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The Dualistic Opposition of Āz and Xrad in the Shahnameh and Middle Persian Literature

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Abstract

A foundational tenet of Zoroastrianism is the cosmic dualism between good and evil, a struggle that originates at creation and culminates in the victory of righteousness. Within this framework, the ancient concepts of *Xrad* (wisdom) and *Āz* (greed) emerge as opposing forces, representing good and evil, respectively, and are frequently depicted in direct conflict. This antagonism is vividly illustrated in Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* and can also be traced in Middle Persian texts and Manichaean literature.Through a comparative, library-based analysis of the *Shahnameh* and Middle Persian sources, this study examines the opposition between *Āz* and *Xrad*, revealing how these concepts are portrayed in Ferdowsi's epic, a cornerstone of Iran's cultural, mythological, and historical heritage. The findings demonstrate that the *Shahnameh*'s verses depicting the struggle between *Āz* and *Xrad* align with recurring motifs in Middle Persian literature. Moreover, given the *Shahnameh*'s unique linguistic, stylistic, and source-based distinctions from earlier texts, the study argues that *Āz* and *Xrad* gradually evolved beyond their original religious context, becoming embedded in the broader intellectual and cultural discourse of Iran. This research not only deepens our understanding of Zoroastrian dualism as reflected in the Persian literary tradition but also highlights the dynamic interplay between religious doctrine and cultural adaptation.

Keywords: *Āz*, *Xrad*; *Shahnameh*, Zoroastrian religion, Middle Persian Literature, Cultural evolution.

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