



## BOYCE, MARY

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**BOYCE, Nora Elizabeth Mary** (b. Darjeeling, India, 2 August 1920; d. London, 4 April 2006), scholar of [Zoroastrianism](#) and its relevant languages, and Professor of Iranian Studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) of the University of London ([FIGURE 1](#)).

Mary Boyce was born in India where her father, William H. Boyce, was a High Court Judge in Calcutta. Her mother, Nora, was a granddaughter of the noted historian of the Puritan revolution, Samuel Rawson Gardiner. While she was still young, the family returned to England and she was sent to Wimbledon High School and then to Cheltenham Ladies' College. After a short spell in the Land Army during the early years of the war, she went to Newnham College, Cambridge and read English for Part I of her degree, and Archaeology and Anthropology for Part II, graduating with a double first in 1943. She was taught by Hector Munro Chadwick (1870-1947), a world authority on oral literatures who influenced some of her studies on Parthian minstrelsy mentioned below. Chadwick's wife and collaborator in scholarship, Nora Kershaw Chadwick (1891-1972), had enrolled to study Persian under Professor [Vladimir Minorsky](#) (1877-1966) at SOAS, which had been temporarily relocated to Cambridge during the war, and Boyce followed her lead. Within a year she was appointed Assistant Lecturer in Anglo-Saxon Literature and Archaeology at Royal Holloway College, University of London (1944-46). When SOAS returned to London she went there to study under Walter [Bruno Henning](#) (1908-1967) who encouraged and inspired her to study Old Persian and other ancient Iranian languages.



In 1946 Boyce returned to Cambridge and embarked on her doctoral dissertation on “The Parthian hymn cycles” under the joint supervision of Henning and [Harold W. Bailey](#) (1899-1996). Her research was based on the photographs of the Turfan fragments (see [TURFAN EXPEDITIONS](#)), which Henning had brought from the Prussian Academy of Sciences (Preussische Akademie der Wissenschaften) in Berlin. The documents shed new light on both [Manicheism](#) and the Middle Iranian Languages. The influence of Henning was considerable since he too had studied these fragments. A year later, in 1947, she was appointed to a lectureship in Iranian studies at SOAS. She completed her thesis in 1952, and it was published as *The Manichaean Hymn Cycles in Parthian* two years later.

She also joined a seminar (1949-50) to study the important Sasanian tract, the *Letter of Tansar*. The seminar was directed by Henning and the famous Iranian scholar Mojtaba Minovi (1903-1976) who was at the time working at the BBC (see [GREAT BRITAIN xxiii](#)). Her contribution, an annotated English translation of the text, was published later (Rome, 1968).

After completing her doctorate, she made several visits to Hamburg and Berlin to catalogue the Iranian manuscripts in the [Manichean script](#). They were published as *A Catalogue of the Iranian Manuscripts in Manichean script in the German Turfan Collection* by the Institut für Orientforschung of the Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften (nr. 45, Berlin, 1960). This became a standard work of reference for generations of scholars. Her other contributions should also be noted in this respect: “Some remarks on the present state of the Iranian Manichaean MSS. from Turfan, with additions and corrections to Manichaean hymn-cycles in Parthian,” published in *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Orientforschung* IV, 2, 1956, pp. 314-22. Other articles on Manichean topics include, “Sadwēs and Pēsūs,” *BSOAS* 13/4, 1951, pp. 908-15; “Some Parthian abecedarian hymns,” *BSOAS* 14/3, 1952, pp. 435-50; and “On Mithra in the Manichaean Pantheon,” in *A Locust’s Leg: Studies in Honour of S. H. Taqizadeh*, ed., W. B. Henning and E. Yarshater, London, 1962, pp. 44-54. Two particularly important works are her *A Reader in Manichaean Middle Persian and Parthian*, 1975; and *A Word-List of Manichaean Middle Persian and Parthian*, 1977. In this word-list she used material collected by Henning and generously passed on by his widow, Maria Henning (see Boyce’s “Obituary: Walter Bruno Henning,” *BSOAS* 30/3, 1967, pp. 781-85). Boyce completed her Manichean and Parthian studies in “Parthian Writings and Literature” (pp. 1151-165) and “The Manichaean Middle Persian Writings” (pp. 1196-204), *Camb. Hist. Iran*, 3(2), ed.

E. Yarshater, Cambridge, 1983. Both of these complement her earlier and still valuable discussions of “Middle Persian Literature,” (pp. 31-66) and “The Manichean Literature in middle Iranian,” (pp. 67-76), *Literatur*, HO I.IV.2, Leiden and Cologne, 1968. For the general reader, she wrote a succinct survey in “Old Iranian Literature,” *A Guide to Eastern Literatures*, ed. D. M. Lang, London, 1971, pp. 95-105. The first stage of her career was therefore mainly focused on Manichean and Parthian textual studies, but she had ranged wider with, for example, “A Novel Interpretation of Hafiz,” *BSOAS* 15/2, 1953, pp. 279-88; “Some remarks on the transmission of the Kayanian heroic cycle,” *Serta Cantabrigiensia*, Wiesbaden, 1954, pp. 45-52; and “The Parthian *gōsān* and Iranian Minstrel Tradition,” *JRAS*, 1957, pp. 10-45. She also began to turn her attention to Zoroastrianism and published, for example, “Some Reflections on Zurvanism,” *BSOAS* 29/2, 1957, pp. 104-16 (a review essay of R. C. Zaehner, *Zurvan: a Zoroastrian dilemma*, Oxford, 1955; repr. with a new foreword, New York, 1972). During this stage of her career she was also active in scholarly bodies: she served the *Corpus Inscriptionum Iranicarum* from its inception as secretary and treasurer (1955-70) alongside Henning as chairman; the Council of the Royal Asiatic Society (1956-60, 1965-68) and the editorial board of the journal, *Asia Major* (1962-76).

The turning point in her life was a 12-month study-leave in the Zoroastrian villages around Yazd, notably in Šarifābād in 1963-64. This came soon after her appointment in 1963 as Professor of Iranian Studies at SOAS, succeeding Henning who had moved to Berkeley in California. The overland journey and residence in these remote villages must have been arduous for her since she had recently suffered a painful injury to her back which troubled her for the rest of her life. Till her demise, it compelled her to work while lying on her back and writing everything by hand.

In recognition of her pioneering field-work she was awarded the Burton Gold Medal of the Royal Asiatic Society in 1972, and, in 1985 the Sir Percy Sykes Memorial Medal of the Royal Society of Asian Affairs. By this time she was already an honorary member of the American Oriental Society (1976) and a foreign member of the Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters (1978). Following early retirement she became Professor Emerita and a Professorial Research Associate at SOAS (1982-2006). The Professor Mary Boyce Prize for the study of Asian religions has been instituted by the Royal Asiatic Society in her memory.

Boyce’s field-work transformed her studies in two ways. First, she had studied



ancient texts from a linguistic perspective and, although she did not have a strictly religious upbringing, living with devout Zoroastrians stimulated her interest in the religious aspect of their lives. Second, it transformed her whole perspective of the study and history of the religion. Who, she asked, were likely to have a deeper understanding of the religion, western academics or the devout priests living in a remote spot sequestered from outside influences so that orthodox beliefs and practices were retained for millennia? Boyce also believed it was critical to understand the way traditions were preserved orally. She developed her theory of the continuity of Zoroastrian belief and practice from the time of the prophet right down to modern times. This led her to conclude that modern practices can shed light on obscure ancient texts, including the *Gāthās*. She summed this up in a little-known article published for the Open University program in Britain, “The Continuity of the Zoroastrian Quest,” in *Man’s Religious Quest: a Reader*, ed. W. Foy, London, 1978; repr. 1986, sec. 11.1.17, p. 613: “[I]t has been a weakness in the western study of Zoroastrianism that it has concentrated largely on texts. ... In a purely academic study of religion it is possible to make a subjective choice of what seems significant whereas encounters with a living faith force one to accept its adherents’ own understanding of its essentials, which are likely, moreover, to be embodied in its main observances.” Having studied with devout priests, she came to take a different view of priesthood from that which had dominated Protestant scholarship as exemplified by J. H. Moulton (*Early Zoroastrianism*, Hibbert Lectures, London, 1913, pp. 116-19) who asked: “How are we to classify Zarathushtra [?] ... Was he Prophet and Teacher, or was he Priest? Is the religion of the Gathas practical and ethical, or sacerdotal?” Moulton concluded, “That Zarathushtra is teacher and prophet is written large over every page of the Gathas. He is perpetually striving to persuade men of the truth of a great message, obedience to which will bring them everlasting life. He has a revelation ... There is no room for sacerdotal functions as a really integral part of such a man’s gospel; and of ritual or spells we hear as little as we expect to hear.” Boyce rejected such polarization and saw *Zoroaster* as both teacher and prophet, inspired, as she was, by the priests she encountered in Iran. This view led her to stress both his visionary experience and his training as an Indo-Iranian priest, and to understand the *Gāthās* as in part, at least, meditations on the ritual (see “Zoroaster the Priest,” *BSOAS* 33/1, 1970, pp. 22-38).

After her return from Iran she reflected at length on the significance of what she had witnessed, and produced concomitantly some Parthian and

Manichean studies as well as articles on Iran, including, for example, “The fire-temples of Kerman,” *Acta Orientalia* 30, 1966, pp. 51-72; and “Bibī Shahrībānū and the Lady of Pārs,” *BSOAS* 30/1, 1967, pp. 30-44. However, she began to focus increasingly on the Zoroastrian religion and its rituals, with articles such as “*Ātaš-zōhr* and *āb-zōhr*,” *JRAS*, 1966, pp. 100-18; “On the sacred fires of the Zoroastrians,” *BSOAS* 31/1, 1968, pp. 52-68; “On Mithra’s part in Zoroastrianism,” *BSOAS* 32/1, 1969, pp. 10-34; and “Haoma, priest of the sacrifice,” in *W. B. Henning Memorial Volume*, eds., M. Boyce and I. Gershevitch, London, 1970, pp. 62-80. To complement her knowledge drawn from Iran she also began a fruitful collaboration with Firoze Kotwal, a Parsi High Priest (and temporary lecturer in Zoroastrian rituals, SOAS, 1973) endowed with an encyclopedic knowledge of Zoroastrian liturgy, whence their joint study in two installments on “Zoroastrian *bāj* and *drōn*,” *BSOAS* 34/1-2, 1971, pp. 56-73, 298-313.

The first substantial indicator of Boyce’s grand theory of the continuity of Zoroastrian belief and practice emerged in volume I of her magisterial four-volume, *A History of Zoroastrianism* (hereinafter *HZ*). In *HZ* I (*The Early Period*, HO I.1.2.2A, Leiden, 1975; 3d corr. repr., 1996), Boyce began with a substantial discussion of the pre-Zoroastrian religion (pp. 22-177) which she also believed to be part of that great continuity (except Zoroaster only venerated beings that were *spəntā*). After a discussion of the *haoma* ritual and the *Gāthās*, she concluded (p. 217f.): “There is thus no reliable evidence from the *Gāthās* to set against the tradition and the observance of Zoroaster’s followers, which testify to his maintenance of the blood sacrifice and *haoma* cult, together with the other rites of the ancient Ahuric religion.” Later (p. 223) she wrote, “It seems natural that Zoroaster as priest should have been concerned to give his new doctrines expression in observances, so that belief could declare itself through worship and be sustained by it; and there is no reason therefore to doubt the tradition that attributes to the prophet himself the founding of the feasts later known as *gahāmbārs*” (see [GĀHĀNBĀR](#); cf. her *Zoroastrianism: its antiquity and constant vigour*, 1992, p. 105, for now attributing its founding to Zoroaster’s early followers). Further on in chapter 9 (pp. 229ff.) she argues that the Pahlavi concepts of the two states of *gētīg* and *mēnōg* and the three periods of *Bundahišn* (Creation), *Gumēzišn* (Mixture, i.e., good and evil) and *Wizārišn* (Separation) have their roots in *Gāthic* teaching.

After the publication of *HZ* I, Boyce’s work continued to be focused mainly on religious issues, notably, “Mihragān among the Irani Zoroastrians,” in *Mithraic*



*Studies: Proceedings of the First International Congress of Mithraic Studies*, ed., J. R. Hinnells, I, Manchester, 1975, pp. 69-76; “On Mithra, lord of fire,” *Monumentum H. S. Nyberg*, I, Acta Iranica 4, Tehran and Liège, 1975, pp. 69-76; “On Varuna’s part in Zoroastrianism,” *Mélanges linguistique offerts à Émile Benveniste*, Paris, 1975, pp. 55-64; and “On the Zoroastrian temple cult of fire,” *JAOS* 95/3, 1975, pp. 454-65.

The year 1977 saw the publication of one of her finest works, based on her 1963-64 field-work and entitled *A Persian stronghold of Zoroastrianism*. Presented as the decennial *Ratanbai Katrak Lectures* at the University of Oxford (1975), it is cogently written and reflects concerns that would determine the course of her subsequent studies. In contrast to her earlier Manichean textual studies, every chapter is about religion, including the introductory one, which sets the context in the villages and in local Iranian history, with, for example, the description of the basic diet in relation to festive celebrations (p. 15) and the ensuing exposition of key doctrines. The lives of the villagers are described with compassion and understanding and consistently interpreted in the light of belief and traditional practice to demonstrate how piety permeated every aspect of life, especially the account of the purity laws and, particularly, menstruation (pp. 100-107; see [BINAMĀZI](#)) and the *barašnom-e no-šwa* or ablution of the nine nights (pp. 111-37), part of which Boyce observed personally (pp. 119, 128, 130). This makes for a unique, seminal narrative displaying outstanding sensitivity and insight. A briefer version of this work appeared while she was Paton Visiting Professor at Indiana University (*A last stronghold of traditional Zoroastrianism*, Bloomington, 1977) and was published, along with another public lecture, *Zoroastrianism: the rediscovery of missing chapters in man’s religious history*, Bloomington, 1977, in the *Teaching Aids for the Study of Inner Asia* series.

Boyce was always keen to encourage others to study Zoroastrianism. She was generous with the time she gave to her students, and her tutorials, like those of Henning, could last for hours. She supported, encouraged and where necessary chided all who came to her for help. This enthusiasm was also manifested in her writing, in the two books designed for students: first, her ground-breaking study of Zoroastrianism (*Zoroastrians: their religious beliefs and practices* (London, 1979), weaving the narrative from pre-Zoroastrian times down to the present in both India and Iran thus highlighting her conviction of the continuity of the Zoroastrian tradition. Complementing this textbook was a chrestomathy, again both ancient and modern, so that students

could read the sources for themselves (*Textual Sources for the Study of Zoroastrianism*, Manchester, 1984; repr., Chicago, 1990).

There has been much debate over the religion of the Achaemenid kings (see [ACHAEMENID RELIGION](#)) and determining the first king to become a Zoroastrian. Boyce had no doubts that all of them were Zoroastrians, including the founder, Cyrus the Great (see [CYRUS iii](#)). Thus in *HZ II (Under the Achaemenians*, HO I.1.2.2A, Leiden, 1982; as well as in her “The Religion of Cyrus the Great,” *Proceedings of the London 1985 Achaemenid History Workshop*, eds., A. Kuhrt and H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg, Achaemenid History III, Leiden, 1988, pp. 15-31), she asserts, at her first mention of Cyrus (p. 43), that he “put himself forward as a champion of Zoroastrianism” without adducing any evidence. In reconstructing the religion of the various Achaemenid monarchs she often uses evidence taken from living usage (for example, p. 70, on [Cambyses](#) making offerings for his father’s soul and p. 248 on the calendar observed by [Artaxerxes II](#), 404-358 BCE). In this volume, after discussing the pre-Zoroastrian religion of the Medes (see [MEDIA](#)) and Persians, she dedicates a chapter to each of the Achaemenid monarchs combing not only classical sources but also showing a wide knowledge of the archaeological material relating to each monarch with a particular concern to construct the history of Zoroastrianism in those imperial times. It is the most substantial study of the religion in this period yet written. The successor volume *HZ III (Zoroastrianism under Macedonian and Roman Rule*, HO I.1.2.2, Leiden, 1991), co-written with Frantz Grenet who authored chapters 3 on Susa and Elymais and 7 on Eastern Iran ca. 250-50 BCE, with a contribution by Roger Beck on the Zoroastrian pseudepigrapha, is certainly the largest study undertaken of Zoroastrianism in these two eras. The collaboration with Grenet involved more than two chapters. Each read the other’s manuscript, commented, and often arrived at different conclusions. For example, Boyce rejected the credibility of the Onesicritus story in which the citizens of Bactra (see [BACTRIA](#)) threw their old people outside the city wall to be eaten by dogs, for she found it “unthinkable that in any Zoroastrian community there should have been a practice of allowing the old or the sick to be eaten alive by dogs” because it would go against the doctrine that death is the work of [Ahriman](#) and one should not hasten death and burden one’s soul with sin (p. 7, n. 24). In a footnote, however, Grenet accepts the story citing parallel accounts (but also see p. 377ff., n. 63 where Grenet is credited with changing Boyce’s mind concerning the [Oracle of Hystaspes](#)). What is remarkable about this volume is that Zoroastrianism is studied not only in the Iranian border



territories such as [Gandhara](#) but also in the non-Iranian lands of the former Achaemenid empire including Galatia, [Cappadocia](#) and Pontus, Syria and Egypt. Here also Boyce sees continuity between living practice in Iran and the Zoroastrianism found among Zoroastrians living in Galatia (p. 260) and believes modern practice can illuminate an Achaemenid-era altar found in Cappadocia (p. 265 and pp. 269f., where she sees consistency between Strabo's account of Cappadocian Zoroastrian practice and Zoroastrian practices in modern Iran). When she goes on to discuss Zoroastrian influence on the Jews (*HZ* III, pp. 362-468; also idem, "Persian Religion in the Achaemenid Age," *Camb. Hist. Judaism*, 1, eds., W. Davies and L. Finkelstein, Cambridge, 1984, pp. 279-307) she assumes that the eschatological teaching in the Pahlavi books (see [ESCHATOLOGY i](#)) can be traced back to the prophet not just in structure but also in theological complexity (*HZ* III, pp. 365f.; also "On the antiquity of Zoroastrian apocalyptic," *BSOAS* 47/1, 1984, pp. 57-75; and *Zoroastrianism: a shadowy but powerful presence in the Judaeo-Christian world*, London, 1987).

Boyce is known as one of the chief campaigners for an earlier date for the prophet than the previously common sixth-century dating. The publication that fleshes this out fully is chapter 2 of her *Zoroastrianism: its antiquity and constant vigour*, Costa Mesa, CA, 1992 (hereinafter *ZACV*). It is worth looking at this volume in more detail as it is the last monograph she published based on her five *Columbia Lectures on Iranian Studies*, delivered in 1985 at the Center for Iranian Studies in New York. In the early chapters she summarized her conclusions from *HZ* I and II, and sometimes refined those earlier works and drew out the implications so as to form something of a conclusion to her work. In chapter 1 she dismissed the various legends linking Zoroaster with different places (see [ZOROASTER ii](#)), while in chapter 2 she examined the social conditions implied by the Old Avestan literature, concluding that "The possible chronological limits thus appear to be c. 1500-c. 1200; and a date at the lower limit, i.e. around 1200, seems the most reasonable one to postulate" (*ZACV*, p. 45, and a view she confirmed in the foreword to *Zoroastrians*, 2001, p. xiii), and locating the prophet's homeland as the Inner Asian Steppes (see [AVESTAN GEOGRAPHY](#)). Boyce's views on the date of Zoroaster, which was earlier than what most other scholars of Zoroastrianism had provided, did not enjoy universal acceptance and the debate on the topic continues to this day.

In chapter 3 (*ZACV*, pp. 32-61), Boyce reconstructed the pre-Zoroastrian cosmology and cosmogony (see [COSMOGONY AND COSMOLOGY i](#)) by using mostly the Pahlavi *Bundahišn* alongside some parallels with Vedic thought



because, as she enunciated in *HZ I*, p. 131, she believed that since Zoroaster was a moral thinker inspired by his vision of the divine, he probably accepted existing hypotheses rather than evolving cosmological ideas of his own. In both books, therefore, she sees a great continuity not only within Zoroastrianism but also with pre-Zoroastrian thought. In chapter 4 she takes issue with three recent translators (Humbach, Insler and Kellens) for approaching the *Gāthās* only from a textual perspective and not taking account of the beliefs of Zoroaster's followers (p. 64). In *ZACV*, Boyce emphasizes Zoroaster's priestly training and that the *Gāthās* were meditations on the *Yasnā* he was performing (pp. 64-68) and in which rite, she believed, Zoroaster was involved in animal sacrifice (p. 69). She enthusiastically accepted the *Yasnā Haptaŋhāiti* as a prose liturgical creation of the prophet (*ZACV* pp. 65, 87-94); Narten *apud* Boyce, new foreword to *HZ I*, 3d repr., 1996, p. xiv, and suggested as quite probably so in Narten *apud* Hintze, *BSOAS* 65/1, 2002, p. 32; q.v. Johanna Narten, *Der Yasna Haptaŋhāiti*, Wiesbaden, 1986, p. 126; and Almut Hintze, *A Zoroastrian liturgy: the worship in seven chapters (Yasna 35-41)*, Wiesbaden, 2007, p. 92). And likewise the doctrine of the *Aməša Spəntas* and the detailed eschatology (*ZACV*, p. 76f.) expounded in the Pahlavi literature (see [MIDDLE PERSIAN LITERATURE](#)). She also argued therein that it was Zoroaster who introduced the five times of daily prayer, the *sudra* and *kustī* (*ZACV*, pp. 84-85) and the *gahāmbārs* including *Nowruz* (*ZACV*, pp. 104-05; see [NOWRUZ i](#)). These radical scholarly theories are stated as simple fact rather than being argued for. She did assert the prophet's innovations, notably apocalyptic eschatology and the teaching on the *Mainyus*, especially the heptad, and the exaltation of *Ahura Mazdā* to the exalted position of primacy over the other spirits, or gods, such as *Mithra*. But she saw the cult of the *fravašis* as perhaps a deviation from Zoroaster's teaching (*ZACV*, pp. 106-7, the reference to the *fravašis* in *Y. 37.3* she argues, p. 91, is an interpolation; also *idem*, "The Absorption of the *Fravašis* into Zoroastrianism," *AOASH* 58/1-2, 1995 [1996], pp. 25-36). She justifies her view of the great continuity of the prophet's teaching by pointing out that as the religion was confined mainly to the Iranians it did not have to make great adjustments to the faiths of other races (*ZACV*, pp. 107, 112-16 where she stresses continuity in the *Yašts* which others such as Zaehner and Gershevitch have seen as backsliding into paganism, although she allows for a little of that). Boyce explains the continuity with pre-Zoroastrian tradition especially the *Yazatas* since the prophet altered the concepts only in so far as they were not to be venerated as independent deities but as evocations or agents of *Ahura Mazdā* (p. 111). The purity laws of the *Vendidād*, she argues, are based on Zoroaster's dualistic



conception of the world (p. 118). The narrative in the Pahlavi book *Ardā Virāz Nāmag*, she presumes (p. 119), belongs to the early days of the religion. Her conclusion on the Younger Avesta is that “it appears in essentials strikingly faithful to the doctrines and vision of its founder” (p. 121). She also gave her current views on the problem of the Zoroastrian calendars (ZACV, pp. 108-10 and associated notes). It was something on which she had published in “On the calendar of Zoroastrian feasts,” *BSOAS* 33/3, 1970, pp. 513-39 which thesis she herself refuted in her last articles, “Further on the Calendar of Zoroastrian Feasts,” *Iran* 53, 2005, pp. 1-38; and “Preliminary note by Professor Mary Boyce to Agha Homayoun Sanati’s translation of her article ‘On the Calendar of Zoroastrian Feasts,’” *Ātaš-e dorun, The Fire Within: Jamshid Soroush Soroushian Memorial Volume II*, eds., Carlo Cereti and Farrokh Vajifdar, Bloomington, IN, 2003, pp. 57-61.

In her chapter on “The religion of empires” (ZACV, pp. 125-148) she stresses the continuity of tradition through the Achaemenids, as evidenced especially by Darius and in the Greek literature (see [GREECE vi](#)), although she asserts one major change and that was the introduction of fire temples under Babylonian influence (pp. 128-29; see [BABYLONIA ii](#)), and sees the continuity going through the Parthian period (p. 133). Her sadly unfinished *HZ IV* (With Albert de Jong, *Parthian Zoroastrianism*, 2 vols., HO, Leiden, *forthcoming*) will continue the narrative down to the end of the Arsacid period. The major change she sees in the Sasanian period was the emergence of a written form of the orally transmitted Avesta although she argues this affected only the learned priestly classes (ZACV, pp. 133-35). But she also sees some liturgical developments as the scholar-priests studied the *Avesta*, for example, the *Vendidād* service performed between midnight and dawn, that is in the *Ušahin Gāh*, to ward off the powers of darkness (p. 135) and she believes the priests evolved more prayers and rites for the community but she maintains that the underlying teaching remained faithful to the prophet (pp. 137-40). She asserts that the statues erected in Achaemenid and Parthian times were removed as more fire temples were built (p. 141). But there were different branches of the religion, namely Zurvanism which she sees coming down from Achaemenid times, and Mazdakism where traditional dualism was influenced by Gnosticism (see [GNOSTICISM i](#)) and flourished despite some intermittent persecution of proselytizing religions among other groups such as Buddhists, Jews and Manicheans. But she maintains that at the end of the Sasanian period traditional Zoroastrianism remained dominant and coherent (pp. 142-48).

Chapter 8 (ZACV, pp. 149-62), unlike most works on Zoroastrianism, but like Boyce's *Zoroastrians*, 2001, pp. 145-95, carries the study of Zoroastrianism beyond the Sasanian period into the period under Islamic rule (also idem, "Zoroastrianism in Iran after the Arab Conquest," *A Zoroastrian Tapestry: Art, Religion and Culture*, eds., P. Godrej and F. Punthakey Mistree, Ahmedabad and Cliffedgeway, NJ, 2002, pp. 229-45). She scours the fragmentary sources to reconstruct the history of Zoroastrian oppression and persecution as they were gradually driven from the great urban centers and were compelled to live in poverty, hidden from Muslim view in villages in the Yazdi plain and not even allowed to build wind-towers (see [BĀDGIR](#)) to cool their houses in the scorching summer heat. But other than the deep compassion she evinces for the Zoroastrians, there is little in this chapter which grows out of her own life-changing field-work in Šarīfābād.

Although Boyce acknowledges that there were changes in the religion, for example, the introduction of temple fires (p. 184), the central theme of the final chapter (ZACV, pp. 163-91) is that which has been seen to be the lynchpin of her general theories, namely, the fidelity and endurance of the ancient teachings and practices, not only from the time of the prophet, but even from pre-Zoroastrian times. For example, she argues that the *čahārom* rite on the fourth day after death, when the living bid farewell to the soul, which can be traced back to Sasanian times because the Parsis observe the same rite. "Its origins are almost certainly pre-Zoroastrian, so that basically the rite is likely to have been maintained from the prophet's own day" (p. 167). But she believes this orthodoxy was undermined in the 1960s by Iran's "economic miracle" when a number of Zoroastrians from Yazd migrated to big cosmopolitan centers, notably Tehran, and came under western and reformist influences (see idem, "Some points of traditional observance and of change among the Zoroastrians of Kerman," *Ātaš-e dorun*, pp. 43-56). She argues that the modern period has been neglected because philologists have dominated Zoroastrian studies and their interest wanes after the Pahlavi period (p. 165). Boyce believes the Iranians have more importance than the Parsis (see [PARSI COMMUNITIES i](#)) for her study because they have remained in Iran and retained their old traditions better than the Parsis have in their new country; further, she argues that persecution made them more steadfast whereas Parsis have been influenced by western Christian thought. So although the book is entitled *Zoroastrianism: its antiquity and constant vigour*, she comments on the majority of Zoroastrians, namely the Parsis, only in passing. Another key theme in the final chapter is how the teachings underpin the daily life and



ideals of these remote and oppressed Zoroastrians (ZACV, pp. 176-82; also idem, “The vitality of Zoroastrianism as attested by some Yazdi traditions and actions,” *Corolla Iranica: Papers in honour of Prof. Dr. David Neil MacKenzie*, eds., Ronald Emmerick and Dieter Weber, Frankfurt, 1991, pp. 15-22).

Boyce was an outstanding teacher and supervised the research of many who went on to hold professorships (see *infra*). She was so keen to perpetuate the study of Zoroastrianism that in her will she bequeathed her estate to SOAS for the founding of a professorship in Zoroastrian studies and her library to *The Ancient India & Iran Trust*, Cambridge, of which she was an Honorary Fellow. In an exceptional move, the *Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe*, London, held a memorial liturgy for her and posthumously declared her an “Honoured Friend” by a change in its constitution to permit bestowal of this title on non-Zoroastrians (*British Association for the Study of Religions Bulletin* 111, 2007, p. 4). Another first was a departure in the organization and presentation of the six *Bai Ratanbai Katrak Lectures* delivered decennially by a particular invitee since their subvention (1923) and inauguration (1925) at Oxford: the 2009 series consisted of six speakers, all of whom commemorated and focused on Mary Boyce’s scholarship. The range of her contributions to the study of Iran in general, and Zoroastrianism in particular, is inestimable.

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