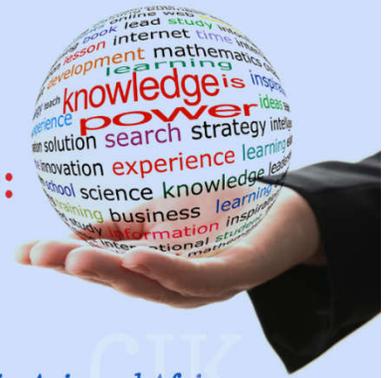


# CYRUS CHRONICLE JOURNAL (CCJ):

*Contemporary Economic and Management Studies in Asia and Africa*



An imprint of the CYRUS Institute of Knowledge (CIK)



<http://www.cyrusik.org/>

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### **Announcements:**

- [CIK 2019 Conference](#) – April 17<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> 2019, MIT, Cambridge, USA
- [CIK 2018 Conference](#) – March 4<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> 2018, ESCA and UM5, Casablanca and Rabat, Morocco
- [CIK 2017 Conference](#) – April 14<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> 2017, MIT, Cambridge, USA
- [CIK 2016 Conference](#) – March 15<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> 2016, The American University in Cairo, Egypt
- Guidelines for submission to CCJ - <http://www.cyrusik.org/ccj/submission-guidelines/>

**CYRUS CHRONICLE JOURNAL (CCJ):**  
**Contemporary Economic and Management Studies in Asia and Africa**

*The flagship journal of the CYRUS Institute of Knowledge*

THE CYRUS CHRONICLE JOURNAL (CCJ)

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The CYRUS Institute of Knowledge (CIK) Journal is a refereed interdisciplinary journal. The editorial objective is to create opportunities for scholars and practitioners to share theoretical and applied knowledge. The subject fields are management sciences, economic development, sustainable growth, and related disciplines applicable to the emerging economies in Asia, Africa, and other emerging economies. Being in transitional stages, these regions can greatly benefit from applied research relevant to their development. **CCJ** provides a platform for dissemination of high quality research about these regions. We welcome contributions from researchers in academia and practitioners in broadly defined areas of management sciences, economic development, and sustainable growth. The Journal's scope includes, but is not limited to, the following:

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He will be assisted by an editorial board consisting of distinguished members from world-class institutions of higher learning, practice and industry.

We invite authors to submit their papers and case studies to [Editor@Cyrusik.org](mailto:Editor@Cyrusik.org). We will have a quick turn-around review process of less than two months. We intend to begin with two issues per year consisting of about 5-8 papers and case studies per issue. The first issue is being planned for the fall of 2015. A selected number of papers submitted to the CIK conference will be double-blind reviewed for inclusion in **THE CCJ**. We intend to have special issues on themes that are within the scope of Journal. Also, we will have invited guest issues.

### **THE CCJ: An imprint of the CYRUS Institute of Knowledge (CIK)**

#### **Background:**

This is a historical time for the mentioned regions, and The Cyrus Chronicle intends to offer what is most urgently needed. There is no question that organizations and businesses that are capable of analyzing and applying advanced knowledge in management sciences and development are in high demand, and especially during transitional periods. It is an unusual time in the target regions and the world, a time which requires active intellectual participation and contributions. It is the era of revolution in terms of communication, technology and minds for billions of people. It is a time for intellectuals, entrepreneurs, and philanthropists to help enlighten minds and therefore enrich the quality of life for millions. It is a time to focus intensely on the regions' historical characteristics, achievements, human and natural resources, and its significant deficit in development, management sciences, and democracy. CIK's vision, "to cultivate the discourse on human capital potentials for better living," is the appropriate response to current challenges, and the journal is a platform for sharing the perspectives of scholars and practitioner with a wider audience.

CIK associates tend to have a foot in two worlds. First, most of the associates possess a wealth of intellectual and experiential knowledge which is enhanced by their active involvement in business, consulting and scholarly research and collegiate teaching. Second, some associates are sons and daughters of the affirmation regions and possess an ethnic identity, language skills, and the insights only embraced by insiders. Third, most of the CIK board of directors' members and associates are well-known scholars, members of editorial boards of journals, and even editors. CIK possesses depth, breadth, and a competitive edge to successfully manage chronicle.

CIK is committed to developing knowledge that positively contributes to the life of the world citizens, especially, the target regions. CIK is a charitable, educational, and scientific organization that has been in operation since 2011. It is a secular and nonpartisan organization that has many scholars and practitioner as member.

## Editor's Introduction

Since inception in 2012, the Cyrus Institute of Knowledge has held five annual meetings. Two years ago, we published the first volume of *Cyrus Chronicle Journal (CCJ): Contemporary Economic and Management Studies in Asia and Africa* in conjunction with the 2016 annual conference.

CYRUS Institute of Knowledge (CIK) has had two successful international conferences since. Between the CIK March 2016 conference at the American University of Cairo and the April 2018 at Morocco, we have accepted 54 abstracts and 10 complete papers from 12 countries and 35 institutions, organizations, and companies. Please see CIK website for detail information in this regard. For some plenary sessions we had up to 150 participants.

The acceptance rate for this issue of CCJ is less than 20% considering many papers that were submitted for review and full papers for the conference. Our aim is to publish the highest quality papers that pass through multiple review process. CIK colleagues and conference participants have proposed and suggested special issues of the journal which is based on core topics (i.e., entrepreneurship, innovation, ethics, and sustainable development) and/or country specific. Therefore, we welcome your articles which meet these characteristics. We already have several papers about Iran.

Now we welcome you to the third issue (CCJ.V3). The journal intends to cover scholarship pertaining to emerging economies in Asia, Africa, and other emerging economies. Scholarship dealing with these regions tend to be either ignored or misunderstood, and there are limited outlets for scholars who work in these countries to share their scholarly outputs. Focusing on these two continents will help researchers from both developed countries as well as these two continents - which together account for the largest portion of the world population and growth. The CCJ intends to fill these gaps. An examination of our mission may shed some light on this question. The primary purpose of the journal is four-fold:

1. To share and promote knowledge of economic, management, and development issues facing countries of Asia and Africa and other emerging markets. Focusing on assessment, evaluation, and possible solutions help advance countries in this which has the largest world habitats. Development challenges are global; virtually every country faces problems concerning economic development, sustainability, food and water, population and environmental degradation. Yet no country gains by shunning opportunities that globalization can provide, with the possible exception of a few countries whose leaders lack a full understanding of the opportunities that globalization can offer. To take advantage of such opportunities, knowledge is the primary requisite. And this journal aspires to make a contribution to this body of knowledge.
2. To encourage the generation and dissemination of knowledge by local scholars whose access to mainstream academic outlets may be limited? We know many scholars from academic, public and private sector organizations whose first-hand knowledge of problems and solutions isn't being shared for lack of an appropriate outlet for dissemination. The CCJ may provide an opportunity for spreading such knowledge.
3. To focus on countries that span the northern band of Asia – from China to Turkey – to the northern tier of Africa, areas that have not previously been the subject of much attention. In the past, these countries have tended to gain the attention of scholars and the media only in times of man-made or natural crises. But in fact, these nations have many challenges similar to those of others. They wrestle with shortages of food and water and the growth of population and pollution. Although they have educated their own citizens, especially in countries that had been under the shackles of dictatorship for decades, now they have become freer to express ideas in journals such as this.
4. Academic scholarship emanating from the region under the journal's coverage tend to get lost in the academic jungle where the pressure of "publish or perish" leaves behind the younger and less experienced members. This journal will give an opportunity to the scholars with first-hand knowledge of these areas to publish their research and thereby make important contributions to the management and development body of scholarship on which the journal will concentrate. We need to know more about these topics in countries such as Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Morocco and Tunisia as well as other countries covered by this journal. The CCJ will provide a platform for established as well as younger scholars who might collaborate with them in their research.

In this third issue of the *Cyrus Chronic Journal*, we include four articles and one request for book chapters and cases. Scholarly articles, from established scholars and policymakers, cover the gamut from US-China relations and anomie and dysfunction in the Middle East to direct investment in the MENA countries, inclusive business in supply chain and, finally, barriers that Western educational entrepreneurs face in pursuit of educational initiatives. As part of our mission to advance

knowledge about the region and subjects of our coverage, we will continue to include reviews of major scholarly books relevant to the Journal readers.

On the journal's operational side, we want to make the publication more accessible to a wide audience across the world, and so, consistent with the 21st -century trend toward electronic media, we will publish this journal online. To maintain rigor and originality, articles submitted to the journal will undergo the standard blind review process. Reviewers' anonymous comments are shared with authors, as appropriate. Submission guidelines and procedures are delineated on the journal's website: <http://www.cyrusik.org/research/the-cyrus-chronicle>

As the first editor of the journal, I am pleased and proud to accept this challenge. I bring some experience; my first editorial assignment was as an undergraduate at the then Pahlavi University in Shiraz, Iran, a top-ranking institution in the region. A few students and I founded and published Danesh-Pajouh (knowledge seeker). In those days when freedom of expression was severely limited, we managed to publish one issue in March 1965 before the censors put a stop to the enterprise.

Years later, while directing a doctoral program in international business in Texas in the early 2000's, I also was the co-editor - and eventually editor - of the International Trade Journal (ITJ) until my retirement in 2013. Under my leadership, the ITJ acceptance rate fell below 10%.

Publishing an academic journal is simply a labor of love. The rewards are many-fold and include working alongside a dedicated team of colleagues – Nader Asgary, Alf, Nancy Black Sagafi-nejad, and the entire editorial Board. In addition, of course, we thank our contributors who have trusted their work of scholarship is being published in a new but growing and promising publication. They have spent many hours working to polish and prepare for the journal for publication. In this third issue, we have already reached a threshold of about 20% in acceptance. Still, CCJ needs your support and so I ask for your help in the following ways:

- We are interested to offer special issues based on themes and country case studies. Your support, suggestions, and contributions are welcomed;
- Contribute articles, case studies, and book reviews and commentaries;
- Encourage your colleagues to do the same;
- Spread the word, especially in countries where CCJ can be most effective;
- Cite the articles published in this journal in your own research when applicable;
- Attend the annual conferences of the CIK (<http://www.Cyrusik.org>), physical platforms that serve every year as spawning ground for articles that may ultimately be published in this journal;
- Give us your feedback by telling us how we can further promote and improve the journal.

Welcome and thank you.  
Tagi Sagafi-nejad, Editor

# Zoroastrianism and the Search for Identity in Central Asia: The Spread of the Prophet's Message and Politics down the Ages<sup>1</sup>

Farok J. Contractor<sup>2</sup>

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## Introduction: The Search for a Cultural Identity in Today's Central Asia

Today, some nations of Central Asia, freed of the atheistic rule of the former Soviet Union, are harking back, nostalgically, to their pre-Islamic heritage. UNESCO declared 2003 to be the "3000th Anniversary of Zoroastrian Culture" and funded a "Zoroastrian Project" to compile history and record Zoroastrian traditions. In nations like Tajikistan, old customs like Nowruz are promoted, links to Persian history emphasized, and Zoroastrian associations were formed, in a search for cultural identity. But others say that these were transparent attempts to counter resurgent Muslim fundamentalism in the region, prop up authoritarian regimes, and are tainted with the rough politics of the region.

Following its Islamization around a thousand years ago, the region was ruled by a variety of empires and khanates,

including for brief periods those of Genghis Khan and Timurlane, until the Tsars expanded Russia southwards from the mid 1860s onwards. The Russians completed their conquests in 1881, having reached the border of Afghanistan, although it was not until the Communist era that Russian administrative control of civil life was effective.

Today, the region is predominantly Muslim, and no Zoroastrian religion or practice remains except practices embedded in "folk rituals" and beliefs<sup>3</sup>. A few stray individuals may call themselves Zoroastrian. According to Wikipedia<sup>4</sup>, fewer than 10,000 individuals in Central Asia call this their religion, but this is likely no more than remnant populations in remote villages<sup>5</sup>, or an affectation by a handful of intellectuals, or those whose political agenda is to counter Islamic fundamentalism. However, throughout the region, there is growing interest in its pre-Islamic heritage, such as the celebration of Nowruz<sup>6</sup>. This is especially the case in Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, whose governments mobilize public employees, and students, to put up banners and fill

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<sup>1</sup> Selected portions of this article appeared as Contractor, F (2008), "Projecting a Persian Past" Parsiana, (Volume 30, Number 16, pages 140 - 147).

<sup>2</sup> Farok Contractor is Distinguished Professor of Management and Global Business at Rutgers Business School, a Fellow of the Academy of International Business (AIB), and author of ten books and over 150 scholarly articles. He holds a Ph.D. (Managerial Science and Applied Economics) and an M.B.A. from the Wharton School, as well as two engineering degrees (M.S. in Industrial Engineering, University of Michigan, and B.S. in Mechanical Engineering, University of Bombay). He has chaired or been on the supervisory committees of 19 doctoral dissertations on International Business topics. He has taught at the Wharton School, Copenhagen Business School, Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University, Nanyang Technological University, Indian Institute of Foreign Trade, Indian Institute of Management, Xavier Institute (India), Rutgers business programs in Beijing and Shanghai, Lubin School of Business, and Theseus and EDHEC in France. He has also conducted executive seminars in the US, Europe, Latin America, and Asia. Farok Contractor's research focuses on key issues in International Business, such as corporate alliances, outsourcing and offshoring, valuation of intangible assets, the technology transfer process, licensing, and foreign direct investment. His papers and books have been cited over 10,500 times, and he is among the top-ranked contributors of scholarly papers in the field. He has served Rutgers as Department Chair, CIBER (Center for International Business Education and Research) Research Director, Ph.D. program coordinator, and other key school and university initiatives. He writes a blog for managers, students, policy makers, and educated laypeople covering International Business issues at <https://globalbusiness.blog>. email: farok@business.rutgers.edu

<sup>3</sup> E-mail to the author dated June 3, 2007 from Prof. John Schoeberlein of Harvard University, a noted expert on the region.

<sup>4</sup> Wikipedia, "Demographics of Central Asia", [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics\\_of\\_Central\\_Asia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of_Central_Asia).

<sup>5</sup> See <http://www.manzaratourism.com/uzbekistan/zoroastrianism>

<sup>6</sup> See Erica Marat, "Celebrating Novruz in Central Asia," *Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, 21, March 2007.

stadiums with choreographed celebrations on a scale befitting a USSR May Day pageant.



From His Stadium Reviewing Stand President Rakhman Oversees Nowruz Day Celebrations in Tajikistan

For Central Asia as a whole, most of the nations are Turkic in culture and language, with heroes like Timurlane. But with many languages, and a tiny minority ethnic Russian population, the Russian language is often used as a lingua franca. All the states have an issue with, or worries about, an Islam that is resurgent and fundamentalist, once the lid of Soviet atheism and control was lifted. Many of their governments (typically autocratic in character) try to use pre-Islamic or secular symbols, folklore and heroes, in popular culture or in textbooks<sup>7</sup> as a counter to radical Islam or to lower the influence of the Russian culture and political dominance which ended in 1991 with the dissolution of the USSR.

In modern Central Asia there are four cultural models, magnets and political influences. The first is a modern vision of secularism and international business based on energy resources, and foreign investment with Russian or English used as a common language. The second is a Turkic identity, and language evoking Turkic heroes of a glorious past such as Genghis Khan or Timurlane. The third is a strict and fundamentalist Sunni Islam, introduced by Wahhabi prosetizers from Saudi Arabia<sup>8</sup>. The fourth cultural model is association with a “greater Persian” and “Aryan” past, espoused most strongly in Tajikistan.

The use of Nowruz and Zoroastrianism as markers of cultural identity are a particularly sensitive issue in Tajikistan, a country where the region’s divisions appear to be the most acute. This is because the nation is governed by Tajiks, descendants of Soghdians, a Persian people who speak a language related to Farsi. But only 55



<sup>7</sup> Henrik Ohlsson (2014), “Teaching About Religion in a Post-Soviet State: An Examination of Textbooks in Kazakhstan’s Upper Secondary School System.” *Religionshistoria*

Magisterkurs Examensarbete Höstterminen. <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:849050/FULLTEXT01.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Henrik Ohlsson (2014), *ibid.*

percent of the population is Tajik, mainly in the south of the country. 23 percent are Uzbek (predominantly in the north), while 10 percent are ethnic Russian. With the loosening of Soviet control starting in 1987, a so-called “cultural,” -- but actually political -- movement called Rastokhez was set up by the Tajik-speaking faction, to glorify pre-Islamic Soghdian symbols, including Zoroastrianism, and links to a “greater Persian” past<sup>9</sup>. They replaced a statue of Lenin with one of Firdausi in the middle of the capital, Dushanbe. (Firdausi may or may not have been a devout Muslim, but he is the towering literary figure of the middle Persian language as the poet of the pre-Islamic epic stories in the Shah Nameh). This was the first political attempt to link Tajikistan with a greater Persian pre-Islamic identity.

But so great were the divisions with the Uzbek north and the rest of the population that, following independence and the sudden withdrawal of Soviet control in 1991, a brutal five year civil war sprang up. Many Tajik government figures associated with the movement were murdered by fundamentalists. The war ended in 1997 with an uneasy compromise, with the Tajiks under president Rakhman(ov)<sup>10</sup> dominant, but sharing 30% of power with an Islamic renaissance party and a communist party. But brutality and occasional murders have continued since. At the same time, a new movement, called the Aryan Project was started, and President Rakhman was instrumental in having UNESCO declare 2003 to be the “3000th Anniversary of Zoroastrian Culture.” As before, pre-Islamic and Zoroastrian associations were being used to try and forge a national identity, but also for partisan political purposes<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> This is not to suggest an association with the current Iranian regime. On the contrary, the Tajik leadership views Iran and Shiism with some suspicion and distrust.

<sup>10</sup> In a further renunciation of the Soviet era, the President later changed his name from the Russified Rakhmanov to just Rakhman.

<sup>11</sup> Clarke, P. & Beyer, P. (2009). *The World's Religions: Continuities and Transformations*. Routledge, Abingdon, UK 2009.

<sup>12</sup> Boyce, M. (2001). *Zoroastrians: Their religious beliefs and practices*. Psychology Press.

<sup>13</sup> Zarathushtra wrestled with the notion of evil, whose presence he acknowledged as dogging the steps of humankind. In later Zoroastrian theology, over a thousand years later, evil is portrayed as a malevolent being called Ahriman, in opposition

## The Origins of Zoroastrianism

The prophet Zarathushtra (also called Zoroaster by the Greeks, or Zarthost in contemporary Central Asia and Iran) was said to have lived and preached in northeastern Persia or Tajikistan. Until a decade ago, his birthdate was said to have been in the sixth century BCE, but more recent philological inferences place him around 1700 BCE<sup>12</sup>. Zarathushtra proclaimed one God<sup>13</sup> who he named “Ahura Mazda” or loosely translated “Lord of Light.” This makes Zoroastrianism the world’s first monotheistic religion.

With the spread of Islam in the seventh century CE, Zoroastrians being converted to Islam, dwindled in number so that today around 70,000 Zarathustis, calling themselves Parsis<sup>14</sup>, live in India, an estimated 10,000 at most all over Central Asia and a remaining 25,000 scattered worldwide. While its genetic carriers, the Parsis, may be dwindling into physical near extinction, the ideas of Zarathushtra continue to amplify and ricochet into mankind’s globalized future with gathering recognition – already being credited with seeding and significantly influencing Jewish and Christian theology<sup>15</sup>.

## Mixing Religion and Politics

The search for identity in Central Asia may well incorporate the various historical currents and religions that have swept through that region over the past four millennia. Promoting Zoroastrianism as a heritage, and as an example of ethical behavior can be a useful buttress for civil societies there. But mixing religion with the state, or politics, is seldom beneficial. The Rastokhez movement in the late 1980s in Tajikistan was followed by murders, terrorism, and then a civil war that may have killed as many as 50,000 and displaced a half million<sup>16</sup>.

to Ahura Mazda. It is not clear from the earliest scriptures whether Zarathushtra himself considered evil as a dualistic cosmological entity in opposition to, or co-equal with, God, or whether he considered evil to be merely an ethical issue to be wrestled with in the mind of each person.

<sup>14</sup> According to legend, escaping discrimination, a group of Zoroastrians fled to India from a port in the province of Fars on the southern Persian coast, and are now known as Parsis, having lived quietly in India for over a millennium.

<sup>15</sup> Willey (2015), *Influence of Zoroastrianism on Judaism and Christianity*. [http://www.cais-soas.com/CAIS/Religions/iranian/Zarathushtrian/zoroastrianism\\_influence.htm](http://www.cais-soas.com/CAIS/Religions/iranian/Zarathushtrian/zoroastrianism_influence.htm) and Foltz, R. (2004). *Spirituality in the land of the noble: How Iran shaped the world's religions*. Oneworld Publications Ltd.

<sup>16</sup> According to Freedom House, *Nations in Transit – Tajikistan*

Zarathushtra clearly enjoined his followers to not tolerate evil and hypocrisy.

*“For he who looks upon evil with tolerance is  
no other than evil.”*

-- Yasna 46:6 (Translation by D. J. Irani<sup>17</sup>)

Tolerating and condoning misdeeds in the name of religion is something that Zarathushtra condemned. The Sassanians, who made Zoroastrianism the state religion of Persia in the third to seventh centuries CE, and then intermittently persecuted non-Zoroastrians, set a terrible example for the Muslims when they took over after 651 CE. The former Reza Shah Pahlevi, who wrapped himself in an “Aryan” pre-Islamic heritage invited even greater vituperation from the mullahs and fundamentalists. Iranian Zoroastrians who were promoted by the Shah suffered an even greater downfall and exile than others associated with his regime.

Most facets of human life present a mixed picture – of good and evil, of pure religion mixing with politics. But Zoroastrianism prescribes active un-mixing. It urges its followers to actively eschew evil and promote good, and thus to engineer a better existence for mankind and the universe. It was the first to suggest a universal progression for humankind and a glorious destiny.

*“O Ahura Mazda, ... Spirit of Truth and Right!*

*... grant me and my followers such authority  
and power through Truth,*

*That with the Good Mind, we may bring the world  
peace and happiness,*

*Of which, Thou, O Lord, art indeed the first possessor.”*

-- Yasna 29:10 (Translation by D. J. Irani)

## The Spread of Zoroastrian Ideas

Attempts by rulers to interfere with religion, or use it for political ends is nothing new. For a significant portion of his life, Zarathushtra appears to have incurred the enmity of powerful rulers. Often persecuted, and driven from place to place, he felt keenly the injustice and deception

(2003).

<sup>17</sup> Irani, D.J. (1922). The Hymns of Zarathushtra, Center for Iranian Studies, Reissued in 1998.

<sup>18</sup> Nanavutty, P. (1999). The Gathas of Zarathushtra: Hymns in

practiced by persons in power. In the Gathas, Yasnas 48 and 49 are a cry to Ahura Mazda to deliver Zarathushtra out of the hands of evil rulers, or Kavis, and Karapans (corrupt priests) who,

*“...through their perverse intellect*

*...delude the evil rulers of these lands “*

-- Yasna 48:10 (Translation by Pilo Nanavutty<sup>18</sup>)

In Yasna 49, he specifically mentions one

*“...Bendva<sup>19</sup>, of evil intent, long since oppressed me*

*because I tried to help the downtrodden*

*through justice due to them.*

*O Mazda, come to me as a great blessing. Help me.”*

-- Yasna 49:1 (Translation by Pilo Nanavutty)



Despite persecution, the ideas of Zarathushtra took root in receptive hearts in his homeland (the border region straddling Persia and the trans-Oxus River region in today’s Tajikistan), and then spread to the Middle East, China and Europe. Zoroastrian ideas penetrated and altered Jewish (and later Christian) theology, and also spread eastwards, with travelers along the Silk Road to China. Soghdiana (today’s Tajikistan and Uzbekistan)

Praise of Wisdom, Mapin. Publishing, Ahmedabad, India.

<sup>19</sup> Scholars are unsure whether *Bendva* is an actual ruler’s name or a title suggesting Defiler or Deceiver.

was the possible original home of Zarathushtra, and was the major crossroad in the Sino-Mediterranean trade. Ruins of Zoroastrian fire temples are found in many of the Central Asian republics.

While the rulers and petty chieftains of Soghdiana or Khwarazm<sup>20</sup> (to use the Persian name) have long since disappeared, nameless, into history, the voice of the prophet's message resonates down the millennia. Of the six "names" or attributes used by Zarathushtra to describe God, two directly relate to a state of righteous government. Khshathra-Vairya is the Kingdom of Heaven, or ideal society governed by Ahura Mazda. Asha Vahishta, or the highest Truth, is realized when man inclines his thoughts towards righteousness and justice.

While Cyrus the Great, founder of the Achaemenid Empire may not have been an active Zoroastrian, many of his values (and the reason historians confer the title "Cyrus the Great" on him) reflect Zoroastrian ideals. Soon after taking over the Babylonian Empire, Cyrus instituted a reign of tolerance, and redress of historical injustices, famously releasing the captive Jews and sending them back to rebuild Jerusalem<sup>21</sup>. But his successors in the Achaemenid Empire, grew inexorably more imperial, and hierarchical. Under Artaxerxes I (Ardeshir) (465–424 BCE), Zoroastrianism became, in effect, the state religion, and spread to all parts of Persia. Under the Sassanians (224 – 651 CE) Zoroastrianism was officially the state religion. This era saw the first persecutions of non-Zoroastrians, such as Christians and Manicheans, setting a bad precedent for the Muslims that took over from the Sassanians.

### **The Spread of Zoroastrian Ideas to China and Europe**

Today, the Western world is recovering from a historical amnesia or myopia induced by its long sleep during the Dark Ages. Few among Western historians realize how internationalized the world was in the pre-Christian era. The Phoenicians had already circumnavigated Africa in 600 BCE<sup>22</sup>. The first of many "Suez Canals" was ordered

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<sup>20</sup> This is roughly the area in the map between the Amu Darya (known to the Greeks as the Oxus River) and the Syr Darya (Greek Jaxartes River)

<sup>21</sup> The Bible contains as many as 19 laudatory references to Cyrus. In opening the prison gates, in releasing kings held behind bars by the Babylonians, and making the crooked things straight, Cyrus is called the "Lord's anointed." "Thus saith the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him; and I will loose the loins of kings... I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight: I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in

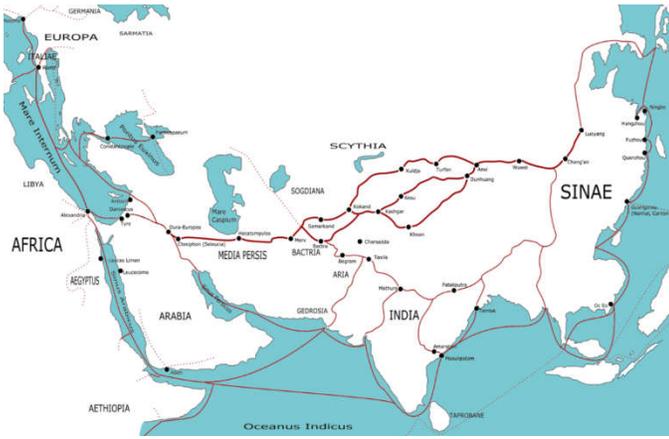
dug by Pharaoh Senausert III (1874 BCE), followed by Pharaoh Necho II (609-594 BCE), the same Pharaoh who sponsored the Phoenician expedition around Africa. Darius I's dig was only the third, in 510 BCE. The Greek philosophers knew about Zarathushtra's teachings. To them we owe the Hellenized name "Zoroaster." Indian pepper, condiments, gems and "mul-mul" (very light cotton fabric known to the Romans as "vetri venti" or "woven winds") passed overland through Persia to the Mediterranean, or took the maritime route through the Red Sea. So unbalanced was this trade that Pliny the Elder made his famous speech about the Roman trade deficit, involving a drain of Roman gold to India to the tune of 50 - 100 million seseterces per year.

To the east, both Persia and India were well connected to China. The most traveled land route ran from the Sassanian capital of Ctesiphon to Bukhara or Samarkhand (today's Uzbekistan), thence to Dunhuang, Chang-An (today's Xian of the clay warriors), and ending at Luoyang the then Chinese capital<sup>23</sup>. The Indian Mauryan Empire capital of Pataliputra (Patna) was connected via Mathura, Taxila, Baghrum in Afghanistan (where the Americans today have their airbase) and Bactria. Maritime trade ran from the Chinese ports of Hangzhou, Quanzhou, and Guangzhou past India to the Mediterranean, or to Africa.

sunder the bars of iron..." (Isaiah 45: 1,2)

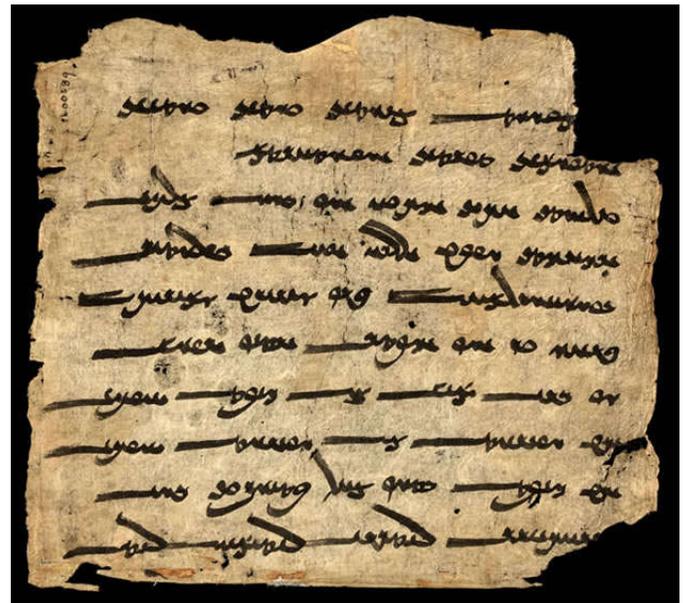
<sup>22</sup> They completed the circuit in a mere two and a half years, going down the east coast of the continent, around the Cape of Good Hope, and back past the Straits of Gibraltar. Some two thousand years later, the Portuguese took a whole century to timorously creep around Africa. Afraid to cross the Indian Ocean, it was an Arab navigator, Ahmad Ibn Majid, familiar with the East Africa to India trade route, who finally took Vasco da Gama from Malindi to Calicut.

<sup>23</sup> Luoyang was, for many centuries, the capital of the Eastern Han and Wei dynasties.



Source:  
[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Image:Transasia\\_trade\\_routes\\_1stC\\_CE\\_gr2.png](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Image:Transasia_trade_routes_1stC_CE_gr2.png)

Did Zoroastrians travel these routes? A large and growing body of archeological evidence says so<sup>24</sup>. The oldest surviving copy of a Zoroastrian prayer, the Ashem Vohu is a ninth or tenth century copy found in Dunhuang (see map), an important stop on the Silk Road in China. The document is written in Soghdian script, although it transcribes the much older Achaemenid Avesta language. It reflects the fact that, not only was Soghdiana (today's southern Uzbekistan and Tajikistan) the possible original home of Zarathushtra, but also that Zoroastrianism persisted there well beyond 1000 CE. Remains of Zoroastrian fire temples dot many of the Central Asian republics. The Soghdians, centered in Bukhara and Samarkhand, were the intermediaries in the Sino-Mediterranean trade. As recently as Marco Polo (1254 – 1324), Soghdiana was not completely Islamic. Marco Polo traveled by land through Samarkhand to China, returning by sea from the Chinese port of Quanzhou.



The “Ashem Vohu” written on a 9th or 10th Century manuscript found in Dunhuang, China. Source: The British Library.

Undoubtedly therefore, there were Zoroastrians in the Mediterranean countries and in China, millennia before the Parsis of India ventured out with the British as traders of tea and opium in the 18th and 19th centuries. While there is no evidence yet of Zoroastrian communities or worship in the Mediterranean or in China, offshoots of Persian or Zoroastrian beliefs, and artifacts, may be found from London to the East Coast of China. London has the famous Mithras temple excavated near the St. Paul's Underground Station. It is estimated that, at one stage, a third of the Roman army followed neither Roman nor Christian gods, but worshipped Mithras<sup>25</sup>. Quanzhou, the port from which Marco Polo embarked on his return journey back to Europe had a Manichaean temple<sup>26</sup>. Only in the Ming Dynasty (1368 - 1644) was it converted into a Buddhist temple (as foreign religions were proscribed), and Manichean beliefs incorporated into a new “Buddha of Light.” But the eastern Chinese ports continued to have many polyglot communities, including Nestorian Christians.

<sup>24</sup> The Parsis of India used to think that their flight to India in eighth century CE onwards, to avoid the strictures of Islam, was the first migration of Persians to India. But recent digs at Sanjan (their initial port of arrival in the Indian state of Gujerat) suggest a much earlier presence based on maritime trade. Between Sanjan and Umbergaon, the Varoli River delta – before it got silted over in its present state – likely provided a large, sheltered circular port deep enough for the ocean-going vessels of two millennia ago.

<sup>25</sup> Mithras (as the Romans called him) is Mithra, the “yazad” or angel of light in later Zoroastrian theology.

<sup>26</sup> Manichaeism, founded by Mani (216-276 CE), a Sassanian Persian, was a synthesis of Zoroastrian, Jewish, Christian, and Gnostic ideas. In the 8<sup>th</sup> Century Manichaeism was the official religion of the Uighur Khanate (including portions of today's Xinjiang Autonomous Region of China).



Manichaean shrine on Huabiao Hill near Quanzhou. Photo by M. Wilson, 2004. Source: Manichaean and (Nestorian) Christian Remains in Zayton (Quanzhou, South China) by Professor Sam Lieu and Dr Ken Parry. (<http://www.anchist.mq.edu.au/doccentre/Zayton.htm>)

It is only in the last 500 years that, aided by gradual European control of East-West commerce, the volume of maritime trade along the southern periphery of the Asian continent eclipsed the amount carried over land routes through Central Asia.

Today, there remain no Zarathustis in China, or in Europe (except for a handful of immigrants and recent converts). But the archeological evidence remains. The ideas of Zarathushtra continue to leaven the thinking of all mankind.

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