

THE DAEVAS IN ZOROASTRIAN SCRIPTURE

Chris Ghan

Dr. Signe Cohen, Thesis Supervisor

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to analyze the depictions of the *daevas* in Zoroastrian scripture, their evolving portrayal over time, and how their depiction as an antagonistic supernatural force helps to define and reinforce Zoroastrian values and the cosmic moral order.

The thesis begins with a brief overview of the Zoroastrian faith and its cultural origins. Next, it discusses portrayals of conflicting gods and monsters in related Indo-European, and in particular Indo-Iranian, traditions to provide further grounding of the concept of “*daevas*” in the broader cultural context of the ancient world. Next, the thesis analyses in detail portrayals of the *daevas* as antagonistic gods worshipped by enemies of the faith in the *Gathas*, the oldest Zoroastrian texts which are traditionally attributed to Zarathustra himself. From there, it further analyses the portrayal of the *daevas* in the later Avesta, the core collection of authoritative Zoroastrian texts.

Following up on the Avesta, the next step is to analyze the later Pahlavi texts, particularly focusing on the *daevas* in the *Denkard*, *Bundahishn*, and *Menog-i-Khrad*, and then trace their further evolution into the divs of central Asian folklore. Finally, the *daevas* as a whole are analyzed and conclusions are drawn about their role in Zoroastrian theology, ritual, and rhetoric and how it serves to reinforce Zoroastrian ideals, practices, and identity.