



CEDRENUS, GEORGIUS

CEDRENUS, GEORGIUS, twelfth-century Byzantine historian who edited the *Synopsis Historiōn* of John Skylitzēs (text ed. by I. Bekker, *Georgius Cedrenus Ioannis Scylitzae ope*, Bonn, 1839). He relates “Of his lineage [i.e., of Ninus, king of Assyria] was also Zōroastrēs, the notorious astronomer, born amongst the Persians: he prayed to be thunder-stricken by the fire of the air and to be consumed, charging the Persians to pick up his bones after the burning and to guard and honor them. “And as long as you preserve them,” says he, “sovereignty over your country will not be usurped.” Thus, when he had been reduced to ashes by the heavenly fire, the Persians held his remains in honor, until they showed him contempt, and were deprived of their rule” (*Synopsis Historiōn* [= *Histor. Compendium*], 16 B, Bonn ed., vol. I, p. 29.19f.; text with commentary in Bidez and Cumont, II, p. 60). Gennadius Scholarius in his letter to the Exarch Joseph also refers to Zoroaster as *periboētosastronomos* “the notorious astronomer.” Both narratives probably derive from the *Chronography* of the sixth-century John Malalas of Antioch, who also uses the epithet *periboētos* and adds that “[Zoroaster], praying to Orion, was reduced to ashes by the fire of the air” (text in Bidez-Cumont, II, pp. 57, 58 n. 3: Zoroaster was anciently connected by Greek writers claiming Persian sources, with Nimrod; and Nimrod, with Orion, the mighty hunter).

Zoroastrians believe Zarathustra was assassinated by a Turanian, Brādrēs; though the seventeenth-century *Dabestān* adds that the dying prophet cast his prayer-beads (*yād-afraz*) at the miscreant, whom they incinerated—the opposite of the Byzantine tradition which probably belongs to a body of



astrological lore about Zoroaster from Mesopotamia (see Russell, 1987, p. 444). The Armenian linguist Lap'anc'yan connected Orion with Arm. *Ara*, Platonic Gk. *Ēr*, son of Armenios (and associated also with Zoroaster), the legendary warrior who dies and is resurrected after a spirit-journey to the next world resembling those attributed to the Iranian prophet. Orion is blinded, but his sight is restored as he walks towards the Sun: Zoroastrians at death are exposed to the Sun (Pahl. *xwaršēd-nigerišn*). He is accompanied by a dog, Sirius, and a dog must be led up to the body of a dead Zoroastrian as part of the funerary rites (NPers. *sagdīd*). The great, sinuous constellation near Orion, Eridanus, has been called “the river of Orion”; if the element *-danus* is Iranian *-dānu-* “body of water” (cf. Ossetic *don* “water”; Don, Danube, etc.), then *Ēr* = Orion. Eridanus may be seen as *Ēr*'s path to the Sun (the *daēnā-*, whom the soul meets after death, is referred to sometimes as *ravān-e rāh* “soul of the way”), and the astral legend related by Malalas and Cedrenus is part of the complex of traditions which link Zoroaster to *Ēr* (see Russell, 1984).

Ancient Iranians associated the bones of their kings, presumably preserved in *astōdāns* after exposure (though not, of course, cremation, which was forbidden by Zoroastrianism) or embalming, with the power of sovereignty. The Roman emperor Caracalla sacked the royal tombs of the Arsacids at Arbela, scattering the bones (Debevoise, p. 265), and in the mid-fourth century the Sasanian Šāpūr II sacked the Armenian Arsacid necropolis of Ani and held the bones for ransom. The Armenians must have believed that the royal bones really did have power, for they paid the ransom and re-interred them at Alc', on Mt. Aragac (Faustus, 4.24). Since Malalas lived in the Sasanian period, it is not clear who dishonored the bones of Zoroaster, and which dynasty was thus brought down; but it is well known that Alexander, whose invasion signaled the end of the Achaemenids, entered the tomb of Cyrus at Pasargadae. S. Shahbazi has suggested that Middle Iranian tradition—presumably, one of the ultimate sources of the legend recorded by Malalas—conflated Zoroaster's patron Kavi Vištāspa and Cyrus (see also Boyce, *Zoroastrianism* II, pp. 68-69). A further confusion of the prophet with Vištāspa might have produced this element of the legend; one recalls that a building at Naqš-e Rostam, not far from Persepolis and Pasargadae, came in Muslim Persia to be called the “Ka'ba of Zoroaster.”



BIBLIOGRAPHY

J. Bidez and F. Cumont, *Les Mages hellénisés*, Paris, 2 vols., Paris, 1938; repr. 1973.

N. C. Debevoise, *A Political History of Parthia*, Chicago, 1938.

J. R. Russell, "Ēr, Ara, and Ardāy Wirāz," *REA*, 1984, pp. 477-85.

Idem, *Zoroastrianism in Armenia*, Harvard Iranian Series 5, Cambridge, Mass., 1987.

A. S. Shahbazi, "The "Traditional Date of Zoroaster" Explained," *BSOAS* 40, 1977, pp. 25-35.

(James R. Russell)