

# Book of Arda Viraf

The **Book of Arda Viraf** is a Zoroastrian religious text of Sassanid era in Middle Persian language that contains about 8,800 words.<sup>[1]</sup> It describes the dream-journey of a devout Zoroastrian (the 'Viraf' of the story) through the next world. The text assumed its definitive form in the 9th-10th centuries C.E., after a long series of emendations.<sup>[2]</sup>

## 1 Title

The title of the book is read as either *Arda Viraf Namag* or *Arda Viraz Namag*. Due to the ambiguity inherent to Pahlavi script, 'Viraf' (the name of the protagonist) may also be transliterated as 'Wiraf', 'Wiraz' or 'Viraz'.<sup>[3]</sup> The 'Arda' of the name (cf. *Asha*; cognate with Skt. *ṛta*) is an epithet of Viraf and is approximately translatable as “truthful” or “righteous.” “Viraz” is probably akin to Proto-Indo-European *\*wiHro-*, “man” see Skt. *vīra*.<sup>[2]</sup> *Nāmāg* means “book”.

## 2 Textual History

The date of the book is not known, but in *The Sacred Books and Early Literature of the East*, Prof. Charles Horne assumes that it was composed fairly late in the ancient history of Zoroastrianism, probably from the period of the Sassanian empire, when Zoroastrianism experienced a state-sponsored revival.<sup>[4]</sup> The fact that the “evil” Alexander the Great is referred to as a Roman suggests this period, in which the rivalry between the two empires was intense.

## 3 Plot summary

Arda Viraf is chosen for his piety to undertake a journey to the next world in order to prove the truth of Zoroastrian beliefs, after a period when the land of Iran had been troubled by the presence of confused and alien religions. He drinks wine and a hallucinogen, after which his soul travels to the next world where it is greeted by a beautiful woman named Den who represents his faith and virtue. Crossing the Chinvat bridge, he is then conducted by "Srosh, the pious and Adar, the angel" through the “star track”, “moon track” and “sun track” – places outside of heaven reserved for the virtuous who have nevertheless failed to conform to Zoroastrian rules. In heaven,

Viraf meets Ahura Mazda who shows him the souls of the blessed (*ahlav*). Each person is described living an idealised version of the life he or she lived on earth, as a warrior, agriculturalist, shepherd or other profession.<sup>[5]</sup> With his guides he then descends into hell to be shown the sufferings of the wicked. Having completed his visionary journey Viraf is told by Ahura Mazda that the Zoroastrian faith is the only proper and true way of life and that it should be preserved in both prosperity and adversity.<sup>[5]</sup>

## 4 Quotes from the Text

- They say that, once upon a time, the pious Zartosht made the religion, which he had received, current in the world; and till the completion of 300 years, the religion was in purity, and men were without doubts. But afterward, the accursed evil spirit, the wicked one, in order to make men doubtful of this religion, instigated the accursed Alexander, the Rûman,<sup>[6]</sup> who was dwelling in Egypt, so that he came to the country of Iran with severe cruelty and war and devastation; he also slew the ruler of Iran, and destroyed the metropolis and empire, and made them desolate.<sup>[7]</sup>

- Introduction

- Then I saw the souls of those whom serpents sting and ever devour their tongues. And I asked thus: 'What sin was committed by those, whose soul suffers so severe a punishment?' Srosh the pious, and Adar the angel, said, thus: 'These are the souls of those liars and irreverent [or 'untruthful'] speakers who, in the world, spoke much falsehood and lies and profanity.'<sup>[7]</sup>

- Section 4, Hell

## 5 See also

- Persian literature
- Middle Persian literature
- Zoroastrianism
- Divine comedy

## 6 References

- [1] <http://www.farvardyn.com/pahlavi4.php#57>
- [2] Philippe Gignoux, “Ardā Wīrāz”, Encyclopædia Iranica, online edition, New York, 1996-, consulted 21 February 2015. <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/arda-wiraz-wiraz>
- [3] <http://titus.uni-frankfurt.de/texte/etcs/iran/miran/mpers/arda/arda.htm>
- [4] <https://archive.org/stream/sacredbooksearly07hornuoft>
- [5] <http://www.avesta.org/pahlavi/viraf.html> Translation of the Book of Arda Viraf
- [6] Alexander the Great was called “the Ruman” in Zoroastrian tradition because he came from Greek provinces which later were a part of the eastern Roman empire - The archeology of world religions By Jack Finegan Page 80 ISBN 0-415-22155-2
- [7] <http://www.avesta.org/mp/viraf.html>

## 7 External links

### Full texts

- Translation of the Book of Arda Viraf
- Middle Persian text (Romanized version)
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## 8 Further reading

- Kassock, Zeke, (2012), *The Book Of Arda Viraf: A Pahlavi Student's 2012 Rendition, Transcription And Translation* , ISBN 978-1477603406

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