

‘Alī and the »Sons of Ādhurbādh«: Zoroastrian Priestly Authority in the Early Islamic Era

Kayla Dang*

This article uses Arabic sources to examine the Islamic-era *mowbed* (Zoroastrian chief priest) in Abbasid society, in what I argue is the conscious continuation of the mowbed’s pre-Islamic role as judge, scholar, sage, and advisor to kings. Moreover, I argue that the mowbed used his status to promote the standing of the Zoroastrian community, as well as to assert the authority of the priesthood within that community – an authority which was negotiated under Muslim rule and through Islamic and particularly Shi’i figures, above all ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 661 CE). Muslims were already debating the status of Zoroastrians, or Magians, as part of the *ahl al-dhimma* – with Shi’i strands of tradition supporting more favorable views of the Magians. We should understand mowbeds as part of this dialectic, seeking the favor of caliphs, amirs, and sometimes rival sectarian leaders.

As well as providing a survey of Arabic references to mowbeds in the Islamic period, this article will study two relevant Arabic texts: the first is a previously untranslated *risāla* composed in 986 on behalf of the Buyid amir Ṣamṣām al-Dawla by Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm al-Ṣābi’ (d. 994), in which Magians, and specifically »the sons of Ādhurbādh b. Mārsfand«, claim to have a letter of protection from ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib which grants them an exemption from paying the *jizya*; the second is a passage in al-Bīrūnī’s (d. 1048) *al-Āthār al-bāqiya*, which also asserts that the Zoroastrian priesthood was descended from Ādhurbādh b. Mārsfand – and moreover that access to knowledge of the Avesta was certified through written documents.

Keywords: Zoroastrians, priesthood, authority, mowbed, dhimma, ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, Buyids, Ṣamṣām al-Dawla, Shi’ism

The Zoroastrian priesthood was greatly diminished over the centuries after the Arab conquest of Iran. Only a fragment of the Zoroastrian knowledge that had once existed remained by the ninth and tenth centuries CE, when the majority of the extant Zoroastrian Middle Persian (ZMP) books were redacted and composed. The traditional view of the Zoroastrians of this period argues that they became increasingly isolated and »inward-looking«, struggling under Arab Muslim oppression to preserve their storehouse of knowledge from the Sasanian period and earlier.¹ However, this view, which is mostly a result of having taken the Zoroastrian sources themselves at face value, has been called into question. This critique does not

* Correspondence details: Kayla Dang, Saint Louis University, kayla.dang@slu.edu.

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1 E.g., Bosworth, *Interaction of Arabic*, 62ff; also Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 242-243, who calls the extant ZMP books »the literature of an already moribund society ... largely inward-looking, concentrating on the life and heritage of its own community«.

deny the violence and hardship experienced by Zoroastrians under new Muslim regimes, nor does it dispute the loss of religious knowledge that occurred as a result, but it engages with the broader historical context in which Zoroastrian communities continued to thrive.

Scholars like Jamsheed Choksy have for decades viewed some of the more obviously late Zoroastrian texts as products of the Islamic period, therefore reflecting the concerns of a community in conflict and coexistence with an increasingly Muslim world.² Additionally, several recent articles contextualize ZMP works in the Islamic context in which they were written, in the city of Baghdad and in dialogue with Muslim, Christian, and Jewish literature.³ Scholars have long recognized the value of Arabic texts as sources for the study of Zoroastrianism,⁴ and there have been several treatments of Zoroastrians as a minority community under Muslim rule.⁵ The present study builds on these by using Arabic sources to look beyond internal Zoroastrian narratives; it also foregrounds the authors of the ZMP works – Zoroastrian priests – as active participants in Islamic society and in the formation of the Zoroastrian tradition.

Arabic sources from the ninth through eleventh centuries provide an outside perspective of Zoroastrian priests both as historical figures of the pre-Islamic past and as contemporary authorities. These sources complement Zoroastrian texts to show who and what a Zoroastrian priest was during this time: a figure of authority outside of his community, and potentially a friend to Muslim caliphs and scholars alike. Moreover, Arabic sources demonstrate that the Islamic-era Zoroastrian priesthood was an institution that articulated itself under the patronage of Muslim rulers and through Islamic modes of authority. By at least the ninth century, Zoroastrians began to use the Middle Persian title *hudēnān pēšōbāy* («leader of the faithful»), perhaps a calque of Arabic *amīr al-mu'minīn*, to designate their highest priestly office.⁶ Arabic sources, however, continue to refer to the Zoroastrian *mowbed*, and even the

2 E.g., Choksy, *Conflict and Cooperation*.

3 De Jong, *Zoroastrians of Baghdad*; Rezaia, *Dēnkard* against its Islamic discourse; Terribili, *Dēnkard* language variation; Campopiano, *Zoroastrians and Holy Qur'an*; Sahner, *Zoroastrian dispute*; Sahner, *Zoroastrian law*; Vevaina, *Purity and polemics*.

4 Gottheil, *References to Zoroaster*; Nyberg, *Sassanid Mazdaism*; Kreyenbroek, *Zoroastrian priesthood*; Shaked, *Some Islamic reports*; and Choksy, *Conflict and Cooperation*. Short overviews include Bürgel, *Zoroastrians in medieval Islamic sources*; as well as Guidi and Morony, *Mōbadh*; Morony, *Madjūs*.

5 De Menasce, *Problèmes des Mazdéens*; Choksy, *Zoroastrians in Muslim Iran*; Choksy, *Conflict and Cooperation*; Daryaee, *Zoroastrianism under Islamic rule*. For more general treatment of *dhimmī* communities under early Muslim rule, see Friedmann, *Tolerance and Coercion*; Khanbaghi, *Minority Religions*; Levy-Rubin, *Non-Muslims*. For a study of Iranian conversion to Islam, see Bulliet, *Conversion to Islam*; Bowen-Savant, *New Muslims*.

6 Compare the ninth-century use of the Arabic term *imam* by Dionysius of Tel-Mahre to refer to himself as the leader of the Christian community; see Wood, *Imam of the Christians*. The *hudēnān pēšōbāy* and the development of Zoroastrian priestly authority in the Abbasid period are discussed further by Rezaia, *Concept of leadership*, who focuses on the title in Middle Persian sources and compares it to the offices of the Christian *catholicos* and Jewish *exilarch* under the Sasanians.

mowbedān mowbed, as the chief priest of the Zoroastrians.⁷ Contemporary to Muslim debates about the status of the Zoroastrian community as a protected minority (*ahl al-dhimma*), Abbasid-era Zoroastrian priests cultivated the reputation of the mowbed from the Sasanian past and used their personal relationships with Muslim rulers to negotiate their own authority within the Zoroastrian community, as well as the status of the community more broadly.

Sometimes this negotiation failed disastrously, as will be discussed below. In the tenth century, however, Zoroastrians obtained an edict of protection from the Shi'i Buyid amir Ṣamṣām al-Dawla. This edict of 986, from a previously untranslated letter in the *dīwān* of the Buyid secretary Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm al-Ṣābi' (d. 994), reveals how a particular group of Zoroastrians (1) articulated their lineage as belonging to the family of Ādurbād ī Mahrspandān (*min wuld Ādhurbādih ibn Mārsfand*), a Zoroastrian priest from the early Sasanian period, and (2) claimed to possess a letter from 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib himself expressing special protections for them apart from the rest of the Zoroastrian community. Comments from al-Bīrūnī confirm the importance of Ādurbād's lineage for high priests of the eleventh century. I argue that the Zoroastrian mowbed was not just the leader of the Zoroastrians in Baghdad; members of the priesthood used their position and proximity to Muslim elites to shape the narrative of their own tradition and authority.

The edict of Ṣamṣām al-Dawla will be discussed in more detail in the final section of this article, particularly in relation to similar documents and treaties in the possession of other *dhimmī* communities at this time. I will begin by summarizing the Muslim debate about the status of the Zoroastrian community during the Abbasid period, and then discuss the Muslim perception of the Zoroastrian mowbed. The mowbed in Arabic sources was often a stock figure, whose Islamic-era reputation was based on Sasanian depictions of the mowbed as a wise man and advisor to kings; but mowbeds were also historical figures of the Abbasid era who worked at the side of caliphs, amirs, and Arabic scholars. These actual priests, and eventually a single family of them, may have influenced these literary depictions of mowbeds as well as our modern understanding of Zoroastrian orthodoxy (if such a thing existed).

7 A note on terminology: Arabic authors borrow terms from Persian for different priestly offices, namely, *al-mūbadh/al-mawbadh* (pl. *al-mawābidha*) for Middle Persian (MP) *mōbed/mowbed* ([mgwpt'] < Old Persian **magu-pati-*, the »chief priest«) and *al-hirbadh* (pl. *al-harābidha*) for MP *hērbed* ([hylpt'] < Avestan *aēθrapaiti*, the »scholar priest«). The latter appears in Arabic sources as an ancillary priest serving a more local jurisdiction, with a distinction in hierarchy as well as function. For instance, in al-Balādhuri's (d. 892) *Futūḥ al-buldān* it is the *hirbadh* of Darabjird, in Fārs, who negotiates the settlement of capitulation on behalf of his community (ed. de Goeje, 648; trans. Hitti and Murgotten, 2.130). Both the *hērbed* and the *mowbed* titles appear in Sasanian-era sources, along with several others, and all of the priestly offices undergo a change in function over time, particularly after the fall of the Sasanian kingdom. However, both *mowbed* and *hērbed* are still used today within the Zoroastrian community; see Kreyenbroek, *Zoroastrian priesthood*. The diachronic development of the nature and role of these priestly offices deserves closer attention. In this paper, I focus on the *mowbed* (which I normalize as »mowbed«) in Arabic sources both because it was the highest priestly title used by Arabic authors and because it appears far more frequently in Arabic sources than the *hērbed*.

Magians in the Quran and in the Islamic Tradition

Indeed, those who believe, and those who are Jews, Sabians, Christians, Magians, and those who are polytheists – God will judge between them all on Judgment Day. Surely God is a witness to everything.⁸

Quran 22.17, Sūrat al-Ḥajj

Zoroastrians, or Magians (*al-majūs*),⁹ appear in the Quran only once, when they are listed alongside Jews, Sabians, and Christians, and (syntactically) separated from polytheists. However, their status is unclear. On the one hand, Jews and Christians were considered »People of the Book« (*ahl al-kitāb*) along with Muslims, sharing their prophets and scriptures. On the other hand, polytheists were only to be given the choice between conversion and death. Both Sabians and Magians occupied an in-between category, with a status that was negotiated over time, but they were usually considered protected communities (*ahl al-dhimma*).¹⁰ Medieval Islamic jurists and modern scholars mostly agree that Magians, while part of the *ahl al-dhimma*, were not originally considered *ahl al-kitāb* and only later came to be identified as such.¹¹ The problem usually debated was whether or not the Magians had a book of scripture; it was initially decided that they did not, until it was agreed that they did.¹² A study of Arabic sources shows the wide circulation of varying hadiths on the subject of the status of the Magians in the eighth, ninth, and tenth centuries. This is not so surprising, as Muslims and Zoroastrians negotiated communal boundaries over these centuries of intermingling and gradual conversion to Islam.¹³ The point here, however, is that different groups of Muslims held different opinions about Magians. Below, I discuss the role of Shi'i movements in the development of Muslim attitudes towards Zoroastrians – and their mowbeds.

8 »Inna llādhīna amanū wa-llādhīna hādū wa-l-ṣābi'īna wa-l-naṣārā wa-l-majūsa wa-llādhīna ashrakū inna llāha yafsilu baynahum yawma al-qiyāmati inna llāha 'alā kulli shay'in shahīdun«; cf. Quran 2.62 and 5.69, which group together Christians, Jews, and Sabians, but do not mention Magians.

9 Another note on terminology: »Zoroastrianism« is a modern designation for the religion which was usually called, by its followers, the »good religion« (MP *weh-dēn*) or the »Mazda-worshipping religion« (MP *mazdēs-n-dēn*). In Arabic, as in Syriac, the Persian term for the religion's class of priests (MP *mog* < Old Persian *maguš*) had been generalized to refer to the religious community as a whole, e.g., »Magians« (Arabic *al-majūs*; Syriac *mḡušē*). And while Zarathushtra has always been regarded as the founder of the Magian tradition, the self-designation of »follower of Zarathushtra« (e.g., New Persian *Zartoshti*) only became widespread in the Islamic period – along with the identification of Zarathushtra as prophet of a revealed religion with a book, that is, the Avesta.

10 The true identity of the Sabians of the Quran is unknown, although several communities would later claim association for the status and protection afforded to them as *ahl al-dhimma*. See van Bladel, *Arabic Hermes*, 66ff; also discussed below.

11 E.g., Friedmann, *Dhimma*; Morony, *Maḍjūs*; Pakatchi and Qasemi, *Ahl al-Kitāb*; cf. Vajda, *Ahl al-Kitāb*, who discusses only Jews and Christians as comprising this category.

12 By the tenth century, Arabic authors regularly mention the »book« of Zarathushtra, e.g., al-Mas'ūdī (d. 956), *Murūj*, §548, ed. Pellat, 1.270. Also see Choksy, *Conflict and Cooperation*, 117.

13 Both communities offered legal opinions on issues including intermarriage, sexual intercourse, inheritance, and the sharing of food; for Zoroastrian opinions, see the MP *rivāyāts* (treatises in the form of questions and answers) written by Zoroastrian priests in the ninth through eleventh centuries, such as those attributed to Ādurfarrbay ī Farroxzādān, Ēmēd ī Ashawahishtān, and Frāy-Srōsh. Also see Choksy, *Conflict and Cooperation*, 122-137.

Early hadith collections and conquest narratives from the eighth and ninth centuries establish a precedent for accepting the *jizya* («poll tax») from Magians, going back to the *sunna* of the Prophet Muḥammad, as well as his successors – primarily ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (r. 634-644).¹⁴ These reports have slight variations in the content (*matn*) as well as in the chain of transmission (*isnād*), and represent traditions from competing Islamic authorities. For example, one *isnād* for the report about Muḥammad taking the *jizya* from the Magians of Hajar (i.e., Bahrain) goes back to a grandson of ‘Alī – al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafiyya (d. between 714 and 720), to whom the origin of the Murji’i doctrine is attributed – and is transmitted from two Kufans: the Murji’i Qays b. Muslim (d. 738) and the Shi’i Qays b. al-Rabi’ al-Asadi (d. 785).¹⁵ Another report relies upon the witness of a Companion of the Prophet, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. ‘Awf (d. 652), who testifies to the caliph ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb about the Prophet’s statement on the Magians. In one version of this report, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. ‘Awf merely affirms that Muḥammad accepted the *jizya* from the Magians of Hajar. In this version, the source of the report and its transmitters are all from the banū Tamīm, a tribe that counted Zoroastrians among its members and had a long history in Hajar as clients of the Sasanians.¹⁶

Some reports, and indeed the ones most favorable to Magians in the debate regarding their status as *ahl al-kitāb*, go back to early Shi’i authorities. A second version of the ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. ‘Awf report has the Companion testifying to ‘Umar that the Prophet actually *said*, «Treat the Magians as you would the People of the Book» (*sunnu bihim sunnata ahli l-kitābi*). This version of the report cites as transmitters the fifth and sixth imams of the Shi’i tradition, Ja‘far b. Muḥammad al-Šādiq (d. 765) and his father, Muḥammad al-Bāqir (d. 732).¹⁷ In fact, another tradition, which appears in early hadith compilations as well as taxation treatises like Abū Yūsuf’s (d. 793) *Kitāb al-kharāj*, credits ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib with saying that Magians are a people with a book (*ahlu kitābin*), and that this was the reason for Muḥammad accepting the *jizya* from them in the first place.¹⁸

However, not everyone was willing to accept these reports as legitimate traditions. For instance, the ‘Alī report is repeated by ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Šan‘ānī (d. 827), although this early traditionist clearly believes the chain of transmission to be suspect.¹⁹ Yet, the circulation of all of these different hadith, even when their *isnāds* were doubted by the traditionists copying them, demonstrates the fluidity of the Magians’ status in Islamic society in the eighth and ninth centuries, and beyond. For example, al-Muṭahhar b. Ṭāhir al-Maqdisī (c. 966) reports (without an *isnād*) a tradition about ‘Alī in which he says that the Magians were people

14 These reports are summarized by Magnusson, Charter of Salman al-Farisi, 191-192; Choksy, *Conflict and Cooperation*, 116-119; and Friedmann, *Tolerance and Coercion*, 72-76; they were also the focus of a 2014 dissertation chapter by Andrew Magnusson, *Muslim-Zoroastrian Relations*, 44-85; I build upon these studies in my own dissertation, Dang, *Transmitters*.

15 Choksy, *Conflict and Cooperation*, 116, points out the «pro-Iranian» backgrounds of the two transmitters for his larger point about the doubtful authenticity of such reports.

16 This version of the report goes back to a provincial secretary named Bajāla who saw ‘Umar’s letter and/or witnessed the statement of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. ‘Awf about the Magians of Hajar; the Tamim connection is pointed out by Magnusson, *Muslim-Zoroastrian Relations*; also see Lecker, *People, Tribes, and Society*, 11.73.

17 Choksy, *Conflict and Cooperation*, 116, points out these transmitters.

18 Abū Yūsuf, *Kitāb al-kharāj*, 129-130 (two reports); in the second report, which is also recorded by ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Šan‘ānī, ‘Alī relates how the Magians justify close-kin marriage and how they lost their book.

19 ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Šan‘ānī, *Muṣannaf*, ed. al-A‘zamī, 6.70-71 (#10029). Abū ‘Ubayd al-Qāsim b. Sallām (d. 838) is also skeptical of the ‘Alī tradition; *Kitāb al-Amwāl*, §§86, 1706-1708, ed. Harrās, 46-48, 724.

with a book, and furthermore that they had a prophet (*fa-qāla kāna l-majūsu ahla kitābin wa-lahum nabīyun*).²⁰ The proliferation of both the 'Alī tradition and the two versions of the 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. 'Awf tradition (one with a Tamīmī and another with a Shi'ī imāmī *isnād*) indicates that the Islamic perception of the Magian community was influenced at different times by competing authorities within the Muslim *umma*.

It is within this shifting landscape that Zoroastrian mowbeds negotiated their own status as well as that of their community. Another version of the 'Alī tradition would surface again under the Shi'ī Buyids – in the letter preserved by the secretary al-Ṣābi' to be discussed below – this time for the benefit of a particular family of Magians. We should understand the developing perception of the Magian community not just as a debate within the Islamic legal tradition, but perhaps also as being actively shaped by successive leaders of the Magians in Baghdad – sometimes at high risk to the Zoroastrian community. But first, we must establish the mowbed in his role outside of the supposedly »inward-looking« Zoroastrian community. A survey of Arabic sources of this period demonstrates the presence of the mowbed beside Abbasid caliphs and in dialogue with Muslim intellectuals.

The Wise Mowbed in Arabic Sources of the Abbasid Period

Arabic references to Zoroastrians appear in histories, geographies, *adab* works, heresiographies, *ṭabaqāt* literature, and more; a detailed study of these references is beyond the scope of this article.²¹ Some of these reports concern historical mowbeds from the pre-Islamic past who appear in histories of the Sasanian period. Other Arabic texts cite contemporary Zoroastrian priests of the Abbasid era as authors of books, as informants on topics of Persian religious or cultural significance, as sages attributed with wise or clever sayings, as participants in religious debates in the court of the caliph or his viziers, and as advisors to the caliphs. Here I focus on a few examples in order to demonstrate the Islamic concept of what I call the »wise mowbed« and to trace some historical mowbeds from the Abbasid period who are known from Arabic and ZMP texts.

Arabic authors offer several definitions of the role and function of the mowbed. Ibn 'Abd Rabbih al-Andalusī (d. 940) glosses the title of mowbed as *'alīm al-Furs*, »learned one of the Persians«. ²² According to al-Mas'ūdī (d. 956), the ancient mowbed was »the one in charge of matters of the religion« (*al-qayyim bi-umūr al-dīn*),²³ as well as a »custodian of the religion« or even its »preserver« (*ḥāfiẓ al-dīn*), and close in rank to that of the prophets.²⁴ Al-Ya'qūbī (d. 910) describes the *mowbedān mowbed* (Middle Persian for »mowbed of mowbeds«), the

20 Al-Maqdisī, *Bad' wa-l-ta'riḫh*, ed. Huart, 3.6, where 'Alī stops in the middle of a story about the Companions of the Cave in order to make this comment: »wa-ruwīya 'an 'aliyi bni abi ṭālibin r.ḡ.h. dhakara aṣḥāba l-kahfi fa-qāla kāna l-majūsu ahla kitābin wa-lahum nabīyun wa-sāqa l-qiṣṣatan«; also see 4.158 in the same work for another passing reference by al-Maqdisī to *al-majūs as ahl kitāb*.

21 Shaul Shaked has drawn a useful distinction between Arabic texts with incidental references to Zoroastrians, on the one hand, and Arabic texts which offer full chapters or treatments of Zoroastrian religion, on the other; he focused on the latter (see particularly Shaked, *Some Islamic reports*), and called a study of the former an enormous task. I have undertaken that task in my dissertation (Dang, *Transmitters*). Also see Guidi and Morony, *Mōbadh*, who provide several of the following references (although some of the chronology is confused).

22 E.g., Ibn 'Abd Rabbih al-Andalusī (d. 940), *al-Iqd al-farīd*, ed. al-Tūnġi, 2.349-350.

23 Al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab*, ed. Pellat, 1.287 (§581) and 1.293 (§597).

24 Al-Mas'ūdī, *al-Tanbīh*, ed. de Goeje, 103; trans. Hoyland, 99-100.

highest office of Zoroastrian priesthood in the Sasanian period, as »the scholar in charge of the laws of their religion« (*al-‘ālim al-qayyim bi-sharā’i*), further glossing the title as *‘ālim al-‘ulamā’* (lit. »scholar of scholars«).²⁵ Not only are Arabic authors familiar with the Middle Persian priestly title, but they seem to have a good idea about his standing in the Zoroastrian tradition: as a scholar and preserver of the religion and its laws.

Yet the earliest Arabic reference to the mowbed – actually to the *mowbedān mowbed* – appears in the context of *ṭabaqāt* literature, in the biography of an early hadith transmitter named Abū Qilāba (d. c. 725), of whom Ibn Sa‘d (d. 845) says, »if he had been one of the Persians (*‘ajam*) then he would have been the *mowbed mowbedān* [sic], that is, the *qāḍī al-quḍāt*.«²⁶ Thus, Ibn Sa‘d and others who repeat this comment offer an explanatory gloss of the Persian title »chief mowbed« (or literally »mowbed of mowbeds«) in Arabic as the Islamic *qāḍī al-quḍāt*, »chief judge« (or literally »judge of judges«). Although the office of the Muslim *qāḍī* developed independently from its Zoroastrian counterpart, the office of the chief *qāḍī*, specifically the *qāḍī al-quḍāt*, was an innovation of the Abbasids, and the title was probably a calque of the Persian *mowbedān mowbed*.²⁷ Furthermore, the reputation of the mowbed as a judge pervades the Arabic sources, both as an historical figure of the Sasanian past and as a contemporary figure interacting with the highest levels of Islamic political and intellectual authority. On the other hand, Ibn Sa‘d and other Arabic writers in the ninth century and beyond do not seem to be explaining the etymology of the *qāḍī al-quḍāt* so much as explaining the Persian office of *mowbedān mowbed* in a Muslim context and for a contemporary Muslim community – one in which mowbeds were still circulating and relying on the prestige of their past reputation.

All of the aforementioned definitions applied both to the mowbed of the pre-Islamic past and to contemporary mowbeds, when the mowbed was considered an authority on matters of Persian religion and also a source of knowledge about the Persian past – and when Arabic authors both read the written works of mowbeds and spoke with them in person about these subjects.²⁸ Thus the continuity of the contemporary mowbed with the past was no accident: the ninth- and tenth-century mowbed was perfectly placed to promote the reputation of the mowbed from the Sasanian past up to his own time. And this reputation translated into real standing in Islamic society, if we can trust the plethora of sources that attest to the mowbed’s position in the court of the caliph and amongst Arabic literati.

25 Al-Ya‘qūbī, *Ta’rīkh*, ed. Houtsma, 1.202; cf. trans. Gordon, 2.478 and Hoyland, 133.

26 Ibn Sa‘d, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kabīr*, ed. ‘Umar, 9.183 (#3886). Note that here the text reads *mawbadh mawbadhān*: the order of the MP two-part title is often reversed in Arabic (perhaps reflecting its Arabicization in an *idāfa* construct), or sometimes the word *mawbadhān* just stands alone (although it is technically a plural in the original Persian).

27 In fact, Abū Yūsuf, author of the *Kitāb al-kharāj* mentioned above, was the first *qāḍī al-quḍāt* to be appointed in Baghdad, first by the caliph al-Hādī (r. 785-786) and then by Hārūn al-Rashīd (r. 786-809), for whom he wrote the aforementioned work. Although some scholars are skeptical of Persian influence on this innovation (e.g., Blich-Abramski, *The judiciary*), this connection between the Zoroastrian office and the Muslim one was made often by Arabic scholars.

28 Al-Mas‘ūdī claims to have gotten all of his information about the Persians directly from their scholars and priests, and specifically from their »accurate and famous« books (*al-Tanbih*, ed. de Goeje, 110 and 104). Other Arabic authors name mowbeds as translators or redactors of Persian works, and even quote a handful of these authorities by name; for more of these citations, see my dissertation (Dang, *Transmitters*).

The figure of the wise mowbed appears in Arabic sources in several related roles, all of which depend upon his reputation as a judge, scholar, and sage. The mowbed is a source of wise sayings and witty rebuttals in *adab* works and *siyāsa* literature, particularly in the genre known as »Mirror for Princes«, or *Fürstenspiegel* – continuing a Persian tradition of advice for kings.²⁹ Here the mowbed is most commonly an ahistorical, decontextualized, generic figure credited with some aphorism. Sometimes the anecdote is more specific, but with recycled content. Taken individually, these examples do not bear much historical weight. Similarly, the mowbed also appears frequently as a participant in interreligious disputations, in settings both real and imagined.³⁰ Because of the decontextualized referential nature of the *adab* literature in which they appear, often reiterated centuries later, they seem to be part of the semi-legendary setting of early Abbasid rule.

The Zoroastrian tradition has its own semi-legendary account of such a disputation: the ZMP text known as the *Gizistag Abālish* (»The accursed Abālish«) details how Ādurfarrbay ī Farrozzādān, the author of much of the ZMP compilation known as the *Dēnkard* (»Acts of the religion«), disputed with Abālish in the presence of al-Ma'mūn and the latter's *qāḍī* and vizier.³¹ Interreligious disputation has a long history in the Zoroastrian tradition, including the famous fourth-century priest Ādurbād ī Mahrspandān and his defeat of heretics of the religion, including (in some versions) the prophet Mani.³² Ādurbād is the same priest who is claimed by Islamic-era Zoroastrian mowbeds as the father and progenitor of their priestly line (to be discussed further below). The *Gizistag Abālish* represents another continuation of a pre-Islamic Zoroastrian tradition. The events which it narrates may be a literary invention, like other such disputation narratives produced by Christian communities at this time.³³

However, a range of Arabic authors refer to a Zoroastrian mowbed in the presence of al-Ma'mūn (r. 813-833) or his Barmakid viziers.³⁴ And the names of some famous intellectuals are repeated Arabic accounts of debates and disputations. One name that crops up repeatedly is the Shi'i scholar Hishām b. al-Ḥakam (d. between 795 and 815), who is associated with a mowbed in several different accounts.³⁵ The verisimilitude of these examples is corroborated

29 An entire book of the ZMP text known as the *Dēnkard* (»Acts of the religion«) is devoted to collections of wise sayings and features many aphorisms from mowbeds, including those of Ādurbād ī Mahrspandān, the progenitor of the Zoroastrian priesthood; see Shaked, *Wisdom*.

30 For example, al-Mas'ūdī describes a disputation in the *majlis* of Yahyā b. Khālid al-Barmakī (d. 805), in which a mowbed, who is also called »a judge of the Magians« (*qāḍī al-majūs*), participates (*Murūj al-dhahab*, §2578, ed. Pellat, 4.241); for a translation and analysis of this disputation narrative, see Meisami, Mas'ūdī on love.

31 *Gizistag Abālish*, ed. and trans. Chacha. See Sahner, Zoroastrian dispute.

32 Although Ādurbād is thought to have been the high priest of Shāpūr II (r. 309-379), some traditions place him in opposition to the prophet Mani, who lived earlier in the third century. For example, in the *Dēnkard*, Ādurbād ī Mahrspandān issues ten statements and then Mani responds to and rebuts each one; *Dēnkard III*, 199-200, ed. and trans. de Menasce.

33 For example, the Syriac Christian *Life of Simeon of the Olives* was revised to depict this bishop of Ḥarrān as going to Baghdad to debate al-Ma'mūn himself, despite his having died nearly a century beforehand in 734; see Tannous, *Simeon of the Olives*.

34 Ibn Abī Ṭāhir Ṭayfūr (d. 893), *Kitāb Baghdād*, ed. al-Kawtharī [1968 reprint], 48; al-Tawḥīdī (d. 1020), *al-Baṣā'ir wa-l-dhakhā'ir*, ed. al-Qāḍī, 9.92; al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī (d. 1108), *Muḥāḍarāt al-udabā'*, ed. Murād, 4.337; Yāqūt (d. 1229), *Mu'jam al-buldān*, ed. Wüstenfeld, 1-2.669-670, 2.519.

35 There are at least three distinct anecdotes by four different authors: Ibn Qutayba al-Dīnawarī (d. 889), *Uyūn al-akhbār*, ed. Ṭawīl, 2.168-169; Ibn 'Abd Rabbih al-Andalusī (d. 940), *al-Iqd al-farīd*, ed. al-Tūnjī, 2.349-350; al-Mas'ūdī (d. 956), *Murūj al-dhahab*, ed. Pellat, 4.236-246; Ibn Ḥazm (d. 1064), *Rasā'il*, ed. 'Abbās, 3.202.

by other more specific citations, which point to mowbeds as part of the Abbasid intellectual community and associated with particular scholars, judges, caliphs, and amirs. The reputation of the wise mowbed granted Zoroastrian priests proximity to Muslim ruling elites, a position which held great potential for them and the Zoroastrian community, but also great risk, because the most important role of the mowbed was advising kings, or caliphs.

The mowbed's role as an advisor to the Persian kings is prominent in the Arabic reception of Persian history. Ibn Qutayba (d. 889), in reading the books of the Persians, likens the *mowbedān mowbed* of the past to the secretaries (*al-kuttāb*) of his own time for the role they play in the administration.³⁶ Al-Mas'ūdī records an episode in which the Persian king's mowbed is addressed as »overseer of the religion and advisor to the king, the one informing him about matters of state which he has neglected and omitted, in the command of his lands and his subjects.«³⁷ In al-Mas'ūdī's hierarchy of Persian offices, the mowbed was either second only to the king or just below his viziers.³⁸ We cannot assume, from these sources, complete historical accuracy for the role of the mowbed in the Sasanian period. However, they do offer an Islamic representation of the mowbed and a context in which he appears to have continued his earlier role, but now as an advisor to Muslim caliphs instead of Zoroastrian kings. Several Arabic references link the mowbed to individual caliphs and their courts, beginning with the semi-legendary references to mowbeds with al-Ma'mūn (r. 813-833).

Historically grounded references begin to emerge for the mid-ninth century, when a Zoroastrian mowbed appears as a witness at the famous trial of al-Afshīn during the reign of al-Mu'taṣim (r. 833-842). Here the mowbed testifies about the heretical tendencies of al-Afshīn, condemning the general and distancing himself from associations with *zanādiqa* (»heretics«) – and he does so alongside the highest judges and authorities of the Islamic court, with all its notables in attendance.³⁹ The narrator of this episode reveals that the mowbed later converted to Islam under the caliph al-Mutawakkil (r. 847-861) and became his boon companion.⁴⁰ Although the mowbed in this account is unnamed, he has been identified as Zarduxsht ī Ādurfarrbay, the son of Ādurfarrbay ī Farrozzādān (who disputed in the court of al-Ma'mūn).⁴¹ Zarduxsht is quoted by name in a few Arabic works,⁴² but was also so well known for his conversion and association with al-Mutawakkil that he was mentioned by

36 Ibn Qutayba al-Dinawarī, *Uyūn al-akhbār*, ed. Ṭawīl, 1.60-61.

37 Al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab*, ed. Pellat, 1.293 (§597).

38 Compare the hierarchy in *Murūj al-dhahab* (ed. Pellat, 1.287) with that in *al-Tanbih* (ed. de Goeje, 103).

39 Both the vizier Ibn al-Zayyāt and the chief *qāḍī* Aḥmad b. Abī Duwād were present, and »not a single person of high social or official rank« was left in the palace; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'riḫ*, ed. de Goeje *et al.*, 3.2.1310.

40 Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'riḫ*, ed. de Goeje *et al.*, 3.2.1310; cf. al-Dhahabī (d. 1348), *Ta'riḫ al-Islām*, ed. Tadmuri, 16.19-20.

41 See de Blois, Persian calendar, 45.

42 Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī (d. 970), *al-Tanbih 'alā ḥudūth al-taṣḥīf*, ed. Ṭalās, 21, 24; Yāqūt (d. 1229), *Mu'jam al-buldān*, ed. Wüstenfeld, 3.185; as well as by the author of the anonymous historical text in codex Berlin, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Sprenger 30, pp. 62, 94, 141 (see Rubin, Ibn al-Muqaffa' and Sasanian history).

some Arabic authors simply as »al-Mutawakkil's mowbed,«⁴³ while others attest to an unnamed mowbed in this caliph's entourage.⁴⁴ The notoriety of these particular mowbeds in the mid-ninth century, Zarduxšt ī Ādurfarrbay and Ādurfarrbay ī Farrozzādān, along with their interactions with Muslim judges, religious authorities, and caliphs, probably informed the ninth- and tenth-century Arabic definitions of the mowbed as a *qāḍī*, and particularly of the *mowbedān mowbed* as *qāḍī al-quḍāt*.

No matter how well respected the office of the mowbed was outside of the Zoroastrian community, there was considerable pressure for these mowbeds to convert, particularly under caliphs who were less tolerant than al-Ma'mūn. Reading into later passages of the *Dēnkard*, it seems that Zarduxšt's apostasy caused significant turmoil for the Zoroastrian community and particularly for the *dīwān* of the priests. For example, the final redactor of the *Dēnkard*, Ādurbād ī Ēmēdān, informs us that he struggled to preserve Zoroastrian religious knowledge in the aftermath.⁴⁵

Zarduxšt ī Ādurfarrbay was not the only mowbed subject to political and social pressures. Nearly a century later, al-Mas'ūdī informs us about two successive mowbeds of his own lifetime: the current mowbed and his predecessor, who met an early demise, possibly due to sectarian politics. Al-Mas'ūdī says that at the time of writing *al-Tanbīh wa-l-ishrāf* in 956, a mowbed named Ēmēdh b. Ashawahisht (Ēmēd ī Ashawahishtān in Middle Persian)⁴⁶ was the current leader of the Zoroastrians of Jibāl, 'Irāq, and the rest of the lands of the Persians. The mowbed before him, according to al-Mas'ūdī, was Isfandiyār b. Ādhurbādh b. Ēmēdh, who was put to death by the caliph al-Rāḍī (r. 934-940) in Baghdad in 937.⁴⁷ Based on the date of Isfandiyār's death given here, he is thought to be the son of the final redactor of the *Dēnkard*, Ādurbād ī Ēmēdān.⁴⁸ This passage is crucial for establishing a timeline and genealogy for the Zoroastrian priests of the Islamic era.⁴⁹ It also hints at further upheavals for *al-majūs* – and their possible involvement in the sectarian politics of the period.

43 E.g., al-Bīrūnī (d. 1048), *al-Āthār al-bāqīya*, ed. Sachau, 223.

44 Al-Mas'ūdī (d. 956), *Murūj al-dhahab*, ed. Pellat, 5.20; Ibn al-Nadīm (d. 990), *Fihrist*, ed. al-Sayyid, 2.326; al-Tawhīdī (d. 1020), *al-Baṣā'ir wa-l-dhakhā'ir*, ed. al-Qāḍī, 6.236; al-Bīrūnī, *al-Āthār al-bāqīya*, ed. Sachau, 31-32.

45 *Dēnkard III*, 420; see a partial translation in Rezaia, *Dēnkard* against its Islamic discourse, 346-347.

46 An extant ZMP treatise (MP *rivāyat*) is attributed to this mowbed, and he is also quoted by multiple Arabic authors in the late tenth century as an authority on Persian knowledge; these citations are discussed in more detail in my dissertation (Dang, *Transmitters*). Note that the spelling of his name is inconsistent in Arabic sources, as the Persian long -ē- was rendered in Arabic either by an alif or yā'.

47 al-Mas'ūdī, *al-Tanbīh*, ed. de Goeje, 104-105; cf. trans. Hoyland, 101.

48 This assumes a *floruit* for Ādurbād ī Ēmēdān in the late ninth to early tenth century, which is corroborated by the Melkite Christian writer, Quṣṭā ibn Lūqā of Ba'labakk (d. c. 920), who mentions »Ādhurbādh the mowbed« as an informant about the many languages of the Avesta. The reading of this name comes from the emendation of van Bladel (Zoroaster's many languages, 193-195, citing the edition of Samir and Nwyia). Additionally, the ZMP work known as the *Bundahishn* names Ādurbād ī Ēmēdān as a contemporary to other ninth-century figures like Zādspram ī Gushn-Jam (*floruit* c. 881); *Bundahishn* 35a, trans. Agostini and Thrope, 189-190.

49 The genealogies of the priests are discussed in further detail in my dissertation, where I correct several common misidentifications and establish a more accurate chronology; see Dang, *Transmitters*.

That Isfandiyār may have been caught up in sectarian matters might be inferred from al-Mas'ūdī's comment that he gave the full account of this mowbed's death in another of his works, together with his account of Sulaymān al-Jannābī, also known as Abū Ṭāhir Sulaymān b. Abī Sa'īd (d. 944). Abū Ṭāhir was the leader of the Qarmaṭī, an offshoot of the Ismā'īlī Shi'ī movement in Bahrain, who – after massacring pilgrims in Mecca and stealing the black stone from the Ka'ba in 930 – continued to harass pilgrims on the hajj until al-Rāḍī negotiated a settlement with him.⁵⁰ Unfortunately, the story of Isfandiyār's death does not appear in the sections on al-Rāḍī and Abū Ṭāhir in the extant version of al-Mas'ūdī's *Murūj al-dhahab*, where he instead refers the reader to relevant sections in two of his (lost) works, *Akhbār al-zamān* and *Kitāb al-awsaṭ*.⁵¹ Despite the lack of further details, two explanations for al-Mas'ūdī's comment in *al-Tanbīh* are possible: the first is that the mowbed's death had nothing to do with Abū Ṭāhir al-Jannābī and was merely included in the section of reports during the reign of al-Rāḍī because of chronological proximity; the second is that Isfandiyār's death was somehow connected to the affairs of Abū Ṭāhir, the Qarmaṭī leader in Bahrain. The second explanation is more compelling, especially in light of the specificity of al-Mas'ūdī's comment which names Abū Ṭāhir instead of simply referring to the caliph under whose name he organizes his reports in this final book of the *Murūj al-dhahab*.

Isfandiyār's involvement with Abū Ṭāhir might extend to an incident after the events of 930, when Abū Ṭāhir famously (and disastrously) supported the prophecies of a Persian holy man from Isfahan who foretold the imminent fulfillment of all religions, but who turned out to be a fraud. It is possible that the mowbed Isfandiyār supported these claims in hope of a restoration of Magian Persian rule,⁵² or that he provided a similar prophecy for Abū Ṭāhir after the failure of his other Persian holy man to deliver on his promises.⁵³ We have already seen the associations between a mowbed and the early Shi'ī theologian Hishām b. al-Ḥakam, as well as the Shi'ī strands of hadith supporting the view of Magians as *ahl al-kitāb* which were circulating from the eighth to the tenth century. Zoroastrian mowbeds may have been active participants in the promotion of these traditions, allying themselves with various Shi'ī sects with which they found favor or common ground. In any case and for whatever reason, a leader of the Zoroastrian community was put to death by the caliph al-Rāḍī in a tumultuous time. Isfandiyār's successors, however, enjoyed a much better reputation, particularly after the emergence of the Buyid amirs.

50 This branch of the Ismā'īlī Shi'ī movement saw Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl as the seventh imam and the *mahdī*; the movement was based upon teachings of Ḥamdān Qarmaṭ, who sent Abū Ṭāhir's father, Abū Sa'īd al-Jannābī (d. 913), to proselytize in Bahrain, where he founded a Qarmaṭī state in 899 that continued to trouble the Abbasids and Buyids after Abū Ṭāhir's lifetime. The black stone was not returned to Mecca until 951, several years after Abū Ṭāhir's death.

51 Al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj*, §3428, ed. Pellat, 5.204.

52 Madelung, in his summary of these events (Qarmaṭī), certainly seems to think there is a connection.

53 Such prophecies developed out of the Zoroastrian millennial scheme and appear in several variations in extant ZMP works from the Islamic period.

Instituting the »Sons of Ādurbād«: Mowbeds, the Buyids, and 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib

As Abbasid power waned, the heartland of Zoroastrianism came to be ruled by newly appointed Buyid amirs. The Buyids (c. 934-1062) were a Twelver Shi'i dynasty founded by three brothers from Daylam who claimed descent from the Sasanid kings, notably through an alleged genealogy leading back to Bahrām V Gōr (r. 420-438).⁵⁴ As self-styled *shāhān shāhs* (Middle Persian for »king of kings«, in Arabic *malik al-mulūk*), the heritage claimed by the Buyids extended to their tolerance – or even support – of Zoroastrians. Along with Sabians and Christians, there were Zoroastrians who served as prominent Buyid bureaucrats, several retaining the *nisba* of *al-majūsi*, that is, »the Magian«. ⁵⁵ It is with the Buyids that we again find the mowbed.

An Arabic inscription on the ruins of the fifth-century BC Achaemenid palace of Darius at Persepolis informs us that in the year 955 CE the amir 'Aḍud al-Dawla (d. 983) enlisted »Mārsfand the mowbed from Kāzarūn« to read the Persian inscriptions for him there.⁵⁶ 'Aḍud al-Dawla's mowbed translator bears a name which connects him to a Sasanian-era mowbed of particular importance: Ādurbād ī Mahrspandān. I have already mentioned his fame for disputing with Mani, but he was also famous for undergoing an ordeal of molten copper and thus defending the Zoroastrian religion.⁵⁷ Ādurbād ī Mahrspandān appears throughout the ZMP works as a champion of the religion, but his genealogy is elaborated only in the late ninth- or early tenth-century redaction of a cosmological text known as the *Bundahishn*, in a chapter which also contains the names and lineages of a handful of contemporary mowbeds.⁵⁸ Around this time, a collection of wise sayings attributed to Ādurbād ī Mahrspandān was also translated into Arabic.⁵⁹ Under 'Aḍud al-Dawla's son and successor, Ṣamṣām al-Dawla (r. 983-986, 989-998), a group of Magians declared themselves to be descendants of Ādurbād ī Mahrspandān and claimed to possess a document from 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib himself which granted them special protections.

54 On the Iranian background of the Buyids, see Kraemer, *Humanism*, 44-45; Madelung, The title Shāhānshāh; Bosworth, *Heritage of rulership*; Donohue, *Buwayhid Dynasty*; and Mottahedeh, *Idea of Iran*.

55 For some of their names and offices, see Donohue, *Buwayhid Dynasty*, 81; Choksy, *Conflict and Cooperation*, 120ff; Kraemer, *Humanism*, 85.

56 See Donohue, Three Buwayhid inscriptions, 75-78; he provides the text, translation, and commentary as well as an image of this inscription. Persepolis, in the heart of Persian territory, had been an important cultural and religious site since the time of the Achaemenids. It was also the site of Sasanian monuments and inscriptions, which are probably what 'Aḍud al-Dawla wanted to have read to him.

57 According to the story, molten copper was poured on his chest and he survived, thus proving the strength and correctness of his religion. References to this ordeal appear in several ZMP works, as well as in al-Ya'qūbī's treatment of the life of Mani (although his mowbed disputant is unnamed).

58 *Bundahishn* 35.a, trans. Agostini and Thrope, 189-190; this passage has been edited and translated several times, each time with a different interpretation of the number and names of these priests. I discuss this text and other ZMP and Arabic works in my dissertation (Dang, *Transmitters*) to establish a chronology for the ninth- and tenth-century Zoroastrian priests.

59 The wisdom of Ādurbād appears in Miskawayh's (d. 1030) *al-Ḥikma al-khālida* – as the *Mawā'iz Ādurbād* (ed. Badawī, 26-28); Miskawayh also calls this mowbed *ḥakīm* (»sage«; ed. Badawī, 67). This collection of wise sayings roughly corresponds to the Middle Persian *andarz* works attributed to 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 6 of the *Dēnkard* (see Shaked, *Wisdom*, 279-300). In fact, in the introduction to *al-Ḥikma al-khālida*, Miskawayh claims to have finally found a manuscript of a Persian work called *Jāwidān khirad* (»Eternal wisdom«) in the possession of the *mowbedān mowbed* of Fārs, which served as the basis of his own work. Here the citation of a mowbed (and the entire frame story) is a trope or device used to give authenticity and antiquity to his work, but the fact remains that parts of Miskawayh's compilation are in fact translations of extant MP works.

The edict of Šamšām al-Dawla

The *diwān* of the Buyid secretary Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm al-Šābi' (d. 994) includes an edict from Shawwāl 375 AH (= February 986 CE) in which Šamšām al-Dawla confirms 'Alī's original protections for the Magian descendants of Ādurbād ī Mahrspandān, including an exemption from paying the *jizya* which was demanded from Magians and other *dhimmi* communities. The full translation of this letter appears in the Appendix, but I discuss some excerpts here:⁶⁰

This is a writ (*kitābun*) from Šamšām al-Dawla Shams al-Milla (»the Sun of the Nation«) Abū Kālijār, the son of 'Aḏud al-Dawla Tāj al-Milla (»the Crown of the Nation«) Abū Shujā', the son of Rukn al-Dawla Abū 'Alī, master, leader of the faithful:

To the community of Magians of the sons of Ādhurbād b. Mārsfand (*li-jamā'ati al-majūsi min wuldi ādhurbādha bni mārsfanda*): You are linked to us because God Almighty and his Prophet – may God bless him – has confirmed you under his treaty and protection, and because the truth and inviolability of this has been confirmed by us for most of you. You have presented a letter in your possession from the leader of the faithful, 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib – may the blessings of God be upon him – which contains what your faith requires with respect to persons and property, your custody of possessions and resources, and your exemptions from the payment of the *jizya* which (other) people of your community give (*wa-i'fā'ikum min adā'i al-jizyati llātī yu'addihā ahlu millatikum*), for reasons thus granted to you, and to all who trace their lineage to your (fore)father [...]

[...] that you are not opposed in the performance of the ceremonies of your religion, and are not prohibited from entering your fire-temples and from repairing those of them and the shrines that require it, and that you are not opposed in fulfilling your religious duties and using your revenues and your estates and your religious endowments and their disbursement for what has been dedicated from the coffers of your charity for it; and that you conduct yourselves as has been prescribed for you in leadership over the people of your community, and the levy that the one appointed to leadership imposes, it being a single *dirham* a year from each man from among the people of your community except for you, and that its lawsuits proceed under your jurisdiction, and its judgments are executed by you [...]

[...] And whoever reads this writ of ours from among the ranks of overseers and officials of the land-tax and the police and the trade tribunal and judiciary and inheritance tribunal and other (branches) of civil administration, let him refer every matter, both small and large, to one of the sons of Ādhurbād b. Mārsfand, and let him treat them to their benefit with regard to assistance and avoid disadvantaging them in his reckoning, and let them be on guard against him violating and disregarding (it), God-willing.

Written in (the month of) Shawwāl, in the year 375.

60 Al-Šābi', *Rasā'il*, ed. al-Thāmīrī, 2.376-378. Before the recent edition was published, this letter was noted only by Donohue, *Three Buwayhid inscriptions*, 78 (with n. 8), and summarized by Hachmeier, *Letters of al-Šābi'*, 134; it has not, to my knowledge, been discussed by other scholars of Zoroastrianism.

Many of the protections and affirmations detailed in this edict are similar to those in other documents obtained or produced by *dhimmī* communities around this time, including the freedom to worship and maintain their shrines, security for inheritances and the disbursement of funds within the community, and assurances against unfair treatment by Muslim officials. The secretary Abū Ishāq, a Sabian himself, records a similar (albeit much shorter) edict from the caliph al-Ṭāʿī (r. 974-991) for the protection of the Sabians of Ḥarrān and its surrounding regions.⁶¹ Even the Magians' claim to possess a letter or agreement from 'Alī is not so strange: other *dhimmī* communities articulated their autonomy and protection with similar claims through Muḥammad or his Companions. Such claims include the Treaty of Najrān and other treaties that form the basis for the so-called Pact of 'Umar, both of which define protections for Christian communities from the beginning of the Arab conquest.⁶² Similarly, the late tenth-century *Epistle* of Sherira Gaon reimagines the Arab conquest in terms favorable to the present, particularly in the Jews' welcoming of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib.⁶³

Magians of the Abbasid period maintained other claims to protection through alternative documents and figures of authority. Salmān al-Fārisī, a Companion of the Prophet and the first known Persian Zoroastrian convert to Islam, supposedly obtained a letter from Muḥammad detailing an agreement for the protection of his family (including relief from the *jizya* payment), both for those who converted to Islam and (possibly) those who had remained Zoroastrian. This letter is preserved in tenth-century Arabic chronicles and is known as the *'ahd nāmāh* («written treaty») of Salmān al-Fārisī.⁶⁴ To all of these claims we can now add the edict of Ṣamṣām al-Dawla for the Magians.

61 Al-Ṣābi', *Rasā'il*, ed. al-Thāmīrī, 2.244. During the reign of al-Ma'mūn (r. 813-833), pagans from Ḥarrān begin to call themselves Sabian and to change their manner of dress in order to assimilate to others around them; see van Bladel, *Arabic Hermes*, 66-67, 104-106; and Kraemer, *Humanism*, 84, who calls this claim «a stratagem on their part, with the caliph al-Ma'mūn's complicity». Meanwhile, Mandaean living in the marshes of southern Iraq, near Wāsiṭ, were claimed by Islamic authorities to be the true Sabians mentioned in the Quran; see van Bladel, *Sasanian Mandaean*, 47-59.

62 See Levy-Rubin, *Non-Muslims*, particularly for the Pact of 'Umar (or *Shurūṭ 'Umar*) as a product of the mid-ninth century, as well as a general discussion of the genre and arguments for its genuine origin in the surrender agreements of the early Arab conquest (which were themselves based on centuries of international diplomacy in the region); many of these documents are also discussed by Magnusson, Charter of Salman Farisi, in comparison to Salmān al-Fārisī's *'ahd nāmāh*.

63 Gross, When the Jews greeted Ali, studies Sherira Gaon's *Epistle*, composed in 986 or 987, as part of a much larger contemporary tradition of apocryphal accounts of the Arab conquest, including other 'Alī traditions among Christians and Jews.

64 On the figure of Salmān al-Fārisī, and its development over time, see Bowen-Savant, *New Muslims*, 61ff; on the treaty itself, see *ibid.*, 83-89, where she notes that different versions of the text say either «those who converted and (wa-) who kept their religion» or «those who converted or (aw) those who kept their religion», so that the intended recipients of this protection among Salmān's family are ambiguous. The *'ahd nāmāh* purports to be from the year 631, but several anachronisms and general skepticism about its authenticity make this highly unlikely; however, it is possible that the charter is not a completely modern invention (as some have argued), just a medieval one. According to Magnusson, Charter of Salman Farisi, the charter likely originated in the ninth or tenth century amidst similar genres – but we must conservatively say the tenth, since it does not appear in any text before Abū al-Shaykh's (d. 979) *Ṭabaqāt al-muḥaddithin*. Bowen-Savant, *New Muslims*, 86, also finds an origin of this document in the Buyid era, which was characterized by «'Alidist sympathies and ideas about Muḥammad and his companions that favored Iranian interests».

What is extraordinary about Şamşām al-Dawla's edict, however, is the status and protection afforded in it specifically to the Magians of the family of Ādurbād ī Mahrspandān (*li-jamā'at al-majūs min wuld Ādhurbādh ibn Mārsfand*). This edict explicitly confirms the Prophet's inclusion of Magians as *jizya*-paying members of the *ahl al-dhimma*, but it goes one step further in that it exempts the Magians of Ādurbād's lineage from paying that *jizya* on the grounds that this exemption had been given to these Magians centuries ago from 'Alī himself. I have already summarized the Muslim debates about whether or not Magians should be granted the *right* to pay the *jizya*. Note, however, that the terms for the rest of the Magians were also favorable: the payment of a single *dirham* per head is quite low, with most assessments for the *jizya* payment of *dhimmī* men as at least one *dīnār* (which at this time may have been worth up to 50 *dirhams*).⁶⁵ Moreover, the edict suggests that this family's leadership over the Magian community had been entrusted to them long ago.

As shown above, other Shi'i hadith traditions had been circulating for centuries asserting the *dhimmī* and even *ahl al-kitāb* status of Magians and going back to 'Alī and his successor imams. However, the possession of a written decree from 'Alī is incredible and must be spurious – a tenth-century invention to claim antiquity for the status of the Zoroastrians of Ādurbād's line made to Shi'i rulers. Such a claim is not so different from the Buyids' own promotion of a Sasanian legacy, as well as Arab clientage.⁶⁶ The »sons of Ādhurbādh« seem to have found a winning combination of time, place, and ruler to assert their authority. Şamşām al-Dawla's edict is dated to the year 375 AH (= 986 CE), when his tenuous control of Iranian territories was crumbling. Just one year later, Şamşām al-Dawla was imprisoned by his brother Sharaf, and eventually Baghdad was no longer the true center of Buyid power. Apparently the Magians won Şamşām al-Dawla's favor at just the right time, and in the midst of considerable social and political upheavals. It is unknown how long that protection lasted in practice. What is clear, however, is the prominence of the family of Ādurbād within the Zoroastrian tradition *as we know it* and the authority of those priests who claimed descent from him.

The authority of the sons of Ādurbād ī Mahrspandān (*al-majūs min wuld Ādhurbādh ibn Mārsfand*) may have become even more centralized in the following eleventh century, as suggested by the following comments of al-Bīrūnī in his *al-Āthār al-bāqiya*:

65 Cahen *et al.*, *Djizya*; Miles, *Dirham*.

66 Bosworth, *Heritage of rulership*, 12, discusses the Daylamite Buyid claims of descent from the Arab tribe of *Ḍabba*.

It has been recorded in the books of chronicles that at the end of the reign of Sābūr [II] »who has broad shoulders« there appeared a community in opposition to the Magians, but Ādhurbādh son of Mārsfand from the line of Dūsūr son of Manūshjihr debated them and overcame them, then he showed them a sign (miracle) by ordering molten copper to be poured on his breast, and so it was poured on him and it hardened but did not harm him, and then Sābūr established his (=Ādhurbādh's) sons along with the sons of Zarādusht⁶⁷ in the office of the high priesthood (*al-mawbadhān-mawbadhiyya*). No knowledge of the Avesta which he [Zarādusht] brought is permitted except to one of them who is trustworthy in his religion and whose way is praised among the adherents of their religion, and he has no authority in this way until a document is written for him in which it is attested that the masters of the religion have granted (him) permission for it.⁶⁸

Al-Bīrūnī explains that the Zoroastrian priesthood of his time all descended from Ādurbād ī Mahrspandān's family line going back to the time of Shāpūr II (r. 309-379). He also names this priest's ancestors as Dūsūr and Manūshjihr, which accords with the genealogy of Ādurbād ī Mahrspandān and all the mowbeds given in the final chapters of the *Bundahishn*.⁶⁹ Al-Bīrūnī even includes a reference to Ādurbād's ordeal of molten copper, one that mirrors his account of Zarathushtra's own similar ordeal (which precedes this passage) – a tale which does not appear in extant ZMP works. Additionally, al-Bīrūnī tells us that for any Magian to have knowledge of the Avesta, he had to seek written permission from the masters of the religion. Evidently, the eleventh-century mowbeds from among the »sons of Ādhurbādh« held all the power for access to religious knowledge and authority.

Conclusion

We should understand the extant ZMP texts – and their canonicity – in the context of the interactions between Zoroastrian mowbeds and Muslim political and intellectual authorities. In such a context, the way priests elaborated their authority in internal Zoroastrian narratives raises questions about their claims of continuity with the past, particularly through the figure of Ādurbād ī Mahrspandān. The »Magians from the descendants of Ādhurbādh b. Mārsfand« (*al-majūs min wuld Ādhurbādh ibn Mārsfand*) are the very mowbeds who were at the side of the caliphs and amirs, some of whom are named in contemporary ZMP works. It is significant that this is the line of priests that composed the extant ZMP works, some of which were copied in Baghdad around this time.⁷⁰ The projection of authority of the lineage of Ādurbād ī Mahrspandān was a successful one, both outside of their community and within it.

67 It is unclear if the »sons of Zarādusht« are a separate line of priests or a reference to Zarathushtra's original institution of the priesthood.

68 Al-Bīrūnī, *al-Āthār al-bāqiya*, ed. Fück, 75-76; cf. translation by Taqizadeh, *New contribution*, and Shaked, *Eso-teric trends*, 187. Note that al-Bīrūnī knew and possibly spoke with mowbeds and is generally well-informed on matters of Zoroastrianism.

69 This Manūshjihr (Manushchihhr in Middle Persian) is a legendary figure from the distant past who bears the same name as the ninth-century Middle Persian priest and author Manushchihhr mentioned elsewhere in this article.

70 De Jong, *Zoroastrians of Baghdad*, and Rezaia, *Dēnkard* against its Islamic discourse, both draw attention to Baghdad as a center of Zoroastrian religious learning, showing the importance of the Abbasid capital especially in relation to the compilation of that ZMP work.

ZMP texts like the writings of Manushchihir show that in late ninth-century Fārs different kinds of priests competed for the recognition (and financial support) of local Zoroastrian communities.⁷¹ Additionally, Shaul Shaked has observed the pluralism of Zoroastrian doctrine in extant sources from outside the Zoroastrian tradition, as well as the construction of Zoroastrian »orthodoxy« in the Islamic period.⁷² Patricia Crone has illustrated the persistence of »local Zoroastrianisms« into the Islamic period and which supported various uprisings and messianic movements, including many proto-Shi'i movements.⁷³ We may never know to what extent the surviving ZMP works are representative of earlier Sasanian Zoroastrianism, but their exclusive existence has afforded them the status of canonicity – despite the hints of other varieties of Zoroastrianism which appear in external sources from the Sasanian and Islamic eras.⁷⁴ Yet Arabic sources discussed above reveal part of the story of how Zoroastrian orthodoxy was formed: as a product of the Islamic period, under the patronage of Islamic rulers, through the personal interventions of individual mowbeds and their assertions of the authority of their family line.

The Zoroastrians were not the only religious community negotiating their status and protection under Islamic rule. This process of negotiation was ongoing and dependent upon the favor of the current regime. A community's status also greatly depended upon the standing of its individuals within the caliph's (or amir's) court and his administrative bureaucracy. When they fell out of favor, so too did the religious community. Claims to early treaties and decrees of protection proliferate in the ninth and tenth centuries, even among the accepted *ahl al-kitāb* communities of Christians and Jews. And 'Alī was frequently the focus of such claims at this time, by different groups among Christians and Jews.

The Ādurbād ī Mahrspandān line of Zoroastrian priests was perhaps always important within the Zoroastrian tradition, but their authority gained new significance in the tenth century. At this time, inclusion in this lineage meant an exemption from paying the *jizya*. Further evidence from al-Bīrūnī in the eleventh century suggests that permission to study the Avesta had to be granted by the priests of the line of Ādurbād. Reading this passage alongside the edict of Ṣamṣām al-Dawla, we should view the narrative of priestly authority and continuity with the past as a self-legitimizing construction of the ninth and tenth centuries, built in terms of Islamic modes of authority and structures of power. If this particular narrative of Zoroastrianism in Arabic sources is a Shi'i elaboration, it was deliberately formed by Zoroastrian mowbeds in complicity with their Shi'i Muslim rulers. This should prompt us to question other narratives offered by these mowbeds in ZMP sources, and to reexamine their role in the Zoroastrian tradition.

71 Discussed in Kreyenbroek, Zoroastrian priesthood.

72 E.g., Shaked, Some Islamic reports, 50, where he states: »It would be a mistake to let ourselves be misled by the late literary corpus of Zoroastrianism in Pahlavi which, having achieved the status of canonicity in the Islamic period, obliterated all other expressions of the faith and assumed the role of the only true representative of historical Zoroastrianism.« Shaked has a special interest in formulations of the so-called »Zurvanite« cosmology, particularly as it appears in Islamic heresiographical sources. I am interested in the idea of Zurvanism only insofar as it represents a modern scholarly construction of »heresy« from the point of view of »orthodoxy« – but I am more interested in how the orthodoxy of Zoroastrianism *as we know it* came to be, or as Shaked put it, »achieved the status of canonicity«.

73 Crone, Nativist Prophets.

74 For example, the remnants of Achaemenid-era Zoroastrianism in late ancient Armenia (see Russell, *Zoroastrianism in Armenia*) or the syncretistic Zoroastrianism of Sogdian merchants along the Silk Road in medieval China (see Grenet and Azarnouche, Where are the Sogdian Magi?; de la Vaissière and Trombert, *Les Sogdiens en Chine*).

*Appendix: The Edict of Ṣamsām al-Dawla, 986 CE*⁷⁵

[A copy of the edict written for the Magians in Shawwāl in the year 375 AH]

This is a writ (*kitābun*) from Ṣamsām al-Dawla Shams al-Milla («the Sun of the Nation») Abū Kālījār, the son of ‘Aḏud al-Dawla Tāj al-Milla («the Crown of the Nation») Abū Shujā’, the son of Rukn al-Dawla Abū ‘Alī, master, leader of the faithful:

To the community of Magians of the sons of Ādhurbādh b. Mārsfand: You are linked to us because God Almighty and his Prophet – may God bless him – has confirmed you under his treaty and protection, and because the truth and inviolability of this has been confirmed by us for most of you. You have presented a letter in your possession [p. 377] from the leader of the faithful, ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib – may the blessings of God be upon him – which contains what your faith requires with respect to persons and property, your custody of possessions and resources, and your exemptions from the payment of the *jizya* which (other) people of your community give, for reasons thus granted to you, and to all who trace their lineage to your (fore)father, as well as the mandate of Muslims, both among those governing and (their) subjects, both the early generations and the later ones, for your protection and defense, and the maintenance for your sanctuary, and abstaining from taking anything that you own – both animate and inanimate, and both newly acquired and old; and that you do not force provisions from anyone, and do not demand restitution, and that you are not opposed in the performance of the ceremonies of your religion, and are not prohibited from entering your fire-temples and from repairing those of them and the shrines that require it, and that you are not opposed in fulfilling your religious duties and using your revenues and your estates and your religious endowments and their disbursement for what has been dedicated from the coffers of your charity for it; and that you conduct yourselves as has been prescribed for you in leadership over the people of your community, and the levy that the one appointed to leadership imposes, it being a single *dirham* a year from each man from among the people of your community except for you, and that its lawsuits proceed under your jurisdiction, and its judgments are executed by you; and that you not share (with Muslims) the principal balance of your inheritances, nor its derivatives and remainders nor its losses and gains, and do not become familiar in anything with them, just as the leader of the faithful, ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib reported from the Messenger of God – may God bless him – about the prohibition of inheritances [p. 378] between different religious communities,⁷⁶ which is the same as what his letter included in it about your fulfillment of what is required from the compliant *dhimma*-agreement, as well as the certified document and the stipulated conditions and circumscribed limits.

75 Al-Ṣābi’, *Rasā’il*, ed. al-Thāmīrī, 2.376-378.

76 According to al-Thāmīrī (378 n. 1), this refers to a hadith of the Prophet in which he says, »A people cannot inherit two religions« (*lā yatawārathu ahlu millatayni*). This is, in fact, the hadith which is quoted in al-Ṣābi’'s record of the caliph al-Ṭā’i’s edict of protection for the Sabians. However, ‘Alī does not appear in the *isnāds* of this hadith but in another, in which he witnesses to a similar statement of the Prophet, who says that brothers from the same mother can inherit from one another, but brothers from different mothers cannot; sometimes this *hadith* is coupled with a quotation of Quran 4.12, *Sūrat al-Nisā’*.

You have asked that you continue in all these provisions, abide by his pact with you, and carry out his ordinance unto you. Therefore, we consider complying with your request and relieving you of your need as obedience to God Almighty and his Messenger – blessing and peace be upon him – and adherence to the instruction of the leader of the faithful – God’s blessings be upon him – in both his letter mentioned earlier and in his binding decree copied here, and his judgment carried out concerning it, and his conduct which adheres to it, so you should have complete faith regarding that, and you can rely on it.

And whoever reads this writ of ours from among the ranks of overseers and officials of the land-tax and the police and the trade tribunal and judiciary and inheritance tribunal and other (branches) of civil administration, let him refer every matter, both small and large, to one of the sons of Ādhurbādh b. Mārsfand, and let him treat them to their benefit with regard to assistance and avoid disadvantaging them in his reckoning, and let them be on guard against him violating and disregarding (it), God-willing.

Written in (the month of) Shawwāl, in the year 375.

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