

MANI

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INTRODUCTION

Iran and the Persian Culture based on the teachings of Zarathushtra has been the cradle of Philosophy and Religious thoughts throughout history. All the prophets who preached monotheism were born in and around the Persian Empire and all the major religions of the world had a connection with the Persians. No other land has produced as many prophets as Iran and no other culture has had such direct influence in the emergence of prophets as the Persian Culture.

Zarathushtra introduced some unique concept never known among nations. He introduced the concept of humans being the MASTER OF THEIR OWN FATE. The concept of ASHA the ABSOLUTE TRUTH as existing in nature, the concept that God is within each person and is reachable by self-realization - KHOD-AH, and above all how to make society righteous and direct it on the path towards perfection.

Truly the knowledge derived
By the good mind
Never before known
Among the Wise and Creations
With it form good rule, never waning
And make society Righteous
Leading us towards perfection
Zarathushtra - Gatha - Yasna HA 28.3 (FR)

With the establishment of the Persian Empire these teachings were put to practice on a larger scale. Within the empire there was an all round progress outside the Empire initially it lead to a new breed of thinkers called Greek philosophers. But there were oppositions to such thoughts for it went against the existing beliefs and philosophers like Socrates

were put to death in Athens. The freedom of thoughts had no limits and it lead to Zurvanisms a concept that inquired into the birth of God itself.

The direction that civilization had taken in the two centuries since the Persian Empire was created was promising and Aristotle who was a teacher to Alexander could foresee the advantage of leading such a civilization. He advised Alexander, "If you destroy the Persians you will have destroyed one of the pillars of civilization". Which he did destroy and the world was left with the other pillar, which unfortunately was still based on the concept of divine intervention in the fate of humans. Statues of clay and stone were molded and chipped by human hands and once placed in a temple it became all-powerful. God spoke through the Oracles and the divine orders from the oracles had to be followed without recourse. For the subjugated Persians there was no option left but to presents their concept through divine intervention to make it more acceptable to the masses, and soon prophets of God were born with Persian intervention.

Jesus Christ was introduced as a prophetⁱ by the wise men the Magi's and given the three gifts of Vohu-Mana, Asha Vahista and Khash-Atra-Vairyu.ⁱⁱ In the mean time within the Persian Empire there was a chaotic situation among the masses. Alexander had destroyed most of the libraries, killed the old and learned and helped in the reintroduction of ancient Mithraism in northwestern Iran. Zarathushtism, which was based on wisdom, was deteriorating. Valaksh the Parthian king tried to organize the ancient knowledge written in Avesta. Then in 226 CE the Sassanian dynasty took control of the Empire by defeating the Parthian. The Sassanians were trying to consolidate Zarathushtism and it was at this juncture that a young Iranian by the name of Shuriak introduced himself as Mani the prophet and expanded on the theory of Zarvanism.

MANI

HIS LIFE

"Abu Rehan Birooni" the Iranian philosopher and historian, whom western scholars wrongly call Arab, informs' us that Mani was born on April 14, 216 CE. Mani's Persian name was Shuriak, or Cubricus in Latin. "Pattak" his father was a Parthian Noble from Ekbatan (Hamadan) and his mother was from the royal family of the "Askanians" they had settled in Babylonia where Mani was born.

Mani claimed that an angel visited him at the age of 12 and told him to be prepared to be the messenger of God. Again at the age of 24 he claimed the angel came to him and this time ordered him to start preaching the message of God. He started his mission by recruiting followers at home, but it was a period of political turmoil, the Sassanian who had taken charge of the empire in 226 CE, had appointed Tansar a Zarathushti high priest to collect the scattered Avesta and standardize it, so Mani thought it was wise to set sail to India and preach his religion there and earn recognition. It was the year 241 CE that in India he converted Turan Shah and many of his courtiers to his religion.

On his return to Iran King Ardashir the founder of the Sassanian dynasty had died and his son Shapour (241-270) was the ruler. Mani went to Pars and Babylonia and converted Mehrshah and Pirooz the brothers of King Shapour then with their help he approached Shapour and presented his religion to the young king who gave him permission to preach. Shapour also supported Mithraism while at the same time gave Kartir the Mobed e Mobedan, the high priest of the Zarathushti religion, permission to consolidate the religious text of the Zarathushties.

Shapour's son Hormoz who ruled for a short period had nothing to do with Mani. After Hormoz, Bahram become king and he did not like what Mani was doing. In 277 CE Bahram sent a message to Mani and called him to his palace. Mani had sensed that his days were numbered and all along his journey to Shush he bids farewell to his followers who came to see him. Bahram had harsh words for the now 60-year-old Mani and after discussions and accusation he ordered Mani be imprisoned. After being tortured for 26 days in prison, Mani died.

By 300 CE, within 25 years after the death of Mani his religion had spread up to Syrian and Egypt in the West and up to China in the East. For about 80 years starting in 762 CE, Manichaeism was the state religion of the Turkic people Ujghurs.

His followers flourished till the beginning of the reign of Mahdi the Abbaasi Khalifeh of Islam, when they were persecuted and killed or forcefully converted to Islam.

MANI HIS TEACHINGS

The religion of Mani comprises of six books, five of which were written in his native language of "Arami-Suryani " and the sixth, which was called "Shapourgan" was written in Pahlavi language. His teachings were based on Zurvanism and preached Dualism. He preached that the world is made of light and darkness, goodness and evil. Everything good was associated with light and everything evil with darkness. With regards to the creation of the earth and humans, the prince of darkness steals some light and with it creates humans and all other forms of life on earth. Thus humans are the creation of the evil force in which the light is imprisoned, Mani preached the process by which humans could relieve the light and return it to the realm of goodness. One of which was the procreation of fewer children. His teachings are further classified under Gnosticism, which comes from the Greek word for Knowledge and points at a belief that salvation comes from an insight in a secret knowledge. Gnosticism also involve that man has a capacity to discover truths with the help of the intellect alone. It further believes in the theory that everything is involved in a fight between two powers or two qualities; light; the good or the responsible; and darkness, the bad, the evil or the irresponsible. In this dualism humans play a role, but humans are of minimal importance compared to the totality of this cosmic battle. Gnosticism did not start with Mani but existed before him and Judaism and Christianity were strongly influenced by it in its early days. Simon Magus (Simon the Persian) an important figure in the New Testament, who is also know by many different titles such as Simon the leper, Lazarus (john 11), Simon the Pharisee (Luke 7: 44-46) Simon - zealot (Luke 6: 15) Simon the magician,ⁱⁱⁱ Simon was a Gnostic and the Gospel of John has many Gnostic elements.

INFLUENCE OF MANI ON AVESTA

The teachings of Mani have influenced other religions mainly Zoroastrianism. The dualism that Zarathushtra is accused of is in fact the dualism of Mani. The dualism of Zarathushtra is limited to the human mind.

And these thoughts in the beginning
Their opposing nature revealed themselves
In the mind and in the words also

In the deeds and these were good and bad
And of these the wise
Rightly choose not so truly the unwise
Zarathushtra - Gatha - Yasna HA 30.3 (FR)

While Mani whose teachings were based on Zarvanism speaks of two separate creators one creating all that is bad and the other creating all the good things. The word Ahriman that represents the creator of evil does not appear in the Gathas of Zarathushtra at all. In fact Zarathushtra says that good and bad, happiness and pain are the product of human thoughts.

That these laws you understand
That wisdom has given humans
Happiness and grief

And that practice of evil harms
Progress and followers of truth
And as a result of these shall come illumination
Zarathushtra - Gatha - Yasna HA 30.11 (FR)

Mani's dualism is preserved in the Vandidat, Bundahisn, Denkart and other parts of Sassanian era Avesta.

ORGANIZATION & PRACTICE

The Manichaeans society consisted of two groups, the elected and the laymen. The elected class had only male members, and they were the ones deemed to disentangle their seed of light from their bodies. They did not marry, did not eat meat, and drink wine or work. All they did was to preach. The laymen lived fairly normal lives. The married, but it was considered a good act not to have many children, as an increasing number of humans would mean that the light was spread in more bodies. For they believed that light was imprisoned into the body of humans by the devil. The laymen had only limited access to the teachings of Manichaeism and left much of that to the elected class who acted as their representatives. The laymen attended weekly fasts, but little is known of the religious services of the two classes. What Mani seems to have picked up in India is the transmigration of the souls. The layman had to hope to be born as an elected. We do not know much about how

the elected class came into being but it seems family and schooling played a decisive role.

THE REALM OF MANICHEANS

There exist some letter written by Mani to his followers in Ctesiphon, Babylon, Mesene, Edessa, Susiana, Armenia and India, which show how far, and widespread his followers were. After Mani's death his doctrine spread even further. He had followers from China to India to Egypt and to Rome. His religion survived for a long time till it was wiped out by persecution and conversion by the hands of Islam and Christianity while the final blow was set by the Mongolians invasion of Asia in the thirteenth century.

To know more about Mani and his teachings research need to be done on the various fragments of Manichaeism literature, which were found in Chinese Turkestan and in Turfan plus those found in El Faiyum in Egypt.

ⁱ Mathew 2.2

ⁱⁱ Mathew4 Check for meaning <http://www.ancientiran.com> Influence on other religions.

ⁱⁱⁱ Barbara Thiering in her book Jesus the Man