



ARDWAHIŠT

ARDWAHIŠT (Av. Aša Vahišta, Mid. Pers. Ardwahišt, Ašawahišt; NPers. Ardībehešt, Ordībehešt), one of the six great Aməša Spəntas who, with Ahura Mazdā and/or his Holy Spirit, make up the Zoroastrian Heptad. Of the six, Aša has the clearest pre-Zoroastrian antecedents, since he hypostatizes the ancient Indo-Iranian concept called in Av. *aša*, in Old Persian *arta*, in Skt. *ṛta*. His name is thus grammatically neuter. In his own *Gāθās* Zoroaster speaks of Aša more often than any other of the six, though only once (Y. 28.8) with the adjective *vahišta-* “best,” which later became a fixed element of his name. The prophet often speaks of him together with Ahura Mazdā, whom he calls Aša’s “father” (Y. 44.3; 47.2), and “creator” (Y. 31.8). Aša, like all the six, is “of one desire” (*hazaoša-*) with Ahura Mazdā (Y. 28.8; 29.7), i.e., in seeking the end of evil. He is Ahura Mazdā’s counselor (Y. 46.17); and what Ahura Mazdā has created through his Holy Spirit, i.e., all that which is *spəntōdāta-*, is also described as being the “world” or “creatures” of Aša, *ašahyā gaēθā* (Y. 31.1; cf. 43.6).

As the hypostasis of what should be in the physical sphere, i.e., order, regularity, Aša is present “in the beginning, at creation,” when Ahura Mazdā fixed the course of sun, moon and stars (Y. 44.3). It is through him that Ahura Mazdā made the plants grow (Y. 48.6), and he has the epithet “world-furthering,” *fradā t.gaēθa-* (Y. 33.11). As the hypostasis of what should be in the moral sphere, i.e., truth, justice, righteousness, Aša is of immense religious importance, representing what has been called “the decisive confessional concept of Zoroastrianism” (H. Lommel, *Die Religion Zarathushtras*, Tübingen,



1930, p. 48): For the true Mazda-worshipper must be *Ašavan* “possessed of *Aša*,” i.e., just, righteous, whereas the wicked man, the *dragvant*, strays from “the path of *Aša*” (Y. 51.13), being a follower of *Aša*’s direct foe, the Drug, hypostasis of disorder, crookedness, falsehood. Blessedness will be the lot of those who deliver the Drug “into the hands of *Aša*” (Y. 30.8). The soul of the holy (*spənta*) man is accompanied by *Aša* (Y. 34.2), and those “yoked with *Aša*” will receive the best reward (Y. 49.9). Zoroaster himself seeks *Aša* steadfastly (Y. 28.4) while worshipping Ahura Mazda, who dwells in paths “straight in accord with *Aša*” (Y. 33.5). The saviors (*saošyant-*) of this world are those who follow Ahura Mazda’s teaching “with acts inspired by *Aša*” (Y. 48.12). (For the many other Gathic passages concerning *Aša* see Gray, *Foundations*, pp. 28ff., 38ff.)

The physical “creation” which belongs to *Aša*, and in which he is immanent, is fire—fire grandly conceived as a force informing all the other six “creations,” giving them warmth and the spark of life; and which is manifest also in many visible forms, from the greatest of all, the sun which orders day and night and controls the seasons, to hearth and ritual fires, and also the fire of the judicial ordeal, prototype of the fiery torrent of Judgment Day, when all will receive their just deserts “by fire and by *Aša*” (Y. 313). One epithet which Zoroaster gives *Aša* is *xʷənvant-* “sunlike, sunny” (Y. 32.2), and he calls fire “strong through *Aša*” (Y. 43.4; 34.4). The ritual offering (Mid. Pers. *ātaš-zōhr*) which is made to fire is also an offering to Ahura Mazda and to *Aša* (Y. 34.3); and Zoroaster, wishing to serve fire, thinks upon *Aša* (Y. 43.9). (On *Aša* and fire cf. especially H. Lommel, “Symbolik der Elemente in der zoroastrischen Religion,” in *Zarathustra*, ed. B. Schlerath, Darmstadt, 1976, pp. 266-69.)

There is no evidence in the *Gāθās* that Zoroaster himself conceived of the six Aməša Spəntas hierarchically (cf. Lommel, op. cit., p. 47); but the group divides naturally into three dyads, with *Aša* paired with Vohu Manah. (For the many Gathic passages in which the two are mentioned together see Gray, op. cit., pp. 28ff.)

The opening sections of the old Av. *Yasna Haptaŋhāiti* formerly, it seems, accompanied the priestly offering to fire; and in them *Aša* is repeatedly named, alone or with Ahura Mazda, and once with Vohu Manah and Vohu Xšaθra (Y. 35.10). He receives there the epithets *sraēšta-* “most beautiful” (Y. 35.3), *Vahišta-* “best” (Y. 35.5, cf. Y. 41.1), and *vohu-* “good” (Y. 36.4); and is worshipped as “*Aša Vahišta*, most beautiful, the Aməša Spənta, radiant (*raočahvant-*)” (Y. 37.4). The veneration of fire is explicit; and once (Y. 37.1)



Aša appears himself to represent fire in what is otherwise a list of physical creations. Later in the liturgy the worshippers seek “companionship with Ahura Mazdā and Aša for ever” (Y. 40.2, cf. 41.6), and ask that the community should be made *Ašavan*– “possessing Aša” and *Aša-čīnah*– “attached to aša” (Y. 40.3). Ahura Mazdā himself they venerate as *Aša.ηhac*– “accompanied by Aša” (Y. 41 .3).

One of the four holiest Zoroastrian prayers, the *Ašəm vohu*, is wholly devoted to Aša and the principle of *aša*; and here again the divinity has the epithet *vahišta*-, as regularly in Young Av. texts. He is frequently associated in the *yasna* with Ātar, *yazata* of fire (e.g., Y. 1.4 ; 2.4; 3.6 et passim). There is also a special link between him and Airyaman, *yazata* of friendship and healing, implied in the *Ardwahišt Yašt* (cf. *Dēnkard* 3. 157.7). The *xšnūman* or liturgical invocation of Aša is “Aša Vahišta, most beautiful, the Aməša Spənta;” and, thus invoked, he is regularly associated with Airyaman and Saokā (see *Sīrōza* 1.3, 2.3). According to the Zand (Pahlavi version) of a lost Av. text, preserved in a 9th century Pahlavi work, towards the end of time Aša and Airyaman will come upon earth together to initiate the conquest of the demon Āz (*Zātspram* 34.38-9); and subsequently it is Aša’s creation, fire, which together with Airyaman will purge the whole earth with molten metal (*Bundahišn*, tr. 34.18).

Airyaman is not honored in the Zoroastrian calendar; and after its creation, probably in the 4th century B.C., Aša, who then himself received the dedication of both the third day and the second month, was allotted three of the other “calendar” divinities as helpers, namely Ātar, Sraoša, and Vərəθ rayna (ibid., 26.43). The last-named may have been so chosen because Victory will ultimately be to the world of Aša; and Sraoša, as guardian of prayer, has a natural link with the guardian of fire, before which Zoroastrian prayers are said. In one text the other, probably still more ancient, Iranian divinity of prayer, Nairyō.saraha (Nēryōsang) is added to the three calendrical divinities as a helper of Aša (ibid., 3.15).

In one place in the Zand (ibid., 26.38) it is said that after Ahura Mazdā had created the six great Aməša Spəntas, he himself being the other and best member of the group, he asked them: “Who created us?” They remained silent, and he asked a second and a third time. Finally *Ardwahišt* replied: “You created us,” and the other then repeated this with him. The Pahlavi text continues: “Ohrmazd forthwith made *Ardwahišt* the base (*teh*) of all that is spiritual;” but there follows, probably by a commentator, a play on words: “Even as Wahman is great (*meh*), so *Ardwahišt* is the base (*teh*)” (ibid., 26.39);



for in the tradition Wahman (Vohu Manah) is regularly the first of the six, and stands on the right hand of Ohrmazd, with Ašawahišť on his right hand (ibid., 26.8). The close Gathic partnership of Aša and Vohu Manah is faithfully reflected in the tradition, e.g., in the legend of the prophet's birth both are consulted by Ohrmazd, and carry out his commands together (see *Dēnkard* 7.2.17, 25ff.; M. Molé, *La légende de Zoroastre selon les textes pehlevi*, Paris, 1967, pp. 16ff.). Here Wahman is invariably named first, but again it is Ašawahišť who is the spokesman (*Dēnkard*, 7.2.18); and at the conversion of Wišťāsp it is to him that Ohrmazd sends Nēryōsang with a message, and it is he who, acting upon this message, brings about the king's final acceptance of the faith (*Dēnkard* 7.4.85-86; Molé, op. cit., p. 57). Ardwašišť is thus repeatedly represented as active and effective; and in a 9th-century Pahlavi text it is said that Wahman should dwell in one's thoughts, Srōš in one's words, but Ard, i.e., Ardwašišť in one's actions (*Dēnkard* 3.13-14; E. W. West, SBE XVIII, pp. 18-19). According to one passage of the Zand (*Bundahišn*, tr. 26.35), the especial task is allotted to Ardwašišť of preventing the demons inflicting more than due punishment on souls in hell. In a later text (M. R. Unvala, *Dārāb Hormazyār's Rivāyat*, Bombay, 1922, I, p. 257.5-7; tr. by B. N. Dhabhar, *The Persian Rivāyats of Hormazyar Framarz and Others*, Bombay, 1932, pp. 259-260), this activity is ascribed to Mithra, who has his own ancient links with justice and fire, and so comes to share some attributes and activities with Aša. In a NPers. text (*Second Ulamā-i Islam*, Unvala, op. cit., II, p. 82.8-10; Dhabhar, op. cit., p. 452) another activity ascribed to "Amešaspand Ardibehišť" is that he, with Bahrām (Vərəθ rayna), stands guard over Ahriman, chained in hell with an invisible (*mēnoġ*) chain. This is evidently an adaptation of ancient legends concerning chained monster and guardian hero (cf. Aži Dahāka and Əraetaona).

Ardwašišť's religious significance is further shown by the fact that he is guardian of one of the five watches (*gāh*) of the 24-hour day, which means that he is invoked in all liturgies and prayers uttered during it. His *gāh* is Rapithwin (see *Bundahišn*, tr. 3.22), from noon till 3 o'clock. Noon is regarded as the perfect time, at which the sun stood still at creation, and will again stand still after Frašegird. In Zoroastrian usage as attested from the late Sasanian period, in the "daēvic" season of winter this *gāh* is called instead "Second Hāvan" (Hāvan being the first *gāh* of the day, from dawn till noon); and it is with the coming of spring at Nō Rūz (Nowrūz) that Rapithwin symbolically returns, to be kept throughout the seven months of "ahuric" summer (ibid., 25.9ff.). Nō Rūz itself, the seventh day of obligation following the six *gāhāmbārs*, and the holiest of all Zoroastrian festivals, is dedicated to



Aša Vahišta and to fire, the seventh creation (see M. Boyce, “Rapithwin, Nō Rūz, and the feast of Sade,” in *Pratidānam, Studies presented to F. B. J. Kuiper*, ed. J. C. Heesterman et al., The Hague, 1969, pp. 201-215). At every Ātaš Bahrām a *yasna* is solemnized in Aša’s honor in Rapithwin Gāh on Nō Rūz, i.e., Rūz Hormizd of Māh Farvardīn; and special observances are devoted to him in that *gāh* on the next two days also, the third day being, as always, his own, Ardībihišt Rūz. In the second month of the year, Ardībihišt Māh, the third day, when day and month names coincide, is Aša’s name-day feast, when “many go to the fire temples” (see Bīrūnī, *Chronology*, p. 219; K. N. Seervai and B. B. Patel, “Gujarāt Pārsis,” *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency* IX, 2, Bombay, 1899, p. 217).

Nō Rūz is an annual prefiguration of the “New Day” of eternal happiness; and Aša, like all the other divine beings, has his allotted task in the great battle between good and evil which will ultimately precede it. He will then seize the mighty *dēv* Indar (Av., Skt. Indra), who in the present time “freezes the thoughts of creatures from practising righteousness, just like hard-frozen snow; and instills into people’s thoughts that they need not wear the sacred shirt and cord (*kūstī*)” (*Bundahišn*, tr. 27.6). He is thus fittingly opposed by the lord of righteousness and fire, and the proponent of right action.

Arta- (Mid. Iranian *ard-*), representing either the Av. divinity Aša or the principle *aša*, occurs frequently as an element in Iranian personal names (see Justi, *Namenbuch*, pp. 31-40; M. Mayrhofer, *Onomastica Persepolitana*, Vienna, 1973, pp. 163-167). In Plutarch’s account of Persian religion Aša is represented, as the second of six gods created by “Horomazes,” as god of Truth, Alētheia (*Isis and Osiris*, 47). On the Kušan coins he appears as Ašaeixšo, with diadem and nimbus, like Mithra in the same series (see M. A. Stein, *Zoroastrian Deities on Indo-Scythian Coins*, London, 1887, pp. 11-12 with fig. xvii; J. Rosenfield, *The Dynastic Arts of the Kushans*, Berkeley, California, 1967, p. 75).

See also [Aməša Spənta](#); [Aša](#).



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Given in the text.

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