



DĒN YAŠT

DĒN YAŠT (*Yašt* 16 of the Avesta), a relatively short text, consisting for the most part of repetitive or formulaic sentences (Lommel, pp. 154-56; *Avesta*, tr. Darmesteter, II, pp. 593-97). Although the title implies a hymn to Daēnā, the text is devoted exclusively to the invocation of a female divinity named Čistā (q.v.), whose name is related etymologically to *čisti-* (intuition, idea) but in no other way. Except for several formulaic repetitions, she is mentioned only in this text and in *Yašt* 10.126 and thus appears to have been only a minor goddess, worshiped sporadically. The text consists of three distinct parts: strophes 1-4, containing the only original formulaic material, with the archetypal sacrifice by Zarathustra introduced in strophe 2; strophes 5-13, with the continuation of Zarathustra's invocation, requesting from Čistā the visual power that characterizes the fish *kara*, the virile stallion, and the vulture, which, according to *Yašt* 14, *Vərəθrayna* (see [BAHRĀM](#)) had granted to him (*Yt.* 16.7, 16.10, 16.12, corresponding to *Yt.* 14.29, 14.31, 14.33); and strophes 14-20, with enumeration of three other archetypal worshipers: the woman *Huuōuuī* (strophe 15, invocation in the past tense *yazata*), the priest, and the leader of the nation (strophes 17 and 19 respectively, invocation in the present tense *yazamaide*).

The fundamental study of the *Dēn Yašt* was published in 1934 by Émile Benveniste (q.v.; Benveniste and Renou, pp. 56-64). It remains useful, except for some metrical corrections and the rather loose treatment of the chronology of some parts of the text. The prerogatives of Čistā clearly suggest that she was a goddess of travel. The epithets accorded to her in the first part of the text



leave no doubt on this point; the principal epithet, *razišta-*, which belonged to the good path, was hers by simple hypallage. The benefits requested in the second part, especially sharpness of vision and swift legs, are the most useful qualities for the traveler. It is this identification that explains the connection between Čistā and Daēnā: Both guide travelers on the road, the path of religion, in accordance with the later sense of *daēnā-* (Benveniste and Renou, p. 63), as well as the ritual path and the road to the hereafter, reflecting older ideas. In this connection there are curious correspondences with the last Gatha (Y. 53). The only two worshipers named explicitly, Zarathustra and Huuōuuī, belonged to the circle in which the Gathas were worshiped. Furthermore, *čistā-* was a component of the name of Zarathustra's daughter Pouručistā, who plays a central role in *Yasna* 53. These details cannot be solely owing to chance, for the word *daēnā-* is attested in each of the five first strophes of the Gatha. Nevertheless, the precise relation between the two divine personalities remains unclear. According to *Yašt* 16.1, Čistā- and Daēnā- were two names for a single divinity (*cistəm . . . yəm vaṇvḥīm daēnəm māzdaiiasnīm*). Although this evidence was dismissed by Benveniste (Benveniste and Renou, p. 63), Ilya Gershevitch (p. 167) has accepted it. In addition, in *Yašt* 10.126 Čistā is described as the *upamana* of Daēnā (*cistəm . . . daēnaiiā māzdaiiasnōiš upamanəm*). The meaning of *upamana-* is unfortunately far from clear in such expressions as *dāmōiš upamana-* (see DĀMI-), but it approximates “alter ego.” It seems likely, then, that *čistā-* is a metonymic designation for Daēnā, personifying her capacity for seeing the road and for herself being seen (cf. Lankarany, pp. 146-47).

The fact that the noun is more frequently qualified by a passive verbal adjective “she who is noticed” than by an abstract suffix denoting “the capacity for noticing” does not compromise this interpretation. Although Daēnā does distinguish the road, she is herself also distinguished, as clearly as the dawn is distinguished, by the *uruuan* “soul” of the dead at the end of the third night. She reveals herself as beautiful or ugly to the gods who watch over the hereafter, depending upon whether the departed was good or bad.



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