

# **On the Good Faith**

**A Fourfold Discursive Construction  
of Zoroastrianism in Contemporary Russia**

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# Abbreviations

Av	Avestan
AShA	Avestan School of Astrology
Mp	Middle Persian
Np	New Persian, Farsi
NRM	New religious movement
Oldp	Old Persian
ROC	Russian Orthodox Church
RuNet	Russian-language Internet
Vd	Vidēvdād
Y	Yasna
Yt	Yasht

Note: for abbreviated and latinized titles of electronic news papers used in this thesis see the list of selected materials to Chapter 4 in the Appendix.





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At this point, my interpretation of the image of a tree-fragment from a relief at the Persepolis Apadana on the cover of my thesis has little to do with the religious and cultural symbols that are thematically tied to the relief. In my eyes, this study has been but a fragment of the search for the roots, trunk, branches, and twigs that comprise the multifaceted, sinuous tree of ideas about modern Zoroastrianism. This type of scholarly research, even in its best expression, remains contextualized as ever; it is rooted elsewhere and branches off in many directions. My thesis is no different, and I am keenly aware and deeply grateful that my work has grown from many scholarly ideas and theories and has benefitted from my diverse educational background that has been developed in several different countries. I am lucky that my work has been nourished in such fertile intellectual soil – I have learned from my Russian, Persian, German, and Swedish teachers and specialists in the study of religions and Iranian culture during the 1990s and 2000s.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

This study is about discourses on Zoroastrianism in contemporary Russia during the 1990s and 2000s. To a reader not familiar with either the history of Zoroastrianism or Russian studies, such a research question might imply a number of hidden essential preconditions relating to the topic that are not necessarily associated with a country of origin such as Russia, both in popular and in mainstream academic understandings. However, in relation to the mentioned period of time, it has become commonplace in academic literature that the two decades following the collapse of the Soviet Union have been characterized by dramatic transformations in most Eastern European and Central Asian societies. During the course of the 1990s, religion became a distinctive theme with an important ideological potency for almost every post-Soviet society, a theme that has also been subject to public discussion. A further structural feature of the post-Soviet area regarding religion is not only the diversification of longstanding established religious communities, but also the emergence of innovative religious groups, known mostly by the academic designation of new religious movements (NRMs). This is also the case, generally speaking, of Zoroastrianism in Russia, the greater public and cultural relevance of which came to light precisely in the 1990s and lasted into the 2000s.

One of the central aspects of this sudden increase in cultural interest in Zoroastrianism was the legitimization of the practitioners' community and, additionally, the attempt to gain international recognition. According to Russian Zoroastrians, the official point of departure for their organized religious movement was the summer of 1996, when the St. Petersburg Zoroastrian community, using the latest innovative form of communication at that time in Russia, namely email, introduced itself to other Zoroastrian organizations on the Internet. In their message they stated:

There has been for some years a Zoroastrian community (община) in St. Petersburg. In 1994, it was officially registered and at the moment is the only organisation confessing Zarathushtra's religion in St. Petersburg. The founder and leader (настоятель) of the community is a hereditary mobad, P.P. Globa. The community has been conducting regular religious activity, has studied

and spread Mazda's religion. We would like to hear from [other] fellow believers (единоверцы) around the world (Post 1997:24).

Indeed, this email received some feedback from foreign Zoroastrians. Two replies translated from English into Russian were documented one year later on the pages of the Russian Zoroastrian magazine *Mitra* published by the St. Petersburg community. A Parsi Zoroastrian from California, apart from giving instruction in theology and rituals, gave his short biography:

I am an American citizen and a follower of the Mazdayasna Zoroastrian religion. I am of priestly descent [...]. We are traditional Zoroastrians keeping the religion alive and active; we are neither converts nor proselytes. We are approximately 60,000 [believers] living in India, and about 10,000 more liberal [believers] scattered across North America (Post 1997:ibid).

The second email came from Stockholm. Similarly to the Parsi American, a Swedish Zoroastrian wished to be more informed about the activities and doctrinal concepts of Russian Zoroastrians. Both messages sounded friendly; the first ended with an expression referring to Ahura Mazda's blessings and the second with a neo-Zoroastrian farewell "ushta (te)." Both generally implied that St. Petersburg Zoroastrians can count on new friends in faith from abroad. Moreover, the messages also articulated firstly, that contemporary Zoroastrianism had adherents scattered throughout Western countries and, secondly, that the religion was practiced by some living in the diaspora who regarded themselves as traditional Zoroastrians as well as by others who were depicted slightly pejoratively as "converts" and "proselytes." There was a third aspect that said rather more about the character of the St. Petersburg community itself and might determine possible interrelations with the outside, namely: they had their own Zoroastrian lineage of religious authority, "the hereditary mobad P.P.Globa." Obviously, this positive feedback from abroad was deliberately selected by *Mitra's* editorial board. Any voices of Zoroastrians from India or Iran, from the so-called "traditional" centers of this ancient, well-known, and still living religion, were not quoted here. Did the Russian Zoroastrians not receive any replies from them? Were Indian and Iranian Zoroastrians ignorant? If they were not, would the Parsi and Iranian dastūrs and mōbeds (i.e. priests) be sympathetic towards a foreign, recently founded Zoroastrian group and accept "non-ethnic" believers, i.e. those not "born into the Zoroastrian religion"? Or, put differently, perhaps it was the St. Petersburg Zoroastrians themselves who were not necessarily interested in recognition by foreign Zoroastrian religious authorities, since they had their own accepted leader? Even if such hypothetical questions cannot give us any simple answers, they clearly show the complexity of

such discussion when we try to grasp the picture of contemporary Zoroastrianism without drawing attention to geographical borders or wish to define it as a collection of normativities or a sort of fixed mainstream religion. Like every other religious current, the Zoroastrian religion attracts a large number of interested participants and communities. Moreover, the presentation of a particular religion within an academic study is naturally going to become complex, especially if one tries to describe differences in the statements or practices of the people who call themselves Zoroastrians, and who, due to their diverse cultural embodiment, cannot be reduced to the norms and historical environment that were native to the religion's countries of origin.

But what is Zoroastrianism in Russia about from the perspective of Russian observers? I am afraid that once again, this raises more questions than answers. Were St. Petersburg Zoroastrians “traditional” believers, part of the “religious revival” in the 1990s, emerging out of certain unknown conspiratorial groups that survived in the Soviet underground? Or were they even ethnic Zoroastrians, who had migrated from India and Iran and hence a body of Zoroastrian diaspora or a “foreign mission”? Are they adherents of a new religious “cult,” similar to others that emerged after perestroika and interested in Far Eastern or Oriental philosophies and ritual practices? Finally, were Russian Zoroastrians from St. Petersburg Zoroastrians at all?

I believe that, while these two simplified (“ideal” and “contextual”) interpretative approaches play an important role in understanding strategies of self-presentation of religious groups at global and local levels, they do not reveal anything else—they depend upon symbolic resources not only within the religious field but outside it, within their own local culture. In my view, the question “are NRMs or ‘non-traditional’ religions originally foreign to the culture of the host country?” has to be answered negatively. This means, if we continue the discussion on Zoroastrianism in Russia, we might ask, for instance, whether “non-religious” discourses—such as the development of academic theories and translations of Zoroastrian texts, the interest of journalists, politicians, artists, and literati and the diverse discourses of Zoroastrianism launched by them—are not the decisive circumstances keeping this religious current alive. This is why, unlike mainstream descriptive academic studies on the subject of contemporary religion at a local level, my study adopts an internal cultural perspective, simultaneously focusing on a number of selected public arenas within Russian culture in recent decades, where Zoroastrianism has been involved in processes of adapting and construing symbolic meanings. In this way my thesis aims to study the Zoroastrian religion in popular culture by referring to recent fields of study that seek to identify the ways in which religious traditions—or aspects of various religious traditions—are cited, replicated, and

altered, including in the visual arts and in mass-produced literature. In particular, this interaction addresses how “issues of identity, meaning, and value are being negotiated by the majority of people outside the context of institutional religion” (Lynch 2007:133). Some of the fields discussed in my study include contemporary religion, academic research, mass media, and fiction; these are the public spheres where these meanings originate, are transformed, and then exported to other social fields. The bird’s eye perspective adopted in this study allows the investigation of fragments and strands of discourses of and on a religion, not only those produced and articulated by internal and external actors in the religious field, but also of the transformations and changes in the self-presentation of the discursive communities of Russian Zoroastrians acting within contemporary Russian society. Thus the exchange and formation of elements in Zoroastrian discourse in different cultural locations will be the main focus of this study.

At the beginning of this study I will establish historical and interdisciplinary frames and discuss research parameters. Firstly, I will present the general picture of contemporary Zoroastrianism from the perspective of the history of religions. This analysis of recent academic debates should serve as a point of departure, providing basic knowledge for the further study of modern, local expressions of Zoroastrianism, and for that reason is necessary for an introduction to the theme of Zoroastrianism in Russia. In the course of this chapter, other important contexts as such as the contemporary analysis of local Russian religious landscapes will be discussed. Finally, I will briefly explain certain theoretical and methodical notions which I have underpinned my study.

## 1.1. Point of departure and previous research

In the 1990s, Zoroastrianism appeared on the religious-discursive landscape of the countries in the former Soviet Union. Apart from the emergence of some direct references to Zoroastrianism in the political rhetoric of the Middle Asian republics, which had been part of the Persian Empire in antiquity, the European part of the former Soviet Union also felt an affinity to this cultural-political trend. The former Soviet Union, including Ukraine, the Republic of Belarus, and the Russian Federation, was not influenced either by direct migration or by institutionalized forms of ethnic Zoroastrianism. Most small groups throughout the post-Soviet area interested in Zoroastrianism, and even self-declared Zoroastrians, were not acknowledged as such by law—with the exception of the Russian Federation, where according to the register of the Federal State



Statistical Office, there is one officially recognized Zoroastrian religious organization, namely the Zoroastrian community of St. Petersburg (RSE 2009).

Scholars commenting on Zoroastrian discourse in the post-Soviet area have interpreted the movement as “quasi” Zoroastrianism, as a kind of a contemporary “ancestral religion” (Kriukova & Shkoda 2006:312), as a local esoteric NRM with very diffuse institutional structures (Tessmann 2005:156f), as evidence of a global development of “neo-Zarathushtrianism” and a new “esoteric tradition” with particular emphasis on the Zurvan doctrine (Stausberg 2002:332f), as a sort of “mimetic reconfiguration” of non-ethnic Zoroastrianism (“Para-Zoroastrianism”) (Stausberg 2008a:249ff), or as a further exponent of a modern, global form of Zoroastrianism in general (Krupnik 2008b:25). Another aspect of the academic discussion has been the question of whether post-Soviet developments belong to the category of a Zoroastrian diaspora. Two disciplines—Zoroastrian studies and the study of religions—which until recently were dominated by historians and linguists, have made several attempts to examine modern Zoroastrian groups across the world. Generally speaking, few studies on modern Zoroastrian settlements have been carried out since the 1970s (e.g. Kulke 1974; Boyce 1979 (2002); Hinnells (see 2000); Doroshenko 1982; Kestenberg Amighi 1990; and Kreyenbroek & Munshi 2001). Most of them concentrated on Iran and India where Zoroastrians lived throughout many centuries, while the Indian Zoroastrians were examined in greater depth than the Iranian Zoroastrians (Stausberg 2008b:582). Moreover, from the 1990s onwards, three scholars have undertaken studies on the Zoroastrian diaspora (Writer 1994; Hinnells 1996, 2005; Stausberg 2002). Their studies have documented how Zoroastrianism, one of the oldest institutionalized religions, gradually spread to regions and cultures far away from its cultural and geographical origins. Thus, there are now small Zoroastrian communities across the globe.

Primarily, the dissemination of Zoroastrian communities has been explained as the result of several migration waves from Iran and India, when Zoroastrians, due to political or economic oppression or the search for better conditions, left their communities and built new ones abroad. Hence the existence of Zoroastrian groups outside its place of origin dates back, perhaps, to the Achaemenid Empire (Hinnells 2005:699). Later, after the fall of the Sasanian dynasty, in the aftermath of the Arabic-Islamic invasion in the 7th century, Iranian Zoroastrians gradually became a marginalized minority (Khanbaghi 2006:20). The second major settlement of Zoroastrians was in Gujarat, India, where the Iranian Zoroastrians allegedly moved soon after the invasion towards the end of the 7th or the beginning of the 8th centuries. Since that time one can observe two Zoroastrian “homelands,” together with a number of small diaspora

groups which continue to be loosely connected with their parental (Iranian and Indian) communities.

According to John Hinnells (b. 1941) the modern Zoroastrian diaspora comprises groups that came into being through two main phases of migration that occurred in the mid-19th century and then almost a century later:

The first, which might be termed the older Zoroastrian diaspora, was to China, Sind, East Africa, and Britain; the second was to Britain again (in the 1960s) and to the New World of Canada, USA and Australia. The second phase involved more ‘sending countries’, Pakistan, East Africa and Iran, whereas the first had been just from India. There have been two groups of ‘twice migrants’, people from Pakistan and East Africa—indeed, if one includes the migration to India one can speak of some Parsis from Bombay as ‘thrice migrants’ (Hinnells 2005:699).

However, Hinnells himself admits that this division remains a conventional one because there were multiple further migrations to other Western countries by some Zoroastrian individuals (Hinnells 2005:699). The role of the Zoroastrian diasporas for “the development of the community and the religion in the old country,” namely India, was crucial (Hinnells 2005:1). Michael Stausberg (b. 1966), in an earlier published counterpart to Hinnells’s work that even contains information on some regions neglected by Hinnells, has analyzed in detail how practicing Zoroastrianism beyond its earlier settlements has led to the transformation of certain Zoroastrian theological and ritual elements and also added others (Stausberg 2002:5f). Both authors point to structural differences within the two major “traditional” Zoroastrian areas: the urban and rural environments have produced different “forms of religion or religiosity” (Stausberg 2002:10). Moreover, there are some further differences between Zoroastrian groups within each country of the Zoroastrian diaspora (Hinnells 2005:715). Russia has never been a target country for Parsi and Iranian Zoroastrians. Logically, this also led to the fact that this theme was not studied. More recently, the migration of Parsi and Iranian Zoroastrians to post-Soviet areas was demographically less significant than to Western countries. As a result there are no known ethnic communities that have retained their religion, except for the few migrations of certain Parsi individuals to cities in the former Soviet Union, e.g. to Moscow or Kiev.

Given these migration processes from Central and South Asia to Western countries, accompanied by the demographic decline of traditional communities in India and Iran, some new reinterpretations of the Zoroastrianism began to appear. Despite the fact that Zoroastrianism remained in many diasporic contexts an ethnic community, the growth of interest in that religion among Iranian refugees and some West Europeans and Americans with diverse

religious, or even non-religious backgrounds, gradually transformed the religion into a universal message with new interpretational possibilities and minimal attention paid to rituals. This led to the establishment of a number of Zoroastrian organizations in the USA, Western Europe, and the former Soviet Union, which acknowledged converts (Stausberg 2002:362ff; Hinnells 2005:523ff). Here, the first converts embraced the religion of Ahura Mazdā and his prophet Zarathushtra in the 2000s (Stausberg 2002:332; Tessmann 2005:147ff).

However, apart from migrations to Western countries, there were other political and cultural circumstances that inspired a new academic understanding of Zoroastrianism in the global context. As mentioned above, this was a reinvention of the Zoroastrian past within the framework of a “nativization” of ethnic history and attempts at the re-identification of certain peoples in the Middle East and Central Asia. Thus, Zoroastrianism played a political role for ethnic minorities: once in the 1960s, when Kurds from two religious groups (Yezidis and Ahl-i Haqq) sought recognition as Zoroastrians from the Iranian government and from Zoroastrian authorities in India and Iran (Hinnells 2005:8), and then, two decades later, when the Central Asian republics and countries of the Caucasus tried to resist foreign influence after the disintegration of the Soviet Union (Rafiy 1999:205ff, also 285ff). The latter case of the “Zoroastrianization” of the Tajik, Uzbek, and Azerbaijani peoples (Steblin-Kamenskii 2003:330; Stausberg 2002:6f; Hinnells 2005:9; Kriukova & Shkoda 2006:312) was motivated by the desire to revert to a religious tradition that was interpreted as peaceful and had left traces of folk rites in order to serve as a political middle ground between Islam and Soviet atheism, and as a possible means of withstanding the creation of theocratic Islamic states. The state policy of the three Middle Asian countries in the 1990s supported the establishment of a number of cultural, non-political organizations (such as the *Mazdayasno* in Tashkent or the *Zoroastrian Culture Centre* in Dushanbe) where Avestan and Pahlavi literature was studied and Zoroastrian rituals and initiations were performed.<sup>1</sup> In the late 1990s, with the support of state authorities, Avestan texts were translated into Middle Asian languages.<sup>2</sup> These organizations received

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<sup>1</sup> Apart from some brief references to the interest in Zoroastrianism and the building of Zoroastrian groups in this region (Rafiy 1999, Boyce 2003, Stausberg 2002, Hinnells 2005, Tessmann 2005, Steblin-Kamenskii 2009) there are still no academic studies which would shed light upon them. The only sources of information are occasional articles in the Zoroastrian diaspora’s periodicals such as the WZO magazine *Hamazor* (approx. 1982–), the journal of Zoroastrian Associations of North America *FEZANA* (1988–), the oldest liberal Parsi magazine *Parsiana* (1964–) or the reports of Parsi lady Dr Meher Master-Moos on the website of the Zoroastrian College. See for instance, <<http://mazorcol.org/>> (accessed 20 October 2011).

<sup>2</sup> However, most translations into Uzbek, Tajik, and Azerbaijan were made from Persian (Farsi) translations and not from Avestan original texts.

support from the Zoroastrian College in India, headed by Dr Meher Master-Moos and other donors from the Zoroastrian diaspora. Also the *World Zoroastrian Organization* (WZO), under the direction of Shahin Bekhradnia who has also studied the Badakhshani people (see Bekhradnia 1994:116ff), carried out humanitarian work in Tajikistan

In addition to these two models that explain change and diversity within modern Zoroastrianism, namely the migration of ethnic Zoroastrians and the claiming of Zoroastrian ancestry in Central Asia and the Middle East, a particular third model has emerged in the context of post-Soviet religiosity. This is the “imaginative” legacy of Zoroastrianism that originated in Russian esotericism, as one example of common European developments (Tessmann 2005:152). The European image of Zoroastrianism and its prophet Zarathustra was mediated through diverse texts and inspired by the reception of ancient stories about Zarathushtra in scientific literature and fiction (Stausberg 1998, Rose 2000), and, to a lesser degree, by the various receptions of Zoroastrian religious literature and their scholarly translations. This imaginatively constructed Zoroastrianism is not entirely new; it has been attractive to diverse cultures during different historical periods through horizontal transfers in the reception of names, doctrinal elements, ritual sequences, iconography, etc. If we look at certain doctrines of the past, the religious systems of Manichaeism and Mithraism, for instance, are possibly early examples of theological and ritual reflections on Zoroastrianism in antiquity. Obviously, since the establishment of Oriental Studies at European universities, academic scholarship has also stimulated an intensive adaptation of Zoroastrianism to further images of the Oriental world within Western culture. The development of scholarly research and increasing academic production of studies on foreign cultures has enabled receptive processes in other fields. Thus new interpretative perspectives were opened up by the “cultic milieu”<sup>3</sup> of the *fin de siècle* creating further affinities to Zoroastrian philosophy and the image of Zoroaster/Zarathushtra, transmitted through occult and theosophical works or by diverse religious movements. The examples are numerous. For instance, the *Mazdaznan* movement inspired by Zoroastrianism (Stausberg 2002:378f) was also popular in Western and Eastern European countries (and also, allegedly, in the Russian Empire and the early

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<sup>3</sup> According to Colin Campbell (2002:23), the cultic milieu is “the sum of unorthodox and deviant belief systems together with their practices, institutions, and personnel and constitutes a unity by virtue of a common consciousness of deviant status, a receptive and syncretistic orientation, and an interpretative communication structure. In addition, the cultic milieu is united and identified by the existence of an ideology of seekership and by seekership institutions. Both the culture and the organizational structure of this milieu represent deviant forms of the prevailing religious and scientific orthodoxies in combination with both instrumental and expressive orientations. Two important elements within the milieu are the religious tradition of mysticism and the personal service practices of healing and divination.”

Soviet Union)<sup>4</sup> throughout the first decades of the 20th century. To this exchange of doctrinal ideas between Zoroastrianism in its occult and Western esoteric versions as “Zarathustra’s teaching” and the new religions, perhaps we should add publications of other contemporary transnational religious movements such as the *Grail Movement* founded and developed after World War II in Austria by Oskar Ernst Bernhardt (1875–1941). Similarly to anthroposophical and theosophical sources, Bernhardt’s esoteric works also adopted the figure of the prophet “Zara-Tustra” and interpreted Zarathustra’s doctrine in a theosophical light as one of the spiritual masters of mankind.<sup>5</sup> Another arbitrary example, among many, is the *Church Universal and Triumphant* (CUT) founded and originally run by Mark (1918–1973) and Elizabeth Clare Prophet (b. 1939) in the late 1950s and 1960s in the USA, which became a rapidly expanding international New Age organization in the mid-1990s. Zarathustra, in the CUT’s view, is also the highest adept in the hierarchy of the Great White Brotherhood, the keeper of “spiritual and bodily” fire, the head of the Order of Melkhisedek, and master in the education of the soul on its way to further stages of spiritual development. In India, apart from the *Ilm-i Khshnum* movement (Stausberg 2002:118ff), diverse “transreligious” groups such as the “Lovers” of Meher Baba (Stausberg 2002:97) or the cult of Shri Gururani Nagkanya (Yogini) and Shri Jimmy Yogiraj (Keul & Stausberg 2010, also Hinnells 2005:113) originated in the Parsi milieu and then acquired a large number of non-Parsi followers. In my M.A. thesis I tried to present another example of imaginative Zoroastrianism cultivated within post-Soviet astrological Zoroastrian groups in the early 2000s as an example of an indigenous reaction to or interest in esotericism and oriental religions, hence as a sort of New Age movement that originated in the late decades of the Soviet Union (Tessmann 2005:156f). Since the 1990s, through contacts with other Zoroastrian institutional bodies and individuals, these groups have attempted to integrate into the Zoroastrian diaspora.

To summarize, these three models set the framework for post-Soviet and, in the narrow sense, contemporary Russian Zoroastrianism as religious practice. However, they are insufficient for exploring the development of that movement in detail. Generally speaking, the examination of Russian Zoroastrianism might

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<sup>4</sup> The possible connection of the Mazdaznan movement to Russia can be seen in the (self-constructed) biography of the Mazdaznan teacher Ottoman Zar-Adusht Hanish (1844–1936) (Stausberg 2002:392ff) and the works of the Russian émigré Iurii Terapiano (1892–1980) who wrote about Mazdeism from the theosophical perspective (see also Chapter 5). As far I know there are still no studies to the Mazdaznan movement in Russia.

<sup>5</sup> One of the Grail texts was dedicated to Zarathustra: [Abd-Ru-Shin], *Zoroaster: Life and Work of the Forerunner in Persia* (Forerunner Book Series). Stuttgart (?): Grail Foundation Press, 1996.

be described as a case study in the “field of modern and contemporary Zoroastrianism” that still remains “one of the most under-researched areas” in Zoroastrian studies (Stausberg 2008b:587) as well as, perhaps, a “non-ethnic Neo-Zarathushtrianism which has taken global dimensions since the Iranian Revolution” (Stausberg 2008b:587). However, despite the fact that this external, global perspective would certainly highlight the importance of modern technologies, migration processes, and human mobility in the dispersion of Zoroastrian religious knowledge across the world, it would nevertheless neglect the connections between Russian Zoroastrianism and Russian popular culture, Russian society, and its local contexts. While my M.A. thesis situated the Zoroastrian trend amongst the new wave of Russian indigenous NRMs of the 1990s, it did not address the question of change and diversity within post-Soviet Zoroastrianism as it emerged; nor did I analyze this movement in the context of contemporary Russian popular culture. Rather, the main aim was a systematic ethnographical and historical description of two Zoroastrian groups in two post-Soviet states (Tessmann 2005:9). The question “Which ideas and discourses inform Zoroastrianism during the 1990s and the 2000s?” was not on my agenda then and still remains open. The same is true for the following sub-problems, which focus on the diversity and dynamics of various discussions within the movement six years later: “Who are the actors?” “What do they articulate?” “What are the reactions of the cultural environment to that religion?” In my opinion, addressing these problems is possible only when we understand the development of Zoroastrianism in Russia in a new theoretical and methodological light as a total number of discursive communities that negotiate and construct their religion in (partly polemical) interactions with each other and their cultural environment. For this purpose methods of qualitative research that allow a high level of convergence with primary sources are necessary. This is the issue of theoretical discussion in the course of this chapter.

Examining the topic from the point of view of the study of religions, and in particular of the separate field established since the 1990s exploring NRMs and “non-traditional” religiosity in the post-Soviet area (Grigor’eva 1999:99f), may shed light on the adaptation and resistance strategies of a NRM and of non-religious actors in a country where the dominant religious background of the population is (or is at least nominally) Christian Eastern Orthodox.

## 1.2. Aims, scope and delimitations of the study

In the present study I will examine how Russian Zoroastrianism is textually constructed and represented by applying discursive analysis as the method for

examining social discourses, which help us to understand the relationship between language and its embodiment in cultural practices. The study will provide a multifaceted picture of Zoroastrianism developed within various textual genres during the 1990s and 2000s. The topic will be analyzed by means of four textual corpora that will be approached as different fields, or as religious, scholarly, journalistic, and literary meta-discourses. The idea for partially separating these social activities chosen for my study is based on the sociological view that all print sources are produced as part of a given social practice by actors having specific purposes, meaning that they foreground their own specific, professional autonomy. This view is built upon the social theory of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002) who elaborated a theory of fields of cultural production (see Bourdieu 2003), where a social field is a system of certain rules, norms, and positions or, in Bourdieu’s terminology, where an agent is able to apply his/her own habitus, “a practical sense of ‘the game,’ a set of dispositions to act, which is determined by the structure of positions in the field and the particular social trajectory (and history) of that agent” (Chouliaraki & Fairclough 2001:101). Bourdieu distinguished between many social fields such as the artistic, political, scientific, etc. The co-existence of these fields is relational which means that although these fields have their own boundaries, when taken altogether they construct a unity of social life. In this way, Bourdieu’s theory allows for an analysis of socio-internal communication “which brings together agents from various different [sic] fields” (Chouliaraki & Fairclough 2001:100) and describes how “religious and social change is driven both by competition among specialists within the field and by transactions across the boundary of the field” (Engler 2003:449).

My approach results in the following research questions:

- How do these four fields represent Zoroastrianism?
- Which elements of Zoroastrian discourse can be identified in each of these fields?
- What kinds of expression, styles, and genres does the totality of this Zoroastrian discourse incorporate?
- Which patterns of presentation in each field are regular and which are instable and occasional?
- Does any interference exist between these fields and if so—what are they like and how can they be described?

With the help of the abovementioned questions I will try to test the hypotheses that I had at the beginning of my research that should be mentioned here briefly: To begin with, I expected different media to portray different images of

Zoroastrianism. I suspected that many discourses would emerge, in which Zoroastrianism assumed different degrees of significance; that there would be close interrelationships with the ideas accumulated by a specifically religious discourse, called here Russian Zoroastrianism, and with other discourses; that these would enrich, copy, or even ignore each other. During the initial stage of this study it was also unclear to what extent Russian Zoroastrianism itself was a sphere where speech about Zoroastrianism possessed a polysemantic character or whether most adherents came to Zoroastrianism from the esoteric astrological milieu grouped around Pavel Globa (see Tessmann 2005).

Like every study of contemporary religious groups—although intentionally based on textual sources—my study would be unthinkable without communication with people who considered themselves Zoroastrians in the post-Soviet area. The insider and outsider dilemma in the study of religious groups is described by many scholars of religions, including those dealing with Zoroastrianism (e.g. Hinnells 2005:3f), although I agree that this tension is rather a pseudo-problem (Jensen 2011:30). My work on the present thesis was preceded by a long period of sporadic, though continual correspondence with some Russian Zoroastrians since 2001; this communication has continued up until the present. I have made several field trips to Minsk, St. Petersburg, and Moscow, occasionally participating in group meetings and celebrations, taking interviews from a few members, and collecting diverse printed and online materials.<sup>6</sup> In particular, my contacts with some activists of the St. Petersburg Zoroastrian community have been close and friendly. They responded kindly to every wish or every written request on my part to be kept up to date concerning the community's affairs or to acquire literature. My field studies were met by a corresponding interest among the Russian Zoroastrians in my research, so that I was repeatedly interviewed whenever I came to visit the St. Petersburg Zoroastrian community. These interviews were published in *Mitra* magazine and later posted to three websites maintained by the St. Petersburg Zoroastrians.<sup>7</sup> I was asked many times to publish my own contributions in

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<sup>6</sup> Some results from my first research trips at the beginning of the 2000s, financed by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft within the project Zoroastrian Rituals in Changing Cultural Contexts (2001–2004), are documented in a brief sub-chapter of Michael Stausberg's second volume of *Religion of Zarathushtra: History-Present-Rituals* (Die Religion Zarathushtras: Geschichte-Gegenwart-Rituale) (Stausberg 2002:332–334) and are included in my unpublished master's thesis *Astrozoroastrianism in Modern Russia and Belarus* (Astrozoroastrismus in modernen Russland und Belarus) (Tessmann 2005).

<sup>7</sup> I counted three of my texts and two of my photographs in different issues of *Mitra*. All texts, with only one exception, were published without any approval and further usual formalities on my part. Of course, I would have wished to have been notified and asked in advance. However, I have learned that this style of communication is the natural one for my respondents. So I made no attempts to change it. See for instance, *Religion* 2002: 72–77.



*Mitra*, although I considered this unnecessary and declined. In contrast to my relationship with the St. Petersburg community, I have not had similar longstanding contacts with the *Russian Anjoman* that launched a new Zoroastrian community in 2005.

For the present study on Zoroastrianism in Russia, another theoretical angle was also adopted. The thesis draws for the most part on large quantities of published texts. Other empirical sources such as observations and interviews, and also different kinds of visual and audio sources such as film, art, music, etc, were taken into account mostly as background information. Such limitations are justified for two reasons: on the one hand, the reception and interpretation of texts remains crucial to the shaping of individual or collective identities and discourses, while on the other hand, text-oriented methods and the genre of the dissertation itself set strict space limitations on the collection and presentation of source materials.

### 1.3. Outline of the thesis

The remainder of this introductory chapter will outline the historical background and theoretical implications of this study. I will present the results of my content and discourse analysis of the four discursive constructions. Chapter 2 discusses the parameters of Zoroastrianism as articulated by practitioners and other religious specialists, based on print publications (books and periodicals) and multi-media texts on the Russian language Internet (RuNet). Apart from numerous published materials by the leader of astrological Zoroastrian groups Pavel Globa, I will also analyze the Zoroastrian magazine *Mitra* (Митра, 1997–) produced by the Zoroastrian community of St. Petersburg and texts from the website of the *Russian Anjoman* (Русский Анджоман, 2007–). In addition, I will draw on their Internet presence such as homepages, forums, and blogs. While Chapter 3 analyzes scholarly production (books, journal articles), Chapter 4 focuses on interviews and publications from Russian newspapers collected from RuNet. Chapter 5 addresses Zoroastrian motifs in contemporary fiction. Whereas the discussion in Chapter 2 is situated at the primary level of “construction of social reality,” Chapters 3, 4, and 5 deal with Zoroastrianism above all at the level of discussion “about the movement,” which means it has been constructed from the perspective of agents that are not involved in religious practices (Barker 1995:288).<sup>8</sup> These three latter chapters

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<sup>8</sup> Here one can make the distinction between emic and etic levels of perception or points of view, terms which are characteristic since the 1970s within psychological and anthropological research.

intensify the level of analysis for the structure of Zoroastrian discourse because they sometimes refer to, try to be uncritical to, or even identical to constructions of Zoroastrianism by believers. Subsequently, Chapter 6 will present my findings in a comparative light and contextualize them in a discussion on methods used in the study of religions.

## 1.4. Sources and selection procedure

Ideally, textual research dealing with discourses quantitatively should take into account all print sources available, in a process or method comparable to the creation of mega-corpora used in linguistics (e.g. Stede 2007, Kratochvílová 2010). Perhaps the accumulation of such corpora relating to certain themes, also necessary for qualitative investigations into religions in modernity, is a task for the future. Whereas I have tried to collect as many texts as possible on Zoroastrianism, a comprehensive elicitation in my study is not feasible. Hence, in search of answers to my research questions, I have decided to identify an adequate sample and for that purpose I have consciously selected texts that in my opinion would present the whole spectrum of Zoroastrianism in Russia from the idiosyncratic to the particular.

The two first categories of texts have been relatively easy to deal with: almost all sources to be analyzed were obtained through direct contacts with practitioners, who generously shared them with me, or through straightforward bibliographical research common to scholarly discourse. The only way to find sources for the other two chapters has been a lengthily, multi-staged, and sometimes even intuitive search for keywords on RuNet. However, in the case of mass media I could have used the vast digital databases owned by some Russian media companies for a fee, but this has not been possible for a doctoral thesis such as mine.<sup>9</sup>

The textual sources for Chapters 2, 3, 4, and 5 are listed in the Appendix.

## 1.5. Notes on transliteration

In some cases, in order to cite the original Russian material, I will provide the translation of Russian terms with the originals in Cyrillic. In my text, all titles of

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<sup>9</sup> I am very indebted to Mikhail Bezrodnyĭ for the reference to a special Russian mass media data base *Integrum World Wide* that makes possible other quantitative and qualitative designs of scholarly research.

primary and secondary sources such as journals and books appear in translated, italicized English, with their Russian, German, and Persian original titles in Cyrillic and Latin in parentheses. Names of cities, states, and individuals familiar to international English readership are not transliterated and used according to the Oxford Russian-English dictionary. All others are reproduced according to the Library of Congress transliteration system. The titles of periodicals within this study appear in transliterated Russian with their English translations in parentheses.

In the context of this study, I mean by Russia the territory of the Russian Federation when referring to recent history. When I use Russia as a retrospective geopolitical term, it implies a broader understanding such as the Soviet Union and even earlier, the Russian Empire.

One of the terminological problems in all studies on Russia is the distinction between the words *русский* and *российский*, both of which may be translated into English as Russian. The former refers to the ethnic group and, at the same time, is used as a cultural marker e.g. Russian language, culture, politics, and RuNet as well. The second adjective is rather a civic designation that has been officially used since the 1990s and does not distinguish between ethnic differences. Hence, the inhabitants of modern Russia are not only ethnic Russians but also other Rossiane (*россияне*), the people of various other ethnicities living in that territory. It is not easy to mark this difference in the course of the text. However, I try to express it precisely when referring to Russian as an ethnonym; in all other cases, I mean Russian in the civic sense of this term.

Middle Asia refers in this thesis to the region defined according to the terminology of Soviet geography; it includes the five former Soviet Middle Asian republics inhabited by the Turkic and Iranian peoples: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, whereas the term Central Asia additionally includes some historically, culturally, and linguistically coherent regions surrounding the contemporary Islamic Republic of Iran.

Zoroastrian names and terms i.e. their Avestan, Old, Middle, and New Persian etymology, are given in my study according to the materials and diacritics published in *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (1982–), the most reliable source for the religious, political, social, and cultural history of the Iranian peoples. Since 2009 it is available online ([www.iranicaonline.org](http://www.iranicaonline.org)).

All translations from Russian and German into English are my own unless otherwise noted.

## 1.6. Religion in Russia in the 1990s and 2000s

The textual materials studied in this thesis were produced in the two decades following the disintegration of the Soviet Union, i.e. during the time of the “Great Transformation” of a large area of Eurasia (Ramet 2010:3). In 1991 the Soviet Union officially disintegrated into fifteen autonomous states. The collapse was preceded by a crisis in the Soviet empire dating back to the 1970s due to many internal and external political and economic factors, such as gradual economic decline, crisis in the Communist government and its ideology, and the “fiasco of Soviet foreign policy” (Trenin 2005:86ff). The events after 1989 had irreversible consequences for the former Soviet republics, including a precarious economic crisis and dramatic discontent in various societies of the post-Soviet area. Individually, many people experienced the post-Soviet period as a time of hardship, “[a] strange and discomfoting temporality” (Prozorov 2008:210), and on a collective level as extremely traumatic (Sztompka 2004:155ff). 1991 was also formally the year of the new beginning of the Russian state (Mommsen & Nußberger 2007:9). While the early 1990s were “revolutionary and chaotic” in many senses, the late 1990s marked the consolidation of the new regime under the first Russian president Boris Yeltsin (1991–1999), who was concerned with the transition from a centrally planned economy to a free market economy and liberal economic reforms (Mommsen & Nußberger 2007:23). The results of reforms for the majority of the Russian population were catastrophic and brought poverty, growth in social inequality, and the moral deterioration of the inhabitants (Kääriäinen & Furman 2007:31). From the start of the 2000s the situation in Russia can be characterized, politically and economically, in terms of a series of stabilizing processes under the presidencies of Vladimir Putin (2000–2008, 2012–) and Dmitry Medvedev (2008–2012). For the majority of Russians, Putin’s presidency symbolized “the end of ‘time of troubles’” (Kääriäinen & Furman 2007:36). However, both Western and Russian political scientists highlighted the fact that such stabilization was made possible by the conscious rejection of democratic values in favour of an autocratic regime, referred to in some academic literature as a “defective” or “planned” democracy (Mommsen & Nußberger 2007:26f,33).

Due to Russian society’s controversial relationship with religion, the demise of the Soviet Union marked the end of the official promotion of atheism and the sporadic anti-religious campaigns of the Soviet era (Newton 1988:87ff).<sup>10</sup> In the

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<sup>10</sup> The view of political change and religion in the Soviet Union requires a more accurate and differentiated approach, incorporating the idea of complexity and original cultural diversity of the vast range of peoples united politically during that time. It has been argued many times, that Soviet political and economic policies led to attempts to build a dominant, Soviet “goal culture” (Johnson 1970:25), which in spite of its strong orientation towards the Communist

1990s, religious initiatives began to develop from below without being suppressed and went hand in hand with attempts to adapt to Western democratic values. Legislative changes were also taking place. The increasing public activity of some previously suppressed subcultures, active since the 1960s and 1970s, in particular traditionalist Orthodox and esoteric underground movements (Pazuchin 1991:158f), together with the increasing interest of foreign missionaries, resulted in a distinctly diversified religious scenario.

For the study of religions and other humanities concerned with religion, the two post-Soviet decades have been crucial for exploring the question as to whether religion in the post-socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe lost its social or individual meaning after the period of state atheism (Barker 2000, Tomka 2010). Published studies narrowly focused on various East European countries have shown that generalizations can be rather problematic: although there are sometimes similar tendencies (such as the increasing importance of religion in the life of modern post-communist societies or, simultaneously, a lower level of church attendance) there is no homogeneity at all. It also needs to be remembered that, before the establishment of the socialist political regimes, the region had incorporated heterogeneous religious landscapes that remained throughout the time of the official suppression of religion(s). Thus, one of the strongest features to emerge indicating strong cultural diversity is the rough division between the culturally shaped and politically active “mainstream” Churches of either Western (Catholicism and Protestantism) or Eastern (Orthodox) Christianity. Moreover, the latest attempts to measure changes in the history of religion as some kind of fundamental transformation that is distinct from those in Western countries, have proved in retrospect to be rather unsuccessful. Furthermore, we still have to date only a fragmentary understanding of the actual degree of atheization in the socialist period, one not based on solid empirical data. Some scholars argue that atheistic views were also typical of historical periods before the hegemony of political-ideological doctrines in socialist countries. This suggests not only a reduction in the direct impact of socialist ideology but also confirms the secular model of the common decline of established, institutional religions in Western Europe, which can be applied in turn to Central and East European societies. For instance, the basis of contemporary atheism in the extremely “non-believing” Czech Republic stretches back to the appearance of nationalistic currents and “secularist attitudes” in the 19th and at the beginning of the 20th centuries (Hamplová &

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utopia was unable to control the presence of other cultural voices. Thus, as generally understood, the ‘atheization of people’ was based on the local alternatives of diverse peoples, who did not necessarily share the ideological goals of the Soviet government and were driven by other, mostly ethnic or religious traditions.

Nespor 2009:595). Russian scholars also claim that cyclical processes of secularization began with the Europeanization of Russia as early as in the 18th century (Sinolina 2002:224; Plotnikov 2007:327). This means that the 1990s, with their sudden visibility of traditional forms of religion, according to the popular journalistic and also scholarly metaphor of a “revival of religion” (e.g. Greeley 1994:253ff) or a “spiritual vacuum” after communism (e.g. Lewis 2000:177), were akin to other historical periods when a shift of cultures also occurred. Such shifts generate mass interest in religion although most people remain religiously indifferent, living within the “non-religious cultural tradition” (Sinolina 2002:226f). The “radical transformation” of the early post-Soviet period also caused a transient “splash of religiosity,” which tried to compensate for the personal insecurity of the people arising from the social catastrophe (Dubov 2001:84). Generally speaking, contemporary religious life in Russia and the former communist countries recalls processes of the “de-institutionalization of religion, the subjectivization of religious choice, the growth of ‘bricolage’ (or do-it-yourself religion), and the individualization of religion” (Borowik 2007:665), a religious situation that very much resembled that of Western European countries.

Spheres of scholarly interest in relation to Russia have been: the problems of legislation (Mitrokhin L 2000; Shterin 2007a; Richardson & Krylova & Shterin 2004), secularization (Plaggenborg 1997; Sinolina 2002; Plotnikov 2007), comparison with other Western and Eastern European countries (Pollack 2003; Pickel 2007), atheism and “new” religiosity at both state and regional levels (Furman 1997; Kääriäinen 1999; Krindatch 2004), interactions between the Russian state and the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) (Mitrokhin N 2006), religious education (Glanzer & Petrenko 2007; Kozyrev 2008), esotericism or heterodox knowledge (Rosenthal 1997; DeNio Stephens 1997; Menzel 2007b; Belyaev 2008, 2010), NRMs (Grigor’eva 1994, 1999, 2002; Balagushkin 2002; Shterin 2001, 2004, 2007b; Panchenko 2004) and links to the later anti-cultist movement (Mitrokhin L 2000; Shterin & Richardson 2000).

Institutional changes in the religious sphere in Russia were initiated by new laws that acknowledged the official status of religious organizations and regulated their relations. While earlier versions of the law *On Freedom of Worship* (1990) granted free mission and equal juridical rights to every religion in the Russian Federation, the later version (the 1997 law and further supplements) promoted policies of “managed historical pluralism” (to reword Nikolas N. Gvosdev’s concept) (Glanzer & Petrenko 2007:54), characteristic of the political state since Putin’s presidency. Whereas pluralism was evaluated favorably, the actual number of legally recognized religious organizations was gradually reduced. This has had a twofold impact on the Russian Orthodox Patriarchate in its confrontation with the active proselytizing of foreign religious

organizations perceived as rivals, and the wish to become “a moral and patriotic standard of Russian life” (Basil 2005:153). This restrictive tendency in the legislation from the mid-1990s, also in the Russian regions, resulted in the passing of the law *On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations* (1997), which has been widely discussed in Russian and Western scholarly literature (Shterin 2007a:201ff, Shterin & Richardson 2000:249, Richardson & Shterin 2008:258f, Lewis 2000:235ff). According to this law, acquiring the status of a juridical organization requires “confirmation, provided by a local administration, of its existence in the given territory for a period of no fewer than fifteen years, or confirmation of its membership in the structure of a centralized religious organization of the same religious confession, provided by said organization” (cited by Richardson & Shterin 2008:258). In addition, the law recognized the historical importance of major “traditional” religions, above all the Russian Orthodox Church, and three others: Islam, Buddhism, and Judaism. In the meantime, this was regarded as a “compromise” after anti-cult debates and a number of regional anti-mission laws were passed (Shterin 2007a:197ff). Some scholars viewed the law of 1997 positively by arguing that the registration launched a new phase in the relationship between the state and religious groups, which was characterized by “civil peace among religious communities” (Balagushkin 1999:229), but most studies on small groups witnessed catastrophic economic and political disadvantages for so-called “non-traditional” religions as a result of the law (Shterin 2007a:203).

Russian sociologists, in cooperation with Finnish scholars, have documented changes in religious and social values in post-Soviet Russia based on six surveys conducted in 1991, 1993, 1996, 1999, 2002, and 2005 (Kääriäinen & Furman 2007, see also Daniel 2007). These studies have shown that Russian society went through great structural transformations in an extremely short period of time. In sum, since 1991 Russian interest in religion has increased markedly. In contrast to the previous statistics compiled by Soviet sociologists, which depicted the total domination of the atheistic worldview at the beginning of perestroika, from the mid-1980s until 1991, public opinion polls conducted immediately after the disintegration of the Soviet Union identified a rapid rejection of Communist values, such as atheism, materialism, collectivism, and a strong growth in attraction towards religion. In the opinion of these scholars, this abrupt change in behavior (from atheism to a religious pattern) occurred in two groups of the population: the young and the elderly. They explained that the first group (“the children of perestroika”) sought in religion a rebellious counterpart to everything associated with the past, whereas elderly groups comprised people who had already been committed believers during the Soviet era. Dmitriï Furman found that despite immense interest in Christianity, there was also a

boom in eclectic, informal forms of religious activity, above all astrology, mysticism, and belief in UFOs. One of the most important findings was that the majority of the population were so-called “vacillating” people who had no clear position concerning religion. Sociological studies have indicated a low level of practice among institutionalized religions, including Russian Orthodox Christianity. Further attempts at typologizing the religiosity of the Russian population have confirmed the initial picture, by claiming that Russia shows similar results to Western and Central European countries, where so-called “traditional” believers constitute a minority (Belyaev 2008:200ff). Meanwhile, studies on the religiosity of the younger generation of Russians in the 2000s revealed that the privatization of belief, lack of conventionality, and eclectics were its principal features (Turunen 2005:200f).

According to Kääriäinen and Furman (2007:20), commitment to religion and particularly to the ROC, reached its peak during the revolutionary years (1991–1992) after which the growth in the attraction to religion began to wane. Towards the end of the 1990s it stopped altogether without reaching the level of “mass religiosity.” In 2005, 79% of the Russian population expressed their adherence to the ROC (Kääriäinen & Furman 2007:43). However, perhaps the most striking finding has been that only a few of the declared adherents identified themselves as religious believers (Kääriäinen & Furman 2007:43,46f); even fewer (about 11%) stated that they go to church once a month (Kääriäinen & Furman 2007:55). Since that time, Russian sociologists have observed the formation of two stable groups of believers and non-believers. Simultaneously, Kääriäinen and Furman discovered the growing power of the Russian Orthodox Church in Russian society as a whole (Kääriäinen & Furman 2007:38ff). In the 2000s, the ROC began to play an important role in Putin’s (and later Medvedev’s) politics by assuming the ideological mission of creating a new national identity and new national idea (Scherrer 2004:37f). On this point the diverse scholars evaluating the developments of the 2000s disagree: some confirm that there was a “pro-Orthodox consensus” established within Russian society overall (Kääriäinen & Furman 2007:20ff, Arinin 2010), where Russianness is associated with being Orthodox; others observe that the image of the ROC in the “mass consciousness” is still highly contradictory and that the ROC cannot serve as the basic religion for all ethnic Russians, not to mention the Rossiane. Furthermore, belonging to the ROC does not imply only Russian ethnicity, because Orthodox Christianity develops universal teachings that have already been adapted by people of different ethnic origins. As a result of this inconsistent picture in the minds of people, the majority do not experience any genuine attachment to Orthodox Christianity in terms of its content, and tend



to receive it through a “folk, partly pagan culture that easily absorbs the amorphous, astrological-occult common idea of spirituality and the gastronomic as well as ritual aspects of Orthodox Christianity” (Lunkin 2010:66). Perhaps the image of three more or less confessed Orthodox presidents (Yeltsin, Putin and Medvedev) adds a certain prestige to the Russian Orthodox Church among the Russian ethnic population, but geopolitical notions—due to the Russian Federation being a polyethnic and multi-religious land—have compelled them to be cautious about making statements that postulate the superiority of the ROC and hence, of ethnic Russians (Basil 2005:158,160). Generally speaking, the public (“demonstrative”) religious image of politicians (also in the case of some Muslim representatives) continues to have negative connotations (Dubov 2001:92). The scholarly prognoses of a closer political alliance between the Russian state and the ROC over a longer period are rather unrealistic (Kääriäinen & Furman 2007:87). The failure of the “Orthodox Christian state” model for Russia has been ascribed above all to the inability of the ROC to tolerate other religions and hence the absence of civil religion which is necessary for democratic societies (Balagushkin 1999:234ff). Above all, Russian Orthodoxy is a highly conservative institution and needs internal reforms (such as the introduction of church services in modern Russian) that have also been emphasized by believers themselves (Knox 2005:91ff). According to opinion polls in 2001, the idea of an Orthodox clerical state was supported by just 5% of Orthodox people (Mchedlov et al. 2002:17). Also the ethnic heterogeneity of Russian society is one of the principle reasons why it appears to be impossible to consolidate all peoples under the banner of Orthodox Christian faith as the state religion. Clearly, the present-day policy in Russia reproduces the “religio-national symbiosis” of the previous Soviet policy of “functional ambivalence” (Ramet 1987:53f), where the connection between religious and national identities has been handed down by the simultaneous disapproval of that relation.

However, Orthodox Christianity is not and never has been the only religion in Russia, and Russia has never been homogeneously Orthodox either (Plaggenborg 1997:289). Since the 1990s, certain descriptive sociological field studies have portrayed extreme religious diversity and diffusion as being the principal features of the Russian religious landscape (Mchedlov et al. 2002; Filatov 2002; Bourdeaux & Filatov 2004). According to the law of 1997, Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism belong to the major “indigenous” (традиционные) religions of Russia. Islam and Buddhism have great regional significance, unlike the ROC. Thus, statistically, Islam the former has a predominant position in six administrative provinces. Islam is also culturally and ethnically diverse; if we

look at Islam as an ethnic marker, Muslims “constitute between 12 and 17 million people, or between 8 and 12 percent of the population. They constitute the majority in seven of Russia’s ‘autonomous republics’” (Shterin 2004:87). According to sociological surveys (which, however, do not distinguish between self-ascription and actual membership), there are estimated to be between 600,000 and 1.2 million Muslim believers (Krindatch 2004:123). Islam is represented by different Muslim groups, although the majority of them are Sunnis. Apart from this, in the Chechen Republic, Dagestan, and Ingushetia there are two Sufi orders (Naqshbandiyya and Kādiriyya) (Krindatch 2004:123). Buddhism continues to be practiced in its three “traditional” regions: Tuva, Buryatiya and Khakassia (Fagan 2001:10). During the late 1980s and early 1990s Buddhist centers began to be rebuilt in the cities throughout these special areas as well as elsewhere in Russia, while the number of adherents at the beginning of the 2000s amounted to about 120 centers, including both old monasteries of the Gelug(pa) school in Siberia and plenty of other imported schools and groups representing three major directions (Hīnayāna, Māhayāna and Vajrayāna) (Zhukovskaia 2001:29,44). Roman Catholicism had occupied an important place among Russian elites during the previous two centuries, and in spite of confrontations with the Russian Orthodox Church, it remains “a natural, spontaneous attraction” for modern Russians (Filatov & Vorontsova 2000:82). In the Eastern and Far Eastern territories, one can observe the active missions of Protestant religious organizations that compete successfully even with the ROC (Krindatch 2004:131ff). The general atmosphere of these inter-confessional relations is evaluated as tolerant.

After the fall of the Soviet Union esoteric currents, which had previously existed in the underground, became more visible. According to some scholars, recent forms of Russian esotericism are rooted in previous epochs (e.g. Rosenthal 1997; Carlson 1997; von Maydell 1997; Bogomolov 2000; Menzel 2007b; Belyaev 2008, 2010). In particular, certain traditional tendencies, such as magic and astrology, can be traced back to a remote past (Ryan 1997). However, they may also be connected to similar later developments in Western countries (such as occultism and spiritualism) as well as in the East (for instance, Indian mysticism). One of the principal characteristics of the esotericism of the post-Soviet era is its change from an elitist to a mass movement: with the translation and distribution of Western New Age literature and reprints of pre-revolutionary banned books, it has reached the masses. According to Holly DeNio Stephens (1997:359), in the late 1990s, “[m]en and women across the economic spectrum and of all professions (including those in government positions and scholars in the hard sciences) are active in occult groups and sects, organized and informal; curiosity about the occult pervades all elements of society.”

One of the hot topics in the study of religions in Russia are NRMs or new religions (Buriakovskii 1991; Kanterov 2001; Balagushkin 1999; 2002, Grigor'eva 1994 1999, 2002; Shterin 2007b, 2001, 2004). Scholars, in particular sociologists of religion, have conducted many studies on the statistics, dynamics, and typology of NRMs, including indigenous Russian groups. The contemporary "foreign" NRMs in Russia, which means those currents whose practices have been imported, are rooted in three decisive historical periods and were imported from the USA and Europe. They comprise the majority of the contemporary Russian NRMs. Religious organizations such as the *Hare Krishna* movement or *Jehovah's Witnesses* already appeared during the Soviet era (Antic 1993:252ff). Since the 1990s, the most rapidly expanding NRMs are the Christian groups such as the Presbyterians, the Methodists, the *New Apostolic Church*, and the *Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (in total 351 registered communities).

The establishment of a Russian cultic milieu as part of the urban scene of the late Soviet era coincided with, or has been an expression of the "period of crisis of the Soviet system," e.g. the time of preparation for the appearance of NRMs in Russia began in the early 1970s (Shterin 2001:40f). The diffusion of NRMs had been obvious to everyone since the late 1980s (Balagushkin 1999:15). The 1990s were the years when, apart from the resurgence of major "traditional" religions and missions by foreign innovators, certain indigenous NRMs began their activity (Filatov 1999; Balagushkin 2002; Grigor'eva 1999; 2002; Shterin 2001b; Bourdeaux and Filatov 2004). The largest among them were the *Great White Brotherhood (Jusmalos)*, the *Mother of God Centre*, and the *Last Testament Church (Vissarion)*. According to some studies, the total number of "full" members of the "new" NRMs in Russia never exceeded about 40,000, i.e. 0.03% of the Russian population (Shterin 2001:143f). The total figure of all "new" and "old" NRMs including charismatic churches is allegedly no higher than 300,000 (about 0.2% of the population) (Shterin 2007b:160). In the 2000s, the indigenous NRMs did not necessarily remain a local phenomenon; their development also showed tendencies towards transnational dissemination, particularly towards Western Europe (Shterin 2007b:158; Rademacher 2003:588f).

As in the USA and Western European countries the establishment of these small groups was soon accompanied by xenophobic tendencies among the established Christian Orthodox organizations, and there was an organized campaign by a ROC-inspired Russian counter-cult movement fighting against NRMs and inspired by similar organizations in Western countries such as the USA and Germany (Shterin & Richardson 2000:257ff). The situation had become especially strained by the mid-1990s. In a national survey conducted in 1997, the statements of the respondents indicated some hostility towards new religious groups: they fully acknowledged the general principle of freedom of

personal choice of belief (96%), but disagreed that every religious organization should have equal juridical status (40%) (Krindatsch 2004:135). However, with further restrictions introduced by laws of religion in the 2000s, the anti-cultist lobby lost its strong original agenda.

During the post-Soviet era there have also been attempts to initiate religious education (mostly Christian), considered to be quite different from how it is practiced in Western democracies: “Overall, the church-state developments in this period have not followed any consistent pattern in state or private education or in higher or lower education” (Glanzer & Petrenko 2007:57). The discussion throughout the 2000s about the introduction of the obligatory course *The Basics of Orthodox Culture* into state schools, suggested by the Moscow Patriarchate, has been the most controversial educational theme in the Russian media. Although the law On Education passed in 1992 stressed the secular character of the primary and secondary educational levels in state schools, the Ministry of Education has promoted the idea since 2002 of “integration of the non-confessional religious subject, ‘Orthodox culture,’ into the curricula of state schools, which did not produce the desired results in the majority of Russia’s regions” (Kozyrev 2008:279). This was the case in the few central regions which introduced *The Basics of Orthodox Culture*, either as a voluntary or as a compulsory subject. In 2010, however, after much criticism on the part of other religious authorities and scholars, the ROC and the three other “traditional religions” mentioned in the 1997 law (Islam, Buddhism, and Judaism) were nevertheless granted by the Russian government and president Medvedev the right to teach their religions to the fourth and fifth grades at the national level, i.e. in the 19 regions of the Russian Federation. For all other students, who did not belong to these religious denominations, a course in secular ethics became the alternative option.

This general picture of the contemporary religious scene in Russia is necessary for understanding the subject of my study. As the next step, I will give a broad outline of the history of Zoroastrian groups in Russia that will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2. Broadly speaking, because of the relatively small representation of their communities on the recent Russian religious landscape, Zoroastrian groups or individuals seem to be somehow peripheral to the major public discourses on religion e.g. on Russian Orthodox Christianity and Islam. Irrespective of this, Zoroastrianism shares many features with other religious innovations in Russia that became visible in the 1990s.<sup>11</sup> I believe the

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<sup>11</sup> My interest in Zoroastrianism arose during my study of history of religions at the State University of St. Petersburg in the mid-1990s. Yet despite the great commitment to the history of ancient forms of Zoroastrianism and Iranian languages, I must admit that I could find only a few sources that shed light on modern Zoroastrianism and its “surviving” believers. In addition, contact with Zoroastrians in other countries was not possible for me, chiefly due to

development of Zoroastrian religious discourse in Russia can be divided into four main phases: (1) the formation of astrological Zoroastrian groups in the 1980s and early 1990s; (2) the consolidation and establishment of the St. Petersburg Zoroastrian community in 1994; (3) the appearance of alternative Zoroastrian religious discourses during the mid-2000s (4) and the period of maintenance until the present. In the following I will give a brief characterization of each of these developments.

(1) Similar to the indigenous NRMs, the groups interested in Zoroastrianism have their prehistory within the holistic, esoteric, or cultic milieus of the late Soviet Union of the 1970s and 1980s (Shterin 2001:116). From an analysis of biographies of “old” Russian Zoroastrians, it becomes clear that they were not only attracted to Zoroastrianism but were also inspired by many other religious and esoteric topics (Tessmann 2005:99ff). Zarathus(h)tra as a topos of many occult teachings played an important role in this. Many came into contact with Zoroastrianism through the astrological courses of Pavel Globa (b. 1953), where some Zoroastrian feasts such as Nouruz, the New Year feast, were celebrated above all. Another important factor was the intensive reception of Nietzsche’s works in the circles of Soviet intellectuals that put the name and image of Zarathustra into wider circulation. Some traces of that influential line of reception may still be found within diverse nationalist-patriotic ideologies since the 1970s.

(2) Most adherents I met at the beginning of the 2000s said that they entered the community in the early 1990s due to their interest in astrology (Tessmann 2005:119). That period coincided with Globa’s public activity on TV and his open-stage lectures throughout the post-Soviet area. With the registration of the St. Petersburg and Moscow Zoroastrian communities in the mid-1990s (1994 and 1995 correspondingly), publishing activities were also established—a small community newsletter and the magazine *Mitra* appeared. Apart from periodicals, there have also been translations published of liturgical texts from Avestan or English into Russian.

(3) Through the introduction of initiation rituals by a few representatives of the foreign Zoroastrian clergy (both mōbeds and mōbedyārs) in the 2000s and the establishment of the *Russian Anjoman* in Moscow, Zoroastrian discourse received new impulses and became more diverse.

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the “time of economic troubles” and also recent Russian history, which was also, as for many friends and relatives, a part of my reality. Besides, according to a commonly accepted scholarly view there, new religions were not put on the agenda of serious academic research. They have been not accepted as “true.” Now, at the beginning of the 2010s, that position seems to be one of the oddities of the past: modern religiosity has gradually moved to the forefront of scholarly research in Western as well as Eastern European countries (see also Chapter 3).

(4) After some tensions between the two currents—the astrological Zoroastrian and the new, “convert Zoroastrianism”—there came a period of stabilization and in a way, of compromise, when the “newness” of Zoroastrianism enacted itself by rethinking and reinterpreting established doctrines and rituals of ethnic Zoroastrianism. This might be compared, with its many local peculiarities, to how it is perceived at present in India and Iran.<sup>12</sup>

The aforementioned developments in the religious field form only part of the discourses on Zoroastrianism in Russia. If one observes them from the perspective of long historical sequences, the particular discourses on Zoroastrianism found in other fields, such as science, mass media, art, and politics, have other origins and historical continuities (stretching back a long way before the 1990s). Therefore these discourses will be partly reconstructed within the framework of my study.

## 1.7. Theoretical background: discourses and vertical transfers

This study on Zoroastrianism in Russia relies theoretically on the discursive and communicative approaches to religion that have been developed on the basis of interpretative content analysis since the 1980s. In addition to this, the study is inspired by the hypothesis of cultural transfers and especially exchanges between religious and other social spheres. In the following sub-chapter I will discuss the theoretical premises of my points of departure. Finally, I will focus on the framework of discourse analysis that I have applied to this study.

In the humanities the term “discourse” has been present and actively used for a long time (Ruoff 2009:92). In the humanities and social sciences it became better known in recent decades, partly as a result of the reception of Michel Foucault’s structuralist-discursive works (Keller 2007:16; Otterbeck 2010:155). Including Foucault’s usage, the term “discourse” has immediate connection to the complexity of understanding what it is. Thus, many different scholarly constructions have developed their own ideas about the use of discourse in interpreting reality. There are roughly six historically developed discourse

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<sup>12</sup> As indicated earlier, the answer as to whether Russian Zoroastrians are recognized by “orthodox” Zoroastrians, despite the broad polemics in mass media, becomes more obscured with the passing of time and thus makes the distinction between “established” and “non-established” Zoroastrianism thin. The change in the strongly negative positions of “orthodox” Parsis and Iranian Zoroastrians towards the mission among other ethnicities could be observed even during the recent visits of Zoroastrian priests to Russia or of some Russian Zoroastrians to Iran and India, to places where such interests have been tolerated (see Chapter 2).

traditions, or “styles” of research within the social sciences (Wetherell & Taylor & Yates 2006:382). Two definitions upon which my own understanding of discourse is based closely are: (1) linguistic or socio-linguistic constructionist theories, which see a discourse as a “language in use” or “as a particular way of talking about and understanding the world (or an aspect of the world)” (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002:1), and (2) sociological research that explains discourse as a set of “communicative processes of maintenance and change of societally relevant themes and forms” (Knoblauch 2001:207).

The discursive approach to religion, though it is gradually becoming more popular, seems to be rarely used and has still not established itself among students of religion in spite of the arbitrary and theoretically unreflected appearance of the term “discourse” in some works in the study of religions since the 1970s (Engler 2006:516). In general, it remains one of the desiderata of historical discursive research at all (Landwehr 2008:162). In the following, I will briefly mention some, in my view, well-founded contributions to that field. One of the first scholars of religion to focus on a discursive understanding of the nature of religious doctrines and practices arising within religious groups was the American sociologist Robert Wuthnow (b. 1946). In his work *Communities of Discourse: Ideology and Social Structure in the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and European Socialism* (1989), Wuthnow examined three periods in the history of European civilization, during which ideological (and also religious-political) battles could be shown to be products of crucial changes in political, economic, and social life. Wuthnow formulated discourse in its simple form as speech acts which articulate social positions (Keller 2007:41). He argued that discourses are constructed through speech interactions between social actors who constitute “communities of discourse.” In Wuthnow’s view, these communities are therefore necessary for the existence of discourse. He described them as “communities of competing producers, of interpreters and critics, of audiences and consumers, and of patrons and other significant actors who become the subjects of discourse itself” (Wuthnow 1989:16). According to Wuthnow (1989:ibid), discourse is a sum of different sorts of cultural production, namely “the written as well as the verbal, the formal as well as the informal, the gestural or ritual as well as the conceptual.” However, he insists that the central theoretical task of historical studies is the contextualization of a discourse—or its “close articulation.” Such contextualization allows the scholar to analyze the connections between a social movement (“temporally associated form of ideology”) and its cultural contexts (Wuthnow 1989:9). Therefore, the researcher has to analyze and interpret the mutual processes between ideology and contexts. These processes can be described through three modes: production, selection, and institutionalization (Wuthnow 1989:10). Wuthnow’s approach

aimed to highlight the different points of view and, more importantly, to understand how these positions were constructed. In another work, an article on religious discourse in the public arena in the USA, Wuthnow shows how the discursive understanding of religion may be applied to contemporary religious debates. Wuthnow demonstrates the possibility of analyzing two sermons with the help of literary criticism. The simple framework consisting of the “examination of distinctions and connections, contrasts and parallels” (Wuthnow 1988:336) helps to reveal the building elements of religious discourse and thus to see the conflicting qualities (in this case, the conservative and reformist) of religious messages. He stated that such analyzes are needed because “[r]eligious discourse in the public arena is not simple talk about the gods in an otherwise secular context. It is use of a certain rhetorical style, a style that conforms to certain rules of underlying structure, but that communicates only to the extent that this structure is appropriate for the application in question” (Wuthnow 1988:ibid).

Parallel to the idea of religious discursive communities and their particular public rhetoric, another scholarly trend appeared in the 1980s in Germany, namely the discursive study of religion (*diskursive Religionswissenschaft*) (von Stuckrad 2003a:266). As part of the unfolding polemics about the meta-theoretical preconditions for the study of religions, Hans G. Kippenberg (b. 1939), a scholar of religion, insisted on the necessity of a dialogue with other humanities. Yet the extensive subtitle of Kippenberg’s programmatic article pointed to two statements as being crucial to the debate surrounding the revitalization of the study of religions: (1) the refusal of a universally applicable definition of religion as an object of scholarly study, and (2) the epistemic superiority of the scholarly description over the religious. In the latter case science and religion should exemplify only interpretative alternatives. In general terms, he explained the history of religions as a “continuous practical discourse on the interpretation” of the “inner nature” of the individual (Kippenberg 1983:16). Analyzing classical theories of the discipline, usually distinguishing between religious acting and religious ideas, Kippenberg suggested another view that was inspired by Austin’s theory of speech acts (Kippenberg 1983:21f). Hence statements about religion are to be expressed as illocutions, which means that religious ideas play different roles depending upon their societal situation. Together with Clifford Geertz, Kippenberg argued that a scholar of religion should be first of all an observer who, instead of searching for conclusive definitions, should document “language events” (*Spracherreignisse*) (Kippenberg 1983:22) and examine the “interdependence of utterances and speech acts” (Kippenberg 1983:28).



Similar to the theoretical construction of Wuthnow, Kippenberg's ideas scarcely influenced the academic study of religions during subsequent decades. Studies applying discourse analysis were rare. To my knowledge, the only text in the discipline of the history of religions that used a discourse approach (but in his own understanding) in the 1990s was Lars Albinus's (b. 1965) article on doctrinal changes within the ancient Greek religion (Albinus 1997). Interestingly, at the beginning of his article, Albinus emphasized this very fact "As an orientation towards the topic of communication, discourse analysis has been applied especially within branches of linguistics, sociology, and political history, but it is hard to find anything but small-scale evidence of it in the history of religions" (Albinus 1997:203). Like Wuthnow, Albinus regards religion as a particular kind of communication that has its own "constitutive structures" and purpose. Hence, the texts as "products of a discursive formation" belong to a "religious system of communication, when it represents a transcendent, that is extra-discursive, in origin [...]" (Albinus 1997:204). Furthermore, it seems that for Albinus a religious discourse "maintains reference to the words—and practice—of an originally non-transcendent representative of the transcendent (e.g., [sic] Pythagoras, Moses, Jesus, Muhammad, and Buddha). Eventually this representative is himself represented by the textual tradition, which then takes over the worldly manifestation of the otherworldly voice. The point is that a religious discourse is always dominated by such an absent voice, mediated by a person or a text that represents it" (Albinus 1997:204f). Albinus also mentions that although discourses stand in interrelation to each other, there is a distinctive marker for identifying contrary discourses, namely that of authorization. In his opinion, the transformation from *mythos* to *logos* paradigms in ancient Greece was not an unexplainable shift from one religious norm to another or from one religious identity to a completely different one. This was a transformation of a religious discourse of human reality (*cosmos*) that was the result of social changes with their "new speech practices" and "the very existence of two discursive oppositions," Plato's innovative philosophy and the Homeric worldview which was becoming obsolete (Albinus 1997:213f). Hence, Albinus argued that discourse analysis of religion "should fruitfully relieve the burden of explanation from concepts such as 'mentality' and 'tradition'" (Albinus 1997:205).

Two decades after his aforementioned programmatic article was published, Kippenberg, in collaboration with his student Kocku von Stuckrad (b. 1966), suggested again that the study of religions should concentrate primarily on the discursive character of religious formations (which means that it should be regarded first and foremost as a communicative form). They also insisted that stubbornly holding onto a theory while neglecting heterogeneous, conflicting

empirical data would be a loss to the study of religion (Kippenberg & von Stuckrad 2003; von Stuckrad 2003a). The two scholars argued that “[...] there are the *objects* [of study] which make up a scientific discipline and not any preconceived theories and terms [...]. New theories are rather the result of the societal formulation of questions and objects that have changed” (Kippenberg & von Stuckrad 2003:8). In another article von Stuckrad discusses how the problem of meta-theory can be solved by means of a discursive understanding of religious processes. He seeks to explain this by introducing a new approach, a different theoretical turn within the study of religions. Hence, like other humanities, the study of religions has undergone three stages of transformation, which he pinpoints as the following: “First, the linguistic turn moved the issue of religion from its place in the transcendent and numinous into the realm of language and text. Next, the pragmatic turn questioned the focus on merely semantic approaches to religion. That is, through analyses of written sources, scholars emphasized the contexts and pragmatic options that are necessary to really understand what a text is all about. Finally, the writing of culture debate demolished academic confidence in the scholar’s neutral role as an objective observer and placed his or her work in a cultural process of constructing meaning that produces only narratives” (von Stuckrad 2003a:255). These crucial and objective changes in the rethinking of scholarly research demonstrated the deficits of the study of religions to such an extent that the basis of the discipline itself was put into question. Kippenberg and von Stuckrad in their program for restructuring the study of religions went so far as to state that object-oriented study would lead to the blurring of the boundaries between *Religionswissenschaft* and the other humanities: having access to multiple methods, the study of religions becomes just one of many perspectives within cultural studies. By taking such a stance, the “highly elusive” term religion is justified but not defined, because a discursive approach has to be concentrated on phenomena crossing several spheres and acquiring different meanings. Religion is reduced in this direct way to a communicative process. The scholars suggested thinking of religion as a discourse (“that is more as an exchange of opinions”) acting on the discursive field “where identities (including the scientific) have been built, boundaries have been drawn and power spaces have been occupied” (Kippenberg & von Stuckrad 2003:14). According to von Stuckrad, such a discursive approach transforms the study of religions into a new way of understanding religious phenomena occurring with the two following perspectives. On the one hand, he appealed for the “integration” of “polyfocal analysis” where many approaches would shed light on the dynamic of the religion in the culture. On the other hand, the discursive approach carries a “shift of attention” so that religion is observed communicatively, which

means that “[r]eligious scholars should no longer scrutinize religions as belief-systems but as systems of communication and shared action. Instead of trying to understand the believers’ inner states of mind—which, in fact, fully escape scholarly verification—the only thing religious studies should be interested in is analyzing the public appearance of religious propositions” (von Stuckrad 2003a:268).

As mentioned in his programmatic article, Stuckrad wishes to engage discourse theory as developed in North American and British Cultural Studies but inspired by such French-language theoreticians as Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu, Jacques Lacan, Roland Barthes, and Julia Kristeva. He claims that “[f]rom this perspective, discourse conceptualizes representations of social positions that are negotiated among groups in a complex process of identity formation and demarcation. Hence, the term “discourse” refers to an ideal type used to make visible continuities, adaptations, and transfers of meanings and positions in a setting of changing power relations. When this theoretically constructed discourse becomes visible, we can talk of a field of discourse [...]” (von Stuckrad 2003a:266). He continues, “[c]oncentrating on communication and action means, instead, that we address religious traditions as powerful ingredients of public discourse. Religions are powerful not because they reveal transcendent truths or the effects of an ontologized “History,” but because they serve as instruments in the communicative formation of identity and provide people with a concrete script of action” (von Stuckrad 2003a:268f).

Another of von Stuckrad’s works, published in 2003 as a revised version of his postdoctoral thesis *Shamanism and Esotericism: Observations on the History of Culture and Science* (Schamanismus und Esoterik: Kultur- und wissenschaftsgeschichtliche Betrachtungen), seems to be a discursive application of this idea of religion in action—in that von Stuckrad tries to find historical and cultural uptakes of contemporary Shamanism (von Stuckrad 2003b:14), by analyzing which elements of Western esoteric discourse reflect current shamanic practice in Western countries (von Stuckrad 2003b:21). Just like other discursive fields, “Shamanism” seems to be a space constructed by a “variety of contributions from science, religion, philosophy, art and literature, but also political and economic factors” (von Stuckrad 2003b:4). He concentrates on the interconnections between Western esotericism and Shamanism in a historical discussion that starts from the time of its formation during the European Enlightenment, through Romanticism up to and including the modern esotericism of recent decades (von Stuckrad 2003b:30). His study shows that the polemics about the “generic” authenticity of European Shamanism found among scholars and modern shamans in the West make no sense: Shamanism in the Western adaptation was formed in the European context exclusively

within modern Western esoteric discourse. Therefore it should be considered as an independent (of other cultures and historical periods) exponent of the European religious landscape.

The idea of the discursive—which means, above all, the changing and dialectical—character of the construction of a religion is something that modern scholars of religion are well aware of (Flood 1999; Paden 2002). Perhaps one of the most impressive applications of discursive thinking and the use of a spatial metaphor for religion as a field is the study *The Men of God: Turkic Islamists in Germany* (Die Gottesmänner. Türkische Islamisten in Deutschland) by German ethnologist Werner Schiffauer (b. 1951) in 2000. Schiffauer investigated a Turkish Islamic movement in Germany by applying a historical-anthropological approach, including discursive interpretations, to a wide range of qualitative data collected by him over many years. In his study Schiffauer shows that a homogenization of the image of one religion and interpretation of its evolution makes sense only when one tries to present it as a “discursive field” with a number of competing discourses, because “not only do new positions constantly appear in a discourse field, but the adherents of a particular position also constantly revise their opinions” (Schiffauer 2000:328).

To summarize, the idea of discourse approaches to the study of religions, discussed above, have focused on internal diversity and organization, process and change, as well as on the rhetorical strategies developed by some discursive communities in order to construct meanings within given religious practices. However, what has remained beyond any scholarly interest in these concepts is the problem of the cultural environment and local contexts, in which religious discourses have their source of inspiration and revitalization processes. Also, what is really going on in the exchange of different kinds of knowledge (including religious) between social fields? Indeed, if we take religion as one of the living components in the production of a culture, it is also important to question a reverse relationship where religious actors are active consumers of modern society.

I believe the relationship between different social practices may also be explained by means of the theory of vertical transfers of knowledge, as proposed by the German scholar of religion Burkhard Gladigow (b. 1939). In an article published in 1995, Gladigow claimed that religion adopts and shares forms of knowledge transferred from other systems such as science, literature, and “new mass media” (Gladigow 1995:29). In addition, he discussed texts as a “medium of transmission” between societal subsystems (Gladigow 1995:30). Concerned with the relations between the natural sciences and religions, he argued that a vertical transfer of the “findings of the human and natural sciences concerning ‘religion’ seem to be a characteristic of the European history of religions”

(Gladigow 1995:31). The popularization of knowledge, in his opinion, is the fastest modus for the production of meaning, which has been characteristic of most recent history (Gladigow 1995:36). For further research, Gladigow suggests working out a kind of semiotic descriptive approach that could bring together religions with “interpretative systems of meaning” (Sinndeutungs-systeme) and applying them to their constitutive fields of society (Gladigow 1995:38). At this point, I would suggest that not only one-way transfers feeding into religion can take place (which is Gladigow’s main concern in the article), but that mutual and, perhaps, more complicated relations are also possible.

These theoretical perspectives elaborated within the study of religions—which I would briefly emphasize again as the idea of religions as discursive communities, the discursive nature of doctrine, and the theory of transfers of knowledge—have prepared the stage for the particular type of discourse analysis that I intend to use in my thesis. Such an approach aims to cover the description of religious semantics, as well as the interpretation of the dynamics, changes, and transformations both within religion and in its interrelations within other social structures involved in the processes of meaning-construction. Ideally, this aim will combine philological and sociological research and also draw on qualitative methods from both disciplines. Unfortunately at this stage of elaboration, the formulation of special discursive or sociology-of-knowledge approaches in the study of religions still remains a project for future research (Krech 2006:107). For this reason, I believe that the theoretical position, and recommendations in practical matters for research, of critical discourse analysis (CDA) as elaborated by the British and Danish scholars Norman Fairclough (b. 1941) and Lilie Chouliaraki (b. 1963), as well as discourse analysis within the sociology of knowledge as described by German scholar Reiner Keller (b. 1962), are compatible with the issue I set out in this thesis. Furthermore, when compared to other kinds of textual analysis, such as linguistically oriented analysis, CDA is more narrowly linked to the actors and their purposes; it examines how power has been allocated through texts and their re-contextualization. Hence, it is entirely suited to a broad set of research questions. The method “can appropriate other methods” such as various types of linguistic analysis (Fairclough 2007:210). Drawing on CDA, religion can be understood as one of many social practices that consist of such elements as “activities, subjects and their social relations, instruments, objects, time and place, forms of consciousness, values, discourse” (Fairclough 2001:231). The focus of my research is on the last in this wide range of elements—the discourse on Zoroastrianism. This general discourse described above by Fairclough is without doubt more voluminous than religious discourse alone and, perhaps goes back to times before religious discourse as such—i.e. in the narrower sense of the practitioner’s discourse—

came into being. The idea of CDA, therefore, implies the dialectical and semiotic character of interpretations associated with a religion in the context of the entire cultural production that also includes other spheres of social life, i.e. those traditionally understood as being “outside” of religious domains, for instance, mass media or politics. Discourse is a form of language and other semiotic (including visual) expressions. It can be understood in a threefold sense: as part of acting, representing, and being (Fairclough 2001:231). Discourse “may be more or less important and salient in one practice or set of practices than in another, and may change in importance over time” (Fairclough 2001:231).

When applying these notions to the subject of my thesis—the discourse on Zoroastrianism in modern Russia—we can detect that Zoroastrianism is: first, a social activity of the Russian Zoroastrians as a group within modern Russian society; second, the cultural production of new representations of that religion, which include both self-reflections and outsider-perceptions of the Russian Zoroastrians and their practices; and finally, third, the process through which Zoroastrian identities are constructed in a local context. Therefore, despite the frequently expressed imperative for an instrumental definition, it is not necessary, from the discourse analytic perspective, to define religion in a general sense because its character is understood here as functionalist and “anti-essentialist” (Otterbeck 2010:156). Even though religion may be regarded as a category, it remains a “co-dependent, portable discursive marker” (McCutcheon 2007:197). What is important is to bring together in the textual analysis the interplay of meanings and their contextual dependence. Perceived in this way, religion is close to discourse itself: religion is also a manner of acting, representing, and constructing identity. Thus, Zoroastrianism may be constructed by actors whose chief purpose is their own interests and who can decide for themselves whether religion is a matter of practice and ideas, a leisure activity or lifestyle choice, a historical abstraction, a component of the material and spiritual culture of ancient and modern peoples, a source of controversy at the (inter)national level, or one of many basic inspirational models for visual and textual art. Also, for this same reason, modern religions are multi-representative—which means that, depending upon the contexts, religions contain both similar and different features for those individuals who are interested in or involved in the production and consummation of religious knowledge. The producers and consumers of the public image of religions are not necessarily religious specialists and practitioners, but also people who have for some reason interpreted religion, such as scholars, journalists, artists, writers, and others. Moreover, one of the hypotheses of this thesis is that the material I analyze in each type of discourse can offer its own understanding of religion within the aforementioned fields and their specific practices. Hence, the (above

all) spatial categories of science, mass media, and literature are also understood as representing ideal types of discourse and hence reveal “ideal” discursive values that usefully serve analytical purposes, in a similar vein to religion. This notion allows one to describe discourses on Zoroastrianism on the move, with its key themes and discursive transfers. For instance, to give an illustration of this notion, Zoroastrianism portrayed in fictional literature as a theme constitutes one side of a specific literary discourse developed to describe a given religion.

## 1.8. Discourse analysis as method

The identification and analysis of discourses and semantic transfers around the theme of “Zoroastrianism in Russia” requires a specific way of proceeding. The main steps are typical of any qualitative textual research. These involve collecting, analyzing, and evaluating the material. Through these procedures the researcher strives to encompass the totality of the “imaginary corpus” of a discourse (Landwehr 2008:103). It may consist of texts and other cultural artifacts. The discourse analyst, furthermore, sees the texts not only as representations but also as interactions (van Leeuwen 2008:4). Moreover, the focus on the texts also includes an analysis of the visual part of the printed material collected in the course of my study. A discourse analysis is thus “more than text analysis” (Keller 2007:76). Therefore, despite my emphasis on the variety of written, published, or recorded data (books, magazines, newspapers, or interviews), I will also use audio-visual data, along with the descriptive framework of visual design developed by Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen, which may be seen as one of the fruitful theoretical supplements to CDA (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996:13).

However, as is usual in scholarly work, the variability and great amount of primary material discussed also indicate limitations in the description and analysis of the subject by creating descriptive and analytic models. The limitations of the material in this thesis become apparent in my deliberate selection of texts produced by actors from different social practices such as religion, science, mass media, and fiction. These four spheres or fields are represented by voluminous text corpora that are analyzed in the four principal chapters. These chapters may be seen both as separate studies and as congruent “transdisciplinary” investigations (Fairclough 2007:225) that highlight different aspects of the same theme: Zoroastrianism. As a methodological consequence, each of the four chapters has its own style and pattern based on certain regularities of discourse structure in the textual corpora I have examined.

It is worth mentioning that discourse analysis is to some extent not just an “analysis” but more of an angle from which to observe dynamics and changes placed in their historical perspective. Hence the student of religion should use two types of description when analyzing religious developments: the macro and micro levels. In this study I will try to maneuver between the two. According to Fairclough (1992:85f), “micro- and macro-analysis are [...] mutual requisites.” While research at the micro level reveals “how participants produce and interpret texts on the basis of their members’ resources”, macro-analysis aims “to know the nature of the members’ resources (including orders of discourse) that is being drawn upon in order to produce and interpret texts, and whether it is being drawn upon in normative or creative ways” (Fairclough 1992:85). Such a ploy is also essential because the analyzed sources are written in Russian, but my interpretation here follows the English translation. However, generalizations about a theme that has never been properly illuminated can still have an important value: the micro analysis of the texts provides a “mold” of social and religious issues that possess further potential for interpretation. So, even though it is not necessarily explicit in discourse analysis, my intention here is to provide a description that is closer to the original sources themselves. For this reason I have chosen the mid-way course between discourse analysis—a tool for making generalizations—and the linguistic method.

With the application of the discursive approach in my work, I take into account the period from the beginning of perestroika until the present. In this study I intend to examine a wide range of contents, rules, and points of intersection within Zoroastrian discourse in contemporary Russia, as a multi-dimensional snapshot, rather than just a vertical analysis, situated in a broad historical discursive perspective. Nevertheless, this horizontal orientation of the study hides other risks, namely of trying to grasp too much. For this reason I have set tight restrictions on the work, concentrating only on a few highly relevant examples. Thus, my discourse analysis is limited to chosen “spot checks.” It is true that this selection process reflects a certain element of my subjectivity. According to CDA, there is always an “uncertainty principle” in such research “At the level of sub-textual analysis ‘observers’ (i.e., people reflecting more than casually on text and talk) cannot exclude themselves from their observations (i.e. interpretations), these being selective and potentially influenced by their ‘position’ and interests. Such effects cannot be avoided if the aim is an understanding of the links between discourse and social processes at large, but they can be made explicit” (Chilton 2004:205).

At the outset of my study I consider Zoroastrianism as a “knot,” “topic,” “meeting point,” “place of struggle,” or even a “place of competition,” but united under the general term of Zoroastrian discourse, which helps us to see of how



religious, scholarly, media, and literary fields relate to each other and invent Zoroastrianism as a symbolic representation. Moreover, in this study, I have no reason to drop the term Zoroastrianism (and invent something new, or use “Russian Neo-Zoroastrianism” or “new Mazdayasna religion” as might perhaps be expected) for the variable set of religious practices that have their counterparts in other countries yet appear to be something quite different. Sometimes I prefer to designate it as Russian Zoroastrianism in the sense of a *modus operandi* when discussing religious practice in the Russian territory. This designation serves merely as a point of orientation or a way of determining religious and secular actors, who treat it according to their own ideas about Zoroastrianism, which is obviously not the same religion that was practiced long ago in the regions of origin. Also the lack of any ethnic connections to mother countries such as Iran and India with regard to Zoroastrian groups in Russia is rather an argument against the use of the term “Neo-Zoroastrianism” in the sense of a “new wave” evoked by migration processes.<sup>13</sup> To summarize, I have imagined Zoroastrianism as a *topos* related to life in modern Russian society in contrast to the religious field presupposed by regular or occasional ritual practice.

Finally, I should mention that I have used as a basis for my research the procedures of qualitative content or data analysis (Mayring 2000) supported by a special type of software for qualitative research: ATLAS.ti. This program (as well as many other programs for text and linguistic analysis) provides immediate insights into the contents of sources (from texts to multimedia) and helps to identify certain categories by highlighting separate terms grouped around precisely formulated themes. Such computer assistance allows the researcher to verify a vast range of written and visual materials, essential to my collection and study of four voluminous text corpora. Texts and other collected visual materials were read and codified, meaning that all sequences, utterances, or parts of materials were assigned to one or more corresponding categories (or keywords). During the process of working through the data, they were connected with each other, contrasted, interpreted, and evaluated. Such computer assisted research does not replace scholarly work in analysis of data but provides rather a necessary auxiliary tool in “making easier the steps of text analysis on screen” (Mayring 2000). Therefore, I used it as a tool that helps to test, control, and reduce errors in the research process because “[t]he computer will expose errors and suggest corrections; it will apply rules indefatigably, and it will continue to tell us largely what we already know” and “[t]hey are able to apply sophisticated models to indefinitely large stretches of text and they are getting better and better at it” (Sinclair 2004:12). Additionally, ATLAS.ti allows simple quantitative

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<sup>13</sup> While the latter would fit the *Russian Anjoman*, it would not be true of astrological Zoroastrian groups that have a different point of departure.

procedures to be undertaken, such as assessing the frequency of categories and visualizing content networks.

By applying such methods of discourse analysis to researching Russian Zoroastrianism, I expect to provide complementary views on this religion in diverse contexts, which will be elaborated in the following four chapters.

## Chapter 2: Zoroastrianism in the frame of religious practice

This chapter aims to present a description and analysis of the *religious* Zoroastrian discourse in Russia in the 1990s and 2000s. Additionally, it compares the formal and content structures of several sub-discourses, which make up the imaginary totality of that field. The analysis is based upon various material sources collected during the long preparation phase of my study on Zoroastrianism in the post-Soviet area (since 2001). Starting from contexts where Zoroastrianism is used as an autonym (a self-reference of a person or a group) or an element of other contemporary religious-philosophical systems, I will turn to a survey of printed and online materials and their genres. After that I will explore their formal structures including certain iconographic and language expressions. The chapter will also discuss selected content issues of religious discourse. At the end of this subchapter, the results of the analysis will be summarized.

### 2.1. Zoroastrian voices and their resonances

Although the presence of scholarly and literary Zoroastrian discourses or their subsets within Russian culture is something that can be established since at least the period of the European Enlightenment (see Chapters 3 and 5), the appearance of the discourses analyzed in this chapter is undoubtedly a phenomenon of late modernity. Hence, this religious meta-discourse can be described as innovative for the region of Russia. As one might expect, the largest strand in this modern discursive production on Zoroastrianism is written by Russians claiming Zoroastrian identities, and by other religious actors who have incorporated Zoroastrian philosophical and ritual elements into their worldview. Arising originally in the environment around the astrologer Pavel Globa and his adherents in the 1990s, the discourses of practitioners became differentiated in the 2000s due to the emergence of the *Russian Anjoman* group and the *Kosmoenergetika* movement. However, it is also obvious that because of the

interpretative strategies of other religious but non-Zoroastrian actors within fragments of diverse discourses on Zoroastrianism, Zoroastrian figures, and Zoroastrian religious literature, the term “religious discourse” covers more themes and practices than solely those of the practitioners. Fully aware, therefore, of the complexity and incompleteness of the presented material, I will concentrate mainly on the antithetical, i.e. Russian Zoroastrian discourse while allowing myself, if necessary, a few observations on the others. In the following passages, I will briefly discuss the contexts of the religious discourse on Zoroastrianism from a historical perspective, with special reference to its dependence upon different spheres of power and religious authorities.

Public interest in Zoroastrianism in the 1990s was primarily connected to Pavel Globa (b. 1953), a prominent Russian astrologer, who popularized his version of astrology by making political astrological predictions and by giving (increasingly well-paid) public lectures and seminars (Tessmann 2005:57ff).<sup>1</sup> According to some early interviews with Globa in the press he started to teach “practical astrology” in small groups in 1979 (Kanevskaja 1990). One of his oldest students in astrology dated those meetings back to 1982 (Tarasova 2000:41). Following these underground teachings he attempted to reach wider audiences in 1984, but did not succeed until the late 1980s when he and his former wife Tamara Globa (b. 1957)<sup>2</sup> began to give public interviews in the Soviet mass media. Television broadcasting during the perestroika period in particular helped him to gain wide popularity. This was the space where religious and esoteric topics had gradually begun to be discussed during that period. The first appearance of the Globas was a show on Leningrad TV entitled *The Fifth Wheel* (Пятое колесо) in 1989 (Belyaev 2008:37). On that popular show Globa commented on a film about the legendary French seer Michel de Nostredame (1503–1566) drawing on his own (allegedly unpublished) translation of *The Prophecies* (1555) into Russian. In the following years Globa’s popularity increased, and he was invited (after the couple had separated) to contribute to many mainstream journals and radio and TV programs. During the 1990s Globa’s media image became so popular and influential that he was virtually given a monopoly on talking about astrology in the entire post-Soviet

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<sup>1</sup> The price of the one-day crash course in Avestan Astrology (taking about 5 hours) for one person in September 2011 was 1500 RUB (about 36 EUR) (News Globa 2011). According to the price list on *globainstitut.ru* in 2008 astrological services offered by the Globa’s institute staff varied between 75 and 350 EUR, whereas the Globa’s own “VIP-services” on *pavelgloba.ru* in 2011 cost between 1350 and 2500 EUR (also with his personal participation in some events such as weddings, birthday and collective meetings, presentations and concerts).

<sup>2</sup> Tamara Globa still seems to be a practicing astrologer who has strayed from the system of *Avestan astrology* and its method. It looks like Globa’s specialization is mostly print and online women magazines, for which she produces astrological prognoses. See also her web site: <[www.tamara-globa.ru](http://www.tamara-globa.ru)> (accessed 16 March 2012).

area. He often appeared conspicuously in many mass media: on concert stages, regional TV and radio programs, and in the press throughout almost all former Soviet republics. His own charismatic personality and astrological lectures—with some bizarre speculative excursions into the history of the ancient and modern world—provided the basis for the establishment of Globa’s public cult; the reception of scientific publications and fiction, i.e. a sort of “reading-religion” among his adherents (von Stuckrad 2003b:280) also played a significant role.

For Globa, teaching Zoroastrianism was an important part of legitimizing his astrological knowledge and, simultaneously, a source of inspiration for the production of new astrological concepts which became part of a particular astrological system—*Avestan astrology*. To summarize, Globa’s extraordinary position in the post-Soviet mass media and his popularizing tactics are what, more than anything else, may provide us with the key to understanding the increasing interest in Zoroastrianism as a religion in the post-Soviet area at that time. According to an interview that I conducted with Globa and one of his former wives Iana in Berlin in 2003, Globa became an astrological teacher as a young history graduate in the early 1980s (Tessmann 2005:60). This happened before the official registration of two Zoroastrian groups in St. Petersburg in 1994 that were subsequently re-registered in 2000 (Statute 2000(1999))<sup>3</sup> and 1995, and because the so-called *The White Mountain* (Белая гора) was cancelled in 1999, (Krupnik 2008b:25) Globa’s pupils began gathering in private. Globa gave his astrological lectures at this time, and there were also occasional celebrations of Zoroastrian feasts (Chistiakov 1998:18). In the mid-1990s, while Globa was continuing to teach astrology to diverse audiences, many religious organizations in the Russian Federation were permitted to legitimize their own activities because of new laws on religion (see Chapter 1). The notion that Zoroastrianism and astrology could be practiced in organized, exclusively religious groups appealed to some of his active students. Some of Globa’s followers expressed their wish to practice Zoroastrianism within the framework of a special religious community. However, the turnover rates for attendees was extremely high at the astrological courses, also known since the beginning of the 1990s as *Avestan Schools of Astrology* (henceforth *AShAs*)<sup>4</sup>, which were established in many major cities of the former Soviet Union. When it came to certain special, religiously constructed groups, even they remained dependent upon the *AShAs*, retaining a voluntary, informal, or commercial status.

<sup>3</sup> This re-registration was made possible as a result of the decision of the Constitutional court in 1999 that religious organizations registered before 1997 have the right to maintain their juridical status (Shterin 2000:204f).

<sup>4</sup> The Russian abbreviation of this name is spelled “Asha” (АША i.e. *Авестийская школа астрологии*, also in plural) that has a Zoroastrian connotation linked to the Avestan ethical concept of *asha* (literally: “truth” or “order”). See Globa T 1993:4.

According to one informant, there have been about 48 *AShAs* in the post-Soviet area during the last two decades (Personal communication 2006). Currently about 20 of them are still in operation. The five largest and most active are in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Perm (Russia), Minsk (Belarus), and Kiev (Ukraine). The Perm *AShA*, founded in 1993 (Lushnikov 2000:30), has been responsible for the organization of the annual tour (тур-фестиваль) *On the Path of Zarathustra* (Путём Заратуштры, 1996–), open for a fee to anyone interested in Zoroastrian “holy” and other tourist places in the southern Urals and Eastern Siberia. These tours also invite non-Zoroastrians. Globa’s original astrological system adopted by the *AShAs* played an important role in the spread of interest in astrology during the post-Soviet era. His concept became a stimulus for other astrological offshoots and original systems such as the “classical Western” branch of post-Soviet astrology grouped around the *Centre for Astrological Research* and the *Astrological Academy* in Moscow. In fact, almost every current post-Soviet astrologer in her/his 40s or 50s was Globa’s former student or was influenced by *Avestan astrology* and Globa’s publications.

The *AShAs* guaranteed the circulation of Globa’s teachings among a considerable number of people who also gradually spread Zoroastrian texts to broad Russian audiences. Since the mid-1990s RuNet has been the most important medium distributing astrological books and information about meetings and lectures. The organizational structure of the *AShAs* has often been unstable, which has led to a high rate of people leaving the organization. In the 2000s the *AShAs* membership numbers became diminished. For instance one of the large *AShAs*—the *Avestan Association of Republic Belarus* (ARBA, later also *Astra*), according to its own assessment, experienced in one decade a downward swing: from about 1,000 regular students on astrological courses in 1991 to only about 100 adherents in 2002 (Tessmann 2005:143). According to one informant, the overall number of people who attended astrological courses in organizations applying Globa’s system (between 1989 and 2006) is approximately 30,000 but only about 6.6% of these people (i.e. 2000 active members) have continued to learn or practice *Avestan astrology* (and in that way remain affirmative towards Zoroastrianism) up to the present. My personal impression is that these figures are an overestimate and the number of interested persons attending the *AShAs* nowadays, in the best-case scenario, amounts to about 1000 people. The *AShAs* are designed as small commercial organizations and, as a rule, are based on demand from anyone who is able to pay for courses or seminars. The active core of the *AShAs* teaches (so-called certified) astrological courses, produces and sells astrological literature, and organizes Globa’s lectures, meetings, and feasts. The established network of the *AShAs* throughout the post-Soviet area is also maintained through the organization of so-called *International Practical-*

*Scientific Conferences on Avestan astrology* since 2002 that are likewise attended by their leader Globa.

Within this astrological milieu there have always been a few people who have wanted to see a sort of business or hobby in Globa's system rather than an alternative "scientific" discipline. Some interviews with adherents in the early 2000s testified that Globa sometimes conducted quasi-Zoroastrian initiations in a private atmosphere, as well as immediately after his public lectures on stage (Tessmann 2005:63). Contrary to known Parsi and Iranian Zoroastrian initiations (called *navjote* or *sadrepushi*), the initiates received only a *kusti* (in both conventional variations—a worn white girdle) without any *sudre* (a special white shirt) necessary for this Zoroastrian ritual. In addition, Globa's girdles have been not white but tricolored—yellow, red, and blue—and symbolize the three colors of the god Zervan. Globa ties the girdles around his students' waists, knotting them at the front one after another and recites certain *manthras*. In addition to these student initiations into Zervanism or Zoroastrianism, Globa has also chosen certain devoted pupils (both male and female). By means of special *khorbād* (*ervād* or *herbad/herbed* in the Parsi and Iranian terminology correspondingly) initiations equivalent to a lower priest qualification, he has allowed his assistants to conduct as priests *yasna* liturgies and to initiate laymen independently. The initiates regarded themselves as believers or Zoroastrians (зороастрийцы) and were actually separated from the remaining Astrologers (астрологи), although the former continued their education in or teaching of *Avestan astrology*. Moreover, in 2000 in St. Petersburg, a special *Zoroastrian Congress* was launched originally intended to be an annual meeting of Russian Zoroastrians, including some Zoroastrian foreign guests, but due to financial difficulties it has since been disbanded.

The mixed "astrological Zoroastrian" profile of the AShAs gave rise to events in the early 2000s when a further discourse on Russian Zoroastrianism with a newly constructed discursive community appeared. This community set itself apart from Pavel Globa and the AShAs. The new (and to some extent separatist) direction was caused by the wish of some students to be initiated by original Zoroastrian authorities ("bearers of the tradition") and to be acknowledged by foreign Zoroastrians. The search for "proper" Zoroastrianism is historically traceable: it already began in 1999 when one of the former AShA-students in Minsk created the website *avesta.org.ru*.<sup>5</sup> Through this he established many contacts with Zoroastrians around the world, especially with those living in Western countries. He also received private funding from some foreign Zoroastrians for hosting his website. Even though in the Commonwealth of

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<sup>5</sup> Even though the first Russian website dedicated to Zoroastrianism *avesta.isatr.org* appeared in December 1998 (lastly accessed 18 April 2011).

Independent States (CIS) at that time no one had been born or initiated into Zoroastrianism (with the exception of those initiated by Globa), the website was intended as a project that would help to launch a “religious center for the consolidation of Zarathushti in the CIS” (Tessmann 2005:145). One year after that, through the mediation of an Iranian immigrant in Minsk who was travelling to Sweden for a Zoroastrian congress organized by the *Zoroastrian Universal Community*<sup>6</sup>, a group of Globa’s students closely involved in the publication of his books and the Zoroastrian calendar established contact with the Swedish *mōbed* of Iranian descent Kamran Jamshidi. As result, Jamshidi, who lived in Gothenburg and was responsible for many conversions to Zoroastrianism among Iranian immigrants and Europeans in Western European countries, arrived in Minsk and conducted the *sadrepushi* ritual for two male and three females (Stausberg 2002:332; Tessmann 2005:146). Shortly afterwards, the Minsk group that had been intending to become part of the *Zoroastrian Universal Community* dispersed and the majority returned to the Minsk AShA. The website continued to be moderated until 2003 and was then shut down. The moderator of *avesta.org.ru*, Iurii Lukashevich (b. 1977) blessed and guided by Jamshidi, found other people interested in Zoroastrianism in Moscow who had no connection with the AShAs and astrology and who wished to cooperate in the founding of a center for a Zoroastrian association of all CIS countries. This led, in 2005, to the further initiation of five male and one female in Moscow conducted by Jamshidi.<sup>7</sup> Formally, this was the starting point of the *Russian Anjoman*. With its website *blagoverie.org*, it has exerted a great influence on the post-Soviet Zoroastrian discourse on the Internet and in special Zoroastrian forums such as *avesta\_ru* on *LiveJournal* (Живой журнал). The new Moscow converts see themselves as an organization representing all (converted) Zoroastrians in the former Soviet Union and insist on keeping in contact with the *Iranian Mobed Council* (Np. Anjoman-e Moghān-e Irān) that seems to have accepted the proselytizing character of Zoroastrianism and the appearance of new Russian or post-Soviet Zoroastrians in general. Although the public activity of the *Russian Anjoman* concentrates to a large extent on communication within RuNet, one of the members of the *Russian Anjoman*, namely Konstantin Krylov (b. 1967), is known widely as a prominent political figure. He is an active blogger, journalist, philosopher, and figure of great importance among Russian nationalists. Qualified in information technology and philosophy, he is also the current editor-in-chief of the online periodical *The Agency of Political News*

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<sup>6</sup> This Zoroastrian organization was founded in 1992 in Gothenburg (Stausberg 2002:329). For further information about Zoroastrian groups in Sweden see also Stausberg 2008c.

<sup>7</sup> Apart from information spread by the Russian Anjoman there are some reports by the Zoroastrian Universal Community. See e.g. <<http://vcn.bc.ca/oshihan/Pages/RussiaE.htm>> (accessed 21 March 2012).



(Агенство Политических Новостей (АПН)). Since 2007 Krylov works for *The Institute of National Strategy* (Институт национальной стратегии) and since 2010 edits the journal *The Problems of Nationalism* (Вопросы национализма); he is also one of the founders of the “national democratic” *Russian Voluntary Organization* (Русское общественное движение (РОД)). Since the late 1990s, Krylov has also published, apart from a vast number of philosophical and publicist essays, literary works in two other genres: fantasy and poetry, under pseudonyms (two of them he later revealed as Mikhail Kharitonov and Iudik Sherman). However, in his political activity, the theme of Zoroastrianism is confined to his individual religion. With some minor exceptions, he does not touch or even discuss it publicly. Since its foundation, this discursive community has sometimes identified itself in opposition to the astrological discourse of Globa’s adherents, although the members of both communities have met and cooperated in the organization of lectures given by Iranian *mōbeds* since the mid-2000s. In one of the latest events (before the publication of this study), there was an attempt to consolidate people in Moscow interested in Zoroastrianism—both from the astrological milieu and the *Russian Anjoman* in August 2011, and the founding of the group *Zoroastrian Community in Moscow* on Facebook (Personal communication 2011).

Apart from these astrological and conversion discourses on Zoroastrianism there are certain intersections and key actors and events without which the picture of Zoroastrianism in Russian would be incomplete. Two major influences on Russian Zoroastrianism have come from India and Iran as well as from the Parsi diaspora. One of the strongest and most continuous is the activity of the Indian *Zoroastrian College* and its envoy Dr Meher Master-Moos who has tried to foster relations with the Russian Zoroastrians. The *Zoroastrian College* in Bombay is an offspring-institution of the Parsi esoteric movement *Mazdayasnie Monasterie* belonging to the *Ilm-i Khshnum*’s heritage. Dr Meher Master-Moos, its active leader, a woman from the Parsi upper class who was educated in England (Rafiy 1999:256ff; Kreyenbroek & Munshi 2001:231ff; Stausberg 2002:125ff; Hinnells 2005:105ff), organized bilateral visits to a few groups in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in the early 1990s. Through this, she tried to motivate people who were interested in old Tajik culture to learn about Zoroastrianism via her philological projects (e.g. translations of *Khorde Avesta* into Tajik). Together with two Parsi priests, she also organized a series of initiation rituals in Middle Asia. The exchange with the *Zoroastrian College* was also realized through cultural events and meetings (such as conferences in alternative medicine), in which some St. Petersburg Zoroastrians took part. For her own part Master-Moos and other adherents also visited some of Globa’s ASHAs in the

2000s (the last documented visit took place in summer 2008) and also gave public lectures organized by the *Russian Anjoman*.

Linked to the activity of the *St. Petersburg Zoroastrian Community* and the *Russian Anjoman*, certain recent tendencies in the establishment of Zoroastrianism in post-Soviet territories came into being because of selected Iranian Zoroastrian reformist groups. In 2007 activists of the Zoroastrian community (literally “parish”) of St. Petersburg invited a *mōbedyār* (Zoroastrian lay priest of non-priest Zoroastrian parentage) from Yazd, named Kamran Loryan, to Moscow and St. Petersburg; this visit was financially supported by a businessman from England. Loryan conducted new *sadrepushi* ceremonies with the white *kusti* for the people initiated by Globa many years ago. Globa did not mind; moreover, he met Loryan and they held a religious meeting. Loryan made known to the public that he is planning to learn Globa’s astrology. In July 2008 he took part in the tour in the Urals and performed *sadrepushi* for various interested people. Thanks to his mediation, Russian Zoroastrians who are Globa’s adherents now have contacts with Iranian Zoroastrian reformist priests and with the head of the *Iranian Mōbed Concil*, Ardeshir Khorshedian, who visited St. Petersburg and Moscow in July 2009. Such contacts allowed the visits of Russian Zoroastrians in Teheran and Yazd in 2006 and 2011 as well as the conducting of the Zoroastrian marriage ceremony for a Russian couple from Moscow in 2008.

The number of Russian Zoroastrians initiated by different religious authorities from abroad during the 2000s gradually grew. According to a concerned informant there have been about 100 *kushtivans* (initiated Zoroastrians with a *kus(h)ti* cord) throughout the overall post-Soviet area (Personal communication 2006). Also, according to information from the *Russian Anjoman* about 100 people became Zoroastrians in the post-Soviet area (Anjoman 2007). These people underwent *sadrepushi* or *navjote* initiations conducted by several different authorities, among them Globa, Kamran Jamshedi, Iurii Lukashevich, Meher Master-Moos together with the Parsi ervads Faramroz Mirza and Khushroo Madon, Kamran Loryan, and the *khorbads* of the St. Petersburg community.

The previous intersections and actors briefly described above were now directly linked to groups of Russian Zoroastrians who originally came from conventional Zoroastrian contexts. However, alongside the latter there were also marginal discussions, which included and reinterpreted Zoroastrianism in the wider context of post-Soviet esotericism. Here, Zoroastrianism appears as one of many elements building other religious ideologies or structures—for instance, within some *neopagan* groups, politically active groups, or the *Kosmoenergetika* movement.

Since the 1970s and 1980s, Russian *neopaganism*, which has religious philosophical roots from tsarist times, has developed into a well-known and self-contained phenomenon of the Russian religious and political scene (Shnirelman 1998, 2005:58; Pribylovskii 1999:123ff). Perhaps because their sources of inspiration similarly lie in late Soviet New Age culture, *Globa's* groups and neopagan groups share many ideas and ritual practices (Tessmann 2007:4ff). This relationship can be described as a sort of exchange between the two currents. Obviously, they also share the common environment that was formed in the late Soviet underground which articulated anti-Christian views. For instance, one of the prominent figures of Russian patriotic samizdat and neopagan ideology since the 1970s, Anatolii Ivanov (Skuratov) (b. 1935), has presented his religious philosophical views as “Zoroastrian,” “Avestan,” or “Indo-Iranian” mainly referring to the Nietzschean philosophical understanding of Zarathustra rather than the religion of Zarathustra in its modern context (Verkhovskii & Mikhaïlovskiaia & Pribylovskii 1999:39; Pribylovskii 2002). In 1981, Ivanov also created an anti-Christian text titled Zarathustra [sic] Did Not Speak Thus (The Basics of the Aryan Worldview) (Заратустра говорил не так (Основы арийского мировоззрения)) where following philosophical and historic-social observations of Hinduism and Buddhism, he suggested that Mazdeism should become a new paradigm for humankind. Roughly quoting a passage of one of the Avestan hymns (Yt. 19:89), Ivanov predicted, in a clearly expressed millenarian style that a Saoshyant (Спаситель) would open a new epoch (Ivanov (Skuratov) (2003)1981). Perhaps his ideas and other deliberations within nationalist cycles can explain why Zoroastrianism is the permanent discussion topic within the neopagan milieu. One might also add that many publications, e.g. The Union of the Veneds published in St. Petersburg and The Bazhov's Academy of Secret Knowledge in the Urals (Lunkin & Filatov 2000:145) have been influenced by certain ideas of Russian Astro-Zoroastrianism which emphasizes its differences from other contemporary Zoroastrian groups operating abroad.

Another example of the incorporation of Zoroastrianism into one's own worldview is the Cosmic Energy movement (Kosmoenergetika). *Kosmoenergetika's* spiritual practices and healing methods, known since the late 1990s, aim to heal the modern human being through Yoga and other Eastern (Jain, Buddhist, and Zoroastrian) spiritual “recovery” practices. Zoroastrian mystical experiences have been conducted by Parsi ervad Dr Ramyar P. Karanjia, principal of the Parsi priestly school in Mumbai, *The Athornan Boarding Madressa (Dadar Athornan Institute)*. Since 2004, together with the Russian activists of *Kosmoenergetika*, he takes part in common prayers claimed by the participants to be “initiations in the energetic power of the Zoroastrian faith” and the “purification of mental channels by reciting

Zoroastrian prayers.” Those courses, called conferences, can be attended annually either in Moscow or in two other Russian cities, Rostov-on-Don and Krasnoyarsk, and since 2007 in Arkaim as well.

Through contacts between Russian Zoroastrians from the AShAs and NRMs, their ideas and practices also have the possibility to reach other audiences and receive new interpretations of their own teachings from outside. An example of such an exchange is the cooperation between the *St. Petersburg Zoroastrian Community* and the *Natureman* (Дитя природы) group founded in 2006. The Natureman community organizes annual festivals around St. Petersburg with diverse healing seminars, including workshops in Eastern martial arts. In 2010 and 2011, Konstantin Starostin, the community’s headman and the youngest of the community *khorbads*, has been one of many instructors at their festival who gave lectures about *Avestan astrology*, Zoroastrian doctrine, and astrological Zoroastrian anthropology according to Globa’s teachings (Starostin 2010). For its part, *Mitra* provided the opportunity to publish a text written by a *Natureman* activist (Arkhipov 2009).

All of these discourses, practices, and actors build an emic construction of Zoroastrian religious discourse that crosses into other discursive fields, e.g. mass media, science, and literature, which are analyzed in other parts of the present thesis. The next subchapter is devoted to the description of the textual material from the strand of Zoroastrianism as an element of religious discussions.

## 2.2. Information flood: books, periodicals, translations, and Internet presence

The texts that make up the Zoroastrian religious discourse constitute a comprehensive corpus. Most of them were printed as physical books or published online and hence, are easily accessible to outsiders. RuNet seems to be the main space where the Zoroastrian discourse has been (re-)produced and actively formed. According to one of the Russian scholars I interviewed in 2009, it would not be necessary to come to Russia to do fieldwork in order to understand how Russian Zoroastrians are living and what they are doing, because most religious discussions occur in the virtual depths of RuNet. In particular, the most explosive places satisfying such expectations are the special forums and the popular website *LiveJournal*, which includes many accounts and entries by Russian Zoroastrian activists. This is only part of the textual production that generally began to dwindle with new restrictions regarding copyrights introduced in the mid-2000s. This reduction is, of course, not evident

in interactive communication and sharing, but rather in the online publication and hosting of printed texts that cannot be published without a licensing agreement from the authors, which was not the case at RuNet's inception. Thus the greater part of the Russian Zoroastrian archive, namely Globa's works, were withdrawn from some astrological websites (e.g. *ashavan.by.ru* in 2010), where they had been hosted for a long period of time by his former and current students as open resources. *Mitra's* publications also provide limited online access to RuNet users, so that these texts are usually distributed and sold through specialized networks such as the *AShAs*.

These texts, to a much larger extent than the original Zoroastrian texts and their translations into Russian, have been received both by Zoroastrians interested in astrology and by a wider audience. Globa's books intend to provide popular historical knowledge and pastoral advice to people who consider themselves Zoroastrians. This also means that Globa's pupils absorb "Zoroastrian views" in his interpretation, but by using the Russian translations of the Avesta and Pahlavi literature, they would be able to interpret them with the help of Globa's statements. Globa's texts are an example of notorious and conscious discursive intertextuality, because he tries to create and legitimize his own teaching by using rhetoric based on analogies with ancient and current events, historical facts, various teachings, and philosophies. As a prominent figure and famous astrologer, he produces an enormous number of magazine and newspaper articles in genre interviews, including astrological political prognoses, which are also read by ordinary people (see Chapter 4). Globa's books continue to form a thematic core in the discourse of the astrological Zoroastrian milieu and in the editorial circle of *Mitra*, although there are many other sources accepted by Russian Zoroastrians that contribute significantly to their perception of Zoroastrianism. In the following subchapters I will attempt a critical depiction of different sorts of textual material related to Zoroastrianism.

### 2.2.1. Words of the Master Pavel Globa

Globa has published in many sub-disciplines of astrology, also covering divinatory techniques. As mentioned earlier, it is appropriate among contemporary astrologers in Russia to think of Globa (with his former wife Tamara) as the person that popularized astrology during the perestroika years. Under his name a huge number of books were published, including brochures and articles dealing with *Avestan astrology* and its tools. According to my research Globa's publications comprise about 50 titles in astrology and other esoteric sub-disciplines like chiromancy, phrenology, numerology, and astrological mineralogy. His website mentions "more than 40 books" in 2009 or

“about 50 books of scientific and popular-scientific content”<sup>8</sup> in 2011, but because of the earlier chaotic publication of materials by his adherents, it is impossible to establish the precise number of works ascribed to him. It is obvious to an outsider that Globa’s activities in writing, recording, or publishing his own ideas constitute the largest part of the literary production of that milieu. I have divided the entire corpus of publications into sections, which I assume may be described as genres, also because they are oriented towards certain activities. In the following pages I will briefly characterize these works.

### **Astrological booklets for astrological courses at ASHAs.**

This is a series of materials to accompany two astrological courses (since 2005) edited and published by the *Astra* astronomical-astrological society and publishing house in Minsk. The course publications consist of seven and eight slim brochures respectively, and include such titles as: *The Zodiac*, *The Planets*, *The Planets in the Zodiac*, *Particular connections of planets*, *The Degrees*, *Working with the Ephemerides*, etc. These materials can be ordered by mail as basic study materials for a “correspondence course by astrologer Pavel Globa.”

### **Popular books about religious and astrological matters.**

While the specific astrological brochures are mainly intended for the audience interested in or practicing astrology, there are also books dealing with other subjects. In these publications, Globa presents a mixture of moral-religious and basic astrological problems harmonizing with his *Avestan astrology*. Within this rubric, I would suggest that two of Globa’s works are “genuinely programmatic” and have had a significant influence on the Zoroastrian discourse within the astrological milieu. His first book entitled *The Living Fire* was published twice, in 1996 and in 2008, while the second appeared as *The Teaching of the Ancient Aryans* in 2007. There is also another text of great importance, namely the brochure *Zervan-Zoroastrianism* (1997), circulating among astrologers and Russian Zoroastrians anonymously but edited by one of Globa’s students.

*The Living Fire* is the title of the most famous and most comprehensive of Globa’s works dedicated to the Zoroastrian understanding of the world, written in Russian in the early 1990s and initially published in 1996. The first edition of *The Living Fire* was published by two Moscow (*Vagrius*, *Iauza*) and one St. Petersburg (*Lan’*) publishing houses,<sup>9</sup> all appearing in the early 1990s. The print-

<sup>8</sup> Until 2010, this information appeared on his old website:

<<http://www.globa.ru/biography.asp>> (accessed 21 March 2012). See the newer version:

<<http://www.globa.ru/astrologicheskije-programmy-i-publikacii>> (accessed 04 April 2011).

<sup>9</sup> Despite the economic crisis of the 1990s, all three publishers survived but with changed profiles: whereas *Vagrius* specializes in “memoirs, fiction, biographies and historical novels, selected works and adventures, encyclopedias and artistic albums,” *Iauza* produces socio-political works (with some tinge of patriotism), historical literature (particularly military or war history), and fiction. At that time *Lan’* concentrated on literature for high school and

run of *The Living Fire* amounted to 50,000 copies that suggests the orientation of the publishing houses towards the general public. The second edition appeared twelve years later in two Moscow-based publishing houses, *Eksmo* and *Iauza*.<sup>10</sup>

If we compare the circulation of both editions, the difference is striking: the immense number published in 1996 (50,000 copies) is approximately eight times more than the modest number published in 2008 (6,000 copies). Similarly, the second release of *The Living Fire* as another of Globa's compendiums, a "twin-book" entitled *The Teaching of the Ancient Aryans* (2007), which also belongs to the rubric of programmatic texts in my classification, had a print-run of 6,000 copies. When compared visually these two publications are strikingly similar and the contents of both works overlap on the major thematic areas of astrology and Zoroastrianism. In *The Teaching*, there are also numerous paraphrases reminiscent of the contents of *The Living Fire* in both of its editions.

Crucial changes in publishing politics indirectly reveal, apart from the increasing differentiation processes within that business, a new segmentation of the readership of this genre. Hence the second edition with its more expensive design, but even the poor paper quality and high price, tends to attract an audience narrowly interested in the history and religion of its own country, namely in the pre-Slavic past. This correlates clearly with the annotation on the back cover. Even when aimed only at this one target group, public acceptance is broader than one might expect from a work "explaining solely the Zoroastrian religion."

If one tries to contextualize *The Living Fire* with other publications that appeared in 1996 or more generally in the 1990s, a twofold picture emerges. Firstly, the book is a good example of the "new," i.e. original and untranslated, literature appearing after the collapse of the Soviet Union (Stephens 1997:357f). The general theme varies between popular astrological knowledge and oriental religious symbolism, which have been in fashion at least in the popular syncretistic projects of the *Theosophical Society* since the 19th century. In this, we can see a generic affinity with such older esoteric compendia as *The Secret Doctrine* by Helena Blavatsky or *The Living Ethics* by Helena Rerikh, reprinted many times in post-Soviet Russia. Secondly, the stylistic, structural, and formal features of *The Living Fire* link it to the genre accepted in the former Soviet

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university education. See the historical surveys on their own websites: <<http://www.vagrius.com/aboutus>>, <<http://www.yauza.org/about.php>>, <<http://www.lanbook.com/publish/>> (all accessed 08 March 2009).

<sup>10</sup> While *Iauza* still deals with history and politics, *Eksmo*, founded in 1991, has a broad profile; in terms of capacity, it is one of the leading companies on the Russian book market. The spectrum of publications is very broad, including Russian detective series, modern Russian-language and translated fiction, and children's literature. In addition, *Eksmo* finances many TV-projects and soap operas on Russian TV using its own resources. See also <<http://www.eksmo.ru/eng/about/>> and <<http://www.eksmo.ru/publishing/about/>> (both accessed 08 March 2009).

Union as *scientific-popular literature* (научно-популярная литература) that “introduces the achievements of science and technology in a commonly accessible form” (Evgen’eva 1982:410). The publication of the first edition of *The Living Fire* occurred shortly after the academic translation of the Avesta (Steblin-Kamenskii 1993) and Pahlavi Zoroastrian books (Chunakova 1987, 1991) (see Chapter 3) from their original languages into Russian. However, no less crucial were the interconnections between the “racial” publications of the radical nationalist movement, which was interested in Nietzschean philosophy and hence in his interpretation of Zoroastrianism.

**Popular books exclusively about astrology.**

These astrological books are aimed at a broad public. There are both short and extensive volumes. Regarding the content, they cover mostly popular astrological knowledge and are relatively easy to understand without any special skills. For instance, both *What is the Moon Silent About* (О чем молчит луна, 1991) and *Astrology of the Name* (Астрология имени, 2007) deal with lunar and solar astrology that is presented by means of interpretative simplifications.

**Zoroastrian astrological annual calendars.**

Since 1999 Globa and an editorial board in Minsk annually publishes the *Zoroastrian Astrological Calendar* that gives recommendations (topics are food, colors to wear, medical tips, etc.) for everyday use on the basis of *totem* and *antitotem* classifications of days, months, and years. These books are quite voluminous, having an average of about 600 pages. In the years between 1999 and 2011, 11 volumes appeared with the title of the totem’s year: owl, falcon, deer, sheep, mongoose, wolf, stork, spider, grass-snake, beaver, (white) turtle, or magpie. Apart from the usual derivation of these calendars in the short parts for each day, we can also see the tendency of inserting additional texts between them, such as diagrams, pictures, and descriptions of numerous horoscopes linked to the biographies of prominent historical and contemporary figures.

**Typed lectures, notes, and summaries by Globa’s students and adherents.**

This is the most extensive and for many reasons obscure category of lecture materials, which belongs rather to the grey literature of the astrological Zoroastrian movement and hence has only nominal authorship. The category of lectures recorded by Globa’s listeners comprises perhaps the most substantial part of the literary practice of the astrologers and Zoroastrians. In many cases these recordings are not edited. This fact suggests a situation of spontaneity during Globa’s lectures and sometimes records the reactions of listeners. Graphically, they are texts written on a typewriter (until the mid-1990s) or computer with no pictures or diagrams. However, there are some early examples that break this rule such as, for instance, *Kosmogensis* (Globa 1991), published as a book.



### Various.

In this group of texts, I would include Globa's articles, interviews, speeches documented in the *Zoroastrian magazine Mitra*, and other media such as websites. The websites reproduce Globa's texts and lectures, and serve as advertisements for his websites such as the already closed *globa.love.ru* and others. The most recent one, *globa.ru* created in 2003, is not constructed like a personal page, but rather aims to present his astrological enterprise. Other Russian websites of the ASHAs (*asha.ru*; *arba.bl*; *perm-asha.chat.ru*) also have practical goals in mind, because RuNet is the most accessible medium for spreading information about arranged meetings and lectures as well as for selling and distributing astrological and religious literature.

Although Globa's speeches also play a significant role, I have chosen for the purposes of my discourse analysis the work most associated by his adherents with a certain system of their doctrine—*The Living Fire*. It is his most popular book that, as expressed in an advertisement, “explains the basics of the teaching of the ancient Aryans in an easy and accessible form.” Besides, this book is regularly referred to (cited and paraphrased) in many publications in Zoroastrian periodicals (e.g. *Mitra* and *Tiri*) as well as in purely Avestan astrological publications such as the *Messenger of Avestan astrology*. Conducting a diachronic textual study on the basis of the two editions of *The Living Fire* (1996, 2008) can unveil many interesting changes within the astrological strand of Zoroastrian religious discourse over time.

### 2.2.2. Group activity: The St. Petersburg magazine *Mitra* and the community messenger *Tiri*

In addition to the aforementioned Pavel Globa's corpus, there is another of similar importance, namely the corpus of material published by various authors in Russian Zoroastrian periodicals. For this analysis, I have chosen two periodicals produced by the St. Petersburg Zoroastrian community. These are the Zoroastrian magazine *Mitra* and the community messenger *Tiri*, both of which also produced online editions (*mitra-piter.narod.ru* and *tishtriya.narod.ru* respectively).

The history of the Zoroastrian magazine *Mitra*, which is published annually, developed alongside the history of the St. Petersburg Zoroastrian community following its official establishment in 1994. It is the only periodical of Zoroastrianism in the post-Soviet area orientated towards external readers.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Although at different times there have been many other print periodicals which combine the material of Zoroastrianism and Astrology such as *The Way of Arta* (Путь Арты, 1999 (only one issue) or *The Messenger of Avestan Astrology* (Вестник Авестийской астрологии, 2008-).

*Mitra* started in May 1997 as a “bulletin of the Zoroastrian community” and existed in that role until 1999. The earliest issues (1997, 1998) were edited by three different editors. Among them was the professional editor Galina Sokolova, who still continues to work on the editorial board of the magazine. At a later date, i.e. from 2000 onwards, Globa is mentioned as *Mitra*’s editor-in-chief. According to Sokolova, ideas about content, authors, and design were originally discussed with her spiritual mentor Globa (Personal communication 2003). The magazine was intended from the time of its inception to be an important activity for the whole community. According to the original concept of *Mitra*, it was meant to have two main purposes: to enlighten and to inform. While the first, enlightening tendency tried to present Zoroastrianism to outsiders “not only from the scientific point of view, but from the position of people who consider themselves to be Zoroastrians” (Editorial board b 2000:98), the second, informative tendency targeted a certain Zoroastrian astrological milieu, because it was assumed that *Mitra* would be of interest in other cities of the former Soviet Union where it would be distributed through members of the *AShAs*. According to Sokolova, “[t]he most important aspect of the magazine is its reflection on the resurgence of the Zoroastrian tradition in Russia, and its explanation of the Avestan doctrines with the aim of enlarging the circle of knowledge” (Sokolova 2000:62). One of the main topics discussed in all issues of the magazine has been the editor’s reflections on the magazine’s history as well as on current trends (Sokolova 2006:206f). Hence, the basic thematic fields covered by *Mitra* remain “religion, history, philosophy, culture, and astrology” (Sokolova 2000:63). In the first fourteen years of its run, from 1997 to 2011, *Mitra* published 15 issues. The first four issues were modestly designed, in black and white, with the exception of the third issue, whose two cover pages depict the gold *farvahar* symbol and stars against a blue background. The later series, beginning with the new numeration became more colourful and voluminous (e.g. the 2009 issue had 222 pages). In 2007, following the initiative of its editors, the magazine went online.<sup>12</sup> The website is used for distribution (with a price list) and presents all issues with the possibility of probe reading of some articles. According to the webpage, the magazine attracted about 50 authors—both Russians (usually members of diverse *AShAs* in the post-Soviet area) and foreigners (Iranians and Parsis, including some from the diaspora). A frequently published author of articles on archaeological finds related to Zoroastrianism is archaeologist Valentin Shkoda (see Chapter 3).

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<sup>12</sup> See <<http://mitra-piter.narod.ru>> (accessed on 21 March 2012). It contains the contents of all issues published until 2011. Two of these, (2(6).2000 and 9(13).2007) can be accessed on RuNet for free.

The formal structure of each issue, starting from the sixth (1(5).2000) coincides with the magazine's new series, which seeks to reflect the contents of the legendary 'original' Avesta, in fact a collection of Zoroastrian texts that until the time of the Sasanian empire should have included 21 parts (the so called *nask*), which allegedly correspond to the 21 words of the *Ahunvar* prayer. A precise description of the *nasks* can be found in the eighth chapter of the middle Persian religious text *Dēnkard* (Religious acts), which was hitherto not translated into Russian.<sup>13</sup> However, *Mitra* orients towards another source, namely the *Persian Rivāyats* published in English by Parsi ervad Bamanji Nusserwanji Dhabhar (1869–1952) in 1932, and republished in the same issue of *Mitra* (1(5).2000), translated from English into Russian. The *Rivāyats* comprise a collection of explanatory religious letters from Iranian Zoroastrian priests to their colleagues in India during the 15th and 16th centuries. The abovementioned issue included the Russian translation by Iurii Lukashevich, who used the online publication on the website of the American convert Joseph Peterson (Hinnells 2005:636). Thus, each rubric of the magazine is presented as one of the Avesta's 21 *nasks*. From a practical point of view, the format of the magazine allows for the inclusion of every rubric, and for that reason each issue includes a reduced number of them. Each subchapter concludes with a short depiction of the contents (e.g. "the 6th *nask* of the Avesta—Nadar// The explanation of the interpretation of the world of stars, planets, and constellations").

*Mitra* magazine was intended to be a sort of communicative bridge between Russian-speaking people in the post-Soviet area who had chosen Zoroastrianism as their religion. However, apart from the intention to be "Zoroastrian," as is indicated on the front cover of every issue, the magazine in fact accumulates other topics bordering on Zoroastrianism that do not have any visible connection to religion. These can also be studied from a common cultural perspective as one of the timestamps of modern Russian, post-Soviet culture, or like any periodical as a collection of discursive fragments. However, my wish is to "extract" the discourse that reveals religious topics and how it moves within the milieu, while insisting on its own affiliation to Zoroastrianism.

*Mitra* includes a great variety of text genres (from an appeal to the community written by its leaders to poetic studies of some laymen), which reflect the individual and collective activities of Russian Zoroastrians in St. Petersburg and in other places.

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. Kellens 1989. A number of chapters were prepared for publication by St. Petersburg Iranologist Alii Kolesnikov at the Institute of Oriental Studies.

The second source for investigating the discourse of the practitioners is a small internal monthly bulletin of the Zoroastrian community, entitled *Tiri*, published since 1998, almost parallel to the publication of *Mitra* with some interruptions between 1999 and 2001. The paper issues of *Tiri* I collected were one- or two-page xerox copies in DIN format, containing internal news of the St. Petersburg Zoroastrian community and giving brief information about Zoroastrian holy figures corresponding to each month. In 2004, with the launching of the online version of *Tiri* and publishing activity in other fields, the idea of the internal printed bulletin was abandoned. The online version remains a collection of texts taken from previous print issues and of texts that were not included in *Mitra* itself.

### 2.2.3. Internet mission of the *Russian Anjoman*

The third part of the analyzed sources reflecting the Zoroastrian discourse of practitioners is located on the Internet and is represented by a group of the *Russian Anjoman*. As mentioned before, the formal act of foundation of the *Russian Anjoman* was the *sadrepushi* ceremony for six converts conducted by mobad Kamran Jamshidi in January 2005 in Moscow.<sup>14</sup> Two years later, the Internet portal *blagoverie.org*<sup>15</sup>, founded by active converts, also became a virtual space where diverse topics connected to Zoroastrianism were discussed. With the exception of a few publications in foreign Zoroastrian periodicals, e.g. in the World Zoroastrian Organisation (WZO) magazine *Hamazor* (Isfand-Zadeh 2003), the only medium used by activists of the *Russian Anjoman* to date is the Internet. Parallel to their participation in other religious forums and disputes, where the *Anjoman*'s members take the liberty to speak about the Zoroastrian community of the CIS, they created their own forum on *blagoverie.org*.

<sup>14</sup> This version is also represented in the article about Zoroastrianism in the Russian part of Wikipedia edited by one of the activists of the *Russian Anjoman*. Cf. <<http://ru.wikipedia.org>> (accessed 05 May 2011).

<sup>15</sup> According to Zoroastrians of the Russian Anjoman the term *Good belief* or *good-believing* (благоверие) is also another Russianized name for Zoroastrianism that was in fact reinvented by the activists of that community. On the one hand, the word can be seen as demonstrating a semantic shift from Orthodox Christian use, which, in older Russian, means "true faith, piety" (Sorokin Iu 1985:32), and also "orthodox faith, Russian orthodoxy" (Avanesov 1988:172), and has been in use since the 17th century together with *благоверствие* and *благоверство*. Such Christian connotations can still be observed in present usage among Orthodox Christians on the Internet, see for instance: <<http://blagoverie.narod.ru>> (accessed 14 January 2010). On the other hand, it is evidently a translation of the middle Persian *weh-dēn* and the modern Farsi *din-e beh* (both: "the good religion") into Russian, one of the autonyms of the Zoroastrian religion. The members of the Russian Anjoman also actively use the derivative *good-believer* (благоверный) in singular and plural as a substitute for the word Zoroastrian/s.

#### 2.2.4. A step aside: *Kosmoenergetika* and other NRMs

Zoroastrianism, as one of several spiritual practices, is an integral part of the activity of *Kosmoenergetika*, The Cosmic Energy movement (Космоэнергетика), represented by the *Charity Foundation of Spiritual Culture* (International Project). The texts that explain this are scant because of the clearly non-discursive character of this teaching, which is expressed rather in a combination of common and individual prayers that have to be repeated for the achievement of particular states of mind. These can be reached gradually when someone led by a teacher passes through seven stages of study of the opening and closing of Zoroastrian “spiritual channels.” Effectively, knowledge of *Kosmoenergetika* has been transmitted at spiritual conferences by the “bearers of tradition.” Perhaps the main sources that reveal the tradition derive from the personal activity and works of Parsi ervad Dr Ramiyar Pervez Karanjia, translated from English into Russian by the Russian “yogi, philosopher, and orientalist” Evgeny Lugov. There are two systematic educational texts: *The Avestan Spiritual Tradition* (Авестийская духовная традиция, 2009) distributed as a printed publication by the Moscow section of *Kosmoenergetika*, and *Practical Zoroastrianism* (Практический зороастризм, accessed since 2010) translated from English and presented online (Karanjia 2008(?),2009). Besides these, the website of *Kosmoenergetika* also contains texts that are scripts of auditory questions to and answers by Karanjia taken from conferences entitled *The Zoroastrian Practices* (Arkaim 2007 and 2008, Moscow 2008, Rostov-na-Donu 2010).

One of the themes of Globa’s and *Mitra*’s publications is the idea of a Zoroastrian and Slavic synthesis that is reflected in their periodical publications and books as well as some websites, where a collection of Slavic myths and excerpts from *Veles’ Book* (Велесова книга) has been placed. The idea of this synthesis is supported by, and cultivated within many *neopagan* publications that contain fragments of the astrological Zoroastrian discourse received through knowledge of the publications of Globa and the *AShAs*. In particular, everything points to Arkaim as one of the central topics in the context of Russian ethnic nationalist and neopagan groups (Shnirel’man 2001:58ff), where religious, ideological, and political elements exist in a complicated genetic relationship. One of the radical examples here is the ideology of the *Technotronic Avesta* (Технотронная Авеста, 2008) written by Russian nationalist and former leader of the radical nationalist group on RuNet, the *North Brotherhood*, Pëtr Khomiakov (b. 1950) (Khomiakov 2008).

### 2.3. Formal structures

This subchapter addresses formal structures and analyzes certain parameters of visual (iconographical, text surface) and linguistic (rhetorical and intertextual) representations of religious discourse in all its variety. I will start with a discussion of the iconographic particularities of Globa's publications and afterwards direct my attention to other aforementioned contexts.

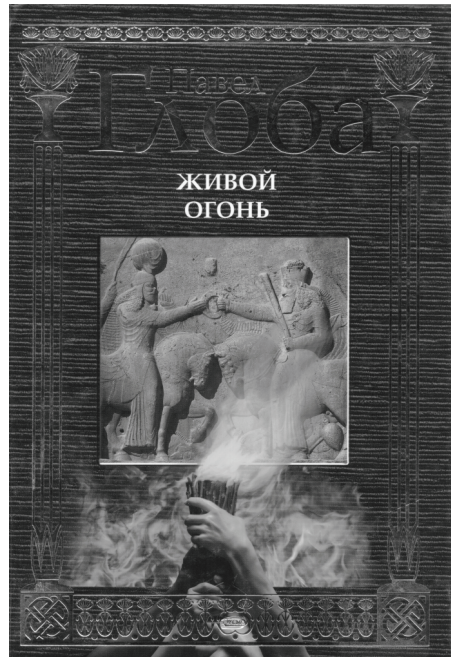
Most of Globa's publications in the early 1990s still preserved, from the iconographic point of view, the style of underground or samizdat literature. They were typewritten on low-quality paper, and contained poor pictures and ornamental elements. For instance, one of his first books, *Kosmogenezis* (Космогенезис, 1991), similar to typewritten excerpts of Globa's lectures, which circulated separately in and outside of the *AShA*, reproduces all of his lectures in written form. This text is sometimes regiven as a dialogue between the two astrology teachers Globa and Koroviak and their students. In some parts of the text, there are explanatory schemas or symbols that were originally drawn by hand. A similar lack of visuals can be observed in the black and white design of the series of astrological booklets used for the courses at the *AShA*. A decade later, in the late 1990s and 2000s, the attempt to visualize the books' content through the design of covers was increasing. A perfect illustration of the transformation in the course of two decades of the esoteric understanding of Zoroastrianism through the global use of Zoroastrian symbols and visual images is a comparison of the two editions of Globa's *The Living Fire*.

The cover of the first edition, a medium-sized 304-page paperback, portrays a blue sky with shining stars and the figure of a bearded old man presented in an exaggerated, light-shadow manner surrounded by a slight halo. The man who wears vestments and a cowl over his head raises in his left hand a shining bluish-white bowl. To the right of the bowl there are a number of stars, which form a constellation (easily recognised as the Great Bear) with two stars strongly emphasized. A dark-blue clock face in the foreground in a golden setting with the clock hands showing about five minutes after twelve; the long hand is between the second and the third star symbols and simultaneously directs viewers outside of the clock to the Ursa Major constellation. There are no numerals on the clock face but three graphic symbols: two golden decorative stars (with eight and seven points respectively) in the middle, and on the right a considerably large and complex golden sign. I was able to identify the two signs as double swastikas, or so-called in Avestan astrological circles, as the sign of *Zervan* on the left, and the so-called "star of the Magi" or "Chaldean star" used in Globa's astrological circles on the right.

Designed similarly to *The Teaching of Ancient Aryans* (Учение древних ариев, 2007), the revised edition of *The Living Fire* from 2008 differs from the latter solely in the main color (red and blue correspondingly) of the book boards and central photographs placed on the board of the book. The central part has a colored photograph of a part of the stone relief of the Sasanian King's Ardashir I investiture scene in Naqsh-e Rostam, where there is the figure of a horseman on the right, while the God Ohrmazd "hands the ring of sovereignty" (Wiesehöfer 1986) to Ardashir on the left. The figure with a fly-whisk behind Ardashir is not visible on the reprint; the left edge was cut perhaps in order to draw attention to the interaction between the two central figures. The third, lower part of the front cover includes another, half-transparent colored photographic representation with a torch flame held up by five bare hands. The scene of the investiture is partially enveloped in flames emanating from the lower edge. Two plaited rosettes are decorated with stylized swastika.

These two graphic representations clearly show a certain clash between two different views of what the reader might expect to find inside the book. On the one hand, the first image avoids any Zoroastrian symbolism and tries to reveal the "magic" and astrological character of the teaching presented. If we assume that the bearded old man ("ancient wise man") on the left is the prophet Zarathushtra, then this would coincide with certain wide-reaching traditional reception lines within the European cultural space that depict him primarily as an ancient magician and astrologer (Stausberg 2007:192ff), not influenced by other established modern religious portrayals of Zarathushtra. The other symbols, a starry sky, a shining glass bowl in the hand of the old man (an occult attribute, perhaps connected with the prediction of the future or crystal gazing), a clock, and a decorative double swastika, are attributes or signs of "secret" knowledge.

On the other hand, the second example is close to the traditional idea of Zoroastrian iconography appealing to antiquity, but remains religiously neutral (perhaps because of the orientation of the book towards a broader audience than Russian Zoroastrians). The symbol of the *faravahar* reproduced on each page inside the book is not present on the boards. At the same time, the cover is highly decorative and presented in a stylized fashion: the front and back hard covers include many superimposed and perhaps unnecessary elements (silver ornaments, golden headings, stylized steles). This accentuation of the naively decorative may refer to old ornamental books. Analyzing the design of recent Russian neopagan and patriotic-historical books, one can observe similar tendencies. The photographic reproduction (but not drawing) in the middle of the front cover is a bit confusing and seems to be put there for frivolous reasons.



Illustrations 1-2. The book front covers of *The Living Fire* by Pavel Globa from 1996 and 2008 (originally colored, differently sized). Photo: ©P. Globa; ©Vagrius; ©Iauza; ©Eksmo.

This, however, is the central place in the space and hence important: the reproduction corresponds to the idea of legacy. The image of the investiture relief is therefore another kind of “investiture,” an “analogon” of reality (Barthes 1977:17 cit. Kress & Leeuwen 1996:24) transmitted through a modern medium. Besides the Persian connotation, it also has a Zoroastrian connotation: the narrative inside the book attempts to be rooted in the time of the Sasanian dynasty. Decorative double swastikas are used in both covers.

The internet presence of Globa also possesses a certain symbolism that refers to Zoroastrianism. Globa’s former website accessed in 2007 was entitled “*Avestan astrology of Pavel Globa.*” Immediately below this caption, there is a colored panel. The colored *faravahar* with a man turned to the left is placed inside a horizontally stretching hexagram figure with a light brown background. The orange circles lead to a fragment of a picture of an anthropomorphic bull, the so-called “guardian man-bull” (as portrayed on the gate of Xerxes in Persepolis “the gate of all nations”). Meanwhile, on the right, after a space we see a Zoroastrian *afarganyu* (fire vase) with seven tongues of flame. Close to the last, there is a black-and-white picture of Globa, where he raises the index finger of his right hand in a warning (or even in a ritual) gesture. The background is comprised of horoscopic discs with the numeration of houses and signs of



constellations without any visualized astrological calculations. The central space is occupied by the *Ahunvar* prayer in Avestan script on the right-hand side. The new 2010 website has dropped many of the aforementioned symbols in favor of the *farahavar* inside a stylized sun in the middle of the upper panel.

Issues of *Mitra*, in particular of the new series, are an example of the stylization of Zoroastrian and esoteric motifs together with some modern elements expressed through photographs. In the cover representations we see elements that create a certain framing of various main images. Thus, the ornamental line depicting a row of Zervan's signs tied together (connected right and left-facing swastikas) with four rosettes in the four cover corners builds up a decorative framework that is used for each issue beginning from volume three of the old series. From issue to issue, the *faravahar* symbol is centered either on top of the ornamental line or right below on the front cover, while the emblem of the St. Petersburg Zoroastrian community, namely a portrayal of a Persian golden lion in color with a raised right paw, is always on the back cover. The lion is enclosed within a bright golden border with a double swastika right above the lion's body. Background pictures include mystical motifs with astrological symbols (4.1999), photographs (e.g. St. Petersburg city sights with Globa's and Atashband's 2 (6).2000 or Dolli Dastur's portraits (5–6(9–10).2003)), *faravahar* symbolism (e.g. 3 (7).2001), artifacts of Sasanian art (e.g. 5–6(9–10).2003, (11).2004), rock reliefs and Persepolis (e.g. 9(13).2007) as well as pseudo-Achaemenian motifs (e.g. 4(8).2002)). Also featured are: Zarathushtra's mountain in the Urals with Zarathushtra's portrait, a stele of Sanjan (cf. 8(12).2006).

If we compare this to the webpage of the *Russian Anjoman* we see the same use of photographic images as a montage for the presentation of the "good religion." The slim, upper horizontal panel reproduces a burning *afarganyu* exactly in the center. This fire is considered to be a source of light that brightens clouds gathering over the mountain landscape. The observer can see only the summit of a partially snow-covered mountain, which allegedly resembles one of the pictures of Mount Elbrus. Consequently, the *afarganyu* appears to be flying in the sky. Directly underneath this collage runs the first stanza of the *farovane* (the so-called Zoroastrian creed) in Avestan script. On the left-bottom edge of the website, a fragment of a scene from Xerxes' palace in Persepolis is represented.

If we are to draw some conclusions about the persistence of particular iconographic symbols used by practitioners, then it is not only the *faravahar* that is highly popular among Zoroastrian groups. The mythical lion, a special symbol of the St. Petersburg community is also consistently used. Portraits of the prophet Zarathushtra are seldom found, although the latest web presentation of

the St. Petersburg Zoroastrian community *zoroastrian.ru* (since March 2009) has changed that tendency. In the upper panel one is struck by the golden head of Zarathushtra in the center of the frame, a diluted Palace bridge to the left (associated with the tourist image of romantic St. Petersburg), and a golden *faravahar* to the right. There are additional references to the past, i.e. ancient artifacts such as stone reliefs of the Persian kings and fragments of Avestan texts in original script, which are included for both authentic and decorative reasons.

In respect to the text body of *The Living Fire* (1996) does not include any photos or pictures; the text contains 12 numbered chapters without any subchapters.<sup>16</sup> The titles of the chapters are relatively short (from two to six words). Within the text they are marked in bold. At the beginning of the book there is an “Introduction” and at the end there are three additional chapters (“Q&A”, “Conclusion” and “Bibliography”). In the “Contents,” the number of pages for these additional chapters is not mentioned. Each separate chapter consists of between 2295 and 11766 words: the shortest is Chapter 9 (“The attitude towards poverty and wealth”) and the longest is Chapter 7 (“Astrology as a key to world understanding”). The last chapter as well as chapter three (“The teaching of good and evil,” consisting of 9246 words) constitute the most voluminous textual parts of the whole work. Additionally, three other chapters (4, 8 and 10) are twice as long as the sum of other individual chapters. The “Conclusion” is extremely short (264 words), but is still slightly larger than the “Bibliography”. The chapters are mostly well structured and divided into similar-sized paragraphs usually comprised of about 7–10 sentences.

One observes a clear tendency in the text to make enumerations and classifications of things, beings, and ethical categories. Beginning from Chapter 1 the author tries to construct some word oppositions and play on contrasts, which rhetorically tends towards an epideictic style, where appealing to feelings and experiences is given more weight than logos. The text body of *The Living Fire* (2008) has been altered in many places. It is also a more voluminous, imposing work in hardcover with a format of 17x24 cm (and about 380 pages). However, the quality of paper is poor because it is the sort used for newspapers and paperbacks. Although the formal “Contents” shows minimal changes, the previous work has been substantially extended and lengthy new parts have been inserted into the old structure of the text without any mention in the “Contents”.

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<sup>16</sup> The chapter titles are as follows: [0] Introduction; 1. What are they, the ancient Aryans?; 2. The Heritage of the Aryans; 3. The teaching about good and evil; 4. Why does man come into this world?; 5. The main moral-ethic principles; 6. The defilement of good beings and human sins; 7. Astrology as a key to world understanding; 8. Men, women, children; 9. The attitude towards poverty and wealth; 10. Calendar, feasts, fasting days; 11. The chosenness and the high destiny of man; 12. Cosmos, the Earth, people; [13] Q&A; [14] Conclusion; [15] References.

Throughout *The Living Fire* (2008) twenty photographs, pictures, and schemes have been distributed. The main part (11) is prevalent in Chapter 7 “Astrology is a key to world understanding,” smaller fractions can be found in Chapter 2 “The heritage of Aryans” (3), in Chapter 12 “The Cosmos, Earth, and people” (3), “The high destiny of man” (2) and in “Men, women, children” (1). The Table of Contents lists twelve chapters, not annotating a vast number of subsequently added subchapters into the text body.<sup>17</sup>

The titles of the included chapters are the same as in *The Living Fire* (1996) except the last. There is no more “References” and the previous part “Q&A” is not present as well. The list of contents is placed at the end of book. The title of Chapter 4 was shortened to “The highest destiny of man,” and the title of Chapter 10 was shortened to “Zoroastrian calendar: Lunar and solar cycles.” The conclusion got a “makeweight” in the form of “The era of Aquarius [is] the finest hour (literally: “star hour”) for Russia: The Russian national idea.” Within the flux of the chapters, headers are printed in bold. Each separate chapter is between six and 74 pages long; once again, the shortest chapter and the largest chapters are the same. Chapter 8 “Men, women, children” comes in as the second largest chapter. Thereafter Chapter 2 and 3 follow. The “Conclusion” takes just six pages.

There is a short colophon of a six-line summary after the title page and another more detailed one at the end of the book. The annotation on the back of the hardcover represents a black and white portrayal of Globa:

1. The book “The Living Fire“ narrates about beliefs,
2. traditions and customs of our ancestors, ancient
3. Aryans. According to a legend they have brought
4. a Teaching of the Sole Cosmic Law to Earth.

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<sup>17</sup> Here is a small synopsis of those texts compared to the old structure of *The Living Fire* (1996). (Chapter 1. The Heritage of Aryans): The Origin of Zoroastrianism (37–41); The early period of the Indo-Iranian community (42–46); The historical predecessors of the Persian empire (47–51); Cyrus the Great [is] founder of Achaemenid imperium (51–55); Zoroastrianism without Zarathushtra [is] a phenomenon of the Achaemenids (55–64); Christianity and Zoroastrianism (64–68); Zarathushtra’s prediction of Christ’s birth (68–74); The Persian religion of Mitra [is] a forerunner of Christianity (74–87); (Chapter 7. Astrology [is] a key to world’s understanding): Astrology [is] a compass for everyday life (175–216); The Watchers of Time (217–224); The Watcher of the Past [is] Shatavaesh (224–229); Sexuality [is] Shatavaesh’s energy (229–234); (Chapter 8. Men, women, children): the ancestors’ cult in the life of the Indo-Europeans (235–239); Fravashi [are] guardian spirits of the descendants (239–246); the wedding ritual and the ancestors’ cult (247–251); the influence of the seven generations on the fates of the descendants (251–256); the genetic bond of the generations (257–287);(Chapter 11. The highest destiny of man): Khaoma [is] a replenishment of Khvarna (335–338); Khaoma [is] a tree of all seeds (338–345); the Moon and the calendar (345–350); The goddess of the Moon within the Avestan tradition (350–355); (Chapter 12. Cosmos, Earth, people): The age of Aquarius [is] period for the distinction between good and evil (365–373).

5. Thanks to them we have the opportunity to understand better the inter-
6. connections of different life aspects, our world as
7. a whole, and the most important—our role in that. The main
8. principle of the Aryan teaching is
9. freedom of choice and how one should deal with—
10. what one has to decide for himself.
11. The book can be interesting for the general
12. audience.

The structure of headers in *The Living Fire* (1996 and 2008) is clear and unambiguous for the reader. The author often uses enumerations (e.g. “Cosmos, Earth, people”), or explicative constructions (e.g. “Astrology is a key for the world’s understanding”), that sometimes tend towards clichés or conventional expressions for an unprofessional audience. This resembles the basics of formal logic and underlines again the interpretative-speculative character of the work. The textual structure of *The Living Fire* (1996) is clear-cut, while *The Living Fire* (2008) is quite intricate due to its excessive size and volume. This forced the author to divide extensive parts of the text by adding 22 subheadings. These subheadings are not spatially inclusive or comprehensive and obviously present a technical stopgap solution for a text flux that is not manageable by any other means. Also both books are covering extremely different topics that tend to give an opinion on every sphere of human and earthly life (starting with ethical and moral values and ending with regulations of everyday life based on astrological Zoroastrian teachings).

Both presented texts show perfectly well that Globa is an experienced orator. They are written in a “living” manner implying the existence of a certain “collective we” who establish direct contact with the (imaginary) audience. However, that is also an imprint of Globa’s creative process from his public lectures to his printed materials. For the formation of common ideas he also utilizes generalizations for different purposes. Firstly, he ascribes an unquestionable authority to primordial times and peoples (“Ancient Aryans,” “ancient civilizations,” “ancient science” [astrology]). He speaks from the perspective of “a critic of the idea of progress and of state of affairs in modern science, politics and economics” (Globa 1996:2ff).<sup>18</sup> Within every sphere of contemporary life, he postulates an obvious “decline” and reasons that the solution of the manifold problems of modernity lies in the human past. He

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<sup>18</sup> Throughout my thesis I am quoting Globa 1996 according to the print of the electronic version that was available in 2008 on the webpage <<http://ashavan.by.ru>> (accessed 12 February 2008).

claims that people reflect the past. For instance, modern people should not invent new solutions but search for them in ancient cultures and civilizations. In this he makes use of common grammatical constructions such as “it is considered,” and “the Ancient people believed that.” Secondly, he claims that some common beliefs or ideas are correct because they have been shared by many people. This *modus operandi* vindicates his approach towards normativity everywhere (“homosexuality is pathological”). Thirdly, his appeal to genetics research underpins a collective ego that often leads to paradoxical conclusions (“Zoroastrians in Russia have Zoroastrian genes that have awakened after the Soviet era”). He arbitrarily uses different vocabulary for the designation of his own teaching (such as “the Cosmic Law,” “*Avestan astrology*,” “the teaching of Ancient Aryans,” “Zoroastrianism,” “Zervanism,” and “astrology”) and does not distinguish between these denotations explicitly. Such a strategy makes his ideas accessible not only within the astrological Zoroastrian milieu but also to every interested, sporadic, and potentially uneducated person. Even the style and set of topics and examples discussed assume that the reader is inclined to follow sensationalistic headlines like those about political decisions, war conflicts, and natural catastrophes that are announced by mass media.

Globa’s text shows patterns that are typical for the argumentative strategy of the author leading to contradictions: he provides an alternative to scientific understanding of the world through astrology by criticizing science for failures and simultaneously makes use of scientific facts and theories to reinforce his arguments (Chapters 1 and 2). Between the lines of the book one could read the ambition of setting a full philosophical interpretation of human life in the contemporary world and with this certain recommendations for everyday practice for non-Zoroastrians who nevertheless seek to live according to “cosmic laws.” To summarize, thinking in analogies is a widespread strategy of esoteric sources and provides a stable research basis for any esoteric discourse.

Like other charismatic people, Globa skillfully utilizes implications and insinuations in his utterances. This was also my impression during my interview with him and I assume that the strategy of making claims that are “irrefutable because they are impossible to verify” plays a crucial psychological role for his adherents. This approach repeatedly reinforces the identification of Russian Zoroastrians as the roots of an astrological milieu through their teacher. The information that remains concealed does not concern his private life, but rather his authority as an esoteric specialist who has received a secret initiation into astrological and Zervanite knowledge. In *The Living Fire* (1996 and 2008) curiously there is no information about the genealogy of the author that is articulated in the primary literature of his Zoroastrian students, e.g. in *Mitra*. His position is expressed from the voice of a primary authority that nobody

challenges, because the authority of a prominent astrologer is reinforced by the mass media. Such nuanced allusions can be observed in the short biography on the back cover of *The Living Fire* (2008)

The Aquarian era appears in Globa's texts, in particular in 2003 as a symbol of liberation and new opportunities for his adherents, and in the general sense, for all of Russia. In *The Living Fire* (2008) this emphasis lies in the chapter "Conclusion." According to him the Russian folk and especially the Russian state, since it carries in-depth "Aquarian" qualities, cannot exist without possessing a certain spiritual-political "meta-idea" (Globa 2008:375).

One of Globa's central metaphors presented in the title of the book reveals his understanding of the doctrine he spreads through the masses as the "religion of fire." The word "fire" with its lexical variations that amount to 53 in the first edition of the text, builds a dense network of collocations with a large set of other sacred attributes. Most frequently used are the terms "divine" and "highest." Another expression that plays an important role is the phrase "defilement of fire," weighed as the worst sin of all, and in the context of Marxism, Leninism, and materialism mutually it means "devil's teaching" (Globa 1996:75f). In another context we read that a "primordial defilement" occurred because of an "improper choice of the man" (Globa 1996:24) that allowed evil to invade the world (Globa 1996:25). In such a way, "fire" symbolizes a free choice with individual responsibility as a new viewpoint in the changing post-Soviet era. The tautological nuance of "living fire" intensifies the allusion of a free, positively assessed element. In another text passage, the fire becomes a metaphor for humanity too:

Within the man who is created after God, Fire represents a spirit of the human, his creative potential or a particle of divine light giving the possibility to grasp the idea of the higher world without losing himself. Regarding the world structure that is an inner fire, actually, [it] is not distinguishable from the other sorts of sole Fire. The analogy of that term can be found in all traditions that embrace the distinction between light and darkness" (Globa 1996:31).

The distinctive rhetorical figure of the astrological Zoroastrian discourse can be observed within the text that utilizes striking Christian allusions, e.g. a reference to Jesus (Luke 12:49): "I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!" (Globa 1996:9). Although the quotation (actually used outside its context) should enhance the explanations, it does not work as an argument but as an appellation to old Christian sources and old authority, relativizing Globa's primary notion of the "particular" and "pure" Zoroastrian character of his teachings and building a bridge to the dominant, Christian

orthodox background of mass culture. Indeed, the metaphor “fire” is almost universally positive whenever it is found in other religious and occult teachings.

Another metaphor that is repeatedly used in the text is linked to astrology. Astrology is science leaning towards medicine. Through its prognoses, astrology is expected to change human behavior for the better. Because of this expectation, astrology also becomes medicine’s rival. As the author states, a professional astrologer could make a diagnosis of fate and offer a means of avoiding or promoting that fate.

Spatial metaphors and simultaneous binaries such as East-West are steadily attainable and make Globa’s position vivid. E.g. the writing provides the opinion that the Eastern lifestyle, especially Eastern philosophy and religion, is more valuable than the Western lifestyle. The latter offers to the humankind a technological way of development that steers people towards new catastrophes (e.g. the appearance of “biological robots” and “non-humans” resisting the rest of humanity (Globa 2008:377)).

Globa also uses selected metaphors bordering popular philosophical and religious clichés (“life is a chess party,” “main goal of man is the way to God,” “life [of the man] is not blessedness, not suffering, it is work”). Idiomatic features of this text manifest themselves in two aspects: the first I would label “astrological,” where astrological terms are used (“Neptune in the Aquarius”). The second is linked to the Soviet past, common places, and existing realities within Soviet culture (e.g. outlining life as hard work and examination, he compares that with a “trip for potato gathering”—a common social practice in the Soviet times, which at present has no more cultural relevance for urban dwellers (Globa 2008:23f)).

The word “choice” (выбор) is, regarding historical descriptions, overrun with scientific terminology but colloquial and vivid towards utterances about current Russian and international politics and ordinary life. The vocabulary carries a partial imprint of the “old Soviet times.” This is characteristic of *The Living Fire* (1996), whereas the 2nd edition with its new texts makes use of contemporary fashionable expressions such as “public relations,” “globalization,” “virtual worlds,” etc. The text offers plenty of rhetorical questions that provide stylistic lightness and expressivity during introductions of philosophical discussions about morality, life, and humanity. This, along with asyndeta (a group of words that are not connected through conjunctions) in the titles are precious figures in Globa’s speech.

Globa’s individual position in the text is hard to find because of his collective self-identification in the frequent usage of the pronoun “we.” The narrating voice appeals to “our country” and “our history.” Particularly, in the introductory parts of each chapter, he uses clauses that often emerge in scientific

speech like “let us see.” In this sense, he constitutes common language space and gives the illusion of scientific evidence, which he vindicates, asserting his authority as an educated historian.

According to Fairclough (2007:47), every text could entail “a set of voices which are potentially relevant and potentially incorporated into the text.” Although the search for those “voices” is sophisticated and not always successful, the researcher should pose the question, “Through what mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion and through which suppressions in the text do these voices emerge?” Firstly, as I have already mentioned, the strong tendency of the text to appear “scientific” implies many examples from different sciences. Globa informs the reader about some facts from physics, mathematics, biology, medicine, and history. Those examples should bolster the understanding of the items he discusses in analogies forming a holistic view of the world. The scientific voices breed intertextuality through the method of “indirect reporting” of what was written or said. Globa makes no precise explanations of scientific theories and facts, nor does he use quotations; he just describes (or even reinterprets) them in his own way. Another example of the presence of such textual anomalies is his direct reports or quotations from the New Testament. Jesus Christ is the dominant voice that is quoted in this text. In the first edition of the book, Jesus’ name is cited 27 times throughout the entire book whereas Zarathushtra’s figure stays in the background with only 13 references. There are no direct quotations from the Avesta at all; it is perpetually paraphrased without giving any further references or footnotes. Quotations from political events are strikingly extensive, e.g. the interview given by the former Russian president Vladimir Putin for an Iranian TV-program during his visit to Iran in 2008 (Globa 2008:119ff), which is presented in Globa’s unabridged “Conclusion” (Globa 2008:380). A straightforward comment after this quotation that leans towards political authority (“even the president thinks that Zoroastrianism is a ‘mother-religion’ in our country”) concludes *The Living Fire* (2008) and emphasizes again the populist and Russia-centered idea of the book.

One more aspect of Globa’s intertextuality—I would call it an obvious case of religious intertextuality—reveals the syncretic (and even synthetic) character of Globa’s teachings. By adopting non-Zoroastrian religious-philosophical concepts such as karma or yin and yang, he blends them with Zoroastrian theology without being confused. In a similar way he uses vocabulary and hence also theological concepts of Russian Orthodox Christianity (“God” (Господь), “sin” (грех), “blessing” (благословение), and “penitence” (покаяние)) to explain Zoroastrian matters, names, and symbols. Similarly, these rhetorical strategies take root within the astrological Zoroastrian milieu. For instance, the practice of the Eucharist (причащение),



carried out using pomegranate juice and milk after common prayers in the St. Petersburg Zoroastrian community, is interpreted by means of vocabulary commonly used within Christian ritual practices.

Perhaps the concept of *Mitra's* structure, contents, and design can best be illustrated by a brief description of two issues from 2000 and 2007 that are accessible for free (in contrast to most other issues where one can just see the titles) on *Mitra's* website. Both cover special topics. A comment in the news section explains why these issues were published online in full: the editor decided on free access only in the case of issues dedicated to “internal celebrations” more precisely to the first *Zoroastrian Congress* and the 10th anniversary of *Mitra*. The following analysis focuses on the paper versions. The first issue has 63 pages, including the inner covers used for texts and pictures, with a print-run of 500 copies. The 2007 issue is four times thicker (253 pages plus covers) with a print-run of 1000 copies. The first issue consists of texts and visual materials devoted to materials and commentaries from the 2000 congress held in St. Petersburg. The structure of that issue reflects the order of individual speeches, recorded and slightly edited by the editor(s) and published as separate articles. The “*nask*-structure” of *Mitra's* regular issues is omitted here; the longstanding rubrics outside this “*nask*-structure,” for instance, “Zoroastrian cuisine,” are also missing. Instead, all contents are derived from the quasi-planned and “extraordinary” congress speeches that take up most of the space, final reports with corresponding documents in a bureaucratic style, and finally good feedback from the participants regarding the organization of the congress, published in the rubric “Our post.” The next part, also signed by the editor, consists of short replies to a questionnaire from a Ukrainian couple about Zoroastrianism in their lives, and then the final words of the organizational committee. After that there are a poem, a short article about time, post-congress impressions, and then an article by the editor about the magazine *Mitra* itself and its role in the development of Zoroastrianism in the post-Soviet area. The issue concludes with a fragment from the Russian translation of the Pahlavi text *Shayast na shayast* (The allowed and the non-allowed) written around the 9th century CE and entitled “Zoroastrian commandments.”

The second issue was published on the 10th anniversary of *Mitra*, as is mentioned in the preface (“Editorial article”). The issue consists of a large number of texts with the ‘*nask*-structure’ as well as reports of the meeting between Pavel Globa and Iranian *mōbedyār* (Zoroastrian lay priest) Kamran Loryan in Moscow (4–30) in May 2007, documented with a lot of photographs, one article by Globa, and culinary recipes. In the “annotation” on the website written in five languages (Russian, Ukrainian, Belarusian, English and Farsi), the background is explained. Some texts, such as “The course on Zervan-

Zoroastrianism,” a summary of an old Globa speech, are revised for this publication following Globa’s conversation with Loryan.

Another style of articulation of Zoroastrianism is clearly distinguished by the Internet presence of the *Russian Anjoman*. Their website constructs a collective “we” as a community of co-religionists sharing basic postulates of Zoroastrianism, which are listed on the welcome page (in the Russian version, each of the nine postulates begins with “we believe in”). Here, apart from the tendency to use Zoroastrian religious terms based on the close reading of religious texts and their translations, we observe the application of scientific and linguistic vocabulary. Similar to the new website of the St. Petersburg Zoroastrian community, *zoroastrian.ru*, that appeared three years later, *blagoverie.org* is a collection of textual sources of and news about global and Russian Zoroastrianism (also partially in other languages). The contents of *blagoverie.org* are clear-cut and divided into seven rubrics: “Avesta,” “Tradition,” “Priesthood,” “Admission of the faith,” “Anjoman,” “The World of Good Faith,” and “Forum”. Particularly, the forums have been important for the community over the years. They present Zoroastrianism through a collection of translations from Avestan and Pahlavi ritual instructions. The forum moderators compiled the most relevant information from the Internet and RuNet that is of any relevance to traditional (Iranian and Indian) forms of Zoroastrianism (e.g. TV-broadcastings that are accessible on the Internet, YouTube trailers, links to other [including the St. Petersburg website] Zoroastrian websites).

## 2.4. Selected topics

In the following subchapter, I will try to present some topoi of the Zoroastrian religious discourse. In my view, these chosen topics possess a controversial character for the aforementioned discursive communities, and for that reason, such comparison helps us understand the variety of answers to the subjects that constitute this overall religious field. Like the previous one, this subchapter initially turns towards the (printed) material produced by Pavel Globa, *Mitra*, and the website of the *Russian Anjoman*. To a smaller extent, I will also analyze the connections to some marginal discursive communities mentioned above.

### 2.4.1. Between secret doctrine and universal religion

The question “What is Zoroastrianism?” or the idea of the sublime potential of this religion is the starting point for everyone who begins to articulate his own position or belief in a textual frame. Hence, this simplified problem is genuinely

fertile for exploration, depending upon how variously and repetitiously the answers to these questions within the religious discourse of Zoroastrianism are given. The first of the regular binaries in the discussion of the role of Zoroastrianism in the astrological milieu is the exclusive relationship between religion and science. Globa's views about science as a destructive power in human history use rhetorical figures that betray the great impact of scientific language. Thus, religion only can meet the needs of modern people and make the world harmonious; correspondingly, human reality is constructed as "wholeness" (Globa 1996:3; Globa 2008:13). Starting with ancient history, Globa claims that humankind knows very little about older periods and peoples, and in this sense, the results of scientific studies are not self-evident. The same distrust of academic efficiency, despite the apparent utilization of scientific theories, can be observed in the texts of other discursive communities in the religious field as well.

In order to advance his arguments, Globa suggests an alternative history based on interpretations that deviate from common scholarly interpretations of the past. For instance, the *Atlantis* myth as well Avestan texts have been used as sources to prove that the Aryans came to Earth from outer space. That long tradition should legitimize, in Globa's view, the contemporary Zoroastrianism that he attempts to present in *The Living Fire*. Thus, the cosmic myth that developed into an imaginative history of ancient Aryans and the idea of the five races that formed the civilizations on Earth build one of the central concepts in the astrological Zoroastrian doctrine. This theory originates from some anthroposophical ideas and from *The Living Ethics* (also *Agni Yoga*) (re-published several times from the 1920s to the 1990s) by Elena and Nikolay Roerich, who were familiar with the Hyperborean legend of the seven root races received through its theosophical interpretation by Helena Blavatsky. The renowned occult concept about the Arctic as the home country of the Aryan (consequently of Slavic and Russian) people, in combination with the scientific discourse about the Eurasian proto-community and the migration of the Indo-Iranians, has enjoyed its popularity in the 1990s by the Russian Neopagans and has also inspired authors of many Slavic fantasy books (see Chapter 5). According to Globa's monistic concept, the essence of every religious world teaching is the cosmic universal law that was brought to Earth from Ursa Major by the white Aryan race many millions of years ago.<sup>19</sup> He claims that in Zoroastrianism, as opposed to other religions, the Universal law has been absolutely preserved. The Aryans had initially founded a civilization in the Arctic after landing, but due to the flood after the Ice Age, they moved to Eurasia. In the south, between the *Daiti* River (the Ural River) and the lake

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<sup>19</sup> In his early lectures Globa also mentioned the exact time, dating it back eight and a half million years ago. See e.g. Globa 1990:197.

*Vourukarta* (the Caspian Sea), they found a second home—a country named *Khairat*. After that, Aryans gradually spread out to Europe, Iran, and India. From this viewpoint the Aryan (=white, European) race is manifested as a holder of the highest knowledge and the founder of a highly developed civilization that should enrich other nations with its achievements; this is not necessarily Globa's original idea, since it is completely consistent with neopagan ideas from the 1990s (Shnirel'man 2001a).

Even though in modern ethnic Zoroastrianism the highest adored deity is Ahura Mazdā, Globa emphasizes that the teaching of *Zervan* as an absolute principle is crucial for the attainment of secret Zoroastrian knowledge. According to his view, *Zervan* manifests himself in two emanations: first as *Zervan Karana*, a limited, terrestrial time, and then as *Zervan Akarana*, an unlimited time or eternity. The latter *Zervan* is the father of entity and the physical universe, who gave birth to two spirits *Ahura Mazdā* and *Angra Mainyu*. That is why *Zervan* holds the central position and why Globa draws a theological distinction between two main currents within Zoroastrianism: an exoteric, underlying Zoroastrianism itself and a hidden, esoteric Zoroastrianism, particularly *Zervanism*.<sup>20</sup> He describes Zoroastrianism as the religion of his pupils, who in contrast to him do not have an Iranian ancestry (Tessmann 2005). However, he sees himself as the only “proper” *Zervanite* and *magician*<sup>21</sup> in Russia. Globa emphasizes that he is just one of many *Zervan* worshipers, and that the others are believed to live “probably in Tajikistan.” The esoteric tradition of *Zervanism* or the religion of the ancient Median mages provides, in his opinion, particular canons and rituals, which are not implemented in the so-called “orthodox” Zoroastrianism. Modern Zoroastrianism is what remained after an old “concealed teaching” of antiquity called *Zervanism*. Although all religions could be reduced to the same origin, Zoroastrianism (particularly, its esoteric component) is extraordinary among others because of its “archaic” form. One of the authors in *Mitra* tries to reconstruct the reasons why *Zervanism* was excluded from the Zoroastrian mainstream religion:

<sup>20</sup> The term *Zervanism* (usually *Zurvānism*, <Av. *zruuān*, “time”) has been primarily applied in the religious-historical secondary literature about religion(s) of ancient Iran and refers probably to the alternative religious current at the time of Sasanian Persia. Whereas Mary Boyce and her successors (Boyce 1982:231f) see in *Zurvānism* a “heresy” opposing the Sasanian state-Zoroastrianism, there is another view on it as a variation of the Zoroastrian creation myth (see Stausberg 2001(1):245ff, 480).

<sup>21</sup> See Tessmann 2005. Globa's definition suggests an intensive reception of scientific literature of this subject. In the foreground stand doubtlessly the works of R.C. Zaehner 1954 and 1955. Perhaps, another example is a theory expressed by H. C. Nyberg (1966:388): „Er [sc. *Zervanismus*] ist typische Priesterlehre und Priesterspekulation. *Der Zervanismus ist die besondere Ausgestaltung der alten medischen Religion der Magier vor der Ankunft des Zoroastrismus; er ist die Religion der Magier.*“ (Italics in the original). In Nyberg's view, *Zervanism* [sic] is much older than Zoroastrianism.

It becomes clear that the conflict between Zervanites and orthodox Zoroastrians was brewing. Zoroastrians, striving for order and clarity and worshipping the Sun [sic] and fire, as well as fire temples, services and regulated life—can hardly coexist with the impetuous, seeking for truth and freedom, free from all forms and ideas Zervanites. Bright red-blue-yellow or white cords of Zoroastrians, and black-gray-white cords of Zervanites emphasize an abyss as it would be between day and night vision. Zervanism has been considered gloomy—the triad raven-spider-grass-snake being sacred to Zervanites cast a trembling over the normal people worshipping a bull, a camel and a dog. Accusations of witchcraft [unclear—AT] could easily be attributed to Zervanites and became a cause for deportations. "In emptiness there is no life but death"—this phrase could be a verdict of guilty for the people owning the keys to their own consciousness (Amosov 2007:206).

*Zervan* as a deity of time, on the one hand, and the Universal cosmic law on the other, fulfill the basic concepts upon which the *Avestan astrology*, being an inner part of *Zervanism*, has been based. In his wish to bridge primordial truth to modern *weltbild*, Globa insists that astrological prognosis is understood as a vehicle to research and change destiny on several mystical levels. From this point of view, it is quite logical that the largest chapter of Globa's primary work *The Living Fire* in both editions is dedicated to applied esoteric knowledge—namely to astrology ("Astrology as a key to the understanding of the world"). The chapter explains the meaning of astrology to the modern man and some spatial differentiations of astrology as well. Collocations of the words "Avestan" and "astrology" within the chapter are quite seldom (from the total 134 just 14), which shows the strong tendency by Globa to ascribe general validity to his own method. Globa designates astrology as "Ancient," "divine science," "lost science," and he occasionally uses the term "astrological approach" (Globa 2008:37). Astrology in *The Living Fire* is defined as a "science," but is often accompanied by the constant attributive word "secret," which also corresponds to the idea that astrology is an 'occupation for few' (Globa 2008:25,35). Globa explains that modern astrology has false interpreters and could degrade into a fashion, as has been the case since "the beginning of democracy." However, the "proper" astrology is an esoteric one. *Avestan astrology* is a sort of pre-astrology that has given birth to other astrological schools (European, Indian, and Tibetan). In his texts, Globa appeals to scientific evidence and authorities (also to so-called "Great personalities" [великие люди]: outstanding scholars, artists, politicians) by cultivating the main aspects of many schools of astrology, the ideas of correspondences, and resemblances, which can be reduced to the hermetic formula "as above, so below" (36).

*Avestan astrology* is considered a part of the Aryan teachings. Globa inherited *Avestan astrology* in its esoteric form from his grandfather, a circumstance that

is not mentioned in either editions of *The Living Fire* but is discussed in *Mitra* and the Russian mass media (see Chapter 4). Globa explains that some Zoroastrian elements do not differ from “agnostic,” “non-mythologized,” contemporary European astrology. Globa also operates with commonly known signs; he often gives explanations based on the Jungian psychological understanding of a human and his strivings to change his own character. Globa draws a great panorama of analyzing components (apart from the usual planets, houses, and signs of the zodiac), including many new (fictional) planets (for instance, Proserpina), meteors, or particular points on the lunar calendar (for instance, the Black and the White Moons). As a rule, while Globa’s texts describe his astrological approach, they lack any technical instruction of how to use this knowledge practically.

Generally, *Avestan astrology* understands itself as a prognostic therapy radiating the astrological chart as a state of good and evil potentials in the private life of a human. Mostly such astrology gives many reasons for pessimistic prognoses. According to this astrology, evil disturbs harmony in the world. However, bad constellations should not make people into fatalists without any hope to improve their conditions; it should give a great impulse to overcome fate through the Zoroastrian imperative of good thoughts, good words, and good deeds. Nevertheless, Globa, by integrating *Avestan astrology* into the Aryan myth and the Zervanite or Zoroastrian religion when it comes to the presentation of his astrological system, does not always articulate the religious or traditional character of the symbiosis. It is typical for him to describe astrology as a “science” and himself as an “astrologer” or a “historian” who made astrology his main profession. The impression that Pavel Globa is a commercially successful brand and not a private person is visible on his RuNet websites (also because of a minimum of personal data and the overuse of a “professional image,” such as Globa’s books, interviews, and TV-broadcasts). These websites, usually hosted by an individual webmaster, offer a range of paid astrological consultations (e.g. *globa.ru*, *pavelgloba.ru*).<sup>22</sup>

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22 Globa’s “official” biography (here *globa.ru*), which reads more like an advertisement, contains descriptions of his astrological predictions and occupy most of the website’s space. Cf: “Pavel Pavlovich Globa is a prominent astrologer and historian, rector of the Astrological Institute, president // of the Association of Avestan astrology, author of about 40 scientific-popular books. His astrological // knowledge he inherited from [his] ancestors whose roots [sic] can be retraced many thousands of years ago to // the prophet Zarathushtra [sic] predicting the coming of Jesus Christ. His prognoses for the future development of our // Land and the situation in the World have been realised to have a probability of not less than 85 per cent. Here are some of [his] // prognoses: the collapse of the USSR, Chernobyl’s average, the catastrophe of the ferry “Estonia,” the earthquake in // Armenia, the August crisis, B.N. Yeltsin’s dismissal, V.V. Putin’s rise to power, the act of terrorism on the 11th of September, // the [second – AT] Iraq war and and the enigmatic escape of Saddam Hussein.

The main metaphors for astrology in the texts are the idea that astrology works like “medicine,” and that using astrology is like visiting lawyer in order to get good advice. Astrology helps “to understand the laws of our world,” “to live with life laws,” “to prevent,” and “to alleviate conflicts” (Globa 1996:36) Astrology explains “cycles of universe” (Globa 1996:36) and “cosmic influence on the Earth” (Globa 1996:36). Globa also briefly surveys astrology regarding its fields. The main accent he provides to his astrology is personality. Thus, astrology in everyday life “allows defining peculiarities of a character (innate and learned), strong and weak sides of personality (including talents and psychological complexes), true direction of development of personality..., define the temptations of evil and the support of good forces (from where and when one should expect them). His astrology also “explains the true causes of current events, foretells several variations of future events that depend upon future choices, corrects behavior (prompts what should be paid attention to), chooses the optimal time to begin an affair, warns about dangerous and critical situations, and a lot of other things” (Globa 1996:37). Another “astrological approach” used by Globa is karmic astrology. In the common sense, astrology is considered a tool “to predict the future” (Globa 1996:36f), but the main goal of astrology is therapeutic and educational.

If we turn our gaze towards the milieu of the *AShAs* and analyze the various sources about Zervanism within the text corpus of *Mitra*, we can detect that Globa’s programmatic articles are the most voluminous sources of information within them. His pupils often use his sentences without going deeper into other possible sources, and if they do (e.g. with references to some scholarly publications<sup>23</sup>) they try to interpret them in the same way as Globa did it in his publications.

Affection towards popular philosophy and speculative history are the reasons why Globa remains in his own way almost unreceptive towards modern forms of

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[blank] // People who took heed of his warnings saved us from many misfortunes—in 1993 the first block of the Rovenskaia NPS, in March 95 [there was] extraordinary preventive measures at // the Ignalinskaia NPS. [In] November 1994, a crash at the ammoniac industrial complex in the city of // Ventspils was averted; that are just a few of the commonly acknowledged facts. Annually he shares his // prognoses [with us] trying to warn the humankind against fatal errors, to escape several catastrophes and to avoid // improper political decisions. Now many political figures, big businessmen and // famous people consult Pavel Globa. [We] hope that we will subsequently learn some names.[blank] // The main direction of Pavel Globa’s work is an in-depth investigation of astrological science and // its popularization, the systematization of knowledge and the education of professional astrologers. Most of the // famous astrologers nowadays have studied astrology by Pavel Globa, he occupies this position already // thirty years long. Some people are proud of this, some people conceal it, but there is hardly any astrologer who was not reading // his books and not studying [his] works.”

<sup>23</sup> The most cited source is Zaehner 1955, also translated into Russian by Globa’s adherents.

Zoroastrianism in his publications. His main interests are religions in their historical, esoteric transformations. The primary Zoroastrian sources, the Avesta and Pahlavi books, serve him only as illustrations for his speculative intellectual constructions. That is the point where his pupils seek to bridge *Avestan astrology* to modern Zoroastrian rituals and construct a specific modus of Zoroastrian discourse as a discourse of believers, which is not present at all in Globa's speech.

However, Globa conducted some programmatic articles for his pupils published in *Mitra* that are now freely accessible online. Besides these articles, the genre of creed within Globa's collected work is less prevalent and only seems to have been used in self-presentations (e.g. at the *First Zoroastrian Congress* in 2000) (Globa 2000a:6ff) and religious disputes with foreign Zoroastrians, for instance, with möbedyār Kamran Loryan (Path 2007:4ff; Globa 2007a:57ff; [Zervanites] 2009:3ff). Thus, symptomatically—in the very first publication of *Mitra's* zero issue—he, being a leader of the newly established community at that time, draws a strong distinction between Russian and other “directions” within modern Zoroastrianism in the “honoring of the Zervanite tenet in the river-bed of Zoroastrianism” (Globa 1997b:2). Without explaining why it is a necessary point, Globa clarifies this theological difference and continues:

Orthodox Zoroastrianism does not acknowledge something that is higher than Ahura Mazda—God-Creator, however, the secret (сокровенная) part of Zoroastrianism is the teaching about Zervan as basis of fundamentals (основа основ), incomprehensible and unknowable absolute of absolutes, indefinable, indescribable in the words of human language. Zervan is infinite in forms and appearances in time as well as in space. Worlds are bearing through Zervan's thought. We hardly belittle Ahura Mazda as Creator, because in some sense Ahura Mazda and Zervan are one; as one could become a Creator if he is already unified with Zervan (Globa 1997b:2).

Globa depicts Zervanism as a monotheistic religion (Globa 2000a:13). Without Zervanism, a “living spirit of the teaching,” Zoroastrianism would suffer (Globa 2007b:193).

Thus, Zervanism is assumed to be a modern, somewhat pervasive religion, with many adherents as well as an abstract, theological construction that differs from Zoroastrianism as it was founded. Globa's narrative surmises real Zervanites and Zervanite communities living outside of Russia:

There are now just a few Zervan-Zoroastrian communities in the world; establishing contact with them is difficult. One can count a few communities in Pamir, in Hindukush, in the North-East Iran. There is data about the existence of Zervanites on the territory of the former USSR, primarily in Tajikistan, and also in the region of the mountains Badakhshan. There have been reported a few



communities in Uzbekistan, particularly in the area of the Fergan valley. Some evidences persisted about groups of Zervanites at the beginning of this century in Azerbaijan (Globa 1997b:2).

Although some Russian Zoroastrians are still anxious to find Zervanites during their travels throughout Iran (Malakhova 2007:147), that assertion—while permanently contended by the Russian scholars (see Chapter 3)—has been considered non-conclusive on selected pages of *Mitra* (but it has been indirectly confirmed at least once [Path 2007:4ff]) by mōbedyār Loryan in 2007 (Loryan 2007:20). Loryan appeared on the magazine's pages in 2007 during an attempt to draw attention away from that topic and focus it to Gathic Zoroastrianism.

However, the main position of the *Mitra* supports the Zervanite myth as one of the most important postulates of Globa's teachings (Tarasova 2000:41; Smirnov 2000:48f; Sokolova 2000:62). However, there is an opinion that apart from astrology the Avestan teaching also consists of alchemy (Koroviak 2000:46f). Nevertheless, the junior-prior Chistiakov, while discussing the establishment of a "canon" for Russian Zoroastrianism, distinguished between "receivable" and "heretic" Zervanism that cannot be accepted among other Zoroastrian texts. Chistiakov demanded the research on that topic (Chistiakov 2000:18) that had been fixed in the final document of the Congress (Document 2000:55) but had not been mentioned since. Globa also accredits a manuscript that he calls *Zervan Namag* (the book of Zervan) to Zervanite texts that is still mostly unknown to other people (Tessmann 2005:98f). This work has been used by Globa to communicate some stories, maxims, etc. (Globa 2000a:8). Among all students and colleagues, the astrologer Nikolaï Koroviak is the only other person that circumstantially cites the *Zervan Namag* as well (Koroviak 2000:46).

Globa describes a peculiar Zervanite teaching that is linked to certain ceremonies and feast observances in the pages of *Mitra*. There are about four "main Zervanite festivals," which can be distinguished through their strict character and are "associated with the receiving of a personal revelation through mantras and meditation".<sup>24</sup> Nonetheless the celebrations of one of the so-called Zervan days during the tour near lake Turgoiak in the Urals has been similar to ordinary celebrations within the astrological Zoroastrian milieu (Sokolova 2007:234). The beginning of the Persian New Year (Nouruz) on the 21st of

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<sup>24</sup> For instance, see [Feasts] 2007:66f: "1. Holiday of Zervan-king, Zervan-father and Zervan-ruler. Zervan holiday in a shape of a Lion is celebrated on August 7–8th, when the sun is at 15° Leo.// 2. Holiday of Zervan Akarana, the unlimited time, which is depicted in the form of a golden spider web with a human head. Celebrated on November 22th at 30° Scorpio.// 3. Holiday of Zervan, the Creator, Kirder's holiday. Noted in our Yuletide—from the 4th to the 17th January, prevalently on January 4th, at 14° Capricorn.// 4. Holiday of Zervan Karana, the limited time. It is celebrated on the day when the sun passes through the degree in the fall of Saturn (21° Aries)—April 11th."

March is also interpreted as the “point of Zervan,” when the Sun moves into the border between Pisces and Aries and enters the terrestrial world (Volynkin 2007:104). This exact moment is important for the overall community, therefore they gather each year on that day early in the morning.<sup>25</sup>

If Zervanism is being connected to the esoteric part of Zoroastrianism (as *Avestan astrology* or also *Avestan alchemy*) as acknowledged by Globa and his sympathizers in *Mitra*, then this is also a direct link to the concept of cosmic law and Indo-Slavic culture (Kuchma 2000:38). Within the literature that is being discussed here, the terms “Zervanism” and “Zoroastrianism” are often reciprocally interchangeable.

*Mitra* reproduces other points of view that can be perceived from the main ideas of Zoroastrianism as well, and therewith tries to harmonize its own pro-Globa understanding of religion with the opinions of other religious specialists both from Iran (Kamran Loryan, Ardeshir Khorshedian) and from India (Burzin Atashband, Meher Master-Moos) (see Atashband 2000:33f; Master-Moos 2007:137ff). As a result, there is an obvious disinclination to articulate different kinds of religious knowledge. Globa’s rhetoric has been transformed into a kind of religious relativism. Thus, Zoroastrianism is considered to be a “pluralistic” religion that potentially possesses many coexistent interpretations of rituals; it is also a “less dogmatic” religion. However, it remains “monotheistic.” Even though it is an ancient kings’ religion, Zoroastrianism is considered inherent to the modern people.

For the *Russian Anjoman* this Zervanite doctrine, which is widely discussed in the astrological Zoroastrian milieu, sounds rather obscure and hence, the *Anjoman*’s activists criticize any connection to occult and esoteric sciences. They insist on the linking of Russian Zoroastrianism to the Iranian tradition and approve of contacts to Iranian (but not to Indian) religious authorities such as the *Iranian Mobed Council*, acknowledged by them as “the highest authority among the world Zoroastrian community,” which does not necessarily correspond to reality. In the text that can be defined as the *Anjoman*’s creed, the RuNet website’s welcome page states<sup>26</sup>:

We believe in the Oneness of Creator [sic]—Ahura Mazda—the life giving wisdom, the creator of life and wisdom, whose essence is light and goodness.// We believe in the first and only prophet Asho Zarathushtra and the revelation granted to him by Ahura Mazda.// We believe in the existence of both spiritual and material worlds.// We believe in ASHA (righteousness and order), that is the Law of the existence.// We believe in the essence of human beings and humanity: daena (conscience), mana (spirit, mind) and farvahar (spiritual protector) that

<sup>25</sup> In 2009, I took part in the Nouruz celebration that began about at 7 a.m.

<sup>26</sup> This text has two editions in Russian and English, the former is much larger than the latter.

allow them make [sic] their choice [sic] between Good and Evil.// We believe in Ameshaspands (Beneficent Immortals), the seven divine steps/stages of evolution.// We believe in “dād o dahesh”// donation/contribution and helping the needy.// We believe in the sanctity of earth, wind, water and fire, plants and animals and in necessity of the environmental protection.// We believe in “Frashkard” (constant rejuvenation) of the world.// Frashkard means “positivism” and find [sic] always new ways in life to reach the common humane objectives, destroy evil and fulfil people's desire of happiness and joy (original English translation) (Anjoman Mazda Yasna 2007).

Similar to the concepts of Globa's students, the “good faith” is in the *Anjoman's* view, a religion that is open to everyone in the world.

#### 2.4.2. The “Good religion” and the destiny of Russia

Globa envisions the purpose of Russian Zoroastrians today in, literally reproduced, the “restoration” of Zoroastrianism on the territory of the Russian Federation. Considering himself a direct offspring of some secret Iranian *Zervan* worshipers, who originate from a *Zervanite*-Zoroastrian house near Tabriz, Globa claims that his grandfather on his mother's side, Ivan Nikolaevich Gantimurov, built a small Zoroastrian congregation in St. Petersburg at the beginning of the 20th century. The congregation, however, could not rest longer under the dramatic social-economic circumstances of that time and went up in smoke after the October Revolution of 1917. He also insists that those St. Petersburg Zoroastrians had obtained some plot of land near the St. Petersburg Buddhist temple (the Datsan Gunzechoinei). *Mitra* echoes the notion of primordial Zoroastrianism existing in modern Russian territories through the pathetic rhetoric of self-projections; this notion was clearly articulated at *the first Zoroastrian Congress* in 2000 (Chistiakov 2000; Lushnikov 2000; Kuchma 2000; Globa 2000a, 2000c; Sokolova 2000).

In the works of Globa and *Mitra*, Russia occupies an essential place among other countries as a “homeland of Zoroastrianism” and the “birthplace of the prophet Zarathushtra.” Mary Boyce's hypothesis about the supposed birthplace of Zarathushtra is broadly discussed in the Russian translations of her popular book *Zoroastrians: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices* (1979).<sup>27</sup> Boyce's work has become commonplace for some speculative assertions that Zarathushtra was born in the Urals. However, according to the original text, Zarathushtra is supposed to have lived “in Asian steppes near to the east bank of Volga” (Boyce

<sup>27</sup> See the Russian translation of *The Zoroastrians* (Зороастрийцы: верования и обычаи, 1985) that includes not only a new preface and postscript, but also many comments and additions such as an amended title to the Russian bibliography.

1988:3), and this does not imply an exact location (see also Chapter 3). Nevertheless, false references to or paraphrases of Boyce's hypothesis have also been used as irrefutable evidence and are found in almost all publications by Globa and in *Mitra*.

In Globa's eyes, the prophet Zarathushtra popularized the exoteric version of Zoroastrianism, hiding *Zervanite* mysteries and knowledge from the non-adepts. For the members of the *Russian Anjoman*, the "righteous" Zarathushtra is understood as

the first and only prophet, who received the revelation of God and who was chosen by Ahura Mazda for the prophetic path. Zarathushtra rejected the immoral beliefs and proclaimed the Good Faith (Bekh Din). He showed the people a path to the knowledge of God and perfection, approved religious laws and established Anjoman of mobed preserving continuity and purity of the faith to this day (Blagoverie 2007).

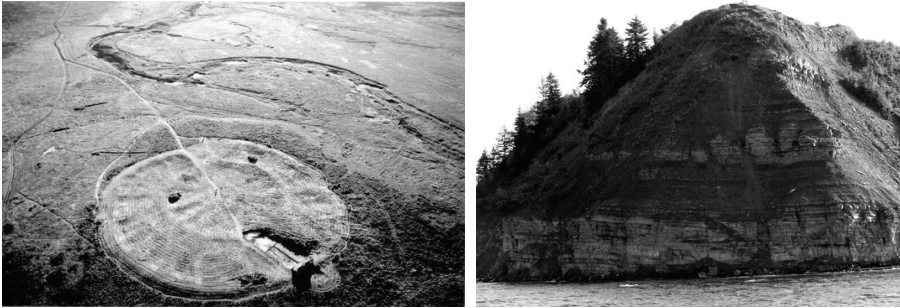
The idea that Zoroastrianism was the native religion of the Russian territories is not unique within the astrological Zoroastrian strand. The *Anjoman* also started an online-project about Zoroastrian elements that are present in Russian heritage. This idea is embraced in some locations in the former Soviet republics, especially by diverse ethnic minorities. This ad hoc approach uses linguistic or ethnographic data to describe the post-Soviet area as "originally predisposed" to Zoroastrianism. Apart from the awareness that Russian Zoroastrianism represents a new religious community that has never been present in Central Russia, the link to the historically grounded legitimization is important for both discursive communities. The *Russian Anjoman* also states that "Zoroastrians have always lived in this territory" (Russian Anjoman 2007).

However, the argumentation in the *Mitra* does not always aim to involve scholarly materials. It understands itself in the same context of Aryan or Hyperborean mythology, which implies uncountable parallels between the language, myths, and cult practice of Slavs and Iranians (and in a narrower sense, Zoroastrians). This leads to the fact that the terms "Aryan," "Slavic," and "Zoroastrian" are not distinguishable from each other (e.g. Sokolova 2002:89). Thus, an author states:

It is impossible to swim across the river and get to the opposite bank not pushing off from the other side, the one on which we stand. What I mean? The opposite bank for us is Zoroastrianism, and the bank, where we stand is the Holy Rus. Here, in this area, such a tradition, I mean Zoroastrianism, has never existed in fact. However, there has been a tradition, a culture being very similar, very akin to Zoroastrianism. A unique culture, actually. To date, though, there is no such clarity, consistency, logicity, which exists in Zoroastrianism. And we need you,

by and large, pick up this culture, wash it, which was illegal, in general, forgotten and flouted, indeed trampled down. Because our roots and origins [came] from it (Kuchma 2000:37).

These views with a large spectrum of narratives are quite at home for many Russian NRMs, such as theosophical and Roerikh's groups, and different *neopagan* communities as well.



Illustrations 3–4. The archeological site Arkaim in the Chelyabinsk Oblast and *The White Mountain* or the *Zarathushtra's mountain* on the cape Strelka where rivers Kama and Chusovaya flow together. Photo: ©O. Lushnikov, ©Perm AshA.

A further publication in *Mitra* formulates it in the following manner:

As we know, the Iranians, Slavs and Indo-Aryans are the descendants of a sole Aryan race that was thousands of years ago divided into three branches. The Indian Vedas, the Slavic Vedas and the Avesta, in essence, have derived from a single source—from the teachings of the ancient Aryans, who came to Earth in the distant past from the stars of Ursa Major (Editorial board b 2000:98).

The center of the world or *axis mundi* in that heterogeneous, eclectic worldview is *Arkaim*. Together with many Russian NRMs, Globa's adherents devote great attention to *Arkaim*—without any doubt a central point of their pilgrimage to the “prehistorical Zoroastrian” sights. *Arkaim* is an archaeological site in the southern Urals near Magnitogorsk. It is a kind of Russian Stonehenge and is revered as an ecologically constructed ancient settlement and observatory. It was discovered in 1987. In fact, *Arkaim* is only part of a big archaeological complex (of the so-called “land of protopoleis”) comprising about 20 circular settlements, which date from the 18th to 16th centuries BCE and are ascribed to the archaeological culture of *Sintashta*.

Called by some the “navel of the earth” or the mystical *Shambala*, *Arkaim* also takes a significant place in the eschatological constructions of some religious groups (Lunkin & Filatov 2000:145). The role of *Arkaim* as a central esoteric

place for all of Russia was articulated by Tamara Globa in the early 1990s (Shnirel'man 2001b). Like other archaeological enigmas of the prehistoric periods, *Arkaim* has its esoteric religious dimension and is adored by many people as a mystical place of revelation. According to statistics, *Arkaim* is visited by about 5000 people annually, and 40% of them are adherents of various parapsychological and religious groups. The wave of “esoteric tourism” flooded the remote area because of mass media reports and some publications written by Pavel Globa and his former wife Tamara. For both of them *Arkaim* has been a place that contains huge spiritual energy that can influence people in a positive way. With the building of many wells, stoves, ovens for metal, and a particular sewage system, as well as multistage water filtration, the ancient settlement has been proclaimed as the absolute ecological system that did not adversely affect the environment. *Arkaim* is implemented in many different metaphors e.g. as a fantastic “zone” reminiscent of the film *Stalker* (Сталкер, 1979) by Russian filmmaker Andreï Tarkovskii (Starostin 2003:148) and as a “land of *Fravashi*” where the “Aryan ancestors” have lived in harmony with nature and the universe (Starostin 2003:149).

Since the beginning of the 1990s, there were two routine patterns of interpretation for *Arkaim*. According to the first, religious-esoteric interpretation, *Arkaim* is the *Vara* of the Zoroastrian ancestor *Yima* (Zartoshti 2003:126), a “sacred capital of king *Vishtaspa*” (Lushnikov 2005), and “one of the first Zoroastrian temples” (Gorshcharik 1999:50). From an astrological point of view, it is considered to be an ancient observatory that had been built in accordance with certain cosmic constellations. In the first case, the astrological Zoroastrian publications refer to Young Avestan texts such as *Vendidad* (*Vidēvdāt*) and *Yasht* (hymns), which speak about *Aryanam Vaejga* land (<Av. “Aryan length”) with the beautiful *Datiya* River, both of which are mentioned in the Avestan text *Vidēvdāt* (Vd.1:1–2), but have not been localized by scholars yet (Stausberg 2001:109). Other Avestan hymns say that *Spitama Zarathushtra* lived in *Aryanam Vaejga* near the *Datiya*, offering sacrifices to *Ahura Mazdā* (Yt.5:104, 9:25, 17:45). Thus, this first group is confident that *Aryanam Vaejga* can be identified with the territory near *Arkaim*. It is connected to the expectancy of *Zarathustra's* prophecy that “the teaching will come back to [the place] where it rose from” (Globa 2008:31).

The “good religion” is also interpreted as a religion that expresses a “protected behavior towards the environment” and a “harmonic relationship between human beings and nature” (Butakova 1997:32). This view also supports the program of the tour *On the Path of Zarathustra* that takes place in the Urals and assumes that participants with urban backgrounds will go on a pilgrimage to

the “sacred places,” which are connected with the ancient Aryan (Lushnikov 2000:32) civilization and with the prophet Zarathustra (Lushnikov 2005).

Thus, a new mythological, *Astro-Zoroastrian* and *sensu lato* Aryan geography has been created and a new prehistory has been redrafted for every tourist spot. For instance, orthodox-Christian pilgrim places and shrines have been declared places that perpetuate holy Zoroastrian traditions because they were built on ancient Zoroastrian altars (Lushnikov 2005). Particular sacred energies have been ascribed to such places and landscapes. They allegedly emanate positive power, or *khvarna* (<Av. *xʷarənah*, Zoroastrian type of charisma). The pilgrimages have been symbolically understood as mysteries of overcoming of the “cabals” of the Evil or Ahriman (Lushnikov 2005).



Illustrations 5-6. The emblem of the tour *On the path of Zarathushtra* (1996-2005), Perm AShA (originally colored) and a *sadrepushi* or *navjote* ceremony lead by a St. Petersburg *khorbad* in Arkaim. Photos: ©O. Lushnikov, ©Perm AshA.

Globa argues that this event is an indispensable Zoroastrian duty like the pilgrimage of Muslims to Mecca or Jerusalem for the Jews (Globa 2004:88). The touring festival has been organized from the AShA in Perm and usually lasts about ten days. The number of participants increased from 16 in 1996 to around 100 in 2006. The program has been gradually extended: while in the first three years there were few destinations, since 1997, 11 fixed ones have been chosen. The most notable from them are *Zarathustra's Mountain* or *White Mountain* (Гора Заратустры или Белая гора), the *Treasury of Zem* (Сокровища Зема) in Kungur's ice hole, *Daena's Island* (Остров Дэны/Веры) in the lake Turgoiak, Arkaim and *Vohumana's* mountain, or visits to the Belogrodskii monastery of Holy Nikolay. The touring program includes important activities such as the

celebration of *Astro-Zoroastrian* festivals: the *Fravashi* or ancestors' commemoration, the festival of *Tishtar*, and the festival of *Ardivisura Anahita* or the *Water Consecration*. Usually the celebrations are combined with workshop activities including lectures about the basics of Zoroastrianism and astrological disciplines (e.g. Astropsychology or karmic Astrology). Sometimes participation in the folklore-ethnographic festival near *Arkaim* is included. Thus, *Zarathushtra's Mountain (White Mountain)* is in the astrological Zoroastrian hagiography Zarathushtra's place of birth. According to this modern myth, when his mother brought him to the mountain, it became miraculously white (Globa 2004:88). In addition to *Zarathushtra's Mountain*, other new rituals have appeared. One of them is reproduced in a film directed by Perm journalist and producer Varvara Kal'pidi, *In the Search of Zarathustra* (2004): the immolating of a red rose to the water may remind the Russian Zoroastrians of the prophet Zarathushtra (Perm AShA 2006; Globa 2006). In addition, the meetings of the members of *ASHAs* from the entire post-Soviet area and other interested persons during the tour *On the Path of Zarathushtra* or collateral conferences serve much more elaborate purposes than simple entertainment. They approve the perception of the territories of the former Soviet republics in the post-Soviet era as unified space, and of religion as a leisurely activity:

What can bring people being different by age, profession, and character together? That is before all the righteous (праведная) religion. In this severe for our country period—however, we believe Ukraine, Russia and Belarus are one country, although being artificially disconnected—only the knowledge of our roots and ancient traditions and the rebirth of the ancient Aryan culture can give us the understanding and can revive our nations like the bird Phoenix (Netrebovskii, Smirnov & Khristenko 2000).

Contrary to Globa and *Mitra*, the topic of *Arkaim* is not popular among the activists of the *Russian Anjoman*. One of them states in the forum:

*Arkaim* may have (but probably does not have) some relationship to the ancestors of the Iranians [...] but it has nothing to do either with *Zarathushtra*, or with the Good Faith (Bahman 2008).

Nevertheless, when discussing Putin's speech on TV, the *Russian Anjoman* did not disavow Putin's statement that Zoroastrianism "has its origin in the southern Urals," as was the case with Globa and his students, but rather it tried to draw attention to their community and their problems because of the forced informal and non-judicial status:



The Russian Anjoman perceived with satisfaction the words of the President [sic]. For the first time in the history of modern Russia, Vladimir Putin, being the first face of the state, has publicly announced during an official visit the Good Faith as originally existing in the territory of Russia, and has elaborated upon the role of Zoroastrianism in the forming of other world religions and the cultural heritage of the folk of Russia. The President's words give grounds to hope for a positive change in relation to the community of the traditional Zarathushti (Anjoman Media 2008).

The past (both imaginary and historical) and the history of Zoroastrianism and other religious currents occupy an important place within Globa's, *Mitra's*, and *Russian Anjoman's* sub-discourses. All three see themselves in the middle of an eschatological struggle between good and evil described in the Zoroastrian texts. All three groups support the cosmological scheme of the Pahlavi *Bundahishn* (the concept of three epochs in this struggle).

Krylov, answering in his *LiveJournal* the question whether in Zoroastrianism there is an analogy to the Christian "holy history," writes:

The entire history is a history of the struggle of the Creator and the people against the Enemy [sic] and its creatures. Correspondingly, Zarathushtra's times are, if one is inclined to compare to something, the winter in 1941. This means, "the offensive of the enemy is stopped, one prepares a breakthrough" // But it is not necessarily so that "everything important has happened before us". We are still at war now and the times are the same. What is going on now is not less important than what happened thousands of years ago. Perhaps even more important (Krylov 2010).

In an earlier text Krylov states that Russia and the Russians have an important messianic mission for the entire Universe; the Russian people will be saved for the Last Day (Krylov 2004). Because the "creation of the world was an act of war" (i.e. a struggle of Ormazd against Ahriman), the answer to Evil should be positive energy from humankind. He wrote,

The Universe is a missile, launched straight into the throat of the Enemy. Its purpose is to hit and to explode. This implies the meaning and the inevitability of the End of the World: The world will be destroyed, but its destruction will destroy the enemy with its power too. That is why it has been created. Yet, it is perfectly clear who in our world the warhead is: this is us, the Russians (Krylov 2004).

Besides this concept, Globa and his followers have appropriated the notion of the beginning of the Aquarian era after the period of pollution and catastrophes. In this context, Zoroastrianism is essential for the solving of ecological problems in Russia. In Globa's vision, the future of humankind has been sketched rather pessimistically. In *The Living Fire II* his pessimistic insights conform to Samuel

P. Huntington's idea of a "clash" between two parts of the world—the East and the West—expressed in his controversial work *The Clash of Civilizations* (1996). According to Globa, the outcome of this intercultural fight is guaranteed to favor the Eastern civilizations. He ascribes a particular role in the "end of history" to Russia and the Slavic peoples (Globa 2007c:736f).

If we abstract from the Zoroastrian theological concepts of time, we can observe that the Russian Zoroastrians share the common fears and hopes of secularized postmodern thought. Therewith, the Zoroastrian terms and concepts are in a certain sense metaphors for the interpretation of post-Soviet reality. In particular, they are linked to post-perestroika trauma and feelings of personal and common social instability.

While in the 1990s the AShAs have had only one authority in religious questions, namely Pavel Globa, the 2000s have been rich on contact with foreign Zoroastrians and authorities, which brought new themes and discourses. The new challenges of communication have sensitized the idea of the role of the Russian Zoroastrians at the global level and the grade of their embodiment. Thus, the contacts of the *St. Petersburg Zoroastrian Community* with the Iranian *mōbedyār* Loryan since 2007 have been stigmatized through a series of new discursive events, which open a new possibility for Globa's adherents to experience or adopt other forms of Zoroastrianism. A recently initiated convert and longstanding author reported in *Mitra*:

At the final evening meeting at the Zoroastrian community in St. Petersburg, Kamran said that he has had up to this last moment not understood why he has arrived. He believed that people in Russia knew much about Zoroastrianism, but still up to this moment, in fact, before his arrival, the formation of Zoroastrianism in Russia were only a preparatory stage. But now it was time to find a spiritual support and to put everything in right order. Kamran said: "Everything must be done properly. We must build a 'house' in accordance with the rules of house building. If you will be allowed the slightest mistake, sooner or later, at the least testing, the roof of 'such house' may break down on you" (Zakharova 2007:29)

Both Loryan and his mentor Khorshedian who visited Russia made attempts to persuade Globa's adherents to refuse esotericism in their beliefs. Does it mean that the new behdins felt ready to reject *Avestan astrology*? Apparently, that was not the case. The above citation and two further issues address identical discussion topics such as *Avestan astrology* and Zervanite philosophy in Globa's presentation, prognoses, reports on Arkaim, etc., and show the solidity of the esoteric Zoroastrian discursive frameworks that were developed earlier. If the turn to "traditionalist" Zoroastrianism was observed as a chance to find a common language with the *Russian Anjoman*, Globa's leadership and the

esoteric practices of his students can be perceived as the most disturbing factors. Perhaps it makes sense to look back at a vision that Globa sketched for his adherents at the first Zoroastrian Congress in 2000:

Once again, I would like to remind you that we are creating now a kind of a basis, a foundation. We have the prospect of a temple. In order to do this we need, firstly, to launch the process so that everything in the future would go independently from us. Secondly, the temple can be erected only with the involvement and with the help of the people who already are the bearers of the tradition, of the teaching. This is possible only on the condition that we will enter the common, unified system of the Zoroastrian teaching. We must not be separated from them. Otherwise, we would be a sect. If Zoroastrianism provides for better opportunities in different directions, we will use them. Moreover, why [should not we do] the same thing? I understand that the Indian current of Zoroastrianism is somewhat different from the Iranian. Likewise, we will distinguish ourselves from the one and from the other, and that is good. I think this question can be asked when we will have established an indissoluble union with our valued guests, and not only with India, but with Iran and so forth. Over the next 20 years, we will do it; then we will build the temple. Jupiter and Saturn are now in Taurus, and the month of Taurus is connected with Asha-Vahishta, i.e. with the Ized who is coincidentally the keeper of the fire (Globa 2000:56).

Globa suggested the strategy of the “golden mean” for the Russian Zoroastrians in his speech. This meant the acceptance of other, “traditionalist” authorities that could also help to improve the distinctive features of their beliefs, perhaps as descents of a “particular sort of Zoroastrianism,” Zervanism. The events of the 2000s with their controversies have still not provided a clear answer as to whether or not this will be possible in the future.

The problem of the future is irrelevant to the *Russian Anjoman* that focus primarily on the universal and not necessarily “Russian” character of Zoroastrianism. For instance, to the direct question about Zoroastrianism in Russia and its development, one of the members of the *Russian Anjoman*, Krylov, behaves rather cautiously arguing his personal position as one of the ordinary believers. To the question “What are the perspectives for the Good Faith (Благоверия) in Russia and around the world?” he replies:

I do not know. At the moment I myself would become a good believer (благоверным)—what is still far, far away. // Ivan Titkov [linked to a *LiveJournal* account—AT] can answer you more thoroughly (krylov 2009).

One more act of self-positioning in the religious space is the global perspective: from this point of view, Russian Zoroastrianism is “one of many” branches in

the world that enjoy equal positions. On this point, Globa's followers concur with the ones from the *Russian Anjoman*.

### 2.4.3. A religious ideal: Being Zoroastrian

With the question, "What is our/my faith?" an individual is linked to the self-projection of a Zoroastrian in the world. What is the religious imperative of Zoroastrian discursive communities? How do confessed believers articulate the problems of self-reference, identity, and representation? Generally, according to the discourses in *Mitra* and the *Russian Anjoman*, religion is a basic concept of human life. Religion is also a criterion for the grade of human development. Thus, in the astrological Zoroastrian milieu, being religious is more valued than not having any religious belief.<sup>28</sup> However, the adherence to religion has to be a conscious choice. The junior leader (младший настоятель) Chistiakov from the *St. Petersburg Zoroastrian Community* claims:

[...] if a person has chosen Christianity, I think that's fine too, and in any case better than no choice at all. But to combine religions—I consider simply a reckless occupation: it is impossible to sail on two ships, because you will inevitably drown. One must make a choice (Chistiakov 1998:36f).

Globa's discourse gives at least three main variations of the Zoroastrian identity, which, in his opinion, can take place in Russia: by birth, by conversion, and in general by something that can be depicted as a "genetic" belonging. Particularly, the first case is a considerably rare one. It borders with the exclusivity that Globa ascribes to himself as a "hereditary Zervanite." According to his autobiographical sketches, utterances in many interviews, public presentations, and short notices that are scattered in the publications under his name, he became a Zoroastrian through the bloodline of his Iranian ancestors. His students developed this type of presentation that one can label "Globa's multi-variable hagiography." The second possibility to gain a Zoroastrian legitimization by the *St. Petersburg Zoroastrians* is the initiation (*navjote* or *sadrepushi*) by permanent learning. The initiation ceremony itself is a ritual that has altered in the last two decades. Globa's early publications and some oral witnesses of his adherents, recount "Zervanite" initiations conducted by Globa publically on the stage immediately after his astrological lectures. One of the attributes of the ceremony is a tricolored cord handed to the initiands. The

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<sup>28</sup> In the first group interviews conducted in the *St. Petersburg Zoroastrian Community* in 2001, my position as agnostic was not welcomed warmly. In addition, childlessness seemed to be another important point of criticism.

colors are construed to be those of the deity *Zervan*. Since the registration of the *St. Petersburg Zoroastrian Community*, no such initiations have been documented. Despite the limited religious authorities of *khorbads* as religious specialists, they were responsible for those rituals and carried them out using a new style, namely with white ritual clothes that were given to St. Petersburg females and males.<sup>29</sup> As explained in an article:

We're not going to prove to anyone whether we exist, and whether we are genuine Zoroastrians or not, and whether we can be Zoroastrians or cannot. We just live within this tradition; our children have been born from Zoroastrian marriages. This indicates that the Zoroastrian tradition is getting roots in our territory (Sokolova 2002a:103).

The second aspect of Zoroastrian identity includes a wide spectrum of activities: attending courses in *Avestan astrology*, acquiring Avestan, Middle Persian, and modern Persian languages, as well as conducting Zoroastrian prayers and rituals.

Another explanation of interest in the Zoroastrian tenet is the concept of “genetic memory,” which is articulated in *Mitra*:

We have heard about Zoroastrianism relatively recently, roughly 8–10 years ago, when we came to P.P. Globa’s lectures. First, we were interested only in the predictive aspects of astrology. But over time, when we got [more] information about the Avesta as a moral and an ethical teaching and about the freedom of choice between Good [sic] and evil, when we heard about the ancient Aryans, most probably at this point appeared the genetic memory (Netrebovskii & Smirnov & Khristenko 2000:58).

Globa and regular *Mitra* articles dedicated to the ancient history explain the Russian affiliation to Zoroastrianism through common Aryan heritage and the “memory of territory”—an idiosyncratic idea to nationalist and other new religious groups. The most acute evidence of “Zoroastrianess” is the production of new mythology around the archaeological complex Arkaim in the Ural steppes. In its context, Russian Zoroastrians are striving for a tautological self-legitimization of their worldview based upon a chain of simplified analogies: they consider themselves Zoroastrians because of Arkaim’s interpretation as an Aryan settlement and hence, a Zoroastrian one. In reverse order, Arkaim is a Zoroastrian settlement because ancient Russian territories were allegedly inhabited by Aryans who were Zoroastrians.

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<sup>29</sup> According to my interviews in St. Petersburg during the 2000s, St. Petersburg *khorbads* conducted a number of *sadrepushi* ceremonies in Kiev and Poltava.

However, apart from the aforementioned scenarios there are other ethnic dimensions that distinguish a Zoroastrian person from others. Zoroastrians are supposedly morally strong people (also primarily in the sense of Christian-European values), which is one of the repeating motifs within Globa's popular astrological publications.

The *Russian Anjoman* does not articulate this idea explicitly but it regards the presence of ethnic Persian blood favorably. They boldly assert that the ancient heritage of Iranian peoples is dominant in the modern cultures that occupy territories close to the former Persian Empire during the Sasanian dynasty's reign. Thus, Tajikis or Azerbaijanis are ipso facto bearers of Zoroastrianism. The confirmation of such a position reflects the contemporary politics of Central Asian republics in the ideological platform where pan-Persianism has been utilized for the revision of historiography, aimed obviously at the obliteration of the Soviet era from their historical-political maps, which can be detected in mass media reports (see Chapter 4). Moreover, in an online project about present day Zoroastrian rudiments the *Russian Anjoman's* activists develop an ad hoc approach that presents an in-depth analysis of folk religions of diverse nationalities in the post-Soviet area and that uses linguistic and ethnographic data to constitute the concept of the post-Soviet area as being "originally predisposed for the Zoroastrian religion" (Russian Anjoman 2009).

The *Russian Anjoman* insists on certain rules for the conversion to Zoroastrianism, which forbid any earlier *sedrepushi* or *navjote* rituals:

[...] the conversion to the Good Faith by the people who grew up outside of the tradition should be conducted not earlier than the age of 25 or not earlier than before the marriage and the childbirth. I.e. at the time of the conversion to the Faith [sic] the person must have a formed personality, being able to make serious decisions and bear full responsibility for them. Such qualification is not a canonical rule. This is the result of our practice during the last 5 years (farnabag 2007a).

Although there are many different religions, Globa claims that God is one; he seldom calls him *Ahura Mazda*, however *Ahura Mazda* is submissive to *Zervan*, who is considered absolute Time. In the moral sense God is akin to human conscience, which leads to the curious conclusion that to be a "moral human being" is more important than to be a practicing believer. On that point the notion that a human is close to God shows the proximity of Globa's teachings to New Age movements' esoteric understandings of the relationship between human beings and divine transcendence (Hanegraaff 1996:204ff; Heelas 1996:18ff).

Personalities are evaluated based upon how ordinary or extraordinary they are. Thus, Globa develops the idea of the people as *khvarna* bearers. The “great people,” gifted personalities in science, literature, and art, attract him in his astrological books and serve to reinforce the legitimacy of the horoscopes he is discussing. They incorporate an indefeasible “refrain” and serve as illustrations of his notions. They possess a charisma that corresponds directly or approximately to the word *khvarna*. However, Globa proclaims a “golden middle.” Extraordinary people should be treated with self-reflexivity exactly as normal people are (Globa 1996, 67). Globa names 12 “bodily signs” of such people (e.g. “seven moles in the shape of the Great Bear”). Humans can perfect themselves on the basis of proper ritual and ethical practices.

Otherwise, the receiver of the message remains in Globa’s eyes a “disappointed,” “weak” person, who, succumbing to the idea of human progress, arrives at a dead end in his life. However, humans possess a “creative spark” and have enough power to change. Globa appeals to “make a choice” and “to take responsibility,” which implies that he sees people who live passively and inertly as opponents. I assume his invocations are directed largely to the group of educated people who were traumatized by the events of the early 1990s. The Russian designation “technical intelligentsia” denotes the knowledgeable workers in economics, industry, engineering, and communications over the last few decades of the Soviet Union. This social group is considered to be the “avid reader” group of Russian society. Besides, according to some researchers the technical intelligentsia composes a major part of the new religious movements in Russia. They are people with some talents in art and literature; they love entertainment and love to travel to foreign countries, and are therefore the most environmentally conscious Russians. The social status of the adherents of *Avestan astrology* and convert groups is mainly akin to the other NRMs in Russia.

Lastly Globa distinguishes between the individual male and female missions. According to him, men and women have their own different methods of achieving fulfillment in their lives (Globa 1996:50). Whereas the man is a bearer of “kinetic energy,” the woman expresses herself through “potential energy” and hence is traditionally a keeper of what in Globa’s view should be considered more valuable. Women are “more perfect” [sic] and closer to the Cosmos (Globa 1996:50). This notion reverberates the fact that women constitute the larger part of his clientele. These ideas are also present in *Mitra*, where the female authors consider Zoroastrian women’s mission to be beyond traditional issues.

However, his declaration of being a committed Zoroastrian seems to have damaged his prestige among the conservative nationalists that are oriented in their ideological programs towards Orthodox Christianity. Krylov has never advertised his religious adherence, which he always has explained as his own

choice. In his *LiveJournal* blog, where he regularly writes since 2001, Krylov has promised many times to define his position towards Zoroastrianism but has constantly confined himself to only a few words. Here are examples from *LiveJournal* in 2009 illustrating his brief style of reporting on Zoroastrianism:

Question: For what reason does a Russian become necessarily [Zoroastrian]/ [or] need Zoroastrianism? //That is, above all, two questions, not only one. Krylov: I consider the Good Faith [sic] a truth—or, at the minimum, the greatest truth than all I am aware of. // [I] think, a true faith is a necessary thing. In particular, for a Russian. To me, anyway, that has proved very useful (krylov 2009).

An orthodox colleague asked Krylov whether he would “absolutely dismiss the possibility to adopt Orthodox Christianity,” and he answered:

I do not dismiss something absolutely—for instance after long tortures someone can do everything and if affected can act in any odd way. But here and now—I do not see why I should betray the true and good faith. Even with a strong respect towards Christianity (krylov 2009).

#### 2.4.4. The Avesta and other holy books

In general, most Zoroastrian publications from aforementioned sources reproduce scholarly translations of the Avesta or other Pahlavi treatises that are available in Russian (see Chapter 3). However, the need for further translations of these Zoroastrian texts from original languages by the laymen of the as well as by the activists of the *Russian Anjoman* has been perpetually highlighted. The reason why this is necessary is that in order for common believers to “sharpen” their worship skills, they first need to know how to properly participate in ritual acts. Hence, this issue became one of the most important causes for both groups. At the beginning of the *AShAs* in the early 1990s when no one from the astrological groups could read and share knowledge in Avestan and Pahlavi, the main Avestan prayers were simply “given” by Globa. Globa misspelled some ritual formulas (e.g. the *Ahunvar* prayer), that later, with the import of Parsi liturgical texts having above all a transliteration, was explained through “particularities” of the spelling in the dialect that Globa’s grandfather had possessed (Tessmann 2005). As a rule, Globa’s publications and some articles in the early *Mitra* indicated quotations or paraphrases of large passages of scholarly translations (e.g. a fragment of the *Mihr Yasht* in Braginskiĭ translation by Chistiakov (Chistiakov 1997:7).



The junior leader Chistiakov's studies in Avestan began the entire series of Avestan lectures, which were linked to the Zoroastrian liturgy in the *St. Petersburg Zoroastrian Community*. Since then, *Mitra* published his explanations for the other community members (0.1997:12f, 1.1997: 5ff, 3.1999: 10f, 1(5).2000: 27ff, 3(7).2001:6ff see also the explanation of Zoroastrian liturgy by Chistiakov 1998:18ff). Chistiakov also translated Parsi literature from English, such as *The Khorde Avesta* in 2005 and *The 101 Names of Ahura Mazda* in 2006, which he introduced with special comments for the Russian readership. According to Globa, Avestan and Pahlavi texts should be compulsory reading for everyone in the community:

Naturally, I believe that the Avestan language should be learned by all community members. At least, they have to know what a mantra has been recited about, what services are carried out. Though they do not thoroughly know [that], but in general, they have to have certain skills in doing so. Also Pahlavi, because the great literature is written in Pahlavi (Globa 1997b:2).

However, it is a fact that the majority of the Russian Zoroastrians cannot read original Zoroastrian religious texts. Parallel with those languages, English and Farsi have also become essential knowledge for translations of articles and publications written in other Zoroastrian journals. Besides, they have become urgent for gathering new contacts in the diaspora, Iran, and India. Language education has been attempted within organized courses for community members.<sup>30</sup> Even the presentation of their own groups and publications on RuNet required, in their opinion, a wider reception through translations into English and Farsi. Thus, an annotation of *Mitra* 9(13) in 2007 on the *Mitra* website has been translated into English, Farsi, Belarusian, and Ukrainian. The two latter languages are official state languages of two post-Soviet countries, where the most active *ASHAs* (Minsk and Kiev) operate.

The same idea to translate foreign language texts into Russian occurred to the moderator of the web-portal *avesta.org.ru*, Iurii Lukashevich, in the late 1990s. Sponsored by some diaspora Zoroastrians, he also translated the *Gāthās* directly from the English edition of the *Avesta* by German Avestologist Karl Friedrich Geldner (1852–1929) (Lukashevich 2004).<sup>31</sup> The similar relationship between old Avestan and Pahlavi texts as the “bearers of true spirit” of the Zoroastrian religion can be seen in the strong trend of the *Russian Anjoman* to translate works into Russian as much as possible since the mid-2000s. Thus, “[t]o

<sup>30</sup> One such lesson in Farsi I observed during my fieldwork in St. Petersburg in March 2008.

<sup>31</sup> I myself was involved in the preparation phase of this translation by donating the copy of Geldner's *Avesta* in 3 vols. (1896, 1891 and 1896) being conducted in the frame of the project *Zoroastrian rituals* at University Heidelberg (see Chapter 1 and Lukashevich 2004:8).

Zoroastrians, the Avesta is not just an ancient text speaking of bygone eras, it is a living book that carries the light of Truth, and is used in worship and prayer [original quotation in English]" (Anjoman Avesta 2006). At another place, Krylov explains how he understands the collection of Avestan texts by highlighting the central role of the *Gāthās*:

The Avesta is not the "Bible" at all and certainly not the "Koran" of Zoroastrians. It is closer, we say, to the Indian Vedas. // The Avesta itself is divided into hymns and prayers, laws and the sacred history. The "prayers" part consists of the Yasna (the Gathas of Zarathushtra), the Vispered ("All the lords," appeals to yazata, that means to higher powers which are worthy of worship), the Yasht (hymns to the Creator and creations) and the so-called "little Avesta"—a collection of daily prayers. As some Abrahamic "holy book" can be considered the Videvdat—"the rules against the devas". Basically that is ritual requirements, such as those which can be found in, we say, the Torah. // The [very] source of the teaching is the Gathas. The Zoroastrian doctrine is, in general, a comment to the Gathas. // A very great role in Zoroastrianism plays tradition. However, tradition plays a huge role in most living religions (krylov 2007).

#### 2.4.5. Zoroastrianism confronting other religions

The relation towards other religions is part of the inclusionary and exclusionary strategies that are actively being used by practitioners.<sup>32</sup> As mentioned above, in *Mitra's* publications the status of a religious person is evaluated more favorably than someone who does not have any belief. It does not matter what religion someone believes in. However, the "eclectics" in someone's beliefs need to be evaded (at least concerning the authorities). Thus, to the question of whether it is "possible to combine Zoroastrianism with other religious traditions" and "to consider himself a Christian, being at the same time a Zoroastrian" Globa replied:

How shall I put it? I think that to go to a Christian church and to visit some Zoroastrian feasts [at the same time—AT] is, perhaps, still possible. However, if we say, to be a full member of the community, and especially a priest—it is not (Globa 1997b:2).

The vectors of exclusion by Globa and his students are directed towards two major topics: modern world religions and so-called "heresies," including their ancient and contemporary forms. The first are necessary to underline the

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<sup>32</sup> Of course, apart from this, there are also some other controversial topics extensively discussed in the astrological Zoroastrian milieu, such as homosexuality, cloning, abortion, and surrogate motherhood. Cf. Maksimenko 2001.

originality and authority of Zoroastrianism. The second topic forms an image of the “ideological enemy.”

If, alongside other “world” religions, Zoroastrianism is described as a sort of a basic or original religion, then it is also a sort of “wise ancestor” to modern world religions such as Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism because it is considered to formulate “main questions” (Globa 1997b:1). These other world religions explain everything by means of an eschatological battle between good and evil, which in their view remains characteristic of the majority of religions. In particular, Christianity is observed as non-contradictory and the most related to Zoroastrianism. Thus, an example that has been used as an argument on the close spiritual connection between Zoroastrianism (in its astrological expression) and Christianity is the birth of Jesus Christ that was foreseen by Zoroastrians.<sup>33</sup> Globa also views Jesus as a successor to Zarathushtra. This notion is supported in earlier publications and lectures in which Globa cited many passages from the New Testament and related Zoroastrian myths and prayers to Jesus’ parables and sayings.<sup>34</sup> Globa claims that there are strong allusions between some Christian texts and Zoroastrian texts, for instance, the Apocalypses of St. John and Bundahishn:

In both sources, there are descriptions of the Last Judgment, the cosmic battle, the comedown of the dragon to the earth. Apropos, the dragon is called Gochehar. But in general, the symbolism is the same (also the both dragons have the same color) (Globa 1997c:8).

However, while the relation to Russian Orthodox Christianity in a great number of texts seems to be strong, one can also find critiques of this relationship.

Both the contents and the form of religious vocabulary used in publications by Globa and the *Mitra* were sometimes borrowed from many Church Slavonic terms, which have been used in the church service and in the relevant religious literature. Similar to some *Neopagan* groups, *Astro-Zoroastrians* try to establish relations to Old Believers (староверы) by interpreting the teachings of Old Believers as the more indigenous and pure beliefs of the Russian nation with more pagan elements than are found in the Russian Orthodoxy (Shnirel'man 2001a). The Old Believers are recognized as the keepers of the Zoroastrian legacy in their ideas and customs. The Old Believer’s girdle used in prayers,

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. Globa 1997c:5: “That is known for everyone that the Mages (волхвы), who came from the East and blessed Jesus by calling him Saviour, were astrologers, the followers of the ancient religion of Zarathushtra.”

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Globa 1997b:3: “In Christendom, if you would read the Gospels and those commandments announced by Christ but before you had read Avesta you would notice a huge number of matches in the rites and the interpreting approach of the commandments.”

ornamented with symbols of life and the sun, is a variation of the Aryan or Zoroastrian *kushti* (Lushnikov 2007).

Buddha, who in Globa's view seems to have been a pupil of Zervanite mages, integrated Zoroastrian postulates into his philosophy. In particular, the Buddhist teaching on the noble eightfold path and nirvana are nothing more than an altered Avestan teaching about *Zervan* (Globa 2007c:107). A publication in *Mitra* using these ideas also claims that Zervanism and Zen-Buddhism have a close relationship (Amosov 2007:205). This might be obvious to someone when comparing the basic techniques of spiritual practices of Zen Buddhism such as "meditation and concentration" with the practices of Zervanism (Amosov 2007:206).

Despite being one of the most discussed themes in mass media, Islam does not attract any attention on the part of Globa and his students. Apart from some brief references by Globa, who views Muslim rites (in Boyce's sense) as a variation of some Zoroastrian ritual sequences (Globa 1997a:15), there is no discussion on Islam at all. The same tendency of avoiding any discussions about the relation of Zoroastrianism to Islam is visible by one of the members of the *Russian Anjoman* when he says "Islam and Zurvanism lie at one layer, being orthogonal to Zoroastrianism" (farnabag lj 2007).

Almost each issue of *Mitra* tries to draw attention from the readership to a Zoroastrian and Slavic synthesis (Sokolova 2002). Globa claims that ancient Russian beliefs contained many features from the Zoroastrian and hence the Aryan tradition. Calendar festivals such as the vernal (March c. 21st) and autumnal equinoxes (September c. 21st) or the winter (December c. 21st) and summer (June c. 21st) solstices refer to the course of the sun on the ecliptic and are of cosmic importance (Globa 1996:3). In *Mitra* every festival has a Slavic analogy and a second Russian designation. For instance, the celebration of *Ivan Kupala* on the Summer solstice, one of the central festivals of Russian Neopagans, has been celebrated by Globa's adherents as the *Rapitvin* festival with the jumping over fire and ceremonies similar to neopagan traditions. In the publications of *Mitra* there are special columns dedicated programmatically to find parallels between neopagan Slavs and Zoroastrians, where the old Slavic symbols, clothing, or fables have been discussed (Starostin 2000). This fashion seems to be mutual. Thus, more than an ethical or religious teacher, Zarathustra [sic] is the key person in the sacral history of Russia, accomplishing the connection between the Indo-Aryans and the Old-Slavs and serving as an ideological legitimization of the leading status of the Russians over other nations. Thus, Zarathustra, in the opinion many Neopagans, is an "old-Russian prophet" (Shnirel'man 2001a), who began to preach in the Urals.

For both Zoroastrian discursive communities, the elaboration of some concepts of a “religious enemy” is common. According to Globa and to many authors at *Mitra*, Manichaeism is the most antagonistic religion to Zoroastrianism (e.g. Zakharova 1998, Razgovorova & Sokolova 1998). This Gnostic religion originated in the 3rd century BCE in Persia and after that became popular over the wide territories from Europe and North Africa to China, then expired in the 14th century CE. The main irritation on the part Russian Zoroastrians in their publications is the Manichaean doctrine about the material and spiritual split of human beings that contradicts Zoroastrian anthropology where there is no such distinction. It is remarkable that the fact that Manichaeism belongs in the past of humankind does not stop Globa from producing his anti-Manichaeism propaganda. Whereas the first is a religion of good and light, the second makes the life of people perverse. Vegetarianism and sexual abstinence have also been criticized.

In *The Living Fire* (1996) the author’s voice arises against contemporary post-Soviet NRMs, such as UFO-groups, spiritistic practices, and magic practices (Globa 1996:74f). Many articles in *Mitra* also appealed against esoteric tenets, which are actually a “nourishing ground” for many NRMs in Russia, such as the *Secret Doctrine* by Helene Blavatsky, freemasonry, and other occult concepts (e.g. Sokolova 2004).

If the website of the *Russian Anjoman* misses any references to a religious enemy in its introduction, their activity on RuNet certainly makes up for the lack of vitriol through their expression of some radical moods. In a fashion akin to some pro-orthodox and neopagan nationalist groups in Russian radical nationalist camps, the *Russian Anjoman* criticizes “Semitic” or Abrahamic religions. Such racist or (according to the author) “vedic” views are akin to the *Technotronic Avesta* that tries to “debunk” the Semitic religions “at divine, sacral, and mystic levels” (Khomyskov 2008:2). One of the most discussed themes of the *Russian Anjoman* is the negative evaluation of Judaism and the Judean god Yahweh, who has been interpreted as a demon on the side of Ahriman. This position is shared by many members of the *Russian Anjoman*. Often it finds its expression in *LiveJournal* contributions. For instance, in reaction to a text written by Krylov in the style of a journalistic-philosophical essay about hatred towards the Russian Jews<sup>35</sup>, an activist of the *Russian Anjoman* explained to one of his opponents:

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<sup>35</sup> Krylov (2005) wrote on the idea that behind the whole Jewish people as an entity there is a spiritual power or a divine being: “This G-d [sic], undoubtedly, is existent. It is understandable, that this being cannot be the Creator [sic]. However, that is not the Enemy [sic] in person how many orthodox [people] think. That is a particular being belonging to devas, a very ancient and powerful, and the main thing—a believing indeed that it would be the Creator [sic]. This is “Ialdabaoth” of the Gnostics—“madman,” “snake with a lion snout,”

The sensible person cannot deny the influence of the Good Faith on the Abrahamic currents in the Middle East. However, Zoroastrianism has never stated the position of the absolute monotheism in the Abrahamic sense, understanding all of its immorality and perversion.// Strictly speaking, there are two sorts of monotheism: the Aryan and the Semitic. The latter is a distortion, the antipode of the former. The former is the absolute top of abstract thought and moral consciousness, i.e. the extremely right-wing ideology. The latter is paganism, in the worst sense of the word, brought to the absolute, the extremely left ideology (farnabag 2007b).

Another convert of the *sadrepushi* in Moscow in 2005 also made clear how this anti-Abrahamic position of the *Russian Anjoman* is rooted in the early 2000s. She regarded herself as belonging to a group of the young “furious anti-Christian nationalists,” who wanted to take part in the “fight against Yahweh.” Later these nationalists went into three different directions “one part of the people left for Satanism, another for Paganism.” She chose Zoroastrianism, where this metaphysical struggle against Abrahamic monotheism looks like the following:

Ahura Mazdā is the leader of light powers in the world. All other good gods are belonging either to the Amesha Spenta, or to the Yazata, because the Good is the same everywhere: it is home, happy family and warm boots for the winter. [I am] exaggerating of course, but the meaning is that. Yahweh—or Ahriman himself, or one of its devas, perverts and putting himself at the service for the people—a creation of Ahura Mazda, cleverly taking away power from the one whose name is unknown (tishtar 2005).

According to other comments, the activists of the *Russian Anjoman* evaluated Yahweh as “a usual upstart, a petty, vindictive, unjust, and selfish dev (on-Semitic ‘el’)” who subordinated to Ahriman (bahmanjon 2005). Another person from the *Russian Anjoman* wrote “[h]e cannot proclaim himself neither as absolute good nor as absolute evil, because both are very real and objective. Therefore, he manifests himself of being someone third, standing above good and evil” (pyc\_ivan 2005).

The Anti-Semitic views and discussions about superiority of one race over the other are hard to find in most materials published by Globa and his students. However, the Aryan myth with its picture of different peoples and their role in mythical world history has been reproduced without any essential changes since the early 1990s up to the present.

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“king of the archonts,” “Living Evil.” And the Jews are strictly connected to that through “Skhina” playing the role of a “data bus” [a term from the computer sciences that means a subsystem that upholds transfers – AT].

## 2.5. Summary

As we observed in this Chapter, the religious discourse of Zoroastrianism is heterogeneous; it constitutes many discursive strands and is being produced by several communities with diverse interpretations of the world. Each of these interpretations gives a unique perspective on the geographical, cultural, and chronological orientations of Zoroastrianism. They present “partial, tentative, and continually redrawn sketches of where we are, where we’ve been, and where we’re going” (Tweed 2006:74). In this way, Zoroastrianism is able to maintain its canonical body of information while simultaneously acknowledging the changing nature of the discourse surrounding it.

The contexts in which Zoroastrianism has been discussed by some individuals interested in Zoroastrianism as a religion and practitioners who take part in rituals or religious activities in contemporary Russia are various. The dominant strands here are presented as three groups that publish texts, namely: those of astrologer and leader of *AShAs* Pavel Globa, astrological Zoroastrian groups (being represented in my study through the Zoroastrian magazine *Mitra* and the community messenger *Tiri*), and the *Russian Anjoman* (*blagoverie.org*). *Kosmoenergetika* with its broader focus and other NRMs (in the foreground neopagan) can be observed as marginal agents of the Zoroastrian religious discourse.

The texts in which I tried to reconstruct Zoroastrian religious discourse are spread by means of diverse media. So I analyzed books, periodicals, websites, and blogs on RuNet as well. These texts have different functions—from the clearly expressed normative (preaching) function by Globa to informative and entertainment functions. I must insist that the print productions analyzed are rooted in the cultural and historical realities of Russian (post)modernity while the content deals with systematically presented eschatological, moral, and ethical matters and further normative attempts to regulate the everyday practices of the post-Soviet people.

Concerning its origin, one can observe four sub-discourses or strands. The print and online productions ascribed to Pavel Globa form the most dominant strand of discourse by sheer quantity. Globa can be identified both as the charismatic leader of the Russian Zoroastrians with an Avestan astrological background and as a prominent public figure, almost the sole authoritative astrologer of the Russian mass media. Globa’s Aryan Zoroastrianism is quite passive; I would say a latent form of a racial teaching shared with the publications of Russian nationalists. The character of Globa’s multimedia activity reveals a tendency to adjust to the aggressive competition on the capitalist market. The publishing business with its prosperity displays Globa as a

brand that is being sold and successfully purchased. He is a prominent figure who is moving between diverse social fields and roles. Globa's publications and lectures cover many esoteric disciplines (astrology, alchemy, magic) and divinatory techniques (tarot, physiognomy, chiromancy, etc.). As early as the beginning of the growing popularity of Zoroastrianism and *Avestan astrology* (1989–1990) in the post-Soviet area, he presented astrological interpretations like a consistent trans-religious synthesis applying to several Eastern Asian, Hindu, and theosophical terms, which were all integrated into *Zervan-Zoroastrian* teachings. This tendency to use bricolage techniques and analogies continues to this day.

Being one of the most public Russian *New Age* activists, it is obvious that Globa would become one of the most prominent actors to originate this NRM due to his immense energy and management skills, as well as the revival in interest of old occult literature. The doctrine of the Zoroastrian NRM has absorbed the Soviet *New Age* discourses with their strong orientation on theosophical developments as well as western trends in astrology. Compared to concepts of other esoteric teachers (who are also born in the 1950s), one can see plenty of content parallels in the views of Globa. Although Globa published his principal books a half decade earlier, he shares many ideas with other representatives of the second and the third waves of the modern Russian esotericists and healers. Belyaev (2008:55) views the similarities at three points<sup>36</sup> which, in my opinion, also are characteristic for Globa's worldview, namely: (1) modern esoteric teachings are descents of ancient secret knowledge; the modern world and the human beings are now in a crisis; the adherents of modern esoteric teaching are "chosen" people; (2) diseases can be cured by the person who develops his/her potential; (3) being rich is a virtue, and esoteric teachings should be paid for. Regarding other themes such as the role of Russia, family life, and the relationship with ancestors, Globa is close to patriotic-national, pro-Eastern, and pro-Slavic discourses. Globa determines his own position as a leader and spiritual teacher that is far above the spiritual level of his pupils because he claims the importance of belonging to a secret tradition through heredity from his ancestors. His pupils who do not have any Zoroastrian roots could learn but, in his opinion, their potentials are quite limited.

His authority in explaining Zoroastrianism and its moral, philosophical, and ritual particularities forms the basis for further publications by the *St. Petersburg Zoroastrian Community*. However, both constitute only a part of the entire religious Zoroastrian discourse that entails the astrological system of *Avestan astrology*. Despite the lack of essential contradictions between Globa's

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<sup>36</sup> I am sure that further comparative studies of contemporary texts in that field can display many other important intersections between Russian esotericists.



publications and those of his adherents (due to the former having partial control over the editing process), both strands cannot be considered as identical. That depends upon their different purposes (such as, for instance, lectures by Globa and community reports in the *Zoroastrian magazine Mitra*), expressed above all in the genres of the publications.

Globa's adherents give their belief a ritualistic dimension, by which they have created their own original rituals and festivals. These were at first rooted in the Soviet past, Orthodox Christianity, Slavic popular beliefs, and monistic and holistic understandings of the world in the same sense as many Russian NRMs. Only during the post-Soviet era did *Astro-Zoroastrians* establish contact with Zoroastrian communities abroad and started combining their practices with the practices of contemporary ethnic Zoroastrians and the new Zoroastrian groups. The impact of the new communications lead to changes in their beliefs that still have an open character and can be understood within patriotic and neopagan discourses in Russia today. Both strands are to a great extent heteroglossic and are able to harmonize many contradictions through the authority of the spiritual teacher Globa.

The discursive community that stands in some opposition to the astrological Zoroastrian sub-discourse is the *Russian Anjoman* with its intensive activity on RuNet during the 2000s. The *Anjoman's* original orientation on both "traditional" and diasporic forms of Zoroastrianism (Neo-Zoroastrianism) led to the understanding of their own group as one of many branches of foreign religious organizations and not, as it was in the case of the St. Petersburg Zoroastrians with their "authentic" Russian Zoroastrianism. Also other representatives of the local cultic milieu, such as *Kosmoenergetika*, neopagan groups, and diverse NRMs partly incorporate Zoroastrianism in the spirit of ideas articulated by Globa.

The texts analyzed also give an idea how these strands of religious discourse of Zoroastrianism have developed during the last two decades. For instance, if we look at Globa's *The Living Fire* in 1996 and then twelve years later, we can notice a strong dependence on his representation of social and political events in Russia, and his reflections on political decisions and figures (a number of political activists, dissident singers, etc.). The second edition is about reality transformed through political and social changes: many events lost their immediate topicality and some figures were not used and discussed anymore. The strategies of the *Russian Anjoman* expressed on their website reveal the active use of new mass media for the collection of information about Zoroastrianism and for the intensive search for contacts to ethnic Zoroastrians in Iran and the diaspora. These changes in self-presentation—from isolation to

communicative openness—were realized parallel to new iconographic representations in print publications and on websites.

The analysis of formal structures of sub-discourses, such as iconographical and textual surfaces, rhetoric, and transtextual connections again highlights differences and similarities between discursive strands. At this point it is clear that Globa's publications strive for his acknowledgement as a Zoroastrian authority in Russia by his students as well as in the mass media landscape. His own *Avestan astrology* is considered to be genuinely Zoroastrian in the public space. That is well articulated in the permanent and even redundant use of the central Zoroastrian symbol of modern Zoroastrians—a winged disc, i.e. *faravahar*. Ancient Persian and Zoroastrian symbolisms are also important for *Mitra* and the *Russian Anjoman*. All three strands appeal to Persia and its Achaemenid and Sasanian dynasties and use the visual metaphor of Zoroastrianism as fire, which is characteristic of other Zoroastrian communities worldwide. There is a difference in Globa and *Mitra's* strategies to connect Zoroastrian symbolism to occult and neopagan iconography. Globa's texts are a result of the collaborative work of his assistants, colleagues, and students. Most publications are compiled from his astrological lectures and consist of a lot of information about numerous topics such as esoteric teachings, astrological prognoses, and reactions to modern political events, etc. This is a marked contrast to the *Russian Anjoman's* activity, which is not a production of some texts dedicated to the Zoroastrian religion, but an open exegesis of the Zoroastrian tradition online, in their own and in other Zoroastrian forums.

Practitioners' texts utilize a simplified strategic behavior model that consists of an uninterrupted search for analogies that means an extension of (religious) meaning on the one hand, and a branding of intellectual "enemies" that means a setting of limits on the other. However, the regulation of these processes has different origins. Whereas the seekers aim to design the connections between their ideas about Zoroastrianism and their spatial and cultural belongings moving from their personal experiences and preferences, the rhetorical struggle against "wrong thinking" and regulation of the Zoroastrian discourse as such is the principal concern of their teacher Globa. With the building of *The Russian Anjoman* this prerogative was withdrawn and then called into question. However, the *Russian Anjoman* later constructs similar patterns to distinguish Russian Zoroastrianism from "other improper world views" like Astrology, Zervanism, and world religions that border on their wish to establish a kind of orthodoxy.

In my analysis of the inner discursive controversies between the strands, I discussed four topics. They reveal doctrinal and practical orientations of discursive communities and actors. The discussion about the understanding of

Zoroastrianism showed that Globa and *Mitra*, although they share the common idea of Zoroastrianism as a universal, over-ethnic religion, they still defined it in the terms of an esoteric doctrine. In Globa's eyes, *Avestan astrology* and Zervanism are necessary components of Zoroastrianism. Their eclectic ways allow the absorption of other cultural and religious artifacts as originally Zoroastrian. In general, the negative utterances towards industrial society, progress, technology, and Western technological advanced societies with simultaneous involvement in practices of the free market reveal Globa's Zoroastrianism as a contradictory teaching full of antagonisms. On the one hand, Globa calls for simplification of life and avoidance of scientific research, but on the other hand, this is impossible without pro-Western trends and even achievements of modern nature and the humanities.

The second topic with a controversial character is the relation between Zoroastrianism and former Soviet territories within their past, present, and future. Globa, *Mitra*, and the *Russian Anjoman* have elaborated a range of strategies in order to present their ideas. However, if they tried to explain that Russia was the origin of the Zoroastrian religion, they would all disagree about the role of Arkaim. Globa, one of discoverers and active promoters of the mass media picture of Arkaim, views it as the place where Zarathushtra was born and lived to his death. He claims that the reality described in the Avesta resembles the Ural steppes. This position is akin to the *Kosmoenergetika* worldview that interprets Arkaim as a place of spiritual power; both models can also be identified throughout many publications of other NRMs. The *Russian Anjoman* conducted a special project of Zoroastrian elements in the folk cultures of the former Soviet Union. However, they do refuse any connection of Zoroastrianism to Arkaim. The *Russian Anjoman* including above all the members of Tajik or Azerbaijani provenance seek to share the notion that the ancient heritage of Iranian peoples is strong in modern cultures near the Persian Empire in the time of the Sasanian dynasty. The Middle Asian peoples ergo are direct bearers of Zoroastrianism. The confirmation of such a position reflects circumstantially the contemporary politics of Central Asian republics in the ideological sphere where pan-Persianism is used for revising historiography aimed obviously at escaping the Soviet era of their existence.

What does it mean, being a Zoroastrian? The third topic deals with the self-understanding of the practitioners, their religious identity as it is articulated to the outside world. While Globa presents himself as an inherited priest (*mōbed*) by claiming that his ancestors were Zoroastrians, his students can become Zoroastrians only by choice. In general, there is also another interpreting model circulating within the astrological Zoroastrian milieu that should explain the integration into Zoroastrians groups—genetic inheritance. However, for

practical, organizational matters it is necessary for a Zoroastrian to be initiated into Zoroastrianism, although there is something like a Zoroastrian “in one’s own soul” (в душе). In this, the *Russian Anjoman* acknowledges merely ethnic Zoroastrian authorities, especially Iranian *mōbeds*. In the astrological milieu there have been many initiations conducted by local and foreign authorities in the course of the last two decades that are well documented on the pages of *Mitra*. Individual ceremonies and prayers are important to some Zoroastrian groups, but the *Russian Anjoman* expresses anti-ritualist ideas and proclaims Zoroastrianism as an individual religion being far from the collective spirit of weekly rituals in the St. Petersburg community.

One of the virtues of Russian Zoroastrians according to the collected material is their ability to read original Zoroastrian texts. This notion is shared by Globa, *Mitra*, and the *Russian Anjoman*. All three have articulated the necessity of special religious translations into Russian, which would give intensive specific religious focus to the texts and prayers. The doctrine of *Kosmoenergetika* offers at this point a different view: for the Kosmoenergets it is sufficient when Avestan prayers (such as *Ahunvar*) are repeated without one being aware of the meaning of the separate words. In the selection of original Zoroastrian texts the actors prefer to bring out different points. Globa appeals to a secret manuscript with the title *Zervan-namag* and sharpens his attention to Pahlavi books with astrological passages. Diverse publications in *Mitra* fully accept that view and do not gain attention from Globa’s followers. However, the *Russian Anjoman* emphasizes that the message of the prophet Zarathustra and his ethical doctrine explained in the *Gāthās* are closer to Neo-Zoroastrian currents in the West and Iran, confessing an intellectual Gathic Zoroastrianism.

The strategies of inclusion and exclusion of the strands can be observed in how texts within the religious Zoroastrian discourse describe other religions. This theme is always present in all of the discursive strands. Namely, one of the most important issues of *Mitra* is its polemics against “false teachings” (лжеучения). So, extinct Manichaeism, Freemasonry, and diverse local and foreign NRMs (“cults”) are regarded as belonging to dark powers that damage the creations of Ahura Mazdā. In contrast, Eastern philosophies and religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Bon, Old Believers’ faith (старообрядчество), and even ancient Mithraism are evaluated as positive because they are akin to Zoroastrianism (as they see it) in terms of the features in doctrines and rituals. The other reason for this positive evaluation is the theosophical notion of one ancient (in the case of Globa and *Mitra*’s texts, Aryan) religion, which is characteristic of the New Age cultic milieu. In their forums, the *Russian Anjoman* are very critical towards “Abrahamic religions” and also articulate

predominantly anti-Semitic radical views that resemble polemic publications by neopagan nationalist groups.



## Chapter 3: Zoroastrianism in the Russian academic discourse

This chapter will cover Zoroastrianism in the Russian scholarly discourse, with a particular focus on the 1990s and 2000s. By examining scholarly production, I will introduce two perspectives of study on Zoroastrianism. The first one is a historiographical macro-perspective with some general lines discussing a few scholarly works mainly from linguistic and historic disciplines on Zoroastrianism from the end of the 19th century until the 1990s. This is written rather as a short annotated bibliography with a few elements of generalization. The second perspective outlines a micro-structure of three chosen academic articles and examines the way Zoroastrianism—particularly Russian Zoroastrianism—was constructed throughout the scholarly studies of the 1990s and 2000s in detail.

The historiographical aspect covered in the first part of the chapter drew some inspiration from three works by Russian authors discussing the problem of how Russian and Soviet science (in reality a number of different academic disciplines) treated Zoroastrianism. Interestingly, this problem was not reflected by Soviet and Russian scholars who wrote about Zoroastrianism over the last few centuries, although, in fact they did not view itself outside the European mainstream research. The three aforementioned Russian works were identified during different stages of my study. Two of them were found on RuNet as parts of two different M.A. theses in history; the third one was a doctoral dissertation in history presented at Dagestan State University. Chronologically these three works cover different periods: Kuznetsova examined Russian Zoroastrian studies from the second part of the 19th century through the 1920s (Kuznetsova 2005); Nugaev reviewed the period from the 1850s until the beginning of the 1990's (Nugaev 2005); Egorov summarized the results of the research during the middle and late Soviet period, from the 1940s through the early 2000s (Egorov 2003). The three authors employed different analytical strategies to their material. While the works of Kuznetsova and Nugaev include non-scholarly genres for their sources, Egorov thoroughly analyzes articles and monographs, strongly sticking to the scholarly studies themselves. Egorov's qualitative method allows

him to draw many interesting conclusions (particularly, the prevailing emphasis on the “Eastern hypothesis” of the origin of Zoroastrianism) about the distinct character Soviet and post-Soviet research on Zoroastrianism had. On the basis of these studies, I created my own view of main trends and subjects in Russian scholarly works on Zoroastrianism.

In the second part I will draw attention to three works covering academic branches where Zoroastrianism is discussed as a contemporary religion. The academic disciplines most engaged with Zoroastrianism are Iranian studies and study of religions. This choice of disciplines also reflects my background in the humanities, so I did not extend the analysis to findings in other (potentially the natural sciences) fields. The objective scarcity of written scholarly works in Russia dedicated to the historical and theoretical implications in the study of Zoroastrian theory in the last few decades allows me to focus on the main scholars in this field and their discursive positions. In order to ensure the objectivity of my analysis, the three selected texts are contrasting examples. In addition, the macro and micro perspectives of analyzed materials should relate to each other in the short summary.

### 3.1. A historiographical perspective on Zoroastrianism

Like in Western European countries, the Russian scholarly discovery of Zoroastrianism focused originally on textual criticism of ancient historical documents whose methods could be traced to the 18th century. The first Russian reception of Zoroastrianism aligned with the study of ancient civilizations with their religious, economic, and political history and immediately reflected similar processes within the philological and historical research in the West. The publication of *Zend-Avesta* by French scholar Abraham Hyacinthe Anquetil-Duperron (1771) in the West opened a sphere of study that had for a long time remained a prerogative of Iranian studies (or Iranian philology) (Khismatulin 2009).

The political and economic expansion of Russia into the Near and Far East and its proximity to the Orient were factors which predetermined the great demand for practical and theoretical knowledge of the Eastern languages in the 19th and 20th centuries. Thus, with the establishment of Eastern language courses at universities in Kazan, St. Petersburg, Moscow, and others, the fundamentals for intensive economic, political, and cultural studies in regions—particularly Iran and Turkey—were laid out (Oransky 1967:4). Although the practical applications of these languages to commerce and politics prevailed, the academic discovery of these regions began with the foundation of the Asiatic



Museum (1818) as a part of the Russian Academy of Sciences that collected manuscripts and other artifacts from Eastern cultures. The Asiatic Museum was developed from collections of Tsar Peter the Great's oriental antiquities and handwritings gathered beginning in the early 18th century. Because parsing the Asiatic Museum's collections required both in-depth knowledge of both the old and new Oriental languages in addition to a broad historical perspective of the region, the museum became the starting point for Russian Oriental studies, and particularly, for Iranian studies themselves. The Institute of Oriental studies of the USSR Academy of Sciences was founded on the basis of a restructuring of the Asiatic Museum in 1930, with main headquarters in Leningrad and Moscow. After the head office moved to Moscow in 1950 and was renamed the Institute of the Peoples of Asia of the USSR, the Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg continued to house the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts that is still present today. Apart from Moscow and St. Petersburg with their main scholarly institutions becoming established during the Soviet era, other similarly structured foundations for Oriental studies in Soviet republics were also established.

The formation of special faculties for Eastern languages was conducive to professional education in Russian Oriental studies among other regions, including Iran (Oransky 1967:5). In that sense, the Russian scholarship was also a part of European elitist scholarly community: most of the first Russian Orientalists were either European scholars invited from abroad or gifted Russians that got complementary education in European countries such as Germany. Subsequently, they worked in the paradigm of Western Oriental studies, also publishing their research results in European languages.<sup>1</sup>

In spite of the institutionalization of Oriental studies, the interest in Zoroastrianism was rather peripheral: the scholars writing about it worked within different disciplines and normally had plenty of other research interests. In Russia there are two main disciplines that developed scholarly interest in Zoroastrianism: comparative linguistics and history. Beginning with Friedrich Max Müller (1823–1900), whose fundamental ideas of his linguistic and mythological comparative studies had instantly been absorbed in Russia, Zoroastrianism was getting a lot of attention by scholars of Indo-Iranian linguistics and early scholars in the study of religions. Müller was for a long time interested primarily in the ancient implications of Zoroastrianism drawing his view of Indo-European history through the prism of comparative study of such works as the Avesta and the Rig-Veda (Stausberg 2008b:563).

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<sup>1</sup> As an example for the immense strength of Russian Iranian studies at its beginning Oranskiï mentions the great number of Russian scholars among contributors in the groundwork *Grundriß der iranischen Philologie* (1901–1904): Oransky 1967:5f.

Zoroastrianism as the firm object of research in Russian Iranian studies originally belonged to the pre-Islamic period of Persian history (Khismatulin 2009) and was construed to the basis of Avestan, Old and Middle Persian, and also New Persian written sources.

Another side of cabinet work held out during the Soviet period up to our time has been extensive archaeological and ethnological research in Central Asia (referred to as “Middle Asia,” excluding Kazakhstan). This research received a great deal of international attention allowing the Russian language to become one of the professionally acceptable languages within Iranian studies (Fragner 2006:13). Iranian studies’ research exchange between Soviet and Western scholars was extensive, with Soviet scholars immediately announcing their findings through articles published in German, English, Italian, and French in all appropriate periodicals abroad, which was an exception within other humanities studies’ development (Shchepilova & Miliband 1980). Towards the demise of the Soviet Union, Iranian studies was without a doubt the most flourishing branch of Oriental studies in general (Alpatov & Palm 1980:183f; Steblin-Kamensky 2004:37f). But with the collapse of the Soviet Union, subsequent economic catastrophe with unavoidable shortages for the state’s subsidies for science coupled with the establishment of independent Central Asian states led to the demise of Russia’s monopoly in Central Asian research. Only the Central Asian excavation sites still remain as one of the earlier main topics for Iranian studies in Russia.

One approach to finding the historical roots of Zoroastrianism lies in the archaeological excavations on the territories of ancient Khorezm, Bactria, Margiana, and Sogdiana spread out across the borders of modern Iran.<sup>2</sup> The advantage of these excavations has been and still is a “complex” method in which the archaeological artifacts are studied together with regional ethnographic data, thereby drawing achievements from many disciplines of natural and social sciences (Frumkin 1970:3,7). As a result, the longstanding archaeological expeditions in pre-mountain settlements in Tajikistan or near the Oxus River in Turkmenistan are still carried out by Russian specialists through international CIS-programs. A “traditional” challenge of those excavations is to distinguish when and under what circumstances Zoroastrianism became a religion of the Iranian peoples who had lived there since the Middle to Late Bronze era till the Arabian expansion. The expectation that one could find a “homeland of Zarathushtra,” however, has not been confirmed. Soviet-Russian archaeologist Viktor Sarianidi (b. 1929) is one of the prominent representatives of the theory of “Protozoroastrianism,” a system of clear-cut religious

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<sup>2</sup> See in general with extensive bibliography and some illustrations of artefacts and maps until the 1970s Frumkin 1970; also as more popular version Masson 1982.

worldviews prior to Zarathushtra's teachings that Sarianidi believes originated in Bactria and Margiana. In his view, an early form of Zoroastrianism with fire and khaoma or soma temples, as well as specific burials (including the burial of dogs), appeared in this territory demonstrated by the archaeological complex of Gonur tepe in Turkmenistan between 3000 and 2000 BCE (Sarianidi 2010:13,27ff, 69ff, 66ff). This conglomerate of religious beliefs and practices should have been developed before Zarathushtra was born. Later these were spreading to Persia and India. However, the discovery of the so-called Bactria-Margiana Archaeological Complex in Turkmenistan (extending to some areas in Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan) and the initiative to find evidence of "Protozoroastrianism" seems to be a misguided practice in the eyes of most Russian archaeologists and Iranologists.<sup>3</sup> The Hellenistic states of Central Asia also could not be defined through the predominance of Zoroastrian religion, but unequivocally contained elements of the Zoroastrian pantheon or some Zoroastrian rites mentioned in the Avesta. The religious landscape in pre-Islamic Central Asia seemed to be heterogeneous and convergent on a great scale—Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Zoroastrianism, and other local cults as well, co-existed there for a long time. Panjikent, a Sogdian temple settlement from the 6th through 8th centuries CE near Samarkand in western Tajikistan<sup>4</sup>, raised questions about Zoroastrianism being professed in that territory and stirred big debates on whether or not Zoroastrianism was the religion of the Sogdians. Now archaeologists have a tendency to view the Manichean character of iconography in the excavated cultic buildings (Belenitskiĭ 1954:25–82).

Since the discovery of Bronze Age settlements in the Southern Ural steppes were identified as definite evidence of a Proto-Indo-Iranian substrate at the end of the 1980s (Jones-Bley & Zdanovich 2002), the scholarly quest for the "homeland of the Aryans" and the "pre-Zoroastrian religion" got a second wind. One of the first-discovered and most studied settlements remains the archaeological site Arkaim. Arkaim was excavated in 1987 in the Chelyabinsk region, near Magnitogorsk. Arkaim makes up one part of the large "land of protopoles," which consists of about twenty complexes. Each of these complexes has one to three circular settlements dating from about the 20th to 16th

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<sup>3</sup> See polemics about the theory of Margiana as a homeland of Zoroastrianism articulated by the archaeologist Viktor Sarianidi in a range of articles dedicated to Zoroastrianism in Central Asia in the frame of two issues of journal *The Bulletin of Ancient history* (1.1989 and 2.1989). See also Sarianidi 1998, 2010.

<sup>4</sup> The excavations in Sogdiana began in the late 1940s. Archaeologist Boris Marshak (1933–2006) and his team worked there until the middle of the 2000s. For his bibliography of Sogdiana see e.g. Vseviov & Shkoda 2006:13ff.

centuries BCE that are ascribed to the archaeological culture of Sintashta.<sup>5</sup> The Sintashta culture was seriously studied in the 1970s by Soviet archaeologists under the direction of Vladimir Gening (1924–1993). Gening’s student and the discoverer of Arkaim, archaeologist Gennady Zdanovich (b. 1938), saw Sintashtan archaeological culture as an extension of the “wide “horizon of fortifications” of the Eurasian steppe in the developed Bronze Age”,<sup>6</sup> what includes overall northern territories from the Don to the Irtysh rivers. Many scholars tried to reread Avesta’s texts ‘through the prism of Arkaim’ in order to connect the archaeological data to a few archaic layers within the entire Avestan mythology. As such, there is a hypothesis that the Avestan *var*, a sort of fortification of the first mythological king Yima depicted in Vidēvdād, could be a prototype for Arkaim and other Eurasian circular fortified towns (Zdanovich 2002). Arkaim’s ideology and religion and its direct reflection in burial rituals have been seen as an early stadium of the late Iranian Zoroastrianism since the time of the Achaemenids (Malyutina 2002:165). Through sensational excavations Arkaim became a sort of Russian Stonehenge, the enigmatic place attracting many esoterically minded people, who have attempted to build scholarly interpretations in their own worldviews (see Chapter 2) (Shnirelman 1998:37ff). That is why Arkaim seemed to be without a doubt the most discussed topic connected to Russian Aryan history in the Russian mass media as well as by Russian scholars of diverse disciplines.

While ethnographic research on the mountainous and urban regions of Central Asia has been actively carried out, the modern day minorities inside Iran, like groups of Zoroastrians, have not been investigated by Russian scholars. Zoroastrian themes in the frameworks of history and comparative linguistics were reflected in European science debates as a means of enriching the international scholarly discussion through local research (e.g. ethnography, linguistics, and archaeology) in Central Asia and in Transcaucasia. The culture and religion of contemporary Zoroastrians in Iran and India were excluded from the research and were first introduced in the 1980s with the acceptance of Boyce’s fieldwork among Zoroastrians in Yazd in the 1960s. In the following subchapters I am going to discuss the main topics of Russian research on Zoroastrianism that have been transmitted through Avesta translations into Russian, critical translations of Pahlavi texts, and the socio-economic history of Ancient Iran and Central Asia.

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<sup>5</sup> There are an extensive number of scholarly publications about Arkaim since 1987. See <<http://www.arkaim-center.ru/index.php?page=103&ver=1>> (accessed 21 March 2012).

<sup>6</sup> He mentioned a number of scholars. See Zdanovich 2002:xxiv.

### 3.1.1. Zoroastrian texts translated into Russian

The knowledge about pre-Islamic Iran, as a cultural and religious field, has been established in the frame of the translation and philological analysis of some sacred and historical manuscripts from oriental countries, among which the most important is the Avesta, a linguistically heterogeneous codex of Zoroastrian texts. Similar to the German and the French scholarly traditions of Avestan texts' translations, one could observe in Russia and later in the Soviet Union a constant interest in critical textual approaches conducted on comparative linguistic data.<sup>7</sup>

The first Russian scholar who translated a few parts of the Avesta into Russian was Kaetan Kossovich (1815–1883)<sup>8</sup>, who was intensively working on reprinted Avestan manuscripts and Achaemenid inscriptions from 1861 until 1872. Kossovich was a multifaceted philologist, who was also translating Ancient Greek, Sanskrit, and Hebrew texts. He applied his language talents to Persian matters using materials from Western scholars' works.<sup>9</sup> He did not have any direct students or successors and his contributions to Iranian (and particularly Avestan) studies gradually became obsolete. Many of his interpretations have been revised by his followers. However, the translation of four Avestan chapters (he dealt mostly with *Yasna* texts) into Russian, Latin, and Sanskrit with comments and a glossary, had remained for decades the only separate translation of the Avesta, and henceforth it became a rare pre-revolution book (Kossovich 1861, Kossowicz 1865). Apart from that translation he also published two other parts from the Gāthās and commentary (Y. 28–34 and Y.43–46) as separate works (Kossowicz 1867, 1869).

Kossovich's further attempts to translate small parts of the Avesta became an agenda of other Russian scholars of Iran. In particular, Carl Salemann's study of Avestan (1876) became a necessary curriculum course for the students of the Iranian philology department at St. Petersburg University. The teaching of Avestan among other Iranian languages was continued after the Russian October revolution in 1917 by Salemann's student Aleksandr Freiman, the founder of the Soviet school of Old-Iranian philology and comparative historical Iranian studies (Oranskiĭ 1974:116; Baevskiiĭ 2001). As a rule for the entire period, the Avestan translations into Russian with further critical analysis of content occurred occasionally in the frames of universal world literature (e.g. Saleman 1880), big historical encyclopaedic projects and written works of the

<sup>7</sup> Some fragments of Avesta were translated into Russian in literary and poetic form also from the known European translations.

<sup>8</sup> See a detailed survey and bibliography of him Oldenburg 2009, also Reychman 1963:11f.

<sup>9</sup> For more general information about his academic career with further bibliography see Durkin-Meisterernst 2005.

ancient world (Nikitina 1962; Abaev 1963), or during the Soviet era within (Persian) Tajik literature. This inscribed the Avesta into the intellectual heritage of the Central Asian republics (Bertel's 1960; Braginskii 1956, 1960). The most involved interpreters who translated Avesta during the Soviet era were Aleksandr Freiman, Evgeii Bertel's,<sup>10</sup> Vasilii Abaev, and Iosif Braginskii who published Avestan fragments with comments in various Soviet periodicals.

In addition, the translation of Avestan texts forced the accumulation of knowledge and systematization of educational material which could be integrated into teaching at Russian universities. One of the first systematic manuals for the Avestan language in the world was published in Russian by Sergeï Sokolov in 1961. It was translated into English in 1967, but did not find English scholarly readership. One should mention that during the Soviet era the acceptance of contemporary Western translations and philological research in Avestan was hampered and carried out exclusively within an academic environment, which can be contrasted with the active development of studies of ancient history and archaeology. Some Russian translations of the Avesta were used by historians and archaeologists specializing in ancient times to highlight religious, economic, and political aspects in ancient Persia and other pro-Iranian cultures and societies.

Following the example set by Bertel's paper (Bertel's 1951) in which the general progress of Avestan studies was examined, *The Introduction to Iranian Philology* (1960) by Iosif Oranskii summarized the achievements of Soviet Avestan studies, including localization, time of codification, and lexicology of the Avesta (Oranskii 1988<sup>2</sup>:74ff). Only thirty years later, in 1992, one of the most brilliant historiographical works on the Avesta in European and American Avestan studies, written by historian and professional restorer Leonid Lelekov, was published posthumously. Curiously, Lelekov's work was almost completely ignored. His book was thought to be a doctoral dissertation, but for organizational reasons it was not acknowledged as such (Raevskii 1992:3). Lelekov presented a comprehensive analysis of historiography within *Avestology* (авестология)—the branch, he claimed, that dealt with Avestan texts and handled problems and controversies until the beginning of the 1980s, having analyzed a great deal of secondary European, American, and Russian monographs and periodical articles. Lelekov also emphasizes problems with the study of the Avesta and Zoroastrianism, going into detail about the secondary literature in many languages. He also published articles with the same theme in the 1970s and 1980s that became the most serious theoretical insights into

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<sup>10</sup> See his biography and bibliography Zand 1990. Apart from the work mentioned above, Bertel's has translated some Avestan passages and published them in periodicals. See e.g. Bertel's 1924.

research on the Avesta and Zoroastrianism in Western science periodicals (Lelekov 1978, 1991).

Consequently, the Avestan translations appeared to be published quite regularly during the 20th century but in fact were sparsely scattered through a range of edited works, conference proceedings, and periodical publications. The interest in the Avesta as an original religious-poetic compendium, in a range of other extensive ‘old holy books’ such as the Rig-Veda, the Bible, or the Koran, may be first observed as early as in the 1990s. Ivan Steblin-Kamenskii translated and published Avestan texts as separate books; in 1990 he published *The Avesta: Selected Hymns* in Dushanbe (Tajikistan) and in 1993 he published *The Avesta, Selected Hymns from Videvdāt* in Moscow. Actually, Steblin-Kamenskii’s works were the first publications after Kossovich’s. Unlike Kossovich, Steblin-Kamenskii did not try to provide a special critical text in a narrow scholarly genre in either of his works on the Avesta as it would be inaccessible to all readers except for academics. Instead, he reduced criticism to the minimum and created some poetic interpretations of Avestan texts oriented towards the mass readership.

The last of the Russian translation versions of the Avesta, *The Gāthās of Zarathushtra* by Steblin-Kamenskii, was published in a hardcover format in 2009; it offers “Avestan poetry” with linguistic comments, some of which were already presented to the scholarly community earlier (Steblin-Kamenskii 2000:290ff). *The Gāthās* illustrates how the genre of scholarly work finally mutated into popular literature. This intentionally-produced ‘popular version’ of scholarly work followed in the footsteps of two available translations of the Avesta by Russian Zoroastrians: *Gāthās, Holy Hymns of Zarathushtra* by Iurii Lukashevich in 2004 and *The Khorde Avesta* by Mikhail Chistiakov in 2005. The latter two works do not conceal that they should serve ritualistic purposes within Russian Zoroastrian communities. Nevertheless, the author claims that it was “the first full translation of the Gāthās of Zarathushtra in the Russian language” which was written not so much for Iranian studies specialists and linguists as for historians, ethnographers, archaeologists, and for all those “interested in Revelations [sic] of the [that] ancient Aryan—one of the first prophets in spiritual development of human and religious teachings of the mankind” (Steblin-Kamenskii 2009:3). Apart from the Gāthās’ translation where every *gāh* was decorated with black and white hemp leaves and commentaries following every stanza were printed in smaller letters, the book includes four introductory articles about Zoroastrian culture in the past, a glossary, an extensive bibliography in Western and Russian languages, and the researcher’s background with two photographs. Colored photographs without any explanation of their origins cover the contents of the translated material, and

they obviously serve an additional function—to draw parallels between the contemporary and past everyday lives of Iranian peoples.

Apart from Steblin-Kamenskiĭ's works, some short translations of the Avesta in the 1990s were provided by other St. Petersburg researchers of Iranian philology such as Zarina Kharebati (Kharebati 1997, 2001), Viktoria Kriukova (Kriukova 1999), and Moscow historian Svetlana Vinogradova (Vinogradova 1980, 1997).

Curiously, a rethinking of the traditional translation of Avestan texts appeared as a collection called *The Avesta in Russian Translations*, published in 1997 and compiled by a freelance writer, Ivan Rak. Not having any linguistic or historical background, Rak still provided a serious systematic work (in collaboration with St. Petersburg scholars) incorporating all scholarly translations and translations' fragments of the Avesta in Russian including the Vidēvdād (1–3, 8, 13, 18, 19, 21), the Gāthās (28–30, 43, 44, 46, 47), Young the Avestan Yasna (9, 10, 12, 19, 60) and the Yasht (1,5, 6, 8, 10, 13, 14, 17, 19, 22). Since then the collection of texts has been appreciated in the scholarly community and used for programs in history of religions at high schools. Remarkably, most Avestan fragments included in the compilation have two variations of translation on average, a few have three (the Gāthās: Y. 30—("The Doctrine of Dualism") or Y. 44 ("The Sermon with Questions")), and some even have four (Yt. 9 ("Khom-Yasht") or Yt. 10 ("Mihr-Yasht")), which implies a certain insistence upon selection of Avestan material by Russian scholars and simultaneously shows a conventional pluralistic approach to their interpretation.

The debates on the Avesta and its alternative translations were drawn toward the geographical reconstructions of ancient Iran and bordering countries. These geographical debates were also the main point of contention among hypotheses of Zarathushtra's time and place of birth. The Avesta was considered a sort of "encyclopedia of the ancient world" that should explain how Zoroastrianism was developed and changed historically. In that way it also should explain modern ritualistic, mostly non-Islamic, practices of Central Asian peoples.

Beginning at the end of the 19th century, scholars became interested in Zoroastrian works other than the Avesta. The inspiration for these scholars was drawn, without a doubt, from the publications of the Zend-Avesta and Pahlavi religious texts within the ground-breaking series *The Sacred Books of the East* brought up by Western scholars between 1880 and 1897. Thus, the critical edition of the further Zoroastrian treatise in Farsi *Zarathuštñāma* (facsimile and translation into French on the basis of ten known original writings) was brought out at the very beginning of the 20th century (Rosenberg 1904). The latter Russian translation of *Zarathuštñāma* was made by Zarina Kharebati about 90 years later, but unfortunately, it was not published (Kharebati 2001).



The teaching of Middle Persian as well as Old Persian became a firm part of the basic education at faculties for Iranian studies. During the Soviet era legal and economics texts were of higher priority, and religious texts were not in demand (e.g. Dandamaev 1963; Perikhanian 1974, 1997). The ice was broken toward the end of the 1980s with the publication of a series of translations by St. Petersburg philologist Ol'ga Chunakova who published critical translations of major Middle Persian treatises as follows: *The Book of Deeds of Ardashir Son of Papak* (1987), *To Know the Ways and Paths of the Righteous People: Pehlevi Edifying Texts* (1991), *Zoroastrian Texts: Of Spirit of Wisdom (Dadestan-i menog-i khrad). Primal Creation (Bundahishn) and Other Texts* (1997), *Pehlevi Devine Comedy: The Book About the Righteous Viraz (Arda Viraz namag) and Other Texts* (2001). Chunakova also compiled the *Pehlevi Dictionary of Zoroastrian Terms*, complete with mythological figures and mythological symbols, also in Russian (Chunakova 2004). Although her translations were very popular among interested Russian readership, they did not find a lot of acknowledgment in the West possibly due to their shortcomings in critical analysis and their focus on Russian audience (Weinreich 2001:252). From 2007 to 2009, another St. Petersburg scholar, Alii Kolesnikov, was working with similar subject matter in the project *Late Zoroastrian texts from the XV–XVI centuries (on the handwritings from the Institute of Oriental studies in St. Petersburg and Paris National Library)* (Kolesnikov 2008). In this way the 1990s were the years when the Pahlavi religious texts began to be translated into Russian and as a result, they were received by Russian speaking recipients like never before.

### 3.1.2. Zoroastrianism and social-economic history

From the beginning, Zoroastrianism was perceived as an integral part of the pre-Islamic history of Iran, and research on Zoroastrianism was incorporated into the archaeological and political-economic history of the ancient world (e.g. Tolstov 1948a, 1948b, 1962; Avdiev 1953; Gafurov 1955; D'iakonov M 1961; Lukonin 1961, 1979; Masson & Romodin 1964). During the Soviet era a great deal of monographs and articles were published trying to connect the Zoroastrian religion to the ideological history of ancient cultures found in "Soviet Central Asia." For this kind of research, it was crucial to collect the material objects of extinct cultures. Accordingly, Soviet Central Asia became the site of the *Hermitage State Museum*, which has a rich Persian collection consisting of many Achaemenid and Sasanian material objects (Marshak & Nikitin 2004). The *Hermitage* collection has been and still is an excellent source for historical works, and in particular, of ancient Persian art and

culture. During the Soviet era this collection inspired many historic publications by internationally renowned scholars like Igor Diakonov and Mohammad Dandamaev, with special iconographical works by Vladimir Lukonin and Kamilla Trever (Lukonin 1961, 1977, 1979; Trever 1939; Trever & Lukonin 1987).

Beginning in the 19th century, the historical aspect of research on Zoroastrianism in the Russian school was strong. Konstantin Inostrantsev (1876-1941) was an influential figure because of his academic interest in Iranian pre-Islamic history (Kolesnikov 2005). While his many short publications were dedicated to ethnography and the literature of Iran and Middle Asia he became famous through his doctoral thesis *The Sasanian Sketches* (Сасанидские этюды, 1909), presented at St. Petersburg University one year later and translated into French afterward. He also worked with a great deal of Arabic sources that, he believed, could explain the dark, not-yet-studied periods of Zoroastrian Iran. He wrote several monographs on the history of Zoroastrianism including ancient Iranian funeral rituals and funeral architectonic environments (Inostrantsev 1909) and the Zoroastrian migration to India (Inostrantsev 1915) as well.

In the Soviet era Zoroastrianism was integrated into the universal history posited by Marxist philosophy of history. Soviet historians such as Boris Turaev and his student, Soviet historian Vasilii Struve (1889–1965) (Oranskiĭ 1974:116), both stood at the beginning of the historical research of the Ancient East with a very broad spectrum of analysis. Struve was a founder of the descriptive historical concept including the idea of five chronological formations based on Marx's historical materialism. Turaev dealt with the reformation activity of Zarathushtra and with religion in the Avesta and in the Rig-Veda (Turaev 1935), whereas Struve discussed the problems of the origin of Zoroastrianism and its foundations. Through the analysis of Achaemenid inscriptions, Struve came to the conclusion that the Achaemenids were not adherents of the Zoroastrian religion, contrary to what is presented in the Gāthās (Struve 1942<sup>2</sup>, 1948, 1960). However, the problem of religion and Persian dynasties had been central throughout Soviet historical research.

The Khorezmian Central Asian expedition, the longest expedition that ever took place during the Soviet era, raised the issue of which ideological and religious fundamentals were part of ancient Central Asian cultures. The founder and longstanding director of the expedition, ethnologist Sergeĭ Tolstov (Tolstov 1948a, 1948b, 1962), assumed that Khorezm may be identified as the legendary Avestan *airyanəm vaējah* (“the Aryan’s expanse”) and the place where Zarathushtra was born (Tolstov 1948:88), which still remains unconfirmed (Rapoport 1992). The ossuaries found in Khorezmian settlements were built between the 5th–8th centuries CE and were used in the

broad context of Central Asian beliefs and ceremonies. These ossuaries should be traced back to the Zoroastrian funeral tradition that may have started as early as 1000 BCE (Rapoport 1971).

In the 1950s and 1960s the problem of reconstructing Zoroastrian religious history and its possible variations was being discussed by historian Igor D'iakonov. In his *History of Media* (1956), written as a work detailing the history of "ancient Azerbaijan," one can find long passages about the Avesta and Zarathushtra in which D'iakonov drew extensive linguistic material to substantiate the theory that the magi, one of the Median peoples, were the priests and most ardent followers of Zarathushtra's religion (also D'iakonov M & Perikhanian 1961).

D'iakonov's colleague, Mohammad Dandamaev, dedicated an enormous number of articles and monographs to Ancient Iran, where Zoroastrianism was one of most discussed topics because it had to be presented in the frame of Soviet historiography as the ideological groundwork for this ancient culture (Dandamaev & Lukonin 1980). Vasilii Abaev, a philologist working on Ossetian material, was another prominent researcher on Zoroastrianism that also wrote articles about the history of Zoroastrianism. He claimed that Zarathushtra was at first a "reformer" of an old cult that produced the ethic interpretation of antagonism between Good and Evil in Zoroastrianism (Abaev 1990).

The new view on Zoroastrianism as an object independent from the interests of general history was initiated with a book called *The Avesta* written by historian of philosophy Aleksandr Makovelskii, which was published in 1960 in Baku. The book had a compilative character and was a description of the Avesta that contained little insight into the philosophical and social teachings based on the secondary literature analysis. Its superficial characteristics were mentioned by the department of philosophy at the Academy of Sciences in Azerbaijan. A 'scientific commission' recommended the publication by emphasizing that the book was "[...] a first attempt of Marxist-Leninist analysis of the main content of the Avesta in whole [sic]" and it "does not pretend to be an all-round investigation of this old cultural memorial."

The 1960s were the years when Marxist-Leninist historical ideas were being applied to the history of Persia and Central Asia. In the foreground, the religion of Zoroastrianism served as the negative component of these "class societies." As a result of archaeological activities in Afghanistan and Tajikistan during the 1950s and 1960s, many general works in the history of ancient Persia appeared (D'iakonov M 1961; Dandamaev 1963; Dandamaev & Lukonin 1980).

The first volume of the compendium *The History of the Tadjik People*, edited by Bobodzhan Gafurov and Boris Litvinsky in 1963 placed the Avesta on one line with archaeological findings as a major written source about cultural life in

Central Asia and Iran in the 1st millennium BCE, particularly during the time of the Achaemenids (from 600–400 BCE), but with certain reservations about territorial diffusion.

Although Zoroastrianism was a religion that was included again and again into later books in the history of religions, because of the dominance of three main world religions (particularly Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism), it still remained in background. One of the lucky early exceptions was the Soviet classic, *Religion in the History of the Peoples of the World*, written by scholar of comparative ethnographic studies Sergeï Tokarev (1899-1985).<sup>11</sup> Tokarev analyzed the “religion of Iran” (although he also called it Zoroastrianism, he mostly used Mazdeism as describing a pre-Zarathushtrian period in the history of Zoroastrianism) as a religion of high-stage development fixed during the crisis of the slave-owning-formation. Together with Judaism and Hinduism, he saw a “religion of the national-state” in opposition to the three transnational world religions of Buddhism, Christianity and Islam. Describing short history, eschatology, and the rituals of Zoroastrianism, he emphasized the “cosmopolitan” character of Zoroastrianism and its considerable influences on other ancient and medieval religious movements. He also mentioned that Zoroastrianism had been widespread until the beginning of the 20th century in Azerbaijan and that the contemporary Zoroastrians lived in Iran and West India (Tokarev 1976:388).

*The Zoroastrians in Iran* (1982), a book by historian Elena Doroshenko, is a compilative work based on the analysis of Western (particularly Boyce’s research) and Russian/Soviet scientific literatures as well as some works by Parsi writers. Doroshenko’s work is actually a survey of Zoroastrian studies and presents “an attempt to handle a number of questions pertaining to the Zoroastrian creed, to trace through the evolution of Zoroastrian parish [sic] in Iran as a whole during the last centuries, to show mutual connections of Iranian Zoroastrians to their co-religionists Parsis living in India, finally to display the forms of Iranian Zoroastrians’ adaptation to modern conditions for the readers” (Doroshenko 1982).

The *Mythological Encyclopaedia of the World* was published in the early 1990s. This two-volume reference book replete with rich iconographical materials should be presented to students of religion as “a great event in the scientific and cultural life of this country” (Shakhnovich 1993:71). Most articles about Zoroastrianism, except the general article by Braginskiï and Lelekov (1991:560f) and one article about the god Mazda by Toporov (Toporov

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<sup>11</sup> For detailed descriptions and criticisms on Soviet religious studies and particularly Tokarev’s work see Throver 1983:263ff.

1992:88f), were written by Lelekov and drew attention to secondary literature from the West (Lelekov 1991:67,78f,120f,141f,460f).

Despite its characterization as a work of popular science, the *Myths of the Ancient and Early Medieval Iran*, written by Ivan Rak (1988), should be valued as a serious systematic work in Zoroastrian mythology. In the 1990s Zoroastrian themes attracted attention in a comparative study that was published in 1997 with an intention to analyze Zoroastrianism and Islam regarding their ideas about death and funeral ritual practices (Khismatullin & Kriukova 1997). Zoroastrian funeral rituals were also analyzed in two books by Moscow ethnographer Margarita Meitarchiiian. Additionally, she presented visual documents and used some possibly outdated secondary literary sources (Kriukova 1999).

A number of scientific works emerged in the 1990s discussing a wide spectrum of problems from Zoroastrian mythology to the general theory underlying the history of religion. In the latter case, Zoroastrianism was classified as an “ancient world religion” or “Palaeolithic religion” (Zubov 1997). It was also considered one of the oldest and most independent religions in the world which “could not go out of [its] territorial and ethnic borders” but was simultaneously seen as a modern “regional religion” that was widespread in ‘traditional’ regions in India and Iran and also through “Sri-Lanka, Afghanistan, Yemen, Canada, USA, Great Britain, Australia and others” (Puchkov & Kaz'mina 1997).

In the last edition of historian of the East Leonid Vasil'ev's *Religions of the Ancient World*, Zoroastrianism was displayed as an “early religious system.” In the chronology of Zoroastrianism, one was supposed to see some stages of early Zoroastrianism; particularly in Mazdeism, the religion of the Achaemenids which knew but did not acknowledge the authority of prophet Zarathushtra. Mazdeism was based on the triadic worship of Ahura Mazdā, Mithra, and Ardivisura Anahita (Vasil'ev 2000). In addition to this triad there was a god of time—Zervan. The transition from Mazdeism to Zoroastrianism should be signified through “Zarathushtra's reform” that sharpened the antagonism of Good and Evil—Ahura Mazdā and Angra Mainyu—where the “distinct ethical accent” plays a great role. Due to Zarathushtra, the religion of Iranians belonged to a new type of religions—the religion of a prophet. Zoroastrianism greatly influenced the religion of Judaism. Modern Zoroastrianism was a prosperous religion with increasing expansion. According to Vasil'ev, Zoroastrianism had indirectly impacted Western Christianity and Māhayāna-Buddhism in the East through Mithraism. In his book he described funeral rituals on towers of silence by Parsis. Zoroastrianism was the “official state religion of Sasanids.”

A number of doctoral dissertations appeared in Russian in the 2000s setting the focus of their research on the matter of Zoroastrianism either from its ancient historical perspective (Mel'nikov 2003; Khalikov 2004; Krupnik 2008a) or as a consolidated historiographical survey (Nugaev 2005).

When Zoroastrianism was studied by scholars during the pre-revolution and Soviet eras, it was apparent that Zoroastrianism did not appeal to the public as an existing contemporary tradition. Zoroastrianism was an object of study in two main branches of the humanities: linguistics and regional historiography focused on ancient societies in Central Asia. As a result, specific research was met with a certain disinterest to the current state of affairs. However, this changed during the late Soviet period in the 1980s. After observing the scholarly research on Zoroastrianism, one might come to the conclusion that scholars of historical education with strong philological abilities generated more complex theories about Zoroastrianism than other types of scholars. The lack of ethnographic research on the remaining Zoroastrians in traditional societies such as India and Iran forced researchers to learn about Zoroastrian heritage through Central Asian artifacts. As a consequence, every archaeological expedition inside this region is somehow a search for Zarathushtra's homeland that closely intertwined with politics in the newly independent Central Asian states.

### 3.1.3. The reception of Western scholarly works

The works about Zoroastrianism translated from European languages into Russian appeared only towards the end of the 19th century. The first translations were written in the popular-science genre. As a rule, Zoroastrianism was treated as one of the constant components of edited books dedicated to non-Christian or ancient religions. One great source of information was a chapter about Persians, Zoroastrianism, and Manichaeism by Edvard Lehmann (Lehmann 1899:140) in *Lehrbuch der Religionsgeschichte*, which was initiated through the ideas of Pierre Daniel Chantepie de la Saussaye and included articles about many ancient religions in the 4th edition (Lehmann 1925:199ff, 264ff). Lehmann's work, with its obsolete tendency to describe religion from the naïve perspective of a foreign observer, was reprinted after the perestroika and was included into religious studies programs in the 1990s as scientific evidence.

Whereas the translation of scholarly literature from the Western humanities<sup>12</sup> was rare during the Soviet era, Oriental studies obviously

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<sup>12</sup> So far the translations of historical works on the Zoroastrian religion do not provoke any astonishment from the natural science publications that were less expected. There has been another sort of literature—namely, a book in the history of astronomy—that was translated into Russian and had related Zoroastrianism (also Zurvanism) to the development of the

exercised more possibilities. Usually the theories from the West were being reflected in surveys with the goal to ‘denigrate the wrong ideas of a bourgeois science.’ The common tendency in the humanities to criticize Western authors, however, assumed that the original versions of those books should be read and then analyzed in Russian publications. This practice allowed a fertile exchange between Soviet and Western scholars in Iranian studies. In the 1970s a number of popular-science books were translated (Fray 1972; Dresden 1977) covering the history and mythology of ancient Zoroastrianism. Accordingly, the Russian translations helped with the transfer of Western popular-science literature making it accessible for many readers because of its high circulation. The translation of foreign secondary literature on Zoroastrianism into Russian was made not only from English, French, and German, but also from Eastern European languages (Rypka 1970).

Undoubtedly, such discursive events were a significant step in the formation of contemporary Zoroastrian communities in Russia and also led to some researchers codifying the popular edition of Boyce’s *Zoroastrians: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*, which was translated into Russian by Ivan Steblin-Kamenskii in 1987. Boyce’s book, which had four editions, reached a large circle of Russian readership. But this does not mean that Boyce’s other monumental works such as *History of Zoroastrianism* were ignored. Her ideas and interpretations were also criticized (e.g. Lelekov 1978:190; Abdullaev 1994:239ff). The Russian translation of *Zoroastrians* was revised four times in 1987, 1988, 1994, and 2003. The translator introduced some updated changes in her editions as new research materials became available.

It seems that with the political and the social changes in the 1990s that the original editions of scholarly Western literature should have found its way to Russia. In fact, because of its costliness and the lack of foreign language knowledge in Russia, such literature could not be distributed among non-professionals as it had been done with earlier Russian critical translations. In the

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natural sciences. I have no evidence of whether or not van der Waerden’s notions have spread among historians of Iran. However, Pavel Globa tried to undermine his ‘Zervanism’ with quotations from *Science Awakening* that was undertaken also by the scholar of religion Igor Krupnik (see below). *Science Awakening* (Volume 2) by Bartel Leendert van der Waerden, dealt with the genesis of current astronomy and was translated from Dutch into Russian in 1959 (The Dutch original was published firstly in 1950, then it was translated into English (1954) and German (1956)). Van der Waerden tried to establish some relation between astronomic-astrologic knowledge and forms of religions. According to him, astrology had religious essence that he claimed to identify in connections “between Omen Astrology and Old-Babylonian polytheism, between primitive zodiacal astrology and Zurvanism, the fatalistic worship of Infinite Time, between horoscopic astrology and Zoroastrism [sic], the religion of ZARATHUSHTRA [sic].” The aim of his investigation was to shed more light upon the historical religious-astrological grounds of scientific astronomy. See van der Waerden 1974:182.

publishing business, which was not controlled by the scholarly elite (as it had been practiced in the Soviet Union), other types of literature were demanded. Nevertheless, the strong tendency to adapt of Western ideas could stimulate new attempts to translate some scholarly works of popular science into Russian. It is also worth pointing out that the emergence of the Internet has provided enormous possibilities for sharing and obtaining new information at no cost at all.

## 3.2. Contemporary Zoroastrianism in Iranian studies and the study of religion

Considering the strong attention to the subject in the 1960s and 1970s, not much has been published within the last two decades on the subject of Zoroastrianism. In accordance with the scholarly tradition of systematic historical studies, Zoroastrianism has been explained alongside other ancient religions. Modern Western studies were mostly ignored while the reception was directed solely to former Soviet research or prior Western publications. Therefore the recent popular-science books by Russian Iranologists have been the most noticeable discursive events by Russian Zoroastrians (Steblin-Kamenskii 1990, 1993, 2009; Kriukova 2005). However, most of the publications by Iranologists and historians specializing in the history of ancient Iran were within the period of scholarly articles written at about the same time as the special periodical *The Bulletin of Ancient History* (Вестник древней истории (1937–)) that could be seen as a central discussion space for the scholarly community dealing with ancient Zoroastrianism. By attempting to comprehend some aspects of contemporary research in Zoroastrianism I selected three texts from different disciplinary origins that should be analyzed at length.

### 3.2.1. Scholarly skepticism surrounding neo-Zoroastrians

Current academic research on Zoroastrianism during the post-Soviet era is strongly associated with a St. Petersburg Iranologist, Prof. Ivan Steblin-Kamenskii (b. 1945), whose translations from Avestan into Russian made him a very meaningful figure in that field. He is the most cited scholar by Russian Zoroastrians, particularly during the 1990s. The first exemplar of scholarly discourse I will present is his text entitled *The Translator's Afterword to the Fourth Edition*, which was published in 2003 within the Russian translation of a book by English Iranologist Mary Boyce. Before delving into Steblin-



Kamenskii's work, I have to give some retrospection to the characters and the background of Steblin-Kamenskii text.

Born in a scholarly family (his father Mikhail Steblin-Kamenskii was a prominent Russian researcher of Scandinavian languages and old Icelandic epics), Steblin-Kamenskii began his scholarly career early: while he was still a student he spent time as a Russian language teacher in the Pamir by the Wakhi people, simultaneously gathering language materials that became the basis for further research in that region. His fieldwork there led to two academic monographs about the Wakhi language which he defended in 1971 (about the historical phonetics of the Wakhi language) and in 1984 (about the agricultural lexis by the Pamir peoples from the historical-comparative perspective). Beginning in 1981 he started to work as a professor, docent at the Eastern Faculty of the Institute of Iranian studies at St. Petersburg State University, and from 1995 through 2005 as a dean of the same faculty. In 2003 he was awarded the title of Academician of the Russian Academy of Sciences, the highest degree of state recognition for one's scientific work. Steblin-Kamenskii produced an extensive number of publications (about 150), including translations of European language secondary literature and poetry.

It becomes apparent from his scholarly profile and research interests that Steblin-Kamenskii's studies in Avestan were just one of many topics he worked on. In addition to his Avestan studies, he wrote many articles in Russian and in English, but he deserves to be mentioned through his publications of Avestan texts as separate books in the style of poetic translations into Russian with small portions of scholarly critical apparatus. Starting with the translation of the Vidēvdād in his *Avesta. Selected Hymns from Videvdat* (1990), which soon became a rarity among people interested in ancient literature, Steblin-Kamenskii began to concentrate his efforts on the Avestan Gāthās that were published almost twenty years after the first (*The Gāthās of Zarathushtra*, 2009).

Steblin-Kamenskii also provided translations for Western works, the most notable being the translation of *Zoroastrians: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices* by British Iranologist Mary Boyce written in 1979 (in Russian *Зороастрийцы: Верования и обычаи*, 1985). Boyce's *Zoroastrians* became one of the most important discursive events in the contemporary discussion about Zoroastrianism and one of the most respected sources for professionals and amateurs alike. *Zoroastrians* was published four times (in 1985, 1988, 1993, and 2003) with more than 55,000 copies sold.

The translation of Boyce's popular book was carried out with the participation of Steblin-Kamenskii's mentors—a historian and longstanding director of the Eastern section in Hermitage, Vladimir Lukonin, and after Lukonin's death, Iranologist Edvin Grantovskii. For the Russian translation

Boyce wrote a special preface in which she expressed her gratitude towards the Russian team and claimed that the research on Zarathushtra should be important for the Russian public because “[p]roceeding from the content and the language of Zoroaster’s hymns how it now clear is that he really lived in Asian steppes near to East of Volga” (Boyce 1988:3). Despite her historical description of Zoroastrianism over the course of centuries, Boyce’s style was criticized by many scholars; part of the problem was that Boyce provided her own views about the character and future of Zoroastrianism in her work. In the postscript to the 1st edition, Boyce opened discussion about the demographical problems of Zoroastrianism: she saw the intake of new adherents from Central Asia and claimed that “two peoples of Iranian descent—Yezidis from Iran and Iraq and Tajikis from the former Soviet republic Tajikistan—announced that their ancestors had been secret Zoroastrians and have been trying to get recognition as believers by community leaders” (Boyce 2003:326). She felt a bit skeptical about an affirmative answer from the Parsis, however, and stated that some Zoroastrian clerics might use that situation in order to increase the number of their adherents. Steblin-Kamenskii’s comments about the “secret Zoroastrians” were unambiguous “according to many years of observations of all researchers, neither among valley dwellers of former Soviet Tajikistan nor among mountain Tajiks had there been ‘secret’ Zoroastrians.”

Revised Russian translations of Boyce’s *Zoroastrians*, in particular the 2003 edition, became a peculiar subject of controversy between the translator and Russian Zoroastrians (particularly Pavel Globa) who had gotten a great deal of inspiration from that book for many years. For this reason I believe that *The Translator’s Afterword to the Fourth Edition* follows one of the strongest contemporary scholarly tendencies regarding Zoroastrianism that is characteristic of the 1990s and 2000s: this revision reads like a diatribe.

The text to be analyzed takes up four incomplete pages and was placed within the 4th Russian edition of *Zoroastrians* (2003) between Boyce’s *Postscript to the First Edition* and Boyce’s short curriculum vitae at the end of the text’s main body. This section of text represents an article written in polemic style and does not contain any footnotes. *The Translator’s Afterword* is signed with the long signature “slave of God Ioann, the nephew of father Ioann Steblin-Kamenskii, new Russian martyr, canonizing and praying for by the Russian Orthodox Church on the 2nd of August after New Style” and dated “7th of May 2003” in “Sankt-Petersburg” (Steblin-Kamenskii 2003:331). If this text is compared to other prefaces and postscripts within the book it leaves the same impression of being standard text in this genre. But the content and bizarre signature are anomalous; one might assume that the translator chose this kind of self-expression in order to reach certain readership, namely, people calling

themselves Zoroastrians and reading in Russian. The late reception of *The Translator's Afterword* as a reply in *Mitra* does confirm that the message found its recipients (Editorial board a 2004:187f).

At first the author stated that his translation of Boyce's *Zoroastrians* had some "miraculous fate" and since then had been increasingly popular in some post-Soviet audiences. Contrary to Boyce's assumption, this does not show the "enlightenment" of the Russian people at all; it is the result of "almost one century of the eradication of faith in God." This is not obvious to Europeans who have been living "in unspiritual (бездуховный) world for a long time." Thus, when Steblin-Kamenskii made the translation, it coincided with the "rebirth of religion in our country releasing it from the ideological sway" (Steblyn-Kamenskii 2003:328). He carried on that this era was characterized by the activation of "sects" and the sudden quest for occult truth. In Central Asia and Transcaucasia he observed the same traces of secularization in the form of exalted behaviour regarding Islam, but the people receiving secular education during the Soviet era were not able to accept the Muslim style of life unconditionally. The author wrote that since the 1980s he had met many people from the Asian republics building Zoroastrian communities. Zoroastrianism, in his opinion, seemed to them "more attractive" because "of its ancient allusions" (Steblyn-Kamenskii 2003:329).

For that reason Steblin-Kamenskii's scholarly works themselves had a lot of popularity among religious amateurs. Thus, a spokesman for the parish *Mazdayasna* from Tashkent showed a great deal of respect toward Steblin-Kamenskii, promising to chisel the author's name on one of the foundation stones of a future Zoroastrian temple. The author, however, felt that his name did not belong on the temple using a skeptically laden paraphrase patently of biblical origin (Acts 4:11) if he want that the "builders" would better "reject" this "cornerstone." Calling someone a Zoroastrian the way some of his contemporaries did, in the author's opinion, "goes too far." For example, the author told a story about an encounter at the home of high priest mōbedan-e mōbed Rostam Shāhzādi (1912–2000) in 1995 with a young Zoroastrian from Tajikistan. Steblin-Kamenskii described the circumstances in which a young man who called himself a Zoroastrian ignored the professional opinion of the author that there had not been any Zoroastrians in the Soviet and post-Soviet era. Consequently the author felt that his authority amongst others as a serious scholar was seriously compromised.

The young Zoroastrian had supposedly come from the upper reaches of Zeravshan, which the author had visited many times. Steblin-Kamenskii debated the fact that there had never been "secret" mountain Zoroastrians because ethnographically it was a thoroughly-studied area. According to the author,

these secret Zoroastrians had neither existed in the mountains of Central Asia, nor Tajikistan, nor Afghanistan, nor Pakistan, nor China. The ancestors of the young Zoroastrian should have been ordinary Muslims. His “Zoroastrian” name was actually a pseudonym because his proper name had been of Muslim and Arabian origin.<sup>13</sup> According to Steblin-Kamenskii there were “secretive Muslim sects of Ismā‘īlites” or some “pagan Kāfirs” in Nuristān and Chitrāl. The author agreed that there were different beliefs and customs coming from Zoroastrianism, but he thought that the strongest religious tendencies in Central Asia were Buddhism and “some tribal cults with Aryan elements.”

Steblyin-Kamenskii also stated that since ancient times Zoroastrianism had been widespread through Khorezm, Sogdiana, and Bactria, but the last references to it were dated to the first centuries after the Islamic invasion. No evidence of Zoroastrians appeared after the Mongols had emerged. In contrast, the Central Asian Jews had not been seriously studied at all, while they preserved many rituals and customs connected with Zoroastrianism than anybody else. Just like gypsies in their language, the Bukharian Jews could be the living bearers of the Aryan heritage.

Steblyin-Kamenskii felt positive that the idea of “secret” Zoroastrians in the Badakhshan Mountains, in the Pamir, or in the upper reaches of Zeravshan, was “misleading information through which one tries to gain acceptance of the Zoroastrian parishes abroad.” The author referred to Boyce by asserting that “by virtue of Parsis and Gabrs parishes’ historical development, to become a Zoroastrian one could already be born as such” (Steblyin-Kamenskii 2003:330). With that non-footnoted argument he also ‘duplicated’ one of the central topics within the modern Parsi controversy about the conversion of foreigners.

Steblyin-Kamenskii mentioned the statements of Pavel Globa (“P.P. Globa”) regarding his Zoroastrian descent. So, Globa’s first “writings” were supposed to have been borrowed from Boyce’s *Zoroastrians*. Boyce’s book may have inspired Tamara and Pavel Globa to “invent” their Avestan and Zoroastrian roots. Steblyin-Kamenskii recalled too that Globa had called him the author as “non-enlightened professor” in the past. Globa speculated about Zoroastrian ideas publically, used *Desatir* (a forged document analyzed by Boyce in her book), and made absurd errors in geographical designations. There were a huge number of absurdities on the “neo-Zoroastrian websites on the Internet” (Steblyin-Kamenskii 2003:331). The teachings of Globa are one example of “religious communities which are becoming degraded.” To conclude the article the author expressed his bitterness about those who had given up their faith in Christianity.

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<sup>13</sup> Allegedly he mentions an activist from Tajikistan, see for that Irandoust 2003:132.

He also quoted the Orthodox Christian morning prayer “For the living [people]” in its Slavic Church form.<sup>14</sup>

The presented text is considered a sharp criticism or rather, a pamphlet against some groups of people calling themselves followers or descendants of secret Zoroastrians from Central Asia. The author distinguished between two imitations of Zoroastrianism: one appealing to ancient religious traditions in Tajikistan and the other appearing as a new wave of pseudo-Zoroastrianism in Russia initiated by Pavel Globa. Steblin-Kamenskii’s knowledge of other manifestations of new Zoroastrianism, for instance, the active politics of the Zoroastrian group *Bozorg Bazgash*t, was limited, so he concentrated solely on Globa’s groups.

Steblyn-Kamenskii’s point of departure was the ethnic Zoroastrianism that he viewed as the single possible way to perform Zoroastrianism. Otherwise the author recognized his own role as a person stimulating conversation on Zoroastrianism in the post-Soviet era through his translation of Boyce’s *Zoroastrians*. But just like most of his fellow Russians, he denied other religions and was pleased to recognize the religious norm in Russian Orthodox Christianity. That position had been expressed not only in chosen lexica with a distinct Christian connotation but also by complete skepticism about the false religious “enlightenment” of the Russian people as an antithesis to Boyce’s words about the high reading level of Russians (“how enlightened are your people”) once expressed by her in a letter to Steblin-Kamenskii. Moreover, Steblin-Kamenskii states that the “so-called civilized Europeans” themselves cannot be objective in evaluating Russian spiritual degradation because they also lived in an “unspiritual world” for a long time (Steblyn-Kamenskii 2003:328).

Contrasting Russia with a cultural Other, the “people in the West,” reminds one of vastly nuanced conservative discourses, namely the traditional polemics within Russian philosophy among Slavophiles and Westernists and contemporary debates within the ROC against “foreign influence” and new “sects.” Formally, Steblin-Kamenskii also uses an extensive, orthodox-colored signature that lets people identify him as a strong orthodox believer. Being involved in academic conversations and using such biased formalities creates an incredible dissonance at the genre level in the text and calls the legitimacy of his academic agnosticism but not his longstanding experience as a prominent Iranian studies scholar into question. Additionally, in the text Steblin-Kamenskii does not try to hide his strict Orthodox Christian reflections regarding the religious situation in Russia. In some instances his description of his opponents and his statements had an ironic, even sarcastic, character. He assumed a clear critical position towards new Zoroastrians (although the latter should rather propose the ‘Christian

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<sup>14</sup> See the exact passage from the orthodox prayer book (православный молитвослов) online: <<http://perevodmolitv.narod.ru/molitv-utr.html>> (accessed 21 March 2012).

absolution' towards 'nonbelievers'). Evidence from the text reproduced the stereotypical notions that orthodoxy belonged solely to the Russian people and that Russia was ethnically homogenous, which are both contradictory to the idea of a secular state.

Moreover, Steblin-Kamenskii called the sincerity of Russian Zoroastrians' beliefs into question and claimed that they were seeking more attention from abroad, which indirectly accused them of a lack of patriotism. Thus, Steblin-Kamenskii branded Globa's adherents as "degraded" Orthodox Christians. On the other hand, his reputation as an Iranologist that carried out a great deal of field work in Central Asia yielded much evidence about why there is no historical basis for Irandust and Globa's statements about the genuine origin of Zoroastrianism in post-Soviet territories. In this way he tried to clarify the scholarly positions in order to avoid further misinterpretations of scholarly work.

### 3.2.2. Russian Zoroastrianism as a pagan religion

The next text worth investigating was presented as a paper at the *Third Torchinov Conference: Religious and Oriental studies* in 2006 at the Faculty for Philosophy of St. Petersburg University (Kriukova & Shkoda 2006:311–316). The authors are ethnologist Viktoria Kriukova and archaeologist Valentin Shkoda. Viktoria Kriukova is a researcher who specialized in Zoroastrian texts in her early articles and then on Zoroastrian and Islamic rituals of purity in Central Asia during her later articles (Kriukova 1996, Khismatullin & Kriukova 1997). She published a popular book on the historical and ritual parameters of Zoroastrianism (Зороастризм, 2005). Shkoda works at the Hermitage State Museum; he is also an archaeologist working at the longstanding expeditions of the aforementioned museum in Panjikent, Tajikistan. The text entitled *The Conversion to Zoroastrianism to a Religion of Ancestors in the Post-Soviet Space* is a six page long conference paper, that does not contain any bibliography at the end or any illustrations. All dates relevant to the sources are placed in the footnotes. Six of the footnotes consist of internet references to primary sources, two are of scholarly works, and one is of primary literature.

The authors claim that interest in Zoroastrianism has recently been increasing. They believe that the reason for this is a "spiritual quest" that has followed the fall of communist ideology. The development of Zoroastrianism in Russia was greatly influenced by the Russian translation of *Zoroastrians*, a widely circulated-book written by Boyce that was published in 1985. The authors mentioned that her "private opinion" was shared by many as the only true "uncritical stance" towards Zoroastrianism.

The second impetus behind a resurgence of interest in Zoroastrianism in Russia is the possible “astrological component” of this Ancient Iranian religion. According to Kriukova and Shkoda, the connection between Zoroastrianism and astrology is vague. However, this connection has remained a strong factor in determining the reason why the idea of Zoroastrianism did not vanish from European culture.

Zoroastrianism specifically occurred in Russia through the *Avestan astrology* of “P. Globa.” He and his adherents are the “creators of a new pagan religion.” Overall Zoroastrianism is “one of the manifestations of the “Russian Aryan idea.” Kriukova and Shkoda discuss the unconfirmed Russian Zoroastrian idea that Zarathushtra was an Aryan who was born and lived in Siberia. Thus they mention the tour *On the Path of Zarathushtra* that is conducted annually at Perm’s School of *Avestan astrology*. This festival is curiously similar to the nomadic strategy of the transference of toponyms in Ancient times. In that way the Russian Zoroastrians created their “own Zoroastrian history and geography;” however, there are some differences between the Perm, Chelyabinsk, and St. Petersburg parishes regarding this practice.

Kriukova and Shkoda distinguish between astrological Zoroastrianism and the Zoroastrianism found in the St. Petersburg parish (the only official Zoroastrian organization in all of Russia), which they call “historical Zoroastrianism.” According to them, the journal *Mitra* with its many publications is the best example of thinking that roughly adopts the idea that Zoroastrianism and Christianity employ similar reasoning. As evidence, the Christian Orthodox cultural background and Boyce’s speculations became the “suggestive base for the further invention of a new religion under the old name.”

Kriukova and Shkoda analyzed the similarities between Zoroastrian and Christian elements by asserting on the one hand that the more “marketed” (*раскрученная*) religion is caused by the arrogance of its adherence by Russian Zoroastrians, while on the other hand, their behavior sheds light on an important characteristic of pagan religions. The last is characterized by the “non-distinction between own and other religions,” and “associating” one’s own gods with foreign ones. This over-tolerance is one of the reasons why such “easily accessible spiritual teachings” are popular.

As a second condition that was conducive to the longevity of Zoroastrian ideas, the authors name the territories “having immediate relation to the Iranian culture and claiming Iranian cultural heritage” such as Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. The authors regard such cultural enthusiasm as an outburst of national self-consciousness in those Central Asian countries that were competitive with each other. Kriukova and Shkoda state that the politics

involving Zoroastrianism seeks to integrate itself with the Western world by developing its own ideology, separate from that of Islam.

In the last part of the paper Kriukova and Shkoda summarize that the degree of interest in Zoroastrianism in the post-Soviet era is high. This has occurred because of the “spiritual quest” that post-Soviets are taking following the collapse of communist ideology. This “spiritual quest” is akin to “pagan religiosity” using “Aryan ideas” for political goals. Moreover, the researchers observe some “creative relation to religion” through the use of a few scholarly works about Zoroastrianism for the construction of one’s beliefs.

The metaphor of the “spiritual quest” after the collapse of the Soviet Union seemed to be commonplace in publications in the 1990s. This metaphor is similar in context to the description in Steblin-Kamenskii’s *The Translator’s Afterword to the Fourth Edition*. Not being theoretically proven, it reflects the political chaos and activity of some religious organizations. In addition, religious groups and movements started coming from Eastern and Western countries in order to find new followers among the “former godless communists” as soon as the Soviet Union collapsed. This “spiritual quest” metaphor has been used mutually by both Western and Russian researchers and reveals the lack of quality information about the actual state of affairs in post-Soviet Russia and the naïve idea that the everyday lives of people are controlled by political decisions.

The topics that are discussed in the paper are sometimes similar to the ones found in the articles in *Mitra*. I specify them as some themes which have been used in the analysis of recent Zoroastrianism in the post-Soviet area: Zoroastrianism and Present, Zoroastrianism and Mary Boyce, Zoroastrianism and Astrology, Ural/Arkaim vs. Val dai, Zoroastrianism and Russian Aryan Idea, Zoroastrianism and Christianity.

Zoroastrianism still remains a relic for Kriukova and Shkoda; they talk about it respectfully as an “ancient Iranian religion,” whereas the Russian Zoroastrians have been disdainfully presented as the adherents of a new “pagan” religion. The authors claim that Russian Zoroastrians are profiting from Christian heritage in order to get more members. Hence “religious over-tolerance” is a negative factor of such movements that borders on manipulation in their eyes. In the conclusion of their report, the authors claimed that Russian Zoroastrians take a “creative” approach towards their religion and also towards scientific literature, which implies that the Zoroastrians are integrating scientific research into their religious map of the world. For example, the authors considered the Russian translation of Boyce’s Zoroastrians to be the main source of inspiration for the formation of the Russian Zoroastrian “pagan” religion. It is remarkable that other popular, non-scholarly Zoroastrian books, for example Russian translations of the Avesta, were totally overlooked by the authors.



### 3.2.3. An extinct or a living religion?

The last article about Zoroastrianism presented here is a text written by Igor Krupnik (b. 1983), a Moscow scholar of religion. He defended his ancient history doctoral dissertation about Zurvanism (Krupnik uses the term "Zervanism") in the "spiritual culture of Iran" in 2005. He is a very active online forum participant at the forum of the *Russian Anjoman*. In the following pages I will analyze his work titled *Zoroastrianism: Academic Research against Academic Myths* from the first volume of *Journal for Religious studies Religo*, published by the Moscow Society for the study of religions since 2008. However, the earlier version of his text already appeared in 2007 on the website [blagoverie.org](http://blagoverie.org). Some main ideas about Zoroastrianism and scholarly trends within the Russian school had already been articulated in his previous papers at the annual student conference at Lomonosov University in Moscow (Krupnik 2004:98ff).

The article represents another perspective in research of Zoroastrianism that was initiated by study of religions being re-established as an academic field in Russia during the 1990s (Smirnov 2009:90ff). Currently there are about 37 establishments in Russia where study of religions could be studied as an independent science; this vibrant field is gaining acceptance among other disciplines in the humanities (Kostylev 2009). This eight-page article contains short academic information about the author (status, academic location and e-mail address) and a 12-lines abstract in English. The article is written in a standard academic style; eighteen references are footnoted; there was no bibliography mentioned at the bottom.

According to Krupnik, there has always been some degree of dogmatism in science and particularly in the humanities that prevents the generation of new knowledge. The purpose of the article, however, was to show the actuality of research on Zoroastrianism because in "domestic science there are a number of stereotypes and 'myths' regarding the way pre-Islamic Iran religions took shape" (Krupnik 2008b:22).

Krupnik's article has two major ambitions. First, he intended to criticize the formalism in "domestic sciences," which requires examining the "Iranian religious phenomenon" in order to change some fixed opinions. Secondly, by debating the existence of Russian Zoroastrians he claimed that Zoroastrianism had to be studied as an "active religious system." Zoroastrianism is, in the author's opinion, a unique religion that combines the "charm and mysticism of the East" and the "rationalism and positivism of the West." For the West the religion of Zoroaster has remained enigmatic for a long time.

Krupnik believed that previous Western scholars had done a great deal, but that they did not answer the main questions about Zoroastrianism. Only

recently “some likeliness of a full picture” (Krupnik 2008b:23) is beginning to surface, according to Krupnik. However, answers about the origins and development of Zoroastrianism cannot come soon enough. Textual sources dated after 300 CE are rather inconsistent. The early history of Zoroastrianism is dark; there are still many “blank spaces.”

The domestic school of research on Zoroastrianism had many prominent representatives. The focus of research had been laid not only on a solely homogeneous “Iranian religion,” but on some of the “problems of Iranian history, archaeology, linguistics and philology” (Krupnik 2008b:24). There were just a few special publications on this topic written in the 2000s compared to a great number of Western works. Krupnik acknowledged openly in a footnote that contemporary Zoroastrian studies in Russia are at a standstill.

The main problem of the domestic school of research on Zoroastrianism is its “absence or, anyway, its complete lack of clarity” reflected in a “total shortage of sources” (Krupnik 2008b:ibid). Hitherto there has not been any complete translation of the Avesta in Russian, as well as many other Pahlavi texts (for instance, the Dēnkard). There are a few loners such as philologist Olga Chunakova, who translated almost all of the Pahlavi texts from the originals. The fundamental works of foreign scholars have not been published.

Another one of the central problems of the domestic school of research on Zoroastrianism is the idea that Zoroastrianism is a dead religion investigated exclusively by historians. Scholars try to substitute the term “Zoroastrianism” with “Parsism,” which Krupnik disagreed with. He stated that there were many Zoroastrian groups all over the world. He supplied his work with many examples and evidences drawn from the Internet and wrote that most Zoroastrian communities in former USSR territories were founded in the 1990s. There was a strong Zoroastrian appeal to the old roots in Tajikistan; the other Zoroastrian groups began, however, from ‘nothing’. In Russia the spreading of Zoroastrianism is linked to P.P. Globa’s “Avestan astrology” book craze in the 1990s. Krupnik considered Sankt-Petersburg (t-i-d.boom.ru); the Russian Anjoman (blagoverie.org); contacts with Iranian Zoroastrians through the Norwegian Zoroastrian organisation *Bozorg Bazgasht* (bozorgbazgasht.com) and non-registered communities throughout the post-Soviet space: in Chelyabinsk, Perm, Vladivostok, Sochi, Grodno, Dnepropetrovsk, Odessa, Kiev and in Minsk (globaastra.ru).

Krupnik tried to find out why the idea that Zoroastrianism was an extinct religion was widespread. He related it to the prohibition on proselytizing, which was a forced solution in Arabic politics. In the past Zoroastrianism actively used missionaries to spread its message (for instance, in 300 CE). But now the multitude of Zoroastrian Internet websites should prove that this is, in fact, a living religion.

Krupnik also stated that there is one aspect of Zoroastrian philosophy that is not being actively researched. The author quotes some examples of a “philosophical discourse” (Krupnik 2008b:26) in a work by Marina Wol’f *Early Greek Philosophy and Ancient Iran* (2007), and expects there to be more interest in Iranian (pre) Philosophy.

Krupnik discussed the tendency of reference, educational, and popular science books to homogenize Zoroastrianism. He stated that there had not been any mention, for instance, of Zurvanism in these books. In his opinion, in pre-Islamic Iran there had been many different schools of Zoroastrianism. The author quoted van der Waerden, the Dēnkard, and Yeznik of Kolb that all mentioned several forms of Zoroastrianism.

Krupnik expressed his own position about the history of Zoroastrianism: “until 700 CE Zoroastrianism had displayed not an undiluted phenomenon but a “melting pot” in which completely heterogeneous religious tendencies of Indo-Iranian, common Indo-European and Semitic provenance ‘had boiled’” (Krupnik 2008:27). Just after the Islamization a “whole religious system that aimed to unite the rest of its adherents” had been invented. It became “classical, orthodox” Zoroastrianism, and later transformed into Parsism. This is the object of research for the domestic school of research on Zoroastrianism, which ignores other periods of history for Zoroastrianism.

Krupnik showed the polyphonic character of Zoroastrianism on one simplified table and explained it in the following text. From the ancient, amorphous religion of the Proto-Indo-Iranians three tendencies to worship god surface: Mazdeism, Mithraism, and Anahitism. Mazdeism became the basis for Zarathushtra’s religion, the Zoroastrianism of Gāthās. “Devil-worship” of an evil spirit occurred simultaneously to Zoroastrianism, according to Krupnik. A third religious movement, Zurvanism, should be considered evidence of the cultural contact between Zoroastrianism and Mesopotamia (which occurred no earlier than the second half of Achaemenid reign). As evidence of this cultural exchange, Krupnik quoted three classical scholars in Zoroastrian studies: Walter B. Henning, Robert C. Zaehner, and Henrik S. Nyberg. Some scholars also identify a “Proto-Zurvanism,” but this theory merits a separate investigation.

Towards the end of the article Krupnik expressed hope that the post-Soviet school of Oriental studies had great potential and the problems surveyed in the presented article could be solved. The author directs his criticism towards investigations that should be made by domestic researchers studying Zoroastrianism.

The article claims to reveal some myths about Zoroastrianism that should arouse the development of new knowledge. Krupnik criticized scholars in Oriental studies for propagating two myths about Zoroastrianism. First, the author disputes

that Zoroastrianism is a dead religion, and secondly he points out that Zoroastrianism in ancient times had been not homogenized and had many unique schools of thought and tendencies. His argumentation and further schematic presentation at the end shows that he himself was interested in Zurvanism and ancient forms of Zoroastrianism. As confirmation that Zoroastrianism is still alive, he demonstrated examples of some Zoroastrian web addresses from RuNet that should underpin the idea of religion as something that is subjectively perceptible and postulated as such by the people who believe in it.

### 3.3. Summary

The first, historiographical part of the presented chapter made explicit the preferences for themes and subjects of research on Zoroastrianism since the second part of the 19th century through the 1990s. An undisputed authority in that research is one of the healthiest branches in Russian Oriental studies—Iranian studies or Iranology, which covers a wide spectrum of disciplines studying Iranian people, their written and oral culture, and their history. This research has shed light on the written sources of ancient Iran. From the interpretation of Achaemenid inscriptions to the exegesis of Pahlavi texts, it has given explanations of Zoroastrianism in Ancient Persia and in Central Asia.

The main interests of scholarly work were Avestan and Pahlavi translations and historical reconstructions of social-political relations in ancient Iran. The intensive reception of Western scholarly production by translating many European works into Russian and the strong tendency to notify foreign colleagues about Russian projects and results, particularly archaeology in Central Asia, are strategies that characterize pre-revolution and late Soviet Iranian studies. During the Soviet era, Iranology served to construct the idea that historical Central Asian regions were the bearers of Iranian culture, although this concept has been mostly idealized. Iranologists have peddled this idealized concept by exemplifying the cultural transfers between the ancient peoples of Central Asia on the basis of longstanding excavations in Sogdiana, Bactria, Margiana, and Ancient Persia.

In contrast to the other humanities, the state politics expressed in purposeful atheistic propaganda has not prevailed in Iranology. Curiously, the commonly acknowledged and shared Marxist-Leninist criticism on religion that it helped to preserve social inequalities in ancient societies helped Zoroastrianism to be positively evaluated as a folk ideology. Zarathushtra with his simple peasant name seemed to be a reformer and progressive thinker. Zoroastrianism became

the religion to investigate in ancient and contemporary life for the Iranian peoples in Soviet Central Asia.

During the Soviet era the problems of ancient Zoroastrianism were discussed most intensively. The exchange between Western and Eastern Iranian studies has been productive, although its intensity has varied. In the beginning of the 1980s, the tendency to take notice of contemporary Zoroastrianism in Iran increased, but Russian mainstream research did not go in that direction at all. The 1990s produced many popular science translations from Zoroastrian writings into Russian, which apart from close critical attention to the texts symbolized a standstill of polemics around Zoroastrianism in contrast to high-grade works from earlier decades. The separate publications of *Vēdidād* and Pahlavi texts were still the main issues of scholars who have been hindered from publishing translated religious texts in during the Soviet era. Nevertheless, Soviet works on Zoroastrianism received a trustworthy citation status within Russian academia, while plenty of Western scholarly works remained overlooked.

This isolationist situation around Zoroastrian studies in the 1990s and 2000s could be explained through many factors, but the most of obvious is economic collapse in the scientific sector in the late 1990s. Additionally, an objective crisis of scholarly research on Zoroastrianism occurred because of the saturation in the research of historical documents and hence, there were many attempts to present Zoroastrianism as a stable religion apart from factual gaps, for instance, evidence of Zarathushtra's historicity or clear distinctions in cult practice during different historical periods.

The second part of the chapter concentrated on three particular scholarly texts and tried to extract contemporary, post-Soviet controversies about modern Zoroastrianism and its Russian appearances. Its scholarly perception changed during the 2000s, which was not characteristic of research on Zoroastrianism in the pre-revolution and Soviet eras. The controversy itself—whether Zoroastrianism has a future in Russia and whether Russian Zoroastrians could be perceived as equal to other believers from large denominations or small traditional religious groups—raised new questions on religious research in study of religions and other disciplines. The public appearance of Russian Zoroastrians since the 1990s has changed the established tradition of research on Zoroastrianism within Iranian studies as well.

The relationship between the specialists of Iranian culture with the Russian converts to Zoroastrianism seems to vary from moderately negative to totally negative. This was clearly signalled by some pejorative rhetoric used in the first and second texts by Steblin-Kamenskiĭ and Kriukova and Shkoda, respectively. “Grand” metaphors about new and revived religious life in the post-Soviet era as an intensive “spiritual quest of people after the collapse of the communist

regime" and a "religious vacuum in Soviet time" should serve to reveal the "secular" character of modern Zoroastrians and their "non-religious goals." Steblin-Kamenskii used the strict ethnic definition of Zoroastrianism (thereby defining Russian Orthodox Christianity as an ethnic religion and simultaneously a norm among post-Soviet people), which excluded the possibility of studying the re-emergence of Zoroastrianism in Russian as one of his academic enterprises.

The second text, apart from the criticism on the original ideas of Russian Zoroastrians, moved partly in unison with the first. However, Kriukova and Shkoda viewed Zoroastrian trends in the entire post-Soviet era at two levels: the individual level (new pagan religion) and the communal level (politically-calculated ideology of the Central Asian states, in order to escape Muslim pressure). Kriukova and Shkoda regarded both tendencies expressed by Russian Zoroastrians to be "speculating around the Aryan myth" through the intensive use of scholarly literature for their own individual and collective goals in very selective way.

Still, a voice of positivity that takes the challenges faced by Russian Zoroastrians for granted comes from scholars of religion. Scholars of religion perceive Zoroastrianism as an evolving religion with its contradictory ancient and contemporary developments. Study of religions in Russia has a blurry critical approach to Russian Zoroastrianism and has not yet worked out how Zoroastrian groups should be studied. However, Russian study of religions has been impacted by Russian Iranologist traditions with an intent to reconstruct ancient religious history. Its current issue is to correct the homogenous picture of Zoroastrianism popularized by Iranian philologists through the criticism "of 'deadness' of Zoroastrianism, absence of philosophy in Zoroastrianism, linear conception of the historical evolution of this religion." The patterns of rethinking Zoroastrianism offered by Russian scholars of religion are diverse and set into distinct historical contexts. That allows them to study the religions of Ancient Persia and contemporary Zoroastrianism in Russia as equal among other religions and historically changing entities, without any doubt about their religious character. Russian Zoroastrianism has been understood as an autonym and as such it should also be studied academically. This dynamic stance towards the history of ancient and early medieval times gives rise to models of religious interrelations that have been salient in study of religions but neglected in Iranian studies during the 1990s and 2000s.

# Chapter 4: Zoroastrianism within the journalistic field

## 4.1. New mass media and Zoroastrianism

This chapter will address the question of how mass media, particularly journalistic work on RuNet, have contributed to the image of Zoroastrianism in contemporary Russia. As in the preceding chapters, the method used here is qualitative, although I will also apply some minor elements of quantitative analysis. I will analyze by whom and how Zoroastrianism has been dealt with in Russian mass media. I do not attempt to discuss how religion (Zoroastrianism) absorbs media for its own goals (that was a part of the discussion in Chapter 2, namely, in the analysis of print production of Zoroastrian discursive communities) or whether the media establish a kind of mass media religion that implies all sorts of existing religious meanings including Zoroastrianism (Schilson 1997; Gräb et al. 2006). I rather examine the fragments of public discussion on Zoroastrianism in mass media from a pragmatic, media studies point of view, by concentrating on the medium of the Internet,<sup>1</sup> and in particular, on the Russian-language Internet (RuNet).<sup>2</sup> This perspective, where mass media is understood as a sort of “conduit linking religion and popular culture” (McCloud 2006:335), aims at analyzing the descriptions of religious groups by mass media.

While the main question of this chapter presupposes a general description of Zoroastrianism in the context of journalistic reflections, the process of research itself requires formulating complementary research questions that serve to shed light on some quantitative and qualitative aspects of the problem, namely: Who do journalists consider Zoroastrians? Do they take this religion seriously? Which

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<sup>1</sup> A medium is here narrowly understood as a system of more or less institutionalized relations within the public communication rather than its general meaning in communication studies, where it refers to language, a script, or a system of signs. See also Hasebrink 2006:10.

<sup>2</sup> For the history and parameters of RuNet, see the study by Brunmeier 2005.

themes dominate the Zoroastrian discourse in journalism (if it is available at all), and which are excluded? Which actors are important in journalistic reports? Does Zoroastrianism form the central issue in the articles, or is it of marginal significance? How familiar is the topic of Zoroastrianism in an everyday journalistic context? Are there any local or global tendencies in the media reports? What are the religious collocations of Zoroastrianism? In the conclusion to this chapter I will present a preliminary discussion of mutual interfaces between journalism and other discursive fields discussed in my study.

The method applied here is a specific application of content analysis—a sort of systematic analysis of an extensive number of media products, used for many purposes (such as business and politics) and hence, having several possible research designs (Rössler 2005:295–298). The purpose is to “describe a characteristic or find a relationship in collected data” (Riffe & Lacy & Fico 2005:176). Früh (2007:27) provides another definition, “content analysis is an empirical method for a systematic, intersubjective and comprehensible description of content and formal features of messages. The aim [of that] is an interpretative inference of facts.” During the last three decades, quantitative content analysis has become one of central methods of communication and mass media studies (see Wirth & Lauf 2001). In contrast, qualitative content analysis has been less popular, but current research favors the golden mean, in which two perspectives profitably supplement each other. Rössler (2005:16) argues that the distinction between quantitative and qualitative styles of analysis in the humanities should be defined as a distinction between standardized and non-standardized methods. Standardized methods aim to reduce the complexity of many collected sources (Rössler 2005:17), extract some medial patterns, and identify the structure of medial discourses (framing) that (within reason) “could be inferred to broader contexts (where the communicator and recipient interact) such as historical, social, and political situations” (Rössler 2005:29). Media texts have been studied as essentially the recordings of various forms of communicative processes (Rössler 2005:236). Such an understanding does not conflict with discourse analysis, which defines texts in a dynamic fashion and thereafter draws inferences about changes and regularities in societies.

Since the 1970s, content analysis has been applied in study of religions to religious and public texts consisting of religious (or related) elements, including newspapers and journals from religious groups and public organizations. However, such studies have been rare because of a strong hermeneutical tradition of analysis in study of religions. This has changed since the late 1990s and early 2000s in the USA, particularly after the birth of such scholarly periodicals as *Religion in the News* (1998–) and the *Journal of Media and Religion* (2002–), which has set the agenda in study of religions as an



interdisciplinary enterprise and provided a forum for specialists from different fields in the humanities. However, this research has in fact become a prerogative of most mass communication scholars (e.g. Stout & Buddenbaum 2002).<sup>3</sup> Characteristically, in the 2000s, a series of studies were dedicated to the coverage of major religions and denominations in Western print media, particularly of Islam (e.g. Poole & Richardson 2006). These studies applied content analysis to print media (e.g. Hoffmann 2004, Larsson & Lindekilde 2009) and TV broadcasting (e.g. Gormly 2004).<sup>4</sup> Similar to most other religious minorities across the world (with the exception of the Protestants' mass media image in Greece, see Bantimaroudis 2007), Zoroastrians and Zoroastrianism as issues in mass media discourse have not been studied yet.<sup>5</sup>

Loyalty towards traditional religions and large denominations can be a cause for journalists' bias when they report about small religious groups. Thus, according to Eileen Barker:

They are unlikely to be interested in presenting an everyday story of how “ordinary” life in an NRM can be or even of the rewards that it offers contented members—unless it can expose these as fraudulent, fantastic, or sensational. They are nearly working to a tight deadline—very tight compared with months or years that scholars may spend on their research. They are also limited in the amount of time or space that they have to present their story. Only rarely will the electronic media concentrate on a single topic for more than thirty minutes and only rarely do the printed media allocate more than a few hundred words (Barker 1995:299).

For these reasons, journalists have been criticized by scholars. Journalists, it is claimed, often fail to understand and interpret reality because of their populist or elitist selectivity, superficial labelling, predominant financial interests, or ignorance of foreign countries (Sibii 2009:381ff). Poor, biased journalism can

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<sup>3</sup> Perhaps one of few exceptions is a project initiated by some scholars of religion in Tübingen, Germany: Islam in mass media (Medienprojekt 1994).

<sup>4</sup> Although the theme of Islam and media could be dated back to polemics on colonialism and the criticism of Edward Said (1935–2003) and his well-known book *Covering Islam* (1981), where he argued that the Western usage of Islam reveals journalistic deficits because that term “seems to mean one simple thing but in fact is part fiction, part ideological label, part minimal designation of a religion called Islam.” Elsewhere he also continues: “Today Islam is peculiarly traumatic news in the West. During the past few years, especially since events in Iran caught European and American attention so strongly, the media have therefore covered Islam: they have portrayed it, characterized it, analyzed it, given instant courses on it, and consequently they have made it known. But this coverage is misleadingly full, and a great deal in this energetic coverage is based on far from objective material. In many instances Islam has licensed not only patent inaccuracy, but also expressions of unrestrained ethnocentrism, cultural, and even racial hatred, deep yet paradoxically free-floating hostility” (Said 1981:x).

<sup>5</sup> The representation of diverse religions in Tsarist or Soviet Russian mass media at large is a less known terrain. An investigation in this field could lead to interesting discoveries, also in regard Russian Zoroastrianism.

endanger society because journalistic products may have a long life by reception, duplication, and agenda setting in public communication. Mass media may easily become disseminators of stereotypes, concepts of (religious) “enemies” ([Der] Islam in den Medien: Mediennprojekt 1994), and bias instead of following the journalistic goals of objectivity, accuracy, and fairness (Fedler & Bender & Davenport & Drager 2005:135,138ff,234ff). “Yellow journalism” is also a source of open speculations or fabrications of some religious themes, for example during the 1990s when complementary “ghost cults” were invented by some reporters (Borenstein 1999:452).

According to some American mass media scholars, “religion has been, and remains, a difficult and challenging subject matter for journalists and journalism” (Hoover 2009:1190), even though religion is one of the characteristic cultural parameters of societies, which is often discussed by journalists. Compared to other fields that receive much more media coverage such as politics or science, religion tends to fall into oblivion. The critics state “[f]irst, that there simply is not enough of it, and second, that when journalists have taken on the religion story, they have failed to do so with the same levels of expertise and seriousness they devote to other, more ‘important’ beats” (Hoover 2009:1991). In Russia during the 1990s, mass media were a central place where the public discourse on religion came into being after the fall of the Soviet Union and where many themes such as religious quests, religious belongingness, national identity, religious pluralism, and legislation have been discussed intensively (Agadjanian 2000:252ff; Agadjanian 2001:352ff). Further studies on religion(s) within the Russian mass media are needed, since the privatization of many mass media by different political powers in the 2000s has profoundly changed the media landscape. This may result in adopting the tendency to obscure religious issues from the agenda of journalistic work or, on the contrary, show some crucial changes or shifts in coverage on religious groups in Russia. Such studies would be highly beneficial to the social sciences, despite the statements of some Russian mass media experts who tend to highlight the homogenizing role of mass media for “human culture of the 21st century” rather than see something atypical appear in Russian mass media (Kratasjuk 2006:35).

For a content analysis of Zoroastrianism in mass media, I have used Russian newspapers and journals from RuNet, based on recent statistical survey rankings of the most distributed daily newspapers (Kharkina-Welke 2009:572).<sup>6</sup> A few

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<sup>6</sup> If content analysis of a religion in cyberspace seems to be very attractive for social scientists, the technical realization obviously remains an issue for future studies (Rössler & Wirth 2001:298). However, search engines with different systems of indexation, particularly popular ones like Google, allow the access of information of every kind based on a keyword search. In this way, one could roughly imagine from the point of view of explorative statistics how knowledge of a certain religion, in this case Zoroastrianism, could be dispersed through the

newspapers in the sample come from top websites in RuNet's rankings that have high visitor figures, like the tabloid newspaper *Komsomol'skaya Pravda* (*The Komsomol Truth*) and two newspapers that specialize in politics and society—*Trud* (*The Labour*) and *Kommersant* (*The Businessman*) (Kharkina-Welch 2009:578). Supposedly, the selected online newspapers will cover a considerable part of Russian mass media segment. Free electronic versions of newspaper articles can be accessed by RuNet users, but when they are compared with their offline, printed versions in the archives, they provide incomplete coverage for many reasons such as incompleteness of archives etc.

In a very time-consuming procedure I collected and examined about 300 texts from which I extracted 250. This sample includes results I obtained by a plain keyword search on the website of each publication. The Internet is becoming a very popular medium among Russian media consumers, and even though it is often characterized as an elitist medium (Kratasjuk 2006:50), electronic newspapers are quite influential and strong in reflecting and forming public opinion, which means they are able to influence collective behavior. According to statistics from 2006, about 34% of the entire (urban) population of Russia over 18 years of age has access to the Internet, while in 2009 the audience varied between 20.6% and 37.5% (Internet in Russia 2009:6). I have decided to concentrate on many newspapers, which means employing vertical rather than horizontal sample gathering, because of limited access to the archives of some newspapers. The collected texts thereby present a “snapshot with a limited meaningfulness” (Rössler & Wirth 2001:298) of the Russian press on RuNet using the search term “Zoroastrianism.” It is worth mentioning that the first stage of my investigation within Internet archives of Russian newspapers detected a strong interest in religions other than Zoroastrianism.<sup>7</sup> As mentioned above, most journalistic publications prefer writing about dominant or traditional religions in the region. This appears to apply to the entire Russian Federation. With very few exceptions, Zoroastrianism in Russian mass media is

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Internet. Thus, at the beginning of my study (March 2010), I used two search engines: Yandex and Google. The results of a plain search indicated by the intensive use of term “Zoroastrianism” within the Russian-speaking Internet space compared Google and Yandex search efficacy. The results have shown an apparent difference between these search engines: while Yandex had 251.000 hits (in Russian, on Russian servers), Google found seven times less, 37.400 hits (in Russian). In the case of Google I have searched just for the Russian sites with the extension “.ru.”

<sup>7</sup> Compared with the presence of other religions on RuNet, the Yandex search engine gives about five times fewer hits for the keyword “Zoroastrianism” than for “Buddhism” and sixty times fewer hits than “Orthodox Christianity” or “Islam.” I also compared the frequency of appearances of “Zoroastrianism” via Google on Russian, Swedish, German, British, and American Internet sites in their original languages. As a result, searching on Google only among Russian web pages clearly showed that the word “Zoroastrianism” in the Russian-language space on the Internet brought the largest number of hits.

not linked to Russian NRMs. For that reason I cannot present any evidence as to whether or not Zoroastrianism is a more significant theme compared with other NRMs in Russia, such as the *Anastasia* movement or different pagan groups.

The first part of the study deals with quantitative data, illustrated with figures. The results are based on techniques of simple content analysis such as means, proportions, and frequency counts, namely: (a) analysis of publications during the last two decades; (b) author; (c) genre. Afterwards the contents of the material are presented covering the following aspects: (1) contexts, (2) media events/media actors and (3) Zoroastrianism as a main topic or (4) its association with other religions. In addition, journalistic attitudes are evaluated (positive-neutral-negative) based on the expressed tones in the articles. The findings discussed in those parts are summarized in the conclusion.

As mentioned above, the first step of content analysis entails the selection of relevant journalistic sources. The media, news agencies, and newspaper websites that had the greatest distribution record were preferred sources. This study included news agencies and newspapers that in turn influenced regional media that reinterpret and sometimes directly quote materials from the former. Two findings have been made in a further reduction of the material. Firstly, Zoroastrianism is a part of many discussions in Russian-language mass media that originate in the territories of the former Soviet Union (including Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) and other post-Soviet countries. The analysis of these sources and their contents, mostly from Russian-language news portals and newspapers, could further be developed as a separate topic. Here, however, they have been only briefly touched upon. Secondly, an immense portion of RuNet's material about Zoroastrianism relates to esoteric topics or is represented within the confessional press of large religious denominations. So among the sources, there is an esoteric newspaper, *The Oracle* (Оракул), that has been published since the early 1990s in addition to confessional (Orthodox Christian, Islamic, Judaic) media or other texts of religious journalism (Buddenbaum 2006:200ff). Such material will not be discussed here. Instead, I will focus on journalistic production from the widely distributed daily press, thus attempting to eliminate all confessional and esoteric publications. I also have to note that different kinds of literary journals and thematic magazines (business, fan, scholarly, or women's) are further excluded from the scope of this study.

In addition to Russian seven national newspapers,<sup>8</sup> I examine several regional newspapers such as *Chelyabinskii Rabochii* (*The Chelyabinsk Worker*) (society,

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<sup>8</sup> Namely Rossiiskaya Gazeta (state newspaper), Komsomol'skaya Pravda (boulevard, society, politics), Moskovskii Komsomolets (boulevard, society, politics), Novaya Gazeta (The New Newspaper) (society, politics), Nezavisimaya Gazeta (The Independent Newspaper)

politics) and *Volzhskaya Kommuna (The Volga Commune)* (boulevard, society, politics). Russian national newspapers regularly report about the archaeological site Arkaim near Chelyabinsk, which is often associated with religious and scholarly discourses on Zoroastrianism. Regional newspapers from the Samara region have also published some materials on Zoroastrianism and its local history. Local media resources aligned with one of the two Russian ‘capitals’ (Moscow and St. Petersburg), have also been used in gathering information. Since this study is focused on Zoroastrianism, it was impossible to avoid using some electronic news sources that are dedicated to the topic of religion. Thus, I have drawn some articles from two Russian information portals on religion, namely *Religare* and *Mir Religii (The World of Religion)*. The data set consists of 32 newspapers and information portals (mostly national newspapers). In addition, I have analyzed the most influential newspaper on RuNet, *Gazeta*, and the online journal *Russkii Reportyor (The Russian Reporter)*.

For the collections of articles I used the keyword “Zoroastrianism” (зороастризм) and its grammatical derivative “Zoroastrian” (in Russian there are three grammatical genders зороастрийский [-ая, -ое]: masculine, feminine, and neuter), which usually does not make any difference for search engines like the Russian Yandex. I also occasionally used other semantic indicators which are idiosyncratic in the semantic cloud of Zoroastrianism, for example, such religious terms as *Avesta*, *Ahura Mazdā*, *navjote* or *sadrepushi*, etc. Using these related terms was also not necessary because in most cases these terms were commonly combined with the main keyword “Zoroastrianism.” I also did not include orthographic errors or unusual deviations from the term “Zoroastrianism” as keywords, even though they are quite common in electronic or print production. To summarize, the collected material for this study can be qualified as a random sample (Früh 2007:105) gathered by a keyword search on the newspapers’ websites. In the course of collecting the material, recurring articles in various newspapers were noted and eliminated. Advertisements within online publications were also excluded.

The data set, which consists of 249 articles from 32 electronic sources on RuNet that were collected during two months (February-March 2010) with a later update to the collection (October 2011), shows a balanced distribution of articles for news websites. The newspapers in the data set are apparently underrepresented, even though some newspaper articles were available for a fee in electronic archives. There is a constantly low number of articles on

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(particularly, its special supplement for religions NG-Religii (The Supplement “Religions” of the Independent Newspaper) (society, politics, religions), one of the most informative and competent sources on religions in Russia and elsewhere, Trud (society, politics), Gazeta (society, politics) and Kommersant (economics, politics, society).

Zoroastrianism over the period of a decade compared to the number of articles one can find about other religious themes. The largest number of articles containing the word “Zoroastrianism,” namely 26, can be found on the website of the information agency *RIA Novosti* (RIA News), followed by the *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* with 24 articles. These are followed by news agencies such as *News.ru* (20), *Interfax* (16), and *Regnum* (16). By comparison, there are just a few hits recorded for the regional press. On the one hand, I presume that these findings reflect the bias of freely-accessed search engines, which work with different indexing systems yielding different coverage and prioritization of material. On the other hand, they clearly show that “hard” articles such as News and short reports prevail.

The ebbs and flow of media interest in Zoroastrianism during the last two decades is not easy to detect, and the sample hardly gives an adequate idea of these changes. Here the examination of richer databases is necessary. However, there were some media events that brought Zoroastrianism to the forefront of attention in Russian mass media. To begin with, there was an interview with the Russian president Vladimir Putin for an Iranian TV agency in 2007 that for first time articulated the relevance of Zoroastrianism in Russian politics. Moreover, media attention was supplemented by reports of archaeological findings at excavations in Central Asia. In addition, there were some reports about Russian and foreign culture (e.g. Nouruz celebrations, exhibitions, and publications of new books) and politics (terrorist attacks against Yezidis in Iraq and minority issues in Iran and India), where Zoroastrianism appears both marginally and as the main subject of the report. According to this sample, media interest in Zoroastrianism was particularly strong during the years 2006 and 2007.

The authors of the articles are mostly journalists or editors (I also include short news articles without any author signature) (231). 11 articles were signed by scholars, two by writers and another two by politicians.

In respect of journalistic genres in which the articles were published (Reumann 1994:102ff), many articles (46%) that mention Zoroastrianism are informative, hard news, including coverage about important events. Interpretative articles (soft news) such as “feature or human-interest stories” (Fedler & Bender & Davenport & Drager 2005:131f), are represented as well (32%). Perhaps this priority of news genres reflects the Internet resource-based sample.

Zoroastrianism is a very rare subject in news publications. It remains of marginal thematic importance in reports and articles. Thus the extensive group of reports about Nouruz, a New Year’s feast celebrated on the first days of the spring equinox by many Iranians, depicts Zoroastrianism as an important cultural ancestor or basic element in the culture of many ethnic groups but does not offer any additional information. Zoroastrianism is therefore mentioned

nominally, often in non-religious contexts. In feature stories and interviews, Zoroastrianism is of little importance.

In general mass media's attention is rather scarce to both Russian Zoroastrianism and global Zoroastrianism, while Diaspora-Zoroastrianism seems to be almost unknown: journalists only mention Iran and India as countries where Zoroastrians live. 56% of the sample texts refer to countries outside of post-Soviet territories (16% to India, 30% to Iran, and 5% to Europe) and 19% to Russian territories (including such federal regions as the republics of Dagestan, Tatarstan, and Chuvashia). In 17% of the analyzed cases the geographical context is not mentioned at all, and about 12% refer to more than just one geographical region. Only 4% of the samples aimed to describe Russian Zoroastrians as part of an active contemporary community of believers by trying to portray their religious life, while the rest deal with Zoroastrianism as a contemporary Indian or Iranian religion or as a timeless abstraction and metaphor set in secular contexts.

## 4.2. A media kaleidoscope: thematic convergence

In order to analyze the media space assigned to Zoroastrianism, I assembled the contexts and the collocations of the word "Zoroastrianism" in the collected articles. By continuously updating the code book, I categorized the material according to topics or themes. In Früh's opinion, the number of content categories or themes differentiated by a researcher can be created at random. Thus, complexity of categorical structure is dependent upon the research goal, which also determines abstraction levels (Früh 2007:240). In this way, I tried to sharpen rough categories such as events, actors, and intersections between other religions.

It turns out that the term "Zoroastrianism" has been used in many non-religious contexts. The map of the thematic field in the code book provides an idea of the journalistic use of Zoroastrianism as a point of reference in reports on politics, economics, culture, science, and tourism.

The largest number of articles refers to Zoroastrianism in the context of Nouruz (53 entries). Articles on Nouruz are short and provide a few lines of news. Geographically they cover an extensive space of mostly neighboring countries, where the spring New Year seems to be either a folk celebration or a state holiday. Conventionally one could distinguish between foreign countries, countries in former-Soviet territories, and the territory of Russia itself. Nouruz is depicted both as an Islamic and pre-Islamic (Zoroastrian) feast. Sometimes journalists give a more general characterization of Nouruz as an Iranian and

Middle Asian feast. Some journalists recognize that Nouruz is a Russian calendar event because of active Nouruz festivals in a couple of Russian regions, namely in Dagestan and Chuvashia. In general the articles portray this as a calm and joyous affair, but sometimes disasters can occur as, for example, in 2010 when “three hundred Iranians became victims of the feast of ‘adoration of fire’” or *čahāršanbe suri* due to fires and accidents related to the negligent use of pyrotechnics or even anti-government criticism during public celebrations (L 2010, NRu 2010, RG 2010).

With the Nouruz celebrations the contentious idea of a “Zoroastrian calendar” enters the stage (T 2001, I 2002, NRu 2009, Reo 2009, VM 2009, NR2 2010). Forecasts from the “Zoroastrian calendar” occupied articles in the news during the past decade. They are usually placed within astrological forecasts. In fact, the “Zoroastrian calendar” has nothing to do with the religious Zoroastrian solar calendar, but instead draws inspiration from the Avestan astrological calendar practiced by Pavel Globa and his adherents (see Chapter 2). Other names used by the press for this calendar system include the “calendar of the Aryans” and the “Persian calendar.” According to Globa’s annual calendar publications, the years from 2000 (the first year of the 32-year cycle) until 2010 have 10 of 32 animal names or “totems” (and, correspondingly, “anti-totems”) that are coupled with diverse colors for each year. Each year of the Avestan astrological calendar begins with the spring equinox, that is, the first day of Nouruz. So far, there have been the years of the Owl (2000), the Falcon (2001), the Deer (2002), the Sheep (2003), the Mongoose (2004), the Wolf (2005), the Stork (2006), the Spider (2007), the Snake (2008), the Beaver (2009), the Turtle (2010), the Magpie (2011), and the Squirrel (2012). In my sample the characteristics of three years (2001, 2009, and 2010) are mentioned, but it is highly probable that an additional search may show an active reception of the topic in the regional press, which readily reproduced articles published on the national level. The recommendations for each year usually offer advice for personal and public life, and they often use esoteric terminology. One journalist explains that “according to traditions of Zoroastrianism,” in the year of Violet Sheep (2003), “the windows of the other world will open and the ancestors could be incarnated [sic].” In addition, a “karmic re-compensation” is said to occur in the year of the Sheep. Such reports have been published not only on the pages of the boulevard press, but also in national papers. The information portal *Mir Religii* uncritically identified the Avestan astrological system as “Zoroastrian.”

Another theme connected with Zoroastrianism in Russia is Arkaim (about 13 entries with a direct reference). From cultural, political, and scholarly points of view, Arkaim is a popular theme in mass media, but news reports that mention Arkaim rarely, mention Zoroastrianism as well. Arkaim is considered to be the



place where the prophet Zarathustra [sic] was born or preached. In connection to Arkaim, Zoroastrianism has not always been portrayed in a positive manner. In one article, the vivid esoteric scene surrounding Arkaim and its waves of enthusiasm towards Zoroastrianism is pejoratively portrayed as a disturbance for the archaeologists working there (ChR 2005).

### 4.3. Media events and media actors

Media events highlighting Zoroastrianism include exhibitions, archaeological discoveries, and celebrations. None of them refers to any religious historical controversies or events within contemporary Zoroastrian groups or communities, and they are mostly of a secular, political character.

Perhaps one of the most important political events using Zoroastrianism as a cultural exchange occurred in 2007 when Russian president Vladimir Putin visited Iran. In an interview with the *Islamic Republic News Agency* (IRNA), he made some statements that came as a surprise to Russians. Putin had visited Arkaim two years prior and received an update on the ancient settlements in the South Urals by a professor at Chelyabinsk State University, archaeologist Gennady Zdanovich, whom he promised financial support.

On his trip to Iran, Putin used this occasion to emphasize the symbolic closeness and fruitful political relations between Iran and Russia by referring to their cultural intersections:

Iran is a world power. Originally, its territory spread from the Near East to India. Also a part of the ex-Soviet Union belonged to the territory of ancient Iran. Iran is a land of a proto-religion, of Zoroastrianism. Thus, some specialists state that it was a source of inspiration for Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. However, there is also evidence that Zoroastrianism arose on Russian soil—in the South Urals. Then, in the course of the migration of peoples, the bearers of that religious culture turned up in Iran, among other places. That means and I want to say that the histories of our countries and interrelations between our cultures are of a deeper character, and that they have deeper roots than it sometimes seems to be the case according to the specialists [sic]. In this way, these relations instill confidence that we will always succeed to reach an agreement on all problems which could occur because we understand each other (Putin 2007).

While Putin erroneously calls Zoroastrianism “Zarathustrism” (“заратустризм”) has almost never been used before in modern Russian, referring instead to the spelling of the literary figure of Zarathustra invented by Nietzsche), the website of the Russian president entails an edited version of the interview with the usual,

proper designation of this religion. The interview, which above all dealt with many other economic and political topics, was broadcasted on Russian TV channels. It was also published on the official website of the Russian president and was discussed several times by the press including Putin's references to Zoroastrianism. Putin's words regarding Zoroastrianism were used as a sort of self-promotion on the websites of different groups of Russian Zoroastrians (*zoroastrian.ru* and *blagoverie.org*) where the audio and print copies of the interview were duplicated.

While Putin's interview highlighted Zoroastrianism as a political metaphor in the context of international and nationalist discourses, another media event occurred which disclosed social antagonisms inside Russia. In 2008, when the Moscow poet Vsevolod Emelin (b. 1959) published his 12 stanza poem entitled *The Moscow Zoroastrianism*, it caused a vehement quarrel particularly among Russian bloggers, and brought the word "Zoroastrianism" to the attention of the public and the Russian press. The poem was a reaction to the incidents of setting fire to private cars (most of them were imported from abroad) on the streets of Moscow and other major cities like Perm, St. Petersburg, and Vladivostok in June 2008. Emelin posted this poem to his *LiveJournal* blog, *emelind*, on June 4th. During the next couple of days, his blog post received dozens of comments. It received much criticism from conservatives, who interpreted it as an appeal to damage the property of innocent people, or, on the contrary, enthusiasm from liberal bloggers who understood these actions as a revolutionary protest against the "power of the rich" and the corruption of the contemporary apparatchiks. Here, Zoroastrianism came into the picture because of its association with fire worship (огнепоклонничество), and in this case the worship was indexically identified with burning, which in turn was interpreted as a form of purifying Russian society and restoring social justice. Emelin referred to the instigators of these acts of terror as "avengers," "Russian Zarathustras [sic]," and "Robin Hoods from Butovo," in his poem. The spelling of the name of the prophet, in line with the provocative character of the poem, clearly alludes to Friedrich Nietzsche's *Also Sprach Zarathustra* rather than to the prophetic figure of the Zoroastrian religion. In the last stanza Emelin thanks the instigators for their "vengeance" in the name of "starving" people. The radical tone of his poem led to critical reactions in central newspapers. On June 6th *Izvestia* published an article with the heading "Cars are burning across the whole land." In this article a journalist states that *The Moscow Zoroastrianism*, since it was incredibly popular within the Russian blogosphere, is a direct appeal to "actions of an extremist character" and should be punished in accordance with Russian criminal law.. An editorial on June 8th in the Pskov newspaper, *The New Chronicles*, called *Izvestia's* article "a publication outstanding in its absurdity;"

this editorial also included an interview with Emelin, in which he shows an apparent enthusiasm regarding the political reaction of his poem that, he held, confirmed the social mission of poetry (NChr 2008). However, this entire controversy did not result in any deeper reflection on the significance of Zoroastrianism; it seems like it was just an effective poetic metaphor with a nod to the Nietzschean superman. Some other political manifestations and cases of arson one year earlier were also publicly interpreted as a kind of ‘political’ Zoroastrianism (Vz 2007).

Beside these two examples, there is another group of prominent media figures connected with Zoroastrianism. In my sample they are Pavel Globa, Alexander Bard, and Parsi-born individuals such as businessman Ratan Tata, and the deceased frontman of the British rock band *Queen*, Freddie Mercury.

Astrologer Pavel Globa’s activity in mass media, particularly in the “yellow press” and on TV, could be seen as evidence of para-social interactions created between the public and media figures. Globa possesses the status of a “media guru,” who is not defined here as religious but rather a secular figure with mixed authority, being simultaneously one of the top figures in contemporary Russian pop culture. After analyzing collected materials, it becomes evident that his status as a leading media figure obscures his activities as one of the main public astrologers in Russia, who constantly receives a great deal of attention. Zoroastrianism and Globa’s leading spiritual position among the astrological Zoroastrian groups are mostly left unmentioned by the Russian press. A comparison of the entire number of his regularly published interviews, prognoses, and comments in articles where he talks about Zoroastrianism leads to the conclusion that his religion does not play a significant role for public interests, but rather that his attraction makes him one of the popular characters in the spirit of prominent astrologers in modern Western countries. Globa’s interviews in high-ranking boulevard newspapers, such as *Komsomol’skaya Pravda*, where Globa mentioned his affiliation with Zoroastrianism, do not create a comprehensive picture of Zoroastrianism. Globa’s autobiographical account suggests that his conversion to Zoroastrianism was natural, but in the eyes of observers, his conversion to Zoroastrianism abroad seems enigmatic. In an interview he argues:

For instance, I went to India and adopted Zoroastrianism. My papa was an artist. He had a place on a tour there. He became sick; I went instead of him. Later I was offered to attend an expedition to the Pamir. I went there also. [I] excavated there an ancient town. It turned out [it was] a Zoroastrian one! Now, in the Hermitage [museum], there are all sorts of stuff that we excavated (VM 2002).

Globa also gives some information on his genealogical relations to Zoroastrianism (“I believe in god [sic]. [My] religion is Zoroastrianism; however [my] ancestors were Orthodox as well as Catholic and Muslim”) (K 2009). Regardless of this obscure Zoroastrian image, Globa’s influence on the astrological perception of Zoroastrianism through the popularization of the “Zoroastrian calendar” in mass media is immense. Through the manipulation of many astrological systems and chronologies, he invented a 32-year-long animal calendar where, like in Chinese and other East Asian calendars, animal totems and anti-totems (see Chapter 2) provide behavioral guidelines for people inclined to mysticism. Media descriptions of the calendar vary, sometimes calling it Zoroastrian, and other times calling it Persian.

The function of Globa’s media presence is the apparent bridge between different discourses, for instance, between the patriotic and the astrological. He is a medium who channels the hopes and angers of the people, reproducing some ideo-political stereotypes such as Russia-centered and imperialist notions. Moreover, his political role during elections has often caught the eyes of reporters. Whether or not his public prognostications about the future of political, financial, and economic events is part of the media’s political bias remains speculative. Supposedly, the mass media, particularly the “yellow” press, need him in the role of an entertainer who is able to both intimidate and reassure the public.

Another example: Swedish pop musician and producer Alexander Bard (b. 1961) (Stausberg 2008c:294) is one of few prominent Western people whose Zoroastrian interests have been mentioned in the Russian press and who remains, together with his pop music projects *Army of Lovers*, *Vacuum*, and *BWO*, recognizable in Russia since the mid-1990s. The articles about Bard in the sample seek to point out that apart from his numerous activities he also possesses a Zoroastrian identity. In interviews he often has been asked about this topic. After being initiated into Zoroastrianism by Kamran Jamshidi in Gothenburg in 1997 (Stausberg 2002:329ff), Bard became a vivid personality among other European converts, especially through his blogging activities. In one of his interviews, Bard considers himself a member of the Swedish Zoroastrian community since 1983. Being known as an eager adherent of the ‘Gathic’ (which emphasizes ethics) version of Zoroastrianism, he views this faith as a kind of philosophical system. When asked the question “What connects you to Zoroastrianism?” he shows himself to be more interested in the history of Zoroastrian ideas and painted Zoroastrianism as an old tradition, much older than Greek philosophy, “which anyway was strongly influenced by Zarathushtra” (L 2006).

Scholars and archaeologists are also media actors who play the role of inventors and discoverers of Zoroastrianism in their works. Doubtless one of them is Viktor Sarianidi (see Chapter 3), who is also called a “second Schliemann” of our time and is one of the most successful Soviet-Russian archaeologists of Greek descent. He appears in the press as a strong advocate for the localization of the “proto-homeland of Zarathushtra” in Turkmenistan:

Here, on the border to the desert Karakum a unique, original, and prosperous civilization blossomed, which in its splendour and glory was no less developed, if compared with other ancient civilizations and culturally advanced centers of the ancient world—Mesopotamia, India, Egypt, and China. At excavations of the palace-temple complex Gonur-tepe (second millennium BCE), the richest material was brought out, which allows us to assume that the ancient homeland of the first world religion—Zoroastrianism—was the land Margush (Margiana), in the old delta of the Murgab River (I 2006).

The article dedicated to the archaeological conference in Turkmenistan did not discuss the speculative character of Sarianidi’s assumptions that were not shared by most scholars at that conference.

According to another article, it is quite sure that historians refer to Margush as the original place of Zoroastrianism by arguing that “references about that state [Margush] have been entailed in the sacred book of Zoroastrians “Avesta” and in the famous rock inscription, which dates back to the times of Persian King Darius I” (L 2003). This should give the Sarianidi hypothesis more weight, even though it has not been proved scientifically. Further findings in that territory have been interpreted in a similar fashion (L 2000), as complementary clues for the Turkmenistan hypothesis, which is presented as an unequivocal fact. In contrast, other translations and scholarly hypotheses have hardly drawn any attention from journalists.

In similar fashion, Gennady Zdanovich (see Chapter 3), an archaeologist working in Ural, attracts journalists’ writings on Arkaim (RR 2008). Ivan Steblin-Kamenskiĭ (see Chapter 3) is another scholar who is more well-known in the regional press. Also, *Peterburgskii Dnevnik* (The St. Petersburg Diary) published two articles on Zoroastrianism where Steblin-Kamenskiĭ was presented as the only authority being competent to the Zoroastrian religion in Russia (PD 2007, 2009).

#### 4.4. Zoroastrianism as a main reference

Texts on Zoroastrianism that present it as an independent religion and give some historical insights and peculiarities of its religious cult and ideas are highly rare. Apart from some media actors practicing Zoroastrianism, such as astrologer Pavel Globa, front man of *Queen* Freddie Mercury, producer and singer Alexander Bard, and internationally-known conductor Zubin Mehta, there are only a few mentions of ordinary Zoroastrians such as a Zoroastrian in Uzbekistan, or a spokesman of Zoroastrian groups in St. Petersburg and Moscow. Three reports from the sample mention Russian Zoroastrianism as an organized religion.

Perhaps one of the first feature articles on the Russian Zoroastrians from St. Petersburg and Moscow was published in 1997 and was written by the religious journalist and sociologist Aleksandr Shchipkov (b. 1957). Shchipkov is now the head editor of the website *Religare*, which republished the article online in 2006 (Rea 2006). The article deals mostly with representatives of the St. Petersburg Zoroastrian community. Shchipkov also writes about Mikhail Chistiakov, who explains the community life and doctrinal features of his organization in the 1990s. Shchipkov was well-informed by Russian Zoroastrians about their leader Pavel Globa and their ideological orientation toward Zervanism. In his article, Shchipkov began with the formal structure of the Zoroastrian group, stated its official name (St. Petersburg Zervan-Zoroastrian community), and then explained that the Moscow Zoroastrian community was an unstable group that had some ideological tensions with Zoroastrians from St. Petersburg. During the course of article, he mixes encyclopedic knowledge about Zoroastrianism and filters it through information given by the Russian Zoroastrians themselves, which makes the text sound like a scholarly report. The article covers information on the Avesta, Zarathushtra's date of birth, the initiation of the Zoroastrian movement through Globa, Zoroastrian ethics, eschatology, life after death with integrated notions of reincarnation and fatalism, the Zoroastrian pantheon, Zoroastrian anthropology, the formal structure of the St. Petersburg group, their religious practices, and so on. Shchipkov also presented the relationship between Mazdeism and Zervanism and proved their connections to Christianity that was tolerating by St. Petersburg Zoroastrians, but at the same time from the ideological and ritual point of view it has been understood as incompatible to the religion of St. Petersburg Zoroastrians. In the end, Shchipkov wrote that Arkaim is the evident point of departure in the historiography of Russian Zoroastrians who oriented themselves toward Aryan culture (later Slavic) rather than Iranian culture. The author did not express any criticism, but the tone of the article varied between neutral, ironic, and skeptical.

Shchipkov's tone is even noticeable in the title, "Pal Palych Globa's Zoroastrianism," where the author qualifies the type of Zoroastrianism that is being studied in a suggestive, potentially biased manner.

A short report from 2001 entitled "Ashem Vohu, [Ladies and] Gentlemen!" portrays St. Petersburg Zoroastrians at a Nouruz party "Yesterday at about 7 a.m. the people in the white coats, white caps, and white gauze masks gathered. However, that was not a consultation of doctors. Those were the 'Piter's' [the people from St. Petersburg—AT] Zoroastrians at celebration of New Year, the year of Falcon which began on the 21st of March with the first rays of the sun" (KP 2001). The journalist also surveys rituals, food, and quotes Chistiakov's comments about the ethical doctrines of Zoroastrianism.

While the first two reports are dedicated to Zoroastrians from St. Petersburg, an article from 2007 published in the English language newspaper *The Moscow Times* and reproduced in full size (but without the photograph) on the website of the *Russian Anjoman* under the rubric "the mass media," does not mention other astrological Zoroastrian groups in Russia, and describes the Moscow Zoroastrian community or the *Russian Anjoman* community as the only existing Zoroastrian group. According to the article, select members of the group (for example, Ivan Titkov and Farroukh) work hard in order to "change the image of their religion as a mysterious sect and become one of Russia's several recognized congregations" or "debunk the misconceptions associated with the religion and improve its reputation" (MT 2007). The latter goal is achieved through active participation in different fields of Russian contemporary culture. According to Titkov, a titular figure within the community:

[...] there was a Moscow nightclub called Avesta, which is the name of ancient Zoroastrian scriptures. "We find that offensive and will probably have to challenge them at some point."

He said offense is often caused because nobody thinks of Zoroastrianism as a real religion. At a science fiction convention a few years ago, a member of Moscow Anjoman met with the authors of "Bez Poschady" (No Mercy), a book about future cosmic wars between Russia and Zoroastrians that live on other planets. "The authors didn't want to offend anyone, and chose Zoroastrianism as a hostile religion by thinking there were no Zoroastrians left," Titkov said (MT 2007).

Zoroastrianism is here considered to be a religion by choice—which comes from the special rules of the Iranian "Anjoman Moghan" (properly: Anjoman-e Moghān-e Tehrān). The appearance of Russian Zoroastrians has been a result of their "own intellectual pursuits, which led them to the few doctrinal and historical texts that were available in the Russian language" and conversations in post-Soviet territories conducted by Kamran Jamshidi in the 2000s as well. The

article states that “[t]here are between 100 and 200 people who went through the Zoroastrian induction ceremony in Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States who are not of Persian descent.” Except for the details, such as the Zoroastrian religious clothes or making prayers with the help of Google reminders, the article also describes future plans for the Zoroastrians, including their wish to rule Zoroastrian burials with local towers of silence.

Journalists are often involved in discussions about Zarathushtra’s birthplace, and whether or not it was localized in Central Asia, the Urals, Arkaim, the Chusovaya River, or on the Valdai height (KP 2001). The Zoroastrianism also enjoys journalistic attention from informative articles (KP 2006). Particularly, Zoroastrian burials are one of the trademarks of Zoroastrianism in mass media (NRu 2000, NG 2000, G 2006).

The sample articles contain three different spellings of the prophet’s name, Zoroaster (Зороастр), Zarathustra, and Zarathushtra, which have been used synonymously. The primary goal of scholarly publications is to debunk misconceptions that associate Zarathushtra with an Aryan provenience. In “Zarathushtra Did Not Speak Thus” (PD 2007), Steblin-Kamenskii presented his opinion of the latest problems in the discussion of Zoroastrianism that touch the relationship between the historical Zarathushtra and the one of Nietzschean interpretation, the Aryan hypothesis, the exact contents and moral imperatives of the Avesta and finally, the problem of Russian Zoroastrians. These theses are quite similar to Steblin-Kamenskii’s preface to his Russian publication of the *Gāthās* from 2010. The article also includes a black-and-white picture of Kamran Loryan, an Iranian Zoroastrian mōbedyār together with his translator and the editor of the *Mitra*, Galina Sokolova, in the background in Steblin-Kamenskii’s office. The last subchapter of the article is devoted to Russian Zoroastrians insofar as he argues that someone cannot become a Zoroastrian by choice, because it is a religion of ethnic belongingness and inheritance. In this respect, Pavel Globa’s challenge to be the head of Zoroastrians in St. Petersburg and a Zoroastrian priest seems to be an illegitimate act. However, after that Steblin-Kamenskii follows up with a more lenient statement:

All right, if one considers that Zarathushtra’s sermon appealed to the whole of mankind, thus, perhaps, this ancient religion has its own right to renovation and change bewareng of its essence: obtaining of “good thoughts, good words and good deeds” (PD 2007).



## 4.5. Sharing mass media space with other religions

Zoroastrianism is often mentioned as a component or religious pre-element to the cultures and doctrines of other religions, such as Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. A narrower connection to religions like Yezidism, Manichaeism, Druism, Bahaism, and Bazhovstvo is transmitted through mentions of the idea that Zoroastrianism served as a basis for the above religions.

The term “Zoroastrianism” most often occurs in contexts explaining Yezidism as a religion (also a “sect”, RG 2009), having many ideological and ritual parallels with the latter (NG 2004, NG 2006, Vs 2006, BBCRu 2007, L 2007, P 2007, R 2007, Vz 2007, IF 2009, NG 2009, RG 2009). Mass media portray Yezidism as one of the most enigmatic religions, and contemporary Yezidism, with its homeland in parts of Iraq, Turkey, Armenia, and Georgia, is being faced with problems common to every modern religion (one of them is the ethnic identity of some Armenian and Georgian Yezidi groups whose provenience is not Kurdish). In my sample, mass media understand Yezidism as one of many Kurdish religions. Therefore, most articles that touched on Yezidism are about political confrontations between the Kurds and their antagonists.

Apart from a programmatic article written by a Russian scholar of Yezidism in 2004 for the *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* and a review on her book produced by a scholar of religion in 2006, the formulation of Yezidism in the news is oversimplified. It should be mentioned that the author herself tends to make many comparisons about Yezidism at ideological, ritualistic, and linguistic levels with Zoroastrianism, stating that Yezidism could be traced back to the time of “folk Zoroastrianism” based on a “complex of ancient Indo-Iranian conceptions which are close to Indo-Aryan.”

Thus, in a report about a conflict between Arabs and Kurds in 2007 at the religious Yezidi centre in Mosul, where 23 Yezidi were murdered, the news designated Yezidism as a syncretic “Pre-Islamic, keen to Zoroastrianism” religion, that consisted of “elements of Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Manichaeism” or a “mix of Zoroastrianism, Islam, and other faiths.” There are also statements that “Yezidism originated in the epoch of Zoroastrianism [sic].” Another report on the first after-war elections in Iraq reported on Yezidism as a “dualistic Zoroastrian sect, Satan worshippers.”

The collocation of Zoroastrianism and Manichaeism in journalistic articles signals their ideological closeness based on dualistic interpretations. According to another article, which used Zoroastrianism as a direct source for the dualistic worldview in Manichaeism, Manichaeism was explained as a syncretic religion that adopted “Judaic, Christian, and Babylon-Chaldean ideas” as well. While

writing about Catharianism, another journalist traced their ideas to Manichaean teachings that, according to the journalist, should be based on Zoroastrianism.

Mentions of Zoroastrianism can also be found in other contexts, for example in an article written by Semën Kozlov, a scholar of the Druze religion, stating that “[i]n religious system of Druzes the elements of Zoroastrianism, Christianity, Islam, and pre-Islamic faiths have oddly been combined.” A similar trend can be found in journalistic reports on local cults, for instance, *Bazhovstvo*, or in a story about a “sect Ashtar” in Archangel’sk. In an article on Bazhovcy, an “occult-pagan sect” in the Ural area, one finds a fragment of their hymn where Zarathustra appears as the “Great Zoroaster” (великий Зороастр) who in a “sacred ritual” over the “flame of the bonfire” transfers the people to a “cosmic fire” (NI 2004).

In a few reports, Armenian Christianity is presented as a political and cultural antagonist to Zoroastrianism. The blurred traces of that position are seen in the five reports about celebrating Christian saints who countervailed the Sasanids at the beginning of early Christian missions. Christianity is evaluated in the article as the origin of Armenian writing culture and hence of great importance. In this way, Armenian saints like Vardan Mamikonian (ca. 388–451 CE) have been understood as Armenian heroes who were able to stop the dissemination of “hostile” Zoroastrianism in the 5th century CE (RIA 2010). However, there are points that view Zoroastrianism positively from the Christian point of view. In a report on a Russian man from Uzbekistan considered to be a Zoroastrian, journalists summed up that the protagonist was “the last Zoroastrian in our region whose philosophy clearly and distinctly identifies an Orthodox man with his generous spirit and sincere love to his neighbor” (T 2002).

News reports also associate Zoroastrianism with Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. Tracing mainstream academic research, journalists also state that original religious postulates of Zoroastrianism such as the idea of paradise were incorporated into the doctrines of its religious successors.

## 4.6. Journalistic evaluation

Overall, journalistic coverage of Zoroastrianism has been unbiased, with some tendency to showcase the religion in a positive light. Perhaps such perception shows that journalists are ignorant towards modern Zoroastrianism and perceive it as a dead, ancient religion. In this respect, Zoroastrianism acquires an enigmatic halo within the conventional views that European culture has towards the religion of Zarathustra (see Chapter 5). On the other hand, journalists uncritically followed the lines of their interviewees by transferring

the enthusiasm of their faith. Zoroastrian figures such as Globa and Bard have been fully recognized by journalists. In political news, only evaluations of politicians were presented, without having any deeper reflections on the complexity of the scholarly discussion about Zoroastrianism. The idea of the polyphonic character of modern Zoroastrianism and information about controversies between Indian Zoroastrians and other diaspora groups are basically unknown to the press. The tensions between Russian Zoroastrians and Parsis such as in the case of ‘Chistiakov’s controversy’<sup>9</sup> in February 2010 remained unnoticed. The exception here are articles translated from English and constantly reproduced articles about new ways to bury human corpses by Parsis under new religious-cultural circumstances such as using solar batteries for traditional Zoroastrian *dakma*-burials.

90% of the sample material contains an unbiased evaluation of Zoroastrianism. This can be interpreted on one hand as an idiosyncratic feature of journalism to pay less attention to religious matters and on the other hand to have less interest in particular minorities that do not hold major political sway in Russia. While there are some negative tendencies that are creating an antagonistic view towards Zoroastrianism articulated in the confessional press, for instance in a few Muslim or Russian orthodox publications, this is uncommon for non-confessional journalism in Russia.

## 4.7. Summary

Mass media has often been accused of supporting the ruling religious actors, who in most Eastern and Western European countries are dominated by different Christian churches. They also could have provided incorrect information about the existing religious distribution in order to preserve the cultural cohesion of society (Bantimaroudis 2007:220). However, the presented study on Zoroastrianism in the Russian mass media gives distinct evidence that journalists are able to take neutral and/or positive positions in their evaluation of a religious minority. The notion, widely held by state leaders, that orthodoxy is common ground in Russian culture with strong separation from other religions has not always received support from the Russian mass media. For example, in one interview president Putin indicated that 90% of Russians were religious

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<sup>9</sup> That controversy was received by the Parsi press right after the speculative attempt to conduct the *navar* ceremony (the first grade or stage of the Zoroastrian priesthood) for a Russian *khorbad* from St. Petersburg, Mikhail Chistiakov by Dr Meher Master-Moos and two ervads in Mumbai February 19th 2010.

orthodox (Putin 2003). For journalists, Putin's remarks remained largely insignificant and went almost unnoticed.

Zoroastrianism is a marginal theme in Russian mass media. The content analysis made it explicit that major contexts, where Zoroastrianism has been mentioned, are associated with cultural and/or political events in the Central Asian states, former Soviet republics, Iran, and India. Because of the small number of its adherents and sophisticated access to information on Zoroastrianism it is depicted as an extinct *religion*, but a living *culture*. The lack of information on Zoroastrians across the world tends to present the religion as an abstraction. Being an elusive, ancient tradition, with the glorious past of the Persian ("Zoroastrian") Empire, and intelligible ethical teachings for modern people—it gains a mostly positive evaluation.

Generally, it is popular academic works that serve as a point of departure for journalists who write about Zoroastrianism. Zoroastrianism is mentioned among other world or monotheistic religions so that it can gain equal rights in relation to Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. This is being done without having to present Zoroastrianism in its theological complexity as well as its contradictory currents and changes.

There is not sufficient media coverage about major Zoroastrian centers in India and Iran as well as the large diaspora isles all around the world. Zoroastrianism has generally been understood as a non-local phenomenon for Russia. In a few reports in e-newspapers and on regional TV (e.g. the Perm), Zoroastrianism is described as a "homemade religion." Interestingly, the "yellow" press strives to popularize Zoroastrianism but erroneously uses Globa's "Zoroastrian calendar" by believing it would be an authentic religious calendar developed within the Zoroastrian tradition. My analysis suggests that this tendency does not seem to be the case in the national press, although it is a very successful topic in the regional press.

Media attention to the contents and ideas of Zoroastrianism is low, although the press reveals some mass media linguistic routines of Zoroastrianism that are also characteristic for the scholarly discourse and form static closed statements per se. The exotic, enigmatic aura of Zoroastrianism is further expressed in the description of the Zoroastrian pantheon with Amesha Spenta and the teaching of the "three main virtues." Other positive features of Zoroastrianism that should be noted include gender equality and (in contrast to Christianity and Islam) the absence of proselytism.

Whereas religious controversies and conflicts, particularly "counter-cultism and anti-cultism" (Beckford 2003:153), receive considerable media attention, qualitative analysis of media texts has shown lack of such treatment in the case of Zoroastrianism. Instead, one can observe an unbiased or even positive stance

towards it. Criticism is regarded as unnecessary because of Zoroastrianism's identification as an extinct or non-domestic religion. There is no association of Zoroastrianism with a "sect," which has a definitively negative connotation in media debates on many Russian NRMs. For journalists Zoroastrianism seems to be a "religion of value." In regards to the ritualistic contents, the Russian press perceived it as a foreign and probably badly reproduced religion, and only a few articles depicted Russian Zoroastrians. The mass media material reveals that Zoroastrianism is expected to be a transnational phenomenon. This allows the assumption that there are not any insurmountable obstacles preventing Zoroastrianism from becoming one of Russia's modern religions. Russian Zoroastrianism is not listed as a "sect" even though some scholars seem to consider it one (see Chapter 3). The other side of the coin is that this media perception reflects the attempts of Russian Zoroastrians to get public acknowledgment as a universal and sometimes "traditional" religion in Russia (see Chapter 2). As mentioned above, despite the fact that mass media is not usually interested in religious themes, with the exception of scandals and sensations, they nevertheless immensely influence public opinion because of their "standardizing effect" (Beckford 2003:212). This standardization of knowledge on Zoroastrianism as an abstract and philosophically understood teaching in contrast to the ignorance of this living, changing religion is evident.

Mass media are oriented on public figures and their ability to channel knowledge. As it was shown while discussing Pavel Globa's biography, there are different ways for a new Russian Zoroastrian to develop a career in Russia. The feelings of respect, indifference, or rejection that recipients of Globa's astrological prognoses emit all help to successfully transmit the contents of his message to wider audiences. If the Zoroastrian part of his media activity lies in the shadows, the standardized astrological contents with their simple and speculative economic and political expectations of the near future will prevail.

Zoroastrianism as a living tradition abroad is represented through the characterization of such media actors as prominent Parsis and a Swedish convert. Their religious belonging is accepted uncritically and, usually, mass media are not interested in questions of religious authorities within modern Zoroastrianism. Additionally, in order to show particularities of Zoroastrianism, journalists draw upon news from English sources. The latter cover only a tiny part of the public expression of Zoroastrianism in India and Iran. Thus, the burial system of the Parsis seems to be the most reproduced information on this living religion in the Russian press.

Reporting on Nouruz is one of the most evident strategies in the journalistic discourse on Zoroastrianism. The integration of Zoroastrianism into the tradition of Central Asian and other non-Slavic peoples, depicting its peaceful

celebrations, gives a standardization effect throughout the RuNet press. On the one hand, it shows independent, or rather imaginary neutrality in that region in regards to religious controversies such as “Islamic fundamentalism” or “pathologies of new cults.” On the other hand, Zoroastrianism is also reported as an ethnic religion and henceforth is widely accepted as such. There is also a third consequence: regularly transmitting information about several religious events, celebrations, and feasts, mass media assert the pluralistic character of Russian religious culture in the entire post-Soviet region. This point, however, is frequently used by Russian politicians in steering their imperial interests towards neighboring countries (the countries of the former Soviet Union).

# Chapter 5: Zoroastrianism in contemporary Russian fiction

## 5.1. Religion in Russian fiction in times of change

This chapter is dedicated to the study of Zoroastrianism in Russian fiction as predominantly a part of popular or mass culture. I will proceed in presenting various aspects of a cultural arena where religion and literature, particularly Zoroastrianism and contemporary Russian mass literature, are interrelated.

Conceptual problems such as the distinction between secular and sacred and between literary and religious contents within a fictional text have been discussed elsewhere and cannot be solved in a simple way (Schipper 2009:813). Fiction that deals with explicit religious themes and traditions is “capable of challenging both religious and secular complacency” (Tate 2006:129). Religious themes incorporated in fiction are further resources for a discursive view of a particular religious practice or belief. This chapter concentrates on the explicit use of religious names, terms, and contents around Zoroastrianism. For practical reasons, fictional literature deals with short references rather than engaging in extensive theological discussions or detailed descriptions of religious traditions. This is achieved through diverse strategies of combination that are typical for the literary process, i.e. “[t]he author of a literary text select from the external textual fields [...] by combining chosen components and revealing in the text itself its status as a ‘staging discourse’” (Schipper 2009:813). The effects of these creative strategies are representations, which do not necessarily correspond with the original, religiously interpreted impulses.

There are a spectrum of sound academic studies that analyze the interrelations between literature and religion in Russia. For instance, many Russian writers, in particular those of the romantic and realistic periods of the 19th century,<sup>1</sup> are studied with a focus on their personal religiosity or their

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<sup>1</sup> This means that the primary position of literary criticism is that Russian classics are closely related to Eastern orthodox Christianity. Among them, as expected, is Fyodor Dostoevsky as the culmination point of ‘religious’ writing.. However, the picture is not as simple as it seems

religious-philosophical concepts throughout the overall work.<sup>2</sup> There are also studies of mystic and esoteric elements in literary works of some key figures of the Silver Age—in the history of Russian literature, the period of the first two decades of the 20th century—and the Soviet era (Rosenthal 1997). Systematic studies of religious themes and discourses, prophets, or religious authorities are found less frequently (e.g. Kasack 2000). Apart from the myriad examples of literary analysis of Christian motifs in Russian literature, historical surveys on Islam in Russian poetry and prose are also available (Ermakov 2000, Alekseev 2007). Contemporary fiction is not discussed in these studies (with some exceptions). However, the appearance of new Russian literature with its popular character in the 1990s and new circumstances arising from the perestroika make such investigations highly compelling. This chapter outlines some new contexts of Russian literature that help contextualize recent changes within post-Soviet literary practices and their impact on Russian culture. The gradual appearance of diversity in Russian literature took shape towards the end of the Soviet era during the 1990s. This occurred as a “result of the social, political, and cultural liberalization,” when avant-garde literature, the “fiction of the Changes,” appeared (Chitnis 2005:3).

According to another literary critic, Sergeï Chuprinin (b. 1947), editor-in-chief of literary magazine *Znamya* (The Banner, 1931–), modern Russian literature is a conglomerate of a great number of literary modes. This redundancy is partially a consequence of the intensive commercialization of the publishing industry. Chuprinin also highlights the internal differentiation of book production:

[T]he traditional hierarchical structure of domestic literature has given way for different urban grounds’ building, where the writers are parting of the ways with each other, or, if you wish, their own niches by orienting (consciously or unconsciously) not on such conciliarist’s category as the Reader but on differing target audiences (Chuprinin 2007b:331).

In fact, the saturation of the literature market since the 1990s—because literary production is not conceivable anymore without any economic profit as it was often in the Soviet economy—makes it impossible to display common features and spectra of new literature. Moreover, the boundaries between mainstream and mass literature has blurred. A new phenomenon, a “literary fashion,”

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to be. See discussion about in Casedy 2005:23f. There is also a narrowly-focused study on Aleksandr Pushkin that also does not give a simple picture, see Raskol’nikov 2004.

<sup>2</sup> In particular, within the continuously treated section *Religion and Culture* in the Russian journal *Study of Religions* (Религиоведение) (2001–), there are articles about various literary works of Russian and world literature.



formed through considered public relations or even by chance, has added to the literature conjuncture (Chuprinin 2007b:322f). Also worth mentioning is the spatial aspect of contemporary Russian literature—the extreme geographic diffusion of producers. Both writers and readers of Russian literature live in various former Soviet countries. This is why the term “Russian literature” implies works by Russian authors irrespective of their nationality and place of residence. Globalization influences former national literature by offering a wider range of themes and topics, which are now comprehensible to non-Russian readers too. In addition, genres of Russian fiction are diversifying through “new hybridization.” Apart from fiction, where religious themes are usually enacted within secular contexts, modern Russian literature creates further syntheses and innovations such as non-secular Orthodox (Chuprinin 2007b:445f) or Islamic fictional literature, where fiction that is intended for a broad audience consciously adopts conservative religious opinions. However, books published in the religious genre are not subject to mass phenomena.

Beyond the receptive audiences that were categorized into two general groups—high and mass literature—Chuprinin extrapolates a third group that he calls *middle literature* (миддл-литература). He defines this as a “type of literature (словесность) inheriting a stratum between the high [or] elitist and the mass [or] entertainment literatures coming out from their dynamic interaction, and as a matter of fact overcoming perpetual opposition between them. To the middle class for the same reason may be ascribed either “enlightening” variations of high literature, [...] mastering of which does not require particular spiritual and intellectual efforts by the readers, or, mass literature’s forms, which differ in high performance quality and intend to be not only amusing for the public” (Chuprinin 2007b:312). The parameters of *middle literature* remain relative to each other, according to writer and publicist Aleksandr Kabakov (b. 1943):

The stratification is the following: elitist culture, simple culture, mass culture. A hundred years ago, there were Chekhov, Tolstoy and cheap print. That is all. Now the space between high art and cheap print moved objectively apart and is filled with an enormous amount of stages like an escalator—they are keeping a distance but all together moving upwards (qtd. in Chuprinin 2007b:313f).

Science fiction literature (научная фантастика), which experienced periods of flourishing in the 1970s and 1990s, is one of the most fruitful types of modern Russian mass literature. It is similar to its Western counterpart that often employs explicit religious dimensions. Russian science fiction in the 1990s had to deal with religious topics differently than how it was done in the Soviet era (Silant’ev 2009). Sergeĭ Chekmaev’s (b. 1973) writing illustrates how a writer’s

interest in religion can transform the science fiction genre. Chekmaev, according to some Russian critics, is known as the founder of *Orthodox urban fantasy* (православное городское фэнтези). In one interview, he stated that religion attracts great attention among Russian fantasy writers (Chekmaev 2005). Apart from religion's distant influence on Russian fantasy literature in the pre-Soviet era (Raevich 1979), this influence is undoubtedly rooted in the 1960s, "when the writers of the 'new wave' were thinking about the divine, the role of the church in the future world, the strength and the weakness of contemporary religious currents" (Chekmaev 2005). Modern fantasy continues this "quest for religion." Chekmaev defines the main issue of science fiction and fantasy literature as "alarmist" rather than "entertaining," i.e. that it places ethical problems on society's agenda. Hence, apocalyptic events in these genres reflect assumed deficiencies within modern societies by projecting them into horrific scenarios. In Chekmaev's view, a watershed for such religious themes in fantasy literature coincides with the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s, when "many writers became conscious about the perspectives for development of our country: what is that new Way?" Thus, there have been some literary attempts to imagine the future of Russia as Islamic dystopias (by Vladimir Mikhailov and Iurii Nikitin) or poly-denominational syntheses of Mongol-Chinese-Slavic identities (by Holm van Zaichik, a pseudonym of Igor Alimov and Vyacheslav Rybakov). Besides, Chekmaev mentions a large number of stylized fantasy works as quasi-patriotic and "orthodox in a sort of cheap popular print" (лубочно-православного толка). Orthodox faith in fiction is, as he puts it, "just a comfortable screen that allows justifying of further brutal (literary: "tooth crushing" зубодробительные) exploits of super-heroes" (Chekmaev 2005).

My study of contemporary Russian fiction focuses on the secular layer, and all sorts of religious literature were excluded (for instance, works by orthodox writers who are strictly writing within their religious paradigm, i.e. all sorts of confessional literature). The sample was limited in direct references to Zoroastrianism, but nevertheless, it was possible to build a corpus of some published and online literature with references that treated Zoroastrianism from many perspectives. The sample consists of text fragments from books and magazines. Some texts are from self-published (самиздат) literature online, for instance on the server of Moshkov's library with special copyright literary sections.<sup>3</sup> In this way, the corpus (see Appendix) is heterogeneous: it includes texts that develop the theme of Zoroastrianism, have it as a short sideshow, or use it as a cursory metaphor. The gathered material allows the identification of Zoroastrian narratives in different genres of Russian fiction with various aesthetic qualities.

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<sup>3</sup> See: <<http://zhurnal.lib.ru/>> (accessed 28 September 2010).

There are no academic studies that have analyzed how Zoroastrianism is used within fictional and non-fictional literature in the past and present. However, some reflections on the construction of ethnic identity and anxieties in Parsi fictional works written in English have been attempted (e.g. Kapadia & Khan 1997). A survey on the use of Zoroastrianism in English literature published between 1940 and 1990 was conducted by searching for the term “Zoroastrianism” in the *Religion and Literature Database*. The search yielded 42 references to Zoroastrianism and Zoroastrian characters, mainly in the genre of science fiction (Zoroastrians and Parsis in Science Fiction 2005).<sup>4</sup> The resulting synopsis showed that the prevailing pattern in that representative sample was a brief and cursory mentioning of (1) the Zoroastrian religion, (2) the prophet Zarathushtra and (3) some ritual and ethnic peculiarities of contemporary Zoroastrian communities in India and Iran. There are also (4) Zoroastrian names and terms. The latter are used rather loosely, for instance in H. Beam Piper’s Fuzzy book series in the 1960s (*The Complete Fuzzy*, 1998), which “take[s] place on a planet named ‘Zarathustra,’ but the novels have no Zoroastrian characters and no references to the Zoroastrian religion” (Zoroastrians and Parsis in Science Fiction 2005). In addition, John Brunner’s Zarathustra trilogy (*Polymath/Castaway’s World*, 1963; *Secret Agent of Terra/The Avengers of Carrig*, 1962; *The Repairmen of Cyclops*, 1965) refers to the planet Zarathustra for its plot. Often the references take inspiration from Friedrich Nietzsche’s *Also Sprach Zarathustra* (including its musical interpretation by Richard Strauss, which in turn is used in Stanley Kubrick’s film *2001: A Space Odyssey*, from 1968).

13 of the literary references to Zoroastrianism are somewhat more elaborate, including works from the following authors: Harry Harrison (*Bill, the Galactic Hero*, 1965), John DeChance (*The MagicNet*, 1993), Robert Heinlein (*The Moon is a Harsh Mistress*, 1966), Fritz Leiber (“Adept’s Gambit” in *Swords in the Mist* in *The Three of Swords*, 1947; *The Wanderer*, 1964; *Our Lady of Darkness*, 1977), Larry Niven/Steven Barnes (*Dream Park*, 1981), Carl Sagan (*Contact*, 1985), Kim Stanley Robinson (*Green Mars*, 1994), Neal Stephenson (*The Diamond Age*, 1995), and Philip K. Dick (*The Divine Invasion*, 1981 and *Valis*, 1981). The anonymous author of this survey states that “the only science fiction novels we are aware of with actual Zoroastrian characters are Harrison’s *Bill, the Galactic Hero* (in which the title character is considered to be a Zoroastrian), and Stephenson’s *The Diamond Age* (which sports a minor, unnamed Parsi banker)” (Zoroastrians and Parsis in Science Fiction 2005). One example where there are

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<sup>4</sup> According to the investigator, “[t]his list is not comprehensive, but it does list all Hugo—and Nebula-winning novels with Zoroastrian references” (Zoroastrians and Parsis in Science Fiction 2005).

many references to the original Zoroastrian dualistic model and its cosmogony is Philip K. Dick's novel *The Cosmic Puppets* (1957). *The Cosmic Puppets* uses the names Ohrmazd and Ahriman for the two main powers in the cosmic struggle that is occurring in a little town where the main character of the novel was born and where he returns after his long absence. Dick also draws on the Zoroastrian concepts of the eschatological struggle between two powers as well as good and evil animals, which ally themselves with their patrons.

However, the anonymous author of this database synopsis believes that the involvement of Zoroastrianism within English written fiction is very low when compared with other religions. He speculates that:

The obvious reason why Zoroastrianism is mentioned so infrequently is that there are now so few Zoroastrians in the world. There are no known Zoroastrian science fiction writers. Most English-language science fiction writers have probably not had the opportunity to meet any Zoroastrians (Zoroastrians and Parsis in Science Fiction 2005).

This also allows us to conclude that the impact of Zoroastrianism on science fiction is insignificant compared with Christianity and Islam, which have much more popularity and offer a large number of fantastic transformations in this fictional genre. Another reason could be that not every science fiction author writes in genres where religion plays an important role, and those who do tend to synthesize something original rather than recreate religions.

The present chapter is dedicated to references to Zoroastrianism in Russian popular culture. Occasional references to Zoroastrianism can be found in music, theater, cinema, and the visual arts.<sup>5</sup> A closer analysis of these genres should be

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<sup>5</sup> The analysis of further references from media, film, and different kinds of artistic work is itself a fertile theme of a separate study. Here I will briefly mention some of them. In particular, Eastern Siberia and the Urals are the two most active regions with their great interest in local archaeological sites and ancient history, which are financially better-supported by local governments (see Chapter 2). In 2004 in Perm, a fantasy TV movie *In the Quest of Zarathushtra* (Director: Varvara Kal'pidi) has been created, in 2005 it won a prize at the *The Golden Tambourine* (Золотой бубен) festival in Khanty-Mansiysk. The film got a great resonance among Russian Zoroastrians from the astrological milieu also because of the consultation by Perm Zoroastrian Oleg Lushnikov and an preface by Pavel Globa. In 2005, on the stage of the opera and ballet house in Ufa, the premiere of a "mystical" ballet *Arkaim* was presented. Two years later another dance performance with the same name was staged in Chelyabinsk. One can also regard the performances and texts of extreme artist and esoteric philosopher and poet Andrey Yeliseyev aka AZsacra Zarathustra (b. 1960) to belong to Zoroastrian discourses, which are amalgamated with re-interpretations of Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* and postmodernist philosophy. Both had certain examples of "Zoroastrian symbolism." Also in the visual arts in the 1990s–2000s, there were some examples of reflections on the figure of Zarathushtra such as e.g. the digital art project *Deisis* (Предстояние) in 2004–2009 ([www.deisis.ru](http://www.deisis.ru)). In this, Zarathushtra [sic] is, among others, a representative of "sacral history," the prophet of the "the closest to the Christianity" teaching

conducted. The present study focuses on print sources, particularly fictional literature written in Russian and published in Russia during the 1990s and 2000s. Additionally I must indicate that with exception of the aforementioned study on Zoroastrian references in English science fiction, there are no other special systematic academic studies (particularly in study of religions) on the reception of the Zoroastrian religion in contemporary fiction. Moreover, there have been no attempts to search for Zoroastrian elements in Russian literature in both the past and present. However, some preliminary spot checks among individual references on certain Zoroastrian religious tenets or Zoroastrian traces from diverse literary sources allow the projection of such a discursive study. Sources for interrelations between literature and Zoroastrianism are diverse because of the selective-combinatory nature of the fictional process and the issue of transforming external sources in other cultural products. An indicator for the presented selection are the simple terms *Zoroastrian* or *Zoroastrianism* mentioned by writers. Yet the most productive indicator that garnered the majority of references in my study was *Zarathushtra* (also *Zarathustra* and *Zoroaster*). I will concentrate on the literary character of Zarathu(s)htra in the first subchapter. Then I will group the references into three parts: past, present, and future.

## 5.2. Thus spoke the Russian Zarathustra

For many centuries, Zarathushtra has been one of the conspicuous images in European culture, a “figure of East-West cultural reflections par excellence” (Stausberg 2006:11; also more in detail Stausberg 1998). Zarathushtra, as a product of diverse interpretation styles in the frame of Russian culture, came to absorption perhaps through European readings of Eastern literature and oral tradition with its different literary, religious, and visual discourses on Zarathushtra since the Age of Enlightenment.<sup>6</sup> Among others, his authority as a

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that attracted three “Abrahamic” world religions (Judaism, Islam and Christendom). Moreover, the painter Lena Hades (Лена Хейдиз) (b. 1959) made 20 illustrations for the recent publication of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in 2004. Her Zarathustra’s cycle exhibited at the First Moscow Biennale of contemporary art in 2005 in a special project dedicated “against ideologisation of Nietzsche, particularly against political radicalism that he allegedly appealed for and against anti-Semitism, as if he suffered from” (Hades 2004).

<sup>6</sup> See Steblin-Kamenskii 2009:6. Thus, one of the first poetic reflections about Zarathushtra goes back to the 18th century with the poem *The image of Felitsa* (Изображение Фелицы, 1789) written by Russian poet Gavriil Derzhavin (1743–1816), where the sculpture portrait of Tsar Peter the Great stood in the chambers of the Catherina the Great (1729–1796) was called a “Zoroastrian idol” (Зороастров истукан). See Zapadov 1957:388.

legendary sage and powerful mage has been the greatest and the most persistent of pattern for many centuries (Stausberg 2006:20ff).

In the 20th century, German classicist and philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) wrote *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None*, which produced a contradictory image of Zarathushtra that had only an indirect relation to the Persian prophet. Since the first translation into Russian, a decade after the original publication (1898), Zarathustra became one of the central, most widely discussed works of Western philosophy among Russian intellectuals (see in general, Rosenthal 1986,1994). Nietzsche’s “influence touched a deep chord in the Russian psyche that continued to reverberate long after his initial reception” (Rosenthal 1994:17). The Russian reception of Zarathustra experienced different periods of (dis)interest in Nietzsche’s heritage and caused a de facto prohibition of his works in the Soviet era between the late 1920s and the 1970s. However, some scholars in that period see Nietzsche’s indirect influence as a philosophy of Nietzscheanism within Bolshevik and Stalinist ideologies (Agursky 1994:256ff). Also Nietzsche’s philosophy influenced writers such as Evgeny Zamiatin (1884–1937) and Boris Pasternak (1890–1960) (Clowes 1994:313ff). After the 1970s and with the publication of new translations of Zarathustra into Russian at the beginning of the 1990s, a new wave of lively intellectual debate arose (Sineokaia 2004) and we can observe an immense popularity of Nietzsche and his aphorismes in the Russian mass media use (see Bezrodnyĭ 2006).

On one hand, Nietzsche stepped into the reign of Persian religious semantics, but on the other hand, he continued the long European tradition of reinvention and reinterpretation with his two philosophical concepts—the eternal recurrence and the superhuman—by questioning the Christian grounds of European moral order. Thereby the figure of Zarathustra became a subject for further interpretations. In Russia (and perhaps in the rest of the world as well), Zarathustra can be considered as a sort of contemporary prerequisite for interest in the Zoroastrian religion and, as such, a part of the religious discourse on Zoroastrianism. As noted elsewhere, Russian reception of Nietzsche was a product of selective processes, which were transforming Russian cultural discourses within (religious) philosophy, literature, music, art, and cinema (Deppermann 1992, Rosenthal 1986, Moliteno 2001). Over time, Nietzsche’s ideas began to fade. The central ideas of Zarathustra were vulgarized (Clowes 1986:315ff). Within Russian nationalist polemics Zarathustra has been reinterpreted as a folk revolutionary and Nazi propagandist (Koschmal 2006:195) and then, in the 1970s, as an intellectual anti-Christian rebel. It is undeniable that Nietzsche handed down Zarathustra as a moral teacher with a new modernist imperative, and thus, he gave him prophetic charisma. Apart

from direct clues to ancient knowledge of Persian Zoroastrianism, for example, Herodotus' opinion on Persian virtues,<sup>7</sup> there are some other amazing intertextual allusions which are harmonic with Zoroastrian theological notions, such as the high responsibility of personality and the positive relationship of body and soul (anti-asceticism). Stylistically, using rhythm and aphoristic form, Nietzsche continued the tradition of sermons, although his inspiration was considerably drawn from the music of his time, especially from Richard Wagner's epic cycle the *Ring of the Nibelung* (*Der Ring des Nibelungen*, 1876) (Loeb 2010:148ff).

Zarathustra has become a crucial discursive field for European modernity where diverse religious discourses, inter alia, are crossing. Soon after the publication of the Russian translation of Nietzsche's Zarathustra, it became popular among Russian poets and writers of the Silver age (the last decade of the 19th and two first decades of the 20th century) who were inspired by Oriental religions and mystical poetry. Stimulated from the figure of Zarathustra they included this fictional character into their works—to mention only a few: Valerii Briusov, Konstantin Bal'mont, Ivan Bunin, Nikolaï Gumiliov, Velimir Khlebnikov, Vladimir Maiakovskii (Steblin-Kamenskii 2009:4). Apart from romantic ideas and philosophical views toward Zarathustra in mystical poetry and religious-philosophical prose where the Persian prophet is not easily distinguishable from the Nietzschean doppelgänger, there have also been examples in other fictional forms like satire (compare *The Twelve Chairs*, 1927 by the writing duet of Il'ia Il'f and Evgenii Petrov) (Steblin-Kamenskii 2009:4). The synthesis of many of Zarathustra's prototypes also occurred in the cycles of Russian occultists, where Helena Blavatsky's prophet from *The Secret Doctrine* (1888) has been "recognized" again by her theosophical and anthroposophically-minded students in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Carlson 1994:109ff). One of the prominent Russian theosophists and later adherent of the mystic George Gurdjieff, Piotr Uspensky (1878–1947), wrote in his original work *The Fourth Dimension* (1910) "The major content of the Theosophical system must be considered synthetic philosophy, revolutionary morality, and the doctrine of the superman" (qtd. in Carlson 1994:110). According to Maria Carlson, the doctrines of the superman and eternal recurrence of the Nietzschean Zarathustra were received and developed by Russian occultists "continued to live in Russian

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<sup>7</sup> See Steblin-Kamenskii 2009:7. For instance, in chapter 15 *The Thousand and One Goals* (*Von tausend und einem Ziele*) Nietzsche paraphrases Herodotus' report (1,131) that the sons of the Persians are to be educated "in three things alone—to ride, to draw the bow, and to speak the truth." These statements was echoed by Nietzsche as followed: "[t]o speak truth, and be skilful with bow and arrow"—(the entire passage: „Wahrheit reden und gut mit Bogen und Pfeil verkehren“—so dünkte es jenem Volke zugleich lieb und schwer, aus dem mein Name kommt—der Name, welcher mir zugleich lieb und schwer ist (Nietzsche 2008:61).

art of the avant-garde” and “seeped by osmosis into the emerging mythology of the new Soviet state” (Carlson 1994:122,123).

Furthermore, there is also another essential strand of contacts between Zoroastrian texts and Russian literature. The epoch of the Silver Age also produced a literary adaptation of Zoroastrian religious literature, in particular, a poetic translation of Zarathushtra’s Gathas. Apart from the scholarly translations, there also were poetic versifications of the Gathas’ fragments by Briusov and Balmont, which were afterwards accepted by Russian scholars. The primary translations of original Zoroastrian texts, the literary and philosophical reception of Nietzschean Zarathustra, and the poetic treatment of Gathic texts all occurred over the course of a few decades in Russian culture.

As mentioned above, in the Soviet era, Nietzschean Zarathustra discourse was still present in Russian literature. However, this was not the only means of transporting Zarathushtra’s name and character. The below quoted text is an example of Soviet neo-romanticism with its interest in national roots and “father’s faith” (Epshtein 2005:218f), which was another modus to transport religious contents into Soviet culture. Zarathustra appears as an unexcelled humanist in both the historical novel *The Fires on the Barrows* (Огни на курганах, 1932) and the short story *The Blue Jay of Zarathustra* [sic] (Голубая сойка Заратустры, 1945) by Vasilii Yan (pseudonym of historical belletrist Vasilii Yanchevetskiĭ (1874–1954)), where the plot is set during the siege of Baktra (Balkh) by Alexander the Great. Zarathushtra is a “great teacher of nations” whose aphoristic sentences and moral lessons should survive for centuries. In that parable, one can also see allusions to the discourse on national, Central Asian identity. Balkh (an area in modern day Afghanistan) symbolizes the entire region of Middle Asian Soviet republics that tried to withstand Alexander’s army. According to Soviet critic Nemirovskiĭ, the prophetic character in *The Blue Jay of Zarathustra* is “directed against Nietzsche’s pseudo-Zoroaster, with its grimy sermon of individualistic freedom” (Nemirovskiĭ 1989:551). Indeed, in his story Yan presents Zarathushtra as an archetypal wise man by neglecting the proper spelling of the name of the Persian prophet, which again refers to the Nietzschean figure.

Another example that supports the idea of the continuous process of Zarathushtra’s discourse in Russian fiction can be found in the works of exiled Russian poet and publicist Iurii Terapiano (1892–1980). His book entitled *Mazdeism: The Modern Followers of Zoroaster* (Маздеизм. Современные последователи Зороастра, 1968) describes Zoroaster as the bearer of a sophisticated “Zoroastrian esoteric” tradition. Terapiano construed a multifaceted picture of Zoroastrianism which is based upon the work *Practical Metaphysics of Zoroastrianism* written by the Parsi writer Minocheher Hormasji



Toot in 1937. The author writes that he documented the particularities of the doctrine and the cult, drawing on his memories from conversations with an old man at the Russian embassy in Teheran before World War I (1968:12,30ff). The Zoroastrian teachings depicted in this book obviously refer to theosophical concepts such as the five-race doctrine (1968:15). In addition, a special dietary practice described by the author, foreign to the practices of modern Zoroastrianism, instead resembles the dietary guidelines of Mazdaznan groups. Similar to Uspensky, Terapiano was inspired by many esoteric currents of his time (yoga, theosophy, Gurdjieff etc.) and was wanted create a new one in his prosaic novels and poetry (Nevzorova 2009).<sup>8</sup>

After this brief introductory survey of literary references to Zarathushtra, Zoroastrianism, and correspondent discourses that should perhaps be studied in detail in future research, I will start to discuss some of the selected findings.

### 5.3. Zarathushtra in the context of European discourses

A part of the sample which I will discuss below confirms that Zarathus(h)tra is a multi-contextual reference. Texts integrate images, which are a continuation of different European traditions including those that refer in some way to Nietzsche's protagonist. Some modern Russian writers feel attracted by philosophical parables that make it possible to disclose their own convictions or show the tensions of social change processes (a creative method applied even before Nietzsche) (Stausberg 2006:24), while others use the figure in a modern deconstructionist way, mostly as a parody. A small portion of the collected references signalize a distortion of images of both Zoroastrian and European Zarathus(h)tras that in the course of history have lost any possible connection to the historical personality or the Nietzschean hero.

The first category consists of three references in which Zarathus(h)tra is a subject of some European discourses. While the genres of these texts belong to mass literature per se (fantasy and crime fiction), all three insist on the esoteric or occult character of Zarathushtra.

In *The Obscurantist* (Мракобес 1997, 2005), written by Elena Khaetskaia (b. 1963), Zarathushtra (named in its Greek manner as Zoroaster) is mentioned in a

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<sup>8</sup> It is not clear and no research has been conducted in answering the question of whether Terapiano's book was available for Soviet intellectuals in the 1970s, although there are some references by Ivanov (Skuratov) 1981. A paperback brochure (no reprint) from 1992 that was published at a theosophical publishing house that was recommended for a course in the history of religions at the State University of St. Petersburg, certainly played a big role for the popularization of Zoroastrian ideas, in particular Russian Zoroastrians, as well as other people interested in oriental religions.

theological context, where he is presented as a powerful astrologer and mage, which was a popular interpretation that was circulating in Europe during the Middle Ages. According to one of the legends, he was born laughing. Khaetskaia's novel mentions the source of this legend, the French Dominican chronicler Vincent of Beauvais (1190–1264) (Stausberg 1998:458). Beauvais wrote in his work *Speculum Maius* (The Great Mirror [of history], ca. 1247) that Zarathushtra was the “son of Ham and a grandson of Noah” and received his knowledge from the devil (Khaetskaia 2005:40).

In Anton Farb's magic fantasy novel about the knights called Dragon-slayers, *The Day of Holy Never* (День Святого Никогда, 2005), Zoroaster is presented as a mage alongside other great prophets, such as “Moses, Jesus, Mohammed, Gautama, and other colleagues of Zoroaster [sic]” (Farb 2005:330). The novel entails also some theological passages that reveal that Zoroaster was a religious inventor from Persia who had created the Avesta and developed teachings about the relationship between two sacral powers imagined as two gods, “That were the ancient Persians who at first brought the diversity of pagan pantheons to two implacable deities” (Farb 2005:329). Zarathustra is depicted as a man who declared that the Devil's name was (called in the novel Khton) Angra Mainyu and then had to “invent” a “worthy opponent, and for his own purpose—a defender and a protector who has been successfully embodied in the colourful figure of Ahura Mazda” (Farb 2005:329). According to the novel's plot, all monotheistic religions are considered to be a “complot” of deceitful mages, where confession to a good god sustained their reign. Thus, an elder Dragon-slayer Sigizmund explains that Zoroaster's idea of the divine radically changed historical reality:

Ormuzd was not just “another” god. He was the first god-mentor! The Avesta, unlike all previous scriptures, included not only family and historical records of cases occurred in the heaven, but the first attempts to regulate the earth's affairs. It is in the Avesta were introduced so-called ‘commandments’, the instructions of God to man ... Never before the gods taught the people. Punished, encouraged, ignored—but not instructed! The actions of pagan gods were deprived of any edification... (Farb 2005:329f).

Therewith the text suggests that Zarathushtra's dualistic “invention” and the Avesta scripture served to systematize future monotheistic religions, especially when compared to the chaos of paganism.

The third example of the occult European reception of Zarathushtra is found in Boris Akunin's (b. 1956) *Leviathan* (Левиафан, 2001). Being one of the leading contemporary authors writing in the *historical crime fiction* genre that belongs par excellence to Russian *middle literature* (Chuprinin 2007a:133),

Akunin creates the atmosphere of an elitist society in the 1870s by using literary language and playing with rhetorical clichés from that time. In *Leviathan*, the instigator of a chain of unclear murders is Madame Renata Kléber, a cold-blooded adventurist that exploited the idea of being a medium who was “lead by Zarathustra’s [sic] voice” (Akunin 2011:115). This is an example of a time when the figure of Zarathustra, similar to other mystical authorities of ancient history, is introduced to esoteric, mesmerist, and spiritist cycles.

The second group in this sample gives an idea of how Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* has been received by Russians in the past. This construed past, however, consists of different ideas of Zoroastrianism. The first reference is a crime novel, written by an epigone of Akunin’s style of historical crime, Anton Chizh. *The God’s Poison* (Божественный яд, 2006) transfers the reader into the Russian fin de siècle, while the second reference, the novel *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Так говорил Заратустра, 1994), written by Iurii Kuvaldin, (b. 1946) is about the Soviet era.

Chizh’s crime novel, similar to the Akunin’s, is stylized as a story from pre-revolutionary Russia on the eve of the revolution of 1905. The atmosphere where Nietzsche’s *Zarathustra* was a passionate object of reading by the Russian elite in the beginning of the 20th century is transmitted through a quotation from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* as an epigraph at the beginning of the novel (Chizh 2009:5). However, inside Chizh’s book one can also detect esoteric references to Zoroastrianism that have been used as a literary expedient creating socio-cultural settings or the intellectual atmosphere of the novel. Chizh describes the Russian public of the fin de siècle’s passion for mystic and occult practices. The novel begins with a scene in a public lecture with a bit of irony “The poster of the famous capital lecture-hall invited to the lecture ‘The Avestan secrets.’ In the spacious hall [...] there are merely about 10 persons” (Chizh 2009:8). One of the protagonists and future victims of the novel, Prof. Serebriakov, lectures about a “Persian book Avesta” and a “divine drink khaoma.” Indeed, Serebriakov himself invented a green-colored drug (called “soma”). The Haoma drink (<Av. *haoma*, Ved. *sóma*) that is predominantly used within the traditional Zoroastrian ritual *yasna*, is described in the novel as a miraculous medicine that transforms an ordinary human being into a “superman,” because it “makes drunk, gives health, power, feeling of joy and opens deep knowledge. Thanks to khaoma’s power Zarathustra [sic] conquered death” (Chizh 2006:9). Indeed, this passage is a witness of the merging of two Zarathus(h)tras: one is concerned with the ideal of a “superman,” and the propagates khaoma for the acquisition of eternal life. Both of these interpretations of Zarathus(h)tra are not identical to the two originals a priori and are rather creations by the author.

If Chizh's use of Nietzsche is only cursory and touches merely the form and historical background of that fictional reality, the next reference opens an extensive discussion during the 1970s Soviet Union. Being fully rooted in the Russian reception of Nietzsche, Kuvaldin's philosophical-historical work *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* provides the fictional biography of a Soviet man named Nikolai Beliaev. The novel's timespan covers 20 years (from 1963 until 1983) in which Beliaev gradually develops his career as a Soviet apparatchik. The ironic depiction of "Zarathustra" in the novel belongs to Beliaev's father Aleksandr, an ethnic Russian who is a Spanish translator and former political convict who lives outside Soviet order as a desperate tramp and a drunkard. His adult son Nikolaï is ashamed of his father's lifestyle and behavior. Every attempt to set him on the right path seems to be unsuccessful. His moral suffering becomes a sort of verbal revolt against Soviet power during conversations with Nikolaï "The state is the stickiest and the most miserable of all the cold monsters! It tells lies coldly—I am the folk! The state lies about good in every language and all that it tells is lies and all that it has is stolen" (Kuvaldin 2006:11).

Nikolaï's father says that ruling powers use "own hypnosis: communism, equality..." and hence he is an "egoist," a "God for himself" that does not need any prophets. Apart from anarchy, he advocates anti-Semitism (although practically he can accept that his own son is a half-Jew) and conspiracy theories. He also revolts against Christianity and believes that it is full of mistakes and lies. On the contrary, Nietzsche with his philosophical individualism of Zarathustra made him a free agnostic, "Then Zarathustra solved me of my lackey-shame! [...] I overstepped my own genetic slavery!" Elderly Beliaev possesses no practical skills and commercial quickness like his son. Through speculation with public, socialistic property, which are not discounted as well as with the shade business with cars, posts at the university etc. the latter becomes an "underground millionaire." Nevertheless, Nikolaï is not a primitive profit-seeker running after wealth: at the same time he is a professor of civil engineering, a well-read man with a large family that makes his career as a communist. He is a new type of Soviet bureaucrat, a type who consciously moves to power in the shade of Russian criminal capitalism. The totalitarian state regime, ideological oppression, and numerous restrictions in everyday life do not cause any difficulties for him as he skillfully navigates his career. In contrast with Beliaev senior, he is also on the quest for God. Nikolaï concludes "it is necessary to believe," especially in Christ, the "god of Jews," and to belong to an institutionalized religion like the Orthodox Church because of its universal character. After a strained conversation with his father, he says:

I unconsciously feel that it is necessary to believe. That is a not bad tradition. One must not name God and say his name, but it is impossible if one want not recognise him [...] All the rest zarathustras are a plagiarism! [...] (Kuvaldin 2006:359).

However, Nikolai's belief is functional and adaptive to new conditions, unlike his father's individual position. Involved in the "conflict of generations," he estimates the views of his father as a relic of foolish liberalism and futile (in his eyes) opposition to the Soviet regime: "Where are your temples, oh Zarathustra?"—Nikolai bitterly asked his father (Kuvaldin 2006:359). In this novel, Kuvaldin developed two types of characters that help to describe the "clash of times and situations" before the Soviet Union collapsed. Obviously, the figure of Beliaev senior, also called Zarathustra, is linked to the history of Soviet dissidents, namely to the national-patriotic underground where Nietzscheanism, critique of the Soviet regime, and social anarchy played a great role. The story of Zarathustra is in this way a metaphor for the loss of revolutionary, idealistic, and non-conformist power under the pressure of a new epoch where mimicry, adaptation, and capitalist behavior are indispensable virtues. Nietzschean Zarathustra as an ideal type merely remains a literary construction. The intellectual religion of the impoverished "Russian Zarathustras" should make way for traditionalism, a union between the state and Orthodox Christianity, and hence, say goodbye to Nietzschean idealistic belief in a superman.

In the former example, the metaphor of Zarathustra reveals a life position, a concrete person with a certain reaction and a re-thinking of Nietzschean Zarathustra within the confines of totalitarianism. In Sergeĭ Alkhutov's (b. 1968)<sup>9</sup> *Zarathustra's Return: A Book for the Ones Who Will Die* (Возвращение Заратустры. Книга для тех, кто умрёт, 2008), Zarathustra is used as the same abstract Nietzschean moralist and hermit with the distinction that he is placed a century after the original Nietzschean character was invented. In a postmodernist way, Alkhutov discusses the effects of the Nietzschean *Zarathustra* on Russians and world cultures altogether. His Zarathushtra loses himself as a philosopher but becomes a precursor of fascism, which makes his philosophy superfluous. According to the author himself, *Zarathustra's Return* "...is not a novel. When the book was published it was called a 'scientific-popular philosophical publication'—perhaps, they have named it correctly" (Chekalov 2009). Alkhutov also explains his motive, "[o]ne moment I decided that Friedrich Nietzsche's 'Thus Spoke Zarathustra' has to be finished. Moreover, to be finished by me—I somehow became matured for that. Well then I sat down and finished" (Chekalov 2009). A

<sup>9</sup> Sergeĭ Alkhutov is an editor (and the former editor-in-chief) of the Internet journal „Contemporary literature on the Internet (Современная литература в Интернете)” (www.lito.ru) known since 2001. His text *Zarathushtra's Return* was included into the long-list of nominees for the Russian Prize *The National Bestseller* in 2008.

critic called Alkhutov's work a "poststructuralist tractate" that tells the story of Zarathustra in a world where there is no good and evil anymore (Zubarev 2008:7). The plot is the story of Zarathustra after he became 77 years old and returned to his old cave. He observes a picture that serves as an allusion to Europe after the rise of fascism: in front of his cave there is a cobbled area "wiped off through kersey boots" and the stone tablets with his records he left to the people earlier. The sentences written on these tablets are indistinct and were written in blood. Zarathustra was able to discern the following four phrases: "God is dead"—runs the first // 'Superman'—runs the second // 'Smash old annals!'—runs the third // 'Thus spoke Zarathustra'—runs the fourth" (Alkhutov 2008:8). Each of these words is plain absurdity in the eyes of the old and experienced Zarathustra. The self-irony and bitter wisdom are just ways to rethink what had happened at his home in Europe.

Then Zarathustra burst out laughing and by laughing, he spoke in that way: "God is dead"? But whether the sentence "God is dead" itself did not become a God? // "Superman"? I met him, but he associated with little tortoises and bats. Now they are solving the world as if it needs to be solved // "Smash old annals?" For that you must be not an elder but a mouse. But who of my pupils did acknowledge in himself a mouse? // "Thus spoke Zarathustra?" However, Zarathustra does not tell this phrase (Alkhutov 2008:8).

The elder left the cave and went away until he came to a modern city of "Wet water" [an allusion to Moscow?]. Soon he is in the middle of urban human rubbish and there he finds a pen and begins to write new laws. Nevertheless, he writes not for himself; he is accompanied by a man who shelters him from the people who dispute his new philosophy that champions relativism, pacifism, and anti-racism. Zarathustra's metaphors and pictures reveal fragments of contemporary Russian reality, but their wisdom is universal. In the conclusion, Zarathustra emerges from a subway with his host and then escapes in the middle of a crowd. Dismayed, Zarathustra's fellow begins to search for him, but then gives up and finally summarizes:

'Zarathustra was deep—and then, he did return in the depths of the human. Zarathustra was lofty—and then, he did return to the tops of everyday man. Now, as he has returned, I would tell you my own little knowledge // There are summits and there are depths. However, life did not appear on the summits and all the living did not appear in the depths. Indeed, the origin of life became shallow water, and life itself is a puddle and muddy foam. However, the most beautiful of gods have arisen from foam. He stood and then he sat down to the bench. The tunnel was taking up a train for another and it was similar to a fathomless cave, and the platform was paved with...but it was not a cobbled stone (Alkhutov 2008:63).

This philosophical postmodernist parable ends with a sort of prayer that closes its cyclic construction in a pacifist, anti-fascist manner (“May touch no soldier’s boot this soil!” (Alkhutov 2008:63)).

Another connection between Nietzsche and the present moral and political conditions in modern Russia is established by Anton Antonov (b. 1970). In Antonov’s satirical novels *The Ashes of our Fires* (Пепел наших костров, 2001) and *Zarathushtra’s Sword* (Меч Заратустры, 2002), he paints a fantastical scenario in the genre of humorous science fiction, where Moscow is suddenly transported to another planet. The inhabitants are forced to explore the territory and search for survivors, which leads to unavoidable power conflicts between different groups that utilize religious rhetoric. One of these groups of *mazdai*<sup>10</sup> is organized by “heretic № 21, who was to be searched, arrested and convicted in a matter of priority” (Antonov 2001:242) with an amazing sword that reads “good” or “evil” on either side of the blade (Antonov 2002:99). The *mazdai* leader calls himself “Zarathushtra.” People do not know exactly who he is, because he hides his true personality. As a result, numerous preachers with swords in hand usurp that name by proclaiming “Thus spoke Zarathustra,” which leads to each of them being considered the real Zarathushtra. Occasionally, pretenders arrive in order to assume power over everyone. The situation of common “disaster, famine, fear, rebellions, and riots, broken tread of time and broken life” in alien Moscow generates an unbridled hysteria, where everyone wants to be seen as a prophet. Zarathushtra is depicted as a warlike and charismatic leader who also consolidated the sects called *mazdai*, *demoniads*, *adamits*, *Satanists*, *mitraists*, *albigoids*, *cabbalists*, *pagans*, and even Christians. The Christians “have carefully and thoroughly refuted all of these heresies in their sermons and with that contributed to their proliferation.” Zarathustra is considered to be a mixture of Zorro and a samurai. The interpretation of Zarathushtra’s teaching is not mentioned, and for the author of this trashy satire, is totally unimportant. For the Moscovites it does not matter “who and how refers to Zarathustra’s words and reinterprets them in own way. It was important that everyone literally did that.” Zarathustra himself symbolizes total ambivalence and ethical relativism, because “he is one with two faces and he serves as good as evil simultaneously understanding good and evil in his own way” (Antonov 2002:99). These characteristics are the result of a fictional play where the mission of Nietzsche’s Zarathustra is to break up the dualism between good and evil and make himself a superhuman; in the process of Zarathustra’s

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<sup>10</sup> One of the members of the Russian Anjoman remembers the early 2000s as a time of religious self-definition among the ultra-radical nationalist groups (see Chapter 2), and mentioned their mood as a high degree of ‘youthful’ nihilism “[everything] must die”. Perhaps, the name of *mazdai* portrayed in Antonov’s novel has some allusion to this story.

struggle for power, he falls victim to extreme relativism. Apart from this, both books shed some light on religion in Moscow during the 1990s, when the (traditional) Nietzschean reception and a quest for religion as a basic element of national ideology could be distinguished.

The satirical figure of an ancient philosopher quite akin to the Nietzsche's Zarathustra can be found also in the debris of RuNet literature, where parodies on Nietzsche and his invention of Zarathustra prevail. For instance, in Ruslan Belov's (b. 1951) *Thus Zarathustra Talked Himself into Trouble* (Так договорился Заратустра, 2009), Belov paints Zarathustra as an elder sitting in a cave and selling advice laced with pessimism to ordinary, hard-working for small change. "Make your soul pure," "Don't be in hurry!" etc.—the people despair and do not understand the depths of his wisdom at all. Finally, when Zarathustra reasons about death and non-existence, a warrior ("a goner") goes berserk and cuts Zarathustra's throat with a spear. Belov accentuates the total misunderstanding between the philosopher selling abstract advice and the ordinary people who do not want eternal truth but need tangible help. Perhaps this situation of bargaining reflects capitalist consumerism, where everything is for sale—even philosophy.

Another deconstructive stance towards Nietzsche's Zarathustra that portrays the prophet's ideas as a commodity is reproduced in the third part of the trilogy by Baian Shirianov (aka Kirill Vorob'ev) (b. 1964): *High Pilotage* (Высший пилотаж, 2002) (see also Chuprinin 2007a:411f). In his trilogy, Shirianov describes an alternative reality where the city of Moscow is under the siege of drugs in the late 1980s. Shirianov enumerates literary titles of world literature (from the stereotypical library of a Russian intellectual), which he molds into a slang language used to take drugs; in the list of numerous titles, Shirianov mentions *Thus Spoke Zarathushtra*. He links this title to eight variations of a drug consumer's levels of addiction. The first stage of drug use is called "Thus boiled Zarathustra." Eventually, drug users reach a period of abstinence called "Thus made himself clean Zarathustra," but then these users revert back to "Thus has been turned on Zarathustra" (Shirianov 2002:47).

There are also references in the sample that include characters named *Zarathustra* or *Zarathushtra* yet do not evoke either the Zoroastrian prophet or Nietzsche's character. Both of these references are allusions to Nietzsche, however. Andrei Livadny's *Bridge over Abyss* (Мост через бездну, 2008) and *Face of Reality* (Грань реальности, 2008) continue the tradition of American science fiction writers (see 5.1) and tell about a destroyed planet *Zoroastra* which has been a "center of the criminal activity of genetic engineering" where scientists have created biological robots with a "dubious ethical sense." The second example uses the name Zarathustra in feminine form, which is a peculiar



metaphor for the feminist writer and psychoanalyst Lou Andreas-Salomé (1861–1937), who was familiar with Nietzsche. In Andreas-Salomé’s biographical essay *Thus Spoke [she] Zarathustra* (Так говорила Заратустра, 1999), Larisa Garmash highlights the importance of the intellectual exchange between Salomé and Nietzsche for the creation of his works.

To summarize, the figure of Zarathus(h)tra that appears in modern Russian literature in most of my findings has a direct connection to the philosophical work *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* that (albeit quite belatedly) was translated into Russian at the end of the 19th century. During the following century, it has been discussed intensively in philosophical, religious, and literary circles. Since the 1970s, *Zarathushtra* gained attention among Soviet intellectuals after a long period of prohibition from the late 1920s to the 1960s (because the book was deemed to promote Nazi ideology). However, the Nietzscheanism of the 1970s was connected with some nationalist movements, a trend that lasted until the 2000s. Russian literary references to Nietzsche’s *Zarathustra* in the 2000s have been transformed using a convenient philosophical-literary approach. The conventional literary form of secular parables or even philosophical sermons, and Nietzschean musical styles served as an example to follow for a large number of his epigones. Although detailed philosophical implications are certainly in use, *Zarathushtra* mostly remains symbolic of the depreciation of values and anarchy.

#### 5.4. Zoroastrianism in past, present, and future modes

As was discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, most participants in the Zoroastrian discourse seem to believe that Zoroastrianism is an extinct religion. The references in the sample seem to reinforce this belief: only a few of the texts present or have some allusions to Zoroastrianism as a contemporary religion and a phenomenon of our time. Otherwise, most references are literary transformations that operate inside a fictional reality. The following subchapter will focus on the use of the term “Zoroastrianism” starting from various time periods in the literary treatment of it. This distinction is a conditional one because literary texts usually consist of many aspects, which one can interpret depending upon primary questions about the text. In the conclusion to this chapter, I will try to show the interplay between texts within each mode.

### 5.4.1. The past: ancient Persia and magic

In the most voluminous group of texts in the sample, Zoroastrianism is viewed as a historical or even legendary religion of the past. Often this past is linked to the former Persian Empire until the time of the Islamic conquest. This view of Zoroastrianism occurred to Aleksandr Ilichevskii (b. 1970), a contemporary representative of a sort of “literature not for everyone” and second place winner of the Russian national literary nomination *The Big Book* (Большая книга, 2005—). In his works *Petroleum* and *The Persian* (Нефть, 2004; Перс, 2010), the author returns to Azerbaijan, the country of his childhood and a country of petroleum that he perceived in a metaphorical sense. Petroleum is the “wine of life creation,” a “philosopher’s stone” that offers to explain secrets of life. Petroleum is just a liquid: “for itself it is rubbish, however, through sublimation (alchemy!) it becomes golden” (Ilichevskii 2005:259). Ilichevskii thinks that this substance, Azerbaijani petroleum, could explain why Zoroastrians that lived earlier in Azerbaijan were fire-worshippers. Azerbaijan, the “land of fires” (“eternal fires”) is unique and genuine for the fire-worshippers, because “there are no more places on Earth, where petroleum altars exist since many centuries already” (Ilichevskii 2005:259). He continues that in order to spread his religion throughout other countries, Zarathustra was forced to replace petroleum by “pure fire” from wood.

The theme of magic Zoroastrianism that originated in the ancient world and its importation from Indo-Aryan or Persian civilizations to the Slav areas is popular in the genre of Slavic fantasy. Thus, Timofey Alekseev’s *The Sunset Children* (Дети заката, 2009) placed the origin of the Zoroastrian religion and Zarathushtra [sic] in the legendary past of the Slavic people. This neo-pagan style fantasy is about a Slavic clan (Alekseev calls them sun-worshippers and “grandchildren of Dazhd bog”) that is in hiding from the pursuit of a group possessing occult powers that is willing to subordinate the Slavic folk through violent Christianization. In this work, Christianity is transformed into a religion of slavery and evil by a group called the “Brotherhood of Shadows.” The Slavic clan of Nevzor escapes into a parallel (or timeless (безвременье)) reality in order to materialize in the present in a little Siberian village. The journey through time is possible because of a secret drink consisting of living and dead waters that was invented by ancient Zoroastrians and introduced to the Slavs by Slavic mages (волхвы). Zarathushtra’s [sic] Avesta is a secret book that describes how evil could destroy the human race through selfishness (самость), “Faint of consciousness begins when a man tempted by the spectre of selfishness wants to distinguish his own “I” in opposition to everything. His consciousness would be split up: the “I” and “not I”, “I”—“You,” “WE”—“they” are rubble of the destroyed wholeness. A person will be torn to pieces by the centrifugal force of selfishness”

(Alekseev 2010:245). A man who lives in the present nicknamed “Wood-goblin” (леший), Dmitrii Kovaliov, helps the Nevzor people and transports them to modern Russia, avoiding the nets of the Brotherhood that has many agents in Western countries. He states that the struggle between good and evil is eternal because if these contradictions cease, the world would be destroyed.

Another author working in the genre of Slavic fantasy uses a pseudonym that conveys Zoroastrian semantics, Arina Vesta (usually marked on the book covers with its short form: Avesta). Her novel *The Star of the Mages* (Звезда волхвов, 2007) links Russian words (such as “virgin” (дева) <Indo-European category of divinities \*deiǵó-) (Vesta 2007:61) to Indo-Aryan times and explains how the Persian symbol of the eight-pointed star relates to the Christian symbol for God’s mother Mary. According to the plot, the eight-pointed star is also a symbol of Russia and the future (Vesta 2007:106).

Andreï Sanregrè constructs Zoroastrianism as one of the basic mystic tenets of humanity in his esoteric novel *Arbat: Contiguity* (Арбат. Соприкосновение, 2007). Sanregrè depicts the sub-culture of Russian painters who lived and worked in the 1980s and 1990s in the famous promenade Arbat in historical downtown Moscow. The novel is partly autobiographical and refers to many religious traditions such as Sufism, Christianity, and diverse mystical concepts. The main character, Andreï, is a painter nicknamed “The Blue Swords” for his impressive thirst for mystic themes. Andreï regularly experiences special states of mind where mysticism intertwines with reality. After the sudden death of a fellow sculptor, he starts to read his friend’s diary and begins to think about own destiny in Gnostic terms as one of the “luminous,” creative people who are able to “detect the vibrations of the Supreme Reason in the Universe.” Such people can work in diverse fields, not exclusively in art, as Andreï assumed. They are innovators who, in contrast to the “extinguished.” ordinary people, have to express their views using the “Word.” This Word is a “universal form of personified thought, [that means] an essence of Reason.” The period of the late Soviet Union is understood in the novel in the frame of Zoroastrian eschatological chronology, as the era of Mixture when good and evil are fighting. That situation is projected onto the life of artists who are in permanent material and spiritual conflict in the cosmological sense: the struggle between light and darkness is about creative, “luminous” souls. In addition to that, Western countries are assumed to have an organized system of control over the social environment by dark forces. The evil entities, “being unable to influence the choice of the individual, they create an environment around him pushing a young talent in a certain direction.” In chapter 36 Andreï gives a voluminous dialogue that reveals the general ideas of Zarathustra’s [sic] teachings. One of

the characters in the novel, the mother of the deceased friend, explains *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in the context of the “proper,” authentic teaching of Zarathustra [sic]:

In this book, Nietzsche caught a thing that God created human beings making them like him—free and full of creativity; that man is able to rule over luminaries. However, in those years, the teaching of Zarathustra has not been translated completely. Certainly, Nietzsche has used the translations of ancient manuscripts, discovered by the British archaeologists in the early 20th century. Therefore, the voluntary origin in his work has prevailed. Some people took this as a call for permissiveness. Many have fixed on the Aryan race, which has been a transmitter of Zarathustra’s ideas. In particular, in the Hitler’s mind—who was inclined to the absolute, the part of the teaching, which he understood and turned a blind eye to what was inaccessible to him—cause and effect were substituted. He attributed to Aryans everything that Zoroaster preached (Sanregrè 2007:250).

However, the essence of Zoroastrian teachings lies in other things; it has a complex structure and a universal character:

Zarathustra brought to the people a whole complex of doctrines. That are a belief in one God (Ahura Mazda), a catechism of worship (how to communicate with God), white magic (as opposed to the “devas”—the demons) and real knowledge. Also that were the celestial map and astrology, which enables in making horoscopes and looking deep into past and future, as well as Bundahishn (Primal creation) [...] (Sanregrè 2007:249).

Zoroastrianism does not differ from the teachings of Jesus Christ; they could harmonically complete each other (Sanregrè 2007:250). Sanregrè explains a gnostic model of reincarnation, a spiritual path of human souls that was articulated by Zarathustra or in a Greek translation by Zoroaster. According to this explanation, the soul is made of a special substance called *farr* (<Av. *x’arənah*, Np. *farr*, Zoroastrian type of charisma) that has male and female qualities. During the course of one’s life, the soul produces *farr*, and excess amounts of *farr* are gathered by *fravashi* (“angels of the first level”) and then passed from the archangels up to the Creator. Sanregrè explains that the creator sends energy called *khvarena* (which is different to Sanregrè’s use of *farr*) back to the people, and its quantity is measured on the last day of one’s life. The forces of evil cannot give *khvarena*; they lure people with substitutes like money, fame, or power, yet this does not mean that the luminous sell their souls to evil but rather that the soul may begin to idle. Since he was a painter, Sanregrè visualized the Zoroastrian mythological idea of souls being treated after death in one of his illustrations. Generally, the teaching of Zarathustra is a secret oral knowledge

replenished with rites and sacred songs in the Avestan language. In general, the picture of Zoroastrianism and the prophet Zarathustra reveals Sanregrè's knowledge of Pahlavi Zoroastrian literature translated into Russian and of *Avestan astrology* as it is explained by Pavel Globa.

Johns Cole (the pseudonym of Dmitrii Kolosov) in the second part of his book from the series *The Atlantes, The Warrior* (АТЛАНТЫ. ВОИН, 1995) shows how many discourses can intersect within one literary text: elements of Nietzsche's Zarathustra are combined with Zoroastrian Pahlavi theology and some trickster narratives in his work. Cole deploys the panorama of the Ancient world with heroes, cultures, and religions on the eve of the Greco-Persian wars (first half of the 5th century BCE), mixing these events with fantastic parallel realities. The book continues the history of the Atlantes, a highly developed alien race from the planet Atlantis. Due to the destruction of their civilization by the hostile Al'zils, the Atlantes were forced to leave their planet in order to find another. In the four-volume sequel, *The Warrior*, the Atlantes continue a bloody confrontation between themselves. The human race, with its diversity of cultures and heroes, is just a tool in the hands of the Atlantes who created them. Rusii, one of the mighty Atlantes, seeks to conquer the Earth. With the help of "adept" Zarathustra [sic], he strives to possess an "Aura of the East," and then gain power over the Cosmos. Rusii is a "clot of cosmic energy," and he creates a "mono-idol" out of himself that becomes one of the "gods" whom the human race believes in. The idea of a god is not an end in itself; it is considered to be a sort of unifying force in the struggle for greater power.

Like his father, Rusii has created mechanical bio-robots that look like demons which serve as his helpers, such as the dragon Azhi Dakhaka (<Av. *āži dahāka* "a dragon-like monster"). They are "ephemeral artifacts," robots that are very mobile, but simultaneously have an "unstable inner contour—energy multiplied by deceit." After the demon begin to riot, Rusii seeks to restore his own reign and subordinate the renegades. Rusii hatches a plan to kill all of the demons he created in by transforming himself into a god. However, this god simultaneously plays two contradictory roles with two different masks of the "two brothers of Time" by shifting from Ahuramazda to Ariman and back again:

The similarity between the gods was not only in growth. Those face-masks also resemble one another—paralyzed, lifeless, and indifferent-impenetrable. While Ariman's mask was black, the mask of Ahuramazda had a pinkish hue. The cut of clothes was the same. Similar rain coats, boots, trousers. The God of light has the white. Ahuramazda's head was crowned with a massive pectoral in the form of the solar discus; the sleek white arms were studded with rings (Cole 1995:62).

For each god Rusii sets certain rules: during the day, Ahuramazda appears, and at night, Ariman broods over the world. In the novel we learn about another character, namely Rusii's friend and adviser Gumii, who in the human world is known as the great mage Zarathustra. In the novel there are many descriptions of this figure, which I would call a "prophet-trickster," so at the beginning of the story Gumii-Zarathustra appears as a stranger:

The wanderer was an unremarkable man. If intruding in the crowds anyone hardly would pay attention to a simple, wrinkled with years and wind face. An ordinary mage like hundreds in Parsian cities. A filthy white robe, a cane stick, a rare old man's beard on the cheeks and the chin. Just the eyes. The eyes were extraordinary. The huge, penetrating, with the unnaturally blue, almost white pupils. They exuded intelligence, authoritativeness, force. Those eyes could conquer, to impose its will; [they] could make your heart keep a joyful trembling. If required, those eyes could kill (Cole 1995:17).

Zarathustra is depicted as a superman, with extraordinary abilities similar to those found in Hollywood films: he is able to change bodies, fly in the sky, and use hypnosis. Similar to Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* he has two animal friends: an eagle and a lion (by contrast, Nietzsche's character has an eagle and a snake). Although some Atlantes think that he is "a chained dog" (Cole 1995:42) of Ahuramazda-Ariman, the others suspect that Zarathustra wishes to reign over the world. His trickster nature precludes any boring moralizing. In the scene designed to resemble the Zoroastrian court of Mitra and Rashnu, where the soul of a Scythian Scill arrives, Zarathustra recites long Nietzschean passages while "dead drunk" (Cole 1995:65), which is altogether funny and absurd.

Formally Zarathustra is a subordinate of Ahuramazda, although he knows that the black and the white mages, who have their own protectors—demons—are acting according to the will of Rusii who has the right to manipulate both. In the final battle against another Atlant named Hermit, Zarathustra helps to accumulate Devas (<Av. *daēuua-*, Mp. *dēw*, "evil divinities, demons") and Yazata (<Av. *yazata* "good divine beings that are worth for the worship") in order to protect Ariman-Ahuramazda. Disappointed in Rusii after the deaths of his animal friends, Zarathustra betrays Rusii. He understands that the Atlantes and the demons are not his element; his true mission is to guide the people towards becoming Supermen. Ariman loses the battle and lands on the planet Katrak. Zarathustra is captured by the hostile mage Kemruz, an ally of Hermit. Although Kemruz leaves Zarathustra, another feminine Atlant, Leda, abducts him. Leda forces Zarathustra to regenerate into an "Other," simply a sole traveller walking to the sea.

Even after its nebulous disappearance, Gumii-Zarathustra is seen in other historical epochs like in Persepolis, where the Earthling Alexander the Great and Leda visit him. Gumii, the former Zarathustra, now calls himself “Zarathustra’s disciple” and explains to Alexander the true purpose of Zoroastrian doctrine: after the victory of good over evil a new age will be born, “good makes the man wise, evil makes him strong. In our century there is evil and that is a century of power, but when this power produces a man of great spirit, like Zarathustra, then it will turn into wisdom and the age of good will come” (Cole 1995:459). This once again echoes Nietzschean ideas such as the eternal recurrence and the concept of superman. In general, if the atmosphere of the Nietzschean *Zarathustra* prevails in the novel, one can also observe many elements and characters that belong to the reign of Zoroastrian mythology. Nietzsche’s work and fragments of Zoroastrian doctrine have melted into a literary symbiosis. Mythology also alters the plot of the Greek-Persian wars, thus making the story more receptive.

Zoroastrianism as a real religion of the Persian kings, invented and written down in the Avesta by the mage Zarathustra [sic], is the point of departure for an adventure novel by Sergeï Morkhov, *The Scroll of Zarathustra* (Свиток Заратустры, 2009). However, Avestan texts are contextualized within the plot as a collection of hidden knowledge that is to be deciphered at the end of the 20th century CE by the main characters of the book who are searching for a magic formula that can grant eternal life.

Zoroastrian characters living in ancient times are used within three other fictional works written in the fantasy genre. The first one is *The Almshouse* (Богательня, 2001) by Henry Lion Oldie (the pseudonym of Dmitry Gromov (b. 1963) and Oleg Ladyzhenskii (b. 1963)). This historical fantasy tells the story of Burzoï, a Zoroastrian physician nicknamed “Snake King,” who after the order of his patron, the Sasanian king Anushirvan (Kosrow I Anōširavān (531–579 CE)), was sent to India to get a secret book, the Indian Pentateuch (<Sanskrit *Pañcatantra*, “five topics,” also known in Iran as a collection of fables *Kalila wa Demna*). Although the book is actually an existing collection of Indian animal fables and the story of the translation of *Panchatantra* into Middle Persian in the 6th century CE, and after that into Arabian and other Western languages (Khaleghi-Motlagh 1989; Riedel 2010), the novel interprets this story in a mystic way. Thus, *Panchatantra* is supposed to be the fragment of a proto-language that unites ancient peoples. By bribing an Indian monk, Burzoï gets a copy of the text, translates it into Pahlavi and hands it down to Anushirvan. Suddenly, every succeeding translator of *Panchatantra* creates new contents; the book gets additional chapters, changes its title and begins to circulate through Eurasia under many other titles. After translating the work, he tries to put its knowledge

into practice and starts reading it to his three daughters at a fortress on the Persian Gulf. Burzoï thinks this aids the Gnostic separation of *psyche* and *physis*, and because of this he would be able to create a spiritual “fundament” for a new social order from his daughters. However, two daughters die. Through sacrifice of the third he creates an artificial deity—called Ahura-Spenta (a fictional compound from <Av. *ahura*, a “deity” and *av. spənta* “holy”), a “force” that is able to complete his plan. He then commits suicide by imbibing poison. Then, the deity melts into a strong, living Rite that forms the mystical footprint of the Tower of Babel—a social utopia and “ideal society” is built. The fortress turns into a special place, a “Thread of Time,” “the abode stitches through different eras, keeping a constant place in space.” Repeating for eight centuries, the Rite is a crucial ceremony in an alternative world during the European Middle Ages, in a state called Henning. There the native-born aristocrats possess superhuman abilities and rule over other countries, which are ordinary and have to protect themselves with arms. Henning’s aristocrats, however, cannot achieve their abilities without a relevant procedure of initiation—the “old Rite” created by the grounder, the “first architect” of the Guild, Burzoï, and handed down by many generations through the Guild of the Murderers. The Guild of the Murderers are professionals that have access to the abode and are sure that they are keeping guard of an ideal society, “...a world of prosperity and happiness”, where “everyone knows his place, where the guards are fearless and powerful, but they cannot raise a hand against their fellow citizens [...] And a huge mass of populace worked honestly, in sweat, being glad with their fate without complaint and rebellion. Because it can benefit from working, living in prosperity...” (Oldie 2008:527). But when a certain monk speaks with the ghost of Burzoï, it becomes clear that Burzoï made a mistake that gives him no peace. A double Rite of a girl and a boy who love each other breaks the tradition and redeems Burzoï and his daughter. Henning turns into a society of lords carrying arms and poor peasants in which the Guild is abolished because it is no longer needed.

Andreï Basirin’s *The Shadow of Alamut* (Тень Аламуга, 2006) in the genre of “fighting magic,” also designated as “Arabian fantasy,” includes another fictional Zoroastrian mage or “gebr” (Np. *gabr*, a xenonym of a Zoroastrian), Roshan Farrokh, who lives in the 12th century in Syria. With self-irony, he is practically a superhero who helps to defend his hometown of Manbidzh from devious nobles. Roshan fights alongside the knights-templar against assassins. He is a sort of superhero, a “giant in a striped robe and a Bukharian skullcap” with a long staff; a seasoned traveller and virtuous warrior (Basirin 2006:64). Intellectually, he is a polymath: physician, philosopher, skilled chess player. He loves risk and danger and invests a lot of savvy into the art of transformation. Thus, “Roshan practiced thirty varieties of lameness. He knew also how to



slouch and to hunch in fourteen ways. Two of them have caused in others an overpowering terror. This frightening stoop was the secret masters of the fight; on it, they know each other” (Basirin 2006:163). Even the folk know him as a “defender of the Towns” because he has not once offered his services to the rulers and inhabitants of the states. Being a Zoroastrian, Roshan is far from the figure of a pious Zoroastrian pundit—he is a Zoroastrian outsider. Someone in the novel asks him:

Listen, Roshan. I heard that the fire-worshippers have a sort of powerful clerics—the mages. Are you not one of them? //—No. The gebr felt bored.—Of the mages I was kicked out. Because of drunkenness and debauchery (Basirin 2006:168).

Roshan is a convinced Zoroastrian whose world is imbued with the confrontation of two powers: *asha* as good and *srudzh* as evil, which he feels almost physically with his own skin and closed eyes. But *asha* is also a “mystic power, law and understanding” (Basirin 2006:88). These powers are given by both Ormazd and Ahriman. Roshan shares the knowledge of the point where good parts evil, that is almost invisible in the religion of assassins: “If there is not the image of God then the line between good and evil becomes very shaky. It is necessary to be a very pure person to see it” (Basirin 2006:411). Enemies call him a pagan and a fire-worshipper. He believes that “[a]ll in the world is interwoven into *mizhdem* (a reward after death), or, as the Indians say, in a pattern of karma. After a cause comes a consequence. Some of our actions entail others. The main thing is not losing touch with *asha-law*” (Basirin 2006:265). However, the message of Zoroastrianism in the eyes of Roshan is not the only truth. In a dispute, he states, “[a]ll religions hold the line between chaos and order. There is this line or elsewhere—it does not matter how sincerely a man goes to the light—sooner or later he will come. And does not matter, from where he started the path” (Basirin 2006:267).

Vasilii Kuptsov in *The Last Wood-Goblin* (Последний Леший, 2000) developed a Zoroastrian character that is quite different from those discussed above. His satirical fantasy tells about two epic heroes, Sukhmat and Rakhta, who promised to bring a real goblin to the Kievan Prince Vladimir. Together with their shaman fellow Noydak they have to fight many insidious monsters and other creatures. Above all, they meet a Zoroastrian priest named Feramurz (or in short form Feram). Feramurz is a sly fox who tries to cooperate with Slavonic priests of Perun. Ferarmurz claims to honor a fake divine being that he calls Simurgl (Np. Simorǵ; Mp. Sēnmurw, a mythical bird). One of the Perun’s priests is very suspicious:

He came together with the cult of Simurgh, now declaring that he honours the Avesta, with that also being a fire-worshiper? He turns something ... Though, we must say, fire it doesn't matter which—whether sacred, sacrificial or magic—obeys this Feram more than anything. And even without the magic potions! He just says the necessary word in a whisper—and the fire will flare up, and if he says another—the fire will fade [...] OK, perhaps he would fit on anything; such lords of fire would always fetch a good price! (Kuptsov 2000:76f).

Feramurz came to the Kiev Rus after the Arabs invaded Iran in order to garner adherents to his evil Faith. In the plot, he intervenes in the ambivalence of Prince Vladimir and tries to influence state politics towards adopting a new state religion. The heroes find out that Feramurz is a black mage and betrayer of the true faith of the Avesta who serves not Ahura Mazdā but Ahriman. Ahriman is necessary for the existence of Good, because “if evil would escape, then there would not be good, would it?” (Kuptsov 2000:79). After his mission with the Slavs fails, his trail is lost in Constantinople, where he should have been converted to Christianity (Kuptsov 2000:470).

#### 5.4.2. The present: petroleum and mirrors

While most of the studied literary texts suggest that Zoroastrianism belongs to the (often imaginary, fictional) past, there are some examples that regard it as a modern religion. In the short story *Kurban Bayram* (Курбан-Байрам, 2004), Aleksandr Ilichevskii (see 5.4.1) uses metaphors of petroleum as a sort of life essence that intersects religious-philosophical themes with sacrifice and rituals. The plotline follows the narrator, a Russian physicist driving in his car from Moscow to the countryside in Velegozh on the Oka River, where he has a country house. The man is tired after a burdensome urban winter in Moscow and seeks a place of solace “I can have up sleeping, where I can think, where no one can distract me, except God.” Along the way, his consciousness drifts through a large associative net of events and figures of the past: The Russian Empire, Iran, the Caspian Sea; poets, political figures, military figures—everything in the Middle Russian landscape resonates with the lost reality of pre-Caspian deserts and oases, the place where the narrator lived as a child. Suddenly an accident on the road happens: a man driving a truck with sheep (both living and dead) invites the narrator to his house, where he receives a warm welcome. The stranger, along with a Muslim named Mustaf and his family, are forced to live in the foreign land of Russia. Mustaf sells sheep for the “feast of sacrifice” (also *Kurban Bayram*), an annual Muslim holiday after the Muslim hajj that is

also celebrated in Russia.<sup>11</sup> The protagonist understands that the host has nothing to do with Kurban Bayram—it is not “their festival,” these sheep are only his earnings for the year. The family itself is not Muslim; it belongs to a Middle Asian minority:

Word for word it becomes clear that they are not Azerbaijanis, but Medes—an ancient people, almost older than Persians, succeeded [sic] to Zoroastrians since the time of the Achaemenids. They came from southern Azerbaijan. They are taken here as Azerbaijanis, but they themselves speak Turkic only in presence of others. Modern Iranian Zoroastrians—those are not genuine, because the proper are the Medes. The Medes are mages. They have always been arguing with the Persians beginning from the time of Darius. Mustaf is spelling in a strange way the name of King Darius: Dari sakhum, with an emphasis on “i”. Namely the Medes were able to keep a genuine purity of thought and ritual which were commanded by Zoroaster. For instance, for the ritual fire the Medes use petroleum, not wood (Ilichevskii 2010:304f).

One of Mustaf’s daughters shows the protagonist a niche in the courtyard, where ritual fire, a kind of “eternal fire,” burns nourished by petroleum. The hosts take petroleum for a sort of wonderful medicine; they believe that such fire has “something inexplicably inveigling, quite different than in the flame of a rushlight or a candle. The difference between them is just as between fresh and sea water” (Ilichevskii 2010:305). In the middle of the courtyard, the narrator notices a tower reminding him of a petroleum derrick. He asks about it, but the girl becomes panicked and changes the subject. The narrator suddenly understands that the derrick may be connected to a kind of fire ritual. But he suppresses the questions and is left alone with the girl while the father brings a pomegranate. The story develops from an enigmatic poetic fable into a terrible nightmare. The narrator says goodbye to the friendly Mustaf, who, after all, wants to thank him by stabbing a sheep. Horrified by this action, the narrator rushes headlong into a raging blizzard, pursued by ghosts. A day later, he desperately turns back towards Moscow. Before long, the narrator is found dead near the outskirts of Moscow on a radio tower with a sheep's head in his hands.

Similar to Ilichevskii who links Zoroastrianism to the history of Azerbaijan, Lola Elistratova, an author who writes in the genre of “feminine prose,” associates Zoroastrianism with Tajikistan. Her novella *The Tower of Silence: A Novel a la Tatu and Zarathushtra* (Башня молчания: Роман в стиле Тату и

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<sup>11</sup> In Arabic this Muslim central festival is called ‘Īdal-Adhā (with some variations ‘īdal-kurbān or ‘īd al-naḥr), while in Turkish-speaking countries it is known under the name *Kurbān-bayramı*. That means a “sacrificial feast” or al-‘Īdal-Kabīr “the major festival”. During this festival, beginning on the 10th of the month, *Dhu l-Ḥijjaj*, the last month of the Muslim lunar calendar, every Muslim should buy and sacrifice an animal (usually a sheep for one person). See Mittwoch 1965.

Заратуштры, 2005), which is “interlacing family chronicles and psychoanalysis” (Morozova 2005:7), adopts the metaphor of the Zoroastrian burial complex (*tower of silence*). This is the key to understanding the psychological state of the protagonist, a designer named Liolia in her late thirties. The plot is a conflict between two women-rivals, a story of Liolia’s hatred for her school friend Inna. Inna suddenly dies from a gastric flu, and Liolia is quite convinced that it occurred because of her notorious wishes to kill Inna. Liolia’s imagination paints Inna’s ghost as if she were still alive, but her dead friend is visible just to Liolia. Liolia had a difficult childhood, but now she has everything she needs to lead a happy life: a hearty partner, a lovely son, and an interesting job. However, her blind hatred against the ugly and unsuccessful Inna causes excessive psychological discord, as she attempts to repress memories of her childhood. The *tower of silence* refers to the metaphor of a Moscow nomenclature house (“The House” or the “house on the bones”) representing family history as a gradual (material but obviously not spiritual) decline (from prosperity among party functionaries to misery and death). Additionally, the grim symbol of the *tower of silence* represents Liolia’s childhood. For that reason, going out onto its platform does not mean death (as one would expect at the beginning of the last scene) but liberation from the House, an oppressive past and a courageous flight towards freedom.

In the first part of the novella, the chapter titles are comprised of lyrics from Russian girl band-duo *Tatu* (t.A.T.u). The second part of the novella provides epigraphs from some early Russian translations by Braginskii of the Zoroastrian *Gathas* and paraphrases from popular dictionary articles about the doctrines and rituals of Zoroastrians. This chain of quotations is connected to the life circumstances of the protagonist, who thinks of herself as a person who belongs to many cultures: similar to the design company she works at, “East and West,” Liolia is the child of a Russian woman and a Tajik father (with an “Indian blood”) who left the family when Liolia was a small child. Liolia’s memories of her father consist of sunny feelings and enigmatic stories of bizarre Zoroastrian ancestors, which provide the basis for the metaphor of the *tower of silence*:

One day my father told me a story about a tower of silence. "Our ancestors, the Persians,—said my father, buried the dead on the sites of the stone towers, where the corpses were torn by birds of prey." My father was a Tajik, God knows, how he landed in Moscow away from the sunny grapes of the Fergana valley and from the fat pilaw with quince. He betrayed the land of his Zoroastrian ancestors, and then forgot his daughter in the Moscow tower of silence. // Since that time the image of the House as tower firmly entrenched in my mind. I knew that I was a resident of a terrible astodan, living among dead people (Elistratova 2005:114).

The Zoroastrian religion provides the main metaphor that serves to explain contemporary culture. According to critic Tat'iana Morozova:

This is not just shocking fusion of the incompatible. This is—one of the explanations of internal discord of the main character. A person, living in such a mishmash of cultures, deprived of support and a reference point. The ancient words of the Avesta [...] emerge out on the surface of life and what we mistakenly call modern culture. This "culture" is like everlasting Indian soft mud, which covers the country for centuries, but is perfectly safe for those who are accepted by this country (Morozova 2005:16f).

The American bilingual writer Margarita Meklina (b. 1972) in *Zoroastrian Mirrors* (Зороастрийские Зеркала, 2009) explains in one interview that her novella "is a paraphrase of the chef d'oeuvre of Persian literature" (Bavil'skiĭ 2009). The Persian chef d'oeuvre Meklina refers to is *The Blind Owl* (Buf-e kur, 1937), a mystical-philosophical novel written by Iranian writer Sadegh Hedayat (1903–1951) with some Sufi interplays. Meklina's novella was nominated for the Nikolai Gogol literary award *The Nose* (Нос, 2009–) for "innovation of the current prose" in the Russian language. Indeed, the text is rich with metaphors, symbols, and mystical prose. The main narrative is a love story between a young Slavic woman and a much older Persian art dealer, Sadegh, with a Persian last name translated into Russian as "Light of Love." Both characters live in exile in the USA. The novel consists of small chapters that the writer calls "mirrors," short stories about Sadegh and the woman, although at the end the reader is made to understand that the woman leads a double life as a mother in two different families (with Greek and Chinese husbands and two daughters of different ages). After a while, Sadegh disappears and her quest to find him brings her the bitter awareness that he is dead. One of the central scenes of this novella is the "metaphysical" marriage ritual of the narrator with her lost lover. While in deep mourning, the woman decides to celebrate their ten-year anniversary and buys herself a white dress, then goes to a Persian restaurant. Sitting at a table for two and immersed in memories and an invisible monologue from her Persian lover, the woman becomes an object of ridicule by two young Iranian waiters working in the restaurant. They arrange a *sofre aghd* (Iranian marriage table) for the woman as a bonus, but in fact, it is a Persian marriage tray with items that have the appropriate symbolic meanings of fertility, love, and optimism. Among the items include spices, two large sugar cones, two burning wedding chandeliers, and a mirror (called in the novella a "Zoroastrian"). The woman adds that instead of the Koran the waiters use an Omar Khayyam book that happened to be on the table. As described in the novella, wedding rites are used in Persian marriage either by Muslims or by Zoroastrians. Through this ritual, the woman wants to experience a metaphysical reunion with her dead lover.

The sample includes only a single cursory reference to Zoroastrianism in contemporary Russia in Viktor Pelevin's (b.1962) fantasy trash satire *t* (2009 (third prize of the *Great Book* 2010)). The main protagonist, Leo Tolstoy, who goes by the initial "T" or the "count T," is a new hero of a novel that is being written by a group of Russian ghostwriters living in modern Russia. Tolstoy has a sort of imaginary contact to one of his creators, Azazel Brakhman, who has long philosophical conversations with Tolstoy. Pelevin, being generally sarcastic toward religion in his works, posits in his novel how Russian religious tolerance is determined through a struggle for economic and political power between two main criminal groupings. Thus, if it comes to a conflict of interests in politics, the religion may be used in argumentation against the opponent. Thus, the plot is about a creative group writing story about Leo Tolstoy (considered a "hero who is living alone, a master of fighting arts whose age is about thirty") moving to a Russian Eastern Christian holy monastery, the *Optina Hermitage* (Оптина пустынь), in order to confess his sins before death. However, he is accused of insulting other religions. For instance, among others there are Russian Zoroastrians called Mazdeists. The fact that they do not constitute an ordinary religious group that is widely known is quite visible in a dialogue between two of the novel's characters. This is construed as a semantic misunderstanding between the "crisis manager" Suleiman and the powerful general Shmyga:

Suleiman didn't quite get it, at first: "What Zoroastrians?" And Shmyga says: "Those effing Russian-Mazdeists". Suleiman says: "Comrade General, which Mazdeists are you talking about, exactly—the sixth or the third? You're worried about those driving "Mazdas," aren't you?" Now Shmyga, in turn, got all worked up: "I'm worried about Russian fire worshippers, got it? What if they don't like it that your barge is on fire and sinking? What if it hurts their religious feelings?" Suleiman decided his arm was being twisted for no good reason here [...] (Pelevin 2009:140).

As the dialogue progresses, the reader may understand that religious groups seem to be respectful subjects in society: "Then Shmyga replies him tiredly—you could cheat me, Suleyman, but no Zoroastrians, no fucking way" (Pelevin 2009:139). Russian Muslims are also concerned about their public image to such a degree that, according to Shmyga, they can abandon their own adherents such as the Muslim Suleiman, who according to the plot shows his brutality in public. However, Pelevin's sarcasm implies the contrary. In fact, Russian religious groups are not focused on respect. The themes of religious identity and tolerance here are not serious; they are another kind of rhetorical instrument that is used by the Russian mafia for criminal purposes. Generally, Pelevin remains true to himself in his skepticism of post-Soviet reality as being absurd, fantastic, and cruel.

### 5.4.3. The future: star wars and love for the motherland

The sample also contains two models of fantasy fiction where Zoroastrianism is placed in the future. The second part of Vladimir Sorokin's (b. 1955) scandalous<sup>12</sup> postmodern novel *The Light-Blue Lard(fat)* (Голубое сало, 1999) mentions "Siberian" Zoroastrianism. The first part of the novel is about a future project by Russian scientists who clone famous Russian writers and poets such as Leo Tolstoy, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Andrei Platonov, Vladimir Nabokov, Anna Akhmatova, etc. and get an eternal substance, a sort of light-blue lard, which is made by the clones. Light-blue lard is produced as a side effect of writing literary texts. But after successful production of the substance, the scientists are soon shut down by the barbaric members of a sect called the Order of Russian Earthfuckers who possess a time machine. The Earthfuckers send the captured light-blue lard as a valuable gift (as a "greeting made from ice") to the USSR government in 1954 with the idea that, if used properly, it could change the course of Russian history, perhaps to preserve the Soviet regime that later falls. The head of the Soviet state, Joseph Stalin (1878–1953), and his lover (in the story), Nikita Khrushchev (1894–1971), use the lard for their own purposes. Stalin and Khrushchev, together with German dictator Adolf Hitler (1889–1945) and fascist reichsführer of the SS Heinrich Himmler (1900–1945), who in the novel seem to have survived after World War II, try to find immortality through the means of a lard-injection. That is a rough summary of the plot, although it is more structurally complex than that. In the second part of the novel, Lavrentii Beria (1899–1953), chief of the Soviet secret police, explains the light-blue lard and touches on the fictional history of the Russian Zoroastrians:

This is the so-called ice cone sent to us from the near future by the Order of Russian Earthfuckers. The Order will be formed of many sects of Earthfuckers in 2012. In 2028 the members of the Order will settle down in East Siberia, upon the Bold Mountain, where remains of a Siberian Zoroastrian settlement will be found in the underground—descendants of a minor sect which... I think, at the end of the 6th century BCE fled from the great Achaemenid Empire to the North. Gradually they found themselves in taiga, in between the two Tunguskas and up the Bold Mountain, which granite they were happily digging into for four centuries. Why that? In their search for the so-called Subterranean Sun, which rays, according to their beliefs, would wipe out the distinction between Good and Evil and bring the human race back to its paradisiacal state. The Siberian Zoroastrians invented the time machine able to

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<sup>12</sup> In 2002 Sorokin was accused of distributing pornography in his novel by the young organization *The Walking Together*, which is known with their support of the pro-Putin politics: <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/2122713.stm>> (accessed 21 March 2012). Sorokin's case was not initiated because he failed to appear in court.

send small objects back in time. Here you can see one of those objects (Sorokin 2009:159).

The image of Earthfuckers is an allusion to a dystopic Russian future where nationalists seize power, and should be understood as an extreme metaphor: patriotism literary consists of copulating with Russian soil (an exaggeration of a widespread patriotic expression of love for the motherland (любовь к родине)). This futile act of patriotism is conducted by a secret, violent society and leads to nothing other than nonsense and cruel barbarism. The word “Avesta” loses its meaning as a codex of Zoroastrian religious texts and is used in the novel by nationalist leaders as a watchword (Sorokin 2009:154).

The trilogy of *The Tomorrow War* (Завтра война, 2003), *With No Mercy* (Без пощады, 2004) and *The Moscow Time* (Время—московское! 2006), later supplemented with the further three sequels *The dream pilot* (Пилот мечты, 2011), *The pilot beyond the law* (Пилот вне закона, 2011) and *The pilot girl* (Пилот-девица, 2012) was written by Iana Botsman (b. 1973) and Dmitrii Gordevskii (b. 1973). Both authors write under the pseudonym Aleksandr Zorich. *The Tomorrow War* series is perhaps one of the few works where a fictional Zoroastrian civilization moves into the foreground of the story. Zorich’s trilogy is a space opera, a genre that is quite unusual for modern Russian science fiction. The series is distinguished by strong Russian patriotism. According to the authors, who live in the East Ukrainian city of Kharkov, apart from obvious Western influences, the trilogy has been inspired by the classics of Soviet science fiction literature such as Ivan Efremov (1908–1972), Arkadii and Boris Strugatskii (1925–1991, b. 1933), Grigoriï Adamov (1886–1945), and modern Russian social and political journalism as well (Tiulenev 2005). It is remarkable that Konstantin Krylov (b. 1967), who is a philosopher, journalist, and member of the *Russian Anjoman* (see Chapter 2), is listed among the authors’ inspirations.

The plot transports the reader into the 27th century CE when the human race represents the United Nations (UN), which consists of the majority of Earth’s nations. The UN is already discovering new planets in far parts of the galaxy. Each of Earth’s nations has a different role working for the UN. Russia is among five nations responsible for military actions and the advancement of science. As if global politics were not difficult enough to manage in the first place, some nations have lost contact with the UN and due to the process of “retrospective evolution” have become uncivilized. This has led to the creation of a separate faction of nations that are unaffiliated with the UN. In the 25th century, one separatist Earth colony unexpectedly replaced its social order with that of the ancient culture of Persia by communicating in Farsi and practicing the “forgotten” religion of Zoroastrianism. The UN names this separatist colony



Concordia, or “the Clone.” After the UN’s refusal to honor Concordia’s independence, war erupts while Concordia continues to colonize new planets using *luxogen* deposits, a type of fuel that is required to colonize space.

One of the main plot threads concerns a Russian space cadet, Aleksandr Pushkin (a namesake of the great Russian poet Aleksandr Pushkin (1899–1837)), who is an example of a Russian patriot. The love story between him and a Concordian girl named Issa Gor and his time spent in Concordian captivity leads to a contrast between the UN (especially its Russian part) and Concordia. At first glance, Concordia is not a proper enemy for the UN unlike non-human races, but are rather alternatives to each other. The social structure of Concordia is strictly regulated into four castes that are impossible to transcend: the Zaotars (<Av. *zaotar* “highly qualified priest”) (politicians, high military, and priests), the Pehlevans (<Np. *pehlevān*, “athlete”) (high bureaucrats and military people), the Entls (scientists and intellectuals), and finally the Dems (manual laborers). The Dems are being cloned and are essentially used as slaves for the other three castes. The Concordian caste system provides a stark contrast to the developed democracy of the UN. Order, discipline, patriotism, and military ideology are the most appreciated virtues of both the UN and the Concordians in space. However, the Concordian social order borders on absurdity and seems quite backward to the people living in the UN.

Pushkin’s thinking and reflexive personality allows him to deduce more about Concordia than can be gleaned from history books—he assumes that Concordia is a potential rival to the UN and that a future war between them is unavoidable:

[...] we and the Clone are two false mirrors opposite each other. We are reflected in them—they in us. Now both sides like to look at funny, even through crooked pictures. But what if we get tired of this play? (Zorich 2009a:288).



Illustrations 7–8. Two posters for the PC game *The Tomorrow War* (2008) based on the trilogy by Aleksandr Zorich. The group of people in the left picture of the left and in the right picture depict Concordians with their symbols of propaganda – a decapitated Lamassu bull statue from Persepolis and the fire bowl in the opened hands. The space ships in the background invoke associations with the Zoroastrian *faravahar*. Photo: ©A. Zorich.

Pushkin is right about the inevitability of war—the second and the third books in the trilogy catalogue mutual hostilities in the struggle for resources and political supremacy in space. Another crucial message of *The War Tomorrow* is the idealistic image of a valiant officer acting according to a strict professional code of honor; it does not matter which side he takes in the war. An Ashvan (<Av. *ashavan*, “the follower of truth”) could be anyone. How did Zoroastrianism become a driving force of Concordian ideology? As the reader learns, the trend towards Zoroastrianism begins in 2357, during what the Concordians call the “Primordial Hour”; when on their planet (named Vertragna) 40,000 colonists have the same dream about the necessity to become religious. The Concordians start to follow their teacher Zoroastrian “zaotar Rimush” who was originally “an Armenian from Italy” (Zorich 2009c:411). Rimush learned Persian within a week (Zorich 2009c:ibid). The cult of the “grey-haired ascetic with radiant eyes” (Zorich 2009c:100) is part of the Concordian ideology that brings courage to their soldiers, although Rimush died about 300 years ago. According to a Concordian woman named Rishi, one of Pushkin’s friends, “the Resurgence of Tradition is a great wonder” (Zorich 2009c:411).

The Concordians have their own strict, “Zoroastrian” ethics that also inform their ritualistic behavior, namely fire-worshipping on holy altars. Similar to the Russian nation, they cultivate a strong patriotism to their planet. They conduct a permanent struggle against impurity (what is explained to be almost maniacal) and name themselves Ashvans. In order to observe their religion properly, the Concordians build an institute of secret police called Asha that protect religious properties within Concordia and purge their religion of the “Manichean heresy” that occurs on the Planet Glagol (also called in Concordian Apaosha: <Av. *apaoša*, “demon of drought”). Ultimately, they surpass every other Earth colony and distinguish between their former partners, the Aners (<Mp. *anērān*, “non-Iran”), and the Drudzhvants, their enemies. Thus, Russians are essentially Aners, while alien space races, like the Chirogs, are considered enemies. However, trust towards Russians and Concordians does not preclude tricking and killing for prosperity.

In the eyes of an Earthie, Concordian culture consists of plenty of symbolic objects, which helps Earthies to imagine cultural differences easier. These symbols serve to describe foreign cultures from the perspective of an outsider. For example, Concordian space ships have Persian names derived from Zoroastrian mythology, such as Vishtaspa (<Oldp. *Vīštāspa*, a Zoroastrian king

and Zarathushtra's protector), Frashaostra and Dzhamaspa (<Np. Jāmāsp; both are Zarathushtra's disciples and righteous Zoroastrians), and Khvarena (<Av. *xʷarənah*, Zoroastrian type of charisma). The architecture in Zorich's novel serves to glorify religious-ideological dogmas and is presented through the reproduction of old Persian architectonic elements.

In the series, the Russian nation's lexicon resembles the 20th century jargon of the Soviet Marine Corps. In stark contrast to religious Concordia, it is not clear whether Russian ideology is concerned with Eastern Orthodox Christianity; because of Russian "love of the land," Russian patriotism is more visible than anything else is. However, some passages reveal Eastern Orthodox Christianity as an inseparable component of national identity in the context of contemporary politics.

Overall, *The War Tomorrow* is highly acclaimed by most Russian critics because of its attractive, vibrant characters, a healthy self-irony, and an ardent belief in the invincible unity of a nation that, somewhat naively yet nonetheless masterfully, highlights Russian ethnic self-confidence. According to the Russian critic Pëtr Tiulenev:

[o]n the first place this science fiction is turned toward the present, toward us. The main characters of the cycle are direct and noble people, proper patriots of their motherland and human race at whole. Zorich does not try to re-consider history or agitate for this or that political order. The Kolchak space-vehicle launching site co-exists in his books with the respect for the Red Army and for anti-totalitarian society. The most important is not the colour of flags and any words of national anthem. The most important is keeping of trust about the great future of own country and working for its good—hourly, at own place, whatever it seems insignificant [sic]. Then we will go into space and put every enemy to flight.// Is that right, tovarischi?" (Tiulenev 2005:73).

Zorich's book contains one of the central motifs of post-Soviet science fiction—the "loss of the Empire" (Menzel 2007a:328). Another characteristic Russian issue articulated by Zorich is the messianic one—the Russian nation has to bring salvation and prosperity to all of humanity, which corresponds with the position of the astrological Zoroastrian strand (see Chapter 2).

## 5.5. Summary

This chapter has presented some examples of Russian fiction that adopt the semantics of Zoroastrianism and how Zoroastrian figures, theology, and historical narratives have been integrated in these stories. Thus, this study did

not discuss the problem of distinguishing between sacred and secular contents within a fiction work and reader perceptions. This study used a pragmatic approach that focused on the use of Zoroastrian lexis and concepts by producers of Russian fiction.

As mentioned earlier, Russian fiction in the 1990s experienced a change. With the appearance of three principal tendencies in culture—liberalization, commercialization, and globalization—genres and themes in Russian fiction have gradually become hybridized. During the Soviet era, one could distinguish between two canonical categories, *high* and *mass* literature, and in the 1990s, another stage of literary production (called *middle literature*) sprung up. Religion is treated as a topic of great cultural interest in many fictional genres. In particular, speculative fiction (such as science fiction and other types of entertainment literature) has used religious themes to create new fictional realities.

One of the central points of discussion about Zarathus(h)tra and Zoroastrianism in Russian literature during the 20th century can be traced to the strong reception of Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophical work *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883–1885; Russian translation 1898). *Zarathustra* still draws a lot of attention from Russian writers more than a century after its first Russian publication. Some fictional texts from the Soviet era continue to transport pre-Nietzschean discourses of Zarathus(h)tra mediated by European reception.

With various keywords such as *Zarathushtra*, *Zoroastrianism*, *Zoroastrian*, *Ahura Mazdā*, *Angra Mainyu*, etc. and their possible variations, I have collected 31 texts written by 25 authors in my sample. My selection was also based on different “degrees of involvement” with Zoroastrianism in the fictional texts. I also highlighted texts that contained Zoroastrian lexis without any further explanation. Hence, I was primarily interested in detailed passages or concepts that involved Zoroastrianism.

Zoroastrianism, as an object of fiction, is a rare and insignificant topic when compared to other religions, particularly Christianity and Islam. However, the results of my study should signal a certain interest in Zoroastrianism in Russian fiction during the 1990s and 2000s based on an extensive number of references. If compared to the discussed synopsis from the *Religion and Literature Database*, which contained a collection of references to Zoroastrianism throughout English fiction during a period of 50 years, such a great number of Zoroastrian references in Russian fiction (during the 1990s and 2000s) seems to be an outstanding result.

More than half of the analyzed works in the sample were written in speculative fiction genres such as science fiction, fantasy, and superhero fiction. Other genres in the sample include contemporary Russian *middle* and *mass*

literature as crime stories, psychological thrillers, esoteric novels, and different genres of online literature. The sample also includes, to a lesser extent, examples of “serious” fiction with *metarealism* or postmodernist prose. Novels, series of novels, and short stories or parables are also presented in the sample.

The presence of Zoroastrian semantics confirms the circulation of diverse—old and new—literary and religious discourses throughout Russian culture. The main groups distinguished in the sample comprise of references to the prophet Zarathushtra and some more developed literary contents that concentrate on Zoroastrianism as whole.

By and large, the material revealed a heightened attention to the name “Zarathushtra” in its different variations. The literary treatment of Zarathustra ranges over a great number of characters. Although the sample shows some traces within European history of Zarathus(h)tra’s reception, the most used form of the spelling, “Zarathustra” (Заратустра), shows its dependence upon the Nietzschean prophet. In some cases, it is no longer possible to draw the line between the Persian and Nietzschean Zarathus(h)tras. A writer’s imagination can profit greatly by quoting large passages from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* when discussing ancient Persia and Zoroastrianism (Cole 1995). As a side effect of such longstanding attention to Nietzsche’s creation, there is a “corrosive” perception of his ideas that expresses itself through the processes of simplification and reduction. Otherwise, one can observe a certain persistence in using the literary form and style invented by Nietzsche. Obviously, after Nietzsche it would be difficult to recognise the original prophet of the Zoroastrian religion or to separate him from the Nietzschean character coursing through Russian fiction.

I analyzed fragments of European discourses on Zarathus(h)tra. Three texts in the sample can be incorporated into esoteric or occultist discourses that are well-known in the cultures of Western Europe. They refer to the (assumed) historical epochs when Zarathushtra (here with the spelling Zoroaster) lived. Zarathushtra is presented in the foreground as a mage, a mystic figure, an “inventor” of some kind of religious worship (Akunin 2011; Farb 2005), and as a devil-worshipper in contrast to Christian characters (Khaetskaia 2005). Often Zarathus(h)tra and Zoroastrianism have little connection to each other.

The second subgroup of analyzed texts included allusions to the Nietzschean *Zarathustra*, which showed its appreciable impact through numerous Russian reflections on Nietzschean philosophy and literary developments. In fact, the figure of Zarathustra and the metaphors created by Nietzsche have been and still are very attractive to Russian writers. It would be wrong to insist that these new stylized stories about Zarathustra are imitations of Nietzsche’s writing. They immediately confront Russian modernity and hence are very instrumental. They

use central characteristics of Zarathustra’s image (that Nietzsche also used)—his reputation as a prophet and orator—without any religious references (Kuvaldin 2006; Alkhutov 2008). A side effect of the Russian reception of Nietzsche following World War II, the figure of Zarathustra is still linked to the theme of fascism and its risk in contemporary Russia (Alkhutov 2008). Those influenced by this interpretation of Nietzsche do not regard “Zoroastrianism” as a religion, but rather a metaphorical term that encompasses anarchist ideas just like it has been used by Ivanov-Skuratov in the 1970s (see Chapter 2) and, recently, by Emelin (see Chapter 4). Also, the satirically presented sect of *mazdai* (Antonov 2001) is nothing but a parody of nationalist groups in the 1990s confessing radical Nietzscheanism without being immediately connected to Zoroastrianism. We see a more sophisticated, grotesque picture in Sorokin’s work, where Zoroastrianism is linked to perverse patriotism with esoteric elements in the future of Russian nationalists. However, like in the religious Zoroastrian discourse, there are also attempts to show the difference between Nietzsche’s character and the historical Zarathushtra (Sanregrè 2007).

The major organizing principle between the texts in the sample was the time period that Zoroastrian-themed references took place in: past, present, or future. Most of these temporally diverse texts were of the fantasy or science fiction genres. In Zorich’s space opera, Zoroastrianism is presented as the state ideology of Concordia that is opposed to the ideology of the leading nation on Earth—Russian Orthodoxy. If the description of the Concordian ideology can demonstrate certain elements of Zoroastrian or ancient Persian symbolism, the Orthodox theme finds as much as no expression. In one case, old and new images were freely interwoven into a fantasy story: Cole’s fantasy transports Nietzsche’s *Zarathustra* to Ancient Persia where the ancient cult coexists with the fictional re-interpretation of Zoroastrian doctrine and numerous Nietzschean quotations. It is typical that in the genre of Slavic fantasy Zoroastrianism is accepted as the “teaching of the mages” (the Indo-Aryan ancestors of the Slavs), and hence, genuine to modern neopagan and Vedic doctrines (Alekseev 2010; Vesta 2007).

At present, Zoroastrianism is a religion that has a strong relationship to Central Asia and such countries as Tajikistan (Elistratova 2005), Azerbaijan (Ilichevskiï 2005, 2010a, 2010b), and Armenia (Sanregrè 2007). However, Iran is recognized as the homeland of Zoroastrianism (Meklina 2009, Morkhov 2009). One author assumes some connection between Indian Parsis and Tajik Zoroastrians (Elistratova 2007). In one case, Zoroastrianism is mentioned as the established religious belief of a community in Russia (Pelevin 2009). This, however, is expressed ironically.

The analysis has shown that genre styles have also influenced the modality of representation: fantasy literature constructs Zoroastrianism per se as something unrealistic or even nonexistent; it is a subject of the past and the future with satirical and fantastical modes. Fantasy and science fiction intensively absorb scholarly discourses of the ancient world and give them a psychological dimension. In these genres, Zoroastrianism is viewed skeptically; it is described through the prism of postmodernist and poststructuralist thinking as a narrow-minded ideology (Zorich 2009a, 2009b, 2009c), a play, or even a manipulation (Cole 1995). Other non-speculative genres, although they have some ideas about geography of ancient Zoroastrianism, do not view it as one of the modern institutionalized religions. Usually their knowledge rests in fragmentary theological constructs such as the dualism between good and evil or the practice of fire-worshipping that are borrowed from academic publications and encyclopedic articles.

A small portion of the references picture Zoroastrianism as an esoteric teaching that represents the “proper,” “genuine” Zoroastrianism (Ilichevskii 2010a, Sanregrè 2007), which parallels the astrological strand of religious discourse on Zoroastrianism (see Chapter 2). In fiction, this secret knowledge is ascribed to chosen (and in any case “enigmatic”) peoples, like direct descendants of the ancient Medes or a few Armenian clans. Only one author from the entire sample develops his own interpretation of Zoroastrianism as a Gnostic system that would perfectly be incorporated into other esoteric-philosophical systems such as Sufism. To do this, Sanregrè uses additional concepts of Zoroastrianism, for instance the distinction between visible and invisible worlds, *fravashi* transformation, etc. (Sanregrè 2007).

One reason why Zoroastrian lexica have been used is the intensive production of entertainment literature in genres adapting “exotic,” particularly oriental themes for wider audiences. This exoticness is not transmitted directly to the Russian cultural space but often through Western European mediation. This is discernible in the use of names and terms. The typical example for this notion is the name of the prophet *Zoroaster* (Зороастр), or the most salient example in the sample, Zarathustra (Заратустра), instead of the conventional *Zarathushtra* (Заратуштра).

Concerning the appearance of Zoroastrian symbols or special iconography within the texts analyzed above I must state that my sample nearly ignores any possible variations. The covers of science fiction, fantasy, and superhero novels mostly represent space ships with heroes from the future or warriors from the past. That means that the designers often deal with iconographical patterns and visual canons developed within these genres. The central metaphor in Elistratova’s novella, *daḵma* or *tower of silence* is not what is presented on the

book's cover, but a fragment of a Buddhist Indian bas-relief (Eliustratova 2005). Ancient Persian symbolism is detectable in the design around the Zorich book trilogy that has its realization not in print but in two computer games based on the trilogy, *Tomorrow War* and *Tomorrow War: K Factor* (2006, 2007). Thus, the "military propaganda" of Concordia's warriors uses the Arabic alphabet and is comprised of some allusions to ancient Iran, such as Achaemenian winged bull statues from the Gate of All Nations in Persepolis, built under Xerxes I. The main symbol of the Concordian civilization is the flame, while any allusion to the *faravahar* is completely missing.

To conclude, the variety of fictional images of Zarathus(h)tra, Zoroastrianism, and its adherents in high or mass literature in Russia during the 1990s and 2000s illustrates that despite vulgarization and erosion in the interpretation of the original texts, they remain fertile sources for inspiration.



## Chapter 6: Zoroastrianism in modern Russia: studying discourses and transfers

With this concluding chapter I have reached the point where relations between four discursive constructions of Zoroastrianism in Russia need to be discussed. As claimed in the introduction, the four fields with their discourses of Zoroastrianism are reconstructed on the basis of different textual corpora that were collected and analyzed in a systematic way in preceding chapters according to, respectively: (1) Russian Zoroastrians and other religious actors being interested in Zoroastrianism; (2) scholars; (3) journalists; and (4) fiction writers. One can study communicative interactions between different actors within these chosen fields.

Unlike ethnological or anthropological studies of religion, my object of study is religion documented in texts.<sup>1</sup> I suggest a discursive way of looking at modern religion that shifts the focus to local cultural contexts with their polyphonic structure. According to the discursive analytical approach, the textual corpora constitute collections of texts where human thoughts and actions, “traces” of events and conflicts are easily accessible for scholarly research due to their public articulation. This critical discursive approach made it possible to detect some structural features of public representations of Zoroastrianism that had accumulated in texts of different genres and styles.

The analysis of these textual corpora has shown that there are some content relationships between religion, academic research, mass media, and fiction in public communication. Hence I will conclude this study with some final reflections on material I have presented in a threefold way as (1) a summarizing discussion about the object of study and relationship between these four fields; (2) considerations on strategies of description; and, last but not least, (3) some reflections on the study of religions.

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<sup>1</sup> However, discourse analysis, in particular CDA, regards all constructed research on collected materials and fixed words as a text (Fairclough 2003:21f). Hence, the application of CDA in anthropological studies is possible.

## 6.1. Zoroastrianism in a mirror: its images in contemporary texts

The literature produced by self-confessed Russian Zoroastrians including Pavel Globa's works, publications in the Zoroastrian magazine *Mitra*, and online texts on the websites *zoroastrian.ru* and *blagoverie.org* as well as some reflections by other NRMs (such as *Kosmoenergetika* and neopagan groups)—are sources that constitute the religious discourse. This is represented through the most voluminous text corpus of many discursive communities, only a few of which are analyzed in my study. The religious discourse is not homogenous. Analyzing the routinization of patterns in the presentation of Zoroastrianism, we can speak of two major contrasting and partly competing positions among Russian Zoroastrians. In particular, the construction of Zoroastrianism articulated by Globa and his followers act as complementary sub-discourses and differ noticeably from that of the *Russian Anjoman*. Also the positions of marginal religious actors, if they support the astrological sub-discourse, differ visibly from the *Russian Anjoman*. The criteria that distinguish Zoroastrian communities are their respective pre-histories, their different interpretations of Zoroastrianism, the question of authority, and so on.

The astrological Zoroastrian sub-discourse, which constitutes the first Zoroastrian discursive community, originated in the cultic milieu of the Russian underground spiritual movements that started in the 1970s. Hence, their primary interest in Zoroastrianism is rooted in Russian esotericism, namely in astrology. While Zoroastrianism as a living religion with theological and ritual particularities is largely unknown, the figure of Zoroaster, with his long history in European esoteric and literary milieus, where he was reputed as an important Persian astrologer and mage (Stausberg 1998, Rose 2000), was quite familiar to the modern New Age seekers who hoped to revitalize Zoroaster's important legacy. Both dimensions, i.e. Indo-Iranian religious traditions on the one hand, and European literary-esoteric reinterpretations on the other, have thereby become points of departure for the development of contemporary Zoroastrianism in Russia. Through the intricate merging of different Zarathushtra discourses, Globa and his followers legitimized astrology as a spiritual component of Zoroastrianism. However, in the Soviet era astrology was practiced as a hobby and a sort of underground profession. Astrology in those circles seemed to be understood as a therapeutic or healing procedure (note the medical metaphor when they speak of "horoscope as a diagnosis") that prescribes a special diet and rituals. Characteristically, this alternative (esoteric) knowledge is said to consist of old magical and occult ideas placed within a

modern level of reflection. At the same time, astrology absorbs other kinds of epistemological models, e.g. modern scientific views and mass media images.

From the sociological point of view this Zoroastrian community, especially in its early period, can be understood as a New Age movement, particularly *sensu stricto* (Hanegraaff 1996:97ff,518), if one considers Globa's explicitly expressed teachings on a new epoch or the Aquarian age, based on his astrological system. While the Western application of the idea of the New Age is linked historically to counter culture currents in Europe and the USA in the 1960s and 1970s, having become less relevant since then, Globa's adherents transferred their expectations of individual and social transformation to the 2000s. The period of change following the perestroika has been metaphorically understood by Globa's adherents as not only the beginning of the Age of Aquarius, but also as a time of religious choice in the cosmic struggle between good and evil, and in the Zoroastrian view, between Ormazd and Ahriman. This personal problem of choice and necessity following the end of the Soviet era (constructed in Globa's lectures and publications as the "empire of the evil") has been perhaps the most urgent theme of dramatic economic, political, and social changes during the 1990s post-Soviet era. Spirituality and the consumption of esoteric knowledge, however, are not the only significant points in the worldview of these Russian Zoroastrians, who acknowledge Globa's authority; his followers have also tried to institutionalize their groups by creating religious organizations with legal status. These are supposed to have a hierarchical structure that distinguishes between priesthood and ordinary believers. However, this hierarchy is only visible during collective activities such as liturgies or festivals and does not stretch into the informal, everyday life of the community. Additional effects of those officially acknowledged groups—both religious (the *St. Petersburg Zoroastrian community* and the *Moscow Zervanite-Zoroastrian community* [that was soon dissolved]) and astrological (the *AShAs*)—include a book publishing business, astrological courses, and the organization of group travel outings inside the former Soviet Union, India, and Iran. Just as in the Western New Age movement or NRMs, most members of the groups that are engaged in astrology and Zoroastrianism are female (e.g. Woodhead 2007:115, Hunt 2003:99f). The *Zoroastrian magazine Mitra* constructs a world where the teacher's authority, secret knowledge, collective rituals, and travels to Arkaim, India, and Iran are the key elements. Some policies in the group building exercises reflect the perceived deficits of Russia's socialist past. They also indicate social needs that needed to be satisfied during the economic strains of the crisis period in the 1990s. On the one hand, "learning" to be religious in a group is a mechanism of moral rehabilitation after bans against public religious activities during the Soviet era. On the other hand, this is a sort of new, uncoerced, conscious

collectivism that was commercially organized and is making some profit through educational and publishing activities.

The “esoteric” models of Russian Zoroastrianism and Globa’s public activity as an “inheritor of Zoroastrian genes” have obviously prepared grounds for the idea of an authentic Russian Zoroastrianism. The appearance of the *Russian Anjoman* in 2005, i.e. in quite different economic and political circumstances, with its positive acknowledgement towards the conversion to Zoroastrianism in Western countries as well as its diverse attempts to engage the Iranian priesthood—all of this has challenged the esoteric components of Russian Zoroastrianism during the 1990s. The main strategies adopted by the *Russian Anjoman* include critical literary interpretations of Avestan and Pahlavi texts, but in particular also include the Gathas and “globalized” or revised versions of previous views on Zoroastrianism that they obtained through contacts to other Zoroastrians worldwide. Lively discussions occurred on RuNet (also in some non-Russian Zoroastrian forums), where comments and explanations on the theological structure of Zoroastrian scriptures, according to the *Anjoman*, were regularly produced. In contrast to Globa’s movement, the majority of the active members of the *Russian Anjoman* are male, a few of them are of Middle Asian descent, and all members have a high educational background. Apart from their conceptualizations, the *Russian Anjoman* has also attracted the attention of the “converted,” transnational Zoroastrianism that is active in several Western countries. The website of the *Russian Anjoman*, *blagoverie.org*, underlines such qualities as strict individualism in religious behavior and historical engagement with Zoroastrian, and in particular, Gathic ethics. In critical and sometimes extreme opinions towards the so-called “Abrahamic” religions, such as Christianity and Judaism, that was expressed on RuNet’s forums, the *Russian Anjoman* remains close to the position of radical nationalist groups. The deliberate orientation of Iranian Zoroastrianism as the normative model of the religion goes against any possible local religious authorities, such as Pavel Globa. On the contrary, the *Russian Anjoman* is eager to accept Zoroastrian authorities, mainly mōbeds from Iran and the Zoroastrian diaspora. Over time it has become clear that the two Russian Zoroastrian communities will neither develop mutual hostility, nor fight against each other; the most important issue for them is to ensure cooperation between everyone interested in Zoroastrianism and to actively participate in events outside of Russia. So behind the mutual criticism, this dualistic view on religion has been tolerated; it is more important for both parties to identify their own interests as the Russian Zoroastrians.

The quest for an ethnic Zoroastrianism and acceptance from the “bearers of the Zoroastrian tradition,” which means ethnic Zoroastrians predominantly from Iran and India and their authorities, and also apprehensions that are held

in common with other NRMs—were all reasons why both groups attempted to contact foreign Zoroastrians (e.g. according to the *Mitra's* publications, the St. Petersburg group has received many Zoroastrian visitors from different countries since the late 1990s). The *Russian Anjoman* has been more selective in its choice than Globa's adherents. Thus, one of the most longstanding contacts of the *St. Petersburg Zoroastrian* community was with the Indian esoteric organization, the *Zoroastrian College* (led by Meher Master-Moos). The Parsi religious authorities did not accept Russian Zoroastrians and henceforth such contacts were dismissed. Although Globa initiated many of his students in the 1980s–1990s, a change in the strategy of self-presentation as a transnational community led to the first conversions of the few post-Soviet and Russian Zoroastrians by foreign religious specialists. In 2001 Swedish mobad Kamran Jamshidi conducted the *sadrepushi* initiation for five persons in Minsk, Republic of Belarus. After that, occasional group conversions occurred throughout post-Soviet territories. Since the mid-2000s, Russian Zoroastrians hold the contacts to some Iranian religious specialists (such as mōbedyār Loryan and mōbed Khorshedyan), who have visited communities in St. Petersburg and Moscow and were involved in conversions with members of both communities. Pavel Globa also behaved responsively towards these visits and tried to succeed in gaining the acceptance of Russian Zoroastrians by foreigners. It seems that Russian Zoroastrians are generally quite open towards both main Zoroastrian traditions—the Iranian and the Indian—and welcome new interpretations from Western countries such as the USA and Sweden.

Even though they were originally antagonistic in regards to some doctrinal and ritual forms, both communities endorse the idea of genuine involvement in Zoroastrianism in Russian history and culture. This recurrent motif of 'nativization' is evident in *Mitra's* research on Zoroastrian patterns in Slavic folklore and in *blagoveri.org's* project to uncover Zoroastrian heritage in many smaller cultures of former Soviet territories. The emphasis on lexical and customary similarities between Zoroastrianism and the Russian cultural heritage is an argumentative strategy shared by both groups. The other parallels are their claim of total compatibility of the scientific method with belief, but simultaneously mistrust towards scholarly translations of Zoroastrian texts into Russian, which, in their view, should be translated anew by the believers themselves.

The character of public activity among Russian Zoroastrians has steadily changed. At *The First Zoroastrian Congress* in 2000, Globa remembered that his students and colleagues had lived in a "shadow" period in the 1980s before the perestroika; at that time, astrology and Zoroastrianism were practiced underground. Since the beginning of the 1990s, they entered onto a large public stage. There is also an increasing tendency from isolationist, astrological

Zoroastrianism within the *AShAs* to a more open, public, and differentiated articulation of it involving modern Zoroastrian symbolism. The analyzed material from the late 1990s and 2000s shows changes in the spatial orientation of their astrological sub-discourse: one can observe a shift to educational trips or journeys to India, Iran, and Arkaim resulting in travel notes, meetings, international contacts, and conferences documented in print and online media for Russian Zoroastrians. The discourses of practitioners unwittingly take part in the process of the imaginative reunification of the post-Soviet territories in trying to believe that these territories are politically homogenous. In general, Russian Zoroastrians share two main discourses among other urban NRMs in the post-Soviet area: they are concerned about the new Russian identity and Russia's cultural heritage (Borenstein 1999:451f).

Whereas the discursive strands analyzed in Chapter 2 belong to the religious dimension, the next three chapters provide an analysis of the discursive image of Zoroastrianism beyond Zoroastrian groups. These chapters focused on discursive spaces where modern Zoroastrianism is one of the elements of the meta-discourse on religion in contemporary Russia. Zoroastrianism within the fields of scholarly, journalistic, and literary production occupies a rather modest position: quantitatively there are relatively minor cultural responses to Zoroastrianism within them. Nevertheless, the search for relevant texts was fertile and allowed for the creation of textual corpora for every of the aforementioned fields. The study on the further specific textual corpora revealed a number of sub-discourses in addition to the religious field. A few of them can be evaluated as vagabonding between different spheres. Another side of the analysis is the existence of discursive varieties or particularities that are unique to these diverse fields.

The main question of Chapter 3 is the construction of Zoroastrianism by scholars as expressed in their publications, popular writings, and popular science works. In sum, Soviet scholarly discourse produced the most continuous and largest body of statements on Zoroastrianism during the 20th century; in particular, the 1970s were the heyday for scholarly production that dealt with this religion. Research on Zoroastrianism was situated within the framework of different disciplines (even if not distinguished clearly), which have been engaged in various discourses on Zoroastrianism (primarily history, Iranian philology, archaeology, and study of religions). In the 1990s and 2000s scholarly discourse posited the idea of a Zoroastrian proto-religion or a Zoroastrian proto-culture in Middle Asia. The esoteric view of Zoroastrianism was sharply criticized by scholars. However, the subject of Zoroastrianism is a clear witness of the decline of Oriental studies in contemporary Russia. The study of Zoroastrianism remains isolated from Western scholarly production and is only minimally

involved in the discussions within Zoroastrian studies. Their emphases still lie in the translation of Avestan and Pahlavi texts into Russian, the social-economic history of ancient Iran, and archaeological excavations in Middle Asia. This lamentable situation in the humanities in the 1990s has led to the popularization of science and the reproduction of old theories. Perhaps because of the politically salient focus on Middle Asia, contemporary developments of Zoroastrianism in Iran and India have been neglected. Only after the self-assertion of Russian Zoroastrians have scholars tried to reflect on contemporary Zoroastrianism as an object of study. In particular, only the scholars of the study of religions, who have become increasingly reflexive towards NRMs, have endeavored to change this situation by taking Russian Zoroastrian communities seriously.

As a further sphere of discussion on Zoroastrianism I have chosen the journalistic production of around 250 small texts gathered from RuNet. The contexts in which Zoroastrianism is represented and journalists' knowledge on Zoroastrianism are to be expected for the overall treatment of religion in mass media. Thus, the most represented journalistic genres include the usual categories: sensations and celebrations, where religion enjoys the marginal position of being evaluated with and dependent upon the main content of reports. In this study both categories supply something in between neutral and quite positive evaluations. While the information about archaeological findings, mostly in Central Asia, reveals rather romantic ideas about the "legendary" past, the celebration of Nouruz in the first spring month, praised as the "Zoroastrian New Year," is often reported positively. Even if the abstract character of Zoroastrianism and its marginal significance to journalists prevails in the material I have analyzed, the focus of some reports on public actors and figures (Pavel Globa), prominent businessmen, scholars, or less well-known believers (the *Russian Anjoman*) indicates that this religion has the image of being a living tradition. As a rule, journalistic reports produce non-critical understandings that are reduced to simplified descriptions. Russian journalism covering foreign religions tends to be fixed on sensations and attractive biographies that stand in a reciprocal relation to the religious discourse of Russian Zoroastrians who actively perpetuate the media stories about archaeological discoveries and scholarly hypotheses to their own religious advantage. Therefore, the mass media discourse also helps in legitimizing Zoroastrian communities.

Many articles are dedicated to the archaeological settlements around Arkaim and the Bactria-Margiana Archaeological Complex. In these articles, journalists endorse the hypotheses that the prophet Zarathushtra was born in Russia or Turkmenistan. They pay a lot of attention to scholarly production, but they have a "loose," fragmentary idea of Zoroastrianism. As a result, Zoroastrianism remained rather abstract and blurred, with scant references to the contemporary

state of affairs around the world. That leads to the situation that Zoroastrianism is becoming the Other in a double sense—as spatially as chronologically. This “abstract” conception of Zoroastrianism gains a positive-neutral rather than negative connotation. In such a way, weak religious traces (often just abstractions without any further explanation) of Zoroastrianism are founded in reports about the Southern ex-Soviet republics and small ethnicities inside the Russian Federation. Only in a few cases do these stories involve people who believe in Zoroastrianism and tell their personal stories. Thus, the reports about Russian Zoroastrians portray believers in an equivocal way. The rhetoric they use covers a broad range of emotions: neutrality, irony, respect, and sympathy. Criticism in their reports is hardly present. In the anti-cultist discourse which is widely reproduced in the mass media and uses public blackmail on the NRMs, one does not find any mention of Russian Zoroastrians as operating in “sects.” Moreover, journalists try to find the original roots of Russian Zoroastrianism and therewith contribute to the documentation of new religious groups that are not yet an object of scholarly discourse.

While journalistic discourse aims to link Zoroastrianism with other ancient and less discussed religions such as Yezidism and Manichaeism, Russian Zoroastrians, particularly Globa’s adherents, endeavor a strategy to make themselves distinct (and sometimes to become hostile toward other religions): they carry out their own theology, organize disputes between their leader and foreign guests, take part in some interreligious forums on RuNet, and write programmatic articles in their journals. Due to this, journalistic activities stimulate the exchange between other spheres of knowledge about the Zoroastrian religion and also react to interrelations between other discourses. Scholarly controversies (e.g. Zoroastrian authenticity of such settlements as Arkaim and Gonur) that are not articulated at length within the scholarly discourse have clearly been visible in journalistic representations; even through in mass media Zoroastrianism has been treated in the context of regional Russian politics. The routinized reports about Nouruz celebrations in the 2000s may indicate a constant interest in the possibility to avoid the Islamic theme in connection to the former Soviet republics and are valid as a sort of exertion of new political power on that territory.

Mass media also acts as a channel in transferring Globa’s astrological activities with its linkage to Zoroastrianism in mass consciousness. Therefore, Globa’s representation of his “Zoroastrian calendar” unwillingly becomes a part of the image of Zoroastrianism in Russia that is totally unknown for other cultures and is per se an innovation in interpreting Zoroastrianism.

Chapter 5 explains how the fictionalization of Zoroastrianism has created an image of this religion in mainstream literature. Literature is often characterized



as a realm of fiction and imagination per se. The representation of Zoroastrianism in literature as an object of study evoked a high level of diversity. Literary discourse clearly indicates immediate connections to encyclopedic knowledge as an extract of the scholarly discourse on Zoroastrianism. Most of the literary references in my sample were found in such speculative genres as science fiction. The second group of contemporary literary works represents philosophical epigones of Friedrich Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. The analysis has shown that Nietzsche's style has influenced the modality of representation. So, within the science fiction genre the unreal character of Zoroastrianism and its authorities is idiosyncratic. In almost all of the discussed works one encounters only fragmentary theological speculations. A modus of a satirical view on Zoroastrianism, Zoroastrians, and Zarathushtra is perhaps one of the striking peculiarities, which was not present in other observed discursive constructions. The figure of the prophet Zarathushtra in Russian fiction is not unambiguous because in most cases his appearance is dependent upon context. This means that a variety of characters carry his name. Russian Zoroastrians, whose references are available throughout the text corpus, are sometimes perceived critically, and other times perceived nonsensically. Contrary to that, Central Asia with its inhabitants is widely accepted as an original Zoroastrian area and therefore is evaluated more favorably. Some Zoroastrian images, symbols, or rituals in fiction—e.g. the most widely known *towers of silence*—are used as fashionable, exotic metaphors. However, they are interwoven into narratives describing the lives of ordinary Russian people. There is only one reference that challenges the esoteric view on Zoroastrianism that echoes ideas on the “secret teachings” of Globa's adherents.

## 6.2. Descriptive strategies and discursive modes

Interest in Zoroastrianism has never been widespread and yet it remains constant within Russian culture. The study of Zoroastrianism in Russia is displayed some dispersive interpretative processes throughout many spheres of social life, but nonetheless there are a constraining range of fields where Zoroastrianism enjoys popular, public use. This public access is enabled through the mediation of print or texts circulating on RuNet. An accurate statement requires a number of complementary studies on Zoroastrian discourse from a historical, *longue durée* perspective in this region; however, it would be not completely speculative if one assumed that knowledge and the cultural presence of this religion in Russia has never been discussed at length and in detail except for during the period from the 1990s to the 2000s. The presence of

Zoroastrianism within scholarly and literary discourses can be traced back to earlier periods of Russian history, especially if one observes this territory as a crossroad of incessant cultural exchanges between two culturally constructed abstractions: Orient and Occident. However, since the 1990s, when Zoroastrianism was officially marked on the religious map among other contemporary religions in the Russian Federation, this discourse overstepped its marginality in Russian culture and came into its own.

In my narrowly focused examination of Zoroastrianism, each chapter encounters disciplines that have their own methods of exaggerating some structures of religion. Thus, in Chapters 3 and 6, I used common critical tools to analyse the primary literature; Chapter 2 deals with the history of science and its agenda. My attempt to analyze mass media was the most advantageous, because there are special elaborated methods of collection and evaluation for large amounts of journalistic production. In general, the discursive perspective I use in my study with its a priori interdisciplinary character has allowed me to detect relations between different “maps” of Zoroastrianism within Russian cultural contexts.

Each of four text corpora detected a relative stability in the presence of the reference “Zoroastrianism” in Russian public communications during the last two decades. Zoroastrianism’s prominence, compared with other religions (like Christianity or Islam), is rather low. However, if one pays attention to the NRMs which originated in the 1990s, such misbalance does not seem to be striking. In the following pages I will discuss how religious, scholarly, mass media, and literary fields crystallize Zoroastrian discourse, i.e. how they build patterns through routines and regularities by drawing from their own factual or imaginative resources.

However, I must mention that the intensity of reproducing Zoroastrianism in each field gradually varies: while Zoroastrianism is of paramount importance to the individual and collective creativity of Zoroastrian religious groups, the idea of Zoroastrianism in scholarly production, mass media, and fiction is only found occasionally. The textual and visual capacity of this thema within the first corpus of Russian Zoroastrians and other religious agents is greatly exceeded all others. Contrastingly, there are fewer references to Zoroastrianism in mass media. Scholarly production, mass media, and fiction hold a more abstract idea of Zoroastrianism; they view it as the sum of some idiosyncratic parameters such as “fire-worship” and “funeral rituals.”

The thematic mapping in every separate field can also turn the cultural construction of Zoroastrianism into its historical perspective. However, I argue that the time frame this study was concentrated within was too short to make far-reaching conclusions on the dynamics of common Zoroastrian discourse

that should be seen over a longer period of time and on the basis of richer data. Also, the interest or disinterest in certain themes or the stability of coherent attention to Zoroastrianism during such a short period is not possible to detect, although the analysis displays a number of old discourses on Zoroastrianism that were inherited from earlier historical periods such as the Nietzschean philosophy of Zarathustra. However, mass media is the sphere where such measures make sense because of the intensity of the constant reproduction of a limited number of contents that have few doctrinal and ritual features. Above all, mass media are more effective in perpetuating the stereotypes about Zoroastrianism and Zoroastrians. Thus, by the active use of some references to Zoroastrianism that reveal it as an element of the national culture of ex-Soviet Middle Asian countries since the mid-2000s, the Russian mass media also pursues certain political aims: it articulates interest in an integrative idea for the future of post-Soviet countries and yet again expresses the wish of political power over the former republics and Russian neighbors in the South.

From the four corpora, only the first two offer explanation and a multifaceted view on Zoroastrianism (religious and scholarly fields); the others (mass media and literature) simplify ideas or use selected symbols. Thus, modal distinctions take place through two different strategies—interpretative and nominal-designative—which are both adopted by practitioners and scholars on the one hand, and by journalists and writers on the other. While discourses of Zoroastrian communities seem to appear as constitutive and at some points hybrid-innovative because they restrict established social rules and offer new challenges, the scholarly field in the 1990s seemed to be mostly conservative. Russian Zoroastrians offer multiple varieties of material density in their works, whereas mass media tend to simplify and nominalize their ideas.

Regarding the intersections of theme and content, the four discursive spheres bring to light some inter-discursive asymmetries, which also indicate dependent and independent positions of different discourses. The Zoroastrianism of practitioners is a dimension that is saturated with themes and nuances, and it possesses an immense integrative ability that aims to subordinate certain non-religious, secular contents. Hence, the entire media discourse on Zoroastrianism could be completely integrated into the religious field without fear of engendering any conflicts, except for some critiques on the factual failures of journalists. Similarly, the use of scholarly hypotheses that deal with Zoroastrianism is one of the most popular and most effective methods for practitioners to validate their work. Fictional discourse in some cases appears to conflict the most with religious discourse. This happens because the meaning has been controlled through religious discourse with help of internal authorities as well as through the corpus of doctrinal literature with its exegetic texts. Thus,

fiction shapes figures such as Zarathustra by leaning against the literary tradition that substantially draws on Friedrich Nietzsche, which is completely excluded by Russian Zoroastrians.

However, all knowledge undergoes erosion, which can also be observed in the mapping of Zoroastrianism. Practitioners even try to overcome the “vagueness” of representation by creating some exclusionary mechanisms like “portraits of the enemy” or ritual and food prescriptions (in particular, in Globa’s teachings). Otherwise, the vagueness of discourses opens further possibilities of interpretation for them in a holistic, esoteric manner, which is based on the analogical, metaphorical, and fragmentary understanding of human life and the world. In contrast, scholarly producers use successive exegetic methods in the interpretation of texts and artifacts, which are controlled by verification processes unique to the fields they are working in.

The qualitative (and to some degree) quantitative analysis of the four discourses has shown that Zoroastrian concepts within each field have multiple modes. Whereas some of them enrich each other with new themes and discussions, there are also communication barriers between science, religious, and journalistic layers. On the contrary, scientific and encyclopedic knowledge of Zoroastrianism meets no conflicts in journalistic and practitioner discourses where it is used more intensively than in fiction. Moreover, the increasing print production of practitioner discourse and the mass character of journalistic discourse supplant scholarly discourse from the market. Scholarly discourse suffers from the lack of credibility within two more engaged disciplines—Iranian studies and study of religions—and is also under pressure from new Russian Zoroastrians, who try to legitimize their own groups in the eyes of mass media.

### 6.3. Studying contexts and some comments on method

In retrospect, the discursive study on Russian Zoroastrianism in the 1990s and 2000s finds itself between different disciplinary and interdisciplinary fields. The first field was my original point of departure—the discipline of the study of religions—which is generally interested in diverse aspects of religion in human life, the object of which is not easily definable in the category of religion. In this sense the presented study has tried to make a contribution to the understanding of contemporary religions and esotericism with some inductive remarks about NRMs in the context of social life. In that view Russian Zoroastrianism is an example that is rooted in the era of new capitalism or contemporary social changes (Fairclough 2007:4f), which is surviving economic and political collapse, vividly reacting on and even, to some extent, contributing to social and cultural

changes in that region. It has been shown that Russian Zoroastrianism is an example of religious diversity in modern society. In Russia, it stands as an alternative to the cultivated ideological form of the dominant and politically enforced Russian Orthodox Church by sharing many other discourses that circulate within Russian culture. So, the religious landscape in Russia resembles that of other industrialized countries and Russian Zoroastrianism is an example of strategies taken by small religions that exist on the global level worldwide.

Another scholarly index of Zoroastrianism is the *geographic* one that describes the region of Eastern Europe (one of many cultural oppositions constructed by the Western Europeans). There is also a *thematic* categorization that is placed on Zoroastrianism in my study, located within other fields such as science, the mass media, and literature. It intersects a range of autonomic interdisciplinary fields, including new interdisciplinary foci dealing with countries (Regional or Area studies) or with religion outside of the study of religions. Moreover, it has been argued that modern religions have to be studied by means of complex approaches that accentuate their multi-dimensional regional contexts. Religious currents are embedded in common cultural spaces that crucially determine their style and structure in transforming them into indicators and participants of social life. *Methodologically*, stemming from the former, the study of contemporary religions begs the question of a detailed exegetic work with different kinds of contemporary texts analyzed in context—not only in the genre of religious literature, but also originally dealt with by the scholars of religion—as sources on history of modern religions as an enhancement to field work. Of course, this work has to be open towards any kind of multi-media material that is collected during the study. The category of “holy books” in the study of Russian Zoroastrianism is not of paramount importance to religious groups led by charismatic individuals like in the case of the *St. Petersburg Zoroastrian community*. Works by a religious leader are texts through which Avestan and Pahlavi tracts have been translated into modern times and adopted into everyday Russian life. In that way the study is linked to the hermeneutical and discursive approaches developed within theological and linguistic studies.

If religion is an object of interest for many different disciplines, what can be done on the part of the study of religions? What should its contribution be? First is its ability to be experienced, critical, and self-reflexive: which also entails using a comparative perspective for all phenomena interpreted. In my thesis I focused on seeing social change from a broader perspective, detecting links and deficits in what is known as “discourse analysis.” Apart from the fact that there are many different ideas on what a discourse analysis looks like, my approach stands close to the evaluation of content designed in the form of themes. My analysis was

geared towards qualitative research accompanied by a special text analyzing program that collected a large number of primary sources on Zoroastrianism.

Thus I was guided by discourse analysis in attempting to employ a model with multiple focuses, applying it from inside of the studied culture, which includes the study of the religious discourse together with its traces in culture.

My first attempt was to describe Zoroastrianism as constituting a group activity, in other words, a discursive community, “whose members share sufficient common understandings or a kind of common language enabling them to discourse with one other” (Strenski 2003:185; see also Wuthnow 1988). However, these understandings are unstable, experiencing different internal and external conditions such as splitting and merging, or birth and death; they could also be incoherent, which would make it impossible to think of them in terms of a system. What is important is that a discourse theory inspects every idea in terms of its social history within different contexts. Namely, the mapping of a language as it is used and an accurate description of internal discourses is necessary to understand the mechanisms of representations of religions in our time and thus see such processes from a historical perspective. Religious discourses in that light do not look atypical and foreign to everyday life, but similar to other political, social, or economic discourses, they are a means of building a style for the reproduction of reality. Perhaps the main difference between other meta-discourses of human life is that religious discourses operate in a particular style of language; one of their main features are dichotomies of human existence, articulated in the notorious discourse on transcendence (van Noppen 1988:7).

Apart from intensive discursive reading (e.g. Svalfors 2008) of primary literature that is necessary for students of modern religions (which is a micro level of research), there is the possibility to see religion in action through the analysis of cultural contexts (at a macro level) in its “natural environment” with further interpretative resources and forces.

The relevance of discursive approaches to the study of religions is obvious and has been mentioned elsewhere (Kippenberg & von Stuckrad 2003). Firstly, it reflects historical contexts of religious phenomena. Secondly, it illustrates religions as changing discourses and practices, shows their dynamics, outlines changes in pronunciation for religious utterances, and investigates actors and their multi-dimensional roles within society. Furthermore, discourse analysis is able to detect constellations and contradictions and allows the avoidance of being forced to coherently describe an object in scholarly work. Discourse analysis can also uncover transformative processes at global and local levels.

Discourse analysis can be successfully integrated into other types of analysis including textual and anthropological approaches. As was argued elsewhere,

discursive thinking leads inexorably to overcoming if not breaking disciplinary borders and the policies of different disciplines (Jäger 2007:18). Perhaps that is one of the reasons why discourse analysis did not gain popularity for a long time—with an exception in linguistics—in the established humanities, although it had enjoyed success in small interdisciplinary projects. Now this approach is gaining more and more adherents. In my opinion, it is understandable that discourse analysis has become instrumental to the study of religions following some postmodern tendencies that postulated a broad understanding of religion (see e.g. Eim 2009). Even if discourse analysis does not necessarily solve “old” fundamental problems within the study of religions, it will no doubt be able to offer a flexible, almost universally applicable tool for studying every religion as a set of dynamic and changing structures and, moreover, can reorganize research of religions and pose new questions. Discourse analysis clearly rejects some previous analytical models such as the Durkheimian dichotomy and Geertz’ model of religion as a separate and distinctive cultural system (Schiffauer 2000:319f). What counts is that the variety of possible interpretations describing processes of the origin and developments of religious knowledge are more appropriate in terms of an objective shift in meaning as an “interpretation of interpretation” rather than a search for religious essence. Such multiple focuses from inside the studied culture should also lead to a reduction of Western bias that has been sharply criticized in Postcolonial debates.

Since the study of religions became impossible without broad studies of cultural contexts and their media channels, this means that a scholar of religion has to possess many additional competencies like language skills, regional knowledge, and awareness of intellectual tendencies in the humanities. Any comparative studies in these cases also presuppose deep historical and contextual knowledge that also requires time-consuming procedures. Every approach to discourse analysis explains a great deal but has its blind spots. The investigations in this study have been conducted on a large scale which has led to some vagueness about the material. In discourse analysis, “everything is of importance,” this means that the selection of material is highly subjective and depends upon the researcher and his “phenomenological behavior.” There is no stopping point in the analysis that technically causes multi-volume investigation. What follows is an “error” that is admissible in all qualitative research: the validity of evidence is not always obvious.

This leads me to imagine the study of modern religions as a collective enterprise. This would entail the creation of a database for new religions, and work on texts of diverse religious practitioners that need to be studied together with ethnological data. The differences and intersections of contemporary religious groups could be systematically studied this way.





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# Appendix

## Selected materials to Chapter 2:

Personal communication (interviews and emails) with some Zoroastrians from Russia, Belarus, Uzbekistan (2001–2012)

### Websites:

[arctida.ru](http://arctida.ru)

[ashavan.by.ru](http://ashavan.by.ru)

[asha-piter.ru](http://asha-piter.ru)

[astrus.su](http://astrus.su)

[avesta.isatr.org](http://avesta.isatr.org)

[blagoverie.org](http://blagoverie.org)

[cosmoenergy.ru](http://cosmoenergy.ru)

[globa.ru](http://globa.ru)

[globainstitut.ru](http://globainstitut.ru)

[mitra-piter.narod.ru](http://mitra-piter.narod.ru)

[natureman.ru](http://natureman.ru)

[pavelgloba.ru](http://pavelgloba.ru)

[perm-asha.chat.ru](http://perm-asha.chat.ru)

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[tishtriya.narod.ru](http://tishtriya.narod.ru)

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## Selected materials and their abbreviations to Chapter 4:

- AF Аргументы и факты online ([www.aif.ru](http://www.aif.ru));
- BBCRu Би-Би-Си Русская служба ([www.bbcussian.com](http://www.bbcussian.com));
- ChR Челябинский рабочий (<http://www.chrab.chel.su/news/index.php>);
- G Газета.Ru ([www.gzt.ru](http://www.gzt.ru));
- I Известия.Ру ([www.izvestia.ru](http://www.izvestia.ru));
- IF Международная информационная группа Интерфакс ([www.interfax.ru](http://www.interfax.ru));
- K Издательский дом «Коммерсантъ» ([www.kommersant.ru](http://www.kommersant.ru));
- KP Комсомольская Правда ([www.kp.ru](http://www.kp.ru));
- L Лента.Ру издание Rambler Media Group ([www.lenta.ru](http://www.lenta.ru));
- MK Московский Комсомолец ([www.mk.ru](http://www.mk.ru));
- MT The Moscow Times ([www.themoscowtimes.com](http://www.themoscowtimes.com));
- NewG Новая газета ([www.novayagazeta.ru](http://www.novayagazeta.ru));
- NG Независимая газета ([www.ng.ru](http://www.ng.ru));
- NI Новые Известия ([www.newizv.ru](http://www.newizv.ru));
- NChr Новые Хроники ([novchronic.ru](http://novchronic.ru));
- NR2 РИА «Новый Регион» ([www.nr2.ru](http://www.nr2.ru));
- NRu NEWSru.com ([www.newsru.com](http://www.newsru.com));
- P Правда.Ру ([www.pravda.ru](http://www.pravda.ru));
- PD Петербургский дневник (<http://www.spbdnevnik.ru>);
- PN Пермские новости ([www.permnews.ru](http://www.permnews.ru));
- R IA Regnum ([www.regnum.ru](http://www.regnum.ru));
- Rea Religare: Религия и СМИ ([www.religare.ru](http://www.religare.ru));
- Reo Мир религий ([www.religio.ru](http://www.religio.ru));

- RG Российская газета ([www.rg.ru](http://www.rg.ru));
- RIA РИА НОВОСТИ (<http://rian.ru>);
- RR Русский репортёр ([www.rusrep.ru](http://www.rusrep.ru)) online journal;
- T Труд ([www.trud.ru](http://www.trud.ru));
- U Утро.ру ([www.utro.ru](http://www.utro.ru)) ежедневная электронная газета;
- V Ведомости ([www.vedomosti.ru](http://www.vedomosti.ru)) электронное бизнес-издание;
- VK Волжская Коммуна ([www.vkonline.ru](http://www.vkonline.ru)) газета Самарской области  
Областная общественно-политическая газета;
- V Вечерняя Москва ([www.vmdaily.ru](http://www.vmdaily.ru)) портал городских новостей;
- Vs Вести.Ru ([www.vesti.ru](http://www.vesti.ru));
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