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ZOROASTER VIII. AS PERCEIVED IN ARABIC AND PERSO-ISLAMIC LITERATURE

The life of Zoroaster or Zarathustra (Zarādošt, Zardošt, Zartošt), was fragmentarily known to Muslim authors. Their information mainly goes back to Zoroastrian oral or written sources and Greek philosophical works. In the late 13th century, the Persian Zoroastrian *Zarātošt-nāma* (originally titled *Mawlud-e Zartošt*) by Kay Kāvus b. Kay Ḵosrow, based on Middle Persian sources, became widely known among Muslims, too.

Most Arabic and Persian universal histories mention Zoroaster. They tend to start with his coming from Azarbaijan to the king Goštāsp in Balkh (qq.v.), but some add before this a passage showing him to have originally been a juggler, a disciple of an Israelite prophet, or a student of philosophy in Ḥarrān (q.v.). A period of travels before coming to Balkh or a subsequent tour of converting people in and around Iran is often mentioned. Zoroaster's birth, childhood, and miracles (q.v.) are rarely mentioned in Islamic sources before the *Zarātošt-nāma*.

After the conversion of Goštāsp, there usually follows a version of wars, either initiated by Goštāsp or by his enemies, who refuse to convert and/or pay taxes. In both cases, Zoroaster's role is marginal, as already in Middle Persian epic tradition. Zoroaster's later life and his death are rarely mentioned.

In works by Muslim authors, Zoroaster was conceptualized according to three paradigms. The first was that of a prophet. Zoroaster is not mentioned in the Qurʾan, but the Qurʾan affirms that each nation has been sent a prophet of its own (16:36) in its own language (14:4). This provided a model through which Zoroaster could be seen as a prophet. While other figures of Persian national history were often identified with Islamic prophets, Zoroaster is only rarely identified with Abraham (q.v.; e.g., Asadi Tusi, *Garšāsp-nāma*, v. 50, p. 385). This may reflect the idea that he did not need to be identified with any of them because he was a prophet in his own right. In a second paradigm, philosophical literature presents Zoroaster as a Sage. Some Illuminationists went further, portraying him as a source of perennial wisdom and a prophet. The third paradigm saw Zoroaster as a false prophet and juggler.

Zoroaster in historical books. Zoroaster is extensively discussed by Moḥammad b. Jarir Ṭabari (q.v.; d. 923), who relates (ed. de Goeje, I, p. 648; Ṭabari, tr. IV, pp. 46-47), that he was originally a servant of one of Jeremiah's disciples who "betrayed his master and slandered him," was cursed, and caught leprosy. Moving to Azarbaijan, he initiated the religion of Zoroastrianism. Abu Rayḥān Biruni (q.v.; d. after 1050) mentions this story (Biruni, *Āṯār*, p. 247), identifying the prophet as Elyās, but prefers another version, narrated by Zoroaster himself in his *Ketāb al-mawālid*, according to which his teacher was not the prophet Elyās but the Ḥarrānian philosopher Elyus. Further, according to Ṭabari, Zoroaster went from Azarbaijan to Goštāsp in Balkh (Ṭabari, ed. de Goeje, I, p. 648; tr. IV, p. 47). The latter converted to his religion and "forced the people to embrace it, and perpetrated a great massacre among his subjects."

Biruni (*Āṯār*, p. 247) gives a physical description of Zoroaster when he appeared for the first time at the court of Goštāsp: "Then came Zarādošt ebn Safiḏ-tumān the Azarbaijanian, descendant of King Manučehr, of the nobility of Muḡān, from among their rich and noble people. This happened when Goštāsp had ruled for thirty years. He wore a tunic that was open on both sides, bound with a belt made of palm fibers, and a *fadām* on his mouth. In his hand he carried worn sheets, pressing them against his breast." The description seems to be modeled after the habit of the priests when feeding the fire (q.v.), the "worn sheets" referring to the Avesta (q.v.).

Ṭabari (ed. de Goeje, I, p. 681; Ṭabari, tr. IV, pp. 76-77) tells another version of Zoroaster's early career. An Israelite prophet, Sami, was sent to Goštāsp in Balkh. There he was joined by Zoroaster and Jāmāsb (q.v.;

JĀMĀSPA), the vizier of Goštāsp. The former knew Hebrew and recorded in Persian what Sami said in that language. Ebn Ḵaldun (q.v.; d. 1406) says that it was Jāmāsp who knew Hebrew and translated the words of the, in this version, anonymous prophet for Zoroaster (Ebn Ḵaldun, *Taʾrik̲*, II, p. 323).

Abu Solaymān Banākati (q.v.; d. 1329-30) relates that Zoroaster was in the service of one of Jeremiah's disciples, from whom he learned esoteric sciences. Through judicial astrology he learned that there would appear a person like Moses, who would receive theophany and call others to his religion. Zoroaster believed that he was this new prophet and prepared himself through asceticism, so that light became visible on him (Banākati, *Rowżat*, pp. 33-34). Abu'l-Ḥasan ʿAli Masʿudi (q.v.; d. 956) mentions that Zoroaster was considered by some to be one of the six persons who consisted of light only, without any material body (Masʿudi, *Moruj,* sec. 1223). Banākati then adds that because of a lack of a spiritual guide this light became a gate for Satan to enter. Thus, Banākati manages both to save Zoroaster's sincerity and to dismiss Zoroastrianism as a false religion.

Aḥmad b. ʿAli Maqrizi (q.v.; d. 1442) builds on Ṭabari but adds some details (Maqrizi, *Ḵabar,* secs. 135-41). In the *Ḵabar* (sec. 136), he tells how, after having come from Palestine to Azarbaijan, Zaribošt (cf. Gottheil, p. 28, and *Hazār pursišn*, as quoted in Sheffield, p. 1, n. 1) Ebn Saqmān (Spitāmān) further went to Persia, India, China, and the land of the Turks, but no one accepted him. In Farḡāna (q.v.), people wanted to kill him, but he escaped and came to Goštāsp, who imprisoned him for a while. Maqrizi also mentions that his *Zand* (q.v.) contains a prediction of the Prophet Moḥammad.

Zoroaster's peregrinations and initial imprisonment resemble those of Mani (q.v.), which may have influenced this version (cf. Reeves, pp. 29-84). According to Mir Moḥammad Ḵᵛāvandšāh Mirḵᵛānd (d. 1498), the imprisonment lasted for seven years and ended with the miracle of the horse whose four legs disappeared in the soil until Zoroaster prayed for the horse to be released (Mirḵᵛānd, *Rowżat,* II, p. 703; cf. *Zarātošt-nāma*, ll. 917-1128, pp. 47-59).

In Abu'l-Qāsem Ferdowsi's (q.v.; d. 1019 or 1025) *Šāh-nāma*, Zoroaster is discussed in the section written by Abu Manṣur Daqiqi (q.v.; *Šāh-nāma*, ed. Khaleghi, V, ll. 14-1028, pp. 76-174). The largest part of this Daqiqian interlude is taken by an extended version of the events described in the *Ayādgār ī*

Zarērān (q.v.), but it is preceded by laudatory verses on Zoroaster (ll. 39-50, pp. 79-80). Daqiqi describes Zoroaster as a tree the leaves of which are pieces of advice and the fruit of which is wisdom. A similar tree metaphor is, though, used by ʿAli b. Aḥmad Asadi Ṭusi (q.v.; d. 1072-73) to describe Garšāsp (Asadi Ṭusi, *Garšāsp-nāma*, v. 6, p. 409), so one should not read too much into this.

Ṭabari and Ferdowsi do not use the new religion of Zoroaster to motivate the conflict between the king and Rostam, but several historians, e.g., Abu Ḥanifa Dinavari (q.v.; d. after 894), spell out that Rostam refused to convert to Zoroaster's false religion and stood for the old Iranian religion (Dinavari, *Aḵbār*, pp. 27-28). Originally, Esfandiār (q.v.) was the Zoroastrian hero, as shown, e.g., by the *Ayādgār ī Zarērān* and Abu Manṣur ʿAbd-al-Malek Ṯaʿālebi (d. 1038; *Ḡorar*, p. 258). In these sources, Esfandiār's enemies are described as villainous warlords refusing to convert and pay taxes to King Goštāsp.

Firdowsi's *Šāh-nāma* may bear traces of an older version of the conflict, probably deriving from the lost prose *Šāh-nāma*. Ṯaʿālebi (*Ḡorar*, p. 315) and Ferdowsi (ed. Khaleghi, V, l. 218, p. 238), mention a magic-proof chain given by Zoroaster to Esfandiār. This may be related to the chains in which Esfandiār is to bring Rostam to Goštāsp. Moreover, the chain being magic-proof may relate to Zāl's (q.v.) being depicted as possessing magic powers.

Šams-al-Din Moḥammad Šahrazuri (d. after 1288?) has a unique version of the meeting of Zoroaster with Rostam (Šahrazuri, *Nozhat*, pp. 310-12). According to it, Zoroaster initially introduced his new religion to Rostam, who told him that there was a great king, Goštāsp, who was always right, and if he were to convert, Rostam would follow his example. After this Rostam asked Zoroaster about the destiny of his, Rostam's father. Zoroaster took the measuring instrument he had inherited from the philosopher Furis. With its help his soul was able to speak with the Supreme Light. Then Zoroaster told Rostam the destiny of his father, who would survive his son but be killed afterwards. Šahrazuri does not tell what happened later but this would imply that Rostam converted to the new religion.

Moḥammad b. Maḥmud Ṭusi (fl. 12th c.), on the contrary, relates that Rostam had known Zoroaster when the latter was merely a juggler, which was why Rostam would not be convinced by the miracles later performed by him (Tusi, *ʿAjāʾeb*, p. 75). Ṭusi also tells (*ʿAjāʾeb*, pp. 442-43), that Zoroaster was originally a juggler, but then claimed being a soothsayer and finally a prophet.

Some sources mention that Jāmāsp became Zoroaster's successor ("caliph" in Ṭaʿālebi, *Ḡorar*, p. 262); *mubadān mubad* in Abu Saʿid ʿAbd-al-Ḥayy Gardizi (fl. 11th c.; *Zayn,* p. 78). Abu ʿAli Balʿami (see AMIRAK BALʿAMI; d. ca. 997) mentions that Zoroaster did not die during the reign of Goštāsp, but that he lived on into Bahman's reign (Balʿami, *Tārik̲*, p. 470). After this he disappears from Balʿami's narrative.

Most stories are silent about the end of Zoroaster's life. Gardizi (*Zayn*, p. 78) and Ṭaʿālebi (*Ḡorar*, pp. 261-62), tell that after Goštāsp had converted, Zoroaster travelled around accepting conversions, but Barātrukarš (Tūr ī Brādrōrēš in Zoroastrian sources, with variants) killed him at the age of 77, 35 years after his claim for prophethood. Sadid-al-Din ʿAwfi (q.v.; fl. late 12th c.) adds that the murderer chopped Zoroaster into pieces and, having had the murderer caught, Goštāsp killed him and appointed Jāmāsp as Zoroaster's successor, after which "that false doctrine spread to different parts of the world" (ʿAwfi, *Jawāmeʿ*, p. 66).

In modern studies since A. V. W. Jackson (q.v.; d. 1937), it has been claimed that in Ferdowsi's *Šāh-nāma* Zoroaster gets killed when the Turanians invade Balkh (Jackson, pp. 129-32). This seems to be based on a misreading of *Šāh-nāma* (ed. Khaleghi, V, ll. 1117-19, p. 183; Moscow ed., VI, p. 958), which does not mention Zoroaster at all, though line 1119b has a variant stating "I do not know who killed that *hirbad*," accepted by Johann Vullers (q.v.; d. 1881) into his edition (III, p. 1559). There is no indication, however, that this would refer to Zoroaster.

Abu Bakr Qoṭbi Ahari (q.v.; fl. 14th c.) in *Tawārik̲-e Šayk̲ Oways* (p. 62), says that Zoroaster killed himself, "as related in the *Šāh-nāma*." This may refer to the story told by Šaraf-al-Zamān Ṭāher Marvazi (d. after 1120), who tells that, having read from the stars that his time was come, Zoroaster wanted people to think that he had ascended to Heaven, so he went to the wilderness of Azarbaijan to be devoured by beasts. However, the beasts only ate some parts of his body, and the rest was later found (Marvazi, *Ṭabāʾeʿ*, pp. 54, 64). In Christian Arabic sources, there is an even more bizarre story about his end. According to the *Majmuʿ* by Jerjes al-Makin b. al-ʿAmid (d. 1273), Zoroaster wanted his disciples to eat his flesh and drink his blood, so they boiled him in a large cauldron and ate of it (Schilling, pp. 161-62, 178-79).

Zoroaster is described in very positive terms by three historians of the 10th century, Muṭahhar b. Ṭāher Maqdesi (fl. 966), Masʿudi, and Balʿami. Maqdesi

(*Badʾ*, III, pp. 149-50) calls him the prophet of the Magians. He does not explain whether he himself accepts this or whether it is only the Magians who claim it. Masʿudi starts his discussion with a long genealogy linking him to Manučehr (*Moruj*, sec. 547). He mentions Zoroaster's baffling miracles, including the foreknowledge of future events, but refrains from commenting on them (*Moruj*, sec. 547; cf. Masʿudi, *Tanbih*, p. 93).

At the end of his chapter on Goštāsp, in a passage not coming from Ṭabari, Balʿami, (*Tārik̲*, p. 470), refers to the wisdom of Goštāsp, "who left behind many books of wisdom because Zoroaster had come to him." This is followed by a sentence where the references are unclear: "even though he made a false claim for prophethood. But there is no doubt but that he was a wise man with special knowledge." The linguistically less forced interpretation is to take this to refer to Goštāsp, although one would expect Zoroaster to be this claimant of prophethood. In either case, Goštāsp's wisdom derives from Zoroaster.

Zoroaster in heresiographies and Islamic law. Even though they implicitly come close to accepting Zoroaster as a prophet, Maqdesi, Masʿudi, and Balʿami do not go quite as far as that. Other Muslims did, though. Abu Moḥammad ʿAli Ebn Ḥazm (d. 1064) says that many Muslims accept Zoroaster's prophethood (Ebn Ḥazm, *Faṣl*, I, p. 196). Discussing belief in pre- and post-Moḥammadan prophets, he condemns the latter, but, he adds, prophethood cannot be denied to those before Moḥammad who performed true miracles, referring to Qurʾan, verses 35:24 and 4:164. He leaves the question open: Zoroaster may have been a prophet if he performed real miracles. If not, then he was not. Without commenting on them, Ebn Ḥazm later mentions two miracles transmitted by Zoroastrians (*Faṣl*, I, p. 197): the miracle of the molten copper and another, rarer in Islamic sources, of a horse's hooves going through Zoroaster's stomach without harming him (cf. Šahrastāni, *Melal*, p. 267). Thus, it is clear that Ebn Ḥazm did not consider it of any great importance to deny the possibility of Zoroaster being a prophet. Turning to the *Avesta*, he refers to the loss of major parts of it, which makes Zoroastrianism prone to have become corrupt (*Faṣl*, I, p. 199). Yet this criticism is not directed against Zoroaster himself, as it is only the later tradition that has become corrupted.

While historians and heresiographers are rather positive toward Zoroaster, jurists usually take a negative stance and, though mainly speaking about the religion, sometimes explicitly condemn Zoroaster as well. Thus, e.g., the Ḥanafite (q.v.) jurist Jaṣṣāṣ (d. 981) calls him "a lying pseudo-prophet" (see

Friedmann, pp. 75-76).

Zoroaster in philosophical books and science. Philosophical books tend to be positive toward Zoroaster. Šahrazuri (*Nozhat*, pp. 310-12), gives an interesting first-person narrative of his life. Zoroaster relates that he came from Azarbaijan, but used to travel with his father to Ḥarrān. There he studied under the ascetic philosopher Furis, from whom he learned philosophy and astrology. Under certain astrological conditions, light entered under his skin and he received the ability to speak directly with the Pure Light. He emphasizes, still speaking in the first person singular, that this was no trick of his, thus defending himself against contrary insinuations. Having returned to Azarbaijan, Zoroaster was envied and escaped his slanderers to the mountains. From there he sent a word to people that they would be punished by snow/ice, which also happened. After this Zoroaster went to the East and came to Rostam.

In Šahrazuri's version, Zoroaster is not linked to monotheism but to philosophy. Biruni (*Āṯār*, pp. 247-48), also knows this version, saying that Zoroaster himself mentioned in *Ketāb al-mawālid* that in his youth he studied under Elyus the philosopher in Ḥarrān. Then Biruni proceeds to a more detailed version. Greeks, such as Amuniyus (ps.-Ammonius) in his book on *Ārāʾ al-falāsefa* (*Ketāb Amuniyus*, pp. 54-55), claim that Pythagoras had two students. One went to India, the other, Filkus, to Babel, where he met "Vārṭuš, known as Zarādošt b. Buršāsp [Pourušaspa], (the latter) commonly called Safiḏ-tumān [Spitāmān]." Zoroaster learned from Filkus. When Filkus died, Zoroaster fabricated his book.

The Ismaili Abu Ḥātem Rāzi (d. 322/935) refers to the same story, but says that Vārṭus, here Zoroaster's student, corrupted the teaching of Zarhešt (*Aʿlām*, p. 147). Abu Ḥātem's version implies that Zoroaster's original teaching was true. Here, Zoroaster is seen in terms similar to those of Jesus, whose genuine religion was corrupted by Paul.

Qoṭb-al-Din Moḥammad b. ʿAli Lāhiji (fl. late 17th c.), relates that God set the spirit of Zoroaster in a tree that grew in the highest heaven and then planted the tree on the top of mount Āsmuna-ḵar in Azarbaijan (Lāhiji, *Maḥbub,* I, pp. 355-59; cf. Šahrastāni, *Melal*, p. 265). Zoroaster's spirit was mixed with a cow's milk, which his father drank, and the milk became a drop of semen, which then further developed in his mother's womb. Satan attacked his mother, but a celestial voice advised her how to cure herself, and Zoroaster was born

laughing. Abu'l-Fatḥ Moḥammad Šahrastāni (fl. 12th c.) mentions how his enemies tried to get rid of him by leaving him in places where animals might trample or devour him (Šahrastāni, *Melal*, p. 266). At thirty, God sent Zoroaster as a prophet to all people. His religion is described by Lāhiji in Islamic terms. He committed miracles and a holy book was sent down to him. Lāhiji also gives a long doctrinal discussion of Zoroastrianism (Lāhiji, *Maḥbub*, I, pp. 356-59). All this is ultimately quoted from Zoroastrian sources and largely conforms with Šahrastāni (*Melal*, pp. 264-67).

Šehāb-al-Din Yaḥyā Sohravardi (d. 1191) mentions Zoroaster on a par with Hermes (q.v.), Plato, Kay Ḵosrow (see KAYĀNIĀN vii.), and Empedocles as an ancient sage of perennial wisdom (Sohravardi, *Ḥekma*, p. 157). Sohravardi's commentators went even further, Šahrazuri sometimes calling Zoroaster a prophet and even adding after his name the benediction formula reserved for Islamic prophets (Šahrazuri, *Šarḥ*, p. 333, cf. p. 393).

In the *Šarḥ* (pp. 22-23), Šahrazuri, claiming that he only explains Sohravardi's words, says that the ancient Persians spoke in symbols and their religion is actually compatible with Islam. Among them there was an *omma* (community) which was divinely guided. Šahrazuri contrasts this group with other Magians, who were unbelievers and took the tenets at face value, becoming dualists. To the *omma* belonged some of their sages, kings, and prophets, Zoroaster being both a king and a prophet. The fall of their Empire and the burning of their books by Alexander (q.v.) put an end to this group, but Sohravardi brought their teachings back to life. This puts Zoroastrianism on the same level with Judaism and Christianity: their originators were true prophets, but the contemporary Zoroastrians, Jews, and Christians adhere to a corrupt form of their religion.

Zoroaster was also known as an astrologer, and several pseudepigraphs were attributed to him already in Greek. In Islamic times, a collection of five astronomical/astrological works was attributed to Zoroaster, the foremost among these *Ketāb al-mawālid* 'The Book of Nativities.' He is also sometimes quoted as a scientific authority. This probably arises from the attribution to him of Middle Persian books, such as the *Dēnkard* or the *Bundahišn* (qq.v.). Thus, e.g., Abu ʿAbd-Allāh Yāqut (d. 1229) quotes him as an authority on the system of *kešvars* (*Moʿjam*, I, p. 26), and Qābus b. Vošmgir (r. 978-1012) refers to a book in Pahlavi script where Zoroaster is an authority on zoology (*Qābus-nāma*, p. 101). He is also occasionally mentioned in Arabic agronomical literature.

It is conspicuous how rarely authors of *adab* (q.v.) mention Zoroaster. Thus, e.g., Jāḥeẓ (q.v.; d. 868-69), Ebn Ābi Ṭāher Ṭayfur (q.v.; d. 893), Ebn ʿAbd Rabbeh (d. 940), and Ebn Qotayba (q.v.; d. 889) hardly mention him at all.

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