

# Religion and Medicine in Mazdaznan

## Distinction without Differentiation

Bernadette Bigalke

If Johannes Itten, the early Bauhaus teacher, had not been a staunch adherent of Mazdaznan, a very small religious group, perhaps only emic historiographies of it would exist in Germany today.<sup>1</sup> Within research on the cultural history of the so-called life reform movements (*Lebensreform*) and the growing body-culture movement around 1900, it became a fringe topic, treated both as an exotic subject and as an ideologically suspect case.<sup>2</sup>

For scholars of religion, Mazdaznan is of considerable interest since its diverse teachings combine a variety of religious and scientific currents. Its authoritative texts contain (neo-) Zoroastrian<sup>3</sup> and Christian

- 1 Paul Citroen, "Mazdaznan am Bauhaus," in *Bauhaus und Bauhäusler: Bekenntnisse und Erinnerungen*, ed. Eckhard Neumann (Bern: Hallwag, 1971); Ludger Busch, "Das Bauhaus und Mazdaznan," in *Das frühe Bauhaus und Johannes Itten*, ed. Rolf Bothe et al. (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje, 1994); Peter Schmitt, "Johannes Itten und der Aryana-Bund in Herrliberg," in *Johannes Itten und die Moderne: Beiträge eines wissenschaftlichen Symposions*, ed. Christa Lichtenstern (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje, 2003); Peter Schmitt, "Teppich, Ornament und esoterische Symbolik bei Johannes Itten," in *Das Bauhaus und die Esoterik*, ed. Christoph Wagner (Bielefeld: Kerber, 2005); Christoph Wagner, "Zwischen Lebensreform und Esoterik: Johannes Ittens Weg ans Bauhaus in Weimar," in *Das Bauhaus und die Esoterik*, ed. Wagener.
- 2 For scholarly discussion on race theories that were developed in esoteric groups and life reform circles around 1900, see Ulrich Linse, "Mazdaznan – die Rassenreligion vom arischen Friedensreich," in *Völkische Religion und Krisen der Moderne: Entwürfe „arteigener“ Glaubenssysteme seit der Jahrhundertwende*, ed. Stefanie von Schnurbein and Justus Ulbricht (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 2001); Helmut Zander, "Sozialdarwinistische Rassentheorien aus dem okkulten Untergrund des Kaiserreichs," in *Handbuch zur völkischen Bewegung 1871-1918*, ed. Uwe Puschner, Walter Schmitz, and Justus Ulbricht (München: Saur, 1996); Peter Staudenmaier, "Occultism, Race and Politics in German-speaking Europe, 1880–1940: A Survey of the Historical Literature," *European History Quarterly* 39, no. 1 (2009); Peter Staudenmaier, "Race and Redemption: Racial and Ethnic Evolution in Rudolf Steiner's Anthroposophy," *Nova Religio* 11, no. 3 (2008).
- 3 Michael Stausberg, *Die Religion Zarathustras: Geschichte – Gegenwart – Rituale*. Vol. 2 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2002); Michael Stausberg, "Para-Zoroastrianisms: Memetic transmissions and appropriations," in *Parsis in India and the diaspora*, ed. John Hinnels and Alan Williams (London: Routledge, 2007).

Central to Mazdaznan:  
combination of religious  
narratives and ‘medical’  
practices

narratives, as well as the most recent findings of medicine and biology. Furthermore, Mazdaznan’s teachings preach an ascetic lifestyle in a Weberian sense: they broach issues like a special diet (fasting and vegetarianism), (intestinal) physiological hygiene, breathing techniques as prophylactic and therapeutic methods, eugenic, sexual and maternal practices (‘prenatal education’), and musical therapy. All these practices aimed at mental and physical perfection since Mazdaznan wanted to create a ‘new man’ as part of a ‘new human race’ with expanded mental capacities and transformed bodies.<sup>4</sup>

With this peculiar combination of religious narratives and allegedly science-based bodily practices, Mazdaznan is a fascinating case illustrating the existence and acceptance of macro-level conceptual distinctions – particularly between religious and scientific knowledge – paralleled by their complete irrelevance in terms of structural differentiations at the micro-level.

### Historical Context

Mazdaznan influenced  
by American body-  
culture movement

To understand Mazdaznan, some knowledge of the wider American cultural and religious context is required. Firstly, it should be noted that Mazdaznan is clearly influenced by the American body-culture movement which emerged in the decades around 1900.<sup>5</sup> Secondly, the development and establishment of Mazdaznan was most likely influenced by the field of healthcare and contemporary health enterprises. An increasingly institutionalised therapeutic landscape for the upper class had developed on the East Coast at that time, of which the sanatorium of John Harvey Kellogg in Battle Creek, Michigan, is a prominent example. The range of preventive practices and therapies offered in this sanatorium were similar to those that Mazdaznan demanded from its followers. In his “sanitarium” – as he preferred to

4 Bernadett Bigalke, *Lebensreform und Esoterik um 1900: Die Leipziger alternativ-religiöse Szene am Beispiel der Internationalen Theosophischen Verbrüderung* (Würzburg: Ergon, 2016); Severine Desponds, “Eugenik und die Konstruktion der weiblichen Übernatur: Eine Fallstudie über die Mazdaznan-Bewegung in den Vierzigerjahren,” in *Handbuch Gender und Religion*, ed. Anna-Katharina Höpflinger, Anna Jeffers, and Daria Pezzoli-Oligiati (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008); Ramona Jelinek-Menke, “Ein solches Kind ist ein wahrer Erlöser: Eugenik und die Konstruktion menschlicher Normalität bei Mazdaznan,” *Zeitschrift für junge Religionswissenschaft* 8 (2013).

5 Ruth Marie Griffith, *Born Again Bodies: Flesh and Spirit in American Christianity* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004).

call it – Kellogg placed great emphasis on a vegetarian diet, on breathing and laughing therapy and on regular colon hygiene for his patients. The sanatorium in Battle Creek was, in its early years, an enterprise under the tutelage of the Seventh Day Adventists.<sup>6</sup> Thirdly, public discourse on religion in the USA changed deeply at this time. Impetus for that change was also added by an interreligious meeting to enhance the global dialogue on faiths during the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893, organised by liberal Christians. The audience was mesmerised by the representative of Theravada Buddhism, Anagarika Dharmapala, and the representative of Hinduism, Swami Vivekananda. Both were eloquent and successful as teachers bringing religious and philosophical wisdom from ‘the East’. Given the extensive media coverage of the event, a wider public sought more of these sorts of religious experts. Since then, the character of the ‘guru’ from Asia with an all-encompassing teaching and exotic outfit was instilled in the minds of many US citizens. And many ‘Asian Masters’ would follow in the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>7</sup>

Zooming in on the religious field in the US, it is plausible to place Mazdaznan within the spectrum of the religious phenomenon that came to be known as New Thought religion.<sup>8</sup> Groups placed under this banner shared certain features in terms of both content and

Mazdaznan as New  
Thought religion

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- 6 Albert Wirz, *Die Moral auf dem Teller, dargestellt am Leben und Werk von Max Bircher-Benner und John Harvey Kellogg, zwei Pionieren der modernen Ernährung in der Tradition der moralischen Physiologie; mit Hinweisen auf die Grammatik des Essens und die Bedeutung von Birchermues und Cornflakes, Aufstieg und Fall des patriarchalischen Fleischhüngers und die Verführung der Pflanzenkost* (Zürich: Chronos, 1993); Bryan Wilson, *Dr. John Harvey Kellogg and the religion of biologic living* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014). The story of Kellogg and Battle Creek gained fame with a novel by T. C. Boyle, *The Road to Wellville* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1993) and with the subsequent movie *The Road to Wellville* (1994), directed by Alan Parker, starring Anthony Hopkins as Kellogg.
- 7 Richard Hughes Seager, *The World’s Parliament of Religions: the East/West encounter, Chicago, 1893* (Bloomington: Viking Penguin, 1995); Maria Sofia Moritz, *Globalizing “Sacred Knowledge”: South Asians and the Theosophical Society, 1879–1930* (PhD thesis, Jacobs University Bremen: 2017); Jane Naomi Iwamura, *Virtual orientalism: Asian religions and American popular culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Allen Richardson, “Asian Religions in the United States: The Role of the 1893 World’s Parliament of Religions in Shaping an Evolving Pluralist Ideology”, in *The Cambridge History of Religions in America, vol. 2: 1790 to 1945*, ed. Stephen J. Stein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).
- 8 Bernadett Bigalke, “Gesundheit und Heil: Eine ideengeschichtliche Spurensuche zur Einordnung der Mazdaznan-Bewegung in ihren Entstehungskontext,” *Gesnerus* 69, no. 2 (2012).

social structure. Their adherents were predominantly urban, white, female and liberal protestant in background. There was no dogmatic standardisation. One finds combinations of scientific, idealistic, spiritualistic, pantheistic, kabbalistic, Theosophical and Christian teachings. The theory was that proper use of one's 'mind' in interdependence with the 'cosmos' should lead to 'higher spiritual development' or a 'higher self', physical and mental health, self-composure and economic well-being.<sup>9</sup> Like Theosophists and other esoteric groups, New Thought adherents were interested in 'Asian' philosophy and religions, thereby creating and promoting an affirmative orientalism.<sup>10</sup> Within this history of fascination for 'the East', 'meditation' and 'Yoga' practices were appropriated and simultaneously recreated both by North Americans and Europeans.<sup>11</sup>

### Otoman Zar-Adusht Hanish and Mazdaznan

Mazdaznan was founded by Otoman Zar-Adusht Hanish<sup>12</sup>, as he was known to his followers and in his writings. He authorised his title with his initiation and ordination in line with the Zoroastrian tradition. Additionally, the word *Zar* means 'prince' and alludes to an alleged noble birth. *Mazdaznan* is also an adaption from Zoroastrian vocabulary, meaning 'worshiper of Mazda'. Not much is known about Hanish's early years except for the hagiographical information of which his spiritual and therapeutic journey to Tibet forms a great part. After his own healing and initiation into a 'temple order' in Tibet was accomplished, he was chosen by this order to spread its

#### Construction of a (Neo-) Zoroastrian tradition

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- 9 Wouter J. Hanegraaff, "New Thought Movement," in *Dictionary of Gnosis & Western Esotericism*, ed. Wouter J. Hanegraaff (Leiden: Brill Academic, 2005).
- 10 Richard G. Fox, "East of Said," in *Edward Said: a critical reader*, ed. Michael Sprinker (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992); Richard King, *Orientalism and religion: post-colonial theory, India and "the mystic East"* (London: Routledge, 1999); Christine Maillard, "Ex oriente lux: Zur Funktion Indiens in der Konstruktion der abendländischen esoterischen Tradition im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert," in *Constructing Tradition: Means and Myths of Transmission in Western Esotericism*, ed. Andreas Kilcher (Leiden: Brill, 2010).
- 11 Karl Baier, *Meditation und Moderne* (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 2009); Mark Singleton, *Yoga Body: The Origins of Modern Posture Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).
- 12 Graul, *Nonkonforme Religionen im Visier der Polizei: Eine Untersuchung am Beispiel der Mazdaznan-Religion im Deutschen Kaiserreich* (Würzburg: Ergon, 2013), 61. His actual name was most likely Otto Hanisch.

spiritual knowledge all over the world.<sup>13</sup> In 1900, Hanish founded the *Mazdaznan Temple Association of Associates of God* in Chicago. Chicago's religious scene was very diverse at that time, creating a simultaneous situation of competition and cooperation between smaller religious groups:

In particular, Chicago was a magnet for emergent spiritual healing movements. So-called mind cure, faith cure or divine healing, and Christian Science were often conflated by news media by the 1880s, and they shared a modicum of terms and goals. Closer inspection, however, revealed a set of distinct groups practicing sometimes radically different teachings. Babel-like, they often failed to communicate with one another; unlike Babel, it is unclear how much they tried.<sup>14</sup>

Small branches of Mazdaznan soon emerged in California and later in Europe too.<sup>15</sup> Hanish published books on *Health and Breath Culture*, *Inner Studies* and *Mazdaznan Home cook book*.<sup>16</sup> In these books, he promoted his vegetarian diet, exercises in breathing and concentration, and his instructions for (intestinal) bodily hygiene. His explicitly religious works *Ainyahita* (Anahita) und *Yehoshua Nazir* (Jesus) were published somewhat later.<sup>17</sup> Both texts mirror contemporary discourses on founders of religions in the light of growing (popular) knowledge of religious history. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, such discourses encompassed the quest for the historical Jesus including creative interpretations of apocryphal gospels or of newly 'discovered' ones like the Jesus-was-in-India story.<sup>18</sup> Embedded in a Neo-Persian

Creation of an  
alternative Christology

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- 13 Stausberg, "Para-Zoroastrianisms: Memetic transmissions and appropriations," 242.  
 14 Amy B. Voorhees, "Understanding the Religious Gulf between Mary Baker Eddy, Ursula N. Gestefeld, and Their Churches," *Church History* 80, no. 4 (2011): 803.  
 15 For the spreading of Mazdaznan in England, see Julia Twigg, *The Vegetarian Movement in England: 1847-1981. A Study in the Structure of its Ideology* (PhD thesis, University of London: 1981), ch. 7.  
 16 Otoman Zar-Adusht Hanish, *Health and Breath Culture According to Mazdaznan Philosophy (Sun-Worship)* (Chicago: Society of Metaphysicians Ltd., 1902); Otoman Zar-Adusht Hanish, *Inner Studies. A Course of Twelve Lessons* (Chicago: Sun Worshiper Publishing, 1902); Otoman Zar-Adusht Hanish, *Mazdaznan Encyclopedia of Dietetics and Home Cook Book of Cooked and Uncooked Foods. What to Eat and How to Eat It* (Chicago: Mazdaznan Publishing Company, 1904).  
 17 Otoman Zar-Adusht Hanish, *Ainyahita in Pearls* (Chicago: Mazdaznan Press, 1913); Otoman Zar-Adusht Hanish, *Yehoshua Nazir. Jesus the Nazarite. Life of Christ* (Los Angeles: Mazdaznan Press, 1917).  
 18 Olav Hammer and James R. Lewis, "Introduction," in *The Invention of Sacred Tradition*, ed. James R. Lewis and Olav Hammer (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 10–11; Hans G. Kippenberg, *Die Entdeckung der*

master narrative, Hanish presented an Aryanised biography of Jesus.<sup>19</sup> The other central mythological figure in Mazdaznan's theology was Ainyahita, 'prophetess', 'mother' and 'patron' of the 'white race', who gave Hanish the 'precious pearls' of the Mazdaznan teachings. She is a transfiguration of the Zoroastrian goddess Anahita.<sup>20</sup>

In 1907, a German branch taking the legal form of an association was established in Leipzig by a Swiss American from Los Angeles, David Ammann, and his family. Ammann and his wife assiduously held lectures and taught cooking classes, managed a monthly journal and a mail-order business for the dietetic and therapeutic instruments needed as a Mazdaznan adherent. They promoted themselves as authorised representatives of the 'Master' Hanish who would visit regularly to meet his followers and perform Zoroastrian-inspired initiation rites. Mazdaznan adherents saw themselves as living a modern religion that was suitable for urban middle-class white-collar employees, and their needs and capacities. They promoted Mazdaznan as an attractive offer in the growing field of life reform activities that also included 'reform' religion.<sup>21</sup> For Itten, this self-understanding of Mazdaznan as genuinely 'modern', its texts on education, its teaching of the temperaments, the breathing techniques and the proposed vegetarianism were the perfect means to train his students at the Bauhaus in Weimar and, ultimately, in a utopian vein, to create the coming 'new man'.<sup>22</sup>

Most of the Mazdaznan were members of both the Lutheran church and of Mazdaznan. It was not uncommon in the Kingdom of Saxony to be active in religious or ideological ('weltanschauliche') associations in addition to being a church member. Hanish

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*Religionsgeschichte: Religionswissenschaft und Moderne* (München: Beck, 1997).

19 Olav Hammer, ed., *Alternative Christs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

20 Stausberg, "Para-Zoroastrianisms: Memetic transmissions and appropriations," 243. Anahita is an assimilation of a Greek goddess into the Zoroastrian pantheon; see Mary Boyce, *Zoroastrians: Their Religious beliefs and practices* (London: Routledge, 2003).

21 Bigalke, *Lebensreform und Esoterik um 1900*, ch. 3.5.; Ulrich Linse, "Lebensreform und Reformreligion," in *Die Lebensreform. Entwürfe zur Neugestaltung von Leben und Kunst um 1900*, Bd. 1, ed. Kai Buchholz et al. (Darmstadt: Haeusser Media, 2001).

22 Ulrich Linse, *Die Mazdaznan-Pädagogik des Bauhaus-Meisters Johannes Itten*; online: [www.bauhaus.de/de/bauhaus-archiv/2129\\_publicationen/2132\\_bauhaus\\_vortraege/](http://www.bauhaus.de/de/bauhaus-archiv/2129_publicationen/2132_bauhaus_vortraege/) (04.02.2019).

and Ammann did not force the Mazdaznan to leave the church. If they were regular Sunday churchgoers at all, they integrated the Mazdaznan diet, the breathing exercises, the weekly meetings of the Mazdaznan society and the annual ‘Gahanbar’, a festive week with ceremonies and intensified spirituality, into their way of life.

### Distinction and Differentiation

The teachings of Mazdaznan were presented as being compatible with modernity, founded on the latest findings of natural science and backed up by age-old religious wisdom as well as newly made revelations received by Hanish.

Mazdaznan presented as compatible with modernity and supporting the creation of the ‘new man’

Narratives of that sort have their roots in US religious history in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Liberal-oriented Christian groups in the 19<sup>th</sup> century had adapted a certain popularised Enlightenment discourse with a specific understanding of empiricism (Baconianism) which was then combined with narratives of modernity. Pursuing a ‘scientific worldview’ and being ‘religious’ at the same time was no contradiction at all in these circles.<sup>23</sup> One possible development within this process of adopting Enlightenment discourse into Christian theology was a movement away from inherited doctrines and an orientation towards modes of knowledge and knowledge itself that were provided by science, personal experience and cultural cosmopolitanism. This line of thought was adopted by the majority of Spiritualist and New Thought groups as well.<sup>24</sup> These cultural and intellectual developments were wrapped up in a growing consumer culture that affected the book market<sup>25</sup>, the healthcare market and other societal spheres.

Influence of Christian Enlightenment narratives

23 Craig James Hazen, *The Village Enlightenment in America. Popular Religion and Science in the Nineteenth Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 10; David Hollinger, *After cloven tongues of fire: Protestant liberalism in modern American history* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), ch. 1.

24 Catherine Albanese, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007); Sally Morita, “Unseen (and Unappreciated) Matters: Understanding the Reformatory Nature of 19<sup>th</sup> -Century Spiritualism,” *American Studies* 40, no. 3 (1999); Janet Oppenheim, *The Other World: Spiritualism and Psychological Research in England 1850–1914* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

25 Matthew Hedstrom, *The rise of liberal religion: book culture and American spirituality in the twentieth century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

**Threefold legitimation  
through tradition,  
revelation, and science**

In the social sphere, the behaviour of the Mazdaznan leader Hanish corresponded to the specifics of the Mazdaznan teaching. The legitimation of his authority was established threefold:

- 1) He claimed to have had revelations and an initiation into a specific tradition of ‘religious wisdom’ by the mythical figure Ainyahita herself.
- 2) Hanish propagated Zoroastrian knowledge, acting as an intermediary for a very old religious tradition.
- 3) He bore the title ‘Dr.’ which marked him as a man of natural science and an officially recognised therapist. The respectability of the medical profession at that time and the symbolic capital it brought with it were important for Hanish’s reputation.



Hanish (1910) in his ceremonial clothing. This style of photographic representation was typical for preachers and missionaries in the USA at that time. Unknown photographer.

The multiple communication strategies Hanish employed to legitimise his authority are in line with the performances of other esoteric leading figures in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and are particularly typical for those that offered therapeutic salvation goods.<sup>26</sup> His performance as both a priest wearing exotic and precious clothing and a medical practitioner displaying scientific medical knowledge requires an explanation. Why was he communicating in multiple symbolic ways to his audience? He did so at a time when the social fields of medicine and religion came to be more exclusive and thereby specialists no longer pursued dual careers.<sup>27</sup>

26 Olav Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge: Strategies of Epistemology from Theosophy to the New Age* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2001).

27 His appearance as priest *and* practitioner may have its roots in Romantic Medicine

Mazdaznan: medicine/  
science and religion  
distinct but comple-  
mentary

The specific lifestyle teachings of Mazdaznan mix naturally scientific and religious semantics and argumentations when addressing normative and anthropological questions. Mazdaznan adherents consciously propagated the compatibility of both spheres of knowledge although knowing that their social environment sharply differentiated the fields of medicine and religion. The epistemic distinction was also presupposed by Mazdaznan adherents but was not interpreted as a potential source of conflict. Mazdaznan's emic concepts of 'religion' and 'science' were construed as complementary and referring reciprocally to one another. Modern science confirming religious wisdom and vice versa. The group acknowledged the distinction on the macro-level but within the organisation itself there was no dichotomy resulting in a structural differentiation since both spheres were seen as complementary.

### Conflict with State Authorities

In the USA as well as in Germany, similar conflicts with state authorities arose out of Mazdaznan's teachings and practices. In the following section, I will explain the German case and examine it within the frame of the reference problem of religious and cultural heterogeneity.<sup>28</sup>

Labelling conflicts:  
religious or ideological  
cultural association?

In Leipzig, Mazdaznan took on the legal form of an association. As both a religious and an ideological cultural association it fell under the (potential) supervision of the Political Police department. Part of the Ministry of the Interior, this department was responsible for the supervision of associations and press publications. Its role was to prevent and repress criminal offences, and to protect the social order. Mazdaznan's representatives reacted to these hegemonic structures by avoiding, most of the time, presenting Mazdaznan as 'religion' so that the association would not be suspected of unauthorised religious activities.

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where 'magnetic' healers were addressed as 'Priesterarzt' when engaging in the healing of psychosomatic ailments of their patients; see also Stephanie Gripenrog, *Anormalität und Religion: zur Entstehung der Psychologie im Kontext der europäischen Religionsgeschichte des 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhunderts* (Würzburg: Ergon, 2016).

28 An in-depth case study of the history of conflict between Mazdaznan and the state authorities of the former Kingdom of Saxony has been carried out by Johannes Graul, *Nonkonforme Religionen im Visier der Polizei: Eine Untersuchung am Beispiel der Mazdaznan-Religion im Deutschen Kaiserreich* (Würzburg: Ergon, 2013). I draw on his rich material in this section of the article.

Allegations by former supporters, rivals and families of followers

Initially, internal communications within the Political Police department classified Mazdaznan as one of the many health-oriented and therapeutic associations that were seen as mostly innocuous. Always short of personnel resources, the police accepted Mazdaznan's self-portrayal as expressed in its publications and public lectures. The tide turned when various allegations, addressed directly to the Political Police, were made by former supporters, rivals and angry family members of followers. The critics came up with pretty much everything that sect stereotypes in Western Europe have to offer: fraud, quackery, cases of death, psychic manipulation, authoritarian religious leadership and homosexuality.<sup>29</sup>

The continuing external pressure resulted in investigations by the police to establish whether Mazdaznan potentially posed a danger to the public. However, the state authorities still grappled with the question of what Mazdaznan actually was. The answer to this question would enable further decisions involving tried and tested policing methods, and ultimately determine which state department could provide further 'professional' information. This search for a clear definition of the 'nature' of the group was mirrored in the daily press. Here, Mazdaznan was labelled alternately as a "philosophy", a "system of education", "lifestyle teaching" and "health teaching".

Saxonian health department: Mazdaznan practices are "alarming" and "harmful to health"

For want of a clear label and a sound rationale for any sanction, the police came up with the idea of checking whether Mazdaznan posed a danger to public safety ('gemeingefährlich') on a mental or physical level. One possible danger was seen in the 'religious exaggeration' of the health teachings, since the religious and thereby normative framing of certain physical techniques might eventually be harmful. An enquiry was first lodged with the Ministry of Culture (competent for religious associations) which deemed itself not responsible. An enquiry was then made with the medical authorities. A hastily written report by the Saxonian health department solely based on the association's main guide books (e. g. *Inner Studies*) classified the proposed strict fasting rules, the regular colon hygiene through enemas, the self-medication in case of sexual diseases and the explicit advice on

29 Otto Rauth, "David Ammanns Ausweisung," *Mazdaznan* 7, no. 6 (1914); for the history of sect stereotypes, see Claudia Wustmann and Katharina Neef, "Störer gesellschaftlicher Ordnung: Über inhaltliche Kontinuitäten in Sektenbeschreibungen," *Religion-Staat-Gesellschaft* 19, no. 1/2 (2011).

how to handle one's sexual intercourse as “alarming” and “harmful to health”. The state and its administrative representatives acted in this process as institutionalised agents with the power to interpret and police what constitutes a ‘proper’ religion and/or what constitutes a ‘reasonable’ and ‘healthy’ lifestyle for its subjects. It sanctioned non-conformist actors on the basis of these authoritative interpretive procedures.

Mazdaznan's promoter, David Ammann, and his family were expelled from Saxony as “cumbersome foreigners” in summer 1914. The police did not plan to destroy the association as a whole but to weaken it. In the end, it was not one specific statutory violation by Ammann or Hanish that led to this sanction but a diversity of suspicious facts plus the persistence of the external allegations. The police acted almost out of weariness in order to re-establish peace and quiet in the social niche of alternative cultures and religions in Saxony.

Expulsion of Mazdaznan  
leaders from Saxony

## Conclusion

The case of Mazdaznan demonstrates how the state authorities were constantly in need of updated knowledge on their subjects in order for them to assign ‘accurate’ labels, which in turn enabled police officers to follow appropriate guiding principles. This updated knowledge could not be supplied by the work of a police department alone, with enquiries being made to specialised authorities (health or religious authorities) in order to rationalise severe policing decisions.

The lack of structural and social differentiation of religion and medicine was not seen as problematic by Mazdaznan, in contrast they actively practised both as complementary. It was even not problematic for the state authorities as long as certain practices were not seen as a potential threat to the mental or physical health of their subjects or citizens. However, when the authorities were forced to enact regulatory measures, they quoted the protection of the differentiation of medicine and religion as their reason for taking action against a non-conformist group. Thus, while the distinction between religion and medicine was never in question, but merely interpreted differently by mainstream society and Mazdaznan adherents, the differentiation between religion and medicine and its enforcement gained importance only in the context of power struggles and claims of validity.

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