

DĀNESH

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The UNIVERSITY of OKLAHOMA
College of International Studies
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From the Faculty Advisors

Since its founding in 2016, *DĀNESH* has sought to provide a forum to showcase the original research produced by undergraduate students at the University of Oklahoma's Iranian Studies program. This third volume of the journal was produced through the able editorial leadership of **Corey Standley** (BA, 2019) and **Kayleigh Kuyon** (BA, 2019). As co-editors-in-chief, Corey and Kayleigh have ensured that *DĀNESH* has continued to thrive as a forum for the study of all aspects of the history, culture, society, and politics of Iran and the Persianate world.

The name of the journal, *DĀNESH*, comes from the Persian word meaning *knowledge, learning, and wisdom*. We believe this is a fitting name for a journal that seeks to foster deep and compassionate understanding of one of the world's most culturally rich and historically complex civilizations. It is with this in mind that we present this volume of *DĀNESH*.

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Zoroastrians: Becoming a Minority in Their Homeland

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It is arguable that no other religion has had more direct and indirect influence on humankind than that of the ancient Zoroastrian faith. This religion, which was the firstborn of the revealed world-religions, existed long before it entered recorded history and has ancient, roots in the Bronze Age, reaching as far back as 1500 B.C.E.¹ According to some ancient Greek sources, it could have even originated several thousand years before that.² Zoroastrianism has had a large impact on Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, as well as some influence on Buddhism and Gnostic traditions. It even held the status of state religion for three prestigious Iranian empires, spanning well over a millennium.³ Yet today, many people in the West have never heard of Zoroastrianism. Pockets of Zoroastrians remain in India and Iran, along with even smaller communities sprinkled across the world, but the total number of Zoroastrians left on Earth is estimated to be fewer than 120,000.⁴ James Darmesteter has said of the faith: “There has

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¹ Mary Boyce, *Zoroastrians: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices* (Routledge, 1979), 1-2.

² Richard Foltz, *Spirituality in the Land of the Noble: How Iran Shaped the World’s Religions* (Oneworld, 2004), 19.

³ Boyce, *Zoroastrians*, 1-2.

⁴ M.T. Stepaniants, “The Encounter of Zoroastrianism with Islam,” *Philosophy East and West* Vol. 52 no. 2 (2002): 159.

been no other great belief in the world that ever left such poor and meager monuments of its past splendor.”⁵ Indeed, the primary religion now associated with Zoroastrian’s homeland of Persia is Islam, particularly Shi’ism. How did this happen? If Zoroastrianism was already so old and entrenched by the time the Arabs invaded Persia, why did it fade away over the next few centuries while Islam grew and other minority religions endured? This paper will address these questions and more by taking a look at the Zoroastrians from the 8th through the 11th centuries, their relations with the Muslims of that time, how they reacted to Muslim rule, and what factors may have led them to convert, flee, or die fighting for their ancestral religion.

Setting the Scene

The final years of the Sassanian Empire were far from its finest. The Sassanian monarchy had been losing power to the military and the local nobility since the death of its last powerful king, Khosrow Anushirvan. The Empire was frequently funding war, and as a result the middle and lower classes were suffering severely.⁶ The state religion of Zoroastrianism, which had long relied heavily on government support to sustain itself, had largely lost touch with the needs of Persians, some of whom were already leaving the state’s religion in favor of Manichaeism, Judaism, Christianity, or other religions before the Arabs arrived with Islam.⁷ Such facts have led many western scholars to suppose that Zoroastrianism was close to dying on its own and all it required was a conquering people to come with a new religion to crush the ancient, mummified faith into dust.⁸ However, these interpretations are largely based on preconceptions, as we already know the results of the Arab-Islamic invasion. Even in its weakened state, Sassanian Persia was still massively wealthy, and Zoroastrianism continued to dominate all of the Sassanian minority religions, securing the loyalty of the citizenry, rich and poor.⁹ The religion provided its followers with a purpose for life, ways of achieving their goals, rules for personal conduct, hope, and strength. However, it was laden with archaic doctrine and priests who continuously charged citizens for their religious services. Zoroastrianism

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Janet Kestenberg Amighi, *The Zoroastrians of Iran: Conversion, Assimilation, or Persistence* (AMS Press, 1990), 58.

⁷ Foltz, *Spirituality*, 37.

⁸ Boyce, *Zoroastrians*, 143.

⁹ Ibid., 141-143.

was in need of the reviving breeze of reformation, but what came first were the Arabs with the religion of Muhammad.¹⁰

With the onset of the Arab-Islamic conquest of Persia in 633 C.E., the Sassanian Empire fell quickly. Only a decade later, Arab forces had already reached the northern and easternmost reaches of the Empire, and by 654 C.E. all the major cities to the east had fallen to the Arabs.¹¹ Despite these radical changes, there was no rapid transition from Zoroastrianism to Islam. Islam, like Zoroastrianism, was primarily an ethnic religion at the time and the Arabs were not nearly as interested in converting people as they were in securing financial gains, which they obtained through the taxation of non-Muslims.¹² The Arabs, who separated themselves from the Persians by living in garrison towns, allowed the Persians to largely maintain their governing system and only a minority of Persians, such as the military class, lost their religious freedom.¹³ Worried that too much change to the existing system might hurt their steady flow of tax collections, the conquering Muslims allowed the same Persian families who had held governmental positions under the Sassanian monarchy to remain in office, assuming that they submitted to Muslim rule.¹⁴

Even in this early period, during which the Arabs took measures to disrupt the existing system as little as possible, some of the more remote areas refused to stop fighting and rural revolts were common across Persia, though they were small and localized in nature.¹⁵ In fact, many regions, especially in the east, would remain volatile or semi-autonomous for centuries to come.¹⁶ As a whole, however, Persia was firmly under Arab dominion and the ways in which Persians in different areas reacted to this would eventually lead to vastly different outcomes in Muslim-Zoroastrian relations and patterns of conversion, which will be further expanded. To

¹⁰ Ibid., 143-144.

¹¹ Amighi, *Zoroastrians of Iran*, 59.

¹² Aptin Khanbaghi, "De-Zoroastrianization and Islamization: The Two Phases of Iran's Religious Transition, 747-837 CE," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* Vol. 29 no. 2 (2009): 202; Jamsheed K. Choksy, *Conflict and Cooperation: Zoroastrian Subalterns and Muslim Elites in Medieval Iranian Society* (Columbia University Press, 1997), 4.

¹³ Khanbaghi, "De-Zoroastrianization," 202.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Patricia Crone, *The Nativist Prophets of Early Islamic Iran: Rural revolt and Local Zoroastrianism* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 167.

¹⁶ Amighi, *Zoroastrians of Iran*, 60.

begin, this question must be addressed: why did Zoroastrians begin converting to Islam at all, if the majority of them were not being forced?

Early Muslim-Zoroastrian Interactions

The main change that the Arabs instituted in Persian society was that of dividing the community into different categories based on whether they were “People of the Book,” “People without a Book,” or non-Arab converts, later called clients.¹⁷ The “People of the Book” category was a group of protected minorities which, according to the Koran, is supposed to include Jews, Christians, and Sabians. With fewer scriptures than other religions and a monotheistic faith, and no adherence to the Islamic tenants, the Zoroastrians found themselves part of the “People without a Book” group. This simplified their options under the expanding Arabs to death or conversion to Islam.¹⁸ However, given the facts that the Arabs needed the Zoroastrians to run the bureaucracy and that the Zoroastrian population greatly outnumbered that of the Arabs, they decided to include the Persian population in the first group.¹⁹ Not coincidentally, this decision also meant that the huge Zoroastrian population would be subject not only to the land tax, but the *jizya* head tax.²⁰ One might think that poorer Zoroastrians with weaker ties to their religion would have quickly converted in order to avoid these extra taxes. However, while Islamic law says that all Muslims are equal, the Arabs had not completely forgiven the duality of the Zoroastrian religion and, at least under the Umayyad Caliphate, Persian converts did not attain this equal status.²¹

That is not to say there were no financial incentives to convert, especially for high-ranking officials who could see the Arabs preferred to employ Muslims where they could. The Caliphate may have seen Islam as an Arab religion and its subjects as a means to becoming rich, but there were many individual Muslims who were eager to grow the ranks of their religion.²² Early on, Muslim holy men were able to convert some Persians by convincing them of the parallels between the two religions. Occasionally some Muslims with power, such as the Arab commander

¹⁷ Ibid., 61.

¹⁸ Boyce, *Zoroastrians*, 146.

¹⁹ Ibid., Amighi, *Zoroastrians of Iran*, 62-63.

²⁰ Amighi, *Zoroastrians of Iran*, 62-63; A. Christian Van Gorder, *Christianity in Persia and the Status of Non-Muslims in Iran* (Lexington Books, 2010), 79.

²¹ Amighi, *Zoroastrians of Iran*, 62-63.

²² Boyce, *Zoroastrians*, 147.

Qutaiba ibn Muslim, would even offer small amounts of money to any Zoroastrians who would begin attending Islamic prayers.²³ Though other examples of financial incentive appear in the record, they are uncommon and any large-scale conversions based on economic opportunity lacked concrete evidence.²⁴ That said, there were plenty of other reasons to convert. For enslaved Persians, it was often the opportunity for freedom that drew them to Islam. Others came to it because of how familiar it seemed, as the young religion had borrowed several elements from Zoroastrianism, and still others saw the mere fact that the Sassanians had been defeated by the Arabs as evidence of the divine power that lay behind Islam.²⁵ If none of these things were tempting enough, the devotional life of a Muslim was far simpler than that of a Zoroastrian. A new convert would find himself freed from the priests he had previously been bound to and laws concerning the purity of women were much easier to cope with in Islam.²⁶ All of this is taking for granted the fact that conversion was even an option, as most religions of the time were ethnically based and traditionally didn't accept converts.²⁷

Despite the many reasons why a Zoroastrian in early Islamic Persia might have considered conversion, very few actually did so in the early years. This contradicts many Muslim sources saying that Zoroastrians converted quickly and easily; however, the fact that the Arab population was between one-tenth and one-fifth of the number of Persians and that the two groups often refused to live together, most Zoroastrians probably knew very little about Islam early on.²⁸ Even for those who did, Islam presented a completely different, monotheistic version of looking at the world for a dualist Zoroastrian. Islam also came with a foreign tongue and many customs that were completely alien to Persians, such as circumcision, rules

²³ Ibid.; Van Gorder, *Christianity in Persia*, 48-49.

²⁴ Richard W. Bulliet, "Conversion to Islam," in *The New Cambridge History of Islam*, edited by David Orrin Morgan and Anthony Reid, 529-538, 670-671. Vol. 3, *The Early Islamic World Eleventh to Eighteenth Centuries*, (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 530.

²⁵ Boyce, *Zoroastrians*, 148.

²⁶ Ibid., 149.

²⁷ Crone, *Nativist Prophets*, 174.

²⁸ Choksy, *Conflict and Cooperation*, 44; Richard W. Bulliet, "Conversion Stories in Early Islam," in *Conversion and Continuity: Indigenous Christian Communities in Islamic Lands, Eighth to Eighteenth Centuries*, edited by Michael Gervers and Ramzi Jibrān Bikhāzi (P.I.M.S., 1990), 132.

governing which meats were clean and unclean, and abstention from wine.²⁹

However, with the opening of the 8th century, the Umayyads changed the language of the administration from Persian to Arabic.³⁰ This was a blow to Zoroastrianism, and Persians who had already voluntarily converted and learned Islam's sacred language now had a huge advantage. As more government positions were filled with Muslim converts and Zoroastrians were squeezed out, the next blow was already on its way. The translation of the great Persian epics into Arabic not only undermined the uniqueness of Zoroastrianism's links with Persia's glorious past, but it also allowed Islamic civilization to absorb knowledge of this celebrated history into its common fabric, thus permitting Persian Muslims to claim their connections to Persian history without coming across as anti-Islamic.³¹ This encouraged even more upper-class Zoroastrians, who were already under more pressure than the lower classes, to convert. Seeing the damage that was being done, some Zoroastrians tried bribing Persian Muslims to stop their translations, though the offers were refused.³² Further damage was done by Persian Muslims as they started attaching themselves to Islamic history with stories of people such as Salman al-Farsi and the fictitious Sassanian princess, Shahrbanu.³³

At this point, the rate of conversion began to pick up drastically for much of Persia. The increasing number of converts led to the caliphate's ability to pass more and more laws to increase Arabization. By 741 C.E. the Umayyads felt that they no longer needed any Zoroastrians in the government, so they decreed that non-Muslims be excluded from such positions.³⁴ This decree, of course, led to further conversions by government officials who did not wish to lose their livelihoods. Many of these conversions, however, were discovered to have been faked and the offending Zoroastrian administrators were executed.³⁵ At the same time, propagandists for the house of 'Abbas, who were rivals of the widely-

²⁹ Boyce, *Zoroastrians*, 149.

³⁰ Khanbaghi, "De-Zoroastrianization," 203.

³¹ C.E. Bosworth, "The Heritage of Rulership in Early Islamic Iran and the Search for Dynastic Connections with the Past," *Iran* Vol. 11 (1973): 55-56.

³² Apton Khanbaghi, *The Fire, the Star, and the Cross: Minority Religions in Medieval and Early Modern Iran* (I.B. Tauris, 2006), 19.

³³ Boyce, *Zoroastrians*, 151.

³⁴ Khanbaghi, *Fire, Star, Cross*, 19; Amighi, *Zoroastrians of Iran*, 65.

³⁵ Khanbaghi, *Fire, Star, Cross*, 19.

despised Umayyads, were fostering the growing Shi'ite movement, relying heavily on Persian Muslim supporters, and they soon gained enough power to seize the caliphate.³⁶ Once in power, the 'Abbasids often showed favor to Persian Muslims and the disadvantages for Persians who did not convert were increasingly obvious.³⁷ Though it took time, this contributed to the continued increase in conversions, as shown by the graph from Bulliet's study (see appendix of this paper, p.109).³⁸ Under the 'Abbasids, the Zoroastrian literary culture would flourish like it never had, but the Zoroastrians themselves would also begin to face the harshest persecution that they ever had.³⁹

Reasons for Conversion

So far, we have seen many of the reasons that medieval Persians may have had for converting from Zoroastrianism to Islam, but there are still the patterns of conversion to discuss. This subject includes different kinds of patterns, both overall and regional. Generally, Persians converting to Islam came in three different phases: military, urban, and rural.⁴⁰ The military phase was primarily during the years of the Arab conquest and there were very few converts. As previously noted, few Zoroastrians were forced to convert during these years and most were allowed to keep their religion if they submitted to Arab rule and paid their taxes.⁴¹ While there was at least one story in which a Persian commander was so awed by the invading Muslims and their religion that he requested their permission to join them, this tale probably does more to show the sorts of didactic messages Muslims were passing around than it conveys reality.⁴² The second phase of conversion deals mostly with the city-dwellers of medieval Persia, wherein conversion began in earnest. On the whole, Muslims were vastly outnumbered by the Zoroastrians during the late 7th to mid-8th centuries. However, populations were not distributed evenly, and Muslims tended to congregate in cities. This inflated their population ratio in urban areas and led to greater impacts which, coupled with other factors, increased

³⁶ Boyce, *Zoroastrians*, 151.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Richard W. Bulliet, *Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Period: An Essay in Quantitative History* (Harvard UP, 1979), 23.

³⁹ Van Gorder, *Christianity in Persia*, 51; Foltz, *Spirituality*, 37.

⁴⁰ Choksy, *Conflict and Cooperation*, 106.

⁴¹ Foltz, *Spirituality*, 37.

⁴² Bulliet, "Conversion Stories," 124.

conversion rates.⁴³ These events spanned the 8th and 9th centuries and into the 10th century.

The third and final phase was the widespread acceptance of Islam in Persian villages and rural communities across Persia. As can be expected, Islam bled out of the urban areas as people moved around and as missionaries continued to proselytize. Initially, villages would only have a minority of Muslims in them and they would often live separately from the Zoroastrians, but as more conversions occurred on an individual or small group basis, communities would eventually reach a critical mass of Muslims and the religious reorientation of the area would be ensured and then spread further.⁴⁴ Conversion during this time was less a matter of belief and more a matter of social behavior. To succumb to the growing power of Islam through conversion was often considered a symbolic death in the Zoroastrian community and, as a result, some Zoroastrians would follow one another in conversion in order to remain a part of the same community. Many of these converts did not know much about Islam and would end up mixing bits and pieces of it with their former religion.⁴⁵ This led to religious identity ambiguity, where Persians would use whichever identity best suited them, given the social situation at hand.⁴⁶ By the end of the 10th century, this massive wave of conversions was tapering off and the small remaining Zoroastrian communities were even more cohesive and capable of fending off Muslim missionaries, despite conversions continuing through the 13th century.⁴⁷

It should be kept in mind that these were overall patterns, as there were more specific regional patterns of conversion that took place across Iran. In areas forming the southeastern and western territorial boundaries of Persia, namely communities in present day Iraq, Khuzistan, Azerbaijan, and Sistan, Muslims and Zoroastrians were readily able to coexist in relative harmony.⁴⁸ It had only taken a few major battles before the inhabitants of these areas had surrendered to the invading Arabs and there had not been excessive violations of the pacts made thereafter by either side. As a result, there were fewer bitter memories to cause the opposing sides to hate each other and they began to intermingle in civic centers such as Ardabil,

⁴³ Choksy, *Conflict and Cooperation*, 107.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Bulliet, "Conversion Stories," 128-129.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 530.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*; Choksy, *Conflict and Cooperation*, 107.

⁴⁸ Choksy, *Conflict and Cooperation*, 45.

Ctesiphon, Tabriz, and Jalula'. The two religious communities in these provinces even banded together against external threats like the Turks and the Mongols. With all of this in mind, it should be no surprise that these places later saw the fairly peaceful conversion of the Persians, as Muslims became closer to Zoroastrians and were able to convince them of Islam's ascendancy.⁴⁹

Patterns of Conversion

The regions that included Fars, Khurasan, the Jibal, and Kirman were a very different story.⁵⁰ These areas were the historical centers of Zoroastrian society and they likely had plenty to remind them of the Sassanian glory days. Additionally, the people in these regions had been much less willing to submit to Muslim rule during the initial invasion and had fought long and bitter wars. Muslim leaders had punished them for this, which only led to more hatred and large-scale insurrections—which, in turn, caused the extermination of large swathes of the population and the enslavement of many survivors. Remaining Zoroastrians in these parts of Persia were consequently very unsupportive and distrustful of Muslim immigrants. Nevertheless, immigrants continued to come and the ongoing tensions and struggles for power led to much lower rates of cooperation and cohabitation than in the west and southeast.⁵¹

The third and final grouping for general, regional patterns of interactions between the invading Arab-Muslims and the Persian Zoroastrians is that of Transoxiana and the Caspian areas of Tabaristan and Daylam. Like in the second group of regions that included Fars and Kirman, "Muslims and Zoroastrians in these regions held a mutual distaste for cohabitation and long-lasting enmity as a result of brutal military clashes."⁵² The Persians native to these areas, like the land itself, were very inhospitable to Arab settlers and regularly attacked them. However, tempestuous as these regions were, they simply did not reach the vast amounts of conflict as the old Sassanian centers of power did and they were able to achieve cooperation with Muslims sooner.⁵³

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Choksy, *Conflict and Cooperation*, 45.

⁵² Ibid., 46.

⁵³ Ibid.

Zoroastrians Under the ‘Abbasids

Now, having discussed both reasons for conversion and the patterns in which it arose, we can return to the Zoroastrians where we left them: under the ‘Abbasids. This was a hectic period for Zoroastrianism as it at once found its literature booming, its members either converting to Islam or facing persecution, and a restructuring in the face of dwindling numbers of qualified priests. All of this was happening with a backdrop of political turmoil as audacious leaders arose within Persian society and tried to use the social and religious disorientation to enforce their own ideologies.

Though the ‘Abbasids were Arab, the succession of the ‘Abbasid Caliphate in 750 C.E. was largely thanks to Persians and it marked the Persian conquest of Islam.⁵⁴ The ‘Abbasids removed many of the discriminations that had previously been in place against converts, granted governorships to Persian Muslims, and even allowed local Persian dynasties to form.⁵⁵ However, they also turned out to be deadly enemies for Zoroastrianism. The Islamic clergy under the ‘Abbasids, who were largely Persian, began persecuting heretics zealously.⁵⁶ These efforts were primarily focused against Muslim sectarians at first, but they culminated in a harsher climate for non-Muslims and Persians who were suspected to have been false converts, as Ibn Muqaffa found out when he was killed for allegedly practicing Zoroastrianism in secret.⁵⁷

By the 9th century, animosity against Zoroastrians had reached the point that their temples and sacred fire-shrines were being destroyed and they feared losing their status as a protected minority altogether.⁵⁸ As a reaction to this, Zoroastrians began transcribing and codifying holy books, the first of which stemmed from ancient oral traditions and were originally written down to defend the religion against Christianity and Manichaeism.⁵⁹ In the face of this new threat posed by Islam, scholars arose who began supplementing their religion with philosophy, reinterpreting some scripture in order to be more in line with Islam, and composing important works that exist to today.⁶⁰ The purpose of these written works spanned everything from personal letters and answers to questions about Zoroastrianism to

⁵⁴ Amighi, *Zoroastrians of Iran*, 66-67.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Boyce, *Zoroastrians*, 151.

⁵⁷ Khanbaghi, *Fire, Star, Cross*, 20.

⁵⁸ Stepaniants, “Encounter of Zoroastrianism,” 166.

⁵⁹ Van Gorder, *Christianity in Persia*, 51; Foltz, *Spirituality*, 37.

⁶⁰ Crone, *Native Prophets*, 376; Van Gorder, *Christianity in Persia*, 79.

recordings of the proper rituals, purity codes, religious laws, and daily observances.⁶¹ Examples include a book by a Zoroastrian leader named Manushchihir, entitled “Religious Judgements,” a book by a layman, the “Doubt-dispelling Exposition,” and the largest extant Pahlavi work “Acts of the Religion.”⁶² It is obvious that Zoroastrianism was facing pressure to appear more like the Abrahamic faiths at this time, as writers reworked anecdotes to synchronize prophetic literature and even drew parallels between the life stories of Muhammad and Zarathustra.⁶³

The Zoroastrian writings of this time also serve to give valuable insight as to the changing outlook of those who still clung to their ancestral faith. Along with the Muslims, they had begun to realize that both Arabs and Islam were in their lands to stay and the literature reflects this with attempts to restructure memory and apocalyptic narratives that rationalize the “grievous calamity” that had befallen them.⁶⁴ From the Muslim point of view, all was right in the universe and God had granted them victory and dominion over their adversaries. As previously mentioned, some Zoroastrians shared the view that Muslim victory over the Sassanians meant God favored the Muslims and they consequently converted. Those who did not convert were left to make sense of a reality in which their gods had apparently either been defeated or had deserted them, leaving them to suffer at the hands of a people whom they had for so long viewed as nomadic savages.⁶⁵ Some of them handled this by altering collective memories of the past, claiming that Muslim victories over Zoroastrians had not only been unavoidable, but they had actually been foretold and prophesized. The Zoroastrians, they said, had always been doomed to become subordinates to the Muslims, and the fact that the time had finally come was not necessarily something to be upset about; it was simply a signal that this world was coming to an end.⁶⁶

The Zoroastrians certainly had reason for such despondency, as they faced increasing persecution through the 9th and 10th centuries. Despite the efforts of Zoroastrian scholars, many Muslims did not consider the now shrinking Zoroastrian population to be “People of the Book,” instead

⁶¹ Boyce, *Zoroastrians*, 154-155.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Choksy, *Conflict and Cooperation*, 64-65.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 43.

labelling them nonbelievers, fire-worshippers, and infidels.⁶⁷ Muslims would often attack them in public and torture dogs, a semi-sacred animal in Zoroastrianism, in front of them as a form of provocation.⁶⁸ Zoroastrians were mandated by law to dress differently than Muslims, usually by wearing yellow, and were forced to paint an image of Satan on their doorposts.⁶⁹ Not even their property was safe, as Muslims were known for taking it on tenuous legal grounds. There were elaborate rules in place for how the collection of the *jizya* tax should take place, whose point it was to humiliate the payer and exalt the collector during the process.⁷⁰

It was also during this period that Zoroastrians began using “dakhmas,” which were simple, stone-surfaced tower structures whose purpose was to continue the Zoroastrian tradition of leaving the dead exposed to the elements without the corpses being in full view or easily accessible to Muslims.⁷¹ Muslims even found a way to use this against the Zoroastrians, as they began to climb up into these towers and use them to perform the calls to prayer.⁷² Perhaps one of the more egregious acts against Zoroastrianism occurred in 861 C.E., when Caliph Mutawakkil felled a tree that, legend had it, was planted by Zoroaster himself and was deeply venerated by his followers.⁷³

It is worth noting, however, that many of the laws passed against Zoroastrians were not uniformly enforced and none of this is to say that the Zoroastrians were innocent in this regard or that persecution was a one-sided affair. Over the entire course of the first few centuries of Muslim rule in Persia, but most commonly early on or in areas such as Fars where Zoroastrian power was much more lasting, Zoroastrians persecuted Muslims as well. Until the 10th century, Muslims in Transoxiana often faced attacks on their way to mosques to worship. Religious riots were constantly breaking out, but as time went on and Muslims gained the upper hand in the population, they had an increasingly easy time in crushing the Zoroastrians.⁷⁴

⁶⁷ Stepaniants, “Encounter of Zoroastrianism,” 166.

⁶⁸ Foltz, *Spirituality*, 38.

⁶⁹ Amighi, *Zoroastrians of Iran*, 68.

⁷⁰ Boyce, *Zoroastrianism*, 146.

⁷¹ Boyce, *Zoroastrianism*, 157-158.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 158.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Choksy, *Conflict and Cooperation*, 43.

Conclusion

Up to this point, we have seen much as to the patterns of Zoroastrian conversion and the factors that may have prompted them to do so, along with how they treated and acted towards Muslims. But what impact was all of this having on the religion of Zoroastrianism itself? We have already discussed how much of the Zoroastrian literature that sprung forth in the 9th and 10th centuries became rationalizing and apocalyptic in nature and how the religion bended to appeal to the Abrahamic faiths; however, the nature of the religion was also changed in other ways.

As the urban Zoroastrians began turning to Islam and deserting their old faith, Zoroastrianism lost its economic base.⁷⁵ Though the *magi* pled with their former constituents, telling them that charity ensured their salvation, many of them had a hard-enough time meeting the demands of Muslim taxation and had no extra money to spare. This created deflation in the price for Zoroastrian religious services as priests strove to compete with one another for the remaining market, with many forced to find additional work as farmers or traders, while others deserted priesthood altogether, urging their sons to find more profitable professions.⁷⁶ As a result of declining religious vocational studies, Zoroastrianism was forced to change its authority structures and to redistribute responsibility. Unqualified members of the religious hierarchy were raised in status by the chief high priest and certain less important rituals were pushed aside, but efforts to keep the temples running were often in vain. Many urban priestly schools, such as ones in Isfahan, Istakhr, Arrajan, and Firuzabad, were soon forced to completely halt operations. However, many rural *magi* and their fire temples were able to receive enough financial support to endure late into the 10th and 11th centuries.⁷⁷

It is fascinating to read about millennia of Persian history and see the massively powerful Zoroastrian faith, the seeds of which grew into many of the world's largest and most widely adhered-to religions, seem to wink out of existence. It is easy to read Muslim sources of the time and believe that it all happened so quickly, that Islam was superior or that Zoroastrianism was so old and weak that Zoroastrians readily left their ancestral faith to the annals of history. However, while four centuries may be the blink of an eye on the grander scale of human existence, conversions are not done by entire races or countries; they are done by individuals who

⁷⁵ Ibid., 98.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 99.

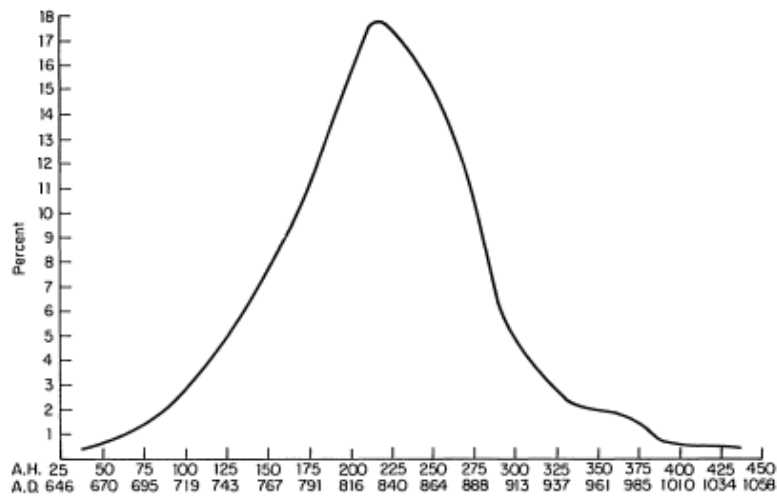
have needs and desires, experience crises, and feel the pressures of real life impacting their decisions. The fading away of Zoroastrianism while other minority religions in Islamic Persia persisted should not be taken as a sign that Zoroastrians were in any way inferior to or more passive than the Christians or Jews of the time.⁷⁸ Instead, one should question the Zoroastrians' sudden changes of fortune and consider the numerous reasons that life might have been improved by conversion in the given situation. One should also remember that not all were willing to give up their beliefs. Some fought to the bitter end for their faith and still others fled, most notably the Zoroastrians who made their way to the Gujarat region of India in 936 C.E., where they would come to be known as the "Parsees" and can still be found to this day.⁷⁹ Certainly, the number of Zoroastrians left is a far cry from the religion's glory days and many people will never know just how much their lives have been impacted by this ancient faith, but it has made its impact nonetheless, and the fire never quite went out.

⁷⁸ Khanbaghi, *Fire, Star, Cross*, 21.

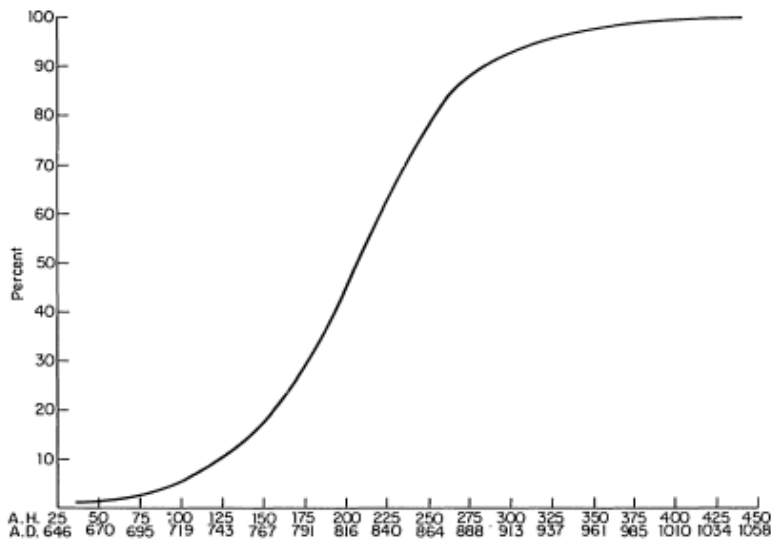
⁷⁹ Foltz, *Spirituality*, 38.

Appendix:

The Curve of Conversion in Iran



Graph 2. Bell curve of Iranian conversion.



Graph 3. Cumulative S-curve of Iranian conversion.