

## AVESTA AND ANCIENT EASTERN CIVILIZATION

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**Abstract:** This article scientifically analyzes the historical and cultural relationship between the Avesta and ancient Eastern civilization. The study highlights the religious and philosophical essence of the Avesta, its moral concepts, and its influence on the social structure and cultural development of ancient Eastern society. In addition, based on archaeological and historical sources, the role of Zoroastrianism in the civilization processes of Central Asia and neighboring regions is examined.

**Keywords:** Avesta, ancient Eastern civilization, Zoroastrianism, I. P. Veynberg, Abu Rayhan al-Biruni.

### Introduction:

In the territory of the Ancient East, during the 10th–7th millennia BCE, the most important processes connected with the origins of human civilization and cultural development took place. Various forms and spheres of cultural activity emerged in the East. Writing, literature, art, science, and the world’s first major religion — Buddhism — appeared during this period. The concept of the Ancient East does not fully correspond to modern understandings of the East. The Ancient East covered a vast region stretching from Egypt to China, where, beginning from the 7th millennium BCE, the earliest civilizations in human history developed in the valleys of the largest rivers — the Nile, Tigris and Euphrates, Indus and Ganges, Huang He, and Yangtze — regions that provided favorable conditions for the development of agriculture. It was precisely in these regions that the first forms of statehood, cities as political, religious, and trade centers, and writing systems emerged. In these territories, spiritual culture gradually separated from productive labor and became an independent sphere of activity. Separate social groups engaged in governance, education, collecting information, and transmitting knowledge emerged and expanded. The civilizations of Egypt, Mesopotamia, India, and China were among the oldest and greatest cultures. Under their influence, the civilizations of Urartu, Phoenicia, the Hittites, and Elam were formed and played a significant role in the history of human culture. According to I. P. Veynberg, ancient Eastern culture fulfilled “a great mission as the first discoverer and founder”; it developed writing, established the foundations of statehood, and created conditions for people of different ethnic, professional, social, and property status to live together. While other cultures benefited from the experiences and achievements of primitive and ancient Eastern cultures, ancient Eastern culture itself emerged from primitive society. The influence of primitive traditions remained strong and constant. Mythological thinking, speech, and forms of activity were inherited from the primitive era. At the same time, ancient Eastern cultural monuments deeply recognized themselves as the “beginnings” and “innovations” of their world. In the myths of Egypt, Mesopotamia, India, and China, not only the theme of the “creation of the world” (heaven, earth, animals, and humans) occupies an important place, but also the “creation of civilization,” which sharply distinguished these societies from primitive life. In myths such as “Enki and the Universe” of Mesopotamia, the myth about the god Ptah in Egypt, and the legends about the mythical rulers of China, gods and first ancestors are portrayed as the founders of agriculture and handicrafts, builders of the first cities, creators of statehood and religion, and



inventors of law and writing. They are represented as the creators of all achievements of civilization that distinguished society from primitive life. Furthermore, myths also depict the conflict between two opposing and incompatible worlds. Information about the customs and beliefs of the peoples of the Ancient East has been preserved in various historical sources, literary works, and monuments of art, leading us into a world very different from our modern imagination. Mythological thinking played a major role in the formation of ancient Eastern culture.

### **Literature Review:**

Scientific studies devoted to the topic “Avesta and Ancient Eastern Civilization” mainly examine the religion of Zoroastrianism, the culture of the ancient peoples of Iran and Central Asia, systems of governance, moral views, and the formation processes of Eastern civilization. Among the sources related to this topic, the most important and primary source is the Avesta itself. It reflects the religious beliefs, social life, attitudes toward nature, and spiritual values of the peoples of the Ancient East. The scholar Abu Rayhan al-Biruni, in his work *Osor ul-boqiya*, provided valuable information about Zoroastrian rituals and the calendar systems of ancient peoples. According to the scholar, the religion of Zoroastrianism strongly influenced the lifestyle of ancient societies, and fire worship ceremonies in particular became an important element of Eastern culture. Beruni’s information serves as an important scientific basis confirming the historical reliability of the religious ideas reflected in the Avesta. The orientalist scholar Vasily Bartold paid special attention to the geographical information contained in the Avesta in his studies of Central Asian history. He emphasized that territories such as Aryanam Vaejo, Sogdiana, Bactria, and Khorezm mentioned in the Avesta were major centers of ancient Eastern civilization. According to Bartold, Zoroastrianism first emerged in Central Asia and later spread to Iran. The archaeologist Sergey Tolstov attempted to scientifically substantiate the information contained in the Avesta through archaeological findings from the Khorezm archaeological expedition. His research revealed the connection between ancient Khorezm culture and Zoroastrianism. In particular, fire temples discovered at sites such as Janbas Kala, Toprak Kala, and Koy-Krylgan Kala correspond closely with the religious rituals described in the Avesta. The translation of the Avesta by the Uzbek scholar Asqar Mahkam played an important scientific role in studying this source. The translation widely explains the ethical principles of the Avesta, such as the struggle between good and evil, diligence, purity, and justice. These ideas formed one of the main foundations of the spiritual life of ancient Eastern civilization. In her studies on the history of Zoroastrianism, Mary Boyce evaluated the Avesta as one of the oldest religious sources in human history. According to the scholar, the dualism of good and evil in Zoroastrianism later influenced other Eastern religions and philosophical systems. In particular, the sanctity of fire, respect for natural elements, and moral purity played an important role in the development of Eastern civilization. Historian Boris Litvinsky emphasized that the ideology of Zoroastrianism played a significant role in the development of the civilizations of Bactria and Sogdiana. According to him, the Avesta is not only a religious source but also a historical document reflecting the economic, political, and cultural life of the peoples of the Ancient East. Thus, the Avesta is considered one of the primary sources for studying the religious, philosophical, spiritual, and cultural development of ancient Eastern civilization. The ideas contained in it played an important historical role in shaping humanity’s moral thinking, systems of governance, and social life.

### **Research Methodology:**



During the research process, the texts of the Avesta, historical sources related to ancient Eastern civilization, and modern scientific literature were studied using a comparative-analytical approach. In addition, archaeological data, historical-philosophical views, and the scientific research of Oriental scholars were analyzed, and their interrelationships were clarified. Through methods such as generalization, source studies, and comparative analysis, the role of the Avesta in the development of ancient Eastern civilization was scientifically examined.

### **Analysis and Results:**

According to Wang Jilai and Lan Chi, the religion of Zoroastrianism emerged in ancient times due to the necessity for the population of the southern part of Central Asia to unite against external enemies and establish statehood. They support this argument by referring to passages in the Avesta where Zoroaster calls the oasis inhabitants to unite against nomadic invasions. In the “Gathas” section of the Avesta, Zoroaster appeals to national feelings and urges the people to unite against invaders from the north. Therefore, they consider him not merely a prophet, but also a fighter and leader of a resistance movement. From an ideological perspective, northern nomads at that time worshipped the Daevas. Based on the historical writings of Herodotus, they believed in the immortality of the soul, divination, and worshipped the sky, earth, sun, moon, water, and fire, particularly the sun and fire. The Scythians, including the Saka and Massagetae tribes, especially revered the sun, while the Massagetae also worshipped the sun god Mithra. Besides the sun, fire was also an object of worship among northern pastoral peoples. However, Zoroastrians opposed the Daevas, considering them symbols of evil and suffering that should be destroyed. According to these scholars, Zoroaster reformed the primitive Aryan religion and called people to unite and struggle against the worshippers of the Daevas. As a result, during the years of resistance wars, the nomadic peoples of southern Central Asia united to establish a state. However, this issue remains controversial. In the early twentieth century, the ethnographer and historian Aurel Stein, who conducted archaeological research in Northern India, Central Asia, and Eastern Turkestan, noted that the phrase “invaders from the north” appears in Sanskrit sources from Northern India and refers to the Kushan Empire and Hephthalite Empire dynasties that invaded Northern India. There are also various opinions concerning the birthplace and period of Zoroaster. Some scholars claim he originated from Media in northwestern Iran, while others argue that he lived around 1000 BCE or even earlier. Some consider him a contemporary of Siddhartha Gautama. The German scholar Josef Markwart believed that Zoroaster was born in Khorezm. According to modern research, however, he lived in Bactria during the 7th century BCE. This view is supported by descriptions in the Avesta where Zoroaster depicts the land in which he began his activities: “There are heroic leaders commanding numerous armies and vast territories; there are mountains, rich pastures, and water plants; they produce everything necessary for cattle breeding; there is a vast deep lake and large rivers whose waves pass through lands such as Iskata (Scythia), Bovulu (Kabul Valley), Mulu (Marv), Halieva (Aria), Gava (a district of Sogdiana), Sogdiana, and Khorezm.” These “great navigable rivers” are interpreted as the Amu Darya and Syr Darya. At that time, there was no writing system, and therefore Zoroaster himself could not write. He composed many religious hymns and songs that were transmitted orally from generation to generation. Around 350 CE, during the early years of the Sasanian Empire, these oral traditions were compiled into a book known as the Avesta. Zoroaster’s missionary hymns, written in the Bactrian language, became known as the “Gathas,” although by the time they were written down, the language itself had disappeared. Besides the Gathas, the Avesta also contains later sections such as Yasna, Vendidad, Yashts, and Vispered. Among them, the “Vendidad” is regarded as the latest written collection of religious rules and rituals. Another important aspect of the Avesta in studying the history of Turanian peoples is its



mention of regions created by Ahura Mazda, such as Airyana Vaejo, Gau (in Sogdiana), Mulu (Marv), and Baxdi (Bactria), which are considered the homelands of the Aryans. Wang Jilai describes the Saka and Massagetae societies as populations inhabiting territories from east of Lake Balkhash and the Ural Mountains to the Altai Mountains outside the borders of the Achaemenid Empire. Due to limited historical information in Chinese and Western sources, the nomadic Turanians opposing the settled Aryans mentioned in the Avesta are regarded as a general designation for these nomadic peoples. Regarding the Saka and Massagetae societies, Yuy Taishan, citing Herodotus, notes that “the Massagetae wore the same clothes and lived the same lifestyle as the Scythians,” and that “some considered themselves part of the Scythians.” According to him, this “same lifestyle” referred to nomadic life. Lan Chi explains that during the rule of the Achaemenid Empire, many followers of Zoroastrianism lived in Bactria and Sogdiana. In addition, the Zoroastrian calendar began to be used in Bactria, Parthia, and Khorezm. Local deities worshipped in Central Asia were also respected by the Persians. These included Anahita, worshipped by the Bactrians, and Mithra, worshipped by the Massagetae. According to the scholar, this reflects the tolerant attitude of the Persian Empire toward the beliefs of conquered peoples. Considerable attention has been paid to the importance of the Avesta in studying the history of the Ancient East, and some parts of it have been translated into Chinese. This has become a useful source for researchers studying ancient Eastern history. Nevertheless, there remain controversial and unresolved issues regarding the interpretation of information contained in the source.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations:**

The study of the topic “Avesta and Ancient Eastern Civilization” demonstrates that the Avesta is not only a religious text, but also an important historical document illuminating the social, cultural, and moral life of the peoples of the Ancient East. The ideas presented in it — such as the struggle between good and evil, diligence, justice, and purity — played a crucial role in shaping the spiritual foundations of Eastern civilization. The research findings indicate that the concepts reflected in the Avesta were closely connected with the development of ancient state structures, moral norms within society, and religious beliefs in Central Asia and neighboring regions. Archaeological and historical sources also confirm the harmony between the ideas of the Avesta and real historical processes. Overall, the Avesta remains one of the principal sources for understanding the formation and development of ancient Eastern civilization, and its scientific study is of great importance for the fields of history, culture, and philosophy.

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