

Avesta.org



Joe Peterson, November 4, 2017



Avesta ~ Zoroastrian Archives

Today is month Aban, day Tir/Tishtar, year AY 1386



		<h2>SSZ Conference</h2> <p>November 4, 2017 Arbab Rustom Guiv Darbe Mehr, 8615 Meadowbrook</p> <p>Drive, Burr Ridge, IL.</p>
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[WZSE – Weekly Scripture](#)

"Zoroastrianism is the oldest of the revealed world-religions, and it has probably had more influence on mankind, directly and indirectly, than any other single faith." - [Boyce, Zoroastrians, 1979, p. 1.](#)

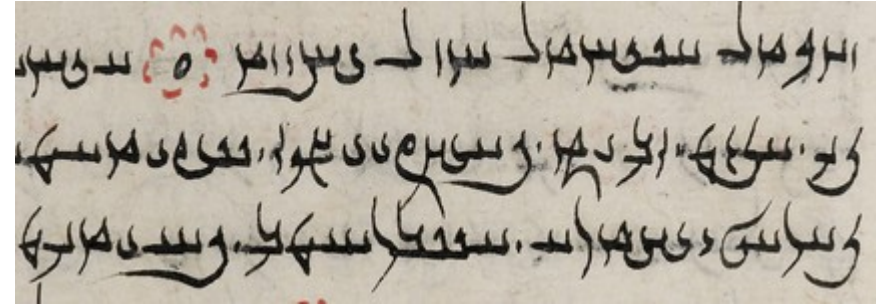
"Zoroaster was thus the first to teach the doctrines of an individual judgment, Heaven and Hell, the future resurrection of the body, the general Last Judgment, and life everlasting for the reunited soul and body. These doctrines were to become familiar articles of faith to much of mankind, through borrowings by Judaism, Christianity and Islam; yet it is in Zoroastrianism itself that they have their fullest logical coherence...." - [Boyce, op. cit. p. 29.](#)

Agenda

- Original motivation
- Evolution
- Demographics
- Surprises
- What's next?

Why?

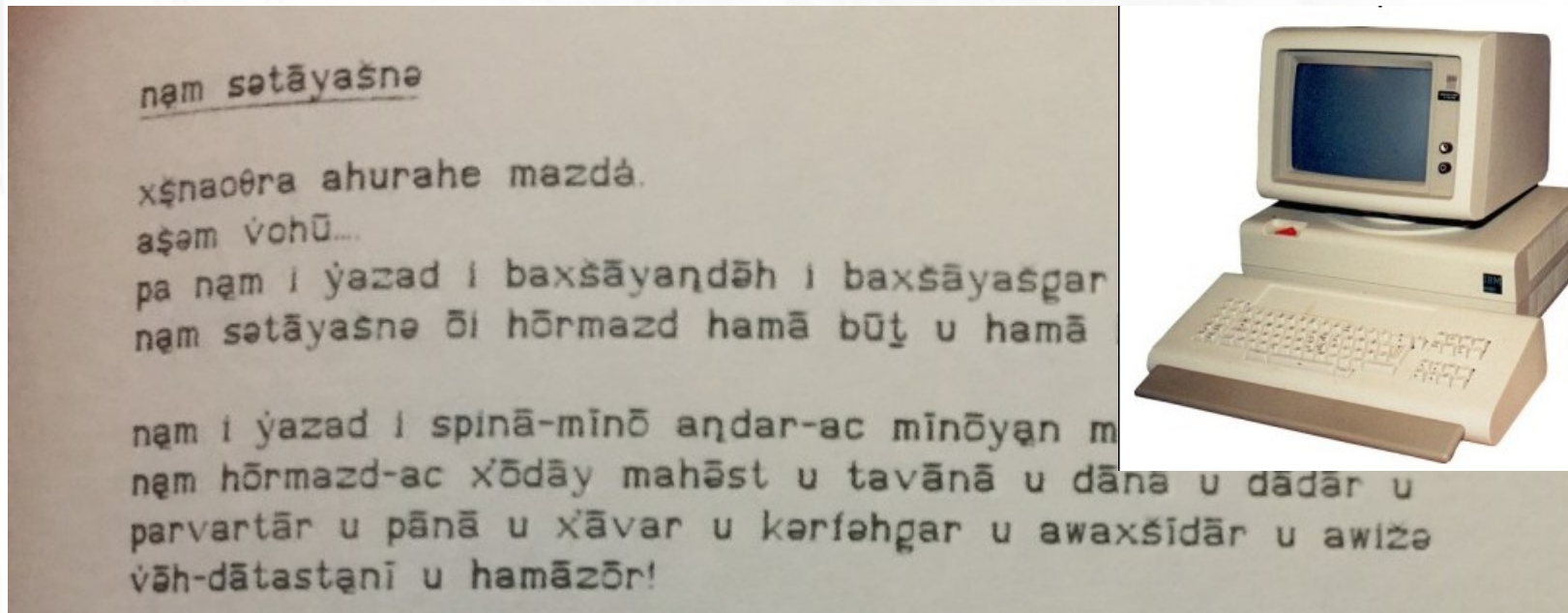
- Started digitizing texts for my own use
- Accurate, Searchable
- Learning (word freq lists)
- Preserve, share, rare docs (Denkard, GBd, Rivayats)
- Let texts speak for themselves



1. كتاب الله عز وجل
كتاب الله عز وجل
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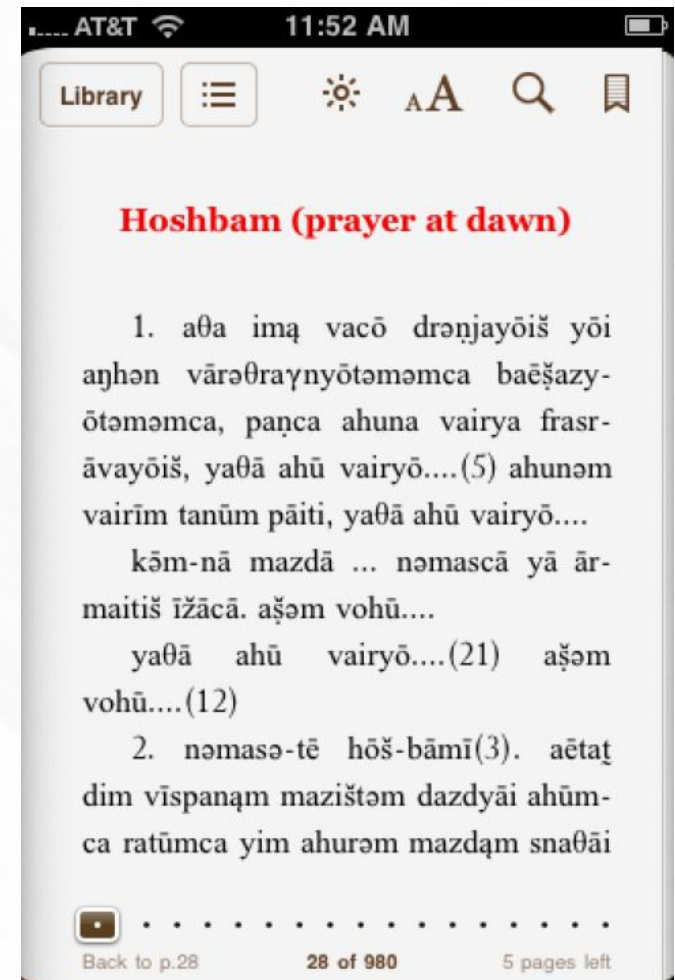
How it started

- Photocopies: Geldner Avesta and SBE
- Oldest format: IBM Displaywriter
- Drafting machine to write Avestan
- CP/M computer (pre-DOS), bitmap fonts
- (newer data formats – ASCII, GML, SGML, TEI, HTML, ePUB, PDF, ODT; ...)



History (continued)










- 1995: Internet had personal web site
- Add texts continually, fonts
- 2003: More community involvement (books, articles, store)
- 2010: Chat service (discontinued 2014)
- Evolve to more rich content
- Evolve to wider audience – interfaith, baby names
- 2017: NEWEST: *šak-ud-gumanih-vizar -- The Doubt-removing book of Mardanfarrox*, edited and translated by Raham Asha (2015)



Early challenges

- **Spelling** (khwarrah – divine grace or glory – farr, farrah, khurra, Av. khvarenah, khwarenah, hvareno)
- **Respect copyrights**
- **Questions (drove FAQ), chat service**
- **External links kept disappearing (e.g. fonts)**

Standardize spelling

-  Farhang-i bihdīnān. (Book, 1956) [WorldCat.org] –
-  Farhang-e behdinān (Book, 1956) [WorldCat.org] –
-  Farhang-i Bahdīnan (Book, 1978) [WorldCat.org] –
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-  Farhang-E Behdīnan (Book, 1956) [WorldCat.org] –
-  Results for 'Farhang-e behdīnan' [WorldCat.org] –

Digital preservation

- 150 dpi compressed, 1200 dpi currently / rescans
- Very difficult to find – research libraries only
- Many original documents too fragile to photocopy

Samples showing effect of scan settings on image quality and size



Learning aids

Highest frequency: Words occurring over 200 times

ahe	• 𐬀𐬀𐬎𐬌𐬎𐬎	Of this, of that (mnG) (246)
ahmāi	• 𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬀𐬎𐬎	To (or for) this, to (or for) that (D); we (plD) (208)
ahurahe	• 𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬀𐬎𐬎	Of Ahura, of the Lord, of God (G) (292)
ašaonō	• 𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬀𐬎𐬎	Of Asha, of Truth, of Righteousness, World Order (G) (422)
ašavanəm	• 𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬀𐬎𐬎	Ashavan, owning Asha, Asha-sanctified (A) (297)
ašāum	• 𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬀𐬎𐬎	O Ashavan, O righteous one (V) (286)
ašəm	• 𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬀𐬎𐬎	Asha, Truth, Righteousness, World Order (NA) (400)
asti	• 𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬀𐬎𐬎	Is (3/1) (218)
avi	• 𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬀𐬎𐬎	towards (adv., prep. with A or G) (249)
ayese	• 𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬀𐬎𐬎	I wish, I desire, I demand (1/1) (249)
dātarə	• 𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬀𐬎𐬎	O Giver; O Maker, O Creator (mV) (249)
fravašim	• 𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬀𐬎𐬎	Fravashi (farohar); guardian spirit or angel (A) (290)

Learning aids (con't)

Animals:

bear	arṣa	ܐܪܫܐ
beaver	bawra	ܒܘܪܐ
boar, wild pig	varāza	ܘܪܐܝܐ
camel	uštra	ܘܫܬܪܐ
cow or bull	gao	ܓܘܐ
crab	kahrpu	ܟܗܪܦܘܐ
dog	span	ܫܦܢܐ
eagle	sacna	ܫܥܢܐ
fish	masya	ܡܝܫܝܐ
goat	būza	ܒܘܙܐ
hedgehog	sīžaka, dužaka	ܫܝܒܘܟܐ ܘܕܘܒܘܟܐ
horse	aspa	ܐܫܦܐ
livestock (small, i.e. goat, sheep, small cattle)	anumaya	ܐܢܘܡܝܐ
livestock	pasu	ܦܫܘܐ

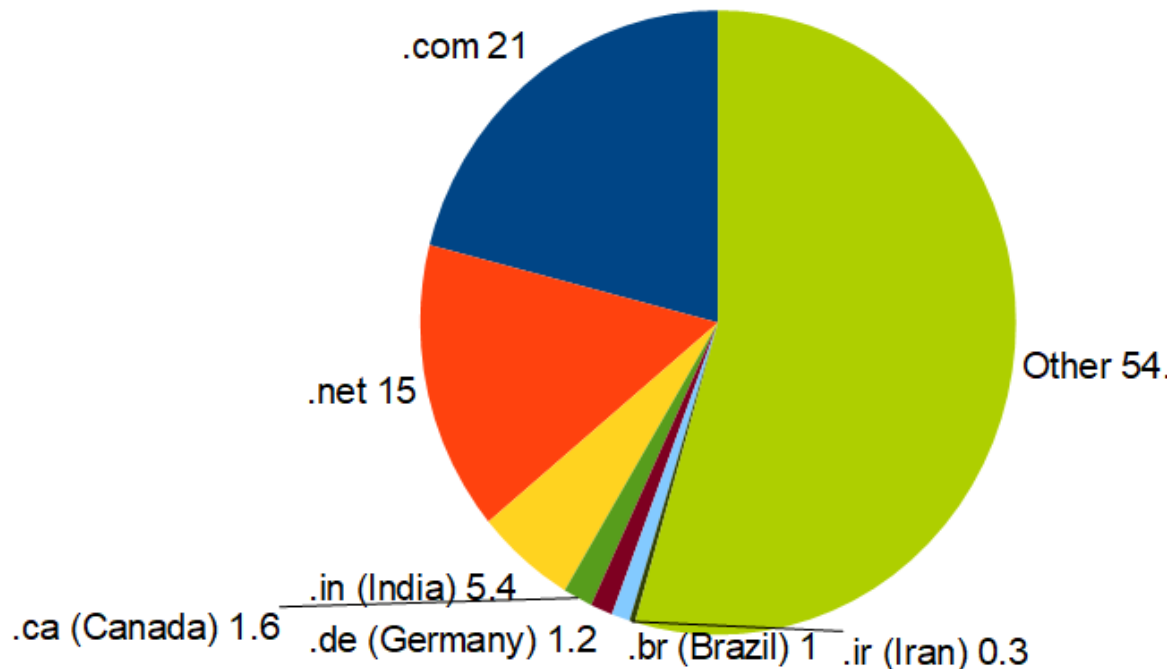
Contributors

- Er. Soli Dastur (weekly blog, many scanned rare books, audio prayers)
- Dr. Kersey Antia (articles, reviews)
- Er. Noshir Hormuzdiar, history of priesthood
- Dr. Jehan Bagli, Greater Bundahisn
- Dr. William Malandra, Emily West (fonts)
- Sam Kerr (many articles)
- Khursheed Bapasola (Zoroastrian Shop)
- Ervad Gustad Panthaki
- Ervad Brigadier Behram Maneckshah Panthaki
- Dr. Ervad Ramiyar Parvez Karanjia, Principal of Dadar Athornan Madressa in Mumbai India
- Nader M. Patel, Mumbai
- Calcutta Parsi Anjuman and Sohrabji Panthaky
- Pallan Ichaporia
- Dhun and Cyrus Madon
- Raham Asha


Usage

- 11,000+ files
- 300 audio recordings
- Successful requests: 70,000,000+
- Average requests per day: 13,000
- Distinct hosts served: 4,000,000+

Percent of traffic



Top 5 requests



20% of total requests

Kanga, <i>Khorda Avesta (English)</i>	6% (40% of bytes)
Znames (baby names)	6%
Z FAQ	6%
Audio (mp3)	3% (43% of bytes)
Kanga, <i>Khorda Avesta (Guj.)</i>	2%

Surprises

- Tremendous interest worldwide (no promotion, just content)
- Community support, contacts
- Popularity of baby names
- Almost no feedback – spelling only few times in 20+ years; requests almost nil
- Huge number of links and citations, e.g. baby names sites, textbooks, interfaith calendars
- How quickly other sites disappear

Surprises (continued)

- “pahlavi” texts all blocked in Iran; renamed “mp”
- Continual stream of requests to translate Pahlavi text (Advice of Adarbad) into various languages, from all over the world
- Constant technology changes
 - Formats, speed increases, cost of storage
 - Drive richer text, need to rescan
- Requests for texts not in worldcat
- Chat support was not manageable

What's next?

- More events, new releases
- More annotations
- Better scans, especially Kanga's dictionaries
- More rare texts welcome
- Mobile device support
- More epub
- Searchable pdfs
- Videos – esp. *koshti bastan*
- *Suggestions?*

Questions?



the instruction of, a guidance for all who are, was and will be and the science of sciences, viz, the beautiful Mantra so that the souls of the chieftain Bridge, may be released from Hell and may come thence pass over the Best Existence of the Holy, the bright sunset-sunlight and all-beneficent.

In obedience to your command, I compassed and I accept, pur pure religion & think, speak and practice (in accordance with it.)

the, the metals.

naive to the
made man the
daily creatures and
speeds and the power
them for the sovereignty.
the unimportant
the contest in battles

innocent due to him the
rough barbaric opinions
the creatures, the
the knowledge of the
to the religion, innate
find through the ears, a

Handwritten text in a non-Latin script, likely Persian or Urdu, covering the right page of the notebook. The text is written in cursive and includes various lines of prose and possibly poetry.



Hi I'm JP,
Thanks to Society of Scholars of Z'ism
and ZAC for inviting me to speak about
avesta.org
I make no claims about being a scholar,
but hope this will still be interesting



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Screen shot

Agenda

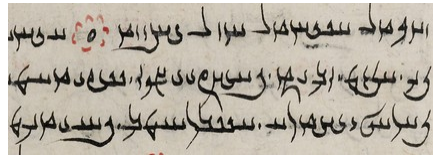
- Original motivation
- Evolution
- Demographics
- Surprises
- What's next?

What I'll talk about

Feel free to ask questions as I go along

Why?

- Started digitizing texts for my own use
- Accurate, Searchable
- Learning (word freq lists)
- Preserve, share, rare docs (Denkard, GBd, Rivayats)
- Let texts speak for themselves

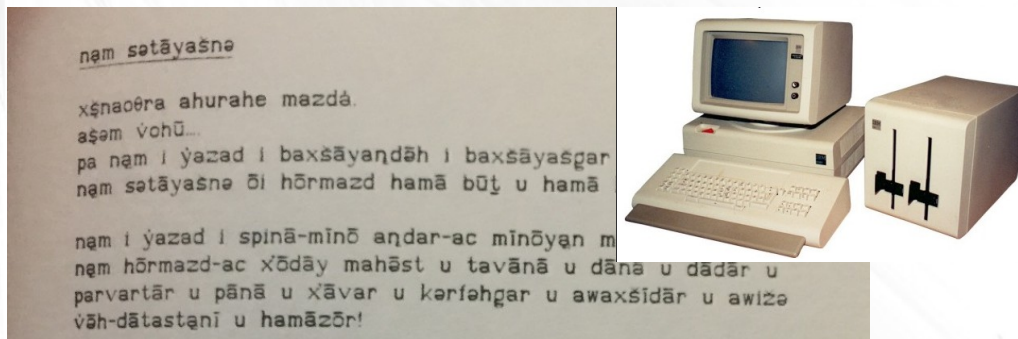


۱ هکذا...
...
...

- My own use: Never dreamed it would go beyond my own filing cabinet; PRE-INTERNET – no way to share
- Texts incredibly interesting – cross-reference, better understand (e.g. details on lost texts in Dk 8 & 9)
- Accurate – proof read entire Av text 4-5 times, then build spell checked and dictionary in iterations
- Avoid controversies, or inserting my own views
 - [Calendar preferences, emphasis on seasonal festivals]
 - [Article on importance of baresman]
 - [Intro to Dabestan, I mention that (according to articles in Acta Iranica Azar Kayvani mystical writings were fabrications and full of absurdities)]
- [Inventing rituals???

How it started

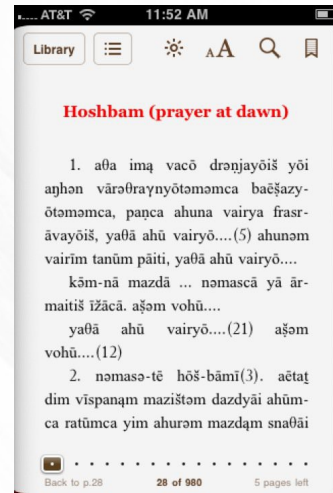
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- Drafting machine to write Avestan
- CP/M computer (pre-DOS), bitmap fonts
- (newer data formats – ASCII, GML, SGML, TEI, HTML, ePUB, PDF, ODT; ...)



- Augsburg College biomedical research in High School summer project
- Large collection at U of MN, where Dr. Malandra taught Avestan (some of the photo-copies were because Bruce Lincoln was teaching there at the time, and often had half the books checked out)
- (((– including Parsiana subscription, JCOI)))
- DisplayWriter, later able to import from Displaywriter to CP/M
- Earliest: Geldner's edition of Avesta +
- +Darmesteter revised translation (rare, interesting to find still useful)
- Pahlavi texts (U of AZ Dinkart/Sanjana; one volume of Sanjana's Denkard missing from U of Az, found in Chicago)
- Parsi Avesta language brochures, U of Penn
- (((Taraporewala short book)
- (((Back then fonts were called “daisy wheels”)

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Soli Dastur, Kersey Antia, Jehan Bagli,
etc.

Khursheed Bapasola (shop)










Events from Chicago newsletter, mobeds
council, fezana

Early challenges

- **Spelling** (khwarrah – divine grace or glory – farr, farrah, khurra, Av. khvarenah, khwarenah, hvareno)
- Respect copyrights
- Questions (drove FAQ), chat service
- External links kept disappearing (e.g. fonts)

- Ran into snags with my plan to let the texts speak entirely for themselves
- Spelling was and continues to be big problem
 - – Thousands of years in multiple languages
 - – SBE horrible attempt at standardizing all their many volumes (not just Z), make texts jarring caused more confusion than anything
 - – Decided to incorporate a “standardized” spelling (from Kotwal & Boyd) not ideal, e.g. *dae* not *day*, *boi* not *boy* Erachji Sohrabji Meherjirana (Dastur) 19th ce
- Copyright, annotate texts to note more recent scholarship
- Had to make some choices, e.g. Calendar preference – not perfectly unbiased
- Limited materials I had access to, part-time effort (not comprehensive)

Standardize spelling

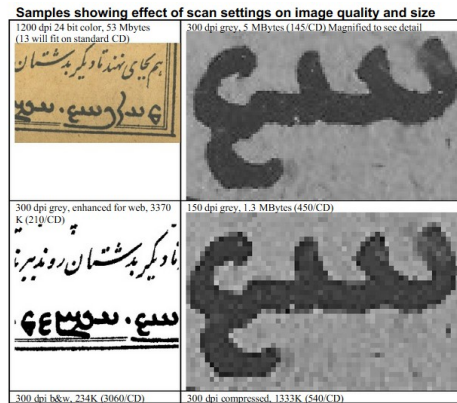
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This is still a big problem, and not a good solution –
cognitive computing such as Watson may be best aid
in the long run

Jamshid Soroush Soroushian 1956 – dictionary of
Zarthushti dialect – included baby names

Digital preservation

- 150 dpi compressed, 1200 dpi currently / rescans
- Very difficult to find – research libraries only
- Many original documents too fragile to photocopy



Article in FEZANA journal

- Benefits – easy access, searchable, spare rare material from being handled
- e.g. inter-library loan of Kanga's Grammar

Learning aids

Highest frequency: Words occurring over 200 times

ahe	𐬀𐬎𐬌𐬀	Of this, of that (mnG) (246)
ahmāi	𐬀𐬎𐬌𐬀𐬎𐬌𐬀	To (or for) this, to (or for) that (D); we (plD) (208)
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ašavanom	𐬀𐬎𐬌𐬀𐬎𐬌𐬀𐬎𐬌𐬀𐬎𐬌𐬀𐬎𐬌𐬀	Ashavan, owning Asha, Asha-sanctified (A) (297)
ašāum	𐬀𐬎𐬌𐬀𐬎𐬌𐬀𐬎𐬌𐬀𐬎𐬌𐬀𐬎𐬌𐬀	O Ashavan, O righteous one (V) (286)
ašom	𐬀𐬎𐬌𐬀𐬎𐬌𐬀𐬎𐬌𐬀𐬎𐬌𐬀𐬎𐬌𐬀	Asha, Truth, Righteousness, World Order (NA) (400)
asti	𐬀𐬎𐬌𐬀𐬎𐬌𐬀𐬎𐬌𐬀𐬎𐬌𐬀𐬎𐬌𐬀	Is (3/1) (218)
avi	𐬀𐬎𐬌𐬀𐬎𐬌𐬀𐬎𐬌𐬀𐬎𐬌𐬀𐬎𐬌𐬀	towards (adv., prep. with A or G) (249)
ayese	𐬀𐬎𐬌𐬀𐬎𐬌𐬀𐬎𐬌𐬀𐬎𐬌𐬀𐬎𐬌𐬀	I wish, I desire, I demand (1/1) (249)
dātaro	𐬀𐬎𐬌𐬀𐬎𐬌𐬀𐬎𐬌𐬀𐬎𐬌𐬀𐬎𐬌𐬀	O Giver; O Maker, O Creator (mV) (249)
fravašim	𐬀𐬎𐬌𐬀𐬎𐬌𐬀𐬎𐬌𐬀𐬎𐬌𐬀𐬎𐬌𐬀	Fravashi (farohar); guardian spirit or angel (A) (290)

One of my original goals was to assemble lexical aids to help me learn Avestan better. Not sure how useful others have found it, but it was for me.

Quiz: most frequent:

- 1) Yazamaide = 1791 (“we venerate”)
- 2) Aat = 815 (“then”)
- 3) mazdao 808 (Nom./Gen.) why? Because as N & G it gets double credit!

Learning aids (con't)

Animals:

bear	arša	د (ا) یخس .
beaver	bawra	د (ا) یکنی .
boar, wild pig	varāza	د (ا) یس .
camel	uštra	د (ا) یس .
cow or bull	gao	د (ا) یس .
crab	kahrpu	د (ا) یس .
dog	span	د (ا) یس .
eagle	sacna	د (ا) یس .
fish	masya	د (ا) یس .
goat	būza	د (ا) یس .
hedgehog	sīžaka, dužaka	د (ا) یس .
horse	aspa	د (ا) یس .
livestock (small, i.e. goat, sheep, small cattle)	anumaya	د (ا) یس .
livestock	pasu	د (ا) یس .

Other examples:

- list of animal names,
- weapons,
- numerals,
- cognates and mnemonics

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- Sam Kerr (many articles)
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- Nader M. Patel, Mumbai
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- Pallan Ichaporia
- Dhun and Cyrus Madon
- Raham Asha

Most tireless contributor was Soli Dastur

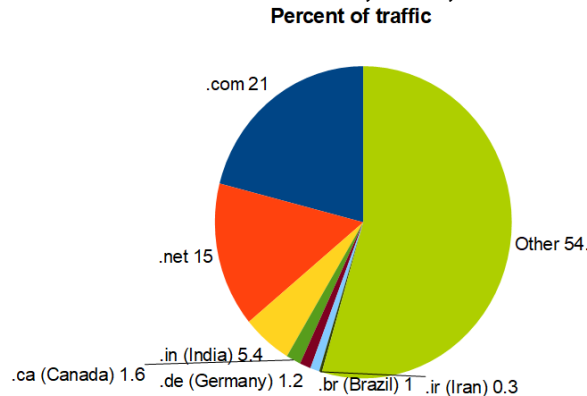
- Scan rare books and sent to me
- Recorded dozens of prayers for audio section

Dr. Antia: articles

Dr. Ichaporia also contributed (timeline)


Usage

- 11,000+ files
- 300 audio recordings
- Successful requests: 70,000,000+
- Average requests per day: 13,000
- Distinct hosts served: 4,000,000+



- Over 11 thousand files
- 300 audio recordings
- 13 thousand requests per day
- Over 4 million unique requestors (some may be dups)
- Most not identifiable by besides .com & .net, india is by far the largest number of requests, followed by Canada, Germany, Brazil, and Iran

Top 5 requests



20% of total requests

Kanga, <i>Khorda Avesta (English)</i>	6% (40% of bytes)
Znames (baby names)	6%
Z FAQ	6%
Audio (mp3)	3% (43% of bytes)
Kanga, <i>Khorda Avesta (Guj.)</i>	2%

Another statistic I found interesting:

Of the 11 thousand files, these 5 account for 20% of file requests, and since 2 of them are large, 83 percent of the data sent from the site.

Because of how popular – digitize (improve readability and much faster to download), correct typos

Very first prayer (Ashem Vohu) had Vashistem instead of Vahisitem (((Original scans were huge, binary, hard to read, and full of typos, so I took 3 years to correct (13 pages of typos) and convert to searchable text.))

(((some others:)))

757920	Naurooz Prayer Book
294512	Yasna
241364	Combined Avesta Grammar
229871	dhalla/saga.htm
215841	op/op.htm
191497	Glossary of Zoroastrian words
190526	Yashts, Kanga

Surprises

- Tremendous interest worldwide (no promotion, just content)
- Community support, contacts
- Popularity of baby names
- Almost no feedback – spelling only few times in 20+ years; requests almost nil
- Huge number of links and citations, e.g. baby names sites, textbooks, interfaith calendars
- How quickly other sites disappear

- Scholars, like Insler requested pdf of Yasna in transcription font, very convenient for his research
- Drives more traffic on my ISP (iCompute) than all other domains he serves combined
- Community passion, frequent requests to help redesign

Surprises (continued)

- “pahlavi” texts all blocked in Iran; renamed “mp”
- Continual stream of requests to translate Pahlavi text (Advice of Adarbad) into various languages, from all over the world
- Constant technology changes
 - Formats, speed increases, cost of storage
 - Drive richer text, need to rescan
- Requests for texts not in worldcat
- Chat support was not manageable

- Finnish, Polish, Ukranian
- Chat filled with people who were not very knowledgeable trying to answer basic questions, and spreading misinformation.
- (((Steady stream of requests that basically amounted to them wanting me to do their homework for them)))
- Uncivil behavior, constantly banning members, time consuming

What's next?

- More events, new releases
- More annotations
- Better scans, especially Kanga's dictionaries
- More rare texts welcome
- Mobile device support
- More epub
- Searchable pdfs
- Videos – esp. *koshti bastan*
- *Suggestions?*

Thank audience
Questions

Questions?

