

Religion in Ancient PERSIA

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As Persia had been conquered by Aryan tribes, we should not be surprised to find the same pantheon of gods from the Vedic period in India. These were both beneficent and frightening at the same time.

Their religion as very close to nature and their worship was often done outside on top of a mountain, led by the Magi who guarded the sacred fire.

Mount Elburg was believed to be the holy mountain with cosmic significance as it was from there that souls ascended to the sky. There also one found the donkey with 9 mouths and 6 eyes along with 10 fish who **guarded the TREE Gaokerena**. The juice from its fruit gave the elixir of immortality which was coveted by an **evil lizard**.

Vayu, the god of the wind, treated the cosmic ocean at the foot of this sacred mountain by gathering the rains brought by the god of water, Tishtrya.

The greatest Persian god of antiquity was " AHURA-MAZDA ", the god of **light and wisdom**. Zarathustra abbreviated his name to OHRMAZD.

In the beginning, the god ZURVAN AKARANA (which means "infinite time") bemoaned the fact that he had no son. He offered a sacrifice to the Creator who gave him twins: the first was AHURA-MAZDA, who became the *god of truth and light*, the second was named AHRIMAN, which can be translated as "destructive thought". Just like Abel and Cain, the 2 brothers represented the good and bad tendencies in humanity.

As in Vedic religion, the god of fire ATAR, (the son of Ohrmazd), was very important. He sent the sacrifices to the gods, which enabled them to combat the forces of evil and darkness. The god Rapithwin was considered to be like the warmth of the sun which is reborn each spring.

The god of war, was VERETHRAGNA. (Like Vishnu) he had "10 avatars" or incarnations on earth. He thus successively appeared as: a tempest, a bull, with golden horns, a white horse, an impetuous boar, a camel, an adolescent aged 15, a crow, a ram, viscous stag and a man with a golden sword.

The feminine element of the Pantheon was represented by the beautiful and noble goddess Anahita (or Ahurani) who made a potion with hallucinogenic powers from the

fruits of a third sacred tree in the cosmic ocean. This was HOAMA (equivalent to the Indian SOMA), and taking it guaranteed immortality !

Persian Cosmogony :

The first man (Gayomart), was born out of the sweat of Ohrmazd. He died 30 days later, but from his mortal remains a human couple emerged : Mashya and Mashyoi. They had 7 pairs of children, who in turn gave birth to 15 tribes who (according to ancient Persia) peopled the earth.

The Reforms of Zoroaster or Zarathustra :

Around the year 650BC, into a priestly family in the region of Herat (within Afghanistan) was born the Persian prophet Zarathustra, formerly called ZOROASTER.

He was considered to be a reformer of the ancient Persian religion, which was the sole domain of the aristocratic military families. His notions of justice and personal conscience clashed head on with the customs and ideas of these old families.

Persian religion did not believe in reincarnation and the cycles of earthly life (as in Hinduism), and rather than cremating their dead they preferred to leave them on the "towers of silence" where the vultures would eat them.

Zoroaster traveled far and wide, and one day he met a prince named Vishtaspa, who adopted these religious reforms and offered Zoroaster his protection against the ancient religious casts. (This is reminiscent of Martin Luther, who without the protection of Prince Frederic of Saxe would have been burned at the stake like Jan Hus by the Inquisition.)

The religion of Zarathustra was a new concept, based on tolerance, respect for others, doing good and struggling against evil.

This evolution of conscience which could discern good and reject the influence of demons, led to life lived with a pure spirit under the light of heaven. Mazda was the god of light.

We do not believe in chance, (since animals who return to their birthplace to give birth remember these places by instinct.). It is more probable that Zoroaster learned and was influenced by the Jews who had fled from Israel to avoid being taken capture by the Assyrians.

When we find the authority of a power greater than ourselves, the presence of conscience in an individual, and above all the path towards light which is in constant struggle with the forces of darkness, we have a doctrine comparable to that of the monks of Qirbet Qumran or the Essenians, whose Mother-house was beside the Dead Sea.

This phenomenon appears again with more evidence when one compares the spirit of tolerance of Cyrus with the cruel attitude of his 2 predecessors, Astyage and his father Cyaxare (who had not the slightest respect for human life). The following records of destruction are attributed to them :

- murder, blood baths, piles of heads at the entrance to the fortified cities.
- impalements and skinning alive of their prisoners
- corpses horribly mutilated left out in the open for wild animals and vultures to eat.
- ferocity towards women and old people, and enslaving boys and girls after subjecting them to terrible abuse.

How else can we explain these radical differences in behavior ?

Primitive Zoroastrianism, more usually called MAZDEISM struggled against demons and worshipped ONE Supreme God. Only later, the doctrine diversified and reintroduced several ancient gods, like Mithra, in the reign of Artaxerxes (456 to 425BC), and finally even Zarathustra was defied.

Examples of the doctrine of AHURA MAZDA :

" The Great spirit is named OHRMAZD, (Ahura Mazda). He is the creator of the world and sees into the depths of our hearts. His law demands us to give our LOVE and respect to the Wise Lord and his priests the Amesha Spenta. We must be pure and know the law " (Instructions from the book of Catha.)

" The man who is wise in thought, word and action is holy, according to the Law of Spirituality. Ahura Mazda created the ultimate definition of the integrity, immortality abundance and purity of the sovereign power, and also food for the spirit of those who are dear to God through their thoughts and actions." (Gatha).

In the Videvat, the rules for chasing away demons and bad spirits are outlined in order to introduce goodness in the home and family. As in the temptation of Jesus, the temptations

of Zarathustra are related. Andra Mainyu offers him the domination of the world if he will renounce his mission...