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REFLECTIONS ON THE ORIGIN AND THE EARLY HISTORY OF TĪR

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1. *Introduction*[1]

As is widely known, the Old Iranian religion has a polytheistic character and thus the Iranian pantheon included several gods, one of which was Tīr. Within the Iranian religion Tīr was the god of the rain, of the planet Mercury (Boyce 1982, 32-33)[2] and of writing. Tīr, who was first worshipped by western Iranians (as was the female deity Anāhita), was very popular during the Parthian and Sasanian periods (3rd century BC - 7th century AD) and he was also venerated in Armenia during this period, but unfortunately little is known about his early history.

His name has directly or indirectly come down to us in several forms: Tīr, Tīrī and Tīriya. The original form is Tīriya- (Nöldeke 1888, 420; Schwartz 1985, 673; Panaino 1995, 61), while Tīrī has evolved from Tīriya through contraction (/iya/ > /ī/). This is confirmed by:

1) The Elamite spelling *Ti-ri-ia* (Hinz 1975, 238)[3].
2) The Iranian anthroponyms, composed with this element, in the Aramaic Nebenüberlieferung (5-4th century BC) and in the Parthian ostraca from Nisa (1st century BC). In these names there is an overall presence of y (*tyry*).
3) The Choresmian spelling *Cyry*.

A possible etymology of the name Tīriya- was proposed by Gershevitch (apud Zadok 1976, 230b; followed by Boyce 1982, 33)[4]. He derived it from the Old Iranian root **tṛya-*, "to go" (Sogd. *tyr-*, Yaghnobi *tir-*) and connected this meaning with the moving aspect of planets and, more particularly, the swiftness of Mercury, the planet nearest to the sun[5]. This feature of Mercury is also attested in Babylonian texts (Gössmann 1950, 24-25 nr.79; Eilers 1976, 43-44; Boyce 1982, 33). The planet (^{mul}gu$_4$.ud) is called *šiḫṭu*, a word belonging to the semantic field of *šaḫāṭu*, "to leap, to jump" (cf. *CAD* Š/2, 417). More illustrations of the connection between swiftness and Mercury are the Arabic name (ᶜUṭārid, "who runs fast" (Eilers 1976, 51) and the connection of the Greek god Hermes, the swift god of the messengers (Eitrem 1912, 778; Jost 1996[3], 690), and Mercury (Jensen 1890, 136; Deimel 1914, 91; Eilers, loc. cit.).

The aim of this article is to make a study of the origin and the ethnicity of Tīr. First of all a general research on this deity and his cult within the Iranian lands will be conducted, followed by the same type of discussion on Tīr and his cult in Armenia. The results of this research will pro-

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[1] The abbreviations used in this article are cited according to the system used in *NAPR* 8, 1993, 49-77.

[2] The modern Persian name of the planet is still Tīr.

[3] And not *Te-ri-ia-da-da*, the name cited by Schwartz (1985, 673n.1). This spelling is nowhere attested.

[4] More on the etymology can be found in Panaino (1995, 72-73).

[5] Mercury, the planet connected with Tīr, is the swiftest planet, completing its circuit around the sun in 88 days.

vide valuable data in order to discuss the theories on his origin and to have a closer look at the "ethnicity" of Tīr among the Iranian peoples.

2. *Tīr in the Iranian Lands*

The history of Tīr is a complicated matter. Before attempting to offer a clear overview of Tīr's history, the two identifications in which Tīr was involved, will be discussed: Tīr and Nabû on the one hand and Tīr and Tištrya on the other hand. Both identifications are important events in Tīr's history and therefore are of major importance for reconstructing his history.

2.1. *Tīr and Nabû*

The first identification concerning Tīr was his association with the Babylonian god Nabû, who was the god of writing and wisdom in Babylonian and Assyrian religion[6]. From the Neo-Babylonian period onwards he was also the god of the planet Mercury (Jensen 1890, 136; Ungnad 1908, 16; Deimel 1914, 91; Gössmann 1950, 24-25 nr.79; Pomponio 1978, 202-204; Boyce 1982, 32; Panaino 1995, 64).

The connection between Mercury and Nabû is not directly proven by the cuneiform sources, but there are two circumstantial indications, which point to such a connection (Pomponio 1978, 203):

1) A seventh-century inscription dedicated to Nabû, in which he is called $^{d}Gu_4$-ud, i.e. Mercury. The objection that in the same text he is also called "star of Marduk", usually a designation for Jupiter, does not pose a threat to this since the title "star of Marduk" can refer to Mercury in New Year's time (Kugler 1911; Lambert 1957-58, 387 n.6).
2) Mercury is called *Nbw* in Syriac and *Nbw* / *ᶜNbw* in Mandaic documents (Payne Smith 1879-1901, 2268; Jensen 1890, 136; Deimel 1914, 91).

It must be mentioned that the connection between Nabû and the planet Mercury was only established during the Neo-Babylonian period (Panaino 1995, 64). Before that the god of Mercury was most likely Marduk. One of the reasons for this assumption is the above-mentioned relation between Mercury and "star of Marduk".

Besides of being the swiftest planet (cf. *supra*), Mercury was also related by the Babylonians to the coming of the rain (Boyce 1982, 205). The planet is called *mušaznin zunni*, "who makes it rain" in a ritual (Thureau-Dangin 1921, 153 line 306; see also Eilers 1976, 51 and Boyce 1982, 205) and *mušabšû zunni u mīli*, "who causes the rain and the seasonal flooding of the rivers" in a dedicatory inscription (Lambert 1957-58, 386). As a consequence of his connection with Mercury, Nabû was also associated with the coming of the rain.

With all this being established it is not hard to see the common features (Mercury and the coming of the rain) between Nabû and Tīr and the reason why the two gods were brought together, i.e. the planet Mercury. Tīr was at the time of the syncretism a minor planetary deity (Boyce 1982, 32-33), whose popularity started to grow after his association with the great Babylonian god.

Boyce and Eilers have different opinions on where Tīr met Nabû and got syncretized with him. Eilers supposes that Nabû, being venerated in Assyria (Pomponio 1998-2001, 19-21), came into contact with Tīr, who was worshipped in Armenia. According to Boyce (1982, 32) the meet-

[6] This god has been thoroughly studied by Pomponio (1978).

ing took place in Elam. The main arguments for this scholar are a postulated Neo-Elamite veneration of Nabû and the fact that at that time the Persians lived in close contact with the Elamites. It was thus easy for them to adopt the cult of Nabû and to connect this newly arrived divinity with their own minor deity Tīr.

Unfortunately for Boyce there is no single indication for a cult of Nabû in Elam during this Neo-Elamite period. The only time this Babylonian god was unambiguously venerated in Elam was during the reign of Untaš-Napiriša (*ca.* 1275-1240 BC), the king who built Dur-Untaš (nowadays Čoğā Zanbīl) and included in this city a sanctuary dedicated to Nabû (Pomponio 1978, 55-57; Seidl 1998-2001, 27).

Another responsibility of Tīr was the art of writing, with which Nabû too was related. It is generally accepted that Tīr's connection with writing was not a part of "his original Iranian conception" (Boyce 1988, 277). One of the questions related to this is whether Tīr took this aspect simultaneously with his identification with Nabû or that he only became the god of writing when the Iranians invented their own script and subsequently a new social group, i.e. the scribes, entered Iranian society. This question cannot be answered with certainty, since there is disagreement as to when the introduction of writing and scribes in Iranian society took place (cf. D'jakonov 1970). The following views of Boyce (1982, 31-32) and Panaino (1995, 61) should not be taken for granted.

Boyce believes that the Persians used Elamite scribes, who had learned Persian, already since the eighth century BC and that the Medes used cuneiform and Aramaic scripts. The first part of this view, as Boyce acknowledges, is a variant of Gershevitch's theory (1979), according to which the Persians learned Elamite to alloglottographically write down their own language. This theory, however, has not yet been thoroughly studied. The second part is even more difficult since it touches upon the discussion on the historicity of the Deiocid kingdom (cf. Helm 1981, Brown 1988 and Schmitt 1996).

Panaino points out that the scribes played a prominent role in Tīr's entry into the Iranian pantheon, which he situates in the Achaemenid period. The scribes certainly attached great importance to the cult of a god of writing. Additionally they hoped to gain influence within the Iranian society by promoting Tīr and Nabû, since writing was considered an alien art by the Zoroastrian priests, who further believed that writing should have nothing to do with holy matters (Boyce 1982, 123 and 1988, 278).

The view of Panaino does, if slightly modified, not contradict a pre-Achaemenid entry of Tīr into the Iranian pantheon. It is equally possible that the scribal aspect only came into being when Darius I introduced the Old Persian writing. The newly established group of scribes promoted the scribal character of Tīr in the wish to reach their own goals, described above.

2.2. *Tīr and Tištrya*

An undeniable episode in the history of Tīr is his identification with Tištrya, a Zoroastrian divine being (*yazata*). Tištrya is associated with the star Sirius and also with the bringing of rain, which is the central theme of the Avestan hymn to him[7].

The main argument in favour of such an identification is the Zoroastrian calendar, for Tīr plays a prominent role in it: a month, a day and a religious feast are named after him (Boyce 1982, 243-250; Panaino 1995, 68-70). This makes it obvious that Tīr must have been adopted into orthodox

[7] For more information on this *yazata* (holy being) see the study by Panaino (1990-1995).

Zoroastrianism by the time the Zoroastrian calendar was devised (Boyce 1982, 202; Schwartz 1985, 673). The calendar is thus turned into a *tempus ante quem* for the identification of Tīr and Tištrya.

The logical next question concerns the date of the design and the introduction of this calendar. Opinions are not unanimous on this issue: more than a century ago West (1897, xxvii and xlvii) proposed 505 BC, while Marquart (1905, 210n.1) pleaded for 494/93. Taqizadeh (1938, 36-37) prefers the year 441. Two more recent proposals, being 503 BC and the reign of Xerxes (485/84-464/63), must be ascribed to respectively Hartner (1985, 759) and De Blois (1996, 49; followed by Kellens 1998, 511-513). Panaino (1990, 662) leaves the question unanswered.

Bickerman (1967, 204-205 and 1983, 784-786) tries to find absolute *tempora ante quem* and *tempora post quem* for the introduction of the Zoroastrian calendar. His *tempus post quem* is 459 BC, since in that year the last Elamite Treasury Tablet was drafted, indicating that in that year the Achaemenids still used their own Old Persian calendar[8]. His *tempus ante quem* is 90 BC: an ostracon from Nisa dated to that year is the oldest dated document using a Zoroastrian month name. Bickerman concludes that the Achaemenids probably used their calendar – at least in Egypt and the western satrapies – until the Macedonian king Alexander the Great overran their empire. Evidence favouring this is made up by the Aramaic papyri from Egypt (5th-4th centuries BC) and the Samaria Papyri from Palestine (second half of the 4th century BC). Boyce's *tempus ante quem* is the fall of the Achaemenid Empire (331 BC), because of the spread of the calendar in other lands, that all belonged to the Achaemenid Empire. In her view Artaxerxes II (405/04-359/58) was responsible for the introduction of the calendar (Boyce 1982, 144 and 244 and 1988, 20-21).

To make things even more complicated, one should also bear in mind the possibility that the Achaemenids used two different systems simultaneously. The Arsacids, for instance, used both the Babylonian lunisolar system in Aramaic and cuneiform documents and their own solar system in Iranian records (Bickerman 1967, 206 and 1983, 786). It is equally possible that, from Artaxerxes II onwards, two systems were being used by the Achaemenids[9]. Unfortunately, the researcher is facing a deplorable lack of sources: no single dated Iranian document is preserved from the period 459-90 BC! The theory of two simultaneously used calendar systems cannot be denied nor corroborated at all.

An alternative is that the later Achaemenid kings merely gave, as they did with the Old Persian calendar itself (cf. note 8), Persian (in this case Zoroastrian) names to the Babylonian months. As a matter of fact, not the introduction of the calendar itself is important for the history of Tīr – still the main issue of this article – but the introduction of the Zoroastrian month names.

The chronological research conducted above makes clear that, despite the certainty that the introduction of the Zoroastrian month names is a *tempus ante quem* for the identification of Tīr with Tištrya, one should rule out this introduction as a chronological indication for this study. The reason is the inability to define a precise date for it.

In her search for the approximate date of the identification of Tīr with Tištrya Boyce's (1982, 201-204, 243 and 1988, 278) starting point is not the introduction of the Zoroastrian calendar, but the religious context. Because of the association of Tīr and Tištrya some religious aspects, which

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[8] This calendar is actually nothing more than a Persianization of the lunisolar Babylonian calendar: the Babylonian month names are simply replaced by Old Persian ones.

[9] It is tempting to postulate the simultaneous use of a cultic and a civil calendar system (as in Egypt), but such a theory remains fully hypothetical.

were basically strange to Zoroastrianism, entered it: worship of a planet and its god (errant planets are not venerated in traditional Zoroastrianism), worship of a god with a name not known in Avestan and, last but not least, the worship of a patron of writing, an art considered as alien and malicious by the orthodox Zoroastrians (cf. *supra*). Obviously Tīr's introduction into Zoroastrianism must have encountered a certain degree of opposition by orthodox Zoroastrians and must consequently have been supported by an institution of great power, i.e. the Achaemenid king. It looks thus very probable that the introduction must be situated in the Achaemenid period.

By combining Boyce's and Bickerman's theories the period during which the association of Tīr and Tištrya took place can be narrowed down to 459-331 BC.

Boyce tries to offer a more precise date and in order to achieve this goal she brings in another factor: the syncretization of another western Iranian divinity, Anāhita, with the Zoroastrian *yazata* *Harahvaiti[10]. This, in fact, is a syncretization, very parallel to the one of Tīr and Tištrya. First of all, it has the same typology: a Persian deity connects an Avestan and a Babylonian/Semitic deity, or in this case: Anāhita connects Av. *Harahvaiti and Bab. Ištar. Secondly, the motives for this association are the same as for the one in which Tīr became involved: the western Iranians did not want to give up the whole of their old religion at the time of their conversion to Zoroastrianism. Finally, the means too are identical: the power of the Achaemenid kings. As a result it is likely that both syncretisms occurred at about the same time (Boyce 1982, 204 and 1988, 280).

The date of the identification of Anāhita and *Harahvaiti is relatively certain and must be situated during the reign of Darius II (423/22-405/04 BC), since at least two temples dedicated to her existed in that time. Darius' son and successor Artaxerxes II (405/04-359/58), who is the only Achaemenid king calling upon Anāhita in his inscriptions, even imposed the cult on his subjects and spread it all over the empire, as Berossos lets us know through Clemens of Alexandria:

> "Later, after the passage of many years, the Persians did have statues of human figures. This was introduced by Artaxerxes, son of Darius, who was the first to set up the statue of Aphrodite Anaitis in Babylon, Susa, Ecbatana, Persepolis, Bactra, Damascus and Sardes and instructed (the people) to worship it."

As Darius II was most likely a Zoroastrian believer, the *conditio sine qua non* for the establishing of temples for Anāhita under royal tutelage is that this goddess had to be accepted by Zoroastrianism. Otherwise the king would have run the risk of being accused of heresy. Consequently the syncretization of Anāhita and *Harahvaiti must have taken place during the reign of Darius II, although one cannot exclude that it happened earlier. Yet, if the identification of Anāhita and *Harahvaiti and the subsequent adoption of Anāhita into Zoroastrianism had occurred during the reign of Darius I or Xerxes, one could wonder why Anāhita had to wait until Darius II to be promoted by the Achaemenid kings, bearing in mind that she was at that time already a rather popular divinity.

Until objections appear that really pose a threat to the plausibility of Boyce's proposal I will accept it and consequently I believe that Tīr became associated with Tištrya during the reign of Darius II or Artaxerxes II.

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[10] The connection between the names Anāhita and *Harahvaiti is not difficult to find (Boyce 1982, 202): during the fifth century BC *Harahvaiti's *epitheton ornans* Arədvī Sūra Anāhita, "moist, mighty, pure" had taken the place of her real name.

For more information on this goddess I would like to refer to the study by Boyce (1975, 71-74).

Through this association it was possible for Tīr to penetrate in eastern Iranian territories, an evolution which the Achaemenids are responsible for. The spread of the Zoroastrian calendar in other areas occupied by the Achaemenids (Cappadocia, Sogdia, Chorasmia, Sīstān and Armenia) only confirms this (Boyce 1982, 243; Panaino 1995, 68).

At first sight an association of Tīr and Tištrya seems awkward, since two different stellar beings became identified. Yet there are some good reasons to identify precisely these two divinities: they both have a stellar character (which is still a common feature), their names start with the same syllable and both are related to rain (Boyce 1982, 204-205).

Most authors are convinced that Tīr and Tištrya were originally two different divinities, Tīr being connected with Mercury and Tištrya with Sirius. Schwartz (1985, 673-674) attacks this hypothesis by offering three arguments in favour of an original identity of the two gods, whereby the differentiation only took place later on. First of all, Tīr cannot be an exclusively western Iranian god, since he is also attested in East Iran (among the Kushans[11], in the old calendar of Sīstān, in the proper name Tiravharna in a Kharoṣṭhī inscription). Secondly, Tištrya does not occur in Old Persian names while Tīr is not attested in Avestan. Lastly, the two names never occur together in an ancient source. Unfortunately for Schwartz, his arguments – although interesting – cannot be labelled convincing, since the materials he uses are too recent to prove him right (Panaino 1995, 77-78). Moreover, the Pehlevi literature might indicate that Tīr and Tištrya are originally different beings (Forssman 1968, 54).

The identification discussed above makes it clear that Tīr and Anāhita had still a considerable number of adherents at the time when they were identified with Zoroastrian *yazatas*. Apparently the popularity of both divinities was high enough to persuade the Achaemenid kings from Darius II on to promote their cults.

2.3. *History of Tīr and his cult in the Iranian lands*

The first Iranians to venerate Tīr were the western Iranian people, of whom the two best known are the Medes and the Persians (Boyce 1975, 76). This is corroborated by his non-occurrence as a god in the Avestan literature[12].

The manner how and the date when Tīr entered the western Iranian pantheon are not precisely known. According to Boyce (1982, 31-32; see also Russell 1987, 291) Tīr entered their pantheon only after the settlement of these tribes in their respective historic territories (certainly not later than 900 BC; cf. Briant 1984; Young 1988, 8; Dandamayev 1989, 1; Sumner 1994). The reason for it is simple: in the northern steppes of Iran the planet Mercury is not very conspicuous and therefore it must have been only a minor stellar being in the eyes of the dwellers. However, during the journey southwards of the western Iranians the planet became more visible and thus more important. Tīr was born[13].

At a certain moment the western Iranians came to know the Babylonian god Nabû and linked

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[11] The attestation of Tīr on a Kushanite coin is problematic. Stein (1888, 16-17; followed by Davary 1982, 284) read the legend as TEIPO, but this was denied by Göbl (1961, 99, 109 and 1984, 66; followed by Rosenfield 1967, 101) who read MEIPO. As Panaino (1995, 70) mentions, also the latter proposal does not offer a final solution.

[12] Tīr occurs only once in Avestan, more precisely in the PN Tīrō.nakaθβa- (Yt. 13, 126), whose exact meaning is still not certain (cf. Mayrhofer 1979, I/80-81 no.306).

[13] According to Nöldeke (1888, 418) the connection with Mercury was not his original feature.

him with their minor stellar being Tīr, also related to Mercury. This means that their veneration of Mercury now became strongly influenced by the Babylonian religion. From that moment on the idea of Tīr arose and his popularity increased gradually, until finally the Zoroastrians too accepted him.

Panaino (1995, 61 and 78) pleads for a later date of Tīr's entry into the Iranian pantheon. Although he does not want to exclude some limited veneration of Tīr before the rise of the Achaemenids, he clearly prefers the Achaemenid period and even implies that Tīr only entered the Iranian pantheon together with Nabû. This would mean that both Tīr and Nabû became only known to the Iranians in the Achaemenid period.

Boyce (1982, 119) is positive that the western Iranian pantheon included the divinity Tīr (together with Anāhita) at the moment when the Zoroastrian teachings reached the western Iranians. Elsewhere (1982, 7-8) she writes that Zoroastrianism already reached Media, more particularly Raga, during the 8th century BC, which means that Tīr was already worshipped during that century. If this is right, Panaino's late date hypothesis should be discarded and it should be accepted that Tīr entered the Iranian pantheon somewhere between 1000 and 750 BC. Yet, as Zoroastrianism only started to become more widespread in west-Iran from 625 on (Boyce 1982, 40), the *tempus ante quem* may be shifted towards 650 BC.

The relatively late date of Tīr's first attestation[14] can be explained in two ways. Each way can be reconciled with one of the two theories presented above on the date of Tīr's entry into the Iranian pantheon. Either Tīr had not yet entered the western Iranian pantheon in that time (Panaino) or he was not yet important enough in the eyes of the Iranian people to function as a name-inspiring institution (Boyce). The second explanation can also be formulated more precisely: Tīr was not particularly important among the Median tribes mentioned in various Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions (9th-7th centuries BC). Preference should be given to Boyce's theory and consequently to the second explanation of the late date of Tīr's first attestation.

Because of a lack of sources the history of Tīr before the end of the 6th century, when he is attested for the first time, remains dark. At that time personal names containing Tīr start to appear. The first attestation of such a name is situated in a text drafted on 17 July 510: in a contract from Babylon a person *Tīryadāta, who also has a Babylonian name (Nabû-kāṣir), gives a house to Bēl-ittanna. Interesting is that *Tīryadāta is said to have received this house from the king. Other attestations of Tīr-names (*Tīraya-, *Tīra/īdāta-, *Tīrīvā-) are found in the Elamite tablets from Persepolis, dated to the period 509-494. Again in Persepolis a man named *Tīraspāda is mentioned in an Aramaic text from the fourth year of Artaxerxes I (461-60)[15].

In Babylonian and Aramaic sources from the fifth century various persons occur, bearing a theophoric name composed with Tīr. Especially the Babylonian Murašû Archive from Nippur[16] (last quarter of the fifth century) contains such names: *Tīra, *Tīrakāma, *Tīrībāzu, *Tīrīdāta, *Tīrīfarnah, *Tīryadāta, *Tīryāma and *Tīryavauš.

During the reign of Darius II Tīr was connected with the Zoroastrian Tištrya. Until then both

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[14] He does not occur (for instance as a part of a personal name) in the Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions (mentioning Medes) nor in the Neo-Elamite tablets from Susa (mentioning Persians) from the sixth century BC.

[15] See Hallock (1969, 762-763) for the attestations in Elamite and Bowman (1970 no. 27:4) for the Aramaic text.

[16] See especially Stolper (1985) on the Murašû Archive.

religions lived next to each other in western Iran. The identification with Tištrya was very important for Tīr, because after it his popularity increased even more and his cult spread further east and west.

Tīr's attestation in anthroponyms points to a certain popularity among the people. Yet no single Achaemenid king mentions him in his inscriptions. His female colleague Anāhita, too, is not given very much attention, since only Artaxerxes II mentions her. Except for Anāhita and Mithra no other god but Ahuramazdā occurs in royal Achaemenid inscriptions. Nevertheless, in one inscription Darius invokes Ahuramazdā *hadā visaibiš bagaibiš*, "together with all the gods" (DPd)[17]. This formula develops into *hadā bagaibiš*, "together with the gods" in other inscriptions of Darius and Xerxes.[18] It is obvious that Anāhita, Mithra and Tīr are indirectly referred to.

The absence of other gods in the Achaemenid inscriptions before Artaxerxes II has two explanations. First, there is the own ruler's pride (as the King of kings he only mentions the King of gods). Secondly, the religious situation plays its part. Darius and his successors were probably Zoroastrians, but it is certain that, despite the Zoroastrian zeal to convert the people, the non-Zoroastrian deities, such as Tīr, still had numerous adherents during the reigns of these kings. By invoking exclusively Ahuramazdā the kings confirmed their own adherence to Ahuramazdā (Boyce 1982, 119).

During the Sasanian period (3rd-7th century AD) Tīr-Tištrya became the object of confusion: he was at the same time demonized and considered a good divinity. The reason for this is that during that period the Zoroastrians devised an astrological system in which the planets were maleficent while the stars were beneficent. The problem concerning Tīr-Tištrya was his connection with both Mercury (a planet) and Sirius (a star). As a consequence of this the Pehlevi literature shows a confused image of Tīr and Tištrya. In one part of it Tīr is considered the opponent of Tištrya, as a result of which some texts identify Tīr with Apaoša/Apōš, the demon of drought. In the other part Tīr remains united with Tištrya as a beneficent deity. This confusion only started to grow after the end of the Achaemenid period and posed no problem for the priests, who preferred and nowadays still prefer a complete identification of both divinities (Boyce 1975, 75-76 and 1982, 205; Russell 1987c, 292; Panaino 1995, 64-67 and 78-85). Some examples:

1) In Middle Persian preliminaries of Avestan liturgies (all devoted to Tištrya) Tīr-Teštar is mentioned.
2) The month and day, named after Tištrya in Avestan, are named after Tīr in Middle and New Persian.
3) The modern term for the religious feast of Tīr is *jašan-i Tīr u Teštar*.

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[17] See also DB IV 61 and 62-63: (Auramazdā) utā aniyāha bagāha, "(Ahuramazda) and the other deities".

[18] The formula possibly occurs in an inscription of Artaxerxes I (464/64-424/23) too. The text (A^1Pa) is reconstructed by Kent (1953², 153), but Schmitt (1987, 245-246n.11 and 2000, 113) considers this reconstruction "a mere fabrication". He may be right, but concerning the passage at stake some research could be useful. The preserved signs of line 11 are u-v : h-[...] (Schmitt 2000, 113). This could perfectly belong to the sentence *mām Auramazdā pātu hadā bagaibiš*, "Me may Ahuramazdā protect, together with all gods", as it occurs in the other inscriptions. Unfortunately the parallel passage in the Babylonian version too is not preserved (cf. Schmidt 1953, Pl. 202C).

3. *Tīr and Armenia*

Tīr was not only popular in the western Iranian lands. He had also a cultus in Armenia. It is important for the study of Tīr's origin to have a closer look at his Armenian whereabouts, because some scholars consider him an originally Armenian god.

His name in the Armenian literature is Tir and not Tiwr, as some text editions try to make the reader believe. The latter form is not attested in any manuscript and consequently has no manuscript authority (Thomson 1976, 483; Russell 1987c, 292). Tir was used often in Armenian anthroponyms: Tiribazos, Tiridates,... (Nöldeke 1888, 419; Russell 1987c, 294-295). The fourth month in the Armenian calendar, Trē[19], was named after him.

Two Armenian authors provide us with information on Tir: Agathangelos, who in the second half of the fifth century AD wrote a history on the conversion of Armenia to Christianity, and Moses Khorenac'i (8th century AD), the most famous Armenian historian who produced a history of Armenia but who retrieved his information on the pre-Christian Armenian religion from Agathangelos (Carrière 1899, 20-25 and 27; Thomson 1976, lxi).

Two passages in the History of Moses Khorenac'i are relevant here. In the first one (II 40) Ervand (Orontes), an Armenian king, builds a new holy city, calling it Bagaran (not far from his newly built political capital Ervandašat) and moving all idols of Armavir to this new place. Ervand is most likely Orontes (*ca.* 212 - *ca.* 200 BC), the last king of the Orontid dynasty.

The last passage (II 49), where Moses gives information on Tir, tells the story of king Artašēs[20], who established Artašat as his new capital. Again the idols were moved from one place to another (from Bagaran to Artašat). Only one statue was not placed in Artašat itself, but, as Moses writes, "outside the city near the road". This was the statue of Apollo.

In Moses' eyes Apollo was the Greek equivalent of Tir[21], while Artemis corresponded to Anāhita, so it is fairly sure that the two passages cited above do indeed refer to Tir and Anāhita (Widengren 1965, 178 and 186; Thomson 1978, 149n.7). The assumption by Boyce (1975, 77n.370) that Apollo should in this context be associated with Mithra is simply wrong, since Moses Khorenac'i normally connects Mithra with Hephaistos.

The second Armenian author, Agathangelos, mentions (§778; Greek version §128) a sanctuary dedicated to Tir in his story about the expedition of king Tiridates III who wants to destroy all pagan idols in Artašat:

> "Afterwards he himself, i.e. the king, set off and departed with all his armies from the city of Valaršapat. He came to the city of Artašat in order to destroy the altars of the deity Anahit there, and also that one which was situated at the place called Erazamoyn. On the road he first came across the sanctuary of study and wisdom, of the dream-expounding, dream-interpreting worship of the god Tir, the scribe of the knowledge of the priests, called the chancellery of the scribe of Ormizd" (Agathangelos § 778; Greek version §128)[22].

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[19] It should be noted that this form is not an Armenian development, but an Iranian one (Russell 1987c, 293).

[20] Tommasséo (1843, 143n.2) believes that Artaxias II (34-20 BC) is meant here, but most likely Russell (1987b, 659-660) is right in assuming that Artaxias I (189-160 BC) was the king who established Tir's sanctuary at Erazamoyn.

[21] In the Greek version of Agathangelos' work Tir is also translated by Apollo (Thomson 1976, lxi).

[22] It should be noted that, according to modern scholars, the information provided by Agathangelos on pagan gods is not always very reliable (Thomson 1982, 608).

The oracle of Tir at Erazamoyn[23] (Gr. Ὀνειρομούσοι) is not otherwise known (Thomson 1976, 483n.4). This sanctuary was established *ca.* 176 BC, together with Artašat (Hewsen 1987, 660). It is also indirectly mentioned by Moses Khorenac'i, who wrote that a statue for Apollo was put up near the road, a little bit out of town (Gelzer 1896, 110). At present the sanctuary only exists in literary sources: hitherto no temples were found in Artaxata (Russell 1987b, 660).

From these sources it has become clear that Tir was venerated in Armenia at least during the third century BC (Russell 1987c, 296). It cannot be determined when the cult of Tir for the first time appeared in Armenia, but there is a good chance that it happened after Tīr was adopted by the Zoroastrians (cf. *supra*). As a result Tīr arrived in Armenia together with the Zoroastrian belief, most probably in the first half of the fourth century, during the reign of Artaxerxes II (cf. Chaumont 1987, 434 and Russell 1987, 444).

4. *Reflections on Tīr's Origin*

Several theories concerning the origin of Tīr have been defended during the past decades.

4.1. *Semitic*

One author (Zadok 1976, 230) expresses (with doubts, however) belief in a Semitic origin of Tīr. The Medes may have borrowed the West Semitic lunar deity Te(h)ri[24] from the Aramaeans. This Te(h)ri got mixed up with the Iranian word for the planet Mercury (also Tīr) and so the new deity Tīr was born.

Gnoli (*apud* Panaino 1995, 73n.57a) points to the correspondence of the Av. month of Tištrya and the Bab. month Du^{2}uzu, also the month of Sîn, the Mesopotamian Moon-god. Panaino (*ibid.*) does not intend to solve the problem, but gives the interesting remark that a derivation of the Iranian name for Mercury from a Semitic name for the Moon is rather problematic.

4.2. *Armenian*

According to some scholars Tir/Tīr is a god who was adopted by the Armenians from the previous inhabitants of their land (Eilers 1971, 43 and 44n.75; Boyce 1975, 77) and who later was imported by the Medes. These transferred him to the Persians. The contact with Nabû happened according to Eilers in Assyria, according to Boyce in Elam.

An argument used in favour of an Armenian origin of Tir/Tīr is the relation between the Armenian Tir and dream interpretation. This connection is mentioned in the work of the Armenian historian Agathangelos (cf. *supra*).

If dream-interpretation is indeed one of the original aspects of the Tir/Tīr-cult, then there is a good chance of him being a real Armenian deity. This relation should thus be investigated thoroughly, in order to determine the Armenian genes of Tir/Tīr. It will, however, be shown that the validity of the argument is disappointingly low.

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[23] Eraza- certainly comes from Old Iranian **rāza-*, "secret" (Patkanean 1882, 15; Russell 1987c, 296), while *-moyn* is attested elsewhere in compounds and has a basic meaning "like" (*ibid.* 297). Bailey (*apud* Russell 1987c, 314n.45) suggests a derivation from a base *mau*, "to speak". The meaning would then be "dream-speaker".

The sanctuaries of Tir also had scribal schools attached to them, where Armenian priests were trained in the scribal arts (Gelzer 1896, 110; Russell 1987c, 299-300).

[24] Te(h)ri was especially worshipped in Ḫarrān. See Lewy (1945-46, 425-433) and Van der Toorn (1995, 1587) for more information on this divinity.

When Zoroastrianism entered Armenia during the Achaemenid period the Armenians preserved strong regional traditions and incorporated them into the imported religion (Russell 1987, 439). The aspect of dreaming may well be such an Armenian regional tradition, all the more since dreams and dream interpretation play an important role in Armenian literature and consequently in Armenian thought (Thomson 1991, 267-268).

Alternatively the dream interpretation may be the result of Greek influence, since Armenia also underwent some Greek influence. Dreams were an important aspect in Greek religion and life.

Consequently dream interpretation is not necessarily an original aspect of the Tir/Tīr-cult and the main argument to consider Tir/Tīr an Armenian god has now lost most of its strength.

Next to the poor strength of the argument discussed above there are also some serious objections against such an Armenian origin. The first one concerns the chronology. It has already been shown that Tir/Tīr entered the western Iranian pantheon between 1000 and 750/650 BC. Were Tir/Tīr originally Armenian, he must have been worshipped there already some time before that. In that case Tir/Tīr would have been venerated in Armenia before the Achaemenid period. Yet it has already been pointed out that there is no hard evidence for a Tir/Tīr-cult in Armenia before the Achaemenid period, while he was widely worshipped in Armenia during the Parthian and Sasanian periods (Boyce 1975, 77n.370; Russell 1987c, 575; Boyce and Grenet 1991, 324).

The second objection touches the history of Armenia. If Tir/Tīr were an Armenian god, who was picked up by the Armenians from the previous inhabitants (*i.e.* Urartians) of Armenia, this would mean that the Armenians already lived in Armenia during the Urartian period. Yet such a hypothesis is problematic, since it has been generally accepted that only after the disappearance of the Urartian kingdom the Armenians started to settle in what would become Armenia (Barnett 1982, 364-365; Zimansky 1995, 1141).

Furthermore the most likely people from whom the Armenians inherited Tir/Tīr are the Urartians. There is, however, no attested Urartian god Tir/Tīr (cf. Riemschneider 1963), neither does the Urartian language contain such a root. If Tir/Tīr really were an Armenian god, then the Armenians must have taken him with them when they moved to Armenia.

Finally, there is also a linguistic objection against an Armenian origin: the month name Trē has an internal Iranian evolution and is not a form evolved within Armenian (cf. note 19).

4.3. *Iranian*

Since Tīr was very important in the Iranian religion during the late Achaemenid and Hellenistic periods, it would seem obvious to consider him a purely Iranian god. An argument in favour of such a position is certainly the chronology: the first attestations of this divinity are situated in Iran and Babylonia.

Yet there are some problems with this. First of all Tīr has no Indo-Aryan cognates (Eilers 1976, 48) and, secondly, he is strange to Iranian tradition, in that way that his cult is allegedly related to the explaining of dreams (cf. Chaumont 1987, 434).

At first sight these two objections seem to make an Iranian origin of Tīr implausible. Yet both problems can be solved. The second one, in fact, has already been solved above. The relation between dream-interpretation and Tīr is not necessarily Iranian in origin: it can be ascribed to Armenian or Greek influence. The first problem is indeed undeniable – Tīr has no Indo-Aryan cognates – but it can be explained likewise. As Tīr came in only at a later stage, he does not need the postulated Indo-European cognates.

There are various possibilities for the origin of Tīr. He could be Armenian, Semitic, Iranian or he could also be picked up by the Iranians from non-Iranian tribes and people living in the area (e.g. Elamites, Kassites or the Kutian-Lullubian tribes[25]). It has been shown that he is probably not Armenian and also the Semitic theory is not convincing. In my view Tīr is a genuine Iranian planetary god, whose importance became significant only through his association with Nabû.

5. *The Ethnicity of Tīr within Iranian*

This section focuses on the etnicity of Tīr. In the following it will be investigated if Tīr can be connected with one of the two main western Iranian tribes: Persians or Medes.

Within Old Iranian there are several phonological aspects pointing towards the existence of several dialects, *e.g.* Old Persian /s/ vs. Median /sp/. Most of the aspects which do not belong to Old Persian (*e.g.* /z/ for Old Persian /d/, /s/ for Old Persian /θ/) are conventionally considered Median (because of the historical importance of the Medes), although this is far from being certain. The following part of this article will, however, accept this convention.

In all probability Tīr was originally and especially worshipped by Medes, rather than by Persians. This is indirectly shown by three indications. The first of these arguments wants to connect Tīr with Medes, the other two function as arguments against any relation between Tīr and Persians.

1) The majority of the personal names, constructed with the theophoric element Tīr, is attested in Aramaic and Babylonian. The Iranian names and loans in these two languages normally belong to the Median dialect, which enhances the idea that Tīr is especially part of Median names. It should, however, be noted that a name does not offer certainty about the ethnicity of its bearer.
2) Tīr is never mentioned as a god in the Elamite Persepolis Tablets, while various other gods, Iranian as well as Elamite ones, do occur in this archive (cf. Koch 1977, 80-119). This does not need to be an argument against a Persian character of Tīr. An alternative explanation may be that Tīr was at that time not a full part of the Iranian religion supported by the Achaemenid kings.
3) Tīr is never mentioned in any of the Royal Achaemenid Inscriptions, whereas his colleagues Mithra and Anāhita do occur in the inscriptions of Artaxerxes II and Artaxerxes III (only Mithra). This means that the Achaemenid kings were themselves not very ardent adherents of Tīr, since otherwise he would certainly appear in their inscriptions, as does Anāhita. Yet they promoted the cult of Tīr to be absorbed in Zoroastrianism, because it was the only way to unite both religions, at that time existing in western Iran. As has been mentioned above, the adoption of Tīr within Zoroastrianism meant for the latter the total conversion of the western Iranian people. By this it assumed the status of top religion in the Iranian lands.

Unfortunately the evidence is circumstantial and one cannot deduce from it a direct link between Tīr and the Medes. Nevertheless the combination of three circumstantial arguments points to such a relation.

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[25] Neither the Elamites nor the Kassites nor other regional tribes seem to have known an indigenous divinity Tīr. Of course this is not fully certain due to a lack of sources.

If this is true, an additional argument concerning the discussion where Tīr and Nabû meet has turned up. They did most likely not meet in Elam, as Boyce argues, but in Media. The Medes got acquainted with Nabû through their contacts with the Assyrians, who certainly included the Babylonian Nabû in their pantheon[26]. Finally the Medes syncretized this god with their god Tīr.

6. *Conclusion*

All this shows that the origin of Tīr cannot be precisely known, although the sources point to a double possibility: either he was a western Iranian (more precisely: Median) god or he was a god, originally belonging to non-Iranian tribes in the region, but later picked up by the Iranians to denote the planet Mercury. This article prefers the first possibility. In that case he was originally a non-important (fertility and/or) Median stellar deity, who entered the Iranian pantheon sometime between 1000 and 750/650 BC and whose importance boosted after the Medes identified him with the great Babylonian god Nabû, whom they had learned to know through their contacts with Assyria.

This identification probably took place after ca. 625 BC. Before that he was, as said before, not important and this resulted in the total absence of personal names containing the theophoric element Tīr before the Achaemenid period. He is mentioned neither in Neo-Assyrian (9th-7th century BC) texts nor in the Neo-Elamite archive from Susa (*ca.* 625-550 BC) nor in the scanty Iranian onomastic material from Neo-Babylonian texts (626-539 BC).

From the Achaemenid period onwards the popularity of Tīr steadily increased. Tīr starts to appear in personal names in Babylon and Persepolis during the reign of Darius I. They probably belong to Medes. It should also be noted that in that period he is never attested in his position of divinity.

Before the reign of Darius II Tīr and his female colleague Anāhita maintained their cults in western Iran, despite the rising influence of Zoroastrianism. As the western Iranians did not want to give up their old religion completely while converting to the Zoroastrian belief, a solution to this had to be found to unite both religions. The result was the introduction of Tīr and Anāhita in orthodox Zoroastrianism, which was made possible through an identification with respectively Tištrya and *Harahvaiti.

This identification proved to be good for both parties: Tīr could now extend his area of influence to eastern Iran, while the Zoroastrians could now more easily convert western Iranians and even export their religion to Armenia. This solution was unofficially (in that sense that Tīr does not appear in their inscriptions) stimulated by the Achaemenid kings. This is partly proven by the fact that Artaxerxes II introduced Anāhita in his inscriptions. From now on more personal names with Tīr start to appear.

The above described evolution culminated in the enormous popularity of Tīr during the Parthian and Sasanian periods, during which some confusion arose around the figure of Tīr, a god who apparently realised some kind of "American dream" by beginning small and ending up great.

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