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The Social Life of Zoroastrians in the Safavid Era 1501-1722, Based on the Accounts of Travel Memoirists, and the Influence of Religious Teachings on It

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Abstract

Zoroastrians are the adherents of the ancient Iranian religion who, despite cultural and historical changes, still live in Iran and other countries. For gaining knowledge on their condition throughout the history of Iran, other than historical sources, travel memoirs reflect the social and cultural condition of common Zoroastrian people and provide us important information regarding their social and cultural history. In the present study, the social life of Zoroastrians is explained based on what the travel memoirists of the Safavid era have referred to, and it has been correlated to Zoroastrian religious teachings. In this regard, these questions have been answered: what the social life of Zoroastrians was like in this era, what the functions of Zoroastrian religious teachings were in their life and how they adhered to them. For this purpose, following the introduction, the population of Safavid era Zoroastrians is studied based on travel memoirs, then their daily life (jobs, clothing, food, marriage), beliefs (belief in a savior figure, fasting, impurity, loved and loathed animals) and rites (celebration, death and purification) are investigated and correlated to the teachings of their holy texts. In the end it is concluded that despite pressures, placement in lower social and professional ranks, and different clothing to distinguish them from Muslims, they were steadfastly hopeful for the coming of Sōšāns (the future savior) in the face of the hardships of the time and they enacted their celebrations and rites related to death, impurity and purity according to the teachings of their religion.

Keywords: Safavid, Zoroastrians, Social history, Travel memoirs, Zoroastrian religion.

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Introduction

The first Safavid king Shah Ismail ascended to the throne in 1501. He and his successors, who ruled until 1722, were Shiites and with massive pressure they led almost all the Muslims of Iran to adhere to this branch of the religion (Boyce 2002: 208). The ascension of the Safavids caused many changes in Iran. The progenitors of these rulers and their children and grandchildren held zealous religious beliefs. In this era, Zoroastrians were known as idol worshippers and heathens. Like other religious minorities they paid Jizya. The first religious clash between Safavid kings and non-Muslim minorities happened in the era of Shah Tahmasp (1524-1576). He took too much in taxes from non-Muslim minorities, threw them out of court and called them infidels.

Shah Abbas the first (1587-1629) at the beginning of his rule treated the minorities somewhat without religious conflict and gave them liberty to enact the rites of their religions (refer to Falsafi 1960: 68). In this era, generally every religion had its particular neighborhood in every city. He brought a great number of Gabrs (Zoroastrians) from Yazd and Kerman to the capital (Isfahan) and its suburbs for menial work and created a town named Gabrabad for them with three thousand humble one-storey houses with no embellishments. The town had wide, straight streets and was created with precise architectural design and principles (Della Valle 2001: 510-516). After some time, concurrent with the end of his rule, as the flourishing of Isfahan's Jolfa became widely heard of, and Armenians came from everywhere to Isfahan, Shah Abbas moved the Zoroastrian population from Gabrabad to Isfahan and gave it to the new Armenian immigrants so that they would be neighbors with their co-religionists (Nemiranian 2007: 213 quoted in Farsnameh Naseri 1200-1277 Hijri). Thereupon the Zoroastrians did not fare well in this era (Chardin 1993-1996, vol. 5: 1690).

Shah Safi (1629-1642) did not have much religious zealotry, therefore the religious minorities of his time were more or less in peace. However, his rule was not very dominant outside of the capital (Raeen 1957: 115-116).

Shah Abbas the second (1642-1666) moved the Gabrs of Isfahan again to the previous town of Saadatabad or Gabrabad in the lowest region of Jolfa. At this time, Jolfa consisted of four regions of which the furthest was the abode of the Gabrs (Chardin 1993-1996, vol. 4: 1566-1569 and vol. 5: 1690-1952).

In the era of Suleiman Shah (1666-1694) and Shah Sultan Husayn (1694-1722) we witness the height of the harassment of religious minorities. The Ulama (religious scholars) of this era made the Shah the tool of their religious whims and, with the high power they had, exerted pressure on the minorities.

During the crowning of Suleiman Shah, a Zoroastrian of the progeny of Rustam Shah (the last Shah of the Timurid dynasty) was put upon the throne along with a wooden statue to remove the impurity predicted by astrologists. At the end of the cursed hour, the Zoroastrian escaped and they beheaded the statue with a sword (Cruyssen 2001: 98). The destruction of fire temples, forcing Zoroastrians to convert to Islam, killing those who resisted conversion to Islam, the destruction of the region of the Gabrs in Isfahan are among the pressures exerted upon them in this era (Boyce 2002: 215-216). When the Afghans attacked in 1719, such treatment caused the Zoroastrians to consider them their saviors and support them and stand against Safavid soldiers (refer to Gilanentz 1965: 53, 98 and 101 and Krusinski 1984: 55 and 72).

Since the Zoroastrians of the Safavid era were a minority, they have been little discussed. Therefore, gaining knowledge of their social life proves difficult. Of helpful sources for this purpose are travel memoirs which give us valuable information on the topic. Travel memoirists were usually precise and detail-oriented people with strong memory and imagination, who reported their observations with extraordinary depictions and since they were not government officials, they recorded their observations without consideration for punishment by the state and they expressed the good and the bad well.

In this study, the social life of Zoroastrians in 1501-1722 has been described and the effect of religious teachings on the quality of their lives has been stated.

Background of the Study

Mary Boyce and Katayun Mazdapour have discussed Zoroastrians and their social life throughout history at length in their works, but they have paid little attention to the accounts of travel memoirists. Jamsheed Kairshasb Choksy has also mostly investigated the condition of Zoroastrians in the beginning of the Islamic era and how Muslims treated them in his works. Other writers (Maryam Mir Ahmadi, Moslem Aliabadi and Ali Jafarpour) who have focused on the condition of minorities in the Safavid era have not explored Zoroastrians in much detail.

Of travel memoirists, among those whose works have been used for this study are: 1. Don Garcias de Silva Figueroa, a Portuguese travel memoirist of the Shah Abbas era who came to the court of Iran in 1614 and stayed in Iran for two years. His notes on Iran are one of the highly important sources of the early seventeenth century. 2. Pietro Della Valle was in Iran from 1617 to 1623. He has described the social and political status of Iran well. 3. Thomas Herbert, an English travel memoirist, came to Iran in 1628. He had a wide scope of observation and in his memoir he has spoken of social and historical matters. 4. Jean Chardin was a French merchant who travelled six times to the east from 1631 to 1665. During forty years he travelled six times (in the era of Shah Safi, Shah Abbas II, and Shah Suleiman) to Iran and wrote one of the most comprehensive travel memoirs on the status of Iran (Chardin 1993-1996, vol.1: 17-18). 5. Tavernier visited Iran nine times and in the years 1632-1668, he witnessed the three kingdom eras of Shah Safi, Shah Abbas II and Shah Suleiman and he has described various topics accurately. He has discussed Zoroastrians more than the others. It appears that he had close contact with Zoroastrians for three years and he had been closely acquainted with their religious mores and rites. However, on some matters his accounts do not correspond to what has been said in Zoroastrian religious texts, his descriptions are at times elementary and crude and he has accepted commonplace anecdotes. 6. Martin Sanson is of the travel memoirists of the era of Shah Suleiman, he lived in Iran for many years. Because he was a religious person he paid more attention to the social ranks and religious posts of Iran. 7. Engelbert Kaempfer entered Isfahan in 1684. His descriptions of historical places and the social condition and official systems are important. Kaempfer's scientific viewpoint has left behind precise information about the Safavid era. 8. Krusinski, of the last travel memoirists of the Safavid era specially the last Safavid Shah, Sultan Husayn, a Polish priest from Krakow, was a missionary and a physician of the Safavid court who resided in Iran for twenty years and reflected the social and political condition of Iran more, and 9. Gilanentz, of the travel memoirists of Shah Sultan Husayn's era, was very precise in the analysis of the times and affairs (Gilanentz 1965: 24-30).

1. The Zoroastrian Population of the Safavid Era

According to Tavernier, the Zoroastrian population of the time (circa. 1654) mostly resided in Kerman and Isfahan. Their population in Kerman was more than ten thousand. Their temple was situated in the around of Kerman in which their senior mowbed (priest) lived. At least one pilgrimage to this place was obligatory for every Zoroastrian in his lifetime (1957: 418-420). Yet the number of the Gabrs of Isfahan in the era of Shah Abbas II (1642-1666) reached four thousand, all of whom under the order of the shah were moved to their previous town of Saadatabad or Gabrabad in the lowest region of Jolfa. In fact, Jolfa consisted of four regions, the farthest of which was the abode of the Gabrs (Chardin 1993-1996, vol.4: 1566-1569 and vol. 5 1690-1952).

2. Daily Life

2.1. Professions

Since the beginning of the Islamic era, strict limitations were placed upon Zoroastrians. Consequently, they turned mostly to farming and gardening for a living and spent their life at the service of the Amahraspandān (Holy Immortals) of the land and plants and water and useful animals. They believed the path of salvation is “working and purifying the four elements, plowing the ground, building gardens, purifying the water from insects and lighting the fire” (Sanson 1965: 188).

As a result, most of the Gabrs of the Safavid epoch were hostlers, farmers, workers, builder’s apprentices and weavers and they weaved premium rugs and wool fabrics. They turned less to business and trade because their wages were little and they had no fund for merchandising. Overall, their special trade was farming. Not only did they consider farming a good and reputable job, but also they felt they please God and gods by engaging in it because mowbeds consistently considered the highest worship to be the birthing of children, building unfarmed lands, and planting fruit-bearing trees (Chardin 1970, vol. 2: 132-137).

However, women mostly threaded yarns at the threshold of the house, spun wool and emptied the spindle weaving fabric (Figuroa 1984: 206 and Della Valle 2001: 510-516). Amongst this, the Gabrs of Kerman mostly worked with wool (Tavernier 1957: 418).

Overall, the most important profession of the Safavid-era Zoroastrians was farming and animal husbandry because in religious texts the importance of these two professions has been much emphasized. In *šāyist našāyist* it has been stated that the pleasure of Spandarmad (Holy Thought, the fourth Amahraspand, earth goddess) is where there is farming, birthing a virtuous son and farming sheep on that land (15: 24). In *Vendidad* (3: 4 and 5), on the third level, the most fortunate land is considered that on which a virtuous man plants as much as he can of wheat, fodder and fruit-bearing trees and provides watering equipment to arid lands. On the fourth level, the most fortunate land is where herds of all sizes are farmed and trained. In *Saddar Nasr* (9), the value of farming is considered equal to that of worshipping God, and the revering of farmers and keeping hardships and war away from them have been emphasized. He who eats of a tree that has been planted by a farmer, whatever good deeds he shall do once fed, is as though the farmer has done with his own hand. Furthermore, peace and tranquility shall be given to his mind for the life of people, after creation by the sublime God, survives owing to the labor of the farmer. For if one does not eat, he shall die; so he to whose toil the survival of men’s lives depends, must be revered and honored. So the biggest ease and happiness is of a land ... on which grains are planted (*šāyist našāyist* 13: 19).

Religious teachings consistently emphasize planting fruit-bearing trees, wheat, fodder and somehow building arid lands and breeding herds. As a result, Zoroastrians always preoccupied themselves more with these two trades to please Ahura (God) and Amahraspands, not exclusively due to the advice of mowbeds and the instructions of religion, but due to its equal valuing with the worship of God as the farmer is a keeper of men’s lives like God.

2.2. Clothing

In the time of Shah Abbas I, the clothing of Zoroastrian men was like the common man, but very tight and short like the poor. It was colored terra cotta and made of firm and rough material. They put on their heads turbans that were completely round and usually plain white. They did not shave their beards and like other Iranians, they kept the hair on their cheeks and chins long. The clothing of the women did not resemble others’ at all, they wore a thin type of pants, a very loose top or robe that came down to the ankles and gave them excellence and dignity. The sleeves of their top were quite long like Arab women’s, to the extent that they came down to the waist in the front and waved to the ground in the back and they were not able to bring their hands out from their sleeves to hold each other’s arms. On it they wore a headscarf or chador that was green and yellow, tending more toward yellow, resembling chadors that Arab or Chaldean women

wore. Orange-colored pendants hanged at the back of their scarves. Herbert considers orange to be their favorite color and reminiscent of the sun god. They always moved with uncovered faces on the street, while Muslim women were deprived of this liberty. They colored their hair more or less light, and mostly red, yellow or brown. A lot of them were barefoot and did not wear shoes or slippers (Herbert 1928: 140, Figueroa 1984: 206, Della Valle 2001: 510-516).

On the material of the fabric, it has been said that Parnagān (monochrome, damask) is better for the body and cotton for the mind, because Parnagān is of harmful animals while cotton is farmed of water and grown of land, therefore it is more important, better and more dignified for the mind (*Menōg ī xrad* 15: 62-66).

Travel memoirists have generally identified the material of the clothing as firm and rough and of vintage colors. *Menōg ī xrad* has also referred to wearing cotton fabrics, which were not as soft as Parnagān, and that it is healthier for the mind. The choice of material, color and even type of clothing could not have been completely up to Zoroastrians; therefore religious teachings cannot be taken into account because the opinion of the Islamic society was always imposed on them in this matter. The general rule was to not wear clothing similar to Muslims; therefore, they had to put on a certain belt and wear distinct clothing to differentiate them. Sometimes, based on the orders of the government of the time, they had to sew a rectangular patch to their clothes to distinguish them from others (Choksy 1989: 54-55; also see: 2002).

2.3. Diet

In this era, Zoroastrians drank wine and perhaps ate pork on the condition that they had fed the pig with their own hand before. It was important that the pig had not eaten defecation, if it had, then they considered its meat forbidden. In general, they were known for eating well and feasting and at meal time they consumed wine and alcohol. They did not eat rabbit's meat, neither did they eat mulberries (Tavernier 1957: 424 and 426).

Good or bad nature is manifested by wine. Should a man of a good nature drink wine, he is like a golden or silver goblet which shines brighter the more it is polished (*Menōg ī xrad* 15: 20 and 26). Drinking wine in moderation is approved of in Zoroastrianism, while drinking it in excess is considered a sin (*Dēnkard book 3, 9* and *Dadestan i Denig* question 50).

Religious texts have referred to the importance of drinking wine but religious sources have not spoken about eating pork, rabbit's meat or mulberries and Tavernier has probably either made a mistake in reporting the matter or accepted commonplace anecdotes.

2.4. Marriage

Tavernier says the Gabrs' religion allows them up to five wives on the condition that they be able to take care of them, but it is not allowed to divorce any of them, unless in the case of proven adultery, or converting to Islam and that only after a year's time during which they might remorsefully return to their religion. If they feel contrition, the mowbed shall separate them for three years as punishment, then marry them again and they become espouses once more. During nuptials, a female mowbed questions their consent in front of witnesses and after admission brings water and rubs it on their foreheads and says a prayer. So they wed. Although Gabrs can have five wives, in fact only one of them has a marriage contract and she is prioritized over the other wives. But if she does not produce offspring for seven years, the husband can have another wife without divorcing the first wife but he must take care of her as he can afford (1957: 423).

Pahlavi Rivāyat states that a man is allowed to leave his wife only when he has unequivocal suspicions about her mind or body (34: 1). It is likely that by five wives, Tavernier meant the five types of marriage common

among Zoroastrians²¹ because among them, even having two wives was only approved of when the first wife was barren or lacked physical and mental health (Boyce 2002: 227).

3. Beliefs and credence

3.1. Belief in a savior figure

Gabrs attribute three unborn children to their prophet. Tavernier believes them to be of one mother, however, the religion (*Saddar Bundehish*: 35)³ believes them of three mothers. According to Tavernier, when Ushidar-mah comes the sun will stop for ten days⁴ as a miracle so that people will bring faith in him. In religious texts, twenty days is mentioned. He has referred to the second savior as Otethotius Sōšāns and said he will emerge more powerful than his two brothers and will convert the whole world to the creed of their prophet. Tavernier has most likely accepted the common belief on this matter because his account generally corresponds to texts but there are contradictions in details which are due to his negligence (Tavernier 1957: 421-424).

3.2. Fasting

Fasting is one of the great sins in Zoroastrianism. According to the lines 48-52 of *Vendidad*, a fasting person deserves great punishment in this world and the afterlife. Between two persons, the one with a full stomach shall be in the company of Aməša Spənta (or Amahraspandān Holy Immortals) more than the hungry one. A hungry man is half dead, while the other has the value of a sheep, a cow and a human. The person who fasts shall see the highest punishment in the afterlife, such as binding his limbs together with steel chains or worse (*Vendidad* 4: 48-52).

Zoroastrians abstain from eating meat for four days every month (the second, twelfth, fourteenth and twenty first). In these four days, eating meat is sinful and is called *nabor* in expression (Niknam 2003: 47-48).

3.3. Impurity

Tears, fallen out tooth, and hair and nails detached from the body were considered impure and they used the expressions *hihr*⁵ and *nasā*⁶ for dirtiness. *Hihr* were impurities that fell from a live body and were generally not solid, but *nasā* were impurities that were ejected as dead. A corpse and pieces torn from the body were called *nasā*.

² 1- *pādixšāy-zanīh*, the marriage of a maiden for the first time with the approval of her parents. 2- *čagar-zanīh* the marriage of a widow or divorcee. 3- *ayōkēn-zanīh* the marriage of a girl who is her father's only heiress daughter whose child is named after her father. 4- *stūr-zanīh*, the marriage of a maiden with a man on the condition that their son be named after a boy who passed away before fifteen years old or in puberty before marriage. All expenses and facilitation of the marriage is upon the parents of the deceased. 5- *xwasrāyān-zanīh*, the marriage of a maiden without the approval of her parents (*Mādayān ī Hazār Dādestān* 104-106).

³ Zoroaster (Zardušt) has told them that Ushidar, Ushidar Māh and Sōšāns shall be born of your maidens ... there shall be a maiden with *Nāmīg-bed* ... Ushidar shall be born of her ... once a millennium passes ... once again the maidens shall sit in water, there shall be a maiden named *Weh-bed* who will become impregnated from the water ... Ushidar Mah shall be born of her ... twenty days and nights the sun shall stop in the sky and not set ... when the era of Ushidar Mah has passed, the maidens will go and sit in the water of Hamun River, there shall be a maiden named *Ardad-bed* who will be impregnated by it and when nine months passes, Sōšāns will be born of her. So Sōšāns shall come and people shall simultaneously accept Zoroastrianism...

⁴ In fact twenty days.

⁵ *Hihr*: Filth and defecation.

⁶ *Nasā*: Corpse, carcass.

3.3.1. Hihr

As soon as women or girls felt the beginning of menstruation, they immediately left home and lived in the wilderness, in a wooden hut with grille walls which had a curtain hanging in it. For ten days, water and broth were taken to them until that time passed, after that everyone sacrificed a baby goat, hen or pigeon based on what they could afford. Afterward, they bathed and invited some relatives to a small gathering and hosted them (Tavernier 1957: 423 also see: *šāyist našāyist* 2: 75, Ādur-Farrōbay ī Farrozzādān: 36, 35).

Should a menstruating woman see water or fire, there is a Framān⁷ upon her. She must not look at the sun and other lights, sheep and vegetation and she shall not speak with a virtuous man (*šāyist našāyist* 3: 27-29). Elsewhere it is said that cooked food that is three steps away from a menstruating woman is evil, it is not proper to eat food that is left from her lunch as dinner and what is left of her dinner as lunch, it should not be given to the woman herself either (3: 12). A menstruating woman should be avoided, and bread and broth should be given to her in doses so that she can eat it (Saddar Nasr 41 and 68). Their food should be taken to them on iron or lead plate; the carrier should stop three steps away from her (*šāyist našāyist* 3: 53; also see: Ādur-Farrōbay ī Farrozzādān 132-140).

It was perceived that woman during menstruation was in the possession of the devil and demons. Therefore, she did not have the right to touch the elements of purity, and she always had to avoid the members of the household and not eat meals with them during menstruation. These difficult instructions, which are generally mentioned in *Vendidad*, encouraged a lot of women toward Islam.

3.3.2. Nasā

Gabrs did not shave their hair like other Easterners; by contrast they grew their hair long and did not cut their nails. If by chance they had to cut their hair or nails they would put it in a special place designated for that purpose (Tavernier 1957: 434). When combing, if hair fell on their clothes and remained there for more than six hours they cleansed it with cow urine for purification and if by accident they came across or touched impurity, after coming home they had to wash themselves with cow urine (Tavernier 1957: 426). In the case of touching the corpse of a human or a dog or even looking at it they purified themselves with cow urine (ibid). According to *Vendidad* combing the hair and cutting the nails are actions deserving of death which put people in the path of demons. It has been recommended that when people comb their hair or cut their nails they put it away in holes and cracks ... you, oh Zarathustra, in this corporeal world when you comb your hair and cut it or cut your nails you should immediately move it to a place that is ten steps away from the virtuous man, thirty steps away from fire, thirty steps from water and fifty steps away from the brand of the Barsom (the bunch of twigs used in the Yasnā ceremony). And thereupon dig a hole in soft earth and place the cut hair in it, then afterward draw a steel card of three, six and nine grooves and recite the Ahunavar prayer three, six and nine times (17: 1-6). In addition in *šāyist našāyist* it has also been said that cut nails should not be discarded without praying. For if they do not pray it will be the tool of great demons (12: 6).

Ardā Vīrāz in his spiritual voyage sees that worms chew a woman's body. He questions the reason and realizes she was an infidel who in life combed her hair over fire and cast hair and lice and nits into the fire and put fire under her body and took care of her body with fire (Ardā Vīrāz 34: 1-3).

It has been said that after cutting nails, it must be put in paper and *Yaθā ahu vairyo*⁸ should be recited ... and should not be allowed to be used by sorcerers; it has been said that if it falls on food, illness should be

⁷ Framān: a degree of sin.

⁸ Or Ahunavar is one of the four Gathic Avestan formulas.

feared (Saddar Nasr 14; for impurity of tooth see: Ādur-Farrōbay ī Farroxzādān 49, 54, 86, 89, 92, 97, 99, 101, 102, 103).

The reason why Zoroastrians generally kept their hair and nails long was that cutting hair and nails were considered impure and for removing impurity they often had to use cow urine for purification or after cutting they had to perform complicated and difficult actions to avoid impurity (see 4.3. Purity section in this paper).

3.4. Animals

3.4.1. Beloved animals

The two animals that Zoroastrians loved were cows and dogs. Killing and eating the cow was forbidden in their religion because it gave great services to humans. It ploughed the field and helped wheat grow, which was their food. The heifer, in addition to the importance of its milk, was the tool of the purification of impurities and the blessing of sins (Tavernier 1957: 428-429).

It has been said that the infidel who in life kills sheep, cows and other quadruples against the rules of religion will have his limbs broken and separated in the afterlife (ibid, 31: 1-3). Therefore, killing sheep without following principles should be strictly avoided. In *sūtkar nask* (one of the seven Nasks (parts) of Gāhān), it is said that the punishment of those who have killed sheep in contradiction to rules is that the wool of the sheep shall become sharp like razors and the killer of sheep shall be hit with it (*šāyist našāyist* 10: 8, also Saddar Nasr 34 and Pahlavi Rivāyat 14: 5; 26: 2; 61: 3).

According to custom, dogs had much value and respect from Zoroastrians (Tavernier, quoting Tancoigne 2004: 192). Whenever they eat bread they must take three bites from themselves and give it to the dog. They must not hit dogs, for among dervishes there is none who is more of a dervish than a dog. They should constantly feed the dog, for it has great rewards ... if on their path a dog is sleeping they should not step too hard for they could wake it. The importance of the dog is mostly because in this world it is the guard of men and sheep. If not for the dog, they could not have one sheep. And every time it barks, demons and devils shall jump and run away (Saddar Nasr 31).

The dog alone has three qualities: that of the clergyman, the warrior, the farmer, the musician, the highway thief, the peddler and the child (*Vendidād* 13: 44).

The corpse of various types of canines, except the fox and the skunk and the beaver, is like the corpse of men (*Pahlavi Rivāyat* 44: 1). Unto he who kills a dog is four counts of sin (*Pahlavi Rivāyat* 21: 5).

Ardā Vīrāz sees the soul of a man whom demons tear apart like dogs, he finds out that in life this man took food from shepherd or home-guarding dogs or beat or killed them (Ardā Vīrāz 48: 1-4 and previous source 98: 1-3).

The importance of having dogs and cats is mostly due to their benefit for mankind. The cow provided the food of men and its urine was also the means of purification. The value of the dog is so high that its corpse is equal to a human's corpse. It has been emphasized to feed it of one's own food, not to disturb its peace and not to hurt it. The person who harms a cow or dog experiences severe punishment (in the case of the cow, the breaking of his limbs or the piercing of his body with the razor-like hair of the animal and in the case of the dog, getting torn apart by demons) in the afterlife.

3.4.2. Hated animals

All creatures that are harmful or disgusting to humans from predator quadruples to scorpions and tarantulas and toads are all of the anti-creations of evil, therefore, they are considered impure (Boyce 2002:

70-71). Safavid Zoroastrians hate eels, crocodiles, toads, frogs, turtles, crabs, household and wild mice⁹, and specially the cat¹⁰ which they say resembles the devil, the most (Della Valle 2001, vol. 1: 510-516 and Tancoigne 2004: 192 quoting Tavernier). When they got ill, they would send the poor to go find these animals and kill them, in this way they could give money to the poor and also do good deeds for the sake of the deceased by killing the animals. The reason for this enmity with the animals is because they do not consider them the creations of God, but the creations of the devil and tools for him (Tavernier 1957: 428-429).

In the religion, it has been advised to kill harmful animals and the insects of the earth, for it has great rewards. Especially these five things, first the toad which lives in water, second the snake and scorpion, third the fly which flies, fourth the ant, fifth the mouse ... so whomsoever kills more noxious animals, his reward is like that of the fire temple caretaker who worships God (Saddar Nasr 43; also see: *Pahlavi Rivāyat* 21: a-13, a-2, a-5, a-8).

Killing evil animals, including noxious animals such as snakes, toads and scorpions and wandering beasts such as mice, cats and other savage quadruples not only had great reward for Zoroastrians but also was a way for the poor to make money and do charity for the deceased.

4. Rites

4.1. Celebrations

4.1.1. Nowruz

Among all celebrations, Nowruz is the happiest and most important one of Iranians and specially Zoroastrians. In the Safavid era, to celebrate this occasion they covered pottery urns with plants and decorated the house with it. They mixed some garden cress seeds with soil, wetted it, covered the entire urn with it, covered that with wet rags and filled the urn with water. Some days afterward, the garden cress seed would grow because of the moisture and the urn would be full of cress plants all over (Chardin 1993-1996, vol. 2: 728).

The Zoroastrian creed derives strength from the planting of wheat. When wheat is planted, demons start stirring and when it sprouts, they become weakened from the bottom of their hearts and when it reaps demons cry ... Demons make home in a house in which wheat rots and decays and when there is an abundance of wheat, it is like molten iron swishes in demons' mouths (*Vendidād* 3: 30 and 31).

It was also common to color eggs for Nowruz. People considered the egg a source of the genesis of life and creatures. As a result, they dyed and painted many eggs and presented them to each other. Every year the kings put five hundred eggs which were gold plated and had four miniature faces painted on them on golden trays and sent them to their wives (Chardin 1993-1996, vol. 1: 452). The importance of the egg among Iranians was because they considered the creation of the galactic sky to be like an egg. Ahura Mazda created the sky like an egg and put all creation into it; himself took abode in it through battling the devil ... and created the earth like an egg yolk inside the sky (*Bundahišn* 139).

Planting plants (which strengthened religion and destroyed demons) and dying eggs (its relation to the universe) were among rites that are still performed during Nowruz. However, because Nowruz was a national celebration, for more information on it refer to Chardin, *ibid*.

⁹ *Bundahišn* 9.

¹⁰ *Ibid*.

4.1.2. The Sepandārmazgān celebration

On the fifth day of the month of Esfand, Sepandārmazgān is celebrated to honor virtuous women. Formerly, women wore new clothes on this day and received presents from men and men did the contemporary household tasks and chores of women. Currently, Zoroastrians still celebrate this day under the name of women's or mother's day. In the Safavid era, all women gathered in the city or the village and killed every toad they could find (Tavernier 1957: 424).

It is said in *Vendidad* that the most melancholy place on earth, on the fourth level, is that where numerous evil holes have formed more (3: 10). Therefore, who brings the most happiness and satisfaction to the earth is he who destroys the homes of evil creations on the earth more (3: 22).

Killing noxious animals was one of the things they did in this celebration (see 3.4.2. Hated Animals section of this paper).

4.2. Death

At death, they put a dog's snout on the mouth of the moribund so as to calm his soul and put it in the hands of an angel (Tancoigne 2004: 192 quoting Tavernier). About this, only a blind dog has been mentioned: "a blind dog drives away evil when he puts his snout on a corpse. If he puts his snout on the hair or nails, he does not drive away impurity" (*šāyist našāyist* 2: 4).

Overall, the Gabrs put the corpse on towers or buildings that were called Dakhma¹¹. Some travel memoirists have referred to it as towers of silence. The Dakhma was a round area on a tall mountain which was miles away from the villages around. The walls around the Dakhma were made of stone and cement and there was a small iron door for entering and exiting. Sometimes there was no door. The area was around ten meters and steeped toward the center. In the center, there was a deep hole which they called Astudan¹². They put the bones inside it and put sulfur and lime on that to turn them to ash. On the four outside corners, four deeper holes were dug which were connected to the center hole. The depth of the holes was approximately one meter and they were filled with gravel and pebbles (Ghadiani 2012: 501 and Mehr 1995: 174-175). The carriers of the dead entered the Dakhma by ladder. Using a tall stick, they stood the corpse up clothed in the open space next to the wall to be preyed on by crows, kites and other carnivore birds. In summer, a bad odor spread around from this four-walled place. In winter because the corpses froze birds did not approach them (Figueroa 1984: 204-206; Chardin 1993-1996, vol. 5: 1562; Della Valle 2001: 80).

After the dog's visit ... they should take the corpse to a high mountain and space according to ritual. So that dogs and birds do not take it to a place where there is water and farming and living, the corpse is bound so that scavenging birds eat its flesh, if the flesh is not eaten it rots, decays and hosts noxious bugs. Thence, they take the bones away ritually to the astudan which is so higher than the ground and a ceiling is on top of it such that rain cannot touch the corpse (*Dadestan i Denig* question no. 17 and refer to *Vendidad* 6: 44-45; *Ādur-Farrōbay ī Farroxzādān* 50).

Steppe eagles found the corpse faster than all others and took the eyes out of their sockets. If crows approached the right eye, it showed that person was virtuous and had been blessed. But if they took out the left eye, he was a sinner. As a result, it would sadden everyone; they would not speak to each other and did not eat (Tavernier 1957: 425 and Herbert 1928: 139). It has been said in the religion that after life leaves the body, when the wolf and fox and dog and bird take the body and chew it, there will be no difficulty to the consciousness of the virtuous, but there will be such pain and hardship to the soul of sinners that they shall cry out (*Pahlavi Rivāyat* 24: 1).

¹¹ Funerary tower erected on a hill for the disposal of the dead according to the Zoroastrian ritual.

¹² A place for putting dead bones.

The event of being seen by a dog, according to popular belief, brought peace to the soul of the dead and placed it in an angel's hands. Then, they took the dead to the Dakhma, the construction material of which was all stone, iron and cement. Then they exposed the dead to scavenging birds on a tall ladder and finally, they took the remaining bones to the Astudan.

4.3. Purity

One way to cleanse impurity and sin was to use cow's urine. They mixed cow's urine with water and fed it to sinners to have their sins forgiven. They called it the 'judge's water'. They cultured the cow's urine mixed with water for forty days in willow and other plants' skin. After the penitent person confessed to his sin, if his sin was big he had to stay at the judge's house for ten days and not consume water or drinks, unless given to him by the judge ... then they fed him with the mixture. So he became purified of sin. After purification from sin that person had to give a feast to his friends at the judge's house. A female sinner also repented from sin in the same order with a female judge (Tavernier 1957: 427).

The usage of cow's urine for purification was mostly to cleanse impurity coming from a dead human or dog (*Dēnkard* book 3), even looking at them, or the impurity from touching cut hair or nails. On this matter, the food of a woman who gave birth to a stillborn child was ash mixed with cow's urine in the amount of three bites, six bites or nine bites (*Vendidad* 5: 50 and 51; also see: *Ādur-Farrōbay ī Farroxxādān* 79, 80). Then nine nights¹³ must pass, and in these nine nights she must be away from Zoroastrians, separate in housing, food and clothing. After these nine nights she must wash herself and her clothes with cow's urine mixed with water, hence she will be pure and clean (*Vendidad* 5: 56, also see: *Ādur-Farrōbay ī Farroxxādān*).

He who needs to perform *baršnūm*¹⁴ but cannot and does not, shall not be purified even if he performs *Pādyāb*¹⁵ a thousand times. For this evil nature is in his veins and flesh and bones. Except religious *nērang*¹⁶ nothing will purify (*Saddar Nasr* 36).

Yet he who performs *baršnūm* for people must be a man who reveres the soul and speaks the truth and so virtuous he devotes his life to piety (*Saddar Nasr* 36).

It could be said that the most important and difficult way of purification was performing *baršnūm* which according to different sources took nine, ten or fifteen days. During this time, one had to consume cow's urine which was cultured in ash, water or plants' skins. Afterward, he washed himself and his clothes with cow's urine and during the entire time he lived separately in home, clothes and food from other Zoroastrians. In the end, occasionally he gave a feast.

Conclusion

– The main profession of Safavid Zoroastrians was farming and grooming. On one hand, religion encouraged them to do these jobs; on the other hand, they were poor and had no fund to enter industry and trade.

– Men's clothing was plain and humble, tight and short from rough and firm terra cotta colored material. They wore turbans on their heads and kept their hair and beard long. Women wore a loose and long top, with a yellow or green headscarf and did not cover their faces. In religious teachings, no attention has been given to clothing, except silk clothing for the body and cotton for the mind has been considered beneficial.

¹³ Fifteen days, *Dēnkard* book 3.

¹⁴ *Baršnūm*: The major purification ritual.

¹⁵ *Pādyāb*: Purification ritual.

¹⁶ *Nērang*: Religious ritual.

- Gabrs drank. According to their religious beliefs, wine revealed good or bad nature. As for eating pork, which is according to Tavernier, there is no reference in religious texts.
- Tavernier has said their religion allows them five wives. Most likely he meant the five types of marriage common among them since bigamy among them was only approved of in the case of the first wife's infertility or lack of mental or physical health.
- During history the followers of Zoroastrianism keenly looked forward to the emergence of the savior figure. Therefore, they came to believe that Sōšāns will be born of the seed of the prophet himself, which is kept miraculously in the Hamun River.
- On impurity, the most important matter that attracted Tavernier's attention is the impurity of daštān (menstruation). Other impurities are related to hair and nails cut from the body which they avoided according to doctrine. One purifying element was cow's urine which they used with water or ash.
- According to doctrine, cows and dogs were highly important, but killing noxious animals had great rewards because they were of evil.
- Planting seeds in Nowruz was important because it made demons cry, they also considered the egg the source of the world's genesis.
- The dead were put in the Dakhma and the importance of which eye was taken out first was among common beliefs. About the belief in a savior, only Tavernier has made some reference to the matter, which mostly corresponds to their religious beliefs.
- On the rites of death, being seen by a dog, and putting the dead in the Dakhma, they also acted according to religious doctrine.

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