

سروش

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Sraosha

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Sraosha is the Avestan language name of the Zoroastrian yazata of "Obedience" or "Observance", which is also the literal meaning of his name.

In the Middle Persian commentaries of the 9th-12th centuries, the divinity appears as *S(a)rosh*. This form appears in many variants in New Persian as well, for example Perso-Arabic سروش, *Sorūsh*. Unlike many of the other Yazatas (concepts that are "worthy of adoration"), Sraosha has the Vedic equivalent to Saraswati.

Sraosha is also frequently referred to as the "Voice of Conscience", which overlaps with both "Obedience" and as his role as the "Teacher of Daena", Daena being the hypostasis of both "Conscience" and "Religion".

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In scripture

In Zoroaster's revelation

Sraosha is already attested in the Gathas, the oldest texts of Zoroastrianism and believed to have been composed by Zoroaster himself. In these earliest texts, Sraosha is routinely associated with the Amesha Spentas, the six "Bounteous Immortals" through which Ahura Mazda realized ("created by His thought") creation.

In the Gathas, Sraosha's primary function is to propagate the religion of Ahura Mazda to humanity, as Sraosha himself learned it from Ahura Mazda. This is only obliquely alluded to in these old verses but is only properly developed in later texts (Yasna 57.24, Yasht 11.14 etc.). Directly evident in the Gathas is the description as the strongest, the sturdiest, the most active, the swiftest, and the most awe-inspiring of youths (Yasna 57.13), and as the figure that the poor look to for support (57.10).

In the ethical goals of Zoroastrianism ("good thoughts, good words, good deeds") as expressed in Yasna 33.14, Sraosha is identified with good deeds. This changes in Zoroastrian tradition (Denkard 3.13-14), where Sraosha is identified with good words. In Yasna 33.5, the poet speaks of Sraosha as the greatest of all (decision makers) at the final renovation of the world.

In 50.4-5, the poet sees the path of Sraosha (an allusion to the Chinvat bridge) as In 43.46, Zoroaster is reminded to hurry with the propagation of Mazda's message before the prophet's death (before he encounters Sraosha and Ashi). In 44.16, Sraosha and Vohu Manah ("Obedience" and "Good Thought") are said to be brought to all humankind.

In the younger Avesta

Sraosha has two yashts dedicated to him. One of these is Yasna 56-57, which is part of the primary Zoroastrian act of adoration. Yasna 56-57 is a "hidden" yasht in that those verses describe a devotee's relationship with Sraosha but do not directly address him. The other hymn to the divinity is Yasht 11, which is a direct invocation of Sraosha and bears his name in the title. Yasht 11 - like the other direct Yashts also - is not part of the liturgy of the Avesta proper. Yasht 11 has survived in a fragment of the Hadhokht Nask, which is today part of the Khordeh Avesta, the "little Avesta."

In Yasna 56-57, Sraosha is variously described as mighty, the incarnate word of reason, whose body is the holy spell (57.1). She "possesses Truth" (*ashavanem*) and is "stately" (57.2, 57.5, 57.7, 57.9, 57.11, 57.15 etc.). He is said to have been the first in all of creation to adore Ahura Mazda and the Amesha Spentas. (57.2 and 57.6). He recited five holy verses in order to favor the great sextet (57.8), and the Ahuna Vairya invocation and other sacred formulae are her weapons (57.22). He returned victorious from her battles with evil (57.12), which allowed the various aspects of creation to populate the world (57.23). Sraosha wanders about the world teaching the religion of Mazda (57.24). Sraosha is frequently described as the "lord of ritual" (57.2, 57.5, 57.7, 57.9, 57.11 etc.) and he propitiates haoma with sacrifice (57.19).

In Yasht 11, mankind lives under Sraosha's constant guardianship (11.7). He is not interrupted by sleep in his constant vigil (11.14) in which he wields his weapons against the druj (11.0). Sraosha teaches the word of Ahura Mazda to mankind (11.14). The poor look to him for support (11.3) and he is welcome in all homes that he protects (11.20).

In yet other texts Sraosha is again protector of ritual, but here the celebrant priest receives the epithet *Sraoshavarez* (Yasht 24.15; Vendidad 5.25, 7.17 et al.). In Vendidad 18.22, Sraosha is called for help against the demon-serpent Azi Dahaka who threatens to extinguish the hearth fire (cf. Atar).

Sraosha is the chief adversary of Aeshma, the daeva of wrath, for Aeshma distracts from proper worship, distorting "the intention and meaning of sacrifice through brutality against cattle and violence in war and drunkenness."^[1] While Aeshma's standard epithet is *xrvi.dru-* "of the bloody mace," Sraosha's standard epithet is *darshi.dru-* "of the strong (Ahuric) mace." Sraosha will overthrow Aeshma at the renovation of the world (Yasht 19.95).

In Zoroastrian tradition

In Zoroastrian tradition, Sraosha is one of the three guardians of the Chinvat bridge, the "bridge of judgement" that all souls of the dead must cross. Although Sraosha is only one of the three divinities that pass judgement (the other two being Rashnu and Mithra), Sraosha alone accompanies the soul on their journey across the bridge.

As also the other two guardians of the bridge, Sraosha is closely identified with Ashi, "Recompense". In Yasht 17.15 and 17.17, Sraosha is called Ashi's "brother." One of Sraosha's stock epithets is *ashya*, which may either mean "companion of recompense" or simply "companion of Ashi".

In the day-name dedications of the Zoroastrian calendar, the seventeenth day of the month is dedicated to Sraosha.

References

1. ^ Assmussen 1983, p. 479.

- Dhalla, Maneckji Nusservanji (1938), *History of Zoroastrianism*, New York: OUP, p. 182.

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Yazata

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Yazata is the Avestan language word for a Zoroastrian concept. The word has a wide range of meanings but generally signifies (or is an epithet of) a divinity. The term literally means "worthy of worship"^[1] or "worthy of veneration".^[2]

The *yazatas* collectively represent "the good powers under Ohrmuzd", where the latter is "the Greatest of the *yazatas*".^[3]

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Etymology

Yazata- is originally an Avestan language adjective derived from the verbal root *yaz-* "to worship, to honor, to venerate". From the same root comes Avestan *yasna* "worship, sacrifice, oblation, prayer". A *yazata* is accordingly "a being worthy of worship" or "a holy being".

As the stem form, *yazata-* has the inflected nominative forms *yazatō*, pl. *yazatānhō*. These forms reflect Proto-Iranian **yazatah* and pl. **yazatāhah*. In Middle Persian the term became *yazad* or *yazd*, pl. *yazdān*, continuing in New Persian as *izad*.

Related terms in other languages are Sanskrit *yájati* "he worships, he sacrifices", *yajatá-* "worthy of worship, holy", *yajñá* "sacrifice", and perhaps^[a] also Greek ἅγιος *hagios* "devoted to the gods, sacred, holy".

In Pokorny's comparative dictionary on Indo-European languages, the author considers *Yazata-*, *yaz-*, *yasna*, *yájati*, *yajñá*, ἅγιος *hagios* to all be derivatives of a Proto-Indo-European (PIE) root *ǵagʰ-* (*ǵagʰ-*) "*religiös verehren*"^[4] ("religiously venerate"). However, some partially derivative authorities, such as Calvert Watkins' PIE Roots appendix to *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, give no indication that Greek ἅγιος *hagios* is still considered a reflex of this PIE root.

In scripture

The term *yazata* is already used in the Gathas, the oldest texts of Zoroastrianism and believed to have been

composed by Zoroaster himself. In these hymns, *yazata* is used as a generic, applied to God as well as to the "divine sparks", that in later tradition are the Amesha Spentas. In the Gathas, the *yazatas* are effectively what the *daevas* are not; that is, the *yazatas* are to be worshipped while the *daevas* are to be rejected.

The Gathas also collectively invoke the *yazatas* without providing a clue as to which entities are being invoked, and—given the structure and language of the hymns—it is generally not possible to determine whether these *yazatas* are abstract concepts or are manifest entities. Amongst the lesser Yazatas being invoked by name by the poet of the Gathas are Sraosha, Ashi, Geush Tashan, Geush Urvan, Tushnamaiti, and Iza, and all of which "win mention in his hymns, it seems, because of their close association with rituals of sacrifice and worship".^[5]

In the Younger Avesta, the *yazatas* are unambiguously divinities, with divine powers but performing mundane tasks such as serving as charioteers for other divinities. Other divinities are described with anthropomorphic attributes, such as cradling a mace or bearing a crown upon their heads, or not letting sleep interrupt their vigil against the demons.

At some point during the late 5th or early 4th century BCE, the Achaemenids instituted a religious calendar in which each day of the month was named after, and placed under the protection of, a particular *yazata*. These day-name dedications were not only of religious significance because they ensured that those divinities remained in the public consciousness, they also established a hierarchy among the *yazatas*, with specific exalted entities having key positions in the day-name dedications (see Zoroastrian calendar for details).

Although these day-name dedications are mirrored in scripture, it cannot be determined whether these day-name assignments were provoked by an antecedent list in scripture (e.g. *Yasna* 16), or whether the day-name dedications provoked the compilation of such lists. Relatively certain however is that the day-name dedications predate the Avesta's *Siroza* ("30 days"), which contain explicit references to the *yazatas* as protectors/guardians of their respective days of the month.

In tradition

The 9th - 12th century texts of Zoroastrian tradition observe the *yazatas* (by then as Middle Persian *yazads*) in much the same way as the hymns of the Younger Avesta. In addition, in roles that are only alluded to in scripture, they assume characteristics of cosmological or eschatological consequence.

For instance, Aredvi Sura Anahita (*Ardivisur Nahid*) is both a divinity of the waters as well as a rushing world river that encircles the earth, which is blocked up by Angra Mainyu (*Ahriman*) thus causing drought. The blockage is removed by Verethragna (*Vahram*), and Tishtrya (*Tir*) gathers up the waters and spreads them over the earth (*Zam*) as rain. In stories with eschatological significance, Sraosha (*Sarosh*), Mithra (*Mihr*), and Rashnu (*Rashn*) are guardians of the Chinvat bridge, the bridge of the separator, across which all souls must pass.

Further, what the calendrical dedications had begun, the tradition completed: At the top of the hierarchy was Ahura Mazda, who was supported by the great heptad of Amesha Spentas (*Ameshaspands/Mahraspands*), through which the Creator realized ("created with his thought") the manifest universe. The Amesha Spentas in turn had *hamkars* "assistants" or "cooperators", each a caretaker of one facet of creation.

In both tradition and scripture, the terms 'Amesha Spenta' and 'yazata' are sometimes used interchangeably. In general, however, 'Amesha Spenta' signifies the six great "divine sparks". In tradition, *yazata* is the first of the 101 epithets of Ahura Mazda. The word also came to be applied to Zoroaster, but Zoroastrians to this day remain sharply critical of any attempts to divinify the prophet. In a hierarchy that does not include either Ahura Mazda or the Amesha Spentas amongst the *yazatas*, the most prominent amongst those "worthy of worship" is

Mithra, who "is second only in dignity to Ohrmazd (i.e. Ahura Mazda) himself."^[6]

In the present day

In the 1860s and 1870s, the linguist Martin Haug interpreted Zoroastrian scripture in Christian terms, and compared the *yazatas* to the angels of Christianity. In this scheme, the Amesha Spentas are the arch-angel retinue of God, with the *hamkars* as the supporting host of lesser angels.

At the time Haug wrote his translations, the Parsi (i.e. Indian Zoroastrian) community was under intense pressure from English and American missionaries, who severely criticized the Zoroastrians for—as John Wilson portrayed it in 1843—"polytheism", which the missionaries argued was much less worth than their own "monotheism". At the time, Zoroastrianism lacked scientifically-trained theologians of its own, and so the Zoroastrians were poorly equipped to make their own case. In this situation, Haug's counter-interpretation came as a welcome relief, and was (by-and-large) gratefully accepted as legitimate.

Haug's interpretations were subsequently disseminated as Zoroastrian ones, which then eventually reached the west where they were seen to corroborate Haug. Like most of Haug's interpretations, this comparison is today so well entrenched that a gloss of 'yazata' as 'angel' is almost universally accepted; both in publications intended for a general audience^{[7][8]} as well as in (non-philological) academic literature.^{[9][10]}

Amongst the Muslims of Islamic Iran, Sraosha came to be "arguably the most popular of all the subordinate Yazatas", for as the angel Surush, only he (of the entire Zoroastrian pantheon) is still venerated by name.^[11]

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| 1. ↑ Boyce 2001, p. xxi. | 5. ↑ Boyce 1972, p. 195. | 9. ↑ <i>cf.</i> Luhrmann 2002, p. 871. |
| 2. ↑ Geiger 1885, p. xlix. | 6. ↑ Boyce 1969, p. 24. | 10. ↑ <i>cf.</i> Dhalla 1914, p. 135. |
| 3. ↑ Büchner 1993, p. 1161. | 7. ↑ <i>cf.</i> Gray 1927, p. 562. | 11. ↑ Boyce 1993, p. 214. |
| 4. ↑ Pokorny 1930, p. I.195. | 8. ↑ <i>cf.</i> Edwards 1927, p. 21. | |

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