

The Concept of ‘MiΘra’ in the Ancient Iranian Mythology

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Abstract

MiΘra (male) is the name of one of the Ancient Iran’s gods. MiΘra, meaning ‘contract’ and keeping it within measure, is the gist of Manichaeism and has mighty and theurgic forces. The myth prevalent in Mihr-Yašt is that MiΘra observes all the contracts agreed upon in the society, sets people free of troubles, and brings peace and security. The myth has had important consequences for beliefs and behaviors of the people of the time. However, even though MiΘra was dignified in Zoroastrianism, Ohrmazd was regarded as God of gods in this religion. Yet, MiΘra is close to Soroush and Sun and has a lot in common with them. He was also highly dignified in the eras of Achaemenian, Parthian Empire, and Sasanian and could find its way to Europe in the era of Parthian Empire. The remnants and remainings of the Mithraic religion and temples can also be observed in Iran’s ancient athletics and Zurkhaneh. The purpose of the present paper is to give the readership a review of the concept of MiΘra, as it was conceived in the ancient Iran and the relationship the concept has with some other significant concepts that were contemporary to MiΘra.

Keywords: MiΘra, Mithraism, contract, Ohrmazd, Zoroastrianism, religion, ancient Iran, Christianity, Manichaeism

1. Introduction

The influence of what was worshiped before the emergence of Zoroastrianism in the Ancient Iran on Zoroastrianism has been constantly disputed and studied among researchers working on Ancient Iran (e.g., Gordon, 1972, 1999; Nabarz, 2005; Nock, 1937; Thieme, 1975; Schofield, 1995). These studies and disputes were feasible only because, in Zoroastrian, Yasna, and Yašta documents, mentions were made to what ancient Iranians worshiped and to rituals and traditions they sustained. From among these, MiΘra, along rituals and traditions associated with him, was popular. This popularity was aggravated because of the coincidence and competition of Mithraism with Christianity. The expansion of this ancient-Iranian religion over Iran’s borders indicates that MiΘra had a particular status among the ancient Iranian. He was also highly dignified by the upper class. As religions and traditions stand out as the result of governments’ and administrations, MiΘra is a familiar name today and includes a range of meanings including contract, friendship, compassion, sun, etc. MiΘra is also popular among the common people and the name is used in the meaning of friendship and compassion. The name of the seventh month of the year in the Iranian calendar is taken from MiΘra (i.e., Mehr) and Mihragān, which is held in some regions of Iran and is in opposition of Norouz (the beginning of New Year), is celebrated in Mehr. MiΘra is also used in combination of other terms.

In the present paper, some issues related to the term of MiΘra, as depicted in Avestā, and the roots of the term, as originated from ancient Iran and India, are presented. Because of the bolded presence of MiΘra in ancient Iran, gods such as Soroush and even God of gods, i.e., Ohrmazd, were in constant alliance with and opposition to MiΘra. Yet, it is doubted whether MiΘra had a status higher than Ohrmazd in the time context of ancient Iran or Ohrmazd kept the higher status. A lot of research has been carried out with respect to this issue (e.g., Amuzegar, 2008; Boyce, 2001; Thieme, 1975). In the present paper, MiΘra, some issues associated with him, and his relationship to Ohrmazd are discussed. The power of MiΘra in comparison to other ancient Iran’s gods is explained and the effects of Mithraism on other religions such as Manichaeism and Christianity which reigned many countries at the time (and even today, Christianity is one of the most universal religions in the world) are discussed. These effects of Mithraism can still be observed where Manichaeism and Christianity are followed. Further, the hypotheses on the diminishing of Mithraism after the emergence of Zoroastrianism are discussed.

There is a difference between the contemporary meditation and the ancient meditation; our contemporary meditation is more materialistic, whereas the ancient meditation is mostly religious and theurgic. The validity of today's contracts is guaranteed by laws but, for ancient Iranians and Indians, it was the 'holiness of contract' that guaranteed the contract would be delivered; i.e., theurgic forces are observing the contract (Thieme, 1975). God, or God of gods, is the watcher. Therefore, according to the ancient beliefs, there was a huge and theurgic force hidden in the contract similar to the theurgic force in God's speech in universal religions like Islam and Christianity. The force was believed to be derived from the universe's discipline that had a high status in ancient Iranian and Indian beliefs, as there was discipline in every contract. God of Aša was a powerful god that, in the ancient Iranian mythologies, was a symbol of the ethical and universal discipline and showed divine laws in this universe (Amuzegar, 2008, p. 385). The name of the second month of the Iranian calendar (i.e., Ordibehesht) has been taken from God of Aša (Amuzegar, 2008). To sum up, the present investigation deals with the different aspects of Miθra in ancient Iran and his presence in different eras and kingdoms. Each of these aspects and issues could be the subject of independent research attempts.

2. Mithraism and Contracts

2.1 Miθra in Avestā and his Stewardship of Contracts

Gershevitch (1967), in his volume on Miθra, states that Miθra's stewardship of contracts included all types of contracts existent in the society; that is, it not only watched those contracts agreed upon by individuals, but also guaranteed unwanted contracts like those among brothers or between a father and his children. However, it is necessary to note that the meaning of the concept of 'contract', as intended in the present paper, does not include such natural/inherited contracts and, thus, any mention of the word 'contract' in the paper does not refer to kinship relations; rather, it refers to synthetic, agreed-upon contracts which may even overrule inherited contracts. Yet, social relationships had a determining influence on the value or the sacredness of the contract. Thieme (1975) has mentioned this point as follows:

They say that contracts are of different value or sacredness. A contract between two friends, if they *choose* to conclude such a contract, is twenty times as sacred as that, say, between strangers. A contract between two fellow citizens, ... between two fellow students, ... between father-in-law and son-in-law, between two brothers, ... between two countries, always provided they *choose* to conclude such a contract, is more sacred in each case than the preceding one. (p. 25)

Gershevitch (1967) argues that, in Zoroastrianism, a contract is anchored by the religion at one end and the follower of the religion at the other. As Thieme (1975) states, if a follower of Zoroastrianism breaks the contract his sin will be ten times the sin of the person who breaks the contract between two countries (pp. 25-26). The most valued contract with its sacredness being a thousand times the sacredness of other contracts was that promised between two countries that, of course, involved a contract between the kings of the countries. The king who broke the contract posed his country to Miθra's rage. On the other hand, Miθra gave his favor to the country the king of which would observe the contract and, instead of disease and disaster, ordained rainfall, plans, and well-being to the country (Thieme, 1975, p. 32).

An adjective repeatedly used for Miθra in Mihr-Yašt is *vouru gaoyaoiti* that means 'the owner of spacious pasturages'. This title has been induced in the literature on Miθra from the fact that there are statements in Rigveda which link Miθra to gavyūti (pasturage). There are many examples in Rigveda that show that it is Miθra who made the pasturages fertile (see Bivar, 2005; Schofield, 1995).

Gavyūti was a special type of pasturages that is surrounded by habitats and farms. At the time of peace, these Gavyūtis were expanded so that the livestock could freely roam in them. In fact, it was Miθra who expanded the gavyūtis; he set the people free of hardships (*azō/amhas*) and endowed them with peace, safety, and spacious pasturages (Thieme, 1975). It is worth mentioning that, in Rigveda, the spacious pasturage (*urvīgavyūti*) is known as an endowment from Miθra and, without any doubt, it means at a general level that Miθra would guarantee to secure safety, because 'spacious pasturage' (*urvīgavyūti*) is very close to the concept of safety (*abhaya*) in Rigveda. In Mihr-Yašt, it has been repeatedly mentioned that the security provided by Miθra is above all the agreed-upon guarantees. Miθra secures peace and safety by promising compensation to those who are loyal to their allegiances and threatening those who break their contracts (Thieme, 1975; Gassmann, 1876). However, at the time a war happened, or when a raid would be expected, the livestock were kept either near the village or in the stable.

2.2 The Degree of the Importance of a Contract in Mithraism

In ancient Iran, there could be found cases in which a man was accused of breaking his contract but the man did not admit it; in these cases, the man was required to undergo the 'trial of water'. One example of the trial of

water is the following; the man who was accused of breaking his contract, while holding a standing man's thighs in his hands, was required to sink this head into water. While sinking his head into water, the accused man uttered these words "by means of truth, save me Varuna!". From the second the accused man sank his head into water, a crossbowman shot an arrow, and a fast runner ran to bring the arrow back. Till the runner was back with the arrow, if the accused man was still alive under water, it was assumed that Varuna, God of Promise, had recognize him as an innocent man and, so, kept him alive. If the accused man died under water, it was assumed that he had been impure and the trial was over (Boyce, 2001, pp. 8-9; see also König, 2015).

It was believed that the impure contract breaker ruined the whole country (Gershevitch, 1967, pp. 74-75) and he had to repay for his sin by receiving torments in hell. The people were stressed that the contract, both with the righteous or with unrighteous, would never be broken (Amuzegar, 2008, p. 386). The mysterious and theurgic force existing in the contract made both Ohrmazd and his sincere followers be loyal to the contract and the force did not let wicked Satan abject the contract.

'Contract' was the principal spirit of Creation in ancient Iran. The contract was stipulated between Ohrmazd and Satan at the end the first three thousand years, stating that the last war between goodness and badness would happen nine thousand years after the speculation of the contract and the contract constituted moved the principal core of Creation forward; during these nine thousand years, MiŌra and Soroush would watch the contract. At the end of the twelve thousand years (i.e., nine thousand years after the contract was speculated), it would be the time for the last war between Ohrmazd and Satan. At that time, all the followers of Satan would vanish and he himself would be defeated (see, for example, Amuzegar, 2008; Zaehner, 1965).

3. The Relationship of MiŌra with other Mythological Gods

3.1 *MiŌra and Soroush*

The most important god associated with MiŌra is Soroush (Sraoša). The word *Sraoša* means 'to follow commands' and is the symbol of a group of people who are commanded by one person; therefore, Sraoša is the representative of a group (see Nyberg, 1974, p. 68). In another interpretation, Sraoša is the name of a religious council of pious individuals the members of which obey the commands ordered by the head of the council (i.e., MiŌra). The close alliance between MiŌra and Soroush makes it tenable to claim that, historically, Soroush is that god that characterizes the council. The distinctive feature of Soroush is a quarterstaff that is comparable to the one that MiŌra uses to kill demons (see Nyberg, 1974). Like MiŌra, Soroush participates with Rašn (the name for another Mithraic god) in justice councils, held near Činvat Bridge, to watch the judgments (see Amuzegar, 2008). This event happens at a particular time during the Mithraic year (known as Hāvan Gāh; Boyce, 1969). The name of Soroush is repeated more than the names of other gods in Mithraic verses; in all of the verses in which the name of Soroush has been mentioned, Ohrmazd's initial prayer is deleted. Soroush has a close alliance with MiŌra; therefore, the deletion of Ohrmazd's prayer may be related to this issue. However, it cannot be said that Soroush had no place in Ohrmazd's main doctrines (Boyce, 1969, p. 33).

3.2 *MiŌra and God of Sun*

Zoroastrian clerics stress that MiŌra and the sun are Ohrmazd's two eyes by which Ohrmazd sees the universe. However, by stating that God of Sun only rules the sun, while MiŌra's glitter covers all the stars in the sky, they again imply that MiŌra has relative greatness over God of Sun. Thus, MiŌra is considered greater than the sun and, even in prayers related to the sun, the name of MiŌra is uttered before the name of the sun. Anyway, even though MiŌra is great, his status is considered as lower than the status of Ohrmazd (Boyce, 1969). Although MiŌra is visibly associated with the night sky, the moon, stars, and twilight, his alliance with the sky is not disconnected through the bright day; however, his alliance with the sky through the bright day is less clear and visible.

MiŌra, along with the sun, moves from the east to the west and, after the sundown, comes back to the earth and watches the contracts. To serve this function, MiŌra is characterized as the god who is always awake; that is, he would never go to sleep. MiŌra's alliance with the sun had led to a situation in which MiŌra is considered equal to the sun (Amuzegar, 2008; Boyce, 1969; Jalali Naeini, 2005). One myth about MiŌra is that this god, after being born, undertook to assess his own strength; therefore, he decided to assess his strength against the sun. In the competition, the sun could not tolerate MiŌra's strength and fell down to the earth. Then, MiŌra went to him, stretched his right hand, and helped him stand up. The two gods shook hands; this was the sign showing that the sun pledged allegiance to MiŌra. After that, MiŌra crowned the sun and the two had remained loyal companions since then (Bahar, 2007, p. 32). MiŌra is the first god who climbed the Harā Mountain before God of Sun (Bahar, 2007). The ancient Iranians thought of MiŌra as the symbol of light and, in their opinions, MiŌra was a mediation between the created light and the eternal light. Because MiŌra was the symbol of light, his name had also been used in the meaning of sun (see Farch-Vashi, 2009, p. 85).

4. The Relationship of Mithraism with other Religions

4.1 Mithraism and Zoroastrianism

There exist particular propositions to make us believe that Zoroastrianism has negated MiΘra (e.g., Amuzegar, 2008; Boyce, 1969; Kuiper, 1982; Thieme, 1975). The first proposition is that the existence of Mithraism in the west of Iran in the last eras has had the researchers assume that Mithraism, with its distinctive dogs, has been worshiped as separated from Ohrmazd (Amuzegar, 2008; Kuiper, 1982; Thieme, 1975). Yet, there is no evidence to support this proposition, as there is no document in which mentions have been made to MiΘra without any mention to Ohrmazd. That is, in all documents, MiΘra has been associated with Ohrmazd and this fact rejects the hypothesis that MiΘra and Ohrmazd are not linked to each other. This shows that, at worst, Zoroastrianism has not negated Mithraism altogether (see, for example, Amuzegar, 2008; Boyce, 1969).

The second proposition, derived from the following of Mithraism in the west of Iran, is related to the 'dark rituals' held in this religion. These dark rituals are commonly practiced in Mithraism and, if we are looking for a reason to justify that Zoroastrianism has negated Mithraism, we should find evidence that these rituals have been opposed by Zoroastrianism and its followers. Evidence mentioned by the proponents of the contrast between Zoroastrianism and Mithraism is as the following. A distinctive feature of the religion of Mithraism is to deliver animal sacrifices and there is documentation that Zoroastrianism opposed this tradition, though the documentation is not well-founded. The researchers have considered this as showing that there was a contrast between Zoroastrianism and Mithraism. Animal sacrifices have been forbidden by Ohrmazd in Zoroastrianism. However, Mithra's role of Tauroctonus has been, in fact, taken from Haoma that is the god of sacrifices and is in the center of rituals in Zoroastrianism. Therefore, it is not tenable to draw conclusions about the contrast between Zoroastrianism and Mithraism based on the dark rituals in Mithraism. In other words, there is no strong positive evidence to support this claim (see Amuzegar, 2008; Thieme, 1975).

The third proposition is concerned with the characterization of MiΘra as God of War that, it is believed, is incompatible to Ohrmazd's commands. However, no mentions have been made in historical documents, showing that the prophet of Ohrmazd negated war, even if the war was undertaken to serve truth. Some researchers have considered Ohrmazd's silence as demonstrating that Ohrmazd negates war for whatever purposes undertake. However, this conclusion does not have much validity. In Zoroastrianism, Zoroaster has sung his songs to Ohrmazd and has told his praises to him. Of all the gods, Zoroaster has only talked about Ohrmazd and those gods who have close alliances with him (that is, Soroush, Spenta Mainyu, Amešāspentas, and MiΘra). In addition, the main characterization of MiΘra, as God of Justice and Faith, is completely compatible with Ohrmazd's principles. These clearly show us that, though nothing has been explicitly stated about war in Zoroastrianism, Ohrmazd confirms a war if it has been undertaken for truth. This is a principle that has been encouraged by MiΘra in Mithraism (Boyce, 1969).

4.2 Mithraism and Christianity

As said before, in the era of Parthian Empire (in the second century B.C.), when the Roman troops advanced through Asia Minor and Armenia, they learned to worship MiΘra from the local natives (Gordon, 1972). They took the Mithraic traditions to their homelands in Europe when they came back and, in this way, Mithraism was expanded through Asia Minor and Armenia by the Romans (Gordon, 1972). Then, it was also expanded through other European countries extending from Black Sea to Britain. Such expansion of Mithraism led many Europeans to begin to follow the Mithraic traditions and Licinius ordered that a temple (MiΘra's Temple) be built near the Danube River in AD 307. On the Roman walls in the north of England, we can still see pictures of MiΘra. However, at the end of the fourth century (AD) when the East Roman emperors recognized the Christianity as the official religion and forbade other religions, the Mithraic temples were closed. Under the pressure of Church and the Christian ruler, through force and genocide, the followers of Mithraism gradually vanished (Jalali Naeni, 2005; see also Gordon, 1972; Nicholson, 1995).

Iranians consistently insist that the gods in their religions be compared with Christian catholic saints and not with Greek and Roman gods worshiped before the emergence of Christ (see, for example, Boyce, 1969; Ezquerra, 2008; Lease, 1980; Nabarz, 2005). The meaning of this demand would be clear to someone when he/she lives among Zoroastrians. Therefore, even though some of the Mithraic gods have sanctuaries, there is no sanctuary for Ohrmazd because, in catholic regions, there is no sanctuary for 'Father'. He is so great and supreme that people should not annoy him by their small prayers, charities, and repentances (Boyce, 1969; Ezquerra, 2008). It seems that MiΘra's Temple was called (i.e., it was not called Ohrmazd's Temple!) because the followers of Mithraism believed that Ohrmazd is so great that his followers do not have the eligibility to build a place for him with their hands (Boyce, 1969).

Because both Mithraism and Christianity had been contemporary for five centuries in Europe, the two religions highly influenced each other (Ezquerro, 2008; Fareh-Vashi, 2009; Jalali Naeini, 2005). Therefore, you can find many shared features between these two religions. The followers of both religions believe that this universe is not the last existence stage; rather, human life is considered as a gate through which a person moves from mortality to eternity (Fareh-Vashi, 2009; Martin, 1989). The pious people would enter the paradise and the wicked ones would be forced into hell. The followers of Mithraism, like Christians, believe that Miθra, like Christ in Christianity, is the mediation between the creator and his servants (Fareh-Vashi, 2009; Jalali Naeini, 2005). They have learned rituals such as baptism, the ritual of eating bread and drinking wine in a group, and communion from the Christians. Mithraism's ethical principles are also parallel to Christianity's commands. Miθra is a god who was born and his followers celebrate his birthday on December 25th, a day which later coincided with Christ's birthday (see Fareh-Vashi, 2009; Grassmann, 1876). Further, 'Sunday' (Day of Sun) is the Christians' off-day and is the prayer day in Mithraism. The role of Miθra as the observer of religious practices and judgments is comparable to the role of Christ who, though great he is, is only god's servant. At the end, it is worth mentioning that many of big European churches have been based on the models taken from Miθra's temples (Fareh-Vashi, 2009).

Mithraism was expanded in the ancient world to the extent that, according to the prominent French critic, Ernest Renan, if Christianity was stopped because of some disease during its expansion, people all over the world would turn to Mithraism as cited in Fareh-Vashi, 2009). The followers of Mithraism and Christianity lived together for five centuries in Europe and, as mentioned above, they had commonalities with each other (see Gordon, 1972) for a discussion of these influences). However, at the end, the popes and Christian rulers and kings uprooted Mithraism all over Europe; therefore, Mithraism does not have many followers in the European countries and most of its documents and writing have been vanished (Jalali Naeini, 2005, pp. 94-95).

4.3 Mithraism and Manichaeism

The 'live spirit' was called *Spiritus Vivens* by the followers of Manichaeism in the west and it was considered equal as wisdom. On the other hand, *Spiritus Vivens* was called Miθra by the followers of Manichaeism in the south-west (Boyce, 1962). Miθra and the Manichaean god (*Spiritus Vivens*) had some features in common. Both of these gods were creators, both welcome war, and both were dominant over satanic forces. Like Miθra who would defeat the 'Lying Ruler', *Spiritus Vivens* would attack the 'universe's rebels'. According to the Manichaean documents and religious texts, *Spiritus Vivens* would defeat the tyrants and would take back the kingdom from them. He would punish them and would take their strength by force.

Since *Spiritus Vivens* is the 'first conqueror', he is exactly related to Miθra who is dignified as the 'most victorious god' (*Vərəθraϕtəmō yazatanəm*). Both of these gods would try to defeat 'liars' (*ānrtasya sētū*). The second feature of Miθra (i.e., being the god of sun) has been bolded since the emergence of Christianity and it is difficult to consider him as a god who welcomes war but who does not concern himself with sun. Similarly, according to the Manichaean traditions, *Spiritus Vivens* created the sun and declared possession over one of the three thrones within the sun. Therefore, these two gods have shared enough common features to enable us to identify them as the same god emerging in two different religions (see Boyce, 1962). In Manichaeism, the savior gods from the third creation helped people. Accidentally, the third of these savior gods had characteristics to lead us believe that he was Miθra himself. Like other savior gods, this third god was always in war with the wicked forces and was also related to the sun. He moved the sun forward and declared "possession over one of its thrones" (Boyce, 1962). Apparently, the similarities between the third savior god in Manichaeism and Miθra were so much that the Manichaean groups sent to ancient Iran felt they could not overlook Miθra and his practices.

5. Some other Issues Related to Miθra

5.1 The Status of Miθra and the Related Ceremonies

Zoroastrian clerics believe that the status of Miθra should be ranked second, after the status of Ohrmazd. Ohrmazd is at the top of gods during the first half of the month and Miθra is at the top of gods during the second half (Boyce, 1969). Miθra's oldest ceremony (i.e., *Mihragān*) was held each year with the presence of the king and the common people and this ceremony is one of the two great times during the religious year (Boyce, 1969). Miθra created ruby in Norouz (one of the Iranian ancient ceremonies specifying the beginning of New Year) and topaz in *Mihragān*. These two jewelries have superiority over other types of jewelries in the Mithraic traditions (see, for example, Birouni, 1973). Usually, the prayer of *Bāj* begins with Ohrmazd's prayer; but, in only one day during the year (i.e., in Miθra's day (Mehr 16th) which was considered as the most sacred day during *Mihragān*), the clerics expressed Miθra's prayer without any mention to Ohrmazd. The reason behind this practice may be rooted in the fact that, in the far past, people dignified Miθra as a lord who had a status parallel to that possessed by Ohrmazd (Boyce, 1969, pp. 32-33; you can also refer to Amuzegar, 2008; Bahar, 2007).

5.2 MiŌra and the Ancient Athletics

MiŌra has had such influential effects on the Iran's culture that the Iranian people, both consciously before Islam and unconsciously after it, have tried to model MiŌra's behavioral patterns (Bahar, 2007). Because of these effects, we can find similarities between Iranian athletes' traditions, beliefs, and Zurkhanehs and what was valued in Mithraism. According to the traditions of Iranian Zurkhanehs (i.e., where ancient athletics were practiced), the athlete should be pious, clean, and clear-eyed and, in addition to undertaking religious practices, he should have good attitudes. When in rage, the athlete should not humiliate his rival in public and should always observe humanity. He should help the poor as much as he can and should shun knaveries.

The above practices for magnanimity have also been encouraged in Mithraism (Bahar, 2007). In Iranian ancient athletics, athletic practices began after the Morning Prayer and that was the time MiŌra began to shine the universe. The athletes' behaviors had some commonality with Mithraic practices, too. The followers of MiŌra were educated on war mores and, in a similar vein, war mores were symbolically taught to the athletes in Zurkhanehs. Only the grownups were allowed to enter Zurkhanehs. Further, like other Mithraic rituals, women were not let to enter Zurkhanehs. On the other hand, it was not only the Mithraic rituals and behaviors that were comparable to the athletes' characteristics and behaviors. Zurkhanehs themselves were similar to Mithraic temples as far as their structure was concerned (Bahar, 2007). Zurkhanehs were connected to streets through long stairways and were usually built under other buildings (Bahar, 2007). This structure was similar to the structure of Mithraic temples that looked like caves (Bahar, 2007). In Zurkhanehs, like Mithraic temples, there existed an arena and a stage. Near the Zurkhaneh's entrance, again like Mithraic temples, existed a fountain that, of course, has lost its principal meaning today. Parallel to the firebox in Mithraic temples which was hung on the two sides of the picture of MiŌra, there is a firebox in Zurkhaneh which is used today to heat the tempo instrument (used to excite the athletes) and to prepare drinks (Bahar, 2007). Like the walls of Mithraic temples on which figures have been sculpted, Zurkhaneh's walls have been painted with pictures of Rostam (an ancient, mythological athlete) and other athletes (Bahar, 2007).

5.3 Some of the Main Characteristics of MiŌra

The following are some of the main characteristics of MiŌra that have been mentioned in different documents and religious texts.

- MiŌra is related to rainfalls (Thieme, 1975).
- MiŌra causes plants to grow, a function related to MiŌra's role as God who causes rain (see Amuzegar, 2008; Thieme, 1975).
- One characteristic of MiŌra is defined as 'giver of sons' (puthrō-dā). Endowing a person with a son was considered parallel as MiŌra providing people with spacious pasturages. Providing people with wealth and giving them sons was a part of MiŌra's attention to the nations' comfort and welfare, resulting, in return, to local stability and stability of international contracts (Hinnells, 1975).
- MiŌra is also characterized as 'giver of life' (gayō-dā). He is the god that endows people with children, sends rainfalls, and causes plants to grow (Hinnells, 1975). In addition, MiŌra is known as parallel to twilight and he is the one who returns the seven territories from sleep to awakening. Therefore, these show that MiŌra deserves the title of 'giver of life'.
- Finally, MiŌra sets his creatures free of difficulties. He does so by securing them safety and expanding the pasturages (Kuiper 1982).

6. Conclusion

In *Mihr-Yašt*, MiŌra watches all contracts. Particularly, the contract between two persons, speculated at free will, was valued and sacred more than a contract, for example, between two brothers if the latter contract was assumed because of kinship relations. Therefore, even if two brothers speculated a contract between themselves at free will, that contract would be more valued and sacred than the one they had because of their kinship relations. The most important contract was that speculated among the followers of Mazdaism. If one side of such a contract broke it, the sin of breaking the contract was considered ten times the sin of breaking the contract between two countries. In addition, there was no difference whether the contract was speculated with pious individuals or vicious individuals in that the contract was not allowed to be broken. One example was the contract between Ohrmazd and Satan that lasted nine thousand years.

The hypotheses on the diminishing of MiŌra after the emergence of Zoroastrianism cannot be supported as, in most documents; the name of MiŌra comes after the name Ohrmazd, the latter being regarded as God of gods in those documents. Ohrmazd's silence about some Mithraic rituals should be interpreted as confirmation, and not negation, since, if it was otherwise, Ohrmazd negated these rituals explicitly. With the expansion of the Empire

of Achaemenian, and entrance of non-aristocratic and middle-class individuals into the Durbar, Miθra, who was at the center of power among the low- and high-class, was appealed to attention among the aristocratic individuals (Amuzegar, 2008; Gordon, 1999; Schofield, 1995). During Parthian Empire, Miθra could find his path to Europe. Further, during the Empire of Sasanian, Miθra was also at the center of power and religions like Christianity and Manichaeism were highly influenced by him. Even today, the effects of Mithraic beliefs on Iranian athletic traditions and rituals can be observed.

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