



GĒTĪG AND MĒNŌG

GĒTĪG AND MĒNŌG, a pair of Middle Persian terms that designate the two forms of existence according to the traditional Zoroastrian view of the world as expressed in the Pahlavi books. The term *gētīg* alludes to the material, visible, and tangible aspect of the world; *mēnōg* refers to the aspect of the world that is essentially mental, invisible, and intangible. The two terms have their antecedents in Avestan usage, where they correspond respectively to *astuuant-*, (lit. “boney,” from *ast-* “bone”) and *mainiiauuā-* (lit. something like “mental” or “spiritual,” from *man-* “to think”).

Although the distinction between the two concepts is based on the visibility of the one and the invisibility of the other, the invisibility of *mēnōg* is somewhat ambiguous. It is, in particular, noteworthy that many of the spiritual entities appear from time to time in a variety of forms. This is true, for example, of the concepts of *xwarr* (Av. *xʰarənah-* “fortune, glory”; see [FARRAH](#)), *dēn* (Av. *daēnā* “the religious person,” q.v.), *Wahman* (Av. *Vohu Manah* “the Good Thought,” one of the *Aməša Spənta*, see [BAHMAN](#)), and the mythical figure of *Vərəθraγna* (see [BAHRĀM](#)). Besides, the luminaries are also considered to be *mēnōg*, although they are plainly visible.

The distinction between these two concepts is based on the idea that everything in the material world has a counterpart that is not visible, and conversely, that the spiritual world stands in a relationship of complementarity and parallelism to the visible and material world. Although these terms refer to two types of existence, they can also denote two worlds, two realms. The one in which we live is the *gētīg* world, the other is the world



of *mēnōg*. These two worlds co-exist simultaneously, but they are often portrayed as representing two different stages in the history of the world. According to the classical Zoroastrian cosmogony of the Pahlavi books, the world was first created in *mēnōg*, then, according to one version, as *gētīg* in *mēnōg*, and only finally as *gētīg*. The eschatological world is spoken of sometimes also in terms of *mēnōg* (see [COSMOGONY AND COSMOLOGY i](#)).

Viewed from the point of view of creation and eschatology, *mēnōg* precedes the *gētīg* form of being and serves as a model for the latter's creation. *Gētīg* is thus sometimes said to be derived from *mēnōg*, being in a sense dependent on it and secondary in importance to it. Thus it is said: "*Gētīg* is the fruit of *mēnōg*, *mēnōg* is its root" (*Škand gumānīg wizār* 7.2). However, as *mēnōg* reflects the changes brought about in *gētīg*, for example in so far as the moral and religious behavior of individuals affects their *mēnōg* counterparts, it is not only the source of *gētīg* but becomes also in a sense dependent on *gētīg*.

The material world is a creation of Ohrmazd (see [AHURA MAZDĀ](#)). Ahriman (q.v.) does not have a legitimate, primary presence in the material world. In so far as he exists in that world it is only as an intruding and destructive force. The powers of evil graft themselves on the good creations of Ohrmazd, maintaining their disruptive presence in the world parasitically. At least from this point of view it can be said that Ahriman does not exist (Shaked, 1967). This may already be expressed by the Gathic phrase that he created non-life (Y. 30.4, where the Pahlavi commentary imputes to it a difference sense; cf. *Pahlavi Yasna*, pp. 135 f.).

The Iranian opposition between the spiritual and material worlds stands in marked contrast to the conception of these two notions in the various gnostic schools, including Manicheism, as well as Neoplatonism. In those systems the contrast between the notions of the spiritual and the material was regularly identified with the distinction between what is good and elevated as opposed to what is evil and vile. The Iranian view differs typologically from that of the gnostic-type religions. It is, however, quite close in spirit to the dualism of the Jewish Dead Sea sect and related Jewish apocryphal writings, and also to the theology implied in the writings of the primitive Christian church (Shaked, 1972, pp. 443 f.; idem, 1984, pp. 315 f.).

Notwithstanding the above description, the worlds of *mēnōg* and *gētīg* are sometimes viewed in late Iranian writings (i.e., in writings that probably belong to the latter part of the Sasanian period) in a manner that is somewhat



out of character for Zoroastrian thinking. They are sometimes represented as corresponding to the values of good and evil respectively. In the catechism text of the *Pand-nāmag* (*Pahlavi Texts*, ed. Jamasp-Asana, pp. 41 f.), a person has to declare himself as “coming from” *mēnōg*, as a sign of righteousness, and not from *gētīg* (*az mēnōg mad hēm, nē pad gētīg būd hēm*) The latter concept is identified in this context with the realm of the demons.

Mēnōg is often used in the sense of the world-to-come, the other world, the world of eschatology. This usage is prominent in the Pahlavi commentary to the Gathas. There, and in other texts as well, the Gatha approach to the world (*gāhānīg*), which is the highest, is regularly glossed by the adjective *mēnōgīg* “having *mēnōg* character” (e.g., *Pahlavi Yasna*, p. 124, 28.1b).

The material world is usually regarded as extremely valuable for the battle plan of Ohrmazd. This concept is stated clearly in several texts (e.g., *Dēnkard* 3.123, tr. in Shaked, 1971, p. 70). As man is the main career of the burden of battle against Ahriman, it is said that there will never be a period in which man will not exist in the material world. The material world, *gētīg*, is Ohrmazd’s creation and the place where Ohrmazd has undeniable superiority over Ahriman, who does not exist there.

The material world is the place of mixture (*gumēzagīh*), where good and evil are inextricably blended into each other. Neither good nor evil can be experienced in their full unmitigated force in this world, where each is diluted by its opposite. While *mēnōg* is unlimited and intransient, *gētīg* is limited and transient. Apart from serving as the place where the powers of good are mixed with those of evil, this world is a place of mixture also in the sense that everything that exists in it has a *mēnōg* as well as a *gētīg* aspect, and that these two aspects of being are not easily separable in this world: they were only neatly separated before creation.

The distinction between *mēnōg* and *gētīg* does not correspond to a distinction between the divine and the human worlds. *Yazads*, i.e., entities that deserve to be worshipped, exist both in *mēnōg* and in *gētīg*. The evil powers, for their part, exist not only as spirits, e.g., as *mēnōgs* within man, but also as undesirable forms of existence in the material world.

The interplay between the different *mēnōgs* is the subjects of Zoroastrian speculations about the composition of man. A favorite theme for speculation in the theological writings is the question whether it is possible to witness



mēnōg. This is answered in the positive under certain conditions; it is especially the hallmark of high religious achievement. The organ for such vision is called the eye of the soul (*jān cašm*; Shaked, 1994, p. 48).

Since the idea of *mēnōg* serves to designate, among its other senses, an ideal form of things that exist in the material world, it may be used sometimes in the sense of an ideal form of a whole group of particular *mēnōgs*, thus creating the phrase *mēnōgān mēnōg* “the *mēnōg* of (all) the *mēnōgs*” to designate Ohrmazd.

In the field of eschatology, individual eschatology, that which deals with man’s fate after death, is all played in *mēnōg*, involving man’s spiritual aspect alone. Universal eschatology, that which is concerned with the fate of the world, deals with the final destination of the *gētīg* world at the end of time. The descriptions of universal eschatology in the Pahlavi books (e.g., *Pahlavi Rivayat*, ed. Dhabar, pp. 156 f.; cf. Shaked, 1971, pp. 85 f.) sometimes make the world look like a new type of existence, in which *gētīg* and *mēnōg* become so close together that they lose their distinctions.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

G. Gnoli, “Osservazioni sulla dottrina mazdaica della creazione,” *AIUON*, N.S. 13, 1963, pp. 163-93.

H. Lommel, *Die Religion Zarathustras nach dem Awesta dargestellt*, Tübingen, 1930; repr. Hildesheim and New York, 1971, pp. 93-129.

Pahlavi Yasna and Visperad, ed. B. N. Dhabhar, Bombay, 1949.

S. Shaked, “Some Notes on Ahreman, the Evil Spirit, and His Creation,” *Studies in Mysticism and Religion Presented to G.G. Scholem*, ed. E. E. Urbach, R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, and C. H. Wirszubsky, Jerusalem, 1967, pp. 227-34; repr. in idem, 1995.

Idem, “The Notions *mēnōg* and *gētīg* in the Pahlavi Texts and Their Relation to



Eschatology,” *Acta Orientalia* 33, 1971, pp. 59-107; repr. in Shaked, 1995.

Idem, “Qumran and Iran: Further Considerations,” *Israel Oriental Studies* 2, 1972, pp. 433-46.

Idem, “Iranian Influences in Judaism,” *Cambridge History of Judaism* I, Cambridge, 1984, pp. 308-442.

Idem, *Dualism in Transformation. Varieties of Religion in Sasanian Iran*, Jordan Lectures in Comparative Religion 16, London, 1994.

Idem, *From Zoroastrian Iran to Islam: Studies in Religious History and Intercultural Contacts*, Variorum Collected Studies Series, Aldershot, U.K., 1995.