

H.-P. SCHMIDT'S SCHOLARLY CRITICISM OF KELLENS' VIEW

Dr. Kersey Antia, Oct 5, 2019; updated Nov 10, 2019

Hanns-Peter Schmidt finds Jean Kellens' views, though erudite and scholastic, so untenable that he devotes his entire paper refuting at least some of them in *Atash-e Doran, The Fire Within*, Volume II, (edited by C.G. Cereti and F. Vajifar, 2003, pages 357-376). He challenges Kellens' view of Kayanian dynasty as a fiction without any historical validity. In another work written along with Eric Pirart, Kellens propounds the theory that Zarathustra was not the author of the Gathas and in his later publication he even doubts historicity of Zarathushtra and Vishtaspa. In this work Kellens assumes "a total break in the tradition between the composition of the Gathas and that of the later Avesta," etc., which Schmidt finds improbable and "obviously dictated by Kellens' desire to eliminate Zarathushtra as the author of the Gathas." However, Kellens is not motivated to do it for any personal inclination or the like in my observations, but rather strictly on the basis of rigorous study which however is fueled in short by overreading the Vedas into the Old Avesta at the expense of the latter, thereby in my opinion shortchanging the Avesta and deserving the title of a Vedic or pro-Vedic rather than an Avestan scholar. Following this trend Kellens even maintains that the authorship of the Gathas does not make any sense as they are not the work of one person such as Zarathustra but are the expression of a whole religious group. But as Schmidt argues even the Rigveda clearly shows that the individual work "counted very much." And as it is common practice even in the Vedas to use the third person when a poet refers to himself by name, just as Zarathushtra does in the Gathas, which, however, leads Kellens to deny Zarathushtra's authorship of the Gathas.

I would like to note here that whenever Zarathustra naturally has to rely on older Vedic terminologies as they were the only ones current among his followers, he does so without compromising his own revelation, which is clearly attested by the fact that his very unique cognates and concepts of Vohu Mana and Spenta Mainyu cannot be traced in the Vedas.

Schmidt also dwells on P.O. Skjaervo's attempt to relegate Zarathushtra along with Vishtaspa to myth and notes that Skjaervo does not provide any evidence in support of it. "The attempts to spirit Zarathushtra out of history," concludes Schmidt, "reminds me of similar attempts made in the 19th century regarding Gautama Buddha or in the 20th regarding Jesus Christus." Schmidt provides references for all his

observations which could provide useful to any one interested in this subject but my main aim in quoting him (and others) is to raise awareness about it and in turn emphasize the need for having our own scholars of our religion who can guide the community, especially in the western diaspora, in such controversial matters, especially as I find none at present who is as acquainted as Kellens and his school with Vedic Sanskrit and Old Iranian languages as to be able to meet the challenge posed by them and others whose tribe may grown as more fundamental problems have already been undertaken by scholars in he last few centuries, leaving the upcoming ones to find new ones however far off the main track they may be.