



## SAOŠYANT

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**SAOŠYANT**, a term in Zoroastrianism sometimes rendered as “savior” (Bartholomae). This approximation of the meaning, in eschatological contexts only, has the disadvantage of associations with Christian theology. Since the term also occurs frequently in reference to contemporary individuals, including **Zoroaster**, a more neutral translation such as “benefactor” (e.g., Darmesteter; Humbach and Faiss) or “helper” (Lommel) may be preferred. Within the **Avesta** itself, one finds an evolution of the semantics of the term from the **Gathas** of Zoroaster to the **eschatology** of the late strata of the so-called Younger Avesta. In the Pahlavi Books the term is used only in the singular **Sōšāns** to refer to the last of three eschatological savior figures. In the Pahlavi versions of the **Yasna**, **Vendidad**, and **Wispered** the Avestan is always glossed with **sūdōmand** “useful,” etc. There was also a commentator of the late Sasanian period named **Sōšāns**, whose teachings (**cāštag**) are cited in our sources (see West, p. 243).

The morphology of the name is transparent. It regularly formed of an active participle in **-ant-** of the future stem of a verbal root  $\sqrt{sū-}/sau-$  (OInd.  $\sqrt{sū-}/śav-$ ; IE  $*\sqrt{kue}H_1-$  “to swell”). In Old Indian the verb has a semantic range “to swell, be strong, increase, prosper.” In Avestan corresponds **sūra-** (OInd. **śūra-**) “strong,” **yawaēsū-** “ever thriving.” However, there is a further semantic development, “to be of use, profit, advantage” (intransitive), and “to create profit, use, advantage, to further” (transitive). It is in this latter semantic range that the Zoroastrian tradition understood the meaning. *Yt.* 13.128 concludes with the formulaic “we worship the **frawaši** [q.v.] of righteous Astwaṭ-ərəta,”



followed in stanza 129 by an etymological explanation of the name: “who will be the Victorious Saošyant by name ... (he is called) *saošyant* because he will further (*sāwayāt*) all material life.” *Y.* 70.4 has the etymological figure *saošyantō ... suyamna*. The Pahlavi gloss itself is an etymological rendering, as *sūdōmand-* (NPers. *sūdmand*) “useful, profitable, advantageous” is based on the substantive *sūd* “use, profit, advantage” < OIr. \**sūti-*. According to C. Bartholomae (cols. 1561-62), Av. *sawā-* and *sawah-* imply “advantage, profit” in the other life (Insler: “salvation”).

Although *saošyant-* is formed on the future stem, both in the *Gathas* and in the later texts, it is a designation of contemporary persons as well as those in the future. At *Y.* 48.9 the term is self-referential, as Zoroaster demands: “Let it be spoken to me, the poetry of Good Mind! May the Saošyant know how his reward shall be!” Self-referential is also the figure *daēnā- saošyantō* “the Vision of the Saošyant.” At 53.2 Zoroaster speaks of “the Vision of the Saošyant which the Lord gave.” *Y.* 45.11 refers to “a future one (*aparō*: cf. *Y.* 9.2: *aparasciṭ* *saošyantō*) who thereby despises (evil) gods and men ... through the Vision of the Saošyant.” In the plural is found (*Y.* 34.13): “This is the path, O Lord, which Thou didst tell me as Good Mind’s, well-made, along which the Visions (or Daēnā-souls, as Lommel p. 228?) of the Saošyants proceed even with Truth.” With reference to the future, Zoroaster asks (*Y.* 48.12): “To which (men) will come the discernment of Good Mind?” To which he responds (st. 13): “So, they will be Saošyants of the countries [*Pahlavi Y. frašegird-kardār*] ... They, indeed, have been designated as the adversaries of Wrath.” Finally, in a complex metaphor (*Y.* 46.3), Zoroaster asks, “When, o Mazdā, will those bulls of days rise forth to support the world of Truth? With mature teachings (when will) the intellects of the Saošyants (rise forth)?”

Zoroaster’s usage of “Saošyant” to refer both to a contemporaneous person and to people in the future carries over into the later texts. In the former sense, the word occurs only in the plural and seems to refer to individuals of exalted status. In *Y.* 13.3 they are cited together with the *Aməša Spəntas* as spiritual leaders (*ratūš*), as being “most learned, truest in speech, most powerful, most intelligent.” They are to be emulated by those reciting the *Yasna*, who, in *Y.* 70.4, pray: “So that we may speak out (*wācim nāšīma*) with zeal [just as the Saošyants of the countries, being of profit, speak out (*wācim barənti*)], may we be Saošyants, may we be victorious!” The idea of proclamation is contained in the explanation of the phrase *yaṭ ašāi wahištāi* at *Y.* 20.3 “and so (the word) *ašəm* signifies for you, the Saošyants, three

teachings: the entire utterance, the proclamation, the whole utterance of Ahura Mazdā.” Proclamation is also the theme of Y. 14.1: “I shall stand ready, o Aməša Spəntas, to be your praiser, priest, invoker, worshiper, reciter (and) singer ... for the sake of our wellbeing and possession of Truth, (of us) righteous Saošyants. In explanation of the Gathic verse (Y 44.13b) *kaθā drujəm nīš ahmāt ā [nīš.]nāšāmā*, Y. 61.5 has “*nīš.nāšāma* (means, may we as) Saošyants (smite) the Lie.”

A theology of the Saošyants as savior figures appearing at the end of time to accomplish the *Frašō.kərəti* is clearly articulated in later Avestan texts. As a single person, this figure is known generally as the Victorious Saošyant (*saošyant- wərəθrajan-*) and specifically as Astwat.ərəta (see *ASTVAT.ƏRƏTA*). Y. 26.10 (also Yt. 13.145) declares: “We worship all the ... Frawašis of the righteous, from Gaya Marətan (the first man) to the Victorious Saošyant.” According to the belief, he will arise from the Kəsaoya sea (see *KAYĀNSĪH*), sprung from the seed of Zoroaster watched over by 99,999 Frawašis (*Vd.* 19.5; Yt. 19.92;13.62). His mother, to be impregnated by the semen, is known by two names, Ərədat.fədrī and Wīspa.taurwarī; the latter is explained at Yt. 13.142: “she is ‘all-overcoming’ because she will give birth (to him) who will overcome all hostilities of daēwas and men.” In the role of eschatological figures the Saošyants are numbered among the “unborn men who (will) accomplish the Frašō.kərəti” (*frašō.carəθraqm*; Yt. 13.17; 19.22). Haoma exhorts Zoroaster to praise him “for strength as the future Saošyants will praise me” (Y. 9.2). At Yt. 19.89, the Kāwyan Glory (*x<sup>w</sup>arənah*) “will accompany the Victorious Saošyant, as well as (his) other companions, when he will make existence wonderful (*frašəm*), not aging, imperishable, not rotting, not putrefying, ever-living, ever-thriving, when the dead will rise up ...” (see also *KAYĀNIĀN xii*). That is, the primordial paradise of Yima will be reclaimed in the end.

In the Pahlavi tradition, of the three sons of Zoroaster begotten through the preservation of his semen in the Kəsaoya sea, only the last bears the name Sōšyāns. According to the account in the *Bundahišn* (chaps. 33, 34) the first of the sons, Ušədar (= Av. Uxšayaṭ.ərəta) will be born in the year 9970 to usher in the 10th millennium of the Zoroastrian world calendar. He will be followed by Ušədarmāh (= Av. Uxšayaṭ.nəmah) in 10970 to usher in the 11th millennium. In both cases the world will experience a brief period of increased goodness followed by a decline. Finally in 11943 the true and final Saošyant will be born. As Sōšyāns, he will begin the accomplishment of the Frašegird in 11973 with the resurrection of the dead and the performance of the final sacrifice of



the bull Hadayānš, from whose fat the White Hōm will be rendered, whereby all will become immortal.

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