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SOME REMARKS ON CHRISTIAN TERMINOLOGY IN PERSIAN

The New Persian language has not been used so far in Christian liturgy on a large scale. The two main Christian minorities in Iran, namely Armenians and Assyrians (Persian *Āsūrī*) use their own languages in liturgy: classical Armenian called Grabar and Syriac respectively.

Catholic churches, which are frequented by foreigners staying in Iran, conduct their liturgy in European languages. Most often the language used is English, French or Italian. The prevailing custom, at least in some churches, is that after the reading of the Gospel also a Persian translation of the given passage is read, this being done for listeners who are not fluent enough in the given European language, as well as in consideration of the official character of Persian, which enjoys high prestige in Iran. Also in Persian are sometimes written notices put up outside churches.

To the author's knowledge*, there is only one Catholic church in Iran in which services are in Persian. The church is at St. John Bosco School in Tehran. The priest who says Mass in Persian is the Rev. Kurosh Mehravand, SDB, also a lecturer in the University of Tehran. He is the author of a translation of the missal as well as of a number of articles on the theoretical problems connected with establishing the up till now undeveloped Christian terminology in Persian¹.

* Written in 1978.

¹ *Āyīn-e-Yazeš-e-Sepand*, Tehrān (no date given); Kurosh Mehravand, *Persian Christian Terminology*, Tehran 1970; Kurosh Mehravand, *Schematic Summary of the Principles leading to the Formation of the Christian Persian Terminology*, Tehran 1970.

While proceeding to elaborate the numerous new terms and to make a translation of the missal, one that would be suited to the needs of the present day, the Rev. Kurosh Mehravand naturally encountered a number of difficulties. First of all he had to assume a standpoint as to the plausibility of resorting to Arabic loan-words, in which Persian abounds. The point is that Arabic loan-words constitute the bulk of the elaborated religious terminology in Persian. There arises, however, a delicate problem of the close association existing between the Arabic terms and Islam. Except the few old Arabic words connected with Christianity (e.g. *ta'mīd* 'baptism'), of which some (e.g. *faṣḥ* 'Easter') are generally little known anyway, the body of the Arabic religious vocabulary is so strongly connected with Islam (e.g. *qorbān* 'sacrifice', *mo'men* 'believer') that its introduction to Christian liturgy could, overlooking the „undesirable” stylistic effect, entail vagueness in the message conveyed.

As the introduction of borrowings from European languages would be certainly inadvisable for many reasons, a native (non-Arabic and non-European) lexical basis for deriving the new terms had to be found. The Rev. K. Mehravand found such a basis partly in the Persian of Zoroastrism. It was an interesting experiment, utilizing for Christianity a native tradition, which is so rich in the case of Iran. Making use of the tradition of Zoroastrism seems justified, considering the fact that this religion has been regarded by the Iranians with great sentiment up to the present day. For besides guaranteeing specific stylistic advantages, such as the lack of association with the Moslem worship, some of the notions connected with Zoroastrism display considerable similarity, as to their essence, to the Christian content which is transferred onto them. This concerns „the bloodless sacrifice of the Homa and that of the Catholic Mass. In each case it is the God who is at the same time the victim and the priest, and in each case the offering is made to the Heavenly Father of the priest-victim”².

Resorting to the Zoroastrian basis is in principle interesting and justified but requires a certain amount of reserve. For example, the use of the term *daṣme* meaning 'sepulchre'³ may evoke inappro-

² K. M., *Persian Christian Terminology*, p. 5 (after R. C. Zaehner).

³ *Āyīn-e-Yazeš-e-Sepand*, p. 5.

priate associations because of the Zoroastrian meaning of the word („a circular stone building in the form of a cylinder, on the flat surface of which the fire worshippers lay the bodies of their dead”⁴).

The general principles which the Rev. K. Mehravand followed while elaborating the new terms are summed up in his own stipulations formulated as follows: „the meaning must be grasped by person of ordinary culture, the structure of the word must be euphonic and there must be no occasion for a false understanding or for ambiguity”⁵.

Worth noting is the happy choice of the root *yaz-*, still present in the word *Yazdān* 'God', for the coining of certain terms connected with Mass. The root, which is found in the Avesta in the form *yaz-* (cf. Sanskrit *yaj-*), was used by the Rev. K. Mehravand to propose the word *yazeš* (with the suffix *eš* which appears in verbal nouns) to denote the sacrifice itself as it takes place in Mass. Up till now the Arabic *qorbānī* or the native *namāz* have been used in this sense; however the meaning of the latter, namely 'service', 'prayer', is too general. Some other proposed neologisms in which the same root is used are: *yazeš gozārdan* 'to celebrate the Mass', *yazeši* 'sacrificial', *yazešgar* 'celebrant', *yazešgarī* 'consecration', *yazeš-nāme* 'missal', *yazešgāh* 'altar'.

The various methods of elaborating neologisms are discussed by the Rev. K. Mehravand in another brochure of his⁶. He enumerates the following possibilities (p. 4): giving old words new content, forming compound words, and a combined method of calquing European (Greek and Latin) terms.

An example of the first method mentioned above is the word *ašū* used in the meaning of 'saint'⁷ (its former meaning in Zoroastrian texts being 'heavenly') and its derivative *ašūi* 'sanctity'. The noun *ferestāde* was already used in the past in the meaning of 'apostle' (a calque from Greek), however the adjective *ferestādegānī* 'apostolic' has not been attested so far in dictionaries (Steingass is familiar with the form *firistagānī*).

⁴ Steingass, *Persian-English Dictionary*, London 1892, p. 505.

⁵ K. M., *Persian Christian Terminology*, p. 6.

⁶ Kūrūsh Mehrāvand, *Vāže-sāzi dar zabān-e-fārsi*, Tehrān 1349 (= 1970).

⁷ *Āyīn-e-Yazeš-e-Sepand*, p. 8, 9.

The word *ham-yū-ī* is probably a calque from the Latin *communio*. It seems however not to fulfil the stipulation of intelligibility. The root *yū-* (*yō-*), which is used here with the meaning of 'one', although attested by Steingass, is certainly not clear to a Persian with an average education (*yo* meaning 'one' is found in Pašto). Moreover it is doubtful whether the choice of the root denoting 'oneness' (and this is most probably what was meant) renders the Latin meaning of the word properly, for the Latin *communio* is not at all derived from *unio* 'oneness' but from *communis* 'common'. The latter is not etymologically related to 'oneness', but to the verb *munire* (*com-munis*)⁸.

As a sidenote to the above example, a reservation can be made as to the methods used by the Rev. K. Mehravand in the calquing of compound words in his brochure on word-formation in Persian⁹. The choice of a Persian root (or a root from any other Indoeuropean language) made from the point of view of its etymological identity with the Greek or Latin equivalent will not always be right, considering frequent divergencies in meaning within the same root. Such divergencies already existed in very distant times.

The Rev. K. Mehravand's translation of the missal was made with great care. It seems to fulfil its function well as a text intended for liturgical purposes, owing mainly to the elegance of its slightly archaized style, which is at the same time free from Arabisms. In some places, however, the archaization seems to have been carried too far, as in the case of the precativ *be-res-ād* used in the text of the Lord's Prayer or in the use of the word *kātūzī* in the meaning of 'believer'.

The text under consideration is not, however, according to the author of the translation himself, the final version. It can be hoped therefore that in the future, liturgical texts in Persian will be more perfect and more suited to the requirements of the present day.

⁸ A. Walde, *Lateinisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, Bd 1, p. 255, Heidelberg 1938.

⁹ K. M., *Vāže-sāzī dar zabān-e-fārsī*, p. 6 ff.

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QUELQUES REMARQUES SUR L'HÉBREU CONTEMPORAIN

On admet généralement que „la renaissance de l'hébreu” a commencé vers 1880 grâce à Eliezer Ben Yehouda (1858—1922), qui se mit à parler l'hébreu exclusivement et incita les autres à le faire aussi. On parle de la „renaissance” mais il faut observer qu'en réalité l'hébreu n'était pas une langue „morte”. Elle était employée dans toutes les communautés juives comme langue écrite. Depuis la fin du XVIII^e siècle naquit en Europe Orientale et se développait plus tard une littérature hébraïque remarquable dans sa qualité et dans sa quantité. L'hébreu parlé en Palestine était le lien entre les Juifs des différents pays. En contacts mutuels ils se servaient de l'hébreu en prononciation sépharadite (espagnole), qui est en usage aussi maintenant en Israël. L'idée de Ben Yehouda était de parler l'hébreu constamment dans son milieu et d'élever les enfants dans cette langue, afin qu'elle devînt leur langue maternelle. Il s'efforçait avec ses amis d'introduire l'hébreu dans les écoles pour toutes les matières enseignées et de former des gens auxquels cette langue servirait à exprimer toutes les choses. En 1888 fût fondée la première école primaire à Rishon-le-Sion. Le développement commencé alors d'aujourd'hui amené à la création de cinq universités hébraïques en Israël.

L'hébreu en 1880 était fin prêt quant à la grammaire et la syntaxe. Mais le vocabulaire ne l'était pas. Puisque les gens qui lisaient l'hébreu avant 1880 ne vivaient dans les pays de civilisation très évoluée, il manquait surtout un vocabulaire technique moderne. Des 1890 fût formé un Comité chargé des recherches des