



## AŠAVAN (POSSESSING TRUTH)

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**AŠAVAN** (Avestan, also *ašāvan-*), lit. “possessing truth (*aša*).” This word is attested in Old Persian as *artāvan-*, and in Old Indian as *ṛtā’van-*. It is used as an adjective referring to humans, to Ahura Mazdā and the divine or angelic entities, or to anything that pertains to the world of Ahura Mazdā and the domain of Aša, cf. *Y.* 68.15 *vīspe. . . ke asti vohu ašava antarə zqm asmanəmcā* “all that is good (and) *ašavan* between earth and heaven.” In reference to human beings, it distinguishes him who walks the path of Aša (cf. Rigvedic *\*ṛtāsya path-* “the path of the truth”) and proceeds in his spiritual realization, the initiated, and, more generally speaking, the pious and the just; in reference to other beings or things, it has acquired the meaning of “holy.”

As *aša* “truth” is diametrically opposed to *druj* “the Lie,” thus also *ašavan* is diametrically opposed to *drəgvant drvant* “possessing lie.” According to the Zoroastrian concept of dualism, all beings may be deemed either *ašavan*, the followers of truth, or *drəgvant/drvant*, the followers of the Lie, conforming to an idea already prominent in the *Gāθās*. The former are assured salvation, while to the latter falls a long torment: (*Y.* 30.1) *darəgəṃ drəgvō. dəbyō rašō savacā ašavabyō* “Long harm for those possessing lie, and profit for the truthful.” The battle between *ašavan* and *drəgvant* preoccupies Zarathustra, who nevertheless has no doubts as to the final victory of *aša*: (*Y.* 48.2) *ašavā mazdā vānghaṭ drəgvantəm hā zī aṇəuš Vanuhī vistā ākərətīš* “Shall the *ašavan* overcome the *drəgvant*, Wise One? For this is known as the good renewal of existence.” The analogous meanings of OInd. *ṛtā’van* and Old Pers. *artāvan* would suggest a common Indo-Iranian ancestry, whereas the Av. *ašavan*



would have been influenced by the reform of Zarathustra. (Such is the opinion of a number of scholars: E. Herzfeld, *Altpersische Inschriften*, Berlin, 1938, pp. 289ff.; *Zoroaster and his World*, Princeton, 1947, pp. 514ff.; H. S. Nyberg, *Die Religionen des alten Iran*, Germ. tr. H. H. Schaeder, Leipzig, 1938, p. 368; S. Wikander, *Vayu I*, Lund, 1942, pp. 153f.; J. Duchesne-Guillemin, *Zoroastre. Étude critique avec une traduction commentée des Gâthâ*, Paris, 1948, pp. 130f.; idem, *La religion de l'Iran ancien*, Paris, 1962, p. 196; idem, "La religion des Achéménides," in *Beiträge zur Achämenidengeschichte*, ed. G. Walser, Wiesbaden, 1972, pp. 70f.; F. B. J. Kuiper, "The Bliss of Aša," *IJ* 8, 1964, pp. 126ff.; idem, "Ahura Mazdā "Lord Wisdom"?" *IJ* 18, 1976, pp. 31f.; G. Widengren, *Die Religionen Irans*, Stuttgart, 1965, p. 143.) While *ašavan* designates all followers of the Good Religion, even those still living, the Old Persian and Old Indian terms instead refer to the souls of just men, who have become possessed of *aša/rtā'* after their death. Echoes of this second meaning can also be found in the Avestan *ašavan* and in the Pahlavi term *ahlaw* (see H. W. Bailey, *Zoroastrian Problems in the Ninth-Century Books*, Oxford, 1943, pp. 87 n. 4; J. de Menasce, "Vieux-Perse "artāvan" et pehlevi "ahrav"," in *Mélanges d'histoire des religions offerts à Henri Charles Puech*, Paris, 1974, p. 58). According to a recent suggestion by W. Sundermann (*AOASH* 24, 1971, pp. 371ff.) this specific value of the Old Persian term may have survived in Man. Parth. *ardāw* (in the texts M 48, M 173, M 6120, M 8286) as "soul in Paradise." Normally in the Manichean texts, *ardāw* designates the elect, the just, and the followers of the doctrine of Mani.

Old Persian *artāvan* is found twice in the "daiva-inscription" of Xerxes (XPh 47-48) *šiyāta ahaniy jīva utā marta artāvā ahaniy* "that I may be happy in life and in death may I be *artāvan*;" (XPh 54-56) *utā jīva šiyāta bavatiy utā marta artāvā bavatiy* "and in life he becomes happy and in death he becomes *artāvan*." However, actually, there is no real divergence in meaning between Old Pers. *artāvan* and Av. *ašavan*; recent studies have shown that being *šiyāta* "happy" in life and *artāvan* after death are both the results of one and the same mode of conduct during one's earthly existence (G. Gnoli, "Ašavan. Contributo allo studio del libro di Ardā Wirāz," in *Iranica*, ed. G. Gnoli and A. V. Rossi, Naples, 1979, pp. 387-452). In Mazdaism, entry into Paradise is limited to those dead who are recognized as *ašavan*: In *Vidēvdād* 19.31 and *Hādōxt Nask* 2.16, Vohu Manah and the other deceased receive the soul of the dead with the vocative *ašāum* (see J. Kellens, "Trois réflexions sur la religion des Achéménides," *Studien zur Indologie und Iranistik* 2, 1976, p. 114 n. 3). The quality of *ašavan* is acquired in life. If an individual is not *ašavan* during his



life, he can not arrive at the Best Existence (*vahišta ahu*) after his death: *jīvasčīṭ nōiṭ bvaṭ ašava māšaščiṭ nōiṭ baxšaiti vahištahe aṇhāuš* (Vd. 5.61 ).

Vedic *ṛtā'van*, Avestan *ašavan*, Old Persian *artāvan* all derive from an ancient Indo-Iranian concept, onto which the Zoroastrian concept has been grafted with originality. Vedic *ṛtā'van* may also refer to the living: It is an epithet for the Gods, the defunct Fathers, and the initiated seers, but not for common mortals, since the knowledge of *ṛtá* has been withheld from them. It is this fact that allows the reconstruction of the unity of both the Indo-Iranian and the Zoroastrian notions of *ṛtā'van/ašavan*, even in its most diverse nuances. The Zoroastrian *ašavans* are analogous to the Vedic initiated seers; just as the latter have access to the vision of the sun (*svardr'ś* “he who sees the sun”), the manifestation of *Ṛtá*, thus also the former have access to the vision of *Aša* (Kuiper, “The Bliss of *Aša*,” pp. 126ff.). The idea of the “most blessed union with *Aša*” (*urvāzišta ašahya sar-*) and of the “beatitude of *Aša* which is made manifest with light” (*ašā yečā yā raočēbīš darəsatā urvāzā* Y. 30.1) is at the base of the Zoroastrian conception of the *ašavan*. The extension of the term to all of the followers of the Good Religion is a secondary phenomenon, probably due to the opposition of *ašavan* to *drəgvant/drvant* (Pahlavi *ahlaw* and *druwand*), as well as to the influence of the latter on the former (see I. Gershevitch, *The Avestan Hymn to Mithra*, Cambridge, 1959, p. 156). To the idea of the *fravaši* of the *ašavan*, living or deceased (Gershevitch, op. cit., pp. 154ff.) the *ašaunqm fravašayo* *āš*, who have their dwelling in the “solar residence of *Aša*” (*xʷanvaitīš ašahe vərəzō*, Y. 16.7), are linked several Greek attestations: In the Calendar of Cappadocia, *artana* (perhaps from the genitive plural of *artāvan*, \**artāunām*) is the name given to the month of the *Fravašis*; according to Hesych, *Artaioi* meant “heroes” among the Persians; this probably reflects an archaic and pre-Zoroastrian heritage, as the *Fravašis* were originally linked to a belief in immortality that was typical of a society imbued with warrior values.

For Mid. Pers. *ardā* and *ahlaw* see *Ahlaw*. (Add to the bibliography given there: W. Belardi, *The Pahlavi Book of the Righteous Viraz*, Rome, 1979, pp. 111ff. Ph. Gignoux, “Corps osseux et âme osseuse”: Essai sur le chamanisme dans l’Iran ancien,” *JA* 267, 1979, pp. 41-79.)

See also [Aša](#).



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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See also U. Bianchi, “L’inscription “des daivas” et la zoroastrisme des Achéménides,” *RHR* 192, 1977, pp. 7-11.

I. Gershevitch, “Word and Spirit in Ossetic,” *BSOAS* 17, 1955, pp. 483f. (for a derivation of Ossetic (*i*)*dauäg* “spirit, protective genius” from *ārdauäg*).

Idem, “Zoroaster’s own Contribution,” *JNES* 23, 1964, pp. 18ff.

W. B. Henning, “Mitteliranisch,” pp. 68 and n. 1, 98, 99f., 117 n. 6.

J. Kellens, “Sur un parallèle inverse à l’inscription des “daiva,”” *Studi e Materiali di Storia delle Religioni* 40, 1969, pp. 209-13.

H. S. Nyberg, *A Manual of Pahlavi II*, Wiesbaden, 1974, pp. 10-11, svv. *ahlav* and *ahlāi* and p. 30 s.v. *artāi* and, *artāk*.