fuses representations of the Persian Zarathustra, Nietzsche’s transformation of him, and the more underlying dilemmas of the human condition into a genuinely new artistic creation.

However, when word spread about the sculpture and its imminent unveiling, Melbourne Zoroastrians started a controversy which speedily spread all over the world. Schipperheyen was invited to speak to the Zoroastrian community in Sydney (where his work was perceived as highly offensive), an event which Schipperheyen perceived ‘as being put before a religious court’ (email of July 20, 2006). Zoroastrian internet-networks were mobilized globally in order to prevent their ‘prophet’ being presented as a gigantic nude in a sculpture park, and Schipperheyen reports having received over 500 emails and many phone calls, the fiercest criticism originating from Mumbai. (Obviously not all Zoroastrians objected and some even appreciate the artistic qualities of the work.) The events surrounding the Danish newspaper depictions of Muhammad fresh in mind, the internet-campaign by enraged Zoroastrians led to the Gallery perceiving the sculpture a security issue. As a result, the Gallery prevailed on the artist to change the name of the sculpture. It now carries the title ‘Thus Spake Zarathustra’, thereby clearly limiting the mimetic appeal to the figure created by Nietzsche.
Sketch 2: Mazdaznan

While Nietzsche’s Zarathustra is a powerful textual invention, our subsequent sketches will deal with a series of religious movements that in one way or the other reinvent Zoroastrianism outside the ethnic boundaries of the genetically continuous established Zoroastrian communities. Mazdaznan (for which see Linse 2001; Stausberg 2002b: 378–400), the first movement to be considered here, was started and promoted by Otman Hanish (d. 1936) whom his admirers regarded as the ‘Zarathustra redivivus’. In some varieties of his name this claim is spelled out by inserting the middle name Zar-Adusht, that besides creating an association with Zoroaster was meant to contain the word Zar (‘prince’), referring to Hanish’s alleged noble birth. While there are traces of a hagiography of ‘the Master’, as he was officially addressed, that would dislocate his spiritual authorization to a temple-order in Tibet – one cannot avoid thinking of Madame Blavatsky here – not much is known about his early biography in terms of empirically validated information before his foundation of the first Mazdaznan-organizations in Chicago and California in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. From North America the movement later spread to Europe. While it has survived the death of its ‘Master’ and to some extent blossomed in the decades after WW II, the movement seems to have lost its force since the 1970s (at the very latest) and is nowadays on a sharp decline.

As many, if not most, religious innovations, Mazdaznan draws on a wide range of influences and inspirations. Typically for many modern movements the impact of the Theosophical Society is noted throughout (see Linse 2001). Here, no general characteristic of the movement will be attempted, but the emphasis will be on its mermetic reconfiguration of Zoroastrianism. That is not meant to obstruct the heterogeneous elements deriving from other sources that the movement built on.

For Zoroastrians and Zoroastrian scholars alike, the very name of the movement is recognizably adapted from Zoroastrian vocabulary. The name for the religion of the Mazda-worshippers (Pahlavi dēn ī māzdāsēn) is here condensed into a single word. By adopting that name, Mazdaznan emphasizes its alleged ‘Zend-Avestan’ origins. Mazdaznan, however, understands that word to signify the ‘master-thought’ which is referring to an all-embracing teaching consisting of thought, word, and deed (see Stausberg 2002b: 379), another well-known Zoroastrian meme. Zoroastrian memes are transfused in Mazdaznan mythology and practice.

As to practice, among others such as breath and breathing, Mazdaznan emphasized songs and prayers, many of which were composed by Hanish, sometimes elaborating on Zoroastrian memes (names and motives). At the same time Mazdaznan attached great importance to the ancient ‘Mantras’, even if recognizing that their original intention and purpose were no longer apparent. Nevertheless, the ancient Zoroastrian mantras, the

\[ Yatha \text{ and the } Ashem, \text{ were enjoying a primary position in Mazdaznan prayer books which even contained several free translations of the ancient Avestan mantras by Hanish himself. Both formulae were also set to music (see Stausberg 2002b: 385). }\]

In many respects, Mazdaznan was a hygienic system based on assuming the original perfect condition and future perfectibility of the human body. The emphasis on the significance of the body for spiritual progress was perceived to be a heritage from Zoroaster’s teaching (see Linse 2001: 282). Mazdaznan encouraged vegetarianism and prescribed a refined dietetics, resulting in the publication of a series of cookery books, suggestions for therapies, and the production and sale of dietetic substances and products.

The ultimate aim of the praxis is ‘rebirth’, understood here as a spiritualization of the body, leading to self-salvation. Apart from emphasizing ascetic self-discipline and prescribing several techniques, Mazdaznan developed a program of eugenics aiming at the betterment of the offspring through carefully controlling the circumstances of the very act of procreation and subsequent pre-natal ‘education’ of the fetus. Hanish’s Mazdaznan championed an articulate racial ideology (see Linse 2001: 272–9; Stausberg 2002b: 387–9) according to which only the members of the ‘highest’, i.e. the Aryan, race are in a position to benefit from Mazdaznan’s program and to develop to mankind’s highest ultimate potentials. According to Mazdaznan, in its purest form the Aryan race is to be found where ‘Zarathustra’s spirit and his lofty aims in life’ are realized in the best manner, where ‘heart, blood and skin are purest’, namely in Great Germania (Linse 2001: 278). Through proper ‘race care’, the white race and the ‘Germanians’ have to purify themselves and to get rid of ‘impure blood’, in order to be able to transform them into the seventh and ultimate race. ¹

Turning to mythology, according to Hanish the ‘mother’ and ‘patron’ of the white race is called Ainyahita, a clear transfiguration of the Zoroastrian goddess Anahita. Hanish creates a mythological account around Ainyahita whom he presents as a blue-eyed girl of ten, dressed in white, girdled with the kasti and regularly saying her paites (Hanish 1913; Stausberg 2002b: 379–81). This mythological universe, set in remote Tibet, is populated by various Zoroastrian divine beings and demons with whom Ainyahita converses extensively. Even the dialogues with Ahura Mazda, however, are only prelims for her discovery of her divine self, the divinity in her heart. According to Mazdaznan, Ainyahita’s ‘pearls’ (a Gnostic metaphor) were later on assembled by Zarathustra, the ‘great carrier of light’ for the Aryans and progenitor of the Aryan race, who had lived around 6,900 years BCE and recreated the truly Aryan religion founded by Ainyahita. That religion was later on embodied by ‘Jesus the Nazarene’. Accordingly, Hanish provides an ‘Aryanized’ biography of Jesus whose Zoroastrian-Ainyahitan teaching was sabotaged by Paul and his doctrines leading to a ‘Judaization’ of early Christianity. There were continuous traces of the true Aryan teach-
had obtained the Zoroastrian ritual garments from a Parsi art dealer. Kaul adopted the Zoroastrian surname Sraoasha (sometimes also spelled as Craoasha) and even added the prestigious Zoroastrian priestly title Dastur to his name.

This unique Dastur started to propagate what he regarded as Zoroastrianism and reports claim he had 'converted' some 30 persons to his Zoroastrianism. It seems that he was most successful in recruiting people clinging to some sort of 'Aryan' ideology. Unfortunately, it is unclear what his Zoroastrianism amounted to, but as he did not hesitate to get in touch with the Bombay Parsi community asking for books about Zoroastrianism to be sent to him it seems that his vision of Zoroastrianism was from an ideological point of view more affine to established Zoroastrianism rather than a reinvention of his own (as was the case with Hanish). Later on, Kaul founded an American Zoroastrian Association in San Diego. It seems that this association held regularly meetings and had a library and two lecture halls. There were plans to establish a fire-temple. Unfortunately, I have lost track of what happened to Dastur Kaul and his movement around the time of the outbreak of World War II.

Sketch 4: The Mazdayasni Zarathushhti Anjuman/International Mazdayasnan Order

The next movement to be considered here started its activities likewise at the West Coast of the United States, in Washington State in the early 1960s, before moving its headquarters to Springfield, Oregon, where, between 1964 and 1969, it acted under the name The Mazdayasni Zarathushhti Anjuman. This name was subsequently changed to The International Mazdayasnan Order (for this and the following see Stausberg 2002b: 362–4). Unlike in the case of Mazdaznan this choice of name is explicitly designed to create a linkage with established Zoroastrianism; unlike Mazdaznan and Dastur Kaul this movement was directly inspired by two Zoroastrian priests, namely Dastur Bode from India and Rashid Shahrnurdan, an Iranian priest who spent the better part of his life in India and had the reputation of being a mystic (dervish). Dastur Bode went regularly to their center in the US.

In contrast to Dastur Kaul and Mazdaznan who were appealing to Westerners, the recruitment basis for this movement mainly seems to consist of ethnic Iranians seeking to 'return' to Zoroastrianism. The political sympathies of the movement are clearly with the former Shah regime, and the political resistance towards the Islamic Republic seems to have lately seriously restrained its liberty of action in Europe. In the United States some years back the movement reported a membership of some 500. Not quite unexpectedly in view of its recruitment basis, the movement emphasizes the importance of the freedom of choice of religion. It emphasizes monotheism, egalitarianism, ecology, democracy, and rejects sacrifice, fasting, and
priesthood. With Mazdayasna it shares an optimistic outlook for the future and it likewise stresses the aim of individual moral-spiritual self-perfection. While the teaching of that movement with its 21 principles does not correspond to established mainstream Zoroastrianisms, its ideas are not far removed from reinterpretations of the religion as proposed by leading modern Zoroastrian intellectuals and in contrast with the cases outlined above it was inspired by two 'ethnic' Zoroastrian priests. In a figurative sense, its appeal may be classified as diasporic since it promises to offer to ethnic Iranians the option of returning to their perceived religious origins. In any case, the International Mazdayasna Order may be considered a reconfiguration of Zoroastrianism crossing beyond the borders of the established Zoroastrian communities. The same is true for the next movement to be considered here.

Sketch 5: The Zarathushtrian Assembly

While the International Mazdayasna Order seems to go largely unnoticed in Zoroastrian circles, this is not the case with the Zarathushtrian Assembly, an organization which was incorporated in California in 1990 (for what follows see Staunberg 2002c: 366–72; Hinnells 2005: 523–6). Although the Zarathushtrian Assembly has several prominent founding members (most of them ethnic Zoroastrians) and a good number of committed adherents, the organization is mainly inspired by the work and the personality of Ali Akbar Jafari, one of the most controversial figures of modern Zoroastrian history (at least from a Parsi point of view). His very name is anathema for Parsis who perceive themselves as 'orthodox' or 'traditional' and who use every occasion they can to bring him into discredit. While there are conflicting accounts about Jafari's background and education – he was born in Kerman (Iran) – Jafari spent many years of his youth in Karachi (Pakistan) where he came into contact with the local Parsi community.

Jafari considers Dastur Maneji N. Dalalla (1875–1956), one of the leading progressive Parsi twentieth priests and intellectuals of the twentieth century (see Staunberg 2002b: 108–11; Hinnells 2005: 212–16), among his teachers. Jafari's interpretation of Zarathushtrianism which he started to unfold since the 1960s is indeed indebted to Dalalla's scholarly work. Moving to Teheran, where a number of his books were published by Zoroastrian organizations, Jafari became an influential figure in the growing and modernizing Zoroastrian community of the capital.

Following the revolution resulting in the formation of the Islamic Republic, Jafari left Iran, as the new regime was not favorable to persons with links to the former government and who furthermore had prominently renounced Islam and were actively recruiting Muslims to Zoroastrianism. While Jafari, who at the time of writing is in his late 80s, settled in California, he was likewise traveling extensively within North America, but also to Europe and Australia. Many of his students and admirers revere Jafari as a guru, but his

religious program is less centered on his personality and charisma, but is rather built on apparently rational arguments. His reputation is not that of a revealer, but that of a scholar. This claim is underlined by the academic title Doctor, the validity of which is regularly cast in doubt by his Parsi adversaries.

Jafari's reconstruction of Zarathushtrianism focuses on the Gathas which by most modern scholars and Zoroastrians alike are generally ascribed to Zarathustra himself (see Staunberg in press). Jafari goes so far as to take the Gathas as the only canon for Zoroastrianism. According to this view, all later Zoroastrian traditions are acceptable only in so far as they conform to the canonical authority provided by the Gathas. The crucial question then is the content of the Gathas. While contemporary philological scholarship still struggles with reaching even the most basic consensus of an interpretation of the Gathas, Dr Jafari is able to extract a clear message from these five hymns of archaic poetry of some 278 stanzas (see Jafari 1989). To begin with, Jafari's Zarathushtrism is a pronounced monotheism denouncing any divine beings besides Ahura Mazda. Moreover, this Gathah-Zarathushtrism is the sum of everything that is deemed to be politically incorrect from the point of view of a modern, enlightened worldview: the Gathas promote a progressive, egalitarian (as to race, caste, nationality, and gender), altruistic, liberal, competitive, conscientious, democratic, and ecological mentality. Morals turn into ethics: There are neither pre- nor proscriptions, but individual responsibility and freedom of choice. Jafari's Gathas are stripped of links to conventional religion: mankind is its own savior, concepts of an individual's afterlife are largely absent, priesthood is rejected, and initiation is redefined as an act of confession of faith. The entire ritual apparatus of Zoroastrianism is abandoned or replaced by reconstructed rituals that are deemed to be in line with the Gathas.

This modernistic reconfiguration of the message of Zarathustra redefines adherence in terms of choice and commitment to a certain 'way of life' rather than membership in an ethnic community. That is why the Zarathushtrian Assembly does not regard itself as just another traditional Zoroastrian association, but as the prototypical Zoroastrian organization par excellence, since it claims to be the only one exclusively committed to following Zarathustra. The Zarathushtrian Assembly is a de-ethnicized memetic reorganization of Zoroastrianism.

While the established ethnic Zoroastrian communities struggle with reproducing their membership basis, memetic Gathah-Zarathushtrianism recruits adherents or sympathizers from other gene pools. According to Hinnells' sources, in London alone Jafari's network 'accepts' some 100 members a year into Zarathushtrianism. The primary target- or interest-group are Iranians of a Muslim background, and by now a network of small-scale, mainly Persian-speaking, organizations have cropped up around the world that in one way or the other are linked to the Zarathushtrian Assembly and its aims. The interest-groups, however, seems to be extending to people from the former
Soviet Union and the Central Asian countries that have a profound Iranian cultural legacy. Moreover, it seems that the Gatha-Zarathushrian movement is increasingly appealing to people who have no genetic affiliation to Iran. Occasionally some Europeans and Americans have declared their adherence to Gatha-Zarathushrianism, and The Zarathushrian Assembly seems to have found relatively fertile grounds in Venezuela and Brazil, which is a haven for many new religious movements and diverse forms of spiritual experimentation.

**Sketch 6: Alexander Bard**

As soon as new religious movements are able to attract celebrities, they obtain an increased degree of publicity, respectability, and media-attention. At least in Sweden, this is what happened to Zoroastrianism. The celebrity in question is a musician by the name of Alexander Bard (b. 1961). Bard became famous as a member of the Swedish pop band Army of Lovers which had several hits in the early 1990s. The band was controversial for their provocative, partly frivolous videos, and controversial for their cross-dressing and explicit lyrics. After the band split up, Bard pursued further projects as a musician and producer as well as writing books and working as a sort of psychoanalyst. Bard is very much a celebrity and dazzling figure in Swedish public life.

According to his own account, after his childhood in a devout Christian environment and a brief interplay as a ‘Satanist priest’ in adolescence Bard got interested in and eventually ‘converted’ to Zoroastrianism while he was living in Amsterdam in 1983. (Bard adopted his forename Alexander in 1985, i.e. after his ‘conversion’, and from a traditional Zoroastrian perspective this is a very odd choice.) His initiation was performed by an Iranian Zoroastrian priest in Gothenburg in 1997. Whereas Bard does not publicly advertise Zoroastrianism and (unlike many Christian artists) refrains from making references to his religion in his music, he makes no secrets of his religious confession (which also features on his homepage) and thereby has, in Sweden at least, contributed to attracting a certain amount of public attention to Zoroastrianism.

Bard does not subscribe to Zoroastrianism in any of its established varieties. His peculiar vision of Zarathustra (see Staubs 2002b: 330–1) is inspired by Dr Jafarey in regarding Zarathustra primarily as a philosopher who, according to Bard, already some 3,700 years ago proclaimed a modern existentialist philosophy emphasizing the necessity of freedom of choice. Moreover, in Bard’s view, Zarathustra had anticipated the revolutionary thoughts of twentieth-century natural sciences, in particular the Big Bang theory and quantum mechanics, the former (in Bard’s reinterpretation) necessitating the assumption of a Wise Spirit (Ahura Mazda) setting the frame for the process and unfolding of the laws of nature (Asa), and the latter requiring a non-deterministic worldview. As religions (in Bard’s view)

have to be judged according to their compatibility with modern science, Bard finds Zarathustra’s philosophy to be the best choice. In line with his scientific views, Bard rejects standard features of traditional religion (in the Judaic-Christian-Islamic prototype) including priesthood, divine anthropomorphism, moral prescriptions, prophecy, and eschatology. Hence, Bard takes some radical steps towards de-religionizing Zoroastrianism further than his mentor Dr Jafarey. Whereas The Zarathushrian Assembly in its way celebrates a number of Zoroastrian festivals, these are more or less irrelevant to Alexander Bard. While Dr Jafarey and many members of The Zarathushrian Assembly, despite emphasizing the universal character of Zarathustra’s message, still cling to its Iranian legacy (for example by celebrating Iranian festivals), with Alexander Bard the ethnic background even of Zarathustra loses any importance whatsoever. For him, Iran is in no way privileged, and he regards the question of where Zarathustra had lived as completely immaterial. Likewise, he shows no interest in the fate of the established ethnic Zoroastrian communities and he has few contacts with the Swedish Zoroastrian association in Gothenburg.

**Sketch 7: Pavel Globa and his Avestan Schools of Astrology**

Kamran Jamshidi, the Swedish-Iranian priest who had formally initiated Alexander Bard into Zoroastrianism, is actively spreading the ‘good religion’ around the world. Among others, Mobed Jamshidi has performed several initiation-ceremonies in Minsk (Belarus) and in Moscow (in 2001 and 2005 respectively). It seems that none of the initiatives had an ethnic Iranian background. As a matter of fact, Russia is currently witnessing an increasing interest in Zoroastrianism, mainly resulting from the efforts of Pavel Pavlovich Globa, a well-known astrologer born in 1953. Globa started his career as a public astrologer during the years of Perestroika. Because of his television shows and his famous clientele he can be regarded as a post-Soviet media celebrity (see also his homepage: www.globa.ru).

Globa claims distant Persian ancestry and reports that his grandfather, a physician, had started a small Zoroastrian group in early twentieth-century St Petersburg which was subsequently suppressed in the wake of the October Revolution. In a way, then, Globa claims to continue the work started by his grandfather before the Soviet era. Globa recounts that (somewhere in Eastern [mythical] territories) his grandfather had initiated him into the esoteric wisdom of ‘Zervanite mobeds’, i.e. priests upholding the cosmogonic primacy of the divinity Zurvan. Zurvanism is often regarded as a ‘sect’ of Zoroastrianism – and in Globa’s view that seems to bolster its esoteric dimension. Globa believes that there are still pockets of Zurvanites living in Northwest Iran. While those who, like Globa himself, have a genetic as well as an initiatory affiliation to esoteric Zurvanism can claim to be ‘Zervanites’, his students are mere ‘Zoroastrians’.
The important points of reference in Globa’s memetic reconfiguration of Zoroastrianism are neither Zarathustra nor the Ga
thas and the supreme god Ahura Mazdah but the Sasanian dynasty, the Pahlavi-books, in particular the Bundahishn, the time-god Zurvan and the other yazata connected to the calendar. Unlike Dr Jafarey and Alexander Bard who build their mimetic transformations of Zoroastrianism on their interpretation of Zarathustra and the Gathas, Globa wishes to reconstruct Sasanian Zoroastrianism which in part is a continuation of Mesopotamian astrological traditions. In this
view, even the Zoroastrian priesthood of the Magi, despised by modernist reconstructions of Zoroastrianism, gains a positive quality as transmitters of ancient cosmic and astrological knowledge that was partly inherited from Chaldea. For Globa Zurvan is the sole absolute deity who conceived Ahura Mazdah and Angra Mainyu as two subordinate Spirits. Zarathustra was a reformer restoring the pristine purity of Zurvanite religion. According to
Globa, Zarathustra had lived between the river Volga and the Urals, locating the religion in Slavic territories and linking Indo-Aryan and Slavonic religious genealogies. While Dr Jafarey and Alexander Bard are basically modernists, Pavel Globa is an esotericist and this shapes his Astro-
Zoroastrianism.¹⁴

In several Russian cities, Globa has founded a number of so-called Avestan Schools of Astrology where his pupils teach and issue diplomas to their students. With respect to the dualism between Ahura Mazdah and Angra Mainyu, Avestan astrology is held to be a powerful protection against the forces of evil. The Avestan ‘system’ of astrology as ‘rediscovered’ by Globa is apparently not much different from ordinary Western prognostic astrology, apart from some minor modifications. However, Globa has added some new planets, including Arta and Azit, creatures of Ahura Mazdah and Ahriman respectively. The system also works with the distinction between menog and getig, as the transcendent and real worlds respectively, opening for different astrological contextualizations and leading to different astrological evaluations of otherwise identical constellations. According to Globa, the Avestan form of astrology is superior to other forms of astrology for it is grounded in a religious system rather than in a materialistic worldview. The religious grounding of Avestan astrology is provided by the elaborate Avestan/Zoroastrian calendar as devised and modified by Globa (and his closest collaborators). While the Avestan astrology assigns a yazata to each day and month (as in the traditional Zoroastrian calendars), it likewise assigns a good (= ‘totem’) and an evil (= ‘antitotem’) animal to each day, month, and year. As a system of katarchic astrology it provides practical guidance, including ethical and practical guidance (what to do and what not; what to eat, how to dress, etc.). Moreover, it has prognostic value. The yearly Zoroastrian calendars (in color and large formats) are among the main publications of Globa’s groups. They are religious manifestos and a prognostic as well as ethical instrument for day-to-day behavior.

In 1994 a Zoroastrian Congregation was founded and registered in St Petersburg.¹⁵ This congregation has a hierarchical structure, with Globa acting as its head (Dean or ‘mobed’).¹⁶ The Dean has selected some of his closest pupils to act as horbads who constitute a council. The horbads (including some ladies) were initiated by Globa. The horbads are in their turn authorized to initiate people into Zoroastrianism. The memetic adaptation of the historical Sasanian and post-Sasanian priestly nomenclature (dastur, mobed, horbad) underscores the positive evaluation of the Zoroastrian priestly traditions. While the candidates during initiation previously obtained tricolor cords — red/yellow/green, symbolizing good thoughts/words/deeds and representing the three colors of Zurvan — they later started using white cords which they obtained from the Parsis in India. The colorful Astro-
Zoroastrian cord was replaced by ‘real’ Zoroastrian kustis. They also obtained a white priestly dress from the Parsis. In that way, the impact of the Parsis brought some aspect of Astro-Zoroastrianism closer in line with established Zoroastrianism. The Astro-Zoroastrian priests perform some special liturgies which, however, are very remote from any Zoroastrian models. The congregation arranges regular prayer-meetings where they partly employ Avestan texts and their Russian translations. Furthermore, it arranges festivals, some of which are adaptations from Iranian prototypes (including Nowruz, Rupatin, the Gahambar, and Mehregan). In their rituals, the fire is of paramount importance — a clear memetic-ritualistic transfer. Sometimes, the congregation arranges special events such as conferences. Moreover, the congregation publishes a newsletter and a magazine (Mitra) promoting the Avesta, Avestan astrology, Zoroastrianism, and Zurvanism.

Religious innovation and the emergence of para-Zoroastrianisms

This chapter is a study of religious innovation as a result of the spread of what is here referred to as religious ‘memes’ beyond the boundaries that religious communities erect around themselves. The stimuli for religious innovation often arise from various forms of interactions with other religious traditions (as much as from internal competitions and negotiations); cross-fertilization of religious traditions is an important means of religious innovation. The seven cases sketched in this essay are different (and partly even contradictory) forms of elaborations and reconfigurations of Zoroastrian memes by persons who were not primarily socialized into (ethnic) Zoroastrianism.¹⁷ Whereas the first set of examples (§ 1) entailed the mere usage of the name (= memetic unit) Zoroaster/Zarathustra as the author or protagonist of reassembled or newly written textual materials without any apparent Zoroastrian genealogy of the textual materials in question, the remaining sketches have different degrees of relationships to established institutional Zoroastrian communities. While Dastur Kaul (§ 3) as an individual and

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The International Mazdayasnan Order (= § 4) as a group regarded themselves as continuing the established Zoroastrian tradition (= a memetic complex). Mazdaznan (§ 2) cannot be categorized as a Zoroastrian movement; rather, Mazdaznan lays claim to a more encompassing legacy that also embraces historical Zoroastrianism (as one of its subsequent developments) and avails itself freely of various aspects of established Zoroastrianism. The Zarathushtrian Assembly (§ 5), in contrast, presents itself as the purified version of primordial Zarathushtrianism, deriving in unmediated fashion from Zarathustra and its words as laid down in the Gathas. While Mazdaznan emphasizes bodily behavior such as nutrition, breathing, singing, and sexuality, Gatha-Zarathushtrianism focuses on ethics, ideology, and in the case of Alexander Bard (§ 6) on the compatibility with natural sciences. Former popstar Bard is as much a celebrity in Sweden as TV-astralloger Pavel Gliba in Russia. In contrast to the modernist ideology of Gatha-Zarathushtrianism, Gliba’s esoteric Astro-Zurvanism (§ 7) builds on other aspects of the traditional Zoroastrian legacy.

The future developments of the para-Zoroastrianism sketched in this chapter remain to be seen. They may well turn out to be relatively short-lived experiments only to be replaced by others. The main thrust of this chapter was to exemplify the flow of memes or representations, the study of which may open new horizons for religious history.18

Notes
1 Other sketches could be added, not the least from the Muslim world, including astrology and mysticism, e.g. the Azar Keivan-school (see Staueberg 2002a 413–17). Sarah Stewart drew my attention to the Zoroastrian memetic legacy of Central Asia, especially in Tajikistan.
2 No diasporic orientation of these communities is attested by the sources.
3 Peter Schipperheyn has generously commented on an earlier draft of this section.
4 Mazdaznan race ideology is in many respects close to Nazi ideology, but there are also some distinct differences, and Mazdaznan did not benefit from the Nazi regime.
5 There were several early twentieth-century attempts at ‘Aryanizing’ Christian origins.
6 John Hinnells reminds me of an incident reported in the Parsi Prakash (vol. VIII). When the Government wanted to acquire and pull down the building housing the Mazdaznan-centre in summer 1944, Mazdaznan officials protested by referring to the religious status of the building. At that point some Parsi individuals and organizations intervened and challenged that claim, emphasizing the non-religious character of the place. (These Parsis obviously found it difficult to accept cooking classes as a ‘religious’ activity.)
7 On December 13, 1944 Dastur Bode put forward an appeal to the High Court for the recognition of the Mazdaznan-center as a center of worship (see the preceding note); the appeal was dismissed with costs and the building was pulled down (source: Parsi Prakash; information provided by Hinnells).
8 It needs to be emphasized that Jafari has also many admirers and sympathizers among ethnic Zoroastrians the world over.
9 The ‘Acceptance Ceremony’ of a certain Stephen Williamson as performed by Jafari is documented at http://www.cfn.org/~opti/stevewho.html (accessed on July 18, 2006). Interestingly, the ritual was performed inside a Zoroastrian temple.
11 Mobed Jamshidi is the grandson of a former Iranian high-priest (Arshid Azargoshap) from Teheran with roots in Yazd.
12 Pictures of both events can be seen on http://www.ooshian.org/IndexEnglish.htm (accessed on July 18, 2006).
13 The following sketch is based on Tessmann 2005. This MA-thesis (supervised by the present author) is based on written source-materials, internet materials, and two shorter field trips to Minsk and St Petersburg. Mrs Tessmann (who has also kindly commented on an earlier draft of this section) is currently a PhD-student at Södertörn University College, Stockholm.
14 While Globa and some of his followers maintain that his astrology had been ‘Zoroastrian’ all along, the available sources suggest that Globa around 1889–90 started to place astrology in a ‘Zoroastrian’ light (Tessmann 2005: 62).
15 The registration was subsequently modified twice (in 1996 and 2000).
16 After Globa had moved away from Moscow, a ‘junior dean’ (or zaatar) was appointed acting as deputy dean.
17 In the contemporary world, the study of religion and Iranian philology contributes to spreading Zoroastrian memes. Reading about Zoroastrianism or reading Zoroastian texts (edited and translated by philologists) may invite various people to creatively ‘do something’ with these memes in their life. In that way, scholars may well contribute to processes such as those described in this chapter.
18 To this day, indigenous Zoroastrians have not yet made attempts to claim legal copyrights for ‘their’ memetic materials. For a critical discussion of attempts to expand the notion of copyright in order to control ‘cultural appropriation’ see Brown 1998.

Bibliography
It is widely thought that the climax of Parsi political social and economic power was in the late nineteenth century, with major leaders in Bombay, the rest of India and even with a Member of Parliament in London – Dadabhoy Naoroji in 1892. The Jijibshahs (see Palsetia in this volume), the Wadis, the Petit and the Tatas were industrial giants in India. Parsis were prominent in the field of social reform, notably female education (S.S. Bengali), and in law (see Sharafi in this volume on Davar). Perhaps the year in which they felt at their most powerful was 1905–6. Dadabhoy Naoroji still strived the international political stage; he was the only person who could hold together the moderate and the radical wings of the Indian National Congress (INC) and was invited for a unique third time to preside at the annual Congress in Calcutta (Mambo 2005: 44–59; Masani 1939). Sir Preresheshah Mehta, who had been recently knighted, was dominating western Indian politics (Mody 1997). In 1906 Sir Muncherji Bhownaggree (see McLeod in this volume) was coming to the end of his second term as a Westminster MP. Sir Dinshah Wacha was the organizational heart of the Bombay Presidency Association (Kulke 1974; Palsetia 2001: 277–319). The Tatas were making huge inter-communal charitable bequests.

Older Parsis in Mumbai often complain that the modern community lacks the giants of the nineteenth century and consequently that the Parsi community’s standing and influence have declined, a position reflected in Luhmann 1996: 126–57. Whereas books on Indian history in the nineteenth century usually make some reference to Parsis, books on the twentieth century rarely do. But that is only one side of the story. Many Parsis are understandably proud of their continuing history and the achievements of individuals are related in international magazines and other publications, notably the monumental works of Godrej and Puthakey-Mistree (2002), and Mody (2005).1 This chapter first considers a range of Parsi achievers since 1906 to
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