



ĀSMĀN

ĀSMĀN (sky, heavens), in Zoroastrian cosmology the first part of the material (*gētīg*) world created by Ohrmazd (*Bundahišn*, ed. B. T. Anklesaria, p. 33.2; *Dēnkard*, p. 124.6; *Zātspram* 1.25; *The Pahlavi Rivâyat Accompanying the Dâdistân-î Dînkîk*, ed. B. N. Dhabhar, Bombay, 1913, p. 128). The *Pahlavi Rivâyat* (loc. cit.), for example, relates that Ohrmazd formed his creatures out of “endless light” and kept them in his own body for 3,000 years, where they developed and were improved by him. Finally he manifested each one, in its proper order, in the external universe; and he first brought forth the heavens from his head. Šahrestānī relates a similar legend, which he derived from Jayhānī (*al-Melal wa’l-neḥal*, ed. Badrān, Cairo, 1370/1950, p. 603; Pers. tr., Tehran, 1350 Š./1977, p. 186). The *Pahlavi Rivâyat* specifies that the height and breadth of the heavens were equal (the same was true of the Primal Man, Gayōmard). Their spherical shape is indicated by the further statement that “the depth of their base (i.e., the lower hemisphere) is equal to the breath of the void (*tuhīgih*).” The *frawahrs* of the believers assist Ohrmazd in the invisible (*mēnōg*) world to keep the heavens separated from the earth and to prevent their collapse (*Yašt* 13.2). But in the material world itself nothing holds up the heavens (*Pahlavi Yasna* 44.4, *Pahlavi Rivâyat*, p. 128); and so they are sometimes referred to as “without pillars” (*abēsutūn*; see *Zand ī Xwurdag Abestāg*, ed. Dhabhar, Bombay, 1927, p. 256.9; *Zātspram* 34.20).

The substance of the heavens was described as stone (*Dēnkard*, p. 829.15; *Dâdistân ī dēnīg*, question 90, in *Cod. Avest. Pahl.* III; *Pahl. Yasna* 30.5, cf. Old Pers. *asman-*); shining metal (*Bundahišn*, pp. 77.11, 221.15); *almāst* (i.e., steel,



Bundahišn, p. 18.5; *Dādistān ī mēnōg ī xrad* 8.7., ed. F. C. Andreas, Kiel, 1882); or glass (*Bundahišn*, p. 173.3; *Pahlavi Rivāyat*, p. 128.4). The *Dēnkard* (p. 124.8-9) refers to the substance of the heavens as *mēnōg* wind (*wāy*). (See also J. de Menasce, *Le troisième livre du Dēnkard*, Paris, 1973, p. 127.) The heavens being spherical and white in color (*Bundahišn*, p. 11.3), they may be compared to a bird's egg (*Dādistān ī dēnīg*, question 9; *Pahlavi Rivāyat*, loc. cit.; *Mēnōg ī xrad* 43.8; *Zātspram* 34.20; *Bundahišn*, p. 18.4). But they are divided into four concentric spheres around the earth at the center (also viewed as strata, *pāyag*, above it): those of the stars, the moon, the sun, and boundless light (the locus of paradise, *wahišt*); the distance from the earth to the first sphere and between each successive sphere is given as 34,000 *frasangs* (e.g., *Pahlavi Rivāyat*, p. 129). The Zoroastrian tradition tended, however, to make the number of spheres conform to that of the planetary bodies in astrological lore or to that of Ohrmazd's original creations (and so to that of the Amahrspands). Thus references to six or seven spheres occur. The stratum of the atmosphere might be included, and the star sphere might be divided in two, the outer sphere being that of the fixed stars impervious to penetration by Ahriman's evil substance (*Bundahišn*, p. 28.1ff., p. 71.4). A scheme represented in a Persian *revāyat* consciously juxtaposes the seven planetary bodies and seven heavens: the levels of the wind, the stars, the moon, the sun, Garōdmān, Pahlom Axwān (Best Existence), and Endless Light (*The Persian Rivāyats of Hormazyār Frāmarz and Others*, ed. B. N. Dhabhar, Bombay, 1932, p. 426; cf. *Bundahišn*, pp. 32-33).

The sphere of the heavens is pierced to allow the movement of the heavenly bodies over the disc of the earth's surface. For the sun there are 180 windows to the east and 180 to the west; for the moon, 135 on each side; for the stars, 90 on each (*Bundahišn*, p. 55.2; *Pahlavi Rivāyat*, p. 208). In contrast to this mechanistic view, the heavens were personified as a divinity in shining armor (the material sky). Āsmān helped fight against the demons (*Bundahišn*, pp. 60.14, 172.14; *Persian Rivāyats*, p. 48); and to him was dedicated the 27th day of the Zoroastrian month.

Manichean mythology, with its quite distinct cosmic structure, envisages 10 heavens (plus the level of the zodiac, see *Mir. Man.* I, p. 183). These were fashioned by the demiurge, Living Spirit (Mihryazd), and his five sons from the flayed hides of the vanquished archons (see H. J. Polotsky in Pauly-Wissowa, Supp. VI, 1935, cols. 253-54; S. H. Taqizāda, *Mānī wa dīn-e ū*, Tehran, 1335 Š./1956, p. 41; H.-C. Puech, *Le Manichéisme*, Paris, 1949, pp. 78-79). The



first son, Splenditenens (Mid. Pers. Pāhrbed) was assigned the protection of the heavens until the consumption of the material universe by fire at the apocatastasis (see A. V. W. Jackson, “A Sketch of the Manichaean Doctrine Concerning the Future Life,” *JAOS* 50, 1930, pp. 195-97). Manichean mythology has two dragons hanging from the lowest heaven; these are the Gōčihhr of Zoroastrian astrology, Jawzahr(a) in Islamic science, and represent the nodes of the moon’s orbit (see D. N. MacKenzie, “Zoroastrian astrology in the *Bundahišn*,” *BSOAS* 27, 1964, p. 515).

Islamic scholars conceived of the heavens as a sphere on which were fixed the stars; it rotated from east to west on a fixed axis passing through the north and south poles. The motion was like that of a mill (Bīrūnī, *al-Taḥḥīm*, ed. J. Homā’ī, Tehran, 1318 Š./1939, p. 58). At least seven levels were envisaged, one for each planetary body; but as many as eight or nine might be mentioned (ibid., pp. 56-57; cf. *Persian Rivâyats*, p. 429). The spherical form and the motion of the heavens are subjects of metaphor in classical Persian poetry. They are likened to a dome or a blue tent (cf. *Šāh-nāma*, ed. J. Mohl, I, Paris, 1835, p. 12.77). Greater attention is given to the fourth heaven than to the others, since it is the abode of the sun and the point to which Jesus ascended (cf. the importance of the sun-station as the dwelling of the Third Messenger in Manicheism).

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