

**ZOROASTRIANISM: THE ASPIRATION OF AN ANCIENT BELIEF TOWARDS  
PERFECTION**

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**Annotation:** This article examines the emergence and development of Zoroastrian beliefs. Like other beliefs, Zoroastrianism has had a significant place in people's lives. It also reveals that some elements of the rituals of this faith have been preserved to this day. It also provides information about the discovery of elements of the Zoroastrian funeral ritual at archaeological sites.

**Key words:** Zoroastrianism, religious beliefs, Bronze Age, agricultural culture, fire, monument, cattle breeding, customs, dakhma, ossuary.

**Annotatsiya:** Ushbu maqola zardushtilik e'tiqodlarining paydo bulishi va uning rivojlanishini o'rganadi. Insonlar hayotida boshqa etiqodlar singari zardushtiylik xam yaxshi o'rin egallagan. Bu e'tiqod marosimlaridagi bazi elemintlarning bugungi kungacha saqlanib kelinayotganligi xam ochib beradi. Zardushtiylikdagi ko'mish marosimi elemintlarining arxeologik joylarda topilgani xaqida xam malumot beradi.

**Kalit so'zlar:** Zardushtiylik, diniy e'tiqodlar, bronza davri, dehqonchilik madaniyati, olov, yodgorlik, chorvachilik, urf-odat, daxma, ostadon.

**Аннотация:** В статье рассматривается возникновение и развитие зороастрийских верований. Зороастризм, как и другие религии, занимает важное место в жизни людей. Это также свидетельствует о том, что некоторые элементы религиозных ритуалов сохранились до наших дней. В нем также содержится информация об обнаружении элементов зороастрийских погребальных ритуалов на археологических памятниках.

**Ключевые слова.** Зороастризм, религиозные верования, бронзовый век, земледельческая культура, огонь, памятник, скотоводство, обычаи, дахма, ассуарий.

Zoroastrianism is one of the oldest world religions and has been the main religion of many Eastern peoples for over a thousand years. Before the spread of Islam, the peoples of Central Asia, Iran, and Azerbaijan followed this faith. Even after the arrival of Islam, this religion maintained its position for a long time. The influence of Zoroastrianism grew stronger as several states were established in the Middle East, and its customs and principles later affected the newly formed religions and traditions.

As a result of analyzing the Avesta, it becomes evident that until the time of Zarathustra, our primitive ancestors adhered to various tribal religious beliefs. Primitive relations were gradually replaced by the earliest class-based society. A strong idea was necessary for the formation of this era. Because local tribal religions became a force hindering the rise of society to a new stage of development. In these complex times, the need arose to unite the various tribes of the region, thereby uniting them around the idea of statehood. Zarathustra entered the historical arena as one of the progressive people of his time, correctly understanding this necessity [1, – P. 197].

One of the features that completely distinguishes Zoroastrianism from other religions, such as the worship of fire, is the peculiarity of the burial rite. The bodies were transported to special places - burial chambers, and the bones, cleaned by birds, were placed in ossuaries. [2, – P. 53-56]. According to Zoroastrian teachings, it was considered a sin to bury people's bodies in the ground after death. Therefore, after a person's death, their body was carried to special hills. These hills

were located far from human habitation, and on the hill various dogs, eagles, and wild birds ate human flesh and separated it from bones. And the rain cleansed the bones even more. The sun dried it completely. After this, people living around the hill collected the bones, placed them in pottery vessels, and in many cases were buried in the deceased's house. These vessels were called ostadons or ossuaries. The shape of the ostadon varied, with a rectangular base and a lid of various shapes, even in the form of a human head or figure, sometimes resembling a jug, sometimes in the form of a seated person. [3, 4]. The faces of the ostadon were decorated with relief images or drawings. These images reflect the customs of people of that time, for example, mourning events. Numerous such remains have been found in Central Asia, particularly in Khorezm. (Xumbuztepa [2, - P. 53-56], Mizdahkon [5, - P. 65-70], Qirontov [6], Toq qal'a [7, - P. 171.; 8], etc.).

As mentioned above, creatures that cleanse bones after death (various dogs, eagles, wild birds) were considered sacred. Especially in their work, the eagle was valued very differently in people's lives. In the Kashkadarya region, elements of various religious beliefs are reflected in many examples of material culture. One of the examples of material culture is the ossuaries associated with burial rites, usually made of ceramics and stones. Ossuaries discovered and studied during scientific research and numerous archaeological and ethnographic expeditions in Kashkadarya are preserved in the "Shakhrisabz" State Museum-Reserve. In 2012, fragments of printed (stamped) ossuaries dating back to the 6th-7th centuries were discovered in Yumoloktepa, located 5 km southeast of Shahrisabz. The hill appears to consist of the remains of a small village fortress. When the ossuary fragments were reconstructed by combining them, it was found that two of them were whole ossuaries and one was half. All of them are red clay, have the same composition in terms of shape and decorations, and their exterior is engraved in bright colors [9, - P. 48-55].

One of the main reasons for the constant burning of fires in Zoroastrian temples was that during the spread of belief, that is, at the end of the Bronze Age and the beginning of the Early Iron Age, the climate in Central Asia cooled down. In turn, our ancestors, in order to help socially vulnerable groups, constantly lit fires in temples, protecting them from the cold. Religious lessons were also taught around the fire. Consequently, fire temples served not only as a religious institution but also as a spiritual and social institution [10, - P. 31].

Fire held special significance in Zoroastrian rituals. Fire manifested itself in various forms: celestial fire, fire hidden in a tree, fire burning in fire temples, divine fire, lightning fire, and fire that gives warmth and life to the human body. The burning bonfire was considered eternal and was dedicated to the spirits of a particular deity or ancestors. They were preserved without being erased and protected from the gaze of strangers and non-believers. The ash of the hearth or fireplace was also considered sacred and was buried in sacred places [11, - P. 47-48]. Even today, fire is considered sacred and is widely used in daily life. For example, in many places in Surkhandarya, Kashkadarya, and Bukhara regions, when the bride arrives at the groom's house, they circle around the fire at the entrance. In some places, the bride is carried by the groom and circled around the fire three times. More often, in the oasis regions, before placing a child in a cradle, they would step over the burning fire three times, according to such beliefs, there was a belief that people who clung to the cradle would burn to death in the fire. In the Surkhan oasis, many rituals of cleansers are performed with fire. This shows that the sacred fire rituals in Zoroastrianism still continue in the daily rituals of people. Some other manifestations of the customs of respect and attention to fire have been preserved in the lifestyle of the peoples of Central Asia to this day. In the valley Kipchaks, the hearth of the household is never extinguished. Not extinguishing the fire day and night in the hearth is a custom inherited from

our ancestors, and according to their understanding, a hearth without fire is like an ownerless, lonely house. Only in a household whose hearth always burned with fire did there always be prosperity [12, - P. 67]. In Zoroastrianism, specific funeral rites were developed [13, - P. 65-72]. At Zoroastrian burials, priests and relatives of the deceased recited special prayers for three days and nights. Drinking water and eating were forbidden during rituals. Twice a year, during the spring Navruz and autumn Mehrjon holidays, they would offer incense, charity, and sacrifices to the spirits of their ancestors [11, - P. 46].

The Avesta reflects the socio-economic life, religious views, ideas about the world, customs, and spiritual cultures of all Turkic peoples, Persian-Tajik, Azerbaijani, Afghan, and other peoples who lived in Central Asia in ancient times. Stages of development of Zoroastrianism in Central Asia.

Zoroastrianism is a doctrine that opposed the beliefs that deified the forces of nature that existed in Central Asia in primitive times. He condemned unnecessary bloodshed, military conflicts, and wars of aggression, calling for a settled and peaceful life, engaging in labor, farming, and animal husbandry.

With his teachings, Zoroaster wants to teach people to live in peace and harmony, to work honestly. According to the teachings of this religion, people's fate in the afterlife is determined according to their life in this world, and after death, each person, according to their deeds in this world, either enters eternal comfort - paradise, or if they have many evil deeds, they enter a place of limbo - misvongatu, which sees neither joy nor sorrow [14, - P. 72].

The basis of Zoroastrianism is dualism, according to which the world is built on the basis of the struggle of opposites. The eternal struggle between good and evil, light and darkness, life and death continues. All good is represented by Ahura Mazda, and all evil is represented by Ahriman. Ancient burials of the settled population of the Surkhandarya and Kashkadarya oases, dating back to the 9th-4th centuries BC, have not been found. During this period, Zoroastrian burial rites were widespread in the southern regions of Uzbekistan. Some bones of ancient people were found and examined in the vicinity of Sangirtepa in Kashkadarya, Kyzyltepa and Bandikhontepa in Surkhandarya. Dispersed bones of people from Sangirtepa and Kyzyltepa were found under the surfaces of houses [15, - P. 28]. Thus, archaeological data indicate that burial rites in these regions were based on Zoroastrian traditions.

The 4th-1st centuries BC were the flourishing period of ancient Khorezm, and monuments from this period are numerous and diverse. Almost all ancient cities of Khorezm were built to defend the oasis from neighboring steppe tribes. On the right bank of the Amu Darya, Jonboskala, Bozorkala, Qurgoshinkala, Qirqqizkala, Ayozkala, and Tuproqqal'a, stretching from east to west, were built close to each other and in a row at the foot of irrigation structures. The presence of a unified defense system and extensive irrigation systems indicates that Khorezm was a powerful centralized state. Until now, religious finds have been recorded in Kuzaliquir, considered the oldest city in ancient Khorezm. Fragments of burial masks and hollow statues dating back to the 4th-3rd centuries BC were found in the temple complex and the center of the cult of kings in Kuzalikir. Based on ash and small bone fragments, these hollow sculptures, dwarf ostadon, as well as burial masks and box-shaped ash containers, to ostadon, and subsequently to statuary ashtrays. In 1950-1954 BC. Numerous ossuaries have been found in the central part of the Oybuyirkala settlement dating back to the 5th-4th centuries. The shape of the ostadon is barrel-shaped, and there are many sculptures of a seated woman [16, - P. 68]. In the Ancient Khorezm kingdom, which was formed in the 5th-4th centuries BC and pursued an independent policy, the state religion was Zoroastrianism. During this period, the Old Khorezmian script (4th century BC) emerged. Until recently, the main city of the country, which had not found its place in science,

Akchakhan Kala, was a ruined ancient city in Southern Khorezm, now under the Kyzylkum dunes of the Beruni district of the Republic of Karakalpakstan. Archaeologists of Karakalpakstan under the leadership of Professor V.M. Yagodin, together with archaeologists from the University of Sydney, Australia, have been conducting archaeological field research since 1995. The monument consists of two parts, namely inner and outer cities, which are surrounded by two rows of majestic defensive walls. The inner city part of Akchakhan fortress covers 13 hectares, and its defensive walls are fortified with towers every 22-23 meters along its perimeter. There are four entrance gates to the city on all sides [17, - P. 82-83]. In the center of the city, on a high platform, stands the city's main fireplace. The flames burning in it were visible from afar, beyond the city walls. When determining the time when the Avesta was written or when Zoroaster lived, Soviet historians repeatedly focused their attention on the era of Kavi Vishtaspa. According to the research of V.V. Struve and V.I. Abaev, Zarathustra and Kavi Vishtaspa, who defended his views, were historical figures. According to V.V. Stroeve,..." For the first time in Margiana, the largest mass of people accepted Zoroastrianism" [18, - P. 29]. Almost all prominent historians acknowledge that Central Asia was the first homeland of Zoroastrianism. In particular, V.I. Abaev wrote that..."Zoroastrianism was formed in Eastern Iran, in neighboring territories where settled culture and Scythian nomads lived," while M.M. Dyakonov believes that the ancient parts of the "Avesta" were written in Bactria [19, - P. 60-73]. If I. Aliyev believes that the Avesta was created in the expanses of Eastern Media and Central Asia, then K.V. Trever considers Sogd, and I.M. Dyakonov considers Bactria or Khorezm the homeland of the Avesta [20, - P. 24.; 22, - P. 85.; 23, - P. 390]. Uzbek Avesta scholar M. Ishoqov considers..."Khorezm, Sogd, and adjacent regions" as the place where the Avesta was created [24, - P. 5]. The subsequent period in the development of Zoroastrianism began in the 3rd millennium BC. The last quarter of the 2nd millennium BC and the period before the Achaemenid invasion. It was during this period that we observe the emergence of the truly legitimized Zoroastrianism - the Avesta - in Central Asia. Archaeological data also confirm the complete formation of Zoroastrianism during this period. If in the Bronze Age in the south of Central Asia it was customary to bury the dead with their belongings, now this custom has been abolished, since, although many archaeological monuments of this period have been excavated (Kuchuktepa, Bandikhan I, Kyzylcha VI), archaeologists have not encountered a single grave. This situation indicates a radical change in the customs of burial - the formation of Zoroastrianism. The next stage in the development of Zoroastrianism can be called Zoroastrianism of the Achaemenid period [25, - P. 198-207].

It seems that V.I. Abayev did not pay attention to the following scientific innovations on Zoroastrianism of the Achaemenid period. In Bactria, along with Zoroastrianism, there are archaeological sources indicating the preservation of the custom of burning the dead during the Achaemenid period. An example of this is the Pshaktepa monument [26] discovered and studied by Academician A.A. Askarov. Here, researchers witnessed burned human bones being buried according to certain customs.

In the territory of Central Asia, the period of Kuchuk, Yaz I can be called a period of widespread Zoroastrian traditions. According to the ideology of Zoroastrianism, the material culture and customs of the population also changed. We see this primarily in the abolition of the custom of burying the deceased. According to Zoroastrianism, customs such as considering water sacred, honoring bread, and respecting the farmer were also among the requirements of this Zoroastrian religion [27, - P. 5]. These customs continue to this day in our traditions and values. This is a separate object of research, which is currently mainly studied by ethnologists.

Kazakh archaeologists have discovered Zoroastrian fire temples in the regions of Southern Kazakhstan, Semirechye, and Taraz. The widespread prevalence of Zoroastrianism in these regions is evidenced by the excavations of the ancient cemetery in Taraz and the ancient settlement of Baba-ata near the Karatau Range.

Some researchers consider the territory of modern Kazakhstan to be the homeland of the founder of Zoroastrianism. One of them, the Avestan scholar M. Boys, writes: "Based on the content and language of the hymns composed by Zoroaster, it was established that he lived in the Asian steppes east of the Volga." Indeed, nomadic pastoralism, the main occupation of the ancient population of Kazakhstan, left an indelible mark on the views of Zoroastrians.

The "Avesta" shows special care for cattle and the improvement of their feed, pastures, and animal breeds. This is clearly stated: a person who eats meat is more satisfied than a non-meat eater. Excavations of the Tekturmas Zoroastrian cemetery in Taraz have shown that the external forms of the ossuaries are represented by yurts. Their surfaces are decorated with geometric or floral ornaments. Many cults associated with Zoroastrianism persisted in the cities of Kazakhstan even after the appearance of Islam [28, - P. 96]. In the houses of Otrar in the 12th century, archaeologists discovered hearth-altars [29].

Conclusion. Zoroastrianism is one of the ancient religions that occupies a special place in the history of human civilization, the formation and improvement of which includes a long evolutionary process. We analyzed the emergence of the religion of Zoroastrianism, its appearance in various monuments from the Bronze Age, and its connection with such types of economy as agriculture and animal husbandry. The religious beliefs of Zoroastrianism, the veneration of the sacred fire, the idea of the struggle between good and evil, the significance of customs and religious rituals in social and cultural life, as well as rituals through mausoleums and ostadon, and traditions related to the deceased are of great importance. The results indicate that Zoroastrianism can be evaluated not only as an ancient belief system, but also as a worldview system striving for perfection, which had a significant impact on the spiritual and cultural development of humanity.

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