

“The Talmud in Its Iranian Context”

A Book Review

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Scholars have hitherto played a negligible role in exploring the contribution of Zoroastrian Iran toward the cultural shaping of Jews living within its orbit, though they have done a great spade work in the past exploring the relationship between Persian and Jewish sources. *The Talmud in Its Iranian Context* (edited by Carol Bakhas and Rahim Shayegan, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen, 2010: Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism, 135), (along with the volumes of Irano-Judaica), represent a welcome trend towards addressing this lacuna: “We can no longer afford to imagine the rabbis who gave life to the Babylonian Talmud as hermetically sealed off from the wider, vibrant world they inherited. Indeed, mounting evidence demonstrates that in order to comprehend Sasanian Jewry more fully, in particular the rabbis and the heritage they have bequeathed in the Babylonian Talmud, scholars must immerse themselves in the language, culture, society, and other religious ethos of the Sasanian Empire.” (p. XIII). Various contributors to this text lay bare the fact of extensive influences of Sasanian law and culture on Jews in Persia, leading to the discovery of a joint intellectual history of Sasanian Jewish rabbis and Sasanian Zoroastrian Dastwars, the Zoroastrian official titles of Hargbed and Bidakhsh in the Babylonian Talmud, the integration of Sasanian legal terminology in the social life of Persian Jewry, the Persian Jews’ extensive knowledge of Sasanian jurisprudence often enabling them to even manipulate Sasanian laws to benefit themselves, Mobeds and rabbis practicing similar rituals and holding comparable beliefs, the Jewish practice of observing silence during a meal and wearing a girdle, new insight into understanding and interpreting Pahlavi texts for comparative purposes, adopting the paradigm of “intertextuality” adopted in Midrashic studies for finding new strategies for reading Pahlavi texts and Zand, the oral tradition and multiplicity of response to the issues raised, etc. Without appearing facetious, I thought I would fail in my duty as a still surviving Magian if I did not present my two-penny worth of observations on the topics that touch the Magians, albeit in the manner of a non-academician, in order to enhance the long neglected dialog between the two ancient systems without meaning to contradict any views but rather hoping to provide a Magian angle for adding to its reliability.

Richard Kalmin, one of the foremost scholars on Judaism, surveys the evidence that the Magis were dream interpreters, even though his very first words are: “Evidence is far from plentiful,” he does find plenty of evidence to

prove his thesis, but they are mostly extraneous and not internal from the body of Zoroastrian texts, the testimony of the Greeks, the bitter enemy of Persians, can hardly be relied upon here. Herodotus does mention the dream interpreters *AMONG* the Magis (and not Magis *as* interpreters) in 1.120, 1.128, and 7.12-19. However Herodotus had never visited Persia, and he may perhaps be confusing the Magi with the Chaldean priests he met in Babylon, who were well-known for interpreting dreams. Herodotus narrates that the Magis interpreted Xerxes's dreams as Xerxes being destined to be the ruler of the entire world, "inducing him to wage his ill-fated war with the Greeks." (p. 91). However, Herodotus states earlier that it was King Darius I's ardent resolve to conquer Greece after losing out to them earlier and that he even ordered his personal attendant to remind him of it every day. On his death bed he entrusted his son Xerxes to accomplish this goal. So Herodotus' testimony here is not reliable and is contradictory to what he himself had stated earlier in this very regard.

Cicero did have at least some familiarity with the Magis, living as he did in Anatolia at the time, but due to the wide-spread syncritization prevailing then in Anatolia, it is difficult to ascertain whether the Magis had assimilated alien practices, including dream interpretation, if they indeed did. Cicero has much more to say about the Magi too. See my paper on this subject in the *Journal of the K.R. Cama Oriental Institute*, January 1995, pp. 59-65. Dream interpretation is a universal phenomenon, and the Magis may have at times engaged in it, but there is no clear-cut trace of it in the Avesta, much less any reference or methodology for the interpretation of dreams in the Avesta that I know as a Magian. Rather, the fact that Artaxerxes II ranks astrologers together among sorcerers when he says in a late inscription cited by Shayegan "let not the sorcerer, nor the astrologer destroy (what I have done)," may militate against Kalmin's hypothesis, especially as Artaxerxes II is unquestionably regarded by historians as Zoroastrian unlike the earlier Achaemenids. See my paper, "Were the Achaemenians Zoroastrian? A Zoroastrian View-point" presented at the V Conference of the Societas Iranologica Europoea at Ravenna, October 6-11, 2003. *Denkard* (74:72) asserts that Zarathushtra visited Babylon and "converted the city from sorcery," which, even though apparently unhistorical, reveals the Zoroastrian distaste for Chaldaean practices which even involved the prophet's mythical visit to prove it. Also, a Zoroastrian daily prayer, oft repeated during the day, disavows sorcery and magic. Moreover, as Rahem Shayegan has painstakingly pointed out, the Sasanians were not aware of their Achaemenid ancestors, and their so-called claim to the land conquered by their Achaemenid ancestors is a Roman fabrication, and if the Sasanians made such a claim, it was because of the Roman propaganda awakening them to it. Even so, the Roman propagandists refer more often to Cyrus than to Darius I, which may speak for itself in more

ways than one. (See Rahim Shayegan, “On the Rationale Behind the Roman Wars of Sabuhr II the Great,” *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 18, 2008, 111-113.)

Kalmin himself finds the evidence supplied by the dream literature as “equivocal”. He also notes that Palestinian rabbis were as a rule favorably disposed toward dream interpretation, and the Bible, while regarding the will of God as supreme, “values the dream interpreters Joseph and Daniel.” He concedes: “Clearly Babylonian rabbinic attitudes are not reducible to any single cause; a variety of factors most plausibly played a role.” (p. 92) Bezabel Bar-Kochva (*The Image of the Jews in Greek Literature*, University of California Press, Berkley, 2010, p. 523) reports that such flattering traits and practices “as the lifestyle and daily schedule of philosopher astrologist (Theophrastus), and the incubation of prophetic dreams in the Jerusalem Temple” were attributed to the Jews in the Hellenistic period. If so, at least a novice like me would not assume them to militate against Judaism then.

Relying on the advice to the rabbis in b. Pesahim for avoiding any contact with astrologers, Kalmin, on the basis of some observers, assumes “some of these Chaldaeans were Persian priests.” “Modern scholars,” Kalmin adds, “note the terms “magian” and “Chaldaean” are interchangeable in the writings of many ancient authors, and that Chaldaeans, like Magi, had technical expertise that made them sought after by an international clientele.” Kalmin, however, does not provide references for it. All the Iranists I have read uniformly denounce the tendency of the ancients towards identifying Magis with Chaldaeans as misleading and untenable. Much less is known to my knowledge for the Magis having “had technical expertise (like the Chaldaeans) that made them sought after by an international clientele,” so they possibly could not be a threat to the Babylonian rabbis as Kalmin assumes. Not all the ancient writers tended to distinguish between the Magis and Chaldaeans, but Albert De Jong finds Diogenes Laërtius quite reliable in his observations. — *Traditions of the Magi: Zoroastrianism in Greek and Latin Literature*, Brill, Leiden, 1997. De Jong does not fail to notice that Diogenes stays clear of contemporary practice of identifying the Magi with the Chaldaeans. Diogenes was not only well aware of Zoroastrianism, but also of various Greek writers who were interested in studying Zoroastrianism. While even modern scholars as a rule uncritically regurgitate Herodotus’ version of Xerxes flogging the Hellespont, Diogenes was perhaps the first writer, Greek or non-Greek, to deride Herodotus’ fallacy for depicting Xerxes as flogging his goddess of water. What is all the more impressive is his precise understanding of Zoroastrian practices: “But that he (Xerxes) would have destroyed statues is natural enough” (Ibid, p. 227), because the Persian religion disallowed raising statues to the divinities. Therefore, the fact of Diogenes refraining from identifying the Magis with the Chaldaeans speaks volumes about him in this matter. If the rabbis felt threatened by the Magi, reasons for it may perhaps lie

elsewhere, say, the rabbis' possible concern about their flock being attracted to the Magi for other reasons such as their easy connections with the government officials and their ability to resolve Jewish demands or grievances quickly because of it, or the risk of conversion which, though rare, was not prohibited by the Magis then, etc., etc. What the *Cambridge History of Iran* (Vol. 3 (2), Cambridge, 1983, p.828) observes in this regard should enable us to quench the issue: "But whatever justification may be found for confusing the Chaldeans and Magians and idealizing them as bearers of primeval wisdom, the process clearly went too far. Thus an entire literature was based on names which were supposed, by their Persian sound, to establish a precise link with the Magians. Among such names, Zoroastres, Zaratas and others like these have nothing at all to do with the historical Zoroaster. Seen though in the context of Iranian religion, the Greek Magian texts are an indication of this religion's susceptibility to mis-interpretation."

These of course are hypothetical reasons, and further research is needed, especially as there is no tradition of dream interpretation among the Magi for centuries, even though they have kept intact most traditions even after migrating to India. Rather there is some evidence that suggests that magic was not unknown to the Jews. – See Gideon Bohak's book on *Ancient Jewish Magic*, and his various articles on Jewish magic, (especially as he is a Senior lecturer at Tel-Aviv University in the department of Jewish Philosophy and the Program of Religious Studies) and the book on *Prayer, Magic, And the Stars In The Ancient and Late Antique World*, edited by Scott Noegel, Joel Walker, and Brennon Wheeler. (The Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park, Pennsylvania, 2003). The latter covers magic and society in the late Sasanian Iraq but is conspicuous by the absence in it of any reference to the Persians or Zoroastrianism which is not true for Judaism or even Christianity. (See footnote 16 on page 5 and pp. 187-206.) Also see Michael Swartz's *Scholastic Magic: Ritual and Revelations in Early Jewish Mysticism*, 1996.

M.A. Dandamaev and V.G. Lukonin deplore "the confusion of the Median Magi with Chaldean astrology and magic" and "also the arbitrary interpretation of the term "magus" as wizard, sorcerer and magician. These scholars ignore the distinction, already well known to Apuleius between the Iranian Magi and the meaning of "sorcerer" and "astrologer" which the word "magus" took on later among the Greeks and Romans. Apuleius spoke out against such a confusion, observing that the word "magus" is used among the Persians to designate priests and not magicians." (*The Culture and Social Institutions of Ancient Iran*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1989, pp. 329-30).

Moreover, the Babylonian Talmud is not entirely free of references to Babylonian astronomy as shown by Jonathan Ben-Dov (Neo-Assyrian Astronomical Terminology in the Babylonian Talmud, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 130.2, 2010, pp.267-270). Whereas I am not aware of any

adoption of Babylonian practices in Zoroastrian texts, though some other indirect influences may exist, especially in the sphere of calendar months.

There are references to bibliomancy in Eliezer Segal's *The Babylonian Esther Midrash* (Scholar Press, Atlanta, 1994) and in J. Trachtenberg's *Jewish Magic and Superstition* (New York, 1970, p. 216).

As sorcerers and devil-worshippers were regarded as *Ag-din*, 'follower of the evil religion', (See Albert De Jong, *Irano-Judaica V*, Jerusalem, 2003, p. 21), it is inconceivable that the Magis had any affinity with the Chaldean sorcerers.

Kalmin quotes a rabbi as saying, "He who learns a single thing from a Magian is worthy of death" with a comment that it "implies that some rabbis did learn things from Magians" and the evidence for it is outpouring from almost every chapter in this book. Moreover, such a death sentence could not have been even thinkable or possible as the status of the Magi then was next to the king and the Exilarch, or the Jewish Court, had no jurisdiction to pass a death sentence, though it could order other judgments, but only against the Jews. Despite exceptionally good relations prevailing between the Zoroastrians and the Jews, (for which see my forthcoming paper), human nature renders it impossible for two people to live in perfect harmony forever without running into some disenchantment with the other. Even when the Parsi Zoroastrians in India were quite happy with their unprecedented socio-economic progress under the British rule, they nevertheless were not free of friction with the Britishers and the British rule. The Jews were no different and were certain to have experienced some frictions with the Zoroastrians then and tended to express it in provocative terms. Such uneasiness with one another is often evident within the Jewish community itself or any other society. Nevertheless, Kalmin presents a vast array of facts unknown to most Magians who would surely appreciate his pioneering work. Another contribution of Kalmin's thesis lies in inviting attention to the need for studying in-depth relations between the Sasanian Magi and the rabbi who influenced their adherents for centuries, and in inspiring researchers to explore this subject further by involving more Magians in this worthy endeavor.

Another paper on the negative remarks about Cyrus the Great in some Jewish quarters by Jason Mokhtarian is very informative. But for this laudable and long awaited effort towards a cooperative study of Judeo-Sasanian literature and history, such information would hardly be available, at least to the non-Jewish audience to whom it comes rather as a surprise. Louis Ginzberg, the first scholar who noted it, construed it as the Sasanian Jewry simply transferring their discontent with their Sasanian rulers onto their Achaemenian forbears via literary attacks since the Palestinian sources are not so hard against Cyrus. Mokhtarian, however, finds no textual evidence for Ginzberg's hypothesis. Instead he posits that the negative profile of Cyrus is

due to the numerous attempts by Darius I to discount Cyrus's achievements and glory in order to raise his own profile and dynastic claim. As I am at present engaged in writing about it, I am aware of this matter and find Mokhtarian's observations about Darius I's dynastic claim quite in accord with the recent scholarly findings. However, there is little evidence for Darius I or other Achaemenians overtly or actively under-emphasizing or undermining the role of Cyrus. As a matter of fact, every Achaemenian king was reportedly coronated at Cyrus's Pasargadae Palace, after putting on the royal robe Cyrus had worn at his own coronation and, at least ceremoniously, partaking and chewing the herbs and curdled milk he had eaten before winning his battle against Astyagis. So it was "his desire, and indeed need, to attach the family of Cyrus to his family" that Darius ordered a short inscription engraved at Cyrus' palace at Pasargadae, saying "I am Cyrus an Achaemenid," though Cyrus did not claim to be a Achaemenid. "A simple explanation," says R.N. Frye, "would have Darius an usurper, who needed the legitimacy of belonging to the family of Cyrus and was thus entitled to rule." (*G. Gnoli Festschrift*, p. 112). Instead of undermining the greatness of Cyrus, he yearns so much to belong to Cyrus' dynasty in order to demonstrate his own "legitimacy" as a ruler and denounces as liars those that do not believe him. Pragmatic as he was as a "usurper", he even tried hard to manipulate facts about his ancestry, in order to fix or tie in his dynasty with that of Cyrus, and thus feel free to ride on Cyrus' popularity among the Persians. And what is so significant here, is the fact that, while reviewing this same subject of usurpation as Mokhtarian does, Frye not only rules out any effort by Darius to "discount" Cyrus' achievements in order to enhance his but also emphasizes Darius' efforts to ride in on Cyrus' glory, as he found it to be the safest political alternative for his own survival. I do not know of any opinion among the Iranists that contradicts Frye's. Moreover, Darius found it necessary to legitimize his usurpation by marrying "Atossa and Artystone, daughters of Cyrus" as well as Phaedyne "who like Atossa had been wife to Camleyses and then to Bardiya" and "Bardiya's own daughter, Parmys", per A.T. Olmstead— *History of the Persian Empire*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1948, p. 109). Such a move on his part does not smack of "discounting" Cyrus in any way but obviously represents quite an opposite move. Further evidence for it could be generated from what Darius himself claims in the DB passage OP 68-71 that "I had put *OUR* royal house in its proper place, *just as it was previously*. So Gaumata the Magus could not take away *OUR* royal house!" Moreover, A.T. Olmstead observes Darius found it "necessary to deal carefully with any decree claiming the authority of the empire's founder" as "Darius had but recently usurped the throne" and "warned (his satrap) Tattenai and his fellows to keep away from the place and to allow the governor and the elders of the Jews to continue building the temple to the God of Heaven", as ordered by Cyrus. He even provides for the temple's expenses and sternly warns: "If any man alters his (Darius's) decree,

let a bean be put out from his house and let him be impaled upon it, let his house be a refuse heap for ever.” In closing he reiterates: “I Darius have made this decree, let it be executed with all diligence”. (*History of Palestine and Syria*, Charles Scribner’s and Sons, New York, 1931, p. 570). Thus, “discounting” of Cyrus’s achievements can hardly be explained by any known actions of Darius (or even any of his successors). What Olmstead further observes confirms such an assertion: “Scholars in recent years have almost *unanimously declared these decrees to be forgeries*. Placed against their contemporary background, the *decrees are justified*. They are not in Hebrew but in Aramaic, which had already been employed in Babylonia and Assyria as early as the eighth century, and by now had largely supplanted the cuneiform in Babylonia and the hieroglyphics in Egypt. The papyri from Jewish community at Elephantine include official rescripts in Aramaic, copies of the official Aramaic translation of Darius’ own Behistun inscription. The Jewish archives proper show the same official formulae, the same use of Persian words, the same Hebraisms, and the same textual errors.”

As I have explained in a separate treatise on Cyrus, (yet unpublished), downplaying of Cyrus’ exalted status in the Bible could be traced to the uneasiness or wonderment a thousand years later among the Jews for describing a pagan king as a messiah, as messiahs primarily belonged to the House of David and/or to the Judaic faith.

We need to look no further. Cyrus continued to be venerated by the Achaemenians as well as their enemy, the Greeks, up to the very end of dynasty as evidenced by Xenophon’s *Cyropaedia* as well as by all the Achaemenian kings maintaining Cyrus’ resting place so well and spending lavishly for all its rites and Magis, as well as by Alexander honoring Cyrus by visiting it and punishing those that pillaged it. As stated by Arrianus in his *Anabasis of Alexander*, VI, 29, 7-8, the Achaemenid king gave the Magian priests a sheep every day and a fixed quantity of meat and wine as well as a horse each month for conducting religious services for Cyrus. His observations are so much in accord with the Zoroastrian practice to this day that it cannot be casual or doubtful. I should here also note that Ilya Gershevitch’s claim that the story of “The False Smerdes” is after all false (See *Acta Antiqua Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, 27.4, 1979, pp. 337-351) may undermine Mokhtarian’s claim, but Gershevitch’s ingenuous finding that only his genius can fathom, rests on too many assumptions that may not always hold up and if only one of them fails, it may compromise his whole premise.

After (or due to) the Greek conquest and Greek rule, the memory about the Achaemenians faded fast from the Iranian psyche, which retained only the Avestan evidence available to them. Indeed, the Jews were perhaps the only ones aware of King Cyrus then, and of the role he played in freeing the Jews from Babylonian captivity. The Zoroastrians became aware of it only in

modern times due to western scholarship. But the memory of the havoc brought upon them and Darius III by “the accursed Alexander” was too harsh for them to expunge and exclude from their collective memory or history, and so they accounted for it in their own way by suffixing Dara as the last two kings to the end of Kyanian dynasty. Somehow Darius perceived it to his advantage to claim himself as an acceptable, even rightful successor to Cyrus and his dynasty instead of starting his own dynasty though it seems his motive was to end Cyrus’s Median dynasty so as to start a Persian one, since otherwise it is hard to explain his instituting the annual custom of Mogutbish (Magi Beating) Day, known as Magophonia to the Greeks, when it is said no Medean Magi could dare to come out on the streets. Darius seems to have exploited this anti-Medean and anti-Magi feeling among the Persians to his advantage, per Frye (p. 113). Consequently, it was easy for him to accuse Gaumata as the usurper and depict him as a much-hated Medean Magus and hide the fact that whom he really did away with was actually the grandson of Cyrus. But Cyrus was regarded in such high esteem that Darius had no recourse but to hide the truth. So he tried hard to remain in the good grace of Cyrus and his dynasty which led even Herodotus to adopt his false version of the events. He may have employed this subterfuge not only to ensure the acceptance of the people as they evidently revered Cyrus as also to ensure the continued allegiance and assistance of the Medeans, which he indeed succeeded in winning. Daniel T. Potts, as quoted by Mokhtarian, is right on the mark when he describes “Darius’ seizure of power” “as a Persian coup d’ etat,” but it is hard to perceive Cyrus’ empire as Anshanite, since he happened to be a Medean and an Aryan and not an Elamite king ruling over Anshan, as his ancestry clearly demonstrates he was not an Elamite. These facts militate against the hypothesis that “the Persian anti-Cyrus trend influenced the Jews of Babylonia.” If such Persian propaganda, overt or covert, ever existed against Cyrus, Daniel 5:28 would not have generated un-historic stories about the cooperation between Cyrus and Darius the Mede. It is quite plausible that Shapur II came to know about the Achaemenians once ruling over Anatolia and the Near East mainly from his predecessors’ contacts with the Romans and Greeks. For example, Shapur I and Kirdar found many Zoroastrians among the prisoners they took in Cappadocia, per their own inscription at the Ka’be-ye Zartosht near Naqsh-e-Rustom, which is still extant. These Zoroastrians lived there from Achaemenid times, per Boyce. The reason for the anti-Cyrus bias in the Rabbinic literature therefore lies elsewhere. As a clinical psychologist I tend to believe we may not have to look too far for it but in the human nature itself, which often tends to forget past after a lapse of centuries or a millennium, especially in antiquity, and forgets even what a Messiah like Cyrus did for them, but remembers what all their high expectations he did not or could not possibly fulfill, even though he carried the big name-tag of a messiah. History is replete with such scenarios. Even Christ’s followers felt let down in their expectations of

prophecies Christ had raised when they failed to materialize; albeit Cyrus himself cannot be accused of raising people's expectations. Even in our own times Gandhi's promise of *Ram Raj* (Golden Age) failed to arrive. It was natural for the human expectations to overshoot and over-reach when a Messiah is on the horizon. There is no objective record of Cyrus failing the Jews in any tangible way, including not allowing goldsmiths and silversmiths and others to return to Judea; rather, there is evidence that many exiles refused to return to Israel as they were quite well-settled in Babylon, e.g., the Murarkas later on. Being assigned the role of a messiah, Cyrus had an impossible task of meeting every one's expectations of him. This indeed maybe the psychological reality behind the bad press he got, especially in the absence of any tangible evidence for a Persian anti-Cyrus propaganda, as also in face of the abundant evidence to the contrary all through the Achaemenid dynasty. It should also be noted that the Sasanians were quite oblivious of not only Cyrus, but also of most of the Achaemenid rulers, including perhaps Darius I, if we do not go solely by the post-Sasanian testimony of Arab writers that the first Kyanid Dara had started postal system, as it is too late to be reliable. To a lesser extent, it is true of the Parthian dynasty too, as it too is absent in the *Shahnameh*, which may be due to the Sasanian attempts at identifying themselves as the true successors of the Kyanids, in order to bolster their claim as true guardians of the religion and champions of orthodoxy, according to most scholars and so it had nothing to do with Darius I's "political agenda against Cyrus," if it existed at all. And not having expertise in Jewish history, despite writing a lot about it, I do not know if some of the allegations against Cyrus are historically true, e.g., "blaming the failure of Second Temple on the fact of its foreign gentile patronage (*Pesigta Rabbate* 35.1)." If "Palestinian sources often criticize Cyrus for his policy failures," I wonder if history really could bear it out. If it does, Mokhtarian's hypothesis would gain validity. It is difficult however, to agree with Mokhtarian's conclusion that "the Achaemind and Sasanian attitude towards Cyrus had an effect on how the Babylonian exegetes depicted the Persian king of their biblical past" (p. 139), as there is little objective evidence for the prevalence of such an attitude as already stated. Nevertheless more than any scholar that I for one am aware of, Mokhtarian has brought our attention to the negative Rabbinic depictions of Cyrus and presented us with an exhaustive explanation for it from his expertise which if augmented by a similarly well-researched explanation from the view-point of Zoroastrian history may perhaps enable us to access the truth fully. Indeed Mokhtarian's effort has inspired me to make a humble initial attempt in this direction.

This publication indeed lives up to its declared goal, that "the plurality of truths in the Bavli could have reflected the mosaic of faiths within the religious landscape of the empire itself" as against the Palestenian Yerushalmi, which as a rule opts for "consensus at the expense of dialectical disputation" evidently

due to the Roman influence. The Pahlavi Zand tradition evinces “certain striking structural similarities with the midrash and its multiple layers of interpretations,” indicating a rich potential for devising paradigms of “intertextuality” such as the ones used in Midrashic studies in order to formulate and advance new techniques for interpreting the Zand literature, opening up new vistas for employing hitherto unused sources for the comparative study of exegesis and hermeneutics, a task meticulously and successfully carried out by Yuhan Vevaina, the only Zoroastrian contributor to this publication. Future publications could benefit by contributions and comments from more Zoroastrian scholars and Magis. The eminent scholar of Iranian studies, Prods Skjærvø, has made this task easier by providing a guide to interested scholars for the useful new ways to understand and interpret the Zand literature for comparative purposes. When we add to all this the oral tradition prevailing in both systems, the spikes for finding similarities between them go even higher. This publication indeed has richly served its mission and could even achieve much more if it inspires scholars in both areas to continue their dialog and research in this untapped, neglected area, albeit with input from knowledgeable Magi whose rank is thinking by the day.