

THE STUDY OF ZURVANISM IN ARAB COUNTRIES

Ulugbek Nusratullo ugli Olimov

Junior Researcher at the Institute of History, Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Uzbekistan

Abstract: *This article discusses the role and analysis of the Zurvanite doctrine, one of the complex and controversial branches of Zoroastrianism, in modern Arab historiography. Based on the scientific research of Arab scholars such as Jamshid Yusufi and Firas Sawah, the study examines the reasons for the emergence of Zurvanism, particularly the proposition of the idea of “Absolute Origin – Zurvan” to resolve the problem of traditional dualism (Good and Evil). The article elucidates the historical developmental stages of this current (Achaemenid, Parthian, and Sassanid eras), its internal philosophical contradictions, and the characteristics of the deterministic (jabriyah) and materialistic (dahriyah) schools within it. The analysis results indicate that Arab researchers evaluate Zurvanism as a syncretic doctrine formed under the influence of various cultures, and their conclusions align with fundamental views in world oriental studies.*

Keywords: *Zurvanism, Arab historiography, Zoroastrianism, dualism, Zurvan (Infinite Time), Sassanid period, religious-philosophical currents, syncretism, fatalism and materialism.*

Modern Arab historiography, in researching the Zoroastrian religion, pays serious attention not only to its comparative analysis with other confessions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) but also to the study of the internal doctrinal evolution and philosophical contradictions of the teaching. In this scientific direction, the issue of Zurvanism – a complex movement formed within the bosom of Zoroastrian theology and possessing unique cosmogonic and ontological views – holds a special place.

In particular, prominent researchers Jamshid Yusufi and Faras Sivah, in their fundamental studies, investigate this movement not merely as a religious heresy, but as an independent object of analysis. The authors evaluate Zurvanism as the most contradictory and intricate phenomenon in the history of Zoroastrianism. The primary reason for this is the extremely poor preservation of primary written sources regarding the movement and the fragmentary nature of the information that has reached us. Nevertheless, Arab scholars acknowledge this doctrine as a historically crucial event in terms of ideology, which brought about a philosophical turn in the thought of the peoples of ancient Turan and Iran.

The conceptual basis and ontological essence of the doctrine of Zurvanism are manifested in the fact that it was aimed at resolving the theological dilemma that arose as a result of the dualistic worldview in classical Zoroastrianism – which is built upon two opposing poles of existence (Good and Evil). Although the mutual struggle between Ahura Mazda and Ahriman occupies a central place in traditional Zoroastrianism, the question of their source of origin remained open.

According to the analysis of the Arab researcher F. Sivah, the existence of two opposing forces as primordial and equal powers gave rise to a legitimate and logical question in human thought: “What is their origin, and what is the basis that unites them?” Precisely to resolve this metaphysical problem, the Zurvanites put forward the idea of a

single and absolute Origin – Zurvan (“Infinite Time”) – which stands superior to these two forces and exists beyond space and time.

According to this doctrine, the divine status of Ahura Mazda and Ahriman was reconsidered: they were interpreted not as independent, self-created gods, but as emanations and twin children of Zurvan. Through this approach, the Zurvanites attempted to link the model of the universe's creation from dualism to a single source – a monistic basis – and thereby fill the logical gap in Zoroastrian cosmogony.

The issue of determining the genesis and stages of chronological development of the Zurvanite doctrine remains one of the most controversial problems in modern Oriental studies. F. Sivah attributes the root cause of this complexity to the scarcity of primary sources. Due to the fact that dogmatic writings inherited directly from the Zurvanites themselves have not been preserved, researchers face serious difficulties in accurately dating the formation of the movement.

Nevertheless, based on existing indirect evidence and comparative analyses, the author proposes a scientific hypothesis: Zurvanite ideas took root during the Achaemenid era and developed in a latent form during the period of Parthian rule. The true apogee (zenith) of the movement coincides with the Sasanian era. During this period, Zurvanism entered into sharp ideological competition with the class of official orthodox clergy (the Mobads) and even attempted to rise to the level of state ideology.

Jamshid Yusufi also supports this chronological approach. He emphasizes that while traces of Zurvanite dualism are almost nonexistent in the most ancient “Avesta” texts (the Gathas), its influence begins to be clearly felt in subsequent historical stages, particularly within Sasanian court circles, which testifies to the evolutionary character of the doctrine. According to F. Sivah’s final conclusion, although Zurvanism did not rise to the level of a fully institutionalized independent religion, it maintained its existence as the strongest intellectual and philosophical opposition current (dissident movement) within Zoroastrian theology.

In Arab historiography, Zurvanism is studied not merely as a unified doctrine, but as a phenomenon that is complex and contradictory in its internal structure. Scholars pay special attention to the doctrinal heterogeneity (diversity) of this movement and to the textual inconsistencies found in the sources.

In particular, while conducting a comparative analysis of the texts of the “Vendidat” (Videvdat), the holy book of Zoroastrianism, J. Yusufi identifies a serious theological paradox. According to him, certain passages of the source contain indications that Ahura Mazda created Zurvan (Time). This is diametrically opposed to the fundamental Zurvanite axiom that “Zurvan is the father of all and the absolute Origin”. This situation indicates that the texts were edited or altered during the long-term ideological struggle between official Zoroastrianism and Zurvanism.

In turn, F. Sivah interprets Zurvanism not as a monolithic (unified) doctrine, but as a complex system uniting various philosophical currents. According to his classification, two major radical schools formed within the bosom of Zurvanism:

1. Jabriyya (Fatalistic Determinism): Representatives of this school absolutely denied human free will (choice) and linked all processes in the universe to strict fate and the

movement of the stars. In their view, man is a helpless being fully subjugated to the judgment of Time (Zurvan).

2. Dahriyya (Materialistic Nihilism): This direction was distinguished by its rejection of the metaphysical world and moral responsibility. Considering the world to consist only of matter, they denied the eternity of the soul and reward in the afterlife. This led to the strengthening of worldly (secular) views that were alien to Zoroastrian ethics.

Due to the scarcity of primary sources in restoring the socio-ethical standards of Zurvanism, researchers are forced to apply a reconstructive method based on existing fragmentary information and rely on scientific hypotheses. According to F. Sivah's assumption, the influence of Eastern philosophy, particularly the ascetic and pessimistic views of Buddhism, is felt in the ethical system of this movement. This influence is especially evident in the ideas of renouncing worldly pleasures and resigning to fate.

Furthermore, studies highlight the radical views of Zurvanism regarding gender issues. The negative attitude towards women observed in the sources (elements of misogyny) is completely contrary to the relatively egalitarian (equality-based) spirit of traditional Zoroastrianism. This situation can likely be explained by the fact that the Dahriyya direction perceived matter as a "source of evil" and understood reproduction as becoming bound to the material world.

J. Yusufi, focusing on the religious studies aspect of the issue, emphasizes that Zurvanism entered into a process of symbiosis with the Cult of Mithra and other ancient religious traditions. These facts indicate that Zurvanism was an extremely complex syncretic doctrine, rich in internal contradictions, formed at the crossroads of various civilizations.

By way of conclusion, it can be said that the scientific views of Arab researchers on Zurvanism are in harmony with existing trends in global Oriental studies. In particular, their conclusions draw a conceptual parallel with the results of fundamental research conducted by the prominent Western Iranologist R. Zaehner. Today, modern science acknowledges the existence of a source gap in fully illuminating Zurvanism's relationship with classical Zoroastrianism, its exact causes of origin, and its social roots; this issue remains in need of future new archaeological and textual research.

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