



## DĒN

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**DĒN** (Av. *daēnā*, trisyllabic in Old Av., disyllabic in Young Av.; Mid. Pers. *dēn*; NPers. *dīn*), theological and metaphysical term with a variety of meanings: “the sum of man’s spiritual attributes and individuality, vision, inner self, conscience, religion.”

In the Gathas *daēnā* (which is only “ahuric”) denotes “vision, conscience, individuality.” Stanley Insler (p. 69) suggests “conception,” which is, however, irrelevant to the theological or metaphysical connotations of *daēnā*; for instance, “their own soul and their own inner self (hardly to be read “conception”; Insler, p. 271) did vex them” (Y. 46.11). In Middle Persian *dēn* is defined as *xēm* “character, conscience” and *xēm* as *xōg* “nature, habit” (*Dēnkard*, ed. Madan, II, p. 511; Shaked, p. 70). It is maintained that Ohrmazd first and foremost created *xēm* and *dēn* (*Dēnkard*, ed. Madan, II, p. 499; Shaked, p. 50), *dēn* clearly standing for “conscience, inner self.”

In the sense of religion *dēn* (*weh-dēn* “the good religion,” *māzdēsñ dēn* “the religion of Mazdā worship”) is a brilliance from the nature of Ohrmazd; its principle is the mind/thought of Axw, Ahū (q.v.; “the supreme lord”), and its manifestation is the recitation and practice of the holy words (*mānsr*), which itself is the mean (*paymān*; *Dēnkard*, ed. Madan, I, p. 326; de Menasce, 1973, pp. 309-10). The essence of the Mazdean religion is the wisdom of Ohrmazd, with knowledge and action (*kunišn*) as its essential elements; its purpose or function is to purify (ms.: heal) the mixed (i.e., Ahriman-ridden; see AHRIMAN) creation (*Dēnkard*, ed. Madan, I, p. 329; de Menasce, 1973, p. 313) by conquering and destroying the adversary (*Dēnkard*, ed. Madan, I, p. 351; de



Menasce, 1973, p. 331). The religion is God's wisdom, His word (logos), the substratum par excellence of the principle of creation, the holy words of the religion, the divine Ahunwar (q.v.), who gives the world its being and maintains its existence. In the fashioning of Wahman "the good mind" the religion dwelt with him (*Bundahišn*, tr. Anklesaria, p. 19, chap. 1.53). Ahura Mazda (q.v.) created man with his vision (*daēnā*; Y. 46.6). The bond of religion (*paywand ī dēn*), which denotes "adopting a righteous religious authority in time and not deviating from his authority," is one of three bonds (the others being *paywand ī gēhān* "the bond of the world" and *paywand ī frašegird* "the bond of the renovation") that men should observe (*Dēnkard*, ed. Madan, II, p. 492; Shaked, p. 36). In the domain of government the Mazdean religion, the supreme spiritual power, and royalty, the temporal power, are twins, for sovereignty is essentially religion and religion sovereignty: Royalty (*xwadāyīh*) is founded on the religion and the religion on royalty, and the exaltation of Iranian royalty (*ērīh xwadāyīh*) cannot be separated from submission to the Mazdean religion (*Dēnkard*, ed. Madan, I, p. 47; de Menasce, 1973, p. 65). The omniscient Mazdean religion is likened to a mighty tree with one trunk (the mean), two main boughs (action and abstention), three branches (good thoughts, good words, and good deeds), four small branches (the estates of the priests, warriors, husbandmen, and artisans), five roots (the lord of the house, the village headman, the tribal chieftain, the ruler, and the highest religious authority, the representative of Zoroaster on earth, Zarathuštrōtom), and above them all the head of all heads (*sarānsar*), the king of kings, the ruler of the whole world (*Škand Gumānīg Wizār* 1.11; de Menasce, 1945, p. 24; Zaehner, 1956, p. 86).

In the Avesta (q.v.) *daēnā* in the sense of "conscience" is one of the five spiritual faculties, together with *axw* "vital strength," *baodah* "perception," *urvan* "soul," and *fravaši* "the everlasting and heavenly tutelary of material beings" (Y. 26.4).

*Dēn* is not only divine wisdom but also its emanation as innate human wisdom (*āsn-xrad*), a principle with far-reaching implications, for all beneficial knowledge thus of necessity falls within the compass of *dēn*. This important feature is apparent not only from the contents of the Avesta, which is a miscellaneous accumulation encompassing both the words of the Prophet and the authoritative pronouncements of the ancient fathers of the faith, but also from various explicit interpretations in Middle Persian literature. According to the *Dēnkard* (q.v.; ed. Madan, I, p. 335; de Menasce, 1973, p. 318), "all wise



words uttered in virtue of the innate wisdom (*āsn-xrad*), whether by the people who were before the advent of the Mazdean religion or by those who had come afterward and were ignorant of the good religion, are in conformity with the revelations of the *dēn*.” *Dēn* is thus the totality of all sagacious knowledge of mankind because this knowledge encompasses the diffusions of the innate wisdom, the essence of Ohrmazd. In the account of the history of the Mazdean scriptures given in the *Dēnkard* (ed. Madan, I, p. 415) it is said that “all wise words spoken by the religious authorities, throwing light on religious precepts, [are] an exposition of the Avesta, even though they had not derived them from any revelation of the Avesta” (for a full account of this passage, see Shaki, 1981, p. 121). On this point it is declared in *Dādestān ī dēnīg* (q.v.; chap. 89; West, p. 258) that the customs and laws of the holy rulers who lived before Zarathustra in Xwanirah, for example, Yawišt ī Fryān, Gōbadšāh, and Pešōtan, contributed to the advancement of the *dēn*, that is, Mazdean wisdom. In a significant sentence in the *Dēnkard* (ed. Madan, I, p. 411) “the incorporation of every knowledge in the Mazdean religion and its safekeeping (ms.: endurance)” are mentioned.

Apart from these considerations, the miscellaneous contents of the encyclopedic *Dēnkard* attest to the omnifarious nature of the *dēn*. It is to be noted that the term *dēnkard* itself resolves into *dēn-kardag*, in which *kardag* (from the root *kun-* “establish, prescribe, enact”) means “orthodox traditional law, teaching; *sunna*” pronounced by the ancient teachers of the religion (*pōryōtkēšān*; see Shaki, 1978, pp. 291-92). Hence *Dēnkard* denotes “traditional teachings and expositions of the Mazdean wisdom (*dēn*),” that is, everything that has been incorporated in the *dēn* by virtue of its merit, including such foreign teachings as Greek and Indian philosophy and sciences. Ādurbād ī Ēmēdān (q.v.), the last redactor of the *Dēnkard*, described the book aptly as *dēnkard nibēg kardag ast ī az wisp-pēsīd dēn paydāgīh*: “The scripture of the *Dēnkard* is a book of orthodox expositions revealed from the omniscient Mazdean *dēn* (wisdom)” (*Dēnkard*, ed. Madan, I, p. 405; de Menasce, 1973, p. 379). The generally accepted description of the book as “acts of the religion” therefore reflects a misapprehension; it should, rather, be described as the “compendium of Mazdean wisdom.”

*Dēn*, the deification of the religion, and the deities of space (*Gāh*) and time (*Zamān*) are the three divine instruments of creation, as assistants of Ohrmazd (*Bundahišn*, tr. Anklesaria, p. 40, chap 3.12). The *yazatā* *Daēnā* is a daughter of Ahura Mazda and Ārmaiti (q.v.; *Y.* 17.16), but, according to an inscription



found at Arebsun in Anatolia, she is the sister and wife of Ahura Mazdā (Boyce, *Zoroastrianism* II, p. 275). In the *Dēn yašt* (q.v.; *Yt.* 16) Daēnā praises the deity (Razišta) Čistā (q.v.), embodiment of “the most true wisdom,” which impregnates the Mazdean religion.

The *daēnā/dēn* represents a person’s deeds (*kunišn*), his inner self. In the Pahlavi commentary on *Yasna* 26.6 *daēnā* is glossed by *kunišn* “deed” (*Y.* 45.2, 48.4, 51.21). The fathers of the faith considered *dēn* to be “that which one always does” (*Dēnkard*, ed. Madan, II, p. 473; Shaked, p. 14); because “of thoughts (*menišn*), words (*gowišn*) and deeds (*kunišn*) it is the deed that counts (on the day of reckoning), for words are unreliable, thought unascertainable, but deeds are palpable, and (it is) by deeds that men are judged” (*Čīdag handarz ī pōryōtkēšān* 24-26; Kanga, p. 24). On the day of judgment the soul of a dead man, at the dawn after the third day, goes along the path created by time for both the just and the wicked to the Činwad bridge (see ČINWAD PUHL; *Vd.* 19.29), created by Ahura Mazdā, where he is met, according to his deserts, either by a beautiful maiden or by a hag, the personification of his deeds, his inner self (Daēnā/Dēn), a name used by the Prophet for this eschatological figure (*Y.* 31.20).

A full account of the personification of the *daēnā* “inner self” as a woman is first given in *Haδōxt nask* (2.11): When a just man dies after the third night “his own *daēnā* appears in the form of a maiden, beautiful, queenly, white-armed . . . as beautiful as the most beautiful of creatures . . . (proclaiming) . . . ‘Youth of good thought, good words, good deeds, good inner self (*daēnā*) I am your very own inner self (*daēnā*; *azəm tē . . . ahmi . . . yā hava daēna xʷaepaiθe.tanvō*).’” The concept of this female figure is a relic of the pagan past, a myth recounted in the *Vīdēvdād* (19.30), according to which when the soul of a just man reaches the Činwad bridge “there comes that beautiful one, strong, fair of form, accompanied by two dogs at her sides. She comes over the high Hara and takes the souls of the just over the Činwad bridge . . . to the ramparts of the invisible *yazatas*” (Boyce, 1984, p. 80).

The *daēnā* of the bridge appeared in early Sasanian times in the inscription of Kerdīr at Sar Mašhad (KSM) as Kerdīr’s own *dēn*, leading his “ideal body” (*hangirb* “likeness”) over the Činwad bridge. The high priest, in his vision of the hereafter, related “and now comes a maiden, appearing from the east, and I have not seen a nobler woman than she” (KSM 35; Back, p. 452); “he who is righteous his own *dēn* leads him to paradise, and he who is wicked his own *dēn* leads him to hell” (KSM 29; Back, p. 445; Gignoux, 1968, ll. 42-43). The story



is repeated in the *Ardā Wīrāz* (q.v.) *nāmag* (4.11; Gignoux, 1984, pp. 48, 157; Vahman, 1986, pp. 194-95), where the woman is said to be the personification of one's own *dēn* and deeds (*ān ī xwēš dēn ud ān ī xwēš kunišn*), and in the *Mēnōg ī Xrad* (2.125; Nyberg, *Manual*, pt. 1, p. 73), where she introduces herself as the just man's "good deeds." According to the *Wizīdagīhā ī Zādspram* (31.5) the *dēn*, personified as a beautiful woman, takes care of the soul of the righteous person in paradise, teaching it the speech of the spirits.

The two distinct referents of *Daēnā*, that is, the maiden of the bridge and the *yazatā* of religion, have led the majority of Iranists to posit two distinct nouns from the same root *di-* "see" (against which, see Nyberg, pp. 114 ff.). It is argued that the *daēnā* of religion represents "that which is seen or recognized (as the truth)," as against the *daēnā* as the maiden of the bridge, "who sees or recognizes (the truth)" (Lommel, pp. 150-51; Boyce, *Zoroastrianism* I, p. 238). It is thus suggested that there may be two pairs of Avestan words, *daēnā*/*Daēnā* "conscience/the maiden of the bridge" and *daēnā*/*Daēnā* "religion/the *yazatā* of religion" (Boyce, *Zoroastrianism* I, pp. 239-40). In Manichean Middle Persian *dēn* denotes "religion; the Manichaean community" (Boyce, 1977, p. 38).

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