Preface

"It is the tyranny of hidden prejudices that
makes us deaf to what speaks to us in tradition."
Hans-Georg Gadamer

Philology as a textual practice in the early 21st century bears a peculiar burden: it has come to be passé for many and, yet, it remains fundamental for a few. The readers of this edition will undoubtedly be in the latter camp. Mindful of our present scholarly moment, this work represents an attempt at demonstrating the central importance of hermeneutics for developing a reflexive philological practice that does more than merely translate old texts 'accurately' and hence, establish a 'reliable' edition. Rather, I hope this *Text* volume and its companion *Commentary* will allow us to develop more nuanced reading strategies located in the here and now that engage with both the literary exoticism of the text itself while simultaneously addressing the historiographical challenges our readings engender. Put simply, this critical edition attempts to be properly critical, that is, it takes the philological production of a 'text' — in this case one written in Zoroastrian Middle Persian or Pahlavi — as a fundamentally hermeneutical enterprise. The *Dēnkard* Book 9 could not be a better candidate for both a restrictive textual hermeneutics and a more expansive cultural hermeneutics of the Zoroastrian tradition more than two decades into the new millennium. Textual study in the 20th century saw a heady mix of German philosophical hermeneutics, New Criticism, French Structuralism, post-structuralist forms of critical theory, and a general destabilizing of the fixity of textual meaning, be it the move from the privileging of authorial intent to reader-response theories or the tension between readings that privileged a hermeneutics of faith attempting to restore meaning(s) to texts versus a hermeneutics of suspicion that attempts to decode meanings that are often disguised within texts that occlude the economic, social, ideological, and psychological dimensions of their production.

As anyone having followed a famous writer on a book tour can attest, authorial reminiscences on the origins and stimulus for the work can be remarkably fluid, often self-contradictory, and unfailingly complex. The origins of the present work stem from a dissertation written under the supervision of Prods Oktor Skjærvø in the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations at Harvard University and completed in 2007. Much has happened in our field since then, and, given the long gestation of this project, it seems worth narrating the intervening years. My initial interest was on working on comparative Indo-Iranian

ritual texts, a topic that has seen great progress on the Zoroastrian side by the expansive philological projects and research agendas of Jean Kellens, Almut Hintze, and Alberto Cantera. Skjærvø steered me instead to *Dēnkard* Book 9 and the importance of developing more principled readings of the Pahlavi corpus to attempt to excavate the many archaisms he saw in the text. I remained sceptical, and so he gently suggested I read Edward William West's translation in the *Sacred Books of the East*[1] and make up my own mind. I was immediately struck by the fact that *Dēnkard* Book 9 was not in fact one text but rather it contained three radically different summaries of lost commentaries on what we now call the 'Old Avesta' produced in a 'Table of Contents' enumerative style.

Given the fact that the *Dēnkard* is our largest extant Pahlavi text at almost 170,000 words, it represents the crowning intellectual achievement of the Zoroastrian theologians of Late Antiquity and the early Islamic era. For me this meant that the 'emic' hermeneutical tradition simply did not hold to a fixity of meaning and that the monologic translations of us philologists attempting to impose a single 'correct' understanding of the *Gāϑās* was not merely a quixotic intellectual enterprise, it patently flew in the face of how the Zoroastrian tradition understood itself and its own inheritances. I was convinced.

As Skjærvø and I began reading the first of the three commentaries (*nask*s; see below), it became clear that unlike the word-for-word translation of the Old Avestan corpus in the *Pahlavi Yasna*, the *Sūdgar Nask* represented the other end of the literalism-allegoresis spectrum. Every *fragard* (emic divisions of the 'Old Avesta' in *Dēnkard* Book 9; see below) appeared at first glance to have little or nothing to do with the Old Avestan *hāiti* (emic divisions that structurate the written instantiations of the *Yasna* ceremony in our extant manuscripts) it was nominally commenting upon. Instead, it operated using a form of eisegesis that relentlessly read into the 'Old Avesta' the entire socio-theological world of Avestan and Pahlavi literature known to them in the Sasanian (224–651 ce) and early Islamic centuries, while simultaneously evoking the timeless meta-textual world of archaic myth and ritual found in and inherited from the Avestan corpus. Prior scholarship had essentially mined the texts for individual theological phenomena and the common consensus, with which I concur, was that the *Sūdgar Nask* was a *midrash* of sorts.[2] Since the *Sūdgar Nask* purported to be a Pahlavi résumé of a lost Pahlavi translation (Pahl. *nask*) of a (Young) Avestan commentary or tractate (Av. *naska-*) on the Old Avestan corpus, the philological, hermeneutical, and historiographical challenges of the text slowly became apparent and, I might add, continue to prove highly vexing all these years later.

As Hans-Georg Gadamer's quote above states: "It is the tyranny of hidden prejudices that makes us deaf to what speaks to us in tradition."[3] Initially,

1 West 1892.
2 Cf. de Menasce 1958, p. 69 and Shapira 1998, p. 10.
3 Gadamer 1989 [2006], p. 272.

Skjærvø and I approached the text from very diametrically opposed hermeneutical positions. He read a text that was deeply conservative with respect to the Avestan source material and 'traditional' at every turn. I read a text that was fundamentally radical in its theological claims for its moment, be it late antique or early Islamic. For me, our divergences in reading practices were clearly a by-product of the differences in our technical abilities, intellectual pedigrees, scholarly training, and, ultimately, our hermeneutical sensibilities — despite being teacher and student. The years of reading and re-reading together has, unsurprisingly, made each of us approach the text from the perspective of the other, a 'fusion of horizons' as it were, allowing for both of us to be simultaneously vindicated and nuanced, an object example for how hermeneutic communities create consensus.

As we initially worked our way through the text, I was struck by the fluidity of the citations of and allusions to other Pahlavi and Avestan texts, and I began grasping for a more sophisticated critical idiom than simply resorting to the regnant forms of source criticism developed for fully literate traditions with explicit hermeneutical modalities and well-understood interpretive schools and lineages. Pahlavi literature, being at the cusp of the transition from a world of sacral orality to one of fully written scholasticism,[4] demands a theory of textual transmission that is not simply based on the Classical assumption of the loss of grammatical meaning in each successive generation but, rather, one that foregrounds hermeneutical agency — both *theirs* and *ours*. Despite what looks like a 'rough draft' at first glance, the literary complexity of the *Sūdgar Nask* — and all texts for that matter — demands that as contemporary hermeneuts — we — develop a hermeneutical — reflexive — philology that can only be truly critical once we grapple with our own historicity, constructedness, and intellectual values.

Fortuitously, a hermeneuticist appeared on the scene to stimulate my philological work. The late Yaakov Elman from Yeshiva University came to our NELC Department to work with Skjærvø as a Starr Fellow in 2002–2003. My conversations with him proved incredibly stimulating and fruitful and he was the one who suggested that I read Daniel Boyarin's, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash*.[5] Finally, I had encountered the literary critical idiom of 'Intertextuality' in a parallel late antique religious tradition to go along with our philological discoveries that were allowing us to make ever-increasing sense of the *Sūdgar Nask*'s narratological trajectories. What became patently obvious to me was that these commentaries were not unsophisticated or indiscriminate patchworks of salvaged texts simply thrown together. We were, in fact, dealing with 'deeply troped' texts — a term I borrow from Boyarin — whose literary sophistication and theological complexity were obscured by the seemingly free-associative 'Table of Contents' style.

4 See Zeini 2020 for a discussion of scholasticism in Pahlavi literature.
5 Boyarin 1990.

Skjærvø and I were still deeply troubled by the beginnings of these *fragard*s, which began by dilating "about" (*abar*) the *incipit* of the Old Avestan *hāiti* in question and whose link to the Old Avestan base text in question was often tenuous at best. Boyarin made the point that all interpretations are motivated by some textual phenomena in the base text.[6] This meant determining the 'hermeneutic trigger' in the Old Avestan base text that led to the narratological unfolding of the *fragard* in question.[7] At this juncture it became clear that not all the *fragard*s operated in the same manner; some (§9.20–22) appeared to be using a 'folk etymology' of the Old Avestan *incipit* itself triggering those particular interpretive narratives. Other *fragard*s seemed to be eisegetical in another manner by constructing complex interpretive narratives by dilating on some particular theme, line, phrase, or word found also within the *Pahlavi Yasna* version of the Old Avestan base text.

All of the *fragard*s in the *Sūdgar Nask* mark topics and transitions in the 'Table of Contents' style by *abar* "about X" and then *ud ēn-iz* (*paydāg*) *kū* "and this too (is manifest)," implying that all the contents of the putative original were from the Dēn, the theological concept we often translate as "religion, vision, sacred tradition, world view, etc" and which I commonly render here as "Tradition."[8] Besides the philological difficulties of establishing a critical text from manuscripts that span from the 16th century CE to the last decade of the 19th century, as well as attempting to elegantly translate this highly allusive commentarial genre, the primary challenge of my project has been to attempt

6 A point I have attempted to reiterate in Vevaina 2018, p. 139.

7 As is often the case in long-standing teacher-student relationships, the 'origins' and genealogies of ideas, concepts, and critical idioms fall victim to the vagaries of memory, much like what we experience when we attempt to historicize the various competing and contradictory 'imagined pasts' in our texts. Prods Oktor Skjærvø and I are simply unable to remember precisely or agree definitively on which of us first used the metaphor of a 'trigger' or 'triggering' when reading and discussing the Text, and so he suggested I write this note: The term was not used by me in Vevaina 2007 though I used the collocation "... hermeneutic key to unlocking the exegetical trajectory of this text" (p. 122). The term was first put in print by Skjærvø (2008b, pp. 533–549) in his partial analysis of §9.21, where he uses "(exegetic) trigger" and variations in eight instances (pp. 538, 542, 543, 544, and 546). I first used the metaphor in print in Vevaina 2010d, pp. 231–243 referring to "(exegetical) trigger" and variations in four instances (p. 232, 234, 239), which was the Conference Proceedings from a talk delivered at the 6th European Conference of Iranian Studies, held in Vienna on 18–22 September 2007 (4 months after I defended my dissertation). I used the metaphor "(exegetical) trigger" there in five instances, though it bears stating that Skjærvø generously read and commented on my talk, as he has always done. A hermeneutical morass if there ever was one! We can leave it to readers — reader response — to exercise their own personal hermeneutics, to draw their own conclusions, and, in the final analysis, to determine for themselves the intent, efficacy, and value of such an exercise in scholarly self-reflexivity in this particular instance.

8 See Vevaina 2010a, pp. 111–143 for further details and where I first used the term "sacred tradition" (p. 117 and *passim*). Here I translate *dēn* as "Tradition," with capitalization following the convention found in Skjærvø 2011.

to decode or make less opaque each of these 23 interpretive narratives based on the assumption that they are all hermeneutically motivated in the Avestan and/or Pahlavi base text. All these *fragard*s fundamentally draw upon the corpora of Avestan and Pahlavi literature — both extant and lost — in order to produce radically new forms of allegoresis from millennia-old traditional materials and do so by mobilizing, deploying, and producing varied and complex forms of intertextuality — the warp and weft of traditional intersignifications — that ultimately 'make Tradition' — *dēn kard(an)* — so to speak.

A substantial and fundamentally intertextual *Commentary* has been written with this hermeneutical aim in mind in the years after the dissertation was completed in 2007 and will appear as a separate book in the IRANICA Series. Once again, SKJÆRVØ's encyclopaedic knowledge of the Avestan and Pahlavi texts came into fuller effect when he, in parallel with my writing my *Commentary*, completed transcribing the extant Pahlavi corpus in the years following my completion of the dissertation. He informs me that he began this monumental work in 1991. His generosity in widely sharing his searchable electronic Pahlavi files has served for many of us as a 21st-century substitute for the traditional oral erudition of a Zoroastrian priestly authority or a 19th century savant for that matter, thus far better mimicking the dynamics of memory retrieval of an oral corpus with electronic word searching than simply scouring the indices of the existing philological editions, as I, and those before me, had done while preparing our paper-based editions. My theory of intertextuality — relentless allusion — as generating and reifying traditional intersignifications — has continually been proven justified as I found more cotexts and intertexts. As a consequence, the *Commentary* has grown inordinately large, hence the splitting of the project into two publications, and, thus, validating the inescapable value and importance of the digital humanities in the production of an early 21st century critical edition, even one printed on paper and relatively traditional, as this one has proven to be.

This brings me to the codicological component of the project. *Dēnkard* Book 9 has more manuscripts than any other book of the *Dēnkard* with the earlier translations and editions being largely based on the 'B' manuscript copied in Turkābād in *ca*. 1660 CE (1009 PYE; see below) and housed in the K. R. Cama Oriental Institute in Mumbai (COI). The codicological value-add of this project is the production of an eclectic edition that includes the 'DH' manuscript, the oldest known manuscript of *Dēnkard* Book 9, written in 1577 CE (964 AY) in Kermān and housed in the M. F. Cama Athornan Institute in Mumbai. My philological analysis of the manuscripts confirmed that the 'K43b' manuscript written in 1594 CE (943 PYE) in Turkābād, which WEST used is, in fact, a copy of DH (see my STEMMA). None of the prior scholarship on *Dēnkard* Book 9 incorporated DH consistently, and, in addition, I have included readings from all the secondary manuscripts available to me (see my Critical Apparatus). It also needs stating that the emendations in the text have been kept to as bare a minimum as possible, greatly contrasting with prior scholarship on the text. The desire to

foreclose the hermeneutical contingency generated by the great number of textual variants in Pahlavi manuscripts has often led the best of philological minds in Iranian studies to amend far more liberally than I believe is strictly necessary.

The intervening years since the dissertation was completed have also allowed me to return twice to Harvard University in the summers of 2014 and 2015 to work intensively with Skjærvø on a smoother and more readable translation. The infelicities of the translation in the dissertation stand, I hope, in marked contrast with the present work. In translating the *Sūdgar Nask* I have aimed at producing a readable translation in the target language that most closely captures the often-paratactic syntax and enumerative style of the Pahlavi source language, itself seemingly reflecting Avestan syntax, thus strongly implying the lurking presence of 'lost' Avestan *Vorlagen*.

As I have argued before, the *Listenwissenschaft* on display in *Dēnkard* Books 8 and 9, is a salient example of an epistemo-hermeneutical complex of memorization, ritual performance, and numerological speculations on the sacred corpus encoded in the phrase *dēn-ōšmurišn*, which I have translated as "Enumerating the Tradition."[9] It is precisely these orally-derived forms of enumerating traditional material "as made manifest/revealed from the Tradition," that serve to make the Pahlavi corpus a second-order discourse — a commentary — on the inherited world of archaic myth and ritual found in the archaic Avestan corpus.

Ultimately, it is my fervent hope that this project allows hermeneutics to find its pride of place amongst the panoply of approaches to better understanding the four millennia of Zoroastrian history.[10]

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9 See Vevaina 2010a, pp. 111–143.

10 See Stausberg 2008, pp. 561–600 and Stausberg/Vevaina 2015, pp. 1–18 for broad surveys of the various methods and approaches to the study of Zoroastrianism.