

**Zarathushtra
and
the Religion of Ancient Iran**

**The Greek and Latin Sources
in Translation**

Edited By

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Introduction

“If Zoroaster, for example, were to return to the earth,” Abraham Hyacinthe Anquetil du Perron wrote, “would he recognize the portraits that people have made of him?”¹ In fact, the fascination with Zarathushtra first enters Western literature in Greek texts from the fifth and fourth centuries BCE, and writers since then seem not to have ceased thinking about him. Within this vast body of literature about Zarathushtra and Zoroastrianism, the Greek and Latin writings occupy a special place. This book, by offering translations of many Greek and Latin texts on the subject, directs attention to them again. Historians of religion will be familiar with several of these texts, and will, I hope, find it useful to have these materials brought together in one volume. But, as the editor, I hope also that these materials will prove to be of interest to others. Let me, therefore, attempt to explain what is so distinctive about these Greek and Latin texts, what they say about Zarathushtra and Zoroastrianism, how a reader might come to them, and what questions they raise.

The Uses of Greek and Latin

The Greek and Latin sources have long been important for the historical study of religions and for the history of Zoroastrianism in particular. In a detailed study of many of these texts, Albert de Jong says that they “are nothing less than fundamental for the writing of a history of Zoroastrianism”.² Already in antiquity, as this book shows, several Greek and Roman writers drew on their literary predecessors in their remarks on Zoroaster and the religion of the Persians. Much later, after the Renaissance opened up new approaches in Europe to Zoroastrianism, Thomas Hyde noted their centrality to his studies in 1700. His book on the Persians, he said, drew from “some few Greeks and Latins, and some other Arabic and Persian Mohammedans”. But he went on to add that the “Mohammedan” writers were “scarcely useful on the rites of the Magi,

¹ “Si Zoroastre, par exemple, reparoissoit sur la terre, se reconnoîtroit-il aux portraits que l’on a faits de lui. Né moins de six cens ans avant Jesus-Christ, il seroit assurément surpris de se voir renvoyé au-delà de la guerre de Troie. L’Adorateur du Tems sans bornes (l’Eternel), principe de tout ce qui existe, entendroit-il son nom, sous celui de *Prêtre des Etoiles*? Issu du sang des Rois de Perse, & Mede de naissance, que diroit-il de se trouver relégué dans la Palestine au service des Esclaves de ses Peres? Telles sont les métamorphoses que produit quelquefois l’Histoire” (Anquetil du Perron 1771, 1.2, *Vie de Zoroastre* 5).

² de Jong 1997, 15; and cf. the bold claim in Millar 1998b, 523, “. . . so far as evidence from Antiquity is concerned, our (supposed) knowledge of Zoroastrianism depends entirely, and without exception, on Graeco-Roman representations”.

especially since they vilified them, and represented them sometimes in invidious ways because of ignorance and malice”.³ Therefore, Hyde said, he relied on Greek and Latin sources as well as the ancient Persian texts in the compilation of his work. If Hyde was, as we know, unable to read the ancient Persian texts with any systematic accuracy or rigour, the same cannot be said of Anquetil du Perron. But even this intellectual found that he needed to call on the Greek and Latin texts in his path-breaking publications on the Avestan and Pahlavi texts. In his essay on the *Life of Zoroaster*, he wrote that while he was going to relate what “the books of the Parsis have informed me of their Legislator”, these materials were nevertheless suspect on account of the fact that they were the testimony of Zoroaster’s own followers. For this reason, and “in order not to omit anything that might serve to make him better known, I shall take care to compare the traits that the Greeks and Latins furnish us”.⁴ Even after the decipherment of Avestan texts in Europe, then, the Greek and Latin sources were seen as necessary aids for an understanding of Zoroastrianism; they were a check on the Persian sources and a means to complement these materials when they were thought to be imperfect, inaccurate, or defective in some respect.

A brief glance at any of the standard accounts of Zoroastrianism from the last one hundred years will show that the Greek and Latin sources remain an intrinsic part of scholarly studies of the religion. While the Greek and Latin texts are still at times used in the orthopaedic mode prescribed by Hyde and Anquetil, they are often also read with a sensitivity to such issues as context, genre, and ideology. Along with numerous Iranian and other non-Iranian sources, they form the basis for a history of religious ideas and practices. In that sense, the texts should facilitate what Mircea Eliade called, in perhaps too grandiose a fashion, “a total hermeneutics” that can “decipher and explicate every kind of human encounter of man with the sacred, from prehistory to our day”.⁵ From the perspective of Zarathushtra and the history of Zoroastrianism, the texts assembled in this book can be read together with other sources about Persian religion as well as the many scholarly treatments on the subject.

For the project of a total hermeneutics, this book provides a vast range of Greek and Latin texts, including many that are familiar to scholars but also many that are usually not classified as part of the study of religion. For example, the selections from Herodotus, Strabo, Plutarch, Diogenes Laertius, and Agathias in the opening chapter are relatively well studied by experts, and their inclusion in this collection will occasion little surprise. However, the book also contains many texts that describe Zarathushtra as a son of Semiramis, a

³ See *Veterum Persarum et Parthorum et Medorum religionis historia*, 2nd edn. (Oxford, 1760), 24.

⁴ Anquetil du Perron 1771, 1.2, *Vie de Zoroastre* 1.

⁵ Eliade 1969, 58.

second Ninus, a king of Bactria, the author of numerous Greek treatises, and the victim of lightning. If these texts are not valuable for the reconstruction of religious history—a point that is debatable—they are nevertheless indispensable for an understanding of the uses made of Zarathushtra in the Greek and Latin traditions and for the reception of this figure. In my view, these statements are part of the history of Zarathushtra, and therefore inseparable from an understanding of him. These representations illustrate the range of possible claims that could be made about Zarathushtra, and hence indicate the complexity, flexibility, and the limitations of the discursive traditions that developed around him.

The Greek and Latin texts are special in the sense that they form the largest corpus of non-Iranian textual sources to survive from antiquity on the subject of Zoroastrianism. One needs to acknowledge both the mass and the diversity of these materials. While most of them are outsiders in relation to Persia and Persian religion, the writers come from a variety of cultural, political, and social backgrounds; they are monotheists and polytheists; Christians and non-Christians; accomplished literary stylists and writers of awkward prose; Greeks, Romans, and others. Each source raises a set of specific questions and contributes to the study of Zoroastrianism in particular ways; each offers a unique stance or perspective on ancient religion. In writing about these sources as a group, and in presenting them under one set of covers as “Greek and Latin” authors, I might appear to be making a case for internal coherence. However, I do not mean to flatten out the richness or strangeness of the texts, and draw attention to differences as well as similarities in them.

A principal question raised by the texts concerns the status of the outsider. Most of the texts, apart from some inscriptions, were composed by those outside of Iran and the Iranian diaspora. Thus, the authors bring an outsider’s perspective, with all that such a situation entails, to their writings. In his work on literary texts, Mikhail Bakhtin argued that it was precisely the external status, or exotopy, of the writer that led to creative understanding:

Creative understanding does not renounce its self, its place in time, its culture; it does not forget anything. The chief matter of understanding is the *exotopy* of the one who does the understanding—in time, space, and culture—in relation to that which he wants to understand creatively. Even his own external aspect is not really accessible to man, and he cannot interpret it as a whole; mirrors and photographs prove of no help; a man’s real external aspect can be seen and understood only by other persons, thanks to their spatial exotopy, and thanks to the fact that they are *other*.⁶

⁶ M. Bakhtin, “Pis’mo I. I. Kanaevu o Gëte” [Letter to I. I. Kanaev on Goethe, written on 11 October 1962], in *Estetika slovesnogo tvorchestva* (Moscow, 1979), 334, quoted in Todorov 1984, 109.

Bakhtin's view is that elements of a culture, e.g. political and religious ideology, are not always discernible to insiders, but are often perceived by those who are located on the outside. Marshall Sahlins, who calls this Bakhtin's "golden passage", paraphrases the point by saying that it takes "another culture to know another culture".⁷ Neither author suggests that the natives have only one authentic attitude, which can then be reconstructed on the basis of exotopic narratives. It is also true that the distinction between insider and outsider is always complex and never simple, that cultural positions are often hybrid, intersubjective, and multiform, and that seemingly indigenous doctrines can be formed in zones of cross-cultural contact. Nevertheless, as Bakhtin suggests, externality may bring an element to cultural description that is not available within the terms of a group's own ideologies.

Where the exotopic observer sees things that the native does not, an encounter with otherness can also transform the native's understanding of the culture. Writing on the subject of hospitality, Jacques Derrida places a particular emphasis on the consequences that follow from an encounter with the foreigner. He suggests that the foreigner can test the fundamental assumptions and values of the native in a radical way.

But before being a question to be dealt with, before designating a concept, a theme, a problem, a program, the question of the foreigner is a question *of* the foreigner, addressed *to* the foreigner. As though the foreigner were first of all *the one who* puts the first question or *the one to whom* you address the first question. As though the foreigner were being-in-question, the very question of being-in-question, the question-being or being-in-question of the question. But also the one who, putting the first question, puts me in question.⁸

The foreigner is viewed here in the terms of a question that arrives and is put to me. Quite apart from any element of self-projection, the foreigner is, as Derrida says, the one who puts the first question and also the one who puts me in question. True enquiry, whether philosophical or religious, and the formulation of problems comes from a space on the outside that is absolutely foreign. It is precisely because it comes from this utterly foreign space, or perhaps non-space, that the question poses a challenge to my ways of being and thinking. The foreigner, conceived in this broad sense, is the one who puts the first real question to me that I have not already encountered before; and the foreigner is the one who puts me in question by making possible a radical challenge to my fundamental assumptions and by opening up the possibility

⁷ Sahlins 2004, 4 (for the golden passage, see 5).

⁸ Derrida 2000, 3.

of self-scrutiny. Accordingly, the foreigner is the one to whom, in turn, I address my first question, without forgetting that at the same time I am putting myself in question. The implication of Derrida's work, then, is that some of the Greek and Latin texts, while working through matters connected with the religion of ancient Persia, are also a part of a process of profound self-interrogation.

The texts in this volume show a range of perspectives that emerge in cross-cultural encounters, from the exotopic to the self-reflective to those that do not easily fit into any classification. If the use of these sources for a cross-cultural history of religion is not in doubt, the exact nature of their value is nonetheless harder to determine. First, while these sources have been a part of religious studies for some centuries, debates about their utility and significance continue to rage unabated. It sometimes seems as if no two scholars of Zoroastrianism can agree on general propositions about their subject, much less about so vexed a problem as Greek and Latin sources. I do not propose to enter here into a discussion of the disputes and disagreements that have marked the study of Persian religion.⁹ Some sense of the range of opinions held by scholars can be gained from the notes and references given below. But it should be understood that, within the history of Zoroastrianism, the analysis of these sources occurs in a context of controversy, some of which is fuelled, in turn, precisely by the status of sources. The circularity at work in these scholarly debates has done little to dissipate their fervour or intensity, but the complexities ought to be appreciated.

Secondly, the Greek and Latin sources translated in this book do not offer any direct, unmediated, or unproblematic access to Zoroastrianism or its history. The reader needs to address questions of genre, context, and authorship, none of which are easy to resolve in relation to a full range of ancient literary and documentary sources. In a book such as this, particular care needs to be applied in the interpretation of sources, since they often appear as deracinated, disembedded, and decontextualized fragments. No small part of the reader's labour must go toward recognizing the partial nature of these texts and comprehending their place within wider literary traditions and socio-political environments. Moreover, there is a complex relationship between these sources and the body of accumulated knowledge about Zoroastrianism. There is a danger of lapsing into historical positivism and seeking proof for ideas, practices, or events in these materials. But it is naive to posit the existence of an event or ritual solely on the basis of a detail mentioned in the sources. Nor is it always possible to find corroboration of an Iranian source in a Greek or Latin one, or to stipulate a one-to-one correspondence between Greek and

⁹ For one account of the divergent views held by scholars in the field, see de Jong 1997, 39–75.

Iranian sources or Latin and Iranian sources, without acknowledging and working through such issues as translation, religious belief, and authorial ideology. Since Iranian sources, like Greek and Latin sources, may have any number of reasons for making a statement about a religious matter, we need to probe further when Iranian and non-Iranian texts appear to be consistent with each other on points of detail or judgement. By this logic, Zoroaster is not always the same as Zarathushtra, nor is Zarathushtra always the same as Zoroaster.

In presenting the Greek and Latin sources here in translation, one is confronted not just with the problem of translation into English from an ancient language. Translation is an involved and complex process that raises a host of thorny and intractable problems. But in this case, it is what the Greek and Latin sources say about Persian religion that is also at issue. Leaving aside for the moment those Greek and Latin texts that may have been composed by Persians, we are dealing not just with the highly contested category of ancient religion, but also, as noted above, with how an ancient religion is represented by other people with their own particular cultural, geographical, and temporal locations. Obviously, interpretation has to proceed with care in this scenario and pay attention to questions of difference. Even the very concept of polytheistic Greek and Roman religious frameworks pose challenges, as the debate about Herodotus' famous comments on the names of the gods reminds us.¹⁰ The fluidity of polytheism may have entailed a broader and more absorptive system in which the demarcation between follower and non-follower was less rigidly maintained than in monotheistic cultures. Some scholars have argued that the Greeks and Romans viewed all divinities as part of a vast interconnected network. If this pluralistic view is correct, then the concept of a "foreign religion" becomes harder to understand. "How did the Greeks view foreign religions?" Jean Rudhardt asks. "What did they think of them? I am not sure that such questions are pertinent; in fact, I doubt whether the Greeks would have understood them in the way that I have just put them."¹¹ Perhaps it is the flexibility of the Greek and Roman attitude to religion that allowed Greeks and Romans to assimilate the deities of other cultures into familiar gods, so that an equivalence was established between Ishtar and Aphrodite, Osiris and Dionysus, or Ahura Mazda and Zeus. In the case of overtly Christian writers, moreover, an insistence on the singular truth and legitimacy of Christianity, among other things, coloured the representation of Zoroastrianism. Often, Persian monotheism was seen as too threatening to the fundamental concepts of Christianity, and was therefore denied; or Persian doctrine was

¹⁰ See Herodotus, *History* 2.3 and 2.50.

¹¹ Rudhardt 2002, 172; cf. Harrison 2000.

characterized as a dualism, but in terms very different from those used to describe the conflict between God and Satan.

The Christian sources remind us that many of the Greek and Latin representations of Zoroastrianism occur in texts composed by authors who were often unsympathetic to Persia, whether because they were from regions at war with Persia, or opposed to Persian rule, or subjects of Persian power. The Achaemenids and the Sasanians, among others, were regularly described in critical or hostile terms by Greek and Latin writers. For the Achaemenid era in particular, which has left behind relatively few indigenous texts, this situation means that much of the political history of Persia is dependent on sources who were in conflict with the empire. As Pierre Briant writes, “The Great Kings and the Persians thus left the control of their historical memory to others. Here is an extraordinary situation: one must reconstruct the narrative thread of Achaemenid history from the writings of their subjects and their enemies—hence the power and authority long ascribed to the Greek authors.”¹² It is precisely these kinds of authors, for instance, who promote the idea of Persian decadence or claim that the Achaemenid Persians practised religious imperialism, whereas these ideas now seem dubious in the light of work by scholars such as Briant, Heleen Sancisi-Weerdenburg, and Amélie Kuhrt.¹³ However, the problem of Achaemenid sources should not be taken to imply that authors who say they are well disposed to Persians offer neutral, or favourable, readings of Persian practice and custom. Greek and Latin writers, like Persian ones, remarked on religious issues for any number of reasons, not all of which are easily interpreted or analyzed by readers in other times and places. On questions of religion, as with questions of politics, nothing can be taken at face value.¹⁴

Despite the problems associated with the use of Greek and Latin sources, I insist on the continued use of external materials for the study of ancient culture and religion. I have given some reasons for this above and only add here a defence of comparative studies as such. The point of comparative analysis is not simply to seek confirmation or repudiation of an objective, whether cognitive or historical, that one has already formulated in advance. Nor is it to find, as Mark Taylor cautions, either “a monistic perennial philosophy in which all religions are purported to express the same truth differently” or “a dualistic heresiological model in which true religion is privileged over and set

¹² Briant 2002, 7.

¹³ See Briant 1990 and the volumes on *Achaemenid History* (1987–) edited by Sancisi-Weerdenburg and Kuhrt.

¹⁴ For Zoroastrian views of non-Zoroastrian religions, see Menasce 1945 (polemical texts against other religious groups), Shaked 1990 (on Judaism), and de Jong 2003.

against false religions”.¹⁵ Comparative study that is worthwhile requires an informed negotiation of sameness and difference, and seeks to understand issues of identity and otherness with methodological and theoretical self-awareness. “What we learn from exposure to dissonant configurations,” Marcel Detienne says, “we can learn in no other way.”¹⁶ In that spirit, this book offers a set of texts that potentially moves forward the comparative understanding of cultures. Of course, it makes merely a small contribution to that end, concerning as it does cultures that were not far removed in space and that often came into contact with each other. Even so, as some have shown already, the comparative analysis of Greek and Latin sources in relation to Iran yields interpretive insights that are not available by other means. Indeed, the reader will find it more rewarding not just to pursue comparisons that are direct and familiar, but also, as Detienne urges, to compare the incomparable—the incomparable that “offers an initial resistance to comparison and obliges the comparatist to ask how and why such and such a category does not exist or seems to have no meaning in one society investigated among others”.¹⁷ Such a project calls on readers to think across cultures in ways that are ambitious, constructive, experimental, and perhaps dangerous, as they open themselves to the possibility of far-reaching comparisons.

Zarathushtra and Zoroaster

Zoroaster was a Greek name, and Zarathushtra an Iranian one.¹⁸ When the Greeks or Romans said Zoroaster for Zarathushtra, to what and to whom were they referring?¹⁹ Can we know what they meant by that name? The Greeks themselves said that Zoroaster’s name, *Zoroástrēs* and its variants, meant “star-worshipper” or “star-diviner”, that is, someone who practices divination from stars. This followed from the letters *astr* in the middle of the name; these letters very closely resembled the Greek word for “star”, *astron* or *aster*. Hence, “Zoroaster” was interpreted as *astrothutes* or “star-diviner”, an explanation we

¹⁵ Taylor 1998, 14.

¹⁶ Detienne 2002, 186.

¹⁷ Detienne 2002, 183.

¹⁸ This section of the introduction reworks some of the material from my essay, “The Philosopher’s Zarathushtra”, in a volume on Greece and Achaemenid Persia, edited by Christopher Tuplin and Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones (Swansea: The Classical Press of Wales), forthcoming in 2007.

¹⁹ It is instructive to compare Greek and Latin representations of Zarathushtra with representations of him in the Zoroastrian material. For Zarathushtra in Pahlavi literature in particular, see Molé 1967; for Zarathushtra in the Zoroastrian tradition generally, see Brüner 1997.

find already in fourth-century writers such as the historian Dinon and Plato's friend Hermodorus.²⁰ Some writers also used the initial letters of the name (Zo-) and took the name to mean "living star".²¹ Others remarked on the perceived fire in stars and connected this fire to the importance of fire in Zoroastrianism.²² Various suggestions were forwarded in antiquity by writers at different times, but it was certainly the stellar element in Zoroaster's name that attracted many of these would-be etymologists. The label "Chaldaean", which was sometimes applied to him, was thus a reference to this etymology and to the Babylonian associations of Iranian religion.

But in attempting to answer the question of Zoroaster, let us also take up some of the points made above and turn to the earliest Greek writings about the Persian figure. In the first place, we note that the use of Zarathushtra by classical Greek sources upsets conventional scholarly views about the implacable hostility of the Greeks and Persians, just as the appeal to Zarathushtra also contravenes what we might be led to expect by the widespread negative portrayal of Persians in Greek art and literature. It may surprise some, given my remarks about the Greek sources for Achaemenid history, to see Zarathushtra appear in Greek texts as a venerable object of desire rather than as a source of derision. In fact, a full-scale military presence in mainland Greece can be dated only to the years 490 and 480–479 BCE. As the archaeological and iconographic evidence indicates, there was considerable receptivity to Iranian cultural influence in mainland Greece, the northern Aegean, and western Anatolia. Iranian themes and styles may have assisted social stratification in the fifth and fourth centuries BCE, and these foreign elements probably found their most eager recipients among the upper echelons of Greek societies.²³ Admittedly, scholars have found it easier to trace influence in the other direction, and to argue for significant Greek impact on Iranian art and culture in places such as Pasargadae, Persepolis, and Susa. While the details of this cross-cultural interaction have only just begun to emerge in any meaningful way, suffice it to say that the evidence points to a greater degree of interaction and receptivity than has been previously accepted. Such things as Greek luxury toreutic, textiles, clothing, jewellery, seals, and even court ceremonial and court settings show recognizable marks of Iranian influence. On the other hand, Greek and Ionian culture left an impact on Persian sculpture and statuary at the same time that Greeks themselves also fought for the Persian king. An important

²⁰ Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Philosophers* 1.8.

²¹ See e.g. Pseudo-Clement of Rome, *Recognitiones* 4.27; Gregory of Tours, *History of the Franks* 1.5.

²² See e.g. Pseudo-Clement of Rome, *Homilies* 9.4–6.

²³ See esp. Miller 1997.

general context for Greek uses of Zarathushtra, then, is the receptivity on both sides to foreign elements and a sense of cultural inter-connectedness.²⁴

The use of Zarathushtra by Greeks and Romans also raises the question of cross-cultural translation, in this case, the translation of a figure from Iran to elsewhere. In her study of the image of Zoroaster, Jenny Rose states that there are two kinds of cross-cultural translation, the “academic” and the “imaginative”.²⁵ As Rose’s own book demonstrates, this dichotomy scarcely begins to account for the multilayered representation of Zarathushtra in the Greek and Roman texts, even in the early period, as he performs the roles of magus, prophet, philosopher, and astrologer. Nor does the Greeks’ receptivity to Persian culture in itself explain the complex and multi-faceted representation of Persians in general and Zarathushtra in particular in Greek literature. The topic brings into focus fantasies and distortions, anxieties and appropriations, and interpretations and misinterpretations. It involves questions of ethnicity and identity, and it pertains to the relationship between the self and the other and between Greek and barbarian. But it is hard to evaluate these representations and the relationships that they describe in any straightforward sense, not least because of the complicated and shared histories of Greeks, Romans, and Persians. Thus, the issue of receptivity is complicated by the reality of Persian imperial and political rule in western Asia, since the Persians ruled over several Greek communities in the region of Asia Minor, including, of course, the home cities of Ionian intellectuals such as Herodotus. Strabo wrote, “The Persians of all the barbarians became the most famous among the Greeks, because none of the other barbarians who ruled Asia ruled Greeks.”²⁶ The Romans, too, fought a series of wars with the Persians in the Sasanian period, and by no means was there a stable or peaceful relationship between Roman and Persian rulers. The Persians had a special place among barbarians, and this invariably shaped the kind of othering to which they were subject in Greek and Latin material.

The particular features of this translation into Greek and Latin also mean that our subject is part of the study of Orientalism and part of the history of representations of the “Orient”. Any informed approach to Zarathushtra arrives at its subject today through accumulated layers of European Orientalism. While I emphasize that contemporary reflection on Zarathushtra is necessarily triangulated through centuries of Orientalist scholarship, I do not suggest that

²⁴ For a good discussion of these issues, and an extensive bibliography, see *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. ‘Greece, Relations with Persian Empire’. On the subject of Greek receptivity to Persian culture, the stakes are described clearly in Miller 1997 and Burkert 2004, ch. 5. Some scholars have argued for limited interaction between Greeks and Persians; for the fourth century BCE, see e.g. Starr 1975 and 1977.

²⁵ Rose 2000, 5.

²⁶ Strabo, *Geography* 15.3.23 (735).

we should set aside such scholarship entirely, despite the criticisms to which it has been subjected in the last twenty-five years. But it is important to state that some of the most prominent features of this kind of Orientalism may discourage critics from considering those qualities in the ancient texts to which they need to pay attention if they are to understand the place of Zarathushtra in ancient Greece. I have referred already to the receptivity on the part of the Greeks to Iranian practices. I refer also to questions of agency and representation, as well as to the desire on the part of some Greeks and Romans to speak for, and on behalf of, another culture. As Edward Said has noted, the exteriority of Orientalist texts can be traced back to early Greek sources, including one source, moreover, that is often quoted in connection with Zoroastrianism.

Orientalism is premised upon exteriority, that is, on the fact that the Orientalist, poet or scholar, makes the Orient speak, describes the Orient, renders its mysteries plain for and to the West. He is never concerned with the Orient except as the first cause of what he says. What he says and writes, by virtue of the fact that it is said or written, is meant to indicate that the Orientalist is outside the Orient, both as an existential and as a moral fact. The principal product of this exteriority is of course representation: as early as Aeschylus's play *The Persians* the Orient is transformed from a very far distant and often threatening Otherness into figures that are relatively familiar (in Aeschylus's case, grieving Asiatic women). The dramatic immediacy of representation in *The Persians* obscures the fact that the audience is watching a highly critical enactment of what a non-Oriental has made into a symbol for the whole Orient.²⁷

This presumption to represent the Orient can be a problematic element in the oldest forms of Orientalism, and indeed we see evidence of it in Greek and Latin texts about Zarathushtra. As Said implies, these texts are laying the basis for the creation of Orientalist categories and stereotypes in the later selective construction of antiquity. It would be worthwhile, given enough time, to explore the dialectical relationship between the ancient sources and Orientalist scholarship. But I also add the qualification to Said's remarks that, in the case of the Greek or Latin Zarathushtra, an attention to exteriority, surface, and techniques of representation alone is an insufficient condition of analysis. For one thing, a deeper appreciation of Zarathushtra's place in Greek and Roman culture arises when these representations and their underlying structures are linked to social and political contexts in Greece, Rome, and Iran. For another,

²⁷ Said 1978, 20–21. Not all of Said's arguments about Aeschylus' *Persians* have gained assent; for a useful orientation to the modern discussion of the play, see Harrison 2000. For a discussion about the 'Zoroastrian' rituals in the play, see Hall 1989, 89–91.

some ancient thinkers were also working through specific Iranian oral traditions, which should therefore be read against the relevant texts.

What happens to an oral tradition when it enters a literate society in another culture? In the fifth and fourth centuries BCE, there were no written texts in Iran that mentioned Zarathushtra. Such documents as Darius' cuneiform inscription at Behistun refer explicitly to Ahura Mazda and not to his prophet, and Zarathushtra's name first appears in Iranian written records as late as the fifth and sixth centuries CE.²⁸ But the historical Zarathushtra becomes a figure of memory and of oral tradition in Iran, and the recollections surrounding him were being received in Greece and refracted through Greek lenses already in the fifth century BCE. To borrow a concept from Maurice Halbwachs, and since developed further by Jan Assmann in connection with Moses, we can say that classical Greek culture was at this stage the beneficiary of an Iranian collective memory, or mnemohistory, of Zarathushtra.²⁹ It is the reception of this mnemohistory, or *Gedächtnisgeschichte*, that makes possible the translation from Iranian Zarathushtra into Greek Zoroaster.

The Greek Zoroaster is the result of a transformative process that leads from memory to alterity or from recollection to otherness, but not just to any alterity or any otherness. The Greek Zoroaster is an acceptable image of Zarathushtra; he is an assimilable other. No matter how receptive the Greeks remained to non-Greek categories of thought, they never quite were able to embrace the foreignness of Zarathushtra, fully and in his absolute singularity, and for them Zoroaster never really approximated Zarathushtra. In this sense, for the Greeks, he occupies a place in the history of self-definition (*Eigengeschichte*) as much as in the history of the other (*Fremdgeschichte*), and the reader may care less in assessing the truth or authenticity of a particular representation of Zarathushtra than in understanding how this figure was used and creatively appropriated by Greek elites. It may be only a slight overstatement to claim, as Michael Stausberg does, that "Zoroaster" constitutes a case-study in the "European history of religion" (*Europäische Religionsgeschichte*) rather than in the "history of religion in Europe" (*Religionsgeschichte Europas*).³⁰ But what this also means, as implied above, is that Orientalist scholarship of the modern

²⁸ Concerning the appearance of his name, it is generally accepted by scholars that the Avestan texts were written down as late as the fifth and sixth centuries CE. The oldest surviving manuscripts are as late as the thirteenth century CE; see Skjærvø 1996. Millar 1998b, 523, notes that "the earliest references to Zoroaster contained in texts in Iranian languages are found in Manichaean writings discovered in Central Asia". Boyce 1996, ch. 7, gives a date of about 1200 BCE for Zarathushtra, a date that is accepted by many, though not all, scholars. Millar 1998b and Kellens 2006 are sceptical about the very existence of a historical Zarathushtra.

²⁹ Assmann 1997.

³⁰ On these terms, see Stausberg 1998, 1.6–20.

period maps onto an ancient style of Orientalism, so that ancient and modern remain in a constant dialogue with each other. The approach to reception-history that is implicit in these remarks is largely why this book contains numerous passages about Zoroaster even when they have not always figured in studies by historians of Iranian religion.

Although I am suggesting that all ancient representations of Zarathushtra are of interest in terms of reception-history, or *Rezeptionsgeschichte*, I do not on these grounds alone exclude Iranian traditions from the discussion, and, on the contrary, wish to insist on their relevance to the classical Greek and Latin sources. The Greek and Latin sources used ideas and doctrines connected with this figure for different purposes, and emphasized different features of the Iranian material to suit their own purposes. For instance, Aristoxenus makes use of the fundamental dualism in Zoroastrian thought, that is, the struggle between Ahura Mazda and Ahriman, to forge a connection between Pythagoras and Zarathushtra.³¹ The details of Iranian dualism are well known, and do not bear repetition in this introduction.³² But it will be important to recall the dualism of the ancient Zoroastrian world-view in looking at Greek philosophical texts that bear on the relationship of Pythagoras and Plato. Hence, the notes and introductory headings in this book contain references to Iranian and other materials, which bring to bear additional perspectives on the Greek and Latin texts under discussion.

The interplay between Iranian and Greek traditions about Zoroaster can be traced back to some of the earliest sources. The major pre-Socratic philosophers, as Martin West has argued, show the influence of Zoroastrianism—especially in the cases of Pherecydes of Syros (Time), Heraclitus (identification of Fire with Justice), Anaximander (astronomy), and Empedocles—though they do not mention Zoroaster by name in any of the surviving fragments.³³ Xanthus the Lydian does mention Zoroaster when he estimates that 6,000 years separate him from Xerxes' expedition,³⁴ while Ctesias, who was active in the late fifth century and who presents a great deal of information about Iran, makes Zoroaster the king of Bactria.³⁵ Also illustrative

³¹ Aristoxenus is quoted by Hippolytus, *Refutation of All Heresies* 1.2.12.

³² For Iranian sources, see the index to Boyce 1984, s.v. "dualism". The subject is much discussed; see e.g. Nigosian 1993, 88–89; Shaked 1994; Boyce 1996, 192–95; de Jong 1997, 168–77; and *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. 'Dualism'.

³³ West 1971.

³⁴ Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Philosophers, Introduction* 1.2; *FGrHist* 765 F 32.

³⁵ Ctesias, *FGrHist* 688 F 1f = Arnobius, *Against the Heathen* 1.52; cf. the text in Lenfant 2004. The connection with Bactria is mentioned also by Pompeius Trogus (Justin, *Epitome of the "Philippic History" of Pompeius Trogus* 1.1.9) at the end of the first century BCE and by many others after him.

of interaction between Greeks and Iranians in the archaic and early classical period are such things as the high priest at Ephesus and the use of “magos” in Greek, both of which are topics that have been well discussed. Concerning the first, it is very likely that already by the time of Darius the high priest of Artemis at Ephesus had a Persian theophoric name, Megabyxos, which is close to the Persian name Bagabuksha.³⁶ Concerning the Magi, Walter Burkert rightly says that “[t]he word *magos* (*magush*) is incontrovertible evidence for Iranian influence in Greece”.³⁷ The word can refer to Iranian priests or magicians, as the texts given below indicate, but it shows up widely both in Greek texts and in Iranian sources such as the Behistun inscription, the Elamite tablets from Persepolis, and in the Avesta.³⁸

Once the explicit references to Zoroaster begin in Greek and Latin literature, they do not seem to stop. In the Hellenistic age, as Joseph Bidez and Franz Cumont showed, Zoroaster lies at the heart of a powerful and far-reaching tradition.³⁹ In this later tradition, which starts in the third century BCE and continues until the end of antiquity, Zoroaster acquires great status as the author of books and treatises on magic, astrology, and reincarnation. The writer Hermippus, who is quoted by Pliny, already records that Zoroaster left behind two million lines of verse, on which Hermippus himself wrote a commentary and to which he compiled the indices.⁴⁰ Text after text in Greek, Latin, Coptic, Aramaic, and Syriac, is ascribed to Zoroaster in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, and various documents and pseudepigrapha are signed in his name or in the names of his followers such as Ostanes and Hystaspes.

In general, scholars say that little in these works is recognizably Iranian or Babylonian, and often compare them to the works of Hermes Trismegistus, in which little is recognizably Egyptian. Roger Beck surveyed these writings and stated “that these Zoroastrian pseudepigrapha are essentially the products of Hellenistic learning and that their authors used the names of Zoroaster and the magi not because they were themselves magi or drew primarily on magian sources, but because these exotic names conferred the desired authority of a remote and revelational wisdom”.⁴¹ One familiar element in this body of literature is the notion that Zoroaster was the prophet and founder of the

³⁶ See Xenophon, *Anabasis* 5.3.6, and Strabo, *Geography* 14.1.23 (641), with Bremmer 2004 and Burkert 2004, 105–107.

³⁷ Burkert 2004, 107.

³⁸ *Yasna* 65.7. For some useful orientations to the meaning of ‘magos’ in Greek literature, see Gordon 1987; Graf 1997, ch. 2; and Bremmer 1999; see ch. 3, below.

³⁹ Bidez and Cumont 1973. See also Duchesne-Guillemin 1958.

⁴⁰ Pliny, *Natural History* 30.4.

⁴¹ Beck 1991, 493.

religion of Iran, a point that was made in different ways by Plutarch, Diogenes Laertius, and Agathias.⁴² Other Iranian details about the biography of Zoroaster occur in this mass of evidence, but experts in the field are reluctant to accept them as evidence for a historical account of Zoroaster. To quote Albert de Jong, “The only traces that are certainly sound, are the name of Zoroaster, the legend that he laughed at birth, the information that he began to explain the tradition at the age of thirty and the remarkably correct story in Diodorus Siculus that Zathraustês received the revelation from the Good Daimon [Vohu Manah]. Less easy to understand, but having a genuine ring is the tradition that Zoroaster retreated from the world into the solitude of a forest or a mountain.”⁴³

Nevertheless, the presence of Zoroaster in the earlier Greek literature is not just an “oriental mirage” since there is a discernible substance of Persian religion, however etiolated, in many of the texts. In each case what survives and is considered significant is refracted through Greek sensibilities, but each layer also refracts at some level the encounter with Persia, whether political, religious, or philosophical. “The Romans,” Momigliano writes, “never had the problem of comparing Pythagoras and Plato with Hermes Trismegistus or Zoroaster because they had neither Pythagoras nor Plato. But they never forgot that Persia and indeed Egypt were real countries which posed political problems.”⁴⁴ I would make the point differently: the issue is not that Greeks or Romans “forgot” that Persia or Egypt were “real countries”. There were many Greeks and Romans for whom Persia was very much a part of lived experience. Indeed, the evidence for contact between Greece, Rome, and Persia is solid and irrefutable. What is useful is to understand the functions, the variations, and the dynamic of the representations of Persia in Greek and Latin sources, even when they appear not to reflect a seemingly objective or authentic reality. Momigliano was correct to imply that Greek texts tended sometimes to disguise the political realities of contemporary Persia but he was also right to imply that the juxtaposition of Greek and Persian was conceived by the Greeks as a problem. By invoking an illustrious Persian, the Hellenistic Greeks attempted to confer authority and legitimacy on their own tradition. Perhaps, the context for these representations is the world of the divine man, the prophet, the healer,

⁴² Plutarch, *On Isis and Osiris* 46–47 (369D–370C); Diogenes Laertius 1.6–9; Agathias, *Histories* 2.23–25.

⁴³ de Jong 1997, 322–23. On the name, see Diodorus of Sicily 1.94.2 and Cosmas of Jerusalem, *Commentary on the Poems of Gregory of Nazianzus* 38.461 (Migne, PG). On the laughter at birth, see Pliny, *Natural History* 7.16.72 and Augustine, *City of God* 21.14, with the Iranian sources *Denkard* 7.3.2, *Wizidagiha i Zadspram* 8.15–16, and *Zaratoshtnameh* 186–89. On the importance of the age of thirty, see the scholia on Plato, *Alcibiades I* 121e. For Diodorus of Sicily, see 1.94.2. On the withdrawal of Zarathushtra, see Pliny, *Natural History* 11.42.242; Dio Chrysostom, *Oration* 36.40–41; and Ammianus Marcellinus 23.6.33.

⁴⁴ Momigliano 1978, 148.

or the saviour in the eastern Mediterranean, and we see in them a desire to appropriate an eastern sage and a wish on the part of Greek and Roman elites to identify with Iranian wisdom. But by reformulating the political realities of the time in their peculiar manner, the Greeks were also specifying their own break with Persia and signalling a displacement away from the other culture.

In a passage published less than a decade before his final collapse in January of 1889, Friedrich Nietzsche wrote,

And you also asked yourselves often, “Who is Zarathustra to us? What shall we call him?” And like me, you gave yourself questions for answers.

Is he a promiser? Or a fulfiller? A conqueror? Or an inheritor? A harvest? Or a ploughshare? A physician? Or a convalescent?

Is he a poet? Or a genuine man? A liberator? Or a subduer? A good man? Or an evil man?

I walk among men as the fragments of the future: that future which I contemplate.⁴⁵

The text poses a pressing question to the reader, Who is Zarathushtra to us? This is the question that the Greeks and Romans asked themselves, and it is the question that we can redirect against them. Who was Zarathushtra to the Greeks and Romans?

But in also offering an imaginative and perceptive treatment of Iranian dualism and eschatology, the passage delivers a warning. The astonishment that we feel at this rhetorical flow points not to the limitations of the philosopher’s system of thought but our own, for, on closer examination, many of Nietzsche’s polarities do not contain opposites, or at least not in any conventional sense. In truth, Nietzsche is not giving us opposites but rather a series of paired, or dualistic, questions. It is an arrangement that challenges notions of polarity and proximity and that undermines the logic of our systems of classification. The passage threatens to disturb any settled polarity between the Same and the Other, by interrogating the idea of a common ground on which such a polarity might assume meaning. This is a problem of epistemology,

⁴⁵ *Also Sprach Zarathustra* 2.42: “Und auch ihr fragtet euch oft: ‘Wer ist uns Zarathustra? Wie soll er uns heissen?’ Und gleich mir selber gabt ihr euch Fragen zur Antwort. Ist er ein Versprechender? Oder ein Erfüller? Ein Erobernder? Oder ein Erbender? Ein Herbst? Oder eine Pflugschar? Ein Arzt? Oder ein Genesener? Ist er ein Dichter? Oder ein Wahrhafter? Ein Befreier? Oder ein Bändiger? Ein Guter? Oder ein Böser? Ich wandle unter Menschen als den Bruchstücken der Zukunft: jener Zukunft, die ich schaue.” Translation modified from R. J. Hollingdale. Quoted in part in Rose 2000, 1. My discussion of the passage is indebted to Foucault 1970, xv–xxiv.

language, and logic, and of their very limits, and it is presented to us by someone who, like the third world-saviour known as the Saoshyant, is from the future. But there is no straightforward solution to the problem of thinking beyond good and evil, and indeed the philosopher of the future explicitly says in this passage that he can offer only questions for answers. Among other things, Nietzsche reminds us of the perils of creating dichotomies that are too stark and simplistic when we are thinking about relationships between cultures. So also (Nietzsche's) Zarathushtra tells us not merely to oppose Greeks to Persians or Romans to Persians, but rather to look at the continuities and changes, the interactions and transformations, in order that we might, as he said, let the polyphony of the world resound once again.⁴⁶

Religion, Religions

What is religion, and what counts as a source for religion? As noted above, the field of Zoroastrian studies is marked by disputes and disagreements, and it is hard to arrive even at a provisional definition of the religion, much less the theories and methods that ought to bear on it. This book ranges widely in its coverage of sources, and "religion" is understood here in a broad sense. Nevertheless, one problem that our study runs into is the notion of religion itself within the context of the ancient world. Scholars have often remarked that there is no one catch-all term for religion in the early Indo-European languages. "One fact can be established immediately," Emile Benveniste writes: "there is no term of common Indo-European for 'religion'. Even in the historical period there are a number of Indo-European languages which lack such a term, which is not surprising. For it lies in the nature of this notion not to lend itself to a single and lasting expression."⁴⁷ Benveniste continues by claiming that the embedded nature of religion in ancient culture made it harder for ancients to give a definition of it or to understand it as a dominant ideological force.

If it is true that religion is an institution, this institution is nevertheless not separated from other institutions or outside them. It was not possible to evolve a clear conception of what religion is or to devise a term for it until it was clearly delimited and had a distinct domain, so that it was possible to know what belonged to it and what was foreign to it. Now in the civilizations which we are studying everything is imbued with religion, everything is a sign of, a factor in, or the reflection of, divine forces. Thus outside special confraternities no need was felt for a specific term to designate the complex of cults and beliefs, and this

⁴⁶ See the 'Preface' to *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* (from the *Nachlass*).

⁴⁷ Benveniste 1973, 516.

is why to denote 'religion' we find only terms which appear as separate and independent creations. It is not even certain that we understand them in their true and proper meaning.⁴⁸

If religion was not separate from other ancient institutions and permeated all aspects of society, then everything could be described as religious and all things that exist could be said to be divine. By that measure, all texts from antiquity are sources for religion, and everything that can be said about antiquity also has a connection to ancient religion. A related problem arises from such a conception of religion: some have claimed that the very attempt to define religion is a modern Western phenomenon, which comes out of specific historical and material circumstances in nineteenth-century Europe when the study of comparative religions came to be institutionalized. Thus, the challenge for students of non-Western religion is to remain aware of this history of religious studies and to be conscious of unspoken attitudes and assumptions that shape approaches to the past. As Benveniste implies, it is for these reasons not clear that, in the present day, we comprehend with any sensitivity the vocabulary used by the ancients when they refer to religious or sacred phenomena.

The problems of arriving at a single definition of religion are, in fact, numerous, and it would be futile in this context to devise even a provisional definition of religion or of Zoroastrianism. Definitions of religion are often connected to questions of method and theory. Clifford Geertz lamented the poverty of thought in modern attempts to theorize religion after the work of Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, Sigmund Freud, and Bronislaw Malinowski, and offered a new theory of his own, only to see it challenged, reformulated, and rejected by a host of scholars on the grounds that it was limited, tendentious, and worse.⁴⁹ Similarly, the entry on "religion" in the *Oxford English Dictionary* contains many elements in it that do not apply either to Zoroastrianism or to other religions, ancient and modern.⁵⁰ Moreover, since this book uses Greek and Latin sources, one might argue that the reader needs to have clear and consistent definitions of Greek religion, Roman religion, and early Christianity, in addition to a definition of Zoroastrianism.

The working assumption in the writing of this book has been that the study of religion is essentially pluralistic, characterized by diversity in approach and method, open to all forms of interrogation and self-scrutiny, and actively multidisciplinary. For one thing, this assumption means that

⁴⁸ Benveniste 1973, 517.

⁴⁹ See "Religion as a Cultural System", in Geertz 1973, 87-125; and cf. Lincoln 2003, 1-8.

⁵⁰ *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd edition, s.v. "religion".

the sources remain accessible to scholars of different backgrounds and orientations. Within the field of Zoroastrian studies, the sources will prove to be of use to scholars who argue for a conservative, internally consistent, and unified Zoroastrian tradition across antiquity; to scholars who discount the idea of a monolithic Zoroastrian tradition and claim the existence of discrete and different Iranian religions; to scholars who strike a balance between these two positions and proceed on the basis of tentative and provisional definitions; or to scholars who follow their own eclectic methods in approaching Zoroastrianism. For another, the book contains many sources that do not appear in such earlier collections as the *Fontes historiae religionis Persicae*, by Carl Clemen; *Passages in Greek and Latin Literature relating to Zoroaster and Zoroastrianism*, by W. S. Fox and R. E. K. Pemberton; and *Les mages hellénisés*, by Joseph Bidez and Franz Cumont; and that are not discussed in the more recent and synoptic works of Roger Beck and Albert de Jong. Although the book does contain translations of almost all of the Greek and Latin sources that have been analyzed by these scholars, it also contains texts that have been analyzed by other writers, for example, those who have written about the religious life of the ancient Iranian diaspora; the influence of Zoroastrianism on Greek philosophy, early Christianity, and Manichaeism; or the uses of religious language in royal propaganda. In some cases, the book offers texts that have been the subject of little or no analysis, and it may act as a spur to critical thought and reflection on relatively understudied material.

Selection and Organization

In response to Benveniste and de Jong, who noted on two occasions separated by more than fifty years that all the Greek and Latin sources for the study of Zoroastrianism had been collected,⁵¹ it can be said that very many of the sources presented here do not appear in earlier works, such as the books by Clemen, Fox and Pemberton, or Bidez and Cumont, mentioned above. Since readers' interests evolve and change, it is entirely predictable that a collection made in the twenty-first century consists of different texts and emphasizes different concerns than collections made in the first part of the twentieth century. The principles for the selection of texts in this book are provisional and, to an extent, factitious. I do not deny the subjective and biographical impetus to this collection, and admit that another editor would have come up with a different selection of material. I also regret that visual evidence and material culture could not be included in this book.

⁵¹ Benveniste 1929; de Jong 1997, 14.

In general, the book makes available in translation all the Greek and Latin texts that have been part of the scholarly study of Zoroastrianism for the last century or so. The texts range in time from the fifth century BCE to the Byzantine era, with some flexibility at either end of this scale. Virtually all the texts gathered by Clemen, Fox and Pemberton, and Bidez and Cumont appear in this volume in English translation, though in a few cases, chiefly connected with the so-called Zoroastrian pseudepigrapha, this book presents shorter selections than those given by Bidez and Cumont. As explained below, the *Chaldaean Oracles* are omitted, though they appear, for example, in Fox and Pemberton. This book contains translations of almost all the texts discussed in prominent treatments of Zoroastrianism such as the multivolume *History* begun under the authorship of Mary Boyce and the texts analyzed by de Jong in his study of Zoroastrianism in Greek and Latin literature. It should be pointed out that not all the texts in this book come from literary sources or texts with good manuscript traditions. Several are documentary in nature, and were inscribed in stone or written on papyrus. These texts figure prominently in the volume, and often give perspectives different from those provided by literary authors on such subjects as ritual practice and the incorporation of religious ideology in royal self-presentation.

Whereas earlier collections typically printed only texts that referred explicitly to Zoroaster or the Magi, this book casts its net more widely and includes many that make no direct mention of these figures. For instance, many of the texts of early Greek philosophy that are supposed by scholars such as Burkert and West to reflect knowledge of Zoroastrian tradition appear in this collection, even if the Greek philosophers nowhere explicitly acknowledge any interest in Iranian traditions. Similarly, the book contains texts that throw light on the interaction between Zoroastrian and other religious traditions, and offers translations of scores of documentary texts that contribute to our understanding of the Zoroastrian diaspora in Asia Minor, Egypt, and elsewhere. Nor does the book avoid controversial topics, and it presents several texts that bear on such matters as the worship of Anahita outside of Iran or the relationship between Zoroastrianism and Manichaeism. I have also included many texts that have received minimal attention in the literature and that are, in my view, important nonetheless for the study of religion in Iran and the interaction of various religious traditions.

As with the selection of texts, the organization of this book should not necessarily be considered normative for the study of Iranian religion. The structure that this book imposes on a vast mass of texts has only been made possible through manipulation by the editor. The arrangement of material does not always follow chronology, disregards the autonomy of the Greek and Latin

languages, and often ignores distinctions between Christian and non-Christian writers. By organizing much of the material into chapters thematically, the book does imply, with other scholarship, that there are vital continuities in Iranian religion across the centuries, even if there are also significant changes and disruptions, and that it is important to reflect on Zoroastrianism synchronically no less than diachronically. Another guiding principle of the book is to place Zoroastrianism in the context of other religious and cultural expressions, whether these are sympathetic, polemical, or otherwise inclined. To an extent, that is unavoidable, given the exotopic character of Greek and Latin literature in relation to Persia. But the point is also to show that ancient Persian culture was shaped by its interaction with other peoples and traditions; and it is to point out that the modern study of Zoroastrianism depends in part on an understanding of such cross-cultural engagement.

In some respects, the volume follows the rubric advocated by de Jong, whose book has established itself as one of the most influential studies of Zoroastrianism in Greek and Latin literature. For instance, the first chapter gives translations of texts (from Herodotus, Strabo, Plutarch, Diogenes Laertius, and Agathias) that he describes as “the five most important passages on the religion of the Persians in Greek literature”.⁵² While I myself would not adopt this characterization, I agree that numerous scholars have considered these texts extremely important for questions of doctrine and ritual, and therefore I follow de Jong by placing them in a separate initial chapter. The reader who consults de Jong’s book, or any other important study, such as Boyce’s massive *History of Zoroastrianism*, should in principle have no difficulty in finding here the translations of passages discussed by these scholars, regardless of the methodologies adopted.

Ultimately, the headings and organization have to do less with problems in current scholarship and criticism, and more with critically fertile modes of approaching an ancient religion from a cross-cultural perspective. Thus, after presenting the five texts that have been central to much scholarly discussion, the book takes up representations of Zarathushtra and the Magi, proceeds to questions of doctrine, belief, ritual, and the nature of divinity, and concludes by providing materials in the last chapters for understanding the historical context and cultural situation of Persian religion. Alternative arrangements of the material are clearly viable. For instance, the chapter on Zarathushtra could include a selection from Apuleius, *Apology* 25–26, which currently appears in the chapter on Magi; selections from Basil and Hippolytus (Basil, *Letters* 258.4, and Hippolytus, *Refutation of All Heresies* 1.2.12) could appear in the section on Zurvan rather than elsewhere; and many inscriptions that are not currently

⁵² de Jong 1997, 2.

located in the chapter on historical inscriptions could justifiably be placed under that heading. Nevertheless, the book's indices and its system of cross-references obviate to some extent the arbitrariness of its organization. As a rule, each section or chapter contains references to texts that appear in other parts of the book and that are also relevant to the topic in question. I have appended a brief introduction to each chapter, with suggestions for further reading. The notes are deliberately short, and are intended chiefly to elucidate proper names and clarify textual issues; these also refer to scholarly works as appropriate. Since the chapters complement each other, each section of the book should ideally find resonances throughout and, by suggesting connections, open up insights and perspectives for the reader. While each chapter stands on its own, then, and can be read in isolation, each also is also part of a larger, more complex web of ideas that it is profitable to understand as a whole.

Chaldaean Oracles

This book does not contain a translation of the *Chaldaean Oracles*. These are in their current form about 350 lines of Greek hexameter, which have been divided by modern editors into fragments of varying length. The texts of these oracles were transmitted largely by Proclus and Damascius; the former wrote a commentary on the oracles that was refuted by Procopius of Gaza. In the eleventh century, Michael Psellus developed an interest in the cosmological and soteriological wisdom contained in the oracles as well as in Proclus' commentary, and he produced a corpus of some forty-two oracles. It was Psellus' text that reached the attention of George Gemistus Plethon (1355–1450/52), who believed that he had found in these Greek texts the message of Zoroaster as it was transmitted by his students, the Hellenized Magi. He gave this collection of texts the title "Magian Oracles of the Magi of Zoroaster". The reasons for Plethon's attribution of the *Oracles* to Zoroaster are unclear, but he was probably influenced directly through contact with a Jewish teacher called Elissaeus in Adrianople and indirectly through the writings of Shihâboddîn Yahyâ Sohrawardî.⁵³ Plethon's work was the predecessor to the edition produced by Wilhelm Kroll (1894), which laid the groundwork for the text and commentary of Édouard des Places (1971) and the translation into English by Ruth Majercik (1989). Fox and Pemberton also included a selection from the *Chaldaean Oracles* in their collection. I said above that this book ranges widely and includes many passages that are of importance for the reception of Zarathushtra if not for

⁵³ For the relationship to Elissaeus, see George Scholarius Gennadius, *Oeuvres complètes* 4.152 (Paris, 1935; ed. L. Petit, M. Jugie, and X. A. Sideridès); and Bidez and Cumont 1973, 2.260. For Sohrawardî, see Corbin 1971 and the latter's work in general.

the study of religion per se. However, the *Chaldaean Oracles* are not translated here mainly because the attribution to Zoroaster occurs only as late as Plethon. Other factors are the absence of a good text, the uncertainties connected with transmission, and the admittedly obscure and difficult passages in the Greek. The interested reader may consult the works mentioned above, together with the helpful analyses of Polymnia Athanassiadi and Michel Tardieu.⁵⁴

Translations

I have followed different principles in translating different texts, and hence some may seem more idiomatic than others. In many cases, I have taken over the translations of Fox and Pemberton, whose work this book is intended to supersede, but in most if not all instances their faintly archaic renditions have been modified. The texts come from a period that spans over a thousand years, and it would be arrogant of me to claim complete familiarity with the style and language of every author included in this volume. On occasion, I have consulted published translations, and used these for guidance, as indicated in the notes. Several texts have not been translated previously into English, and their inclusion in this book will, I hope, make them accessible to a wide audience.

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⁵⁴ See Athanassiadi 1999 and 2002; and Tardieu 1987.

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Conventions

- () refers to an author's own parenthetical words, unless otherwise stated. In documentary texts (e.g. inscriptions), uncertain or obscure letters are occasionally also placed in parentheses.
- [] refers to words not present in the source text
- . . . ellipses refer to words in a source that have been omitted by the editor of this volume, unless otherwise stated. In documentary texts (e.g. inscriptions), uncertain or obscure letters and words are occasionally also indicated by ellipses.

Figures in bold type (e.g. **55**) refer to texts in this volume.

In order to make the work accessible to a wide audience, diacritical marks have been kept to a minimum in the notes and translations.

