

ADDITIONAL NOTES BASED ON ZOROASTRIAN REBELLIONS IN ABBASID PERIOD

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As I found more evidence on this subject after reading Elton L. Daniel's well-researched works "The Political and Social History of Khurasan under Abbasid Rule" 747-820 (*Bibliotheca Islamica*, Minneapolis and Chicago, 1979), I am trying to summarize and add them to my findings as it may help us to grasp the socio-religious conditions in Khurasan from where the *Qisse Sanjan* posits the arrival of Parsis at Sanjan. Historians often hold the Abbasid Caliphate (749-1258) as the end of an "Arab Kingdom" and the rise of a cosmopolitan "Islamic Empire, which even led to the belief that it was Persianized or even "neo-Sasanid", though it was soon opposed by the Iranians.

Even as Daniel concedes that the Abbasid revolt "was just what historians have been most reluctant to call it: a true mass uprising" (p.189), he details how it was secretly and ingenuously orchestrated over years to artfully exploit the Umayyad rulers by making false promises in order to advance the Abbasid claim to the Caliphate which sadly led to even more dissatisfaction and resentment among the Khurasanis who "had not reckoned on the determination of al-Mansur and his supporters in Iraq to create a highly centralized empire headed by an authoritarian Caliph." (p. 194).

While the Dehgans who owned small holdings and lived on their land, and not as absentee landlords in urban palaces, the upper aristocracy opposed the Abbasid revolt in order to maintain their privileged status. However, maintains Daniel, that even though "it is not altogether clear what the Abbasids offered the Dehagan," (my guess being promising lessening of land tax and not forcing conversion of Zoroastrian farmers when unable to pay it, as they (Dehgans) are often known to have paid it themselves), "but it does seem safe to say that the Dehagan, including their Arab counterparts, were a dominant element in the new regime." (p. 191). Daniel adds: "In the words of one source, they (Dehagan) flocked to Islam in the days of Abu Muslim," but in a footnote finds it "highly speculative." (p. 199).

It is difficult to agree with Daniel when he claims: "The rise of the Muslim religious class corresponded with the final collapse of the priestly class which had existed in pre-Islamic Iran" as the Mazdakite struggle and the Arab conquest had weakened their position, which maybe true to some extent but, as already noted, as conversion of

Zoroastrians to Islam had not yet exceeded the level of fifty percent, it can not be entirely true. The revival of Zoroastrianism in the tenth and eleventh centuries and the composition of its fundamental doctrines in various Pahlavi texts also forebodes such a conclusion. And I personally believe that even the learned Dasturs of our own time could not have been so rooted in the Good Religion as to match their contribution, nor did the later Zoroastrians practice all the religious requirements, etc., as they did. While he may be right in opining that they were not “very adept at making use of the syncretistic religious movements,” his apparent attempt at basing such a view on their rejection of Bihafaridiyya's ideas is not justified in view of his own claim that Bihafarid did not attempt to restore “pure” Zoroastrianism, as claimed by Barthold, but wanted “symbiosis or reconciliation of Zoroastrianism with Islam and social reform.” (p.91). However, he raises a very significant but hitherto neglected issue when he comments: “Still, it will be interesting to know to what extent the new religious class had roots among the old Zoroastrian clergy. Unfortunately the question is unresolved and given the nature of the evidence, probably unresolvable,” (p. 192), especially in view of its relevance for the current clerical situation in Iran. However, resolving this problem can provide us meaningful information about how Muslim clergy in Iran as opposed to the west of Iran was affected by almost absorbing totally the Zoroastrian clergy within itself and to what extent such an absorption was voluntary and to what extent it contributed to Shi'a and Sufi ideas, or to Khurramiyya and other revolutionary movements, etc. Such an inquiry gains significance as Daniel finds that “the Abu Muslimiyya were originally Magians (whom Abu Muslim had brought into the movement?) and formed the nucleus of what became the Khurramiyya.” (p.131). While it is not possible to trace an exclusive Zoroastrian element or movement in all these Anti-Abbasid revolutionary groups, almost all of them do seem to contain some involvement by the Zoroastrians, though obviously not too openly to bring on themselves further oppression.

Daniel reports that though Ishaq was not, for example, Zoroastrian, the doctrinal content of Ishaq's propaganda was remarkably similar to that of Sunbadh”, and Ishaq “attracted the Magians factions by claiming that Zoroaster was still alive and by predicting that he (Zoroaster) would soon come forward to re-verify the true religion. Although the only extant resource categorizes Ishaq as a Khurramite, he seems to have been responsible for precipitating a movement, quite widespread in Central Asia, known as the “wearers of white”(Mubbayida in Arabic and Safid-jamagan in Persian). Their white banners could be interpreted as a repudiation of the black of the Abbasids, and endorsement of the Umayyads, or call for the return of the “white” religion of Zoroastrianism to supplant Islam, the “black” religion.” (p.

132). Daniel relates that the movement was forced to go “underground” at first, but later on it burst into the tumultuous revolt of al-Muqanna “with dramatic results in Transoxiana.” (p. 133)

As regards the “heretical” movement of Ustadhsis, Daniel regards it as “the least understood of all such movements. However, he notes that he adopted the religious syncretism of Bihafarid and he “may also have posed as one of the saviors predicted by Zoroastrian legends. However, Daniel finds it “extremely difficult to understand why the Kharijites, even allowing for their tolerance of Dhimmis would have cooperated with Zoroastrians, even if less than orthodox one, in any revolt which had a confessional basis or in which religious issues were of any real importance.” (p. 136). Obviously, however the dissatisfaction with the Abbasids apparently had risen to such a level that there was no restrictions placed on opposing it, as witnessed by the revolt of Al-Muqanna, an officer in Abu Muslim's army, which Daniel describes as “a consequence of general disillusionment with Abbasid rule.” He “taught that Abu Muslim was greater than Muhammad” (p. 138). One of his missionaries was an Arab “who, after giving al-Muqanna his daughter in marriage, carried the Da'wa' into Transoxiana.” Almost all the villages of Sogdiana and Bukhara joined the movement along with many Turks. It is interesting to note that the nineteenth-century English poet, Thomas Moore has based his poem *Lala Rukh* on al-Muqanna, “the veiled prophet” of Khurasan. However, after reading the history of all these rebellions it seems impossible to believe that the Zoroastrians all the while remained on the sideline. They may have been it seems adopting the tactic of *Tasquiya* (dissemination) quite prevalent at the time and calling themselves by other names to avoid persecution and the Mazdakites regarded themselves as Zoroastrian until they totally disappeared according to Arab historians. Since the Zoroastrians tended to be cautious about not incurring the wrath of their Muslim rulers even complaining to Abu Muslim about the rebel Bihafarid misrepresenting their faith, more research is needed to delineate their role, active or hidden in these resistance movements. It seems however obvious they would have participated in the Abbasid Revolution. Daniel observes: “This profusion of religions in one area (Central Asia) necessitated a measure of religious tolerance and contributed to much syncretism among the different groups. The Central Asia had a traditional role as a refuge for religious non-conformists of all persuasion.” (p. 139).

(If so, one wonders what necessitated the migration of a few boat-full Zoroastrians from Khurasan of all places to Sanjan in India and that too when none of the Zoroastrians of Yazd or Kerman living much closer to the Persian Gulf did not. Or, were they also settled there for the maritime trade even before the Arab conquest, which may also

perhaps explain why their migration was not known to the Zoroastrians in Iran and why at least some of them also did not migrate there as an escape from severe and relentless persecution!)

Babak was the most powerful and famous of the Khurramites or Khurramdian, who rebelled at the time of Caliph Ma'mun for twenty years from 816 to 838. "His movement, too, is variously described as Mazdakite and Zoroastrian," according to Homa Katouzian (*The Persians: Ancient, Medieval and Modern Iran*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2009, p. 81), who adds "these rebellions, and especially one such as Babak's were revolts against the state, the state being the caliphate at the time." He held out till defeated by the cunning Persian general Afshin, who in turn was also done away with by the Abbasid king on the charge of hiding his Zoroastrian identity.