
ARASH -E- KAMANGIR
EREKSHA THE ARCHER
as per the AVESTA

Fariborz Rahnamoon

Arash-e-Kamangir is an Iranian mythological character who shot an arrow from mount Damavand to the banks of river Jehun to demarcate the border between Iran and its arch-enemy Turan. The festival of Tirgan is supposed to be the celebration of this feat. The belief is that the source of the story is Avesta and Shahnameh. Let us see if it is true.

We read about Arash and his skill as an archer in Tir Yasht in the Avesta, but there is no mention of a border dispute or settlement. *"We sacrifice unto Tishtrya, the bright and glorious star; who flies, towards the sea Vouru-Kasha, as swiftly as the arrow darted through the heavenly space, which Erekhsha (Arash), the swift archer, the Arya amongst the Aryas whose arrow was the swiftest, shot from Mount Khshaotha to Mount Hvanvant."*¹ This verse in the Avesta later caught the imagination of others, and folklore has developed, giving it a historical perspective over time.

Tir Yasht is a thesis on the star Tishtarya (Sirius). Mentioned in the Tir Yasht is the cosmological description of the star Tishtarya, the associated stars, planets and constellations. The time, location and season of appearance and disappearance in the sky, its celestial path across the sky, and the distance it travels before its disappearance. There is no mention of any historical event.

The Pahlavi text, like Dadestan-e-Denig (Ch 93) compiled in the Islamic era, explains how Tishtarya turns water into a cloud, transports it, and later delivers it in a purified state as snow or rain; how it does it evenly between lakes, rivers and farms. It also explains how a black demon fights Tishtarya and causes drought, flood and disaster.

These two texts, written in different periods, show the degeneration of knowledge. The ancient Tir Yasht is a factual report which has turned into prayers at some point. It sees the star Tishtarya as a marker in the sky, a calendar and associates a climatic event on Earth with the advent of the star. The Pahlavi text takes a mythological approach; it personifies the star and shows it as the creator of the climatic condition on Earth. It claims Tishtarya turns water into clouds.

Tishtrya is the brightest star in the sky and has a luminosity 25.4 times greater than the sun, but it is 8.6 light-years away and does not emit heat toward Earth to evaporate the waters. It is not the cause of the rain.

Tishtrya is known by its Greek name Sirius as part of Canis Major's (Big Dog) constellation. It is visible twice. It appears in the evening sky on the long winter night and then vanishes to reappear just before the summer solstice in the morning sky before sunrise. Long before the Greeks, the constellation involving Tishtar was visualized as a bow and arrow.

Hindu mythology associates it with hunting and bow and arrow. The Chinese have depicted it with the Chinese Emperor Zang drawing a bow and arrow toward Tishtar, Tsien Lang, the Heavenly Wolf. The Iranians saw in it a person who they called Erekhsha or Arash. He was holding the bow aiming the arrow at Tishtar. Six stars made the curved bow, and the seventh star, the tip of the arrow, aimed at Tishtarya.

In summer, with daylight, the constellation slowly fades and ignites the mythologist's imagination. They see Arash's body melt away, having put all his strength into the arrow.

In winter, there was rain and snow, so the evening star Tishtrya was associated with rain and called the rain star. In summer, there was no rain, but the summer heat evaporated the waters and formed clouds which would later fall as rain; this was reason enough to justify it as a Rain Star.

The ancient Egyptians noticed that the heliacal rising of the star Sirius in summer would occur a short time before the annual flooding of the Nile. The flooding of the Nile was a significant event in their life, so the sighting of Sirius (Tistarya) became critical.

Tishtarya, Sirius, was known among North American natives as 'Wolf Star' (Pawnee), 'Moon Dog' and 'Wolf that hangs by the side of Heaven' (Northern Osage).

Bundahishn 2:2 gives us the Avesta / Phalavi names of "twenty-eight asterisms of reckoning, the names of which [are these]: Padevar, Pesh-Parviz, Parviz, Paha, Aze-sar, Beshn, Rakhvat, Taraha, Azara, Nahn, Maian, Avdem, Mashaha, Spor, Husru, Sroi, Nur, Gelu, Grafsha, Varant, Gao, Goi, Muru, Bunda, Kaht-sar, Vaht, Mayan, Kaht."

Bubdahishn 2:4 "Tishtar [Sirius] is the chieftain of the East, Sataves the chieftain of the South, Antares [Vanand] the chieftain of the West, the Seven Bears [Haptoring] the chieftain of the North; the Lord of the throne, Capricornus, whom they call the Lord of Mid- Heaven, is the chieftain of chieftains; Parand, Mazd-tat, and others of this list are also chiefs of the directions."

Science today tells us that, Tishtrya was once a main-sequence star. Sirius is slowly moving closer to Earth and will gradually increase in brightness over the next 60,000 years before it recedes. It will, however, remain the brightest star seen from Earth for the next 210,000 years.

With the above information in mind, read the translation of Tir Yasht verses 8.5 to 8.36. To see them describe the path of Tishtarya and the other associated significant stars and planets seen from Earth and reach a conclusion. Is it a prayer, a myth, a scientific paper, or a combination? Below are a few verses.



1-Chinese Emperor Zang (75-88 CE) is drawing a bow and arrow toward Sirius.² 2- The constellation depicts Arash the archer. 3-Egyptian goddess Sopdet represented Sirius, who brought new soil and fertility to the land by flooding the Nile.³

8.6 *'We sacrifice unto Tishtrya, the bright and glorious star; who flies, towards the sea Vouru-Kasha, as swiftly as the arrow darted through the heavenly space, which Erekhsha, the swift archer, the Arya amongst the Aryas whose arrow was the swiftest, shot from Mount Khshaotha to Mount Hvanvant.*

8.8 *'We sacrifice unto Tishtrya, the bright and glorious star, that afflicts the Pairikas (apparently shooting stars or comets), that vexes the Pairikas, who, in the shape of worm stars, fly between the Earth and the heavens, in the sea Vouru-Kasha, the powerful sea, the large-sized, deep sea of salt waters. He goes to its lake in the shape of a horse, in a holy shape, and down there, he makes the waters boil over, and the winds flow above powerfully all around.*

8.9 *'Then Satavaesa makes those waters flow down to the seven Karshvars of the Earth (seven continents), and when he has arrived down there, he stands, beautiful, spreading ease and joy on the fertile countries (thinking in himself): "How shall the countries of the Aryas grow fertile?" 'For his brightness and glory, I will offer him a sacrifice worth being heard...*

8.12 *'We sacrifice unto Tishtrya; 'We sacrifice unto the rains of Tishtrya. 'We sacrifice unto the first star; we sacrifice unto the rains of the first star. 'I will sacrifice unto the stars Haptoiringa to oppose the Yatus and Pairikas. 'We sacrifice unto Vanant, the star made by Mazda; for the well-shapen strength, for the Victory, made by Ahura, for the crushing Ascendant, for the destruction of what distresses us, for the destruction of what persecutes us. 'We sacrifice unto Tishtrya, whose eye-sight is sound.*

8.13 *'For ten nights, O Spitama Zarathushtra! Tishtrya, the bright and glorious star, mingles his shape with light, moving in the shape of a man of fifteen years of age, bright, with clear eyes, tall, full of strength, strong, and clever.*

8.14 *'He is active as the first man was; he goes on with the strength of the first man; he has the virility of the first man.*

8.16 *'The next ten nights, O Spitama Zarathushtra! the bright and glorious Tishtrya mingles his shape with light, moving in the shape of a golden-horned bull.*

8.18 *'The next ten nights, O Spitama Zarathushtra! the bright and glorious Tishtrya mingles his shape with light, moving in the shape of a white, beautiful horse, with golden ears and a golden caparison.*

8.20 *'Then, O Spitama Zarathushtra! the bright and glorious Tishtrya goes down to the sea Vouru-Kasha in the shape of a white, beautiful horse with golden ears and a golden caparison.*

8.21 *'But there rushes down to meet him the Daeva Apaosha, in the shape of a dark horse, black with black ears, black with a black back, black with a black tail, stamped with brands of terror.*

8.22 *'They meet together, hoof against hoof, O Spitama Zarathushtra! the bright and glorious Tishtrya and the Daeva Apaosha. They fight together, O Spitama Zarathushtra! for three days and three nights. And then the Daeva Apaosha proves stronger than the bright and glorious Tishtrya; he overcomes him.*

8.23 *'And Tishtrya flees from the sea Vouru-Kasha, as far as a Hathra's length. He cries out in woe and distress, the bright and glorious Tishtrya: "Woe is me, O Ahura Mazda! I am in distress, O Waters and Plants! O Fate and thou, Law of the worshippers of Mazda! Men do not worship me with a sacrifice in which I am invoked by my name, as they worship the other Yazatas with sacrifices in which they are invoked by their names.*

8.26 *'Then, O Spitama Zarathushtra! the bright and glorious Tishtrya goes down to the sea Vouru-Kasha in the shape of a white, beautiful horse with golden ears and golden caparison.*

8.27 *'But there rushes down to meet him the Daeva Apaosha in the shape of a dark horse, black with black ears, black with a black back, black with a black tail, stamped with brands of terror.*

8.28 *'They meet together, hoof against hoof, O Spitama Zarathushtra! the bright and glorious Tishtrya, and the Daeva Apaosha; they fight together, O Zarathushtra! till the time of noon. Then the bright and glorious Tishtrya proves stronger than the Daeva Apaosha; he overcomes him.*

8.30 *Then, the bright and glorious Tishtrya returns to the sea Vouru-Kasha, in the shape of a beautiful white horse with golden ears and a golden caparison.*

8.31 *'He makes the sea boil up and down; he makes the sea stream this and that way; he makes the sea flow this and that way: all the shores of the sea Vouru-Kasha are boiling over, all the middle of it is boiling over.*

8.32 *'And the bright and glorious Tishtrya rises from the sea Vouru-Kasha, O Spitama Zarathushtra! the bright and glorious Satavaesa (Venus) rises from the sea Vouru-Kasha; and vapours rise above Mount Us-Hindu, that stands in the middle of the sea Vouru-Kasha.*

8.33 *'Then the vapours push forward, in the regular shape of clouds; they follow the wind along the ways Haoma traverses, the increaser of the world. Behind him travels the mighty wind, made by Mazda, and the rain, and the cloud, and the sleet, down to the several places, down to the fields, down to the seven Karshvars of the Earth.*

8.34 *'Apam Napat, (Sons of Water) O Spitama Zarathushtra! divides the waters amongst the countries in the material world, in company with the mighty wind, the Glory, made by the waters, and the Fravashis of the faithful. 'For his brightness and glory, I will offer him a sacrifice worth being heard...*

8.36 *'We sacrifice unto Tishtrya, the bright and glorious star, whose rising is watched by men who live on the fruits of the year, by the chiefs of deep understanding; by the wild beasts in the mountains, by the tame beasts that run in the plains; they watch him, as he comes up to the country for a bad year, or for a good year, (thinking in themselves): "How shall the Aryan countries be fertile?" 'For his brightness and glory, I will offer him a sacrifice worth being heard...*

Ha 8.22/23 talks of the end of the winter appearance, and 8.28 announces its reappearance in summer to make the sea boil. 8.31

ACCORDING TO THE SHAHNAMEH: The peace treaty with the Turanians was during the reign of Kai Ghobad, and it was young Rostam's first combat. Rostam picked Afrasiab up by his belt and held him overhead when Afrasiab's belt broke, and he managed to escape, but it scared the hell out of Afrasiab. He advised his father, Pashang, the Turanian king, to initiate a peace treaty with the Iranians and retreated to the other side of river Jehun. Rostam is the hero. There is no mention of Arash, nor does the situation warrant a contest. Arash gets mentioned in a few verses of the Shahnameh but for different reasons.



CONCLUSION

Tir Yasht was originally a cosmological paper on Tishtarya, the brightest star in the sky. The archer and bow and arrow are the asterism formed by seven stars. The arrow's flight from Mount Khshaotha to Mount Hvanvant shows the path of Tishtarya in the sky. It became a prayer by adding a few devotional sentences at some point in history. Later under Greek influence, the Pahlavi text on Tishtarya converted facts into fiction by personifying the constellations. Each writer later presented a different version of the Pahlavi folklore in the Islamic era. In the last century, these myths got further developed by nationalists. The latest and more popular version of Arash-e-Kamangir is in the form of a poem by the politician poet Siavash Kasrai written in 1959.

Siavash Kasrai portrays Arash as a soldier in the army of Manucher Shah, the grandson of Fareydoon. The Turanians had invaded and occupied parts of Iran, but a peace treaty was finally signed. One of the conditions was that an archer would shoot an arrow from mount Damavand and where the arrow lands would demarcate the border between the two counties. Arash, known for his archery, was asked to perform the feat. He puts his might into the arrow, and the Yazata of wind helps the arrow travel till noon, land in a walnut tree on the banks of river Jehun and settles the border dispute. Since Arash had infused his arrow with his life force, he melted away as the arrow flew towards its destination. This melting out of Arash dramatizes the constellation's disappearance with the rising sun's light.

The story of Arash-e-Kamangir is a beautiful and inspiring myth. It is a later development and is not from the Avesta or the Shahnameh, as claimed by many. As per the Shahnameh, Fareydoon divides his kingdom among his three sons, Salm, Toor and Iraj. Iraj gets the lands of Iran; the other two brothers are not happy with their share. They kill Iraj in cold blood. Fareydoon was very angry but did not want to go to war against his sons. The wife of Iraj, who was pregnant, gave birth to a baby girl after the death of Iraj. This girl grows up and gives birth to a baby boy. He is named Manucher, and Fareydoon crowns him the King of Iran. Manucher goes to war against his maternal uncles, Salm and Toor and kills them both in a battle to avenge his grandfather. So there is no border dispute and no peace treaty. Manucher is a clear winner; he killed the two kings, and the situation does not warrant a peace treaty.

As described in Tir Yasht, the asterism made up of seven stars is seen as Arash with a bow and arrow. The arrow's flight path illustrates the path of Tishtarya in the sky. Thus Arash-e-Kamangir is a constellation. Later in history, it became a myth, but the historical references are flawed.

With the degeneration of civilization initiated by the Greeks under Alexander, scientific papers became prayer and a source of legends. Unfortunately, Greek philosophy rules over humanity. Aristotle limited human senses to only five. The Greeks enforced using only the sense of hearing, and people believed what they heard. As a child, the tooth fairy and flying reindeer condition the young mind to believe what they hear. Those who question get accused of blasphemy. The Gathas recommends using ten senses with Wisdom,⁴ and modern science names upwards of 33 senses. The world still believes in five.

May Wisdom Prevail.

¹ Tir Yasht 8:6

² <https://www.starmythworld.com/>

³ Pictures 1 & 3 Wikipedia Picture 2 created by author. 4 <https://earthsky.org/>

⁴ Gatha Ha 44.18