

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php

FOREIGN LITERATURE ON THE NEW
TESTAMENT.

SOME part of the ground covered by Herr Bousset has been almost simultaneously explored, with great minuteness, in Ernst Böklen's *die Verwandtschaft der jüdisch-christlichen mit der Parsischen Eschatologie* (Göttingen, Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1902, M. 4).

The object of this monograph is to discuss, or rather to present material for a discussion of, the relations between Zoroastrianism and early Christianity in the department of eschatology, where the analogies and coincidences of the two religions are mainly, though not exclusively, visible. It was time that such investigations should be attempted. The long series of researches conducted by scholars like Kohut, Spiegel, Darmesteter, Cheyne and Lehmann has laid bare the data available for determining the influence of Mazdeism upon post-exilic Judaism, and in the apocalyptic Judaism from Enoch downwards Parsi traces are both numerous and significant. As early Christian eschatology drew considerably upon such apocalyptic traditions, it is natural to suppose that, indirectly at least, it should betray some slight dependence upon such conceptions. And, as a matter of fact, this is demonstrable, particularly throughout the book of Revelation. In our own country, Professor J. H. Moulton, whose investigations seem unknown to Herr Böklen, has done very competent pioneering work in this field of research. But much remains to be won, and a sober, critical survey of the whole question is one of the desiderata of the day. Unfortunately the present essay does not go far toward supplying the want. For one thing, it is marked by wealth and width of reading rather than by historical judgment. Herr Böklen's plan is to sketch, first of all, the Parsi conception of the individual soul's future after death, and then to collect more or less relevant

parallels to the various items of the doctrine from Jewish, classical, early Christian, Mohammedan and Mandaean sources. In a succeeding section (pp. 69 f.) he develops in the same fashion the final future of the world according to Zoroastrian eschatology, appending here again a rich heap of coincidences and analogies. For these citations, both from Parsi and other writings, every student will feel heartily indebted to Herr Böklen's laborious research. But, even although one may be disposed to agree with his final judgment (which is hurriedly tacked on, pp. 144-149) inclining to a verdict of *non liquet* in the meantime, the reasons for it are not adequately marshalled, nor does this somewhat tentative conclusion (substantially that of Hübschmann, twenty-four years ago) follow with any cogency from the preceding pages, which are descriptive and interesting rather than characterized by any constant impact of critical judgment upon the evidence. This is due, in part, to the limitations of the author's method. The question of the relation between the eschatologies of Zoroastrianism and early Christianity cannot be approached with any security except across a preliminary consideration of this wider and prior question: apart from the medium of Judaism, is there any proof that Mazdeism could or did come into direct contact with early Christianity? The answer to this involves a study of the spread of Zoroastrianism or Magism in the East during the first century of our era, as well as an investigation of the Mithra-cult and similar Iranian developments in the syncretism of the age. It also demands a delimitation of "early Christianity." For, while the influence of Zoroastrianism upon Gnosticism and certain forms of Christianity during and after the second century is patent, it is unscientific to write as if the historical conditions which underlay such a relationship were necessarily in existence during the first century. How far, and in what way, any early Christians in Palestine and Asia Minor were

acquainted with Zoroastrian tenets, is the first question to be asked. And when this is ignored, as it is by Herr Böklen, or when writings from the first three or four centuries of early Christian literature are promiscuously cited as if they rested on the same historical and religious plane, the method must be pronounced unsound and the results precarious. Such parallels or analogies as are adduced become as unreliable as statistics, even when they are not verbal and fallacious. The correct estimate of their significance depends upon the accurate appraisal of prior historical factors and religious presuppositions. Herr Böklen fails to appreciate the latter, nor does he make any attempt to place his readers in the proper position for focussing his picture or for sifting either the early Christian or the Zoroastrian quotations which he has accumulated with conscientious and painstaking labour. The value of his timely monograph would have been doubled had he seen his way to preface it with some historical survey of the period or periods during which any inter-action of Mazdeism and early Christianity occurred, and also with a lucid statement of the literary problems which attend the higher criticism of the Avesta. He is of course alive to the uncertainty regarding writings like the later Bundahis, and very properly assumes the pre-Christian age of the Gâthas and the bulk of the Vendidad. But I am afraid he has presupposed in his readers a better knowledge of current Avestan criticism than some of them are at all likely to possess or to secure easily.

5. Finally it is to be noted that in the new series of the *Texte und Untersuchungen* two essays have been issued, this year, which are of special moment for the New Testament critic. One, appealing to the textualist, is Dr. R. Janssen's attempt to reconstruct the Greek text of the Fourth Gospel employed by Nonnus the Egyptian, whose metrical paraphrase of that gospel appeared at the beginning of the 5th

century (*das Johannes-Evylm. nach der Paraphrase des Nonnus Panopolitanus*). The value of this text has been already recognized, and even exaggerated, by Blass, at whose instigation and with whose assistance the Michigan scholar has worked. Its main interest is the light which it may throw upon the circulation of earlier texts in whose wake it seems to follow. For example, a careful collation shows that the Nonnus text possesses striking affinities, too striking to be merely accidental, with the text of Chrysostom, the Syriac versions (particularly the Sinaitic), and the Latin versions (especially *e*). So far as I can judge, its affinities with Hort's "neutral" type are less than its agreements with A D, etc. But these relationships, which outweigh any independent value of the text, are problems to be worked out elsewhere. Meanwhile, one has to acknowledge with gratitude the immense labour spent by the author on this small essay; it is a pity that he could not enter into the wider textual questions raised by his studies, but what he has done is well done and welcome. The result is naturally problematical at various points, owing to the delicate nature of the task. Yet Dr. Janssen has worked with great self-restraint and patience, and the one complaint one has to make about his textual notes is that occasionally, as e.g. in the case of the Coptic versions, they fail to exhibit an altogether adequate conspectus of the evidence, as that bears upon the comparative criticism of Nonnus.

Dr. Wrede's *die Echtheit des 2 Thess. Briefsuntersucht*, which deals with a problem of literary criticism, decides that this epistle must have been copied from, or consciously moulded upon, 1 Thessalonians, and that the author wrote not earlier than 100 A.D. The discussion of the eschatology (pp 40 f.) furnishes no very convincing arguments. Wrede's really strong point against the Pauline authorship is the

amount of self-repetition and the detailed resemblances between the two epistles. These parallels are printed in full and examined with keen care; but one doubts whether the admitted difficulty occasioned by this feature is less insurmountable than the other difficulties involved in any of the pseudonymous hypotheses. The latter press so heavily on Wrede that, in opposition to Schmiedel, he gives up the seventh decade date entirely, as too soon after Paul's death. Rejecting *en route* Spitta's attempt to save the epistle by means of Timothy's authorship (p. 36), and finding in iii. 17 a reference to some collection of Pauline epistles, he reverts to the close of the century, thus agreeing with Holtzmann in opposing the more conservative view which has recently been winning doughty adherents like the Dutch Baljon, the Swedish Kolmodin, Professor Bacon in America, and Mr. Askwith in this country. As I have said, the strength of this clever essay lies in its display of the literary relationship between the two Thessalonian epistles, rather than in the attempt to provide a positive historical setting for the pseudonymous letter, although it must be allowed that the treatment of 2 Thess. ii. 4 and Rev. xi. 1-2 is on the right lines, and that the parallel to iii. 6 f. adduced from Hippolytus (p. 49) is more than interesting. The monograph shows all the subtlety which is the strength and weakness of the author's work: subtlety allied to a certain rigour. But, while admitting the particular difficulty emphasized by this vigorous, frank study, I am still inclined to think that the Thessalonians were diverted, like poor Ariadne in Plutarch's tale, by actual forged letters, which were written during Paul's absence, and that the *ἀνομία* may have been Caligula's blasphemous claim to worship or something similar.

JAMES MOFFATT.