



SSZ

**Society of Scholars of
ZOROASTRIANISM**

Zoroastrian Association of Metropolitan Chicago

(Supported by Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America (FEZANA)
and World Zoroastrian Organization (WZO))

Proudly hosts

2016 Society of Scholars of Zoroastrianism (SSZ) Conference “Zoroastrian History: Pre-Achaemenian Times to the Present Day”

at the

Arbab Rustom Guiv Dar-e-Mehr, 8615 Meadowbrook Drive, Burr Ridge, IL 60527,
on

Saturday September 3, 2016

The *Society of Scholars of Zoroastrianism (SSZ)* is an initiative to promote study and scholarship of the Religion of Zarathushtra, formalized during the Eighth World Zoroastrian Congress in London in 2005. The mission of the Society is to revive the tradition of scholarship within our community among *athornans* and *behdins* alike, and to promote interaction among academicians, theologians (priests), educationists, lay scholars and practitioners of Zoroastrianism, through roundtable discussions, conferences and publications. The aim is to make SSZ a prestigious organization on par with scholarly organizations of other faith communities, and merit affiliation with international bodies such as the American Academy of Religions.

SSZ Conferences have been held in Chicago each year since 2006, when noted scholars and students present their research papers. To encourage Zoroastrian studies within the community, these SSZ conferences also include sessions on *Zoroastrianism-101* delivered by community members, especially the next-generation. Persons/Associations interested in the mission and vision of the Society of Scholars of Zoroastrianism, are invited to host future Conferences in their areas. SSZ will provide assistance as needed. The organizers enjoy complete autonomy in regard to programming and organizing the Conference.

All community members, students, scholars and members of interfaith communities are invited and encouraged to participate. You will no doubt be enriched, your presence gives support to the speakers, and your feedback is invaluable so that future research efforts may be directed in a constructive manner for the benefit of both the academicians as well as the community.

Registration. Suggested donation is \$10. Breakfast, lunch and tea will be provided. ***Please RSVP by August 27, 2016*** to Dinaz Weber (630-830 3430, kenanddina@yahoo.com) or Roshan Rivetna (630 340 8272, rrivetna@aol.com) For program information contact Rohinton Rivetna (630-325 5383, rivetna@aol.com) or Rayomand Ravji (630 589 6631, rayomand.ravji@gmail.com) and visit www.s-s-z.org.

2016 Society of Scholars of Zoroastrianism (SSZ) Conference
“Zoroastrian History: Pre-Achaemenian Times to the Present Day”

PROGRAM

SATURDAY September 3, 2016

9:00 Registration and Breakfast

9:20 *Benediction – Mobedyar Boman Damkevala*

Monajat – Mani Rao

Welcome by ZAC – President Ervad Rayomand Ravji / VP Afshan Barshan

Welcome – WZO President US Chapter Kayomarsh Mehta

Welcome – FEZANA President Homi D. Gandhi

Introduction to SSZ – Rohinton Rivetna

Morning Session – Pre-Nihavand History - Session chair Eric Elavia

9:50 *Pre-Achaemenian History – Sarosh Irani*

10:20 *The Achaemenian Empire – Khursheed Ichaporia*

10:40 *The Selucid and Parthian Empires- Persis Driver & Kamal Saher*

11:10 *The Sasanian Empire – Ervad Rayomand Ravji / Afshan Barshan*

11:30 *Zoroastrianism and Empire in Late Antiquity– Prof. Richard Payne*

Luncheon

12:30 *Lunch*

Reading of a poem “Achaemenian Empire” by Farida Bamji

Ancient Sogdiana, ‘A Zoroastrian Stronghold’: A Modern Overview-- Kersi Shroff

Afternoon Session – Post Nihavand History - Session Chair Dastur Kersey Antia

1:30 *The Sassanians and Zoroastrian History after the Arab Invasion*

-- Dr. Daryoush Jahanian

2:45 *History of the Parsees in the sub-continent – Dr. Dinyar Patel* (via Skype)

3:45 Tea Break

4:15 Keynote Address - *The Concept of Friendship in Ancient Iran – Prof. Jamsheed Choksy*

5:15 *Arbab Rustam Guiv Dar-e-Meher 33rd Anniversary Benediction – Dastur Kersey Antia*

5:30 Networking with hors-d’oeuvres and drinks.

SUNDAY September 4, 2016

9:00 to 12:00 Visit to Oriental Institute, Chicago

12:30 pm Farvardian Jashan followed by lunch at the Dar-e-Mehr hosted by Katy and Kersi Bhatena and Dinaz and Ken Weber.

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SPEAKER PROFILES AND ABSTRACTS

Dr. Kersey H. Antia is the high priest of the Zarathushti community in Chicago since 1977, and has served as an honorary priest for over half a century. A fully-ordained priest with the Best Boy medal and the Prefect Medal from the the M.F.Cama Athornan Institute in Mumbai, Dr. Antia studied religion and Avesta-Pahlavi under Dasturji Dabu, Mirza and other learned priests, and has won essay prizes from K.R. Cama Oriental Institute and other institutions since 1956, and Avesta-Pahlavi scholarships in college. He has lectured widely and is author of numerous papers on religion and psychology. A clinical and management psychologist in private solo practice in Illinois, he is also affiliated with several hospitals. He is listed in several Who's Who and included in Outstanding Religious Personalities and Scholars of the 20th Century and others. Dr. Antia is author of "Acceptance in Zoroastrianism," available on Amazon and "Influence of Zoroastrianism on Judeo-Christian Beliefs." He is currently writing about Jews and Zoroastrians through history and the rivalry between Persians and Roman emperors spilling into trade wars over silk trade with China, leading to emigration of Zoroastrians to India.

Professor Jamsheed K. Choksy (BA, Columbia University; PhD, Harvard University) is Distinguished Professor and Professor of Iranian Studies at Indiana University, Bloomington. He was nominated by the US President and confirmed by the US Senate as a member of the Council overseeing the US National Endowment for the Humanities. Choksy has held fellowships from the Institute for Advanced Study (Princeton), National Endowment for the Humanities (Washington, DC), Guggenheim Foundation, the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences (Stanford), American Philosophical Society, and the American Academy of Religion. Choksy is a consulting editor for the *Encyclopedia Iranica*. He is the author of *Triumph over Evil: Purity and Pollution in Zoroastrianism* (1989), *Conflict and Cooperation: Zoroastrian Subalterns and Muslim Elites in Medieval Iranian Society* (1997), and *Evil, Good, and Gender: Facets of the Feminine in Zoroastrian Religious History* (2002).

Persis Driver has a BA and MA in Business and Economics, Masters in Teaching, and is currently completing his PhD in Educational Psychology at UIC. She has taught elementary and secondary students in India and the U.S. Currently teaches courses on Child and Adolescent Development, and Learning and Instruction to undergraduate and graduate students preparing to work with children and adolescents in multiple capacities such as teachers, advisers, nurses, child advocates, and youth development professionals.

Khursheed Ichaporia holds an MBA and MS in Biology. Having worked in the Biotech and food industry as well as the University of Rochester, Khursheed currently teaches Biology, Microbiology and Anatomy and Physiology at local community colleges. She has a great enthusiasm for everything "Parsipano" and wants to be involved in any activity which engages Parsi kids and youth. Khursheed is currently pursuing a doctorate in Education.

Sarosh Irani is currently a freshman at Wayne State University, Detroit, where he is planning to pursue a degree in Nutrition and Food Science with a minor in Business. He graduated from North Farmington High School as a National Merit Scholar and President of the National Honor Society. Sarosh has always been interested in History and Geography from a young age, and was a Michigan State finalist at the Geography Bee on 3 occasions, and won a silver and a gold medal at the North South Foundation Geography Bee held in Michigan. In high school, Sarosh was an active member of many clubs including HOSA (Health Occupations Students Of America) where he was Co-President, Model UN where he was Treasurer and Parliamentarian and Quiz Bowl. His ultimate goal is to attend medical school and become a physician, most likely with a specialty in Pediatrics. In his free time, he enjoys drawing, playing tennis and cricket, and volunteering his time at a local hospital.

Daryoush Jahanian, M.D. was born and raised in Tehran, Iran. He has been a community activist since the high school years, a founder and the first president of the Fravahar Zoroastrian youth organization in

Tehran, a founder and the first president of Zoroastrian Association of Kansas (ZAKA), has taught the Gathas to young students, given speeches in schools, interfaith functions, the Gathas conference and Zoroastrian congresses. He has published a book, *The Zoroastrian doctrine and Biblical connections* and his book, *Gathas, the message of Zarathushtra*, with comments and free translation will be published soon.

Abstract: Dr. Jahanian will talk about the Sasanians and what happened after the Arab invasion. This is a fraction of what actually happened to the Zoroastrians after the Arab invasion. Due to continuous persecution, discrimination, financial pressure and massacres, the population of Zoroastrians of Iran from an estimated four million at the turn of the fifteenth century dwindled to only seven thousand at the middle of the nineteenth century. At this time, the French ambassador to Iran wrote: "Only a miracle can save them from total extinction." With the support of their Parsi brethren and their own faith, the Zoroastrian community in Iran revived and their fate turned around. Today they are well educated and enjoy the respect and trust of the general Iranian population and have built a reputation of "scrupulous honesty".

Dinyar Patel is an assistant professor of history at the University of South Carolina. He received his Ph.D. in history in 2015 from Harvard University, where he completed a dissertation on Dadabhai Naoroji.

Abstract: "Heritage and Diaspora." Diaspora has actually been a very integral part of Zoroastrian heritage. A global diaspora of Zoroastrians has been in existence for far longer than many people think; indeed, the very fact that Parsis settled in Gujarat is quite likely the result of there already being communities of merchants in the region. Both Parsis and Iranian Zoroastrians have long traditions of being mercantile communities, something that has been a defining factor in explaining our mobility over the centuries. This talk will concentrate on the development of diaspora communities from the 1700s onward and consider how Zoroastrians can maintain their own identities as the community becomes increasingly scattered around the globe.

Richard Payne is a historian of the Iranian world in late antiquity, ca. 200–800 CE. His research focuses primarily on the dynamics of Iranian imperialism, specifically how the Iranian (or Sasanian) Empire successfully integrated socially, culturally, and geographically disparate populations from Arabia to Afghanistan into enduring political networks and institutions. His recent book, *A State of Mixture: Christians, Zoroastrians, and Iranian Political Culture in Late Antiquity*, explores the problem of religious diversity within the empire, showing how Syriac-writing Christians could create a place for themselves in a political culture not of their own making. The book has won awards from the American Philosophical Society, the International Society for Iranian Studies, and the American Academy of Religion. He is currently at work on the role of Zoroastrian religious institutions and the intersection of ideological and material dimensions in Iranian history. He also maintains interests in the social history of Christian and Zoroastrian communities in the early Islamic world, the interaction of the Near East with Central and Inner Asia, and the comparative study of ancient empires in the Near East and the Mediterranean from the Akkadians to the Romans. Payne completed a doctorate in history at Princeton University. He was awarded the Bliss Prize from Dumbarton Oaks, the Crisp Fellowship from Phi Beta Kappa, a research fellowship from the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), and a visiting research scholarship from the Institute for the Study of the Ancient World at New York University. He was elected a research fellow of Trinity College, University of Cambridge.

Abstract: Zoroastrianism and Empire in Late Antiquity

The most extensive and enduring of ancient Near Eastern empires was built on Zoroastrian foundations. Known as Çrânđahr in Middle Persian, its very name recalled the mythical homeland of Zoroaster in the Avesta, and its artistic and literary production bore the distinct imprint of the so-called Good Religion. But though scholars have long acknowledged the importance of Zoroastrianism in the Iranian – or Sasanian – Empire, the role of the religion in imperial politics remains underappreciated. The lectures will discuss how the Good Religion transformed the disparate elites of the Parthian period into a unified Iranian ethno-class, a ruling elite defining itself in Zoroastrian terms. In addition to providing an ideology and ethnic identity, the

Zoroastrian priest-scholars advanced the material interests of the aristocracy, through juridical institutions that safeguarded patrimonial wealth and guaranteed biological reproduction. The unification of the elite through Zoroastrianism did not, however, exclude religious others from participation in imperial politics. Unlike its Christian Roman counterpart, a Zoroastrian empire could integrate Christians, Jews, and others into its institutions and networks, as long as they accepted positions subordinate to those of the Iranian ethno-class. It was the capacity to unify its practitioners without excluding non-Zoroastrians that made the Good Religion such an effective ancillary to empire in late antiquity.

Ervad Rayomand Ravji was ordained a Nâvar at the Cama Baug Agiary in Mumbai in 2002. He later returned to achieve a higher degree of priesthood, the Marutab. Rayomand received his Bachelor's of Science (B.S.) in Psychology with a minor degree in chemistry- as a premedical student - at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He currently serves as President of the Zoroastrian Association of Metropolitan Chicago.

Kersi B. Shroff

- Attorney at Law (Virginia), specializing in International and Comparative Law. Served the U.S. Government for thirty three years as a Senior Legal Specialist, and as Chief, Western Law Division & Co-Director of Congressional Legal Research (2000 – 2011). Heading a team of eleven International Attorneys, responsible for reporting to the U.S. Congress and Federal Agencies on legal issues arising from relationship of the U.S. with the countries of the European Union, the (British) Commonwealth of Nations, and Central and Latin America.
- Graduated from a law school in Pakistan; qualified as a Barrister at Law in England; and, obtained a Master of Comparative Law Degree, from the George Washington University Law School, Washington, DC.
- After retiring in 2011, undertaking independent studies of the archaeology, civilizations, and traditions, of the Persian Empires and former Eastern Iranian lands in Central Asia.
- Lectured on Zoroastrianism at the University of Maryland, College Park, MD, Honors course, on the Spiritual Heritage of Human Race (2009 - 2011).
- Joined a Russian archeological expedition to Tajikistan (2013), to excavate two 5th – 7th centuries CE sites in the ancient regions of Sogdiana: Hisorak and Panjikent.
- A return visit to Tajikistan, and neighboring Uzbekistan (2014), increased my knowledge of the historical prevalence of Zoroastrianism in former Eastern Iranian lands in Central Asia.
- Related publications:
 - Finding 'Sroasha' Tying a Kusti in Sogdiana, A Journey to ancient archeological sites in Tajikistan, Parts I and II, Hamazor (2013-14).
 - Archeological traces in two ancient sites in Sogdiana & Bactria: Takhti Sangin & Sarazm FEZANA Journal (2015).
 - Zoroastrian Features in Ancient Archeological Sites in Central Asia: Some Recent Developments (paper presented at a seminar in London, England, 2015).

Abstract: Ancient Sogdiana, 'A Zoroastrian Stronghold'¹: A Modern Overview

The early presence of Zoroastrianism “is strongly biased towards the west of Iran,”² but it is also well known that the Avesta is not a South-western Iranian language and that the cradle of Zoroastrianism is considered to be to the east and north-east of Iran. The Vendidad lists the lands created by Ahura Mazda, beginning with the mythical Airyana Vaejah, and continuing with the regions of Sogdiana, Margiana and Bactria. In a Pahlavi text, *Shahristaniha i Eran*, a legend is preserved that “the Avesta itself was preserved in the citadel of Samarkand, the capital of Sogdiana.”³

Sogdiana (in present day Tajikistan and Uzbekistan) in Central Asia was conquered by Cyrus the Great in 540 BCE. According to scholars, Sogdian religious practice could be considered to be a polytheistic variant of Mazdaism, different from the later reformed Zoroastrianism of the Sassanians. Sogdian art depicted images of multiple gods, but these were sometimes altered to conform to an Iranian model. Among the identified deities portrayed are twenty three of Zoroastrian origin, including Sroasha, Verethragna, Anahita, Mithra, and ‘Mehr-Ahura.’ The veneration of fire was common, and archeological findings have revealed places of worship where these deities were honored.

Dakhmas for exposing the dead in the traditional manner also existed in Central Asia, but under an Eastern Iranian variant, the bones after drying were preserved in clay urns, called ossuaries, decorated with pictures of the Amesha Spentas, and engravings depicting Zoroastrian beliefs. The ossuaries were deposited in a building, called *naus*, housing together deceased members of a family. According to a leading archeologist, ossuaries constitute an essential source of information on Central Asian Zoroastrianism.⁴

Based on the author’s visits in 2013 and 2014 to several archeological sites in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, and on joining Russian archeologists carrying out diggings in the former country’s sites in Panjikent and Hisorak, the paper presents the findings of an extensive number of artifacts, documents, funerary items, temple structures, and coins indicating the practice of a variant form of Zoroastrianism from the 5th to 7th centuries CE.

Reference is also made to archeological findings in Western China, where many Sogdians arrived after the Arab invasion. Among the rich findings is a document found in Dunhuang which is considered to reveal a version of the Ashem Vohu prayer, the text of which is nearly 300 years older than any surviving Avestan manuscript.⁵

Finally, the paper reports on the work of an Australian Professor and Archeologist who has recently found new evidence of Zoroastrian imagery in the ancient region of Khorezm, (Choresmia) in Uzbekistan. In 2014, her team pieced together the painting of a ‘colossal figure’ thought to be Sraosha, which is the earliest representation by five or six centuries of a well attested and purely Zoroastrian symbol. This finding, it is stated “should certainly provoke a re-evaluation of Khorezm’s role in the history of Central Asian Zoroastrianism.”⁶

¹ With due acknowledgement of the title of Dr. Mary Boyce’s Lecture, “A Persian Stronghold of Zoroastrianism,” Ratanbai Katrak Lectures, 1975.

² Nicholas Sims-Williams, “Some Reflections on Zoroastrianism in Sogdiana and Bactria,” IV Silk Road Studies, Reports on the 3d Conference of the Australasian Society for Inner Asian Studies, Macquarie University, NSW, Australia, Sept. 1998.

³ *Id.*

⁴ Franz Grenet, “The Silk Road, Central Asia and China,” in ‘The Everlasting Flame, Zoroastrianism in History and Imagination’ 98 (Ed. Sarah Stewart, 2014).

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⁵ Sims-Williams, *supra*, note 2.⁶ Alison Betts, Professor of Silk Road Studies, University of New South Wales, Australia, in a draft paper co-authored with other contributors, including Franz Grenet (2015).

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