



## Āš

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### Āš

*i. Etymology.*

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#### i. Etymology

The word *āš* does not seem to appear in the earliest New Persian literature and the single occurrence of *āš* in Middle Persian, in the Pahlavi *Vīdēvdād* (13.28; H. Jamasp, *Vendidad*, Bombay, 1907, I, p. 473; II, p. 31; D. D. Kapadia, *Glossary of Pahlavi Vendidad*, Bombay, 1953, p. 245) is probably only *ā-š* “then he.” The word is attested from old in the Turkic languages (see G. Doerfer, *Türkische und mongolische Elemente im Neupersischen* II, Wiesbaden, 1965, pp. 59-62 no. 481).

The origin of the word has not yet been determined; both Indo-European and Turkic etymologies have been proposed. Thus J. A. Vullers, *Lexicon persico-latinum etymologicum* I, Bonn, 1855, s.v., compared OInd. *āśa* “food,” a connection doubted by Horn (*Etymologie*, p. 8). E. Herzfeld (*AMI* 8, 1937, p. 23 n. 3) compared Av. *āštra-*, but the word in question is *aštrā-* “whip, goad.” (Alternatively Herzfeld posited an etymon *\*āšna*.) Also etymological connection with NPers. *āšāmīdan* “to drink” (cf. *Air Wb.*, cols. 1705-06 *ašama-*



“to swallow”) is improbable.

On the Turkic side *aš* “food, soup” has been derived from Turkish dialect *aš* “grain,” but the semantic development is more probably from “food” in general to specialized foods like “meat” or “grain,” see Doerfer, loc. cit., who prefers to assume an Iranian origin of the word. In his *Türkische Lehnwörter im Tadschikischen* (AKM 37, 3, Wiesbaden, 1967, p. 27 no. 219), however, Doerfer appears to assume a Turkic origin. On the meaning of *aš* in Turkish dialects, see also M. Räsänen, *Versuch eines etymologischen Wörterbuchs der Türksprachen*, 1969, pp. 29f. Note also NPers. *āšgāl/āškāl* “kitchen remainder, refuse,” which is likely to be from \**āš-ak-āl*, rather than directly connected with Ar. *ašš* “dry bread.”

Compounds with *āš* are NPers. *āšpaz* “cook,” *āšpazī* “cooking,” *āšpaz-kāna* “kitchen,” Turk. *ašči* “cook” (borrowed in Arabic). The NPers. kitchen expressions for dishes containing the suffix *-bā* or *-vā* are apparently much older than *āš*, cf. *gandom-bā/vā*, “wheat soup,” *ispēd/safid-bā* “white soup,” *māst-vā* “yoghurt soup,” *šūr-bā/vā* “salt soup” (modern Ar. *šūrba*). This suffix probably goes back to *-bāg* from OIr. *pāka*, root *pak-/pac-* “to cook,” NPers. *poktan*, *paz-*, etc. (cf. M. Mayrhofer, *Kurzgefasstes etymologisches Wörterbuch des Altindischen* II, Heidelberg, 1963, pp. 185f.).

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(W. Eilers)

ii. In Modern Iran

*Āš* (thick soup) is the general term for a traditional Iranian dish comparable to the French *potage*. It is made from various combinations of vegetables, rice, pasta, grains, peas and beans, meat, fruits, spices, and tart flavorings such as



lime juice, tamarind, sumac, yogurt, or vinegar; a tart *āš* is sweetened with sugar, honey, or a sweet-and-sour syrup made from vinegar and thickened sweet grape juice.

A particular *āš* often derives its name from the main ingredient, such as *āš-e ālūča* (damson), *āš-e arzan* (millet), *āš-e omāĵ* (fresh granulated wheat flour), *āš-e anār* (pomegranate), *āš-e bādemĵān* (eggplant), *āš-e bāqalā* (fava bean), *āš-e bolġūr* (bulgur), *āš-e tarkīna* (hominy), *āš-e ĵow* (barley), *āš-e čoġondar* (beet), *āš-e rešta* (noodles), *āš-e zerešk* (barberry), *āš-e sabzī* (green herbs), *āš-e somāq* (sumac), *āš-e ġūra-ye tāza* (fresh sour grape), *āš-e kašk* (whey), *āš-e gandom* (wheat), *āš-e lūbīā* (bean), or *āš-e nārdāna* (dried pomegranate).

*Āš* is most often served hot; some kinds, such as those made with yogurt, pomegranate, or sour grape juice, are eaten cold, especially in summer. *Āš* is a common dish among low- and middle-income Iranians for economic reasons but is also used as an appetizer by the wealthy. It is popular throughout Iran, although some varieties are regional or ethnic in origin, including *āš-e kārda* in Fārs, *āš-e tarkīna* in Lorestān, and *āš-e āšū* or *āš-e ālāġūna* in Tūyserkān and Kamsa (called *āš-e esfandī* in Maġallāt).

In addition to being a regular part of the diet, certain kinds of *āš* are prepared as votive offerings for specific occasions. *Āš-e māš* (mung bean), for example, is prepared on the tenth day after childbirth, when a mother and her child go to the public bath; it is served there, along with other foods, drinks, and sweets, to the mother, her friends, and the bath attendants. *Āš-e Emām Zaynal-‘abedīn-e Bīmār* is made to resolve difficulties, cure patients, or release prisoners; the ingredients are collected from neighbors and local people and then cooked and distributed or served at prayers or mourning ceremonies. *Āš-e rešta-ye pošt-e pā* is prepared on the third or fifth day after the departure of a loved one in hopes of shortening the duration of the journey. It is cooked with noodles made from flour that has been placed on a tray with a Koran and a mirror, and which the traveler has sprinkled on himself before leaving; the *āš* is then distributed among neighbors. *Āš-e šol(l)a qalamkār*, made with meat and legumes, is prepared on one of the holy days (21 Ramažān, the day of Imam ‘Alī’s martyrdom; also 10 Moġarram, 20 Šafar, or 28 Šafar), as an offering for the survival of children in a family or as thanksgiving for recovery from a severe illness.



To exorcise illness, *āš-e Abū Dardā'* (attributed to Abu'l-Dardā' 'Owaymer b. Zayd Ẓazraǰī, a companion of the Prophet—a confusion between the Arabic *dardā'* and the Persian *dard* “pain, illness”) is prepared for male patients; for women, *āš-e Omm al-Dardā'*. A male or female figurine made out of dough is dropped into the *āš*. Once the patient has eaten the *āš*, the figurine is thrown into flowing water, symbolically washing away the illness.

Other kinds of *āš* are used as specific medicines or medicinal supplements. *Āš-e qarāqūrūt*, made of rice, spinach, small lentils, and generous amounts of dried black curds, is prescribed as an antihelmintic, particularly for ejecting tapeworms. *Āš-e ālū*, prepared with black or yellow prunes, rice, and common vegetables, is given as a laxative. *Āš-e nārdāna*, or *nārdānak*, cooked with dried black pomegranate seeds, is used for diarrhea. *Āš-e šalǧam*, made with common *āš* vegetables, rice, and generous amounts of turnips, is used in the treatment of influenza and colds. *Āš-e šola* or *āš-e šola zīra*, a thin *āš* prepared with rice starch and cumin seeds, with or without meatballs, is taken to fight fever. *Āš-e 'adas o kadū*, cooked with Mediterranean squash, onions, and generous amounts of lentils, is made into a paste and taken for chest ailments. *Āš-e ābgūra*, containing sour grape juice, is used to treat ailments of the liver. *Āš-e torš*, also made with sour grape juice, plus lime juice and powdered coriander seeds, is prescribed for acne. *Āš-e māst o kāsni*, a very thin soup with rice starch, fresh wild chicory, and large quantities of yogurt, is used to treat acute gonorrhoea.

The decoration of tureens full of *āš* is a traditional culinary art; sauteed onions and mint are most commonly used, but intricate paisley and floral designs and inscriptions can be made with whey, saffron, minced meat sauce, sauteed garlic slices, and legumes. An *āš* prepared as a votive offering is usually decorated with the names of holy places or brief prayers fashioned from whey and sauteed mint. In a cooking manual of 1260/1844 by a certain Ḥajǰīa Belqays Ẓānom mention is made of a tureen decorated with twelve ingredients in the name of the Twelve Imams (ms. in the possession of 'E. Elāhī). Other sources that describe various kinds of *āš* include the *Kār-nāma* of Ḥajǰīa Moḥammad-'Alī Bāvaṛčī written in 927/1521 for one of Shah Esmā'īl Ṣafawī's courtiers; *Māddat al-ḥayāt* by Nūrallāh, the cook of Shah 'Abbās I (written in 1003/1594); *Noska-ye šāh Jahānī* (about 1050/1640-41); *Sofra-ye aṭ'ema* by Mīrzā 'Alī-Akbar Āšpaz-bāšī, Nāṣer-al-dīn Shah's chef (1301/1883), and more recent books on Iranian culinary arts and folklore, especially the works of Sayyed Abu'l-Qāsem Enǰavī Šīrāzī (see also Storey, III/2, pp. 389-94).



The term *āš* also appears in popular expressions and proverbs, often as a generic term for food (e.g., see ‘Alī-qolī Amīnī, *Farhang-e ‘awām*, Tehran, n.d., pp. 23-24; ‘Alī-Akbar Dehḡodā, *Amṡāl o ḡekam* I, Tehran, 1339 Š./1960, p. 36).

A list of the most important kinds of *āš* and a description of each appears in Moḡammad Dabīrsīāqī, *Loḡat-nāma-ye fārsī*, fasc. 4, Tehran, 1363 Š./1984, pp. 528-36.

See also Mirzā ‘Alī-Akbar Khan Āšpaz-bašī, *Sofra-ye aṡ‘ema*, Tehran, 1353 Š./1974.

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(‘E. Elāhi)

### iii. Among Zoroastrians

During the time of oppression the Zoroastrians of Iran were reduced to a poverty which became proverbial among the Muslims of Yazd and Kerman. Their staple diet then was coarse barley bread, pounded millet, and herbs and fruits in season. Their festive dishes tended accordingly to be simple, sustaining ones, which have become traditional. A variety of *āš* are regularly cooked on holy days, including *hrīsa* or *āš-e gannom* “wheat (NPers. *gandom*) pottage,” which is a festive breakfast dish. Its main ingredient is pounded wheat, which is stirred into boiling water, with two or three pieces of meat, onions if desired, and seasoning (salt, pepper, and saffron). This is cooked overnight, the pot being sunk on a bed of embers in a hollow in the ground, with more embers packed around it, and the whole covered by a thick layer of



coarse straw, *kuḍēr*. In the morning the meat, by then thoroughly cooked, is lifted out, pounded in a mortar and stirred back into the thick broth, which has the consistency of oatmeal porridge. This is eaten piping hot. Another sustaining *āš*, *āš-e luwok*, is cooked to use up *luwok* (Pahl. *drōn*, Av. *draonah*), the round flat portions of wheaten bread which are baked in quantity on holy days. These, being small, quickly become dry and hard. Chickpeas are simmered for a while in water, to which a handful of pounded meat is then added, and a handful of pounded *naxod-e tomī* (a large, hard yellow pea), and seasoning, with nowadays sometimes a few tomatoes; and finally the *luwok*, broken into little pieces, are stirred in and cooked for a few minutes, until they have absorbed the liquor and become soft.

These two *āš* are eaten in the home. There are also varied *āš-e xayrāt*, cooked to be distributed charitably, either by the community or individuals. One made annually at the village of Šarīfābād, near Yazd, at the Jašn-e Mehrīzed (Mehragān), is cooked in immense cauldrons in the fire-temple kitchen. Each family contributes wheat, lentils, chickpeas etc., and these ingredients, seasoned, are simmered for several hours together with the haunch-bones of the sacrificial sheep. This yields a thick and very palatable broth. Other more recently endowed *āš-e xayrāt* are made with rice and mutton. For more modest family *āš-e xayrāt*, meat is not an ingredient. The most popular *āš* then is one made with strips of dough, not unlike noodles. This is called *āš-e hmīr* “dough (NPer. *kamīr*) pottage” (NPer. *āš-e rešta*): According to one recipe, sliced beetroot is put into boiling water, to be followed by several pounds of beans and chickpeas, and a bowlful of fried, with seasoning. When these ingredients are well cooked the strips of dough are added and allowed to simmer for about five minutes. Other kinds of *āš* cooked for charitable distribution are *āš-e kašk*, made with barley, and *āš-e sūlī*, for which flour is sieved and roasted before being added to a vegetable broth. This is cooked especially in winter, being very sustaining.

M. Boyce, *A Persian Stronghold of Zoroastrianism*, Oxford, 1977, pp. 55-59.