



VĀYU

VĀYU “Wind, Atmosphere, Space,” name of a deity. Indo-Iranian religion recognized two wind gods: Av. *vayu*, Ved. *vāyú*, and Av. *vāta-*, Ved. *vāta-*. In Iranian the latter is both a deity and the natural phenomenon (cf. MPers., Parth. *wād*, Kušān coins OAAO, SogdB *w’t*, Khot. *bāta-*; see further, Bailey, p. 276). By contrast, in the Avesta *vayu-* is always a proper name, never an appellative. Further, the Middle Persian evidence suggests that, as an appellative, OIr. *wāyu-* included “atmosphere” as the realm of the wind’s activity. In Avestan the name appears as *vayu-* with shortened a preceding *y* (cf. Parth. *wyw*). The peculiar acc. sg. *vaēm* is a corruption of **vayum*, while *vayān* of Nyāyīšn 1.1 as acc. sg. is perplexing (but see Schwartz, 1975). As H. Humbach observed, SogdB *wyšprkr* /*wēšparkar*/ is an Eliranian form of an OIr. name plus epithet which is attested in Av. *vayuš uparō.kairyō*. This then explains the deity found on Kušān coins iconographically identified as Śiva, but whose name is given as OEŠO /*wēšo*/.

The name derives from the verb *vā-* “to blow” (IE **√H2weH1-*) and is one of a few primary derivatives in *-yu-* in Indo-Iranian, the only other such word that is common being Ved. *manyú-*, Av *mainyu-* (AiGr II, 2, p. 842). Vedic *vāta-* and GAv. *vāta-* (Y. 44.4) are sometimes trisyllabic, *va’ata-* (< **H2weH1-nt-o-*; EWA II, p. 542, thus wrongly AiGr II, 2, p. 587). The tradition preserved in Yt. 15 attempted an etymology of the name *vayu-*. In stanzas 43-44 Vāyu explains the meaning of his names, *vayu*, *apayate*, and *vanō.vīspā*, with the formula:

The reason that I am called *vayu* (*apayate*, *vanō.vīspā*) is that I



pursue (attain, conquer) both creations, both that which Spənta Mainyu created and that which [Anra Mainyu](#) created.

awaṭvayuš (apayate, vanō.vīspā) nāma ahmi yaṭwa dāma vayemi
(vayemi: to √way- “to pursue, chase”; apayemi, vanāmi) yasca
daθaṭspəntō mainyuš, yasca daθaṭanrō mainyuš

The form yas° where one expects yaṭ° is due to imitation of the phrase Y. 57.17, Yt. 13.76 yaṭmainyū dāmaṇ daiḍītəm yasca spəntō mainyuš yasca anrō.

Vāyu is a complex, multifaceted deity. While the depiction of Vāyu in Yt. 15 is basically that of a martial deity capable of protecting the creation of Spənta Mainyu, elsewhere in the Avesta he appears as a feared god of death. In the Pahlavi books a very clear distinction is made between the Good Wāy (Wāy ī weh) and the Bad Wāy (Wāy ī wattar). Further, in the Avesta, he is superior not only to both Spənta Mainyu, the Beneficent Spirit, and Anra Mainyu, the Evil Spirit, but also to [Ahura Mazdā](#), who must entreat him for aid. As Philip G. Kreyenbroek has shown (see [COSMOGONY AND COSMOLOGY i. In Zoroastrianism/Mazdaism](#)), ancient Iranians, like their Vedic counterparts, entertained a variety of conceptions regarding creation and the formation of the cosmos. On the basis of the much later Pahlavi sources, one can identify one scenario where there was a primordial condition of infinite Space (Vāyu) and infinite Time ([Zruwan](#)), from which the dualities of finite space and time evolved as the requisites of the creation of the world. The close association of Space-Time is already foreshadowed in the Avesta, where Vāyu shares the epithet darəyō.xwādata- (Pahl. dagrand-xwadāy) with Zruwan. Thus, in the [Sih Rōzag](#) (see below) Wayu, Θβāša (Space; = Pahl. Spihr), and both Infinite Time (zruwan- akarana-) and Time of Long-dominion (zruwan- darəyō.xwādata-) are invoked together. Indeed, the cosmogonic priority of Time became the central thesis of Zurwanite theology during the Parthian and Sassanid periods (see Zaehner). In the [Bundahišn](#) account of creation, we read: “Between them (Ohrmazd and Ahreman) was the Void; some call it Wāy” (1.4). That is the primordial situation. Later in the account (1.26), however:

(Ohrmazd) created the form of the Good Wāy, since Wāy was necessary. Some say ‘Wāy of long- dominion.’ And He fashioned forth the creation with the assistance of Wāy of long-dominion, since when He created the creation Wāy was necessary as an



instrument of His for the task.

ā-š kirb ī wāy ī weh frāz-brēhēnīd ciyōn wāy abāyast. ast kē wāy ī
dagrand-xwadāy frāz-gōwēd. u-š dām pad ayārīh ī wāy ī dagrand-
xwadāy frāz-brēhēnīd, cē ka-š dām-iz dād wāy-iz abzār-ē ī-š pad
kār andar abāyast

The implication here is that the author of the Bundahišn is attempting to relegate what in another theology (Zurwānite?) was Wāy's creative independence, to Ohrmazd's sovereignty over creation.

In Zaraθuštra's vision, it appears that Ahura Mazdā is the creator of the two Spirits as Twins (yēmā), an adaptation of the Indo-European cosmogonic myth of primal twins (see Lincoln). Martin Schwartz (forthcoming) has demonstrated that the duality of the two Spirits follows from the basic sense of Indo-Iranian manyu- as embracing intense mental activity that can manifest itself either in violence and destruction or in benign creativity. He has suggested that this should be regarded as parallel to the splitting of Vāyu, rather than agreeing with [Georges Dumézil](#), who went so far as to see in Zaraθuštra's two mainyu-s a sublimation of the two Vāyu-s of the inherited pantheon, though this was in the context of his tripartite theory (see also Widengren). Be that as it may, one can suppose that once Vāyu, as infinite space above the categories of good and evil, became finite, he split in two. As such, he assumed the part of the benevolent, if at times violent, Wind, on the one hand, and that of the evil bringer of death, on the other. Vedic Vāyu and Avestan Vayu appear to have few common traits. With some exceptions the former always is invoked together with [Indra](#) (vāyū índrasca) and in the context of the ritual is the first to partake of soma. Yet, as noted by Wikander, in the Indian epic, the Mahābhārata, Vāyu's nature is embodied, ambivalently, in the person of his human son, Bhīma (the Terrible), who is loving and protective of his family, on the one hand, and brutally violent with foes, on the other. So, it would seem that the Indo-Iranian deity was regarded with ambivalence as having both a benevolent and malevolent side of his personality.

Since Ahura Mazdā must request the ability to strike down Anra Mainyu's creatures, Vāyu seems to exercise dominion over both creations. This suggests that in some circles Vāyu enjoyed a universality that overshadowed both Ahura Mazdā and Anra Mainyu. In fact, [H. S. Nyberg](#) imagined that Vāyu was



the supreme deity of a particular community, just as Ahura Mazdā and [Miθra](#) also had their respective communities in which they reigned supreme. The idea of rival sectarian communities in pre-Zoroastrian Iran has been generally ignored by scholars.

In Yašt 15 of the Avesta, a picture of Vāyu's nature can be painted mostly on the basis of his various epithets. His standing epithet is uparō.kairya- "having superior skill." He is strong (uṡra-), swift (aurwa-) and fleet (taxma-). In appearance he is broad-chested (pərəθu.wara-), broad-hipped (pərəθu.sraoni-), high-stepping (bərəzi.pāḍa-) and high-girdled (uskāt.yāsta-) with golden helmet (zaranyō.xaoḍa-), cape (-pusa-; cf. images of OAAO, e.g., Rosenfield, p. 91 and coins 149, 150), necklace (-mina-), vestment (-wastra-), shoes (-aoθra-) and girdle (-aiβyāṇha-). He is a warrior who has a golden chariot (zaranyō.wāṣa-) with golden wheels (zaranyō.caxra-) whose yoke-straps are firm (dərəzi.yaoxəḍra-). His weapons are golden (zaranyō.zaya-), and he has a sharp spear (tižyaršti-), whose (blade) is broad (pərəθwaršti-) and whose (thrusts) are impetuous (+wīžyaršti-: see Mayrhofer, 1979, no. 384). Given this image of the god, it is not surprising that in the Bundahišn he is the patron of the warrior or noble caste, the [artēštārān](#) (Bd. 26.28). On the epithet list in the Yašt, see below.

Although Yt. 15 paints a picture of a mighty, benevolent deity who protects the creation of Spənta Mainyu and who harkens to the entreaties of [ašawans](#), there is the malevolent side of his nature that is only hinted at in the Yašt, but which has explicit expression in the [Vendidad](#), [Nyāyišn](#), and [Aogəmadaēcā](#). Vendidad 5.8 and 5.9 have the repeated: astō.wiḍōtiš dim bandayeiti wayō dim bastəm nayeiti, speaking of a dying man, "Astō.wiḍāti binds him; Vāyu leads him bound." The Pahlavi gloss follows word for word the Avestan: astōwidād ōy bandēd wāy ī wattar ōy bast nayēd, and vs. 9 has the comment: ast kē ēdōn gōwēd ē wāy ī weh ān hamāg barēd, "Some say, 'the Good Wāy bears them all.'" Apparently the commentator wished to distinguish, as we shall see, the Bad Wāy who leads away the soul, while the Good Wāy carries the righteous soul to heaven. The Bundahišn (27.43, 44) makes a related statement:

It is Astōwidād[/[Astwihād](#), the demon of death, i.e.], the Bad Wāy, who takes the breath-soul.

astwihād wāy ī wattar kē gyān stānēd. ciyōn gōwēd kū: ka dast abar mardōm mālēd būšāsp, ka-š sāyag abar abganēd tab, ka-š



cašm wēnēd gyān be zanēd.

As He says, ‘when (his) hand strokes a man, it is lethargy; when he casts his shadow, it is fever; when he sees his eye, he slays the breath-soul; and they call (this) death.’” Verses 78-81 of the Aogəmadaēcā list paths of dire circumstances which one can escape, but not that “which belongs to merciless Vāyu” (yō vayaōš anamarəždikahe), meaning that death is inescapable. There are indications in Yt. 15 that lurking behind the ašawan Vāyu, is a sinister Vāyu. When Ahura Mazdā entreats Vāyu, the boon He asks for is “that I may strike down the creatures of Anra Mainyu, by no means what belongs to Spənta Mainyu” (Yt. 15.4: yaθa azəm nijanāni anrahe mainyəuš dāmanəm naēciš awat yō spəntahe). And when the worshipers invoke Vāyu it is with the formula: “We worship that (nature) of thine, o Vāyu, which belongs to Spənta Mainyu” (Yt. 15.5; Sīh Rōzag 2.21: aētaṭ tē vayō yazamaide yaṭ tē asti spəntō.mainyaom).

Yašt 15, the Yašt dedicated to Vāyu, actually bears the Pahlavi title Rām Yašt, even though the minor deity Rāman is nowhere mentioned in the Yašt. In the order of the days of the month, Rām immediately precedes Wād. The Sīh Rōzag contains two litanies dedicated to the deities of the 30 days of the month. In many cases, subjoined to the deity of the particular day are invocations of other deities who do not have their own name day. To the 16th day of Miθra subjoined is Rāman. Yet, Rāman has also his proper day, the 21st, and to him have been subjoined Wayu, Øβāša, and both Infinite Time (zrwan- akarana-) and Time of Long-dominion (zrwan- darəyō.xwaδāta-). It is curious that Vāyu occurs here and not under the 22nd day, Vāta. At Y. 6.2 miθrəm vouru.gaoyaoitīm ... yazamaide is immediately followed by rāma xwāstrəm yazamaide. Similarly, at Vd. 3.1, Rāman follows Miθra: miθrəmca wouru.gaoyaoitīm jaiḍyaṭ rāmaca xwāstrəm. In these two cases, one finds a more natural order of ‘Miθra of wide-pastures’ and ‘Rāman of good pastures.’ The ultimate reason for the connection between Vāyu and Rāman remains obscure, though the Bundahišn (26.28-29) attempts an equation:

Rām, whom one calls Good Wāy of long-dominion, is himself Wāy of long-dominion who, among the Spiritual Deities, has as his the proper activity chieftainship of the Warriors. (29) And when the soul (gyān) of the righteous crosses the [Cinwat-bridge](#), the Good Wāy takes his hand and brings him to his proper place. One calls



(him) ‘Rām’ for the reason that he is the giver of pleasure (rāmišn-dādār) to the whole world. (30) But when the Bad Wāy strikes the life-breath (gyān) from the body, this Good Wāy receives it and gives it contentment.

rām ī wāy ī weh ī dagrand-xwadāy gōwēd xwad ast wāy ī dagrand-xwadāy kē andar mēnōgān artēštārān- sālārīh xwēškārīh dārēd. ud ruwān ī ahlawān ka pad cēhwidarag widerēd, wāy ī weh dast gīrēd, ō ān ī xwēš gāh barēd. ē rāy rām gōwēd cē rāmišn-dādār ō hamāg gēhān. ka-z wāy ī wattar gyān az tan be zanēd, ōy wāy ī weh be padīrēd ud hunsandīh be dahēd.

The Yašt itself is a late editorial compilation of various sources, much of which has been assembled by a redactor who understood little Avestan. Like others among the ‘Great’ Yašts, the stanzas are segmented according to the kardah system. The first stanza seems to have been taken from two different sources, in that the first two lines begin with the formula yazāi (name of deity) “I shall worship” (entities which have nothing to do with either Rāman or Vāyu), while the next two have the formula with the name of the deity (namely, Vāyu) followed by yazamaide “we worship” and zbayamahi “we invoke.” Stanzas 2-41 are segmented according to the individual petitioner (see below). The final kardah, stanzas 42-57, is mostly concerned with Vāyu’s names and epithets, and occasions of distress when one should invoke Him by his names.

With stanzas 43-44 begin a series of names of Vāyu. These names appear to be citation names, that is, words, which have been taken from originally different contexts and inserted here. Thus, apayate appears to be dat. sg. of the part. pres.; wanō.wīspā might have originally been nom./acc. pl. fem., while wohwaršte could represent loc. sg. masc., nom./acc. du. fem., or even acc. pl. masc. The effort in these two stanzas is to etymologize the names. Stanzas 45-48 contain a list of epithets, which are rather perplexing. Whoever compiled the list seems to have had little idea what the words meant or how they should be cited; and the method of citation is reminiscent of the late Sassanid *Frahang ī ōim*). Words ending in a and ə are apparently vocatives, while those ending in ō and īš are nominative. Other items are hard to judge: for example xwarənā, aiβi.xwarənā and windixwarənə; or saocahi and bucahi, which may well be 2nd sg. act. verb forms. It is also curious that some epithets, which occur in the Yašt are absent from the list: uparō.kairya, wimanəkarə, and those in stanzas 54 and 57. Like the lists of Ahura Mazdā’s epithets (Yt. 1)

this list probably had some apologetic purpose in addition to the magical properties of the names.

A feature which Yt. 15 has in common with other Yašts, namely, 5, 9, (16), and 17, is a formulaic series of supplicants who petition the deity for boons. The most extensive series is found in Yt. 5. The other Yašts, though much abbreviated, generally follow the order of Yt. 5, and it might be tempting to see in Yt. 5 the model, which the others imitate. Yt. 15 follows Yt. 5 in the initial series: Ahura Mazdā, Paraδāta Haošyaṇha, Yima, Aži Dahāka, Ōraētaona, Kərəsāspa (for the latter four, see [JAMŠID](#), [AŽDAHĀ](#), [FERĒDŪN](#), [KARSĀSP](#)) except that Yt. 15 inserts Taxma Urupi between Haošyaṇha and Yima. Between Kərəsāsp and Zaraθuštra in Yt. 5 are ten men omitted in Yt. 15, but where Yt. 15 inserts Aurwasāra (absent in Yt. 5). Further, in place of Zaraθuštra, Yt. 15 has Hutaosā, and then in place of Vištāspa, Zairiwairi, and Arəjaṭaspa (for whom, see [KAYĀNIĀN ix. Kauui Vištāspa ...](#), [AYĀDGĀR Ī ZARĒRĀN](#), [ARJĀSP](#)). Yt. 15 concludes with ‘maidens.’ Further, even where the names match up between the two Yašts, the wording is not always identical. For example, Yt. 5.17-18 “The Creator, Ahura Mazdā, worshipped Her in [Arya Vaējah](#) of the good [Dāityā](#) (river). Then He entreated Her, ‘Grant me this boon [o good, most strong Ardwī Sūrā [Anāhitā](#)], that I may instigate the son of Puruśaspa, righteous Zaraθuštra, to think ..., to speak ..., to act according to the Religion.” In contrast, Yt. 15 has: “The Creator, Ahura Mazdā, worshipped Him in Arya Vaēja, etc. He entreated Him, ‘Grant me this boon [Vāyu, who has superior skill] that I may slay the creatures of Anra Mainyu, but not that which belongs to Spənta (Mainyu).’” The conclusion to be drawn from this and other examples is that Yt. 15 is not simply appropriating material from Yt. 5, but rather, drawing on some common source.

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