

APOCALYPSE NOW: ZOROASTRIAN REFLECTIONS ON THE EARLY ISLAMIC CENTURIES

TOURAJ DARYAEE

University of California, Los Angeles

Although Middle Persian apocalyptic texts were redacted during the Muslim era, they have rarely been used as historical sources for the early Islamic period. While the texts do not give detailed chronological information, they do present the Zoroastrian community's reflection on the conquest and the sectarian and political developments of that era. Further they present information that cannot be ascertained from other sources regarding the view of the native population of the plateau, especially the Zoroastrians. This is important, since there seems to have been a large number of Zoroastrians until the ninth and tenth centuries and it was only then that there appears to have been a high rate of conversion.¹

What the apocalyptic texts predict is simply an internalization and the framing of current events, written by the author followed by an end of time scenario. When looking at the texts, at once it becomes clear that we are not dealing with apocalyptic stories but with contemporary political events embedded in this genre of semi-literary historical works. Apocalyptic literature appears in situations of hardship and fear. This type of situation could emerge when the social organization, including access to central power is cut off and the group is jeopardized, especially when the cultural pattern of a society is at risk or in danger from an external force.² This holds true for the Zoroastrians when we would think of the Arab Muslim conquest, the Abbāsī revolution, sectarian revolts, and provincial uprisings as recorded in these texts. What needs to be done is to identify these events within the texts, which would provide clues as to the view of the Zoroastrians regarding these events and their importance for that community. To demonstrate the usefulness of these texts, here it is intended to study three historical episodes reflected in Middle Persian apocalyptic literature. The first, reflecting

¹ R. Bulliet, *Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Period: an Essay in Quantitative History*, Harvard University Press, (Massachusetts and London, England, 1979) 23.

² T. Olsson, "The Apocalyptic Activity. The Case of Jāmāsp Nāmāg," *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East*, ed. D. Hellholm, J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck) (Tübingen, 1983) 31.