



PLANETS

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In antiquity, only five planets (Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn) were known, because these were visible to the naked eye; in many early traditions, and also in some Iranian contexts, the two so-called “luminaries,” the Sun and the Moon, were added to their number. For this reason, some sources mention both the “five” and the “seven” planets. In some cases, Hellenistic astrological doctrines treated the Sun and the Moon as planets, although with special characters and privileges. In other sources, particularly in India, the lunar nodes are added to this list. The discovery of the periodicity of the apparent orbits of the planets around the earth and of their retrograde movement caused them to become objects of continuous observations, particularly in Mesopotamia. This effort gave very good (mathematical) results at the beginning of the Achaemenian period, thanks to the Babylonian astronomical schools (Hunger and Pingree, 1999). Many other civilizations have had, on the contrary, a very superficial idea of these special astral bodies and have made frequent confusion between them and the fixed stars.

The origin of the names of the planets and their demonization. The extant Avestan sources do not indicate any clear knowledge of the planets as astral bodies that were to be distinguished from the fixed stars. The possible connection of the word *tīrō*, the first member of the compound *tīrō.nakaθβa* (a masculine proper name in *Yašt* 13.126; Eilers, 1976, pp. 7, 47; Panaino, 1995a, pp. 61-85), with the name of the western Iranian god of the planet Mercury (Tīriya, etc.) remains a matter of discussion.



The planets did not play any cosmological role in Avestan uranography, and their opposition to the planets was a later phenomenon; it was only within the framework of Middle Persian sources and under the influence of Hellenistic astrology that the planets took on the negative function that was earlier attributed to the *Pairikās* (“witches,” also called *stārō.karāma-*, “starred-worms”; Panaino, 2005a), thus assuming the denomination of *Parīgān*. Their peculiar movement, in some cases “retrograde” (*apāxtara-*), was assimilated to that of the falling stars, which in Avestan sources were fighting against the fixed stars, which were led by Tištrya (Panaino, 1995a). Actually, the term *abāxtar* (pl. *abāxtarān*) for the planets derives from Old Iranian **apāxtara-* (“backward-turning, retrograde”), a comparative stem built on *apāk-/apāṅk-* “backward” and derived from the preposition *apa* “behind” (see [AXTAR](#)). It is very probable that term was also strictly connected with the northern direction (the side of the demons), “north” being the other possible meaning of **apāxtara-* according to the system of orientation already attested in the ancient Iranian sources (cf. also Armenian *apaxtarkʻ*). The Greek term for the planets (πλάνητες ἀστέρες [*planētes asteres*] “wandering stars”) emphasizes the irregularity of their movement, and it perfectly corresponds to Middle Persian **wiyābānīg* (from the verb *wiyābān-*, “to deviate, to go astray”). We find the same Middle Persian word—negated—as the term for the actual stars: *a-wiyābānīg* “which do not deviate” (corresponding to Gk. ἀπλανής [*aplanēs*], Lat. *inerrantes*, i.e., “fixed”). The fixed stars were mistakenly considered as “desert stars” (because of a false etymology, such as Persian *bi ābān* “without water”) in later Arabo-Islamic and medieval sources; in Latin such stars were named *beibenie*, etc. (Kunitzsch, 1981; 1993).

Western Iranians surely had opportunities early on to be acquainted with the well-developed Mesopotamian astronomical tradition, and they should have known the five planets already in the Achaemenian period. (See [Table 1](#).) Indirect references such as Herodotus, 1.98, concerning the correspondence between the colors of the seven walls of Ecbatana and those of the planets, support such a statement. Also the Iranian names of the planets confirm the influence of a Babylonian pattern—one that was also followed by the Greeks. *Tīriya*, for instance, was worshipped in western Iran, where he played a role corresponding to that of the Egyptian *Thoth* and the Babylonian *Nabû*, the patron of the scribes. All these gods, like *Hermes* for the Greeks, were associated with the planet “Mercury,” which in Middle Persian was named *Tīr*.

Furthermore, the Middle Persian name of the planet Saturn, *Kēwān*, was



doubtless an Akkadian loanword from *kajamānu* “the permanent, steady” (MacKenzie, 1964, p. 520, n. 46; *Kiwan* is also attested in the *Book of the Zodiac* of the *Mandaeans* (Drower, 1949, pp. 60, 65). Saturn was associated in Greek sources with Krónos, and it is possible that Zurwān was considered its Iranian parallel, as is apparently confirmed from the Armenian name of this planet, *zruan* (the only other Armenian name of sure Iranian derivation is *Anahit*; see Hübschmann, 1897, p. 94, n. 1; MacKenzie 1964, p. 520, n. 46). The Babylonian god of the planet “Jupiter” was *Marduk*, and he corresponded to *Ohrmazd* in the Iranian pantheon and to *Zeus* in the Greek one. In its turn, Babylonian *Nergal* corresponded to *Wahrām* in Iran, and the planet protected by these divinities was named “Mars” in Latin, because the Greeks had associated *Nergal* with *Ares*; the goddess *Ištar*, patron of the planet “Venus,” corresponded in Iran to *Anāhīd* and among the Greeks to *Aphrodītē*.

Doubtless, the demonization of the planets took place only after their names were set; this is inferred from the contradictory situation that the planetary demons maintained their original divine names. This interesting phenomenon seems to be due to the reaction of Zoroastrian priests vis-à-vis the new astrological doctrines, which offered a seductive explanation of human events. Thus, the Zoroastrian clergy accepted *astrology* but introduced a number of dualistic patterns into this foreign “art,” attributing a positive role only to the stars and the constellations, a malefic one to the planets. It would have been absolutely impossible to consider negative divinities for the stars, such as *Tištrya*, which had been worshipped for centuries, while it was much simpler to associate the negative image of the falling stars (as responsible of the cosmic disorder) with the planets, whose movement appeared less regular and at times retrograding. The planets, as astral bodies termed *abāxtar* “retrograde” (see above) in Middle Persian sources, were also called *nē axtar* “not-star” and sometimes also *gādog* or *gēg* “bandit.” We may recall that in Akkadian the planets were also called *bibbu* “wild ship.”

According to a later source like the *‘Olamā-ye Eslām* (Zaehner, 1972, p. 412), *Ohrmazd* would have surrounded every one of the seven planets with light, giving to each of them Ahuric standard names. Contrariwise, this text states that their actual (demoniac) names were: *Zerīš* (Saturn), **Tariš* (Jupiter), **Nānyaiθ* (Mars), *Tarmad* (the Sun), *Xišm* (Venus), **Sēš* (Mercury), and *Bēš* (the Moon). It is possible that some priests tried to introduce other, properly *daēvic*, names instead of the positive ones, although this pious attempt completely failed, because use of the latter was so ancient and well rooted that



every theological substitution would be ineffective in practice. What is astonishing is the inclusion of the two luminaries in the list of demons, which makes such a Persian source very unorthodox. On the contrary, it should be noted that, notwithstanding the Zoroastrian demonization, some sources, like *Bundahišn* V, B 12, correctly following the classical astrological doctrine, still described two planets as *kirbakkar* “beneficent” (i.e., Ohrmazd and Anāhīd) and two others as *bazakkar* “maleficent” (Kēwān and Wahrām), while they considered Mercury (Tīr) as “neutral” and changing its influence according to the general astrological configuration in which it was framed. Later Zoroastrian sources attest a frequent confusion between *Tištār* and Tīr, a phenomenon probably deriving from a complex system of relations between the star and this planet (Panaino, 1995a, pp. 61-85). The planets, as stated in chapter IV, 8-10 of the *Škand-Gumānīg Wizār* (de Menasce, 1945, pp. 50-51), were considered “robbers” or “bandits” in opposition to the stars, which were “givers” (*bayān*) *par excellence* (see Panaino, 2013).

The names of the planets in other Middle Iranian languages—for instance, those in Sogdian—were basically derived from a western Iranian pattern, one already fixed during the Achaemenian period, although it is not attested in Old Persian, but only in Middle Persian. Exceptional is the case of Khotanese, where the inspiring model was Indian.

The planets in Zoroastrian astrological and astronomical sources. In Late Antiquity, Iranian lands were opened to a double influence, both in astronomy and astrology, from West and East, respectively, which produced a mixture of old Iranian, later Hellenistic, Indian, and Babylonian astral traditions. According to Zoroastrian religious sources, the planets were located in the *spīhr ī gumēzišnīg* (sphere of mixture), i.e., in the zodiacal area, where they fought against the fixed stars (*Bundahišn* II, 8-9; Henning, 1942, pp. 232-33, 240; Belardi 1977, pp. 125-26). It is here that the five planets attacked the “cardinal” stars, already mentioned in Later Avestan texts (*Bundahišn* V, 4; cf. *Tištarya*, ed. Panaino, 1990a, pp. 106-7; see [Table 2](#)). Saturn (Kēwān) fought against the general of the generals, the Pole Star, *Mēx ī gāh* (Henning, 1942, pp. 231, 241-242; Panaino 1989; 1995-96; 1999b).

The planetary cords of wind. The movement of the planets was governed by the Sun by means of a cord (*band*, *zīg*, *hampaymanag*, *rag*), which prevented them from wandering off from the maximum of their proper elongations, thus limiting the potential damage that they could produce in the sublunary world (*ŠGW*, IV, 46; de Menasce, 1945, pp. 54-55). According to the *Bundahišn* V A 8



(MacKenzie, 1964, p. 516), the length of the cord of Mercury was 1,850 (correct figure: 1,350 = 22°20'); this number exactly corresponded to the radius of the epicycle of Mercury in the *Almagest* of Claudius Ptolemy; the length of the cord of Venus was 2,831 (= 47°11'), corresponding to the maximum equation of the anomaly according to Sasanian astronomical tables (*Zīg ī Šahryārān*) established for the period of [Kosrow I](#) (Pingree, 1997, p. 40). The origin of these celestial cords is clearly Indian, although the inspiring model could be already Platonic (*Timaeus*, 39 C-D). We know, in addition, the presence of cords in the Zoroastrian cosmology in the framework of a mechanical model of the astral sphere (see *Bundahišn*, VB, 1-3 [MacKenzie, 1964, p. 517], where all the astral bodies rotate around Mount [Harburz](#), pulled from cords of wind exactly in the same manner as all the astral bodies rotate around Dhruva, the fixed Pole of the heaven in the Purāṇic literature [Panaino, 1998, chap. 3.2]). These cords (called *vāta-/vāyu-rašmi-*; *vātabaddhāni-*), which blocked and limited planetary movement, assumed in the Iranian framework a definite anti-demonic function. Their origin, at least in part, reflected an earlier mythical tradition, according to which the star Sirius (Tištrya) bound the Pairikā [Dužyāiryā](#), the chief of the falling stars, with an infinite number of bonds (*Yt.* 8.55). Although there are other references to cords connecting the earth also with the stars (see [ZODIAC](#)), it is worthwhile to mention the fatalistic doctrine attested in the Pahlavi text *Wizārišn ī čačrang ud nihišn ī nēw-ardaxšīr*, par. 30, where, with reference to the game of *nard*, it is stated that revolving and turning of the counters was done according to the die, just as the peoples living in the *gētīg* world are tied by a bond to the *mēnōg*, “and all of them turn and move according to the planets and the twelve constellations” (Panaino, 1998, chap. 4.8; 1999a, p. 251).

Planets and horoscopes. Only two [horoscopes](#) are known in Middle Persian literature: the first, concerning the entire world (*zāyč ī gēhān*), attested in chapter V of the *Bundahišn*, is very close to that of [Gayōmart](#) (*Bundahišn* VI F), which in its turn corresponds to the Indian horoscope of the *mahāpuruṣa*—“eminent man [of destiny]” (as given in the Sanskrit astrological treatise *Yavanajātaka*; see Pingree, 1973, p. 123, correcting MacKenzie, 1964, pp. 523-25, who considered this *thema mundi* of Chaldean origin after an earlier suggestion made by F. Cumont). In this horoscope, the seven planets (i.e., the five planets plus the Sun and the Moon) were placed in the zodiacal signs and in their proper astrological exaltations, with the exception of Mercury, which the composer of the *Bundahišn* did not put in Virgo, where its standard point of astrological exaltation was traditionally located, but rather in Pisces.



MacKenzie's attempted textual emendation (1964, p. 514), moving Tīr to 15° Virgo in order to obtain its proper exaltation gives impossible results, because, if the Sun was in Aries, then Mercury could not stay in Virgo at 146° distance from the Sun (Mihr), since his maximal elongation would be only 22°30' (Raffaelli, 2001, pp. 93-94). According to Greek astrology, some of the planets (*Bundahišn* VB, 14; MacKenzie, 1964, p. 520) were associated with the basic natural elements: Tīr with air and Venus with water (Raffaelli, 2001, pp. 54-56).

The lunar knots and the false planets. In the astrological chapters of the *Bundahišn*, we find several technical terms referring to the planetary positions, e.g., MPers. *kadag-xwadāy* (MacKenzie, 1964, p. 528, n. 76) and Pers. *kad-ḡudāy* “the lord of the house” or “domicile” (in its technical meaning of place where a planet becomes most potent), deriving from Gr. οἰκοδεσπότης [*oikodespótēs*]. Every planet had its two domiciles, one diurnal, one nocturnal. Together with some Indo-Greek terms and methods, Sasanian horoscopes presented also a number of independent innovations, as in the case of the lunar knots (placed into Gemini and Sagittarius). They were unknown in Classical astrology, but they were added to the number of the planets by Sasanian astrologers as the extreme result of a later Indian tradition (of the fifth century CE), in which Rāhu and Ketu (the two false and invisible planets, demons of the eclipses) had already been inserted into the planetary class, so that the number of planets was extended to 9 (*navagraha*- “the nine planets”). A “black Sun” (*Mihr ī tamīg*) and a “black Moon” (*Māh ī tamīg*) were also inserted into the horoscope of the world in order to explain the eclipses; they were another duplication of the two Indian “false” planets and functionally corresponded to the head and the tail of the heavenly Dragon. For the role of the Dragon, [Gočīhr](#) or Gawčīhr, see Panaino 2005c and the important studies by W. Hartner. A special astrological terminology regarding the planets is attested in two astrological predictions preserved in the [Kārnāmag ī Ardašīr ī Pābagān](#) (III, 4-7; IV, 6-7), about which see Panaino, 1996a.

Jupiter and Saturn and their conjunctions. Chapter VI F of the *Bundahišn* (tr. MacKenzie, 1964, pp. 522-23, 528-29) explains that, by force of a decree by Time, which was manifested in a particular horoscope, [Gayōmart](#) was able to survive for 30 years after the irruption of the demons in the world. In Gayōmart's horoscope an extraordinary relevance was attributed to the mutual configurations of two planets in particular: Jupiter and Saturn; both were placed in their proper exaltations at the moment of [Ahreman](#)'s irruption; Jupiter was in Cancer in the cusp (Lat. *cuspes*) of the House of Life (*mēx ī*



gyānān), while Saturn was in Libra. After 30 years, Saturn, having approximately completed its revolution, came back to its point of departure, i.e., again to its exaltation, while, on the contrary, Jupiter, whose revolution takes 12 years, was exactly at 180° distance from its initial position, i.e., in its dejection or depression (in Capricorn), where its power was at minimum. Such a configuration showed the supremacy of Saturn, the “star” of Death (*stārag ī margīh*), over Jupiter, the “star” of Life (*stārag ī zīndagīh*), determining the death of Gayōmart (cf. *Wizīdagīhā ī Zādspram*, II, 21; tr. Gignoux and Tafazzoli, 1993, pp. 38-39, 193; *Bundahišn* VB, 13).

The importance attributed to Jupiter and Saturn and in particular to their mutual conjunctions was one of the most important independent contributions of Sasanian astrologers (Pingree, 1963a), such a tradition being unknown in other cultures. The increasing importance attributed to the so-called “political astrology” in the Sasanian period gave birth to the notion of a number of chronological periods and sub-periods (Kennedy, 1964, pp. 26-30), which were led by each planet in turn and which assumed an enormous importance also in the doctrine of the Great Conjunctions. It is important to note that a Jupiter/Saturn conjunction occurs approximately every 20 years; on such occasions, Sasanian astrologers calculated the so-called “historical” horoscopes in order to determine the most important public events of the following 20 years. As explained in the later Arab and Persian sources, these conjunctions were distinguished as of four types, by period: “little conjunctions” (every 20 years), “middle conjunctions” (after ca. 240 or 260 years), “great conjunctions” (after ca. 960-980 years), and the entire cycle of four great conjunctions (less than 4,000 years), which was considered a “mighty conjunction.” A fundamental point in this doctrine is the fact that every little conjunction takes place in the same astrological triplicity—i.e., in the same group of three zodiacal signs (3 of fire, 3 of earth, 3 of air, 3 of water)—12 (or in some cases 13) times consecutively. Thus, the occurrence of a middle conjunction, after ca. 240 or 260 years of little conjunctions, was defined by a transition of the event from the previous triplicity to the following one—from the triplicity of fire to that of earth, then to that of air, and finally to the one of water. The next transition, back to fire, completed passage across the zodiac and constituted a great conjunction. At this point the entire cycle started again.

The middle conjunction was strictly related to fate and destiny, especially those of dynasties and kingdoms, and it was taken as corresponding to a



radical change of power in the history of the world. But the most important conjunction was doubtless the “mighty” one, which took place approximately at the turn of every millennium, after four middle conjunctions and with the return to the initial triplicity of fire. Such a conjunction was astrologically very significant, because it was associated with a change of religion (Kennedy, 1964, pp. 30-37). It is clear that this doctrine was superimposed, although approximately, upon that of the 12 millennia of the Zoroastrian tradition (Pingree, 1968, pp. 73-75). Although the Zoroastrian doctrine established that every millennium was under the domination of a zodiacal constellation (*‘Olamā-ye Eslām*: Zaehner, 1972, pp. 410-11), the planets also assumed an important role. At the beginning of the *gumēzišn*, the domination (*hazārag xwadāyīh*) of the seventh millennium was given to the Balance (*Bundahišn* V B 15-17), Libra, a sign representing the point of depression (*šēbān šēb* = ταπείνωμα ταπεινωμάτων [*tapeínōma tapeinōmátōn*]) for the Sun (and, then, for the forces of Ohrmazd), but also the place of exaltation for Saturn, the most dangerous of the planetary demons. Thus, Kēwān became the lord of the seventh millennium. For a more detailed analysis of the theological adaptation of this astrological doctrine to the Zoroastrian chiliadic system, see the comments by D. Pingree, apud A. Panaino 1996b, with regard to the *Zand ī Wahman Yasn* VI, 4, 10; VII, 10; IX, 14 (ed. Cereti, 1995), where the history of the world was arranged according to this system of exaltations.

The planets and the cosmic year of the “Persians.” The calculation of the planetary movements was essential for the preparation of the three known versions of the Sasanian astronomical tables (*zīg*) and of very long cosmic cycles. *Abū Ma‘šar* and al-Sijzī (Kennedy and van der Waerden, 1963, pp. 316-17; Pingree, 1968, pp. 28-29; van der Waerden, 1977-78, pp. 368-70), mention three different cosmic years: the first one of 4,320,000,000 years, of the Indians, the second of 4,320,000, attributed to Āryabhaṭa (*Arjabhaz*), and a third of 360,000, ascribed to the “Persians” and some “Babylonians.” The first system, based on the *Paitāmahasiddhānta*, was connected with the *Mahāyuga*, while the third is also known by al-Bīrūnī (*Chronology*, ed. Sachau, 1879, p. 29; *Qānūn*, ed., 1956, p. 1475), who attributed its introduction to Abū Ma‘šar, although it results to be very close to the old *Sūryasiddhānta* in its original version (Pingree, 1968, pp. 28-29). The latter cycle dated the flood in the night after Thursday February 17, -3101 (= 3102 BCE) at 0° of Aries in connection with a “Mighty Conjunction.” The analysis of the mathematical and astronomical parameters used in these cycles has given rise to complex discussion about the influence of the various Indian astronomical schools



(*pakšas*) on Sasanian Iran, in particular between B. L. van der Waerden and Pingree; the *status quaestionis* is resumed in Panaino 1998, pp. 161-79, and *passim*.

Planetary melothesiae. In the Pahlavi *Wizīdagīhā ī Zādspram*, XXX (Gignoux and Tafazzoli, 1993, pp. 98-99), there is attested a planetary *melothesía*, i.e., a symbolic representation of the correspondences connecting the parts of the human body to the planets and the zodiacal constellations. This source can be, at least partly, compared with the *melothesía* of the Sanskrit *Yavanajātaka*, I, 123-126 (Pingree, 1978, II, pp. 251-52, 325-26). Very interestingly, this Pahlavi text does not give any negative comments about the planets, which, contrariwise, are considered as a harmonic part of the creation. In chapter XXVIII of the *Bundahišn* (par. 3), the use of hands and feet is compared with the seven planets and the twelve zodiacal constellations: “hands and feet are like the seven [planets] and the twelve [constellations]” (*ud dast ud pāy abzār čīyōn haftān ud dwazdahān*). (See ZODIAC.)

Apotropaic traditions and Indian iconography. In a number of popular Iranian traditions, as well as in some magic rituals of the Zoroastrians, we can find some unexpected apotropaic invocations (in Pāzand) to the planets (Kanga, 1900, pp. 144-45; Panaino, 2005b); the *Ayādgār ī Jāmāspīg*, XIII, 6 (Messina, 1939, pp. 59, 107), a passage generally concerning the subject of “nativities,” underlines a strong opposition between the twelve zodiacal signs, viewed favorably, against the negative and bad planets. The presence of the wise *Jāmāsp* here deserves a special attention, because he was considered in Pahlavi and Persian literatures as the apocryphal author of an astrological treatise (ms. Paris Arabe BN 2487; see Kennedy 1964, pp. 34-36; Sezgin, 1979, pp. 86-88), which is dedicated to the Great Conjunctions, starting with the universal flood. In this manuscript the author, who normally mentions Zoroaster as “our prophet,” placed the age of Zardušt 1,300 years after the flood, precisely in -1801. This manuscript is very interesting, because in the horoscope of the single conjunctions, every planet is represented as having a number of hands (from 3 to 6), every one handling an object. The origin of this particular planetary iconography, although unclear in its details, seems to be Indian. About the Indo-Greek influences upon the Iranian representation of the planets, see Pingree, 1963b; 1965, p. 254. The Arabic version (Ritter, 1933; Ritter and Plessner, 1962) and the Latin one (Pingree, 1986) of the *Picatrix*—one of the most important medieval treatises of magic—still preserve (in chap. III, 7) a Middle Persian denomination of the planets (Pingree, 1976,



pp. 178-79), although their names were spelled in a very peculiar form: in the Arabic version, they are: *Kēwān*, *Hurmuz*, *Bahrām*, *Mihr*, *Anāhīd*, *Tīr*, *Māh*; in the Latin version: *Kayhven*, *Harmiz*, *Baharam*, *Maher*, *Anyhyt*, *Tyr*, *Mehe*. In Khotanese literature the planets (*graha*-) were named according to the Indian terminology (e.g., Khot. *Br̥haspatā* (Jupiter) = Skt. *Br̥haspati*; see the *Book of Zambasta*, XXIV, 202: Emmerick, 1968, pp. 380-81; Leumann, 1933-36, pp. 322-23; Qing, 1992, p. 41). Also the demons of diseases were frequently called *Graha* (Bailey, 1982, p. 29), but the extant sources do not allow one to conclude that in such a case the planets were strictly meant.

The planets in the Manichean tradition. Manichean sources agree with the Zoroastrian ones in the negative evaluation of the planets, which were considered demons; they are 5 or 7 (but in the latter case, the lunar knots were added, and not the two luminaries; Sundermann, 1973, p. 45, n. 13; Panaino, 1997b). A Zoroastrian influence is visible in Manichean use of *abāxtar* as the generic term for “planet” (on which, see below), in spite of its other meaning, “north,” which was the demonic direction for the Zoroastrians, but not for the Manicheans, who considered “south” as the demonic side. Probably, the negative value attributed to the retrograde movement of the planets was a much more important consideration. A number of Manichean texts know of the “doctrine of the astral bindings” (Panaino, 1998; 1997b): the planets (named *parīgān*) were bound with cords of wind (M 178; Henning, 1948, pp. 312-13), but also the human soul was fastened by the demoness *Āz* to the stars and the planets. By means of these bonds, *Āz* would like to direct humans towards sin and badness (M 7982, 7983, Andreas and Henning 1932, pp. 196-99; cf. Panaino, 1998, chap. 6).

The celestial world is connected to the terrestrial one by means of conduits (Coptic *lihme*) and roots (Coptic *noune*), about which we possess ample information in western and eastern Manichean or anti-Manichean sources (for Gr. *ρίζαι* [*rhízai*], Lat. *Radices*, cf. *Panarion*, LXVI, 26: Riggi, 1967, pp. 118-25). These links surely had ambiguous functions, because they played at the same time a mechanical role, namely, turning the sphere, and a demonic function, namely, pouring iniquity on the earth (particularly the third *lihme*), but they also blocked the demons. In addition, some of them were also attached by *Āz* to the souls of human beings. The image of the planetary demons is clearly documented in the Mandaean literature, particularly in the *Ginzā* (Lidzbarski, 1925, p. 103, 97, 9-34; Panaino, 1998, chap. 8). In the Ethiopic version of *Henoch*, XVIII, 13-16, XXI, 3-6, the seven stars, probably the planets,



were bound, and the astral bodies can turn thanks to the force of the winds.

The planets in the Mazdakite tradition. The only religious tradition of Iran in Late Antiquity that did not demonize the planets is the Mazdakite one; according to Šahrastānī (Gimaret and Monnot, 1986, pp. 631-36), in front of the god of Mazdak four powers were sitting; they governed the world by means of seven inferior figures (the five planets plus the two luminaries) turning inside of the circle belonging to the twelve spiritual beings (i.e., the constellations). The identification of the single planets and zodiacal constellations there represented is partly controversial; see Christensen, 1925, pp. 81-82; Klíma, 1957, pp. 188-91, 219-21; Shaki 1985, pp. 535-541; Gimaret and Monnot 1986, pp. 634-36.

The planetary week. According to an earlier astrological pattern, each of the seven days of the week was put under the protection of a planetary divinity. This tradition entered the western Iranian lands in Late Antiquity. Thanks to a Sogdian intermediation, the planetary week found its way to China (Chavannes and Pelliot, 1912, pp. 190-91), probably through the [Manichean missions](#). Chinese names of the days, in fact, show a patent Sogdian derivation (Müller, 1907), as happens also in the case of the corresponding Uighur forms (Thomsen, 1910; Andreas, 1910; Bazin, 1963, p. 571, n. 2; Yoshida, 1988; Panaino, 1995a, p. 69, n. 39; Zieme, 1995; see [Table 3](#)).

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