

The Influence of Zoroastrian on Hadith

Posted on November 2, 2018

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the influence of the Zoroastrian religion on Hadiths and Islam that happened in the course of time during the political, religious, and cultural disruption. This influence occurred during the conquest of Mesopotamia, present-day Iran, and Khorasan by Muslims and shows some similarities with the primary source, the Quran. The conversion to Islam of the indigenous people in Mesopotamia and Iran took many years due to instability resulting from the collapse of the great Roman and Sassanid empires. It also happened because of the mix of cultures and faiths of the Arabs and the indigenous people. There are two main aspects of this influence to be considered. Firstly, the indigenous people were divided into three groups; some of them kept their faith but paid the Jizya (tax), while other people had no choice but to embrace Islam; the other group rebelled for at least 150 years after the conquest of their land. Secondly, due to the instabilities caused by the conflict, it took many years to record Islamic history and traditions. Therefore, as writing the Hadiths and the biography of the Prophet relied on the memory of different mixed races of jurists, it is difficult to distinguish the pious from the impious (someone who hides their faith). The purpose of this study is not to distinguish the authenticity of Hadith but to bring forth the inherent similarities shared by the religions, as the contact between the Arabs and the Parsees is even older than Islam itself. It is the study of the cultural, political, and religious amalgamation of people from two different places merging over centuries.

Introduction

Zoroastrianism is the pre-Islamic religion of Iran, and Zarathustra (most widely known as Zoroaster outside Iran) is the founder of this religion and philosophy; it is also the first religion that proposed the idea of monotheism and unification under one God that later influenced Judaism, Christianity and most importantly Islam and Hadith. [Friedrich Nietzsche](#), the great 19th-century philosopher, used Zoroaster as his mouthpiece to dramatize the death of God. Hence, the influence of Zoroastrianism on these three major religions of the world is indisputable. However, the influence of Zoroastrianism on Islam and Hadith is remarkable, as we'll see in the course of this study. The commonalities and influence are far-ranging as they include the day-to-day practices borrowed from Zoroastrianism and Islam. It includes rituals, public holidays, prayers, clothing, and infrastructure. The prohibition of exhibiting too much grief is similar to Islam and Zoroastrianism. The prohibition to urinate in water and the prohibition to walk with one shoe is typically Zoroastrian.

Apart from day-to-day life, it also affected their beliefs about the afterlife, judgment day, resurrection,

and the concept of dualism that differentiates good (Spenta Mainyu) from evil (Angra Mainyu). The ascent of the prophet to heaven in Islamic literature is also an indication of the commonalities shared by the two religions. In Zoroastrian tradition, Viraz (Arda Viraz, the Zoroastrian Priest who wrote the book of Arda Viraz) is guided by Saraosh, while in Islam, Muhammad is guided by Gabriel through their journey of the heavens. (Textual Sources for the Study of Zoroastrianism). One can also track the roots of Islamic Sufism. Furthermore, the similarities between the founding figures of these two religions are startling. Along the way, we'll also see the fabrication done by the rebels as a polemic to the Arab faith.

Literature Review

Richard C Foltz, in his most insightful book *Spirituality in the Land of the Nobles*, says the following: "the extraordinarily broad and profound influences of Iran on the world's religions", the Judaism and Christianity borrowed from Zoroastrianism and Islam borrowed from both Judaism and Zoroastrianism and one cannot turn a blind eye on the 'profound influence' as Richard Foltz put it in his dramatic expression about the profundity of the influence of Zoroastrianism on world religions. (Foltz, *Spirituality in the land of the noble: how Iran shaped the world's religions*).

Another prominent scholar of Zoroastrian religion says the following:

"Zoroastrianism is the oldest of the revealed world religions, and it has probably had more influence on mankind, directly and indirectly, than any other single faith." (Boyce, 2011)

Boyce is one of the leading figures regarding the philosophy and religion of Zoroastrianism, put quite accurately in the above statement. The influence can be direct as well as indirect in terms of our discussion, as I have already asserted this gesture somewhere above that Judaism is influenced directly by Zoroastrianism, and Islam is influenced by Zoroastrianism through Judaism and then directly from Zoroastrianism in Persia (Boyce, 1990). To quote another proponent of the subject:

'With extensive and varied contacts between Arabs and Persians, particularly in the course of the 6th century, it is hardly surprising that a number of Islamic concepts and practices should have been adopted from or influenced by the tenets of Iranian religions.....Among these are the eschatological notions of resurrection, the bridge between heaven and hell that the resurrected bodies will have to cross, millenarian and Messianic beliefs, and the catastrophic end of the world.' (Richard et al., 1998)

Nothing can get more elaborate than the above statement, where Richard G states the adoption of Persian traditions and concepts in Islam that shaped the Islamic religion over the course of time. It includes beliefs like resurrection, doomsday, the idea of heaven and hell, and the coming of the Messiah.

Ghorbannejad wrote an article in 2014 regarding the roots of Islamic Sufism. He argues that the roots of inspiration of Islamic Sufism can be traced back to Zarathustra, who laid the foundation of their

belief system; he states the following in the article 'Late Onset of Sufism in Azerbaijan and the Influence of Zarathustra Thoughts on its Fundamentals':

'Islamic Sufism started in Azerbaijan later than in other Islamic regions for some reasons. Early Sufis in this region had been inspired by mysterious beliefs of Zarathustra, which played an important role in the future path of Sufism in Iran, the consequences of which can be seen in illumination theory.' (Parisa Ghorbannejad, 2014).

The influence of Zoroastrianism is undeniable, whether its daily life or a matter of spiritual struggle Zoroastrianism seems to be the dominant influence for Arabs due to its rich traditions and the man behind, Zarathustra, who has been considered the prophet of Allah by many Muslims. A man and a philosopher who would change the course of world religion forever.

Another famous concept regarding the coming of Imam Mahdi is very famous among Muslims and alludes to the end of the world; it is a very controversial concept even among Islamic Scholars; nonetheless, present in Hadith, it says:

'Allah will bring out from concealment al-Mahdi from my family and just before the day of Judgment; even if only one day were to remain in the life of the world, and he will spread on this earth justice and equity and will eradicate tyranny and oppression.' (Musnad Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, Vol. 1, P. 99)

As we can see from the above Hadith, the coming of al-Mahdi and the end of the world is described by the prophet himself, according to Musnad Ahmad Ibn Hanbal. According to the very famous Sufi Poet Allama Muhammad Iqbal, the concept of the coming of al-Mahdi had been borrowed from Zoroastrianism. H Mahmood, in his book Interpreting Sacred Texts: Eschatology in Islam, says the following:

'Iqbal further corroborates his argument by proving that this idea [the idea of the coming of Imam Mahdi] has penetrated into Islam from Magian and Zoroastrianism concepts of the return of Zoroaster's unborn sons.'

The argument was not intended to highlight the contradiction that resides among Sufis but to bring forth the origins of Hadith that were directly borrowed from the Zoroastrian tradition.

The concept of evil (Angra Mainyu) and good (Spenta Mainyu), which is also known as dualism, is the major contribution of Zoroastrianism to the Islamic conception of good and evil. They believed evil is the active agent in this universe. The Muslims borrowed this concept, and later it was manipulated by the religious fanatics of our time but it is a concept that is meant to be understood in terms of personal struggle and movement, it doesn't mean 'holy war. Nonetheless, the original concept refers back to Zoroastrians. (Stepaniants, The encounter of Zoroastrianism with Islam. Philosophy East and West)

There are many Persian phrases used in Hadiths apart from the borrowed words in the Arabic

language. Here is an example of such phrases uttered by Prophet Mohammad; hrš by bed wa-huwa be-fāresiya tafsirohu koll šay'en fodder yakun, "harča bāyad board, which can be translated as 'all that has been decreed will come about' "(Moḥammad b. Ḳa-law, I, p. 345). Similarly, al-ʿenab do wa'l-tamr yak yak which means "grapes are [eaten] two by two, dates are [eaten] one by one" ('Ali Qāri, p. 248, no. 305). In Abu Ḥafṣ 'Omar, p. 43, there are other Persian expressions quoted by the Prophet. (Encyclopedia Iranica). Hence, the adoption of these Persian phrases into Hadith is a direct indication of the influence that Zoroastrianism had on Islam, even in the time of Prophet Muhammad.

Many similarities in the writing of the biographies of both Prophets Muhammad and Zoroaster can be seen, such as the first declaration of new faith among their families, having few followers, and then migrating to different places. Also, there are a few stories in their biographies, as proclaimed by followers, which are not mentioned in the primary sources, the Quran and Avesta, such as their childhood, ascent to heaven, and the accusation of being magicians. Besides, it is vibrant that Ibn Hisham wrote the biography of the Prophet Muhammad, which is based on the Sira by Ibn Ishaq. Ibn Ishaq was born in 703 CE. Like many ancient manuscripts, Ibn Ishaq's work has been lost, it is believable that his work reached us through Ibn Hisham which borrowed many aspects from Zoroastrianism.

The doubts about the origins of Hadith have always baffled students of religious studies over the course of history. Ignác Goldziher, the Hungarian Scholar of Islam, argues how these doubts spread in early Islam. The Hadith was composed over many years by Arab and non-Arab jurists; their accounts were a collection based on the memories of people from different places. For example, they visited Iraq, Kufa, Basra, and Egypt, which was originally a land of different nationalities and faiths. Here, we can see the influence that other cultures, and especially the Zoroastrian faith, had on the Hadith. For instance, there are two verses in the Quran that mention the word al-Dahr (Quran, 45: 2, & 76: 1), which refers to time. The given verses are indisputably literal and require no explanation whatsoever. Both deal with the word al-Dahr, and it doesn't indicate any attribution to God, which means time. However, in one of Qudsi's Hadiths, God calls himself time. The Hadith has been repeated and rephrased time and time again in different Isnads, but in all the Hadiths, God repeats it as a mantra, exemplifying himself as time.

As a whole, in Sahih Sitta, this mantra appears 12 times while five times in al-Bukhari and Muslim. It is not merely Sahih Sitta al-Bukhari and Muslims but also Malik and Abu Dawud who mentioned it once in their books. However, Musnad Ahmad referred to it quite a few times in his book. More probably, this concept of time attributed to God might have found its way into Islam through Zoroastrianism. Nonetheless, the time when the Sassanid Empire collapsed under the rule of Umar Ibn al-Khattab, the religious heresies did not vanish from those areas; they flourished with time and gave rise to different sects. According to the book 'Mohammad and Islam', there is a possibility that this fabrication and manipulation occurred due to the constant interaction of Arabs with the people of Mesopotamia (Goldziher, 2016).

Hence, the argument leads us to doubt whether all Hadiths that were passed to the Imams involved in

collecting them can be believed. The study shall also illustrate the evidence based on historical records that the Hadiths were fabricated for political purposes. In order to use the fabricated versions of Hadith against their enemies, Ali bin Abi Talib and Mu'awiyah b. Sufyan made it all up. It also seems that Abu Hurayra fabricated many Hadiths, as stated in the Sira of Umar Ibn Khattab. The rulers relied on Hadith to regulate the daily affairs of day-to-day life. Consequently, the scholars tried to fill the gaps (left by time, as I have already mentioned that it was composed over the years after the death of Muhammad) by other sources and none other than Judaism and Zoroastrianism. Thus, we can obtain an absolute view that Hadiths were written under the influence of other faiths, especially the Zoroastrian faith. It was hectic to trace down the original sources, particularly for Imam al-Bukhari, as there was a gap of five generations between him and the Prophet. Also, the project concentrates on the reasons why other traditions leaked into the Hadiths and the biography of the Prophet Muhammad.

Another leading figure, Salman Farsi, the spiritual counsellor of Noshirwan-e-Adil, was the only person with Mohammad from Iran; he was converted to Christianity due to the dualistic nature of Zoroastrianism and then converted to Islam because even Christianity was about three Gods (the concept of Trinity). He remained one of his closest advisors and companions of Mohammad. And we know that Salman Farsi was the Zoroastrian high priest which was known as Dastur-e-Dinar, hence, it is probable that Mohammad was influenced by Zoroastrianism through him.

Furthermore, one of the great pillars of Islam is to pray to Allah, but there is no indication in the Quran of how Muslims should practice prayer. However, biographies and Hadiths instructed Muslims on how to pray and how to perform ablutions. We can see the same things in Zoroastrianism as in Islam: prayer five times a day and at exactly the same times. In addition, the ablution is nearly the same: washing the face, forehead, palm to ankle, and feet with clean water. If there is no water, they have to purify themselves by touching the ground three times and then rubbing their face and the backs of their palms. This process is called 'Yadab', which in Islam is 'Tayamum'.

To emphasize the two major points, Zoroastrian people start their prayer by saying, 'By the name of the God, the Beneficent, and the Merciful. My Ahura Mazda, please me, I believe in the Zoroastrian Religion, which was sent by the Prophet Zoroaster. This faith is away from Dew (Devil) and pagans; then they recite the mantra (Zoroastrian supplication). Here, we can see the similarity with Islam as they start with, 'By the name of Allah, the Beneficent, and the Merciful'. Also, the testimony in Islam is very similar, saying, 'I testify that Muhammad is a Messenger of Allah'. Secondly, the Zoroastrian faith also has another kind of prayer, which is mass prayer, meaning that they pray in large or small groups (Hienz, 2008).

According to the book 'The Origins of Muslims Prayer: Sixth and seventh-century Religious Influences on the salāt Ritual', a strong disgust has been seen among Muslims concerning dogs; it is said that Mohammad ordered the killing of all the dogs in Madina, but there is an indication of conflicting arguments because first, he ordered to kill all the dogs with black colour and then forbade to kill them out of affection that came from Zoroastrian tradition (Boyce, 1992).

As per the source 'Late Onset of Sufism in Azerbaijan and the Influence of Zarathustra', there is another parallel of commonalities that can be seen among these religions. Muslims believe in the unity of God and so are the Zoroastrians, they call their God Ahura Mazda. Like the Quran, they have a book that they call Avesta, the word of God. The Sufi tradition in Islam didn't come with Islam but it was there centuries ago even before the arrival of Islam, one can argue that just like Sufism in Islam, Zurvanism is an offshoot of Zoroastrianism. Furthermore, the Zarathustra was the sole inspiration for Islamic Sufis, who were baffled by its mysterious nature and provided the foundation for the Islamic Sufis to become a dominant sect in Islam, having its roots in Zoroastrianism. (Ghorbannejad, 2014).

Research Questions

- How did the Zoroastrian faith influence Hadith and the day-to-day practices of present-day Muslims?
- What are the major influences that the Zoroastrian faith had on Islam and Hadith?
- To what extent has Zoroastrianism influenced present-day Islam?
- What is/are the similarities in terms of influence among these religions?
- What were the reasons behind these influences?

Scope and Limitations of this Study

The purpose of this study is to evaluate and analytically review the influence of the Zoroastrian faith on Hadith and Islam. Many religious scholars have already debated this issue, and the students of religious studies are fascinated by the startling similarities between Zoroastrianism and Islam. The similarities in practices are so abundant that one is forced to believe that Islam itself is an extended form of Zoroastrianism, just like Christianity and Judaism. We are living in the 21st century, and questions about the reliability of religion and myths have never been so vital as they are now. Hence, the scope of this study is far-ranging and far-reaching for the people who are daring enough to dive deeper into the realm of ideas, concepts, and beliefs in order to test their reliability for a better understanding of the world we live in and our position in this universe. Although these questions about faith, religion, and mythology may seem cliché to many, in fact, we are no more modern than Zarathustra, who examined and challenged his position in this universe that always started him and forced him to reconsider his position in the world he lived.

The research is a careful analysis of the concepts and beliefs shared by Zoroastrianism and Islam through historical evidence in the spotlight of experts on the subject who have spent their whole lives studying Zoroastrianism and Islam. The study contains up to 20 references in order to support its major argument. All the references are taken from the most reliable sources available. The problem has already occurred in many generals regarding the influence of Zoroastrianism on Islam and Hadith; the references are quoted in the literature review section along with a brief summary of the influences of Zoroastrianism on Islam and particularly on Hadith.

The references that I have quoted deal with the issue on a surface level, while the in-depth study of the given problem is one of the preliminary purposes of this study. Furthermore, the purpose of this study is to give a comprehensive, honest, and objective overview of the nature of intertextuality that is ever present in religious texts and the nature of flexibility of human faith in the pre-scientific world. The targeted audiences of this study are not merely the people of academia but also people from all fields of life. Like any qualitative research and the fallible nature of human beings, it does have limitations, ambiguities, and openness of opinions that can be challenged, as it is just an attempt to indulge the reader in a dialogue like the great Greek thinker Socrates used to do 2000 years ago.

Research Methodology

The method that would be applied to this study is analytical-descriptive, where different texts from ancient, medieval, and modern times would be used as a source of material and then critically evaluated and analyzed under the prism of the above-mentioned research questions. Although the research primarily deals with religious issues, its interdisciplinary nature would welcome historical, cultural, political, religious, and philosophical texts of the time. Thus, the history of ideas and, more specifically, the history of religious ideas and thought their evolution and extinction, and, most importantly, their transmission to other cultures during the course of colonization and wars would be the grand frame of the research.

It (domain of the research) also includes a thorough examination of the decentralization of the Persian Empire under Islamic rule and the instabilities that were caused during the conflict that went on for 150 years after the conquest of the Persian Empire. The use of the analytical-descriptive method would allow me to describe facts from authentic resources that can be described in terms of information, knowledge, and history, while the analytical method would be used to evaluate the given data without being sentimentally involved or biased. Hence, the analytical-descriptive method would be a great choice concerning the nature of the issue under question.

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