NOTE ON BARUKH BEN NERIAH AND ZOROASTER

BY

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Jacques Duchesne-Guillemin recently stated 1):

Plus tard, les Juifs, pour résister intellectuellement à la domination perse, ont forgé des généalogies spirituelles, allant jusqu'à identifier Zoroastre à Baruch, le scribe de Jérémie. Ainsi, toute la sagesse des Iraniens découlait de Palestine.

His only reference is to A. V. W. Jackson, Zoroaster, The Prophet of Ancient Iran (London, 1899), p. 166. There, however, Jackson merely cites Richard J. H. Gottheil, "References to Zoroaster in Syriac and Arabic Literature", in Classical Studies in Honour of Henry Drisler (N.Y. 1894) pp. 24-51. In order to evaluate the above allegation, therefore, we must turn to Gottheil's article.

If the Jews actually tried to show that Zoroaster and Barukh b. Neriah were one and the same, that fact would have substantial consequences. We know that Jews did try to demonstrate the Jewish origin of men they admired and respected among gentile nations, or to show, at the very least, the basis in Judaism of all that was important in their teaching. This was the case, for example, with the Spartans, who were held by the Maccabees to be children of Abraham. The Persians were likewise alleged to be children of Abraham and Keturah in both Jewish and Armenian-Christian sources. 2) If, therefore, it could be shown that some Jews believed Barukh and Zoroaster to have been the same man, one might infer serious Jewish consideration of Zoroaster's doctrines, and considerable Zoroastrian, or at least Iranian, influence on Judaism. Much is said about Iranian influence on Judaism at various periods, from II Isaiah to the Arab conquest though most especially on the first century B.C. and A.D. sects. The

specific problem before us provides an opportunity to assess one such assertion.

Duchesne-Guillemin's allegation is completely without foundation. The evidence cited by Gottheil is from late Christian-Syriac sources. Gottheil cites 3) Bar Bahlul, *Lexica* (Ca. 832 A.D.), who refers to "Zardosht, whom people say is Baruch the scribe." Likewise, 'Ishodad of Hadatha (Ca. 852 A.D.) in his commentary on Matthew 2:1 states:

It has been asked whence did the Magi receive [information] that when a certain star should appear, the King of Kings was born. The truth of the matter is that it had been predicted by Zaradosht, the head of their sect, either because he was constrained by divine power... or because he was of the people of Israel and a student of the Scriptures... Some say that he is the same as Baruch the pupil of Eramya [Jeremiah] and that because the gift of prophecy was denied him, as had been his wish, and because of the bitter exile and the sack of Jerusalem and the Temple, he became offended... and went among other nations, learned twelve languages, and in them wrote that vomit of Satan, i.e. their book which is called Abhasta...

The same tradition is repeated in the Book of the Bee, by Solomon of Ḥilāt (1222 A.D.), "This Zaradosht is Baruch the scribe." Gottheil cites de Sacy (p. 30 n. 2) who offered an explanation of the connection of Jeremiah with Zoroaster, but offers no explanation of the identification of Baruch with Zoroaster. Gottheil does note, however, that Tabari says that Zoroaster was of Palestinian origin, and was a servant to one of the disciples of Jeremiah.

What then do we know for certain? Merely that certain 9th century Christian-Syriac writers regarded Zoroaster as identical with Barukh, and that these writers were cited later on by Arabic historians.

On such a basis, one can hardly assert that the Jews forged a spiritual genealogy which went so far as to assert that Zoroaster was identical with Barukh.

The fact is that so far as we know, it was the Christians who did so, and not the Jews. Furthermore, the earliest appearance of such a spurious genealogy was in the 9th century A.D., according to the sources available to us. If one may venture a guess on the etiology of

3) p. 28.