

THE ROLE OF WRITTEN SOURCES IN THE STUDY OF CENTRAL ASIAN  
ETHNOCULTURE

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**ABSTRACT**

The spiritual nature of the Uzbek people, based on the principles of national ideology, is being developed on the basis of the ancient Zoroastrian doctrine. The ideas put forward in the sacred book of this doctrine “Avesta” are, in fact, the content and principles of the first stage of our national idea. The book «Avesta” provides information about material and spiritual life of Central Asian peoples in ancient times, their religious views, ideas about the first world and its place in it, its traditions. The main content of the book is also the dreams, goals and aspirations of our ancient ancestors.

*Key words: Avesta, Zaratoustra, Central Asia, historical source, good thoughts, good word, good trace.*

**INTRODUCTION**

Zoroastrianism is the religion of two distinct ethnocultural communities living on the west coast of modern southwestern Iran and India. Small groups of Zoroastrians live in other provinces of these countries, Singapore and Hong Kong. This religion may stand alongside other religions and their goals and objectives.

Today, the total number of Zoroastrians cannot be counted. According to current estimates, 100,000 people in India, 50,000 in Iran, more than 5,000 in Pakistan, and several thousand in the United States and Europe.

The holy book of Zoroastrianism is Avesta, and its study and research is one of the most pressing issues today. First President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov spoke also at the 155th session of the Executive Board of UNESCO about the celebration of 2700th anniversary of the sacred book of Zoroastrianism Avesta, established in Khorezm in 2000 - in the International Year of World Culture..

**MAIN PART**

Avesta is the oldest, most unique and rare work from all the sacred sources known to mankind. For three thousand years this monument fulfilled the moral task of spreading the

three sacred rules of Zoroastrianism: “*Good thought, good word, good deeds*” as a hymn of good for all.

The history of the writing of this ancient monument, its composition and originality have been widely studied throughout the world. There is also a scientific direction called “Avesta” .

In the 17th century, European orientalists began to study Avesta. Professor Thomas Gand from Oxford University provides valuable information about Avesta in his book “Ancient Iranians: History of Parthian and Midianite Religions” (1700). In 1771, the French Orientalist A. Duperron published the French translation of Avesta.

Russian scientist A. O. Makavelsky conducted research on Avesta, and in 1960 he published a monograph “History of the scientific study of Avesta” (“History of the study of Avesta”).

In addition, researchers such as J. Darmstener, A. V. Jackson, I. Marquart, H. Newberg, E. Benvenist, S. P. Tolstov, W. Geiger, W. Bartold, I. Braginsky, F. Spiegel were active in this field. Famous scientists such as E. Benvenist, S. P. Tolstov, W. Geiger, W. Bartold, I. Braginsky, F. Spiegel. Herzfeld, W. Henning, D. Gershevich, W. Wolf also showed interest in this field.

Nowadays there are A. Saidov, E. Abdullaev, N. Dzhurayev, M. Ishakov, A. Makhkamov and others are working on the translation, interpretation and study of the «Avesta” in Uzbek. It is noted that Professor M. Kushchanov has the same good intentions to study the Avesta.

Avesta is the sacred book of Zoroastrianism, the code of morals, etiquette, religious laws and rules of the peoples of this religion. Originally, the Avesta consisted of 21 books. To date, only parts of it have been preserved. For example, Jasna, Vsparat, Yasht, Videvdad.

The basic laws and rules reflected in the Avesta, the leading concepts of religious faith, are related to the name of the historical figure Zoroastra. His name comes from the ancient Iranian words “*zarat*” and “*ustra*”. “*Zarat*” means yellow, “*utra*” means camel, i.e. “man led by a yellow camel”. Zoroaster differed from others in that he was a very talented poet, theologian, philosopher and scientist. He believed that only faith in one God could bring society to a new level of development. At the age of 40 Zoroaster attracted the attention of Ahuramazda, the God of good, and since then he has become a prophet of his religion (“*messenger of good*”).

The country on which Avesta was founded might be, according to its historical geography, the regions of northeastern Iran bordering Margiana, Bactria, Sogdiana, Khorezm or Central Asia. Because the ancient place names of Avesta indicate that it is one of these

provinces. Ancient geographical territorial concepts in Avesta - the names of ethnic tribes and regions, socio-economic relations, social structure of society.

Avesta is a unique source of ethnogenesis of Central Asian peoples and history of early statehood. It reflects concepts related to the creation of the Universe and the Earth, myths and legends, philosophical and moral views, primitive and ancient divine ideas of Uzbek, Tajik, Persian and Afghan, Azerbaijani and other peoples.

Written sources claim that before the Achaemenids there existed "Ancient Bactrian Kingdom". There are even opinions that it includes Margiana and Sogdiana districts. This political state association was headed by Bactria. Indeed, if we analyze the composition of the society of that period, in the ancient agricultural areas priests were at first on top of the system of government. They were "owners of cattle and huge pastures". The soldiers are Aryans, the next owners of property after priests. The main wealth in Avesta was cattle. In his teachings, Zoroaster said: "One must have a good animal. I provide free movement and free life for the owners of cattle here" (Yasna, 24. Goths). These free people were Aryans. The category of shepherds in Avesta is the wealth of priests and Aryan warriors - shepherds who feed their cattle and annual animals.

As for the category of craftsmen, they are farming communities in which the profession of labour and military weapons, jewellery, ceramics and textiles is inseparable from agriculture. However, there is no information about agriculture in Yasna and Jasta Avesta. Such information is contained in the book Videvdat Avesta (Videvdat, Chapter 3).

The Zoroastrian religious philosophy is based on the struggle of opposing forces. This struggle begins between gods and continues in nature and in human life.

As for the religious and moral philosophy of Zoroastrian, to be a believer one must always stay clean, live with good thoughts, good words, good deeds, it is necessary to organize the content and essence of everyday life of every Zoroastrian. Evil in the universe stems from the unbelief of people. They must be eliminated, believers must be active in overcoming them.

In Zoroastrianism faith is based on three pillars: purity of thought, fortitude of speech and humanity of actions. Or good thought, good word, good deed. "Avesta" says: "It is a sign of faith to keep the word, to be faithful to it, to adhere to trade and agreements, to pay debts on time and to be free from deception and betrayal". According to Zoroastrian philosophy, when a man dies, his soul remains in his body for 3 days, and on the fourth day under the supervision of an angel in the form of a beautiful girl he crosses the bridge "Chinwot" to heaven. The sinners will drown in hell. The good ones, on the other hand, continue to live in new bodies. Thus, Avesta is the world's oldest religious philosophy of

Zoroastrianism, this book is not only a religious, but also a historical and literary source in the broadest sense, an encyclopedic presentation of the long history of our ancestors and the development of thinking.

This divine, historical, literary source covers the history of several periods in its own right. Its oldest layer - sacred songs - was written in the time of Zoroastra. Analysis of the events described in them shows that it was created in the Bronze Age. The data from Avesta are also a unique written source for studying the ethnogenesis of the Uzbek people.

In many countries of the world more than 1000 volumes of books about Avesta have been published - encyclopedias, dictionaries, reference books, scientific brochures, lectures and collections of articles at various conferences. Traditional Zoroastrian symposiums are held annually in Chicago and Toronto.

All this indicates that Zoroastrianism and the meaning of its sacred book are growing. But even so, some aspects of it, especially enlightenment, remain unclear. That is why we intend to bring this issue to our readers today.

According to Academicians V.V. Struve, K.V. Truver and S. P. Tolstov, the religion of Zoroastrianism and his sacred book Avesta appeared in Central Asia, more precisely in Khorezm, and then spread to the countries of the West, the Middle East. This view has been confirmed in a number of scientific studies of contemporary Uzbek scientists.

Like a divine spiritual light, Avesta, the main source of Zoroastrianism, illuminates people's hearts with the light of goodness, humanity, truth and religion. However, it should also be noted that no holy book has been subjected to Avesta opposition and cruelty. Over the centuries it withstood the onslaught of enemies several times, was forbidden to read and study, was set on fire, but burned appeared again from the ashes and resumed as the phoenix. It has been passed down by word of mouth from generation to generation and has been repeatedly published as a book.

The scientist Lawrence Mills, who studies Avesta, writes in his "Psalms of Zoroastra" ("Hymns of Zoroastra", Leipzig, 1895) that every word of Zoroastra is filled with deep meaning, and no book in the world can compare with it in content and simplicity.

Many scholars studying Avesta talk about the language and style of writing of the book, showing that it corresponds to the literary traditions of Eastern culture. The reader's attention is attracted by the simplicity of narrative and extreme fluency of educational and didactic traits. The artistic aspects of the text are also in line with the traditions of Oriental classical literature and attract the reader's attention.

## CONCLUSION

Avesta expresses the idea of human perfection, which, as noted above, is achieved through his own efforts on the road to good. In this case, the fact that a human being is worthy of his country, his people and is not afraid to be around others is considered an important indicator of perfection. The idea of the perfect person, which is an important aspect of our national idea, is also an idea that embodies spiritual and moral principles and encourages people to do good.

The great cultural monument created in the land of ancient Movarounnahr - the religion of Zoroastrianism and its sacred book - a collection of advice and wisdom, as well as familiarity with them, study, assimilation and practice are of great importance in the formation and education of a modern harmoniously developed generation.

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