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The Zoroastrian Priests of the Islamic Era

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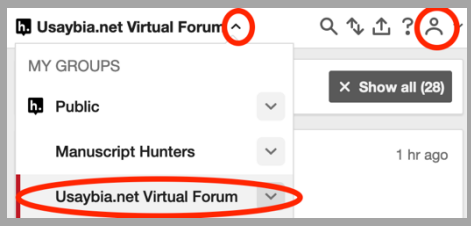

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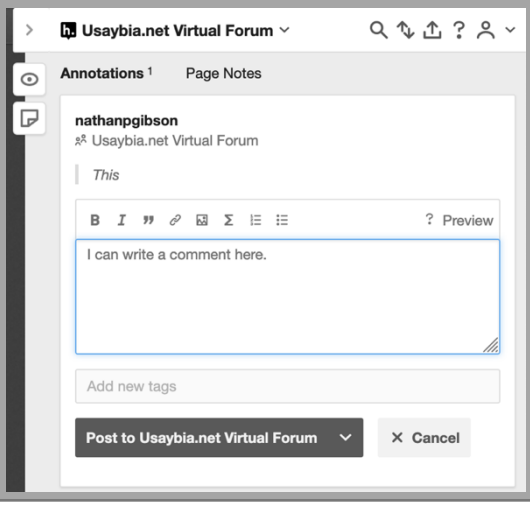

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Introduction to the Problem:

The Zoroastrian priesthood was greatly diminished over the centuries after the Arab conquest, and its traditions so scattered that only a fragment of the Zoroastrian knowledge that had once existed still remained by ʿAbbāsid era. Yet despite the gap between the ninth- and tenth-century priests and the end of the Sasanian kingdom, the extant corpus of Zoroastrian texts is taken to be the product of a continuous tradition of priestly transmission. Furthermore, the "dwindling priesthood" of the ninth and tenth centuries is thought to be that of a single family. That may in fact be the case, but the accompanying assertion that that family is descended from that of a famous Sasanid-era priest is more problematic. It relies upon a constructed genealogy with several missing links—a genealogy which only seems to be asserted for the first time in the ninth and tenth centuries. Modern scholars' uncritical acceptance of these claims have led to several inconsistencies in interpreting the familial relationships of priests known from that period. This further contributes to the picture of a Zoroastrian orthodoxy with roots in the Sasanian era—but which more clearly should be understood as a construction of the Islamic era, and given authority under the patronage of ʿAbbāsid and Būyid rulers.

This article questions standard narratives of Zoroastrian history and priestly transmission by looking at Zoroastrian priests in Arabic sources of the ninth and tenth centuries alongside contemporary Middle Persian texts. The information provided by Arabic sources corroborates the names and chronology of some individual priests, and can help rectify the mistakes commonly made by modern scholars who have mostly accepted the *mobeds*' claims of continuity at face value. In addition, the Arabic sources not only show just how active the *mobeds* were outside of their "dwindling Zoroastrian communities" but also how they leveraged their knowledge and expertise to gain the favor—and patronage—of new rulers in a drastically altered context from that of the Sasanid past from which they claimed descent.

Part I: The ZMP Sources on the History of the Tradition

- *Zand ī Wahman Yasn* (Xusrō, council of the *mobeds*, and the teaching of the *zand*)
- *Letters of Mānuščihr* (ca. 881 family of *mobeds*, disputes over duties)
- *Bundahišn* (Ch. 35 genealogy of *mobeds* in family of mythical Mānuščihr—conflations and mistakes in our readings)
- *Dēnkard* III (final redactors of *Dēnkard*; later colophons)

Part II: The Arabic Sources and the *mobeds* of the Islamic Era

As important as the Zoroastrian Middle Persian texts have been for the study of Zoroastrians and Zoroastrianism(s), this field has long relied on outside sources to fill in the gaps of our knowledge and in the written record.[1] Yet despite several

[1] For example, de Jong's (1997) *Traditions of the Magi*, and Bidez & Cumont's (1938) *Les Mages Hellénisés*; more recent and noteworthy is Richard Payne's (2015) *State of Mixture*, where he has incorporated Syriac hagiograpical and historiographical works into the study of Sasanian Iran.

studies of Arabic sources that mention Zoroastrians in the Islamic period,[2] few aim to be comprehensive in their treatment.[3] Decades ago, Shaul Shaked pointed to the value of the Arabic sources, especially as many of the authors were Iranian in origin, and consulted with actual Zoroastrians.[4] However, Shaked and others are mostly interested in the beliefs and practices of Zoroastrians, rather than individual Zoroastrians or their priests.[5] There is still no major monograph on or diachronic study of the Zoroastrian priesthood in particular, despite the importance of this institution for the very preservation of the texts that define Zoroastrianism as we know it.[6] A major barrier to any such work is that it requires familiarity with multiple languages and literary traditions; without readily available translations and editions of the primary sources in question, it is easy to see why scholars have been isolated in their own fields of study and their particular research languages.

In this article I have collected various citations in Arabic sources about Zoroastrian priests—only some of which have been noted by scholars before—and attempted to organize them in a meaningful way. As well as bringing all of these citations together in one place as an aid for others interested in the topic who may not have the necessary facility with the language, such a project is the only way to notice patterns—if such patterns indeed exist.

These references span authors, genres, and centuries of Arabic literature. They appear in histories, geographies, *adab* works, heresiographies, *ṭabaqāt* literature, and, of course, Ibn al-Nadīm's catalogue of books in tenth-century Baghdad. Apart from the Zoroastrian priests that appear in histories about or reports from the Sasanian period, these texts cite the Zoroastrian priests of the ʿAbbāsid era (usually *al-mawbaḏ* in Arabic)[7] as authors of books, as informants on topics of Persian religious or

[2] Gottheil 1894, Modi 1933, Chaumont 1960, Shboul 1979, Shaked 1994, and Bürgel 1999; more historical overviews can be found in Spuler 1952, Bulleit 1979, Morony 1984 and 2012.
[3] E.g. Kreyenbroek 1987a and 1987b, which are excellent starting points. Actually, encyclopedia entries are actually some of the most comprehensive treatments of Zoroastrian priests for the Islamic period, but these often recycle unqualified statements and incorrect information: Guidi & Morony ("Mōbadh" *EI*^{2}); Morony 1986 ("Madjūs" *EI*^{2}).
[4] Shaked 1994.
[5] E.g. Zaehner 1955, who is concerned with the identification of "Zurvānism" as an alternative to more orthodox Zoroastrianism.
[6] There is an understandable split between the study of the Sasanian and post-Sasanian periods, which also has to do with language barriers and traditional boundaries of disciplines like Iranian studies. There are more targeted studies of the Zoroastrian priesthood for the Sasanian period, but though very useful for studying the development of the offices of priesthood alongside other administrative positions, these studies are usually limited to short articles on specific topics: see Gignoux 1980, 1982, and 1983, Shaked 1990, Kreyenbroek 2013, etc.
[7] This transliteration renders the Arabic spelling of the Middle Persian title *mōbed* or *mowbed* [mgwpt], which itself originally means "chief priest" (as in "chief *mog*" or "chief *magus*"); however, the Arabic terminology is not consistent. Sometimes authors refer to the title of the *mawbaḏān mawbaḏ*, or the chief *mawbaḏ* (MP *mobedān mobed*, patterned on the title given to "king of kings," MP *šāhān šāh*); sometimes *al-mawbaḏān* is used as a singular (despite its origin being the genitive/oblique plural in the title previously mentioned); sometimes *mawbaḏ* appear with the article *al-* and sometimes without; there is even an Arabicized plural on the pattern of the broken plural (*al-mawābiḏa*). It is debateable whether the Arabic term retains the same meaning as the Middle Persian office as found, for example, on Sasanian-era bullae and seals; I would argue that the function of the office changed in the Islamic period, and

cultural significance, as sages attributed with wise or clever sayings, as advisors to kings and caliphs, and as participants in religious debates in the court of the caliph or his vizier. Sometimes the reference is to a named individual—and in a few instances this name is corroborated by Zoroastrian texts[8]—sometimes the reference is specific but unnamed.[9] Some of these references are sometimes a-contextual and a-temporal, or are recycled from earlier authors (and so cannot be used as contemporary evidence); and even when they are given context (a *mobed* speaking with a specific caliph, for example) they are of a legendary tone that gives suspicion to their historicity. So each example must be considered on a case-by-case basis.

The Arabic citations can be divided into three major categories or themes:

1. the *mawbaḏ* in inter-religious disputation
2. the *mawbaḏ* as a "judge" and advisor
3. the *mawbaḏ* as informant of the intellectual community

These categories and themes are not mutually exclusive, and they are to a certain extent arbitrary, but I organize them this way as a heuristic exercise to bring other possible patterns and themes into focus.[10]

A recent article by Götz König which reproduces an (incorrect) "traditional genealogy" of Zoroastrian priests; the article actually has a much bigger point about the transmission of Greek philosophy that coincides with mine: that the ninth-century Zoroastrians, and especially the priest Ādurfarrbay Farroxzādān and his circle, are participating in a particularly ninth-century, ʿAbbāsid intellectual project.[11] König concludes that there was no continuous transmission of Greek philosophy in Middle Persian—and although I disagree with König's arguments about the lack of Greek philosophy in earlier ZMP texts, he is right to point to the ʿAbbāsid period as the resurgence or codification of Greek philosophy in Zoroastrian circles—as part of a larger intellectual phenomenon at the time…

Recently, scholars have drawn attention to Baghdād as the center of Zoroastrian religious learning, showing the importance of the ʿAbbāsid capital especially in relation to the compilation of the *Dēnkard*.[12] For instance, de Jong has reiterated that the longest and most comprehensive Zoroastrian Middle Persian work, the *Dēnkard* ("Acts of the Religion"), was actually written in Baghdād in the ninth century, and (according to the earliest colophons we have for a Zoroastrian manuscript) found and copied there again in 1020.[13] Rezania argues that the *Dēnkard* was actually written for a Muslim audience as an apologetic text defending the Zoroastrian religion in the context of inter-religious discourse in Baghdād.[14]

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retroactively so too did the understanding of that role in the Sasanian period…but this is the topic of another paper.

[8] These references have received the most attention (e.g. Modi 1931), yet the genealogies of these individuals is often mistaken (or taken for granted, without textual proof)—something I hope to rectify in another paper.

[9] Or *al-Mawbaḏ* is given as a name / title.

[10] As an alternative, Shaked 1994 distinguishes between incidental references to Zoroastrians and actual discussion of their beliefs and practices.

[11] König 2018: 32-33.

[12] de Jong 2016 and Rezania 2017.

[13] de Jong 2016; also see Rezania 2017 for an excerpt and translation of this colophon.

[14] Rezania 2017. Though he does not (here) make use of Arabic sources as a counterpart to the Middle Persian texts, see his forthcoming article entitled "Zoroastrian Representatives at

[Similarly, Campopiano examines ZMP texts of the ninth and tenth centuries for their view on Muslims and purity regulations, giving special emphasis to the apologetic text of the *Škand-Gumānīg Wizār* ("The Doubt-Dispelling Exposition") in the context of interreligious debate of the late ninth century and the development of Islamic rationalistic theology.[15]] But who were the priests who wrote these Zoroastrian texts? **If the *Dēnkard* is the epitome of what survives, then what else was out there? We might find more variety than the surviving Zoroastrian manuscript tradition shows.**

There were evidently more *mobeds* than previously assumed, and they are more active in the wider intellectual circles than previously supposed, and operating under the patronage of Muslim rulers. There were multiple communities of Zoroastrians living under Islamic rule, and it is not clear to what extent they communicated with each other or followed similar practices. As the letters of Mānuščihr show, in the late ninth century Fārs there was some difficulty in getting communities to recognize the regional authority of a particular priest… Additionally, Crone has illustrated the persistence and plurality of "local Zoroastrianisms" in this period as well.[16] Arabic sources shed light on where and when these communities thrived, what groups and individuals were considered authoritative in the wider Zoroastrian community, and what regional variety there might also have been. We should be viewing Zoroastrian priests as part of the intellectual culture of the ʿAbbāsid and Buyid courts, and placing Zoroastrianism in the dialectic of competing claims to Magian orthodoxy and orthopraxy in the early Islamic period. This will have implications for the context of the surviving body of Zoroastrian literature and what it represents of the Zoroastrian tradition. Perhaps we should be emphasizing the particular, elite religion of the Sasanian *magi*, and their early Islamic successors as even more particularized: a single line of priests descended through one family (whether the genealogy is real or imagined)—priests who, once they had lost the patronage of the Sasanids, sought it from local elites in an entirely new context.

II.1. The *mobed* in inter-religious disputation

I begin with examples of *al-mawbaḏ* in inter-religious disputation for two reasons. The first is because this is a topic that other scholars have already treated in secondary literature; I move to "new" ground below. The second is because it is the example the most easily dismissed as a topos: it is difficult to situate the disputational inter-faith *majlis* as a historical event, despite references to specific individuals, because the individuals and the content of their debate is often recycled (and

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the Abbasid Court," in which (as I gather from his 2017 article) his translation of the MP title *hudēnēn pēšōbāy* is "Representative" (which has conventionally been translated as "leader of those of the good religion," or "leader of the faithful" as a calque of the Arabic *amīr al-muʾminīn*).

[15] Campopiano 2018, also examining passages from the *Dēnkard*, the *Bundahišn*, the *Zand ī Wahman Yasn*, and the *rivāyat* of Ēmēd ī Ašawahištān; unlike these other texts, however, the Middle Persian of the extant *Škand-Gumānīg Wizār* (ed. de Menasce) is written in the Avestan script (this form of writing Middle Persian is called *pāzand*); the text also survives in a Sanskrit translation. In these texts, the MP word *ag-dēnān* (lit. "(those of) the bad religion") is taken to mean "Muslim," in contrast with *weh-dēnān* (lit. "(those of) the good religion"), which is the most common MP word for those who follow the teachings of Zarathuštra and worship Ahura Mazdā.

[16] Crone 2012.

attributed to different individuals at different times). For example, al-Rāġib al-Iṣfahānī (d. 1108) in his encyclopedic *adab* work entitled *Muḥāḍarāt al-udabāʾ* ("Lectures of the Cultured Ones"), describes how al-Maʾmūn was sitting with his "theologians" (*mutakallimūn*), and the Christian catholicos (*al-jāṯalīq*), when the Zoroastrian *mobed* joins them. The anecdote reads like a bad joke of the "a priest and a rabbi walk into a bar"-type, with the *mobed* delivering the punch-line and getting the better of his Christian counterpart, making al-Maʾmūn laugh uproariously.[17] This appears to be a retelling (in slightly different wording) of an anecdote that also appears in al-Tawḥīdī's (d. 1020) earlier *adab* work, *al-Baṣāʾir wa-l-ḏaḫāʾir* ("Insights and Treasures"), already nearly 200 years after the event described—if it actually happened.[18]

The caliphates of al-Maʾmūn (r. 813-833) and his father Hārūn al-Rašīd (r. 786-809) are a popular setting for religious disputation. Julie Meisami discusses the disputation on love from al-Masʿūdī's (d. 956) *Murūj al-ḏahab* ("Fields of Gold") that is supposed to have occurred in the *majlis* of Yaḥyā b. Ḫālid al-Barmakī (d. 805).[19] In this disputation, after a series of twelve Muslims (nine of whom are prominent *mutakallimūn*: five Muʾtazilī and four imāmī Šīʿī; the others being a Ḫārijī, a Murjiʾī, and an unknown theologian) the thirteenth and final participant is a Zoroastrian *mobed*.[20] The very topic of the debate on the nature of love famously goes back to Plato's *Phaedrus,* and al-Masʿūdī consciously uses this episode as a digression from his treatment of the Barmakids—whose scion Jaʿfar b. Yaḥyā (d. 803) was allegedly killed for his illicit love affair with Hārūn al-Rašīd's sister, al-ʿAbbāsa. This time was considered a "Golden Age" by later Arabic authors, and was a continual (and often elaborated, if not spurious) source of literary inspiration for them. Yet the rhetorical nature of al-Masʿūdī's narrative (and others') does not preclude an actual historical occurrence. Nor does the relatively late date of these Arabic accounts necessarily indicate their fabrication—especially when contemporary texts also allude to them.

Zoroastrian texts from the ninth and tenth centuries also provide examples of inter-religious disputation. For instance, the Middle Persian text known as the *Gizistag Abālīš* describes how Ādurfarrbāy ī Farroxzādān, who is called *hudēnān pēšōbāy* ("leader of the faithful") and *mobed*, debates with a Zoroastrian apostate named Abālīš before *Māmūn amīr mūminīn* and his *kādīg* (for Arabic *qāḍī*).[21] Though scholars have shown that this story is based on an Arabic precedent adapted to a Zoroastrian context (Abālīš likely rendering the Arabic name Abū ʿAlī or Abū Layṯ),[22] the fact of its adaptation and attribution to this specific individual at the court of al-Maʾmūn shows that such an event was though to be possible—and indeed we know from Arabic sources that Zoroastrian *mobeds* were present as such inter-religious debates.[23] Other examples from Zoroastrian tradition corroborate these (real

[17] ed. Murād, IV.147; the joke is rather raunchy; see a translation in van Gelder 2005: ??, under the section on Zoroastrian close-kin marriage.
[18] ed. Wadād al-Qāḍī, VII.79.
[19] On the Bactrian background of the Barmakids and their rise and fall in the ʿAbbāsid administration, see van Bladel 2011 and 2012.
[20] Meisami 1989, who credits the *mobed* with the most detailed and sophisticated argument; ed. Pellat, IV.236-46.
[21] ed. Chacha 1936.
[22] See de Jong 2016 and Rezania 2017: 342 n.20, both citing van Ess 1991: III.203ff.
[23] de Blois (1996: n. 79) is skeptical of this text having any historical value beyond confirming the date of the figure in question; he calls it "an edifying work of fiction" in which

or imagined) contexts of religious disputation in the court, in a long tradition going back to the first Sasanian kings.[24]

Even if the disputation is a topos, it is still very likely based on historical fact.[25] There are too many instances for this *not* to be the case. Ibn Saʿdī (ca. 1010) tells of his disappointment in the theological debating societies of Baghdad: he complains that the discussions between Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians, Manichaeans, and Muslims (both "Sunnis and heretics") do not use the revelation of the Qurʾān as a starting point.[26] The level playing ground of these disputations does not win this religious purist's approval, but it does show how prevalent they were. Al-Ḏahabī (d. 1348) describes another such inter-religious *majlis* in Baṣrā in 772/3 which included a Sunni, a Šīʿī, a dualist, a Ḫāriǧī, a gnostic (?), the son of the Jewish exilarch, a Christian theologian, and one Zoroastrian named ʿAmr, the nephew of *al-mawbad* / al-Muʾayyad.[27]

The names of some famous intellectuals are repeated in these and other accounts of debates and disputations. For example, Ibn Qutayba al-Dīnawarī (d. 889) and Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih al-Andalusī (d. 940) both relate the story of a *mobed*—who is glossed by the latter as *ʿālim al-furs* ("a learned man among the Persians")—in a disputation about the nature of the world with Hišām b. al-Ḥakam (d. after 814), the same imāmī Šīʿī theologian from al-Masʿūdī's account of Yaḥyā b. Ḫālid's *majlis* (above).[28] Another participant of al-Masʿūdī's *majlis*, the Muʾtazilī Ṯumāma b. Ašras (d. 828) also has another go at it: the *adīb* ʿAlī b. ʿUbayda al-Rayḥānī (d. 834) describes another *majlis* on love in presence of caliph al-Maʾmūn, with himself, Ṯumāma, and Yaḥyā b. Akṯam (d. 857), the latter two scholars, judges and associates

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the anonymous author uses the known figure of Ādurfarrbay ī Farroxzādān to give verisimilitude to his account.

[24] With legendary champions like Ādurbād ī Mahrspandān, to whom the Zoroastrian priests of the Islamic period trace their lineage and orthodoxy of religion as well as textual tradition (discussed below). On the competitive religious environment in the Sasanian court, see Gardner et al. 2015.

[25] And historical precedent, in the courts of the Sasanian kings.

[26] As related by the Andalusian al-Ḥumaydī (d. 1095) in his biographical dictionary, *Jaḏwat al-muqtabis* (ed. al-Abyārī, Cairo-Beirut. n.d.) and reproduced with some additions by another Andalusian biographer, al-Daqqī (d. 1203); discussed in Cook 2007.

[27] *I wonder if this word was mispointed, as in van Bladel's emendation of Ǫustā's letter?* Snir 2013: 8 n. 31 citing al-Ḏahabī, *Taʾrīḫ al-Islam*, ed. Bashshār ʿAwwād Maʿrūf et al., 383 (with further references: "For another version of this episode, see Ibn Taghribirdi 1930, II, p. 29 (edition 1992, II, 36– 37); on the liberal cultural atmosphere at the time, see also Yaqut 1990, III, pp. 242– 44."):

> Ten persons used to meet regularly. There was no equivalent to this gathering for the diversity of the religions and sects of its members: al- Khalil ibn Ahmad — a Sunni, and al-Sayyid ibn Muhammad al-Himyari — Shiite, and Salih ibn 'Abd al- Qaddus — dualist, and Sufyan ibn Mujashi' — Khariji, and Bashshar ibn Burd — morally depraved and impudent, and Hammad 'Ajrad — heretic, and the exilarch's son — a Jew, and Ibn Nazir — a Christian theologian, and 'Amr the nephew of al- Mu'ayyad — Zoroastrian, and Rawh ibn Sinan al- Harrana — Gnostic. At these gatherings they used to recite poems, and Bashshar used to say: Your verses, Oh man, are better than sura this or that [of the Qur'an], andfrom that kind of joking and similar things they declared Bashhar to be a disbeliever.

[28] *ʿUyūn al-aḫbār*, ed. Yūsuf 'Alī Ṭawīl, II.168-169; *al-ʿIqd al-farīd*, ed. Muḥammad Altūnjī, II.349-50.

of al-Ḥasan b. Sahl (d. 850) who step into the role of *wazīr* after his own forced retirement.[29]

The references show that the idea of inter-religious disputation was never *just* a topos; rather than the caliph merely "tolerating" religious minorities or gathering the leaders of these other communities in Baghdad under his control, it seems that the *mobed* was a known figure of respected authority in the court of the caliph. This was due partly to a continuation of the *mobed*'s advisory role to the Sasanids and his reputation as a man of learning, but this story also must be told in the context of the changing social dynamics of the ʿAbbāsid revolution and the first centuries of that dynasty: when supporters of the rebellion came from predominantly Persian backgrounds, and the non-Arab *mawālī* increasingly filled administrative roles, with Zoroastrian converts like the Barmakids and then the Nawbaḫt family rising to prominence under al-Maʾmūn and the later Būyid *amīr*s. This is the story of Iranian nationalism, the *šuʿūbīya*, and the *zanādiqa*. [30] It is also the story of the changing tides of political power that saw the execution of Jaʿfar and the assassination of al-Faḍl b. Sahl. And it is precisely with these individuals and their circles of intellectual elites—the who's who of the ʿAbbāsid court, from the ranks of the *kuttāb*, *quḍā*, *wuzarāʾ*, and general *udabāʾ*—that we find the Zoroastrian *mobeds*, when we glimpse them at all. And there is reason to suspect that the *mobeds* played their own part in the administration of the caliphate, even if the general role of advisor to the caliph himself.

II.2. The *mobed* as a "judge" and advisor

In a way, this aspect of the Zoroastrian *mobed* of the ʿAbbāsid period is the most evident but the most elusive. There are many passing references to this figure at the side of the caliph—so like the role of the *mobed* in Arabic narratives of the Sasanian past—but they are vague as to nature of this relationship, the identity of the *mobed*, and his standing with regard to the rest of the Zoroastrian community. I can only gather these references, and try to ascertain from the contemporary Arabic sources as to what the role of the *mobed* was in the Islamic era.

The attributions of wise sayings to *mobeds* in Arabic are numerous, sometimes as translations of Middle Persian wisdom literature (MP *andarz*) but also as stand-alone citations on a particular topic alongside other Greek or Muslim sages.

Ibn Qutayba (d. 889), in reading the books of the Persians, likens the *mobedān mobed* to secretaries (*al-kuttāb*) for the role they play in advising kings.[31]

The title *al-mawbaḏ* is most often glossed by Arabic authors as *al-qāḍī*, while the *mawbaḏān mawbaḏ* (for MP *mobedān mobed*) was explained as *qāḍī al-quḍāt*, or "judge of judges," the highest authority under the caliph alongside the vizierate.[32] That office was an innovation of Hārūn al-Rašīd (r. 786-809), perhaps as a calque of

[29] Al-Rayḥānī, *Jawāhir al-kilam wa-farāʾid al-ḥikam* ("The Jewels of Speech and the Pearls of Wisdom"), ed. and trans. Zakeri 2006, #2493; this episode also appears in the biographer Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī's (d. 1229) entry for al-Rayḥānī in his *Muʿjam al-udabāʾ,* ed. Iḥsān ʿAbbās, 1993. Beirut, IV.1816 (#786). On this *majlis* and al-Rayḥānī's circle of associates, see the introduction to Zakeri 2006, where he dates this disputation to the years 825-828 (after al-Ḥasan b. Sahl retires).

[30] See Ibrahim 1994.

[31] *ʿUyūn al-aḫbār*, ed. Yūsuf ʿAlī Ṭawīl, I.60-61.

[32]

the Sasanian priestly high office.[33] The first (extant) author to gloss the title *al-mawbaḏ* is Ibn Saʿd (d. 845), who says that if Abu Qilāba (d. 725/6)—a traditionist from Baṣrā—had been one of the *ʿajam* then he would have been a *mobed mobedān*, which means *qāḍī al-quḍāt*."[34] This anecdote is repeated in several other *ṭabaqāt* works.[35] In addition, al-Ḫwārazmī (ca. 970s) also glosses *mawbaḏ mawbaḏān* as *qāḍī al-quḍāt* in his *Mafātīḥ al-ʿulūm*.[36]

Both al-Masʿūdī (d. 956) and Ibn Ḥazm (d. 1064) attempt to explain the role of the *mobed* in his Zoroastrian context and internal hierarchy. Al-Masʿūdī describes how the first *mobed* after Zarathuštra was the mythical Jāmasp from Azerbaijan, while Ardašīr (r. 224-242) (re-)instituted the office and appointed the *mobedān mobed* over the other priests.[37] Al-Masʿūdī actually spoke with a specific *mobed* whose name is also known from a Zoroastrian text (see below). Ibn Ḥazm…[38]
Both authors seem to have been relatively well-informed by Zoroastrians, despite the anachronism of these claims (in fact, the title *mobedān mobed* seems to have developed in the later Sasanian period)[39]—and despite the polemic nature of the latter work. In fact, several heresiographies relate important information about the Zoroastrian priesthood in the Islamic period.

Another example is al-Šahrastānī's (d. 1153) heresiographical work *Kitāb al-milal wa-l-niḥal*, which has long been studied for its comments on Zoroastrian belief and practice, especially for the origins of the prophet Zarathuštra.[40] In the *Kitāb al-milal wa-l-niḥal*, al-Šahrastānī describes the office of the *mobedān mobed* in the time of the Persian kings of old:

> And the kings had a recourse to which to turn (*marjiʿ*), the *mobedān mobed*, who was the most learned of the learned men, the foremost of the sages, and they [the kings] would proceed from his command, not disagree with him, and would only seek the authority of his opinion, and give him as much power as the absolute power of the caliphs of that time.[41]

This was the legacy of the Sasanian-era *mobedān mobed* as recorded by al-Šahrastānī in the twelfth century. But what does this office signify in the post-Sasanian period,

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[33] See E. Tyan, "Kāḍī" *EI*^{2}.
[34] *al-Tabaqāt al-kabīr*, ed. 'Alī Muḥammad 'Umar, ??.
[35] e.g. al-Fasawī (d. 890), *al-Maʿrifa wa-l-taʾrīḫ* (but without the gloss of *qāḍī al-quḍāt*); Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣfahānī (d. 1038), *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ wa-ṭabaqāt al-aṣfiyāʾ*; and al-Ḏahabī (d. 1348), *Siyar aʿlām al-Nubalāʾ*, ed. , .
[36] ed. van Vloten, 114.
[37] See al-Masʿūdī's *Murūj al-ḏahab* (ed. Pellat, I.271-72,287) and his *al-Tanbīh al-išrāf* (ed. de Goeje, 103).
[38] *al-Fiṣal fī l-milal* (ed. 1347/1928, vol. I.92-93).
[39] See Kreyenbroek 1987a and 1987b.
[40] E.g. Shaked 1994, etc.; ed. Cureton 181ff; see translations in Gimaret & Monnot 1986: 633ff and Shaked 1994: 63-64. Some sections of this work (which do not appear in most of the manuscripts) were likely copied from an earlier (lost) work by the tenth-century Sāmānid vizier(s) named al-Jayhānī: The putative *Kitāb al-Masālik wa-l-mamālik*, perhaps edited by three generations of al-Jayhānī's in the late tenth century—all viziers of the Sāmānids; see Pellat ("Djayhānī," *EI2*), as well as the translation of Shaked 1994: 64-73, citing the translation of de Menasce 1954.
[41] *Kitāb al-milal wa-l-niḥal*, ed. Cureton, 180; *wa-kāna li-mulūkihim marjiʿun hūwa mawbaḏ mawbaḏān aʿlamu l-ʿulamāʾi wa-aqdamu l-ḥukamāʾi yaṣdurūna ʿn amrihī wa-lā yarjiʿūna illā ilā rāʾyihī wa-yuʿaẓẓimūnahu taʿẓīma l-sulāṭīni li-ḫulafāʾi l-waqti*

practically speaking? When the Zoroastrian Sasanids are gone, and Muslims now ruled Iran?

According to Arabic sources, *mobeds* continued to appear at the side of caliphs, viziers, and *amīrs*—evidently as early as the beginning of the ʿAbbāsid caliphate: later in the section on Zoroastrians in al-Šahrastānī's heresiography, he also describes various sects of the *majūs*, including one called *al-Sīsāniyya*, which was led by a man called Sīsan in Nīšābūr in the time of Abū Muslim (d. 755). Sīsān appears to have rejected the recitation of the Avesta (here indicated by the Arabic word *zamama*) and the worship of fire in favor of other practices, and *al-Sīsāniyya* were "the deadliest enemies of the *zamzamī majūs*," i.e. the Zoroastrians who practice recitation—or perhaps the priests themselves. In fact, "a *mobed* of the *majūs* brought him [Sīsān] before Abū Muslim, who then killed him at the gate of the main mosque of Nīšābūr."[42] This *mobed* had the ear of the first ʿAbbāsid ruler, as the beginning of what appears to be a pattern of *mobeds* in the ʿAbbāsid court and beside the Muslim rulers of Iran.

For example, there is a well-known episode in which a *mobed* serves as a judge (or witness) in an Islamic context: the high-profile trial of the disgraced al-Afšīn (d. 841).[43] Al-Afšīn had served as a general under al-Maʾmūn (r. 813-33) and al-Muʿtaṣim (r. 833-42) but, due in large part to his rivalry with the Ṭāḥirids of Ḫurāsān, as well as his support of the failed rebellion of al-Māzyār (a local ruler in Ṭabaristān), was now accused of apostasy, or the charge of *zindīq*.[44] One of al-Afšīn's accusers at the trial is an unnamed *mobed* whom the narrator of the report describes as "a Magian who subsequently converted to Islam at the hand of al-Mutawakkil and became one of the latter's boon companions."[45] This description of the *mobed* casts doubt upon his integrity as a witness—either because he is not trustworthy even in regards to his own religion (because he would later convert), or because his testimony is inadmissible in a Muslim court (not having yet converted).

François de Blois has identified this *mobed* as one Zarādušt b. Ādurfarrbay.[46] His father, Ādurfarrbay ī Farroxzādān, was the first redactor of the Middle Persian *Dēnkard* and was supposed to have disputed with "Abālīš" in the court of al-Maʾmūn.[47] Zarādušt's apostasy was regarded as a tragedy by the final redactor of the *Dēnkard*, Ādurbād ī Ēmēdān, who has to pick up the pieces of this text and put them

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[42] *Kitāb al-milal wa-l-niḥal*, ed. Cureton, 187; *ṯumma anna mawbaḏa l-majūsi rafaʿahū ilā abī muslimin fa-qatalahū ʿalā bābi l-jāmiʿi bi-nīsābūra*

[43] This episode appears in al-Ṭabarī's (d. 923) *Taʾrīḫ al-rusūl wa-l-mulūk*, ed. de Goeje et al., III.2.1308-13 (trans. Bosworth, XXXIII.185-93); this trial is also reported, with some variation, by al-Ḏahabī (d. 1348), *Taʾrīḫ al-Islām*, ed. Tadmurī, 16.17-21 and also in his *Siyar aʿlām al-nubalāʾ*, ed. Shuʿayb al-Arnāʾūṭ, ??. Note that *al-Afšīn* is actually a title, of the Central Asian princes of Samarqand.

[44] The associations of such charges, which ranged from outright heresy and dualist / Manichaean beliefs to essentially "not being a good Muslim", are beyond the scope of this paper (see Ibrahim 1994, cited above).

[45] al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīḫ al-rusūl wa-l-mulūk*, ed. de Goeje et al, III.2.1310 (trans. Bosworth, XXXIII.188); al-Ḏahabī (d. 1348), *Taʾrīḫ al-Islām*, ed. Tadmurī, 16.19-20; *wa-kāna l-mawbaḏu majūsiyyan ṯumma baʿda hāḏā aslama ʿalā yadi l-mutawakkili wa-nādamahū*.

[46] de Blois 1996:45, citing a passage in Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī's (d. 1229) *Muʿjam al-buldān*, ed. Wüstenfeld, III.185,925; also see Hämeen-Anttila 2018: 75-76. Al-Bīrūnī (d. 1048), who quotes the *Xwadāy-nāmag* transmitter (Mūsā b. ʿĪsā) al-Kisrawī (ca. 870s) who spoke with "al-Mutawakkil's *mobed*" (*al-Āṯār al-bāqiya*, ed. Sachau, 223); see Hämeen-Anttila 2018: 76-89

[47] As related in the Middle Persian *Gizistag Abāliš*, mentioned above.

together again.[48] If this identification is correct, then the very priests responsible for transmitting the most comprehensive extant work about Zoroastrianism were intricately intertwined with the ʿAbbāsid rulers. Even aside from the identity of this particular *mobed*, the al-Afšīn episode confirms that a Zoroastrian priest was an active participant in a trial at which the highest offices of al-Muʿtaṣim's administration, both the vizier Ibn al-Zayyāt and the chief *qāḍī* Aḥmad b. Abī Duwād, are presiding.

In addition to this example, there are numerous others that attest to *mobeds* being present in the court of caliphs and *amīrs*, conversing with them and advising them on various topics: among the ʿAbbāsids, these incidents are mostly with al-Maʾmūn (r. 813-33) but also with al-Muʿtaṣim (r. 833-42),[49] al-Wāṯiq (r. 842-47),[50] and al-Mutawakkil (r. 847-61).[51] Al-Bayhaqī (ca. 930s) relates that al-Maʾmūn and *al-mawbaḏ* discussed what is beneficial for the body; he also states that the *mobed* did not convert to Islam, despite this interreligious dialogue.[52] Al-Tawḥīdī (d. 1020) recounts an episode in which a *mobed* astounds al-Maʾmūn with his intellect (and his wordplay with a Qurʾānic verse?).[53]

Nearly all of these examples, taken singularly, cannot bear much historical weight: because of the acontextual referential nature of the *adab* literature in which they appear, often written centuries later, they seem to be part of that semi-legendary setting of past of ʿAbbāsid rule. However, other citations corroborate the historicity of these examples, which point to *mobeds* at the side of Muslim rulers as early as the ascendance of Abū Muslim (d. 755)—as we learned from al-Šahrastānī (d. 1153).

Moreover, there is an interesting detail that appears consistently across the ʿAbbāsid references, especially for the *mobeds* in the time of al-Maʾmūn: they are noted as being from Ḫurāsān, or from Marw, or else present there with him during his momentous decision to overthrow his brother and seize command of the caliphate. Al-Tawḥīdī (d. 1020) quotes an acontextual aphorism attributed to "a *mobed* in Marw."[54] Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī (d. 1229) tells us that Ḥimdān b. al-Saḥt (?) al-Jurjānī relates that "when I was with Ḥusayn b. ʿAmr al-Rustamī, who was one of al-Maʾmūn's leaders, he was asking *al-mawbaḏān* from Ḫurāsān, when we were in the court of 'the one with two commands' [= al-Faḍl b. Sahl], about the festival of *Naw-rūz al-Mahrajān*…;" this *mobed* then gives a detailed explanation about this "New Year"

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[48] See Rezania 2017 for quotations from the *Dēnkard* regarding this matter.
[49] i.e. the al-Afšīn episode, discussed above.
[50] e.g. al-Tawḥīdī (d. 1020), *al-Baṣāʾir wa-l-ḏaḫāʾir*, ed. Wadād al-Qāḍī, VII.130.
[51] For references to *mobeds* and al-Mutawakkil, see al-Masʿūdī (d. 956), *Murūj al-ḏahab*, ed. Pellat, V.20); al-Tawḥīdī (d. 1020), *al-Baṣāʾir wa-l-ḏaḫāʾir*, ed. Wadād al-Qāḍī, 6.236; al-Bīrūnī (d. 1048), *al-Āṯār al-bāqiya*, ed. Sachau, 223.
[52] *Kitāb al-Maḥāsin wa-l-masāwiʾ*, ed. Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm, I.281.
[53] *al-Baṣāʾir wa-l-Ḏaḫāʾir*, ed. Wadād al-Qāḍī, VII.121; al-Qāḍī notes that this saying is elsewhere attributed to ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, and that it also appears in Miskawayh's *al-Ḥikma al-ḫālida*. A similar anecdote appears in al-Rāġib al-Iṣfahānī's *Muḥāḍarāt al-udabāʾ* (ed. Murād, I.445), but this time the witty phrase is solely attributed to the *amīr al-Muʾminīn*: people lift their heads in amazement, then he recites Q. al-Isrāʾ "The Night-Journey" 17:7: "If you do good, you do good for yourselves; and if you do evil, [you do it] to yourselves."
[54] *al-Baṣāʾir wa-l-Ḏaḫāʾir*, ed. Wadād al-Qāḍī, 9.92; although this reference is not necessary linked to the reign of al-Maʾmūn, and elsewhere this same aphorism is attributed to "the Persian *mawbaḏān*," as in Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih al-Andalusī's (d. 940) *ʿIqd al-farīd*, ed. Muḥammad al-Tūnjī, 1.246). Other wise sayings, in Arabic, of an *al-mawbaḏ*, can be found scattered through *adab* literature—for example in al-Rāġib al-Iṣfahānī's (d. 1108) *Muḥāḍarāt al-udabāʾ*, ed. Murād, I.373,433 and IV.813.

festival's origin.[55] Similarly, although this next example does not involve a *mobed,* Miskawayh (d. 1030), in his *Jāwīdān Ḫirad*, citing a (pseudepigraphical) work of al-Jāḥiẓ, relates that while al-Maʾmūn was in Ḫurāsān he sought the advice of a Persian sage from Kābulistān named Ḏūbān in regards to his coup against his brother.[56] Al-Rāġib al-Iṣfahānī (d. 1108) provides another example of a Persian advisor to al-Maʾmūn, this time a *mobed* from ʿIrāq (?) who attended him in Marw:

> *Al-mawbaḏ* was in the presence of al-Maʾmūn in Marw, and he was speaking with him when he received a packet (i.e. containing correspondence) from al-Ḥasan (b. Sahl) which contained the reports about Iraq, and the death of the son of *al-Mawbaḏ* (*ibn al-Mawbaḏ*); so al-Maʾmūn said to him: "May God give you good recompense (*al-ʿiwaḍ*) and a successor after him." Then the *mawbaḏ* replied to him with the proper prayer (e.g. *raḥimahu llāhu*), and then al-Maʾmūn was amazed, and said: "Do you know what I mean?" He said: "No." [Al-Maʾmūn] said: "It is said that your son died." He said: "I already knew that." [Al-Maʾmūn] said: "From where did you learn that? Since the packet (of correspondence) only just arrived?" He said: "I knew that the day he was born."[57]

In this last example, the *mobed* is with al-Maʾmūn when he receives reports from al-Ḥasan b. Sahl (who was attempting to put down opposition in ʿIrāq), and though the setting provides another excuse to show off the wit and wisdom of the *mobed*—who recognizes the mortality inherent in all living things—it also hints that the presence of the *mobed*, who had ties to Zoroastrians back in Iraq worth reporting in official government correspondence, in some way provided political support to al-Maʾmūn.

Most of these references occur in the court of the ʿAbbāsids or their intellectual circles, but Zoroastrians also sought the patronage of the *amīrs* of the Būyid dynasty (ca. 934-1062), an Iranian dynasty that claimed descent from the Sasanid kings, notably through a "trumped up" genealogy from ʿAḍud al-Dawla back to Bahrām Gōr (r. 420-38).[58] As self-styled *šāhān šāh*s (MP for "king of kings"), in Arabic *malik al-mulūk*, part of the Iranian heritage of the Būyids extended to their tolerance—or even support—of Zoroastrians.[59] Miskawayh (d. 1030) relates that not everyone approved of this patronage, describing how in the year 979 CE Muslims in Šīrāz rioted, plundering the homes of Zoroastrians and killing some; the *amīr* retaliated against these Muslims.[60] However, there were several prominent Būyid bureaucrats with the *nisba* of *al-Majūsī*, i.e. "the Magian."[61] A street in Baghdād was

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[55] *Muʿjam al-buldān*, ed. Wüstenfeld, I-2.669.
[56] *al-Ḥikma al-ḫālida*, ed. Badawī, 19; this Ḏūbān then leads al-Maʾmūn's viziers to a buried treasure and a lost book of Persian wisdom (see below).
[57] *Muḥāḍarāt al-udabāʾ*, ed. Murād, IV.337.
[58] Kraemer 1986: 44; on the Iranian background of the Būyids, also see Madelung 1969 (with reference to Kabir 1959 and 1956), as well as Donohue 2003 and Mottahedeh 2012. Rukn al-Dawla, on a medal from 962 in Rayy, depicted himself as a Persian king with an inscription in Middle Persian reading, "May the glory of the *šāhān šāh* increase," a traditional inscription found on many Sasanian coins and seals, and a medal from 969 in Fārs similarly depicts ʿAḍud al-Dawla, with the same MP inscription as well as the Muslim *šahada* in Arabic (*lā ilāha illā llāhu*); see Kraemer 1986: 44-45.
[59] See Frye 1960 for the prominence of Zoroastrians in western Iran under the Būyids.
[60] Ibn al-Aṯīr (d. 1223), *al-Kāmil fī l-taʾrīḫ*, ed. n/a, VIII.235; cited by Donohue 2003: 81.
[61] E.g. Abū Saḥl Saʿd ibn Faḍl al-Majūsī, who served as ʿAḍud al-Dawla's representative of Baghdad before his conquest of Iraq, also Abū'l-Faraj Manṣūr ibn Saḥl al-Majūsī, who was his financial minister, and Bahrām ibn Ardašīr al-Majūsī, another official (Donohue 2003: 81,

even named *darb al-majūs*.[62] To be clear, the Būyids were Muslim rulers, and used Arabic for administrative purposes, and I do not intend here to promote any ideas about them having Zoroastrian tendencies; rather, I hope to show that Zoroastrian *mobeds* also played a role in the Būyid entourage—and ponder how that affects our understanding of the Zoroastrian priesthood and the transmission of their religious texts.

An Arabic inscription on the ruins of the old fifth-century BC Achaemenid palace of Darius at Persepolis informs us that in the year 344 AH [=955 CE] the *amīr* ʿAḍud al-Dawla (d. 983) enlisted a *mobed* named "Mārsfand from Kāzarūn" to read the Persian inscriptions for him there.[63] A translation of the Būyid's Arabic inscription reads as follows:

> The Prince Abū Šujāʿ ʿAḍud al-Dawla, God strengthen him, was present here in Ṣafar of the year 344 AH, and the writing on these ruins was read to him. It was read by ʿAlī b. al-Sarrī the secretary from Karḫ and Mārsfand *al-mawbaḏ* al-Kāzarūnī.[64]

Persepolis, in the heart of Iranian territory in the province of Fārs, had been an important cultural and religious site since the time of the Achaemenids, and it was also the site of Sasanid monuments and inscriptions as well—which are probably what ʿAḍud al-Dawla wanted read to him.[65] Kāzarūn is one of the sub-provinces of Fārs, to the west of Šīrāz and almost 200 kilometers from Persepolis; evidently the *mobed* Mārsfand traveled some distance to attend to the *amīr*—like the secretary from Karḫ (i.e. Karkā d-Bēt Slōk, or modern Kirkuk)—or was already part of his retinue. The Zoroastrians of Kāzarūn must have held some sway with the Būyid *amīrs*, because there is a report that they were able to prevent a Ṣūfī mosque from being built there by Abū Isḥāq al-Kāzarūnī (d. 1033).[66] Furthermore, it is possible that this mid-tenth-century Mārsfand (the Arabic rendering of the MP *Mahrspānd*) was some relation to the Ādurbād ī Mahrspāndān mentioned by Farrbay in the *Bundahišn* genealogy of contemporary ninth- / tenth-century priests, who might further be identified with the Ādurbād ī Mahrspandān mentioned in a sixteenth-century *rivāyat* as an editor of the *Dēnkard* ca. 931.[67] (see above).

The letters of one Būyid secretary, Abū Isḥāq Ibrāhīm al-Ṣābīʾ (d. 994), shed light on the issue of the family of Ādurbād. In one letter dated to the year 375 AH [=986 CE], al-Ṣābīʾ details how Ṣamṣām al-Dawla granted protection to the descendants of Ādurbād ī Mahrspandān, who had presented him with a letter from

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189); ʿAḍud al-Dawla's physician was ʿAlī b. al-ʿAbbās al-Majūsī, etc. (see Kraemer 1986: 85ff).

[62] Kraemer 1986: 85.

[63] Donohue 1973: 75-78 provides the text, translation, and commentary as well as an image of this inscription. Also see Mokhlesī 1384/2005: 53.

[64] Translation adapted from Donohue 1973.

[65] Daryaee 2015: 111-12 says, "Tradition has it that 'Aẓōd ad-Dowle had asked Māresfand (Pahl. Mahrspand) to read the inscriptions left by the Sasanian king of kings, Šāpūr II, next to where he left his inscriptions" (citing Frye 1975: 251 and Bosworth 1978: 19).

[66] Donohue 2003: 81 with n. 307, citing Muḥammad b. ʿUthmān, *Die Vita des Scheich Abū Isḥāq al-Kāzarūnī* (ed. F. Meier…).

[67] See Mottahedeh 2012: 154, who says that the *mobed* in ʿAḍud al-Dawla's inscription is "a known Zoroastrian scholar of the time," but without further explanation.

ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib himself that detailed their agreement to pay the *jizya* as *ahl al-kitāb*.[68]

→ INSERT TEXT OF LETTER HERE

This *risāla* ("letter") of al-Ṣābīʾ is corroborated by al-Bīrūnī's (d. 1049) comment a generation later about the family of Ādurbād: al-Bīrūnī explains that the Zoroastrian priesthood of his time (i.e. the eleventh century) all descend from one family line going back to the time of Šāpūr II (r. 309-379), and that they must carry certification in order to access certain texts.[69] This corresponds with the genealogy of priests at the end of the Middle Persian *Bundahišn* ("Primal Creation"), which lists several contemporary ninth-century priests who all claim to be descended from Ādurbād ī Mahrspandān, who is revered throughout the Zoroastrian texts as a hero of the religion and remembered as the *mobedān mobed* of Šāpūr II.[70]

However, the decree from ʿAlī that is mentioned must be spurious—a tenth-century invention to claim antiquity for the status of the Zoroastrians of Ādurbād's line, made to pro-ʿAlid rulers. Al-Balāḏurī (d. 892), in his narrative of the Arab conquest of Hajar (Bahrain), includes the following report from al-Ḥusayn from the famous traditionist al-Zuhrī (d. 741) from Saʿīd b. al-Musayyib (d. 715): "The Prophet exacted the *jizya* from the *majūs* of Hajar, ʿUmar exacted it from those of Fārs, and ʿUṯmān from the Berbers," with a similar tradition reported from another *isnād*.[71] Al-Balāḏurī also includes several reports that the *majūs* were to be accepted as *ahl al-kitāb* ("people of the Book") and thus required to pay the *jizya*—as al-Ṣābīʿ's letter details (above). If al-Balāḏurī's account is to be trusted, then if the Persian Zoroastrians of the tenth century had a letter of protection from any of the first caliphs, it would likely have been from ʿUmar and not ʿAlī.

But despite this protection, many Zoroastrians had converted to Islam by the tenth century. The tenth-century *mobeds* needed to keep their followers as well earn the support of the ruling elite.[72] It is under the Būyids, who make similar claims to a

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[68] al-Ṣābīʾ, *Risāʾil*, ed. Iḥsān Dhannūn al-Thāmirī, II.376-78; al-Thāmirī's footnote on the name of *Āḏarbāḏ* cites al-Ḫwāramzī's definition of *mobedān mobed* as *qādī al-qudāʾ* and mentions that this *mobed* was contemporary to Mānī. Donohue 1973: 78 n. 8 says the *Āḏarbāḏ* mentioned in al-Ṣābīʿ's *risāla* might also refer to the one mentioned as an editor / copyist of the *Dēnkard* ca. 930 CE (known from a later colophon, which Donohue does not cite).

[69] *al-Āṯār al-bāqiya*, ed. Fück, 75-76; this passage is from the fragments excluded from Sachau's 1878-79 edition and translation, and first noticed by Taqizadeh 1937 and then edited by Fück 1952.

[70] See *Bundahišn* XXXIII.9-11 (trans. by West 1880).

[71] *Futūḥ al-buldān*, ed. de Goeje, 80; *…qāla aḥaḍa rasūlu llāhi l-jizyata min majūsi hajara wa-a aḥaḍahā ʿumaru min majūsi fārsa wa-aḥaḍahā ʿuṯmānu min barbar*. Al-Balāḏurī also transmits statements from the Prophet concerning the inclusion of *al-majūs* in the designation *ahl al-kitāb*, as well as reports that people criticized him for it (ed. de Goeje, 77, 79). ʿUmar seems to have been confused about the matter, but ultimately followed Muḥammad's original designation of the *al-majūs* as *ahl al-kitāb*: in the section on the conquest of the Sawād, al-Balāḏurī reports from ʿAmr al-Nāqid from the father of Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad that the *muhajjirūn* were sitting in front of a mosque with ʿUmar, who said, "I don't know how to treat *al-majūs*," and then ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. ʿAwf (d. 654) got up and said, "I bear witness that the Prophet said, *Treat them according to the same law with which you treat the* ahl al-kitāb" (ed. de Goeje, 267).

[72] As Campopiano summarizes, "Mazdeans' superior obsession with defilement could reflect their isolated status and the dwindling numbers of Mazdeans – and in particular, their clergy –

prestigious lineage from the past, that the Zoroastrian priests establish (or invent) their own lineage to the fourth-century Ādurbād ī Mahrspandān. Although Ādurbād is mentioned in several of the Sasanian-era ZMP works, it is only in the works of late ninth and tenth centuries that the fantastic nature of his ordeal of molten copper is elaborated—with apocalyptic significance. Similarly, only tenth-century ZMP texts mention the priestly lineage of Ādurbād; whereas the genealogy of *mobeds* found in the last chapters of the *Bundahišn* emphasizes the lineage of Mānuščihr. Much like the claim to the patronage of ʿAlī, the tenth-century *mobeds* promote their own importance through a prestigious Zoroastrian genealogy.

II.3. *al-mawbaḏ* as a learned informant

In addition to the high-profile *mobeds* who were in the courts of the caliphs or the *maǧālis* of his viziers and intellectual elite, there are also numerous references in Arabic literature to the *mobed* as a learned informant to the intellectual community. Sometimes he is simply a wise figure, to whom some aphorism is attributed (and this may more correctly belong in the category of *mobed* as advisor or that of interreligious disputant); sometimes he has been consulted in person by one of the Arabic authors, usually to explain some Iranian concept; however, sometimes the references are to the written works of *mobeds*—either read by the Arabic authors themselves or cited as contemporary works which had been summarized for them. This last section explores all of these learned *mobeds* in more detail.

In Ibn al-Nadīm's (d. 990) *Fihrist*, the catalogue of books known to this bookseller in tenth-century Baghdād, includes a section on books with admonitions, *ādāb,* and wise sayings of the Persians, Greeks, Indians and Arabs. Here, Ibn al-Nadīm lists some relatively well-known titles of Persian wisdom (MP *andarz*), as well as one "*kitāb al-mawbaḏān mawbaḏ*, which is about wise sayings, collections, and *ādāb*."[73] He also mentions that al-Mutawakkil summoned a *mobed* from Fārs, who is listed among the translators of *Kalīla wa-Dimna*.[74] There are many more titles of Persian *andarz* works in Arabic, some of which are extant, some of which have Middle Persian originals or parallels. Ibn al-Nadīm also lists a *mobed* among the translators of the Persians in his section on philosophy and the sciences.[75]

Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī (d. 971) is another rich source for citations of specific *mobeds*. When listing his (written) sources for the *Taʾrīḫ sinī mulūk al-arḍ wa-l-anbiyāʾ* ("Chronicle of the Years of the Kings of the Earth and of the Prophets"), which are essentially versions of the Sasanian Persian *Xwadāy-nāmag* translated into Arabic, he notes the work of one *mobed*: the *Kitāb taʾrīḫ mulūk banī Sāsān* from the

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feeling pressured by the adherence to Islam of some of their members, the loss of power and influence, and the loss of control (as Crone has shown) in their 'Low Church' and heretical movements" (86). – "The constant obsession with pollution helped to hold the weakening community together and to prevent intensification of social interaction with the Muslims, which brought with it the seductions of conversion (linked to social promotion) and risked depriving the Mazdean community of believers and economic resources" (93).

[73] *Fihrist*, ed. Sayyid, II.349-40; *fī l-ḥikam wa-l-jawāmiʿ wa-l-ādāb*.

[74] *Fihrist*, ed. Sayyid, II.326. The manuscript reading of *al-murīd al-aswad* ("the black disciple"), which does not make sense, should be emended to *al-mawbaḏān mawbaḏ*; see Hämeen-Anttila 2018: 76 n.55.

[75] *Fihrist*, ed. Sayyid, II.151; *min naqalat al-furs*. Though the list roughly accords with the sources cited by Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī for the Persian "Book of Kings" tradition, Ibn al-Nadīm lists them along with a translator of astronomical works as well (and makes no mention of the *Xwadāy-nāmag* in this section).

redaction (*iṣlāḥ*) of one "Bahrām b. Mardānšāh, *mobed* of the district of Šābūr in the land of Fārs."[76] This priest is also mentioned as a translator of Persian works (into Arabic) in Ibn al-Nadīm's *Fihrist*.[77]

Ḥamza and Ibn al-Nadīm were not the only ones reading Persian books—either in the original Middle Persian or translated into Arabic. Ibn Qutayba (d. 889) says that he read "books of the *ʿajam*," i.e. books of the Persians.[78] There is a tantalizing reference to the Zoroastrian text known as the *Bundahišn* in the eleventh-century New Persian *Tārīḫ-e Sīstān* ("History of Sīstān): the author seems to quote the *Bundahišn* either through or alongside a quotation from Abū l-Muʾayyad al-Balḫī's (ca. 980s) lost Persian work *Kitāb-e Garšāsp*.[79] But a particularly exciting example of a reference to the written work of a specific *mobed*, comes from the genre of heresiography—and this example shows that not all heresiographers merely recycled their material from earlier sources.[80] ʿAbd al-Jabbār (ca. 995), in his *Taṯbīt dalāʾil al-nubuwwa* during his discussion of false *mahdī* figures like the Christian Messiah, includes a reference to the Zoroastrian savior named Pešōtan and, in doing so, refers by name to the teachings of *Āḏarbāḏ b. Āmād*, i.e. the tenth-century priest Ādurbād ī Ēmēdān, whom we know was the final redactor of the *Dēnkard*.[81] It is not clear whether ʿAbd al-Jabbār references a written work or merely some knowledge of this *mobed*'s teachings—but the fact that they were known so specifically by an Islamic heresiographer shows not only the circulation of Zoroastrian ideas but also the reputation of *mobed*s in Islamic intellectual circles.[82]

Other Arabic authors seem to have met and spoken with *mobeds*, who inform them on some Zoroastrian practice or Persian tradition. For example, al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 868) in his *Risālat al-ḥanīn ilā awṭān* ("Letter on the Yearning for Homelands") uses an example from Persian epic literature, saying, "And *al-mawbaḏ* related that he read in the life of Isfandiyār b. Yustāsf b. Luhwāsf, in Persian (*bi-l-fārisiyya*)…he was asked, 'What do you long for?' and he said, 'A whiff of the dust from Balḫ and a drink of the water of its *wādī*."[83] It is conceivable that al-Jāḥiẓ knew this *mobed* as

[76] ed. Gottwaldt, IX.4-5.
[77] ed. Flügel, 245.
[78] *ʿUyūn al-aḫbār*, ed. Yūsuf ʿAlī Ṭawīl, I.60-61 (see above).
[79] See Hämeen-Anttila 2018: 138-39, where he corrects the reading of *Kitāb-e Ibn Dahshatī* to *Kitāb-e Bun-dahišt*, i.e. the *Bundahišn*. Abū l-Muʾayyad wrote during the Samanid period, but his New Persian *Šāh-nāma-ye bozorg* is only known through fragmentary quotations such as the one mentioned here.
[80] This is a serious problem in dealing with the Arabic primary sources: that despite references to Zoroastrians (*al-majūs*) in regards to practices and beliefs, the authors of these texts do not necessarily have first-hand information; this is something which de Jong criticizes in his 2016 article. But there are also genuine notices even in heresiographical texts (as this example, which has escaped de Jong's notice, demonstrates).
[81] ed. Reynolds & Samir, 134-35; also see Shaked 1994: 76-77, citing the translation of Monnot 1974: 286-88.
[82] Rezania 2017 argues that the *Dēnkard* was written for a primarily Muslim audience as an intentionally apologetic text; this citation from ʿAbd al-Jabbār would support his theory that it was read by a Muslim audience, but he does not mention (or is unaware of) this example—which is proof of the divide across academic disciplines, research languages, and genre-specific studies—despite the recent edition and English translation of this text.
[83] *Rasāʾil*, ed. Hārūn, II.407-408; Hameen-Anttila 2018:32-33 (with n. 22-23) hesitantly identifies this work (as originally in Middle Persian) with one mentioned in Ibn al-Nadīm's *Fihrist* titled *Kitāb Rustam wa-Isfandiyār* and supposedly translated by someone named Jabala ibn Sālim.

well as other Zoroastrians, because his works are filled with accurate references to different beliefs and practices of *al-majūs* that are also known from Zoroastrian Middle Persian texts.[84] The geographer al-Maqdisī (d. 966) says he met a *hirbaḏ*[85] of the *majūs* in Fārs; he also visited a fire temple in Khūz (al-Ahwāz) and questioned the priest there.[86] Al-Bīrūnī (d. 1049) cites two (contemporary?) Zoroastrian priests as informants on Persian festivals: Ādurbād, *mobed* of Baghdad, explains why people gift each other with sugar on the festival of Nawrūz, while the *mobed* Xwaršīd explains the date of the feast of Ādur-čašn is the first day of the Persian month of Šahrēwar.[87]

Although some of the *mobeds* just mentioned have names, they are generic ones and not easy to corroborate with other extant sources. However, Arabic sources of the tenth century can help us identify one particular Zoroastrian *mobed*—at the same time, elucidating the complexity of Zoroastrian priestly genealogy and the pitfalls of modern scholars understanding of it. In the *Fihrist*, Ibn al-Nadīm discusses the histories of different kinds of languages and scripts. One version of the origins of Persian writing says that Afrīdūn,[88] when he divided up the earth between his sons—Salam, Ṭūj, and Īraj—gave each one of them a third of the inhabited world and wrote a contract (*kitāb*) between them. Ibn al-Nadīm adds, "*Ēmēd* the *mobed* told me that that document is with the king of China, brought along with the Persian treasures in the days of Yazdgird. But God knows best."[89] This quotation from the *Fihrist* suggests that Ibn al-Nadīm actually spoke with Ēmēd the *mobed* (e.g. "he said to me," *qāla lī*). Indeed, later in the passage Ibn al-Nadīm breaks from his quotation of Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ on the Persian scripts to quote Ēmēd again, this time concerning the particular script called *wayš-dabīrīya* which no one seems to know anymore.[90] Ibn al-Nadīm says, "I asked *Āmād* the *mobed* about it and he said: 'Yeah, it's going the way of translation, just as there are translations in Arabic writing.'"[91] If Ibn al-Nadīm knew Ēmēd and spoke to him in person, we can assume that he was also present in Baghdād in or before the 980s, at the time the *Fihrist* was being compiled.

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[84] See especially his *Kitāb al-ḥayawān*, ed. Hārūn, I.55-56,190; II.289-90; IV.95-96,296-300; V.66-71, etc.. Another letter of al-Jāḥiẓ attests that the Persian sayings of Buzurgmihr, as well as the *Testament of Ardašīr*, were read in the court in Baghdād (*Rasāʾil,* ed. Hārūn, II.191-92). Note that al-Jāḥiẓ became a *kātib* for the vizier Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Malik al-Zayyāt (d. 847), to whom the *Kitāb al-ḥayawān* is dedicated; this is the same official who arbitrates at the trial of al-Afšīn (ca. 841 discussed above) alongside as well as the soon-to-be-apostate *mobed* and *nadīm* of al-Mutawakkil, as well as the the *qāḍī* (and al-Jāḥiẓ' sometimes rival) Aḥmad b. Abī Duwād (d. 854)—for whom the *Kitāb al-ḥayawān* was eventually completed.

[85] The title of another Zoroastrian priest (MP *hērbed*), in subordinate / alternate role to the *mobed*.

[86] *Badʾ wa-l-taʾrīḫ*, ed. Huart, II.62-63.

[87] *al-Āṯār al-bāqiya*, ed. Sachau, 216 and 222 (trans. Sachau 1879: 200 and 207).

[88] =MP *Frēdūn*, for Avestan *Θraētaona*; see EIr "Ferēdūn."

[89] Sayyid 2009: I.30; the *mobed* is referring to the flight of the last Sasanian king, Yazdgird III (d. 651), and his family to the Tang court, where Zoroastrianism was briefly patronized and Chinese troops were offered for Yazdgird's son's failed campaign to reconqer Persia.

[90] Perhaps rendering MP *wēš-dibīrīh*, "better script."

[91] Sayyid 2009: I.32 = ed. Flügel 13.13-14; *naʿam hīya tajrī majrā t-tarjamati ka-mā fī kitābati l-ʿarabīyati tarājimu*. Ēmēd seems to be saying that works originally written in this script are now being translated and / or written in the Arabic script.

Ibn al-Nadīm's informant is named [ʾmʾd], vocalized as *Āmād*, for Middle Persian *Ēmēd*.[92] The name of this priest, although it appears garbled in the Arabic transmission, has been identified with an individual to whom is attributed a Middle Persian *rivāyat*, or "letter," containing a series of questions on various religious topics: Ēmēd ī Ašawahištān, i.e. Ēmēd, the son of Ašawahišt.[93] Aside from this letter, however—where he is nowhere called a *mobed*, but only given the honorific "dearly departed" (MP *hu-fraward*)—he is not otherwise known in Zoroastrian Middle Persian literature. So let us explore how this identification was made.

Ēmēd was not only known by Ibn al-Nadīm, but is quoted by at least two other contemporary Arabic writers. Yāqūt (d. 1229), in his *Muʿjam al-buldān*, quotes Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī (d. 970) extensively about Persian knowledge—including passages from some texts which are no longer extant as Ḥamza's own works. In these excerpts, Ḥamza twice quotes Ēmēd ī Ašawahištān as direct informant. First, concerning the date of the construction of the palace of Khusrō (*īwān Kisrā*), Ḥamza quotes Ēmēd in disagreement with a statement made by Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ and says, "the *mobedān mobed*, Ēmēd b. Ašawahišt, said to me…"[94] The second quotation concerns the meaning of the name of the city of Baṣra, and Ḥamza says, "I heard the *mobed*, the son of Ašawahišt say: 'Al-Baṣra is the Arabicized form of *bas rāh* because it used to have many roads which branched out from it to different places…'"[95]

J.J. Modi first identified Ḥamza's informant as the Ēmēd ī Ašawahištān known from the Middle Persian *rivāyat* that bears his name, suggesting that he was contemporary with Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī in the late tenth century.[96] However, because Modi did not read Arabic himself, he was unaware of the other Arabic citations of Ēmēd in Ibn al-Nadīm and al-Masʿūdī (to be discussed next), as well as the multiple other mentions of *mobeds* in contemporary Arabic texts that have been collected since his time. Modi's own insistence that there was no evidence of a Zoroastrian community in Baghdād led him to further postulate that Ḥamza and Ēmēd the *mobed* would have met in Iṣfahān.[97] However, the range of direct quotations and references to Ēmēd show that this *mobed* was conversant with Arabic writers in and around Baghdad from the 950s until the 980s—and that *mobeds* were present in Baghdād as well as Iṣfahān.

In his *Kitāb al-tanbīh al-išrāf*, al-Masʿūdī (d. 956) refers to Ēmēd ī Ašawahištān as a contemporary:

> At the time of writing this history, in the year 345 [=956 CE], the *mobed* of the Persians for the province of Jibāl, ʿIrāq, and the rest of the lands of the Persians is *Ēmēd b. Ašawahišt*,[98] and the *mobed* before him was *Isfandiyār b.*

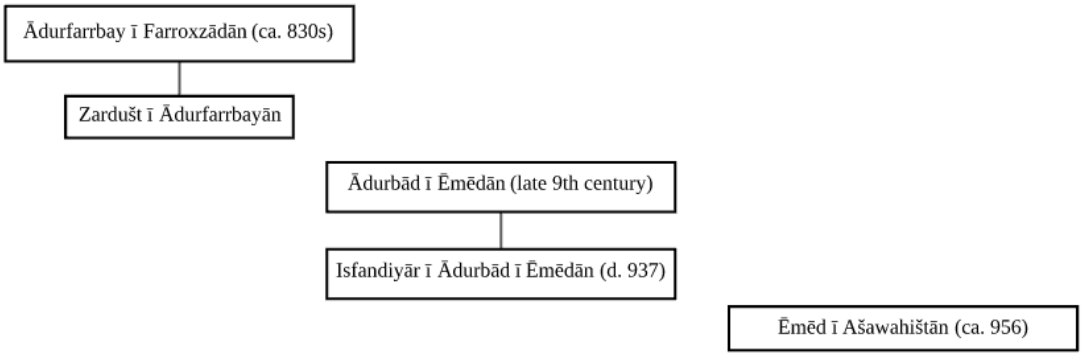
[92] The Arabic script leaves the initial vowel ambiguous, and could certainly indicate the long *–ē* of Middle Persian just as well as the long *–ā* of Arabic.
[93] *Rivāyat ī Ēmēd ī Ašawahištān*, ed. B.T. Anklesaria (1962) and Safa-Isfehani (1980); also see de Menasce 1962 for a partial translation. Ēmēd's interlocutor in this *rivāyat* (Gušnasp, son of Mihr-Ātaš, son of Ādur Gušnasp) is not otherwise known.
[94] Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-buldān*, ed. Wüstenfeld, I-1.426; *qāla lī al-mawbaḏān mawbaḏ Ēmēd b. Ašawahišt*.
[95] Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-buldān*, ed. Wüstenfeld, I-2.637; in Middle Persian *was rāh* means "many roads."
[96] Modi 1931.
[97] Modi 1931: 287-88.
[98] Pointed as [ʾnmʾḏ ʾbn ʾšrhšt], which I would emend to [ʾymʾḏ bn ʾšwhšt]; there is also a variant reading of [ʾstwhšt] for the latter part of his name.

> *Ādurbād b. Ēmēd*,[99] who was put to death by al-Raḍī in Baghdād in the year 325 [=937 CE].[100]

With some slight emendations, particularly in the pointing of the Arabic script, these names are recognizable as *Ēmēd b. Ašawahišt* and *Isfandiyār b. Ādurbād b. Ēmēd*, which might be rendered in Middle Persian as Ēmēd ī Ašawahišt(ān) and Isfandiyār ī Ādurbād(ān) ī Ēmēd(ān). Thus Ēmēd ī Ašawahištān became the chief priest, or *mobed*, of Jibāl, ʿIrāq, and Fārs in 937, and was still *mobed* there at least until 956. It is possible that he was still active (although admittedly elderly) in Baghdād when Ibn al-Nadīm was compiling the *Fihrist*, which was not completed until 987.[101]

This passage from al-Masʿūdī is crucial for establishing the chronology and genealogy of other known Zoroastrian priests of the tenth century. The second but earlier *mobed* mentioned by him is thought to be the son of the final compiler of the Zoroastrian religious compilation known as the *Dēnkard* (who names himself as Ādurbād ī Ēmēdān in Book III of the *Dēnkard*). Concerning this individual we can also add a citation by the Melkite Christian writer, Qusṭā ibn Lūqā of Baʿlabakk (d. ca. 920), who mentions another "Ādurbād the *mobed*" as an informant about the many languages of the Avesta and the Zoroastrian priests' understanding of that sacred text.[102] Putting this information together with what we know about al-Mutawakkil's *mobed*, Zardušt ī Ādurfarrbāy (the apostatized son of the first redactor of the *Dēnkard*—that interreligious disputant from the time of al-Maʾmūn, named Ādurfarrbāy ī Farroxzādān), then we can craft the following timeline of Zoroastrian *mobeds* in the ninth through tenth centuries:[103]
[ADD CITATION INFORMATION]

[99] Pointed as [ʾḏrbʾd bn ʾnmyḏ], which I would emend to [bn ʾḏrbʾḏ bn ʾymyḏ]; there are also variant manuscript readings of the name Ādurbād as [ʾzrbʾd] and Ēmēd as [ʾnhd]; note that the spelling of the latter *mobed*'s patronym is different from the former—perhaps an indication that they are not direct descendents.
[100] *al-Tanbīh al-išrāf*, ed. de Goeje, 104-05.
[101] This date is based on the colohpon of the *Fihrist* dated 377 [=987 CE]; ed. Sayyid, I.98. Hämeen-Anttila 2018: 28 also makes this identification: "The well-known second compiler of the *Dēnkard*, Ādurbād ī Ēmēdān, seems to have died around 900 (Tafazzoli 1983) and is thus too early to be identified with this Amād, but the mōbad Anmādh (read *Aymādh) mentioned by al-Masʿūdī, *Tanbīh*, p. 104//149, as the (Chief) Mōbad in 345/956 might well come into question."
[102] Following van Bladel 2017: 193-95, who emends the manuscript reading of *ʾdryʾ al-muʾayyad* to *Āḏurbāḏ al-mawbaḏ* and suggests that he is the same individual known as the final redactor of the *Dēnkard*, Ādurbād ī Ēmēdān (and also the father of al-Masʿūdī's *mobed* Isfandiyār). For the Arabic text of the letter and a French translation, see Samir & Nwyia 1981; an English translation can also be found in Gutas 2006: 42.
[103] Despite the clarity of al-Masʿūdī's statements, scholars have continued to erroneously claim either that the earlier *mobed* (Isfandiyār) was the descendent of the later one (Ēmēd ī Ašawahištān), or—by conflating multiple individuals with similar names—asserted that al-Masʿūdī's contemporary Ēmēd ī Ašawahištān is that same as that mentioned in the genealogical chapter of the *Bundahišn*—which, if we distinguish the names of the individuals correctly, must rather have a *floruit* in the late ninth century (as a contemporary of Mānūščihr, who authored letters ca. 881).



The content of Ēmēd's statement in the *Fihrist* about the translation of Persian into Arabic gives a clue about the role of Ēmēd and other *mobeds* in ʿAbbāsid and Būyid intellectual circles: as informants about Persian and particularly Zoroastrian customs, as well as translators of Middle Persian texts into Arabic on a range of subjects.

It should be noted that sometimes the citation of a *mobed* is a trope or device used by authors to give antiquity and authority to their sources, as perhaps in the case of Miskawayh (d. 1030), in his introduction to *al-Ḥikma al-ẖālida* ("Eternal Wisdom")—a compilation of wisdom literature from various sources and traditions, beginning with Persian wisdom. Miskawayh, after describing how in his youth he had read in one of al-Jāḥiẓ's works about a Persian book called *Jāwīdān ẖirad*—which is Middle Persian, or perhaps Parthian, for "Eternal Wisdom"—then claims to have finally found a manuscript of this work in the possession of the *mobedān mobed* of Fārs.[104] Miskawayh quotes al-Jāḥiẓ who quotes al-Wāqidī (d. 822)[105] who quotes al-Faḍl b. Sahl (d. 818), who says that the king of Kābulistān sent an old man named Ḏūbān to al-Maʾmūn, who subsequently informs him about a lost book of ancient Persian wisdom buried beneath the ruins of the palace of Ctesiphon, which al-Ḥasan b. Sahl later copies (and translates) with the help of an otherwise unknown individual named Ḫiḍr b. ʿAlī.[106] This is the "Testament of Ūšanj" which Miskawayh claims to have found and provided for his readers.

This and other wisdom literature collected in *al-Ḥikma al-ẖālida* certainly reflects Middle Persian originals or even translations, including a collection of wise sayings attributed to none other than Ādurbād ī Mahrspāndān.[107] Yet Miskawayh's citation of al-Jāḥiẓ is thought to be from a pseudepigraphical work, and the frame story which it recounts is certainly fantastical.[108] Even so, the characters and the

[104] *al-Ḥikma al-ẖālida*, ed. Badawī, 5.
[105] A famous early historiographer from Medina, transmitter of *maġāzī, sīra*, and *futūḥ* literature, whose work survives mostly in quotation; see "Wākidī," *EI*^{2} by S. Leder.
[106] Miskawayh, *al-Ḥikma al-ẖālida*, ed. Badawī, 18-22.
[107] After the "Testament of Ūšanj," this is the second collection of wisdom in Miskawayh's work: the *Mawāʾiẓ Āḏurbāḏ* (ed. Badawī, 26-28). This collection of wise sayings roughly corresponds to the Middle Persian *andarz* works attributed to the Sasanian-era *mobedān mobed* named Ādurbād ī Mahrspandān, which survive in two extant collections, known respectively as the *Andarz ī Ādurbād ī Mahrspandān* and the *Wāzag ī ēwčand ī Ādurbād ī Mahrspandān* (), as well as a scattering of his wise sayings in Book VI of the *Dēnkard* (see Shaked 1979: 279-300).
[108] Miskawayh cites the *Istiṭālat al-fahm*, which is regarded as a pseudonymous work (see Pellat 1984: 144).

setting of this nested (re)discovery of Persian wisdom are plausible—in the court of the caliph al-Maʾmūn, with the translation of this text sponsored by his vizier al-Ḥasan b. Sahl. So it is conceivable that Miskawayh, a secretary under the Būyid ʿAḍud al-Dawla—the same *amīr* who commissioned the *mobed* Mārsfand al-Kāzarūnī to read Persian inscriptions to him at Persepolis—got a version of these books of wisdom from a *mobedān mobed* of Fārs in his own time: one who promoted the importance of Ādurbād ī Mahrspandān as he shared his knowledge of Middle Persian texts. There is something to this story, something that only partly has to do with the attraction of apocryphal anecdotes to famous figures…

Part III: Conclusion

The combined total of these citations—with all the usual caveats about trusting our sources—gives more than plausibility to the pattern of Zoroastrian priests participating in the intellectual culture and administration of the ʿAbbāsid caliphs and the Būyid *amīrs* in the ninth through eleventh centuries. There were *mobeds* that advised these rulers and benefited their patronage. If that is too vague a proposition, it is still far better (and more conclusively demonstrated) than what we've had until now. In lieu of firm facts there is the danger of misconstruing the tantalizing clues that we do have, and of giving them greater importance (and historical veracity) than they warrant. But just catching a glimpse of this network—on the fringe of the giants of the Arabic literary tradition with whom they are interacting—may help us understand in turn what the Zoroastrian priests were writing in Middle Persian around the same time, and what the connection is between the priests, their texts, and their link to the Sasanian past. I suspect that it is a much more complicated picture than they would have us think.

The traditional narrative, in both scholarly sources about the post-Sasanian period and in the remnants of Zoroastrian texts themselves, is that after the Arab conquest of Iran the Zoroastrians gradually converted to Islam until by the time they sat down to write their religious texts, there were few priests left to write them and what remains is only a fragment of what there had once been. But this traditional narrative assumes a continuity and pervasiveness of "orthodox" Zoroastrianism from the Sasanian period to the Islamic period, "orthodox" in the sense that it is reflective of the beliefs and practices of the Zoroastrian community as they survive in the textual tradition that has been handed down by particular Zoroastrian priests who present their religion and its traditions as always having been favored by Persian kings who are representatives of the God Ahura Mazdā here on earth. In other words, the orthodoxy of Zoroastrianism is a circular argument bound in a textual tradition that was mostly redacted only in the Islamic period.

What is at stake in understanding the Zoroastrian priesthood in the Islamic period, and unraveling their priestly genealogies (and the scholarship on them), is more than the need for greater scholarly precision. **The claim that the Islamic-era Zoroastrian priests were all from a single family—and that that family is the sole inheritor of the extant Zoroastrian tradition—rests upon a number of assumptions and promotes the belief that those priests' ownership of the tradition is representative of that entire tradition—i.e. that what survives of the tradition *is* the tradition, not in terms of proportion but in terms of orthodoxy…** However, if we suppose that this is *not* the case, we may be better prepared to understand the extant ZMP texts as illustrative of one of the varieties of Zoroastrian thought and tradition that permeated both the Sasanian and post-Sasanian periods. **If**

the myth of orthodoxy is shattered, then we can investigate not only the development of Zoroastrian belief and practice over time and across geographic location, but also how our own perceptions have affected Zoroastrian studies and scholarship.

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