

Dating Zarathustra: Oriental Texts and the Problem of Persian Prehistory, 1700–1900

Suzanne Marchand

Department of History, 224 Himes Hall, Louisiana State University

Baton Rouge, LA 70803, USA

smarch1@lsu.edu

Abstract

Establishing the identity, and the chronology, of the Persian religious reformer Zarathustra has been of great interest to western scholars since antiquity—but became an urgent question in the early modern era. Scholars trained chiefly in biblical exegesis particularly wished to know if Zarathustra had preached a monotheistic or a dualistic faith. The complexity of the source material, however, made it difficult to decide this question, and impossible to securely place Zarathustra in time. Even after the deciphering of Old Avestan, the question of Zarathustra's dates has remained enormously fraught, and dependent on inferences from classical or biblical texts. The ongoing quest to date Zarathustra shows us that 'orientalism' as a scholarly enterprise exhibits many continuities across the centuries and that chronology continues even today to be a crucial and controversial subject.

Keywords

Zarathustra – history of philology – history of chronology – ancient Persia – orientalism – Aryans – Avesta

1 Introduction

It has become an old saw, and a familiar student complaint, that historians fetishize dates. It may well be true that we historians sometimes engage in games of numerology that the general public and our fellow social scientists find recondite. But it is also true that we often take dates for granted, and fail to appreciate

just now much effort, and sometimes ideology, goes into assigning dates to events and making correlations between dates, vertically across time, or horizontally across space. Early modern historians have shown that the study of chronology — and especially biblical and Near Eastern chronology — was a tremendously complex, but much vexed, and often religiously-motivated field of scholarship from the sixteenth through eighteenth century,¹ but their studies usually finish before 1800, and very few modern historians have delved deeply into the niceties of the chronological battles of later periods (with the exception, of course, of scholars of Darwinian reception). This has left us to fall back on the positivist narratives of the nineteenth century, in which decipherments and archaeological digs supposedly wiped out confessional or ideological battles, making the establishment of Near Eastern chronologies simply a matter of building on the solid work of others, and filling in the blanks.² Students of ‘orientalism,’ in their rush to denounce modern scholars for aiding and abetting imperialism, have also forgotten just how much the intertwined fields of ancient history, oriental philology, and the history of world religions remained deeply riven by fundamental debates long after the decipherments arrived. Finally, modern intellectual historians’ discomfort with dealing with specialized philology has made it hard for us to appreciate something quite obvious to specialists in ancient Near Eastern history, religion, and archaeology today: that ancient chronologies are hypothetical correlations, based on the juxtaposition of more or less accepted dates—and on them hang webs of interpretation, interpolation, and contextualization, which can and do collapse if for any reason those dates change. The chronological battles of the early modern period, that is to say, have their roots in antiquity itself, and have never, in fact, actually ended, but remain

-
- 1 I have learned most of what I know from the great expert on the subject, Anthony Grafton. See his *Defenders of the Text: The Traditions of Scholarship in an Age of Science, 1450–1800* (Cambridge, MA, 1991), ‘Tradition and Technique in Historical Chronology,’ in *Ancient History and the Antiquarian: Essays in Memory of Arnaldo Momigliano*, ed. Michael Crawford and C.R. Ligota (London, 1995), pp. 15–31, and most recently, Daniel Rosenberg and Anthony Grafton, *Cartographies of Time* (New York, NY, 2010). Other landmark books on the subject include Paolo Rossi, *The Dark Abyss of Time: The History of the Earth and the History of Nations from Hooke to Vico* (Chicago, IL, 1984), and for the natural sciences, Martin Rudwick, *Worlds Before Adam: The Reconstruction of Geohistory in the Age of Reform* (Chicago, IL, 2008), William Poole, *The World Makers: Scientists of the Restoration and the Search for the Origins of the Earth* (Oxford, 2010), and other titles. A recent, remarkably learned addition to the literature is Jed Z. Buchwald and Mordechai Feingold, *Newton and the Origins of Civilization* (Princeton, NJ, 2013).
 - 2 Jennifer Rose, in her extremely erudite study of Zoroastrian historiography, describes post-Revolutionary scholarship as constituting an ‘honest’ attempt to establish dates and authentic texts. Jennifer Ann Rose, *Imago Zoroastris: European Discourse Concerning the Persian Mage* (PhD Dissertation, Columbia University, New York, NY, 1993), 1: 238. This does not seem fair to me either to early modern, or to modern history of scholarship.

central to virtually every field of inquiry. In no field is this so much the case, perhaps, as in the study of ancient Zoroastrianism, a field in which fundamental chronological questions are still passionately debated — and unresolved.³

There are very good evidentiary reasons — which I will spell out below — for the persistence of chronological quarrels in Zoroastrian studies. The evidence, and its interpretation, is complicated, and not made any easier for non-specialists to appreciate by the fact that many of the post-1800 works I will be considering below adopted a deeply positivist idiom; their pages swim with linguistic minutiae whose significance is lost to all but the most learned specialists in any given field. As an outsider to the field, I have done my best to consult the most highly regarded recent work, and have benefited from several expert readings of this text.⁴ I am quite sure I have still missed resonances and niceties, and I shall make no attempt to air an opinion about who was, and is, ‘right’ about the dates for the flourishing of Zarathustra, the religious reformer and refounder of the religion of Ahura Mazda, known to the Greeks and Europeans before the nineteenth century as Zoroaster.⁵ (For the sake of consistency, I shall refer to him throughout this essay as Zarathustra and use, anachronistically, the term ‘Zoroastrianism’ for his religion, even though ancient and early modern scholars did not.⁶) However, inspired by Denis Feeney’s ground-clearing study of Greek and Roman dating practices, and informed by the work of the early modernists and historians of science, I contend it might be useful

-
- 3 By no means should this be taken to imply that there have been no advances since 1700, or since 1900, in this field. On the contrary, I have the highest respect for the remarkably learned and thoughtful linguists, archaeologists, and religious studies scholars who have worked through mountains of obscure texts in the most difficult of languages. It is simply that the larger chronological and philological questions we would dearly love to have resolved are extremely complicated, and cannot be clearly answered by any concatenation of the now extensive ancient evidence. The fact that scholars in the field remain (usually) so careful about what they can say, and what cannot be said with complete confidence, is to me a very great tribute to the high quality of the scholarship in the field.
- 4 This paper has undergone numerous revisions since its first airing at the University of Maryland, College Park some years ago. I would like to thank all of those who have helped me revise it, most especially Alexander Bevilacqua, Richard Gordon, Mordechai Feingold, Almut Hintze, Ab de Jong, Anthony Grafton, and Daniel J. Sheffield. I have learned much from their work, as well from the state-of-the-art online encyclopedia, <http://www.iranicaonline.org>, and the essays in the newly published *Wiley Blackwell Companion to Zoroastrianism*, eds. Michael Stausberg and Yueh Sohrad-Dinshaw Vevaina (Chichester, 2015).
- 5 It should be noted that there remain specialists who believe that Zarathustra may not have been a real historical person at all, and that presumptions of his historicity simply lead to arbitrary readings of the Zoroastrian texts to confirm his authorship. See, e.g., Prods Oktor Skjærvø, ‘The Gāthās as Myth and Ritual’, in *The Blackwell Companion*, 59–67.
- 6 One can find many elocutions in early modern texts, including ‘the religion of the ancient Persians’, ‘the religion of the Magi’, and ‘the religion of the Guebres (Parsis)’.

for an intellectual historian to explore the tangled web of Zoroastrian studies *after* the decipherments began, to understand just how incredibly difficult it remained (and remains) to assign dates, and how much was at stake in giving the Persian 'prophet' an earlier, or a later, lifespan.

What Feeney's study shows, critically, is that all ancient dates, even for the Greeks and Romans, were always and remain deeply contingent, arrived at by correlating two or more events or testimonies, the dates for which are themselves contingent upon other, equally tenuous, correlations. Moreover, he writes, for the composers of these synchronisms, down at least to the eighteenth century, 'it [was] not a neutral process to choose which events and protagonists in one culture are going to be lined up against which events and protagonists in another culture.'⁷ It is my view that this was still true for nineteenth-century ancient Near Eastern history, in part because the most crucial correlates introduced to pin down the flourishing of the Persian reformer remained events reported in the Old Testament. Determining the depth of Zoroastrianism's antiquity was absolutely crucial to Europeans seeking to understand its meaning and its uniqueness vis à vis Judaic antiquity, and to a lesser extent, Greek and Egyptian sciences, something that was already true before the nineteenth century, but became even more pronounced in that latter age of desperate origin-seeking and of fetishization of exact dates. Dating also took on heightened meaning in the wake of the decipherment and pairing of the two most ancient 'Aryan' languages, Sanskrit and Avestan, as scholars threw themselves into the search for the original Indogerman or Aryan *Heimat*. Still, even when racially tainted, ancient Persian studies, like Assyrian studies, remained especially fixated on religious questions and the synchronization of biblical and 'pagan' histories — something that reminds us that modern scholarship, for all its linguistic specialization, carries with it many of the passions and practices of previous eras.

Zoroastrian studies, too, in the modern era continued to be shaped by an obsession that took hold in the seventeenth century and continues until today: determining whether Zoroastrianism is essentially monotheistic or dualistic.⁸ Several of today's leading Zoroastrian specialists have called attention to the ways in which the long battle to impose one or another of these categories has profoundly distorted our understanding of the religion;⁹ hence, it seems worthwhile

7 Denis Feeney, *Caesar's Calendar: Ancient Time and the Beginnings of History* (Berkeley, CA, 2007), 15, quotation at 23.

8 As we shall see, this question has much older roots, in Hebrew, Greek (Platonic), and Gnostic texts.

9 See, e.g., Almut Hintze, 'Monotheismus zoroastrischer Art', in *Echnaton und Zarathustra: Zur Genese und Dynamik des Monotheismus*, eds. Harald Strohm and Jan Assmann

to me — at least until Michael Stausberg writes the sequel to *Faszination Zarathustras*, his magisterial account of Renaissance and early modern readings of Zarathustra — to show how the study of Zoroastrianism continued to revolve around this question right through the supposedly secular nineteenth century. Finally, it seems to me that we can learn much about the history of nineteenth-century ‘orientalism’ by studying the development of a field in which European scholars increasingly positioned themselves as historically linked to, rather than essentially different from, the peoples of Asia.¹⁰ As the ancient Persian specialist Friedrich Spiegel wrote in 1852, ‘The interest that Europeans took in the documents of the ancient Orient has significantly risen since we have recognized that in studying the history of the Orient we study our own history.’¹¹ That some Europeans, at least, could be persuaded that Persia and the Orient belonged to ‘our history’ in the era of high imperialist hubris and Graecophile education deserves some unpacking — and critical scrutiny.

Finally, if perhaps more difficult to demonstrate directly, Zoroastrian studies has often played a role in intra-European attempts to correct and stabilize, or to critique and undermine, narratives that feature the West’s cultural founding fathers: the ancient Israelites and the Greeks. Imbedded in ancient sources — including the Old Testament and Greek writings — were already ambivalent, and ambiguous, tributes to Persia’s philosophy and sciences (especially astrology), to its military prowess, and to its (generally) admirable and occasionally uncomfortably familiar religious beliefs and practices. From Herodotus to Plutarch, from Diogenes Laertius to Plethon, from Athanasius Kircher to Nietzsche, the Persian Magi (of whom Zarathustra was considered the founding father) were sufficiently ancient and respectable to throw the originality and primacy of both the Greeks and the Israelites into question — though there were also, already by later fifth-century BCE Greek associations of the Magi with quack healers using spells, a tradition that informed the pervasive assumption in the Christian world that Zarathustra and the Magi were practitioners of dark magic.¹² That is to say: the ancient sources *themselves* left behind plenty of material that could be appropriated by iconoclastic non-experts such as Voltaire

(Paderborn, 2012), 64–65, and the literature cited there. One can further tangle the web by noting — as early modern scholars already did — that already in the early medieval period, the Zoroastrians themselves may have overstated or massaged their views to persuade Muslim overlords that as fellow worshippers of one God, they ought not to be persecuted, or more heavily taxed.

10 Cf., Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York, NY, 1979).

11 Friedrich Spiegel, *Avesta: Die heiligen Schriften der Parsen*, vol 1 (Leipzig, 1852), 1–2.

12 Martin L. West, ‘The Classical World’, and Marco Frenschkowski, ‘Christianity’, in *The Blackwell Companion*, 440, 461–463.

or Nietzsche, and which troubled, intrigued, and embroiled those who threw themselves into technically extremely challenging and socially often unrewarding pursuits such as the study of Avestan philology or Zoroastrian rites.

Given the specialized language in which most nineteenth-century orientalists wrote, it is often harder to tease out their political, religious, and personal penchants than is the case in the less technical works of a Voltaire or a Nietzsche. Yet the former did have their own worldviews and cultural ambitions, and hoped in some way to intervene in the political, institutional, and religious worlds they inhabited. We should also keep in mind that these self-proclaimed 'orientalists' often bore a heavy, or even confessionally risky, burden of explaining their dedication to 'other' peoples' cultures. Especially in the nineteenth century, those who devoted themselves to things 'oriental' felt themselves the unappreciated underdogs in a world in which classicists and right-Hegelian Protestant pastors were kings. These men often attempted, sometimes very subtly, to upgrade their importance by linking themselves to more mainstream conversations, and when they did so, regularly challenged accepted wisdom, even when their object was to demonstrate the Bible's truth or the inventiveness of the Greeks.¹³ Unless we recognize that in their worlds orientalists often remained oddballs or iconoclasts, we will not understand the frustrations and/or the resentments they occasionally betray and which sometimes also shape their scholarship. Nor will we recognize the ways in which they have contributed both to the distorting of other peoples' religious traditions, and to undermining of western self-satisfaction and insularity.

2 Persia and the Problem of Chronology

For the purposes of our story, it is crucial to know that the Zoroastrian holy book, the Avesta, is itself a complicated compilation of liturgical texts and commentaries of different ages; the familiar term 'Zend Avesta' actually means 'Avesta plus (Pahlavi) commentaries,' one of the earliest manuscript forms in which the Avestan liturgies survived.¹⁴ Not until the nineteenth century was it recognized that within this corpus there is an older layer of texts (including the

13 Here see Martin Mulsow's fascinating *Moderne aus dem Untergrund: Radikale früh-aufklärung in Deutschland, 1680–1720* (Hamburg, 2002).

14 See J. Kellens' entry in *iranica.com* on "Avesta," <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/avesta-holy-book>; and Philip G. Kreyenboek, "Exegesis," <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/exegesis-i>. Zend is now commonly transliterated as Zand, the Iranian equivalent of commentary or exegesis.

Yasnas and the ritual hymns known as the Gathas) in a language now known as 'Old Avestan', and a later layer, composed in 'Young Avestan'. Preserved in oral traditions, Avestan ritual texts and commentaries were first compiled and written down during the Sassanid period (c. 224–651 CE) at a time when few still understood Avestan. The language subsequently became unreadable, even by Zoroastrian priests. Additional commentaries, prayers, and other fragmentary texts were written down (in Pahlavi) in the ninth century, but undoubtedly had much earlier origins. There may have been pre-Sassanid Zoroastrian texts; according to one Greek source, cited by Pliny, Zarathustra himself had written two million lines of verse.¹⁵ Middle Persian traditions explained the loss of original Zoroastrian writings by claiming that Alexander had accidentally burned most of them in taking Persepolis; the others had been plundered by the Greeks and subsequently lost. Oral tradition, internal philological evidence, and references or allusions in Greek, Hebrew, or Assyrian texts make almost certain an origin for Zoroastrian ideas (and their founder) centuries before the first mention of his name in a mid-fifth century Greek text.¹⁶ Yet the question remains: how long before this *terminus ante quem* did he flourish? There are no clearly datable Zoroastrian texts before the Sassanid era, and even today the internal philological evidence is extremely difficult to piece together. This has meant that Zarathustra's chronology hangs heavily on interpolations from other traditions.

Greek sources have been crucial in these interpolations, although they, too, have significant problems and contain innumerable contradictions. While some Greeks (especially Ionian Greeks) surely knew about Zoroastrians by the time of Cyrus the Great (c. 576–530 BCE), references are vague until the time of Herodotus, who reported the following about the religion of the Persians:

They [the Persians] have no images of the gods, no temples nor altars, and consider the use of them a sign of folly. This comes, I think, from their not believing the gods to have the same stature with men, as the Greeks imagine. Their wont, however, is to ascend the summits of the loftiest mountains, and there to offer sacrifice to Zeus, which is the name they give to the whole circuit of the firmament. They likewise offer to the sun and moon, to the earth, to fire, water, and to the winds. These are the only gods whose worship has come down to them from ancient times. At a later period they began the worship of Aphrodite, which they borrowed from

15 Michael Stausberg, 'Zarathustra: Post-Gathic Trajectories', in *The Blackwell Companion*, 71.

16 Almut Hintze, 'Zarathustra's Time and Homeland: Linguistic Perspectives', in *The Blackwell Companion*, 32.

the Arabians and Assyrians. Mylitta is the name by which the Assyrians know this goddess, whom the Arabians call Alitta, and the Persians Mitra.¹⁷

Herodotus's discussion of the ascetic nature of Persian religious practices, their horror of lying, and their devotion to purity (such that they will not urinate or vomit in rivers [1.139]), attracted many an admiring comment from later Protestant writers, though these would have to work their way around the Greek historian's comments about the Persians' love for luxuries and vices, and their unpalatable death rituals and idolatrous practices of fire- or star-worship. Herodotus's description of the worship of 'Zeus' as a god representative of the whole firmament would be crucial to Muslims and Christians wishing to impose on Zoroastrianism a pseudo-monotheistic Zurvanian cosmology — that is, one that emphasizes the importance of the Zurwān, the god of time, who, according to some Zoroastrian texts, begat the twin spirits of Ohrmazd and Ahriman as a kind of prelude to the Creation. Finally, Herodotus's invocation of 'Mitra' and his Arabian and Assyrian cousins would feed a wide stream of speculation about relations between the Persian Mitra and the Roman cult of Mithra, and the Assyrian origins of Persian ideas.¹⁸ Herodotus did not invoke Zarathustra by name, as did his near contemporary Xanthus, who offered the first dating of the sage: 6,000 years before Xerxes crossed into Greece, or 6480 BCE in our terms. But then again, Xanthus was, and is, only known from fragments cited in later sources.

As Martin West has described, a much more extensive discussion of the Magi and of Zarathustra began during, and immediately after, the time of Plato, as fascination with 'barbarian wisdom' and its deep antiquity spread amongst the Greeks. It seems that Plato, and certainly his student Eudoxus, knew about Iranian philosophical dualism; Eudoxus, as West argues, in modifying Xanthus's dates to place Zarathustra to 6,000 years before the death of his mentor (or in our terms 6347 BCE), was perhaps making a wonderfully sagacious Zarathustra the forerunner of his admired mentor.¹⁹ Many more accounts of the wise Persian dualist followed, and from the third century BCE, a wave of texts reported on the both curious and learned ideas and practices of the

17 Herodotus, *The Persian Wars*, trans. George Rawlinson (New York, NY, 1942), 1:131–132.

18 For a short discussion of Zurvanism, see the entry in *iranica.com* by the leading expert, Albert de Jong. De Jong, 'Zurvanism', at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/zurvanism>, updated March 28, 2014. For the history of Mithraism and its complexities, see R.L. Gordon, 'Franz Cumont and the Mysteries of Mithraism', in *Mithraic Studies*, vol. 1, ed. J.R. Hinnells (Manchester, 1971): 215–248, and more recently, Gordon, 'From Miθra to Roman Mithras', in *The Blackwell Companion*, 451–455.

19 West, 'The Classical World', in *The Blackwell Companion*, 443.

Persians as well as other wise barbarians.²⁰ Some of these texts purported to be the work of Zoroaster himself; some, most notably Plutarch's *Isis and Osiris*, contained extensive and well-informed accounts of Persian beliefs and religious rituals. But in fact no direct Greek translations from ancient Persian (or Indian or Egyptian) texts have come down to us. Apparently, although the Greeks were curious about other cultures, as Arnaldo Momigliano noted, they were not curious enough to learn the languages of the ancient Orient.²¹ Their chronologies and the degree to which they admired Persian philosophy or customs varied greatly. Some variant readings of Xanthus and Hermodorus made their dates for Zarathustra not 6000 years before Xerxes's crossing or 5000 years before the fall of Troy, but 600 and 500 years, yielding dates of roughly 1080 BCE and 1750 BCE rather than 6480 BCE and 6250 BCE, respectively.²² While some ancient writers championed his philosophy, others made him an alchemist, diviner, astrologist, or magician (all of which, as Franz Cumont later claimed, fit ancient definitions of 'science'). Diogenes Laertius in the third century CE refuted claims that 'barbarian' Persians or Egyptians had invented philosophy, but left behind a hugely influential summary of the practices and convictions of the Magi which included their horror of images of the gods, their faith in the rebirth of all men, and their view that the cyclical movement of time would return all things to the same state.²³

20 West, 'The Classical World', 437–445; Arnaldo Momigliano, *Alien Wisdom: The Limits of Hellenization* (Cambridge, 1975), 141–148. A comprehensive collection of the classical sources on Zoroastrianism were published in 1920 by Carl Clemen, *Die griechischen und lateinischen Nachrichten über die persische Religion* (Giessen, 1920), and reorganized and reinterpreted by Joseph Bidez and Franz Cumont in 1938, *Les Mages hellénisés: Zoroastre, Ostanès, et Hystape d'après la tradition Grecque* 2 vols (Paris, 1938). In English, see now Phiroze Vasunia, *Zarathushtra and the Religion of Ancient Iran: The Greek and Latin Sources in Translation* (Mumbai, 2007).

21 Momigliano, *Alien wisdom*, 7–8.

22 I am using here a nominal date of 1250 BCE for the fall of Troy, more or less the date we can infer from Herodotus, and presuming that the Trojan war was, in fact, a historical event.

23 Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*, 1.9; for an English translation, see <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0258>, including note 7. Thanks to Richard Gordon for this reference. Nietzsche, as a young scholar, made intensive studies of Diogenes Laertius, on which see Jonathan Barnes, 'Nietzsche and Diogenes Laertius', in *Nietzsche-Studien* 15 (1986): 16–40. It is possible he took some of his views of Persian wisdom — including the idea of the eternal return — from Laertius's (critical) reportage on the subject. But Robert Yelle makes a convincing case that there are many more contemporary sources for Nietzsche's conception of the eternal return including, especially, Crezuer. Robert A. Yelle, 'The Rebirth of a Myth?

So too did Jewish, Roman, Christian, and Islamic commentators record, or allude to, a long series of interactions with Persians as well as the deep antiquity of Persian religious rituals and ideas. With respect to Jewish-Persian contact, this, too, probably began in the age of Cyrus, who liberated Israelite exiles from their Babylonian captivity after his conquest of Mesopotamia (539 BCE). Current scholarship is generally very careful about parallels and analogies between the two religions in the period of the composition of the Pentateuch (again a subject where dating is extremely fraught), but there certainly were intersections, demonstrated above all by the book of Isaiah (45.1), which calls Cyrus 'the anointed one', a line that has sometimes been taken to show that the Magi practiced a faith akin to that of the Hebrews.²⁴ In the late antique period, substantial cultural transfers — and confrontations — clearly occurred, though Jewish writers rejected the dualism they considered essential to Zoroastrianism.²⁵ In the New Testament, it is the Magi who, among all the other ancient oriental religious men, are wise enough to follow the star to Christ's birthplace in Matthew 2:1–12. Many Jewish and Christian writers preferred to make the pagan reports of his deep antiquity more comfortable by identifying him with Ezekiel, prophet in Babylon between about 593 BCE and 571 BCE; with Nimrod (in the case of the Mishna); or, in the case of some church fathers, with the son of Ham, who was, along with Shem and Japhet, one of Noah's three sons, claiming him to be the inventor of black magic.²⁶ Learned Romans reiterated the (various) Greek dates for Zarathustra, though in the fourth century CE, Ammianus Marcellinus, who had actually gone to war with the Sassanids, and evidently had learned some Persian words, made something of a breakthrough by identifying the Persian Vishtaspa, the king Zarathustra is said to have converted, with Hytaspes, Darius I's father, meaning that the Persian prophet would have had to thrive in the period we now would identify as 580–550 BCE. That is a date Christians after him could assimilate to the period of the Babylonian captivity (c. 597–539 BCE) and to the figure of Ezekiel, though Eusebius would follow the Greek-Assyrian writer Ctesias, and make Zarathustra a king of Bactria, who made war against Ninus and Semiramus in a nebulous era that long predated the Captivity. But whenever Zarathustra had thrived, he was still presumed to have been a dualist. Having subscribed to both Neoplatonism and Manicheism, Augustine (as Max Müller later noted)

Nietzsche's Eternal Recurrence and its Romantic Antecedents', in *Numen* 47, no. 2 (2000): 175–202.

24 Other telling passages include Esther 1–10, Daniel 6, 8–11, and Ezra, 4–7.

25 Yaakov Elman and Shai Secunda, 'Judaism', in *The Blackwell Companion*, 426–434.

26 Rose, *Imago Zoroastris*, 1: 8.

could conceive of dualist Zoroastrians as having had an inkling of the true religion long before God's specific revelation to the Jews.²⁷ But in the later medieval period, western Christians would make dualism central to their critique of eastern heresies, and in so doing, make the Manicheans, and the ancient Persians, more 'others' and idolaters than ancestors.²⁸

Middle Persian writers drew heavily on classical and Christian accounts, often using a date of 258 years before the coming of Alexander (330 BCE) for Zarathustra's ministry; had they wished to synchronize these known dates with the Christian calendar (as later Christian writers using their evidence would do), this would have yielded a date of about 571 BCE for the Persian's first prophecies.²⁹ Of course these writers were in a position to know much more about the post-Sassanid Zoroastrian communities, and some wrote extensively about the founder and his faith. Most important here was Ferdowsi's tenth-century epic tribute to the history of the Persian Empire, the *Shahnameh*, and a subsequently lost work called *The Book of the Grand Conjunctions*, written by the Persian philosopher Giamasb in the reign of king Kishtasb (Visthaspa, possibly the same as the Greek Hystaspes). In Giamasb's book, the 'prophet' Zarathustra was said to have flourished 1300 years after the Flood during a first conjunction of the planets; a second conjunction brought about the appearance of a second prophet, presumably Moses, who founded a different religion. This dating allowed Zarathustra frequently to be identified with Abraham and to be called Ibrahim Zerdascht, Abraham, Friend of the Fire.³⁰ But other Arabic narratives made Zarathustra the servant of Ezra, or the disciple of either Jeremiah or Elijah.³¹ Within the Muslim traditions, then, as in the Christian and Jewish traditions, we again face extreme chronological challenges in correlating the unknown, or highly disputed dates of the Flood, Abraham's lifespan, and the dispersion of Noah's sons. Even as a pagan refiguration or follower of biblical persons, Zarathustra remained an enigma.

Among medieval Christians and Muslims Zarathustra, when mentioned at all, held an ambiguous position. Though he might have been privy to some

27 Müller, citing Augustine, *Retractions*, 1:13, in 'Preface', to Idem, *Chips from a German Workshop*, vol. 1: *Essays on the Science of Religion* (New York, NY, 1900), xi.

28 See R. I. Moore, *The War on Heresy* (Cambridge, MA, 2012), e.g., 264, 308.

29 Jackson, *Zoroaster*, 157–169.

30 This source was highly valued by Barthélemy D'Herbelot and used in his *Bibliothèque orientale, ou dictionnaire universel contenant generalement tous ce qui regarde la connaissance des peuples de l'Orient* (Paris, 1697), e.g., 930–931. Thanks to Alexander Bevilacqua for this reference.

31 Dmitri Levitin, *Ancient Wisdom in the Age of the New Science: Histories of Philosophy in England, c. 1640–1700* (Cambridge, 2015), 105.

inklings of divine wisdom, his perverted understanding and pagan context had made him an idolater, a dualist, and the inventor of magic; ancient Greek and Jewish inquiries respecting his philosophy, science, theology, and wisdom were side-lined by the need to distance Christianity from paganism and magic.³² But in the early seventeenth century, curiosity about the persecuted Iranian Zoroastrians and the Zoroastrian community of ‘Parsis’ in India spread, both among Muslim intellectuals and among European travellers and missionaries making their first visits to India and Persia. Perhaps the first to demonstrate new interest was the Safavid king Shah Abbas I (r. 1588–1629), who made a desperate effort to locate a copy of the Zoroastrian holy book, reportedly executing two Zoroastrian Dasturs when they failed to produce one.³³

Abbas’s anti-Ottoman overtures to the western powers opened the way for the entrance of Catholic missionaries and European travellers, who learned to share his interest in the Zoroastrians, just as they shared his dislike for the more powerful religious communities in his empire — the Armenians, the Hindus, and the Muslims. This on-the-ground exposure led some visitors to question the Zoroastrians’ reputation as dualists and believers in black magic. In the 1610s, Pietro della Valle found the ‘Guebres’ of Isfahan poor and dirty; yet they told him that they believed in one supreme god, which he thought preferable to the idolatry of the Hindus. Father Gabriel de Chinon, working in Persia in the middle of the century, believed the priests who told him that they recognized only one god, and honored fire only because it was essential in the miraculous saving of their prophet (Zarathustra). And in the next generation, the French Protestant traveller Jean Chardin was thrilled by an offer to purchase a set of Zoroastrian scriptures called the ‘Zend pasend vosta,’ which proved the existence of a Persian form of primeval monotheism. Chardin hired a Zoroastrian priest to read the scriptures to him, but after a three-month trial decided that the text was so garbled and contained so many absurdities that it couldn’t possibly be an authentic, ancient Avesta, and thus refused to buy it for the Bibliothèque Royale. The French traveller eventually concluded that Zoroastrian belief in one god was a ruse adopted during the later evolution of the faith to evade persecution by the Muslims.³⁴

Back in Europe, interest in the actual Zoroastrian books, and in Zarathustra himself, picked up in the wake of Renaissance attempts to recover ‘the ancient wisdom’ and the Reformation’s commitment to scriptural truth. By the early

32 Frenschkowski, ‘Christianity’, 461–462.

33 See Nora Kathleen Firby, *European Travellers and their Perceptions of Zoroastrians in the 17th and 18th Centuries* (Berlin, 1988), 28, 35–63.

34 Firby, *European Travellers*, 50, 57–64.

seventeenth century, as Dmitri Levitin has shown, the hope that ‘pagan’ texts might lay the foundation for a true history of religion and philosophy was already widespread, as the ubiquity of editions of Diogenes Laertius’s *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers* testifies.³⁵ The lack of authentic ancient Persian texts was no aberration for philologists, who could not yet read hieroglyphics, Sanskrit, Pali, or cuneiform, but made elaborate and skillful use of early Christian, Hebrew, Syriac, Arabic and Greek texts, including later Greek works such as Plutarch’s *Isis and Osiris* and the *Chaldean Oracles*. The *Oracles*, one of those Hellenistic works which purported to be the work of Zarathustra himself, appealed greatly to Gemistos Plethon, Pico, and Francesco Patrizi, in part because some of the content seemed — like the other esoteric bestsellers of the day the *Corpus Hermeticum* and the *Sibylline Oracles* — to document the deep antiquity of pagan wisdom and, tantalizingly, to foreshadow Christian doctrines. While fifteenth- and sixteenth-century scholars revelled in prefigurations and allegories, however, by the mid-seventeenth century, historical chronologies had come to the fore, and some sobriety had been introduced by Isaac Casaubon’s demonstration that the *Corpus Hermeticum* and *Sibylline Oracles* were Christian forgeries. This may have boosted interest in the *Chaldean Oracles* and ancient Persian wisdom generally among those seeking not to undermine the historical veracity of the Scriptures, but to offer external (pagan) proof of the historical veracity of the Scriptures.³⁶ Debates about this text, certainly, raged throughout the later seventeenth century, especially as newly available Arabic and Persian sources were added to the mix. By the end of the seventeenth century, to be sure, European scholars were well acquainted with Zoroastrianism and its founder, and deeply interested in reconstructing his life story.

Gradually, as learned Europeans distanced themselves from the witch craze and/or from the Inquisition’s zealous persecution of heretics, Zarathustra’s reputation as a magician no longer made him quite so scary; already in 1625, for example, Gabriel Naudé absolved him of having practiced black magic.³⁷ In the early modern period, he was widely identified as the founder of the Chaldean (or sometimes Sabian) religion, though this sometimes made him a star- and fire-worshipping idolater, and sometimes a monotheist reformer whose teachings had been misrepresented by Plutarch and the later Greeks.³⁸

35 Levitin, *Ancient Wisdom*, 51, 27.

36 Levitin suggests this was the case for Ralph Cudworth; Levitin, *Ancient Wisdom*, 87.

37 See Naudé, *Apologie pour les grands personnages qui ont esté faussement supçonnez de magie* (Amsterdam, 1625).

38 Cudworth made him both; Levitin, *Ancient Wisdom*, 88–89.

One of the greatest *érudits* of the later part of the century, Pierre-Daniel Huet, insisted that a historical Zarathustra had never existed, but contributed to the upgrading of Zoroastrianism's moral heft by arguing that the Persian reformer was actually a refiguration of Moses.³⁹ Zarathustra was not as dear to the hearts of those intrigued by occult philosophy as was the Egyptian Hermes Trismegistus. But his extensive ancient paper trail made him an important participant in seventeenth-century debates about the origins, transmission, and corruption of Adamic wisdom across the Near East⁴⁰ — and an attractive figure for eighteenth-century *philosophes* seeking a surreptitious means to attack Judeo-Christian hubris, intolerance, and exclusivity.

3 Zarathustra and the Enlightenment

Again, Michael Stausberg and others have written extensively about orientalist scholarship and Persian studies in this period, and thus this section will pass quickly across an extremely rich and diverse intellectual landscape, one in which Europeans increasingly figured Zarathustra as something like a kindred spirit rather than as an idolatrous heretic. As we have seen, steps toward a more sympathetic understanding of the Persian religious reformer began already in the seventeenth century with our travellers and with a general softening of attitudes toward ancient heresies such as Manichaeism. This more sympathetic understanding went hand in hand with a snowballing corpus of historicizing biblical scholarship which, as Dmitri Levitin has demonstrated in a critically-important essay, was not necessarily challenging to Christian orthodoxies, but in large part born out of efforts to answer chronological and other challenges and to stabilize particular confessional strains of thought.⁴¹ Rooted in the sixteenth century, these historicizing practices gave a great boost to oriental studies, resulting in the outpouring of an enormous number of extraordinarily learned tomes on a wide variety of subjects by the end of the seventeenth century. One of these was Oxford orientalist Thomas Hyde's *Historia religionis veterum Persarum* (1700), a massive work which drew much more extensively

39 Guy Stroumsa, *A New Science: The Discovery of Religion in the Age of Reason* (Cambridge, MA, 2010), 102.

40 See Daniel Stoltzenberg, *Egyptian Oedipus: Anathasius Kircher and the Secrets of Antiquity* (Chicago, IL, 2013) 135–143.

41 Dmitri Levitin, 'From Sacred History to the History of Religion: Pagans, Jews, and Christians in European Historiography from the Reformation to "Enlightenment"', in *Historical Journal* 55 (2012): 1117–1160. Thanks to Knud Haakonssen for this reference.

on post-Mongol Arabic and Persian texts, including the *Shahnameh* and the *Sad dar*, or *100 Chapters*, as well as on the accounts of the travellers to recreate a largely coherent and admirable Persian religion, in which Zarathustra figured as a student of the prophet Ezra, whose knowledge of the true religion made possible a side-lining of the dualistic and idolatrous tendencies in the religion of the Persians and made possible a now enhanced return to original monotheism.⁴² Hyde argued that in the wake of these reforms, Zoroastrians subordinated dualism to a first principle of creation, and — like Father Gabriel before him — he downplayed Zoroastrian fire worship, treating it as a civic, rather than religious, ritual, as a means to clear the Persian prophet of charges of idolatry.⁴³ In the wake of Hyde's magisterial, but Zurvanian, view of Zoroastrianism, shaped by his dependence on Muslim accounts, debates about Zarathustra increasingly took seriously his real existence as an ancient 'prophet', not only of Zoroastrianism, but of monotheistic religion as a whole.

A good Anglican, Hyde tread carefully in his attempt to explain similarities between Zarathustra's religion and the religion of the ancient Israelites, never really coming to grips with the severe chronological problems created by his insistence that Zarathustra had flourished during the time of Darius Hystaspes, in the middle of the sixth century, but also studied with Ezra, whom Hyde's contemporaries believed to have lived a century later (c. 480–440 BCE).⁴⁴ As Levitin has argued, Hyde valued the *Sad Dar* highly as it contained, in his reading, an internal, Persian, account of Zoroastrian beliefs, unlike the *Chaldean Oracles*, which he counted as a forgery. As an Arabist, he was convinced that he and his fellow orientalist could offer means of access to the ancient Near Eastern world that were unavailable by way of Greek sources (and their readers).⁴⁵ Yet, his efforts to demonstrate the existence a kind of ancient

42 Hyde presented so complimentary a picture of ancient Zoroastrianism that a commentator in 1818 could joke that 'he apparently was more than half a believer in the religion he describes'. William Erskine, 'On the Sacred Books and Religion of the Parsis', in *Transactions of the Literary Society of Bombay*, vol. 2 (London, 1820; reprint 1876), 338. For the most recent and careful reading of Hyde, see Levitin, *Ancient Wisdom*, 95–109.

43 Thomas Hyde, *Veterum Persarum et Parthorum et Medorum Religionis Historia* (Oxford, 2nd ed., 1740), 159–160. Henri Bayle took exception to Hyde's view of Zoroastrian fire worship, accusing him of borrowing the methods of the Jesuits in China, who tried to claim that Confucian rituals were civic, rather than religious, rites. Bayle, *Dictionnaire historique et critique* vol. 4 ([1702]), on ARTFL site, <http://artflsrv02.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/philologic/getobject.pl?p.3:561.bayle>, 560 note G.

44 Levitin, *Ancient Wisdom*, 105. Hyde mentions Zarathustra's dependence on Jewish teaching early in his book, 'Praefatio', v, in *Idem, Historia*.

45 Levitin, *Ancient Wisdom*, 104.

Jewish-Persian syncretism still could not be clinched without a direct, datable ancient Persian text. He knew of the existence of a Persian religious book known as the Avesta, but to his frustration he could not read the Young Avestan and Pahlavi manuscript (later identified as a copy of the *Vendidad Sadeh*, a ninth-century collection of legal texts that form part of the Avesta) owned by the Bodleian library. Recognizing the evidentiary issues and suspicious of Hyde's overly ecumenical approach, Henri Bayle, adding an entry on 'Zoroastre' to the 1702 edition of his *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, found the English scholar entirely too credulous with respect to second-hand reports of the rationality and religious probity of the Persians. 'He [Hyde] believes that God revealed to Zoroaster the coming of the Messiah, and that Zoroaster inserted in his works this marvelous revelation'. Bayle ended his entry by suggesting that Hyde had naïvely trusted in the authenticity of works attributed to the ancient Persians.⁴⁶ The English orientalist and anti-deist Humphrey Prideaux, however, vigorously refuted Hyde's claims, arguing in his two-volume *The Old and the New Testament Connected in the History of the Jews and Neighboring Nations* (1715–18) that Zarathustra — like Mohammed — had been a fanatic and a crafty imposter.⁴⁷

In the next decades, Hyde's work was followed by many more moderate universal histories, antiquarian studies of the ancient Near East, surveys of pagan mythologies, and annotated biblical translations. As Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal power diminished, European travellers, traders, and missionaries fanned out to collect more ethnographic and antiquarian information, as well as an increasing number of manuscripts and artefacts. It had been perfectly possible to study pagans before the eighteenth century, and even to suggest that the ancient Israelites might have borrowed ideas or practices from others — though this was likely to embroil the writer in learned controversies.⁴⁸ But it was much more dicey to make pagan religious systems and gods ethically equivalent to those of the Jews and Christians, to suggest that others might have had revelations of earlier and more universal theological importance than those recounted in the Old Testament, or to argue that Christianity itself

46 Bayle, *Dictionnaire*, 4: 560, note H.

47 Prideaux, *The Old and the New Testament Connected in the History of the Jews and Neighboring Nations* (London: 9th ed., 1725), 300ff. Anquetil was still struggling with Prideaux's critique in 1771, and the English reproducing it in 1858; see Anquetil-Duperron, *Zend Avesta, ouvrage de Zoroastre* (Paris, 1771), 1:64, and below, note 68.

48 Levitin, 'From Sacred History to the History of Religions,' 1137–1139; John Gascoigne, 'The Wisdom of the Egyptians,' in *The Uses of Antiquity: The Scientific Revolution and the Classical Tradition*, ed. Stephen Gaukroger (Dordrecht, 1991), 175–183.

remained riddled with idolatry (though of course Protestants could, and did, say this about Catholic cults of the saints, for example). With the waning of religious prosecutions for heresy in Europe — in the Netherlands and England first, and gradually elsewhere — it became easier to entertain such ideas, just as the further progress of historicizing biblical scholarship made it harder to uphold allegorical or literal readings of the Scriptures. Against this background, we can see the emergence of the wide-ranging, ‘enlightened’ discussion of God and gods that Frank Manuel so beautifully described many years ago.⁴⁹ Of course, in focusing attention on other cultures, Europeans imposed their own expectations and desires on practices or ideas that were internally fragmented, heterogeneous, and resistant to chronological synchronization. This heightened the Christian tendency to seek for each set of believers a set of original ‘scriptures’, a single religious founder or prophet, and a coherent set of doctrines and rituals which could said to be shared by all Hindus, or by all Zoroastrians. Deist presumptions about humanity’s fundamental oneness and ability to read ‘the book of Nature’ mingled with older Neo-Platonic conceptions of Adamic wisdom and learned attempts to reconstruct world chronology to produce a widening conversation about the purer, primeval forms of universal revelation, the means by which it had spread and been corrupted, and the exact timing of each nation’s contribution to the process.⁵⁰ All manner of theories circulated. But to make one’s case for the greater antiquity of Iran or India, the Chinese or the Egyptians, one needed proof, preferably in the form of a set of ur-ancient scriptures. And thus, the race to find such ‘oriental books’ — begun much earlier by figures such as Guillaume Postel and Shah Abbas — accelerated, and as a wider public was drawn in, so too did the stakes increase exponentially.

Before we describe this race, and its outcome for Persian studies, it is crucial that we also note the use of orientalist travelogues and books made by enlightened non-specialists, eager to root out of their own churches practices they regarded as superstitious, intolerant, or irrational. For these impish critics, the more the Asian gods, religious founders, or scriptures looked like European

49 Frank E. Manuel, *The Eighteenth Century Confronts the Gods* (Cambridge, MA, 1959). Levitin has recently argued against the fetishization of the post-1680 ‘crisis of the European mind,’ and for a longer term understanding of religious historiography which identifies the later sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries as the moment at which the foundations were laid for the critical and historical analysis of Christianity. This view has much merit, but we can also see the eighteenth century, especially in continental Europe, as the period in which a much wider, more public, and more directly anti-clerical discussion of world religions took flight. See Levitin, *Ancient Wisdom*, 1–31.

50 Cf., Urs App, *The Birth of Orientalism* (Philadelphia, PA, 2010), 254–266.

comparanda but trumped the latter by being older, wiser, or less persecutory, the better — and this usage, too, I am convinced, helped to upgrade European respect for figures such as the Buddha, or Zarathustra, and to put renewed emphasis on the question of ur-monotheisms. Of course, Exhibit A here is Voltaire.⁵¹ Protected by Frederick the Great or by Swiss exile, Voltaire extolled the great age of Chinese, Persian, and Indian religions; it was no secret that he meant to show that the Christian religion was by no means the oldest, or the most sublime, of the world's many priestly conspiracies; Moses had had no monopoly on moral truth. Like Isaac de Beausobre, whose *History of Manicheism* (1734/39) Voltaire admired, the *philosophe* thought Zarathustra more a natural theologian than a magician, and credited him with developing the concept of the Fall.⁵² Voltaire made his wise rationalist Zadig a Zoroastrian and delighted in invoking Zarathustra, whom he styled as a lawgiver and a prophet. Others, too, working forward from Chardin, Hyde, and the missionary accounts, also emphasized the purity and practicality of the original teachings, and enhanced the personality and centrality of Zarathustra, the better to juxtapose an overly legalistic and prudish Moses. As Sylvain Levi has glossed this relationship: 'in the polemics directed by the Encyclopaedists against the Christian church, the sonorous and mysterious name of Zoroaster, exalted by the classical tradition, offered a candidate to rival Moses. The Persian denied the Hebrews the glory of having [the only] primitive, sublime laws.'⁵³ The Persian religious reformer, that is to say, obtained both more concreteness, more moral integrity, and more charismatic appeal as Enlightened thinkers deployed him for their own critiques of Christian, or Jewish, hubris.

But flattering comparisons with Moses also forced to the fore the chronology question and the problem of the missing Avestan 'scriptures'. As the British and French made deeper inroads into South Asia and the eastern Mediterranean, and as holy men were pressed, or bribed, to help the interlopers learn their sacred languages or locate ancient books, the race to find and read the Vedas, the hieroglyphic inscriptions, and finally the Persian sacred books intensified. In 1761, Voltaire excitedly announced the discovery of an ur-ancient Veda,

51 For Voltaire's readings of Zarathustra, see Stausberg, *Faszination Zarathushtra* 2:901–946.

52 Rose, *Imago Zoroastris* 1:218–221; on Beausobre, Guy G. Stroumsa, 'Isaac de Beausobre Revisited: The Birth of Manichean Studies,' in *Studia Manichaica*, eds. R.E. Emmerick, W. Sundermann and P. Zieme (Berlin, 2000), 601–612.

53 Quoted in Herrenschmidt, 'Once Upon A Time, Zoroaster', *History and Anthropology* 3, no 1 (1987), 214. The English, too, increasingly treated the Persian prophet warmly. Like Voltaire, Gibbon admired Zarathustra's condemnation of fasting and prayer, in favor of his injunctions to useful agricultural labor. Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, with notes by the Rev. H. H. Milman* (Philadelphia, PA, 1871), 1:235.

which he called the so-called Ezourvedam. In 1767, the British surgeon, self-taught Arabist, and former governor of Bengal, J. Z. Holwell produced another bombshell: a set of original ‘Gentoo’ scriptures titled the ‘Chartah Bhade Shastah’ and dating to a clearly pre-Mosaic 3100 BCE. Holwell claimed to have lost the original text — he had, after all, he insisted, endured confinement in the ‘Black Hole’ of Calcutta. But he quoted liberally from his notes on the text, arguing that the Hindus had preserved an authentic and pure form of the primeval revelation, as against the revelation of Moses, which was ‘clogged with too many incomprehensible difficulties to gain our belief.’⁵⁴ Holwell’s Shastah was immediately drawn into a battle over its authenticity and, especially, over its deep date. Yet his compatriots Alexander Dow and Nathaniel Halhed, now able to read Sanskrit texts, similarly called into question the short chronologies of ‘the peoples of the Book’ with respect to much deeper Indian accounts of time.⁵⁵ Into this context came the report from Surat from a French scholar on the make, Hyacinthe Anquetil-Duperron, that he had discovered and learned to read the sacred books of the Persians. Across Europe, this report raised hopes that the mysteries surrounding the historical identity and religious teachings of Zarathustra would finally be solved.

Although it would take Anquetil a further nine years to translate and publish his *Zend Avesta*, the Académie des Inscriptions immediately commenced intense discussion of Zarathustra and his dates. In 1762, the erudite Abbé Foucher put forward a highly influential theory which sought to square the Zarathustran dating circle, explaining the high Greek dates while confirming that the ‘real’ religious reformer belonged to the era of the Babylonian captivity, as Hyde had claimed. Drawing on hints in Pliny and Suidas, Foucher argued, in three papers before the Académie, that there had been two Zarathustras: one very early fire-worshipper, and a later Jewish apostate and courtier who had won Darius’s confidence and had assimilated ancient Zoroastrian teachings to those of the Jews. This Zarathustra had written some books — including *The Chaldean Oracles* — but they had all been lost, and even manuscripts that might turn up in Persia would be of dubious authority and antiquity.⁵⁶

Anquetil-Duperron’s *Zend Avesta*, appearing in French in 1771, was expected to clear up these debates. Here at last was an authentically ancient set of scriptures,

54 App, *Birth of Orientalism*, 297–362; Holwell quoted in *Ibid.*, 342.

55 Bruce Lincoln, “Isaac Newton and Oriental Jones,” in *History of Religions* 42 (2002), 17; in Thomas R. Trautmann, “Indian Time, European Time,” in *Time: Histories and Ethnographies*, eds. Diane Owen Hughes and Thomas Trautmann (Ann Arbor, MI, 1995), 179–185.

56 ‘Histoire de l’Académie Royale des Inscriptions et belles Lettres’, (May 1762), in *Journal des Savans* (1762): 263–268.

their existence rumoured and their language the subject of speculation for centuries. Anquetil, who had studied with a Zoroastrian high priest in Surat, claimed that he could now date Zarathustra; he was born about 589 BCE, and came to eastern from western Iran some three decades later. At the age of 65 (c. 524 BCE) he gave lessons in philosophy to Pythagoras in Babylon.⁵⁷ For Anquetil, Zarathustra was neither an imposter nor a pagan recipient of Adamic wisdom; instead, he belonged to a chapter in human history in which he, Confucius in China, and Moses in Israel had incited a kind of revolution, purifying morals, laying down laws, and chasing away foreign gods.⁵⁸ This was all very well, but the text Anquetil offered as his translation of the Persian holy book did not fit Europeans' now more 'enlightened' expectations. His *Avesta* was full of strange rituals and prayers, and lacked the philosophical, and theological, coherence and sophistication many now expected from Zarathustra. Upon its publication, William Jones — also offended by Anquetil's ridiculing of his alma mater, Oxford — immediately condemned the text as a fake. Jones could not make head or tail of Anquetil's account of the structure of the ancient language he was purportedly translating from (it turned out his translation *was* horrendous), but also objected that a moral philosopher and sage of Zarathustra's calibre could never have written such rubbish. He concluded, as did Voltaire, that the text must be the creation of a modern-day Parsi.⁵⁹ So much for those grand hopes that Zarathustra's identity would now be revealed!

In the next years, Jones's countryman, John Richardson, expanded this critique, arguing that Anquetil's 'Zend' language diverged too far from modern Persian to be a believable ancestor, as well as contained numerous (and obviously late) Arabic words. Moreover, Richardson wrote, the 'uncommon stupidity of the work itself' convinced him it was a forgery. Zoroaster, so respected by the Greeks, could not have concocted a religion characterized by such 'jejune puerilities'.⁶⁰ Zarathustra's original worship of sun and fire as representatives of Omnipotence 'seems to have been an idea too refined for the gross capacities of the vulgar', who

57 Anquetil, *Zend Avesta*, 60–61.

58 *Ibid.*, 7–8.

59 James Darmesteter, in the introduction to his *Avesta* translation, says about Jones's critique: 'In fact, the only thing in which Jones succeeded was to prove in a decisive manner that the ancient Persians were not equal to the lumières of the eighteenth century, and that the authors of the *Avesta* had not read the *Encyclopédie*. Darmesteter, 'Introduction', *The Zend Avesta*, Part 1: *The Vendidad, Sacred Books of the East*, vol. IV, ed. F. Max Müller (Oxford, 1888), p. xvi. On Voltaire's critique, see Stausberg, *Faszination Zarathushtra*, 1:938–939, 944.

60 John Richardson, *A Dissertation on the Languages, Literature and Manners of the Eastern Nations* (Oxford, 1778), 13–16, quotation at 16.

consequently turned to idolatry.⁶¹ Both the ancient language and the ancient religion of the Persians, he lamented, were entirely lost; Anquetil's work was a modern forgery. Writing in 1818, William Erskine, another colonial official, similarly discounted all Persian texts, ancient and modern, whose retrospective and garbled accounts of Persian prehistory remained essentially 'romance'; 'Under these circumstances', he wrote, 'it would be vain to look for any authentic account of Zertusht, or of the origins of his sacred volume. The Zend Avesta does not belong to the age of history; it remains single in the Zend tongue; and we cannot rely on anything recorded by the historians of Zoroaster, all of whom, besides being comparatively modern, have allowed their imagination to run riot in their accounts of his wonderful works and miracles.'⁶² We must remember that there *were* a large number of forged ancient books circulating at the time, including the *Ezourvedam* (outed in 1781), the poetry of Ossian, and, as it turned out, Holwell's *Shastah*. Dating any of these works — for which there were no reliable biblical or classical points of reference — was as risky as it was desirable. Jones, Richardson, and Erskine were right to be suspicious, even though they also had ulterior motives in dismissing Anquetil's scholarship and the Avesta's authenticity.

In the Germanies and in France, Anquetil's readers proved more sympathetic. Herder thought Anquetil's *Avesta* credible — and inspired Johannes Kleucker, professor at the University of Riga, to provide a German edition of the text (1775) — though Göttingen's highly influential cultural historian, Christoph Meiners, did not. Carsten Niebuhr's reports on Persepolis (1774) helped the cause; Herder took it upon himself to explicate Niebuhr's descriptions of Persepolis, a task that meant using Anquetil's *Avesta* to interpret the site, and battling Meiners on the question of Persia's debts to the Egyptians. Still, he knew that Anquetil's decipherment, and his dates, remained in dispute, and that his own interpretations, consequently, stood on shaky ground; he carefully titled his major essay on the subject 'Persepolis: A Set of Suppositions' (1787).⁶³ Silvestre de Sacy's decipherment of the Sassanid Pahlavi inscriptions (1793) made it clear that Avestan *was* a real language, anterior to the Sassanid era, and made logical the preservation of the Avestan books in the Pahlavi language. Over the next decades, several scholars — including Jones himself — remarked on similarities between Avestan and Sanskrit vocabularies.

61 Richardson, *A Dissertation*, 22.

62 William Erskine, 'On the Sacred Books and Religion of the Parsis', in *Transactions of the Literary Society of Bombay*, vol. 2 (London, 1820; reprint 1876): 329.

63 On Herder's studies of Persepolis, see Hamid Tafazoli, *Der deutsche Persien-Diskurs: Zur Verwissenschaftlichung und Literarisierung des Persien-Bildes im deutschen Schrifttum von der frühen Neuzeit bis in das neunzehnte Jahrhundert* (Bielefeld, 2007), 368–402.

But nothing much came of this observation until the relationship was cemented by the work of Rasmus Rask in 1826 — in part because of the complexity of the philological tasks, and in part because so many orientalists turned their attention to Sanskrit rather than Avestan studies.⁶⁴ For approximately fifty years, this deep uncertainty about Persian antiquity discouraged scholars from pursuing studies of Avestan, precisely during the time that classical philology turned itself into a specialized *Wissenschaft* and attention, popular and scholarly, turned to publications devoted to exciting new translations from Sanskrit texts and the competition to decipher hieroglyphics.

It is worth noting, however, something that came to the fore in later enlightened efforts to deal with pagan, and especially Persian, ancient wisdom and/or monotheism, and that is the increasingly openly-stated animus evinced among champions of the ‘oriental’ pagans towards the narrowness of a providential history focused on the Jews. Voltaire had made this complaint against older universal histories in his *Philosophy of History*, and we have seen, above, Holwell denounce the incomprehensible (and self-serving) histories of Moses. It had always been possible to describe the backwardness and barbarity of the early Israelites — who, of course, had to be harangued by Moses and the Prophets to behave themselves properly. But as the pagan ‘orientals’ received a certain sort of upgrading, this often came at the cost of the Israelites, whose claims to ‘specialness’ Enlightened critics deeply resented. Although William Jones was unwilling to throw biblical chronologies and frameworks entirely on the dustheap, he credited the Persians and Indians with possessing a primordial monotheism so perfect as to strain “the outermost limits of orthodoxy.”⁶⁵ And by the century’s end, other more radical voices had begun to accuse the Jews of having actually *stolen* ideas or even whole books from the wise pagan of the East.⁶⁶ In this late Enlightenment Orientophilia—born out of resentments directed both at Jews and at clergymen, and the desire to generalize and rationalize revelation—we can detect the fashioning of some of the frameworks which made possible the transformation of early modern anti-Judaism into nineteenth-century anti-Semitism.⁶⁷

64 Darmesteter, ‘Introduction’, xix–xxiii.

65 Thomas R. Trautmann, “Indian Time, European Time,” in *Time: Histories and Ethnographies*, eds. Diane Owen Hughes and Thomas Trautmann (Ann Arbor, MI, 1995), 179–185.

66 In 1790, the French orientalist Louis-Mathieu Langlès asserted that the Pentateuch was ‘an abridgment of Egyptian books, the original of which exists in India’. Quoted in App, *Birth of Orientalism*, 473.

67 Lincoln suggests such a trajectory beginning with Jones himself in “Isaac Newton and Oriental Jones,” 17–18.

Anquetil's *Avesta* remained for several decades beneath a cloud, but European scholars did not forget about Zarathustra or about Persian monotheism. One wide-ranging discussion — into which waters Edward Gibbon also sailed — concerned Zarathustra's excellence as a lawgiver and champion of yeoman farmers.⁶⁸ But more powerfully enlightened traditions of origin-seeking and de-centring the biblical narrative continued, the former among the Romantics and nationalists, the latter among the continuers of the radical Enlightenment. In many respects, these two streams met in the world of German late enlightenment scholarship and philosophy, and in no text more obviously than in Friedrich Creuzer's massive, and hugely controversial, *Symbolik und Mythologie der alten Völker, besonders der Griechen* (1810–12). For our purposes, the most interesting part of the work was the long section Creuzer added in 1819, responding in part to some of the work done by his fellow enlightened Romantics and friends, Joseph von Hammer Purgstall, Friedrich Schlegel, and Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling. Creuzer, steeped in Neoplatonic texts and in the new Indology, had initially emphasized the origins of Greek religious ideas and symbols in Egypt and India. But in volume two he insisted that it had become clear that Egypt should be treated as a 'Vorschule'; inspired by Hammer's linking of Persian figurations of light in the darkness with the torch-bearing imagery frequently deployed in Roman Mithraic cults, he lavished new attention on Persia, laying particular emphasis on links between Persia's (allegedly) torch-bearing Mithra, the Greek Perseus, and Christ as the 'light shining in the darkness'.⁶⁹ Creuzer questioned Zarathustra's real existence, arguing instead that the significance of his name was to be found in the endurance of his teachings. Yet for the iconoclastic German classicist, the authenticity of the *Zend Avesta* as a statement of the pre-Biblical ancient *Lichtreligion* of the Persians was not in doubt.⁷⁰ He pushed past dating issues by arguing — as would many in future — that the *Avesta* might not predate the Sassanids, but clearly contained deeply ancient content. Drawing in Hyde's Zurvanian solution, he conjectured that the ancient Persians must have had a single, higher principle of time/God to explain the origins of the dualism of good and evil, and to provide hope that light would prevail, good would be saved, and nature would be redeemed.⁷¹

68 See, for example, M. de Pastoret, *Zoroastre, Confucius et Mahomet, comparés comme sectaires, législateurs, et moralistes*, part 1 (Paris, 1788); Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, 1:234–238.

69 Creuzer, *Symbolik und Mythologie der alten Völker* (Leipzig: 2nd ed., 1819), 677–778; ix (Vorschule), 727, n. 111 (on Hammer).

70 Creuzer, *Symbolik*, 667, n. 3.

71 Creuzer, *Symbolik*, 680, 697–707.

Creuzer's efforts were those of a pious Protestant, attempting to flip upside down the radical critique of religion and priests typified by C. R. Dupuis's revolutionary best-seller, *L'Origine de tous les cultes* (1795). Unlike many of his contemporary classicists, Creuzer was eager to link Greece with the Brahmins and the Magi, and he would feel his colleagues' wrath in the 'Creuzer Affair' that roiled German philological circles in the 1820s.⁷² It is unlikely that he had a racial project in mind in sketching out the westward spreading of this *Lichtlehre* by the Brahmins and the Magi, to Egypt and Greece, and then to Rome and 'our' Germanic 'Gauen' (precincts),⁷³ roughly following Friedrich Schlegel's account of the dispersion of the Indogerman peoples — though an attempt to demonstrate a national connection may have played a role. But this trajectory, and Creuzer's terminology, would be useful to those who wished to bypass the Old Testament and the Semites in their accounts of Christianity's origins. In a footnote, Creuzer followed Anquetil in noting that the 'Zend books' very often deployed the term 'Arier', which also could be found in one of Herodotus's many lists of eastern peoples (in 7.62). He gave credit to the now obscure orientalist J. G. Rhode for applying the term not just to the Bactrians, Medes, and Persians, but also to the ancient Indians, as 'Arya' also occurred in their religious books.⁷⁴ By no means did Creuzer, or Rhode, use the term to describe an elite race of men, and the term was not used with great frequency or consistency until the 1830s in Germany, and a bit later — thanks to the work of the transplanted German, Friedrich Max Müller — in England.⁷⁵ But a consensus was forming that this was a philologically-sanctioned term for a deeply ancient civilization

72 See Marchand, *German Orientalism*, 66–71.

73 Creuzer, *Symbolik*, 728.

74 Creuzer, *Symbolik*, 736, n. 90. Friedrich Schlegel, who is often blamed for originating the term, apparently first invoked it in 1819, in a review of Rhode's work in *Jahrbücher der Literatur*. See Christopher Hutton, 'Rethinking the History of the Aryan Paradigm', <http://hiphilangsci.net/2013/07/24/rethinking-the-history-of-the-aryan-paradigm>. Perhaps Schlegel did popularize the term, but by 1819, the triple identification — Airya/Arya/Arioi already had the sanction of Anquetil, Creuzer, and Rohde. This linguistic argument would be repeated frequently by nineteenth-century authors, including, for example, Friedrich Spiegel, *Avesta: Die heiligen Schriften der Parsen*, vol 1 (Leipzig, 1852), 5; Adolphe Pictet, *Les Origines Indo-Européennes ou les Aryas primitifs: Essai de paléontologie linguistique* (Paris, 1863), 2:27–29. See also Stefan Arvidsson, *Aryan Idols: Indo-European Mythology as Ideology and Science* (Chicago, IL, 2006), 20–21.

75 J. G. Rhode, *Die heilige Sage und das gesammte Religionssystem der alten Baktrier, Meder, Perser oder des Zendvolks* (Frankfurt, 1820), e.g., 14. On usages in Germany, Tuska Benes, *In Babel's Shadow: Language, Philology, and the Nation in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Detroit, MI, 2008), 202; in England, Trautmann, *Aryans and British India*, 13.

with at least a rudimentary form of monotheism. Even before they became a race, the 'Arya' were thus already seen to be morally superior to the Hindus and other ancient polytheists, and potentially equal or ancestral to the Jews.

There is no need for us here to belabour the history of Aryan racial theory. What we need to underline is a growing conviction shared between German linguists and Romantic historians of religion (who were often one in the same) that the Sanskrit and Avestan languages, like the Hindu and Zoroastrian peoples, were probably older, and perhaps wiser, than all others, and that the history of the latter, in particular, was essential for understanding 'our' history. This identification was perhaps weaker amongst the French, many of whose orientalists in the age of Silvestre de Sacy's dominance left both Romanticism and religious belief behind, and certainly in Britain, where Anquetil's text remained in doubt, and colonial officials and missionaries found the religious views of the modern Parsees distasteful. Here, Prideaux's attack on Zarathustra's 'fanaticism' had reached its 16th edition by 1815, and was re-edited, with an introduction by a popular historian, in 1858.⁷⁶ Yet, even as Creuzer's speculative histories came under fire, remnants of his thinking endured, certainly in mythological inquiries of his friends Schelling, Friedrich Schlegel, and Josef Goerres (who taught himself Persian in the 1810s), in G.W. F Hegel's praise for Persia's non-idolatrous, and only superficially dualistic, Persian 'religion of Light',⁷⁷ and also in the new linguistics.

4 Zarathustra in the Age of Philological Wissenschaftlichkeit

It is certainly true that Romantic universal histories and speculative, orientalizing polemics suffered — in the eyes of fellow scholars, at least — with the advent of more specialized, and at least superficially secular, styles of classical philology (especially in Germany) and of oriental philology (especially in France). After about 1830, publications grew more technical and specific, and scholars more guarded about their speculations. Racial thinking did infiltrate and increasingly structure much of the field that came to be known as Indogerman or Indoeuropean philology; specialists in things Persian (including Arthur de Gobineau and Adophe Pictet) provided some of the most egregious theories

76 Humphrey Prideaux, *An Historical Connection of the Old and New Testaments*, ed. J. Talboys Wheeler, 2 vols (London, 1858).

77 Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, on dates, 182, 186; on Persian religious ideas, 178–9, 195. On Schelling, see George Williamson, 'Gods, Titans, and Monsters: Philhellenism, Race, and Religion in Early Nineteenth-Century Mythology', in *The German Invention of Race*, ed. Sara Eigen and Mark Larrimore (Albany, NY, 2006), 47–66.

and descriptions of racist history.⁷⁸ Yet, the origins of Aryan racial theory is a subject that has been deeply studied by others, and need not be rehearsed directly here.⁷⁹ I am interested, rather, in underscoring how deeply the search for the primeval Indogerman language and homeland, especially as it related to things Persian, remained deeply linked to religious questions and to theological polemics in Europe and in South Asia. After all, Vedic Indian culture might have been older, but it was undeniably polytheistic and not invoked in the Bible; the Persian 'Aryans', on the other hand, were seen to be more like 'white' Europeans, in large part because they could claim to be at least some sort of monotheists and had been mentioned, mostly admiringly, in Greek accounts and in the scriptures.⁸⁰ I want to show how unresolvable chronological questions about Zarathustra's dates of flourishing permitted the formation of two quite different ways of making Zoroastrianism relevant to Christian Europeans. Oriental, and here specifically, Persian philology may have become *wissenschaftlich* in the nineteenth century, but that does not mean that it was willing, or able, to leave behind all of its evidentiary problems, theological penchants, or axes to grind.

As we have seen, down to the end of the eighteenth century, Persian studies was dominated chiefly by British and French scholars, most of them men with good modern Persian skills and extensive contact with Zoroastrian communities in Iran or India. This was also true of the great French Arabist Antoine de Sylvestre de Sacy, whose work on the Pahlavi inscriptions copied by Niebuhr at Persepolis straightened out the chronology — and language — of Sassanid kings; of Henry Rawlinson, who located (1835) and translated (1843) King Darius's Behistun inscription; and of the Danish scholar Rasmus Rask, who

78 In 1855, Gobineau drew heavily on Burnouf and Herodotus to identify a pure race of 'Zoroastriens-Iraniens', whose attempt to convert the Assyrians and other Semites had resulted in their own 'infection' with Semitic blood, and produced (among other things) the cult of Mithras, see Eline Scheerlinck, *An Orient of 'Mysteries': Franz Cumont's Views on 'Orient' and 'Occident' in the Context of Classical Studies in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries* (Dissertation, University of Ghent, 2013), 228–229. Pictet's vast *Les Origines Indo-Européennes ou les Aryas primitifs*, 2 vols (Paris, 1863) opened with a paean to the providential superiority of the Aryans, marked by 'the beauty of their blood and by the gifts of intelligence'. Pictet, *Origines Indo-Européennes* 1:1.

79 See here Trautmann, *Aryans and British India*; Maurice Olender, *Languages of Paradise*; Kveta Benes, *In Babel's Shadow*; Arvidsson, *Aryan Idols*.

80 In India, educated Parsis themselves rediscovered their own illustrious and racially superior history in this period by delving into European travelogues and Avestan scholarship, now available in British imperial libraries and schools. Talinn Grigor, 'Parsi Patronage of the Urheimat', in *Getty Research Journal* 2 (2010): 58, 61–63.

offered tentative, but promising, proofs for the authenticity of the Avesta and its linguistic relationships to Sanskrit texts in 1826.⁸¹ Yet, in the 1820s a new cadre of linguists began to seize scholarly leadership. Most of them were stay-at-home scholars, not men who conversed regularly or easily in modern oriental languages, and, by nationality, Germans. These would be the men (and they *were* all men) responsible for professionalizing Persian philology, but they did so chiefly by focusing attention on the oldest available text, that is, the Avesta — interest in the *Shahmenah* and Persian poetry decreasing correspondingly — and by focusing even more intensely than had their enlightened forbears on Zarathustra's religious identity.⁸² Although its ultimate significance for understanding Zoroastrianism was disputed, the major new element these nineteenth-century scholars added was the linkages made between Zend and Sanskrit. This offered the opportunity to ratify those early Greek dates for Zarathustra and his books, and to make Zoroastrianism, in one way or another, deeply relevant to European history, a claim that surely carried racial baggage but was also, we should not forget, by no means comfortable or conventional for classically-educated, bourgeois Christians.⁸³

We should note, in this regard, that the very large number of Europeans who were not Persian philologists continued to have a dim view (or no view at all) of oriental religions, past and present. This goes, too, for the large number of missionaries who were fanning out across Asia in hopes of bringing Christianity's light to still 'dark' places. The Scottish missionary John Wilson, for example, settled in India in the 1830s, and made it his life's work to demonstrate the false and absurd beliefs of the Parsis. In 1843, responding to the Parsis' rebuttals, Wilson published a massive treatise in which he reiterated William Jones's claims that the *Zend Avesta* (Anquetil's version) was too absurd to be considered a divine product. Moreover, the whole 'wretched' religion was a modern one: 'the legends about Zoroaster and his followers, which are now current among the Parsis, are a mere tissue of comparatively recent fables and

81 Rask's essay, originally written in Danish, was published as *Über das Alter und die Echtheit der Zend-Sprache und des Zend-Avesta* in 1826.

82 For a comprehensive overview of the contributions of German scholars since the 1820s see Rüdiger Schmitt, 'Iranian Studies in German: Pre-Islamic Period', on [iranica.com](http://iranicaonline.org/articles/germany-iii); <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/germany-iii>, and for a wider cultural survey, Bijan Gheiby, *Persien oder Iran? Die Deutschen entdecken das Land Zarathustras* (Mainz, 2012).

83 Looking back on the 1820s and 1830s, Max Müller recalled that in this era, scholars and especially classicists 'would not believe that there could be any community of origin between the people of Athens and Rome, and the so-called Niggers of India...' Müller, *India: What Can it Teach Us?* (London: 2nd ed., 1892), 28.

fictions'.⁸⁴ To defend themselves, as Michael Stausberg insightfully argues, the Dasturs increasingly took to emphasizing the monotheism of their faith, the one means by which their theology might be taken seriously in British India.⁸⁵ If many Avestan scholars believed the Parsis, usually for their own reasons, it is probably safe to assume that most Europeans, if they thought about Parsis at all, shared instead Wilson's prejudices.

The most significant Persianist of the 1820s was still a Frenchman, Eugène Burnouf, though as we shall see, he was not a traveller and worked closely with German scholars, most importantly with the Sanskritist Adolf Lassen. When in 1826 Burnouf and Lassen published an important study of Pali, it seems that Burnouf had already begun working on Avestan, the reading of which was complicated by Anquetil's poor translation and the paucity of contemporary texts. In his letters to Lassen, Burnouf also described the loneliness he experienced in pursuing exacting, specialized scholarship in a French world where eloquence was king and carelessness rife. Burnouf's letters also illustrate just how monumentally difficult a task it was even for the linguistic genius Burnouf to sort out the ancient Persian languages.⁸⁶ Ultimately, he had to start with one portion of Anquetil's Avesta, using, however, other manuscripts in the Bibliothèque du Roi, most especially a fifteenth-century Sanskrit translation of the Yasna (or liturgy). This allowed the French Sanskritist to identify parallel constructions in Avestan and Sanskrit, and — applying some of Franz Bopp's recently published principles of comparative grammar — to fix some of the Avesta's basic grammatical forms. Burnouf's *Commentary on the Yasna* (1833) proved to a watershed study of the language, and the one that saved Anquetil's reputation and made possible further progress in reading Avestan. Yet progress remained slow, lagging behind Sanskrit studies, and was marked by a kind of positivist modesty. As Rudolf Roth noted in 1871, the nineteenth-century Avestan scholar 'felt that when he took a step, in order to seize a desired fruit, the ground under his feet shifted, right and left he saw the greatest curiosities, which injured his grammatical certainties, had to believe that every ancient poet and priest spoke in half-understood and incoherent sentences, and to take these stammerings for what has been considered since

84 John Wilson, *The Parsi Religion as Contained in the Zend Avesta, Propounded and Defended by the Zoroastrians of India and Persia, Unfolded, Refuted, and Contrasted with Christianity* (Bombay, 1843), 447. On this conflict, see Michael Stausberg, 'John Wilson and der Zoroastrismus in Indien: Ein Fallstudie zur interreligiösen Kritik', in *Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft* 5 (1997): 87–114.

85 Stausberg, 'John Wilson', 110.

86 See *Choix de lettres de Eugène Burnouf, 1825–1852* (Paris, 1891), 12–48, 52–70.

antiquity Zoroastrian wisdom. No wonder that the more careful pulled their feet back again and the professional interpreters wanted to leave themselves and others time to create some clarity before they were willing to trust in their interpretations'.⁸⁷

Roth undoubtedly numbered Burnouf amongst this cast of modest Iranists. In his *Commentary*, Burnouf insisted that he was simply offering a strong hypothesis, which others could, and should, test. And although he claimed that the results of his work would illuminate almost all of human history,⁸⁸ he was never very forthright about what conclusions his readers should draw about issues beyond the linguistic ones closest to his ken. Moreover, although his work clearly demonstrated the relationship between the two 'Aryan' languages, it did not resolve the question of the dating of the ideational content or the individual pieces of the *Zend Avesta*, which Sacy had shown had been compiled in the Sassanid period. Burnouf's breakthrough certainly did not convince Friedrich Windischmann, one of the foremost German Persianists of the century's first half, that Sanskrit was the key to understanding, and dating, Zarathustra.

It is worth teasing out Windischmann's position before tracing that of the individuals who followed more directly in Burnouf's wake. Friedrich Windischmann came by his interest in orientalism honestly; his father, Karl Josef Windischmann, was a doctor, theologian, and enthusiast of oriental and esoteric wisdom, who obtained a professorship at the University of Bonn in 1818. Karl Josef was also an engaged and committed Catholic, and reader of Schelling and Hegel. He finished only the first four (East Asian) books of his projected multi-volume study of world philosophy, but we can see a little of what he thought about 'the ancient Persian religion of light' in his 1831 introduction to a set of passages about Zarathustra drawn from the *Shahnameh* and translated by the Arabist J. A. Vullers. Here the elder Windischmann invited his readers to acknowledge ancient Zoroastrianism 'as the most noble of what the oriental paganisms have to offer, and at the same time to recognize it as a star, which announced to the pagans as well the future [coming] of the true king of light and prince of victory'. Zarathustra, the elder Windischmann insisted — invoking a now-familiar European preference for Zoroastrianism over Hinduism and Islam — had left traces of noble and pure

87 R. 'Beiträge zur Erklärung des Avesta', in *Zeitschrift der deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 25 (1871), 1–2.

88 Eugène Burnouf, *Commentaire sur le Yacna: L'un des livres religieux des Parses* (Paris, 1833), 1:XXV.

religions to be reawakened after a period of 'slumbering beneath the stultifying shadows of Muslim poppies'.⁸⁹

Friedrich Windischmann proved a more expert linguist than his father. Yet, he was also a deeply religious man and equally devoted to a kind of Augustinian search for pagan sparks of the original, true faith. Friedrich, in fact, made a career in the Church as canon to the archdiocese of Munich, and was prominent enough in Church politics to have had the Pope request his assistance in reaching out to eastern Christians.⁹⁰ While a much more expert linguist, Windischmann, it is clear, took over his father's vocabulary of proto-revelatory sparks and stars as a means to explain similarities between Jewish and Persian ideas without making the former derivative of the latter. His arguments, of course, hung on chronology, and he had some fancy footwork to do in order to get his prophets in the right order. In his posthumously published *Zoroastrische Studien* (1863), Windischmann, using the dates suggested by Islamic texts, placed a mostly monotheist Zarathustra after the time of Isaiah (at the beginning of the sixth century BCE), claiming that in the wise words of this noble pagan, 'the sparks of the Mosaic revelation glimmered'⁹¹ — though Windischmann also emphasized the Persian's not so noble, and quite unbiblical, ideas. Zarathustra in turn, he argued, had inspired Cyrus (the biblical Koresh) to liberate the Jews from their Babylonian captivity. But Windischmann then had to respond to rational exegetes, who had argued that the fact that Isaiah knew the name Koresh meant that the Israelite prophet must postdate the Captivity, and hence Zarathustra. To address these arguments, Windischmann simply reverted to faith: God, who had spoken to Isaiah, was fully capable of knowing in advance the name of the future Persian monarch.⁹² Here, we have not yet left behind the early modern Catholic versions of 'the ancient theology', although the chronological questions have become more acute and pressing.

Windischmann's friend and fellow Catholic Friedrich Spiegel was more circumspect. Yet he, too, devoted many carefully-worded pages to the problem of prioritizing Persian and Jewish monotheisms. After Henry Rawlinson's Behistun find, the Bavarian government commissioned Spiegel, who had studied with Friedrich Rückert, to study the oldest Persian manuscripts on the continent, in Copenhagen and in Paris. Following in the methodological footsteps of Thomas Hyde and Friedrich Schlegel, Spiegel worked backward from the more modern

89 Windischmann, *Zoroastrische Studien: Abhandlungen zur Mythologie und Sagen-geschichte des Alten Iran*, ed. Friedrich Spiegel (Berlin, 1863), xxviii–xxix.

90 Félix Nève, *Frédéric Windischmann et la haute philologie en Allemagne* (Paris, 1863), 8–10.

91 Windischmann, *Zoroastrische Studien*, 132.

92 Windischmann, *Zoroastrische Studien*, 137.

Pahlavi and medieval Persian (Pazend) texts, neither well-known in Europe at the time.⁹³ By 1851 he was ready to begin publishing critical editions of Avestan texts together with their Middle Persian translations, and in 1852 he published his own full translation of the Avesta. What is noteworthy about Spiegel is that although he acknowledged the importance of Sanskrit linguistics, he worked from Middle Persian texts and consulted works by the Parsis themselves ‘when my understanding [of the Pahlavi translation] did not suffice’.⁹⁴ This method, essentially of trusting the Parsi and Islamic traditions rather than abandoning these to work forward from Sanskrit parallels, was linked to Spiegel’s subtle, but discernible, religious commitments, which in turn relied on chronology. Both in 1852 and in later works, Spiegel underlined the impossibility of sorting out the chronology, but his interpretation — that the importance of Zarathustra (whether he had been a real person or not) lay in the fact that he represented the Indogerman reworking of Semitic ideas — implied the priority of Abraham and Moses.⁹⁵ In his three-volume culture-historical synthesis (1871–1878), *Iranische Altertumskunde*, he was more explicit, arguing for a late date (around 600 BCE) for Zarathustra’s reforms and a transmission from the Hebrews to the Persians of the idea of a single God.⁹⁶

In giving tradition and the Parsis themselves authority, Spiegel was not alone; but his trust in tradition was recognizably Catholic and immediately attacked by the Indologists, most of whom at the time leaned strongly in the direction of anti-clerical Protestantism and had little respect for Parsi learning. In 1853, Theodor Benfey denounced Spiegel’s method as ‘subjective’, a critique that would be repeated by Rudolf Roth, professor of oriental languages at the University of Tübingen, almost twenty years later. ‘[H]ow can man seriously believe that one can find the objective truth in scholiasts and commentaries, in the Talmud and the Rabbis?’ Roth asked.⁹⁷ It was much more valuable to know what the original author of the texts had meant, Roth argued, than what translators and interpreters over the years had said about the Persian scriptures. ‘And if, finally, the creator of the confessions is Zarathustra, the promoter of the faith, it is even more important to understand his words rightly’.⁹⁸

93 Rüdiger Schmitt, ‘Spiegel, Friedrich’, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/spiegel>.

94 Spiegel, *Zend Avesta*, vi.

95 Spiegel, ‘Ueber das Leben Zarathustras’ in *Sitzungsberichte der königl. Bayer. Akademie der Wissenschaften zu München, philosophisch-philologische Classe*, vol. 1 (Munich, 1867), 1–92, 2–22; 66–69.

96 Jacques Duchesne-Guillemin, *The Western Response to Zoroaster* (Oxford, 1958), 24.

97 Roth, ‘Beiträge’, 4. On Benfey’s critique, see Gheiby, *Persien oder Iran?* 153–154.

98 Roth, ‘Beiträge’, 16.

Spiegel's reading of the words of one crucial Zoroastrian 'profession of faith', Roth concluded, made no sense; when parsed with the help of Vedic grammar, however, they demonstrated belief in one reigning God of the world (Ahura Mazda) who rewarded good works and had sent a shepherd (Zarathustra) to bring men faith and to lead them to salvation.⁹⁹ Spiegel remained unconvinced, however, responding to Benfey and Roth that he had no intention of conceding priority to the Indologists: 'The best Veda specialist is just as little the best Avesta specialist as the best Greek specialist is ipso facto the best Latinist...'¹⁰⁰ The two schools continued to work from their own linguistic presumptions for decades to come; for more than 150 years after Anquetil's 'decipherment', there was simply no consensus on which method of reading Avestan should count as *wissenschaftlich*.

Now Benfey and Roth, who were primarily Vedic specialists, descended from a different school than did Spiegel, but their interests and those of their fellow German Indologists were also shaped by religious and Romantic concerns. One might even say this about Franz Bopp, who had studied with K. J. Windischmann, had thrilled to the ideas of Friedrich Schlegel, and had gone to Paris in 1815 in the hope of finding the primeval truths concealed in the Vedas.¹⁰¹ Roth himself had begun as a theology student under the direction of the maverick Protestant and orientalist Henrich Ewald, and came to see the significance of his Sanskrit studies in understanding the history of 'Aryan' religions, of which Christianity was the culmination. After 1857, his course titled 'Allgemeine Religionsgeschichte' became compulsory for Protestant theology students at the University of Tübingen, a hotbed of radical-Protestant biblical philology.¹⁰² Friedrich Rückert (1788–1866), the orientalist scholar and poet for whom linguistic inquiry was intertwined with high Romantic hopes of locating Babel — and perhaps discovering the ur-language of paradise¹⁰³ — taught

99 Roth, 'Beiträge', 21.

100 Spiegel quoted in Gheiby, *Persien oder Iran?*, 154.

101 But Bopp had devoted himself to Indoeuropean grammar to such an extent that he refused to speculate, even when pressed by Windischmann and Wilhelm von Humboldt, about primeval linkages between Hebrew and Sanskrit. Suzanne Marchand, *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire: Religion, Race, and Scholarship* (New York, NY, 2009), 126.

102 Indra Sengupta, *From Salon to Discipline: State, University, and Indology in Germany, 1821–1914* (Heidelberg, 2005), 72–84. On Tübingen and Ewald, see Marchand, *German Orientalism*, 106–111.

103 See Maurice Olender, *The Languages of Paradise: Race, Religion, and Philology in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA, 1992); on Rückert in particular: Kveta Benes, 'Transcending Babel in the Cultural Translation of Friedrich Rückert (1788–1866)', in *Modern Intellectual History* 8, no. 1 (2011), 61–90.

Persian and other oriental languages to Paul de Lagarde, perhaps the most respected Persianist, and the most fanatical anti-Semite and proponent of 'Germanic' religion of the last part of the nineteenth century. But of all of these late Romantic teachers and proponents of ancient oriental studies who carried older traditions forward into the modern period, surely the most influential on the Protestant side was Carl Josias von Bunsen, whose protégé Martin Haug would prove the foremost antagonist to the Windischmann-Spiegel school in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Having learned Hebrew as a boy and having studied classical philology with C. G. Heyne in Göttingen, Bunsen then learned Arabic and Persian; in the 1810s he was preparing to study Sanskrit when B. G. Niebuhr, Roman historian and Prussian envoy to the papal court, hired him to be his personal secretary. A fateful encounter with Champollion during his stint as Niebuhr's secretary made Bunsen an Egyptophile, in part because he hoped Champollion's decipherments would finally unlock the mysteries of the Orient. Bunsen followed Champollion's work with great enthusiasm, and had a hand in persuading Karl Richard Lepsius to study hieroglyphics rather than Greek. He married a British clergyman's daughter, conspired with Friedrich Wilhelm IV to unite the Prussian and English churches, and became Prussian ambassador to the Court of Saint James.¹⁰⁴ Yet, his political career did not prevent him from pursuing two lifelong dreams: to rewrite the Bible, in light of the latest orientalist scholarship, and, relatedly, to finally straighten out Egyptian chronology in the hope that he could thereby delve backward, behind biblical chronology, in order to uncover the origins of humankind's religious consciousness. These dreams would generate massive publication projects, the fruit of his collaboration with the younger philological experts Bunsen patronized and encouraged, many of whom long bore the imprint of Bunsen's esoteric, Christian convictions. Lagarde was one of these, as was Max Müller, who obtained Bunsen's support when he was a semi-starved student of Sanskrit. In 1857, Müller wrote his great friend and patron: 'I do not yet despair of discovering the chord by which the dissonance of the Veda and the Zend-Avesta and the Chinese Kings will be brought into unison with the key-note of the Bible. There can be nothing accidental, nothing inharmonious on earth and in history; the unresolved discords in the East must find their solution, and we dare not leave off till we have discovered the why and the wherefore'.¹⁰⁵

104 On Bunsen, see David Gange, *Dialogues with the Dead: Egyptology in British Culture and Religion, 1822–1922* (Oxford, 2013), 98–102.

105 Müller to Bunsen, 24 Jan. 1857, in Georgina Müller, ed. *The Life and Letters of the Right Honourable Friedrich Max Müller* (London, 1902), 1188.

It was Bunsen, similarly, who ‘discovered’ and made possible the career of Martin Haug, whose reading of the Gathas (the oldest and most difficult part of the Avesta) as something like Zarathustra’s gospels ignited fierce new chronological and interpretive debates. Haug, like Roth, had studied with Ewald in Tübingen, and had learned from Roth himself to approach Avestan by way of Sanskrit. But like many a bright young orientalist of his generation, including Müller, Haug’s job prospects were grim. A Protestant and a peasant’s son, he had been passed over for professorships in southern German states, and for the Bavarian state patronage that made possible the Avestan studies of his Catholic colleagues Friedrich Spiegel and Friedrich Windischmann.¹⁰⁶ In the early 1850s, Haug was working as an unsalaried Privatdozent at the University of Göttingen, desperate for a permanent job. Bunsen took him into his house, paid him to help prepare Bunsen’s new edition of the Bible, and funded his travel to important collections.¹⁰⁷ Bunsen’s (esoteric) worldview did not take over Haug’s; the latter was already profoundly immersed in the Göttingen-Tübingen sea of historical biblical criticism, and eager to learn about ‘first things’. Yet, it is significant to see Haug’s breakthrough work on the Gathas in light of his relationships with Bunsen and his esoteric, Protestant circle.

Haug’s work is only one of the many sources of Bunsen’s final book, *God in History* (3 vols), which was published after his death in 1860. Here Bunsen, having departed from his Egyptophilia, set about telling the story of humankind’s religious consciousness, emphasizing the strain of thought that he called Aryan Christianity. This story, he argued, began in Central Asia with an apparently simultaneous Aryan and Semitic renunciation of animism, an act which marked the true beginning of human history, and was attested in both the Old Testament and in the *Zend Avesta*.¹⁰⁸ Reading backward from both texts, Bunsen conjured a prehistory in which the Semites and Aryans ‘were as yet

106 On Haug, see also Pascale Rabault-Feuerhahn, *L’archive des origines: Sanskrit, philologie, anthropologie dans l’Allemagne du XIXe siècle* (Paris, 2008), 340–344.

107 Herrenschildt, ‘Once Upon A Time’, 223–224; Almut Hintze, ‘Martin Haug’, in *Encyclopedia iranica*, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/haug-martin>.

108 Bunsen neatly cut off the possibility of Humean or anthropologizing ‘natural’ history, however, by insisting that one could really only reliably start with Abraham, and/or with other texts, as a means to delve into the humankind’s deep past. ‘As those who study the laws of the starry heavens do not begin with the nebulae, nor take the orbit of comets for the starting-point of their planetary observations, so have we, in beginning our pilgrimage through the ages with a sketch of the character of Abraham, stepped at once into the full daylight of the more recent history of the human kind’. Bunsen, *God in History, or The Progress of Man’s Faith in the Moral Order of the World*, trans. Susanna Winkworth, 3 vols (London, 1868), 1:221.

living side by side, but slightly, or scarcely, distinguishable from each other'.¹⁰⁹ Zarathustra and Abraham, rough contemporaries, had taught monotheism and ethics, and though the latter was distinguished by his superior courage in the renunciation of the magic and nature-worship (as the Zoroastrians retained fire worship), the former demonstrated already the Aryan commitment to Mind and to metaphysics.¹¹⁰ Bunsen made no bones about describing 'us' as, racially speaking, 'Aryans' and descendants of Japhet. But he did not want to lose the Semitic side of Europe's *spiritual* inheritance; though he gave consideration to the possibility that the Chinese, too, might have developed primitive forms of monotheism and preserved fragments of Adamic wisdom, he fully endorsed the conventional 'orientalising' reading of later Asian cultures, arguing that their tendency to despotism inevitably caused them to degenerate.¹¹¹ Bunsen's claims, like those of Spiegel, bore a striking resemblance to older versions of the ancient theology, except that what was crucial in this case was his validating of the perfection of the original, shared revelation *before* the time of Moses, and not the replacement of pagan 'sparks' by the higher truth of the biblical revelation to the Jews. And of course, this depended on a high chronology for Zarathustra, which Haug and Bunsen estimated at 3000 BCE, about 2400 years earlier than Spiegel's date.¹¹²

Bunsen died in 1860, but in many respects his protégées carried his work forward, in somewhat different directions. Müller continued to work on Sanskrit texts as well as on Aryan mythology and the origins of religion, a topic that carried him into deep discussions about natural and historical revelations. As a Sanskritist, he devoted himself to the natural and pristine language of the *Rig Veda*, in large part because he was convinced that etymology could be used as a quasi-historical method and that the *Rig Veda*, as the oldest document of the Aryan race, might throw light on humankind's religious and geographical origins. He, too, held a degenerationist view of the East, and thought the tracing backward of Asian religions to their purest first forms might give Christian missionaries enhanced powers to convince Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims to embrace Christ over 'other Masters'.¹¹³ In his early work he tended to upgrade

109 Bunsen, *God in History*, 1:223.

110 Bunsen, *God in History* 1:278, 287–91.

111 See Bunsen on the Chinese in *God in History* 1:243–272; Haug also mentions this possibility in a review of the fourth volume of Müller's *Rig Veda*, 'A Contribution towards a Right Understanding of the Rigveda', extract from *The Times of India* (Bombay, 1863): 5. On degeneration, Bunsen, *God in History* 2:290.

112 Bunsen, *God in History* 1:290.

113 Müller, 'Preface', in *Chips from a German Workshop*, xxiv. These very popular lectures were, by the way, dedicated to the memory of Baron Bunsen.

oriental and 'Aryan' religious ideas at the expense of 'Semitic' ones, chastising Christians 'who value the tenets of their religion as the miser values his pearls and precious stones, thinking their value lessened if pearls and stones of the same kind are found in other parts of the world...'¹¹⁴ In the age of Darwin, Müller was only one of many arguing that we need not trust the Old Testament or deal with its manifold chronological issues any more, though Müller himself remained a believing Christian and in 1870 distanced himself (and his fellow Sanskritists) from the wilder theories propounded by non-philologists that 'the religion of Christ has not come to us from the Semites' but from the Aryans.¹¹⁵ It is instructive, however, that Bunsen's heirs, most of them in Germany, continued to hope that philology, especially Indogerman philology, could provide the key to the history of Religion with a capital R — or at least the key to *their* religious history, and *their* religious reform. This strain of thought is palpable in Haug and in the large number of scholars who followed his lead, making this tradition, by the 1880s at least, more influential and popular than the Catholic-traditional school of Spiegel.

Haug's important treatment of the Gathas as sung prayers was enabled by Bunsen, but also by the work of Roth and Max Müller on the Vedic hymns, which in turn drew inspiration from biblical studies of the Psalms, the classicists' study of the Homeric epics, and the proto-nationalist investigations of the original forms of the *Nibelungenlied*, all of which assumed that orally transmitted songs or poems were the earliest form of literature. The Gathas, Haug claimed, were the work of Zarathustra himself — contradicting the claims of the Zoroastrians, who held that they represented the words of Ahura Mazda, as transmitted to Zarathustra. For Haug, the Gathas represented the essence of Zoroastrianism; and because Ahura Mazda was the only high god exalted in them, they proved that this earliest religious movement known to history was monotheistic, and admirably free from rituals and sacrifices. The Gathas contained teachings about heaven and hell, the immortality of the soul, and the resurrection of the body — and had not been borrowed from a foreign source. They were a kind of primeval poetry, with profound moral import, and ought to be considered a kind of Zarathustrian 'sermon on the mount'.¹¹⁶ Haug's high chronology for the actual 'gospels' of Zarathustra, justified by high dates, too, for the *Rig Veda*, ratified his view of the Gathas as the

114 See here Arvidsson, *Aryan Idols*, 63–123.

115 Müller, 'Preface', in *Chips from a German Workshop*, xxvi.

116 Haug, *Essays*, 264–268, 310–313; Dan Sheffield, 'The Quest for a Historical Zarathustra: The Role of the Prophet in the Thought of Friedrich Spiegel and Martin Haug', *Journal of the K. R. Cama Oriental Institute* 71 (2013), 7.

untainted, original, and essential tenets of Zoroastrianism, which could not have been borrowed, only contaminated by later contact with other cultures.

In 1859, as Bunsen's health faltered and Haug despaired of finding full employment in Europe, the young Iranist was persuaded to accept a post as superintendent of Sanskrit studies at the University of Poona, almost certainly arranged by Bunsen. Haug's celebration of the Gathas as Zarathustra's 'gospels' pleased especially the western-educated Parsis, who wanted 'scientific' backing for their reforms. Having been welcomed into the community, Haug exulted in having (at last) become a scholarly success, and began to believe that the Parsis — at least those who followed his lead — should play a role in the new, critical study of their religion. It was chiefly for the Parsi youth, he claimed, that his 1862 *Essays on the Sacred Language, Writings, and Religion of the Parsis* were intended.¹¹⁷ He appears to have made many friends in Bombay and Poona — though some worried that his views were rather *too* radical.¹¹⁸

Haug's claims rested on his exceptional philological skills. Yet, they clearly also had everything to do with the persistence — partly underground — of interest in religious questions, and the resumption of older debates between iconoclasts (taking an Orientophile position) and Christian defenders, defending the accuracy and uniqueness of the Old Testament. The chronology question, he well knew, continued to be absolutely vital, even though the Parsis themselves held to the more conventional dating of Zarathustra to the period that corresponded roughly to that of the Babylonian Captivity of the Jews: 'As the doctrines of Zoroaster bear in several points such a striking resemblance to those of Christianity, it is a question of grave importance to ascertain the age in which he lived,' Haug wrote.¹¹⁹ After arriving in India, he seems to have softened his claims, perhaps in light of Parsi influence. Before leaving Europe, he believed that Zarathustra's life must have predated the Median conquest of Babylon in 2234 BCE, something that would have made the Persian religious reformer decidedly older than Moses, and perhaps a contemporary of Abraham.¹²⁰ By 1865, he was claiming that Zarathustra could not have lived later than 1000 BCE; but this still made him, in Haug's eyes, 'the *first* prophet of truth who appeared in the world, and kindled a fire which thousands of years

117 Haug, *Essays*, 41.

118 One of those to criticize Haug was, not surprisingly, a Parsi who had himself studied with Spiegel at Erlangen. Sheffield, 'Quest', 7, 9–12. Also Mary Boyce, 'Forward', in Idem, ed., *A History of Zoroastrianism: The Early Period* (Leiden, 1975), x–xi.

119 Haug, *A Lecture on an Original Speech of Zoroaster (Yana 45), With Remarks on His Age* (Bombay, 1865), 17.

120 See above on Bunsen's deep dating of Zarathustra.

could not entirely extinguish¹²¹ (emphasis added). Still, for most Europeans this was heresy, or, as *The Times of India* described Haug's work, an orientophile form of 'sneering at the scriptures'.¹²²

It is worth noting, too, that by no means were *other* oriental chronologies secure at this point. In England (as elsewhere), David Gange notes, disputes over Egyptian chronology raged in the 1860s, all of them fired by inter-Christian religious controversies.¹²³ In fact, in the 1870s and 1880s debate about the history of the Jews was undergoing a revolution of its own, thanks to two developments. The first was the full-blown emergence of the Higher Criticism. In 1871, Julius Wellhausen demonstrated that the Old Testament itself was a patchwork of different authors, composing at different times; hugely controversial, at first, the work of Wellhausen eventually contributed to the dating of the probable compilation of the Old Testament to a later date than the presumed lifespan of Moses, perhaps even the fifth or fourth centuries BCE. The other major development was George Smith's translation of the Assyrian 'Flood' tablets that A. H. Layard had found at Nineveh. These proved that Berosus had not lied: the Assyrians had had a Flood and Creation story, too, one that was uncomfortably similar to that of the book of Genesis. Here *was* an oriental text older than the books of Moses, one that would soon form the foundations for an epic older than those of Homer: the epic of Gilgamesh. Similarly, newly discovered or deciphered Egyptian texts, including *The Book of the Dead*, made it seem that Manetho was also right; the Egyptian dynasties stretched far backward into time. Yet, it is worth not losing sight of the specific challenge posed by a deep Persian chronology: it usurped the right of the Israelites to claim the title of the first monotheists, and, for racists, offered the opportunity to create an Aryan prehistory for New Testament ideas.

I am convinced that this is the quest pursued by another of Bunsen's protégées, Paul de Lagarde, beneath vast tranches of specialized studies of early Armenian, Coptic, and Avestan texts. Lagarde devoted much of his life as a professional orientalist to trying to find oriental sources of Christian ideas older than the Septuagint, the Greek Old Testament. This too was a hugely complicated and onerous task, and one that Lagarde never completed. But he did work hard to push Avestan texts backward chronologically in order to identify, for example, the origin of the Jewish ritual of Purim in the Persian

121 Haug gives this date his 1865 lecture. *A Lecture*, 26. quotation at 27.

122 See for example, „K”, 'Dr. Haug and Parseeism', in *The Times of India*, 13 June 1864; thanks to Yuhan Sohrab-Dinshaw Vevaina for sending me a copy of this interesting attack on Haug.

123 Gange, *Dialogues with the Dead*, 96–101.

Fravardigan festival.¹²⁴ Lagarde, too, was a vehement religious reformer, a Protestant so hell-bent on purifying the faith of the newly-founded German Empire that he wanted to throw out Luther and Saint Paul, and reduce the Bible to an abstract message of salvation.¹²⁵ He would find it especially attractive to use the Creuzerian equation of 'Mithra/Mitra' as a means to prove the deep antiquity of a cult of the fire-bringer, and the Herodotus passage about the ancient Persians' lack of temples and altars to suggest a primeval, pan-Asiatic, non-idolatrous religion of light.

As is well known, Lagarde was also a vicious anti-Semite, as Bunsen, Haug, and Müller were not. Reiterating Bunsen's position in 1862, Haug explicitly argued that similarities between Judaism and Zoroastrianism were probably the result of independent evolution.¹²⁶ Haug, as Clarisse Herrenschmidt has argued, surely did not mean to found an Aryan Christianity, and we should not think that all 'high daters', then or now, have been motivated by racism or anti-Semitism. Yet it cannot be the case, as she claims, that they had simply taken over the religious ambitions of his Parsi friends.¹²⁷ Rather, as this essay has shown, it is far more likely that he had shared in the hyper-Protestant search for oriental wisdom pursued by Bunsen and his circle of collaborators. Horrified by the radical and racial use of some of this material in the early 1870s, another member of this circle, Max Müller, explicitly denounced the association of linguistic/religious and racial Aryanism.¹²⁸ But both Haug and Müller would have racist followers,¹²⁹ and Lagarde would himself play a very important role in linking an evolving campaign for a new Germanic religion with the continuing reformist campaign to destroy the textual stability and chronological priority of the Old Testament. In France, Pictet argued that the ur-monotheism of the Aryan family, to which the Zoroastrians returned (and the Hindus did not), suggested the providential destiny of this family, which might not have held on to monotheism with the tenacity of the Hebrews, but

124 On Lagarde's orientalism, see Marchand, *German Orientalism*, 281–284.

125 See Ulrich Sieg, *Deutschlands Prophet: Paul de Lagarde und die Ursprünge des modernen Anti-Semitismus* (Munich, 2007).

126 Haug, *Essays*, 2.

127 Herrenschmidt, 'Once Upon a Time', 230.

128 Tomoko Mazusawa, *The Invention of World Religions, Or How European Universalism was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago, IL, 2005), 246–253.

129 One of Haug's was the American Albert Pike, a Freemason, and Confederate general. In 1874, Pike penned a curious study titled *Irano-Aryan Faith and Doctrine* which relied heavily on the work of Haug. Albert Pike, *Irano-Aryan Faith and Doctrine, As Contained in the Zend Avesta* (Louisville, KY, 1924). Pike's manuscript was published by and admiring transcriber, W.M. Wood, in 1924.

whose energy, diversity, and creativity made it God's appointed carriers of civilization and progress.¹³⁰

We might profitably place Nietzsche's *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, composed in 1881–1883, against the backdrop of these debates about the origins of monotheism and the place of Zarathustra in the history of 'Aryan' ideas. We are still unclear about what, exactly, Nietzsche knew about ancient Persia at the time he wrote his prophetic masterpiece; yet, he was intimately familiar with many later Greek sources including, especially, Diogenes Laertius.¹³¹ He also knew some Indian works by way of his friendship with the Indologist Paul Deussen, and perhaps by way of Richard Wagner's Indologist brother-in-law, Hermann Brockhaus. Nietzsche also had met the husband of his former flame, Lou (Andreas) Salomé; Friedrich Carl Andreas was a Persian philologist, and apparently 'Zarathustra' came up in Nietzsche's conversations with Lou.¹³² He definitely knew his Creuzer and his Bachofen. We know that Nietzsche borrowed at least one of Haug's books from the Basel University library, and Kathleen Marie Higgins has shown numerous places in Nietzsche's text where he seems to draw on Haug's essays.¹³³ Nietzsche almost certainly knew of Haug's work on the Gathas, for that would have given him additional license to frame many of Zarathustra's pronouncements as songs; his notoriously unreliable sister said that the structure of *Also Sprach Zarathustra* was in fact modelled on the Zend Avesta. This all may be right, but what surely mattered at least as much to the philosopher with the hammer was that a very long line of heretics, including Plethon, Voltaire, Herder, and Volney, had set so much store by Zarathustra, who by this time had become the single 'noble pagan' who could stand as a primeval Moses, as well as an anti-Moses. Finally, I think it was crucial for Nietzsche that Zarathustra — whose 'dreamlike figure', his sister claimed, had pursued him in various shapes since his earliest boyhood¹³⁴ — was so hard to date or place in time; his very ambiguity offered an opening for Nietzsche to invent sermons, songs, and teachings. Zarathustra could be the 'first moralist' and yet not be weighed down by historicist baggage.¹³⁵ He was the ideal mouthpiece for the philosophy of the eternal return.

130 Pictet, *Les Origines Indo-Européennes*, 717, 720, 753–754.

131 Peter Levine, *Nietzsche and the Crisis of the Humanities* (Albany, NY, 1995), 120.

132 Rudolf Binion, *Frau Lou: Nietzsche's Wayward Discipline* (Princeton, NY, 1968), 101–104; 133–135.

133 Higgins, *Comic Relief: Nietzsche's Gay Science* (Oxford, 2000); for the book borrowing, 213, n. 41.

134 Förster-Nietzsche, 'Die Entstehung von 'Also Sprach Zarathustra'', in Friedrich Nietzsche, *Also Sprach Zarathustra: Ein Buch für Alle und Keinen* (Leipzig, 1907), 479.

135 'In creating this character, Nietzsche had broken all the rules of historicist perspectivism, for Zarathustra has no historical or cultural location'. Levine, *Nietzsche and the Crisis of the Modern Humanities*, 122.

Nietzsche's *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, we might say, marked the revival and re-popularization of this early modern iconoclasm, taking advantage of scholarly uncertainties. Yet, it is only the most remembered face of a much larger (if more specialized and fragmented) debate about 'oriental wisdom' and the origins of religion that had persisted for centuries, and would continue on for decades afterwards. These debates widened, in fact, in the period after Nietzsche's descent into madness, as the era I call that of the 'furor orientalis' opened in earnest. Imperialist treasure-trawling yielded a new flood of ancient oriental texts and monuments, and a new generation of theologians and even some classicists began to believe that they could take those Greek and heretical sources, and their high dates, seriously. Although the search for ancient books went on, in some respects attention shifted to the Creuzerian project of finding oriental ideas in western texts, something that was on its face simpler, but in reality involved making more philological, and philosophical, assumptions and taking more scholarly risks.¹³⁶ But even those writing for more popular audiences still gave religious questions pride of place. As Steven Aschheim noted many years ago, Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* was often taken up and championed, not by atheists, but by religious iconoclasts thirsting for a new kind of spirituality, stripped of the 'weakness' and 'decadence' of conventional Christianity, and seeking ways to get rid of the Old Testament historical ballast.¹³⁷ Works such as Oxford professor Lawrence Mills's *Our Own Religion in Ancient Persia* (1913) or American populariser Miles Menander Dawson's *The Ethnical Religion of Zoroaster: An Account of What Zoroaster Taught, as perhaps the very oldest and surely the most accurate code of ethics for man, accompanied by the essentials of his religion* (1931) demonstrate clearly that this iconoclastic tradition continued to call on the 'real' Zarathustra, too, in their reformist campaigns.¹³⁸ Even Percy Sykes, in 1930, happily prodded conventional wisdom, proclaiming that 'the purity and loftiness of conception of Ahura Mazda, as preached by Zoroaster, exceeds that of Yahweh' and recommending that its morally superior tenets be repeated 'by every lad when he is old enough to don the mystic girdle'.¹³⁹

136 The work of Richard Reitzenstein on the *Pimander* (1904) is exemplary of this trend. On his work see Marchand, 'From Liberalism to Neoromanticism: Albrecht Dieterich, Richard Reitzenstein and the Religious Turn in Fin de Siècle German Classical Studies', in *Out of Arcadia* (British Institute of Classical Studies Supplement, 79, 2003), eds. Martin Ruehl and Ingo Gildenhard (London, 2003): 129–160.

137 Steven E. Aschheim, *The Nietzsche Legacy in Germany, 1890–1990* (Berkeley, CA, 1994), 204–208.

138 For Mills' work, see Lawrence Mills, *Our Own Religion in Ancient Persia* (New York, NY, 1913).

139 Percy Sykes, *A History of Persia* (London, 1915), 113, 114.

Between about 1880 and 1920, more important strides were made in the reading of Avestan texts and the understanding of the linguistic history of ancient Persia. Christian Bartholomae's *Altiranisches Wörterbuch* (1904) will have to stand in for a comprehensive list of achievements. Yet, the question of Zarathustra's antiquity still could not be resolved, and controversies raged about the extent to which Judaic monotheism, as well as apocalyptic and gnostic formulations, could be said to be dependent on Zoroastrian ideas. The British Methodist James Hope Moulton and the Swedish Lutheran Nathan Söderblom both took to studying Avestan in the 1890s, concluding that ancient Judaism was essentially different from, and not influenced by, Zoroastrianism; in contrast, the more theologically daring champion of the 'religious-historical school', Wilhelm Bousset, focusing attention on the gnostic tradition, came to opposite conclusions.¹⁴⁰ A considerable number of other iconoclasts (including Franz Cumont, F. X. Boll, Robert Eisler, Richard Reitzenstein, Josef Strzygowski, Michael Rostovtzeff, Hans Jonas, and H. H. Schaefer), eager to reveal the oriental underbelly of the classical world, dwelt extensively on the contributions to world history of ancient Iran — and again, religion remained at the heart of most of their investigations.¹⁴¹ Albert Schweitzer returned to the subject of Persian-Jewish similarities repeatedly, claiming that Zarathustra's great ideas (including some form of ethical monotheism) *could* have been the foundation for a world religion — but simply weren't taken up by the Hellenistic world.¹⁴² It would take the ingenuity, and the courage, of a Max Weber to cut the Gordian knot: to simply describe Zarathustra typologically as a prophet, and to skirt the question of dependence by calling Zoroastrianism a 'relative monotheism', 'in all likelihood determined at least in part by Near Eastern rather than intra-Iranian influences'.¹⁴³ No fan of Romantic philology, Weber did not want to play the priority game or to defend a particular version of Christian belief, but like his contemporaries William Robertson Smith and Émile Durkheim to understand religion in structural, social, and economic terms. And in thinking of Zoroastrianism in that frame, the chronological questions that had vexed centuries of inquirers could, at last, be sidelined; scholars of religion became free to choose fresh points of departure.

140 Eric J. Sharpe, *Nathan Söderblom and the Study of Religion* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1990), 41–48; on Bousset, Marchand, *German Orientalism*, 282–284; 287–289.

141 The first sentence of Bidez and Cumont's important two-volume study, *Les Mages hellénisés* reads: 'Le génie original que l'Iran manifesta dans la politique et dans les arts ne s'affirma nulle part avec plus de force que dans ses croyances'.

142 Schweitzer quoted in Gheiby, *Persien oder Iran?* 269–272.

143 Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, trans. Ephraim Fischhoff (Boston, MA, 1964), 24.

And yet Avestan scholars, and even students of Mithraism, still cannot escape the chronological issues that determine which contextualizations they reach for in their on-going attempts to resolve the remaining uncertainties in their field — which are many.¹⁴⁴ Persian philology has obtained higher and higher degrees of technical proficiency, which those of us on the outside can only admire. Yet technical proficiency doesn't answer all questions, especially in a field constructed, as Rudolf Roth noted, on such shifting evidentiary sands. There are still high daters and low daters for Zarathustra, and still those who insist, over the trenchant critique of Franz Cumont's work made by R. L. Gordon in 1971, that Mithraism began as a primeval Iranian cult.¹⁴⁵ There are still those who ask the old, iconoclastic questions, such as Harald Strohm, whose *Die Geburt des Monotheismus in alten Iran* (2014) opens: 'The question of how belief in one God might have arisen has, even today, yes, today again, something capable of moving the world.'¹⁴⁶ Strohm promptly, then, dates the three epicentres of monotheism, the Jahwe religion of Israel, the Aton religion of Echnaton in Egypt, and the Ahura Mazda religion of Zarathustra to the eighth to fifth century BCE, the fourteenth century BCE, and 1500–1000 BCE, respectively, throwing us back into the game Eviatar Zerubavel has called 'out-pasting'.¹⁴⁷ Strohm, and his Egyptological collaborator on another recent book of essays (*Echnaton und Zarathustra: Zur Genese und Dynamik des Monotheismus* [2012]) Jan Assmann, seem to have drifted away from the Weberian paradigm in order, once again, to unsettle conventional Christian and Jewish readers and to reopen old, iconoclastic debates. Undatable still, Zarathustra, it seems, is destined for yet another of his 'eternal returns'.

144 See Almut Hintze's 2012 subtle and fascinating inaugural lecture as Zartoshty Professor of Zoroastrianism in the University of London, *Change and Continuity in the Zoroastrian Tradition* (London, 2013), and the essays in *The Blackwell Companion*.

145 The leading scholar of the previous generation, Mary Boyce, stuck to a high date for Zarathustra, while others opt for dates in the 6th century BCE. On interpretations of Mithraism, see Gordon, 'Franz Cumont and the Mysteries of Mithraism'; and against this position, David Ulansey, *The Origins of the Mithraic Mysteries* (Oxford, 1989).

146 Strohm, *Die Geburt des Monotheismus in alten Iran* (Paderborn, 2014), 11.

147 Eviatar Zerubavel, *Time Maps: Collective Memory and the Social Shape of the Past* (Chicago, IL, 2003), 105–109.