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The Fire Wāzišt and the Demon

Almut Hintze, London

In the Middle Persian Zoroastrian texts the fire Wāzišt is the fire of lightning. Residing in the clouds, it belongs, together with the star Tištar, to a group of beneficent beings producing rain. As Tištar is opposed by Apaoš, the demon of drought, so the fire Wāzišt, too, has an opponent. This demon, the story goes, utters a fearful cry called ‘thunder’ when smitten on the head by the fire Wāzišt. As a result the waters flow and rain is produced. This myth is related or alluded to in a number of Pahlavi texts. The demon’s name is Spenjruš (spnclwš) or Aspenjruš (ʾspnclwš) in several passages of the Bundahišn, in the Pahlavi Rivāyat of the Dādestān i Dēnīg 18.d2 and in the Pahlavi translation and gloss to Y 17.11. Its name appears as Sponjagr (spwncgl) in Zādspram 3.17, besides other variants, and as Spenjagr (spncgl) in Škand Gumanig Wizar 4.52.

A demon Spenjagr (spncgl) slain by the fire Wāzišt also seems to be mentioned in the Pahlavi translation of Vd 19.40, where spncgl renders the Avestan hapax legomenon spəṇjaγrīm. The latter is usually considered by scholars to be the proper name of a demon slain by the fire vāzišta-(BARTHOLOMAE 1904, col. 1619). The form Spenjruš (spnclwš) or Aspenjruš (ʾspnclwš), in contrast, is the equivalent of Av. spinjauruška-, mentioned in Yt 9.31 as the name of a daēva-worshipping enemy of Zarathustra’s patron, Kavi Vištāspa (BARTHOLOMAE 1904, col. 1625).

Editors and translators of those Pahlavi texts where the story is mentioned usually assume that the demon’s correct name is the Middle Persian equivalent of Av. spəṇjaγrīm and therefore regard the transmitted forms Spenjruš or Aspenjruš as mistaken for Spēnjargāk, Spanjagr3 or Spenjagr4. However, the discrepancy between the spelling of the name in the Pahlavi texts, on the one

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1 In the manuscript TD2 the readings and attestations are as follows: spnclwš 50.11, spnclwš 123.6, 138.2, spnclwš 187.8, spnclwš 70.7, 135.7, 138.1.4, ʾspnclwš 64.3.5.
2 West 1880, p. 62 with n. 1, p. 28 with n. 1 (Aspenjargāk).
hand, and its transcription in the scholarly tradition, on the other, justifies doubts about its common interpretation as the Middle Persian equivalent of Av. *spaṇjāyrim*. Moreover, the meaning of Av. *spaṇjāyrim*, which is believed to underly the demon’s name, is not clear. In spite of Humbach’s convincing morphological analysis as *spaṇ-jaγri*- (see below n. 29), it is puzzling that a noun meaning ‘spattering prosperity’ should function as the name of a demon. In an attempt to explain it, Humbach refers to the oral tradition of the Mazda-yasnians, who interpret it as ‘destroying prosperity by spattering water.’ Apart from that source being unidentified, this explanation is hardly convincing, not least because the demon is one of *drought*.

In what follows I propose to investigate the attestations of the demon’s name in the Pahlavi texts with a view to establishing its correct form in Middle Persian. I shall argue that the demon’s name is not Spenjagr but Spenjruš or Aspenjruš in those passages where it is written *səncəš* or *ʾsəncəš*. Moreover, the etymology of Av. *spəṇjauruška*- and the question of the meaning of Av. *spaṇjayri*- will be discussed, and I shall argue that *spaṇjayri*- is not the name of a demon but an epithet of the fire *vāzištə*- . This interpretation will be supported with reference to a passage from the *Yasna Haptopṭāti*. I shall conclude that, while the myth of the fire *vāzištə*- slaying a demon goes back to the Avesta, there is no Avestan evidence for the demon’s name. It was during the course of the development of the myth and its meteorological connections, triggered by an association of *spaṇjaγri*- with forms of *sp(r)enj*- ‘to burst forth; be bright; sprout’, in the Middle Iranian period that the name of the daēva-worshipper *spəṇjauruška*- (spenjruš) provided that of the demon, possibly because of its assonance with *spaṇjayrim* (spenjagr), the meaning of which was no longer understood. From this there also originated the reinterpretation of *spaṇjayrim* as a demon’s name and the confusion in some of the Pahlavi texts of two names for the demon slain by the fire Wāzišt.

1. The name of the demon slain by the fire Wāzišt

Perhaps the most detailed account of the battle between the fire Wāzišt and the demon is found in the *Iranian Bundahišn*. According to this myth, the demon Spenjruš or Aspenjruš resides in the clouds and is, along with the demon Apaos, in conflict with the rainmakers. Apaos is opposed to Tištar, and Aspenjruš to the fire Wāzišt (TD2 50.11, 135.7, 187.8), who is said to have been created in the clouds in defiance of the demon Aspenjruš. The latter is smitten on the head in the clouds by the fire Wāzišt with a club (gad), and as a result the waters flow and rain is produced. The club is like the blazing of fire and is also called ‘light-

5 Since the forms Spenjruš and Aspenjruš vary indiscriminately in the passages relating to the two sets of opposed pairs, the optional initial vowel of Aspenjruš could be either analogical on the name of the demon Apaos or, more likely, as suggested by N. Sims-Williams (e-mail of 10 October 2004), merely prothetic.
ning’ (rōzāg). When struck on the head, Aspenjruš utters a fearful cry (wāng) which likewise is referred to as ‘thunder’ (yarrānāg). Finally, the fire Wāzišt is said to be the body of the fire of Spenāg Mēnōg with water in the clouds. In the manuscript TD2 the text runs as follows (137.15–138.7):

When it happens that way, the most invigorating fire, as it has been created in the clouds in opposition to the demon Aspenjruš, makes that water flow and strikes his club upon the head of the demon Spenjruš. That club (causes) the burning of fire. Because of the flow of fire into the water there is brightness in the clouds which they call lightning. And when he [i.e. the fire] strikes that club upon (him), Aspenjruš utters a fearful cry which they call thunder.

The most invigorating fire (is) even also the body of the fire of the Bounteous Spirit with water in the cloud.


7 This word is erroneously written twice.

8 On form and meaning of Av. vāzišta- see Hintze 2007, on Y 36.3.
In both the Avestan and the Pahlavi texts, the fire vāzišta- is one out of several fires. The locus classicus for this distinction in the Avesta is Y 17.11, where the heavenly fire is worshipped as the son of Ahura Mazdā together with five different fires:

Y 17.11 δḇām ātrām ahurābe mazdā puθrām yazamaide
ātrām bərzisauaŋhəm yazamaide
ātrām vohu.friānəm yazamaide
ātrām uruuaζištəm yazamaide
ātrām vāzištəm yazamaide
ātrām spəništəm yazamaide
*xə♭dəm.nafəδrəm nairiiō.sayhəm yazatəm yazamaide
ātrəm vispanq̄ nənənaŋq̄ nəmənə, paim yazamaide
ahurābe mazdā puθrəm
aζauaŋhəm aζābe ratum yazamaide
maζ vispaεibiiō ətərəbiiō

We worship you, the fire, the son of Ahura Mazdā.
We worship the fire of high strength.
We worship the fire who loves what is good.
We worship the most joyful fire.
We worship the most invigorating fire.
We worship the most bounteous fire.
We worship the fire, the master of all houses.
We worship Ahura Mazdā, the truthful one, the model of truth, together with all fires.

Three of those names, namely ātar- vāzišta- ‘most invigorating fire’, ātar-uruuāzišta- ‘most joyful fire’ and ātar- spəništa- ‘most bounteous fire’ are also found in the YH (Y 36.2–3) from where they probably derive. The Pahlavi translation of Y 17.11 explains that the fire Wāzišt slays the demon Spenjurš:

Y 17.11 ṭhš wʾzyšt ṣḇbẉ-m [zk ṣdyʾ spnclwš12 mhwtn-ytʾ]
ātaxš wāzišt yazēm [ān dēw spenjurš zanēd]

We worship the fire wāzišt [that one slays the demon spenjurš]

9 In Y 17.11 Nairiiō.sayhə-, the messenger (aštə-) of Ahura Mazdā (Vd 19.34), is, like its Ved. cognate nārāśaṁsa-, a name for the ritual fire.
10 This epithet of nairiiō.sayhə- is attested twice and occurs in two spellings. One is that of a compound, xə♭dəm.nafəδrəm (gen.sg., Ny 5.6). The other is that of the acc.sg. xə♭dəm nafəδrəm (Y 17.11), edited without variants by Geldner 1886–1896, I, p. 71, where both members of the compound are inflected, see Bartholomae 1904, cols. 547, 1055, n. 1.
11 Narten 1986, p. 157, n. 84.
12 Dhabhar 1949, p. 94, edits spnclwš, while Persian Rivayats p. 59, n. 8 (no. 4), has spnclwšk.
In the Pahlavi texts, the distinction of five fires is found, for instance, in the *Pahlavi Rivāyat* of the *Dādestān ī Dēnīg*, which in A. V. Williams’ translation reads as follows:

PRDd 18.d1: (In) one place (it is) revealed that the fire (is) so valuable, Ohrmazd created the body and soul of Fire from his own mind and thought, and he created its radiance and glory from the light of the Endless Light.

PRDd 18.d2: And he made five (fires). One (is) that which burns before himself in Garōdmān, and with this he makes true the essence of men; and one (is) that which he created in the body of men; one (is) that by which he smites the demon *Spanjagr*; and one (is) that which he created in water and plants; one (is) that which he desired to create in the material world.\textsuperscript{13}

The phrase in PRDd 18.d2, rendered by Williams as ‘that by which he smites the demon *Spanjagr*, refers to the fire *vāzišt*. The reading *spncgl* on which his transcription *Spanjagr* is based, is not found in the manuscripts but results from an emendation in his *Pahlavi Rivāyat* I 96 from a transmitted word which he transliterates as *spnclw’dʾkʾ* (ibid., p. 244). The ambiguous character of the Pahlavi script, however, also allows the same word to be read as *spnclwškʾ* /spenjrušk/. The latter is probably the correct form, because, apart from the suffix -*ka-* , it agrees with the demon’s name in the *Iranian Bundahišn*.

A transcription Sponjagr is justified in *Zādspram* 3.17, where the name is transmitted as *spuncgl* (or rather: *spncgl*, see below p. 131) by the manuscripts K 35 (fol.239r l.15) and BK.\textsuperscript{14} By contrast, the manuscript TD offers a reading *spnclʾšnʾ*.\textsuperscript{15} The latter form could be transcribed as *spenjarāšn* and interpreted as corrupted from *spenjruš*. In any case, in spite of the different forms of the name in Zs 3.17, this demon, which is presented as the opponent of the fire *wāzišt*, forms part of the two sets of opposed pairs, the other being Apaoš contra Tištar. In Zs 3.17 the demon Sponjagr has the same function as Spenjruš/Aspenjruš in the *Bundahišn* and Spenjrušk in the *Pahlavi Rivāyat* of the *Dādestān ī Dēnīg*.

The demon’s name also occurs as Spenjagr in *Škand Gumānīg Wizār* 4.52, where it is spelt *spəṇzagar* in Pazand, and *spncgl* in a surviving fragment of the Pahlavi version\textsuperscript{16}:

\[\text{ŠGV 4.52 mn hcdl y ‘LH-šān ’ltyk y tyštl W spncgl šdy’}\\ 4.53 W ‘thš y w’čšt W ’p’ws šdy’\]

\textsuperscript{13} Williams 1990, II, p. 36 (translation), I, p. 96f. (Pahlavi text). Further references to the five fires are given by him in part II, p. 157f.  


\textsuperscript{15} Anklesaria 1964, p. 23; Gignoux/Tafazzoli 1993, p. 325.  

\textsuperscript{16} Jâmâsp-Âsânâ/West 1887, pp. 23, 199, 267; de Menasce 1945, pp. 54, 55, 60.
4.54 ʾryk špyl mynwʾn y lwt btm twmykʾn
ptʾ wʾlʾn krtʾlyh W swt bhlʾlyh y ʾL dʾmʾn

4.52 az azēr ʾi aweisān ardīg ḫ tištar Ṿ spenjagr dēw
4.53 ud ātāxī Ṿ wāzišt Ṿ ud apāoš dēw
4.54 abārig wēh mēnōgān Ṿ i abāg tomīgān
pad wārān kardārīh Ṿ ud sūd baxtārīh Ṿ Ṿ ū dāmān

Below them (is) the battle between Tištar and the demon Spenjagr
and the most invigorating fire and the demon Apaoš
(and) the other good spiritual (beings) with the darkness
about the production of rain and the distribution of benefits to the creatures.

This passage exhibits a curious confusion between the two sets of opposed pairs
in so far as Spenjagr is presented not as opposed to the Fire Wāzišt but to Tištar,
whose enemy otherwise is always Apaoš.

It emerges from this survey that the name of the demon opposed to the fire
Wāzišt is usually Spenjruš/Aspenjruš (Bundahišn, Pahl. version of Y 17.11) or
Spenjrušk (PRDd 18.d2), the Middle Persian equivalent of Av. spīṇjauruška-. It
could be Sponjagr in Zādspram 3.17 (spncgl K 35 BK, with the variant spnc ʾsnʾ
in TD, possibly representing spenjarāšn) and it is Spenjagr in ŠGV 4.52 (Paz.
spəṇzagar, Pahl. spncgl, with a mix-up of the agents in the opposed pairs) and
apparently also in the Pahlavi translation of Vd 19.40, where it is a transcription
of the Avestan word spəṇjarām.

2. Av. spīṇjauruška-

The name Spenjruš or Spenjrušk is the Middle Persian equivalent of Av.
spīṇjauruška- referred to in Yt 9.31 as the name of a daēva-worshipping enemy
of Kavi Vištāspa. Zarathustra’s patron prays to the deity Druvāspā and requests
the following favour:

Yt 9.31 uta azəm nijanāni
taqiriāuuaṇtəm duždaēnəm
uta azəm nijanāni
*spīṇjauruškəm daēuuaiiasnəm

And that I may slay
Taqiriāuuant of bad belief.
And that I may slay
the daēva-worshipping Spinjaurushka\textsuperscript{17}.

\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Geldner} 1886–1896, II, p. 124, edits a form which could be read either as \textit{spīṇjaurušom}
or, assuming that the sign š may also represent the ligature šk, \textit{spīṇjauruškəm}. That the
latter is the correct reading emerges unequivocally from the facsimiles of F1 (JAMASP-
Asa 1991, p. 118) and E1 (fol. 238r l.1–2, Kotwal/Hintze, forthcoming).
There is no extant Pahlavi translation of this passage. However, it is to be expected that the name of the daēva-worshipper Spinjauruška would be written spnclwšk, just like that of the demon smitten by the Fire Wāzišt in the Pahlavi texts. This implies that either the same name was used for both a man and a demon or that the daēva-worshipper of the Avesta had himself become a dēw in the Pahlavi texts.

The formation and meaning of spinjauruška- are uncertain.18 Bartholomae’s (1904, col. 1625) connection of āuruška- with the Latin adjective luscus ‘blind, obscure, unintelligible’ is untenable because luscus probably derives from an earlier *nuscus attested in the noun nuscītiō ‘night-blindness’, from nuscītiō, an earlier form of luscītiō.19 Bartholomae relates the first part of the name spinjauruška- to an otherwise unattested noun spinja- which he considers to be the name of a tribe.20 However, it is more likely that the first member is the same as that in sponjajrī-, i.e. spon- ‘prosperity’. This requires the assumption that spin- goes back to earlier spon-, possibly under the influence of the following palatal stop -j-, i.e. spanj° > sponj° > spinj°.21 A form with spon- is attested in the otherwise corrupted variant reading of the manuscript J10 sponzurōšakəṃ.

The second part of the compound is then āuruška-. This could be a diminutive form with the suffix -ka attached to an -uš- stem from a root jar/gar. In Indo-Iranian, stems in -uš- are, like those in -as-, neuter nomina agentis expressing the carrying out of the action denoted by the verbal root.22 While there are no other examples in Avestan for the further suffixation of Indo-Iranian action nouns in -as, -uš-, -iš- with -ka-, Vedic parallels include a-cchandás-ka- ‘without metre’, Epic dhánusška- ‘archer’, literally ‘provided with a bow’ (dhánus-, AiGr. II:2, p. 523), TS an-āśir-ka- ‘without blessing’ (āśiṣ- ‘wish’, AiGr. II:2, p. 537, § 367 bε). The suffix -ka- does not change the meaning when attached to a nominal stem which forms part of a compound.23 The meaning of the suffixed formation is therefore that of a Bahuvrīhi and could be either ‘provided with …’ or ‘occupied with …’ (AiGr. II:2, p. 522 ff.). In addition, the suffix -ka- may also add a pejorative semantic component, since Av. spinjauruška- is the name of a deceitful person.

18 Mayrhofer 1979, p. 77, comments that the etymology is “völlig unklar”.
19 Walde/Hofmann, I, p. 838 ff.; Clare 1982, pp. 1052, 1207. Ernou/Meillet 1959, p. 371, point out that the noun occurs with initial n- already in Plautus, Festus 176, where it could be due to the influence of nox ‘night’. They consider luscus, luscitiosus as “mot populaire, d’origine inconnue”.
20 Bartholomae (1904, col. 1619) connects spinja- with spongha-, the proper name of a truthful person. For an uncertain OP equivalent *spanga- see Hinz 1975, p. 225 with references, Mayrhofer 1979, p. 76.
21 On the sound change span- > spon- see de Vaan 2003, p. 482. The sound change -a- > -i-, however, occurs normally after, not before a palatal i, c, j, ž, see Hoffmann/Forsmann, p. 63, § 30.dd.x.
22 AiGr. II:2, pp. 229, 489 ff.; Brugmann 1906, p. 534.
23 AiGr. II:1, p. 102 ff., § 45c, 1930, III, p. 518, § 361d; F. Edgerton: The k-suffixes of Indo-Iranian, Leipzig 1911, pp. 8, 18, 29 ff.
The morphological segmentation of the name is thus spin-jar-uš-ka-. The noun span-ja-γr-i-, in contrast, is formed from a reduplicated root. Humbach 1991, II, p. 172, regards the name of the daēva-worshipper as a diminutive of spanjaγri-. However, in order to avoid the semantic difficulties of his explanation, it is preferable to assume that the underlying root gar/jar in spin-jauruška- is different from but homonymous with that in spanjaγri-. Of the various roots gar/jar in Indo-Iranian, gar ‘to welcome, honour’ (IE *ɣwerH) and gar ‘to wake’ (IE *hgær) are excluded for semantic reasons. Possible candidates among those remaining include Ved. gar ‘to raise (a weapon)’ (IE *gælbi, according to Mayrhofer 1986–2001, I, p. 470) and Av. gar, Ved. gar ‘to swallow’ (IE *gærbi, Mayrhofer 1986–2001, I, p. 469f.).

The only Avestan evidence for a root gar ‘to raise (a weapon)’ has been thought to be the isolated form ni-γrāire, which occurs twice only in Yt 10.40 (Bartholomae 1904, col. 512). However, this form is probably to be emended to *niynaire with Insler 1967, who assumes a scribal error. So far, however, the emendation has been a pure conjecture because Geldner 1886–1896, II, p. 134, does not record any variant readings. It now receives additional and decisive support from the manuscript J18, not used by Geldner, of the K. M. JamaspAsa’s collection, where a form with -n- is attested at the first occurrence (niynäri, fol. 138v l. 4) while the reading is niγrāira the second time (fol. 138v l. 9).

There remains then only the root gar ‘to swallow’. It occurs in the compounds aspō.gar-, nara.gar- ‘swallowing horses’, ‘swallowing men’, both of which function as epithets of the ‘horned serpent’ slain by the hero Karasāspa (Kellens 1974, p. 30f.). In the morphological analysis presented above, it would be the only possible root underlying the name spinjauruška-. While it is hard to justify -jauruška- as a nomen agentis governing spin- (“swallowing prosperity”), the -ka- suffix could be used to turn a basic Bahuvrīhi into a name, or to mark it as pejorative. The compound could thus mean ‘occupied with the swallowing of prosperity’, ‘characterized by the swallowing of prosperity’. The name would describe a deceitful person who swallows prosperity as his food, gobbles up prosperity.

There are other stories in the Yasīts (and later Epic) which suggest that daevic creatures ‘swallow’ the good things of life. In addition to the ‘horned serpent’ that swallowed men and horses (Yt 19.40), there is also the monster Gandarəβa who rushed about with his mouth wide open ‘to destroy the bodily living beings of truth’ (Yt 19.41). Furthermore, Yima is said to have brought prosperity back on earth after it had been taken away by the demons (Yt 19.32). Such parallels confirm that this sort of name is appropriate for a daeva-worshipper, even if it

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25 The manuscript is described by Hintze 1994, p. 56, and 1989, p. 45.
may be figurative like Homeric δημόβορος ‘devourer of the common stock’. The meaning is also nasty enough to make the transference to a demon plausible.\(^{27}\)

\[\text{3. Av. } \text{spəṇjyrīm}\]

The Avestan noun spəṇjyrīm is attested only in Vd 19.40, where the ātar-vāzišt- is said to slay a demon:

\[\text{Vd 19.40: } \text{ātrəm vāzištəm frāiiazaēša} \]
\[+\text{daēum.janəm spəṇjyrīm} \]

You shall worship the fire vāzista- which slays the demon, the spəṇjyrīm

That one particular demon is slain by the fire emerges from the accusative singular case of the first member of the compound +daēum.jan-.\(^{28}\) The form spəṇjyrīm is analysed by Bartholomae 1904, col. 1619, as the acc.sg. of a masculine stem spəṇjyrīia-. Syntactically he considers the acc. to be governed by the root noun °janəm. Interpreting spəṇjyrīm as the name of the demon slain by the fire vāzista-, he translates the phrase as ‘you may worship the vāzista-fire, the one that slays the demon, the Spanjyaґra’.\(^{29}\) The Pahlavi translation of this verse, however, is ambiguous as to the interpretation of spəṇjyrīm, which is not translated but transcribed as spncgl:

\[\text{Vd 19.40 } \text{ʾthš y wʾzyšt prʾc yḏbhwn-šn} \]
\[\text{mnw šdyʾ mhytwn-yt spncgl} \]
\[\text{ātaxš i wāzišt frāz yazišn} \]
\[\text{kē dēw zanēd spenjagr} \]

One shall worship the most invigorating fire, which slays the demon, the spenjagr.

Bartholomae describes spəṇjyrīm as a compound of the elements spən- and ayriia- ‘first’ (Bartholomae 1904, col. 50), but without further analysis. More convincing is Humbach’s explanation that it consists of spən- and jayri-.\(^{30}\) The

\(^{27}\) This section on the name spinjaurēška- has greatly benefited from discussions with Elizabeth Tucker, who also drew my attention to the Greek parallel.


\(^{29}\) That Bartholomae interprets spəṇjyrīm as the demon’s name emerges unequivocally only from the German translation thanks to the grammatical distinction of gender in that language: “Das Vāzista-Feuer, (das) den Daēva schlägt, den Spanjyaґra, sollst du verehren!” (Wolff 1910, p. 432). Also in Kellens’ translation (1974, p. 154) spəṇjyrīm is unambiguously taken as the name of the demon: “Offrez le sacrifice au feu vāzista, qui tue le démon Spanjyaґri”.

latter equals Vedic jāgbri- ‘spattering’ attested only once in RV 1.162.15, where, with regard to the sacrificial horse, one is advised:

RV 1.162.15 mā tvāgnīr dhvanayīd dhūmagandhir
mókbá bhrájanty abhí vikta jāgbriḥ /

Do not let the smoky-smelling fire envelope you with smoke\(^{31}\);
do not let the shiny pot boil over spattering.

From a morphological point of view, jāgbri- is an adjective from the reduplicated root ghar ‘to drip, sprinkle’. Such forms with an accented reduplicative syllable, zero-grade root and a primary i-suffix are agent nouns usually referring to the repetition of the action denoted by the verbal root.\(^{32}\) Literally, jāgbri- thus means ‘(repeatedly) sprinkling, spattering, spurting’. The stem of the Av. compound has been credibly posited by Humbach as spəṇjaγri- and translated as ‘spattering prosperity’. Like his predecessors, Humbach interprets it as the name of a demon. However, in spite of his convincing morphological analysis, it is difficult to accept that a noun with such a meaning would serve as a demon’s name.

Some insight into the meaning and function of this compound may be gained from a comparison of the Vīdēvdād passage with a stanza from the Yāsna Haptaŋhāiti. J. Narten has shown that in Y 36.2 the heavenly fire of Ahura Mazda is addressed and invited to come down and merge with the ritual fire. After this process has taken place, the ritual fire is identified not only with Ahura Mazda’s heavenly fire but also with the deity’s most bounteous spirit.\(^ {33}\)

In Y 36.3, the worshippers approach (pairijasāmaidē) the transformed ritual fire, addressing it by the ‘most invigorating of names’ (nāmanām vāzištəm) of Ahura Mazda’s fire:

Y 36.3 ātarś vōi mazdā ahurahiiā abī
mainiūi vōi abīi spōništō abī
bihat va tōi nāmanām vāzištəm
ātarə mazdā ahurahiiā
tā ḍ̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣̣"
ous spirit (*mainiūš spōništō*). The identification of the ritual fire with Ahura Mazdā’s heavenly fire, which is invoked in Y 36.2, is made in the first ahī-clause. The second such clause equates the ritual fire, now identical with Ahura Mazdā’s heavenly one, with the deity’s most bounteouos spirit. The latter was mentioned in Y 36.1 in its function of retributing evil. According to Narten, it is because of this judicial role that in Y 36.3 *spōna- mainiū-* is called the most invigorating (*vāzišt-*) of all the names for the divine fire.34

The Pahlavi translation of Y 36.3 confirms Narten’s interpretation of *vāzišt-* as the name of the ritual fire in which *spōna- mainiū-* is present in so far as the Av. clause *abiā spōništō abi hiiaṭ vā tōi nāmanām vāzištām*35 is translated in the sense that the fire’s characteristic or personality (*xwēš*) is called *abzōnīg*, which translates Av. *spōništā-*, when its name is *wāzišt*36:

Y 36.3 'tōh ʾpt' zk y 'whrmzd ṭ's 'ʾvt [ʾpt' dyn' y 'whrmzd] W ʾpt' mynwḵy h 'k's 'ʾvt' [ʾy-myŏh ṭ'wtybrn d] II ṭ'pzwynk ʾy'ntspsh ṭ'd 'm't ṭ'w' ṭ's ṭ'm cygwh w 'zyšt' II ṭ'n' 'tōh y 'whrmzd ṭ'lk ṭ'z k'2 br' 'ymygtnmyn ṭ'yḵ-š hyhl y mynwḵ W gytyk he-š l' whl yhsnn-m] II ṭ'

1 zk-š Dhabhar 4 ʾlk y Dhabhar 8 hyhl Dhabhar
zy-š K5 J2 ʾw' K5 J2 'k'1 J2
2 ʾy't' y Dhabhar 5 ʾlk Dhabhar 9 yhsnn-m Dhabhar
ʾy'mtwn-m Dhabhar yhmt deleted before
3 bnpsh Dhabhar 6 ʾn' Dhabhar, J2 7 yhsnn-m J2
npsh J2 yhsnn-m J2

ātaxš pad ān ē ohrmzd āgāh ast [pad ān ē ohrmzd] ud pad mēnōgīb āgāh ast [ʾi-š ast ka-š pad waḥrmīb be nišinēnd ] II ṭ'
abzōnīg ast 'xwēš tā kā ʾō tō nām cyōn wāzišt II ṭ'
ān ātaxš ē ohrmzd ī tō pad ān ē harw dō be ʾrasēm [kū-š bīxīr ē mēnōg ud gētīg az-š adāb dāram ] II ṭ'
The fire has knowledge of that belonging to Ohrmazd [of the religion of Ohrmazd] and it has knowledge of the *mēnōg* [it has it when it is established as a Wahrām fire]. II ṭ'

Bountiful is its own when it corresponds to your name of *wāzišt*. II ṭ'
We approach that fire of you, O Ohrmazd, provided with both [that is, I hold back from it the filth of the spiritual and physical (world)]. II ṭ'

35 By splitting the Av. sentence in the middle after *vōi* and before *abiā*, the Pahlavi translation separates *mainiūš* from *spōništō*.
36 The Pahlavi text is given according to the edition of Dhabhar 1949, p. 169. A reading different from the form edited by Dhabhar but attested in one of the manuscripts is marked by a plus sign (*). The symbol II indicates the end of a section in the manuscript J2, where the text switches from Avestan to Pahlavi. Different sections are marked by an index number in order to facilitate finding corresponding clauses of the transliterated and transcribed Pahlavi text and the translation.
The tradition that the fire vāzišta- is identical with Ahura Mazdā’s most bounteous spirit was also known in the Middle Iranian period. This is confirmed by the passage from the Bundahišn, quoted above on p. 121, where the fire wāzišt is said to be the body of the fire of the bounteous spirit (TD2 138.6). The text also suggests that the fire Wāzišt has an affinity to water thanks to its identity with the fire of Spenāg Mēnôg.

In the course of the Yasna ritual, it is from Y 36.3 onwards that this divine fire, which is also Ahura Mazdā’s most bounteous spirit, is believed to inhabit the ritual fire. If the fire vāzista- is the one in which Ahura Mazdā’s most bounteous spirit (mainiiuš spōništō) is present, then the compound spōnjayri-, rather than being a semantically unsuitable name for a demon, could be an epithet of that fire. It is because of the presence of mainiiuš spōništō or spōnta- mainiui-, that the fire vāzista- is said to ‘spurt spōn’: spōn-jayri-. Accordingly, Vd 19.40 should be translated as follows:

Vd 19.40: ātrəm vāzištəm frāiiazaēša +daēum.janəm spəṇjaγrīm
You shall worship the most invigorating fire
the one that slays the demon, the one that spurts prosperity.

Tradition elaborated on the myth that this ‘most invigorating’ fire slays a demon. That the myth goes back to the Avesta is evidenced by the fire’s epithet +daēum.janəm in Vd 19.40. While the demon is not named in the Avesta, the daēva-worshipper’s name spinjauruška- was reinterpreted to become the demon’s name spəṇjaγrīš in Middle Persian. This emerges from the Pahlavi translation of Y 17.11 quoted above on p. 122 and from other texts. One reason why a daēva-worshipper of the Avesta became the demon opposed to the fire Wāzišt in such texts can be seen in the phonetic similarity of his name to the fire’s epithet spəṇjaγrīm. The whole myth could have been secondarily derived from Vd 19.40, where spəṇjaγrīm was re-interpreted as agreeing with daēum. Subsequently, spəṇjaγrīm was confused not only with the name of the daēva-worshipper spinjauruška- but also, as N. Sims-Williams suggested to me, with a Middle Iranian word *sp(r)enjan vel sim. meaning ‘lightning’. The meaning ‘thunder’ of this word is attested, for instance, in Buddh.Sogd. ’spryncn P9.36 ‘thunder-bolt’. E. Benveniste, Textes sogdiens, Paris 1940, p. 220, writes ’spryncb (with final -b, thus also Bailey 1979, p. 473b), but N. Sims-Williams kindly informs me that this was corrected by Gershevitch in an unpublished annotation to his copy of W.B. Henning’s Sogdica, London 1940, p. 31. Sims-Williams further comments that “[t]he annotation is in connection with the entry “sprync nsng” in a Manichaean Sogdian glossary fragment, which Gershevitch proposed to read sprync nsn (with different word-division) and to interpret as “thunderbolt”. For nsn (lit. “stone”) = vajra = “thunderbolt” he refers to Gr.Bd. 139sq. The MP or Parthian equivalent in the glossary fragment is missing, but should have begun with the letters ‘+s (or, theoretically, ‘+š),
so it may well have been a close cognate of the Sogdian form, with prothetic ‘
before the group sp(r)-’.”37

Iranian “sparg” ‘to burst forth; to be light; to sprout’ belongs to an IE root
*spʰrəγ (*spʰρəγ “to issue, burst forth” (of sound, light, fire, water, plants)38
widely attested in IE languages such as, for instance, in Ved. sphūrjati ‘to thun-
der, resound, roar’; Av. (fra-)spargya- ‘sprout’, Gr. ἀσφάργος, ἀσπάργος ‘as-
paragus’; Old English spearca, Engl. spark; Latin spargō ‘to scatter, emit’; Gr.
σφαργέομαι ‘to burst with a noise, crackle, sputter; to be full to bursting (of
udders)’. Other Middle Iranian cognates include Khot. sparggā ‘noise, twang’
(of bows) (BAILEY 1979, p. 415b) and Man.Sogd. sprmyyy ‘flame’. Since in Mid-
dle Persian a word cannot begin with three consonants, spr- has been simpli-
fied to sp-, cf. Pahl. Psalter present stem spz- ‘to sprout, to blossom’, indicating
/(a)spīz / or /(a)spēz / < *spṛja-;39 Pahl. spyc- /spīz- / ‘to shine; sprout’, Man.MP
‘spyxtin, ‘spyz-‘40 Pahl. spycšn /spīzišn/ ‘sprouting’ (e.g. Zs 30.35), ‘brilliance’
(e.g. Zs 34.25), Man.MP ‘spyzyšn ‘brightness’ M 781.50, “a stylistic variation of
rwšn” (HENNING 1947, pp. 40, 46).

The meteorological connections, which the myth of the fire Wāzišt slaying a
demon developed, could have been triggered by an association of the first part
of the fire’s epithet, resegmented as spəṇj-aγri-, with a similar sounding word
derived from “sparg ‘to burst forth; to be light; to sprout’, of which a form with
nasal infix is attested in Khwaresm. isprenjik ‘to blossom’ < *sprenja(ya)-.41 The
meaning of this root is also close to that underlying the epithet’s second part jayri-
‘spurting’. Thus a demon’s name could have been formed meaning either ‘(flash
of) lightning’ or ‘thunder’, ‘thunderbolt’. An older form of the demon’s name
could be preserved in Zs 3.17 if the reading of K35 and BK is interpreted as rep-
resenting sprncgl /sprenzgar/ or /sprenzgar/ rather than spncgl /sponjag/42 In
the Pahlavi script, the spelling spncgl differs from sprngcl /spenjagr/, transcrib-
ing Av. špəṇjagrim, only by one additional vertical stroke. The form sprenzgar,
possibly an Avestan loanword, could have produced an optional variant spen-
zgar adapted to Pahlavi phonology. The identity of the latter with /spenjagr/
could have motivated the use of a different, but similar sounding proper name,
spinjruš, of an evidently evil person, to substitute the name with “sparg ‘to burst

37 N. SIMS-WILLIAMS, e-mail of 10 October 2004.
40 MacKENZIE 1971, p. 76.
41 Henning 1947, p. 47, n. 5; Morgenstierne: “Iranian Elements in Khowar”, in: BSOS 8
42 That the name of the demon could be a corruption of a word meaning ‘(flash of) light-
ning’ and that the variant spncgl in Zs 3.17 could perhaps be read *sprncgl and thus
preserve a trace of an older form was suggested to me by N. SIMS-WILLIAMS in an e-mail
forth; be light; sprout’ at a time when the myth had already developed its meteorological connections. That the root sparg was involved in the development of the tempestuous aspects of the myth is suggested by the detail of the demon’s fearful cry also called ‘thunder’ when hit on the head by the fire.

The entire myth appears to be an aetiological account of the origins of lightning and thunder. The fact that, apart from two instances (Zādspram 3.17; ŠGV 4.52), spəṇjaγrīm was not used to provide the demon’s name, indirectly indicates that even at that time this noun was not understood as the name of a demon. Rather, some memory of the ‘spurting’ (°jaγri-) nature of the fire vāzišta- has been preserved in the detail of the story that the club, which the fire uses to hit the demon’s head, is like the blazing of fire also called ‘lightning’.

References

AiGr. = Wackernagel/Debrunner
Delbrück, B. 1888: Altindische Syntax. Halle (Syntaktische Forschungen 5) [repr. Darmstadt 1976].


J2 = Mills 1893


TD 2 =ANKLESARIA, T.D. 1908