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JUDAISM AND MAZDAYASNA: A STUDY IN DISSIMILARITIES

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SINCE the days of Thomas Hyde (1700) much has been written on the comparison of Judaism and Mazdeism. Students of the subject have hitherto taken up what we may call the higher theological development of both religions, and have found some similarities, which may be due to parallel evolution or to diffusion of ideas. No unanimous verdict has been reached by scholars. Our method of approach will not be a study of these intellectual data but of more concrete features. It is based on the following preliminary observations.

In the description of the Persian religion by Herodotus there is not one word said about God or theology, only about ritual and practices which come under observation. This attitude of Herodotus is most common. There were many Copts in Egypt when the 'Arabian Nights' assumed their present form. And yet we find nothing in the 'Nights' about higher Christian theology but many stories on concrete points of religion such as Herodotus noticed in Persia. Again the things that mattered in the controversy between the Judeo-Christians and the converts made by Paul were circumcision, meats offered to idols, blood, things strangled, and fornication. No doctrine is mentioned. So far as I was able to observe, in West Africa the arguments of Moslem missionaries were not an appeal for a deepening of the belief in a God in Heaven, known of all Africans, but discussions about fasting in Ramadhan, abstaining from pork and to some extent from liquor, and using written Moslem talismans instead of, or in addition to, ancient amulets made

by the witch-doctor. From Egypt the Hebrews borrowed, perhaps, circumcision, but certainly not belief in life after death. Nearer to us we have other instances. We do not find that the worship of the Virgin Mary, transubstantiation, Christian soteriology, and the doctrine of orders have had any influence, positive or negative, on Judaism. But now there are organs and choirs in synagogues and temples, and in England rabbis wear the clerical collar. When these influences are not even found, it would be most unlikely that theological contacts exist at all. What do the Poles know about the Jewish religion, or the Jews of the Catholicism of their neighbors in Poland? Only externals, only details, usually misunderstood and exaggerated. These are the things that are always observed and remembered and that usually prevent the influence of one religion upon the other, and often cause the contact between two nations of different religions to make them not more alike but still more different. In our discussion, therefore, we shall take the point of view that for a foreigner the essence of a religion is rather non-essential. What he observes, what he may imitate if he approves of it, are concrete elements, which a theologian working from the inside may consider as secondary. We think that it is a kind of psychological law.

One of the first ideas to be compared in the case studied here is the attitude towards the dog. It is well known that Zoroastrianism nearly became a kunolatry. The look of the dog was well known as a purifying and saving power. A dog's life was worth more than a man's life. In the Bible, on the contrary, the dogs were held in contempt, as they are in all the Semitic East to day. They were rightly looked upon as shameless, treacherous, and filthy. To be called a dog was an insult. It was a title given to the Gentiles and the enemies of Israel, or to male prostitutes.

The praises of the ant found in Proverbs 6 6-8 and 30 24-25 are well known. The ant retained this excellent reputation in Talmudic literature. On the contrary, the killing of ants was a duty for all Mazdeans, and a means of gaining merit. He went 'to the ant' to kill it and never would have called it 'exceeding wise.'

The cock was greatly honored in Mazdeism. In rabbinical Judaism he is called the most impudent of birds, lascivious, quarrelsome and vicious. He is a mischievous dish-breaker, either by his mere crowing or when he flies about the house. Breeding of cocks was forbidden in Jerusalem because they scratch the ground and may spread ritual uncleanness by picking up unclean objects. The demons have cock's feet. This last belief may be of Babylonian origin. Most certainly, as well as the former, it is just the opposite of what a Zoroastrian would have thought.

For the Mazdeans, swine were good animals classed with the camels (Bundahish 14, 6). The Hebrews were far from thinking likewise.

Finally, the sacredness of the bull, which had been so recently overthrown in Israel, should easily have revived if the Israelites had been keenly desirous of imitating the Persians.

Another subject where dissimilarity is evident is that of the ablutions so important in Jewish ritual. The Magi are said to have overthrown a king for having built bath houses, as they cared more for the cleanness of water than for their own. True or not, the story was not unlikely, and that was just the kind of story that would make their religion very uninteresting to Jews. The purifications with *gomez* or ox-urine would be most obnoxious to them as to any one else.

Hebrew temple ritual was as different from Persian ritual as possible, and remained so. "The Persians think it unlawful to build temples or altars," says Herodotus, "imputing folly to those who do so." Burning victims would have been to them the worst form of sacrifice instead of the highest as in Israel. If Persian examples had been followed by the Jews they would have revived the worship on top of the mountains, which had been suppressed not so long before.

The Mazdean custom of incestuous marriage was much criticized by foreigners. It certainly would not have appealed to the Hebrews more than to others.

The Magian custom of exposing dead bodies to birds of prey would have been quite as unattractive to a Jew. No doubt the other Mazdeans did not as yet practice this method

of disposing of corpses, but a Jew who would have liked to know about the real Persian theology would have had to be much with Magians. They would certainly have taught him that the duty of keeping the earth clean from pollution was the first step in the 'good religion.'

We shall now take up some features of religion where we find concrete and therefore essential dissimilarities.

Even the doctrine of God must be approached from this point of view. If a Moslem argues with a Christian on belief in God he does not take up a lofty point of theology but that of *shirk* in the plainest form and says at once, "How can God have a son if he has not a wife?"

In the same way a Jewish monotheist, noticing the lofty teaching of Zoroaster, would have claimed that it was nevertheless inferior to that of Moses and less clear. He would have been repelled by the mention of Ahura's wives, even though these may be explained away as being rivers. If a Jew had had a chance to know the subtleties of Mazdean thought he would have thought that his own belief in the *ruah* of God was far more valuable and strong than the pale connection of Spenta Mainyu with thought.

And after all the Jew would have been right, far more than he could think. The Semite conception of God as the author of evil made of the problem of evil a greater, a nobler, a more tragic thing than the doctrine of Ahriman. Compare the book of Job and its transcendent and triumphant message, and the Mazdean method of solving the problem of evil by taking care of bitches, repeating sacred texts, and killing ants and frogs.

Of course the Hebrew could not accept Persian dualism. He could not if he was a Semite, and his God was above evil. He could not because his God was not like the Iranian deity developed from a nature power. He could not because he took little interest in nature as such, in its possible laws and in its struggles.

Less foreign to his point of view was the dualism of Egypt, set forth in a warm imagery as the conflict between Set and Osiris. That might have appealed to Jews of the Diaspora

and it probably did through the mysteries.¹ We may note here that the belief in Satan's independence of and opposition to God appears clearly first in Wisdom 2 24, that is to say in a book written in Egypt, where Persian influence is not to be thought of, but where Hellenistic influence, including much of the old Egyptian religion, was evidently at work.

The Semitic East is full of spirits good and bad, the *jinn*. They are not and were not, like the Yazatas, mere personifications, but real living beings, mixing with men and women, and when they had names, these were in Israel good Semitic names, as they should be in a Semitic world. Persian names are not found among them. Every man has a double. The Hebrews could have learned that centuries ago in Egypt. There was no need for them to hear of *fravashis*.

If the Hebrew doctrine of the Resurrection had been derived from Persia the Cinvat bridge would have come into prominence as the central feature of it. We may easily explain the doctrine of resurrection as a purely Jewish development. If we must find foreign influence, Egypt was nearer than Persia and more friendly.

There was no single line of development of Jewish Eschatology during the last centuries before Christ. The differences between these various systems evolved in Judaism and that of Mazdeism have been set forth by Charles, Söderblom and others. From our point of view, similarity in the doctrine of hell would be more likely than in the doctrine of heaven. We shall, therefore, note here the striking difference between the Jewish and the Avestan hell. The latter is a place of cold, stench, and poison. The former is the place of fire, the most sacred symbol of the Zoroastrian God. Had a Zoroastrian influence been at work on Judaism it would have unified Jewish eschatology in a direction sympathetic to Mazdean principles. The result would have been a similarity approaching to that of 'Tophet and Eden' of Immanuel ben Solomon Romi with Dante.

¹ L. Corfaux, *Influence des mystères sur le Judaïsme alexandrin avant Philon*. *Museon* 34, 29-88.

It is true that Zoroaster had apocalyptic tendencies, but these are also found in Ezekiel, who certainly found their roots in the old religion of Israel, and not in a Zoroastrianism unknown then in Babylonia.

Moreover we want to emphasize the point that Jewish theologians did not generally accept the apocalyptic views found in the apocrypha. Apocalypticism remained very much on the margin of the main current of Jewish thought. Most important therefore is the fact that even in that margin Mazdean influence cannot be certainly proved.

Judaism as soon as we observe it as a clearly developing form of religion is a book religion. Not so Zoroastrianism. It is well known that the destruction of Persepolis by Alexander dealt to that religion a most severe blow. There was left not a single complete copy of Zoroaster's work. In contrast with Judaism, we may call Mazdeism an archive religion. The similarity found here by some with Judaism turns out to be a dissimilarity.

Our next point is that there was no reason why the Jews should have had any friendly feeling towards Mazdeism. It is true that Cyrus had been their friend and they should have been grateful to him, but it is by no means certain that Cyrus was a Zoroastrian. If Darius was the first Persian ruler to follow the reformed faith of Zoroaster he was also a firm ruler, who probably nipped in the bud Jewish national hopes by doing away with Zerubbabel. The prophecy of Zechariah shows that Israel was at the beginning of the rule of Darius expecting a wonderful apocalyptic manifestation of God, destroying the power of Persia and establishing a Messianic rule. This hope was disappointed. Under the successors of Darius heavy taxes had to be paid, and the little good done by Cyrus was so completely forgotten that the Jews hailed Alexander as a deliverer.

Again, one does not very well see at what period of Jewish history the influence could have been felt. Not under Persian rule, we think, when religion was closely connected with the state and when, moreover, the attitude of the King of Kings was tolerant towards other religions. The Achemenians knew

and said clearly that Ahura was the god of the 'Aryan Aryans', thus qualifying his universality and lessening the appeal he could make to other races. Darius did not reject the other gods, the *baga*, they were beneficent to him. A fragmentary copy of the Babylonian version of the Behistun inscription used in Babylonia apparently does not even mention Ahura-Mazda. Thus were the Achemenians so tolerant that they can scarcely have been witnesses to the Zoroastrian faith. The attitude of respect for the God of Israel which they assumed—or which their Aramean secretaries well trained in diplomacy assumed for them—would probably strengthen much the Jewish faith in the God of Israel who had rescued them from Babylon's yoke. It would be understood as lack of real faith in Ahura-Mazda. As for the Jews of Babylonia they must certainly have known that the Achemenians respected Marduk as if he were a real god. In the time of Artaxerxes Mnemon the official protection extended to the triad Ahura, Mithra, Anahita would be severely judged by a monotheist Jew, for behind Mithra were Shamash and Marduk, and behind Anahita was the goddess Ishtar, now forever connected with shame in her name Ashtoreth. Under the empire of Alexander and of the Seleucids Mazdeism was discouraged and uninterested in a world mission. Where it was growing at all, as in Armenia and in Commagene, it was in a polytheistic and debased form.

The very fact that the Mazdeans let the lofty teaching of Zoroaster in the Gathas be smothered by Magian beliefs and practices shows that they had not understood it well and so could not transmit it to others, even if they had cared to do so, and if there had been a point of contact. The Gathas were in a dead language and hidden away. If a Jew had had access to them, could he have been more of a Zoroastrian than the adepts of the prophet of Iran? Would he have been enough of a critic to know more than his masters, the Magians? To ask the question is to answer it.

We may also note here that the assimilation between Zoroaster and Nimrod, found in so many Syriac sources, goes back almost certainly to a Jewish view, which would stamp the prophet of Iran as an alien of the worst kind and an antagonist

of Abraham. Other traditions identifying him with Balaam or Baruch, Jeremiah's secretary, or even making him a disciple of Elijah, were they known among Jews, would leave Zoroaster either an enemy of the living God or a plagiarist. In either case, it would discourage investigation.

Finally we think that a 'borrowing' hypothesis is always *a priori* a doubtful one. Israel had a real religious genius. In Persian and Seleucid times, an Israelite had a right to be proud of his discovery of God. We cannot imagine that Israel could busy itself with copying from nations which were scarcely up to its level. Religious leaders of Israel had discovered by themselves the doctrine of individual responsibility. They gave it such a form that it is greater than any doctrine ever taught in Persia. After all, the world follows Israel and not the Parsis.

L. R. Farnell says excellently, "The hypothesis of borrowing, which is always legitimate where the peoples with whom we are concerned are adjacent, is only raised to proof either when the linguistic evidence is clear, for instance when the divine names or the names of cult-objects are the same in the various districts, or when the points of resemblance in ritual or religious concept are numerous, striking, and fundamental, or peculiar to the communities of a certain era."² No such adequate proofs have been brought forward by advocates of Mazdean influence on Judaism. Indeed, no proofs at all can be brought in the field of lower and concrete religious forms.

After his thorough study of Armenian Zoroastrianism, M. H. Ananikian comes to the conclusion that even in Armenia, where there was much influencing by Mazdeism of concrete aspects of religion, the higher aspect of Zoroastrianism has left no trace.³ This makes us still more sceptical of the claims of influence of Mazdayasna on Jewish theology. We should certainly want the clearest kind of evidence for theological influence when we can discover none in the concrete forms of religion where it should come first.

² *Greece and Babylon*, p. 37.

³ *ERE* I, 802.