

# SPREAD OF DUALISTIC BELIEFS AMONG THE BOGOMILS OF EASTERN EUROPE

Dr. Kersey Antia, Aug 11, 2019; updated Sep 29, 2019

In my 1956 essay on “Influence of Zoroastrianism on Other Religions”, I have referred to its influence on Mithraism, Manichaeism and Bogomils (it is now on Avesta.org); however, the recent research such as the one undertaken and edited by John Hinnells (*Mithraic Studies*, 2 Volumes, Manchester, 1975 and *Studies in Mithraism*, Rome, 1994) have led to a revision of the older views about Mithraism. What Plutarch recounts about Zoroastrian dualism in his *De Iside et Osiride*, Chapter 16, (circa 70 A.D.) is highly debatable and does not reflect the Zoroastrian tradition and ethics. However, about the role Plutarch describes of Mithra as a mediator between Ohrmazd and Ahreman, Yuri Stoyanov notes that it has been interpreted as representing a developed form of Zurvanism or a mid-point between “Catholic Zoroastrianism” and the Roman Mysteries of Mithra and yet it remains as “one of the most notorious unsolved conundrums of the religious history of antiquity.” (*The Other God*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2000). Stoyanov provides an interesting array of references for showing Zoroastrian influences on the Greek thought on pp. 317-8) which is useful for further research in this area: “The possibility of Zoroastrian influences on Orphism and Pythagoreanism is discussed, for example, by Duchesne-Guillemin in his *Ormazd et Ahriman*, p. 87. Zoroastrian impact on Orphic cosmogony and teaching of salvation is suggested by Boyce (see above, n. 96).

The parallels between Zoroastrian traditions and the concepts of Heraclitus, along with a survey of the earlier studies and approaches to the problem, have been examined at great length in M.L. West, *Early Greek Philosophy and the Orient* (Oxford, 1971), pp. 165-102. In Chap. 7, “The Gift of the Magi”, pp. 203-42, West offers a strong argument for active Iranian influence on the development of Greek thought in the period 550-480 BC. For earlier endorsements of similar views, see, for example, R. Eisler, *Weltenmantel and Himmelszelt* (Munich, 1910), and for criticism, see J. Kerschenssteiner *Platon und der Orient* (Stuttgart, 1945). Iranian influences on early Ionian philosophical and religious movements are discussed, also in Boyce, *A History of Zoroastrianism*, vol. 2, pp. 153-63. The parallels between the concepts of Empedocles and Zoroastrian thought are examined for example, in Bidez and Cumont, *Les Mages hellénisés*, vol. 1, pp. 238 ff, with the suggestion that they reflected Empedocles’ Pythagorean affinities. Cf. (Compare) Duchesne-Guillemin, *Religion of Ancient Iran*, p. 152; Kingsley,

*Ancient Philosophy*, pp. 226-7; "Meetings with Magi; Iranian Themes among the Greeks, from Xanthus of Lydia to Plato's Academy", *JRAS* (Journal of Royal Asiatic Society), Series 3, 5, 2, 1995, pp. 173-210. For Plato's contacts with the Iranian world, see now A.D.H. Bivar, "Plato and Iran" in *The Personalities of Mithra in Archaeology and Literature* (New York, 1998), pp. 67-89; on Plato's dualism of, for example Petrement, *Le dualisme chez Platon*, Chaps 1-3; Fontaine, *The Light and the Dark*, vol. 3, 1988, pp. 167-82.

Mithraism swept the Roman world in the first 400 years of the Christian era and became the favorite cult or faith of the Roman soldiers as well as of many Roman emperors which prompted E. Renan to comment: "If Christianity had been halted in its growth by some mortal illness, the world would have become Mithraic." Nevertheless, even Stoyanov finds it hard to establish even the outline of its doctrines and mythology except in broad dualistic outlines. However, he explains in great detail how the originally Iranian tribes such as Alans, Sarmatians, Cimmerians, and Scythians from Central Asia and Sogdiana settled in the Black Sea region which "was probably influenced by Zoroastrian tradition possibly comprising a pantheon of seven gods including fire worship," (p. 67). Since I have dealt with this influence at length in "The Argument for Acceptance in Zoroastrianism," pp. 89-107, *Create Space*, 2015, I need not dilate on it here. Stoyanov also states that these Iranian tribes ultimately settled in Bulgaria and came to be known as the Bogomils and were influenced by Manichaenism and its dualism. Stoyanov posits: "The Bogomil trinity of God the Father and his older and younger son, Satanel and Jesus Christ, closely approaches the analogous Zurvanite trinity of Zurvan, Ahremen and Ohrmazd to the extent that, despite the lack of strong historical evidence, no less authorities on religious history than R. Zaehner and M. Eliade have argued that it was derived from Iranian tradition. More controversially, it has been suggested that early Bogomilism might have been affected by Balkan residues of Mithraism, although late references to "Mithraism" seem to allude generally to paganism" (p. 163). The priest Bogomil is regarded as the founder of Bogomilism. The Slavonic word Bog is actually the Iranian word Baga, (Sanskrit Bhaga from which Bhagavan is derived) meaning God. Stoyanov thus translates the name Bogomil as "Beloved of God," "one who entreats God (or God's grace)" or "worthy of God's mercy" (p. 164). I have elsewhere shown in detail that the recent scholarly opinion seems to locate Zurvanism within Zoroastrianism itself and not as a heresy as was often held in the past.

Stoyanov provides evidence for showing the ancient Iranian origin of Slavs, Serbes, Croats and even some Polish people on page 370 which is very impressive as well as enlightening: The background to the Serbs' and the Croats' arrival in the Balkans, their Iranian origins and

Slavicization, can be found in J.V.A. Fine, Jr. *The Early Medieval Balkans: A Critical Survey from the Sixth to the Late Twelfth Century* (Ann Arbor, 1983), pp. 49-59. On the Sarmatian origins of the Serbs and Croats see also R. Browing, *Byzantium and Bulgaria* (London, 1975), p. 44; Sulimirski, *The Sarmatians*, pp. 188-94; "Sarmatians in the Polish Past", *Polish Review*, I:I, 1964, pp. 47-51; F. Dvornik, *The Slavs: Their Early History and Civilization*, Boston, 1956), pp. 26-7. For recent politicized interpretations of the Croats' Iranian origins, see for example, S. Sakac, "The Iranian Origins of the Croats according to C. Porphyrogenitus", in A. Bonifaviv and C.S. Mihanovich. *The Croatian Nation in its Struggle for Freedom and Independence* (Chicago, 1955); and some of the contributions in *Etnogeneza Hrvata, Ethnogenesis of the Croats*, ed. N. Budak (Zagreb, 1996). The extensive Iranian influences on the Slavs and Slavonic religion are treated more generally in Dvornik. *The Slavs*, pp. 47 ff; M. Gimbutas, *The Slavs* (London, 1971), pp. 151-70; I. Dujcev, "Il mondo slavo e la Persia nell'alto medioevo" in *Medioci bizantino-slavo*, 3 vols. (Rome, 1965-71; vol. 2, pp. 321-424; R. Jacobson "Slavic Mythology" in M. Leach and P. Freund (eds), *Funk and Wagnalls Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend* (New York, 1949, vol. 2, p. 1025 ff.

After the Ottomans conquered the Byzantine Empire and spread their rule in Eastern Europe, the Balkan Bogomils slowly withered away, though some journalists in the nineteenth century reported the existence of Bogomil colonies in Bosnia. The Islamization of Bosnia, however led to the end of Bogomilism. What remains are dualist imprints on Slavonic folklore, dualist legends and myths preserved in the polemical records of their adversaries and some fragments of their inner teachings.

What Stoyanov notes in his concluding remarks is quite relevant for Zoroastrian dualism: "Certainly, medieval Bogomil and Cathar adepts did not see themselves as "dualists" (to reiterate, the term was first introduced by Hyde in 1700), although it is conceivable that the followers of the Cathar theologian John of Lugio, apart from seeing themselves as essentially Christian, may have been able to define themselves as believers in the existence of "two principles". The use of the term "dualism" is, then, a theological and scholarly convention for discussing certain religious ideas, ideally without a confessional or ideologic bias." He adds: "The war of labels over the nature of Zoroastrianism has raged unabated and has generated yet more labels, ranging from 'the first monotheism' to the 'the first dualism' and from 'dualist monotheism' to 'monotheistic dualism'. Parallel to this war of definitions there evolved the process of a cultural appropriation of Zoroaster by figures such as Voltaire, Goethe, Kleist and Shelley, while Nietzsche, who originally adopted Zoroaster as his mouthpiece and

stepping stone for his 'transvaluation of all values', ultimately praised him as the most truthful of all thinkers. This cultural and philosophical focus on Zoroaster and his religion was to lead to the curious notion that Zoroastrianism can emancipate modern man from Christianity and the even more curious sympathy of positivism for the ancient creed." (p. 288).

As Stoyanov concludes, insofar as religious events "produce legal and structured explanations for the origin of evil, which, for a variety of socio-religious reasons, periodically seemed more influential and justified than their monistic counterparts, it is likely that monism will have periodically to encounter and resume its battle against the theologically dying and rising 'other god'." Insofar as Zoroastrian dualism contributed to this end, however indirectly, its contribution to this development will remain quite noteworthy, especially as it stands as a pioneer of dualistic ideas even though it harnessed them to expound monotheism as I have explained in my thesis on dualism in Zoroastrianism.