

## LOOKING BACK: ZOROASTRIAN IDENTITY FORMATION THROUGH RECOURSE TO THE PAST

11-12 October 2013

Throughout their long history Zoroastrians have referred to and relied upon notions of what is traditional and authoritative in order to conserve their identity as a minority faith. This involves a process of connecting, in every generation, to what is received and recovered from the past whether it be religious texts, teachings, or events, both real and imagined. Tradition is not, however, a simple or static phenomenon; it is ongoing, accumulative and responsive to the need for change in social and cultural contexts.

Though now it is one of the smallest religious faiths in the world, Zoroastrianism is a microcosm of a wide range of religious history, as it spans more than three millennia of changing conditions. For several centuries it enjoyed imperial patronage, and then for much of its history since the Islamic conquest, it was subordinated to the status of a minority religion in Iran: it was at times variously suppressed and tolerated, as initially it was deemed not to qualify for the status of *ahl-e ketab*. In India since the early ninth century CE the émigré community of Parsis has enjoyed religious freedom and in the modern period great economic success. Like many religious communities Zoroastrians now have a diaspora spread all around the globe.

This two-day conference will examine the patterns of identity formation in ancient, medieval and more recent periods, looking at how texts, traditions, icons, rituals and symbols have been used to form Zoroastrian identities.

## **Day One, Friday 11 October**

**8.30 – 9.15**            **Registration**

**9.15 – 9.30**            **Welcome**, Paul Webley (Director, SOAS, University of London)

**Introductory Remarks**, Sarah Stewart (SOAS, University of London)

**9.30 – 11.15**            **Session 1 – Scripture and Significance for the Tradition**

Almut Hintze (SOAS, University of London):

***A Zoroastrian Vision***

Dastur Dr Firoze Kotwal (Mumbai):

***Continuity, Controversy and Change: a study of the ritual practice of the Bhagaria priests of Navsari***

Alberto Cantera (University of Salamanca):

***The 'Sacrifice' (Yasna) to Mazda: its antiquity and variety***

**11.15 – 11.45**            **Coffee Break**

**11.45 – 1.30**            **Session 2 – Tradition, Authority, Orthodoxy, Continuity, Change, Origins, Conservatism and Innovation in Zoroastrian (Iranian and Parsi) Religion and Culture**

Touraj Daryaee (University of California, Irvine):

***Refashioning the Zoroastrian Past: from Alexander to Islam***

Antonio Panaino (University of Bologna):

***Uranography and Astrology in the History of Zoroastrianism***

Yuhan Vevaina (University of Stanford):

***No One Stands Nowhere: the insider-outsider problem in the study of Zoroastrianism***

**1.30 – 2.30**            **Lunch Break**

**2.30 – 4.15**            **Session 3 – Enduring Zoroastrian Symbols and Iconic Forms in Art and Architecture**

Frantz Grenet (Collège de France, Paris):

***Extracts from a Calendar of Zoroastrian Feasts: a new interpretation of a Bactrian silver plate at the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris***

Vesta Sarkhosh-Curtis (British Museum):

***Zoroastrian Symbols in Parthian and Sasanian Culture***

James Russell (Harvard University):

***Imagery of Zarathushtra: continuity and change in tradition***

**4.15 – 4.45            Tea Break**

**5.00 – 6.00            Keynote Speech**

Philip Kreyenbroek (Georg-August University, Göttingen):

***Return to the Past, in the Gathas and in later Zoroastrianism***

## **Day Two, Saturday 12 October**

### **9.30 – 11.15            Session 4 - Cross Fertilisation of Ideas between Pre-Islamic and Post-Islamic Iran**

Albert de Jong (University of Leiden):

***The Denkard and the Zoroastrians of Baghdad***

Jamsheed Choksy (Indiana University, Bloomington):

***Zoroastrian Goodwill in Medieval Muslim Contexts***

Ashk Dahlén (Uppsala University):

***'He Addressed the Kayanian King: "I Am a Prophet"' – the Image of Zoroaster in the Shahnameh (Book of Kings)***

### **11.15 – 11.45            Coffee Break**

### **11.45 – 1.30            Session 5 – Minority Status: cultural/religious identity and relations with the majority religion**

Khojeste Mistree (Zoroastrian Studies, Mumbai):

***Collision, Conflict and Accommodation – A Question of Survival and the Preservation of the Parsi Zoroastrian Identity***

Dan Sheffield (Princeton University):

***Magian Mystics? Azar Kayvan and his Followers between Persianate Zoroastrianism and Imami Shi'ism***

Jenny Rose (Claremont Graduate University):

***Riding the (Revolutionary) Waves between Two Worlds: Parsi involvement in the transition from Old to New***

### **1.30 – 2.30            Lunch Break**

### **2.30 – 3.00            Address by Lord Bilimoria CBE, DL**

### **3.00 – 4.15            Session 6 – Modernity: the use of the past in the balance of traditional Zoroastrian culture and modernity**

Shernaz Cama (University of Delhi):

***Sacred Armour; Relevance in a changing world***

Richard Foltz (Concordia University):

***Zoroastrian Symbolism and Tajik Nation-building***

### **4.15 – 4.45            Concluding Remarks**

Alan Williams (University of Manchester)

**4.45 – 5.15      Tea Break**