



ĀRAŠ

ĀRAŠ, Avestan 𐬀𐬵𐬀𐬶𐬀, Middle Persian ĒRAŠ, a heroic archer in Iranian legend.

i. *In older literature.*

ii. *In modern literature.*

i. In Older Literature

The Avesta (*Yašt* 8.6) refers to what was apparently a familiar episode in the epic tradition: 𐬀𐬵𐬀𐬶𐬀 “of the swift arrow, having the swiftest arrow among the Aryans” shot an arrow from Mount Airyō.xšaoθa to Mount Xʷanvant. The identity of these places is unknown. V. Minorsky tentatively identified the latter mountain with the Homāvan mentioned in *Šāh-nāma* and *Vīs o Rāmīn*, apparently a peak in northeastern Khorasan (*BSOAS* 9, 1943, p. 760). Thus his shot was supposed to be eastward, perhaps to the Harī-rūd region. The Mid. Pers. text *Māh ī Frawardīn Rōz ī Xurdād* (sec. 22, *Pahlavi Texts*, p. 104) also alludes to this event; it was on the auspicious 6th of Frawardīn that “Manūčīhr and Ēraš of the swift arrow (*šēbāg-tīr*) took back the land from Afrāsyāb the Turanian.” By contrast, *Dādistān ī Mēnōg ī Xrad* 27.44 (ed. T. D. Anklesaria, Bombay, 1913) refers simply to Manūčehr as the one who retook the Iranian territory from Padišxwār-gar (Ṭabarestān) to Bun ī Gōzag. The latter region is probably to be located between Gōzgān and the Oxus (see J. Markwart, *Wehrot und Arang*, Leiden, 1938, p. 14; *Ḥodūd al-ālam*, tr. and comm. Minorsky, p. 331).



The legend of Āraš is given with full details only in sources of the Islamic period, though these vary somewhat among themselves; e.g., Ṭa'ālebī, although he does allude to the common tradition, places Āraš in the reign of Zav, son of Ṭahmāsp (*Ġorar*, pp. 108, 133), and Bīrūnī (*Āṭār al-bāqīa*, p. 220) and Gardīzī (*Zayn al-aḵbār*, p.243), in contrast with the Mid. Pers. *Māh ī Frawardīn* text, give the date of the mighty bowshot as the 13th of the month Tīr, i.e., during the festival of Tīragān. Presumably this difference is due to the attraction exercised by the homonymy of “Tīr” (identified later with the god Tištār) or *tīr* “arrow.”

The archer's name appears as follows: Ēraš (Ṭabarī, I, p. 435.7, II, p. 997; Ebn al-Aṭīr, I, p. 166); Āraššēbāṭīr, a later form of the name but including the epithet with it (Ṭabarī, I, p. 435.6, II, p. 992); Āraš-e Šewātīr (*Moǰmal*, p. 90); Araš, for Āraš (Ṭa'ālebī, *Ġorar*, p. 107; Bīrūnī, loc. cit.) and Āraš (Maqdesī, *Bad' III*, p. 146; Baḷ'amī, *Tarǰama-ye Tārīḵ-e Ṭabarī*, Tehran, 1337 Š., p. 36; *Moǰmal*, p. 43; *Šāh-nāma*, Moscow ed., VIII, p. 66.235, IX, p. 273.317; Gorgānī, *Vīs o Rāmīn*, Tehran, 1337 Š., line 330; Maḷ'ašī, *Tārīḵ-e Ṭabarestān*, ed. B. Dorn, St. Petersburg, 1850, p. 18). His feat occurred in these circumstances: After Afrāsīāb had surrounded the Pišdadian king, Manūčehr, in Ṭabarestān, both agreed to make peace. Manūčehr requested that the Turanian return to him a piece of land the width of a bow-shot, and Afrāsīāb assented. An angel (in Bīrūnī it is “Esfandārmaḍ,” i.e., the Beneficent Immortal Spandārmad) instructed Manūčehr to prepare a special bow and arrow; wood, feather, and iron point were taken from a special forest, eagle, and mine (*Ġorar*, p. 133). The skilled archer Āraš was commanded to shoot. According to Bīrūnī, Āraš displayed himself naked and said: “Behold! my body is free of any wound or sickness; but after this bowshot I will be destroyed.” At dawn he shot and was immediately torn to pieces. (Ṭa'ālebī agrees with this. A later tradition has him survive and become head of the archers; see Ṭabarī and *Ṭabaqāt-e Nāšerī*, ed. Ḥabībī, Kabul, 1342 Š., I, p. 140.) God commanded the wind to bear the arrow as far as the remote regions of Khorasan, and in this way the boundary between the Iranian and Turanian kingdoms was established.

The place Āraš shot the arrow is variously identified: Ṭabarestān (Ṭabarī, Ṭa'ālebī, Maqdesī, Ebn al-Aṭīr, Maḷ'ašī), a mountain of Rūyān (Bīrūnī; Gardīzī), the fortress of Āmol (*Moǰmal*), Mount Damāvand (Baḷ'amī), or Sārī (*Vīs o Rāmīn*). The place where it landed (or was borne by the wind or an angel) is also reported differently but with general geographical harmony: by the river of Balḵ (Ṭabarī, Ebn al-Aṭīr), Ṭoḵārestān (Maqdesī, Gardīzī), the banks of the



Oxus (Baḷ'amī). Bīrūnī has it descend between “Farḡāna” and “Ṭabarestān;” these are probably to be understood as Farḡār and Ṭāleqān or Ṭoḡārestān (Minorsky, *Ḥodūd al-ālam*, p. 330). In Ṭa'ālebī's account the arrow was borne to the district of Ḳolm (east of Balk); it landed at sunset at a place called “Kūzīn,” a name easily emended to *Gōzbon, the Bun ī Gōzag of the Mid. Pers. account (see also *Ḥodūd al-ālam*, *ibid.*). This name also accounts for Bīrūnī's idea that the arrow struck a walnut tree (*ḵowz*). Other accounts deviate from the older tradition represented in these texts, probably under the influence of fluctuations in the understanding of where Iran's eastern border actually lay. The *Moḵmal* gives the landing place as 'Aqaba-ye Mozdūrān, which was between Nīšāpūr and Saraḡs (Ebn Ḳordāḏbeh, p. 202). Marv is named in *Vīs o Rāmīn* and in Maḗ'ašī, *Tārīḵ-e Ṭabarestān*.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

See also Th. Nöldeke, “Der Beste der arischen Pfeilschützen im Awesta und im Tabarī,” *ZDMG* 35, 1881, pp. 445-47.

R. v. Stackelberg, “Iranica,” *ZDMG* 45, 1891, pp. 620-28.

On the suggested identification of Āraš with the bowman on the reverse of Arsacid coins see V. G. Lukonin, in *Camb. Hist. Iran* III, 1983, p. 686 with references.

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ii. In Modern Literature

The story of Āraš does not appear in any detail in courtly epic and romance or in popular literature and, apart from occasional brief allusions, was essentially lost to the Persian literary world until revived by Ehsan Yarshater in his *Dāstānhā-ye Īrān-e Bāstān* (Tehran, 1336 Š./1957-58). The theme of Āraš struck a chord among writers and poets and it was quickly taken up, becoming the subject of several works in the ensuing years. The first was a multi-form work by Aرسالān Pūryā entitled *Āraš-e tīr-andāz* (Tehran, 1338



Š./1959-60; second printing, Tehran, 1357 Š./1978-79 has the title *Āraš šīvā-tīr*), which begins with a qaṣīda of seventy lines, followed by a one-act play and finally a prose version of the story. Next came Sīavoš Kasrā'i's long poem in free verse called *Āsraš-e kamāngīr* (Tehran, 1338 Š./ 1959-60; for details see [KASRA'I, SIAVASH](#)). It was followed by the publication of "Āraš dar qalamrowe tardīd," a short story by Nāder Ebrāhīmī (Tehran, 1342 Š./1963-64), a maṭnavī in the meter ramal by Mehrdād Avestā with the title *Ḥamāsa-ye Āraš* (Mašhad, 1344 Š./1965-66), and finally Bahrām Beyzā'i's *Āraš* in 1977. Neither a short story nor a play and in part a response to Kasrā'i's *Āraš-e kamāngīr*, Beyzā'i's *Āraš* was staged a number of times around the world, most notably in Annenberg Auditorium, Stanford University California in July 2013.

Four of these works present Āraš as the savior of Iran from the tyranny of Afrāsīāb. In the troubled times following the Moṣaddeq period, the story of Āraš appears to have symbolized for many Iranians their political hopes, while Ebrāhīmī's story, where Āraš fails in his mission through a lack of will, expresses the frustration of these hopes. In 1340 Š./1961-62 a literary journal called *Āraš* was founded in Tehran, which ran for about eight years.

W. Hanaway, "Popular Literature in Iran," in P. Chelkowski, ed., *Iran: Continuity and Variety*, New York, 1971, pp. 70-73.

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