



DEAD SEA SCROLLS

DEADSEA SCROLLS, parchment and papyrus scrolls written in Hebrew, mainly of the 1st centuries B.C.E. and C.E., found in caves around Qomrān on the northwest coast of the Dead Sea and considered to represent a sect of Judaism. A number of Iranian elements can be discerned in these documents, particularly pertaining to dualism, a characteristic of Iranian religions. Until the discovery of the Qomrān manuscripts the doctrine of two spirits was only sporadically attested in Jewish literature, but it is clear that the spirits under God's command were not always good and benevolent; for example, God is said to have sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the citizens of Shechem (Judges 9:23) and Saul to have been troubled by an "evil spirit" after the "spirit of God" departed from him (I Samuel 16:14). In apocryphal, Christian, and rabbinical literature the good and the evil spirits are opposed to each other. For example, in the apocryphal Gospel of Judas (2nd century C.E.) the spirits of truth and error that serve men are mentioned, as well as a third spirit personifying the ability to choose: "and in the midst is the Spirit of intelligence, who is able to turn wherever he chooses." In most texts, however, only good and evil spirits are named, as in the Gospel of St. John; in the Gnostic treatise *Hermas* there is reference to the holy spirit and the evil spirit who dwell together in man.

In contrast to these laconic references, the manual of discipline (or community rule) found among the Qomrān documents includes a small treatise on the two spirits as propounded by the Qomrān sect, founded in the mid-2nd century B.C.E. The fact that God created all things is stressed, followed by the



specification “He created man to have dominion over the world and made for him two spirits, that he might walk by them until the appointed time of his visitation; they are the spirits of truth and error. In the abode of light are the origins of truth, and from the source of darkness are the origins of error. In the hand of the prince of lights is dominion over all sons of righteousness; in the ways of light they walk. And in the hand of the angel of darkness is all dominion over the sons of error; and in the ways of darkness they walk. And by the angel of darkness is the straying of all the sons of righteousness, and all their sin and their iniquities and their guilt, and the transgressions of their works in his dominion. . . . But God in the mysteries of his understanding and in his glorious wisdom has ordained a period for the rule of error, and in the appointed time of punishment he will destroy it forever. And then shall come out forever the truth of the world” (Burrows, pp. 374-76).

As André Dupont-Sommer and K. G. Kuhn independently observed, these words are immediately reminiscent of the Zoroastrian doctrine of the two spirits, as embodied in the ethical and eschatological dualism of the Gathas. Kuhn also noted that the Jewish document differs from Iranian doctrine on one important point: specifying predestination, rather than the free choice of Zoroastrian theology. He did not, however, look beyond the Gathas and orthodox Zoroastrianism. Henri Michaud, on the other hand, sought a connection to Zurvanism but unfortunately based his argument on Plutarch’s dubious testimony; the question must now be reexamined in the light of R. C. Zaehner’s *Zurvan, a Zoroastrian Dilemma*.

It is possible to explain the contrast between the free choice offered by Zoroaster and the predestination espoused at Qomrān without resorting to Zurvanism; for example, it could have resulted from an adaptation of gathic doctrine to the context of Jewish religion. But there is at least one feature of the Qomrān manual that betrays a nongathic source: identification of the good and evil spirits with light and darkness respectively. In addition, the essential gathic emphasis on the role of the two spirits in the drama of choice was so alien to the Jewish milieu that it could be accommodated only through conception of a third spirit (see above).

The opposition between predestination and free choice, the identification of the spirits with light and darkness, and the claim that the two spirits were created by God are all features of the Zurvanite myth of a god of time or destiny, father of Ohrmazd (light) and [Ahriman](#) (dark). As this kind of theology prevailed in Iranian religions in the period of the New Covenant Jewish



community at Damascus (1st century B.C.E.), it is more likely than the ancient gathic theology to have been known to the Qomrān sect. This conclusion is borne out by Flavius Josephus' report that "The sect of the Essenes holds that Destiny is master of all things and that nothing happens to men but what has been decreed by it" (*Antiquitates* 13.5.9). In the Dead Sea scrolls several references to casting lots provide further corroborative evidence: "According to each man's inheritance in truth he does right, and so he hates error; but according to his possession in the lot of error he does wickedly in it, and so he abhors truth" (from the manual of discipline; Burrows, p. 376); "Thou has cast for man an eternal lot" (from the Thanksgiving psalms; Burrows, p. 404).

The Middle Persian term *mēnōg* has a complex of meanings that are strikingly similar to those of the Hebrew term *rūah*, used in at least three senses at Qomrān: the two spiritual entities, the two opposing qualities in man, and the numerous qualities and faculties in man (Shaked, 1972, p. 436). Nevertheless, "The complex of notions associated with the idea of *mēnōg* forms part of a coherent system in Iran, and stands in complementary opposition to the term *gētīg*, while in Judaism the development, though not actually contradicting anything found originally in Judaism, never comes to form anything like a coherent system" (Shaked, 1972, p. 437). Ohrmazd is said to be all-knowing, Ahriman ignorant; perhaps the most distinctive epithet of God in the scrolls is *El de'oth* "the God of knowledge" (Shaked, 1972, p. 440).

In the creation myth recorded by the Armenian Eznik of Kołb in the 5th century Zurvan says to Ahriman "I have made Ohrmazd reign above thee," which implies that Ohrmazd reigns in the *mēnōg* but Ahriman in this world. Similarly, at Qomrān the present age is said to be dominated by the evil spirit: "So shall they do year by year all the days of the dominion of Belial. . . . And [the world] has wallowed in the ways of wickedness in the dominion of error until the appointed time of judgment which has been decreed" (Burrows, pp. 373, 376).

There is also a single allusion to belief in physical resurrection, a Zoroastrian doctrine, in the Qomrān scrolls, in hymn 17 (Vermès, p. 186): "For the sake of Thy glory Thou hast purified man of sin that . . . he may partake of the lot of Thy Holy Ones; bodies gnawed by worms may be raised from the dust to the counsel [of Thy truth] . . . that he may stand before Thee with the everlasting host."



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