



RAŠN YAŠT

RAŠN YAŠT, the Middle Persian title given to the twelfth *Yašt* of the Avesta. It is dedicated to the Zoroastrian deity Rašnu (MP. Rašn, Skt. Satyapati-).

RAŠNU

The Avestan proper noun Rašnu ultimately derives from the PIE root **h₃reǵ-* “to direct, make straight” (see Rix, 304, s.v. **h₃reǵ-*) together with the primary suffix *nu-*. C. Bartholomae translated the name as ‘Justice’ (Bartholomae, col. 1516, s.v. *rašnav-* 2), “Name des Gotts der Gerechtigkeit”) while I. Gershevitch argued in favor of the meaning ‘Judge’ (Gershevitch, p. 223; see also Lommel, p. 97). Both of these definitions fit with the figure’s judicial role (on which see below). In contrast, E. Pirart proposed the translation ‘Orientation’ (“l’Orientation,” Pirart, 2006, p. 24), supposing that Rašnu originally represented the ‘straight’ pronunciation of ritual texts (“la prononciation «rectiligne» des textes rituels,” Pirart, 2009, p. 221; see also Pirart, 2006, pp. 46-47).

Rašnu, whose standing epithet is *razišta-* (MP. *razistag*) “straightest,” is invoked five times in the *Yasna* (*Y.* 1.7, 2.7, 16.5, 65.12, 70.3), but does not figure in the Older Avestan portions. He is said to be the son of Ahura Mazda and Ārmaiti and the brother of Sraoša, Miθra, Aši, and the Mazdaiiasnian Daēnā (*Yt.* 17.16). In *Vd.* 4.54-55, Rašnu is depicted presiding over an oath-swearing ritual involving “water which is sulphurous, golden, bestowing proof” (*āpəm saokəntauuaitīm zaraniiauuaitīm vīθušauuaitīm*, *Vd.* 4.54; cf. Schwartz, 1989, pp. 293-95, who translates *āpəm saokəntauuaitīm* as “oath



water”) and harsh penalties are prescribed for anyone committing perjury by “warding off Rašnu and cheating Miθra” (*rašnaošca paiti.sanhəm miθraheca aiβi.druxtəm, Vd. 4.54*).

This passage is seemingly congruent with the broad theme of *Yt. 12* (vv. 5, 9-37, see below) which consists of repeated appeals unto Rašnu to be present at the *varah-*, a term usually understood to mean a ritualised ‘ordeal’ that was undertaken by a defendant to prove their veracity (see Bartholomae, col. 1365, s.v. ²*varah-* “Probe, Prüfung, Ordal,” who compares MP. *war* “oath, ordeal”; see also Avesta, tr. Darmesteter, II, p. 168; Lommel, p. 96; cf., however, Pirart, 2009, pp. 227, 234, who rejects this interpretation, and instead translates *varah-* as “[sacrificial] space”: “l’aire [sacrificielle]”). In the Middle Persian texts, Rašnu functions primarily as a judge of the deceased. He is said to possess a set of “yellow, golden scales” (*tarāzūg ī zard ī zarrēn, AWN 5.5*) in which are weighed an individual’s accumulated sins and virtues. This balance “does not dip (unjustly) on any side: Not for the righteous ones, nor the sinful ones, not for lords nor other rulers. It does not alter so much as a single hair(’s breadth) and possesses no partiality” (*ēc kustag oğrā nē kunēd nē ahlawān rāy ud nē-z druwandān, nē xwadāyān rāy ud nē-z any dahibedān. cand mōy-ēw tāg bē nē wardēd ud āzarm nē dārēd. MX 2.120-21*).

THE RAŠN YAŠT

This *Yašt* has traditionally been considered as one of the ‘minor’ *Yašts* (see Lommel, p. 1) composed at a relatively late period (see Bartholomae, col. 1516, s.v. *rašnav-*, n. “Dem das späte und nichtssagende Stück *Yt.12* gewidmet ist”; see also Lommel, p. 95; Panaino, 1992, p. 160). It is attested in thirteen manuscripts (F1 E1 Pt1 P13 O3 L18 K12 J18 J10 J19 W2 M12 B27) of both the *Khorde Avesta* and pure *Yašt* types. It exists only in Avestan and comprises 39 verses. In his edition of the text, Geldner followed F1, Pt1, L18 by not dividing the hymn into *kardes* “chapters” (see Avesta, ed. Geldner, II, p. 162, fn.; so also Lommel, p. 95). Several manuscripts, however, which belong to the ‘F1’ line, e.g., E1, P13, W2, as well as J10, M12, which belong to the ‘J10’ line, do break the text into 31 such units. In this case, verses 0-8 constitute the first *karde*, and each successive verse represents a new *karde*.

The hymn begins (vv. 1-2) with a brief question and answer session between Ahura Mazdā and an unidentified “truthful one” (*ašauuan-*, presumably Zaraθuštra) on the nature of the “bounteous mantra” (*mąθra- spənta-*). The following six stanzas (vv. 3-8) contain a set of technical instructions dictated by

Ahura Mazdā and relate to the *varah-* (on which see above). This includes the invocatory formulae to be uttered, e.g., “We call, we propitiate Rašnu who is strong ... to this prepared *varah-*” (*zbaiiamahi frīnāmahi rašnūm yim amauuanṭəm ... auui imaṭ varō uzdātəm*, v. 5) as well as certain ritual actions to be performed, such as the direction to “strew forth one-third of the *barəsman-* along the path of the sun” (*θrišūm barəsma frastərənuiiā paitiša hū aδβanəm*, v. 3). The rite is said to be attended by a host of divinities besides Rašnu, including Ahura Mazdā, the Victorious Winds (*vāta vərəθrājanō*), Dāmōiš upamana-, the Kauui-dynasty Glory (*kauuaēm x^varənō*), and the Mazdā-made Radiance (*saoke mazdaδāite*) (vv. 4, 6). The section closes with the praising of Rašnu through a series of 13 vocative forms (vv. 7-8).

The remainder of the *Yašt* (vv. 9-37 = *kardes* 2-30) has been recognized as important for containing the most comprehensive cosmographical account found in the Avesta (see Panaino, 1993-94, p. 119; Skjærvø, 1994, p. 224). Accordingly, each verse begins with the line “Be you, O truthful Rašnu at ...” (*yaṭciṭ ahi rašnūuō ašāum upa ...*), followed by the name of a place, and concludes with a repetition of vv. 5-8, which invite Rašnu to be present. In this way a map of the universe is constructed, consisting of 29 distinct locations. This cosmography is highly stylized: The overall scheme may be divided into seven thematically distinct categories (see below; cf. Windfuhr, p. 628, who makes instead five such divisions) within which there is a preference for triadic or heptadic groupings of verses. This world-view can be presented thus:

Group I ‘Seven Continents’

v. 9: western continent (*arəzahi*), v. 10: eastern continent (*sauuahi*), v. 11: southeastern continent (*fradaδafšu*), v. 12: southwestern continent (*vīdaδafšu*), v. 13: northwestern continent (*vouru.barəšti*), v. 14: northeastern continent (*vouru.jarəšti*), v. 15: central continent (*x^vaniraθəm*);

Group II ‘Aquatic Features’

v. 16: Sea of Wide-bays (*zrایی vourukašəm*), v. 17: Tree of the Saēna bird (*vanəm ... saēnahe*), v. 18: waters (?) of the *Raṅhā* (*aodaēšu raṅhaiiā*), v. 19: source (?), of the *Raṅhā* (*sanake raṅhaiiā*);

Group III ‘General Terrestrial Features’

v. 20: edge of the earth (*karanəm ... zəmō*), v. 21: middle of the earth (*vīmaiδim*



... *zəmō*), v. 22: anywhere on earth (*kuuaciṭ ... zəmō*);

Group IV ‘Mountainous Features’

v. 23: lofty *Harā* (*harq̄m bərəzaitīm*), v. 24: Mount of Good-action (*hukairīm barəzō*), v. 25: Peak of the lofty *Haraitī* (*taērəm haraiθiiā bərəzō*);

Group V ‘Celestial Features I’

v. 26: star Vega (*vanaṇtəm stārəm*), v. 27: star Sirius (*tištrīm stārəm*), v. 28: stars of Ursa Major constellation (*stārō yōi haptōiriṅga*), v. 29: stars which have the origin of water (*stārō yōi afš.ciθra*), v. 30: stars which have the origin of earth (*stārō yōi zəmasciθra*), 31: stars which have the origin of plants (*stārō yōi uruuarō.ciθra*), v. 32: stars of the Beneficent Spirit (*stārō yōi spəntō.mañiauuā*);

Group VI ‘Celestial Features II’

v. 33: moon (*māṅhəm*), v. 34: sun (*huuarəxšaētəm*);

Group VII ‘Heavenly Realms’

v. 35: Endless Lights (*anayra.raocā*), v. 36: Best Existence (*vahištəm ahūm*), v. 37: House of Welcome (*garō.nmānahe*).

The hymn concludes (v. 38) with the standard closing formulae found in all the *Yašts*.

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