



HOMOSEXUALITY I. IN ZOROASTRIANISM

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Zoroastrian literature contains discussions of personal relations only in legal contexts and is quite explicit with regard to sins of a sexual nature, including between males. The information about “homosexuality” contained in this literature is restricted to anal intercourse, as defined in the *Videvdad* (8.32): “When a man releases his semen in a man or when a man receives the semen of men.” The action takes place between sexually mature males (*aršan-*), and there is no mention of sexual intercourse between prepubescent boys and adult males, so common in the Islamic period, or between women. In the *Avesta* there is no mention of heterosexual anal intercourse, but in Zoroastrian texts this practice is alluded to and equally condemned.

In the Zoroastrian world picture, the world is a battlefield between the forces of good and evil, and, since one of the duties of the partisans of good is to produce new life in the manner of Ahura Mazdā and his daughter-consort Ārmaiti, the earth, the barrenness of homosexuality clearly qualified it for the camp of evil, as elaborated in Zoroastrian literature. According to the myth of the establishment of the lands of Iran in the *Videvdad* (1.11), anal intercourse between men was produced by the Evil Spirit to plague Ahura Mazdā’s ninth



creation, the land of the Hyrcanians (*vāhrkāna*). The term used is *narō.vaēpiia-* “male anal intercourse,” and the corresponding verb is active *vaēpaiia-*, passive *vifīia-*, past participle *vīpta-*. The original meaning of the term must be “to shake, make tremble,” a normal feature of sexual ecstasy. In Old Indic this term is commonly used to denote poetic and religious ecstasy, and the use of *vaēpiia-* in the Old Avesta (*Yasna* 51.12, to some extent incomprehensible) should probably be interpreted in this vein as a “trembler, quaker,” rather than as with a sexual connotation, since it is a derogatory term used about a rival poetaster (*kəuuīna-*; see Skjærvø, 2001, pp. 373-74).

Elsewhere in the *Avesta* anal intercourse is only mentioned as an instance of sinful behavior that is to be punished. There is a distinction between consensual and non-consensual passive partners; thus, in the *Videvdad* (8.26-32), the punishment for a man who is submitted to anal intercourse against his will is “eight hundred strokes with the horse whip, eight hundred with the bastinado,” which is the same, for instance, as for killing a sheep-dog (*Vd.* 13.2); but, if he does it willingly, his sin is inexpiable. Moreover, both the active and passive partners are regarded as *daēuuas* (see *daiva*) and *daēuuu-*worshippers and succubae, incubi, and she-males of *daēuuas*; that is, they belong to and promote the evil creation and will remain *daēuuas* after death. Similarly, the *Dēnkard* (chap. 22; ed. Dresden, p. [13]; tr. de Menasce, p. 41) tells us that the souls of passive and active participants in anal intercourse, because of their proximity to *dēws*, themselves look like *dēws*.

There is also an Avestan fragment that indicates that the passive partner in anal intercourse may be killed with impunity (Fragment, *Vd.* 7.52.3), which underlies the rule cited in the later Zoroastrian literature that killing someone practicing anal intercourse can be a good deed (*Dādestān ī dēnīg*, question 76, ed. Anklesaria, 1958, p. 146; SBE, vol. 18, pp. 223-24 [question 76], translations partly outdated) or that anyone may kill two men (*gōlāmbāra* and *mowājer*) caught in the act by cutting off their heads or slashing their bellies and that they are the only ones that can be killed without the permission of high priests or kings (*Saddar naṣr*, ed. Dhabhar, chap. 9; SBE, vol. 24, p. 267).

In the Middle Persian literature, anal intercourse is referred to as *kūn-marz*, lit., “buttock-rubbing.” Elsewhere the Avestan terms are used, spelled variously, presumably to render the Avestan forms (see, e.g., the manuscript variants in *Mēnōy ī xrad*, ed. Anklesaria, pp. 103-04). According to the Pahlavi books, *kūn-marz* was instituted by the Evil Spirit when he performed it on himself (*pad kūn-marz ī xwēš*) to create by abortion “demons, lies,” etc. (*Mēnōy*



ī *xrad* 7.10; SBE, vol. 24, 1885, pp. 32-33; tr. Tafazzoli, p. 22), an act that the *Pahlavi Rivāyat* (chap. 8d2; tr. Williams, II, p. 12) considers a heavier sin than when he performed it with the *dēws*. The *Pahlavi Rivāyat* (chap. 8c3-6; tr. Williams, II, pp. 11-12) adds that it is this evil practice among *dēws* and humans that produces and increases most evils in the world and which will only be abolished when the *Sōšāns* comes and all men practice sexual intercourse with their mothers and daughters (*xwēdōdah*).

The longest discussion of anal intercourse, its rationale, and the reason why it is so evil is found in the *Dādestān ī dēnīg*, questions 71-76 (ed. Anklesaria, 1958, pp. 140-47; SBE, vol. 18, pp. 216-27 [questions 72-77]). Here it is explained clearly that anal intercourse was instituted by the forces of evil to prevent the semen of men from mingling with women and so from producing the desired result of renewal and furthering of life in the service of good, and instead to cause the progress of mankind to come to an end.

For the rest, the Pahlavi books basically repeat the injunctions of the *Avesta*, adding a few details about the amount of sinfulness involved. Thus, in the classification of the *Mēnōy ī xrad* (35.4-5; tr. Tafazzoli, p. 51), *kūn-marz* is the heaviest sin a person can commit, while the second heaviest is being a passive (*wīftag*) or active (**wēbēnīdag*) participant in anal intercourse, which seems to indicate that the author understood these terms differently from *kūn-marz*. In the *Dādestān ī dēnīg* (question 71 [72]) the two (*wīftag nar* and *wēbēnīdag nar*) are mythologized as two of the seven ancient evildoers, whose evil matched that of the Evil Spirit himself; the former instituted the practice of male intercourse aimed at destroying procreation, while the latter taught men to deposit their semen in the wrong receptacle, male or female. A characteristic feature in these sources of anal intercourse is the stench it produces, which, according to the *Pahlavi Rivāyat* (chap. 8c5; tr. Williams, II, p. 11) reaches the world of the Adversary (*petyāragōmandīh*), but according to the *Dādestān ī dēnīg* (questions 72-73 [73-74]) does not reach the unsullied realm of God and the Amahrspands (cf. Ebn al-Jawzi's statement, *Damm al-hawā*, p. 192, that the stench of Hell comes from the pudendas of adulterers).

The punishments and future prospects of men performing anal intercourse vary in the sources. In the *Ardā Wirāz-nāmag*, the passive performer (*u-š mard abar xwēš tan hišt*) is punished by having a snake the size of a beam go in through his rectum and out by the mouth, while other snakes are chewing up his body (chap. 19; tr. Gignoux, pp. 174-75). Curiously, this sin is the first that *Ardā Wirāz* encounters in Hell; all other sins are further down, and so more



serious, among them anal intercourse (presumably heterosexual) coupled with adulterous seduction, which is punished by being eaten by snakes and worms (chap. 71; tr. Gignoux, p. 201). In the *Pahlavi Rivāyat* (chap. 41; tr. Williams, II, p. 69) *kūn-marz* is listed together with adultery, highway robbery, and various other sins as deserving capital punishment. According to the *Rivāyat ī Ēmēd ī Ašawahištān* (ed. Safa-Isfahani, chap. 29.8; Pers. ed., p. 186), the sin of *kūn-marz* even annuls the merits of *xwēdōdah*; and only tearful repentance and bodily penitence can save the sinner (ibid., cf. *Dādestān ī dēnīg*, question 71 [72]). In the *Šāyest nē šāyest* (supplementary texts, ed., Kotwal, chap. 17.7), he who commits *kūn-marz* is listed together with the “heretic” (*ahlomoy*) as someone who is not raised after death and whose soul remains a *dēw*, in accordance with the *Videvdad* (8.32); but in the *Dādestān ī dēnīg* (question 74 [75]) it is pointed out that, according to the *Dēn*, all dead bodies are resurrected, though some authorities deny this. A more lenient view is expressed in the *Dādestān ī dēnīg* (ibid.), where it is said that it is possible to convert the sinner, which is the only reason one might want to sit down at table with them. Indeed, the Amahrspands pity those deceived by the *dēws* and forgive them, and the Creator would not want to abandon any of his creation to the Lie (ibid.).

Only in the much later Persian *rivāyats* do we find a distinction between intercourse with adult men and under-age boys. Thus, according to one *rivāyat* (ed. Dhabhar, 1932, p. 291; ed. Unvala, 1922, I, pp. 307, 310), *gōlām-bāragi* with a man (fifteen or older) counts as a *margarzān* sin, that is, worthy of capital punishment, but with a boy of eight as a *tanāvīrī* sin, that is, fifteen times less than a *margarzān* sin.

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