



SRAOŠA

SRAOŠA (MPers. *Srōš*) a major deity (*yazata*) in Zoroastrianism, whose great popularity reserved a place for him in Iranian Islam as the angel *Surōš*. In Avestan, *s(ə)raoša-* occurs both as common noun and as a proper name. It is derived from an *s*-extension of \square *sraw-/sru-* “to hear.” Both finite forms and nominal derivatives are formed. As a common IIr. verb, the basic meaning is “to obey, be compliant,” that is, “to hear and obey.” In Gathic Avestan a finite form occurs, *səraošanē* “I shall be obedient.” A primary derivative in *-ti-* is attested in Ved. *śruṣṭi-* “obedience” and GAv. *asrušti-* “disobedience.” Other derivatives in Av. are *sraošyā-* “punishment” (Xwar. *swy* “disciplinary action”), *sraošin-* “obedient, mindful,” *sraošya-* “deserving of discipline, punishment.” Thus, *sraoša-* falls within the semantic range of “hearkening, obedience, discipline”; *sraošō.carana-* is the “instrument of (administering) obedience, punishment,” and the *sraošāwarəza-* is the individual who is the enforcer of obedience, discipline (including the rooster).

Sraoša in the Gāthās. Although *Sraoša* is never part of the group of the [Aməša Spəntas](#) appearing in later strata of the Avesta, in the *Gāthās* he has a prominent place beside [Aša](#), *Vohu Manah*, and the others. Like the other Entities, *Sraoša* appears sometimes as an abstraction, sometimes as an individual. At *Y.* 33.5 Zarathustra says, “I shall invoke *Sraoša*, mightiest of all” (... *vīspā.mazištəm səraošəm zbayā* ...), where the verb *zbā-* is characteristically used for the invocation of a deity. At *Y.* 43.12 *Sraoša* is named in conjunction with the goddess [Aši](#) “Reward,” foreshadowing his standing epithet in the post-Gāthic literature, *ašya* (see below). There we may translate, “When Thou didst



say to me, ‘Thou hast gone in forethought to Truth, so thou didst not dissemble to me in disobedience,’ (I thought) I must rise up before Obedience will come to me accompanied by wealth-bestowing Reward, who (Ašī) may distribute rewards in abundance to the parties” (*hyaṭ mōi mraoš ašəm jasō fraxšnənē, at tū mōi nōiṭ asruštā pairyaoyžā, usərāidyāi parā hyaṭ mōi ā.jimaṭ, səraošo ašī mąza.rayā hacimnō, yā vī ašiš rānōibyō sawōi [vi]dāyāt*). At *Y.* 44.16 Z. inquires about a “smasher of resistance” (i.e., Vištāspa?) and concludes, “Now, let Obedience come to him through Good Mind, o Mazdā, to him whomever it is that Thou wishest” (*at hōi vohū səraošo jaṇtū mananḥā, mazdā ahmāi yahmāi vaši kahmāicīt*). In these two contexts, which involve obedience or harkening to Ahura Mazdā’s Word (*mąθra*), *sraoša* seems to be meant as a simple substantive. Thus *Y.* 28.5 “By this *mąθra* of Ahura Mazdā shall we proclaim with (our) tongues the greatest obedience, o xrafstras” (... *səwištāi səraošəm mazdāi, anā mąθrā mazištəm, vāurōimaidī xrafstrā hizwā*, where the genitives *sawīštahyā* and *mazdā/mazda’ah/* must be restored *metri causa*); and by implication at 45.5 “Those who will render obedience and respect for this (Word) of mine ...” (*yōi mōi ahmāi səraošəm dąn cayascā ...*).

Hymns to Sraoša. Although there are references throughout the Avesta to Sraoša, most information is contained in two related texts, namely *Yasna* 57 and *Yašt* 11. *Yasna* 56 is a short composition whose stanzas begin with “May Sraoša be here for the worship of X” (*səraošō idā astū* [name(s) in the genitive] *yasnāi*). Unlike most sections of the *Yasna* recitation, *Y.* 57 is typical of the major *Yašts* with its 13 *kardag* (chapter) divisions of the 34 stanzas. Perhaps it was originally counted among the other *Yašts*. If so, once it had been moved to its current position in the *Yasna*, a substitute would have been needed to fill the eleventh position in the *Yašt* collection. This is the *Srōš Yašt Haδōxt*, presumably taken from the *Haδōxt Nask* of the Sasanid Avesta. It too is characterized by a *kardag* division (into 5 chapters) of its 22 stanzas, though it contains little information about Sraoša that is not already in *Y.* 57. Owing to its inclusion in the *Yasna*, the *Srōš Yašt* has a Pahlavi gloss, of which there is also a Sanskrit rendering. Although there is no exact correspondence between the *Yašts* and the days of the month, Sraoša has a fixed place between Mithra and Rašnu, as in the sequence *Yašts* 10-11-12 and the days 16-17-18 of the month. In terms of literary style, *Y.* 57 is composed, for the most part, in the octosyllabic meter typical of much of the *Yašts*. By contrast, *Yt.* 11 shows only sporadically any metrical pattern and seems to be generally a loose compilation of diverse materials. The *Srōš Bāj*, though an important daily *drōn* recitation, is simply composed of passages from other texts.



Sraoša in the non-Gāthic Avesta. Owing to the richness of Sraoša’s persona outside the Gāthās, it is unlikely that he was a creation out of Zarathustra’s vision. Since there is no obvious counterpart in the Vedas, it may be concluded that he is a purely Iranian deity. His close connection with ritual as well as his association with Mithra may suggest a common functional heritage with Ved. Bṛhaspati who is similarly associated with the martial deity Indra, though this seems remote. As an examination of his epithets reveals, Sraoša is very much a man of action in his own right. In outward appearance he is handsome (*huraoda*), tall (*bərəza*) and powerful in his arms (*bāzuš.aojah*). His youthfulness is emphasized in that he is the strongest, bravest, swiftest, fleetest and most dreaded from afar of youths (*aojišta, tancišta, θβaxšišta, parō.katarštəma yūnqm*). Elsewhere he is simply brave (*taxma*), swift (*āsu*) and powerful (*aojahwant*). He is bold (*daršita*), valorous (*hqm.vərətiwant*) and armed with a mighty wooden club (*darši.dru*). Through his physical prowess he is a smasher of resistance (*vərəθrājan*) and a head smasher (*kamərədō.jan*) of the demons, which allows him to rule at will (*vasō.xšaθra*) and be conquering (*vanwanah*). Particularly important is his role as guardian and protector. Thus he is called most protective (*θrātōtəma*), a guardian (*harətar*) and overseer (*aiβyāxštar*). Even houses protected by Sraoša (*nmqna sraošō.pāta*) are worshiped. In general, he, with other deities, is a promoter of the material world (*frādat.gaēθa*). He shares with Mithra and men an enigmatic epithet *tanumqθra*, which perhaps means “who embodies the holy word.” He also possesses high intelligence (*bərəziδī-*). Finally, Sraoša has the standing epithet *ašya*. As a secondary derivative of *aši*, it has the sense of being connected in some way to *aši*. However, it is unclear whether this means that he is a companion of the goddess Aši or that he is a source of rewards. If the epithet is based on the Gāthic passage quoted above, it is likely to refer to the goddess Reward. The Pahlavi Srōš Ahlāy (MMPers. *srwš’hr’y* “The Column of Glory”) is of no help, since it derives from OPers. *artāwan-* (see [AŠAVAN](#)), showing that Zoroastrian tradition held that *ašya* was a derivative of *aša*. Manichean Sogdian *srwšrt* preserves the historically correct form; otherwise, if it followed Middle Persian, it would have been *’rt’w* “electus.”

As already seen in the Gāthās, Sraoša is associated with harkening to the holy word (*mqθra*). This role is expanded in the non-Gāthic Avesta to include ritual, speech, and religion in general. According to his *Yašt*, he was the first to strew barsman (§ 6) (see [BARSOM](#)), the first to recite the five Gāthās of Zarathustra (§ 8), and also the first to worship at the strewn barsman, clearly a priestly function. Since Ahura Mazdā revealed the Religion to him, he is the teacher of



the Religion (*Yt.* 11.14: *daēnō.disō + daēnayā*) In his warrior role, his weapon is the club, yet in his priestly function his weapons are the Ahuna Vairya prayer, his “victorious weapon,” the Yasna Haptañhāiti, the Fšūsō.mąθra, as well as all sacrificial acts (*Y.* 57.22).

By far, the theme of Sraoša’s protection of the world from demonic forces dominates his hymns. This seems to be the primary source of his popularity throughout the history of Zoroastrianism. “Three times the same day or the same night he descends to this continent, shining Xwaniratha, in his hand holding the weapon, sharp at the blade, easily wielded at the head(s) of the demons” (*Y.* 57.31; see also *GrBd* 26.49) Especially active at night, he has “not slept since the two Spirits created their creations” (*Y.* 57.17) and “not falling asleep he guards and protects Mazdā’s creatures, he who protects the entire material world with his upraised weapon after sunset” (*Y.* 57.16). Although he routs the demons indiscriminately, Ahura Mazdā “created (him) as the antagonist of Wrath with the gory club (*Yt.* 11.15: *aēšma xrwi.dru*). Thus, “after sunset he smites Wrath with his shattering weapon (inflicting) a gory wound” (*Y.* 57.10). As protector, he wards off evil calamities and famines from this house, settlement, clan, and country, “in whose house he is satiated (with food and) treated with hospitality” (*Y.* 57.14).

In the Pahlavi literature. Whether because of the paucity of preserved Avestan texts or because of historical developments, the Pahlavi literature, while continuing what is known from the Avesta, amplifies the roles of Srōš in a number of ways. Most striking is his association with Mihr and Rašn. In the Avesta, all that is said is that in battle, “Mithra drives the frightened regiments hither, Rašnu drives them thither, Sraoša *ašya* chases them everywhere” (*Yt.* 10.41). Yet, in the later tradition these three deities play a major role in the judgment of the deceased’s soul and in its conveyance to the reward it has earned, as they sit at the Cinwad Bridge (*DD* 13.2-3) (see [ČINWAD PUHL](#)). In respect to the deceased, Srōš is to be invoked to protect the soul for the first three days after death, as it hovers in a liminal situation threatened by demonic powers (Suppl. Texts to the *Šnēš* 17.3). On the fourth day, as psychopomp, he escorts the soul to the bridge, where judgment takes place (*MX* 2.114ff.; *GrBd* 26.50). As might be expected, at the Frašegird (see [FRAŠŌ.KERĒTI](#)) Srōš accompanies Ohrmazd for the judgment of the souls (*Zādsp* 35.31-33). And at that time he also smites *Āz* (*PRDD* 48.94) as well as his arch-enemy Xešm (*GrBd* 34.27; *MX* 8.13 ff.)

Srōš’s prowess in combating demons and protecting the material world



contributes to his apparent elevation to a position of near equal earthly authority with Ohrmazd. Thus, “Srōš holds the material world (*gētīg*; see [GĒTĪG AND MĒNŌG](#)) through the performance of protection (by command) from Ohrmazd. Just as Ohrmazd is ruler in the spiritual world and the material, Srōš is the ruler of the material world. As He says: Ohrmazd is the protector of the soul in the spiritual world and Srōš is the protector of the body in the material world” (*GrBd* 26.46-48). His “proper function (*xwēškārīh*), the defense and protection of the those living in the material world, is by the command of the Creator” (*DD* 27.6). In the context of ritual, the *PRDD* (56.3) states—as an explanation of why, unlike the other deities who are to be worshiped together with Ohrmazd, Srōš is to be worshiped alone—that he is the lord and ruler (*xwadāy ud dahibed*) of the world. In contrast to the *Srōš Yašt*, where he comes down to the central continent, Xwaniratha (see [HAFT KEŠVAR](#)), in the Pahlavi books he exercises his sovereignty (*xwadāyīh*) mostly in Arzah and Sawah (*GrBd* 26.55), but also in *Ērānwēz* (*MX* 44.25). This sovereignty further became a model for earthly rulers, who are called *srōšahlāy ī gētīg* (*DkM*, p. 585.14).

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