

A black and white photograph of a classical marble sculpture of a human face. The focus is on the nose, which is broken and reconstructed with a different piece of stone. The eyes are closed, and the surface of the marble is cracked and weathered.

VARIOUS

***DE TRIBUS
IMPOSTORIBUS,
A. D. 1230:
THE THREE
IMPOSTORS***

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IMPOSTORS***

Various

De Tribus Impostoribus, A. D. 1230: The Three Impostors

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This pamphlet in its present form is the result of an inquiry into the characters represented in a historical grade of the Ancient Accepted Scottish Rite, and the probability of their having existed at the date mentioned in the said grade. Few appeared to have any very clear notion of the relation of the characters to the period—Frederick II. being confounded with his grand-father, Frederick Barbarossa—and the date of the supposed foundation of the Order of Teutonic Knights, 1190, being placed as the date of the papacy of Oronata, otherwise Honorius III. Inquiry being made of one in authority as to the facts in the case—he being supposed to know—elicited the reply that the matter had been called to his attention some months previous by an investigator—now deceased—but the matter had been dropped. It was also surmised by the same authority that an error might have been made by one of the committee having ritualistic matter in charge—but he, having also been gathered to his fathers, was not available for evidence.

It is stated that the action took place when Frederick II. was Emperor of Germany, and Honorius III. presided over spiritual conditions; but this Pope, according to *Haydn's Dictionary of Dates*, reigned 1216–1227, and the dissertation on the pamphlet names Gregory IX., successor to Honorius, (1227–1241) as the Pope against whom the treatise was written. The infamous book mentioned in the representation no one seemed to have any knowledge of. Inquiry made concerning the treatise at various libraries supposed to possess it, and of various individuals who might know something of it, elicited but the information that it was purely “legendary,” that, “it had no existence except by title,” and that “it was an item of literature entirely lost.”

Having been a book collector and a close reader of book catalogs for over twenty-five years, I had never noted any copy offered for sale, but a friend with the same mania for books, had seen a copy mentioned in a German catalog, and being interested in “*de tribus Impostoribus*” for reasons herein mentioned, had sent for and procured the same—an edition of a Latin version compiled from a Ms. 1598, with a foreword in German. The German was familiar to him, but the Latin was not available.

About the same time I found in a catalog of a correspondent of mine at London, a book entitled “*Les Trois Imposteurs. De Tribus Impostoribus et dissertation sur le livre des Trois Imposteurs, sm. 4to. Saec. XVIII.,*” and succeeded in purchasing it.

The manuscript is well written, and apparently by two different hands, which would be probable from the facts set forth in the “Dissertation.” A copy of the translation from the Latin is probably deposited in the library of Duke Eugene de Subaudio as set forth in the colophon at end of the manuscript.

The manuscript is written in the French of the period, and is dated in the colophon as 1716. The discovery of the original Latin document is mentioned in the “Dissertation” as about 1706. It has been annotated by another hand, as shown by foot notes, and several inserted sheets containing notes in still another hand, were written evidently about 1746, as one of the sheets is a portion of a letter postmarked *4e Aout* in latter year.

I append a bibliography from Weller's Latin reprint of 1598 which will show that the pamphlet has “been done before”; but it will be noted that English versions are not so plenty as those in other tongues, and but one is known to have been printed in the United States.

I must acknowledge my indebtedness to Doctissimus vir Harpocrates, Col. F. Montrose, and Maj. Otto Kay for valued assistance in languages with which I am not thoroughly familiar, and also to Mr. David Hutcheson, of the Library of Congress, for favors granted.

Ample apologies will be found for the treatise in the several introductions quoted from various editions, and those fond of literary curiosities will certainly be gratified by its appearance in the twentieth century.

A. N.

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In 1846, Emil Weller published "*De Tribus Impostoribus*," and also a later edition in 1876, at Heilbronn, from a Latin copy of one of the only four known to be in existence and printed in 1598. The copy from which it was taken, consisting of title and forty-six leaves, quarto, is at the Royal Library at Dresden, and was purchased for one hundred gulden.

The other three, according to Ebert in his "Bibliographical Lexicon," are as follows: one in the Royal Library at Paris, one in the Crevanna Library and the other in the library of Renouard.

An edition was published at Rackau, in Germany, in 1598, and Thomas Campanella (1636), in his "*Atheismus Triumphatus*," gives the year of its first publication as 1538.

Florimond Raimond (otherwise Louis Richeome,) claims to have seen a copy owned by his teacher, Peter Ramus, who died in 1572.

All the talk of theological critics that the booklet was first printed in the seventeenth century, is made out of whole cloth.

There is nothing modern about the edition of 1598. It may be compared, for example, with Martin Wittel's print of the last decade of the sixteenth century, by which it is claimed that it could not have been printed then, as the paper and printing of that period closely resembles that of the eighteenth century.

With the exception of the religious myths, few writings of the dark ages have had as many hypotheses advanced in regard to origin as there have been regarding this one.

According to John Brand it had been printed at Krakau, according to others, in Italy or Hungary as a translation of an Arabic original existing somewhere in France.

William Postel mentions a tract "*de Tribus Prophetis*," and gives Michael Servetus, a Spanish doctor, as the author.

The Capuchin Monk Joly, in Vol. III of his "Conference of Mysteries," assures us that the Huguenot, Nic. Barnaud, in 1612, on account of an issue of "*de Tribus Impostoribus*," was excommunicated as its author.

Johann Mueller, in his "Besiegten Atheismus," (Conquered Atheism), mentions a certain Nachtigal who published at Hague, in 1614, "*De Trib. Imp.*," and was therefore exiled.

Mosheim and Rousset accuse Frederick II as the author with the assistance of his Chancellor, Petrus de Vineis. Vineis, however, declares himself opposed even to the fundamental principles of the book, and in his "*Epist. Lib. 1, ch. 31, p. 211*," says he never had any idea of it.

Others place the authorship with Averroes, Peter Arretin and Petrus Pomponatius. Heinrich Ernst accuses the above mentioned Postel. Postel attributes it to Servetus, who, in turn, places it at the door of the Huguenot Barnaud.

The instigator of the treatise, it is claimed, should have been Julius Cesar Vanini, who was burned at Toulouse in 1619, or Ryswick, who suffered at the stake in Rome in 1612.

Other persons accused of the authorship are Macchiavelli, Rabelais, Erasmus, Milton (John, born 1608,) a Mahometan named Merula, Dolet, and Giordano Bruno.

According to Campanella, to whom the authorship was attributed occasionally, Muret, or Joh. Franz. Poggio, were responsible. Browne says it was Bernhard Ochini, and Maresius lays it to Johann Boccaccio.

The "three cheats" are Moses, Jesus and Mahomet, but the tracts of each of the latter alleged authors treat only of Moses, of whom they say that his assertions in Genesis will not hold water, and cannot be proved.

Weller, in his edition of 1876, speaking of the copy of 1598, says that this issue should never be compared with any of the foregoing.

Many authors have written "*de Tribus Impostoribus*" because they had some special object in view; for instance, John Bapt. Morinus, when he edited, under the name of Vincentius Panurgius, in Paris, 1654, an argument against Gassendi, Neure, and Bernier.

Joh. Evelyn with a "*Historia de tribus hujus seculi famosis Impostoribus*," Padre Ottomano, Mahomed Bei, otherwise Joh. Mich. Cigala, and Sabbatai Sevi (English 1680, German 1669,) ¹ Christian Kortholt "*de Tribus Impostoribus Magnus*," (Kiel 1680 and Hamburg 1701,) against Herbert, Hobbes and Spinosa, Hadrian Beverland, Perini del Vago, Equitis de Malta, "*Epistolium ad Batavum in Brittania hospitem de tribus Impostoribus*," (Latin and English 1709.)

Finally, Michael Alberti, under the name of Andronicus, published a "*Tractatus Medico-historicus de tribus Impostoribus*," which he named the three great Tempters of Humanity: 1. Tea and Coffee. 2.

Laziness. 3. Home apothecaries.

Cosmopoli Bey (Peter Martin Roman), issued at Russworn in Rostock in 1731, and a new edition of same treatise—*De Trib. Imp.*—1738 and 1756.

For a long time scholars confused the genuine Latin treatise with a later one. De la Monnoye fabricated a long dissertation in which he denied the existence of the original Latin edition, but received a well merited refutation at the hands of P. F. Arpe.

The false book is French—“*La vie et l’esprit de Mr. Benoit Spinoza.*”² The author of the first part was Hofrath Vroes, in Hague, and the second was written by Dr. Lucas. It made its first appearance at Hague 1719, and later in 1721, under the title “*de Tribus Impostoribus,*” *des Trois Imposteurs*. Frankfort-on-the-Main at the expense of the Translator (*i. e.* Rotterdam.)

Richard la Selve prepared a third edition under the original title of “The Life of Spinoza,” by one of his Disciples. Hamburg (really in Holland,) 1735.

In 1768 there was printed by M. M. Rey, at Amsterdam, a new edition called a “Treatise of the Three Impostors;” immediately after another edition appeared at Yverdoner 1768, another in Holland 1775, and a later one in Germany 1777.

The contents of “*L’esprit de Spinoza*” (German) by Spinoza II, or Subiroth Sopim—Rome, by Widow Bona Spes 5770—(Vieweg in Berlin 1787,) are briefly Chap. I, Concerning God. Chap. II, Reasons why men have created an invisible Being which is commonly called God. Chap. III, What the word Religion signifies, and how and why so many of these Religions have crept into the world. Chap. IV, Evident truths. Chap. V, Of the Soul. Chap. VI, Of Ghosts, Demons, etc. Then follows fifteen chapters which are not in the treatise (? Edition 1598.)

The following became known by reason of peculiarities of their diction: 1. *Ridiculum et imposturae in omni hominum religione, scriptio paradoxa, quam ex autographo gallico Victoris Amadei Verimontii ob summam rei dignitatem in latinum sermonem transtulit* ††† 1746. Which according to Masch consists of from five to six sheets and follows the general contents, but not in the order of the original edition. 2. A second. *Quaedam deficiunt, s. fragmentum de libro de tribus impostoribus*. Fifty-one pages is a fragment. 3. One mentioned by Gottsched. *De impostoris religionum breve. Compendium descriptum ab exemplari MSto. quod in Bibliotheca Jo. Fried. Mayeri, Berolini Ao. 1716, publice distracta deprehensum et a Principe Eugenio de Sabaudia 80 Imperialibus redemptum fuit.* (forty-three pages.) The greater part of the real book in thirty-one paragraphs, the ending of which is *Communes namque demonstrationes, quae publicantur, nec certae, nec evidentes, sunt, et res dubias per alias saepe magis dubias probant, adeo ut exemplo eorum, qui circulum currunt, ad terminum semper redeant, a quo currere inceperunt. Finis.*³ A German translation of this is said to be in existence. 4. According to a newspaper report of 1716, there also should exist an edition which begins: *Quamvis omnium hominem intersit nosse veritatem, rari tamen boni illi qui eam norunt, etc.*,⁴ and ends, *Qui veritatis amantes sunt, multum solatii inde capient, et hi sunt, quibus placere gestimus, nil curantes mancipia, quae praejudicia oraculorum—infallibilium loco venerantur.*

5. Straube in Vienna made a reprint of the edition of 1598 in 1753.

6. A new reprint is contained in a pamphlet edited by C. C. E. Schmid and almost entirely confiscated, entitled: *Zwei seltene antisupernaturalistische manuskripte*. Two rare anti-supernaturalistic manuscripts. (Berlin, Krieger in Giessen, 1792.)

7. There recently appeared through W. F. Genthe an edition, *De impostura religionum compendium s. liber de tribus impostoribus*, Leipsic, 1833.

8. Finally, through Gustav Brunet of Bordeaux an edition founded upon the text of the 1598 edition was produced with the title, *de Tribus Impostoribus*, MDIIC. Latin text collated from the copy of the Duke de la Valliere, now in the Imperial Library;⁵ enlarged with different readings from several manuscripts, etc., and philologic and bibliographical notes by Philomneste Junior, Paris, 1861 (?1867). Only 237 copies printed, and is out of print and rare.

9. An Italian translation of the same appeared in 1864 by Daelli in Milan with title as above.

10. A Spanish edition also exists taken from the same source and under the same title. London (Burdeos) 1823.

Note. All the preceding Bibliography is from the edition of Emil Weller, Heilbronn 1876.—A. N.

The only edition known to have been printed in the United States was entitled “The Three Impostors.” Translated (with notes and illustrations) from the French edition of the work, published at

Amsterdam, 1776. Republished by G. Vale, Beacon Office, 3 Franklin Square, New York, 1846, 84pp. 12°. A copy is in the Congressional Library at Washington.
From this I transcribe the following notes:

NOTE BY THE AMERICAN PUBLISHER.

Table of Contents

We publish this valuable work, for the reasons contained in the following Note, of which we approve:

NOTE BY THE BRITISH PUBLISHER.

The following little book I present to the reader without any remarks on the different opinions relative to its antiquity; as the subject is amply discussed in the body of the work, and constitutes one of its most interesting and attractive features. The Edition from which the present is translated was brought me from Paris by a distinguished defender of Civil and Religious Liberty: and as my friend had an anxiety from a thorough conviction of its interest and value, to see it published in the English Language, I have from like feelings brought it before the public, and I am convinced that it is eminently calculated to promote the cause of Freedom, Justice and Morality.

J. Myles.

PREFACE BY THE TRANSLATOR.

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The Translator of the following little treatise deems it necessary to say a few words as to the object of its publication. It is given to the world, neither with a view to advocate Scepticism, nor to spread Infidelity, but simply to vindicate the right of private judgment. No human being is in a position to look into the heart, or to decide correctly as to the creed or conduct of his fellow mortals; and the attributes of the Deity are so far beyond the grasp of limited reason, that man must become a God himself before he can comprehend them. Such being the case, surely all harsh censure of each other's opinions and actions ought to be abandoned; and every one should so train himself as to be enabled to declare with the humane and manly philosopher

"Homo sum, nihil humani me alienum puto."

Dundee, September 1844.

The Vale production is evidently translated from an edition derived from the Latin manuscript which is the basis of the translation given in this volume. The variations in the text of each not being important, but simply due to the different modes of expression of the translators—the ideas conveyed being the same.

The Treatise in Vale's edition concludes with the following:

"Happy the man who, studying Nature's laws,
Through known effects can trace the secret cause;
His mind possessing in a quiet state,
Fearless of Fortune, and resigned to Fate."
—Dryden's *Virgil. Georgics Book II, l. 700.*

There is also in the Library of Congress a volume entitled "*Traité des Trois Imposteurs.*" *En Suisse de l'imprimerie philosophique*—1793. Boards 3½ × 5¾ inches, containing the Treatise proper 112 pp. *Sentimens sur le traite des trois imposteurs*, (De la Monnaye) 32 pp. *Response a la dissertation de M. de la Monnaye* 19 pp. signed J. L. R. L. and dated at Leyden 1 Jan., 1716, to which this note is appended: "This letter is from Sieur Pierre Frederic Arpe, of Kiel, in Holstein, author of the apology of Vanini, printed at Rotterdam in 8°, 1712." The letter contains the account of the discovery of the original Latin manuscript at Frankfort-on-the-Main, in substance much the same as the translation given in this edition.

In the copy at the Congressional Library, I find the following manuscript notes which may be rendered as follows: "Voltaire doubted the existence of this work, this was in 1767. See his letter to his Highness Monseigneur The Prince of ——. Letter V, Vol. 48 of his works, p. 312."

See Barbier *Dict. des ouv. anon.* Nos. 18250, 19060, 21612.

De Tribus Impostoribus. Anon.

L'esprit de Spinoza trad. du latin par Vroes.

In connection with this latter note, and observing the name written at end of the colophon of the manuscript from which the present edition is translated, it is probable that this same *Vroese* was the author of another translation.

Another remarkable copy is contained in the Library of Congress, the title page of which is displayed as follows: