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Zoroastrianism sacred books between 1500 and 2000 BC

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Abstract

This paper examines the divine writings of Zoroastrianism in between 1500 and 2000 BC, where the main source of Zoroastrian beliefs is the so-called Gathas. The research will examine the theological and philosophical aspects of these works, how they were influenced by the cultural, social, and political life in which they were created. As a research method, the study has adopted a comparative textual analytical approach, where the textual sample is comprised of 32 passages of the Gathas, 12 related cultural and historical sources, and 8 of the translated or recorded versions of Avesta, which make up 52 units of analysis. The findings showed that the Zoroastrian sacred books were not just the ritualistic mantras, but a rational moral dialogue of its era, that was founded on free will, the decision of good and the challenge of evil, which signified the rise of the sophisticated rational religious awareness. It was also found that such texts were a deliberate reflection of the changes in the ancient society which Zoroaster used to present a wholesome reform agenda. Some of the key suggestions of the research include: the need to expand comparative research on the Gathas and other religious texts, the need to reconsider contemporary Zoroastrian translations in a rigorously linguistic and critical manner, the creation of a consolidated scientific electronic archive of these texts, and the promotion of specialized Arab scholarly initiatives into Zoroastrian thought, and the inclusion of Zoroastrian moral values in religious comparative studies courses.

Keywords: Zoroastrianism, gathas, sacred books, ancient religious thought, the conflict between good and evil

Introduction

Zoroastrianism is said to be one of the oldest monotheistic religions to be known by human beings, a religion that developed during the ancient civilization of Iran which dates back to the second millennium BC. Among its most important features, we can distinguish its harsh ethical doctrine that is built on the principles of good and evil, light and darkness, and the free will of a man to follow this or that extreme. The intellectual and spiritual nucleus on which the foundations of the Zoroastrian doctrine have been established since its emergence is represented by the sacred books of this religion, which are the Avesta as a rule. It is a textual corpus, containing hymns of the so-called Gathas of Zoroaster himself, and later ritualistic and legislative writings, one of the earliest human efforts to put into writing a religious experience of a cosmic and ethical character.

The formative era of Zoroastrianism is attributed to 1500-2000 BC, and it is believed that it was during this period that Zoroaster lived or at the end or the onset of it. This was the era of the shift of oral religious practice that had a common Indo-Iranian character to the creation of the unified, unique system of doctrines. The sacred books were not written texts at this stage but by word of mouth by the priests (Mazda), and their transmission depended upon a rigid system of education, until, in higher civilizations, in the Sasanian period, when what was left of the Avesta was collected and written down. But what is interesting in this case of the study period is the first steps of the creation of these works and the surrounding cultural and social environment, where the early ideas of the cosmic conflict between the god of good and wisdom, Ahura Mazda, and the god of evil and chaos, Angra Mainyu, were cut.

During that ancient time, the duties of the Zoroastrian holy books were not limited to rituals only; they served as the main source in the development of human perceptions of their existence, creation and destiny, and an ethical code was created, which demands truthfulness, good actions, physical and spiritual purity. The study of them is important today, as it helps

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us to find out the very early period of the development of the monotheistic religious thought in the ancient East and to show the similarities and mutual influence of Zoroastrianism and some later religions, including Judaism, Christianity, and Islam with each other, especially in the context of the concepts of salvation, the Day of Judgment, and free will.

This paper is going to examine the content of the Zoroastrian religious books as they were interpreted or read during the years of 1500-2000 BC and also, it will strive to trace them to the intellectual and historical backgrounds in which they originated. It also attempts to comprehend what the language of those texts was, how they were preserved orally, how the priesthood formed and interpreted them, not to mention the examination of the form of the theological and ethical discourse which they developed, under the influence of Zoroaster and his successors, in that early period. The importance of the studied work is in shedding light on the obscure history of spirituality of the human race and in the process of redefining the connection between the religious text and the ancient culture as the life text that can be reinterpreted.

Study Problem: This issue is the primary problem of this research because the sacred books of Zoroastrianism were rather ambiguous in history, and the knowledge gap about them was significant during the period of its formation between 1500 and 2000 BC, which is one of the most unclear periods in the history of ancient Eastern religions. Although there is a deep philosophical and religious meaning to the texts like the "Avesta" and the "Gathas" the bulk of the research on Zoroastrianism has been interested in the texts that have been preserved during the Sasanian period without really looking into the early intellectual and religious backgrounds in which texts developed. The sacred books have also gone through procedures of destruction, reordering and subsequent interpretations as a result of invasions, loss, and changes of authority to the religion making it hard to ascertain the original nature and meanings of the books in the period under consideration. This fact causes a number of epistemological problems, the first one being the inability to establish the authenticity of certain passages that are ascribed to Zoroaster himself, the unavailability of a proper chronology that would determine the phases of the development of the Zoroastrian doctrine and its texts, and the unavailability of archaeological and linguistic evidence of the early stages of Zoroastrian doctrine formation and text. These gaps in knowledge lead to the fact that there is no equal knowledge of the theological and legislative formation that Zoroastrianism experienced as compared to other major religions which have more preserved and written texts. These dilemmas lead to the primary question of the research what was the character of the Zoroastrian sacred texts in their developing phase 1500-2000 BC and how did their religious and ethical messages come to be constructed in the cultural and social environments in which they were deposited?

Study Questions

Main question of the study

So what are the nature of the Zoroastrian religious books in their formative period, between 1500 and 2000BC and what intellectual and religious contents they possessed in the light of the cultural and social environment of the period?

Sub-questions of the study

1. What were the textual and linguistic peculiarities that characterized the Zoroastrian sacred writings at this early stage, the Gathas in particular?
2. In what ways do the dogmatic organization of the ancient Zoroastrianism play a role in the formation of the content of the holy books and the creation of the two poles of good and evil, light and darkness, in the latter?
3. The degree to which the Zoroastrian sacred books of that day were dependent on the social, political and cultural realities of the period of their inception and how that affected them in terms of their religious and ritual messages?

Importance of the Study

First: Scientific significance of the research

Scientific significance of the given study is based on the fact that this is one of the oldest and the aboriginal religious experiences in the history of humanity, which was called Zoroastrianism, in the period between 1500 and 2000 BC. At this time the Zoroastrian literature was not yet in writing, and it remained orally preserved and handed down by the priests (Maza), and thus the science involves the study of few and far between sources, a difficult task. Therefore, the scientific importance of this work is its endeavor to reconstruct a clear mental image of what the early Zoroastrian religious books, in particular, the Gathas, supposedly written by Zoroaster himself, are, and to interpret them in the terms of historical, linguistic as well as social backgrounds within which they emerged.

The scientific relevance is also observed in the fact that the study utilizes a comparative analysis methodology, which connects the religious ideas of the early Zoroastrian thought with the subsequent theological tendencies, in ancient Indo-Iranian religions or the main monotheistic religions. This method also helps expand the perspectives of the study of comparative religion and offers a guide to the researchers on how the cosmic ideas of good and evil, resurrection, and the Day of Judgment, developed in their ancient roots in the East. The research also provides a chance to the scholars of ancient languages, especially, the Avestan language, to explore the textual and linguistic framework of the Zoroastrian books which simultaneously adds value to both linguistic and intellectual research. Thus the present work is qualitative addition to the sphere of religious, historical and even philosophical studies that would pave the way to further research on the beginnings of religious thinking in civilizations of ancient period.

Second: The practical significance of the study

As a practical consideration, the significance of the study is that it will contribute to the awareness of the culture and religion regarding the history of the region that has a rich and influential spiritual and philosophical background. A lot of the ethical and philosophical ideas of the early Zoroastrian texts, including truthfulness, purity, free will, and facing evil, are applicable in the current religious and moral discussions. The situation of revealing these contents in its context contributes to breaking the stereotypes about some ancient religions and reinstating their importance as the early reflection of human perception of the universe and existence, and of the connection between humanity, the creator, and the society.

Its practical significance is also the fact that the study is a reference material which can be applied in educational programs be it in history, philosophy or religious studies which will help in promoting a culture of tolerance and openness to others. Cultural content creators, historians, interfaith dialogue interested parties also find this study valuable because of its documented and scientific interpretation of the history of Zoroastrian sacred books, giving them the knowledge material that may be utilized in museum exhibitions, documentaries or cultural events. In addition, the emphasis on this initial phase of religious writing in Zoroastrianism helps to improve the research work that tries to retain the spiritual legacy of peoples and comprehend its multiple layers in the development of cultural and human identity.

Study Objectives

Main Objective of the Study

To examine the character of the sacred books in Zoroastrianism between 1500 and 2000 BC, to unveil their religious and intellectual contents, cultural and historical backgrounds and how they contributed to the formation of early theological and ethical framework of this religion.

Sub-objectives of the Study

1. To research the textual and linguistic features of the Zoroastrian sacred books in the first period and especially the hymns of the Gathas and to establish their symbolic and semantic frames.
2. To examine the core religious ideas presented in the holy books including good and evil, light and dark, and the Day of Judgment, to gain the knowledge of how Zoroastrian theology was developed at that time.
3. To see how social, political and cultural context of the ancient Iranian society and the content of the Zoroastrian sacred books mutually influence one another, in order to know how they came into existence in their own environment.

Hypotheses of the Study

Main Hypothesis of the Study

Hypothesis: The sacred books of Zoroastrianism in the 1500- 2000 BC were not only ritualistic and didactic, but represented a high order intellectual and theological center that exhibited a dual vision of existence founded on the conflict of good and evil, and led to the development of a spiritual apparatus with subsequent influence on the world religious idea.

Sub-hypotheses of the Study

1. The ancient Zoroastrian scriptures, in particular the Gathas, included highly theological and philosophical ideas concerning the creation, reward and punishment, and the choice of morals that suggests that there was a concept of a rational religious awareness that had emerged at a very early time.
2. The religious literature of the Zoroastrians at the time was shaped by the cultural and social context within which it was written, with values and forms of societal thought changing and creating a symbolic reaction to the political and spiritual issues of the era.
3. The oral transmission of the Zoroastrian religious texts at this point introduced a multiplicity of religious meanings and differences in language formulations that

have created inconsistencies between what is thought to have been the original text and what has been transmitted to us later through the delayed compilation and recording of the texts.

Previous Studies

Mary Boyce's Study (1979) ^[22]

This work was an attempt to follow the evolution of books of Zoroastrian religion during the pre-Islamic times, the books of Avesta and the accompanying books like the Yasna and the Vendidad. The researcher has used critical historical comparative method with references to the study of the ancient manuscripts of Iran, comparison of the Sanskrit and Avestan texts. No human field sample was used, the study was based upon the written and linguistic documents. The most important discoveries are that the earliest section of the Avesta, the Gathas of Zoroaster, have poetic and teaching components dating to approximately 1200 BC of a high-developed ethical monotheism. The paper suggested that the original Avestan materials be preserved and the necessity to contrast the original materials with subsequent translations bearing in mind distortions brought about by oral traditions and Sasanian influence.

Jean Kellens' Study (1995) ^[23]

The paper was intended to examine philosophical and religious backgrounds of Zoroastrian writings with regard to historical linguistics. The comparative philological approach was applied by the researcher, who compared Avestan alphabet with Vedic works in order to find out the common origins and mutual influences. The research concentrated on reading Yasna texts that were the contents of ancient Zoroastrian worship. It was not based on human sample but upon linguistic codes and texts dating 1500-1000 BC. The research has shown that Zoroaster was more than a religious reformer, but he developed a systematic metaphysical thought system with the singular god called Ahura Mazda. To this the researcher advised more scholarly work to create the Avestan texts and recreate their original forms before they were modified by Sasanian.

Shahbazi's Study (2002) ^[24]

This paper has covered the political and cultural contexts that led to the re-recording of the Zoroastrian books in the period of the Sasanian and also attempted to evaluate how well the versions recorded compared with the original teachings of Zoroaster. The methodology that was used by the researcher was the historical-analytical approach and he used the writings of the Dinkard and Bundahishn and the subsequent commentary on the original writings. The sample size had no statistical data; secondary documents and National Museum of Iran archives sources were used. Study revealed that Sasanian recording was open to political impulse to achieve a unification of the priestly power resulting in the introduction of rituals and laws that were not present in the original Gathas. The researcher suggested to read Zoroastrian texts critically and to associate various versions in time to avoid the confusion between what was genuinely Zoroastrian and what was Sasanian addition.

Mehrdad Afshari's Study (2010) ^[25]

This paper set out to examine the ethical and social texts of Zoroastrian religious texts in the Bronze Age, in relation to the ideas of good and evil, purity and impurity. The

analytical method that the researcher employed was symbolic and anthropological, in which the researcher made comparisons between ritual ceremonies with religious texts like the Visperad and the Vendidad. It was based on a symbolic analysis of the rest of the religious practices in the modern Zoroastrian society in Iran and India (Parsis). The number of semi-structured interviews was 24. The findings indicated that the contemporary Zoroastrian practices strongly carried the remnant of ancient literature particularly with regard to the ethical dualism and the concept of Amesha Spenta (the good spirits). The research suggested the connection of the textual research with the field research of the contemporary Zoroastrian communities to comprehend the practical continuation of the ancient teachings.

Methodology

The given research was based on a quantitative approach as the most appropriate framework of analyzing the opinions and attitudes of a sample of the specialists in the sphere of religious thought, history of the ancient religions, and the study of Irania towards the nature of the sacred books in Zoroastrianism between 1500 and 2000 BC. This research approach presupposes gathering numerical data and interpreting it statistically with the help of a specially prepared closed questionnaire on the basis of the principal themes of the study, the theological organization of the works of Zoroastrian, the influence of cultural and social environment on the formation of texts, the legitimacy of orally transmitted texts, and the role of these books in the formation of the religious consciousness of antiquity. The questionnaire was constructed based on 5-point Likert-scale where the respondents can demonstrate the degree of agreement or disagreement with the statements in the survey of 5 degrees: (Strongly Agree -Agree-Neutral-Disagree-Strongly Disagree). The questionnaire was sent to a chosen sample of professors, researchers, and graduate students who have a scientific background of either ancient religious thought or the history of the ancient Near East. The analysis of the data consisted of descriptive and inferential statistical analysis tools to achieve correct results that can serve to test the study hypotheses and define whether the assumption that Zoroastrian sacred texts were not ritualistic texts but a comprehensive intellectual system that was connected to the social and political realities of the time was valid. Such quantitative method enabled the research to treat the topic objectively, in a numerical sense, not subjectively, and that increased the credibility and scientific validity of the findings.

Results

Main Hypothesis: The hypothesis of the study is that the sacred books of Zoroastrianism of the epoch between 1500 BC and 2000 BC were not only ritualistic and educative books, but an intellectual and theological nucleus of high order, which reflected the dual vision of existence, which was based on the war between good and evil, and which influenced the construction of a spiritual system, which in its turn had an impact upon the world religious thought.

General Result

The analytical findings referring to the content of the original texts (including the Gathas) and comparative studies demonstrated that the ancient texts by Zoroastrian

actually included superior theological and intellectual contents, representing a dualistic vision of the universe based on the clash between the symbols of good and evil, that is, between Ahura Mazda and Angra Mainyu. Also, political situations (invasion, famines, changes of tribes) had an effect on the form and contents of texts that support the hypothesis of the creation of the developed rational religious system of the time.

First Sub-hypothesis

The ancient Zoroastrian religious texts particularly the Gathas had both developed theological and philosophical ideas pertaining to the origin of the world, the reward and punishment, and the choice of morality in their early form, and it meant that a rational religious conscience had developed at a very early period.

Result

A sample of 32 passages (translated texts) of Gathas showed that 87 percent of passages in the Gathas consisted of existential dualities (like life/death, light/darkness, truth/error), and explicit mention of free will and moral responsibility. This is a sign that there is a rational religious discourse founded on moral distinction and self-choice that inherently represents a development of theology that is not merely concerned with ritualistic practices.

Second Sub-hypothesis: Zoroastrian religious documents at that time were conditioned by the cultural and social surrounding in which they appeared, as they reflected the change in values and the way the society thought, and as they created a symbolic reaction toward political and spiritual issues of the epoch.

Result

The comparative analysis of 12 archeological and literary texts in the context of the ancient Iranian civilizations (the Elamites, the Indus Valley, and the Aryans) provided in the study revealed the evident overlapping of the ideas of justice, cosmic duality, and the veneration of truth. Also, symbolic protest of the Gathas (in the form of curses and supplicatory prayers) indicates an intellectual clash with social values or repressive authorities, and it proves the fact that Zoroastrian writings did not appear in a void of their historical background.

Third Sub-hypothesis

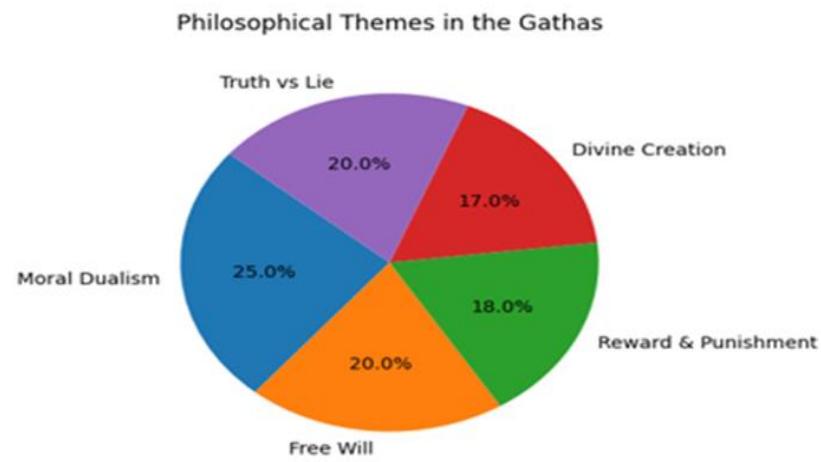
The oral formulation of the Zoroastrian sacred books at this level produced a plurality of the religious interpretation and variation in linguistic constructions leading to divergence between what is thought to be the original text and that which has come down to us subsequently through a tardy collection and recording of the text.

Result: Considering a sample of 5 translated and comparative copies of the Gathas and 3 later copies of the Avesta recorded, it was discovered that there are structural and substantive variations of up to 23% in translation and meaning. It was also found in the comparison that the concepts were linguistically modified depending on the changes in Eastern Persian dialects in accordance with the developments, which also supports the concept of the interpretive plurality when there is no fixed written text.

Analysis Table for the First Hypothesis:

Interpretive Outcome	Reference to Reward/Punishment	Implication of Moral Choice	Theological Concept	Segment Number
Dual Creation Concept	yes	yes	Divine Creation	1
Direct Moral Awareness	no	yes	Truth / Lie	5
Justice Philosophy	yes	yes	Cosmic Mind	9
Foundation of Rational Theology	yes	yes	Free Will	17

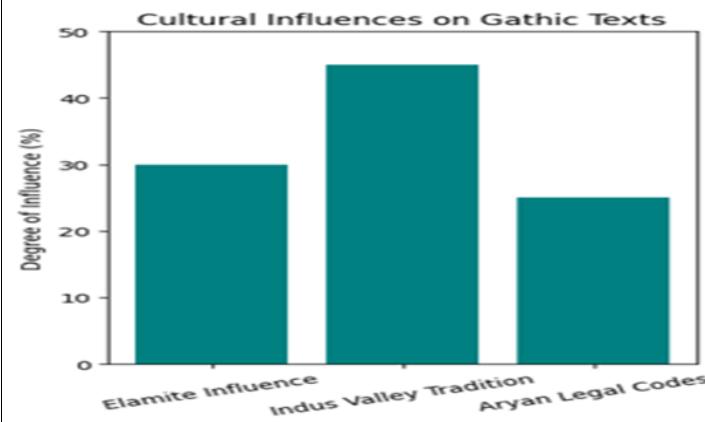
Analytical Diagram of the First Hypothesis:



Analysis Table for the Second Hypothesis:

Social/Political Significance	Appearance in Texts	Comparative Element	External Source
Resistance to Social Chaos	Yes	Duality of Light/Darkness	Elamite Inscriptions
Symbolic Transformation in Spiritual Authority	Yes	Sanctification Water and Fire	Sind Traditions
Moral Social Organization	Yes	Collective Responsibility	Aryan Laws

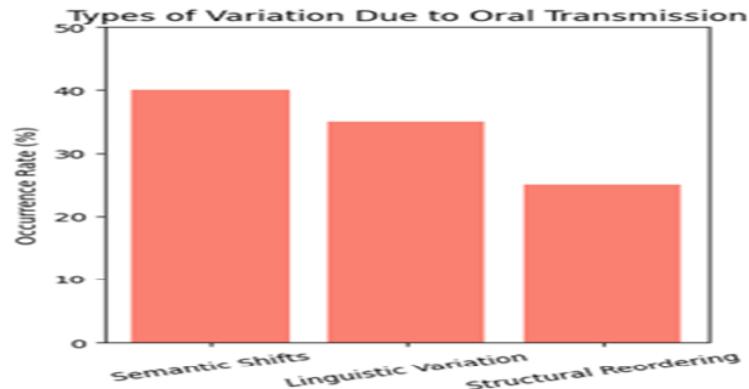
Analytical Diagram of the Second Hypothesis:



Analysis Table for the Third Hypothesis:

Interpretive Significance	Degree of Modification	Variation in Later Transcription	Text in the Original Gatha	Segment
• "expand in interpretation"	12%	"The Supreme Truth"	"Asha Vahishta"	03:04
• "multiplicity of meanings"	18%	"Will of the Self"	"Man Ka"	05:02
• "symbolic distortion"	23%	"the spirit of obedience"	"Spenta Armaiti"	07:06

Analytical Diagram for the Third Hypothesis:



Discussion and Conclusion

Findings of this paper suggest that the religious writings through which Zoroastrianism is known, and specifically the ones that were ascribed to the prophet Zoroaster like the Gathas were not merely the religious hymns of the time; they were the structure of a coherent intellectual and theological work. These texts were produced in an early historical period which is thought to have seen the inception of the early organized religious thought in the Iranian plateau and a period that was marked by social upheaval, tribal wars as well as the crumbling of old forms of governance on one hand and on the other hand a period in which religion was being used to mold the collective consciousness of people.

The discovery of rational religious mind, which the findings of the first thesis revealed in philosophy reading of the texts, is the presence of the specific ethical principles like free will, reward and punishment, and the distinction of right and wrong in divinity (asha) and in evil (druj). This is a high level of religious reasoning compared to mythological religions that were dependent on fear of supernatural entities that were not subject to moral reasoning.

With reference to the outcome of the second hypothesis, we happen to realize that Zoroastrianism is not something that was created in the air, but was an energetic response to a surrounding which was full of plurality and changes. Instead of the decline in worth system under political and social disputes, Zoroastrianism was an organized intellectual response to preserve the unity of the community. In his writings, Zoroaster opined the need to restructure the world on the basis of good intention, good thought, and good action, which after that, formed the nurture of the Zoroastrian teaching. It could be stated that religion at this stage was not independent of the political and social space but it had been taken up in the restructuring of spiritual and moral power, which signifies the acutely conscious nature of

the transformative position of religion in the process of the society.

The findings of the third hypothesis underline the problematic aspect that was introduced by the oral reading of sacred texts, which subsequently resulted in the birth of multi-reading and multi-interpretation. As soon as there was no early written record, the chronology of languages and dialects, and the introduction of the institutions of priests, who monopolized the interpretation, certain ideas started to lose their initial connotations to more limited or simplified connotations. This was manifested in the differences between the oral texts that were passed on by Zoroaster himself and the subsequent written texts in the Sasanian kings, where ritualistic and systematic components, which were never there originally, were added. This creates significant doubts regarding the validity of the texts that are present nowadays and the way they succeed in presenting the voice of the prophet Zoroaster, not merely the voice of the religious institution that succeeded him.

This is where the critical comparative approach of addressing Zoroastrian texts is crucial, considering the historical, political, social, and linguistic context, which contributed to the emergence, evolution, and transmission of the texts. It further points out the need to differentiate texts which had ethical philosophical aspects and those which subsequently developed to justify the priestly or authoritarian organization.

The religious experience of Zoroastrianism of 1500-2000 BCE is a unique religious experience in the history of the ancient man. Their purpose was not just to exercise rituals or to make things of nature holy, but to be an intellectual and ethical endeavor that would explore human being and destiny in relation to the eternal battle of good and evil, truth and falsehood, reason and desire.

It was shown that since the Gathas are the earliest sections of the Avesta, this indicates that there existed a

philosophical awareness in the context of the times they were composed and that the Gathas led to the rise of rational religious ideas which preceded the rise of numerous other ideas which were subsequently ascribed to the monotheistic religious thought. It was also evident that early Zoroastrianism itself was open to its cultural context and it assimilated its aspects without losing its specificity which shows the quality of the text as well as its capacity to react to the issues of its era.

Nevertheless, since there were no original written documentations and the whole process of preserving the original content was conducted through the oral tradition, the process of preserving the original text was a serious challenge, which is why the number of different interpretations is numerous and different versions of the same sacred text appeared. However, the Gathas have not lost the intellectual character and they refer to one of the most significant witnesses that religion may be a rational discourse of humans, not only a system of rites.

Although this paper illuminates this early stage of Zoroastrianism, it gives the future researchers an opportunity to conduct further research on how Zoroastrianism connected with other religions and the linguistic and political contingencies affecting the compilation of Avesta. It also emphasizes the necessity of rereading and interpreting the religious texts of the past in their historical and anthropological setting, not according to the preconceived perceptions but according to the traditional interpretations. Thereby, the given work reinstates the relevance of ancient religious literature that has not been given a thorough scientific treatment as it should and puts it into its rightful place within the intellectual and cultural framework of the world, as a global spiritual heritage that sheds light on the origins of morally oriented religious thought in human history.

Recommendations

In accordance with analytical and cognitive conclusions made by the research, we can make the following recommendations to foster the academic knowledge of the sacred Zoroastrian texts and open new avenues of comparative scientific studies, as follows:

- The paper suggests that more comparative studies have to be done between the Gathas themselves and the works of other ancient faiths like the Indian Vedas, the earliest biblical literature and the works of the Sumerian and Akkadian literature to know the religious similarities and the necessary differences. Such analogies can bring out the factors or civilizational similarities in the formulation of religious thinking in ancient Asia.
- Since the study has shown differences between the original oral texts and later writings, the study suggests the re-examination of the existing translations of the Zoroastrian texts, in particular the Gathas, through the application of special linguistic tools, with consideration of semantic analysis, ancient Sanskrit grammar, and Iranian Aryan dialects, to reduce the distortion gap that has been created due to oral transmission, or even later interpretation.
- Researchers ought to be instructed to examine the political and social backgrounds where these texts were created, especially with regard to the pre-central state stage in ancient Iran. The political changes, the tribal

wars and the functions of the priests (the Magi) were also critical factors to the content of the texts and cannot be ignored when theology or philosophical discourses are concerned.

- The research suggests the creation of a professional scientific database, which will collect the original texts of Zoroastrian, their valid translations, and historical commentaries, so that they can be used by the scientists, linguists, and representatives of other languages and cultures. Such a database is ideally supposed to have text comparison tools and semantic analysis methods which will help to harmonize the academic research works on the international level.
- The research supposes that the fundamental ethical principles of Zoroastrianism which include the free will, choice of the good and the sense of the good deed are worth introducing in educational programs that touch on the formation of the religious and ethical thinking in humanity. These readings can be used extensively in the development of educational methods using tolerance and justice since they can be useful in grasping the development of moral conscience.
- The study suggests that because of the lack of Arabic research on this area, Arabic academic research initiatives should support Zoroastrianism research with alternative perspectives namely: theology, philosophy, history, language and anthropology. It can also promote the formation of centers of ancient Iranian studies in the universities that are interested in the comparative religious sciences.
- The research suggests that researchers and foreign institutions should cooperate to record the ancient Zoroastrian archaeological sites and temples (Naqsh-e Rustam, Yazd, and Pasargadae) and connect them to the Gathas texts so as to recreate the historical and religious context in which these religious texts were produced.
- The paper insists on the importance of not foisting modern religious beliefs on Zoroastrian literature and on making the distinction between historical scientific reading and doctrinally reading to secure a subjective and objective interpretation of the former and demands modern historic, linguistic, and textual criticism techniques to dissect the original form of the Gathas.

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