

**NO HELP FOR EVIL AXT.  
AHRIMAN'S IMAGE AND THE ADVENT OF FRAŠAGIRD IN THE  
STORY OF JŌIŠŤ Ī FRIYĀN**

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The *Mādayān ī Jōišť ī Friyān* (MJF)<sup>1</sup> is a work of Zoroastrian literature composed in Middle-Persian language around the 9th century AD<sup>2</sup>. It consists of riddles imbedded into a vivid frame story, key elements of which can be traced back to the Avesta (Yt. 5.81-83). Created for edifying purposes the narrative recounts in an entertaining way how the wise and God-fearing youth Jōišť ī Friyān outwits the wicked sorcerer Axt. Under constant threat of death Jōišť succeeds in solving 33 riddle questions put forward to him by his ruthless adversary. In a counter move the youthful hero then poses three questions to the sorcerer, which the latter is incapable to answer on his own. In order to save his life, Axt rushes to hell, where he asks for demonic assistance. But his patron Ahriman proves unwilling to respond to the questions. With no answers ready Axt returns to Jōišť, accepts defeat and is slain in accordance with the rules of the contest.

These are the three questions, which Jōišť ī Friyān poses to the sorcerer:

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<sup>1</sup> Text-critical editions of the MJF by: West 1872 (see also Haug, West 1874); Ja'fari 1987; Ğeybi 1988; Weinreich 1992, 1994; Cantera, Toledo 2006. An Armenian translation (1958) and glossary was published by R. Abrahamian.

<sup>2</sup> Similar to most MPB texts the MJF does not contain extra-linguistic information pointing at the time of its composition. The proposed 9<sup>th</sup> century dating is based on two positions: 1) Most datable MPB texts were composed around this time, a period during which Zoroastrian literary activities in Iran experienced a temporary revival; 2) The MP language of the MJF contains a number of features which bear witness to NP linguistic influence, e.g. *šudan* in the sense of "become" (MJF 118, 129, 293), *-ihā* as plural suffix (MJF 44, 384, 388), *rāy* as direct object marker (MJF 35, 194, 273, 287 etc.), *tuwān-* "to be able" functioning as finite verb (MJF 385), *čiyōn ka* as temporal conjunction "when" (MJF 59), the replacement of ergative with active construction (MJF 65-66, 388-389, 402-403). A similar dating of the MJF, also based on linguistic features, is proposed in Cantera, Toledo 2006, 69-70. The oldest dated MJF manuscripts (M 51b and K 20, see Weinreich 1992, 45) were copied in India in 1269 and 1321 AD respectively.

**MJF (369-370)** What is the value (*arz*) of a piece of land and a handful of seeds? What is the value (*arz*) of an ox used for ploughing? (370-372) What is the value (*arz*) of the meritorious deed of a next-of-kin-marriage (*xwēdōdah*)?<sup>1</sup> (cf. the same questions repeated in MJF 380-383)

As it appears, the key to the understanding of these questions is the precise meaning of MP *arz* “worth, value” (MacKenzie 1971, 11). In the given context *arz* is used as a technical term, denoting the spiritual value attributed to tillage, seeds, ox, and next-of-kin-marriage according to their importance in mankind's fight against evil<sup>2</sup>. For a Zoroastrian, knowing the spiritual value of a religious entity (i.e. a physical object, an idea or an action) means to understand how strongly its occurrence, performance or omission will influence ones individual redemption after death and the final collective salvation of mankind at the end of time. Of course, such kind of specialised knowledge one would expect to be commanded by a religious authority, endowed with the gift of spiritual insight, and not by an evil man like Axt. So it comes as no surprise, that, when approached by Jōišť ī Friyān, the sorcerer has nothing to answer.

Looking for a way out, Axt transfers himself to the underworld and requests his lord and master, the Evil Spirit, for help<sup>3</sup>. Ahriman listens to the riddle questions and responds:

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<sup>1</sup> MJF related text quotes and paragraphing in this article refer to Weinreich 1992, 1994.

<sup>2</sup> Other religious entities whose *arz* “spiritual value” is discussed in MPB texts include: meritorious deeds (*kīrbag*) (ČH 53), the Wahrām fire (PRDd. 18g5, 18h1), rain (ZKA 238.1-3, tr. ZKAT 440), the adherents to the Good Religion (*wehān*) (Dk. 6.302), the righteous Mazdayasnian religion (*wehdēn ī māzdesnān*) (PRS 42). Besides this, Dk. 8.25.1 (cf. DkM 729.7-10) informs us about the existence of a text called *Arzestān*, the (now lost) Pahlavi translation of a (similarly lost) part of the Avesta which contained “... the essential about the value (*arz*) of animate and non-animate possessions, eating, drinking, each one with the necessary information.” (translation from Cantera 2004, 18); for the placement of the *Arzestān* within Zoroastrian literary tradition see Klingenschmitt 1968, 79).

<sup>3</sup> Axt’s travel to hell in search of knowledge related to the Good Religion recalls the exploits of three other personalities as narrated in MP Zoroastrian sources: 1) Ardā Wirāz, main protagonist of the eponymous AWN, tours heaven and hell on order to find out on behalf of his co-religionists whether their prayers and ceremonies would reached the neither world, and if they would come to the help of their souls or not. (cf. AWN 3.1-4, ed. Vahman 1986, 80-81). Interestingly, in M51b (formerly H6), K20 and K26, the three oldest MSS codices containing the MJF, the latter always follows immediately after the AWN (cf. Haug, West 1872, iii-xi), a circumstance which suggests

**MJF** (384-385) I can not answer to your questions. (385-387) Because, if I gave you the answers, all my creation, demons, bad spirits and witches included, would leave [the material world]. (387-388) And I do not like you more than I like my own creatures. (388-391) The very moment, I answer the questions you have asked me, all my creations will be powerless, and no adversity will remain. (391-393) Up there (i.e. in the material world), [these answers] will benefit Ohrmazd's creation and immediately the resurrection of the death (*rist-āxēz*) and the awarding of the Future Body to mankind (*tan ī pasēn*) will take place.

In order to give full value to the peculiarity of Ahriman's statement, let me paraphrase his reply according to my understanding: The Evil Spirit knows the right answers to the three questions, but he doesn't want to tell them to Axt, because he fears, that his words would drive all evil out of the material world and without delay provoke the advent of Frašagird, the final salvation of mankind.

There are at least two points in this interpretation, which do not fit the traditional picture of Ahriman. First, there is the assumption, that the Evil Spirit, who is not renowned for his wisdom or intellectual abilities, should have profound insight into matters of Zoroastrian doctrine. Second, it appears that Ahriman, the sworn enemy of God and the Good Creation, could be in a position to exercise influence over a key element of Zoroastrian faith and theology, the eschatological events at the end of time.

It is rather remarkable, that although all previous MJF editors have rendered MJF 384-393 in a way comparable to the translation proposed above, none of them has made an attempt to address the mentioned conceptual inconsistencies. Nonetheless, to shed light on the given passage seems to be

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that both narratives might have been grouped together deliberately because of perceived thematic similarities; 2) The high-priest Kirdir, a historical figure active in early Sasanian times, claims in his inscriptions to have visited heaven and hell in order to improve his knowledge about the teachings of the gods concerning justness and wickedness (cf. Skjaervø 1983, § 2, 10). 3) Yima, Iran's mythological first ruler, is said to have retrieved from the demons in hell and brought to mankind "the benefit of every non-sacrificed [service], of every non-cultivated herd, as well as all prosperity and growth which the Creator of innate wisdom [gave] to people." (translation Shaked 1987b, 238).

important not only for the reason that Ahriman's monologue represents the narrative's climax, without a thorough understanding of which the frame story's literary merits can hardly be fully appreciated, but also because an exposure of the concepts underlying Ahriman's argumentation might help to widen our views on medieval Zoroastrian religious thought.

In the following I will first investigate the contextual background of the reasons given by the Evil Spirit for his refusal to respond to Axt's questions. And then, based on the investigation's results, I will attempt a short description of Ahriman's image and eschatological role, as I think they could have been perceived by the MJF author and his Zoroastrian readers. For a beginning, let us have a short look at the Evil Spirit's traditional image.

#### **An ignorant Ahriman**

The most comprehensive description of the devil's endowments and abilities is contained in the first chapter of the *Greater Bundahišn*, an undated MPB account of mythological events linked to the creation of the world:

**Gr.Bd. 1** (1) Ohrmazd existed high up, in the light, in a state of omni-science and goodness, and in infinite time. (3) Ahriman was deep down, in darkness, in a state of after-knowledge (*pas-dānišnīh*) and aggression. (13) And Ohrmazd in [his] state of omni-science knew that the Evil Spirit is there. (15) The Evil Spirit, on account of his after-knowledge (*pas-dānišnīh*), was unaware of the existence of Ohrmazd. (41) Ahriman strove with Ohrmazd, who [is] the Lord. And the prescience and universality and excellence and imperishability of Ohrmazd, and the powerlessness and self-centeredness and inferiority and after-knowledge (*pas-dānišnīh*) of the Evil Spirit became manifest when He created the creatures<sup>1</sup>.

Here, in consistent application of the Zoroastrian dualist scheme, Ahriman, the devil, is depicted as the complete opposite of God Ohrmazd. While the latter is correlated with light, omniscience, goodness, and supremacy, the Evil Spirit is coupled with inferiority, darkness, aggression and ignorance. Moreover, we are informed that it was Ahriman's after-knowledge (*pas-dānišnīh*) which at the

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<sup>1</sup> MP transcription in Cereti, MacKenzie 2003, 32-38.

beginning of the world left him unaware of God's very existence, while, at a later stage, his inability to foresee the end (*awēnāg-frazāmīh*) was the reason for his acceptance of Ohrmazd's power-sharing pact, an arrangement limited to nine thousand years, implying his own final defeat and the complete annihilation of evil<sup>1</sup>:

**Gr.Bd. 1 (27)** Thereupon the Evil Spirit, because of his inability to foresee the end (*awēnāg-frazāmīh*), agreed to that pact<sup>2</sup>.

We do not know the origins of the concept of Ahriman's ignorance, so articulately advocated in the *Bundahišn*. There is no reference to it in the Avesta, although its texts contain many an example of the Evil Spirit's other shortcomings<sup>3</sup>. That the notion of the devil's lack of knowledge is nevertheless an old one, appears from Plutarch's "De Iside et Osiride" (1<sup>st</sup> century AD) where it is stated that Zoroaster, the Magian, compared Oromazes, the good God of his creed, with light and the bad demon Areimanios, with darkness and ignorance (ἄγνοια):

**Plutarch, "De Iside et Osiride"** (46) For some believe that there are two gods who are rivals, as it were, in art, the one being the creator of good, the other of evil; others call the better of these a god and his rival a demon, as, for example, Zoroaster the Magus, who lived, so they record, five thousand years before the Siege of Troy. He used to call the one Horomazes and the other Areimanius, and showed also that the former was especially akin, among objects of perception, to light, and the latter, on the contrary, to darkness and ignorance (ἄγνοια)<sup>4</sup>.

Eight centuries later, around the time of the MJF's composition, the idea of an ignorant Ahriman must still have been widely accepted. This is suggested by the fact that *Mardān-farrox ī Ohrmazddādān*, the author of the 9<sup>th</sup> century

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<sup>1</sup> On the Zoroastrian millenary time scheme which is underlying the Ohrmazd-Ahriman power-sharing pact see e.g. Kreyenbroek 1993; 2002.

<sup>2</sup> MP transcription in Cereti, MacKenzie 2003, 35.

<sup>3</sup> For a brief summary of the Evil Spirit's portrayal in the Avesta and in MPB literature see Duchesne-Guillemin 1984; for a much more detailed exposition see Darmesteter 1877.

<sup>4</sup> Ed. Bidez; Cumont 2007, 70; translation de Jong 1997, 163-164.

Pahlavi treatise *Škand Gumānīg Wizār* could refer to this concept as to one of the teachings, which set the Zoroastrian doctrine apart from the precepts of the hated Manicheans, who according to him bestowed their own Evil Spirit not with after-knowledge but with the ability of foresight<sup>1</sup>.

### The Source of Knowledge

However, parallel to texts offering an unequivocally negative view of the devil's mental capacities, there are also accounts which provide us with a portrayal of a rather different Ahriman.

The arguably most widely-quoted tradition in this regard is the myth about the Evil Spirit's contribution to the creation of light, re-told by two early Christian authors: the Armenian Eznik of Kołb (5<sup>th</sup> century) in his famous apologetic treatise "On God" (also known as "Against the Sects") and a Syrian Anonymous in a brief account<sup>2</sup> dedicated to a 5<sup>th</sup> century Zoroastrian trial of two Iranian converts to Christianity.

According to these writers, their Zoroastrian contemporaries believed, that Ahriman taught his demonic allies that God, who was desperately trying to create light, could easily fashion sun and moon by performing the meritorious deed of next-of-kin-marriage with his own mother and sister:

**Eznik of Kołb** (187) When he (i.e. the Evil Spirit) saw, they say, that Ohrmiz had made beautiful creatures, and he did not know how to create light, he consulted with demons. He said: "Of what use is Ohrmizd that in such a manner he made beautiful creatures, yet they remain in darkness, because he does not know how to make light? But if he were intelligent, he would enter his mother, and there would be a sun as soon. And he would have relations with his sister, and the moon would be born<sup>3</sup>.

**Syrian Anonymous** Oder muß man vielleicht dem Ahraman zu gefallen suchen, der, nach euren Worten, aus seinen Werken als weise, kundig und hoch mächtig erscheint, wie Hormizd als

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. ŠGW 16.23, ed. de Menasce 1945, 252-253; for a more detailed discussion of ŠGW 16 see Sundermann 2001.

<sup>2</sup> Th. Nöldeke (1893) who translated and dated the account gave it the name "Acten des Adhurhormizd und der Anâhêd".

<sup>3</sup> Ed. Mariès, Mercier, 1959, 62-63; translation Blanchard, Darling Young 1998, 117-118.

schwach und dumm, da er gar nichts zu schaffen wußte, bis er von Ahramans Schülern lernte? Denn als er, nach euren Worten, die Welt erschuf, liess er sie in Finsternis, bis er von Ahramans Schülern lernte. Dann erst schuf er das Licht. Und als Hormizd dann nur einmal bei seiner Mutter schlief, wurde die Sonne, die so hell ist, geboren<sup>1</sup>.

Another demonstration of Ahriman's familiarity with the spiritual power of meritorious deeds is provided by a tradition contained in the Pahlavi treaties "Supplementary Texts to the *Šāyist nē-Šāyist*". Here, the Evil Spirit instructs his confidant, the demon of fury Xēšm, how to destroy the spiritual benefit people obtain from participating in the Gāhāmbār festival, performing the Mēzd ritual, and consuming their next-of-kin marriage:

**Supp.ŠnŠ 18** (1) It is said in the Avesta (*dēn*) that Xēšm rushed before Ahriman and growled: "I will not go into the world, because God Ohrmazd has created three things in the world about which I can not do anything at all". (2) Ahriman growled: "Say, what are these three things!" (3) Xēšm growled: "The Gāhāmbār festival, the Mēzd ritual and the next-of-kind-marriage (*xwēdōdah*)!" (4) Ahriman growled: "Infiltrate the Gāhāmbār festival! If anyone among them (i.e. the people who are celebrating it) has stolen anything, the Gāhāmbār is destroyed, and the matter will be according to your desire. Be present at the Mēzd ritual! If anyone among them (i.e. the people who are performing it) has chattered, the Mēzd ritual is invalidated, and the matter will be according to your desire. (5) [But] leave the next-of-kin-marriage (*xwēdōdah*), because I do not know a remedy for it; since whoever approaches [his wife] four times [in such a marriage] shall never separate from the alliance with Ohrmazd and the gods"<sup>2</sup>.

As will be remembered, the spiritual value of religious entities, among them the next-of-kin marriage was also the subject of Axt's questions to Ahriman.

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<sup>1</sup> Ed. Bedjan 1891, 578; translation Nöldeke 1893, 36.

<sup>2</sup> MP transliteration and transcription in Kotwal 1969, 76-77; a close thematic parallel in PRDd. 56.13-16, see also the translation of PRDd. 56.13-16 in Sundermann 2008, 158-159.

Besides this, there is another aspect the Christian authors' light creation myth and the Xēšm episode share with the MJF: their portrayal of Ahriman does clearly not support the traditional notion of his ignorance. Quite to the contrary, all three traditions testify to the fact that the Evil Spirit was thought to be endowed with an extraordinary insight into the ways of the Good Creation.

As for the source of Ahriman's knowledge, neither the Xēšm episode nor the MJF offer us any explanation. The mentioned Christian authors seem to have regarded this insight as one of the Evil Spirit's intrinsic properties, as they invoked the light creation myth as an evidence for their Iranian contemporaries' alleged inclinations towards devil worship<sup>1</sup>. However, in a Zoroastrian context, to which the quoted Pahlavi sources clearly belong, the assumption, that the devil could be by his very nature equally or even more knowledgeable than God, is completely untenable.

A more adequate, if not less remarkable explanation for Ahriman's knowledge can be obtained from an Arabic source re-produced in the "*Kitāb al-milal wa-l-niḥal*", *al-Šahrastānī's* well-known 12<sup>th</sup> century treatise on Iranian religious beliefs. The account is attributed to the Islamic scholar *al-Jayhānī*<sup>2</sup> and deals with matters of Zoroastrian doctrine. Shaul Shaked (1994b, p. 64, n.81), who translated and commented it, characterised *al-Jayhānī's* report as a compilation, originating in the Zoroastrian *zand*, the Pahlavi exegesis of the Avesta.

Among a wealth of material often unfamiliar from extant Pahlavi sources, *al-Jayhānī* provides us with a curious document which contains a list of 18 terms of contract, said to have been the conditions under which Ahriman agreed to Ohrmazd's power-sharing pact. The eleventh condition of the pact stipulates that:

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<sup>1</sup> The Syrian Anonymous concludes his Christian hero's listing of beneficial deeds attributed to the Evil Spirit (among them the latter's contribution to the creation of light) with the following ironic statement addressed to the presiding Zoroastrian judge: "Wie aus den Tatsachen ersichtlich, ziemt sich's also für uns, dem weisen und mächtigen Satan zu gehorchen und zu dienen, nicht aber dem dummen und unkräftigen Hormizd." (Ed. Bedjan, 579; translation from Nöldeke 1893, 37). On Armenian Christian sources (including Eznik of Koḥb) ridiculing supposed Zoroastrian devil worship see Russell 1987, 440.

<sup>2</sup> On *al-Jayhānī* see Pellat 2004, 265-266.



**Jay. 11** [...] he (i.e. Ahriman) should have some of the intelligence (*'aql*) and the insight (*bašar*) which is in the creatures of God, so that his creatures should know the paths of beneficial and harmful things<sup>1</sup>.

In the context of our investigation, this statement suggests that the Evil Spirit received his thorough understanding of the spiritual value of religious entities directly from Ohrmazd. As perplexing as the idea of such a cosmic knowledge transfer may sound, it nevertheless locates the notion of a well-informed Ahriman within Zoroastrian doctrine, as it clearly shows the secondary, derived nature of Ahriman's insight and in doing so reaffirms his subordinate position in relation to God.

### Religious Insight and the End of Time

One more reference to Ahriman's insight and the time when it came into his possession is contained in the Pahlavi composition *Dādestān ī Mēnōg ī Xrad*:

**DMX 29 (6-9)** At the period of primal creation (*bundahišnīh*) the people were so insightful that when they did a good deed or committed a sin, they saw with their own [inner] eye the reward for the good deed or the retribution for the sin. (9-10) And their was not a single sin originating from the people. (10-12) [But] then the evil Ahriman concealed the reward for the good deed and the retribution for the sin. (12-15) And exactly because of this it is said in the Avesta (*dēn*): "From all the harm the accursed evil stinker did to Ohrmazd's creation, four things are the worst and the most grave: the hiding of the reward for the good deed [and] (of) the retribution for the sin, (the hiding of) the intentions of people and (of) the end of the [worldly] affairs"<sup>2</sup>.

The statement, that ever since the end of the period of primal creation the Evil Spirit hid from mankind the insight into the consequences of their deeds is in

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<sup>1</sup> Translation Shaked 1994b, 71; Arabic quotes from de Menasce 1954, 57.

<sup>2</sup> MP transliteration in Čunakova 1997, 46; for DMX 29.12-15 see also ed. Sanjana 1895, 28 (§ 14.8-10).

full accord with the already quoted sources: The chronology of events reflects the moment in time when Ahriman started to implement his part of the power-sharing pact<sup>1</sup>, and the mentioned recompense for good and bad actions presupposes knowledge about these actions' spiritual value in order to be established.

In addition to this, there is another point of interest: DMX 29.12-15 provides us with a MP quote from the Zoroastrian holy scriptures (*dēn*) which declare that the concealment of this knowledge from mankind was among the biggest harm the Evil Spirit ever did to Ohrmazd's creation. The high level of damage thought to arise from Ahriman's refusal to share his insight with mankind is proportional to the extraordinary importance attributed to knowledge within Zoroastrian doctrine. People, although born into the good sphere, are given the possibility to choose to whom they want to belong, to God or to the forces of evil. Their choice is manifested by their thinking, speaking and acting according to the principles of the Good Religion or against them. Every righteous thought, word and action increases the individual believer's chances to reach paradise after death and, parallel to this, contributes to the gradual achievement of mankind's collective salvation at the end of time. In order for a person's deeds to be considered truly righteous they ought to be performed in a state of awareness about their spiritual benefit<sup>2</sup>. To achieve this state of awareness people are in need of religious insight, which in Zoroastrian perception is inseparable from the knowledge, provided to mankind in form of the Good Religion. Hence, religious knowledge is an indispensable precondition for Frašagird, the act of final salvation at the end of time. How one inevitably leads to the other, is comprehensively illustrated by a cause-effect chain, contained in the 6<sup>th</sup> book of the Pahlavi *Dēnkard*:

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<sup>1</sup> Although the pact as such was made at the very beginning of primal creation, Ahriman could commence to act on it only when this cosmic period had already finished, as immediately after the two parties had agreed upon the contract Ohrmazd recited the Ahunavar prayer and sent his adversary into a 3000-year-long stupor; cf. Kreyenbroek 1993.

<sup>2</sup> In this context is interesting to note, that according to the variant of the light creation myth preserved in the anonymous Syrian report God had already many times consumed his next-of-kin-marriage with his mother, but it was only after he became *aware* about the potential benefit of this deed, that the sun and other useful things could thus be created, cf. Nöldeke 1893, 36 (ed. Bedjdan 1891, 578).

**Dk.6 C75** From knowledge of the religion (*šnāsih ī dēn*) there comes about consideration of the sacred word, from consideration of the sacred word there comes about the increase of the practical application of the religion and (the increase) of the worship of the gods, and from the increase of the practical application of the religion and (the increase) of the worship of the gods (there comes about) the elimination of the demons from the world (*druz bē kardan ī az gēhān*), and from the elimination of the demons from the world there comes about immortality (*anōšagih*), the Renovation (*frašagerd*) and the Resurrection of the dead (*rist-āxēz*)<sup>1</sup>.

Like in MJF 385-387, also in this passage the events at the end of time are described as being heralded in by the disappearance of the demons from the world. This almost poetical image is based on the Zoroastrian concept that evil does not have its own corporeal form. Due to this deficiency it can oppose the good creation only in an indirect way, through the infiltration of people who have not made a conscious choice for the good sphere. Once people take side with Ohrmazd, evil is forced out of their body and has to look for another place to stay<sup>2</sup>.

In Zoroastrian texts the mass exodus of demons from the world is normally provoked by actions attributed to highly authoritative religious figures, like the prophet Zarathustra and the Sōšyans, mankind's final saviour<sup>3</sup>. Making the departure of evil and the events at the end of time depending on something, arising not from men of God, but from the Evil Spirit, like it is done in the MJF, is extremely unusual. Moreover, this idea, once accepted, leads us to the somehow startling realisation that by choosing to speed up or delay the release

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<sup>1</sup> MP transcription in Shaked 1979, 170. A thematic parallel in Dk.6. C49 concludes with the expulsion of the demons: "From good education there comes about good wisdom, from good wisdom there comes about good habit, from good habit there [comes about] good character, from good character there comes about righteous action and through righteous action the demons are expelled from the world (*druz az gēhān bē kard bawēd*)." (MP transcription in Shaked 1979, 162).

<sup>2</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the Zoroastrian concept of a exclusively spiritual existence of evil see Shaked 1967; 1969, 194f.

<sup>3</sup> On the separation of evil from mankind in the result of actions attributed to Zarathustra and/or the Sōšyans see e.g. Y. 9.14-15, Yt. 19.80-81, WZ 34.47-48, ZWY 3.23; on other 'separators' see ZWY 7.32-33 (god *Mihir*), ZWY 3.24 (*Wahman ī Spandyādā*, identified by ZWY's editor Cereti 1995, 184, 173 with Artaxerxes I), ZWY 3.27 (the Sasanian king *Wahrām Gōr*).

of knowledge in his possession, Ahriman would be in a position to influence the advent of Frašagird.

There is no doubt that such a concept, bizarre as it seems, nevertheless fits into the framework of Zoroastrian dualism. It can be explained as the negative mirror image of actions implemented by the good God Ohrmazd, who sustains the spreading of knowledge to achieve Frašagird, while his evil adversary Ahriman withholds this knowledge in order to undermine mankind's final salvation. But does the notion of Ahriman's active role in the induction of Frašagird really reflect existing Zoroastrian thought, or should it be regarded as an isolated product of the MJF author's literary imagination?

The answer to this question is suggested by two conceptual parallels contained in *al-Jayhānī's* already mentioned list of Ahriman's conditions to the cosmic power-sharing pact. The wording of the pact's thirteenth stipulation implies the existence of a link between religious insight hidden by Ahriman and the advent of Frašagird:

**Jay. 13** [...] there should be hidden from the people the knowledge of the [reward] of the work of the righteous and the wicked to the day of Resurrection and Judgement.

Whereas the Evil Spirit's potential influence on the events at the end of time is confirmed by the eighteenth condition, which grants Ahriman control over the Sōšyans:

**Jay. 18** [...] until the day of Resurrection he (i.e. Ahriman) should hold sway over him who revives the dead, who gives [eternal] life to the good, and who banishes the wicked<sup>1</sup>.

### **Knowledgeable but Doomed**

On the basis of Jay. 13 and Jay. 18 we can finally conclude, that all ideas which are expressed or implied in MJF 384-393 must have been part of Zoroastrian doctrine, current at the time of the story's composition. With other words,

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<sup>1</sup> Translation of Jay. 13 and Jay. 18 from Shaked 1994b, 71, 72; cf. also de Menasce 1954, 57, 58.

around the 9<sup>th</sup> century AD<sup>1</sup> there were members of the Zoroastrian community who adhered to the following ideas: Ahriman has insight into core values of the Good Zoroastrian Religion (MJF 384-393, Supp.ŠnŠ 18.4-5, Jay. 11). He received this knowledge from God Ohrmazd (Jay. 11) and is exploiting it since sometimes after the end of primal creation for his own evil purposes. (DMX 29.6-12). He shares his knowledge with his demonic allies (Supp.ŠnŠ 18.4-5), but hides it from human beings (MJF 384-391, DMX 29.10-15, Jay. 13). By concealing it from mankind he creates immense harm as he deprives people of the ability to make the right choices (DMX 12-15), besides this its possession enables him to exercise influence over the advent of Frašagird (MJF 391-393, and possibly Jay.18).

There is no indication in the available sources as to how this set of beliefs could have related to the traditional notion of Ahriman's ignorance. Considering the diversity of religious concepts tolerated within the framework of Zoroastrian teachings in late- and post-Sasanian times, there is a fair chance that both perceptions existed side by side<sup>2</sup>.

On the other hand, one might consider the following: Ahriman's knowledge is originally not his own, but of a secondary, derived nature, and his influence over the advent of Frašagird is of questionable value too, as delaying it seems to be excluded by the power-sharing pact's strict time frame<sup>3</sup> and speeding it up, as we have seen on the example of MJF, is clearly not in evil's interest. Hence, while on cosmic level the appropriation of spiritual insight may have given Ahriman a temporary advantage in his fight against Ohrmazd - and on earth its alleged concealment by the forces of evil might have served as a convenient excuse for a lack of religious commitment among ordinary Zoroastrians - there was no way the Evil Spirit could have used his knowledge for winning the last battle. From the very moment he unwisely

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<sup>1</sup> And perhaps already much earlier, if we count the quoted 5<sup>th</sup> century Christian sources among the evidence. Besides this, one has to take into consideration that most works of MPB literature are the final versions of texts which evolved in oral and/or written transmission over long periods of time; in that context cf. e.g. the references to *dēn* "the Avesta, holy scriptures" in the quoted Supp.ŠnŠ 18.1 and DMX 29.12. Consequently these works often preserve traditions the emergence of which significantly predates the actual text's time of composition.

<sup>2</sup> On the variety of religious concepts current within the Zoroastrian community during that period see e.g. Shaked 1994a, 20; 1969, 200; 1994a, 52; 1987a, 252.

<sup>3</sup> Interestingly, it is predicted in ZWY 7.32 that due to initiatives of the forces of evil the agreed-upon 9000 years of the power-sharing pact will finally be exceeded by 1000 years.

agrees to Ohrmazd 's proposal to limit the pact to 9000 years, the devil remains trapped in time and nothing, even not thorough insight into the ways of the Good Creation, can help him to avert his ultimate defeat. Perhaps, the traditional image of an ignorant Ahriman isn't that wrong, after all?

### Abbreviations

- AWN - Ardā Wirāz Nāmag, see Vahman 1986.
- ČH - Čidag Handarz ĩ Poryōtkēšān, see Čunakova 1991, 33-37, 69-74.
- Dk.6 - Sixth book of Dēnkard, see Shaked 1979.
- DkM - Dēnkard ed. Madan, see Madan 1911.
- DMX - Dādestān ĩ Mēnōg ĩ Xrad, see Čunakova 1997, 10-138.
- Gr.Bd.1 - First Chapter of Greater Bundahišn, see Cereti, MacKenzie 2003.
- Jay. - al-Jayhānī, see Shaked 1994, 64-73; de Menasce 1954.
- MJF - Mādayān ĩ Jōišť ĩ Friyān, see Weinreich 1992, 1994.
- MP - Middle Persian (language).
- MPB - Middle Persian of the Books.
- NP - New Persian (language).
- PRDd. 1990. - Pahlavi Rivāyat accompanying the Dādestān ĩ Dēnīg, see Williams 1990.
- PRS - Pursišnīhā, see JamaspAsa, Humbach 1971.
- ŠGW - Škand Gumānīg Wizār, see de Menasce 1945.
- Supp.ŠnŠ- Supplementary Texts to the Šāyist nē-Šāyist, see Kotwal 1969.
- WZ - Wizīdagīhā ĩ Zādspram, see Gignoux, Tafazzoli 1993.

Y	- Yasna.
Yt.	- Yašt.
ZKA	- Zand ī Xwurdag Abestāg (Text), see Dhabhar 1927.
ZKAT	- Zand ī Xwurdag Abestāg (English translation), see Dhabhar 1963.
ZWY	- Zand ī Wahman Yasn, s. Cereti 1995.

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