



## HŌM YAŠT

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**HŌM YAŠT**, name given to a section of the Avestan *Yasna*, namely, *Y.* 9-11.11, which thus, technically, is not one of the *Yašts* at all. (There is a very brief, two-stanza *Hōm Yašt* found as *Yašt* 20.) However, like the *Srōš Yašt* (*Y.* 57), *Y.* 9-11.11 contains a sustained collection of stanzas appropriate to Haoma (q.v., for *haoma* the plant and its divinity), although it lacks the strophic divisions (Pahl. *kardag*, Pers. *karda*) common to the major *Yašts*.

Set within the *Yasna*, the *Hōm Yašt* is central to the ritual and is recited prior to the priestly consumption of the *parahaoma* (Pahl. *parāhōm*). However, it is difficult to equate the content of specific verses with the sequence of ritual actions, except perhaps for the verse in *Y.* 10.17 about pouring Haoma from the silver to the golden cup. What we have is a collection of, mostly poetic, compositions of quite diverse sorts, which a redactor (or redactors) has assembled to accompany the ritual. That is, the *Hōm Yašt*, like the other *Yašts*, is not an original composition itself, even though it seems to embrace many specimens of ancient poetic materials whose subject is Haoma.

### STRUCTURE AND CONTENT

*Y.* 9.1-2. The opening two stanzas set the scene for the rest of the extended composition. *Zaraθuštra* is ritually tending the fire and reciting the *gāθās*, as Haoma approaches him. *Zaraθuštra* asks him who he is (“Who, o Man, are you, the most beautiful of the entire material world whom I have seen”), to which Haoma responds that he is “righteous Haoma *dūraoša*.” Although the word *dūraoša* is a standing epithet of Haoma, its meaning is obscure (see Mayrhofer,



*Wörterbuch* I, p. 733, s.v. *duróša-*; perhaps the Avestan word is a loanword and has no Indo-Iranian etymology). Whatever the original meaning and source of the word might have been, the tradition, which the redactor of the Hōm Yašt probably knew well, has it mean that “*dūrōšth* is this, namely, that it holds death (*ōš*) far (*dūr*) from the soul of men.” Then Haoma exhorts Zaraθuštra to press him for drinking and for strength.

Y. 9.3-15. These stanzas are introduced with the words “Then Zaraθuštra said: Reverence to Haoma” and are framed by a repeated formula (see below). They rehearse a favorite theme found in the Yašts, the enumeration of the first three heroes of Iranian legend and myth, plus the hero of the present age, Zaraθuštra himself. Here, the father of each hero is first identified as the presser of Haoma; the boon he receives is the son who was born to him; and then the son’s accomplishments are given. From a text-critical perspective, it does not seem possible to trace the origin of these passages to Yašt passages, nor to derive the Yašt passages from them. Rather, this material appears to have been drawn from common oral sources, which all precede the redaction of the extant Avesta. The poetic composition of this section is in well-formed verses throughout, with those of the *anuštubh* type predominating (see Geldner, 1877, pp. 120 ff.; for the Vedic meters cited, see below, “Poetics and Redaction”).

The compositional structure has the following formulaic pattern: “Who was the first (second, third, forth) [man] to press you for the material world? What reward was accorded him? What boon came to him?” (9.3, 6, 9, 12). The question is followed in the next stanza by the response formula, “Then he, righteous Haoma *dūraoša*, answered me. Wīwahwant (Āθβya, Θrita, Pourušāspa) was the first, etc.” (9.4, 7, 10, 13). A final formula in these stanzas specifies the boon, “that a son (two sons, 9.10; you, 9.13) was/were born to him.” After each of the formula sequences is completed, additional verses recount exploits and virtues of the respective sons (Yima, Θraētaona, Urwaxšaya/Kərəsāspa, Zaraθuštra). These verses preserve fragments of ancient epic traditions of legendary heroes. In spite of the tight compositional structure of 9.3-15, there appear to be several interpolations: Θrita, strongest of the Sāmids (9.10); “famed (*srūtəm*, acc.) in Aryana Waējah” (9.14); the final verse of 9.15 not only changes from second to third person, but what appears to have been a *gāyatrī* (a meter of three *pāda* [metrical foot]), “who became (*abawaṭ*) the strongest, the bravest, the most energetic, the fastest of the creation of the two Spirits,” has interpolated the *pāda* “who was (*ās*) most



victorious.”

*Y. 9.16-21.* Here the unity of the opening is broken. Some continuity is attempted in 16 through the formulaic, “Then Zaraθuštra said: Reverence to Haoma,” followed by a short *staoma* “praise stanza.” Although the verbs are in the second person, showing that for the redactor Zaraθuštra is the grammatical subject, stanzas 9.17-21 are poorly constructed collections of phrases, whose subject “I” is in Avestan literature (and similarly in the *Ṛigveda*) more generally understood as the worshiper (cf. the ubiquitous *N. yazāi, yazamaide* “I/we worship N.”). This grouping of stanzas concludes with a formulaic series of boon requests (for prosperity, victory, and the like) of the pattern: “This first (second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth) boon I ask of you, o Haoma *dūraoša*.”

*Y. 9.22-24.* The stanzas 9.22-23 contain verses describing favors which Haoma grants to heroes, women giving birth, householders (?) who study the Nasks (see [AVESTA](#)), and unmarried maidens, while 9.24 recounts how Haoma deposed from power a certain *Kərəsānu*.

*Y. 9.25, 26, 27.* These are three thematically unrelated stanzas. 9.25 is a *staoma*. 9.26 relates that *Mazdā* provided Haoma with *Paurwanya* (the constellation Orion?) as his belt, girdled with which, on the peaks of the mountains, he preserves the \*bridles and \*canes of the (Holy) Word (on which see *EIr.* V/4, p. 379b, s.v. CHARIOT). 9.27 is an invocation.

*Y. 9.28-32.* *Yasna 9* concludes with a series of stanzas whose common theme is that Haoma is invoked to overcome and destroy enemies. All of the verses in 9.30-32 are built on the formula, “On the body of N., for the sake of the righteous person threatened with destruction, strike the mace, o yellow Haoma!” Note the Vedic parallel (*indra*) *jahí vādhar* (*RV* 7.25.3) to *haomqwadarə jaiḍi*.

*Y. 10.* This section is a fairly loose collection of stanzas and verses, where concern for Haoma as plant and juice predominates. *Y. 10.1* commands the demons to depart and *Aši* and *Sraoša* to settle as guests in “this Ahuric house.” This leads immediately into a series of *staomas* addressed to Haoma, the lower and upper pressing stones (10.2), to the “clouds and rain which cause Haoma to grow on the peaks of the mountains,” and the mountains themselves (10.3), to the earth which bears Haoma as well as its \*pastureland (10.4); 10.5, where Haoma is exhorted to grow in all its stems, sprouts, and branches, concludes



the sequence 10.2-5, in which Haoma is invoked directly. The first verse of 10.6 states that Haoma increases when praised and that the man who praises Haoma becomes very victorious; while the second, again addressed to Haoma, states that “even the slightest pressing, praise, and drink serves to slay 1,000 demons.” Y. 10.7 is a poorly constructed collection, which states that Haoma’s curative medicine removes pollution from the house where he is praised; yet it is followed in 10.8 by lovely verses, evocative of similar Vedic statements about Soma: “Indeed, all other intoxicating drinks are accompanied by Wrath with the bloody cudgel, but that intoxication which is Haoma’s is accompanied by gladdening Truth,” and “Haoma’s intoxication makes nimble the man who may laud Haoma like a young son.” Y. 10.9 returns to the themes of Haoma’s medicinal powers and his ability to grant victoriousness. Y. 10.10 is particularly interesting in that it refers to the fashioning and deposition of Haoma on Mt. Haratī by “the skillful god,” a reference not to Ahura Mazdā, but to the Indo-Iranian craftsman deity (cf. *RV* 4.18.3). There is a very obscure reference in 10.11 to birds carrying Haoma away to various mountains, followed by a good *gāyatrī* verse in 10.12 proclaiming that “thus you, of many species, grow in these mountains.”

Seemingly unrelated to growing in mountains is a line about Haoma’s medicinal powers and a verse invoking Haoma’s help against him who vilifies “me.” In language reminiscent of Y. 10.8, 10.13 reveres Haoma, who “makes the mind of the pauper as exalted as even (the mind) of the richest” and who, like Vedic Soma, generally dispenses wealth to his worshipers. Y. 10.14 opens with an obscure verse, which tantalizingly refers to a “drop of milk” [?] (*gaoš drafšō*) and uses a word *wārəm*, which has been variously interpreted but looks like the common Vedic word for the wool filter (*vā’ra-*); it closes with a dedication of the worshiper’s body to the deity. In 10.15 the worshiper rejects the vagina of the polluting whore “who sits down devouring Haoma’s sacrificial offering.” Y. 10.16 (which is not in verse) is a sort of confession of faith, in which the worshiper affirms his belonging to five things, namely, good thought, good speech, good deeds, obedience, and the righteous man, and his non-ownership of their opposites. As if to remind the listener that Zaraθuštra is still the subject of the verbs in the first person, 10.17 repeats the phrase “then Zaraθuštra said” not encountered since 9.16. A five-*pāda* (i.e., a *pankti*) *staoma* praises all Haomas whether on the mountain peaks, in the river valleys, or “held in straits, in the clutches of women.” This is followed by the ritual description of pouring the juice from the silver to the gold cup. Y. 10.18 appears to be a retrospective on the verses of the Yašt as Haoma’s hymns



(*gāθā*), praises (*staomayō*), \*teachings (+*cašanā*), and correctly uttered words. Y. 10 then concludes with three stanzas: the desire for the intoxicating drinks to go forth, perhaps in anticipation of the consumption of the *parahaoma* at the conclusion of the Hōm Yašt (10.19); an unexpected reverence to the Cow (10.20); and a series of “we worship Haoma” statements, which end with the worship of Zaraθuštra’s reward (*aši*, q.v.) and *frawaši* (see FRAVAŠI).

Y. 11.1-3. Narrated in the third person, these three verses contain a fascinating series of curses uttered by three *ašawans*, the Bovine, the Horse, and Haoma, who curse the *zaotar-*, the *bāšar*, and the *xwāšar*, respectively. Understanding these words to mean “priest,” “rider,” and “drinker,” C. Bartholomae (*AirWb.*, col. 1880) speculated that the three verses portray the tripartite order of the social classes (on which see AVESTAN PEOPLE). E. Benveniste (1932) picked up on this idea, but asked why the place occupied by the third, agriculturalist, estate should be represented by a drinker. Instead of a regularly formed agent noun \**xwartar-* on *xwar-* “to drink” (as already understood in the Pahlavi gloss *xwardār*), he proposed an otherwise unattested, \**hu-wāstar-* “good herdsman” (cf. *wāstryō.fšuyant-* the common term for the third estate), citing the *bahuvrīhi* compound *xwāstra-* < \**hu-wāstra-* “who has, offers good pasture.” With this correction one obtains the series: priest, knight, herdsman. Although the meaning of *zaotar-* is certain, there are problems in understanding *bāšar-* as “rider” and *xwāšar-* as “good herdsman.” In spite of Pahl. *aswār*, NPers. *suwār* “horseman, rider” (cf. OPers. *asabāra-*, adj. lit. “being a horse’s burden”), by itself, as K. Hoffmann (1986, pp. 166, 173, 179, n. 4, but contested by M. Schwartz, 1989, p. 114) showed, *bāšar-* must mean lit. “bearer” and contextually “groom.” Further, a noun \**hu-wāstar-* is unlikely, since *hu-* (OInd. *su-*) rarely (only Ved. *susaniṭr-*, *súhoṭr-*; perhaps Av. *hudōiθrī-* “schönäugig,” *AirWb.*, col. 1826; “gut sehend,” Wackernagel and Debrunner, 1954, p. 680) forms compounds on agent nouns in °*tar-*. Left with a series priest, groom, drinker, one finds little support for a tripartite sociological interpretation. The priest’s trespass is that he does not distribute the cooked portions of the bovine, but keeps them for himself and his family. The groom does not petition the horse for swiftness; and the drinker holds Haoma after he has been pressed, as if he were bound (?) like a condemned thief. That is, the first and third are cultic/sacrificial violations, while the second is a failure to petition. Note the quite different version found in the *Pahlavi Rivāyat* 26, which itself purports to be from the Dēn “Religion” (*ēn-iz paydāg kū* “this too is revealed”).



*Y. 11.4-7.* In this section stanzas 11.4-6 are direct discourse of Haoma regarding his rightful portion of the sacrificial victim, while 11.7 is the admonition of the third-person narrator. Its placement after the previous section appears to be a follow-up on the Bovine’s curse regarding the distribution of the victim. Here, Haoma asserts that his father, Ahura Mazdā, vouchsafed for him the jaws, together with the tongue and the left eye, as his sacrificial portion (*draonah*). He also delivers a curse, against anyone who would destroy or steal his portion, that in such a person’s house daēwic children—*Dāhakas*, *Mārakas*, and *Waršnas*—will be born, rather than an *Aθrawan*, *Raθaēštā*, or *Wāstryō.fšuyant* (the regular terms for the three classes). In conclusion the narrator admonishes the sacrificer to cut out the portion quickly, lest Haoma bind him as he bound Fraņrasyan the Tūranian.

*Y 11.8.* This is a short stanza proclaiming “reverence to Haoma” (*nəmō haomāi*). The common phrase “Zaraθuštra said,” which introduces the stanza, may well be intended to extend at least into 11.9, if not also to the first-person subject of 11.10.

*Y 11.9.* The redactor has cleverly strung together a sequence of Gāθic quotations, cited, according to custom, by the opening word(s), in such a way that one counts from one to ten. The citations, which are given in Standard Avestan rather than Gāθic, suggest: “one” (*yō nō aēwō* for *yā nā aēwō*, *Y. 29.8*), “both” (*aṭ tē uye* for *aṭ tōi ubē*, *Y. 34.11*), “three” (*θrāyōidyāi*, *Y. 34.5*), “fourth” (*tūrahe* for *tūrahyā*, *Y. 36.12*), “\*five” (*məṇdāidyāi* for *məṇdaidyāi*, *Y. 44.8*), “sixth” (*xšwīdəm*, *Y. 29.7*), “seven-eight” (*haptāždyāi*, *Y. 31.22*; *haptī + āždyāi* [*Y. 51.17*]), ‘nine tenth” (*nawa dasme*, *nə wā* [*Y. 41.2*] + *dasəmē* [*Y. 28.9*]), to which is added the fuller citation of *Y. 28.9*, *yōi wā waēθma* (for *yōi wā wōiθmā dasəmē*). The only real problem the redactor faced was “five,” as there is no word even approximating the anticipated *pañca* or *puχδa-*. If this stanza were the creation of a late Sasanian redactor familiar with the Avestan script, then a graphic explanation will clarify the enigmatic *məṇdāidyāi*. That is, if one writes a letter *p* upside down, the result is something resembling *m*; further, if one substitutes a *δ* for *d*, the result is the same letter in the Pahlavi script for *c* (see AVESTAN LANGUAGE i. The Avestan Script, with Table 2). In this way, the visual pun achieved *pəñcaidyāi*.

## POETICS AND REDACTION

The above summary of the content of the Hōm Yašt suggests that, as a whole, it is a compilation of a variety of different compositions. Nevertheless, the



redactor made extensive, almost exclusive, use of poetic material. Some of these verses can be identified as Zoroastrian, since *zaraθuštra*– or *spitama*– are integral to them, while the others may be pre-Zoroastrian or simply not identifiable as specifically Zoroastrian. The verse distribution according to type (i.e., of strophes of octosyllabic feet [*pāda*] in paired [indicated with +] or single verses, with caesura [indicated with :]) is as follows: *gāyatrī* (8 + 8 : 8), 29 examples; *anuštubh* (8 + 8 : 8 + 8), 33; *pankti* (8 + 8 : 8 + 8 : 8), 2. These figures include verses containing full lines of 16 syllables, but with displaced caesura (7 + 9 and 9 + 7), and those whose final *pāda* has but 7 syllables. In addition there are 14 lines (of two *pādas*) and 35 single *pādas* which form no part of a standard verse. There appears to be only one certain case of deviation from the octosyllabic *pāda*, namely, the *trištubh* discussed below.

Quite apart from the way the diverse content is organized, the redactor's hand can be observed even in the construction of verses. For example, he has taken the model *anuštubh* (8 + 8 : 8 + 8) verse of 9.30:

*paiti ažiš zairitahe*

*simahe wišō.waēpahe*

*kəhrpəm nāšəmnāi ašaone*

*haoma +zairə wadarə jaiði*

and artfully expanded it in 9.32. The opening line is in *trištubh* meter (11 + 11), where all the gen. sg. fem. endings are governed by *jahikayā* (“of the whore”). This is followed by a line in *anuštubh*, whose referent is masculine (*yeṇhe*)! Then the whole verse concludes with the refrain *kəhrpəm . . . jaiði*. Schematically, the verse reads:

*paiti +jahikayā +yātumaityā*

11

(*yātumatiyāh*)

+*maoδanō.kairyā +upastā.bairyā* 11 (*upastāwariyāh*)

*yeṇhe frafrawaiti manō* 8

*yaθa aβrəm wātō.šūtəm* 8



*kəhrpəm nāšəmnāi ašaone* 8

*haoma +zairē wadarv jaiḍi* 8

Such a mixture of meters and genders could hardly have been produced by an original poet fluent in Avestan; yet for a later redactor, who himself and whose audience did not control the language or, probably, understand metrics, the verse would have seemed elegantly constructed.

When was the Hōm Yašt redacted? The graphic evidence of 11.9, discussed above, shows that, in its present extent, it would have to have been the product of a time after the invention of the Avestan script, that is, during the reign of Šāpūr II (310-79 C.E.) at the earliest (see K. Hoffmann, s.v. AVESTAN LANGUAGE i. THE AVESTAN SCRIPT).

While the Hōm Yašt shows almost no features in common with the elaborate cosmic imagery of the Somapavamāna (“soma being filtered”) hymns of Ṛgveda IX, there are indications that elements of poetic diction were shared by Iranians and Indo-Aryans in respect to *haoma/sōma*. Particularly striking are the shared epithets *zairi-/hári-* “yellow,” *bərəzant-/brhánt-* “high, lofty,” and *wərəθrajan-/vrtrahán-* “smashing resistance.” Haoma’s association with mountains finds common expression in *āhwa paurwatāhwa . . . wīraodahe haomō* “you, Haoma, grow in these mountains”/ā’ . . . *rúhatsómo ná párvatasya prṣṭé* “as Soma climbs on the back of the mountain.” The latter case is probably a metaphor for soma-juice climbing the rim of the filter, just as Haoma’s epithet *frāšmi-* “having rays” (cf. *hū frāšmi.dāta-* “the setting of the Sun’s rays”) also reflects an ancient metaphor of the yellow juice spreading like the sun’s rays on the wool filter. Further, there are correspondences between *haomahe maḍa-* “Haoma’s intoxication” and *máde sómasya* “in the intoxication of Soma” and between *rənjyō maḍō* and *mádam . . . ráṃhyam* “swift intoxication.” The Hōm Yašt also shares other phrases with Vedic poetry, but these are associated with other deities than Soma (see Schlerath, 1968, pp. 148-49).

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