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**SRAŌŠA AND NIGHT IN THE AVESTAN VĪDĒVDĀD<sup>1</sup>**

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Most of the Avestan Vīdēvdād is dedicated to myths and ritual rules and injunctions relating to opposition to the forces of evil. The latter are represented by the main antagonist of Ahura Mazda – Angra Mainyu – an evil spirit, demonic beings, non-Zoroastrians and heretics, and harmful animals. In daytime the patrons of performed rites and all spheres of life of the Zoroastrian community are served by gods who have their own specialization. Almost all of them act only during daylight hours. One of the important aspects of the ancient Iranian world picture presented in the Avesta is the idea of fractional composition of the day, divided into several parts. In the corpus of the Old Avesta, in the Gathas of Zaraθuštra (Y. 30.3) there is no categorical opposition of day and night, wakefulness and sleep. However, in the texts of the Young Avesta the attitude to these concepts undergoes a change; night and sleep begin to be understood as a dangerous period (night) and state (sleep). During the night, when the forces of evil are the strongest and

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most active, and the righteous Zoroastrians are at their most vulnerable, Sraōša, the deity of obedience, becomes the principal god to protect the faithful. This is a purely Iranian (not Indo-Iranian) deity, first appearing in Zaraθuštra's sermons. The sacred animal associated with Sraōša in the Vīdēvdād is a rooster, which awakens people from a dangerous sleep, at the same time being an auxiliary priest (according to J. Kellens) under Sraōša who plays the role of the high priest during the morning liturgy. The dog is also an animal associated with Sraōša, according to Vīdēvdād it guards people, houses and herds, and stays awake at night, like the gods Ahura Mazdā, Miθra and Sraōša. In the hymn dedicated to him, Sraōša himself is compared to a shepherd's dog.

**Keywords:** Vīdēvdād, Avesta, Sraōša, day, night, wakefulness, sleep, rooster, dog

The Vīdēvdād, a collection of Avestan texts of mytho-ritual and jurisprudential themes, belongs to the genre that A. Hintze designated as “*frašna* literature”, from the Avestan *āhūriš frašnō*, “the Ahurian question” [Hintze 2009, 39]. This designation implies that the texts included in this ritual compendium are composed as a series of questions that are asked on behalf of Zaraθuštra, the prophet of Zoroastrian religion, and the answers that the supreme god Ahura Mazdā gives him. According to A. Cantera “all Young Avestan texts belonging to the *frašna*-genre... have been composed probably for being intercalated between the Old Avestan texts in the Zoroastrian long liturgy” [Cantera 2013, 138]. Thus the Avestan Vīdēvdād simultaneously has an independent significance as a source on Zoroastrian mythology and ritual and is one of the components of the long liturgy, during which it is read alternately with two other Avestan texts – the Yasna and the Visperad. Both are important in understanding the role played in the Vīdēvdād and the entire Avesta by the Zoroastrian deity of Obedience Sraōša.

Besides chapters (or fragards) dedicated to important Zoroastrian myths, the Vīdēvdād contains a detailed list of rules that were prescribed to be observed when making contracts, performing ritual ablutions and other rites of purity, and so on [Malandra 2000]. The combined blocks of passages within fragards or even groups of fragards may be thematically related without necessarily constituting a coherent system dealing with a particular subject. Although the narrative of such passages is based on the application of ritual prescriptions to

specific situations, they also usually contain references to deities patronizing a particular area of Zoroastrian community life. So, when the 7<sup>th</sup> fragard (V. 7.16) deals with the purification by water (and cattle urine) of ritually unclean clothes that have been defiled, compilers mention the *arədvī* source and include a quote from a liturgical text, the Yasna (Y. 65.5) [Darmesteter 1880, 78, n. 3] where the cleansing role of the goddess Arədvī Sūrā Anāhitā patronizing water is explained. Similarly, in the parts concerning the earth, the patron goddess (one of the six Aməša Spənta) Spəntā Ārmaiti, who in the Vīdēvdād denotes the earth itself, is mentioned; the contract deity Miθra is mentioned in the legal prescriptions, and so on. These examples of obvious associations of deities and objects, however, differ from the picture we see in the hymns to the gods, the Yašts, where, unlike the fragmentary references in the Vīdēvdād, the full range of the gods' power is revealed.

One of the main gods of the Vīdēvdād's pantheon is the deity of Obedience Sraōša<sup>2</sup>. The inclusion of the texts related to Sraōša in the Vīdēvdād is related to the very nature of the ritual compendium. The title of this collection of texts, derived from the Avestan *vīdaēuuadāta*- "the law discarding the *daēuuas*", "the law providing rules for how to keep the *daēuuas* away" [Skjærvø 2007, 106], "the law for repelling the *daēuuas*" [Cantera 2013, 85], contains the idea of opposition between the "righteous Zoroastrians" and the *daēuuas*, who in this case can be understood not as "old gods", but rather as representatives of demonic forces. The role of Sraōša attested in the Avestan and later Zoroastrian texts not only as a mediator between the world of gods and man, but also as a protector of believers from the forces of evil is quite consistent with the subject matter and the spirit of the Vīdēvdād. According to Zoroastrian beliefs, these forces are most active at night.

In the Zoroastrian tradition the contraposition between day and night first of all is connected with the idea of the battle between the forces of truth (*aša*) and goodness with the forces of lies (*druj*), evil, and death. The night period, as a rule, represents in the texts the most dangerous time, when, according to Zoroastrians beliefs, the forces of evil are most active. Zoroastrian day is divided into several periods,

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<sup>2</sup> With the first meaning of the Avestan *səraōša*- "hearkening", see: [Kreyenbroek 1985, 2].

and the most general division is one into day and night. Moreover, in the Avestan texts, the day (Av. *aiiar-*, *aiian-*) is represented in the Zoroastrian pantheon by special deities of the day (Av. *aiiara-* occurs in the plural in Yasna 1.17 and 2.17), while the night (Av. *xšap-*, *xšapan-*, *xšapar-*; Middle- and New Persian *šab*) does not have its own deity, although ‘night’ serves to denote a more general concept of a day part as a period from sunset to next sunset (Av. *xšapan-*, see: [Bartholomae 1904, 548–549]). This situation seems to be a reflection of the Zoroastrian opposition of day and night, since the worship of the night is known in the Vedic texts (Rig Veda 10.127, Atharva Veda 19.50). The Middle Persian version of the name of the nocturnal period is often *šab ud rōz*, same as *šab-o-rōz* (“night and day”) in New Persian. The count begins from the night (evening) time, which correlates with examples from some other Indo-European languages and cultural traditions. However, in the Middle Persian texts there is also a variant of *rōz šab* (“day [and] night”), which is actually the main one. Thus, according to the calendar passages of the Middle Persian Bundahishn, “always first the days should be counted, and then the nights, because first the day leaves, and then the night comes” [Chunakova 1997, 300], which may indicate a desire to arrange the nocturnal period in such a way that the daytime, a “good” part of the nocturnal period precedes the nighttime which is a “demonic” one.

The Avestan “night” *xšap-*, corresponding to Skt. *kṣap*, *kṣapā* (“night”), goes back to the Proto-Indo-European *\*k<sup>w</sup>sep-* meaning “darkness” [Pokorny 1959, 524]. At the same time, contrary to this opinion, A. Trofimov suggested that “it is impossible to reconstruct with confidence the proto-form *\*k<sup>w</sup>sep-* as a PIE designation of the night”, and “Indo-Iranian *kṣap-* is an isolated stem of unknown origin” [Trofimov 2015, 907]. As to the use of *xšap-* / *kṣap* in Avestan and Sanskrit, – while Skt. *kṣap* is just one of the terms for night, probably not carrying a special semantic connotation (being a rather rare word that in most cases means a period of time [Jamison, Brereton, 1.70.5–7]), Av. *xšap-* almost completely displaces others, at least as far as we can judge from the surviving text of the Avesta and from Middle Persian translations of the Avesta and Zoroastrian texts. In the Avestan language, however, only one other word for “night” is attested – *upa.naxtar-* (“at the border of the night”: Vīdēvdād 7.79;

N.68) related to Indo-European *\*nokʷ-t* “night”. In Middle Persian, there is also no clear evidence for this root attested only in the Eastern Iranian languages – Wakhan (*naγd* “night” [Steblyn-Kamensky 1999, 242]) and Sanglichi (*nāγδ* “night” [Abaev 1989, 231]).

The exclusion of *\*naxt-* from the lexicon of sacred texts and/or its suppression with *xšap-* was caused by the ritual use of words – if we assume that the Avestan *xšap-* has a negative connotation in the Zoroastrian understanding of the night as a period of time belonging to the forces of evil, as a time-sphere of darkness as opposed to the area of light.

Another word, directly or indirectly related to the night period, Avestan *xʷafna-* “sleep, dream” (Vedic *svāpa*), could also be used with different connotations: “*xʷafna-* was a divine positive creation since the remotest times (the beginning of the creation), but its occurrence can be also used by demons to divert good persons from their duties (in particular those of the priests)” [Panaino 2015, 168].

Both *xšap-* and *xʷafna-* are attested together in the Gathas, in the Yasna 44.5, composed in the form of riddles-rhetorical questions:

“Thus I ask Thee, tell me plainly, O Ahura:

Which artist created both, light (*raocāscā*) and darkness (*təmāscā*)?

Which artist assigned both, sleep (*xʷafnəmcā*) and waking (*zaēmācā*) (to their proper time)?

Who (is He) through whom dawn (*ušā*), noon (*arəm.piθβā*), and nightfall (*xšapācā*) (exist)

which remind a responsible (person) of (his dutiful) purpose?” [Humbach 1991, 158].

In this passage, important concepts are brought together: the general division of the day into daytime and nighttime (“light and darkness”) with the accompanying states of wakefulness and sleep, as well as the periods of dawn, noon and night *xšapā-*. As in later texts, daylight hours are divided (in this case, dawn and noon), while nighttime is indivisible. Since the answer to questions posed by Zoroaster to the supreme deity Ahura Mazda is obvious, – the creator is Ahura Mazda himself, we can judge that in the Gathas day and night, as well as wakefulness and sleep, have an equally positive connotation and are juxtaposed rather to highlight the unity of these phenomena.

In other parts of the Avesta, starting with Yasna, a different understanding of this opposition appears, separating day and night, wakefulness and sleep. So, the deities of the day mentioned in Yasna 1 are deified divisions of the daytime. They are glorified during the celebration of the Zoroastrian liturgy (Y. 1.17, 20 and others), including when listing different time periods – day, month, season, year. Each of the daily segments has its own patron deity of the same name. Such divisions are also known for the night period (listed in the Avestan passage F 27b), but they are not deified.

The Avestan Yasna and Nērangestān witness the division of the day into five time periods (Middle Persian *gāh-*, the term was not used in the Avestan language as a time period), although these two collections of Avestan texts do not agree in choosing the starting point for the day, – in the Yasna the day begins after sunrise, and in the Nērangestān during the previous period of time, that is, before dawn [Rezania 2010, 96–97]: *uśahina* (from morning dusk to sunrise), *hāuuani* (sunrise to noon), *rapiθβina* (noon to midday), *uzaiierina* (from midday to sunset), *aīβisrūθrima* (from sunset to morning twilight).

While the night itself is not deified, there are patron deities representing it (Sraōša, Rašnu, Aši). The Young Avestan Zoroastrian gods themselves (excepting the three mentioned) are inactive at night. Thus, the Avestan Miθra in Yašt dedicated to him is called the first of the gods who rises above the sacred peak Haraitī (*Harā-*) in front of the sun; there is neither night nor darkness (*nōiṭ xšapa nōiṭ tamā*) (Yt. 10.13, 50) in the celestial abode of Miθra. The night remains outside the sphere of activity of Miθra, he seems to be above the night, outside of it – Miθra is a sun-god. Simultaneously, the same hymn says that Miθra “watches in darkness” (Yt. 10.141), and both Ahura Mazda (V. 19.20) and Miθra (Yt. 10.7) hold the epithet *axʷafna-* “sleepless”.

One of the gods acting in conjunction with Miθra is Sraōša, whose abode is also located at the top of Haraitī<sup>3</sup>. Sraōša, together with Miθra and Rašnu, administers a posthumous judgment on the human soul, and, therefore, is associated with death and the afterlife, that are also associated with night in Zoroastrianism. He is also a protector of

<sup>3</sup> See: [Gershevitch 1967, 205].

people from the forces of evil, in particular at night: Sraōša is “not sleeping, awake (*zaēnaṅha*), he keeps Mazdā’s creatures, not sleeping, awake, protects Mazdā’s creatures, he keeps the entire material world with arms raised after sunset ... He does not sleep, keeping the world of righteousness, from the moment the two Spirits created the creatures – the Holy Spirit and the Evil; he fights with monstrous demons all day and night” (Y. 57.16–17)<sup>4</sup>. The concept of being awake is one of the important characteristics of the act of protection of the righteous world from demonic forces at night. The Avestan Vīdēvdād 18.5–6, sketching the images of a righteous priest (*āθravan-*) and a “lying” one, refers precisely to the nighttime, which is described as an active or inactive state without sleep. The Vīdēvdād 4.45 says about the night prayers which are under protection of Sraōša (though he is not mentioned directly here):

“If [a Zoroastrian] comes asking for wisdom, let him pray with the holy *maqra* the first half of the day, and the second, and the first half of the night, and the second – for the sake of multiplying wisdom that is based on Truth, let him be concerned about multiplying wisdom with the worshiped Truth”. Following the Vīdēvdād 4.45 the same idea one of the edifying Middle Persian texts renders, where unlike the Avestan text, a three-part division of the day is formulated: “[One should] devote a third of the day and a third of the night to a religious school, asking the righteous for wisdom, a third of the day and a third of the night – to cultivate earth, a third of the day and a third of the night – to eat, rest and have fun” (translated by O. M. Chunakova [Chunakova 1991, 70]).

The eighteenth fragard of the Vīdēvdād paints a picture of the awakening of man at dawn, assisted by the rooster, the Sraōša’s bird<sup>5</sup> opposed by the “long-handed” demoness Būšiiāštā (“What-will-be-ness” [Panaino 2015, 168]), who “puts all material lives to sleep at once when the light is awake” (V. 18.14–16). Thus, sleep, non-wakefulness is a result of the influence of a demoness, representing a prolongation of the night (the time of dominance of the forces of evil). The division of the night into unnamed thirds (although there is an

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<sup>4</sup> See: [Kreyenbroek 1985, 44–45; Panaino 2015, 169–170].

<sup>5</sup> It has to be emphasized that the rooster in this fragard serves as a *sraōšāvarəza*, a kind of auxiliary priest while Sraōša serves as a high priest *zaotar* [Kellens 2016, 195], see also: [Cantera 2021, 109].

Avestan fragment where different parts of the night are named) is mentioned in the Avestan Vīdēvdād 18.18–23. This part of the fragard is dedicated to the preservation of the sacred fire during the night, which is also aided by Sraōša and the rooster, who eventually chases Būšiiqštā away with his cry at dawn.

It is remarkable that in the Vīdēvdād fire calls Sraōša for help and protection from demons in the third (the last) part of the night only, before the dawn. The Middle Persian texts (GBd. III. 21–22, BTA 44) follow the Yasna 1.7 and call the period of the day under the patronage of Sraōša/Srōš, Ušahin, lasting from midnight to dawn, especially its first part (DkM., 793.8 ff) (see: [Kreyenbroek 1985, 117]).

Sraōša himself is compared to a dog guarding cattle (*pasuš.hauruuāṅhō*): *yaθaca pasuš.hauruuāṅhō aētaṭ sraošəm ašīm pairi.barāmaide* – ‘We care about Sraōša like about a dog guarding cattle’ (Yt. 11.7). This non-sleeping (*anauuaṅhabdāmnō*) and awake (*zaē-nayha*) god stands on the defense of the living beings – creatures of Ahura Mazda after the sunset (*pasca hū frāšmō dāitīm*) (Y. 57.16). The dog in the thirteenth fragard of the Vīdēvdād bears an epithet *zaēni.budrəm*, ‘awake, intent’ (V. 13.39). It is *vācim paiti zaēniš*, ‘awake with its bark’, and in the house where such a dog is a guardian ‘will not steal anything a thief or a wolf (*tāiiuš vā vāhrkō vā*); killed will be wolves, destroyed wolves, thrown back splashing saliva wolves; killed will be wolves, destroyed wolves, thrown back splashing saliva wolves’ (V. 13.40). A close description with partly similar lexicon we find in the Vedic texts dealing with night, though the dog is not mentioned there, and night is not only a dangerous period of time, but also a deity. In the Rig Vedic hymn dedicated to Night, the goddess is asked to protect people from the same main enemies – thief (*stenám*)<sup>6</sup> and wolf (*vṛkaṃ*): *yāváya vṛkyāṃ vṛkaṃ yaváya stenám* – ‘withhold she-wolf and wolf, withhold thief’ (RV 10.127). In a Atharvanic hymn to Night both wolf and thief are mentioned together again as enemies who can be strike out by Night *vṛkasya téna*<sup>7</sup> (AV 19. 50.1).

There are two intriguing passages in the Atharva Veda (AV 8. 1,13–14) left by translators and commentators without appropriate

<sup>6</sup> Avestan and Vedic roots are the same: Av. *tāiiuu-* ‘thief’, ai. *tāyáv-*, *stāyáv-* [Bartholomae 1961, 647]. See also: [Monier-Williams 1951, 1260].

<sup>7</sup> Kulikov makes a correction: *sténam* [Kulikov 2013, 261].

explanation [Elizarenkova 2007, 207]. In an incantation “for a long life” we find following lines: ‘Let both the wakeful (*bod<sup>h</sup>ás*) and vigilant (*pratibod<sup>h</sup>ás*) protect you, let both sleepless (*asvavnás*) and awake (*tvānavadrānás*) protect you, let both herding (*gopāyámś*) and attentive (*jágrviś*) protect you!’ The text expresses the wish not to perish, to avoid death, and, among other things, not to get caught by the two dogs of Yama that are sent to look for people who are destined to die. It seems likely that the mention of “guarding” pairs of unnamed “awake” characters may be reminiscent of two other dogs acting as protectors. Such dogs are present in the text of the Avestan Vīdēvdād (13. 49). These are not the dogs connected with afterlife, but they also form a pair: ‘When two come to my house, they should not interfere with them – the dog that guards the cattle and guards the house. My houses would not have stood firmly on the land created by Ahura if I had not had a dog guarding the cattle and guarding the house (*pasuš. hauruuō vā viš.hauruuō vā*)’. It is obvious that, unlike in the Avesta, dogs did not play such a significant role in the Vedic culture and religion, so their mention in some contexts might become inappropriate. Both the Avesta and the Vedas, as we have seen, contain texts that are close in content and in lexical composition, dedicated to the night, the protection of people from thieves and wolves. The differences between two secret scripts indicate the differences in the development of the once close cultures – Iranian and Indian. So, in the Avesta, the night is largely understood as a dangerous period and is not deified. Of course, unlike Yasna 44.5, where day and night are presented as equal creations of the supreme god, the later Zoroastrian tradition demonizes the night, firmly linking it with the realm of darkness, evil, and death. Formulated in the Avesta, the idea of the opposition of “endless light” (in which good forces rule) and “endless darkness” (which dominates the forces of evil and serves as their abode) – *anayraēšuuā raocōhuua... anayraēšuuā tēmōhuua* (H. 2.15), was further developed in the Zoroastrian theological literature in the Middle Persian language. The contraposition of these spheres, which is common in other Indo-European traditions, reaches maximum tension in Zoroastrianism, which leads to some imbalance, both mythological and textual. The main protector of people during this period becomes the Zoroastrian deity of obedience Sraōša – he takes over the protective role that is assigned in the Vedas to the deity of the night. It is

possible that an analysis of the Avestan and Vedic textual fragments uniting night, dog and Sraōša could make clear the sufficient changes in perception of nighttime in the Avesta and Vedas.

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### **СРАОША ТА НІЧ В АВЕСТИЙСЬКОМУ ВІДЕВДАТІ**

Специфіка авестійського Відевдата полягає в тому, що більша його частина присвячена викладу міфів та ритуальних правил та приписів, пов'язаних із протистоянням силам зла. Останні представлені як основним антагоністом Ахура Мазди – Ангра Манью – злим духом, так і демонічними істотами, незороастрійцями та еретиками, шкідливими тваринами. У денний час покровителями обрядів і всіх сфер життя зороастрійської громади служать боги, які мають свою спеціалізацію. Майже всі вони діють лише у світлу пору доби. Одним із важливих аспектів давньоіранської картини світу, представленої в Авесті, є уявлення про дробовий склад доби, розділеної на кілька частин. У корпусі Старшої Авести, в Гатах Заратуштри (У. 30.3) немає категоричного протиставлення дня та ночі, неспання та сну. Однак у текстах Молодшої Авести ставлення до цих понять зазнає змін, ніч і сон починають розумітися як небезпечний період (ніч) та стан (сон). У нічний час, коли сили зла найсильніші і найактивніші, а праведні зороастрійці перебувають у найбільш уразливому становищі, головним богом, що захищає віруючих, стає Сраоша, божество послуху. Це чисто іранське (не індоіранське) божество, яке вперше з'являється в проповідях Заратуштри. Священна тварина, яка асоціюється у Відевдаті зі Сраошою – півень, що пробуджує людей від сну, що несе безпеку, одночасно, згідно з Ж. Келленсом, будучи допоміжним жерцем при Сраоші, що виконує роль вищого жерця під час ранкової літургії. Пов'язаною зі Сраошею твариною є і собака, згідно з Відевдатом, що охороняє людей, будинки, стада і не спить у нічний час, подібно богам – Ахура Мазді, Мітрі, Сраоші. Сам Сраоша у присвяченому йому гімні порівнюється з пастушим собакою.

**Ключові слова:** Відевдат, Авеста, Сраоша, день, ніч, безсоння, сон, півень, собака

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