

CHAPTER 16

The Zoroastrian and the Manichaean demon $\bar{A}z$

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The indisputable fact that the Zoroastrian demon (Av.) $\bar{A}zi$, (MP.) $\bar{A}z$ steadily increased in prominence and importance has been simply stated or described as a development within Zoroastrian demonology or as a consequence of the impact of Buddhism or Manichaeism on the Zoroastrian doctrine. It was Hanns-Peter Schmidt who recently pointed out that there is, notwithstanding this development, an essential identity of the Avestan $\bar{A}zi$ and the Middle Iranian $\bar{A}z$, at least in so far as the activities of $\bar{A}z$ as the demon of hunger, thirst, gluttony, avarice, and miserliness are concerned. For the aspect of sexual desire, which is absent in the meager Avestan references and which plays only a marginal role in the Pahlavi texts, the possibility of a Manichaean influence on the Zoroastrian doctrine was taken into consideration.¹

Prof. Schmidt's results, which also correct, modify or confirm some of my assumptions on the relation between the Zoroastrian and the Manichaean demon $\bar{A}z$, mainly those I had put forward in my article "Some more remarks on Mithra in the Manichaean Pantheon"², induce me to reconsider those aspects of the Manichaean $\bar{A}z$ which can be compared with the Zoroastrian $\bar{A}z$.

That the Zoroastrian $\bar{A}z$ is basically "hunger, thirst, gluttony", etc., and not sexual desire, that it destroys and causes death, has justly been underscored by Schmidt. His evaluation of the relation between the Zoroastrian and the Manichaean $\bar{A}z$ follows Zaehner: "Zaehner hat den Unterschied zwischen der(!) zoroas-

¹ Schmidt 2000, pp. 517-527.

² Sundermann 1978, pp. 487-499.

trischen und der manichäischen Āz richtig beschrieben: bei Mani ist die sexuelle Begierde zentral, im Zoroastrismus die Gefräßigkeit und Habgier."³ This definition is correct for the Zoroastrian part but needs extension on the Manichaean side. The Manichaean Āz is no less sexual desire than it is gluttony and mortal destruction, so that the relation between the Zoroastrian and the Manichaean Āz is similarity rather than difference.

The aspects of sexual desire and gluttony of the Manichaean Āz are best illustrated by the myth of the creation of the first human couple by Āz or by her incarnations, the demon *Ašaqlūn* and the demoness *Nebrō'ēl*, which is now amply attested in several versions.⁴ What they all have in common is the tradition that the procreation of Adam and Eve by way of copulation was preceded by a cannibal act, an act of most ignoble gluttony: *Ašaqlūn* and *Nebrō'ēl* devoured the offspring of their fellow demons in order to amass in their bodies as much light substance of the World Soul as possible.

It is remarkable that Schmidt considers it possible that this Manichaean myth even inspired the Zoroastrian tale of the first human couple, *Mašya* and *Mašyāna*, who devoured their own children until Ohrmazd himself interfered and removed the sweet taste of the children from their parents' mind.⁵

When Manichaean texts list different aspects of sinful desire there appear "Unzucht" and "Diebstahl", "Raub, Begierde, Hurerei", and "die Unersättlichkeit des Mammons" side by side.⁶

Zaehner drew attention to the fact that the Zoroastrian Āz is instrumental in the decomposition and death of man, and he found confirmation in a famous passage of Ferdousi's *Šāhnāme*.⁷

³ Schmidt 2000, p. 521.

⁴ Théodore bar Koni, *Livre des Scolies* (recension de Séert) II, trad. par R. Hespel, R. Draguet (†), Lovanii 1982, pp. 236-237, text: Theodorus bar Koni, *Liber Scholiorum* II, ed. A. Scher, Louvain 1960, p. 317; Andreas, Henning 1932, pp. 198-201 = Hutter 1992, pp. 81-104; 56th *Kephalaion* in: [Polotsky, Böhlig] 1940, p. 138; W. Sundermann, Mani's "Book of the Giants" and the Jewish Books of Enoch. A Case of Terminological Difference and What it Implies, in: *Irano-Judaica* III, ed. Sh. Shaked, A. Netzer, Jerusalem 1994, pp. 45-47; for Augustine cf. E. Feldmann, *Die "Epistula Fundamenti" der nordafrikanischen Manichäer*, Altenberge 1987, pp. 16-21, 82-87.

⁵ Schmidt 2000, pp. 524-525.

⁶ A. Böhlig, *Kephalaia* I, zweite Hälfte, Stuttgart u.a. 1966, p. 287.

⁷ Zaehner 1955, p. 172.

Schmidt has shown that this is by no means a marginal effect of *Āz*, but that already in the *Vendīdād* *Āz* appears as a “Dämon des Todes”.⁸ But a demon of death is the Manichaean *Āz*, too. M 805a /V/10/, a piece from Mani’s *Šābuhragān*, mentions h’n xyšmmrg ”z u ’wrzwg “that greed and lust, (filled) with the death of fury”,⁹ and many more texts speak of *āz* and *āwarzōg* together with *xišm*, the destructive fury. The three of them constitute the *mēnōgīh ī tan*, the demoniac spirituality of the body.¹⁰ How the destructive force of *Āz* works is well described in the Middle Persian cosmogonical text of “Mitteliranische Manichaica I”: “When the first man (*Gēhmurd*) and “the Female one of the Glories” (*Murdyānag*), the first male and female persons, began living on earth, then Greed (*Āz*) awoke in them, and wrath (*xišm*) filled them. And they started to clog up springs, to injure trees and plants, to rage on earth and become greedy. They have no fear of the gods. And they do not recognize these five Elements (of Light dispersed in the world), by which the world is ordered, and they torture (them) permanently.”¹¹

According to *Dēnkard* M, no. 357, *Āz* is the opponent of *xrad* “reason” (and *x’arrāh*).¹² Mani claims in his *Šābuhragān*¹³ to teach “reason and gnosis” (*xrd ’wd d’nyšn*) and to redeem mankind from *Āz* and *Ahriman*.

The *Zand ī Wahman Yasn* says that at the end of Zoroaster’s millennium mankind will worship *Āz* and *x’āstag* (possession).¹⁴ The Manichaean *Āz* misleads Adam and Eve to worship “greed and lust” (“z ’wd ’wrzwg pryst’nd) and to obey the demons.¹⁵

So there is a broad range of comparable facts, which is hardly fortuitous in the case of two religions that coexisted for centuries. The main difference seems to be that the Zoroastrian *Āz* is rarely sexual desire and that what points to sexual desire may be

⁸ Schmidt 2000, p. 519.

⁹ Sundermann 1981, p. 97.

¹⁰ Andreas, Henning 1933, p. 300, text M 9 II /R/15-16/. Mary Boyce called *Ismag* (the Parthian equivalent of MP. *Xešm*) “the active spirit of Hyle” (*BSOAS* 14, 1952, pp. 438-439).

¹¹ Andreas, Henning 1932, pp. 200-201; Hutter 1992, pp. 98-99. My English translation follows largely Klimkeit 1993, p. 234.

¹² Schmidt 2000, p. 520.

¹³ Andreas, Henning 1933, p. 307, text M 49 II /R/8-11/. On this fragment being part of the *Šābuhragān* cf. Sundermann 1981, pp. 91-92.

¹⁴ Schmidt 2000, p. 521.

¹⁵ Andreas, Henning 1932, p. 199; Hutter 1992, pp. 94-95.

explained as influence from the Manichaean side. This is Prof. Schmidt's convincing solution. I think, however, that this Manichaean influence on Zoroastrian mythology was greater than on Āz in particular if one accepts that the Zoroastrian figure of *Jeh*, the demon Whore, owes something, if not her very existence, to Manichaean influence. The Zoroastrian *Jeh* was Ahriman's companion when he attacked Ohrmazd's world. *Jeh* is, as her name indicates, the personification of sexual desire. That this is so is confirmed by her foolish "desire for man".¹⁶ Ever since F. Cumont first pointed it out, this episode has been combined with a related myth ascribed to the Zoroastrians and handed down by Theodore bar Kōnai, who says that the seducer of the women (so instead of the Zoroastrian "whore") was no one other than the divine messenger *Narsē*. This episode was explained by Hans Heinrich Schaefer as a Zoroastrian borrowing from the Manichaean side, namely the myth of the seduction of the archonts.¹⁷ If that was so, the Zoroastrian *Jeh* may be explained as a substitute for the Manichaean Āz. And there are more features that both have in common.

Both the Manichaean Āz and the Zoroastrian *Jeh* become, so to speak, the target of divine seduction. The demon Whore is made, according to Zādšparam, "queen" and "chief" (*bān[ūg], sar*) of all the whore demons.¹⁸ The Manichaean Āz is "captain of the *Āsrēštār*-Demons" ('wy 'sryštr'n s'r'r').¹⁹ The *Bundahišn* reports that the demon Whore comforts Ahriman after his first defeat against Ohrmazd by telling him how she will damage and

¹⁶ Thus according to both versions of the *Bundahišn* (Zaehner 1955, pp. 355-360).

¹⁷ H.H. Schaefer, "Der iranische Zeitgott und sein Mythos", in: *ZDMG* 95(20) 1941, pp. 291-292. G. Widengren maintained the opposite position (*Die Religionen Irans*, Stuttgart 1965, p. 305, n. 48) with reference to Zaehner 1955, p. 186 (not 168), n. 48, who, however, regarded the "zervanite" origin of the demon Jehas no more than a hypothesis. Widengren's own arguments, as developed in "Primordial man and prostitute: A Zervanite motif in the Sassanid Avesta", in: *Studies in Mysticism and Religion presented to Gershom G. Sholem*, Jerusalem 1967, pp. 337-352, are based, as I understand them, on linguistic and stylistic criteria of a translation language which are, in my view, not compelling.

¹⁸ Zaehner 1955, pp. 345, 351.

¹⁹ Andreas, Henning 1932, pp. 199-200, thus Hutter 1992, pp. 95-96, who translates s'r'r ad sensum as "Anführerin".

destroy the creation of Ohrmazd (just as the Manichaean *Āz* does). Ahriman then rises and launches another attack against the good creation.²⁰ The fourth Coptic *Kephalaion* says about *Āz*: “Sie, diese Hyle, die Ἐνθύμησις des Todes ist es, die veranlaßt hat den König des Reiches der Finsternis und seine Kräfte, sich zu erheben zum Krieg (πόλεμος) und zum Kampf gegen die Aeonen der Größe.”²¹

But why, one may ask, did the Zoroastrians need another demon of the *Āz* type? Was there not their own *Āz*, mentioned in the *Zādsparam* passage directly after the whore and so similar to the Manichaean figure? If we assume, with Professor Schmidt, that the Zoroastrian *Āz* was rather a male demon than a demoness and if we remember that the Manichaean *Āz* was certainly female,²² if we further accept Schaefer's view that the Zoroastrian demon *Jeh* would not exist without the pattern of the Manichaean *Āz*, then a possible reason could be that the Zoroastrians introduced into their pandemonium a female demon who corresponded more exactly to the cosmogonical role of the Manichaean *Āz*. To assume a Manichaean pattern of the Zoroastrian demon *Jeh* would easily explain the enigmatic appearance and disappearance of the *Jeh* demon in the course of the cosmogonical events. She makes, to put it in Zaehner's words, “dramatic and apparently inexplicable appearance” only in order to “dramatically fade away” before long.²³

If there is a semantic continuity of the Zoroastrian *Āzi-/Āz* concept, if there is also a broad range of identity of the Zoroastrian and the Manichaean *Āz* concept and if there are cases of Manichaean influence on the Zoroastrian *Āz* and the figure of *Jeh*, is *Āz* then another “Zoroastrian dilemma”? It is a dilemma for the modern scholar, I think, because we are not (yet) in a position to fix the time when and the way how *Āz* came to be a first-rate demon in the Zoroastrian lore. In my article of 1978 (not quoted by Schmidt), I had ventured the hypothesis that the promotion of the Zoroastrian *Āz* came about under Manichaean influence because *Āz* is attested as a leading eschatological combatant in Manichaean and in late-Sasanian Pahlavi texts.²⁴ But

²⁰ Zaehner 1955, pp. 355-360.

²¹ [Polotsky, Böhlig] 1940, p. 26, ll. 18-20.

²² Schmidt 2000, pp. 517, 525.

²³ Zaehner 1955, p. 183.

²⁴ Sundermann 1978, pp. 495-499.

this does not necessarily mean that the idea itself is a late one. I now think that I rashly disregarded in 1978 a passage in Plutarch's *De Iside et Osiride* which says that in the end "Areimanus will bring a plague (λοιμὸν) and famine (λιμὸν)²⁵ and inevitably perish by them utterly and disappear".²⁶ If we may interpret Plutarch's "famine" as *Āz* (insatiable hunger is a characteristic of *Āz*), then the Zoroastrian *Āz* as an eschatological power would be attested already in the second century A.D. when Plutarch wrote, and that means before and independent of any Manichaean infiltration.

So far I have stressed some similar traits of the Zoroastrian and the Manichaean *Āz*. But there are of course also differences. One different detail may have possibly been the male gender of the Zoroastrian *Āz* (assuming it was not female).²⁷ A safer point is the relation of *Āz* in both religions to the fire.

Schmidt quotes as one of the oldest Zoroastrian texts mentioning the demon *Vidēvdād* 18, 19, 21, and 23, where the fire of the household (*ātar*) turns beseechingly to the master of the house, the cattle-breeding farmer and to the god *Srōš* (the adversary of *Āz*) asking for more firewood. "It is", the fire says, "as if *Āzi* snatches my vital power before my appointed span of life (ends)."²⁸ Here the greedy, voracious and devouring *Āz*, it seems, deprives the divine fire of its apportioned food.

Another kind of consuming fire bears the Avestan name *vohufriiāna*.²⁹ It lives, according to the *Bundahišn*, in the bodies of men and animals and consumes (*xwarēd*) water and food.³⁰ One of the medieval Zoroastrian texts in New Persian language, a version of the '*Ulamā-i Islām*, takes up this description as follows:

*wa digar dar tan-e ġānwarān ast o hame ċizhā
xorad*

²⁵ λιμός is "hunger, great appetite, desire" (*Benselers Griechisch-Deutsches Wörterbuch*, Leipzig 1962, p. 480).

²⁶ Cf. my remark in Sundermann 1978, p. 496, n. 64.

²⁷ Cf. Schmidt 2000, p. 525.

²⁸ Schmidt 2000, p. 518 with n. 9.

²⁹ Chr. Bartholomae, *Altiranisches Wörterbuch*, Strassburg 1904, col. 1433.

³⁰ *Zand-Ākāsīh. Iranian or Greater Bundahišn*, ed. B.T. Anklesaria, Bombay 1956, pp. 156-159.

And another (fire) is in the bodies of [men and] animals, and it consumes everything.³¹

But a few lines further down the author contradicts his own words and states:

digar ān ke porsidi ke dar rastāxiz čun āteš dar tan-e mā bāšad bi xoreš čun tawānad bud wa ġawāb ma'lum ast ke xoršid az hame-ye ātešhā garmtar ast wa bi xoreš ast ma'lum ast ke xoreš diw mixorad ke gofte āmad ke čand diw dar tan-e mardom momtazeġ and porsid ke čun xoreš be tabā šod čun xoši bāšad ke čun āz o niyāz nabāšad be xoreš če ħāġat bāšad čun druġ-e garmā nabāšad be sāye če ħāġat čun druġ-e sarmā nabāšad be āteš če ħāġat čun waran nabāšad be zan če ħāġat.³²

Again, about what you asked as to how, at the Resurrection, the fire which is within us will exist without food, the answer is: it is evident that the sun is hotter than other fires, but it lives without food. It is clear that food is eaten by the demon [Āz], as it is said that there are several demons intermingled in the body of man. It is asked: 'When there will be no food, how will there be any pleasure?' (It should be known that) when there are no (demons like) Āz and Nyāz (i.e., avarice and want), what need is there for food? If there is no *druj* of heat, what need is there for shelter? If there is no *druj* of cold, what need is there for fire? If there is no *druj* of lust, what need is there for women?³³

³¹ Text Unvâlâ 1922, p. 75, l. 2; translation Dhabhar 1932, p. 442. Text in [] is added from Barzu Kamdin's Collective Rivāyat, belonging to Ervad E.K. Antia.

³² Text Unvâlâ 1922, p. 75, ll. 3-7.

³³ My translation is based on Dhabhar 1932, p. 442. Text in [] is added from Barzu Kamdin's Collective Rivāyat, belonging to Ervad E.K. Antia.

In other words it is strictly speaking not the fire itself which consumes the food but its adversary, a demon who, as can be deduced from context and parallel text, is $\bar{A}z$. This amounts to a correction of the Zoroastrian doctrine and it goes against the Manichaean lore.³⁴

As regards Manichaeism, a close relation between $\bar{A}z$ and fire can also be established but a complementary, not an antagonistic one. $\bar{A}z$ is not the enemy of the fire, the fire is a manifestation of $\bar{A}z$ herself. The demon $\bar{A}z$, says the "Sermon on the Light Nous", made the qualities $\bar{a}z$ "greed" and $\bar{a}warz\bar{o}g$, which must be a synonym of $\bar{a}z$ guardians over the human body, and the "devouring fire" (Parth. *wxryndg 'dwr*) its supreme commander.³⁵ This fire is the vital power within the microcosmic bodies and arouses sexual desire.³⁶ But it is also the great fire of the macrocosm, which the "Sermon on the Light Nous" compares with the trunk of the dark tree of $\bar{A}z$.³⁷ The "Great fire" was enclosed in the beginning of the world in three ditches which surround the earth, but in the end it will get free and set the world ablaze.³⁸ Both kinds of demoniac fire (as opposed to the divine element fire, which also exists) are described in the Parthian fragment M 35,³⁹ and their voracious character is underlined. They are explicitly classed with the demon $\bar{A}z$ in an informative passage of the Middle Persian *Kephalaia* text M 5750 /V/i/4-12/:

'wd pd 'mdyšnyh 'y "z šh r'h 'y mrg pyd'g bwd **
'dwr 'y (n)hwftg u 'dwr 'yg 'šq'rg 'w wrdyšn ** u
bwy 'wd 'sprhmg'n 'w whyšt

And at the coming of $\bar{A}z$ three ways of death are re-

³⁴ M. Molé, who has translated the whole passage, stressed its agreement with the doctrine of Mazdak (Molé 1959, pp. 166-167).

³⁵ Cf. Sundermann 1992, pp. 62-63, 85.

³⁶ Cf. [Polotsky, Böhlig] 1940, p. 26, ll. 15-17.

³⁷ Sundermann 1992, pp. 74-75.

³⁸ Sundermann 1992, pp. 120-121.

³⁹ Henning 1943, pp. 71-72. —It is a widespread anthropological doctrine in late antiquity, perhaps popularised by the adherents of the Stoic philosophy, that the process of digestion is a kind of cooking food by an interior heating force, cf. e.g. Th. Gomperz, *Griechische Denker. Eine Geschichte der antiken Philosophie* III, Frankfurt a.M., p. 133. Such doctrines certainly come close to the Manichaean and Zoroastrian concept of the interior fire.

vealed, the hidden fire and the visible fire (both leading) to transmigration, and (good) smell and flowers to paradise.

In this text fire in man and fire on earth are taken as manifestations of *Āz* which lead to rebirth (by misleading man to doing sinful acts, consuming wine and meat, doing worldly work, etc.). But *Āz* contributes – surprisingly and of course unwillingly – also to the redemption of the human souls by “good smell” and “flowers”. I refer this statement to the genesis of the vegetable world from the semen of the celestial demons which they once shed when the Third Messenger appeared visibly in female shape before their eyes.⁴⁰ Later in history, when human kind undergoes transmigration, the plants become a favorite receptacle of the more refined human souls, who will be given the chance to return to paradise by way of the sacramental meal of the elect (and even immediately as the fine scent of the flowers?).⁴¹

A notable difference between the Manichaean and the Zoroastrian fire doctrine is that the Manichaean one is consistent while the Zoroastrian one is not. The *Vidēvdād* passage quoted above charges *Āzi* with depriving the fire of its apportioned food. The author of the '*Ulamā-i Islām* tries to release the sacred fire altogether from the imputation that it is hungry, greedy, gluttonous, and devastating. In the case of the '*Ulamā* I find some statements which are familiar to me from Manichaean texts too. The idea that the human body is divided into seven parts: brain, marrow of the bone, veins, nerves, flesh, skin, and hair,⁴² has comparable parallels in Gnosis and Manichaeism.⁴³ The idea that the four seasons are manifestations of demons and antagonistic enemies⁴⁴ has a parallel in a Manichaean New Persian text M 106 etc. that will shortly be published. So it is not impossible that the Zoroastrian author may have been familiar with the

⁴⁰ Cf. e.g. H.-Ch. Puech, *Le Manichéisme; son fondateur, sa doctrine*, Paris 1949, p. 80.

⁴¹ Cf. W. Sundermann, “Who is the Light-NOYΣ and what does he do?”, in: *The Manichaean NOYΣ*, ed. A. van Tongerloo, J. van Oort, Lovanii 1995, p. 264.

⁴² Dhabhar 1932, p. 441.

⁴³ Cf. P. Nagel, Anatomie des Menschen in gnostischer und manichäischer Sicht, in: *Studien zum Menschenbild in Gnosis und Manichäismus*, ed. P. Nagel, Halle S. 1979, pp. 70-71, 82-85.

⁴⁴ Dhabhar 1932, p. 442.

Manichaean lore, and that his apology of the fire was also directed against Manichaean adversaries.

I think Prof. Schmidt has proved that the idea of the Zoroastrian Middle Persian demon *Āz* may be understood from Zoroastrian premises as they are still traceable in the Avesta. But I think also that the *promotion* of the *Āz* owes something to Manichaean influence, at least within the limits fixed by Schmidt. It remains a task for the future to reconsider, in light of Hanns-Peter Schmidt's results, a possible influence of the Zoroastrian on the Manichaean *Āz* concept.

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