



MĀH YAŠT

MĀH YAŠT (*Yašt 7*), one of what have been termed ‘minor *Yašts*’ of the Avesta. As the name indicates, it is dedicated to the Moon (Av. *māh-*, *māṇha-*; Phl. *māh*) and follows immediately upon the *Xwaršēd Yašt* dedicated to the Sun. Lacking the *kardah* divisions of the ‘great’ *Yašts*, it is a short hymn, composed of seven stanzas plus introductory matter in a mix of Avestan and Pāzand. Stanzas 6 and 7 are formulas common to the *Yašts* generally. Stanza 6 is the *ahe raya* formula in which the deity’s name with epithets is inserted, in this case, *māṇhəm gaociθrəm* “the Moon containing the seed of the Bull.” In stanza 7, to *māṇhahe gaociθrahe* has been added *gəušca aēwō.dātayā gəušca pouru.sarədayā* “and (the worship) of the Uniquely Created Bull, and of the Bull containing (the seed) of the many species (of animals).” According to the myth preserved in the Pahlavi books, when Ahriman slew the primordial Bull (see [GĀW Ī ĒWDĀD](#)), part of his semen was transported to the Moon, and from that purified semen were born the various species of beneficent animals (see Boyce, 1975, pp. 138-39). The remaining stanzas 1-5 make up the core of the *Yašt*.

A theme that runs through the *Yašt* is the observation of the moon’s phases. In the first stanza, after lines calling for the reverence (*nəmō*) of Ahura Mazda, the [Aməša Spəntas](#) and the Moon containing the seed of the Bull, there is another reverence “to the (Moon) which has been observed (*paiti.dītāi*).” Then, in stanza 3, there is a series of four statements in the 1st person: “So, have I observed (*paiti.waēnəm*) the Moon; so, have I watched (see Kellens, 1984, p. 22) the Moon; I have looked upon (*aiβi.waēnəm*) the shining Moon; I have viewed



(?) the shining Moon.” These statements may be in response to the questions posed in the second stanza: “When does the Moon wax? When does the Moon wane? Fifteen (days) the Moon waxes, fifteen it wanes. Its waxing (is the same length) as its waning; its waning is even (the same length) as its waxing.” To this chiasmic construction has been appended a quotation of *Y.* 44.3d: *kəyā mā uxšyeiti nərəfsaiti θbat* “Who is it by whom the moon waxes (and) wanes other than Thee?” The names of the moon’s phases are specified in stanza 4, namely, *antarə.māh* the new moon, *pərənō.māh* the full moon and *wišaptaθa*. The latter name contains the word *hapta* “seven” and indicated the half-moon occurring seven days from, perhaps, the new moon and seven days after the full moon. It appears, then, that an original lunar month of 29+ days has been supplanted by the standard solar month of 30 (15 + 15) days.

An understanding of the meaning of these terms for the moon’s phases is further complicated by the evidence of the *Dēnkard* III.259 (DkM, pp. 274.20-276.2) “On the Pentads of the Month.” According to this account, the month is divided up into six pentads. Starting from the New Moon, the first pentad, *Andarmāh*, covers days 1-5; *Purrmāh* covers 11-15; *Wišaptas* covers 21-25. These are the “good pentads” (*panjag ī weh*). Following each of the good pentads follow three other pentads (*3 panjag ī dudīgar*) called in order *Padīrag-Andarmāh* (Against-Andarmāh), *Parīrag-Purrmāh*, and *Parīrag-Wišaptas*. Except by accident, this schema has nothing to do with the solar month of the calendar, as, in theory, it commences with each new moon. However, because it presupposes a thirty day lunar month, it will be constantly out of phase with the moon. What cannot be known for certain is whether the Avestan terms referred to single days or to pentads; or whether there were two *wišaptaθa* days or only one. There is a peculiar, isolated sequence of the terms in the nominative/vocative plural in stanza 4, where there is no grammatical connection to what precedes or follows. Could such plurals refer to multiple-day periods?

As literature, the *Yašt* has little to recommend itself. One can identify many verse lines of 7, 8, and 9 syllables, yet they seem not to form coherent strophes such as one finds in the great *Yašts*. So, for example, stanza 5 opens with a 16-syllable line with caesura after the seventh syllable (like the Gāthic *ahunawaitī* meter): *yazāi māñham gaociθrəm / bayəm raēwan̄təm xʷarənañhan̄təm* (I shall worship the Moon containing the seed of the Bull, the opulent, glorious god). After this there follows a series of eleven epithets that shows no coherent metrical pattern. Note that besides *Māh*, *Ahura Mazda* and *Miθra* are the only



deities called in the Avesta *baγa* (see [BAGA](#)).

Some of the elements of *Yašt 7* are modeled after elements of *Yašt 6*. Stanza 4 appears to be a muddled attempt to create a strophe describing how the warmth of the moon in Spring allows vegetation to grow (see Bailey, 1956, pp. 38-39). It is partially modeled after *Yt. 6.1*:

āaṭ yaṭ hwarə raoxšne tāpayeiti

*āaṭ yaṭ *hwarə.raocō (cf. Ved. svàrbhānu-) tāpayeiti*

where *Yt 7.4* has:

āaṭ yaṭ māṅhəm raoxšne tāpayeiti

Inexplicably, instead of *mā* (nom. sg.), Geldner's edition has it in the accusative, though MS F1 has *māṅha*, neither of which makes grammatical sense. *Yt. 6.1* continues with *hištəṅti mainyawāṅhō yazatāṅhō satəmca hazəṅrəmca*, giving the full four lines the meaning, "Then when the Sun warms with its brilliance, then when the Sun's light warms, the spiritual Deities are present by the hundreds and thousands." Thereupon follow four lines:

taṭ xvarəṅō haṅbārayeṅti

taṭ xvarəṅō nipārayeṅti

taṭ xvarəṅō baxšəṅti

zəm paiti ahuraδātəm

"(The Deities) together bear the glory, they bring down the glory, they distribute the glory over the earth created by Ahura." In *Yt. 7.3*, after the lines dealing with the 1st-person observation of the moon, there occur five lines which seem to be without context:

hištəṅti aməšā spəṅta

xvarəṅō dārayeṅti

hištəṅti aməšā spəṅta

xvarəṅō baxšəṅti



zqm paiti ahuraδātqm

except that they echo *Yt.* 6.1. “The Beneficent Immortals are present; they hold the glory ... they distribute the glory over the earth created by Ahura.”

Although there is no Pahlavi gloss of the *Yašt* itself, the *Māh Niyāyišn* repeats all the stanzas of the *Yašt*, to which have been composed glosses in Pahlavi, Sanskrit, Persian, and Gujarati (see Dhalla, 1965, pp. 82-111). K. Geldner’s critical edition is the standard Avestan text. Translations include those of F. Wolff, 1910, H. Lommel, 1927,, J. Darmesteter, 1883, 1892, and M. N. Dhalla.

See also [CALENDARS i. PRE-ISLAMIC CALENDARS](#).

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