



AXTAR

AXTAR (Middle and New Persian) “star” or “constellation.” This word, which first appears in Pahlavi, is an early back-formation from Middle Persian *apāxtar* (*abāxtar*) (planet) produced by artificial dropping of the first component (false deglutination). This was made possible by a notion that *apāxtar* meant “off-star” or “unstar” (*nē-axtar*), whereas in reality *apāxtar* can be traced through the Old Iranian **apāxtara* (backward-turning, retrograde) to Aryan **apāk-* or **apānk-* “backward.” The planets were regarded as abnormal stars because their courses appear to be in the opposite direction to the general eastward motion of the firmament.

Also derived from *apāxtar* is the New Persian word *bāktar*, which means “west” in the context of an eastward orientation and “north” in that of a southward orientation. If the speaker means “west,” he turns his back on the rising sun; if north, on the noon sun.

These matters were first elucidated by W. Eilers in “Stern—Planet—Regenbogen—Ein Beitrag zur vorderasiatischen Himmelskunde,” in *Der Orient in der Forschung. Festschrift für Otto Spies*, Wiesbaden, 1967, pp. 112ff.; also in *Abhandlungen der Göttinger Akademie der Wissenschaften*, Phil.-hist. Kl. 3, 98, 1976, pp. 115ff., and more fully in *Sinn und Herkunft der Planetennamen*, Sitzungsberichte der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Phil.-hist. Kl. 5, 1975, pp. 8ff.

Compounds of *axtar* with verbal stems indicating “count” or “know” mean “astrologer;” e.g. *axtar-(ā)mār* (q.v.), NPers. *aktaršenās*. The occasional (NPers.)



reading *aḵtar-e āmār* or *aḵtar-e mār* with a senseless *eżāfa* is of course incorrect.