THE INTERPRETATION OF DEVS IN THE AVESTA AND ANCIENT EASTERN TEXTS

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Annotatsiya: Mazkur maqolada “Avesto”, qadimgi fors bitiklari hamda mumtoz sharq manbalari asosida dev (daēva) tushunchasining tarixiy-semantik evolyusiyasi tadqiq etiladi. Tadqiqotda devlarning dastlab qadimgi oriy xalqlari sig‘ingan ilohlar bo‘lgani, Zardusht islohotlari natijasida esa yovuz kuch va shaytoniy mavjudot sifatida talqin qilina boshlagani yoritiladi. Shuningdek, Ahriman, jodu, karpan va andarmon kabi tushunchalarning lingvokulturologik xususiyatlari tahlil qilinib, ularning “Shohnoma”, “Avesto” va boshqa qadimgi manbalardagi aks etishi ko‘rsatib beriladi. Maqolada dev obrazining mifologik, diniy va ijtimoiy qatlamlari hamda uning o‘zbek va fors mumtoz adabiyotidagi talqinlari ilmiy asosda tahlil qilinadi.

Kalit so‘zlar: Avesto, dev, daēva, Ahriman, Zardusht, Shohnoma, mifologiya, jodu, andarmon, lingvokulturologiya.

Аннотация: В данной статье на основе “Авесты”, древнеперсидских надписей и классических восточных источников исследуется историко-семантическая эволюция понятия дев (daēva). В исследовании показано, что первоначально девы являлись божествами, почитаемыми древними арийскими народами, однако после реформ Заратуштры они были переосмыслены как злые силы и демонические существа. Кроме того, анализируются лингвокультурологические особенности таких понятий, как Ахриман, джоду, карпан и андармон, а также их отражение в “Шахнаме”, “Авесте” и других древних источниках. В статье научно рассматриваются мифологические, религиозные и социальные аспекты образа девов, а также их интерпретация в узбекской и персидской классической литературе.

Ключевые слова: Авеста, дев, daēva, Ахриман, Заратуштра, Шахнаме, мифология, джоду, андармон, лингвокультурология.

Abstract: This article examines the historical and semantic evolution of the concept of devs (daēvas) based on the *Avesta*, Old Persian inscriptions, and classical Eastern sources. The study demonstrates that devs were originally regarded as deities worshipped by ancient Aryan peoples, but after Zoroaster’s religious reforms they came to be interpreted as evil and demonic beings. The paper also analyzes the linguocultural features of concepts such as Ahriman, jodu, karpan, and andarmon, as well as their representation in the *Shahnameh*, the *Avesta*, and other ancient texts. Special attention is given to the mythological, religious, and social dimensions of the dev image and its interpretation in Uzbek and Persian classical literature.

Keywords: Avesta, dev, daēva, Ahriman, Zoroaster, Shahnameh, mythology, jodu, andarmon, linguoculturology.

Introduction. Understanding the concept of devs (daēvas) constitutes one of the principal foundations for the study of Iranian studies, religious history, and ancient mythology. This article examines the role and interpretation of devs in the *Avesta* and in Old Persian inscriptions. In these sources, devs initially appear as a group of deities worshipped by the ancient Aryans. However, in his *Gathas* (the oldest part of the *Avesta*), Zoroaster rejected these ancient gods, deprived them of their divine status, and established a sharply negative attitude toward them. Although these deities are not mentioned directly in the *Haptanhaiti* (“Seven Chapters”), this perception continued in the *Khorda Avesta* (Younger Avesta) and in the inscriptions of Xerxes (Khshayarsha) from the Achaemenid period.

The analysis of the phenomenon of devs in the study of religious layers of society occupies an important place in the investigation of the culture, mythology, and literature of Turanian and Iranian peoples. In order to understand Uzbek and Persian classical literature, especially epics such as the *Shahnameh*, it is useful to study the historical evolution of the image of devs within the following four periods:

1. The period of the Aryans and Indo-Iranian unity.
2. The period from Zoroaster's reforms to the fall of the Achaemenid Empire.
3. The period from Alexander the Great's invasion to the end of the Sasanian era.
4. The period from the spread of Islam to the age of national heroic epics (folk books).

This study focuses on the second period, namely the status of devs in the *Avesta* and Achaemenid inscriptions.

Devs (*daēvas*) were originally the deities worshipped by ancient Iranian Aryans. These "gods" retained their power both before Zoroaster's discovery of the spiritual world and from the very beginning of creation itself, being considered supporters of *Druj* (Falsehood) and *Aeshma* (Wrath) (Yasna 29.2, 4). During Zoroaster's time, devotion to devs was widespread. Rulers (*kavis*), priests (*karapans*), and even the prophet's close relatives worshipped devs. Therefore, Zoroaster complained to Ahura Mazda about those who opposed his teachings and about his failures in this struggle (Yasna 46.1–2).

All devs were regarded as descendants of *Aka Mana* (evil thought/Ahriman). Ahriman taught them evil thoughts, evil words, and evil deeds in order to destroy the world. These false gods became infamous throughout the seven regions of the earth for their wickedness (Yasna 32.4). They were deceitful beings who encouraged humanity to turn away from *Vohu Mana* (Good Thought) and the wisdom of Ahura Mazda. Jamshid himself was among those deceived by them; he uttered falsehood and thus became sinful (Yasna 32.5, 8).

The devs themselves also fell victim to Ahriman's deception. Because they failed to use reason and wisdom, they could not choose the righteous path and instead embraced the way of wrath (*Xashm*), leading humanity into disaster (Yasna 30.6). According to Zoroaster, they had never been "good gods," since under their guidance priests and tyrannical rulers devastated the world, slaughtered cattle mercilessly, and harmed agriculture (Yasna 44.20).

Dev-worshipping rulers and priests were considered corrupters of divine revelation. They spoke evil of the sun and cattle, misled the wise, and raised swords against the followers of truth. Zoroaster fought against such beliefs and called upon people to abandon false religion and believe in Ahura Mazda (Yasna 32.1–2). He promised that whoever opposed the devs would gain Ahura Mazda as a friend, brother, and father (Yasna 45.11). The destiny of Mazda-worshippers was the Realm of Light (*Garodman*), whereas the followers of devs were condemned to eternal darkness and remorse (Yasna 31.20).

In the *Younger Avesta*, the classification of devs expanded and came to include several groups:

1. Demonization of Ancient Gods.

As in the *Gathas*, later texts preserved a negative attitude toward the old deities. The chief of the devs, Ahriman, was called "the demon of demons" (*daēvanām daēvō*) (Vendidad 19.43).

In the history of dualistic concepts found in classical texts, the lexical structure of the word *Ahriman* (Persian: اهریمن), symbolizing evil and darkness, holds particular importance. Studies in the historical etymology of Persian demonstrate that this word originated in the Old Iranian religious-philosophical worldview. Ahriman in Zoroastrianism represents the deity of evil, darkness, death, and destruction.

Linguistically, the term derives from the Avestan compound *Aŋra Mainyu*, composed of two independent elements: *aŋra-* meaning "hostile," "evil," or "destructive," and *mainyu-* meaning "spirit" or "mind." Over time, the phonetic form evolved considerably. In medieval

sources, especially Manichaean texts, the word appears as *ahrmen*, describing a force leading humanity astray. In New Persian, it stabilized into the form *Ahriman* and became widely used in literature in the sense of "devil" or "enemy."

In mythological and religious traditions, Ahriman was not merely a linguistic unit but the embodiment of all destructive principles—death, disease, and falsehood—standing in opposition to Ahura Mazda. Modern folkloric studies also connect Ahriman with the symbolism of the color black, associated in ancient imagination with mourning, fear, and evil.

After Ahriman, the most powerful evil force was *Aji Dahaka* (the Dragon), whom Ahriman created to destroy the Ahuric world (Yasna 9.8; Yasht 15.24). Like Ahriman, the devs originated from *Apaxtar* (the North), the realm of darkness and misery identified with hell.

During this period, worshippers of devs were deprived of religious freedom. Interestingly, Zoroastrians and dev-worshippers occasionally revered the same deity, such as Anahita, but in different ways. Ahura Mazda, Iranian kings, and heroes openly offered sacrifices to Anahita beside rivers, whereas dev-worshippers such as Aji Dahaka and Afrasiyab prayed secretly in caves or outside Iran. Yet the goddess accepted only the prayers of the supporters of goodness (Yasht 5.29, 41, 94–95).

The great gods of the Vedic pantheon—Indra, Sauru, and Nanghaitya—were transformed in Zoroastrianism into servants of Ahriman (Vendidad 10.9). This ideology persisted into the Achaemenid era. In Xerxes' famous *Daivadana* inscription at Persepolis, the king declares that, by the will of Ahura Mazda, he conquered lands devoted to dev worship, destroyed their temples, and commanded: "You shall not worship the devs!" Here, the word *dev* referred to foreign and illegitimate gods.

One of the most fascinating concepts in the semantic evolution of mythology is the word *dev*. In Uzbek, it generally denotes an evil spirit, giant monster, or metaphorically an enormous and powerful being. Yet in English, words such as *devil*, *divine*, and *deity* all ultimately trace back to the same ancient Indo-European root.

According to etymological studies of Iranian languages, the Uzbek *dev* and Persian *dīv* derive from the Proto-Indo-European root *deiw-o-* meaning "bright sky" or "celestial god," itself linked to the verbal root *dyēu-* ("to shine").

The historical development of the term unfolded as follows:

- *Devá-* — God, divine being, luminous entity. In Indian mythology, the *Devas* are benevolent gods opposed to the *Asuras*.
- In Avestan, *daēva-* initially meant "god," but after Zoroaster's reforms it came to signify a false god or demon.
- In Middle Persian (Pahlavi), *dēv* meant demon or devil.
- In New Persian and Uzbek, *dev* became the giant monster or demonic being of folklore.

A remarkable linguistic phenomenon thus occurred: the same root acquired opposite meanings in India and Iran. In India, *deva* retained the positive meaning "god," while in Zoroastrian Iran *daēva* came to mean "demon." This semantic reversal resulted from Zoroaster's monotheistic reforms centered on Ahura Mazda. The old polytheistic gods, such as Indra and Sauru, were redefined as evil forces. Consequently, the *Vendidad* (*Vī-daēva-dāta* — "Law against the devs") was composed.

The Indo-European descendants of this root also appear in words such as *deity* and *divine*, which derive from the Latin *deus*. Although the English word *devil* comes etymologically from Greek *diabolos* ("slanderer"), comparative demonology often places it alongside *daēva* because both denote evil spirits. Scholars also note that the Zoroastrian concept of *daēva* influenced later Jewish and Christian demonology.

In Uzbek folklore and classical literature, the word *dev* functions as a demononym with several semantic layers:

• Giants and cannibalistic monsters of fairy tales, such as the three-headed or seven-headed devs.

• Symbolic references in Alisher Navoi's *Sab'ai Sayyor*, where Bahram's struggle against dragons alludes to demonic qualities.

• Figurative expressions such as *devdek kuchli* ("strong as a giant") or *devona* ("mad," literally "possessed by a dev").

Invading tribes and hostile enemies of Iran were likewise called devs. Before Zoroaster, these beings supposedly walked openly upon the earth in human form and abducted women. After Zoroaster's coming, they were driven underground (Yasna 9.15). Hushang and Tahmuras, for example, fought and subdued the devs of Mazandaran. In this context, devs appear as real, humanlike enemies who could be defeated.

Negative human traits were also personified as devs. Wrath (*Aeshma*), greed (*Oz*), death (*Astovidotu*), and sloth (*Bushyosp*) became demonic figures. Bushyosp, for instance, was the "long-armed" demon of negligence who caused people to oversleep and neglect worship (Vendidad 18.16). Humans could overcome these devs through prayer and ritual purity.

Social deviants such as immoral men and corrupt women were likewise classified among the devs. It was believed that their mere gaze could dry rivers and wither plants (Vendidad 8.32–33).

Natural disasters such as drought, severe winters, and harmful insects were attributed to devs. One of the clearest examples is the battle between *Aposha*, the demon of drought, and *Tishtrya*, the deity of rain identified with the Sirius star. Aposha appeared as a black, hairless horse, while Tishtrya manifested as a beautiful white horse. After three days and nights of battle, aided by human prayers and Ahura Mazda's support, Tishtrya triumphed and rain fell upon the earth (Yasht 8.20–29).

In Zoroastrianism, agriculture itself was regarded as a weapon against the devs. The *Vendidad* proclaims: "Whoever sows wheat sows the seeds of righteousness and presses burning iron into the mouths of the devs" (3.32).

Ahura Mazda was assisted in the struggle against devs by the *Amesha Spentas*, the *fravashis* (guardian spirits), and *Sraosha* (obedience/divine hearing). Sraosha, armed with a mace, guarded the world day and night against the devs. Mithra and Ashi were also destroyers of demonic forces.

The *Younger Avesta* describes two possible destinies for the devs:

1. They are driven into *Apaxtar* (the northern hell) and condemned to annihilation.
2. Like defeated enemies, they are physically destroyed or chained. For example, Tishtrya defeats and binds Aposha. This resembles the reliefs of Darius I at Behistun, where rebel kings are depicted in chains beneath the king's feet. Similar motifs appear in the *Shahnameh* and *Yadgar-i Zariran*, where Gushtasp and Isfandiyar brutally punish the Turanian leader Arjasp, symbolically reenacting the ritual destruction of the dev.

The study of negative figures in classical literature and folklore is essential for reconstructing the worldview and historical memory of ancient peoples. Words such as *dev* and *jodu* ("magic") have long served as synonyms for evil. Yet careful study of the *Shahnameh* and Zoroastrian texts reveals that both originally carried connotations of sanctity and divinity.

Historical sources indicate that during Zoroaster's birth era, *jodus* were not evil sorcerers but respected religious leaders. According to *Selections of Zadspram*, Zoroaster's father Pourushaspa consulted the *jodus* when his son was born laughing, since they were regarded as wise counselors.

Thus, among the ancient Aryans, *jodu* referred to priests and ritual specialists rather than wicked magicians. Sanskrit *kalpa* likewise refers to religious ritual and ceremonial practice.

The social roots of Zoroaster's struggle against the *jodus* were not merely theological but also economic and ideological. Ancient priests promoted asceticism and believed that the world

should perish before the coming of a savior. Consequently, they opposed agriculture and settlement. They performed mass animal sacrifices and devastated cultivated lands. Zoroaster, by contrast, advocated sedentary life, farming, and the protection of cattle. Therefore, he condemned these priests as *jodus* (evil sorcerers) and *karapans* ("mumbling priests"), portraying them as servants of Ahriman. In this way, a word once meaning "holy priest" came to signify "evil magician."

Naturally, Zoroaster's opposition to the priests extended to their gods—the devs. Etymologically, *dev* originally meant "shining divine being." In Indian tradition, *Deva* retained its sacred meaning; Greek *Zeus* and French *Dieu* derive from the same root. Even in the *Shahnameh*, the phrase "radiant rulers" alludes to the ancient sense of luminous divinities.

However, observing the destructive behavior of the old priesthood, Zoroaster concluded that their gods themselves must also be evil. In the *Gathas*, he declares to the devs: "You are all descendants of evil thought (Aka Mana)... You deceived humanity and ruined life." Thus, beings once regarded as gods were transformed into demons.

Because the *Shahnameh* preserves multiple historical layers, it retains two distinct portrayals of devs:

1. Devs as civilizers and transmitters of knowledge. They teach Tahmuras writing, build palaces for Jamshid, and introduce baths and bridges.
2. Devs as enemies of humanity and soldiers of Ahriman, against whom struggle becomes a sacred duty.

In conclusion, the modern negative meanings of *dev* and *jodu* in Uzbek and Persian literature are the result of the ideological transformation initiated by Zoroaster. Seeking to free society from destruction, blood sacrifice, and backwardness, and to establish settled life and prosperity, Zoroaster declared the old priests (*jodus*) and their gods (*devs*) to be embodiments of evil. Over millennia, this linguistic and cultural transformation became deeply embedded in collective consciousness and vocabulary.

Andarmon.

In Uzbek literary and colloquial speech, the word *andarmon* (and the compound verb *andarmon bo'lmoq*) is actively used to express a person's psychological absorption or complete devotion to a particular activity. Semantically, the word signifies not merely being busy, but becoming wholly immersed in something with one's entire being and mind. The etymology of the term traces back to ancient Iranian mythology and heroic epics.

According to scholarly research, the oldest archetype of the word appears in the *Avesta* as *Vandaremainiš* (Vandaremaynish). Iranian scholar Ibrahim Purdavud, in his commentary on the *Yashts*, explains that the name consists of two components and literally means "a person whose character and thoughts strive for fame and praise."

In the historical development of Iranian languages, the initial consonant *v* often shifted to the vowel *a* in later forms (compare: *Varkana* → *Gurgan*, *Vahman* → *Bahman*). Through this phonetic transformation, *Vandaremainiš* gradually evolved into the classical Persian form *Andarimon* and later entered Uzbek as *andarmon*.

Historical sources and the *Shahnameh* portray Andarimon as one of the bravest and most renowned commanders of the Turanian army. Two mythological-historical layers are associated with this figure:

In the *Aban Yasht* (sections 116–118), Andarimon of the Xionite tribe offers hundreds of horses and thousands of cattle to the goddess Anahita on the shore of the Farakhkart Sea, praying for victory over the Iranian king Gushtasp and the hero Zarir. His prayer, however, is not granted, and he is later killed by Prince Isfandiyar in religious warfare.

In Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* and al-Tabari's historical works, Andarimon appears as Afrasiyab's brother and a mighty Turanian warrior. During the famous battle of the "Twelve Champions," he is slain by the Iranian hero Gurgin Milad. Ferdowsi describes him as follows:

“There was also the brave rider Andarimon,
Who could drive his spear and arrows through mountains.”

The semantic transition of this personal name into the meaning “to be deeply occupied” can be explained through antonomasia—the linguistic process by which a proper noun becomes a common noun. Andarimon’s defining trait was complete dedication to fame, glory, and victory. Over time, his name came to symbolize the state of being wholly absorbed in one’s purpose and forgetting everything else.

Today, Uzbek dictionaries define *andarmon* simply as “busy, occupied.” Yet beneath this everyday meaning lies a deep historical memory. The word conveys not only busyness but also total devotion, wholehearted engagement, and complete immersion in a task—just like the ancient Turanian hero Andarimon.

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