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'Wind' – An Old Iranian Deity

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‘Wind’, an Old Iranian Deity

1. Vaēkərəta

The name of *Vaēkərəta* found in Young Avestan Vidēvdād 1,9 as the seventh item in the list of settlements and regions created by Ahura Mazdā is considered as etymologically obscure. Scholars thought of an isolated formation which would be comparable to the Old Indian Vṛddhi derivation in, e.g., the Vedic tribe name *vai-karṇá-* from *ví-karṇa-* ‘having large or divergent ears’ (cf. Air.Wb. 1313). That is, however, unlikely for the simple reason that Av. *vaē* (phonetically *vai*) is different from OInd. *vai* (phonetically *vāi*). In contrast we regard *Vaēkərəta* as a compound of two nouns, segmenting it into *vaē-kərəta-* < *vaiiu-kərəta-* ‘built/founded by Vaiiu.’ Its first member is Av. *vaiiu-* ‘wind’ obviously personified as name of a deity.¹

Comparison with Ved. *vāyú-* ‘wind’ as name of a god often mentioned in coordination with Indra makes it evident that the personification of the wind is of Indo-Iranian origin. However, owing to its ambiguous function, personified Av. *Vaiiu-* did not fully participate in the downfall of the old gods propagated by Zarathushtra, but it survived to a certain extent. Wind can be good and healthy, and it can be bad and disastrous as well. Accordingly personified Av. *Vaiiu-* is a spiritual being of double nature. The negative trait of his character is attested as early as in Y. 53,6, the only Gāthic occurrence of the term/name,² and it is conspicuous in AirWb. 1357/8, conspicuous where Bartholomae desperately poses two homonyms *vayav-* (1) and *vayav-* (2). Typical of the double significance of *Vaiiu* as spiritual being is YAv. Yašt 15,43 f., where he proclaims:

I chase both creations, that which is created by the Beneficent Spirit (Spənta Mainiiu) and that which is created by the Destructive Spirit (Aṅgra Mainyu).

Under these premises it is not surprising that the redactors of the Sasanian Avesta doubted the correct Mazdayasnian character of Yašt 15. Being dedicated to *Vaiiu* and, as it seems, previously having been transmitted as **Vay Yašt* it was renamed by them into *Rām Yašt* after the deity Phl. *Rām* < Av. *rāman-* ‘peace.’

The picture of Av. *Vaēkərəta* as a settlement founded and protected by *Vaiiu*, the god of Wind, recurs in the name of *Wayšagird*, i.e. *Wēš-gird*, ‘a strong town in Transoxiana ... wind blows there constantly’ as transmitted by the Arabic Ḥudūd al-Ālam, ed. Minorsky, p. 115.³

¹ Note YAv, *vaēm* < **vaiium* acc.sing. of *vaiiu-*.

² Y. 53,6 *vaiiū bərədubiiō duš.xvarəθəm*

³ Cf. ibid. 120 and, particularly, 353 f.

Contrary to the stem *vaiiu-* in Av. *Vaē-kərəta-* < *Vaiiu-kərəta-*, its namesake *Wēš-gird* < *Vaiiuš-kərəta-* is characterized by the petrified nom.sing. Av. *vaiiu-š* as first member of the compound. This peculiarity, which has a parallel in Phl. *ātaxš* 'fire' < Av. *ātar-š*,⁴ suggests that the name of *Wēšgird*, besides its physical reference, has a religious connotation.

The petrified nom.sing. Av. *vaiiu-š* is furthermore preserved in the Sogdian compound *wyšparkar* < Av. *Vaiiuš uparō.kairiō* 'the wind active in the upper regions,' found in a Manichean text where it is paralleled to *myʹtyβ* 'Mahādēva,' a very current name of the Indian god Śiva. From this passage we derived, as early as in 1975, the etymological equation to Av. *vaiiu-š* of the name of the Bactrian god *Oēšo*.⁵ Accompanying a pictorial representation of four-armed Śiva and written in Graeco-Bactrian script that name is found on the reverses of very numerous coins of the Indo-Scythian Kušāna dynasty.⁶ That does, of course, not mean that *Oēšo/Vaiiuš* is Śiva, but it makes sure that the characteristics of Śiva were to a large extent characteristics of the Iranian *Vaiiu* in non-orthodox traditions of the Iranian religion.

2. *Vaēduuōiš*t

Under the title *Zardušt Nāma*, Book 7 of the Pahlavi encyclopedia *Dēnkard* transmits a Zarathushtra biography. This colorful text is, of course, of highly legendary character, yet traces of digestion of concrete historical events are, nevertheless, sometimes discernible in it. Among them is the story of the encounter of the prophet with the Karap *Vaēduuōiš*t, whom Zarathushtra unsuccessfully tried to win over for the Mazdayasnian Religion as transmitted in *Dēnkard* 7,4,21-27⁷. The term Phl. *karap* (< Av. *karapan-*) qualifies that person as a priest inimical to Zarathushtra, which, as we see in the present case, is not in contradiction with his enormous wealth.

The content of this long-drawn story is shortly as follows:

(7,1,23, cf. 24) Zarathushtra on Ahura Mazdā's order demands from *Vaēduuōiš*t in return for the divine benefits bestowed upon him "a hundred most vigorous young men and maidens and a team of four horses; if you give them to Him splendor and glory will be yours through that gift, and if you do not give them to Him, evil notoriety will be yours through that non-bestowing."

⁴ Cf. Bactr. *aθšo* < *ātrš* enlarged by addition of purely graphical *-o*.

⁵ in J. Duchesne-Guillemin (ed.): *Monumentum Nyberg* 1, 397-408. Téhéran, Liège 1975, 397-408

⁶ See Humbach/Faiss: *Zarathushtra and his Antagonists*. Wiesbaden 2010, 67-70 (§ 36).

⁷ best accessible in Marian Molé: *La légende de Zoroastre selon les textes Pehlevis*. Paris 1993, 46 f.

(7,1,25, cf. 26) In reply to this that Karap exclaimed: “I do not have received much from you [that is, my wealth is not due to your work], nor from Ahura Mazdā; I am a lord of higher rank (*bagtar*) than you are, (you) and Ahura Mazdā, in wealth I am superior, too, to Ahura Mazdā, much has been acquired by me, (namely) a thousand droves of swine.”

In Pahlavi the name of the Karap is written *wydwyšt*, but the first occurrence of his name in the Dēnkard text is given in Avesta characters as *Vaēduuōišť*. Whereas this form is Middle Persian insofar as it lacks a final vowel, it looks quite Avestan for the rest. In our view the transmitted form *Vaēduuōišť* is to be segmented into *Vaē-duuōišť*, a collocation of Av. *vaiiu-* ‘wind’ with the attribute *duuōišťa-* (phonetically *duvōišťa-*), the exact Avestan equivalent of Old Persian *duvaišťa-* ‘most far-off’⁸, the superlative of Av. *dūra-* ‘far off,’ a form notably differing from its Vedic equivalent *dávišťha-*⁹. The combination **vaiiu-duuōišťa-* thus reconstructed by us denotes the wind blowing most far-off, the spirit acting most far-off, or even the airspace extending most far-off, respectively.

In the Dēnkard passage quoted above *Vaēduuōišť*, whose name undoubtedly is of theophoric character, styles himself as being superior not only to the prophet but even to Ahura Mazdā himself. This is a strong hint about the historical existence of contemporaries of Zarathushtra’s who materially and spiritually worshiped the Wind or, even, the atmosphere as highest deity. An unexpected trace of the extraordinary part played by *Vaiiu* in ancient times is even preserved in the Rām Yasht (< **Vay Yašt*) itself: In Yt. 15,4 the list of those praying to ‘*Vaiiu* active in the upper region’ (*Vaiiuš yō uparō.kairiīō*) and making offerings to him starts with Ahura Mazdā himself.

⁸ Darius Persepolis 23 *duvaišťam šiyātiš axšatā* ‘happiness (will be) unbroken for the longest while’

⁹ in *dávišťhám asya*, ‘sehr weit weg (von ihm)’ RV 6,51,13.