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## On the concept of leadership and the office of Leader of the Zoroastrians (*hu-dēnān pēšōbāy*) in Abbasid Zoroastrianism

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### Abstract

Like many other religions, Zoroastrianism frequently restructured its priestly organization during its long history, largely because of the environmental changes to which it was exposed. A major shift in status – from being the state religion in the Sasanian Empire to holding only a minor position in the early Islamic period – challenged the Zoroastrian hierarchy of authority. The Abbasid state provided Zoroastrianism with an opportunity to initiate a new office, which was called *hu-dēnān pēšōbāy* “Leader of the Zoroastrians”. This article is the first to deal with this office in detail and scrutinizes the concept of leadership (*pēšōbāyīh*) in Sasanian and Abbasid Zoroastrianism. It sheds some light on the priestly structure of Zoroastrianism in this period and investigates the position of the office within the overall religious organization. It re-examines, moreover, evidence for the officiating Zoroastrian theologians in this office at the Abbasid court in Baghdad. Finally, it searches for the parallels between this office and that of the East-Syrian catholicos and the Jewish exilarch.

**Keywords:** Leadership; Priestly organization; Authority; Inter-religious contact; Iran and Islam; Sasanian Empire; Abbasid dynasty; Baghdad

### Introduction

To organize their social and spiritual affairs, religious groups develop an organizational structure. As religious groups are sensitive to their environment, they often react to the environmental changes by restructuring their organization. Therefore, the organizational structure of religious communities is often as dynamic as the religion’s other facets. Environmental changes that can affect the organizational structure include economic crises, political challenges, or contact with other religions. For around one-and-a-half millennia, Zoroastrianism endured in the context of different world empires: the Achaemenian, Alexander’s, the Seleucid, the Parthian, the Sasanian and finally the Abbasid empires. The status of the tradition fluctuated over this long period of existence, developing into a “religion”<sup>1</sup> and to a state religion, yet Zoroastrianism seems to have possessed a well-structured religious organization even before its integration in the imperial power, as the Avestan texts

<sup>1</sup> See BeDuhn 2015; Rezania 2020a.

attest.<sup>2</sup> Close cooperation between Zoroastrianism and the reigning sovereign in the Sasanian period<sup>3</sup> suggests that the religion was (at least theoretically) active in the whole territory of the empire. This circumstance called for a hierarchical and well-organized priesthood. After the Islamic conquest and the collapse of the Sasanian empire, however, Zoroastrianism lost the financial and political support of the empire. This new situation challenged Zoroastrianism and ergo its organizational structure. The events of the two first centuries of Islam are only dimly lit for scholars, due to a marked scarceness of sources. As the Abbasids arose in the second/eighth century, Zoroastrianism faced a new challenge: an era of intensive engagement between religion and government, when theological and philosophical discussions waited to begin. To respond to the needs of this period, the Zoroastrian priestly organization seems to have undergone some changes. One of them – the hypothesis of this article – was the introduction of a new office called *hu-dēnān pēšōbāy* in the early Islamic period.

The first lexeme of the term *hu-dēnān pēšōbāy*, lit. “the people of good tradition/religion”, is a Zoroastrian emic self-designating term and does not need any further consideration. I will investigate the semantic field of the second lexeme in Section 1, divided into two subsections: firstly, in the pre-Abbasid Zoroastrian literature, and secondly, in the Zoroastrian literature from the Abbasid period. Afterwards, I will discuss the position of the office of *hu-dēnān pēšōbāy* in the Zoroastrian pyramidal hierarchy (Section 2). Sections 3 and 4 investigate the evidence for a Zoroastrian *hu-dēnān pēšōbāy* from the eighth to early eleventh centuries, as well as evidence for the location of the office at the Abbasid court in Baghdad. Section 5 scrutinizes parallels between the Zoroastrian office and the offices of the representatives of other non-state religions in the Abbasid and Sasanian periods.

## 1. The semantic field of *pēšōbāy(ih)*

### 1.1. *pēšōbāy(ih)* in the pre-Abbasid Zoroastrian literature

*pēšōbāy* is a well-attested lexeme in Middle Persian and can unerringly be dated to the early Middle Persian period, roughly the first half of the first millennium. David N. MacKenzie (1967: 130–3) convincingly rejected the supposition that the term consists of *pēš* (< \**patyaši-*) and *pāy* (< *pāda-*). He points out that such a construction would result in *pēš(o)pāy*. The written Pahlavi form, however, evinces a full *ō* and it cannot be anaptyctic. On the basis of the Manichaean and Armenian attestations, he makes the case that the second component of the lexeme, *ōbāy*, derives from \**abi-pāya-* > \**aβpāy-* > *ōpāy-* and later *ōbāy-* with the meaning “defend, guard, protect, secure” (p. 132). Accordingly, *pēšōbāy* must mean “vanguard, guarding in front” (p. 132f.). MacKenzie asserts that the lexeme “could only develop after the establishment of the Middle Persian forms *pēš* and *ōpāy-*” (p. 133). Moreover, the preservation of *p* (instead of *b*) in Armenian, *zaur pēšōpāy* (Hübschmann 1895: 230), attests its development in early Middle Persian.

The meaning “guarding in front”, as proposed by MacKenzie, can be attested in PY 57.25 or its parallel passage in PYt. 11.25. The phrase containing *pēšōbāyih* reads:

(PY 57.25) [...] *az ōy druwand hēn [[ī dušmenān]], kē pad ulih<sup>4</sup> drafš<sup>˘</sup> nayēnd pad pēšōbāyih ī xešm [...]*

<sup>2</sup> For the Zoroastrian socio-political and socio-religious spatial structures in the Avestan period, see Rezania 2017a: 370–83.

<sup>3</sup> This close cooperation led to the designation of the Sasanian brotherhood of sovereignty and religion depicted in Arabic sources of the early Islamic period; see e.g. al-Mas‘ūdī 1965–79: 1/289; Boyce 1968: 33; Shaked 1984: 37–40. Historians of the Sasanian period date this concept in the later centuries of the Sasanian period. This hypothesis takes only textual sources into consideration, however.

<sup>4</sup> Hürdi-Avestā MSS. adds *xrūrīg* (hlryk), which seems to be the Pahlavi rendering of Av. *xrūra-* “bloody” (AirWb, 539; Dhahbar 1949: 246). Kreyenbroek (1999: 50, 91) reads as hapax \**xruwīg*.

(May you protect us) from the wicked army [[the enemies]], who lead through a raised banner with Wrath as their vanguard.

The meaning “vanguard” makes good sense in PV 2.24 as well:

(PV 2.24) *kū pēš az zamistān awēšān deh būd hēnd burd-wāstar. [[kū-šan pēšōbāy-ēw ī nek būd u-šan anbār abāz kard.]]*

Before the winter, their lands were full of pastures. [[As they had a good vanguard,<sup>5</sup> they stocked up.]]

In some Zand passages,<sup>6</sup> the lexeme *pēšōbāyih* glosses *pēš-rawišnih* “precedence, preference, guidance, forward progress, advancement, pre-eminence” (Dhabhar 1949: 92). These Zand passages use the lexeme *pēš-rawišnih*, or more precisely the phrase *pad pēš-rawišnih*, to translate Av. *p(a)(o)uruua*.<sup>7</sup> This latter lexeme is a marker of anteriority in Avestan and basically means “front; prior”. This meaning of the lexeme *p(a)(o)uruua* corresponds to the main meaning of Middle Persian *pēš*. This semantic correspondence explains the choice of the lexeme *pēš-rawišnih* to translate *p(a)(o)uruua*.<sup>8</sup> In PY 5.2, for example, it is used as an adverbial phrase (*pad pēš-rawišnih*) to qualify the act of “worship” expressed by the verb *yazam* “I worship”:

(PY 5.2) *ān ēdōn az yaštārān ī andar ēn gēhān pad pēš-rawišnih yazam [[pad pēšōbāyih]]*

I worship the ones among the worshippers of this world, who excellently [[in the foremost way]] (worship).

The lexeme *pauruuatāt-* in Y. 5.2 (= Y. 37.2b-c)<sup>9</sup> qualifies *yasnanqm* and can be translated as “the most excellent worship”.<sup>10</sup> By the usage of the phrase *pad pēšōbāyih* as a gloss for *pad pēš-rawišnih*, the lexeme *pēšōbāyih* simply represents anteriority.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, in PY. 60.2, *pēšōbāyih* glosses *frāztom padih* “being most forward”. This phrase is the translation of the second component of Av. *darāγō.fratamaθβa-*, which Bartholomae translates as “Prinzipat” or “Gebieterschaft” (AirWb, 695). The Avestan passage Y. 60.2 has a parallel in Afr. 1.2. Correspondingly, the Zand of the latter is parallel to the PY. 60.2 addressed above. The Middle Persian translation of Afr. 1.2 glosses the phrase *frāztom pēšōbāyih* “the highest leadership” with *mowbedān mowbed* “the Priest of Priests”.<sup>12</sup> Doing so, it provides a semantic link between the concept of leadership and the office of *mowbedān mowbed* as its highest level. This concept is relevant for the constitution of the office

<sup>5</sup> Kapadia (1953: 465) suggests “a leader, a chief, a head”.

<sup>6</sup> See e.g. PY 5.2 = 37.2 (< Y. 5.2 = Y. 37.2b-c), 33.14, PVyt. 26 and 41.

<sup>7</sup> In Y. 5.2 = 37.2 and 33.14: *pauruuatāt-*, in Vyt. 26 and 41: *pa(o)uruuō*.

<sup>8</sup> It should be noted that, especially in the Zand literature, the constituent *rawišnih* was used for building abstract nouns.

<sup>9</sup> It reads: *tām aṭ yasnanqm pauruuatātā yazamaidē / yōi gāuš hacā šīieṭti* “We worship him with the most excellent worship (of those) who are on the side of the cow” (Hintze 2007: 168).

<sup>10</sup> For the use of a substantive instead of an adjective as a stylistic device in this stanza, see Hintze 2007: 168f. For the metaphorical use of anterior and posterior markers in a hierarchy of value, see Rezanian 2020b.

<sup>11</sup> In a passage from the Zand literature, PY 32.11, we find an antonym for *pēšōbāy(ih)*. There, the lexemes *pasōbāy(ih)* mark posteriority. Dhabhar (1949: 84) gives the meanings “dependence, servitude, vassalage” for this lexeme.

<sup>12</sup> It, moreover, replaces the terms *mānbedān mānbed[ih]* “the householder of householders” with *mowbedān mowbed*.

*hu-dēnān pēšōbāy* as the highest Zoroastrian authority in the early Islamic period (see Section 2.1 below).

Functioning as the marker of anteriority, the lexeme *pēšōbāy* receives the meaning “preceding” as well, which is attested for example in PY 32.13c. The passage reads:

(PY 32.13c) *kē pad ēd ī tō mānsar †dawāg hēnd* [[*kū pēšōbāy ī pad dēn hēnd*]] [...]

The ones who are messengers<sup>13</sup> of your divine formulas<sup>14</sup> [[i.e. who are *pēšōbāys* in the tradition]]

In this passage, the lexeme *pēšōbāy* seems to gloss *mānsar dawāg*. The latter word of the phrase translates av. *dūta-* with the same meaning “messenger”.<sup>15</sup> It is not far-fetched if we assume that the commentator of this passage understood *pēšōbāy* “forerunner” with both meanings of the term, i.e. “messenger” and “someone who goes ahead”.

Both lexemes for *pēšōbāy(ih)* are attested in the meaning “leader(ship)” in the Manichaean and Zoroastrian Middle Persian corpus as well.<sup>16</sup> The Zand passage P. 43 is one of the rare Zoroastrian passages that exemplify this meaning:

P. 43.2 *ud nē kē pad framān pad-iš brādarān pad dōšišn ul dōšīd estēd kū andar xānag pad pēšōbāyih dāšt estēd*

Not the one who because of order but the one whom his brothers have admired because of love, i.e. he has been considered at home as leader.<sup>17</sup>

Another Pahlavi (Zoroastrian Middle Persian) text in which the lexeme *pēšōbāy* is attested in the meaning “leader” is the *Andarz ī Ādurbād ī Mahraspandān*. The corresponding passage reads:

(AAM 48) *pēšōbāy mard grāmīg u-š meh dār ud saxwan aziš padīr*.

Honour the leader and consider him great and obey him!

## 1.2. *pēšōbāy(ih)* in the Abbasid Zoroastrian literature

The entire meaning of the lexemes *pēšōbāy(ih)* attested to in the pre-Abassid period is also attested to in the Zoroastrian literature of the ninth and tenth centuries. WD 61.20, for example, evinces the etymological meaning “vanguard”, which we read in some texts in Section 1.1.<sup>18</sup> *Wizigard ī dēnīg* represents Warahrām as the general (*spāh-sālār*) and

<sup>13</sup> It can be read as *gōwāg* as well. *dawāg* is the active present participle (see Durkin-Meisterernst 2014a, para. 499) of *dawīdan* “to run” but has the same meaning here as *gōwāg* “ones who speak (the divine formulae)”; see AirWb, 749. Dhabhar (1949: 197) reads *dōbāk* and translates it as “spokesman, messenger, apostle, prophet”.

<sup>14</sup> The lexeme *mānsar* corresponds in this Middle Persian translation to Av. *maθrān-* “master of divine formulas, poet”. This lexeme is built on *maθra-* “divine formula, poem” which is generally rendered in Middle Persian as *mānsar*. It is not clear whether *mānsar* designates “poem” or “poet” in this Middle Persian translation. If it designates “poets”, it is possible to translate the phrase as “(fore)runner of the poets”.

<sup>15</sup> Kellens and Pirart 1988–91: II/260; AirWb, 749.

<sup>16</sup> For uses in Manichaean texts, see MW R 2, MIK 8259 I V i 3 (Durkin-Meisterernst 2004: 291); M385/R/H/6 (Durkin-Meisterernst 2014b: 162f.).

<sup>17</sup> Translated differently by Jamaspasa and Humbach 1971: I:65.

<sup>18</sup> The dating of this text is challenging. The listing of its attestations in this section does not mean that I date the text in the Abbasid period. It fits much more to Abbasid than the Sasanian literature, however. For a discussion on this text, see Sheffield 2005.

banner-holder (*drašdār*) of the army of spiritual divinities. It portrays him as the foremost vanguard (*pēšōbāytom*), the bravest (*marčābuktom*) and firmest (*awestwārtom*) in the battle of divinities, running to every place with strength (*amāwandih*). We can find this meaning in another passage in the same text. According to WD 21.15, Zarathustra would like to come to Ērānšahr to be at ease and fearless. He and his companions, however, do not know how to cross the sea. Zarathustra appeals to Ohrmazd for a solution. A spiritual utterance encourages him to cross the sea. “Subsequently, Zarathustra goes forth because of (his) power and victory as vanguard” (*pas Zardušt az amāwandih ud pērōzgarīh pad pēšōbāyīh raft*).

We saw in Section 1.2 that the Zand literature uses the lexeme *pēšōbāy* *inter alia* to gloss *pēš-rawišnīh*, which translates Av. *p(a)(o)uruua-*, a marker of anteriority in Avestan. In the final chapters of his anthology, Zādspram similarly uses *pēšōbāy* as a marker of anteriority.<sup>19</sup> In a passage of the same book, the ninth-century author uses the lexeme in the meaning “former”. Besides differentiating between the “soul on the way/road” and the “soul in body”, Zādspram explicitly asserts that the former goes ahead, in front of the latter.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, Dk. VII, 3.12 and 14 designate the predecessor cow and horse of a flock as *pēšōbāy*. We find parallel phrasings of the same narrative, also with *pēšōbāy*, in WZ 10.6f. and WZ 21.10.

As it is normally the case for anterior markers, *pēšōbāy* has been used in Middle Persian to express superiority. One example is the phrase “the superior one in the propagation of Ohrmazd’s religion” (*dēn ī ohrmazd rawāgēnīdārīh pēšōbāy*) in Dk. III, 202.4.

Similar to PY 32.11 (see note 12 above), a series of passages in the *Dēnkard* sets *pēšōbāy* and *pasōbāy* as antonyms of one another.<sup>21</sup> Using these lexemes, Dk. III, 155 discusses the signs of increase and decrease of fortune in a society. Its first three sections read:

(III, 155.1) *abar daxšāg ī xwarrah abrāz ō bālist waxšīšn ān ī xwarrah nišēb ō \*nigūnīh nirfīšnīg ram az nigēz ī weh-dēn. (2) hād. az daxšāgīh ī andar abrāz ō bālist waxšīšnīg ram ēn-iz sē ēwēnag (3) ka-šān meh ī pad dēn-āgāhīh aziš handarz framān-barišnīh pēšōbāy. keh pad dēn-pursišnīgīh ud hu-niyōšīh pasōbāy.*

(1) About the signs of increase of Xwarrah to the highest growth, and the ones of its decrease to the lowest [lit. to the decreasing inversion] (in a) society [*ram*] according to the exegesis of good religion. (2) Yes. There are three forms of the signs of increase of Xwarrah to the highest growth: (3) (firstly,) when their greatest (person) according to the religious knowledge is their superior [*pēšōbāy*] and they obey his advice, (and when their) most little (person) according to the religious affairs and fellowship is their inferior [*pasōbāy*].

In this passage, *pēšōbāy* and *pasōbāy* constitute terms expressing social grades. In Dk. VII, 8.32, *pēšōbāyīh* and *pasōbāyīh* not only oppose each other, but also gloss two antonymous phrases: *pēšōbāyīh* glosses *pad frāzīh* “through superiority”, *pasōbāyīh* glosses *pad abāzīh* “through inferiority”. Similarly, the next example, Dk. IX, 32.5, uses the lexemes *pēšōbāy* and *pasōbāy* parallel to *pēšīh* and *pasīh*. *pēšōbāy* and *pēšīh* here designate “leader” and “leadership”, *pasōbāy* and *pasīh* “follower” and “following”:

<sup>19</sup> See WZ 30.16, 23, 47, 54, 34.19, 35.14; he, moreover, makes the adverb *pēšōbāyīhā* with the meaning “as the first person” (WZ 35.9).

<sup>20</sup> WZ 30.47: “The former, the soul on the way, goes forth and arrives at the assembly before the body” (*pēšōbāy ruwān ī andar rāh frāz rawēd ō hanjaman pēš az tan bē rasēd [...]*). Gignoux and Tafazzoli (1993: 109) translate it in this passage as “guide”. A link to the specific meaning “guide”, however, is absent in the passage.

<sup>21</sup> Dk. III, 155, VII, 8.32, 8.35, IX, 32.5, 32.19 (parallel to PY 32.11) and 45.9.

(IX, 32.5) *ud awēšān az anāštīh pad zanišn zanēnd pad ān ī ašmāh dōšīšn kē dēw hēd. kē-tān nē pad pēšīh hunsandīh ka pēšōbāy dagrand-zadār bawēd. ēdōn pad pasīh-iz ast kū zanēd ka-z-itān pad pasōbāy dagrand-zanišn kunēd.*

They [i.e. the demon-worshippers] hit (others) with blows because of enmity and because of their love of you demons. Nobody receives content from your leadership [pēšīh], i.e. you permanently destruct when you are leader. So is it also when you follow: you hit, i.e. you permanently destruct even when you follow.

Another passage in the same chapter, Dk. IX, 32.18, describes the unrighteous people as the ones who “sin in (the position of) leadership or fellowship” (*pad pēšōbāyīh ud pasōbāyīh wināh kunēnd*). It is probable that the phrases including *pēšōbāy(ih)* and *pasōbāy(ih)* in both Warštmānsar-nask chapters of the *Dēnkard* IX are glosses.<sup>22</sup> As a gloss of “tyranny” (*sāstārīh*) with a negative meaning, *pēšōbāyīh* occurs in Dk. VII, 4.50. Denoting the meaning “leadership”, it ascribes a meaning similar to “mastery” to *pēšōbāyīh*.

Some chapters of the *Dēnkard* III discuss the leadership of wisdom (*xrad*). Dk. III, 68 depicts wisdom as the leader of good men (*hu-narān*). Dk. III, 220, represents wisdom’s leadership over the body of humans<sup>23</sup> as profitable, and the leadership of lust (*waran*) as harmful.

The authors of some Pahlavi works use the lexemes *pēšōbāy(ih)* to represent a prototypical leader. Zādspram ascribes the function of chief ritual priest (*zōd*) and authority (*rad*) to Zarathustra at the time of his birth. In doing so, he calls him “the leader of creatures” (*pēšōbāy ī dāmān*; WZ 8.18). Similarly, he calls Mēdyōmāh the leader of the whole people who went in front of Zarathustra (WZ 20.3). Ādurfarnbay, son of Farrozzād, calls Mašī, Syāmag, Hōšang, Tahmurip, Jam, Frēdōn, Mānuščihr and Sāmān the leaders of specific periods (Dk. V, 1.8). A passage in the *Dēnkard* VII (1.43) designates prophets before Zarathustra as *pēšōbāy* alike:

There were other prophets before Zarathustra whose names are not mentioned in the Mazdayasnian tradition because it is manifest that from time to time some spiritual beings might have descended to the more superior leader.

Dd. 47.21–3 render the Zoroastrian ritual performed by multiple priests. According to the text, the chief ritual priest, *zōd*, goes to his place, *zōdān gāh*, and the assistant priests stay on his right and left sides in their determined places. According to these passages, the ritual priest with the best leadership should be chosen as the chief ritual priest (“The one is chief ritual priest, whose leadership is the best, and the others are assistant priests” *ud ōy zōd ī weh pēšōbāyīh ud abāriḡ hamkārihā*; Dd. 47.22). In this passage, *pēšōbāyīh* means “ritual leadership”.

From the phrase “leader(ship) at the time” (*pēšōbay(ih) ī andar zamānag*) in Dk. V, 1.8<sup>24</sup> we can conclude that the author presupposes the existence, at all times, of a single leader in the Zoroastrian community. A phrase in the enigmatic passage VIII, 13.20 expresses the same idea: “the leaders who came every period” (*pēšōbāyān ī zamānag zamānag \*mad*).<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Another phrase in this part of the *Dēnkard* attests to the lexeme *pasōbāy* without *pēšōbāy*: (Dk. IX, 45.9) *ud abar awēšān ōy druwand pasōbāy ud ayār* “About those who are followers and friends of unrighteous persons”.

<sup>23</sup> See also Dk. III, 363.

<sup>24</sup> Dk. V, 1.8: *kū az payāmarān frēstagān dēn padiriftārān būd kē hangirdīḡ bowandag padirift čiyōn Gayōmard būd kē drōštāg aziš čiyōn Mašē* [...] *Kayān ud any-z was pēšōbāyīh ī andar zamānag*. “Among the prophets, messengers, and recipients of religion, there were some, such as Gayōmard, who received (the religion) entirely and completely; some, like Mašē [...] and Kayanids, who received a part of it, and also many other leaders at (their) time.” Manuscript B. reads *pēšōbāyīh*; Amouzgar and Tafazzoli (2000) emend to *pēšōbāyān*.

<sup>25</sup> M., 690: *madan*.

These passages let us conclude that the authoritative leadership designated by *pēšōbayih* in the Abbasid period is singular at every time point.<sup>26</sup>

## 2. The office of *hu-dēnān pēšōbāy*

### 2.1. In the Abbasid period

The newly coined term *hu-dēnān pēšōbāy* and its synonyms, as used in the Abbasid period, appear some 30 times in the Zoroastrian Middle Persian corpus, often to designate the bearer of the title.<sup>27</sup> Additionally, there are some passages which shed light on the function of this position in the Zoroastrian hierarchy of authority in the Abbasid period. Among them, the eleventh-century *Riwāyat* of Farnbay-srōš, son of Wahrām, offers us the most significant passage regarding this office. The second question in the text reads:

(RFS 2.1<sup>28</sup>) *pursišn ēn kū ka hu-dēnān pēšōbāy ēd mowmard-<sup>+</sup>ēw rāy mowbedih ī šahr-<sup>+</sup>ēw dahēd, pad passand ud ham-dādestānih ī weh-dēnān, pas az ān pad ēw-čand radih ī kustag-<sup>+</sup>ēw dahēd, ud gumārd sazāg<sup>29</sup> pad ēwēn nibēsēd, ud wehān ī ān kustag frāz padirēnd, ud abar be estēnd, u-š pad rad ud mowbed dāreṇd, ud andar awiš framān-burdār bawēnd, ud ān rad pad harw šahr abestān<sup>+</sup> gumārēd, pas ān hu-dēnān pēšōbāy widerān bawēd. u-š ruwān<sup>+</sup> ō pahlom axwān rasēd, u-š ēd gōwēd kū hu-dēnān pēšōbāy widard. ēn rad<sup>+</sup> ō nūn<sup>30</sup> rad mowbed nēst. harw kē ōy rāy mowbed xwānēd tā nōg<sup>+</sup> gumārēd ēd az nōg hu-dēnān pēšōbāy ēd nē bawēd. u-š wināh ī garān bawēd. sāl-drahnāy abar ān gōwišn be estēd. ēn kū ān gōwišn ayāb drāyišn aziš wināh ud puhl pādīfrāh čē ud weh abāg-iš hamih čiyōn abāyēd kardan.*

This is the question: if the Leader of the Zoroastrians confers the office of high priest [*mowbedih*] of a region [*šahr*] on a high priest, with the pleasure and agreement of the Zoroastrians, and after a while he confers on him the office of chief authority [*radih*] of a district [*kustag*], and fittingly notifies the appointment, and the great ones of that district accept (this appointment) and confirm<sup>31</sup> (this), and consider him the chief authority and high priest, and obey him, and that chief authority appoints<sup>32</sup> trustees (?)<sup>33</sup> in every region, and afterwards that Leader of the Zoroastrians passes away and his soul reaches the foremost world, than someone says this: “The Leader of the Zoroastrians passed away. Henceforth, this chief authority is not the chief authority (or) high priest. Who calls him high priest, he will not be this, until the Leader of the Zoroastrians will reappoint him anew. It will be a huge sin for him [sc. the one who calls the appointed *rad* or *mowbed* high priest] if he stands by this statement one year long.” (The question) is whether this is a (right) statement or chatter. What is the sin and its punishment and retribution? How should the great ones reach agreement with him?

<sup>26</sup> We find another attestation of *pēšōbayih* in the phrase “from the fame of leadership to (the one of) authority” (*az nām ī pēšōbayih tā dastwarih*) in NM II, 9.4. The sentence is syntactically too complex to be discussed here.

<sup>27</sup> AWN 11.2, 11.9 (*dēn-pēšōbāy*); ZFJ 658 (*pēšōbāy ī dēn*); Dk. III, 16 (*pēšōbāy weh-dēn*), 142 420; IV, 2; V, 1.2, 1.3; RAF 1, 93; Dd. Int.11 (*dēn-pēšōbāy*), Int.23 (*dēn-pēšōbāy*), Int.25 (*pēšōbāy ī dēn*), 44.5 (*pēšōbāy ī dēn*), 87.8; NM I, 3.4, 3.5, 7.5; II, 6.5; ŠGW 4.107, 10.55f.; GA 6 (*weh-dēnān pēšōbāy*), B., 640 (col) (2x); RFS, 1.3, 2.1 (4x).

<sup>28</sup> De Blois (2003: 141 and 143 n. 12) convincingly shows that the text tends to be in New Persian rather than Middle Persian. Therefore, he transcribed the text in New Persian, which was presumably spoken in the eleventh century. For the sake of comparability, however, I render the text in Middle Persian.

<sup>29</sup> MS: *gumārd ī sazāg*.

<sup>30</sup> MS <sup>+</sup>wkww.

<sup>31</sup> For the meaning of the phrase *abar estādan*, lit. “to stand by sth”, see Macuch 1993: 76f.

<sup>32</sup> The MS reads *gumārd /gwmʾrt/*. With this verb, the sentence should be translated as “that chief authority appointed trustees in every region”. This translation is only possible if we accept the influence of the grammar of New Persian and the absence of ergative structure in this late Middle Persian text.

<sup>33</sup> CPD gives for *abestān* “refuge, support, trust”.

The answer to this question, which emphasizes the sinfulness of such an assertion, is not relevant to the discussion here. What is significant is the socio-spatial hierarchy of the Zoroastrian priestly organization in the eleventh century and the relation of their corresponding religious leaders, aspects that are discussed in the question. The text delineates a three-layered socio-spatial hierarchy, the smallest unit region (*šahr*), followed by the district (*kustag*), and finally the whole Zoroastrian society – although this is not explicitly named as a socio-spatial unit in the question. The corresponding religious leaders of these units are, in order, the high priest (*mowbed*), the chief authority (*rad*) and at the highest level the *hu-dēnān pēšōbāy*. The text clearly reveals a pyramidal hierarchy and notes that the lower authorities were appointed by the authority at the top of the hierarchy. It is the *hu-dēnān pēšōbāy* who appoints a *mowbed* for a region or a *rad* for a district. Apparently, the agreement of the Zoroastrian inhabitants of a region, or of the religious authorities<sup>34</sup> of a district, played a decisive role in these appointments. On the basis of this text, it seems the suggestion of Leader of the Zoroastrians can potentially be rejected. The final appointment of a priest as *mowbed* or *rad* presumably needs the official notification of Leader of the Zoroastrians after the acceptance of the authorities of the corresponding spatial unit. The text, moreover, delineates the usual career of a priest: after graduating from priestly study and functioning as a priest for a while, he (or she?) can be nominated to become the high priest of a region. Again, after functioning in the high priestly office for a time, he can be promoted to the chief authority of a district.<sup>35</sup> Unfortunately, the text is silent on the topic of the appointment of the Leader of the Zoroastrians. It is not far-fetched, however, to assume that one of the most prominent *rads* was selected for this office. How he was selected and who selected him is not addressed in our sources.

The three-layered socio-religious hierarchy represented in RFS 2.1 recalls the Avestan socio-religious hierarchy with five levels: the *ratus* (> MP *rad*) of the house, village, district and land as well as the title *zaraθuštrō.tāma-* at the very top of the hierarchy.<sup>36</sup> The *pater familias*, the *ratu* of the house, is selected and is not engaged in the organizational affairs of Zoroastrian society as much as the *ratus* of other units. Therefore, we cannot expect it in this description of the hierarchy of authorities. The four-layered socio-spatial Avestan hierarchy of authorities thus seems to have dwindled to a three-layered socio-religious hierarchy in the Islamic period. As a consequence, the office of the *hu-dēnān pēšōbāy* seems to correspond to that of the *zaraθuštrō.tāma*,<sup>37</sup> which constituted the office of Leader of the Zoroastrians and was unique, at all times, in the entire Zoroastrian society.

The first question of the *Riwāyat ī Farnbay-srōš* deals with a reform of the Zoroastrian calendar. This divides the year of 365 days into twelve months of thirty days each and five intercalary days. According to the reform, the five intercalary days, which had stood after the eighth month *Ābān*, were moved to their original place in the Zoroastrian calendar, i.e. to the end of month *Spandarmad*, the last month of the year. Two Arabic sources report this calendar reform as well. According to these Arabic sources, the reform must have happened in the year 1006 (de Blois 1996). The *Riwāyat ī Farnbay-srōš* is dated to the year 377 of Yazdgird (= 1008/9 CE) and shows that at least some priests in Khorasan did not accept the reform for some years. François de Blois (2003: 143) offers the following scenario for the communication between the priests in Nišābūr, the high

<sup>34</sup> For this use of *wehān*, see NM I, 1.0; II, 1.4, 7.1, 5; also Rezania 2021.

<sup>35</sup> This resembles the career of the Sasanian high priest Kerdīr in the third century, which was engraved in four inscriptions in the Fars province, in Naqš-i rajab, Naqš-i rustam, Sar-Mashhad and Ka'bi-yi zardusht. For a short representation of Kerdīr's career and promotions, see Skjaervø 2012.

<sup>36</sup> For a detailed discussion of the socio-spatial structure of Avestan society as well as its priestly organization, see Rezania 2017a: 339–79; for its implementation in the Sasanian empire, see Morony 1984: 281–3.

<sup>37</sup> On this office and its relation to the leadership in Shiite Islam, see Kreyenbroek 1994.

priest (*mowbed* = *mōbaδ*) named as Farrah-srōš<sup>38</sup> and Abū Miswar in Baghdad: “The letter indicates that it [calendar reform] was instituted by the *mōbaδ* (who evidently resided in Fārs), that the *mōbaδ*’s instructions were communicated to the believers in Khurasan by a Zoroastrian dignitary residing in Baghdad.” De Blois is completely right that Farrah-srōš must be the initiator of the calendar reform. If we accept that Farrah-srōš resided in Fars, as de Blois suggests, the question arises why a priestly Zoroastrian reform, instituted in Fars, should be communicated to the Zoroastrians in Khorasan via Baghdad. Albert de Jong (2016: 231) remarks that “the evidence does not really support” the assumption that Farrah-srōš resided in Fars.<sup>39</sup> From this circumstance, he concludes that the *mowbed* of the *Riwāyat* was the Leader of the Zoroastrians of his time, and like Abū Miswar, resided in Baghdad. But how much does the evidence really support this? Unfortunately, we are confronted with a textual ambiguity at a decisive point in the letter: de Blois translates the two sentences *amāh pad nāmag ī dēn did ud hu-dēnān pēšōbāy wihēzag frāz padirift* as: “We have looked in the books of the religion and have accepted the *wihēzag* of *hu-dēnān pēšōbāy*.” In this way, he considers *amāh* the agent of both sentences. The latter sentence, however, can be interpreted in another way as well: “We have looked in the books of the religion, and *hu-dēnān pēšōbāy* accepted the *wihēzag*.” It is difficult to prefer one interpretation over the other solely on the basis of syntactical criteria. The semantic conditions might help to choose the more fitting interpretation. The first interpretation leads to de Jong’s conclusion that the *mowbed* of the *Riwāyat* was the Leader of the Zoroastrians in his time, which produces an inconsistency in the usage of the terms for the offices of the priestly hierarchy in this text: RFS 2.1 evidences that Farnbay-srōš clearly differentiates between *mowbed*, *rad* and *hu-dēnān pēšōbāy*. It is not convincing to assume that he uses the terms *hu-dēnān pēšōbāy* and *mowbed* interchangeably in formulating the first question. The second reading does not introduce this inconsistency and therefore seems more fitting, in my opinion. This implies the following scenario: Farrah-srōš, a high priest (*mowbed*) in Baghdad, Fars or wherever, instituted the calendar reform. He sent his suggestion to the Leader of the Zoroastrians in Baghdad. The Leader of the Zoroastrians and his office members, such as Abū Miswar, verified the reform. Consequently, the Leader of the Zoroastrians, as the highest Zoroastrian authority, accepted and approved the calendar reform and asked his office member, Abū Miswar, to communicate it with Zoroastrians in different regions. It is not an accident that Farnbay-srōš elucidates the hierarchy of Zoroastrian authority in a passage that directly follows this question. By this, he accentuates that the Leader of the Zoroastrians constitutes the highest authority of the Zoroastrian community, and therefore, his decision applies *mutatis mutandis* to the question of the calendar reform as well.

Dk. III, 16, in which Ādurfarnbay discusses the Zoroastrian hierarchy of authority, affirms the singleness of the office Leader of the Zoroastrians, as Farnbay-srōš represents in his *Riwāyat*. He poses the question: according to whose doctrinal authority (*dastwar*) should a Zoroastrian act, in the case of dissension among Zoroastrian authorities? He answers the question as follows:

*passox. hād. ōy hudēn ān \*niyōšišn gīrišn ud kunišn pad dastwarīh ōy kē andar āwām pēšōbāy weh-dēn ud abārīg weh-dēn burdār ī ōy hamband šāyēd. ka ō ān dastwarīh anayāb ud weh-dēn \*bowandaq-mēnīdārīhā ān ī ēk az čāštag ī awēšān pēšēnīg ud*

<sup>38</sup> De Blois (2003: 139) takes for granted that this priest is the same as the author of the *Riwāyat*. Therefore, he assumes that the name of the priest is rendered differently in the text as Farnbay-srōš, Frī-srōš or Farrah-srōš. This assumption is not justified, however.

<sup>39</sup> De Jong (2016: 231): “It seems to be one example of the general rule that scholars believe all meaningful Zoroastrian intellectuals to have held on in Pārs.”

*pōryōkēš ud dēn dastwar būd hēnd andar a-tarmēnīdārīh ī ān ī did pōryōkēš ud dēn dastwar \*čāštag \*wihānīg \*niyōšīdan<sup>40</sup> ud griftan ud kardan padīš \*ōstānīgān \*winirdan<sup>41</sup> xūb.*

Answer: Yes! That Zoroastrian should listen to, admit and act according to the authority [*dastwarīh*] of the one who is the leader [*pēšōbāy*] of Zoroastrianism at the time, and according to the other upholders of Zoroastrianism who accord with him [*lit. are in the same thread with him*]. If he cannot find this authority it is fine if he listens to, admits and acts, in the sake of the perfect consideration of the good religion, according to one of the doctrines of those who have been former ancient teachers and religious authorities, which have been reliably established, without holding the cause (? [*wihānīg*]) of the doctrines of other ancient teachers and authorities of religion in contempt.

This passage not only characterizes the Leader of Zoroastrianism as the highest Zoroastrian authority, but also attests to the singleness of this position in every time period (*ōy kē andar āwām pēšōbāy weh-dēn*). Because of this singleness, we can assume that the phrase *pēšōbāy weh-dēn* and *hu-dēnān pēšōbāy* denote the one and the same office.

In the introduction of the *Dādestān ī dēnīg*, Manuščihr similarly represents the office of the *hu-dēnān pēšōbāy* as the most authoritative priestly office. The text consists of the author's written answers to the letter of inquiries (*pursišnīg-nāmag*; Dd. Int.3) that some Zoroastrians, inter alia a certain Mihr-xwaršēd, son of Ādurmāh, sent to him. Presumably, they have excessively praised him in this letter, having called him perfect in the office of the priest of the country (*kišwar dastwarīh*), "unique and without equal, peerless with no counterpart".<sup>42</sup> Such praise left Manuščihr feeling uncomfortable, writing:

(Dd. Int.11) *aqar andar ēn zamānag ud šahrān \*ī-mān šnāxtag ud āšnāg abar kas ast pad ōy ī dagr wurrōyišnīh Jud[ dēn-pēšōbāy ī \*frāzīg man xwēš rāy nē ābrōyīg dārēm. ka ān stāyišn ī 'sālār mān ēwāzīg niyābag' abar man srawāgihēd ud nē-z rāmišnīg bawēm ka-m meh az xwēš sālār nāmēnēnd. [...]*

If, in this time period and in these regions which we know and with which we are acquainted, there is a great person who is the \*chief Leader of the Religion [*dēn-pēšōbāy ī \*frāzīg*] on account of his steadfast belief, then I do not consider myself honourable if the praise "our sole proper chief [*sālār*]" is broadcast about me, and I am not pleased if they call me greater than their own chief.<sup>43</sup>

This text, firstly, evinces the existence of the office of the *dēn-pēšōbāy* in Manuščihr's time, which I consider to be identical to the *hu-dēnān pēšōbāy* because of the uniqueness of the office. Secondly, it attests that a priest other than Manuščihr was appointed to the office at this time. Thirdly, it shows that Manuščihr considers this office the most authoritative Zoroastrian office. He emphasizes the authoritativeness of the office of the *dēn-pēšōbāy* in another passage in the introduction of his book, as well:

(Dd. Int.23) *ōh-iz nūn jud az čihrag dānišn baxšāyišnīh ī weh mēnōgān ud mānsar wizārišnīg ud nigēzišn ī dēn rōšntar nimāyišn ī abar dēnīg warzišn az dō bun abērtar az-iš paydāgihēd: ēk az mādayān <ī> nimūdārīh ī \*āsn-xrad ī dēn-pēšōbāy ud ēk mādayāntar az nihādag ī hufraward pēšēnīgān ī pēšōbāyān ī meh pōryōtkešān.*

<sup>40</sup> B., 12: <č'š't' h'nyk ywšytn'>.

<sup>41</sup> B., 12: <'wst'nyk'n' yndltn'>.

<sup>42</sup> Jaafari-Dehaghi 1998: 39; Manuščihr quotes these phrases from the received letter in his response.

<sup>43</sup> Based on Jaafari-Dehaghi 1998: 33.

Therefore even now, apart from essential knowledge, and the gifts of the good spirits, and the explanation of the sacred words, and the teachings of the religion, the clear interpretation of religious practice mostly derives from two sources: one is the interpretation of the principles by the *Āsn Xrad* (: innate wisdom) of the (current) leader of the faithful [*dēn-pēšōbāy*]; and the more important one is from the \*foundations of the earlier blessed leaders [*pēšōbāyān*], the great teachers [*pōryōtkešān*] of the faith. (Jaafari-Dehaghi 1998: 37)

Manuščihr identifies the main sources of authority as two-fold: the living authority and the past authority. The first class has only one member at any moment in the history, and this is the Leader of the Zoroastrians. Because of his innate wisdom, he serves as the highest Zoroastrian authority. His innate wisdom, his uniqueness at any moment in the history as well as his authoritativeness for the whole religious community are represented as the characteristics of his office. Foundations laid by preceding leaders (*pēšōbāyān*)<sup>44</sup> constitute the second source of authority, and these are, in Manuščihr's opinion, more authoritative than the current leader. In Dd. Int.25, Manuščihr again emphasizes the authority of the office of the *hu-dēnān pēšōbāy*, this time rendered as *pēšōbāy ī dēn*, and he completely subordinates himself to this authority. The passage again evidences that Manuščihr did not hold the office, at least at the time of authorship of the *Dādestān ī dēnīg*. He represents the judgement of *pēšōbāy ī dēn* as the surest route to true and manifest interpretation. This assertion is only understandable if we assume that the *pēšōbāy*'s judgements were authoritative, leaving no room for further priestly discussions.

In Chapter 44 of the same book, Manuščihr elucidates the relationship between the two priestly positions *hērbed* “teacher priest” and *hāwišt* “student priest”. He explains that they are relational terms that denote the positions of these two types of priest. In the first four paragraphs of the chapter, Manuščihr explains that each priest is at the same time a student, in his relationship to his teacher; as well as a teacher, in his relationship to his student(s). The fifth paragraph reads as follows:

(Dd. 44.5<sup>45</sup>) *čiyōn gōwihēd-iz kū pārs āsrōnān pēšāg framādār abar ōstān mowbedān-iz ī pārs sālār pēšōbāy ī dēn \*hašāgird ast bē wizid pēšihā ī andar dēn.*

As it is said, even, that the Commander of the profession of priests in Pars, who is the head [*sālār*] of the *mōbeds* of the province Pars and the Leader of the Religion, is a student who was chosen for his eminence [*pēšihā*] in (matters of) religion. (Kreyenbroek 1987a: 202)

In this translation, the text seems to imply that the Commander of the profession of priests was the *pēšōbāy ī dēn* as well. This interpretation introduces a problematic inconsistency, however: Manuščihr, the author of the text, calls himself in Dd. 93.13 *pārs ud kermān rad ud āsrōnān pēšāg framādār* “the Chief Authority and the Commander of the Profession of the Priests of Fars and Kerman”.<sup>46</sup> As we saw above, he did not hold the office of Leader of the Zoroastrians when he penned the *Dādestān ī dēnīg*, and he has not been called as such in the whole Pahlavi literature. Therefore, this understanding of the passage does not seem fitting. I thus propose the following translation, which philologically fits as well as the above translation, but offers the advantage of greater consistency:

<sup>44</sup> Whether Manuščihr differentiates between *dēn-pēšōbāy* and *pēšōbāy* cannot be determined.

<sup>45</sup> K35, 161v. 9–11, Macuch 1993: 58f. and Kreyenbroek 1987a: 201f.

<sup>46</sup> On this office, see Macuch 1993: 58f.

As it is said, even, that the Commander of the Profession of Priests in Fars, (who is) the chief [*sālār*] of the *mowbeds* of the province Fars<sup>47</sup> as well, is a \*student (in respect to) the *pēšōbāy ī dēn* who was chosen for the leadership [*pēšihā*] of religion.

The passage in this reading consistently confirms that the office of the *pēšōbāy ī dēn* (= *hu-dēnān pēšōbāy*) is the most authoritative priestly office of the Zoroastrian community.

The *Kitāb Baghdād*, authored by Abu al-Faḍl Aḥmad b. Abī Ṭāhir b. Ṭaifūr (204/819–280/893), a descendant of an Iranian family from Khorasan (Huart 1927), provides another piece of information about Zoroastrian theologians at the court of al-Ma'mūn. The sixth (and only surviving) volume of his book deals especially with al-Ma'mūn and the events of his reign. A passage in this book portrays al-Ma'mūn's interaction with a Zoroastrian high-ranked theologian:

He [Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm] recounted: He [al-Ma'mūn] posed a question to Mūbid of Mūbidān. He asked him: "What is the fruit of the mind?" He answered: "It has many generous fruits. One attains a healthy refuge/retreat from thanksgiving." (Ṭaifūr 1423: 152)

The office of *mowbedān mowbed*, Priest of Priests, belonged to the organizational structure of the Sasanian Zoroastrianism and did not exist in the Abbasid period any longer. The singleness of this office in Sasanian Zoroastrianism seems, however, to have made it comparable to the office of *hu-dēnān pēšōbāy* in the eyes of the Islamic authors. The text thus portrays a conversation between the caliph and the highest Zoroastrian authority in this period, the Leader of the Zoroastrians. A narration from the early Islamic period similarly alludes to the existence of this Zoroastrian office in the Abbasid period (al-Bustī 1396: II/254f.). This narration curiously designates Muḥammad b. al-Sā'ib al-Kalbī as *mawbidhān mawbidh*.<sup>48</sup> It is not my concern why al-Kalbī is called *mawbidhān mawbidh* here. Significant for this discussion is only that a tenth-century source uses the term *mawbidhān mawbidh*, probably to refer euphemistically to a man of high sagacity by resorting to the designation of the highest authority of Zoroastrianism. Whether the text uses the term as a reminiscence of the Sasanian *mowbedān mowbed* or as an equivalent for the Abbasid *hu-dēnān pēšōbāy* cannot be decided, however.

## 2.2. The office of *hu-dēnān pēšōbāy* in pre-Abbasid literature

The term *hu-dēnān pēšōbāy* is attested to in three texts that cannot be dated precisely. The first is the *Ardā Wirāz Nāmag*, a report of Wirāz's ascension to the Paradise and the Hill. There, the term *dēn-pēšōbāy* occurs in two passages 11.2 and 11.9, where the author links together Gayōmard, Zarathustra, Kay Wištāsp, Frašōstar, Jāmāsp, Isadwāstar, upholders of Zoroastrianism (*dēn-burdārān*), well-doers (*kardārān*) and the leaders of the religion (*dēn-pēšōbāyān*).<sup>49</sup> Although the text was presumably penned in the late Sasanian period, it was repeatedly re-edited in the later periods, making it possible to even trace the development of Middle to New Persian in the text. Therefore, it is not far-fetched to assume that the occurrence of the term *dēn-pēšōbāy* is rooted in the later re-editions of the texts in the early Islamic period.

<sup>47</sup> Macuch (1993: 58) translates the last phrase in "*sālār* ('Vorsteher') der Provinz sowie der *mowbedān* von Pār". It seems to me, however, that this phrase is the description of the mentioned title *āsrōnān pēšōg framādār*, which Macuch translates as "Standesbefehlshaber der Priester".

<sup>48</sup> Muḥammad b. al-Sā'ib al-Kalbī died in 146/763 in Kufa at the age of at least 80 and was the author of the longest ever composed commentary on the Quran (Atallah 1997).

<sup>49</sup> AWN 11.2: [...] *frawahr ī Zardušt ī Spitāmān ud kay Wištāsp ud jāmāsp ud Isadwāstar ī Zarduštān ud abāriḡ dēn-burdārān ud dēn-pēšōbāyān* "the pre-soul of Zarathustra, son of Spitama, Kay Wištāsp, Jāmāsp, Isadwāstar, son of Zardušt, and other upholders of the religion and leaders of the religion"; AWN 11.9: *frawahr ī Gayōmard ud Zardušt ud kay Wištāsp ud Frašōstar ud jāmāsp ud abāriḡ kerdārān ud dēn-pēšōbāyān* "the pre-soul of Gayōmard, Zardušt, Kay Wištāsp, Frašōstar, Jāmāsp and other well-doers and leaders of the religion".

Another text that includes a single attestation of the lexeme *pēšōbāy* and is tentatively dated in the late Sasanian period (Elman and Moazami 2014) is the *Zand ī Fragard ī Jud-dēw-dād*. The corresponding passage reads:

(ZFJ, 658f.) [...] *mard ī čiyōn šāhān šāh ayāb mowbedān mowbed ayāb ādurbād ī †mahrspandān ayāb ān kē andar ān zamān pēšōbāy ī dēn kē-š az nē būd murnjēnišn ī dām.*

Someone like the King of Kings, the Priest of Priests, or Ādurbād, son of Mahrspand, or the one who is Leader of the Religion [*pēšōbāy ī dēn*] at that time, who does not destruct the creatures.

It is difficult to definitely decide whether the passage derives from the pre-Abbasid period, and whether *pēšōbāy ī dēn* is a term that designates the office scrutinized in Section 2.1 or is a vague lexeme in this text. It is striking, however, that the phrase *pēšōbāy ī dēn* is aligned with the institutions King of Kings and Priest of Priests. This fact as well as the wording “one who is Leader of Religion at that time” imply that the author designated a unique office by the term *pēšōbāy ī dēn*. The uniqueness of the office *mowbedān mowbed* and its position at the top of the pyramid of authority, however, are in contrast with the uniqueness of the office of Leader of Zoroastrians and the parallel existence of both offices. We might thus conclude that this passage was penned in the post-Sasanian period and set in parallel to the office of Priest of Priests and Leader of Zoroastrians.

The term *pēšōbāy ī dēn* is attested to in a Manichaean passage as well, where the term designates the leader of the Eastern Zoroastrian community:

(M543/R/2–5) *sangbed ud pēšōbāy ī dēn māzdes tō nōg hammōzāg ī xwarāsān ud rāyēnāg ī weh-dēnān.*

... of the/head of the [sa]mgha and leader of the/Mazdean community. You new Teacher of Xwarāsān and guide of the Good-Religionists. (Leurini 2017: 99)

The dating of this passage poses some difficulties. Again here, we cannot determine whether the passage dates to the pre-Abbasid period, and whether *pēšōbāy ī dēn* designates the Abbasid Zoroastrian office.

### 3. Officiating Leaders of the Zoroastrians

The Abbasid sources, Middle Persian and Arabic, name some Zoroastrian theologians who held the office of Leader of the Zoroastrians. All of these authorities are already known in the scholarship.<sup>50</sup> On the basis of Dd. 44.5, some scholars list Manuščīhr among the holders of the office. As we saw above, this passage does not inevitably support this conclusion (see also Section 3.3 below). The attestations for the holders of the office are summarized in the synoptic Table 1. The indirect attestations and allusions are marked in parentheses.

<sup>50</sup> According to West (1896–1904: 105), “[t]he names of five successive leaders of the religion, during the ninth century, are now known, and the following dates for their rule may be suggested as probable”: Ādurfarnbay (815–35), his son Zardušt (835–40), Juwān-ĵam (840–60), his son Mānuščīhr (860–90), Ādurbād (890–910). Anklesaria (1964: I:xv, 1969: II/1–24) considers the following holders of the office: Ādurfarnbay (750–833), his son Zardušt (833–47), his son Wahramšād, his son Juwān-ĵam, his son Mānuščīhr (870–93), Ēmēd, son of Ašawahišt, his son Ādurbād, and Farnbay-srōš, son of Wahrām. Boyce (1979: 153–5) envisages the holders of the office as: Ādurfarnbay, his son Zardušt, Juwān-ĵam, son of Wahramšād, his son Mānuščīhr, and Ādurbād, son of Ēmēd. König (2019: 217) lists these holders of the office: Ādurfarnbay, his son Zardušt, his son Wahramšād, his son Juwān-ĵam, Ādurbād, and Ēmēd, son of Ašawahišt.

**Table 1.** Zoroastrian officiating priests serving as Leader of the Zoroastrians and their attestations in the sources of the Abbasid period

	Author of the cited passage↓	Office holder → Date → ↓	Ādurfarnbay c. 810–30	Zardušt ~ 830–850	Juwān-jām < 881	Ašawahišt ~ 881	Ādurbād > 881	Spandyār <= 936–7	Ēmēd >= 936–7
Dk. III–V	Ādurbād	9th cent.	III, 142, 420, IV, 2, V, 1.2f.	III, 420			III, 420		
RAF	Ādurfarnbay ?	9th cent.	I, 93						
Dd.	Manuščihr	9th/10th cent.	87.8						
NM	Manuščihr	881	(I, 3.4)	(II, 1.13)	I, 3.5, 7.5	(II, 6.5)			
ŠGW	Mardānfarrox	10th cent.	4.107, 10.55f.				?		
<i>Buldān</i>	Ḥamza	893–961/71		(III/185)					(I/425f., 437)
<i>Murūj</i>	Mas'ūdi	943 <sup>51</sup>	VIII/3453						
<i>Tanbih</i>	Mas'ūdi	956						(104f.)	(104f.)
<i>Āthār</i>	al-Birūnī	c. 1000					(216)		
B., col. I	Māhwindād	1020	(B., 640)				(B., 640)		
<i>tathbit</i>	'Abd al-Jabbār	< 1025					(179f.)		
GA	?	9th/10th cent. <sup>52</sup>	6						

<sup>51</sup> See Pellat 1991: 784f.<sup>52</sup> There is no inner textual or even inner Zoroastrian evidence to date the text. On the basis of parallels with Christian materials, we can presumably date the text in the ninth or tenth century; see Sahner 2019: 5.

I will elaborate on the testimonies represented in Table 1 in the following section, insofar as they need discussion.<sup>53</sup>

### 3.1. Ādurfarnbay, son of Farroxxād

The earliest attested officiating Leader of the Zoroastrians is Ādurfarnbay, son of Farroxxād. Manuščihr (Dd. 87) calls Ādurfarnbay “the supreme *hu-dēnān pēšōbāy*”. Anklesaria (1969: II/11) therefore considers him the first Zoroastrian to receive the title from the reigning caliph. In an editorial note preserved in Dk. III, 142.5, and similarly in IV, 2, the editor of the *Dēnkard*, presumably Ādurbād, designates Ādurfarnbay as “the leader of Zoroastrians”. The first colophon of the manuscript B. does not directly call Ādurfarnbay (and Ādurbād) *hu-dēnān pēšōbāy*. It asserts that the Leaders of Zoroastrians edited the *Dēnkard*. Later in the text, the scribe explicitly mentions Ādurfarnbay (and Ādurbād) as the authors of the book. Therefore, this passage indirectly supports the designation of these two priests as *hu-dēnān pēšōbāy*.

In his letter to the Zoroastrian authorities of Sīrgān, Manuščihr names a Leader of the Zoroastrians: *hu-fraward hu-dēnān pēšōbāy* <sup>2</sup>dpwllwdd> *Farroxxādān nibišt* (I, 3.4). Unfortunately, his first name seems to be corrupted. The name of his father, however, is undoubtedly to be read as Farroxxād. The attributed adjective *hu-fraward* “blessed” shows that Manuščihr is here referring to a preceding Leader of Zoroastrians. The passage thus presumably hints to the earliest attested and probably first Leader of the Zoroastrians, whom Manuščihr names in his *Dādestān ī dēnīg* as well (see Kanga 1967: 151).

The *Mādayān ī gujastag Abālīš* portrays a disputation session in which Ādurfarnbay disputes with a converted Zoroastrian in the presence of the caliph al-Maʿmūn (813–33). Albert de Jong (2016: 230f.) notes that we can only ascribe limited reliability to this attestation. Christian Sahner (2019: 2, 12) points out that the *Mādayān ī gujastag Abālīš* is a literary text of the genre “the monk in the emir’s majlis” and not a historical genre. Therefore, we cannot ascribe any historical reality to the represented disputation. The narration, however, might include some historical realities, such as the historicity of Ādurfarnbay and presumably his contemporaneity with the caliph al-Maʿmūn.

In the *Murūj al-dhahab*, al-Masʿūdī (d. 345/956) recounts a conversation between the caliph Qāhir and Muḥammad b. ʿAlī ʿAbdī Khurāsānī. Qāhir asked his interlocutor to narrate to him the works of the preceding caliphs. About al-Maʿmūn, Muḥammad recounts as follows:

Yes, o Commander of the Faithful, then the affairs came to al-Maʿmūn. At the beginning, because of the influence of al-Faḍl b. Sahl and others, he acted according to astrological axioms and theorems and followed their consequences. He pursued the manner of the past Sasanian kings, such as Ardashīr b. Bābak and others. He tried hard to study ancient books, devoted all his efforts in scrutinizing them, and persisted in their study. He was fascinated by understanding them and reached their insight. As to what happened to Faḍl b. Sahl, the holder of two directorships, as it is known, and he [= Faḍl b. Sahl] came to Iraq, al-Maʿmūn abandoned all of that and proclaimed belief in Islam [lit. monotheism, promises and threats]. He kept the company of theologians. Many superior debaters and disputants, such as Abū Hudhail, Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm b. Sayyār al-Nazzām and others, with whom he [= al-Maʿmūn] both agreed and disagreed, approached him. Jurisprudents and

<sup>53</sup> This excludes Dk. III, 142, 420; IV, 2; V, 1.2f., Dd. 87.8, ŠGW 4.107, 10.55f. and the first colophon of the manuscript B.

authors interested in knowledge attended his scholarly assemblies. He brought them from different cities and appointed wages for them. People became inclined towards the skill of thinking and learned discussion and disputation. All these groups authored books for the victory of their teachings and the verification of their beliefs. [...] (al-Mas‘ūdī 1965–79: VIII/3453)

In this passage, al-Mas‘ūdī is describing the religious discourse newly established by al-Ma‘mūn. The caliph organized assemblies with theologians and jurists, who engaged in discussions and disputations. The last sentence of the quotation is highly significant for our discussion. Writing apologetic books in defence of each teacher’s own religion and belief system was a process initiated by al-Ma‘mūn. The creation of the *Dēnkard of Thousand Chapters* by Ādurfarnbay, the third book of Ādurbād’s *Dēnkard*, fits well historically in this period. This passage can thus indirectly support that Ādurfarnbay was a contemporary of the caliph al-Ma‘mūn.

Anklesaria presumes that Ādurfarnbay was Leader of the Zoroastrians from the beginning of the Abbasid dynasty.<sup>54</sup> This assumption, however, is neither based on evidence nor probable. If we accept that Ādurfarnbay and al-Ma‘mūn were contemporaries even briefly, the years around 750 still seem unlikely as the starting point of Ādurfarnbay’s leadership. It is unlikely that Ādurfarnbay could have spent 70 or 80 years in a high office that he could not have attained until he was well into maturity. Indirectly comparing his age with the legendary age of 150 years attributed to Sasanian Ādurbād, grandson of Ādurbād, son of Mahraspand, Anklesaria (1964: I:xv) indeed assumes that Ādurfarnbay lived to be 150. Indeed, his exhaustive written works, comprising more than 100,000 words,<sup>55</sup> do suggest a long life for Ādurfarnbay – but not necessarily 100 or 150 years. Therefore, we are on safer ground if we assume that Ādurfarnbay bore the title Leader of the Zoroastrians not very long before the reign of al-Ma‘mūn.<sup>56</sup>

### 3.2. Zardušt, son of Ādurfarnbay

Besides a direct attestation in the *Dēnkard*, we find only limited allusions to Zardušt, son of Ādurfarnbay, in Middle Persian and Arabic sources. A reference to his interaction with Muslims comes from the *Epistles of Manuščīhr*. In his letter to his younger brother, Zādspram, Manuščīhr writes:

(NM II, 1.13<sup>57</sup>) *saham kū ašmāh abar ēn xīr andar xwēš ōwōn wēš hēd čiyōn Zarduxšt ī <’c>farnbay ka-š +nasāgihā<sup>58</sup> winārd. az-iš <’c>farnbay xwad wēšihid/kahist<sup>59</sup> u-š bē ō(h) nibišt<sup>60</sup> kū Musalmānān ka-šān āšnūd ēg-išān nēk passandīd. ud Rāzīgān pāsox nibišt kū aqar-itān tigr<sup>61</sup> dūr-iz nihād hē ēg-išān weh-iz passandīd hē.*

<sup>54</sup> Anklesaria 1969: II/4, followed by König 2019: 217.

<sup>55</sup> Dk. III comprises c. 78,900 words, Dk. IV 4,600, Dk. V 7,800, and RAF 11,400.

<sup>56</sup> Anklesaria (1969: II/16f.) finds evidence for Ādurfarnbay in two New Persian *Rivāyāts*. In the first one (Unvālā 1922: I/103), however, the name of the priest is rendered as Ādur-farrukh-zād, and in the second one (Unvālā 1922: I/118) as Mūbid Ādur-Khurdād. Their identification with Ādurfarnbay is thus not reasonable, especially if we consider that personal names constructed with *ādur* “fire” were common.

<sup>57</sup> K35: 221v., TD4a: 449; Kanga 1957; Anklesaria 1964: I:xii.

<sup>58</sup> TD4a, K35: n’škyh’.

<sup>59</sup> K35: wyšyhyt, TD4a: ksyhyt’.

<sup>60</sup> K35: xwēš.

<sup>61</sup> K35: tgl; TD4a: ’wdl.

It seems to me that you are in this matter so self-concentrated as Zardušt, son of \*Ādurfarnbay when he arranged the case of \*Nasā. \*Ādurfarnbay himself \*made more of that/was belittled thereby\*. He must have written: “As the Muslims heard it, it pleased them.” The people of Ray wrote in answer: “If you had thrown the arrow far away, too, it would have pleased them even more.”

The passage apparently refers to an inter-religious Zoroastrian-Islamic matter. Zardušt must have taken a measure which Manuščihr assesses to be more in the interest of Muslims than Zoroastrians. This passage does not attest that Zardušt held the office of Leader of the Zoroastrians. It only hints that his activities in inter-religious Zoroastrian-Islamic affairs had far-reaching consequences. To be authorized to engage in these activities, Zardušt must have held a high position in the Zoroastrian organizational hierarchy. Whether this interaction occurred during the lifetime of Zardušt’s father (Anklesaria 1969: II/15) or during his own period of leadership is difficult to decide.

In the entry of lemma *sūristān*, Yāqūt mentions a Zoroastrian literate named Zardusht b. Ādhurkhwār. It is probable that Ādhurkhwār is a rendering of Ādurfarnbay and that the passage therefore refers to Zardušt, the second Leader of the Zoroastrians:

*Sūristān*: Zardusht b. Ādhurkhwār, known as Muhammad al-Mutawakkil, mentioned that *Sūristān* is Iraq and the Syrians are ascribed to it. They are Nabatians and their language is called Syrian. It was located at the margin of the kingdom. They asked for what they needed, expressed their complaints and spoke in that language. It is a vernacular (dialect) of languages that Ḥamzah mentioned in book *Taṣḥīf*. (Yāqūt 1866: III/185)

If this priest is Zardušt, son of Ādurfarnbay, this passage alludes to his conversion to Islam.<sup>62</sup> By recounting the events of the year 225/840 at the court of al-Mu‘taṣim (r. 833–42), al-Ṭabarī (1879–1901: III/1308; 1989–2007: XXXIII/186f.) narrates Afšīn’s trial: “A group of prominent figures had been assembled to heap reproaches on al-Afshīn for what he had done, and not a single person of high social or official rank (*aḥad min aṣḥāb al-marātib*) was left in the palace.” One of these persons of high social or official rank whom al-Ṭabarī lists is *al-mūbaḍ*, “the (Zoroastrian) priest”. He must have been a representative of Zoroastrianism at the Abbasid court, regarded as a person of high social or official rank at the court. Anklesaria (1964: I:vii, xxi, 1969: II/13) assumes that this Zoroastrian priest is Zardušt, son of Ādurfarnbay. As grounds for this assumption he cites Edward Browne (1902: I/331–3), but Browne does not identify the priest at all. Anklesaria, moreover, assumes that “the calamity which befell Āṭar-frenabag’s son Zaratust, must have taken place in the first year of the reign of Kahlīfah Mutawakkil (r. 847–61)”. Noteworthy, however, is that al-Ṭabarī narrates Afšīn’s trial by recounting the events of the year 225/840, which falls in the reign of al-Mu‘taṣim. Although this narration does not help to identify the Leader of the Zoroastrians in this period, it is certainly significant evidence for the existence of a Zoroastrian representative at the Abbasid court in this period, his involvement in the legal activities of the court and his inclusion among Abbasid high-ranking officials.

<sup>62</sup> In his rendering of the conversation between the caliph Qāhir and Muḥammad (see Section 3.1 above), al-Mas‘ūdī explicitly expresses that al-Mutawakkil’s religious policy was different from his predecessors: “Then al-Mutawakkil, o Commander of the Faithful. He disagreed with beliefs of al-Ma‘mūn, al-Mu‘taṣim and al-Wāthiq. He forbade exertion and disputation about ideas and punished the people for that. He commanded imitation and propagated Hadith narration. [...]” (al-Mas‘ūdī 1965–79: VIII/3456).

### 3.3. *Juwān-ĵam, son of Šābuhr, Ašawahišt, son of Juwān-ĵam, and Ādurbād, son of Ēmēd*

In a passage after the passage where Manuščihr names Ādurfarnbay in his epistle to the authorities of Sīrgān (see Section 3.1 above), he names another former Leader of the Zoroastrians: *hu-fraward ud meh-frazānag hu-denān pēšōbāy Juwān-ĵam Šābuhrān* “the blessed and sagacious Leader of the Zoroastrians Juwān-ĵam, son of Šābuhr” (NM I, 3.5). In another passage in this same letter, Manuščihr again refers to this person (NM I, 7.5). This must have been Manuščihr’s father, whose name is alternatively rendered in the literature as Gōšn-ĵam, for example by Farnbay ī Dādāgīh, the author of the *Bundahišn*, but as son of Wahramšād (GBd. 35A.8). Manuščihr seems to refer to his father in an enigmatic passage written to his brother:

NM II, 6.5<sup>63</sup> *ēdōn saham kū az hamēstārīh ī man abar ašmāh ziyān wēš šāyēd būd kū az was hamēmālīh ī čiyōn hudēnān pēšōbāy was ī čiyōn ham nām ī man ud az-iz bē šudan ī man. (6) nē būd ī-tān ayār-ēw ī čiyōn man. ziyān ī ašmāh nē kem šāyēd būd kū ān ī az was hamēmāl kē-šān man ast ī abāz-dāštār ham. (7) ēd dānēd kū man mihr dōšāram ī kas ud āzarm ī kas rāy az warzišn ī dēn nē čaftom ud gāh ī dēn rāy ō ēč kas petyārdār bawam: ka-z-im dōšist dōst bawēd ēg-iš ham-pahikār bawam.*

(5) It seems to me that my opposition may result in great harm to you, namely both because it is strong (opposition) as Leader of the Zoroastrians and strong (opposition) as one who is of the same name, and even from my abandoning you. (6) You have not had a friend such as I. The harm to you may not be less than that which I have to contend with from the many opponents I have. (7) Know this, that I do not deviate from the practice of the religion because of (my) love and sympathy for someone, and because of the status in the religion I will oppose anyone; even though I love him very much indeed I shall fight him nevertheless.

This passage, firstly, evinces again that Manuščihr did not hold the office of Leader of the Zoroastrians at the time he was writing the *Epistles*, the year 881; secondly, that someone with the same patronymic name held the office at that time. Of Manuščihr’s brothers, Zurwāndād and Ašawahišt,<sup>64</sup> the latter is preferable because the succeeding leaders, Ādurbād, son of Ēmēd, etc. are his offspring.

Aside from some direct attestations in Pahlavi literature, al-Bīrūnī mentions Ādurbād, grandson of Ašawahišt, as Ādharbād in his *Āthār al-bāqīya* as the high priest (*mawbidh*) of Baghdad.<sup>65</sup> Having been written around 1000, the passage gives a *terminus ante quem* twenty years earlier than what we can infer from the oldest colophon of manuscript B. for Ādurbād’s lifetime.<sup>66</sup> Another piece of information about this Leader of the Zoroastrians comes from ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s *Tathbīt* (1386: I/179f.). He writes: “This is what I can affirm from what has been mentioned by Adhurbād, son of Amīdh, the high-priest [*al-mawbidh*], in his description of Pēšōtan.”<sup>67</sup>

### 3.4. *Spandyār, son of Ādurbād, and Ēmēd, son of Ašawahišt*

A piece of evidence about the two priests, Spandyār, son of Ādurbād, and Ēmēd, son of Ašawahišt, comes from a passage in al-Mas‘ūdī’s *al-Tanbih*:

<sup>63</sup> TD4a, 467; K35, 228v.

<sup>64</sup> See GBd. 35A.7f.; for the family tree of these priests, see Anklesaria 1964: I:xv; König 2019: 217.

<sup>65</sup> al-Bīrūnī 1878: 216, 1879.

<sup>66</sup> On the basis of GBd. 35A.8, West (1892: IV:XXXIII) considers him a contemporary of Zādspram and, by this, living at the latter end of the ninth century. This passage, however, does not allow this conclusion.

<sup>67</sup> See Monnot 1974: 286–8; Shaked 1994: 77f.

Their two chairmen [*ri'āsāt*] and high priest(s) [*mūbed*] in the time of authorship of our book, the year 345, in the region Jibāl, Iraq and other non-Arab countries are Inmād b. Ašawahišt, and the high-priest before him Isfandyār b. Ādurbād b. Inmīd, whom al-Rāḏī killed in the City of Peace [i.e. Baghdad] in the year 325. We received this news and the narration of his death and what has been mentioned from his relation with Qurmaṭiyya Sulaimān b. al-Ḥasan b. Bahrām al-Ġannābiyy, owner of Baḥrain from that one of al-Rāḏī's news in the book *Murūj al-dhahab wa ma'ādin al-jauhar*. (al-Mas'ūdī 1893: 104f.)

The passage does not directly state that these priests held the office of Leader of the Zoroastrians. It asserts only that Spandyār, son of Ādurbād, son of Ēmēd, was a high priest (*mowbed*) in Baghdad. Significantly, however, it designates the two named Zoroastrian priests each as “chairman” (*ra'īs*), lit. “the owner of directorship”. This wording seems to be comparable with mp. *pēšōbāy*. The father of Spandyār, Ādurbād, was the editor of the second edition of the *Dēnkard*, comprising nine books, and himself a Leader of the Zoroastrians. Therefore, it is probable that he held the office after his father. The paragraph moreover asserts that al-Rāḏī, the Abbasid caliph (909–40), had him killed in the year 325/936–7 in Baghdad. According to the text, he was replaced by Ēmēd, son of Ašawahišt, whom, according to Yāqūt, Ḥamza b. Ḥasan al-Iṣfahānī met in Baghdad:

Ḥamza, son of Ḥasan, said: “I read in a book something quoted from Ibn al-Muqaffa' that the remained palace in Madā'in is a construction of Shābūr, son of Ardashīr. Then the Mūbidān Mūbid, 'Imīd, son of Ashawahist, said to me that the matter is not as Ibn al-Muqaffa' claimed. Maṣnūr, father of Ja'far, destroyed that palace, and the one which remained is a construction of Ḥusraw 'Abarwīz.” (Yāqūt 1866: I/425f.)

It is noteworthy that this passage calls Ēmēd *mūbidān mūbid*. As I pointed out in Section 2.1 above, we can consider the use of this Sasanian title in the early Islamic period as a designation of the highest Zoroastrian authority and thus a synonym of *hu-dēnān pēšōbay*. It is therefore highly probable that we can regard Ēmēd, son of Ašawahišt, as a Leader of the Zoroastrians in the tenth century, as Anklesaria suggested.<sup>68</sup> In another passage, Yāqūt again cites Ḥamza's conversation with a son of Ašawahišt, presumably again Ēmēd. The passage reads:

Ḥamza b. Ḥasan Iṣfahānī said: “I heard from Mawbidh b. 'Asawahisht saying that Baḥra is the Arabic rendering of '*bas-rāh*' because there were many roads branching from there to different places.” (Yāqūt 1866: I/437)

Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī was born in 280/893 and died between 350/961 and 360/971. He visited Baghdad three times, in 308/920–1, in 323/935 and one time in between (Rosenthal 1986). These dates accord with al-Mas'ūdī's indication that Isfandyār was killed in 325/936–7 and Ēmēd replaced him that same year. The dates of Ḥamza's trip to Baghdad lie before his assignment in Baghdad, however, if they indeed met in Baghdad.<sup>69</sup> However, this does not contradict his designation by Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī as *mūbidān mūbid*. It is possible that he wrote the passage after his assignment and thus designated him as *mūbidān mūbid*.

Student priest Spandyād, son of Farrox-burzēn and interlocutor of the Riwāyats of Farnbay-srōš, son of Wahrām, calls him [Farnbay-srōš] *mowbedān mowbed*, “Priest of Priests” in the epilogue (RFS, 5). I treated the occurrence of this term in the Arabic sources

<sup>68</sup> Anklesaria 1964: I:x; see also Justi 1895: 333.

<sup>69</sup> In contrast to Modi (1931: 287f.), I find it more likely that the two met in Baghdad than in Isfahan.

as counterpart to the Zoroastrian title *hu-dēnān pēšōbāy*. I refuse to extend this interpretation to the Zoroastrian texts, however. The Zoroastrian designation of the office must have been known to Spandyād. If Farnbay-srōš had held the office, Spandyād would have called him by this honourable title.

#### 4. The office of the *hu-dēnān pēšōbāy* in Baghdad

Recently, Albert de Jong (2016) examined the Zoroastrians of Baghdad and convincingly showed that the office of Leader of the Zoroastrians was located in Baghdad. In his article, he presents the evidence from Pahlavi literature supporting this fact.<sup>70</sup> I do not need to treat these indications here again, especially because I have already discussed some of them in another place (see Rezania 2017b). To summarize the results of this research, Dk. III, 420 notes that three Leaders of the Zoroastrians, Ādurfarnbay, Zardušt and Ādurbād, worked in or had access to the same divan. The passage also shows that the divan was integrated in the residence of the Leader of the Zoroastrians. Furthermore, the oldest colophon of the manuscript B. attests that the divan, and *mutatis mutandis* the residence of the leaders, was in Baghdad and existed even in the year 1020.

Supporting evidence for the location of this Zoroastrian office in the Abbasid capital goes beyond the texts discussed by de Jong. The passage by al-Mas‘ūdī quoted in Section 3.4 above reveals that Al-Rāḍī killed Spandyār, son of Ādurbād in the year 325/936–7 in Baghdad, which is evidence of Spandyār’s activities in this city; it also indirectly confirms his residence in the centre of the caliphate. Al-Bīrūnī similarly attests the presence of Ādurbād, son of Ēmēd, another Leader of the Zoroastrians, in Baghdad (see Section 3.3 above).

In his *Murūj al-dhahab*, al-Mas‘ūdī depicts a *majlis* convened by Yahyā b. Khalid b. Barmakī, who was active at the Abbasid court in the last decades of the eighth century.<sup>71</sup> According to this source, Yahyā invited eleven theologians of different Islamic confessions, a non-denominational scholar, and one Zoroastrian priest or judge, to discuss love. Although Mas‘ūdī names each of the other twelve scholars, the Zoroastrian priest remains anonymous, expressed only as “the high priest, who was a Zoroastrian and a judge of Zoroastrians” (*al-mawbidh wa kāna majūsiyya al-madhab wa-qāḍī al-majūs*; p. 241). Although this piece of evidence does not address the Leader of the Zoroastrians, it still testifies to the involvement of a Zoroastrian priest in an Islamic discussion in Baghdad, and hence provides evidence of the Zoroastrian priests’ activities in Baghdad.

Significantly, Ḥamza Isfahānī mentions a personal encounter with the Zoroastrian priest Ēmēd, son of Ašawahišt. Where the encounter happened is not revealed in the text. Modi (1931: 287f.) suggests two probable places: Isfahan, the birthplace of the author and where he spent most of his life, or Baghdad, which he visited three times. Modi finds it more likely that the two met in Isfahan firstly because, according to him, there was no Zoroastrian population in Baghdad, and secondly because “there was very little of Zoroastrian population at Bagdad in the 10th century, there cannot be a fire-temple there” where Ēmēd “is said to have had his talk with his questioner” of the *Riwāyat ī Ēmēd ī Ašawahištān*. I do not think that these arguments are strong enough to determine that Isfahan was the more likely place for Ḥamza’s meeting with Ēmēd. Firstly, we do not know whether a fire-temple existed in the tenth century in Baghdad or not. Secondly, the fire-temple where Ēmēd and the questioner of his *Riwāyat* met was not necessarily located in Ēmēd’s residential town. They could have met in the fire-temple in Ēmēd’s native town or in any town that Ēmēd visited. Thirdly, it is more probable that Ḥamza al-Isfahānī

<sup>70</sup> This includes ŠĒ, GA, RFS and the first colophon of the manuscript B. of the *Dēnkard*.

<sup>71</sup> See al-Mas‘ūdī 1965–79: para. VI/2565–81; also Choksy 1997: 31, 153 n. 49.

posed a question about the constructor of Madā'in in Baghdad as he visited the site. Finally, from the evidence presented above, we are now informed that a chain of Zoroastrian theologians was located in Baghdad but not a sizeable Zoroastrian community. I am therefore inclined to consider Baghdad the more likely location for Ḥamza and Ēmēd's encounter; but the evidence for this argument is in any case thin.

Another piece of evidence regarding the activities of Zoroastrian priests in Baghdad comes from the *Kitāb Baghdād*, presented in Section 2.1 above. The passage portrays al-Ma'mūn's interaction with a Zoroastrian high-ranked theologian, designated as *mawbidh mawbidhān*. This passage allows us to conclude that a conversation took place in Baghdad between al-Ma'mūn and probably the Leader of the Zoroastrians, although his identity in this period is uncertain.

If we assume that Ādurfarnbay was a contemporary of the caliph al-Ma'mūn, the evidence presented in this section implies that the office of Leader of the Zoroastrians was located in Baghdad from the beginning decades of the ninth century to the year 1020. The Leaders of the Zoroastrians participated in theological discussions in Baghdad, especially at the court. They also devoted considerable efforts in Baghdad to preparing apologetic books as, according to al-Mas'ūdī (see Section 3.1 above), al-Ma'mūn encouraged the theologians to do. Therefore, the office in Baghdad was not only the highest authority for intra-Zoroastrian affairs, but also the representative of Zoroastrianism in the inter-religious matters at the Abbasid court. The extent of the involvement of the Leaders of the Zoroastrians in inter-religious concerns becomes particularly striking if we consider that the Zoroastrian population of Baghdad, even in the Sasanian period, was not large; and in the Islamic period, it was shrinking towards disappearing (Morony 1984: 295f., 298–301). In the tenth and eleventh century, the high-ranking Zoroastrian theologians were not in Baghdad because of Zoroastrians and their affairs but because of Zoroastrianism and its contacts with Islam and other religions, and particularly with the Islamic state.

## 5. Abbasid invention or Sasanian imitation

In his article on the Zoroastrians of Baghdad, Albert de Jong also alludes to a parallelism between the Leader of the Zoroastrians and the offices of Christian catholicos and the Jewish exilarch.<sup>72</sup> This section attempts to ascertain which components constitute this parallelism.

The title “catholicos”, corresponding to the title “patriarch”, denoted the heads of the Oriental churches lying outside the boundaries of the former Roman Empire (Kaufhold 2007). One of the most famous catholicos in the Abbasid period was Timothy I (740–823), who was elected in 780 as Catholicos-Patriarch of the East-Syrian Church. His strong ties to the caliphate emerges from his interactions with the caliph al-Mahdī (r. 775–85) and Hārūn al-Rashīd (r. 786–809). In various letters, he reports that al-Mahdī entitled him to reconstruct numerous churches and commissioned him to translate Aristotle's *Topics* from Syriac into Arabic. He received considerable financial support from Hārūn al-Rashīd and accompanied him on several journeys. The most significant evidence of his interactions with the Abbasid caliphate is found in his report, included in a letter to a friend, of a two-day disputation with the caliph al-Mahdī which took place in 782/83 in Baghdad. Although the conversation itself was in Arabic, Timothy's record of the event is in Syriac and takes the form of a dialogue.<sup>73</sup>

The title *rēš galuta* “exilarch” was borne by the official representatives of Babylonian Judaism. The holder of the office was the highest Jewish authority. This office was current

<sup>72</sup> See de Jong 2016: 232; also Sahner 2019: 7.

<sup>73</sup> Heimgartner 2009b, 2009a.

in the Islamic states. We hear of a prominent exilarch, David b. Zakkai, in the tenth century and Hezekiah, the last exilarch and also the last gaon until 1040.<sup>74</sup>

Baghdad was the seat of both offices, that of catholicos and of *rēš galuta*. For the sake of closer cooperation between patriarchate and caliphate, Timothy transferred the patriarchal see from Seleucia-Ctesiphon, a few kilometres westwards, to Baghdad, where he remained until the end of his life (Heimgartner 2009b). The Babylonian exilarchate profited from the relocation of the Islamic caliphate to Baghdad by becoming the Jewish representative to the Islamic state (Jacobs 2007). Jewish commentary tradition expresses the significance of the exilarchate office at the centre of caliphate with terms like the “Davidic house” at Baghdad, or the “scholars who formed part of the retinue of the exilarch were called ‘scholars of the house of the exilarch’”.<sup>75</sup> Similar to the office of catholicos, the exilarchate profited from the caliphate by being provided with official facilities for its theological activities.

Integrating the representatives of non-state religions into the state and settling them at the capital of the empire was a political measure that had already been taken by the Sasanians. The East-Syrian Church had employed the office of catholicos since the fifth century. Afterwards, Armenians, Georgians and Caucasian Albanians adopted it as well. Whereas older scholarship assumed that the institution of the exilarchate “first emerged in Babylonia and later developed under Parthian, Sassanid, and Islamic rule”,<sup>76</sup> the apt investigation of Geoffrey Herman illustrates that the exilarchate existed in the latter half of the third century. The tolerant atmosphere in the reign of Šābuhr I allowed non-Zoroastrians to become connected to the court. In this period, a Jewish family “acquired a representative status before the king”; the exilarch stood at the head of a pyramidal hierarchy and appointed “a single successor over a pyramidal religious hierarchy” (Herman 2012: 133). The “main position of the Exilarch”, writes Herman, was “as the leadership of a religious community by the crown”. According to him, the exilarch is “a leader on behalf of the kingdom” (Herman 2012: 259).

The extent of the integration of the representatives of the Christians and Jews in the Sasanian state can hardly be overemphasized. The exilarchate seems not to have possessed a formal position in the Sasanian administrative hierarchy; however, it became a recognized religio-political institution in the Sasanian Empire. The exilarch, like the catholicos, enjoyed courtly honour and considerable wealth and belonged to the lower nobility of the Sasanian state. Entitling of exilarchs by the king arises from the evidence that Yazdegird I girded with his own hands Huna b. Nathan with the belt, the sign of the exilarchate.<sup>77</sup>

In the first half of the fifth century, Sasanian Christianity developed a state-recognized central hierarchy. This gave the Empire, which strongly preferred to not deal with intra-Christian dissensions, the possibility of central control. Sasanian Christian sources show that the catholicos were at the head of this hierarchy, above other bishops. In the course of the fifth and sixth centuries, more and more bishoprics acknowledged the authority of catholicos.<sup>78</sup> The catholicos’ appellation as “father of fathers”, analogous in form to *šāhān šah* and *mōwbedān mōwbed*, evinces the religious courtly authority endowed by the state and the king. As the caliph al-Mahdī expected Timothy I to accompany him on his journeys, Sasanian catholicoi were demanded to remain with the king at court or accompany him on hunting or war expeditions (Herman 2012: 50–3, 133). The

<sup>74</sup> Jacobs 2007; Bartal 2017; Gottheil and Bacher 1906.

<sup>75</sup> Gottheil and Bacher 1906.

<sup>76</sup> Bartal 2017; see also Gottheil and Bacher 1906.

<sup>77</sup> Herman 2012: 38, 259; Gottheil and Bacher 1906; Bartal 2017.

<sup>78</sup> Payne 2015: 13, 64f.; Kauffhold 2007.

close link between the offices of the representatives of the non-state religions and the state bestowed on them a double authority: supported by the state, they constituted the highest religious authority in their community as well. Because of their position at the court, they were able to exert political influence in the affairs of the state to promote the interests of their communities.

The catholicos' and exilarch's closeness to the Sasanian state was spatialized in their offices' geographical nearness to the court. Traditionally, the Sasanian Empire maintained two capitals: the city complex of Ctesiphon and Weh-Ardašīr was chosen for the winter capitals because of their military and economically strategical location, as was the case for Baghdad as al-Manšūr searched for an excellent location for the foundation of his future centre of the Abbasid state. The Sasanian summer capital was situated in Khuzestan. Herman's study reveals that the exilarch was located in two cities, Neharde'a and Mehoza, the former until the end of the third century, the latter from the fourth century onwards, both in the region of Weh-Ardašīr (Herman 2012: 123, 134–6, 161). The geographical proximity of the office of exilarch to the court, which was the case for that of the catholicos as well (Daryaee 2009: 78), was preferred by both sides: the court could more strongly communicate and control the religious officers; and with their presence at the court, they could more easily influence courtly decisions.

The Sasanians generally displayed tolerance towards Jews and Christians. The state had an interest in seeking a balance of power between Zoroastrianism and other religions. Persecution or massacre was the exception, rather than the rule, but it did occur. Regarding courtly representatives, we are informed that an exilarch and a catholicos were executed, and the catholicos Babowai was prisoned in the reign of Pērōz (459–84), who is famous for his infatuation with Zoroastrianism.<sup>79</sup> Even if Zoroastrianism was the state religion of the Sasanians, they seem to have perceived themselves more as emperors of the Sasanian empire, including different religious communities, than the kings of a Zoroastrian state. The situation was not much different in the Abbasid caliphate. The caliph was the ruler of the Islamic empire more than the commander of Islam.

The Jewish sources emphasize that the exilarchate was, at least in theory, hereditary.<sup>80</sup> Whether the office remained within one family in reality is not our concern. The Jewish claim of the inheritance of the office within a family, even descending from David, in any case constituted the Sasanian reality of the office in the Abbasid period. It is presumable that the Zoroastrians, newcomers among the religious representatives at the Abbasid court, constructed the office as hereditary as well. All Zoroastrian theologians officiated as Leader of the Zoroastrians presumably originated from Ādurfarnbay, son of Farrozzād.<sup>81</sup>

The above short review of the interactions of the Sasanian and Abbasid states and the representatives of the non-state religions reveal two sets of parallels between the Sasanian and Abbasid period on the one hand, and between the Zoroastrian office of Leader of the Zoroastrians and the Christian and Jewish offices of catholicos and exilarch on the other. These sets comprise:

- integration of the office in the state and a strong bond between political power and the representatives of the non-state religious communities;
- location of the office at the capital of the Empire, geographically near to the central power;
- close and personal relationships between the ruler and the officiating representatives;

<sup>79</sup> Payne 2015: 164–8; Herman 2012: 41–9.

<sup>80</sup> Herman 2012: 133, 259; Jacobs 2007; Gottheil and Bacher 1906.

<sup>81</sup> See Anklesaria 1964: I:xv; König 2019: 217.

- communication between the state religion and the other traditions, culminating in disputation with or in the presence of the ruler;
- inclusion of representatives from these religions among the (lower) courtly nobility;
- general tolerance towards non-state religions, accompanied by exceptional cases of hardship or persecution, or even execution of their representatives;
- constitution of the highest religious authority by the officiating representative in his community;
- support for the representatives, along with their scholarly activities, by the state;
- family heredity of the office;
- end of the office in the first half of the eleventh century.

This parallelism lets us conclude that the relational position of the offices of the representatives of non-state religions to the state and their interactions with it remained more or less constant with the emergence of Islam. The Abbasids did not invent a new mechanism to communicate with non-state religions; they simply sustained the Sasanian arrangement. The Sasanians initiated an office that survived some eight centuries. The Zoroastrian policy of tolerance in the Sasanian period paid off for Zoroastrianism in the Abbasid period, as it profited from Sasanian relations between the state religion and other faiths.

Existing scholarship reveals a similarity between the Middle Persian title *hu-dēnān pēšōbāy* and the Arabic title of the Islamic ruler *amīr al-muʿminīn*.<sup>82</sup> Direct parallelism between both titles, however, exists neither on the linguistic-semantic level nor on the level of inter-religious relations. On the linguistic-semantic level, we have to consider the difference between ʿamīr “commander” and *pēšōbāy* “leader”. On the level of inter-religious relations, the asymmetry between the positions of Islam as the state religion and Zoroastrianism as a non-state religion should not be neglected. Therefore, similarity between the two terms cannot not be interpreted as parallelism; much less should it allow us to conclude that the Zoroastrian term followed the Islamic one. It might be wiser to follow Raham Asha’s hint to the parallelism between the Zoroastrian term and the Jewish term *rēš galuta* (Asha, n.d.: n. 30). The similar position of Zoroastrianism and Judaism as non-state religions in the religious field of the early Islamic period on the one hand, and the semantic analogy of the two terms on the other hand, suggest that *rēš galuta* may have been a departure point for the construction of the new Zoroastrian title of *hu-dēnān pēšōbāy* in the Abbasid period.

## Conclusion

We can conclude from the evidence scrutinized above that the meanings of the lexeme *pēšōbāy* in the pre-Abbasid Zoroastrian Middle Persian texts include “vanguard; anterior, preceding; superior, excellent; leader”. In the pre-Abbasid texts, the lexeme was used to denote social leadership. The designation of religious leadership in particular is not attested, however. In the Abbasid period, the lexeme occurs in the semantic fields of ritual, authority and prophecy. The lexeme is not reserved for positive connotations only; it occasionally occurs in negative contexts as well. Whereas the etymological meaning of the lexeme points to the person designated as *pēšōbāy* as one singled out from the group of followers, this specificity is not explicit until the Abbasid period.

It was shown that the term *hu-dēnān pēšōbāy* does not occur in the pre-Abbasid Pahlavi literature and hence constitutes a neologism of Abbasid Zoroastrianism. The office is primarily designated as *hu-dēnān pēšōbāy*, but occasionally also as *weh-dēnān pēšōbāy*, *pēšōbāy weh-dēn*, *dēn-pēšōbāy* as well as *pēšōbāy ī dēn*. The sources mention some Zoroastrian priests

<sup>82</sup> Anklesaria 1969: II/3; Kreyenbroek 1987b: 160.

from the first half of the ninth century onwards who bore this title. Evidence regarding the holders of the office is thin and we can determine their identities only with uncertainty. The most significant characteristics of the office comprise its uniqueness at any moment in history as well as its authoritativeness for the whole religious community. The authorities of different districts and regions were subordinate to this high office, and their appointment was under its jurisdiction. This three-layered socio-religious hierarchy of Abbasid Zoroastrianism seems analogous to the Avestan socio-religious hierarchy with four levels. Whereas the Leader of the Zoroastrians could be a chief authority from any region, his office was located in Baghdad. The *hu-dēnān pēšōbāy* was not only the highest authority in intra-Zoroastrian affairs but was engaged in inter-religious discussions as well and was, moreover, the representative of Zoroastrianism at the Abbasid court. Presumably, the Leaders of the Zoroastrians were supported by the caliphate in their apologetic activities.

The office of Leader of the Zoroastrians was instituted parallel to those of the Eastern-Syriac catholicos and the Babylonian Jewish exilarch. With their origins in the Sasanian Empire, these institutions continued until the first half of the eleventh century, a period that evinces activities of Zoroastrian authorities in Baghdad, the confirmation of the calendar reform of 1006 by the Leader of the Zoroastrians, and the copy of the *Dēnkard* manuscript from the divan of the Leader of the Zoroastrians in 1020. A comparison between these institutions in the Sasanian and Abbasid period on the one hand, and the Zoroastrian and Jewish-Christian traditions on the other, exhibit some ten parallels, a crucial one being that the representatives of these non-state religions had a seat in the capital of the Empire, geographically and politically near to the imperial power.

The initiation of the office of Leader of the Zoroastrians at the Abbasid court and our discussion thereof in this article represent an illuminative example of how inter-religious contact, in this case especially with the state and its religion, can alter the intra-religious priestly organization of a community.

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## Abbreviations

- AAM *Andarz ī Ādurbād ī Mahrspandān*, quoted after Jamasp-Asana (1897: 58ff.)  
 Afr. *Āfrīnagān*, the Avestan text quoted after Geldner (1896)  
 AirWb *Altiranisches Wörterbuch* (Bartholomae 1904)  
 Av. Avestan  
 AWN *Ardā Wirāz Nāmag*, quoted after Gignoux (1984); see also Vahman (1986)  
 B. The MS B of the K.R. Cama Oriental Institute Bombay after the facsimile edition by Dresden (1966)  
 col. colophon  
 CPD *Concise Pahlavi Dictionary* (MacKenzie 1971)  
 Dd. *Dādestān ī dēnīg*, quoted after K35; for chs 0–40, see also Jaafari-Dehaghi (1998)  
 Dk. *Dēnkard*, quoted primarily after MS B. and occasionally after M.; see also Skjærvø unpublished  
 Dk. III see de Menasce (1973)  
 Dk. V see Amouzgar and Tafazzoli (2000)  
 Dk. VII see Molé (1967)  
 Dk. IX see Tafazzoli (2018)

- GA *Gujastag Abālīš*, quoted after Chacha (1936)
- GBd. *Great Bundahišn*, quoted after Pakzad (2005)
- K35 (Christensen 1934a, 1934b)
- M. *The Complete Text of the Pahlavi Dinkard* by Madan (1911)
- NM *Nāmagihā ī Manuščīhr*, quoted after TD4a and K35; translations: different articles by Kanga; see Rezania (2021)
- P. *Pursišnīhā*, quoted after Jamaspasa and Humbach (1971)
- PAfr. *Pahlavi Āfrīnagān*
- PCIR *The Pahlavi Codices and Iranian Researches*; edited by K. Jamasp Asa, M. Nawabi and M. Tavousi
- PV *Pahlavi Wīdēwdād*, quoted after Jamasp (1907)
- PVyt *Pahlavi Vištāsp Yašt*
- PY *Pahlavi Yasna*, quoted after Dhabhar (1949)
- PYt. *Pahlavi Yašt*
- RAF *Riwāyat ī Ādurfarnbay ī Farroxxādān*, quoted after TD2; see also Anklesaria (1969), Āturfarnbag (1384)
- RFS *Riwāyat ī Farnbay-srōš*, quoted after TD2; see also Anklesaria (1969)
- ŠĒ *Šahrestānīhā ī Ērān*, quoted after Daryaei (2002)
- ŠGW *Škand gūmānīg wizār*, quoted after de Menasce (1945)
- TD2 manuscript TD2 = PCIR, 54
- TD4a manuscript TD4a = PCIR, 52
- Vyt. *Vištāsp Yašt*
- WD *Wizīgard ī dēnīg*, quoted after Skjærvø unpublished
- WZ *Wizīdagihā ī Zādspram*, quoted after Gignoux and Tafazzoli (1993)
- Y. *Yasna*, quoted after Geldner (1896)
- ZFJ *Zand ī Fraḡard ī Jud-dēw-dād*, quoted after TD2

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