



KHORDEH AVESTA

KHORDEH AVESTA (Pahlavi *xwurdag abistāg*; Pers. *Ḳorda Avestā*) “The Little Avesta,” the name given to collections of Zoroastrian texts used primarily by the laity for everyday devotions. Thus, it excludes the high liturgy of the priestly ritual, namely, the *Yasna*, *Visperad*, and *Vendidād* (q.v.). What the Khordeh Avesta does include is not uniform. The manuscript traditions show that the core was composed of the following texts: (1) a short confession of faith, (2) “incantation for the binding of the sacred girdle” (*nērang ī kustīg-bastan*), (3) *Srōš-wāz* (also called “incantation for washing the hands” *nērang ī dast-šōy*), (4) Dawn (*Ōšebām* or *Hōšbām*), (5) *Niyāyišn* (five hymns of Praise), (6) *Gāh* (q.v.; prayers appropriate for the five daily Watches), (7) *Sīh Rōzag* (invocations for the Thirty Days of the month), and (8) Blessings (*Āfrīnagān*). However, this original sequence is found only in a class of manuscripts that also includes the *Yašts*.

The vast majority of manuscripts are those lacking the *Yašts* altogether or including only a selection. Both Iranian and Indian, they have no claim to antiquity. As *K. F. Geldner* (q.v.) remarked, “They vary much in compass. Hardly two manuscripts are to be found which agree exactly in contents and arrangement. Their composition depended upon the pleasure of the copyists, who probably for the most part availed themselves of material from various sources” (p. xlvi). Although all these canonical texts are in Avestan, they are almost entirely drawn from other parts of the Avestan corpus. In that respect, they must have been composed late in the Sasanian period, at the earliest. There are also Pahlavi and Sanskrit renderings, as well as texts in Persian and



Gujarati that could be understood by the unschooled laity. Just how diverse the Khordeh Avestas are can be seen in the edition of Pahlavi translations of forty-one texts assembled by [B. N. Dhabhar](#) (q.v.) from various manuscripts, none of which contains all these selections, and of the texts contained in M. F. Kanga's editions. What follows is a summary of the canonical texts as arranged in Geldner's critical edition of the Avesta.

1. Although Geldner gave to the first text the title of "Confession of Faith," in the manuscripts it often bears the title *fīrāmūn* (or MPers. *pērāmōn yašt*), that is, "around the *yašt*" or "the around-*yašt*." What exactly this means is unclear. It consists of only the two sacred prayers, the *Ašəm vohū* (q.v.) and the *Yaθā ahū vairyō* (see [AHUNWAR](#)), and is not to be confused with the true confession, the *Frawarānē*.

2. *Nērang ī kustīg-bastan* is the incantation said whenever one binds on the sacred girdle or belt (see [KUSTĪG](#)). With introductory matter in Pāzand and two stanzas assembled from various Avestan sources, the *Nērang* invokes Ahura Mazda for aid in overcoming Anra Mainyu (see [AHRIMAN](#)), as the reciter declares himself a Mazdean.

3. *Srōš-wāž* invokes the protective deity [Sraoša](#) (q.v.) and is recited in the morning after one wakes up. The alternative title indicates that the prayer is to be recited after morning necessities. Its five stanzas are drawn exclusively from the *Yasna* and *Vendidād*.

4. *Hōšbām*, as the name suggests, is the prayer to be recited at dawn. Except for the phrase *nəmasə.tē hōšbāmī* "reverence to thee, Dawn" (a mixture of Avestan and Pāzand), the Avestan of the five stanzas is drawn exclusively from the *Yasna*, *Vendidād*, and *Srōš-wāž* without mention of the Dawn.

5. *Niyāyišn* is a collection of five extensive litanies to the Sun (*xwaršēd*), to Mihr, to the Moon (*māh*), to the Waters (*ābān*) and to the Fire (*ātaxš*).

The *Xwaršēd Niyāyišn* is to be recited three times a day: in the morning (*hāwan gāh*), midday (*rapiθβin gāh*), and evening (*uzīrin gāh*). The litany begins with introductory material in Pāzand that reflects New Persian with a smattering of Arabic vocabulary. The nineteen stanzas divide into two parts. The first (1-10) is mostly dedicated to invocations of various deities, while the second (11-16) is identical to the *Xwaršēd Yašt* (*Yt.* 6.1-6). To this is attached a coda of three stanzas, a series of formulaic prayers in both Avestan and Pāzand.



Like the *Xwaršēd*, the *Mihr Niyāyišn* is to be recited at the three *gāhs*. Originally god “Covenant,” Miθra/Mihr (see [MITHRA i](#)) had come to be regarded almost exclusively as a manifestation of the sun or the sun itself. As such, its first nine stanzas and the beginning of the tenth are identical to the opening stanzas of the *Xwaršēd Niyāyišn*. Thereafter, stanzas 11-12 are identical to *Yt.* 10.144-45, and stanzas 13-15 to *Yt.* 10.4-6. The concluding two stanzas (16-17) contain formulaic prayers in both Avestan and Pāzand.

The *Māh Niyāyišn* dedicated to the Moon is to be recited three times per month, at the new moon (*antarə.māh*), the full moon (*pərənō.māh*), and *vīšaptaθa*, the crescent seven days following the full moon (for this complex system of reckoning, see under [MĀH YAŠT](#)). The text, consisting of twelve stanzas, is based almost entirely on the *Māh Yašt*, except for stanzas 10 and 11, which are omitted in a number of manuscripts but are found also in the *Wištāsp Yašt* 6-7. These stanzas are composed of regular octosyllabic *pādas* that have been either adapted or borrowed from other sources. They are addressed to the deities (*yazata*) in general and have nothing to do with the moon.

The *Ābān Niyāyišn* dedicated to the waters also bears the longer title *Ardwī Sūr Bānū Niyāyišn* “Litany of the Lady Ardwī Sūr.” It can be recited in the presence of bodies of water, whether in streams or wells, also during the watches of the 10th day, *Ābān*, as well as the days of the *hamkārān* “collaborators” of *Ābān* (q.v.), namely, Spandārmad (day 5), Dēn (day 24), Ard (day 25) and Māraspand (day 29). Of its eleven stanzas, 1-7 are taken from the *Ardwī Sūr Yašt* (*Yt.* 5) 0-6.

The *Ātaxš Niyāyišn* dedicated to Fire (*Ātaxš*, further named in the Pāzand *ātaxš ī bahirām*) is the fifth and last of the *Niyāyišns*. See further under [ĀTAŠ NIYĀYIŠN](#).

6. The *Gāhs* are a collection of five compositions each to be recited at the appropriate watch or division of the day, namely, *hāwan* (morning), *rapihwin* (afternoon), *uzērin* (evening), *ēβsrūsrim* (sunset to midnight), and *ušahin* (midnight to dawn). See further under [GĀH ii. TIME](#).

7. *Sīhrōzah* is a collection of thirty prayers to be recited on the appropriate day of the month. See further under [SĪH-RŌZAG](#).



8. *Āfrinagān* or “Blessings,” together with their ceremonies, are recited by two priests in conjunction with various ceremonial occasions: honoring the departed, during the five *gāθā* days concluding the year, during the six seasonal festivals (*gāhānbār* , q.v.), and at the beginning and the end of the summer (the months Frawardīn through Mihr). See further under *ĀFRĪNAGĀN*.

Although the *Yašts* are included in the *Khorda Avesta* (see under *AVESTA*), each one is treated in an individual entry in the *Encyclopædia Iranica*. As works of literature, only the *Yašts* merit interest. Also, since the various compositions in the *Khorda Avesta* contain mostly material found elsewhere in the Avesta, they are of small interest to philologists. Yet there are occasional passages of unique content. For example, in the *Hāwan Gāh* (1.6) one finds an archaic perfect-intensive + *zaouye / zauzuwai* / (see Kellens, p.195) “is invoked,” which has a semantic parallel with *jóguve* “he intones, extols” at RV 1.127.10, also in the context of dawn. In sum, then, the *Khorda Avesta* is of greatest scholarly relevance to students of Zoroastrian rituals.

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(A copy of the manuscript at the Majles Library, Tehran, MS 15286, is available online at http://ada.usal.es/paginas/buscador_biblioteca.)