

DARMESTETER ON DUALISM

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As the renowned scholar James Darmesteter explained long ago that the Parsis in his times denied any real existence to Ahriman and made him “a symbolical personification of bad instincts in man. Some European thinkers “occasionally wondered at the progress made by the Parsis in the rationalism of the school of Voltaire and Gibbon. Yet there was no European influence at the bottom and long before the Parsis had heard of Europe and Christianity, commentators, explaining the myth of Tahmurath, who rode for thirty years on Ahriman as a horse, interpreted the feat of the old legendary king as the curbing of evil passion and restraining the Ahriman in the heart of man. That idealistic interpretation was current in the fifteenth century and is prevalent now with most of the Dasturs,” which incidentally refutes Boyce’s claim of Parsis being dualist until westernized. He adds in a footnote: “Their views of Angra Mainyu seem to differ in no respect from what is supposed to be the Orthodox Christian view of the devil. (*The Zend-Avesta*, Part I, Oxford, At The Clarendon Press, 1880, pp. lxxxiii), a fact I have established in a forthcoming publication I often wonder if this non-dualistic Parsi view is because the Parsis were settled on the western coast of India for the Sasanian silk trade with China via Ceylon (Shri Lanka) as I have extensively noted elsewhere and had moved there long before the ninth century when the Zoroastrian scholars in their debates with their formidable conquerors emphasized, if not overemphasized, dualism in order to obliquely hint at the inadequacy inherent in the absolute monotheism of Judeo-Christian tradition for explaining the riddle of evil in the world. The Parsis’ view of dualism therefore may not have been influenced by the dualistic view expressed in the ninth and tenth century Pahlavi texts especially as there was no communication between them until much later in the times of the Rivayats and as they were then not quite conversant with the Pahlavi language or texts, thereby resulting in the absence then of any reference to these texts as far as I know.