



ARMAITI

ARMAITI (Spəntā Ārmaiti, Pahl. Spandārmad, Pers. Isfandārmad), one of the six great *Aməša Spəntas* who, with Ahura Mazdā and/or his Holy Spirit, make up the Zoroastrian Heptad. The common noun *ārmaiti-* has a Vedic cognate *arāmati-* (fem.) “piety, devotion” and the *Rig Veda* knows a goddess Aramati, “seemingly already by then a fading figure” (H. Lommel in *Zarathustra*, ed. B. Schlerath, Darmstadt, 1970, p. 388). In Zoroaster’s *Gāθās* the common noun occurs with the adjective *spənta* “bounteous, holy” (Y. 32.2); and this adjective is used repeatedly there with the divinity’s name (Y. 33.13; 34.9, 10; 49.2; 51.4, 11). It becomes her fixed epithet in Young Avestan, and is compounded with *ārmaiti* to form her proper name in Middle Iranian and Persian.

For Zoroaster the possession of devotion was an essential part of being righteous, *ašavan*; and he conceived its hypostasis, Ārmaiti, as being active in leading man to the good life and to salvation. “Devotion shall plead in turn with the spirit where there is opposition” (Y. 31.12). “Give, O thou Devotion, strength to Vīštāspa and to me” (Y. 28.7). It is through his companionship with Ārmaiti, the prophet declares, that he has deserved to attain truth, whereas the wicked man neither supports her nor makes her his own (Y. 49.2). Like all other members of the Heptad, Ārmaiti is in the closest possible relationship with Ahura Mazdā, a relationship which in her case Zoroaster conveys metaphorically by calling her his “daughter” (Y. 45.4).

The physical creation which Ārmaiti protects, and in which she is immanent, is the earth (see, e.g. *Bundahišn*, tr. 3.17); and her association with it is repeatedly adumbrated, in characteristically allusive style, in the *Gāθās*: “She



(Ārmaiti) shall indeed give us good dwelling, she (shall give) us enduring, desired strength of good purpose. Then through order (*aša*) Mazdā made plants grow for her” (Y. 48.6). “When, Mazdā, shall Ārmaiti come with Truth (Aša), having good dwelling, with pasturage?” (Y. 48.11). “Enduring Ārmaiti gave body and breath” (Y. 30.7). In India Āramati likewise had a connection with the earth, although this is attested only in a late passage (Sāyaṇa’s commentary on *Rig Veda* 7.42.2, 14th century A.D.). Some regard this parallelism as coincidental, others hold it to be the record of a genuinely old, i.e. proto-Indo-Iranian, association. In Khotanese the earth itself is called *śśandaā-*, which is from **śūantakā-*, corresponding to Av. *spəntā-*; the name of the goddess survives as Śśandrāmatā- (from **śūantā* Ārmaiti), used for the Indian (Buddhist) goddess Śrī; a third Khotanese term, ysamaśśandaa- (from **zam(a)- *śūantaka-*, cf. Av. *zam-* and *spənta-*) denotes the “world,” rendering Ind. *Loka* (see H. W. Bailey, *Dictionary of Khotan Saka*, Cambridge, etc., 1979, pp. 345, 395, and idem, *The Culture of the Sakas in Ancient Iranian Khotan*, New York, 1982, pp. 136-43); and the fact that the adjective *spənta-* occurs so often for Ārmaiti in the *Gāθās* (where epithets for other members of the Heptad are sparingly used) suggests that it may have been a traditional one for the bountiful earth, the all-mother, and so have been used especially by Zoroaster for the Aməša Spənta immanent in earth. Otherwise it is not easy to account for the fact that this adjective, applicable generally to Ahura Mazdā himself and to all the good creations, belongs also particularly, in his revelation, to this one divinity. (Against the further suggestion that the Khotanese divinity Śśandrāmatā, was not in fact the Zoroastrian Aməša Spənta but simply the ancient earth-goddess Zam, see M. Boyce, *JRAS*, 1983, pp. 305-6.)

In several Gathic verses Ārmaiti, guardian of earth, is associated with Xšaθra, the hypostasis of justly used power, who protects and is immanent in the overarching sky (Y. 31.4; 43.16; 48.11). There is no trace of a similar link between *arāmatī-* and *kṣatra-* in Indian tradition. While dominant, Xšaθra appears also to have been the especial guardian of men, Ārmaiti had under her protection women, who like the earth give and nourish life. (Cf. Y. 38.1, an ancient text probably pre-Zoroastrian in content: “This earth then we worship, her who bears us, together with women.”) This association is emphasized in Pahlavi texts, e.g. *The Supplementary texts to the Šāyest nē-šāyest*, ed. F. M. P. Kotwal, Copenhagen, 1969, chap. 15.20: “He who wishes to please Spandārmad in the world . . . he should please and make joyful the earth and virtuous woman.” It is probable that it was to Spəntā Ārmaiti, guardian both of earth and women, that Artaxerxes II prayed for the health of his daughter-wife



Atossa, “making his obeisance and clutching the earth before this goddess,” whose name is rendered in Greek by that of Hera, the consort of Zeus (Plutarch, *Life of Artaxerxes*, 23.5; cf. C. Clemen, *Die griechischen und lateinischen Nachrichten über die persische Religion*, Giessen, 1920, p. 87; Boyce, *Zoroastrianism* II, p. 220). Down into Islamic times the holy day of Spandārmad (on which see further below) was celebrated as a festival for women: “Isfandārmadh is charged with the care of the earth and with that of the good, chaste and beneficent wife who loves her husband. [Hers] . . . was a special feast of the women, when the men used to make them liberal presents. This custom is still flourishing at Isfahan, Ray and in the other districts of Fahla” (Bīrūnī, *Chronology*, p. 229). Her festival was a favored time for courtship, and on that day “maidens chose husbands for themselves” (see M. R. Unvala in *F. Spiegel Memorial Volume*, ed. J. J. Modi, Bombay, 1908, p. 206).

There is no marshaling of the six great Aməša Spəntas in order in the *Gāθās* (see [Ardwahišt](#)); but in the Younger Avesta (e.g. *Y.* 1.2 and passim) Ārmaiti is placed fourth, directly after her partner Xšaθra, and as first of the three female divinities. In one grouping of the Heptad which is enshrined in the tradition (see *Bundahišn*, tr. 26.8) the three neuter/male Aməša Spəntas stand on the right side of Ohrmazd, the three female ones on his left, with Spandārmad therefore at his left hand. In *Y.* 37.5, 39.5, Ārmaiti is associated with other female divinities of abundance and goodness; and her *xšnūman* or regular liturgical invocation is “bounteous (*spəntā-*), good Ārmaiti, good, far-sighted Rātā, Mazdā-created, bounteous” (*Sīrōza* 1.5). The minor female divinity Rātā is the hypostasis of the gift, hence of liberality, so that association with her emphasizes yet further the bountiful aspect of Spəntā Ārmaiti.

This bounteousness is linked, as has been shown, with her immanence in the earth. The association between the Aməša Spənta and her creation is so strong that in a number of Young Av. passages her name is used as a synonym for earth itself. “We worship you, Spəntā Ārmaiti, as (our) dwelling” (*Y.* 16.10); “he struck this earth...saying: “Go forth, beloved Spəntā Ārmaiti”” (*Vd.* 2.10); “let him [i.e. an evil man] be thrust into the darkness of Spəntā Ārmaiti, into the place of corruption [i.e. the grave]” (*Vd.* 3.35); “her look [i.e. that of the whore] takes the colors away from a third of Spəntā Ārmaiti” (*Vd.* 18.64). As earth, Spəntā Ārmaiti receives and nurtures semen involuntarily emitted (*Vd.* 18.51); and her name is rendered as *pr̥thivī* “the broad one, earth” by Neryosang Dhaval in his Skt. translation of the *yasna*, with, as interpretation of the Pahlavi gloss to *Y.* 1.2, *pr̥thivīpatnī* “lady of the earth” (see Bartholomae,



AirWb., p. 337). In Christian Armenia her name, in its Parthian form of Spandaramet, was used to render that of Dionysus in 2 *Macc.* 6:7, but in its Persian form, Sandaramet, it translated Hades, i.e. the underworld, in Ezekiel 31:16, etc. (See also [Armenia: Religion](#).)

In the main rituals of Zoroastrian worship Ārmaiti is held to be physically represented by the earth of the consecrated precinct, the *pavi*; and still today Zoroastrian priests solemnize these age-old services seated cross-legged, hence in close contact with the ground. (For modern expositions of the doctrine and practice, by Irani Zoroastrians, see Boyce, *Stronghold*, p. 51). Pahlavi texts derived from lost Avestan works stress the nurturing aspect of Spandārmad's link with earth, e.g. *Bundahišn*, tr. 26.78ff.: "The duty of Spandārmad is the nurturing of creatures . . . Her bountifulness is such that all creatures live through her." In *Yt.* 1.27 the worshipper invokes the 10,000 powers of healing of Spəntā Ārmaiti—presumably through the medicinal herbs which she, as earth, nourishes.

In other passages the ethical and spiritual aspects of Spandārmad are honored without any reference to her physical creation. It is through her, it is declared in the *Dēnkard* (9.42.2, cf. 9.59.4), that Ohrmazd's creatures have "complete mindfulness" (*bowandag menišnīh*) of him; and it is she who protects the souls of the just (*Dēnkard* 9.41.10). Her closeness to Ohrmazd is constantly stressed. In *Vd.* 8.21 she is entreated together with him for protection against the powers of evil; and in a passage derived from a lost Avestan text she is said to have been sent by him, together with two other female *yazatas*, Ardwišūr and Ardāfraward, to protect the infant Zoroaster from harm (*Zātspram* 10.3). In a Young Av. text there recurs Zoroaster's own metaphor, by which he spoke of Ārmaiti as the "daughter" of the supreme Being (see *Vd.* 19.13, 16); and this metaphor is alluded to again and again in Pahlavi passages which derive from lost Avestan texts (see *Dēnkard* 9.52.27; 53.2; 59.4-5; 68.47).

A complication arose, however, from this metaphor because of Ārmaiti's association with mother earth. Thus in *Vd.* 19. 13, 16, it is as representing her creation, earth, that Ārmaiti is hailed as the "bounteous, beautiful daughter" of Ahura Mazdā; but in *Yt.* 17.16, where [Aši](#) is being brought into close relationship with the great ethical beings of Zoroaster's own revelation, it is said that the father of this divinity is Ahura Mazdā, her mother Spəntā Ārmaiti, her brother Sraoša and her sister the Mazdā-worshipping Religion. As earth, Ārmaiti is the mother also of the human race, because she accepted part of the seed of Gayōmard and nurtured it, until the *rīvās* plant grew up and



produced the first man and woman. So a Zoroastrian should acknowledge: “My stock and lineage is from Gayōmard. My mother is Spandārmad, my father Ohrmazd. My humanity is from Mahrē and Mahryānē” (*Čīdag Andarz ī Pōryōtkēšān*, 2nd ed., J. M. Jamasp-Asana, *Pahlavi Texts II*, p. 42). The existence of these two metaphors, of mother and of daughter, later led priestly scholastics, taking the figurative anthropomorphisms literally, to use them as a justification for *xwēdōdah* or next-of-kin marriage, in this case between father and daughter (see E. W. West, *SBE XVIII*, pp. 392-94, with notes). The passages are *Dēnkard* 3.80.3-4 (for which see J. de Menasce, *Le troisième livre du Dēnkart*, Paris, 1973, p. 86), and the *Pahl. Rivayat* 8.2ff., with the declaration attributed to Ohrmazd: “This is Spandārmad, my daughter and my queen of heaven, and the mother of creation” (*ēn Spandārmad ī man duxt u-m kadag-bānūg ī wahišt, ud mād ī dāmān*).

When the Zoroastrian calendar was created, probably in the fourth century B.C., the first seven days were allotted to the Heptad, Spəntā Ārmaiti receiving accordingly the dedication of the fifth day (see *Y.* 16.3). The twelfth month was also devoted to her (for possible reasons see Boyce, *Zoroastrianism II*, p. 249); and when “name-day” festivals were developed (see *ibid.*, p. 251), hers was thus held on the fifth day of the twelfth month. Because of her link with the earth, it came to be celebrated, not only as a festival of women, but also as that of farmers, and to be called *jašn-e barzīgarān*; and characteristic observances on this day were concerned with attacking *xrafstras*, in this connection insects and reptiles which were thought to harm the good earth and the crops borne by it. What was originally a one-day feast came to be extended, it seems in the early 11th century A.D., to a ten-day observance among the Zoroastrians of Iran (for reasons see Boyce, *BSOAS* 33, 1970, pp. 535-36). This festival they divided into two pentads, called in their own speech “Sven-i kasog” and “Sven-i mas” i.e. the lesser and greater feasts of Sven[dārmaz]. The feast was greatly beloved in the community, which was by then a predominantly farming one. The custom developed of going to *daḵmas* during Sven-i kasog, to pray for the souls of those who had died sudden or violent deaths, and whose bodies, not having been carried to the towers, would have lain somewhere on or in the good earth (see Boyce, *Stronghold*, p. 201). The last day of Sven-i mas is the true name-day feast of the Aməša Spənta, celebrated on day Spandārmad of month Spandārmad. In the morning a service is solemnized in her honor at the local fire temple, and in the afternoon the community used to gather there to make merry and feast together. This latter custom was maintained until well into the twentieth century in and around Yazd.



BIBLIOGRAPHY

Given in the text.

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