



TIŠTRYA

TIŠTRYA (Pahl. *Tištār*, NPers. *Teštār*), an important Old Iranian astral divine being (*yazata*-), to whom the eighth hymn (*Tištār Yašt*) of the Later Avestan corpus was dedicated (Panaino, 1990).

Tištarya should be identified with the most brilliant star visible in the firmament, Sirius (*alpha Canis Maioris*), although different opinions have been expressed in the past on this point (for the state of the question, see Panaino, 1995, pp. 1-14). This identification is confirmed by Plutarch (*De Iside et Osiride* 47; cf. *Yt.* 8.44). It is also very probable that Vedic *Tiṣya* (RV V.54.13; X.64.8) corresponds to Av. *Tištarya*, according to the etymological explanation proposed by Forssman (1968), which puts the star Sirius in a direct and clear relationship with the three stars of Orion's Belt (*delta, epsilon, zeta Orionis*) by its name as well as by observation and by the account of a few mythological passages in Vedic literature. In these, the asterism of Orion's Belt was represented as an arrow called *iṣus trikāṇḍā*, shot by *Tiṣya* (or *Rudra*) towards *Prajāpati* in order to punish him because of a sexual sin committed against his daughter, who appeared in the body of a "female gazelle" (*rohīt*-); for the Indian passages concerning this astral myth see Forssman (1968, pp. 58-59). Thus Sirius would have been named as "the one who belongs to the three stars": IE. **tri-str-o-m* "group of three stars"; then IE. **tri-str-i̯o-s* by dissimilation > IIr. **ti-str-i̯a-* > Av. *tištriia-*. Ved. *Ti-ṣyà-*, for his part, would derive from **ti-šr-i̯a-* < **ti-str-i̯a-* by a secondary dissimilation of -t- by analogy with **púṣiya-*, masc. "he who makes prosper." (*Púṣya-* is the name of the sixth or eighth *nákṣatra*- "lunar station," with which *Tiṣya* will be later



associated.) Forssman (1968, p. 56) would identify **púšiya* with the second part of the name of the Av. demon *a-paoša-* [see [APŌŠ](#)], the direct antagonist of Tištrya. But we can consider an alternative, in which Ved. *tišya-* comes directly from IIr. **ti-str-ija-*, through the simplification of the cluster *-str-* to *-š-* (Panaino, 1995, pp. 31-33; Forssman, 1968, p. 56, n. 92). The linguistic correspondence with Greek Seirios has been assumed by Fischer (1969), but it remains questioned (Panaino, 1995, p. 35).

The symbolic link with the astral theme of the heavenly “arrow” is strongly present in various Oriental uranographies, particularly with respect to the star Sirius, which in India was shot by the archers Tiásya or Rudra, but which in Iran corresponds to Tištrya himself. In fact, according to *Yt.* 8.6-7 and 37-38, Tištrya flies in the sky as the arrow shot by the most valiant archer of the Aryans, i.e., the hero *Ṛṛaxša* (Kellens 1977). This image was already present in the Mesopotamian celestial lore, where Sirius was named *KAK-SI-SÁ* “arrow” in Sumerian and *šiltahu* or *šukūdu* “arrow” in Akkadian (Götze, 1923; Gnoli, 1963; Panaino, 1995, pp. 28-32, 47-59). We may notice that also in later Egypt Sirius (*Sōthis*) was the target of the arrow shot by *Sathis*, while in China, the celestial Emperor shot an arrow against the sky jackal, i.e., Sirius (*Tian láng*). It is worthwhile to recall that in later times *Tištār* and the planet *Tīr* (which is sometimes by folk etymology erroneously associated with the meaning “arrow” of Mid. Pers. *tīr*, which actually derives from OIr. **tigra-/i-*) became direct antagonists, but a strange and complex relation actually existed between them. Already in Mesopotamian texts the Sumerian name of Sirius (*KAK-SI-SÁ*) was sometimes used also for that of the planet Mercury. In addition, the god of the planet Mercury, *Tīriya* in western Iran, a protector of the scribes, as in the parallel cases of *Thoth-Mercury* in Egypt and *Nabû-Mercury* in Babylon (Panaino, 1995, pp. 62-85), probably was associated with [Tištrya](#), but after the (later) demonization of the planets he became a demon (see *tir*). Relics of the original positive role of *Tīriya* can be seen in the Pahlavi tradition which assumes that *Tištār* and *Tīr* were the same being (*Ir. Bd.* V, B, 12), while the same source contrariwise states that *Tīr* should correspond to *Apōš*; the later and modern well known custom, still extant among Zoroastrians, to call *Tīr Yašt* the hymn to Tištrya attests to a direct identification of the two names and beings.

Tištrya is the Iranian protagonist of the myth of the liberation of the waters, which, at least to a certain extent, could be structurally and functionally compared with that of Vedic *Indra Vṛtrahān*; the parallel passages in *Yt.*

8.56-61 and 14.48-53 (*Wahrām Yašt*) have been discussed in this Indo-Iranian framework by Benveniste (1934, pp. 36-37, 177-99) and Panaino (1995, pp. 36-45); but see also Kellens (2001, pp. 478-79) for a fresh analysis of the problems involved.

The Avestan hymn to Tištrya contains two different mythical events, one concerning Tištrya's fight with Apaoša and the latter with the Pairikās, which probably correspond to shooting stars. The first myth (stanzas 13-34) describes the combat of the *yazata* against Apaoša for the possess and liberation of the waters contained in the (cosmic) ocean Vourukaša. The two champions appear in the body of a horse, but while Tištrya is a beautiful white stallion (*auruša-*), his antagonist is a black (*sāma-*), glabrous, and horrible horse. It is possible—but the passage is unclear (see *Yt.* 8.8)—that also the Vouru.kaša assumes the form of a mare, for whose possession the two male horses come to fight. Before the combat Tištrya assumes three different *avatars*, taking ten days for each; he successively changes the form of his body into a fifteen-year-old man, a bull with golden horns, and finally a splendid white horse. These three transformations (which correspond to three of Vərəθryna's *avatars*) probably should astronomically cover the period beginning with the heliacal rising of the star Sirius in July and lasting till the first appearance of the meteor showers between August and September (Panaino, 1995, pp. 15-24).

In the body of a white horse Tištrya attacks Apaoša, but after three days and nights he is defeated, because the *yazata* was not sufficiently worshipped by the Aryans (see *Yt.* 8.24). Only after a kind of potential or incrementing *yasna*—offered by Ahura Mazdā himself in favor of his champion (*Yt.* 8.25) can Tištrya move again against Apaoša, and at midday he defeats him who runs away; thus the waters of the Vouru.kaša are free and can be distributed among the seven *karšvars* by Tištrya with the help of Satavāesa (*Yt.* 8.32). The entire story probably offered a sufficient indeterminateness in the timing of the autumnal rains on the Iranian lands; this in fact explains why the month dedicated to Tištar (i.e., the fourth of the Zoroastrian calendar; see [CALENDAR](#)) did not correspond to the actual month of the true liberation of the waters and of the rains. The day dedicated to Tištar is the 13th of the month; also in the Sogdian calendar *tyš* [tīš] was the name of the same day (Henning, 1939, p. 95; 1945, p. 149, line 19 = *SP* II, p. 208), known also from al-Bīrūnī and Mount Mugh documents, while in the Parthian calendar it was *tyry*, and in the Choresmian *tyry* (Tok-kala) or *gyry* (al-Bīrūnī).

According to the *Tištar Yašt*, other constellations and single stars, in particular



Satavāesa, probably Fomalhaut (*AlphaPiscis Austrini*), collaborate with Tištrya. In the same hymn (st. 12), the Tištryāeinī stars also are mentioned; astronomically they seem to correspond to the constellation *Canis Minor*, but it is probable that they were also the “wives of Tištrya” (Klingenschmitt, 2000, p. 225).

The second myth concerns the fight of Tištrya with the Pairikās, led by a demoness called Pairikā Dužyairyā “The Bad year Witch” (see [DUŽYAIRYĀ](#)); these demonesses, with the support of the Yātus (whose astral role is unknown), were assumed (*Yt.* 8.8) to be *stārō kərəmā* “worm stars” (but, perhaps, it is a compound *stārō.kərəmā* “having starred worms” or “belonging to the star-worm showers” (problems and other solutions have been discussed by Scherer, 1953, p. 24, n. 1). They were expressly flung by Anra Manyu (*Yt.* 8.39) with the purpose of bringing chaos into the (apparently) regular movement of the (fixed) stars, which in fact were strictly connected with the falling of the rains and with the return of the waters. Tištrya and the other stars were also named *afšciθra-*, generally translated as “having the seed/origin” of the waters (or of the rains), but possibly meaning “having the brilliance of the waters/rains” (Panaino, 1990, pp. 92-93; cf. Cantera, 1997). Tištrya (like Miθra) can get in and out of the human time, as shown by Kellens (2003; Panaino, 2003).

In the Pahlavi texts Tištar was still worshipped; he was mentioned in various Pahlavi passages, in particular in the astronomical and astrological chapters of the *Bundahišn* (chaps. II and V; see Henning, 1942; MacKenzie, 1956; Raffaelli, 2001), where he plays the role of direct antagonist of the planet Tīr and the leader of the fixed stars of the Eastern quarter (*Tištar xwarāsān spāhbed*), but under the general command of the Pole Star. Also important is the account about the cycle of Tištar as summarized in the *Anthology of Zādsparam* 3.7-17. The *Dādestān ī Dēnīg* 92, gives an additional description of the liberation of the waters and rains (Gignoux, 1988). Various collaborators of Tištar (*hamkārān*) are listed in these sources (Panaino, 1995, pp. 87-94), but very remarkable is the presence of the *xar-ī se pāy* “the three-legged ass,” probably a kind of Iranian unicorn (Panaino, 2001). Tištar, according to the *Šāyest nē šāyest* 22.3, is the protector of travelers (Kotwal, 1969, p. 91). A probable iconography of Tištrya (in Sogdian Tiš) has been recently identified by Grenet (apud Marshak, 2001: 238) in some Sogdian paintings (Grenet and Lee, 1988; Grenet and Marshak, 1998) or on the ossuary from Kaška-darya (Grenet and Pinaul, 1997, p. 1059).



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