Further Comments on a Passage of the Lawḥ-i-Ḥikmat

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Introduction

One of the themes expounded in the *Lawḥ-i-Ḥikmat* – a Tablet of the ʻAkká period revealed in honour of Nabíl-i-Akbar – is the way in which philosophical wisdom is ultimately dependent on revealed religion. Bahá'u'lláh states:

> *The sages aforetime acquired their knowledge from the Prophets, inasmuch as the latter were the Exponents of divine philosophy and the Revealers of heavenly mysteries. Men quaffed the crystal, living waters of Their utterance, while others satisfied themselves with the dregs. Everyone receiveth a portion according to his measure. Verily He is the Equitable, the Wise.*

Furthermore, Bahá'u'lláh adds that "the essence and the fundamentals of philosophy have emanated from the Prophets". This principle is illustrated with some examples from well-known figures of classical philosophy:

> *Empedocles, who distinguished himself in philosophy, was a contemporary of David, while Pythagoras lived in the days of Solomon, son of David, and acquired Wisdom from the treasury of prophethood. It is he who claimed to have heard the whispering sound of the heavens and to have attained the station of the angels. In truth thy Lord will clearly set forth all things, if He pleaseth. Verily, He is the Wise, the All-Pervading.*
>
> *Consider Hippocrates, the physician. He was one of the eminent philosophers who believed in God and acknowledged His sovereignty. After him came Socrates who was indeed wise, accomplished and righteous. He practised self-denial, repressed his appetites for selfish desires and turned away from material pleasures. He withdrew to the mountains*

where he dwelt in a cave. He dissuaded men from worshipping idols and taught them the way of God, the Lord of Mercy, until the ignorant rose up against him. They arrested him and put him to death in prison. Thus relateth to thee this swift-moving Pen. What a penetrating vision into philosophy this eminent man had! He is the most distinguished of all philosophers and was highly versed in wisdom. We testify that he is one of the heroes in this field and an outstanding champion dedicated unto it. He had a profound knowledge of such sciences as were current amongst men as well as of those which were veiled from their minds. Methinks he drank one draught when the Most Great Ocean overflowed with gleaming and life-giving waters. He it is who perceived a unique, a tempered, and a pervasive nature in things, bearing the closest likeness to the human spirit, and he discovered this nature to be distinct from the substance of things in their refined form. He hath a special pronouncement on this weighty theme. Wert thou to ask from the worldly wise of this generation about this exposition, thou wouldst witness their incapacity to grasp it. Verily, thy Lord speaketh the truth but most people comprehend not.

After Socrates came the divine Plato who was a pupil of the former and occupied the chair of philosophy as his successor. He acknowledged his belief in God and in His signs which pervade all that hath been and shall be. Then came Aristotle, the well-known man of knowledge. He it is who discovered the power of gaseous matter. These men who stand out as leaders of the people and are pre-eminent among them, one and all acknowledged their belief in the immortal Being Who holdeth in His grasp the reins of all sciences.[1]

Nabíl-i-Akbar was probably not unfamiliar with this correlation between ancient Greek philosophy and the Jewish religion. In fact, as Bahá'u'lláh states, He is following "some accounts of the sages", accounts that actually represent a long historiographical Muslim tradition of which Abu'l-Fat-i-Sháhristání (1076–1153 CE) and Imádu'd-Dín Abu'l-Fidá (1273–1331 CE) – from whose histories Bahá'u'lláh seems to quote – are two representatives.

For a Western reader, however, the implications of the words of Bahá'u'lláh may pose a challenge to the long-standing assumption that Greek philosophy – considered for many the bedrock of Western civilization – developed in the absence of any influence from foreign religions or philosophical schools.

Three decades ago, Juan Cole presented some of the Muslim sources of this tradition pointing also to a chronological inconsistence from the perspective of modern scholarship in regards to the statement about Empedocles and Pythagoras[2]. More recently, Peter Terry approached the subject from a different angle and, aside from analysing the Muslim sources – adding more to the list presented by Cole – left room for a literal reading of this tradition in the context of the fragility of ancient chronologies and the infallibility of Bahá'u'lláh as the Manifestation of God[3]. Both positions represent, to some extent, the sides of the dialogue that over the years has been held among Bahá'í scholars in formal and informal discussions about the historicity of the tradition.

The focus in the chronological issues of the Tablet has, to a certain extent, deviated attention from the theme presented by Bahá'u'lláh, that "the essence and the fundamentals of philosophy have emanated from the Prophets". Whether such transmission really happened and, if so, where and how it can be traced, are issues independent of the chronological plausibility of the tradition quoted by Bahá'u'lláh regarding Empedocles and Pythagoras.

Moreover, other questions may rise that seem important for a deeper appreciation of the theme underlying this section of the *Tablet of Wisdom*. Was this transmission limited only to the sages mentioned in the *Lawḥ-i-Ḥikmat* or did it extend to other philosophers and other schools of ancient philosophy in the West? Did such transmission from revealed religion to Greek philosophy occur only via Judaism or had other origins as well?

This presentation does not intend to fill these gaps but it will try, however tentatively, to examine some of the ancient sources that may allow for the idea of foreign religious inputs into the development of Greek philosophy. It will also survey some of the conclusions that present-day scholarship has to offer about this subject and lastly it will suggest some links between ancient and Muslim sources for the tradition under review.

Greek philosophy and Persia

Ancient Greek literature offers a large amount of accounts about Zoroaster, Persian religion and the practices and customs of the Magi as is shown by Franz Cumont and Joseph Bidez in their monumental *Les Mages Hellénisés*[4]. More recently, Albert de Jong has synthesised some Greek and Latin sources offering an interesting picture of the Persian religion as it was seen in ancient times[5].

The oldest known Greek record about Zoroastrianism belongs to the book *Lydiaka*. In a particular section known as *Magika* (On the Magi) its author, the Lydian historian Xanthus (fifth century BCE), mentioned Zoroaster in connection with the doctrines of the Persians[6] and placed him six thousand years before the second of the Graeco-Persian wars[7]. Unfortunately, only a few lines of his work have survived in the books of Clement of Alexandria and Diogenes Laertius, among others. A cotemporary of Xanthus, the historian Herodotus (484-425 BCE), despite not mentioning Zoroaster by name, also paid some attention to the religious customs of the Persians in his *History*. The interest for the religion of Zoroaster and the Magi was to be present throughout the history of Greek literature and thought.

That there was some knowledge of Zoroastrianism at that stage should not come as a surprise. The Ionian region, on the Aegean coast of the Anatolian peninsula, was always under the influence of the neighbouring Persian Empire. Eventually (545 BCE) the entire region became subjugated to the Persians. Other evidence, moreover, reveals that during the Achaemenid dynasty the Magi were established well inside territory under the Greek cultural orbit. For instance, in Dascylium (modern Ergili, Turkey), a bas-relief from the fifth century BCE shows a group of Magi performing a ritual. Historical accounts mention also that a temple dedicated to Anahita was built by Cyrus in Lydia[8].

This contact between both civilizations in Ionia is of particular relevance to our subject, especially when considering that during the sixth and fifth centuries BCE the region was a crucible where the first philosophical ideas of the Western world were developing in places such as Miletus or Ephesus.

The earliest preserved record explicitly linking a particular philosopher to Zoroastrianism can be dated back to the fourth

century BCE. Aristoxenus of Tarentum, a disciple of Aristotle with interest in Pythagorean ideas, wrote a biography of Pythagoras which was subsequently used by later biographers[9]. One of the few fragments that have survived for us is quoted by Hippolytus (170-236 CE) who quotes Aristoxenus together with an unknown Diodorus the Eretrian, stating that "Pythagoras came to Zaratas[10], the Chaldean"[11] who imparted to him a doctrine that clearly resembles Persian dualism.

Evidently, Zoroaster and Pythagoras were not contemporaries. Aristoxenus' statement is, however, the expression of a firmly rooted tradition, transmitted in different versions, according to which Pythagoras learnt the doctrines of the Zoroastrians from the Magi in Babylonia or from their prophet Himself. As Kingsley convincingly shows, even the dating by some Greek historians of Zoroaster in the sixth century BCE may have been the result of an effort to make Him coincide in time with Pythagoras[12].

All the surviving biographies of Pythagoras agree in this influence into his thought. Thus, Diogenes Laertius (probably third century CE), the author of the *Lives and opinions of eminent philosophers*, states that "... [Pythagoras] was a young man, and devoted to learning, he quitted his country, and got initiated into all the Grecian and barbarian sacred mysteries. Accordingly, he went to Egypt, on which occasion Polycrates gave him a letter of introduction to Amasis; and he learnt the Egyptian language, as Antipho tells us in his treatise on those men who have been conspicuous for virtue, and he associated with the Chaldaeans and with the Magi."[13]

The Neoplatonic Porphyry of Tyre (233-305 CE) wrote in his *Life of Pythagoras* that the sage, while in Babylon, "associated with the other Chaldeans, especially attaching himself to Zaratus, by whom he was purified from the pollutions of his past life, and taught the things from which a virtuous man ought to be free. Likewise he heard lectures about Nature, and the principles of wholes. It was from his stay among these foreigners that Pythagoras acquired the great part of his wisdom."[14]

In discussing Pythagoras' thought, Porphyry also states that he learnt from the Magi "secrets concerning the course of life"[15] and adds the following: "Such things taught he, thought advising above all things to speak the truth, for this alone deifies men. For as he had learned from the Magi, who call God

Horomazda, God's body is like light, and his soul is like truth."[16]

Iamblichus (250-325 CE), a disciple of Porphyry and one of the outstanding figures of Neoplatonism, states in his biography of the Samian that in his search for wisdom Pythagoras travelled to Egypt and afterwards to Babylon where he met the Magi: "He was taken captive [from Egypt] by the soldiers of Cambyses, and carried off to Babylon. Here he was overjoyed to be associated with the Magi, who instructed him in their venerable knowledge, and in the most perfect worship of the Gods. Through their assistance, likewise, he studied and completed arithmetic, music and all other sciences. After twelve years, about the fifty-sixth year of his age, he returned to Samos."[17]

While describing the teachings of Pythagoras, Iamblichus mentions, moreover, that "his divine philosophy and worship was compound, having learned much from the Orphic followers, but much also from the Egyptian priests, the Chaldeans and Magi...". He also links some of the Pythagorean rules with Zoroastrian practices: "The bodies of the dead he did not suffer to be burned, herein following the Magi, being unwilling that anything (so) divine (as fire) should be mingled with mortal nature. He thought it holy for the dead to be carried out in white garments; thereby obscurely prefiguring the simple and first nature, according to number, and the principle of all things."[18]

Besides his biographers[19], many other Greek and Latin authors mention in their writings a sojourn of Pythagoras with the Magi. Cicero (106-43 CE)[20], Valerius Maximus (first century CE)[21] and Philostratus (170-247 CE)[22] are some Latin examples. The Platonic philosopher Apuleius (124?-170? CE) makes a comment similar to that written later by Iamblichus: "There are some who assert that Pythagoras was about this time carried to Egypt among the captives of King Cambyses, and studied under the magi of Persia, more especially under Zoroaster the priest of all holy mysteries; later they assert he was ransomed by a certain Gillus, King of Croton."[23]

The Christian teacher Clement of Alexandria (?-215 CE) also mentions this connection and affirms that: "He [Pythagoras] held converse with the chief of the Chaldean and the Magi; and he gave a hint of the church, now so called, in the common hall which he maintained"[24].

Another pre-Socratic philosopher who is linked with Persia in ancient sources is Democritus (460-370 BCE), one of the earliest, probably the first, of the atomists. Historian Claudius Aelianus (second century CE) mentions that "it is reported that Democritus the Abderite was wise, besides other things, in desiring to live unknown, and that he wholly endeavoured it. In pursuit whereof he travelled to many countries; he went to the Chaldeans, and to Babylon, and to the Magi, and to the Indian Sophists."[25]

Furthermore, in an interesting text in which fragments from Democritus are quoted, Clement of Alexandria states:

> ... pluming himself on his erudition, he says, "I have roamed over the most ground of any man of my time, investigating the most remote parts. I have seen the most skies and lands, and I have heard of learned men in very great numbers. And in composition no one has surpassed me; in demonstration, not even those among the Egyptians who are called Arpenodaptæ, with all of whom I lived in exile up to eighty years." For he went to Babylon, and Persia, and Egypt, to learn from the Magi and the priests.[26]

Diogenes Laertius begins his biography on Democritus stating the following:

> [Democritus] was the son of Hegesistratus, but as some say, of Athenocrites, and, according to other accounts, of Damasippus. He was a native of Abdera, or, as it is stated by some authors, a citizen of Miletus.
>
> He was a pupil of some of the Magi and Chaldaeans, whom Xerxes had left with his father as teachers, when he had been hospitably received by him, as Herodotus informs us; and from these men he, while still a boy, learned the principles of astronomy and theology. Afterwards, his father entrusted him to Leucippus, and to Anaxagoras, as some authors assert, who was forty years older than he... And Demetrius in his treatise on 'People of the same Name', and Antisthenes in his 'Successions', both affirm that he travelled to Egypt to see the priests there, and to learn mathematics of them; and that he proceeded further to the Chaldeans, and penetrated into Persia, and went as far as the Persian Gulf. Some also say that he made acquaintance with the

> Gymnosophists in India, and that he went to Aethiopia.[27]

Empedocles is also said to have visited the Magi. Thus, in his biography on Apollonius of Tyana, Philostratus (179-247 CE) states: "For Empedocles and Pythagoras himself and Democritus consorted with wizards [*magoi*] and uttered many supernatural truths, yet never stooped to the black art..."[28]

Diogenes Laertius quotes the following about Socrates: "Aristotle tells us that a certain one of the Magi came from Syria to Athens, and blamed Socrates for many parts of his conduct, and also foretold that he would come to a violent death."[29] Similarly the pseudo-Platonic work *Axiochus* (c. 300 BCE) portrays Socrates as saying that he learnt about the existence of an afterlife from the Magi Gobryas, grandson of a companion of Xerxes.

Plato, Socrates' pupil, is also said to have had some interest for Persian religion. Seneca (4 BCE-65 CE), for instance, explains that at the time of his passing, Plato was accompanied by a group of Magi[30]. Diogenes Laertius states that "Plato had also formed the idea of making the acquaintance of the Magi; but he abandoned it on account of the wars in Asia."[31]

Clement, mistakenly following one of the many pseudo-Zoroastrian works that circulated during his time, identifies Er, the personage of a late Platonic myth present in the *Republic*, with Zoroaster[32]:

> And the same [Plato], in the tenth book of the *Republic,* mentions Eros the son of Armenius, who is Zoroaster. Zoroaster, then, writes: "These were composed by Zoroaster, the son of Armenius, a Pamphylian by birth: having died in battle, and been in Hades, I learned them of the gods." This Zoroaster, Plato says, having been placed on the funeral pyre, rose again to life in twelve days. He alludes perchance to the resurrection, or perchance to the fact that the path for souls to ascension lies through the twelve signs of the zodiac; and he himself says, that the descending pathway to birth is the same. In the same way we are to understand the twelve labours of Hercules, after which the soul obtains release from this entire world.[33]

Dealing also with the myth of Er, Proclus informs of a certain Colotes, a third century BCE Epicurean, who

questioned the originality of the myth in his anti-Platonic polemics and accused Plato of plagiarism from Zoroastrian ideas[34].

Clement also notes that "it is well known that Plato is found perpetually celebrating the barbarians, remembering that both himself and Pythagoras learned the most and the noblest of their dogmas among the barbarians. Wherefore he also called the races of the barbarians, 'races of barbarian philosophers'..."[35]

Another Christian writer, Lactantius (260-330 CE), asserted: "Whence I am accustomed to wonder that, when Pythagoras, and after him Plato, inflamed with the love of searching out the truth, had penetrated as far as to the Egyptians, and Magi, and Persians, that they might become acquainted with their religious rites and institutions (for they suspected that wisdom was concerned with religion), they did not approach the Jews only, in whose possession alone it then was, and to whom they might have gone more easily."[36]

In the twentieth century, scholars in the field of classical studies, ancient history and Greek and Latin philology have done important research into the Eastern influences on Greek thought. In some cases this research has confirmed some of the ancient records quoted above and in others it has offered new and fascinating theories. This interest for the Oriental influence on Greek thought rose partly after the reconstruction by Jaeger of some parts of a lost work by Aristotle. Jaeger's conclusions followed by the publication of *Les Mages Hellenises* and Bidez's *Eos ou Platon et l'Orient* shook some of the assumptions held at the time in Western scholarship and opened a whole new vista in the field of classical studies.

The most important intellectual achievement of the pre-Socratics was to arrive to the notion of the existence of a universal principle or *arkhé*, from which all existence is derived and to which all existence can be reduced. Interestingly, there is evidence enough to conclude that at least in the case of some of the pre-Socratics this idea of an *arkhé* may had its origin in Persian religion.

While Pherecydes is not generally included as one of the pre-Socratics his was at least a role of transition between the mythical thinkers and the early philosophers. He is also said to have been the first Greek author to write in prose. Martin L. West[37] notes that some features of Pherecydes' system had no

precedent in Greek thought but rather seem to have some counterparts in Persia and India. Pherecydes' conception of Chronos would be one case: "Pherecydes's Time, like Zurván and Kála, always existed. He too creates out of his seed, without a consort, we don't know exactly how. Our world is fashioned not by him but by Zas [i.e. Zeus]. Zas, it is true, does not spring from Chronos's seed... Pherecydes prefers to say that he too always existed, and that again has Iranian parallels."[38]

Anaximander's (610-546 BCE) astronomy is also thought to have certain elements of Iranian origin[39]. He seems to be the first Greek in ordering the celestial bodies – with doctrinal rather than astronomical purposes – in the sequence 'stars-moon-sun' placing therefore the stars in the first place above the earth: "...the stars were hoop-like compressions of air, full of fire, breathing out flames at a certain point from orifices. The sun was highest of all, after it came the moon, and below these the fixed stars and the planets."[40]

This scheme has parallels only in Persian religion and it is possible to find Avesta and Pahlavi texts where this order is reproduced in different contexts, such as descriptions of the ascension of the soul. In some cases, a fourth level above the sun, the 'endless stars', is added[41]:

> ... for in the *Dámdád Nask* it is revealed that when they sever the consciousness of men it goes out to the nearest fire, then out to the stars, then out to the moon, and then out to the sun; and it is needful that the nearest fire, which is that to which it has come out, should become stronger. (*Sháyást Lá-Sháyást* 12.5,)[42]

> ...'Thereupon, when Ohrmazd had produced the material (dahisno) of Zartosht, the glory then, in the presence of Ohrmazd, fled on towards the material of Zartosht, on to that germ; from that germ it fled on, on to the light which is endless; from the light which is endless it fled on, on to that of the sun; from that of the sun it fled on, on to the moon; from that moon it fled on, on to those stars; from those stars it fled on, on to the fire which was in the house of Zoish; and from that fire it fled on, on to the wife of Frahimrvana-zoish, when she brought forth that girl who became the mother of Zartosht.' (*Denkard*, 7.2.3)[43]

> I announce (and) carry out (this Yasna) for these places and these lands... and for the stars, moon, and sun, and for the eternal stars without beginning, and self-disposing, and for all the Asha-sanctified creatures of Spenta Mainyu, male and female, the regulators of Asha. (*Yasna* 1.16)[44]

> And we sacrifice to all the springs of water, and to the water-streams as well, and to growing plants, and forest-trees, and to the entire land and heaven, and to all the stars, and to the moon and sun, even to all the lights without beginning (to their course). (*Yasna* 71.9)[45]

> We worship the good, strong, beneficent Fravashis of the faithful, who showed their paths to the stars, the moon, the sun, and the endless lights, that had stood before for a long time in the same place, without moving forwards, through the oppression of the Daevas and the assaults of the Daevas. (*Yasht*, 13.57)[46]

Interestingly, Anaximander's *arkhé* and key concept of the Infinite or Boundless (*to apeiron*)[47], shares also some of the features of the Persian 'endless stars'[48]. Both are designated as the principles of all things, are 'self-disposing', and have a fixed duration[49].

All these coincidences induce West to state that: "Anaximander's conceptions cannot be derived from Greek antecedents, and to suppose that they chanced to burgeon in his mind without antecedents, at the very moment when the Persians were knocking at Ionian doors, would be as preposterous as it was pointless."[50]

Just as fire plays a major role in Zoroastrian doctrine, for the Ephesian Heraclitus (540-475 BCE) fire it is the *arkhé* of all things:

> This world, which is the same for all, no one of gods or men has made; but it was ever, is now and ever shall be an ever-living fire, with measures kindling and measures going out. (Fr. 30)

> All things are exchanged for Fire, and Fire for all things, even as wares for gold, and gold for wares. (Fr. 90)[51]

It is in fragments like these that Duchesne-Guillemin sees connections between the Heraclitean fire and Zoroaster's

Asha. Both fires play the role of cosmological principles, both share also eschatological implications ("fire in its advance will judge and convict all things", fr.66) and both inspire the deeds of men[52]. West points to several other coincidences between Zoroastrian and Heraclitean ideas some of which can be mentioned here[53]:

Treatment of corpses:

Fr. 96	*Vendidad* 3.8
Corpses are more fit to be cast out than dung.	O Maker of the material world, thou Holy one! Which is the second place where the Earth feels sorest grief? Ahura Mazda answered: 'It is the place wherein most corpses of dogs and of men lie buried.'

The souls of the dead can smell:

Fr. 98	*Yasht* 25-32
Souls smell in Hades (hell).	At the end of the third night, O holy Zarathustra! when the dawn appears, it seems to the soul of the faithless one as if it were brought amidst snow and stench, and as if a wind were blowing from the region of the north, from the regions of the north, a foul-scented wind, the foulest-scented of all the winds in the world. And it seems to the soul of the wicked man as if he were inhaling that wind with the nostrils, and he thinks: 'Whence does that wind blow, the foulest-scented wind that I ever inhaled with my nostrils?'

Non-adoration of figures:

Fr. 5

And they pray to these images, as if one were to talk with a man's house, knowing not what gods or heroes are.

The philosopher and mathematician Whitehead once described philosophy as a series of footnotes to Plato, a statement that well describes the magnitude of the influence Plato has had on Western thought. For some modern scholars however, Plato drunk, in turn, from Eastern systems of thought, particularly Persian religion. As has already been noted, even some ancient sources point to that direction.

In 1923, Jaeger published his *Aristotle, Fundamentals of the history of his development*. In its fourth chapter, the German scholar reconstructs from different fragments part of the ideas presented in a lost early Aristotelian work, *On Philosophy* (*peri philosophia*), which "holds a unique place in Aristotle's development"[54]. As the title portrays this piece – originally presented in dialogue form – contained Aristotle's ideas on philosophy and its history. His thesis was that "the same truths reappear in human history, not merely once or twice but indefinitely often"[55]. Following a chronological order Aristotle deals first with some Eastern forms of thought, including Zoroastrianism, and proceeds afterwards with the Greek sages.

A fragment from *On Philosophy* dealing with the Magi survives in Diogenes' *Lives*. In it, Aristotle assimilates the Persian divinities with the Greek. Diogenes, in turn, compares this view with that of other authors:

> But Aristotle, in the first book of his Treatise on Philosophy, says, that the Magi are more ancient than the Egyptians; and that according to them there are two principles, a good demon and an evil demon, and that the name of the one is Jupiter or Oromasdes, and that of the other Pluto or Arimanius. And Hermippus gives the same account in the first book of his History of the Magi; and so does Eudoxus in his Period; and so does Theopompus in the eighth book of his History of the Affairs of Philip; and this last writer tells us also, that according to the Magi men will have a resurrection and be immortal, and that what exists now will exist hereafter under its own present name; and Eudemus of Rhodes coincides in this statement.[56]

In another fragment, contained in Pliny's *Natural History*, Aristotle is reported as giving a date for Zoroaster: "Eudoxus, who wished it to be thought that the most famous and most beneficial of the philosophical sects was that of the Magi, tells

us that this Zoroaster lived 6,000 years before the death of Plato. Aristotle says the same."[57]

This fragment proofs some knowledge of the Persian division of time in intervals of 3,000 years, successively ruled by Ahura Mazda and Angra Mainyu. By placing Plato as a reference for dating Zoroaster, Aristotle is establishing a link between both. Plato's doctrine is thus represented as the cyclical return of ancient doctrines brought first by Zoroaster. In a section of *Metaphysics*[58], moreover, Aristotle mentions the Magi as an intellectual precedent in discussing Plato's dualism. This remarkable fact seems to further corroborate Jaeger's theory which was afterwards accepted by other scholars like Nyberg[59], Bidez[60] and Cumont[61] among many others. With all this evidence Jaeger states that "the Academy's enthusiasm for Zarathustra amounted to intoxication...It heightened the historical self-consciousness of the school to think that Plato's doctrine of the Good as a divine and universal principle had been revealed to eastern humanity by an Oriental prophet thousands of years before."[62]

Eudoxus of Cnidus (408-355 BCE), mentioned earlier, has been identified by some as the possible channel for this transmission. He was well versed in Chaldean astronomy and is said by ancient sources to have performed extended travels. His role in the Academy was not minor and during an absence of Plato, he even assumed its direction. His origin from Cnidus is of especial importance since the place had significant connections with the Persian Empire[63]. There is further evidence of students in the Academy of 'Chaldean' origin[64].

On the other hand, it must be noted that the Magi living in the Western part of the Persian Empire soon assimilated Babylonian religion and science. These Magi, or best called Maguseans, incorporated into the Persian religion notions of astrology, astronomy and other concepts that were alien to what was professed by the Magi in the East. Thus, with the expansion of the Persian territory, its religion evolved into a Babylonian version. It is the Magusean's heterogeneous version of Persian religion that later philosophers like Eudoxus may have encountered. This may explain the use of the Semitic name 'Zaratas' for Zoroaster as well as the ancient notion of Zoroaster as a Chaldean astrologer or the many references to Chaldean Magi. It is difficult, therefore, to segregate what was purely Zoroastrian from what was Babylonian in the doctrines incorporated into his thought by Plato[65].

The myth of Er[66] may stand as an example of such a phenomenon. It contains an imagery that is clearly Babylonian in origin but includes, at the same time, eschatological elements that may be traced till the *Avesta*[67]. Similarly, the *Phaedrus* – a work with strong Babylonian influences as can be gathered from its many astrological elements – also contains some elements that can be found in works circulated by the Maguseans[68].

At some point in the *Statesman* Plato uses a myth involving the god Chronos to explain why humans are mortals. For this purpose, Plato goes on to use a rich set of dualistic concepts. While Bidez does not rule out the possibility of an influence on Plato from Empedocles, in any case he seems to agree with Reitzenstein in ascribing a Persian origin to some of the elements present in the myth: "The idea that generation depends on the movement of stars; the reference to the earthborn men with no offspring; the intercalation in between each of the great periods of Time of moments of catastrophic oscillations and earthquakes, when stars suffer chaotic perturbations and collide in a way similar to the fight described in the Bundahishn (with the zodiac commanded by Ormurzd and the planets leaded by Ahriman placed face to face); and last but foremost the hypothesis envisaged at some point by Plato of the alternative predominance of a god of Good and a god of Evil, such are the principal elements of the myth that can make the pan-Iranian thesis plausible."[69]

In addition to the *Statesman*, there are also clear occurrences of this dualism in *Timaeus*, *Laws* and *Epinomis*:

> And therefore, since we now claim that, as the soul is cause of the whole, and all good things are causes of like things, while on the other hand evil things are causes of other things like them, it is no marvel that soul should be cause of all motion and stirring – that the motion and stirring towards the good are the function of the best soul, and those to the opposite are the opposite – it must be that good things have conquered and conquer things that are not their like. (Epinomis, 988d)[70]

> ...and since He perceived that all soul that is good naturally tends always to benefit, but the bad to injure, – observing all this, He designed a location for each of the parts, wherein it might secure the victory of

> goodness in the Whole and the defeat of evil most completely, easily, and well. (Laws, X 904b)[71]
>
> One soul, is it, or several? I will answer for you – "several." Anyhow, let us assume not less than two – the beneficent soul and that which is capable of effecting results of the opposite kind. (Laws, X 896e)[72]

When analysed against the background of Aristotle's statement in *On Philosophy* and in *Metaphysics*, these texts become appealing arguments in support of the thesis that the Platonic thought of the late period, which incorporates into its system a form of dualism of opposites which is so characteristic of Plato's doctrine, may have its intellectual origins nowhere else than in Persian religion[73].

The Greek notion of the human body as a microcosm presenting in itself the order or parts of the greater cosmos appears in a particular passage of Plato's writings[74]. This is a concept on which there is a consensus in that it has a Persian parallel in the Greater Bundahishn[75] but opinions differ when establishing who first incorporated this idea. Duchesne-Guillemin sees rather an influence into Persian religion from Greece or from India[76] and adduces, among other reasons, the later date of the Bundahishn. On the other hand, Bidez, following Göetz, believed in an influence in the opposite direction and considered the passage in the Bundahishn as likely having its origin in the Avesta. In this way, the pseudo-Hippocratic *Peri Ebdomádon* (On the weeks), where this notion is also present, and the Platonic *Timaeus* may have drunk from the doctrine reproduced later in the Greater Bundahishn which would have reached Greece through the Cnidean physicians serving the Persian kings[77].

Against the theories linking Plato with the East, other authors like Koster, Festugière, Spoerri and Dodds[78] deny or at least suspend the possibility that Plato ever incorporated Persian doctrines into his thought. The arguments put forth are varied, but a common feature is that they rely mostly, it should be noted, on distinct interpretations of Platonic thought rather than on alternative comparisons between Persian and Platonic texts. In some cases, it has been rightly noted that some of the Platonic doctrines that Bidez and others have traced back to Persia have instead immediate precedents in Greek soil and especially in Pythagoras but have avoided the

question of where Pythagoras or others acquired those ideas from.

Regardless of how indebted Plato was to Zoroaster's religion, it is manifest that a considerable interest for the Persian religion aroused in his Academy. Two of Plato's disciples, Hermodorus of Syracuse and Heraclides of Pontus are said to have written works dealing with the Eastern religion or at least entitled under the name of its founder. As has already been noted, two other disciples of Plato, Aristotle and Eudoxus, proved to have some knowledge of the Zoroastrian doctrines.

The Alexandrian conquests strengthened Greek and Persian cultures and a large amount of documentation about the Zoroastrian religion began to proliferate. Books on astronomy, astrology, botany and mineralogy[79] ascribed to the Prophet Himself or to the semi-legendary Magi Ostanes, perhaps parts of the Avesta[80] and philosophy treaties summarizing some of the Zoroastrian doctrines became more and more available in the Greek world. According to Plyny the Elder, Hermippus of Smyrna (third century BCE) compiled over two million lines of Zoroastrian texts[81]. These apocryphal books – the work of Maguseans in most cases – had in turn an impact on the neo-Pythagorean, neo-Platonic and Stoic schools as well as on Hellenistic Judaism[82].

Greek philosophy and the Jewish religion

Today, it is widely recognized that ancient Greek mythology and theology received a notable input from Semitic ideas and imagery – particularly from Phoenicia and Babylonia – in the second and the end of the first millennium BCE[83]. Traditionally however, the possibility of a later Jewish influence on Greek culture has been overlooked or considered by many as simply an invention by Jewish and Christian apologists.

Just as was the case with Persian religion, ancient Greek and Latin literature provide a no less relevant catalogue of records concerning Judaism[84]. Many of those records are the manifestations of the antisemitic trends that had started in Alexandria during the second century BCE and invaded the Roman Empire. As a consequence, a second type of records covers the apologetic efforts of Jewish and Christian scholars

to lessen the effect of the many defamations circulating at the time.

There is, however, a third category of ancient records. These have a rather positive tone, comprise the earliest mentions to Jewish religion and, therefore, precede and are independent of any later vituperative or apologetic literature. As Martin Hengel has noted "...the earliest Greek witnesses, for all their variety, present a relatively uniform picture: they portray the Jews as a people of 'philosophers'. From this it is clear that the intellectual 'encounter' between Greeks and Jews did not take place only from the Jewish side, and that the Greeks took and interest in meeting this people with its religion that sounded so 'philosophical'".[85]

To a certain extent these records implicitly assumed that an exchange of ideas from the Hebraic world into the Greek was a matter of fact. It is in this context that some classic authors held a respect for the Jewish religion as an ancient and influential philosophical system of thought just as it happened, as has been shown previously, with Persian religion.

One of the earliest Greek accounts on the practices of the Jews is attributed to one of Aristotle's disciples, Theophratus (372-287 BCE)[86], who in discussing about sacrifices portrays the Jews as a philosophical people: "During this whole time, being philosophers by race, they converse with each other about the deity, and at night-time they make observations of the stars, gazing at them and calling on God by prayer. They were the first to institute sacrifices both of other living beings and of themselves; yet they did it by compulsion and not from eagerness for it."[87]

Origen tells us about a now lost work by Hecateus of Abdera (fourth century BCE) dedicated to the Jewish religion: "And there is extant a work by the historian Hecataeus, treating of the Jews, in which so high a character is bestowed upon that nation for its learning, that Herennius Philo, in his treatise on the Jews, has doubts in the first place, whether it is really the composition of the historian; and says, in the second place, that if really his, it is probable that he was carried away by the plausible nature of the Jewish history, and so yielded his assent to their system."[88]

Megasthenes (c. 300 BCE), who spent some years in India where he was at the service of Seleucus Nicator I, is quoted from his book *Indica* as stating that: "All the opinions

expressed by the ancients about nature are found also among the philosophers outside Greece, some among the Indian Brahmans and others in Syria among those called Jews"[89].

Pythagoras was said to also have had contacts with the Jews. Some fragments by the Peripatetic historian Hermippus of Smyrna (third century BCE) and preserved by Josephus and Origen point in that direction. The reference quoted by Josephus is from Hermippus' *De Pythagora*:

> Pythagoras, therefore, of Samos, lived in very ancient times, and was esteemed a person superior to all philosophers in wisdom and piety towards God. Now it is plain that he did not only know our doctrines, but was in very great measure a follower and admirer of them. There is not indeed extant any writing that is owned for his but many there are who have written his history, of whom Hermippus is the most celebrated, who was a person very inquisitive into all sorts of history. Now this Hermippus, in his first book concerning Pythagoras, speaks thus: "That Pythagoras, upon the death of one of his associates, whose name was Calliphon, a Crotonlate by birth, affirmed that this man's soul conversed with him both night and day, and enjoined him not to pass over a place where an ass had fallen down; as also not to drink of such waters as caused thirst again; and to abstain from all sorts of reproaches." After which he adds thus: "This he did and said in imitation of the doctrines of the Jews and Thracians, which he transferred into his own philosophy." For it is very truly affirmed of this Pythagoras, that he took a great many of the laws of the Jews into his own philosophy.[90]

The passage alluded by Origenes seems to refer to a different work of the same author: "It is said that also Hermippus, in his first book on legislators, related that Pythagoras brought his own philosophy from the Jews to the Greeks."[91]

Later biographers of Pythagoras also described some connections between him and the Jews. Thus Porphyry, quoting a certain Antonius Diogenes, says: "He sent de boy [Pythagoras] to a lyre player, a gymnast and a painter. Later he sent him to Anaximander at Miletus, to learn geometry and astronomy. Then Pythagoras visited the Egyptians, the Arabians, the Chaldeans and the Hebrews from whom he

acquired expertise in the interpretation of dreams, and acquired de use of frankincense in the worship of divinities."[92]

Iamblichus offers further information on this contact and explains that Pythagoras spent some time in solitude on Mount Carmel:

> Enjoying such advantages, therefore, he sailed to Sidon, both because it was his native country, and because it was on his way to Egypt. In Phoenicia he conversed with the prophets who where descendants of Moschus[93] the physiologist, and with many others, as well as with the local hierophants. He was also initiated into all the mysteries of Byblos and Tyre, and in the sacred function performed in many parts of Syria...
>
> After gaining all he could from the Phoenician mysteries, he found that they had originated from the sacred rites of Egypt... Therefore following the advice of his teacher Thales, he left, as soon as possible, through the agency of some Egyptian sailors, who very opportunely happened to land on the Phoenician coast under Mount Carmel where, in the temple of the peak, Pythagoras for the most part had dwelt in solitude... They [the sailors] began to reflect that there was something supernatural in the youth's modesty, and in the manner in which he had unexpectedly appeared to them on their landing, when, from the summit of Mount Carmel, which they knew to be more sacred than other mountains, and quite inaccessible to the vulgar, he had leisurely descended without looking back...[94]

Both Porphyry and Iamblichus detail Pythagoras' visit to Egypt. Laertius also alludes to this episode[95]. This was an old tradition that can be traced as far as Isocrates in the fifth century BCE[96] and that has especial relevance for the understanding of later views held by Christian and Muslim historians. Eusebius, for instance, in his *Praeparatio evangelica* considers that Pythagoras' learning from the Jews could have occurred during his sojourns in Egypt or in Babylonia[97]: "Pherecydes also is recorded to have been a Syrian, and Pythagoras they say was his disciple. He is not, however, the only teacher with whom, as it is said, Pythagoras was associated, but he spent some time also with the Persian Magi, and became a disciple of the Egyptian prophets, at the time

when some of the Hebrews appear to have made their settlement in Egypt, and some in Babylon."[98]

Regarding Plato, Numenius of Apamea (second century CE) is quoted as having made the following striking comments:

> Also from the Pythagorean philosopher himself, I mean Numenius, I will quote as follows from his first book *On the Good:* 'But when one has spoken upon this point, and sealed it by the testimonies of Plato, it will be necessary to go back and connect it with the precepts of Pythagoras, and to appeal to the nations of good repute, bringing forward their rites and doctrines, and their institutions which are formed in agreement with those of Plato, all that the Brahmans, and Jews, and Magi, and Egyptians arranged.'[99]
>
> Thus then speaks Numenius, explaining clearly both Plato's doctrines and the much earlier doctrines of Moses. With reason therefore is that saying currently attributed to him, in which it is recorded that he said, 'For what else is Plato than Moses speaking Attic Greek?'[100]

The peripatetic Clearchus of Soli (c. 300 BCE) is one of the earliest authors known for having established a sort of link between the Jewish religion and a particular Greek philosopher. In a book discussing the phenomenon of dreams, he reproduces a dialogue between Aristotle and a Jew which has been preserved in Josephus' *Contra Apionem*:

> For Clearchus, who was the scholar of Aristotle, and inferior to no one of the Peripatetics whomsoever, in his first book concerning sleep, says that "Aristotle his master related what follows of a Jew," and sets down Aristotle's own discourse with him. The account is this, as written down by him: "Now, for a great part of what this Jew said, it would be too long to recite it; but what includes in it both wonder and philosophy it may not be amiss to discourse of. Now, that I may be plain with thee, Hyperochides, I shall herein seem to thee to relate wonders, and what will resemble dreams themselves. Hereupon Hyperochides answered modestly, and said: For that very reason it is that all of us are very desirous of hearing what thou art going to say. Then replied Aristotle: For this cause it will be the best way to imitate that rule of the Rhetoricians, which

> requires us first to give an account of the man, and of what nation he was, that so we may not contradict our master's directions. Then said Hyperochides: Go on, if it so pleases thee. This man then, [answered Aristotle,] was by birth a Jew, and came from Celesyria; these Jews are derived from the Indian philosophers; they are named by the Indians Calami, and by the Syrians Judaei, and took their name from the country they inhabit, which is called Judea; but for the name of their city, it is a very awkward one, for they call it Jerusalem. Now this man, when he was hospitably treated by a great many, came down from the upper country to the places near the sea, and became a Grecian, not only in his language, but in his soul also; insomuch that when we ourselves happened to be in Asia about the same places whither he came, he conversed with us, and with other philosophical persons, and made a trial of our skill in philosophy; and as he had lived with many learned men, he communicated to us more information than he received from us." This is Aristotle's account of the matter, as given us by Clearchus; which Aristotle discoursed also particularly of the great and wonderful fortitude of this Jew in his diet, and continent way of living, as those that please may learn more about him from Clearchus's book itself; for I avoid setting down any more than is sufficient for my purpose.[101]

While it is attested that Aristotle spent a part of his life living in Asia some authors[102] consider this encounter with a Jew as fictitious. This conclusion is reached on the grounds that placing a hellenized Jew as a contemporary of Aristotle is an anachronism. Paradoxically, the argument can be applied to Clearchus himself.[103]

There is direct evidence of various ancient authors having incorporated notions of Jewish religion into their works. Thus, some scholars see traces of a passage from *Genesis* (I.28) in the *De universi Natura* written around the second century BCE by the Pythagorean Ocellus Lucanus[104].

In his *Res Divinae*, the Latin Varro (116-27 BCE) assimilates the god Jupiter with Yahweh and extols the way in which the Jews worship their God. Augustine quotes from him:

> He [Varro] also says that for more than one hundred and seventy years the ancient Romans worshipped the gods without and image. 'If this usage had continued to our own day', he says, our worship of the gods would be more devout'. And in support of his opinion he adduces, among other things, the testimony of the Jewish race. And he ends with the forthright statement that those who first set up images of the gods for the people diminished reverence in their cities as they added to error, for he wisely judged that gods in the shape of senseless images might easily inspire contempt.[105]

> Yet Varro – one of themselves – to a more learned man they cannot point – thought the God of the Jews to be the same as Jupiter, thinking that it makes no difference by which name he is called, so long as the same thing is understood. I believe that he did it being terrified by his sublimity. Since the Romans habitually worship nothing superior to Jupiter, a fact attested well and openly by their Capitol, and they consider him the king of all the gods, and as he perceived that the Jews worship the highest God, he could not but identify him with Jupiter.[106]

The anonymous pseudo-Longinus author of the *De Sublimitate* – written around the first century CE – also quotes from *Genesis* and praises Moses: "A similar effect was achieved by the lawgiver of the Jews – no mean genius, for he both understood and gave expression to the power of the divinity as it deserved – when he wrote at the very beginning of his laws, I quote his words: 'God said' -what? 'Let there be light. And there was. Let there be earth. And there was'".[107]

And Porphyry, who also quoted from the book of *Genesis*[108], is said by Lydus to have assimilated Yahweh with the Platonic Demiurge: "But Porphyry in the Commentary on the Oracles says that the god worshipped by the Jews is the second god, the creator of all things whom the Chaldaean in his discourse on the gods counts to be the second from the first god, i.e. the Good."[109]

Of course, modern scholarship has offered different theories about a possible Hebraic influence on Greek philosophy but a general consensus as to how and when it happened is still lacking.

In recent times, for instance, West has detected some common features between the biblical giant Og and the Greek Ogygos. The biblical Leviathan and Rahab also seem to have a counterpart in Pherecydes' Ophioneus but the possibility exists that both the biblical and the Greek mythical beings have a common origin in the ancient Middle East.[110]

For Stern, the fact that some Pythagoreans like Ocellus were aware of some Jewish doctrines may be proof of a Hebraic influence on neo-Pythagorean circles.[111] And Hengel considers that the personification of "Wisdom" as it appears in Proverbs (8.22-31) and Job (28) can not be the result of an influence from Greek culture. Rather, the personification of Sophia in Greek thought, which is later, seems of Oriental influence.[112] Similarly, Hengel points to the possibility that many of the themes and concepts present in the Estoic school had the same origins. One wonders if Hengel means Hebraic when he says Oriental.[113]

As has been shown earlier, the Platonic myth of Er has been considered by some as an element with strong Persian roots. But for others, however, the myth may be Semitic in origin. The name Er, for instance, is a Semitic name (Lc. 3,28). Gómez de Liaño points out the striking similarities in the structure and imagery used by Ezekiel in his vision of the Chariot (1.4-28) and Plato's symbols in Er's myth (*Rep.* X.617). Common features appear also between Plato's description of the ideal city and Ezekiel's vision of the Holy City. Gómez admits, however, that despite the common features of both texts, the possibility exists that its authors followed a common Babylonian text or scheme not yet identified.[114]

The Muslim sources

Juan Cole lists a number of Muslim authors that reproduce the tradition alluded to by Bahá'u'lláh in the Tablet of Wisdom. The names and works of some of them are:

Sa'id al-Andalusí (1029-1070 CE): *Kitáb Tabaqát al-Umam*

Abu'l-Fatḥ-i-Sháhristání (1076–1153 CE): *Kitáb al-Milal wa al-Nihal*

Jamálu'd-Dín al-Qiftí (1172-1248): *Táríkh al-Hukamát*

Muwaffaqu'd-Dín ibn Abí Usaybiah (1194-1270): *Uyun Al-Anba Fi-Tabakat Al-Attibba*

Imádu'd-Dín Abu'l-Fidá (1273–1331 CE): *Al-Mukhtasar fi Akhbar Al-Bashar*

Walbridge[115] and Terry[116] mention an earlier writer, the Persian Abú'l Hasan al-'Ámirí (d. 992), that also used the tradition in his *Al-Amad 'Alá al-Abab*[117]. Being the earliest known Muslim author to treat the issue, it will be worth reproducing his words as translated by Rowson:

> The first one to whom wisdom was attributed was Luqmán, the Sage, as God says: "And verily we gave Luqmán wisdom" (Q. 31:12). He lived at the time of the prophet David; they where both residents of the land of Syria.
>
> It is said that Empedocles the Greek used to keep company with Luqmán and learn from his wisdom. But when he returned to the land of Greece, he spoke on his own authority about the nature of the world, saying things which, if understood literally, offend against (the belief) of the Hereafter. The Greeks attributed wisdom to him because of his former association with Luqmán; indeed, he was the first Greek to be called a Sage. A group of the Bátinites claim to be followers of his wisdom and speak of him with high esteem. They claim that he wrote in symbols whose hidden meanings are rarely comprehended.
>
> Another Greek who was described as wise was Pythagoras. In Egypt he kept company with the companions of Solomon son of David, after they moved there from the land of Syria. Having (already) learned geometry from the Egyptians, he then learned the physical and divine/metaphysical sciences from the companions of Solomon. These three sciences – that is, geometry, physics, and the science of religion – he transferred to the land of Greece... He claimed that he had acquired these sciences from the niche of prophecy.
>
> After him, another Greek who was described as wise was Socrates. He derived (his) wisdom from Pythagoras, but limited himself to the divine sciences...
>
> Then, after him, another one described as wise was Plato. He was of noble lineage and pre-eminent among

> them. He agreed with Socrates in deriving (his) wisdom, and with Pythagoras...
>
> Another of the Greeks after Plato who was described as wise was Aristotle... [He] studied with Plato for nearly twenty years in order to derive wisdom (from him)...[118]

Accordingly, Rowson sees the origin of the reference to Empedocles – actually the Muslimized pseudo-Empedocles – to traditions circulating among the batínís[119].

Similarly, he traces the reference to Pythagoras back to Eusebius (see quotation in the precedent section)[120], a reasoning which is quite convincing. But there is also a passage from Porphyry, an author widely used and quoted by Muslim historians, that also fits well as the source for 'Al-Amirí's passage on Pythagoras: "As for his knowledge, it is said that he learned the mathematical sciences from the Egyptians, Chaldeans, and Phoenicians; for of old the Egyptians excelled in geometry... and the Chaldeans in astronomical theorems, divine rites, and worship of the Gods."[121] Both 'Al-Amirí's and Porphyry's texts coincide in mentioning the Egyptians as Pythagoras' teachers in geometry while Porphyry mentions the Chaldeans as the instructors of the Samian in divine matters. Since sometimes the identification of the Chaldeans with the Jews was, to a certain extent, common in medieval times it may be assumed that some readers of Porphyry, including 'Al-Amirí or his source, may have understood this reference to the Chaldeans as a reference to the Jews. What is more probable is that a combination of Christian (be it Eusebius, Augustine or both) and Pagan texts took place.

Furthermore, it is also worth noting that 'Al-Amirí's text does not portray Empedocles and Pythagoras as meeting with David and Solomon but rather as meeting their followers. In the case of Pythagoras, this is consistent with pre-Islamic texts.

The information as it appears in 'Al-Amirí was afterwards used by other historians such as Al-Andalusí and Al-Sijistání (*c.* 932- *c.* 1000, *Siwán al-Hikma*). From Sijistání it passed to Sháhristání and from him to other writers like Abu'l-Fidá. From Al-Andalusí the text passed to al-Qiftí and ibn Abí Usaybiah.[122] As for Al-Andalusí, it interesting to note, that among the many books he cites in his work, he does not make any mention of 'Al-Amirí's. It should not be discarded, therefore, that both

authors used a common source or that there was an intermediary between both.

The tradition quoted by Bahá'u'lláh, while widely used in Muslim scholarship seems therefore, in the absence of further evidence pointing to a different direction, to be not a repetition but an evolution of previous traditions. At its core, it derives in last term from the many Pagan sources referring, on the one hand, to the stay of Pythagoras in Egypt and, on the other, to his contact with the Jews. At a second level we find both traditions linked in a single one by some Christian authors like Eusebius or Augustine who locate Pythagoras' contacts with the Jews in Egypt. At a third level, we have 'Al-Amirí or one of his sources rescuing this Christian tradition and adding to it comments about Empedocles – with no precedent in ancient writers – and data extracted from Pagan historians like Porphyry. At a fourth level, we find historians like Sháhristání and Abu'l-Fidá – authors probably quoted by Bahá'u'lláh – using 'Al-Amirí's version and adding to it little variations like the one describing Pythagoras as living in the days of Solomon.

Conclusion

Ancient records and modern scholarship offer us an enormous amount of information about a possible transmission of ideas from Eastern religions into Greek thought. This data help us to better understand the implications of Bahá'u'lláh's statement that "the essence and the fundamentals of philosophy have emanated from the Prophets". The *arkhé* of some of the pre-Socratics or the dualism of Plato with its notion of a supreme Good, may stand as just two examples of such phenomenon.

To prove or to discard a chronological synchrony between Empedocles and King David or between Pythagoras and Solomon, becomes, therefore, a very secondary matter, just as for the question of whether the tradition quoted by Bahá'u'lláh needs to be interpreted literally or not. Of course, it could be interpreted literally and hopefully future research will uncover new documents backing this approach. But in any case, what is important from the passage under study are not the examples cited by Bahá'u'lláh from some historians but the statement that the Manifestation Himself is presenting and that underlies the whole passage.

When an individual approaches the history of ancient philosophy from the standpoint marked by Bahá'u'lláh then he or she is confronted with a whole new picture, one that questions many of the prevalent paradigms in present-day Western scholarship. It also transcends the traditions present in Muslim historiography, for it forces the researcher to take into account besides Jewish religion, other ancient religions such as Zoroastrianism or even Hinduism or Buddhism[123], and to consider the cases, not only of the most popular figures of Greek philosophy, but also of their predecessors and successors.

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NOTES

Note: I want to express my gratitude to Leilí Egea and to Somhairle Watson for proofreading the text.

[1] Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*.

[2] Cole, Juan. "Problems of Chronology in Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet of Wisdom", 1979.

[3] Terry, Peter. "Some Chronological issues in the Law-i-Ḥikmat of Bahá'u'lláh", 2000.

[4] Bidez, J.- Cumont F., Les Mages Hellénisés. Zoroastre, Ostanés et Hystape *d'après la tradition grecque*, 1938.

[5] de Jong, Albert. Traditions of the Magi. Zoroastrianism in Greek and Latin Literature, 1997.

[6] Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, III.2.11 (trans. Schaff). This and other texts of the church fathers available at http://www.ccel.org/.

[7] Diógenes Laertius, *Lives of eminent philosophers*, 1.2 (trans. Yonge). As will be shown this dating implies a knowledge of the Zoroastrian conception of cycles.

[8] Bidez-Cumont, op. cit. I, 6.

[9] K. S. Guthrie, *The Pythagorean sourcebook and library*, 1987, pp. 38-39.

[10] "Zaratas" is a Semitic form for "Zoroaster". While Xanthus used the Greek form "Zoroastres" other authors used "Zaratas" a fact that implies an import of the term from Babylonia. Cf. Bidez-Cumont op. cit. I, 37-38 for an etymology of the word "Zaratas" including an identification by Aghatias of both names with the same person. Some classical authors, however, seem to regard Zaratas as a Magi living in Babylonia and not as the prophet Zoroaster Himself.

[11] Hippolytus, *The Refutation of all Heresies* (trans. Schaff). Book 6, chapters 18-19.

[12] Cf. Kingsley, "The Greek Origin of the Sixth-Century Dating of Zoroaster", 1990.

[13] Diogenes Laertius, *Lives and opinions of eminent philosophers*. VIII, 3 (trans. Yonge, 1853)

[14] K. S. Guthrie, op. cit. 125 (Porphyry, *Life of Pythagoras*, 12)

[15] Ibíd. 124 (Porphyry, *Life of Pythagoras*, 6)

[16] Ibíd. 131 (Porphyry, *Life of Pythagoras*, 12)

[17] Ibíd. 61 (Iamblichus, *Life of Pythagoras*, 4)

[18] Ibíd. 95 (Iamblichus, *Life of Pythagoras*, 21).

[19] For a discussion on the biographies of Pythagoras see J.A. Phillip, "The Biographical Tradition-Pythagoras", 1959.

[20] *De finibus bonorum et malorum* V, 29.

[21] *Factorum et dictorum memorabilium liber*, VIII, 7.2

[22] *Life of Apollonius*, I.2.

[23] *The Apologia and Florida of Apuleius of Madaura* (transl. H. E. Butler, 1909), p. 184.

[24] *Stromata* op. cit I.15

[25] *Various History*, V. 20 (trans. Thomas Stanley,1665)

[26] *Stromata* op. cit. I. 15

[27] Laertius, op. cit. IX.1-2.

[28] Vita Apollonii, I.2.1 (trans. F.C. Conybeare 1912)

[29] Laertius, op. cit. II.24

[30] Bidez, *Eos ou Platon et L'Orient*, 1945, p. 2.

[31] Laertius op. cit. III, 8.

[32] Cf. Edwards, "Atticizing Moses? Numenius, the Fathers and the Jews", 1990.

[33] *Stromata* op. cit. V. 14.

[34] Cf. Edwards, op. cit.

[35] *Stromata*, op. cit. I. 15.

[36] *Divine Institutes*, IV. 2 (trans. Fletcher).

[37] West, M. L. *Early Greek Philosophy and the Orient*. 1971.

[38] Ibíd. pp. 34-35.

[39] Cf. Ibíd. pp. 89-91

[40] Fr. A18. (trans. Burnet, 1908).

[41] Passages referred to in West op. cit.

[42] E. W. West in *Sacred Books of the East*, Vol. 5. All Zoroastrian quotations from http://www.avesta.org/.

[43] E. W. West in *SBE*, Vol. 47.

[44] L.H. Mills in *SBE*, Vol. 31.

[45] Ibíd.

[46] Yasht, 13.57 (trans. James Darmeteter *SBE*, Vol. 23).

[47] Fr. A.9: "Anaximander of Miletos, son of Praxiades, a fellow-citizen and associate of Thales, said that the material cause and first element of things was the Infinite, he being the first to introduce this name for the material cause. He says it is neither water nor any other of the so-called elements, but a substance different from them, which is infinite, from which arise all the heavens and the worlds within them. And into that from which things take their rise they pass away once more, 'as is ordained; for they make reparation and satisfaction to one another for their injustice according to the appointed time' as he says in these somewhat poetical terms."

[48] West mentions Burkert (Iranisches bei Anaximandros', *Rheinisches Museum*, 1963) as a proponent of this theory, op. cit.

[49] Ibíd. p. 93.

[50] Ibíd. p. 97.

[51] All Heraclitan fragments following Burnet's translation (1919)

[52] Cf. Duchesne-Guillemin, "Heraclitus and Iran", 1963.

[53] Cf. West, op. cit. 177-200.

[54] Jaeger, Werner. *Aristotle. Fundamentals of the History of His Development*, 1962, p. 126.

[55] Ibíd. p. 130.

[56] Laertius op. cit. I, 6.

[57] Pliny, *Natural History* (30.3) in Ibíd. p. 131. cf. Jaeger op. cit. 135 for some arguments on the provenance of this fragment from *On philosophy*.

[58] "This difficulty arises not from ascribing goodness to the first principle as an attribute, but from treating unity as a principle, and a principle in the sense of an element, and then deriving number from unity ... those of them who compromise by not describing everything in mythological language – e.g. Pherecydes and certain others – make the primary generator the Supreme Good; and so do the Magi, and some of the later philosophers such as Empedocles and Anaxagoras: the one making Love an element, and the other making Mind a first principle. And of those who hold that unchangeable substances exist, some identify absolute unity with absolute goodness; but they considered that the essence of goodness was primarily unity". Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1091b (trans. Hugh Tredennick)

[59] Nyberg, "Questions de cosmogonie et cosmologie mazdéennes", 1931.

[60] J. Bidez, *Eos ou Platon et l'Orient*, 1945, p. 36.

[61] Bidez-Cumont, op. cit.

[62] Jaeger, op. cit. 134-135.

[63] Cf. Ibíd. 24-37.

[64] Jaeger, op. cit. 105 and 132.

[65] Cf. Bidez-Cumont op. cit. I, 34-36 and 57-59 for further considerations on this.

[66] The Myth of Er is found at the end tenth book of Plato's *Republic* starting in 614b.

[67] Cf. Bidez, op. cit. 43-51 for an analysis of the myth under this light.

[68] Ibíd. 62-63.

[69] Ibíd. 72-73. Bidez here is following the thesis put forth by R. Reitzenstein in 'Plato und Zarathustra', *Bibliothek Warburg*, 1927.

[70] (trans. W.R.M. Lamb, 1925)

[71] (trans. R.G. Bury, 1968)

[72] Ibíd.

[73]Cf. Bidez-Cumont op. cit. I, 34-36 and 57-59 for further considerations on this. Ibíd. 97-98.

[74] *Timaeus*, 73

[75] Chapter 28.

[76] Duchesne-Guillemin, *The Western Response to Zoroaster*, 1973 pp. 73-78

[77] Bidez op. cit. 126-133.

[78] See bibliography.

[79] For a catalogue and description of such texts see íbid. I chapters IV to VII.

[80] Cf. Íbid. I 91ss.

[81] Íbid. I 86.

[82] Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, 1981, 192-193

[83] See for instance Michael Astour's *Hellenosemitica* and Walter Burket's *The Orientalizing Revolution*.

[84] Dr. Iraj Ayman has pointed me to a work by the late Manuchehr Salmanpour published in *Safini-yi Irfán* IV in which the author presents sources for the idea of a Jewish transmission into Greek philosophy. Unfortunately I have been unable to consult this article to the risk of repeating some of its thesis.

[85] Hengel op. cit. 255.

[86] Reinach and Stern consider this fragment as the first Greek text "to deal expressly with the Jews". Jaeger, however holds a different opinion.

[87] Quoted in Stern, *Greek and Latin authors on the Jews and Judaism* I, Jerusalem, 1976, p. 10.

[88] Origen, *Against Celsus*, I.XV

[89] Stern op. cit. I 46. This fragment has survived in Clemens' *Stromata* I 15.72 and was afterwards reproduced by Eusebius in *Praeparatio Evangelica* IX.6

[90] Josephus, *Contra Apionem* I.161 (trans. William Whiston 1895).

[91] Stern op. cit. I 96. Fragment in Origenes' Contra Celsum I 15.

[92] K. S. Guthrie, op. cit. 125. (Porphyry, *Life of Pythagoras*, 11).

[93] Identified by Guthrie as Moses. See Danton Sailor's *Moses and atomism* for an opposite view.

[94] Ibíd. 61 (Iamblichus, *Life of Pythagoras*, 60).

[95] Cf. Diogenes op. cit. VIII.3

[96] "If one were not determined to make haste, one might cite many admirable instances of the piety of the Egyptians, that piety which I am neither the first nor the only one to have observed; on the contrary, many contemporaries and predecessors have remarked it, of whom Pythagoras of Samos is one. On a visit to Egypt he became a student of the religion of the people, and was first to bring to the Greeks all philosophy, and more conspicuously than others he seriously interested himself in sacrifices and in ceremonial purity, since he believed that even if he should gain thereby no greater reward from the gods, among men, at any rate, his reputation would be greatly enhanced." Isocrates 11.28 (trans. by George Norlin 1980).

[97] Besides the fragments from pagan writers there are also abundant arguments set forth in Jewish and Christian spheres on the theme of a Mosaic transmission into Greek philosophy, Aristobulus together with Artapanus, Eupolemus, Philo of Alexandria or the above mentioned Flavius Josephus being the Jewish writers known for having defended this idea. In confronting the attacks made from the pagan ranks Jewish and also Christian writers endeavoured to prove the antiquity of the Mosaic religion and to establish bridges between philosophy and revealed religion with the twofold purpose of proving a dependence of philosophy on revealed religion and avoiding any notion in the mass of believers of incompatibility between reason and faith, between religion and philosophy. For some authors theology and philosophy were not only compatible but rather the same thing.

Clement says of Aristobulus: "Aristobulus, in his first book addressed to Philometor, writes in these words: Plato too has followed our legislation, and has evidently studied carefully the several precepts contained in it. And others before Demetrius, and prior to the supremacy of Alexander and of the Persians, have translated both the narrative of the Exodus of our fellow countrymen the Hebrews from Egypt, and the fame of all that happened to them, and their conquest of the land, and the exposition of the whole Law. So it is perfectly clear that the philosopher before-mentioned has borrowed much, for he is very learned; as also was Pythagoras, who transferred many of our precepts into his own system of doctrines" (*Stromata* I.22). Eusebius quotes Eupolemus as saying that Moses invented the alphabet that was afterwards taught to the Phoenicians who in turn transmitted it to the Greeks (*Praep.* IX.26).

Christian authors, especially Clement of Alexandria, Eusebius, Origen and Pseudo-Justin followed also this trend and dedicated whole chapters showing supposed examples of plagiarism made by Greek philosophers from the revealed Scriptures. In some cases, like in Pseudo-Justin, this endeavour reached the point of exaggeration in attempting to detect references to the cross or the trinity in the works of Plato. Paradoxically, some authors, as was also the case with Pseudo-Justin, combined these ideas with harsh antisemitism.

[98] *Praeperatio* X. IV (trans. E.H. Gifford 1903). Interestingly, Alexander Polyhistor may have identified the prophet Ezekiel with Zoroaster. This idea may have been the result of a mixture of two traditions, one representing Pythagoras as a pupil of Zoroaster and the other having Pythagoras meeting the Jews in Babylonia. The identification of Zoroaster with Ezekiel is denied by Clement of Alexandria (*Stromata*, I.15): "Zoroaster the Magus, Pythagoras showed to be a Persian. Of the secret books of this man, those who follow the heresy of Prodicus boast to be in possession. Alexander, in his book *On the Pythagorean Symbols*, relates that Pythagoras was a pupil of Nazaratus the Assyrian (some think that he is Ezekiel; but he is not, as will afterwards be

shown)...". See Bidez-Cumont op. cit. 42 and Hegel op. cit. 154 for further information.

[99] *Praeparatio* IX. VII

[100] Íbid. XI.X, Eusebius is quoting Clement's *Stromata* I.22 .

[101] Josephus, *Contra Apionem* I.161 (trans. William Whiston 1895).

[102] Cf. Reinach *Textes d'auteurs Grecs et Romains relatifs au Judaïsme*, 1895, p. 12; Stern op. cit. I 47; H. Lewy, "Aristotle and the Jewish Sage According to Clearchus of Soli", 1938.

[103] In this regard it would be interesting to note that archaeological evidence shows some presence of Jews in Athens at least as late as the third century BCE. Cf. Lewis, "The First Greek Jew", 1957.

[104] Stern, op. cit. I 131

[105] Ibíd. I 209

[106] Ibíd. I 210

[107] Ibíd. I 364

[108] Ibíd. II 444

[109] Ibíd. II 443

[110] Cf. West op. cit. 40-46.

[111] Stern, op. cit. I 131

[112] Hengel, op. cit. 148-49

[113] Íbid. 153-154.

[114] See Gómez de Liaño, *Filósofos griegos, videntes judíos*, 2001, pp. 215-252.

[115] Walbridge, "Explaining Away the Greek Gods in Islam", 1998.

[116] Terry, op. cit.

[117] This work has been translated and published by Everett K. Rowson. The present author, however, has only had access to the Phd dissertation of Rowson. I first became aware of the existence of this translation thanks to a posting to *tarikh* discussion e-list by William McCants (2005-09-10).

[118] Rowson, *Al-'Amiri on the Afterlife. A Translation with Commentary of His al-Amad 'ala al-Abad* (Ph.D. diss.), 1982, III.1-8.

[119] Ibíd. p. 227.

[120] Ibíd. p. 232.

[121] K. S. Guthrie, op. cit. 124. (Porphyry, *Life of Pythagoras*, 6)

[122] Ibíd. 223. Rowson considers 'Al-Amirí as the direct source for Andalusí.

[123] See Conger, Rahula and Sastri in the bibliography, for some recent works studying the possibility of an Indian influence in Greek thought.