

UNEARTHING OF CONNECTIONS BETWEEN THE TALMUD AND SASANIAN ZOROASTRIANISM

Dr. Kersey Antia, Mar 6, 2020

There seems to be many minds or major parallels, common concepts or interconnections between Judaism and Zoroastrianism still lying hidden from our view. Despite being so devoid of the knowledge of Judaic literature, I was fortunate to come across one such hidden reference to a Zoroastrian practice ferreted out by Kaakov Elman (“Who are the Kings of East and West in Ber 7 A?: Roman Religion, Syrian Coin and Zoroastrianism in the Babylonian Talmud,” Studies in Josephus and the Varieties of Ancient Judaism, 43-80, Louis H. Feldman Jubilee Volume, Chapter 2007 World Cat. or.). Elman analyzes in great detail a Baraita on the subject of divine anger, which is found only in the Babylonian Talmud and not at all in the Palestinian sources. The Baraita runs as follows:

“It was taught in the name of R. Meir: At the time when the sun rises and all the kings of the East and the West put their crowns upon their heads and bow down to the sun, the Holy One, blessed be, he immediately becomes angry.”

It is incorporated in a highly structured Sugya on the subject of divine anger. The Sugya however appears in various permutations in several places. It is not possible or necessary here to go into all the details in Elman’s 37-page article, but it should suffice to note that Elman sees here a Babylonian/Iranian venue to account for most elements in this Baraita: Sasanian Kings (whose capitol was actually in Babylonia), facing the sun while praying, donning a crown, not performing any (bloody) sacrifices and basing his claim to be a monarch in part on his piety. Elman believes there is another possible connection with Zoroastrianism in this Baraita – a reference to anger which is Aeshma in the Avesta and in the Jewish texts as Ashmedai, which as I have already noted is held by many scholars as representing Aeshma. Ellman believes, “Clearly, whoever produced this Baraita was familiar with Sasanian practices.” “Thus,” he concludes, “the Iranian affinities of this Sugya are quite pronounced and important and that too would tend to support a Zoroastrian venue for he Baraita.” More such discoveries can be expected in view of Talmud scholars lately concentrating on studying the inter-connection between Talmudic Jews and Zoroastrians.