



ĀSRĒŠTĀR

ĀSRĒŠTĀR, in Middle Persian Manichean texts a kind of demons, often associated with the *mazans*. As a class they do not distinguish themselves, but two of their members play a crucial part in Manichean cosmogony as the creators of mankind, incorporating both the roles of creator demons (in this function partly identified with *Āz* “Greed,”), and seductor of the first human females. The origin of the word in Iranian is uncertain; one straightforward analysis would be **ā-srēš-tār*, i.e., agent noun from **ā-srēš-* “to attach to, mix into” (thus *Mir. Man.* I, p. 22 [194] n. 2; cf. also OInd. (*Atharva-veda*) *āśrēṣa*, name of an evil spirit or goblin?), and its original meaning “clinger”, or “mixer” (cf. also Av. *ham.sraēš-* “to stick together,” and NPers. *sereštan* “to mix, knead, form,” *seriš* “glue”).

The *āsrēštārs* feature prominently in the cosmogonical text in *Mir. Man.* I. Outside of this text they are mentioned only in texts dealing with the final defeat of Ahriman and the other evil forces (Sunderman, *Mitteliranische manichäische Texte*, p. 97; MacKenzie, “Šābuhragān,” p. 512-15). The role of the *āsrēštārs* in the creation of mankind in brief is as follows: After the initial attack by the King of Darkness (Iran. Ahrimen; Ar. al-Šayṭān, Eblīs al-Qadīm) on the Realm of Light (*wahišt*, *wahištāw*; *jenān al-nūr*), and the distressing defeat of the five sons (*amahraspandān*, *mahraspandān*; *al-ajnās/al-elāha al-kaṃsa*) of the First Man (Ohrmizdbay; al-Ensān al-Qadīm), who were devoured by and thus mixed with and imprisoned in the forces of darkness, the forces of light initiated an elaborate process aimed at liberating and redeeming the lost light and bringing it back to its homeland and origin. For this purpose the



Third Messenger was evoked (Rōšnšahryazd, also Mid. Pers. Narēsahyazd, Parth. Narēsafyazd and Mihryazd, see Boyce, *Reader*, p. 10, Sundermann, “Namen,” pp. 100-02; *al-bašīr*, see *Fehrest*, tr., p. 783 n. 193) who in order to induce the demons to shed their seed and thereby also release the light inside them, appeared in the middle of the sky and revealed his male and female forms to the female and male demons (the sons and daughters of darkness) respectively. Filled with lust they began to emit the light, and in order to stop this Āz hit upon the plan of collecting all the light now inside the demons, in a material creation: plants, animals, and humans. Thus the creation of mankind followed upon extraordinary sequence of sexual acts involving incest and cannibalism among the sons and daughters of darkness and their aborted offspring. Āz decided to create mankind in the images of the androgyne Third Messenger whom she had just seen (*Mir. Man.* I, p. 21 [193]; Boyce, *Reader*, p. 71 y 37; Asmussen, tr., p. 128) and donning two lion-shaped (*šagrkirband*) *āsrēštārs*, one male and one female, began teaching lust and copulation to the newly aborted (i.e., born) demons. The *āsrēštārs* (and/or Āz) devoured the resulting offspring and from it gave birth to (or formed) the first two humans (Gēhmurd and Murdiyānag; also *noxwīr* “first man” and *farrahān srīgar* “the female-shaped of the glories;” Ādam and Ḥawwā’). A part of the light of the gods (*xwašn īg yazdān*) was bound in Adam’s body as his soul, and both their bodies were filled with every conceivable bad quality and evil, but more in Eve than in Adam (*Mir. Man.* I, pp. 23-27 [195-199]; *Reader*, pp. 73-74, tr., pp. 129-30). When the first two humans were grown up Āz and the *āsrēštārs* rejoiced and the chief of the *āsrēštārs* (*āsrēštārānsārār*) spoke to the two humans saying that he had given them the whole creation to enjoy and to do his will. And he set a giant dragon (*azdahāg ī mazan*) to guard them from the gods, who might want to abduct them (*Mir. Man.* I, p. 28; *Reader*, p. 74; tr., p. 130).

The version of the creation of mankind reoccurs—with only minor variations—in all accounts of the myth, but the designation *āsrēštār* for these two particular demons is found only in the Middle Persian text published in *Mir. Man.* I. In other Middle Iranian texts the male is called Šaklūn or Šaqlūn (from Syriac Ašaqlūn; Gk. and Lat. Saklas) and the female Pēsūs (Parth. and Sogd., cf. Sundermann, *Mittelpersische und parthische Texte*, p. 55 11 . 1046-47; Gershevitch, *Grammar*, p. 238 1649; Syriac Namrā ēl). In the text published by Boyce (“Sadwēs and Pēsūs”), Pēsūs is described as she seizes and binds the light within the material creation and places a guardian (*pahragbān*) over it. In the *Fehrest* of Ebn al-Nadīm it is two unnamed archons, male and female



(*arkūnān dakar wa untā*), who twice have intercourse to create Adam and Eve. The account of the birth of Cain, etc., is missing in the Iranian texts, but in the *Fehrest* it is related as follows: The male archon next had intercourse with Eve, from which Cain was born. Cain had intercourse with his mother to produce his son and brother Abel and two girls (Ḥakīmat-al-dahr “Wise of the Ages” and Ebnat al-ḥeṣṣ “Daughter of Greed”), who became the wives of the two brothers and thus ensured the continuation of mankind. To clinch the matter, however, an angel (later in the text called al-Şendīd [?] and probably identical with Şaqlūn) raped Wise of the Ages, Abel’s wife, who then bore two daughters. Abel, jealous and angry and suspecting Cain, complained to Eve; upon hearing about this Cain killed Abel and took Wise of the Ages as wife. That the angel in question was the same as al-Şendīd and Şaqlūn, is made probable by the subsequent account in the *Fehrest* involving al-Şendīd, which is only fragmentarily preserved in Iranian texts but clearly features Şaqlūn (*Fehrest*, tr., pp. 785-86; Henning, *Bet- und Beichtbuch*, p. 48, text e frag. II, notes p. 101; Sundermann, *Mittelpersische und parthische Texte*, pp. 70-77 nos. 18-21). In this story the demon (al-Şendīd, Şaqlūn) acts as the seducer of Eve and tries to destroy Adam and Eve’s son Seth (Ar. Şātel, Iran. Şītīl) who, however, is saved by his father.

The Manichean creation myth clearly incorporates both Zoroastrian (e.g., Āz, Gēhmurd, and Murdiyānag) and Old-Testament material (Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, the Seducer), but Mani combined and fused the elements in his own way to produce one grandiose synthesis. Similar myths are common in other gnostic systems as well (see e.g., H. Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*, 2nd ed., Boston, 1963).

See also [Cosmogony](#); [Manicheism](#).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

For the creation story see the Middle Persian in *Mir. Man.* I, pp. 19-28 [191-200]; transcribed in M. Boyce, *A Reader in Manichaean Middle Persian and Parthian*, Acta Iranica 9, Tehran and Liège, pp. 71-74, text y 36-51; tr.



J. P. Asmussen, *Manichæan Literature*, Persian Heritage Series 22, New York, 1975, pp. 127-30.

Arabic version in *Fehrest* (Tehran¹), pp. 393-95; S. H. Taqizāda, *Mānī wa dīn-e ū*, Tehran, 1335 Š./1956, pp. 154-55; *Fehrest*, tr. Dodge, pp. 783-86.

For the Syriac version by Bar Kōnai, see A. V. W. Jackson, *Researches in Manichæism with Special Reference to the Turfan Fragments*, New York, 1932, repr. 1966, pp. 246-49.

Other texts concerning the *āsrēštārs*: M. Boyce, "Sadwēs and Pēsūs," *BSOAS* 13/4, 1951, pp. 908-15.

I. Gershevitch, *A Grammar of Manichean Sogdian*, Oxford, 1961.

W. B. Henning, *Ein Manichäisches Bet- und Beichtbuch*, *APAW*, 1936 (*Selected Papers* I, *Acta Iranica* 14, Tehran and Liège, 1977, pp. 417-557).

D. N. MacKenzie, "Mani's *Šābuhragān*," pt. 1, *BSOAS* 42/3, 1979, pp. 500-34; pt. 2, *ibid.*, 43/2, 1980, pp. 288-310.

W. Sundermann, *Mittelpersische und parthische kosmogonische und Parabeltexte der Manichäer*, *Berliner Turfantexte* 4, Berlin, 1973.

Idem, *Mitteliranische manichäische Texte kirchengeschichtlichen Inhalts*, *Berliner Turfantexte* 11, Berlin, 1981.

See also: J. P. Asmussen, *Manichæan Literature*, pp. 131-35.

Idem, "Manichæism," in *Historia Religionum*, ed. C. J. Bleeker and G. Widengren, Leiden, 1969, pp. 603-04.

M. Boyce, *Reader*, p. 7. H. -C. Puech, *Le Manichéisme*, Paris, 1949, pp. 80-81, notes pp. 173-75.

W. Sundermann, "Namen von Göttern, Dämonen und Menschen in iranischen Versionen des manichäischen Mythos," *Altorientalische Forschungen* 6, 1979, pp. 95-133, esp. pp. 99-103, notes pp. 118, 132-33.