A name for all and no one: Zoroaster as a figure of authorization and a screen of ascription

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Commonly held to be one of the so-called founders of religion which make up "the foremost type of religious authority," Zoroaster (= Zarathustra) belongs to the list of "sacred names" that stand "for a unique experience and ... an uninterchangeable symbol of human faith and hope" - as Joachim Wach puts it in a classical study.1 As is the case with other "founders," ancient and modern, the authority ascribed to Zoroaster is intimately linked to a textual corpus embodying what believers regard as divine revelation.

This chapter will contextualize the problem of textual ascriptions and the related inventions of sacred traditions with respect to two different yet interrelated historical lines of development. The first part will briefly discuss the problem of textual ascription with regard to the construction of Zoroastrianism as a chain of transmission (from the divine to the community of believers). Besides Zoroaster, two of his associates are relevant for this process. A spurious text is attributed to one of them in later Iranian Zoroastrian literature, while fragments have been ascribed to the other one outside the Zoroastrian tradition, that is, in the West, since the second century CE. In the course of the development of Zoroastrianism as a religious "system," the foundational act of divine revelation came to be conceptualized as a verbal exchange ("dialogue") in which Zoroaster is the colorless, shadowy receiver and transmitter of the divine "revelation discourse" spoken by the god Ahura Mazda. The idea that the revelatory discourse is to be identified with a literary corpus, namely a scripture in the form of a book, is a much later development in Zoroastrianism. Even later premodern sources do not claim that Zoroaster actually wrote down this "book." Accordingly, premodern Zoroastrianism constructed the figure of Zoroaster as a receiver of divine revelations without ever attributing literary texts to him. Modern Western scholarship, however, did. While modern Western scholarship may well be informed by a critical or

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1 Wach, Sociology of Religion, p. 341.
at least agnostic stance to indigenous constructions of tradition and the attribution of texts, in its own way of “writing religion” the academic study of religion actively constructs sacred traditions. In my view, the study of Zoroastrianism is an example of modern scholarship actually producing a pseudopigraph. Here as elsewhere, scholarship made an impact on its “object,” that is, (modern) Zoroastrianism.\(^1\)

The second part of this chapter moves beyond the frame of the Zoroastrian traditions and presents an early example of the process that the editors of this volume also observe among “newer religious movements originating in Western Europe or North America,” namely the finding of the venerable past in other parts of the globe and the spurious attribution of new scriptures to “other” (esoteric or ancient) geographies.\(^2\) Ever since the Hellenistic age, in the West (seen from the perspective of the Iranian plateau) the “sacred name” of Zoroaster (and one of his associates) was taken to authorize different sorts of “alien wisdom.” Zoroaster is an important example of this otherwise well-studied phenomenon, and the texts ascribed to him belong to a greater repertoire of literary fakes.\(^3\) We will briefly look at some texts illustrating the range of ascribed materials and identify one charge of plagiarism and one instance of religious polemics leading to the emergence of a skeptical voice.

In the case of astrology, the history of misattributions continued not only in later Western European history but also in the Islamic Middle East. In the West, the movement generally referred to as “the Renaissance” led to a renewed interest in Zoroaster.\(^4\) Friedrich Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is probably the best-known writing credited to Zoroaster. All this is a long history stretching over vast territories in terms of space and time, of which the present chapter can only discuss a tiny portion. After a short survey of relevant developments in Zoroastrianism, I will proceed briefly to discuss selected texts and books that were ascribed to Zoroaster from Hellenistic times to the Middle Ages. Let us begin our cross-cultural itinerary where it all started.

THE INVENTION/CONSTRUCTION OF AUTHORITY: IRANIAN PERSPECTIVES

Most of the (premodern) Zoroastrian texts recounting the history of the “good religion” draw a complex picture of continuity and change. It is generally held that the religion existed from the beginning of creation to some extent. In a way, then, Zoroaster did not reveal anything particularly new. On the other hand, the texts create the impression that it is only with Zoroaster that the religion was revealed and received in its totality, that Zoroaster created the necessary genealogical link between the first man and the eschatological heroes, and that it was with the “acceptance” of the religion on the part of a powerful patron (“king”) by the name of Viśtāspa that the religion was eventually transmitted further.

In terms of a chronology of the sources, the pairing of Zoroaster and Viśtāspa makes its first appearance in a set of hymns known as the Gāthās. These 240 stanzas of ritual poetry composed some time before the middle of the first millennium BCE — attempts at specifying their precise date and location of origin are matters of ongoing scholarly dispute — are universally regarded as the founding textual monument of Zoroastrianism. Since this text is almost obsessed with a threat against the community and cosmic order by human and superhuman opponents, it was generally assumed that the Gāthās testify to the emergence of the religion against the bitter resistance of a hostile environment.

**The Gāthās and the modern ascription of foundational authorship**

The Gāthās are reckoned to be part of the Avesta, commonly referred to as the “sacred scripture of Zoroastrianism.” The name “Avesta” refers to an assembly of texts in an ancient Iranian language (Avestan) that were put into writing only many centuries, if not more than a millennium, after they were composed.\(^5\) Different sets of Avestan texts are recited in different ceremonial contexts. The designations of some major parts of the Avesta are identical with the names of the rituals in which priests recite the respective text. The Yasna, for example, designates a major priestly liturgy as well as the text recited in the course of the ritual. The Gāthās, in turn, are a central part of the Yasna.

On linguistic grounds, nineteenth-century Western philologists identified the Gāthās as containing materials older than the other Avestan texts. While the implications of the linguistic differences between the Gāthās and most other Avestan texts to a certain extent remain a matter of dispute, internal evidence shows that the remaining (and possibly later) Avestan texts ascribed a special status to the Gāthās (and some other pieces): the five Gāthās are worshiped (Y. [= Yasna] 71:6), and they are proclaimed to be “entrusting,”

\(^1\) On modern Zoroastrianism see Stausberg, Die Religion.
\(^2\) See the Introduction to the present volume.
\(^3\) See Mannigian, Alien Wisdom.
\(^4\) See Spyer, Die literarische Fälschung.
\(^5\) See Stausberg, Fascination.

\(^7\) A special alphabet was designed for that purpose, probably in the sixth century BCE; see Keller, *La Quatrième naissance*, p. 35.
"protective," a "mental nourishment," an "attire for the soul," and "giving way for a great remuneration in the other world" (Y. 55:2). One passage mentions that the divine being Snaôa was the first who (in the appropriate fashion) recited the Gâthás, "the five of Spitâma Zarathustra, the Aôa-executing" (Y. 57:8). Zoroaster (Zarathustra in Avestan) is here in a very special way affiliated to the Gâthás, but regarding this as affirming Zoroaster's authorship of the Gâthás seems like an over-interpretation. As a matter of fact, no premodern Zoroastrian ever put forward the claim that Zoroaster was the author of the Gâthás. Therefore, the attempt made by modern scholars to establish Zoroaster as the author of the Gâthás — an attribution that is simply taken for granted and considered a "fact" by most scholars — moves far beyond the (theo)logical framework of Zoroastrian doctrine. This ascription cannot be proved from the text itself (i.e. text-immanently).

In principle, of course, there is nothing wrong with that. In this case, however, the suspicion arises that the "discovery" of Zoroaster's authorship of the Gâthás is heavily informed by Western preconceptions of (1) the nature of literary texts (after all, "authentic" texts require an author) and (2) the logic of historical innovation (after all, cultural inventions tend to be produced by single individuals). However, in the case of the Gâthás the category of authorship must probably be considered both speculative and meaningless from a historical point of view. The Gâthás can therefore well be regarded as being falsely attributed to a reputed figure by modern scholarship. This case, then, is very different from, and almost the reverse of, those in which the attribution of texts regarded as sacred texts by certain religious traditions has been denied by modern Western scholarship. Be that as it may, the misattribution was eagerly adopted by modern Zoroastrians, who would thereby be provided with a prophet-cum-author, a construct guaranteeing the authenticity of the faith ab initio.

Interestingly, this process of ascription has been uncritically reinforced and even extended in the history of scholarship. Martin Haug, who in the 1850s and 1860s invented the ascription of the Gâthás to Zoroaster, was initially reluctant to ascribe the entire text to Zoroaster. Later, several leading scholars of Zoroastrianism around the year 1900 had left the question of the authorship of the Gâthás more or less open. It was only in the course of twentieth-century scholarship that Zoroaster's presumed authorship of the Gâthás came to assume an almost dogmatic status both in Western scholarship and among Zoroastrians.

What is more, in recent scholarship there are some speculative attempts to ascribe also the Yasna Hâpaštähñâ, seven chapters that are framed by the Gâthás in the textual arrangement of the Avestan Yasna, to Zoroaster.

Even in this case, there clearly is a process at work in which the formation of scholarly hypotheses is bypassed in order to achieve a more consistent textual Ur-corpus for the foundational history of Zoroastrianism.

Even though the ascription of authorship seems to be a modern misattribution, Zoroaster is nevertheless the key individual in the religio-ritual textual space of the Gâthás. Zoroaster is of crucial indexical importance for the process of ritual communication that occurs through him, the priestly-poetic-visionary intermediary of Ahura Mazda, the only one who would listen to his instructions, the depository and charioteer (in a poetical competition) of the powerful divine formulas, the successfully installed poest-sacrièr, rivaling and condemning other poets while praising the deities.

Zoroaster as the receiver of divine instruction

In the remaining, probably more recent, parts of the Avesta the figure of Zoroaster is cast in a much more schematic and functional fashion. Among the ideological roles that this name plays in these texts is that of the divine interlocutor: He is the one who asks questions of the god Ahura

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8 See Panaino, Many, parôle et pensée, p. 61. The verse in question was regarded as an important piece of evidence for first ascribing the Gâthás to Zoroaster (in 1862) by Haug, Essays, p. 317.
9 See Panaino, Many, parôle et pensée, p. 103, with the clarifying distinction that the Gâthás are placed under the authority (rather than the literary paternity) of Zoroaster, who made the divine formulas available for his group.
10 There is no doubt that Zoroaster is the key human figure in the group of persons populating the ritual universe of the Gâthás. His name has a central position in the poetic composition of the Gâthás and he may even occur as the poetic "I" in the text; see Hintze, "On the Literary Structure." But all that does not logically imply that Zoroaster was the author of these texts.
11 Occasionally, this argument has been turned the other way round: had Zoroaster not been an "original thinker," his name would have become all but forgotten; see Ausasser, "Die Verkündigung," p. 22.
12 The meaningfulness of the question of authorship has been emphasized by Kellessis, Essays, p. 87.
13 For the importance of this position in legitimating the authenticity of the faith in the light of outside critique (advanced by Christian missionaries), see Stausberg, "John Wilson.

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14 See Haug, Die fünf Gâthás (1835), where he ascribes only some selected passages of the Gâthás to Zoroaster, while holding that the remaining parts were written by his successors and possibly even by his predecessors. In his later Essays (1863) a slightly less differentiated picture emerges.
16 See Boyce, Zoroastrianism, p. 88 (who finds that Zoroaster's authorship of the text "can seem self-evident" — but only to the believer, it may seem); Hintze, "On the Literary Structure.
17 On these aspects (all of which would merit further discussion) see Kellessis, Essays, pp. 83-94; Panaino, Many, parôle et pensée, pp. 95-105; Hintze, "Die ur des"; Sjäervö, "Rivals and Bad Poets": "Praise and Blame": Zarathustra.
18 For this and the following see Stausberg, Die Religion, 1, pp. 31-40; Sjäervö, Zarathustra, pp. 106-7.
Mządä, who provides extensive answers; or, when Zoroaster does not enquire, he is the addressee of Ahura Mządä's speeches of instruction, that is, the god's verbal epiphany, occasionally taking the form of a vocative ("O Zaraüştra"). This act of verbal epiphany/revelation is then continued, celebrated, and commemorated in the employment of the texts in the corresponding rituals.

This genre of revelatory dialogue is continued in the Middle Persian (Pahlavi) literature. In Middle Persian we even find a technical term for this form of "consultation": ham-parsag\textsuperscript{19}. Zoroaster's encounters and dialogues with Ahura Mządä and the Beneficent Immortals are a fixed part of the biographical accounts provided by several Middle Persian texts. Moreover, there are some texts according to which Ahura Mządä (Middle Persian: Šrmazād) granted the gift of omniscience to Zoroaster.\textsuperscript{20} Despite the revelatory knowledge obtained by Zoroaster in this manner, Zoroastrian writings did not ascribe spurious texts to him.

\textbf{Jâmëš and Vištāsp}

No such restrictions, however, seemed to apply to two closely related personae, namely Zoroaster's patron ("king") Vištāsp and the latter's associate ("minister") Jâmëš. Like Zoroaster, both are marked out as media for the transfer of divine and divinatory knowledge. There is a late text (in Pahlavi and Pārsī) containing Jâmëš's replies to Vištāsp's question as to the future of the "pure religion," Zoroastrianism. This text, which is obviously cast in the beginning of the beginnings of the religion, is referred to as the \textit{Jâmëš Nāmāg} (The Book of Jâmëš) and by modern editors is generally associated with, and incorporated in, other materials that are assembled under the title \textit{Ayyādār-i Jâmëšīg} (The Memorial of Jâmëš). This text is the sole example of a disattributed text, a literary fake or pseudoepigraph, in ancient Zoroastrian literature.

Vištāsp, on the other hand, is nowhere in the Zoroastrian texts credited with the gift of omniscience. At one place, however, \textit{The Memorial of Jâmëš} (13:8) casually remarks that Vištāsp's soul at one time had been in highest heaven (garmādānān). This can be taken to imply that he had obtained special knowledge by undertaking an ecstatic-visionary journey\textsuperscript{21} as a sort of cognitive displacement. Moreover, there is a text bearing the title Vištāsp


\textbf{Yazı (Vištāspa Hymn) which contains a series of instructions about the religion, addressed by Zoroaster to his patron, who occasionally also poses a question to Zoroaster. These texts consistently cast Vištāsp in the role of the recipient of the religion without any revelatory power of his own. Under his Greek name Hystaspes, the fame of Vištāsp as a revelatory medium even spread outside Iran. It seems that certain fragments that were (obviously mistakenly) ascribed to Hystaspes circulated in the West,\textsuperscript{32} and some Christian authors -- including Justin Martyr (d. 165 CE), Clement of Alexandria (d. before 215/217 CE), and Lactantius (d. c. 320–5 CE) -- employed them for apologetic purposes. While Justin and Clement actually mention books that went under the name of Hystaspes, Lactantius introduces Hystaspes as a "very ancient king of the Medes" who, living long before the founding of the Trojan nation, had a remarkable dream that was handed down to posterity in the form of an interpretation by a prophesying boy (\textit{Divine Institutes} VIII.15.19).\textsuperscript{33} Note that Hystaspes is here reported to be a second-degree authority, since his original dream is transmitted and made intelligible only by the interpretation of the prophesying boy. This implies the combination of several revelatory media and two types of mediator: the dream of the reputed ancient king living in \textit{in illo tempore}, and the special visionary hermeneutics of the timeless, ageless, and nameless boy. Hystaspes here emerges as the ultimate source (and not as the author!) of the prophesies, for which Lactantius accordingly does not transmit any title.

\textbf{The scripturalization of the tradition and Zoroaster as the bringer of the book}

For many centuries, if not more than a millennium, the Avestan texts were transmitted in an exclusively oral manner.\textsuperscript{34} Zoroastrians maintained that policy even after a variety of scripts had long since been available in Iran. Several Manichean and Christian sources suggest that books were unknown in Zoroastrian circles, or at least that they did not appreciate

\textsuperscript{32} The witnesses are compiled by Bidez and Cumont, \textit{Les Mages}, 11, pp. 159–76 (eighteen fragments, few of which are explicitly attributed to Hystaspes). It is only in the \textit{Thesmophoria} of an unknown Christian writer (possibly Severus, the former patriarch of Antioch, who died in 620), that the title \textit{Oncles of Hystaspes} (Σφήνας Υγέων) which is current in modern scholarship, is actually being used.
\textsuperscript{33} Modern scholars have sought to identify this boy variously as Zoroaster (Boyer) or Jâmëš (Hultgård).
\textsuperscript{34} The exception confirming the rule stems from Lydia, where, according to Pausanias, Persian priests were using books in their rituals; that, however, may be explained by the exigencies of the diasporic situation, see Stausberg, "Invention," pp. 258–9.
A name for all and no one

Long before this process of "scripturalization" of the Zoroastrian religion, we have, in the case of Vištâsp/Hystaspes (see above), encountered an example of the circulation and appropriation of texts, that is, "oracles" or even "books," outside the framework of the Zoroastrian tradition. These texts were (mistakenly) ascribed to a figure which, within the Zoroastrian tradition, was intimately linked with the act of the original revelation that Vištâsp is said to have "accepted." Zoroaster, however, the recipient of the divine revelation, presents an even more extreme example of this twin development of misattribution and discursive appropriation from outside the Zoroastrian traditions. Whereas the Hystaspes fragments belonged to a rather homogeneous textual genre, Zoroaster's presumed authorship came to cover a broad range of materials that, in the course of its development, is increasingly less capable of being reduced to a common denominator.

Moreover, while the texts misattributed to Vištâsp were being used by Christian apologetics during a period of some four centuries — from the mid-second to the mid-sixth century CE — Zoroaster's fame as an author had begun to spread in different milieus somewhat earlier. Furthermore, and more importantly, Zoroaster's fortune as an "author" of different materials continued, with a fresh supply of new textual materials, down to the present age. As illustrated above, in the nineteenth century the Western propensity for ascription would eventually cross-fertilize with the inner-Zoroastrian transformation, that is, "textualization," of the scheme of revelation; as a combined effort this produced the image, by now uncritically taken for granted, of Zoroaster as the author of the Gāhâs and the founder of what came to be referred to as "Zoroastrianism.

SPREADING THE NAME: OUTSIDE ASCRIBITIONS

For references see Stausberg, "Invention," pp. 268–70.

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Surveying the texts or sayings (mistakenly) attributed to Zoroaster might create the impression that this was a very special case. However, one should not forget that “putting words into people’s mouths was an old and respected literary convention among the Greeks,” even in pre-Hellenistic times. And there were other “mouths” available, including Orpheus and Hermes Trismegistus. Moreover, as with other reputed authors, the process of ascription and reception increased its own self-affirmative dynamics: having once become a successful source of “alien wisdom,” the name of Zoroaster will have attracted the ascription of ever more spurious data.

**Lapidary fragments**

In his *Natural History* Pliny the Elder (d. 79 CE) is the first Western source to provide more extensive information about Zoroaster, including some hints of his date, his biography, his habits, his way of life, and some peculiarities of his body. Pliny also raises the question whether there was just one individual or several persons bearing the name Zoroaster.

In one passage Pliny mentions a prescription of Zoroaster against epilepsy (37.57.157). He also provides some further indirect quotations (37.55.15; 37.58.159) from “Zoroaster,” mostly concerning precious stones such as the “exebenus” and the “bostrychitis.” Moreover, Pliny reports that Zoroaster had praised (eucyclus) the “astrot” for magical matters (in magicis artibus) (37.49.133). Obviously, then, a lapidary carrying the authority of Zoroaster was in circulation and available to Pliny. At the end of the third century, or in the fourth, Solinus provides some further lapidarian references to Zoroaster.

Classicsists Bidez and Cumont link these passages to the report in the tenth-century Byzantine encyclopedia *Suda* of a treatise *On the Virtue of Stones*, which it ascribed to Zoroaster. However, it remains open to doubt whether there actually was such a work, or whether the *Suda* or its source merely assumed the existence of it, based on the “extracts” found in Pliny and Solinus. However that may have been, in his *Liber lapidum* (*Book of Stones*), Marbodius of Remans (1035–1123) still refers directly to “Zoroaster.” Most probably, however, these quotations are derived from a different source altogether.

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34 Ibid., pp. 200–1 (= fragments O 60–1).
35 Ibid., p. 140 (= fragment O 1).
36 Ibid., pp. 196–200 (= fragment O 59).

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Earlier in his *Natural History*, in a more comprehensive discussion of Zoroaster, Pliny refers back to Hermippus, who, according to Pliny, had written in a very careful manner about the art of magic. Moreover, he reports that Hermippus had commented on the 2 million lines composed by Zoroaster, and had even listed the contents of his volumes (30.4). It is generally assumed that the authority in question is the biographer and grammarian Hermippus of Smyrna; if so, this would place this commentary in the late third century BCE. Unfortunately, nothing is known about the origin, content, and later destiny of these lengthy “volumes.” In any case, the “volumes” were almost certainly a misattribution. Since the *Natural History* was one of the most widely read works during the Middle Ages, Pliny’s report on Zoroaster’s 2 million lines was passed on by learned authors right into the early modern period.

### The charge of plagiarism and *On Nature*

At an unknown date an anonymous scholiast to the Platonic *Alcibiades* (1) noted some information about Zoroaster, for instance that he had lived 6,000 years before Plato and that he had left behind various writings (*συνογγεωμετρε δεισφορεσ*) showing that, according to him, there were three divisions of philosophy, namely physics, economics, and politics. Unfortunately, there are no further traces of these writings.

In his *Republic* (5) Plato tells the story of a certain Er (9), “the son of Armenius, a Pamphylian by birth, who, having fallen in war, was found after ten days, dead, but unaffected by decay; when eventually he was supposed to be burned on the pyre on the twelfth day, he returned to life (614Bff.). Referring to this myth, Clement of Alexandria (d. before 215/217 CE) states that this “son of Armenius” was identical with Zoroaster. This is because Zoroaster himself according to Clement (*Sirtomata* 5.14) had written: “The following I wrote, Zoroaster the son of Armenius, from Pamphylian descent, who died in war, whatever I learned from the gods when I was in Hades.” Clement obviously had before him a text ascribed to...
Zoroaster that was most probably in part a plagiarism of Plato. Clement, in any event, transforms the myth of Er(os) into a myth of Zoroaster.

The literary character of Zoroaster's utterance is further emphasized by a later source elaborating that theme: in his commentary on a passage of the Republic, Proclus (412-85 CE) cites previous commentators who had argued that the myth referred back to Zoroaster instead of to Er. According to Proclus, the Epicurean philosopher Colotes (third century BCE), had even produced a book purporting to bear the name of Zoroaster. This could be held to imply that this Epicurean had polemically charged Plato with plagiarism. Proclus proceeds by saying that he himself had consulted Zoroaster's Four Books on Nature, the preface of which he then goes on to quote. This preface is almost identical with the text quoted by Clement more than two centuries earlier. Proclus, however, adds an important qualification, namely that the author of On Nature had also used whatever he had learned from "other enquiries" (i.e. apart from Zoroaster). Furthermore, Proclus gives some hints of both the form and the content of these four books: for instance that the texts centers around a conversation that Zoroaster had with Cyrus the king ("though which Cyrus, does not become apparent"), and that the books are otherwise replete with astrological observations which, "as everyone knows," are in disagreement with Plato. From all of this, Proclus derives the conclusion that it remains unclear whether the myth of Er actually originated from these sources, and whether the name of Zoroaster instead of Er(os) was actually written in the copy of the text.43

The almost identical wording of the opening formulas reported by Proclus in the fifth century and by Clement in the third, together with Prussus' suggestion that most readers would have an idea of its astrological content, attest that learned people in Alexandria and Athens were familiar with this text. However, a careful reading of Proclus' argument does not in my view necessarily support the assumption that On Nature was the book known to Colotes in the third century BCE.44 Proclus makes a distinction between Colotes' assertion and his own independent scrutiny of On Nature; in other words, Proclus does not state that Colotes knew Zoroaster's On Nature. Hence, the third century CE (the time of Clement) seems to be the terminus ante quem for On Nature.

43 For the text see Bidez and Cumont, Les Mages, 11, pp. 159-60 (= fragment O 13).
44 For this view see Bidez and Cumont, Les Mages, 1, p. 111; Beck, "Thus Spake Not Zarathustra," p. 159. Briant, "Persianism," p. 76 (ignoring the polemical nature of Colotes' reported assertion) even claims that On Nature actually was the original from which Plato derived the myth.

The dozens of supposed textual witnesses that the classicists Joseph Bidez and Franz Cumont have assembled under the title On Nature can be regarded as modern attempts to restore an ancient pseudopigraph. In his scrutiny of these fragments, Roger Beck sees "no reason to deny . . . that ultimately some of the material goes back to real magian sources and magian lore."43 While this observation pertains to the content of the fragments, the very narrative frame of the story as reported by Proclus—a dialogue between Zoroaster and a king, here named Cyrus—distantly reminds one of the genre of the revelatory dialogue, in particular of the revelatory scheme of the Visāsp Yait (see above), reporting Zoroaster's instruction of "king" Vištāspa. The narrative frame, consisting of the preface reported by Clement and Proclus together with Zoroaster's dialogue of instruction of the king, may then have been subsequently fleshed out with different materials of a vaguely astrological nature. Interestingly, from Clement's summary it seems that the text was dealing with the ascent of the soul through the twelve signs and its subsequent descent by the same path, while the sort of astrology reported in the other sources seems to be more of a technical kind (see below).

Poetics and critique: books in the Christian/Gnostic environment

The data hitherto referred to as being variously ascribed to Zoroaster floated freely through Greek and Latin literature with varying success. Some "books" left no further traces, while others did. A further group of texts, however, stirred opposition from certain philosophical quarters. In chapter 16 of his biography of the leading Neoplatonist philosopher Plotinus, his student Porphyry (c. 234–305/10) reports that there were different sections of Christians in Plotinus' time. Some of the "heretics" had formerly been partisans of philosophy. Note that Porphyry seems to regard Christianity and philosophy as competing systems, with some former philosophers "converting" to Christianity. Porphyry gives the names of two such renegades who, joined by their entourage, "fooled" many people with their claims to possess treatises of various authors and "apocalypses" of Zoroaster, Zostrianos, and others. Furthermore, Porphyry reports that Plotinus had written a book with the title "Against the Gnostics," while he had assigned some further work to his students: Amelius was supposed to write against "the book of Zostrianos," while Porphyry himself had to write against the "book of Zoroaster." Porphyry

proudly adds that he was able to put together a large number of arguments showing that this “book was both unauthentic and recent, made up by the founders of that sect in order to make believe that the doctrines they had themselves chosen to uphold were those of the ancient Zoroaster” (16.2.b).  

By a stroke of good luck, both texts mentioned by Porphyry are attested in the corpus of texts from Nag Hammadi, which includes an apocalypse generally referred to as Zostrianos. This long treatise presents an autobiographical account of the otherworldly journey of its eponymous hero. Recent research has suggested that Zostrianos “is a fourth century Coptic translation of an essentially pagan Greek apocalypse produced in the late second or early third century that effected a rapprochement between traditions at home in Gnostic Sethianism and Middle Platonism of a strongly Neopythagorean bent.” While the Coptic treatise does not provide any clues about the genealogy of this Zostrianos, the Christian rhetorician Arnobius, a contemporary of Porphyry, in his Adversus gentes (Against the Heathens), from around 297 to 303, characterizes Armenius as the grandson of Zostrianos. Armenius, however, was held by some (see on Clement, above) to be the father of Zoroaster. Accordingly, Zostrianos turns out to be the great-grandfather of Zoroaster. 

On the other hand, the final colophon to the Nag Hammadi treatise, in a cryptogram (132:6–9), qualifies the preceding apocalypse as words of truth of Zostrianos and at the same time, in the last line, as “words of Zoroaster.” This comes somewhat unexpectedly, like “a pious afterthought” almost as if to confirm the arbitrary nature of the ascription criticized by Porphyry. The text seems to have no apparent features that would indicate any form of Zoroastrian legacy. The shared ascription to Zostrianos and Zoroaster possibly aims at linking the somewhat otherworldly figure of Zostrianos to a better-known and more “mundane” personality and at interposing a further medium in the process of transmission of divine knowledge. The presumed genealogical relationship between the two figures could be, but does not need to be, a motive for the second ascription. If it were, the genealogy would enhance the idea of a successive chain of authoritative wisdom.

For the text and an extensive commentary see Tardieu, “Les Gnostiques.”

See Bidez and Camont, Les Mages, III, p. 15 (= fragment B4). However, there seem to be various readings of the name in different manuscripts, one reading Osthane in place of Zostrianos.

For Turner in Barry et al., Zostrian, p. 483 (“Zostrianos was the grandfather of Zoroaster”).

Ibid., p. 662.

So what about the book of Zoroaster that Porphyry took upon himself to refute? Again, his statements could not be more exact, for one version of another Gnostic text, referred to as The Apocryphon of John, explicitly refers in an interpolation to “the book of Zoroaster” (2.18:20) as a source of further information for a long list of the parts of Adam’s body and the 365 angels ruling over these parts. The wording of the text (again a Coptic translation from a lost Greek original) does not make it entirely clear whether the information provided by The Apocryphon of John is actually excerpted from the “book of Zoroaster” or whether the latter was merely regarded as a mine of further information of the sort provided in this Gnostic text. While it is almost certain, or at least highly probable, that this “book” is a false attribution to Zoroaster, its precise origin and identity remain a matter of speculation. As the “book” is mentioned as part of additional materials (found in the longer version, but not in the two shorter versions of the texts), the establishment of a date for The Apocryphon of John and conflicting hypotheses about its origin will not necessarily throw much light on the provenance of the reference to the “book of Zoroaster.” At any rate, the passage from Porphyry can be adduced as providing evidence that a “book of Zoroaster” circulated in Christian/Gnostic environments in the late third century CE. Provided that the gist of its contents as provided by The Apocryphon of John matches what the Neoplatonist school knew about it, one is tempted to speculate that disagreements and polemics between Platonist philosophers and Christians/heretics were partly about anthropology, that is, the nature of the human body. However that may have been, in his Contra Celsum Origen (d. 254) provides a further hint that books ascribed to Zoroaster played a prominent role in some branches of Christian/Gnostic discourse. At one point (1.16), the theologian criticizes his “Gnostic” adversary for expelling Moses from his catalogue of the wise, while at the same time stressing the importance of Linus, Musaeus, Orpheus, Pherecydes, “Zoroaster the Persian,” as well as Pythagoras, and claiming that their views were laid down in “books” and have been preserved down to the present age. This is in line with many Gnostic/Christian writings dispensing with the Tanach; the scriptural vacuum was then filled by, among others, Zoroaster and his purported writings. And it is in these contexts that polemics arose and pertinent “philological” critique emerged, while other misattributions (like the ones discussed in the following section) were simply passed on (or not), without provoking any form of opposition.

See King, Secret Revelation, p. 114.
Astrological misattributions between East and West

In its entry on Zoroaster, a tenth-century Byzantine encyclopedia, the *Suda*, ascribes an astrological work to Zoroaster, namely the *Asterioskopika* ("star-watchings") and/or the *Apoloemmatika* ("horoscopical outcomes"). However, the fragments from ancient sources that Bidez and Cumont grouped under that heading\(^5\) (mostly examples of standard technical astrological predictions) have in common the attribution to Zoroaster, but do not refer to this work. Hence one is left with the concern that not all of these fragments actually derive from this source; alternatively, the *Suda* may have tagged a book title as a label on to diverse fragments circulating under the name of Zoroaster. Zoroaster was for several reasons a very popular candidate for astrological misattributions. First, several ancient authors credit Zoroaster with astrological knowledge; secondly, his very name, with its middle element, *astr-*, reminiscent of Greek *astron* or *aster* and thus linking the name to the world of the stars, evoked astrological associations; and thirdly, the tradition making him a "Chaldean" associated Zoroaster with the reputed masters of the astrological craft.\(^5\)

With few exceptions (e.g. the sixth-century CE Byzantine writer Joannes Lydus),\(^9\) the materials circulating under Zoroaster's presumed authorship were obviously not inspired by Iranian sources.\(^9\) The earliest datable source providing a reference to an astrological prescription (on the timing of sowing) attributed to Zoroaster is once again Pliny the Elder (Natural History 18.55.200), who probably drew on more ancient materials. These, however, will be no earlier than the second century BCE. Around 175 CE the Hellenistic astrologer Vettius Valens refers to Zoroaster for the calculation of the maximum length of life allotted by the moon again illustrating that there must have been astrological materials (fragments, if not entire books) in circulation that were ascribed to Zoroaster.

Later on, turning to the East, one finds several Arabic astrological books and fragments ascribed to Zoroaster.\(^15\) Again, Zoroaster is one of several mouthpieces of special knowledge, others being, for instance, Hermes and again Jamasp. The astrological texts ascribed to Zoroaster were translations from Middle Persian (Pahlavi) and/or New Persian. According to David Pingree, the translations of astrological works from Middle Persian "were virtually the earliest scientific texts in Arabic," and "early Abbâsid astrology... was largely Sasanian and Greek in origin."\(^16\) One of the earliest of these texts, and the oldest surviving treatise on genethliography (the science of casting natalities), is the Book of Nativities and Eclipses and Revolutions of the World and Prognostication of the Division of the World and Revolutions of the Years of Nativities and Interrogations (Kitaab al-mawaalid wa al-kiswâfît wa tabâwiw sinî al-alâm wa tâyîr qimât al-dunya wa tâbâwiw sinî al-mawaâlid wa al-masâ'îl), ascribed to Zarûdush (Zoroaster), who, according to a piece of purportant autobiography, is presented as a native of Azerbaijan\(^7\) who went to study magic at Harrân under a master apparently named "Aelius (or Illyius) the wise."\(^8\) It is stated that the text was translated around 787-795 from "Newer Persian" (= Middle Persian) into Arabic, and that the original treatise, written by Zoroaster in "Old Persian," had apparently been translated into "Newer Persian" in 637, the year the Iranian capital Ctesiphon was captured by the Arabs. The text thereby claims to capture pre-Islamic Iranian knowledge, albeit not in its original version. On the other hand, according to Pingree there is evidence that the text is actually based on a Greek original that was translated into Middle Persian some time in the third century CE and later on underwent some elaboration. Pingree argues that this Greek original must have offered an astrological system closely resembling that of Dorotheus of Sidon and Vettius Valens,\(^9\) the latter of whom, as we have seen, in turn borrowed in one place from a text misattributed to Zoroaster. Hence, we obviously have to do with materials that, by their ascription to Zoroaster, were first appropriated from the East to the West, only to be reappropriated in turn by the East from the West. Later on, the eleventh-century astrologer 'Ali ibn Abi al-Rijal (Latin: Abenagel) derived parts of the materials of his *Kitâb al-bârî* from the pseudo-Zoroastrian *Kitaâb al-mawaâlid*. Through its translations into Latin and several European vernaculars, Abenagel's quotations from "Zoroaster" became known throughout Europe. Thereby, the pendulum again swung back to the West.

Apparently, however, there were further sources available as well. A case in point is the Bologna professor Cecco d'Ascoli (= Francesco degli Stabili), who was burned at the stake in 1327. In his commentary on

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\(^{5}\) It is unclear whether these are two works or only one; Bidez and Cumont, *Le Mage*, 1, p. 134.


\(^{7}\) Bidez, "Thus Spake Not Zarathushra," pp. 337-4.


\(^{9}\) Gundel and Gundel, *Astrologomena*, p. 62, suggest a Syrian or Egyptian provenance for the bulk of these materials.

\(^{10}\) For surveys see Siergin, *Geschichte*, pp. 88-9; Pingree, *From Astral Omens to Astrology*, pp. 44-6.

\(^{11}\) Pingree, *From Astral Omens to Astrology*, p. 41.

\(^{12}\) This information can also be found in other Iranian sources.

\(^{13}\) Pingree, *From Astral Omens to Astrology*, p. 45. See ibid., p. 46.
Giovanni Sacrobosco's *De sphaera mundi* (from around 1230), the work that initially put Cecco d'Ascoli into trouble, he claims to quote verbally from the book *On the Rule of the Quadrants of the Eighth Sphere* (libri de dominio quartorum octavae sphaerae) by Zoroastes (sic). The "quotation" unfolds the doctrine of four great ages of the world, each consisting of 12,000 years and each containing a new law introduced by divinely guided men. While it does not seem that it was this sort of macro-historic predictions (with its implicit challenge to the Christian authorities) that brought Cecco d'Ascoli into difficulties, it is nevertheless fascinating to find that materials of this sort ascribed to Zoroaster (and possibly having an Iranian background) were in circulation among astrologically inclined and "unorthodox" intellectuals.

Zoroaster's fame as a great astrologer was maintained throughout later European intellectual history. Occasionally the astrological etymologies of the name were further elaborated. In modern times some additional astrological publications were attributed to Zoroaster. These include a presumably "kaballistic" treatise of prognostic astrology (Das Teleskop des Zoroastors [sic]) from the late eighteenth century in the German language; a single-sheeted folio of prognostic astrology "By ZOROSTEER, Professor and Teacher of the Science," published in Rochdale around 1850 (providing the address of the author, where further astrological services could be ordered); a German booklet containing planetary nativities (Zoroaster's Planetenbuchlein) from around 1925; and a "Horoscope for every date in your birthday book" by a presumed "court astrologer" assuming the name "Madame Daria Zoroastre," published in London in 1952. While the earlier ascriptions — from Pliny in the first century to Cecco d'Ascoli in the fourteenth — seemed to have at their origin some form of East–West intercultural contact and would, more or less successfully, maintain the illusion of authenticity, the authors of the later works were consciously fabricating, and even their readers must have realized the blantly fictional nature of their *noms de plume*.

**PROSPECTS**

There are many more texts falsely attributed to Zoroaster than could be mentioned, let alone discussed, in this brief survey. Just as in the cases discussed above, the attributions range from the playful to the serious. Passing fancies and literary ephemera stand next to texts founding new sacred traditions. Two cases in particular would merit further elucidation: Plothen and Nietzsche. Shortly before the fall of the Byzantine Empire the controversial philosopher Georg Gemistos Plethon (d. 1454) ascribed the so-called *Chaldæan Oracles* (a body of revelatory fragments from late antiquity) to Zoroaster and reestablished these as a consistent body of texts. Zoroaster, the "author" of this text, is (besides Plato) at the same time regarded as the originator of the "neo-Hellenic" religion which Plethon had advocated. "Zoroaster's" *Chaldæan Oracles* were widely exploited in early modern esoteric discourses, among others by the Neoplatonist philosophers Marsilio Ficino (1433–99) and Francesco Patrizi (1529–97). The "Zoroastrian" *Oracles* shared a history with the Hermetic texts, including the eventual critique of their presumed authorship and their occasional "survival" in modern esoteric discourses. The semantic surplus of the authorizing names was not easily disrupted by philological critique. Consequently, Zoroaster served as a sort of screen on which a wide range of texts (like the astrological booklets referred to above) could be projected at will. That Zoroaster remained a powerful figure of discursive authorization in Western religious history is amply illustrated by Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) and his *Also sprach Zarathustra*. This "book for all and no one" powerfully challenged the foundational basis of Western thought, morals, and religion. Significantly, Zarathustra is the name of the antihero who at the same time declares the death of the old God and functions as the solitary hero of a new foundational narrative — a "name for all and no one" at all.

**REFERENCES**


66. For extensive textual analysis see Stausberg, *Faszination*, 1.


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