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REITZENSTEIN AND QUMRÂN REVISITED BY AN IRANIAN

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THE following remarks are intended to be merely general indications of overall problems which nonetheless, I believe, are necessary before one investigates specific words or concepts which may be borrowed by one culture from another.

The controversies over the Iranian mystery religions, Iranian gnosis, and the Iranian origin of most dualisms in the ancient world, had died down by World War II. But the discovery of the Dead Sea scrolls, as well as other new materials, has raised again the spectre of substantial Iranian influences on Israel and Greece.¹ It might be useful to recall briefly certain historical backgrounds which may help to clarify the general problem of Iranian influences on the religious thought of her neighbors.

The earliest time of influences would be the Achaemenid empire from Cyrus to Alexander. In Iran of the Achaemenid period we have primarily three elements of importance for the religious situation: the old 'Aryan' rites and beliefs, ancient Near Eastern influences, and the reforms of Zoroaster. Strictly speaking Iranian influences on other religions would mean such influences which can be traced back to Zoroaster or to the later synthesis of all three primary elements which synthesis we call later Zoroastrianism. For example, 'the soul of the cow' or 'the voice of the cow (Humbach)' *guš urvan* would be a special motif which probably could be traced back to the prophet Zoroaster, while consanguineous marriages in Iran, whatever their origin, would be a special characteristic of later Zoroastrianism. Our sources are few: the Avesta and the Pahlavi religious books mostly

¹ I use the term 'Iran' in an historical context, to mean the vast area where Iranian languages and Iranian culture were dominant. 'Persia' would be used for the modern state, more or less equivalent to 'western Iran.' I use the term 'greater Iran' to mean what I suspect most Classicists and ancient historians really mean by their use of Persia—that which was within the political boundaries of states ruled by Iranians, including Mesopotamia and usually Armenia and Transcaucasia. One must be careful, of course, in using political conceptions in the history of religions.

from the ninth century A.D., with scanty Classical, Armenian or Syriac sources, plus several inscriptions. The sources frequently do not tell us what we would like to know, and at times they have been misused, or they have been interpreted only from one point of view.

At the outset three general propositions about the sources may be set down; first, when Classical and Hebrew scholars speak of Iranian influences what they often mean are simply non-Judeo-Hellenistic features and nothing which really can be identified as peculiarly Iranian. Or if they do narrow their conceptions to distinguish between the non-Judeo-Hellenistic influences on Greek or Judaic thought, then when they speak of Iran they are really referring to Manichaeism or Mandaism. Needless to say the invoking of the last two to prove Iranian influences on Greece or Israel is dangerous. Second, the Avesta is similar to the Rigveda (or the Psalms) and philosophical or theological ideas can be derived from it (either from the Gathas or the Young Avesta) as easily as say philosophical principles of Philo can be derived from the Psalms (or Genesis). In other words, the basic Iranian sources for deriving influences are the ninth century A.D. Pahlavi books, the syncretic nature of which can easily be imagined. Third, and finally, I believe one may say in a general manner that Iran : Babylonia = Rome : Greece. It is quite understandable why ancient historians should view their history as the opposition of East and West with the Romans taking over from the Greeks after the first century B.C., while their enemies the Iranians remained constant, from the Achaemenids through the Parthians and the Sasanians. One might well compare the relation of Roman philosophy with Greek philosophy to a presumed relation between Iranian and Mesopotamian thought. The parallel, of course, is a mere indication, no more, since we have so few sources in the East. One may note that the world capital moved from Athens to Rome in the West but only from Babylon to Ctesiphon in the East. The most important provinces of the Sasanian empire were in Mesopotamia where the largest cities were located and contacts with Syria and Palestine were close. We must return, however, to borrowings and try to analyze the problem systematically before continuing with the general posi-

tions of Reitzenstein and with the protagonists of Iranian influences in Qumrân.

In general, all-inclusive, phenomenological or other typological comparisons will be avoided. For example, one might draw a parallel between a threefold division of the contents of the Avesta and of the Old Testament, where in the former the Pahlavi *gāsānīk* (Avestan *gāthā*) spiritual knowledge or ethics, might correspond to the 'Prophets' of the Old Testament, the *dātīk* (*dāta-*) or law literature would correspond to the Torah, and the *hātak-mānsrīk* (*haḍa-māθra*) or additions to the basic teachings, such as history, myths, etc. would correspond to the 'Scriptures' of the Old Testament.² But when we compare Buddhist writings, or the religious literature of the Sikhs, or the writings of many other religions, we may come to a conclusion little more significant than the observation that most religious writings may be so divided, or that most human societies in antiquity could be divided into three classes of priests, warriors and common folk. Interesting and important though such general observations may be, we shall not be concerned with them here. Before turning, albeit briefly, to more tangible matters of borrowings, let us reconsider the historical circumstances of possible borrowings.

We know from the tolerant religious policies of Cyrus, Cambyses and Darius that the Persians were *parvenus*, little removed from a semi-nomadic 'Aryan' society, and with a high regard for the ancient cultures of the Near East. They were also great imitators, as we learn from Herodotus and can see from their art, state bureaucracy, and the like. These were either direct continuations of the past or syntheses of various other cultures. One would expect cultural influences, on the whole, to move into Iran from the West rather than the reverse under the Achaemenids. At the same time the world empire of the Achaemenids must have exerted an influence over the subject peoples. Religious influences, however, are difficult to determine. One would expect that the great period for the borrowing of ideas from Iran by Greece would be the Seleucid period, since after the Parthian conquest of Iran and Mesopotamia, eastern Iranian culture,

² Cf. H. S. Nyberg, 'Sassanid Mazdaism according to Moslem Sources,' *Journal of the K.R. Cama Oriental Institute* 39 (1958), 32.

which was primarily feudal, and one might say 'chivalric,' dominated the scene (in Iran). One may trace Greek knowledge of the eastern Iranian oral epic literature to this period or possibly even before, such as the tale of Zariadres and Odisis told by Chares of Mytilene.³ But the *early* Seleucid period is characterized by the separation of Greek and Iranian, the citizen of a *polis* and the member of a *politeuma*, by the double bureaucracy in Greek and Aramaic, and by Greek and native religions in their proper places and not mixed. In *late* Seleucid times, however, when the cult of the divinized ruler, syncretism, gnosticism, etc., came to the fore, the semi-nomadic Parthians were ruling in Iran and the Seleucids were limited to Syria. Provincial Iranian culture, with local cults and practices, was hardly passed on to the West by the Parthians.⁴ The existence of small principalities in Asia Minor, Transcaucasia and elsewhere with strong Iranian influences among the ruling upper classes is known, and they were a legacy from the Achaemenids. Antiochus of Commagene is a good example of Iranian influences in the West (as seen from Iran). In other words, most influences from Iran on Greece should be either late Achaemenid survivals or much later influences from the time of the Roman empire and the late Parthian-Sasanian period.

In discussing Achaemenid influences on the Greeks, scholars, primarily Reitzenstein, have argued that the concept of the 'primeval man,' the *Urmensch* and the dualism of good or light and evil or darkness were Iranian ideas borrowed by the Greeks. The touchstone for determining Iranian influences was whether Greek sources provided us with answers to problems, which answers further fitted into the Greek milieu or the Greek scheme of things. If Greek sources failed to provide clues then Iranian influences could be expected. Fortunately the Iranian origin of the Greek text of the early fourth century B.C. *Περὶ Ἑβδομάδων*, as argued in the famous article of A. Götze, which was a pillar of

³ Cf. M. Boyce, 'Zariadres and Zārēr,' BSOAS 17 (1955), 463 ff.

⁴ When Geo Widengren in his 'Der iranische Hintergrund der Gnosis' in *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte* 4 (1952), 18 (Sonderdruck) says, "der iranische Hintergrund der Gnosis sich in vielen Fällen eben als ein parthischer erwiesen hat," I cannot follow him. There is no evidence that the Parthian horsemen brought new philosophical or religious ideas from eastern Iran and spread them in the West.

Reitzenstein's Iranian *Erlösungsmysterium*, has been refuted and we do not need to concern ourselves with it.⁵ Further the Zoroastrian origin of Plato's dualism is most unlikely since any ethical dualism in Plato should be based on his metaphysical dualism, and an Ahriman has no place in Plato's thought. In my opinion it is now convincingly established that Classical opinions of the Iranian origin of Platonic, or for that matter other Greek, philosophy are based on a later Hellenistic construction, perhaps all to be traced to Aristoxenos, who made Pythagoras a student of Zoroaster.⁶ We must never forget that, surmises aside, there is no evidence for schools of philosophy, or even a fixed Zoroastrian orthodoxy with scholasticism in Iran before the late Parthian-Sasanian period. One cannot profitably compare Plato and Zoroaster, and dualism does not help us.

To turn to the *Urmensch*, an Iranian origin is possible, especially if scholars cannot find origins or reasons for the appearance of related concepts in their Greek texts. But the *Urmensch* in Iran is first found in myth and story which brings us to a literary domain, to the realm of epic and comparative folklore. If we find similar stories among various Indo-European peoples from the earliest times of their literatures we had best assume a common origin unless certain proper names, motifs, or odd details can be traced in origin to one people. For example, the story of Gayomard, the Iranian primeval man, or the first king, from whose body at death came seven metals, can be compared with the third book of Plato's Republic, where the worth of men is described in the allegory of gold, silver, etc. Further Hesiod *Works and Days* (126 ff.) and perhaps even the Eddas (Völuspa, 17 ff.) might be called as witnesses. The matter becomes further complicated, however, when the book of Daniel (Ch. 2) with the

⁵ See the summary, with references, in J. Duchesne-Guillemin, *The Western Response to Zoroaster* (Oxford, 1958), 72-78. It is interesting to recall that Reitzenstein was in Göttingen with F. C. Andreas when the Iranian Turfan texts were being deciphered. At the time there was uncertainty about many fragments, whether they were Zoroastrian, Christian, Manichaean, Buddhist or other in content. If he had had our greater knowledge of Manichaeism of today, Reitzenstein might have proposed different theories, and might not have characterized Manichaeism as basically an Iranian religion.

⁶ Cf. J. Kerschesteiner, *Platon und der Orient* (Stuttgart, 1945), 211, contra W. Jaeger, *Aristoteles* (Berlin, 1923), 133 ff.

dream of Nebuchadnezzar is remembered. (The relation of the myth of the tree with that of the metals is unclear.) It would seem that we have here very ancient common myths, which have developed in different directions, but which probably also have had mutual contacts in historical times, such that any attempt to disentangle the threads of various origins and later influences is well-nigh impossible. The main point for us is that a borrowing by Greece from Iran, as evidenced in dualism or the theory of the *Urmensch*, cannot be shown for the Achaemenid period or, if you will, for Plato and his contemporaries. The next point follows, that if one postulates a Greek borrowing of ideas from Iran it probably should be dated in the *later* Hellenistic age when Greeks had contacts with Iran primarily through the 'Hellenized Magians' of Asia Minor as Cumont and Bidez call them. In other words an early, direct borrowing of important religious ideas by the Greeks from Zoroastrianism is unlikely. A late, indirect borrowing of religious concepts might be possible and this should be a fruitful field for interested scholars. But even here we are not on firm ground. In the vast unknown of the area east of Palestine much is possible but our sources do not exist and we have no evidence for any theory. Let us instead turn to Qumrân.

It would be difficult, if not impossible, to prove an influence of Greek philosophy on the development of orthodox Judaism, even though the avenue for such influences might be indicated in Philo and his contemporaries. To show Iranian influences would be even more difficult. If we turn from orthodox Judaism to other groups represented in literature by the Apocryphal books and even Cabbalistic works such as the Zohar, Iranian influences might be more easily inferred.⁷ An example of a direct, tangible influence from texts is the demon Asmodeus, where an Iranian etymology for the name is the most satisfying explanation. On the other hand, none of the stories about this demon can be traced to either an Iranian prototype or even compared with an Iranian parallel.⁸ The Iranian names in the book of Esther, or Iranian words in the Talmud only show us that Jews were living

⁷ There is no Iranian influence in the Midrash except a few stereotyped formulae, according to H. Torczyner, 'The Foreign Words in Our Language,' *Our Language* (*Lšwnnw* in Hebrew) 8 (Jerusalem, 1937), 99-109.

⁸ L. Ginsberg, *The Legends of the Jews* 3 (Philadelphia, 1913), 165 ff.

under Achaemenid, Parthian or Sasanian rule, which we already knew. In short, little can be gained from this avenue of approach.

It is interesting to glance in retrospect at the various scholarly fashions or controversies since 1900 on Iranian influences on Israel or Greece. Just before the turn of the century the distinguished French Iranist James Darmesteter startled those concerned with religious problems by his assertion that the Gathas were an early monument of Gnosticism and that Philo was the source of such ideas in the Gathas.⁹ His untenable beliefs brought forth a number of works on Iranian-Jewish relations, but the result of the controversy was the conviction that contacts surely existed though borrowings of concepts or ideas could not be established.¹⁰

The second movement was the Iranian *Erlösungsmysterium* of Richard Reitzenstein which provoked opposition as well as support in the period between the wars. The result of these controversies was the realization that many religious concepts, including features of Gnosticism, were widespread in the syncretic later Hellenistic period, such that it would be well nigh impossible to find one religion as the origin. The widespread idea of god as light might be a case in point. This does not mean that certain details or motifs could not be traced; for example, the Iranian background of the 'Hymn of the Soul' in Syriac, is proved by the setting of the story as well as by Iranian words in the Syriac text.¹¹ What we need, however, is evidence for an autochthonous, flourishing Iranian 'saviour-mystery religion' from which influences radiated to Palestine and Greece. Such evidence has not been forthcoming.

Finally, after World War II the finding of the Dead Sea Scrolls coincided with the discovery in Iran by scholars of an aberrant Zoroastrianism called Zurvanism. The Essenes and the 'Zurvanites' were associated with each other because both groups, it would seem, believed in 'Destiny' or 'Fate,' a pessimistic philoso-

⁹ Cf. the introduction p. xci and xcvi to vol. 3 of his translation *Le Zend Avesta* (Paris, 1893).

¹⁰ Cf. the works of E. Stave, *Über den Einfluss des Parsismus auf das Judentum* (Haarlem, 1898), E. Böklen, *Die Verwandtschaft der jüdisch-christlichen mit der parsischen Eschatologie* (Göttingen, 1902) and others.

¹¹ Cf. G. Widengren (note 4) for a summary, plus I. Gershevitch, 'A Parthian Title in the Hymn of the Soul,' *JRAS* (1954), 124-126.

phy, and they both believed in the dualism of good or light and evil or darkness under this inexorable fate. Presumably we can assert that the Essenes existed, but a separate religion of Zurvanism with organized followers is unattested and, in my opinion, consequently a myth. On the other hand, it would be difficult to deny the existence in the first century B.C. in the Hellenistic world of ideas of pessimism, fate, predestination, dualism, a last judgment, and the like. One needs, however, precise textual analogies, as, for example, 'the children of light and the children of darkness,' which, to my knowledge, is not attested in any Iranian source. It seems that such clear, unequivocal references will not be found, but rather speculation will be rife. Iranian words in the Dead Sea Scrolls would not be extraordinary and they would prove nothing about religious influences. It is true that many beliefs of the 'heretical' sect of the Essenes do apparently resemble certain features of the 'heretical' Zoroastrian movement of the 'Zurvanites,' but perhaps many of these common beliefs are what one might expect in the late Hellenistic age such as time speculation and the power of evil. May not the unorthodox Jewish beliefs of the Essenes be traceable to the soil of Palestine, to the Judaism of that period with the apocryphal books, and above all to the *Zeitgeist*? I suspect that if we had sources from Babylonia and Iran they would show a similar, mixed, syncretic Hellenism such as we find in the western Hellenistic world. But we do not have adequate sources, and scholars grasp at every fragment to construct a system, in itself an enterprise fraught with many dangers. Perhaps it would be wiser to forego a well-wrought system with influences and borrowings until we have some Dead Sea Scrolls from east of the Syrian desert.