



## ARDĀ WĪRĀZ

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**ARDĀ WĪRĀZ**, “Wīrāz the just” (i.e., “the justified, the blessed”), principal character of the Zoroastrian Middle Persian text *Ardā Wīrāz-nāmag* (The Book of Ardā Wīrāz). His name has sometimes been cited by scholars as “Wirāf;” cf., however, the Avestan form of this proper name: Virāza (*Yašt* 13.101). (For discussion of his epithet, the term *ardā*, see Ahlav; also J. de Menasce, “Vieux-perse ‘artavan’ et pehlevi ‘ahrav’,” *Mélanges Ch.-H. Puech*, Paris, 1974, pp. 57-62). The text in which Ardā Wīrāz figures is a report of his extra-terrestrial soul journey, including a description of heaven and hell. The context of this journey holds particular interest. Wīrāz was sent in order to verify (1) Zoroastrian belief about the invisible world, and (2) the efficacy of the rituals of the Zoroastrian community. This scene of piety troubled by religious uncertainty seems to be set some time after the fall of the Achaemenid empire; but the final redaction of the text probably refers to the early Islamic period (see especially *Ardā Wīrāz* 1.23-27 for an explanation of the journey’s purposes.) Wīrāz was chosen, because of his virtue, out of the entire community assembled at the fire temple of Ādur Farnbag and was required to drink the narcotic *mang*. His seven sisters, who were his wives (according to the pious practice of consanguineous marriage, *xwēdōdah* [q.v.]) strongly objected to his being subjected to this ordeal; but eventually they assented. Wīrāz was unconscious for seven days and nights; and during this time his sisters and others watched over him, praying and reciting the Avesta and Zand texts. When Wīrāz’s soul returns to his body, he narrates his experiences. This account is chiefly taken up with a catalogue of the punishments of the damned in hell and of the rewards of the just in heaven. The list of offenses and



punishments occupies some sixty percent of the entire work. It is much more developed and explicit than the enumeration of rewards, in particular in the area of sexual sins.

The narrative of Wīrāz is not unique. Parallels are found in more precisely dated sources—the legend of Zoroaster recorded in *Dēnkard* 7 and the monumental inscriptions of the 3rd-century priest, Kirdīr (q.v.). In the *Dēnkard*, King Wištāsp is depicted as hesitating to join the new religion. After drinking *mang* (and thus making an extra-terrestrial journey), his doubts are resolved. (See *Dēnkard* 7.4. 83-86, ed. and tr. M. Mole, *La légende de Zoroastre selon les textes pehlevi*, Paris, 1967.) In the case of Kirdīr, it is again a matter of a vision of heaven and hell in the course of a soul-journey. He explains in the Naqš-e Rājab inscription that he was seeking assurance that the cult, to whose development he had contributed, was efficacious. Thus again the theme of doubt is implied in a piece of visionary literature.

The *Ardā Wīrāz-nāmāg*, like many of the Zoroastrian works, underwent successive redactions. It assumed its definitive form in the 9th-10th centuries A.D., as may be seen in the text's frequent Persianisms, usages known to be characteristic of early Persian literature (e.g., generalized use of the durative particle *hamē*). This book has become comparatively well known to the Iranian public, thanks to its numerous versions in modern Persian (often versified and with illustrations). It was early made available in Western languages by M. Haug and E. W. West (*The Book of Arda Viraf*, Bombay and London, 1872 [repr. Amsterdam, 1971]; *Glossary and Index of the Pahlavi Text of the Book of Arda Viraf*, Bombay and London, 1874) and by M. A. Barthélemy (*Artâ Vîrâf Nâmak ou Livre d'Arda Vîrâf*, Paris, 1887). A recent edition and translation is by Ph. Gignoux (*Le livre d'Arda Virāz*, Paris, 1984). Inevitably this work has been compared with Dante's *Divine Comedy* (see the bibliography). Some influences, transmitted through Islam, may have been exerted on the latter, but these remain to be fully demonstrated.

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