

Zoroastrian Heresies -- Variations on the Basic Theme Which Weren't Acceptable

A. Zurvan -- "Time"

1. Dominant form of Zoroastrianism at the Sassanian Court 224-642 AD. Died out after the Islamic conquest of Persia.
2. Time was seen as source of all things -- therefore it was the origin of the opposed "Twin Spirits" of Ahura Mazda and Angra Mainyu

i.e. This was an attempt to get around the Dualism of classic Zoroastrianism's formulation of the human predicament, a response to a felt need for an ultimate unity at the root of things
3. Heretical elements -- Differences from classic Zoroastrian formulation
 - a. As 'time' controls all --- humans don't have free will
 - b. Ahura Mazda was not the only spirit worthy of worship
 - c. Good and evil not absolute cosmological opposites

B. Manichaeism

1. Origin -- the prophet Mani 216-277 AD. Brought up in Zoroastrian Persia but in a household strongly influenced by Gnosticism
2. Geographical extent. Centered in NE Iran until the 16th century, when it disappears. During 4th century, popular in late Roman Empire and spreading throughout central Asia. Elements of Manichaeism present in Cathars of Medieval Southern France.
3. Saw his religion as a reconciling of Christianity, Zoroastrianism and Buddhism
4. Non-Zoroastrian Teachings
 - a. Matter is evil, spirit is good (substitutes matter-spirit dualism for good-evil dualism of classical Zoroastrianism)
 - b. Advocated asceticism and celibacy (Practical outgrowth of matter-spirit dualism)

5. Teaching of classical Zoroastrianism accepted in Manichaeism
 - a. Heaven and Hell
 - b. Individual judgment
 - c. Life after death
 - d. God-Satan dualism
 - e. “Bundahishn” The concepts of history and of creation

C. Mazdakism

1. A radical popular movement of the 5-6th century AD
2. Primary known tenants: the abolition of private property, hierarchical social organization and marriage
3. Suppressed by Zoroastrian priesthood and civil government

Present Day Zoroastrian Customs -- Held by Parsees of Northwest India

1. Moral stance and liturgical life
 - A. Asceticism and fasting rejected as contrary to human nature
 - B. Use of angelic beings as a means to approach the primary god (Semi-divine intermediary spirits)
 - C. Religious Ceremonies which correspond to and mark the beginning of important stages of life

Example: “Naujote” (In Iran, “Sedrepushan) The ceremony initiation into adult life.

This takes place among the Parsees at age 9 or 11 (Even numbers are unlucky). The essence of the ceremony is the dressing of the young person in the clothing symbolic of adult life.

1. The sacred shirt (sudrel)-- symbol of the ‘armor of faith’ in war against evil. This is a white cotton shirt with a purse at its V-Neck symbolizing the duty of storing up righteousness

2. The sacred cord or belt (Kusti) Is to be tied around the waste to the accompaniment of prayers three times a day.

Before this ceremony the child is not seen as morally responsible. After the ceremony, all thoughts, deeds, actions and words are weighed in the final judgment. The ceremony is the same for men and women.

Gahambars -- Six Seasonal Festivals of the Zoroastrian Religious Year

1. Each festival is in honor of an “Amesha Spenta,” or guardian spirit of one of the seven basic aspects of creation. (The New’s Year Day Festival, for some reason thought of in a category by itself, honors the final Amesha Spenta, fire or ‘Asha’)

2. Table of Amesha Spenta names and element of creation they symbolize and guard

Amesha Spenta’s Name	Translation	Element they guard and symbolize
Ahura Mazda	Wise Lord	Humanity
Vohu Mainyu	Good Purpose	Cattle
Asha	Righteousness	Fire
Khshathra	Power, Kingdom	Sky
Armaiti	Devotion	Earth
Hausvatat	Health	The Waters
Ameretat	Immortality	Plants

Each of these spirits has its own particular festival. Basic structures of all festivals are similar: the Yasna sacrifice in the morning followed by feasting and alms giving in the afternoon.