



RAŠN

RAŠN, Avestan Rašnu, the deity of the ancient Iranian pantheon who functions as the divine Judge. The word *rašnu-* is a primary derivative in *-nu-* (see Wackernagel/Debrunner, §575) of the verb *raz-* (OInd. $\sqrt{raj-}$, IE * $\sqrt{h3reg-}$) “to move in a straight line; to direct.” It occurs both as an adjective “just, *rectus*” and as a proper name. The etymologically related superlative *razišta-* “straightest, most just” is his standing epithet. While there is no reflex of his name in Old Indian, it appears outside the Avesta in theophoric names occurring in the Persepolis Fortification tablets, namely, *Rašnuka, *Rašnudāta, and a dubious *Rašnubar(a). Irrespective of the question of whether Darius I was a Zoroastrian, the onomastics of the tablets can hardly have been influenced by Zoroastrianism, and, therefore, Rašnu must be regarded as a ‘pagan’ old Iranian deity.

The *Yašt* (*Yt.* 12) dedicated to Rašnu is a late redactional collection, in which the author has attempted to appropriate material belonging to the divine Judge for Ahura Mazdā (stanzas 3-4), yet has retained the original verses proper to Rašnu (stanzas 5-6) and then added additional text. The *Yašt* opens with a formulaic query of Ahura Mazdā that is common in late Avestan texts, where Zarathustra asks Ahura Mazdā specifically concerning the *rašnyā uxdahe*, which probably means “in respect to the rule of speech” (understanding *rašni-ā* locative with postposition of *rāzan-/rāšn-* (see Insler, 1975, p. 267). Specifically he asks of the Holy Word (*mąθrahe spəntahe*) three things that are in the sphere of jurisprudence, that is, “the correct law ... the law of judicial procedure ... the decision” (*arš.dātəm ... frāždātəm ... wiciθəm*).



On the meaning of *frāž̥*, compare OInd *prādivāka*- “judge,” i.e., one who tries a legal case (*prāś-*, on which see Benveniste, 1969, pp. 158-61). In verses 5-6 Rašnu is invoked to come in his role of judge to the *warah*. The legal term *warah*- can mean “an oath” or “an ordeal” (see Malandra, 1975, p. 267). That is, the *warah* was a procedure in which the defendant in a case would swear to the veracity of his testimony, and then a means of testing the veracity would be imposed. Like the Vedic judge Varuṇa (see Lüders, 1951, pp. 28-40), Rašnu was invoked at a trial where oaths were ritually solemnized. Thus, verses 5-6: “We invoke, we propitiate lofty Rašnu, the powerful. I invoke even the *urwaθā*, to come to this instituted *warah*, to the fire and the *barasman* [see [BARSOM](#)], to the overflowing cup, to the ordeal-ghee, and to the vegetable oil. Then he will come to thy aid, to this instituted *warah* ...” In this context, fire functions as the embodiment of *aṣa* (truth) and water as the element over which oaths were sworn (cf. *Atharva Veda* 4.16: “and (Varuṇa) is hidden in the meager water”); the oils most likely belonged to the actual ordeal. Verses 7-8 contain lists of epithets in the vocative which are indicative of his nature: truth-possessing (*aṣāum*), most just (*razišta*), most beneficent (*spəništa*), wisest (*waēdišta*), who *knows best from afar (*parakwistəma*), who sees farthest in the distance (*dūraēdarəštəma*), who best supports the trial (**arəθəm bairišta*), who best strikes down the thief (*tāyūm jayništa*) ... who best destroys both the thief and the bandit at this trial (*nasišta tāyūmca hazarhanəmca ahmi arəθe*). The epithets are mostly self-evident and appropriate to the divine Judge, especially his ability to perceive at a distance the secret activities of people. In keeping with the theme of the Judge’s ubiquity the closing stanzas name, with identical formulae, all the places in the world where Rašnu is present.

Although neither Mithra nor Sraoša is mentioned in the *Rašn Yašt*, they appear together in the *Mihr Yašt*. The association of the Judge with Mithra, the deity who has jurisdiction over the inviolability of covenants and treaties, parallels that of Varuṇa with Mitra in the Veda. The *Mihr Yašt* dramatically portrays Mithra driving in his chariot with Rašnu, now on his right (st. 126), now on his left (st. 100). Reminiscent of the Vedic dvandva compound *mitrā-vāruṇā*, the two deities are paired in the expressions *hacimnō miθrō.rašnuca* and *haθra miθrāca rašnuca* (*Yt.* 13.3 and 47, respectively; note also a proper name in Middle Parthian *ršnwmtr* [Henning, 1964, p. 250], in inverse order). In the *Vendīdād* (4.54-55; cf. *Dk.* 8.44.16) Rašnu and Mithra appear in an obscure context that involves in some way “oath-water” (*āpəm saokəntawaitīm*). In *Yt.* 10.41 all three pursue and harry the covenant breakers. Further, Rašnu in liturgy is often invoked together with the female deity Justice (Arštāt; see

AŠTĀD). The close association of the trio Miθra-Sraoša-Rašnu is reflected, not only in the order of the *Yašts* (10, 11, and 12), but also in the order of the days of the month, where days 16, 17, and 18 bear their names, respectively (see [CALENDARS i](#)).

In the Pahlavi books, the prominence of Mithra has greatly diminished, while Rašnu’s old role of divine judge has been confined, together with Mihr and Srōš, to judge of the dead. According to the traditional account given in the *Mēnōg ī xrad* (1.71ff.; tr. Zaehner, pp. 133-34), on the fourth day after death Srōš, as psychopomp, leads the soul on a perilous trip to the Cinwat Bridge (see [ČINWAD PUHL](#)), where Mihr and Rašn await. It is Rašn who holds the scales (*tarāzūg*) and impartially weighs the soul’s deeds. Although there is no mention of Rašn in the *Bundahišn* (chap. 34; esp. GrBd, pp. 223.16-224.8) account of the raising of the dead and the final body (*ristāxēz ud tan ī pasēn*), the Pahlavi gloss on *Y.* 46.5c (quoted DkM, p. 857.14-15) understood the verse eschatologically as “By Rašn is to be quickened the one who is righteous and the one who is wicked [namely, each one is to be held in justice].” His standing epithets in Pahlavi are *rāst* and *ristag*, both “true, just.”

See also [RAŠN YAŠT](#).

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