

Universal and Individual Eschatology in Pahlavi Literature and the Babylonian Talmud

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Abstract

The following article investigates the idea of the hereafter between Zoroastrians and Jews of Sasanian Iran. The original ancient texts that serve as the heart of these religions (the Gāthās and the Torah) lack fundamental eschatological discussions. As a result, it is difficult to demonstrate how the above-mentioned traditions have influenced each other regarding eschatological ideas. Both traditions, however, developed a comprehensive body of eschatological literature during the Sasanian era, which will be discussed in this paper. Finally, this paper will compare Bavli tractate Giṭṭin 56b–57a with the *Ardā Wīrāz-nāmāg* (a Pahlavi book in which a priest called Wīrāz ascends to heaven and hell while alive), and it will be argued that tractate Giṭṭin 56b–57a was the motivating inspiration behind the *Ardā Wīrāz-nāmāg*—a composition that shares the tractate’s themes and motifs regarding punishments in hell.

Keywords: Talmud, Babylonian Talmud, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Middle Persian, Pahlavi, eschatology.

Introduction

Zoroastrians and Jews share a common dilemma regarding the hereafter and eschatology.² (Shaked 1998, 565-69) Indeed, the original ancient texts that serve as the heart of these religions (the Gāthās and Torah) largely lack eschatological discussions and descriptions of “the world beyond death.” Later sources, such as the Young Avestan texts and the biblical Nevi’im, contain sporadic eschatological and otherworldly discussions. One finds more organized discussions of the hereafter and the end of the world only in the Pahlavi texts and the Talmud and Midrash.

There are scholars who believe that the *Avesta* contains some eschatological ideas that could have influenced Jewish texts (Shaked 1994, 28). On the other hand, some, such as Jean Kellens, argue that one can find only hints of individual eschatology in the

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2. Shaked explains that “it is not quite clear whether the idea of resurrection is already expressed in the Gāthās. Yasna 30.7 and 34.14 are regarded by Lommel (232 ff.) as indicating the existence of this belief.”

Avesta³ (Shaked 1994, 27). In any event, the issue of who influenced whom is still open to discussion and investigation. However, the more important fact—that discussions of the hereafter and the end of the world in the two aforementioned traditions bear some similarity—is beyond doubt. In fact, the resemblances between Zoroastrian and Judaic canonical texts have been deeply explored.

Nonetheless, the possible connections between Talmudic and Middle Persian materials require further investigation. This paper initially aims to take a step in this direction by examining the shared ideas in these two textual traditions regarding the hereafter and eschatology among Sasanian Zoroastrians and Jews. First, a general overview of eschatology, heaven, and hell in Talmudic and Middle Persian texts will be provided. Following this, we will provide a comparison of the Bavli tractate *Giṭ. 56b-57a* with the *Ardā Wīrāz-nāmāg*.

Chronology of Eschatological Themes within Zoroastrian and Jewish Traditions

Discussions of universal eschatology concerning mankind's fate and the end of the world are very vivid in Sasanian Zoroastrianism. Regarding the earlier appearance of eschatological notions in Zoroastrianism, Shaul Shaked states that “there can be little doubt that the eschatological conceptions are quite old in Zoroastrianism. They have their origins, indeed, in the *Gāθās* of Zarathushtra, but the question as to when each individual feature in this complex of ideas made its first appearance in Iran is not easy to answer” (Shaked 1994, 27). Moreover, in agreement with this statement, Philip Kreyenbroek states that “the concepts of heaven and hell, a judgment of the soul, and a final battle between the cosmic forces are attested in the *Gāθās*. That final struggle, which may imply an end to time as we know it, involves fire and molten metal and will cause the world to become ‘perfect’” (Kreyenbroek 2002, 45-46). Kreyenbroek is not alone among scholars in believing that concepts such as heaven and hell, the judgment of the soul, and the final battle were mentioned in the *Gāθās*. Regarding the notions of resurrection and the savior figure (*Sōšāns*)⁴, on the other hand, he is less categorical:

There is no clear reference [in the *Gāθās*], however, to a physical resurrection of the dead, nor does the word *saoshyant* appear to have the meaning it was to acquire later. Both concepts are found together, however, in *Yasht* [for instance in *Yt. 19:89-92, 48:9 and 53:2*], which contains references to many of the features of Zoroastrian eschatology as described in the later tradition. (Kreyenbroek 2002, 45-46)

3. As Shaked states, Kellens (1987b; Kellens and Pirart 1988/91) has denied the existence of Gathic eschatology. In his latest article (Kellens, forthcoming), he seems to accept individual eschatology, but not notions of collective or universal eschatology in the *Gāθās*. This seems also to be the position of Humbach, who in the introduction to his most recent book (1991) makes no allusion to eschatology. According to this approach the *Gāθās* are understood as ritual texts, their terminology to be interpreted from the usage of the Vedic texts.”

4. The Zoroastrian messiah.

It should be kept in mind that scholars such as Kellens and Humbach do not share these ideas regarding the Gāθās, understanding as they do the texts to be purely ritual manuals that cannot be understood without knowing the related ritual performances. However, Shaked's standpoint is more consistent in interpreting the texts somewhere in between these two extremes. In Shaked's view, the Gāθās are neither provincial Vedic texts nor exclusively representative of later Zoroastrianism (Shaked 1994, 28).

The timing of the eschatological ideas expressed in Jewish and Zoroastrian traditions put aside, their resemblance cannot be denied. In this regard, Shaked believes that Jewish and Zoroastrian eschatology and discussions of the apocalypse could not have developed independently of each other (Shaked 1994, 28). Moreover, he asserts that "certain scholars, among them Flusser, Boyce, and Hultgård, have recently treated various problems arising from the comparison of Iranian and Judaeo-Christian notions in this field, and have generally inclined to accept the idea that there was in Iran a body of well-developed eschatological faith before Judaism evolved its own version" (Shaked 1994, 28).

With regard to the chronology of eschatological themes within the Zoroastrian and Jewish traditions, two central ideas are attested. One largely doubts the emergence of eschatological themes in the *Avesta*, specifically in the Gāθās, implying that its influence on the Jewish tradition is also doubtful. The opposite position finds eschatological themes throughout the *Avesta* and suggests its influence on Judaism is certain. As noted above, however, there are a group of scholars whose views lie somewhere between these two extremes.

Universal Eschatology

According to the Iranian tradition, the whole history of creation happens over a 12,000-year time span.⁵ The first three-thousand-year period is the period of spiritual creation of Ohrmazd, and the second three-thousand-year period is the time during which Ohrmazd creates his subjects. The third three-thousand-year period is when the creations of Ohrmazd and Ahriman (good and evil respectively) are mixed in the world,⁶ and the last three-thousand-year period is when Ohrmazd and Ahriman's creations will eventually be parted, and three saviors from Zoroaster's seed will rise at the commencement of each millennium.⁷ During the final 57-year stage of the world's history, called Frašgird ("the Renovation"), Sōšāns, the third and last savior, emerges and incites the resurrection.

Overall, Zoroastrianism is believed to be one of the oldest traditions in which millenarian ideas were expressed. Kreyenbroek traces Iranian references to millenarian ideas back to the late Achaemenian period (Kreyenbroek 2002, 50). He asserts there is "no need, therefore, to look for an alien origin of the notion of cyclical history in

5. There is a 9000-year time-span version as well.

6. The Pahlavi expression for "Period of Mixing" is *gumēzišn*.

7. For a detailed explanation, see Kreyenbroek, "Millennialism and Eschatology," 36–39.

Zoroastrianism” (Kreyenbroek 2002, 51-52). Millenarian ideas are expressed in the Babylonian Talmud as well. One of the main motifs of the Jewish apocalypse is the calculation of world periods. The rabbinic calculation of a seven-thousand-year world duration is noted in the Babylonian Talmud (Sanh. 97a-b; ‘Abod. Zar. 9a) and is also found in the Testament of Abraham and 2 Enoch (33:1-2) (Winston 1966, 197).

In the Babylonian Talmud, we read that “R. Kattina said: Six thousand years shall the world exist, and one [thousand, the seventh], it shall be desolate, as it is written, and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day ...” (Sanh. 97a-b; also see Roš Haš. 31a). Furthermore, attributing specific actions to defined eras in world history is expressed in the Bavli: “The Tanna debe Eliyyahu teaches: The world is to exist six thousand years. In the first two thousand years, there was desolation; two thousand years the Torah flourished; and the next two thousand years is the Messianic era, but through our many iniquities all these years have been lost” (Sanh. 97a-b). Kaufmann Kohler describes the transformation of the idea:

The Perso-Babylonian world-year of twelve millenniums ... was transformed in Jewish eschatology into a world-week of seven millenniums corresponding with the week of Creation ... Of these the six millenniums were again divided, as in Parsism [Zoroastrianism], into three periods: the first 2,000 years devoid of the Law; the next 2,000 years under the rule of the Law; and the last 2,000 years preparing amid struggles and through catastrophes for the rule of the Messiah. (Kohler 1901, 211)

Thus, while Debbei Eliyahu’s specific chronology differs from the Zoroastrian, the progression of a “golden era,” a “corrupt era,” and the final “messianic times” is common to the two traditions. Moreover, just like the days of the savior in Zoroastrianism, the days of the Jewish Messiah are also counted in the Talmud: “R. Eliezer said: The days of the Messiah will last forty years ... R. Eleazar b. Azariah said: Seventy years ... Rabbi said: Three generations ...” (Sanh. 99a). And the days of Sōšāns will last fifty-seven years in the Middle Persian texts.

One distinguishing aspect of Iranian savior figures is the fact that the sun will stand still when they arise. This phenomenon is mentioned in the Hebrew Bible as well as in the Talmud. Joshua 10:13 states, “and the sun stood still, and the moon stopped, until the nation took vengeance on their enemies. Is this not written in the Book of Jashar? The sun stopped in the midst of heaven and did not hurry to set for about a whole day.” From this verse, the Talmudic rabbis developed the idea of the sun standing still for people of prominence. For instance, in tractate Sukkah 28a, it states that “our Rabbis have taught: Hillel the Elder had eighty disciples, thirty of whom were worthy of the Divine Spirit resting upon them, as [it did upon] Moses our Master, thirty of whom were worthy that the sun should stand still for them [as it did for] Joshua the son of Nun, [and the remaining] twenty were ordinary” (Sukkah 28a). Furthermore, in Av. Zarah 25a it states,

“A Tanna taught: Just as the sun stood still for Joshua, so did the sun stand still for Moses and for Nakdimon b. Gorion.”⁸ Since associating the “sun standing still” with prominent people is a common motif among rabbis and goes back to Joshua in the Bible, it can be inferred that Zoroastrian priests who recorded the extraordinary events of messianic times incorporated this Jewish idea into their writings.

According to the Bundahišn Bd:19,⁹ “Regarding the end of the world and resurrection,” ten years before Sōšāns [the last Zoroastrian messiah] arises, people “resist eating food, and will not die” (Bd 19:221). Sōšāns will then perform the resurrection of the dead. This idea is likely related to Rav’s saying in Ber. 17a: “In the future world there is no eating nor drinking nor propagation nor business nor jealousy nor hatred nor competition, but the righteous sit with their crowns on their heads feasting on the brightness of the divine presence ...” (Ber. 17a). Regarding propagation in the Bundahišn, we read “[they] provide everybody with children and wives, and they [men] will copulate with women as they do in the world, however there will be no begetting of children” (Bd 19:226)

In addition, the Bundahišn states that Sōšāns will raise the dead over a period of 57 years. There is an order to these resurrections: “First they will make Gayomard’s bone[s] rise, then those of Mašī and Mašyānī [the Zoroastrian equivalents of Adam and Eve], and then those of other people [mythical heroes]” (Bd 19:223).

The seventh-century *Pirqe Mashiah*, a Hebrew Midrash of apocalyptic type, contains several eschatological themes, primarily the glorification of Jerusalem, the temple, the messiah and the events accompanying his arrival, and Eden and Gehinnom. This text is of particular interest for its allusions to events of the seventh century. It also illuminates relations between Jews, Christians, and Arabs at this time. Furthermore, the use of earlier material in the text illustrates the development of messianic ideas. In this work, we read that:

When Messiah emerges, Israel will say to him: “Go out and bear good tidings to the sleepers of Machpelah¹⁰ that they should arise first.” At that hour he will go up and bear good tidings to the sleepers of Machpelah, and say to them: “Abraham, Isaac and Jacob! Arise! You have slept enough!” And they will respond and say: “Who is this who uncovers the dust from upon us?” And he will say to them: “I am the messiah of the Lord. Salvation is near! The hour is near!” And they will reply and say: “If it is indeed so, go out and announce to the first man that he might arise first.” At that moment

8. Although there is no discussion of the sun standing still with the messiah in the Bavli, we read in Pesah. 54a and Ned. 39b that the Messiah (or his name) existed before the sun was created.

9. All translations of the Bundahišn are based on Mehrdad Bahar’s Persian translation, which is based on three manuscript copies of the Iranian Bundahišn (DH, TD1, and TD2) Mehrdad Bahar, trans., *Bundahišn*, (Tehran: Tus Publications, 1378 [1999]). I have translated Bahar’s Persian into English.

10. The site of a cave, probably in the ancient city of Hebron, where Abraham, Sarah, Rebekah, Isaac, Jacob, and Leah were buried.

he will say, to the first man: “Enough of your slumber!” And he will say: “Who is this who chases the sleep from my eyes? And he will say: “I am the messiah of the Lord from the sons of your sons.” Immediately the first man will stand up and all his generation, and Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the righteous and all the tribes and all the generations from one end of the world to the other end, and they will make the sound of praising and singing heard, as it was said, “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the one bringing good tidings.” (Spurling 2004, 163-64)

This narrative indicates that “the first man, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob” will rise first and then the people of the world will be resurrected. This idea that resembles the order of resurrection in Bundahišn must be based on a Talmudic one, which is as follows:

Elijah used to frequent Rabbi’s academy. One day — it was New Moon — he was waiting for him, but he failed to come. Said he to him [the next day]: “Why didst thou delay?” — He replied: “[I had to wait] until I awoke Abraham, washed his hands, and he prayed, and I put him to rest again; likewise, to Isaac and Jacob.” “But why not awake them together?” — “I feared that they would wax strong in prayer and bring the Messiah before his time.” (B. Meṣi’a. 85b; see Schwartz 2007).

In both traditions, the messiah will raise the first man, the first patriarch(s), then resurrect all humankind.

According to the Bundahišn, “During fifty-seven years Sōšāns will raise the dead, [they] raise all the people, whichever men are righteous and whichever are wicked ... [And] then, when he has restored all of the material life’s physical body, they will give them their [material] shape ...” (Bd 19:223). Then, everyone will gather, and people will see their good and bad deeds, and for three days, the wicked will be sent to hell and suffer punishments in their physical body, while the righteous will enjoy the highest level of heaven. Thus, both the Pahlavi texts and the Talmud believe that the messiah will revive people in their physical bodies. However, in addition to this common idea, there is another shared theme in both Talmudic and Pahlavi texts: convincing adherents who doubt the notion of resurrection. Regarding this theme, Shaked believes that resurrection was probably a doctrine that was challenging for Jews and Zoroastrians of the period (Shaked 1994, 32).

In Sanh. 91a, a Min (a heathen or a heretic) asks Rav Ammi, “Ye maintain that the dead will revive; but they turn to dust, and can dust come to life?” Moreover, in the Bundahišn, it is Zoroaster himself who asks Ohrmazd about the resurrection: “Zardušt asked of Ohrmazd, ‘Whence shall they acquire the body which the wind has blown away, and the water has dragged down, and how shall resurrection occur?’” (Bd 19:221). The answer to this question in both Talmud and Bundahišn is somewhat similar. In Sanh. 91a, Rav Ammi provides the following parable:

This may be compared to a human king who commanded his servants to build him a great palace in a place where there was no water or earth [for making bricks]. So they went and built it. But after some time it collapsed, so he commanded them to rebuild it in a place where water and earth was to be found; but they replied, “We cannot.” Thereupon he became angry with them and said, “If ye could build in a place containing no water or earth, surely ye can where there is!”

Furthermore, in the Bundahišn, Ohrmazd explains that he fashioned his creation at the beginning of the time when there was no substance and no help from the others; this means he can do it again in the time of resurrection, and the second time it will be easier for him: “Behold, when they [creation] did not exist, I made that [which was not], how can I not recreate what already existed? For at that time, I will demand the bone from the spirit of the earth, the blood from the water, the hair from the plants, and the life from the wind, as they received at the beginning of creation” (Bd 19:222–23). One may note here the existence in both Rav Ammi and the Bundahišn of the idea that if God could fashion his creation with no substance and help at the beginning of time, he can do it again.

A related issue is that of gathering human parts from nature during resurrection. According to the Bundahišn, the body of mankind is an illustration of the material world. In Bd 13, we read that “skin is like the sky, flesh like the earth, skeleton like the mountain, veins like rivers, blood within the body like the water in the river, stomach like the sea and hair like the plants. Where the hair has grown thick like the forest, essences of the body like the metals, innate wisdom like humanity ...” We can find a kind of similar idea in the Midrash as well. The *Avot de-rabbi Nathan*¹¹ states that “all that God created in the world, He created in man.” Among numerous examples of this ideal are, “the hair of a human being corresponds to forests, the teeth to doors, the lips to walls, the fingers to nails, and the neck to a tower” (Eisenerg 2010, 34). In 2 Enoch 30:8, a similar idea is expressed:

On the sixth day I ordered My Wisdom to make man of seven substances, (1) His flesh from the earth; (2) his blood from the dew; (3) his eyes from the sun (4) his bones from the stones; (5) his thoughts from the swiftness of the angels, and the clouds (6) his veins and hair from the grass of the earth (7) his spirit from My spirit and from the wind. (Charles and Morfill 1896, 39-40)

Therefore, God has several collaborators when the time of the resurrection comes; collaborators from nature, which he did not have when he initially began the creation of the world.¹²

11. The *Avot de-rabbi Nathan* is an Aggadic work of 700–900 CE, which is usually printed with the minor tractates of the Talmud.

12. A similar concept can be seen in the first verses of Surah Qāf of the *Qurʾān*. In verse 15 it states: “Did We, then, become worn out by the first creation? Not at all; but they are in doubt about a fresh creation.”

Still, it is obvious that the idea of resurrection was not clearly understood by the adherents of either Zoroastrianism or Judaism, even by the Sasanian era.¹³ Shaked believes that among Zoroastrians, “the inordinate attention paid to [resurrection], and the effort made to convince us that faith in the Resurrection is not absurd, seems to indicate that in the eyes of many people this was a subject fraught with difficulties, if not simply embarrassing” (Shaked 1994, 32). He further clarifies that “in Judaism too the topic of resurrection was under attack around the beginning of the current era” (Shaked 1994, 32). Shaked asserts that the insertion of the concept of the resurrection into the main daily prayer of Jews, the Amida, and a section of the Mishna (Sanh. 10:1) indicates that it was not commonly acknowledged among the people.¹⁴

There are several Talmudic narratives (Sanh. 91b-92a) that credit Shaked’s claim. As mentioned earlier, there is no direct reference to resurrection in the Old Testament. Thus, the Talmudic rabbis refer to Biblical verses in which the future events of the world are implicitly referred to using the future (and not past) tense as proof of the resurrection. For instance, in Sanhedrin 91b it states: “It has been taught: R. Meir said, whence do we know resurrection from the Torah? From the verse, then shall Moses and the children of Israel sing this song unto the Lord... (Exodus. XV, I) not sang but shall sing is written: thus resurrection is taught in the Torah. Likewise thou readeest, then shall Joshua build an altar unto the Lord God of Israel (Josh. VIII, 30) not ‘built’, but shall build is written: thus resurrection is intimated in the Torah...” And the rabbis go so far as to say: “The following have no portion in the world to come: He who says that the Torah is not from Heaven, or that the resurrection of the dead is not taught in the Torah” (Av. Zarah 18a).

According to the *Bundahišn*, the resurrection will be followed by a process of purification by fire:

Then Ariyaman Yazad burns the metal which is on mountains and in valleys, and [that melted metal] turns to a river on earth. And then [they] purify all the people through that melted metal. To the righteous that seems like a river of warm milk. If one is wicked, then that seems to him like melted metal... Gōzihr the snake burns by that melted metal and the metal rushes into hell, and that filth and dirt in the middle of earth—which is hell—burns by that and purifies. The hole through which Ahriman rushed [to earth] will be sealed by that metal... (Bd: regarding the end of the world and resurrection: 19:225, 227–28)

Moreover, Shaked believes that references to final purification with fire can even be found earlier in the Avesta: “The Gāθās also refers to the molten metal (Y. 51.9, 32.7, 30.7), which, although the context is not very clear, can be taken in the sense which

13. In the *Ardā Wirāz-nāmag* people who have been doubtful of heaven and hell and the reality of the resurrection of the dead and the future body are in hell.

14. Concerning the notion of resurrection more common ideas are attested. For instance, both the Talmud and the *Bundahišn* contain the idea of man’s body being planted in the earth like a seed, which will sprout up in many forms (or as Rabbi Meir states, will be “multi-clothed”). See the Babylonian Talmud, Sanh. 90b and Ketub. 111b, cf. Bd 19:222.

developed around this notion in the Pahlavi writing, that of a mechanical judgment, whereby people have to wade through a river of molten metal, with the righteous emerging safe and sound” (Shaked 1998, 565-69).

One more commonality we can identify is the purification by fire in the “World to Come” in the Midrash (but not the Talmud itself). However, the Talmud does contain narratives in which the hell is associated with fire (B. Bat. 74a, and 84a, Šabb. 39 a-b). Moreover, the “river of fire” and the horrible scenes of hell described in 2 Enoch resemble the descriptions of hell in Middle Persian texts—especially the *Ardā Wirāz-nāmag*, which will occupy us presently in this paper (Bauckham, Davila, and Panayotov 2013, 741).¹⁵ After purification by fire and passing through the river of molten metal, the *Bundahišn* states that the soul and body of each person will meet. Each human being (now resurrected) should then become immortal. Then, the final *Yazišn* occurs:

Sōšāns and his companions will begin the resurrection *Yazišn*, and they will slay the *hadhayōš* (mythical ox) for that *Yazišn*. From the fat of that ox and the white *hōm* they will prepare *Anōš* (the immortal beverage) and give it to all people; and all humans will become immortal up to eternity. (Bd: Regarding the end of the world and resurrection: 19:226)

Thus, Sōšāns himself is in charge of the final resurrection by making the immortal beverage out of the ox *Hadhayōš*’s fat and white *hōm* (*Av. haoma*, a hallucinogenic beverage used in rituals).

Sacrificing the ox *Hadhayōš* itself is a common eschatological motif between Pahlavi texts and the Talmud. The *Bundahišn* introduces *Hadhayōš* as follows:

Regarding the *hadhayōš* ox, also called *Srisok*, it [Scripture?] says that at the beginning of creation, it transported people from region to region, and at the resurrection, they will arrange immortality out of it. In the Scripture it says [that the ox] is alive in the name of that honorable man who has built a fortification around one-third of this earth [to protect the ox] that will last till resurrection when it is (the ox) requisite. (Bd: Regarding the quality of that creation: 9:153)

A counterpart to *Hadhayōš* also exists in the Jewish tradition. According to the Talmud, “Rabbah said in the name of R. Johanan: The Holy One, blessed be He, will in time to come make a banquet for the righteous from the flesh of Leviathan; for it is said: Companions will make a banquet of it” (B. Bat. 75a). And in the following narrative, the rabbis relate another story about the Leviathan being slaughtered by the Lord, and how it will be served at the final banquet of God. In B. Bat. 74b, Rab Judah asserts that Leviathan was created male and female, but God castrated the male and “... killed the female preserving it in salt for the righteous in the world to come; for it is written: And

15. In this book edited by Bauckham, Davila, and Panayotov, we read that the “river of fire” (Aramaic: *dinore*) goes out from under the Throne of Glory, and flows down upon them, and goes from one end of the world to the other.

he will slay the dragon that is in the sea” (B. Bat. 74b). Moreover, Howard Schwartz cites an interesting myth mentioning a messiah-ox: “Others say that God will serve the Messiah-ox and messianic wine at the banquet. The Messiah-ox makes its home in Paradise, where it waits to fulfill its destiny when the Messiah comes. Then it will be slaughtered and served at the messianic banquet ...” (Schwartz 2007, 508). In some other myths as well, other creatures (namely the Behemot, Ziz, and the messianic ox) are said to be feasted upon in the World to Come.

The Bundahišn concludes its discussion of universal eschatology with strange speculation about whether or not people are clothed in the World to Come. Though it seems like a strange idea, it appears that the author of the text included it intentionally to persuade people to give charity to the poor. At the end of chapter 19, it states that “it (scripture?) also says that who has performed no Yašt, and has ordered no *gēti-xrīd* and has given no garments as charity to the needy, will be naked there; if you perform an Ohrmazd Yašt (the worship of Ohrmazd) in his name, the spirit of Gāθās will serve the purpose of clothing to him” (Bd 19:227).¹⁶ And again, in the Talmud, the subject of people being naked or garmented in the World to Come is a matter of discussion. In one instance in the Bavli, (Sanh. 90b) Queen Cleopatra wonders about the topic above, and on another occasion, R. Hiyya b. Joseph states: “The just in the time to come will rise [apparelled] in their own clothes ...” (Ketub. 111a). As can be seen, even a peculiar idea such as people being naked or clothed in the World to Come can be shared by the Jews and Zoroastrians of the time. The section above demonstrates that most of the main themes of universal eschatology were shared between Middle Persian texts—mainly the Bundahišn—and the Talmud. The difference is that in the Bundahišn we have a chapter dedicated specifically to universal eschatology, whereas the Talmud does not—here, the notions are scattered throughout the text.

Individual Eschatology

What happens to the human soul and body after death is the subject of individual eschatological texts. In the following section, the subject of individual eschatology will be discussed briefly, primarily based on the *Bundahišn*, *Ardā Wīrāz-nāmag*, Babylonian Talmud, and Midrash.

According to Pahlavi sources, after someone dies, their soul does not leave the body immediately. Instead, during the first three nights after death, the soul of a righteous person stands at the head of the body and recites the Uštavaiti Gāθās¹⁷ joyfully. A wicked person’s soul also sits near the head, but whines and recites Yasna 46. The demon Wizarš sits there too with his associates, trying to find an opportunity to irritate the deceased person. The Bundahišn describes the first three nights as follows:

16. There are two Pahlavi terms in this section regarding giving charity and doing some specific ritual for the deceased person: namely, *ahlaw-dād* and *geti-xrīt*.

17. Yasn 43-46 is called Uštavaiti Gāθā.

When men pass away, the soul sits near the body—where the head is—for three nights. During those [three] nights, [the soul] sees many attacks from the *dēv* Vizareš (Wizarš) and its companions, and [the soul] turns back towards the fire which is kindled there. That is why the fire is kept burning during those three nights and days, where its head was. And if the fire is not there, it turns its (dead body's) back towards the Warharān fire or towards the ever-kindling fires. As soon as the body experiences tearing and disintegration, it feels as uncomfortable to it (the body) as a man when his house is destroyed. Those three days, the soul sits near the body with the hope, "Maybe if the blood runs and the wind enters the body, I will be able to return to life!" (Bd 15:200)

What is striking about the Bundahišn's vision of the soul and body of the dead is the lingering of the soul around the body for three nights, hoping to return to it, and feeling uncomfortable about damaging its body. On this point, the Babylonian Talmud states that "R. Hisda said: A man's soul mourns for him [after death] seven whole [days],"¹⁸ and "R. Isaac also said: Worms are as painful to the dead as a needle in the flesh of the living" (Šabb. 152a). Thus, Babylonian Talmudic sages believed that the soul does not depart immediately and mourns for its body for seven days. Furthermore, the deceased person feels the pain of their body tearing as the soul leaves it.

Other than these Talmudic quotes, more relevant materials can be found in the apocrypha of the Old Testament and Midrash.¹⁹ Furthermore, in the Talmud Yerushalmi, Mo'ed Qat. 3.5, it states: "During the three days [following death], the soul hovers in flight over the body, thinking it may be able to return to it, but when it sees that its appearance becomes discolored, it abandons it and departs"²⁰ (Winston 1966, 196). This is worth further investigation in order to understand why the Talmud Yerushalmi (rather than the Bavli) incorporates this Zoroastrian notion. Was it not originally a Zoroastrian concept? Or did some compilers of the Bavli see the resemblance and (due to their traditional animosity towards Zoroastrian priests) omit it from their materials?

The same idea is presented in the Tanchuma, Miqez 4 where it explains that mourners are forbidden to work during seven days following burial, but the poor can

18. When Ardā Wirāz was temporarily dead, his body was guarded and protected by the *Avesta* recited for seven days and nights. According to AWN 2:32–36, his seven sisters and a number of priests recited *Avesta* the whole time, and protected him from any harm.

19. According to Shaked, "Judaism by the end of second temple period got most of its eschatological ideas through the apocrypha of the Old Testament, the Jewish writings of the period just before the emergence of Christianity" (Shaked, "Eschatology in Zoroastrianism," online edition).

20. I believe that the Talmud Yerushalmi had at least some affiliation with Iranian culture and worldview. Throughout history the greater Iran's worldview spread across the region and even beyond—for instance, it is documented that there were Manichean preachers who used to travel to other lands and share their ideas and beliefs with the people they met. There are works that have been published regarding Judaism's contacts with Iranian ideas and beliefs since the Achaemenid era. Regarding Yerushalmi, Herman states: "While some Yerushalmi traditions have parallels in the Bavli, and apparently originated in Babylonia, there are also traditions that appear to have been composed in Palestine, and might have been authored by a circle of Amora'i of Babylonian ancestry" (*A Prince without a Kingdom*, 17).

start working after three days and the reason is “after three days the flesh becomes putrid, the countenance changes, and the soul pleads for itself as is said ‘But his flesh grieveth for him, and his soul mourneth over him’” (Berman 1996, 250). Moreover, in the Testament of Abraham (Rec. A 20), we read that they wait three days before burying Abraham, and Winston suggests that presumably the reason that burial was delayed for three days stemmed from this Iranian notion²¹ (Winston 1966, 196).

The second phase of individual eschatology according to Iranian tradition is when the soul of the departed departs disappointedly from the body after three days. For the righteous, the soul leaving the body is accompanied by pleasant feelings: “There comes a maiden shape to receive [him] in good shape, [wearing] white garments, of fifteen years, who is fair on all sides, by whom the soul is gladdened” (Bd 15:251). For the wicked, however: “A terrifying maiden shape comes to receive [him] ... a shape that hides rudeness within, she is frightening from all sides. Because of this, fear goes through the soul” (Bd 15:252).²² At this stage, the journey to the afterlife begins:

... that virgin guides it [the soul] to a ladder with three steps, and by that ladder, with three steps representing good thought, good words, and good deeds it ascends to Garōdmān (the highest level of the heavens). By the first step, it makes it to the star station; by the second, it reaches the moon station; and by the third, it reaches the sun station where the Garōdmān is. (Bd. 15:253-54)

The maiden’s appearance thus represents the departed soul’s good or bad words, deeds, and thoughts. It leads the souls of the righteous and wicked over the *Činwad puhl* (a bridge all souls must cross upon death) to be judged by the *Yazats*, such as Mihr, Srōš, and Rašn. According to the Hāduxt Nask, the maiden is accompanied by two dogs.²³ When the departed soul crosses the bridge, the bridge becomes wide and comfortable for the just, and thin and perilous for the wicked.

In several Pahlavi texts, a threefold division of realms is introduced: paradise, the middle section (hamistagān, for those whose virtues and sins are equal), and hell. Souls are sent to these three realms according to their values. These descriptions offer the best and more coherent description of the fate of human souls after death provided in the *Ardā Wirāz-nāmag*.²⁴

21. Also, as Barclay states, “When the dying man sees it [Angel of Death], he shudders and opens his mouth. The Angel of Death then lets it [the gall] fall into his mouth. The sick man dies, corrupts, and becomes pale. Three days the soul flies about the body, thinking to return to it, but after it sees the appearance of the face changed, it leaves it and goes away” (Barclay 1878, 28-29).

22. Unlike the Hāduxt Nask, the Bundahišn mentions the “astral body of a cow” and “a garden” which will be shown to the departed soul before the beautiful maiden appears.

23. In *The Iranian Talmud* (121–23), Shai Secunda examines Hāduxt Nask and compares it with the Babylonian Talmud, Soṭa 3b.

24. For further reference, see Awn 4–9, Bd 15, and Shaked, “Eschatology in Zoroastrianism.” In the testament of Abraham the angel Michael realizes that the sins and good deeds of a certain soul are equally balanced, and he therefore sets it up in the middle to expect the final judge of all (Rec. A 12; 14); see Winston 1966, 195.

In the Talmud, however, the “Angel of Death” takes souls. He is mentioned numerous times in the Bavli. For instance, in ‘Abod. Zar. 20b:

It is said of the Angel of Death that he is all full of eyes. When a sick person is about to depart, he stands above his head-pillow with his sword drawn out in his hand and a drop of gall hanging on it. As the sick person beholds it, he trembles and opens his mouth [in fright]; he then drops it into his mouth. It is from this that he dies, from this that [the corpse] deteriorates, from this that his face becomes greenish?

Death itself is a demonic phenomenon in Zoroastrianism, and Ohrmazd has no association with the dying and annihilation of its creation. On the contrary, it is Ahriman who is associated with death and destruction. Therefore, the assimilation of Satan with the Angel of Death in the Talmud could have an Iranian origin. For instance, in Bava Bathra 16a it is stated that: “Resh Lakish said: Satan, the evil prompter, and the Angel of Death are all one.”

Scholars such as Edward Burnett Tylor and David Winston believe that the idea of the “Bridge of Gehinnom” entered the Jewish Midrash through Zoroastrianism²⁵ (Tylor 1878, 358-59). In Yalkut Shimoni on the Book of Isaiah, the latter is mentioned. Winston asserts that:

When the Midrash indicates that the wicked will be made to pass over the bridge of Gehinnom, which will then suddenly appear as narrow as a hair and they will fall into the abyss, this is certainly the Persian notion of the Chinvat (Činwad) bridge which appears wide and comfortable to the righteous, who are helped over it by a heavenly maiden, but for the ungodly it is so narrow and hair-sharp “like a razor’s edge,” that they fall helplessly into hell. (Winston 1966, 211-12)

After crossing the bridge, a third phase appears: entering heaven or hell. In the following section, the general picture of heaven and hell will be discussed as evoked in the *Ardā Wīrāz-nāmag*, the Babylonian Talmud, and the Jewish apocrypha.

Heaven and Hell according to the *Ardā Wīrāz-nāmag* and the Talmudic Narratives

Although it is commonly believed that many of the eschatological themes shared between Zoroastrianism and Judaism are likely to have originated in Iranian thought, here it will be argued that the same motif between the two texts under investigation—that punishments in hell are suited to the crime in both the *Ardā Wīrāz-nāmag* (AWN) and tractate Giṭ. 56b–57a—was originally Jewish. While there are also Christian texts that share the same theme, this paper’s hypothesis is that the Jewish narrative motivated the Christian texts as well.

25. In his book, Tylor introduces several traditions in which the notion of the “bridge of the dead” is present, for instance, Scandinavian mythology, Hinduism, and Islam.

The Middle Persian *Ardā Wīrāz-nāmag*, which runs to about 8,800 words, is a description of heaven and hell as seen by the priest Wīrāz in a seven-day vision incited by narcotics. In her *Mythological History of Iran*, Amuzegar suggests that Ardā Wīrāz is probably an ancient character who was attributed to the Sasanian period at a later time. She believes that the origins of this apocalyptic narrative must be very ancient despite the fact that its extant version probably dates to the Sasanian period (Amuzegar 2006, 30).

Heaven in the *Ardā Wīrāz-nāmag* and the Talmud

Ardā Wīrāz's brief and somewhat cursory description of heaven depicts a place where every person who has perfectly carried out his or her duties in the material world enjoys a perfect life. Heaven is where souls can visit great religious leaders, heroes, Yazatas, and even Ahura Mazdā himself. It is a place of light and harmony, full of golden and silver thrones, carpets, and clothes ornamented with precious stones, etc. In Ardā Wīrāz's heaven, people who were not practicing rituals and prayers, but performed other good deeds, still have a promised place.

During his journey to heaven, besides visiting Amahraspandān (archangels) and prominent religious figures such as Zardušt, Wištāsp, and Jāmāsp, Ardā Wīrāz visits different classes of spirits such as the "souls of those who did not perform Yašts, and did not chant Gāhān ... but did other sorts of good deeds, souls of good kings, liberal, nobles, religious people, those who performed Yašt and recited Gāhān, truthful, righteous women who praised the good creation of god and respected their husband or guardian ... souls of warriors and heroes, farmers, artisans, shepherds, cultivators, teachers, etc." (AWN 7-15).²⁶ These descriptions comprise the bulk of Ardā Wīrāz's reflections on heaven. The Talmud does not provide much information concerning heaven either.

Three expressions are used to describe heaven in the Talmud: *Gan Eden*, *Olam Ha Ba*, and *Pardes*. Generally, *Olam Ha Ba* (the World to Come) refers to the world after the resurrection, where everyone enjoys an eternally joyful life in the material world. However, sometimes in the Talmud, the expression may refer to heaven. The Persian expression, *pardes*, is used just once in the Talmud, Ḥag. 14b. Finally, *Gan Eden* (Garden of Eden) is the garden in which Adam and Eve resided before the fall. Talmud says the Garden of Eden was created before the creation of the world (Ned. 39b). It is a garden full of roses (B. Bat. 84a), its aroma is powerful (B. Bat. 75a), and there are canopies ornamented with precious stones and gold (B. Bat. 75a), etc. According to R. Joseph, people are positioned in these canopies according to their merits:

R. Joseph the son of R. Joshua b. Levi, became ill and fell into a trance.
(Or according to some he actually died.) When he recovered, his father asked him, "What did you see?" "I saw a topsy-turvy world," he replied,

26. I have consulted Gignoux's edition for translation of *Ardā Wīrāz-nāmag* (Philippe Gignoux, *Le livre d'Ardā Wīrāz*, translittération, transcription et traduction du texte Pehlevi, Nouvelle édition, revue et augmentée, tr. Jaleh Amuzegar (Tehran: Institute Français de Recherche en Iran et Éditions Mo'in, 1382 [2004]).

“the upper [class] underneath and the lower on top,” he replied. “My son,” he observed, “you saw a clear world. And how are we [Torah scholars] there?” “Just as we are here, so are we there. And I heard them saying, ‘Happy is he who comes hither with his learning in his hand.’ And I also heard them saying, ‘Those martyred by the State (Roman government), no man can stand within their barrier’ ...” (Pesah. 50a)

R. Joseph’s narrative might imply that he, just like Ardā Wīrāz, saw different classes of spirits in heaven, namely the upper class (rich, monarchs), lower class (probably workers generally; agriculturalists, artisans, shepherds), Torah scholars and martyrs (probably who fought the Roman state). R. Joseph’s classification of people is the traditional grouping of people in Iranian institutions; hence Ardā Wīrāz also visits the aforementioned classes of spirits.

R. Joseph’s narrative is comparable to a paragraph in *Zand i Wahman Yasn*, in which Ahura Mazdā tells Zoroaster about the placement in the other world of people who are highly ranked in the material world:

... And I tell you this O Zardušt: “That whoever in that time goes after body (material world) cannot save [his] soul, since his body is fleshy, his soul is frail in the hell. Whoever goes after soul, his body [is] frail in the material world, [he is] destitute and poor, and his soul is stout in heaven.” (ZWY 4:68). (Kreyenbroek and Cereti 1998, 139)

Thus R. Joseph’s “topsy-turvy world” in which “the upper [class] underneath and the lower on top” is shared by the author of *Zand i Wahman Yasn* as well.

To conclude, the amount of information both texts provide regarding heaven is very minute compared to hell, which will be examined in the following section.

Hell in the *Ardā Wīrāz-nāmag* and the Talmud

Prior to arriving in hell, Ardā Wīrāz sees a river: “I saw a river, fearful and hard to cross, in which were many souls and *frawahrs* (guardian angels), some of them could not cross, some of them crossed with difficulty, and some crossed easily” (AWN 16). Ardā Wīrāz’s companion angels explained: “This river is made of many tears of people who shed tears when someone dies, and do lament, mourn and cry ...” (AWN 16). Afterwards, Ardā Wīrāz returns to the Činwad Bridge, and eventually begins his journey into hell. As mentioned previously the inverse of heaven, hell, is described in detail by Ardā Wīrāz. Not only are physical characteristics described, but also a detailed list of sins and their associated punishments. Two angels named *Srōš* and *Ādur* accompany Ardā Wīrāz on his visit to hell. At first, hell appears to him “like a pit, that a thousand cubits²⁷ would not reach its bottom” (AWN 54). His journey in hell begins thus:

27. Gignoux read this word as “vāz” meaning “cubit,” however the word can also be read as “vāj,” which allows for Fereydoun Vahman’s translation as “call or voice.” See Vahman 1986.

And then pious Sroš and Ādur the Yazad, took hold of my hand, so that I proceeded unhurt. In that manner I saw heat and cold and drought and hunger that I had never seen nor heard of in the world ... and I saw the frightful hell's mouth that was like the most frightful pit ... and regarding darkness, it was so that darkness was graspable, and regarding stink, it was so that when the breeze reached someone's nose they would collapse and tremble and fall ... and everyone thinks: 'I am alone.' And when three days and nights passes [they] say that: "nine thousand years is completed and I am not released." In every place the minimum amount of noxious creatures (*xrafstras*) is as high as a mountain, and [they] tear and maul the souls of the wicked so that it is unworthy of a dog [a dog would not eat that perished body]. (AWN 18)

Ardā Wīrāz also describes meeting Ahriman on his journey. "Then I saw the Gannāg Mēnōg (Ahriman) who is full of death, the world-destroyer, whose religion is evil (*duš-dēn*), who mocked the wicked in the hell and said: 'Why are you eating Ohrmazd's bread and work for me? And [why] don't you think of your creator and do as I wish you to do!' In this manner [he] speaks to the wicked very mockingly" (AWN 100). Thus, we learn from these accounts that on the way to hell, there is a river of tears and that hell itself is both cold and hot and like a pit. The darkness is also intense, disgusting odors are prominent, and Ahriman, the World Destroyer, resides there. Moreover, in hell, Ardā Wīrāz hears "... Ahriman and *dēws* (devils) and *druzes* (demons) and many other souls of the wicked from that place (from there) were groaning and crying" (AWN 53). This general depiction of hell is similar to that of the Talmud.

The Talmudic hell has a mouth like a pit. Regarding this mouth, the Talmud states that "... Moses said thus: If a mouth has already been created for it [Gehenna], 'tis well; if not, let the Lord create one. He said thus: If the mouth is not near to this spot, let it draw near" (Ned. 39b). In Šabb. 33a, hell is also described as a bottomless pit: "Rabbah b. Shila said in R. Hisda's name: He who puts his mouth to folly, Gehenna is made deep for him, as it is said, a deep pit is for the mouth [that speaketh] perversity." Moreover, according to R. Joshua b. Levi, Gehenna has seven names, among which "pit," "destruction," and "Tumultuous Pit" are used in reference to the Jewish hell (Eiruvin 19a). In addition, there is a Prince of Gehenna who has teeth that gnash against the wicked (Sanh. 52a). Gehenna is always hungry (Šabb. 104a) and cries, "Give me the heretics and the sinful [Roman] power" (Abod. Zar. 17a). Furthermore, Gehenna is described as being like the night. In the Bavli, it states that "every man has his sword upon his flank because of the dread in the night. [The dread of Gehenna, which is likened unto night]" (Sanh. 7b).

How Punishment Fits the Crime in the Talmud and the *Ardā Wīrāz-nāmag*

After Ardā Wīrāz provides a general picture of hell, he explains how each sin is punished. For instance, the punishment for a man who "... in the world did not keep right measure,

nor bucket nor stone weight²⁸ and nor unit. [And] mixed water with wine and mixed dust with grain, and sold them to the people at a high price” is to be forced to everlastingly measure dust and ashes, with a bushel and gallon, while the Guardians of Hell make him eat them (AWN 27). Furthermore, the punishment for a man who kills a pious man is to suffer a torturous and cruel death eternally (AWN 21). In general, as it will be observed in the upcoming discussion, the repetition of a certain punishment eternally is a common theme in both the *Ardā Wirāz-nāmag* and the Talmud.

In what follows, tractate Giṭ. 56b–57a will be examined in relation to the *Ardā Wirāz-nāmag*. This tractate narrates a supernatural incident concerning the son of Titus’s nephew, who decides to convert to Judaism. In general, the Talmud’s depiction of Titus is very negative, since Vespasian and Titus showed cruelty toward the Israelites when suppressing their revolt. Titus is also the destroyer of the Jerusalem temple.

On the other hand, the Talmud says Onkelos (the son of Titus’s nephew, Kolonikos) wished to convert to Judaism. He magically raised Titus, Balaam, and the Sinners of Israel (or, in some manuscripts, Jesus) from the dead, and asked their opinions about the people of Israel and converting to Judaism:

Onkelos son of Kolonikos was the son of Titus’s sister. He had a mind to convert himself to Judaism. He went and raised Titus from the dead by magical arts, and asked him: “Who is most in repute in the [other] world?” He replied: “Israel.” “What then,” he said, “about joining them?” He said: “Their observances are burdensome and you will not be able to carry them out. Go and attack them in that world and you will be at the top as it is written, her adversaries are become the head, etc.; whoever harasses Israel becomes head.” He asked him: “What is your punishment [in the other world]?” He replied: “What I decreed for myself. Every day my ashes are collected and sentence is passed on me and I am burnt and my ashes are scattered over the seven seas.”

He [Onkelos] then went and raised Balaam by incantations. He asked him: “Who is in repute in the other world?” He replied: “Israel.” “What then,” he said, “about joining them?” He replied: “Thou shalt not seek their peace nor their prosperity all thy days for ever.” He then asked: “What is your punishment?” He replied: “With boiling hot semen.” (Because he enticed Israel to go astray after the daughters of Moab. Sanh. 106a)

He then went and raised by incantations the sinners of Israel [or Jesus]. He asked them: “Who is in repute in the other world?” They replied: “Israel.” “What about joining them?” They replied: “Seek their welfare, seek not their harm. Whoever touches them touches the apple of his eye.” He said: “What is your punishment?” They replied: “With boiling hot excrement,

28. In Pahlavi “*sang*,” meaning “stone,” is used as a unit of weight.

since a Master has said: ‘Whoever mocks at the words of the Sages is punished with boiling hot excrement.’” (Talmud Giṭ. 56b–57a)

In the Babylonian Talmud, the punishments of Titus, Balaam, and the Sinners of Israel are somehow suited to their sins. The characteristics of these punishments resemble those described in the *Ardā Wīrāz-nāmag* as well. In the narrative, the sins highlighted are the destruction of the temple, killing Israelites (Titus), enticing people to chase after women of the city of Moab (Balaam), and mocking the words of the sages (sinners of Israel/Jesus). Furthermore, the punishments are eternal burning and turning to ashes, being boiled in hot semen, and boiling in hot excrement.²⁹ Considering these sins and punishments in the Bavli, it is sensible to examine some cases in the *Ardā Wīrāz-nāmag*.

In the first case, for those who attack and murder Israelites, a recurring and violent death is specified. This is similar to the murderer in the *Ardā Wīrāz-nāmag* whose punishment is a recurring and torturous death (chapter 21). Furthermore, *Ardā Wīrāz* expresses that having sexual affairs (Balaam’s case) is one of the sins that also results in this form of punishment. Additionally, punishments such as being boiled in a cauldron, and being penalized with excrement or semen, are very common in *Ardā Wīrāz-nāmag*. The following section of the *Ardā Wīrāz-nāmag* discusses adultery:

And I saw the soul of a man whose body was in a brazen pot and [they] were cooking it. His right foot was outside of the pot. I asked, what sin this body has committed. Srōš the pious and Ādur Yazad said: “that this is the soul of that wicked man who in his life³⁰ due to lasciviousness and in a bad manner went to the married women very much. And his whole body became sinful and with his right foot he used to smite, kill, and massacre frog[s], and ant[s], snake[s] and scorpion[s] and other noxious creatures. (AWN 60)

The man who copulates with married women in the *Ardā Wīrāz-nāmag* is boiled. The semen, however, is not hot, like what Bavli states regarding Balaam.

Yet, there are other cases where semen is mentioned as punishment. For instance, in AWN 88, which discusses the punishment for men who seduce other’s wives or mistresses, and in AWN 70, which discusses the punishment for women who betray their husbands, the text tries to create horrible scenes emphasizing the word semen, just like what we saw in Giṭ. 56b–57a.

The following chapter demonstrates that people who polluted the bath³¹ were punished using something which is known as a main source of pollution, namely excrement:

29. There is a curse in Pesah. 110a, which is composed based on the quality of different kinds of punishments in hell, as mentioned in Giṭ. 56b–57a: “May boiling excrement in a sieve be forced into your mouth, (you) witches! May your head go bald and carry off your crumbs; your spices be scattered, and the wind carry off the new saffron in your hands, witches!”

30. Gignoux reads *pad zindagān*, which he translates as “among the living.” I agree with the reading, but translate it as “while he was living,” or “in his lifetime.”

31. The text refers to the rules and regulations of using public baths and water.

And I saw the soul of a man who [they made him] to eat excrement, filth, and dirt. And demons bashed him with stone and clod ... This is the soul of those wicked men who went much to bathhouse and contaminated the water, and fire, and earth with dirt and filth, and they went in [the bathhouse] virtuous and came out wicked. (AWN 41)

Additionally, Ardā Wīrāz declares that the man and woman who ate nasā (dead matter, pollution), and killed the sacred animals of Ohrmazd, are punished by eating their own excreta (AWN 98).

Other than Gittin 56b-57a which was discussed above, more cases of these kinds of horrific punishments are found in the Talmud, for example in a passage on spies:

R. Shim'on (Reish) b. Laqish said: "They died an unnatural death." R. Hanina b. Pappa said [that] R. Shila of Kefar Tamarta expounded: "This teaches us that their tongue was elongated, and fell to their navel, and there were worms issuing from it and entering their navel and from their navel entering their tongue." R. Naḥman b. Yitzḥaq said: "They died of croup."

Secunda notes that R. Shila's strange depiction of the spies' punishment for slander, which is "elongated tongues" and "penetrating worms," seems to come out of nowhere. After he introduces the Jewish narrative's parallel from the *Ardā Wīrāz-nāmag*, however,³² it becomes clear that R. Shila's description matches what Ardā Wīrāz had to say regarding the punishments for slander and lying (Secunda 2014, 118-21).

Conclusion

There exist apocrypha related to Rabbi Yehoshua, famous for his conversations with the Angel of Death, and his heavenly journey in the Talmud. For example, on a journey, Rabbi Yehoshua meets Elijah, and Elijah asks him whether he wishes to visit hell: "Is it your desire that I place you upon the gate of Gehinnom?" I said to him: "Yes!" What Rabbi Yehoshua sees in hell is as follows:

... People who are hung by their noses, and people who are hung by their hands, people who are hung by their tongues and people who are hung by their feet. He showed me women who are hung by their breasts, and he showed me people who are hung by their eyes. He showed me people that are forced to eat their (own) flesh, and people that are forced to eat the coals of broom, and people sitting alive while worms eat them ... people who are forced to eat fine sand ... (Baucham and Davila 2013, 740)

32. In the *Ardā Wīrāz-nāmag*, the soul of "that wicked man who in this world was slanderous and made people fight against each other" suffers as follows: "[his] tongue was drawn out from his mouth and the noxious creatures (*xrafstarān*) were chewing [it]" (AWN, 29:1-4). And in another chapter, the soul of a man "whose tongue was being gnawed by worms" had "told many lies and falsehoods, and from it came much harm and damage to creatures" (AWN, 33:1-4).

Nearly all of the punishments Rabbi Yehoshua visualizes here can be found in the *Ardā Wīrāz-nāmag*. Overall people being punished on the limbs by which the crime was committed is a common theme of *Ardā Wīrāz-nāmag* and the Jewish Apocryphal texts. Furthermore, as is well known, there is a series of later Christian Apocalypses (such as the Apocalypse of Peter) in which the main theme resembles what we saw in the Talmud, *Ardā Wīrāz-nāmag* and Jewish Apocrypha.³³ In particular, hell torments are suited to the sin of the sufferer.³⁴

This paper has aimed to show the resemblances the Babylonian Talmud and Middle Persian texts share concerning the hereafter. There are ancient traces of similar motifs regarding the hereafter and heavenly visions in Iranian and Jewish source materials. Hence, scholars have no consensus regarding the dates of these materials and their chronology. The only indisputable fact is the lateness of Christian materials compared with Zoroastrian and Jewish texts.³⁵ However, it should be borne in mind that there is hardly anything in the Avesta that runs parallel to what the Middle Persian texts describe of the hereafter, heaven, and hell. Moreover, the dating of the Pahlavi manuscripts in existence today is very disputable. As Secunda cautions,

Some scholars assume that the text [*Ardā Wīrāz-nāmag*] was composed at earliest in late Sasanian times, and perhaps even postdates the Muslim conquest of Iran. In light of the second- and third-century flourishing of a related genre in some Christian texts, there are some scholars who have suggested that *Ardā Wīrāz nāmag* actually represents a derivative work indebted to Judeo-Christian literature. (Secunda 2014, 118)

Concepts such as the hereafter, the resurrection, heaven and hell are very ancient in Iran. However, the *Ardā Wīrāz-nāmag* as such is presumably indebted to Judeo-Christian literature and was created in an environment where such a genre was already flourishing. However, as Secunda correctly notes, the author of the *Ardā Wīrāz-nāmag* created an *Iranian* version of this literature that is itself based on older Iranian ideas regarding heaven and hell (Secunda 2014, 118).

Considering that most of what the Talmud relates regarding heaven, hell, and heavenly visions happened in Palestine, and also that the main characters in these narratives are the

33. Overall, it is believed that Christian Apocalypses were influenced by Jewish Apocrypha.

34. One significant example of the Christian Apocalypses in which this theme is present is a Latin document from an eighth-century manuscript entitled “The Epistle of Titus, The Disciple of Paul.” The following is a section of the latter: The prophet Helias bears witness that he saw

Some suffer hanging ... by their tongues, some by their eyes, others hang head downward; women will be tormented by their breasts, and youths hanging by their hands; certain maidens are burned upon a gridiron and some souls are fixed (? pierced) with perpetual pain. Now by these divers torments is shown the act of every one . . . They that hang by the tongues are blasphemers and also false witnesses . . . women are commanded to be tormented in their breasts, these are they which gave their bodies unto men in lasciviousness . . .” James Montague Rhodes, ed. and trans., *Lost Apocrypha of the Old Testament: Their Titles and Fragments* (1920; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2015).

35. It should be borne in mind that most of the Pahlavi manuscripts existing today are from the ninth century onwards.

Palestinian sages, it is perhaps fair to conclude that for certain Zoroastrian (and likewise Christian) priests in the Sasanian era, Talmudic narratives such as (Giṭ. 56b–57a) served as a model for composing books about sages who make heavenly journeys and observe how punishments suit certain crimes. On the other hand, a weaker argument could also occur here: since the *Ardā Wīrāz-nāmag* is a whole book written in accordance with an established apocalyptic genre, and since Talmudic narrations regarding the World to Come in general have been influenced by the Pahlavi accounts, it makes sense if anyone argues that the *Ardā Wīrāz-nāmag* inspired the short anecdotes such as Onkelos Son of Kolonikos in the Talmud Bavli.

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