

Hermann Detering

Traces of Indian Philosophy in Basilides

Part 1: Basilides References to Sāṃkhya¹

Translated by Michael Lockwood

1. Short Story of a Forgotten Question

That the early Christian heretic Basilides could have been influenced by Indian philosophy, was already in the 19th Century by some scientists suspected. It was mostly Indologists who argued the thesis, only a few theologians, such as Justus L. Jacobi, joined them. In the Gnostic article of the second edition of the *Protestantischen Realenzyklopädie* – a remarkably clear, still up to date readable account of the Basilidian system – Jacobi traces the origin of the name of God as the „non-existent“ in Basilides. Jacobi does not want to exclude a connection with Philo, but even more probable appears to him, „that the Buddhist idea of Nirvana is taken up by him ... From the connection of India with Egypt and Asia Minor we find so many traces in the second/third century that the influence of Buddhism can be accepted without any historical difficulties.“²

The thesis was also taken up by Helena Blavatsky and her theosophical society. Blavatsky saw this as corroborating her theory of an Indian influence on early Christian gnosis, the second and third centuries.³ Her later assistant, George R.S. Mead, a well-known author and translator of the *Pistis Sophia*, contributed further important observations and

¹ The spelling of Sanskrit words is not always consistent; well-known terms such as Sāṃkhya, were usually written in normal type, but such terms as Puruṣa or Prakṛti were everywhere else written in small italics.

² Justus Ludwig Jacobi, „Gnosis“, in *Real-Enzyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche* (hg. von Johann Jakob Herzog; Bd. 5, 2. Aufl.; Leipzig, 1879), 204–47, here 220.

³ H. P. Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled: A Master-Key to the Mysteries of Ancient and Modern Science and Theology* (Bd. I, Science; New York, London, 1877), 156ff.

devoted the subject, in an enlightening chapter, to his book on the Gnostic sects of the second century.⁴

But all the assumptions at this early stage have a speculative, unsystematic character. A methodically reflected realization of this thesis can be found only in J. Kennedy's essay *Buddhist Gnosticism, the System of Basilides* (1902).⁵ The Indologist Garbe, in his book on the Sāṃkhya philosophy, agreed with the judgment of Kennedy; also, in Garbe's eyes, the system of Basilides was „completely imbued with Buddhism”.⁶ However, apart from the parallels Kennedy mentions, Garbe does not introduce much that is new. Kennedy's essay has remained the only systematic attempt to prove the Buddhist origin of Basilidian thought. Among the few theologians who referred to it, was G.A. van den Bergh van Eysinga. In a short essay titled *Basilideis and Buddhism*, he turns against Kennedy's theses.⁷ He argued that ideas such as that of suffering „as a fundamental feature of all existence” or „transmigration of souls with the law of retribution” were also known to Orphics and Pythagoreans, so by no means needed to be sought in India. Other supposed parallels drawn by Kennedy, such as „the derivation of existence from nonbeing, the evolution of the chaotic seed mass by differentiation and selection, the absence of any administration, the natural autonomy of every thing,” can, according to van den Bergh van Eysinga, be interpreted from Greek Philosophy, in order to be explained.

When the Buddhologist Edward Conze brought the issue of the connection between gnosis and Buddhism back to the agenda at the Gnosis Colloquium in Messina, the topic

⁴ George R. S. Mead, *Fragments of a Faith Forgotten, Some Short Sketches among the Gnostics Mainly of the First Two Centuries - a Contribution to the Study of Christian Origins Based on the Most Recently Recovered Materials* (1906), 253.

⁵ J. Kennedy, „Buddhist Gnosticism, the System of Basilides”, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (1902), 377–415. Albert Edmund's book „Buddhist and Christian Gospels” also contains some valuable observations. According to Edmund, his book is said to have originated before Kennedy's article; Albert J. Edmunds und Masahuru Anesaki, *Buddhist and Christian Gospels: Now first compared from the originals; being gospel parallels from Pali Texts, repr. with add. 4. ed.: being the Tokyo ed. rev. and enlarged* (Philadelphia, 1908), 142, note 62.

⁶ Richard Garbe, *Die Samkhya-Philosophie: Eine Darstellung des indischen Rationalismus* (Leipzig, 1917), 128.

⁷ G. A. van den Bergh van Eysinga, „Basileides und der Buddhismus”, in *Aus Indiens Kultur. Festgabe Richard von Garbe dem Forscher und Lehrer zu seinem 70. Geburtstag dargebracht von seinen Freunden, Verehrern und Schülern* (Veröffentlichungen des Indogermanischen Seminars der Universität Erlangen III; Erlangen, 1927), 74–77, here 128. [the researcher and teacher, on his 70th birthday, offered by his friends, admirers, and students]

of Basilides remained largely neglected.⁸ Not until forty years later, in 2007, did Erik Seldeslachts in an article contributed to *The spread of Buddhism* return to the old question. But his contribution is essentially just a repetition of the theses set up by Kennedy.⁹

The majority of the works mentioned so far come from Indologists. Kennedy's investigation could have been used by theologians as a occasion for an in-depth discussion of the issue, but that's hardly happened, for reasons we'll discuss later. The results of Kennedy's work were merely touched, if at all, and there can be no question of a detailed discussion. The passage of the Dutch scholar quoted above is an exception.

Nowadays the interest in the question seems almost completely extinguished, yes, one could doubt, at least as far as the German theological world is concerned, whether the theses were even received at all. In the Basilides book of the Protestant theologian Winrich A. Löhr, not only is there no argument with them, even Kennedy's investigation is in vain in Löhr's bibliography.

The silence of the theologian world has reasons. It has to do not least with traditional ecclesiastical-academic education and its fixation on Greek philosophy, i.e. Plato, Aristotle and the Stoa. Indian philosophy, literature and religion are not compulsory subjects in theology education. The fact that India could in any way be relevant to the question of the origins of Christian Gnosis or even of early Christianity does not register with most theologians. Instead, the magic word to explain the Gnostic origins is still 'Plato'. For Protestant theologian Christoph Marksches, Basilides is a „Christian thinker“ who strives to „pass on basic facts of the Christian history of salvation under the presuppositions of a *Platonic world view*“¹⁰ [emphasis added]. According to Marksches, the same applies to most other Gnostics, as well as indeed „Gnosis“ should have arisen, „in the educational metropolises of antiquity, in an attempt by reasonably educated people to explain their Christianity, in those time“. It should have been „adopted from the contemporary popular philosophy, and had already [been] assimilated by Jewish-Hellenistic thinkers.“¹¹

⁸ Ugo Bianchi, *Le Origini Dello Gnosticismo: Colloquio Di Messina, 13-18 Aprile 1966. Testi E Discussioni Pubblicati a Cura Di Ugo Bianchi. The Origins of Gnosticism. Colloquium of Messina, 13-18 April 1966* (1967).

⁹ Ann Heirman und Stephan Peter Bumbacher, Hrsg., *The spread of Buddhism* (Handbook of oriental studies. Section eight, Central Asia, Handbuch der Orientalistik v. 16; Leiden; Boston, 2007).

¹⁰ Christoph Marksches, *Die Gnosis* (2010), 82.

¹¹ Marksches, *Die Gnosis*, (see n. 10), 84.

With this outdated view— a variant of Harnack’s old theory – Marksches has yet to face the problems that were once raised against Harnack by the representatives of the Religious History School, Richard Reitzenstein, Wilhelm Bousset, Rudolph Bultmann, Kurt Rudolph, but also by Gero Widengren and others. Moreover, a closer examination may show that much of what Marksches, Löhr, and others think of „Platonism” or „contemporary popular philosophy,” can only, with difficulty, be forced into the Procrustean bed of a „Platonic world view”. Overall, their neglect of older literature has subverted what could otherwise have provided them with some pointers for an alternative view of things.

In fact, it is worth picking up the thread again and continuing where the older explorers once stopped. The growing knowledge of the influence of Indian religion and philosophy on the Hellenistic world makes it possible not only to better test the viability of the old arguments, but also to contribute a number of other observations.

Our focus should first be on a point that is crucial to the demonstration of Indian influence in Basilides, and which has not been adequately appreciated in both older and newer literature. This is a passage from the so-called *Acta Archelai*, in which the author has given us an Excerpt from a work by Basilides, in which Basilides quotes a philosophical tradition whose author he calls a „barbarian” (foreigner, non-Greek, non-Roman).

2. Basilides speaks of ‘Sāṃkhya’

2.1 Text and Translation

Hegemonius, Acta Archelai 67,4-12

(Beeson [GCS] 96,10-97,24)

4. Fuit praedicator apud Persas etiam Basilides quidam antiquior, non longo post nostrorum apostolorum tempore; qui et ipse cum esset versutus et vidisset quod eo tempore iam essent omnia praeoccupata, dualitatem istam voluit adfirmare quae etiam apud Scythianum erat.

English Translation

4. There was a preacher to the Persians, a certain Basilides who used to live, not long after the time of our apostles, who, being clever and having noted all the (theological) views already being circulated, he wanted to revive the dualism Scythianus had taught.

5. Moreover, since he had nothing that he

5. Denique cum nihil haberet quod adseret proprium, aliis dictis proposuit adversariis. Et omnes eius libri difficilia quaedam et asperrima continent. Extat tamen tertius decimus liber tractatum eius, cuius initium tale est: »Tertium decimum nobis tractatum scribentibus librum necessarium sermonem uberemque salutaris sermo praestabit: per parabolam (parvulam?) divitis et pauperis naturam sine radice et sine loco rebus supervenientem unde pullulaverit indicat«.

6. Hoc autem solum caput liber continet? Nonne continet et alium sermonem? At, sicut opinati sunt quidam, nonne omnes offendamini ipso libro, cuius initium erat hoc? Sed ad rem rediens Basilides interiectis plus minusve quingentis versibus ait:

7. »Desinamus ab inani et curiosa varietate; requiramus autem magis quae de bonis et malis etiam barbari inquisierunt et in quas opiniones de his omnibus pervenerunt.

Quidam enim horum dixerunt initia omnium duo esse, quibus bona et mala adsociaverunt, ipsa dicentes initia sine initio esse et ingenita; id est in principiis lucem fuisse ac tenebras, quae ex semet ipsis erant, non quae (genitae) esse dicebantur.

8. Haec cum apud semet ipsa essent, proprium unumquodque eorum vitam agebant quam vellent et quale sibi

could claim as (intellectual) property, he presented his opponents with the sayings of others. All his books contain difficult & very complicated things. Yet the thirteenth book of his treatises, which begins thus: „To us who the word of salvation will be of service with a necessary and substantial passage: By the parable of the rich and the poor, it indicates where nature, without root, without place, and connected to things, could have sprung.“

6. Does the book contain only this chapter? Doesn't it contain other passages? But should not all of you, as some people thought, be offended by a book that started off like that? But returning to business, Basilides says after inserting about 500 lines:

7. „Let us abandon vain and inquisitive varieties; investigate good and bad things, and Let us ask what the 'foreigners' have done to views they have taken in all these things«. Some of them have said that there are two beginnings of all things with which they connect the good and the evil.

From the very beginning, they said that they were without beginning and without witness, i.e. that there was originally light and darkness that existed out of themselves and that, as they said, should not have been created.

8. As long as they were with themselves, each one of them had a life of its own (as it wanted) and as it suited; for all that is

competeret; omnibus enim amicum est, quod est proprium et nihil sibi ipsum malum videtur. Postquam autem ad alterutrum agnitionem uterque pervenit et tenebrae contemplatae sunt lucem, tamquam melioris rei sumpta concupiscentia insectabantur ea et coadmisceri ac participari de ea cupiebant.

9. Et tenebrae quidem haec agebant, lux vero nequaquam ex tenebris quicquam recipiebat in sese nec in earum desiderium veniebat, tantummodo quod etiam ipsa spectandi libidinem passa est. Et quidem et respexit eas velut per speculum. Enfasis igitur, id est color quidam lucis, ad tenebras factus est solus, sed lux ipsa respexit tantummodo et abscessit, nulla scilicet parte sumpta de tenebris.

10. Tenebrae vero ex luce sumpserunt intuitum et yles enfasin vel colorem, in quo ei displicuerant. eum ergo nequiores de meliore sumpsissent non veram lucem, sed speciem quandam lucis atque enfasin, boni raptiva mutatione traxerunt. Unde nec perfectum bonum est in hoc mundo, et quod est valde est exiguum, quia parum fuit etiam illud, quod initio conceptum est.

11. Verum tamen per hoc ipsum exiguum lucis, immo potius per speciem quandam lucis, creaturae valuerunt generare similitudinem perferentem ad illam, quam de luce conceperant, permixtionem.

dear to them, which is their own, and nothing appears to be bad. But when each of them came to the perception of the other and the darkness saw the light, she pursued it as if she were seized by the desire for a better cause, and desired to be mingled with him and to share in it.

9. Even though the darkness did so, the light in no way received anything from the darkness and had no desire for it; only that it was seized on his part by the desire to look. And she saw it as in a mirror. That's why it's just a reflection. i.e. a gleam of light had been produced in the darkness, but the light itself only looked and drew back, no part had been seized by the darkness.

10. The darkness caught sight of the light and the hyle (matter) a reflection or glow in which they had displeased him. Because the wicked had not taken the true light from the better, but merely a certain glow of light and a reflection, they tore away (the reflection) of the good in an abrupt turn. Therefore, there is nothing perfectly good in this world, and what is there is very little, because that was not enough, what was received in the beginning.

11. Nevertheless, through this little light, even more so this mere light, the creatures were able to produce a similarity that reaches to the mixture they had received from the light.

12. And that is the creation that we perceive. „But the remaining parts that

12. Et haec est ista, quam cernimus, creatura.« Sed et reliqua eorum similia in consequentibus executus est. Haec autem sufficere aestimavi ad ostendendam eius in hac parte sententiam. In his enim de mundi conditione conscripsit secundum quod Scythianus senserat.

were similar were explained below. But I believed that this was enough to explain his view in this regard. In it he wrote about the creation of the world in the way as Scythianus had already done.

2.2 Context

The Acta Archelai (AA), originally written in Greek, perhaps also in Syrian, but today only in a Latin translation from the 4th century, are attributed to an otherwise unknown ecclesiastical writer named Hegemonius.¹² The anti-Manichaean script, which originated from earlier sources¹³, contains disputes which the bishop of Archbishop Archelaus is said to have had with Mani and his pupil Turbo. Scripture is considered an important patristic source for the history of Manichæism.

In Archelaus's criticism of Mani, his accusation of Mani's plagiarism plays a central role. The bishop claims that Mani usurped his theology from certain predecessors.¹⁴ In order to substantiate the accusation, Archelaus designs a kind of heretic genealogy dating back to apostolic times. A certain Scythianus is said to have been the first to represent and introduce a dualistic doctrine into Christianity (AA 62,2). A pupil of Scythianus and heir of his literary legacy named Terebinthus, who called himself 'Budda' (sed Buddam nomine sibique hoc nomen inpositum), followed him later.

Finally, the bishop mentions another „certain Basilides“ (Basilides quidam), whom he calls a preacher (prædicator) from Persia. He, too, represented a dualistic doctrine which, as Archelaus says, he assumed from Scythianus, in the absence of his own ideas (cum nihil haberet quod adseret proprium), just as Mani did. Archelaus quotes two fragments from the 13th book of the „Treatises“ of Basilides: a shorter one from the introduction

¹² *Subscriptio* (Beeson 98,16-17).

¹³ Samuel N. C. Lieu, *Manichaeism in Mesopotamia and the Roman East* (Religions in the Graeco-Roman world v. 118; Leiden; New York, 1994), 136. Eszter Spät, „The ‚Teachers‘ of Mani in the ‚Acta Archelai‘ and Simon Magus“, *Vigiliae Christianae* 58/1 (2004), 1–23, here 1f.

¹⁴ *Iste non est primus auctor huiusmodi doctrinae nec solus* (62,1).

and a longer one after 500 lines, in which Basilides gives a detailed account of a dualistic tradition.¹⁵

The meaning of this insertion, as well as the relationship between the two excerpts, is not very clear. According to Löhr, the correspondence of the Basilides quotation with Mani's teachings „according to the writer's not entirely respectable logic“ is to prove the accusation „that Mani only re-embodied the teachings of Scythianus.“¹⁶ It is true that Hegemonius was tried to deny Mani's originality and that the passage quoted subordinated to this interest in the broadest sense. Since the author evidently could not come up with a quotation from Scythianus he cited in order to prove his reproach, he probably presented his readers with a little discovery as a substitute, which he took from the work of Basilides.

To what extent Hegemonius himself believed that Mani could be convicted with a quotation from the work of Basilides is an open question. With the quote Hegemonius could at best have proved that Basilides was a plagiarist of Scythianus and had adopted his dualism. But even this argument would be on shaky ground. For it is clear that, in the second quotation, by no means is the position of Basilides represented, but only that of certain *barbari*.¹⁷

As far as the first quote is concerned, an important conclusion can be drawn from the author's own position. But, as we shall see in the next section, this is not consistent with Hegemonius' thesis that Basilides was a dualist.

2.3 Analysis of AA 67.5 – dualistic or not?

In the introduction to the 13th book of his „Treatises“, Basilides speaks of the „word of salvation“ (*salutaris sermo*), mentioning in this context *a parabola divitis et pauperis*; the parable is to indicate „whence nature, without root, without place, and with things, may have sprung“ (AA 67: 5).

¹⁵ The authenticity of the two Basilides quotations has been challenged by B. Layton and some others. Today it is generally assumed that they are genuine; see Bentley Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures: A New Translation with Annotations and Introductions* (New Haven, Conn, 2007).

¹⁶ Winrich Alfried Löhr, *Basilides und seine Schule: eine Studie zur Theologie- und Kirchengeschichte des zweiten Jahrhunderts* (Tübingen, 1996), 224.

¹⁷ „Basilides cites the foreigners' views on evil, but nothing at all indicates that these were his views, too“ – Gerhard Uhlhorn, *Das Basilidianische System: Mit besonderer Rücksicht auf die Angaben des Hippolytus dargestellt* (Göttingen, 1855), 53.

The short section contains several issues. To ask is:

- a) to which scripture and which parable Basilides refers;
- b) the connection between his statements and the parable;
- c) how the enigmatic words *natura sine radice et sine loco rebus superveniens* are to be interpreted;
- d) To what extent the short passage can give any indication of the dualistic position of Basilides claimed by Hegemonius.

a) - c) Scholars usually refer to the scripture mentioned by Basilides, to the parable contained in the Gospel of Luke about the rich man and poor Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31). The problem of this interpretation is obvious. Apart from the fact that we still know too little about the nature and extent of Basilide's gospel literature, it remains puzzling what connection there is between that parable and the question that Basilides addresses regarding the origin of the evil in the world. How extensive is this theme (the contrast between light and dark) reflected in the parable of the rich man and poor Lazarus?

In his interpretation, A. Orbe tried to show that the parable must indeed be understood in terms of a struggle between light and darkness, whereby the light symbolizes the wealth of good, while darkness symbolizes poverty and deficiency.¹⁸ Similar interpretations of Luke 16:19-31 can already be found before Orbe. Jacobi had criticized it early on. He had denied the connection with the Lucan simile and pointed out the crucial difficulty of this interpretation. Basilides unquestionably understands the principle of the good as the rich and the evil as the evil of poverty, but „that parable would argue so decisively that even Gnostic exegesis is not attributable to the reversal of the parallel without obvious evidence.“ Jacobi supposed that Basilides „had an apocryphal gospel in mind.“¹⁹

Jacobi's critique was well founded,²⁰ and his argument that Basilides could refer to an „apocryphal gospel“ is plausible. And yet at least *en passant* it pointed to an alternative interpretation not yet envisaged. Would it be conceivable that Basilides, with his *parabola divitis et pauperis*, referred in a subtle allusion to the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32), which also refers to a „rich man“ (the father) and a „poor man“? (the returning

¹⁸ Literature at Löhr, *Basilides und seine Schule*, (see n. 16), 229.

¹⁹ J.L. Jacobi, „Das ursprüngliche Basilidianische System.“, *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 4 (1877), 481-544, here 500.

²⁰ Adolf Hilgenfeld, *Die Ketzergeschichte des Urchristenthums: Urkundlich dargestellt* (Leipzig, 1884), 210.

son)? In any case, the content of the parable in its Gnostic or Patristic-Neo-Platonic interpretation could be perfectly reconciled with the light-dark theme and the question of the origin of the bad in the world. The poor would then, as Möller already assumed, nothing other than „the world-languishing spiritual principle which ... returns to its origin“.²¹

Möller had falsely read this interpretation from the parable Luke 16:19-31 (probably better: reading it in), but this, as we have already seen, is impossible because of the negative portrayal of the rich Lazarus. As an interpretation of the parable of Luke 15:11-32, on the other hand, the statement would suit perfectly. In this way, one could explain why Basilides thought he recognized in the Parable an indication of where nature, which is „without root, without place, and connected to things, could have sprung.“ „Nature without root and place“ was for Basilides the principle of evil represented by the world; „Poverty“ is not based on any essential, „root-like“ cause, but merely as a consequence of turning away from the riches of origin.

d) But regardless of which parable Basilides had in mind. The language he uses, the fact that he does not give an own radix to the principle of evil, is enough to make it clear that he could not have been a dualist, as Hegemonius claims.²²

If he were a dualist, Basilides would have to ascribe to the second entity an independent existence, as he does in the AA 67, 7 ff. of his referential dualistic system. There he speaks of the fact that the two principles „existed out of themselves“ and were „non-generated“ (*quae ex semet ipsis erant, non quae [genitæ] esse dicebantur*). This expresses the basic equivalence of the two principles. On the other hand, Basilides expresses himself here, without reference, but representing his own views, in categories familiar to the Neo-Platonists. Evil does not have its own existence (no „root“ and no „place“), but is merely a waste and detachment from the original principle; it is a lack of good. But this conception is not dualistic, but monistic – and it is originally Basilidian in that, as we shall see, it coincides with the image of the „monistic“ Basilides transmitted by Hippolytus.

²¹ Ernst Wilhelm Möller, *Geschichte der Kosmologie in der griechischen Kirche bis auf Origenes*, 1860, 351, note 6.

²² So, too, says Jacobi: „It is evident, then, that the ‘*natura sine radice et sine loco*’ is not explained by the ideology of the rugged dualism, where the group of Irenaeus transfers to Basilides. When these Oriental systems speak of the loss of the root and the place, they assume that both are essentially evil; this is precisely what Basilides denies“ – Jacobi, „Das ursprüngliche Basilidianische System.“, (see n. 19), 505. – Also Epiphanius, in the *Panarion Hæreticorum*, 3.18.5 (46, 2, 8), discusses the dualistic doctrine (represented by Scythianus) where you have two principles, two roots underlying (ἐκ δύο ριζῶν ἢ δύο ἀρχῶν ἐνεργεῖσθαι τὰ πάντα).

Due to the distorted portrayal of Hegemonius, later commentators have unfortunately been led astray. For example, Wilhelm Bousset regarded the passage in question as the strongest „obstacle to those ... who would attribute dualism to Basilides”,²³ and maintains that Basilides has attributed to evil, „that covers the things of this world, its own, fundamentally rooted existence”.²⁴ But that does not correspond to Basilides view. His words clearly show that he was not a dualist at the moment. It is true that in the second quotation, a dualistic tradition is quoted by him, but his own theological views have nothing to do with it, contrary to the assertion of Archelaus / Hegemonius.

2.4 Scythianus and Terebinthus

The role of the two alleged predecessors mentioned by Archelaus (Mani's or Basilides'): Scythianus and Terebinthus, whose biography preceded the two quotations of Basilides, has largely been ignored. According to Archelaus/Hegemonius, Scythianus was the first to proclaim Mani's dualistic doctrine. Archelaus adds that Scythianus and his followers were also influenced by the teachings of Pythagoras. Scythianus is said to have lived already at the time of the apostles. The name had been given to him because of a stay in Scythia – by birth he had been Saracen. From Scythia he had traveled to the area of the upper Thebai, where he had bought up a prisoner and married her. With her he settled in Egypt and studied the wisdom of the Egyptians. Furthermore, Scythianus had a student named Terebinthus, who wrote four books for him, with the titles *Mysteria*, *Kephalaia*, *Evangelium* and *Thesaurus*, the same books that later came into the possession of Mani. At the end of his life, Scythianus is said to have lived with his pupil Terebinthus and to have decided to travel to Judea to meet with the apostles.²⁵ He was soon to die, without being able to complete his plans.

After the death of Scythianus, Terebinthus had to flee to Babylon. There he declared he was in possession of all Egyptian wisdom teachings. He also claimed that he was born by a virgin and raised by an angel in the mountains. In addition, Terebinthus had changed his name in Babylon and had from then on been called 'Budda'. Terebinthus died in a fall

²³ Uhlhorn, *Das Basilidianische System: Mit besonderer Rücksicht auf die Angaben des Hippolytus dargestellt*, (see n. 17), 52.

²⁴ Wilhelm Bousset, *Hauptprobleme der Gnosis* (Bd. 10; Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments; Göttingen, 1973), 94.

²⁵ One may assume that these are meant to be those who were considered to be teachers there (*ibi videbantur esse doctores*).

from the roof of his house; after that, his books are said to have been in the possession of his widow.

Of the widow of Terebinthus, Archelaus claims that she had a young slave named Corbicius. When the boy was twelve years old and the widow died, he inherited from her the four mentioned books. Later, Corbicius called himself Mani; the four books became the basis of his proclamation.

The tradition of the two predecessors of Mani (216-274) communicated by Archelaus is also confirmed by Epiphanius (315-403)²⁶ and Cyrill of Jerusalem (313-386),²⁷ a clear indication that the *Acta Archelai* dates back to the first half of the fourth century. However, the details of the tradition of both Church Fathers differ in part very much from the presentation of the *Acta Archelai*. For example, Epiphanius knows facts about Archelaus to report that Scythianus was a businessman who achieved great wealth through his trade in goods from India. His wife was in fact a prostitute he had bought off in a brothel in the town of Hypsele. After all, he, who had been spoiled by luxury and idleness, wanted to devise something new and began to search for the causes of injustice. Fascinated by the idea that everything in the world was based on two principles and two roots, Scythianus explained his findings in the four books already mentioned above and finally traveled to Jerusalem to argue his theories with the Apostles. Because of his stubbornness, they had failed to convince him. So Scythianus finally moved into a house in Jerusalem and died in a fall from the roof, while he was busy with his magical practices, which he had learned from Egyptian and Indian sages. His pupil Terebinthus is said to have fled to Persia after the death of Scythianus and lived there with an elderly widow. In Persia, he had discussed with Mithras disciples and the prophets Parcus and Labdacus on the two principles and finally suffered the same fate as his master: he also fell from the roof of his house in the practice of magic, and died.

It is not the place to examine, here, the different traditions, and question their historical value. Obviously, the narrative involves contradictions²⁸ and various narrative motives (for example, the fall from the roof) were pushed back and forth in accordance with the „tree-change-your-principle“ and transmitted from Scythianus to Terebinthus and vice

²⁶ *Panarion haereticorum*, 66.6-7.25-31.

²⁷ *Procatechesis et Catecheses ad illuminandos*, 6, 22-24.

²⁸ An example is mentioned in her recent essay: „The first of these forerunners,“ Scythianus is said to have lived in the time of the apostles – a sheer chronological impossibility, considering that Mani was born in AD 216. No even remotely similar statement can be found in the Manichaean. „ – Spät, „The Teachers' of Mani in the ‚Acta Archelai‘ and Simon Magus“, (see n. 13), 4.

versa. It is not even clear whether these motives are not themselves from older anti-heretical storytelling traditions. It seems that the narrator drew his material primarily from the Simon Magus saga, evidently in order to replenish the available dry data about the two predecessors of Mani with new material.

Eszter Späth goes a step further and comes to the conclusion after a thorough comparison of the Simon Magus saga with the Scythianus-Terebinthus narrative that the latter is nothing but a replica of the first or „the completely fictional biography attributed to them: the motifs of this fraudulent vita are the life of Simon, well known to everybody in this age“.²⁹

The fact that the Scythianus narrative does not pursue a purely historical intention, but is primarily intended to deny Mani's doctrine of any originality, is undisputed.³⁰ That this is supposed to be but a replica of the Simon Magus saga is difficult to swallow. Why the effort? Would not it have been more plausible to reject the assumed involvement of Scythianus and connect Mani directly to the Simon Magus tradition? Mani could have been discredited in a much simpler and more convincing manner, especially since the Simon-Magus saga was already well known at that time and the judgment of the Fathers on the *pater omnium hæreticorum* had long been established.

2.5 Background of Religious History of AA 67.7-12

Although the statements of the Fathers of the Church about Scythianus and his student Terebinthus are thoroughly questionable, that doubt could serve as a stimulus to search further for a more factual historical source of the religious views of Basilides, at least in one major respect: the traveler to India, Scythianus, with a pupil Terebinthus, who called himself „Budda“. Instead of giving credence to the doubtful stories of the Church Fathers, it would be far better to consider whether such stories might contain an indication of the true origin of the teaching system referred to by Basilides. Studies examining the system's possible Indian origin have not yet been made. Instead, scholars have been fixated on Zoroastrian sources, right from the start. For Jacobi and others, it was clear that the second fragment cited by Archelaus/Hegemonius „undoubtedly expresses a Persian

²⁹ Spät, „The ‚Teachers‘ of Mani in the ‚Acta Archelai‘ and Simon Magus“, (see n. 13), 22. Similar to Maddalena Scopello, „Simon le mage, prototype de Mani selon les Acta Archelai“, *Revue de la Societe Enest-Renan* (1988), 67-79. Scopello sees Simon as the archetype of Mani.

³⁰ A fact already affirmed by Ferdinand Christian Baur in Ferdinand Christian Baur, *Das manichäische Religionssystem nach den Quellen neu untersucht und entwickelt* (Tübingen, 1831), 461.

dualism.”³¹ Of course, this assumption can not be entirely dismissed, especially since the AA report of a Persian residence of Basilides in Persia.³² Nor can we deny that there are some striking parallels between the Persian dualism and the Basilides fragment. And yet Jacobi already shows that this thesis was associated with considerable difficulties, and therefore was not consistently carried out. Jacobi believed that he could solve the difficulties by assuming that the original of the dualistic doctrine of the *barbari* was referred to Basilides „through the mediation of a Greek representation.”³³ The whole has the „nature of a Greek reflection”, thus „the peculiarity” of the original has been blurred.

Löhr goes one step further. The question of the historical source of the religious views in the second fragment is briefly touched on, but the answer to which is immediately held to be impossible. It is „pointless”, according to Löhr, „to interrogate the fragment ... exactly; we do not seem to get further than an *interpretatio græca*”; at best, Löhr believes he is able to make out the author of the *interpretatio græca*; he assumes it is Basilides, himself.³⁴

Löhr admits that he lacks „philological competence” „to evaluate Zoroastrian original sources really thoroughly and properly.” The more extensively, however, he devotes himself to interpreting the layer he suspects. This he largely reconstructs on the basis of a section from Plutarch's *De Iside et Osiride* (373 BC). Here Löhr finds those Middle Platonic ideas which he believes to recognize in the Basilides fragment. In Byard Bennett's essay from the year 2007, „Basilides' 'Barbarian [Foreign] Cosmogony': Its Nature and Function within the Acta Archelai”, Bennett has represented a variation of this thesis independently of Löhr, but based on similar arguments.³⁵

From a methodological point of view, Löhr's procedure is questionable. Even the explanation with which he dispenses with any further investigation into other possible

³¹ Jacobi, „Das ursprüngliche Basilidianische System.”, (see n. 19), 506. Today this conception is advocated by Ekkehard Mühlenberg, „Basilides”, in *TRE* (Bd. 5; Berlin, New York, 1979), 296–301.

³² One must, however, expect that the information about the alleged Persian residence of Basilides of Hegemonius was invented in order to emphasize in this way the proximity to the originating from Persia Mani.

³³ Jacobi, „Das ursprüngliche Basilidianische System.”, (see n. 19), 509.

³⁴ Löhr, *Basilides und seine Schule*, (see n. 16), 249, note 136.

³⁵ Byard Bennett, „Basilides' 'Barbarian Cosmogony': Its Nature And Function Within The Acta Archelai”, in *Frontiers of Faith - The Christian Encounter with Manichaeism in the Acts of Archelaus* (Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies 61; 2007), 157–66. Unlike Löhr, the question of a possibly Zoroastrian or Manichæan origin of the sources used in the fragment is not left open by Bennett, but treated in detail – and answered negatively.

religious sources of Basilides' views seems strange. Within the framework of a study of theology and church history, one should expect a clarification of the religious-historical context. As for the lack of „philological competence“, a number of translations and commentaries have existed, over an extensive period of time, which would have fundamentally clarified the problem. This abdication of any thorough research into the history of religious views raises serious doubts about Löhr's postulating a platonizing or pythagorean interpretation. Without any specific definition of content – however hypothetical –, what is supposed to be interpreted remains in a kind of black box, so that all statements about an *interpretatio græca* made by Basilides hang in the air. In the end, the supposed „interpretation“ of the religious-historical reference in question must replace it. Löhr can not admit this, because otherwise he would have to concede that the Basilides section, in fact, refers to a construct made up entirely of Hellenistic set pieces. As such, however, it would not have been described by Basilides as the doctrine of the barbari, as Löhr, unlike Bennett,³⁶ seems to know.

As already mentioned, the crucial baselines of Zoroastrianism can be determined relatively clearly on the basis of available literature, translations and commentaries. In fact, there are a few striking parallels:

- Archelaus presents his excursus on Basilides under the theme „dualitas“ [„duality“] (AA 67.4); he wants to prove that Basilides represented a dualistic doctrine and took it over from the foreigner. The Zoroastrian doctrine is one of the best-known and most distinguished dualistic systems in the history of antiquity. That Basilides should have known it, would indeed be possible, especially if the remark about his stay in Persia was correct.
- According to the doctrine taught by Basilides, the two principles („light“ and „darkness“) are said to have been beginningless and indeterminate; it is said that they existed „on their own“ (*ex semet ipsis erant*). – In addition, similar parallels can be learned from the Zoroastrian cosmogony. Zoroastrianism also knows a kingdom of light and a kingdom of darkness; Ormazd reigns over the kingdom of light and good, Ahriman, over

³⁶ Bennett obviously did not recognize this difficulty and promptly fell into the trap. For him, the fragment belongs to the „broader context of the Middle Platonic interpretation of Plato's Timaeus.“ (Bennett, „Basilides' 'Barbarian Cosmogony'“, 163, 165.) But the Middle Platonic interpretation of the cosmogony of the Timaeus would never have been called „barbaric“ / „foreign“ by an ancient author!

darkness and evil.³⁷ Their existence is regarded as „beginningless“.³⁸ Their empires are separated from each other by the void or the nothingness. While Ormazd was and always will be, and his dominion, is limited only by space, the rule of Ahriman is both spatially (through nothingness) and temporally terminated by an eventual victory of light over darkness. For the mentioned spatial and temporal limitations there is no equivalent in the AA.

- The darkness (*tenebræ*) is said to have been „seized by the desire (*concupiscentia*) for a better cause“ at the sight of the light, which then desired (*cupiebant*) to be mixed with it. Ahriman, too, is seized by the desire for the light at the sight of the higher world, which until then had remained hidden from him. „[He] beheld a point of light, and because he is a substance of himself, he strove to attain it; and his desire for it waxed so mightily that [it was as great as his desire] for the darkness.“³⁹
- „The creation we perceive“ is a mixture of light and dark. In Zoroastrianism, too, the existing world is regarded as a „mixture“, more precisely as the result of a struggle between light and darkness.⁴⁰

The correspondences between the doctrine taught by Basilides and Zoroastrianism are essentially limited to the above-mentioned parallels. An identity of the two views can hardly be deduced from this basis, especially since the conditions on closer inspection become considerably more complicated.

According to AA 67: 8, the darkness is said to have sought after the light when light and darkness recognized each other. This presupposes that both entities did not know anything about each other earlier. On the other hand, in Zoroastrianism, Ormazd, because of his omniscience, knew from the beginning that Ahriman existed. Only, Ahriman did not know anything about the existence of Ormazds.⁴¹

³⁷ „The light was above and the darkness beneath; and between them was the void. Ormazd in the light and Ahriman in the darkness,“ R. C. Zaehner, *The Dawn and Twilight of Zoroastrianism* (New York, 1961), 248. Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Biographie des Teufels: das radikal Böse und die Macht des Guten in der Welt* (2000), 27.

³⁸ Herman Lommel, *Die Religion Zarathustras: nach dem Awesta dargestellt* (1930), 28.

³⁹ Zaehner, *The Dawn and Twilight of Zoroastrianism*, (see n. 37), 254.

⁴⁰ Lommel, *Die Religion Zarathustras*, (see n. 38), 130. Zaehner, *The Dawn and Twilight of Zoroastrianism*, (see n. 37), 250.256.

⁴¹ Bennett, „Basilides' 'Barbarian Cosmogony': Its Nature And Function Within The Acta Archelai“, (see n. 35), 163, note 23. Bennett uses this argument with reference to Manichaeism; it applies equally to Zoroastrianism.

- The relationship between light and darkness in Zoroastrianism (as well as in Manichæism) is often shaped by images of struggle. This motive is lacking in the AA, here the motive of desire prevails.⁴² Bennett: „... it is remarkable that the relation between the good and evil principles in the fragment is nowhere an assault on the realm of the good. The absence of a conflict motif clearly separates the fragment's cosmogony from that of the Manichæan and Zoroastrian traditions.”⁴³
- A crucial point: AA 67:10 identifies darkness with matter. In contrast, Zoroastrianism clearly differentiates between Ahriman and matter.⁴⁴
- In AA, the creation mixed by the good and the bad arises because of the pursuit of the bad for the light (*creaturae valuerunt generale similitudinem perferentem ad illam, quam de luce conceperant, permistionem*), thus is „improvement of the bad”. In Zoroastrianism first of all the good creation arises. This is then mixed secondarily, by intervention of Ahriman, with bad, is thus „diminution of the good”.⁴⁵
- In Zoroastrian cosmogony the mirror motif is missing. Ahriman recognizes a ray of light. In the AA, darkness recognizes only the faint reflex of a ray of light. This shows a strong tendency to transcend the divine sphere, which is missing in Zoroastrianism.⁴⁶
- The mythological elements in the Basilides presentation are much reduced compared to the Zoroastrian myth. In the texts of Zoroastrianism, the relationship between Ormazd

⁴² At best, 67,10 („in abrupt turn”, *raptiva mutatione*) could be considered a weak reflex of the battle theme.

⁴³ Bennett, „Basilides' 'Barbarian Cosmogony': Its Nature And Function Within The Acta Archelai”, (see n. 35), 162. Löhr says: „While according to Zoroastrian teachings the evil principle is spiritual, Mani's doctrine conceptualizes the evil principle essentially as matter. On the other hand, for the Zoroastrian doctrine in its different variations, the earthly natural world was not bad and deficient, but holy and worthy of worship”, Löhr, *Basilides und seine Schule*, (see n. 16), 233.

⁴⁴ Bennett, „Basilides' 'Barbarian Cosmogony': Its Nature And Function Within The Acta Archelai”, (see n. 35), 162.

⁴⁵ Lommel, *Die Religion Zarathustras*, (see n. 38), 134.

⁴⁶ See also Bennett: „The barbarian cosmogony instead uses visual terminology for describing how a form of the light was retained by the darkness, effecting a change in matter and leading to the production of the sensitive world: The light, having a passion for gaze, looked at the darkness, as if in a mirror; Manichæan and Zoroastrian teaching”. Bennett, „Basilides' 'Barbarian Cosmogony': Its Nature And Function Within The Acta Archelai”, (see n. 35), 162. Mühlenberg asserts: „Die zoroastrische Tradition, in der die Finsternis eine Spiegelung des Lichtes an sich reißt, die dann erlöst werden muß, hat er abgelehnt“ = „The Zoroastrian tradition, in which the darkness seizes a reflection of the light, which then has to be redeemed, he [Basilides] has rejected”; Mühlenberg, „Basilides”, (see n. 31), in *TRE*, 5:300], But in the Zoroastrian tradition the darkness robs a light, not a *reflection* of light; that's an important difference.

and Ahriman is elaborately staged and developed in various scenes. The conflict between the two powers is personalized, psychologized (envy motive) and moralized. All this is missing in the presentation of Basilides. Basilides describes the relationship between light and dark distanced as a process between the two powers light and darkness. From the context it follows that the *bona et mala* are less to be understood in the ethical („good and evil things”) than in the ontological sense („good and bad things”). The whole fragment bears more of a philosophical than mythological character.

The last point deserves special attention, because there is actually another dualistic system within the ancient history of philosophy/religion which, because of its non-mythological character, fits much better with the views expressed by Basilides:⁴⁷ the *Indian Sāṃkhya*. Initial indication that Indian philosophy or religion represents the reference point for the presentation of Basilides views, could be the framework in which Archelaus has embedded the Basilides fragments. Regardless of how the historical nature of the information about Scythianus and Terebinthus is assessed in detail, the information about the India traveler Scythianus and his pupil Terebinthus / ‘Buddha’ contains indications that should not be ignored. The assumption that the *opinionones* of the *barbari* could be the views of Indian philosophers or followers of the Indian religion, suggests itself. That the term *barbari* may indicate Indian Brahmins is confirmed by Clement: he describes „the gymnosophists among the Indians” as „another kind of barbarian philosopher” (*Strom.* 1.15.71).⁴⁸

2.6 Sāṃkhya

Knowledge of the Sāṃkhya doctrine belonging to the six „Darshanas”, the six systems of classical Indian philosophy, is generally not very widespread. Nevertheless, in view of the limited scope of our subject matter, a detailed account of the classical Sāṃkhya system can be omitted here; on the one hand, because in the next section, in any case, we will deal with individual aspects relevant to our investigation, and, on the other hand, that

⁴⁷ Garbe, *Die Samkhya-Philosophie*, (see n. 6), 249ff.

⁴⁸ Parallels between Valentinian Gnosis and Sāṃkhya have already been suggested by Stephen A. Kent, „Valentinian Gnosticism and classical Samkhya: A thematic and structural comparison”, *PEW* 30:2 (1980), 241–59, here 241–59. Kent expressly points to the possibility of a historical dependence; the exchange of goods between India and Alexandria could also have brought about cultural exchange, especially p. 242: „Evidence does indicate that some Greeks certainly knew the parts of the Mahabharata, and thus possibly the Bhagavadgita”. Nevertheless, Kent states, „it seems wisest, given the evidence, to consider both Valentinian Gnosticism and classical Samkhya as indigenous developments” (p.242)

the classical Sāṃkhya doctrine according to the consensus opinion in antiquity did not even exist. The earliest compact representation of the Sāṃkhya doctrine is the Kārikā or Sāṃkhya-Kārikā, a kind of catechism, which emerged at the earliest in the 2nd century AD⁴⁹ and is generally dated to the 4th century AD. Other works crucial to the foundation of Sāṃkhya date from later times, such as the Sāṃkhya-Sūtra, which was written in the 14th/ 15th century.⁵⁰

However, since the doctrine has been proven to be much older and the ideas expressed in these later works are, in the opinion of well-known Indologists, often of ancient roots dating back to pre-Buddhist, perhaps even Vedic times,⁵¹ it can only be stated that individual Sāṃkhya elements in the ancient world had been connected with other Indian systems.⁵² A characteristic example of this is the well-known Bhagavad-Gita, which forms part of the Indian great epic *Mahabharata* and originated even in pre-Christian times. In it, Sāṃkhya, Buddhism, Vedic elements and Yoga have come together in a mixture that makes it difficult to extract the individual systems. In addition, Indologists such as Keith, Garbe, and Frauwallner have observed „a number of striking similarities between Sankhya and Buddhism”, which of course does not make the clear distinction any easier.⁵³

Here it should suffice to say that in Sāṃkhya we are dealing with one of the oldest forms of dualism. Concerning the general core of the doctrine, Albert Schweitzer summarized it with a few sentences, which are to suffice for the preliminary characterization: „The Sāṃkhya doctrine undertakes to fathom the relation of the soul to the world of the senses in such a way that they are trapped Her and her coming free from her becomes

⁴⁹ Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya, *Lokāyata: A Study in Ancient Indian Materialism* (New Delhi, 2012), 366.

Chattopadhyaya refers to the testimony of Dasgupta. Chattopadhyaya: „The fact is that the Sankhya is extremely old and modifications have been put forward in it from very early times”, Chattopadhyaya, *Lokāyata*, 364.

⁵⁰ Michel Hulin, *Sāṃkhya literature* (A History of Indian literature; v. 6: Scientific and technical literature; pt. 3, fasc. 3; Wiesbaden, 1978), 127.

⁵¹ „...with the exception of the five tanmatra („subtle elements“), the whole ontology of Sāṃkhya has been already elaborated before the 5th century B. C.; Hulin, *Sāṃkhya literature*, (see n. 50), 130, cp. 128. Chattopadhyaya, *Lokāyata*, (see n. 49), 368.

⁵² Hulin, *Sāṃkhya literature*, (see n. 50), 129.

⁵³ Gerald James Larson und Īśvarakṛṣṇa, *Classical sāmkhya: an interpretation of its history and meaning* (Delhi, 2014), 92. Oldenberg went a step further, considering Sāṃkhya as an important factor influencing Buddhism: „So we have every right to identify Sāṃkhya as the doctrine that appears behind fundamental ideas of Buddhism, probably not as the next, but as a more distant background. Of course it is nonclassical Sāṃkhya; it is obviously only on the way to adopt the definitive type.” Hermann Oldenberg, *Die Lehre der Upanishaden und die Anfänge des Buddhismus* (Göttingen, 1915), 318.

understandable ... From eternity, she supposes, there is soul and material for herself. The fact that the two relate to each other and separate themselves again gives rise to world events." Schweitzer adds with a sidelong glance at the ancient Gnosis: „The basic idea of the system is therefore akin to that of the Oriental Greek Gnosticism.”⁵⁴

Schweitzer correctly describes the philosophy of Sāṃkhya as a doctrine of salvation based on cosmological ideas. The knowledge of the assumptions of their interweaving in matter stands at the beginning of the process of redemption; yes – as with most Gnostics – is part of salvation itself.

According to Johnston, the early Sāṃkhya is said to have contained hardly any cosmological notions: „Early thought in Sāṃkhya as in Buddhism, which is in fact almost exclusively concerned with the religious fate of man.” Originally, the doctrine was „in fact little concerned with the cosmos”.⁵⁵ But that is not very plausible. Cosmology and the doctrine of salvation cannot be separated in Sāṃkhya. The cosmology functions in Sāṃkhya as a „narrative” for the foundation of the doctrine of salvation; without them, soteriology would be completely in the air. In addition, the name Sāṃkhya = „enumeration” already seems to indicate a close connection with cosmology, since the number and listing of the individual cosmological elements plays no small role here.⁵⁶

The crucial question in our context is the age and dissemination of the doctrine. As far as age is concerned, the teachings of Sāṃkhya, as already mentioned, reach into very early, pre-Buddhist times. As a mythical founder of the doctrine is the Indian sage Kapila, who is said to have lived in the 6th, perhaps even in the 7th century B.C. Rightly or wrongly, the essential elements of the later system are traced back to him.⁵⁷ Since teaching was amalgamated with almost all other philosophical tendencies, in antiquity it is also found outside of India in various connections with other ancient philosophical currents.

The question of where Basilides got to know philosophy is easy to answer. Basilides lived in Alexandria. But Alexandria, as is generally acknowledged, has long been a „focal point

⁵⁴ Albert Schweitzer, *Die Weltanschauung der indischen Denker: Mystik und Ethik* (2016), 313–14.

⁵⁵ Johnston E.H., *Early Samkhya. An Essay on its Historical Development According to the Texts*, 1937, 18.

⁵⁶ „The word ‘Sāṃkhya’ is derived from the Sanskrit noun *sankhya* (number) based on the verbal root *khyā* (make known, name) with the preverb *sam* (together) ... the aim of Sāṃkhya is to take into account all the important factors of the whole world, especially of the human condition”; Ferenc Ruzsa, „Sankhya”, *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, O. J., [zitiert 3. Mai 2017]: < <http://www.iep.utm.edu/sankhya/> >. Ferenc Ruzsa, „Sankhya”, *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, o. J., n.p. [zitiert 3. Mai 2017]. Online: <http://www.iep.utm.edu/sankhya/>.

⁵⁷ Hulin, *Sāṃkhya literature*, (see n. 50), 136.

of Indian influences"; „The biggest part of Indian trade went through this metropolis. The trade with India was particularly lively in the first century... According to Pliny, Roman-Indian trade amounted to several millions of sesterces a year... Of all places in the Hellenistic period, it was Alexandria which was best informed about India, and this knowledge was not only about commercial things, but also, the spiritual and religious life of India.”⁵⁸

It can be shown in many ways that Indian philosophy had a great attraction for the educated Hellenistic world; their representatives were universally respected because of their ascetic way of life.⁵⁹ Löhr rightly notes that in the second century A.D., „ever since the Hellenism of the 3rd/2nd centuries” B.C., the flow is attested to have reached its peak, which saw the wise peoples of the east-Indian Brahmins, Persian Magi, Babylonian Chaldeans, and Egyptian priests, as the recipients of a higher knowledge mediated by revelation.”⁶⁰

That Basilides could have known the Indian doctrine through the mediation in Alexandria of living Indian Buddhists and Brahmins, can be proved; that he actually knew them may be clear from the following section: a comparison of individual elements of Basilides’s dualist cosmology with those of Sāṃkhya.

2.7 Analysis of AA 67, 7-12 – Historical parallels

1) *Two beginningless opposing principles, light and dark.* Already from the first hints that Basilides makes about the cosmogony of the *barbari* (AA 67,7), it turns out that we are dealing with a purely dualistic doctrine: Basilides speaks of „two beginnings of all things”, these are „without beginning and unproven”, „existing by themselves”. The two principles are called „light and darkness”.

The philosophy of Sāṃkhya, along with Persian Mazdaism, is considered one of the oldest forms of (metaphysical) dualism. Here, too, there are two „completely different

⁵⁸ E. Benz, *Indische Einflüsse auf die frühchristliche Theologie* (1951), 180. H. G. Rawlinson, *Intercourse Between India and the Western World: From the Earliest Times of the Fall of Rome* (2001), 137..

⁵⁹ Löhr, *Basilides und seine Schule*, (see n. 16), 199. Lucian reports of the formerly Christian Peregrinus Proteus († c. 165) that he burned himself „at the stake in the manner of the Brahmins” (*De morte Peregrini*, 39).

⁶⁰ Löhr, *Basilides und seine Schule*, (see n. 16), 199. Theodor Hopfner, *Orient und griechische Philosophie* (Leipzig, 1925), 42f.

entities" existing „from eternity ... side by side and in one another".⁶¹ By this is meant the opposition of *Puruṣa* and *Prakṛti*. In German this contrast becomes often referred to by the terms „nature" and „spirit" or „soul" and „matter", but these are sub-aspects.

The concrete basic meaning of *Puruṣa* is „man", „human". The term can also be extended to „humanity" or – as in the Vedas – to the „primeval man" (from whose parts the universe has been created). In the Sāṃkhya philosophy it is called the „person" or „original soul", i.e. the absolute, eternal consciousness, free from any relation, any content, and therefore immutable. As a knowing subject, it can never become an object. In contrast to the monistic Vedānta doctrine, in the Sāṃkhya, *Puruṣa* is not thought of as the All-One, but as an infinite set of individual soul-monads.⁶²

The antipode to the more masculine, purely contemplative, passive *Puruṣa* is the feminine imagined, active *Prakṛti*. Here, too, the terms „nature" or „matter" only approximate what is meant. The term derives from the root *kr* = „do", „make" and the preposition *pra* = „before", „first". More precisely one would probably have to speak of „primordial matter" or „primordial nature", sometimes also *Mūla-Prakṛti*.⁶³ It should be noted that this matter is thought not only of gross, visible material, but also of the subtle, invisible. That is why the human soul is considered a part of the *Prakṛti*; she is divorced from the immaterial „original soul". Primal matter exists in two different modes: an unfolded (*avyakta*) and an undeveloped (*vyakta*). Furthermore, it consists, like a braided strand, of three „strands", the so-called *Guṇas*: these include 1) *Sattva*, meaning the pure, constant, good and bright, 2) *Rajas*, the moving, the active, the energetic, Passionate and finally 3) *Tamas*, the dark, lethargic, heaviness. All *Guṇas* are in principle neither good nor bad, they only become dominated by one of them and thereby destroys the balance.

As a classical locus for the eternal, beginningless existence of both opposing principles is a passage from the Bhagavad Gita (13:19): „You should know that the Prakṛiti and also the Puruṣa are both beginningless... ."

Like the two *principii* mentioned by Basilides, *Puruṣa* and *Prakṛti* also meet in the Sāṃkhya in the categories of light and darkness. Although this contradiction is not demonstrable in the Kārikā, this does not mean much, because we are dealing here only with a brief

⁶¹ Paul Deussen, *Sechzig Upanishad's des Veda: Aus dem Sanskrit übersetzt und mit Einleitungen und Anmerkungen versehen* (3. Aufl.; Leipzig, 1921), 62.

⁶² „The two types of entities of Sāṃkhya are Prakṛti and Puruṣas, namely Nature and persons. Nature is singular, and persons are numerous"; Ruzsa, „Sankhya". Ruzsa, „Sankhya", (see n. 56).

⁶³ *Mūla* from „root"; see AA 67, 5.

outline of the doctrine, a kind of catechism. On the one hand, the difference between light and darkness arises from the traditional cosmogonies of traditional Vedic literature, but also from the philosophical determination of the relation of light and spirit. Sāṃkhya-Sūtra I, 145 states that „[the spirit] is light, because the concepts of the non-spiritual and the light are mutually exclusive.” And also VI, 50 declares, „The thought-existing enlightenment is different from the non-souled, inanimate.”

For Garbe, it followed „that the mind is light (*prakāśa*), meaning that it enlightens the mechanical processes of the internal organs, *i.e.* brings to consciousness.” „If the luminosity can not be a property of an attribute of the soul, then only the assumption remains that the light is the soul itself, *i.e.* Garbe notes that the idea of an identity of light and spirit is also typical of Gnosticism and presumably of the Sāṃkhya doctrine.⁶⁴

With regard to an identification of the *Prakṛti* with the darkness, I refer to Larson’s saying about the legendary founder of Sāṃkhya, Kapila: „In the beginning there is darkness (*tamas*) alone. In that darkness there is a field (*kṣetra*) (or *kṣetrajñā*?). Darkness (*tamas*) signifies *prakṛti* and *kṣetra* (or *kṣetrajñā*) signifies *Puruṣa*.”⁶⁵

2) The State of Ignorance. As long as light and darkness do not know anything about each other, both lead their own lives. They are self-sufficient and in a state of divinely peaceful harmony.⁶⁶ In this scenario, referenced by Basilides, it is easy to recognize the basic features of the Sāṃkhya cosmogony: there, too, the state of the world before its unfolding is characterized by the fact that the both dual entities *Prakṛti* and *Puruṣa* have no knowledge of each other and therefore coexist peacefully.

In the Sāṃkhya doctrine, this state of rest is usually associated with the Guṇa theory. The *sāmyāvastā* designates that pre-revolutionary phase in which the three Guṇas of the primordial and non-manifest *Prakṛti* (the so-called *Mūla-Prakṛti*) are still in equilibrium. In this state, according to Garbe, „none of the three Guṇas is less or more ... than either of the other two, in which they remain in complete uniformity and unrelated. As long as this state of equilibrium is not disturbed, the primordial matter remains a fine

⁶⁴ Garbe, *Die Samkhya-Philosophie*, (see n. 6), 129.

⁶⁵ Karl H. Potter, Hrsg., *The encyclopedia of Indian philosophies* (1st ed.; Delhi, 1970), 192.

⁶⁶ If, as Gerhard May claims, the fragment was a forgery in analogy to the Manichæan doctrine, the forger would have worked badly, for in Manichæism the inhabitants of the world of matter live not in self-absorbed harmony, but in strife; they „bash each other, driving each other back and forth, hunting around in wild frenzy”; Gerhard May, *Schöpfung aus dem Nichts, Die Entstehung der Lehre von der creatio ex nihilo* (AKG 48; Berlin, New York, 2011), 80, note 84. Geo Widengren, *Mani und der Manichäismus*. (Stuttgart, 1961), 52.

indiscriminate mass, in which all the forces and properties which appear in the unmanifested world rest alike without activity.”⁶⁷

However, no Guṇas are mentioned in the „barbarian”/“foreign” teaching of Basilides. This could be related to the fact that the „barbarian”/“foreign” cosmogony of Basilides is shortened or simplified, or that Basilides did not yet know the Guṇa doctrine. It is controversial whether the Guṇa doctrine was part of the Sāṃkhya philosophy from the very beginning or whether it was later associated with it. In our comparison of the two cosmogonies it does not matter. Decisive are the characteristic basic ideas which are found both in the passage referred to by Basilides and in the cosmogony of the Sāṃkhya doctrine:

- a) before the world process, the two primordial beings are at rest;
- b) this state of rest is a consequence of their respective self-centeredness (Hegelian: their „being-with-oneself”).

In some way this scenario is concerned with thoughts that we know from Hegesipp’s theological understanding of Basilides. Here God puts an end to the segregation of the spiritual from the gross physical elements and the restlessness of the upward-striving creatures by spreading the veil of ignorance (μεγάλην ἄγνοιαν) over his creation (7.27.1 ff. - 299.6 M.). By leaving the souls unaware that there are other, more beautiful zones outside their world, they no longer struggle with the pursuit of the impossible (such as a fish grazing in the mountains with the sheep). „Everything that remains in its place does not die; but it dies if it wants to go beyond its nature.”

Unlike the cosmogony of the *barbari*, the „great forgetting” of Basilides, however, does not stand at the beginning of the world, that is, at the beginning of evolution, but at the end of the absorption process. By the way, however, the basic idea is the same. The universe only comes to rest when the different forces acting in it know nothing of the existence of the higher ones. Only when the different worlds are no longer aware of each other does their unruly pursuit of higher things come to an end. Obviously, Basilides also used these ideas to support his own cosmological views.

Jacobi, in his interpretation of the passage, notes that the idea of *omnibus enim amicis* is an impossible idea in *Zend Avesta*. Instead of seeing it as an important argument against the derivation of Persian dualism, Jacobi explains the disagreement with „Greek reflection” which Basilides allegedly received through the mediation of a Greek account. Löhr has taken up this thread and further substantiated the reference to the Greek

⁶⁷ Garbe, *Die Samkhya-Philosophie*, (see n. 6), 283.

philosophy.⁶⁸ He recognizes in the presentation of Basilides the influence of the Stoic *Oikeiōsis* theory, according to which „every living being from its birth on impulsively created for self-preservation.”⁶⁹ Because the Stoic psychology of the soul has little to do with the relationship of the two primordial powers of which the text speaks, Löhr adds as an explanation: „an eclectic author” could (!) „get the idea”, „to use the stoical theory to describe the ‘psychic’ life of the cosmic principles before the second decisive phase of mutual influence.”

But the whole complex of ideas – without the assumption of a second layer of interpretation – can be derived much more simply and coherently from the Indian Sāṃkhya philosophy. In fact, matter (at least in the state of equilibrium of the three Guṇas) is neither bad nor evil then,⁷⁰ and the primordial equilibrium is essentially a consequence of its being-in-itself.⁷¹ The arguments put forward by Jacobi, Löhr, and others, such as additional hypothetical assumptions of alleged secondary Stoic or Middle Platonic layers of interpretation, prove to be superfluous. All traits of the tradition cited by Basilides can be deduced from *one* source, the philosophy of Sāṃkhya.

3) Mutual Perception. The state of mutually-peaceful coexistence ends at the moment when light and darkness recognize each other (*postquam autem ad alterutrum agnitionem uterque pervenit*). Again, this thought has its complete equivalent in the Sāṃkhya: because of the fact that the unconscious *prakṛti* is recognized by *Puruṣa* and illuminated („enlightened”), the forces get out of balance; the process of becoming the world begins.

Larson describes this development on the basis of *Kārikā* as follows: „This disruption of equilibrium because of the proximity of *Puruṣa* is the cause of the process of emergence of the manifest world. The realm or dimension of being pure (*i.e. prakṛti*), which is inherently non-intelligent or non-conscious, is illuminated by the mere presence of *Puruṣa*, which is inherently intelligent or conscious. This illumination of the realm of *prakṛti* by *Puruṣa* brings about the disruption of the unmanifest condition, and creation of

⁶⁸ Jacobi, „Das ursprüngliche Basilidianische System.“, (see n. 19), 512.

⁶⁹ Löhr, *Basilides und seine Schule*, (see n. 16), 245.

⁷⁰ Schweitzer, *Die Weltanschauung der indischen Denker*, (see n. 54), 315.

⁷¹ According to the Sāṃkhya doctrine the world does change, even when it seems at rest and the three Guṇas are in balance (Garbe, 291 f.). This is related to the fact that the three Guṇas, according to the Sāṃkhya doctrine, in this state of change are subject to the same. If it is said in the paper that light and darkness initially led a life of their own, as it suited them, and that all things were dear to them, this could be a reflex of this doctrine (admittedly very crude). See Schweitzer, *Die Weltanschauung der indischen Denker*, (see n. 54).

the world ensues. In other words, it is by the association or proximity of the two principles – *prakṛti* and *Puruṣa* – that the world as we know it appears. Without this association or proximity of *prakṛti* and *Puruṣa*, there would be no worldly existence or human experience.”⁷²

The idea that the process of the creation of the world comes into being solely through the knowledge or perception (*agnitio*) of the respective opponent (and the resulting shock) is characteristic of the philosophy of the Sāṃkhya: The process of the creation the world is the result of a pure act of knowledge, *i.e.* the consequence of the mutual recognition of two opposite principles.

4) The attraction of light. The reaction caused by the knowledge of the light on the side of the darkness is called *concupiscentia* by Basilides. The term has, as Löhr correctly remarks, an erotic component. Löhr refers to the Platonic eros and assumes that Platonic thoughts were entered into the original doctrine proclaimed by the *barbari*. That is not impossible. In our context, *i.e.* against the background of the Sāṃkhya doctrine, however, a more coherent explanation is possible. In fact, we find in the corresponding texts a parallel to the *concupiscentia* mentioned in the section of Basilides. Relevant texts speak of the great attraction that *Puruṣa* (= light) exerts solely through its presence on *Prakṛti* (= darkness). This attraction is compared with that of a magnet on a piece of iron - a very frequently used picture, which we will return to.⁷³ The attraction that goes from *Puruṣa* to *Prakṛti* is also expressed in the term *kṣobha*; by this is meant the shaking of the primordial matter, through which the fateful intertwining of *Puruṣa* to *Prakṛti*, the connection of the souls with the primal matter, is initiated.⁷⁴ However, the texts give little information about the nature of this shock. Since *kṣobha* in Sanskrit can refer to passionate excitement (caused, for example, by an erotic thought), it could actually contain an erotic component. The reference to Plato proved once again to be superfluous.⁷⁵

5) Active, passive. Löhr correctly observes that the attraction of light to darkness is greater than that of darkness to light (as far as one can speak of it in the last case).⁷⁶

⁷² Larson und Īśvarakṛṣṇa, *Classical sāmkhya*, (see n. 53), 11f, 173f.

⁷³ Garbe, *Die Samkhya-Philosophie*, (see n. 6), 287.

⁷⁴ Garbe, *Die Samkhya-Philosophie*, (see n. 6), 288. The commentary to which Garbe refers dates from later times, but the doctrine seems to be old and could already go back to the founder of the school itself; see 288, note 1.

⁷⁵ Zaehner, *The Dawn and Twilight of Zoroastrianism*, (see n. 37), 248ff.

⁷⁶ Löhr, *Basilides und seine Schule*, (see n. 16), 231.

Darkness seeks the light, but not light, the darkness. This, too, corresponds to the ideas of Sāṃkhya. The characteristic of the *Puruṣa* is that it remains completely passive during the entire process of becoming the world and acts only as an „observer“ or „eyewitness“. The *Puruṣa* is „sole witness, isolated, neutral, onlooker and non-acting“; all activity is based exclusively on the *Prakṛti*. The above-mentioned picture of magnet and iron is intended to show this by illustrating that the iron (= *Prakṛti*) moves to the magnet (*Puruṣa*), not *vice versa* (the „unmoved mover“ in Aristotle). In the classical Sāṃkhya texts, the relationship spirit-matter is sometimes compared with that of master and servant. Another concise image is that of the milk flowing unconsciously out of the cow’s udder (= *Prakṛti*).⁷⁷

6) Through his eyes the light illuminates the darkness. Löhr rightly asks, „how a glance can project light“, and makes use of the Stoic doctrine of the „pneumastab“ emanating from Hegemonikon.⁷⁸ However, the matter in question can be completely coherent again – and without any Stoic „flashlight“ – deriving from the range of ideas within Sāṃkhya. Knowledge is „illumination“ by the cognitive subject.⁷⁹ The fact that the *Prakṛti* is illuminated by the encounter with the *Puruṣa* is explained by the light nature of the *Puruṣa*, of which **1)** was already mentioned.

7) Reflex, Reflection, enfasis, pratibimba. When the light looks upon the darkness, it looks like a mirror (*velut per speculum*). In the darkness, only one reflection (*enfasis*) has been created. According to the teachings of Sāṃkhya, *Prakṛti* is not only „illuminated“ by *Puruṣa*, as just mentioned, but at the same time – like the image (*prati*) of the sun (*bimba*) reflecting in the dark pond – there is a reflection of the light: *pratibimba*.⁸⁰

This reflection is, in the context of the Sāṃkhya doctrine, the cause of the many forms of suffering. The suffering is only lifted and terminated when the *Prakṛti* is no longer „lit up“ by the *Puruṣa*.

⁷⁷ Garbe, *Die Sāṃkhya-Philosophie*, (see n. 6), 224. There are also corresponding Kārikā citations. In Ruzsa’s article. „Sāṃkhya“, „Prakṛti, although unconscious, possesses the capability to respond in a specific, structured way because of its *sattva guṇa*, the information-intelligence aspect of nature“.

⁷⁸ Löhr, *Basilides und seine Schule*, (see n. 16), 244.

⁷⁹ Garbe, *Die Sāṃkhya-Philosophie*, (see n. 6), 287. In addition Ruzsa, „Sāṃkhya“: „*Puruṣa* is said to illuminate *Prakṛti*, and *Prakṛti* reflects the nature of *Puruṣa*.“

⁸⁰ The term does not appear in the Kārikā, but is presupposed (Garbe, *Die Sāṃkhya-Philosophie*, 85). In the *Brahma Sūtra*, the individual soul is „only a reflection“.

The metaphor, by the way, is not a peculiarity of Sāṃkhya, but an old Indian theme; among others, one already meets in the *Brahmabindu-Upanishad*.⁸¹

The mirror theory also has different connotations in other ancient philosophical concepts.⁸² For example, the reflection in the final fragment of the conversation between Tot and Ammon in the *Corpus Hermeticum* (17: 1) has certain correspondences to the tradition cited by Basilides. Whether and to what extent there is a dependence on the tradition cited by Basilides cannot be decided: „Tot: ‘Do you not think that the bodies that appear in mirrors are immaterial?’” [Of course.] ... „Tot: ‘Thus, then, there are reflections of things immaterial on bodies, and, also, of bodies upon things immaterial – that is to say, reflections of things sensible on the intelligible world, and of the intelligible world on the sensible...’”

There are also close parallels to the Plotinian mirror theory. Heinemann presented Plotinus’ conception as follows: „The equation of light and Logos finds ... its natural correlate in equating matter with a mirror. You must not think that this picture is a meaningless parable; rather, the picture merges with the concept of an inseparable unity. The present concept allows the world to emerge from a central light, the Logos, and from a mirror, at which the rays of light break, matter. The only real thing is the Logos, which is invisible, all we see is the reflection of the Logos on another, its reflection on matter. So the world dissolves into a mirage.”

In another place, Heinemann summarizes the result of his observations as follows: „The world of the senses is the reflection of a real, of the Logos, of an unreal, of matter, of course an objective appearance, but nevertheless a mere illusion.”⁸³

With the exception that the world here is not thought to be a mirage or Māyā, but considered real, if one replaces the ‘Logos’ of Plotinus with ‘*Puruṣa*’ and ‘Matter’ with ‘*Prakṛti*’, then Plotinus’ mirror theory corresponds to that of the Sāṃkhya doctrine step by step. Heinemann himself points to the similarity in a footnote. Since Basilides, of course, can not have referred to Plotinus, the only possibility left is that both drew on the same tradition: the Sāṃkhya philosophy, taught in the form of popular Sāṃkhya

⁸¹ „The soul of creatures is a unity, distributed only from creature to creature; a unity and multiplicity at the same time, as the moon is reflected in many waters”; *Indische Philosophie: Altindische Weisheit aus Brāhmanas und Upanishaden*. DB Sonderband: *Klassiker der indischen Philosophie*, S. 6984.

⁸² Also, to be mentioned is the *Apocryphon of John*, NHC II, 1 / NHC IV, 1; the archons see the reflection of the heavenly god „man” in the water and then form the primitive man.

⁸³ Fritz Heinemann, „Die Spiegeltheorie der Materie als Korrelat der Logos-Licht-Theorie bei Plotin“, *Philologus* 81/1-4 (2016), 1-17, here 14.

Brahmanism in spiritual centers such as Alexandria or Antioch, and Hellenistic philosophy and Theosophy or Gnosis was mediated.

7) *In his investigation*, Löhr brings another important parallel of Sāṃkhya into play: the theology of the Christian heretic Hermogenes, who was opposed by Tertullian, and who lived and taught around the end of the second century. Löhr registers some striking similarities. Hermogenes also represents a dualism: Matter, which he regarded as equal to God, co-existing with God, is „neither corporeal nor intangible”, but strives to be shaped by God, whereby this shaping, unlike that of the Stoics, occurs „merely by its approaching God. This is how the transcendence of God is preserved.”⁸⁴

Löhr correctly recognizes the proximity of the Hermogenes to the concept presented by Basilides. What Löhr does not realize is that the theology of the „Christian Platonist(s) Hermogenes” is by no means Platonic, but instead represents a Christian adaptation of certain Sāṃkhya teachings.

The question of the sources of Hermogenes is not the subject of this investigation and should therefore be indicated only with a few key words. The similarities are astonishing and extend to terminological details: not only does the „principal representative of the philosophical dualism of the primitive church”⁸⁵ derive the soul „entirely from the influence of matter” (quite implicitly, by the way), *i.e.* he regards the soul, as the philosophers of the Sāṃkhya likewise do, as ethereal, invisible matter which is to be distinguished from the immaterial „original soul”, and the relation of matter and spirit is determined by him quite in the same way as in the Sāṃkhya. In the view of the Christian heretic it is impossible „that God does not make what already exists out of what already exists. But God is always master and creator, matter is always a slave and in development, but not in its entirety” (Hipp. Ref. 8:17).⁸⁶

In particular, the terms ‘Lord’ (for ‘Spirit’) and ‘Slave’ (for ‘Matter’) demand our attention, because with these same terms, the relationship in Sāṃkhya philosophy between *Prakṛti* (= Slave) and *Puruṣa* (= Lord) is confirmed. It is also striking that, according to Hermogenes, God made matter into the Universe *without touching it*. Creation takes place in Hermogenes through God’s „mere appearance and approach to it; even the magnetic stone merely approaches” (Haer 44). Who in the picture of the magnetic stone did not

⁸⁴ Löhr, *Basilides und seine Schule*, (see n. 16), 241.

⁸⁵ Erich Paul Richard Heintzel, *Hermogenes, der Hauptvertreter des philosophischen Dualismus in der alten Kirche. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der patristischen Philosophie von Erich Heintzel* (1902).

⁸⁶ May, *Schöpfung aus dem Nichts, Die Entstehung der Lehre von der creatio ex nihilo*, (see n. 66), 145.

want to recognize the philosophical theme from the Sāṃkhya already cited above? Löhr realizes that the Christian theologian Hermogenes evidently wants to preserve transcendence. But preserving transcendence is also one of the main concerns of Sāṃkhya, which Hermogenes shares with Buddhism.

The list of parallels could be further expanded upon a more detailed examination. Already my few observations can confirm that the philosophy of Sāṃkhya has influenced the Christian theology of the second century. Their broader scope has hardly been recognized.

3. Summary

Neither of the two fragments of Basilides quoted by Hegemonius in the *AA* can support the claim that Basilides was a dualist. Rather, the wording of the first fragment shows that Basilides thinks monistically: for him, the evil is devoid of „root“ and „place“, and therefore does not represent an independent principle. Instead, it appears as being analogous to later Neoplatonic ideas, as a reduction or absence of the Good. On the other hand, the second fragment admittedly reflects a clearly dualistic position, *but it is not that of Basilides*. The fragment is a representation of a dualistic Cosmogony of certain *barbari*, about which we learn no details about Basilides.

The question of the religious-historical origin of the Basilidean Cosmogony has been answered variously. While it was assumed by Jacobi, Mühlenberg, and others that the paper was a representation of the Zoroastrian tradition, Löhr has generally described the demand for religious history as being „futile“ – the „barbarian“ / „foreign“ teachings, having reached Basilides by the filtering of an *interpretatio græca*. Löhr considers the origin of the supposed Greek interpretations to be middle-Platonic ideas, such as of Plutarch in his writing, *Der Iside et Osiride*. Bennett goes a step further, abandoning the concept of an always interpreted original and identifying the „barbarian cosmogony“ directly with Middle Platonic ideas.

Criticism has been directed to all three positions. Because of some striking misconceptions in them, the derivation of a dualistic cosmogony from Zoroastrianism, in terms of the history of religion, would be possible only with the help of the construct of an *interpretatio græca*. Apart from this view being purely hypothetical, a coherent understanding of the cosmogonic concepts referred to by Basilides cannot be achieved within this interpretive framework.

In this investigation, I have tried to show that it is quite possible, if following the hints given by Hegemonius, to assume an Indian background, *i.e.* that the cosmogony referred to by Basilides is concretely based on the popular Sāṃkhya Brahmanism which Basilides met in Alexandria. A comparison between the Basilides paper and individual elements of the Sāṃkhya reveals a number of striking parallels which suggest that Basilides has indeed referred to a simplified version of Sāṃkhya cosmogony.

If, as the result of this investigation shows, Basilides had knowledge of popular Sāṃkhya Brahmanism, the question arises as to whether and to what extent this has been incorporated into the development and elaboration of his own theological system. This question will be addressed in the Second Part of this essay.

Dr. Hermann Detering - 05. 07. 2017