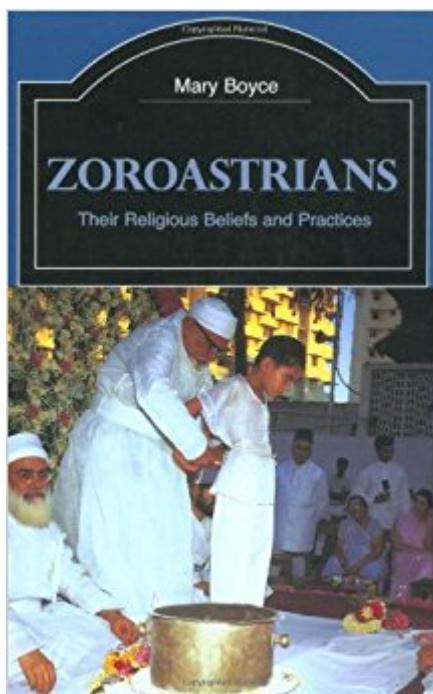


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# Zoroastrians: Their Religious Beliefs And Practices (The Library Of Religious Beliefs And Practices)



## Synopsis

This book traces the continuous history of the faith from the time it was preached by Zoroaster down to the present day - a span of about 3,500 years. First taught among nomads on the Asian steppes, Zoroastrianism became the state religion of the three great Iranian empires and had a remarkable influence on other world faiths: to the east on northern Buddhism, to the west on Judaism, Christianity and Islam. With the conquest of Iran by the Muslim Arabs, Zoroastrianism lost its secular power, but continued to survive as a minority faith. Despite its antiquity, it remains a living religion.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This is an incredible book about the history and development of the Zoroastrian religion from ancient times to the present. However, it is not simply an explanation of Beliefs and Practices. If you are unfamiliar with Zoroastrianism I suggest you read Nigosian's book The Zoroastrian Faith first and then read this one. Boyce's book is the clearest and most well researched work on Zoroastrian religion and is a must for all interested in the relative subject matter.

Goldilocks would like this book. It is perfect for the average reader as far as length, depth, and width of coverage of this topic. Not too deep and not too shallow but just right! In addition to general features of Zoroastrianism it also has a large amount of information on ancient Persia as well as

particularly strong emphasis on the usually neglected Parthian and Sasanian cultures. The coverage of the Parsis in the Indian subcontinent is also very well done. Highly recommended for the general reader who wants an accessible overall view of Zoroastrianism.

The student of religions has few options when it comes to Zoroastrianism. Its scriptures have not been translated into English in over a century and there are vanishingly few scholars capable of dealing with the extreme philological and historical challenges of understanding and translating the material. Thank heavens that of the few books we have, Boyce's book is among them. Flawed though it may be, it is an invaluable overview of the history of Zoroastrianism from the time of its founder to the present day. Boyce did possess ample expertise to motivate and present the history and doctrines of Zoroastrianism in plentiful detail. Too plentiful, in fact, for the tastes of this reader, and I have a large appetite for dry academic material. Even so, plowing through this relentless presentation of technical terms, unfamiliar names, and obscure dynasties and languages was a daunting challenge, even at a short 200 pages. For all Boyce's lavish attention to detail she presents a surprisingly one-sided picture of Zoroastrianism. You would never know reading this book that the historicity of Zarathustra has been challenged repeatedly, or that opinions are sharply divided on whether or not Darius and his successors were Zoroastrians. Boyce has arrived at her conclusions and that is what you get. Her commitment to this interpretation goes too far at times and compromises her scholarly objectivity, as when she refers to the Zurvanites as betrayers of Zarathustra's doctrine and a "deep and grievous heresy". Such ideas simply do not have a place in academic scholarship. If we are to have too few books on Zoroastrianism in English, I am glad this one errs on the side of too much detail and minutiae. This book is the account of a scholar with very deep knowledge indeed, and I am glad for it, flaws and all.

As a fellow Parsee and Zarathusti, I am very glad to have found this book!! It provided be incredible insights into my religion's ~2500 year old history. Thanks to this book, I have truly rediscovered my faith. Boyce has done a terrific job!! She was an authority figure for her knowledge regarding the Zoroastrianism faith. I wish it were possible to thank her today for her tremendous contributions!! I recommend this book to all enthusiasts...

The books focuses a lot on the history of Zoroastrian beliefs and practices. It's not so much a thorough dissertation of Zoroaster's original teachings. This isn't a book if you're interested in something that focuses on the life and teachings of Zoroaster (a.k.a. Zarathustra), himself.

This is a book about what is said to be the forefather of our great religions, founded by the prophet Zoroaster in very early civilized man. It would be commonly associated with fire worshipers as you would find sacred fires as places of worship. In simple form the fire was to the early man where you gathered for warmth, cooking and where humanity came together. While today the fire may be a symbol of the faith, in its beginning it was much more a practice to bring people together. Zoroaster believed there was a separation of good and evil at creation. How subsequent tenants of this concept transitioned from lessons around a fire to a doctrine still practiced 4000 years later begins with song. Have you ever had a song stuck in your head and you couldn't get it out? Well it was the Prophet Zoroaster who brought what is believed to be the world's first religion to humanity through song. In a land where writing had yet to be invented, Zoroaster would have his priests commit to memory the Gatha in song, later to be written down. This book is an academic account of the tenants of Zoroastrianism from its roots through all its evolutionary changes. With a sense of an archeological dig, the reader becomes aware of not only how the world affected Zoroastrianism but also how this ancient faith in turn influenced the Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, Christian, and Muslim religions. This religion is still alive in corners of the world with strong holds in Tehran, Iran and Bombay, India. In a chronological format the author begins with an overview of the tenets of Zoroaster in the beginning and then pulls them through history capturing the ebb and flow of humanity, giving the reader a sense of before, after and most important the present day pictures of life as a Zoroastrian. I found myself focused on the travesty brought on to this religion by Islam and therefore spend a bit of time dwelling on its relevant bearing on us today. In the early sections of the book the reader will be introduced to many new terms which may slow down the reading process with words that have no resemblance of English. That is because they are not even close to English sounding words. However spending time to get the cadence and meaning fluent in your mind will make the rest of the book more enjoyable and meaningful. Of the many, the following terms are critical in terms of understanding and enjoying the book:<sup>\*</sup> Ahura Mazda - Ormzad, lord of wisdom who Zoroaster saw as God<sup>\*</sup> Gathas are the hymns composed by Zoroaster which contain the basic doctrine that was committed to memory by his followers<sup>\*</sup> Zend Avesta the sacred book of Zoroastrianism<sup>\*</sup> Vendidad is a book read at night of the Avesta containing the code against demons.<sup>\*</sup> Dakhma - is the funeral practice of placing the dead body on a high platform for the vultures to eat the flesh. When there were only bones they would be collected and placed in an ossuary. This was out of respect for the earth as they believed the body would contaminate the pure earth.<sup>\*</sup> Spenta - is an adjective which characterizes the good creation, possessing power to aid.<sup>\*</sup>

The Doctrine of Three Times - Creation, Mixture, Separation - makes history in a sense cyclical, with the world restored in the third time to the perfection it possessed in the first one. Meanwhile all the sorrows and strivings of the present time of Mixture as part of the battle against Angra Mainyu (evil). Thus Zoroaster not only saw a noble purpose for humanity, but also offered men a reasoned explanation for what they have to endure in this life.\* Yasna - is the act of worship. It is the main Zoroastrian service\* 7 Amahragpands - the seven creations are the first being Ahura Mazda and the six lesser beings forming the heptad with Ahura Mazda himself the six are: o Vohu Manah - Good Purpose o Asha Vahishta - Best Righteousness o Spenta Armaitiurvatat - Holy Devotion o Khshathra Vairy - Desirable Dominion o Haurvatat - Health o Ameretat - Long Life\* Saoshyant - is the one who will bring benefit; and it is he who will lead humanity in the last battle against evil. (saviour) If one were to distill all the coda into a practical statement on the merits of Zoroastrianism you could say that Wisdom to see things as they actually are, where Justice is the result of making choices in alignment with reality, and Lying being the fraudulent representation of reality. However history and humanity collude to blur this message. The 21st Century view of Zoroaster's original tenant must be viewed through a kollidescope and thus provides reasons for debate. You could begin with the lack of the written word, using only the treasures of archeology as only clues to the testament of what was preached left in the symbols found in art. You must also contend with the evolving languages brought on by conquest, dominion and merging of one ruler over another. The effects are found in conquest and merging of cultures where a King could impose an interpretation of preceding doctrine thus imposing a schism in Zoroastrianism similar to what is found between Protestants, Catholics, and Lutherans in our western world. Since Zoroaster came before the split of the Indo-Iranian culture many of the tenants developed in the beginning had a significant influence over the beliefs, doctrine, and practices, of both the Hindu and the Buddhist people. Against the backdrop of geography and time, we all know that within one language the story takes on at least different colors and many times evokes completely new paths of thought. The next few paragraphs are dedicated to the train to modern day Zoroastrianism. Avestan was the language Zoroaster used in the beginning. This is found in his original Gathas as they were written down long after his death. Pahlavi was the language in the time of the Persian Kings. Sanskrit, albeit equally as old as or older than Pahlavi is the language of India, found it was in prominent doctrine through immigration. The Indo-Iranian split occurred well before Islam, however when Islam forced Zoroastrianism to take refuge in Bombay, translation from both Avestan and Pahlavi to Sanskrit took on a prominent influence in how we see the Zoroastrian Doctrine today. With regard to critical deviations from its origins one could look at the Zurvanite split as the most prominent. This occurred under the Achaemenians times of Cyrus,

Darius, and Xerxes. The Avestan word 'zurvan' means 'time' and in a few of the younger Avesta it was used as the name of a minor divinity, hypostatizing time. The usage appears to be a very limited concession to Zurvanites who had come to believe that Time, Zurvan, did not merely provide the framework for events but was actually in control of them, hence a sentient being. While this would be considered heresy to Zoroastrians it ended up under the rule of the King of kings as being a sect of Zoroastrianism. Simply stated by Zurvanite's through the authority of the King of kings, Ahura Mazda created both good and evil, which is contrary to Zoroaster who said he created all things good, and what wasn't created by Ahura Mazda was evil. One could easily draw the one -v-many parallel story in the division of Eastern Orthodox and Western Christianity. The Manichaeism deviation took root under the Sasanian kings with the introduction of a man named Mani who was reared under the Semitic influence brought a pessimistic view on life. Since he gained favor of the King of kings he was given license to twist existing Zoroastrian text to give authority to his views. Again the original Zoroaster priest found heresy in his preaching. The Mazdakite deviation was brought on an ascetic pessimism where the Sasanian kings found common property to include the women of pheasants as slaves for the royalty. This fractured the families practicing the original tenets of Zoroaster as well strained the loyalty the people held towards their king and his religion. As timing would have it, it was against this back drop that Islam raged through Persia. In 636 (AD) the Muslim Arabs, driven by poverty and religious fervor, had begun to attack the rich lands bordering their deserts. They overran the Byzantine ....please do a keyword search on cigarroomofbooks. There you will find my concluding remarks and a relative bearing on today's world. Your comments are welcome there.

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