

REVIEW ESSAY

Yazd and its Zoroastrians

A review paper of Ali Akbar Tashakori's *A Social History of the Zoroastrians of Yazd* (2019)

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Abstract

This is a review article of a three-volume book in Persian by Ali Akbar Tashakori on the social history of Yazdi Zoroastrians in medieval and modern times.¹ The work goes beyond the history of the Yazdi community, encompassing the broader history of Iranian Zoroastrians. Despite certain novelties, the volumes largely rely on a conventional reconstruction of the history of Iranian Zoroastrians in the second millennium CE. The foundational elements of this reconstruction include the gradual Islamization of Iran and the subsequent “retreat” of Zoroastrians to the “marginal” regions of Yazd and Kerman, the challenging conditions faced by Zoroastrians in medieval and early modern times, the beginning of Iranian Zoroastrians’ social and intellectual “emancipation” in the nineteenth century with Parsi assistance, the community’s increasing political and economic influence in the late Qajar and early Pahlavi eras, and the Pahlavis’ exceptional role in elevating the status of Zoroastrians within wider Iranian society. Tashakori’s extensive reliance on these narratives offers an opportunity to not only review his own new interpretations, but also to reassess these long-standing assumptions. Additionally, the article highlights neglected primary sources pertaining to the Yazdi community.

Keywords: Yazd; Iranian Zoroastrians; Parsis; Social History; Religious Minorities

*...its remote situation and essentially Persian character and, because it is the chief stronghold of Zoroastrianism in Persia.*²

In his influential book *A Year Amongst the Persians*, Edward G. Browne, a renowned British Iranist, expressed the above as the reason for his desire to visit Yazd during his travels to Qajar Persia in 1887/8. His description of Yazd as “the chief stronghold of Zoroastrianism in Persia” likely served as inspiration for another prominent British Iranist, Mary Boyce,

¹ ‘Ali Akbar Tašakori, *Tārīḫ-e eḡtemā’ī-ye zartōštiyān-e yazd* [A Social History of the Zoroastrians of Yazd], 3 vols (Irvine, CA: UCI, Jordan Center for Persian Studies, 2019). 514+354+408 pp. ISBN: vol.1: 978-1-949743-10-4; vol. 2: 978-1-949743-11-1; vol. 3: 978-1-949743-12-8.

² Browne, *A Year amongst the Persians*, 340.

who titled her masterpiece *A Persian Stronghold of Zoroastrianism*.³ This classic epithet accurately reflects the significance of Yazd and its surrounding villages, along with Kerman and its surroundings, in the history of medieval and modern Zoroastrianism in Iran. The volumes under review, written by Ali Akbar Tashakori (hereafter referred to as T.), a scholar from Yazd University, provide a socio-historical survey of Zoroastrians in this important center of Zoroastrianism. However, these volumes are not limited to Yazd alone, nor are they solely focused on social history in a narrow sense. Throughout the work, T. emphasizes the connections of the Yazdi community with other significant Zoroastrian centers throughout the centuries and delves into their economic, political, organizational, and religious history.

The result is a massive three-volume work organized chronologically. The layout of the work follows a conventional approach found in the historiography of Iranian Zoroastrianism during the second millennium CE. The key elements of this historical reconstruction include: the gradual Islamization of Iran and the subsequent migration of Zoroastrians to the “marginal” regions of Yazd and Kerman, the challenging conditions faced by Zoroastrians in medieval and early modern times, the beginning of their social and intellectual “emancipation” through interactions with the Parsis, the community’s growing political and economic prosperity in the late Qajar and early Pahlavi era, and the Pahlavis’ significant role in elevating the status of Zoroastrians within Iranian society. In addition to highlighting and reviewing T.’s novel ideas, this review essay also re-examines some of the principles found in traditional historiography.

The first volume focuses on the history of the Yazdi community from the expansion of Islam to the death of Manekji Limji Hataria in 1890, a Parsi envoy tasked with improving Iranian Zoroastrians’ socioeconomic conditions. In contrast, the second and third volumes cover shorter time periods. The second volume starts with the establishment of local associations (*anjomans*) in Yazd and other Zoroastrian settlements in 1892 and concludes with the decline of the Qajar dynasty in 1925. The third volume encompasses the entire Pahlavi period (1925–1979). Interestingly, T. does not provide any explanation for not discussing the history of the Yazdi community under the Islamic Republic.⁴

I. Centuries of Retreat and the Dark Times of Oppression

Yazd on its Way to Becoming “a Persian Stronghold of Zoroastrianism”

The first two chapters of the first volume provide a brief overview of Muslim theologians’ opinions on *dhimmi* (under protection) groups and the process of Islamization in Iran from the Arab/Muslim conquest to the time of Ilkhanids. These introductory chapters do not offer any significant new information or interpretations. Chapter one, titled “Islam and the Protected People” (p. 7–43), discusses the legal status of Zoroastrians debated among early Muslim jurists and their classification as *dhimmi* people (p. 7–11). The author further explores the legal status of *dhimmis* in Islamic lands, highlighting their subordinate position to Muslims. While *dhimmis* were granted certain basic rights, they also faced numerous restrictions, the most burdensome of which was the imposition of a poll-tax (*jeziya*) on them (p. 11–30). The chapter concludes with a brief overview of the diverse treatment of non-Muslims by different caliphs, which takes into account historical and geographical variations (p. 30–43).

³ This work was the result of a year-long fieldwork she conducted in the Zoroastrian village Sharifabad-e Ardakan in the Yazdi plain in 1963–4. Perhaps Browne was not her only source of inspiration. In the early years of the twentieth century, Abraham V.W. Jackson, a scholar of Iranian studies at Columbia University, also referred to Yazd as a stronghold of Iranian Zoroastrians in his travelogue *Persia: Past and Present*, 349.

⁴ On the state of the Yazdi community under the Islamic Republic, see Green, “The Survival of Zoroastrianism in Yazd,” 115–122; Stewart, *Voices from Zoroastrian Iran: Oral texts and testimony. Volume 2: Urban and Rural Centres: Yazd and Outlying Villages*.

The second chapter, titled “Islam in Iran: An Overview of the Social and Cultural Life of Zoroastrians” (p. 45–71), aims to explain the gradual decline in Zoroastrian numbers and political relevance from the Arab conquests to Mongol rule. Drawing on Jamsheed K. Choksy’s model of the relationship between Muslims and Zoroastrians in early Islamic times, T. identifies three stages in this process: (1) military conquests during the early caliphs, (2) the infiltration of Islam into urban areas of the former Sasanian Empire under the Umayyads, and (3) the expansion of Islam into Iranian villages during the Abbasid period (p. 46). According to T., during the military stage, the collaboration between Muslims and two groups of Zoroastrian elites, namely the landowners from Khorasan (*dehqāns*) and the priests from Pars, was essential to mitigating the threat of potential rebellions (p. 47–52). The gradual expansion of Islam into Iranian villages during the Abbasid period elicited two reactions from Zoroastrians: retreat to remote rural areas far from centers of power and wealth, and migration to the western coasts of India, a group of Zoroastrians who later became known as Parsis (p. 57–66). T. suggests that while Shia Iranian dynasties such as the Buyids showed tolerance towards non-Muslims (p. 62–66), later Sunni Turkish rulers displayed bigotry (p. 66–69). Consequently, from the beginning of the latter’s rule in the eleventh century, the number of Zoroastrians, even in Pars (their most significant religious center), dramatically declined.

All of these outlines appear necessary for explaining the enigma: the growing importance of the Yazdi plain to Zoroastrianism during the late medieval period. This religious importance is evidenced by the fact that early Parsi messengers directed their religious questions to Zoroastrian priests in Turkabad and Sharifabad, two villages located in the northwestern corner of the plain. Chapter three (“Yazd and the Early Information on its Zoroastrians,” p. 73–111) investigates the early traces of Zoroastrians in Yazd and the subsequent emergence of the region as one of the most significant ecclesiastical centers of Zoroastrianism.

The most influential and elaborate explanation for the high concentration of Zoroastrian priests in Turkabad and Sharifabad comes from Mary Boyce. T. engages with her hypothesis, which shows both similarities and differences with his own. It is worth summarizing her explanation here: drawing on the oral traditions of Yazdi Zoroastrians, Boyce suggests that at an unknown time (but certainly before 1478, when the exchange of letters between Parsis and Iranian Zoroastrians, known as Persian *Revāyāt*, began), the *dastur dasturān*, the successor to the highest religious authority in the Sasanian empire, sought refuge in the remote village of Turkabad when life became dangerous and oppressive in Pars, his traditional residence.⁵ Concurrently, the accompanying priests relocated two of the most sacred fires of the Sasanian era, *ādur farrobay* and *ādur anāhid*, to the neighboring village of Sharifabad. Subsequently, these two villages emerged as significant religious centers of Iranian Zoroastrianism, housing both “the acknowledged head of the Irani community” and the most sacred fires of the Zoroastrians.⁶

Despite the drama and originality of this reconstruction, there are several problematic assumptions to consider. One such assumption is the depiction of the Sasanian institution of the head of the priesthood (*dastur dasturān* or *mowbedān mowbed*) as continuously present even after the fall of the Sasanians. However, the existence of this office in early medieval Pars requires solid proof rather than being taken for granted. Additionally, the early letters

⁵ In her publications, Boyce put forward different dates for this migration. In *A Persian Stronghold of Zoroastrianism* (1977), she proposed a date no later than the eleventh century (p. 4). In *Zoroastrians: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices* (1979), she suggested the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries as a possible timeframe for this relocation (p. 163). However, in her later work, *Zoroastrianism: Its Antiquity and Constant Vigour* (1992), she refrained from presenting a precise date (p. 156).

⁶ Her most comprehensive treatment of this subject can be found in *A Persian Stronghold of Zoroastrianism*, 1–7. The religious centrality of Yazd during the Safavid period was best described by Jean Chardin, a French traveler of the seventeenth century. See Firby, *European Travelers and Their Perceptions of Zoroastrians*, 65–6. While Boyce confirmed the independence of Kermani priests, who had their own high priest, she maintained that the head of the priesthood in Yazd held a higher position. See *A Persian Stronghold of Zoroastrianism*, 4, note. 12.

in the collection of the Persian *Revāyāt* do not provide evidence of the presence of this authority within the community. These letters were signed by a group of priests from Turkabad and Sharifabad without any indication of hierarchy.⁷

Another issue lies in Boyce's conceptualization of the formation and development of religious offices as independent from potential intervention by Islamic states. As a result, she does not comment on the fate of the office of *hudēnān pēšōbay* (Leader of Those of the Good Religion), a religious institution likely established under the Abbasids with its probable seat in Baghdad.⁸ The presence of this religious authority in Baghdad challenges the commonly held belief that Pars was the sole center of Zoroastrian leadership during the early Islamic period. References in historical sources also indicate the authority of priests in regions such as Sistan, Khorasan, Rayy, Isfahan, and others. Therefore, it is plausible that some Yazdi priests may have originated from other Zoroastrian settlements, assuming there was any migration of priests to Yazd.⁹

Another problematic assumption in Boyce's theory is the idea of the Yazdi plain's isolation and insignificance during medieval and even modern times. A closer examination of the evidence reveals the opposite. Indeed, medieval Yazd held political significance as the seat of ruling dynasties like the Kakuyids, Atabaks of Yazd, and Muzaffarids. Furthermore, Marco Polo's brief description of the region leaves an impression of its importance as a trading center.¹⁰

Insofar as one can follow T.'s opinion on this subject, which is dispersed throughout several chapters, he appears to distinguish between Yazd's religious and demographic significance (p. 152).¹¹ In other words, Yazd became a refuge for priests from Pars and Khorasan long before it became the largest center of Zoroastrians in the mid-sixteenth century. T. suggests that migrations to Yazd occurred gradually in two main waves (p. 85). The first wave took place during the eleventh and twelfth centuries when mounting social pressures on Zoroastrians in Pars led a group of priests to bring a flame of *ādūr farrobyāy* to the remote villages of the Yazdi plain (p. 84–5). Furthermore, before 1478, Khorasani priests joined their counterparts in Yazd, fleeing from unrest caused by Timur's invasions (p. 85, 132). T. does not provide an explanation for why these priests chose to leave Khorasan while the laity decided to remain, despite the Zoroastrian priesthood's financial dependence on the laity. According to T., the aggregation of priests from Khorasan and Pars elevated the religious status of the Yazdi villages before 1478 (p. 132). The second

⁷ The first recorded mention of a *dastur dasturān* in Turkabad appears in the *Revāyat* dated to 1535. The individual holding this position was named Dastur Noshirvan, son of Rostam, son of Shahriyar, son of Mahvandad. See Dhabhar, *The Persian Rivayats of Hormazyar Framarz*, 629–30. In earlier letters, his father and grandfather were referred to as *dastur* and *herbad*, respectively.

⁸ Instead of considering *hudēnān pēšōbay* as a new institution, Boyce assumed that this religious office was identical to the Sasanian office of the *dastur dasturān*, which was based in Pars. See *Zoroastrianism: Its Antiquity and Constant Vigour*, 152–53. For Baghdad as the likely seat of *hudēnān pēšōbay* and the significance of the city for Zoroastrians in the early Islamic period, see de Jong, "The Dēnkard and the Zoroastrians of Baghdad," 223–38. For a recent treatment of this office and the involvement of the Abbasids in its establishment, see Rezania, "On the Concept of Leadership and the Office of Leader of the Zoroastrians," 1–36. This office stood as the most significant manifestation of a central Zoroastrian authority during the early Islamic period.

⁹ Tracing the movement of Zoroastrian manuscripts through their colophons might offer insight (although not conclusive) into the potential migrations of priest-scribes to Kerman and Yazd. For an exhaustive study on the transmission of Pahlavi manuscripts, see König, "Die Pahlavi-Literatur des 9./10. Jh. und ihre frühe Kodex-Überlieferung (II)," 43–73; König, "Die Pahlavi-Literatur des 9./10. Jahrhunderts und ihre frühe Kodex-Überlieferung (I)," 263–286.

¹⁰ For an effort to challenge the notion of medieval Yazd as an isolated refuge for the high priest, see Choksy, "Yazd: a 'Good and Noble City' and an 'Abode of Worship,'" 217–52. According to Choksy, the rationale behind the relocation of the high priest and the two canonical fires to the Yazdi region "would have been that this was a central locale, with direct road links to western Iran, as well as to Kirman and from there to the western coastal towns of India, where other Zoroastrians have moved," 242–43. For the cultural, economic, and political importance of the region during medieval and early modern times, see Miller, "Local History in Ninth/Fifteenth Century Yazd," 75–79; Mancini-Lander, *Memory on the Boundaries of Empire*.

¹¹ Boyce was primarily interested in the religious significance of Yazd and its villages.

wave of migration to Yazd occurred in the sixteenth century (see below). These migrants, primarily lay individuals, came from Khorasan when the situation there worsened due to Uzbek incursions.¹² It was only then that Yazd and its surrounding areas became the largest Zoroastrian settlement in Iran (p. 134).

This reconstruction is noteworthy because it does not assume a central religious authority from Pars responsible for the migration. T. consistently refers to “priests” in the plural form rather than a single “high priest.” He also accounts for mentions of sizable Zoroastrian communities in Sistan and Khorasan found in some later Persian *Revāyāt*.¹³ However, his hypothesis still relies on the perception of the Yazdi plain as a remote region, distant from centers of power and wealth. Furthermore, similar to Boyce’s model, the migrations of priests to Yazd occurred when pressures in Pars and Khorasan intensified. If we consider the more recent mass migrations of Zoroastrians to Bombay and Tehran as parallels, it is possible that the migrations of both laity and priests to medieval Yazd (and Kerman) were motivated by the better opportunities these regions offered.

Yazdi Zoroastrians during the Safavid Period

By the advent of the Safavids, our knowledge of the history of Iranian Zoroastrians significantly expands. The interactions between Indian and Iranian Zoroastrians become more prominent, as evidenced by the Persian *Revāyāt*, which provide valuable insight into the histories of both communities. The messengers of these letters were primarily lay Parsis or Iranians, often engaged in commercial activities, who traveled between the two regions. In addition to these letters, European travelers in the seventeenth century began taking a keen interest in Persian society, particularly the Zoroastrians of Isfahan, Yazd, and Kerman, considering them remnants of ancient Persians.

Based on the information from the Persian *Revāyāt*, T. observes a shift in the geographic concentration of Iranian Zoroastrians during the sixteenth century, with Yazd gaining prominence (p. 132–4). A letter dated to 1511 indicates that Yazd was the third region, after Sistan and Khorasan, with the largest Zoroastrian population.¹⁴ Another letter, Kamdin Shapur’s *Revāyat* from 1558, according to T., places Yazd and its villages in the first position (p. 134).¹⁵ However, it is important to note that this latter letter does not explicitly state the demographic prominence of Yazd. It mainly lists the names of priests from Turabad (8 names), Sharifabad (10 names), Khorasan (6 names), Sistan (3 names), and Kerman (4 names). It also mentions some lay Khorasani Zoroastrians (*behdins*) residing in Kerman (21 names in total), while the number of Khorasani laity residing in Yazd is provided as 3000 persons. This passage suggests that a significant number of Khorasani Zoroastrians might have settled in both Yazd and Kerman during the sixteenth century.¹⁶ The reasons

¹² Regarding the Zoroastrian migration from Khorasan to Yazd in the sixteenth century, a French traveler from the nineteenth century reported: “*car ceux de Mesched [Mashhad], se voyant trop faibles pour résister aux Musulmans, abandonèrent cette ville pour se réunir à leurs frères de Yesd [Yazd]. Cette émigration a eu lieu, il y a environ trois cents ans.*” See Méchin, *Lettres d’un voyageur en Perse: Djoulfa, Yesd, les Guèbres*, 6–7. Boyce did not consider the possibility that some priests in Yazd might have had roots in Khorasan. She associated the origin of the *dastur dasturān* in Yazd with Pars, while the high priests in Kerman were considered to be of Khorasani descent. See Boyce, “The Two Dates of the Feast of Sada,” 26–40. However, the situation may have been more complex than a straightforward regional categorization suggests.

¹³ For these passages, see Dhabhar, *The Persian Rivayats of Hormazyar Framarz*, 609–10, 620.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 609–10.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 620.

¹⁶ See footnote 12. In a Persian poem written by a Kermani priest of Khorasani background in 1626 CE, which is attached to Bahman Esfandiayar’s *Revāyat*, it is evident that Zoroastrians were still residing in Sistan and Khorasan. The number of laity in Kerman was slightly higher (2500 souls) compared to Yazd (2400 souls). Interestingly, in Qazvin (the former capital of the Safavids), an unnamed Safavid king, possibly Shah Tahmāsb, had settled 300 Zoroastrians. However, Isfahani Zoroastrians are noticeably absent from the account. For this poem, see Unvala, *Darab Hormazyar’s Rivayat*, vol. II, 152–54.

behind this “second wave of migration” (following the initial migrations from Pars) are attributed to instability in Khorasan due to Uzbek incursions and Mashhad’s growing prestige as a religious center of Shia Iran (p. 134).

In terms of the livelihood of Zoroastrians during the Safavid period, T. asserts that while Armenians played a prominent role in the commercial world of Safavid Iran, Zoroastrians were primarily engaged in agriculture and weaving (p. 137). This observation is supported by contemporary Western accounts and Zoroastrian normative texts, which emphasize the Zoroastrians’ reverence for agriculture and disdain for commerce.¹⁷ Although it is true that Zoroastrians of this period were predominantly farmers and gardeners, certain passages in both Persian *Revāyāt* and European accounts suggest the presence of merchants within the Yazdi and Kermani communities.¹⁸

One long-standing assumption about Zoroastrians’ social status in the Safavid era is their complete marginalization and lack of political and economic significance. However, local histories of Safavid Yazd and Kerman mention the existence of an office of the “*darughā* of Zoroastrians,” a Muslim official appointed by the state. This official was responsible for overseeing the bureaucratic affairs of Zoroastrian communities and their interactions with the court, primarily through the collection of the poll tax, among other duties.¹⁹ T. acknowledges the initiative of Shah ‘Abbas (r.1587–1629) in establishing this institution, highlighting the shah’s interest in centralizing control over the Zoroastrian community (p. 141). While T. recognizes the relative social, financial, and political significance of Zoroastrians in this context, he still adheres to conventional belief in explaining the forced migration of Yazdi and Kermani Zoroastrians to the new Safavid capital, Isfahan, in the early seventeenth century (p. 142–3). Drawing a parallel with the Armenian case, T. rationalizes the Armenian displacement by emphasizing their importance in the commercial economy and their role in dealings with Europeans. However, T. wonders about the motives behind Shah ‘Abbas’s policy towards Zoroastrians, suggesting the shah may have sought to present himself as a tolerant ruler to Europeans by showcasing a capital where religious minorities live in peace and security (p. 143). It is unclear, though, why the king would have been concerned with European perceptions of himself and his rule. A more plausible explanation is that Shah ‘Abbas recognized the potential services offered by Zoroastrians, particularly in the weaving industry, and saw value in settling some of them in Isfahan. Additionally, by doing so, he also upheld the royal tradition of having representatives from various religious groups in his main residence.

Further in his chapter titled “Zoroastrians in Safavid Yazd” (p. 113–184), T. provides a description of the content of each letter in the Persian *Revāyāt* from the establishment of

¹⁷ For Zoroastrians’ reverence for farming, see Jean Chardin’s account in Firby, *European Travelers and Their Perceptions of Zoroastrians*, 60. Another French observer described the Zoroastrian aversion to trade in the following terms: “Ils abhorrent le commerce comme contraire à la fin pour laquelle dieu a mis l’homme sur la terre, & disent que la providence lui fournit suffisamment les choses nécessaires à la vie, & que ce qu’il va chercher dans les pays étrangers ne sert qu’à entretenir son luxe & flat(t)er sa concupiscence.” Martin Gaudereau, *Relation d’une mission faite nouvellement par Monseigneur l’Archevesque d’Ancyre à Ispahan en Perse*, 137. For the veneration of agriculture and reservations about trade in a normative, priestly text, see *Saddar nasr* 19 and *Saddar bondahesh* 38 in Dhabhar, *Saddar Nasr and Saddar Bundehehsh*, 17–18, 108.

¹⁸ A letter dated to 1511 was carried to India by three Zoroastrians from Yazd who were traveling for commercial purposes (*az jahat-e tejārat*), see Unvala, *Darab Hormazyar’s Rivāyat*, vol. II, 397. Jean Baptiste Tavernier, a French traveler and merchant of the seventeenth century, mentions the involvement of Zoroastrians from Kerman in the lucrative trade of Kerman wool. See Firby, *European Travelers and Their Perceptions of Zoroastrians*, 41–2, 200. For the significance of Kerman wool in trade between Safavid Iran and European companies, see Matthee, “The East India Company Trade in Kerman Wool, 1658–1730,” 343–83. A short poetic text in Persian called *Qesse-ye Kāvūs va Afsād*, likely composed in the sixteenth century, narrates the story and challenges faced by two Zoroastrian merchants from Yazd who embark on a commercial journey to India. For a summary of this poem, see Sheffield, “Primary Sources: New Persian,” 536.

¹⁹ On the *darughas* of Zoroastrians and their names in the local histories of Yazd and Kerman, see Ghareghlou, “On the Margins of Minority Life,” 45–71.

the Safavids to the end of Shah 'Abbas's rule (p. 146–157). However, there are a few misinterpretations in this attempt. One notable example is the description of the *Revāyat* of Esfandiyar Sohrab, dated around 1520, where T. mistakenly suggests that Esfandiyar had commercial trips to Hebron, which is likely a misreading for Jarun, the old name for Hormuz Island. Hormuz Island served as an important trading hub for West Indian merchants during the late medieval and early modern times.²⁰

The following section of the chapter deals with the history of Zoroastrians during the later Safavid period, spanning until the ascension of the final Safavid ruler, Shah Soltan Hossein, to the throne in 1694 (p. 158–169). During this period, religious minorities, including Zoroastrians, faced mounting pressures from both the state and local authorities. These difficulties are considered a precursor to the even more arduous times that followed under the rule of Shah Sultan Hossein and the subsequent challenges of the eighteenth century.

In 1699, Shah Soltan Hossein issued a decree compelling all Zoroastrians in Isfahan to convert to Islam. Martin Gaudereau, a French missionary residing in the city at the time, provides a vivid account of this tragic event. Despite their desperate pleas for intervention from Europeans present in Isfahan,²¹ the decree resulted in the forced circumcision of Zoroastrian men and the destruction of their fire temple. In its place, a mosque and religious school were constructed, with a Muslim clergyman assigned to instruct the newly converted Muslims in Islamic law.²² Contrary to T.'s viewpoint (p. 173), it seems that this decree did not lead to the same measures taken in Kerman and Yazd, where Zoroastrians remained relatively safe. The same French observer informs us that shortly before the outbreak of violence, concerned residents of Isfahan relocated the sacred fire and its priest to Kerman, where the larger population of Zoroastrians ensured their peaceful existence.²³

Increasing intolerance towards religious minorities during the late Safavid period is traditionally seen as one of the many factors contributing to the Safavids' decline in 1722.²⁴ T. also argues that the Safavids' bigotry, alongside the Afghans' protection of religious minorities, encouraged Iranian Zoroastrians to collaborate extensively with the Afghans (p. 174–78). He cites contemporary sources claiming the crucial role of a commander named Nasrallah Khan Sistani, supposedly a Zoroastrian, in the capture of Isfahan (p. 178–181). While T. should be commended for recognizing the agency of Zoroastrians beyond mere victimhood,²⁵ it seems he may have exaggerated the extent of their assistance. Evidence accumulated from sources demonstrates both the occasional Zoroastrian-Afghan collaboration and instances of massacre or forced participation. Regarding Nasrallah Khan's Zoroastrian identity, it is prudent to exercise caution, as it is possible that his identity was forged by the sources or their informants. The hypothesis put forth by T., which suggests that this wholehearted collaboration be seen as the reason for the exacerbation of Zoroastrians' situation in Yazd (and Iran) in the upcoming centuries (p. 174), is highly unlikely. He argues that their perceived treachery against a Shia state remained ingrained in the collective memory of enraged Shia Muslims. However, there is no concrete evidence

²⁰ Dhabhar also reads Jarun, *The Persian Rivayats of Hormazyar Framarz*, 613.

²¹ Gaudereau asserts that Zoroastrians appealed to the Europeans, seeking their support in obtaining permission from the king to convert to Christianity rather than Islam. See *Relation d'une mission faite nouvellement par Monseigneur l'Archevesque d'Ancyre à Ispahan en Perse*, 139.

²² *Relation d'une mission faite nouvellement par Monseigneur l'Archevesque d'Ancyre à Ispahan en Perse*, 138–39. T. does not provide a detailed analysis of Gaudereau's account.

²³ For the similar observation made by Cornelis de Bruijn regarding the greater freedom of Zoroastrians in other provinces of the Safavid empire, see Firby, *European Travelers and Their Perceptions of Zoroastrians*, 79.

²⁴ A classic study on the downfall of the Safavids is Lockhart, *The Fall of the Safavī Dynasty*, 16–34, 70–9. More recent research continues to support this reconstruction, as seen in, for example, Matthee, "The Decline of Safavid Iran in Comparative Perspective," 276–308. Some of the proposed reasons for this decline show remarkable parallels with those given for the downfall of the Sasanians. The rigid and legalistic nature of Shi'ism and Zoroastrianism are considered responsible for the decline of both empires.

²⁵ See Boyce, *Zoroastrians: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*, 191, who solely focuses on the massacre of Kermani Zoroastrians during the Afghan invasion.

to support the idea that later pressures on Zoroastrians were directly linked to this alleged wholehearted assistance to the Afghans.

Yazdi Zoroastrians during the Eighteenth Century

The number of notable European accounts on Zoroastrians sharply decreased after the fall of the Safavids, only to resurface during the nineteenth century. One significant factor behind this decline may be the political unrest and civil wars affecting the former Safavid territories. Despite the significant decrease in Western accounts, there is still evidence of continued correspondence throughout a substantial portion of the eighteenth century between a minority group of Parsis known as Qadīmīs and Iranian Zoroastrians.

Throughout his next chapter, entitled “Zoroastrians from the Fall of Safavids to the Rise of Qajars” (p. 185–206), T. primarily relies on a versified Persian autobiography of Mollā Fīrūz ben Kāvūs, entitled *Dīnkherad* and composed in 1786. The poem extensively recounts the adventurous journey of this Parsi priest and his father, starting in 1768, as they traveled to Zand Iran to seek answers from Iranians on the calendar and other religious matters. Drawing from this source, T. describes the dire circumstances of the Zoroastrians of Kerman and Isfahan (p. 185–88).²⁶

While Mollā Fīrūz’s portrayal highlights the challenging situation of the Kermani community, it is worth noting that they were still able to respond to a series of inquiries from the Qadīmī Parsis in 1768.²⁷ T. connects the vague reference to the massacre of Kermanis in *Dīnkherad* to the time of Nader Shah, suggesting it was the price Zoroastrians had to pay for their “collaboration” with Afghans (p. 187–88).²⁸

However, a nineteenth-century French traveler named Ferdinand Méchin presents a contrasting perspective on Nader Shah and the Afghans; the perspective of later generations of Yazdi Zoroastrians. Méchin recounts a period of respite for the Zoroastrians during Nader’s rule. Reflecting the positive attitude of nineteenth-century Zoroastrians towards Nader Shah, Méchin reports their participation in the famous siege of Qandahar, where a unit of Zoroastrians played a crucial role. Due to growing despair during the prolonged siege, Nader decided to retreat to his own territory. However, the Zoroastrian unit persisted and launched a surprise assault, successfully capturing the city and delivering it to Nader. In response, Nader granted them significant privileges. When Afghans once again invaded Iran, they retaliated by massacring twelve thousand Zoroastrian families from Kerman.²⁹

²⁶ During the 1730s and 1740s, the plight of Kermani Zoroastrians had already become widely known in Europe and gained proverbial status. This news led to a Protestant group known as the United Brethren sending two physician-missionaries, Christian Friedrich Wilhelm Hocker and Johann Heinrich Ruffer, in 1747 with the aim of converting these oppressed Zoroastrians. However, due to the dangerous conditions on the roads in Iran, Hocker and Ruffer were unable to proceed beyond Isfahan. See O’Flynn, *The Western Christian Presence in the Russias and Qājār Persia*, 125, 128–33.

²⁷ For this unpublished *Revāyat*, see Meherjirana Library MS F60, Folios 55–78.

²⁸ Previous scholarship has attributed this massacre to the Afghans, see Boyce, *Zoroastrians: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*, 191. Choksy also asserts that Zoroastrians experienced Nader’s wrath for allegedly collaborating with the Afghans, although he provides no evidence to support this claim. “Despite Shāhs and Mollās,” 141.

²⁹ Méchin, *Lettres d’un voyageur en Perse, Djoulfa, Yesd, les Guèbres*, 7. The theme of displaying extraordinary valor during the siege of Qandahar and receiving gifts from Nader is a recurring motif. It is also found in the folklore of certain Iranian tribes, particularly the Bakhtiyaris, who boast of their exceptional bravery in capturing Qandahar. That some Zoroastrians might have suffered under Nader’s rule is illustrated in a tragic incident documented by a Carmelite missionary residing in Isfahan at the time. Towards the end of his rule in 1746, several prominent members of the Jewish, Zoroastrian, and Armenian communities in Isfahan were brutally executed (It is worth noting that in Lockhart’s account of the story, Zoroastrians are replaced by Indians, see his *Nadir Shah*, 258). The accused individuals were charged with the theft of a valuable horsecloth from the royal treasury. Among the accused was a Zoroastrian *sarrāf* (money changer and cashier) who worked for the Englishmen in Isfahan, likely associated with the English East India Company (EIC). The Englishmen, believing in his innocence, intervened on his behalf, but their intervention only exacerbated the situation. The enraged king ordered all the accused individuals to be burned

When it comes to the Yazdi Zoroastrians, Mollā Fīrūz's autobiography provides important information. The community was led by a wealthy lay man named Mollā Bahrām Ardeshir Khormashahi, who held the position of *kalāntar*. At Mollā Fīrūz's arrival in Yazd, Mollā Bahram was in Shiraz, likely attending to the community's administrative matters at Karim Khan Zand's court (p. 200). Additionally, Mollā Fīrūz offers valuable insight into how Yazdi priests responded to Parsi inquiries (p. 200). The responses provided to Mollā Fīrūz's father form the *Itōther Revāyat* (Guj. "Seventy-eight *Revāyāt*"), the final letter from Iran.

T. understandably omits discussing the last five *Revāyāt* of the eighteenth century, which contain valuable information about the social and religious life of Iranian Zoroastrians. This neglect must be attributed to the limited accessibility of these later *Revāyāt*, for which T. should not be held responsible.³⁰ However, the significance of this omission becomes evident in his attempt to explain the supposed forced migration of the head of the Yazdi priesthood from Turkabad to the city of Yazd (p. 204–6). Mary Boyce proposed the following explanation to account for the decline of Turkabad as a priestly center:

The last letter to bear the signature of a high priest living in Turkabad is dated to 1681... Sometime during the next hundred years the Dastur Dasturan removed from there to the city of Yazd, where the holder of this office was found residing by travelers in the late eighteenth century, and where he continued to live thereafter. There is no record of exactly when, still less why, the move was made; but given the deep tenacity of the Zoroastrians, and their reluctance to introduce change, the likelihood seems that the Moslem authorities decided that they wanted the leader of the Zoroastrian community more directly under surveillance.³¹

Broadly speaking, T. supports this reconstruction, but offers a more precise date and reason for the removal. Drawing on implicit references in Mollā Fīrūz's autobiography, T. suggests that this forced migration likely took place during the governorship of Muhammad Taghi Khan Bafqi, in the early years of the Zand dynasty (p. 206). Additionally, T. proposes that the reason for the removal could have been Mohammad Taghi Khan's suspicion of the Zoroastrians due to their previous assistance to the Afghans (p. 206). Furthermore, he argues that the forced conversion of Turkabadi Zoroastrians happened around the same time rather than a century later, as suggested by Boyce (p. 205–206).³²

Like Boyce, T. asserts that the last mention of Turkabad and its *dastur dasturān* is found in a *Revāyat* dated to 1681 (p. 205). However, the present writer does not share the same level of confidence in this claim, as there is evidence suggesting the mention of Turkabadi priests in later *Revāyāt*. An unpublished letter written in 1719 by Dastur Jamasp Asa of Navsari was addressed to the priests in Yazd, Kerman, and Turkabad. In the response to this letter, which is also unpublished and dated 1721, the signatures of two priests with the epithet of Turkabadi can be found.³³ This suggests that the last mention of Turkabad and its priests

alive. See *A Chronicle of The Carmelites in Persia (vol 1)*, 651–2. This episode is in perfect harmony with the stereotypes of a deranged and avaricious Nader, particularly in the final years of his rule. For the image of Nader in European and Iranian historiography, see Matthee, "The Wrath of God or National Hero?" 1–19. In any case, this brutality was unrelated to the alleged vengeance for Zoroastrian collaborations with Afghans.

³⁰ The *Itōther Revāyat* is an exception, as it has been edited and translated into English by Vitalone, *The Persian Revāyat "Itōther."*

³¹ Boyce informs us that her hypothesis gained more support when, in 1976, she heard similar oral traditions about the removal of the high priest from Turkabad to Yazd among living Zoroastrians, see *A Persian Stronghold of Zoroastrianism*, 5, note. 17.

³² Boyce, *A Persian Stronghold of Zoroastrianism*, 7.

³³ For Dastur Jamasp Asa's letter to Iranian priests, see Meherjirana Library MS F60, folios 132–43. For the Iranian response, see KRCOI MS R 382, folios 225–7. The names of these Turkabadi priests are Khosro Fereydon Azarbad Turkabadi and Dastur Mahvindad Bahram Turkabadi. Their fathers signed the letter of 1681.

can be extended to 1721. Additionally, following Boyce's view, T. assumes that this migration must have been instigated by Muslim authorities in order to control the priests and Zoroastrian community (p. 205). However, this assumption unnecessarily excludes the possibility of Zoroastrian initiative in this movement.³⁴

Parsis played a crucial role in the modernizing changes that Iranian Zoroastrians, and even Muslim Iranians, experienced from the mid-nineteenth century onwards (see below). As a result, the next chapter ("A Sketch of the Developments in India during the Nineteenth Century and Its Impact on the Parsis," p. 207–234) deviates from the main subject. It surveys the modernization processes undertaken during the British Raj and explores the socioeconomic prosperity and cultural transformations among Parsis in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Yazdi Zoroastrians in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century

The situation of Iranian Zoroastrians is often depicted as the opposite of that of their fellow believers in India. This era is commonly described as a time when Iranian Zoroastrian fortunes were at their lowest ebb and they were on the brink of extinction, if not for the revitalizing efforts of the Parsis in the latter half of the nineteenth century.³⁵ This being the outline, there has been a lack of detailed studies on Iranian Zoroastrians, and the sources pertaining to them, during this period. Therefore, it is commendable that T. devotes an entire chapter to the early Qajar period ("Structure and Social/Cultural Life of Yazdi Zoroastrians from the Establishment of the Qajars to the Arrival of Manekji in Iran," p. 235–94).

The first section of the chapter (p. 237–260) examines the social life of Yazdi Zoroastrians from the dawn of the Qajar dynasty to the death of Mohammad Shah in 1848. Primarily drawing on Manekji's reports, T. discusses their population, social structure, and various aspects of everyday life (p. 237–257). While Manekji's information serves as a valuable source for reconstructing the community's social life in the early nineteenth century, there are also contemporary European accounts on Yazd and its Zoroastrians that T. could have utilized. These accounts reflect the growing European interest in Iran and its Zoroastrian population. Particularly overlooked are the travelogues of several French travelers who visited Iran in the first two decades of the nineteenth century. These travelogues demonstrate increasing French interest in Iran, driven by Napoleonic France's search for allies in the Middle East amidst conflicts with Russia and England. Simultaneously, Qajar Persia was in dire need of military aid and training due to its own ongoing wars with Russia. Among the relevant French travelogues, the accounts of Hilarion Truilhier, Adrien Dupré, and Gaspard Drouville are particularly noteworthy. Here I briefly explore the underexamined accounts of Truilhier and Dupré to emphasize their importance for the history of Yazdi Zoroastrians.³⁶

The image of Yazd and its surroundings portrayed by these two travelers is of a region that is far from isolated. They highlight its strategic importance in both domestic and foreign trade within Iran.³⁷ Truilhier, who was part of an official delegation visiting Yazd in 1807, emphasizes the significance of cotton and silk production to the city's economy.³⁸ He specifically mentions the involvement of Zoroastrians in the spinning of cotton and

³⁴ In a later publication, Boyce also considered the possibility of a voluntary relocation to the city of Yazd. See *Zoroastrianism: Its Antiquity and Constant Vigour*, 161, note. 29.

³⁵ For example, see Stausberg, "From Power to Powerlessness," 177; Stewart, *Voices from Zoroastrian Iran (vol. II)*, 3.

³⁶ Gaspard Drouville's *Voyage en Perse faite en 1812 et 1813* has already been translated into Persian by Manuchehr E'temad Moqadam under the title "safar dar iran." Michael Stausberg occasionally referred to Dupré's travelogue in his trilogy *Die Religion Zarathushtras*, vol. I, 365; vol. III, 103. O'Flynn briefly discussed Truilhier's account of Yazdi Zoroastrians and Jews, *The Western Christian Presence in the Russias and Qājār Persia*, 766.

³⁷ Note Dupré's description of Yazd: "Yezd est une des villes les plus commerçantes de la Perse, non seulement par les produits de l'industrie des habitants, mais encore par sa situation, qui la rend l'entrepôt de toutes les marchandises de l'Inde. Elles y sont déposées par les caravanes d'Hérat et de Bokara." *Voyage en Perse fait dans les années 1807, 1808 et 1809*, vol. II, 97–8.

³⁸ "Mémoire descriptif de la route de Téhéran à Meched et de Meched à Yezd reconnue en 1807," 16.

silk and the production of various fabrics. According to Truilhier's estimation, their population numbered around thirty thousand individuals scattered throughout the villages of Yazd. Interestingly, contrary to expectation, he states that the Yazdi community recognized the head of the priests in Kerman as their *dastur dasturān*.³⁹

Dupré, serving as translator for Camille Trézel, visited Yazd in 1809. His account provides a much more detailed description of Yazd and its Zoroastrians than Truilhier's. The estimated number of Zoroastrians, predominantly residing in the villages surrounding Yazd, was around eight thousand individuals.⁴⁰ Dupré proceeded to list these villages, some of which still have a Zoroastrian population: Cham, Mobarake, Hosseini, Kenao (i.e., Kesnavieh), Nassir Abad, Khoramshah, Posht-e Khan Ali, Abrishon, Kheyr Abad, Taft, Mahriz Abad, Abshahi, Mohammad Abad, Chehr Abad, and Ahmad Abad.⁴¹

Dupré also noted that Zoroastrian attire was similar to that of other Iranians, with the distinction that their leader wore a turban tied around his hat. This leader, likely a lay figure, was appointed by the governor of Yazd.⁴² The Zoroastrians engaged in agriculture, petty trade, and various crafts. Dupré observed that their condition had deteriorated compared to the peace and prosperity they enjoyed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Due to violence and emigration, the population had dwindled, with many Zoroastrians relocating to the cities of Kerman and Yazd.⁴³ In contrast to the prosperous Parsis, Dupré characterized the Yazdis as oppressed and impoverished. In addition to the six thousand tumans they had to pay to the governor, they endured numerous other forms of mistreatment.⁴⁴

Of particular interest, Dupré recounted a visit by their delegation to the Zoroastrians of Kesnavieh village, where the Frenchmen were warmly welcomed with eagerness and affection. During their stay in Yazd, the community leader regularly visited the delegation, symbolizing his friendship by sending fruits and good quality wine each day.⁴⁵ Dupré, curious to learn more about the main fire temple near Yazd mentioned by Jean Chardin, noted that the temple—situated on a mountain eighteen leagues from Yazd—now lay in ruins. It was once the residence of the high priest, who, along with many others, had migrated to India during Dupré's time.⁴⁶

T. compensates for his lack of engagement with these French accounts by focusing on an unpublished Zoroastrian poem in Persian called *mas'ale-ye dīn* (Question of the Religion) (p. 257–60). This poem is one of the very few literary works produced by Zoroastrians themselves during the early Qajar period, providing insight into their situation. It tells of the encounter between Prince Mohammad Vali Mirza, the Qajar governor of Yazd from 1821 to 1828, and a Zoroastrian priest named Dastur Kaykhosro. The poem was composed in 1837 by poet Khodabakhsh Jamasb Yazdi.⁴⁷

The story begins when a group of fanatical Muslims slander the Zoroastrians in an audience with the governor. To verify the claims, the governor, aided by Muslim clerics, prepares thirty-three questions for Zoroastrian leaders on their beliefs and practices. The stakes are high, as the governor threatens to forcibly convert all Zoroastrians to Islam if they fail to convince him. However, a council of Zoroastrian priests successfully responds to the questions, leading the governor to abandon his conversion attempt. While the story provides historical information, it also represents a late example of an understudied genre of medieval

³⁹ Ibid., 17.

⁴⁰ *Voyage en Perse fait dans les années 1807, 1808 et 1809*, vol. II, 100–1. Note the significant discrepancy with Truilhier's estimation.

⁴¹ Ibid., 101.

⁴² Ibid., 101.

⁴³ Ibid., 102.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 102.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 103.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 104. Unlike Dupré, Drouville makes reference to an important fire temple in Yazd where the high priest of the Zoroastrians still resided. See his *Voyage en Perse faite en 1812 et 1813*, vol. II, 194.

⁴⁷ For a summary of this poem, see Sheffield, "Primary Sources: New Persian," 535–6.

Zoroastrian stories, similar to those found in the collection of Persian *Revāyāt*.⁴⁸ These stories often follow a recurring pattern: a Muslim ruler hears slander against Zoroastrians by ill-wishers and is tempted to either convert or kill them all, but the distressed Zoroastrians thwart the plot by persuading the ruler of their truthfulness and exposing the falsehood of their accusers.

The second section of chapter seven deals with the social-cultural life of Yazdi Zoroastrians on the eve of Manekji's arrival in 1854 (p. 261–94), which corresponds to the early years of Nasir al-Din Shah's long rule (r. 1848–1896). After the death of his father, the political-religious situation in Yazd became unstable. There were reports of resurgent insurgencies led by unruly individuals in Yazd, resulting in the increased harassment of Zoroastrians.⁴⁹ Concurrently, Yazd and its villages became a favored destination for Babi missionaries seeking to spread the teachings of Ali Mohammad Shirazi, the founder of the Babi movement. After briefly recounting these incidents (p. 261), T. proceeds to discuss the reformation efforts of Amir Kabir, the young king's chief minister, regarding religious minorities (p. 267–75).⁵⁰ He suggests that Amir Kabir held a special regard for Zoroastrians, possibly stemming from the religion's Iranian roots (p. 268). In this context, T. cites a series of official letters reflecting Amir Kabir and government officials' interest in managing the affairs of Yazdi Zoroastrians (p. 267–75). These documents indicate that the central authorities were both engaged with Zoroastrian elites and concerned with ensuring justice for them. The letters mention two prominent Zoroastrian officials, the *mobadān mobad* and the *kalāntar*, who represented the community's religious and non-religious leadership respectively. The government assigned fixed salaries for these positions, which were deducted from the poll-tax collected from Zoroastrians by the governor of Yazd.⁵¹ Influenced by the "heroic aura" surrounding Amir Kabir in Iranian historiography, T. contends that he had noble intentions to improve the conditions of marginalized Zoroastrians. However, these aspirations were hindered by the turmoil in Yazd and the central government's inability to enforce its policies on local authorities (p. 271, 275).⁵²

According to T., Yazdi Zoroastrians suffered from not only various Muslim pressures but also internal backwardness prior to Manekji's arrival (p. 275–6). One indication of this perceived backwardness was the supposed selfishness and ignorance of Yazdi priests, as well as the general lack of religious knowledge and internal unity within the community (p. 276–84). T. relies on the accounts of Manekji, Niels L. Westergaard, and Abraham V.W. Jackson to support his claim about priestly ignorance (p. 278–81).⁵³ European travelers have a long tradition of accusing Zoroastrians of ignorance, dating back to at least the seventeenth

⁴⁸ For example, see *The Story of Soltan Mahmud Ghaznavi* in Unvala, *Darab Hormazyar's Rivayat*, vol. II, 194–9. This story has been summarized in Stausberg, *Die Religion Zarathushtras*, vol. I, 363–4. Another example is *The Gossips of an Ignoble Person of Yazdi Zoroastrians before King Jahanshah* in Unvala, *Darab Hormazyar's Rivayat*, vol. II, 200–2 (for a very useful summary of this story in English, see Dhabhar, *The Persian Rivayats of Hormazyar Framarz*, 579–80). That Prince Mohammad Vali Mirza was hated by both the Zoroastrian and non-Zoroastrian residents of Yazd for his tyranny and extortion is attested in the account of a Scottish traveler to Iran in the years 1821 and 1822. See James B. Fraser, *Narrative of a Journey into Khorasan*, (appendix B), 22–24.

⁴⁹ For the vulnerability faced by Zoroastrians during interregnums, see Browne, *A Year amongst the Persians*, 370–1; Petermann, *Reisen im Orient*, vol. II, 204.

⁵⁰ His supposed regard for religious minorities had limitations, as certain religious groups—like the Babis—were not only excluded from this tolerance but, indeed, suffered greatly during his career.

⁵¹ According to Ferdinand Méchin (writing in 1867), the high priest received forty tumans as his salary from the Persian government. See *Lettres d'un voyageur en Perse, Djoulfa, Yesd, les Guèbres*, 11.

⁵² T. sees Amir Kabir as a precursor to Manekji in terms of improving the condition of Iranian Zoroastrians. See Tashakori, "Rüykarde-*e* hokūmat be zartoštiyān dar 'ahd nāšeri," 25–51.

⁵³ Regarding Niels L. Westergaard, T. does not extensively discuss his observations of the lives of Yazdi Zoroastrians in the 1840s, despite his harsh tone. Consequently, valuable information, such as what follows, remains overlooked: "A few only are merchants; the most part live poorly and wretchedly by tilling the ground, and other manual occupations... A few merchants travel now and then to Shiraz, Tehran, and Kashan; but their families remain at Yazd." See, "Extract from a Letter Addressed by Professor Westergaard to the Rev. Dr. Wilson," 349.

century.⁵⁴ The basis for these judgments by European scholars such as Westergaard, Jackson, and others before and after them lies in their limited definition of religious knowledge and their disappointment with contemporary Zoroastrian priests' inability to meet their expectations. Priests were expected to have a thorough understanding of the literal meaning of sacred texts, possess a large collection of ancient manuscripts, and present the doctrines of their religion in a concise and coherent manner. Manekji's occasional negative opinion of the Iranian community and its priesthood stems partly from the influence of these Western ideas on Parsi Zoroastrianism in the nineteenth century and partly from the historical divergences between Iranian and Parsi practices and beliefs.

II. Halfway to Emancipation

Manekji Limji Hataria and the "Emancipation" of Iranian Zoroastrians

The beginning of prosperity for Iranian Zoroastrians and their liberation from persecution is credited to the activities of one Parsi man: Manekji Limji Hataria. It would be pointless to deny the crucial role he and the wealthy Parsis behind him played in the modern history of the Iranian community. His efforts, followed by those of his successors, brought about significant structural changes within Iranian Zoroastrianism, both in terms of its internal governance and its relationship with Muslim Iranians. Consequently, T. dedicates the final three chapters of the first volume to him and his activities. However, a problem arises when attempting to lump together the previous 1300 years and describe it as a constant state of persecution and marginalization. This reconstruction overshadows the agency of Iranian Zoroastrians themselves in negotiating and interacting with Muslim officials and the laity throughout the centuries.⁵⁵ It also contradicts the undeniable fact of their survival, albeit in significantly reduced numbers, until Manekji's arrival.

After the last correspondence between Qadīmī Parsis and Yazdi Zoroastrians in 1773, interaction between the two communities did not come to a halt. Many Iranian Zoroastrians traveled or migrated to Bombay and Gujarat for various reasons. Some wealthy Parsis engaged in business with Iranian merchants and even supported the construction of temples in Yazd and its surrounding villages.⁵⁶

Alongside deep concerns over the escalating troubles faced by their co-religionists in Iran and encouragement from British officials (p. 297), the prospect of expanding their political and economic interests motivated some wealthy Parsis to institutionalize their philanthropic activities. Initially, they directed efforts towards Iranian migrants in Bombay and, later, towards Zoroastrians in Iran.⁵⁷ This led to the establishment of an organization called the Society for the Amelioration of the Conditions of the Zoroastrians in Persia (known among Iranians as Anjoman-e Akāber-e Parsiyan, The Noble Society of the Parsis) in 1853 (for the statute, see p. 300–10). Manekji was sent as an emissary to this institution, tasked with reporting on the condition of Iranians and alleviating their socio-economic difficulties using all available means. Prior to this mission, Manekji had already gained extensive travel and negotiation experience as a merchant (p. 311–14). He had also served as a financial assistant in British army expeditions to Afghanistan. Manekji arrived in Iran by sea in March

⁵⁴ See, for example, Jean Chardin's assertion of the ignorance of Zoroastrian priests in Firby, *European Travelers and Their Perceptions of Zoroastrians*, 63.

⁵⁵ In this context, James B. Fraser's account from the 1820s is noteworthy. He mentioned that the lay leader of the Yazdi Zoroastrians, Mollā Mazbānee (likely Marzbān), enjoyed a favorable reputation among Yazd's citizens. On one occasion, he was even able to successfully change the city's governor. See Fraser, *Narrative of a Journey into Khorāsān*, (appendix B), 22.

⁵⁶ For the continuity of the relationship between Iranians and Parsis after the conclusion of the Persian *Revāyāt*, see Stausberg, *Die Religion Zarathushtras*, vol. II, 153.

⁵⁷ To gain a better understanding of the Parsis' philanthropic activities in Iran and their underlying political-economic interests, see Patel, "Power and Philanthropy," 3.

1854, making his first stop in Bushehr (p. 315). In Shiraz, he encountered a group of fellow travelers who accompanied him to Yazd, including the German orientalist Julius H. Petermann.⁵⁸ Manekji spent most of his remaining life in Iran, primarily in Tehran, where he oversaw the campaign to improve the lives of Iranian Zoroastrians and represented them in the Qajar court. In a section of chapter eight titled “Manekji in Iran” (p. 295–405), T. examines Manekji’s extensive network, which encompassed not only state officials and foreign diplomats, but also secular intellectuals (such as Mirza Fath-Ali Akhundzadeh), Muslim theologians, Sufi leaders, and the founder of the emerging Baha’i faith, Mirza Hossein Ali Nouri (p. 337–49).

T. categorizes Manekji’s numerous activities into two groups: those focused on the internal reform of Zoroastrian communities (p. 349–87) and those aimed at enhancing their position within the wider Iranian society (p. 387–405). Regarding innovations in the community’s internal leadership, Manekji was responsible for establishing governing institutions known as *panchayats* in Kerman and Yazd, which were clearly influenced by the Parsi *panchayats*. He personally appointed members to these institutions, drawing from both priests and laity. According to T., these new institutions’ primary role was to communicate news from Kerman and Yazd to Manekji in Tehran and govern the internal affairs of the communities, both secular and religious (p. 349–58).

Manekji was also actively involved in the repair and construction of religious structures. In this regard, he built two new *dakhmes*, one in Yazd and another in Sharifabad. However, Yazdi priests saw these structures, built according to Parsi standards, as foreign and thus discouraged people from using them (p. 358–66). T. appropriately, though exceptionally, attributes this friction to the differing practices of Parsis and Iranians regarding *dakhmes*, rather than the alleged ignorance of the Iranian priesthood, as claimed by Manekji (p. 362–3). In addition to *dakhmes*, Manekji dedicated a portion of his efforts to repairing and constructing shrines and fire temples. Despite Zoroastrianism traditionally being a non-congregational religion, Manekji restored the fire temple in Yazd with the aim of transforming it into a place of Zoroastrian congregation (p. 367–68).⁵⁹

Manekji strongly criticized certain religious practices in Iran, particularly that of sacrificing cows at the shrine of Banu Pars near Yazd (p. 373–6). Having settled in Gujarat, the Parsis had ceased the practice of cow sacrifice, likely out of respect for Hindu beliefs. Given his Parsi background, Manekji would have found the mass sacrifice of cows deeply disturbing and made every effort to abolish this custom. While the Yazdis agreed to discontinue the specific practice of cow sacrifice at the Banu Pars shrine, they continued to sacrifice sheep and goats at this and other shrines.⁶⁰

Another aspect of Manekji’s activities was focused on improving the status of Zoroastrians in Iranian society and alleviating the many restrictive measures imposed on them. In pursuit of this goal, he sought to establish connections with Shia religious leaders and government officials (p. 393–405). The *jeziya* tax was seen as the most significant obstacle to the advancement of Zoroastrians, and its abolition in 1882, through a *farmān* issued by Nasir al-Din Shah, was the culmination of gradual lobbying and negotiation between all the parties concerned. This achievement can be attributed to Manekji’s efforts and the Parsis who supported him. Recognizing its importance, T. dedicates a separate chapter to this process, entitled “Manekji and the Abolition of *Jeziya*” (p. 407–90), in which he presents the correspondence between

⁵⁸ For the account of the encounter between Petermann and Manekji in Shiraz, see Petermann, *Reisen im Orient*, vol. II, 179. Petermann provides a valuable account of Yazdi Zoroastrians and Manekji’s initial arrival there (p. 203–10). It is worth noting that T. overlooks not only this account, but also several other European travelogues written during the reign of Nasir al-Din Shah, including works by Ferdinand Méchin, Arthur De Gobineau, Jakob E. Polak, Lady Sheil, Albert Houtum-Schindler, and many others.

⁵⁹ Petermann remarked: “*Da die Parsi [Iranian Zoroastrians] vor den Moslems in steter Furcht leben, so haben sie in Jesd [Yazd] keinen allgemeinen Ateschgah, Feuer temple, sondern jeder Hausvater hat in seinem Hause einen solchen, vor welchem er den Gottesdienst verrichte.*” *Reisen im Orient*, vol. II, 206.

⁶⁰ Boyce, *Zoroastrians: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*, 211.

Manekji, the Society for the Amelioration, Iranian central and provincial authorities, British ambassadors, and other European diplomats in Iran and abroad.

As is well-known, Manekji's activities were not universally accepted by all his contemporaries in Yazd. As mentioned in the case of the new *dakhmes*, he occasionally encountered resistance, particularly from some Yazdi priests (p. 494–95). T. suggests that such priests opposed Manekji out of fear of losing their dominant position in the community to the new secular elites he supported. This explanation assumes that priests had absolute control over Zoroastrian communities before Manekji's time. However, available evidence on pre-modern Zoroastrianism indicates a distinction, with occasional overlap, between religious and non-religious leadership. While priests were consulted on religious matters, the political, social, and economic leadership of the community rested with the affluent lay families.⁶¹ Considering this structure, Yazdi priests' opposition to Manekji and his *panchayats* can be seen as a reaction to his interference in the religious domain traditionally under their control.

Establishment of the Naseri Association of Yazdi Zoroastrians

While Manekji did initiate the establishment of *panchayats* in Yazd and Kerman, the outcome was not very successful. It was his successor, the second agent of the Society for the Amelioration, Kaykhosroji Khan-Saheb, who revived and transformed this governing body into a more effective institution in 1892.⁶² The newly named Naseri associations, in order to gain the goodwill of Nasir al-Din Shah, took on the task of Zoroastrian internal governance and representation to the outside world. In the first chapter of the second volume, titled "Kaykhosroji Khan-Saheb and the Establishment of Naseri Associations of Zoroastrians" (p. 7–32), T. presents the full statute of the Yazd *anjoman* (p. 11–19). These *anjomans* in Yazd, Kerman, and Tehran were a new institutional development for Iranian Zoroastrians, as they required written proceedings of meetings and the appointment of members by Parsi agents. The associations took control of all community affairs, both religious and secular. Although a prominent priest named Shahriyar held the position of head of the *anjoman*, the responsibility for answering religious questions fell on a lay scholar educated in Bombay, Master Khodabakhsh Bahram, who was a teacher at the Kaykhosravi school in Yazd. It was expected that difficulties would arise challenging this new institution's absolute authority. Similar to the case of Manekji, a group of Yazdi priests were the main opponents of the Naseri *anjoman* and Kaykhosroji, as they felt threatened by the *anjoman's* intervention in the religious sphere (p. 23–32). T., in his analysis of these conflicts, seems to favor the associations' perspective, portraying the Yazdi priesthood as backward and driven by a thirst for power and personal gain.

The second chapter, entitled "Activities of Naseri Association and the Social Life of Zoroastrians until the Constitutional Revolution" (p. 33–63), primarily focuses on the minutes of the Yazd association's yearly activities throughout the final years of Nasir al-Din Shah's reign and that of his son, Mozaffar al-Din Shah (r. 1896–1907). Although, in other parts of his work, T. occasionally discusses passages from Abraham V.W Jackson's travelogue and the memoir of Napier Malcolm—a British missionary whose catalog of Zoroastrian sufferings in Qajar Iran was often quoted by later scholars—one would hope for a more critical assessment of these two sources and their significance in reconstructing the social history of Yazdi Zoroastrians on the eve of the Constitutional Revolution.⁶³

⁶¹ For a similar social structure observed among a cohort of minority religions in the Middle East, see de Jong, "Spiritual Elite Communities in the Contemporary Middle East," 116–140.

⁶² It appears that some Iranian Zoroastrians claimed to be the masterminds behind the establishment of the new institution (p. 20).

⁶³ This becomes even more pressing when one learns that T. has undertaken the translation of Malcolm's memoir, *Five Years in a Persian Town* (1905), into Persian. See *Hāterāt-e Malcolm (pañḡ sāl dar yeki az šahrhā-ye irān)* (1394/2015).

Bahāism and Zoroastrians

The next chapter, “Zoroastrians and the Question of Conversion” (p. 65–113), delves into the topic of Zoroastrians converting to Islam, Christianity, and the emerging Bahai faith in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While treatment of the first two is rather brief, T. devotes closer attention to the interesting phenomenon of a relatively large number of Zoroastrian “converts” to Bahāism (p. 71–111).⁶⁴ Despite its historical connection to Shia Islam, Bahāism consciously separated itself in its early stages, claiming to possess a new universal message and fulfill the prophecies of major religions. Consequently, it managed to appeal to both Muslims and non-Muslims in Iran, especially Jews and Zoroastrians. The earliest instances of Yazdi Zoroastrians converting to Bahāism occurred in the 1880s, with the peak of conversions taking place between 1890 and 1920.⁶⁵ Scholars have expressed surprise at the relative success of the Bahai faith among Zoroastrians, offering various explanations. However, it is important to acknowledge that the study of interactions between Bahāism and Zoroastrianism remains heavily influenced by ideological perspectives, as many researchers who explore this subject are themselves adherents of the Bahai faith and often reproduce the Bahai self-perception of progressiveness and compatibility with modern life. In contrast, Zoroastrianism is frequently portrayed as an “old” religion incapable of adapting to modernity, with its priests blamed for its perceived backwardness. A vivid example of such an approach is found in the following statement from Susan Stiles Maneck, a scholar of both Bahāism and Zoroastrianism:

The despised and poor economic position of Jews and Zoroastrians did not cause their conversions. Rather, conversions occurred as conditions were greatly improving. With social and economic progress, new self-perceptions and ideologies were needed. When the old religion failed to keep pace with the changing circumstances, many embraced the religion that best allowed them to progress into the future while affirming their past with the least amount of dissonance.⁶⁶

The problem with T.’s treatment of this subject is precisely the opposite of celebrating Bahāism. His analysis is clearly polemical against the latter, as he perceives Bahāism in its early stages as a parasitic and syncretic religion (p. 78). When referring to Bahāism, T. frequently employs the problematic term *ferqeh* (sect) and portrays Bahai missionaries as opportunists (p. 73–83) who allegedly fabricated a Sasanian lineage for Baha’u’llah and wrote letters in pure Persian to appeal to Zoroastrian readers (p. 92–94). Furthermore, T. asserts that Bahais misinterpreted Zoroastrian eschatological figures in order to present Baha’u’llah as one of the future saviors (p. 84–91). According to T., the kindness and sympathy shown by Bahai leaders to Zoroastrians is merely evidence of their opportunistic strategy to win Zoroastrian hearts and souls (p. 94–96).

The Constitutional Revolution and Iranian Zoroastrians

The Constitutional Revolution, which took place roughly from 1906 to 1911, was one of the most important and earliest episodes of twentieth-century Iran. This event, it is often argued, had significant implications for religious minorities, particularly Zoroastrians, as they were given a political voice and nearly equal rights for the first time since the Muslim/Arab conquests. The Constitutional Revolution is also considered the first major political event in which Iranian Zoroastrians actively participated following the

⁶⁴ An investigation into the status of *Jadid al-Eslams* (new converts to Islam) with a Zoroastrian background would also have been desirable. On *Jadids*, see Stewart, *Voices from Zoroastrian Iran*, vol. I, 59–61.

⁶⁵ Momen, “The Bahā’ī Faith,” 514. Yazd and its villages were the scene of intensive Babi, and later Bahai, missionary activities in the 1880s, see Browne, *A Year amongst the Persians*, 367–8; 394–417.

⁶⁶ Maneck, “The Conversion of Religious Minorities to the Bahā’ī Faith in Iran,” 45.

emancipatory efforts of Manekji, who paved the way for their acquisition of both financial and social capital.⁶⁷

After a series of public protests involving diverse social, religious, and political groups, Mozaffar al-Din Shah issued a decree in August 1906 forming a national assembly (*majlis*). That same year, following the decree, the ailing king signed an early version of the constitution, which was later revised in 1907 under the title “Supplementary Constitutional Law.” The compilation of the constitution marked a significant milestone in Iranian history, as it limited the arbitrary power of the king and curtailed the authority of the Muslim clergy. Merchants, including some Zoroastrians, were active participants in these events, wielding influence through their financial support of the constitutionalists. Additionally, prominent Parsis in Bombay and London, along with their agent in Iran, Ardeshirji Reporter, also supported the cause of the constitution.

As a hybrid legal document resulting from complex negotiations between secular and religious forces in Iranian society, the Supplementary Law exhibits seemingly contradictory elements across its various articles. On the one hand, it declares Twelver Shi’ism as the state religion of the Persian Empire, granting supervisory powers to multiple clergy members in the legislative process. On the other hand, Article 8 establishes equal rights before the law for all Iranian citizens, a provision fiercely debated between constitutionalists and their opponents. This article, advocated for by influential figures such as prominent Zoroastrians, sparked intense controversy. In his extensive chapter titled “Constitutionalism and Zoroastrians” (p. 115–216), T. presents these controversies and explores the Shia clergies’ divergent opinions regarding Article 8, as it directly impacted the legal standing of Zoroastrians. He examines the perspectives of key figures such as Sheikh Fazlallah Nuri, a staunch opponent of equal rights for religious minorities, and Sheikh Ismail Mahallati, a cleric residing in Najaf who supported the constitution (p. 119–25).

As previously mentioned, several notable Zoroastrians, both Iranian and Parsi, wholeheartedly supported the movement, providing financial contributions and even shedding their blood. Among these individuals were Arbab Jamshid Jamshidian, members of the Jahanian family and their associates, Ardeshirji Reporter, and members of the newly revitalized Zoroastrian Association in Tehran, such as Arbab Kaykhosrow Shahrokh (p. 128–136). Farhang Mehr, writing in 1970, provided three main reasons for Zoroastrians’ extensive involvement in these events: the anti-despotic nature of Zoroastrianism, the love Zoroastrians had for their motherland, and the pressures imposed by the Qajars, which Zoroastrians hoped to alleviate through support for the constitution.⁶⁸

However, one may question whether these religious, nationalist, and intra-communal ideals were the sole motives for Zoroastrian participation. T. presents his own reasons for their involvement, including the opening of Iranian society to Western concepts of freedom and equality, which de-emphasized religion as a marker of identity. Additionally, Zoroastrians’ status as remnants of Iran’s glorious past, financial assistance from Parsis, and their efforts in mobilizing the Iranian Zoroastrian community played significant roles. Moreover, the emergence of new cultural and economic elites within the Zoroastrian community also contributed to their participation (p. 126–127).

Despite ambiguities around the representation of religious minorities in the first parliament, a seat was allocated to Arbab Jamshidian, a wealthy Yazdi merchant and banker residing in Tehran.⁶⁹ It should be noted, however, that he entered the *majlis* as a representative of the merchant class (*tojjārs*) rather than serving as the official representative of the

⁶⁷ Stausberg, “From Power to Powerlessness,” 179.

⁶⁸ *sahm-e zartosthiyān dar enqelāb-e mashrutiyat-e Iran*, 28–34.

⁶⁹ He was a successor to generations of Yazdi Zoroastrian merchants from the early modern and modern eras, with the most renowned nineteenth-century merchant-family being the Mehraban family. Surprisingly, T. completely overlooks the Mehraban family and the significant contributions of its members. For this family, see Boyce, “The Vitality of Zoroastrianism,” 15–20; Mohajer, Nasser and Kaveh Yazdani, “From Yazd to Bombay,” 1–25.

Zoroastrian community. This point is not emphasized enough by T. in his discussion of the subject (p. 139–42). The electoral law of the first *majlis* was based on representation by class and occupation, rather than religion.⁷⁰ It was only during the convening of the second *majlis* in 1909 that the electoral law was reformed, and seats were allocated to specific religious minorities.⁷¹ Arbab Kaykhosrow Shahrokh was elected as representative of the Zoroastrians, a position he held until his suspicious death in 1939.

Significant episodes involving Zoroastrians during this period included the murders of two prominent figures: Parviz Shahjahan, a notable merchant in Yazd and one of the founders of the Jahanian company, in February 1907 (p. 142–60); and Arbab Fereydon Khosrow Ahrestani, a representative of the same company in Tehran, in January 1908 (p. 160–81). Both individuals were highly active in financing the revolutionaries and even in smuggling guns to their camps. When recounting the events following Parviz's murder, T. presents the reports of the British consul in Yazd and the newspapers' coverage of the murder. He also mentions the unsuccessful appeals the Yazd *anjoman* made to Zoroastrian officials in Tehran, government officials, and the Yazd governor to apprehend the murderer and those behind the crime (p. 144–159). However, T. overlooks the role of Parsis in Bombay and London in exerting pressure on Iranian authorities to bring the murderer to justice.⁷²

The murder of Parviz's agent, Fereydon Khosrow, in Tehran a year later attracted even more attention, becoming a political test case in the implementation of the newly ratified Article 8. Khosrow's risky actions, providing the revolutionaries with guns and money, ultimately cost him his life (p. 160–61). His death, carried out by thugs associated with Mohammad Ali Shah (r. 1907–1909), sparked outrage among constitutionalists and the public, as evident in the burgeoning medium of newspapers, and there was unprecedented demand that the Muslim perpetrators be punished. Despite religious reservations, the wrongdoers were eventually sentenced to lashes and imprisonment, but not execution (p. 175–9). Given the prevailing standards of the time, this verdict was considered a measure of success, albeit one that enraged Muslim conservatives.

The new legal and political structures introduced from Tehran did not seamlessly integrate into the daily lives of Zoroastrians in Yazd and Kerman, where the majority of Iranian Zoroastrians resided. As a result, these communities and their leaders had to employ both old and new strategies to safeguard themselves against challenging circumstances. Throughout the Constitutional Revolution, Yazd and its surrounding villages experienced political upheaval, frequent changes in governance, and social unrest, which persisted until Reza Shah's centralization efforts (p. 184–204). It is often assumed that this atmosphere of uncertainty posed the greatest challenge to Zoroastrians, as evidenced by a collection of telegraphs and letters sent by the Yazd *anjoman* to Zoroastrian authorities in Tehran (Ardeshirji and Shahrokh). In these correspondences, they recount mob attacks and frequently request central authority intervention on their behalf (p. 195–204).

At the onset of and during the First World War, the social, economic, and political situation in Iran, and in Yazd specifically, deteriorated. Drawing on unpublished family documents owned by Kiyumars Vafadar, a member of the *anjoman* in Yazd, T. presents a bleak portrayal of the city (p. 212–15). These documents paint a grim picture of the profound impact of famine on Zoroastrians and the wider Iranian population. As a possible solution, many individuals considered temporary or permanent migration to Bombay in search of better opportunities.

⁷⁰ Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, 86, 100–101.

⁷¹ These religious minorities encompassed Jews, Zoroastrians, and Christians, specifically Armenian and Assyrian Christians, while excluding numerous others, including Mandaean, Bahais, and other religious groups that emerged after the advent of Islam.

⁷² On the role of Parsis in this event, see Patel, "Power and Philanthropy," 11–12.

The Sunset of the Parsi Nobles

From the outbreak of the First World War in 1914 to the demise of the Qajars in 1925, the internal situation of Yazdi Zoroastrians was characterized by various conflicts (p. 217). As previously mentioned, one consequence of the Constitutional Revolution was the allocation of a Zoroastrian seat in the parliament. This resulted in two representatives for Iranian Zoroastrians: the Zoroastrian deputy in the *majlis* and the agent of the Society for Amelioration, which was Ardeshirji Reporter at the time. This duality created confusion and discord around the community's leadership (p. 204–12); an uncertainty that also affected the Zoroastrian association in Yazd. Some members, referring to the first *anjoman* statute, considered Ardeshirji to be their representative, while others preferred Kaykhosrow Shahrokh. Drawing mainly on Kiyumars Vafadar's personal letters, who sided with Ardeshirji, T. discusses the rivalries within the *anjoman* and Yazdi community (p. 223). According to T., the murder of Master Khodabakhsh in 1917, a leading scholar of Zoroastrianism and prominent member of the *anjoman*, was the tragic outcome of these internal conflicts (p. 292–303).⁷³

T. explores the intricacies of these tensions in chapter five (“Intensification of Tensions in Naseri *Anjoman*: Murder of Master Khodabakhsh,” p. 217–303). He begins by discussing Yazdi priests' protests against the lenient approach of certain *anjoman* lay members—such as Master Khodabakhsh, Ostad Javanmard, Dinyar Kalantar, and others—regarding Bahai Zoroastrians: Zoroastrians who believed in both Bahaism and Zoroastrianism (p. 217–223). This disagreement resulted in serious friction. The priests refused to perform marriage and death ceremonies for Bahai Zoroastrians, but such were conducted in their absence and under the guidance of knowledgeable members of the laity. The tolerant stance of some *anjoman* lay members, who supported the inclusion of Bahai Zoroastrians, angered both the priests and some community members. As a result, the latter requested Shahrokh's permission to hold a new election in the hopes of gaining control over the Yazd *anjoman* (p. 232). On the other hand, some *anjoman* lay leaders, mainly teachers at Zoroastrian schools, argued the Parsi agent should have final say in the selection of *anjoman* members.

T. interprets the establishment of the Kankāsh-e Mowbedān-e Yazd (Council of the Priests of Yazd) in 1915 as a response to the conflict between priests and certain members of the Yazd association. The council can be seen as the priests' attempt to mobilize themselves in light of these tensions (p. 255–58). However, this new institution's stated objective was to address internal priestly matters and govern the community's religious life.⁷⁴ Since then, this council of priests has replaced the office of the high priest.

In the meantime, another action Ardeshirji and most association members supported further agitated the Yazdi priests. This involved the compilation and circulation of a set of family laws primarily inspired by Parsi family laws, but with minor adjustments to align with Iranian traditions (p. 258–67). The compilation was attributed to Dastur Khodāyār, the brother of the chief priest of Yazd, Dastur Nāmdār son of Shahriyār. Through this early attempt, Ardeshirji and *anjoman* members aimed to establish a written law applicable to all Zoroastrians, replacing the oral decisions traditionally issued by priests for each individual case.⁷⁵ Shortly after his initial approval, however, Dastur Nāmdār rejected the applicability of this compilation. His change of mind was seen as the result of Shahrokh's instigations while in Tehran and, due to this reversal, Ardeshirji removed Nāmdār from his position as the grand *dastur* of Yazd.

⁷³ T. implies that Shahrokh may have been involved in Khodabakhsh's murder (p. 298). This contrasts with Boyce's viewpoint, which contends that he was shot by a Muslim. Boyce, “The Vitality of Zoroastrianism,” 18.

⁷⁴ For a brief history of this institution, along with additional references, see Stewart, *Voices from Zoroastrian Iran*, vol. I, 67–73.

⁷⁵ This move can be seen as a prelude to a similar, yet more successful, attempt by Shahrokh to compile a Zoroastrian personal status law during the reign of Reza Shah (see below).

Ardeshirji's drastic measure in this case, coupled with his intervention in the Yazd *anjoman's* internal affairs by appointing certain members instead of allowing local people to elect them (p. 267), further deepened the rift between Ardeshirji and Shahrokh's supporters in Yazd. These escalating tensions led Ardeshirji to close the association's doors in 1917, with the assistance of the British vice-consul in Yazd (p. 285–292). As the Parsi agent, Ardeshirji considered the *anjoman* to be under his authority while, on the other hand, most of Shahrokh's supporters were advocating for elections. Eventually, with the backing of the central government and Shahrokh (p. 290–1), the majority faction succeeded in holding a new election, resulting in the *anjoman's* reopening that same year (p. 304–307). Despite the British vice-consul's initial hesitation, newly elected members were allowed access to the documents of the dissolved *anjoman* (p. 307–311).

These events contributed to a decline in prestige, in the eyes of the Yazdi community, for the Society for Amelioration and its agents (p. 330–346). Gradually, their influence became limited to supervising the Zoroastrian schools they funded. However, this did not signify a complete rupture in the connection between Iranians and Parsis, but rather a redefinition. Two newly established organizations based in Bombay—the Iranian Zoroastrian Anjoman (established in 1918, p. 314–320) and the Iran League (established in 1922)—replaced the old institution and played a pivotal role in the new phase of relations between Parsis and Iran in the early Pahlavi period. While still continuing the Society's agenda of supporting Iranian Zoroastrians through philanthropic activities, these two institutions also aspired to do more by directly engaging in the broader project of nationalism in Iran and serving as intermediaries in promoting economic and cultural ties between Iran and British India.⁷⁶

III. A Period of Dashed Hopes

Reza Shah, Iranian Nationalism, and the Social Condition of Yazdi Zoroastrians

In his story *Dāstān-e Jāvid* (The Story of Javid, published in 1980), Esmā'il Fasiḥ, a prominent twentieth-century Iranian novelist, subtly portrayed the emancipatory effect of Reza Shah's rise to power (r. 1925–1941) on the life of his young Zoroastrian protagonist, Javid. The political transformation brought about by Reza Shah enabled Javid to escape the torment and suffering he endured in the home of a corrupt Qajar prince in Tehran, ultimately allowing Javid to return to his peaceful homeland of Yazd. The notion of the Pahlavi era being emancipatory for Zoroastrians is not solely the creation of fictional literature; it finds support in scholarly works and is even championed by some Zoroastrians themselves.⁷⁷

The Pahlavi period, which emphasized glorifying Iran's ancient past and considered Zoroastrianism to be an integral part of that heritage, is often depicted as a period of respite and renewed hopes for Zoroastrians, albeit a relatively short-lived one. However, it is important to note that this assessment does not uniformly characterize the history of Iranian Zoroastrianism under the Pahlavis. Scholars such as Mary Boyce, despite acknowledging the general prosperity and relative equality experienced by Zoroastrians during Pahlavi rule, view the era's modernizing changes as detrimental to the integrity of the community.⁷⁸ According to this perspective, changes posed risks to the conservative state of Zoroastrianism preserved for centuries in the secluded villages of Yazd and Kerman.⁷⁹ Thus, secular modernity, which became more pronounced under Pahlavi governance, was

⁷⁶ For the history of the Iran League, see Patel, "Caught between Two Nationalisms," 764–800. For the life and activities of Dinshah J. Irani, one of the founding members of both institutions, see Marashi, "Patron and Patriot," 185–206.

⁷⁷ The perfect example is Oshidari's book, *tārikh-e pahlavi va zartoshtiyān*.

⁷⁸ For example, see Boyce, *Zoroastrianism: Its Antiquity and Constant Vigour*, 184.

⁷⁹ Despite these transformative changes, Mary Boyce observed that the orthodox way of life was still evident in Sharifabad and a few other Zoroastrian villages in the 1960s and 1970s. See Boyce, *A Persian Stronghold of Zoroastrianism*.

seen as both a serious challenge and blessing.⁸⁰ While the positive portrayal of the Pahlavi period may occasionally suffer from exaggeration, presenting it as an extraordinary chapter in the history of Zoroastrians since the fall of the Sasanians, the ambivalent assessment of this period reflects a recognition of irreparable losses, with purportedly essential elements of Zoroastrian life disappearing forever.⁸¹

Avoiding all these discussions, T. begins his third volume with a cursory survey of the growing nationalism of interwar Iran and the consequences of this state policy on the elevation of Zoroastrians' social position within Iranian society ("Nationalism during the Rule of Reza Shah and the Elevation in the Prestige of Zoroastrians," p. 7–57). In the same chapter, T. shifts his attention to the revived relationship between Parsis and Iran under Reza Shah (p. 27–51). According to T., Parsi prominence in India and their activities in Iran was a factor in elevating Zoroastrians' social status (p. 27–28). This time, the Iran League and the Iranian Zoroastrian Anjoman of Bombay were the main intermediaries, with relations primarily centered on Parsi engagement in Iran's cultural and economic affairs, even resurrecting the idea of a "return" to Iran. In the cultural sphere, Parsis continued building schools in Yazd, Kerman, and Tehran that accommodated both Zoroastrian and other students (p. 29–32). These Parsi institutions also sponsored the publication and circulation of books on ancient Iran and Zoroastrianism in Iran (p. 32).⁸²

In the economic domain, however, Parsi attempts are often characterized as failures. Parsi investment plans covered several sectors, including the Iranian oil industry, commercial agriculture, the trans-Iranian railway, and the textile industry. Regarding the oil industry, T. asserts that Parsis appealed for jobs with the oil company several times, citing a letter from the Iran League to Reza Shah as evidence (p. 38–42). However, the letter primarily concerns a request to facilitate Parsi repatriation to Iran rather than a specific demand for employment in the oil industry. T. suggests that Reza Shah rejected these appeals due to his suspicion of a British plot behind such Parsi insistence on accessing this sensitive sector (p. 42).

In terms of industrialized agriculture, the Parsis directed their attention to Khuzestan province, known for its abundant water resources and strategic location.⁸³ T. presents some documents demonstrating early Yazdi Zoroastrian efforts to acquire land and establish a trade company in Khuzestan in 1927 (p. 42–44). Then, he discusses Parsi attempts to settle there, citing a letter from the Iranian Zoroastrian Anjoman in Bombay to the Central Department of Agriculture in Iran in 1937 (p. 45–46). However, this letter primarily indicates the Parsi intention to assist drought-stricken Yazdi Zoroastrian peasants settling in Khuzestan, rather than establishing a Parsi colony. Like other sectors, T. asserts that the outcome was unsuccessful. To explain this setback, he again points to Reza Shah's supposed anxiety over the formation of a colony of British subjects in Khuzestan (p. 47). However, the Parsis' failure to realize their economic plans in Iran should also be seen through the lens of their own hesitation, rather than solely the result of Iranian state suspicions.⁸⁴

An important legal development occurred with the passage of a law in 1933, which granted Zoroastrians (alongside other recognized religious minorities) the right to apply their own religious regulations in matters of marriage, inheritance, and adoption (pp. 51–56). This law became necessary when the state introduced a new legal structure that encompassed a civil law applicable to all Iranians, regardless of their religion. Despite its secular claims, the final civil law was still influenced by Islamic law, particularly

⁸⁰ For the dynamic between assimilation into modernity and maintaining a distinct identity among Tehrani Zoroastrians in the 1970s, see Kestenberg Amighi, *The Zoroastrians of Iran: Conversion, Assimilation, or Persistence*.

⁸¹ Two notable examples of lost "essential" features are the traditions of exposing corpses in *dakhmes* and adhering to an independent religious calendar. See Boyce, *Zoroastrians: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*, 220–22.

⁸² The patronage of Ebrahim Pourdavoud in his translation of Avestan texts into Modern Persian was the most fruitful of such activities. See Marashi, "Parsi Textual Philanthropy," 125–42.

⁸³ Marashi, "Rich Fields in Persia," 76–8.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 61–83, for further exploration of these Parsi uncertainties and hesitations.

in family matters (p. 51). For religious minority deputies like Shahrokh, this meant the imposition of Islamic laws on them. In response, the state did not enforce its personal status codes on non-Muslims, but instead allowed religious minorities to adhere to their own laws in their internal affairs. However, the state now required written regulations to be endorsed in order to apply them in state courts. The responsibility of producing this legal document for Zoroastrians fell upon Shahrokh himself. In his memoir, he describes the process leading to the compilation of the document.⁸⁵ After intense discussions with state officials regarding certain articles, the Zoroastrian law code was finally endorsed.⁸⁶

In the following chapter titled “Social Life of Zoroastrians in Yazd during the Rule of Reza Shah” (pp. 59-93), T. focuses once again on the Zoroastrian community in Yazd. The chapter is organized thematically, with relevant documents presented under each theme. The first theme explores the migration attempts of Zoroastrians from drought-stricken Yazd during the late Qajar period. T. cites documents that highlight the challenges faced by Zoroastrians attempting to migrate or travel to Bombay, as the late Qajar state imposed stricter border controls and restrictions on overseas migrations (pp. 61-65). As an alternative, many Zoroastrians migrated to Yazd city, while the wealthier individuals chose to settle in Tehran. The next section discusses a form of social discrimination faced by Yazdi Zoroastrians, which was the prohibition of riding donkeys and mules on the streets. T. cites correspondences between the Yazd *anjoman* and relevant authorities in their efforts to have this restriction lifted, a few years prior to Reza Shah’s ascension to the throne. These letters reveal the reluctance of Yazd governors and the Muslim population to acknowledge this right (pp. 65-79). The abolition of distinct dress codes for Zoroastrians was a less challenging achievement. Dress reforms were implemented from the center, forcefully applied, and effectively blurred the differences between Zoroastrians and Muslims in their attire, without requiring any active effort from the Zoroastrians themselves (pp. 79-80).

The subsequent section delves into the problems faced by Yazdi Zoroastrians when seeking resolution for their internal disputes through Muslim courts prior to the ratification of the personal status law. The documents demonstrate that occasional litigation between Zoroastrian parties was resolved by Muslim judges applying Islamic laws. To avoid such situations, members of the Yazd *anjoman* often reminded Shahrokh about the necessity of a codified and officially approved Zoroastrian family law (pp. 81-86). The limits of the perceived “emancipatory” developments in the early Pahlavi period are revealed through documents that shed light on the continuing abduction of young Zoroastrian girls, their forced conversion, and marriage to Muslim men (pp. 86-92).

Second Pahlavi, Modernization, Urbanization, and Tehran as the New Center

The rule of Mohammad Reza Shah (r. 1941-1979) is marked by a series of social, cultural, and economic changes in Iranian society, which inevitably had an impact on Yazdi Zoroastrians as well. Chapter three, titled “Second Pahlavi and the Expansion of Modernity in Iran” (pp. 95-130), serves as an introductory chapter that outlines one of the main phenomena of this period: urbanization and the decline of village life, particularly from the 1950s and 1960s onwards. For Zoroastrians, this transition resulted in a transformation from predominantly rural communities in Yazd and Kerman villages at the beginning of the Shah’s rule (reliant on agriculture, trade, and weaving) to urban middle-class citizens residing in major cities across Iran during the later decades of his reign. T. commences this chapter with a section on the overall condition of Iranian villages prior to the land reforms of the 1960s and the prevailing unequal relationships between landlords and peasants (pp. 97-104). The land reform aimed to disrupt these imbalanced dynamics and succeeded in diminishing

⁸⁵ Shahrokh and Writer, *The Memoirs of Keikhosrow Shahrokh*, 30-32.

⁸⁶ These regulations, with some amendments, remain the foundation of the current Zoroastrian Personal Status law in the Islamic Republic, see Stewart, *Voices from Zoroastrian Iran*, vol. I, 80-1; 399-410.

the power of landlords, although it did not fully accomplish all its intended objectives. While the initial purpose was to revitalize rural areas, it ultimately led to the abandonment of villages and mass migration of young villagers to urban centers (pp. 106-111). By focusing on Yazd, T. provides insights into what rural life looked like in the Yazdi plain before the reforms and how modern urban elements gradually permeated the city of Yazd (pp. 111-129).

Chapter four, entitled “Structure and Social Questions of Zoroastrians during the Second Pahlavi” (p. 131-196), examines specific social issues Iranian Zoroastrians faced during this period. Among the various topics, T. focuses on two key questions: the migration of Zoroastrians from rural villages to urban areas and the decline in the Zoroastrian priesthood’s prestige.⁸⁷ The chapter begins by presenting demographic information on the distribution of Zoroastrians in the Yazdi plain based on various census data from the 1960s and 1970s collected by local *anjomans* and Michael Fischer, an American anthropologist who conducted fieldwork in Yazd from 1970 to 1972 (p. 131-143). These statistics clearly indicate a consistent increase in the rate of migration from Yazdi villages, with the rapidly growing city of Tehran as the most appealing destination. Starting from the 1960s, Tehran surpassed Yazd and its villages as the area with the largest number of Zoroastrians in Iran.

After presenting the demographic statistics, T. turns to the topic of Zoroastrian migration to urban centers (p. 144-180). Drawing on reports published by the Tehran-based community magazine *Hukht*, he describes the dire conditions of Yazdi Zoroastrian villagers prior to land reforms (p. 144-153). T. also discusses various “fruitless” initiatives, primarily organized by the Tehran Zoroastrian Association, aimed at alleviating the villagers’ economic hardships (p. 158-172). One well-documented case is the revival of earlier plans to settle a group of Yazdi farmers in Khuzestan in the 1950s (p. 163-169).⁸⁸ Additionally, T. dedicates a section to describing the changes in the Zoroastrian district of Yazd city, which was depopulated of former residents and repopulated by villagers (p. 175-179). While he frequently mentions villager migrations to Yazd and Tehran, T. does not explore migration to other urban centers in Iran, such as Isfahan, Shiraz, Ahvaz, Zahedan, etc. The case of Ahvaz is occasionally mentioned throughout the third volume but presented as a failed Parsi-Iranian Zoroastrian plan, despite the settlement of a group of mainly Yazdi Zoroastrians there since the early Pahlavi period.⁸⁹

The advent of modernity is widely regarded as the primary cause for the scarcity of Zoroastrian priests and decline in their social status in Iran, a position traditionally inherited by male members of priestly families. T. also supports this viewpoint (p. 180-184), but does not provide precise demographic information on Yazdi priests. Additionally, one would expect more evidence showcasing Iranian Zoroastrians’ criticism of the institution during this period.

The final three chapters primarily focus on the Yazd association’s internal affairs and the election procedures for the Zoroastrian deputy during the reign of the second Pahlavi shah. It is worth noting that T. astutely recognizes the broader social changes affecting Yazdi Zoroastrians through developments within the *anjoman* and parliamentary elections. Chapter five, titled “Anjoman of Zoroastrians of Yazd during the Chairmanship of Sohrab Kianian” (p. 197-255), provides a comprehensive overview of the *anjoman*’s history until the death of Sohrab Kianian in 1958. As a prominent lay landlord and community leader,

⁸⁷ This selection omits other socio-religious issues Iranian (and Yazdi) Zoroastrians faced during this period, including the status of women, the establishment of youth associations, controversies surrounding burials, and matters related to the religious calendar.

⁸⁸ In this context, T. presents a collection of valuable unpublished materials, including an encouraging letter from the Ahvazi Zoroastrian Association to the Tehran association in the 1950s. Regarding the history of the Ahvazi community, see Stewart, *Voices from Zoroastrian Iran*, vol. I, 298-322.

⁸⁹ On conducting interviews with members of the contemporary Zoroastrian communities of Ahvaz, Shiraz, and Isfahan, as well as exploring the historical background of each community, see Stewart, *Voices from Zoroastrian Iran*, vol. I, 298-352.

Kianian played a pivotal role in compiling new *anjoman* regulations in the post-war era and ensuring its legal registration with the state registry office. A careful examination of the new rules (presented in full by T. on p. 199–203) reveals the institution's responsibilities as the custodian of community funds, religious sites, and philanthropic activities. Another significant development during Kianian's tenure was the establishment and legal registration of Zoroastrian *anjomans* in the villages and districts surrounding Yazd (p. 204). These institutions enjoyed a semi-autonomous status vis-à-vis the city's main *anjoman*. Detailed information is also provided on the elections of Zoroastrian deputies held in Yazd until 1958 (p. 226–53). These elections were overseen by a Yazdi Zoroastrian supervisory council, typically led by Sohrab Kianian himself, and consistently resulted in the election of Arbab Rostam Giv, a Yazdi merchant and philanthropist residing in Tehran, without any significant challengers.

The next chapter, entitled "Anjoman of Zoroastrians of Yazd during the Chairmanship of Fereydon Kianian" (p. 257–299), follows a similar structure, presenting the proceedings of various elections of *anjoman* members until 1969 (p. 258–283). This is followed by documentation of the elections of Zoroastrian deputies until 1972 (p. 284–290). Following Sohrab Kianian's passing, members confirmed one of his sons, Fereydon, as the association's head. During the association's forty-ninth session in 1964, the third national congress of Zoroastrians took place in Yazd. T. dedicates a substantial section to this event, providing a detailed account of the meetings (p. 261–276). The organization of these nationwide congresses was a new phenomenon that began in the early 1960s, with the first and second rounds being held in Tehran and Kerman respectively. During these congresses, the agendas put forward by various Zoroastrian institutions reflected the socio-religious issues prevalent within the Iranian Zoroastrian community at the time. Following Rostam Giv's decision not to nominate himself for parliamentary elections in 1961, Esfandiyar Yeganegi—a man credited with introducing modern irrigation methods to Iran—was the proposed candidate, with the clear support of the Tehran *anjoman*. Like his predecessors, Yeganegi was elected for successive terms until his death in September 1972, with three years remaining in his tenure.

According to T., a disagreement arose between community leaders in Tehran around the nomination of Esfandiyar Yeganegi's successor (p. 297–299). As opposed to previous instances of a single candidate being unanimously proposed by the Tehran *anjoman*, members were divided between Bozarjemehr Mehr and Fereydon Varjavand this time. T. provides an overview of Farhang Mehr's political career as the influential head of the Tehran *anjoman* and brother of Bozarjemehr. The election is contextualized within the Tehran *anjoman*'s increasing integration into Iran's broader political climate (p. 290–296). Bozarjemehr, supported by his brother, represented the emerging urban middle-class Zoroastrians, while Varjavand was considered aligned with traditional community elites (p. 307).

The election was competitive, but Mehr ultimately stood as the winner. Like in Tehran, he also gained the upper hand in Yazd. In this election, T. observes signs of the increasing tension within the Yazdi community between traditional elites from Mahale (the Zoroastrian district in Yazd), led by the Kianian family (supporting Varjavand), and the more recent city-dwellers (supporting Mehr) (p. 307–312). The culmination of this tension occurred in the same year in the establishment and official registration of a new organization, The Central Anjoman of Zoroastrians of Yazd Province, primarily led by the new urban class (p. 312). This coincided with Yazd's administrative promotion to a provincial capital. As in previous instances, T. includes the new institution's entire statute in the final chapter ("The Central Anjoman of Zoroastrians of Yazd Province: the Supremacy of Village-Born City Dwellers," p. 301–341). The remaining portion of the chapter presents documents and correspondences showing the efforts of the leaders of this new association to surpass the old association (p. 325–341). A brief conclusion summarizes arguments already elaborated on in the preceding chapters of the volumes (p. 343–346).

Tashakori's meticulous attention to detail throughout the three volumes is commendable, but comes at a cost. The book is filled with unnecessary details and digressions. As a result,

the reader may occasionally wonder what the book's main argument is. While the work offers valuable insights and suggestions, some arguments lack rigorous source criticism and there are moments where deeper engagement with primary and secondary sources is needed. However, the work's strength lies in its presentation of unpublished documents, particularly concerning modern Zoroastrians. This feature places it on par with other notable Persian works on the history of later Zoroastrians, such as Touraj Amini's *Documents Pertaining to the Contemporary Zoroastrians of Iran* (1380/2001) and Jamshid Soroush Soroushian's *The History of Kermani Zoroastrians during These Few Centuries* (1370/1991). For this reason alone, it is a welcome addition to the collection of anyone interested in the later history of Zoroastrianism in Iran.

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