

# REJECTION OF ALIEN INFLUENCE ON ZOROASTER

Dr. Kersey Antia, Jul 7, 2020

What G. Gnoli notes at length in the foot-note 4 for rejecting Jewish and Assyrian or Mesopotamian influence on Zoroastrianism deserves to be quoted in full: “There is no point in thinking, as Pettazzoni did (see above, 183), of an hypothetical Jewish influence, through the communities that the Assyrians deported to the “cities of the Medes”, in order to explain the origins of Zoroastrianism. There is no intrinsic reason in the Iranian tradition and no real evidence that can make us incline towards such an hypothesis, which is also contradicted by the absolute chronology that is proposed here for Zoroaster. The influence of Israel on Iran as an explanation for the origins of Zoroastrianism was an hypothesis that Levi Della Vida had already rejected (“Rivista di Cultura” III, 1921, 177-179 [review of Pettazzoni, *Religione*]: Id., *Les Semites et leur role dans l'histoire religieuse*, cit., 118 note 47, ef. 113 note 22). Levi Della Vida suggested an influence of Mesopotamian and Syrian dualistic conceptions and motives on Zoroaster's thought – the primordial opposition of light and darkness, of order and chaos, the ultimate triumph of the principle of good. This tendency to see precedents for Iranian dualism in a hitherto insufficiently stressed Mesopotamian dualism was also apparent in G. Furlani, *Miti babilonesi e asiri*, Firenze 1958, 24. It is worth going into more thoroughly in my opinion, though not so much in order to explain the origin of Gathic dualism as to understand the development of Iranian dualism, in particular the growing acceptance amongst the Magi of a dualistic formula that, unlike the Gathic one, placed Ohrmazd himself in symmetric opposition to Ahriman. As had been said above (see, 210 sqq.), in this new formulation of Iranian dualism is to be discerned the spreading of Zurvanite tendencies, permeated by an astral religiosity, in which Mesopotamian influence cannot be denied (cf. Gnoli, *Achemenidi*, 43 sqq.). (*Zoroaster's Time and Homeland*, Naples, 1980, p. 229). However, it should be noted that Gnoli does not rule out Zurvanite or other influences on later Zoroastrian beliefs which is in line with what is noted in this text.

What G. Gnoli observes about these Gathic dualism denotes its significance: “He (Zoroaster) condemned the religion of the *daivas*, the fruit of ignorance and illusion, and he proclaimed a doctrine that was monotheistic and dualistic at the same time; a highly ethical doctrine, being based on man's free choice, of which the prototype is the choice made by the twin, antithetic Spirits, and a markedly mystico-

philosophical doctrine, because it had its roots in a psychic and mental experience which, notwithstanding its striking originality, was related to the Indo-Iranian conceptions of inner vision. Its final aim was the gaining of “knowledge” by the exercising forces that are aspects of the supreme God and virtues of the man who sets out upon the path of the Good Thought. The system of entities that form the retinue of the Wise Lord is an organic group of relations and interrelations that link the world of God to the world of man, and the physical and material world to the mental and spiritual one. The man who follows truth and justice is the symbol of the Good Spirit.” (*Zoroaster's Time and Homeland*, Naples, 1980, p. 228).

Gherardo Gnoli observes: “An attentive examination of the birth of this new dualism must lead to the conclusion that it is a phenomenon of enormous importance in the history of Mazdeism because, far from leaving Zoroastrian teaching substantially the same with regard to its moral value and the dignity and freedom of man (as Gershevitch thinks), these being its most important characteristics, it is an almost complete reversal of it, on account of its considerable implications. Whereas Gathic dualism gives the central and most important place to Ahura Mazda, and therefore to man who is his bodily “symbol” on earth and opposes the two Spirits as a result of their free choice, the new dualism of the magi demotes Ahura Mazda to the same rank as Anghra Mainyu and gives the most important place to Time – Destiny. Whereas the former exalts the role and the significance of the one God and the moral choice made by man, the latter inevitably ends up by abasing that role and the significance of God the creator, subjecting man to the omnipotence of Time from which the human soul cannot escape ....”

In a footnote, G. Gnoli adds: “I am convinced, as Gershevitch amongst others maintains (*op. cit.*, 13), that the basis of the reality of the two Spirits is their “choice”, and this is a widely accepted interpretation. See, for Instance: Windfuhr, *op. cit.*, 271; Eliade, *Histoire*, I, 324. I do not agree with U. Bianchi who has recently taken up the subject Spirits in Y.XXX.5 as a “declaration de leur nature respective”, (in, *Selected Essays on Gnosticism, Dualism, and Mysteriesophy* (Supplements to 'Numen', XXXVIII), Leiden 1973 [361-389], 362 sq. and cf. 376). If it is true that the two Spirits exist (in consequence of) their choice, which, as Gershevitch rightly says, “is the prototype of the choice which faces each man as he decides between following the path of Truth or that of Falsehood”, it is just as true that their natures (Bianchis) derive from the choice that they have made and not vice-versa. And I do not think that this remarks on the “twins” in Y.XXX.3 and on Spanta Mainyu as the son of Ahura Mazda in Y.XLVII.3, nor those made by Boyce in this connection (*History*, 193 sq.), succeed in demolishing the reasons given by Gershevitch. See also

Widengren, *Religionen, (Zoroaster's Time and Homeland*, Naples, 1980, p. 213).

However, if there is such wide variance between the Gathic and the Sasanian dualism and if as shown by Shaked and others there were many different forms of dualism in existence prior to the ninth century A.D., (and as I for one do not know of any dualism of the Sasanian period that matches the one of the ninth century and beyond), the most important consideration needs to be given to the fact that the latter was devised specially as an effort to counter the absolute monotheism of the zealot conquerors of the country, a circumstance never witnessed previously and therefore it does not even have the justification and bonafides for being treated as a standard dualism ideology as is sadly almost universally done. Indeed there could have been no need to promote or even deal excessively with dualism in the ninth century had there been no conquest of Iran by a people furiously inspired by absolute monotheism and earnestly and counting on it to convert the people they conquered. One can therefore rightly conclude no Arab conquest, no need for post-Sasanian dualism. Above all, as Gershevitch and Gnoli conceive this dualism as an almost complete reversal of the fundamental Zoroastrian teaching of moral value and freedom of man, it will be hard to actually demonstrate that this indeed occurred in history as there is little evidence of it happening up to our own times. As I have shown even these dualistic texts do not overrun the Gathic teachings but rather often emphasize them and several European travellers have testified to it, as I have documented elsewhere.