



CLEMENT, PSEUDO-

(Pseudo-) **CLEMENT**, the unknown author of a work of fiction falsely ascribed to Pope Clement I (88-97 CE) and now generally known as the *Pseudo-Clementines*, which contains passages reflecting myths and teachings of Persian origin. The text has survived in two versions, a collection of homilies, purportedly missionary preachings of Saint Peter, and the *Recognitiones* (*Anagnōrismoí*, Reconsiderations), preserved in a Latin translation by Ruffinus (before 400 c.e.) in the guise of a Roman book of “investigations.” Both versions are derived from a single original, which was probably written in the 3rd, or perhaps as early as the 2nd, century c.e. (Cullmann, pp. 142-43, 156, 157; Quasten, pp. 70-74; Baus, cols. 334-35).

One of the most noteworthy of the stories with a Persian background is that of Nebrod (Nimrod; Genesis 10:8-12), the descendant of Ham, identified in the text with Zoroaster. According to this account, Nebrod aspired to become king. Being a great magician, he attempted to force the star of evil, which, according to the author, still governed the world, to grant him kingship, but the star was angry and sent the fire of kingship down from heaven in the form of a lightning bolt, which killed Nebrod. It was then that the Greeks named him Zoroaster (ostensibly < *zōon ástron* “living star”). Human beings, however, misguidedly supposed that the lightning had come to take Zoroaster’s soul because of his love for God, and in Persia they built for him a tomb, which they venerated as a temple and where they worshiped him as a god. Furthermore, the Persians collected the embers left by the thunderbolt and became the first to worship the heavenly fire, in return for which they



received as their reward the first kingship (*Homilies* 9.4-6; ed. Rehm and Irmischer, p. 133; *Recognitiones* 4.27-29; ed. Rehm and Paschke, pp. 159-61; cf. Bidez and Cumont, II, pp. 50-53). The etymology on which the identification of Nebrod with Zoroaster was based, though false, seems significant. Some scholars have interpreted it as evidence of the westward spread of Zoroastrianism, particularly into Babylonia and Assyria, and of the fusion of Zoroastrianism with the astral religion of the Chaldeans and Babylonians (Bousset, pp. 376-77; Schoeps, 1960, p. 2). The evil governing the world is, of course, to be identified with [Ahriman](#) (Schoeps, 1960, pp. 23). As for the “fire of kingship,” it has been variously explained as the *xvarənah* (“divine light”) mentioned in the Avesta (Bousset, pp. 147-48) and as the sacred fire that burned perpetually on an altar in the palace of the Sasanian kings (Bidez and Cumont, II, pp. 52-53; Schoeps, 1960, p. 3).

Recognitiones contains accounts of the laws of different nations, which follow closely the text of “Book of the Law of the Countries” (29) embodying teachings of [Bardesanes](#), probably written down by one of his students. In the passage on the laws of the Persians it is stated that Persians who had emigrated to Media Atropatene, Parthia, Egypt, and Phrygia were known as “Maguseans” (9.21; ed. Rehm and Paschke, pp. 276-77).

Another noteworthy element in the *Pseudo-Clementines* is the doctrine of a god, the creator of all things, who has divided sovereignty between two kings, one good, the other bad. The latter reigns over the present world and has received authority to punish men who are guilty of injustice; the former (Christ) will reign over the world to come (*Homilies* 15.7; ed. Rehm and Irmischer, p. 215). This dualistic and pessimistic conception of the creation has been linked with the Zurvanist speculations that “limitless time” (Av. *Zruuan akarana*, Pahl. *Zurwān ī akanārag*) gave birth to both good and evil, to both Ormazd and Ahriman. It has been plausibly surmised that the author of the original work was well acquainted with the cosmological notions peculiar to the Mazdean religion (Bousset, pp. 139-40; Schoeps, 1960, pp. 4-7). In accordance with the same dualistic ideology, a sharp contrast is drawn in the *Homilies* between men, representing good and truth, and women, representing evil and error. A similar low estimate of the feminine principle is expressed in certain late Pahlavi writings, like the *Selections of Zatspram* (Zādsprahm 39.30-31, tr. in Zaehner, pp. 350-51) and the *Bundahišn* (tr. Anklesaria, pp. 39-41), and in the Christian *Book of Scholia* by Bishop [Theodore bar Kōnay](#) (tr. in Zaehner, pp. 421-29).



The general tone of the *Pseudo-Clementines* is one of open hostility to Persian religious beliefs. Fire is described as a demonic element, harmful to the human soul, Zoroastrianism as the pinnacle of paganism, and Zoroaster as the arch-imposter.

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