



حبر أبيض  
WHITE INK



**Prof. Mohamed Afifi**

# Zoroastrianism between the past and the present

Zoroastrianism is an ancient religion and is also viewed as a religious philosophy. Zoroastrianism appeared in ancient Persia, and historians disagree greatly about its beginnings, as some see that it appeared between 1400 and 1200 BC, while others believe that it appeared in the seventh century BC. Others say that it appeared in the sixth century BC. The Zoroastrian holy book is known as "Avesta" and "Upasta".

Zoroastrianism continued as the official religion of Persia from the time of the Achaemenid state in ancient Iran to the era of the Islamic conquests of Persia when the conversion to Islam began in the region. The Arabs called Zoroastrianism "Magianism" and its followers "The Magians".

Zoroastrianism was closely associated with Persian nationalism and played a role in the Iranian popular imagination until after the spread of Islam in Persia until some ultra-Persian nationalists viewed Zoroastrianism as their ancient heritage that Islam came to erase, and those people linked between Zoroastrianism and the glory of the Persian element.

Some history books mention that some fanatics of Zoroastrianism tried to claim that Islam was influenced by Zoroastrianism. These sayings appeared early in the Islamic era in an attempt to raise the status of Zoroastrianism before Islam. They talked about the similarity in the number and times of prayers in Islam and Zoroastrianism, and they saw that Islam took the idea of after death from Zoroastrianism.

The biggest of these attempts was to say that there is a Zoroastrian origin in the story of the Ascension in Islam (Mi'raj). Some spoke of the story of Viraf, whose soul left his body and went to heaven, where the Straight Path or the Straight Bridge. The story of the Ascension to heaven was also depicted as the one who ascended to heaven was on the back of an animal, so that the story would come close to Al-Buraq.

Mrs. Mary Boyce, a scholar of oriental literature, says: "It remained common that the story of (Ardā Wirāz nāmag) had an impact on the Islamic story of Mi'raj until it became clear that the last version of that the story was recent and was written after the descent of Islam". Here, the researcher refers to the situation of the story in the Islamic era, or at least that it was Islam that influenced Zoroastrianism in this regard, and not the opposite.

In recent years, the tweet posted by the former Iranian Foreign Minister, "Javad Zarif" on his account in the social network, sparked a great deal of controversy, as he tweeted:

"In memory of the death of Zoroaster, the great Iranian prophet and the founder of the principles of goodness, good deeds and kind words".

Javad Zarif's tweet sparked a storm of criticism, as some viewed it as demonstrating the association of Persian nationalism with Zoroastrianism, especially Zarif's description of Zoroaster as "the great Iranian prophet". How does the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic say this? Others viewed it as an attempt by the regime to improve its global image as being non-biased with Shiite Islam and opened to other religions and cultures.

Some responded to Zarif's tweet with strong disapproval and pointed to the regime's abuse of the Zoroastrian minority in Iran now, as Zoroastrians suffer from marginalization and deprivation of access to jobs, especially high positions in the state.