



ĀZ

ĀZ, Iranian demon known from Zoroastrian, Zurvanite, and, especially, Manichean sources. Avestan Āzi- (not in the *Gāthās*) derives from the root *āz-* “Strive for, endeavor to” (used *in bonam partem*). New Persian continues Mid. Ir. *āz* but without mythological significance, apart from the conception of ĀZ as demon of death implied by the expression “the door of ĀZ” (*dar-e āz*; see R. C. Zaehner, *Zurvan, A Zoroastrian Dilemma*, Oxford, 1955, p. 172). Ferdowsī, for example, uses the phrases *āz o nīāz*, “avarice and want,” and *āz o ranj*, “avarice and distress” (Wolff, *Glossar zu Firdosis Schahname*, Berlin, 1935, p. 10). ĀZ is Greed, Lust, Avarice, Avidity, Concupiscence—the demon both in its mythological (metaphysical) aspect and in its psychological (religious) aspect realized in man. In the Avesta the demon Āzi is the opponent of Ātar (Fire) (*Vd.* 18.19, 21, 22) but is overcome by the milk and fat of the sacrifice (*Y.* 16.8 = 68.8) or by Xvarənah (*Yt.* 18.1). ĀZ is there unimportant, religiously as well as mythologically. In the Zoroastrian Mid. Pers. texts, including those possibly based on lost Avestan material, ĀZ especially represents gluttony as opposed to contentment (*hunsandih*). As an abuse of a natural and legitimate function, it is the most serious menace to pious striving (*tuxšagih*) in the service of Ahura Mazda. It brings about death as it destroys man’s physical strength and so keeps him from fulfilling the whole range of religious duties (his *xwēškārīh*). In Zoroastrian mythology ĀZ is let loose already on Gayōmard, the Primordial Man (*Bundahišn* 43.10); according to the eschatology, it and Ahriman are the last demons to be defeated, their special adversaries being Srōš and Ohrmazd. In Zurvanite theology (represented by Zātspram, 9th/10th-century high priest of Sīrkān and author of the *Wizīdagīhā ī Zātspram*), ĀZ has a primary



importance as leader of the demonic host. This Zurvanite conception explains the great role played by the Manichean Āz: According to a Parthian text, she is “mother of the demons (*mād čē dēwān*), from whom every sin has come” (M 183 in Sundermann, 1973, p. 63).

The Manichean Āz formed the human body and imprisoned in it the soul (i.e., the particle of light, God’s substance). Āz is Hylē, Matter, Evil itself; as an active, invisible power (*mēnōgīh*) of the body, this demon tries to make man forget his divine origin, thus excluding him (and God) from salvation. It is no wonder that in Uighur Buddhism *az* could render *trṣṇā* “thirst, desire” that causes rebirth (see, e.g., the *nidāna*-chain in F. W. K. Müller, *Uighurica* II, 1910, no. 3, pp. 11f., 14.). The principal text on Āz is the Mid. Pers. text T III 260, “possibly from the *Šābuhragān*, or from a translation of another work by Mani” (Boyce, *Cat. Man. Script*, p. 132; ed. in *Mir. Man.* I, pp. 177ff.): The Third Messenger and/or the Maiden of Light (or the twelve Maidens of Light) arouse the lust of the demons by appearing in male shape before the females and in female shape before the males; the demons, by shedding semen, will release the Light previously swallowed by them. Āz becomes enraged and enters “the male *Āsrēštār* and the female *Āsrēštār*, lion-shaped, lustful and savage, sinful and ravaging” (*Mir. Man.* I, p. 194). Āz teaches them and all demons to feel desire and mate, effecting through them the creation of Adam and Eve in the image of the Third Messenger/Maiden of Light (J. P. Asmussen, *Xvāstvānīft. Studies in Manichaeism*, Copenhagen, 1965, pp. 247ff.). She thus attempts to preserve some of the captive particles of Light and to keep man from receiving the knowledge (*gnōsis*) of salvation. (For the fundamental role of Āz as Matter, see W. B. Henning, “Ein manichäischer kosmogonischer Hymnus,” *Nachr. Gött. Gesell. Wiss.*, 1932, pp. 214ff., with the Mid. Pers. text S 9.)

The Manichean Āz is unambiguously feminine, whereas the Avestan Āzi is determined as masculine by the form of its epithet *daēvō.dāta*- “demon-created.” Perhaps Āzi/Āz was originally hermaphroditic.

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See also J. P. Asmussen, “Some Remarks on Sasanian Demonology,” in *Acta*



Iranica 1, Tehran and Liège, 1974, pp. 236ff., W. Sundermann, *Mittelpersische und parthische kosmogonische und Parabeltexte der Manichäer*, Schriften zur Geschichte und Kultur des Alten Orients. Berliner Turfantexte IV, Berlin, 1973.

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