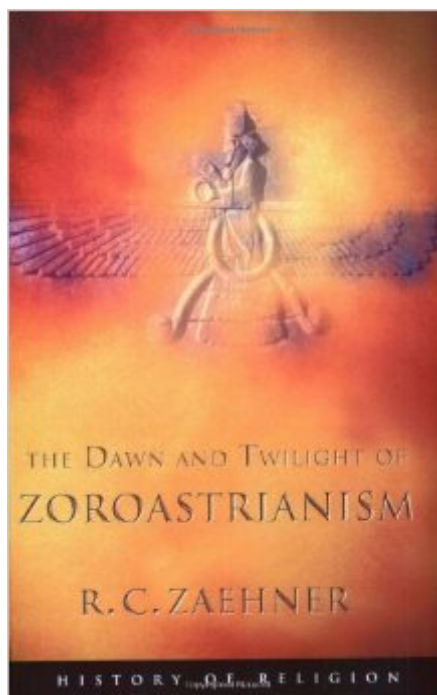


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The Dawn And Twilight Of Zoroastrianism (Phoenix Press)



Synopsis

This classic account of Zoroastrianism is the most comprehensive survey of the religion available. The study's two sections correspond to the two periods of Zoroastrian greatness in its homeland, Iran: the first occurred around 588 BC, during the Achaemenian Empire, and the second during the Empire of the Sassanians (225-652 AD), which long rivaled the might of Rome.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Zaehner is probably the most respected Zoroastrian scholar around. If you want a clear and concise exposition of the Zoroastrian faith and historical experience, this is the work to consult. This book requires a modicum of understanding in order to comprehend the development of the faith, however, so I wouldn't recommend it as a first read. Mary Boyce's 'Zoroastrians' is a good first book, as is Nigosian's 'The Zoroastrian Faith'. I began reading this book first and couldn't get through it. Once I had some background, I was able to come back to it and read it with ease. Zaehner goes to the very beginning: Zoroaster himself. He dates him to the traditional, but mostly now discredited, time of about 250 years before Alexander's conquest. The evidence for this comes from a single unreliable source, and most of the evidence indicates a time between 1600 and 1300 BCE. The primary line of evidence comes from the language and manner in which the Gathas, the songs of Zoroastrianism and the Avesta, the first scriptures are written: they indicate an undeveloped pastoral culture that had not yet begun to coalesce into a dominant Persian culture.

The inaccuracy is not a big deal for this work. Zoroaster's ideas were truly revolutionary, to have a most dramatic impact on history in his singular development of the binary dualism of the cosmic sphere and metaphysical reality. He claimed there was one God worthy of worship, Ahura Mazda, who had one primary adversary, Angra Mainyu, who embodied the Lie and all that was evil. These beings were primal and respectively chose, according to the true natures, good and evil before the dawn of creation.

Steven B. Herrmann Author of "Walt Whitman: Shamanism, Spiritual Democracy, and the World Soul" As the Zoroastrian scholar R. C. Zaehner (1961) tells us in his magisterial book *The Rise and Fall of Zoroastrianism*: the first prophet of Iran, the ancient Persian poet Zarathushtra, taught that every person is born with the freedom to choose between Good conscience and Bad conscience, the Good Mind and the Evil Mind, Right-Mindedness and Wrong-Mindedness, Truth and the Lie. From a Zoroastrian standpoint, there are two consciences within humans, as well as two wills that emanate from a pair of hostile twin Spirits, Spenta Mainyu and Angra Mainyu, the Holy Spirit and Destructive Spirit. Both Spirits are believed to have originally emanated from Ahura Mazda, the Wise Lord of the Gathas (pp. 33-50). The Gathas consist of five books of 'hymns' or 'songs' in the Avesta, a volume generally considered to have been written by Zarathushtra himself. In Zoroastrianism the twin Spirits are not one entity, they are split into a pair of warring opposites within conscience: a pair of hostile twin brothers that form an ethical dualism similar, but not identical to, the dualistic thinking of the Rig-Veda, yet unlike the oldest Hindu scriptures, Zarathushtra thrust the dualistic conception of conscience directly into the forefront of his religious teaching (p. 40). It is a basic tenet of Zoroastrianism that sooner or later every person is faced with an ethical dilemma, a moral decision of having to choose between the two consciences. Ahura Mazda gave humans freedom to choose between the two consciences and twin wills and the Wise Lord of the Gathas was not exempt from having to make ethical decisions Himself.

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