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Nova de universis philosophia

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Francesco Patrizi and the Oracles of Zoroaster:
The Use of *Chaldean Oracles* in
Nova de universis philosophia

Vojtěch Hladký

George Gemistos Plethon (c. 1360–1454) and Francesco Patrizi (1529–1597) are two key figures in the development of Renaissance Platonism. While the teaching of Plethon marks the beginning of a renewal of Platonic philosophy in fifteenth century Italy, the work of Patrizi represents one of its culminations just before 1600. A comparison between their philosophical projects is at hand because the ideas of these two thinkers share various important features. First of all, both Plethon and Patrizi engage in a sharp criticism of Aristotle, favoring Plato and his followers, whom they view as being closer to Christianity. Secondly, they both develop their own original and controversial version of Platonism. Plethon does so in his *Laws*, a book that was condemned after his death as heretical and survived only in a fragmentary form. Patrizi published his great Platonic synthesis in the *Nova de universis philosophia* (1591), a work that was soon placed on the Index. And last but not least, they both base their respective versions of Platonic philosophy on the *Chaldean Oracles*. They attribute this work to Zoroaster, whom they view as the most ancient of all sages.

The idea that Zoroaster was the oldest of the sages originated with Plethon who, relying on ancient Greek sources, identified Zoroaster as the earliest representative of eternal human wisdom and dated him to 5,000 years before the Trojan war, that is, to a period of just before 6,600 BCE.¹ It was also Plethon who claimed that Zoroaster and his magi are the authors of the *Chaldean Oracles*, a book that was viewed as a revelation of the ultimate wisdom already by the late Neoplatonists.² In fact, however, the mysterious pronouncements of

¹ Cf. Hladký (2014a) 249, with n. 42.

² On the constitution of the concept of ancient wisdom in early Renaissance and its sources, see Hladký (2014b).

the *Chaldean Oracles* are usually attributed to the two Juliani, father and son, who wrote – or rather prophesied – during the reign of Marcus Aurelius (161–180 CE).³ Nonetheless, by ‘resurrecting’ this work of allegedly extremely ancient wisdom, Plethon triggered a veritable *Faszination Zarathushtra* – to borrow the title of Michael Stausberg’s fascinating book – which lasted until late eighteenth century, i.e., until a time when genuine Zoroastrian writings were made available to educated European public. A comparable interest in Hermes Trismegistus exhausted itself much earlier and the authenticity of the *Corpus Hermeticum* started to be questioned already during Patrizi’s lifetime.⁴

Unlike Hermetic writings, the *Chaldean Oracles* survive only in quotations and paraphrases found in the works of later authors, mainly the Neoplatonists. In his effort to promote the work, Plethon took a crucial step forward when he issued an edition of the Oracles that was based on the work of Michael Psellos, an earlier Byzantine philosopher and scholar. This edition includes 36 Oracles in 60 verses and two commentaries by Plethon. While both his editorial and interpretative efforts have been fully appreciated only recently,⁵ it should be noted that during the Renaissance, philosophers such as Marsilio Ficino, Pico della Mirandola, and Agostino Steuco all relied on Plethon’s edition of the Oracles.⁶

Patrizi, too, was well acquainted with Plethon’s work and even owned a manuscript where various versions of Plethon’s writings on the Oracles were collected.⁷ He disagreed, however, with the extremely early dating of Zoroaster proposed by Plethon. He viewed it as being in conflict with Biblical history and probably also with the traditional Christian dating of the creation of the world, a fact that Plethon himself seems to have noted (*Contra Schol.* V 378.16–18).⁸ According to Patrizi’s calculations, Zoroaster lived 1,758 years before the death of Plato, that is, around 2,105 BCE. Moreover, after an extensive discussion of ancient sources, Patrizi concludes that

³ Cf. Seng (2016) 21–25, with further references.

⁴ Cf. Mulsow (2002).

⁵ Tardieu (1987).

⁶ Stausberg (1998), Seng (2016) 29–35.

⁷ Vatican, Bibliotheca Apostolica Vaticana, cod. *Barberinianus Graecus* 179, cf. Tambrun-Krasker (1995) lxxv.

⁸ Cf. Hladký (2014a) 249.

Zoroaster was not a Persian but a Chaldean, whose writings were later translated into Greek by the two Juliani (*Zor.*, p. 98–107). In general, though, he accepts the basic outline of Plethon's interpretation since he, too, claims that Zoroaster is the most ancient sage and the *Chaldean Oracles* are genuinely his work.⁹ His own version of the story makes Zoroaster a contemporary of Abraham, whereas Hermes Trismegistus is said to be just slightly older than Moses. Ancient wisdom and Bible thus meet, and the philosophy taught by Patrizi claims to go as far back as to Noah or even Adam (*Zor.*, p. 102).¹⁰

Patrizi's most important contribution to the study of the *Chaldean Oracles* is undoubtedly his new edition, based not only on Psellos and Plethon, but also a number of other ancient authors, especially the Neoplatonists (*Zor.*, p. 108–109, 132–133).¹¹ By including these sources, Patrizi managed to expand the number of the verses of the Oracles from 60 to 320,¹² even if some of the Oracles he reconstructed are omitted from modern editions, and generally viewed as merely loose paraphrases of some Chaldean terms by later authors. One should also note that Plethon's and Patrizi's editions were not superseded until 1895, when a serious scientific investigation of these texts began with Wilhelm Kroll's *Habilitationschrift* just four years after Albert Jahn decided to drop the adjective *Zoroastrian* and returned to the ancient usage of 'Chaldean'.¹³ Patrizi's edition first appeared in 1591 under the name *Zoroaster* as the first appendix to his

⁹ Already Psellos claimed that the *Chaldean Oracles* were extremely ancient, though he did not link them to Zoroaster; cf. Moreschini (2014) 234–235.

¹⁰ Cf. Patrizi, *Nova un. phil., Panarchia*, fol. 9; *Discussiones Peripateticae*, III,1, p. 292–294, Stausberg (1998) 315–317.

¹¹ Patrizi himself mentions Proclus (in particular his commentaries on Plato's *Parmenides*, *Timaeus*, *Republic*, and *Cratylus*), Hermias (his commentary on the *Phaedrus*), Olympiodorus (his commentaries on the *Philebus* and *Phaedo*), Synesius, Simplicius (his commentaries on Aristotle's *Physics*), Damascius, and Nicephorus Gregoras.

¹² Stausberg (1998) 322 with n. 201, observes that two verses are quoted twice. In contrast, Patrizi repeatedly quotes at least one Chaldaean Oracle that is not a part of his edition, namely *Orac. Chald.* fr. 10 des Places = Psell., p. 182, 1145a.4 des Places = 142.20 O'Meara: Εἰσὶν πάντα ἐνὸς πυρὸς ἐκγεγάωτα / *Sunt omnia igne ex uno genita* (*Panaugia*, fol. 22v–d, *Pancosmia*, fol. 75v–c).

¹³ Cf. Tardieu in Lewy (2011) 731–740, Seng (2016) 36–37.

most ambitious work, the *Nova de universis philosophia*.¹⁴ The Oracles were published alongside an edition of Hermetic writings and various anonymous Platonic materials. All these texts were chosen in order to support the main argument of the whole treatise, which advocates a replacement of mainstream Aristotelianism of the period by a more pious Platonic philosophy. By drawing both on ancient texts and some contemporary scientific theories, Patrizi's version of Platonism is paradoxically both more ancient and more modern than mainstream contemporary philosophy of his day. In the "New Philosophy of the Universe", the ultimate and extensively quoted authority is Zoroaster, the most ancient sage of all time – at least according to Patrizi.

Patrizi's construction can work only because, as is well known, the *Chaldean Oracles* represent a version of Middle Platonism and their doctrines seem to be strongly influenced by Plato's *Timaeus*.¹⁵ This is why they can very well complement the teachings of various Platonic philosophers, who treat them with approval, quote them, and view them as an almost divine revelation handed down through the Juliani, who lived just few hundred years earlier. For the Renaissance Platonists, such as Patrizi, this relation is reversed because they believed the Oracles were written at the beginning of time, when the world was still young, and god or gods spoke to humans more directly. Given the Platonic belief in an everlasting unity of human thought, the message conveyed in the Oracles was thus viewed as a concentrated version of various subjects that could be explained within a particular version of Platonism.

Renaissance thinkers used the 'Oracles of Zoroaster' in several different ways. At first sight, they sometimes seem to quote them just for decorative reasons, simply to demonstrate their erudition.¹⁶ Often, however, the Oracles are seen as an ancient and venerable authority that can lend support to some extraordinary claim. Moreover, given their Middle Platonic origin, the Oracles can and do correspond in some doctrinal points to what is being claimed.¹⁷ In his particular

¹⁴ In 2011 edited separately by E. Banić-Pajnić et al. and translated to Croatian by I. Kapec. Patrizi's Latin translation of the Oracles was printed also separately in Hamburg in 1593.

¹⁵ See most notably Brisson (2003), cf. also Dillon (1996) 392–397.

¹⁶ Cf. Patrizi, *Nova un.phil., Panarchia*, fol. 10v–d: *Sed nos auctoritatibus, ornamento potius, quam fundamento philosophamur.*

¹⁷ Stausberg (1998).

version of Platonism, Plethon probably worked with a reconstruction of the Oracles' doctrine that is closer to Plato's thoughts than to the theories of later Neoplatonists. Even the very sequence of the Oracles in his edition outlines a coherent and systematic picture of reality, which he further develops in his other works.¹⁸ Patrizi, too, orders the Oracles in a systematic manner, starting with the highest metaphysical principles and moving downwards to cosmology and anthropology, thus following the hierarchical structure of the Chaldean world.¹⁹ He does not, however, produce any separate commentary on the Oracles. Instead, allusions to and quotes from them appear time and again in his *Nova de universis philosophia* and their various aspects are commented on throughout the whole treatise.

The overall structure of Patrizi's ambitious treatise follows roughly the same structure as his edition of the Chaldean verses. The first, introductory part, *Panaugia* (All-Splendor) is a kind of prelude dedicated to a treatment of light, which is presented as the means to ascending to the first beginning of all, the Father of Lights. From that point, Patrizi proceeds in a good Platonic manner, following an order similar to that he applied to his edition of the Oracles. He starts by dealing with the highest metaphysical principles in *Panarchia* (All-Principles), then turns his attention to the question of soul in *Pampsychia* (All-Soul), and finally addresses the issue of the universe in *Pancosmia* (All-Cosmos). With respect to quotations from the *Chaldean Oracles* in the *Nova de universis philosophia*, there are some slight variations between the Greek text and Patrizi's Latin translation on the one hand and his separate edition of the Oracles on the other hand, which do not, however, seem to be of major significance.²⁰

At the moment, we cannot determine exactly how many references or allusions to the *Chaldaean Oracles* are incorporated in the *Nova de*

¹⁸ Hladký (2014a) 36–37, 179–184.

¹⁹ The headings of the sections of Patrizi's edition of the Oracles run as follows: (1) *Monas, dyas, trias*, (2) *Pater, et mens*, (3) *Mens, intelligibilia, et mentalia*, (4) *Iynges, ideae, principia*, (5) *Hecate, synoches, et teletarche*, (6) *Anima, natura*, (7) *Mundus*, (8) *Coelum*, (9) *Tempus*, (10) *Anima, corpus, homo*, (11) *Daemones, sacrificia*. This order seems to be preserved also in the modern editions of the *Chaldean Oracles*, cf. Saffrey's French translation of Kroll (1894), viii, Seng (2016) 34.

²⁰ According to Stausberg (1998) 346, Patrizi quotes in his *opus magnum* around one hundred out of 320 verses, and more than half of these are quoted several times.

universis philosophia (which is one of the reasons why the treatise would deserve a critical edition). Even a quick glance, however, shows that the presence and influence of the Oracles is quite pervasive, more pronounced even than the numerous quotations from Hermetic writings, or, rather paradoxically, quotations from Aristotle, Patrizi's chief intellectual opponent. On the one hand, there are long sections of the text where the Oracles do not appear at all, but on the other hand, we also find parts of the texts which feature long series of quotations concentrated in a sort of nests. Moreover, among the 320 verses collected in his edition, Patrizi clearly had his favorite Oracles, which are then quoted or hinted at time and again in support of some particular doctrine. To form a preliminary idea of the extent of Oracles' presence in the text, it is helpful to focus on quotations which, just by their graphic appearance, are readily discernible in the flow of Patrizi's argument, and then to give an overview of the particular Chaldean motifs which Patrizi finds congenial to his own philosophical thought.

1. Panaugia

As is well known, one of the most distinguishing features of Patrizi's philosophy is his concept of all-pervading light (*lux, lumen*), which so to say descends from the highest levels of the metaphysical skeleton of his Platonic system down to the physical and sensible world. The first part of the *Nova de universis philosophia* is thus quite properly called *Panaugia* (All-Splendor). Patrizi's account of a progressive expansion of light from one ultimate beginning and its role as the means by which one can ascend back to its source fits well within a broader tradition of Platonic *Lichtmetaphysik*. In the Renaissance, an important predecessor of Patrizi is certainly Marsilio Ficino. There are, however, some particular features of Patrizi's metaphysics of light which indicate a certain shift of interest and which were obviously a reaction to Copernicus' heliocentric astronomy with its new emphasis of the central role of the Sun. So whereas according to Ficino, the Sun and light have a largely symbolic role as the ultimate source of being of everything (and one could speak here of a 'heliocentrism of significance'), in Copernicus' approach, the role of the Sun becomes, so to say, physicalized: this shift then results in his famous Sun-centered cosmology. And although Patrizi is in the end not in favor of heliocentrism, his approach to light seems to share some features with

this development.²¹ He thus even employs some results of contemporary science, including optics, to describe the general characteristics of light. Among other ancient sources, he quotes in this context some twenty *Chaldean Oracles*. They extensively use the image of fire that can be followed from the fiery sky, where the heavenly bodies are located, through the empyreum, i.e. the region that is above our world and filled with light, all the way to the incorporeal light emanating from highest creator of all (I. VII–X, fol. 16v, 19r–22v).²²

It is thus perhaps not a great exaggeration to say that light, fire, and their transformations form the backbone of Patrizi's Platonism. One should also note that the word 'empyreum' was coined by the authors of the *Chaldean Oracles* and then used by various Platonic thinkers, including Patrizi, thus becoming part of the general intellectual culture in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.²³ Patrizi in this context refers to Parmenides²⁴ but in the end, he identifies the originator of this idea with Zoroaster and quotes some Oracles to support this claim (19r/v, cf. 21v). Moreover, the original Oracles describe soul's journey

²¹ A new edition of Ficino's *De Sole* and *De lumine* with commentaries was published by M. Žemla, J. Hlaváček and J. Slezáková in 2017 (Prague, Oikoymenth). For the role of Platonism, i.e. Ficino and Patrizi, in Renaissance discussions of Copernican cosmology, see Horský (1966) and (1967).

²² Fol. 16v–c: *Zor.* 190–191 (189–190) = Procl. in *Tim.* III,124.34–35; *Zor.* 193–194 (192–193) = *Orac.Chald.* fr. 200 des Places; *Zor.* 204 (203) = fr. 60; fol. 19r–b: *Zor.* 174 (173) = fr. 65.2; *Zor.* 164–165 (163–164) = fr. 68.1–2; *Zor.* 176 (175) = Procl. in *Tim.* III,43.17–18; fol. 19v–c: *Zor.* 153 (152) = fr. 51.3, adduced also in a quotation from Simp. in *Ph.* 612.29–35, 613.1–5 (Procl.), cf. Hoffmann (2014) 125–126; Simp. in *Ph.* 614.1–7 (Procl.), containing Chaldean material, cf. Hoffmann (2014) 133–135; fol. 19v–d: Simp. in *Ph.* 616.25–29 (Procl.), containing Chaldean material, cf. Hoffmann (2014) 146; Simp. in *Ph.* 616.33–35, 29–31 (Procl.) with *Zor.* 181 (180) = fr. 57, cf. Hoffmann (2014) 147; fol. 20r–b: *Zor.* (153) 152 = fr. 51.3; fol. 20v–c: Simp. in *Ph.* 614.5–7 (Procl.), containing Chaldean material, cf. Hoffmann (2014) 135; *Zor.* 126 (125) = fr. 32.1; *Zor.* 144 (143) = fr. 96.1; *Zor.* 148 (147) = fr. 66.1; fol. 20v–d: *Zor.* 27–28 (25–26) = fr. 7; fol. 22v–c: Procl. in *Tim.* II,50.20–21, I,408.12–13, III, 124.22–25, III,111.19–21, with *Zor.* 198–199 (197–198) = fr. 61c; Procl. in *Tim.* II,57.9–13, III,83.11–16, with fr. 59; fol. 22v–d: *Zor.* 25 (23) = fr. 3.2; fr. 10 = Psell., p. 182, 1145a.4 des Places = 142.20 O'Meara; *Zor.* 214 (213) = fr. 115.1; *Zor.* 154–155 (153–154) = Procl. in *Tim.* I,348.22–23 = fr. 39.4 (paraphrase); *Zor.* 41–42 (40–41) = fr. 5.1–3; *Zor.* 27–28 (25–26) = fr. 7.

²³ Cf. Lewy (2011) 430–431.

²⁴ Fol. 19r–b: Ps.-Gal. *Phil.Hist.* 50.3–5; cf. DK 28 B 8.56.

through the different layers of the cosmos and towards the divine, which is represented by the image of fire (cf. Plethon, *Decl.brev.* 21.4).²⁵ Similarly, light, whose role Patrizi analysed extensively in his *Panaugia*, would also lead us to its ultimate source. He claims that this idea is present already in the works of some of the most ancient philosophers (l. I, fol. 1r/v). In Patrizi's philosophy, just like in the writings of Ficino and other Renaissance thinkers, light thus acquires not only physical and metaphysical, but also symbolic and spiritual dimensions, and pervades all levels of the universe as he envisioned it. This is true also of the *Chaldean Oracles*, which in connection with this subject obviously were an important source of inspiration to him. He drew on the Oracles to such a large extent because he viewed them as the most ancient text where this motif appears, and thereby as the ultimate source of the long tradition of the metaphysics of light.²⁶

2. Panarchia

The second part of the *Nova de universis philosophia*, called *Panarchia* (All-Principles), develops the main metaphysical doctrines of Patrizi's philosophy. Within this part of the treatise, the *Chaldean Oracles* feature most prominently in book IX, entitled *De uno trino principio* (On the one triple principle), where no less than sixteen Oracles are quoted in quick succession within just two columns of the text (18r-v).²⁷ Patrizi's main aim here is to show the antiquity of the Christian doctrine of Trinity, traces of which he identifies already in the Oracles of Zoroaster and in Hermetic writings which, too, are extensively quoted in this book. In the original *Chaldean Oracles*, one can actually discern a kind of Trinitarian relationship between the three highest metaphysical principles. Although they do not correspond to

²⁵ Cf. Kroll (1894) 55–63, Lewy (2011), 201–204, 241–245, Majercik (1989) 21–25, 30–46, Seng (2016) 41, 43–46, 53, 72, 95–129.

²⁶ See the beginning of the *Panaugia* (fol. 2r–b): *Atque hinc est, ut veterum nonnulli dixerint lucem primam esse formam aetheris totius ac coeli. Quod quidem a Chaldaeis venit.* Cf. also Stausberg (1998) 357, 367–368.

²⁷ Fol. 18r–b: *Zor.* 1 = *Orac.Chald.* fr. 11 des Places; *Zor.* 2 = fr. 12; *Zor.* 3 = fr. 8.1; *Zor.* 5 = fr. 27; fol. 18v–c: *Zor.* 15 = fr. 73.3; *Zor.* 24 (23) = fr. 3.1; *Zor.* 27 (25) = fr. 7.1; *Zor.* 24–25 (22–23) = fr. 3.2; *Zor.* 32 (30) = fr. 39.1; *Zor.* 33 (31) = fr. 39.2; *Zor.* 43 (42) = fr. 108.1; *Zor.* 27–28 (25–26) = fr. 7; *Zor.* 38 (37) = Procl. in *Tim.* I,312.7–8; *Zor.* 39 (38) = Procl. in *Tim.* II,92.7–8; *Zor.* 80–81 (79–80) = Procl. in *Tim.* II,50.24 = fr. 42.1, 68 (introduction); *Zor.* 54 (52) = fr. 5.3–4. Cf. also fol. 21v–c: *Zor.* 2 = fr. 12; fol. 23v–d: *Zor.* 27–28 (25–26) = fr. 7.

Christian Trinitarian theology, they were sometimes interpreted in this manner through the prism of this teaching by some – not entirely orthodox – Christian thinkers.²⁸ Psellos was one of them and his commentaries, which advocated a Trinitarian interpretation of the *Chaldean Oracles*, were edited and translated into Latin by Patrizi as an introduction to his edition of the Oracles (*Zor.*, p. 124, 120).²⁹ Plethon, on the other hand, unequivocally rejected such an interpretation and his account of the Chaldean principles is strictly hierarchical.³⁰ Patrizi, in turn, follows Psellos in his reconstruction of the supreme Trinity of the highest principles. He identifies the Father (*Pater*) of the Oracles with the Father of the Christian Trinity, the Power of the Father (*Potentia Patris*) with the Son, and the so-called Second Intellect (*Mens secunda*) with the Holy Spirit. We should note, however, that in his general introduction to his version of Oracles (*Zor.*, p. 114), Patrizi claims that Zoroaster derived his teaching (*dogma*) about Trinity from Abraham. He admits that ‘through natural light we are not able to arrive to the cognition of the mystery of Trinity’ (*suo lumine naturali non posse nos devenire in cognitionem*³¹ *mysterii Trinitatis*). In Patrizi’s view, the dogma of Trinity is thus specific to the Biblical tradition, which is based on revelation and it is present already in its most ancient representative.³²

In the subsequent chapters of *Panarchia*, the Oracles of Zoroaster are quoted in support of the doctrine of the Platonic Forms and their connection to the sensible world (l. XII).³³ Patrizi adopts from Plethon (*Orac.mag.* 17.15, *Decl.brev.* 21.7–9) the interpretation of Chaldean *iynges* as the Forms (25r).³⁴ The ‘Ideas’ are explicitly mentioned also in one of the Chaldean fragments (*Orac.Chald.* fr. 37 des Places), which Patrizi quotes at length to support his claim regarding the

²⁸ Majercik (1989) 8, cf. also Seng (2016) 56–61.

²⁹ = p. 189, 1149c.5–9 des Places = 146.12–14 O’Meara; p. 194, 122.3–7 des Places = 151.18–21 O’Meara.

³⁰ Cf. Hladký (2014a) 38, with further references.

³¹ Patrizi’s original text and the Croatian edition of *Zoroaster (Zor.)* read *incognitionem*.

³² Cf. Stausberg (1998) 360–367.

³³ Fol. 25v–c: *Zor.* 98–115 (97–114) = *Orac.Chald.* fr. 37 des Places; fol. 25v–d: *Zor.* 116–117 (115–116) = fr. 77; fol. 26r–a: *Zor.* 115 = fr. 37.15–16.

³⁴ Cf. Hladký (2014a) 81–82. On the role of *iynges* in the original *Chaldean Oracles*, see Lewy (2011) 132–137, 249–252, Kroll (1894) 39–41, (2011) 132–137, 162–164, 249–252, Majercik (1989) 9–10, cf. also Seng (2016) 67–71.

antiquity of this Platonic doctrine whose origins can allegedly be traced all the way back to Zoroaster. Further on (l. XV–XVII), several *Chaldean Oracles* are quoted³⁵ to explain the relationship between the Farther and the (First) Intellect, which Patrizi identifies with the second person of the Trinity (31v–c). Moreover, based on the authority of the Oracles, Patrizi claims that inside this Intellect there are Forms which are not only intelligibles, but on a lower level also Minds, and as such capable of active cognition (32v, 34, 37v–38). It is interesting to note that Patrizi mentions Plethon at this point three times (38r/v), although it is in fact Psellos' commentary that is being quoted.³⁶ Yet while Patrizi's interpretation of this subject shares some features with Plethon's treatment of Platonic Forms, where it is claimed that Forms ought to be regarded also as intellects (*Orac.mag.* 10.7–9, 17.15–18.3), the misattribution may well have resulted from a confusion in the manuscript which Patrizi owned.³⁷ Further on, Patrizi quotes a series of Oracles to describe the way intellects descend into the corporeal world through the mediation of souls and subsequently

³⁵ Fol. 31v–c: *Zor.* 39 (38) = Procl. in *Tim.* II,92.7–8 = *Orac.Chald.* fr. 18 des Places (paraphrase); *Zor.* 27–28 (25–26) = fr. 7; fol. 32v–c: *Zor.* 49 (47) = fr. 20; fol. 32v–d: *Zor.* 99–100 (98–99) = fr. 37.2–3; *Zor.* 103–104 (102–103) = fr. 37.4–5; *Zor.* 104–107 (103–106) = fr. 37.5–8; *Zor.* 107–108 (106–107) = fr. 37.8–9; fol. 33v–c: *Zor.* 7–8 = fr. 22; fol. 34r–a: *Zor.* 48 (46) = *PT* IV,52.8; *Zor.* 49 (47) = fr. 20; *Zor.* 71 (69) = fr. 19; *Zor.* 51 (49) = fr. 17; fol. 34r–b: *Zor.* 50 (48) = Procl. *PT* IV,6.10–11; *Zor.* 6 = Dam. in *Parm.* 56.29; *Zor.* 56 (54) = Dam. in *Parm.* 58.21; *Zor.* 52 (50) = fr. 1.10; *Zor.* 57 (55) = fr. 1.1; fol. 34v–c: *Zor.* 58–59 (56–57) = fr. 1.2–3; *Zor.* 60–61 (58–59) = fr. 1.3–4; *Zor.* 61–63 (59–61) = fr. 1.5–6; *Zor.* 3–4 = fr. 8.1, 1.4, 22.2; *Zor.* 63–64 (61–62) = fr. 1.6–7; *Zor.* 65–66 (63–64) = fr. 1.7–8, 1.2; fol. 37v–d: *Zor.* 50 (48) = Procl. *PT* IV,6.10–11; fol. 38r–b *Zor.* 37 (36) = fr. 49.3; *Zor.* 75–76 (74–75) = fr. 49.3–4, Procl. in *Parm.* 1161.28–29; *Zor.* 126–129 (125–128) = fr. 32; *Zor.* 116 (115) = fr. 77.1; *Zor.* 107 (106) = fr. 37.8.

³⁶ Fol. 37v–c: Psell., p. 194, p. 122.6–7 des Places = 151.20–21 O'Meara; fol. 37v–d: p. 194, 122.7–123.1 des Places = 151.21–23 O'Meara; p. 194, 123.1–2, p. 189, 1152a.2–3 des Places = 151.23–24, 146.17 O'Meara; p. 194, 123.4–8 des Places = 151.25–152.3 O'Meara; fol. 38r–a: p. 189, 1149c.10–1152a.7 des Places = 146.15–20 O'Meara (as Plethon); fol. 38r–b: p. 190, 1152b.4–10 des Places = 147.8–12 O'Meara (as Plethon); fol. 38v–c: p. 190, 1152b.10–c.1 = 147.12–15 O'Meara (as Plethon).

³⁷ Cf. Hladký (2014a) 95–96.

take care of everything (39v).³⁸ In this way, intelligible principles become part of the sensible cosmos.

3. Pampsychia

The third and by far the shortest section of the *Nova de universis philosophia* entitled *Pampsychia* (All-Soul), is dedicated to a discussion of the soul and its relation to the cosmos. In this section, an Oracle is first quoted to support the claim that a soul (*animus*) is an entity whose nature is intermediate between things that are corporeal and those that are incorporeal. A soul is thus something that is ‘incorporeal corporeal’.³⁹ Further on (l. IV), Patrizi turns his attention to the question whether the world has a soul. To support a line of reasoning according to which the world is animated by a soul that originates from a higher soul which serves as its metaphysical source (*fontana anima*), six *Chaldean Oracles* are alluded to or quoted here (55r–56v).⁴⁰ It is claimed that the doctrine of a world soul was championed by all important ancient philosophers, the sole exception being the Atomists and Epicureans. Aristotle’s position is said to be somewhere in the middle, so that the Aristotelian world is in part animated and in part not. Not surprisingly, Patrizi finds this doctrine unsatisfactory. The Oracles of Zoroaster are, once again, used to support the venerable antiquity of this idea.

Patrizi does not, however, borrow any other themes from the Oracles’ teaching about the soul and its connection to the body, although in his edition of the Oracles, the section entitled *Anima, natura* (Soul, nature) contains about fifteen Chaldean verses (*Zor.* 144–162). It is very well possible he did not find these particular Chaldean doctrines entirely compatible with his own Christian Platonic conception of the soul. In fact, Patrizi in his *Pampsychia* seems to deliberately refrain from

³⁸ Fol. 39v–c: *Zor.* 158–159 (157–158) = *Orac.Chald.* fr. 54, 70.1 des Places; *Zor.* 153 (152) = fr. 51.3; *Zor.* 155–156 (154–155) = Procl. in *Tim.* I,349.28–29; fol. 39v–d: *Zor.* 144–146 (143–145) = fr. 96; *Zor.* 46, 147–148 (45, 146–147) = fr. 8.2-3, 69, 66; *Zor.* 54 (52) = fr. 5.3–4; *Zor.* 53 (51) = Procl. in *Tim.* III,43.17–18; *Zor.* 125 (124) = fr. 79; *Zor.* 130 (129) = Procl. *TP* IV,52.7–8; fol. 40r–a: *Zor.* 27–28 (25–26) = fr. 7.

³⁹ Fol. 52r–a: *Zor.* 147 (146) = fr. 69, cf. Blum (2014) 198.

⁴⁰ Fol. 55r–a: *Zor.* 219 (218) = *Orac.Chald.* fr. 94 des Places; *Zor.* 149–150 (148–149) = fr. 53; *Zor.* 144–146 (143–145) = fr. 96; fol. 56r–b: *Zor.* 144–146 (143–145) = fr. 96; *Zor.* 149–150 (148–149) = fr. 53; fol. 56v–c: *Zor.* 153 (152) = fr. 51.3.

developing and following all the consequences of his Platonic thoughts. This seems to be motivated by his wish to avoid a conflict with the contemporary Catholic discussion about the individual human soul. It may well be also the reason why this part of his *Nova de universis philosophia* is rather short in comparison with the other parts.⁴¹

Another prominent feature of the Oracles he may have found disturbing is the doctrine's Platonism-inspired dualism, which in the teaching of the Oracles goes as far as to speak of an enslavement of the soul in the matter. From there, it can be released through the rituals performed by theurgy.⁴² Patrizi, as Plethon before him, downplays the theurgic aspect of the Oracles. In the introduction to his edition, he feels the need to explain in what sense they should be seen as the work of the Magi, the followers of Zoroaster. He refuses to connect them with magic in the ordinary sense of the word and rejects any kind of performative magical practices. Instead, he draws on ancient authorities and claims that in the case of the Oracles, magic should be viewed as (1) a theology or knowledge and veneration of god, (2) astronomy, i.e., the study of heavens and their influence upon the earth, and (3) medicine, especially, the knowledge of the powers of nature (*Zor.*, p. 108–119).⁴³

4. Pancosmia

The most extensive and remarkable example of Patrizi's use of the *Chaldean Oracles* is found in the fourth and final section of the *Nova de universis philosophia* named *Pancosmia* (All-Cosmos). Patrizi presents here a long series of twenty-three Oracles which help him further develop the motif of divine fire. Oracles are used here to support the introduction of the most important element of Patrizi's cosmology, namely the heat (*calor*), which has its origin in the transformation of celestial light as it enters the material world (l. V, fol. 75v–76r).⁴⁴ Although various other philosophical sources, and

⁴¹ Cf. Blum (2014).

⁴² Majercik (1989) 19–46, Seng (2016) 110–129.

⁴³ ... *Magiam integram, non esse aliud, quam Dei venerationem: et coelorum, atque naturae virium cognitionem* (*Zor.* p.116). Cf. Stausberg (1998) 358–360.

⁴⁴ Fol. 75v–a: *Orac. Chald.* fr. 10 des Places = Psell., p. 182, 1145a.4 des Places = 142.20 O'Meara; *Zor.* 24–25 (22–23) = fr. 3; *Zor.* 41–42 (40–41) = fr. 5.1–3; fol. 75v–b: *Zor.* 81–83 (80–82) = fr. 42; fol. 76r–a: *Zor.* 103 (102) = fr. 37.4; *Zor.* 113

especially the influence of natural philosophy of Bernardino Telesio, can be detected here,⁴⁵ once again, it is Zoroaster who is treated as the primary and ultimate authority connected with this doctrine. This contrasts with another fundamental element of Patrizi's cosmology, namely humidity (*fluor*), which has no counterpart in the Oracles. The crucial role of water is therefore supported by other ancient authors, such as Homer and Orpheus, who speak of Okeanos as the first principle, but also by Hermes Trismegistos and the *Book of Genesis* (l. VI, fol. 78r).⁴⁶

The key quotation from the *Chaldean Oracles* on which Patrizi builds his cosmology is six verses long (*Pancosmia*, l. 7: *De mundo empyreo* [On empyrean world]), although only the first two of these verses are included in the most recent editions of the Oracles by Des Places and Majercik.⁴⁷ The rest was taken by Patrizi from Proclus' commentary on Plato's *Timaeus*.⁴⁸ The text undoubtedly contains some original

(112) = 37.13–14; *Zor.* 126 (125) = fr. 32.1; *Zor.* 128 (127) = fr. 32.3–4; *Zor.* 121 (120) = fr. 35.3; *Zor.* 134–135 (133–134) = fr. 81.1; *Zor.* 63 (61) = fr. 1.6; *Zor.* 144 (143) = fr. 96.1; *Zor.* 148 (147) = fr. 66; *Zor.* 150 (149) = fr. 53.2; *Zor.* 54 (52) = fr. 5.3–4; *Zor.* 140 (139) = fr. 2.3–4; *Zor.* 164–165 (163–164) = fr. 68.1–2; fol. 76r–b: *Zor.* 20–22 (18–20) = fr. 34.1–3; *Zor.* 171–174 (170–173) = fr. 65 (with introduction); *Zor.* 190–191 (189–190) = Procl. in *Tim.* III, 124.34–35; *Zor.* 193–194 (192–193) = fr. 200; *Zor.* 204 (203) = fr. 60; *Zor.* 260 (259) = fr. 127.

⁴⁵ On the philosophy of Telesio, see Bondi (1997) and De Franco (1997).

⁴⁶ Fol. 78r–a: Hom. *Il.* XIV.201; fol. 78r–b: Hom. *Il.* XIV.246, Orph. fr. 15 Kern = *OF* 22 Bernabé; fr. 226 Kern = *OF* 437 F Bernabé = Clem. Al. *Strom.* VI, 2, 17, 1.2–4; *Corp. Herm.* I, 4.5–7; *Ge.* 1, 2; 1, 6.

⁴⁷ Regarding the need of a new edition of the *Chaldean Oracles*, see Lecerf, Sudelli and Seng (2014) 13–14, Seng (2016) 39–40.

⁴⁸ *Zor.* 181–186 (180–185) = Procl. in *Tim.* I, 317.22–28 = *Orac. Chald.* 57 des Places, Patrizi's edition and his Latin translation:

Ἐπτά γὰρ ἐξώγκωσε πατὴρ στερεώματα κόσμων.

Τὸν οὐρανὸν κυρτῶ σχήματι ἐπικλείσας.

Πῆξε δὲ πολὺν ὄμιλον ἀστέρων ἀπλανῶν.

Ζώων δὲ πλανωμένων ὑφέστηκεν ἐπτάδα.

Γῆν δ' ἐν μέσῳ τιθεῖς, ὕδωρ δ' ἐν γαίας κόλποις,

Ἡέρα δ' ἄνωθεν τούτων.

Septem enim in moles formavit pater firmamenta mundorum.

Coelum, rotunda figura circumcludens.

Fixitque multum coetum astrorum inerrantium.

Animaliumque errantium, constituit septenarium.

Terram in medio posuit, aquamque in terrae sinibus.

Aeremque supra haec.

Chaldean material, as demonstrated already by Hans Lewy, arguably the greatest expert in the field, who claims that this is one of the six versions of a particular cosmological fragment ‘which complement each other’.⁴⁹ Patrizi was clearly even more optimistic about the extent of quotations from the Oracles in this passage by Proclus and modified the text to get more regular verses. He adopted some readings of the manuscripts (περικλείσας, ἐπτάδα) which were later rejected by Proclus’ editor Ernst Diehl but embraced by the first modern editor of the *Chaldean Oracles*, Wilhelm Kroll.⁵⁰ We will have a closer look at an important textual variant a little later.

For Patrizi, correct understanding of these Chaldean verses is of key importance and in the following chapters he quotes them repeatedly to support his innovatory cosmological claims. For instance, he corrects the interpretation proposed by Psellos in favor of Proclus’ suggestion as preserved by Simplicius) (80r–v).⁵¹ According to Patrizi, the *heptad* which appears in one of the Oracles denotes the seven corporeal worlds, divided into an empyreum, and the ethereal and elementary world. Empyreum is filled with light; three ethereal worlds are composed of ‘non-wandering’ stars (*aplanes*), of planets, and the sphere (*orbis*) of the Moon; and finally, the three elementary worlds consist of air, water, and earth. The first world is assigned to the Intellect (*Mens*), the other three ethereal worlds are controlled by the soul (*Anima*), while the last three, elementary worlds are under the

⁴⁹ Lewy (2011) 123–124, with n. 221, cf. Stausberg (1998) 351, n. 350.

⁵⁰ Kroll (1894) 38–39. Procl. *in Tim.* I,317.22–28, ed. E. Diehl:

δοκεῖ μὲν οὖν ὅσα τῷ τρίτῳ τῶν
ἀρχικῶν ὁ θεουργὸς ἀνατίθησι, ταῦτα καὶ οὗτος τῷ κόσμῳ
διδόναι καὶ δημιουργεῖν μὲν τὸν οὐρανόν, κυρτῷ σχήματι
περικλάσας, πηγνύναι δὲ πολὺν ὄμιλον ἀστέρων ἀπλανῶν, (25)
ζώνας δὲ πλανωμένων ὑφιστάναι ἐπτά, καὶ γῆν ἐν μέσῳ
τιθέναι καὶ ὕδωρ ἐν τοῖς κόλποις τῆς γῆς καὶ ἀέρα ἄνωθεν
τούτων.

25 περικλάσας CN Diehl : περικαλέσας P : περικελείσας Kroll

26 ζώνας Diehl : ζωνῶν NP :: ἐπτά Diehl : ἐπτάδα NP Kroll

⁵¹ Fol. 80r–a: *Zor.* 181–186 (180–185) = *Orac.Chald.* fr. 57, 63 des Places = Procl. *in Tim.* I,317.22–28; fol. 80r–b: Psell., p. 194, 123.8–13 des Places = 152.4–7 O’Meara; *Zor.* 153 (152) = fr. 51.3, quoted with context: Simp. *in Ph.* 613.3–5 (Procl.), cf. Hoffmann (2014) 128; fol. 80v–c: Procl. *in Tim.* III,83.12–16; fol. 80v–d: Simp. *in Ph.* 614.1–7, 616.25–29, 612.29–35 (Procl.), cf. Hoffmann (2014) 133–135, 146, 125–126.

influence of nature (*Natura*). Above the seven corporeal worlds, there is light (*lumen*), said to be ‘an image of Paternal abyss’ (*Paterni profundi imago*). The light fills space that is an immediate image of the infinite Paternal abyss, and as such necessarily also infinite. From this light, all stars derive their own particular light. Further on, Patrizi uses another passage from Proclus (preserved by Simplicius), where a variant of a long cosmological Oracle is quoted in order to argue that the ‘seven worlds’ cannot be interpreted as seven solid spheres. The light emanating from the first principle thus passes continuously through all parts of the world. It is transformed into heat and fire and contains within itself ‘the seeds of things’ (*seminibus rerum omnium pregnans*) which are carried down to the primordial humidity (*fluor*), another basic element of Patrizi’s cosmology. At the same time, the world soul animates not only the light but also the corporeal worlds (81r–82r).⁵² A close correspondence between the *Chaldean Oracles* and Patrizi’s own cosmological system is quite evident. In fact, in this particular book of *Pancosmia*, it is difficult to distinguish clearly what is Patrizi’s reception of the Chaldean system and what is his own philosophical interpretation of the Oracles he quotes because one supplements the other.⁵³

There are some more particular points related to Patrizi’s use of the Oracles within the discussion of his cosmology. For instance, in his long cosmological argument, he rejects the notion that the ‘curved shape’ (κυρτῶ σχήματι, fr. 63 des Places) into which heaven was enclosed by its creator should be interpreted as a sphere in the traditional sense (86v).⁵⁴ Based on the interpretation of another two fragments, again adopted from Proclus, Patrizi claims that heavenly bodies are made of fire that was compacted by their creator. It is thus wrong to think of them as being ‘a knot in a table’ (*nodus in tabula*),

⁵² Fol. 81r–a: Simp. in Ph. 616.33–35, 29–31 (Procl.), with Zor. 181 (180) = *Orac. Chald.* fr. 57 des Places, cf. Hoffmann (2014) 147; Simp. in Ph. 612.30–31 (Procl.), cf. Hoffmann (2014) 125–126; fol. 81r–b: Zor. 175 (174) = fr. 111; Zor. 171–174 (170–173) = fr. 65 (with Proclus’ introduction) = Procl. in Tim. II,107.8–11; fol. 81v–c: Zor. 153 (152) = fr. 51.3; Zor. 144–146 (143–145) = fr. 96; fol. 81v–d: Zor. 54 (52) = fr. 5.3–4; Zor. 213 (212) = Procl. in Tim. III,43.17–18; Simp. in Ph. 612.31–35 (Procl.), cf. Hoffmann (2014) 125–126; fol. 82r–a: Zor. 163–166 (162–165) = fr. 68 (with Proclus’ introduction) = Procl. in Tim. II,50.24–27.

⁵³ Cf. also Stausberg (1998) 352–357.

⁵⁴ Fol. 86v–c/d: Zor. 182 (181) = *Orac. Chald.* fr. 63 des Places.

that is, a firm body carried around by a sphere, because that cannot be true of the fire (88v–c, cf. 91[bis]v–c).⁵⁵ Of the various ancient philosophers, Zoroaster is again claimed – based on the Oracles quoted – to be the first to have held such a view (97r).⁵⁶ According to Patrizi, Zoroaster maintained that planets should be thought of as ‘living beings’ (ζῶα, *animalia*), not as inanimate bodies (105v).⁵⁷ There is an interesting textual point. In the long cosmological fragment adduced above, Patrizi does not read ‘bands’ but ‘living beings’. The tiny ‘nu’ which distinguishes between the *zōNōn* and the *zōōn* is highly significant here, because it marks Patrizi’s departure from a long-established ancient tradition of heavenly spheres that was questioned at his time.⁵⁸ It would be interesting to know what Patrizi actually read in his manuscript of Proclus. It is clear, however, that he opted for this textual variant because of certain broader considerations in which his reconstruction of the Chaldean cosmology played a key role, while his source, Proclus, who was himself critical of Ptolemaic astronomy, also played an important part.⁵⁹

As for the Sun, it is said, again in an agreement with the *Chaldean Oracles*, to be composed, like other planets, of fire and like them it moves in a daily and annual motion (107v–109r).⁶⁰ Moreover, similarly to the Chaldean doctrine,⁶¹ Patrizi asserts the centrality of the Sun as the source of the life in our world, although surprisingly he does not seem to support this claim by reference to any particular Oracle (109r–111r).⁶² As for the sublunary world, Patrizi interprets the Oracles as claiming that there are three elements from which the

⁵⁵ Fol. 88v–c: *Zor.* 183 (182) = Procl. *in Tim.* I.317.25; *Zor.* 190–191 (189–190) = Procl. *in Tim.* III.124.34–125.1, cf. Stausberg (1998) 349–351.

⁵⁶ Fol. 97r–b: *Zor.* 190–191 (189–190) = Procl. *in Tim.* III.124.34–125.1; *Zor.* 193–194 (192–193) = *Orac.Chald.* fr. 200 des Places = Procl. *in Tim.* III.132.32–33; *Zor.* 204 (203) = fr. 60.

⁵⁷ Fol. 105v–c: *Zor.* 184 (183) = Procl. *in Tim.* I.317.26; *Zor.* 193–194 (192–193) = *Orac.Chald.* fr. 200 = Procl. *in Tim.* III.132.32–33.

⁵⁸ For a discussion of the problem of the refusal of heavenly spheres by Patrizi, see Rossi (1977), Rosen (1984), and Vesel (2014).

⁵⁹ Cf. Siorvanes (1996) ch. 5.

⁶⁰ Fol. 108r–a: *Zor.* 193–194 (192–193) = *Orac.Chald.* fr. 200 des Places = Procl. *in Tim.* III.132.32–33; *Zor.* 204 (203) = fr. 60.

⁶¹ *Orac.Chald.* fr. 58, 60, 65, 68, 70, 111, 200 des Places, cf. Majercik (1989) *ad loc.* 166, 168–170, 184, 214, Seng (2016) 88–91.

⁶² Cf. Stausberg (1998) 351–352.

material world is composed, namely earth, water, air, and aside from them also the ether, which descends from heavens and ‘nourishes everything’ (*omnia nutriat*) (117v).⁶³ One could also mention that Patrizi quotes several *Chaldean Oracles* to support his claim of the central position of the Earth in the cosmos.⁶⁴ His reasoning is somewhat paradoxical. He argues that the Earth is at the centre of an infinite space, since from a centre, lines can be stretched to infinity (149v–d). One may note that among ancient philosophical schools, a somewhat similar position has been argued for at length by the ancient Stoics.⁶⁵

To conclude, one cannot but admire Patrizi’s ingenuity as both a scholar and a speculative philosopher, and this is holds also of his reception of the *Chaldean Oracles*. Even this brief and general overview demonstrates that he was capable of interpreting these highly ambiguous sayings with a great perspicacity, and contemporary scholarship could still perhaps profit from some of his suggestions. His use of the Oracles was, however, motivated by more than a purely academic interest. Although Patrizi naturally draws on many other sources as well, especially significant are the points where he finds the main features of the Chaldean system to be congenial to his own cosmology. It is most notably the light, which descends from the first principle to the material world and becomes progressively transformed to heat and fire. In this process, the different worlds are established, the Empyrean, the Ethereal, and the Elementary one. The same basic division of reality thus appears both in the Oracles and in Patrizi’s own philosophy.⁶⁶

It seems, however, that – apart from the obvious Platonic background – both Patrizi and the *Chaldean Oracles* shared an important source of inspiration, namely the ancient Stoic physics and its doctrine of the transformation of fire, the main cosmogonic principle. The Chaldeans most notably borrowed the Stoic notion of god conceived of as a

⁶³ Fol. 117v–c: *Zor.* 185–186 (184–185) = Procl. in *Tim.* I,317.26–28; *Zor.* 167–168 (166–167) = Procl. in *Tim.* II,50.22–23, discussed also at fol. 121r.

⁶⁴ Fol. 149v–d: *Zor.* 177 (176) = *Orac.Chald.* fr. 167 des Places; *Zor.* 185 (184) = Procl. in *Tim.* I,317.26–27, discussed also at 125v–c; *Zor.* 171–172 (170–171) = Procl. in *Tim.* II,107.8–11.

⁶⁵ Cf. Hahm (1977) 103–126, with further references.

⁶⁶ Cf. Lewy (2011), 137–139, Majercik (1989) 16–19, Seng (2016) 84–87, *pace* Kroll (1894) 31–35.

‘designing fire’ (*pyr technikon*) and extended it to the immaterial, intelligible Platonic principles. Patrizi then in this respect followed in their footsteps.⁶⁷ Moreover, as we just mentioned, Patrizi shares with the ancient Stoics the notion of an infinite space surrounding our world. The infinite space is filled by light that transforms itself into a divine fire which, broadly speaking, forms and sustains our cosmos. Patrizi himself acknowledges this, but also claims that, unlike Posidonius, ‘Other Stoics indeed asserted the existence of infinite [space]; but it is not clear by which arguments they supported it’ (*Stoici vero alii infinitum [spatim] esse affirmarunt; sed quibus rationibus id confirmarunt, nequaquam constat*) (*Pancosmia*, 64r–a, cf. 83v–d, 86v–d). In Patrizi’s *Nova de universis philosophia*, the Stoic cosmology that is basically pantheist and materialist thus has to be supplemented by Platonic metaphysics, which can demonstrate that the infinite principle of everything produces an immediate and infinite effect in our world, thus creating an infinite space (*Pancosmia*, 74, 82v–83v). In a similar vein, both Platonic metaphysical background and Stoic-inspired cosmology are intertwined already in the *Chaldean Oracles*. This may well be the reason why Patrizi found these enigmatic utterances so attractive and used them so extensively to support his reasoning in his *Nova de universis philosophia*.

⁶⁷ Cf. Kroll (1894) 55, 67–68, Lewy (2011) 430–431, Majercik (1989) 6, 17, 138, 143, 171, Tardieu (1980) 209–210, Seng (2016) 41.

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