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Werner Müller

MAZDAK AND THE AL-
PHABET MYSTICISM
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For the most recent work on Mazdak we are indebted to Franz Altheim and Ruth Stiehl, whose findings depart radically from the traditional interpretation.¹ Until now it has generally been accepted that economic conditions in the fifth-century Sassanid Empire gave the impulse to this revolt, which left in its wake a state of despair tending to take the form of communism. Henceforth, this cliché—well established even in the sources—will undergo serious criticism even beyond the corrections of Nöldeke and Christensen.² For behind the external forms of Mazdakism a religious dynamic was at work which contemporary scholarship simply could not accept.³

¹ Franz Altheim and Ruth Stiehl, *Ein asiatischer Staat*, I (Wiesbaden, 1954), pp. 189 ff., and their *Finanzgeschichte der Spätantike* (Frankfurt a. M., 1947), pp. 24 ff.

² Theodor Nöldeke, *Geschichte der Perser und Araber zur Zeit der Sasaniden*, translated from the Arabic Chronicle of Tabari (Leipzig, 1879), pp. 455 ff., 459–60; Arthur Christensen, *Le règne du roi Kawād̄h I et le communisme mazdakite* (Det Kgl. Danske Videnskabernes Selskab, Historisk-filologiske Meddelelser IX, 6, [Copenhagen, 1925]), pp. 100 ff. Concerning Mazdakism as a reform of Manicheism; see pp. 108 ff.

³ Cf. Tabari's judgment concerning the Mazdakite mass in Nöldeke, *op. cit.*, p. 141; Chusrōs' throne speech, *ibid.*, p. 163; further, *ibid.*, p. 459, concerning the tragic story of ibn Athir and Abulfedā according to whom the mother of Chusrō, who was given over to the Mazdakites, could be saved only by a kiss on the foot executed by her son.

Under Kavādh I (488–531) the Sassanid Empire degenerated into a domain of landed nobility—Iran’s root evil even to this day. The revolt of taxed peasants led by Mazdak was directed against this “rule of a thousand families.” Equal division of land, money, and women was not only demanded but actually effected. Kavādh, at first only a football in the hands of the nobility, let the Mazdakites alone, but in 498–99 he jumped into the affray with his army and completely subjugated the landed nobility who had been heavily hit by the revolt.

If the natural bond between peasants and king had at first resulted in freeing the crown from corulership with the upper classes, so also Mazdak’s extreme designs gave Kavādh’s successor Chusrō I Anōšarvān (531–78) the right to crush the revolution by himself. Mazdak and thousands of his followers lost their lives. By his own authority the king now adjudicated the difficult questions of restitution of property, compensation for assaulted women, and placing and rearing of illegitimate children. The new court nobility and civil class, not a whit better than its sociological predecessor, promptly maneuvered the Empire into the Arabian catastrophe. We are not, however, interested in the end result but in the background of the Mazdakite communism. For the myth that such movements were impelled by the requirements of food and sex has no support in the sources.

Significantly, the only extant report in which Mazdak himself speaks is concerned with the spiritual side of the revolution, that is, with cosmology. This aspect of the Mazdakite world view is sketched by aš-Šahrastānī in his work on religions and philosophical schools according to the reports of a certain al-Warrāk.⁴ Mazdak’s object of worship, the Unnamed God of Light, sits on a throne in the upper world. Before him are four powers with names handed down in Arabic: Distinction, Insight, Alertness, Joy. The four powers govern the world through seven viziers, who in turn are circled by a ring of twelve spirits.

These last two classes of world rulers bear Persian names (inserted right into the Arabic text) drawn from that abstract world of thought which Iranian tradition followed from the time of Zarathustra. Mazdakite dualism portrayed by aš-Šahrastānī is of the same Iranian origin; opposite the world of Light stands the kingdom of Darkness, the former finding personal representation in the Lord of Light, the latter remaining in impersonal anonymity.

Iranian dualism also shapes the division of the viziers and spirits, as

⁴ I follow here the translation of Altheim and Stiehl, *Ein asiatischer Staat*, I, 194–95; cf. Haarbrückers “Šahrastānīs Religionspartheien und Philosophenschulen” (Halle, 1850–51) I, 292–93, and also Christensen, *op. cit.*, pp. 80 ff.

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Altheim and Stiehl have demonstrated. The viziers are divided into two classes: on the one hand, the supreme, priestly, and planning, and, on the other, those who execute, enact, and judge. Similarly in the second group, that which bestows, grows, and preserves opposes consumption and waste.⁵

From this general survey, it would appear that the Mazdakite cosmic structure corresponds exactly to the traditional Iranian model. A closer look, however, shows that it does not really fit into the orthodox framework, and it is just at this point that Altheim and Stiehl have made their decisive advance. Mazdak was striving for a monistic modification of dualism, a subordination of one primal principle to the other, which is tantamount to heresy in Iranian culture. According to aš-Šahrastānī's presentation, the revolutionary held that Light alone acts with purpose and free will, it alone is endowed with knowledge and understanding; while Darkness gropes around blindly, subject to unordered contingency.⁶

The superiority of the Highest and the Light impairs the eternal balance of Persian teaching; it lays hold of a current of thought, strong and deep, which already characterized Manicheism. Mani's religion, on the scene some two and a half centuries before Mazdak, kept the Eurasian continent spellbound for a millennium. Furthermore, as we shall see, it provided the foundation for Mazdakism. The image of a monarchical summit of the world points for the first time to the relationships between the two movements and their common characteristics. Thus in Mani's system Light possesses the same superiority as it does with Mazdak; it occupies three sides of the world, east, west, and north, while Darkness, wedged in, remains in the southern world-region.⁷ For orthodox Manicheism, the final deliverance of Light sparks from their entanglement in matter is as certain as the triumph of the Highest.⁸ An aberration from Mani's teaching, of which we have only scanty information, instigated by a certain Bundos in Rome at the time of Diocletian, taught that the good god had already accomplished victory over the evil one and that the victor should be honored. After being expelled from the Manichean community, Bundos traveled to Persia, and Christensen has almost surely demonstrated that Bundos

⁵ Altheim and Stiehl, *Ein asiatischer Staat*, I, 196.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 201-2.

⁷ Alfred Adam, *Texte zum Manichäismus* (Berlin, 1954), p. 11 (Severus of Antioch), pp. 80-81 (Michael the Syrian). Henri-Charles Puech, *Le Manichéisme, son fondateur, sa doctrine* (Paris, 1949), pp. 75-76, and his "Die Religion des Mani," *Christus und die Religionen der Erde*, ed. by Franz König, II (Freiburg, 1951), 524-25.

⁸ Puech, *Le Manichéisme*, pp. 84-85, and "Die Religion des Mani," pp. 525-26.

was a forerunner of Mazdak, in whose hands then this spiritual foundation developed into an immensely practical dynamic.⁹

Mazdakite ethic also finds its starting point with this superiority of Light. Through a carefully calculated plan, Mazdak's ethics seeks to free the soul from its entanglement with matter and to render harmless, by uniform apportionment, the primary authors of hate and strife, namely, women and goods. Thus their "communism" has its roots in the *religious* sphere; the triumph of Light must be urged and strengthened.

Altheim and Stiehl have drawn attention to the many and diverse descendants from the monistic tendency of Sassanid Iran.¹⁰ For one, the monophysite populaces of the Eastern Church put pressure on the councils (Ephesus, 449) by their battle cry, *Εἰς θεός*, "Let God be one." There were also the enthusiast bands of the prophet with their "Allah il Allah," the true successors of the Monophysites. Finally, in the ancient period, the Neo-Platonists put the divine *νοῦς* and the sun in the highest place. If the Constantinian epoch—permeated by Neo-Platonic vocabulary—saw in the emperor the sun, and in the four caesars the bearers of that light, directed by the emperor as a four-span, this, too, should be recognized as the model for Mazdak's Lord of Light and his four powers. Mazdak's divine hierarchy drew the essential parts of its structure and content from Neo-Platonism, or more exactly from Porphyry's work on the sun.¹¹

So much for Altheim and Stiehl's conclusions. To be sure, the tetrad, which stands out so prominently in the Constantinian fourspan had a long tradition in antiquity. From Empedocles' "Four Roots" and the four elements of the Peripatetics to Philo's *τέτραρα*, the tradition remains unbroken; one might say that the Neo-Platonic "philosophy of four" rests on ancient foundations. That much one must grant Altheim and Stiehl. But do we actually need the model of classical or Greco-Roman antiquity to establish the origin of Mazdakian cosmology? The tetrad has a long tradition also in the East, and Mazdak's four powers are more naturally attached to the East than to the Greek speculation of the West.

In another place I have pointed out how, particularly in Iran, quaternary notions appear.¹² They can be observed everywhere and even a cursory review will produce an imposing number. The Sassanid

⁹ Christensen, *op. cit.*, pp. 96 ff.

¹⁰ *Ein asiatischer Staat*, I, 190 ff.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 202 ff.

¹² *Die heilige Stadt* (Stuttgart, 1961), pp. 131 ff.

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thought-world of the fifth century knew a mythical division of the world into four: Syria and Rome in the West, the land of the Turks in the North, China in the East, and Iraq in the South.¹³ Chusrō I (531–78) divided into four imperial districts what had formerly been the united territory of a commander-in-chief of the troops.¹⁴ Ardrašēr I (226–41) built his first city, Gōr (Fīrūzābād), with four quarters and four gates in a circular wall.¹⁵ The royal coinage of the Sassanids made use of the four-point symbol to designate the four corners of the world.¹⁶ At the top rank of courtiers stand four chief officers: the high priest, the chief judge, the commander of the troops (from Chusrō I's time, four), and the court jester.¹⁷ In the central architectural structure of reform Sassanid religion, the fire house, a stone baldachin arches over four pillars.¹⁸ Manicheism divides world history into four periods marked by four emissaries sent from God: Buddha, Zarathustra, Jesus, Mani.¹⁹ The Manichean "Great Father" together with Light, Power, and Wisdom form a foursome, a tetrad of four persons or a being in four forms, the *πατέρα τοῦ μεγέθους*; just as the encircling twelve Aeons arrange themselves according to the four points of the compass.²⁰

¹³ Altheim, "Turkstudien," *La Nouvelle Clio* (1952), pp. 32 ff. We have employed the corrected wording of al-Bīrūnī, for which Altheim must be thanked.

¹⁴ Nöldeke, *Geschichte der Perser und Araber*, p. 155, n. 2.

¹⁵ R. Ghirshman, "Fīrūzābād," *Bulletin de l'institut français d'archéologie orientale*, XLV (1947), 19, and 21 ff.

¹⁶ Robert Göbl, "Aufbau der Münzprägung," in Altheim and Stiehl, *Ein asiatischer Staat*, I, 68, and his "Die Münzprägung der Kušan," in *Finanzgeschichte der Spätantike*, p. 229.

¹⁷ Christensen, *op. cit.*, p. 102; Altheim and Stiehl, *Ein asiatischer Staat*, I, 174, 195.

¹⁸ Ghirshman, *op. cit.*, pp. 25–26.

¹⁹ Adam, *op. cit.*, p. 5; from al-Bīrūnī's *Chronology of Ancient Peoples*.

²⁰ The sacred form of the quaternary God of the Manicheans conforms to the Christian Trinity. Cf. the prayer in the Turfan fragment, M 176: "Heiliger Gott! O Licht! Du mich siehe! O Kraft! O Weisheit!" in F. W. K. Müller, *Handschriften-Reste in Estrangeloschrift aus Turfan, Chinesisch-Turkestan*, Part II (Abhandl. d. Preuss. Akademie d. Wiss., 1904), part 2, pp. 61–62 and n. 1 (see also the hymn to the "Vier grossherrlichen Wesenheiten," Frag. T. II. D. 169 in Albert von Le Coq, *Türkische Manichaica aus Cotscho*, Part II (Abhandl. d. Preuss. Akademie, 1919) phil.-hist. Klasse No. 3, p. 10; Gustav Flügel, *Mani* (Berlin, 1862), pp. 95, and 292, n. 220; Konrad Kessler, *Mani* (Berlin, 1889), pp. 359, 403: "Ich verfluche alle Götter, welche Mani ersonnen hat, nämlich den vierpersönlichen Vater der Grösse." Here most certainly belongs also the fourfold division of the Manichean Paradise; cf. Flügel, *op. cit.*, p. 101, and Kessler, *op. cit.*, p. 400. Here is perhaps the place to indicate a parallel origin in the roots of subsequent Byzantine art. Among the epigrammatic monuments of Syria, Palestine, and Asia Minor there appeared in the early centuries A.D. the form ΕΙς θεός on the gravestones, door lintels, etc. It is placed for the most part on both sides of a four-divisional quadrate, thus: ΕΙς ΕΕ θεός. A more striking portrayal of the one yet four-formed Great Father can scarcely be imagined (Erik Peterson: ΕΙΣ ΘΕΟΣ: *Epigraphische, formgeschichtliche und religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen* [Göttingen, 1926], pp. 37 ff.).

The proofs demonstrated an Iranian “four tradition” of indeterminate age, but well attested in the Sassanid period. Manichean tetrads recur almost word for word in Mazdak’s four powers and by multiplication in his twelve spirits. Al-Warrāk, the authority for aš-Šahrastāni, already knew of the relation between the doctrines of Manicheism and Mazdakism,²¹ and the probable lineage of Mazdakism leads back through Bundos to Mani. Of course there is some question about Bundos’ role as a Manichean heretic in Diocletian Rome and also as mediator of Neo-Platonist ideas, but it cannot be questioned that he belonged to Mani’s congregation. Manicheism remains the foundation of the Mazdakite movement; Neo-Platonic impulses met an already existing tradition; they invigorated and strengthened it, but did not found it.

One could object to this interpretation by pointing to the syncretistic character of Manicheism itself, which surely shows Neo-Platonic features. But the argument of this objection can be reversed; for these and similar connections could well originate in a general and widespread movement. In view of the spiritual wave which flooded the entire East in the third century, bearing totally or partially gnostic philosophies and religions, the different churches, sects, schools, and congregations with their doctrinal peculiarities, all resemble only incidental froth. Furthermore, Puech has recently given the proper emphasis again to the devaluating turn of Mani’s syncretism. A spiritual force active from Spain to China, which persistently influenced the Eurasian continent for twelve centuries, cannot be patched together out of odds and ends of information; even more, there lived here a real piety which wove together, wherever they come from, various details into an original whole.²²

A final argument leads to a similar interpretation, an argument which Altheim and Stiehl introduce as evidence for the impelling force of Neo-Platonic philosophy and which is the brilliant discovery of the two authors: the alphabet mysticism of Mazdak.²³ “He [Mazdak] said that the king of the upper world rules by means of the letters of the alphabet, whose sum yields the highest name. Whoever can form a conception of these letters, to him is revealed the greatest mystery. But whoever is excluded remains in the blindness of ignorance, forgetfulness, dullness and sorrow with respect to the four spiritual powers.”²⁴

Christensen sloughs off further consideration with an allusion to

²¹ Christensen, *op. cit.*, p. 80; Altheim and Stiehl, *Ein asiatischer Staat*, I, 201.

²² Puech, *Le Manichéisme*, pp. 68–69; *Die Religion des Mani*, pp. 513–14.

²³ Altheim and Stiehl, *Ein asiatischer Staat*, I, 204–5.

²⁴ Christensen, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

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Kabbala.²⁵ Altheim and Stiehl, on the other hand, seriously propose that this remark refers to the alphabet, provided one adds the Lord of Light, the four powers, the seven viziers, and the twelve spirits. It is these twenty-four beings who direct world events, indeed, and even the king of light rules through twenty-four letters. Altheim and Stiehl explain the number "twenty-four" as Greek influence, since the Greek alphabet comprises twenty-four characters, while the Aramaic-Syrian system current in the east at that time had only twenty-two.

If it is the intention of the two authors to derive Mazdak's alphabet cosmology from the West, the proof from numbers is not conclusive. Instances of this alphabet mysticism, uniquely related to religion, are indeed known in the East, but not in classical antiquity of the West. Furthermore, a parallel to Mazdak's alphabet lies much closer at hand in Mani's ABC classification, which was apparently created out of notions widely popular at the time.

Among the canonical scriptures of the founder of the religion, the "Great Gospel" ranks of first importance; it has twenty-two chapters arranged according to the twenty-two letters of the alphabet, one chapter per letter. It is therefore called "The Great Gospel from Aleph to Tau."²⁶ Mani, then, pressed his teaching and revelation into the mold of the alphabet; this is an unambiguous indication of the origin of Mazdak's idea of the highest name as the sum of the letters of the alphabet. That this ABC speculation cannot be a meaningless accretion is evident from other sources, which likewise belong to the East.

There is for instance the monk Pachomius, who died in 345 and can be reckoned as the contemporary of Mani. He formed the first tightly organized Christian monastery in Egyptian Thebais. His *Life*, in Coptic, informs us that he divided the members of the order into twenty-four classes according to the letters of the alphabet, the Coptic alphabet, of course, which like Greek has twenty-four characters. Possibly this reflects a Serapic prototype. Pachomius, before he turned to Christianity, was a recluse in a Serapis temple; out of his years as a priest stems the tonsure which the Pachomian monks took over.²⁷ Jerome, the Church Father (347–420), apparently was influenced by similar notions when in his letters to St. Paula he sought to give a mystical meaning to the Hebrew alphabet.²⁸ Again, a century later—and therefore in the time of Mazdak—the Palestinian abbot Sabas

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 102; also Kessler, *op. cit.*, p. 209.

²⁶ Adam, *op. cit.*, p. 1; Puech, *Die Religion des Mani*, p. 519.

²⁷ Grützmacher, *Pachomius und das älteste Klosterleben* (Freiburg and Leipzig, 1896), pp. 117, 125.

²⁸ Epist. 30 ad Paulam, Migne, P. L., xxiii, 443.

(439–531) wrote an entire tract on “The Mystery of the Greek Letters,” whose Coptic translation is extant.²⁹

The demiurge appears here as the inventor of the ABC, and the ABC itself is regarded as God’s successive acts of creation. Each letter symbolizes in its form an act of the Highest; their sequence reflects the succession of God’s primordial acts.

All this sounds much like Mazdak’s king of the upper world, who rules by means of the letters of the alphabet. Yet what is even more amazing is that this author, though writing Greek, limits the number of characters to twenty-two; he excludes ξ and ψ as later additions. If one regards Mazdak’s twenty-four types as the result of Greek Neo-Platonic influence, one must recognize in Abbot Saba’s system a clear influence of the Aramaic-Syrian alphabet. At any rate, the mixture here of East and West should caution us against giving too much weight to an argument based on the number of characters used. The Orient has its own independent alphabet tradition, which posits, on the one hand, a close bond between the Creator, the Creation, and the governing of the world and, on the other, the alphabet. Of such an alphabet cosmology Western antiquity shows no trace, not even in Neo-Platonism. How far back this oriental mysticism takes us is shown by the acrostics in the Old Testament, especially in the Psalms (9, 10, 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, 119, 145).

This Hebrew-Aramaic-Syrian foundation of a cosmology governs both Mani and Mazdak. It continues down into our modern era, showing up clearly in the Babis of Persia, associated this time with the Arabic alphabet.³⁰

In conclusion we may validate one more piece of evidence for the Manichean “Word of God in Alphabet from Aleph to Tau” whose relation to our line of thinking one would hardly have expected. I refer to the alphabet fantasy of the Anabaptists of Münster.

When Manicheism disappeared into remotest China, it remained alive much longer in western Europe as a powerful undercurrent; it impressed most strikingly the Bogumili in Bulgaria, the Patarenes, and the Albigensians. Bloody persecutions pushed it back into darkness but could not obliterate it. We have good reason to suppose that its last intellectual surge took place among the Enthusiasts of the fifteenth century. Numerous waves of life surge up in these pre-Reformation, “old evangelical” movements: Cathari, Waldensians, Hussites, Beg-

²⁹ The Coptic text with French translation, ed. Hebbelynck, *Les Mystères des lettres grecques*, in *Le Muséon*, I (1900), 5–36, 105–36, 269–300; II (1901), 5–33, 369–414.

³⁰ Friedrich Carl Andreas, *Die Babi's in Persien* (Leipzig, 1896), pp. 42, 44.

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hards, Beguines, and Anabaptists. All contributed to the opposition which finally resulted in the Reformation. In the Scheldt and Meuse districts especially its store of ideas found a home, where it grew increasingly stronger, for a time even reaching the point of absorbing the entire Reformation into itself. Men like Bucer in Strasburg were well aware of this development and were concerned lest the Enthusiasts come into the Lutheran inheritance. The armed rebellion of the Anabaptists at Münster in 1534-35 provides ample proof that this was not just an imaginary concern.

As so often in such cases, we have hardly any information on the teachings of this half-subterranean, partly social, partly religious stream. Only the Anabaptist state at Münster sheds light on the intellectual scene and permits us a momentary glimpse into a conceptual world which is so similar to that of Mazdakism as to be indistinguishable. The Anabaptists share with the Mazdakites the misrepresentations of polemically minded historiography; egalitarian or communistic tendencies toward joint ownership of property (parallels should not be drawn between the excesses of John of Leiden and Mazdakite division of women); and finally the use of religious symbols such as the sun and alphabet mysticism. The singleness of this last element is very striking and clearly must be more than historical coincidence.

From numerous testimonies we know about the veneration of the "Father" by the Münster baptists.³¹ In mass psychoses which occurred in spring, 1535, the people affected would stare into the sun "and believe that the Father sat in the sun and that their hope was no less than that God would reveal himself in the sun," as the chronicler Heinrich Gresbeck has so forthrightly expressed it.³² Further, the use of the tetrad in Anabaptist thought is impressive. The "brothers" wanted to raise four standards to free those who were under siege: on the Meuse in Eschenburg, in Waterland, between Maastricht and Aachen, and in Frisia at Groningen. All men were to go to these assembly points in order to relieve Münster.³³ In renaming the town gates the points of the compass were used: East (Hoerster),

³¹ The most convenient collection of sources is Klemens Löffler, *Die Wiedertäufer zu Münster 1534-35: Berichte, Aussagen und Aktenstücke von Augenzeugen und Zeitgenossen* (Jena, 1923). It lacks, however, the important alphabet section of Heinrich Gresbeck.

³² "Bericht von der Wiedertaufe in Münster," printed by C. A. Cornelius, *Berichte der Augenzeugen über das münsterische Wiedertäuferreich* (Münster, 1853), p. 38.

³³ Löffler, *op. cit.*, p. 207, according to the testimony of the Weseler Anabaptists in April, 1535.



FIG. 1.—John of Leiden, the Anabaptist king, with the ABC scroll in his hand and, behind the coat of arms in the upper left corner, a ribbon with the alphabet. Engraving by Aldegrever.

South (Ludgeri), West (Liebfrauen), North (Kreuz).³⁴ For the royal emblem and coat of arms they used the symbol of the globe, pierced four times by two swords, over which stands a cross; thus it is described by the chroniclers and is represented frequently in the engravings of the time.³⁵

Involved here is the most characteristic feature: the use of the alphabet, portrayed by contemporary paintings as a band fluttering behind the globe. The artist Aldegrever of Soest, who, after the drama came to its tragic end, created the famous engraving of John of Leiden, put a paper scroll in the hand of the Anabaptist king inscribed with the alphabet (see Fig. 1). When they renamed the town gate, the Anabaptists nailed "letters" on them with the new names together with the alphabet, but reduced to twenty-two letters. Even the children were given names in alphabetical order, and if their number went over twenty-two, Old Testament designations were used.³⁶

John of Leiden explained to Fabricius, the preacher, who stayed in the city in November, 1534, as mediator, that he wished to remain in his own faith, since God had revealed it to him and that the things revealed in the ABC's were indeed remarkable.³⁷

These words are very reminiscent of the Mazdakite "King of the Upper World" who rules through the alphabet and also of the "Great Gospel from Aleph to Tau" which contains teachings of Manicheism. It is very likely that this is evidence not so much of individual caprice as of actual historical connections: the individual persons are appar-

³⁴ Hermann von Kerksenbroich, *Anabaptistici furoris historica narratio* (Münster: Edition H. Detmer, 1899-1900), p. 773.

³⁵ Kerksenbroich, *op. cit.*, p. 652. Illustrations by Max Geisberg, *Die münsterische Wiedertäufer und Aldegrever* (Strassburg, 1907), Pls. 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, etc. Cf. also the sketch of the coat of arms in the British Museum, *ibid.*, p. 1, Fig. 1.

³⁶ The alphabet number of the Anabaptists' alphabet in Gresbeck, *op. cit.*, pp. 156-57. It is possible that due to a misprint the *z* has been left out. Of the twenty-six letters of today's alphabet *j*, *u*, *x*, and *y* are omitted. We recall also that the "Great Gospel" of the Manicheans was ordered according to twenty-two letters and that the Abbot Sabas worked with twenty-two characters.

Gresbeck has also given a correct interpretation of the attribution of names to the new-born; first the names in the order of the ABC's, then the Old Testament names. Kerksenbroich has misunderstood the matter: the king gave names to the children after the days of the week, and the seven days of the week were given the first seven letters of the alphabet (Sunday "A," Monday "B," etc.). With this method, however, John of Leiden would never have gotten into difficulty when he came to the end of the alphabet, for he would have moved continually within the circle of the first seven letters.

³⁷ Th. Volbehr, ed., *Bericht des Prädikanten Dietrich Fabricius*; Mitteilungen aus dem germanischen Nationalmuseum (1889), II, 102. It was also possible for us to look at an unpublished manuscript of Julius Otto Plassmann, "Studien zur Volkskunde und Religionsgeschichte der Wiedertäuferbewegung." We wish to thank Prof. Plassmann for his co-operation.

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ently the bearers of a continuing tradition with an indestructible core.³⁸

³⁸ It could be mentioned that there is a possibility of tracing the Anabaptist alphabet speculation back to the Psalm acrostics of the Old Testament. There were also among the Anabaptists men learned in Hebrew who were attempting to understand the translation of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. One would think, e.g., of Ludwig Hätzer who was burned in Constance in 1529 and whose translations also influenced Luther. Cf. J. F. Gerhard Goeters, *Ludwig Hätzer: Spiritualist und Antitrinitarier: Eine Randfigur der frühen Täuferbewegung* (Gütersloh, 1957), pp. 99 ff., 104.

However the acrostics of the Anabaptist songs, which are usually composed on a name or dedication, are never related to the alphabet. Cf. Philipp Wackernagel, *Das deutsche Kirchenlied* (Leipzig, 1870), III, 440–91; Rudolf Wolkan, *Die Lieder der Wiedertäufer* (Berlin, 1903), pp. 173–74, 210 ff., 220 ff., 236–37, 247. Such acrostics are especially characteristic of the Hutterites, that is, the Moravian Baptists. Not one ABC song is to be found among them which is patterned after the ancient Hebraic poetry.

We must look for the point of contact for the Münster Alphabet religion in the region of the Netherlands. In the course of this search it is not entirely improbable that out of the presumed vestige of Manicheism there is an indigenous and original tradition in western Europe itself.