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The Greek constructions of Zoroaster relate to the historical Zoroaster and to the Zoroaster of the Zoroastrian faith in one respect only. The Greeks knew that Zoroaster was the "prophet," in the sense of the human founder, of the national Persian religion of their times. That, of course, is a cardinal fact, but it is one fact only. For the rest, the Greek Zoroasters — for there were many — were fantasies of their own imaginations. Since the Greeks were a curious and inventive people, these multiple Zoroasters are interesting creations in their own right. Of more importance, they are elements in the "West's" construction — or misconstruction — of a major "oriental" religion.

The Greeks constructed two different types of Zoroaster: (1) Zoroaster the prophet or magus, and (2) Zoroaster the philosophical and astrological author. Before we examine these two types, we should look first at the difficulties faced by the Greeks in reconstructing an historical Zoroaster in any form, and also at the Greek conventions for reconstructing remote persons as founts of religious or philosophical wisdom. In the latter undertaking, the Greeks permitted themselves far greater license than do we today.

Even if the Greeks had wished to reconstruct a historically accurate Zoroaster,

the task would have been impossible. The distance in space, time, and language between Zoroaster and them was simply too great. Furthermore, the only possible intermediaries, Iranian magi, were themselves historically distanced from Zoroaster; and, at least after Alexander and the Greeks had humiliated their religion by bringing down their empire, they were not particularly interested in educating the Greeks about that religion or its founder. Culturally and politically, circumstances did not favor the easy communication of religion, as they did, for example, in Hellenistic Egypt.

In any case, dry historical accuracy was of no more interest to the Greeks than to the Iranians. The Greeks had two goals for the reconstruction of prophets and wise men. The first was that the reconstructed persona be appropriate in imputed character and biography to the tradition he founded (never "she," except in the case of the exotic alchemical tradition). The second, much more insidious, goal was that the sage be a convincing peg on which to hang home-grown Greek philosophy or other forms of learning and so give it a patina (to change the metaphor) of authority derived from the far away and the long ago. The Greeks considered the best wisdom to be exoticwisdom or — to use the title of Arnaldo Momigliano's masterly study of the phenomenon — "alien wisdom." What better and more convenient authority than the distant — temporally and geographically — Zoroaster?

Coldly stated, these two goals and the methods of construction necessary to attain them seem flagrantly dishonest. To the Greeks of those times they would have appeared less so. On the charge of fictitious biography, was it not reasonable that a prophet should be made to exemplify the religion he founded? And if data were scarce, why not fill out the portrait with touches from the picture of the generic sage? The false attribution of learned texts was a graver charge. However, the intent, it must be allowed, was seldom to deceive. What was misattributed to Zoroaster, as will be discussed below, were for the most part not original compositions, but compilations of pre-existing material for which the compilers sought a persuasive author. Their decisions to attribute their compilations to Zoroaster — because Zoroaster might have written it, might he not? — says more about their poor taste in philosophical literature than about their deceitfulness.

We shall start our explorations with Zoroaster the prophet of Persian religion. First, however, we should dispose of a third type of Zoroaster: Zoroaster the magician. This Zoroaster is obviously generated out of the pejorative use of the term "magus" to mean "magician." Thoughtful Greeks knew very well that the

original magi were Persian priests; but their language, and subsequently Latin too, soon overwhelmed that original meaning. Furthermore, together with the new denotation "magician," the "magic" of the "magi" usually carried sinister connotations, up to and including necromancy, i.e. conjuring with the spirits of the dead.

Logic would seem to dictate that, once the magi were associated with magic in the Greek imagination, their prophet Zoroaster would necessarily metamorphose into a magician too. And so it was: the encyclopedic naturalist Pliny the elder (first cent. CE) names Zoroaster as the inventor of magic (*Natural History* 30.2.3). However, a principle of the division of labor appears to have spared Zoroaster most of the responsibility for introducing the dark arts to the Greek and Roman worlds. That dubious honor went to another fabulous magus, Ostanes, to whom most of the pseudepigraphic magical literature was attributed. For Zoroaster, as we shall see, was reserved the astrological literature. Magical works specifically attributed to Zoroaster are few and very late; and although Pliny calls him the inventor of magic, he develops no accompanying magician's persona for him.

Zoroaster as the prophet of Persian religion. Albert de Jong (pp. 76-250) has isolated five principal passages from Greek authors in which substantial information (some accurate, some not) is transmitted concerning Persian religion: Herodotus 1.131-2, Strabo 15.3.13-15, Plutarch *On Isis and Osiris* 46-7, Diogenes Laertius 1.6-9, and Agathias 2.23-5. The last three of these passages refer to Zoroaster in his foundational role. (1) Plutarch (first to second cent. CE), discussing dualistic theologies, states: "Others call the better of these a god and his rival a daemon, as, for example, Zoroaster the Magus, who lived, so they record, five thousand years before the siege of Troy. He used to call the one Horomazes and the other Areimanius" (trans. de Jong). (2) Diogenes Laertius (early third cent. CE?), discussing the religion of the magi in very favorable terms, acquits them of the charge of sinister magic and adduces as evidence the Greek etymology of their prophet's name: Zoroaster = *astrothútēs* = star-worshipper (literally. "one who sacrifices to the stars"). Interestingly, the friendly re-characterization is as groundless as the hostile portrait of the evil magician. (3) Agathias (sixth cent. CE), condemning certain "innovations" in Persian religion ("innovations" which are in fact genuine earlier features of Mazdaism), states: "But the Persians of today … have adopted new ways … seduced by the teachings of Zoroaster the son of Horomasdes. When this Zoroaster or Zarades … first flourished and made his

laws is impossible to discover with certainty. The Persians of today say that he was born in the time of Hystaspes, without further qualification, so that it is … impossible to tell whether this Hystaspes was the father of Darius or someone else…. [Zoroaster] was their teacher and guide in the rites of the magi; he replaced their original worship by complex and elaborate doctrines" (trans. de Jong). Other than the basic fact that Zoroaster "established the laws" of Mazdaism then current, the only nugget of biographical fact here is the link to Hystaspes, certainly not "the father of Darius" but "someone else," namely Zoroaster's authentic royal patron Vištāspa.

The first and the third passages suggest hugely different dates for when Zoroaster lived and instituted the faith, and this sharp divergence is echoed in many other Greek and Latin sources. At one extreme Zoroaster's remoteness is measured in millennia, at the other in mere centuries, and Zoroaster is made the contemporary and teacher of historical Greek sages, notably Pythagoras. In two important articles, Peter Kingsley has shown that the late dating is no more grounded in fact than the earlier. The earlier datings (six thousand years before Xerxes or Plato, as well as Plutarch's five thousand before the Trojan War) reflect in one way or another Zoroastrian ideas of world ages and historic turning points (Kingsley 1995), while the later, in particular that to 570 B.C.E, stems from the attempt of Aristoxenus (fourth cent. B.C.E) to co-opt Pythagoras, and through Pythagoras Zoroaster, into a philosophical confrontation with Platonism (Kingsley 1990). Kingsley's invalidation of the sixth-century date has repercussions beyond just the Greek perception of Zoroaster, for that date entered the Iranian Zoroastrian tradition too.

The "biographical" data on the fictitious Zoroaster in Greek and Latin sources were gathered and analysed in the fundamental two-volume study of the "Hellenized magi" by Joseph Bidez and Franz Cumont (data on the life of "Zoroaster," vol. II, pp. 7-62; essay on the life, vol. I, pp. 5-55). It would be impossible here to track through all the data, so a single brief narrative, that found in Dio Cocceianus (*Oration* 36.40 f. — see*EIr.* VII, Fasc. 4, p. 421), will be given by way of example. Dio's portrait story is highly favorable, not merely because he puts it in Iranian mouths, but also because the Greeks, commendably, held Zoroaster and other founders of alien wisdom in high regard. "For the Persians say that Zoroaster, because of a passion for wisdom and justice, deserted his fellows and dwelt by himself on a certain mountain; and they say that thereupon the mountain caught fire, a mighty flame descending from the sky above, and that it burned unceasingly. So then the

king and the most distinguished of his Persians drew near for the purpose of praying to the god; and Zoroaster came forth from the fire unscathed, and, showing himself gracious towards them, bade them to be of good cheer and to offer certain sacrifices in recognition of the god's having come to that place. And thereafter, so they say, Zoroaster has associated, not with them all, but only with such as are best endowed with regard to truth, and are best able to understand the god, men whom the Persians have named Magi, that is to say, people who know how to cultivate the divine power, and not like the Greeks, who in their ignorance use the term to denote wizards" (trans. H. Lamar Crosby).

Zoroaster was also co-opted into Graeco-Roman religion as the founder of one of the mystery cults, Mithraism. Why this was so can be demonstrated almost syllogistically. To the Greek way of thinking, all religions have their founders; Zoroaster was the founder of Persian religion; the Mithras cult by self-definition was "the mysteries of the Persians"; therefore Mithraism must have been founded by Zoroaster. Whether Mithraism really was a Graeco-Roman continuation of Persian religion (though an interesting question in its own right) is here irrelevant. Porphyry, a third-century CE Neoplatonist, paints an elegant portrait of this fanciful Zoroaster instituting Mithras-worship in the archetypal mithraeum: "… Zoroaster was the first to dedicate a natural cave in honor of Mithras, the creator and father of all; it was located in the mountains near Persia and had flowers and springs. This cave bore for him the image of the cosmos which Mithras had created and the things which the cave contained, by their proportionate arrangement, provided him with symbols of the elements and climates of the cosmos. After Zoroaster others adopted the custom of performing their rites of initiation in caves and grottoes which were either natural or artificial" (*De antro nympharum* 6, trans. Arethusa edition).

Zoroaster as the author of astrological literature. The extant fragments of, and testimonies about, the writings falsely attributed to Zoroaster are collected in Vol. II of Bidez and Cumont, pp. 137-263; they are discussed in Vol. I, pp. 85-163. They are also the subject of a full analysis by the present author: Beck, pp. 521-53 (including a discussion of the "Zoroaster" of Dio Coccianus' magian hymns (see *EIr.* VII, Fasc. 4, p. 421) and of the Gnostic Tractate Zostrianos which was discovered subsequent to Bidez and Cumont).

The present author, while recognizing that Bidez and Cumont both laid secure foundations for the interpretation of the Zoroastrian pseudepigrapha and built much of the necessary superstructure, challenged their claim that the

literature was in large part the product of the "Hellenized magi" of the Iranian diaspora in Anatolia and hence reflects the blending of a genuinely Iranian/Zoroastrian tradition (via a Chaldean astrological tradition) with a Greek tradition. To the contrary, he argues (Beck, pp. 492-521) that the Zoroastrian pseudepigrapha are almost entirely Greek products, not even superficially Iranized. The authorial name "Zoroaster" is little more than a label intended to impress and to legitimate.

The literary corpus of this fictitious Zoroaster was immense. Hermippus, a Greek scholar working in Alexandria in about 200 BCE, was said (by Pliny, *Natural History* 30.2.4) to have edited and commented on two million lines of it. That would amount to about eight hundred volumes or papyrus rolls. The titles and the nature of the contents of two major works are known. One was entirely astrological, the *Apotelesmatika* or *Asteroskopika* (i.e. "[horoscopal] outcomes" and "star watchings," respectively). The other, *On Nature* (*Peri physeōs*), was more general, but astrology seems to have preponderated in its contents too. A reason why astrological material would have gravitated to Zoroaster has already been given — etymology. As well as "star-sacrificer" Zoroaster's name was interpreted, via its initial syllable, as *Zōo-*, to mean "living star."

It remains to mention the only instance where Zoroaster's postulated authorship was contentious. His work *On Nature* opens with the words: "These things I wrote, I, Zoroaster son of Armenios, a Pamphylian by race, who died in war, whatever I learnt from the gods, while I was in Hades" (for sources, etc., Beck, pp. 518 f., 528-30). This looks like, and probably is, a case of outrageous plagiarism; for the opening words are the same as Plato's at the start of the great "Myth of Er" which concludes the *Republic* — with the substitution of Zoroaster's name for Er's. Certainly, the plagiarist was not Plato. However, in pseudo-Zoroaster's defence, it is not impossible that Plato, who is quite credibly said to have had connections with the magi (Kingsley, 1995, pp. 199-207), may in turn have drawn on an earlier Iranian story of an other-worldly journey undertaken by Zoroaster or some other magus (Bivar, pp. 86 f.).

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