A Few Comments on Kurosh Salehi and Arezou Nazar's "A Description of Fire Temples of Ancient Iran from the Perspective of Islamic Historians", *Folia Orientalia* vol. LV (2018), 411-425

In *Folia Orientalia* vol. LV (2018) a 24-page article on fire temples mentioned by mediaeval Muslim polyhistors was published by Salehi and Nazar from Sistan and Baluchestan University (Zahedan, Iran). The issue itself appears to be interesting but the way it has been presented raises a number of objections. Below, the more important reservations divided into: (1) technical issues, (2) methodological issues, and (3) substantive issues have been elaborated upon.

(1) Technical issues

A strong advantage of the work is its extensive bibliography, which includes major works by medieval Muslim polyhistors. It is a pity, however, that the authors were not editorially consistent in constructing this bibliography, since in several cases: (i) there is no date of publication, (ii) there are no spaces between two lexemes, or (iii) the colon [:] is used several times instead of the standard comma [,] as a mark separating the place of publication from the name of the publishing house. Also, they should have included texts such as:

(i) Aoki *The Whereabouts of Ādur Farrōbay Fire between the 10th and the 13th Centuries: an Approach from the MSS of the Bundahišn* (2010), (ii) Minardi and Amirov *The Zoroastrian Funerary Building of Angka Malaya* (2017), (iii) Shenkar *Intangible Spirits and Graven Images. The Iconography of Deities in the Pre-Islamic Iranian World* (2014), or (iv) Williams Jackson *The Location of the Farnbāg Fire, the Most Ancient of the Zoroastrian Fires* (1921), which would have allowed for a critical evaluation of the information acquired by reading medieval Muslim works.

The technical shortcomings that are noticeable in the article under discussion are:
 (i) incorrect English versions of Persian proper names, e.g.: (a) the name of the dynasty ruling between 224-651 CE is *Sasanians* (or: *Sas(s)anids*), not *Sasanidis* (p. 411); (b) the adjective formed from the name of the aforementioned dynasty is *Sasanian* (or: *Sas(s)sanid*; p. 420 × 2), not *Sasani* (p. 412, 413, 415, 416 × 2, 417 × 2, 418 × 2, 240, 422 × 2) – in the case of the form *Sasani*, we are dealing with the New Persian (pl. *Sāsāniyān* ساسانیان) name of the above-mentioned dynasty, not used in English; (c) the name of the Macedonian ruler who, by conquering the Persian

state in the 4th century BC, overthrew the reigning Achaemenid dynasty, is *Alexander*, not *Alexandra* (p. 412, 413, 415 × 10, 423), as the latter is the feminine form of that name; (d) similarly incorrect is the title *Alexandra-name* (p. 415), which should actually read *Eskandar-name*; (e) the nickname (Ar. *nisba*) of the medieval Muslim polyhistor Abu Rayhan is written as *al-Biruni* or *Biruni*, not *Birooni* (p. 413, 415, 424 × 2); (f) the name of the mythical Iranian ruler embodying, among other things, justice is in New Persian *Fereydun*, not *Freydoun* (p. 414 × 2; also incomprehensible is the inconsistency in the transcription of the vowel [u] either as /oo/, /ou/ or as /u/); (g) the standard transcription of the name of a city currently located in north-western Iran is *Tus*, not *Toos* (p. 414) – the authors treat the issue of transcription of Arabic or New Persian quite casually, yet in both cases there are specific scholarly standards (e.g. Lambton, *Persian Grammar* (1953 and subsequent editions)).

(ii) inconsistency in the spelling of some proper names, e.g.: (a) transcription of the title of one of the works analysed – *Ḥudūd al-ʿālam* (10th c.), as: *Hodod Al Alam* (p. 417), *Hodod Al alam* (p. 419), *Hodod al alam* (p. 419); (b) transcription of the name Abū ʿAlī Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Yaʿqūb ibn Miskawayh (10th/11th c.) as: *Ibn Maskovie* (p. 415), *Ibn Maskuye* (p. 417), *Ibn Masovieh* (p. 418), *Ibn Maskovieh* (p. 418), *Ibn Meskoye* (p. 424) – five different forms (*sic*!); (c) transcription of the title of one of the literary texts – *Vis-o Rāmin* (11th c.) as: *Vis and Ramin* (p. 424) and *Veis and Ramin* (p. 414) – the reasons for this are to be found in the debate over the correct reading of the name *Vis* or *Veys*, in which we favour the version *Vis* due to Av. *vīs*, Skr. *vīś*, rejecting the folk etymology linking it to a name of Arabic origin, i.e. *Ways*/*Weys*, e.g. *Mir Weys*.

(iii) spelling mistakes, e.g.: (a) the name of the legendary ruler *Jamshid* is written as *Jamishd* (p. 414), although it is given in the correct form on the same page (p. 414 × 2); (b) the name of the people who invaded Central Asia and the Middle East in the 13th century CE, i.e. *Mongol*, is written as *Mangol* (p. 418); (c) the name of the medieval Muslim geographer *Ibn Khordadbeh* (9th/10th c.) is recorded as *Ibn Khordabeh* (p. 413, 424).

(iv) misuse of capital letters, e.g.: (a) *Ancient times* (p. 411) instead of *ancient times*; (b) *Catacombs* (p. 411, 412) instead of *catacombs*; (c) *Event* (p. 414, 415) instead of *event*.

(v) misuse of lower case letters, e.g.: (a) *ferdousi* (p. 422) instead of *Ferdousi*; (b) *Ibn hoqal* (p. 419) instead of *Ibn Hoqal*; (c) *turkish* (p. 415) instead of *Turkish*.

(vi) serious objections are occasionally raised by stylistics making the message difficult to understand, e.g.: (a) "In these four major eras, the era for forming and using these buildings created" (p. 412) – this raises the question of what was created by the era of forming and using these buildings; (b) "Even these fire temples remained for centuries after Islam and for this reason we can have a more precise awareness of these buildings in ancient times" (p. 412); (c) "In ancient time, a kind of buildings was used as religious ones which were used as rituals

and prayer by people" (p. 412); (d) "Zoroastrianism were there who had access to one of the *Avesta*'s versions and read and interpreted it" (p. 417) – *Zoroastrianism* is the name of a religion whose adherents are *Zoroastrians*; (e) "For instance, Nobahar did not consider Balkh neither as idol temple nor as fire temple while confirming its religious function" (p. 423) – *Nobahar* (or rather: *Noubahār*) is a Persian term for a Buddhist temple (Skt. *vihāra*), although the sentence implies that it must have been a medieval Muslim polyhistor.

(vii) non-standard notation of the Arabic definite article *al-* without a hyphen in the main text (p. 411-423) and standard, i.e. with a hyphen, in the *Bibliography* (p. 424-425).

(viii) inconsistent notation of the Persian izafet morpheme *-e* without a hyphen or as *e-* (p. 424).

(ix) inconsistent transcription of Persian and Arabic terms, confusing scientific transcription e.g.: *ahl al-ḏimma* (p. 411; by the way, nowhere, apart from key words, does this term appear in the text) with a simplified one appearing, for example, in the titles of Muslim works cited (translated additionally in the *Bibliography*).

The above-mentioned examples (which by no means include all the shortcomings) indicate a highly careless preparation of the scientific article. The text should have been sent for linguistic correction before printing in order to avoid not only stylistic but also grammatical mistakes, e.g.: (a) "Islamic authors mentioned buildings used as temples for Iranian in ancient times" (p. 412) – it should be rather *used as temples by Iranians* or *Iranian people*; (b) "When describing ancient times, the authors of Islamic era noted many of these building which had religious functions" (p. 412) – should be *buildings*; (c) "Ferdousi considers Houshang as fire worshipper (…)" p. 414) – should be *as a fire worshipper*.

(2) Methodological issues

The article discusses the testimonies of medieval Muslim authors about, as can be inferred from the content, Zarathushtrian fire temples. The authors have applied the descriptive-analytical method to their research, although one might wonder whether a classical philological reading combined with a critical evaluation of the information thus obtained by projecting it onto *strictly* scientific studies would have been preferable.

The methodological downsides of the work are:

(i) the lack of definition of the term "Islamic historians". Does it refer to all, including contemporary, Muslim historians or only the classical ones? A better solution in this situation may have been to use a term such as "mediaeval" or "classical".

(ii) the lack of basic information about the corpus of medieval Muslim texts the authors are working on. We do not know whether they applied any selection key. Why, for example, did they not refer to *Tārix-e Sistān* or *Tārix-e Boxārā*? Was there no information there that could have been successfully used for the article?

(iii) the lack of any information on the selection criterion for medieval Muslim polyhistors (we prefer to use this term in place of "historian" as it better reflects the nature of the researchers and their activities at the time). Occasionally there is such a reference: (a) *the Islamic authors* (e.g. p. 411 × 2), (b) *these authors* (e.g. 412 × 2), or (c) *the authors of Islamic era* (p. 412), but the reader is eager to know which authors are actually behind it!

(iv) the lack of information on when individual medieval Muslim polyhistors lived. Such dates would allow those unfamiliar with the issues to plot a timeline and place individual texts on it, thus creating some vision of historical depth.

(v) the lack of any definition of the basic conceptual apparatus used in the work, e.g.: (a) how do the authors understand the term *idol temple*?; (b) should the lexeme *God* in the sentence "There were, in addition, other authors who confirmed the sacredness aspect of fire, i.e. God and its nearness in the senses that noted individuals achieve God's guidances though worshipping fire and this guidance is not completed by logic" (p. 413) be considered a synonym for the Zarathushtrian term *yazata*?; (c) what does the word *Revayat* in "According to some Revayat (…)" mean? (p. 414) – the simple print suggests a group of people, not a title.

(vi) the lack of any information to place temporally the four historical eras distinguished by the authors (p. 412), the last of which is sometimes inconsistently named: *Ardeshir the first Sasani* (p. 412), *First Ardeshir Sasani* (p. 413), *Ardeshir Babakan's era* (p. 415).

(vii) the lack of distinction between *strictly* historical texts (richly exploited) and literary works. *Šāhnāme* by Ferdousi (quoted several times in the article, but given by title only in *Conclusions* (p. 423)) although containing a number of historical facts, cannot be treated as a source for historical research; in particular, it cannot be a source of historical facts for the oldest history, which it presents in a highly mythologised perspective – Hušang (in a strange English transcription *Houshang*) or Arğasp (existing as *Arjasp*) are mythological figures, under no circumstances may they be treated as historical characters! The lack of such distinction is a serious methodological and substantive fault, especially as the text deals with historical, not literary or mythological accounts.

(viii) the use of inappropriate vocabulary, e.g. *guru* here appears in the colloquial meaning as it means "[a] Hindu spiritual teacher or head of a religious sect. Also in general or trivial use: an influential teacher, a mentor; a pundit" (*The Oxford English Dictionary* (1989: 964)).

(3) Substantive issues

Our most serious reservations relate to mixing historical and mythological facts, leading to a distorted perception of the history of ancient, i.e. pre-Islamic Iran – there is no such thing in Iranian history as the *pre Gashtasb era* or the *Gash-*

tasb era (e.g.: p. 412), since Gaštāsb is a *strictly* mythological figure. It is quite obvious that medieval Muslim authors combined both visions of history into one coherent picture, as they were building on earlier traditions that did so. However, we stand by the view that it was the authors' task to separate what is a record of history and what is a record of mythology in their texts. The lack of such a distinction suggests that the authors themselves share the views of the above-mentioned Muslim polyhistors and regard mythical figures and events as real.

The major substantive downsides of the work are:

(i) explaining the obvious, e.g.: "Catacombs in ancient times were places for burying the dead" (p. 411).

(ii) the interesting statement "Iranians regarded fire as sacred in order to avoid Hell [by the way, why the capital letter? – MMPK & OP]. As such, they lit fire in combustion chamber so that they could remember the hell and recall the burning nature of fire in their thoughts" (p. 413) is devoid of any factual commentary. For that reason we conclude that the view presented therein is true which means the authors conflate fact and fiction. Even if the authors in the question explain the reasons why Iranians worshiped fire, this statement should be backed up with the state of scientific knowledge. Otherwise, the reader, whose knowledge in this area may be limited, might form an erroneous impression as to the reasons for fire worship.

(iii) nor do we understand what connection there is between theism and abandoning fire worship: "Thus when talking about Houshang Pishdadi, he talked about worshipping fire but not fire temples in the sense that not only he talked about theism but inhibition of worshipping fire" (p. 414). Moreover, is it possible to *worship* fire temples? In our opinion, no.

(iv) why do the authors not address the fact that at the beginning of Zarathushtrianism there was no such thing as a fire temple, as they are not mentioned in *Avesta*?

(v) what does it mean that "Yazgerd definitely sought to protect this sacred fire out of religious reasons. Similarly, Khosrow Anoshiravan [rather Anoshirvan – MMK & OP] transferred the sacred fire to river because of idols in Rey fire temple (…). Such religious reasons caused the destruction of Rey fire temple in Islamic period" (p. 418). We understand that the authors refer to Mas'udi's work, but why do they not comment on this information?

(vi) what new principles did Khosrow Anoshirvan create for Zarathushtrianism after he put down the Mazdak uprising (p. 417)? It would be appropriate to cite the critical literature here.

(vii) the authors confuse the ethnonym Turanian, used to describe an ethnos hostile to the Iranians but related to them, with the ethnonym Turk (p. 415).

(viii) what is the ethnonym Zerasb (p. 422)?

Conclusions

The above-mentioned reservations do not constitute a comprehensive account of all observations arising when reading Salehi and Nazar's articles. The topic they have analysed is interesting, primarily due to the cultural transformations that were taking place in Iran after the Arab-Muslim conquest (7th c.), related to the progressive Islamisation of Iranian society. One of the topics that the authors do not mention, but which may have appeared in the texts they analysed, is the phenomenon of the transformation of Zarathushtrian temples into mosques. They write: "In accordance with the treaties that were enacted with the peoples of the Conquered lands, Attempted [capital letter!] to respect the religious beliefs of the people of the conquered areas, They [capital letter!] committed that the fire temples of the people would not be destroyed by them Or [capital letter!] Is [capital letter!] mentioned from securing people. Some documents also talk about freedom of the people at their ceremonies and festivities (Safari Forushani, 2000: 57). Muslim reporters reported fewer fires that were destroyed by Muslim conquerors, Of [capital letter!] course, this is relative, And [capital letter!] the destruction of the fire temple in the areas conquered was likely Or [capital letter!] after a contract with Muslims, they rebelled, This [capital letter!] is the exception" (p. 422), but this type of information requires vigorous verification through other scientific sources.

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