



ĀBĀN YAŠT

ĀBĀN YAŠT, Middle Persian (Pazand) name of the fifth among the Zoroastrian hymns to individual divinities. It is the third longest, with 131 verses (only *Farvardīn* and *Mīhr Yašt* are longer). Although the name indicates that the hymn is devoted to the Waters (Ābān), the Lady Ardvīsūr (Bānū Ardvīsūr) is invoked in the Middle Persian preliminaries; and the Avestan *xšnūman* (dedication) dedicates its recital to the satisfaction of “the water Arədvī Sūrā Anāhitā, the righteous.” This accords with the content of the *yašt* better than its title, since it is in fact devoted to the river divinity *Arədvī Sūrā Anāhitā*.

With this work, as with all the other great Avestan *yašts*, it is possible to trace different strands in its contents, although these are inextricably interwoven in the final reduction. Firstly, there is the ancient celebration, pre-Zoroastrian in origin, of the river goddess Arədvī Sūrā and her life-giving powers. This is well exemplified in vv. 3-5, 96, 132. Secondly, there are verses which embody the specifically Zoroastrian doctrine that she, like all other *yazatas*, was given her separate existence by Ahura Mazdā, in order that she might help in the struggle of the good creation against evil. Some of these verses (such as vv. 1, 6-7, 94-95, 104-18) are apparently old (i.e., pre-Achaemenian) in substance, having been fashioned presumably in the early days of the faith. Thirdly, there are others which appear to have been composed after the syncretistic identification of Arədvī Sūrā with the Semitic goddess Anāitis (q.v.). These (vv. 123-28) describe the *yazatā* in terms which suggest that the priest who first composed them had a cult statue before his eyes; and it seems likely that they were added to the hymn in the time of Artaxerxes II (404-359 B.C.), who set up



images of Anaïtis throughout the Persian empire. Finally, other specifically Zoroastrian verses (notably v. 17, modeled evidently on v. 104) are inept and doctrinally weak, and may be supposed to be late additions; but how late, there is no means of knowing.

The verses in the final category were evidently added in order to exalt the *yazatā* further. This they do both directly (thus in v. 17 Ahura Mazdā is himself represented as sacrificing to her) and indirectly simply by making her hymn longer and therefore more impressive. One of its striking features is an extended run of verses (vv. 21-83) which describe how heroes of old, including the ancestors of Kavi Vištāspa, each sacrificed to Arədvī Sūrā Anāhitā in order to obtain some great boon. These verses contain ancient epic material in brief, sometimes poetic, allusions; but they are “floating” references, which in oral transmission could be incorporated into any hymn with the minor alteration of the divinity’s name. Some indeed appear in other *yašts*—notably the *Rām* and *Zamyād Yašt*s—with only unessential differences. The fact that this epic material is most fully preserved in *Yašt* 5 is a tribute to the popularity of Arədvī Sūrā Anāhitā at the time when her hymn was finally written down and so took on a fixed form—probably well on in the Sasanian period.

As well as being extended by lavish use of general matter Arədvī’s *yašt* seems to have been lengthened by specific borrowings from hymns to other divinities. The clearest of these are in vv. 130, 102, 127, which correspond closely with vv. 6-11 of *Yašt* 17, devoted to Aši, *yazatā* of Fortune, whom Arədvī Sūrā Anāhitā gradually eclipsed. One of two other verses may perhaps derive from a lost hymn to *Vouruna (see under [Apām Napāt](#)), whose place she even more strikingly usurped: His name occurs, perplexingly, in v. 72. Lines in v. 53 are identical with part of v. 11 of the *Mihr Yašt*, but may once have been common to that hymn and the lost one to Mithra’s brother Ahura *Vouruna; and in v. 89, where Arədvī Sūrā says: “Righteous, just Zoroaster, you Ahura Mazdā created master of the corporeal world, us Ahura Mazdā created protectors of all good existence,” the word for protector is *nipātara*, which is a masculine dual, not a feminine singular, and may well betray an awkward adaptation of a verse which originally referred to Mithra-*Vouruna.

There are some verses within the *yašt* which are purely repetitive (e.g., v. 101 is a repetition of v. 4). Such repetitions are often found in oral literature, and they help to extend the written version. A few other half verses seem to be patched together from scraps and tags (e.g., the end of v. 54). The general impression given by the *yašt* is therefore of a text which has grown naturally



through historical processes from an immensely ancient original, and has been deliberately extended further because of Arədvī Sūrā Anāhitā's immense popularity. The final version is linguistically harmonious; but the literary quality varies greatly, from some truly poetic lines in the archaic portions to the halting Avestan of the latest additions.

In living usage the *Ābān Yašt* is never recited in a fire temple or before a fire, but only within sight of water. The same is true of the much shorter *Ābān Niyayeš*, which is almost entirely made up of verses from the *yašt*.

See also [ĀBĀN](#), [ĀBĀN MĀH](#), [ĀB-ZŌHR](#).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Avesta (Geldner) II, pp. 82-102.

Avesta, tr. Darmesteter, II, pp. 363-402.

H. Reichelt, Avesta Reader, Strassburg, 1911, pp. 3-12.

F. Wolff, Avesta übersetzt, Strassburg, 1910, pp. 166-82.

H. Lommel, Die Yāšt's des Avesta, Göttingen und Leipzig, 1927, pp. 26-44.

E. Pūr-e Dāvūd, Adabīyāt-e Mazda-yasna, Yaštā, 2nd ed., Tehran, 1347 Š./1968, I, pp. 233-303.

Discussion in A. Christensen, Les Kayanides, Copenhagen, 1931, pp. 10f., especially 14-15.