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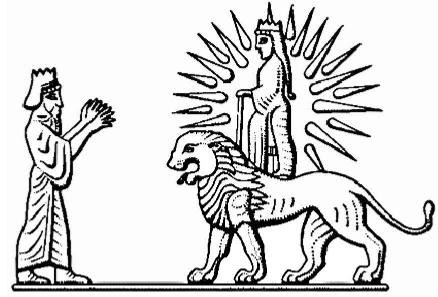

"Trends and Problems concerning the Mutual Relations between Iranian Pre-Islamic and Jewish Cultures"

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ANTONIO PANAINO Ravenna

Trends and Problems concerning the Mutual Relations between Iranian Pre-Islamic and Jewish Cultures*

Dedicated to the dear memory
of Jes Peter Asmussen

Introduction

The number and importance of the events which have so frequently put in contact Iranians and Jews starting from the Achaemenid period onwards are so significant and seminal that they aroused a deep scholarly discussion, much of it debated and controversial. This is particularly the case with historico-religious studies, especially the evaluation of perceived mutual influences – real or not – between Mazdeism[1] and post-exilic Judaism. It would be impossible to collect in a single article a complete and analytical summary of all the data and in particular of all the secondary literature in order to offer a new and definitive solution of this problem. The following notes and reflections, to the contrary, aim to present the reader with the most significant moments of the historical connection between two of the most important civilizations of the ancient world, along with the way in which these events are currently being studied. In the final part, I will try to sum up the most difficult and tantalizing problems connected with the question of the mutual "influences" in order to evaluate the "reasons" lying behind the debate and the plausibility of the different solutions, not without the hidden hope of proposing some new perspectives for future research.

* The present article is based on a revised, enlarged and updated version of two chapters ("L'ecumene iranica nella storia del popolo ebraico; La questione delle mutue influenze tra mondo iranico e giudaico," pp. 62-83) contained in my "L'ecumene iranica e lo Zoroastrismo nel loro sviluppo storico," published in *Atti del Seminario invernale "Il popolo del ritorno: l'epoca persiana e la Bibbia." Lucca, 25-27 gennaio 2000*. Biblia, Associazione laica di cultura biblica, Firenze 2001b, pp. 13-100.

[1] For the history of the Zoroastrian religion see Bausani, 1959; Bianchi, 1958; Boyce, 1975; 1982; 1992; Boyce - Grenet, 1991; Christensen, 1928; 1941; Duchesne-Guillemin, 1953; 1962; 1972; Gnoli, 1991a; 1994a; 2000; Gray, 1929; Humbach, 1984; Jackson, 1899; 1928; Kellens, 1991; Lommel, 1930; Moulton, 1913; Nyberg, 1938; Panaino, 1990; 1992; 1994; 2001a; Pettazzoni, 1920; Widengren, 1968; Zaehner, 1955; 1956; 1961. For the Greek sources regarding Zoroaster and the Mazdean religion see Clemen, 1920a; 1920b; Fox - Pemberton, 1928.

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A Short Historical Overview

Although we cannot exclude episodic contacts with peoples linguistically and culturally Iranian[2] before the fall of Jerusalem (587) under Nabucodonosor II (604-562), it is during the "Babylonian captivity" (587-538) that – with the elimination of any form, actual or only formal, of political autonomy – Israel was incorporated into the Babylonian kingdom. In this way, new conditions for direct contact with Iranian culture were opened. In this period, the Persians were only in a subordinate position with respect to the Medes, from whom they had become free, thanks also to the alliance with Babylon, only in the years between 555 and 550 BC, when the last Median king, Astyages, was taken prisoner by Cyrus II. This change determined a new political phase in which the two remaining leading forces – Persians and Babylonians – very soon would enter into conflict. In 539, Cyrus was able to conquer the city of Babylon without any significant military operation.[3] Through these events, the condition of the Jewish people radically changed. Among the most important consequences of this new political state we cannot forget the return to Israel of some Jews and the reconstruction of the Temple of Jerusalem (edict of Cyrus; cf. *Ezra*, I, 1-4; *Chron*. 36, 23). All these events, narrated in the books of *Ezra* and *Nehemiah*,[4] are very famous but at the same time raise a great number of chronological and exegetical problems on which I will not enter here.[5] I would only like to recall that, although a caravan, led by Zorobabel and Jeshua, in year 537 went home, where it joined the rest of the primitive community, which had remained in Jerusalem, the definitive reconstruction of the temple (520-516) actually started only under the kingdom of Darius I (522-585). The reconstruction of the walls of the town, directed by Nehemiah, was realized between 445 and 443 while, under Artaxerxes II in 398, a second caravan of Jews led by Ezra came back to the Jewish homeland.

As Dunand (1968) has shown, the so-called edict of tolerance issued by Cyrus should be understood in the Persian framework of a general political program aiming at enforcing the Egyptian border.[6] The reconstruction of the temple of Jerusalem and the city walls, as well as the

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[2] About the general history of Pre-Islamic Iran see Frye, 1984; Wiesehöfer, 1996; 1999. About the Achaemenid period see Briant, 1996; Dandamayev, 1992; Dandamayev - Lukonin, 1989; Gnoli, 1974; Olmstead, 1948; for the Achaemenid inscriptions see Kent, 1953; Brandenstein - Mayrhofer, 1964; see also Schmitt, 1991 and (for the Aramaic version of the Bisutun inscription) Greenfield - Porten, 1982. For the Elamite tablets found in Persepolis see Cameron, 1948; Hallock, 1969. A fresh evaluation of the Achaemenid sources has been offered by Lecoq, 1997. About the Parthian and Sasanian periods see Christensen, 1907; 1944; Frye, 1993; Gnoli, 1971; 1984; 1989; 1994b; Schippmann, 1980; 1990; Wolski, 1993. See also Galling, 1964.

[3] On the political meaning of the text contained in the cylinder of Cyrus see Eilers, 1974, von Soden, 1983, and Harmatta, 1974. Cf. also Bickerman, 1976-96 and J. Lewy, 1945-46.

[4] Pelaia, 1960; Aberbach, 1993: 105-127; Rudolph, 1949; Kellermann, 1967; Shaked, 1984: 313; Yamauchi, 1990: 253-266, 272-278. See also Ackroyd, 1970: 173-196, and Smith, 1968.

[5] The authenticity of Cyrus' edict had been questioned by some scholars, but strongly defended by Bickerman (1976-86); see also the supportive discussion by Netzer (1974) and the complex evaluation of the problem by Ackroyd (1990). Cf. also Wiesehöfer, 1999: 26, Stoyanov, 2000: 325-326, n. 134.

[6] See also Posener, 1936.

presence (confirmed by various archaeological data) of significant works of foundation and restoration of a chain of military fortifications along the path connecting the Gulf of Issos to Palestine confirm the coincidence of political interests between the Achaemenid leadership and the strategic role of the Jewish community. Also significant is the strong military collaboration offered to the Persian army by the Jews in Egypt; for instance, the Jewish garrison on the island of Elephantina (near the town of Aswan, slightly north of the first cataract of the Nile). We know that this colony was strongly linked to the temple of the God Yahu, although it turns out to have been involved in various apparently heterodox and peculiar rituals and doctrines, concerning for instance the worship of a divine triad.[7] This can perhaps be explained by the relatively high antiquity of this Jewish community, residing in Egypt long before Cambyses's conquest. In any case this community remained on the side of the Persians even in the most difficult moments, and this fact underlines the strong complementarity of political interests between the two peoples.[8]

I believe that it would be important to recall that many Jews remained in the western lands of the Persian empire and, most of them, in Babylonia, where they represented a very seminal community, the impact of which would remain remarkable also in later periods,[9] in particular after the final destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem.

The Parthian (or Arsacid) period,[10] from the second half of the third century B.C. to the first half of the third century A.D., was no doubt very positive for the Jewish community living in Babylon and in the limits of the Iranian world. The Parthians, in fact, following the habit of the Seleucids did not exert special pressure of religious significance on the Jews, although we have to remark that our sources remain scanty until the second century B.C. Also very important for its consequences on the history of Judaism and of early Christianity was the short conquest of Palestine by the Parthians from 41 to 39 B.C. Of this brief domination, at least in comparison with the following Roman domination, there remained a favourable memory that is visible, e.g., in the idea that the return of the Parthian cavalry would announce the arrival of Messiah.[11] Thus we cannot exclude that the Evangelic reference in Matthew (2, 1-12) to some Magi coming from the Orient was evoking, of course in "informed" minds, a positive and sympathetic attitude towards the Iranian wisdom and the Parthians, who at that time were the leading dynasty in Iran.[12] Although of lesser importance we may remark that in the same period some members of the royal dynasty governing a buffer-state of Adiabene, located between the Roman and the Parthian borders (but in reality a vassal of the Arsacids), were converted to Judaism. Notable among these nobles was Queen Helen and her son Izates.[13]

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[7] See Römer, 2002: 20.
[8] Olmstead, 1948: 364-366; 465-467 (It.tr. 1982: 304-306); Bresciani, 1985: 510-512, 517-518; see also Bresciani, 1958; 1995. Cf. also Verger, 1965, *passim* and Cowley, 1923.
[9] The Iranian influence on the Jewish legal traditions has been discussed by Frye, 1967.
[10] See now Wolski, 1993; cf. Schippmann, 1980.
[11] See Neusner, 1983: 911; cf. Widengren, 1957: 199-200; Shaked, 1984.
[12] On the Magi in Matthaeus see now Panaino, 1999 (with additional bibliography).
[13] Cf. Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, XX, 35 (and *passim*); see Widengren, 1957: 200-201; Millar, 1994: 493.

If on the one hand, the Arsacid power became strategically relevant from the point of view of the Jews in a clearly anti-Roman perspective,[14] on the other hand, from the Parthian perspective the Jewish community assumed a continuously growing political importance both inside and outside the Arsacid domains. Without entering into details on all aspects of the role played by the Jews in the intricate framework of the inner feudal struggles that distinguished the Parthian period (we can just mention the brief revolts of Anileus and his brother Asineus between 20 and 35 A.D. in the area of Nehardea),[15] the presence of Palestinian bands and groups hostile to the Romans occurs many times in the sources. From 70 A.D. ca, under the kingdom of Vologeses I, the Parthians introduced the institutional position of the exilarch (*rēš gālūṯā*). In this way, the Jews obtained an independent authority endowed with political, administrative and juridical powers, but, at the same time, the Parthians were able to guarantee the loyalty of the Jewish community, thus controlling any extremist trends or possible insurrections. Such a function – particularly after the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem and the introduction of a *patriarcatus* under Roman control – assumed a moral and political authority also over the Palestinian Jews, who in a few cases sought the opinion or the intervention of the *rēš gālūṯā* (also in matters of religious and calendrical order). Thus the Mesopotamian area became a significant cultural centre of Judaism, particularly after the unsuccessful Palestinian revolt of 135, led by Bar Kokhba.[16] It is worth noting that, during the Sasanian period, this community remained substantially faithful to the official power. Apart from several persecutions and some general changes in Persian politics (see below), it lived in relatively good circumstances, which evidently made possible the production by the Jewish sages of the code of the *Mišnah* and, around the end of the sixth and the beginning of the seventh century, the final edition of the Babylonian *Talmud*.[17] The power of the *rēš gālūṯā* grew during the second century, when many Jews entered the restricted class of the Parthian nobility. The decisions taken by the *rēš gālūṯā* were imposed inside the community through independent military forces and it was also possible for him to inflict the death penalty.

We will also point out that a number of "Parthian" officers were actually Jews, a fact which aroused new forms of collaboration and synecism; it is not rare to find Parthian administrators of Jewish religion but with Iranian names. The same phenomenon is also known for Seleucid times, when it is possible to find out Greek names in the onomastics of the Jewish community).

Although paradoxical, in politico-religious matters, the Parthians actually were closer to the pragmatic behaviour of the Achaemenid period than to the later religious zeal of the Sasanian kings. With the ascent to power of Ardaxšīr I (224-239/49; dead in 240/41) and the complete defeat of the last Parthian king Ardawān IV (213-224), a radical change in the history of the Near East and of Central

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[14] See Hinnells, 1976; Shaked, 1984; Boyce-Grenet, 1991: 447; cf. Neusner, 1986: 3-7; Böklen, 1902: 91-115.

[15] Cf. Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, XVIII, 310-389; see Widengren, 1957: 203-204.

[16] See Wiesehöfer, 1999: 101.

[17] See Wiesehöfer, 1999: 117.

Asia took place. The rise of the Sasanian dynasty represented for Iranian lands the definitive entrance into Late Antiquity. Led by a political programme aimed at the exaltation of their "Aryanity" and its oldest ethno-religious values, the Sasanians imposed a more centralized form of power than that of the Parthians and they exerted stronger controls on religious minorities. The Sasanian period would also be characterized by the progressive construction of a Mazdean Church with its organization and hierarchy, which would try to impose ortodox faith and a religious canon (i.e. the *Avesta*).[18]

The power of the clergy became extremely strong by time, so that it became very significant in political affairs such as the choice of the king. These privileges, of course, cannot be ascribed without distinction to all the periods of the Sasanian kingdom. On the contrary, under the first kings, particularly under Šābuhr I (239/40-270/72), although the authority of the Mazdean clergy was never under discussion, the prerogatives of the Šāhān Šāh did not suffer limitations. Šābuhr did not refuse to offer his favour and protection to the prophet Mani and he maintained respect for the other religious minorities. In the very case of the tolerance offered to the Manichaeans, whose preaching was directed at Christians and Jews, we see not only the result of the political autonomy of royal power from the religious authorities (as supposed by M.-L. Chaumont, 1988),[19] but also of a kind of universalistic attitude. In fact, according to the historic paradigm suggested by Gnoli (1984), the Manichaean religion, that in Iran pretended to be a direct descendant of Zoroaster's revelation, offered many political advantages, thanks to its camaleontic versatility, to a king who hoped to realize a programme of universal and multicultural domain. On the contrary it would have been very difficult to impose the Mazdean religion on the West as well as Central Asia. It was closely linked to Iranian national identity, whereas Manichaeism offered a fresh opportunity to enter and seduce different religious cultures thanks to its mimetic and interchangeable Gnostic language. The crisis which eventually exploded between universalism and nationalism in Iran found its conclusion with the victory of the Mazdean Church, as paradigmatically shown by the death penalty inflicted on Mani (274 or 277) during the reign of Wahrām I (273-276/77).[20] This sentence had been urgently sought by the landed aristocracy, in close alliance with the clergy, because the Manichaen religion was so boldily hostile to the agricultural works that it damaged in the landowners' economic interests.[21]

In the case of the Jewish community, the change of dynasty and the rise of the Sasanians were doubtless experienced with suffering.[22] The functions of the exiliarch were not abolished, but his prerogatives and autonomy were severely reduced and limited. Ardašīr had no special reasons compelling him to maintain a different treatment of the Jews. In fact, during Sasanian rule the remarkable

[18] About the Avestan literature see Geldner, 1904 (see also his edition of the Avesta, 1889-1896); Kellens, 1989; Panaino, 1998. See also Wolff, 1910. About the composition of the Avestan Canon see Hoffmann - Narten, 1989.

[19] See also the older work of Labourt, 1904.

[20] See Sundermann, 1987: 50-53, 76-77.

[21] On this problem see my contribution (Commerce and Conflicts of Religions in Sasanian Iran between Religious Identity and Political Ideology) in the press for the Fifth Melammu Symposion (Innsbruck 2002).

[22] See Widengren, 1961; Neusner, 1983; 1986; Brody, 1990.

political and diplomatic roles played by the Jews under the Parthians declined enormously. In addition to some persecutions and violence against the synagogues and special restrictions in religious matters – e.g., limitations on the use of fire during Hebrew rituals and interdiction against ritual baths and inhumations of corpses instead of the standard Mazdean exposition of dead bodies –, already under Šābuhr I a new agreement was established with the leader of the Jewish community, Samuel, who was forced to accept Persian law and the imposition of taxes. In addition, Samuel gave his loyalty to the king after the death of about 12.000 Jews, fallen during the siege of the town of Cesarea-Mazaca (260-261), in order to obtain better conditions from the Persian leadership.[23] It is impossible to follow in all their detail the events concerning the Hebrew community during the entire Sasanian history. In the case of the third century, it is sufficient to recall that the declarations of the great priest Kirdīr about the persecutions of Christians, Manichaeans and Jews, do not result, in the precise case of the Jewish community, directly and undoubtedly confirmed from other sources.[24] Although the kingdom of Yazdgird I (399-420) is considered from the sources as still favourable to the Jewish minority – Yazdgird actually married Šōšān-dōxt or Gāsyān-dōxt, daughter of the exiliarch, perhaps Kahana I (400-415)[25] – it was under Yazdgird II (439-457) and Pērōz (459-484) that we see a notable reverse in Sasanian religious politics. According to Rabbinic tradition, Yazdgird II delivered an anti-Judaic decree which imposed the abrogation of the *šabbat*, closed the Hebrew school, and finally put to death or exiled several rabbis. In 486 in the town of Esfahān, where the Armenian Jews had been deported under Šābuhr II (309-379),[26] a most violent putsch against their community took place, probably after an assault on two Zoroastrian priests. The reason behind this change in Sasanian politics towards the Jews seems to be linked to turmoil in the Jewish community because of enthusiastic expectation of the Messiah, who, according to some prophecies, was to appear 400 years after the fall of the Temple of Jerusalem of 68 A.D. (according to the "wrong" dating of some rabbis), i.e. projected immanently for 468 A.D. Yet Sasanian politics with respect to the Jews shifted yet again. In 570 A.D., under Xusraw Anōšag-ruwān (Xusraw I, 531-579), Yemen was added to the Sasanian satellites. Although this act served a wider political aim of a contrast against the Ethiopians, who were allied with the Byzantines in the contemporary geopolitical chessboard, it was actually decided in order to support the powerful Jewish community of Yemen.[27] After a harsh period of difficulties, when nevertheless tolerance and reasonably good relations were generally maintained, a new prophecy, made by a Babylonian Jew, in 640, announced the coming of the Messiah, provoking a rebellion and the immediate reaction of Persian authorities. By this time, however, the general political situation of the Sasanian empire was compromised and the arrival of the Arab invaders soon after would be welcomed by Jews and Christians.

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23 Widengren, 1961: 133-134.
24 Widengren, 1961: 130-131; Gignoux, 1991: 69-70.
25 See Darmesteter, 1893b; 1889: 41-53; Widengren, 1961: 139-141.
26 Widengren, 1961: 134-138. Cf. also Russell, 1987a.
27 Bosworth, 1983: 604-609.

The Question of the Mutual Influences between Pre-Islamic and Jewish Religious Cultures

It should be clear that the problem we are now entering is certainly tantalizing. Its discussion is made more complicated and challenging by the high number, complexity and ambiguity of the pertinent sources (from the *Avesta*, and the Pahlavi books to the Biblical and Talmudic literature, etc.), which cover an enormous span of time and involve a tremendous mass of historical and archaeological data from the Near East and ancient and mediaeval Iran. In addition, we must consider that any discussion regarding the possible impact of an Iranian religion (or of different religious trends of Iranian origin) on the Jewish and, in part, on the Christian religions, raises additional difficulties and suspects to do with theological, confessional and political issues. Last but not least, we cannot avoid taking into account the tragic fact that, during the nineteenth and early twenties centuries, the study of the Iranian world and its prehistory, in particular that of the *arya-s*, was, in the case of some famous scholars (as for the Iranologist and Semitist Paul De Lagarde, a very good scholar, yet also the inspirer of H. St. Chamberlain),[28] directly involved in the establishment of racist ideas,[29] which later generated the criminal myth of Arianity and the superiority of the Indo-Europaean *ethnos*, with the disastrous consequences we all know.

Thus any treatment of the problem has to clear up in advance some old prejudices. We come back now to the early period[30] of Avestan studies, when, particularly in the Illuministic milieu, it was thought that Zoroaster's message might represent a special revelation of ethical, moral, and philosophical significance to be contrasted with the Judaeo-Christian traditions and scriptures or even that it might contain their actual origin.[31] The first versions of the Avestan and Pahlavi texts produced such a disappointment that they generated a number of polemics as well as the accusation of falsification against the first translator of the *Avesta*, the poor and absolutely innocent Anquetil Duperron. He was accused of having falsified the very texts of the Iranian prophet.[32] On the opposite side, we can see trends such as that started and well represented by the Abbé Paul Foucher,[33] who tried to make Zoroaster a disciple of the Biblical prophets. By the way, such a trend, which was present also in Voltaire,[34] was revived on different bases

[28] See Lukács, 1959³: 706-709, 715-716. An interesting discussion about De Lagarde's impact on the cultural background of the Third Reich has been written by Mosse, 1964, with a detailed bibliography.
[29] See also Wiesehöfer, 1988.
[30] For the various speculations connecting Iran and Israel before the first translations of the Avestan sources we refer to Stausberg, 1998, I-II, *passim*.
[31] See the synthesis offered by Duchesne-Guillemin, 1958: 11-17. See also Stausberg, 1998, I and II.
[32] See also Sarton, 1938; cf. also the still now interesting biography of Anquetil Duperron written by Schwab (1934). See also Stausberg, 1998, II: 790-837.
[33] His most important work was the *Traité historique de la Religion des Perses*, in 14 parts, published in the "Mémoires de l'Académie des inscriptions," vols. from 25 (1759) till the 39 (1777). See also Pettazzoni, 1920: 79, 124, n. 46.
[34] Voltaire, 1828: 481.

by two famous Iranologists: Friedrich Spiegel[35] and Raffaele Pettazzoni.[36] Spiegel emphasized the presence of a direct impact of Abraham on Zoroaster, which occurred in Harran, on the way from Ur to Palestine, then part of an area associated with the Avestan *airyana- vaējah-* "the Arian space," the homeland of the Aryans and of Zoroaster.[37] Pettazzoni assumed a two-way influence: the Messianic ideas were transferred from the Jews to the Iranians while dualism followed the opposite path. We have to take into consideration that, according to these scholars, Zaraθuštra was of western Iranian origin. Thus he grew up and lived in a Median framework around the seventh century B.C., in a region and in an epoch when direct contact was possible with Pre-exilic Judaism and Jews of the Babylonian captivity. Another famous Iranologist, James Darmesteter, in the third volume of his monumental translation of the *Avesta*,[38] advanced the risky thesis that the *Gāθās* would have been elaborated in an already "dead" sacred language, between the first century B.C. and the first century A.D. under the direct influence of Neoplatonic ideas and, in particular, of Philon's thought. Then, the core of Zoroastrian literature would be only the reflex of a Hellenizing Judaism, with the *Logos* separated from the divinity and inserted between God and the world. Consequently, the duality[39] *mēnōg* / *gētīg* of the Iranian speculations would correspond to that between the world of the ideas and its reflection in the mundane. In particular Darmesteter supposed (1893a: LVI) that Vohu Manah was the Iranian "translation" of the *Logos* of Philon, and that the other Aməša Spəṇtas[40] directly represented some special "forces" (λόγοι or δυνάμεις) corresponding to divine abstractions. In addition, Darmesteter suggested (1893a: LVII-LXII) the presence of a strong Jewish influence, although in a form to be considered depending on the Neoplatonic tradition, on the structure and external form of the Zoroastrian religion: both the *Pentateuch* and the *Avesta* involve a series of dialogues between a human legislator and his god ("Yahweh saith to Moses" / "Saith Ahura Mazdā to the Spitāma Zaraθuštra"); Yahweh creates the world in six days, while Ahura Mazdā in six successive periods[41]; in both traditions, humanity descended from a primordial couple, in which the very name of the male partner means "man" (Hebr. *adam*, and Av. *mašya-*)[42]; in both religions the first sin is committed by these two primordial beings. The Semitic idea of the universal flood corresponds with the Avestan account of Yima's descent in the *vara* (a sort of refuge) with a third of humanity[43]; and the earth is divided among the three sons of Noah in the Bible and of Θraētaona in the *Avesta*. This kind of comparative analysis, however, did not answer some heavy objections, in par-

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[35] Spiegel, 1871, I: 446-485.

[36] Pettazzoni, 1920: 76-84.

[37] The actual identification of such a mythical land has been much debated; Benveniste associated it with the Sogdiana, while Henning (1951) and MacKenzie (1988) have suggested the Choresmia as the original homeland of the Avestan people; Gnoli (1967) originally proposed the identification with the Sīstān, but now he prefers a wider area in any case located in Eastern Iran between the Sīstān and the Sogdiana; cf. Gnoli, 1989; 1991; 1994: 473-474.

[38] Darmesteter, 1893a: XLIX-C.

[39] Gnoli, 1963; Shaked, 1971.

[40] About the so called Mazdean "Entities" see Geiger, 1916; Narten, 1982; 1984; 1985; Kellens, 1991. Cfr. also Dumézil, 1945.

[41] Just the opposite opinion was suggested by Tiele, 1903: 245.

[42] About this comparison see already Spiegel, 1871, I: 473-474.

[43] See again Spiegel, 1987, I: 478-479, but cf. Kohut, 1871, who to the contrary tries to show the impact of Zoroastrian culture on the traditions regarding Adam in the Talmudic and Midrashic literature.

ticular that of linguistic evidence. According to data emerging from Indo-European and Indo-Iranian linguistics studies, the Gāθic language is clearly more archaic[44] and the composition of the Gāθās in a very late period does not seem likely. The apparent similarities between the texts do not necessarily indicate a direct connection between Jews and Iranians, but could instead be the product of ideas already widespread among other Mesopotamian peoples.[45]

On these premises, it is easy to imagine how, with the continuous evolution of the Avestan studies and with a better knowledge of the languages of Pre-Islamic Iran, the problem of the intellectual and historical relations between Iranians and Jews (starting from their liberation from Babylon thanks to Cyrus the Great's edict) has progressively assumed a more complex scientific dignity and a theoretical and historiographic importance.

The most important points in the debate, however, did not change in the following years. A trend of studies, which gradually became more *nuancé*, tried to suggest a deep impact of the Iranian religious tradition, particularly of Mazdean dualism, on a number of doctrines attested to in post-exilic Judaism and, through this mediation, in the Christian tradition. These influences would have been visible in the angelology, demonology and progressive development of the personality of Satan. For instance, the name of the demon Asmodaeus seems to be derived from an Avestan syntagmatic sequence like **aēšmō daēuuō* "the demon Aēšma."[46] I would like to underline the fact that the progressive monotheistic trend attested in the religion of Israel involved the refusal of all the other divinities who were considered as chimeras[47]; it could be paralleled with the same phenomenon attested in the Gāθic literature, where, according to Gershevitch,[48] the Old Iranian *daēvas* became only "Hirngespinste." The role and image of the individual protective angel have been connected with that of the Avestan Fravaṣ̌is.[49] Other examples are: the eschatology and the doctrine of the final retribution of merits and sins; the theme of the resurrection of the dead; the importance attributed to ritual purity and to precautions against external contaminations and pollutions[50]; and, although it is still a matter of debate, the background of the so-called "ascent of Isaiah."[51] We should also mention the doctrine of the wait for the final Saviour, which has been, for textual reasons to do with the Evangelic Magi, connected to the Iranian conception of the Saošyaṇt(s).[52]

The reader will find the first arguments supporting the presence of these influences in the works,[53] not all of them

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[44] The most important modern translation of the *Gāθās* have been edited by Humbach, 1959; 1991. Kellens - Pirart, 1988, 1990, 1991; Insler, 1975.

[45] Such a farfetched thesis of Darmesteter was later followed only by M.-J. Lagrange (1904).

[46] Bartholomae, 1904: 35-36. See also Pines, 1982.

[47] See in particular Römer, 2002: 19-20.

[48] I. Gershevitch, "Die Sonne das Beste," in *Mithraic Studies*, ed. by J.R. Hinnells, Manchester 1975, pp. 68-89, in particular p. 79.

[49] A kind of feminine protective spirit, created before the corporeal life, but active (although weaker) after life, who accompanies each human being during his life. See Söderblom, 1901; Pavry, 1929; Gignoux, 1969; 1979; 1984. Kellens, 1996; Panaino, 1997. On the hymn to the Fravaṣ̌is see Malandra, 1971.

[50] See Williams, 1994.

[51] See in particular Smith, 1963; Shaked (1984: 314) suggests that the terminology attested in *Isaiah* 45, could be connected with an Iranian background; cf. also Gnoli, 1983 and Russell, 1994.

[52] Literally "who will make prosperous (the existence)," future participle of the verb *sū* "to prosper" (intransitive), but assuming also the eschatologic role of future and final "saviour" (see now the fresh discussion by Hintze, 1995). Cf. also Messina, 1930 and in particular 1933.

[53] See also Duchesne-Guillemin, 1958:86-102.

of equal value and rigour, of scholars such as Alexander Kohut [*Ueber die jüdische Angelologie und Daemonologie in ihrer Abhängigkeit von Parsismus*, Leipzig 1866 (an article which received favour among the Parsis and was translated into English by K.R. Cama with the title: *The Jewish Angelology and Demonology based upon Parsism*, Bombay 1880-83 (in four parts); reprinted in K.R. Cama, 1970, II: 161-276); *Was hat die talmudische Eschatologie aus den Parsismus aufgenommen?* in "ZDMG," 21, 1867, pp. 552-591; and *Die talmudische-midraschische Adamssage in ihrer Rückbeziehung auf die persische Yima- und Meshiasage, kritisch beleuchtet*, in "ZDMG," 25, 1871, pp. 59-94], C.P. Tiele (*Die Kosmogonie des Avesta und Genesis I.* in "Archiv für Religionswissenschaft," 6, 1903, pp. 244-246), Ernst Böklen (*Die Verwandtschaft der jüdisch-christlichen mit der Parsischen Eschatologie*, Göttingen 1902), Th.K. Cheyne (*Possible Zoroastrian Influences on the Religion of Israel*, in "Expository Times," 2/9, 1891, pp. 202-208; 2/10, pp. 224-228; 2/11, pp. 248-253; and *The Book of Psalms; its Origins and its Relation to Zoroastrianism*, in *Semitic Studies in Memory of A. Kohut*, Berlin 1897, pp. 111-119), Erik Stave (*Über den Einfluss des Parsismus auf Judentum, ein Versuch*. Haarlem 1898), Lawrence Mills (*Zaraθuštra, Philo, the Achemenids and Israel*, Leipzig 1906 and *Our own Religion in ancient Persia*, Leipzig 1913), Jivanji Jamshedji Modi (*Angelology. A few traits common to Zoroastrianism, Hebrewism and Christianity*, in "Dante Papers," 7, 1914, pp. 150-159), Charles Autran (*Mithra, Zoroastre et la préhistoire aryenne du Christianisme*, Paris 1935, pp. 161-269). We ought to mention the strong presence in this debate of the so-called *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule*, which plants in Iranian doctrines one of the most important elements of the Gnostic thought in Late Antiquity. Thus it is not peculiar to find among the followers of the thesis of the "Iranian influence" on Judaism scholars like Wilhelm Bousset (*Die Religion des Judentums im späthellenistischen Zeitalter*, Tübingen 1926),[54] Rudolpf Otto (*Reich Gottes und Menschensohn*, Tübingen 1940²), and in a later period also Geo Widengren (*Quelques rapports entre Juifs et Iraniens à l'époque des Parthes*, in "Vetus Testamentum." Suppl. IV, 1957, pp. 197-241; *Iranisch-semitische Kulturbegegnung in parthischer Zeit*. Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Forschung der Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen. Heft 70. Köln und Opladen 1960; and *The Status of the Jews in the Sassanian Empire*, in "Iranica Antiqua," I, 1961, pp. 117-162). Supportive of an Iranian influence, but with moderation and prudence, was also the approach of Alfred Bertholet (*Das religionsgeschichtliche Problem des Spätjudentums*, Tübingen 1909; and *Zur Frage des Verhältnisses von persischen und jüdischen Auferstehungsglauben*, in *Festschrift Andreas*, Leipzig 1916, pp. 51-62).

On the opposite side, we find a good number of "negative" answers to the question of the Iranian influence, although, with many individual nuances and proportions, and expressed not only by specialists of Hebrew and Semitic languages but also by Iranologists. Among them we can mention the reverend James Hope Moulton (*Early Zoroastrianism*, London 1913), the bishop Nathan

[54] Bousset in this work in particular tries to discuss the demonology (1926: 336-340) and the eschatology (together with the apocalyptics; 1926: 506-516). About the Saošyaṇt see already Kohut, 1867: 570-577 and in particular Böklen, 1902: 91-115. Cf. now Hintze, 1995.

Söderblom (*La Vie future d'après le mazdéisme à la lumière des croyances parallèles dans les autres religions: étude d'eschatologie comparée*, Paris 1901, but see also his article-review of the works of J. Weiss (1900), E. Böklen (1902) and W. Bousset[55] entitled *Notes sur les relations du Judaisme avec le Parsisme à propos de travaux récents*, in "RHR," 48, 1903, pp. 372-378) and J. Scheftelowitz (*Die altpersische Religion und das Judentum*, Gießen 1920). We touched above on James Darmesteter and his doctrine about the dependence of the Zoroastrian *Gāθās* on the philosophy of Philon the Jew, but we should add that Darmesteter's extreme theory found support in M.-J. Lagrange (*La religion des Perses, la réforme de Zoroastre et le Judaisme*, in "Revue biblique," 87, 1904, pp. 27-55; 188-212). Another sceptic was M. Gaster (*Parsiism and Judaism*, in *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics*, Vol. IX, Edinburgh 1917, pp. 637-640). A deeply elaborated negative evaluation has been expressed in an important volume by a famous scholar and Catholic cardinal of Vienna, Franz König (*Zarathustras Jenseitsvorstellungen und das Alte Testament*, Wien - Freiburg - Basel 1964, pp. 267-285), who has raised a number of objections about the identification of elements of the Achaemenid religion which are supposed to have had an impact on the Jewish tradition.

As I declared at the beginning, the aim of the present work can neither be an analytical discussion of all the mentioned works[56] nor a new critical evaluation of the sources, which would be beyond my strenght and competence. Instead, it seems to me that the general problem might be – and should be – placed on a different ground from which, perhaps, new approaches could be assessed. In the preceding pages I hope to have made clear that politically significant inter-dependance exists between the histories of the Iranian and Jewish worlds (and, in turn, the Judaeo-Christian world). Such a link is not limited to episodic and rare moments, incidentally connected with the fall of Babylon in the hands of Cyrus; at the same time we cannot deny that the new political architecture built up by the Achaemenids, whose king, the same Cyrus, was called in the Bible the "Lord's Anointed" (*Deutero-Isaiah*, 41, 3),[57] did not raise any special interest among intellectuals and religious men in the Hebrew community. On the contrary it is clear that the concept of Yahweh as an universalistic God, who is the same of the Persians, appears in this period; he is the God who promises a future of peace around the reconstructed Temple, as Römer has rightly remarked.[58] The subsequent episodes connected with the reconstruction of the Temple of Jerusalem, during the Achaemenid period, as well as the complex dialectic which emerged during the Parthian period with the institution of the exiliarch, and the strong anti-Roman politics of the Arsacids and their successors, the Sasanians, cannot have been insignificant for the Jewish world and culture. On these subjects there is no doubt; these relations are confirmed by the later identification, developed in a Jewish framework, of the wise Baruch with Zoroaster,[59] and by the

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[55] Söderblom's review was dedicated to the first edition (1903) of the work of Bousset *Die Religion des Judentums*, here quoted according to the third and definitive edition by H. Gressmann.

[56] Unfortunately I was not able to see G.W. Carter, *Zoroastrianism and Judaism*, Boston 1918. An useful bibliography has been published by Gnoli 1998: 112-113.

[57] See, e.g., Briant 1996, pp. 56-58.

[58] Römer, 2002: 67, 74.

[59] Apud Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, I, 15, 71; Bousset, 1907: 379; Reitzenstein, 1921: 101-102, 264; Bidez-Cumont, 1938, I: 49-50; II: 129-13; 132-133; Widengren, 1957: 219-220.

increasing presence of many Iranian loanwords in the Hebrew and Aramaic languages[60] spoken by the community of the Second Temple as well as the introduction of many linguistic calques based on Iranian models.[61]

More difficult and uncertain is the actual demonstration, in particular from the philological point of view, of a direct influence on the theological and religious framework. In this regard I doubt that we could – as for instance it was done by Kohut[62] – demonstrate a direct and close correspondence between the Avestan entities (i.e. the Aməša Spəṇtas)[63] and the most important angels of the Biblical tradition. In my opinion this idea is not only too bold and inconclusive but also very ingenuous and superficial. In a religious context, a possible influence cannot be explained in terms of agglutination of entire conceptual blocks. Such a phenomenon happens very rarely and, in these cases, imitations are evident also in their direct denomination. More often, in the framework of a long and continuous contact between different civilizations and cultures we can see a process of knowledge, assimilation and adaptation of foreign patterns. Sometimes, when these extraneous ideas are not openly criticized or resisted with hostility as extraneous "viruses," they can produce speculations and stimulate the elaboration of new categories. Take, for instance, the question about the origin of the figure of Satan, who sometimes becomes an hypostatization of the evil[64]: whether he is the punctual mirror image of Aŋra Mainyu or simply the product of a completely independent process of development. To date, the theory has been advanced, discussed and analyzed in inadequate or simplistic terms. It seems to me that a more solid approach would be reflecting on the fact that the image and role of the rebel angel underwent an evolution in the inner context of Jewish religious literature, progressively assuming a more evident and in various aspects more personalized dimension. Bearing this in mind, we should examine the possibility that this development was in great part the fruit of an autonomous reflection within Judaism, which came to draw on contemporary parallel Iranian concepts maturing independently, yet recognisable[65] and perhaps appreciated[66] and absorbed as elaborations.[67] In other words, rather than deciding between inter-religious impact or isolated development within a religious structure, we should consider a kind of evolution of ideas within a particular community's consciousness which also takes up, or at least is stimulated by, compatible elements from other communities which are both physically and in consciousness in close proximity. Through this approach I am not trying to take a comfortable and

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[60] About the importance of the Aramaic language in the Achaemenid period see Hallock, 1985; cf. also Bowman, 1970. With regard to the so called "Nebenüberlieferungen" in general see Hinz, 1973; 1975.

[61] Shaked, 1984: 308-313.

[62] 1866: 17-48 (Engl. tr: by Cama, 1970: 180-217).

[63] On the Aməša Spəṇtas see Geiger, 1916; Dumézil, 1945; Narten, 1982; 1986. Kellens, 1991.

[64] See Römer, 2002: 83-85.

[65] For instance, Moulton's objections (1913: 306) about the fact that Ahreman would not actually be "the prince of this world," do not seem pertinent in the case of the Zoroastrian doctrine, but concerns most fittingly the Zurvanite orientation, where the earthly kingdom was temporarily attributed to Ahreman.

[66] See in particular the prudent and equilibrate evaluation of the problem given by Stoyanov, 2000: 56-64.

[67] In favour of an Iranian influence we can see scholars like Alexander (1999), Cohn (1993) Coudert (1993), J.B. Russell (1977); see also the discussion by Kluger, 1967, Forsyth, 1987: 108-109, and Day, 1988.

ambiguous position, where any theory would be possible. I believe that the kind of approach I suggest is prudent but methodologically strong. If, on the one hand, we can establish on the basis of historical data that the peoples here taken into consideration lived in a particular condition of cultural, social, political, ideological and religious contact, we cannot, on the other hand, particularly in the historico-religious framework, assume that ideological and religious patterns existing simultaneously have not been involved with each other, but on the contrary have remained "cataphract" and impermeable, as if they were in isolation. The fact that the Post-exilic tradition shows a number of transformations and the presence of new trends does not mean that all these changes were strictly the result of a foreign element, extraneous to the basic culture of the Jewish peoples; rather, their presence compels us to take into consideration the possible impact or influence of other contemporary traditions which could have stimulated a dialectic reflex in a close or related cultural context. The impact of Iranian dualism seems to be present in texts such as the I *Chronicles*, 21, 1, where Satan is the protagonist of evil, although he cannot be considered completely independent from the power of god. In fact, these dualistic trends were countered in the *Deutero-Isaiah*, where (45, 1-7), in a framework in which Cyrus is presented as God's Messiah, and the Persian power appears at the service of the God of Jacob; here, Yahweh is the God who created light and darkness, welfare and adversity, nothing existing outside of himself, a statement strongly distinguishing Jewish monotheism from the Mazdean idea of evil as an extra-cosmic power.[68] Take for instance the clearly Iranianized framework, – no doubt evidence of the geographic milieu of the *Book of Tobiah*; apart from the recurring mention of lands and towns such as Media, Ecbatana and Raga, we know that the most plausible period for its composition is between the third and the second century B.C., during the Parthian age.[69] These data, however, would be insignificant if we did not remark that the demon Asmodaeus (*Tb*. 3, 8; Ἀσμοδαῖος; cf. אשמדאי in the *Talmud* and in the *Midrâšîm*[70]) not only seems to have an Iranian name – an idea still under debate but growing in consensus[71] – but also that he behaves in a way fitting in a Mazdean ideological framework (he kills one after the other the seven brothers of Sarah, before they can copulate with her; *Tb*. 3, 7-9), where chastity and sterility are considered big sins, and where one of the most important aims of the demons is to block or to destroy the process of reproduction and continuation of life (recall the Gāθic antagonism between "life" and "[impossibility] of living"). It seems to me more productive to reflect on the wider context (and in particular on the fact that the entire story is located in Ecbatana) in which such an influence could have been developed with fresh trends. Any attempt to deduce a complete

[68] See Römer, 2002: 85-86. Cf. now Liverani, 2003: 223-234.

[69] Widengren, 1957: 215-216; 1961: 118; cf. Moulton, 1913: 327-329. Shaked, 1984: 313-317.

[70] Cf. Jastrow, 1903, I: 129; Cheyne, 1899.

[71] Cf. Kohut, 1866: 72-78 (tr. di Cama, 1970: 251-266); Moulton, 1913: 250-252; Gray, 1929: 186 with additional bibliography; Autran, 1935: 205-206; Widengren, 1957: 215; Shaked, 1984: 318. Against the association between the Avestan demon of the fury (*aēšma*-, m., "fury") and Asmodeus see already Lagrange, 1904: 210 and in particular Scheftelowitz, 1920: 61, who explains its etymology through the root *šmd* "apostatize." For a relatively fresh and supportive evaluation of the Iranian backgound see Pines, 1970.

Iranian derivation of Jewish angelology and demonology would be nonsensical, because – as for instance Marco Bussagli (1991: 13-31) has remarked (and as discussed)[72] –, it is difficult to deny the presence of other elements, such as those deriving from the Mesopotamian world. More significant is the comparison between the Talmudic representation of the Archangels, displayed on the two sides of God's throne, and the Zoroastrian representation, well known thanks to the Iranian *Bundahišn* (chap. XXVI, 8).[73] This parallel was mentioned by Kohut (1866: 25) and reconsidered by Jackson (1898); though the fact that both sources are very late it presents us with some doubts about the direction of the influence. However, we must also consider the interesting fact that even scholars such as Duchesne-Guillemin,[74] substantially less favourable to accepting direct derivations between Judaism and Mazdeism, have remarked, for instance, that the names of the eunuchs of Assueros (*Esther* I, 10) not only show a strong Iranian derivation, but also in some cases can be associated with the very names of certain Aməṣ̌a Spəṇtas.[75] Although this datum could be an external and formal fact, partly derived from misunderstandings and imprecise adaptations – for instance it is very peculiar to see divine entities reduced to the status of servants of King Xerxes – its presence confirms an evident cultural exchange and mutual impact between both religions.

Another fitting case to which various studies have been dedicated concerns the presence in the apocryphal (Christian and Hebrew) literatures of a good spirit opposed to a bad one. Such a doctrine seems to have been received in other contexts (e.g., the *Testament of Judah*, the *Fourth Gospel*, etc.), but it is explicitly evoked in the *Manual of Discipline* from Qumran. In this particular case, the presence of an influence of an Iranian pattern, properly Zoroastrian or perhaps Zurvanite, has been referred to also outside the club of specialists of Iranian studies.[76] The problem, certainly difficult, deserves to be underlined, because it cannot be set aside from the later results emerging in the Christian tradition, where Satan actually becomes the "god of this century" (Paul, II *Cor*. 4, 4: ὁ θεὸς τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου; *deus huius saeculi*) and the "prince of this world" (John, 12, 31: ὁ ἄρχων τοῦ κόσμου τούτου; *princeps huius mundi*).[77] The possible Zurvanite elements of this doctrine cannot be separated from some later speculations (which, in their own turn, could be ascribed to a close tradition) concerning the stereotyped ages of the three Evangelical Magi (the first young, the second middle-aged and the third old), who represent the three periods of human life, but also the three forms of Zurvan-Αἰών,[78] ac-

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[72] More strictly concerning the subjects discussed in this article is the contribution by Stroumsa, 1994. Cf. also Shaked, 1984: 317-318.

[73] See Anklesaria, 1956: 212-213. About the *Bundahišn* see now MacKenzie, 1989.

[74] Cf., e.g., Duchesne-Guillemin, 1958: 71-84. See also Russell, 1990.

[75] Cf. Duchesne-Guillemin, 1978: 60-63; but see on the problem of the Persian names in the *Book of Esther* the following contributions by: Mayer, 1961; Gehman, 1924; Millard, 1977; Moore, 1982; Shaked, 1982: 292-303; Yamauchi, 1990: 226-239; Russell, 1990; Skjærvø, 1994: 500-501; Hinze, 1994.

[76] On this subject see Duchesne-Guillemin, 1978: 64-67, with additional bibliography.

[77] See Gnoli, 1983: 158.

[78] See in general Zaehner, 1955; on the origin of Zurvanisme see Gignoux (1981) and Shaked (1979: XXXIV) suggesting a late date, but *contra* Gnoli (1991b). For the Indian parallels see Scheftelowitz, 1929; see also Junker, 1923; Degani, 1961 and Gnoli, 1994a: 544-545. For a comparison between Iranian and Judaic millenarism see also Gignoux, 1990.

cording to the interpretation and adaptation of a heterodox doctrine, surely of remarkable antiquity.[79] Also important is the possible Iranian derivation of a series of notions appearing in the *Slavonic Book of Enoch*, such as the concept of progressive creation of the world, from the visible state (*gētīg*) to the invisible (*mēnōg*), and the existence of two different times, the eternal and the limited.[80] Recently, Yuri Stoyanov, during one of his talks in Ravenna emphasized this already: "R. Otto and Pines have called attention to the evident Zoroastrian echoes in the allusion to the 'Animal Soul' accusing man (58: 4) in the apocalypse and its time-speculations on the 'Aion of Creation' and the 'Great Aion' (65: 1-8), which adds Iranian influences to the above-mentioned ones influences emanating from sources outside of Judaism." He also remarked that: "The trinity of God and the two principles of light and darkness, respectively Adoil and Arkhas, has also been compared to the Zurvanite trinity of Zurvan, Ohrmazd and Ahriman, given the fact that the speculations on time display an obvious Iranian, probably Zurvanite impact on the Apocalypse."

To what extent the Iranian tradition concerning the Fravaṣ̌i (a feminine double of the individual personality, a spiritual-guide and protector, existing prior to the individual birth) could have stimulated the Christian doctrine of the guardian angel,[81] as well as that of the couple of angelic figures accompanying the human being, remains the subject of investigation which requires a new evaluation of all the sources with methodological prudence and without confessional prejudices, where nobody should be afraid of losing something, if a foreign influence would result plausible or implausible.

Certainly seminal, but on a more fundamental level, is the problem of the possible connections between Zoroastrianism and Judaism in the framework of the doctrines regarding the so-called *post mortem* dimension.[82] The complex Mazdean concept of the final judgment and the subsequent introduction to a paradisiacal or infernal condition (*aŋhuš vahištō* "the best existence" vs. *aŋhuš acištō* "the worst existence"; *garō dəmāna-* "the house of the song (of welcome)" vs. *drujō dəmāna-* "the house of lie")[83] – a doctrine of Gāθic origin to which we have already referred – has often been mentioned as an idea which could have influenced the evolution of the Jewish concept of the afterlife. We see, starting from the Post-exilic period, a significant evolution from an undefined and grey Še'ōl, an undetermined abode of the dead, towards a new concept of the afterlife, based on the dualistic distinction between Hell and Paradise and the diffusion of the idea of a final retribution of sins and merits.[84] The subject is unlimited, because it involves the entire history of both traditions and represents one of the key points of the *querelle* concerning the importance of the relations between these two religious cultures. Thus we simply point out that, in a larger or in a minor form, the entire bibliography about these general themes (discussed in the previous pages) with its enormous number of arguments on both

[79] Panaino, 1999: 33, 47, n. 12, with additional bibliography.
[80] Shaked, 1984: 320-321. See also Pines, 1970.
[81] Moulton, 1913: 324-325; Autran, 1935: 208-209. See also Söderblom, 1899.
[82] Cf. Clemen, 1912: 168-174.
[83] Cf. Jackson, 1928: 147-149; see also Bartholomae, 1904: 512-513; 1090-1092; cf. Kellens-Pirart (1990: 238, 262, sub *dəmāna-*).
[84] See the comparisons, notwithstanding the skeptical evaluation, listed by König, 1964: 277-279.

sides, compels us to pursue this tantalizing subject, which we cannot analytically evaluate here. The invitation to further analysis is all the more crucial, given that different positions in the debate are not always absolute and sometimes yield on certain point. Consider, for instance, the Zoroastrian idea of the resurrection of the dead, a doctrine already evident in the Avestan framework, and which seems to have been ignored in the oldest Jewish literature. Even Söderblom (1901: 315-316), who was skeptical about the significance of the Iranian impact on Judaism, considered the connection in this context reasonable, although with some prudent restrictions (see also the works of Mills, Cheyne e Stave).[85]

Before the final considerations, it seems to me necessary to underline the fact that, among the themes of special interest, we have that of the origin of "Iranian apocalyptic" in a wider sense.[86] Iranian apocalyptic seems to be derived from an independent background of eschatological ideas[87]; yet, after the studies of Ph. Gignoux[88] and more recently Carlo Cereti,[89] dedicated in particular to the later elements attested in the Pahlavi sources of the ninth century A.D., the presence of influences of Judaeo-Christian and Islamic origin is no doubt evident. While the eschatological doctrines concerning the individual destiny of the soul are well described and carefully documented in the older Zoroastrian sources (such as the doctrine regarding the function of sacrifices as a means for attaining safety and eternity),[90] the development of a real apocalyptic, considered in the general framework of a "literary genre," is only the fruit of a later phenomenon and reflects the impact of Judaeo-Christian cultures, superimposing further refinements on an already established doctrine.

It seems to me very fitting for this contribution to give only a summary of the Pahlavi sources belonging to the Sasanian and post Sasanian periods which refer to the Jewish community,[91] because, in spite of the absorption of elements of Judaism described above, we find strong criticism of Judaism (*yahūdīh*) and Jews (*yahūd*)[92]; yet seen in the context of their times, these attacks may have been aimed at other religions as well. In fact, in the changed conditions of the Mazdean Church after the fall of the Sasanian dynasty under Islām, in particular during the ninth and tenth centuries, the priests and wise Zoroastrians became more prudent. Thus, in the *Šāyast nē-Šāyast*, VI, 7 (West, 1880: 196) Jews and Christians are put together with the Zendīg and peoples "of the bad religion" (*ak-dēnīh*), and the *Dēnkard* (in which the *Torah* is said to contain nothing but the words of the demons, while the Jewish Scripture is held

[85] In many studies a particular point is heavily underlined, the fact that, according to the Jewish tradition, the resurrection does not seem to be possible for all the dead, but only for "your dead," i.e., the right Jews, in other words only the dead of Yahveh. See already Söderblom (1901: 316-321) and Widengren (1957: 226-233).

[86] Moulton (1913: 326-327) supposes an Iranian influence on the *Revelation* of John (20, 2, 7-10; 8, 7-12, 9, 15), but the comparison would be fitting only in the case of some passages attested in the *Bundahišn* (such as those of the liberation of the snake Aži Dahāka and of the fall of Gōzihr, the celestial dragon); see also Autran, 1935: 215-234, 235-250.

[87] See Shaked, 1984: 321-324; 1994: 27-51. Cf. Kellens, 1994; 1995.

[88] Gignoux, 1985-88; 1986; 1999.

[89] Cereti, 1995b: 11-27; 1995c; 1996. A different point of view has been suggested by Widengren - Hultgård - Philonenko, 1995.

[90] See Kellens, 1994.

[91] On this subject see Gray, 1905a; 1905b; 1915; Darmesteter, 1889; de Menasce, 1945: 176-181; Widengren, 1961; Shaked, 1990: 85-104.

[92] Cf. Widengren, 1961: 121.

to have been composed by Aži Dahāka [*Dk*, III, 227, 229, 288],[93] a demonic being with the body of a dragon, who lived in Babylon), also contains very negative references to Christians and Manichaeans. Perhaps we can see here a polemic reference to the most famed Talmudic academic centres of the Sasanian period which were located in Sura, Pumbedita and Nehardea.[94] Two chapters (XIII and XIV) of the *Škand-gumānīg Wizār* turn out to be very significant, because they contain a detailed criticism of the Jewish religion (with a good number of direct quotations from the *Pentateuch*, *Isaiah*, the *Psalms*, and other texts), from the point of view of the Zoroastrian doctrine of the ninth century A.D., for which the best source is still the edition and the penetrating commentary by Jean de Menasce.[95] It is again to the deep intuition of Father de Menasce (1969) that we owe the plausible suggestion that, behind many accusations delivered against the Mosaic religion, was the intention to target the Islāmic monotheism, which, after the fall of the Sasanians to the Arabs,[96] was formally excluded from any open or direct criticism. This hypothesis seems no doubt attractive, because it explains the anti-Judaic references (or at least many of them) as a kind of coded attack on Islām. Some centuries later, when the Zoroastrian communities became only a pale minority, in order to obtain a larger space of tolerance in the framework of the "peoples of the book," some Mazdean wise men would try to superimpose and mix the image and personality of Zoroaster with that of Abraham, even though the Jewish patriarch was previously considered under a dark light in Pahlavi literature.[97]

A different subject is that of the very important Judaeo-Persian literature, fruit of a seminal community still living today in Iran, about which I will give only some basic bibliographic references in note.[98]

In conclusion, I would like to express the wish that, although the present contribution is surely not sufficient, it could stimulate a wider reflection on the significance of the religious thought developed in the Iranian Pre-Islamic world, and at the same time a deeper analysis, perhaps through a reconsideration of the historiographical problems, of the controversial, but sometimes ignored problem of the "mutual" influences between the religious cultures of Iran and of the Jewish world. It is very improbable that the final word might ever be written on such a question, but a good step forward would be that of approaching such a target with clarity and prudent attention. It is surely a fitting subject for the MELAMMU scholarly community.

93 Cf. de Menasce, 1945: 240, 242, 284-285; Shaked, 1990: 94-99.
94 Gray, 1905a; 1905b: 180-181; 1915: 562b.
95 1945: 175-203. See now the contribution of Shapira, 2001.
96 See Gabrieli, 1996.
97 Russell (1987b: 60). For the main problems concerning the late Zoroastrian literature see Bailey, 1943. For an overview of the Pahlavi literature see now Cereti, 2001.
98 Important are the essays on Judaeo-Persian written by G. Lazard (many of the are now collected in Lazard, 1995: 27-48, 107-121, 123-132, 157-152); see also Asmussen, 1970 and Gnoli, 1964 (on the inscriptions of Gūr) all containing a large and useful bibliography.

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