

“A seamless portrait of a neglected culture”. Review of Pheroza J. Godrej & Firoza Punthakey Mistree, *A Zoroastrian Tapestry*. Art, Religion & Culture. Ahmedabad: Mapin Publishing Pvt. Ltd. and Middletown (USA): Grantha Corporation, 2002, 762pp., numerous plates and illustrations. In: *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, no. 1,628, 20 February 2004, p.30.

By Almut Hintze (Reviewer’s name)

A Zoroastrian Tapestry. Art, Religion & Culture.

by Pheroza J. Godrej & Firoza Punthakey Mistree (Editors names)

Ahmedabad: Mapin Publishing Pvt. Ltd. and Middletown (USA): Grantha Corporation, 2002, 762pp., numerous plates and illustrations, Rs.7500/-, 175.00.

ISBN 81-85822-71-9 (Mapin)

ISBN 1-890206-22-9 (Grantha)

When the Arabs conquered Iran in the mid-seventh century AD, Zoroastrianism was the most firmly established, widespread and influential religion in the Near, Middle and Far East, which it had dominated for over a thousand years. The religion was inaugurated in the late second millennium BC by the only ancient Indo-European (rather than Semitic) prophet, Zarathustra. Gradually it spread with groups of colonists as far as Anatolia, Egypt and India and was the religion of succeeding Iranian Empires. Its adherents were renowned for their tolerant attitude towards the religions of their foreign subjects, including the Jews. This is borne out, for example, by the 538 BC edict of Cyrus the Great releasing the Jews from the Babylonian Exile and allowing them to rebuild their temple in Jerusalem, an act for which he was hailed as a Messiah in the Hebrew Bible (Isaiah 45.1).

The Arab conquest of Iran and, as a consequence, the imposition there of Islam marks a watershed in Iranian history. Yet it was not until Turks and Mongols, invading from the northern steppes, overran Iran in successive waves from the 11th century that Zoroastrianism was almost eclipsed, its followers reduced to a fraction of what they once were and forced gradually to withdraw to the desert towns of Yazd and Kerman. There they are found to the present day as a small minority. However, in probably the tenth century a group of Zoroastrians emigrated from Khorasan to Gujarat, India, and this proved vital for the strong survival of the faith and its tradition. There they became known as Parsis, because they came from “Pars” (Persia). Later, under British rule, many Parsis moved south to Bombay, being involved in trade, commerce and industry, as aptly shown in this volume by John Hinnells (pp.458-477) and Rusheed Wadia (pp.434-455). The Jejeebhoys, for instance, acquired wealth from the opium trade with China. In the Bombay dockyards the Wadias excelled in shipbuilding. The pioneers of Indian industry were also Parsis, in particular the Tata and Godrej families. Today, about 150,000 Zoroastrians are estimated to live in Iran, India, and a widespread dia-

spora mainly in English-speaking countries including Britain, where the first three Asian MPs were Parsis, Canada, the United States and Australia.

Like the Abrahamic religions, Zoroastrianism is a monotheistic faith, worshipping God as “Lord Wisdom” (Ahura Mazda). He is seen as the creator of a perfect world. The most distinctive feature of Zoroastrian doctrine is its dualistic solution to the problem of Evil: the latter does not come from God, but has a separate origin and is antagonistic to him and his work. All Evil in the world, including deceit and death, comes from that external source, which clings to God’s good physical creation in a parasitic manner and tries to corrupt and eventually destroy it. An intrinsic part of Zoroastrian teaching is its eschatology, and it is in this area that it is likely to have influenced Judaism and later Christianity and Islam (both directly and via Judaism). Like Jews and Christians, Zoroastrians believe that a perfect world will be reinstated at the end of time, being brought about by a saviour, seen as a posthumous son of Zarathustra and born of a virgin. He is expected to defeat and remove evil, resurrect the dead and preside over a universal judgment that will inaugurate a new age of eternal bliss. Indeed it is probable that the Magi about whom Matthew tells that they came to worship Jesus as the redeemer of the world were Zoroastrian priests from Persia. The purpose of human life is to fight evil by, in Zarathustra’s own words, “good thoughts, good words, good deeds”. This is the maxim of Zoroastrian ethics. After death, each person’s soul will face an individual judgment in which one’s good thoughts, words and deeds will be weighed against the evil ones performed during lifetime. The souls will then proceed across the Bridge of Judgment (*Cinvat Bridge*) either to the “House of Welcome” (Paradise) or to the abyss of the “House of Deceit” (Hell) and, in their respective places, await the resurrection of their bodies and the perfection of the physical world at the end of time.

These teachings constitute the basis of Zoroastrian cultural values and religious practices that have persisted to the present day. Many Zoroastrians love knowledge and education, and have long been renowned for their commitment to the pursuit of truth. Material wealth is a good thing as long as it is acquired by honest means and used for beneficial ends, especially charity. Women have equal status to men, a phenomenon unique among ancient religions. The only exception is priesthood, from which they are nowadays barred, although the *Zoroastrian Tapestry* shows evidence that this has not always been the case (p.94f.). Since antiquity Zoroastrians have also been known for their peculiar way of disposing of the dead. They do not bury, burn or submerge them in water but expose them in cylindrical structures known as “Towers of Silence”, to be devoured by vultures. The aim of this practice and of a set of other meticulous purity laws is to avoid polluting the elements, such as earth, fire and water. The latter, in the Zoroastrian doctrine concerning the environment, are perceived as God’s creations while pollution is a product of Evil.

The *Zoroastrian Tapestry*, very well edited by two Bombay Parsis, Pheroza Godrej and Firoza Punthakey Mistree, covers three thousand years of Zoroastrian art, religion and culture, from its beginnings to 1947, the year of Indian Independence. In forty-one chapters, virtually all aspects of Zoroastrianism are discussed, with focus on Iran (especially Yazd) and India (especially Bombay). The articles cover not only subjects such as Zoroastrian history, teachings and observances, but also cooking, costumes, painting and theatre. The text is invariably clear and accessible to the general public, and scholars will appreciate both the quality of the contributions and useful bibliographical references. The most distinguished authorities on Zoroastrianism have contributed. They include both leading scholars such as Mary Boyce, John Hinnells, Shaul Shaked and Richard Frye and religious authorities, in particular the Parsi high priests Hormazdyar Mirza, Kaikhusroo M. JamaspAsa and Firoze M. Kotwal. The text is lavishly illustrated with magnificent photographs, for instance the splendid Parsi portraits in Pheroza Godrej's contribution (pp.620-659) or the pictures of fabulous Parsi textiles and embroidery in Kalpana Desai's article (pp.576-603). These are accompanied by detailed, often highly informative captions. It is virtually impossible to describe the artistic refinement and sheer beauty of this book. Such a huge and splendid volume on Zoroastrianism has never been published before, and will be difficult ever to surpass. It is wonderful value for money. Not surprisingly, the first imprint has nearly sold out.

Word Count: 1118

Almut Hintze, PhD

Zartoshty Lecturer in Zoroastrianism

School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London

Almut Hintze, PhD

Zartoshty Lecturer in Zoroastrianism

School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London

Current Research: an edition, translation and dictionary of the major Zoroastrian ritual text, the *Yasna*.

Recent publications: an edition of an ancient Zoroastrian hymn, the *Zamyād Yašt* (1994) and a monograph on Reward and Retribution in ancient Indo-Iranian religious texts (2000).

The caption accompanying the photograph should explain that the picture shows the magi in a sixth century AD mosaic from the church San Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna (Italy). The Parthian trouser-suit with fluttering cloak identifies them as Iranians, and their headdress and shoes with upturned toes as Zoroastrian priests. While the magi have always been a popular Christian motif, their connection with the Zoroastrian faith is little known.

and the photographs of rituals inside the fire temples.

photographs of British Zoroastrians, their heroes (three Asian MPs)

order and chaos?

in a few months

They allow the reader to receive a good idea of the subject matter even while browsing at leisure.

The articles are complemented by photographic panoramas of Zoroastrian Iran and of the Parsis of Western India, Chronological Tables of Iranian dynasties, a Glossary, Select Bibliography and an Index.

Some of them constitute ideal introductions to a subject. For instance, Dastur Hormazdyar Mirza's survey of the "Literary Treasures of the Zoroastrian Priests" (pp.160-183) offers an authoritative and richly illustrated overview of the manuscript traditions of different Zoroastrian texts. Thus, this publication scores another superlative: it is a book for all times, for both study and leisure. There is, however, one restriction: due to its volume and weight of five kilo, it will be difficult to read this book in bed.

This book is designed for both the general reader and the student of the subject, who will appreciate the notes and references accompanying many of the articles.

Illustrations of

This book is a real treasure-trove.

The chapters are not only of consistently high academic quality but also generously illustrated by the most magnificent photographs, many on large scale and at times stretching over two pages facing one another. Each article starts with a full page picture relating to the topic. For instance, a reproduction of a 19th century oil painting of the prophet from a fire temple in Bombay inaugurates Mary Boyce's chapter on "The Teachings of Zoroaster" (p.18). Particularly stunning are the pictures of the most fabulous Parsi textiles and embroidery in Kalpana Desai's contribution (pp.576-603). Some of the photographs represent well known subjects, such as Achaemenid reliefs and architecture. Others show items reproduced rarely, for instance artefacts from the Alpaiwalla Museum of the Bombay Parsi Punchayet (pp.123ff., 592ff.) or Sasanian silver vessels from the State Hermitage Museum at St Petersburg (pp.135ff.). Indeed many, such as those of Iranian Zoroastrians, are published here for the first time.

Some of them are rarely represented subjects.

Entertaining the Zoroastrian way and a chapter on "The Eating Habits of the Parsis" and the "Parsi Cuisine in the Villages of Gujarat" illustrate the Zoroastrian cuisine, accompanied by mouth-watering photographs. Zoroastrian costume is discussed in chapters on "Dress the Imperial Court" by Vesta Sarkhosh Curtis, on "Traditional Costumes of Yazd" by Firoza Punthakey Mistree. Illustrations of the most fabulous Parsi Textiles and Embroidery can be found in Kalpana Desai's chapter (pp.576-603) and of Parsi Costumes in the 18th and 19th Century by Firoza Punthakey Mistree and Pheroza

J. Godrej (pp.604-619). Pheroza Godrej concludes this amazing array of articles with a substantial contribution on Parsi Portraits in Western India (pp.621-659).

But not enough with this. What follows then are photographs of “Zoroastrian Iran” by Firoza Punthakey Mistree and Pheroza Godrej (pp.660-683), of the “Parsis of Western India” by Pheroza Godrej (pp.684-709), Chronological Tables of Iranian dynasties (pp.710-713), a Glossary (pp.714-726), a Select Bibliography (pp.727-733), a short presentation of the contributors (pp.734-736) and an Index (pp.737-762).

Open questions and research still to be done are addressed in some of the articles. For instance, Ab de Jong in his masterly discussion of “Zoroastrianism and the Greeks” states that the contributions of Zoroastrianism to Greek ideas and vice versa those of Greek traditions to Zoroastrianism is a field “in need of renewed extensive scholarly interest” (P.80).

Zoroastrianism is a life-affirming religion.

Frantz Grenet examines the iconographic representation of Zoroastrian ideas on ossuaries from Central Asia, especially Tashkent and Samarkand. He remarks that it has been suggested that representations of figures on ossuaries from Samarkand could represent priests as well as priestesses (p.94), with reference to G.A. Pugachenkova, *Mesopotamia* 20, 1985, pp.147-183, figs. 57-85.

The volume includes chapters by renowned Iranian scholars.

Fariburz Nariman on “The Contribution of the Sasanians to Zoroastrian Iran” (pp.117-133) investigates the “fusion of religion and kingship” (p.119) under the Sasanian rulers.

Boris I. Marshak writes on “Zoroastrian Art in Iran under the Parthians and the Sasanians” (pp.135-147). The model for the seated archer on Parthian coins is to be found on the coins of Mazaeus, the Achaemenian satrap of Cilicia in Asia Minor, according to E.V. Zeimal. Marshak discusses the Zoroastrian elements especially in the fine collection of Sasanian silver vessels at the State Ermitage Museum in St Petersburg. The article is illustrated by stunning reproductions of some of these vessels showing, for instance, the king hunting and slaying a wild boar (p.139), an image interpreted as representing the idea of the king as a hero, accompanied by success (the royal *khwarenah*), which is seen in the king’s victory over the animal. Particularly beautiful is an ewer from the Ermitage Museum showing the fabulous bird called *sēnmurw*, representing the kingly glory of the Kayanians, the legendary dynasty from which the Sasanians claimed descent (p.140-1).

Jamsheed Choksy discusses the myth of Yima, Gayō Maretan, Anāhitā and some other deities.

Shared characteristics and common roots of Hinduism and Zoroastrianism are studied in two articles.

The Islamization of Iran led to the erosion of Zoroastrianism in its homeland, but not to its extinction. To the present day, Zoroastrian communities are found in particular in the desert towns in the provinces of Yazd and Kerman.

Zoroastrianism, known of old as “the Persian religion”, is one of the world’s most ancient prophetic faiths and one of Iran’s great contributions to religious thought. It is deeply rooted in the prehistoric Indo-Iranian and, ultimately, Indo-European tradition and thus shares a common heritage with the Vedic religion and Hinduism. In its long history it has influenced many other religions, notably Buddhism, Islam, Judaism and, especially, Christianity. For over a thousand years it was the official religion of mighty Iranian empires under the Achaemenian, Parthian and Sasanian rulers, extending at times from the Indus River in the east to the coastline and islands of Asia Minor in the west. Zoroastrianism was probably the religion of Cyrus the Great and of the Iranians during their rule over Israel and their wars with the Greeks and later with the Romans. There was much intellectual interaction between the Persians and the Greeks through whom Zoroastrianism became known in the West as “the religion of the Magi”. Today, more than a millennium after the last of those empires fell, it still has devoted adherents, altogether about 150,000, in Iran and India (the Parsis), and in groups scattered throughout the world.

However, in spite of its historical importance, Zoroastrianism is relatively little known to the general public. The *Zoroastrian Tapestry*

Islam conquered Iran and Iran conquered Islam. The truth behind this poignant phrase lies in the specifically Iranian pre-Islamic intellectual history, which was shaped by the indigeneous religion of Iran, Zoroastrianism. This religion derives its name from the only prophet of Indo-European descent, Zarathustra, whose name the Greeks turned into Zoroaster, from which the name conveniently used in Western discourse. The Zoroastrians refer to themselves as ‘those of the Good Religion’, Behdin in Persian. Around 10-30000 are believed to live in Iran today. There they withdrew to desert towns and villages in and around Kerman and Yazd. The contribution of Zoroastrianism to the culture of modern Iran is immense and as much underestimated in public opinion. Little known is also the contribution of Zoroastrianism to Biblical religions

and the Graeco-Roman philogophical thought. Perhaps better known is the role the Parsis play in India.

It is perhaps the most beautiful book ever published on this ancient religion.

James R. Russell, Albert de Jong, Frantz Grenet,

The volume includes photographs which are otherwise very difficult, if not impossible, to obtain. In particular, the photographs from inside a firetemple or of the houses of Zoroastrians in Iran

by Firoza Punthakey Mistree and Pheroza Godrej (pp.660-683),

by Pheroza Godrej (pp.684-709)

, a short presentation of the contributors (pp.734-736) and an Index (pp.737-762)

Zoroaster is “the first man known on earth to have postulated an end of time, a cessation of human history” (Boyce p.26). Zoroastrianism is the oldest of the credal religions, that is a religion which requires of their adherents a conscious acceptance of their teachings. The Zoroastrians are perhaps best known by their practice of exposing the dead to vultures. Zoroastrian care for the purity of the creations caused the general funerary rite to be exposure of the body, which was laid on stones or in a barren place for the flesh to be swiftly devoured by bird or beast. (Boyce, *Zor. Tapestry* 42). In present days, this practice is only followed by the Zoroastrians in India, as it has been forbidden in Iran. Exposure results from the Zoroastrian abhorrence of any kind of pollution, and dead matter the most polluting. None of the elements, neither earth, nor water, nor fire, all of which are considered as creations by God, should be polluted.

This volume is, as the editors state in the “Foreword”, “an attempt to showcase the art, religion, and culture of both the Iranian Zoroastrians as well as that of the Parsis” (p.9).

The doyenne of Zoroastrian Studies, Professor Mary Boyce, contributed not only an article on the teachings of Zoroastrianism, but also one on the Parthian periods, which is in anticipation of the fourth volume currently under preparation of her monumental *History Zoroastrianism*.

As great as the variety of themes addressed in this book is the variety of scholars contributing to it.

and of Parsi Costumes in the 18th and 19th Century by Firoza Punthakey Mistree and Pheroza J. Godrej (pp.604-619).

Being one of the world's most ancient prophetic faiths, Zoroastrianism is also the oldest of the credal religions, that is a religion which requires of their adherents a conscious acceptance of their teachings. Its founder Zarathustra (or Zoroaster) is ““the first man known on earth to have postulated an end of time, a cessation of human history” (Boyce p.26).

s of great interest and highly informative

its format, the beautiful photographs, its level of finish and perfection, its quality of text, photographs, .

At the heart of its teachings is the concept that Evil does not come from God but has a separate origin.

which has been called by R.C. Zaehner “the most rational solution to the problem of Evil ever devised”. It simply says that

While Ahura Mazda's creation has both a spiritual and a physical existence, Evil exists only on the spiritual plane.

such as love of education, striving for material wealth, equal religious status for men and women and charitable works. Deeply rooted in their doctrine is the Zoroastrians' uniquely positive attitude towards life.

Love of learning and education is deeply ingrained in Zoroastrians and has proved to be the basis for their economic success. Their mental outlook encourages critical self-awareness and scientific forms of reasoning. Joy, laughter and appreciation of all good things given by Ahura Mazdā is not only a pleasure but a religious duty. It is virtuous to enjoy life, because it strengthens what is good, whereas it is bad to be sad, depressed or ill. Fasting and ascetism are not encouraged, neither is withdrawal from the world. A person should marry and have children. Observance of all these precepts produces good fighters for Ahura Mazdā and against Evil. Although women are barred from entering the priesthood, in all other respects they have equal status to men, a phenomenon quite unique among ancient religions.

, strong ethics (the purpose of human life is to reduce the presence of evil in the world), a set of meticulous purity laws (e.g. exposure of dead bodies) to avoid polluting the elements perceived as God's creations, and a fully developed eschatology with belief in life after death, judgment, heaven and hell, Zoroastrianism forged the life and culture of the Iranian people.

where no-one else was attracted to live due to the harsh climate and poor water supply of the area.

They played major roles in the opium trade with China, in shipbuilding (the Wadia family)

The layout of the book is designed with the utmost care. For instance, in the top left and right corners of the pages, each chapter is characterized by an emblem taken from one of its illustrations, while the name of the article's author and title are given at the bottom.

Lavishly illustrated, there is no space for the slightest suspicion of economy.

including the teachings of Zoroaster, his hotly debated place and lifetime (the dates proposed vary from the 15th to the 6th century BC), the history of the faith during the Iranian Empires of the Achaemenids, Sasanians and Parthians and in Islamic times, the sacred scriptures, the interaction between Zoroastrianism and other traditions, especially those of the Greeks, of Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity and Shi'ite Islam, Zoroastrian art in Central Asia and in Iran under the Parthians and Sasanians, the Parsis in India, Zoroastrian ritual and lay observances, cooking, costumes, and paintings, Parsi theatre and portraits.

that expand on the subject in some detail

This is echoed in Ecclesiastes of the Hebrew Bible, where God is Wisdom.

their friendly relationship with the Israelites. Thus,

One of the reasons for the friendly relationship between Jews and Iranians may have been that there is much common ground between the teachings of Zarathustra and those of Judaism and Christianity, all of them being monotheistic faiths.

. Unconnected with Ahura Mazda, it

Their ships, built from Malabar teak, were supposed to be more durable than English vessels made of oak.

While most other publications on the subject are usually either about Iranian or Indian Zoroastrians, *A Zoroastrian Tapestry* focuses on both.

it brought an end to the dominance of a religion that had prevailed in the Near and Middle East for some 1500 years: Zoroastrianism.

This laid the foundation for a friendly relationship between Israelites and Iranians throughout antiquity.

This is a book of superlatives in many ways. It is of the greatest scope and supreme quality in all possible aspects of text, photographs, format and finish.

Jews occupied prominent positions at the Persian court, as illustrated by the as well as by the biblical story of Esther, the Jewish queen of the Persian king Artaxerxes.

, since they are perceived as God's creations

This event did not mean the end of Zoroastrianism: indeed the religion remained vigorous for another four hundred years.

as discussed by John Hinnells (pp.)

Zoroastrianism remained vigorous for another four hundred years. It

Moreover, it is perceived not as a god, but as a force.

Pheroza J. Godrej, Pheroza Godrej, Firoza Punthakey Mistree. Mapin Pub., 2002 - India - 762 pages. 0 Reviews. This Lavishly Illustrated Volume Attempts To Span A Vast Period Of Time And Gives A Glimpse Of The Life And Times Of The Zoroastrian People In Iran And India As Manifested In Their Art, Religion And Culture. From inside the book. What people are saying - Write a review. We haven't found any reviews in the usual places. Contents. 160.Â Bibliographic information. Title. A Zoroastrian Tapestry: Art, Religion & Culture Traditional Indian and Islamic Arts Series. AbeBooks.com: A Zoroastrian Tapestry: Art, Religion & Culture (9781890206222) and a great selection of similar New, Used and Collectible Books available now at great prices.Â 1. A Zoroastrian Tapestry: Art, Religion & Culture. Pheroza J. Godrej (Editor), Firoza Punthakey Mistree (Editor). Published by Mapin (2003). ISBN 10: 1890206229 ISBN 13: 9781890206222. Used Hardcover First Edition Quantity available: 1. Seller: AwardWinningBooks (Spring Branch, TX, U.S.A.) Rating. Seller Rating The catalogue refreshes our memory of a previous 2002 art publication of 762 folio pages, namely, "A Zoroastrian Tapestry: Art, Religion and Culture", edited by Pheroza J. Godrej and Firoza Punthakey-Mistree, who incidentally are also co-curators of this exhibition. But, two of the sections of this catalogue needs some improvements. Hintze, Almut (2004) 'A seamless portrait of a neglected culture. Review of Pheroza J. Godrej & Firoza Punthakey Mistree, A Zoroastrian Tapestry. Art, Religion & Culture. Ahmedabad: Mapin Publishing Pvt. Ltd. and Middletown (USA): Grantha Corporation, 2002, 762pp., numerous plates and illustrations.' The Times Higher Education Supplement (1628). p. 30. Full text not available from this repository. Alternative Location: <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?st> Item Type: Book Reviews. SOAS Departments & Centres 2004. âœA seamless portrait of a neglected cultureâ€. Review of Pheroza J. Godrej & Firoza Punthakey Mistree, A Zoroastrian Tapestry. Art, Religion & Culture. Ahmedabad and Middletown (USA), 2002. In: The Times Higher Education Supplement, no. 1,628, 20 February 2004, p.30. By Almut Hintze. 2015 Zarathustraâ€™s Time and Homeland: Linguistic Perspectives. In: M. Stausberg and Y. Vevaina (eds.), The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Zoroastrianism. With the assistance of Anna Tessmann.