

Jean Kellens. *Essai sur la Gâthâ spəntā.mainiiu*

Benedikt Peschl

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**Electronic version**

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/abstractairanica/55023>

DOI: [10.4000/abstractairanica.55023](https://doi.org/10.4000/abstractairanica.55023)

ISSN: 1961-960X

**Publisher:**

CNRS (UMR 7528 Mondes iraniens et indiens), Éditions de l'IFRI

**Electronic reference**

Benedikt Peschl, "Jean Kellens. *Essai sur la Gâthâ spəntā.mainiiu*", *Abstracta Iranica* [Online], Volume 44 | 2022, document 1, Online since 30 November 2022, connection on 31 August 2023. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/abstractairanica/55023> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/abstractairanica.55023>

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## REFERENCES

Jean Kellens. *Essai sur la Gāthā spəntā.mainiiu*. Leuven : Peeters, 2021, 107 p. (Études avestiques et mazdéennes vol. 7., Persika 22).

- 1 Following Jean Kellens' two substantial articles (Le jour se lève à la fin de la Gāthā Ahunauuaitī. *Journal Asiatique* 301 [2013]. 53–84 ; La Gāthā ahunauuaitī dans l'attente de l'aube. *Journal Asiatique* 302 [2014]. 259–302) on the Ahunauuaitī Gāθā (Yasna 28–34) and his recent monograph (Études avestiques et mazdéennes vol. 6. *Lecture sceptique et aventureuse de la Gāthā uštāuuaitī* [Persika 19]. Paris: de Boccard 2020) on the Uštāuuaitī Gāθā (Yasna 43–46), this small but inspiring book on the Spəntāmainiiū Gāθā (SG, Yasna 47–50) continues the author's systematic revisiting of the Gāthās, aimed at partly updating and partly replacing his contributions to the collaborative treatment of the Old Avestan corpus in Kellens, Jean & Pirart, Éric 1988–1991: *Les textes vieil-avestiques*. 3 vols. Wiesbaden: Reichert (TVA).
- 2 The book opens with a brief Introduction (pp. 9–10), in which the author argues for the internal unity and coherence of the SG, emphasising two features in particular: (1.) the high degree of “lexical, syntactic and thematic continuity” between the individual stanzas and Hāitis (hymns, chapters) of the Gāthā (p. 9); (2.) a common set of twelve thematic stages shared by the SG and the other “polyhâtic” Gāthās (i.e., those comprising more than one Hāiti). After the Introduction follows a stanza-by-stanza presentation of the Avestan text together with commentary notes and a translation (pp. 11–87). In agreement with the style established in previous volumes of the *Études avestiques et mazdéennes*, references to the secondary literature are kept to a minimum. However, Kellens regularly refers back to the more extensive discussions in TVA and

highlights the points where the views presented in the present book deviate from those expressed in TVA.

- 3 Kellens' new take on the Gāthās rests on a systematic analysis of the connections to be found between the often enigmatic assertions that constitute the Old Avestan texts on the one hand, and certain well-known modules of the traditional Indo-Iranian ritual practice (as reflected by the later Avestan and Vedic ritual systems) on the other hand. Accordingly, the Gāthās may be seen as highly sophisticated, speculative elaborations on a sequence of simultaneously ongoing ritual actions. This scenario entails that each Gāthā would originally have represented a more or less self-standing liturgy meant to accompany a distinct ritual to be performed at a distinct time of the day.
- 4 Whereas certain thematic stages are shared by all of the polyhâtic Gāthās, the ways in which some of those stages are emphasised and others demoted to the background differ from Gāthā to Gāthā, as does the sequence in which they appear. Based on the distinguishing features of the SG, which are summarised in the Conclusion (pp. 89–94), Kellens makes a cautious suggestion as to the original ritual context in which this particular Gāthā would have been performed at the time of its composition: whereas he regards the *Ahunauuitī Gāθā* and *Uštāuuaitī Gāθā* as liturgies composed for an auroral and a pre-auroral rite, respectively, the SG would have served as the liturgy of an evening rite designed to ensure a safe passing through the night (p. 94).
- 5 This general interpretive framework provides the background for the author's innovative and often consciously adventurous interpretations of numerous individual passages of the SG. While their discussion falls outside the scope of this book notice, they will give ample food for thought to future students of the text.

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## AUTHORS

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