Thoughts of Gāthic Beginnings and Beginnings of Gāthic Thoughts

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in memory of Stanley Insler (1937–2019)

§1.   How Our Earliest Greek Poems Begin

Three papers (plus the revision of one of them) have appeared so far on the first three words of Homer's *Iliad*: (i) "Gods and Vowels," in J. Virgilio García & Angel Ruiz (eds.), *Poetic Language and Religion in Greece and Rome* (Newcastle upon Tyne 2013), pp. 2–28 (rev. version in Shane Butler & Sarah Nooter (eds.), *Sound and the Ancient Senses* (Abingdon 2019), pp. 153–70); (ii) "The Hymnic Long Alpha: Μούσας ἀείδω and Related Incipits in Archaic Greek Poetry," in Stephanie W. Jamison, H. Craig Melchert & Brent Vine (eds.), *Proceedings of the 24th Annual UCLA Indo-European Conference, Los Angeles, October 26th and 27th, 2012* (Bremen 2013), pp. 87–101; and (iii) "Μῆνιν ἄειδε, θεά and the Form of the Homeric Word for 'Goddess'," in Dieter Gunkel & Olav Hackstein (eds.), *Language and Meter* (Leiden 2018), pp. 54–76. Also discussed are the proem of Hesiod's *Works & Days* (esp. in (i)) and the *Homeric Hymns* (esp. in (ii)). Other related contributions from recent years include: (iv) "Toward an Indo-European Commentary on Hesiod," in David M. Goldstein, Stephanie W. Jamison & Brent Vine (eds.), *Proceedings of the 28th Annual UCLA Indo-European Conference, Los Angeles, November 11th and 12th, 2016* (Bremen 2018), pp. 119–34 (esp. 127–30 on, again, the proem of the *Works & Days*) and (v) "The Prehistory and Analogues of Hesiod's Poetry," in Alexander C. Loney & Stephen Scully (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Hesiod* (Oxford 2018), pp. 61–77, as well as (vi) "Reconstructing the Pre-ancient World in Theory and Practice," in Tomasz Derda, Jennifer Hilder & Jan Kwapisz (eds.), *Fragments, Holes, and Wholes: Reconstructing the Ancient World in Theory and Practice* (Warsaw 2017), pp. 23–40, at 38–39.

§1.1   (Ele)mental musings on the (ele)mental Muses

##**Μουσάων** Ἑλικωνιάδων ἀρχώμεθ᾽ ἀείδειν (Hesiod, *Theogony* 1)
  "From the Heliconian **Muses** let us begin to sing"
##**Μοῦσαι** Πιερίηθεν, ἀοιδῇσι κλείουσαι | … ἐννέπετε (Hesiod, *Works & Days* 1–2)
  "**Muses** from Pieria, glorifying by songs, … sing"
##Ἄνδρα μοι ἔννεπε, **Μοῦσα** (Homer, *Odyssey* 1)
  "Of the man sing to me, o **Muse**"

##**Μῆνιν** ἄειδε, *θεά* (Homer, *Iliad* 1)
  "Of the **wrath** sing, o *goddess* (*θεά* = Μοῦσα)"

• μῆνις < PIE *mneh₂*- 'keep in mind' (thus above all Watkins), …
• … which is widely believed to be a root extension of *men*- 'think', …
• … which underlies Μοῦσα (thus, again, Watkins, among others)

• Μοῦσα ~ Vedic *mántu*- 'caring, mindful', Old Avestan *maṇtu*- 'counsel'
• The mother of the Μοῦσαι (< *men*-) is Μνημοσύνη 'Memory' (< *mneh₂*-).

• Semantics from an Avestan point of view: Μοῦσα ~ *vohū manå* "good thinking" and μῆνις ~ *akem manå* "bad thinking"

§1.2   More musings

##**Μούσας** ἀείδω καὶ Ἀπόλλωνα κλυτότοξον (*Iliad* 1 in the ἀρχαία Ἰλιάς ("Old *Iliad*") found in the library of the book collector Apellicon of Teos (d. 84 B.C.))
  "Of the **Muses** I sing, and Apollo of the famed bow"

##Μνήσομαι (*Homeric Hymn* (3) *to Apollo* 1)
  "Let me **remember**"

• μιμνήσκομαι, etc. < *$mneh_2$-

§2. The Beginning of the Beginning

§2.1 Linguistics in the service of literature

• We may reconstruct how our earliest hymns might have begun — at least the opening syllable! — as follows:

PIE ##*men-/$mneh_2$- [+ *$h_2\underset{.}{u}e$/oid- (or other word of singing) + *$d\underset{.}{i}eu$- (or other divinity)]

§2.2 The "Julie Andrews principle"

• *Let's start at the very beginning | A very good place to start | …*

• Beginnings are "privileged positions" (Peter J. Rabinowitz).

• Oral narrative is traditional (lit. "passed down"), and the most traditional and memorable part of any text is the opening.
• A bard who does something totally different in verse 1000 is doing what bards do, …
• … WHEREAS: a bard who does something totally different in verse 1 is breaking the tradition — …
• … BUT: what a great bard can do is tweak the tradition in verse 1 so that it is remains traditional while also carrying his own stamp.

§2.3 Other Indo-European traditions?

• "A plausible next step would be to return to the Vedic material, starting with *Rigveda* 1.1. What has since ancient times been the first hymn of the collection (though it does not belong linguistically to the oldest stratum) begins with the vowel *a*, in the name of the fire-god *agní-*, whose paradigm is then given polyptotically: acc. ##*Agním* (1a), nom. #*agníḥ* (2a), instr. #*agnínā* (3a), voc. #*ágne* (4a), nom. #*agnír* (5a)" ("Gods and Vowels," rev. version (2019), p. 168).

• Yes, ##*Agním ī́ḷe* "Agni I praise" fits the pattern ##NOUN_ACC + VERB OF SINGING of ##Μῆνιν ἄειδε and some of the other Archaic Greek incipits in §§1.1 and 1.2; …
• … yes, there is something interesting about ##*a* (but there is no time to discuss this here); …
• … and yes, the polyptoton resembles what we find in the proem of the *Works & Days*, which rings changes on the divine name Ζεύς — …
• … BUT: this was not one of my brighter ideas, in the first place because the first book of the *Rigveda* is not one of the Family Books!

• Instead, then, we should look for reflexes of *men-/$mneh_2$- in appropriate texts in other archaic traditions.

- Old Avestan and Vedic make the most sense, for reasons of both genre and subgrouping.
  > I plan to examine the Vedic evidence in my talk at the annual UCLA Indo-European conference next month.

§3.   *men-* in Old Avestan

§3.1   An abbreviated summary of the evidence

- The hymns might be both a very good and a very bad place to search for clues since some of the most important concepts in Zoroastrianism, and thus most frequent words throughout the corpus, are clear reflexes of *men-*.

- √*man* 'think' (e.g., *maṇtā*)
- *manah-* 'thought'
- *mąθra-* 'precept' (Insler), 'sacred utterance', or 'formula'
- *mainiiu-* 'spirit'
- *Mazdā-* 'wise' (cf. *Ahura Mazdā*)

§3.2   Semantic coherence and overlap

- Back to the tripartite reconstruction in §2.1:

PIE ##**men-/mneh₂-** + *h₂ue/oid-* (or other word of singing) + *djeu-* (or other divinity)

- All three go together culturally: the bard, whose two main functions are to remember and to call these memories to the mind of the populace by means of song, is divinely inspired.

- In Greek, the three are sometimes linguistically blurred: Μοῦσαι are literally *men-*tal goddesses, and William Stephen Moran notes that forms of μιμνήσκομαι, like ##Μνήσομαι, refer specifically to bardic memory as instantiated through song and may even be translated as "remember-sing."

- In Avestan, the overlap is even stronger: *men-* refers to thought (e.g., *maṇtā*), to divinity (*mainiiu-* and *Ahura Mazdā-*), and to what may be song and is in any case a special kind of speech (*mąθra-*, for which the etymologically inspired German rendering 'Denkspruch' seems apt and not at all clumsy in the manner of "remember-sing").

§3.3   Beginning thoughts

- It is unnecessary — not to say that it would be both tedious and trivial — to catalogue all the many instances of *men-*, …
- … and it turns out not in general (but see immediately below) to be terribly interesting to note the many clusters of forms (e.g., Y 29.7 *mąθrəm*, *mazdå*, and *manaŋhā*) — …
- … BECAUSE: we are not interested in "un-privileged positions."

- HOWEVER: there are remarkably (?) few examples of *_men-_ in the first verse of any of the seventeen _Yasnas_ that make up the _Gāthas_ (and none in the _Yasna Haptaŋhāiti_): …
- … not a single instance of √_man_ or _maθra-_ in a first verse and only two of _mainiiu-_ (Y 28.1 (see §4.2) and 47.1, each of which has a cluster of three forms that reflect *_men-_) — …
     There is also the engimatic form _manōi_ in 32.1.
- … AND YET: _Mazdā-_ and _manah-_ abound.

- _Mazdā-_: in the first verse of Y 28, 31, 32, 34, 43, 44, 46, 47, 49, 50, 51, and 53

- _manah-_ in the forms _manaŋhā_ and _manaŋhō_: in the first verse of Y 28, 30, 43, 44, 47, 49, and 50 — and not just at the start, for they are extremely common throughout a number of the hymns
- The eleven-verse Y 28, for example, has eight instances across seven of the verses.

- Y 28 stands at the head of the collection. Is this the original situation? Or is Y 28 analogous to RV 1.1? How would we know?
     Spake Martin Schwartz: "Yasna 29, which (rather than e.g. Y28) I regard as the first poem which Zarathushtra composed" ("Lexical Cruces of Yasna 29 and the Serial Cross-textual Composition of the Gathas," in Maria Macuch, Dieter Weber & Desmond Durkin-Meisterernst (eds.), _Ancient and Middle Iranian Studies: Proceedings of the 6th European Conference of Iranian Studies, held in Vienna, 18–22 September 2007_ (Wiesbaden 2010), pp. 219–24, at 219). I am doubtful.

- The conceit of the present paper suggests (see §4) that Y 28 and, even more, 44 have priority in some sense — …
- … BUT: there are surely other ways to look at the matter, which may well not be resolvable, and it is surely wise to stop with the claim that Y 28 and 44 bear a certain resemblance to Greek material that suggests compositional archaism and not venture into further speculation about compositional or post-compositional order.

§4.   "_Manah-_grams"

§4.1   Reverence implies thought

- Two nasal-heavy _s_-stems: _manah-_ and _nəmah-_ 'reverence'
- Just as the nasal-even-heavier forms _manaŋhā_ and _manaŋhō_ abound in the _Gāthas_, so do most instances of the latter noun have the form _nəmaŋhā_ or _nəmaŋhō_.

- _nəmah-_ appears in two first verses: Y 28.1 (_nəmaŋhā_) and 44.1 (2×: _nəmaŋhō_ and _nəmā_, where the former is in fact an adjective: 'reverent')

- _manah-_ shows up all the time without nearby _nəmah-_, …
- … WHEREAS: nearly all instances of _nəmah-_ are correlated with _manah-_: Y 28.1, 34.3, 43.9, 44.1, 49.10, 50.6, 50.8, and 51.20.
     The only two that do not are Y 45.8 (where we do, however, have both _mainiiə̄uš_ and _mazdąm_) and 51.5. The absence of any form of *_men-_ in the latter is especially striking since 51.5 contains what may be the most secure anagram in the _Gāthas_: Stephanie W. Jamison, "An Anagram in the Gāthās: _Yasna_ 51.4–5," _JAOS_ 122/2 (FS Insler) 287–89. Perhaps one anagram in a verse is sufficient unto the cause?

§4.2   Y 28.1

#(#ʔ)*ahiiā yāsā* <u>*nəmaŋhā*</u>   *ustānazastō rafəδrahiiā*
mainiiə̄uš mazdā *p̱a̱o̱u̱ṟu̱u̱ī̱m*   *spəntahyā ašā vīspə̄ŋg šiiaoθanā*
vaŋhə̄uš xratūm **manaŋhō**   *yā xšnəuuīšā gə̄ušcā uruuąnəm*#
   "With hands outstretched in <u>reverence</u> of him, (our) support, the **spirit** virtuous through
   truth, I <u>first</u> entreat all (of you), **Wise One**, through this act, for (that) through which Thou
   mayest satisfy the determination of (my) good **thinking** and the soul of the cow."
      The translations here and in §4.3 are Insler's; I do not necessarily adhere to them, but the matter
      is fortunately at most only minimally relevant here. The transliteration follows Humbach's
      conventions rather than Insler's but is in no place controversial. (Some diacritical marks are not
      standard, but the reason for this is uninteresting: I can't figure out how to make them on my
      computer …)

   • Note also (e.g.) *manaŋhā* and *manaŋhō* (and *mazdā*) in 28.2.

§4.3   Y 44.1

[#(#ʔʔ)*tat̪ θβā pərəsā ərəš mōi vaocā ahurā*]
#(#ʔʔ)<u>*nəmaŋhō ā*</u>   *yaθā* <u>*nəmə̄*</u> *xšmāuuatō*
mazdā *friiāi*   *θβāuuąs saxiiat̪ mauuaitē*
at̪ nə̄ ašā   *friiā dazdiiāi hākurənā*
yaθā nə̄ ā   *vohū jimat̪* **manaŋhā**#
   "This I ask Thee. Tell me truly, Lord. Someone like Thee, **Wise** One, should declare to me,
   his friend, how <u>reverence</u> for your kind is to be from the <u>reverent</u> person, and how friendly
   associations with truth are to be established by us, in order that it shall come to us together
   with good **thinking**."

§4.4   What a great bard can do …

   • … is tweak the tradition in verse 1 so that it is remains traditional while also
      carrying his own stamp (repeated from §2.2).

   • Homer's nasal-heavy ##Μῆνιν (< *μνᾶνιν(/*m*) < *mneh₂-*) is presumably such a
      tweak vis-à-vis ##Μούσας *vel sim.* (< *men-*).

   • Similarly, I suggest, Zarathustra, in turning the religion, also turns the memorable first
      word: #(#ʔʔ)*nəmaŋhō* tweaks *##manaŋhō* (unattested in this position) — …
   • … and not just in Y 44.1 but virtually everywhere: *nəmah-* implies *manah-* in the
      text (see §4.1) because without having *manah-* in mind, Zarathustra would not
      have promoted *nəmah-* to such prominence.

§4.5   One (first-to-)last technique: ring composition

#(#)<u>*Nəmaŋhō*</u> … **manaŋhā**# (Y 44.1)

##Μνήσομαι … μνήσομ' ἀοιδῆς## (*Hymn* (3) *to Apollo* 1–546: beginning to end)
      Three of the four major Homeric Hymns, as well as a number of the minor ones, both begin
      and end with forms of *men-/mneh₂-* and/or *h₂ue/oid-*. All this helps make sense of the
      common (12×!) closing tag in the *Hymns* μνήσομ' ἀοιδῆς## "I shall remember a song," as
      also in the *Hymn* (2) *to Demeter* (1–495 ἀείδειν# … μνήσομ' ἀοιδῆς##) and the *Hymn* (4) *to*

Hermes (1–580 ##Ἑρμῆν ὕμνει, **Μοῦσα** … **μνήσομ'** ἀοιδῆς##), the last of which plays with the sequence M(Ē)N.

##Μοῦσαι …μυθησαίΜΗΝ#(#) (*Works & Days* 1–10: detachable proem)

The final word ('I would speak') sounds like (but is formally unconnected to) the first (thus Watkins) and, furthermore, the final syllable is the desinence -μην, which — as in Ἑρμῆν ὕμνει in the *Hymn to Hermes* (see immediately above) — plays with but does not actually reflect the root *men-*.

##Μῆνιν ἄειδε, θεά, Πηληϊάδεω Ἀχιλῆος | οὐλομένην, … (*Iliad* 1–2; opening phrase)

I will say much more about οὐλομένην on another occasion.