



DIOGENES LAERTIUS

DIOGENES LAERTIUS, author of a biographically arranged history of Greek philosophy in ten books that also deals with the Persian Magi, especially in the first book on the origins of philosophy. Of his life nothing is recorded, but according to the internal evidence in his work he must have lived in the 3rd century C.E. Diogenes Laertius gathered his material from (lost) second- or third-hand sources without citing the chain of tradition completely. He claimed to have based his statements upon the chief authorities that he quoted by name, though he rarely knew their works other than by means of citations. Moreover legendary tradition is not separated from facts. Hence each reported tradition must be examined critically.

According to the Hellenistic (pseudo-Aristotelian or rather peripatetic) view, philosophy must have originated from the barbarians. Rejecting this opinion in the proem of his book (1. 6-9), Diogenes mentions the position and cult of the Magians and, in a completely fantastical manner, refers to the time and name of Zoroaster. Elsewhere he lays great stress on the relations of prominent philosophers to the Magians: a Magian is said to have foretold to Socrates his death (2.45); Plato, interested in getting into touch with them, is said to have been prevented from doing so by war (3.7); a Persian Mithridates is mentioned as Plato's pupil (3.25). It is also stated that Pythagoras, Democritus, and Pyrrho had contacts with the Magians (8.3; 9.34.61).

Historical facts found in the book include: reference to the uprising of the Ionians against the Persians in a (spurious) letter of Pythagoras to Anaximenes (8.49) and the latter's fictitious response (2.5); the relations of Xenophon to the



younger Cyrus and the retreat of the 10,000 (2.49-51); the fictitious correspondence of Heraclitus with Darius (9.12-14); and mention of the next-of-kin marriage among the Persians (9.83).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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