



AIRYAMAN

AIRYAMAN, an ancient Iranian divinity and a *yazata* of the Zoroastrian pantheon, known in Manichean Middle Persian as Aryaman, in Pahlavi as Ērmān. The Avestan common noun *airyaman-*, Vedic *aryaman-*, means “friend, companion;” and the Indo-Iranian Aryaman was, it seems, the hypostasis of friendship, and of friendly alliance; and this being ratified at times by a formal oath, he was close to the *asuras* Mitra and Varuna, who upheld oath and covenant. In the Vedas he appears as one of the group of Ādityas; and with Varuna (under his by-name of Bhaga) he presided over marriage, presumably as the sealing of the bond of friendship between two families.

In Iran Airyaman exercised this same function, and he is accordingly still regularly invoked at Zoroastrian weddings. Moreover, the Middle Persian proper name Bay-Aryāmān attests that in Iran too he was linked with Varuna, the *Baga*. In Zoroastrianism, however, he has also an eschatological role; for it is he, according to the Pahlavi books, who will guide the Saošyant, Astvaṭ.ərəta, when he comes to bring about Frašō.kərəti (see [Frašegerd](#)). Just why this role should be assigned to the *yazata* of Friendship remains a matter for speculation, but conceivably it was because Frašō.kərəti will see the end of all enmity and strife. Thereafter, “Fire and Ērmān Yazd will melt the metal in the hills and mountains, and it will be upon the earth like a river” (*Bd.* 34.18); this river will burn away all wickedness and purify the whole physical creation. Airyaman is thus actively associated with the achievement of Frašō.kərəti, which for Zoroaster and his early followers was an event not far off, and which all Zoroastrians have ardently expected. It is presumably for



this reason that Airyaman is addressed, in the great Gathic prayer called after him, as *Airyāmā išyō* “Longed-for Airyaman.”

Airyaman further became for Zoroastrians a *yazata* of healing, able not only to heal physical evil in the future, but to cure any of the 99,999 present illnesses sent by Angra Mainyu to plague mankind (see *Vd.* 22.7-24). So it is said in the *Bundahišn*, with a direct Pahlavi rendering of a lost Avestan passage: “The Amahraspand Ērmān is that divinity who has given healing to created beings for all ills. As He says: “All the drugs which created beings consume for the ending of sickness—if I, Ohrmazd, had not created Ērmān for healing, that sickness would not (thereby) be cured”” (26.97-98).

A consequence of the doctrine that Airyaman will in the end purge the world with fire is that in the developed Zoroastrian theology he becomes a helper of Aša Vahišta (q.v.), lord of the creation of fire. So he is invoked with Aša on the third day of every month, having (in *Sīrōza* 1.3) the epithet *mazdašāta*—“created by Mazdā.” He follows Aša in *Vd.* 20.11 and in the *Haptān Amešāspand Yašt* (*Yt.* 2.2, 7), while the *Ardvahišt Yašt* (*Yt.* 3) is largely made up of praises of his prayer, the *Airyāmā išyō*. In a passage in the *Dēnkard* (*Dk.* 8.37.13) Ardvahišt actually takes on Airyaman’s role; for there it is said that in the healing of the sick the physical debt is to the human doctor, but the spiritual one to Ardvahišt. (On this see E. W. West, SBE 37, p. 116, n. 2).

It was natural that as *yazata* of healing Airyaman should enjoy great popularity; and when in the 3rd century A.D. Manichean missionaries to Persia deliberately associated Mani’s gods with Zoroastrian *yazatas* for proselytizing purposes, they identified the divine Jesus, a central figure in Mani’s gospel, with Airyaman, calling him Yišō Aryāmān. There may have been a word-play here (on *yišō* and *išyō*), but there were also doctrinal grounds for the identification, since both Jesus Christ and Airyaman were regarded as healers. The association can only have been of practical value to the Manicheans because Airyaman was a beloved divinity in Sasanian Persia. Later among Zoroastrians devotion to Airyaman yielded to the popular and complex cult of “Shah Farīdūn,” the ancient Thraētaona. Yet Thraētaona, a hero-physician, was a man and not a divine being; and so, although his intercession may be sought for help in sickness, no religious service may be dedicated to him. Airyaman, the friend and healer, thus retains his place in the Zoroastrian liturgies.

It is thus possible to trace the cult of the *yazata* Airyaman from Indo-Iranian to



modern times, a span of several thousand years. It is possible, moreover, that it was Zoroaster himself who foretold his part at Frašō.kərəti, for the prayer *Airyāmā īšyō* is in pure Gathic dialect. Nevertheless, an attempt has been made (see J. Kellens in *IJ* 19, 1977, pp. 89-95) to show that there was no genuine Iranian counterpart to the Vedic Aryaman, and that the concept of the Zoroastrian *yazata* was evolved in later times simply from the opening words of the Gathic prayer. According to this interpretation, *airyāmā* in this prayer is the common noun taken as a collective, “the community.”

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