



Zoroastrianism Exploration

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Zoroastrianism Overview

Zoroastrianism was the most influential religion in the Middle East before Christianity and Islamism. Zoroastrianism is one of the most ancient religions in the world and it was the state religion of the ancient Persian Empire. Different from other religions during that time such as Hinduism beliefs, Zoroastrianism believes in the theology of monotheism, Avesta is the classic and primary collection of Zoroastrianism texts. Zoroastrianism believes that there were two gods, good and evil in the early days of the universe. The good god is Ahura Mazda, which means the Lord of wisdom, light, life, creation, good deeds, virtue, order, and truth. The evil god is Angela Maniu, the embodiment of darkness, death, destruction, lies, and evil deeds. In the end, the good god defeated the evil god and became the only ruler of the world. Fire is believed to be a symbol of the good god, a symbol of light and life, and Zoroastrianism believers must adhere to the worship of fire (History.com Editors, 2018). Believers must adhere to the principles of good thoughts, good words, and good deeds so that their souls can be saved and ascended to heaven after death(Religion,2009).

In addition to recording Iran's religious mythology, hymns, etiquette, and commandments, Avesta scriptures also include its national origin, history, folklore, heroic epics, etc., descriptions of angels and demons in Persian religion, and their eschatological concepts and doomsday judgment In other words, it was later inherited by Christianity(BBC,2017).

Zoroaster was the founder of Zoroastrianism, the birthplace and date of Zoroaster still remain unknown and contentious, but according to Muhammad-'Ali Tarbiyat, author of the book *Danishmandan i Azarbayijan*, he noted "Afterwards came Zaradosht (Zoroaster), son of

Sfidtoman (Spitaman) of Azarbayijan, who was a descendant of King Minutshehr and of the Houses of Mfiqan belonging to the nobles and grandees of that place. This happened when thirty years had elapsed from the [beginning] of the reign of Vishtasp” (Taqizadeh,1937).

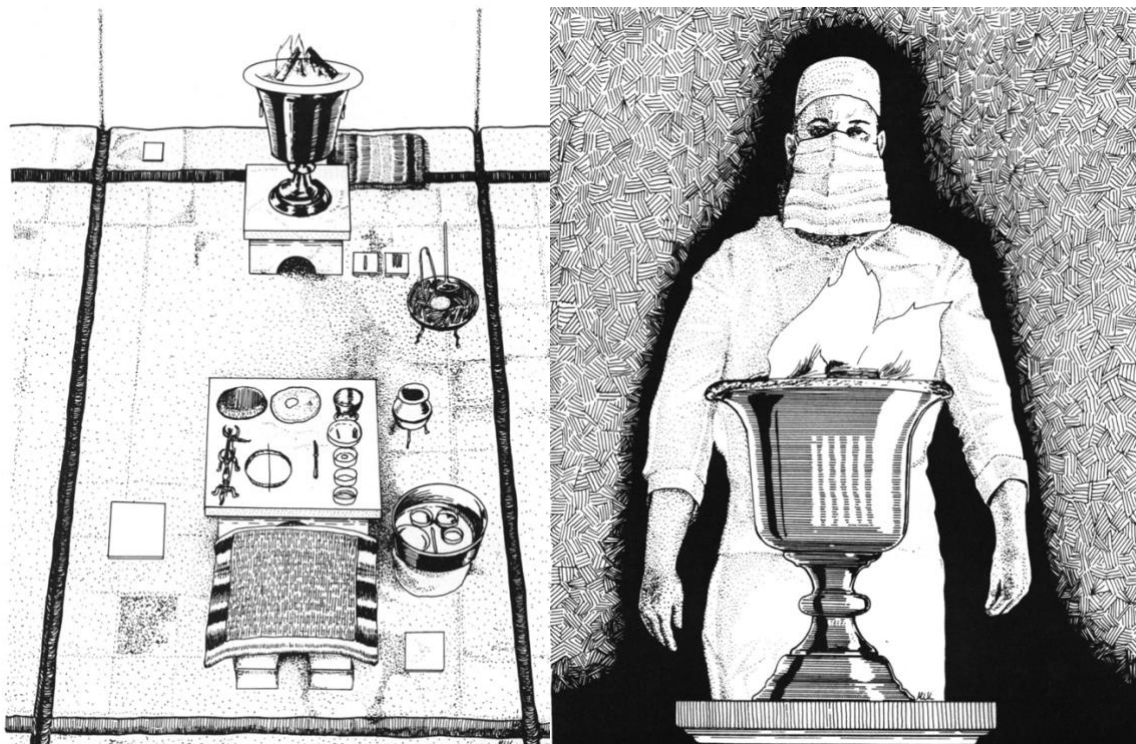
The main religious rituals of Zoroastrianism are: Coming of age ritual, which all young Zoroastrians age of 7 or 10 will receive the sadre and the kusti to wear for the rest of their life; Purification (divided into three types, padyab, nahn and bareshnum which is a complete ritual lasting for days with the participation of a dog); Yasna, which is the chief ceremony celebrating the sacred fire, the ritual involves with a lot of prayers from the Avesta to the sacred fire before feeding it with animal fat, bread, meat, etc., to keep the fire burning continually; Funerals, Zoroastrianism regards to water, fire, and soil as sacred, so it against water burial, cremation, and earth burial. Celestial burial is Zoroastrianism’s funeral ritual, this is also the legacy of ancient Persian funerals. After the death of the believer, the body is sent to the "silent tower". The tower is generally built on a hill. On the top of the tower, a stone slab is placed to put the body, and well within the tower divided into three layers to put the bones of children, men, and women. During the burial, the naked corpse will be placed on the top of the tower, allows vultures to peck the corpse, and then put the skeleton into the well (Religionfacts,2016).

The Ritual Aesthetic:

“a silver metal fire vase set upon a stone stand, a large metal basin of water, a stone table set with numerous utensils and other ritual implements, e.g., a mortar and pestle, saucers, cups, a sieve used for filtering a sacramental drink called horn, two crescent-shaped metal stands, a bundle of metal wires called barsom , and a dish containing sacramental bread. The head priest sits or stands during much of the ceremony on a stone seat covered with a woven rug. Among the ritual items the priest purifies are: a date- palm leaf, pomegranate and horn twigs, sacramental bread, hairs from a living consecrated white bull, and well-water. Outside this space is a bench for Zoroastrians who wish to observe the ceremony. Two priests dressed in white and wearing priestly turbans and white masks conduct the liturgy in the presence of the fire. The two and one-half hour ceremony takes place during the morning hours when the

sun is ascending. A moderate amount of daylight comes through the small windows high above the floor” (Malandra,1996)

In *Ritual Spaces: An Application of Aesthetic Theory to Zoroastrian Ritual* analyzed the aesthetic of Yasna ritual from the perspective of spaces, sights, sounds, and gestures. The essay categorized the spaces in the Yasna ritual as the physical space, which is the enclosure of the ritual space; the meaning space, which is the larger reality the ritual represents; the virtual space, which is a space composed of visual and auditory qualities that create a new matrix of significance. The sights of this ritual are limited in the borders of the ritual space, the white mask and clothes on the priest represent silence and purifier. The most significant part of the ritual is the fire, as the focus point, the dance of the flame represents life and faith. The patterns on the rug are flat and bright colored, which brought a sense of abstracted reality. The repeated sounds chanting and the pounding of the bell clear up one’s mind and bring purification. The priests look at everyone directly in their eye, the mask and costume erased the priests’ identities and their glance becomes a very powerful gesture(Malandra,1996).



Yasna ritual and the priest
(Malandra,1996)

The Patterns:

Some common patterns on Zoroastrianism rugs are:

Boteh:



Boteh can be translated to: bush, herb or bramble, it is usually appeared as a representation of palm leaf and flower bud. Some even believed this boteh motif is related to the yin yang theory (Eduljee,n.d.) .

'S' Shape



The 's' shaped pattern can be commonly found on Zoroastrian rugs, it is believed to be a protective sign representing the sun(Artwise,2018).

Eight Pointed Star



The number eight in Zoroastrianism religion represent the killer of evil, the evolvement of the world. The eight pointed star is a symbol to achieve higher self and happiness (Shabani,n.d.).

Personal Reflection and Zoroastrianism Design Framework

From my understanding of Zoroastrianism, the main difference between Hinduism and Zoroastrianism is that Zoroastrianism believes in one god, while Hinduism believes in many, but they do share some similarities such as their view of life. Believers of Hinduism and Zoroastrianism are both morally obligated to live a life with good behaviour, they both believe in karma and heaven after death. The video of Bali Hinduism is a good example showing believers living in a lifestyle according to their religious beliefs such as using rituals to thank their god and pray for a better future, living mindfully in the forest, not taking more than they need from nature.

When it comes to the design framework for Zoroastrianism, I have found some interesting examples done by the great German philosopher Nietzsche and musician Richard Georg Strauss. Thus Spoke Zarathustra was written by Nietzsche in the 1880s, during that time, the western capitalist society was experiencing an ideological and moral crisis, many traditional sacred concepts have been abandoned, Nietzsche used Zarathustra as a metaphor of a superman to address the spiritual crisis in Europe (Wikipedia,2020). In 1896, a German musician Richard Strauss was inspired by Nietzsche's work and created one of his most significant symphonic poem Thus Spoke Zarathustra, this symphonic poem is about abstract

thought, but Strauss designed the sounds based on the conversion of two very different tones (B for character and C for nature) in order to create dramatic conflicts(Boccaro,2020).

The design examples I have mentioned above are mainly influenced by Zoroastrianism's philosophy and legends. I believe there is also a lot to explore in the Zoroastrianism rituals, I have talked about how the Yasna ritual using spaces, sights, sounds, and gestures to bring the believers into a higher reality, in another word, an immersive experience. The method of Yasna ritual can be used as a design framework for interactive media, VR, and AR projects, it can also be very influential for installation art.

In today's art and design world, one of the common goals is to increase the audience's immersive experience, installation artists use the physical space to create their artistic reality, and hoping when their audience walks into their artwork, they will be completely immersed by the artists' work. In this case, we can look at the design of the Yasna ritual space, the border of the space is precise, the focus point is clear, and all the surroundings are connected and serve as a symbolic representation. For designers, especially AR and VR designers, they need to think about how to bring their users to another reality, how the sights, sounds, and the gestures can work together. The priests in the ritual are a good example, the costumes and masks erased their personal identities, therefore their glances become a very powerful gesture, combining with the flat patterns of the space, the repeated sounds, the whole reality became abstract. This idea can influence game scene and character design.



The Craive Lab



iSurround immersive room

In the end, the exploration does not stop here. There are so much more about Zoroastrianism to explore and discover, just like many of our ancient human civilizations.

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