



BAG NASK

BAG NASK, one of the Avestan *nasks* of the *gāhānīg* group, i.e., texts connected with the *Gāθās*, now lost almost in its entirety (see [avesta](#)). This *nask* is listed in the survey of the Avesta in *Dēnkard* 8.1.9, is briefly described in 8.4, and its contents are resumed in *Dēnkard* 9.47-68 (also in the *Persian Rivayats*; see the bibliography). It consisted of twenty-two *fragards* (twenty-one according to the *Persian Rivayats*, p. 3), the first three of which are extant as *Y.* 19-21. These contain a commentary on the three holy prayers which precede the *Gāθās*: the *Ahuna vairiia*, *Ašəm vohū*, and *Yeṛjhe hātqm*. The rest of the *Bag nask*, now lost, contained a commentary on the *Gāθās* and the prayer *Airiiāma išiiō*, which closes the *Gāθā* collection. Like the Pahlavi version of the *Gāθās* themselves, the Pahlavi version of the commentary is of little or no help for understanding the Avestan text of the *Gāθās* though it may afford some insight into the development of Zoroastrian doctrine.

In the manuscripts of the Avesta, *Y.* 19-21 are called *Bagān yašt* rather than *Bag nask*, which is likely to cause some confusion since in the *Dēnkard* the name *Bagān* (or *Bayān*) *yašt* (*nask*) is given to that part of the Avesta which contained the *Yašts*. However, while the second *bagān/bayān* is the plural of *bag/bay* (for Av. *baγa-*) “god,” the first *bagān* is probably for *baγqm*, accusative of *baγā-*, which is found in the final verses of all three prayers: *Bayqn Ahunahe vairiiehe/Ašahe vahištahe yazamaidē*, *Bayqm Yeṛjhe.hātqm hufraiiaštqm ašaonīm yazamaidē* “we worship the *baγq-* (consisting) of (or: called) *Ahuna Vairiia/Ašəm vohū/* the well-worshipped, truthful *Yeṛjhe.hātqm*.” Note also that *Yasna* 19 calls itself *baγa . . . Ahunahe vairiiehe* and that the *Šāyest nē-šāyest*



(13.1, see below) also quotes the form *bayqm*. The term *bayā-* (different from *baya-* “god”) is usually translated as “part, piece” (e.g., *AirWb.*, col. 922; Darmesteter preferred “divine prayer,” p. 165 n. 17). It is rendered in the Pahlavi version of the *Yasna* as *baxtārīh*, literally “distributorship.” In *Y. 55.7* the *Staota yesniia* is referred to as *bayqm*, but these texts make up the *nask* called *Stōd yašt*. The three *Ašəm vohūs* at the end of *Y. 11.15* are called *bayqm* in the *Šāyest nē-šāyest* (13.1) and may have belonged to the *Bag nask* (Kotwal, pp. 40f., 100).

Yasna 19-21 contain the only remnants in Avestan language of a once extensive commentary on the holy *Gāθās* of *Zaraθuštra* and related texts, somewhat comparable to the Old Indian commentaries on the *Rigveda*. Of the three commentaries the first, on the *Ahuna Vairiia*, is by far the longest, twenty-one paragraphs against five for each of the other two. The technical vocabulary of these commentaries has not yet received the study it deserves. We may note here the use of nominal derivation, as in *vacō yaṭ ahumaṭ yaṭ ratumaṭ* “the utterance containing the words “ahu” and “ratu”” (19.8) and *uštātāt-* “being “*uštā*”” (21.4), and technical terms such as *kāraiiā-* “to *point to, *refer to” (*AirWb.*, col. 448) and *cinasti* and *para.cinasti* “to *assign” (what is spoken of to somebody; see Narten, esp. pp. 86ff.).

All three commentaries contain interesting doctrinal matters, of which we may note the following. Of the three prayers, the *Ahuna vairiia* and *Ašəm vohū* are said to be the words of *Ahura Mazdā*, but the *Yeṅhe hātqm* to have been spoken by *Zaraθuštra* and addressed to the *Aməša Spəntas*. Boyce (*Zoroastrianism* I, p. 263 n. 52) argues against ascribing the composition of the *Yeṅhe hātqm* to *Zaraθuštra*—in contrast to the *Gāθās* and the *Ahunwar*—on the basis of its “syntactical awkwardness,” perhaps rightly, though the lack of consensus regarding the syntax of these old Avestan prayers recommends caution in passing this kind of judgment. The *Ahuna vairiia*, we are told, was created by *Ahura Mazdā* before anything else in the material universe and before the creation of the demons (*Y. 19.1-4*) but after the *Aməša Spəntas* (19.8). When the evil one first appeared *Ahura Mazdā* recited the *Ahuna vairiia* and a passage from the *Gāθās* (*Y. 45.2*). These points were elaborated in the cosmological Pahlavi texts (perhaps already in lost Avestan texts); in the *Bundahišn* it is said that the *Ahunwar* was the manifestation of the “fireshape” (*āsrō-kirb*) which *Ohrmazd* in the beginning fashioned from the “endless lights” (*anagrān rōšnān*) and which was needed to repel the initial attack of *Ahriman* (see *ahunwar* [i, p. 683] and Zaehner, p. 479 index s.v. *Ahunvar*).



The social divisions are said in Y. 19.16-18 to be dependent on the word of Ahura Mazdā (i.e., the *Ahuna Vairiia*), which “has four classes, five masters” (*caθu.pištra panca.ratu*), namely (1) the priest (*āθrauan*), the warrior (*raθaēštar*), the agriculturer (*vāstriiō.fšuiiant*), and the artisan (*hūiti*, only mentioned here in the Avesta; Pahl. *hutuxš*); and (2) the masters of the house, the village, the tribe, the country (*māniia*, *vīsiia*, *zantuma*, *dač iiuma*), and *Zaraθuštra*.

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The passages from the *Persian Rivayats* were translated by West, pp. 418-47 and were not repeated by Dhabhar in his translation (see *Persian Rivayats*, p. 4.).

See also Darmesteter, *Zend Avesta* I-III, esp. I, pp. 160-77 (text), III, pp. x-xi, xvi.

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