

## Allegra Iafrate

### PYTHAGORAS' INDEX

#### DENOTING AUTHORSHIP IN SORTES BOOKS\*

Manuscript Ashmole 304<sup>1</sup>, copied by Matthew Paris during the first half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, is, to my knowledge, the first extant illustrated example of a *sortes* book<sup>2</sup>. Matthew, who was

\* I would like to express my gratitude to Beth Saunders, who kindly helped me revise the style and the language of this contribution.

1. W. H. Black, *A Descriptive, Analytical, and Critical Catalogue of the Manuscripts Bequeathed unto the University of Oxford by Elias Ashmole, Esq., MD, FRS, Windsor Herald, also of some Additional mss. contributed by Kinglsey, Lhuyd, Borlase, and Others*, Oxford 1845, 214; L. Brandin, «Les Prognostica du MS Ashmole 304 de la Bodleienne», in *A Miscellany of Studies in Romance Languages and Literatures, offered to L. E. Kastner*, M. Williams, J. A. de Rothschild eds., Cambridge 1932, 57-67; T. C. Skeat, «An Early Medieval Book of Fate: The *Sortes XII Patriarcharum*. With a Note on Books of Fate in General», *Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 3 (1954), 41-54; F. Wormald, «More Matthew Paris Drawings», *Walpole Society Journal*, 31 (1942-1943), 109-12; R. Vaughan, «The Handwriting of Matthew Paris», *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society*, 1 (1953), 376-94; N. Morgan, *Early Gothic Manuscripts*, Oxford 1982, I, 140-41; E. Montero Cartelle, A. Alonso Guardo, *Los libros de suertes medievales: las Sortes Sanctorum y los Prenostica Socratis Basilei, estudio, traducción y edición crítica*, Madrid 2004 [a reprint as separate volumes with additions and corrections in the collection «Divinatoria», edited by S. Rapisarda and R. Trachsler, Paris is forthcoming]; A. A. Guardo, «Los *Prenostica pitagorice consideracionis*: un libro de suertes medieval. Estudio introductorio», *Studi medievali*, 47 (2006), 839-53; Id., «La *Divinatio ciceronalis*. Un libro de suertes medieval. Estudio introductorio», in *De lo humano a lo divino en la literatura medieval: santos, ángeles y demonios*, J. S. Paredes Núñez ed., Granada 2012, 17-34; A. Iafrate, «“Si sequeris casum, casus frangit tibi nasum”: la raccolta delle sorti del MS Ashmole 304», *Aevum*, 85 (2011), 457-88; Ead., «The Workshop of Fortune: St Albans and the *Sortes Manuscripts*», *Scriptorium*, 66 (2012), 55-87; Ead., «Of Stars and Men: Matthew Paris and the Illustrations of MS Ashmole 304», *Journal of the Courtauld and Warburg Institutes*, 76 (2013), 139-77.

2. For the tradition of Western *sortes* books during the Middle Ages, see

chronicler and illuminator at St Albans<sup>3</sup>, not only transcribed six fortune-telling tracts, but also provided the text with an original *corpus* of illustrations that he himself almost completely invented by adapting and re-elaborating known iconographies for a *genre* that was previously unlikely to be illustrated. *Sortes* were in fact a divinatory typology, susceptible to be condemned rather than adorned. Given this lack of a specific tradition, bare texts were handed down, with rare exceptions, until the Renaissance, when these books underwent a shift of perspective and were more and more employed in courtly and lay contexts, often as a pastime. Thus *sortes* became luxury items decorated by important artists, and in this way are akin to tarot decks<sup>4</sup>.

for instance J. D. F. Sotzmann, «Die Loosbücher des Mittelalters», *Serapeum*, 11 (1850), 49–80 and *ibid.*, 12 (1851), 305–16, 337–42; J. Bolte, «Zur Geschichte der Loosbücher», appendix to G. Wickram, *Werke*, J. Bolte ed., Tübingen 1903, IV, 276–348, especially 278–80; Id., «Zur Geschichte der Punktier und Loosbücher», *Jahrbuch für historische Volkskunde*, 1 (1925), 184–214; «Loosbücher», in *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens*, H. Bächtold-Stäubli ed., Berlin 1927–1942, 1385–401; P. W. van der Horst, «Sortes: Sacred Books as Instant Oracles in Late Antiquity», in *The Use of Sacred Books in the Ancient World*, L. V. Reutgers, P. W. van der Horst, H. W. Havelaar, L. Teugels eds., Leuven 1998, 143–73; K. Bernard, *Compter, dire et figurer. Édition et commentaires de textes divinatoires et magiques en occitan médiéval (XIII<sup>e</sup>-XV<sup>e</sup> siècle)*, thèse de doctorat sous la direction de M.-F. Notz, Université Michel de Montaigne, Bordeaux 3, décembre 2007; Ead., «Jouer sur les mots et jouer avec les mots, des aspects ludiques de l'art divinatoire des livres de sorts: exemples occitans», *Interstudies*, 5 (2009), 54–65; Ead., *Les livres de sorts occitans*, Paris forthcoming; for an interesting overview of the genre in a broader context, see M. Strickmann, *Chinese Poetry and Prophecy. The Written Oracle in East Asia*, Stanford 2005.

3. R. Vaughan, *Matthew Paris*, Cambridge 1958; S. Lewis, *The Art of Matthew Paris in the Chronica Majora*, Aldershot 1987.

4. Y. M. Brett, *Astronomical and Astrological Illustration in Printed Books of the Later Renaissance with Special Reference to Libri delle sorti*, M. Phil. Thesis, Warburg Institute, London 1975; R. Navarro Durán, *Libro de las suertes*, Madrid 1986; R. Navarro Durán, «Libros de suertes», *Ludica*, 3 (1997), 65–79; M. C. Van Hasselt, «L'imaginaire astrologique des recueils de sorts italiens (1480–1551)», *Ludica*, 9 (2003), 14–33; S. Urbini, *Il libro delle sorti di Lorenzo Spirito Gualtieri*, Modena 2006; L. Dolce, *Terzetti per le «Sorti»*. *Poesia oracolare nell'officina di Francesco Marcolini*, P. Procaccioli ed., Treviso-Roma 2006; F. Marcolini, *Le sorti intitolate giardino d'i pensieri* [facsimile of 1540 edition], with a note by P. Procaccioli, Treviso-Roma 2007; *Studi per le Sorti. Gioco, immagini, poesia oracolare a Venezia nel Cinquecento*, P. Procaccioli ed., Treviso-Roma 2007.

Ashmole 304 is a manuscript full of interest. Given the specific aim of our conference, however, my paper today will deal only with the problematic issue of «authorship» in *sortes* books. I would say that, given the nature of this codex, which is a small but rich collection of fortune-telling tracts, the conclusions we can draw from Ashmole 304 easily apply to the broader context of the *genre*.

When we address the question of how *sortes* books relate to the concept of canonicity, our manuscript provides us with a double set of answers; on one hand, our inferences depend on the evidence given by the texts; on the other, we can also interpret what the illustrations created by Matthew Paris tell us. In particular, we will analyze some of the aspects related to the author-portraits that he depicted at the beginning of each tract<sup>5</sup>. Had we not lost several pages of the codex, we could carry out this analysis on the sole basis of the Ashmole manuscript. Unfortunately, it has been partially damaged and we need to resort to its *descriptus*, Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Digby 46, which is a faithful and complete copy of it<sup>6</sup>.

Let us start with the texts.

By definition, with the term «Canon» we usually mean a series of texts of high value, guaranteed by a religious, scientific or philosophical *autoritas*<sup>7</sup>. *Sortes* are quite the opposite. They are anonymous collections of responses of scarce literary value, by no means fixed because often manipulated, moreover transmitting heterodox truths. Despite this apparent distance from a

5. For a more complete series of illustrations, see the website of the Bodleian Library: <http://2bodley30.bodley.ox.ac.uk>. For a full facsimile of the manuscript, see A. Iafrate, *Le moine et le hasard*, Paris forthcoming.

6. It is a 14<sup>th</sup> century manuscript, for its description see W. Macray, *Catalogi codicum manuscriptorum bibliothecae bodleianae pars nona codices a viro clarissimo Kenelm Digby, Eq. Aur., anno 1634 donatos, complectens: adiecto indice nominum et rerum, corrigenda et addenda* by R. W. Hunt, A. G. Watson, Oxford 1999 [1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1883], 42, 177; for the relationship with Ashmole see A. Iafrate, «The Workshop of Fortune: St. Albans and the Sortes Manuscripts», *Scriptorium* 66 (2012) 55–87.

7. The Greek «Canon» literally means «list», and the Canon was the list of fundamental texts to be read from everyone who wanted to practise literature in a regulated, institutional context. It is an idea originated in Alexandria in the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, see *Canon* in S. Hornblower, A. Spawforth eds., *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, Oxford 1996<sup>4</sup>, 275–76.

respected tradition, however, *sortes* books are factually engaged in a conscious dialogue with the idea of «canonicity». In order to survive oblivion and ecclesiastical censorship and to be more appealing to those intended to refer to them, these collections of texts that were often jotted down in the margins of manuscripts, and which were handed down from Late Antiquity without any specific attribution (with rare exceptions), began, at least from the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century onwards, to be ascribed with regularity to authoritative figures.

*Sortes* cannot be considered «astrological» works in strict terms. In the introductions that frequently accompany the responses – introductions that were often purposefully fabricated much later than the texts – we do find astronomical terminology or scientific references but these elements were not necessary to make the book work. They could be used, it is true, to calculate the proper day on which to make the interrogation but they were additional elements, not belonging to the original mechanism of *sortes*, that helped creating a pseudo-astrological aura around these texts. In fact, although *sortes* books are based on a hidden mathematical principle, they purport to provide answers thanks to a random process, decided by astral influences or fate. For this reason, the composite «canon» of the pseudo-authors of *sortes* depended on a criterion that associated them with the sphere of learned magic, philosophy, astronomy or prognostication. The presence of these pseudo-authors probably eased the circulation of the texts, guaranteed the truthfulness of their content and also implicitly suggested their powerful effects.

The notion of «authorship» in *sortes* book, then, played a role in terms of legitimization and justification of texts, whose content was often considered suspiciously.

These names, however, were also chosen because they would evoke a specific provenance and contribute to creating a magical or an exotic aura.

In other words, *sortes* represent a perfect case-study of pseudo-epigraphy or the Medieval concept of authorship<sup>8</sup>.

8. The issue is quite broad: for a good introduction on the topic see A. Hölter, J. Leonhardt, «Forgery (“pseudoepigrafa”)», in *Brill's New Pauly*, M. Landfester ed., H. Cancick, H. Schneider ads., Leiden-Boston 2006-2011, II,

In our manuscript, in order of appearance we find the *Experimentarius Bernardini Silvestri*, the *Prenostica Socratis basilei*, the *Prenostica Pitagorice consideracionis*, the *Sortes Duodecim Patriarcharum*, the *Quaestiones Albedaci* and the *Divinacio ciceronalis*; Bernardus Silvester, Socrates, Pythagoras, the Patriarchs, Albedacus and Cicero are all credited as authors of the prognostication lines that make up these fortune-telling tracts. Let's try to see what are the reasons for this choice.

Bernardus Silvestris, poet and neoplatonic philosopher, related to the circle of Chartres, active during the 12<sup>th</sup> century, had written, among other things, the *Cosmographia*<sup>9</sup>, a long poem on the creation of the world, which included a long section on the sky and the stars, and also the *Mathematicus*<sup>10</sup>, a poem which dealt with the problem of free will.

The presence of Socrates, as famous philosopher of Antiquity, should not surprise us. What is more puzzling, though, is the reference to his kingship expressed by the Greek term *basileus*. My idea is that this appellation was attached to Socrates because of the source of this *sortes* book. As I have demonstrated elsewhere<sup>11</sup>, this *sortes* typology ultimately derives from an Arabic model also known as *qur' at al-muluk*, that is *Sortes of the kings*, because the judges who enounce the prognostication lines are all kings of some distant realms. This tract also circulated under attribution to caliph Al-Mamun, the famous Abbasid 9<sup>th</sup> century ruler. What I think, then, is that the translation, possibly undertaken in some cultural crossroad, like Alexandria, in Egypt, preserved the attribution to a king but inserted the name of Socrates, whose proverbial wisdom was very well known in the Western world<sup>12</sup>.

407-21; in addition to the bibliography listed, see also *Fakes and Forgers of Classical Literature*, J. Martínez ed., Madrid 2011.

9. Bernardus Silvestris, *Cosmographia*, P. Dronke ed., Leiden 1978.

10. D.M. Stone, «Bernardus Silvestris. *Mathematicus*. Edition and Translation», *Archives d'histoire Doctrinale et Littéraire du Moyen Âge*, 63 (1996), 209-83; P. Dronke, *Fabula. Explorations into the Uses of Myth in Medieval Platonism*, Leiden-Köln 1974.

11. Iafrate, «“Si sequeris casum”».

12. M. Camille, «The Dissenting Image: a Postcard from Matthew Paris», in *Criticism and Dissent in the Middle Ages*, R. Copeland ed., Cambridge 1996, 115-50.

The case of Pythagoras is slightly different from the others. The Greek philosopher was indeed considered a magician during the Middle Ages<sup>13</sup>. In *sortes* books, moreover, the very mechanism of response-finding is based on a mathematical principle that could recall the famous Pythagorean table.

Michael Meerson, for instance, maintains that the problematic reference found in Vitruvius's *De Architectura* to precepts composed of «a cube of 216 lines», written by those who followed Pythagoras and his teachings, should be identified with *sortes*-books<sup>14</sup>.

Leaving this question suspended, it is however undeniable that a very early connection between Pythagoras and *sortes* has been firmly established. The first trace of this relationship is to be found in the so called *sortes Astrampsychi*, a Latin translation of the Greek 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D. text found on Egyptian papyrus, where, in the prefatory letter that accompanied the text, Astrampsycus, in presenting his work to Ptolemy, stated that Pythagoras was the inventor of this oracle typology<sup>15</sup>.

The same attribution is also stated by Ibn al-Nadim, in his famous index *Kitab al-Fihrist* written during the 10<sup>th</sup> century, where it is said that Pythagoras was the author of the first *sortes* book<sup>16</sup>. Even in the Arabic world, then, he was considered the father of the genre.

13. J. Levy, *Recherches sur les sources de la légende de Pythagore*, Paris 1927; M. W. Dickie, *Magic and Magicians in the Greco-Roman World*, London 2001; C. Riedweg, *Pythagoras: His Life, Teaching and Influence*, Ithaca, NY 2005; for a good bibliographical survey, see also the item *Pythagoreanism* in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (online resource), particularly points 4.5 and 5: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/pythagoreanism/#mar>, published 2009, revised 2010; F. Jacob, «Die Pythagoreer: Wissenschaftliche Schule, religiöse Sekte oder politische Geheimgesellschaft?», in Id. *Geheimgesellschaften: Kulturhistorische Sozialstudien / Secret Societies: Comparative Studies in Culture, Society and History*, Würzburg 2013, 17-34.

14. M. Meerson, «Book is a Territory: a Hebrew Book of Fortune in Context», *Jewish Studies Quarterly*, 13 (2006), 388-411.

15. For the most complete work on the *Sortes Astrampsychi* see F. Naether, *Die Sortes Astrampsychi. Problemlösungsstrategien durch Orakel im römischen Ägypten*, Tübingen 2010, 63-64.

16. *The Fihrist of al-Nadim: A Tenth-Century Survey of Muslim Culture*, B. Dodge ed. and transl., London-New York 1970, II, 737.

This attribution then, which is suggested by the very mechanism informing these texts and certainly favoured by the cultural background, rich with the Hermetic, Gnostic and Pythagorean influences that characterized Egypt at the time when the first papyrus appeared, was further reinforced by the presence of other magic tables attributed to the Greek philosopher, like the so called *Sphere of Pythagoras* or *Sphere of Life and Death*, broadly employed during the Middle Ages to foretell the outcome of a disease or of a fight<sup>17</sup>.

It is worth wondering, at this point, what is it that John of Salisbury actually meant by *tabula pitagorica* in the famous passage concerning the different practitioners of magic:

sortilegi (...) qui, sub nome fictae religionis superstitiosa quadam observatione rerum pollicentur eventus, quod genus sortes apostolorum et prophetarum et dividendum, et inspectio tabulae, quae Pitagorica appellatur, observatio quoque cuiusque casus in rei de qua quaeritur significatione<sup>18</sup>.

Is he referring only to *sortes* books, like the *Prenostica Pitagorice consideracionis*, as Jean Boudet thinks<sup>19</sup>, or is he actually mentioning two different kinds of divination, operated with written support, i.e. the *sortes* and the *sphere of Pythagoras*, as William Klingshirn states<sup>20</sup>?

Whatever the answer – and I personally agree with the latter hypothesis – it is very likely that the pseudo-authority of Pythagoras, employed in both genres, prompted John of Salisbury to mention them together, creating some confusion in our interpretation.

As for the Patriarchs, they are mentioned as authors of a book of *sortes* as early as the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Earlier examples

17. E. Wickersheimer, «Figures médico-astrologiques des IX<sup>e</sup>, X<sup>e</sup> et XI<sup>e</sup> siècles», *Janus*, 19 (1914), 1-21.

18. John of Salisbury [Ioannis Saresberiensis], *Policraticus I-IV*, K. S. B. Keats-Rohan ed., Turnhout 1993.

19. J.-P. Boudet, *Entre science et «nigromance». Astrologie, divination et magie dans l'Occident médiéval (XII<sup>e</sup>-XV<sup>e</sup> siècle)*, Paris 2006, 95-96.

20. W. E. Klingshirn, «Defining the *sortes sanctorum*: Gibbon, Du Cange and Early Christian Lot Divination», *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 10 (2002), 113-14.

of *sortes* of the same kind were mostly anonymous. It is possible that their names were inserted because there were twelve sets of fortune-telling lines and it would have been easy to associate such a number with the Patriarchs. However, there is a long-standing tradition, dating from Late-Antiquity, that associated the Twelve sons of Jacob with the genre of prediction. The Greek apocryphal work known as *Testamenta Duodecim Patriarcharum*, a collection of Jewish prophecies, attributed to the Patriarchs on their deathbed<sup>21</sup>, and probably composed around the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D., had endured a steady popularity in the Middle East; and even in the Western world, the fame of the Patriarchs as prophets was known even earlier than the translation into Latin, carried out by bishop Robert Grosseteste. Matthew Paris borrowed his copy to transcribe it in 1236<sup>22</sup>:

episcopus Lincolniensis Robertus, vir in Latino et Graeco peritissimus, *Testamenta Duodecim Patriarcharum* de Graeco fideli interpretatione transtulit in Latinum, quae per multa tempora incognita et abscondita fuerunt per invidiam Judaeorum, propter manifestas prophetias de Salvatore in eis contentas. Sed Graeci, omnium scriptorum diligentissimi investigatores, primi in notitiam illius scripti devenientes illud de hebraeo in graecum transtulerunt et penes eos usque in nostra tempora reservarunt<sup>23</sup>.

If the original attribution of the twelve sets of fortune-telling responses probably depended on a numerical coincidence (the same *sortes* were also known as *Sortes Apostolorum*, because the Apostles were, again, twelve), it is undeniable that the fame of the Patriarchs as soothsayers was probably enhanced by their role in the *Testamenta*.

Not too long ago, for instance, Suzanne Lewis, the author of the beautiful monograph on the illustrations of Matthew Paris<sup>24</sup>,

21. *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs: A Critical Edition of the Greek Text*, M. de Jonge ed., in collaboration with H. W. Hollander, H. J. de Jonge, Th. Korteweg, Leiden 1978.

22. «Hoc quoque scriptum adquisivit frater Matheus a memorato episcopo et manu sua ad opus claustralium scripsit», Matthew Paris, *Chronica Majora*, H. R. Luard ed., 6 vols., London 1872-1882, IV, 232.

23. *Ibid.*

24. Lewis, *The Art of Matthew Paris*, 389.



mistook the abovesaid *Testamenta Patriarcharum* mentioned by Paris in his *Chronica* for the *Sortes Duodecim Patriarcharum* in MS Ashmole. She thought, just because of the recurrence of the name of the Patriarchs, that the textual work was the same. She even used the year of the translation recorded by Matthew in the chronicles to fix a *terminus post quem* for the *sortes* in Ashmole manuscript. Such a confusion is quite revealing and shows how strongly the power of names can act.

Finally, Cicero, was known to have written the *Somnium Scipionis*, with the famous passage on celestial contemplation, and he could also be associated with astronomy, having translated Aratus's work on constellations<sup>25</sup>. Quite likely, however, the *Divinatio ciceronalis* was intended to echo Cicero's actual work *On divination*, although the similarities between the two works end with the title<sup>26</sup>. The rethor point of view, in fact, was highly skeptical with regard to several aspects of oracle practises, astrology and predictions and, in the dialogue, he refutes the favourable position of his brother Quintus. This case of pseudo-epigraphy is particularly instructive, although it is hard to say with what degree of consciousness it was constructed. We do not really know whether or not whoever inserted the title knew the content of Cicero's work. If he did, it is interesting to note that he consciously mystified the Canon. However, he might have simply known that a work on divination circulated under the authority of the rhetor and realized that it could have been a safe move to disguise the *sortes* book in that way. The power of Cicero's name would have protected the *sortes* and, as we have just seen, we should not underestimate the power of attraction of authoritative names.

As you have probably noticed, I have skipped Albedacus. In our manuscript, in fact, the tract related to him is missing the first pages, precisely those handing down the title. MS Digby 46

25. Cicéron, *Les Aratea*, V. Buescu ed. and transl., A. Ernout pref., Bukarest 1941 [reprint Hildesheim 1966].

26. The reference edition in English is Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, vol. XX, 1923; Latin text with facing English translation by W. A. Falconer. A new edition in two volumes by D. Wardle, Oxford 2008 (only first edited).

transmits the title *Quaestiones Albedaci*, a name that recurs in other *sortes* collections, where it is sometimes also written as *Albedatus*, for paleographical reasons. This obscure figure, for whom I could not find any precise historical correspondence, except vague references in other *sortes* manuscripts where he is described as «vates persarum»<sup>27</sup>, could very well have been invented. All I could find is a feeble connection with the name Badakh, which might be related to the region of Badakhshan, an area on the silk road between north-eastern Afghanistan and south-eastern Tajikistan, historically famous for the trade of precious stones, like rubies and lapis lazuli<sup>28</sup>.

The name of the area (Badakṣān) derives from a Sasanian official title which indicated a person of high rank, usually an inspector, probably because the country had belonged, or had been assigned as a fief, to a person holding this title. Although not always part of the Persian empire, the area has always been under Persian cultural influence. In this case, the name Albedacus, or, maybe better, Al-Badakh, even if it was a fictitious one, might indeed evoke a Persian provenance to a Medieval audience.

What is more interesting, though, is that MS Digby 46 indicates *Quaestiones Albedaci* as title of the work but displays, as supposed author, the illustration of Anaxagoras.

From an historical point of view, Anaxagoras did take a deep interest in celestial matters, but he is virtually unknown in Arabic literature and only marginally associated to these matters in most Western sources during the Middle Ages. Augustine, John of Salisbury, Vincent of Beauvais, John of Wales, all mention him<sup>29</sup>, but from what they report it would have been hard to connect the presocratic philosopher with the sky and its mysteries. The only source that, to my knowledge, could have actually provided enough material to make such a connection may not

27. For instance, Cambridge, UL Magdalene College, MS Pepys 911; Paris, BnF, MS Lat. 7486; Erfurt, UFE/G, MS Amplon. Oct. 88.

28. Marco Polo, for instance, mentions it in his travel chronicles, see *Le divisament dou monde*, G. Ronchi, C. Segre eds., Milano 1982, 360-62, 364.

29. For a general survey on most of the sources of ancient philosophical knowledge in the Middle Ages, see G. Piaia, «*Vestigia Philosophorum*»: *il Medioevo e la storiografia filosofica*, Rimini 1983, and on Anaxagoras in particular see 24, 25, 30, 52, 54, 83, 92, 93, 130.

even have been available to Matthew Paris: namely, the *De vita et moribus philosophorum*, a Latin translation of the compilation of Diogenes Laertius, the first Latin extant version of which was erroneously attributed to the scholastic British philosopher Walter Burley (ca. 1275-1344/5). In the chapter dedicated to Anaxagoras, we find several references to his deep interest in the heavens:

Hic cum admodum dives esset, possessionibus derelictis, studendi gracia diuturnum peregrinacionem assumpsit. Et cum a quodam criminaretur, dicente: «Non est tibi cure patrie», extenso brachio et ostenso celo, ait: «Immo michi admodum patria cure est». (...) Interrogatus aliquando, ad quid factus fuisset, «Ad contemplacionem» inquit «solis et lune et celi». (...) Hic studiosus fuit valde et multa de motu celi et cursu siderum et natura rerum scripsit<sup>30</sup>.

Even if this specific version of the work was not available during Matthew's lifetime, the text had been circulating in Greek since at least the 12<sup>th</sup> century, and it is known that several adaptations, all now lost, had been translated into Latin before the 13<sup>th</sup> century<sup>31</sup>. This includes the one made by Henricus Aristippus during the 12<sup>th</sup> century, and dedicated to an Englishman, which makes it even more likely that Matthew could know it<sup>32</sup>. It is likely that the association between Anaxagoras and the prognostication tract was prompted by this kind of anecdotal knowledge.

30. Gualteri Burlaei *Liber de Vita et Moribus Philosophorum*, mit einer Altspanischen Übersetzung der Eskurialbibliothek, H. Knust ed., Tübingen 1886, 80-4 [reprint Frankfurt a. M. 1964].

31. See the introduction by H. S. Long of 1972's reprint of Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, R. D. Hicks ed. and transl., Cambridge, MA 1925, I, XXVI.

32. V. Rose, «Die Glücke im Diogenes Laërtius und der Alte Übersetzer», *Hermes*, 4 (1866), 367-97; C. H. Haskins, D. Lockwood, «The Sicilian Translators of the Twelfth Century and the First Latin Version of Ptolemy's *Almagest*», *Harvard studies in classical philology*, 21 (1910), 75-102. In the Abbey of St Albans there was a text by Aristippus, namely Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Selden Supra 24. It is a 12<sup>th</sup> century manuscript transmitting the *De Caelo* by Pseudo-Avicennas and the *Meteora* by Aristotle, followed by three chapters from the *Excerpta metheorum* by Avicennas; the fourth book of the *Meteora* is a translation from Greek by Henricus Aristippus (ca. 114r). See R. M. Thomson, *Manuscripts from St. Albans Abbey, 1066-1235*, Woodbridge 1982, I, 110-11, n. 56.

In this particular case, then, our manuscript shows us a clear discrepancy between the «textual canon» and the «visual canon». Since these portraits were inserted by Matthew Paris himself, we have to conclude that he wanted to replace Albedacus with Anaxagoras. Why he did so cannot be proven, but it is likely that Anaxagoras was preferred because he was thought to be more familiar to the public the text was intended for. The elements that surround *sortes* books have to be calibrated with precision, in order to evoke the power of otherness – the unknown, the foreigner always looks more dangerous, more evil – without seeming too strange. That's why they were sometimes claimed to be translated from Arabic, even if they were not.

This change, then, should not surprise us, also considering that *Sortes* as a genre continuously underwent modification<sup>33</sup>.

Our manuscript is a good case-study and I am going to propose you few examples drawn from it.

The main modification regarding these works concerns the language in which they were written and circulated. In MS Ashmole, for instance, I found evidence of untranslated Hebrew words. Despite several layers of misunderstanding caused by the difficulties of transcribing foreign and unknown words, it is clear that the figures responsible for the response lines of the *Prenostica Pythagorice considerationis* and also those of the *Quaestiones Albedaci* correspond to an original series of 36 Hebrew birds that have been partially translated, whenever the Latin correspondent was known, or simply transliterated. Interestingly enough, among Hebrew *sortes*, one can find the original model on which our two tracts are based<sup>34</sup>: it is a text named *Sefer Goralot Sa' adya Gaon*<sup>35</sup>.

33. Within the limited range of sole MS Ashmole, we find traces of several other untranslated languages (Hebrew, Catalan, Arabic), riversifications of the same text, simplification, adaptation or complication of the tract structure, blatant fabrications and additions. For a detailed analysis of these elements, see Iafate, «Si sequeris casum».

34. Although, it should be clear from the table that Albedacus's version sometimes differs.

35. E. Burkhardt, «Hebräische Losbuchhandschriften: zur Typologie einer Jüdischen Divinationsmethode», in *Jewish Studies Between the Disciplines. Papers in Honor of Peter Schäfer on the Occasion of His 60<sup>th</sup> Birthday*, K. Herrmann, M. Schlüter, G. Veltri eds., Leiden-Boston 2003.

PYTHAGORAS' INDEX: DENOTING AUTHORSHIP IN *SORTES* BOOKS

	Pythagoras	Albedacus	Sa'adya Ga'on	translation <sup>36</sup>
1	columba	gosal	gozal	young pigeon
2	filius columbe	iona	ben yonah	dove's chick
3	coccinus	chore	qore'	partridge
4	anser	duſon	'awwazah	goose
5	guiza	guizan	gizah	hawk
6	turtur	coter	tor	turtle dove
7	gallus	tergon	tarnegol	rooster
8	vespa	mery	dvorah	bee
9	arquia	tuira	kerukyah	crane
10	pavo	thoas	ṭavas	peacock
11	coturnix	salaph	šelaw	rock partridge
12	arbe	arben	'arbeh	locust
13	aia	aya	'ayah	honey buzzard
14	effroa	effrea	'efroaḥ	chick
15	corvus	socoth	'orev	crow
16	agauf	gaab	ḥagav	grasshopper
17	batharana	jarra	bat hay'anah	desert bird of prey
18	vespertilio	athalaph	'aṭalef	bat
19	zerzir	jonas	zarzir	starling
20	rahaḥam	zelem	raḥam	Egyptian vulture
21	peret	edir	peres	bearded vulture
22	haziza (hatiza)	siza	ḥasidah	stork
23	nisus	hes	neš	sparrowhawk
24	zahamat (tahamat)	cauin	taḥamas	nightjar
25	aquila	rioth	nešer	vulture
26	ozma (ozina)	moch	'oznyah	black vulture
27	daa	saph	da'ah	kite
28	saaf	coph	šahaf	seagull
29	coz	riel	kos	little owl
30	salac	salhac	šalak	osprey
31	sefuf	nasmon	yanšuf	owl
32	tinsemet	synay	tinšemet	barn owl
33	anafā	zebal	'anafah	heron
34	diquifat	asroth	dukyfat	hoopoe
35	caaz	euen	qa 'at	pelican
36	arfārperet	oreb	parperah	butterfly

36. In this column I provided the translation of the Hebrew list of names; they often correspond to the Latin form of the *Prenostica pitagorie considerationis*.

Also in the *Divinacio ciceronalis* there are traces of unstratolated ornithological terms<sup>37</sup>: this time, the original must have been a romance language, and it is even possible that the work originated in a specific area of the Iberian peninsula, namely La crau, close to the Pirenees, because in all of Europe one of the bird species is likely to be found only there<sup>38</sup>.

These *sortes* were not only translated but also, sometimes, versified. A good case is represented by the *Experimentarius*, where we find in sequence two versions of the same tract: the first one is in rhythmical hexameters, while the second is in leonine hexameters. The same process applies also to the already mentioned Pythagoras and Albedacus' *sortes*. The latter, in fact, represents the hexameter version of the former, which is in prose.

The structure of the *sortes* can also slightly vary, by adding one or more redirecting tables; the responses are not altered but an extra passage is added, so that the *quaerens* takes a longer time to reach the answer: an example of this is provided, once more, by the Albedacus tract, which represents a slightly more complicated version of Pythagoras.

*Sortes* were also sometimes simplified, or utterly adapted; Alonso Guardo has shown, for instance, that the exotic names of plants, cities and animals, of clear Arabic origin, that recur in the *Prenostica Socratis basilei*<sup>39</sup> (which must have been translated from a version of the Arabic *sortes* known as *qur'at 'l-muluk*)<sup>40</sup> in other manuscripts belonging to other branches of the same textual tradition have been substituted by more familiar terms, thus providing an easier version for a Latin-speaking audience, so that it would not be confused by an excess of strangeness.

Introductions, as I said earlier, were often fabricated and attached to the responses; Charles Burnett, for instance, has

37. Some of these terms appear to have a relation with Spanish, French or Catalan: *pinzón* (Sp.), *pinson* (Fr.), *pinsà* (Cat.) = «finch»; *ganga* (Sp., Fr. and Cat.) = «sandgrouse family»; *tudó* (Cat.) = «wood pigeon»; Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Digby 46, cc. 78r-79v.

38. <<http://www.pajaricos.es/mas/masgangaiberica.htm>>

39. Cartelle, Guardo, *Los Libros de suertes medievales*, 118-20.

40. For the tradition of *sortes* in the Islamic world, see G. Weil, *Die Königslose. J. G. Wetzsteins freie Nachdichtung eines arabischen Losbuches*, Berlin-Leipzig 1929.

found three different versions prefacing the *Experimentarius*<sup>41</sup>. In my opinion, moreover, Matthew Paris substituted and rewrote the introduction of both Socrates and Pythagoras' tracts. Given this fluid panorama, then, it was certainly possible to change the name of the authors or the title of the work. Sometimes this happened according to the cultural context in which *sortes* were employed: Saadya Gaon, the famous 10<sup>th</sup> century scholar, would have been more familiar for a Jewish audience, while Pythagoras would have been better known in the Western world; Anaxagoras, as we have seen, at some point was preferred to Albedacus. The *sortes* of Bernardus Silvester also circulated under the name of king Amaury or under the attribution to a certain Alkardianus<sup>42</sup>.

To some extent, then, this whole process of alteration implied a double level of consciousness. On one hand, we have to imagine an audience ready to accept these attributions; on the other, though, there must have been people who altered, fabricated and falsified these attributions on purpose, perfectly knowing they were not true, only trying to «sell» their product better, to protect it from censorship or to make it more attractive for various reasons. Whatever the case, some of these attributions prevailed in modern scholarship as well: in 1930 Saxl lamented that the *Experimentarius*, an astrological work by Bernardus Silvester, still awaited publication<sup>43</sup>; Thorndike included it in the catalogue of canonical works by Bernardus<sup>44</sup>; Mirella Brini-Savorelli built a whole critical edition on these premises, believing it was a geomantic treatise, and even Peter Dronke went as far as interpreting the opening *caveat* of the tract within the broader context of Bernard's philosophical system of beliefs in relation with the

41. C. Burnett, «What is the *Experimentarius* of Bernardus Silvestris? A Preliminary Survey of the Material», *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge*, 44 (1977), 79-125.

42. *Ibid.*, 89 and ff.

43. The reference is in the article *The Belief in Stars in the Twelfth Century* published in 1959; however I have read it in translation in «La fede negli astri nel dodicesimo secolo», in *La fede negli astri dall'Antichità al Rinascimento*, S. Settis ed., Torino 1985, 185.

44. L. Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science*, New York 1923-1958, II, 112, 114-18.

issue of predestination<sup>45</sup>. It was thanks to a study made by Charles Burnett that we could finally put things back to place<sup>46</sup>.

Even though it is possible to detect differences within the same tradition, and to identify several layers of progress, adaptations, substitutions or implementations, we do not really know who made these changes; whether it was a work carried out in specialized *scriptoria* or specific centres of production or whether it was the undertaking of a single practitioner or editor. Given the complexity of some of these interventions, such as the translations from languages like Arabic or Hebrew, it is however reasonable to situate these centres in Spain or possibly Sicily, where several scholars of different cultures were available and could have easily provided linguistic support. Also, it is in the courts of kings like Alphonso X or Frederick II that we might imagine an interest in pseudo-astrological material like this<sup>47</sup>.

In any case, the path of *sortes* books in Europe is so long and full of detours and their circulation so broad that the same tract could be modified at different stages. I believe that most of these changes took place between the 12<sup>th</sup> and the 13<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Let's now turn to the illustrations of our manuscript. The remarks we can make about the «visual canon» of our authors will necessarily be more precise, because we can date the inser-

45. M. Brini Savorelli, «Un manuale di geomanzia presentato da Bernardo Silvestre da Tours (XII secolo): l'*Experimentarius*», *Rivista critica di storia della filosofia*, 3 (1959), 283-342; Dronke, *Fabula*, particularly ch. 4, 119-43.

46. Burnett, «What is the *Experimentarius*»; Id., «The *Sortes regis Amalrici*: an Arabic Divinatory Work in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem?», *Scripta Mediterranea*, 19-20 (1998-1999), 229-37.

47. On this broad topic, see for instance the second volume of *Micrologus* dedicated to *Le scienze alla corte di Federico II*, particularly S. Caroti, «L'astrologia nell'età di Federico II», *Micrologus*, 2 (1994), 57-73; C. Burnett, «Michael Scot and the Transmission of Scientific Culture from Toledo to Bologna via the Court of Frederick II Hohenstaufen», *ibid.*, 101-26; S. Ackermann, *Sternstunden am Kaiserhof: Michael Scotus und sein Buch von den Bildern und Zeichen des Himmels*, Frankfurt 2009. Under Alfonso's reign several scientific and astrological books and treatises were compiled or translated, such as: *Los quatro libros de la ochava espera*, *Esfera armilar*, *Astrolabio redondo*, *Astrolabio plano*, *Ataçir*, *Lámina universal*, *Açafeha*, *Quadrante pora rectificar*, *Relogio de la piedra de la sombra*, *relogio del agua*, *relogio dell argen vivo*, *relogio de la candela*, *relogio del palacio de las oras*, *Taulas alfonsies*, *Lapidario*, *Libro de las formas et de las imágenes*, *Picatrix*, *Libro de las cruces*, *Axedres*, *dados e tablas*, *Libro conplido en los judizios de las estrellas*.



tions of the illustrations to the first half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, place them in the scriptorium of St Albans, and we can explain their details within the definite perspective of Matthew Paris and in comparison with the rest of his *corpus*. However, as I said at the beginning of this paper, Matthew's illustrative effort constitutes a veritable exception: our inferences, then, are limited to this specific case. Given the absence of a broad figurative tradition, they apply only to the few manuscripts that copied, totally or partially, the illustrations of MS Ashmole, the already mentioned MS Digby 46 and MS Pepys 911 (Cambridge, Magdalene College Library).

I drew inspiration for the title of my paper from the following reference: «effigies vero pitagorica, que in medio unius circulorum depingitur, indice digito tibi huius consideracionis numerum qui infra duodenarium clauditur et rubeo colore prothrahitur demonstrabit»<sup>48</sup>. These instructions are to be found in the introduction that prefaces Pythagoras' prognostications and I believe – as I have demonstrated elsewhere<sup>49</sup> – that they were composed by Matthew himself, who substituted the extant explanatory rule with the one we read, because he wanted to make explicit reference to the *volvelle* which accompanied the *sortes*. The *volvelle*, that he himself decorated, are devices used to obtain the first random number, necessary to activate the process of interrogation. Unfortunately we have lost the original revolving discs of paper or parchment of the manuscript but we can still have an idea of how the drawing might have looked like by comparing the written description with the still extant wooden *volvella* in MS Digby 46.

*Volvelle* were usually simple, plain numbered discs, such as, for instance, that in MS Pepys 911. It is interesting to note, then, that Matthew extended the figurative program even to these devices, decorating them with the portraits authors of the *sortes* which would have engaged, from the very beginning of the proceeding, in a «lively» dialogue with the *quaerens*, by literally indicating him his starting number.

As I said before, Matthew Paris chose to depict the pseudo-authors at the beginning of his related tract, showing them while

48. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 304, c. 40v.

49. See my «The Workshop of Fortune», as in n. 1.

S.C. 1647

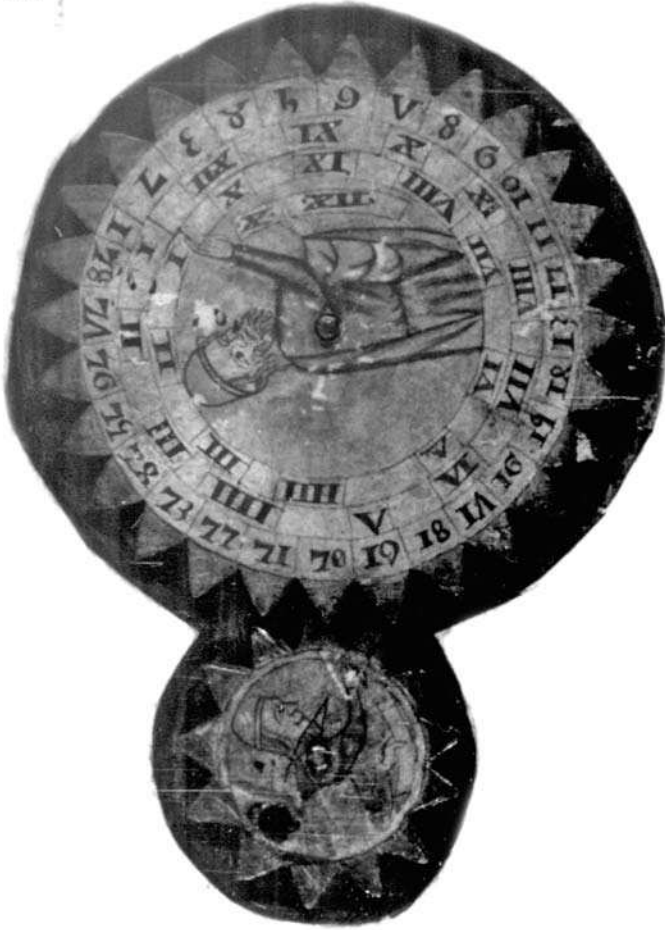


Fig. 1. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Digby 46, inside cover.

writing or in the act of beginning to write, following different models of typical «scribe» iconography, with the implication that the text we see them composing is probably the one we are using. A consequence of the structure of these works, then, is a substantial *mise en abîme* of the proceeding itself, a fact that can be noted, for instance, in the case of the *Sortes Duodecim Patriarcharum*, where the answer is said to be found «in libro Judae» (or in another book of the other sons of Jacob): it is the very manuscript the *quaerens* holds in his hands that becomes, from time to time, the book of Benjamin, the book of Isachar or any other book he is directed to answer.

Each *auctor* representation is bordered by the same kind of frame that appears in several other works by Matthew Paris, especially those enclosing his most important, official and monumental figures<sup>50</sup>.

What all these images have in common is that the use of the frame immediately ennobles the figures enclosed: in all these cases Matthew is either representing a sacred or a distinguished figure (kings, saints, the Virgin, etc.) or he is setting up a formally organized lay-out of the page. In any case, the frame delimits a different space, an official and a trustworthy one<sup>51</sup>.

Scribe iconographies and official layout evoke illustrious figures in the panorama of Western Medieval art history: be they Evangelists or humble monks, all figures, endowed with quills and scrapers, are usually engaged in the fundamental act of writing, sometimes composing, sometimes transcribing. Here, however, there can be no doubt: we are in the presence of actual authors and Matthew, for the figure of Socrates goes as far as

50. For example, he employs them to frame the Virgin Enthroned and the series of English kings (London, BL, MS Royal 14 C VII, cc. 2r and 8v), for the «Veronica» (BL, MS Arundel 157, c. 2r), for the illustrations of the *Vitae Offarum* (BL, MS Cotton Nero D I, cc. 2r-5v), for his hagiographical cycles (Dublin, Trinity College, MS 177), for the Christ enthroned or for the portrait of John of Wallingford (London, BL, MS Cotton Julius D VII, cc. 42v, 60v).

51. Very different from the spatial freedom accorded to the illustrations of his marginal drawings in the *Chronica Majora* (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 26 and 16 and London, BL, MS Royal 14 C VII).



Fig. 2. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 304, c. 31v.

employing the iconography of St Matthew inspired by the Angel, to render the striking couple Socrates-Plato.

We can then assert that these author-portraits match the canonical scribal iconography<sup>52</sup>. However, Matthew does endow his portraits with some specific attributes. I am referring to the choice of headgear displayed in the manuscript. In Medieval art, hats and caps are often used to denote a specific provenance or to identify a social status or a class of people.

The headdress of the Patriarchs, for instance, is chosen purposefully and with a definite attention to realistic details. In her article on the representations of Jewish headgear in MS Cotton Claudius B iv, Ruth Mellinkoff<sup>53</sup> showed that the characteristic pointed hat began to be associated with representations of Jews from the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, probably because Jews were required to wear specific clothes, hats included, by canonical laws. However, this *cornutum pileum*, as it was called, varied in shape, sometimes terminating in a knob, although it could always be classified as pointed, and it is usually found in 12<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> manuscript illustrations. We have two perfect examples of this typology in the representation of the Patriarchs. However, Mellinkoff found evidence of other, less common Jewish head-dress, namely a kind of rounded, cap-shaped, narrow-brimmed hat, whose earliest appearance occurred around 1025-1050 in the illustrations of the Pentateuch of MS Cotton Claudius B IV, that were probably inserted by the illuminator, along with other details, which faithfully represented «architecture, furniture, customs and costume of early-11<sup>th</sup> century England»<sup>54</sup>. Notably, some examples of this rare typology can be found also in the famous St Albans's Psalter. From the 13<sup>th</sup> century onwards, according to the scholar, the rounded cap was almost always replaced by the above-mentioned pointed hat. However, as you can see, Matthew Paris employed them both in characterizing his figures, certainly for variety's sake. In any case, the conscious employment of a

52. In the photographic collection at the Warburg Institute, in fact, they are to be found under the entry "scribe".

53. R. Mellinkoff, «The Round, Cap-shaped Hats Depicted on Jews in BM Cotton Claudius B. IV», *Anglo-Saxon England*, 2 (1973), 155-65.

54. *Ibid.*, 158.

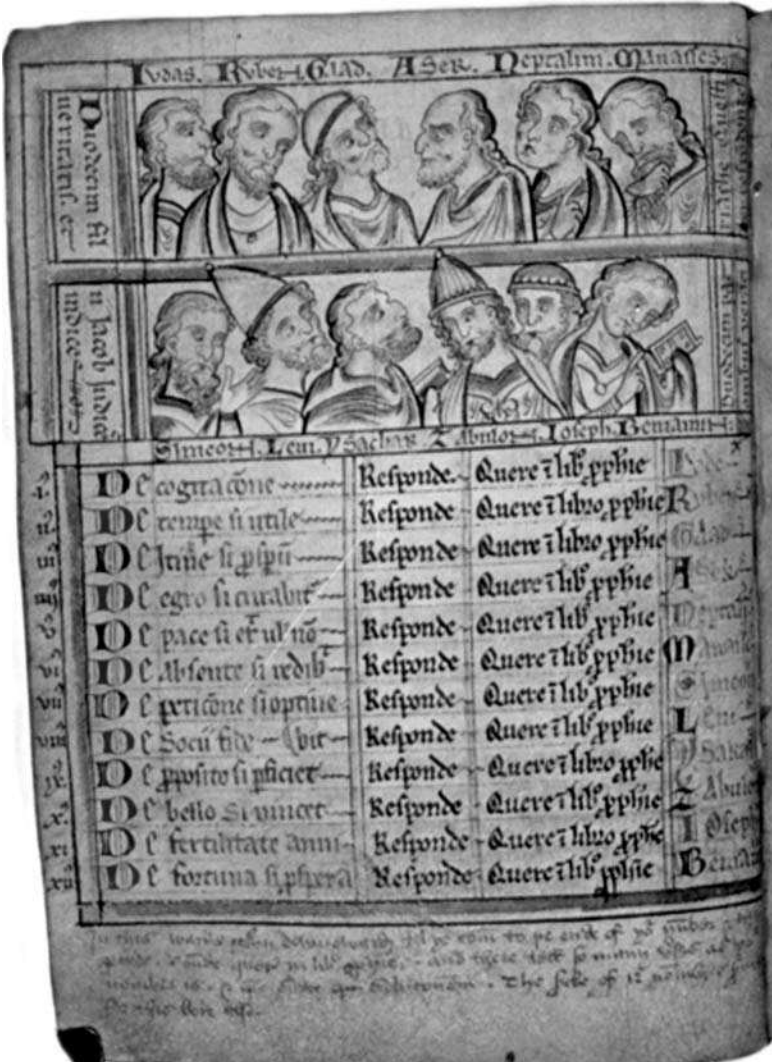


Fig. 3. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 304, c. 52v.

double iconography, which referred to Jewish people, clearly demonstrates his will to give a specific geographical characterization to his authors.

Similarly, we find that Euclides, Socrates and Pythagoras are all wearing a Phrygian cap, clearly recognizable by its characteristic flap. Although not too common in Western Medieval Art, when employed, the Phrygian cap usually represented «Oriental» types, following the custom of Byzantine Art. This type perpetuated a long extant tradition of Roman art, which assigned the Phrygian cap to people perceived as foreigners, those coming from the Eastern borders of the Empire<sup>55</sup>. The best examples apply to the iconography of the Magi, especially between the 5<sup>th</sup> and the 9<sup>th</sup> century<sup>56</sup>. It is quite rare, however, to find this characterization in manuscripts of the Western tradition, unless their scribes were drawing on Byzantine models or were somehow aware of the geographical «otherness» of some Biblical figures. During the Crusades, especially from the 13<sup>th</sup> century onwards, moreover, these elements of attire – the legacy of Roman's perception of the East – were substituted by other details, typical of the new inhabitants of the Eastern territories: turbans and conical helmets replaced the Phrygian caps.

Matthew's figurative choice, then, is a rare and a conscious one and it is a recurrent motif in his *corpus* of illustrations. Phrygian caps are to be found, for instance, also on the head of the Pelagians who dispute with bishop Germanus in ms Trinity College 177 at Dublin<sup>57</sup>, where they are needed to better characterize the visual opposition of the two fronts. These attributes do not seem to imply any judgemental statement but only a different geographical provenance. Possibly, a visual model could have been prompted by some of the 12<sup>th</sup> century illustrations of MS

55. M. Canepa, *The Two Eyes of the Earth: Art and Ritual of Kingship between Rome and Sasanian Iran*, Berkeley and Los Angeles 2009, 34, 37 and relative footnotes.

56. R. Bartal, «The Image of the Oriental: Western and Byzantine Perceptions», in *East Meets West: Art in the Land of Israel*, A. Ovadia, N. Kennan-Kedar eds., Tel Aviv 1998, 131–48.

57. *Illustrations to the Life of St Alban in Trinity College, Dublin, MS E I 40*, W. R. L. Lowe, E. F. Jacob eds., [facs.], Oxford 1924; see also Dublin, Trinity College, MS 177, c. 54v.

Bodley 614 (cc.1v-2r), where two scholars, in foreign disguise, are depicted while making calculations and measurements.

In conclusion, we can say that, in rendering his authors, Matthew Paris is trying to be «philologically» consistent with the specific features of these figures, denoting them as foreign, exotic, Oriental people. The deviation from usual scribal iconography, represented by the headdress, immediately defines them as bearers of a different knowledge. In a textual context where, as we have seen, the mixture of exoticism and magic must always be carefully balanced – enough to evoke but not so much that it results obscure – Matthew showed his audience the reassuring image of canonical scribes, while also clearly denoting their otherness.

#### ABSTRACT

This essay deals with the notion of autorship in *sortes* books, particularly as it emerges from the analysis of Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 304, a 13<sup>th</sup> century collection of different texts, copied and illustrated by Matthew Paris. *Sortes* are a typically pseudoepigraphical genre, usually attributed to figures noted for their astrological, magical or philosophical knowledge.

In this sense, they prove interesting within a discourse on canonicity, precisely because they are constantly in dialogue with the established tradition. The essay will try to show what are the strategies employed by the editors of these compilations in order to create a product that will result appealing to a certain kind of audience, both with alterations of the rubrics or titles, but also through some peculiar illustrative choices.

Allegra Iafrate

Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa  
a.iafrate@sns.it