



## VISPERAD

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**VISPERAD** (or Visprad), name of a lengthy Avestan text divided into 24 chapters (Pahl. *kardag*, Pers. *karda*); the name derives from Av. *vīspe ratawō* meaning “all the *ratu*-s.” It was never meant to stand alone, its chapters being inserted for recitation into various parts of the **Yasna**. Nor does it form part of the normal, daily performance of the Yasna. Rather, its original purpose was to embellish the Yasna ceremony during the five main festivals (Pahl. *gāhānbār*) of the yearly religious calendar.

The word *ratu-* has two distinct meanings. The easiest to define is “season, period of time” and by extension “seasonal festival.” In this sense it is certainly cognate with OInd. *ṛtú-* “season, proper time.” The second meaning is more difficult to ascertain. Chr. Bartholomae (*AirWb*, cols. 1498 f.) gave “judex” as the primary meaning, with a secondary meaning “authority” in general. In the Visperad the term is used extensively in the latter sense and is applied to all manner of deities, abstractions, and the prototypical creatures, namely, the Bovine (see **GĀW Ī ĒWDĀD**), Gayō Marətan (see **GAYŌMART**), and Zərəθuštra. J. Kellens has argued that <sup>2</sup>*ratu-* should be understood as “prototype des espèces vivantes” inasmuch as “à chaque espèce appartient un habitat saisonnier idéal et une période de reproduction.” Although this may apply in certain instances, it is better to adhere to Bartholomae’s determination and translate as “chief, chief authority, master.”

The expression *vīspe ratawō*, as the title of a text, occurs only once in the extant Avesta, in a late addition to the *Mihr Yašt*. Karda 30 contains materials pertaining to the worship of Miθra, where stanzas 121-22 are set in a question-



answer frame familiar in the *Vendidād*: “Zaraθuštra asked ... Ahura Mazdā said ...” The particular question here is, “How shall a righteous man drink the purified libations?” so that Miθra will not be displeased. The response is that they should ritually bathe and undergo whip lashes as penance. The stanza closes with an injunction: “Let no one drink of these libations who is not versed in the Staota Yesnya, the *Vīspe Ratawō*” (*mā.ciš mē āṇḥaṃ zaoθranḥm fraṇ<sup>w</sup>harāt̄ yā [fem.] nōit̄ staotanḥm yesnyanḥm āmātō [masc.] vīspe ratawō [nom. pl.]*). The relative clause is ungrammatical, and it appears that *vīspe ratawō* is an interpolation specifying one of the two texts the worshiper is required to recite. The fact that the words have been placed at the end of the line, without any grammatical connection to what precedes, strongly suggests that they have been a later addition, as we would have expected the genitive plural. In any case, since in recorded Zoroastrian practice the Visperad is never recited alone, the implication is that the worshiper be able to recite the Staota Yesnya together with Visperad, as, for example, in the modern practice of the priestly initiation (*navad*). There are two occurrences where *wīspa-ratu-* are not the title of a text: *Y. 1.19 vīspaēibyō aṣahe ratubyō* and *Y. 2.18 vīspe aṣahe ratawō* “all the *ratus* of Truth,” as the objects of worship.

As the passage from the *Mihr Yašt* suggests, the Visperad was closely associated particularly with the Staota Yesnya. Although the common tradition is that the Staota Yesnya embrace *Y. 14-58* (see *YASNA*), the internal evidence of the Visperad suggests that it recognized only *Y. 27.14-58.33*. This is clearly the plan of *Vr. 1.3-8*. After invoking the *ratus* of the creatures of both spiritual and material worlds (1.1) and the *ratus* of the five festivals, plus the year-end *Hamaspāθmaēdaya* (1.2), stanza 3 invokes “The well-offered portions of the Staota Yasnya, the righteous *ratu(s)* of Truth.” What follows is a series of invocations to: Ahuna Vairya (*Y. 27.14*), Aṣa Vahišta (*Y. 27.15*), Yeṇḥē Hātḥm (*Y. 27.16*); then Ahunawaitī Gāθā (*Y. 27-34*), Yasna Haptaṇhāitī (*Y. 35-41*), Uštawaitī Gāθā (*Y. 43-46*), Spəṇtā.Mainyu Gāθā (*Y. 47-50*), Vohuxšaθrā Gāθā (*Y. 51*), Vahištōišti Gāθā (*Y. 53*), Airyaman Iṣya (*Y. 54.1*), and Fšūšō Məθra (*Y. 58*; followed by the invocation of “the lofty *Haḍaoxta ratu*,” a reference to *Y. 58.33 fšūšō məθrəm haḍaoxtəm*, on which see *HĀDŌXT NASK*). Note, however, that *Vr. 24.1* has the clause “what is between the Ahuna and the Airyaman” (*yaṭ asti aṇtarə ahuna airyamana*).

The occurrence of the words *vīspe ratawō* in the *Mihr Yašt* is relevant to the problem of dating the Visperad. Although counted as one of the “great *Yašts*,” the *Mihr Yašt* (q.v.) is an extended text containing layers of composition and

editorial redaction. Even if the final redaction took place in the mid- to late Sasanian period, the text would not necessarily have been exempt from occasional interpolations. The fact that *vīspe ratawō* occurs here in grammatical isolation shows that the words have been quoted, perhaps as a fossilized form, from some other, now lost, Avestan source. In terms of relative chronology, the Visperad is dependent upon the Yasna for its existence. Beyond these meager facts a more precise dating is elusive.

The Pahlavi Visperad follows the usual pattern of the Pahlavi Yasna, except in its brevity through the abbreviations of repetitions, in that it presents two distinct aspects. The major part is a word-for-word gloss of the Avestan text. To individual glosses are often appended brief words, phrases, or sentences of commentary, which sometimes make oblique reference to material found in Pahlavi literature, sometimes give a ritual context not explicit in the Avestan text. It is possible that the Pahlavi gloss is based on a text older than the one attested in our Mss. For example, *Vr.* 7.2 in all Mss contains a redundant *yazamaide* (“we worship”) where *arštātəm yazamaide* is followed by series of descriptives of this deity and concludes with a second *yazamaide*. That the Pahlavi glosses each word except the final *yazamaide* shows that it was adhering to a correct tradition not reflected in the Mss.

As a work of literature the Visperad fails utterly. It is a derivative text that borrows extensively from the Yasna, yet also seems to draw quotations from sources we cannot identify. The editors who assembled it are, more frequently than not, oblivious of grammar and syntax. Nevertheless, it is usually quite obvious what entities are the objects of veneration, while the arrangement of the chapters has a clear rationale, as they follow key moments in the Yasna ceremony. If we assume the position of the priests who were charged with greatly expanding the Yasna ceremony for the festive occasions of the Gāhānbārs, we can appreciate that they never intended to produce a literary work. By necessity they needed simply to provide Avestan text in order to augment the Yasna.

The contribution of the Visperad to Avestan philology comes from those words and phrases which are not to be found elsewhere. For example, *Vr.* 2.5 closes with a series of three phrases, the last of which is a direct quote, in Standard Avestan, of *Y.* 43.6c. It is preceded by an unconnected phrase *yōi maθrəm saosyantō*, which, as Geldner (*ad loc.*) opined, must be a quote from a lost text. That in turn is preceded by an octosyllabic pāda *spəntəm armaitīm [aramatim] dar<sup>2</sup>təm*, which by itself makes little sense. Another case is the archaic-looking



phrase *frā gawe vərəṇdyāi* at *Vr.* 4.2 (see Benveniste, 1935, p. 82). Similar with tmesis is *frā tanwō rəṅjayeiti* at *Vr.* 7.2.

In addition to verbatim or nearly verbatim borrowings from the Yasna, we occasionally find clever ways in which an author has spliced and altered borrowed text. For example, *Vr.* 16.3 offers a well constructed sentence using both *Y.* 51.22ab and *Y.* 27.5 (*yeṅhē hātqm*): “Zaraθuštra is both *ahu* and *ratu* of these of whom bounteous Ahura Mazdā knows what is better in respect to our worship (of them)”:

*Vr.* 16.3 *yaēšqm nō ahurō mazdā ašawa yesnē paiti vaṅhō vaēda aēšqm zaraθuštrō aṅhuca ratušca*

*Y.* 51.22 *yehyā mōi ašāt hacā vahištəm yesnē paitī vahištəm vaēdā mazdā ahurō...*

*Y.* 27.5 *yeṅhē hātqm āat yesnē paitī<sup>+</sup> vaṅhō mazdā ahurō vaēθā ašāt hacā ...*

In the borrowed sentence of *Vr.* 16.3 the entities over which Zaraθuštra presides are unnamed; however, they are specified as waters, fields, and plants in the “we worship (*yazamaide*)” clause which immediately follows.

*Vr.* 13.3 and 14.1 contain the technical vocabulary for the compositional structure of the *Gāθās. Hāiti*– “section, chapter” (Pahl. *hā*) refers to a hymn as a whole. Each hymn is made up of stanzas or strophes called *vacastašti* “the fashioning of words/speech.” Each stanza is composed of a fixed number of full verse lines (in the case of Ahunawaitī *Gāθā* three to a stanza) called *afsmān*. In turn, a full verse line is divided into two parts with caesura after the first. The half-line is a *pad-*, *lit.* “foot” (like the Sanskrit *pāda*). Finally, the smallest unit is the individual word *wacas*. We also find (*Vr.* 15.2) the words *anapyūxḍa-* “without embellishment” and *anapišūta-* “without alteration” in reference to the recitation (*Vr.* 13.1) of the *Tišra Paoirya*, the “First Three” *hā* of the Ahunawaitī *Gāθā*, and to the recitation (*Vr.* 15.2) of the *Yasna Haptaṅhāiti*—a reference to various styles of recitation which deviated from the straight text. And *Vr.* 14.1 refers to the recitation of the Ahunawaitī *Gāθā* “together with the explanation (*āzainti-*), together with the question (*pərəsu-*), together with the interpretation (*paiti.pərəsu-*), together with both voices.” Moreover, there is a rich vocabulary for the mental retention and the expression of text.

There are two general manuscript traditions of the *Visperad*. Inasmuch as the

Visperad is not an independent text, it is incorporated into the long liturgy of the Vendidad Sāda (VS), that is, the Yasna text with insertions of the Visperad and the Vendidad (see the index, below). In the case of the Mss of the VS, the text of the Visperad is given in extenso. This is not the case with the Pahlavi Visperad, which, as a non-liturgical text, is characterized by extreme abbreviation through the elimination of almost all of the repetitions of the Sāda text. For complete treatments of the two traditions, refer to K. Geldner's "Prolegomena," I, pp. xix-xxiv, and xxxvii-xl and to M. N. Dhabhar, *Pahlavi Yasna and Visperad*, pp. 9-11.

The following is an index of the chapters of the Yasna with the insertions of the chapters of the Visperad.

Yasna 1. 1-8

Visperad 1, which replaces Y. 1.9

Yasna 1.10 – 2.8

Visperad 2, which replaces Y. 2.9

Yasna 2.10 – 11.8

Visperad 3.1-5

Yasna 11.9 -15

Visperad 3.6-7 through 4.2

Yasna 11.16 through Y. 14.5

Visperad 5

Yasna 15

Visperad 6

Yasna 16 and 17

Visperad 7 and 8 ( 7 is recited after Y. 25 and 8 after Y. 65)

Yasna 18 through 21.5

Visperad 9

Yasna 22

Visperad 10 and 11

Yasna 23 – 27

Visperad 12

[Vendidad 1-4]Yasna 28 – 30 (Ahunawaitī Gāθā, of which 28-30 are called the Tišra Paoirya)

Visperad 13

[Vendidad 5 – 6]Yasna 31 – 34

Visperad 14

[Vendidad 7 – 8] Visperad 15



Yasna 35 – 42

Visperad 16-17

[Vendidad 9 – 10]Yasna 43 – 46 (Uštawaiti Gāθā)

Visperad 18

[Vendidad 11 – 12]Yasna 47 – 50 (Spəntāmainyu Gāθā)

Visperad 19

[Vendidad 13 – 14]Yasna 51 (Vohuxšaθrā Gāθā)

Visperad 20

[Vendidad 15 – 16] Visperad 21 – 22: note that 21.4 refers to Y. 52 as “the other Yasna” (*apara-yasna-*)

[Vendidad 17 -18]Yasna 52 – 53 (Vahištōišti Gāθā)

Visperad 23

[Vendidad 19 – 20]Yasna 54 (Airyaman Išya)

Visperad 24

[Vendidad 21 – 22]Yasna 55 – 72

Visperad 8 is repeated after Y. 65

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