THUS SPAKE NOT ZARATHUŠTRA: ZOROASTRIAN PSEUDEPIGRAPHA OF THE GRECO-ROMAN WORLD

Introduction: The pseudepigrapha in their cultural and literary context

In the Mediterranean world, from the third century B.C. to the end of antiquity (and beyond), there circulated a mass of literature attributed to Zoroaster or to other "magi". The language of this literature was predominantly Greek, though at one stage or another various parts of it passed through Aramaic, Syriac, Coptic or Latin. Its ethos and its cultural matrix were likewise Greek—that far-flung Greek culture which we call "Hellenistic" and which furnished the common intellectual and spiritual currency of Alexander's empire and its successor kingdoms and eventually of the Roman empire in its entire eastern half. The ascription of this literature to sources beyond that political, cultural and temporal framework represents a bid for authority and a fount of legitimizing "alien wisdom". Zoroaster and the magi did not compose it, but their names sanctioned it. That was the function of the attributions.

Almost all of this pseudepigrapha is now lost. It is known only in fragments quoted, paraphrased or alluded to in other authors, often at second or third remove. The only work which we possess unmediated and in anything like its entirety is a relatively recent discovery, the tractate of Zostrianos from the Coptic Gnostic library from Nag Hammadi (VIII, 1). For the rest, it is a matter of reassembling the *disiecta membra* and allocating them to their proper originals. This is no easy or straightforward task; indeed, in any final sense, it is an impossible one. Relatively few of the fragments which are attributed to a specific author are also attributed to a specific work. Frequently, moreover, it is questionable whether a specific text underlies the citation at all, rather than a stray story or piece of teaching which the reporting author, or his sources, believed should stem from Zoroaster or the magi. Finally, these pseudonymous works, once composed, were not fixed: they ac-

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1 The phrase echoes the title of A. Momigliano's fine monograph, Alien Wisdom.
creted new material and modifications over the centuries. W. and H. G. Gundel, in discussing the astrological writings of "Zoroaster", put the researcher's dilemma well, if despairingly: "In treating these late texts, just as in dealing with their origins, we find ourselves back in a swampland where one cannot win a firm footing because of the many additional anonymous sources which flow into the tradition". The problem, paradoxical though it may sound, is to disentangle a real pseudo-Zoroaster or a real pseudo-Ostanes from their second- and third-order shadows!

Fortunately, the ground for any study of the Zoroastrian pseudo-epigrapha has been well laid in the magisterial volumes of J. Bidez and F. Cumont, Les Mages hellénisés, the second of which is a collection of all fragments attributed to the three "magi", Zoroaster, Ostanes and Hystaspes, and of all information concerning their supposed lives and teachings carried in western, i.e. non-Iranian, sources from antiquity. The collection was assembled and analyzed with enormous erudition and thoroughness, and it includes, but is not limited to, all substantial candidates for the pseudepigrapha with the exception of the Zostrianos, whose discovery postdated the publication of Les Mages hellénisés by several years.

Reliance on Les Mages hellénisés must be qualified in one important respect. Bidez and Cumont were of the view that magian wisdom was mediated to the West through a very particular channel: Iranian communities of the diaspora, settled in Anatolia since the Persian conquests of the sixth century, which persisted and flourished well into Roman imperial times. The people of these communities were known to the Greeks as Magusaioi, from an Aramaic form for "magi". The cult life and practices of the "Magusaeans" are quite well attested both from literature and archaeology. Less so their beliefs, although we possess a possible record in the form of two hymns whose content was reported by Dio Chrysostom (late 1st—early 2nd cent. A.C.), himself a native of this area. On this and other bases, Bidez and Cumont postulated a Magusaean learning from which the Zoroastrian pseudepigrapha known to us by citation and in fragments ultimately stemmed. This

\[\text{EXCURSUS}\]

\[\text{2 Astrologumena, 62.}\]

\[\text{3 The communities and their practices are described in Chs VIII–X, above. Following Cumont, it has been customary to reserve the term "Magusaeans" for the communities' priests and wise men, their magi. This is erroneous, for Basil of Cappadocia (above, p. 277) makes it clear that this term could be used for the entire folk (ethnos). For convenience' sake, however, and because the "Magusaeans" to be discussed in this excursus are very much a Cumontian construct, the term will here be used in the limited sense of the religious leaders among the Magusaeans and their interpreters to the outside world.}\]