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## INTRODUCTION TO

## PRE-ISLAMIC IRAN

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### THE ACHAEMENID DYNASTY (550 BCE – 330 BCE)

Zarathushtra was born on the 6<sup>th</sup> day after the Vernal Equinox in 1768 BCE. He was recognized and accepted by King Vistasp in 1738 BCE. It is from 550 BCE that we have concrete archaeological evidence of his teachings being put to practical use. As such scholars have been speculating on Zarathushtra's date of birth.

The Achaemenians under Cyrus the Great founded the First Persian Empire in 550 BCE and ruled over it based on the original teachings of Zarathustra. They paid Reverence to Wisdom (MazdaYasni) and spread Wisdom even among their enemies. For Zarathushtra has said.

*Ahya Daeva Ma Hamoi Manoi*

**The Deva worshipers with their unified thought**

*Ahurahya Urvazema Mazdao*

**(Even) they can Create happiness with WISDOM**

*Thwoi Duta Ongho*

**(with WISDOM) They will learn**

*Aongha ma Teng Darayo Yoi Vao Daibishenti.*

**To keep away that what is detrimental.**

(Zarathustra Gatha - Yasna 32.1)

We saw that Cyrus the Great bowed to the Babylonian god Marduk but later by introducing WISDOM among them, the Babylonians realized that it is the Priest that live in temples and that God is everywhere. So they abandoned their temples.<sup>1</sup> So also the Jews did not rebuild their temple for three generations<sup>2</sup> after receiving the funds and the permission to go rebuild their temple. That their beliefs had changed having come into contact with the Persians is evident in the Bible.<sup>3</sup>

*"Let us built with you; for we seek your God, as ye do; and we do sacrifice unto him since the days of E-sar-had-don king of Assur which brought us hither.*

*' But Zerubbabel, and Jeshua, and the rest of the chief of the fathers of Israel, said unto them, Ye have nothing to with us to built a house unto our God; but we ourselves together will build unto the LORD GOD of Israel, as king Cyrus the king of Persia hath commanded us.' "* (Ezra 4:2-3)

The Persians introduced the LOVE OF WISDOM **Philo Sophia**, Philosophy, among the Greeks after the peace treaty of Callias in 449 BCE. Most of the Greek philosophers lived around this period in the Persian Empire and moved to Athens. The Greeks who believed in myths and superstition did not appreciate this intervention and initially condemned the likes of Socrates to death. Finally, Aristotle who was a tutor to Alexander advised him to destroy the Persian culture which he and his generals the Seleucids that followed him, did. In the 106 years that they ruled over the Persian Empire, they reintroduced and promoted the pre-Zoroastrian religion of Mithraism among the Persians, while they suppressed the teaching of Zarathushtra and promoted myths and superstition.

### **PARTHIAN DYNASTY (247 BCE – 224 CE)**

The Parthians also known as Ashkanians, reclaimed the Empire in 247 BCE. Their history is limited to the coins left behind and what the Greeks have written about them. They continued with Mithraism till about the end of their 470-year rule when King Valakhsh (147-191 CE) initiated the collection of the scattered Avesta. It was during the Parthian rule that the Wise Men the Magi went in search of the **King of the Jews** <sup>4</sup> and gave the famous three gifts to baby Jesus. The Persians supported the lineage of King David as Jesus Christ was the 11<sup>th</sup> generation of King David <sup>5</sup>. The Romans who were in control of Jerusalem had installed Herod as the King of the Jews against traditions because Herod was only a half-Jew and not acceptable to the people as a king.

### **SASSANIAN DYNASTY (224 CE – 651 CE)**

The Sassanian Empire was founded in 224 CE and lasted for about 430 years. Ardeshir Papakan the founder of the Empire continued the collection of the scattered Avesta initiated by the Askanians and made Zoroastrianism the state religion. 'Vesta' like 'Veda' in Sanskrit means "Knowledge" and 'A' makes it negative so A-Vesta means "That which was not knowledge" or in modern terms - "Research Papers".

If you look at the core of the Yashts you will find science. Like the Farvardin Yasht, is a thesis on the heart and the Circulatory System. The Mah Yasht is a thesis on the moon and recommends that the best time to plant a seed in spring is with the appearance of the crescent of the moon. Mehr Yasht is about the location of the Natural Meridian of the Earth at 63 degrees longitude from where the sun shines over the entire hemisphere. Hom Yasht is a Phytological report on the Hom plant by a botanist. The centre of learning in the ancient world was located in southern Iran and was called 'Ghond-e-Shahpour'. Scholars from all over the world came to this centre for discourse. Many sources tell us of the vast scientific knowledge of the Persians that was destroyed by the invading Arabs because they believed that everything that humanity needs to know is in the Quran.<sup>6</sup>

The Sassanians were liberal as far as religion was concerned. There was freedom of religion in the Empire, to the extent that during their reign, Mani (216-274 CE) and Mazdak ( d.524 CE ) claimed to be Prophets. Mani was given the freedom to preach by King Shapour-I (241-270 CE) and he converted the brother of king Shapour and many aristocrats. Later in 273 CE, Emperor Bahram imprisoned Mani who died in Prison. Similarly, King Ghobad accepted Mazdak's teachings. Very soon the followers of Mazdak had political motives and Kia Ghobad's son Khosrow Anushirawan before becoming King plotted and

killed the Mazdakites and put an end to their political ambitions. Anushirawan was called Adil, The Just. He is said to have ruled wisely for 48 years (531-579 CE). During his reign, the dykes and dams that had converted Mesopotamia into the grain house of the empire gave way and Anushirawan personally supervised the reinforcement of the dykes. He was followed by son Hormazd and grandson Khosrow Parviz. Thereafter, the royal family had crisis after crisis to the extent that in 4 years from 629 to 632 CE, eight rulers followed one another to the Sassanian throne. Yazdgerd III became king in 633 CE and the Arabs invaded in 636 CE.

The history of the Sassanians has come to us from their adversaries, both the Roman and Islamic narrative is biased. All the records and the knowledge amassed during the Sassanian era were destroyed by the Arabs. Khorasan was captured by the Arabs after the death of Yazdgerd in 651CE, having heard of the atrocities of the Arabs they were able to hide some of their manuscripts. During the late 9<sup>th</sup> and the 10<sup>th</sup> century CE when Iranian rulers like the Somanians and Barmakis came to power in Khorasan, those manuscripts were brought out of hiding and studied. All of a sudden there was an influx of scholars in Khorasan. Samarkand and Bukhara became seats of learning, science and philosophy once again flourished but because they were forced to publish their works in Arabic today Western Scholars wrongly attribute them to Islam and credit Islam, for the renaissance in Europe.

In fact according to Ibn Khaldun, *“The Muslims were illiterate Arabs who did not know how to write and keep books. For bookkeeping, they employed Jews, Christians, or certain non-Arab clients versed in it. Their nobles did not know it well, because illiteracy was their distinctive characteristic”*.<sup>7</sup>

Even Prophet Mohammad was proudly illiterate. The Arabs believed that everything that was to know was in the Quran and they shunned all other knowledge. So to attribute the sudden influx of knowledge which originated in Khorasan Iran to Islam is naïve.

Abu Ali Sina - Avicenna had a short life span of 57 years but has left behind about 200 books on a wide range of subjects like medicine, philosophy and astronomy. Books that dominated the schools of medicine in Europe. Omar Khayam who had a Zarathushti mathematic tutor by the name of Bahmanyar was able to re-publish the ancient MazdaYasni calendar and dedicate it to the ruler of his time which is today known as the Jalali calendar.

The Romans had an existential difference with the Persians; but during their rule over the Persian Empire, Roman soldiers and traders fell in love with the very Mithraism that they had managed to reintroduce among the Iranians. They took it with them to Europe and spread Mithraism all over Europe. You can still find statues and paintings of Mithra In old European churches.



During the Sassanian era, in 323 CE Constantine became Emperor of Rome, he saw the danger of Persian influence in the form of Mithraism. To counter that he adopted the very person who they had crucified three centuries ago, and thus replaced the Sun God Mithra with the Son of God Jesus Christ. The Birth of Mithra on the winter Solstice became the birth of Jesus Christ and the twelve signs of the Zodiac became his twelve apostles.

The Latin word Sol-Stice means Sun-Stands-Still, the Sun appears to stand still for two nights and three days on the Solstice because of the 23-degree tilt of the Earth and its elliptical orbit. The standing still of the sun for three days and two nights and starting back again on the journey became the Birth of Jesus Christ. It also became the story of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ was the recipient of the three gifts (first 3 Amsha Spantas<sup>8</sup>) from the Magis<sup>9</sup> and had mastered the Seven Eternal Laws. He had reached the final stage of Self Realization (Khud-Ah) and declared "I and the Father are one".<sup>10</sup> He was stoned by the Jews and crucified by the Romans for that. By adopting Jesus Christ three centuries later, the Romans took control of the narrative and instead spread their beliefs through him posthumously. For example, in the Bible, it is written of Adam and Eve eat from the Tree of Knowledge but the common narrative is that they eat an Apple. Similarly, it is said that 3 Wise Men went in search of a messiah a prophet. But the Bible, has not specified the number of the Wiseman, it is the Gifts that were three and they were looking for a political figure, the King of the Jews; *"Where is he who has been born **King of the Jews**? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."*<sup>11</sup>

The Sassanians and the Romans were at constant war with each other and that had weakened their economy and tired their population. When the Arabs attacked they did not take them seriously for they were known to them as hungry tribes of the desert who fought among themselves. At times in the past, they would attack border towns and villages of the Iranians and steal food for their survival. In 610 CE Mohammad Ibn Abu Abdulla established Islam and by 632, before his death, he had united the warring tribes of Mecca, Madina and their surroundings. Now they became a united force and had to find ways to keep themselves employed. They had no industry or the prospect of one, so they explored the possibility of attacking their more affluent neighbours. In fact, before defeating the Persians in 636 CE the Arabs had attacked the Byzantine Romans in Syria and Philistine and defeated them in 634 CE.

## **ARAB INVADERS**

The original Arabic speaking people were the Bedouins from the area called Hijaz in Western Arabia and the towns of Mecca Medina and Taif were its centre. The Nabateans to the north were Aramaic speaking people. Yemen to the south was an ancient kingdom that had a relationship with the Iranians. In the Shahnameh, we are told that Fareydoon sought the hand of the daughter of the king of Yemen for his sons, who had to solve a puzzle to win the hands of the royal Yamani maiden. Later some of them were moved to the western shores of the Persian Gulf and were called the Lackminides. Today most of those who converted to Islam have become Arabic speakers and are therefore called Arabs. For example, the Egyptians lost their ancient culture and language after adopting Arabic and so are today called Arabs.

Prophet Mohammad was from the Bedouin tribe of Quraysh he revolted against his family who were the keepers of the house of gods, he destroyed the statues in the house of gods and he united these warring Bedouins under the God Allah. He was illiterate and he recited the Quran for his followers who later wrote it down. Salman-e-Fars a Sassanian mobed who was defrocked because of his Mazdaki inclinations is said to have been the only learned and most influential companion of Prophet Mohammad. Salman also helped Mohammad plan and win a major battle against the people of Mecca, known as the war of Khandar. Khandar means trench. Salman ordered Mohammad's men to dig a trench and cover it up and wait for the enemy to attack, the enemy riders would fall in the trench and make it easy for Mohammad's men to attack and kill them.

Prophet Mohammad established Islam in 610 CE when the Quran was first revealed to him. The revelations continued for 23 years till he died in 632 CE. During this time he fought 8 major battles led 18 others and planned a total of 38 battles. The last battle was the battle of HUNAY in 630 CE.

He started with a handful of followers and his first battle the Battle of Badr was against the caravan of Meccans. He fought against a force of one thousand Meccans with a limited number of followers but used tactics like throwing sand into the eyes of the opponents, and won the battle. The success was attributed to Divine intervention by a revelation in the Quran (3:123). With the last battle, the battle of Hunay (mentioned in the Quran-Surah 9 Taubah 25-27) most of the Bedouin tribes had submitted to Islam. The prophet died two years later of a sickness.

The Prophet was succeeded by Abu Bakr. With the Arab tribes subdued and having submitted to Islam, the united fighting forces were without a job, there was no industry or possibility for one so they had to look for ways to employ the thousand of warriors and keep them busy to avoid any revolt.

In 633 Abu Bakr dispatched two groups one under Khalid Ibn Wahid towards Persian and the other towards the Roman-Byzantine Empire. Khalid had initial success but was defeated on a counter-attack by the Sassanians and Khalid went and joined the forces in Byzantine where they meet with success in Syria.

In 636 CE under Khalifa Umar, they returned to Persia under the leadership of Sa'd Ibn Ali Waqqas and fought the battle of Qhadisiyah that led to the fall of the Persian Empire. It took them 16 years of fighting to conquer the empire when a Persian grain miller murdered Emperor Yazdegerd and the Empire was left without a leader. Thereafter the Iranians in small groups kept fighting the Arabs and freedom fighters like Abu Moslem, Babak Khoramdin, Mazyar, Piroz Nahavandi nicknamed Abu Lulu, Jazooyeh, to name just a few, continued the resistance. Khalifah Umar was murdered by a Persian while Uthman and Ali were murdered by Arabs.

## **QURANIC LAW- THE OBLIGATION TO SPREAD ISLAM**

**In the Quran Allah has declared Islam to be the ultimate religion and that it be manifested over all religions. Thus the spreading of Islam is paramount in the Quran and war as a means is proposed over and over again.**

The Quran was revealed to Mohammad over a period of 23 years starting in 610 CE till his death in 632 CE. Of these 23 years, Mohammad spends 20 years in 38 battles. Many of the battles are mentioned in the Quran and the victories are attributed to divine intervention.<sup>12</sup> Naturally, war and politics were paramount during the period of the revelation of the Quran and Allah has given instructions on every aspect of war.

**In Sura 9:33, 48:28 and 61:9 Allah has repeatedly mentioned that Islam is sent to manifest it over ALL RELIGIONS.**

*“It is He who has sent His Messenger with guidance and the religion of truth to manifest it **over all religion**, although they who associate others with Allah dislike it.”*<sup>13</sup>

**Sura 9:29 The Quran say, Who to fight.**

*“Fight against those who (1) believe not in Allah, (2) nor in the Last Day, (3) nor forbid that which has been forbidden by Allah and His Messenger (4) and those who acknowledge not the religion of truth (i.e. Islam) among the people of the Scripture (Jews and Christians), until they pay the Jizyah with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued.”*<sup>14</sup>

**In Sura 47:4 How to fight to kill and what to do with the wounded are specified.**

*Continue fighting till they embrace Islam. **You are Allah's Helpers.***<sup>15</sup>

*“So, when you meet (in fight Jihad in Allah's Cause), those who disbelieve smite at their necks till when you have killed and wounded many of them, then bind a bond firmly (on them, i.e. take them as captives). Thereafter (is the time) either for generosity (i.e. free them without ransom), or ransom (according to what benefits Islam), until the war lays down its burden. **Thus [you are ordered by Allah to continue in carrying out Jihad against the disbelievers till they embrace Islam** (i.e. are saved from the punishment in the Hell-fire) or at least come under your protection], but if it had been Allah's Will, He Himself could certainly have punished them (without you). But (He lets you fight), in order to test you, some with others. But those who are killed in the Way of Allah, He will never let their deeds be lost.”*<sup>16</sup>

**According to Sura 47:35 Asking for Peace is Weakness.**

*“So **be not weak and ask not for peace** (from the enemies of Islam), while you are having the upper hand. Allah is with you, and will never decrease the reward of your good deeds.”*

**Sura 47:15 The Reward**

*“The description of Paradise which the Muttaqun (pious - see V.2:2) have been promised is that in it are rivers of water the taste and smell of which are not changed; rivers of milk of which the taste never changes; rivers of wine delicious to those who drink; and rivers of clarified honey (clear and pure) therein for them is every kind of fruit; and forgiveness from their Lord. (Are these) like those who shall dwell forever in the Fire, and be given, to drink, boiling water, so that it cuts up their bowels?”*<sup>17</sup>

**Sura 3:173 Confidence**

*“Those (believers) unto whom the people (hypocrites) said, "Verily, the people (pagans) have gathered against you (a great army), therefore, fear them." But it (only) increased them in*

*Faith, and they said: "Allah (Alone) is Sufficient for us, and He is the Best Disposer of affairs (for us)."*<sup>18</sup>

### **Sura 2:216 Jihad**

*"Jihad (holy fighting in Allah's Cause) is ordained for you (Muslims) though you dislike it, and it may be that you dislike a thing that is good for you and that you like a thing that is bad for you. Allah knows but you do not know."*<sup>19</sup>

### **Sura 8:41 Distribution of the Spoils of war**

*"And know that out of all the booty that ye may acquire (in war), a fifth share is assigned to Allah,- and to the Messenger, and the near relatives, orphans, the needy, and the wayfarer,- if ye do believe in Allah and the revelation We sent down to Our servant on the Day of Testing,- the Day of the meeting of the two forces. For Allah hath power over all things."*<sup>20</sup>

**As such when the Arabs attacked Iran and Byzantine they had the support of the Quran and the blessings of Allah. They had come on a mission to spread the message of Allah and they had by way of examples a guide for every situation. They were *HELPERS OF ALLAH* fighting Allah's war and were destined to win but if in the process they got killed they would have their place in Heaven which was the reward and the final destination that everyone has to strive for.**

**According to Tabari, delegations from the Arabs ask for a meeting with Persian Emperor Yazdgerd and also with Rostam the commander of the Persian Army inviting them to submit to Islam and they constantly repeat the verses of the Quran in their negotiations.**

**These Suras in the Quran are for every True Muslim to follow. The Arabs were just following the dictates of their religion. The spreading of Islam is required of every Muslim. They are asked to have no fear of death in achieving this goal and the Quran offers them a better place after death in return. They are not to be interested in WEALTH for it is secondary to the primary aim of increasing the domain of Allah and Umar makes sure to remind them repeatedly.**<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Herodotus, Persian Customs

<sup>2</sup> Bible Ezra ch 5:16-17

<sup>3</sup> Bible Ezra ch 4:2 & 3

<sup>4</sup> Bible Mathew 2:2 "Where is he that is born KING of thr Jews?"

<sup>5</sup> Bible Mathew 1:1-18

<sup>6</sup> Ibn Khaldun

<sup>7</sup> Ibn Kaldun Vol 2 Chapter 3 sec 32 /11.34

<sup>8</sup> VohuMana-Asha Vahista-KhashAtra Vairyu

<sup>9</sup> Bible Mathew ch 4 and Luke ch 4

<sup>10</sup> Bible John 10

<sup>11</sup> Bible Mathew 2.2

<sup>12</sup> Quran (3:123) Quran-Surah Taubah 25-27.

<sup>13</sup> Quran Sura 9:33, 48:28 and 61:9

<sup>14</sup> Quran 9:29 translated by Mohsin Khan <https://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=9&verse=29>

<sup>15</sup> History of Tabari Umar reminds Arabs that they are doing Allah's work.

<sup>16</sup> Quran 47:4 translated by Mohsin Khan <https://corpus.quran.com>

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<sup>17</sup> Quran 47:15 translated by Mohsin Khan <https://corpus.quran.com>

<sup>18</sup> Quran 3:173 translated by Mohsin Khan <https://corpus.quran.com>

<sup>19</sup> Quran 2:216 translated by Mohsin Khan <https://corpus.quran.com>

<sup>20</sup> Quran 8:41 translated Yousuf Ali <https://corpus.quran.com>

<sup>21</sup> History of Al-Tabari 2240 to 2241