

SIMILARITY BETWEEN SOME ZOROASTRIAN AND JEWISH THEMES

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

There are other similar themes in the Iranian and Jewish literature which as Shlomo Pines (*Irano-Judaica III*, Jerusalem, 1990, pp. 41-57) suggests shared some knowledge about each other's belief systems, though they may not have anything else in common; such as the reconstitution of the *Avesta* after the destruction wrought by Alexander as described in the *Denkard* and “a story concerning an alleged loss and miraculous restoration of the Jewish Bible,” in a revelation by Ezra “as told in the so-called Fourth Book of Ezra, a Jewish Apocalypse” probably composed in the late first century. As Pines notes, “it calls to mind and may have as its source the Iranian tradition concerning the burning of the *Avesta* by Alexander.” Pines also draws attention to another such parallel, apparently unsubstantiated but “outside the scope of the present inquiry”: “After having explained that the text of *Avesta*, where study was restricted to a very small elite, was particularly liable to be corrupted, Ibn Hazm wishes to indicate that originally the text of the Torah was exposed to similar danger.” Thus, according to Ibn Hazm, though evidently not factually correct, “the text of religious scripture which is only transmitted to one person or to members of a restricted elite cannot be preserved from corruption” and are liable to be lost altogether,” totally or partially.

Although offering it as a mere suggestion rather than a full-fledged hypothesis, Pines quotes themes in praise of incest in chapter 80 of book III of the Pahlavi text of *Denkard* and in a Hebrew Kabbalistic text.

Pines adds: “The evidence for this kind of sexual union having been practised according to the Zoroastrians also in the supernal world is somewhat more dubious, as references to it appear only to be found in the works of (mainly) Christian opponents of Zoroastrianism. However their reports on the point in question have a certain consistency and it is probable that the stories they relate were current among the followers of this religion.---- “At this point the preceding remarks on Zoroastrian views on incest having provided some needful information, I wish to set forth a somewhat adventurous suggestion – it is by no means a full-fledged hypothesis – concerning a Jewish Kabbalistic text or texts. The text appears to have been written by a 13th-century author.” R. Joseph. Pines finds it “conceivable that he may have been influenced by Iranian doctrines, such as the Zoroastrian teachings concerning incest,” as he hailed from Suse where the story of the Book of Esther is situated.

Authors, some of them his near contemporaries, who took up a similar position may have been influenced by him. If this be so, and if his probable connection with Iran is admitted, the possibility that the Zoroastrian teaching concerning incest may be to some extent a source of doctrines held in this matter by R. Joseph and later Kabbalists cannot be ruled out.” Pines refers to “an anonymous text ascribed to our R. Joseph, which uses in relation to God sexual imagery. According to this text the Jews of Israel may be likened to the children of God's lawful wife with whom He has sexual intercourse by day and openly, whereas the Gentiles may be likened to the children of his concubine (*pilegesh*), with whom He has intercourse by night and in secret. She poses however the condition that the children she bears should rule like the Jews rule in God's kingdom. God promises to do so and fulfills this promise when the Jews do not observe the commandments of the Torah, and His “concubine” accuses them on this score. Moreover, in order to stop these accusations some Gentiles are converted to Judaism and placed “under the wings of the Shekkina.” It is thanks to this that the world is nourished.”