

THE KHURRAMIYA

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As we have noted, Zoroastrian Persia turned Muslim after the Arab conquest of the region. As Wilfred Madelung states in *Religious Trends in Early Islamic Iran* (The University of Oxford, The Persian Heritage Foundation, Bibliothica Persia, 1988, pp. 1-12), “Islam required from its early Persian converts an almost total break with their own religious traditions. Unlike Judaism and Christianity whose prophetic origins were acknowledged by Islam, Zoroastrians, even though it gained a similar legal status as the “book religion” tolerated by the Qur'an, was unequivocally condemned as a false religion. Its founder was a pseudo-prophet without any trace of divine authority. Muslims thus had no incentive to examine the Zoroastrian heritage for elements of religious value as they might search Jewish and Christian scripture and tradition. Zoroastrianism was equally negative in its attitude toward Islam. Put on the defensive by the victorious new religion, it strove to preserve its religious identity and heritage from foreign contamination. “There was nothing to be learned from Islam.” Thus, one many conclude that the break between the old beliefs and Islam was complete. However, “in spite of this uncompromising antagonism between the two faiths, the eighth and ninth centuries witnessed a number of popular revolutionary movements in Iran which overtly mixed Persian and Islamic religious beliefs and motives. The generic name most often applied to these movements in the sources is Khurramdiniyya or Khurramiyya. The name, itself Persian, clearly refers to the Iranian component of their religion. This is generally identified by the Muslim heresiographers as the teaching of Mazdak, the religious and social revolutionary of the age of the Sassanian Kavadh (488-531). The identity of the Khurramiyya in early Islamic times with the remnant of the movement backing Mazdak is generally recognized by modern scholarship, even though the name Khurramdin cannot definitely be traced back to pre-Islamic origins.” However, Madelung finds this history of the pre-Islamic Mazdakite movement quite problematic as it is written and even so it relates the beliefs of Arabs to the neo-Mazdakite sects. The heresiographer al-Shahrastani's account stands apart from the other reports, but Madelung questions its sources. He also questions that Mazdak was the founder of the movement. A. Christensen, in his fundamental monograph on Mazdakism in 1925, described it as an off-shoot from Manichaeism. However, according to recent studies cited by Madelung, Mazdakism, while certainly influenced by Manichaeism, was a Zoroastrian reform movement, as the Mazdakites aspired to re-establish

the true religion of Zoroaster as they saw it but not as a new faith. Even though they criticized established Zoroastrianism, they did not intend to replace it or dismantle its basic structure or to abandon it. "They thus could be described as a Low Church, representing popular religious and social sentiments, in relation to the High Church of orthodox Zoroastrianism, which represented the conservative interests of the aristocracy. The arguments in favor of this view are strong. It is also in agreement with what is known about the character of the Khurramiyya in the time of Islam. The Khurramiyya represented Persian national sentiments looking forward to a restoration of Persian sovereign rule in contrast to the universal religious tendencies of Manichaeism."

However, Madelung finds early Mazdakism more receptive to alien influences than the Zoroastrian High Church and from its very origin it was syncretistic and open to the influence of other religions, in particular Manichaeism, which in turn tended to endanger its doctrinal integrity, making it replete with divergence and religious diversity. The different names given locally to the neo-Mazdakite and Khurrami sects must have often covered religious differences although the accounts do not always clearly identify them. This is quite evident from the different names ascribed to it locally. This diversity in the Zoroastrian Church lying in areas remote from the High Church seems to have enabled the Mazdakites to draw its followers, just as later Abu Muslim al-Khurasan, figurehead of the neo-Mazdakites, the leader of the Abbasid revolution, drew his followers from diverse religious backgrounds. Madelung, despite hoping for more discoveries for establishing firm links between Mazdakism and the later sect of Kanthaens, sees significant similarities between the two. While the similarities he finds between them are too numerous to list here for our purpose, Madelung finds the widespread belief among them, as also among the Khurramdiniya or Khurramiyya who later followed them, in the transmigration of souls very helpful in explaining the existence of such a belief among the Yazidis as described by me in my paper on Yazidism.

Madelung asserts that the Mazdakites described by the Muslim heresiographers therefore were not a single sect with uniform religious beliefs and practices and a common leadership. "Rather they appear as a conglomerate of sects and currents basically characterized by a cosmic dualism and a gnostic syncretism and loosely held together by an allegiance to the revolutionary movement of Mazdak and at least nominal commitment to an ideal Zoroastrian state church, though not to its established hierarchy. Their syncretistic outlook made them naturally more receptive to foreign religious influences than the dogmatically more uniform and institutionally unified Zoroastrian High church. Yet it required a movement of a similar revolutionary and syncretistic nature to bring about the fusion of Iranian dualist and

Islamic elements apparent in the Khurramiyya. Such a movement arose in the Kaysaniyya, the radical Shi'ite, messianic movement which later gave rise to the 'Abbasid revolutionary movement." Madelung postulates that the involvement of the Khurramiyya with the Kaysaniyya was during the time of Abu Hashim, who is said to have espoused extremist Shi'ite doctrines. When he died in 717 his party, popularly known as the Hashimiyya, was quite widespread. The Khurramiyyas played a prominent role in both major branches into which the Hashimiyya had split.

Madelung holds that the Abu Muslim al-Khurasan enjoyed the widest allegiance among the Khurramiyya all over Iran and Transoxamia. The Khurramiyya are often identified with the Abu Muslimiyya or Muslimiyya who recognized Abu Muslim after his death as their imam and a prophet or an incarnation of the divine spirit. The immense popularity of Abu Muslim in Persia was due mainly to the religious allegiance of the Khurramiyya, which ensued the success of the 'Abbasid revolution. Madelung stresses this fact in order to refute recent claims that the 'Abbasid revolution was essentially Arab. Although the revolutionary army was led by Khurasani Arabs, it had the backing of the non-Muslim Persian populace, which was then at least fifty percent of the total Iranian population, if not more, as I have mentioned in my findings about the conversion of Zoroastrian Iran to Islam. "The Umayyad army might not have collapsed so quickly if they had not been operating in enemy country." The hostility between the 'Abbasid rulers and the Khurramiyya was initiated and fanned by the murder of Abu Muslim by the caliph al-Mansur in 753.

The Khurramiyya reaffirmed and solidified their religious commitment to Abu Muslim who stood for Persian self-assertion against Arab domination and 'Abbasid perfidy. It is well known that revolts in his name became quite prevalent in various regions of Iran. The followers even denied that he was dead and expected his return. They held that the Imamate had passed to his daughter Fatima. Later they recognized her son, named Mutahhar or Gohar, as the Imam and the Kudak-i-dana, the omniscient child, who would reappear as the Mahdi. Some Khurramiyyas claimed, according to al-Dinawari, that Babak, the famous Khurrami rebel, was a son of Mutahhar, the grandson of Abu Muslim. The history of Khurramiyya has been well-described by H. Sadighi and by others after him. But, Madelung draws attention to Parsis, a Khurrami clan which so far has escaped proper notice. During the year 1141, Dehkoda 'Abd al-Malik, a Nizari Isma'ili chronicler, noted that a group of Mazadkites (even though he does not refer to them as Khurramiyya, the identity is evident) who had earlier joined the Isma'ili *da'wa* ultimately revealed their secret beliefs. They called themselves Parsis (Parsiyan). Although this name has been used

for the Zoroastrians in India, it does not at all represent them and it is also not used elsewhere for the Khurramiyya. "Its adoption by them evidently reflected their attachment to the Persian and National traditions." They apparently originated from Azerbaijan and thus were most likely remnants of the Khurrami followers of Babak. Earlier, they had professed to be Isma'ilites. The Isma'ili chronicler who was the first to mention them comments that dissimulation or not revealing their true beliefs was their usual practice and they would pretend to follow whatever belief was dominant at the time while concealing their true belief. Thus, when they saw the Isma'ilis becoming strong, they feigned to confess it.

In circa 1124 "a weaver named Budayl arose among them and told them: "The truth is with the Parsis; the Isma'ilis are people clinging to the exterior of religion. The law of the Shari'a is only for those adhering to the exterior of religion. There is no reality to what is declared lawful or forbidden in religion. Prayer and fasting must therefore be abandoned." When this teaching became known, the Isma'ilis seized some of the heretics and forced them through torture to confess." All their followers were killed within a year. Madelung maintains that the description of their beliefs "agrees largely with information about the Khurramiyya from other sources and with allowance for some polemical exaggeration, probably represents it faithfully." They maintained that "the Great Kings of the Persians since Jamshid had been rightful imams. From them, the imamate had passed to Muhammad and 'Ali, and (ultimately) to Abu Muslim Marwazi and to his grandson Gohar. The Isma'ilis fully reject such a claim for the line of imams. How, they question, could the Persian Kings and then Muhammad and 'Ali all have been rightful imams in face of the fact that there was much bloodshed and intense hostility between them? And, as the last Imam, Gohar, has been hidden for more than five hundred years, no one could have access to their imam. Muslims would denounce anyone making such a claim as an infidel."

Madelung observes that "the polemic of the Isma'ili author highlights both the gulf between the Khurrami and Isma'ili conception of the imamate and the persistent commitment of the Khurramiyya to Persian religious and national tradition. In contrast to the line of Qur' ancient prophets and their successors through which the Isma'ilis traced the pre-Islamic imamate, the Khurramiyya considered the Persian kings as their imams. Nothing is said about their attitude to the prophets recognized by Islam." They believed that "the legitimate dominance of Arab Islam lasted only a short time," Thus, the Khurramiyya held that even though Abu Muslim could not succeed in eliminating the Arab domination because he was treacherously killed by the 'Abbasid Caliph al-Mansur after he heroically helped the 'Abbasids

to come to power, “his grandson would complete his work and restore the Persian religion and domination as the Madhi. Islam thus was nothing but a brief interlude in the religious tradition of Islam” (pp. 1-12).