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## *Zoroastrianism Special*

# HIMALAYAN AND CENTRAL ASIAN STUDIES

**Editor** : **K. Warikoo**
**Guest Editor** : **Shernaz Cama**





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**HIMALAYAN AND CENTRAL ASIAN STUDIES**

*Zoroastrianism Special*

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# Message

*India and Iran, are the 'we together', in the pure sunlight of language, with the same or similar divinities, apotheosized concepts and values, wrapped in the inheritance of memories, spanning vast expanses along rivers and creating hydronymy from the Don to the Danube, the Gathas and Vedic hymns with the mind prints of common essence, Iranians translating Sanskrit sutras into Chinese, Iranians doctors curing the son of lord Krishna, or the Physician of Lord Buddha studying under white-clad masters: there are endless sharings throbbing with harmony.*

Prof. Lokesh Chandra

# *Editor's Page*

Prophet Zarathushtra composed his *Gathas* around 1600 B.C. Three Empires followed the teachings of Ahura Mazda, Lord of Light and Wisdom and spread across the known world from West to East. While studies on Zoroastrian thought and philology comprise a large corpus today, the spread of the empires, their influence on thought, ritual, politics and culture across Central Asia is still a matter of discovery and research.

In this millennium attention has been focused on these regions, tracing tangible and intangible culture from imperial Iran across the fluid boundaries created during the late Parthian and Sasanian periods. Recent discoveries by international teams from varying backgrounds of academic study have found rich artistic and linguistic material along the Silk Route. So far, these discoveries remain in volumes on Zoroastrian studies. This edition of the *Journal of Himalayan and Central Asian Studies* brings some of these findings to a wider audience. This will help make links between multicultural concepts, oral traditions as well as iconography. These multicultural links will be taken forward to a much later colonial and post-colonial period of history when adaptation and absorbing new influences once again becomes vital to the creation of a Parsi Zoroastrian culture. It is this multiculturalism, the ability to straddle different geographies and adapt to historical circumstances, while maintaining a core essence, which has been a feature of the Zoroastrian identity throughout its long history.

There has been a conscious decision to explore orality and current practices in areas such as Azerbaijan, where the Lahij community continues aspects of Zoroastrian culture, to examine metal work and textile fragments of parts of China which have recently entered public and private collections, as well as look at how adaptation to colonization created a hybrid identity which flowered in thought as well as art forms.

Many of the contributors to this issue are young and looking enthusiastically at an ancient world. Their viewpoints provide us with new areas which need examination and questions which still need to be answered. Since the authors come from different regions of the world, spellings and notations have been retained in the way they are used by these authors for authenticity. This issue of the *Journal of Himalayan and Central Asian Studies* seeks to create interest in scholars and students beyond the world of Zoroastrian studies and take research further on this vast subject.

**Dr. Shernaz Cama**

# Legendary Women of the *Shahnameh*: An Epitome of Courage and Wisdom

Md. Arshadul Quadri

*ABSTRACT*

*Shahnameh, the fruition of thirty years of labour of Firdausi, attains an exalted position in world literature. Firdausi has earned immortal fame for himself through this masterpiece. As the book of kings, the voluminous work contains an account of more than fifty kings of the legendary, semi-historical and historical period of Iran, taking into its gamut a wide range of issues from politics, administration to love and vengeance. Women are conspicuous by their strong presence in the Shahnameh. Women in the Shahnameh, especially in the legendary period, are strong and resilient. In fact, the women in the Shahnameh give prominence to various stories of the said epic. Women like Faranak, Rudabeh, Sindukht, Tahmineh, Gurdafrid, Jarireh, Farangis, Manizeh and Katayun fill the beautiful mosaic of the Shahnameh with their colorful presence. Tragedy, one of the essential parts of an epic, owes a lot to strong women like Tahmineh and Jarireh in the Shahnameh.*

***Keywords:*** Shahnameh, *epic, tragedy, women, legendary, strong, Faranak, Rudabeh, Sindukht, Tahmineh, Gurdafrid, Jarireh, Farangis, Katayun*

The *Shahnameh* of Firdausi ranks among the greatest works of world literature. This masterpiece of Firdausi is not merely the history of the glorious past of Iran: it is indeed a story of the pain and sufferings of human beings; a story of the morals and manners of kings and knights; a poignant tale of the victor and the vanquished and a refreshing ode to the lover and the beloved. Moreover, the *Shahnameh* of Firdausi presents to its readers strong and powerful women of different eras who are neither mere objects of pleasure nor the source of all evils.

So far as the treatment of women in the*Shahnameh* of Firdausi is concerned, there are conflicting views of scholars in this regard. Noldeke believes that "women do not play in the Shahnameh any overactive role. They appear only as a subject of

desire or love"[1]. Noldeke establishes the supremacy of women in the Iliad of Homer where they are more powerful, dynamic and authoritative than the women of the *Shahnameh.* On the other hand, Mohammad Ali Islami Nadooshan is of the opinion that women are source of all the misfortunes in the Iliad of Homer. The destructive beauty of Helen brings with itself war and destruction. Meanwhile, according to Islami Nadooshan, the women of the*Shahnameh* basically give shape to the tragic stories of the great epic for he believes that had there been no Tahmineh, the death of Sohrab would not have appeared so impactful and tragic. In the same manner, the death of Firoud without Jarireh, the death of Siyavash without Farangis, the death of Isfandayar without Katyaun, the death of Rustam and the tragedy of Zal without Rudabeh would not have manifested as so melancholic in the absence of the above mentioned women characters of the *Shahnameh*.[2]

From the above two opinions it may be presumed that different theories exist regarding the treatment of women in the *Shahnameh*. The opinion of Noldeke seems to be a bit prejudiced because contrary to the opinion of Noldeke, the women in the *Shahnameh*, especially in the legendary period, are strong and endowed with practical wisdom. In fact, these women give prominence to various stories of the *Shahnameh*. Whether it is the story of Faridun, Minuchehr, Sohrab, Siyavash, Kaikhusro etc. women are conspicuous by their strong presence in each and every frame of these tales. Adding a new dimension, women like Faranak, Rudabeh, Sindukht, Tahmineh, Gord Afrid, Jarireh, Farangis, Golshahr, Manizeh and Katayun fill the mosaic of the *Shahnameh.*

The first strong woman that a reader comes across in the *Shahnameh* is Faranak, the mother of Faridun. She sacrifices a lot to protect Faridun from Zahhak. She is a cool headed, confidence personified, a woman who never gets carried away by the prevailing situations; rather she displays her firmness and resolute endurance in trying circumstances. She cleverly thwarts Zahhak's attempt to kill Faridun and thus saves herself and her son from the clutches of Zahhak. Whenever Faridun's life is under threat, Faranak turns up as his savior and extricates him from precarious situations.

Moreover, she has a calming effect on Faridun who, being aware of the atrocities of Zahhak, shudders in anger to decimate him and avenge the killing of his father. Displaying her foresight and wisdom, Faranak calms Faridun and asks him to wait for an opportune time. As Faridun was full of youthful exuberance, he could have been easily swept away by emotions which would have proved fatal for him. At this juncture, Faranak comes to the fore and advises him to calm his nerves as Zahhak had the crown, throne and troops at his command and Faridun could do nothing against him alone. She counsels Faridun in the following ways:

*View not the world with boyish eyes; the laws of blood-revenge*
*Demand it not.*
*Drunk with the wine of youth, Men think themselves the only ones on earth*
*And vapour, but be thy days mirth and joy.*
*Do thou, my son! bear this advice in mind,*
*Give all words save thy mother's to the wind."*[3]

**Fig. 1: Zahhak, the oppressor**[4]

When Faridun puts an end to the tyrannical rule of Zahhak and ascends on the throne, Faranak having known about the triumph of her son opens the door of her treasure for the poor and the destitute. She distributes alms consistently for a week, so much so that not a single poor person was left who had not prospered due to her benevolence. Thereafter, she sent precious robes and jewels laden with camels and horses to her son. It is evident from the following verses:

*Then to all those who were in poverty*
*And strove to hide it she afforded aid,*
*But kept alike their secret and her own.*
*She spent a week on alms till paupers failed;*
*She then unlocked the portal of her secret hoards, brought forth*
*The various treasures that she had amassed.*[5]

From the above evidence it is clear that Faranak was not only a courageous and daring woman but also possessed far sightedness and wisdom. Time and again she shows her true mettle and never wilts under pressure.

Women have often been labeled as unfaithful, disloyal and fickle in various literatures. Stories within stories have been woven in the *Arabian Nights, Sindbadnama*, *Tuti Nama* and *Shuka Saptati* etc. to prove the unfaithfulness of women. The *Shahnameh* of Firdausi is the opposite of this phenomenon. A closer look at the epic reveals that women are not only kind-hearted, but possessed of deep thought. In fact, men have always been rightly guided by women in the *Shahnameh.* Faranak's influence on Faridun, Jarireh's influence on Firoud and Sindukht's influence on Mihrab just go on to show that women played a major role in shaping up the future of different kings and dynasties throughout the *Shahnameh.* A good example of this can be seen in the story of Sindukht. While Mihrab has been portrayed as impatient king, Sindukht is presented by Firdausi as calm and composed. When Mihrab looses sleep over the imminent attack of Sam following the disclosure of the love affair between his daughter Rudabeh and Zal, and is in a state of quandary, it is Sindukht who shows exemplary character and calms the nerves of Mihrab. She is referred to as an *Insightful* (ژرف بین), *Prudent* (فزاینده رای) and thoughtful lady. The following couplets are sufficient to show the calm demeanor through which she tries to pacify her angry husband:

*Sindukht sank down before him and considered.*
*Then having hit on an expedient,*
*For she was shrewd and subtle, came before*
*The sunlike king with folded arms and said:-*
*"Hear but one word from me, then do thy will.*
*If thou hast wealth to purchase life bestow it,*
*And know thou that this night is big with fate.*[6]

The influence of Sindukht on Mihrab can be gauged from the fact that the latter being asked to hand over the keys of treasury to Sindukht, at once does the same as he had complete faith in her. It shows the powerful side of Sindukht on whom the king of Kabul depended so heavily for the safety of his empire.

As a matter of fact, it is Sindukht who is instrumental in tactically solemnizing the marriage between Zal and Rudabeh. Her diplomacy saves the day for both Mihrab and Rudabeh, because king Minuchehr after getting to know about the affair between Zal and Rudabeh, deputes Sam, the father of Zal, to attack Kabul. Mihrab is also enraged at his wife Sindukht and daughter Rudabeh for putting his empire at peril. Infuriated by the act of Rudabeh, Mihrab even thinks of getting rid of both Sindukht and Rudabeh to save his empire from danger. Sindukht handles such a tricky situation with great aplomb. She chooses gift diplomacy to impress Sam as she had firm conviction that opening the door of royal treasury would, on the one hand put to rest the anger of Sam, and on the other hand establish the allegiance of Mihrab to king Minucheher. The lavish gifts for Sam speaks volumes of her audacity as the largesse, the slaves, and the elephants stretched two miles from the gate. The following couplets reveal the wonderful gifts chosen by her for Sam:

*She took his pledge,*
*Then boldly faced the danger, clad herself*
*All in brocade of gold with pearls and jewels*
*About her head, and from the treasury took*
*Three hundred thousand pieces as largesse.*
*They brought forth thirty steeds of Arab stock*
*Or Persian with their silvern equipage;*
*And sixty slaves with golden torques, each bearing*
*A golden goblet brimmed with camphor, musk,*
*Gold, turquoises, and jewels of all kinds;*
*One hundred female camels with red hair,*
*One hundred baggage-mules; a crown of jewels*
*Fit for a king, with armlets, torques, and earrings;*
*A throne of gold like heaven, all inlaid*
*With diverse sorts of gems, the width thereof*
*Was twenty royal cubits and the height*
*The stature of a noble horseman; lastly*
*Four mighty Indian elephants to bring*
*Bales full of wearing-stuffs and carpeting.*[7]

**Fig. 2: Sindukht comes to Sam bearing gifts[8]**

Sindukht's idea of going to Sam as an emissary proved beneficial as she was successful in her attempt to secure the favor of Sam who found her a woman of intellect and wisdom and consequently promised safety and security to her. He sent her back to Kabul with a lot of gifts and presents and asks her not to worry and live happily in Kabul. He even gave her his full assurance of solemnizing the marriage between Zal and Rudabeh. It is evident from the following couplets:

*The paladin on hearing saw in her*
*A woman of counsel and of ardent soul,*
*With cheeks like spring, in height a cypress-tree,*
*With reed-like waist and pheasant's gait. He said:*
*"My pledge shall hold although it cost my life.*
*Live safely and rejoicing at Kabul*
*With all thy kindred. I assent that Zal*
*Shall wed Riidaba.*[9]

It was the diplomatic efforts of Sindukht that made the marriage alliance of Zal and Rudabeh possible. Had she succumbed to the pressure of her husband or been overawed by the mighty presence of Sam she could not have been successful in her efforts. She plays a host of roles under different circumstances with élan. Even Mihrab acknowledged her efforts saying that her intellect and wisdom turned the tide in their favor.

The legendary history of Iran is replete with the valor of heroes like Faridun, Minuchehr, Sam, Zal, Rustam, Sohrab, Toos, Godarz, Giv, Gastham, Hujir etc. It is heartening to see the names of women heroes in this list who are no less than their male counterparts in terms of power, valour and courage. Gord Afrid or Gurdafrid is one such character from which every strong woman can take inspiration. When it comes to flaunting fighting skills, she is no less than a male hero. Firdausi introduces her in the following couplets:

زنی بود برسان گردی سوار　　همیشہ بہ جنگ اندرون نامدار
کجا نام او بود گرد آفرید　　زمانہ ز مادر چنین ناورید[10]

Her fight with Sohrab is a defining moment in the legendary history of Iran where standing true to her name[11] she assumes the responsibility of safeguarding the white castle in the wake of Sohrab's onslaught. She decides to take the battle to the Turkish army when Hujir, the Commander in Chief of the fortress, is made captive by Sohrab. So, she takes the bow and arrow in her hand and roaring like a lion takes to the battlefield challenging the Turanian army for a one-on-one fight. It is evident from the following couplets:

فرود آمد از دژ بہ کردار شیر　　کمر بر میان بادپایی بہ زیر
بہ پیش سپاہ اندر آمد چو گرد　　چو رعد خروشان یکی ویلہ کرد
کہ گردان کدامند و جنگ آوران　　دلیران و کارآزموده سران[12]

A closer look at the character of Gurdafrid reveals that Firdausi is not content in creating heroes out of male characters alone; rather he brings out female heroes like Gurdafrid too who are no less than their male counterparts in terms of power or courage. Firdausi describes her as a woman having extraordinary archery skill so much so that not even an animal could escape her target. In her fight against Sohrab, she had an upper hand initially as she did not give him time to recover from her volley of arrows, as is evident from the following couplets:

هم آورد را دید گرد آفرید　　که برسان آتش همی بردمید
کمانرا بہ زہ را بربیازو فگند　　سمندش برآمد بر ابر بلند
سر نیزہ را سوی سہراب کرد　　عنان وسنان را پر از تاب کرد
بر آشفت سہراب و شد چون پلنگ　　چو بدخواہ او چارہ جو شد بہ جنگ [13]

Sohrab overcomes Gurdafrid after a hard fought battle. Having known the real identity of Gurdafrid, he was even more surprised and had to admit that if the females of Iran were capable of such exploits, what were they to expect from its men of war?

بدانست سہراب کہ او دختر است　　سر موی او ازدر افسراست
شگفت آمدش گفت از ایران سپاہ　　چنین دختر آید بہ آوردگاہ
سواران جنگی بہ روز نبرد　　ہمانا بہ ابر اندر آرند گرد [14]

A look into the character of Gurdafrid reveals that she was not only a brave lady but was equally intelligent. When Sohrab had tightened the noose on her, she played a master stroke to make herself free from the clutches of the hot headed Sohrab. She reminds Sohrab of his masculinity and honour by saying that his soldiers would no longer praise him as brave and courageous if he killed a woman. Having said this she bargains with him bringing in the castle, treasure and guards for release. She completely outwits Sohrab with her bewitching beauty and intelligence.

Gurdafrid is guided by highly patriotic sentiments. The first example of this can be seen in her decision to take the mantle of safeguarding the White Fort in her own hands as she deemed it her duty to save the fort from foreign aggression. Moreover, knowing that Sohrab was attracted towards her and had vowed to win both the fort as well as her, her nationalistic sentiment came in between any tender emotional feelings; she warned Sohrab that the Iranians and the Turanians could never be paired with each other and all his efforts would prove futile in that regard. She also warns him of dire consequences if Kavoos and Rustam come to know about all the latest developments.

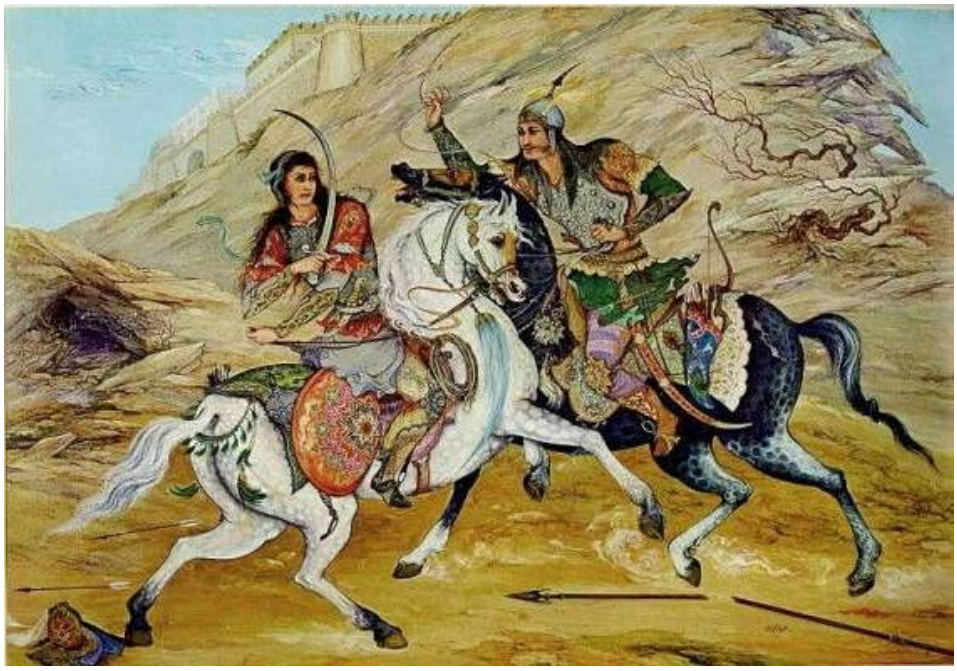

**Fig. 3: Sohrab and Gurdafrid fighting against each other[15]**

There are many other strong, resilient and spirited women in the *Shahnameh* with the sole exception of Sudabeh who is a mixture of two opposite emotions. The reason for including her in this list of the illustrious women of the *Shahnameh* is her audacity and outspokenness. As the daughter of King Hamawaran and wife of Kavoos she embodies all the goodness of an exemplary woman. However, she completely goes astray as the step mother of Siyavash.

As the daughter of the king of Hamavaran, she puts aside all the worries of her father when Kavoos sends a marriage proposal to the king of Hamawaran. She even questions her father's approach regarding the marriage proposal of a king who had been constantly trouncing great empires at his will. She advises him not to feel sad as marriage and sorrow do not go hand in hand. The wise words of Sudabeh must have tranquilized the king of Hamawaran who consequently agreed to marry Sudabeh with Kavoos. It is evident from the following couplets:

بدو گفت سودابہ گر چارہ نیست　　ازو بہتر امروز غم خوارہ نیست
کسی کو بود شہریار جہان　　بر و بوم خواهد همی از مهان
بپیوند با او چرایی دژم　　کسی نسپرد شادمانی بغم[16]

Although the king of Hamawaran agreed to marry Sudabeh and Kavoos, he had developed a grudge against him within his heart. Sudabeh was aware of her father's ulterior motives and tried to keep Kavoos informed of her father's evil designs but

to no avail. Kavoos is arrested by the king of Hamawaran through a stratagem and chained in a castle. Sudabeh shows her loyalty to Kavoos and sympathises with him in his bad times. It was not acceptable for her to bear the separation of her husband and thus she prefers imprisonment over comfort. She takes care of Kavoos in the prison cell. The following couplets bear ample testimony of her faithfulness to Kavoos:

چو سودابہ پوشیدگان را بدید　　بتن جامۂ خسروی بر درید
پرستندگان را سگان کرد نام　　سمن پر ز خون و پر آواز کام
جدایی نخواهم ز کاؤس گفت　　اگرچہ ورا خاک باشد نہفت
چو کاؤس را بند باید کشید　　مرا بی گنہ سر بباید برید
بگفتند گفتار او با پدر　　پر از کین شدش سر پر از خون جگر
بحصنش فرستاد نزدیک شوی　　جگر خستہ از غم زخون شستہ روی
نشست آن ستم دیدہ با شہریار　　پرستندہ او بود و ہم غم گسار[17]

Sudabeh's marriage with Kavoos had been more of a compulsion than of a choice. She could have easily parted ways with Kavoos when the former was made captive by her father. However, showing loyalty to Kavoos she chooses to stay with him in his difficult times. It shows her positive side before vice overtakes her.

Contrary to her image as a perfect daughter and a loyal wife, Sudabeh displays her real self when Siyavash, the son of Kavoos, enters the scene. Sudabeh at once loses her heart to Siyavash and even pays no heed to the sanctity of the relationship. She makes every effort to gratify her evil designs. Seeing all her tricks failed to impress Siyavash, she levels grave charges against him. It shows the darker side of her character where she stoops to levels where she forgets all morality. She even makes Siyavash pass through the fire test much like the Sita of Ramayana where Sita had to give *Agni Pariksha* to her husband to prove her chastity. Here, Siyavash was made to pass the fire test and prove his innocence. However, Siyavash comes unscathed from the burning fire and passes the fire test successfully.

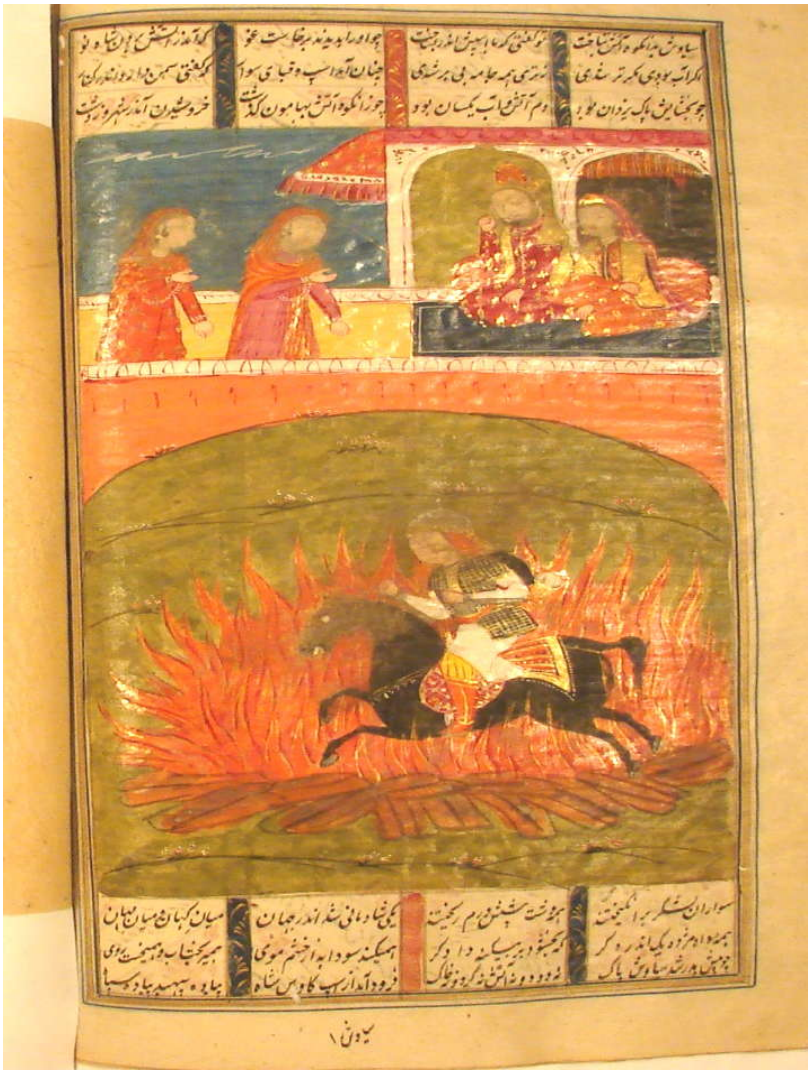

**Fig. 4: Siyavash passing fire test[18]**

It is evident from the above incidents that Sudabeh played every trick to humiliate Siyavash but failed miserably. Consequently, she had to pay a heavy price for her wrong doing as she was killed by Rustam.

The character of Sudabeh is perhaps the only major character of the *Shahnameh* in which a woman has been shown in a bad light by Firdausi. Nevertheless, it would be gross injustice on the part of Firdausi to label him as a misogynist poet. Not even on a single occasion has he made belittling remarks about women. If on some occasions he talks negatively of women he means to set an example before his readers of the virtues and vices ingrained in both the male and female genders.

**Fig. 5: Sudabeh and Siyavash in the Harem**[19]

The tragic death of Siyavash leaves behind a trail of tragedy which even his wife Jarireh could not prevent from happening. Jarireh, the daughter of Piran Viseh and the first wife of Siyavash was a courageous and wise lady. She had a calming effect on Firoud and guides him on important junctures. When Kavoos sends a huge army to Turan to avenge the death of Siyavash from Afrasiyab, she too persuades Firoud to help the Iranian army and avenge the killing of Siyavash, because as the worthy son of Siyavash, it was required of him to take revenge on Afrasiyab.

جریره بدو گفت کای رزم ساز　　بدین روز هرگز مبادت نیاز
برادرت چو کینه جوید همی　　روان سیاوش بشوید همی
ترا پیش باید بکین تاختن　　کمر بر میان بستن و ساختن
برت را بخفتان رومی بپوش　　برو دل پر از جوش و سر پر خروش
گر او کینه جوید همی از نیا　　ترا کینه زیبا تر از کیمیا[20]

Firoud was the only reason for Jarireh to live in the mortal world after the killing of her husband Siyavash. Had she been overwhelmed by motherly affection, she could not have exhorted Firoud to avenge the killing of Siyavash. She puts the life of her only son in danger just to give justice to her deceased husband. She very well knew that her plan could backfire and she could have been left with nothing but repentance. However, she chooses the extreme path and sends Firoud to be part of the Iranian army with a lot of advice. She admonishes him to meet two Iranian commanders namely Bahram and Zangeh Shawaran for the simple reason that they were always loyal to Siyavash and never parted ways with him. For an energetic youth like Firoud, it must have been very difficult for him to identify his real sympathizers and enemies from among the army of his own race. Jarireh's advice must have helped put to rest all his worries. The following couplets show Jarireh's intelligence in comprehending a particular situation:

چنین گفت ازان پس بہ مادر فرود  کز اوّل سخن با کہ باید سرود
نگہ کن سواران ز کند آوران  چو بهرام و چون زنگۂ شاوران
نشان خواه ازین دو گو سرفراز  کزیشان مرا و ترا نیست راز
همیشہ سر و نام تو زنده باد  روان سیاوش فروزنده باد
ازین هر دو هرگز نگشتی جدا  کنارنگ بودند و او پادشا[21]

As the later turn of events suggest, Firoud was killed due to the haughtiness of Tus and Bizhan. The killing of her innocent son meant the end of the world for Jarireh. After this tragedy, she had no reason to live anymore and thus killed herself and met the same fate of Siyavash and Firoud.

Though, Jarireh has a very small role in the epic, she adds to the tragedy of the *Shahnameh*. It is a well known fact that with the story of Sohrab and Rustam, Firdausi takes tragedy to another level. The killing of Sohrab at the hand of his own father Rustam is the culmination of tragedy in Firdausi. The story of Firoud and Jarireh shows another facet of the tragic tales of Firdausi. At first, Firdausi portrays a loving and caring Siyavash. Then he brings Sudabeh to make his life hell. Ultimately, he hands the same fate to both Siyavash and Firoud and puts a tragic end to their lives. However, the tale of sorrow and despair does not end here; it is compounded further when Jarireh enters the scene. The blood soaked body of her beloved son lying down on earth, Jarireh mourning the death of her beloved son and destroying everything in front of her is a terrible scene. Jarireh epitomized tender motherly affections. The loss of her only son was unbearable for her and therefore, she kills herself with the dagger of Firoud and falls beside the body of her son. The following couplets are indicative of the fateful end of Firoud and Jarireh:

فرود سیاوخش بی کام و نام — چو شد زین جهان نا رسیده بکام
پرستندگان بر سر دژ شدند — همه خویشتن بر زمین برزدند
جریره یکی آتشی بر فروخت — همه گنجها را بآتش بسوخت
یکی تیغ بگرفت ازان پس بدست — در خانهٔ تازی اسپان به بست
شکم شان بدرّید و ببرید پی — همی ریخت بر رخ همه خون و خوی
بیامد ببالین فرخ فرود — بر جامهٔ او یکی دشنه بود
دو رخرا بروی پسر بر نهاد — شکم بر درید و برش جان بداد[22]

**Fig. 6: Iranians Mourning the death of Firoud and Jarireh[23]**

Another woman who enters the life of Siyavash after Jarireh is Farangis, the daughter of Afrasiyab. Piran Viseh whose daughter Jarireh was married to Siyavash, proposes that he marry Farangis for she was the only woman on the planet worthy

of him. He praises the quality of Farangis in the following couplets:

ببالا ز سرو سهی برترست  ز مشک سیه بر سرش افسرست
هنرها و دانش ز دیدار بیش  خرد را پرستار دارد بپیش[24]

From the above couplets it is evident that Farangis is endowed with the same quality of skill, knowledge and wisdom that Firdausi seeks in men. She pays a huge price of her loyalty to Siyavash for the reason that her conscience did not allow her to become part of the treacherous plan of her father to wipe out Siyavash. She epitomizes loyalty, compassion and kindness and due to her virtuous qualities is an ideal woman in the *Shahnameh.*

Acting on her husband's will, she clandestinely brings up Kaikusro. She hands over Kaikhusro to a shepherd who brings him up. One can draw a parallel between the life of Faranak and Farangis. Both the brave women fight against all odds to protect the life of their sons. Both of them follow their sons like shadows and bail them out from precarious situations. Like Faranak, Jarireh is always there to help Kaikhusro in his difficult times.

Another remarkable feature of Farangis is that she knows how to return the favours of her benefactors. Piran Viseh had a huge role in protecting her life and that of her son Kaikhusro. In fact, it is with the help of Piran Viseh that she is able to flee Turan away from the clutches of Afrasiyab. When Piran is captured by Giv, Farangis comes to his rescue and saves his life. This shows her kind hearted nature and her loyalty to friends.

Farangis may be referred to as one of the unfortunate women of the *Shahnameh*. She has to pay a heavy price for showing her loyalty to Siyavash. Going against the wish of one's kith and kin is not an easy task. Such acts are worthy of a woman of the character of Farangis. She went against the wishes of her father Afarasiyab because he was wrong, for according to her, supporting the perpetrators of crime is akin to committing that crime. She set standards for an ideal woman through both her words and deeds.

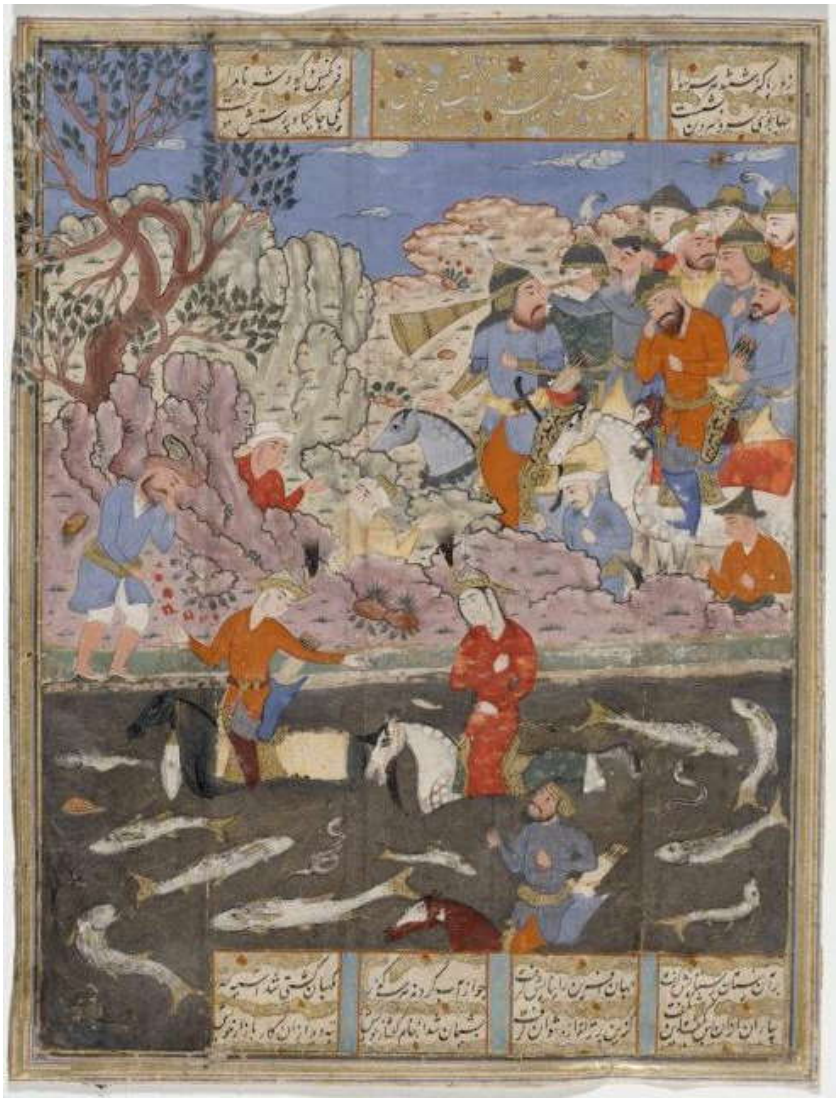

**Fig. 7: Kay Khusru, Farangis and Giv cross the river Jihun[25]**

There are other strong characters; Tahmineh, Manizheh and Katayun, but to go into intricate details of each and every character is beyond the scope of the present paper. It is to be noted however that love is the binding factor for these women. Tahmineh is bold and brave enough to declare her love for Rustam and is so obsessed with Rustam that she straight away goes to his bed and boldly admits her love for him. Manizheh is a devoted lover who does not even care about her own relatives and takes the side of Bizhan in his time of distress for the sake of love. She even renounces her country for Bizhan and his love. Above all, the women of the

*Shahnameh* are strong, wise and chivalrous and through them the legendary stories of the *Shahnameh* take shape and colour.

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# Zoroastrian Deities in Bactria

Julian Kreidl and Jamsheed K. Choksy

*ABSTRACT*

*This article focuses on the Zoroastrian deities and demigods known from western Iran or the Iranian plateau—Dādār, "creator," Ahura Mazdā; the Amәša Spәnṭas, "holy immortals;" yazatas, "worship-worthy spirits;" and divinized or semi-divinized legendary figures—who appear in the worship of Bactrians in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages. The analysis focuses primarily on numismatic imagery of the deities produced by the Kushan rulers and subsequently of the Sasanian Kushanshahs (Kushano-Sasanians) plus onomastics and descriptions from inscriptions and other documents in the Bactrian language.*

## Introduction

Coins of Kushan and Kushano-Sasanian rulers, an inscription mentioning the investiture of Kanishka I, and theophoric names in extant Bactrian manuscripts and inscriptions demonstrate which deities were regarded with importance and which were not in that region of eastern Iran and Central Asia. These sources cover a time span from Kushan times (2nd century CE) to the end of the 1st millennium CE. Consequently, although no Zoroastrian theological works are attested from late antique and medieval Bactria, knowledge of the faith in that region has expanded considerably during the past decades. The surviving materials demonstrate how and why Zoroastrianism as practiced by the denizens of Bactria was both like and different from the religion's manifestations on the Iranian plateau and elsewhere in Asia Minor and Central Asia. One interesting variation was in nomenclature: the names of Zoroastrian divine beings were pronounced differently across regions—and in Bactrian sources, for instance, even the Zoroastrian creator divinity or God par excellence Ahura Mazdā (Middle Persian Ohrmazd) was rendered as Ouromozdo and other forms.[1]

## Preliminary Comments on Zoroastrianism in Bactria

Before examining specific Zoroastrian deities in Bactrian written sources, it seems appropriate to outline Zoroastrianism in Bactria and how it fits into the broader picture of Zoroastrianism within eastern areas, namely Central Asia, and in western areas, namely the Iranian plateau, at that time. The paucity of preserved theological and religious texts in Bactrian (and other eastern Middle Iranian languages) with Zoroastrian content, together with practices in Central Asian societies appearing different from those in the Parthian and Sasanian empires, can lead to a conclusion that Iranians in Bactria (and Central Asia more broadly) ascribed to more heterodox forms of the Iranian faith.[2] For example, the less conspicuous role of Ahura Mazdā and the lack of references to the *Avesta*, let alone preservation of any Avestan scriptures in Bactrian, contrast with the abundance of material extant from Sasanian and post-Sasanian Iran. However, interpretations may not be quite so simple.

The Bactrian language is attested between the 2nd and 9th centuries, but even that time span narrows further for manuscripts. The only explicitly religious Bactrian manuscripts extant (za, zb, zd) have Buddhist, rather than Zoroastrian, content and probably date from the 5th century (za, zb) and 7th or 8th century (zd). On the other hand, the earliest surviving Avestan manuscripts date to the 13th and 14th centuries and most of the Pahlavi or Middle Persian religious books date from mid-Sasanian into Abbasid times or 5th through 13th centuries. Even the Avestan script and the written "Sasanian" archetype of the *Avesta* appear to be products of Zoroastrian scribes, priests, and theologians living during those periods. Yet, the final arrangement of the Avestan scriptures possibly occurred several centuries earlier, perhaps contemporaneous with the Kushan dynasty to the east.[3] That Zoroastrians in eastern Iran and Central Asia transmitted the *Avesta* orally just as did their counterparts on the Iranian plateau is attested by preservation of the Ašəm Vohū prayer in a Sogdian manuscript. Although the copyist may have been Manichean by confession, and not Zoroastrian—which also indicates that document cannot date to before the 3rd century—it is noteworthy that the earliest Avestan text surviving in written form was preserved in the east and not in the heartland of Zoroastrianism further westward.[4]

Similarly, unlike their Parthian and Sasanian counterparts, little is known about the Bactrian priestly class. A priest is mentioned several times in document T as *κηδο* (cf. Manichean Parthian *kēdīg* and Middle Persian *kēd*, "magician, soothsayer," (Avestan *kaēta*-) and there is no reason to believe that his religious function was much different from that of the magi in Iran or even Anatolia/Asia Minor. But the influence and authority of Zoroastrian priests in Bactria likely did not match those of the state-sponsored *mowbedāns*, "magi," and *hērbedān*, "theologians," in the Sasanian Empire because the intimate bond between clerics and nobles, and between faith and state, was not crystallized. In the absence of strict orthodoxy imposed by priests, an array of local practices came to be associated with Zoroastrianism.[5] Doctrinal and ritual differences notwithstanding, Zoroastrians across the entire Iranian

cultural territory shared much within the wide spectrum of dualistic Zoroastrianism and were the most numerous confessional communities until conversion to Islam became widespread between the 9th and 13th centuries.[6]

Additionally, because the Kushans were not indigenous to Bactria, it is possible that Zoroastrianism there was influenced by the newcomers' prior beliefs and praxes just as the legacy of Hellenism left a far stronger religious imprint on eastern Iran than on the plateau where it was systematically expunged. But, because the Kushans seem to have been yet another Iranian or Iranian-influenced group, their beliefs may not have been far apart from those of the people they settled amongst and came to rule.[7] However, even though Zoroastrians most likely formed a majority in Bactria until a few centuries after the Arab Muslims conquered the region, it seems unlikely that Zoroastrianism was the only official religion-after all, unlike subsequent Kushano-Sasanian rulers, the Kushan monarchs minted coins depicting the Buddha whose name was equated to the term for "idol" (Middle Persian *but*) in Iran. An explanation for acknowledging the Buddha, Hindu, and Hellenistic deities within the Bactrian pantheon may be found in the Kushan rulers having to appease substantial Buddhist, Hindu, and Greco-pagan minorities among their subjects. Additionally, while the Iranian plateau had stable dynasties, Bactria was ruled by Kushans, Kushano-Sasanians, Kidarites, Hephthalites, and others.[8] One consequence is that a parallel to the absolute symbiosis of Zoroastrian socio-religious doctrine with Sasanian royal ideology did not develop among the Kushans whose ideas of sacral kingship had to include non-Iranian deities as legitimizers of rule.[9] The lack of such a close relationship between ruling dynasty and official religion in Bactria, which could legitimate and empower an orthodox Zoroastrian elite was consequential. At the advent of Islam in the 7th century, there was no powerful Zoroastrian priestly class which could engage in the same theological discussions with followers of the new religion as Zoroastrian thinkers on the Iranian plateau would. Without intellectual guidance, Zoroastrianism eventually became extinct in the east while it survived on the plateau.

## General Observations on the Zoroastrian Deities of Bactria

The Zoroastrian deities of Bactria, particularly of the Kushan pantheon, as evidenced through images such as those on the reverses of coins, seem in many instances to be associated with royal investiture much like their counterparts who were depicted in Parthian and Sasanian Iran. They appear on Kushan coin reverses during the reigns of Kanishka (ca. ruled 127-150) and Huvishka (ruled ca. 150-180) and on Kushano-Sasanian coin reverses under Ohrmazd (Hormizd) I (ruled 275-300).[10] Interestingly, and perhaps reflecting the less rigid religious hierarchy of eastern Iran, Kushan rulers depicted many more deities of investiture on their coins than any Sasanian king of kings did on coins and rock reliefs.[11] Among the Sasanians, Ahura Mazdā followed by Miθra and Anāhitā (with the creator god always listed

first, followed by the worship-worthy solar/covenant and fertility/investiture spirits alternating with each other) filled that role reflecting their protector statuses going back to the Old Persian inscriptions of Artaxerxes II (ruled 404-358 BCE). Sasanian Kushanshahs, like their Sasanian Shahanshah counterparts, often were depicted facing the deities, who offered diadems of sovereignty, with right hand raised or right forefinger pointed toward the divine spirit conferring investiture.[12] The transfer of these gestures of reverence toward divinities from the ancient Near East into Achaemenian, Parthian, and Sasanian practices and through Iranian custom eastward to Bactria and the rest of Central Asia is attested at the latest by the 1st century BCE when they appeared on the coins of Indo- Bactrian and thereafter Indo-Parthian and early Kushan rulers.[13]

## Ahurā Mazdā/Ahuramazdā/Ohrmazd (ωυρομοζδο, Ouromozdo)

Ahura Mazdā, Ahuramazdā, or Ouromozdo is a relatively rare motive on Kushan coins. Although he is mentioned in the Rabatak inscription as AOPOMOZΔO, "Aoromozdo," there is no definite description of his function in that or other Kushan sources. However, the Bactrian documents attest that his name was extremely commonly used as a personal name. Moreover, ωυρομοζδο in manuscript xp could refer to the Zoroastrian creator god. xp is a letter in which the author informs the recipient that the ruler Purlangzin swore an oath concerning the non- aggression pact between his city and the city of *το χοηο* "your lordship" (a ruler not named in the letter). The author now asks the recipient to do the same; namely to swear an oath before ωυρομοζδο that he will not attack Purlangzin's city:[14]

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| xp18 | [...] ταδο το χοηο ζανο κοαδο πορλαγγοζινο πιδο ω- | "[…] So your lordship should knowthat Purlangzin did go before |
| xp19 | υρομοζδο þοδο ταλδο το χοηο σινδηιοταδο το χο- | Ouromozdo, so if your lordship wishes,your lordship |
| xp20 | ηο πισο ωυρομοζδο þαοο […] | (should) go before Ouromozdo […]" |

However, lack of any honorific phrases before the name, such as *βαγο*, "lord, god," raises the question whether ωυρομοζδο refers to the deity Ahuramazdā or to a Kushanshah or Sasanian Shahanshah such as Hormizd II, who ruled Bactria between the years 300-303 and Iran from 303-309.[15]

In any case, there are numerous examples of Ahuramazdā as a male given name in the Bactrian documents, which points to widespread popularity. The theophoric name also appears in combination with other compounds: βαγοωρομοζδο (and βαγοωρομοζδο), "Bagoromozdo;" βορζοωρομοζδο, "Burzoromozdo;" ιωλοωυρομοζδο, "Yolouromozdo;" οινδοωρομοζδο, "Windoromozdo;" and

βαβοροωρομοζδο, "Shaburoromozdo;" as well as in the family name ωρομοζδανο, "Oromozdano," and possibly also in the family name ιαμβοωρομοζδανο, "Yamshooromozdano".[16] All these names also exist in Western Iranian, or must consist of Western Iranian name compounds for phonological reasons (for example, βαβοροωρομοζδο, "Shaboroormozdo"). βαγο-, βορζο-, and οινδο- could be Middle Persian and Bactrian, whereas βαβορο- is very likely from Middle Persian. Only ιωλοωυρομοζδο, "Yolouromozdo," with the Bactrian development from *d > l, contains a compound which is genuinely Bactrian.[17]

It is noteworthy in all those extant names that Ahura Mazdā is the second compound, whereas in other theophoric names, the divine name can be the first or second part. This has in large part to do with theophoric names containing βανδαγο, βανδο, "slave of" (e.g. ζονοβανδαγο, "Zonobandago;" νανηβανδο, "Nanebando"), μαρηγο, "slave of" (e.g. μαμαρηγο, "Mamarego"), and λαδο, "given by (e.g. οηβολαδο, "Wesholado"), elements with which Ahuramazdā's name is rarely or never combined. In most of these cases, the phonological shape of the divine element— e.g. ζονο, "Zurvan;" ιαμβο, "Yima;" οηβο, "Vayu"—involved is genuinely Bactrian, and excludes a loan from Middle Persian, which strongly suggests they were local compound names. The same cannot be said with certainty about names including Ahura Mazdā. The influence of Zoroastrianism from the Iranian plateau is evident in the prominence given to Ahura Mazdā in naming patterns. However, Ahura Mazdā never shows up in combination with -βανδαγο, -βανδο, -λαδο and -μαρηγο. Middle Persian *'whrmzdd't* and *'whrzmzd't*, Parthian *'hwrmzdt*, and even Sogdian *'Yxwrmztδ'Yt* and *'xwrmzt't* suggest that a Bactrian *ω(υ)ρομοζδολαδο, "O(u)romozdolado," would also not be unexpected. Nonetheless, such a name has not been found in the extant material. Perhaps these divergences between Bactrian and other Iranian theophoric names involving Ahura Mazdā are simply due to the small Bactrian corpus rather than actual usage at that time. While no Bactrian texts describe the roles of Ahura Mazdā, some aspects seem clear.

There is no reason to doubt that Ahura Mazdā played the same, supreme, creator role for Bactrians as among other Zoroastrians. Ahura Mazdā also served as a deity depicted as conferring royal authority. On Kushan coinage, ωυρομοζδο showed up occasionally standing with diadem proffered in right hand - just as this supreme deity does on Sasanian rock reliefs like one depicting the investiture of Ardeshir III (ruled 379-383) at Taq-e Bostan—and staff held in left hand (**Figure 1**).[18] The staff likely was transferred to Ouromozdo from coins of the Kushan ruler known as Soter Megas (probably Vima Takto), "Great Savior," (ruled ca. 64-78) on whose billon tetradrachmas from Taxila an image of Zeus stands holding a scepter and a staff on the reverses.[19]

Ahura Mazdā's divine authority became supreme once the Sasanians took over Bactria. The reverse of a drahm from Harid (Herat) and the reverse of a drahm from the mint at MLKYN both show *mzdysn bgy*, *Mazdēsn bay*, "Mazdā-worshipping Lord" Hormizd (Ohrmazd) I Kushanshah on the left gesturing with a

bent right forefinger over a fire censer toward a seated Ahura Mazdā on the right (**Figure 1a**).[20] Ahura Mazdā wears a crown similar to those on the deity in rock-carved investiture scenes of the Sasanian Shahanshahs Ardeshir I (ruled 224-240), Shapur I (ruled 240-270), and Wahram I (ruled 271-274) in the Persian heartland of Fars. On the Kushano-Sasanian coins, an accompanying inscription refers to the deity as *bwlz'wndy yzty*, "exalted god."[21] Additionally, as on the Iranian plateau, Ahura Mazdā does not appear to have functioned as a solar deity in Bactria but was the creator god, unlike among the pre-Islamic Ishkashmis and Sanglechis as well as in pre-Buddhist Khotanese Zoroastrianism where Ahuramazdā was strongly connected to the sun as evidenced by Ishkashmi rḗmuz, Sanglechi ormőzd, and Khotanese *urmaysde*, "sun."

**Fig. 1: Ahura Mazda-Oromozdo, holding staff**

**Fig. 1a: Ahura Mazda (right), seated, and Hormizd I Kushanshah, with bent forefinger (left)**

**Arštāt/Aštād/Rišt (αþταδο/ριþτο,** Aštado/Rišto**)**

The Zoroastrian goddess of rectitude is known in the *Avesta* as Arštāt and shows up as Aštād in the Middle Persian texts. Yašt 18 invokes her, and she is associated with the 26th day of each month as well.[22] In Bactrian, we have both αþταδο and ριþτο. Ριþτο (< **ṛšti-*) is found on Kushan coins as a deity and in later documents as the name of a day—and is a genuine Bactrian continuant.[23] Αþταδο is so far attested from personal names and as a day name as well, and is loaned from Avestan or Western Iranian.[24] On Kushan coins, Rišt is clearly based on the imagery of the Greek Athena, goddess of wisdom, arts, war, and, albeit less so, justice, wearing a helmet and holding spear and shield.[25] It is unclear if the connection with the Greek Athena resulted in the Bactrian Rišt assimilating some of Athena's duties which are not part of the descriptions of the Iranian Arštāt. But if the wall paintings in which a goddess is holding a gorgoneion are indeed depicting Arštāt/Rišt, it could stand for a more aggressive attitude of the Bactrian deity. Because there is only one genuine Bactrian personal name in which Rišt may be included, i.e., ριþτακο, "Rištako," early 6th century, it appears that the goddess was not particularly popular, but this conclusion could be premature—she may have been more common in female personal names of which only a few are preserved.

**Aši/Ard (αρδοχþο**, Ardoxšo**)**

The Avestan Aṣi (< Proto-Iranian **ṛti-* "reward") is, as a female deity, well-known from several Avestan devotional poems, especially Yašt 17, by means of which we also know her relationship to other deities. She is seen as the daughter of Ahura Mazdā, and, in the Mihr Yašt, she functions as the charioteer of Miθra.[26] The 25th day of each month is dedicated to her. But since *aṣi-* was not personified in the Gāthās, her depiction as a woman on Kushan coins represents the last phase of anthropomorphization which began with the feminine descriptions in her Yašt. It is interesting to note, however, that not all abstract concepts of the *Gāthās* which then became deities in the Standard *Avesta* would take the same path in Bactrian Zoroastrianism, and indeed most of them are not yet known in their Bactrian form.[27] In Bactrian, as well as in other Eastern Iranian languages, the deity's name may go back to **ṛti-wahwīš*, "good reward," hence Bactrian αρδοχþο (Ardoxšo), Sogdian ʾrǰwxy, Khwarezmian ʾrǰwxy, which sets the speakers of these languages apart from western Iranians.[28]

Ardoxšo has an interesting distribution across the Bactrian sources. While her depiction was extremely common on Kushan coins, she was not mentioned in the Rabatak inscription, later Bactrian documents, or within theophoric names. On the coinage of Kanishka and Huvishka, ΑΡΔΟΧÞΟ (incorrectly stamped as ΑÞΑΕΙΧÞΟ) or Ardoxšo was presented like the Greek goddess Tyche (**Figure 2)**.[29] In such

images, she is seated on a throne with cornucopia, standing with a cornucopia, with a victory palm, or with a raised hand, all copied in part from the Tyche of Antioch who was represented on the silver coinage of the Parthian King of Kings Mithradates I (ruled ca. 171-138 BCE) and the bronze coinage of Vologeses III (ruled 104-107, 111-146), revealing the influence of both Greek and Iranian religious art and state influence.[30] Hence, both etymological and visual data attests to the Bactrian continuant of Aṣi was a deity of fortune and wealth. Ardoxšo is also found on terracotta figurines, such as one with Pharro and children.[31] One additional matter should be noted—linguistically and theologically the holy immortal Aša Vahišta (Middle Persian Ardwahišt), "Best Order," may have merged into the Bactrian αρδοχþο (but see below also under Miθra).

**Fig. 2: Ashi-Ardokhsho, holding cornucopia, with Tamga of Huvishka**

### **Ātar/Ātur/Ādur/Ātaxš/Ātaš (αθþο**, Aθšo**)**

The religious roles of fire in Zoroastrianism are well known. Fire is regarded as a "most holy spirit" in the *Avesta* (Ahura Haptaŋhāiti 36.1, 36.3), and liturgically anthropomorphized as the "son of Ahuxra Mazdā" (Yasna 25.7, 62.1; Ātaš Niyāyišn 5). The Ātaš Niyāyišn invokes the spiritual benefits of fire, plus the 9th day of each month and 9th month of each year are dedicated to fire. The Bactrian fire deity αθþο, "Ātaš, Fire," is a continuant religiously of the widely worshipped Zoroastrian deity and a continuant linguistically of the nominative *ātarš*.[32]

The Bactrian Aθšo is the only continuant who can definitely be identified through anthropomorphic imagery—Sasanian engravings, such as a bust emerging from the flames of a fire altar on the reverse of *drahms*, "silver coins," and Sogdian imagery are more open to other interpretations.[33] While Aθšo shares a beard and diadem with other deities on Kushan coins from the reigns of Kanishka and Huvishka, the frequent appearance of flames on his shoulders— although this feature is shared with the Bactrian Xvarənah (Farr)—and, especially, flames around his body set him apart. He was shown yielding fire thongs as well (**Figure 3**) and sometimes even mounted offering a diadem.[34] Apart from the Kushan coins, he is not known from any other Bactrian source except probably in one theophoric name: αþφαρδαρο,

"Ašfardaro," (lit. "Best of/through fire").[35] It seems that Aθšo was a divine figure of decreasing popularity, coming to be replaced by Xvarənah on later coin issues, which may be indicative of a broader trend in Bactrian Zoroastrianism. After all, Xvarənah was a common element in theophoric names of the post-Kushan documents, not so Aθšo.

**Fig. 3: Atar-Athsho, holding fire thongs**

**Druuāspā/Druwāsp (ΛΡΟΟΑΣΠΟ**, Lrooaspo/Lruwasp**)**

The Avestan Druuāspā (Middle Persian Druwāsp), "with sturdy horses' was a pasture goddess, although the Avestan corpus does not offer a very detailed description.[36] Yašt 9, ostensibly dedicated to this female yazata, "worship-worthy spirit," is associated more with cattle, so is often termed the Gōš Yašt. She was associated with two other yazatas, Aṣi and Miθra, in the Avesta.[37] In Bactria, this deity appeared on the reverses of Kushan coins minted during Kanishka's reign (**Figure 4**), after having undergone a gender switch as ΛΡΟΟΑΣΠΟ, "Lrooaspo, Lruwasp," as a male deity proffering a beribboned diadem while riding a horse.[38] The image of this deity clearly displays influence from the reverses of coins issued by the Indo- Bactrian ruler Hippostratus (ruled ca. 80-60 BCE) at Taxila, the Indo-Parthian emperor Gondophares (ruled ca. 26-45), and the early Kushan ruler Soter Megas (Vima Takto).[39]

**Fig. 4: Druuaspa-Lruwasp, mounted and offering beribboned diadem, with tamga of Huvishka**

The Kushan imagery also has been likened to the Dioscuri and explained as the reason for the gender change.[40] However, the Kushans also depicted—while their coins were still issued in Greek—the Greek lunar goddess ΣΑΛΗΝΗ, "Selene," as a male deity, because the Iranian moon yazata Māh was of masculine gender. It would imply that such gender changes were not necessarily influenced by the Greek tradition. In any case, the sound change from Old Iranian*dr- > Bactrian lr- is entirely regular, so Bactrians would have rendered Middle Persian Druwāsp as Lrooaspo/Lruwāsp.[41] This means there is no need to derive the Bactrian divine name from the Middle Persian name Luhrāsp, father of Kay Vīštāsp in the Shāhnāme, "Book of Kings"— indeed, it is possible that the Bactrian form influenced the later Persian one.[42]

### **Kamird (καμιρδο**, Kamirdo**)**

This deity is not attested in Zoroastrian belief from Iran or from other parts of Central Asia. Yet, judging from Bactrian document T, καμιρδο, Kamirdo, seems to have been important in the local Zoroastrian divine hierarchy:[43]

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| T3' | ταδο ταοο βαγο καμιρδο βαγανο | "Then you, (oh) god Kamirdo, king of the gods, |
| T4' | þαυο σασκο καμιρδοφαρο κηδο στορογο οαρσοχοδανο οδουναμοδανο κιρδο | performed a great miracle and deed of renown through the agency of Kamirdofaro the priest." |

However, this deity, "king of the gods" according to the document, is not mentioned otherwise on Bactrian coins or inscriptions. This peculiar discrepancy, together with the etymology of Kamird (**kamṛda-*, "head, chief," cf. Khotanese *kamala-*, "head"), makes it likely that Kamirdo, rather than being an independent spirit, was an epithet of another important deity in Bactrian Zoroastrianism.[44] Perhaps the deity was Miθra, or given the praise found in document T— "performer of miracles, granter of favors and wishes," which is reminiscent of praise for Vaxšu in document Nn, Kamirdo could also be an epithet of the latter deity. It even cannot be ruled out that Kamirdo refers to Zṛvan (Middle Persian Zurwān), "Time," who is not found in earlier Bactrian sources.[45] The theophoric name Kamirdofaro, on the other hand, is attested from document U as well, so the deity or divine epithet was at least modestly known at that time.

### **Māh (MAO**, Mao**)**

The Bactrian lunar deity was without any doubt Māh, written in various ways—most typically as MAO. Of course, Mah is well known from the Avesta, as a yazata having his own Niyāyišn (the 3rd one), Yašt (the 7th one), and day (12th day of each

month). This spirit was believed to bestow happiness and success upon people by controlling *baxt*, "fate," and *brēh*, "destiny."[46] Mah is one of four main or most frequently attested deities on Kushan coins—the others were Miθra, Vayu, and Nana. These four deities were presented in pairs, Mah with Miθra (and Vayu with Nana), with the moon deity on the left and the covenant deity on the right.[47] In standard imagery of the Kushans, MAO offers a beribboned diadem with his right hand—as for instance on the reverse of a dinar by Kanishka (**Figure 5**)—and holds a staff.[48] Owing to Zoroastrian influence, even on Greek coinage issues under the Kushans this lunar deity, called ΣΑΛΗΝΗ, was portrayed as male rather than as female like the Greek Selene. Apart from coins, Mah is also attested in theophoric names, although rarely—e.g., μαμαρηγο (Mamareg), "Servant/Slave of the Moon."[49] Likewise, Mah was not mentioned on the Rabatak inscription (note that Vayu too was omitted).

**Fig. 5: Mah-Mao, holding staff and censer, Kanishka issue**

Another name for the moon deity was recorded in Bactrian as well. The name þομογοβανδαγο undoubtedly belongs to theophoric names with –βανδαγο, "servant/slave of." It should be noted that þομογο (šomogo) is evidenced also through Sogdian *'xšwmβntk* and the Sogdian month name *(')xšwmyc*. However, in Sogdiana, the lunar deity was called *m'γ/m'x,* i.e., Māh, rather than by a name cognate with þομογο. Interestingly, the Bactrian þομογο is related to the word for moon in Munji-Yidgha (Munji *yumaga*), Ishkashmi-Sanglechi (Ishkashmi *ləömik*) and Wakhi (*žə̣mak*), all deriving from the feminine **uxšma-kā-* "growing, crescent."[50] It is unclear whether Bactrian þομογο represented a female or male deity, although at least the Munji- Yidgha data would suggest the former while Zoroastrian practice would suggest the latter. The background of the man who bore the name þομογοβανδαγο is unclear, but it is extremely likely that his name preserves belief in an ancient lunar deity worshipped at that time by Pamiri Zoroastrians.

### **Manah/Vohu Manah/Wahman (ΜΑΝΑΟΒΑΓΟ,** Manaobago**)**

Manah or Mana, known in the Avesta as Vohu Manah, "good thought," is

hierarchically the holy immortal after Ahura Mazdā. The Standard Avestan Wahman (Bahman) Yašt is not extant but Pahlavi, Pazand, and Sanskrit Zan, "exegetical translations," have survived. He presides over the 2nd day of each month and the 11th month of each year in the Zoroastrian calendar.[51] Vohu Manah was portrayed, albeit infrequently, on Kushan coins from the reigns of Kanishka and Huvishka as ΜΑΝΑΟΒΑΓΟ (Manaobago), "Manao the god."[52] Indeed, extant data suggests Manao—unlike any other deity—was routinely referred to as βαγο, "god, lord," in Bactrian although the epithet could be separated from his name by means of the ezafe or connective particle as evidenced by a silver vessel inscription: μαναο ι βαγο, "Manah who is the god."[53] Manao as a Zoroastrian deity in Bactria was presented enthroned on Kushan coins with Indian symbolism: four-armed, wielding a cakra, a plough (linking back to his traditional role in Zoroastrianism as protector of animals especially cattle), and beribboned diadems.[54] Moreover, unlike among Iranians further west who utilized the name Wahman/Bahman, Manao does not appear in Bactrian theophoric names.[55]

### **Miθra/Mihr/Mehr (ΜΙΙΡΟ,** Mihro**)**

Miθra is exceptionally well-attested on the coins of Kanishka and Huvishka, mentioned in the Rabatak inscription, found in theophoric names from Kushan and post-Kushan times, and shows up as the deity μυροιαζαδο (Mihroyazado), "Mihro the god,"—reflecting Middle Persian—in document jh. Unlike Nana and Vaxšu, for whom it is possible to venture hypotheses about where and who in Bactria worshipped them, the veneration of MIIPO spanned location, communities, and dynasties just as it did across the Iranian plateau (and even across Roman Europe as Mithras). Miθra's worship among Bactrians may have involved the designation Ašavixšo (but see the possibility of Ašaeixšo being linked to Aši/Ard/αρδοχþο/Ardoxšo, noted previously).[56]

That the Bactrian Mihro was the solar deity par excellence becomes clear from numismatic and lexical evidence. When Kanishka switched from Greek to Bactrian as the official language of his empire, the same deity which was designated by the Greek name ΗΛΙΟΣ, "Helios," promptly came to be known as MIIPO or MIOPO, "Mioro," on the gold dinars and bronze coins. Mihro was very much a deity who was believed to perform investiture of kings and was presented as such with a beribboned diadem in his right hand and hilt of sword in left hand.[57] He also regularly appeared crowned with a solar halo and with his raised right hand in gesture of reverence (**Figure 6**). Even previously, among the Greco-Bactrians, Miθra and Zeus had been associated together due to the confluence of Zoroastrian and Hellenic beliefs.[58] Members of the Sasanian royal family who served as the eastern provincial governors called Kushanshahs during the third and fourth centuries also depicted Mihr as investing them with authority on their coins. For example, the reverse of a dinar issued by Hormizd I Kushanshah, at the mint of Marv, bears an image of the governor on the obverse. On the reverse, Hormizd was shown with

raised hand, palm turned outward, in the presence of Mihr who wears his characteristic rayed crown. Miθra in turn extends a beribboned diadem, that symbolized legitimate rule, to the Kushanshah (**Figure 6a**), in symbolism and portraiture that was modeled along lines of the Sasanian imperial coinage.[59] The deity is also preserved in the words for "sun" in the languages of the Munji-Yidgha (e.g., *mír̥o*) and Ormuri (e.g., *mēṣ̌*) peoples, both whose ancestors lived within the borders of the Kushan Empire. So, their form of Zoroastrianism too acknowledged Miθra as the solar deity before they converted to Islam in the late Middle Ages.

**Fig. 6: Mithra-Mihro, with raised hand, with tamga of Huvishka**

**Fig. 6a: Mithra (right), offering beribboned diadem, and Hormizd I Kushanshah, with raised hand (left)**

**Mužduwan (MOZΔOOANO/μοζδοοανο**, Muždooano**)**

A rather enigmatic god, who may not be part of Bactrian Zoroastrianism, is MOZΔOOANO, who appears both on Kushan coins and in the Rabatak inscription:[60]

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Rabatak 7 | […] ταδι þαι κανηþκε αβο þαφαρο καραλραγγο φρομαδο | "[…] Then King Kanishka ordered Shafar, the lord of the marches, |
| Rabatak 8 | αβεινα οιαγο βαγολαγγο κιρδι σιδι βαγεαβο ριζδι αβο μα κασιγε ραγα φαρειμοανο β- | to make in this place the temple which is called Bage-ab, in the Kasig plains, for these |
| Rabatak 9 | αγανο κιδι μαρο κιρδι ανδιμανι οφαρρο ομμα οοηλδι ια αμγα ναναοδο ια αμ- | gods who have come hither into the presence of the glorious Umma, that is,the very Nana and very |
| Rabatak10 | γα ομμα αορομοζδο μοζδοοανο σροþαρδο <κιδι υνδοοαο μαασηνο ριζδι οδο βιζαγο ριζδι> ναρασαομιιρο […] | Umma, Ahuramazdā, Mužduwan, Srušard < who in Indian is called Mahasena and is called Vishakha >, Narasa and Miθra […]" |

The inscription makes it clear that Mužduwan was not another Bactrian name for Ahura Mazdā but a distinct deity.[61] In addition to possible confusion created by nomenclature, their images too bear shared features. On Kushan coins, they share a beard, a tiara, and a long robe, but these three features are also shared by them with other deities. The big difference is that Mužduwan is portrayed as sitting on a horseback.[62] Although the horse plays an important role in Iranian religiosity, it is not especially closely connected to Ahura Mazdā in the Avesta or in later traditions—even though Ohrmazd was shown in rupestrian investiture rock reliefs of early Sasanian kings like Ardeshir I. It should be noted that coins engraved with Mužduwan mounted with his right forefinger pointing also bear similarities with the rock reliefs of the first Sasanian Shahanshahs and the earlier coin reverses of Indo-Bactrian and Indo-Parthian rulers.

A connection between Mužduwan and Druuāspā can be ruled out because the latter deity was continued by the Bactrian Lruwasp, as discussed previously. In the Avesta, the figure of the flying horse was associated with Tištrya (but see the discussion below for Tīr), while the Vedic tradition associated the horse with a martial Indra. Indra was demonized, however, and so does not appear in any Iranian pantheon.[63] A connection between Mužduwan and Indra is therefore also tenuous. Perhaps Mužduwan was a pre-Kushan or early Kushan deity from the steppes, both because of his association with the horse and because the name is not attested anywhere outside Bactria.[64] Because MOZΔO$^{o}$ likely derives from **mižd*wāh, "gracious,"–hence ž instead of z (Old Iranian *ž, "Mužduwan") in his name–this, not necessarily, Bactrian deity could be a counterpart of Shiva (Sanskrit *śivá-*, "kind, benevolent"), although Shiva is generally identified with the Bactrian Vayu (Wesh, Middle Persian Way).[65] Indeed, on Kushan coins, Mužduwan holds up a trident

reminiscent of Shiva.[66] Another possibility, also from outside Zoroastrianism, is that Mužduwan derives from the Rig Vedic deity Rudra who was later merged with Shiva.[67] These theories are supported by the fact that Vayu, although one of the prominent deities throughout Bactrian history, is not mentioned in the Rabatak inscription. If both οηþο and μοζδοοανο are Bactrian counterparts of Shiva, it would make sense that only one of them is mentioned in the inscription. It could well be that μοζδοοανο was a Bactrian translation of the Indian name Shiva, and that it was used as an epithet of Vayu.

**Nana (NANA/ναvα**, Nana, Greco-Bactrian NANAIA**)**

Nana was not mentioned in the Avesta but assimilated into Zoroastrian belief after the Persian conquest of the Near East.[68] She would be equated to Anāhitā in Christian Syriac sources. Transmitted eastward, she became an investiture divinity depicted on Kushan coins (**Figure 7**).[69] She stands, her head surrounded by a disk halo, bearing a trident or riding a horse, on the reverses on the coins minted for Kanishka and Huvishka, titled NANAÞAO (Nanašao), "Nana the Queen" (lit. "King"). Nana was prominently mentioned in the Rabatak inscription as the granted of sacral kingship from the divine to human rulers:[70]

**Fig. 7: Nana, holding a trident, with tamga of Kanishka**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Rabatak 1 | •••αν•ο••••þο βωγο στοργο κανηþκε ι κοþανο ραþτογο λαδειγο χοαζαοαργο Βαγο | "… the great salvation, Kanishka the Kushan, the righteous, the just, theautocrat, the lord (king) |
| Rabatak 2 | ηζνογο κιδι ασο νανα οδο ασο οισποανο μι βαγανο ι þαοδανι αβορδο κιδι ιωγο χþονο | worthy of submission, who has obtained the kingship from Nana and all the gods, who has inaugurated theyear one |
| Rabatak 3 | νοβαστο σαγωνδι βαγανο σινδαδο | as the gods pleased" |

Based on ancient Near Eastern, Iranian, and Central Asian patterns of royal authority, it is clear that the term *βαγο* spanned meanings of "lord" from "divine apportioner" or "deity, god" to "king, mortal lord" (< Old Iranian *baga-*, *bayа-*, Middle Persian *bay*)—so Kanishka and his successors were never regarded as divinities or demigods but as human lords chosen and elevated to kingship by "Nana and all the gods."[71] Moreover, line 2 of the Rabatak inscription strongly implies that Nana functioned as the prime bestower of kingship to these male rulers, though assisted by the other deities—i.e. kingship was obtained from the pantheon as a whole, but Nana was a deity to whom the task was especially assigned much like Anāhitā (Anāhīd) in Sasanian Iran.

Interestingly, Nana became less prominent in the post-Kushan legal and economic documents. Likewise, a deity with the status of Nana would be expected to function as a frequent part of theophoric names, but she is only known from νανηβανδο, "Nanebando," and νανη)οβαγοκο, "Nanobagoko."[72] Nana's paucity among attested Bactrian names may be explained by most attested names being those of males whose theophoric connection was with masculine deities. Yet, she remains scarce in the Bactrian corpus. So, possibly, she was especially sacred to the Kushan royal house—much like Anāhitā/Anāhīd would be to the Sasanian royal family and their family holy fire at Istakhr—rather than to Bactrians generally. Certainly, Nana was eclipsed by Ahura Mazdā once the Kushano-Sasanian shahs extended western Iranian authority eastward.

### **Narasa (ναρασαο**, Narasao**)**

Narasao (Narasa) is mentioned in the Rabatak inscription as one of seven deities but does not show up elsewhere in Bactrian sources. This is not coincidental and like the appearance of Srushard (see below), due to the specific nature of that temple inscription. Narasa can be traced to the Avestan Nairiiō.Saŋha (Middle Persian Nēryōsang), a messenger deity, who was, as much later in the Rabatak inscription, explicitly mentioned together with Sraoša and Miθra in Yašt 10.52.[73] In the Avesta, one of his duties is to protect the *frauuašṛi*, "immortal spirit," of the prophet Zaraθuštra (Zardošt, Zoroaster). Given that the temple of Rabatak was not only dedicated to the mentioned deities (especially Umma), but also contained statues of Kanishka, his father, and his grandfather, it is possible to regard Narasa in Kushan times as a protector deity of the royal family.[74] That Narasa does not show up in post-Kushan Bactrian materials is probably due this specific function.

### **Sraoša/Srōš (σροþαρδο**, Srošardo**)**

Sraoša (Middle Persian Srōš), the yazata of "obedience, observation, and prayer," is mentioned in the Gāθās, where he functions as the personification of listening and following the right religion. This deity is especially venerated on the 17th day of each

month in the Zoroastrian calendar. Yašt 11 of the Standard Avesta ascribed further features, including braveness and physical prowess.[75] It was these later features which were invoked in the Rabatak inscription, the only Bactrian source which mentions him (as σροþαρδο, "Srošardo," cf. Avestan *sraošō.ašiiō*). The Kushans regarded Srušard as a martial deity, if information from line 10 of the Rabatak inscription, apparently added later above the actual line, is valid:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Rabatak 9 | [β]αγανο κιδι μαρο κιρδι ανδιμανι οφαρρο ομμα οοηλδι ια αμγα ναναοδο ια αμ- | "[g]ods who have come hither into the presence of the glorious Umma, that is, the very Nana and very |
| Rabatak 10 | γα ομμα αορομοζδο μοζδοοανο σροþαρδο <κιδι υνδοοαο μαασηνο ριζδι οδο βιζαγο ριζδι> ναρασαομιρο […] | Umma, Ahuramazdā, Mužduwan, Srušard < who in Indian is called Mahāsena and is called Višakha >,Narasa and Miθra […]" |

Apparently, Srošardo was likened to two Indian deities: Mahāsena and Višakha, both of whom also appear on Kushan coins and were associated with warfare. That the perception of Srošardo as a war, or warlike, deity was not specifically Kushan is clear from the Standard Avestan data, and likely was his role in Bactrian Zoroastrianism generally. However, Srošardo is not attested in post-Kushan documents, inscriptions, and personal names from that region—the reasons are unclear and may be due to decreased popularity of the yazata's veneration or lack of extant sources.

### **Tīr (TEIPO**, Teiro**)**

This yazata was named TEIPO or Teiro by the Kushans, the Bactrian female cognate of the Western Iranian Zoroastrian worship-worthy spirit Tīr.[76] The Bactrian Tīr is depicted and named on one Kushan coin type, and is reminiscent of the Greek Artemis, herself an "archer" goddess of hunting. Unknown in the Avestan corpus, later in the Pahlavi tradition Tīr, representing the planet Mercury, was strongly connected, confused, and even merged with the Avestan deified star Tištriia or Tištrya, i.e. Sirius, to whom Yašt 8 is dedicated—and as a result both were venerated on the 13th day of each month and during the 4th month of each year in the Zoroastrian religious calendar.[77] The same syncretism occurred in Bactrian Zoroastrianism, because on the one hand, the Tīr of the Kushan coins was portrayed as an archer, which links him to Tištrya. But on the other hand, his name cannot be derived from Tištrya, and must be from **tīra-*, or, in the case of the Bactrian deity, **tīrī-* because of its female gender.[78] Whether the Bactrian Tīr also had an astrological and/or astronomical function, like the Tīr of the Iranian plateau, and if so, what that role was, remains unknown. But even if the Greco-Bactrian tradition would have associated Tīr more closely with Artemis, such a linkage does not exclude the possibility that Tīr among the Kushans and other Bactrians was also viewed as the

deification of a planet, star, or lesser celestial object.[79] Apart from the one Kushan coin, Tīr also is attested in Bactrian personal names, for instance, τιροαδο, "Tirowado," a combination of Tīr and Wād or Vāta, Vayu), which points to continued worship throughout the Bactrian era, while she certainly was a major deity in Zoroastrianism in Central Asia and on the Iranian plateau.

### **Umma (OMMO**, Ommo**)**

This deity is not attested in Zoroastrian belief from Iran. Umma is only securely known from the Rabatak inscription, which has scholars led to conclude that OMMO is an epithet of another goddess. On one Kushan coin issued by Huvishka, she may appear as the consort of Vayu, designated as OMMO OHÞO.[80] Because Umā is one of the names of Shiva's wife Pārvatī, Umma has been equated with her. While such an identification may still be justified on religious grounds, the Bactrian name cannot be a simple transcription of Umā. The latter would have certainly yielded *OMO, in Kushan times also * OMA, and would not account for the double consonant. Umma may be derived from Avestan *upəma-*, "highest," as a divine epithet."[81] The Rabatak inscription, where both Nana and Ommo are mentioned explicitly, does not support reading Umma as an epithet for Nana, although it is noteworthy that so far, Ommo is only attested in contexts where she seems somehow interchangeable with Nana. Another interpretation has been to regard Umma as Aṣi (αρδοχþο, Ardoxšo).[82] Umma has even been considered a loan from Semitic, cf. Hebrew *uma*, Arabic *umma*, "community," referring in the context of the Rabatak inscription to the pantheon of deities, namely, Ahuramazdā, Mužduwan, Srošardo, and Miθra.[83] Because Nana was also Near Eastern in origin, and Semitic month names are attested in Bactrian sources, such a directional borrowing could conceivably have occurred, but in the case of Umma such a borrowing would be unique to Bactrian Zoroastrianism.

### **Vanant/Wanand (OANINΔA, οανινδο**, Oaninda/Oanindo/Wanind**)**

Vanant is a yazata of victory in the Standard Avesta where Yašt 21 is dedicated to him. He was believed to be embodied by Vega, the brightest star in the constellation Lyra.[84] Like Druuāspā/Lruwasp, Vanant underwent a gender change from the Avestan to the Bactrian tradition becoming female—denoted grammatically by the still preserved "a" termination in early Kushan Bactrian nomenclature—likely due to association with the Greco-Bactrian Nike. Indeed, the image of Vanant or Oaninda was modeled after Nike on Kushan coins such as those issued by Huvishka—as a winged female carrying a tasseled staff or a trophy by the left hand and holding-out a wreath or diadem of victory in the right hand (**Figure 8**).[85] Similarity in imagery with the later depiction of Anāhitā carrying a pitcher and offering a diadem on the

7th century rock relief of Xusrō II at Taq-e Bostan can be noted as well.

**Fig. 8: Vanant-Oanindo-Oaninda, holding tasseled staff and offering beribboned diadem**

The gender switch would not have been grammatically problematic because the outcome of both Old Iranian **wanant-a-*, "victorious" (masculine) and **wanant-ī-*, "victorious" (feminine) is οανινδο in Bactrian, the very form which is used in most inscriptions and documents.[86] Moreover, the Sogdian personal name *wnwncβ'm*, "Wanončbam," if interpreted correctly, rules out a male deity. The divine name **wnwnc*, "Wanonč," which is not attested independently in Sogdian, shows a feminine ending (as opposed to the masculine *wnwny*, "victorious").[87] So this deity's gender shift likely was a broader phenomenon and not restricted to Kushan Bactria. Unfortunately, information about the veneration of Vanant among other Eastern Iranian peoples (e.g., pre-Buddhist Khotanese) is limited, so it is presently not possible to determine how widespread the concept of a female Vanant may have been. Yet, because the Bactrian and Sogdian pantheons, and probably theology, seem to have been quite similar (more to each other than to any other attested variant of Zoroastrianism), the Sogdian evidence indicates that this change in Vanant was not a spontaneous Kushan creation. Greek influence, however, cannot be ruled out because Hellenism was, of course, strongly present in Sogdiana as well. Oaninda/ Oanindo is not mentioned in the Bactrian documents, but the word is a relatively common element in personal names. However, it would be wrong to conclude that onomastics points to widespread popularity of this Bactrian goddess—after all, the Bactrian word οανινδο was commonly used for "victor" and "victorious" (< **wanant-a-*, masculine form).[88]

### **Vāta/Wād (ΟΑΔΟ, Οαδο**, Oado**)**

The domain of Vāta (Middle Persian Wād), "wind," in the Avesta then still (also) associated with Vayu (Middle Persian Way), "atmosphere, celestial space," has

been taken over by OAΔO at least by Kushan times.[89] Despite their Proto-Iranian common origin as concepts of the wind, Vāta and Vayu were fully separated within the Bactrian pantheon. Οαδο, the regular word for "wind" in Bactrian and many other Iranian languages, was the anthropomorphic wind deity, while neither textual nor iconographic sources would point to οηþο or Wēšo being especially connected with the wind. Apparently, Vāta/Oado inherited the characteristics of the wind god in the narrow sense (i.e., the personification of wind). Vata was depicted on Kushan coins and probably part of one theophoric name τιροαδο, linking the deities Tīr and Wād, but otherwise not found in any written Bactrian sources.[90]

### Vayu/Way (ΟΗÞΟ, οηþο, Wēšo)

The provenance of this Zoroastrian deity, who is attested as οηþο (and other spellings) or Wēšo on coins as well as in theophoric names, has been much debated by scholars. Yet etymologically the name was a Bactrian continuation of the Avestan Vaiiu or Vayu. It is likely that his name is derived from **vayuš*, the nom.sg of *vayu-*, which is also known from the Avesta *Vaiiu-*.[91] A development of Old Iranian **vayuš* into οηþο is, from a phonological and orthographical point, regular and expectable, but the continuation of the old nominative is unusual. However, because this also occurred in Sogdian *wyš$^{o}$* attested in a name, the etymology seems valid. A closer look to Vāta and Vayu (Vaiiu) in the Avesta and other Eastern Iranian traditions helps understand the development of Bactrian Vayu. In Sogdiana, the wind god W't, Wāt, thus etymologically a descendant of Vāta, not Vayu, is not only associated with the physical wind but also with warfare and violence i.e., the "winds of change."[92] Clearly, in the Bactrian tradition those several attributes of the original wind deity were split between Vāta, representing the wind per se, and Vayu, who continued the aggressive and warlike aspects of the original Old Iranian deity. Thus, the theological developments of Vāta and Vayu, as well as the iconographic development of Vayu during the Kushan period to resemble Shiva may not be due to influence from Indian religiosity but may also have run parallel to it—Rudra, later associated with Shiva, also started out as a wind and storm god, while the wind is not a prime element of Shiva's later nature.

Although Vayu is one of the most common deities on the coins, he does not appear in the Rabatak inscription and neither in the Bactrian documents other than in theophoric names.[93] The iconography of Vayu seems puzzling as well—but can be explained by theological changes (discussed above and previously under Vāta). So, on a gold coin issued by Vima Kadphises (ruled ca. 95-127), he was still portrayed in Iranian and Greek manners, partly resembling the iconography of Herakles evidenced at Behistun as well. The coin has an inscription in Gandhari, where the god in question is called *maheśvara*, "great lord," and *sarvaloga iśvara*, "lord of the world"—both epithets of Shiva (or for chronological reasons possibly Rudra).[94] Later, Vayu, who was named ΟΗÞΟ since the first Bactrian coinage issues but was

not mentioned previously on Greek coinage of Central Asia, had his image steadily Indianized. Depicted with one head and four arms under Kanishka (**Figure 9)**, Wēšo gained three heads, four arms, and a Shivite trident by the time Huvishka's coins were struck.[95] The change in anthropomorphic depiction may be a result of the splitting of the Old Iranian war and wind deity into two with Vayu taking over the warlike features that led to his amalgamation with Shiva in Bactrian worship.

**Fig. 9: Vayu with four arms, and tamga of Kanshika**

**Vərəθraγna/Wahrām/Bahrām (ΟΡΛΑΓΝΟ**, Orlagno**)**

The Avestan yazata Vərəθraγna is another deity portrayed in a warlike manner within the Avesta, its Zand, "Exegesis," and subsequently in Bactria. He was presented on Kushan coins, for instance those minted for Kanishka, as ΟΡΛΑΓΝΟ, "Orlagno," holding a spear in his left-hand while his right-hand rests on the hilt of a sword (**Figure 10**).[96] In those images he is occasionally surrounded by a nimbus—marking his association with the sun (compare the Standard Avestan Mihr Yašt)—and wears a headdress. His overall appearance is eastern Iranian and does not resemble a Greek model. On the Iranian plateau, however, the influence of Herakles/Hercules is evident through images including one of him reposing with a wine cup and a lion-skin cloak in a three dimensional rock carving on the cliff base at Behistun.[97] Vərəθraγna is not known from other Bactrian sources except for theophoric names—though two of them are not fully Bactrian (they, however, are Iranian) and the third attestation is not entirely clear.[98] Unlike in Western Iran, the Greek Heracles (who shows up as ΗΡΑΚΙΛΟ on coins) is not reinterpreted as Orlagno in Bactria; their iconography is totally independent from each other, and no written source suggests otherwise.[99] All in all it seems that Vərəθraγna/Orlagno may have been eclipsed among Bactrians by other martial deities such as Vayu/Wešo, especially once the latter was transformed sans the wind. Such a development can be dated specifically to Kushan times because Orlagno's image on coins was discontinued under Huvishka.

**Fig. 10: Verethraghna-Orlagno, holdong sword and spear**

### Waxšu (ΟΑΧÞΟ, Oaxšo)

The deified Oxus appears on Kushan coins as ΟΑΧÞΟ, "Oaxšo, Waxšu," but is more prominently attested in later Bactrian documents and seals—both as a deity and in theophoric names.[100] This river deity is honored with the most elaborate address to a divine spirit attested in any Bactrian source:[101]

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Nn2' | εζδδηβιδο βαγο οαχο οαρσοχοανδδιγο λαδοιανο λαδοαγαλγο ακιδδηι- | "with the cognizance of the god Waxšu, the wonderful, the granter of favors (and)granter of wishes, whose |
| Nn3' | ο ναμο οδο οαρσοχοανδογο αβο υαρογο ζαμιγο βοοαδογινδο | renown and miraculous ability have-reached the whole earth" |

In Tt3, he is even referred to as βαγο οαχþο βαγανο þαυο, "god Waxšu, king of gods," and on one seal is mentioned as οαχþο ι λωγο (or ωγο) βαγο [Sig9], "Waxšu the lord of the world" (or "Waxšu the one god").[102]

A temple at Takht-e Sangin dedicated to Waxšu, predating the Kushan Empire, indicates the regional importance of this deity and his worship.[103] So, even though ΟΑΧÞΟ, "Oaxšo, Waxšu," was not mentioned in the Avesta, there can be no doubt of his integral role within (northern) Bactrian and Pamiri Zoroastrianism.[104] As a river god, Waxšu was extremely popular among common people, as evidenced by an elaborate statement in document Nn as well as his use in theophoric names. Apparently, Waxšu was worshipped as the supreme deity in some localities of Bactria, but not in others, nor was he the main god in the Kushan interpretation of Zoroastrianism. Judging from the temple in Takht-e Sangin, and documents Nn, O, Tt, and Uu composed mainly in Gozgan (Juzjan), but also in Warnu (document L) and Rob (documents V and W), he was popular in the north, along the Amu Darya and adjacent provinces. Further south he was less popular, possibly because residents of Zabolistan worshipped another water deity.

It is unclear if Waxšu was regarded broadly as the river god, or whether he

was specifically identified as the deified Oxus (Greek Ὦξος) or Amu Darya, granted the root **waxšu-* used to be applied more widely. One of the tributaries of the Oxus River, the Wakhsh River in Tajikistan, continues the pre-Islamic name for the Amu Darya. The name of the Wakhi people, living in the Wakhan corridor and northern Pakistan, also goes back to the same root (Wakhi *Wux̌*, "Wakhan").[105] Therefore, Waxšu may have been a general river deity in the sense that he was also worshipped in areas not directly watered by the Amu Darya or its tributaries, but given the data previously discussed it is difficult to conclude he was the default water and river god especially in southern Bactria and beyond.

### Xšaθra Vairya/Šahrewar (ÞAOPHOPO, Šaoreoro)

Šahrewar, the Avestan holy immortal Xšaθra Vairya, "Desirable Dominion," was mentioned in the Gāθās as Xšaθra, and paired with Ahura Mazdā and with Ārmaiti. In the Standard Avesta, he was associated with Vohu Manah and with Aša, and oversees metals.[106] On Kushan coins, such as those issued by Huvishka, where his name is ÞAOPHOPO, this deity was depicted wearing body armor, holding a spear in one hand and a shield in the other—all manifestations of Šaoreoro as the lord of metals and of the dominions or realms that weapons bring from the deity to his chosen followers.[107] The shield may represent a gorgoneion, thereby equating the Zoroastrian Šahrewar to the Greek Ares within the Bactrian religious context.[108] This deity's name is attested as well in other Central Asian contexts such as the Sogdian language *xšywr*, in addition to the 6th month of each year and 4th day of each month in the Zoroastrian calendar being dedicated to him.[109]

### Xvarənah/Farr (ΦΑΡΡΟ, Farro)

Xvarənah (Old Persian farnah, Middle Persian xwarrah) or Farr, "royal glory," amply mentioned in Zoroastrian texts and images from the Sasanian Empire, was likewise prominently attested on among the Kushans on coins as ΦΑΡΡΟ, "Farro," and in many personal names. In theophoric names, however, only approximately half display Bactrian development (with the simplification of Old Iranian *-rn- to -rr-, later -r-, e.g., the feminine name μαυοφαρο, "Mahofaro," and the masculine names φαροχονδο, "Faroxondo," and þαφαρο, "Shafaro"), while other names preserve the cluster *-rn- indicating non-Bactrian, in most cases Sogdian, origin.[110]

Although Xvarənah is deeply rooted in Zoroastrian beliefs from the Avesta (Yašt 19), no textual reference to it is attested in Achaemenian inscriptions. But it was present as a diadem proffered by the winged figure (probably Ahura Mazdā) in royal rock reliefs. The diadem of sacral kingship shows up in investiture reliefs of Parthian satraps, such as King of Kings Ardawan (Artabanus) V (ruled 221-224) investing Khwasak satrap of Susa (depicted on a funeral stele). It is even given the symbolic form as an eagle—following Avestan tradition—in the founding legend of

the Sasanian dynasty, the Kār-nāmag, "Book of Feats," of Ardeshir I (3.10- 20). Xwarrah is mentioned in subsequent Sasanian royal inscriptions, such as that by Narseh at Paikuli, and depicted as a diadem given by Ahura Mazdā to Ardeshir I, Shapur I, and other rulers on rock reliefs.[111]

The Bactrian Farr on coins of the Kushan rulers predates the early Sasanian attestations and, as evident by numismatic depictions, came to be visualized as a male deity in anthropomorphic form. The masculine form is prefigured in the Avesta where the royal glory takes on the shape of eagles, rams, and other male animals and birds. However, the Bactrian Farr differs in important aspects from the Avestan and Middle Iranian concept of Xvarənah, most notably by its anthropomorphic shape. Curiously, the Rabatak inscription, the only Bactrian writing which touches on how investiture was perceived, does not even mention ΦΑΡΡΟ. Farr is depicted in several ways on Kushan coins. On some minted for Huvishka, this deity gestures with bent forefinger while grasping a sheathed sword (**Figure 11**).[112] ΦΑΡΡΟ usually bears a nimbus and/or flames radiating from his shoulders. On other coins, he holds a purse or bag—this specific imagery may reflect influence from depictions of the Greek Hermes but also symbolizes his role as spirit who grants wealth and abundance to those chosen by Ahura Mazdā to be leaders.

**Fig. 11: Xvarenah-Pharro, wth bent forefinger and holding sword, with tamga of Huvishka**

### **Yima Xšaēta/Jamšēd (ιαμþο**, Yamšo**)**

Yima was the Proto-Indo-European first human *Yemo, part of an original first human pair of twins, who in Norse tradition as Ymir would be dismembered to create the universe, in Roman legend was reflected by Romulus and Remus, in as Yama in Indic lore of the Rig Veda chose to chart the path to the afterlife, and in Iranian legend became a fallen mythical ruler cleft into two. The Iranian Yima Xšaēta, "Shining Twin," was denounced in the Gāθās (Yasna 32.8) by the prophet Zarathushtra, his xvarənah was mentioned in Yašt 19, and his reign eulogized in

Vidēvdād 2. These Iranian traditions found their way into the New Persian Šāh-nāme as the tales about Jam/Jamšēd.

Unlike in the *Avesta* and in the legends of the Iranian plateau, the Bactrian ιαμþο retained divine or, more likely, semi-divine status as a mythical human much like he originally was in Proto-Indo-European and Proto-Iranian legend as a para.δāta or pēšō.δāta, "first created" one. He was engraved on coins from Huvishka and incorporated into theophoric names in the Bactrian documents. Both his Bactrian name, presumably from **Yima-Xšāwā*, "Yima the King" and his portrait on Kushan coins wearing a diadem, a headdress similar to Huvishka, and carrying a spear and sword also imply that he was perceived as a deified mythological ruler.[113] The notion of Yima being "the first king" can also be reconciled with the Avesta, although he is not explicitly called that way.

### **Zṛvan/Zurwān (ζοvο**, Zono/Zun/Zhun**)**

Zurwān, the deified concept of time already known from the Avesta, shows up in two theophoric names, ζονοβανδαγο, "Zonobandago/Zunbandag," or "Slave/Servant of Zurwān," and ζονολαδο, "Zonolado/Zunlad," or "Given by Zurvan." The latter appears, in variants, several times as a personal name in Bactrian documents as well as in early Arabic manuscripts from Afghanistan (as *zl'd*). But some of the references describe the same person, and all men named Zunlad probably belonged to the same family of rulers of Gozgan/Juzjan.[114] Therefore, the relatively common attestation of Zurwan in theophoric names does not convey much about this deity's actual standing among the Bactrians. This deity is furthermore only attested within Bactria during the second half of the 1st millennium. Zurwān was not depicted on Kushan coins, and the first textual reference is ζονοβανδαγο in document jf which dates from the late 5th century. ζονολαδο and its variants, including Arabic *zl'd*, are attested much later, from the 7th to 8th centuries at the terminus of the currently known timespan of written Bactrian. The lack of attestation in the first half of the millennium is, however, completely in line with the observation that Zurvan regained importance in the Iranian world as the central deity of Zurvanism only towards the end of the 4th century.[115] Additionally, Zono/Zun's popularity likely did not match other deities like Miθra and Nana. However, the situation was different to the south of Bactria, because Chinese and Arabic sources describe Zurvan as the main god of Zabulistan (present-day southeastern Afghanistan). The name of the deity is very likely preserved in Pashto in the nowadays old-fashioned exclamatory particle *žo* 'by' < **zṛwā*, as in *xwdāy žo!* "By God!" and could be explained by an exalted position of Zurwān among the pre-Islamic Pashtuns.[116] Zurwān's religious roles in Bactrian Zoroastrianism generally, or even its Zabuli version specifically, remain unclear—perhaps he was a minor spirit of time like the Avestan Zruuan.

**What about Anāhitā/Anāhīd?**

Anāhitā was probably the most important female deity in the western Iranian tradition of Zoroastrianism. She was mentioned in the Avesta as *arəduuī sūra anāhitā*, three epithets whose meaning is still debated although the third most likely meant "undefiled, unsullied."[117] Originally a water goddess, she became the tutelary deity of warfare, kingship, and love, and associated with the planet Venus. The 4th Niyāyišn, 5th Yašt, 10th day of each month, and 8th month of each year are all dedicated to her in Zoroastrian praxis.[118] Textual and iconographic evidence for Anāhitā is ample on the Iranian plateau.[119] Surprisingly, unequivocal references to Anahita are missing in Central Asia before the period of the Kushano-Sasanians. Identification of Anāhitā on Kushano-Sasanian coins (**Figure 12**) is possible not only due to the imagery—as female goddess enthroned or standing, with flat arcade or mural crown, diadem, and staff—but also because she is explicitly named: 'n'ḫyt, Anāhīd.[120] She was presented in those manners on the reverses of issues by the Kushanshahs Ardeshir I (ruled 233-245), Peroz I (ruled 245-275) and Hormizd I (275-300) from mints such as Harid (Herat).

**Fig. 12: Anahita-Anahid, seated, offering diadem and holding staff, with Ardeshir I Kushanshah on obverse**

However, no indigenous Bactrian texts or iconography make reference to Anāhitā, and she does not appear in Central Asian theophoric names other than Sogdian 'n'xtbntk, "Slave/Servant of Anāhitā."[121] This absence, together with the appearance of Nana in Bactria, has led to suggestions that Nana served as the Bactrian, or eastern Iranian, counterpart of Anāhitā even though no compelling evidence exists for such a conjunction.[122] Another suggestion, based on Anāhitā's original role as the female goddess of *āp/āb/ābān*, "water, the waters"—hence her liturgy also being named the Ābān Yašt—has been that she was continued in Bactria as Waxšu— but again no definite connection can be made to that male deity of the Oxus River, especially because as a female deity Anāhitā represents all the waters of the world and symbolizes fertility for plants, animals, and humans.[123] So the riddle of Anāhitā's absence remains for Bactrian Zoroastrianism. Perhaps the answer lies in her worship becoming important on the Iranian plateau, and in southwestern Iran

or Fars province specifically, due to this deity serving as a spiritual patron and protector of the Achaemenian and Sasanian royal families. There she is first noted in the inscriptions of Artaxerxes II (ruled 404-359 BCE) at Susa and Hamadan, "may Ahura Mazda, Anahita, and Mithra protect me from all evil," and subsequently symbolized by the holy fire in the temple of the city of Istakhr.[124] Under such a scenario, her reappearance in Bactria once the Kushano-Sasanians took over fits the (re-)expansion of Zoroastrian beliefs from Iranian plateau into Bactria.

## Reflections

Zoroastrianism has over the centuries comprised a range of beliefs, practices, and practitioners including those of the Bactrian variety which included a mixture of Iranian, Greek, and Indian elements. Not surprisingly, the faith displayed different permutations of its deities among the Bactrians (and, as noted where applicable, among Sogdians, Khotanese, Pamiris and other Eastern Iranian or Central Asian Iranian peoples) than under the magi of the Achaemenian, Parthian, and Sasanian empires. The institutionalization of Zoroastrian deities into Kushan royal- sanctioned beliefs seems to have occurred under Kanishka, who in the process moved away from the Shiva-centered and Greek-centered worship of his father Vima Kadphises. Huvishka expanded the pantheon even further by bringing in worship-worthy spirits like Vanant or Oaninda. The pictorial images of Zoroastrian deities appear to have followed basic forms that arrived from the Iranian plateau on coins and, perhaps, statues but were transformed within Bactrian official iconography under the influence of Greek and Indian art.[125] The range of depictions, however, was not very wide if Kushan and Kushano-Sasanian coins and stucco is representative. Additionally, the Bactrian evidence suggests that, even within a single region, pantheons were undergoing shifts and remodeling beyond the center of the Achaemenian and Sasanian empires of the Iranian plateau which resulted in Miθra and Nana apparently being more popular than Ahura Mazdā and Anāhitā.

So, initially, lack of state-sponsored religious institutions, lack of centralized political systems that sponsored religions, and Indian multi-religious multicultural influences permitted a wider range of beliefs, practices, and iconography to flourish. Later, however, the established divine hierarchy and iconography of the Iranian plateau was imposed on Bactria by the Kushanshahs from the year 233 onward as demonstrated by investiture imagery on reverses of the Sasanian- sponsored coinage. Consequently, even as late as the year 865 (also recorded as the Bactrian year 635), Ahura Mazdā and Miθra were mentioned, with the creator god listed first and the solar and covenant worship-worthy spirit listed second per regular Zoroastrian religious protocol in the bilingual Arabic-Bactrian inscription C.1—"month for (O)rmozdo and Miro"—from the Tochi valley.[126]

## REFERENCES

1. The article focuses solely on the Iranian deities, excluding Buddha, Serapis, Heracles, and other foreign ones.
2. Cf. Tremblay 2006: 222, for instance.
3. Cf. Skjærvø 1994: 201-204; de Vaan 2003: 13-14; Martines and de Vaan 2014: 4-6.
4. Fragment 4 (Or. 8212/84 = Ch. 00829) in Sims-Williams 1976: 46, with a detailed appendix by Gershevitch, pp. 75-82, who discusses linguistic specificities suggesting that Sogdian and other eastern Iranian transmissions and phonologies of the Avestan verse—and perhaps of the wider range of the Zoroastrian scriptures—were at least partially distinct from those of Persian language speakers who compiled their known canon.
5. Choksy 1997: 5.
6. Choksy 1997: 4-5, 84-86, 92-93.
7. See, for instance, Sims-Williams 2002a: 236-240, who proposes that the Kushans were a Saka-speaking people in origin. Regarding the Kushans being of Tokharian descent but influenced by Iranian norms see Choksy 2003.
8. Consult Payne 2016 for a political history of Bactria, especially as regards post-Kushan dynasties and how they built on Kushan and other Iranian heritages in the legitimization and administration of their rules.
9. For the Sasanian model plus its impact on eastern Iran see Choksy 1988.
10. On the date of Kanishka see Bracey 2017: 47-50. On the insertion of Zoroastrian deities into the religiosity of the Kushans see broadly Grenet 2015.
11. Göbl 1983 and 1999: 159, 174 pl. 3.
12. Choksy 1989: 130, pl. 10, fig. 9, 1990a: 34, pl. 2, fig. 9, 1990b: 203, 204, fig. 5.
13. Cf. Choksy 1990: 33-34, pl. 2, figs. 6-8, 1990b: 204, figs. 3-4. See also Mitchiner 1973: pls. 12-14.
14. Sims-Williams 2007: 162-163.
15. Cf. Sims-Williams 2010: no. 546, and Sims-Williams and de Blois 2018: 78.
16. That ιαμβοωρομοζδανο could be read as ιαμβο ωρομοζδανο, with the first word being the given name, should be cast aside.
17. Although at least theoretically it cannot be excluded that in this case the Middle Persian *ywd-* was Bactrianized to *ιωλο-*. In most other cases, however, there is no doubt that *ιωλο* is inherited in Bactrian from Old Iranian.
18. Figure 1 from Göbl 1984: pl. 172, fig. 240/2. See also Göbl 1999: 161, 173, pl. 2, fig. 1031/1.
19. Choksy 1990a: 33.
20. Figure 1a courtesy of American Numismatic Society, New York.
21. Choksy 1989: 130, fig. 9, and 1990b: 204, fig. 5.
22. Choksy and Kotwal 2005: 217, 239, 249.
23. It is unclear whether the personal name ριβτακο contains the divine name or the word **ṛšti-*"spear," cf. Sims-Williams 2010: no. 397.
24. Cf. Sims-Williams 2007: 199. If the name comes directly from Avestan, and is not borrowed via Middle Persian, it will confirm the assumption that there was a Bactrian tradition on its own of handing down the Avestan corpus.
25. Similar depictions are known from murals throughout Bactria and Sogdiana, cf. Shenkar 2014: 88.
26. Choksy and Kotwal 2005: 217, 223, 239. See also Schlerath and Skjærvø 1987: 750-751.
27. For instance, the concept of *daēnā-*, "conscience, insight, religion," feminized in the Haδōxt Nask as the spiritual manifestation of each human's deeds, for whom a Bactrian

counterpart, presumably **ληνο*, is not attested. The word is not even attested in Bactrian in a variant of the widely used Middle Persian or Pahlavi *dēn*, "religion," although its existence can be inferred from *lyn'ng*, "religious," in the Manichean script Bactrian manuscript M1224, cf. Sims-Williams 2009: 263.

28. Cf. Grenet 2015: 218, n 53. Tremblay 2006: 229, derived αβαειχβο from **aša-yaxša-*, which would be a partial loan from Avestan. Previously Cunningham 1888/1971: 92, explained the name as Arda-duxta.
29. Figure 2 courtesy of Julian Kreidl. Cf. Cunningham 1888/1971: 23.
30. Further details in Choksy 1988: 128, and 1990b: 220, fig. 2. See also Cunningham 1888/1971: pls. 16, fig. 7, 22 fig. 2; Göbl 1984: pl. 164, figs. 284/1 and 379/1, pl. 165, fig. 342/1.
31. Smagur 2017: 633, 635, fig. 9
32. Cf. Boyce 1987: 1.
33. For possible imagery see Shenkar 2014: 91-92.
34. Figure 3 from Göbl 1984: pl. 164, fig. 867/1. A beribboned diadem is held on other coins, e.g., Göbl 1984: pl. 164, fig. 33/1. Further details and images in Cunningham 1888/1971: 23, 79, pl. 16, figs.12-14, 16.
35. Cf. Sims-Williams 2010: no. 39.
36. Details in Gray 1929: 73-75.
37. Choksy and Kotwal 2005: 217, 239.
38. Figure 4 from http://www.coinindia.com/Kanishka-G57-477.33.jpg
39. See Choksy 1990a: 33, pl. 2, figs. 6-8.
40. Grenet 2015: 216
41. Nyberg1974: 121.
42. See further Kellens 1996 and Grenet 2015: 216, n 45, who attributes this borrowing to the influence of Bactrian Magi.
43. Cf. Sims-Williams 2012: 98f. Also note mention of the deity's priest, which should remove any doubt about the ritual importance of clergy in Bactrian Zoroastrianism.
44. On the derivation cf. Sims-Williams 2007: 220.
45. Contra Shenkar 2014: 130-131, who while suggesting that Kamird is another name for Zhun, then regards Zhun as another name of Vaxšu. On Zrvan and his attributes see Gray 1929: 124-130.
46. Choksy and Kotwal 2005: 216, 217, 224-225, 233, 249.
47. Göbl 1984: 19, pl. 166, fig. 295/1.
48. Figure 5 courtesy of American Numismatic Society, New York. See also Göbl 1999: 174 pl. 3, fig. 212/1, and 1984: pl. 166, fig. 178/2, respectively.
49. See Sims-Williams 2010: no. 234.
50. Sims-Williams 2010: no. 558.
51. Choksy and Kotwal 2005: 229, 244, 249.
52. Cunningham 1888/1971: 23.
53. Sims-Williams 2009a: 194.
54. For further description and analysis of the symbolism consult Grenet 2015: 216-217. Contra the interpretation of Cunningham 1888/1971: 78.
55. Partially contra Narten and Gignoux 1988: 488.
56. For details see Grenet 2015: 218 n. 53.
57. Göbl 1999: 174, pl. 3, fig. 190/1. See also Cunningham 1888/1971: 12, 23, pls. 16.2 and 15.4, for coins issued by Kanishka and Huvishka respectively with images of Mihro on the reverses.
58. Cf. Grenet 2006b.
59. Figures 6 and 6a courtesy of American Numismatic Society, New York.
60. See further Choksy 1990a: 34, pl. 2, figs. 9-10.
61. Lines 7-10 of the inscription, cf. Sims-Williams 2004: 56. Portions of that inscription

included in this article are based on the translation of Sims-Williams 2004: 55-56.

62. Rosenfield 1967: 83, for instance, analyzed Mužduwan as "probably […] Mazdāh vano" (Mazdāh the triumphant), and accepted MOZΔOOANO as a name for Ahura Mazdā. Previously, Cunningham 1888/1971: 85, interpreted the word as "the plural of Mazdāo."
63. Cf. Cunningham 1888/1971, pl. 17.5.
64. Gray1929: 181-182.
65. Cf. Shenkar 2014: 116, who calls him a "Scythian tribal god of the Kushans."
66. Sims-Williams 1997: 338.
67. Cunningham 1888/1971, pl. 17.5; Göbl 1984: pl. 167.
68. Wright 1977.
69. Boyce and Grenet 1991: 161, 162, 189.
70. Figure 7 from http://www.coinindia.com/Kanishka-G36-636.30.jpg. See also Cunningham 1888/1971: 12, 95-99, pls. 12.13, 17.10-16; Göbl 1984: pl. 167, figs. 234/1, 359/1.
71. Sims-Williams 2004: 55-56. On sacral kingship see Choksy 1988.
72. Cf. Choksy 1988: 35; subsequently Grenet 2015: 209, n. 27. Contra Shenkar 2014: 136.
73. Sims-Williams 2010: no. 279f. Note that neither -βαγοκο nor -βανδο are commonly used with the names of other deities whereas -βανδαγο, which represents -βανδο extended by the suffix *-ka-, was commonplace. See details in Gray 1929: 152-154.
74. Cf. Gnoli 2009: 142-143.
75. Gray 1929: 106-110; Malandra 2014; Choksy and Kotwal 2005: 217, 235-236, 249.
76. Contra Göbl 1984: 20, who attributes the nomenclature to a misreading of MEIPO or Miθra; most other scholars accept the designation as Tīr.
77. On this amalgamation see further Gray 1929: 110-117; Choksy and Kotwal 205: 217, 233-234, 249.
78. Old Iranian **tištrya-* cannot yield τ(ε)ιρο in Bactrian. For the widespread connection of the Sirius star and the archer, also found in ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt and China, cf. Panaino 2005.
79. Note that Artemis herself also was a lunar deity.
80. Göbl 1984: no. 310, holding a lotus flower. A parallel issue has NANA OHÞO, which led to speculation that OMMO could have been a misspelling for NANA. Given Umma's appearance in the Rabatak inscription, however, such a conclusion is less valid. But the name also has been interpreted as OHMO, representing the Kushan king Vima Kadphises cf. Falk 2019: 30.
81. Sims-Williams and Cribb 1995/1996: 84.
82. Fussmann 1998: 587; Shenkar 2014: 83, is likewise not opposed to this theory.
83. Falk 2019: 31.
84. Gray 1929: 166-167; Choksy and Kotwal 2005: 217, 241-242.
85. Figure 8 from Göbl 1984: pl. 168, fig. 245/1. Also see Cunningham 1888/1971: 23, 82-83.
86. Note that some coins also show a form OANINΔA (with a feminine ending), which is not surprising insofar as the oldest Bactrian documents show a language which has preserved the category of gender at least partially. But it is interesting in the sense that the ending -α, while feminine, goes back to Old Iranian *-ā, not *-ī, which means that OANINΔA cannot be a direct descendant of **wanant-ī-*. But the implications of this issue were not relevant for the religious aspect.
87. Cf. Tremblay 2006: 225.
88. For instance, in the first line of the inscription at Surkh Kotal, where the Kushan king was designated as KANHÞKO OANINΔO, "Kanishka the Victorious."
89. On the two Avestan spirits see Gray 1929: 167-170.

90. For more details on coins of Kanishka and Huvishka depicting this deity see Cunningham 1888/1971: 23, 83-84. Not directly attested in Bactrian in the sense of "wind", but note that on coins, the Greek counterpart of OAΔO is simply ANEMOΣ (Greek for "wind") and not any Greek deity associated with the wind. Therefore, it seems from this and other data that the underlying Iranian pantheon was mechanically translated into Greek before the coins were issued in Bactrian, cf. Grenet 2015: 214.
91. First proposed by Humbach 1975, accepted by Grenet 2006a: 89 and Sims-Williams 2010:330.
92. Cf. Panaino 2002: 113.
93. For the idea that Mužduwan in the Rabatak inscription could be an epithet of Vayu, see the discussion for that deity.
94. The two titles are Sanskrit, but the inscription, which is written in Kharosthi, is otherwise Gandhari.
95. Figure 9 from http://www.coinindia.com/Kanishka-G62-627.01.jpg. Further details on the iconographic evolution are found in Grenet 2006a: 88-89.
96. Figure 10 from Göbl 1984: pl. 170, fig. 63/8. See also Cunningham 1888/1971: 81-82.
97. Cf. Shenkar 2014: 161. So, the Bactrian Vərəθraγna was one of a few deities in Central Asia whose depiction did not draw directly on the Greek iconographic tradition.
98. Cf. Sims-Williams 2010: no. 119, 195, and 315. The commonly attested personal name οαραυρανο (and variants), "Oaraurano," i.e., Varahrān, is from Western Iranian.
99. Cf. Shenkar 2014: 161.
100. The name of the Oxus is usually reconstructed as Old Iranian **waxšu-*. Tremblay 2004: 116, 2006: 223, traces **waxšu-* further back to **wahwī-*, the feminine of **wahu-* "good, pleasant," and supposes that it is an abbreviation of **āpāh wahwīš*, "good/pleasant water." But this would make Waxšu, as it would be derived from the feminine **wahwīš*, a female deity, which cannot be corroborated from the Bactrian data. However, given that gender changes among Bactrian deities (relative to their Avestan counterparts) are not uncommon, it could also have happened with Vaxšu. For theophoric names, cf. Sims-Williams 2010: nos. 321- 325.
101. Texts and translations are based on Sims-Williams 2007 and 2012.
102. Cf. Sims-Williams 2012: 104-105; Lerner and Sims-Williams 2011: 56.
103. Now located in Khatlon Province of Tajikistan, on the shores of the Amu Darya between Tajikistan and Afghanistan.
104. Contra Tremblay 2006: 223, who regards Waxšu as the Bactrian continuant of the Proto- Iranian and Zoroastrian water deity Āp/Āb/Ābān < Avestan *āp-*, "water," which would make Waxšu the Bactrian counterpart of Anāhitā.
105. Cf. Morgenstierne 1973b: 433.
106. See further Gray 1929: 45-47.
107. Cunningham 1888/1971: 93, pl. 8, figs. 8-12.
108. Grenet 2015: 219.
109. Choksy and Kotwal 2005: 248, 249.
110. Similar names from other Middle Iranian languages are attested far less frequently, for instance the patronym αδοροφαρνιγανο, "Adorofarnigano," is probably of Middle Persian origin, cf. Sims-Williams 2010: no. 11.
111. Gray 1929: 120-123; Choksy 1988.
112. Figure 11 from http://www.coinindia.com/Huvishka-G206v-638.01.jpg.
113. Cf. also Shenkar 2014: 166. As far as the etymology is concerned, Humbach's proposal, 2002: 69, deriving ιαμþο from an earlier **yamšēdo*, which would be more in line with the Avestan and Middle Persian names, cannot be ruled out. But the linguistic data is not needed for the claim about Yima made here; a derivation from "Yima the King"

would only further support the theory.
114. Cf. Sims-Williams 2010: no. 160.
115. Cf. de Jong: 2000.
116. Cf. Morgenstierne 2003: 29.
117. Boyce 1975: 73 translates them as "moist, mighty, undefiled," Tremblay 2006: 223 has "die hohe, starke, unbefleckte" or "the high, strong, undefiled." See also Gray 1929: 55-62.
118. Choksy and Kotwal 2005: 225-226, 232, 249.
119. See further Choksy 1988: 42, 43, fig. 1.6, 44, 1989: 119, 131, 1990a: 32, 34, 37 n. 29, pl2., fig. 11, 1990b: 203, fig. 6, 2015; and Shenkar 2014: 66.
120. Figure 12 courtesy of American Numismatic Society, New York. Cf. Göbl 1984: pl. 164, fig. 1028/6, pl. 172, figs. 128, 1029/4, 1030/1. For a detailed survey of Anāhitā on Kushano- Sasanian coins see Tanabe 2018: 14-18.
121. Boyce and Grenet 1991: 187 n. 147.
122. Cf. Shenkar 2014: 67.
123. Tremblay 2006: 223
124. Details in Choksy 2002: 47-50.
125. As noted by Cunningham 1892/1971: 9, 10, 16.
126. Dani, Humbach, and Göbl 1964: 132-133.

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# The Avesta in Sogdiana

Nicholas Sims-Williams

ABSTRACT

*According to tradition, Sogdiana, with its capital at Samarkand, was one of the first and best of Zoroastrian lands. This paper surveys the evidence for knowledge of the Avesta in pre-Islamic Sogdiana. It concludes that the Sogdian priests had access to a collection of Avestan texts, though this collection would not have been identical with the Avesta which survived in Sasanian Iran and which is known to us today.*

For the last hundred years the standard text of the Avesta has been the critical edition published by Karl Friedrich Geldner at the end of the nineteenth century.[1] At the bottom of each page of this great work, Geldner records the variant readings of several dozen manuscripts, and in his 'Prolegomena' he discusses in detail the relationships and value of these manuscripts. One might suppose that the result of all this scholarly effort would be the reconstruction of the text of the Avesta, in the form of its original composition more than two thousand years earlier. Unfortunately, that is far from being the case.

In the first place, the surviving Avestan manuscripts are all comparatively recent. Even the very oldest, the Copenhagen Visperad manuscript K7, probably dates from no earlier than 1288, making it almost exactly 600 years older than Geldner's edition.[2] And we are dealing with texts which are certainly thousands of years old, even though we cannot put an exact date to them. Of course, the surviving manuscripts are copies of earlier manuscripts, which the scribes sometimes refer to in the colophons. But these references do not take us back beyond the year 1000 C.E. or thereabouts.[3] We cannot follow the manuscript tradition any further than this, but we have good reason to think that the Avestan texts as we know them were first written down in Western Iran during the Sasanian period, probably in about the sixth century C.E.: it cannot be much earlier, since the script which was invented in order to write them is largely based on a late form of the Middle Persian (Pahlavi)

script.[4] By that time the Zoroastrian religion had been established in Western Iran for a long time – at least since Achaemenian times – and the Avesta had no doubt been committed to memory and transmitted orally by the priests, as it still is today.

As Karl Hoffmann pointed out, some phonetic details of Avestan, as recorded in our written texts, may well show the influence of Old Persian pronunciation. For example, wherever the semivowels [y] and [w] occur after a consonant, both Old Persian and Avestan seem to insert the corresponding vowel [i] or [u] before the semivowel, thus adding an extra syllable to the word. Thus the disyllabic Vedic words *anyá-* 'other' and *sárva-* 'whole' have trisyllabic equivalents both in Old Persian (*aniya-*, *haruva-*) and in Avestan (*aiia-*, *hauruua-*). Since the metre shows that these stems still had only two syllables when the Avestan texts were composed, the implication of this argument is that the additional syllable was inserted during the transmission of the Avesta, as a result of its recitation by speakers of Old Persian in Western Iran.[5]

However, the Avestan texts, or at least the most ancient ones, were certainly not composed in Western Iran, but somewhere in the east of the area where Iranian languages were spoken. This is clear from the place-names which are mentioned in the texts, most of which, in so far as they can be identified, belong to areas such as Chorasmia, Sogdiana, Bactria and Arachosia.[6] Unfortunately, it is very difficult to assign the Avestan language to any specific region or to distinguish between features which belong to the original language and those which result from its long process of oral transmission and its progress from Eastern to Western Iran. Seistan, Arachosia and neighbouring areas in what is now Southern Afghanistan, with the River Hilmand and Lake Hamun, play an important role in Avestan eschatology, and Karl Hoffmann argued that the text of the Avesta contains some dialect forms which can be attributed to this region.[7] Earlier, W. B. Henning had drawn attention to some features shared by Avestan and Chorasmian. He argued that the Gathas were composed somewhere in the region of Marv and Herat, which he regarded as part of a state of 'Greater Chorasmia' ruled by Zarathushtra's patron, King Vishtaspa, while the later Avestan texts would have been composed in Seistan.[8] It must be admitted, however, that all such constructions rest on quite slight foundations.

On another occasion Henning drew attention to certain features shared by Avestan and Sogdian, some of which are also found in other Eastern Iranian languages, arguing that they indicate the position of Avestan as a North-Eastern Iranian language within the Iranian family of languages.[9] In particular he referred to the sporadic shortening or loss of the long vowels [ā] and [ī] before the semivowels [y] and [w], citing examples such as Avestan *a-saiia-* 'casting no shadow', Sogdian *sy'k* 'shadow, shade' vs. Vedic *chāyā-*; Avestan *nauuāza-* 'sailor', Sogdian *nw"z* - vs. Vedic

*nāvājá-*; Av. *juua-* 'to live', Sogdian *žw-* vs. Vedic *jī́va-*. Recently, Alberto Cantera, in part following Hoffmann, has argued that these and other points in which Avestan agrees with Sogdian are characteristic of Later Avestan rather than of the Avestan language as a whole; that would imply that these features do not belong to the original stratum of Avestan, but were introduced into the language during its transmission in Eastern Iran, perhaps specifically in Sogdiana.[10]

Whatever land may have been the original home of the Avestan language, we do have evidence that the Avesta was certainly known in Sogdiana at a time well before the texts were committed to writing in Sasanian Iran. This evidence, to which I shall turn in a moment, should not surprise us. According to tradition, as recorded in the first chapter of the Videvdad, Sogdiana was one of the first and best lands created by Ahuramazda, second only to Aryana Vaejah, the mythical homeland of the Iranians. That Sogdiana was a predominantly Zoroastrian land until the coming of Islam is clear from many facts. It is demonstrated by material remains such as ossuaries and depictions of Zoroastrian yazatas, as well as by linguistic facts such as the use of Zoroastrian terms for 'paradise' in Manichaean and Christian Sogdian texts: *wštm'x*< **wahišta-tama- ahu-* 'the best existence';[11] *rwxšn'γrδmn*, cf. Old Avestan *garō dəmāna-*, Later Avestan *raoxšna- garō nmāna-* 'the shining house of praise'.[12] We even have some evidence of the existence of Zoroastrian books in mediaeval Sogdiana. I do not set much store by the legend recorded in the Pahlavi *Šahrestānīhā ī Ērān*, that the Avesta was preserved in the citadel of Samarkand, the capital city of Sogdiana.[13] More worthy of credence is al-Beruni's statement that the Zoroastrians of Sogdiana possessed a book called *Nwbwsth*, probably meaning 'Book of the Nine (Stones)', which dealt with the magical properties of different stones; in fact what seems to be a version of this very book survives in a Sogdian manuscript found in Dunhuang in Western China.[14]

A wall-painting from Penjikent in Sogdiana, dated to the 740s, shows a book in codex form, with richly decorated cover, apparently being carried in a religious procession.[15] The context is wholly Zoroastrian, so the book too should be Zoroastrian, perhaps some part of the Avesta. Above or behind the codex is a divine figure, tentatively identified by Grenet as the yazata Srosh. The fact that he seems to emerge from the book, Grenet suggests, may be intended to illustrate Srosh's Avestan epithet *tanu.mąθra-* 'he who embodies the holy word'.[16]

Although Buddhist, Christian and Manichaean texts are preserved in Sogdian in large numbers, hardly a trace survives of the Zoroastrian literature which must once have existed. One of the very few exceptions is a famous fragment from Dunhuang in Western China.[17] The main part of this text describes a meeting between Zoroaster and an unnamed 'supreme god', presumably Ahuramazda.[18]

> 'At that time, when the king of the gods, the famous, excellent supreme god was in the fragrant paradise in good thought, the perfect, righteous Zoroaster came thither (and) paid homage, from the left knee to the right, from the right knee to the left, and addressed him thus: O god, beneficent law-maker, justly-deciding judge ...'

The text just cited, which is written in quite normal Sogdian of about the ninth century C.E., is preceded by two lines which at first sight appear to make no sense at all. In fact, as was brilliantly recognized by Ilya Gershevitch,[19] the apparent gibberish contains a version of the Avestan prayer *aṣəm vohū*, admittedly with incorrect word-division and some other minor corruptions. The manuscript reads as follows:

[. . .]mwxšt myšt'y wšt'y wšt''y
'štwxm'y twrt'y 'xwšt'yrtm

If we lay this out in three lines (ignoring the faulty word-division), restore the missing letters at the beginning of the first word, and insert a couple of letters which may have been lost by haplography, we obtain a text which can be directly compared with that of the Avestan prayer:

[? r t] m {w x} w x š t m y š t ' y
*aṣəm vohū vahištəm astī*
w š t ' y w š t ' ' y ' š t w x m '
*uštā astī uštā ahmāi*
y t w r t ' y ' x w š t ' y r t m
*hya t̲ aṣāi vahištāi aṣəm*

If the Sogdian manuscript dates from the ninth century, it is some 400 years older than our earliest Avestan manuscript, and thus the oldest surviving example of any Avestan text. However, that is not its real significance. The language of the *aṣəm vohū* prayer as it appears here is not ninth-century Sogdian but something much older, preserving grammatical endings which no longer existed even in the earliest known Sogdian documents of the fourth century, such as the nominative singular neuter *-əm* and the dative singular *-āi*.

The obvious way to explain these archaisms is to suppose that the language of the prayer is in fact Avestan, transcribed into Sogdian script, with some minor phonetic modifications due to its transmission by Sogdian-speakers. In principle that is probably correct.[20] However, it is important to note that the underlying Avestan text is not the Avestan text as we know it from the 'Sasanian Avesta' of our manuscripts. In addition to preserving the Old Iranian grammatical endings mentioned above, which are identical to those attested in Avestan, the Sogdian *aṣəm vohū* text preserves one phonetic feature which is *more* archaic than the form found in our Avestan manuscripts. Where the Avestan text has a form of the word *aṣa-* 'truth', the

Sogdian transcription indicates a form closer to its Vedic cognate *ṛtá-*, as we see from the sequences *-rt'y- = aṣəm* and *-rtm = aṣəm* (both in the last line of the text). The development of **rt* via **hrt* and **hr* to Avestan *š* was studied in detail by Karl Hoffmann.[21] Avestan loanwords in Manichaean Middle Persian such as *amahraspand* 'Light Elements' (= Av. *amə̄ṣa- spəṇta-*) show that the stage **hr*, with loss of **t*, had already been reached in early Sasanian times. Thus the Sogdian transcription of the prayer, which retains the earlier stage **rt*, must be at least pre-Sasanian.

In several recent publications, Alberto Cantera has argued that the Sogdian language contains several nouns which are borrowed from Avestan.[22] His argument is based on the fact that the words in question preserve the Old Iranian nominative singular ending, which is normally lost in Sogdian. However, the development of Sogd. *zrw'* 'Zurwan' from an Old Iranian nom. sg. form in *-ā̆ is no more irregular than that of the many Sogdian feminine nouns with nom. sg. -ā̆. In the cases of *w'xš* 'word' (cf. Av. nom. sg. *vāxš*) and *fšy'ws* 'gentleman' (cf. Av. nom. sg. *fšuiiąs*), the preservation of the final sibilant may simply be due to the fact that these forms ended in a double consonant.[23] The most plausible of Cantera's examples, in my opinion, is Sogd. *δrγwšk-*, *jwxšq-* 'disciple', which he derives from the Av. nom. sg. *driγuš* (with an added **k*-suffix); but even in this case the form could be inherited rather than borrowed if the addition of the suffix **ka-* took place at an early enough stage, before the expected loss of the final *-š*.

Less dubious examples of Avestan loanwords in Sogdian are the names of the thirty days of the month. These were probably introduced into Sogdiana during the Achaemenian period, as is indicated by the fact that they are regularly accompanied by the word *rwc*, i.e. Old Persian *raucah-* 'day' (rather than by its Sogdian equivalent *myä* or its Avestan equivalent *aiiar-*).[24]

Two further examples of Avestan loanwords in Sogdian deserve a rather more detailed discussion. The first is the name of Avyâmanyu, Avyâman or Vyâman (*'βy'mnyw*, *'βy'mn*, *βy'mn*), a little known divinity who is indirectly attested via Sogdian personal names such as *'βy'mn-βntk* 'slave of Avyāman'.[25] The longer form Avyāmanyu clearly indicates that the name is a compound of Old Iranian *manyu-* 'spirit'. Although in principle one might imagine that the term 'spirit' could be applied to many divine beings, it is *a priori* probable that this name should refer to Spenta Mainyu, the only member of the Zoroastrian pantheon whose name actually contains the word *manyu-*. In Avestan he is usually called *spəṇtō mainiiuš* 'the holy spirit', but he is also referred to in the Gathas by the equivalent superlative and comparative forms, *spāništō mainiiuš* 'the holiest spirit' or *spaniiå mainiiuš* 'the holier spirit (of the two spirits)'. Yet another alternative is the use of the adjective

*vaŋhuš* 'good' or its superlative*vahištō* 'best' in place of*spəṇtō*. The whole range of forms attested may be tabulated as follows:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| *spəṇtō* 'holy' | *vaŋhuš* 'good' | |
| *spaniiå* 'holier' | ..... | + *mainiiuš* 'spirit' |
| *spāništō* 'holiest' | *vahištō* 'best' | |

To fill the obvious gap in this table one may reconstruct the term**vahiiå mainiiuš* 'the better spirit (of the two)', whose absence from the extant Avesta may be nothing more than an accident of survival. Sogdian Avyāmanyu represents this form perfectly – provided that one does not think of it as an inherited Sogdian cognate (which should have had an initial *w*-) but as an ancient loanword (with the characteristic Avestan initial*v*-).

Although Spenta Mainyu is not referred to as **vahiiå mainiiuš* 'the better spirit' in the Avesta as we know it, there are a few other indications of the existence of such a usage. In Chapter 46 of his treatise *De Iside et Osiride*, Plutarch writes: 'some believe that there are two gods who are rivals ... the one being the creator of good, the other of evil; others call*the better* of these a god and his rival a daemon, as, for example, Zoroaster the Magus ...'.[26] As Albert de Jong points out: 'Plutarch's use of the comparative "better" for the designation of the good spirit, has often been connected with Zarathustra's Gāthās ... If Plutarch really reproduces a Zoroastrian expression, he must have relied on excellent scriptural sources (of which no other trace survives)'.[27] The Sogdian name Avyāmanyu may well depend on the same 'excellent scriptural source', or one closely related to it.

The Sogdian term for 'devil', *šmnw*, which translates the name of the Christian Satan, the Buddhist Mara, the Zoroastrian and Manichaean Ahriman, and which is also found as a loanword in Old Turkish and Mongolian, provides a close parallel to the case of Avyâman. It used to be assumed that *šmnw* is identical with Avestan *aŋrō mainiiuš*, Pahlavi *Ahriman*, but the required development of Old Iranian**hr* to Sogdian *š* would be quite unique. The suggestion of F.C. Andreas,[28] that *šmnw* represents an Avestan **ašå mainiiuš* 'the worse spirit', the comparative equivalent of the attested *akō mainiiuš* 'the bad spirit' and the exact negative counterpart of **vahiiå mainiiuš*, is therefore much more plausible.

Since neither **vahiiå mainiiuš* nor **ašå mainiiuš* is actually found in the Avesta, these etymologies imply that at an early stage in the history of the Zoroastrian church in Sogdiana, its adherents had access to the text of the scriptures in some ways more complete than that which survived in Sasanian Iran. In principle, this need not be regarded as problematic or even surprising. We know from the Denkard that the Avesta once included many texts which no longer exist, and some fragments of these lost Avestan texts are preserved in various Pahlavi sources.[29] If Sogdiana

was one of the ancient Zoroastrian lands, as tradition tells us and as the Sogdian transcription of the *aṣəm vohū* tends to confirm, there is no reason to doubt that the Sogdian priests would have possessed a collection of Avestan texts, and no reason to expect that this collection would have been identical with the Avesta whichsurvived in Sasanian Iran.

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1. Geldner (1886-1896).
2. See Hoffmann & Narten (1989), 16.
3. See Hoffmann & Narten (1989), 15.
4. References and summary of recent scholarship in Hintze (2014), 3-4.
5. See Hoffmann (1979), 90; Hoffmann & Narten (1989), 40-42.
6. On the geography of the Avesta (especially of the first chapter of the Videvdad) see now Grenet (2005).
7. See Hoffmann (1979), 92-93; Hoffmann & Narten (1989), 78-81.
8. Henning (1951), 42-45.
9. Henning (1944), 49-51.
10. Cantera (2001), 54-57; (2004), 142-143. I will not discuss here Szemerényi's 1951 paper on supposed 'Sogdicisms in the Avesta', which is almost entirely fanciful. For a systematic critique see Cantera (2004), 139-142.
11. Szemerényi (1951), 164, approved by Gershevitch (1954), 251, who regarded this as the one worthwhile suggestion in Szemerényi's article.
12. See also Pavel Lurje's contribution to this volume on the traditional Sogdian personal names which refer to Zoroastrian yazatas.
13. Sims-Williams (2000), 1; Cantera (2004), 137-139.
14. See Henning (1958), 85; Azarnouche & Grenet (2010), 40-41.
15. See de la Vaissière & Riboud (2003).
16. Grenet *apud* de la Vaissière & Riboud (2003), 134-135.
17. British Library Or. 8212/84, illustrated in Stewart *et al.* (2013), 94.
18. Translation from Sims-Williams (1977), 46-47.
19. *Apud* Sims-Williams (1977), 75-82.
20. Thus e.g. Cantera (2004), 138-139; Hintze (2014), 6. Differently Gershevitch *apud* Sims-Williams (1977), 81, who regards the language as an archaic form of Sogdian.
21. See Hoffmann (1986). Note that 'hr' here probably represents a voiceless or 'breathed' *r*.
22. Cantera (2001), 42-3 with n. 21; (2003), 259 n. 27; (2004), 142.
23. If I am right in interpreting the element -*'yws* in Sogdian personal names as an old present participle *-*yans* 'coming', this provides an exact parallel to *fšy'ws* < **fšuyans*. See Sims-Williams (1992), 39; accepted by Lurje (2010), 376.
24. Sims-Williams (2002), 228.
25. See Sims-Williams (1992), 40. For a fuller discussion of Sogdian *(')βy'mn(yw)* and *šmnw* see Sims-Williams (2000), 9-12.
26. The translation is that of de Jong (1997), 165 (my italics).
27. de Jong (1997), 167.
28. Reported by Waldschmidt & Lentz (1933), 515.
29. Some examples: Hoffmann (1967); Klingenschmitt (1971).

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# Wind and Fire: Some Shared Motifs in Indo-Iranian and Sino-Iranian settings

Jenny Rose

ABSTRACT

*Recent archaeological and textual discoveries have increased our knowledge of the articulation of the Zoroastrian religion in Central Asia during the early centuries of the Common Era. This paper considers the contributions of some of these 'new' materials to our understanding of the interplay of Iranian ('Zoroastrian') and Indian ('Hindu' and 'Buddhist') concepts and iconographies from the time of the Kushan rulers in Gandhara to the late 6th century CE. As Iranian and Indian culture reconnected at both an ideological and aesthetic level during this period, dynamic new art forms were generated that traveled along the Silk Roads into China.*

Many archaeological and textual discoveries since the beginning of this century have increased our knowledge of the articulation of the Zoroastrian religion by practitioners who spoke eastern (Middle) Iranian languages, and who lived beyond the fluid boundaries of imperial Iran during the late-Parthian and Sasanian eras. As Iranian and Indian culture reconnected at both an ideological and aesthetic level during this period, a dynamic artistic repertoire was generated that traveled across Central Asia and into China. Interpretation of this new visual vocabulary continues to challenge notions of what constituted 'mainstream' Zoroastrianism of the time.

Recent finds, often by collaborative international teams, have encouraged close co-operation between scholars from different countries and diverse academic backgrounds. Much of the resultant discussion has not, however, reached a wider public audience; it is hoped that some of the materials presented here will address that omission, while tracing the interplay of certain Iranian ('Zoroastrian') and Indian ('Hindu' and 'Buddhist') concepts and iconographies along the Silk Road.

The image of fire in a fire-holder **(Fig. 1)**, found on an object unearthed in late 2003, reminds us of an original Indo-Iranian religious and cultural connection, before

the two peoples separated in the late 3rd millennium BCE. The artifact on which this image is carved was not, however, discovered in India or Iran, or even Central Asia, but near Xian in north-central China. This was the site of Changan, the ancient capital of several successive Chinese dynasties, including the Han, Northern Zhou, Sui and Tang.

**Fig. 1: Fire blazing in fire holder.**
**Sarcophagus of Wirkak/Shi Jun**
**City Museum, Xi'an, China.**
**(Photo © Jenny Rose)**

The fire motif in question is carved on the stone sarcophagus belonging to a trader and community leader, who was not Chinese but was interred in Changan in the late 6th century CE, that is during the Northern Zhou period **(Fig. 2).** Some sense of the cultural origin of the deceased is gleaned from the depiction of fire and from other reliefs that decorate the engraved and painted exterior of the tomb. These reflect a broad religious vocabulary of Zoroastrian, Buddhist and Manichaean motifs. A Chinese-Sogdian bilingual epitaph on the front of the house-shaped tomb

**Fig. 2: Sarcophagus of Wirkak**
**City Museum, Xi'an, China.**
**(Photo © Jenny Rose)**

relates that the deceased's family had originally come from the region around Shakhrisabz in Uzbekistan.[1] His Sogdian name was Wirkak, and he had been a leader (Chinese, *sabao*) of the Sogdian community, in one of the western prefectures before moving to Changan, where he died at age 86 in 579 CE.[2] Wirkak was buried with his wife, Wiyusi, also of Sogdian descent, who had died a month after her husband.[3] The sarcophagus was placed in a Chinese shaft tomb typical of the period.[4] Despite the Chinese cultural context for the burial, and some syncretistic aspects, the most persuasive reading is that both Wirkak and his wife were Sogdian Zoroastrians.

This perspective is supported by the depiction, on either side of the 'door,' of a figure holding tongs as he tends to the fire **(Fig. 3)**.[5] He wears the mouth cover referenced in the *Avesta* (Av., *paitidāna,* NP*padān*) as a priestly accouterment, worn during an act of worship so as not to pollute the fire (Wd.14.8, 18.1). The *padān* is associated iconographically with Persian priests engaged in ritual activity from the Achaemenid period on. The priest shown on Wirkak's sarcophagus seems to be performing the Zoroastrian funerary rituals, which traditionally took place on the morning of the fourth day after death, as the soul rose to be judged. The whole tomb could be said to function as a large ossuary ('bone box'), with the story of the deceased's life read clockwise from the front, culminating in the panels at the eastern end, which depict the soul's path to the afterlife.

**Fig. 3: Priest tending the fire.**
**Wirkak sarcophagus.**
**City Museum, Xi'an, China.**
**(Photo © Jenny Rose)**

These panels illustrate the passing of the soul across the 'bridge of reckoning' (MP: *činwadpuhl*, from Av. *činuuatōpərətu-*). In the lower right-hand section is a curved bridge, guarded by two dogs, with two priests standing at the entrance wearing *padān* and holding *barsom* (Av. *baresman*), the sacred twigs **(Fig. 4)**.[6] The soul of Wirkak and his wife, with members of their family, are shown successfully crossing

**Fig. 4: Passage of the Soul.**
**Eastern panel, Wirkak sarcophagus.**
**City Museum, Xi'an, China.**
**(Photo © Jenny Rose)**

the **Č**inwad bridge, followed by pack and herd animals. Wirkak and Wiyusi are next seen high above the bridge, above even the clouds and the mountains, kneeling side by side. Wirkak is handing a rolled document to a crowned winged woman, who is thought to represent either his epitomized inner religious conscience (Av.*daēnā*) or the divinity (Av.*yazata*) of blessing, *DahmānĀfrīn*, who is invoked in the funerary ritual on the fourth morning **(Fig. 5**).[7] The Avestan *Hadokht Nask* describes how the individual's *daēnā* greets the soul of the just in the form of a beautiful woman, and accompanies the soul to the first of the four steps that lead up to the Endless Light Av. *anagra-raocah*-), where Ahura Mazdā dwells (HN 2. 9-15). The attributes of a just person (Av. *ašauuan*: 'one who adheres to that which is right,' or 'orderly') include making offerings to the good waters and to the fire of Ahura Mazdā (HN 2.13).

**Fig. 5: Wirkak and Wikusi kneel before a female divinity,**
**Eastern panel, Wirkak sarcophagus.**
**City Museum, Xi'an, China.**
**(Photo © Jenny Rose)**

Since the couple has crossed the bridge, and the crowned woman accepts the document - interpreted as the account of their thoughts, words and deeds - it is assumed that they have been judged as 'good' in all respects; the document is their

passport to the upper regions, that is, paradise. Although the word 'paradise' derives from an Old Iranian term and becomes a key word for the place to which the righteous aspire in later religious traditions, the phrase derived from the *Gāthās* for this concept is *vahišta-ahu-* (Y44.2), or 'best existence.' The Sogdian epitaph on the tomb declares that Wirkak and Wiyusi have entered this 'best existence,' where they will have a new life together.[8]

On the upper right section of the panel, presiding over this transition, is a figure within a mandorla, scarves billowing around him as if animated by the two floating winged attendants, who flap another scarf overhead **(Fig. 6)**. The central figure sits cross-legged atop three bulls and holds a trident in his right hand, with his left hand resting on his upper leg. The trident held upright, and the bull as a vehicle are emblems that are also associated with the Indic divinity Śiva, as Mahādeva or Maheśvara, who often also has three heads.[9] *Śiva*, meaning 'auspicious,' was initially connected with the Vedic deity Rudra, one of whose titles is *paśupati* 'lord of cattle/animals' (*Atharva Veda* 2.34) that is, 'lord of all living beings.'[10] It is partly this association with the life force animating all beings that later connects Śiva with Vedic Vāyu, the 'energy and movement of air,' the 'breath that gives life.'[11]

**Fig. 6: Male Divinity.**
**Eastern panel, Wirkak sarcophagus.**
**City Museum, Xi'an, China.**
**(Photo © Jenny Rose)**

Given the Sogdian Zoroastrian context of this image, it cannot depict either Indic Śiva or Vāyu, but must be the Avestan *yazata* Vayu, who is portrayed as a powerful, dynamic entity, moving between the material and 'thought' worlds, and effecting reward or penalty on both the living and the dead (*Yašt* 15, Wd.5.8,9). Since, in Zoroastrian textual contexts, Vayu does not act as a judge, de la Vaissière interprets the figure as a Sogdian depiction of the divinity, assimilated with the 'Righteous Judge' of the Manichaean scheme, who is also enthroned in the atmosphere.[12] But the couple have already been judged and have moved upwards from the bridge, so

this can only be the Zoroastrian Vayu, who, in the Middle Persian *Bundahišn* takes the soul of the *ašauuan* by the hand after it has crossed the bridge, and brings it to its rightful place in the upper atmosphere.[13] The *Hadokht Nask* anticipates this transport by Vayu into the 'best existence': when dawn appears on the morning of the fourth day after death, and the soul (Av. *uruuan*) of the just leaves the world of the living, a wind blows towards it from the south, that is more sweetly scented than any other wind (HN 2. 7-8).[14] It is from out of this wind that the individual's *daēnā* appears.

Here then, is a Sogdian Zoroastrian representation of Vayu, his scarf fluttering in the fragrant breeze, welcoming the souls of a Sogdian Zoroastrian couple, who had lived and died in China in the 6th century CE.[15] Several arguments have been put forward as to why Ahura Mazdā does not preside: perhaps the most cogent is that the Sogdians seem to have been reticent in producing iconography of this 'supreme god' (Sogdian, *Adhvagh*).[16]

This representation of Vayu, alongside similar examples of the iconographic syncretism of Indian and Iranian motifs, seems to have originated under the stimulus of the Kushans, a dynasty that flourished from around the 1st to mid-3rd c. CE, extending from Gandhara (modern Afghanistan, Pakistan) into northern India and what is now southern Uzbekistan. The ancestors of the Kushans, possibly Scythian, had migrated from northwestern China through Bactria (between the Hindu Kush and the Amy Darya). Under the Kushans, a rich cultural interaction occurred between evolving Indian and Iranian iconographic forms and a remnant Greek style that had survived since the time of Alexander. The ensuing syncretism is seen in the inscriptions and coins of Kanishka I (r.c. 127-150 CE), the most significant ruler of the Kushans.

Kanishka adopted a local Middle Iranian language, written in Greek script, now referred to as Bactrian.[17] A Bactrian inscription found at Rabatak in northern Afghanistan in 1993 is of importance in documenting some chronological and religious facets of Kanishka's rule.[18] The text describes events of the first year of his reign and names several divinities as the source of his authority to rule: these include the Central Asian goddess Nana, the Indian goddess Uma, and the Iranian (Zoroastrian) divine beings Ahura Mazdā, Sraoša, Naryosangha and Mithra.[19] The inscription also mentions a divinity entitled 'Muzhduwān,' (Bactrian, *mozdooano*) meaning 'the Gracious One,' which may be an epithet of Śiva.[20] The dominance of Zoroastrian divinities in the Rabatak text, and on Kushan coins from Kanishka I on, indicates that the public religion of the Kushans at this time was an eastern Iranian form of Zoroastrianism.[21] The understanding that the Kushans were 'officially' Zoroastrian, rather than Hindu or Buddhist, has not been as widely acknowledged as it could be.[22]

Kushan coinage provides some of the earliest anthropomorphic representations of Zoroastrian *yazatas*, modeled on Indo-Greek, Indo-Scythian and Parthian precursors.[23] One type provides the key to the depiction of the Iranian Vayu on Wirkak's sarcophagus: from Wima Kadphises on (r.c. 113-127), coins depict a divinity

with two or four arms, one holding a trident, sometimes with three heads, sometime with a single head and a halo, often in front of a bull. Kanishka's coins identify this figure as *Oēšo* in Bactrian, which derives from Avestan *Vayuš*, a nominative case of Vayu **(Fig. 7)**. Cribb and Srinivasan maintain that, apart from the bull, the above attributes, along with other markers such as the thunder bolt, water pot and animal skin, or horned animal, were attached first to the composite form of Kushan Oēšo and only later associated with emerging imagery of Śiva in Gandhara.[24] The diadem, halo and elephant goad seem not to have been associated with Śiva at this time.[25]

**Fig. 7: Coin of Kanishka I, depicting *Oēšo***
**(Photo courtesy of coinindia.com)**

Such iconography had a direct impact on subsequent representations of Vayu in Sogdiana, where the *yazata* is depicted in several 6th/7th century murals from Panjikent with similar features – three faces, multiple arms, one of which holds a trident –and seated on a bull 'throne.' One of these murals, from a private house in Panjikent, carries the Sogdian label 'Wēšparkar,' linking it with both Avestan *Vayuš* and Kushan *Oēšo*.[26] Wešparkar derives from an Avestan phrase, '*Vaiiušuparōkairiiō*,' meaning 'the wind whose activity is in the upper regions' (Wd. 19.13).[27] Kushano-Sasanian coins expand this equivalency with their identification of a divinity portrayed like Oēšo, but with the inscription 'Burzāwand Yazd' (Bactrian, *borzoandoiazado*), 'the god in the upper regions,' or 'the high (i.e. exalted) god'.[28] In later Sogdian Buddhist context, three-faced Wēšparkar was equated with Mahādeva (Śiva), the 'great god."[29]

The reverse of Kanishka's coins provides the earliest figurative depictions of Zoroastrian *yazatas*, who are named in Bactrian and portrayed with individual characteristics, usually proffering the diadem of power. On one type, Ātar (Bactrian, *Athšo*), the Zoroastrian *yazata* of fire, is shown as a man with flames on both shoulders.[30] The fire-on-the-shoulder motif is also attached to the ruler on Kushan coinage, beginning with Kanishka's father Wima Kadphises. On the obverse of this king's coins, flames rest on the ruler's right shoulder as he makes an offering to fire in a fire holder. In this context, the flames on the shoulder of the king are generally interpreted as a stylized representation of the Avestan concept of *xwarenah* (NP *farr*), the glory that radiates from a ruler authorized by Ahura Mazdā.[31] The two

sides of each coin may be understood to show the Kushan concept of rule: on the obverse, the king pays homage to the divine beings, who, on the reverse, are seen to sanction and support his kingship.[32]

Although the reverse of most Sasanian gold and silver coins display the fire holder in some form, signifying a similar link between an orderly rule and religious adherence, the coinage of only one Sasanian king, Valkash (r. 484-488), echoed the Kushan motif of the flame on the shoulder. The flaming shoulder symbolism of the radiance emanating from a spiritually endowed individual did, however, become part of Kushan Buddhist iconic vocabulary. An early example of this is found on a couple of schist sculptures of the Dipankara Buddha from Shotorak, near Begram, where the surrounding frame was also edged with a mandorla of flames.[33]Such sculptures, as well as reliefs and wall paintings, adorned Kushan-era Buddhist temples and monasteries established at the northern edge of the empire in what is now southern Uzbekistan. This region was a meeting ground for Iranian-speaking Zoroastrians and Buddhists.

That the Kushan Buddhist sites were centers of religious and cultural diversity may be evidenced by the discovery of a monochrome mural at the monastic settlement of Kara Tepe near Termez (fl.2nd – 3rd centuries CE). This mural depicts a meditating Buddha surrounded by two halos of flames. The Russian archaeologist Boris Stavisky considered this mural to be a syncretic combination of 'the image of the Buddha with the attributes of the god of light or fire.'[34]Stavisky interpreted the Bactrian graffiti above the Buddha's left shoulder to read 'Buddha-Mazdā' (*boddomazdo*) which seemed to confirm his analysis.[35]According to this reading of the image, the fusion of the symbolism of the glory of Ahura Mazdā with the image of the Buddha could denote either a Zoroastrian modification of Buddhist iconography, or the Buddhist assimilation of Ahura Mazdāas an attendant local deity. It may also be the personal name of the individual who added the graffiti.[36] Sims-Williams notes, however, that although '*mozdo'* (Mazdā) is attested as a personal name in Bactrian, there is no example of it occurring in compound names; these all use '*oromozdo*' (Ahura Mazdā).[37]In this instance, he suggests, *mozdo* may derive from **mizda*- 'reward' and the name should then be read as 'reward (bestowed by) the Buddha.' This interpretation would seem to dissociate the image's fire halo from any eastern Iranian Zoroastrian stimulus, but the fact that the 'flaming shoulder' motif was already established in Kushan dynastic iconography points to its direct application of the Iranian concept of the *farr* 'to symbolize the divine radiance emanating from the Buddha'.[38]

The 'flaming shoulder' and fiery mandorla motifs of Kushan iconography travelled with Buddhist monks and pilgrims from Central Asia along the trade routes towards China.[39] Buddhist cave temples built into the foothills at Kucha and Kizil on the northern route were decorated with colorful murals, including images of the Buddha and his disciples with shoulder flames.[40] Gandharan-style *Bodhisattvas* on the ceiling of the so-called Chimney Cave at Kumtura, near Kucha, display halos

and 'Iranian' features. It is tempting to wonder whether Peroz, the son of the last Sasanian king, Yazdegerd III (r. 632-651), might have stopped at these sites on his way to or from the Tang Chinese court and recognized the Iranian components of such iconography.

The Chinese Buddhist pilgrim Xuanzang relates that many of the Buddhist sites along the southern route were already buried under the sand by the time he made his way back to Changan from India in the mid-7th century.[41] This was the case at Rawakin Khotan, which was not rediscovered until the early 20th century. Khotanese documents written in an eastern Middle Iranian language are still being discovered in the region. Buddhist Khotanese texts adapted the concept of the *farr*, as *Phārra*, to refer to the elevated status of a Buddha, or in some cases to the stages of a monk on the Buddhist path to enlightenment.[42]

The fact that such discoveries continue to be made in Central Asia, north-central China, and the shifting sands of the Taklamakan Desert, reminds us that there is still a wealth of material relating to eastern Iranian Zoroastrianism to be retrieved. Finds may take the form of artifacts and texts extracted from newly exposed temples, caves or tombs, or they may be located within the existing archives of museums or libraries, waiting for the moment when an enterprising scholar decides to take one more curious look…

**Abbreviations**

| | |
|---|---|
| Av | Avestan |
| *BAI* | *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* |
| Bd | *Bundahišn* |
| HN | *HadokhtNask* |
| MP | Middle Persian |
| NP | New Persian |
| Sogd. | Sogdian |
| Wd | *Widēwdād* |
| Y | *Yasna* |

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1. Identified as Chinese 'Shi', Sogdian 'Kesh'. The epitaph provides the earliest example of juxtaposed Sino-Sogdian text, and is important for the study of the Sogdian language; see Yang 2005.
2. His Chinese name is Shi Jun, or 'Master Shi;'Dien 2003. *Sabao* derives from Sogdian *s'rtp'w* (*sartpāw*), a caravan leader, or merchant chief; *ibid*, pp109, 111. The *sabao* was the designated spokesman for the community and responsible for the actions of its members.
3. Her Chinese name translates as 'Lady Kang,' or 'wife from the Kang family;'Yoshida, 2005. p. 60. The couple's three sons built their parents' tomb, 'in the suitable place' in

Xi'an in February 580 CE; *ibid.*, pp. 59, 61.

4. Yang, 2005. p. 21. The tomb was more elaborate than most tombs of those of similar rank, with five ceiling wells, on a par with imperial tombs and Great Generals of the Northern Zhou; Yoshida, 2005.p 21 and Dien, 2003. pp. 108-109.
5. The birdlike attributes of the priests are discussed in Rose, 2018.
6. In the *Avesta*, two dogs are said to guard the bridge (Wd. 13.9). They accompany the *Daēnā*, who drags the souls of the 'lie follower' (Av. *dregvant*) into darkness, but rises above High Hara with the souls of the just and supports them across the place of reckoning to the presence of the *yazatas* in the 'thought world' (Wd. 19.30).
7. Gulácsi and BeDuhn ,2012. p. 21. A main element of the fourth day ritual (*yašt-ičahārom*) is the *Āfrīnagān-iDahmān*, the 'blessing' or 'praise' of Dahmān. For a detailed analysis of the entire scene, see Grenet et al, 2004.
8. The Sogdian equivalent to this Avestan term is *'xwshtm'xw*; Yoshida ,2005 .pp. 58, 59, 68.
9. Grenet ,2006. p. 473.
10. The *Rgveda* has the related *paśupa* 'protector of cattle,' as a name of Pushan, to whom several hymns are dedicated.
11. Cf. *Rgveda* 1.135.7-9.
12. De la Vaissière, 2015. p. 107.
13. Bd. 30.23.
14. HN 2.7-8.
15. Grenet ,2007. p. 474.
16. Grenet, 2006. p. 92. Grenet mentions Marshak's identification of a few small syncretistic terracotta figures as Indra-Advagh.
17. The legends on the first Kushan coins are in Greek, but early in the reign of Kanishka, Bactrian inscriptions replaced the Greek on the coins.
18. Sims-Williams and Cribb, 1995, re-translated Sims-Williams, 2004,
19. See Sims-Williams, 2004. A later interlinear addition equates Naryosangha and Sraoša (Bactrian, *Narasa* and *Srošard* respectively) with the 'Indian' Mahāsena and Viśāka.
20. Grenet ,2006. p. 89. The goddess Nana has been equated with the *yazatas* Spentā Ārmaiti and Anāhitā; see, respectively, Azarpay,1976. pp 540-542, and Grenet and Marshak, 1998. p. 8.
21. Cribb, 2008. p. 122.
22. The prevalence of Zoroastrianism in the region is supported by Bactrian documents dated with day and month names from the Zoroastrian calendar; see Sims-Williams and de Blois 1996. The forms of some of the names seem to have been borrowed from Old Iranian, however, which may reflect Sasanian influence.
23. See Cribb ,1997. p. 21.
24. Cribb, 2008. p. 124; Cribb, 1997. pp. 31-35; Srinavasan, 2016. p 66 ff. The trident echoes that of Poseidon, being held in the divinity's hand, which is not the case in Kushan Mathuran depictions of Siva; see Srinivasan *Ibid.*, pp. 77, 91. Srinivasan identifies the trident, water pot and thunderbolt as all connoting water, an element naturally associated with Iranian Vayu, as a bringer of rain.
25. Cribb, 1997. p. 35. The thunderbolt (*vajra*) was wielded by both Indra and Rudra, and the water pot was associated with Brahma; for the latter, see Bopearachchi, 2008. p. 35.
26. Azarpay, 1981. p. 30.
27. Sims-Williams, 2000. p. 5.
28. See Cribb, 1997. pp. 29, 30.
29. Such duplication is found in a *Vessantara Jātaka* compiled in the 8th/9th century;

see Grenet, 2006. p. 92, and p. 97 n. 18. See also Yang, 2005. p. 37, in reference to a Chinese source identifying 'the god of Heaven' of the Sogdians (that is, Wēšparkar) with the *Maheśvara* of Buddhist sutras.

30. The Old Avestan liturgy, the *Yasna Haptanghaiti*, identifies Ātar (fire) as the means for worshippers to approach Ahura Mazdā (YH 36).
31. The *xwarenah* is described as 'the mighty, gleaming glory created by Mazdā' (*Yašt* 19.54). The *Farr* is also depicted anthropomorphically as a distinct figure on Kushan coins, named in Bactrian as '*Pharro'*.
32. Cribb, 2008. p. 123.
33. One such statue was transferred to the Kabul Museum in the late 1930s, and stolen from there in early 1993. Another is in the Miho Museum collection.
34. Stavisky, 1980. p. 90.
35. *Ibid*, p. 91. Chinese and Tibetan sources inform that Kara Tepe was a center for the Bactrian translation of Indian texts.
36. Cursive Bactrian graffiti from the Kushano-Sasanian period at Kara Tepe refer to *Oromozdo* (Ahura Mazdā) and *borzomira* (Mithra *berezant* – 'Mithra on high'), denoting that at least some visitors to the vihara were Zoroastrian.
37. Sims-Williams, 2010. p. 275.
38. Tsuchiya 1999/2000, p. 103.
39. Kushan Buddhist monks of the 2nd and 3rd centuries CE were among the earliest translators of Indian Buddhist writings into Chinese.
40. Similar imagery is found at Bamiyan, Afganistan.
41. Wriggins, 2004. pp. 174, 177.
42. Cf. Gnoli.

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# Iranian Metalwork and Textiles from Qinghai/Amdo: Tracing the Silk Road in the Himalayan Region

Matteo Compareti

ABSTRACT

*This paper discusses a group of metalwork and textile fragmentary objects that have recently entered public and private collections in many parts of the world. Most likely, they are the results of the activity of looters in the region of Reshui, Dulan County in the Chinese Province of Qinghai where Tuyuhun and Tubo royal clan graves have been disturbed for a long period. Local police have confiscated a big number of metalwork and textiles from local looters in recent times. Metalwork and textile fragments confiscated in Qinghai became part of the collection of the Dulan County Museum and the Museum of Tibetan Culture in Xining. Those objects display very clear Iranian iconographies that could have reached Tibet through the activity of Sogdian merchants in the last phase of Tubo rule in Central Asia between the eighth-ninth century CE. A technical analysis of metalwork and textiles from Reshui graves does not exist yet and every observation should be considered hypothetically from the point of view of art history by comparisons with similar metal and textile production of the Iranian world. Those precious objects were probably produced in the Samanid Emirate (819-1005) that controlled a big territory between eastern Iran, Afghanistan, and most of the ex-Soviet Central Asia.*

Some highly refined metalwork and textile fragments have recently entered public and private collections in many part of the world. According to the personnel in the Dulan County Museum (Qinghai Province), Chinese police has confiscated a big number of metalwork and textiles from local looters in recent times. The location of the graves that were disturbed by the criminal activity could be from the site of Reshui (Dulan County), approximately fifty kilometers south-west of the Qinghai Lake or Koko-nor.

Qinghai is the Chinese province that was commonly known as Amdo corresponding to the greater Tsaidam Basin. Many graves that belonged to Tuyuhun

and Tubo royal clans have been investigated in this region since the 1980s. Both Tuyuhuns and Tubos recur in Chinese written sources as powerful kingdoms formed around the Qinghai Lake. After defeating the Tuyuhuns and unifying the entire Himalayan region under the Pugyel Dynasty (634-842), the Tibetans (Tubo in Chinese sources) started to become more and more powerful in Central Asia, China and northern India (Beckwith, 1987). They also controlled Dunhuang that was an important Buddhist center along the Eurasian caravan network commonly known as "Silk Road". In early 19th century, the famous British explorer Aurel Stein found in a sealed cave in Dunhuang (cave 17, also known as "Library Cave") many documents in Tibetan, Chinese and other languages that were extremely important for the study of the ancient history of Central Asia in pre-modern time (Rong, 1999-2000).

Metalwork and textile fragments confiscated in Qinghai became part of the collection of the Dulan County Museum and the Museum of Tibetan Culture in Xining. Those objects display very clear Iranian iconographies that could have reached Tibet through the activity of Sogdian merchants in the last phase of Tubo rule in Central Asia between eighth-ninth centuries CE (Heller 1998; Heller 2006).

A technical analysis of metalwork and textiles from Reshui graves does not exist yet. Moreover, as already observed above, looters disturbed the archaeological context several times. Therefore, every observation should be considered hypothetically from the point of view of art history bycomparisons with similar metal and textile production of the Iranian world. Most likely, those objects of luxury arts were produced within the borders of the Samanid Emirate (819-1005), thatcontrolled a big territory between eastern Iran, Afghanistan and most of ex-Soviet Central Asia from its capital Bukhara (Compareti, 2015: 42).

## Metal objects

Among the metal artifacts from Qinghai, two deserve special attention for their decorative elements and origin.

The first specimen in the Xining Museum is a golden circular plaque not very well preserved in the shape of typical Iranian textile decoration normally called "pearl roundel" pattern (fig. 1). Just some vegetal decorations and the leg of an animal survived but any complete reconstructionis impossible. Small perforations still visible in some points of the plaque possibly served to sewor attach it to some other material. Four much better preserved golden plaques in the Mengdiexuan Collection (Hong Kong) look very similar to the fragmentary one in the Xining Museum and could be considered as coming from the same area (Huo, Chan, Lam 2013: cat. 34). Two of them present a fantastic winged creature with vegetal elements on its body and all around it (fig. 2). Even though the way of representing the wings and the pearl roundel pattern could be considered to be rooted in Iranian arts, this creature looks similar to composite animals that appear in Chinese art of the Tang period. On the occasion of the conference "Cultural Exchange along the Silk Road Masterpieces

of the Tubo Period 7th-9th Century" held in Dunhuang between October 18-20 2019, Regula Schorta and Anja Bayer (Abegg Stiftung, Bern) presented some golden plaques with similar decorations and perforations attached to these objects of precious funerary garments. It should not be ruled out that the golden fragmentary plaque in the Xining Museum had a very similar function. The comparison with textiles embellished with pearl roundels looks extremely convincing and in fact, both metalwork and textiles could have the same origin.

**Fig. 1: Fragmentary golden circular plaque, Museum of Tibetan Culture, Xining. (Photo: M. Compareti)**

The second metal specimen in the Dulan Museum is a folded silver gilt dish with an interesting scene in front of a tree (fig. 3). At least three persons can be distinguished: a reclined desperate woman wearing a long garment in the center possibly attacked by a young man with his left legleaning on a triangular, stepped object while another undistinguished (standing?) figure on the right holds in his only visible hand a stick. It is not easy to identify the scene because the bentpart of the dish covers its entire right portion. The position of the woman calls to mind the killing of Penthesileia by Achilles during the Trojan War. However, this scene usually includes only two figures in Classical art while the scene in the silver vessel clearly shows a third person on the right. One possible identification could be another episode of the Trojan War related to Ajax and Cassandra. According to the story, this Greek warrior raped Cassandra who desperately tried to stay attached to a statue of Athena for protection (Connelly, 1993). As it is well known, the Greek goddess was covered with armor and carried a shield and spear. Although a definitive readingcould be possible after restoring the dish, this scene should be considered as rooted in Greek art beyond any doubt.

**Fig. 2: Golden plaque, the Mengdiexuan Collection (Hong Kong). After: Huo, Chan, Lam 2013: cat. 34.**

**Fig. 3: Silver gilt dish embellished with a scene rooted in Greek art, Dulan County Museum. (Photo and line drawings: M. Compareti)**

This artifact could have been imported from the eastern Roman Empire or even Bactria where Greek art had a very strong impact on local culture even after the Arab conquest in the seventh century. Silver vessels embellished with Greek scenes were also produced in Sasanian Persia asinscriptions in Middle Persian and other stylistic details could suggest (Dan, Grenet, Sims- Williams 2014; Compareti, 2020).

Other silver and gold objects found in Tibet that could be dated to the period when the Pugyel Dynasty was in power sometimes present decorative elements

considered to be Greek (Heller 2013a: 259). Silver vessels embellished with Greek subjects could therefore have been in high demand in medieval Tibet exactly as it happened in many other parts of Eurasia. It should not be ruled out that such objects of toreutics were imported into the Himalayan region via Central Asian intermediaries and not directly from the Greco-Roman world.

## Textile fragments

Many textile fragments and even entire well-preserved tunics entered the collection of the Dulan County Museum and the Museum of Tibetan Culture in Xining. Unfortunately, no catalogue of these collections exists. We also see that in the China National Silk Museum collection in Hangzhou and the Abegg Stiftung in Bern there are several textiles that should be considered originally from the greater Tsaidam Basin (Zhao 2015; Gasparini 2016). Some other specimens from that same region have appeared in other public and private collections around the world (Corty 2016).

**Fig. 4: Fragmentary textile, Museum of Tibetan Culture, Xining. (Photo: M. Compareti)**

A small number of graves at Dulan that belonged to Tuyuhun and Tubo royal clans were scientifically excavated while most of them were disturbed by looters. Archeologists found precious fragmentary textiles in every excavated grave (Heller 1998; Heller 2006; Tao, Wertmann 2009; Tao 2013; Heller 2013b).

Almost all the silk textiles in the Dulan Museum, Museum of Tibetan Culture in Xining, China National Silk Museum and Abegg Stiftung in Switzerland belong to the so-called *Zandaniji* group. This is an improper term appearing in Islamic written

sources to describe a group of textiles produced in western Sogdiana, precisely in the village of Zandane, in the region of Bukhara. Islamic sources do not mention any decorative patterns but insist on the nature of these *Zandaniji* textiles that were produced in cotton and not silk (Dode 2016). Many fragmentary textiles of the so-called *Zandaniji* group entered European collections because medieval Christian pilgrims used them to wrap precious relics. One inscription identified on the fragment preserved in the Huy Cathedral (Belgium) has been established to be actually in Arabic and not the Sogdian language as previously thought (Sims-Williams, Khan 2008). At least two more fragments from Dulan and, possibly, neighboring regions present inscriptions in Middle Persian and not Sogdian (Weber 2010: 352-354; Tao 2913: 107-110; Cultural Exchange along the Silk Road, 2019: 10).

**Fig. 5: Sketch of a fragmentary textile from Reshui graves, Dulan. Qinghai Cultural Relics and Archaeology Research Institute (QK001859). After: Xu, Zhao 1996: fig. 4.**

**Fig. 6: Fragmentary textile, Museum of Tibetan Culture, Xining. (Photo: M. Compareti)**

From an iconographic point of view, this group of textiles does not present any parallel in pre-Islamic Sogdian paintings. Pearl roundels containing different subjects were definitely the most popular patterns in Sogdian textile art while they do not appear often in pre-Islamic Persian art.

Textiles embellished with pearl roundels should be considered genuine Sogdian fabrics and not items imported from Sasanian Persia (Compareti 2004). Pre-Islamic Sogdian decorative motifs were quite standardized. Pearl roundels were always simple geometric forms that usually contained just single subjects. On the contrary, so-called *Zandaniji* textiles present much- elaborated round frames that contained confronted animals or other subjects. Geometric elements usually embellish the body of those animals. This peculiarity too seems to be an evolution of pre- Islamic Sogdian motifs that did not appear in Sasanian art (Allgrove-McDowell 2003, 157).

**Fig. 7: Fragmentary textile, Museum of Tibetan Culture, Xining. (Photo: M. Compareti)**

The attribution of so-called *Zandaniji* textiles to the Islamic period seems to be correct although no hints point to specific manufactures. Samanid Central Asia and specifically western Sogdiana just represent one possibility that could be confirmed only by comparing textiles recovered during controlled archaeological excavations. All this suggests extreme caution in considering so-called *Zandaniji* that still present too many enigmatic points. Despite all recent investigations, scholars still use this

term even if they know it is incorrect.

Silk fragments from Dulan region embellished with patterns belonging to the so-called *Zandaniji* typology are very numerous. They usually present big pearl roundels containing two confronted animals such as birds, horses, rams and others. Such couples of animals are usually standing on a vegetal pedestal in the shape of spread wings. In the interstice formed by four pearl roundels, there are usually elaborated animal, vegetal or geometric elements.

One unique well-preserved textile fragment at present kept in the Xining museum displays typical confronted birds embellished with strings of pearls on their body and ribbons attached to the head (fig. 4). This same kind of bird can be observed on another excavated fabric from Reshui graveyard (fig. 5). Despite some minor differences, not only are the colors exactly the same but also the way of representing the wings with curly final feathers, a ribbon attached to the head and the necklace in the beak of the birds look identical (Xu, Zhao 1996: 14-15). Above the confronted birds, there is a flower or fruit while the pedestal looks like a modified version of "Sasanian" spread wings. Pedestals shaped like spread wings occurred in Sasanian coinage as an important element on Persian royal crowns. It could be observed also on Sasanian silverware, seals and one unique textile where it was used to represent just a pedestal for human busts and insignia of rank (Compareti 2010).

**Fig. 8: Detail of the decoration of a tunic, Museum of Tibetan Culture, Xining.**
*(Photo: M. Compareti)*

Confronted birds represented one of the most popular subjects in textiles from Dulan. Other specimens in the Xining museum include birds of prey and peacocks inside pearl or vegetal roundels (fig. 6). In one more textile, the confronted animals inside roundels seem to be stags while couples of birds occur in the interstices outside the circular frames (fig. 7).

Some well-preserved tunics entered the collection of the Xining museum. The most well preserved one presents confronted birds on a pedestal inside geometrical pearled frames and winged horses along the lower rim (fig. 8). These birds are usually identified with pheasants and according to some scholars they could be typically Sasanian. Other details such as geometricelements on the body of birds and the pedestal point to so-called *Zandaniji* textiles. The winged horses have precise parallels in silk fragments from Antinoe (Egypt) that however were not excavated scientifically in the beginning of the last century (Schrenk 2006: 24-25). Details such as the ribbons, the small beribboned pole above the head of the animal and the way to representthe wings, tail and mane of the horse do not point necessarily to Sasanian Persia since they could be observed in Sogdian textiles too. It should not be ruled out that the silk fragment embellished with winged horses within pearl roundels from Antinoe could actually be a Sogdian textile (Compareti 2003: 35). The triangular crenellated elements on the body of the horse strongly support such an identification.

**Fig. 9: Silk fragment of the so-called Zandaniji group embellished with pseudo-Simurghs, the Museum of Tibetan Culture, Xining.**
**(Photo and line drawings: M. Compareti)**

One last fragmentary textile in the collection of the Xining museum points to the Iranian world for the so-called *Zandaniji* textiles. This unique fragment presents a lattice pattern containing singlecomposite creatures that some scholars identified with the *Simurgh* (Middle Persian *Senmurv*, Avestan *Saena Marega*) of Iranian mythology (fig. 9). Such an identification has proved to be wrong since the *Simurgh* was a colossal magic bird and not a composite monster. Its earliestrepresentation can be possibly observed in an eighth century Sogdian mural painting in the so-called "Rustam program" in room 41, sector VI at Penjikent (Tajikistan). Moreover, the same composite creature in the textile in the Xining museum appears in some countermarks on seventhcentury Sogdian coins together with the inscription *farn*. This term corresponds to Persian *farr* (or *farreh*, Middle Persian *xwarrah*, Avestan *Xwarenah*) meaning "glory" or "charisma" that was necessary to a king to rule according to ancient Iranian concepts (Compareti 2019). Therefore, this composite creature should be considered a representation of *farn* which definitely proves a very strong association between those textile(s) in the Xining museum and the Iranian world. Images of this composite creatures appeared in Central Asia (where they were probably invented) and Persia to be later accepted among Christians and Muslims as well. They were never popular among Buddhists in Central Asia nor the Far East and this could help to better understand this kind of decoration in the royal Tubo graves in Reshui (Compareti forthcoming).

This specific specimen could help to identify the place of provenance of many similar textiles (and metalwork as well) at the Tsaidam Basin since some other specimens belonging to the sametypology and embellished with the same subject have appeared on the antiquities markets some yearsago. One fragment belongs to the China National Silk Museum (Gasparini 2016: 90-91) whileCarlo Cristi, an art dealer has two more textiles embellished with this composite creature in his collection. According to experts, weaving techniques and C14 tests conducted on one of the fragments in the collection of Carlo Cristi suggest that they also belong to the so-called *Zandaniji* typology produced somewhere in Central Asia around eighth-ninth centuries (Compareti 2015: 36-37). This chronology seems to be very appropriate although many problematic points stillremain about provenance and meaning.

## Conclusion

Even though none of the items under examination come from controlled excavations, the specimens in the Xining museum and Dulan County Museum suggest that looters could have found precious silver vessels and silks of the so-called *Zandanijy* typology embellished with Iranian motifs in Reshui cemetery or other sites of greater Tsaidam region whose provenance was the same.

Typical Iranian decorative subjects such as winged horses, ducks with a vegetal element in the beak, stags, etc. appear very frequently among the metalwork and textiles confiscated at Dulan and those in the Xining museum. Stylistically too, the

motifs embellishing these objects should beconsidered Iranian since they appear quite often in seventh-eighth centuries Sogdian paintings.The presence of vegetal or geometric motifs on the body of animals and the transformation ofroundels from geometric into vegetal on Tsaidam luxury objects could be considered as a modification of genuine Sogdian models. Very few findings of Reshui present clear connections with Buddhism simply because that religion was not yet spread in the Tubo kingdom at the time of the construction ofthose tombs.

Therefore, precious objects of the Xining and Dulan museums embellished with pseudo-*Simurgh*s constitutes a very good argument to propose better chronologies for the tombs at Reshui and, more in general, greater Tsaidam region. They constitute convincing evidence about the intense relations that occurred between Central Asia and Tsaidam before the spread of Buddhism in the entire Himalayan region.

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# In the name of the Lord of Wisdom and Mind or Ohrmazd (With emphasis on the Shah-nama, Kush-nama and Zoroastrian Pahlavi Manuscripts)

Daryoosh Akbarzadeh

***Abstract***

*With the fall of the Sasanian Empire, some Zoroastrian Pahlavi manuscripts and numerous early Islamic texts have referred to Zoroastrian efforts to keep their religion alive against the "new arrivals", the Arabs.*

*This article deals with one of the most famous Zoroastrian elements and its new format in the Islamic Period. The author will refer to the famous expression "be nām-e Xodāvand-e Jān-o- Xarad" (in the name of the Lord of Wisdom) and its probable semantic adjustment with the proper name of "Ohrmazd", the supreme god of Zoroastrianism. For the claim, I will emphasize on the Shah-nama, Kush-nama as well as post-Sasanian texts and some selected Zoroastrian Pahlavi Manuscripts.*

***Keywords:*** *Ahura-Mazdah, Wisdom, Shah-nama, Kush-nama, Zoroastrian Manuscripts, Bismillah.*

## Introduction

The collapse of the Sasanian Empire was a shock to Zoroastrianism and Iranian identity. It seems that the fall of the Sasanian Empire was so bitter for Iranians that it could be interpreted as a kind of resurrection for both nationalists and Zoroastrians according to a series of texts. (Akbarzadeh: 2014.p 8). With the fall of the Sasanian Empire, not only some Zoroastrian Pahlavi manuscripts, but also numerous early Islamic texts have referred to Zoroastrian efforts to keep their religion against the "new arrivals", the Arabs (cf. *Shah-nama*: 2002. p 2126ff.).

The fall of the Sasanian Empire, Parsi migration to India and diplomatic migration to the Far East (China-Silla) affected Persian literature; from that time, most of the

post-Sasanian texts mentioned the past (Sasanians) with sorrow and pity (cf.*Kush-nama*: 1997.p 267).

However, with the advent of Islam, some traditions and beliefs were continued more or less with archaic forms, some of them are recorded in the Islamic period under new forms, some of them Semiticized, while some became forgotten heritage. Tales of Zoroaster the prophet reached into the Islamic period along with mythical kings and heroes (i.e. Jamshid, Faridun). The replacement of Adam to Kiumarth (the prototype man) in some Semitic texts and exact information on the Iranian calendar under the Sasanians can be seen as proof of the claim. In early Islamic periods, Quran-e Qods[1] was translated into a dialectical language of the southeast where the authors preserved many archaic terms or their equivalents in Pahlavi words (Ravaghi: 1985, introduction). Furthermore, a series of texts like the epics kept alive Zoroastrian heritage. It was not only texts like the*Shah-nama* and *Kush-nama* which preserved this heritage, but also texts like *Garshasb-nama* (2014), *Framarz-nama* (2015), *Sam-nama* (2013), *Shahryar-nama* (2013) and others. Recently, a scholarly work has referred to Azar-Burzin in*Azar-Burzin-nama* and explained why Rustam's grandson was named after this holy Zoroastrian fire. Azar-Burzin is a sample of how one of the most important Zoroastrian beliefs reached into the Islamic period under a new format where this name recalled a national story of the Rustam family (Akbarzadeh: 2017.p 54).

This article deals specifically with one of the important Zoroastrian elements and its new format in the Islamic Period; I refer to the famous expression "bənām-e Xodāvand-e Jān-o-Xarad", 'in the name of the Lord of Wisdom', and probably its semantic usage in place of the proper name of "Ohrmazd", the supreme god of Zoroastrianism.[2] I also refer to the social and political situation of Iran under the Arabs as an important reason for the changed usage between the two terms. Meanwhile, Zoroastrian Pahlavi manuscripts become a part of my interpretation. The author thinks such changes, or clever translations, occurred in the early Islamic period when "Iranian identity" resisted against the "new identity" brought by the Arabs.

## The God of the Wisdom or Ohrmazd

Obviously, "Ohrmazd", Ahura Mazda, was the name of the supreme God of ancient Iran. This holy name can be seen at the beginning of many chapters and passages from the *Avesta,* the Royal Achaemenid inscriptions, and later in Zoroastrian Pahlavi Manuscripts (Boyce: 1984, online). Furthermore, the portrayal of Ohrmazd is visible through bas-reliefs (i.e. in Fars province: Naghsh-Rajab).

Clearly, with the collapse of the Sasanian Empire, Zoroastrians preserved the name of Ohrmazd, which was discarded with the advent of Islam in Iran. Post-Sasanian texts do not use this name as a supreme God in the introduction to their

chapters. They refer to it as the name of a month, the first month of the year,*Shah-nama* (cf. Wolff: 1997.p 848) or *Kush-nama* (1997: p 344) are examples.

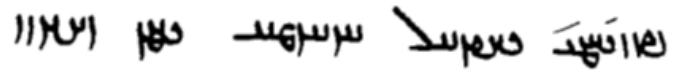
The *Shah-nama* of Firdowsi does not refer to this name directly, as that of God, at the beginning of the tales. The introduction of the *Shah-nama* and the beginnings of the tales like Yadgar-Zariran, Chess, Bozorg-mihr in their Pahlavi versions, and the story of Sasanian kings i.e. Artaxerxes and others, (*Shah-nama*: 2002, passim) support the idea. However, the question arises, as to what happened to this sacred name with the advent of Islam? Was it forgotten under the new political situation of Islamic Iran and discarded in the texts? If so, which term replaced it?

Furthermore, there is no other trace of the new name "Allah" in the introduction of the *Shah-nama*, *Kush-nama* or *Jahangir-nama* (Aydanlu: 2013), *Framarz-nama* etc.

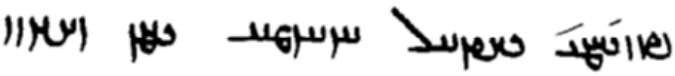
However the *Shah-nama* does not start with "in the name of the God merciful and gracious", 'Be-nām-e Xodāy, Baxšāndeh-ye Baxšāyešgar-e Mihrbān", which reminds us of "Bismillah-al-rahman-al-rahim"[3]. This issue has never been studied based on Zoroastrian Pahlavi manuscripts. Most probably, these manuscripts can be helpful in analyzing some Islamic texts of this period.

## Zoroastrian Pahlavi Manuscripts and the Lord Ohrmazd

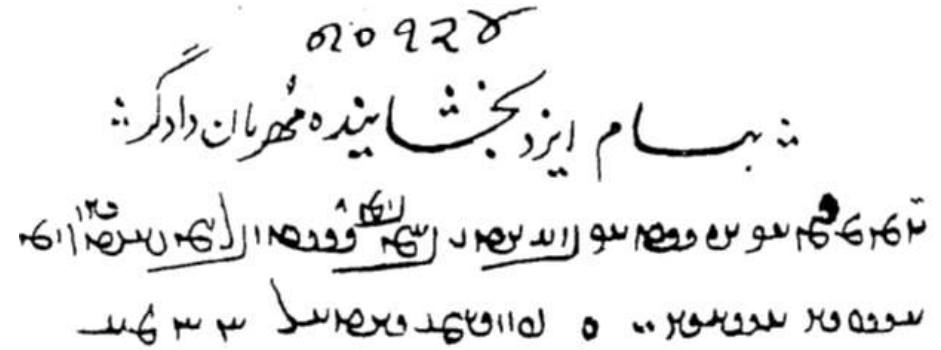
It seems that we are faced with two traditions at the beginning of many Zoroastrian Pahlavi manuscripts; the author/s used the sacred term of "Ohrmazd" at the beginning of the manuscripts or chapters in Pahlavi as one of the known traditions; cf. MS. T.58: 1976, 2, 52:



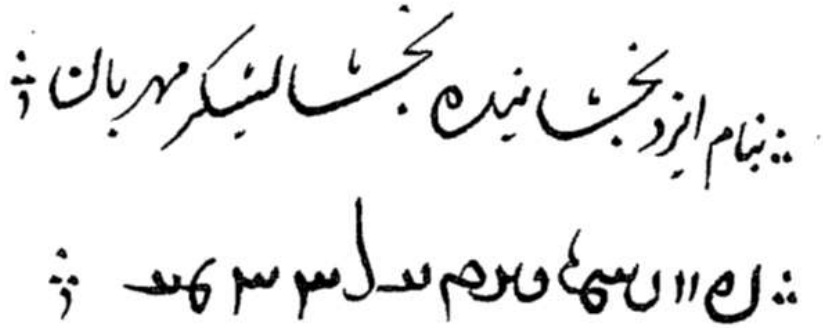
Ms. R 410: 1976, 2:



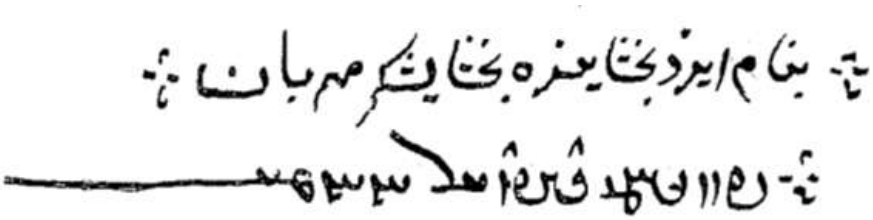
They use "pad nām-e dādār-i Ohrmaz", traditionally in the Pahlavi language but its new Persian equivalent appears as "benām-e Izad Baxšāyandeh-e Baxšāyešgar-e mihrbān" (In the name of God the merciful, the generous and the gracious) (cf. MS. J1: 1976, 2; MS. J3: 1976, 3, Passim); Ms. TD 23: 1976, 2:



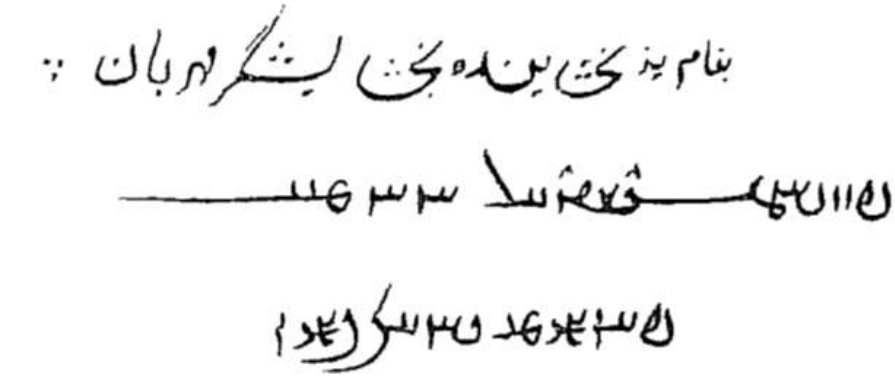
Ms. J1: 1976, 3:



Ms. J2: 1976, 1:



Ms. MU 27: 1976, 2:



Obviously, Persian equivalents are not related to these Pahlavi terms; it is not a correct translation word by word. The question arises as to whether the priests knowingly used such equivalents because they were ignorant about accurate translations or could social and political occurrences be a part of this issue.

Definitely, such New Persian equivalents cannot be related to errors or negligence. The priests were not only capable of writing manuscripts but they were very sensitive about their belief and traditions.

It seems that the authors /priests were afraid of the social and political situation of Iran in the 8th -9th century A.D due to the new arrivals. They knowingly translated the Pahlavi terms correctly (cf. MS.T. 58 or MS. R. 378) and used terms that could not create any religious or social troubles for them; the equivalent New Persian terms are not typically Zoroastrian, but the translated terms are purely Persian.

## The Wisdom and the Creation of the World

Now we come to the texts where the terms "in the name of the God of both Wisdom and mind", have frequently being used, mostly by poets i.e. the*Shah-nama*, as well as in the introduction of many post-Sasanian texts. Just as in the manuscripts, I think there is a close semantic relation between the words "the wisdom and mind", and the proper name of "Ohrmazd".

The Introduction of the*Shah-nama* (2002) states: *In the name of the Lord of both mind and wisdom…… . Who can praise the wisdom and the mind, if I praise, who will listen to me.*

Furthermore, it seems that there is a deliberate usage of the two terms, 'the wisdom and the mind', in Persian texts. Firdowsi describes wisdom as 'the eyes of the mind' (*Ibid*. 26), Darius the Great of the Achaemenid period, thanked Ohrmazd who bestowed him "wisdom".[4]

In the *Shah-nama* (2002: 35 ff.), *Kush-nama* (1997:p 147), and texts like these the "creation of wisdom", appears in the introduction of the texts. The creation is alone described as "spiritual creation", while others are material creations. The poets referred to the creation of the "people, animals, plants and water" after the chapter on wisdom; the creation of wisdom is clearly prior to others. Can this tradition fit in with the same tradition of Creation in the Zoroastrian Pahlavi manuscripts?

The Bundahishn (Bahar: 1991.p 40), chapter on the Creation, narrates: "the creation of Ohrmazd-Ahriman, where Ohrmazd's birth was first, followed by the creation of Seven immortals, after that the material world including the Sky, the Water, the earth, the plant, the animals and the people."

Although, the *Shah-nama* refers to the creation of the Wise, in the introduction, it is silent about the holy name of Ohrmazd. As known, there is no special chapter for wisdom in the introduction of Semitic texts. However, wisdom is an important term in the Holy Quran, but this text does not refer to it as an independent Creation.

Moreover, such stress on wisdom and its creation at the beginning of the works, raises a question as to how the issue of the Creation of wisdom affects post-Sasanian texts? Why was the issue of Wisdom added to the story of Creation? Clearly the creation of spiritual and material creatures in Sasanian to post-Sasanian texts are similar but there is a big difference between them; the difference is that the creation of Wisdom is highlighted in the post-Sasanian period, on the one hand while the creation of Ohrmazd is highlighted in Sasanian texts, on the other hand. Despite this, there is no any difference between the beginnings of the texts from Sasanian to post-Sasanian periods with regard to the description of the creation of the world. Clearly, the gods related to wisdom in the Avesta and Zoroastrian Pahlavi texts (i.e. čista, cf. Reichelt: 1911. p 230) do not have any position in the post-Sasanian texts.

Philologists (Boyce: 1984, online) have interpreted the term Ohrmazd as the "lord of wisdom". There seems to be a linguistic relation between the meaning of this name and the "Wisdom" of the Post-Sasanian texts. I therefore interpret "the lord of wisdom and mind", as translated terms for the name "Ohrmazd". Such an interpretation can help us accept why "wisdom" is highlighted in the introduction of the texts and appears as a kind of spiritual creation.

This change occurred in early Islamic period under the Arab invasion. Zoroastrians priests and nationalists tried with effort to preserve the symbols of nationality and Zoroastrianism at this time. As the priests were afraid of using the name "Ohrmazd" in New Persian in their manuscripts, due to the social and political situation of Iran, the poets also were unable to use the same name at the beginning of their works in the early Islamic period.

Obviously, the term "Ohrmazd" means "lord of wisdom" or "wise God" and he was the symbol of the wisdom of ancient Iran. The Lord is described as perfect, living at the highest level, Heaven, against Evil, which is represented as lacking wisdom (Bundahishn: 1991. pp 32-33). Most probably Iranians and Zoroastrian priests, used translated terms of the Wisdom which reflected "Ohrmazd"; this is why they used "in the name of God the merciful…" for recalling "in the name of Ohrmazd", to protect themselves. Iranians have profited from such translations in the early Islamic periods. The term "nibēg" (book) was a general word, but Iranians used it as meaning the Holy Quran, in the early Islamic period. It is not then strange to suppose that "Wisdom", a popular term, replaced "Ohrmazd", as a term in the writings of this period.[5]

## Conclusion

Using the Middle Persian terms in their new meanings or their equivalents, derivations, new word formations, word formations based on archaic terms, new identity formations for terms in Tazik and Arabization occurred in the early Islamic period, when Iranians needed to defend their identity against the Arabs with the fall of

Sasanian Empire. It is very difficult to believe that the Supreme God of the Sasanian period, Ohrmazd, was forgotten in such a short time, with the coming of the Arabs. Many scholarly works show how Iranians defended their past heritage (Choksy: 2015, online).

However, the tale of the Creation of the world in Post-Sasanian texts like *Shah-nama* is very similar to Sasanian manuscripts. The absence of the name of "Ohrmazd" alone differentiates these texts from Sasanian manuscripts. Here "Wisdom" replaces the name of "Ohrmazd" in Post-Sasanian texts.

Furthermore, there is a close semantic relation between the two terms, Ohrmazd and wisdom. Firdowsi neither used "Allah" nor used "in the name of God merciful and gracious", in the introduction of the *Shah-nama*. He only used "the lord of wisdom and mind". If the "lord of wisdom" of the*Shah-nama* does not reflect the Lord Ohrmazd, why has the term appeared at the beginning of the stories? Why is the creation of Wisdom prior to the creation of "people" and others? People are seen as the supreme beings in Islam (*ashraf-al-makhlughat*). I therefore think the term "wisdom" has played a "word function" in Post-Sasanian texts. This replacement of wisdom for Ohrmazd can be interpreted as a clever translation that happened before Firdowsi and affected the *Shah-nama*.

Obviously, we cannot deny the priests efforts in this period. Nationality and Zoroastrianism definitely joined to defend Iran against the Arabs. As it is known, the national local governments of Tabaristan and Al-Boyed used Khosrow II's fame to extend their authority: founders of Mazandaran's towers used both Pahlavi and Kufic languages for their inscriptions; perhaps they used the Pahlavi language as a part of their nationality, a connection to the past. Zoroastrian Priests joined Caramatians in the south against the Arabs (cf. Daftary: 1990, online).

It seems that Zoroastrian terms were used as a part of Iranian identity in the early Islamic period where the Zoroastrian God, Ohrmazd, under the word function "Wisdom" was one of them. It means that they used clever equivalents to reflect their belief. So, Zoroastrians not only replaced the term wisdom for Ohrmazd, as a correct equivalent, but they avoided the use of "Bismillah…". Nationalists replaced Persian pure terms (be nām-e Xodāy and Baxšāndeh-ye…) for the Arabic Bismillah-al-Rahman-al-Rahim. Efforts of Iranians in the Early Islamic period to pray in New Persian, not Arabic, are comprehensive through the texts (Tarikh-e Bukhara: undated, 45). In fact, keeping the past heritage alive using any kind of method and trying to keep the "new heritage" Persian, were two significant efforts, which have reflected in the texts.

## NOTES

1. Cf. Shekand Gumanig Wizar (cf. De Menasce: 1945) and Gujastag Abalish (Tafazzoli: 1997, 164).
2. I am thankful Prof. Ali Ravaghi for this note.
3. In the introduction of *Bizhan-nama* we find "be nām-e Izad Baxšāyandeh-e Baxšāyešgar-e mihrbān" (Ghafuri: 2015: 47).
4. "A great god is Ahuramazda who created wisdom and activity upon Darius the King" (DNb.3; cf. Kent:1953: 140).
5. The general terms like Nigun (Phl.) in proper meaning of Sajjda (Tarikh Bukhara: undated, 50) or "Khosrow" or "Qaysar" used as proper names for Iranian kings (Sasanian) or Roman kings in the texts.

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# An Ancient Spiritual Bond: The Yasna and the Yagna of Iran and India

Shernaz Cama

ABSTRACT

*The issue of the environment is the most central issue of our generation and there is a realization across the world that benefits of an industrial civilization count little, when exploitation against nature has led to destruction and disharmony.*

*Through the Yasna and the Yagna sacrifices of Iran and India, a philosophical blueprint of Asha or Rta was laid out which has enabled the Indo - Iranian people to create an ethical approach towards not just man but all creation. The rituals of the Yasna and Yagna are of particular relevance to our contemporary world facing ecological destruction, because these ancient ceremonies strive to inculcate in their followers a sense of responsibility towards nature and the environment.*

*Perhaps it is time for the world to re - look at this notion of Asha and Rta. India and Iran can work together in reviving the notions of harmony in man and creation, so that the idea of the Central Asian region as anarchic and dangerous is removed and harmony between man and nature can once again become the bedrock of life.*

Culture refers to the ideas, behaviour, symbols as well as material objects made by human beings. When we look at intercultural dialogues they help us realize that cultures were never separately bounded entities. From the beginning of recorded time the human race has moved and intermingled beyond the borders of any area they called home. Ethnocentrism emphasizes pride in a group which values only its own cultural achievement and, rejecting the beliefs of others, leads to conflict. It is fortunate that the 'Cousin Cultures' [1] of India and Iran represent a world view linked by both geography and history, weaving together a tapestry of deep internal consistency.

The Indo - Iranian identity is a part of the human family linked by linguistic

roots, history, myths and religions. It has shared trade not just along the Silk Route, but also through sea ports. The land route crossed the centre of the then known world, taking Indian cultural expansion westward, while waves of Persian influence extended into India through Malwa and Mathura up to Patliputra. This was not just through conquest, but by gentler means of marriage alliances and exchanges of science, medicine and tangible heritage such as architecture.

However it is perhaps the joint belief in the truth of the Eternal Essence of Nature that is one of the Indo - Iranians' greatest contributions to world thought. A desire to live in harmony with the cosmos, recognizing that human kind is a fraction of a much larger existence, is inherent in the philosophy of this region. Living in a geographical area which ranges from the snow covered plateaus of Central Asia to the hot plains of India, their symbolism is a felt response to the cycle of the seasons. A mythology leading to religious injunctions of the need to nurture creation forms the tapestry of the Indian and Iranian approach to life. This family of Indo-Aryans was a pastoral people when they moved into the Northern Iranian Plateau and later migrated into the Punjab. The hymns of the*Rig Veda* and Zarathushtra's *Gathas* or Songs which were composed much earlier than 1000 BC, [2] celebrate a sacred geography with a joyous wonder about life:

> Who was the First Father of Eternal Law?
> What Being laid down Paths for Sun and Stars?
> Who made the Moon to wax and wane betimes?
> Ustavaiti Gatha 2-3, ***Yasna*** 44.[3]

These earliest questions and ideas about the Creator and creation are not a primitive animism but reflect a yearning to understand not only Creation, but man's role in keeping the balance of *Asha* on *Rta* and preserving cosmic order. Good and Evil are active forces in both Hindu philosophy and Zoroastrianism, reflected in the metaphor of darkness and light, flowing clear waters versus those that are unclean and the Laws which uphold the order of the Universe versus disorder and destruction. A key to the major cultural confluence of ideas can be seen in the tradition of the Zoroastrian Yasna ceremony and the Vedic Yagna and their web of influence across millennia. Both consist of a sacrifice to the Creator, bringing together all natural elements in a sacred space, with Fire, Water, Animals, Earth, Sky, Plants and Man working together to energize this world and protect it from destructive forces. It is a ceremony of universal purification, a ritual through which the sacrificers or priests transmit a holistic vision of life to their community. Here the Zoroastrian Yasna ceremony will be examined in detail, for it foregrounds a vision of creation celebrated for centuries without interruption. It is, with the Vedic Yagna, part of the intangible heritage of humanity going back to the earliest period of human history.

At the core of these Indo- Iranian ceremonies is the general idea that there is 'law in nature and there is war in nature', and because nature contains powers that work for good as well as evil, there is a struggle - nowhere more apparently than in

the positive Creation warring with demons of drought and destruction.[4] The good in Zoroastrianism was signified by Ahura Mazda, the force of Light and Wisdom. The opposite evil force was Angra Mainyu, darkness and negativity. The forces of Ahura Mazda, Mithra and the seven Amesha Spenta have their mirror image in Asura Varuna and the Adityas. The 33 Yazatas from the *Avesta* and the 33 Gods from the three regions bear a striking similarity in their number. The power of prayer - the Yasna incantations and the Suktas are all historical proof of the close association of these branches of Indo- Europeans, spread across Central Asia.

*Agni* or *Atar*, Fire, is primary to the Yasna ritual, but equal importance is given to water in this long ceremony. Fire is the purest of the elements, an intermediary between God and man. In the presence of these elements, haoma or soma (ephedra) juice is created to strengthen mankind, fight off negativity and keep the world in balance.

The preparation and offering of Soma-Haoma was an important part of Indo - Iranian worship. In both, the stalks were pressed and the juice mixed with milk. Both were said to grow on mountains, their mythical home being heaven, and both were regarded as mighty forces capable of giving immortality.[5]

There are no images in these rituals; the hymns of the entire ceremony are dedicated to natural elements and the powers residing in them. This 'act of worship', or sacrifice releases energies, strengthens the priests representing Man and re-enacts the quest for understanding. In a clear parallel to Zarathustra's *Gathas* is the Creation Hymn of the *Rig Veda*.

> "Then even nothingness was not, nor existence.
> There was nor air Then, nor the heavens beyond it.
> What covered it? Where was it? In whose keeping?
> Was there then cosmic water, in depths unfathomed?....
>
> But after all, who knows and who can say.
> When it all came, and how creation happened."[6]

A spirit of inquiry forms a core basis to these rituals and in these faiths. This was a very early period of human history, the Bronze Age where 'matsyanyaya', literally 'where the big fish swallowed the little fish', or unbridled competition prevailed, in conditions of anarchy.[7] Tribal communities were giving way to settlements and rulers had developed strong political ambitions. There was insecurity and uncertainty at this time of chaos. This was when philosophic seekers sought to challenge such violence and provide answers to fundamental questions of rule and righteous conduct. They would provide spiritual weapons to their peoples. In this situation these ceremonies provided a pattern both for human behaviour and for the universe.

Through the Yasna and the Yagna sacrifices, a philosophical blueprint of *Asha* or *Rta* was laid out which has enabled the Indo - Iranian people to embrace differences and diversity, create a humanistic approach of ethical behaviour towards not just

man but all creation. *Asha* represents an order, social and moral, which enables life to be lived in harmony. It could simply also stand for Truth. In this regard the Zoroastrian Prayer the *Ashem Vohu* has to be taken into account. It is the earliest prayer taught to a child and is constantly repeated in daily acts of worship. It deals with *Asha* as Truth:

*Ashem Vohu Vahishtem asti*
*Ushta asti; ushta ahmai*
*hyat Ashai vahishtai Ashem*

Free translation:-

"Truth is the best of all that is good.
It is happiness, the radiant goal of life on earth.
It is attained by living righteously,
For the sake of Truth alone."

The rituals of the Yasna and Yagna are of particular relevance to our contemporary world facing ecological destruction, because these ancient ceremonies strive to inculcate in their followers a sense of responsibility towards nature and the environment. In the *Gathas* Yasna 29, Gaush Urva, the Soul of Creation, calls out in anguish for a Saviour. Zarathushtra comes to earth to ensure total justice and righteousness for all Creation. He preaches the divine Law of *Asha* or Cosmic Truth, in which every aspect of being must be treated with justice. Such justice ensures harmony and this can be possible when there is no exploitation or degradation of Creation. In the 21st century, we are still struggling to achieve Human Rights, in the Bronze Age, Zarathushtra spoke of the rights of plant and animal, mineral and water, of reverence and nurture of all Spenta (Bounteous) Creation.

> "*For when he [Man] commits sin against water with vegetation, even when it is committed against merely a single twig of it, and he has not atoned for it, when he departs from the world, the spirits of all the plants in the world stand up high in front of that man; and do not let him go to heaven.*"[8]

Zoroaster belonged to a family of priests, he was the*Ratu*, or enlightened guide, a *Manthran* (Ys.32:13, 50:6), the reciter of the *Manthra* or sacred word of power, whose teachings would lead all beings to salvation. His belief in a cosmic law led him to create a theology by which he ensured that his followers would treat nature with reverence.

The Avestan belief in a universal principle of order and truth is *Asha*, in Sanskrit it is *Rta*. This order comes about through the conscious efforts of each individual. Zoroastrianism places a great responsibility on man - in his actions lies not just his salvation but the perfecting of creation itself. The Zoroastrian must serve Ahura Mazda in daily actions by care and concern in his dealings with water and earth, plants and animals. Thrift in using nature's gifts and charity to all life is enshrined in the faith. For Zoroastrians, there is only one God, Ahura Mazda - all good is

comprehended within Him. Division and evil only appeared because of the hostile Spirit Ahriman (Angra Mainyu). Evil is the disruption of the fundamental unity of *Asha* and because it negates, it destroys. Evil is the antithesis of good but the conflict between the two will end with the triumph of *Asha*, when evil shall ultimately perish. Wisdom for humanity lies in choosing correctly, in following the path of *Asha* or righteousness and thereby becoming part of the Unity and Goodness of the Universe.

*Asha* is then essential for the balance and well being of our world. Zoroastrian theology stresses the harmony of both the *Menok* and the *Getik*, the spiritual and material aspects of creation providing a holistic approach to life. When spiritual force operates upon matter the world comes into being. This coming together of the two states which constitutes the act of Creation is called in Pahlavi the '*Bundahishn*'. With the realization of the Getik stage, the battle with evil begins for material creation is vulnerable to attack. According to the Zoroastrian myths of the ***Pahlavi Books***, Ahriman attacked God's good creation marring its perfection. He plunged through the waters, creating salt, and attacked the earth, forming deserts. He withered the Plant and attacked the first created beings, the Bull and the First man. The last of creation to be contaminated was fire, which was sullied by smoke. Evil thus marred Spenta or Bounteous Creation. To restore the world to its perfect state, Ahura Mazda needs the help of all beneficent beings and finally, this will culminate in the *Frashokereti* or Renewal of Existence, when all wounds heal and evil in destroyed. The rituals of the religion particularly the Yasna, are therefore concerned with the protection of creation and the need to preserve it from disharmony and evil. The Yasna is a priestly ritual, a turning inward and needs no audience. It creates great spiritual energies without which, it is believed the world would collapse into chaos.

All the seven creations are present in the Yasna in their physical form and are strengthened through being consecrated in a sacred space. But this act of worship fixes the thoughts of the priests, the Zaotar and the Raspi on inner spiritual forces. The priests represent Mankind. They remind the community that 'Life was to be lived with a sense of stewardship for the other creations, so that *Asha* might rule and the world continues from generation to generation'[9].

The name Yasna, Sanskrit Yagna comes from the Avestan root, *Yaz*, Sanskrit *Ya*g, meaning 'to invoke, worship, praise'. By this act, environmental consciousness of the Oneness of Creation is stressed, a belief that deeply influences the life and action of the Zoroastrians. Its antiquity is noted by the Greeks, for Herodotus and Strabo speak of this ceremony of sacrifice, when the sacrificial requisites were 'spread on matting or bed of grass or myrtle and laurel branches', 'the Magians touch it with slender rods and chant an incantation .....holding a bundle of slender rods of tamarisk.'[10]

Unlike the Hindu Yagna, the Yasna can only be performed between sunrise and noon. The ceremony is conducted by two highly qualified priests, in the part of the Fire Temple called the *Dar-i-Mihir*, or the Court of the Lord of Ritual. It requires the recitation of the 72 *Ha's* or chapters of the ***Yasna*** text. From this liturgy, the two

parts of the Avesta which survive in Old Avestan are the Gathas and the Yasna Haptanhaiti, 'the worship of the seven sections', both of which along with brief manthras, were memorized and handed down to form the ***Staota Yasna*** 'words of praise and worship', which remain unchanged across centuries.

In it, the visible, material creation symbolized by physical elements meet the invisible, spiritual counterparts in a place of light and radiance. It is a ritual of affirmation, advancing the world of time towards infinite perfection. Early in the morning, before dawn, the priests draw well water from the temple well. This water or *Zor* is a regenerating, purifying agent. All the implements of the ceremony are in perpetual contact with water. Water is central to the efficacy of the ritual. Along with it the other natural items consecrated include the leaf of a date palm, the *Aiwyaonghana*, the twig of a pomegranate tree or *Urvaram*, the fresh milk of a goat or *Jivam*, the Sacred bread or *Darun, Goshudo*, the clarified butter or *ghee* and haoma, the twig of the haoma plant. These with *Zor*, water and fire in the Afarganiyu or vase, fed with sandalwood and incense are essential for the ceremony. The use of water throughout the ceremony, reiterates that water is the first requirement for life and the holy water becomes symbolic of rain, through which creation receives the gift of life. The ritual of pouring water over the other elements and the Barsam becomes a symbolic enactment of the plant world being fertilized by rain.

When the priests begin their prayers inside the *Pav Mahal* or sacred space they wear the *Pada*n or cloth face mask which prevents their breath from polluting the implements. As each natural element is cleansed and purified, appropriate prayers are recited. These lead up to the sacrifice of Hoama, Vedic Soma, in which the plant is crushed and the Priest partakes of the juice, in an act of strengthening and the continuing of life after sacrifice. The crushing of the hoama is done in a metal or stone mortar where the hoama or ephedra twigs are pounded. Another important metallic implement is the *Mahrui* (moon - faced) stands. This pair of crescent Moon shaped stands are also called the Barsam dan since the Barsam twigs are placed upon then. The word Barsam is from the Avestan *Baresman*, Avesta root *barez*, Sanskrit *barh*,'to grow'.[11]

Originally twigs, these have been replaced since about a thousand years in India where they were not available, with metallic wires of brass or silver. The barsam is placed on the *Mahrui* as it is believed that the moon and its crescent aids growth of plant life and influences fertility. So Barsam will symbolically increase plant life. In the Yasna ceremony the Fire is constantly fed with recitations of praise, a strip of the date palm is used to tie the Barsam in a ritual of uniting all creation called the *aiwyaonghana*, a hair of the sacred albino (white bull) the *Varasyo* is tied onto a ring to again symbolize unity with animal life and man pays respect to Time and space which unite to make *Spenta* Creation.

When the haoma is pounded it is accompanied by the driving away of evil and the words *'Shekaste Ganamino*', 'May the evil spirit be broken.'[12] This haoma is

then strained and, after a sip is drunk by the priest, is kept for the benefit of the whole community. It is used to strengthen the weakest - those infants who have just entered the world-and is still given to a dying person to ensure the immortality of the soul.

The consecration of the Sacred Bread or*Darun* with the butter follows, with the Priest finally eating a portion of this bread to strengthen life. All creation has thereby been invoked and sanctified with the declarations of faith. By the ringing of the mortar and pestle during the pounding ceremony, demons are exorcised. The sacred songs of the Prophet Zarathushtra, the*Gathas*, are recited and blessings of health and happiness or *Tandorosti* are recited in the Afringan ceremony. The water drawn from the well has now been consecrated; mixed with the haoma juice and *jivam* or milk it is poured over the Barsam. The priests praise Ahura Mazda and Zarathushtra as well as all Creation.

With the recitation of the 72nd chapter the Yasna is complete. The priests exchange a *Hamazor* or ritual hand clasp saying*Hamazor hama asho bed*', 'May you be united in strength with all righteous ones'. After finally feeding the fire with sandalwood and Frankincense, the priests prepare for the dramatic climax of the long ritual. They both go back to the well from where they had drawn water at dawn, carrying the now consecrated water back to its source. As the Zaotar pours that water back into the well, he is giving back to nature, its own element in a purified and energized form. Thus the water strengthened by the prayers of man, poured back into its source aids all Creation daily to become stronger. This final ceremony called the*Zormelavvi*, or uniting of water and its source, also impresses upon the Zoroastrian the duty to keep water sources pure as well as symbolically to learn that it is man's duty to keep the mind, source of all action equally pure.

The Yasna ceremony has then reaffirmed the belief in *Asha*, the Law of Harmony, for all the good Creation has come together, material and spiritual worlds have been blessed and strengthened. This ceremony, once performed daily in the Atash Behram or Fires of the highest grade, but less frequently today, energizes both the physical environment and spiritual power so that they can work together to protect Bounteous, Spenta Creation. As long as man enacts the Yasna ritual with plants, animals and the elements, so long will cosmic order continue and the world move on its proper course. Man as the chief creation of Ahura Mazda has a position of responsibility - he is connected to all life and all creation shares the same purpose to build harmony, remove disharmony and decay, and after the *Frashokereti*, to conquer death itself.

In the ***Rig Veda*** *Rta* replaces *Asha* as the great cohesive force providing cosmic order. *Rta* both sustains the universe and regulates the conduct of men, for both are part of a single cosmic order. The root meaning of the word *Rta* is 'to go on'[13]. While *Rta* covers the scope of sacrifice, it extends more importantly to a code of conduct laid down for the well-being of society and harmony in creation. Just as we have the clash between Ahura Mazda and Ahriman, in the later***Samhitas*** and

***Brahmana*** texts, the word *Rta* was interchanged with *Satya* (Truth) and juxtaposed against *Anrta*, falsehood. An act against *Rta* or law hurts not only the established social order but even the general cosmic order.[14]

Later *Rta* would culminate in the concept of Dharma from the root *dhri* 'to Uphold' or 'sustain'. So both Iranian and Indian traditions have a belief in an unfailing Law by which cosmic order is upheld. In the ***Rig Veda*** the Gods who uphold this law are Indra and Varuna, eulogized in many hymns.

The word Varuna is derived from the root '*vr*' - to cover or encompass and denotes the all encompassing sky. Ahura Mazda in his attributes links with Varuna, for he is all seeing, '*Varana*' literally, 'the all embracing sky', white, bright, with the heaven for his star spangled garment.[15] Both are 'Lords', upholders of Order and in the Indian tradition too, offerings of sacrifice, accompanied by mantras or holy prayers give strength to the Gods. They being pleased, in turn, help human beings by sending timely rains and maintaining *Rta* on the cosmic level.

Unlike the Zoroastrian Yasna, the Vedic Yagna has been reinterpreted over time. The Yagna in India has today become a ritual done in front of *Agni*, the sacred fire and accompanied by the chanting of mantras. Unlike the interior world of the Iranian Yasna, the Yagna plays a central role in a Hindu's rites of passage, community celebrations, temple worship, but it continues to hold meaning as worship not only of the deities, but as an upholder of unity and care for the world. Unlike the Yasna which has retained its reference to a specific religious service, the Yagna has grown into a class of rituals. Vedic Shrauta Yagnas are typically performed by four priests; the hotar, the adhvaryu, the udgatar and the Brahmin[16]. The *samagri* or oblations offered to the Fire include *ghee*, or clarified butter, milk, grain and soma. The duration of the Yagna can vary - from a few minutes to a period extending over months. The blessings obtained can be personal - long life, health and prosperity, to release and liberation, *moksha* from this world. The most commonly witnessed Vedic Yagna is when *Agni* is the central witness to a Hindu wedding. The couple getting married walk around the Holy Fire and this Yagna fire is the witness to the vows they make, while walking around it, bound together by a sash or piece of clothing, signifying a new united life.

How do these pre- historic ceremonies fit into an Indo- Iranian world view today? The issue of the environment is the most central issue of our generation and there is a realization across the world that all the benefits of modern industrial civilization do not count, when exploitation against nature has led to destruction and disharmony across the world.

Gaush Urva - the Soul of Creation-had called out for a saviour in Zarathushtra's *Gathas* and this wise Prophet had given the blueprint for a world in accord with *Asha* as a response to the plea made by Mother Earth. A human-centric ideology of utilitarianism and a progress judged only upon material accumulation has destroyed species and made even the air of our cities unfit to breathe. The Indo- Iranians built their civilization upon equilibrium and harmony, where the good of all Creation coincided

with the Sacred. Perhaps it is time for the whole world to re - look at this notion of *Asha* and *Rta*. India and Iran can work together in reviving the notions of harmony in man and creation, so that the idea of the Central Asian region as chaotic, anarchic and dangerous is removed and concord between man and man, along with harmony between man and nature can once again become the bedrock of life and faith.

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# THE ROYAL *FARMĀN* AND THE ABOLITION OF ZOROASTRIAN POLL TAX IN QAJAR IRAN

SHERVIN FARRIDNEJAD

For Firoza Punthakey Mistree and Khojeste Mistree,
whose hearts beat constantly for the Iranī community[1]

**ABSTRACT**

*The abolition of the annual poll tax* jizya *in Qajar Iran (1779-1925) was achieved as a complex affair. The poll tax* jizya *has been levied on every adult male of a given age among the recognized non-Muslim religious minorities, specifically the People of the Book living under Muslim rule (ahl al-kitāb, also identified eventually as "protected people," ahl al-ḏimma, NP ḏimmīs) as a communal sum during the Islamic period. Its elimination under the Qajars was unequally affected by the controversies about the extension of central royal authority from one side and international political pressure from the other side, along with the financial and economical enticements, initiated by the Parsis. The Parsis are the descendants of the Zoroastrians who, in the 10th century, fled from Iran and established an independent community on the Indian West Coast. The interaction between Parsis and their coreligionists remaining in the homeland is a fascinating story of two geographically-separated communities, connected to each other by their common faith and ancestral heritage. By the nineteenth century, the majority of the less than 10,000 Zoroastrian population of Iran was settled in two major cities of Kerman and Yazd, as well as a number of surrounding small villages, living mostly in misery and gloom. In contrast, their Parsi fellow believers enjoyed a flourishing and rich urban life in the growing metropolis of Bombay and in neighbouring cities of Gujarat due to the industrial Revolution in 19th-century India. This was the historical moment in which the Parsi charitable activities played an important role in improving the life and social condition of their Iranī fellows, one of them being their finally successful plan to relieve them of the burden of the annual poll tax. In this paper I would like to review some less-discussed historical documents and correspondences regarding the elimination of Zoroastrian poll tax in Qajar Iran and its aftermath in the context of the Zoroastrians' social life and status.*

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## Socio-economic Status of the Zoroastrians under the Qajars

The religious minorities of Iran have been directly affected by the conversion of Iran to the Islam after the fall of the Sasanians, the last Zoroastrian Empire of Iran, and finally to Shīæī Islam with the establishment of Safavid dynasty in Iran from 16th century onwards. Despite the large scale of conversion to Islam, other religious communities - Zoroastrians, Jews, Christians, Mandeans, Ahl-e Ḥaq, etc continued to survive, among others. The religious minorities of Iran have been treated in different ways during the long history of their existence on the Iranian territory. By the late eighteenth and during nineteenth centuries, the policy of Qajar kings and government statesmen towards their non-Muslim subjects seems to be generally a so-called 'grossly negligent tolerance', at the same time often plagued by ambiguity and was different from city to city and province to province. However, despite being the most tolerated religious minority in Islamic Iran, the Qajar period marks an anti-climax in the history of the Iranian Zoroastrian community, most specifically in the absence of the recognized local authorities, either between the death and the crowning of two kings. It was also very common that the assigned Prince-Governors mostly stayed at the capital in Tehran and left the major provinces like Fārs, Yazd and Kerman to their deputies in situ on their behalf. Being dependant on the mercy and personal assessment of the minor and local governors and deputy governors as well as the resident Muslim clergies was the capricious fate of the religious minority communities including Zoroastrians. This reversible image is reflected at its best in abundant eyewitness accounts from the time, which reveal the situation depending on the place, time and presupposition of the attesters.

Albert Houtum-Schindler (1846-1916), a German engineer and employee of the Persian government for over thirty years in the later 19th and early 20th centuries, provides us with some valuable eye-witness accounts on this fluctuating situation.[3] He mentions that the total number of Zoroastrians in Iran in October 1879 was 8,499 (4,367 male and 4,132 female). Having a sharp eye for details, he writes in an 1882 article about the life and social status of the Zoroastrians that:

> "the social position of the Zoroastrians in the cities of Tehran, Kashan, Shiraz and Bushehr is quite good; the Zoroastrians are freer than the Jews there, and since they trade and are honest, they are respected by everyone. In Yazd and Kerman, they are not as well off as the Jews; they are more despised and treated worse".[4]

Houtum-Schindler gives some more detailed information regarding the restrictions and discriminations against the Zoroastrians. It is from a time in which the poll tax was arranged to be paid collectively by the Parsi-fellows (see below):

> "For example, the Muslims do not allow a Zoroastrian to ride. If a Zoroastrian, Geber as he is called, who, tired from working in the fields, mounts his donkey used for farming to ride home, meets a Muslim, surely will be pelted with stones etc. until he dismounts. The Zoroastrian must wear clothes of a certain cut and colour; the colour

> is yellowish brown; the Zoroastrian who appears in the streets of Yazd in new and clean clothes will immediately be thrown and defiled. To wear stockings, as the Zoroastrians themselves told me, is not allowed for them either. Their headgear must also have a certain colour and shape. In previous times the head tax of the Zoroastrians of Iran was collected by the Persian government officials on the spot, now the tax, for all Zoroastrians in Iran is calculated to about 920 Toman (7,360 Marks) and is paid by their fellow believers in India, whereby the Zoroastrians gain a lot, because in the past the triple or more was taken from them by the greedy officials, also the tax collection on the spot caused many torture and blackmail".[5]

Charles James Wills (1842–1912), the English physician and medical officer for the British Telegraph Department in Iran, who lived fifteen years from 1866 to 1881 mainly in Hamadan, Isfahan and Shiraz, gives in his book *Persia as It Is: Being Sketches of Modern Persian Life and Character* many eye-witnessed valuable details about provincial social life and local customs and religious communities in Iran under the second half of the reign of the Qajar King Nāṣer al-Dīn Shāh (1831-1896):

> "The Guebres (fire-worshippers) from their number (8,000), and their being mostly congregated at Yazd, are in no way persecuted. They are allowed to pursue commercial occupations, and have a high character for integrity. The Christians, Armenian or Nestorian, are either directly or indirectly under Russian protection, and fully avail themselves of it; while the converts of the American and English Protestant missionaries, all originally Armenians or Nestorians, are quite safe under missionary rule."[6]

At the same time other European scholar travellers, among others A. V. Williams Jackson (1862-1937) and Edward Granville Browne (1862-1926) portray another facade of the life of the Zoroastrians in the mains centres, Yazd and Kerman, as an isolated and degraded community, its dignity constantly injured by far-reaching oppressive limitations.[7] From his stay in Iran during 1903-1904, Jackson reports that:

> "The Zoroastrians who dwell within the city [of Yazd] are largely occupied in trading. This privilege was not accorded to them until about fifty years ago, and they are even now subject to certain restrictions and exactions to which no Mohammedan would be liable. They are not allowed, for instance, to sell food in the bazaars, inasmuch as that would be an abomination in the eyes of the Moslems, who regard them as unbelievers and therefore unclean".[8]

Manekji Limji Hataria (1813–1890), the first Parsi emissary to Iran (see below) also delivers an important eye-witness glimpse into the ambiguities of the Zoroastrian community's status, by listing considerable evidence of Muslim mistreatment in various letters and reports to the *Society for the Amelioration of Conditions in Iran* (hereafter *Society*, see below), among others:

> "Dear Sir;
>
> This noble group has suffered in the hands of cruel and evil people so much that they are totally alien to knowledge and science. For them even black and white, and good and evil are equal. Their men have been forcefully doing menial works in the construction and as slaves receive no payment. As some evil and immoral men have been looking after their women and daughters, this sector of Zoroastrian community even during day time stays indoor. Despite all the poverty, heavy taxes under the pretexts of land, space, pasture land; inheritance and religious tax (*jizya*) are imposed on them. The local rulers have been cruel to them and have plundered their possessions. They have forced the men to do the menial construction work for them. Vagrants have kidnapped their women and daughters. Worse than all, community is disunited. Their only hope is the advent of future saviour (Shah Bahram Varjavand). Because of extreme misery, belief in the saviour is so strong that 35 years earlier when an astrologer forecasted the birth of the saviour, many men in his search left the town and were lost in the desert and never returned. ...I found the Zoroastrians to be exhausted and trampled, so much that even no one in this world can be more miserable than them."[9]

Other documents show that some complaints have been positively granted in favour of the Zoroastrians, among others a letter of recommendation from Mīrzā Taqī-Khan Amīr-Kabīr (1222-68/1807-52) the chief minister of Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shāh to Āqā Khān Iravānī, the Deputy Governor of Yazd. The letter is addressed to Āqā Khān Iravānī, who ruled on behalf of his uncle Moḥammad-Ḥassan-Khān Sardār Iravānī (d. 1271 AH/1855) in Yazd. Mīrzā Taqī-Khan Amīr-Kabīr mentions the complaint letter of two Zoroastrian priests Mollā Bahrām and his brother Mollā Rostam regarding the robbery and mistreatment of Zoroastrians in Yazd in his post and orders the compensating and restoring the victims.[10] The letter is dated *Ḏū l-Ḥiǧǧa* 1265 HQ (October/November 1849)[11]:

> «به آن عالیجاه قلمی میگردد که در این باب نهایت اهتمام به عمل آورده، اموال آنها را تمام و کمال از مرتکبین گرفته و به آنها برساند و از آنجاییکه رفاهیت طایفه مزبور را اینجانب طالب است، میباید آن عالیجاه در هر باب مراقب و مواظب باشید که احدی به ملارستم و کسان او به هیچوجه من الوجوه معترض و مزاحم نشده که در کمال آسودگی و فراغت مشغول رعیتی و کاسبی خود بوده، به دعاگویی دوام دولت قاهره اشتغال نمایند».

> "This written to that Excellency that in this issue the complete diligence must be undertaken and all the [stolen] properties must be taken back from the perpetrators and handed back to them. As I am desirous of the comfort and tranquillity of the mentioned people (i.e. the Zoroastrians), that Excellency must take care about this issue and be watchful that not any individual in some way or other opposed or make trouble to Mollā-Rostam and his people in the way that they can go after their duties as the subjects and their business in peace and tranquillity and pray as well-wishers for the durability and strength of the victorious government (i.e. the Qajar dynasty)".

Another follow-up letter with similar content had been sent by Amīr-Kabīr at the same year, in which it is emphasized that the great High Priest Dastur Nāmdar

Šahrīyār was given an audience with Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shāh, was honoured and dressed with a robe of honour. The letter certifies that the king respects the High Priest and promises him any support and protection from the Royal House, and that the local governor is not allowed to gather the poll tax and not subject him to any discrimination and mistreatment:[12]

«عالیجنابا، مجدت همراها، عزیزا!

چون هریک از مذاهب مختلفه و ملل متنوعه که در ظل حمایت قصر بی‌قصور این دولت ابدآیت غنوده‌اند [و] مشمول عواطف خسروانه و عوارف ملوکانه می‌باشند، لهذا درین وقت که زبدةالفضلا موبد موبدان نامدارشرف‌اندوز حضور پادشاهی گشته و مخلع بخلعت مهرطلعت همایون آمده، او را مرخص معاودت فرمودند بآن عالیجاه قلمی می‌شود که کمال رعایت و حمایت درباره او و طایفه مجوسیه به عمل آورده، جزیه آن ها را از قرار فرمان مبارك که مقرر شده است، ملابهرام در دارالخلافه به مقرب‌الخاقان محمدحسن خان سردار برساند. از آن قرار معمول داشته آن عالیجاه مطالبه ننماید و متعرض آن‌ها نشود. می‌باید آن عالیجاه از قرار نوشته عمل نموده، طوری با مشارالیه وطایفه مزبور رفتار کرده که در کمال آسودگی و فراغت مشغول رعیتی خود بوده، به دعاگویی دوام دولت قاهره اشتغال نمایند».

"Your Highness, Your Excellency Companion, My Dear,

As all different denominations and various nations are reposed under shadow of the protection of the inerrant royal palace of this everlasting government and thus extended to his royal favours and kingly kindnesses, hence at this time, in which the Chief High Priest (*mobad-mobadān*) Nāmdār — who is the cream of the learned men (*zobdat-ol-foẓalā*) — was honoured to meet His Majesty and was presented with a robe of honour of his royal sun-countenance, and he was returned back with the promise of protection and support; thus I am writing you this letter that a complete assistance and support must be done in favour of him and all the Zoroastrians (*tā'efe-ye maǧūsīye*); the pull tax must be handed (directly) to the esteemed Excellency (*moqarrab-al-khāqān*) Moḥammad-Ḥassan-Khān Sardār as arranged according to the royal command. Based on this resolution, that Excellency should wither claiming (the poll tax) or interfere in this issue. That Excellency must act according to this writing and treat him and the mentioned sect in the way that they can go after their duties as the subjects in peace and tranquillity and pray as well-wishers for the durability and strength of the victorious government (i.e. the Qajar dynasty)".

The number of repeated complaints of the priests and the reactions of the Prince-Governors and orders to their deputies shows that the discrimination was rarely ameliorated and the local governors continued to gather illegal multiple poll taxes, which was a repeated subject of the letters of complaint.

## The *jizya* "poll tax" of Zoroastrians under the Qajars

The relative ambiguous tolerant policy toward Christians, especially Armenians, was predominantly the ancillary effect of the presence of the European representatives and officials, who saw themselves responsible for the well being of their Christian brethren. Their influence and support alongside the missionary activities resulted in a reduction of the pressure on the Christians of Iran, which shows a clear contrast to the unsteady situation of the Zoroastrians.[13] However, despite the severely active persecution and marginalization of Zoroastrians in the centuries since the Arab conquest of Iran, the situation of the Zoroastrians had improved slightly during the late 19th century. This was due partly to their presence in areas under British influence and partly due to the efforts and influence of the Parsis, their co-religionists in India under the British Raj. The support and effort of the Parsis to improve the living situation of Iranian Zoroastrians had a great impact on the community. In contrast, the Iranian Jews seemed not to be 'privileged' as other religious minority communities and were consigned to their own fate, predominantly living at the whim of local authorities and officials.[14] Despite the alleged 'tolerant policy' of the Qajar kings, the largely underprivileged and poor communities, especially of Jews and Zoroastrians, had been targeted by various discriminations and persecutions that were mostly ignored by the kings. The communities often feared kidnapping, forced conversion or false accusations and harassments brought about by rivals or prejudiced and zealous minor clergies or laymen.[15] Most of the discriminations were harassments instigated by the authorities and administrators regarding legal cases of force-conversions, marriage and inheritance[16] and especially by the time of the gathering of the annual *jizya*. Utilized as a subterfuge for humiliation of the *ḏimmī*s,[17] this amount could be raised arbitrarily in many illegal ways. The majority of the Zoroastrians, who were farmers, simple agrarian workers, or bricklayers and gardeners found it impossible to afford to pay the annual tax. Manekji Limji Hataria reports in detail regarding the poverty of the Zoroastrians, among others about the restriction of their diet and mentions that the majority rarely have rice, meat or vegetables.[18]The sum was increased from 250 to 1,000 *tūmāns*.[19]Around the beginning of the nineteenth century, the yearly poll tax imposed upon the community was 660 *tūmān*, which rose to 920 *tūmān* in 1882 (equal to 7,360 Marks).[20] This was only the sum, which was to be paid to the royal treasury, whereas the governors and tax collectors increased the sum to almost 2,000 *tūmān* (corresponding 1,000 Pound or ca. 25,000 francs. In 2017, this is worth approximately £66,184.70, i.e. wages of 3,030 days of skilled tradesman).[21] The illegally earned surplus fund was the pure profit of the governors and tax collectors. It is reported that in the mid-19th century, out of one thousand Zoroastrian families who were supposed to pay the poll tax, two hundred could pay it without difficulty whereas the rest could afford it either with much trouble or were absolutely incapable to pay it "even under pain and death".[22] Azargoshasp mentions even a much higher amount of 8,450 *tūmān* as the

official *jizya*, stating that local officials demanded even a payment triple the amount,[23] which is in accordance with Houtum-Schindler's early report cited above.

The following document (Figure 1) is an apograph of an original document which confirms the receipt of the *jizya* of the first half of the year 1871(1288 AH), issued by the Prince-Governor of the Yazd and Kerman.[24] It is stated here that the poll tax from both communities are given to him as his *tiyūl*:[25]

«از بابت جزیه هذه السنه یونت ئیل طائفه زرتشت کرمان و یزد که تیول اینجانب است به توسط گماشتگان مفصله ذیل از قرار قبض ایشان تمام دریافت شده:

۸۳۷ تومان و پنج قران مقرراً

به توسط نوروزعلی بیک از قرار قبض مشارالیه که ملاحظه شده
دو طغرا مقرراً ۱۵۰ تومان
بتوسط ذیل ۶۸۷ تومان و پنج قران
از قرار قبض سمعیل خان فراشباشی که ملاحظه شده. ۴ طغرا ۱۵۰ تومان
از قرار قبض دارابیگ ملاحظه شده. ۵ طغرا ۵۳۷ تومان و ۵ قران

سنه یونت ئیل
۸۳۷ تومان و پنج قران
مبلغ هشتصد و سی و هفت تومان و پنجهزار دینار وجه رایج تبریزی است
۴۱۸ تومان و ۷۶۰۰ دینار

مبیع(؟)

تحریرا فی شهر ذی حجه الحرام سنه ۱۲۸۸
محل مهر»

وزیر دول خارجه
۱۲۸۸

"For the sake of the *jizya* for this year of the 'Horse' from the Zoroastrian community of Kerman and Yazd, which belongs to my *tiyūl* is fully obtained according to the receipt by the delegated servants, as it is mentioned below in detail:

837 *tūmān* and 5 *qerān* according to the arrangement[26]
by the agency of Norūz-Alī-Beyg, according to the receipt of the aforesaid man, which is noticed;
Two receipts according to the arrangement for 150 *tūmān*;
By the agency of detailed below 687 *tūmān* and 5 *qerān*;
According to the receipt of the Esma'īl-Khān Farāšbāšī [27], which is noticed, four receipts 150 *tūmān*;

According to the receipt of the Dārāb-Beyg, which is noticed,
five receipts 537 *tūmān* and 5 *qerān*.
The year of the 'Horse'
837 *tūmān* and 5 *qerān*
The sum of eight hundred and thirty-seven *tūmān* and five-thousand *dīnār* of *tabrīz*[28] unit of currency.
418 *tūmān* and 7,600 *dīnār*
[fully] treated (?)
Written in mount *z1ī-haēat-al-ḥarām* of year 1288 [AH] (corresponding 1871)
Place of the seal
Foreign Minister"

The apograph is confirmed and sealed by the British Embassy of Tehran to be a true copy of the original document at the right margin, written in a legible English cursive script:

British Legation Tehran
Page of register 120 certified to be an exact copy of the original.
Tehran, May 1871
(signed) Henry H. Ousley
Act(?).V. Consul

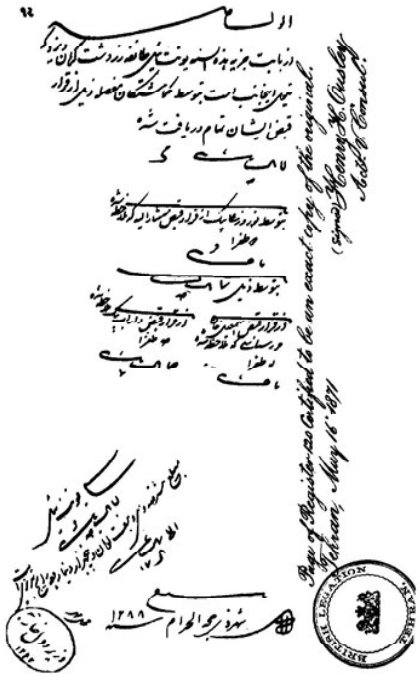

**Fig. 1: An apograph of a receipt of the jizya from the first half of the year 1871 (1288 AH), issued by the Prince-Governor of the Yazd and Kerman**

The actual value or spending power of *tūmān* during the Qajar period was not stable. According to Hinz the value of *tūmān* was changing between 15 Marks under Fatḥ-'Alī Shāh to nearby 10 Marks during the early periods of Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shāh's reign.[29] In order to have a comparison of the sum of the *jizya* and the purchasing power of *tūman*, a comparison between some food prices mentioned in the newspaper *rūznāme-ye vaqāye'-e ettefāqīyye* (*RVE*)[30] is very revealing in this context. According to a price list for *Dār-ol-Ḥelāfe of Tehran*, published in 5th April 1855 (17th Rağab 1271 AH) in *RVE*, for example 1 *man* (= 2,944 kg) Meat costs 1,200 *dīnār*, 4 *man* (= 11,776 kg) oil for 12,000 *dīnār* and 4 *man* fragrant rice (*berenğ-e 'anbar-bū*) is sold for 2,100 *dīnār*.[31] The prices belong to some 27 years before the year of the official abolition of *jizya.* Considering that each *tūmān* is subdivided to 10,000 *dīnār*, it is obvious that the actual gathered amount of *jizya* placed a heavy burden on the community.[32] Not to forget that that as already stated, the actual unofficial sum, which was gathered by the officials under the notion of *jizya* was much higher rather than it was documented.

Different contemporary sources give various numbers for the whole Iranian Zoroastrian population for this period. C. J. Wills, travelling in the same period to Iran, gives a total number of eight thousand Zoroastrians in Iran[33], whereas A.V. W. , Jackson, who visited Iran in the early twentieth century, based on the data given by Ardeshir Reporter, a Parsi agent, a total of eight thousand Zoroastrians only of Yazd and the and the surrounding villages and some eleven thousand Zoroastrians in whole Iran.[34] At the same time Napier Malcolm estimates some fourteen hundred Zoroastrian households only in Yazd in 1905, which results a significantly higher number of the whole Zoroastrian population.[35] The reports of the *Society* estimate the population of the Zoroastrian community in Iran some 7,000 for the last decades of the nineteenth century.[36]

**Fig. 2: The merchant and philanthropist Seth Merwanji Framji Panday (1812-1867). Ahe Anjuman Atash Behram, Bombay (© Godrej/Punthakey Mistree 2002, 610, No. 6)**

### *Society for the Amelioration of the Zoroastrian Conditions in Iran*

The already mentioned *Society for the Amelioration of Conditions in Iran* was established by the Parsi cotton industrialist Merwanji Framji Panday (1812-1867) in 1853, which set its sights on the improvement of the conditions of the Zoroastrian community (Figure 2).[37] Merwanji's personal interest in the situation of the Iranī community was partly motivated by his family relations. His mother Golestān was a refugee from Kerman, who was threatened with abduction. He followed the path of his eldest brother, who already some twenty years earlier in 1834 had established a fund to help refugees from Iran. The first and the most outstanding emissary of the *Society* to Iran was the already named Bombay Zoroastrian and British citizen Manekji Limji Hataria (known as Mānekǰī Ṣāḥeb, bearing the Ṣufī title of *darvīš-e fānī* in Kerman)[38], a learned businessman with a very good command of Persian language and well-versed in Persian literature (Figure 5). Hataria arrived in Yazd for the first time in March, 1854 (Esfand, 1223 AY/Rağab, 1270 AH)[39] and soon submitted his report about the condition of the Zoroastrians to the *Society,* which resulted in the immediate foundation of the *Persian Zoroastrian Amelioration Fund* (hereafter *Amelioration Fund*), known in Iran as the *anǧoman-e akāber-e pārsīyān* ("Society of the Pārsi Noblemen") in 1854 by Dinshaw Maneckji Petit (1823-1901), a Parsi entrepreneur and founder of the first textile mills in India (Figure 3).

**Fig. 3: Dinshaw Maneckji Petit (1823-1901)**

Manekji had dedicated his entire life as agent (NP *wakīl*) on behalf the *Amelioration Fund* to improving the life and the religious and socio-political conditions of his Iranian co-religionists and remained in Tehran until his death in

1259 AY/1890.[40] He supervised the maintenance of Zoroastrian shrines and *daḫmes,* encouraging and promoting interest in modern education in the community by founding high schools and orphanages. By 1882, the year of the abolition of *jizya* for Zoroastrians, already twelve Zoroastrian schools with emphasis on a European type of education were established in Iran.[41] Perhaps the foundation of *anǧomans* as local councils of elders for each community in Yazd, Kerman and Tehran after the model of Parsi Panchayat in Bombay was a major step to give a voice to the scattered and suppressed community of Zoroastrians, as these *anǧomans* could achieved an appropriate official reorganization by the government and Muslim authorities (Figure 4).[42] Furthermore, he successfully could bring pressure to bear on both priestly and lay Zoroastrians of Iran and force them to change certain religious practices according to the Parsi tradition.[43]

**Fig. 4: Members of the Yazd *anǧoman* at the Gahambār khāne in the 19th century, Courtesy: Parviz Vajavand. First *anǧoman* was founded in Yazd in 1884. The *anǧoman* of Kerman was founded shortly thereafter.**

As stated earlier, different contemporary sources give various numbers for the whole Iranian Zoroastrian population of this period. C. J. Wills, travelling in Iran at this time, gives a total number of eight thousand Zoroastrians in Iran[44], whereas A. V. W. Jackson, who visited Iran in the early twentieth century, based on the data given by Ardeshir Reporter, a Parsi agent, a total of eight thousand Zoroastrians only of Yazd and the surrounding villages and some eleven thousand Zoroastrians in whole Iran.[45] At the same time, Napier Malcolm estimates some fourteen hundred

Zoroastrian households only in Yazd in 1905, which results in a significantly higher number of the whole Zoroastrian population.[46] The reports of the *Amelioration Fund* estimate the population of the Zoroastrian community in Iran some 7,108 in 1854,[47] including the biggest community with 6,658 individuals in Yazd and its surrounding villages (3,310 men and 3,348); some 450 individuals in Kerman (Fifteen years later in 1879 the number was increased to 1,378 individuals), 50 individuals in Tehran as well as 21 individuals in Shiraz.[48]

In addition to the numerous persecutions of Zoroastrians, Manekji Limji Hataria reported the yearly head-tax, a religion-based, fiscal penalty, to be paid by the recognized non-Muslim religions, including Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians in Qajar Iran. This head-tax was consisted of 845 *tūmān* (equivalent of ca. Rs. 4,000 in 1882) to be gathered from the Yazdi community and 45 *tūmān* by the Kermani inhabitants, in addition to the other common tax on land, water, cattle, pasture-grounds etc., which was collected as from them as other Muslim subjects. Knowing about the miserable status of their co-religionists in Iran and the heavy burden that this tax caused to the community, obtaining a "partial or total remission" of the *jizya* stood from the beginning at the top of the agenda of the *Amelioration Fund*.[49] The *Amelioration Fund* and Hataria already knew about the abolition of the poll tax of Armenians of Tabriz and other northern Iranian districts close to the Russian frontier.[50] Even if the abolition of the poll tax was from one side due the influence of the Russian government and from other side was ordered by the Crown-Prince 'Abbās-Mīrzā (1789- 1833) as a sign of his goodwill to soften the unsteady relations with the Russian Empire, it was considered as a precedent for hope to achieve its abolition.[51]

**Fig. 5: Manekji Limji Hataria (1813–1890) painted in 1913 by the Parsi artist M. F. Pithawalla. Wadia Atas Bahram fire temple, Mumbai (©Kotwal et al. 2016)**

Hataria was put specifically in charge to convince the Qajar king, Nāṣer-ad-Dīn Shāh, to abolish the *jizya*, which soon proved to need an enormous effort, both in Iran and from abroad. As an international and wealthy merchant and familiar with European customs and practices, Hataria was very well connected with the Qajars as well as European diplomats in Tehran. Besides the famous diplomat and orientalist Sir Henry Rawlinson (1810-1895), who was British Ambassador in Teheran 1859-1860,[52] he met the French diplomat and orientalist Arthur de Gobineau (1816-1882), the Japanese envoy Masaharu Yoshida (1852-1921), the English missionary Napier Malcolm, as well as orientalists Sir Edward G. Browne and Valentin Zhukovski-(1858-1918).[53] Not only he could successfully approach and arrange political alliances with both European and Iranian influential merchants and politicians, but he also aspired to ascertain good and intimate relationships with *'ulamā*, the Iranian religious Muslim elites, who were his potential opponents for the abolition of the poll tax, with whom he had a regular dialogue on theological issues.[54]After waiting for three years, on 15th May 1860, Hataria succeeded in getting introduced by the British Ambassador Sir Henry Rawlinson to the Qajar King Nācer-ad-Dīn Shāh. He could convince the King to reduce 100 *tūmān* in the tax, which by 1860 had risen to 1,020 *tūmān*.[55] Hataria wrote to the King in 1860 (1276 AH):

«شصت سال پیش ۶۰۰۰ خانوار، جزیه ای معادل ۲۰۰ تومان میپرداختند، امّا هم اینک ۱۰۰۰ خانوار بایستی ۸۷۸ تومان بپردازند. زرتشتیان نمیتوانند چنین مبلغی را سالانه پرداخت نمایند. خواهشمند است صرفاً همان مبلغ ۲۰۰ تومان را مطالبه و در صورت امکان آن را سالانه از طریق کنسول بریتانیا وصول نمائید. این اقدام باعث تشویق زرتشتیان به تلاش ساعیانه در امور کشاورزی گردیده و از مهاجرت آنها جلوگیری مینماید. لطفاً اطمینان حاصل نمائید که ۲۰۰ تومان یادشده در سالهای بعدی تغییر نکند. با آنکه احتمالاً حکّام سالانه تغییر میکنند امّا مبلغ مذکور نبایستی تغییر نماید. همچنین خواهشمند است بابت آزادیهای شهری زرتشتیان، اطمینان خاطر داده و اجازه ندهید که دیگران به طور وحشیانه با آنها رفتار کنند.

امضا شده توسط: مانکجی لیمجی. نماینده از طرف زرتشتیان هند، یک کپی به شاه ارسال گردید. مورخ ۱۲۷۶ ق»[56]

"Sixty years ago, 6,000 families have paid a poll tax of 200 *tūmān*, but right now thousand families are obliged to pay 878 *tūmān*. The Zoroastrians are not able to pay this yearly amount. I request you to collect only the same previous 200 *tūmān* and if possible, directly from the British consul each year. This act will encourage the Zoroastrians and push them forward to a laborious endeavour in farming and cultivating affairs and will prevent their immigration. Please be confident that the mentioned amount of 200 *tūmān* won't be changed in future years. Even if the governors might be replaced each year, this amount shouldn't be changed. I also request to make sure that the urban liberties of the Zoroastrians will be respected and it won't be allowed that anybody will treat them cruelly.

Signed by Manekji Limji, emissary of the Parsis of India. An apograph has been sent to the king. Letter dated to 1276 AH (1860)."

Later, it was agreed that the fixed head-tax of 837 *tūmān* will be paid yearly by the Amelioration *Fund* and directly to the royal treasury, which was paid for 28 years up to its definite abolition.[57]

## The *farmān* "Royal Edict" of 1882

The hard struggle for obtaining the complete elimination of head-tax took some more twenty-five years from 1857 to 1882 and cost the *Amelioration Fund* of Bombay nearly 109,564 rupees (ca. 257, 475 francs).[58] Finally a royal decree was issued in August 1882, which exempted the Zoroastrians from the poll tax once and for all, and put them on an equal footing with the Muslims in terms of taxation applied on land, water, and trade. Ronald F. Thomson (1830-1888), the British ambassador to Tehran, sent a certified copy of Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shāh's *farmān* "royal decree" decreeing the immediate abolition of the head-tax, together with an English translation to Dinshaw Maneckji Petit, the head of the *Amelioration Fund.*[59]

The original *farmān* seems to have beeen lost without trace, however, the previously-mentioned verified copy and its translation exists. The *farmān* is dated to the month of Ramażān 1299AH/August 1882. The English translation bears the name and signature, "I. Ibraheem," who probably was the copyist of the Persian apograph. The transcription, or as it was called originally "true copy," was accompanied by a short note from Ronald F. Thomson. Together with other correspondence between the *Amelioration Fund* and the parties involved, it was published in the following year in the "News from Persia," *Proceedings and Reports*, by the *Amelioration Fund* in1883.[60]

Thomson's brief accompanying note reads:[61]

> Teheran, 27th September 1882
>
> Sir,
>
> With reference to the letter addressed to me by the Committee of the Persian Zoroastrian Amelioration Fund on the 8th of September 1881, I have much pleasure in transmitting to you herewith copy and translation of a Firman which has been issued by the Shah, wholly abolishing the Juzia tax, and relieving the Zoroastrian community from its payment from the commencement of the present financial year, the 21st of March 1882.
>
> I am,
>
> Sir,
>
> Your most obedient and humble servant
> (signed) Ronald F. Thomsom

The expected headings of the *farmān* are missing in the Persian apograph, nevertheless the English translation exists. It is written in twenty-one lines in Nasta'līq script and has three verification notes at the left margin. Beside the known usual structure and language of such *farmān*s and naming the different forms of taxations, it is interesting that it avoids to use the term *jizya*, which is referred to as "the sum […], which was annually levied under another name". As the heading and title of *farmān* is unfortunately not transmitted and it seems that the original must be lost, it remains unclear if the term *jizya* was ever used in this context. The reason could be, at the least, to avoid the expected refusal reaction of the Muslim clergy regarding the abolition of *jizya*, which was considered to be a given Islamic right.

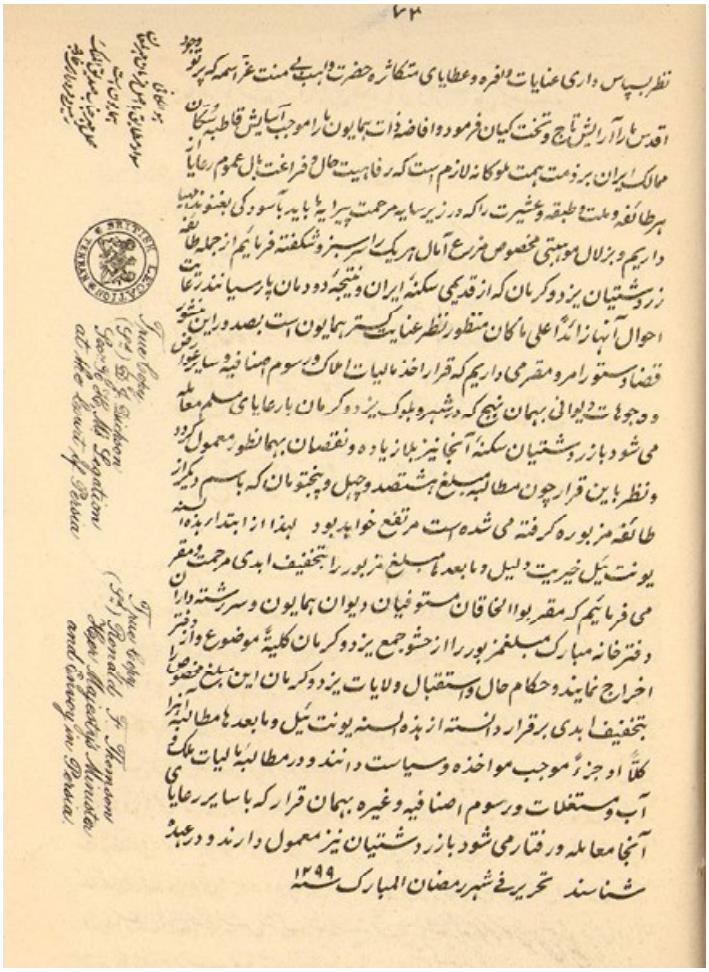

**Fig. 6: The apograph of Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shāh's *farmān* "Royal Edict" of abolition of the Zoroastrian's poll tax, dated to Ramażān 1299 AH/August 1882**

The *farmān* was published originally in the *Bombay Gazette* on 16th November 1882. The apograph of the original *farmān* reads as follows (Figure 6):

«[محل دستخط مبارک همایونی] [62]

[سواد فرمان مهرنشان همایونی] [63]

نظر بسپاس داری عنایات وافره و عطایای متکاثره حضرت واهب بهنت عزّاسمه که پرتو وجود اقدس ما را آرایش تاج و تخت کیان فرمود وافاضه ذات همایون ما را موجب آسایش قاطبه سگان ممالک ایران بر ذمت همت ملوکانه لازم است که رفاهیت حال و فراغت بال عموم رعایا از هر طائفه و ملت و طبقه و عشیرت را که در زیر سایه مرحمت پیرایه ما باید بآسودگی بغنوند مهیا داریم و بزلال موهبتی مخصوص مزرع آمال هریک را سرسبز و شکفته فرمائیم از جمله طائفه زردشتیان یزد و کرمان که از قدیمی سکنه ایران و نتیجه دودمان پارسیانند رعایت احوال آنها زائداً علی ماکان منظور نظر عنایتگستر[64] همایون است بصدور این منشور قضا دستور امر و مقرر میداریم که قرار اخذ مالیات املاک و رسوم اصنافیه و سایر عوارض و وجوهات دیوانی بهمان نهج که در شهر و بلوک یزد و کرمان با رعایای مسلم معامله میشود با زردشتیان سکنه آنجا نیز بلا زیاده و نقصان بهمانطور معمول گردد[65] و نظر باین قرار چون مطالبه مبلغ هشتصد و چهل و پنج تومان[66] که باسم دیگر از طائفه مزبوره گرفته می شده است مرتفع خواهد بود. لهذا از ابتدا هذه السنه یونت ئیل خیریت دلیل و ما بعدها مبلغ مزبور را بتخفیف ابدی مرحمت و مقرر می فرمائیم که مقربواالخاقان مستوفیان دیوان همایون و سررشته داران دفترخانه مبارک مبلغ مذبور[68] را از حشو جمع[67] یزد و کرمان کلیةً موضوع و از دفتر اخراج نمایند و حکام حال و استقبال ولایات یزد و کرمان این مبلغ مخصوص را بتخفیف ابدی برقرار دانسته از هذه السنه یونت ئیل و ما بعدها مطالبه آنرا کلّاً و جزاً موجب مواخذه و سیاست دانند و در مطالبه مالیات ملک و آب و مستغلات و رسوم اصنافیه و غیره بهمان قرار که با سایر رعایای آنجا معامله و رفتار می شود با زرتشتیان نیز معمول دارند و در عهده شناسند.

تحریر فی شهر رمضان المبارک سنه 1299»

The translation of the *farmān* is as follows:[1]

> "Royal *farmān* issued by His Majesty Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shāh, relieving the Zoroastrians of Iran from the payment of the tribute annually levied from them under the name of "*jizya*"[70]
>
> "In consideration of the innumerable benedictions and many bounties, which it has pleased the Almighty – who giveth liberally and may his name be highly esteemed– to confer upon us, and as an act of grace towards Him who has bestowed us the Royal Crown of Persia, with the means of promoting the welfare and relief to its inhabitants, there has devolved on us the duty of securing care, tranquillity and happiness for all our subjects, to whatever creeds, classes, community and tribes they belong, so that they may be reposed under shadow of our mercy and they may be refreshed by the pure and beneficent waters of our special favour.
>
> Amongst these are the Zoroastrians of Yazd and Kerman, who are descended of the ancient and noble population of Persia (*pārsiyān*), and it is now our royal desire to make their peace and well-being more complete than heretofore.
>
> Therefore by the issue of this royal *farmān*, we ordain and command that the real-estate tax (*amlāk*), the *guild taxes* (*rosūm-e aṣnāfīye*), and all other Government imposts and trading dues (*'avārez*)[71], which are taken from our Muslim subjects of Yazd and Kerman, may be recovered in the same manner, and nothing more nor less from the Zoroastrians who also reside there. And whereas in consideration of this arrangement the exaction of the sum of eight hundred and forty-five *tūmān*, which was annually levied under another name (i.e. *jizya*) from the said community will be abolished.

> Therefore, from the commencement of this propitious year of the 'Horse', we remit this sum and absolve the Zoroastrians from its payment henceforward and forever. Hereby we order and command the Chief Accountant of the Finance (*mostōfiyān*) of our Royal Court and Revenue officers of our Royal Exchequer (*mostašārān*) to strike out the said sum entirely.
>
> The present and future Governors of the provinces of Yazd and Kerman, ought to consider all right for the payment of this tribute abolished for ever, and, as regards the present year of the 'Horse', and the following years, if this sum should happen to be exacted, they will be held responsible and will be punished for it. Moreover, regarding the tribute of the land and water and real-estate tax (*mostaġallāt*), guild taxes and for all other [dues, trades and custom duties], the Zoroastrians must be treated in the same manner as our other subjects there are treated.
>
> Written in the month of Ramażān al-Mubārak, year 1299"

The first, which is a *secondo manu* again in Nastaæliq script is the confirmation of Mīrzā Moḥammad-Khān R'īs Nūrī Sadīq-ol-Molk (1818-1900). He was an influential figure in Qajar foreign diplomatic affairs, who acted from 1275 AH/1859 as the chief secretary of the foreign ministry.[72] The note reads:

«هوالکافی
سواد مطابق باصل فرمان مهرلمعان
همایون است
محل مهر جناب صدیق الملک
رئیس دفتر وزارت خارجه»

The two other verification notes by the Consul-General of the time and his secretary are in English, written in a fine cursive English script and accompanied by the stamp of the British Legation, Tehran.[73] The first verification note belongs to Sir Dr. Joseph Dickson (1848 – 1887), the Knight Physician and secretary of the British Legation in Tehran:


**Fig. 7: Stamp of the British Legation Tehran under the apograph of Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shāh's *farmān* "Royal Edict" of abolition of the Zoroastrian's poll tax, Tehran, 1882**

British Legation Tehran

True Copy

(S[igne][d]) D. J. Dickson
Secr[etary] of H, M's Legation
At the Court of Persia

Another foreign doctor who was also in Persia, D. Joseph Dickson came to Iran in 1848 during the last year of the reign of Moḥammad Shāh Qajar (1808-1848) and stayed for almost forty years until his death in 1878 in Iran and was frequently at the service of the king, his harem and courtiers and in 1871, successfully treated Nāṣer-ad-Dīn Shāh when the monarch had malaria in 1871.[74] Dickson acted as an intermediary in a number of secret negotiations between the court of both Moḥammad Shāh and Nāṣer-ad-Dīn Shāhand the English envoy. Being on good terms with the King and queen mother, Ǧahān Khānom Mahd-e 'Oliyā, he played crucial roles in various affairs, which included the disgracing of Amīr Kabīr in 1851 and Mīrzā Āqā Khan Nūrī in 1858.[75]

The second verification belongs to Sir Ronald Ferguson Thomson (1830-1888), K.C.M.G.; appointed Knight Envoy, Minister, and Consul-General of British Legation in Tehran, who, as we have already seen, had played an important mediating role. He spent his entire professional life working for the British Legation in Tehran:[76]

True Copy]
(S[igne][d]) Ronald F. Thomson
Her Majesty's Minister
And Envoy in Persia

Subsequently, Thomson had also informed the High Priests and elders of the Zoroastrian community in Yazd and Kerman by sending a letter stating that the king had already informed the *prince*-governor of Yazd, Masʿūd Mīrzā Ẓell-al-Solṭān (1850-1918), the eldest son of Nāṣer-ad-Dīn Shāh. He asks the Priests to acknowledge the receipt of the king's *farmām* and to send him the exact date of its delivery. The king's letter to Ẓell-al-Solṭān is apparently lost and it is not clear if any memorandum had been sent to 'Abd-al-Ḥamid Mirzā Nāṣer-al-Dōle Farmānfarmā, the governor of Kerman between 1881-91. Thomson's letter to the High Priests of Yazd reads:

«سواد تعلیقه جناب‌جلالت مآب‌اجل اکرم مفخم امجد اعظم مستر طامس صاحب، وزیر مختار دولت بهیه انگلیس مقیم دارالخلافه طهران

عالیجاهان مجدت و نجدت همراهان رؤسای طایفهٔ زردشتی سا کنین یزد! اظهار میدارد فرمان مهرلمعان اعلیحضرت اقدس همایونی شهریاری که به توسّط اینجانب شرف صدور یافته بود در خصوص تخفیف جزیه از طایفهٔ زردشتی سا کنین یزد و کرمان، این اوقات به توسّط حضرت مستطاب اشرف ارفع اسعد والا ظل السلطان، دامت شوکته، مصحوب مأمور مخصوص نزد نایبالحکومهٔ یزد فرستاده شده است که به آن عالیجاهان برسانند. چنانچه تا به حال رسیده است از تفصیل وصول آن و این که چه روزی به آن عالیجاهان رسیده است و به کدام از رؤسا سپردهاند، مشروحاً مفصلاً اینجانب را قرین اطلاع و استحضار دارند. زیاده چه نگارد؟

فی 23 شهر ذیحجه سنه ۱۲۹۹»[77]

"The apograph of the letter of His Excellency Mr. Thomson, the Envoy Extraordinary and Minister of the British government resided in the *Dār-al-Ḫelāfe*[78] of Tehran.

To Your Excellencies, the chiefs of the Zoroastrian community residing in Yazd! It is to be declared that the glow-seal-decree of His Most Royal Majesty, which was issued by the intermediation of yours sincerely, regarding the abatement of the annual poll tax from the Zoroastrian community residing in Yazd and Kerman has already sent by His Excellency, His Royal Highness Ẓell-al-Solṭān, accompanied by an special agent to the deputy-governor of Yazd, in order to reach Your Excellencies. If it has already reached you, please inform me with more details regarding its delivery and that in which day it was handed over to Your Excellencies and to which principals it is trusted, please do inform me in detail. What else shall I write? In 23rd of month Ḏū l-Ḥiğğa, year 1299 AH (6th October 1882)."

The two contemporary High Priests of Yazd at the time were Dastur Namdār and Dastūr Tīrandāz. In his travel book, *Persia Past and Present*: *A Book of Travel and Research* (1906), A.V. Williams Jackson, who met Dastūr Tirandāz in Yazd in 1903, mentions that at the time of his visit, the Chief Priest (*dastūr dastūrān*) of Yazd, Dastūr Nāmdār, was in India, so that his father-in-law, Dastūr Tirandāz, was functioning as the Acting High Priest.[79] Also, Edward G. Brown visited Dastūr Tīrandāz during his travels to Iran in 1887. Brown's account shows that not only was he a respected man in the community, he also enjoyed a certain confidential relationship with the governor of Yazd, Prince 'Emād od-Dolle,[80] under whose administration the "Zoroastrians […] enjoyed comparative peace and security".[81] Short after Brown's arrival in Yazd, "having learned that a European had just arrived in the town," Dastūr Tirandāz, "a portly old man, clad in the dull yellow raiment of the guebres[82]" was sent to him by the governor to "interview the said European and ascertain his nationality, the business which had brought him to Yazd, and his rank and status, so that, if he should prove to be 'distinguished', due honour might be shown him".[83] Despite the initial scepticism of Dastūr Tirandāz regarding Brown's motives in visiting Yazd, it seems that Brown could win his confidence, which enabled him to visit fire temples and have long conversations with him. Brown's account

shows also that the High Priest played a leading role not only logically within the Zoroastrian community, but also in the circle of statesmen. He was also the one who signed the letters to both Qajar and British officials regarding the receipt of the King's *farmān* abolishing the poll tax.

The letter was handed on 2nd Moharam-alharam 1300 AH/13th November 1882 to the Head Priests of the community by the deputy governor of Yazd ʾEbrāhīm-Ḫān and Ḥāǧ Mīrzā Moḥammad-Taqī Tāǧer Šīrāzī Afnān Vakīl-od-Dole (1830 – 1911).[84] There is a marginal note on this letter which refers to the initial response of the High Priests and leaders of the Zoroastrian community in Yazd to Thomson, dated the 7 Muḥarram al-Ḥarām 1300 AH/18th November 1882 that states the memorial is received:

«مجدّد عرض میشود که تعلیقهٔ رفیعهٔ بندگان سامی که در متن عریضه ذکر است، به واسطهٔ جناب فخامت نصاب افتخارالحاج حاجی میرزا محمّدتقی صاحب، تاجر شیرازی، به کمترینان رسیده است.

التاریخ صحیحه دستور تیرانداز، رستم مهربان، دینیار گودرز مهربان، اردشیر مهربان، شهریار بهرام، رستم بهرام، مهربان بهرام، بهمن جمشید، کیخسرو ماونداد، خداداد رشید، سروش بهمن، اردشیر بهرام، بهمن جمشید»[85]

"Renewed we have the honour to bring to the notice that the exalted letter of His Magnificence, which referred to within the letter, has arrived your most humble servants by the agency of the Honorable Ḥāǧī-Mīrzā Moḥammad-Taqī Ṣāḥeb, Tāǧer Šīrāzī.

The just date [accompanied by the seal of the priests], Dastūr Tīrandāz, Rostam Mehrabān, Dīnyār Gūdarz Mehrabān, Ardašīr Mehrabān, Šahrīȳar Bahrām, Rostambahrām, Mehrabān Bahrām, Bahman Ǧamšīd, Keyẖosrō Māvandād, Ḥodādād Rašīd, Sorūš Bahman, Ardašīr Bahrām, Bahman Ǧamšīd."

It is not surprising that Mīrzā Moḥammad-Taqī Tāǧer Šīrāzī Afnān Vakīl-od-Dole, who was the second of the three sons of Ḥāǧ Mīrzā Moḥammad Tāēer Šīrāzī (1798-1876), the great maternal uncle of Sayyed 'Alī-Moḥammad Širāzī, the Bāb (1819-50) was involved in this issue. Beside the fact that he was a very influential and affluent merchant in Yazd and an important supportive figure for the Bahā'ī community of the time,[86] Hataria also had developed sympathy and friendship with Iranian nationalist intellectuals and reformists of the time. He clearly expressed his admiration for Baha'ism and the new converts were in his confidence to allow him to be involved in the community affairs.[87]

## The aftermath

Despite the official abolition of poll tax as an important sign towards the 'equal rights', humiliation and discrimination against the Zoroastrians did not disappear. There have been often, even if isolated, attempts at a local level to reintroduce the

capitation tax. The *jizya* continued to be collected by local officials in Yazd, Kerman, and other cities.[88] Some eighteen years after the official abolition of the head-tax, the Zoroastrian council of Kerman in letters to the prime minister dated to 1900/1318 AH and 1904/1322 AH complained about the renewed suppression of the governor of Kerman to gather tax from the Zoroastrians.[89] These circumstances resulted in Naṣer al-Dīn Shāh's son and successor, Muẓaffari′d-Dīn Shāh (1853-1907), being forced to issue a renewed *farmān* in 1898, maintaining that the Zoroastrians not be subject to Sharī'a-based humiliations.[90] For many clergy the abolition was considered a contravention against Islamic rule: this should be seen in the greater context of the long-lasting challenge to authority between the royal institution and the privileges of *'ulamā* in the legal domain for the determination of legislation, including Sharī'a-based restrictions. This issue regarding the legal status of religious minorities, including Zoroastrians, in today's Iranian civilian jurisprudence within the interdependency between civil and Sharīʿa is still a serious matter of debate.

Even if the *ostensible* annihilation of the *jizya* did not end the discrimination of the Zoroastrian community, it paved the way for the gradual improvement of the quality of life and integration of the Zoroastrians of Iran over the course of the nineteenth century. The *farmān*, not only abolished the *jizya*, but also made Zoroastrians equal to their Muslim neighbours from the point of view of the taxation law. Not only the increase in the Zoroastrian population but also in their economic status had clearly changed. According to the *Amelioration Society* there were nearly fifty Zoroastrian merchants active in Tehran around the mid-nineteenth century, which increased quickly to almost three hundred, only ten years after issuing the abolition *farmān* by 1892,[91] and another in 1898 for elimination of all other discrimination.[92] Furthermore, the abolition of the head-tax was a crucial step toward the improvement of the legal status and socio-political situation of the Zoroastrian community in their homeland and raised hope among the Zoroastrians to be accepted and treated as full and equally entitled members of the Iranian society during the coming centuries.[93]

## REFERENCES

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2. The *jizya* tax, was imposed upon non-Muslims in different ways and at various times during the Islamic history. Some instances speak for its punitive role, probably to force the non-Muslim subjects to convert into Islam by driving the communities into economic ruin. Cf. Moreen 2008.
3. Albert Houtum-Schindler travelled widely throughout Iran and passionately collected

ethnographical, cultural and historical data on archaeological and historical sites, culture, minorities, languages and dialects, flora and fauna, population etc.; for his life and achievements cf. Gurney 2004.

4. Houtum-Schindler 1882, p 56. The translation is mine.
5. Houtum-Schindler 1882, pp 56–57. The translation is mine.
6. Cf. Wills 1886, p. 229. With minimal alteration.
7. Cf. Browne 1893, pp. 370–371; Jackson 1906, 373–375.
8. Cf. Jackson 1906, p. 374.
9. Cf. Persian Zoroastrian Amelioration Fund, *News from Persia*, 1883.
10. Šahmardān 1360 š [1981], p 393. The original document was kept at the *panchayat* treasury of the Ātaš-Varahrām of Yazd and is cited after Maneckji Limji Hataria's reports, H.P. MS 213, Cama Oriental Institute, Mumbai. Two transcripts of similar letters are cited by Ūšīdarī 2535 šāhanšāhī [1977], p. 232.
11. Cf. Ūšīdarī 2535 šāhanšāhī [1977], p. 232, with slight orthographic alteration
12. *Ibid.*
13. For a general survey of the Zoroastrians' life under Qajars cf. Boyce 1979, 196–215; Choksy 2006, 141–153.
14. According to Wills: "As to the Jews, their position is terrible. Probably in no country in the world are they treated worse than in Persia. Beaten, despised, and oppressed, cursed even by slaves and children, they yet manage to exist, earning their living as musicians, dancers, singers, jewellers, silver- and gold-smiths, midwives, makers and sellers of wine and spirits. When anything very filthy is to be done a Jew is sent for"; cf. Wills 1886, pp. 74, 229-233.
15. For some cases cf. Aminī 1380 š [2001], 1–90, for a comparison with other cases of Jews and Christians cf. Kondo 2018.
16. Whereas marrying a Muslim woman was punishable by death, the Muslim men were allowed to marry any non-Muslim woman, which automatically resulted her conversion to Islam. Also, regarding the inheritance law, any to Islam converted male member of a non-Muslim family was entitled to all the inheritance, thus converion for inheritance by greed was a serious threat within the community.
17. The attitude has its roots in early Islamic *tafsīr* tradition. Among others, the authoritative Islamic Quran commentator al-Zamakhshari (1075-1144) interprets the Quranic verse 9:29 (… *ḥattāyu'ṭū l-jizyata'anyadinwa-hum ṣāghirūn,* i.e. "…until they pay the *jizya* from their wealth [lit. from hand], submissively") on *jizya* in his *tafsīr al-Kašāf*, which was considered a primary source by all major scholars after him as such: "The *jizyah* shall be taken from them with belittlement and humiliation. (The *immī*) shall come in person, walking not riding. When he pays, he shall stand, while the tax-collector sits. The collector shall seize him by the scruff of the neck, shake him and say: 'Pay the *jizya*!' and when he pays it, he shall be slapped on the nape of his neck";cf. Zamaḫšarī 1365 AH [1946], II: 262-263; Lewis, 2014. p. 15.
18. Cf. Hāṭriā 1865. pp. 13-14.
19. Cf. Kestenberg Amighi 1990. p. 130.
20. Cf. Houtum-Schindler 1882. p. 57.
21. Calculated by Currency converter: 1270–2017 of The National Archives Currency Convertor.
22. Cf. Menant 1917, I: p. 129; Ūšīdarī, Ǧahāngīr. 2535 šāhanšāhī [1977]. p. 237.
23. Cf. Āẕargošasp 1940.
24. The apograph here is published after Āẕargošasp 1353 š [1975], p. 105, without any

reference or explanation in the text.

25. The term *tiyūl* or *tuyūl* denotes a temporary grant of money or land in pre-modern Iran grant, in which the king bestows the right to collect government taxes to a local governor.
26. The underlined data are given in *sīyāq* script.
27. The *farāšbāšī* was a title for the head of the lackeys.
28. The *tumān* is referred to mostly as *tūmān-e tabrīzī* or *tūmān-e dīvānī* to determine the generally valid accounting system standard all over Iran. As the value of *tūmān* could worsen constantly, especially in Qajar era it was common to calculate its value in current units of exchange for the sake of the daily usage, so the majority of the documents states unambiguously the type of currency, like this document. For the unit calculations cf. Hinz 1991. pp 83–9; Rabino, 1945.
29. cf. Hinz 1991. pp. 83–9.
30. The *RVE* was the first regularly published Persian-language newspaper on Iranian soil. Its first issue was published on 7th February 1851 (5th Rabī‘oṯ-Ṯānī 1267 AH) and the last issue in 16th August 1860 (28th Moḥarram 1277 AH).
31. *RVE* 218/2, re. 1373 š [1994], 1380.
32. The standard denomination of a (*ṣāḥeb-)qerān* of 1,000 *dīnār* (equivalentto 20 *šāhī*) was based on a *toman* of 384 *noḫod*. It was intrdoucedduringthereign of Fatḥ-‘AlīŠāh in 1825-26 and remained the major currency until the end of the hammered coinage in 1876-79; for more details cf. Album et al. 1992.
33. Cf. Wills 1886. p. 229.
34. Cf. Jackson 1906. p. 354.
35. Cf. Malcolm 1905, 44.
36. Cf. Persian Zoroastrian Amelioration Fund, *News from Persia* 1883. pp. 69–70.
37. Cf. Boyce 1979. pp. 209–211.
38. Cf. Ūšīdarī 2535 šāhanšāhī [1977]. p. 427.
39. A narrative of his travel to Iran is published by him in Gujarati in 1865as well as a Persian translation at the same year; cf. Hātaṛiā 1865a-b.
40. Only once between 1863 and 1865 he travelled back to Bombay.
41. The focus of the teaching at the new established schools were sciences and mathematics, as well as religious education for both girls and boys; cf. Boyce 1969. p. 28.
42. Cf. Boyce 1979. pp 209–10; Ūšīdarī 2535 šāhanšāhī [1977]; Šahmardān 1360 š [1981]. pp 136–138. For Zoroastrian *anǧomans* cf. Kasheff 1985.
43. Cf. Ringer 2009. pp. 556–558 (with references).
44. Cf. Wills 1886. p. 229.
45. Cf. Jackson 1906. p. 354.
46. Cf. Malcolm 1905. p. 44.
47. Cf. Persian Zoroastrian Amelioration Fund, *News from Persia* 1883. pp. 69–70.
48. Cf. Menant 1917. p 108. The number of Shirazi population is based on the Zoroastrian Calendar for 1894-95, cf. Menant 1917, 108, fn. 102. Hataria's successor Kaikhusru Tirandaz Khorsand (d. 1893) has recorded the total number of 9,269 in a report to the *Society published in 1892 and a total of 11,000 is given by Aresir Edalji Reporter,* Kaikhusru Tirandaz Khorsand's successor in 1906; cf. Menant 1917. pp. 109–110.
49. Cf. Karaka 1884, I. pp 73-74; Menant 1917, I, pp 132-33; citing the *Parsi Prakash*, vol. I: 654 ff.
50. For Armenians in Iran cf. Barry, 2018.

51. Cf. Karaka 1858. p. 39.
52. Beside his military and diplomatic duties, Rawlinson was the first scholar who deciphered and translated the complete *Old Persian* portion of the trilingual cuneiform inscription of Darius I the Great at Behīstūn.
53. Cf. Sheffield 2013. p. 32.
54. Among others with the influential and authoritative Shī'ī jurist Sheykh Morteżā Anṣārī (1781–1864). He is considered as the 'first effective' model of the 'sovereign legal authority'; cf. Farridnejad *forthcoming*.
55. Cf. Menant 1917. p 133; Palsetia 2001. p. 170.
56. Cf. Hāṭariā 1866. p. 9.
57. *Ibid*., pp. 159-60.
58. Cf. Menant 1917, I. pp 133-134. This equals ca. US$ 10 million dollars in 2000.
59. *Parsi Prakash*, vol. I. p. 662.
60. Cf. Persian Zoroastrian Amelioration Fund, "News from Persia 1883, text, 73; tr. 64-65; Menant 1917, I: 134-35; Choksy 2006. pp. 143–144.
61. Cf. Karaka 1884, I. p. 79.
62. Missing at the publication of the Amelioration Fund in 1883.
63. Missing at the publication of the Amelioration Fund in 1883.
64. ac عنایتکستر
65. ac کردد
66. ac پنجتومان
67. ac مبلغ مذبور
68. The accounting terminus technicus *ḥašv-e ǧam'* has often been hypo-corrected to حق جمع within the secondary literature.
69. For the first official translation sent to the Amelioration Fund in 1883 cf. Amelioration Fund in 1883. Another translation is to be found in Menant 1917, pp134-135, fn. 146. The translation is replicated in a letter from President of the Committee, Persian Zoroastrian Amelioration Fund, Dinshaw Manockji Petit to His Excellency Ronald F. Thomson, Esq., CIE dated Bombay, 4 December 1882.
70. Missing at the publication of the Amelioration Fund in 1883.
71. For the form and collection of the different taxes in Qajar period cf. Floor 1998.
72. His personal memorials and note have been recently published; cf. Yūsefdehī 1398 š [2018].
73. Cf. Scott-Keltie 1885. p. 821.
74. Cf. Mahdavi 2005. p. 177.
75. Cf. Amanat 1997. pp. 89, 151, 346.
76. Cf. Allen 1935.
77. An apograph of this letter is published by Mīr-Ḥosseynī 1391 š [2009], p102.
78. *Dār-al-Ḫelāfe* "Abode of the Caliphate" was the title of Tehran in Qajar period according to the Qajar sources; cf. Sefatgol 2005.
79. Cf. Jackson 1906, 357.
80. *Ibid.,* p. 418.
81. Cf. Browne 1893. p. 406.
82. NP *gabr*, i.e. Zoroastrians.
83. Cf. Browne 1893. p. 397, with slight alteration.
84. An apograph of this letter is published by Mīr-Ḥosseynī 1391 š [2009]. pp.102–103, Doc. No. 6.

85. An apograph of this letter is published by Mīr-Ḥosseynī 1391 š [2009], p 102. The names of the signatures are mentioned only in the apograph published by Tašakorī 1391 š [2012], p. 45, Doc. No. 12.
86. For his life cf. Shahvar 2016.
87. In the late 1870s Hataria corresponded with Bahā'-Allāh, residing by the time in 'Akkā (Acre) and also hired prior to this time Mirzā'Abol-Faẓl Golpāyegānī, a Baha'ī scholar convert as his secretary and the Babi Mirzā Ḥosayn Hamadāni as his scribe; cf. Kotwal et al. 2016. Bahā'ī movement had generally wield an important influence on Zoroastrian community. It is estimated that nearly 4,000 Zoroastrians converted to Bahaism; cf. Maneck 1990, 1–2 as well as Stiles 1984.
88. Cf. Kestenberg Amighi 1990. p 130; Stausberg 2002, II. pp. 165-170.
89. Cf. Sorūšīān 1371. pp. 90, 134.
90. Cf. Jackson 1906. p. 375.
91. Cf. Kestenberg Amighi 1990. p. 147.
92. Cf. Stausberg 2002, II. pp. 166-167.
93. For a short overview on the situation of the Zoroastrians after the Constitutional Revolution and under Pahlavīs and Islamic Republic, cf. Stausberg 2015. pp. 176–190.

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# Zoroastrian Glow in Azerbaijan[1]

Galina Woodova

*"While it is difficult today to establish the precise chronology of the spread of Zoroastrianism, it has left a clear imprint on the world-view and culture of Azerbaijan."* — *Rauf Melikov*[2]

ABSTRACT

*This case study is based on doctoral field research*[3] *in Azerbaijan from 2012-2016,*[4] *exploring the identity of the Lahij coppersmiths for the first time. The Lahijans living in the remote valley of the Girdiman River have remarkably preserved an ancient southwest Iranian mother tongue,*[5] *craftsmanship, traditional lifestyle, narratives,*[6] *blessings, festivals, rituals and ethical principles.*

*Historically the territory of Azerbaijan was under Iranian rule*[7] *and consequently was exposed to Zoroastrian faith.*[8] *During the Sasanian reign the Zoroastrian religion spread to all of its regions.*[9] *Three hundred Zoroastrian magi were sent to proselytize on the territory of what now is independent Azerbaijan.*[10] *On the one hand, generally today there is no awareness, let alone accurate understanding, of Zoroastrianism, which once prevailed in the area. On the other hand, the significance of fire still persists and is reflected best in Novruz festival.*[11] *Moreover, the Lahij community in its Caucasus mountain sanctuary* [12] *represents a living heritage to learn from.*

*Presently the Lahij community is facing an economic crisis causing an erosion of their original identity. Today, nevertheless, their customary ways still contain certain traces of the earlier cultures. While the local people perceive themselves as Shia Muslim, the following observant participation*[13] *yields particular indications of a Zoroastrian*[14] *undercurrent. This study can serve as an introductory sketch tracing Zoroastrianism in Azerbaijan.*[15]

## Past and Present Focus on Fire

Azerbaijani people today present their country as 'the land of fires.' One of the former names of Azerbaijan was *Media-Athropathena*.[16] Athropat, in Avestan *Athravan,* means one tending a fire,[17] which could be a function of a Zoroastrian priest. This name suits the country rich with ever-burning fires fed by natural gases. These fires were called *ateshi Bagavan,* God's fires; name Bagavan was the former name of present capital of Azerbaijan, Baku.[18] The name of the ancient country of *Media* comes from the title *magi,* known as a priest worshiping *Ahura Mazda*.[19]

The 'Tat', southwest Iranian-speaking area, spread from *Absheron* peninsula to *Derbend*, now in Russia, has most likely been Zoroastrian.[20] Under Sasanian reign multiple *ateshgahs*, fire temples, were built[21] and some remain till the present time. The fire temple of Surakhana, formerly built on the source of seven natural ever burning fires,[22] shared by Hindu and Zoroastrians pilgrims, has become one of the core cultural attractions. President Ilham Aliev lit up a torch from Surakhana fire to start the first European Olympic Games held in Baku. The present Surakhana site displays a Zoroastrian exhibition.[23]

## Fire Representations

Two buildings, one historical, The Maiden Tower, and one contemporary, the Flame Towers are the architectural emblems of Baku. A prominent Parsi scholar Dr. J.J. Modi, visited Baku claiming that The Maiden Tower with seven layers and seven pipes supplying seven fires with naphtha gas served earlier as an *ateshgah*, a Zoroastrian fire temple.[24] The Maiden Tower, designed with precise astronomical knowledge, is also viewed as former observatory. At the spring equinox, Novruz, light shines in through particular openings. Local perception renders that Maiden Tower is built in a shape of a flame. The same characteristic but a form[25] of the fire flame is also featured on the Azerbaijani passport.

One known tower, the Sohub-Budug dakhma,[26] called Sukut Qala, the Tower of Silence stands as a testimony to Zoroastrian burial practices. The rugged Shah Dag Mountains hide the highest world ateshgah.[27] Azerbaijani aeronautic engineer Farroukh Jorat restored its Iranian *chahar taq*[28] ancient form with the support of WZO[29] and the Khinalug[30] people. (Pic -2) In September 2018, Farroukh Jorat accompanied our Zoroastrian tour up to the *ateshgah*. Canadian priest Kobad Zarolia sang Avestan hymns over the hot flames lighting up the darkness. After hundreds of years Zoroastrians revisited[31] the sacred ancient fire in the wilderness.

When our group returned to Baku, the Institute of Multiculturalism[32] welcomed us over *armud stekan,* a pear shaped glass of hot tea. They prepared a speech openly affirming that Azerbaijan used to be Zoroastrian. In support they listed the precise facts of the internet articles on The Zoroastrian Heritage of Azerbaijan by K.J. Eduljee.[33] In the Azerbaijani Academy of Sciences, Department of Oriental

**Pic 1: The World's highest *ateshgah* in Khinalig** (Photo by Benedict Peshl)

**Pic. 2: Mowbed Kobad Zarolia at Surakhana Ateshgah**

Studies, a historian Rauf Malikov focuses on Zoroastrianism in Azerbaijan and Sara Ashurbeili researched the Surakhana *ateshgah*, the reign of Shirvanshahs and Baku. Magsud Hadzhiyev, Iranologist and ethnologist documented Zoroastrian customs in Guba region.

Other historians or ethnographers sporadically mention some aspects of Zoroastrianism in their broader research. Still, the general public and even museum guides, at least in 2019, were not aware of their Zoroastrian history. People routinely respond to the word Zoroastrian by a synonym *atesh-perest,*[34]fire worshipper. Zoroastrians themselves explain that they do not worship fire, but the God Creator, All-Wise *Ahura Mazda*, through the pure presence of fire.[35]

## Living Heritage of Lahij

On the one hand, the government recognizes Lahij for its Eastern architectural style and gave it a status of a historical preserve.[36] On the other hand, it is not understood yet that it is possible to explore an ancient Iranian heritage[37] of Azerbaijan through an authentic way of life. Within the overwhelming Azerbaijanization, the Lahij people form one of the most striking exceptions to assimilation. Their endangered language, however, could be soon lost and their fragile identity could erode. Yet the Lahij

community still offers certain residual thought and practice with Zoroastrian essence.

Lahij nestled high in the mountains in the lush, green and fruitful Girdiman river valley is called at its entrance *Cənnət Bağı*, paradise. From centuries past until 1969, when the first dirt road was built, Lahij was accessible only by a narrow, dangerous path. Travelers, riding horses or camels, were at times forced to dismount and lean toward a steep cliff. Today, Lahij is accessible by a four-hour drive, heading northeast out of Baku toward the regional center of İsmayilli. In the past the mountainous fortress was purposefully built to withstand destructive forces and stood firm guarding the country from an enemy attacks.[38] In a parallel way, Lahij stands out as a home to traditions, values, virtues and a mindset changing only at a slow pace.

Entering a closed religious society required an appropriate approach. I came as a learner of local language and culture and all Lahij people became my teachers. One special mentor, bright and cheerful 72 year- old Zibo *khanum,*[39] social heart of the settlement became the key to unlocking the Lahij ways. The people humorously called me *Zibora dimi,* Zibo's tail as I followed her and her advice to all the events and took part in her daily chores.

Pic- 2 a. Out of many vanishing crafts,[40] the leading trade of coppersmiths became a synonym for Lahij. After the Sasanian[41] re-settlement the masters became renowned for an Achaemenid technique of *oyma* ornamentation. The demand for Lahij-made valuables extended to Russia, Turkey, Georgia, Iran, India, and beyond. The ornamented masterpieces form prized possessions of European museums. These cottage industries, mainly self-sustainable family businesses run out of homes, kept Lahij thriving until the 20th century when the industrialization caused many craftsmen to leave.

**Pic. 2a: Coppersmith**

Since the mass-manufactured products flooded the market Lahijans fight an economic crisis. Searching for jobs in cities, besides losing their tongue, a different moral environment tests them. Residents who stay adjust their work to glean some means from the developing seasonal homespun tourism. Like the beloved character, 'the resilient cobbler' from popular Shah Abbas stories, they keep inventing ways to feed their families. Azade Mokadov, an elderly horse gear maker, personifies the resilient character, best of all. He is a blind master, who faithfully persists in working with his skillful hands.

## Ethic Parallels

> "*Religion should be such that its ideals can be applied to our work-a day world."*
>
> *— M.A. Buch.*[42]

While analyzing my fieldwork a pertinent question kept returning. What relationship does identity have to ethics? Current anthropological debate[43] centers on the previously set-aside, but recently re-occurring topic of morality. Lahij field work upholds that morality determines the dynamics concerning the perceptions of belonging. Previously rejected as an outlived concept, the vital practice of virtues becomes the focus of what it means to be a Lahij person.

Since Zoroastrianism is about 'practical morality', it is an 'ethical religion.'[44] The Lahijans are hard workers and active doers, thus their traditional ethics persist through their diligent ways. Their rigorous work ethic deems that the most harmful of sins are laziness[45] and greed. An Iranian afterlife myth *Arda Viraf,*[46] describes a soul stretched upon a rock. The man gathered excessive wealth, but because he hid it no one could benefit from it. The wicked man ignored the instruction, "He who at his door gives to the pious dervishes food and water enough to supply their wants, obtains an excellent thing in return."[47] The Lahij narratives illustrate habitual hospitality[48] and the courtyard doors remain open daily.[49]

Lahij generosity goes hand in hand with frugality and a resolve not to waste.[50] People partially live off the land, using their natural resources wisely. In this, they echo the environmental practices of the Zoroastrian faith. The fruit, berries, rosehip petals and buckthorn berries are picked, fruit is preserved for the winter as jams and jellies, herbs are sundried, pine cones are used to burn in the*samovar*, teapot.[51] The Lahij *buroni,* green long beans, grow in the courtyard with chickens fertilizing them. Many vegetable gardens are planted close to the Girdiman river and by water pipes brought from high mountain springs. Lahijans take good care of their land and flocks.[52]

They also seek the golden middle way of 'just right living' with no overeating or starving or other extremes. The favorite proverb is: *Kem, kemxou, həmişəxou*, eat a little bit at a time and you will have always something to eat. My mentor, Zibo khanum, confessed that she prefers to eat and gain energy to bake rather than to

fast. She expressed that God cares more how she speaks of and treat her neighbor than about her empty stomach, which would disqualify her from working cheerfully.[53] The community appreciates Zibo Khanum's example of shunning gossip and her generous involvement with others.

Taking care of each other and being together in joy and grief, 'togetherness'[54]is one of the key characteristics of a close-knit community. The norm of reciprocity is not complicated, but it is becoming sparse in our impersonal world of high speed. The caring community of Lahij draws together partaking in one another's events, but this quality is quickly lost 'outside of the boundaries.'[55]Lahijans, who move away, usually become nostalgic for the warmth of their neighborhood. They long to return and if there was a way to make living in their heartland, they would. They named their heartland the garden of paradise. The river name *Girdiman* comes from the Avestan *Garothman,* meaning a home of welcome songs, 'a blissful abode,' of heaven.[56]

Marriage is perceived as a fulfillment of one of the life goals.[57] Raising children to become responsible, active, just, honest and truthful[58]community members happens within the sacred union of one man and woman. While many societies follow a double, gender based, standard on cheating,[59] Lahijans pursue faithfulness with refreshing equality. The justice in punishing the guilty men as well proves this.[60] Even today all are expected to avoid intimacy before marriage and to stay loyal to their spouses. Moreover, even widows or widowers usually do not remarry. Divorce is rarely pondered; a stable family is a firm building stone of the close-knit community.

Upon a departure of a loved one the community draws together for three days. After the announcement, over the intercom, the men drop all their work and rally around and bury the deceased in the cemetery with comforting words *Xudo rəhmət sozı !,* May God be gracious and grant him or her rest. The Lahij burial plots are available free of charge to all former inhabitants not excluding even a perplexing case of suicide. One of the master coppersmiths, Nəzər *Muellim,[61]* carves out a free memorial stone with inscription for each bereaved family. He shares that helping one another in Lahij is a must; each needs to give whatever they can. That is what it means to be a true neighbor.

The women gather to share grief the following two mornings in the home of the bereaved. First they hug and kiss the grieving relatives and then settle down on the floors spread with blankets, mattresses, sheets, and pillows. Sitting side by side, they keep scooting closer together, trying to fit everyone in. Then one chosen, experienced lead singer starts to sing a *mərsiyə,* lament. In one coordinated body movement the women use their right hand to slap their right thigh in one rhythm, as if they share a heartbeat. It is a simple, but meaningful expression of belonging, in a time of a deep pain. Upon parting girls pour rose water on guest's hands from a special copper jug called *gülob*.[62] The pleasantly soothing smell follows each person. The final note of future hope resounds in the streets *Şohri vinı !*, May you see happiness yet!

## Blessings

Knowing the transforming power of a timely good word,[63] the *Loyishihon,* Lahijans, have kept alive the archaic genre of blessings. To respond with a blessing to daily occurrences is as natural as breathing. People use certain formulas corresponding to various situations. People working on the streets or in their courtyards could be stacking wood, making copperware, tools, nails, or horse gear, putting horseshoes on a horse, selling spices, herbs and jams, knitting socks or making a carpet… The proper blessing, when seeing people work, is *Xudo körtıra ovənd sozı*, *Xudo zihr tı.* It means, may God make the work of your hands prosper, advance, may God give you strength. In similar context, the Azeri functional equivalent would be *Yorulmayasiz*, may you not grow tired or *Işiniz avand olsun*, may you progress in your work.

When someone is leaving or embarking upon a new venture the blessing, *Xudo rah tı!* May God open the way for you, naturally follows. The Azeri equivalent is, *Yol açıq olsun!* May a way be opened before you! May you succeed! One who receives help or a gift or kindness of any kind, thanks the giver with, *Xudo tıra xoşbəxt sozı, Xudo oxırtıra xəyir sozı*, May God make you happy, May God let you have a good end,[64] and in Azeri, *Sag olun*, Be healthy, which is also a politeness formula for 'thank you.'

Both the Lahij and Azeri languages use parallel blessings within same contexts. While comparing, striking difference between Lahij and Azeri formulas emerges. The Lahij language includes *Xudo,* God, in almost every blessing. This reveals awareness of *Qismət a Xudo*, every good gift, comes from God. Yet the Azeri variations sometimes omit mentioning God. The most powerful Lahij blessing is *Xudo cuntıra sox sozı!* May God revive your soul and make it wholesome! The Azeri shortens it to *Cansaglıgý!,* May your soul be well. This process could be assessed as a change reducing the older genre into 'well wishing.' Since the Lahij blessings kept a fuller thought, confirming and venerating the agency of God, it implies that the Iranian form is probably older than the Turkic.[65]

Sharing the same cultural landscape for many centuries the Iranian and Turkic[66] ways became intertwined. The habitual use of blessings could be one piece of evidence pointing to a belief system, stemming from one root. The seminal research of Mary Boyce, among practicing Zoroastrians in Yazd, offers a possible resemblance to an earlier sacred genre or religious observance. This was the Avestan *vaj*, in Persian *baj*, meaning word or utterance. These formulas were pronounced both by ruler and commoners, before daily tasks or rituals. The action was then performed silently, and when completed another *manthra* was pronounced.[67] The 'prayer wall' around them was to shield people from evil attacks. The Lahij blessings very likely grew out of the root of Zoroastrian *vaj,* powerful word, and protective *manthra*.[68]

## Ritual,[69] Prayer and Light

*"Each ritual collapses past and future into the present by gathering together a world full of meaning and symbolism."* —*Jamsheed K. Choksy* [70]

For the first time the thread, which would unravel traces of the Zoroastrian undercurrent was the enigmatic wedding ritual of tying and untying a red string around the bride's waist three times. No specialist I consulted could explain the meaning or origin of these gestures performed throughout many centuries in Azerbaijan.[71] The semantics of interpreting those actions have changed to affirming the purity of the bride and desire that she would become a mother of seven sons. Practitioners of these gestures seemed to perform them habitually with no hint of awareness of the robust body of beliefs from which they remain.

The field work of Mary Boyce, again offered a solution to my perplexing question. Her description of the initiation ceremony[72] involved tying of the *kusti*, special woven string around the new believer's waist three times. The sacred girdle[73] (Pic- 3) is one of clear identity markers of *behdinan,*[74] the followers of good religion of the Creator *Ahura Mazda* and his prophet and manthran *Zarathustra, Z*oroaster. The person undergoing the initiation into Zoroastrian faith commits to live out the threefold doctrine of good thoughts, good words and good deeds.

In Lahij, and Azerbaijan, the number three in ritual action endured in another ancient wedding tradition of walking around a light three times. Earlier the circling with offering of fat was done around the hearth fire, fanning high flames, and was called *atesh zohr*.[75] As a ritual[76] it was present among the Parsis in India until the 18th century and among Zoroastrians of Iranian desert of Sharifabad in 1963.[77]

Magsud Hadzhiev, a researcher and speaker of Tat from Guba region, described several traditions, pertaining to fire, Novruz and heavenly lights, which he identified as Zoroastrian. He claimed "nothing could take away the love of fire from the 'Tat,' except for the believers turning away to join the opposition."[78] The conquering religion demeaned the old believers by labeling them *atesh-perest.* Thus the open worship by the fire had to be modified. Today the Azerbaijanis at weddings no longer walk three times around the flaming fire, but have altered their ritual to encircling an oil or electric lamp instead.[79]

While the dire need to keep a hearth burning has disappeared, the reverence for fire lingers on. The power of the light of God-Creator symbolized by the sun, fire, torch, candle or a lamp persists in the wedding ceremony. (Pic- 4). Rauf Melikov brought up one case of practice remaining from Zoroastrian times of carrying burning torches in the wedding procession before the bride.[80] While this custom mostly disappeared from other settlements, it is still presently practiced in the cobbled streets of Lahij. Additionally when the Lahij Shias, recite the *salavot,* though praying in Arabic, they gaze into the source of light,[81] instead of the prescribed direction of Mecca.[82] The moon, as one of the lights that overcomes the darkness, is greeted

**Pic. 3: Wedding Ritual**

**Pic. 4: Torches in wedding procession**

when it appears anew in the sky. Besides, the Lahijans still swear by the light. Through all these consequential ritual actions the key focus is still on the light, personifying purity and holiness. The tenacious lifelong struggle of light with darkness still has a powerful presence in the Lahij mind.

## Novruz

*"No Roz is the most joyous and beautiful of the Zoroastrian feasts, a spring festival invested with especial religious significance."* —*Mary Boyce*[83]

Novruz, the new day, New Year and *new light* is the most beloved holiday in Azerbaijan, celebrating the victory of the sunshine over winter darkness. Novruz symbolism encapsulates the Zoroastrian eschatology. The freshness and purity of spring brings renewed life. According to Mary Boyce, Zoroaster first taught resurrection and life everlasting. Thus, Novruz was not only yearly renewal, but also a vivid reminder of the coming day of the final victory of good over evil.[84]

(Pic-5) The Lahij people preserved these ancient practices of the Spring Equinox or New Year. The warm light of sun and fire overcoming cold and darkness is vigorously celebrated. The main paradigm is that life wins over death. Sadness, sin and impurity of the past are cleansed by archetypal ritual actions bringing renewal; for example sprouting wheat, painting eggs, baking cookies in shapes of cosmic lights, lighting candles, deep cleaning, painting homes white, using the power of

**Pic. 5: Navroz eggs**

water to restore health, giving gifts, wearing new clothes, singing and dancing in a circle, burning fragrant juniper branches, jumping over fire, feeding the poor and making up with offenders.[85] Most significantly gathering home, for bringing in the spring renewal together, is a test of belonging to Lahij community.[86]

The Azerbaijani ethnographers assert that Novruz reflects the ancient worldview as their wise forefathers paid careful attention to the Sun, Moon, stars and changing seasons. They explain that in the struggle of good and evil principles the winter was considered the enemy and spring was bringing the promise of a *ferovanlik,*[87] bountiful provision. Since Novruz begins the agricultural year, the people feel the need to actively participate to welcome and usher in the life-giving momentous change.

The anticipation of Novruz builds up through progressive smaller fire festivals. Thus 22nd December, the longest night of the year is to be overcome. The bonfire is built and people jump over the flames, dance, sing and play to overcome harsh, evil winter. The next powerful bonfire is built on *Sade.*[88] The people gather on the square in new clothes in a cheerful mood proclaiming there is 50 days to Novruz. The *Sade* fire was to reclaim light and warmth.[89]

Four weeks before Novruz four *Chershenbe* evenings are celebrated with lighting fires and worshipping of the four basic elements air, water, earth and fire. The first 'air *Chershenbe*' wakes up the warm wind. Since all elements need to melt for the planting, the air should warm the nature, and give it breath of new life.[90] The second *Chershenbe* features water. The third, 'earth *Chershenbe*,' also coincides with 'the parent's day.' Living relatives light candles, say prayers and prepare traditional dishes to attract the family spirits to smell and taste the special supper.[91] Returning to their hearth they are to check upon their children and grandchildren. In some regions people bring painted eggs, Novruz sweets in cosmic shapes, *semenu*, sprouted green wheat, to the cemeteries and light up a candle. In Lahij the candles beside sufre, spread on the tray display are also put next to windowsills.[92] Not candles, but fires are built in the cemeteries.

(Pictures – 6 a,b,c.) The fourth and final *Chershenbe*, is *Ot-atesh,* fire *Chershenbe.* The Azerbaijani ethnographers assert that "in Azerbaijan fire is perceived as 'a living being,' bringing happiness, cheer and joyfulness to everyone around it."[93] Thus, they proceed to describe that every family is expected to light their own Novruz fire. We have observed that in Lahij huge bonfires are lit on each square and then every family does light their fire in their yard. In Baku several fires are lit on the streets and shared by the neighbors.

The ethnographers further proceed to tell, what we have no longer had a privilege of noticing, that on that auspicious eve one tree for each family member is to be planted. They expound that fruit tree brings bounty and is compared to life itself. The duty to plant trees is accompanied with proverbs. "Those who do not plant do not eat, those who plant will have plenty to eat. Plant the tree by a steep ravine, when it falls it will form a bridge for the relatives. Where there are many trees, there are only few graves." To plant a fruit tree was a deed of great kindness.

**Pic. 6a: Novruz**

Although fire worship is older than Zoroastrian beliefs and so are the seasonal cosmic agricultural festivals; the Novruz festival in Azerbaijan was called in typically Zoroastrian terminology *baharcheshn, Ferverdin, Hormuzd bayrami, Azer bayrami.*[94]

Some of the Novruz blessings are:

> "*May your life and days be filled with the fragrance of spring time!*
> *May blessed days open up before you and be filled with light!"*
> The ancient blessing was "*May the fire of your hearth never go out*."[95]

## Conclusion

Novruz rituals in Azerbaijan most accurately represent former Zoroastrian beliefs. Azerbaijani people cherish the presence of ever-burning fires and count fire as significant to the expression of their identity; still they mostly equate Zoroastrian religion with *atesh-perest*. The negative implications of the term have forced the former admiration for fire to be outwardly modified. For example the previous focus upon an open fire is redirected to an alternate source of light. The Lahij people, speaking an Iranian mother tongue, have kept ancient craftsmanship, near eastern architecture, traditional way of life and popular Shah Abbas narratives.

While they claim to be Shia, they present examples, which are Zoroastrian in essence.[96] Zoroastrian ethics have vibrant Lahij parallels. Among these are faithfulness to one spouse, raising just, honest and truthful community members, rigorous work

**Pic. 6b: Spring Color of Novruz in Lahij**

**Pic. 6c: Musicians**

ethic, moderate way of life, active fighting of evil instead of fatalistic resignation, hopeful focus on afterlife and above all togetherness,*hamazuri*. Lahijans use daily the archaic genre of blessings, most likely remaining from the Avestan protective *manthra*, *vaj*. The preparation and rituals of Novruz reveal representation of the active struggle of darkness and light. The victory of light, as Lahijans perceive, with God's help, is brought on by the people's agency. The participation in Novruz is considered the key test of Lahij identity, as family members are required to return even from afar for the auspicious yearly renewal.

As a living heritage Lahij, in 2020, is still a close-knit community with distinctive strands of beliefs and practices including a Zoroastrian undercurrent. The particular identity of Lahij, though, is fragile. While their resilient character adjusts and persists, the relict Lahij Iranian mother tongue is gradually slipping away. 'Outside of boundaries' the traditional morality weakens. The UNESCO inscribed the trade of coppersmith into the list of world intangible heritage, yet Lahij as an example of the Perso-Turkic cultural complex,[97] is an irreplaceable cultural landscape within Azerbaijan.

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2. Melikov, 2004, p. 111.
3. The dissertation "Lahij, Living Heritage of Azerbaijan," was defended in 2016, at FF UBVA, CU, Prague. Simultaneously I was a first doctoral student on a practicum in ADU/AUL, Baku.
4. Consequent visits, like guiding a Zoroastrian journey to the 'Land of Ancient Fires', in September 2018,with the volunteer coordinator Kersi Shroff added more information (Shroff and Woodova, 2019).
5. Southwest Iranian Lahij tongue, branched out of *Pahlavi,* Middle Persian, (Windfuhr, 2012;) in which the latter Avestan Scriptures were written.
   Previously Russian (Grunberg, 1961; Miller,1905) and Azerbaijani linguists (Huseynova, 2002,) analyzed the Tat grammar. John Clifton with*ANAS*, Azerbaijani National Academy of Sciences, charted sociolinguistic attitudes. (Clifton, 2002, 2009.)
6. Lahij turned out to be a rich source of narratives. In the forthcoming book their stories illustrate the attitudes, ideals, goals and virtues.
7. Administrative organization of Iran in 262, in the list of Shapur I., includes Albania and Balasagan, which were on the territory recently called Azerbaijan. (Brunner, p.730, 1983).
8. Early Iranians tribes inhabited the territory (Grantovski, 1970, p.355).
   In 6, 7. c. B.C. Azerbaijan was a part of Media with Mazdaistic faith (Melikov, 2004).
   Herodotus III.92,93, mentions Caspii under Achaemenid rule.
   Sasanians ruled over Caucasus Albania from the third century A.D. (Frye, 1972, p.295;)
   For more see (Frye, 1963; Aliev,1993; Schwartz, 1985; Duchesne-Guillemin, p.877, 1983; Mackey, 1998; Diakonoff, 1985, 2003; Daryaee, 2015; Boyce,1982; Boyce 1987.(Strabo XI.4,5; and Ptolemy V.I0).
9. (Choksy,1989, p.1.
10. Zardably, 2004.
11. Dastur Mehraban Firouzgary thinks that the Sade festival is also very salient.
12. I chose this term for a cultural landscape, isolated in the mountains, preserving some archaic traits, otherwise mostly extinct.
13. Psychologist Loic Wacquant used this terminology, when training with professional boxers to see morality from their side. (Wacquant, 2010).
14. The Lahij people admitted that before Muslim the Gaurs lived in Lahij (Alizade, 2010). Gaur is a designation for a Zoroastrian.
15. The Azerbaijani historian from ANAS, Rauf Melikov, is top expert on the complex topic of Zoroastrianism in Azerbaijan. He researched burial practices, proper names, cultural practices, Zoroastrian motives in oral literature etc. His works are mostly in Azeri and Russian. (Melikov,2004, 2013). Here is a concise history according to Melikov. While the Caspii or Caucasus Albanians around 5.c. B.C. were influenced by Mazdaism and Zoroastrianism of Media, it is difficult to pinpoint whether their customs were pre-Zoroastrian or Zoroastrian in character. In the 3.c. A.D., however, under the Sasanian dominion, Zoroastrianism became the official religion actively propagated in all of the conquered territories. Athropathena was the center of Zoroastrian religion.p.116. The Armenian chronicles of Moses Khorenatsi "The History of Armenia"

and of Moses Kalankatvatsi "The History of Albania" contain pertinent information about the propagation of Zoroastrian practices.p.118 (Melikov, 2004). The Armenian materials are interpreted mostly from a Christian perspective, thus describing the competing religion with animosity as aggressive and intolerant. They claim that drastic measures, including sending the women and children into slavery, were employed when the Zoroastrian faith was not accepted speedily and voluntarily (Kalankatuatsi, I/XVI).

16. Named after its ruler Athropat.
17. … "Media Atropatene, indeed indicates a priestly territory: Atrpatakana "the place of tending the sacred fire(s)"(Schwartz, p.697, 1985, 2003; Choksy, 1989.) Dr. Schwartz himself added in personal conversation the Berlin 2019 ECIS conference that he now interprets Athropat as "the one helped by fire." Even through the different twist in agencythe focus on *atesh* or *azer*, i.e. fire still remains. R. Melikov argues that the proper male name Atesh in Azerbaijan also is a residue from Zoroastrian practice and beliefs (Melikov, 2004).
18. According to Georgian source Картлис Цховреба. Т. II,Тбилиси, 1959 (нагруз. яз.) [KartlisTskhovreba, vol.II, Tbilisi,1959 (in Georgian language), p.166.] Baku till thirteenth century was called Bagavan (Melikov, 2004). Atli Bagavan are former *ateshi Bagavan,* God's fires and are the former toponym for Baku. Sara Ashurbeili also quoted three early Armenian historical sources mentioning ateshi Bagavan, she located in Baku (Ashurbeili, 1983. pp. 28, 29).
    In 2019 Polgozar, Ochaq Rovshan first group visited Armazi (Ahura Mazdi) site in Georgia, which also was called *ateshi Bagavan.*
19. Herodotus called the Magi the sixth tribe of the Medes (I:IOI). The Magi claimed Zoroaster was from their tribe. Later Iranian myth located homeland of Zoroaster in Iranian Azerbaijan (Choksy, 1989).Diakonoff confirms that Magi were a tribe from which priests were taken and they were Zoroastrian (Diakonoff, p.141, 2003). For research on the homeland of Zoroaster see (Frantz Grenet and Almut Hintze, 2015).
20. Under Khosrov I's some southwest Iranian tribes were transported north (Brunner, 1983. pp.764-765). Yezdigerd (420-438) and Khosrov I, Anushirvan built northern mountain belt of 360 fortresses and resettled Iranian people (Alizade, 2010, p.40).
    The province Balasagan stretched from Gilan to Khusrau I's fortified Darband (Brunner, pp.764-765, 1983.) This is the coastal Tat speaking area going through Baku to Derbend now 50 km. into Russia, Lahij fortress above Girdiman and Fit Qala, was part of the protective system.
21. In Albania, Bahram fires were established and Magi sent to serve in the *ateshgahs*, chahar taqs. Today we can find remains of several of them. Near Xangildag mountain is a village Yuxary *Chardaqlar* (i.e. chahar taq, name for a typical Iranian *ateshgah* structure). In the rock there are double openings with arches for a fire temple. Similarly, the origin of the following toponyms points to Zoroastrians. For example *Govuran* (derives from 'Gaur,' a name, which was given to Zoroastrians) had a chahar taq ateshgah. *Mugan* region near Lenkeran, (derives from magi), both end in a suffix-an, which is plural (Melikov, 2004. pp. 121-122). Besides, there are several towers called *Gaur Qala* and *Peri Qala*(Melikov,2004). In Azerbaijan there are three settlements named *Zarat*, which might be coming from Zoroaster's proper name Zarathushtra. There are also two rivers called *Girdiman*, from the Avestan Garothman, which means heaven, or paradise.
22. Melikov studied the complexity of Surakhana Ateshgah and claims that though its

present form is built more recently, it was rebuilt on an ancient fire-worshipping site. Most importantly the local Zoroastrians, called Gaurs, were reported to worship there in the 17th-18th century (Melikov, 2004).

23. Provided by Farroukh Jorat.
24. Dr. Modi claimed that it resembles an analogous Iranian fire-temple (Modi, 1922). Besides, archeologists discovered an ancient fire altar on the adjacent *bazaar,* market square (Adzhalov, 2015).
25. Buta shape is claimed as characteristic for Iranian Yazd, where it is regularly displayed on cloth and also has become popular and wide spread in Azerbaijan.
26. It has not been used for over seven hundred years. Our Zoroastrian tour group visited the Sukut Qala in 2018.
27. Dastur Mehraban Firouzgary added "As we saw in the Tbilisi Ateshgah, they are dual purpose Ateshkadehs. Built over high places and along trade routes, beside places of worship they emitted light out of four direction windows, meant to be guiding trade caravans and travelers as Light Beacons."
28. *Chahar Taq,* four arches, is an Iranian fire temple style with a round dome. The Khinalug ateshgah, nevertheless, has a *Shirvani,* triangular roof, to fit within local architecture. For more on atesh-kadeh structures see (Choksy, 2015, p.394). Colpe highlights that *Chahar Taq* developed during the Sasanian rule (Colpe,1983. p. 906). Dastur Mehraban Firouzgary in the previous footnote answered Colpe's question why was a fire suddenly presented in the open. Additionally it could have been a demonstrative display of the spread of Zoroastrian beliefs.
29. WZO, World Zoroastrian Organization
30. Our Khinalug guide, caretaker of the highest *ateshgah* and ethnographic museum, explained that Zoroastrian cosmic ornaments decorate their upper mosque and were also found in their homes.
31. The Khinalug ateshgah is at an altitude of 2,200 meters, 57 km from the village, near volatile border with Russian Daghestan. Until 2020 permission from Ministry of foreign affairs was required. The arduous path it is only accessible weather permitting.
32. Thanks to president of FEZANA Homi Gandhi's connection with the ambassador of Azerbaijan in Los Angeles.
33. Eduljee, 2018.
34. "The Ethnography of Azerbaijan" publication of ANAS,(Buniyadov, 2007), also uses the term 'atesh-perest.' The three volumes are written in Azeri from a position of a 'common Azerbaijani heritage' without reference to any ethnic group or location.
35. See Kotwal, 2000, p. xvi; Choksy, 1989; Rose, 2011; Boyce, 1989;Mistree, 2010. The Parsi High priest of India, Dastur Firoze M. Kotwal, thinks the significance of fire is hard for others to grasp. The light of the fire and sun represents purity, healing warmth, life and wisdom dispelling the darkness of ignorance (Kotwal, 2000). Dastur Mehraban Firouzgary highlighted that the fire is a medium conveying the prayers to Ahura Mazda.
36. This ensures continuity of building style from Middle Ages; the homes are rebuilt on the same sites.
37. The Lahij people confessed that before the Muslims there lived Gaurs in Lahij (Alizade, 2010). Gaur is one of designations for Zoroastrians.
38. One of the first trades was *zirehgar,* maker of weapons and armor. The skilled Lahij masters made protective armor, from helmets and shields to knee braces and copper gloves. The weapons, both firearms and weapons with blades such as swords, knives,

etc., were used locally and exported abroad (Sumbatzade,1960).

39. A polite address for a woman.
40. The Lahij trades and neighborhoods: *mizgər,* coppersmith, *zərgər*, goldsmith or jeweler**,** *zirehgər,* weapon and armor maker, *ahəngər,* iron worker, *nəilbənd,* blacksmith, *xarrat,* woodcarver*, nəcor,* carpenter*, kuzəgər,* cup maker, *rɪxtəgor,* smelter of metal, *bazzos,* seller of cloth.For more see (Alizade, 2010; Balayev, 2011; Buniyadov, 2007; Efendiyev, 1901; Hadzhiyeva, 2013; Kalashev, 1886; Karaulov, 1901; Mammedbeili, 2004; Sumbatzade, 1960).
41. Under Sasanian Mihr, relative of Khosrov II, 33,000 'Tat' families were resettled into Girdiman area for the purpose of creating a protective buffer zone for Iran, (Kalankatuatsi, 1984). Under Javanshir Girdiman fortress blossomed as a capitol of Girdiman kingdom.

    Minorski argues that immigrants rename their new homes with familiar toponyms thus Lahij was probably named after Lahijan in Iranian Gilan (Minorski, 1963. pp. 32-33.). Yet the southwest Iranian speech, the trade of coppersmiths and the Shah Abbas stories point to possible prior residence in the province of Pars. Also the name for an auspicious bird, bringing in the spring, is *Parstek*, swallow, featuring a probable origin of the Lahij people, before they passed through Gilan.
42. Buch, 2006, p. 56.
43. James Laidlaw exposes that modern social theory tends to slant ethics as if they were imagined, insignificant or false social traits .See Laidlaw, 2010. Also see Zigon, 2018.
44. According to Darmesteter the Zoroastrian thought brought morality and hope assuring that the good will prevail at last if the person does what is his duty. The duty of men is to enlist on the side of good and to spread life-giving forces and conquer forces of death. This is the "robust irrepressible optimism of the Iranian mind." (Buch, 2006, pp. 58-59).

    Nietzsche claims that Zoroaster first made a moral distinction between evil and good and proposed an ethical code (Rose, 2011).
45. Many popular narratives confirm this concept.
46. For Arda Viraf or Arda Viraz and his journey to the underworld read (Stewart, Sims-Williams, Wagmar, Buhler, 2013).
47. Buch, M.A., 2006, Dk. VIII, 454, p. 136.
48. Lahij narratives, "*The Resilient Cobbler*", "*Just a Drop of Pomegranate Juice."* Wood, 2015.
49. The Lahijans believe that the auspicious spring-bringing bird, *Parstek*, swallow, makes nests only in truly hospitable homes. They let this bird eat of the table.
50. Buch, 2006, p. 134.
51. Working of the soil is considered as a work of righteousness (Buch, 2006, p.162).
52. Zoroaster challenges people "to make the land fertile. The earth feels very joyous when there is abundance of flocks and herds." (Vd. III 4. Buch, 2006).
53. Mary Boyce affirms that hunger and sorrow were considered to be of Devil (Boyce, 1983. p. 792).
54. *Togetherness* is my choice replacing the term 'social cohesiveness,' closely corresponding to the Zoroastrian concept of *hamazuri,* being in each other's presence, being there for each other.
55. Terminology of (Barth, 1998).
56. The opposite place for the evil man is dark, foul smelling silent alienating 'hell' of not existence. Those who benefit others will end up in the "house of song", the "house of

good thought," and the "best existence" living fulfilled lives. (Y. 51.15, 32.15, 44.2, Rose, 2011).*Garodman* is filled with music and harmony and is guarded against any presence of evil (Skjaervo, 2011).

57. Zoroastrians elevated marriage to a status of a sacred duty and helping to arrange a good union was equal to atoning for sins. Both partners were to "find fulfillment of some of their highest capacities" when being married. Health and vigour becomes a focus of practical Zoroastrian life, thus marriage was especially praised as it made intimate relationship properly enjoyed, and ensured healthy progeny (Buch, 2006, p.65.), See Mistree, 2010. p. 75.
58. Buch, 2006, p. 84, p. 90; Boyce, 1992, pp. 95, 130.
    The Lahij story *The Seeds of Integrity,* (Wood, 2015).
59. See (Delaney, 1991; Martin, 1989; Mernissi, 1991;Wadud, 2007; Ze'evi, 2006).
60. One example comes from Lahij memoires. A young man got entangled with a seductive wife of a mullah. When caught, he was taken into the street with no pants and beaten with a whip. Although he was ten years younger he had to marry the woman divorced because of their indecency (Suleymanov, 1994. p. 31-32).
    This humorous twist was a reverse of the longstanding practice of the older men marrying young girls.
61. *Muellim,* teacher, also is a respectable term for a man.
62. *Gülob,*rose water. Dr. Shernaz Cama points out the striking similarity between this Lahij practice and the ritual of washing the hands followed after a Parsi Zoroastrian *Uthamma*, or the third day prayers, which end the period of mourning.
63. (Kotwal and Kreyenbroek, 2015, p.334.) introduce prayer formulas and manthras as flowing from an "ancient belief in the effectiveness of the truly spoken word." Zoroaster called himself a *manthran,* composer of manthras. The manthra could compel the divine to act upon the request. p. 335; See (Skjaervo, 2011).
64. This blessing resembles a prayer for the hope of an afterlife.
65. Wood, 2013, p. 54.
66. Diakonoff claims that the Scythian horsemen took the route of the Caspian coast of the Caucasus 7th century B.C. Later Turkic nomads did as well (Diakonoff, 2003,p.52).
67. Boyce, M.1979, p.139.
68. (Kotwal and Kreyenbroek, 2015, p.340) mention *dua tandorosti*, formulaic prayer for health and wellbeing. Also a related genre *nirang,* incantation, was a "standard formula to be uttered on certain occasions."
69. See Stausberg and Karanjia, 2015.
70. Choksy, 1989, p.113.
71. The tying of a string around bride's waist is also done in Turkmenistan as I have learned in visiting the former Parthian country with Zoroastrian beliefs for Novruz 2019.
72. For initiation, The *Navjote,* see (Mistree, 2010, chapter 14).
73. See Lilaowalla, and Cama, 2013, 2016.
74. See Russel, 2004.
75. Dastur Firuze Kotwal describes *Atesh zohr,* practiced by Parsis of Bombay and Navsari until 1823. (Kotwal, 2016, p.106).
76. Due to similarities with the Vedic sacrifice, the fire ritual likely follows an ancient Indo-Iranian tradition (Cantera, 2015, p. 61).
77. Boyce, 1977.
    I have witnessed this in South Siberian Altai'yurts' from 2000-2009 and hope to

address the topic in the future.

78. Hadzhiev, 1995.
79. Dastur Erachji advised that since Zoroastrians cannot see the Creator God they should fix their gaze on reflection of his light the sun, moon, stars and fire (Kotwal, 2000.p. xv).
80. Melikov, 2004.
81. According to Zoroaster's instruction, prayers were offered while standing turned towards fire. The light represents *Ahura Mazda* the Supreme God, creator, Lord of Wisdom, and is iconized by the Sun, fire, lamp or a candle. The cord was worn according to earliest records in Sasanian times (Boyce, 1975, p. 258-259).
82. Henkel, 2012.
83. Boyce, p. 797, 1983.
84. Boyce, 1983.
85. The festivals were mostly for reconciliation and brotherly love (Boyce, 1983).
86. The Lahijans who move away might lose their mother tongue, skills, perhaps even change their moral standards, but by coming to celebrate Novruz, they pronounce they are still residents of Lahij community.
87. *Ferovanlik*- bounty; the Iranian root *farr* means glory, prosperity.
88. *Sade,* from an Iranian number 100-*sat*, on the last day of January between two *chille,* forty day periods.
89. Boyce, 1983. p. 800.
90. This concept corresponds to the waking up of the warm wind *Rapidwin* in the Zoroastrian tradition. See (Boyce, 1983).
91. Buniyadov, 3.vol, 1.ch, p. 26. 2007.
92. The association with the candle light at night by the window, was lighting up the path for fravashis to find their homes.
93. According to ethnographers (Tofig Babayev and Behlul Abdulla, in Buniyadov, 3. Vol, ch. 1, *Novruz bayrami*, 2007).
94. *Baharcheshn*-spring celebration, *cheshn* is a Zoroastrian religious ritual performed with Avestan recitations by a priest for the people in the presence of a sacred fire.
    *Ferverdigan*-Zoroastrian festival of visits of *fravashi*, "the spirits of departed righteous," (Schwartz, M., p. 677, 1985) to former homes.
    *Hormuzd-Ahura Mazda,* the creator God of Zoroastrians.
    *Azer, atesh* now *ot* means fire.
    The word *gumbor* was noted in the Novruz chapter of Azerbaijani Ethnography. I have seen *gahambar* celebrations in Tehran and in a Zoroastrian settlement Mazre Kalonter in Yazd region of Iran in 2017. The atmosphere and meanings line up with the Novruz in Azerbaijan. For Iranian fieldwork see (Fisher, 1973).
95. Buniyadov, 3.volume, 1.chapter, p. 34.2007.
96. There are more Zoroastrian parallels in Lahij and Azerbaijan, which are beyond the scope of this essay.
97. Please See my Bibliography below:

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# An Ocean of Knowledge: The First Gujarati Monthly Magazines

Murali Ranganathan

ABSTRACT

*Though founts of Gujarati type had been available from 1796 in Bombay, printing in that language only began to gather pace in the 1820s. Gujarati, as one of the principal languages of Bombay, gradually acquired a corpus of printed books, mostly printed at printing presses owned by Parsis. The first Gujarati newspaper was started in 1822 but the first Gujarati periodicals appeared only in the 1840s. This essay seeks to outline the history of these early Gujarati periodicals and situate them in their social context to investigate, from a Parsi perspective, the influence they had on popular culture, community history, and Gujarati literature.*

The development of a periodical press in Bombay is closely linked to the development of the art and science of printing and type foundry in Bombay. Printing radically changed the text production, multiplication and dissemination process; combined with an efficient and cost-effective postal delivery system, it increased the accessibility of textual matter to a much larger audience. As one of the major languages of Bombay, Gujarati was at the forefront of all these innovations. In this paper, I briefly outline the development of printing in Bombay, particularly in relation to Gujarati before charting the development of the periodical press in Gujarati in its first decade of its existence: the 1840s. While documenting the periodicals themselves, I also try to identify the men (and they were largely men) who were involved in their production and consumption: the authors, the editors, the publishers and their patrons, and the readers.

Like most other modern Indian languages, Gujarati literature can trace its history back to nearly a thousand years. And like them, most of the composition in Gujarati was in verse before the nineteenth century. The verse format was versatile enough to support a variety of literary genres: criticism, hagiography, poetry, drama, scientific texts, and religious scriptures, to name a few, and even the occasional travelogue or epistle. The Parsis had been using Gujarati as their primary language

of life and business for at least half a millennium before 1800. By the start of the nineteenth century, they had gathered a substantial corpus of Gujarati texts, including translations of ancient *Avesta* liturgy, Pahlavi commentaries, and more recent Persian texts. After the advent of print, Gujarati was the chosen language of print for the Parsis for a century and more. Their newspapers, magazines, pamphlets, religious texts, textbooks, and handbills were all in Gujarati. Their influence on the larger Gujarati literary world, largely unacknowledged, cannot be underestimated. In this paper, I also briefly consider a few modern literary genres which were first popularized through early Gujarati magazines. In view of their rarity and obscurity, I have also included details of the holdings of these Gujarati periodicals, mainly in Bombay libraries, with other details as an appendix to this essay.

## Printing and publishing in Bombay: A Retrospect

The annals of the East India Company record the arrival in Surat of a printing press accompanied by a printer in 1675. This press was financed by Bhimji Paruck, the Company's broker in Surat, to print in the "Braminy characters" but no imprints have yet been discovered. The fate of this press is also not known but it could have made the journey to Bombay where the Paruck clan had moved by the early 1700s. In the 1780s, a printing press owned by the Parsi*sethia,* Pestonjee Bomanjee of the Wadia clan was perhaps the only one then functioning in Bombay. Its printer was also a Parsi, Rustomjee Caresajee, under whose imprint a 1780 calendar and directory for Bombay was discovered in the 1850s; the copy can no longer be traced. It was only in the 1790s that printing and publishing began to assume prominence in Bombay with the inauguration of the newspaper press in the form of *Bombay Gazette* (1790). The *Bombay Herald* (1790) and *Bombay Courier* (1792) provided an impetus to the development of printing in Bombay.[1]

Amongst Indians, the Purvoes found ready employment in the printing industry. The Purvoe (a corruption of the word 'Prabhu') community of Bombay, were first part of the lower rungs of Portuguese bureaucracy; when the English took over in the 1660s, they continued to be employed in government. A reasonable command of the English language and a ready familiarity with the roman script made them indispensable in the composing room. A few Parsis also entered the printing industry in the eighteenth century. The exertions of a lapsed Parsi priest, Behramjee Jeejeebhoy, resulted in the casting of Gujarati type in late 1796 under the auspices of the Courier Press. This type was mainly used for advertisements in the *Bombay Courier* and for printing government legislation. Behramjee himself printed and published the *Khordeh Avesta* in 1798, thus inaugurating the printing of books in Gujarati script.[2] It was only after Furdoonjee Murzban cast his fount of Gujarati type that printing of Gujarati books gathered speed from 1814. The first Gujarati newspaper *Bombay Samachar* appeared in 1822. In the same year, another Parsi

priest, Furdoonjee Dorabjee had also cast Gujarati types, but they being very unsatisfactory, he adopted lithography, newly introduced into India, to print in Gujarati. His innovations, from 1825 to 1829, included *Aukhbar,* the first Persian newspaper of Bombay, the *Akhbare Kubbessay*, the second Gujarati newspaper and *Moombapoor Vurtaman,* the first ever Marathi newspaper.[3] In the following decade, many Gujarati newspapers appeared, prominent among them being the *Jame Jamshed* and *Doorbeen*, all of them printed in their eponymous presses that also issued other Gujarati imprints.

Monthly magazines were largely a novelty in Bombay even as late as 1840. The first English monthly periodical to appear in Bombay was *The Bombay Magazine* whose first issue was published in July 1810 at the Gazette Press. It aimed to be composed of "Original Essays, which whether Sentimental or Humorous, will always be of moral tendency. Selections, from celebrated authors, in the event of a want of original matter. Original Correspondence on various subjects. Trials, when they may be thought interesting to the public. Anecdotes, Original, or not generally known. Comic Tales. A Miscellaneous Collection of Trifles. Domestic Intelligence. A Complete Register of Births, Marriages, Deaths, Appointments, Arrivals and Departures, throughout India."[4] This laundry list of contents provided the template for future magazines in Indian languages. *The Bombay Magazine* survived until 1813.

About a decade later, in 1820, Mulla Firoz, Persian tutor to Bombay governors and prominent Parsi priest, proposed the launch of *The Bombay Monthly Magazine* whose contents closely modeled those of the first magazine. Not wanting to leave any subject or language out of its ambit, he announced that "Philosophical, Scientific, Moral and Literary Disquisitions, and Curiosities, which as well as Anecdotes, Biographical Sketches, Mathematical Questions, Poetry and other amusing and edifying Miscellanies will occasionally appear in the Persian, the Arabic and other Asiatic Dialects; and conclude with the most interesting heads of Commercial Matters including an extensive and accurate Price Current."[5] Evidently, this multilingual magazine demanded a high level of linguistic skills and a broad range of interests from its patrons. Priced at an exorbitant forty rupees per annum, it failed, unsurprisingly, to attract the necessary number of subscribers it needed to take off and the venture had to be abandoned in September 1820.[6] Perhaps the idea of a magazine for Indian audiences was still premature.

Through most of the 1820s and 1830s, a series of short-lived English magazines appeared in Bombay devoted to literature, sports, music and miscellany. The only magazine from this period which survived and prospered was the well-funded Christian missionary monthly, *Oriental Christian Spectator* founded in 1830 by John Wilson of the Scottish Mission (later the Free General Assembly). It was under such circumstances, not particularly favourable to magazines that were financed by subscriptions, that the earliest Gujarati periodicals were conceptualized.

It would not be an exaggeration to suggest that the Parsis owned most of the

Gujarati printing presses operating in Bombay in 1840. The leading Parsi*shetias* of Bombay, Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy, Jeejeebhoy Dadabhoy and Framjee Cowasjee Banajee, to name a select few, had provided the funding for many of these presses though no evidence of their direct involvement in the operations is forthcoming. While they were generally used to subsidies, the printer-proprietors were gradually driven to ensure that their presses were profitable or at the very least self-financing. The printing of periodicals offered yet another avenue for capacity utilization and revenue generation to them.

## Creating an audience of readers: early formal education in Bombay

Besides the numerous elementary schools – typically a roadside school conducted by a *mehtaji* (Gujarati), *puntoji* (Marathi), or *munshi* (Persian or Urdu) – where the rudiments of the alphabet and mathematics were taught, there were, in Bombay, also schools conducted by tutors, both English and Indian, that offered a higher level of education. It was from this group that the first teachers for the early formal schools were selected. The establishment of the Bombay Education Society in 1815 signaled the start of a formal schooling system, as we now know it, in Bombay. By 1819, the operations of the Society had been expanded to include Indian children, who were taught in their own language – Marathi, Gujarati and Hindustani. The formation of the Bombay Native School-book and School Society in 1822 (renamed the Bombay Native Education Society in 1828) gave further impetus to the production of books aimed at school children. The numerous communities of Bombay provided the financial support necessary for this venture and encouraged Indians to admit their children to these schools. These schools were considered a passport to well-paid jobs in government, private offices and other institutions and proved extremely popular. The intake of the Elphinstone Native Education Institution (now known as the Elphinstone College) increased over the years and a college division was added in the 1830s to provide higher education though degrees were not yet being awarded. The next generation of teachers were largely recruited from the graduates of this institution. Simultaneously, schools were also being established in numerous other towns of the Bombay Presidency.

Mission schools also played an important role in the education process. The Christian missionaries received official permission to work in India in the 1813 Charter issued to the East India Company. Bands of missionaries from numerous societies soon began to arrive in Bombay; as part of their repertoire of outreach activities, elementary schools were established in various neighbourhoods of Bombay, generally staffed by Indians, but overseen by a Christian missionary. The American Mission (1813) took the lead in these activities followed by the Scottish Mission (1823). The Free General Assembly's Institution (now known as the Wilson College) also introduced a college division in the 1830s to provide a higher education to the brighter

students. Many of the native regiments of the East India Company also had regimental schools attended by young recruits and children of older employees.

While all the communities of Bombay enrolled their children in these schools, the Parsis formed a significant part of the student population, particularly in the Elphinstone Institution. Their preferred medium of education was Gujarati. By 1840, two generations of students had passed through its portals and were keen to exercise the reading skills they had acquired. Some of them had been exposed to the higher branches of English literature and were perhaps inspired to replicate them in Gujarati.

Newspapers had been enthusiastically consumed by Indian audiences for two decades by the 1840s. Though the subscription numbers were modest, it has been estimated that each copy reached as many as fifty readers. Libraries, catering exclusively to Indians, were also being set up to stock the output of the fledgling print industry across the Bombay Presidency and their members were eager for more reading material. It was indeed an opportune time for a periodical which covered a broad range of subjects. The readers, though they may not have been able to pay the subscription, were waiting.

## The earliest Indian magazine from Bombay

While the 1820s and 1830s were boom years for Indian language newspapers in Bombay, there was very little action on the periodicals front after the abortive attempt in 1820 by Mulla Firoz. There might have been other attempts during this period but I could date the earliest proposal to publish a monthly magazine to January 1839.

On 12 January 1839, the first announcement of the intention to publish a Marathi periodical to be titled the *Digdurshun* appeared in the Bombay newspapers, both English and Marathi. The proposal was made by Raghoba Janardhun, who was also the proprietor of the Anglo-Marathi weekly,*Bombay Durpun.*

> To be published under the patronage of the Community.
>
> DIG DURSHUN, or a MONTHLY MAGAZINE in Marathi – to contain a summary of intelligence, short essays and articles, original and select, on subjects connected with Geography, History, Natural Philosophy, Chemistry, and General Science, with occasional illustrations in lithography. ...
>
> It is hoped that this periodical, combining as it does the benefits of a newspaper, and scientific journal, and calculated, as it is, to improve the native mind and to aid the diffusion of useful knowledge, will meet with the liberal patronage of the community.[7]

The magazine was designed to be a *sarva sangraha,* an omnibus monthly magazine which covered a variety of subjects ranging from science, arts and literature with a smattering of news. It was initially edited by Ball Gungadhur Shastree, an Assistant Professor at the Elphinstone College who was assisted by a few of his students.[8] Printed on a lithographic press, the *Digdurshun* was able to include illustrations and maps in its pages. This would not have been possible with a typographic press

which was the common method of printing Gujarati text in Bombay. The first issue of the magazine appeared in May 1840 and the subscription was five rupees per annum. The Bombay Government agreed to buy twenty copies of the magazine.[9] After regularly appearing every month for over two years, it had to face up to financial realities. By the third volume, the*Digdurshun* was woefully behind in its issues. The issue for January 1842 appeared in June, and by December 1842 only nine issues had appeared of the volume had been published.

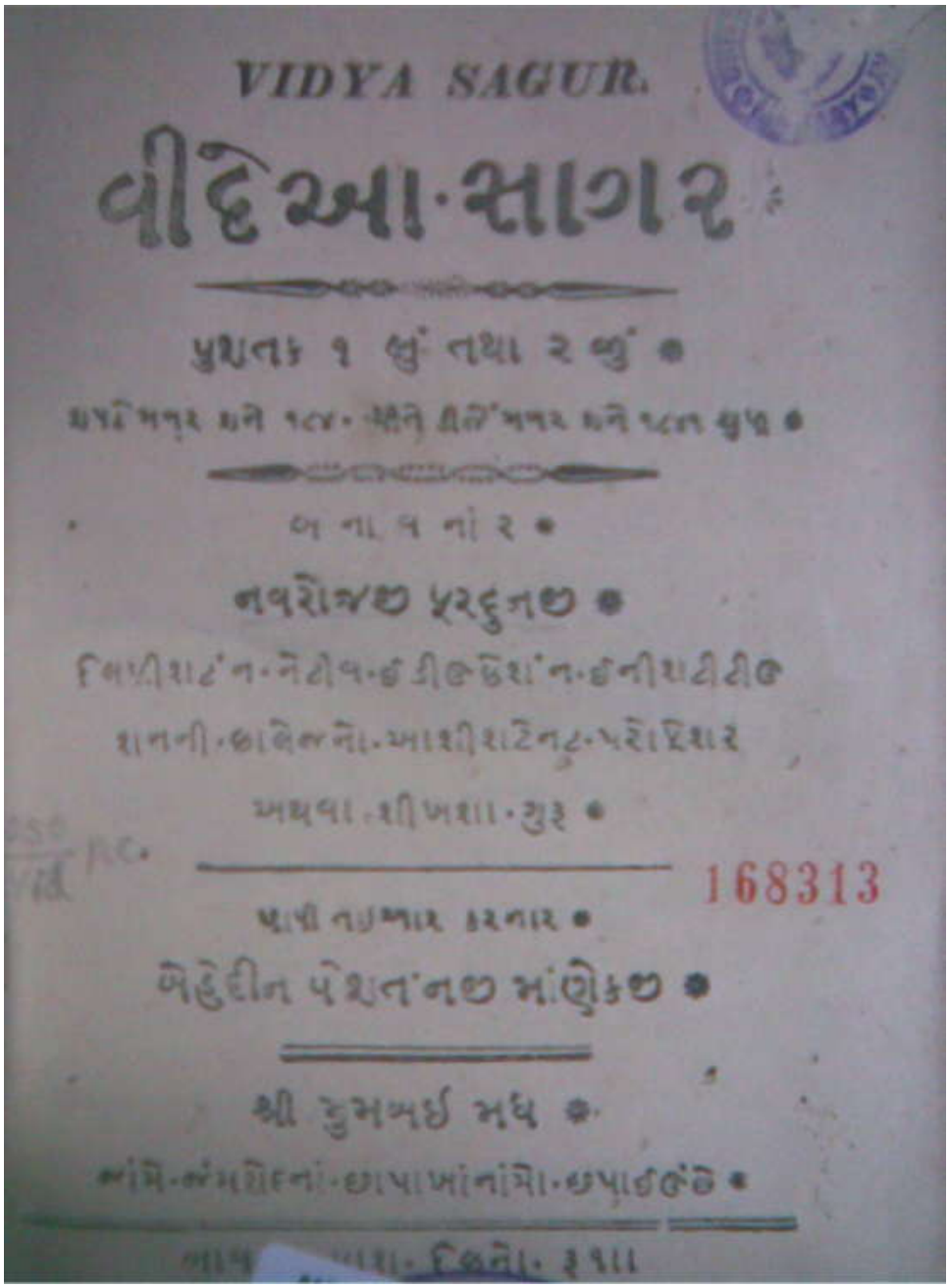
Meanwhile, Raghoba Janardhun sold the magazine in January 1843 to Govind Vittul Kunte, who was popularly known as Bhau Mahajan. Though of an intellectual bent of mind, Bhau was not particularly keen on formal studies and eventually dropped out of school. In October 1841, Bhau Mahajan an alumnus of the Elphinstone Institution, had started the weekly *Prabhakar* which soon emerged as the most influential Marathi newspaper of its time. His acquisition of the*Digdurshun* would have given him the opportunity to write on numerous subjects while optimally utilizing the capacity of his press. Financial difficulties, however, seem to have prevented him from publishing any issue in 1843, and he could eventually complete the third volume only in June 1844. The*Digdurshun* was finally suspended after four issues of the fourth volume appeared.

The Marathi *Digdurshun* and its erudite conductors were certainly an inspiration to prospective editors of magazines for Indians in Bombay. The first Gujarati magazine was directly inspired by*Digdurshun* and its editor, as we shall see, was closely associated with both Ball Gungadhur Shastree and Bhau Mahajan. Before considering the first Gujarati magazine, the first English magazine conducted by Indians and which was part of this triumvirate, may be briefly noticed. The first issue (November 1840) of the*Indian Youth's Magazine* is reviewed by the *United Services Gazette*, a Bombay English newspaper owned by an Indian.

> We have been favored with the first number of the Indian Youth's Magazine. It is an English periodical conducted, we believe, by native youth. Its object is to place science and literature within the reach of every class of society. The first number contains the author's preface, which is brief and modest . . . It is altogether a very creditable production of its kind, and may, if conducted with prudence and care, maintain a circulation amongst natives, and be the means of doing much good to the class for whom it is especially designed – "the studious youth."[10]

## An ocean of knowledge: *Vidya Sagur* (1840-46)

As early as 1840, Nowrozjee Furdoonjee (1817-1885), then in his early twenties, was a shining star in the Parsi intellectual firmament and active in Bombay public life. He had already seen more of the world than the average Parsi, built professional relationships with powerful men in the British ruling hierarchy, and held an important and highly-paid position in the service of the Bombay government. Born in Bharuch,


VIDYA SAGUR.

વીદ્યા·સાગર

પુસ્તક ૧ લું તથા ૨ જું



**Picture 1- VS Title page**

a minor town on the Gujarat coast, Nowrozjee spent his early years at the mission school in Surat conducted by the Christian Missionary Society. He later joined the Central English School at Bombay. An alumnus of the Elphinstone Institution, he had a brilliant career as a student and when, in late 1836, an opportunity arose for an Indian student to accompany an embassy to Afghanistan as an attaché, he was the obvious choice. Nowrozjee traveled across Gujarat by land, reached Karachi by ship, passed through Sind up the Indus, and then overland to Afghanistan for an extended stay of two years. In Kabul, he dabbled in subjects as varied as anthropology, geography and history,[11] while acting as secretary to the diplomatic mission under Alexander Burnes. He fortuitously returned to India in 1839 just before the mission was annihilated by the Afghans. His return overland via Punjab afforded him the opportunity to visit the court of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and travel through North India. He kept up a regular correspondence with Bombay during his travels, many of which were reproduced in Bombay periodicals.[12]

On his return to Bombay, Nowrozjee was employed as Second Assistant to the Professors in the college division of the Elphinstone Institution. He also took over the editing of the Gujarati weekly *Jame Jamshed* on behalf of Pestonjee Maneckjee, the proprietor of the Jame Jamshed Chhapakhana. He began to involve himself in Parsi community affairs, first appearing on the public stage as an interlocutor when a visiting Muslim businessman, later discovered to be a fraud, brought news of a Zoroastrian kingdom in the mountains north of Afghanistan. The themes of "reform" in Indian society and the "moral and intellectual progress" of Indians, then in vogue in colonial Bombay, also began to attract him. Simultaneously, he was at the vanguard of his coreligionists who were trying to combat the influence of the proselytizing activities of the Christian missionaries and the frontal attacks which the Parsi religion was being subjected to in the public press.

Nowrozjee Furdoonjee was Bal Gungadhur Shastree's colleague in 1840 and also a one-time student and must surely have had frequent interactions with him. Bhau Mahajan had been Nowrozjee's classmate in the 1830s at the Elphinstone Institution. It may not be far off the mark to suggest that Nowrozjee was inspired by the *Digdurshun* to start a similar venture in Gujarati. It is quite likely that Nowrozjee and Bhau Mahajan shared a friendly intellectual rapport and might have collaborated on some of the articles which appeared in the two magazines. With an excellent command over English, a deep interest in a wide variety of subjects, and a voracious reading appetite, Nowrozjee had the armoury necessary to conduct a magazine whose avowed objective was to raise the standards of knowledge among his fellow-countrymen. In August 1840, a few months after the appearance of the Marathi *Digdurshun,* the first intimation of a proposal for a Gujarati magazine was publicly noticed by the *Bombay Times.*

> We have much pleasure in drawing the attention of our readers to the prospectus of a Magazine about to be published in the Goojrathee language, to be entitled "The Vidya

> Sagur" or "Ocean of Knowledge." It is to be occupied with extracts and original papers on subjects connected with the different branches of literature, science, and art; the object apparently being to give those who do not possess a knowledge of English, the benefits of those lights which an European education affords; and which, in their present stage of advancement, enables so many of our native youth to point out to their seniors, "that there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in their philosophy." the work is to be edited, we understand, by Nowrojee Furdoonjee, formerly an attaché of Sir Alexander Burnes' political mission to Cabool, and now assistant professor in the College department of the Elphinstone Native Education Institution, in which he was originally educated. We are glad to learn that "The Vidya Sagur" is to be liberally patronized by some of the leading members of the Parsee caste.[13]

The magazine duly appeared in September 1840. The first two volumes of the magazine, comprising sixteen issues, are no longer available but their table of contents has been bound with the third volume, thus giving us some information on the subjects which the magazine focused on. The first two volumes were dedicated to Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy on account of his having financed the magazine.[14] The publication of this journal created tremendous excitement among the educated section of the Parsis. The first two issues were transmitted to London soon after publication to two young Parsis who were then studying in England. Their impressions on seeing the first Gujarati magazine are recorded in their travel diary.

> We have … received two numbers of a periodical called 'Vidya Sagur' (river of Knowledge) conducted in the Goozratte language at Bombay, by Nowrojee Furdoonjee, formerly a student of the Native Education Society, and now Assistant Professor to the College of the Elphinstone Native Education Institution. It treats upon the Elementary Principles of Popular Arts and Sciences, History, and other miscellaneous subjects, we have much rejoiced to see it, and we strongly and earnestly recommend our countrymen to give all possible support to the work. It is the first, the very first of its kind that has ever appeared in the Goozrattee language, and the laudable purpose the talented editor has in view, that of improving his countrymen, is well deserving of encouragement from the inhabitants of Bombay; he has indeed paved the way for this advancement and we hope that he will meet with due support.[15]

The magazine was priced at a steep rupee and a half per issue, a sum which could have been afforded only by the richest sections of society. Subscribers to the magazines were offered issues of the Gujarati newspaper *Jame Jamshed*, also edited by Nowrozjee, gratis. Though conducted independently, the *Vidya Sagur* shared many articles with the Marathi *Digdarshan*; perhaps they were translated from Marathi into Gujarati.

By 1844, Nowrozjee's circumstances had changed. A brief bout of illness followed by a career move (he was now a translator in the Supreme Court of Bombay) meant that he could no longer devote the time necessary to conduct the magazine. The issues of the fourth volume did not appear regularly and the magazine seems to have been suspended temporarily. Nowrozjee formally gave up his editorial

responsibilities only in June 1846 and handed the *Vidya Sagur* over to Cooverjee Rustomjee,[16] who was also an ex-student of the Elphinstone Institution. He had studied under both Nowrozjee Furdoonjee and Bal Gungadhur Shastree and was considered a brilliant student. When he took over the editorial reins, he was an Assistant Teacher in the same school. He conducted the magazine until December 1846 before it was finally wound up when the fourth volume (for 1843) was completed.

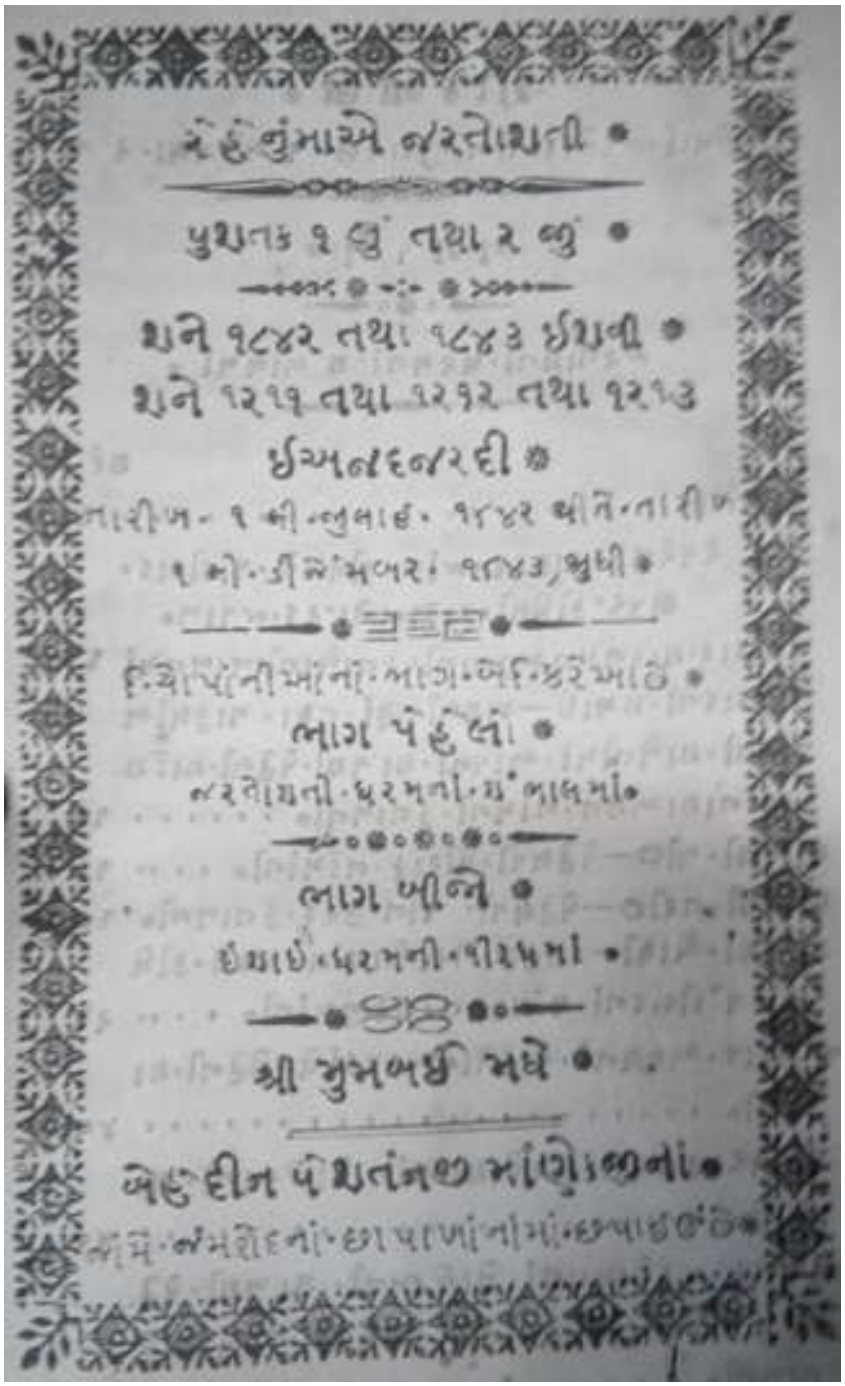
The first attempt by an Indian at publishing a Gujarati monthly periodical in Bombay was a reasonable success having produced four substantial volumes. Financially it must have been a failure and it would not have survived for as long as it did without generous subsidies from its patrons such as Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy.*The Bombay Times*, on the launch of the Gujarati *Dnyanaprasarak* (see below), reviewed the career of the *Vidya Sagur* in 1849.

> This highly interesting and useful monthly periodical, extending to four goodly volumes, is written in a very popular and fluent style, superior in every respect to the Dnyanprasaruk bears ample testimony to the talents and acquirements of the intelligent Native, who attempted for the first time, to disseminate scientific truths, and create a taste for literary pursuits among his countrymen through the medium of the Goozerattee language – a very arduous and difficult task in which he persevered until the year 1843, when he was obliged to give it up for want of adequate support.[17]

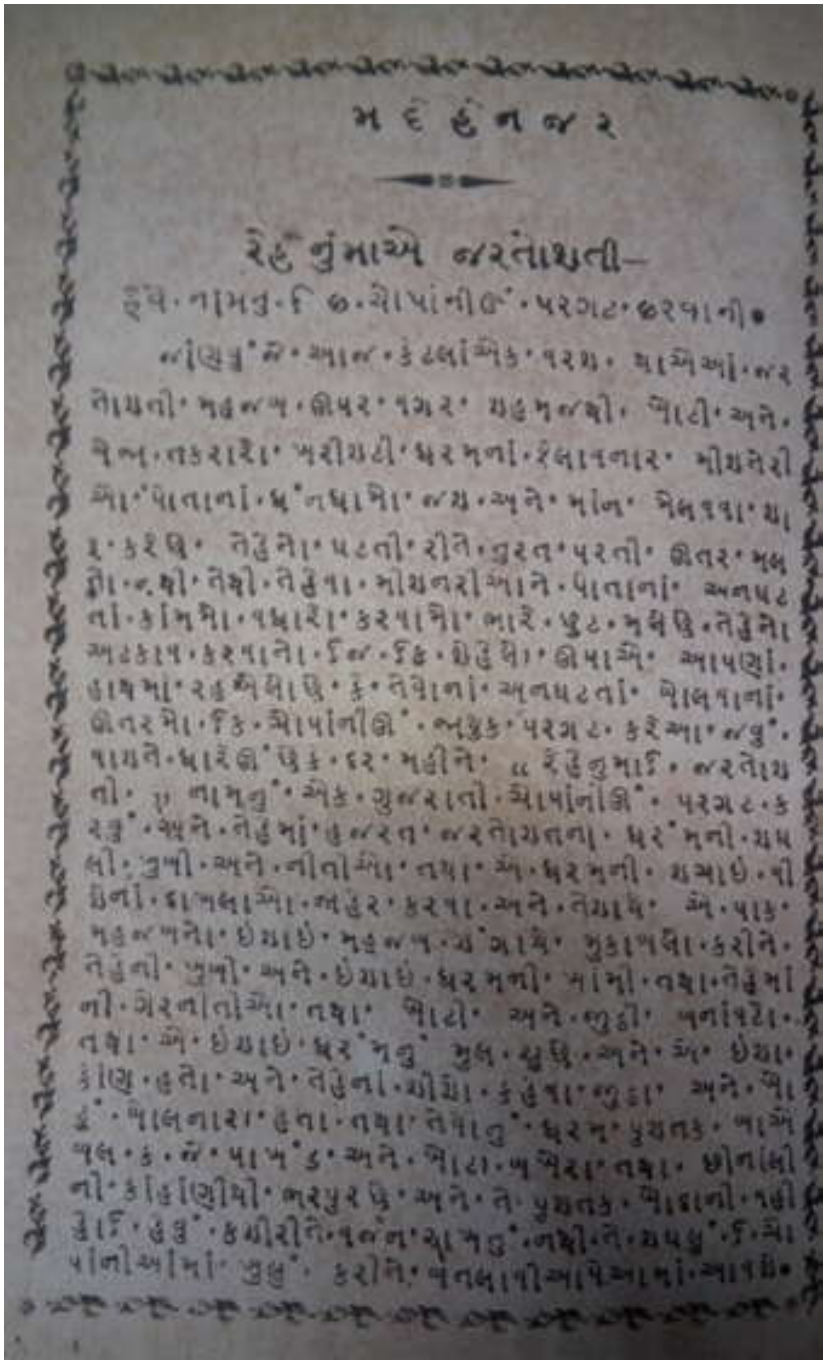
## Defending the true faith: *Rehnumaye Zarthoshti* (1842-45)

A rather unexpected event united the Parsis of Bombay in 1840. The Parsi community had filed a suit against the Scottish missionary John Wilson, who had, in 1839, baptized two young Parsi men, Dhunjeebhoy Nowrojee (aged 16 ½) and Hormusjee Pestonjee (aged 20). The Supreme Court of Bombay ruled that Dhunjeebhoy was old enough to decide for himself and the Parsis gave him up as lost to Zoroastrianism. Besides other Indian religions, the religion of the Parsis had been attacked and discredited by Wilson in his pamphlets and lectures for nearly ten years. The Parsis had sporadically engaged in debate with him but continued to send their children to his mission school at Ambroli in Girgaum, little imagining that some students could be influenced by prolonged exposure to the Christian religion. Only after the two Parsi students entered the Christian fold did the Parsi community organize itself to guard its folk. As their legal approach had failed, they adopted Wilson's own tactics and began to use the press to expose the contradictions in the Christian religion. The Parsis were particularly incensed by the crude insults offered to their religion by the self-righteous missionaries.

The first response was a book titled *Talim-i-Zurtoosht* compiled by 'A Parsee Priest', the pseudonym of Dosabhai Sorabjee Munshi. It appeared under the auspices of the Bombay Parsee Punchayet and was published in August 1840. In the foreword, Dosabhai laments that the Parsis do not have a monthly magazine to combat the



Picture 2 -RZ Title page



**Picture 3- RZ Prospectus**

assaults launched by the Christian missionary periodical, *Oriental Christian Spectator* every month with unfailing regularity.[18] The religious tussle festered for a couple of years before the Parsis grouped together to start a monthly magazine titled the *Rehnumaye Zarthoshti* which was first published in July 1842 Pestonjee Maneckjee, who took the lead in starting the magazine was also the proprietor of the Jame Jamshed Chhapakhana where it was printed. Each fortnightly forty-page issue had two parts – the first one to promote the tenets of the Zoroastrian religion and the second to attack the Christian religion. After appearing fortnightly for six months, the magazine switched to a monthly format from January 1843.

Nowrozjee Furdoonjee, already busy with the editing of the *Vidya Sagur,* was at the forefront of this community initiative and was designated editor of the magazine. The theological arguments were put forward by Eduljee Dorabjee Sanjana (1776–1847) who was the senior *dastoor* or head priest of the Shahenshai sect of the Parsis in Bombay. Eduljee's career as a priest for the Shahenshahi sect of the Parsis progressed steadily and reached its peak with the consecration of an *atashbehram* in Bombay under his supervision in 1830, the year in which he was designated 'head priest'. As an adjunct to his religious duties, he worked on translating Parsi religious texts into Gujarati. A literal Gujarati translation of the *Avesta* first appeared in 1818;[19] three further editions were published, the last in 1870. Leading the Shahenshahi sect during the Kubbessay intercalation controversy which flared up in the 1820s at Bombay, he was instrumental in the publication of many texts during this episode.[20] His introductory texts on the Zoroastrian religion for a young Parsi audience – *Farmane deen* (1837) and *Mojejate Jartoshthi* (1840) – were issued by the Jame Jamshed Chhapakhana. As an expert on theology, Eduljee was equipped to refute any criticism of Zoroastrianism.

From January 1843, the *Rehnumaye Zarthoshti* became a monthly magazine and began to serialize a direct response to Wilson's attacks on the Zoroastrian religion. Nowrozjee translated extracts from English texts which criticized Christianity and suggested that as the Christians themselves did not believe in their religion, the missionaries had no ground to proselytize in India. Wilson's primary plank of illogicality and implausibility was reversed to expose the contradictions in the Christian scriptures. Nowrozjee particularly relied on Thomas Paine, whose *The Age of Reason; Being an Investigation of True and Fabulous Theology* provided him with enough fodder to question the legitimacy of the Bible.

From 1843, Wilson was absent from Bombay for three years. His Parsi proteges also traveled with him to Scotland for education and acculturation. Consequently, the Parsis did not have an immediate combatant in Bombay. And as we have seen earlier, Nowrozjee was also preoccupied elsewhere. By 1845, the *Rehnumaye Zarthoshti* lost its relevance and was abandoned. One can also detect a change of focus on the missionary front; while earlier they had hoped to make converts from all religions, they now preferred to speak to a Hindu audience. Perhaps a brief truce had been called between the Parsis and the missionaries.

## Spreading knowledge the institutional way: *Dnyan Prasaruk* (1849–67)

By the end of 1840s, the educational movement in the Bombay region had strengthened considerably. Successive batches of the Elphinstone Institution, both in its school and college divisions, had been exposed to a wide variety of subjects and sources in English. The professors and teachers of the institution had acquired an excellent reputation in Bombay for their pedagogy and for the enthusiasm with which they engaged with their students. As a means to direct the energy of the more motivated students toward research, scholarship and writing, the Students' Literary and Scientific Society was formed in 1848 at the suggestion of these professors. Its initial objective was to provide a forum for the students to share their essays and lectures with each other. Taking the lead was Dadabhai Naoroji, then an Assistant Professor teaching mathematics and other sciences. While English had been the preferred language for the Society, a demand for the use of local languages led to the formation of two branches – one for Gujarati and the other for Marathi. They were respectively designated the Gujarati Dnyan Prasaruk Sabha [Society for Diffusion of Knowledge] and Marathi Dnyan Prasaruk Sabha. These branch societies organized themselves independently. The main activities of the Gujarati branch was the conduct of primary schools for girls in various parts of Bombay and the publication of a monthly magazine, the eponymous *Dnyan Prasaruk*.

The *Dnyan Prasaruk* had more modest ambitions as compared to the *Vidya Sagur*. It wanted to reach out to the masses who were not highly educated and consequently, its articles were written in a simple style and covered introductory topics in the sciences and arts. The first number contained the introductory lecture given by Dadabhai Naoroji who might also have helped produce the first few issues. During the two decades of its existence, it was edited by a series of young student editors. The editors included Ardeshir Framjee Moos and Kursondas Mooljee, both of whom later became prominent in Bombay public life. For a long time, it was edited by Nanabhai Rustamji Ranina, who later became one of Bombay's leading pressmen.[21] It also received significant encouragement from the Bombay Government, whose Board of Education subscribed forty copies of the magazine for distribution to its various schools.[22]

The Gujarati Dnyan Prasaruk Sabha was dominated by Parsi students and native Gujarati speakers from other communities felt that they were being marginalized from its proceedings. The main point of departure was the language, especially its vocabulary and idiom. The Parsis spoke a Gujarati with a generous admixture of corrupted Persian words and used a distinctive idiom that was different from that spoken by educated Gujarati-speaking Hindus, which, in turn, was a rarefied version of the language of the masses. This led to a schism in the Gujarati branch and the formation of the Buddhiwardhak Hindu Sabha in April 1851 as the third branch of the Students' Literary and Scientific Society.

By the mid-1860s, the Gujarati Dnyan Prasaruk Sabha seems to have run out of steam. The generation of students and scholars who had energized its activities and conducted its magazine had graduated to a different phase of life but had not been able to successfully pass on the baton to the next generation. The *Dnyan Prasaruk* started appearing irregularly and its readership was much diminished. A revolution had taken place in the educational system – it had become more broad-based and the number of Gujarati books had multiplied – and old-fashioned periodicals such as the *Dnyan Prasaruk* did not evolve fast enough to respond to these changes. The *Dnyan Prasaruk* folded up in 1867 after a goodly nineteen volumes. It had enjoyed a reasonably long run when compared to the mass of nineteenth century Bombay periodicals and the impact it left on the Gujarati literary world was also substantial. Its memory seems to have persisted even two decades after it folded up as the name was revived in 1887 for another Gujarati magazine.

Our survey of Gujarati magazines from the 1840s can be completed by mentioning the *Shushtee Vidya* and the *Vidya Saar.* The former intended, as its name suggests, to provide knowledge on the cheap, as compared to the *Vidya Sagur*. It was lithographed at the Doorbeen Chhapakhana by its proprietor Nusserwanjee Tehmuljee. It was started in 1841 but did not survive the year. Some members of the Parsi community were not impressed with the name *Shushtee Vidya*; it was too "cheap" for them. The *Vidya Saar* was started on 1 January 1846 by Cowasjee Burjorjee and was published from his Vartaman Press. It was also modeled on the *Vidya Sagur* and, as its name indicates, proposed to give a digest of knowledge. It does not seem to have survived into 1847.

## Conclusion: Seeding new genres of literature

These early Gujarati periodicals founded in the 1840s played a significant role in providing a regular space for writers to contribute articles in genres which did not earlier exist in the Gujarati literary space. For most of the 1840s and the following decades, translations from English dominated the pages of Gujarati periodicals. Some of the key genres which these periodicals pioneered were travelogues and biographies. Regular book reviews provided a space for literary criticism and debates.

Recounting travel experiences was not a novelty for the average Gujarati; even at the turn of the nineteenth century, the residents of Gujarat had been describing their travel experiences in verse and not just in the Gujarati language, but also in Persian, Sanskrit and Urdu.[23] As exposure to English literature increased, the prose travelogue as a genre attracted the editors of Gujarati magazines. Nowrozjee Furdoonjee, as we have seen, had traveled to Afghanistan in the 1830s. When he returned, he submitted a journal of his travels to the Bombay Geographical Society which however did not deem it worth publishing. When he started editing the *Vidya Sagur*, he gave full rein to his interest in travel literature. A large number of his book

notices were introductions to English travelogues published in the 1830s.[24] In its third volume for 1842, Nowrozjee serialized a three-part article on Kabul based on his personal observations, stating explicitly that he was motivated to write it with a view to educating his Gujarati-speaking compatriots who would otherwise never have got a chance to familiarize themselves with these distant lands.[25] He also included wood-cuts of maps labelled in Gujarati; perhaps this was the first time that Gujarati maps were printed.

Biography and life sketches were not standard in the literary portfolio of Indian languages. Hagiography, especially in verse, was in vogue. Some of the earliest biographical sketches in Gujarati literature first appeared in these magazines. Their subjects included Indian personalities like Raja Ram Mohun Roy, Chhatrapati Shivaji, and Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Notable Bombay men – both European and Indian – were also featured as also figures from India's medieval past like Akbar.

As we have seen, the first Gujarati magazines of Bombay were initiated by individuals – Nowrozjee Furdoonjee and Dadabhai Naoroji – who went on to achieve great eminence in public life. Many others associated with the periodical press also played a major role in the public life of the city. These magazines provided the template for Gujarati magazines from the 1850s and 1860s which went on to develop a more sophisticated literary style and treat their subjects in greater depth. Unlike early newspapers, these magazines did not carry any advertisements and relied mainly on subscriptions and patronage to sustain themselves. Some of them evolved into monthly news reviews while others positioned themselves as literary journals. A more detailed study of these publications and their contents would provide an insight into how a public discourse around knowledge developed in nineteenth century Mumbai.

## APPENDIX
## Holdings and other details of Gujarati periodicals from the 1840s

### *Repositories*

| | |
|---|---|
| BNC | Bapurao Naik Collection, Mumbai (private) |
| FDMRL | First Dastoor Meherji Rana Library, Navsari |
| FGS | Forbes Gujarati Sabha, Mumbai |
| KRCOI | K R Cama Oriental Institute, Mumbai (incorporating the Mulla Firoz Library) |
| PFFRL | People's Free Reading Room & Library, Mumbai |
| UML | University of Mumbai Library (Fort campus), Mumbai |

### *Dnyan prasaruk*

Monthly
Published by the Dnyan Prasaruk Sabha, a branch of the Students' Literary and Scientific Society

| | |
|---|---|
| vol 1:1–5 | August to December 1849 |
| vols 2–19 | Annually to 1867 |

| | |
|---|---|
| FDMRL | 1–17 (1849–65), 19 (1867) |
| FGS | 9 (1857), 15 (1863) |
| KRCOI | 1–2 (1849–50), 3:1–4 (1851), 4–17 (1852–65), 19 (1867) |
| PFFRL | 6–13 (1854–61), 17–19 (1865–67) |

### *Rehnumaye Zarthoshti*

Fortnightly, monthly from January 1843; one rupee per issue
**Printed by Pestonjee Maneckjee at Jame Jamshed Chhapakhana**
Edited by Nowrozjee Furdoonjee & Eduljee Dorabjee Sunjana

| | |
|---|---|
| vol 1:1–12 | 1 July 1842 – December 1842; 392 pp. |
| Vol 2:1–12 | January to December 1843; 760 pp. |
| Vol 3:1–12 | January to December 1844 |
| vol 4:1–? | January to ? 1845 |

| | |
|---|---|
| **KRCOI** | **1–2 (1842–43)** |
| **BNC** | **1–2 (1842–43)** |

### *Shushtee Vidya*

Monthly
Printed at Doorbeen Chhapakhana
Edited by Nusserwanjee Tehmuljee

| | |
|---|---|
| vol 1 | 1841 (further details unknown) |
| | No holdings traced |

### *Vidya Sagur*

Monthly; one and a half rupees per annum or 2 annas per issue
Edited by Nowrozjee Furdoonjee (Sep 1840 to June 1846); Cooverjee Rustomjee (July to Dec 1846)
Printed by Pestonjee Maneckjee at **Jame Jamshed Chhapakhana**

| | |
|---|---|
| vol 1:1–4 | September to December 1840 |
| vol 2:1–12 | January to December 1841 |
| vol 3:1–12 | January to December 1842 |
| vol 4:1–? | January to ? 1843; appeared erratically till December 1846 |

UML 3 (1842); volume 3 is prefaced by the table of contents for volumes 1 & 2 leading to confusion among cataloguers.

***Vidya Saar***

Monthly; five rupees per annum
Printed at the Vartaman Press
Edited by Cowasjee Burjorjee
**vol 1 1846 (further details unknown)**
**No holdings traced**

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8. *Bombay Times* 3.157 (2 May 1840). p. 282.
9. Maharashtra State Archives, Mumbai: Bombay Government, General Department Volume 540 of 1840, p. 129.
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13. *Bombay Times* 3.189 (22 August 1840).p. 538. I could not trace the prospectus.
14. *Parsee Prakash* 1. p. 362.

15. *Journal of a residence of two years and a half in Great Britain* by Jehangeer Nowrojee and Hirjeebhoy Merwanjee, (London: Wm H. Allen & Co., Leadenhall Street, 1841).pp. 383–4.
16. *Parsee Prakash* 1. p. 539, fn. 1.
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18. 'A Parsee priest'. *Talim-i-Zurtoosht.* Bombay, Summachar Press, 1840. Foreword, p. 7.
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20. For example, see Dastur Eduljee Dorabjee Sanjana (tr.), *Madade farishte* (Mumbai: Akhbare Kabeesa Chhapakhana, 1827); and Ervad Edal bin Darabjee bin Rustomjee Sanjana (comp.), *Koreh Vehajak* .Mumbai, Akhbare Kabeesa Chhapakhana, 1828.
21. H.A.K., *A Sketch of the Life and Writings of Nanabhai Rustamji Ranina.*
22. Maharashtra State Archives, Mumbai: Bombay Government, General Department Volume 64 of 1855.
23. For further details, see Mehali Bhandoopwala, 'Gujarati jobanma safarnámáöni tawárikh (san 1860 sudhi)' [A historiography of Gujarati travelogues (to 1860)].*Forbes Gujarati Sabha Traimasik [The Quarterly of the Forbes Gujarati Sabha]*. 78.2–3 (April–September 2013). pp. 28–64.
24. The books which were reviewed in *Vidya Sagur* included Mrs. Postans, *India in 1838* (London, 1839); Ardaseer Cursetjee,*Dairy of an Overland Journey from Bombay to England, and of a Year's Residence in Great Britain* (London, 1840); G. T. Vigne, *A Personal narrative of a visit to Ghuzni, Kabul and Afghanistan* (London, 1840); and, W. G. Osborne, *The Court and Camp of Runjeet Sing* (London, 1840).
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# Language Snapshot of Parsi Gujarati

Anton Zykov

ABSTRACT

*Parsi Gujarati (PG) is a minor vernacular language of the Parsi (Indian Zoroastrian) ethno-religious community of Iranian origin, predominantly spoken in the Western Indian states of Gujarat and Maharashtra.*

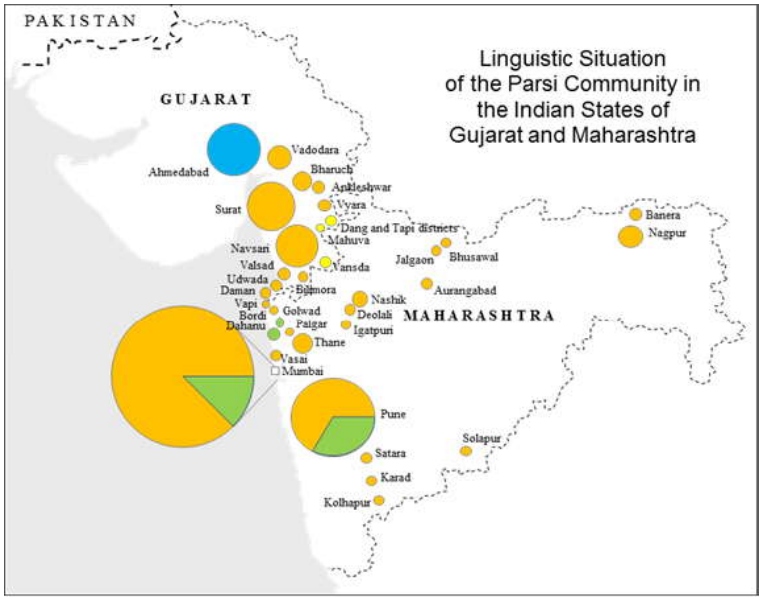
*PG usage is primarily colloquial and restricted to family and community. PG is inextricably linked with the unique Parsi identity: its culture, religious ceremonies and lifecycle rituals, arts and crafts, as well as unique oral expressions and folklore.*

## Overview

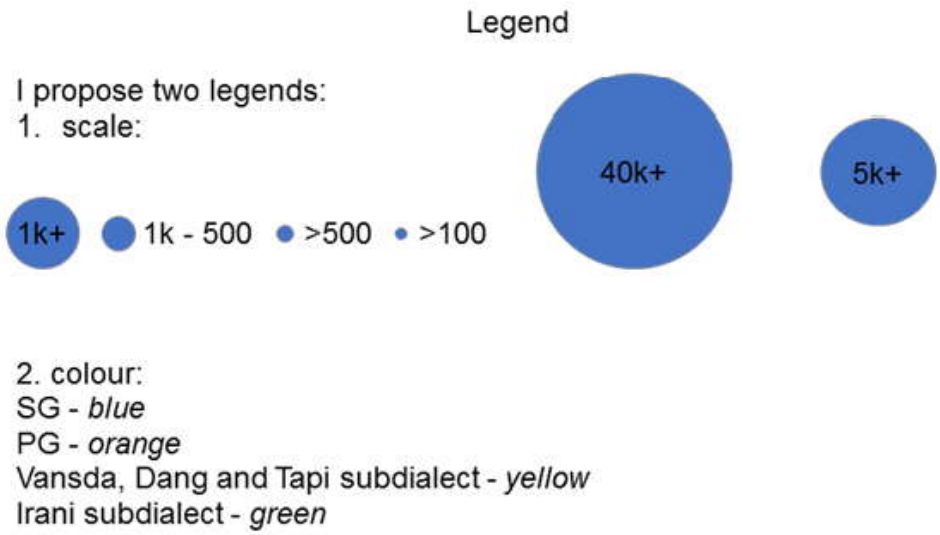
PG number of speakers is estimated*vis-à-vis* the overall Parsi population of India, which amounts to 57,264 according to the 2011 national census. 44,854 Parsis live in Maharashtra, mainly in its capital Mumbai (35 to 38 thousand), and 9,727 reside in Gujarat. My own fieldwork in late 2018 as well as community's own assessment demonstrates 50 to 60 per cent proficiency in PG among Maharashtra Parsis and around 90 per cent proficiency in south Gujarat. Hence, the total number of PG speakers is currently equal to approximately 35,000.

PG's vitality can be assessed as somewhere in between definitively and severely endangered on the UNESCO scale[2]. Parsis are in constant demographic decline with 22 per cent drop compared to 2001 census data. Speakers are rapidly ageing while the Total Fertility Rate (TFR) is below 1[3]. PG sees less inter-generational transmission of the language, especially in Mumbai, where the language is increasingly spoken only by the community elders.

The area of PG in Western India is confined to the metropolitan cities reflecting the Parsi community's urban lifestyle. In Maharashtra, PG is spoken in Mumbai, Pune and Dahanu. In Gujarat traditional places of PG spread include Surat, Navsari, Vadodara (Baroda), Bharuch, Ankleshwar, Udwada, Sanjan and Valsad. Smaller pockets of PG speakers are situated in the villages located in Gujarat's districts of




**Picture 1**




**Picture 2**

Dang and Tapi. Larger, i.e. several hundred members, Parsi communities are located in Kolkata and Jamshedpur, West Bengal; Chennai, Tamil Nadu; Hyderabad and Secunderabad, Andhra Pradesh & Telengana; and New Delhi.

In the Indian subcontinent a sizeable PG speaker community resides in Pakistan (almost exclusively in Karachi with 1675 persons[4]). Significant number of Parsis

live in diaspora: US & Canada; UK; Australia and New Zealand. Smaller communities are found in the Gulf, Singapore and Hong Kong. At the same time PG is usually spoken merely in the first generation and almost exclusively by the elders. The second generation nearly unanimously shifts to English.

PG's history is inextricably linked with the linguistic development of the Zoroastrian community upon its migration from Iran to Western India, described in the late 16th century *Qesse-e Sanjān*. According to this community self-narrative essential for the current Parsi self-identification, the local ruler Jādi Rānā set the following linguistic condition for granting the community refuge on his land:

> *They shall give up the language of Irān*
> *and speak the language of the land of Hend.*
> — Williams 2009.p 85.

Traditionally Parsis have used Avestan and Middle Persian for religious literature and New Persian for the correspondence with their Iranian co-religionists*(Persian Revayāts)*, while some of these documents are accompanied with ritual directions or colophons in PG. In the 15th – 17th centuries various translations and religious oeuvres such as *Ardā Wīrāz-nāmag (Story of Righteous Wiraz), Mēnōg-ī Xrad (Spirit of Wisdom), Zartošt-nāma (Story of Zoroaster), etc.* were composed by Parsi authors, mostly notably Rustam Peshotan (JamaspAsa 2012).

By the 18th century and onwards most of the Parsi authors who worked in Gujarati such as Behramji Malabari and Ardeshir Khabardar had shifted to the standardised literary Gujarati (Gimi 1916-17. p 435).However the early 19th century gave birth to important Parsi periodicals in Gujarati such as the community newspaper *Jām-e Jamšed* (Jamshid's Cup). Founded in 1832, it is still in print today, though written mostly in English.

Other PG publications produced from mid-19th century onwards are intended almost exclusively for the community use:*āgyārī* or fire temple statutes; internal *anjumān* or communal self-governing authority documents; and, most significantly, *Pārsī Prakāš* (Parsi Lustre) a multi volume collection of Parsi community events. A rare exception would be PG theatre plays, most notably by Adi Marzban. However, overall, by early 20th century PG was characterised as 'a language with no literature', a language, 'somehow less pure' than Standard Gujarati or SG (Cama 2019. p 60).

At the end of 20th century the overall decline in Gujarati literacy among the new generation of Parsis turned Parsi Gujarati into a conversational language (Palsetia 2001. p 13). This process was exacerbated by a language shift among the Parsi youth to the area-dominating languages such as English and Hindi as well as Standard Gujarati (in north Gujarat) and Marathi (in Maharashtra).In Mumbai, for instance, Parsi children overwhelmingly attend English-medium schools, where Hindi and Marathi are obligatory national and, respectively, state educational components, leaving no place for even Standard Gujarati. Hence, younger Mumbai Parsis often loose familiarity with SG as well as PG.

At present, PG remains a predominantly spoken language. Its current domains are inextricably linked with several traditional narratives developed exclusively by the Parsi community, such as 1) singing of folk songs known as*monajats*, 2) oral composition and staging of plays (Parsi Gujarati vernacular theatre), 3) embroideries and handcrafts, such as making of sacred Zoroastrian clothing garments: thread (*kusti*) and shirt (*sudro*), 4) particular daily life lexicon, especially various forms of oral expressions, idioms, saying and curses semantically unintelligible for SG speakers; 5) (most importantly) the colloquial discourse affiliated with rituals specific to Parsi Zoroastrian community such as marriages, initiation rites or funerals.

## Current Research

PG status is disputed between a dialect (Masica 1991, p 429; Waghmar 2010. p 469) and a language (Doctor[5]). Modi sees PG as "a result of language shift – from Pahlavi [Middle Persian, the language of the Sasanian Iran – A.Z.] to Old Gujarati… through [transferring] the features of distinct ethnic group on the target language" (2011. p 83) and further being heavily anglicised in the 18th century, with a particular impact on PG syntax, which embraced some structural features of English.

The lack of clarity over the language status apparently serves as one of the reasons for *Ethnologue*'s rather conflicting description of Parsi or Parsee (ISO 639-3, prp) as the language in India with 151,000 speakers[6] which is, in accordance with the website, distinct from Parsi, a dialect of Standard Gujarati[7] (ISO 639-3, guj). PG should not also be confused with yet another Zoroastrian-related language this time a non-existing*Ethnologue* item, Parsi-Dari[8] (ISO 639-3, prd).

Given this inconsistent use of the term Parsi as well as Zoroastrian references it is important to distinguish PG, an Indo-Aryan language, from any varieties of Gavruni (also known as Gabri and Zoroastrian Dari or Dari Zartushti), an Iranian language, spoken by the Zoroastrians mostly in Yazd and Tehran. It has 25,271 interlocutors according to the Statistical Center of Iran[9], while *Ethnologue* (ISO 639-3, gbz) gives a 8,000 figure[10].

*Encyclopædia Iranica* treats Parsi Gujarati as a variety/dialect of SG that evolved in its present form in the first half of the 19th century, stating that "certain ideas, phrases, idioms, turns of language and of thought have almost made their (i.e. Parsis') Gujarati into a special dialect of the language" (JamaspAsa 2012). In academic literature the references to PG and its various features are found in the colonial-time Gujarati grammars and grammatical sketches such as Phadake (1842), Taylor (1908) and Tysdall (1892). The Linguistic Survey of India (Grierson 1928) also dedicates a one-page long description to the language.

More recently PG research saw a dissertation on its phonology (Major 1979)[11] and two reference grammars composed by Gagendragadkar (1978) and Modi (2011). The first one is based only on one language speaker from Mumbai and, hence, fails

to reflect the dialectal variety of the language. The latter, mostly focused on the socio-linguistic aspects, according Sheffield is "unsatisfactory" except for "short textual excerpts and word lists which may be of use" (2015. p 544).

Dwayer's Gujarati manual occasionally refers to certain PG characteristics (2014, p 6) and treats PG as a Surti dialect, unlike Doctor (2004.p 2) and Mistry (2011.p 566) who regard PG as a separate dialect. Dan Sheffield's website[12] contains a very useful learners' guide comprised of a historic and bibliographical sketch, cumulative glossary as well as a PG reader accompanied with translations and exercises.

My project entitled "Videography-based documentation of the language of Parsis in Gujarat and Maharashtra" (2018-20)[13] aims at documenting PG through a text corpus with audio-visual recordings of naturally generated discourse occurring around lifecycle rituals as well as a lexicon with terms arising from rituals and traditional arts and crafts.

The community enthusiasts have also produced collections of PG proverbs, sayings and insults, entitled *Parsi Bol* and *Parsi Bol 2* (Marfatia & Taraporewala 2013, 2016). The diaspora saw a similar publication *My Mother Used to Say* (Rivetna & Rogers 2015). Few Parsi community members interact with new media platforms such as YouTube[14]. An overview article of the language was recently published by a community leader and scholar Shernaz Cama (2019).

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# Parsi Entrepreneurial Success: An Appraisal

Meher Kelawala Mistry

ABSTRACT

*Parsis have been noted for their entrepreneurial spirit and their contribution to trade and industry has been much explored. There have been various attempts by scholars to understand the reasons and circumstances that catapulted the Parsis from traders and merchants to industrial entrepreneurs in the mid-nineteenth century. Parsis, along with Marwaris and Gujaratis emerged as the pioneers in the establishment of cotton textile industry. This paper tries to dissect various theories and explanations to arrive at an understanding of Parsi entrepreneurial success.*

## Lack of Caste Restrictions

Several scholars have attributed the lack of caste restrictions as a primary cause of Parsi economic ascendancy. However Amiya Kumar Bagchi, N. Benjamin and Hinnells have previously demolished caste-based explanations for the Parsi success. Caste did not really pose a barrier to trade among the Hindus. While there was not much occupational mobility among the Hindus as was observed among the Parsis, there were a substantial number of them involved in banking and even overseas trade. Many Banias and Kutchis were found settled in parts of East Africa.[1]

Phiroze Medhora has tried to show that the influence of the religious system in India did not prevent the emergence of an entrepreneurial class and that there were not only many Hindu entrepreneurs in India from the trading classes, there were also many modern entrepreneurs from the Brahmin class and caste as such was not an inhibiting factor. The only impediments it caused was with regard to overseas travel. The taboo on overseas travel as Medhora points out was gradually overcome with various reform movements and a system of atonement.[2] Lack of caste restrictions, however, did bring a few small benefits to the Parsis. Many scholars have argued that due to lack of a caste system and occupational mobility, the Parsis were more adaptable and flexible and these qualities contributed much to their

success. Kulke noted that due to lack of caste restrictions the Parsis were able to mix more freely with Europeans. We have noted that the Parsis too practiced various taboos on inter-dining but these were gradually given up. The fact that the food and drinking habits of the Parsis and Europeans had more in common than other communities too facilitated their social interaction and in a way helped to develop a 'special relationship'. The Parsis too worked at maintaining this relationship by socially intermingling with the Europeans by giving balls, suppers and picnics. Promotion of western education and "emancipation" of the Parsi women was undertaken to a certain extent to earn and maintain the respect that the English had developed for the Parsis as a socially progressive community.

## Minority Status

Dwijendra Tripathi observes that the Europeans had depended on the services of the Parsis as middlemen, agents, and brokers since the beginning of their commercial contacts with India. According to him, the Parsis possessed knowledge of the land and language and being a small minority found it relatively easy and flexible to deal with the foreigners. Their minority status, he asserts, also gave them some advantage in mediating between different interests and political powers.[3] Christine Dobbin in a similar vein notes that their minority position in Indian society gave them an understanding of foreigners' needs and helped them to cater well to the Europeans.[4] But it should be remembered that when the Parsis came into contact with the Europeans, they had spent more than seven to eight hundred years in India and did not consider themselves as outsiders. The Indian society too did not treat them as a foreign community. The Parsi, therefore, was no different from a Banian broker and both were at an equal footing in anticipating and catering to the needs of the Europeans. Phiroze Medhora following Weber's theory has tried to link the economic development of Parsis to their minority status. According to Weber "National or religious minorities which are in a position of subordination to a group of rulers are likely, through their voluntarily or involuntary exclusion from positions of political influence, to be driven with peculiar force into economic activity." Medhora argues that the Parsis being such a minority had no established or defined position within the social system of India and that they tried to obtain their livelihood from non-traditional or newer forms of occupation.[5] Bagchi, however, rightly cautions that the emergence of Parsis cannot be explained in terms of a minority, which had to seek an outlet in trade as they were debarred from other professions.[6] Our research indicates that their engagement with trade particularly maritime trade was not due to their minority position but due to their being a trading diaspora. The Parsis faced no discrimination as a minority and were found in various professions from the initial days of their migration. Their minority position could have been an obstacle in the early years of their migration for some professions but for the receptive Indian

environment. In fact there were certain professions available to Parsis but not to Hindus due to caste restrictions, e.g Parsis could even engage in liquor manufacture, a profitable venture not open to many Hindu castes.

## Close connections with the English

Many scholars such as D. F. Karaka have held the close connections that developed between the Europeans particularly the English and the Parsis to be of paramount importance in their economic growth.[7] Scholars like John Hinnells and Christine Dobbin have stressed the mutual regard and respect the British and the Parsis had for each other. Hinnells writes "The fact that the regard was mutual was probably a major factor in the growth of Parsi wealth and power." [8] The English admired their wealth and were pleased with their professions of loyalty. They also took a sort of unjustifiable pride in their prosperity. Sir James Mackintosh in 1808 remarked "The Parsees are a small remnant of one of the mightiest nations of the ancient world, who flying from persecutions into India, were for many ages lost in obscurity and poverty, till at length they met a just government under which they speedily rose to be one of the most opulent mercantile bodies in Asia."[9] Studies show that there were individuals with wealth and prominence in the pre-British period such as Chahil Sangan at Khambhat, Asa Vora at Bharuch, and the legendary Rustom Maneck of Surat and it would be wrong to assert that the Parsis were dependent on the British for their wealth. Hinnells, however, believes that there is some truth in the assertion that British rule created the conditions in which the Parsis flourished.[10] It must be admitted that the Anglo-Parsi commercial association was economically a mutually beneficent relationship. The Parsis, who by the end of the eighteenth century were the major economic power at Bombay, were providing the largest share of capital in their joint trade endeavours with British merchants. Hinnells stresses that "the British respected the Parsis because in them they saw, in a strange and foreign land, people who shared similar morals, principles and even a physical similarity." The British who were race- conscious and believed in the superiority of the white race may have shown a higher regard for the Parsis due to their being generally fairer than the other Indians.[11] Susan Styles Maneck views race to be one of the crucial factors and comments: "The willingness of European Companies to transact their business through Parsi mediators, to some extent apparently motivated by racial considerations and the belief that the Parsis were more like themselves, lent the greatest impetus to the rise." She suggests that although all communities had dealings with the Europeans and that the Banias served as the earliest brokers and were their leading trade partners in Surat even in the eighteenth century, the Parsis had an advantage over Jains and Hindus for the racial reasons.[12] It would be interesting to explore why and from what point of time, the British discovered this racial affinity and whether it influenced their choices in any manner with regard to commerce. Nevertheless it

must be remarked that while travelers did notice the fair skin of the Parsis, it appears from the Factory Records that at least till the eighteenth century, the Parsis were often referred to as "black fellows".

Ashok Desai and Bagchi too are convinced of a "special relationship" between the Parsis and the British. While Desai agrees that the Parsis had ample scope for capital accumulation in the eighteenth century, he points out that this was also the case with other communities and there were many rich Hindu and Muslim merchants at Surat around this time. He felt that the reason for the later success of the Parsis and the failure of other rich people must be looked for in the Parsis' close contacts with the British East India Company.[13] Bagchi concurs that this special relationship was seen in the fervent loyalty towards the Queen displayed by educated Parsis and the recognition of Parsi merit in the form of titles. The Parsis were often associated with the British as junior or equal partners in many British enterprises. Bagchi believes that more than pre-eminence in commerce it was certain values of the Parsis that made the British select them for such partnerships.[14] So what were these values or qualities that made the Parsis more attractive and did other communities not possess them? Robert Kennedy notes that a Protestant ethic with economic values such as accumulation rather than consumption of wealth, a desire to increase one's material prosperity and a desire to work in the material world were a driving force in their success.[15] An aversion to acquiring wealth among Hindus and Jains and stress on other worldly values must be set aside as there is enough evidence to the contrary. It must be remarked that the other-worldly approach of the Hindus and Jains has been much misconstrued and the pursuit of wealth was equally pronounced in these communities. Both Hindus and Parsis competed for the position of broker to the Europeans at Khambhat, Bharuch and Surat. Also the tendency to accumulate rather than display or consume wealth was more visible among the Banias than Parsis and Weber himself admitted that the Protestant ethic was the strongest among the Jains. Kulke believed that the traditional values of hard work, honesty and integrity played an important role in the Parsi success. Did the British perceive these as values belonging or exclusive to the Parsi community? The British readily accused Parsis as Banias of deceit. There are instances seen of Parsis appointed as Modis, Vakils at Surat and Khambhat who were accused rightly or wrongly of deceit. Although Parsis were generally considered honest in their dealings, there are also disparaging accounts that accuse them of readily speaking lies in the course of business.[16] The Parsi trader was, therefore, perceived to be as honest as any other trader of the times. As Ashok Desai rightly puts it, Parsi success therefore cannot be explained in terms of social or psychological characteristics.

## Early migration to Bombay

Ashin Das Gupta notes that in the eighteenth century there was no difference between the Parsis and the Banias or the Bohoras as far as business or entrepreneurial

qualities were concerned. The Parsis found it difficult to compete with the influence of the Banias and, therefore, moved out of Surat at an earlier date. The Banias had much more at stake and did not migrate.[17] Incidentally when many prominent Parsis moved out of Surat and other towns of Gujarat, the process of decline in the trade of these places had began. The early departure of the Parsis to Bombay in some ways offered them a set of advantages unavailable to the later entrants and helped them to seize opportunities particularly in the "Country Trade" with China.[18] At the same time it would be wrong to suggest that the Parsis metamorphosed into a business community only after their migration to Bombay.[19] An economic survey of the Parsis at Bharuch and Khambhat challenges such a notion.[20] However, it must be conceded that there was a substantial growth in their business activities after their migration to Bombay and most of their capital accumulation that ultimately helped them to transform themselves into industrialists was achieved here and to a large extent can be attributed to their involvement in the China trade. Families like the Wadias, Banajis, Camas, Patels etc. acted as guarantee brokers to the British agency houses and also traded on their own account. Their success made them the most wealthy business community at Bombay. Parsi migration to Bombay itself indicates that they were extremely active in trade. When the British consciously adopted a policy of diverting all trade towards Bombay from Surat and other ports of western India, there was an increase in migration of Parsis towards Bombay. D.F. Karaka notes that almost all trade between Europe and Bombay now went through their hands and they also claimed a substantial share of trade with East Asia.[21]

Hinnells has noted that the Parsis were careful never to appear as competitors with the British. While the East India Company controlled all trade between Europe and India, the Parsis concentrated on trade with the East.[22] The collapse of trade with West Asia may have led to reversal of fortunes of other trading communities. The Parsi monopoly of the China trade until its takeover by the Jews seems to have ensured their prosperity in the first half of the nineteenth century. They soon used their accumulated capital and became pioneers of industries.[23]

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1. Amiya Kumar Bagchi, "European and Indian Entrepreneurship in India (1900-1930)". In Rajat K. Ray, (ed) *Entrepreneurship and Industry in India (1800-1947.* , Oxford University Press, 1992. p. 183. Bagchi makes an interesting point that while many Hindu traders had settled in East Africa, the Parsis were not found there probably because they preferred areas controlled by the British. This is a further indication of their 'special relationship'. See also N. Benjamin, "Bombay's Country Trade with China (1765-1865)". *The Indian Historical Review*, Vol. I, No.2, September, 1974. pp. 295-303.
2. Phiroze. B Medhora,"Entrepreneurship in India". *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol.

80, No 4, December 1965. pp. 561-66.

3. Dwijendra Tripathi, *The Oxford History of Indian Business.* Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2004. p.77. Both Banias and Parsis played the role of agents or Vakils for Europeans to transact affairs with the government.
4. Christine Dobbin, *Asian Entrepreneurial Minorities: Conjoint Communities in the Making of the World Economy 1570-1940.* Curzon Press, Richmond Surrey, 1996. p. 77
5. Phiroze. B Medhora, *op.cit.* pp. 564-65.
6. Amiya Kumar Bagchi, *op cit*. p. 183.
7. Karaka writes "Parsi prosperity may be said to date from the first connection with the English and still more precisely from the time of settlement in Bombay" D. F. Karaka, *The Parsees, Including Their History, Manners, Customs, and Religion*. Vol. I, Macmillan, London, 1884. xvii. He held that the Parsis found an opportunity to distinguish themselves when Bombay became a British possession and although travelers commented on many of their qualities in their observations "it was only at the commencement of the eighteenth century that the Europeans found scope for the admirable qualities of the Parsis" D. F. Karaka, Vol. I, xx.
8. John Hinnells, "Anglo-Parsi Commercial Relations in Bombay Prior to 1847" *Journal of the K. R. Cama Oriental Institute.* No. 46, Bombay, 1978. p. 12.
9. Cited in John Hinnells, *op.cit.* p. 13
10. *Ibid*. p.14.
11. In later writings both by Parsis and Europeans the racially and culturally distinct identity of the Parsis was emphasized in explaining their economic development. They were described as "tall, well-built, with lighter complexion than most Indians and with aquiline features which are very agreeable to the European taste". See Daniel Houston Buchanan, *The Development of Capitalistic Enterprise in India*. A. M. Kelley, New York, 1966. p. 144.
12. Susan Styles Maneck, *The Death of Ahriman: Culture, Identity and Theological Change Among the Parsis of India*. K. R. Cama Oriental Institute, Bombay, 1997. pp.87,110.
13. Ashok V. Desai, "The Origins of Parsi Enterprise", in Rajat. K. Ray, ed., *Entrepreneurship and Industry in India (1800-1947)* , Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1992. pp. 99-108
14. Amiya Kumar Bagchi, *op.cit.* p.183.
15. R. E. Kennedy,"The Protestant Ethic and the Parsis". *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 68, 1962. pp. 11-20.
16. Jongh noted that although the Parsi religion considered lying as a grave sin and deception in commercial dealings as a greater sin, Parsis as do other merchants could not refrain from lying in business. Nora K. Firby, *European Travellers and their Perceptions of Zoroastrians in the 17th and 18th Centuries*. Von Dietrich Reimer, Verlag, Berlin, 1988.p.189.
17. Ashin Das Gupta, "The Merchants of Surat, c. 1700-1750". In Uma Das Gupta, ed., *The World of the Indian Ocean Merchant 1500-1800-Collected Essays of Ashin Das Gupta.* Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2001. p. 334.
18. According to Holden Furber, the country trade had three divisions, the Indian Coastal trade, the trade between Indian ports and Asiatic and African ports west of Cape Comorin, and the trade between Indian ports and ports east of Cape Comorin in Burma, Malaya and China. It had been the chief concern of the servants of the

European East India Companies and the principal source of their wealth. Holden Furber, *John Company at Work: A Study of European Expansion in India in the Late 18th Century.* Oxford University Press, London, 1948. p. 21.

19. Dwijendra Tripathi, *op. cit*. p. 77. Tripathi writes that the Parsis as long as they were confined to Gujarat were generally associated with agriculture or agriculture related small business.
20. See Meher Kelawala, *A History of Some Parsi Settlements on the Western Coast of India (1600-1850)- A Study of Bharuch, Ankeshwar, Khambhat*. Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Mumbai, 2010.
21. D. F. Karaka, *The Parsees, Including Their History, Manners, Customs, and Religion.* Vol. II, Macmillan, London, 1884. p. 254.
22. John Hinnells, *op.cit.* pp.14-18. See also Jesse Palsetia, *The Parsis of India-Preservation of Identity in Bombay City*, Brills, Vol. 17, Leiden, 2001, pp. 54-56.
23. Amalendu Guha notes that it was more of a combination of factors and favourable circumstances that propelled their success. See Amalendu Guha, "More About the Parsi Seths: Their Roots, Entrepreneurship, and Comprador Role, 1650-1918". *The Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.19, No. 3, January 21, 1984. pp. 117-132.

# A European Transformation – The J. J. School of Art and the Rise of Parsi Artists

Pheroza J. Godrej

ABSTRACT

*The wealth that trade brought to Parsi merchants particularly Sir Jamsetji Jeejeebhoy led to the creation of public institutions across the city of Bombay. These included the Sir J.J. School of Arts which gave and continues to give impetus to creativity across India. From the mid-19th century till today, Parsi artists, many of them products of the J.J. School of Arts have added to the wealth of painting, sculpture and varied art forms. This paper traces these Parsi artists across more than a century and looks at their contribution to the modern art movements of the country.*

Until 1857, The East India Company's official policy of employing European artists defined the artistic landscape of India, but with the handing over of India to the Crown, patronage shifted to the nawabs, maharajas and wealthy merchants, especially the Parsis, for whom the 'academic realism' introduced by the influx of European artists had a certain appeal.

Towards the end of the 19th century, Bombay was a bustling city, where merchants from across the globe converged. Money, and making lots of it in the shortest time, was their raison d'etre and "charity" was added to recreate an identity that had taken a battering during the opium war.At this time, the British rulers had already established art schools in Madras and Calcutta. The "Great Exhibition of Works of Industry of all Nations"in 1851, in London, probably inspired Sir Jamsetji Jeejeebhoy 1st Baronet (1783-1859), the great Parsi merchant and philanthropist, who amassed a huge fortune from the opium trade with China, to establish in 1853 a school of Art in Bombay. John Lockwood Kipling, Rudyard Kipling's father, was engaged to teach sculpture and John Griffiths was appointed the first Principal. It was here, at the Sir J. J. School of Art and Architecture that young Indian artists were introduced to European Art. As this presentation unfolds, we shall encounter a

number of artists from the Parsi community, who received their training at this hallowed institution.

**Pestonjeee Eruchshaw Bomanjee Mistry (1851-1938)** was born in Bombay. Not inclined to a formal education, when he voiced his desire to pursue a specialised education in Art instead, his father who appreciated Art did not raise an objection. Thus in1864, he sought admission into Sir J. J. School of Art. Pestonjee Bomanjee was amongst the first painters from Bombay to be trained in British Academic style. However, it was his intent to learn sculpture under John Lockwood Kipling, father of Rudyard Kipling, but Lockwood Kipling left for Mayo School in Lahore. Pestonjee studied under John Griffiths, one of the most important British Victorian Painters, who worked in India.

When the British Government decided to copy the wall paintings in the caves of Ajanta, under the supervision of John Griffiths, who noticed Pestonjee's talent and sincerity, put him in charge of a group of students and sent them to the caves of Ajanta to copy the wall paintings. In London, these copies of wall paintings from the Ajanta Caves are on display in South Kensington, as also in the Crystal Palace.

In 1876, Queen Victoria appointed a special painter, Valentine Prinsep, from England. As Prinsep needed an Indian painter to help him, Griffiths recommended Pestonjee as an apprentice. Pestonjee worked with him for about six months. It was during this time that he developed his unique style and learnt new techniques. What he was able to learn from Prinsep in six months would have taken him five years to learn in England.

Pestonjee's paintings feature portraits of Parsis, their daily activities and their religious rituals. Most of time, his brother, wife and children featured in his paintings. His paintings minutely detail the main characters, including the surroundings, by even brush strokes and gentle controlled colouring. This came to be his unique style. While working at Ajanta, during the winter, his wife Jiloobai used to accompany him. The woman in his Painting ***Feeding the Parrot*** is his wife.

What is interesting to note is that Pestonjee's son E. P. Bomanjee and Grandson Eruchshaw Dadi were also eminent artists of the period. Eruchshaw Dadi studied Art in Mumbai, where he learnt the skills of painting and painting murals. Thereafter, he went to Mayo School at Lahore as an Art teacher. From the 1964 Lalit Kala Academy's Directory it is known that he was a member of the Bombay Art Society and Art Society of India. Eruchshaw Dadi inherited his grandfather's and father's collection of paintings. In 1930, he participated in important exhibitions of the Bombay Art Society. His paintings are displayed at the Devrukh Shikshan Prasarak Mandal, Konkan. He was a one of the few painters who went to England in the 20th century.

**Fig. 1: *Feeding the Parrot*, Pestonjee Bomanjee, Oil on Canvas (CSMVS Collection)**

**Fig. 2: Left:** ***Praying for the Sick / Parsi Husband and Wife*****, Pestonjee Bomanjee, Oil on Canvas (CSMVS). Right –** ***Parsi Priest Praying*****, Pestonjee Bomanjee, Oil on Canvas (CSMVS)**

## M. F. Pithawalla (1872-1937) & Sorab Pithawalla (1911-1959)

Born in Pitha, Gujarat, at the age of sixteen, Manchershaw Fakirji Pithawalla shifted to Bombay and joined Sir J. J. School of Art where he studied under the guidance of Principal John Griffiths and Chiranjilal. Laterally he studied at the British Academy, Rome. It was a great honour for him to be invited in 1905 to paint women of various Indian castes – to be presented to Her Majesty Queen Mary on her visit to India. Noteworthy is the grand reception Sir M. N. Bhownaggree held in 1911 in his honour, being the first Indian artist ever to hold a solo exhibition, held at the*Doré* Galleries in London. For this accomplishment he was abundantly praised by Sir George Birdwood, art historian and early curatorial contributor to the Victoria & Albert Museum, Bombay (now the Bhau Daji Lad Museum, Mumbai). Pithawalla portrayed the lives and likenesses of his patrons and aristocracy. As a part of his training he produced works after the manner of the European masters. At a deeper level, his portraiture enshrined the values of the elite, comprising merchant-princes, lawyers, landowners and their ladies.

**Fig. 3: *Untitled*, Oil On Canvas, MF Pithawalla (Farah Ghadiali Collection)**

**Pithawalla's son, Sorab Pithawalla (1911 – 1959)**, continued his father's artistic commitments, excelling at genre depictions, still life and the portrait. Both, father and son, enjoyed the patronage of the haute bourgeoisie of Western India, particularly those of the Bombay Presidency.

**Fig. 4: Top Left – *Untitled*, Sukhadvalla Collection; Bottom Right – *Untitled*, Jamshed Sukhadvalla Collection, both Sorab Pithawalla.**

Many artists' children also took up portrait painting and earned a name for themselves in the art community. One such was Sorab Pithawalla, the second son of M. F. Pithawalla. He studied for almost ten years the art of portrait painting from his father and also won several awards and prizes at Art exhibitions. He had the skill and a unique proficiency in translating the exact living likeness on canvas. Both father and son had a command in genre depictions - the portrait, indoors, barn life, and still-life - without ignoring social contexts. Their works have the props of a newly emergent bourgeois life that was gaining momentum in India.

## Jehangir Ardeshir Lalkaka (1884-1968)

Jehangir Ardeshir Lalkaka was born in Ahmedabad. He studied at Elphinstone College and Sir J. J. School of Art, Bombay. Thereafter, his grandfather, Sir Navroji Vakil, sent him to study at the St. John's Wood and Westminster Schools of Art, London. When back in India, Lalkaka developed a high-profile practice as a portraitist. Commissions from public institutions as well as individual patrons came his way very easily.

**Fig. 5: *Pirojbai Lalkaka* (Artists Mother), Jehangir Ardeshir Lalkaka (NGMA ,New Delhi)**

His sitters and subjects were drawn from a wide spectrum of late-colonial Indian public life – from British rulers to Indian nationalists, including Dadabhai Naoroji, Mahatma Gandhi, Sir Pherozeshah Mehta, Sir Dinshaw Vatcha, Lord Brabourne and King George V. His expertise at portraiture tends to eclipse his fine mountain landscapes depicting Kashmir, Ladakh, Ranikhet and Ooty. In 1932, he was appointed deputy director of the J. J. School of Art. He was the first Indian to hold this position.

## Shiavax Chavda (1914-1990)

Born in Navsari, Gujarat, Shiavax Chavda joined the Sir J. J. School of Art, Bombay, in 1930. Thereafter, he enrolled with the Slade School of Art, London, where he worked under Professor Randolph. In 1937 he continued his studies at the Academie de la Grande Chaumiere, Paris, where he had the opportunity to work with Leon Bakst and Picasso – designing the sets for the Diaghelev Ballet.


**Fig. 6: *Merce Cunningham Ballet*, Shiavax Chavda, Oil on Canvas**
**(Shiavax Chavda family collection)**

Chavda's art embraced a diversity of preoccupations. He was fascinated by fauna, especially horses and fish. He was a masterful interpreter of ancient Indian art forms and his sympathy with his subjects - whether human, animal or architectural, and his ability to capture the life force, the movements and even their muscular structure or body structure with a few brush strokes is what makes his work unique.

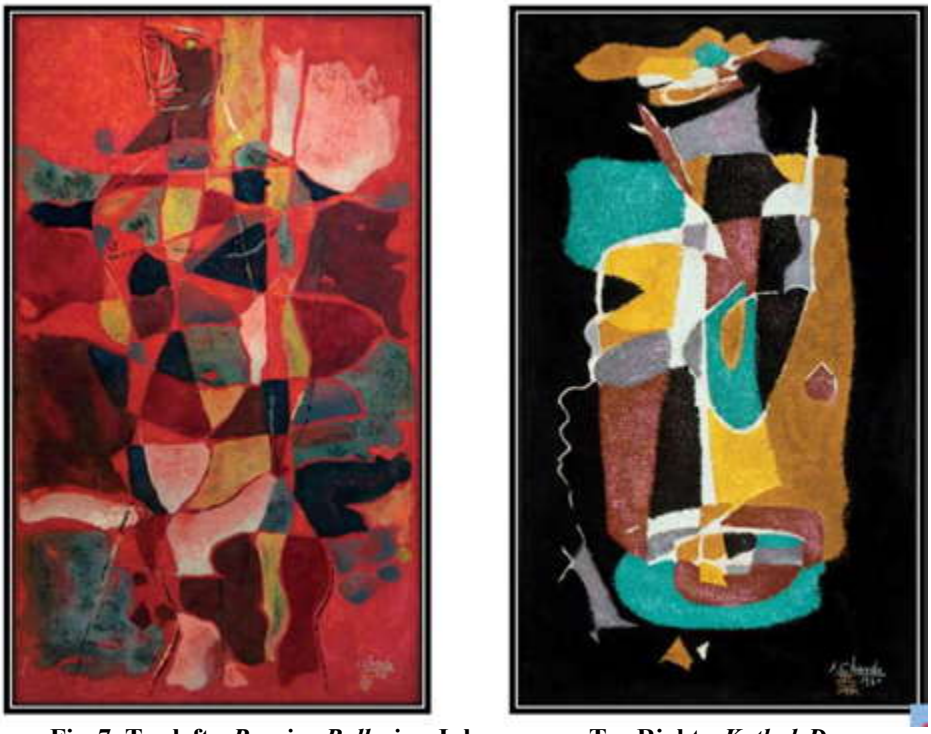

**Fig. 7: Top left – *Russian Ballerina*, Ink on paper, Top Right – *Kathak Dancer*, Ink on Paper (Shiavax Chavda family collection)**

Chavda's wife was the well-known dancer Khurshid Vajifdar, whose sister was married to Mulk Raj Anand, novelist, critic and founder-editor of Marg Magazine. A gifted and prolific illustrator, Chavda illustrated several memorable issues of Marg devoted to classical and folk performing arts. He travelled extensively in India in order to understand his subjects. Indian temples, ancient art traditions, rural life and the sacredness art, all formed the basis of his style.

He had his first solo exhibition in Bombay in 1945 and thereafter in Indonesia, Singapore, London, Paris and Switzerland. His works have also been featured in the 1946 UNESCO Exhibition and the Salon de Mai, in 1993.A retrospective of his work was held at the Jehangir Art Gallery in 1993.

## Jehangir A. Sabavala (1922-2011)

Jehangir A. Sabavala hailed from good lineage. Born in 1922, into an affluent and socially well-reputed Zoroastrian family, his mother belonged to the distinguished Cowasjee Jehangir family that ran flourishing businesses and were equally great philanthropists. They believed that wealth is good when it brings joy to others. It was because of their continuing generosity that the people of Bombay benefitted from

several schools, hospitals, the University Convocation Hall, Elphinstone College, the Jehangir Art Gallery, the erstwhile Cowasji Jehangir Public Hall – now the National Gallery of Modern Art, Mumbai, amongst other landmarks.

**Fig. 8: *The Raven*, Jehangir Sabavala, Acrylic on Canvas (Sabavala family collection)**

His father, Ardeshir Pestonjee Sabavala, hailed from good Surat stock and was a well-educated and qualified barrister from the Inns of Court, London. Sabavala was in and out of schools in various places, including Switzerland. In Bombay, for four years at a stretch he attended the Cathedral & John Connon School. After graduating from Elphinstone College in 1942, he pursued Art at the J.J. School of Art, Bombay. He left for London in 1945 to train at the Heatherley School of Art. In 1947 he moved to Paris to study at the Academie Julian and the Academie Andre Lhoe until 1951. He returned to the Academie Julian in 1952-54, and to the Academie de la Grande Chaumiere in 1957. Thereafter, he returned home to settle in India, except for brief visits abroad. His career has been described as a steady progression, a journey – "with the paintings as steps, in a difficult, highly formalised pilgrimage towards a metaphysical truth".

Sabavala was more or less set in his choice of themes. Experimentation and innovation was not his cup of tea. A blank canvas, he once said, terrified him. However,

when he started painting, he did so as though he had no peripheral vision. Focused with precision, the entire painting already imprinted in his mind, he transferred the visual onto his canvas.

To those who did not have the opportunity to know him closely, Jehangir, because of the aura of propriety that he exuded, appeared unapproachable, or rather, people hesitated to have a dialogue with him. But ask the many young artists who plucked up enough courage to break the ice - they quickly realised that they had misjudged him entirely. The daring ones won, they learnt from him practical lessons in art, and benefitted from the advice he so readily imparted, which most professional artists hold close to their chests. At the grand age of 89, Jehangir achieved in his lifetime a magnificent collection of envious honours, which included the Padma Shree Award in 1977 and the Lalit Kala Ratna Award in 2007. The recognition he attracted made him, his family and India proud to own a painter of such high caliber. More than anything else, the Zoroastrian community was elated. In conversation with Nancy Adajania, his friend of many years, Jehangir admitted:

> "Ín principle, I would say that my work is not overtly related to Zoroastrianism, but in the deep subconscious, perhaps it is. In a way it has to belong to a person who belongs nowhere and yet everywhere."

## Homi D. Sethna (1921-2004) & Nelly Sethna (1932-1992)

A familiar, beloved figure at conferences, screenings and discussions in Bombay from the 1950s through the late 1990s, was Homi D. Sethna, a prolific maker of documentary films, many of which were devoted to the arts of contemporary, as well as traditional India. These included, 'Vishwakarma – The Creator' (1972), 'Kalamkari' (1985) and 'Homage to a Sculptor: Adi Davierwalla (1989). In his work for the Government of India's Films Division, Sethna also celebrated the heroic mythology of the Nehru period in documentaries such as 'Mayurakshi Dam' (1958) and 'Vikram Sarabhai (1995).

Married to studio weaver and researcher Nelly Sethna, he shared many of her passions, especially in relation to the rich history of South Asian textile production and the need to sustain systems of expertise that had been threatened by neglect, decline or commercialisation. Sethna drew inspiration from the pioneering crafts activist Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, often referring to her contributions in speech and writing.

Nelly Sethna's artistic practice was rooted in a profound curiosity about, and a desire to understand, India's diverse ecosystems of cultural production. A student at the Sir Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy School of Art, Bombay, Nelly Sethna walked out after

**Fig. 9: *Kalamkari* (Photo Credit Films Division)**

a confrontation with an unjust principal. She went on to study at the legendary Cranbrook Academy, Michigan, shaped by the Finnish architect and aesthetic educator, Eero Saarinen. A creator of extraordinarily inventive weaves that could well be defined as textile sculpture, Nelly combined art-making with research, writing and activism, on behalf of the art traditions with which she identified.

She became a major contributor to the revival and transformation of the

**Fig. 10: Left to Right Nelly Sethna – *Tapestry, Wool and cotton***
**(Photo Credit: Jamshyd & Pheroza Godrej)**

Kalamkari lineage in the southern Indian town of Masulipatnam, rescuing it from decline. Although regarded as a quintessentially 'Indian' form, Kalamkari derived a considerable impetus, as well as a corpus of imagery, from its close linkages with Iran and a Persian clientele. This Perso-Indian connection may well have appealed to Sethna's imagination.

## Adi Davierwalla (1922-1975)

Adi Davierwalla was a self-taught sculptor, greatly influenced by Epstein and Henry Moore. Indeed, no young sculptor of the times could escape the influence of these giants in the years between the wars and later. However, Davierwalla was gifted and innovative enough to imbibe these influences and then create sculptures that were both original and individualistic.

**Fig. 11: Top – *Icarus*, Bronze, Bottom Right – *Thrust*, Bronze, Bottom Left – *Floating Figure*, Bronze, Dr. Mrs. Pheroza Godrej & Pundole family collection. (Photo Credit: Dadiba Pundole & Jamshyd & Pheroza Godrej)**

Born in 1922, Davierwalla was educated in Bombay and qualified as a pharmaceutical chemist. Drawn towards sculpting, he received some guidance in its basic techniques from the late N.G. Pasare. He began with wood as his medium and gradually went on to work with stone, marble, bronze and steel. He started exhibiting in Bombay in1950. Davierwalla also won several awards- he received the first prize at the State Art Exhibition (1957) and the gold medal at the All-India Sculptor's Show (1957) and the National Award (1965).

His sculptures were displayed in the Sao Paulo Biennale, Brazil, and in the Venice Biennale in 1963 and 1966 respectively. In 1969 his works were included in the traveling exhibition of International Education in the U.S.A and in the following year in a group show organized by the Coray Gallery in Zurich. He was the recipient

of the D. Rockefeller III Fellowship in 1968, and in the same year his show was sponsored by the Bertha Schaifer Gallery, New York.

Davierwalla's executed large sculptures for the Atomic Energy Establishment, Larsen and Toubro and the Life Insurance Corporation. His works are included in several public and private collections in India and abroad.

## Pilloo Ratan Pochkhanawala (1923-1986)

A pioneering figure in the field of modern Indian sculpture, Pilloo Pochkhanawala was never formally trained in art. Working in the advertising world, she turned to sculpture only after a commercial assignment took her to Europe in 1951. "Of course, once abroad, I took the opportunity of visiting the major museums. I did take in the vast collections of paintings, but every time I looked at the major works of modern sculptors I felt struck by a visual bolt. Evidently, it was my sudden grasp of the third dimension that left me mortified by the sculptures…I was seized by the fear of the challenge of tackling something so difficult". (As quoted in S.V. Vasudev,*Pilloo Pochkhanawala.* Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi, 1981).

**Fig. 12: Left -*Mask*, high-fired ceramic mounted on painted iron frame, Dr. Pheroza Godrej collection. Right –*Spark*, Public Sculpture supported by HSBC. (Photo Credit: Jamshyd & Pheroza Godrej)**

Pochkhanawala's body of work, ranging from intricate theatrical sets to monumental public sculptures, explores and applies various materials, textures and techniques innovatively to engage with the concepts of time, space and nature, in a "rare marriage between form and content", as Anahita Contractor notes. "Since Pochkhanawala first began to sculpt in 1951 at the relatively late age of twenty-

eight, her obsession was to unscramble the tight boundaries of space which were available to her through the time she existed in. Her arrangement of motifs, the strategic use of negative space around them, the aesthetic disproportions and, occasionally, her violent distortions even within the abstract mode she chose to work with, render to Pochkhanawala's sculpture a keen dynamism even today" ("Pilloo Pochkhanawala, *Disharmony and Inner Mechanics", Expressions & Evocations: Contemporary Women Artists of India.* Marg Publications, Mumbai, 1996).

Born in Mumbai in 1923, Pochkhanawala received her Bachelor's degree in Commerce from Bombay University. Since the early 1950s, she held several solo exhibitions of her work, including shows in Bombay from 1955 to 1978 and in Delhi in 1965, 1968 and 1982. Her group shows include exhibitions at the Nash Gallery, University of Minnesota, in 1980; in Minnetonka, USA, in 1979; New Delhi in 1979 and 1970; Middleheim, Belgium, in 1974; Belgrade, Bangkok and Tokyo in 1967; and in London in 1963. In addition to exhibitions, the artist was commissioned to create several public sculptures, and designed the sets for various stage productions.

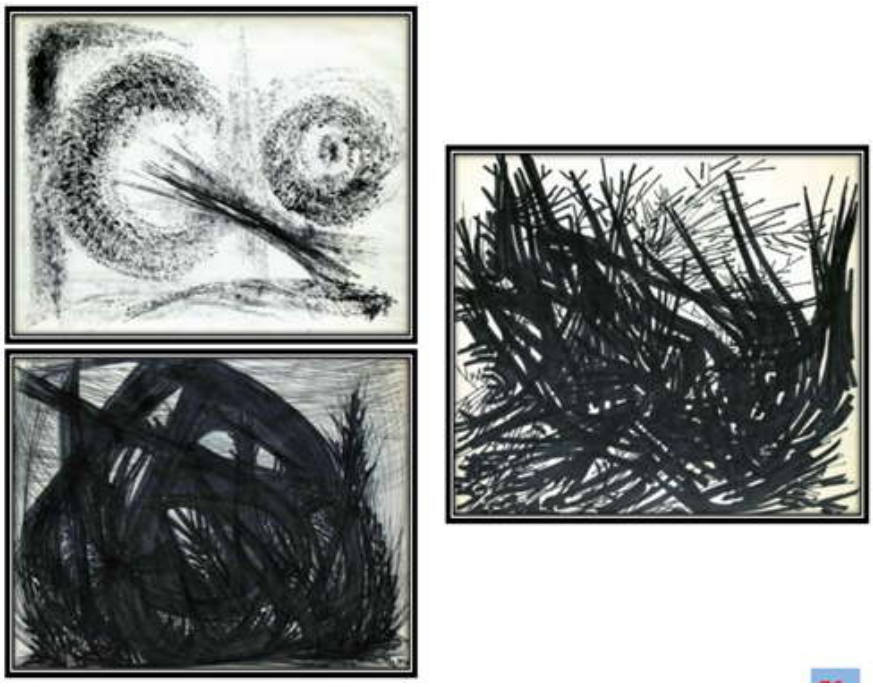

**Fig. 13: Top Left – *Ink on paper*, Right – *Ink on paper*, Bottom Left – *Ink on paper*, JNAF Collection (Photo Credit: Jehangir Nicholson Art Foundation)**

## Homi B. Patel (1928-2004)

Born in Bombay, Homi Patel was a student of the Sir J. J. School of Art, Bombay,

and graduated in 1952. He was a contemporary of K. Ambadas, Apollinrio D'Souza and S. G. Nikam. They formed a group that promoted a rigid adherence to the non-representational and abstract interpretation of Art. His works remained true to this commitment throughout his career.

**Fig. 14: *Untitled*, Homi Patel, Oil on Canvas, Pundole family collection, Photo Credit Dadiba Pundole**

During the 1960s, his work was exhibited at international exhibitions in Venice, Vienna, Zurich, Hamburg, Dusseldorf and Tokyo. At home he displayed at Gallery Chemould and Pundole Art Gallery. It is interesting to note that he was one of the ten artists selected to be featured in the Pundole inaugural show in 1963, alongside Jehangir Sabavala, V. S. Gaitonde, Badri Narayan, Shiavax Chavda, K. H. Ara, and

K. K. Hebbar. Patel's works are in the permanent collections of the National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi and the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, Mumbai.

## Mehlli Gobhai 1931-2018

Mehlli Gobhai, who was born in Mumbai in 1931, completed his undergraduate education at St. Xavier's College. He then went on to train as an artist at the Royal College of Art in London, and the Art Students League and the Pratt Graphic Centre in New York. For twenty years after his studies, he lived and worked out of New York, which is significant in the sense that his work derives from sources then unexplored by most of his contemporaries who spent their time in Europe instead. Gobhai chose to return to Mumbai in the late 1980s.

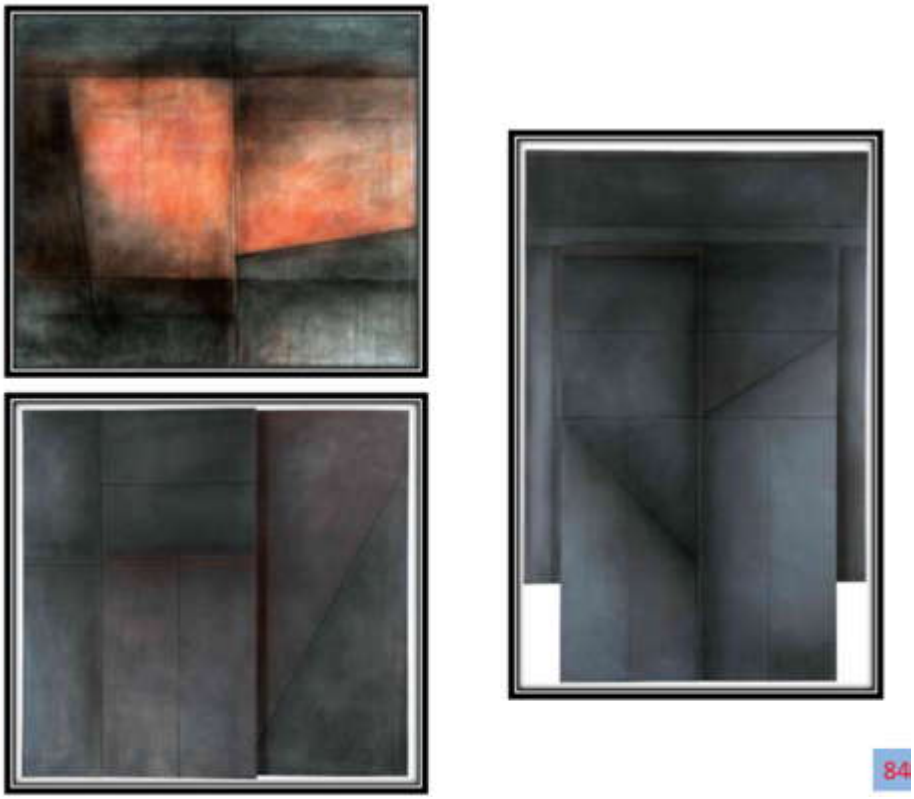

**Fig. 15: Left:** ***Mixed Media on constructed canvas*****, Top Right:** ***Mixed Media on constructed canvas*****, Bottom -** ***Mixed Media on constructed canvas*****, Artists own collection; Photo Credit: late Mehlli Gobhai**

Gobhai was what most people would call a classical abstractionist, but in his work we see many traditional artistic leanings. He always painted in series, using

and reusing an image until he had drawn from it all of its connotations and potential. Surprisingly, abstraction, in Gobhai's case, was borne from the figure amongst other things. He spent two years as a student studying human anatomy and drawing figures, and attributes the learning of form and structure to this early training. He slowly broke down the figure, inventing new and simpler representations of it. He said, "...Slowly I really forgot about the figure and got extremely involved in the pure form. I also got impatient with the sensuality of the curved line. And the elimination of the curved lines has been taken over by the modulation of tones."

In Gobhai's work, surface as well as structure play pivotal roles. His paintings feel and look like either an aged scrap of leather, an old parchment, a metal sheet or the rind of a fruit. Structure on the other hand, is cut down, or refined, to the point of virtual non-existence. Straight and stark lines cut across the painting, depicting the most essential, and according to Gobhai, the only necessary part of the human body - its axis. They defined and organized his paintings for him. He said, "I don't like seductive colours. I feel really good when I arrive at colours that are non-colours. I am suspicious of colour. I am afraid of colour only because it could run away with you and could become a seductive colour. I have this attitude now that you should only pick up a certain colour when you feel that the painting would not survive without that colour."


**Fig. 16: Top Left, Right, Bottom Left – Books written and illustrated by Mehlli Gobhai, Photo Credit late Mehlli Gobhai**

To Gobhai, colour is absolutely avoidable and superfluous. He was ambivalent about and refused to name the colors he used sparingly, but we can make out shades of brown, rust, gray, black and olive, which he had stained and rubbed onto his surface. Gobhai's most recent series of works were painted on handmade, rough textured paper. He worked by stapling this rigid paper to a makeshift easel and then coloring it with layers upon layers of various media including acrylics, pastels, zinc powder and graphite. Apart from a paintbrush, Gobhai used his fingers and cloth to rub in the dry pigments and powders. After he was satisfied with his alternating polishing and scouring, the artist marked the surface by drawing lines over it and sometimes making actual notches in and texturing the surface with a buffer.

## Gieve Patel 1940

Gieve Patel was born in Mumbai in 1940. He is a man of many shades - a practicing general physician, a self-taught artist, a poet and a playwright. His first show was held in Mumbai in 1966. Thereafter, he held several shows in India as well as abroad. He was a participant at the India: Myth and Reality, Oxford, 1982 and the Menton Biennale, France, 1976. Patel has also been an exhibitor for Indian Art from the Herwitz collection, Worcester Art Museum, Massachusetts and "Coups de Coeur" Geneva, 1987.

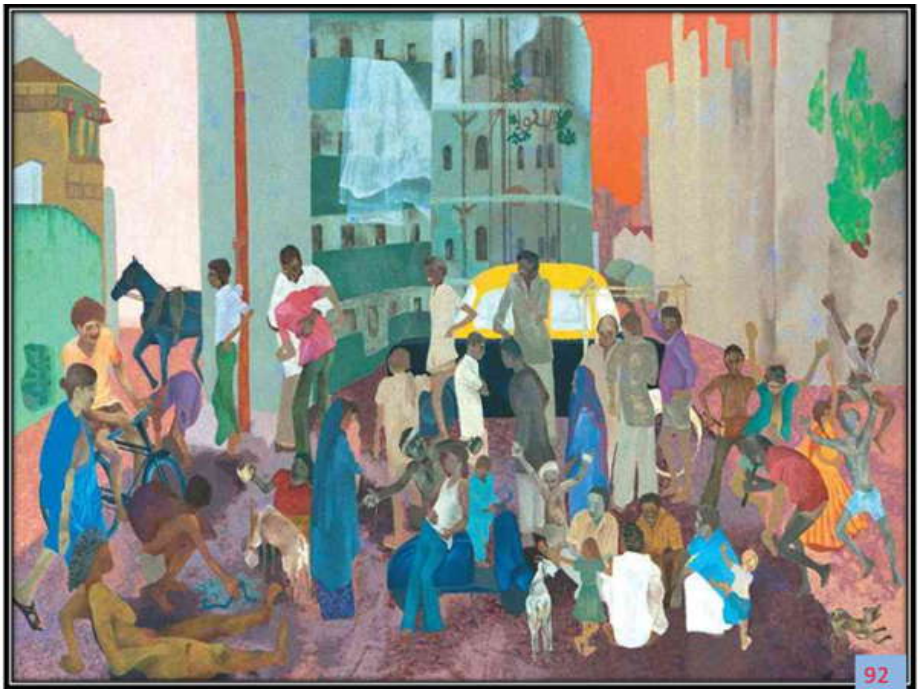


**Fig. 17: *Off Lamington Road*, Gieve Patel, Photo Credit Gieve Patel**

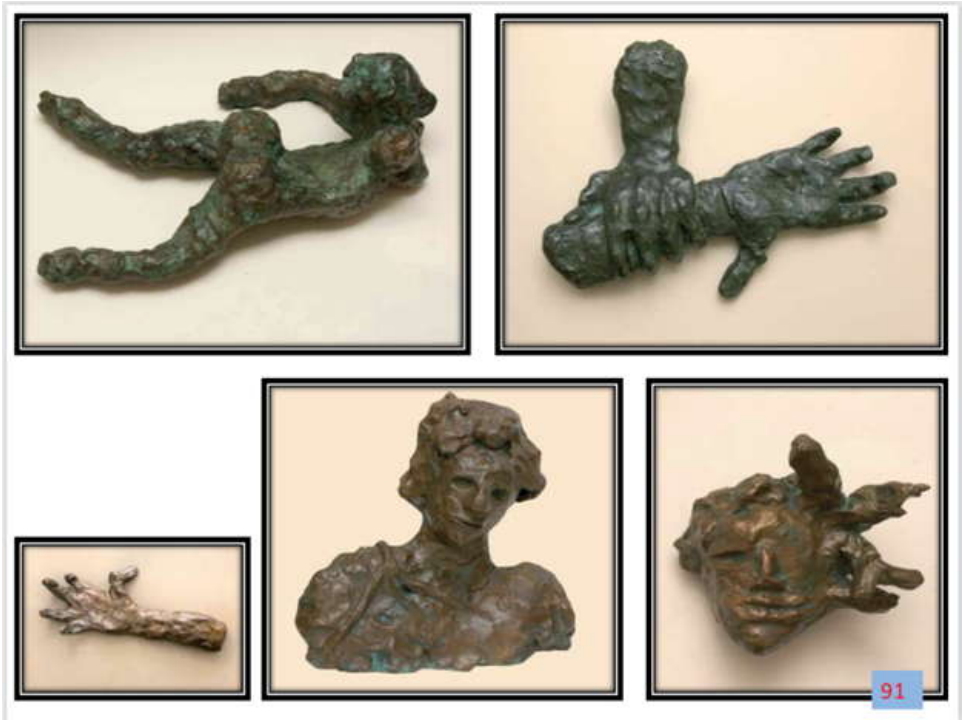


**Fig. 18: Top Left – *Daphne*, Bronze, *Eklavya* – Bronze, Bottom Right – *Daphne*, Bronze, Centre – *Daphne*, Bronze, Bottom left – *Eklavya*; Photo Credit, Gieve Patel.**

Patel draws his inspiration from various human situations. He sees a sense of poetry even in the rough situations that humans have to face and his paintings are a manifestation of this. The common man doing everyday things are a regular feature of his work. His paintings reveal that he is a keen observer: the clothes, the postures and the stances that he encounters everyday are faithfully reproduced in his work.

# Art like Science knows no frontiers: Homi Bhabha and the Spirit of Internationalism

Indira Chowdhury

ABSTRACT

*Homi Bhabha is best remembered as one of India's outstanding scientists and institution-builders; but his much-admired skills as an artist, his deep interest in art and his role as a connoisseur and art collector is today all but forgotten. This paper takes its title from Bhabha's letter to Maulana Abul Kalam Azad written a few months before Indian independence where he argued passionately in favour of an expansive and "internationalist" approach to identifying the "Indian" artist. This paper focuses on the complex conceptual relationship that Bhabha tried to frame between modernism and internationalism on the one hand, and between science, art and citizenship, on the other in the context of post-War Bombay and the newly independent India.*

## The Humanist Scientist

Homi Bhabha's sudden death in a plane crash on 24 January 1966 brought forth many tributes that spoke about his unusual ability to engage deeply with science and the arts. As Mulk Raj Anand, writer and editor of*Marg*, put it, "…when the history of our intelligentsia comes to be written, the world will know how many departures from orthodox positions you made and how many innovations you carried out. I say, in anticipation of such a summing up that you were one of the few possible "Whole Men" of our time."[1] In the same tribute, Anand also pointed out the ease with which artists could discuss their work with Bhabha, the scientist. The depth of Bhabha's interest in these two dissimilar fields becomes easier to comprehend through a biographical lens as this paper argues. As we shall see Bhabha was able to place both on an equally expansive scale because he saw both as an intrinsic part of, what Anand identified as a "philosophy of design for living.'[2]

## Science, Art and Forms of Government

Born into a wealthy Parsi family in 1909, Homi Bhabha led a privileged life in Bombay; it was a life that was intrinsically connected to the world of art, literature and music. The Parsi community was among the earliest to "westernize" in colonial India, and Bhabha grew up listening to Beethoven, Bach, Verdi, Mozart and Wagner on the gramophone. He also took painting lessons from the well-known Parsi artist, Jehangir Lalkaka. Bhabha's evolution into a man with discerning taste began in Cambridge. Bhabha enrolled for a BA degree in mechanical engineering at Gonville and Caius College in 1927. Discovering his passion for physics, music and art, Bhabha realized that engineering was not for him. He cleared the Mechanical Tripos in 1930 and went on to do the Mathematical Tripos clearing it two years later with a first. It was during this time that his artistic skills evolved considerably, he drew and painted what he saw around him and also designed the cover of his college magazine, *The Caian* in 1929.[3] He wondered if he could be an artist in India in a letter to his friend Homi Seervai. He had by then realized that in his old art teacher, Jehangir Lalkaka, he lacked the creative model he aspired to.[4]

Like most liberals of his time, Bhabha spoke about the unity of all mankind, India was not yet free to take her place among the nations of the world, she could do that only when she had absorbed the lessons of an "unbiased" history and studied the blunders of "princes in the day of the East India Company, which eventually led to the conquest of India by England".[5] For the young Bhabha the fusion of the two cultures of the East and the West was important if India had to progress and become a state in which its citizens felt free.

Alongside his discussions of physics, art and life in Cambridge, Bhabha also discussed forms of government with his friend Homi Seervai. His letter of 2 January 1929 picks up the threads of a discussion on democracy that Seervai, who went on to become one of the leading jurists of independent India, had possibly initiated in his letter:

> I agree with you in considering Democracy the only form of government which will give at least a tolerable rule, though it is very far from being an ideal….You support it because 'it is the only possible one which is consistent with the freedom of man'. [6]

From his correspondence with his friend, it becomes clear that Cambridge was the crucible that allowed Bhabha to explore many ideas – about freedom, democracy as well as science, industry and the arts. Bhabha met with the art critic Roger Fry, Slade Professor of Fine Arts and showed him his sketches. As he reported to Seervai, "He felt I had very extraordinary talent and that my powers would be best expressed in works on a larger scale. He said, he would like me to try fresco, say at New Delhi."[7] Until this point, Bhabha seemed quite keen on pursuing art, although he seems equally passionate about physics. In 1932, after clearing the Mathematics Tripos, Bhabha chose the life of a scientist over that of an artist and went on to do

a Ph.D. with Sir R.H. Fowler. Even as he did his research, Bhabha continued sketching. He was awarded his Ph.D. in 1935 and published a number of path-breaking papers. His paper on the process by which fast charged particles create electron-positron pairs was later confirmed experimentally and is now known as the "Bhabha scattering".[8] Bhabha had obviously made his mark in physics and was invited to speak at the Kapitza Club in Cambridge in 1938. But he continued painting and designing sets for student performances at Cambridge. In 1939, he designed the sets of Mozart's *Ideomeneo* for the Cambridge Musical Society.[9]

At Cambridge, his scientific life and his artistic interests seemed to work in tandem. It was also a period when ideas about forms of government would preoccupy him as he voraciously read philosophy, biography and history. His reading led him to think about the situation in colonial India where a new history could inspire people to change. But this could happen only after the British colonizers have been driven out.[10]

Bhabha's interest in the Indian national movement was absent at this point. His understanding of what could be possible and how it could be possible was speculative and abstract. By his own confession he only took a slight interest in the general politics in India. But the year 1939 would change that. As the clouds of war gathered over Europe, Bhabha would find himself stranded in India, unable to return from his holiday at home to the Cavendish where he worked. This would mark a turning point in his life and make way for a new amalgamation of his thinking about scientific institution building, art and citizenship.

## The International Networks of Science

Bhabha was on a break from the Cavendish in 1939 when war broke out in Europe on 1 September 1939. It was impossible for Bhabha to return to Cambridge. Supported by the Tatas, Bhabha began work on his Cosmic Ray Unit at the Indian Institute of Science at Bangalore. Yet, he yearned for the situation to change so he could turn again to doing science in the way he had in Cambridge. His letters to Robert Millikan at Caltech and to Wolfgang Pauli at Princeton speak of this yearning and he probably saw his time in India as an interruption.[11] In 1941, Bhabha was elected Fellow of the Royal Society. This recognition alongside the Adam's Prize that he was awarded the following year, made him one of India's distinguished young scientists and bestowed on Bhabha a new public recognition. The many possibilities for science that Indian independence would bring were being envisioned at that point and the support of the Tata Trusts made it possible for Bhabha to envisage and build a new institution similar to what he had known in Cambridge.

The changes that independence brought saw changes in forms of control and ownership and redefined the relationship between the state and the scientist.[12] The scientists at Bhabha's institute were not expected to define themselves by narrow

nationalism; they belonged to the republic of science, one that was without national boundaries. During the first few years, the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR) saw scientists such as F.W. Levi (Germany) as member of the Mathematics Department and visiting scientists such as the experimental physicist, P.M.S. Blackett from the United Kingdom (who became a Nobel Laureate in 1948) and the cosmic ray physicist, M.S. Vallarta from Mexico. At the same time, research students at TIFR were taught regularly by George Gamow, R.E. Marshak and eminent visiting physicists including P.A.M. Dirac, W. Pauli, G. Wentzel, R. Serber and Bruno Rossi to name only a few. A significant part of doing science at Bhabha's institute was assigning students to take lecture notes of visiting international scientists, getting them approved by the scientist and circulating the cyclostyled notes as learning resources. Research students had the opportunity of closely interacting with international scientists, augmenting their abilities to grapple with the latest problems in physics. This practice also served the purpose of enhancing their confidence levels.

Apart from this unique pedagogy, Bhabha also sent senior scientists to laboratories abroad such as Harwell, Saclay, Chalk River, Lawrence Livermore etc. Thus there was an emphasis on international interactions with scientists who worked in the developed world. All this changed the approach to scientific problems that scientists at this institute undertook – most of them entered collaborations with their international peers quite early in their careers and were aware of the work that scientists abroad were engaged in. Moreover, TIFR began organizing international conferences and symposia from 1950 onwards. Internationalism was a characteristic of scientific research because science offered ways of belonging to a world beyond national boundaries. But internationalism had other ramifications too.

## "Art like Science knows no frontiers"

If science spoke a language that was understood across frontiers, for Bhabha, it also provided a template with which to understand different dimensions of citizenship and expanding the notion of citizenship that the Indian state could confer on independence. Indian independence that came on 15 August 1947 was one such moment in history that offered an opportunity to define what it meant to be an Indian citizen. A few weeks before Indian independence, Bhabha wrote a letter to Maulana Abul Kalam Azad raising a question about Indian citizenship and India's cultural life. His letter was written at a point when India was struggling to deal with a huge number of displaced people as a direct result of the partition of India. In this context, Bhabha's letter to Maulana Azad, the Minister of Education, though ostensibly apolitical, made an interesting political suggestion.

On the eve of Indian independence, an ambitious art exhibition was being planned, scheduled to open in London in 1948. Homi Bhabha was not only a part of

the selection committee and his own painting inspired by the countess' aria from Mozart's opera *The Marriage of Figaro* –"Dove sono I belli momenti" (painted in 1938) was chosen to be part of this exhibition.[13] But the paintings submitted by the Russian painter in exile, Magda Nachman, who was living in Bombay at the time with her husband, M.P.T. Acharya, were rejected. Nachman had met M.P.T. Acharya, the Indian revolutionary in Bolshevik Russia and married him in 1921.[14]The couple had both lived as exiles in Berlin where she soon gained a reputation as a Modern artist. Her works were featured in the Nazi exhibition on Degenerate Art (Entartete Kunst) in 1937. Magda and Acharya had left for Bombay in 1936 a year after the British-Indian ban on Acharya was lifted. Once in India, Magda Nachman had turned to Indian subjects. She was also completely at home with Bombay's cosmopolitanism. As we know the years that preceded World War II saw the city providing shelter to a large community of exiled artists and performers. By virtue of her marriage to M.P.T. Acharya, Magda Nachman had become a naturalized Indian citizen. Nachman's paintings submitted to the committee that was selecting paintings for the London exhibition were rejected, as Nachman had told her husband, on grounds that she was not Indian. Her husband, M.P.T. Acharya had appealed to Bhabha as the "only artist on this Committee and I feel you will not let such a gross injustice done to a fellow artist pass without taking some action."[15]

Acharya's letter to Homi Bhabha also enclosed his letter to Mr. Kekoo Gandhy dated 25th June 1947. It is from this letter we know that Magda Nachman had acquired an Indian passport and had been living in India for nearly 12 years. Moreover, as Acharya wrote, Magda had supported him through their years in Berlin where he had worked on behalf of India. He strongly felt that the rejection of her work had more to do with issues of race. In his letter to Kekoo Gandhy, Acharya also made a strong argument that "all foreigners who accept India as their homes should be considered Indians. Otherwise we should be like the Nazis."[16]He had added in a postscript: "May I point out that foreign artists who became naturalized in France and America are considered French and American artists?"[17]

These strong arguments resonated with Bhabha who took up the matter, not only with Mrs Sarojini Naidu who headed the committee but also with Maulana Abul Kalam Azad. Bhabha elaborated Acharya's closing words with examples from the sciences and the arts. Bhabha urged that the newly constituted state reflect on who was an Indian citizen. Speaking about post-war America, Bhabha wrote:

> …the United States has followed a policy in cultural and scientific matters despite the fact that its immigration laws in other respects are extremely rigorous. It has followed a policy of welcoming to America any men of distinction in the sciences, letters or arts who wishes to make America his home.[18]

Reminding the Maulana of the inadvertent gains of war, when scientific life in America changed profoundly because of the scientists who sought refuge in the United States, Drawing attention to how closely the state and the scientific establishment worked,

he felt that this relationship could benefit India too. At his own institution, he hired scientists irrespective of their nationality.

As a member of the Committee, Bhabha probably used the privilege of insider knowledge to articulate what might have been the basis on which Nachman's paintings were rejected. Like Acharya, he too was convinced that the rejection had little to do with her style of painting, because, he argued, "half a dozen of the pictures chosen by the committee are painted in purely European style, and practically all the others show the unmistakable influence of European art." Arguing that Nachman's paintings were probably rejected on grounds of her European origins, Bhabha, as I have argued in my book, three examples of artists who transcended such confining and narrow "nationalist" categorization: Picasso, who despite his Spanish origins was always included in exhibitions in France, Amrita Sher Gil, who was Indian and Hungarian at the same time, and Simki the French dancer without whom Uday Shankar's troupe could not have functioned. The last two were examples from India. Bhabha argued for a more expansive view of citizenship that would support a new vision for Indian art. Speaking as a scientist, Bhabha wrote: "Art like Science knows no frontiers."[19]

In sharp contrast to the narrow cultural nationalism that dominated this period of Indian independence, Bhabha promulgated a respect for plurality and inclusiveness. His voice of liberal nationalism that was shaped by his understanding of internationalism also expressed itself in his institution building practice.

## An International Institute in cosmopolitan Bombay

Science would have to be serviceable to the nation; it had to be a tool of nation-building, but simultaneously the institutional space for science that Bhabha was intent on building at TIFR had to be a space without boundaries. Thus an interesting dynamic was brought into play between scientific nationalism and scientific internationalism.

Indeed, Bhabha's historical note on his Institute dated 1 January 1954 envisioned an institute that was open to "all scientists of eminence, whatever the country to which they belong and should be unfettered by the secrecy regulations required in commercial and strategic establishments.[20] Scientists at Bhabha's institute included the German mathematician, F.W. Levi who had come to Calcutta in 1935 when the Nazis removed him from his post at the University of Leipzig.[21] The cosmic ray physicist, Bernard Peters who faced difficulties in the USA after Oppenheimer's labeled him in his testimony at the House UnAmerican Activities Committee as a "dangerous man and quite red" was another example. Peters joined TIFR as a Professor of Experimental Physics and stayed on for eight years, returning for a shorter stint some years later.

The location of TIFR in cosmopolitan Bombay complemented the internationalist

aspirations of Bhabha's institute. Having identified Bombay as the most progressive of cities in India, Bhabha in his letter to the Tata Trusts had argued for a scientific research institute worthy of its position.[22] In the years preceding World War II, Bombay also witnessed the arrival of a group of Jewish refugees and exiles from Austria and Germany - among them were the artist Magda Nachman as we saw, the Expressionist dancer, Hilde Holger from Vienna and also the painter, Walter Langhammer and art critics Rudolph and Albrecht von Leyden. Walter Langhammer, an artist at the Vienna Academy had joined the*Times of India* as its first art director in 1939 and had gone on to support young painters from Bombay who chose to express themselves in a new language. Bhabha, a connoisseur of the European modern masters was attracted to these new forms of artistic articulation.

The Institute's art collection began in February 1952. Within a decade, the Institute's art collection included most of the Progressive Artists from Bombay – F.N. Souza, M.F. Husain, Sadanand Bakre. Raza, Gade, Gaitonde to name only a few; as well as a whole range of Modern Indian artists such as Hebbar, Badri Narayan, A.M. Davierwala, Shiavix Chavda and Laxman Pai. The collection included a bronze head of Einstein by Jacob Epstein that Bhabha purchased in 1954.[23] Undaunted by public opinion, Bhabha continued to collect works of art in the belief that aesthetics was important to scientific institution building. In 1961 he commissioned a large-scale mural for the entrance foyer of TIFR. There was also an international dimension to this project as Bhabha had hoped to invite Picasso to execute the mural.[24]The institutional committee set up for the purpose chose M.F. Husain's submission which the artist created into a mural titled "Bharat Bhagya Vidhata" in 1964.[25] Bhabha's project was essentially an attempt to bring together the modernity of Indian art into the modern international style building that was designed by the Chicago architect, Helmuth Barsch. The Institute's invitation envisaged the mural "to be a tribute to Indian art, and a stimulus the aesthetic sensibility of the many young scientists who pass through the building."[26]

This stimulus to the aesthetic sensibility was a real one, as Bernard Peters recollected:

> A further important element in creating a lively intellectual atmosphere was Bhabha's effort to broaden the intellectual base and widen the range of interests of the staff. For this purpose the institute library acquired books and subscribed to journals covering various aspects of human culture; in particular all branches of the arts and sciences were represented and the staff (not only the academic staff) was encouraged to use the library. For the same reason original works of art, ancient and modern, were placed throughout the building and the institute played at times host to artists of highest quality (theatre, music or dance) with free access of the staff. [27]

Thus, Bhabha attempted at his institute to create a space where the practice of science was not separated from an intellectual milieu that included artistic and cultural practices.

## Conclusion

Bhabha's institution thus had a dual purpose: to nurture science and to arouse the aesthetic sensibility of scientists and in the process become champion of and become a benefactor to modern Indian art. Bringing together the two diverse worlds was perhaps a lesson he had imbibed at Cambridge where in his early years he had considered becoming an artist. Bhabha's institutional patronage of the cosmopolitan aesthetics that the Progressive artists group in Bombay had nurtured was driven as much by his own artistic inclination as by his interest in refining the aesthetic sensibilities of the scientists at his institute who saw not only as future leaders in the scientific world but also as connoisseurs capable of holding conversations about art. In his letter to Maulana Azad which I have quoted earlier, Bhabha had articulated the hope that: "with its newly achieved freedom, India will become the leading country of Asia and one of the leaders of the world in cultural matters."[28]

At Bhabha's institute, doing science meant learning from the available traditions of science but also incorporated a cultural pedagogy that prepared scientists for participating in a larger network of scientists and artists and at the same time belong to a terrain that was global and beyond a narrow nationalist identity.

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# Conferment of meaning to Mount Damâvand between Indo-Iranian myths and Zoroastrian pilgrimages

Mariano Errichiello*

ABSTRACT

*Mount Damāvand, located north of Tehrān in the high Harāz valley of Māzandarān, is part of the Central Alborz mountain range. With its 5,670 m height, this volcanic mountain represents the highest peak in Iran and is one of the natural wonders of this country.[1] Besides being one of Iran's most distinctive features and being nominated as a UNESCO World Heritage site,[2] its prominent position in the Iranian skyline has earned Mount Damāvand a special place in the Zoroastrian mythology and Iranian literature.*

*This article examines how the related myths and narratives have conferred meaning to Mount Damāvand, making it a resource with semiotic functions which travelled both East and West, influencing people and cultures across the ages.*

## Stronghold against foreign rule

As the birth place of the Zoroastrian first human *Gayōmard* and of the mythical king *Manuščihr,* Mount Damāvand is one of the preferred backdrops for the wide Iranian mythology.[3] Probably the most renowned myth associated with this volcano is that described by Ferdowsī in the *Šahnāme*. In his epic, the author recounts how *Fereydūn* beats the tyrant *Zahhāk* with an ox-headed mace and, following the guidance of the *yazata*[4] *Saroš*, binds the evil ruler with strips of lion's skin and

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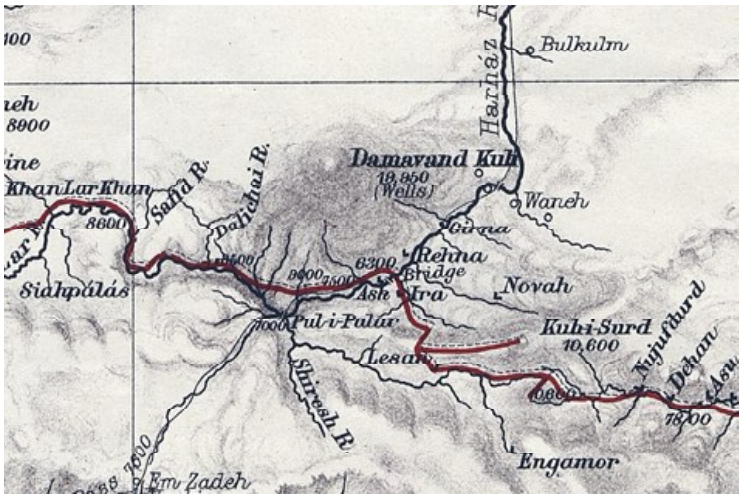


**Fig. 1: Portion of a map from plane table surveys executed by Lieutenant Colonel Beresford Lovett, Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society, 1883.**


imprisons him inside a cave in Mount Damāvand.[5] In this story, the volcanic mountain is depicted as the place where Good triumphs over Evil and where the latter is rendered harmless. Although the story of the rivalry between *Fereydūn* and *Zahhāk* is well known among Iranians, Persian speakers and Zoroastrians because of the popularity of the *Šahnāme*, older versions of this myth can be found in the *Avesta*[6] and in the Middle Persian literature.[7] In fact, the terms *Fereydūn* and *Zahhāk* are developments of the Avestan *θraetaona* '*Θraetaona* (mythical hero)' and *Aži Dahāka* 'dragon *Dahāka*' whose rivalry is also expressed in the Yasna 9.8:

*yō janaṯ ažīm dahākəm*
*θrizafanəmθrikamərəðəm*
*xšuuaš.ašīm hazaŋrā.yaoxštīm*
*ašaojaŋhəm daēuuīm drujəm*
*ayəm gaēθāuuiiō druuaṇtəm*
*yąm ašaojastəmąm drujəm*
*fraca kərəṇtaṯ aŋrō mainiiuš*
*aoi yąm astuuaitīm gaēθąm*
*mahrkāi ašahe gaẽθanąm*

(*Θraetaona*) who slew the dragon *Dahāka*,
having three mouths, three heads,
six eyes, a thousand skills,
the very powerful demonic Deceit,[8]
evil for living beings, deceitful,
whom the Destructive Force whittled forth

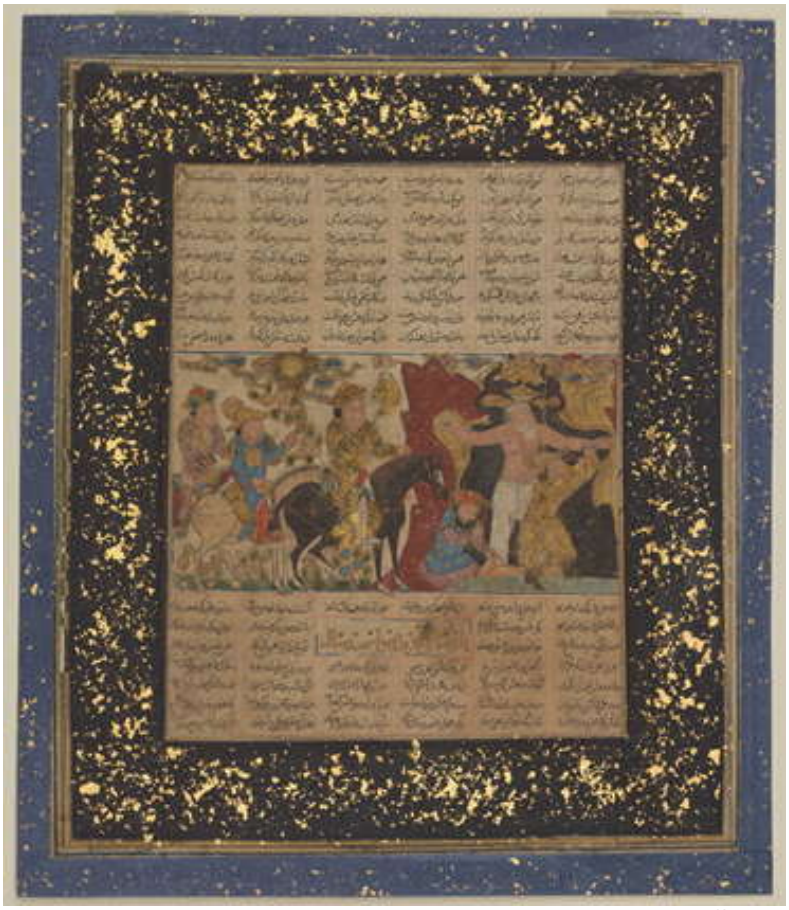

**Fig. 2: "The tyrant Zahhak is imprisoned under Mount Damavand,"*Šāhnāme*, ca. 1300. Details of iconography confirm that production was after the Mongol invasions of Iran and Iraq, and the establishment of Ilkhanid rule in 1258. © The Trustees of the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, Per 104.3.**

as the most powerful Deceit
against the existence which (is) corporeal,
for the destruction of the living beings of Truth.

In the Yasna 9.8, *Aži Dahāka* is depicted as a concrete threat for the material world and humanity. In particular, this dragon is an expression of the Indo-Iranian myth of the dragon which is associated with "the idea of an evil, foreign king ruling over the Iranians." (Daryaee 2020 : p 109).

Another Iranian myth including Mount Damāvand in its scenery is that of *Āraš-e Kamāngir* ('*Āraš* the archer') which is found in the Yašt 8.6 and "in certain Middle Persian texts, and later in *Shāhnāmeh*, *Vīso Ramīn*, Balʿami's translation of Tabari's *Tārīkh*, and a number of other early texts" (Hanaway 1998 : p. 556). The story goes: *Āraš-e Kamāngir* was the champion Iranian bowman who climbed

a mountain and shot an arrow eastward to mark the border between Iran and Turan.[9] By being portrayed as the saviour from the tyranny of *Afrāsiyāb*, a mythical king of Turan, *Āraš-e Kamāngir* was embodying political hopes of a better future for Iranians.[10] The mountain which *Āraš-e Kamāngir* climbed has been identified with different peaks of the region in the various textual sources, nevertheless, Bałami associated it with Mount Damāvand.[11]

The versions of the myth of *Fereydūn* and *Zahhāk* and that of *Āraš-e Kamāngir* described above confer to Mount Damāvand the meaning of a stronghold against external threats and a place of defence of the Iranian national identity.

## Glorification of the past and dissidence

Between the 19th and 20th centuries, literature celebrating the pre-Islamic era was widely disseminated in Iran. It provided a framework to the Iranian nationalists for the glorification of the mythical past of Iran in contrast to the decline caused by the Islamic conquest. By being included into the mainstream discourse, Zoroastrianism acquired symbolic power and became representative of the Iranian identity. The *Šhāhnāme* was one of the key texts of this literary revival and "provided valuable semantic and symbolic resources for dissociating Iran from Islam and for fashioning an alternative basis of identity" (Tavakoli-Targhi 2001 : pp 97-98). This epic contributed to the process of *othering* Islam and to form the national identity in which Mount Damāvand became one of its defining symbols.


**Fig. 3: "Teheran, the capital of Persia," The Illustrated London News, 1873. This illustration depicts a Zoroastrian dokhma or Tower of Silence in the foreground with Mount Damavand in the background. © Archives and Special Collections of SOAS, University of London, MCA/01/03/07.**

As a result of the revival of texts glorifying the pre-Islamic period, the poetry of the time took on a character of nationalism and fed into the construction of the narrative celebrating the past. An expression of this poetry is the poem *Damāvandiyeh* ('On Damāvand') which depicts Mount Damāvand in its nationalistic fashion. It was composed in 1922 by Mohammad Taqi Bahar (1886-1951), who is considered one of the poets of the Constitutional revolution (1906-1911) together with Ali-Akbar Dehkhoda, Iraj Mirza and Mirzadeh Eshqi.[12] In the first verses of his poem, also known as *Enchained White Demon*, Bahar addresses the volcano in the following way:

*Ey div-e sepid-e pāyidar band,*
*Eygonbad-e giti, ey Damāvand[...]*

O white giant with feet in chains
O dome of the world, O Damāvand[…][13]

In his poem, Bahar urges Mount Damāvand "to burst open on the Iranian capital and destroy its sinful inhabitants" (Amanat 2017 : pp 442-443) like the volcanic fire did for Sodom and Pompeii. In these verses, the white cap of Mount Damāvand and its prominence are evoked by the author as symbols of power and dominance over the evil rule which, in this case, was associated with the emerging dictator of that time, who was Reẓā Šāh Pahlavī (1878-1944).

In the following years, Mount Damāvand increasingly became a symbol of resistance and political activism. Sa'id Soltanpur (1940-1981), who was one of the militant poets using Persian poetry as a form of dissidence, composed the poem *Prison Lyric*. In his work, Soltanpur evokes the image of Mount Damāvand to support his struggle with the lines "You're of a mind that I stand alone, I'm of a mind that Mt. Damāvand stands behind me." (Alavi 2013: p 142). *Prison Lyric* is considered to be an expression of resistance literature and represents a good example of how Iranian poets were using their work as a form of commitment to political activism.[14]

## Depository of lost knowledge

The revival of pre-Islamic literature in Iran also had a significant impact among the Zoroastrians of India (henceforth Parsis).[15] The dominant position of the Persian language in India, which was enjoying the status of *lingua franca* until 1835, drove a significant development of Persian print in the country. In the light of the dissemination of Persian literature in India, the Parsis were harking back to the glory of their ancestry in Iran.[16]

In that period, India was under the British rule and the construction of a national identity was an ongoing process as well. Although the Parsis enjoyed a privileged position by being the main business partners of the British, the Westernisation process

had its challenges for them, too. In particular, the Christian missionary John Wilson was attacking Zoroastrianism in an attempt to convert Parsis to Christianity. Furthermore, the introduction of Western education exposed the Parsis to European scholastic subjects and to a more secular way of living. In particular, Orientalist scholarship started to engage with the *Avesta* and the emerging philological discoveries shook the religious certainty of the Parsis.

In this context, Behramshah Naoroji Shroff (1858-1927), a Parsi from Surat, started the spread of an esoteric interpretation of Zoroastrianism called *Ilme Kṣnum* 'Science of Blissing'. Shroff, who soon gained a good number of followers, claimed to have been initiated to such esoteric knowledge by spending three years and half with the *Sāheb Delān* 'Master-Hearts,'[17] who were living in a secluded colony in Mount Damāvand.[18]

Analysed in its historical context, the religious debate on the interpretation of the *Avesta* was dominated by Western philology. The introduction of *Ilme Kṣnum* offered to Parsis an alternative characterised by an esoteric approach and revealed knowledge. As a consequence, Mount Damāvand began to symbolise the place where hidden Zoroastrian knowledge lay. In the dedication note to his first book *jarthośtī dharm samajavā māṭe ilme kṣnumnī cāvī ('The key of Ilme Kṣnum to understand the Zoroastrian religion')*, published in Surat in 1911, Shroff writes:

> Pyārāṃ irān vatanmāṃ jarthośtī daenno surya ast thayo ane jarthośtī vighākaḷā ane dharmnāṃ pustako parāgaṃde thayāṃ, tathā mahān jarthośtī rājy gum thai gayuṃ ane pratāpī jarthośtī prajā ek muṭṭhībhar kommāṃ samāi gai-evo sīhā jarvān yāne jamāno āvatāṃ pahelāṃ je duraṃdeś sāhebo jarthośtī daennāṃ bīj laine gophenaśīn thayā te sāleko […]
>
> In the beloved motherland Iran, the dusk of the Zoroastrian soul took place. The Zoroastrian education and the religious books were destroyed, the great Zoroastrian state went lost and the illustrious Zoroastrian nation was swallowed into a handful community. Before the advent of the dark times or such age, the foresighted masters, having taken the seed of the Zoroastrian soul, went living in the mountain [Damāvand].[19]

In this passage, Shroff builds on the themes of the nostalgia of origin, national identity, and the glorification of the past in contraposition with the decline triggered by the Islamic rule. Moreover, he adds the dynamism of the *Sāheb's* who hid in Mount Damāvand in order to preserve the seminal knowledge of Zoroastrianism. The contribution of Shroff to the meaning-making of Mount Damāvand was significant and introduced an epistemic layer to this symbol.

The mystical journey of Shroff to Mount Damāvand became the first of a set of travels that can be framed within a return narrative. An example is that of Rustom Nazoomie who, Nanabhay Framji Mama maintains, after having visited the same community of hidden Zoroastrian masters in Mount Damāvand became a distinguished astrologer in Iran.[20] Furthermore, in the 1960s, a Parsi from Mumbai, Minocher Nusserwanji Pundol (1908-1975), claimed to have been in touch with the

hidden masters of Mount Damāvand. The story goes that Pundol was able to perform spiritual flights to that colony where he got initiated into esoteric Zoroastrianism.

While the mystical travels of Shroff, Nazoomie and Pundol to Mount Damāvand were all meant to recover a lost knowledge, their narratives include an element of exclusivity: the secluded community of Zoroastrian masters is visible only to predestined spiritually advanced individuals.

The return narrative is found also in the literature produced by Iranians in diaspora. An example is the case of the Iranian journalist Gelareh Asayesh who migrated to the US after the revolution in 1979. In her *Saffron Sky*, published in 1999, Asayesh recounts how the peaks of MountDamāvand powerfully evoke the land of the pre-Islamic ancestors when travelling back to Iran (Darznik 2008 : p 59). In the same way, for Iranians in London, whose construction of identity may also dissociate from Islam, Mount Damāvand is one of the "extremely popular symbols of secular nationalism" (Gholami 2015 : p 90) by being reproduced as an element of the Iranian material culture.

## Rituals Performance and Displacement

In the present times, Mount Damāvand still evokes the pre-Islamic past for those who live in Iran. The Zoroastrians of Iran, who are nowadays reduced to a community of less than 20,000 individuals,[21] visit regularly Mount Damāvand, where priests perform *Jashan* ceremonies.[22]

Nevertheless, the volcanic mountain has symbolic value also for Iranians who do not profess the Zoroastrian religion. The anthropologist Abe, in his ethnographic work performed between 2009 and 2011, found that Mount Damāvand is part of the material culture of environmentalists as a site of social memory. During his fieldwork, he found a poster of the mountain hanged on a wall of an NGO office. For those environmentalists, Mount Damāvand embodies the hope of the "return to the "height of civilisation" that […] ancient Iranians enjoyed" (Abe 2012: p 270). The volcano still represents a form of dissidence, but this time against the consequences of modernisation on the natural environment.[23]

Mount Damāvand is an essential component of material culture also among the Parsis of India.[24] Framed pictures of Mount Damāvand, also informally known as Damāvand *Koh*,[25] are often hung on the walls of Parsi houses, offices and public halls. From the end of the 20$^{h}$ century on, Parsis began organised tours from India to Iran. Groups usually composed by ten or twenty Parsis are led by one or more Zoroastrian priests to visit their lost motherland. Tours last between two or three weeks and one of the most important stops is certainly Mount Damāvand.

During their visits to Mount Damāvand, Parsi priests perform a *Jashan* ceremony, like their Iranian counterparts do. For the Zoroastrians of India visiting Mount Damāvand could be a touching experience to the point that "seeing it with one's own eyes made tears of joy well into them" (Dadrawala 1997 :p 40). Some

**Fig. 4: A group of Parsi priests (Er. Parvez Bajan, Er. Adil Bhesania, Er. Kerman Sukhia, Er. Mehernosh Tata, Er. Ruzan Tata and Er. Shahzad Tata) performing a Jashan ceremony in the foothills of Mount Damavand, 2016.**
**© Courtesy of Ervad Parvez Minocher Bajan.**

Parsis also claim to have experienced miraculous events when visiting the volcano. These experiences include the perception of a "spiritual energy that seemed to pervade the atmosphere" (Dadrawala 1997 :p 99), meeting with shepherds who then inexplicably disappear in a heartbeat, the perception of divine presences and visions of flying beings. Blissand mystery are essential parts of the experience that Parsis have when going to Mount Damāvand.

Drawing upon the methodological approach developed by the American historian of religions Jonathan Z. Smith,[26] sacred places can be defined by the combination of story, ritual and place. The myths found in the Zoroastrian literature, together with the performance of *Jashan* ceremonies *in situ*, fully place Mount Damāvand in the Zoroastrian sacred topography. Furthermore, considering that they physically travel to the mountain, the journeys of Zoroastrians to Mount Damāvand can be considered real pilgrimages.[27] As is common among pilgrimages of other religions and traditions, themes such as the grief for the decline and loss of the motherland, stories of occasional miraculous events, and the idea of the return to restore the national identity are all elements which characterise the journeys of the Parsis.[28]

## Conclusions

The meaning-making of Mount Damāvand has its root in the Indo-Iranian mythology, where the volcano has been portrayed as a symbol of national identity against foreign rule. During the 19th and 20th centuries, the values and beliefs associated with this symbol have served the Iranian nationalism in the process of *othering* the ruling power. By conferring meaning associated with pre-Islamic past, the volcano acquired the semiotic functions of re-appropriation of national identity and political activism. In the same way, Mount Damāvand offered inspiration to Iranians in the diaspora and to the Zoroastrians in India. In fact, the narrative of the return to the motherland was common to these communities. In particular, for the Parsis, this narrative involved mystical travels which enabled spiritually advanced individuals to recover the lost knowledge. In colonial India, the episteme became the weapon to defend the borders of the foundational constituent of Parsi identity: the Zoroastrian religion.

Mount Damāvand as a symbol represents the primordial struggle between Good and Evil in a twofold fashion characterised by a fixed and a mutable aspect. On the one hand, the immutable side of this symbol is the representation of the Good or the authentic *self*. On the other hand, the mutable side corresponds with the Evil or the *other*. In effect, this adaptable side has offered the opportunity to adjust the semiotic functions of Mount Damāvand to the different forms of Evil or*others* at any given time: *Afrāsiyāb*, Islam, Reẓa Šāh Pahlavī and the colonial West, among others.

The versatile semiotic values of Mount Damāvand have helped to form the vision of an aspirational reality which can replace the turmoil of one's current situation. The means of transmission of this symbol evolved to include the tangible material objects, such as posters and framed pictures, in addition to the allegory of myths and oral traditions. In a similar fashion, the aspirational reality embedded in the myths and depicted by the stories of the mystical travels has progressively materialised, as Zoroastrians physically journey to the mountain.

Mount Damāvand is an example of how symbols are resources which individuals, across the millennia, can draw upon to further their inspiration and ultimately lead to action. The meanings are transferred into the material world where rituals and spiritual experiences enable the *self* to overcome the *other*, as *Θraetaona* did with *Aži Dahāka*.

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1. For further information see the Global Volcanism Program of the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History https://volcano.si.edu/volcano.cfm?vn=232010 (accessed: June 24, 2020).
2. See https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/5278/ (accessed: June 24, 2020).
3. Tafażżolī and Hourcade 1993. pp. 627-631.
4. The Avestan term *yazata* 'worthy of being worshipped' proceeds from the verbal

root *yaz* 'to worship' and refers to Zoroastrian divine entities.

5. Dabash 2019. pp. 123-124; Ferdowsi 2016. p. 63.
6. It can be found in Yasna 9, Yašts 5 and 19, and Vīdēvdād 1.
7. It can be found in the *Greater Bundahišn*, the *Dādestān ī Mēnōg ī Xrad*, the *Dēnkard*, and the *Jāmāsp Nāmag*.
8. The occurrence of *daēuuīm drujYm* is problematic and is interpreted in different ways by scholars of Avestan. I am translating *daēuuīm* as acc. sg. f. of the adjective *daēuuī-* 'demonic' qualifying the feminine noun *druj-* 'Deceit'.
9. Turan is a historic geographical region in Central Asia.
10. Katouzian 2009. p. 21.
11. Tafażżolī and Hanaway 1986. pp. 266-267.
12. Alavi 2013. p. xiii.
13. Bahar 1984. pp. 356-358.
14. Alavi 2013. pp. 23-24, 141-142.
15. After the Islamic conquest which marked the end of the Sasanian Empire, Zoroastrians were persecuted. Between the 8th and 10th centuries, groups of Zoroastrians fled to the north-west of India, where they established and flourished. According to the census conducted in 2011, the Parsi community is composed by 57,264 individuals and is considered the largest Zoroastrian community in the world.http://www.censusindia.gov.in/2011census/C-series/C-05/DDW-0000C-05.xlsx (accessed: June 20, 2020).
16. Tavakoli-Targhi 2001. pp. 77-112.
17. Parsis refer to them as *Ābed Sāheb* 'Devout Master,' too.
18. For a biography of Shroff see Mama 1944, Master-Moos 1981 and Hathiram 2013.
19. Shroff 1911. pp. 1-2.
20. Mama 1944. pp. 13-14.
21. Stausberg 2015. p. 187.
22. *Jashan* ceremonies are thanksgiving, celebratory or commemorative rituals that can be performed in special occasions in public or private venues. Iranian Zoroastrians performing rituals at Mount Damāvand are commonly portrayed in local news: http://amordad6485.blogfa.com/post/4785 (accessed: June 27, 2020); http://www.hamazoor.com/persian/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=5169 (accessed: June 27, 2020).
23. Abe 2012. pp. 270-273.
24. This paragraph is based on data which I have collected during my fieldwork carried out between October 2019 and March 2020.
25. This term is of Persian origin and means 'mountain.'
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# A Tale of Two Zs:
# An Overview of the Reformist and Traditionalist Zoroastrian Movements

Pablo Vazquez

ABSTRACT

*This essay's aim is to elucidate the main points of contention between the Reformist and Traditionalist movements that hold much sway in modern Zoroastrianism. "Religions are born and grow within fluid and ever-changing socio-political and cultural context"[1] and Zoroastrianism is no exception to this observation, especially as one of the world's oldest continuously practiced religions. However, the Reformist/Traditionalist divide is a recent development in Zoroastrianism's rather long history, having become a matter of consequence only after the arrival of European missionaries in the 1820s[2]. In order to explore their main points of contention, I begin with an exploration of the Reformist argument over the last 200 years through its history. This traces a path of the development and substance of Reformist thought from its origins in European missionary activity to how it expresses itself internationally in the present day, which as of the time of the most recent edition of this writing is 2020 CE. Following this is a section exploring the Traditionalist movement, which itself developed as a response to the growing Reformist movement of the 1800s onwards. It provides the counter argument and explores its own historical development and shows how it has maintained itself as rather uniquely Parsi movement. The concluding section reiterates the main points of contention espoused by both the Reformist and Traditionalist movements and speculates as to the future of the religion regarding these unique viewpoints within it.*

## The Reformist Movement

The beginnings of the Reformist movement can be traced back to a major event that still reverberates throughout modern expressions of Zoroastrianism: The arrival

of Rev. John Wilson to Bombay in the 1820s. His attacks and arguments against Zoroastrianism in his monumental work *The Parsi Religion as contained in the Zand Avesta and propounded and defended by the Zoroastrians of India and Persia, unfolded, refuted and contrasted with Christianity* were a "massive cultural shock" to the Parsis, who proceeded to blame the Zoroastrian clergy and their lack of Western acculturation and education[3]. For decades following Rev. Wilson's attacks and charges of dualism, polytheism, falsehood, and dead ritual towards the Parsis, Zoroastrians wrestled with what was to be done to cause a cessation of the theological evisceration. The arrival of the philologist Martin Haug provided a major impetus towards the development of the Reformist movement, especially with the publication of his 1862 work*Essays on the Sacred Language, Writings and Religion of the Parsees*. In this work and other essays and lectures[4], Haug argued that the *Gathas* preached a pure monotheism "untouched by the speculation of later ages" and were the only works that could be credited to Zarathushtra[5]. He further asserted that the "prophetic author" of the *Gathas* did not teach a religion of rituals and superstition[6] and that the Parsis should reject "priestly speculation"[7]in order to return to the purity of the original text. This "return to the *Gathas*" approach and the striking proclamation of Zoroastrianism as a non-ritualistic monotheism have become the core tenants of Reformist movement.

The earliest noted Parsi pioneer of the Reformist movement was Khurshedji Rustamji Cama, a Western-educated businessman who at the time considered the status of education amongst the Zoroastrian clergy to be deplorable[8] and established schools and societies to educate the whole of the Parsi community in Avestan and Pahlavi[9], along with promoting a general education of the religion[10]. However, if any figure is to be viewed as the ideological and spiritual founder of the Reformist movement, it would be DasturManeckji Nusserwanji Dhalla, who was sponsored by K.R. Cama and received a Western education[11]. This High Priest of Karachi was heavily opposed to excessive ritualization including the use of the Towers of Silence and supported a revitalized conversion movement declaring it "the thread on which hangs the very existence of this microscopic community"[12]. Labeled as the "Protestant Dastur" by the Traditionalists, Dhalla declared Zoroastrianism to be the first ethical monotheism and the highest point in the spiritual ladder of religious development[13], which was highly reminiscent of Protestant Bible study, the now-discredited evolutionary theory of religion, and popular theological thinking at the time[14]. He cast aside many of the Pahlavi writings and chose to focus on the Gathas, furthering his teachings that the writings on the afterworlds were actually about states of mind, not spiritual destinations after death, and that the laws of purity should not be centered or stressed[15]. His followers would go on to reject many if not all forms of ritualization and the liturgical use of Avestan, considered a dead language by the Reformist movement, despite Dastur Dhalla's own devotional objections to ridding the religion of its non-Gathic elements[16]. In Iran, under the influence of Zoroastrian scholar and Dhalla admirer Ebrahim Pourdavoud, Zoroastrianism began

to further Westernize and align itself to modern Western ideas of ethics and rationalism[17] but would not encounter a rise in the influence of the Reformist movement until the latter half of the 20th century.

These very arguments formulated by Dastur Dhalla and carried on by his followers have been essential cores of the Reformist movement up to the present day with modern inheritors of the movement developing these concerns in new fashions. One major example is the case of Dr. Ali Akbar Jafarey, the late founder of the Zarathushtrian Assembly and an Iranian convert to Zoroastrianism who considered Dastur Dhalla his spiritual teacher. Considered anathema and heavily despised by the Traditionalist movement, Jafarey began his reformist teachings in Tehran, having to flee to the United States due to the Islamic Revolution[18]. Jafarey declared the *Gathas* to be the only worthy canon of Zoroastrianism and furthermore considered these ritual poems to be aligned to modern politically progressive thought. He viewed them as teaching an ethics of egalitarianism and liberalism[19] with an ideal democracy embodied by the concept of "*Vohu Khshathra Vairya*" which he translates as "Good Domain Worthy of Choice"[20]. Jafarey's Zarathushtrian Assembly has been the most successful Reformist organization in the modern era, welcoming hundreds of converts internationally yearly and has had a massive influence on Iranian and Kurdish Zoroastrianism[21]. Another modern example is a rationalist-deistic Zoroastrian movement that views Zarathushtra solely as a philosopher, pushing Reformist ideas to an extreme that is nonetheless tolerated in Reformist communities. An intellectual leader of this movement is Kersee Kabraji, a Parsi engineer whose book *Rationalism in Zoroastrianism* is a common sight wherever Zoroastrians of a Reformist inclination sell their literature. Kabraji establishes an implied authority early on in his text through forewords by both His Holiness the Dalai Lama, the acknowledged head of the Tibetan Buddhist community, and Baron Karan Bilimoria, a Zoroastrian member of the British House of Lords and founder of Cobra Beer[22]. He also immediately acknowledges the debt he owes to Dastur Dhalla in his preface alongside Dr. Richard Dawkins, the controversial evolutionary biologist, stating that the latter helped him realize that there is "no personal god" and that Zarathushtra's teachings were a "rational way of life" supported by a god of logic[23]. Kabraji states that by following this rationalist version of Zoroastrianism, one can have great success in their lives like the Tata and Wadia families of successful industrial fame and that in the 21st century "blind faith" will vanish[24]. Of particular interest are the mentions of his gratitude for the support and advice from the Association for Revival of Zoroastrianism, a Reformist organization which in 2017 established the Dagdah Asha Vahishta fire temple in Pune which is open to all Zoroastrians including converts and notably espouses Reformist teachings[25].

## The Traditionalist Movement

If the Reformist movement can be said to be a reaction to interactions with Western thought, the Traditionalist movement is a response to that reaction as a sort of "conservative backlash"[26]. This idea of a "backlash", however, is countered by adherents of the Traditionalist movement and even by some academics who hold that it is nothing more than a continuation of practices and beliefs which stand against the Reformist innovators seeking to change the religion. Suffused by an ethno-centric closed perspective that believes that Zoroastrianism is "inborn and cannot be acquired"[27], the Traditionalist movement rejects many of the key points of the Reformist movement wholesale including gender egalitarianism[28], conversion[29], the *Gathas*-centric approach, intermarriage, and the rejection of ritual[30]. The beginnings of this Traditionalist approach derive from responses to Rev. Wilson in defense of the faith, yet it did not develop into what it is today until the late 1800s and through further Western interaction. The arrival of the Theosophists in Bombay after the transfer of their headquarters from New York City in 1879[31] and their interactions with the local Parsi community can be considered to be the genesis of the modern Traditionalist movement. These Theosophists, emphasizing an esoteric, perennialist, and occultist approach to religion, encouraged the Zoroastrians to preserve their rituals and supernatural beliefs. They further pushed the Parsis to reject Western scholarship and notions of reform, referring to Zoroastrianism as resting on the "rock of truth, the living rock of Occult Science" which they saw as being concordant with discoveries of modern science at the time[32]. This drew much agreement from the developing Traditionalist movement which saw their own views confirmed of the supremacy and mystical nature of Zoroastrianism. However, after the departure of the Theosophists from Bombay, a hunger for arguments in support of the now-perceived mystical foundation of Zoroastrianism developed which was filled by Behramshah Shroff's *Ilm-e Kshnoom* movement. Shroff claimed to have learned the secret truths of Zoroastrianism from hidden spiritual masters who lived under Iran's Mount Damavand[33], where it is claimed that he entered fully illiterate but returned a master orator with a deep grasp of occult knowledge and even Hindu Ayurvedic medicine[34]. While heavily Theosophical in its emphasis on the metaphysical vibratory power of Avestan prayers, the supernatural effects and ethical nature of vegetarianism, and other mystical teachings, Shroff attributed his learning not to Tibetan masters in the Himalayas as the Theosophists had done but rather to ancient Iranian masters in the Alborz mountain range, which coincided with a "return to Iran" attitude prevalent among Parsi circles at the time[35].

Shroff's followers and admirers went on to have a major influence in the development of the Traditionalist movement, with Framroz Sorabji Chinivala being noted for being quite prolific in his writings and whose still-popular book *Nikiz-I Veh-Daen: An Exposition of the Good Religion* explores various Avestan and Pahlavi texts through an esoteric and symbolic perspective[36]. Phiroze Shapurji Masani,

writing in 1917, added a new element to Traditionalist theology by claiming that the whole *Avesta* was written by Zarathushtra, that chanting the sacred manthras was essential to the development of mind, body, and soul, and that Zoroastrianism was only for those souls who were at the highest stage of spiritual progress[37]. He further argued that the purity laws and rituals of the faith, which were mostly rejected by the Reformist movement, aided in the soul's progress and as such were essential for any devout Zoroastrian's spiritual development[38]. Later writers, including a Mr. Dastoor in 1984, would go on to emphasize Zoroaster's worshipful divinity as a yazata, a concept common in the Zoroastrianism of ancient and Pahlavi times revived within the Traditionalist milieu which now fit contemporary Indian philosophy reminiscent of the Hindu idea of the "avatar". These writers would continue to clamor against non-Zoroastrians entering fire temples and being involved in any aspect of the faith due to their spiritual impurity which could affect the spiritual progress of natural-born Zoroastrians[39]. Even critics of the *Ilm-e Kshnoom* movement have been influenced by the mystical movement as many of its ideas have become rather the norm in the Traditionalist movement. For example, Dastur Kurshed Shapurji Dabu, an esteemed and respected High Priest in the Parsi community in the mid-20th century, embraced vegetarianism, asceticism, devotional to a personal God, reincarnation, and esoteric interpretations of Zoroastrian cosmology and mythology, along with stressing that Hinduism and Zoroastrianism were "cousins" and his teachings were rather consistent with traditional Indian religious philosophy. Such connections and teachings make the Traditionalist movement a stringently Parsi one with little influence outside of Parsi communities.

However, despite being rather Parsi ethno-centric, the Traditionalist movement thrives online where some of its major voices and influencers hold sway among interpretations of the faith among an international audience of believers, sympathizers, and observers alike. The internet is proclaimed as an avenue by some Traditionalist adherents to "expose fakes, charlatans, fake-scholars, and ignorant idiots" through debate, attacks and ridicule, and the direct presentation of the Traditionalist argument[40]. The bastion of the Traditionalist movement online is a website established in 1996 known as *The World of Traditional Zoroastrianism.* This massive virtual project collects the works of various figures past and present involved in the Traditionalist movement with the website declaring that it seeks to protect the "spiritual strength…and the ethnic identity of the Zarathushtri Aryans" through a supernatural belief in the power of the scriptures as ethical and ritual tools of the utmost power[41]. Offering a newsletter known as *The Parsee Voice,* the website also has article upon article of every possible topic of interest to the Traditionalist movement, especially refutations of Reformists' arguments and pillars of thought. The website is not shy about its connection and promotion not just of the Kshnoomist teachings, but also of other mystical and Traditionalist-leaning matters including the Pundol Group's teachings, hagiographies of Zoroastrian saints, and even a Zoroastrian historical ethno-romance called *The Saga of the Aryans*[42]. The website is linked

consistently in online communities and promoted by prominent figures and organizations in the Parsi community not just in India but also internationally. Its spread can be likely attributed to the website having all its writings in English which allows for an international readership. Another voice of the Traditionalist movement, albeit notably controversial, is Khojeste Mistree, a former student of the well-respected scholar of Zoroastrianism Dr. Mary Boyce. Mistree founded his Zoroastrian Studies Foundation in the mid-20th century as a Traditionalist revitalization movement which has now gone international and promotes a strong maintenance of the boundaries advocated for by Traditionalists[43]. In a fascinating case of the unexpected influence of Western scholarship on the development of the religious thinking of a movement that is established as mostly rejecting Western influence, Mistree is adamant that Zoroastrianism is solely an ethnic religion and uses the work of Dr. Boyce to solidify his claims in this area[44]. Mistree has, unlike many other Traditionalist figures, lauded the modern state of Zoroastrian studies at Western universities, pointing towards SOAS, University of London in particular as upholding a Traditionalist viewpoint in its teaching methods[45]. Mistree is not without detractors on both sides, however, with Reformists and Traditionalists alike viewing him with disdain. This can especially be seen online where adherents of both movements can be seen sharing videos ridiculing him while also attempting to catch him committing some sort of blasphemy[46].

## Conclusion

This essay's purpose has been to provide the reader with an overview of the history and arguments of the Reformist and Traditionalist movements which have driven Zoroastrian theology, praxis, and discussion from the 1800s to modern day. History has shown that both have deep roots in European interpretations of Zoroastrianism and developed through attempts to take those very interpretations and elaborate on them within a uniquely Zoroastrian and particularly Parsi context. The inclusion of modern examples of the movements has aimed to show that these ideas are still relevant within Zoroastrianism internationally and have continued to influence the perception of the religion among believers and observers alike. Zoroastrianism is not a monolith, but rather a diverse and multi-faceted religion with varied schools of thought including the two major ones mentioned in this essay. In fact, some scholars believe it would be better to refer to Zoroastrianism not in the singular as defining a monolithic and monocultural Zoroastrianism that simply does not exist, but as Zoroastrian "communities", "beliefs and practices", or even "Zoroastrianisms" in the plural[47]that better reflect the truth of Zoroastrianism historically and in modern day. While this has been a mere overview of the Reformist and Traditionalist movements, the complexity of the Zoroastrian faith means that there are more movements and sub-movements that have existed and currently exist and the future

of Zoroastrianism no doubt will see more debates and discussions pop up as this rather ancient faith makes its way into the 21st century CE.

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