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*Meetings with Magi: Iranian Themes among the Greeks, from Xanthus of Lydia to Plato's Academy**

PETER KINGSLEY

There are not many people who can be said to have done something first. To Xanthus of Lydia belongs the distinction of being the first person on record to write in Greek about Zoroaster and aspects of Iranian religion. Not a Greek but writing in Greek, and living in the country that still joins Asia and Europe, he was to play an exemplary role in presenting details of an eastern religion directly to a western audience.

Xanthus's home was Lydia, in present-day western Turkey. Julia Kerschensteiner¹ goes beyond the evidence in referring to him as "Xanthus of Sardis": already in antiquity there was uncertainty on this point.² But Sardis, sixty miles inland from modern Izmir, was the capital of Lydia; and there can be little doubt that Xanthus – famous for his knowledge of the Lydian empire³ – at the very least spent a fair amount of time there, going through the available temple records⁴ and gathering material from word of mouth.

In the *Suda* we find it stated explicitly that Xanthus came from Sardis.⁵ However, the credibility of this statement stands or falls along with the credibility of the *Suda*'s very next assertion, that Xanthus either was born or was active⁶ at the time of the capture of Sardis. Certainly this must refer to the capture of the city by the Persians in 546 B.C., and not to its later capture by the Ionians.⁷ But in that case the report is hardly credible: Xanthus, as

* An explanation of abbreviations used in the footnotes is given at the end of the paper. My thanks to all who have helped in various ways with comments and advice, especially to Mary Boyce, Christopher Walker and Martin West; and to the Harold Hyam Wingate Foundation, in London, for practical assistance.

¹ *Platon und der Orient* (Stuttgart, 1945), pp. 28, 226.

² "Whether he was from Sardis or not, we do not know": Strabo, *Geography* 13.4.9.

³ Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities* 1.28.2 = *FGrH* 765 F16.

⁴ See Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *On Thucydides* 5 = *FGrH* 1 T17a, with W. K. Pritchett's pertinent observations, *Dionysius of Halicarnassus: On Thucydides* (Berkeley, 1975), pp. 53 n. 16 and 54 n. 20. For the type of inscriptional material in early Lydian which must have been available to Xanthus at Sardis see G. M. A. Hanfmann, *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research in Jerusalem and Baghdad*, CLXXIV (1964), pp. 50–1; G. Neumann, *Kadmos*, IV (1965), pp. 157–64. Xanthus, in particular, will very probably have had access to the king lists mentioned by Nicolas of Damascus: cf. *FGrH* 90 F44 §7 = J. G. Pedley, *Ancient Literary Sources on Sardis* (Cambridge, Mass., 1972), p. 14 §30. Similarly, however unfashionable it may now be to believe ancient writers will have had either the wish or the ability to make use of archival material, it would be wrong to doubt the accuracy of the tradition that Bardaišan of Edessa made use of temple archives at Ani (written no doubt in Aramaic) several centuries later than Xanthus. Cf. Movsēs Xorenac'i, *Patmut' iwn Hayoc'*, ed. L. Abelean and S. Yarut'iwnean (Tiflis, 1913), 2.48, 2.66 = R. W. Thompson, *Moses Khorenats'i: History of the Armenians* (Cambridge, Mass., 1978), pp. 189, 212–13; H. J. W. Drijvers, *Bardaišan of Edessa* (Assen, 1966), pp. 207–9.

⁵ s.v. *Ξάνθος Κανδαύλου* = *FGrH* 765 T1.

⁶ The ambiguous *γεγονώς*. See in general E. Rohde, *Kleine Schriften* (Tübingen, 1901), i, pp. 114–84; F. Jacoby, *Apollodors Chronik* (Berlin, 1902), pp. 197, 214; P. Kingsley, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, LIII (1990), pp. 259–61.

⁷ Jacoby, *op. cit.*, p. 193.

we will see, was writing a good hundred years later. Long ago Rohde explained the *Suda's* statement in a way which is very plausible. Ancient Greek biographers had considerable difficulty rustling up the basic facts on the writers whose lives they wanted to describe. So necessity became the mother of invention, and they started fabricating the lives of authors on the basis of notable incidents that they discovered in those authors' writings. According to the inimitable logic they devised, a historical description by Xanthus of the Persian capture of Sardis could easily lead to the assertion that he himself was living in Sardis at the time when the event he described occurred.⁸ And yet another explanation is also possible. An original report that Xanthus was born in Sardis at or around the time when the city was captured by the Ionians in 500 B.C. could well have been abridged, or otherwise misinterpreted, somewhere along the line due to a natural confusion between this and the earlier capture.⁹ As it happens, a birthdate for him at the very start of the fifth century would agree extremely well with the other evidence we have that has a bearing on Xanthus's age.

Dionysius of Halicarnassus, in the first century B.C., includes Xanthus among the historians who were living and writing "a little earlier than the Peloponnesian War [431–404 B.C.] and who survived down to Thucydides's lifetime".¹⁰ Thucydides was born in or shortly after 460, and Dionysius's statement would tend to indicate some time roughly in the fifties or forties as the period of Xanthus's authorship. Dionysius's comments on early Greek historians deserve our respect.¹¹

For guidance in dating Xanthus we can also go back much earlier than Dionysius of Halicarnassus. Already in the fourth century B.C., the historian Ephorus claimed specifically that Xanthus wrote before Herodotus and was used by Herodotus as a source for his *Histories*.¹² The accuracy of Ephorus's statement has been questioned, and it is often

⁸ Rohde, *op. cit.*, i, p. 164. On the general principle see M. Lefkowitz, *Lives of the Greek Poets* (London, 1981); J. Mansfeld, *Prolegomena* (Leiden, 1994), p. 180 with refs.

⁹ Needless to say, the rigid and formulaic systems of dating used by Greek historians made this kind of confusion the rule rather than the exception. It is possible that, in the case of Anaximenes, the *Suda's* explicit specification of which capture of Sardis he is dating the philosopher by was intended to avoid just such ambiguity (s.v. Ἀναξίμενης = DK 13 A2). See also the points, regarding the two captures of Sardis, raised by G. B. Kerferd in *Museum Helveticum*, XI (1954), p. 120.

¹⁰ ὀλίγωι πρεσβύτεροι τῶν Πελοποννησιακῶν καὶ μέχρι τῆς Θουκυδίδου παρεκτείναντες ἡλικίας: *On Thucydides* 5 = FG¹H 765 T4. To interpret this – with R. Drews, *The Greek Accounts of Eastern History* (Cambridge, Mass., 1973), p. 100 – as saying that Dionysius placed Xanthus "in the same generation with Thucydides" is, to say the least, misleading. For Dionysius's use of the expression παρεκτείνειν μέχρι τινός in the sense of surviving down to a certain point in time, compare *On Isaeus* 1. In *On Thuc.* 5, "down to Thucydides's ἡλικία" could strictly speaking mean "down to Thucydides's late teens or early twenties": see Richard Bentley's *Dissertation upon the Epistles of Phalaris* (London, 1699), pp. 54–7.

¹¹ See below, n. 19; and the further refs. in n. 42.

¹² Ἐφωρος ὁ συγγραφεὺς μνημονεύει αὐτοῦ (sc. Ξάνθου) ὡς παλαιότερου ὄντος καὶ Ἡροδότῳ τὰς ἀφορμὰς δεδωκότος (Athenaeus 515e = FG¹H 70 F180 = 765 T5). The word ἀφορμαί has come to mean many things to many interpreters of this sentence: "inspiration", "impulse", "incentive", "sources" or "model". For Drews (p. 102) it has come to mean that Herodotus started his history chronologically at the point where Xanthus terminated his. It seems to have escaped notice that we have all the evidence we could possibly need to determine precisely what Ephorus meant by the term. The word occurs twice in Dionysius of Halicarnassus's preface to his *Histories*, and his use of it shows without any doubt that it has acquired a semi-technical meaning: "sources of information" ("the ἀφορμαί which gave me familiarity with the subjects I will be writing about", 1.1; in 1.2–4, preparation of "the appropriate ἀφορμαί" is contrasted with the method used by "those who put together their narratives on the basis of whatever reports happen to come to their ears"). We find exactly the same use of the term in the preface to Diodorus Siculus's history (1.4.2–4). The inspiration for both Dionysius's and Diodorus's prefaces, as well as the ideas expressed in them, are traceable back to none other than Ephorus: R. Laqueur, *Hermes*, XLVI (1911), pp. 194–5; G. Barber, *The Historian Ephorus* (Cambridge, 1935), pp. 68–74. Can we say

suggested he simply made a mistake.¹³ That could be correct. But it is important to appreciate that, in part at least, such a negative attitude is a hangover from the prevailing attitude earlier in this century when to disparage Ephorus in every possible way was considered part and parcel of the glorification of Herodotus, the Father of History. The fact is that Ephorus was in a position to know a great deal more about events and people in the century before him than we do. Recent research has tended increasingly to vindicate Niebuhr's old estimation of him as a man with a special "talent for criticism and research".¹⁴ Even his fiercest critics have been forced to admit that he had access to particularly good sources for the history of the late fifth and early fourth centuries.¹⁵ Certainly he could lose his bearings in the troubled waters of Athenian political propaganda, but this is hardly relevant to his statement about Xanthus and Herodotus. What is relevant is the extraordinary importance to him of the works of his predecessor historians. They were his main sources of information; he used them exhaustively and knew them thoroughly; and to be able to make the best possible use of them he considered it essential to know their strengths and weaknesses, and critically assess their respective value as sources.¹⁶ In this case it is fairly certain that he came to his conclusion about the relation between Xanthus and Herodotus through a direct comparison of the full texts of both writers.¹⁷ Apart from the desire felt by scholars to exonerate Herodotus from dependence on Xanthus – a desire which is completely misplaced¹⁸ – the fact is that no genuine reason has ever been produced for doubting the accuracy of Ephorus's statement.¹⁹

where Ephorus took the word and its meaning from? Yes: from the school of Isocrates. See Thrasymachus, DK 85 A1 (ii, p. 319.10–12), with LSJ s.v. ἀφορμή. For Isocrates's influence on Ephorus cf. Barber, pp. 3–4, 75–83; G. Schepens in *Historia Antiqua: Commentationes Lovanienses in honorem W. Peremans septuagenarii editae* (Leuven, 1977), pp. 100–1.

¹³ e.g. Drews, pp. 102–3. Cf. also M. L. West, *Early Greek Philosophy and the Orient* (Oxford, 1971), pp. 32–3.

¹⁴ See Schepens, pp. 98–9, 102.

¹⁵ Barber, pp. 67, 116–17. See now Schepens, pp. 95–118; J. Mansfeld, *Mnemosyne*, 4th series, XXXIII (1980), p. 75 n. 298.

¹⁶ References in Schepens, pp. 103–6, 113; see also Jacoby, *FGrH* iiC, p. 88. As Barber (p. 123) has pointed out with regard to Ephorus's criticism of Hellanicus's accuracy, it demonstrates at the very least "a close reading of his material".

¹⁷ As pointed out above (n. 12), the particular expression that Ephorus uses – Xanthus "provided Herodotus with his sources" – derives directly from the rhetorical school of Isocrates. This excludes the possibility that he was simply repeating the statement of an earlier historian. The crispness of his expression strongly suggests that its origin lies in personal observation and a direct comparison. It is worth mentioning that Ephorus had no prejudice against Herodotus and no desire to undermine his authority. On the contrary, although he was not above correcting him occasionally on points of detail, he respected and favoured him (Schepens, p. 106; Drews, pp. 122, 203 n. 130).

¹⁸ As is natural, the issue tends to get blown up out of proportion. Ephorus's statement is taken to indicate Herodotus's use (and hence, by implication, plagiarism) of Xanthus *in general*; but Jacoby was very probably correct when he followed Müller in assigning the report to the eighth book of Ephorus's *Histories*, which dealt specifically with matters relating to Lydia and Persia (*FHG* i, p. 262; *FGrH* 70 F180–2 with iiC, p. 87). That would imply Ephorus was making a localized rather than a general comment. This at the same time makes sense of the presence of the definite article: 'Ἡροδότῳ τὰς ἀφορμὰς δεδωκότος, "providing Herodotus with the sources" that he used. Within a specific context, this assertion is perfectly plausible. Applied to Herodotus's *Histories* in their entirety, it is transparent nonsense – a fact which has wrongly been used as an argument that Ephorus's assertion must be worthless. D. Fehling has added further to the confusion with his sweeping dismissal of Xanthus as a source for a "great author" like Herodotus: *Herodotus and his "Sources"* (Leeds, 1989), p. 3 and n. 12. For Fehling's frequently extravagant generalizations about Herodotus's sources cf. also P. Kingsley, *Studia Iranica*, XXIII (1994), p. 193 n. 26.

¹⁹ The very little that can be gathered from comparing the surviving writings of Xanthus and Herodotus tends, if anything, to support rather than contradict Ephorus's statement about Herodotus's indebtedness: cf. L.

To have been in a position to exert any influence on Herodotus, Xanthus will have had to start putting his writing into circulation by – at the very latest – the early thirties. One other piece of purely circumstantial evidence points to the same conclusion: a statement to the effect that Euripides avoided following Xanthus in his plot for the *Andromache*.²⁰ The implication is that Xanthus wrote first; Euripides evidently composed the play “at the start of the Peloponnesian War”.²¹ Considered in isolation, this report could always be argued away; but in the complete absence of any indications to the contrary, the agreement with both Ephorus and Dionysius is impressive. Now it also appears, from a statement by Strabo, that Xanthus included in his work a description of an event which took place during the rule of Artaxerxes I (465–425 B.C.).²² Once again, the details harmonize without any conflict. We are unlikely to be far wrong in concluding that Xanthus probably did his writing some time either in the late fifties or in the forties of the fifth century B.C.²³

The work that Xanthus wrote was later given the name *Lydiaca* (“*On Lydia*”) and divided into four books.²⁴ At least, so it seems. The doubt stems from a comment in Athenaeus, which we have already looked at the final part of because of its reference to Ephorus:

The Lydians went so far in their indulgence that they were the first to sterilize women. So says Xanthus the Lydian – or whoever the real author is of the works ascribed to him. According to

Pearson, *The Early Ionian Historians* (Oxford, 1939), pp. 123–5, 132–4. When faced with the fact that the evidence is extremely inconclusive, we need to bear in mind Herodotus’s deliberate and systematic concealment of his sources (*ibid.*, pp. 13, 22–4). It is also important to appreciate the fact that in 5th- and 4th-century Athens Herodotus was the standard authority whereas Xanthus, it would seem, was only known and read by a select handful of specialists (*ibid.*, p. 9). This meant that, later on, whenever Xanthus was quoted it was almost invariably only on matters in which he supplemented Herodotus or gave a different account. (The relevance of this point to our assessment of Ephorus’s report is overlooked by H. Herter, *RE* ixA, col. 1373.) It is instructive to compare the case of Hellanicus. The evidence that Herodotus used him as a source is strong (Drews, pp. 28–9, 82), and this makes it likely that Dionysius of Halicarnassus knew exactly what he was saying when he asserted that Herodotus started off from Hellanicus’s account but attempted to improve on it (*ibid.*, pp. 23–4; Dion. Hal. *To Pompey* 3.7). However, what in practice drew the attention of learned Greeks most was precisely those points on which Hellanicus and Herodotus differed (e.g. Plutarch, *On the Malice of Herodotus* 859a–b; Schol. Aeschylus, *Persians* 719). The points where they agreed were simply not worth the mention.

²⁰ Schol. Euripides, *Andromache* 10 (ii, p. 249.7–9 Schwartz) = *FGRH* 765 F21.

²¹ Schol. Euripides, *Andromache* 445 (ii, pp. 284.17–285.3 Schwartz). So e.g. T. B. L. Webster, *The Tragedies of Euripides* (London, 1967), p. 118 (early twenties).

²² Strabo 1.3.4 = *FGRH* 765 F12.

²³ This agrees with the view that he produced his work around 450 B.C. (Herter, col. 1354). On the other hand, Jacoby (*FGRH* iiiC, p. 750.13) suggested that he wrote after 425. Evidently his reasons for doing so were the same as those that recently motivated Drews to argue to the same conclusion from the statement in Strabo just referred to: “Xanthus reports that during Artaxerxes’s reign a great drought occurred”. According to Drews, “this reference to the reign of Artaxerxes I (465–425) may indicate that Xanthus wrote after 425. Of course, Xanthus would hardly have used so imprecise a term to date the drought; but his terminology led Strabo (Eratosthenes) to assume that Xanthus wrote after Artaxerxes’ reign was over” (p. 193 n. 9). This argument is worthless. As Drews himself admits, the words “during Artaxerxes’s reign” are hardly likely to come specifically from Xanthus. Just one of the many possible explanations is that Strabo found in his immediate source – Eratosthenes – the statement “During Artaxerxes’s reign, as Xanthus reports, a great drought occurred”; Strabo then adapted the order of the words to his own convenience so that the specification of reign became a part of Xanthus’s own statement. The same mistake was made, before Jacoby, by E. Meyer, *Forschungen zur alten Geschichte* (Halle, 1892–9), i, p. 168, and M. Pohlenz, *Herodot* (Berlin, 1937), p. 192 n. 4. It is a question here of precisely the kind of gradual alterations and accretions that one should come to expect – not be surprised by. See further below, with n. 44.

²⁴ *Suda*, s.v. *Ξάνθος Κανθαίου*.

Artemon of Cassandrea in his work *On Bibliography*, their author is Dionysius Scytobrachion. Artemon is evidently ignorant of the fact that the historian Ephorus specifically states that Xanthus is older than Herodotus and provided him with his sources.²⁵

To the academic sleuths of the nineteenth century the attraction of this report, with its promise of unearthing a forgery, was irresistible.²⁶ It gave rise to an extraordinary proliferation of theories, all of which boiled down to either the assertion or the grave suspicion that a great deal of what has come down to us under the name of Xanthus is in fact a forgery by Dionysius Scytobrachion. As Jacoby summed the matter up: whatever explanation you settle for – that Scytobrachion passed off his own fictions under the name of Xanthus; that he rewrote Xanthus; that he brought out a new edition of Xanthus's writings – Artemon's verdict "can't just be rejected".²⁷

The trouble is that in setting out not to reject Artemon's verdict, scholars have ended up forgetting what his verdict actually was. According to Athenaeus (and Athenaeus is our only witness), he ascribed the authorship of Xanthus's works to Dionysius Scytobrachion. But that is impossible: writers were already using and referring to Xanthus before Scytobrachion was even born.²⁸ That Artemon could simply have been mistaken was evidently too disappointing, because in the nineteenth century the modified versions of his accusation started coming into being: that Xanthus's works did once exist but were either replaced, or rewritten, by Scytobrachion. And yet, as Pearson has well noted, if we accept any of these modified versions

the method of Athenaeus in criticizing Artemon – merely pointing to the mention of Xanthus by Ephorus – is foolish and pointless. If Artemon said that the work attributed to Xanthus in the Alexandrian library was a forgery, then no one would argue with him by saying that the genuine work once existed; if, on the other hand, he said that Scytobrachion had invented the name and the work of Xanthus, the retort of Athenaeus is understandable and refutes him completely.²⁹

In other words, it is precisely those who want to make something out of Athenaeus's report on Artemon who are forced to assume that Athenaeus got his facts very wrong.

If, on the other hand, we simply consider the evidence we have, everything falls easily into place. Dionysius Scytobrachion was an original writer. Diodorus Siculus has recorded a number of particularly outlandish mythological stories which he told.³⁰ The sources from which Scytobrachion claims that he "compiled" these stories – a work by Linus in "Pelagian characters" and a "Phrygian poem" by Thymoetes – are clearly fictitious.³¹ If

²⁵ Athenaeus 515d–e = *FGrH* 765 T5 = Pedley, §130.

²⁶ In the following I am in fundamental agreement with the conclusions already reached long ago by J. H. Lipsius, *Quaestiones logographicae* (Leipzig, 1886), pp. 12–15 and A. von Gutschmid, *Kleine Schriften* (Leipzig, 1889–93), iv, pp. 212, 308–15, and resumed by Herter (cols. 1355–6); but I trust I will clarify their position and make it more unassailable. For a full earlier bibliography on the question see Herter, *loc. cit.*, and C. Clemen, *Die griechischen und lateinischen Nachrichten über die persische Religion* (Giessen, 1920), p. 23. For an up-to-date discussion of Scytobrachion see J. S. Rusten, *Dionysius Scytobrachion* (Opladen, 1982).

²⁷ *FGrH* i, p. 510, where the various theories are summarized.

²⁸ Lipsius, *op. cit.*, p. 13; Herter, col. 1356. In view of Rusten's revision of Scytobrachion's dating (*op. cit.*, pp. 85–91), their main argument remains unaffected but needs some adjustment in details.

²⁹ *Early Ionian Historians*, p. 114.

³⁰ Diod. Sic. 3.52–74.

³¹ Diod. Sic. 3.66–7. For Linus-writings see M. L. West, *The Orphic Poems* (Oxford, 1983), pp. 56–67; on Phrygian writings, R. Reitzenstein, *Zwei religionsgeschichtliche Fragen* (Strasbourg, 1901), pp. 94–5 and J. G. Griffiths, *Plutarch's De Iside et Osiride* (Swansea, 1970), pp. 402–3.

Scytobrachion invented these “works” himself, which is highly likely, and if, as we can also assume, it was quite transparent that they were only fictions,³² we have here a very firm basis for Artemon’s assertion that the man was a forger – and, in this particular case, had forged the works of Xanthus. The “Phrygian” and “Pelagian” parallels lend plausibility to Athenaeus’s account and represent one further reason for accepting as accurate his report that, for Artemon, Xanthus’s work was an out-and-out fiction.

The obvious question is what could have induced Artemon to attribute – mistakenly – Xanthus’s work to Scytobrachion. The obvious answer is that somewhere, in writings of his which are no longer available,³³ Scytobrachion had mentioned Xanthus as the source for one of his stories and Artemon then made the mistake of placing this appeal to Xanthus on the same level as Scytobrachion’s appeals to Linus and Thymoetes. But we can also carry the matter a step further. Xanthus and Scytobrachion have a great deal in common. Both were specialists in anecdote – in telling the most extraordinary stories and myths which often dramatically diverged from the more traditional Greek accounts. Both had a great love for the sensational, the extravagant and the fantastic.³⁴ And the parallels go further than that. Both writers were strikingly uninhibited, and took great pleasure in going into details “which to orthodox Greek taste of the classical period would seem indecent and blasphemous”.³⁵ Xanthus tells with some relish the story of the gluttonous king who, half asleep in the middle of the night, started eating his wife limb by limb as she lay beside him and was rather upset when he woke in the morning to find one of her hands still in his mouth.³⁶ It is probably significant that, as we have seen, Athenaeus appends his mention of the claim by Artemon that the works of Xanthus are forgeries to Xanthus’s account of another Lydian speciality: the sterilization or “castration” of women. Now Artemon was living in the age of the great scholiasts.³⁷ For a long time indecency in classical writers had presented literary critics with a problem. To the two solutions that for centuries had done service – either ban the author or allegorize his writing – a third came to be added: if a passage is obscene it cannot be genuine but must be a later forgery. If a work is genuinely classical, it cannot contain anything “improper”.³⁸

We know nothing about Artemon’s skills: as Pearson points out, “one cannot judge a man’s critical ability merely by the titles of his books”.³⁹ Very probably we have a simple case here of an over-zealous critic, very much a man of his times, finding an easy and fashionable way of disposing of discomfiting evidence – evidence which would suggest that a classical writer could also be very crude – by putting the blame for Xanthus’s

³² Rusten, pp. 15, 106, and esp. 112.

³³ Rusten, p. 84.

³⁴ For Xanthus see Pearson, pp. 135–6. As he quaintly puts it, “Xanthus, though he wrote in Greek and for Greeks, was not totally hellenized in his tastes”.

³⁵ *ibid.*, p. 112. Cf. von Gutschmid’s remarks on both writers’ “crudity and sensuality”: *Kleine Schriften*, i, pp. 292–3.

³⁶ Athenaeus 415c–d = *FGrH* 765 F18 = Pedley, §28.

³⁷ He is generally considered a younger contemporary of Aristarchus (Pearson, p. 110).

³⁸ J. Labarbe, *L’Homère de Platon* (Liège, 1949), pp. 411–12. See e.g. Schol. *Iliad* 24.130–2 (v, p. 543.84–96 Erbse) and, on “impropriety” as general grounds for deletion, C. G. Cobet, *Miscellanea critica* (Leiden, 1876), pp. 225–39.

³⁹ Pearson, p. 110. In all fairness to Artemon, it must be said that he was living in an age when forgeries were increasingly flooding the market: they posed the question of genuineness very acutely and in a way that no critic could ignore. See Pearson, p. 9; J. S. Rusten, *American Journal of Philology*, CI (1980), p. 200.

excesses on a much more recent author. The advantage of this explanation is that it accounts for all the facts without our even having to suppose that Scytobrachion ever actually mentioned Xanthus – let alone forged works in his name.

The statement by Athenaeus provides, as we have seen, no support whatever for the theory of a pseudo-Xanthus. It was natural, though, once this theory had started gaining ground in the nineteenth century on the basis of Athenaeus's report, to try to find additional support for it in other details relating to Xanthus. It has, for example, been argued that the *Suda's* confused account of Xanthus's life and family reproduces an imaginary ancestry invented for him by Scytobrachion. This idea has been amply refuted.⁴⁰

As to the fragmentary remains of Xanthus's work itself, attention became focused on two reports by Clement of Alexandria. One of them concerns the date that Clement says Xanthus gave for the founding of Thasos: "in the 18th Olympiad" (708–705 B.C.).⁴¹ But in the fifth century B.C., when the genuine Xanthus would have lived, dating by Olympiads had not yet been invented: therefore, scholars have claimed, it must be a question of a later author writing under Xanthus's name. A closer look at the context shows how misguided this conclusion is. Alongside Xanthus's date for the founding of Thasos, Clement gives an alternative dating by Dionysius of Halicarnassus: twelve years later, in the 15th Olympiad. This Dionysius knew Xanthus's writings well,⁴² and the ultimate source for Clement here is almost certainly Dionysius's own reference, in his work on chronology,⁴³ to Xanthus's divergent dating. If the date given by Xanthus had not already been translated into Olympiads by the time it reached Dionysius of Halicarnassus, then Dionysius will certainly have translated it himself.⁴⁴

An apparently more serious problem is posed by Clement's other reference to Xanthus. In it, he claims that according to Xanthus

the Magi make love to their own mothers, and to their daughters and their sisters (so goes their custom); and the women belong to everyone in common, so that when a man wants to take another man's wife as his own he does so without using force or secrecy but with mutual consent and approval.⁴⁵

There is no doubt that the Magi – best defined as hereditary priests from western Iran – practised incest as a religious duty.⁴⁶ That is not the problem; where the problem lies is

⁴⁰ Herter, col. 1354. On Kandaules as the name of Xanthus's father, see also J. Fraser's observations in *Anatolian Studies Presented to Sir William Mitchell Ramsay* (Manchester, 1923), p. 139.

⁴¹ *FGrH* 765 F30 = Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 1.21.131 (ii, p. 81.18–20 Stählin).

⁴² *FGrH* 765 T4, 8, F16. That the Dionysius whom Clement refers to here is Dionysius of Halicarnassus is clear from *Strom.* 1.21.102 (ii, p. 65.14 Stählin).

⁴³ Clement, *Strom.* 1.21.102 (ii, p. 65.14 Stählin).

⁴⁴ This was already seen quite clearly by Müller, *FHG* iv, p. 396. Translation of earlier methods of dating into later systems, and particularly into the Olympiad system, was of course a routine phenomenon in antiquity: cf. e.g. J. Mansfeld, *Mnemosyne*, 4th series, XXXII (1979), p. 46 with refs. Why, on the other hand, anyone should have wanted to forge a date for the founding of Thasos which was so close to Dionysius's is a question that seems never to have been asked.

⁴⁵ *Strom.* 3.2.11.1 (ii, p. 200.20–4 Stählin) = *FGrH* 765 F31.

⁴⁶ See J. Bidez and F. Cumont, *Les mages hellénisés* (Paris, 1938), i, pp. 78–80; A. Christensen, *L'Iran sous les Sassanides* (2nd edition, Copenhagen, 1944), pp. 322–5; Kerscheneister, p. 178 n. 2; R. C. Zaehner, *Zurvan*

in the following statement about wife-swapping. “Anti-Persian and staunch nationalist though Xanthus may have been,” as Pearson has presented the matter, “it is hardly credible that he should have written this seriously; such nonsense corresponds more to Scytobrachion’s sense of humour.”⁴⁷ Or, as Nock was to put it: “the quotation is at best a genuine text which reached Clement in a garbled form. Such treatment of the words of Xanthus has been ascribed to Dionysius Scytobrachion...”⁴⁸

To defend the statement about free love as genuinely deriving from Xanthus has not proved easy. Herter feebly suggested there is no problem at all because Xanthus is simply describing divorce.⁴⁹ In fact, however, the statement has nothing to do with divorce. On the other hand, what it does have to do with becomes self-evident as soon as we start to compare the vast classical literature on wife-swapping and free sex. For early Greek historians it was routine to ascribe these somewhat alluring activities to as many foreign peoples as possible; often the further detail would be added that these people did what they did in full view of everyone else, “just like the beasts in the field”.⁵⁰

Theoretically there would seem nothing implausible in attributing such a commonplace theme to Xanthus himself. But that would be a mistake. Pearson and Nock were at least partly correct, in that they drew a clear dividing line between the specific statement about incest and the general reference to free love. The two statements exist on two different levels; if the first is by Xanthus, there is every reason to believe that the second, generalizing statement was added by someone else. We do not have to look very far for the person responsible.

Clement of Alexandria was a master in the art of creative quotation. He lived at a time when Christian doctrine was in the shaping, and true Christianity was still something to be fought for. In the battle against the Gnostics, no holds were barred and it was the end that justified the means. As a writer, Clement would twist and abuse quotations to make them fit his point. Not even the holy scripture was sacred. As Buri has observed in relation to his treatment of the Pauline letters:

(Oxford, 1955), pp. 151–8; M. Boyce, *A History of Zoroastrianism* (Leiden, 1975–), i, p. 254 with n. 24, ii, pp. 75–7, 184 and (with F. Grenet) iii, pp. 8, 256, 277–8, 437; R. Beck, *ibid.*, pp. 520–1 with n. 72. To the listing of classical authors provided by Bidez and Cumont add *Dissoi logoi* 2.15 (Diels and Kranz, ii, p. 408.22–4) and Euripides, *Andromache* 173–4; the Antisthenes passage is now fr. 29A in F. Deceva Caizzi’s *Antisthenis fragmenta* (Milan, 1966). For the modern literature on attempts at defining the nature of the Magi see Boyce, *History*, ii, pp. 19–21, 84–8, and the refs. in M. Papatheophanes, *Iranica Antiqua*, XX (1985), pp. 101–61.

⁴⁷ Pearson, pp. 117–18. That Xanthus was anti-Persian and a staunch nationalist is of course only an assumption. To assume that all Lydians were anti-Persian would be like assuming that all Greeks were anti-Persian – which they were not. It is also wise to bear in mind that the Magi themselves need not all have been pro-Persian (West, pp. 240–1). And to preserve our sense of perspective, it is worth remembering that while Xanthus’s name is Greek, the Magi in Lydia also took Greek names: J. R. Russell, *Zoroastrianism in Armenia* (Cambridge, Mass., 1987), p. 13; Boyce and Grenet, pp. 224, 232–3. His interest in them could have been complex.

⁴⁸ A. D. Nock, *Essays on Religion and the Ancient World* (Oxford, 1972), ii, p. 688.

⁴⁹ Herter, col. 1372.

⁵⁰ So especially Herodotus (1.203, 1.216, 3.101, 4.104, 4.172, 4.180), Ephorus (*FGrH* 70 F42), Theopompus (*FGrH* 115 F204). Of course this is an obvious case of what, in psychological terms, would be called a collective projection: unconsciously ascribing to others what one would like to do but is not allowed to. The idealistic aspect of this naturalist’s dream accounts for its reappearance in Plato’s *Republic* (457c–d *et seq.*); see J. Adam’s commentary, *The Republic of Plato* (Cambridge, 1902), i, pp. 292, 308.

Just like the Gnostics, he would rip words out of their original context and give them a completely different meaning from the sense they naturally had in St Paul's sequence of ideas. He, just as much as the heretics, was guilty of fabricating his own additions and falsifications.⁵¹

The relevance of these general points to the question in hand becomes apparent as soon as we turn to the particular context in which Clement cites Xanthus's statement about incest. The reference occurs in a chapter devoted to an attack on free love as practised by some of the Gnostics. The very first sentence of the chapter defines what is to become its guiding theme: "They maintain that women belong to everyone in common" (*κοινὰς εἶναι τὰς γυναῖκας ἀξιοῦσιν*).⁵² These are in fact exactly the same as the words that, in his quotation from Xanthus, Clement uses to make the transition from incest to the theme of free love: "the women belong to everyone in common" (*κοινὰς τε εἶναι τὰς γυναῖκας*). And the identical words occur yet again – just before Clement comes to Xanthus – when he claims that the Gnostics obviously drew their inspiration from Plato's *Republic* which declares that "the women belong to everyone in common".⁵³ Clement was looking around for precedents and parallels to explain the behaviour of the Gnostics. When he came to Xanthus, as he wrote he may not even have distinguished consciously between incest and promiscuity. But if he was aware of the distinction, he was quite prepared to make the jump from the one to the other – as other writers in subsequent centuries were also quick to do.⁵⁴ Every phrase and detail in his account of free love as practised among the Magi bears the mark of Clement's own hand.⁵⁵ It is not that the quotation reached him in garbled form, as Nock and others have supposed. It was Clement himself who garbled it, as is quite clear when one reads the passage in its context.

There is little else to be said on the subject of a pseudo-Xanthus, but two final points deserve mention. For a long time it has been known that the historian Nicolas of Damascus derived some of his material from Xanthus. Von Fritz recently argued at great length that, because some of Nicolas's stories contain details which clearly come from somewhere else, the Xanthus whom he was using was a Xanthus who had been tampered with.⁵⁶ But he

⁵¹ F. Buri, *Clemens Alexandrinus und der paulinische Freiheitsbegriff* (Zürich, 1939), p. 109. See also Morton Smith, *Clement of Alexandria and a Secret Gospel of Mark* (Cambridge, Mass., 1973), pp. 53–4 (on Clement's "ambiguous attitude towards truth"), 58 (on his "willingness to alter quotations to suit his purposes"), and 89 ("all parties among the early Christians revised the text of their Scriptures to meet their doctrinal needs – omitting embarrassing details and inserting" what they thought desirable); and for the same practice among other Christian writers influenced by Clement, P. Canivet, *Théodoret de Cyr, Thérapeutique des maladies helléniques* (Paris, 1958), i, p. 57 and n. 2. For an example of the opposite phenomenon in quoting from a pagan author – Clement breaking off the quotation in mid-sentence because the remainder would contradict his point – see G. Zuntz, *Persephone* (Oxford, 1971), pp. 230–1. ⁵² *Strom.* 3.2 *ad init.* (ii, p. 197.16 Stählin).

⁵³ *Strom.* 3.2.10 (ii, p. 200.16–20 Stählin). Plato's *Republic*, of course, is where the expression comes from: "it is the greatest good for women to belong to everyone in common", *μέγιστον ἀγαθὸν κοινὰς τὰς γυναῖκας εἶναι* (457c–d).

⁵⁴ Cf. e.g. Christensen, *op. cit.* (above, n. 46), p. 325 (Hiuen Tsiang); J. R. Russell, *Journal of the Society for Armenian Studies*, V (1991), pp. 157–72, esp. 160–1.

⁵⁵ Compare especially the language in *Strom.* 3.2.10 (*μίγνυσθαι ὅπως ἐθέλοιεν αἷς βούλουτο ... παρ' ὧν ἂν ἐβελήσωσι γυναικῶν ... οὐ γὰρ θέμις, κτλ*). With Clement's *συναυνοῦντων ἀμφοτέρων* and *ὁ ἕτερος τὴν τοῦ ἑτέρου* compare also *Excerpta ex Theodoto* 43.2 (iii, p. 120.10–11 Stählin), *Strom.* 7.2.9 (iii, p. 8.16).

⁵⁶ K. von Fritz, *Die griechische Geschichtsschreibung* (Berlin, 1967), i.2, pp. 348–77. He is followed among others by Drews (pp. 101–2).

has overlooked one fundamental fact: not once does Nicolas so much as mention Xanthus's name. Already when Xanthus was still alive, many different accounts and explanations of events were in circulation.⁵⁷ We know that Nicolas, writing about the time of Christ, used plenty of other historians in addition to Xanthus.⁵⁸ It is only to be expected that over a period of half a millennium stories and legends should be rewritten, expanded, embroidered. Von Fritz has shown what nobody nowadays is likely to question: that Nicolas did not follow Xanthus exclusively and letter by letter. There is a very great difference between the existence of works that owe some of their original inspiration to Xanthus, and the existence of works being passed off falsely under Xanthus's name. The genuineness of the fragments of information ascribed to Xanthus of Lydia by ancient writers remains unassailed.

The second point, like the first, is most easily dealt with by starting from the influential position adopted by von Fritz. The point concerns a famous reference to Xanthus by Diogenes Laertius: a reference to the effect that, according to Xanthus, Zoroaster lived six thousand years before Xerxes crossed the Hellespont during his assault on the Greeks – that is, six thousand years before 480 B.C.⁵⁹ Following the lead of earlier scholars von Fritz felt able to write, in 1967, that this piece of evidence about Xanthus's dating of Zoroaster must be false because it radically contradicted “the now generally accepted dating” of Zoroaster to around 570; like others before him, he found it inconceivable that Xanthus – supposedly writing in the fifth century B.C. – could have backdated by several millennia someone who had lived just a century earlier. As a result he saw in Diogenes Laertius's testimony one further demonstration that the views attributed to Xanthus in antiquity must be the work of a later, pseudo-Xanthus.⁶⁰ But, since von Fritz was writing, times have changed. The then-popular dating of Zoroaster to around 570 B.C. has been shown to be historically worthless; the sequence of causes that led to its adoption in the first place has been clarified; and convincing reasons have been presented for dating him back to at least the second millennium B.C.⁶¹ What is more, the earliest Greek evidence has as a matter of fact always been a major obstacle to accepting that Zoroaster could have lived in the sixth century B.C. Herodotus's total silence about him is extremely difficult to understand or explain on the assumption that he was such a recent, as well as powerful, figure.⁶² And as far as Xanthus is concerned, Moulton was able to emphasize – at a time when the most widely accepted date for Zoroaster was still the sixth century – that “if Xanthus really is genuine” then “we have a strong argument” for overthrowing that dating.⁶³ Strong

⁵⁷ This is clear from Herodotus 1.95.1.

⁵⁸ von Gutschmid, iv, p. 311; Jacoby, *FGrH* iiC, p. 234; and von Fritz himself, i.2, p. 359. It is generally assumed nowadays that Nicolas's story of Croesus and the “oracles of Zoroaster” has nothing to do with Xanthus but is based, if anything, on Herodotus (*FGrH* 90 F68; Pearson, p. 130, Bidez and Cumont, i, pp. 98–9 and ii, p. 82); and yet, interestingly, nowhere does one find any doubts about a pseudo-Herodotus.

⁵⁹ Diogenes Laertius 1.2 = *FGrH* 765 F32.

⁶⁰ von Fritz, i.2, p. 376.

⁶¹ Kingsley, “Greek origin”, pp. 245–65, with the further refs. in n. 4; Boyce and Grenet, pp. 368–70, 439–40; Boyce, *Zoroastrianism: Its Antiquity and Constant Vigour* (Costa Mesa, 1992), pp. 20–1 and *passim*; N. Cohn, *Cosmos, Chaos and the World to Come* (New Haven, 1993), p. 77.

⁶² Nock, ii, p. 684. The point is well restated by G. Gnoli, *De Zoroastre à Mani* (Paris, 1985), p. 41.

⁶³ J. H. Moulton, *Early Zoroastrianism* (London, 1913), p. 429. See also Clemen, pp. 27–8.

arguments are no longer needed, however: Xanthus's dating of Zoroaster falls effortlessly into the pattern of both Iranian and early Greek evidence. With regard to his six thousand years instead of one,⁶⁴ these are no problem at all. Historical dating was very far from an exact science among either Greeks or Iranians of the fifth century B.C.,⁶⁵ and there were no real grounds for distinguishing between one or several thousand years. As to the exact amount of six thousand years, Bidez and Cumont were doing little more than stating the obvious in saying that "this enormous figure is no longer historical but mythical".⁶⁶ But that is a matter we will soon come back to.

When he refers to Xanthus for the fact that the Magi practised incest, Clement of Alexandria adds that Xanthus dealt with this particular topic in a work of his called *Magica*: a title best translated into English as *On the Magi*.⁶⁷

Well over a century ago it was suggested that this supposed work by Xanthus on the Magi was not a composition in its own right but just a section of his major work *Lydiaca* (*On Lydia*).⁶⁸ And yet the opposite view has also been argued, that here we have the first example in Greek literature of what later was to become a recognised genre: independent works in their own right, entitled *On the Magi* and devoted more or less specifically to the subject indicated by the title.⁶⁹

There is no need to look far to see the weaknesses of this second view. The habit, which we now take for granted, of giving a written work a formal title had not yet been firmly established by Xanthus's time. As to the specific titles *Lydiaca* and *Magica*, it is highly unlikely that either of them goes back to Xanthus.⁷⁰ On the other hand both of them, with

⁶⁴ The alternative MS reading *ἑξακόσια*, "600 (years)", is to be rejected not just on the grounds of manuscript authority but, above all, on the grounds of sense: cf. Bidez and Cumont, ii, p. 8 n. 4, Nock, ii, p. 688 ("the context is fatal to it"). Yet another, and equally decisive, reason for accepting the reading "6,000" is the fact that the datings of Zoroaster circulated in the early Platonic Academy during the mid-4th century B.C. – 6,000 years before the death of Plato, according to Eudoxus and Aristotle; 5,000 before the Trojan War, according to Hermodorus (Pliny, *Hist. nat.* 30.2.3 = Eudoxus, fr. 342 Lasserre = Aristotle, *Περὶ φιλοσοφίας*, fr. 6 Untersteiner; Diogenes Laertius 1.2 = Hermodorus, fr. 6 Isnardi Parente) – are plainly secondary derivatives from Xanthus's dating. Cf. e.g. F. Gisinger, *Die Erdbeschreibung des Eudoxos von Knidos* (Leipzig, 1921), p. 22 n. 1; Nock, i, p. 195; Kerschsteiner, p. 194 n. 4. W. Jaeger made the influential, and often-repeated, claim that the dating of Zoroaster to 6,000 years before Plato's death cannot go back to Eudoxus because Eudoxus died "long before" Plato: Aristotle (2nd edition, Oxford, 1948), p. 136. The claim is groundless, and Jaeger himself later accepted a dating of Eudoxus's death after Plato's. Cf. F. Lasserre, *Die Fragmente des Eudoxos von Knidos* (Berlin, 1966), pp. 137–9, 254–5; G. de Santillana, *Reflections on Men and Ideas* (Cambridge, Mass., 1968), pp. 219–30; and for Jaeger's retraction of his published views, *ibid.*, p. 230. It is certainly significant that Eudoxus knew his Xanthus thoroughly, and made repeated use of his writings in other respects as well (Gisinger, *op. cit.*, pp. 22 and n. 1, 34–5, 62–3, 132; Herter, cols. 1356, 1372).

In *Studia grammatica Iranica: Festschrift für Helmut Humbach* (Munich, 1986), pp. 97–8, I. Gershevitch emended both the reading "6,000" and the variant "600" to "60" so as to find support in Xanthus for a 6th-century dating of Zoroaster. This is a classic example of emending texts to make them mirror one's preconceptions; otherwise, the less said about it the better.

⁶⁵ Kingsley, "Greek origin", pp. 256–64. For the process that led to Zoroaster being viewed by certain Greeks as an older contemporary of Pythagoras – and which gave rise in the first place to the modern idea of dating Zoroaster to the 6th century B.C. – cf. *ibid.*, pp. 261–4.

⁶⁶ Bidez and Cumont, i, p. 7.

⁶⁷ *Srom.* 3.2.11.1 (ii, p. 200.20–1 Stählin) = *FGrH* 765 F31.

⁶⁸ von Gutschmid, iv, p. 315, followed e.g. by Clemen, p. 23, Nock, ii, p. 689.

⁶⁹ F. Cumont, *Textes et monuments figurés relatifs aux mystères de Mithra* (Brussels, 1896–9), i, p. 22.

⁷⁰ So von Gutschmid, iv, p. 308; Herter, col. 1355.

their neuter-plural structure, bear the signs of that formal categorization of works according to subject matter which was to begin with Aristotle a century later.⁷¹ We also need to appreciate that ancient writers tended to treat book titles in a very relaxed manner; the names they cited were more in the nature of convenient reference tags, describing the subject discussed, than strict titles as we understand them. In practice, this casual attitude to what we think of as titles meant it was not unusual for one and the same work to be referred to at different times by more than one name.⁷²

There is one aspect of this categorizing process which is especially relevant here. The classification of works according to subject matter did not stop at providing them with convenient name tags. It also led to the practice of subdividing works according to the various subjects addressed, and giving a separate title to each section.⁷³ So for instance a major historical work by the fourth-century writer Theopompus was known as *Philippica*, but this did not prevent a small but sizeable chunk of it from becoming known by a different name: *Thaumasias*, or “*On Amazing Things*”.⁷⁴ All in all the most likely conclusion is that Xanthus’s *Magica* was, similarly, just a part of his major work known as *Lydiaca*.

There would seem, however, to be one obstacle in the way of accepting this conclusion. It has been claimed that, whereas the Magi only became of any significance to Lydia after its conquest by Persia in 546 B.C., Xanthus’s history dealt entirely with events prior to the Persian conquest: as a result, his discussion of the Magi could not possibly have formed part of his history of Lydia.⁷⁵ The first of these claims is undoubtedly correct, but the second is certainly not: it is directly refuted by Xanthus’s account of the great drought that struck Lydia some time after 465.⁷⁶ The idea that Xanthus’s main work only included references to events prior to the Persian conquest is one that, along with other equally strange assumptions,⁷⁷ is best forgotten.

Von Gutschmid already suggested that Xanthus’s discussion of the Magi occurred in the fourth, and final, book of *On Lydia*.⁷⁸ This is a reasonable theory and a plausible one. Yet we should not exclude the alternative possibility: that his account of the Magi was a digression which occurred at some unknown point in his history. That would make it an excursus on similar lines to Theopompus’s *Thaumasias* – itself a substantial digression on the

⁷¹ Cf. C. Osborne’s comments, *Classical Quarterly*, XXXVII (1987), p. 26, on the role played by the Aristotelian school in this respect; and below, nn. 72, 74.

⁷² Osborne, *op. cit.*, p. 27. One instructive example among many is the way that Aristotle, in discussing lost works of Empedocles, evidently called one of them *Persica* (“*On Persia*”, or “*On the Persian Wars*”: Drews, pp. 31–2) even though earlier in the same sentence he had just referred to it by the more specific title *Xerxes’s Crossing* (Arist. fr. 17 Gigon = Diogenes Laertius 8.57).

⁷³ Cf. e.g. J. Burnet, *Early Greek Philosophy* (4th edition, London, 1930), pp. 131–2; West, p. 112.

⁷⁴ For the title *Thaumasias* see Jacoby’s comments, *FGrH* iiD, p. 365. Of course this tendency to subdivision has a precedent in the earlier practice, which we know goes back at least to the 5th century (Herodotus 2.116), of giving separate titles to portions of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. But the specific, vivid and graphic quality of these earlier titles sets them apart from the more formal, abstract, neuter-plural forms that characterize the 4th-century creations.

⁷⁵ M. Büdinger, *Die Universalhistorie* (Vienna, 1895), p. 15; Cumont, *op. cit.* (above, n. 69), i, p. 22 and n. 2.

⁷⁶ Strabo 1.3.4 = *FGrH* 765 F12; above, n. 23.

⁷⁷ Such as that Charon stopped his history at 492 B.C., or that Dionysius of Miletus stopped his with the death of Darius: see Drews, pp. 27, 156 n. 31.

⁷⁸ iv, p. 315.

subject of Zoroaster and other religious priests and prophets.⁷⁹ But, whatever the case, we must be prepared to admit that Xanthus gave space in his major historical work to contemporary events and people. This may to us seem surprising. First, however, in principle it agrees exactly with what modern research into early Greek historians – and their refusal to distinguish between ancient and contemporary history – has led us to expect.⁸⁰ And second Giuseppe Messina was being refreshingly realistic when he emphasized that, “in providing information about the Magi, Xanthus was in fact writing part of the history of his own land”.⁸¹ The bare facts of the matter are that Xanthus lived in a country which, since the Persian conquest, had lost much of its sense of national identity and historical continuity. It is hard to believe that as a historian – and, what is more, as someone with a particularly keen interest in historical points of contact between Lydia and the East⁸² – he would not have been fascinated by the claims put forward on behalf of the country’s new rulers by priests who, in spite of their wanderings and unsettled past, prided themselves as representatives of an unbroken spiritual tradition. Enough evidence still survives to show how natural and easy it was for Xanthus to develop the same themes in writing about the Magi which he embodied in the rest of his history of Lydia.⁸³

We have one other surviving reference by Xanthus to contemporary issues. In his section on the life of Empedocles, Diogenes Laertius writes:

Aristotle says he was a free and independent man who had nothing to do with official positions of any kind, if indeed it is true that he turned down the kingship which had been offered to him, as Xanthus reports in what he has to say about him; obviously his love for the simple life was greater.⁸⁴

From the late nineteenth century until quite recently, scholars were at a loss how to explain this passage; usually they concluded that Xanthus of Lydia “could not” possibly have ever said such things about Empedocles.⁸⁵ No real justification for this verdict was given – apart from the tacit willingness to assume that every statement attributed to Xanthus in

⁷⁹ On the digression in Theopompus see A. Momigliano’s comments, *The Development of Greek Biography* (Cambridge, Mass., 1971 and 1993), pp. 56, 63; for the surviving fragments, *FGrH* 115 F64–76 with Jacoby, *FGrH* iiD, p. 365.

⁸⁰ Momigliano, *op. cit.*, pp. 28–42, 47–64, 101–4; Drews, p. 115.

⁸¹ *Der Ursprung der Magier und die zarathuëtrische Religion* (Rome, 1930), pp. 36–7.

⁸² Pearson, p. 137; and see the next note.

⁸³ So for example his reference to the Magian practice of incest (*FGrH* 765 F31) harmonizes well with his interest in sexual habits among the earlier ruling classes of Lydia (F4). Again, a passage in the first book of *On Lydia* about the magical use of herbs for bringing back to life a person believed to be dead – F3 = Pedley, §18; for the oriental origin of the story see G. M. A. Hanfmann, *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, LXIII (1958), pp. 68–70 – is highly reminiscent of the type of herbal magic, specifically aimed at bringing back to life people believed to be dead, which was practised by at least some of those Magi in western Anatolia with whom Xanthus is most likely to have come into contact (cf. the context of Pliny’s reference to Xanthus, *Hist. nat.* 25.5.13–14; Bidez and Cumont, i, pp. 188–98; Beck in Boyce and Grenet, pp. 533–4, 561).

⁸⁴ Diogenes Laertius 8.63 = Arist. fr. 865 Gigon = Xanthus, *FGrH* 765 F33.

⁸⁵ von Gutschmid, iv, pp. 309–10; J. Bidez, *La biographie d’Empédocle* (Ghent, 1894), 57; U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, *Kleine Schriften* (Berlin, 1935–72), i, p. 510 n. 1; Pearson, p. 119; Nock, ii, p. 689. Bidez appears later to have changed his mind (Bidez and Cumont, i, pp. 238–40).

antiquity must be the work of that phantom forger Dionysius Scytobrachion, and apart from the apparent strangeness of the Sicilian Empedocles being discussed in a history of Lydia. But, for a whole series of reasons, this scepticism about the report can no longer be maintained. To begin with, as we have seen, appeals to Dionysius Scytobrachion or a “pseudo-Xanthus” are completely without foundation; there is not the slightest evidence to justify supposing that reports attributed to Xanthus in antiquity do not, in fact, derive from him. Second, there is no other Xanthus to whom Diogenes Laertius’s report could plausibly be attributed; on the contrary, he is no doubt the same as the Xanthus cited by Diogenes in the introduction to his work because of his dating of Zoroaster six thousand years before Xerxes’s crossing of the Hellespont.⁸⁶ Third, and more positively, from Diogenes’s passage about Empedocles rejecting the kingship we are clearly meant to understand that Aristotle – in his own discussion of Empedocles – appealed on this particular point to the authority of Xanthus. Scholars who have been willing, as well as those who have been unwilling, to attribute this detail about the kingship to Xanthus of Lydia have balked alike at accepting the straightforward conclusion that Aristotle knew and referred to Xanthus’s writings.⁸⁷ But the crucial point they have missed is that, as we know from elsewhere, Aristotle was indeed familiar with ideas that we find in Xanthus – either as a result of direct acquaintance with his writings, or through the intermediary of colleagues of his in the early Platonic Academy, or both.⁸⁸

This, too, is not all. Momigliano has provided an important clue to the background of Xanthus’s report about Empedocles by pointing to the Asiatic – and more specifically Persian – origins of Greek biographical writing in the fifth century B.C. As Momigliano saw, the fragmentary evidence linking Xanthus’s name with Empedocles is itself a vital piece of information in helping to reconstruct this neglected aspect of early Greek literature; and there is nothing in the least to be surprised at that the first surviving reference to Empedocles should come from someone who was almost an exact contemporary of his – living in Asia Minor.⁸⁹ Finally there are the results of the work done more recently by Grottanelli, who although approaching the evidence from a different angle has arrived at much the same conclusion. The figure of Empedocles remains very much of a riddle when viewed in a purely Greek framework; but Grottanelli has shown that Xanthus’s report about him rejecting the kingship needs – like other details in the ancient lives of Empedocles, not to mention aspects of Empedocles’s own teaching – to be approached and understood in a much broader context: the context provided by the typology of the “divine man”, prophet, healer and saviour which was so widespread throughout the eastern Mediterranean and Near East during the mid-first millennium B.C.⁹⁰ Grottanelli is by no means the first, or the last, to emphasize the oriental background

⁸⁶ Diog. Laert. 1.2 = *FGrH* 765 F32.

⁸⁷ “I am much less certain that Aristotle quoted Xanthus and therefore vouches for the authenticity of the quotation” (Momigliano, p. 31). Wilamowitz (*loc. cit.*) dismissed the obvious implication that Aristotle referred to Xanthus as due simply to “confusion” on the part of Diogenes. ⁸⁸ See above, n. 64.

⁸⁹ Momigliano, pp. 28–38. On the dating of Empedocles see M. R. Wright, *Empedocles: The Extant Fragments* (New Haven, 1981), pp. 3–5; G. S. Kirk, J. E. Raven and M. Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers* (2nd edition, Cambridge, 1983), pp. 280–1.

⁹⁰ C. Grottanelli in *La soteriologia dei culti orientali nell’impero romano*, ed. U. Bianchi and M. J. Vermaseren (Leiden, 1982), pp. 649–70, esp. 660–2.

to the type of seer, mystic and magician that we find in the case of Empedocles.⁹¹ What this means is that in many respects Empedocles had, from the very beginning, more in common with the Asiatic world than with mainland Greece: a point which cannot be done full justice by approaching him solely, or even primarily, as a “Presocratic philosopher”.

Considered together, the effect of these points is cumulative and conclusive: we have here a genuine reference by a genuine Xanthus to Empedocles. But the underlying question still remains as to why Xanthus, living in Lydia, should have concerned himself with the Sicilian Empedocles. The most plausible answer to this question is that Xanthus dealt with Empedocles in his *Magica* – his treatment of that to him contemporary phenomenon, the Magi. There are several factors here that need taking into account. To begin with, it is not just a matter of talking of a broadly Near Eastern or eastern-Mediterranean background to the figure of Empedocles: we must also be more specific. There are in fact aspects of his teaching – and especially of his involvement in magic – which are only explicable in terms of Near Eastern influences that can be traced back stage by stage from Empedocles in Sicilian Acragas, via his Rhodian and Cretan ancestors, to Asiatic origins.⁹² What is more, certain striking features of the historical Empedocles have closer parallels with Iranian Magi than with any other group of people known to us from antiquity: for example his self-acclaimed ability to journey to and return from the underworld at will.⁹³ This parallel also serves to emphasize that the historical connection between the Iranian Magi and the practice of “magic” (which some scholars have attempted to deny) was a real one, and a very meaningful one for the Greeks.⁹⁴ As for Empedocles, the tendency in this century has been to dismiss those writers – such as Pliny and Philostratus – who see in him a disciple of the Magi⁹⁵ as gullible victims of the late-Hellenistic delusion that early Greek philosophy could be traced back to oriental origins. However, closer examination shows that Hellenistic writers who followed this trend were as a rule guilty not so much of fabricating connections between Greek philosophers and the East as of over-simplifying them.⁹⁶ In this particular case there can be little doubt that genuine connections between Empedocles and Magian tradition – however indirect – did exist. And what is more, as we will see, Pliny and Philostratus were by no means the first writers to establish a link between him and the Magi.

Then there is the question of Sicily. The ultimately Asiatic origins, and affinities, of many of the island’s Greek colonizers were by no means the only threads linking it with the East. Indications still survive of interaction between Sicily and Persia in the early fifth century B.C.⁹⁷ As for Sicily’s refusal to give help to Athens during the Persian Wars, one

⁹¹ Cf. e.g. E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley, 1951), pp. 140–7; M. L. West, *The Orphic Poems* (Oxford, 1983), pp. 146–9; W. Burkert in *The Greek Renaissance of the Eighth Century B.C.: Tradition and Innovation*, ed. R. Hägg (Stockholm, 1983), pp. 115–19; P. Kingsley, *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery and Magic: Empedocles and Pythagorean Tradition* (Oxford, 1995), ch. 15.

⁹² *ibid.*, chs. 15, 19.

⁹³ P. Kingsley, *Studia Iranica*, XXIII (1994), pp. 187–98; *Ancient Philosophy*, ch. 15 with n. 33.

⁹⁴ Kingsley, *Studia Iranica*, XXIII (1994), pp. 191–4.

⁹⁵ Pliny, *Hist. nat.* 30.2.8–9 (Bidez and Cumont, ii, p. 10); Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius* 1.2; and cf. Apuleius, *Apology* 27 (Bidez and Cumont, ii, p. 268).

⁹⁶ See Kingsley, “Greek origin”, pp. 247 and n. 11, 255–6 with n. 66; *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, LVI (1993), pp. 1–24; *ibid.*, LVII (1994), pp. 1–5.

⁹⁷ E. A. Freeman, *History of Sicily* (Oxford, 1891–4), ii, pp. 114, 167.

is bound to suspect that it was motivated by more complex and deeper reasons than the explicit excuses and rationalizations provided by certain sources after the event.⁹⁸ And again, during the Peloponnesian War at the end of the fifth century – when Empedocles was either dead or very old – Syracuse had no hesitation about siding with Persia to do everything possible to exterminate what they considered the greatest threat to their continued, civilized existence: the Athenians.⁹⁹ Even more significantly, we find Pythagoreans at the time – Pythagoreans who happen to bear the closest resemblance to Empedocles in their philosophical interests and cultural background – travelling to and fro between Sicily and Asia Minor with the specific aim of furthering the anti-Athenian war effort.¹⁰⁰

It is against this historical background that we also need to situate the dramatizing by Heraclides of Pontus (another colleague of Plato's) of a meeting between a Magus and Gelon: the famous ruler of Syracuse, and ally of Acragas at a time when Empedocles was still a young man.¹⁰¹ Certainly the meeting is described in a work of fiction; but we must not forget that Heraclides's fictions almost invariably had some kind of basis in fact or in earlier tradition.¹⁰² In this case the theme of a meeting between Gelon and a Magus agrees very well with the implication, alluded to in other sources, that Gelon was prepared to form an alliance with the Persians on the presumption that their invasion of Greece would be successful.¹⁰³ Otherwise, it is important to appreciate that the very fragmentary state of the evidence regarding links of this nature between Sicily and Persia is itself significant. The evidence is so fragmentary not because such contacts were necessarily rare, but rather because – with the exception of Heraclides and some of his associates in the early Platonic Academy¹⁰⁴ – any genuine interest in matters Persian on the part of Athenian writers was understandably minimal. The fact is that almost all our knowledge of events in classical antiquity has been filtered through the medium of pro-Hellenic authors, resulting in a massive Athenocentrism which has biased our surviving information about the ancient world on such a vast scale that even today it is scarcely ever questioned. The assumption, still widely entertained, that contacts between Persia and the Greek world were severed during or after the Persian war of 481–479 B.C. is unsustainable. We know the names of hundreds of Greeks, including Athenians, who were attracted for various reasons by Persia and went there during the two centuries down to the time of Alexander. There will have

⁹⁸ Cf. Herodotus 7.157–67 with C. Hignett, *Xerxes' Invasion of Greece* (Oxford, 1963), pp. 17–18, 95–6, 101–2. All we can be reasonably sure of is that Gelon dismissed the Greek embassy and its plea for help (*ibid.*, p. 17 n. 3); the rest is conjecture. See also Freeman, *op. cit.*, ii, pp. 173–81.

⁹⁹ Thucydides 8.26. Cf. 8.28.2, 29.2, 35.1, 45.3, 61.2, 78, 84–5; Xenophon, *Hellenica* 1.1.27–31; Kingsley, *Ancient Philosophy*, ch. 12.

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*, with n. 16.

¹⁰¹ Strabo 2.3.4–5 = Posidonius, fr. 13 Theiler = Heraclides, frs. 69–70 Wehrli. Cf. J. Bernays, *Gesammelte Abhandlungen* (Berlin, 1885), i, pp. 44–5; Bidez, p. 29 n. 1.

¹⁰² Cf. Bidez, pp. 28–9, 35–7; H. B. Gottschalk, *Heraclides of Pontus* (Oxford, 1980), pp. 17, 30 (“... Most of the elements in Heraclides' story can be traced back to a much earlier period ...”), 113, 116–17, 137 and *passim*; Kingsley, *Ancient Philosophy*, chs. 16–17.

¹⁰³ Cf. Herodotus 7.163; above, n. 98. The hiring of Phoenician boats would be an obvious way of effecting such a meeting: cf. e.g. Herodotus 3.136 and, for the Phoenicians in Xerxes's army, 7.25, 7.44.

¹⁰⁴ M. Untersteiner, *Aristotele: Della filosofia* (Rome, 1963), pp. 81–9, with further refs.; Gottschalk, *op. cit.*, pp. 106, 112; above, n. 64.

been a great many more whose names we will never know.¹⁰⁵ And yet these contacts and interactions are largely to be inferred in spite of, rather than with the help of, the main body of classical literature that survives. The overall state of affairs can only be assessed by piecing together fragmentary pieces of disparate and isolated evidence.

There is one other piece to the jigsaw, however. Elsewhere in his section on Empedocles, Diogenes Laertius provides some more information about him which again derives from Aristotle. Among other things that Empedocles had written, we are told, he had composed a “*Xerxes’s Crossing*” (*Xerxou diabasis*), but his sister subsequently destroyed this “*Persica*” of his by throwing it in the fire “because it had been left incomplete”. “*Persica*” – best translated “*On the Persian Wars*” – is no doubt the name that Aristotle himself used in referring to Empedocles’s work, while the title “*Xerxes’s Crossing*” is the one he must have found in his source.¹⁰⁶

The full implications of this title need clarifying at the very outset. What could it have been meant to convey? It might seem to refer, rather generally, to Xerxes’s attempted invasion of Greece; but the expression also refers to something much more specific and precise. It refers to the actual crossing of the Hellespont by Xerxes: a crossing which at every stage the Magi – who were present around Xerxes and at his side – guided or determined with their religious and magical observances. It was these Magi who already featured repeatedly and prominently in the accounts of the crossing used by Herodotus, and who were venomously attacked by the much later writer Pliny for contaminating the Greeks – and, as the context suggests, early Greek philosophers in particular – with the “infection” of their magical superstitions once they had set foot in Europe. As Gigon once noted, “Xerxes’s crossing” alludes to more than just the crucial stage in a large-scale armed attack on the Greek world by the Persians: in the use of this expression we must also reckon with the general idea that, “with Xerxes’s crossing into Europe, the ancient lore of the Magi was for the first time transmitted to the Greeks”.¹⁰⁷ In short, already before Aristotle we have a tradition presenting Empedocles as not only interested in Persian matters but also writing about them, about Xerxes’s abortive invasion of Greece, and – by inevitable implication – about the Magi.

From whom did Aristotle take his information that Empedocles had written a poem about Xerxes’s crossing of the Hellespont? Momigliano noted that “the obvious source” for this “tantalising piece of information” is Xanthus.¹⁰⁸ A number of points reinforce

¹⁰⁵ Cf. esp. A. Momigliano’s comments in *The Idea of Freedom: Essays in Honour of Isaiah Berlin*, ed. A. Ryan (Oxford, 1979), p. 140; also A. Wiedersich, *Prosopographie der Griechen beim Perserkönig* (Breslau, 1922); J. Hofstetter in *Beiträge zur Achämenidengeschichte*, ed. G. Walser (Wiesbaden, 1972), p. 95, and *Die Griechen in Persien* (Berlin, 1978); E. M. Yamauchi, *Persia and the Bible* (Grand Rapids, 1990), pp. 391–3.

¹⁰⁶ Diogenes Laertius 8.57 = Aristotle, *Περὶ ποιητῶν*, fr. 17 Gigon; above, n. 72. Cf. Drews, p. 34; Momigliano, p. 31 and *op. cit.* (above, n. 105), pp. 142–3. Diogenes tells us specifically from which work of Aristotle these details about Empedocles were derived: his early, but now lost, work *On Poets*. There is no room to doubt that the information does indeed go back to Aristotle: on this early work of his see A. Rostagni, *Scritti minori* (Turin, 1955–6), i, pp. 255–322.

¹⁰⁷ O. Gigon in *Horizonte der Humanitas: Eine Freundschaft für Prof. Walter Wili* (Bern, 1960), pp. 49–50. Cf. Herodotus 7.19–191 with Boyce’s commentary, *History*, ii, pp. 164–72; the Platonic *Axiochus* 371a–372a; Pliny, *Hist. nat.* 30.2.8; Diogenes Laertius 9.34; Philostratus, *Lives of the Sophists* 1.10 with Dinon, *FGH* 690 F6; M. Papatheophanes, *Iranica Antiqua*, XX (1985), pp. 107–11; R. Beck in Boyce and Grenet, p. 554.

¹⁰⁸ Momigliano, p. 31.

Momigliano's verdict. We have already seen that Xanthus had things to say about Empedocles.¹⁰⁹ What is more, we have also detected a pattern of Aristotle using Xanthus – for, among other points of interest, his details about Empedocles. To this we have to add that the – unverifiable – story about Empedocles's sister burning his uncompleted poem is very much in harmony with Xanthus's novelistic style and his highly evident “fondness for anecdote”.¹¹⁰ And further, it is important to remember that Xanthus, in Lydia, was ideally situated as well as strongly motivated to gather whatever information he could on the subject of Xerxes's crossing of the Hellespont: it was at Sardis that Xerxes gathered his troops, and Magi, and prepared them for the crucial crossing.¹¹¹ Finally there is the expression “Xerxes's crossing”, *Xerxou diabasis*, itself. As already noted, it derives from Aristotle's source – not from Aristotle. Its linguistic form points to an origin for it in Asia Minor during the fifth century B.C.¹¹² And in fact this very same expression occurs in another statement attributed to Xanthus: the statement referred to earlier, that “six thousand years elapsed from the time of Zoroaster down to Xerxes's crossing” (... *Ξάνθος δὲ ὁ Λυδὸς εἰς τὴν Ἐρέξου διάβασιν ἀπὸ τοῦ Ζωροάστρου ἑξακισχίλιά φησι*).¹¹³ This coincidence is plainly significant. Certainly we also find the expression used in later Greek chronology as a formulaic stakepost for helping to fix other events in time: this or that event happened so many years before or after “Xerxes's crossing”, or so-and-so had reached this or that age at the time. But what is striking about these formulaic uses of the term is that they can all be traced back to one writer in particular – the third-century B.C. scholar Eratosthenes – who, in his attempts at schematizing chronology, happens to have been heavily indebted to none other than Xanthus of Lydia.¹¹⁴

If the report about Empedocles's lost work does go back to Xanthus, which is very probable, we have evidence for his name being inextricably linked with the Magi by a more or less exact contemporary of his. If it does not, that link had already been made by someone before the time of Aristotle. Either way, the connection was established long before the time of those late-Hellenistic “romanticizers” who are so often assumed to have been the first to bring early Greek philosophers quite spuriously into contact with oriental wisdom and lore. There is no denying that this early evidence about Empedocles is thin on the ground. Yet, as noted earlier, the scantiness of the evidence has a significance of its own. Bidez and Cumont hardly went too far in linking the detail about Empedocles's supposed poem on Xerxes remaining unfinished, and then being destroyed, with the fact that Xerxes's invasion ended in failure. Perhaps he was thought to have formulated ideas that expressed “not enough antipathy and too much intelligent comprehension for the defeated empire”; and, similarly, one of the reasons why so very little survives of

¹⁰⁹ *Ξάνθος ἐν τοῖς περὶ αὐτοῦ*: Diogenes Laertius 8.63, Momigliano, *loc. cit.*

¹¹⁰ The expression is Pearson's, p. 117.

¹¹¹ Herodotus 7.26–41, 57, 88, 145–6; Timotheus, *Persians* 116–18 (Pedley, §190); Hignett, pp. 95, 257, 453; Boyce, ii, pp. 165–6.

¹¹² J. Holt, *Les noms d'action en -σις (-τις)* (Copenhagen, 1941), pp. 111, 155, 162; A. A. Long, *Language and Thought in Sophocles* (London, 1968), pp. 17, 33.

¹¹³ Diogenes Laertius 1.2 = *FGrH* 765 F32.

¹¹⁴ For Eratosthenes's knowledge of, and indebtedness to, Xanthus see Strabo 1.3.4 = *FGrH* 765 F12; Pearson, pp. 116, 117, 123; von Fritz, i.1, pp. 88, 98. For use of the term “Xerxes's crossing” by later Greek writers as a chronological stakepost, and their indebtedness in this respect to Eratosthenes, cf. e.g. J. Mansfeld, *Mnemosyne*, 4th series, XXXII (1979), p. 45.

Xanthus's *Magica* may have been because it contained "too many value judgements which proved repugnant to the taste of Athens".¹¹⁵ At any rate, one point in this highly complex area is clear. This is that the enormous Athenocentric bias of our ancient sources has made it almost impossible to view Empedocles, and people with whom he was closely related in the Greek West, in their true perspective.¹¹⁶ All we have to help us in this respect are a few isolated pieces of information hidden away in the most unlikely of places. It is only by giving those fragmentary pieces of evidence the attention they deserve that we can attempt to reconstruct the interests, involvements and activities of influential circles of people who had very little sympathy for and – apart from a handful of people in the early Platonic Academy who were simultaneously attracted by Pythagoreanism in the West and by oriental sources of wisdom – very little in common with that Athenian culture which to us has become synonymous with ancient Greek civilization as a whole.

It will be worth looking more closely at Xanthus's statement that Zoroaster lived six thousand years before Xerxes's crossing.¹¹⁷ As noted earlier, the figure of six thousand years plainly takes us out of the realm of historical "fact" into the realms of mythological history; but the significance of the figure deserves some comments. Here a very few scholars have tried to maintain a position of total scepticism, and deny that the number six thousand has any significance at all.¹¹⁸ However, this is out of the question. We have evidence from elsewhere that Iranian Magi during the centuries after Xanthus measured world periods in terms of similar figures – nine thousand years, twelve thousand – which are also multiples of three thousand; it would, to say the least, be hypercritical to deny any connection between these Magian world periods and the figure mentioned by Xanthus himself.¹¹⁹

On the other hand, practically all scholars have gone to the other extreme and tried to explain Xanthus's figure of six thousand years for the interval between Zoroaster and Xerxes *in terms of* the cosmic periods of either nine or twelve thousand years which are mentioned in later sources.¹²⁰ This is to make an almost equally fundamental mistake. To begin with, the dating of Zoroaster to six thousand years before Xerxes's attempted invasion cannot possibly be reconciled with the dating of Zoroaster in any of the other schemes – where he always occurs towards the end of the world-cycle. Second, it is

¹¹⁵ Bidez and Cumont, i, pp. 239–40.

¹¹⁶ For this point and the rest of the paragraph see Kingsley, *Ancient Philosophy*, chs. 12, 21.

¹¹⁷ For the reading "6,000" see G. Gnoli, *Zoroaster's Time and Homeland* (Naples, 1980), pp. 163–5; and above, n. 64.

¹¹⁸ Notably Clemen (p. 27), who suggested that the figure was simply a convenient "round number" but himself had to admit that the suggestion was hardly plausible. Other, equally half-hearted or inconsistent, attempts to deny that the figure as it occurs in Greek sources has a definite connection with world periods were made by Kerschesteiner (p. 207, plus the refs. in n. 2; but cf. pp. 194–5); W. Spoerri, *Revue de philologie*, 3rd series, XXXI (1957), p. 215. The failure of Kerschesteiner in particular, in her *Platon und der Orient*, to come to grips with the oriental and comparative material has often been noted: cf. e.g. A. Olerud, *L'idée de macrocosmos et de microcosmos dans le Timée de Platon* (Uppsala, 1951), pp. 3–4; Kingsley, "Greek origin", p. 247 n. 11.

¹¹⁹ Cf. Nock's comments, ii, p. 689; Kerschesteiner, pp. 194–5.

¹²⁰ In the earlier literature cf. e.g. Jaeger, pp. 133–5; in the more recent, C. Colpe in *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism*, ed. B. Layton (Leiden, 1980–1), ii, pp. 542–4.

important to appreciate that at least before Christian times there was strictly speaking no such thing as a Magian, or Zoroastrian, orthodoxy in matters of this nature. Different groups, in different parts of the Persian Empire and no doubt at different times, held different and sometimes radically opposite views.¹²¹ And third, it is also important to acknowledge the artificiality and scholasticism which are so marked a feature of the nine-thousand and twelve-thousand year schemes as elaborated in Zoroastrian sources: they are clearly the end result of priestly attempts at forcing religious ideas – often very clumsily – into increasingly complex theoretical structures.¹²² But most important of all is the fact that a basic figure of six thousand years for the acting out of events on earth lies at the core even of these more complicated and artificial systems: a fact which has led an increasing number of scholars to conclude that a six-thousand-year world period as mentioned by Xanthus must – if anything – have been the original period from which the others were for various reasons subsequently derived.¹²³ It is also significant that this same period of six thousand years for the duration of the world continues to appear in Christian, Mandaean, and Armenian sources down to and beyond the Middle Ages.¹²⁴ The evidence from Armenia is particularly relevant: the importance of the number six thousand in Armenian tradition is explicitly stated to derive from “Mazdean” or Zoroastrian ideas,¹²⁵ and the remarkable endurance of pre-Christian Zoroastrian themes in Armenia down through the centuries is well known.¹²⁶

As has often been emphasized, nothing could have been easier than for Xanthus to obtain information at first hand from the Magi in Lydia about their religious and historical views. From his report about the dating of Zoroaster we must conclude that there were Magi in Asia Minor for whom the interval of six thousand years between Zoroaster and Xerxes’s crossing was meant to represent a single vast unit of time, or world period. Placing Zoroaster at the start of this world period presents no problem: it is not a dating to be factually analyzed, but is to be understood as reflecting the *perception* of Zoroaster and his religion as the determining reality behind the world in which we live.¹²⁷ The terminating of this world period with Xerxes’s crossing of the Hellespont is another matter, however, and one that deserves some consideration.

The only person to propose a meaningful explanation for ending such a vast period of time – initiated by Zoroaster himself – with Xerxes’s attempted invasion of Greece has

¹²¹ Nock, ii, p. 689; R. L. Gordon in *Mithraic Studies*, ed. J. R. Hinnells (Manchester, 1975), i, p. 223; Kingsley, “Greek origin”, p. 245 with n. 2; S. Shaked in *Messiah and Christos*, ed. I. Gruenwald, S. Shaked and G. G. Stroumsa (Tübingen, 1994), pp. 232–3.

¹²² The unwieldiness and artificiality of these schemes are well emphasized by Boyce, i, pp. 285–93.

¹²³ Cf. e.g. Boyce, i, p. 286 and *Zoroastrians* (London, 1979), pp. 74–5; Russell, *Zoroastrianism*, p. 168; Cohn, pp. 102–3. According to the later evidence for a 7,000-year scheme, our world again endures for (the first) 6,000 years: Bidez and Cumont, i, pp. 218–19, ii, pp. 365–6.

¹²⁴ Cf. e.g. Drijvers, *op. cit.* (above, n. 4), pp. 17 (implying a Persian origin), 89–90, 194; C. A. Patrides, *The Huntington Library Quarterly*, XXVI (1963), pp. 315–22; Russell, *op. cit.*, pp. 168–9 with n. 95 and in *Bazmavep*, CXLVII (1989), pp. 221–43; also F. Cumont, *Revue de l’histoire des religions*, CIII (1931), p. 70 with n. 5.

¹²⁵ Russell, *Zoroastrianism*, 169; *Bazmavep*, CXLVII (1989), p. 235.

¹²⁶ Russell, *Zoroastrianism*, p. 8 and *passim*. For Zoroastrians in Armenia during Achaemenian times see e.g. Boyce’s comments, ii, pp. 185–6.

¹²⁷ Cf. H. Corbin, *Cyclical Time and Ismaili Gnosis* (London, 1983), p. 191; and also A. R. Burn’s comments, *Persia and the Greeks* (2nd edition, London, 1984), p. 69.

been Cumont. For him, Xerxes's defeat and the subsequent scattering of his troops were a calamity of cosmic dimensions which "presaged the end of the age" that had begun with Zoroaster.¹²⁸ Cumont was certainly right to assume that the ending of the six-thousand year period with Xerxes's crossing of the Hellespont was a result of this historical event being given a huge significance by Xanthus's sources; but the explanation he proposes is questionable, not least because there is another explanation of the details which is far more plausible. From the time of Zoroaster himself, in the second millennium B.C., there had been a standing prophecy that the end of the world – and the beginning of the age to come – would be precipitated by a massive battle: an enormous, armed confrontation in which the Zoroastrian forces of good would once and for all conquer the forces of evil.¹²⁹ As has been noted, it was inevitable that this eschatological vision of a final confrontation would become adapted to suit changing times and conditions: adapted in such a way that "the originally cosmic apocalyptic developed a patriotic character, and came to partake of the nature of 'political prophecy'".¹³⁰ Xerxes himself, according to statements by Herodotus which we have no reason to disbelieve, was repeatedly prompted by visions to initiate the invasion of Greece; at any rate this seems to have been the propaganda put out by the Magi who accompanied him, and who interpreted them as foretelling that he would dominate the entire earth.¹³¹ To interpret his visions in this way was, after all, to do little more than draw out the logical implication of the fact that Xerxes and his successors were presented as the greatest of kings "by the favour of" and in the name of "the greatest of gods", Ahura Mazda: as the "one king of many, the one lord of many", as "king in this great earth, far and wide".¹³² It is this same mixing of the military and theological which also helps to explain Plutarch's telling statement that, according to Magian tradition, the final defeat of the power of evil will initiate not just the world to come but – more specifically, and more prosaically – a world in which all people will belong to "one single state".¹³³ But nowhere is the merging of the worldly and the spiritual, the military and the theological, made more explicit than in the portrayal – which we will come back to shortly – of Alexander the Great as the embodiment on earth of Ahriman, the principle of cosmic evil, and of his army as the demonic representatives of the Race of Wrath.

Interpreting Xanthus's six-thousand year interval between Zoroaster and Xerxes as related to the idea of an apocalyptic battle harmonizes well with the other evidence

¹²⁸ Cumont, *op. cit.* (above, n. 124), p. 58; cf. S. Pétremont, *Le dualisme chez Platon, les gnostiques et les manichéens* (Paris, 1947), p. 20. Reitzenstein's attempted analysis of the material, in R. Reitzenstein and H. H. Schaeder, *Studien zum antiken Synkretismus aus Iran und Griechenland* (Leipzig, 1926), pp. 3–5, is so devious – and assumes such a fundamental misunderstanding on the part of Xanthus – that it ultimately explains nothing.

¹²⁹ Cf. esp. *Yasna* 31.16–18, 44.13–16, with the further literature cited and discussed by S. K. Eddy, *The King is Dead* (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1961), pp. 30–2; *Yasht* 19.88–96 = *Textual Sources for the Study of Zoroastrianism*, ed. M. Boyce (Manchester, 1984), p. 90, with Boyce, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, XLVII (1984), p. 58; Cohn, pp. 101–3.

¹³⁰ Boyce, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, XLVII (1984), p. 59.

¹³¹ Herodotus 7.12–19. Eddy (*op. cit.*, p. 49) is no doubt correct regarding the element of propaganda, although his reading of the first two of Xerxes's dreams is overly imaginative.

¹³² R. G. Kent, *Old Persian: Grammar, Texts, Lexicon* (New Haven, 1953), pp. 147–55. Cf. also Eddy, p. 47 on the "theological rationale" behind Xerxes's campaign against Greece.

¹³³ Plutarch, *On Isis and Osiris* 370b. Cf. Bidez and Cumont, ii., p. 72 with nn. 20, 21; Eddy, p. 31; and B. Lincoln's discussion of the statement and its Iranian background, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, XXV (1983), pp. 136–53.

available, both earlier and later. Yet it necessarily implies that the linking of Zoroaster with Xerxes's crossing must have been made *before* the event: the attempted invasion was, of course, to prove a major failure. In other words, it must originally have been a prophecy of success. Few things could be more plausible. It is essential in the first place that we put ourselves in the shoes of the Magi who witnessed the extraordinary gathering of forces which Xerxes brought together at Sardis just prior to the abortive invasion – and the almost incredible size of the army as it made its way to the Hellespont at Abydos. It would seem to have been an army larger than anyone had ever seen:¹³⁴ a phenomenon of apocalyptic proportions. And from the specific, and visual, we can turn to more general considerations. Devising prophecies was, until recently, always an intrinsic aspect of the making of war: an essential means of propaganda not only for focusing the soldiers' energies and aspirations but also for preparing the enemy to yield.¹³⁵ The Zoroastrian Magi were past-masters in precisely this form of propaganda. On the one hand, there is evidence of them using it to great effect during the sixth century B.C. in Babylonia, to prepare the way for Cyrus's invasion.¹³⁶ On the other there is the evidence for repeated battles of religious and prophetic propaganda, and counter-propaganda, fought out between Greeks and Magi in Anatolia from at least the fourth century B.C.¹³⁷ As for Xerxes himself, we know from various sources that the Persian Wars he instigated were fought almost as much on the level of religious propaganda, prophecies and oracles as on a purely military level. Prophecies and oracles of victory would seem to have flown thick and fast on both sides¹³⁸ – just as they had already done in the mid-sixth century during the earlier phase of Greek–Persian hostilities, and just as they were to continue to do during the Peloponnesian War or, later still, in the time of Alexander.¹³⁹ On the Greek side, there is evidence that the “oracles of Bakis” which were circulated at the time of Xerxes's invasion will have had links with theories about world periods and number speculation.¹⁴⁰ On the Iranian side there can be no real doubt that the Magian dating of Zoroaster in specific relation to Xerxes's critical crossing of the Hellespont was one more, very powerful, attempt to predict and confirm the outcome of the fighting.

As just mentioned, later Iranian tradition was to portray Alexander the Great and his army as the demonic forces of evil. Some scholars have claimed that this “demonization” of Alexander and the Greek and Macedonian forces was simply a product of Sasanian times (A.D. 224–651).¹⁴¹ But, in principle, it is extremely implausible that such a view of Alexander should only have sprung into existence so late. And in fact, as with so many

¹³⁴ Cf. Herodotus 7.20–1, 45, and the amusing anecdote in 56; Burn, pp. 322–32.

¹³⁵ Cf. K. Thomas's classic discussion, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (2nd edition, Harmondsworth, 1973), pp. 461–514. ¹³⁶ Boyce, ii, p. 43; cf. pp. 47–8. ¹³⁷ Eddy, pp. 174–81.

¹³⁸ Herodotus 7.19, 7.37, 8.20, 8.77, 8.96; Hignett, pp. 439–47, Boyce, ii, p. 165, M. L. West, *The Orphic Poems* (Oxford, 1983), pp. 20–1, 40.

¹³⁹ Eddy, pp. 11–14, 174–6; H. W. Parke, *Greek Oracles* (London, 1967), pp. 97–123; West, *loc. cit.*

¹⁴⁰ For the Bakis prophecies, mentioned by Herodotus (as above, n. 138), cf. West, *loc. cit.*; and for their wider involvement in number speculation and ideas of world periods see W. Burkert, “Apollon Didim i Ol'viia”, *Vestnik drevnei istorii* (1990,2), pp. 155–60, esp. pp. 158–9, and “Olbia and Apollo of Didyma: A New Oracle Text”, in *Apollo: Origins and Influences*, ed. J. Solomon (Tucson, 1994), pp. 49–60, 145–7, esp. p. 58.

¹⁴¹ A. Abel in *Atti del convegno sul tema: La Persia e il mondo greco-romano* (Rome, 1966), pp. 119–21; Gnoli, *op. cit.* (above, n. 62), pp. 86–7.

other attempts to trace the origins of Zoroastrian traditions back to Sasanian times but no further, the claim is incorrect: Greek and Latin sources show that the initial “demonizing” of Alexander must be dated centuries earlier.¹⁴² There is nothing surprising in this. From the earliest days of the Zoroastrian religion it had been natural “to look on non-Iranians who took up arms against Iranians, the chosen people of Ahura Mazda, as naturally wicked, creatures of Wrath, like the aggressors whom Zoroaster himself opposes in the Gathas”.¹⁴³ Yet we are now in a position where we can date the first projection of this vision onto the Greeks back not just to the time of Alexander but a century and a half earlier, to the time of the Persian Wars in 480–479 B.C.

Xerxes crossed the Hellespont, but was soon on the run. The prophecy had failed. And yet, as history shows, when such predictions fail they rarely disappear. Instead, they tend to become “hanging” prophecies waiting to be transferred and reapplied to a new situation.¹⁴⁴ This basic religious phenomenon helps to provide the context for understanding some further pieces of information which are inseparable from the material considered so far.

Over a century after Xerxes’s famous crossing, the dating of Zoroaster was modified and transferred. Instead of living six thousand years before Xerxes’s crossing of the Hellespont, he was presented as living six thousand years before the death of Plato – in 347 B.C. This new dating is attributed to two men who were extremely close friends or colleagues of Plato: Eudoxus and Aristotle. The evidence for the attribution is not to be doubted.¹⁴⁵ As scholars have often appreciated, the dating of Zoroaster to six thousand years before Plato implies a perception of some special link between them: that Plato’s teaching was seen as somehow fulfilling and completing Zoroaster’s.¹⁴⁶

That is more or less as far as the matter has been taken, and for one main reason: the difficulty in understanding the detail that Zoroaster lived six thousand years before Plato’s death. Jaeger succeeded, rather too influentially, in doing away with what he called this “peculiar point of reference”: he claimed that it could not have been the original form of the dating because Eudoxus had died before Plato, and so it must just have been a secondary modification introduced – without any real significance – by Aristotle.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴² Cf. Curtius Rufus, *History of Alexander* 4.13.12–14, with Eddy’s comments, pp. 30–1; and the *Sibylline Oracles* 3.388–95 with Varro, *Antiquitates rerum divinarum*, fr. 56a Cardauns, Eddy, pp. 10–14. M. Boyce, *Zoroastrianism: A Shadowy but Powerful Presence in the Judaeo-Christian World* (Friends of Dr. Williams’s Library, Forty-First Lecture; London, 1987), pp. 12–13, Boyce and Grenet, pp. 12–13, 371–5.

¹⁴³ Boyce and Grenet, p. 375.

¹⁴⁴ See e.g. Thomas, *loc. cit.* (above, n. 135).

¹⁴⁵ Above, n. 64.

¹⁴⁶ The point was first made – independently of each other – by Jaeger (pp. 131–6: first published 1923) and by É. Benveniste, *The Persian Religion According to the Chief Greek Texts* (Paris, 1929), pp. 14–21; the many subsequent discussions have added nothing significant. Cf. also Jaeger in *Classical Quarterly*, XXI (1927), pp. 16–17, where his interpretation of the last line of Aristotle’s Plato-eulogy (οὐ νῦν δ’ ἔστι λαβεῖν οὐδενὶ ταῦτά ποτε: *Aristoteles, Privatorum scriptorum fragmenta*, ed. M. Plezia, Leipzig, 1977, p. 6.2) as meaning “But now it is impossible for anyone ever to attain this” is impressively close to later Islamic ideas of Muḥammad as the “seal” of the prophets whose rank can never be equalled (Qur’ān 33:40; C. Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur*, Cambridge, 1993, pp. 76–81).

¹⁴⁷ Jaeger, pp. 133, 136, followed by, among many others, H. S. Nyberg, *Die Religionen des alten Iran* (Leipzig, 1938), p. 27, Spöerri, *op. cit.* (above, n. 118), p. 229 n. 87 (with further refs.), Boyce, ii, p. 260.

However, as Jaeger himself was later to admit, he had raised a false alarm: there is no genuine reason to suppose that Eudoxus did die before Plato, and there are no grounds at all for denying that “six thousand years before Plato’s death” was the original point of reference.¹⁴⁸ In fact it is only when we accept that the evidence as presented to us in the ancient sources is correct and needs no modifying that we can start to appreciate its real value. For it seems never to have been noticed in connection with this ending of the six-thousand-year period at Plato’s *death* that, according to both Iranian and Indian popular traditions which must be assumed to go back to ancient Indo-Iranian sources, a world era frequently comes to an end with the *death* of a great being.¹⁴⁹ As so often, it is precisely the details which are discarded that prove the most important.

We are still left with another oddity. However well Eudoxus, in particular, may have known his Xanthus,¹⁵⁰ it makes no sense to suppose that he himself was responsible for transferring the dating of Zoroaster from six thousand years before Xerxes’s crossing to six thousand years before Plato’s death. This was a Magian system of dating: Eudoxus or Aristotle might have reported it, and even understood its significance, but neither of them would have invented it in the first place. There is an obvious gap in our information which needs to be filled. But here, once again, the evidence required is still available. In fact we are told, in general terms by the author of the anonymous life of Plato, that Persian Magi had come to Athens to learn from him and “participate in his philosophy” (τῆς ἐξ αὐτοῦ μετασχεῖν φιλοσοφίας); while Seneca mentions more specifically in one of his letters that Magi happened to be in Athens *at the time of Plato’s death*, and made special offerings to him as soon as he died (*immolaverunt defuncto*) because they believed he was more than a mere mortal.¹⁵¹ As we will soon see, these reports have a very definite basis in fact. Even without the significant detail – unfortunately suppressed by Jaeger – that Zoroaster was said to have lived six thousand years before Plato’s death, the correspondence between this dating of Plato and the presence in Athens of Persian Magi who took a very special interest in him would be obvious. With the detail restored, the correspondence is unmistakable: there can be little doubt that it was these Magi who, present in Athens at the time of Plato’s death, provided Eudoxus and Aristotle with the remarkable dating of Zoroaster relative to the time of his death.

This is not all, however. Seneca, supplemented by the more detailed account in the anonymous life of Plato, states that what particularly impressed the Magi in Athens was the way that he apparently died on his eighty-first birthday: a number of special significance because it was made up of multiples of the number three. That, according to Seneca’s laconic account, is what prompted the Magi to make those special offerings to Plato on his death.¹⁵² This interest on the part of Magi in three and its multiples could, it

¹⁴⁸ Above, n. 64.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. G. de Santillana and H. von Dechend, *Hamlet’s Mill* (Cambridge, Mass., 1969), pp. 82–5.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. above, n. 64, with further refs.

¹⁵¹ *Anonymous Prolegomena to Platonic Philosophy*, ed. L. G. Westerink (Amsterdam, 1962), p. 15, 6.20–2; Seneca, *Letters* 58.31. For Seneca’s statement that Magi “happened” to be in Athens at Plato’s death cf. P. Boyancé’s comments, *Le culte des Muses chez les philosophes grecs* (2nd edition, Paris, 1972), p. 255 n. 3.

¹⁵² Seneca, *loc. cit.*: “They offered sacrifices to the deceased, reckoning that his destiny was more than merely mortal because he had achieved the most perfect number ...” The author of the anonymous life gives a fuller

might be suggested, be just an Athenian invention. But it is hardly so – any more than the dating of Plato six thousand years after Zoroaster is just an Athenian invention. What seems not to have been noticed is that multiples of three were supremely significant for Zoroastrian Magi in the context of their religion, and formed the basis for their calculations of periods of time: an aspect of Zoroastrianism which has its roots deep in Indo-Iranian ritual. What is more, the evidence indicates that they specifically used multiples of three when assessing the time of appearance of the great Saošyant, or saviour figure, who would bring to an end the world as we know it and inaugurate the age to come.¹⁵³ And yet it is also important to note what happened to these Magian speculations once they passed over to the Greeks. In the anonymous life of Plato, the theorizing about the significance of his age when he died has been placed in an Apollonian context on the grounds that multiples of three and nine bear a special relationship to the cult of Apollo. The connection made here with Apollo is plainly secondary, however: due not so much to any necessary link between the numbers and Apollo as to the fact that Plato himself – and his life – had already come to be interpreted in persistently Apollonian terms.¹⁵⁴ There can be no doubting how far back we need to trace the origins of this “Apollonian” understanding of Plato: back to the time of Plato himself. In a text reporting traditions that must already have been in the air at the time of Plato’s funeral, Speusippus – Plato’s nephew, and the man who succeeded him as head of the Academy after he died – mentioned the belief already current in Athens that Plato was Apollonian in nature, that he was a son of Apollo, and that his had been a virgin birth.¹⁵⁵ Clearly the Magi were not the only people in Athens who sensed something very special about Plato. There were evidently discussions by both Persians and Greeks about the nature of the man and about the timing of his death; and it is rather disconcerting that, according to Zoroastrian tradition, the Saošyant – the great being “who will bring benefit to the whole corporeal world” and prelude the dawning of the future age – will be miraculously born by a virgin.¹⁵⁶

The surviving evidence provides still more information. We are told – and the details must be considered reliable¹⁵⁷ – that “Mithradates the Persian had a portrait-statue of Plato erected in the Academy, and inscribed it: ‘Mithradates, son of Rhodobates, the Persian,

account of the significance of the number 81, and its multiples of 3, just before mentioning the presence of the Magi in Athens (6.1–22, pp. 13–15 Westerink): this is an obvious example of the disjointed nature of the biography, due to the author’s tendency to “mutilate” the evidence so as to adapt it to suit his own purposes. Cf. Westerink, *op. cit.*, pp. xxxiii–xxxiv.

¹⁵³ Cf. Boyce, i, pp. 121 with n. 64, 258, 282, 285, and esp. 291.

¹⁵⁴ *Anonymous Prolegomena* 6.1–4, p. 13 Westerink, with Westerink’s comments, *op. cit.*, pp. xxxiii–xxxiv; A. S. Riginos, *Platonica* (Leiden, 1976), p. 27.

¹⁵⁵ Speusippus, fr. 1 Tarán = frs. 147–8 Isnardi Parente; Riginos, *op. cit.*, pp. 9–13. For Speusippus’s *Perideipnon* see further K. Gäiser, *Philodems Académica: Die Berichte über Platon und die Alte Akademie in zwei herkulanensischen Papyri* (Supplementum Platonicum, 1; Stuttgart, 1988), p. 437.

¹⁵⁶ *Yasht* 13.129; Boyce, i, pp. 282–7. The broad analogies between Plato and Jesus (virgin birth; visits from Magi) are certainly not just due to imposition of Christian themes on pagan biography. Cf. the passages discussed by T. Sinko, *Eos*, XXX (1927), pp. 109–10, and note the significant parallels between the New Testament biographies of Jesus and accounts from the 4th century B.C. about the life and death of Empedocles: Kingsley, *Ancient Philosophy*, ch. 19 with n. 27.

¹⁵⁷ Favorinus, fr. 5 Mensching = fr. 36 Barigazzi = Diogenes Laertius 3.25; U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, *Platon* (2nd edition, Berlin, 1920), i, pp. 713–14, ii, pp. 4–5.

has dedicated this likeness of Plato, made by Silanion, to the Muses.’” This report, too, is significant for a number of reasons. To begin with, Mithradates is of course a good Persian name; so is the name of his father.¹⁵⁸ Second, there are good reasons to suppose that the statue of Plato was only erected at his death: this dedication of a statue by the Persian Mithradates after Plato had died provides an obvious parallel to Seneca’s mention of the special offerings of respect paid to Plato at his death by Magi, and means we can at last put a name to one of those Magi – if there ever were more than one – who are referred to both by Seneca and in the anonymous biography.¹⁵⁹ Third, it is also worth noting that there must be some link between this dedication of a statue by Mithradates and a story which is mentioned in the anonymous life of Plato as occurring “after his death” (*μετὰ τὸν βίον αὐτοῦ*). According to this story a woman had to obtain oracular advice “on whether she should rank his monument (*τὴν στήλην αὐτοῦ*) with the statues (*ἀγάλματα*) of the gods”; the answer she was given by the oracle was that she should.¹⁶⁰ The strange mention of a “monument” of Plato, explicitly compared with “statues” of the gods, can only refer to the “statue” (*ἀνδριάς*) of Plato or – in Mithradates’s own words – the “image” of him (*εἰκών*) which the Persian had erected in the Academy.¹⁶¹ Once again we see the Magian and the Greek perceptions of Plato as someone more than human merging and interlocking. Whatever our own views about Plato, and the nature of his philosophy, there are important lessons to be learned here about how people of different races had come to perceive him at and immediately after the time of his death.

There are fundamental paradoxes that we have to take into account when considering the nature of the Persian Magi. Many of them must have been extremely strict, and self-enclosed, in the execution of their religious duties towards the Zoroastrian community they served. But there were others who were extraordinarily outward-going and free, travelling sometimes within the bounds of the Persian Empire and sometimes to and beyond its edges. In their freedom they appear to have had much in common with the old Iranian figure of the wandering minstrel; and in the case of the Magi, the motive for their wandering would seem to have been at least in part the search for knowledge.¹⁶² Yet even here things are not so simple: there can be little doubt that they sometimes used their apparent wish to learn as a disguise to conceal their deeper intention to influence and teach.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁸ For Mithradates/Mithridates cf. R. Schmitt in *Études mithriaques* (Acta Iranica, Actes de Congrès IV; Leiden, 1978), pp. 397–8 with n. 12, 400 with n. 19, 418, 422–54; P. Huyse, *Iranische Namen in den griechischen Dokumenten Ägyptens* (= *Iranisches Personennamenbuch*, ed. M. Mayrhofer and R. Schmitt, v.6a; Vienna, 1990), pp. 49–51. For the father’s name see R. Zwanziger, *Studien zur Nebenüberlieferung iranischer Personennamen in den griechischen Inschriften Kleinasiens* (Vienna, 1973), pp. 147–50; Schmitt, *op. cit.*, pp. 411 n. 81, 427 n. 52.

¹⁵⁹ See on these points Gaiser, pp. 376–7, 435–6.

¹⁶⁰ *Anonymous Prolegomena* 6.7–13, p. 13 Westerink. The fact that this episode is mentioned by the author of the anonymous life – in his usual disjointed fashion (cf. above, n. 152) – just after his comments on the significance of Plato living exactly 81 years and just before his mention of the presence of Magi in Athens is probably no coincidence.

¹⁶¹ Cf. also E. Mensching’s comments, *Favorin von Arelate* (Berlin, 1963), p. 72.

¹⁶² Boyce, ii, pp. 66, 241, 278; Boyce and Grenet, pp. 58–61, 382–3, 386–7.

¹⁶³ Cf. e.g. Boyce’s comments, ii, pp. 43–7.

There is another aspect of this openness and freedom on the part of some of the Magi which deserves mentioning. That is their remarkable assimilation – and then dissemination – of Mesopotamian lore during the two centuries of Achaemenian rule, from the great conquests of Babylonia and other regions in the sixth century B.C. down to the time of Alexander the Great. In 539 B.C. Cyrus took Babylon. Over the next two hundred years Mesopotamia was to remain Persian territory, and the resulting presence in Babylonia of Zoroastrian Magi – side by side with the native Chaldaean priests – gave rise to an extraordinarily productive influence of Mesopotamian traditions on subsequent Zoroastrian ideas.¹⁶⁴ Already early in this period, during the last quarter of the sixth century, there is evidence suggesting that Babylonian ideas were carried down into Egypt together with Cambyses's invading army: celestial omens of the type found in the so-called *Enūma Anu Enlil* start to appear in Egyptian literary traditions. The transmission of this Mesopotamian material down to Egypt must very probably be attributed to Persian priest-scholars who accompanied the army of Cambyses.¹⁶⁵ And the same thing happened in the East. Omens identical to the ones preserved in the *Enūma Anu Enlil*, in particular, appeared in India; and there can be little doubt that the transmission was due to travelling scholar-priests, or wandering Magi.¹⁶⁶

This role played by Iranian Magi in transmitting Mesopotamian – or “Chaldaean” – traditions to other cultures brings us to another piece of evidence we need to consider. One of the papyri which were buried under the lava at Herculaneum in Italy when Vesuvius erupted in A.D. 79, and recovered in the eighteenth century, contains invaluable details about the early members of Plato's Academy. The text of the papyrus is extremely fragmentary, but one portion of it clearly states that when Plato was very old a “Chaldaean” came to stay with him as a guest; and it goes on to mention a conversation that this Chaldaean had with him during what seems to have been Plato's last night alive.¹⁶⁷ The document is a “remarkable” one, not least because of the striking realism of its details.¹⁶⁸ The source for the account is explicitly given as Plato's assistant or secretary: the astronomer and mathematician Philip of Opus, who himself was present with Plato at the time.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁴ Kingsley, “Greek origin”, pp. 254–6. For the impact of the Iranian occupation on Babylonia itself cf. A. Kuhrt in *Achaemenid History*, ed. H. W. A. M. Sancisi-Weerdenburg (Leiden, 1987), i, pp. 147–56.

¹⁶⁵ For the evidence see R. A. Parker, *A Vienna Demotic Papyrus on Eclipse- and Lunar-Omina* (Providence, 1959); W. Burkert, *Lore and Science in Ancient Pythagoreanism* (Cambridge, Mass., 1972), p. 299 n. 3; D. Pingree in *Mesopotamien und seine Nachbarn*, ed. H. J. Nissen and J. Renger (2nd edition, Berlin, 1987), pp. 618–19. This is not to forget, however, the inevitability of earlier Mesopotamian influence on Egypt (especially under Esarhaddon). For comments on the nature and dating of the *Enūma Anu Enlil* literature cf. E. Weidner, *Archiv für Orientforschung*, XIV (1941–4), pp. 172–84, A. Sachs, *Journal of Cuneiform Studies*, VI (1952), pp. 51–3, and the introduction to F. Rochberg-Halton's *Aspects of Babylonian Celestial Divination* (Horn, 1988).

¹⁶⁶ D. Pingree, *Isis*, LIV (1963), pp. 229–46, and *op. cit.* (above, n. 165), pp. 617–18; Boyce, ii, pp. 241, 278; Kuhrt, *op. cit.* (above, n. 164), i, pp. 150–1; J. C. Greenfield and M. Sokoloff, *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, XLVIII (1989), p. 202.

¹⁶⁷ For the basic text, with proposed supplements, translation and commentary, cf. Gaiser, pp. 176–80, 421–38; T. Dorandi, *Filodemo: Storia dei filosofi. Platone e l'Accademia* (Naples, 1991), pp. 37–8, 133–4, 187, 219–22.

¹⁶⁸ W. Burkert, *Platon in Nahaufnahme: Ein Buch aus Herculaneum* (Stuttgart and Leipzig, 1993), pp. 35–6; cf. also *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, XCVII (1993), pp. 91–2.

¹⁶⁹ L. Tarán, *Academia: Plato, Philip of Opus and the Pseudo-Platonic Epinomis* (Philadelphia, 1975), pp. 124–5 with n. 519, 132–3 with n. 555; Gaiser, p. 421; Dorandi, *op. cit.*, pp. 37, 219–20; Burkert, *Platon in Nahaufnahme*, p. 34; below, n. 191.

This is not the place to go into the details of the conversation. That is a matter requiring separate treatment, partly because the text is so difficult to restore and partly because the crucial interchange contains a subtlety regarding what it means to be foreign or “barbaric” which should be obvious but appears to have been completely overlooked. Here it is enough just to note the basic fact that the “Chaldaean” was staying with Plato as his guest. Scholars have been satisfied to make this Chaldaean an object of the crudest insults, supposedly spoken at his expense by Philip of Opus, or to make him humiliate himself in front of Plato in the most degrading of ways.¹⁷⁰ It would seem any interpretation of the evidence – however gross or implausible¹⁷¹ – is justified as long as it serves to distance Plato from his foreign visitor. What we need to remember is that Plato welcomed the foreigner as his guest (ξένον ὑπεδέξατο) when he was old, ill and apparently dying; and that it was a “Chaldaean”, not anyone else, who delighted him immensely with his remarks and gave him tranquillity and peace (ἡσθῆναι μέγας και ἐν εὐδίαι μεγάλη...) during what appear to have been his final hours.¹⁷²

What can we say about the identity of this “Chaldaean”? Scholars have often commented on the similarities between the references to Persian Magi present in Athens at the time of Plato’s death, the information about a statue of Plato being erected at the Academy by the Persian Mithradates, and this report about a Chaldaean staying with Plato as a guest not just during the very last part of his life but also apparently during his very last night alive. Further than that it seemed unwise to go: a Chaldaean was not the same as a Persian Magus.¹⁷³ However, Gaiser was plainly correct when, in his recent commentary on the Herculeum papyrus, he suggested that the “Chaldaean” and the Persian Mithradates are in fact one and the same.¹⁷⁴ A clear-cut distinction between Persians and Chaldaeans, Aryans and Semites, may to us seem self-evident; but things were not so simple in antiquity. Very close contacts between the Iranian and Mesopotamian worlds exist as far back as we can trace them, “from earliest proto-historic times”.¹⁷⁵ This helps to explain why – from at least the fifth century B.C. – Chaldaeans and Persians were

¹⁷⁰ So e.g. F. Lasserre, *Museum Helveticum*, XL (1983), pp. 171–3; Gaiser, pp. 424, 429–30.

¹⁷¹ Lasserre’s theory that it was Philip of Opus, rather than the Chaldaean, who spoke the crucial words “Whatever is barbarian is completely ignorant” (πάντη τὸ βάρβαρον ἀμαθές) is excluded not only by Philip’s clear role throughout the text as a mere observer, but also by the fact that there is no possible room in the text for a change of subject: cf. A.-J. Festugière, *Revue de philologie*, XXI (1947), p. 9 n. 2, Gaiser, pp. 424–5. As to what someone who himself was ostensibly a “barbarian” or foreigner could mean by making such a statement, cf. already Heraclitus, fr. 107 Diels–Kranz = fr. 13 Marcovich, with H. C. Baldry’s comments in *Grecs et barbares* (Fondation Hardt, Entretiens 8; Geneva, 1961), p. 178; and for Plato’s own appreciation of ironies of precisely this kind, Kingsley, *Ancient Philosophy*, ch. 12. On the other hand, Lasserre’s appeal to *Epinomis* 987d–988a as a supposed parallel for Philip of Opus delivering such a ruthless condemnation of “barbarians” is entirely misguided: the famous statement in the *Epinomis* that “whatever Greeks receive from barbarians they improve on and carry to perfection” is an obvious example of psychological compensation for admitting so freely the extent to which Greeks have been indebted to foreign wisdom (the Greeks must be responsible for something).

¹⁷² III.40–1, V.11–12; Gaiser, pp. 176, 179–80 = Dorandi, p. 134.

¹⁷³ Cf. e.g. Spierri, *op. cit.* (above, n. 118), p. 214 with n. 72.

¹⁷⁴ Gaiser, pp. 421–2, 434–6, rightly comparing Aristoxenus’s reference to Zoroaster himself as a “Chaldaean” (*ibid.*, p. 421; Aristox. fr. 13 Wehrli; below, with n. 178). Earlier Boyancé, *op. cit.* (above, n. 151), p. 254, had tried to harmonize the evidence by explaining the Magi – mentioned in Seneca and the anonymous life of Plato – as Chaldaean rather than Persian priests; but this fails to account either for the very Persian Mithradates, or for the widespread use of the term “Chaldaean” when referring to Persian Magi.

¹⁷⁵ S. Dalley, *Aram*, III (1991), pp. 25–6; and cf. Kingsley, “Greek origin”, p. 254 n. 54.

repeatedly confused by the Greeks.¹⁷⁶ Historically, the contacts became closer than ever with the taking of Babylon by Cyrus in 539 B.C.; and as we have seen, the resulting Mesopotamian influence on Zoroastrianism did not just exert a decisive effect on Magi in Babylonia itself. In fact it also exerted a major effect on those who moved westwards into Anatolia and Asia Minor during the fifth and fourth centuries B.C.¹⁷⁷ The western forms of Zoroastrianism with which the Greeks came into contact, both in Asia Minor and in Babylonia, were forms of Zoroastrianism strongly affected by these Mesopotamian ideas. The result was that, by certain Greeks in Athens during the fourth century B.C., Zoroaster himself was considered a “Chaldaean”. Already we have here the beginnings of the well-known use of the word “Chaldaean” by later writers to refer to people skilled in the arts of astrology and numerical calculation; but the description of Zoroaster as a Chaldaean also contains the much more specific idea that Zoroaster himself, and by implication the religion he had founded, were Babylonian in origin.¹⁷⁸

It has been claimed that this particular reference to Zoroaster as a Chaldaean – made in the second half of the fourth century by one of Aristotle’s chief disciples, Aristoxenus – is the earliest surviving evidence “for the total confusion between Chaldaean priests and Magi” on the part of the Greeks.¹⁷⁹ That is not the case. Earlier in the fourth century the historian Dinon and Hermodorus, one of Plato’s own companions in the Academy, had already etymologized the name “Zoroaster” as meaning *astrothutēs*: a word which certainly had the sense of “star-diviner”, of someone who foretells the future by reading the stars,¹⁸⁰ but which also means quite simply someone who ritually “sacrifices to the stars and planets”. The Babylonian practice of offering ritual sacrifice, on a daily and monthly basis, to the stars and the seven planets is well attested in Akkadian sources.¹⁸¹ And contrary to what is usually supposed, the opening up of the East to the Greeks by Alexander the Great did not do a great deal to clarify their earlier confusion of Zoroastrian with Mesopotamian traditions – for the basic reason that the forms of Zoroastrianism which they encountered at first hand in Babylonia were, themselves, heavily influenced by Babylonian ideas.¹⁸² With only intermittent exceptions, the same merging of the “Chaldaean” and the “Persian” in the minds of Greeks which we already find formally stated by the fourth century B.C. perpetuated itself down to the end of antiquity. Democritus was presented as “going abroad to learn from the Chaldaeans in Persia” (*πρὸς Χαλδαίους εἰς τὴν Περσίδα*).¹⁸³ Then there is the case of Lucian, who in one of his satires portrays a meeting in Babylon with “one of the Magi, the disciples and successors of

¹⁷⁶ Hellanicus, *FGrH* 4 F59 with Jacoby *ad loc.* (i, p. 453); A. Baumstark, *RE* iii, cols. 2046, 2057, 2059, 2062.

¹⁷⁷ See now M. Boyce’s summary of the evidence in *Iranica Varia: Papers in Honor of Professor Ehsan Yarshater* (Leiden, 1990), pp. 20–9; and specific details such as the one noted by J. Bidez in *Mélanges Jean Capart* (Brussels, 1935), p. 61 with n. 3.

¹⁷⁸ Aristoxenus, fr. 13 Wehrli; Kingsley, “Greek origin”.

¹⁷⁹ A. Momigliano, *Alien Wisdom* (Cambridge, 1975), p. 143; A. Kuhrt in *Mesopotamien und seine Nachbarn*, ed. H. J. Nissen and J. Renger (2nd edition, Berlin, 1987), p. 545.

¹⁸⁰ Kingsley, *op. cit.*, p. 254, with the refs. in nn. 56, 58.

¹⁸¹ Cf. esp. F. Thureau-Dangin, *Rituel accadiens* (Paris, 1921), pp. 74–5, 79.29–34, 85; and for invocations of “the seven planets” in the 7th century B.C. (implying some form of cult) see Grayson, and Parpola and Watanabe, in n. 187.

¹⁸² Kingsley, “Greek origin”, p. 255 with n. 62.

¹⁸³ Diogenes Laertius 9.35 (Demetrius of Magnesia; Antisthenes of Rhodes, *FGrH* 508 F12); Baumstark, *op. cit.* (above, n. 176), col. 2057.

Zoroaster” (τινος τῶν μάγων τῶν Ζωροάστρου μαθητῶν καὶ διαδόχων): a man whom he immediately goes on to describe as “one of the Chaldaeans, a wise man ... whose name was Mithrobarzanes” (τινὶ τῶν Χαλδαίων σοφῶν ἀνδρῶν... τοῦνομα δὲ ἦν αὐτῷ Μιθροβαρζάνης). Mithrobarzanes, it should hardly need saying, was a good Iranian name.¹⁸⁴ And to mention just one other example, in his *Theology of Arithmetic* the Neopythagorean Nicomachus of Gerasa reports that “the best-qualified among the Babylonians (Βαβυλωνίων οἱ δοκιμώτατοι), and Ostanēs” the famous Magus, “and Zoroaster” call the seven planetary spheres “herds” or “flocks” (ἀγέλαι).¹⁸⁵ It is interesting to note that the most extraordinary explanations have been proposed for this choice of imagery in alluding to the planets.¹⁸⁶ Classicists appear to remain oblivious of the fact that the standard way of referring to the seven planets in Babylonian religious or astronomical texts was as “the seven sheep (bibbi)”.¹⁸⁷ As we will soon see, this is not the only case where classical scholars have paid no serious attention to the oriental origin of certain ideas even when those ideas are specifically labelled in our Greek sources as “Babylonian” or “Chaldaean”.

This overall history, and these examples, are adequate to explain why a Persian should be referred to by Greeks now as a Chaldaean and now as a Magus; and there were no doubt other factors involved as well. The type of numerical speculation indulged in by the Magi mentioned in Seneca and the anonymous life of Plato, or by a Magus dating Zoroaster to six thousand years before Plato, was especially likely to earn them the title of “Chaldaean”.¹⁸⁸ And it is worth adding, too, that there may have been good reasons why people close to Plato deliberately wanted to *avoid* calling a Persian Magus a “magus”. The term had already fallen heavily into disrepute, and was often used to refer to someone

¹⁸⁴ Lucian, *Menippus* 6. For the name see Schmitt, *op. cit.* (above, n. 158), pp. 401–2, 405 with n. 41, 408, 426, 436, 454; for the passage, Kingsley, *Ancient Philosophy*, ch. 15 with n. 33; and for the Magi as “successors of Zoroaster”, Bidez and Cumont, i, pp. 93 and n. 1, 171 n. 4, 176 with n. 1, ii, pp. 8 n. 5, 119 n. 3, 143 n. 2.

¹⁸⁵ ps.-Iamblichus, *Theologumena arithmeticae*, pp. 56.13–57.8 de Falco = Bidez and Cumont, ii, p. 283. For the famous Magus Ostanēs cf. esp. Pliny, *Hist. nat.* 30.2.8–11, Apuleius, *Apology* 27, and the *Suda*, s.v. ἀστρονομία (Babylonians, Zoroaster, Ostanēs); Bidez and Cumont, i, pp. 168–9, ii, pp. 267–308, K. Preisendanz, *RE* xviii.2.1, cols. 1609–42, P. Kingsley, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, LVII (1994), p. 7.

¹⁸⁶ So e.g. R. Beck in Boyce and Grenet, p. 558.

¹⁸⁷ Cf. E. F. Weidner, *Handbuch der babylonischen Astronomie* (Leipzig, 1915), i, pp. 19–20 with p. 20 n. 1, and p. 75, where he rightly refers to the 7th tablet of *Enūma Eliš* in which the planetary gods are compared to a “flock” (šēnu: *CAD* § 128–31); Thureau-Dangin, *op. cit.* (above, n. 181), p. 79.33 = p. 85.33, where the expression occurs in the context of cult worship (see above, with n. 181); F. Gössmann, *Planetarium Babylonicum* (Rome, 1950), pp. 52–6 §139; *CAD* B 217–19; A. K. Grayson, *Journal of Cuneiform Studies*, XXXIX (1987), pp. 136–8 and 155–6 = S. Parpola and K. Watanabe, *Neo-Assyrian Treaties and Loyalty Oaths* (State Archives of Assyria, II; Helsinki, 1988), pp. 77–8. The conversion by Greeks of the Babylonian flock of planetary sheep into planetary flocks is clearly related to the forced parallel, emphasized by Nicomachus, between the word *agelai* (“flocks”) and *aggeloi* (“messengers”, “angels”). As for the number 7, Burkert (*op. cit.* above, n. 165, p. 311 n. 62) wrongly states – with specific reference to the Greeks – that “it was a scientific achievement not to be underrated to go against appearances, separate the five planets from the fixed stars, and classify them with the sun and moon so that there are seven planets”: this grouping of the planets, like most of their knowledge about the planets, was derived by the Greeks from Babylonian tradition. For the value of the number 7 in both Sumerian and Akkadian as synonymous with “totality”, and its fundamental importance in religion and magic, cf. J. Hehn, *Siebenzahl und Sabbat* (Leipzig, 1907), pp. 4–5; G. Contenau, *La magie chez les Assyriens et les Babyloniens* (Paris, 1947), pp. 85–9; W. Horowitz, “Mesopotamian cosmic geography” (Univ. of Birmingham thesis, 1986), pp. 317–18, 319 with n. 22; *CAD* K 457. The major role of “The Seven” – i.e. the 7 planets – in Syrian cult and cosmology derives in the first instance from Syria’s religious affiliations with Babylonia, not from Greece: see H. J. W. Drijvers, *East of Antioch* (London, 1984), XI, pp. 193–6 with XVI, pp. 35–43.

¹⁸⁸ Cf. e.g. Russell’s comments, *Zoroastrianism*, p. 168, on the later history of speculations involving the number 6000.

who was a master of deceitfulness and trickery;¹⁸⁹ the only time when Plato himself uses the word “magus” in his writings, it is with a contemptuous sense.¹⁹⁰

But there is one other point which is undeniably relevant. As has often been noted, it is no coincidence that the meeting between Plato and the “Chaldaean” was reported by Philip of Opus: the *astrologos*, or “astronomer”.¹⁹¹ It was this same Philip who according to an ancient tradition wrote the so-called *Epinomis* as a small supplement to Plato’s *Laws*:¹⁹² the little treatise discusses astronomy, details about the planets in particular, and the indebtedness of the Greeks for knowledge of such matters to the East. Details of what appear in the text to be genuine elements of Babylonian lore were noted by scholars earlier in the century; the more recent trend, however, has been to move backwards – as so often – and cast doubt even on these supposed examples of Mesopotamian influence, arguing instead that the author of the *Epinomis* had nothing but the vaguest and most fanciful notions of real oriental doctrine.¹⁹³ By and large, scholars now prefer to leave a question mark hanging over the issue of whether the work reveals any genuine familiarity with oriental traditions or not. And yet there is no room for question marks. To take just one of the several examples that have been entirely overlooked: in the middle of his crucial exposition of the nature of divinity the author raises the possibility – which he immediately goes on to present as the truth – that the stars are “likenesses of the gods, images fashioned by the gods themselves” (θεῶν εἰκόνας, ... ἀγάλματα ... θεῶν αὐτῶν ἐργασασμένων).¹⁹⁴ The idea expressed here, and the precise wording used, have given rise to a great deal of concern and creative interpretation on the part of commentators.¹⁹⁵ In fact all the author of the *Epinomis* has done is give a virtually exact translation into Greek of the theological and cosmological statement that – as the *Enūma Anu Enlil* puts it – the great gods themselves “designed the stars as their likenesses” (*kakkabāni tamšīlsunu eširū*); or, as the *Enūma Eliš* preferred to present it, Marduk “fashioned stations for the great gods, he set up the constellation-stars as their images” (*ubaššim manzāza an ilāni rabūti kakkabāni tamšīlsunu lumāši ušziz*).¹⁹⁶

¹⁸⁹ A. Abt, *Die Apologie des Apuleius von Madaura und die antike Zauberei* (Giessen, 1908), pp. 33–4; Nock, i, pp. 309–10; W. Burkert, *Rheinisches Museum*, CV (1962), p. 38 n. 12. ¹⁹⁰ *Republic* 572e.

¹⁹¹ Gaiser, p. 176 (III.35–9) = Dorandi, pp. 133–4 (Φίλιππος ὁ φιλόσοφος ἀστρολόγος τ’ ἐξηγεῖτ’...). For the association between *astrologia* and “Chaldaean” lore cf. Kingsley, “Greek origin”, p. 253.

¹⁹² Diogenes Laertius 3.37.

¹⁹³ Particularly influential in this regard has been Tarán’s *Academica*. Cf. Kingsley, *Ancient Philosophy*, ch. 5 n. 14. For an example of the earlier literature see É. des Places in *Mélanges Franz Cumont* (Brussels, 1936), i, pp. 138–9 = his *Études platoniciennes* (Leiden, 1981), pp. 140–1. ¹⁹⁴ *Epinomis* 983e6–984a1; 984a3–b1.

¹⁹⁵ Cf. e.g. A.-J. Festugière, *La révélation d’Hermès Trismégiste* (Paris, 1949–54), ii, p. 205 (who boldly slides over the idea of the gods producing divine representations of themselves); O. Specchia, *Platone: Epinomis* (Florence, 1967), p. 100; Tarán, pp. 85–9.

¹⁹⁶ *Enūma Anu Enlil*, ed. E. Weidner, *Archiv für Orientforschung*, XVII (1954–6), p. 89; *Enūma Eliš* 5.1–2, ed. R. Labat, *Le poème babylonien de la création* (Paris, 1935), p. 136. For the meaning of *tamšīlu* (“likeness”, “image”, “figure”, “portrait”, “representation”), see A. Schott, *Die Vergleiche in den akkadischen Königsinschriften* (Mitteilungen der Vorderasiatisch-Aegyptischen Gesellschaft, 30.2; Leipzig, 1926), p. 206 and *passim*; W. von Soden, *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch* (Wiesbaden, 1965–81), iii, pp. 1316–17. On the theological assimilation of stars and gods alluded to in these passages cf. Weidner, *Archiv für Orientforschung*, XIX (1959–60), 106–11; A. Livingstone, *Mystical and Mythological Explanatory Works of Assyrian and Babylonian Scholars* (Oxford, 1986), p. 72 and *passim*. From a strictly grammatical point of view, it would be possible to take the “their” in both passages as referring to the stars instead of the gods: “As for the stars, the gods fashioned the constellations as their – the stars’ – likenesses” (*CAD* L 245b). But apart from being meaningless, this misses the obvious theological allusion.

That knowledge of Mesopotamian astral and theological lore penetrated Plato's Academy is certain; and yet there is no reason to attribute this penetration specifically, or exclusively, to the visiting Chaldaean. The Pythagoreans in southern Italy with whom Plato was closely acquainted had been well informed about Babylonian theological and astrological ideas since at least the fifth century B.C.;¹⁹⁷ and the familiarity with Mesopotamian ideas demonstrated by the *Epinomis* has clear antecedents in Plato's own earlier writings. For instance, in the famous myth of Er at the end of the *Republic*, Plato presents a formal list of colours corresponding to each of the planets which agrees precisely with the correspondences presented in Babylonian texts.¹⁹⁸ It will be noted that although more or less straightforward listings of the planetary colours do sometimes occur in the priestly compendia,¹⁹⁹ the Mesopotamian interest in them was purely for the sake of interpreting omens and was – in the broadest sense of the word – strictly astrological in nature.²⁰⁰ And to mention just one other small detail of a rather different kind: in the *Laws*, that final work of his to which the *Epinomis* was added as a supplement, Plato allusively recommended the offering of worship to the sun, moon and planets and – in the same context – went on to mention with approval the “prostrations and salutations” to the sun and moon supposedly practised by “all alike, Greeks and barbarians”.²⁰¹ As scholars have realized,²⁰² Plato is saying more here than he appears to say. The offering of sacrifice to the sun or moon was virtually unheard of in the Greek world,²⁰³ and while his word for “salutations” is ambiguous enough, there is nothing at all ambiguous in his combined reference to “prostrations and salutations” (*προκυλίσεις ἅμα καὶ προσκυνήσεις*). The act of

¹⁹⁷ Cf. P. Kingsley, *Classical Review*, XLIV (1994), p. 296; and for Plato's familiarity with Pythagorean circles in the West, *Ancient Philosophy*, chs. 6–14.

¹⁹⁸ See *Republic* 616e–617a with J. Bidez, *Eos, ou Platon et l'Orient* (Brussels, 1945), pp. *1–*18, and Burkert, *op. cit.* (above, n. 165), p. 301 n. 9: the coincidence cannot be explained as due to independent observation by Greeks. Boll, in F. Boll and C. Bezold, *Antike Beobachtungen farbiger Sterne* (Munich, 1916), pp. 20–2, noted the Mesopotamian origin of the planetary colours in the myth of Er, but missed the exactness of the parallel by wrongly identifying Mercury and Venus in Plato's scheme: see Bidez, *op. cit.*, pp. *1–*2. The parallelism was also diluted by Bezold's mistranslation of Akkadian *šalmu* (applied to Saturn and Mercury: Boll and Bezold, *op. cit.*, pp. 139–42) as “black”. The basic meaning of the word is “dark”, often with the implication of a brownish or reddish hue: *CAD* § 78, von Soden, *op. cit.* (above, n. 196), iii, p. 1078a. For the corresponding adjective *ξανθός* in Plato (also applied to Saturn and Mercury, *Republic* 617a) see Bidez's fundamental comments, *op. cit.*, p. *3; H. Dürbeck, *Zur Charakteristik der griechischen Farbenbezeichnungen* (Bonn, 1977), pp. 100–5.

¹⁹⁹ H. Hunger and D. Pingree, *MUL.APIN: An Astronomical Compendium in Cuneiform* (Horn, 1989), pp. 84–6 (but even here the colours are correlated with predictions of weather).

²⁰⁰ See e.g. Boll and Bezold, *op. cit.* (above, n. 198), pp. 140–7, plus the more elaborate schematizations published by E. Weidner, *Gestirn-Darstellungen auf babylonischen Tafeln* (Vienna, 1967), *passim*; also Diodorus Siculus's perfectly accurate statement (*Bibliotheca* 2.30.4) that, according to the “Chaldaeans”, the planets “through their colour announce events in advance to those who care to pay detailed attention to them”. Tarán's claim (p. 90 n. 410) that “It is uncritical to assume that Diodorus had access to genuine information about Babylonian sources” shows characteristic disregard for the oriental sources. ²⁰¹ *Laws* 821b–d, 887d–e.

²⁰² Festugière, *op. cit.* (above, n. 171), pp. 22–4; E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley, 1951), pp. 220–1, 232–3 n. 70.

²⁰³ Throwing a kiss to the sun (cf. e.g. Lucian, *De saltatione* 17) was quite a different matter. Hesiod, *Works and Days* 336–9 is sometimes cited in this connection, but Hesiod simply talks of sacrificing to the gods “at bedtime and when the sun rises” – not of sacrificing to the sun. For further comments on the passage in Plato see W. H. Roscher, *Nachträge zu meiner Schrift Über Selene und Verwandtes* (Leipzig, 1895), p. 2. On the other hand, the idea in Plato's *Cratylus* (397c–d) that “the first” of the Greeks acknowledged the sun, moon and stars as gods is as fanciful as Theophrastus's notion that, “in some incalculably ancient time”, people sacrificed to the heavenly bodies: cf. Porphyry, *On Abstinence* 2.5 with D. Obbink in *Theophrastean Studies*, ed. W. W. Fortenbaugh and R. W. Sharples (New Brunswick, 1988), p. 274.

prostrating oneself was abhorred by the Greeks, and considered strictly “barbarian”: it is hardly a coincidence that the expression which has the identical meaning (*šukēnu/nagruru*) is a standard occurrence in Akkadian texts.²⁰⁴ There is only one realistic explanation for the passage, which is that it was a diplomatic attempt by Plato to smooth over the “great novelty” of what he was proposing: the introduction of a cult of the planets based on oriental models so as to “save the unity of Greek belief and of Greek culture”.²⁰⁵ In other words, the frank orientalism and open recommendation of planetary worship in the *Epinomis* were no more than an explicit elaboration of what had already been hinted at in Plato’s *Laws*.²⁰⁶

Quite apart from the Pythagorean and Platonic evidence, and its bearing on Plato’s “Chaldaean” visitor, if we are to preserve a sense of historical perspective we need also to remember that the opening up of the East by Alexander the Great later on in the fourth century will have added further to the streams of information making their way back from Babylonia to Greece.²⁰⁷ But even here, things are rather more complex than they may appear. For instance there is the report that Aristotle’s successor Theophrastus described how, when it came to interpreting signs in the heavens,

in his own days the Chaldaeans had the theoretical knowledge of how to predict, in particular, the lives and deaths of individuals and not just general events such as bad weather or good – as in their assertion that if Mercury becomes visible in winter it indicates frost, but if it becomes visible in summer it sends them heat.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁴ M. I. Gruber, *Aspects of Nonverbal Communication in the Ancient Near East* (Rome, 1980), i, pp. 169–71: *nagruru* = *προκύλιαις* and *šukēnu* = *προσκύνησις* (*ibid.* pp. 162–9, 238–45). Note also the “sacrifices and prostrations” offered in the temple of Anu at Uruk: Thureau-Dangin, *op. cit.* (above, n. 181), pp. 109, 111. For prostration as “barbaric” cf. e.g. Euripides, *Orestes* 1507 with M. L. West’s note *ad loc.*, Aristophanes, *Birds* 500–1, Demosthenes 19.338, and also Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1361a36; R. A. Neil, *The Knights of Aristophanes* (Cambridge, 1901), p. 28 n., Festugière, *op. cit.*, (above, n. 171), p. 23 and n. 4. The closest parallel to Plato’s expression in Greek is Lamblichus, *On the Mysteries* 1.21 – in a context of oriental, and specifically “Chaldaean”, religious practices, and clearly reflecting his own Syrian background (cf. 1.1–2); for the synthesis in Syria of Greek philosophy and ultimately Babylonian religious cult see the striking evidence discussed by J.-P. Rey-Coquais, *Les annales archéologiques arabes syriennes*, XXIII (1973), pp. 66–8 (Apamea), with n. 187 above.

²⁰⁵ Dodds, *op. cit.* (above, n. 202), pp. 220–1.

²⁰⁶ Cf. W. Burkert’s comments, *Greek Religion* (Oxford, 1985), p. 327; also G. R. Morrow, *Plato’s Cretan City* (Princeton, 1960), p. 446 (on the *Epinomis* as “the earliest exposition ... of the theology presupposed by the *Laws*”); and on the political implications of the planetary cult outlined in the *Epinomis*, Festugière, *Études de religion grecque et hellénistique* (Paris, 1972), pp. 129–37.

²⁰⁷ Kingsley, “Greek origin”, pp. 254–6 with n. 60. See also S. Amigues, *Théophraste: Recherches sur les plantes* (Paris, 1988–), i, pp. xxii–xxx; and note in this context the familiarity shown by Eudemos of Rhodes, a disciple of Aristotle and a colleague of Theophrastus, with Babylonian traditions closely related to *Enūma Eliš*. Cf. F. Wehrli, *Eudemos von Rhodos* (Basle, 1955), p. 70.20–6; L. G. Westerink and J. Combès, *Damascius: Traité des premiers principes* (Paris, 1986–91), iii, pp. 165, 234–6; A. Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis* (2nd edition, Chicago, 1951), pp. 75–6.

²⁰⁸ Proclus, *In Timaeum*, iii, p. 151.1–9 (from Theophrastus’s *On Signs*) = W. W. Fortenbaugh, P. M. Huby, R. W. Sharples, D. Gutas et al., *Theophrastus of Eresus: Sources for his Life, Writings, Thought and Influence* (Leiden, 1992), i, pp. 362–5 §194. The way that the surviving Greek text *On Signs* contains only a much shorter treatment – it mentions the visibility of Mercury foretelling frost in winter and heat in summer but contains no reference to Chaldaeans or to predictions for individuals (§46) – has rightly been taken as evidence that at this point the text is giving an abbreviated excerpt from Theophrastus: cf. O. Regenbogen, *RE Suppl.* vii (1940), cols. 1412–15, and esp. P. Cronin in *Theophrastus: His Psychological, Doxographical, and Scientific Writings*, ed. Fortenbaugh and D. Gutas (New Brunswick, 1992), pp. 310, 336. The fact that the predictions based on the visibility of Mercury are indeed, as we will see, Chaldaean confirms the genuineness of Proclus’s report.

It is reasonable to take this reference to Theophrastus's "own days" (ἐν τοῖς κατ' αὐτὸν χρόνοις) as indicating that his knowledge was based on information he received after Alexander the Great had made his way into Mesopotamia; and yet there are other factors involved here which it is impossible to ignore. Plato's close friend and colleague, Eudoxus, had already written about Babylonian horoscopic astrology, or the prediction of individuals' lives; although he appears to have been sceptical about this branch of astrology, he was also so familiar with other aspects of Mesopotamian omen literature that he wrote a work called *Bad Weather Predictions* (Χειμῶνος προγνωστικά) which was certainly based on traditions preserved in cuneiform sources; to add further to the picture, it will be noted that Theophrastus used almanac material – and details of correlations between the visibility of stars and changes in weather – which is very closely related to information provided by Eudoxus; and, as far as this last point is concerned, we need to bear in mind the evidence of Theophrastus's indebtedness to Eudoxus in other respects.²⁰⁹ So, even though Theophrastus may have been reporting strictly contemporary information, the details he offered were hardly a significant improvement on the type of knowledge already available in Athens before the time of Alexander. In this, as in other matters, the impact of Alexander's "opening up" of the East has doubtless been vastly exaggerated.

This passage from Theophrastus has been described as a "curious text".²¹⁰ It appears not to have been noted that every detail in it – and, in particular, the details about Mercury – is absolutely authentic and accurate in reporting on Mesopotamian traditions. According to Theophrastus, "the Chaldaeans" claim that "if Mercury becomes visible in winter it indicates frost, but if it becomes visible in summer it sends heat" (τὸν ἀστέρα τοῦ Ἑρμοῦ χειμῶνος μὲν ἐκφανῆ γενόμενον ψύχη σημαίνειν, καύματα δὲ θέρους ἀναπέμπει). In Mesopotamia the greatest of attention was paid to the phenomenon of Mercury's "becoming visible" (*nanmuru*: a term that often, but not necessarily, meant its heliacal rising); the visibility of Mercury was often mentioned in the context of predictions about intense cold or heat; and in the body of omen texts known as the *Enūma Anu Enlil* we find it stated specifically that, in the case of certain celestial phenomena, "if it is winter there will be frost, but if it is summer there will be heat" (*šumma kuššu šurbū šumma ummātu umšū ibašši*).²¹¹ This is the second time that we find people in the immediate entourage

²⁰⁹ Cicero, *De divinatione* 2.42.87 = Eudoxus, fr. 343 Lasserre, with Bidez's comments, *op. cit.* (above, n. 198), p. 164 n. 30; C. Bezold and F. Boll, *Reflexe astrologischer Keilinschriften bei griechischen Schriftstellern* (Heidelberg, 1911), pp. 9–11 and *passim*; B. Einarson and G. K. K. Link, *Theophrastus: De causis plantarum* (Cambridge, Mass., 1976–90), i, pp. xliv–lvi, 111 n. a; and on Theophrastus's indebtedness to Eudoxus in other matters cf. e.g. Gisinger, *op. cit.* (above, n. 64), p. 135 with n. 6. For Eudoxus and astrology see also Burkert, *op. cit.* (above, n. 165), pp. 349–50; and for details about the earliest known (but hardly the earliest written) Babylonian horoscopes, cf. J.-M. Durand, *Textes babyloniens d'époque récente* (Paris, 1981), p. 52 with P. Kingsley, *Classical Review*, XLIV (1994), p. 296. O. Neugebauer (*The Exact Sciences in Antiquity*, 2nd edition, Providence, 1957, p. 188; *A History of Ancient Mathematical Astronomy*, Berlin, 1975, ii, pp. 608–9) gratuitously tried to dispose of the evidence for Eudoxus's familiarity with horoscopic astrology; in particular, he overlooked the significance of the links between Eudoxus and Theophrastus.

²¹⁰ Festugière, *op. cit.* (above, n. 171), p. 16 n. 4.

²¹¹ E. Reiner and D. Pingree, *Enūma Anu Enlil, Tablets 50–51* (Malibu, 1981), pp. 74–7 (XVI 10). Cf. also the parallel texts cited in CAD K 595b (*ina kušši kušši ina umšū umšū dannu ibašši*), and R. Largement, *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie*, LII (1957), pp. 242–3.31–2 (*ina ummāti umšum dannu ibašši ina kušši kuššu dannu ibašši*). The form, and the exact wording, of the double prediction date back at least to Old Babylonian times: A. Goetze, *Old Babylonian*

of Plato and Aristotle giving virtually word-for-word translations into Greek from the *Enūma Anu Enlil* or related Babylonian literature. But what is remarkable, this time, is that the Mesopotamian parallels have not been noticed – or, it seems, even looked for – in spite of the fact that Theophrastus formally and explicitly attributes what he says to “the Chaldaeans”. From this one can judge how unmethodically ancient Greek literature as a whole has been sifted for oriental influences, and how ineffectively the full extent of those oriental influences (Iranian, as well as Mesopotamian) has been assessed.

It goes without saying that none of these examples of familiarity with oriental ideas in ancient Athens does anything to subtract from the significance and importance of Plato’s “Chaldaean” visitor. Instead, they simply help to place the visit in its broader historical context. Scholars who are followers of the modern fashion for viewing Plato as a purely rational philosopher may decide to push the details about the presence of Magi or Chaldaeans in Athens into the background. But in doing so they do not get rid of the evidence for contact between East and West in Plato’s Academy; they just throw away one of the clues to understanding it.

“Like many undoubted facts in history, it is very odd, and not at all what one might have expected.”²¹² This remark, made by a writer in the general context of Greeks, Persians, and prophetic literature at the time of Xerxes, also applies to the evidence for contact between Plato and orientals at the time of his death. As we see repeatedly happening elsewhere, what from an ordinary point of view “should not” happen in terms of contact and interaction between one culture or tradition and another did happen.²¹³ Festugière exerted a major influence on classical scholarship with his unfortunate idea of the “oriental mirage”: the idea, mentioned earlier, that those later Greeks who wrote about links between the East and classical culture were essentially just creating an illusion.²¹⁴ And so did Momigliano, with his image of the Greeks as intoxicated by the notion of “alien wisdom” – preferring to fantasize about foreign sources of knowledge rather than make any attempt to obtain accurate or genuine information.²¹⁵ But, as we have seen, things are not so simple; and the main failure to obtain accurate information about oriental sources lies elsewhere. Greek philosophy was influenced by oriental – and

Omen Texts (New Haven, 1947), tablet 22.22. For appearances of Mercury cf. e.g. Gössmann, *op. cit.* (above, n. 187), pp. 54–7; Pingree and Reiner, *Revue d'Assyriologie*, LXIX (1975), pp. 175–80; A. J. Sachs and H. Hunger, *Astronomical Diaries and Related Texts from Babylonia* (Vienna, 1988–9), *passim*; Hunger and Pingree, *op. cit.* (above, n. 199), pp. 83–4. Previous datings of the earliest methodical Babylonian observations of Mercury to 363 B.C. (e.g. D. R. Dicks, *Early Greek Astronomy to Aristotle*, London, 1970, pp. 167–8) must now be radically revised: Sachs and Hunger, *op. cit.*, i, pp. 12–13. For the visibility of Mercury and predictions of cold or heat cf. e.g. Reiner and Pingree, *Enūma Anu Enlil, Tablets 50–51*, pp. 74–5 (“Parallels” to XVI 8); H. Hunger, *Astrological Reports to Assyrian Kings* (Helsinki, 1992), p. 41 §70. In claiming that Theophrastus’s interest in the Mesopotamian prediction was purely “ironic” (*L’astrologie grecque*, Paris, 1899, p. 27 and n. 2), A. Bouché-Leclercq overlooked not only the preciseness of Theophrastus’s information but also the extent of his – and many of his predecessors’ – concern with the ability of celestial phenomena to affect weather conditions and temperatures on earth: cf. esp. *De causis plantarum* 2.19.4; E. Pfeiffer, *Studien zum antiken Sternglauben* (Leipzig, 1916), pp. 47–9.

²¹² Burn, p. 347. ²¹³ P. Kingsley, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 3rd series, II (1992), pp. 339–46.

²¹⁴ Festugière, *op. cit.* (above, n. 195), i (2nd edition), pp. 19–44; above, with the refs. in n. 96.

²¹⁵ Momigliano, *op. cit.* (above, n. 179), *passim*; Kuhrt, *op. cit.* (above, n. 179), pp. 545–6.

specifically Iranian – ideas from the very beginning.²¹⁶ And with regard to Plato's Academy, the detailed evidence of oriental influence has scarcely begun to be uncovered not because it does not exist but because most modern scholars have no wish to find it. When viewed in the light of contemporary interests and preoccupations, material of the type we have been considering is bound to remain in the shadows: hence its difficulty, but also its extraordinary value. On the one hand, we are naturally more at ease in dealing with the expression "Xerxes's crossing" after it had come to denote a simple historical event stripped of any mythological significance – which is what it had already become by Alexandrian times.²¹⁷ The resulting "factuality" is only a part of the story, however, and only the most important one from a certain point of view. On the other hand when the founder of Neoplatonism, Plotinus, attained such a level of philosophical expertise (*τοσαύτην ἔξιν ἐν φιλοσοφίαι κτήσασθαι*) after eleven years with his teacher that he decided to head straight for the source of wisdom by going to Persia, it is pointless just to say that he was a victim caught in the grip of "the oriental mirage".²¹⁸ And when a thousand years later the Iranian Shihāb al-Dīn Yaḥyā al-Suhrawardī viewed Plato as representative of the western branch of a tradition which was perpetuated in the East by Zoroastrianism, and saw it as his job to synthesize the teachings of Plato and Zoroaster,²¹⁹ or when the fourteenth-century Sufi 'Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī – of Iranian ancestry but educated in Baghdad – presented Plato as the "Pole" or supreme teacher of his age,²²⁰ these men were continuing a tradition which had been in existence for a very long time.

Bibliography and Abbreviations

- CAD *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary* (Chicago, 1956–)
 DK H. Diels, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, 6th edition by W. Kranz (Berlin, 1951–2)
 FGtH F. Jacoby, *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker* (Berlin and Leiden, 1923–58)
 FHG K. and T. Müller, *Fragmenta historicorum graecorum* (Paris, 1841–51)
 LSJ H. G. Liddell, R. Scott and H. S. Jones, *A Greek–English Lexicon* (Oxford, 1940)
 RE G. Wissowa, W. Kroll, et al., *Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft* (Stuttgart and Munich, 1894–1980)

²¹⁶ W. Burkert, *Rheinisches Museum*, CVI (1963), pp. 97–134. Cf. P. Kingsley, *Studia Iranica*, XXIII (1994), p. 192 with n. 21.

²¹⁷ Above, with n. 114.
²¹⁸ Porphyry, *Life of Plotinus* 3; J. Pépin in *Porphyre: La vie de Plotin*, ed. L. Brisson et al. (Paris, 1982–92), ii, p. 209. Regarding the subsequent journey of Damascius and the Platonic school to Persia see I. Hadot in *Simplicius: Sa vie, son œuvre, sa survie* (Actes du colloque international de Paris, 28 Sept.–1er Oct. 1985; Berlin, 1987), pp. 8–9.

²¹⁹ H. Corbin, *En Islam iranien* (Paris, 1971–2), ii, pp. 10–11, 25–6, 34; S. H. Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages* (Cambridge, Mass., 1964), pp. 61–2 and in *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, ed. M. M. Sharif (Wiesbaden, 1963–6), i, pp. 375–80. For al-Suhrawardī's relation to Zoroastrianism see Corbin, *Les motifs zoroastriens dans la philosophie de Suhrawardī* (Tehran, 1946); for his sources of information on Greek philosophy, Kingsley, *Ancient Philosophy*, ch. 24. On the similar views held in the 15th century by Gemistus Pletho, cf. C. M. Woodhouse, *Gemistos Pletho* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 58–9, 322, 362; for Gemistus's sources – probably ultimately Persian – see *ibid.*, pp. 24–5, 63.

²²⁰ *Kitāb al-insān al-kāmil* (Cairo, 1963), ii, pp. 32–3. For the notion of the *qutb* or "Pole" cf. Kingsley, *Ancient Philosophy*, ch. 24 with n. 27.

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