

HYPNOTICA IRANICA ZOROASTRIAN ECSTASY IN THE WEST

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Abstract

The ecstatic journeys that are part of Zoroastrian religious culture are strongly linked to the expressive forms of Gnostic dualism. These are explorations of entheogenic worlds created by the eating of the hallucinogenic substances and/or narcotics, the «food» or «illuminating drink» (*rōnšngar xwarišn*) of the Pahlavi texts. A Gnostic text, the *Apokryphon Johannis* speaks of the Tree of Life and its poisonous fruits. In the beginning, the Edenic trees are one, called in two different ways. The Rabbinical commentaries confirm this conjecture: the two original trees stood both at the centre of the garden, united by the roots. Even in Iran the events of the first parents of mankind are tied to a tree and to the knowledge dispensed from it, and imply the attainment of that knowledge and visionary power. These hallucinogenic rituals play a role also in the teachings of the late *Magusaeans*, the Hellenised *Magoi* or the Magi of the Greek settlements, a kind of Zoroastrian defrocked priests that live in Syria or Anatolia. The Hellenistic and Late-Antique literature gives rise to many comparisons between Iranian lore and Western traditions, with a special regard to the psychotogenic experiences. Also, there are many traces of these contacts among Iranism and Judaism. These ritual attitudes are at the beginning of the Modern magical world.

Among the Coptic Gnostic texts found at Nag-Hammadi between 1946 and 1950, the *Apokryphon Johannis* is remarkable. Four versions of it are known, the oldest is contained in papyrus 8502 of Berlin's Staatsbibliothek = *Berolinensis Gnosticus* (BG).¹ The four texts do not give us the same review, but two: a short one, represented by BG and Nag-Hammadi Codex III, and a more extensive version gave by Nag-Hammadi Codex II and IV.

Irenaeus (*Adv. haer.* I, 29, 1-4) has probably used a short Greek version of the *Apokryphon Johannis* to refute – before 180 A.D. – the teachings of Barbelognostics.² A Gnostic group whose name derives from Barbelo, she is a female Aeon at the beginning of the whole universe.³ She, the Mother of all living,

¹ C. Schmidt, «Ein vorirenäisches gnostisches Originalwerk in koptischer Sprache», in *Sitzungsberichte der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften in Berlin*, 1896, pp. 839-847; ma la prima edizione e traduzione avverrà molti anni più tardi, a cura di W. Till, *Die gnostischen Schriften des Koptischen Papyrus Berolinensis 8502*, (Berlin, 1955).

² Y. Janssens, «L'Apocryphon de Jean» pt. I, in *Le Muséon*, 83 (1970), p. 157.

³ See also Epiph. *Pan. haer.* 25, 2, 2-4.

also has the mission to free the divine element trapped in the material world and struggling against lower Aeons, to bring light into primordial dwelling.⁴

The *Apokryphon Johannis*' plot speaks of a peculiar theogonic development of the divine principle (= «invisible Spirit»),⁵ whereby the life force contained in the water arouses the luminous manifestation of an androgynous reality (= Barbelo),⁶ who gives life to the next emanations of the «fullness», the πλήρωμα. The origin of the theogonic process is an epiphany,⁷ in which the light hidden in the divine life comes out of its secrecy to reveal itself as a «source of shining water».⁸

Barbelo, the «image of light», is the first entity to emerge from the Supreme Being, the Heavenly Father unknown and unpredictable. Through Barbelo the hypercosmic «son» derives and, later, all the brightening entities⁹ which are configured in a πλήρωμα. This light system will break up because of «sister Sophia»¹⁰: it is the origin of an irregular generation, the κένωμα, «void», from which rises the Demiurge, the Ruler of the lower world.¹¹ He is an abortive creation, a sort of monstrous transgender in the resemblance of a dragon with a face of a lion,¹² unaware of the existence of πλήρωμα upon him, and proud in his deceptive singleness. His name is Ialdabaōth.¹³

⁴ Cfr. H. Leisegang, *Die Gnosis*, Leipzig 1924, pp. 186-196; K. Rudolph, *La gnosi. Natura e storia di una religione tardoantica*, ed. it. cur. C. Gianotto (Biblioteca di cultura religiosa, 63), Brescia 2000 (ed. or. Göttingen, 1990)³, pp. 132-133; Ch. Marksches, *Gnosis. An Introduction*, engl. transl. by J. Bowden, (London-New York, 2003), (ed. or. München 2001), pp. 94 ss.

⁵ See now M. Waldstein-F. Wisse (eds.), *The Apocryphon of John: Synopsis of Nag Hammadi Codices II, 1; III, 1; and IV, 1 with BG 8502, 2* (Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies 33), (Leiden-Köln, 1995).

⁶ Cfr. A.K. Helmbold, «The Apokryphon of John», in *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 25 (1966), p. 268.

⁷ C. Colpe, «Heidnische, jüdische und christliche Überlieferung in den Schriften aus Nag Hammadi V», in *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum*, 19 (1976), pp. 120-129.

⁸ BG 26, 19-21.

⁹ *Apocr. Joh.* II, 9, 20; G. Casadio, «Dall'Aion ellenistico agli Eoni-Angeli gnostici», in *Avallon*, 42 (1997), pp. 45-62.

¹⁰ *Apocr. Joh* BG 36, 16; III, 14, 9.

¹¹ G. Quispel, *The Demiurge in the Apocryphon of John*, in R. McL. Wilson (ed.), *Nag Hammadi and Gnosis. Papers read at the First International Congress of Coptology* (Nag Hammadi Studies, XIV), (Leiden, 1978), pp. 7 ss.

¹² About the lion, cfr. F. Cumont, *The Mysteries of Mithra*, engl. trans. by T.J. McCormack, (New York, 1956) (ed. or. Bruxelles, 1903), pp. 105-110; J. Duchesne-Guillemin, «Aïōn et le léontocéphale, Mithras et Ahriman», in *La Nouvelle Clio*, 10 (1958-1960), p. 95; H.M. Jackson, *The Lion Becomes Man. The Gnostic Leontomorphic Creator and the Platonic Tradition* (SBL Dissertation Series 81), (Atlanta, Georgia, 1985), pp. 1-12 and *passim*.

¹³ *Apocr. Joh.* II, 24, 12 and *passim*; for the name, cfr. G.G. Scholem, «Ialdabaoth Reconsidered», in Aa.Vv., *Mélanges d'Histoire des Religions offerts à H.-Ch. Puech*, Paris 1974, pp. 410 ss.; A. Mastrocinque, «Pregare Ialdabaoth», in G. Sfameni Gasparro (cur.), *Modi di comunicazione tra il divino e l'umano. Tradizioni profetiche, divinazione, astrologia e magia nel mondo mediterraneo antico*, Atti del II Seminario Internazionale (Hierá 7), (Cosenza, 2005), pp. 203 ss.

Ialdabaōth, aided by dark powers -- the Archons -- creates the soul of Adam, a faulty duplicate of an image of light.¹⁴ But the psychic man lies motionless on the ground, devoid of the living breath that the Demiurge and the powers cannot infuse. Only by a stratagem, the light world will be able to animate Adam.

After the creation of the soul, Ialdabaōth and the Archons create the real man, the Adam of flesh; they bring to him the gates of paradise, offering the plants that grow there. From the Archons rises a «spirit of imitation»,¹⁵ the ἀντίμιμον πνεῦμα that incited Adam towards evil and sin, inviting him to eat from the Tree of Life, the paradise plant with its deadly fruit.¹⁶ Its root is bitter, its branches are a shadow of death, its leaves contempt and deceit, its seed drinking itself forever to the darkness.¹⁷

Now, the drinking in Gnostic dualism is an action ascribed to the world of darkness;¹⁸ food and drink nourish the body, antithetical to true life, bright and ineffable. Marcion denies the materiality and corporality of Jesus: the Savior feeds and drinks only in appearance (Tert. *Adv. Marc.* 3, 8, 4).¹⁹

This suggestion starts from the Synoptics, in a passage that we find, almost identical, in the first and third Gospel. The subject is John the Baptist of whom Jesus says: «John has come, neither eating nor drinking, and they say “He has a demon. The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and people say: “Here is a glutton and wine drinker (ἰδοὺ ἄνθρωπος φάγος καὶ οἰνοπότης), a friend of publicans and sinners”» (Mt. 11, 18-19). The parallel passage in the *Gospel of Luke* (7, 33-34) is the longest, this suggest that it is the oldest²⁰.

It is the Gnostic Docetism which also echoes Saturninus (or Saturnilo), according to which the Saviour has no body, is a mask that shows itself in human form (Ir. *Adv. Haer.* 1, 24, 2).²¹

The *Apokryphon Johannis* speaks of the Tree of Life and its poisonous fruits²². Those who read the Bible (*Gen.* 2, 9) learn that among all the lush trees in

¹⁴ R. Van den Broek, «The Creation of Adam's Psychic Body in the Apocryphon of John», in R. Van den Broek-M.J. Vermaseren (eds.), *Studies in Gnosticism and Hellenistic Religions presented to G. Quispel* (EPRO 91), (Leiden, 1981), pp. 38-57.

¹⁵ Janssens, «L'Apocryphon de Jean» pt. III, in *Le Muséon*, 84 (1971), pp. 414 ss.; cfr. A. Böhlig, «Zum Antimimon Pneuma in den koptisch-gnostischen Texten», in *Mysterion und Wahrheit* (AGJU, 6), (Leiden, 1968), pp. 162-174 .

¹⁶ G. Filoramo, *L'attesa della fine. Storia della gnosi*, (Roma-Bari, 1987)², p. 148.

¹⁷ *Apocr. Joh.* BG, 56, 4-57, 3 (*Synopsis*, pp. 124-126); Janssens, «L'Apocryphon de Jean» pt. I, p. 159.

¹⁸ See also the Gnostic doctrines of the Mandaeans reflected in *Ginz... lamina II*, 1 (Petermann, 58, 8-18; Lidzbarski, 156).

¹⁹ A. Orbe, «El Hijo del hombre come y bebe (Mt 11, 19; Lc 7, 34)», in *Gregorianum*, 58 (1977), p. 524.

²⁰ Orbe, «El Hijo del hombre come y bebe», p. 523.

²¹ *Ibid.* p. 525.

Eden there were two peculiar ones: «the Tree of Life in the middle of the garden and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil» (*w's hlyym btwk hgn w's hd't twb wry*). God forbids man to eat the fruits of the second tree, the Tree of Knowledge, the Tree of *gnōsis*.

The text, however, falls into contradiction. In fact, Eve, in response to the tempting serpent, says: «Of the fruit of the garden's trees we may eat, but the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God said: "You shall not eat, and you shall not touch it, otherwise you die"» (*Gen. 3, 2-3*). Now, in the previous chapter, we read that the tree in the middle of the garden of Eden was not that of Knowledge, which is forbidden to eat, but the Tree of Life.

In the beginning, the Edenic tree is one, called in two different ways. The Rabbinical commentaries confirm this conjecture: the two trees originally stood at the centre of garden, joined at the roots.²³ Other versions describe the Tree of Knowledge as a hedge enclosing the Tree of Life.²⁴ So, the *Apokryphon Johannis* seems to derive from an ancient Midrashic tradition older than the drawing up²⁵ of *Genesis*.

Some Rabbinical sources claim that Adam, by eating the fruit of the Tree, had the gift of prophecy;²⁶ he preferred the gift of knowledge rather than immortality. This means that it was an entheogenic fruit, capable of expanding the mind over the limits of perception.²⁷

Not surprisingly, other sources identify the Tree of Knowledge with a huge ear of corn.²⁸ The cereal, as well as do the origins of agriculture and food, in fact, refers to the hallucinatory ecstasy of ergotism, the *Claviceps purpurea* poisoning, the sclerotium of rye, the purple mushroom that infests rye and other graminaceous plants such as wheat, liable in the past and in antiquity of serious epidemics.²⁹

From *Claviceps purpurea* derives a highly psychoactive compound, LSD. In 1918, the Sandoz laboratories of Basel, isolated and purified the first ergot alkaloid. In 1934 it was possible to recognize the lysergic acid as a common basis of all derivatives of ergot. But the breakthrough came in 1943 when Albert Hofmann, in charge of studying the lysergic acid amides at the Sandoz

²² I.S. Gilhus, «The Tree of Life and the Tree of Death», in *Religion*, 17 (1987), pp. 337-353.

²³ L. Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, V, (Philadelphia, 1925), p. 91 n. 51.

²⁴ Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, I, (Philadelphia, 1909), p. 70; V, p. 91 (trad. it. di E. Loewenthal, *Le leggende degli ebrei*, I [Biblioteca Adelphi 314], (Milano, 1995), p. 79).

²⁵ Cfr. G. Garbini, «Tra Egitto e Babilonia», in *Storia e ideologia nell'Israele antico* (Biblioteca di storia e storiografia dei tempi biblici, 3), (Brescia, 1986), pp. 183-207.

²⁶ *Gen. Rab.* 200-201; *Yalqut Gen.* 34; Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, V, pp. 97-98; R. Graves-R. Patai, *I miti ebraici* («Il Cammeo», 4), (Milano, 1980), p. 94.

²⁷ Graves-Patai, *I miti ebraici*, pp. 98-99, n. 10.

²⁸ *Gen. Rab.* pp. 139-142.

²⁹ Ch. Rättsch, *Enzyklopädie der psychoaktiven Pflanzen. Botanik, Ethnopharmakologie und Anwendung*, AT Verlag, (Aarau (Schweiz), 2007)⁸, pp. 645 a-650 c.

laboratories,³⁰ accidentally came in contact with one of them (the twenty-fifth diethylamide of d-lysergic acid). After a few hours he was hit by phenomena of alterate perception. Albert Hofmann began the studies on the modified states of consciousness induced by this substance. One quarter of a milligram of LSD was enough to provoke a radical revulsion of ordinary perception. This surprising discovery was confirmed in 1962 by W.A. Taber and in 1964 by K. Genest.

The ecstatic journeys are part of Zoroastrian religious culture,³¹ strongly linked with the expressive forms of Gnostic dualism.³² Explorations of worlds produced by entheogenic drugs and/or narcotics, the «food» or «illuminating drink» (*rōnšngar xwarišn*) of the Pahlavi texts.³³ The Avestan word *baṅha-* (> Pahlavi *bang/mang*) linked with the Sanskrit *bhangā*, «hemp», the *κάνναβς* of Herodotus (4, 74, 1), is of great interest under this point of view.³⁴

The *Frawardīn Yašt* speaks of a liturgy celebrated with much *baṅha* (*pouru.baṅhahe zaošāhe ašāonō fravašim yazamaide: Yašt 13, 124 a*),³⁵ while, in contrast, the *Widēwdād* seems to restrict or stigmatize its ecstatic use.³⁶ The *bang* or *mang* is sometimes called «medicine» (Avestan *baēšazyā-* > Pahlavi *bēšaz*)³⁷ and has – according to the doses, use, and where the plants are identified – sedative, analgesic, hallucinogenic and/or anesthetic properties.³⁸ The action of this compound should be considered together with the Avestan *haoma-* (> pahlavi *hōm*) the psychoactive plant related with the Vedic *soma-*. The *haoma* is the main subject of the Avestan sacrifice, the entheogenic fluid receptacle of light force,³⁹ the libation at the heart of Zoroastrian religion cult.⁴⁰

³⁰ Cfr. A. Hofmann, *LSD il mio bambino difficile*, trad. it. R. Fedeli, (Milano, 2005) (ed. or. Stuttgart 1979), pp. 49 ss.

³¹ Ph. Gignoux, «La signification du voyage extra-terrestre dans l'eschatologie mazdéenne» in *Aa.Vv., Mélanges d'Histoire des Religions offerts à H.-Ch. Puech*, pp. 67 ss.

³² See G. Widengren, «Les origines du gnosticisme et l'histoire des religions», in U. Bianchi (cur.), *Le origini dello gnosticismo. Colloquio di Messina* (Numen Supp. XII), (Leiden, 1967), pp. 28-60.

³³ Gh. Gnoli, «Ašavan. Contributo alla studio del libro di Ard... Wir...z», in Gh. Gnoli-A.V. Rossi (cur.), *Iranica* (Istituto Universitario Orientale – Seminario di Studi Asiatici/Series Minor, X), (Napoli, 1979), p. 439; Id., «Questioni comparative sull'Ascensione d'Isaia: la tradizione iranica», in M. Pesce (cur.), *Isaia, il Diletto e la Chiesa. Visione ed esegesi profetica cristiano-primitiva nell'Ascensione di Isaia* (Testi e Ricerche di Scienze Religiose, 20), (Brescia, 1983), p. 120.

³⁴ Cfr. K. Meuli, «Scythica», in *Hermes*, 70 (1935), p. 122; M. Eliade, *Lo sciamanismo e le tecniche dell'estasi* (Orizzonti dello spirito, 18), (Roma, 1974), (rist. 2005), pp. 424-425; un'altra interpretazione in Albrile, «Daēvica enteogena», pp. 265-267.

³⁵ *AirWb*, col. 901.

³⁶ H.S. Nyberg, *Die Religionen des alten Iran* (Mitteilungen der vorderasiatisch-ägyptischen Gesellschaft, 43. Band), J.C. Hinrichs Verlag, (Leipzig, 1938), pp. 177-178.

³⁷ *AirWb*, col. 925.

³⁸ W. Belardi, *The Pahlavi Book of the Righteous Viraz, I. Chapters I-II* (Biblioteca di Ricerche Linguistiche e Filologiche, 10), (Roma, 1979), p. 116.

³⁹ Cfr. Gh. Gnoli, «Un particolare aspetto del simbolismo della luce nel Mazdeismo e nel Manicheismo», in *Annali dell'Istituto Orientale di Napoli*, N.S. 12 (1962), p. 102; M. Eliade,

It is the *bang* that alleviates the sufferings of Gayōmart,⁴¹ the Πρῶτος ἄνθρωπος, the father of mankind in the Zoroastrian tradition.⁴²

According to the Iranian *Bundahišn*, at the death of Gayōmart⁴³ his seed split into several parts, one was purified by the rays of the Sun, two parts were collected by the archangel Nēryōsang, and a part fell to the ground.⁴⁴ The latest gave birth to Mihrē e Mihryānē, the Iranian Adam and Eve, who sprouted from the earth in the form of a rhubarb plant, which has one body and fifteen leaves.⁴⁵

Even in Iran, therefore, the events of the primordial couple are tied to a tree and to the *gnōsis*, the knowledge that came from it: the attainment of this knowledge and visionary power implies the possession of *xwarrah* (< Avestan *x^varənah-*) – the *aura gloriae* surrounding the Iranian kings and is also their «fortune»⁴⁶.

According to Zoroastrian ideology the *x^varənah-* is imagined as strength and visionary powers, something intangible and endless, a «brightness», a «light power».⁴⁷ The *x^varənah-* leading a whole Avestan work, the *Zamyād Yašt*, is a creative and life-giving power⁴⁸ to the place it occupies in Mazdaean cosmogony.⁴⁹

Trattato di Storia delle Religioni (Universale Scientifica Boringhieri, 141/142), (Torino, 1976), pp. 199-200.

⁴⁰ Cfr. E. Albrile, «Un'inebriante salvezza. Culti enteogeni e mitologie fra ellenismo e iranismo», in *Studi Classici e Orientali*, 55 (2009), pp. 11-34.

⁴¹ G. Widengren, «The Death of Gayōmart», in J.M. Kitagawa-C.H. Long (eds.), *Myth and Symbols. Studies in Honor of Mircea Eliade*, (Chicago-London, 1969), pp. 179-193.

⁴² Cfr. A. Christensen, *Le premier homme et le premier roi dans l'histoire légendaire des Iraniens*, I-II, (Stockholm, 1917), (Leiden 1934); Sh. Shaked, «First Man, First King. Notes on Semitic-Iranian Syncretism and Iranian Mythological Transformations», in Sh. Shaked-D. Shulman-G.G. Stroumsa (eds.), *Gilgul. Essays on Transformation, Revolution and Permanence in the History of Religions* (Studies in the History of Religions [Supp. to *Numen*] L), (Leiden- New York-København-Köln, 1987), pp. 238-256; e la splendida sintesi di M. Shaki, s.v. «Gayōmart», in Yarshater (ed.), *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, X, (New York, 2001), pp. 345 a-347 a.

⁴³ E. Albrile, «Gayōmart nel mare di Kronos», in *Studi Classici e Orientali*, 49(2003), pp. 67-96.

⁴⁴ B.T. Anklesaria, *Zand-Ākāsīh. Iranian or Greater Bundahišn. Transliteration and Translation in English*, (Bombay, 1956), pp. 101, 1 ss.

⁴⁵ Text in S.S. Hartman, *Gayōmart. Etude sur le syncretisme dans l'ancien Iran*, (Uppsala, 1953), p. 61.

⁴⁶ Cfr. E. Albrile, «Fuori c'è un mondo fragile. Due problemi di mitologia astrale nell'Iran sassanide», in *Le Muséon*, 121 (2008), pp. 249 ss.

⁴⁷ See Gh. Gnoli, s.v. «Farr(ah)», in Yarshater (ed.), *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, IX, (New York, 1999), pp. 314 a-315 b.

⁴⁸ See A. Hintze, *Der Zamy...d-Yašt. Edition, Übersetzung, Kommentar* (Beiträge zur Iranistik, Band 15), (Wiesbaden, 1994).

⁴⁹ Cfr. Gnoli, «Un particolare aspetto del simbolismo della luce», pp. 105 ss.; and Id., «Lichtsymbolik in Alt-Iran. Haoma-Ritus und Erlöser Mythos», in *Antaios*, 8 (1967), pp. 528 ss.; M. Bussagli, *L'arte del Gandh...ra*, (Torino, 1984), pp. 111; 262; see also Hintze, *Der Zamy...d-Yašt*, pp. 17 ss.

The «mind's sight» or «wisdom's sight» is the metaphysical tools that in *Zamyād Yašt* enable *Saošyant- Astvaṭ.ərəta*⁵⁰ to transform and immortalize the visible world.⁵¹ There exists a constant relationship between the *x^varənah-* and beverages consumed by the sacrificer or other Zoroastrian religious figures: the *x^varənah-* is in *haoma*, and then in the «ambrosia» (*anōš*) which resurrects the dead and makes the living immortal,⁵² and it is in the milk mingled with *hōm* drunk by Zoroaster's parents before his birth.⁵³

It is the *rōšngar xwarišn*, the «illuminating drink» full of *xwarrah*, that makes it possible that king *Wištāsp*, friend and protector of Zoroaster, is able to contemplate the ultimate mystery, the «mystery of the great *xwarrah*».

In the same sense, the idea of *x^varənah-* is renewed in Manichaeism, applied to Light-Noûs,⁵⁴ the *wahman wuzurg* of Middle-Persian texts, the «glorious» lord (Parthian *farrahāwand*); the name that in *Bundahišn* designates Ohrmazd as *xwarrahōmand*. The great splendour is the *farrah wuzurg*, which in Manichaeism accompanies the beings of Light.⁵⁵

The possession of *xwarrah* is thus intimately linked with power of vision and with extrasensory multiverse, a separate reality.⁵⁶ This altered perception is inextricably connected with the story of *Gayōmart* and his death by Ahrimanic

⁵⁰ Cfr. C.G. Cereti, «La figura del redentore futuro nei testi iranici zoroastriani. Aspetti dell'evoluzione di un mito», in *Annali dell'Istituto Orientale di Napoli*, 55 (1995), pp. 57 ss.; A. Hintze, «The Rise of the Saviour in the Avesta», in Ch. Reck-P. Zieme (Hrsg.), *Iran und Turfan: Werner Sundermann zum 60. Geburtstag gewidmet*, (Wiesbaden, 1995), pp. 77-97.

⁵¹ *Yašt* 19, 94, now in Hintze, *Der Zamyād-Yašt*; cfr. Gh. Gnoli, *Ricerche Storiche sul S-stīntān Antico* (Report and Memoirs X), IsMEO, (Roma, 1967), pp. 22, 24 e n. 1; and more M. Boyce, s.v. «Astvaṭ.ərəta», in Yarshater (ed.), *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, II, pp. 871 a-873 a.

⁵² *Wizīdagīhā ī Zādspram* 35, 5; cfr. M. Boyce, «Haoma, Priest of the Sacrifice», in M. Boyce-I. Gershevitch (eds.), *W.B. Henning Memorial Volume*, (London, 1970), p. 65.

⁵³ *Dēnkard* VII, 2, 39-42.

⁵⁴ Cfr. I. Colditz, «Titles of Kings and Gods in Iranian Manichaean Texts», in A. van Tongerloo-L. Cirillo (eds.), *Il Manicheismo. Nuove prospettive della ricerca. Quinto Congresso Internazionale di Studi sul Manicheismo* (Napoli 2-8 Settembre, 2001) – Atti (Manichaean Studies V), (Louvain-Napoli, 2005), p. 60.

⁵⁵ Cfr. C. Schmidt-H.J. Polotsky, *Ein Mani-Fund in Ägypten. Originalschriften des Mani und seiner Schüler*. Mit einer Beitrag von H. Ibscher, in *Sitzungsberichte der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Phil.-Hist. Klasse*, (Berlin, 1933), p. 79; G.G. Stroumsa, *Aspects de l'eschatologie manichéenne*, in *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions*, 198 (1981), pp. 176 ss.

⁵⁶ R.E. Schultes-A. Hofmann, *Pflanzen der Götter. Die magischen Kräfte der bewußtseinsweiternden Gewächse*, hrsg. Ch. Ratsch, (Aarau (Schweiz)-Milano, 1998), pp. 104-105; R.G. Wasson- A. Hofmann-A.P. Ruck, *The Road to Eleusis. Unveiling the Secret of the Mysteries*, (New York-London, 1978), *passim*; cfr. E. Albrile, «Il corpo immaginato. Ipotesi su una metafora gnostica», in *Archæus*, 8 (2004), pp. 25-40.

hands. The light seed of Gayōmart makes the earth fruitful and generates an anthropomorphic plant, or rather a couple of phytomorphic androids.⁵⁷

All Islamo-Persian sources agree that Adam was Gayōmart,⁵⁸ thus laying the foundations for a syncretism that has produced significant results and mythographic combinations.⁵⁹ This is the case of Ṭāhir al-Maqdisī. According to this Muslim author Gayōmart (= Kayūmarrat) is killed, decapitated by Iblīs. The blood that drips from the severed head is then divided into three parts. One is prey to the darkness and falls into the hands of «Satan», another is saved by the angel Nēryōsang (= Nīryūsank), while the last one fall to the ground, and after a gestation of forty years, gives rise to a pair of phytomorphic androids in the shape of a plant of rhubarb (*rībās*).⁶⁰

The «ejaculated seed into Spandarmad»,⁶¹ that is in soil, is changed into a more cruel but harmless «blood». The symbolic value is identical, the sexual imagination attenuated if not completely removed.⁶² The Islamic mythographer witnesses the confluence of both traditions, Zoroastrian and Manichaean, in what he is telling.

In a remarkable work of a few years ago, Mircea Eliade draws a parallel between the rhubarb plant of Mazdaean tradition and the mandrake of folklore.⁶³ This is a parallel that goes beyond the mythological and religious phenomenology, involving the topics of sociology and ethnobotany. The Middle Persian *rēbās*, indicating a medicinal «plant» (Pahlavi *urwar*), a «bitter herb» which is usually recognized in the plant of rhubarb (*Rheum officinale*).⁶⁴ The name is probably linked with the Avestan *raēva-/raēvant-* «wealth, splendor»⁶⁵ (noun *rayay-*),⁶⁶ semantically related to light and its shining power,⁶⁷ the *x^varənah-*. In *Yašt* 6, 1 the sunlight is explicitly identified with the «undying wealth» (*aməšəm raēm*): during the hot afternoon, the «venerable» and divine

⁵⁷ Cfr. R.C. Zaehner, *Zurvān. A Zoroastrian Dilemma*, Oxford 1955 (repr. New York, 1972), p. 75; B. Lincoln, «Embryological Speculation and Gender Politics in a Pahlavi Text», in *History of Religions*, 27 (1988), pp. 355-365.

⁵⁸ Cfr. Christensen, *Le premier homme et le premier roi*, p. 67; M. Eliade, «Gayomart, Adamo e la mandragola», in *Spezzare il tetto della casa. La creatività e i suoi simboli* (Di fronte e attraverso, 211), trad. it. cur. R. Scagno, (Milano, 1988), (ed. or. Paris 1986), p. 161.

⁵⁹ Shaked, «First Man, First King», pp. 238 ss.; Hartman, *Gayōmart*, pp. 48-58.

⁶⁰ Hartman, *Gayōmart*, p. 133.

⁶¹ Cfr. *Rivāyat to Dādastān ī dēnīg* in Hartman, *Gayōmart*, p. 115.

⁶² G. Mantovani, «Il valore del sangue in alcuni testi gnostici di Nag Hammadi», in F. Vattioni (cur.), *Sangue e Antropologia Biblica* (Centro Studi Sanguis Christi – 1), I, (Roma, 1981), pp. 885 ss.

⁶³ Eliade, «Gayomart, Adamo e la mandragola», pp. 159-169.

⁶⁴ H.S. Nyberg, *A Manual of Pahlavi*, Part. II: Glossary, (Wiesbaden, 1974), p. 169 b.

⁶⁵ *AirWb*, coll. 1484-1485.

⁶⁶ *AirWb*, coll. 1511-1512.

⁶⁷ F. Mawet, «“Light” in Ancient Iranian», in *Journal of Indo-European Studies*, 10 (1982), p. 283.

yazata collect the *x^varənah-* and spread it on earth to produce wealth and prosperity.⁶⁸

The union of anthropomorphic plant and shining power is the logical consequence of Gayōmart story: the seed, in the Mazdaean myth, is the receptacle of «splendor»,⁶⁹ the *x^varənah-*. Fertilising the earth, Gayōmart's seed generates a hybrid creature, partway between a human being, an animal and a plant. A circumstance that has a lot to share with Manichaeism and his main myth, the «Seduction of the Archons», is a dismal cosmogony combined with a more pessimistic anthropogony.⁷⁰

The Archons, excited after eating the Primordial Man and his light sons, are induced to ejaculate their seed on the floor, and by a portion of it sprout the trees and plants. So, the Manichaean Faustus will reply to St Augustine, about the *Jesus patibilis* «crucified on all plants» (*ab omni ligno suspensus*).⁷¹ A correspondence between macrocosm and microcosm (*CMC* 10, 1-16),⁷² is marked by a significant physiological contest.⁷³ In the Manichaean doctrine, the fate of the Living Soul scattered in the world (= *Jesus patibilis*) is linked with the digestive metabolism: through food, day after day, the Manichaean Chosen One adopts and sanctifies the particles of light contained in it; it disjoins the light from poisonous mixture with dark elements.⁷⁴ These bright fragments, cleansed and purified, are returned to their living image, the New Man, ready to welcome the shining Novç (**mpnous nouaine**).⁷⁵

The most striking parallel with the myth of Gayōmart, as pointed out by Eliade, are the traditions about mandrake (*Mandragora officinarum*),⁷⁶ a plant whose psychoactive powers have profoundly marked the visionary world of Mediterranean and Central-Asiatic religions.⁷⁷ This approach is not only phenomenological: the plants of rhubarb and of mandrake are sometimes confused; in some magical recipes rhubarb root is used in synergy with the mandrake root.⁷⁸ The root, that contains a large part of the active ingredients of

⁶⁸ Mawet, «“Light” in Ancient Iranian», p. 287.

⁶⁹ Gnoli, «Un particolare aspetto del simbolismo della luce», pp. 98 ss.

⁷⁰ Eliade, «Gayomart, Adamo e la mandragola», pp. 162-163.

⁷¹ August. *Contra Faust.* 20, 2.

⁷² Trans. L. Cirillo, in Gh. Gnoli-A. Piras (cur.), *Il manicheismo*, I: *Mani e il manicheismo*, Milano 2003, pp. 42-43; 96-97; W. Sundermann, «Il sangue nei testi manichei», in F. Vattioni (cur.), *Sangue e antropologia nella letteratura cristiana* (Centro Studi Sanguis Christi – 3), I, (Roma, 1983), p. 69.

⁷³ Cfr. J. BeDuhn, «The Metabolism of Salvation: Manichaean Concepts of Human Physiology», in P. Mirecki-J. BeDuhn (eds), *The Light and the Darkness. Studies in Manichaeism and its World* (Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies, L), (Leiden-Boston-Köln, 2001), pp. 25 ss.

⁷⁴ *Keph.* 79 (Schmidt-Polotsky-Böhlig [Stuttgart 1935-1940], p. 191, 16-20).

⁷⁵ *Keph.* 94 (Schmidt-Polotsky-Böhlig, pp. 239, 29-240, 6).

⁷⁶ Eliade, «Gayomart, Adamo e la mandragola», pp. 163 ss.

⁷⁷ Rättsch, *Enzyklopädie*, pp. 344 a-357 b.

⁷⁸ Rättsch, *Enzyklopädie*, p. 348 a.

both plants, is one of the most characteristic aspects of the mandrake. Dioscorides called the mandrake ἀνθρωπόμορφος, stating that it is a word already used by Pythagoras.⁷⁹ In fact, the mandrake root resembles a human being on a small scale, from which originates the definition of *semihomines* given by Columella.⁸⁰

Taken for granted all these wonderful qualities about the plant, including its entheogenics effects, we understand its magical and religious use.⁸¹ In Iranian myth, the rhubarb plant, in its anthropomorphic appearance, has borrowed heavily from the mandrake, mainly from its root.⁸² Joined to its psychoactive powers, there is light force and visionary power peculiar of *haoma*.⁸³ It is likely that even the ancient *Gnōstikoi* knew and used the psychoactive power of mandrake in their rituals.⁸⁴ In this sense, it may perhaps explain the evidence of St Epiphanius about Ophites,⁸⁵ which details the ceremony that is involved in the mandrake and his visionary powers: a snake kept in a basket is delivered and used by the members of the sect to consecrate the Eucharistic breads, made of flour mixed with mandrake roots.⁸⁶ Authentic or not, the reconstruction of the Gnostic ritual leads toward entheogenic aspects of ancient cultures, in particular those connected with the initiatory and cultic use of mandrake, a use which will be widely developed in Arabian Hermetism.⁸⁷

⁷⁹ Diosc. 4, 75 a (Wellmann); cfr. also Strabo 17, 1, 28.

⁸⁰ Colum. 10, 19.

⁸¹ *Gen.* 30, 14-16; *Cant.* 7, 14; Diosc. 4, 76 a (Wellmann); Ios. Flav. *Bell. Iud.* 7, 6, 3; see also Räsch, *Enzyklopädie*, p. 348 b.

⁸² Cfr. E. Albrile, «L'altra Circe», in *Eleusis*, N.S. 9 (2005), pp. 3-20.

⁸³ Räsch, *Enzyklopädie*, p. 359 b.

⁸⁴ E. Testa, «La mitica rigenerazione della vita in un amuleto samaritano-cristiano del IV secolo», in *Liber Annuus*, 23 (1973), pp. 306 ss.

⁸⁵ *Pan. haer.* 37, 5, 3-7; cfr. anche *Ir. Adv. haer.* I, 30, 7; *Hipp. Ref.* V, 16, 14; *Ps.-Tert.* 2, 1.

⁸⁶ Testa, «La mitica rigenerazione della vita», pp. 309-310.

⁸⁷ Cfr. N. Peter Joosse, «An Example of Medieval Arabic Pseudo-Hermetism: the Tale of Salāmān and Absāl», in *Journal of Semitic Studies*, 38 (1993), pp. 279-293.