

Linking the Jewish People to India: Friedrich Korn (1803–1850) and His Theory of Universal Revelation through Astrotheology

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Abstract

This article explores the little-known author Friedrich Korn (1803–1850). Korn developed a theory of universal revelation which, among other things, claimed that the Jewish people descended from India. His theory is an amalgamation of the Romantic ideas about India, the historical criticisms as expounded by David Friedrich Strauß, and the desire to see his own conversion from Judaism to Protestantism as congruent with the historical progress of religion. Situating Korn in the intellectual context and theological debates of his time allows us to take a closer look at how he tried to reconcile many opposing stances, namely arguing for a genealogical lineage between India and the Jewish people, while calling for the conversion of the Jewish people to Christianity, and steadfastly believing in universal revelation, while holding on to the tools of historical criticism. These different positions made Korn an untimely author, out of sync with his peers and the scholarly attitude towards Judaism, India, and religion in general.

1. Introduction

In 1850 on his way from Leipzig to Vienna, Friedrich Korn, an indefatigable and prolific writer, died close to the town of Teplice at the young age of 47.¹ Born in 1803 in Prague to Jewish parents, Korn from early on engaged in literary efforts. Although destined by his parents to become a salesman like his father, Korn continued to write in his spare time. During his life he produced an erratic oeuvre that covered many of the fashionable genres of his time. When he perished, Korn, who almost exclusively published under *noms de*

¹ Biographical information following Richard Hoche: Nork Korn, Friedrich, in: Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie, Vol. 24, Leipzig 1887, p. 16.

plume such as Friedrich Nork, Spiritus Asper, and Spiritus Lenis, had not only traversed much of central Europe, but had also crossed the boundaries among the many genres, which he blended into idiosyncratic new ones. He published a variety of voluminous and eclectic works, from fiction to (pseudo-) scientific treatises, satires, and dictionaries that engaged (quite often polemically) with coeval debates.² Yet his contributions were rarely taken seriously by his peers and were often ignored or, worse, ridiculed.³ As the author of a biographical entry in the *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie* (General German Biographical Encyclopedia) from 1887 notes, Korn's literary and satirical works "were rightfully soon forgotten," and his mythological and scientific writings "convey a high amount of dilettantism, and did not find him approval."⁴ On the few occasions that Korn is actually cited (mostly in the second half of the 19th century), it is mostly as a prime example of wild and unscientific speculation.⁵ Today, scholarship on this surely controversial but highly interesting figure is virtually non-existent. Yet his oeuvre is worth studying, not just because of its scientific or philological value (many of his assessments are in fact amateurish and ludicrous), but because it offers us a new insight into a Jewish author's quest for a scholarly reputation and for a theological underpinning of his own path of life in a predominantly Christian Europe.

Central to understanding Korn's life and his writings is the fact that the social constellation of his time forced him to convert to Christianity in order to gain access to the higher strata of society that were otherwise barred. (The exact date of his conversion is unknown, but it was some time after the death of his parents and before the publication of his religious works in the mid-1830s.) The intertwining of his biography and his theories is evident throughout his writing. Moreover, as I will argue, his attempts to connect Judaism with ancient India stem from his desire not only to counter contemporary

² Cf. Hoche, Nork, Korn Friedrich, p. 16.

³ Maybe most famously by Friedrich Engels in his early fragmentary tragicomedy *Der gehörnte Siegfried*. Karl Marx/Friedrich Engels: Gesamtausgabe, Abt. 3: Briefwechsel, Bd. 1: Karl Marx/Friedrich Engels: Briefwechsel bis April 1846. Berlin 1875, p. 121.

⁴ "Die sehr zahlreichen Schriften satirischen Inhalts, die er zum Theil auch unter dem Pseudonym 'Spiritus Asper und Lenis' veröffentlichte [...], sind mit Recht bald vergessen worden. [...] Auch die mythologischen und sonstigen wissenschaftlichen Arbeiten, welche das Gepräge des Dilettantischen in hohem Maße tragen, haben ihm Anerkennung zu verschaffen nicht vermocht." (Hoche, Nork, Friedrich, p. 16).

⁵ Cf.: Richard Gosche: Wissenschaftlicher Arbeitsbericht über das Jahr 1857, in: Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft, 11 (1857), p. 267.

discourses on an Indo-European link (that often excluded Jews), but also to justify and give historical significance to his own path of life, i. e., his conversion. Thus he engaged quite obsessively with Judaism's historical and religious value, and even though he was mostly negative about contemporary Jewry, he attempted to find a common, universal core to both Judaism and Christianity that would place his personal choice to convert in line with the historical development of universal religion.

For this purpose, Korn built a world history of revelation and a genealogy of religions around his own life story and thereby offered a counter-myth to the prevalent ideas on India and revelation. This quest ultimately alienated him both from his Jewish upbringings and from the Christian establishment he was so eager to join. His aspiration to claim respectability for his descent, his life choices, and his farrago of philological and philosophical theories was crushed by the particularity (or narrowness) of the Christian theological discourse of his time. The story of Friedrich Korn is ultimately one of failure, but it is also an illuminating and important attempt to connect Judaism with Indian religions.

2. Universal Religion from the Source of India

So where did Korn's quest for universal religion begin? Well, at the beginning, i. e., the origin of religion itself, which, following a discourse that was already popular during German Romanticism, Korn found in India.⁶ He saw India as the cradle of humanity, philosophy, and religion, and his quest would subsequently not only involve Judaism and Christianity, but also ascribe theological value to Brahmanism and Buddhism. Throughout his oeuvre, he continuously equated Judaism with Brahmanism and, as the two reformatory sides of the same coin, Buddhism with Christianity. His speculations on the relationship between these four religions at times ran wild, goaded by the enticing plausibility of the common etymology of Sanskrit and Hebrew, in

⁶ Cf. Friedrich Nork: *Braminen und Rabbinen oder: Indien das Stammland der Hebräer und ihrer Fabeln. Eine Beweisführung für Bibel-Exegeten und Geschichtsforscher.* Meissen 1836, p. 30 f. And cf. as well: Friedrich Nork: *Vollständiges Hebräisch-chaldäisch-rabbinisches Wörterbuch über das alte Testament, die Thargumim, Midraschim und den Talmud, mit Erläuterungen aus dem Bereich der historischen Kritik, Archäologie, Mythologie, Naturkunde etc. und mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Dicta messiana, als Bindemittel der Schriften des alten und des neuen Bundes.* Grimma 1842, p. 8.

which he heavily engaged.⁷ His productivity and his inability to set limits to his pompous sense of speculative conjecture resulted in evermore fantastic hypotheses that breached the boundaries of what was considered good scholarly (and theological) practice at the time. In his two books, *Der Prophet Elias – Ein Sonnenmythus* and *Die Weihnachts- und Osterfeier erklärt aus dem Sonnencultus der Orientalen*, published respectively in 1837 and 1838, Korn argued that the Prophet Elias and both Christmas and Easter were quintessentially residues of an ancient heliolatrous cult.⁸ Following the historical criticism most prominently represented by David Friedrich Strauß, Korn read the Bible as a mythologization of natural occurrences related to the sun, other celestial bodies, and the change of the seasons. For example, he equated the arrival of evil, as embodied by the snake in the Garden of Eden, with the dawn of winter and the concurrent receding of the sun.⁹ The figure of the Messiah then corresponded to the eagerly awaited return of spring and the reappearance of the sun, which offered a ray of hope during the dark time of year. Both Judaism and Christianity had their theological origins in the sun, which was the quintessence of Korn's astro-theological investigations. These were, of course, outrageous remarks for that time, especially as they were intended (and accordingly understood by his opponents) as a contribution to one of the fiercest theological battles that the 19th century would witness.

3. Christian Reactionaries and the Battle Over Jesus

Benedict Welte, the then rising star of Catholic theology at the University of Tübingen, derided Korn's books in his reviews and cheerfully pointed out their logical shortcomings.¹⁰ He particularly emphasized the blasphemous content that, according to Korn, the fundamental tenets of Judaism and in

⁷ Cf. Vorbemerkung in: Nork, Vollständiges Hebräisch-chaldäisch-rabbinisches Wörterbuch, pp. 1–16 and Nork, Braminen und Rabbinen, p. 170 ff.

⁸ Cf. Friedrich Nork: *Die Weihnachts- und Osterfeier erklärt aus dem Sonnencultus der Orientalen – Etwas für die Besitzer der Strauss'schen Schrift: "das Leben Jesu"*. Leipzig 1838, and Friedrich Nork: *Der Prophet Elias – Ein Sonnenmythus*. Leipzig 1837.

⁹ Cf. Nork, *Weihnachts- und Osterfeier*, p. 13. Korn argues from this reading that the biblical story of creation and of the Garden of Eden stems from Persian mythology.

¹⁰ Cf. for information on Welte: Heinrich Reusch: *Welte, Benedict*, in: *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*, Vol. 41, Leipzig 1896, p. 692. For the two reviews, cf. Benedict Welte: [No Title], *Theologische Quartalschrift*, 1 (1838), pp. 119–135 and [No Title], *Theologische Quartalschrift*, 3 (1838), pp. 536–548.

Christianity were based on the ancient tradition of worshipping the sun.¹¹ Welte therefore asked sarcastically if Korn had only become a Protestant so he could worship the sun and mock scripture, and if he could not have done so before his conversion.¹² Welte took particular offense at the last paragraph of *Die Weihnachts- und Osterfeier* which as a culmination of the book's main hypothesis, equated the Christian doctrine of Christ as the redeemer with the first rays of the sun in spring and then concluded with the plain statement that "this Christ is the Sun."¹³

While the kernel of his argument was theological, Welte nevertheless excoriated Korn's books rather on philological and logical grounds, which situated his reviews in the midst of the battle over the Straussian legacy. Published in 1835, a few years before Korn's contributions, David Friedrich Strauß's *Das Leben Jesu, kritisch bearbeitet* proved to be a huge challenge for Christian theologians, both rationalist and suprarationalist. Strauß readily deployed the historical-critical methodology of the rationalist school and argued that there was not any more philological evidence to attribute historical truth to the Bible than to the myths of the Koran or of the Hindus.¹⁴ The Bible was mythology, Strauß claimed; it did not have any historical value, but was fiction like Homer's *Odyssey*. This was the outcome of taking historical criticism to an extreme, which also repelled many rationalists. In his book Strauß also offered a (very short) positive Christology, where he outlined a theology of the divine relation between God and humanity beyond reason, yet based in history.¹⁵ But the damage was done, Strauß was immediately fired from his position as a lecturer in Tübingen and, after a short stint in Ludwigsburg, could never again secure academic employment. In Strauß's mind, the demythologization of basic Christian tenets and even of Jesus himself was supposed to build a bridge in the ongoing debate between rationalists and suprarationalists; yet in

¹¹ Ibid. 547.

¹² Ibid. From the Protestant side Korn was also attacked along the same lines by Heinrich Leo, who was furious that Korn was given entrance into the Protestant community through baptism, supposedly one day after having mocked Christianity. Cf. Heinrich Leo: *Sendschreiben an J. Görres*. Halle 1838, p. 59.

¹³ Nork, *Weihnachts- und Osterfeier*, p. 79.

¹⁴ Suzanne Marchand: *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire – Religion, Race and Scholarship*. Cambridge 2009, p. 109.

¹⁵ Cf. George Williamson: *The Longing for Myth in Germany – Religion and Aesthetic Culture from Romanticism to Nietzsche*. Chicago 2004, p. 164.

the end, it alienated both sides. He tried to accommodate rationalists through method and suprarationalists through his Christology, but was nevertheless mostly seen and judged as an ardent rationalist, who fervently ventured to destroy faith in Jesus.

Among the numerous irate responses to Strauß, one is especially important in regard to Korn's endeavor, not only because of his vigor and venom, but because of its theological implications for Korn. Carl August Eschenmayer was a professor of medicine and philosophy in Tübingen and one of Schelling's last followers in the medical realm. He was prone to occultism, had a vivid interest in animal magnetism, and had apparently been a friend of Strauß before they engaged in a public feud over the latter's alleged abuse of the Bible.¹⁶ In his book *Der Ischariothismus unserer Zeit*, Eschenmayer charged Strauß with betrayal of Jesus and depicted him as the new Judas.¹⁷ For Eschenmayer, Strauß epitomized the general tendency, which he called "Ischariotism" after Judas Iscariot, to controvert the "clear meaning and letters of the Gospels."¹⁸ While in the end the "difference is quite marginal, whether one plainly negates the facts, or just veils them in a mythical fog," Strauß was guilty of the second transgression.¹⁹ Not even Strauß's appeasement of the suprarationalists found mercy, as his Christology was seen by Eschenmayer as abolishing the centrality of Jesus to the Christian faith and was consequently heretic. Eschenmayer sharply condemned Strauß's vision of a direct relationship between God and humanity that circumvented the historical figure of Jesus. "After he had taken the piece of bread, Satan entered him," he quoted in reference to Strauß from John 13:27, where Judas first assumed his role as the betrayer of Jesus. After Strauß answered with his own *Streitschrift*, in which he claimed that Eschenmayer was "a sanctimonious romancer", Eschenmayer published a response in his *Conflict zwischen Himmel und Hölle an den Dämonen eines besessenen Mädchens beobachtet*, a case study on the exorcism of a girl possessed

¹⁶ Carl August Eschenmayer: *Conflict zwischen Himmel und Hölle an den Dämonen eines besessenen Mädchens beobachtet, Nebst einem Wort an Dr. Strauß*. Tübingen/Leipzig 1837, p. 214. Cf.: Hermann Zeltner: Eschenmayer, Adolph Carl August, in: *Neue Deutsche Biographie*, Vol. 4, 1959, p. 644.

¹⁷ Cf. Zeltner, Eschenmayer, p. 644.

¹⁸ Carl August Eschenmayer: *Der Ischariothismus unserer Tage. Eine Zugabe zu dem jüngst erschienenen Werke: Das Leben Jesu von Strauß*, I. Theil. Tübingen 1835, p. III.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

by a demon, which also included an appendix directed at Strauß.²⁰ Here Eschenmayer, who was convinced the world would end soon, listed several phenomena that supposedly demonstrated the arrival of the servants of Satan on earth, as predicted by the possessed girl (or by the demon).²¹ Beside ghost sightings and demonic possessions, Eschenmayer enumerated the writings of Strauß, who had, maybe even unwillingly (since he was spoiled by “Hegelian materialism”), befriended Satan. By linking him to Satan and thus trying to ostracize him, Eschenmayer, himself a Schellingian, led a proxy war against rationalism, which he saw as the offspring of Hegel’s philosophy.

This is the intellectual context in which Korn tried leave his mark, always oscillating between the grandiosity of his universal ideas and the caution of an outsider. For a recent convert like Korn, these skirmishes, which could easily destroy one’s reputation and career, were also a cautionary tale of treading lightly in the heated realm of theological discussions, as his Jewish descent made him particularly vulnerable to attacks by the old Christian guards.

4. Progress through Conversion

How could Korn counter this challenge while maintaining the validity of his hypothesis? His answer: by diluting historical criticism with the idea of the historical progress of religion.

In the foreword to *Prophet Elias – Ein Sonnenmythus*, Korn appealed to Eschenmayer, not to charge him with Iscariotism. Even though he adopted the historical-critical method from Strauß, historical criticism had its merit if used in the right way, Korn maintained; especially for the explicit goal to convince the Jews of their false messianic beliefs and consequently to instigate Jewish conversion to Christianity.²² Korn even urged Christian missionaries to

²⁰ “In der Eschenmayer’schen Schrift macht sich der Ärger eines frömmelnden Phantasten Luft [...]” David Friedrich Strauß: *Streitschriften zur Vertheidigung und zur Charakteristik der gegenwärtigen Theologie*, Bd. 1, Zweites Heft. Tübingen 1838, p. 10. Cf.: Eschenmayer, *Conflict zwischen Himmel und Hölle*, p. 214.

²¹ Eschenmayer, *Conflict zwischen Himmel und Hölle*, p. 210.

²² Korn, *Der Prophet Elias*, p. VII f. The influence of Eschenmayer on Korn is further illuminated by the fact that a few years later Korn published two works that engaged with demonic possessions, ghost sightings, and animal magnetism, directly referencing Eschenmayer. Cf. Friedrich Nork: *Die Existenz der Geister und ihre Einwirkung auf die Sinnenwelt; psychologisch erklärt und historisch begründet*. Weimar 1841, p. III. And cf. also Friedrich Nork: *Über Fatalismus oder Vorherbestimmung der menschlichen Schicksale, erwiesen in 222 Beispielen für das*

distribute his *Prophet Elias* along with the New Testament to the “lost sheep of Israel” to eradicate any messianic hope among the Jews.²³

In his efforts to find respectability for his ideas of universal religion, Korn dismissed his Jewish heritage and called for conversion. Yet Judaism preserved some of its value in Korn’s work, as he was eager to rehabilitate Judaism as a landmark for the dissemination of progress towards universal revelation. He therefore presented his personal story of conversion as a narrative of historical dimensions, basically crafting a new myth in the guise of the theological discourse of his time. This new myth erected a new order that would provide his life with a teleological justification.²⁴ Korn’s attempts to extract the universal out of the particular, and his conflation of the fictitious and the scholarly, followed the Romantics’ programs of a new mythology, without actually being romantic. Korn posed a counter-myth against Romanticism while his methodology is steeped in Left Hegelian philology. In the guise of a myth, combining a genealogy of the past and a vision of the future, Korn could both make the case for his conversion and his special insight into universal revelation, and also argue that his Jewish descent was actually an asset in understanding the universal revelation as epitomized by Christianity.

Essentially, for Korn Judaism became (just) a necessary step in a historical progress of universal proportions.²⁵ Like David Friedrich Strauß, who tried to balance his scathing historical-critical dissection of the life of Jesus with his Christology, Korn ultimately offered a positive vision for the future of Christianity.

5. Astrotheology and the Sons of the Sun

To find an Archimedean point for his venture, Friedrich Korn turned to the sky: as holy scripture had lost its place at the core of religion, an alternative, a cornerstone on which to build, was needed. While many others turned inward to find this cornerstone for religion (or rather: faith), Korn turned upwards to

Vorhandenseyn des Divinationsvermögen nebst psychologischen Erklärungsversuchen jenes erhöhten Seelenzustands. Weimar 1840.

²³ Korn, *Der Prophet Elias*, p. VII.

²⁴ In my understanding of myth, I follow Manfred Frank: *Der kommende Gott. Vorlesungen über die Neue Mythologie*. I. Teil. Frankfurt a.M. 1982, p. 110.

²⁵ Friedrich Nork: *Ethymologisch-symbolisch-mythologisches Real-Wörterbuch zum Handgebrauche für Bibelforscher, Archäologen und bildene Künstler*, Vol 3, Stuttgart 1845, p. 188.

the sky. Hadn't the Indians, the Israelites and the early Christians looked at the same sky spanning earth? Was not the position under the sky the one constant that united all humans and all revelations through time and space? Rather than basing religion on individual experience, the sky should be the starting point for Korn's inquiry into religion and revelation. The ambitious Korn, never shying away from grand aspirations, hoped to lay the foundation for a new field: astrotheology. While he was not the first to look to the stars for theological implications, he viewed astrotheology as both a logical consequence of the historical-critical turn and as an answer to its shortcomings.

Korn's quest for universal religion through astrotheology was thus based on three considerations. First, to not stray from the Straußian path of historical criticism. Second, to ground his own conversion inside a narrative of historical progress of religion. Third, to avoid the charge of Iscariotism, i.e., the accusation of treason against Jesus.

To reconcile these three aspects, Korn developed his theory of the solar origin of messianic beliefs into a full-blown account of the genesis of religion. However, he did not embark on the irrational road Eschenmayer paced up and down, but rather took a conciliatory approach by bringing together historical criticism and (at times, occultist) Christianity. His work *Das Leben Mosis aus dem astrognostischen Standpunkte betrachtet* was a broadening of the theoretical groundwork laid in his works on Elias and Jesus.²⁶ Moses is identical to the sun, as are Abraham, Bacchus, and Osiris, to name just a few of a rather long list of religious and divine figures. However, Korn expanded his theory to all celestial bodies. So, for example, he asserted that the 600,000 Israelites Moses led out of Egypt correspond to the 600,000 stars in the sky.²⁷ Korn concluded that most myths were based on renderings of the Indian zodiac and thus gave a foundation to the bottomless mythologization in the Straussian endeavor that would tear religious conviction apart until no foundation was left to stand on. Coming from the stars, Korn instead arrived at a first act in the history of religion, namely original revelation (*Uroffenbarung*). Before the beginning of history lay a revelation that cannot be touched by historical

²⁶ Cf. Friedrich Nork: *Das Leben Mosis, aus dem astrognostischen Standpunkte betrachtet*. Leipzig 1838.

²⁷ Nork, *Das Leben Mosis*, p. 14.

criticism, even though the subsequent historical development after this original revelation should rightfully be scrutinized critically.

A key moment for our inquiry is of course Korn's powerful rendition of a trope that became a constant in Europe's approach to India. Starting with Friedrich Schlegel, it became popular to argue for a linguistic, metaphysical, and spiritual affinity between Germany and India, while Jews (or all Semites) were excluded from this "invented tradition."²⁸ With the German fascination with India as a background, Korn's explicit goal was to turn the steering wheel around, and to prove that the Jews also shared a special relation with India. Judaism, he asserted, is "a graft of Brahmanism, because the Hebrews not only through their religious kinship, but also through their language and facial features reveal their Indian descent."²⁹ Following a genealogical chain from the Hebrews who descended from the Egyptians, who descended from the Ethiopians, who descended from the Indians, an affinity between Indians and Jews is established, which is nonetheless affirmed through a continuous decline. The original true message of monotheism was tainted through codification by brahmins and rabbis. The establishment of "often ridiculous ceremonial laws" turned these once-pure religions into unrecognizable systems.³⁰

The anti-rabbinic stance in Korn's work was hardly original but rather a commonplace in anti-Jewish writings. It garnered special popularity among German thinkers of the time, both Jewish and gentile, at least since Johann Gottfried Herder. As historian Frank Manuel observed, "[a]cceptance of primitive Israel and disdainful rejection of post-biblical rabbinism" could go hand in hand.³¹ In a period so historically minded as the first decades of the 19th century, still charged with the Romanticist obsession with origins, elevating the past through a narrative of historical decline, especially in regard to biblical

²⁸ Cf. Eric Hobsbawm: Introduction: Inventing Tradition, in: *The Invention of Tradition*. Eric Hobsbawm/Terence Ranger (eds), Cambridge 1983, pp. 1–14. Cf. Friedrich Schlegel: *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier*, in: *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe*. Ernst Behler/Ursula Struc-Oppenberg (eds), Vol. 8, München 1975.

²⁹ "Ein P[f]ropfreis des Bramaismus sey, weil die Hebräer durch religiöse Verwandtschaft nicht nur, sondern auch durch Sprache und Gesichtsbildung ihre Abkunft aus Indien verrathen." Nork, *Braminen und Rabbinen*, p. VII.

³⁰ Nork, *Braminen und Rabbinen*, p. IX.

³¹ Cf. Frank E. Manuel: *The Broken Staff. Judaism through Christian Eyes*, Cambridge 2014, p. 252. Also Cf. Marchand, *German Orientalism*, p. 45.

as opposed to rabbinic Judaism, was a common trope.³² Elevating the biblical Hebrews almost always came at the expense of rabbinic Judaism in general and of present-day Jewish communities.

Korn followed the trail Herder blazed. For him, universal religion still found its residues in Judaism, which played the historically significant role of establishing revelation at the brink of Europe. Yet its historical significance now lay in Christianity, as Korn himself tried to epitomize through his conversion. His imperturbable belief in the historical-critical method, however, would not let him negate the inherent symbolic truth of Judaism as expressed in the Tanakh. Reading it as a mythologization of the original revelation allowed Korn to regard names, plants, and even specific narrative details such as Esau's lentil soup as allegories or mythologizations of concealed symbols that were universal in nature.³³ Korn postulated one (historical) original revelation that was transmitted through a universal symbolism, in which the symbols assumed different shapes according to the specific circumstances *ad locum*.³⁴ Here, again, the constructed parallelism to Korn's own life becomes evident: his quest had led him from Judaism to Christianity and would now open the door to universal revelation, a theological revolution that could only originate from someone who could himself claim insight into the Indian art of astrotheology via his Jewish descent. He was a son of the sun like all his fellow Christians, but he could also claim that he was closer to the source.

6. A Jewish Outsider goes to India to find a Home

In Korn's vast *Ethymologisch-symbolisch-mythologisches Real-Wörterbuch*, Brahmanism played a distinctive role in the connection between particular religion and original revelation.³⁵ Here Korn further fleshed out his thesis of Brahmanism as the well of all religions by quoting Friedrich Creuzer, the

³² Not coincidentally this period also produced the first modern attempt at Jewish history writing, by Isaak Markus Jost in the 1820s, who would also deploy the narrative of post-biblical, rabbinic decline of Judaism. Cf. Salo Baron: I. M. Jost the Historian, in: Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research, Vol. 1 (1928–30), pp. 7–32, pp. 8f. and 19f. Cf. David Sorkin: The Transformation of German Jewry, 1780–1840. Oxford 1987, p. 135.

³³ Friedrich Nork: *Ethymologisch-symbolisch-mythologisches Real-Wörterbuch zum Handgebrauche für Bibelforscher, Archäologen und bildende Künstler*, Vol. 1, Stuttgart 1843, pp. V–IX.

³⁴ Nork, *Ethymologisch-symbolisch-mythologisches Real-Wörterbuch*, Vol. 1, p. VIII.

³⁵ Cf. their respective entries in Nork, *Ethymologisch-symbolisch-mythologisches Real-Wörterbuch*, Vol. 1 and Vol. 3.

Heidelberg iconoclast in a Classicist guise, who argued that compared “to it all later religions are like pale and broken rays to the full light of the sun.”³⁶ Creuzer was the author of the trailblazing *Symbolik und Mythologie der alten Völker*, in which he argued for the origin of mythical symbols in India.³⁷ This publication triggered the so-called *Creuzer-Streit*, a dispute that rattled the exclusive circles of Weimar classicism with the bold claim that the ancient (classic) myths and religions descended from a primordial Indian religion, that was also monotheistic. This was almost a full-blown attack on Weimar classicism and its philo-Hellenism on the one hand, and Christianity and its role as the torchbearer of monotheism on the other.

Creuzer’s iconoclasm obviously stirred up some controversy and soon entered a more general discussion raging during this time, namely, whether and to what extent Christianity was the sole foundation of European culture and its achievements.³⁸

Korn expanded Creuzer’s theses, which he had already picked up in his early works. The basic tenets were that, first, India was the cradle of religion, and that second, religion was the offspring of astronomy. Combined with historical criticism, this belief in universal revelation was an uneasy amalgamation. To soften the sharpness of his message, Korn had to add another element, namely monotheism.

“All theology was originally astrotheology,” he affirmed; since the Indians were the first to assign meaning to celestial bodies, they thus also invented religion.³⁹ However, the impulse to do this was based on their exposure to revelation, because “man can only reach an idea of God through God”, and not through meditation, contemplation, or, he wrote quite contradictorily, observing the stars.⁴⁰ Yet meditation, contemplation, and observing stars were the instruments that the Indians used to synchronize their astronomic knowledge with their revelatory experience, which elevated them above other nations.⁴¹

³⁶ Nork, *Ethymologisch-symbolisch-mythologisches Real-Wörterbuch*, Vol. 1, p. 290. Cf. Friedrich Creuzer: *Symbolik und Mythologie der Alten Völker: besonders der Griechen – Zweite völlig umgearbeitete Ausgabe*. Leipzig 1819, p. XI.

³⁷ Cf. Raymond Schwab: *The Oriental Renaissance. Europe’s Rediscovery of India and the East, 1680–1880*. New York 1984, p. 215 f.

³⁸ Cf. Marchand, *German Orientalism*, p. 68.

³⁹ Cf. Nork, *Ethymologisch-symbolisch-mythologisches Real-Wörterbuch*, Vol. 1, p. 290.

⁴⁰ Nork, *Ethymologisch-symbolisch-mythologisches Real-Wörterbuch*, Vol. 1, p. 305.

⁴¹ Cf. Nork, *Ethymologisch-symbolisch-mythologisches Real-Wörterbuch*, Vol. 1, p. 189.

Thanks to their pioneering insight into the true nature of God, the Indians were the first to adopt the truth of monotheism. Korn reverted to his earlier unmasking of an undetected relationship between Indians and Jews, not only in regard to their holy languages of Sanskrit and Hebrew, but also in their historical-religious development. An inverted parallelism subsisted between Indians and Jews for centuries. While the Indians unveiled monotheism to the world, over time and through the efforts of the Brahmins, they nevertheless degenerated into polytheism, while the Israelites shifted from polytheistic inclinations to monotheism.⁴² However, Korn seemed to hide the consequences that follow from his assertion that the original revelation took place in India and that the Garden of Eden might be located there, behind a quasi-impermeable wall of etymological and mythological annotations. The charge of Iscariotism was certainly looming over Korn's head.

7. Conclusion

Korn's ideas about the connection between Judaism and India, revelation and the history of religion, were obviously anchored in the intellectual milieu of his own time. The innovative part in his theory of universal religion was the incorporation of his personal story into history. However, Korn's method of picking only those ideas that were suitable to his overall endeavor brought him out of step with the intellectual developments of his time.

Part of Korn's uneasy position lay in his Jewish descent, or rather in his attempt to salvage Judaism while ostensibly debasing it. In light of his own conversion, Korn conveyed the message that Judaism had its historical role, but now Christianity carried the torch of monotheism. He claimed that Christianity (and maybe also Buddhism, though he shied away from that conclusion) turned the monotheism inherent to Brahmanism and Judaism into a universal message by overcoming the doctrines of the cast system and of the exclusionary chosenness of the Jewish people, respectively.⁴³ Korn bashed Judaism's supposed particularism in an attempt to argue for the universality that underlies all religions. In the end, astrotheology is universal because the celestial bodies look the same to everyone, independent of their religion. Judaism is not inherently particular but shares the universal monotheism of

⁴² Nork, *Ethymologisch-symbolisch-mythologisches Real-Wörterbuch*, Vol. 1, p. 188.

⁴³ Nork, *Ethymologisch-symbolisch-mythologisches Real-Wörterbuch*, Vol. 1, p. 308 f.

all religions. It has just outlived its historical function. Consequently Korn himself becomes the historical figure that turns the universal message of Christianity into a universal religion. Given his comprehensive knowledge, this mission can be read as a story about *Bildung*, of regeneration and emancipation through education and knowledge, an idea internalized by many middle-class Jews of Korn's generation.⁴⁴ In Korn's case, the story of Jewish *Bildung* took a twist, as he argued for a Jewish conversion to Christianity. For Korn, this succession from Judaism to Christianity was a necessary outcome of historical consciousness. As revelation progressed, so did the individual. After David Friedrich Strauß deflated the centrality of Jesus, Christianity was now, in this moment in history, ready to embrace the universal message of the sun without tying it to a historical figure. Korn could thus argue that he himself as a descendant of Indian original revelation, via Judaism then converting to Christianity, epitomized the universal trajectory of religion. It was his own personal history that thus underlay his quest for universality. Via the universality of religion and inherent truth he, the outsider, would claim his own path in life.

⁴⁴ Sorkin, *Transformation of German Jewry*, p. 84 ff.