

**Celebrating a Treasure:
140 Years at the First Dastoor
Meherjirana Library**

Navsari, Gujarat, India

January 12-15, 2013



*This conference has been made possible through the
generous support of:*

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Minoo Naval Unwalla (UAE)
The Late Dhunmai T. Batliwala

Forward



It is a distinguished honour to head the First Dastoor Meherjirana Library, this historic institution, as it completes 140 years of service to the cosmopolitan public of Navsari. The treasure the library contains is of manifold value. The library possesses some six hundred Zoroastrian manuscripts, some more than 500 years old, written by hand in the Sanskrit, Persian, Avestan, Pahlavi, and Old Gujarati languages. These manuscripts have been used by generations of foreign scholars who have visited the library as part of their Ph.D. and professional research into the Zoroastrian religion. It is their initiative to hold this conference to interact with national scholars which eventually took shape as a Parzor-Meherjirana initiative. It is indeed a privilege to share the response of so many foreign scholars taking part in the conference and the ever-ready willingness of national scholars to accept our invitation to participate in this conference.

The history of the library is written in letters of gold headed by eminent individuals from Navsari for a number of years. It could not have been possible without the generosity of Burjorji Bomanji Padam on whose land the old *kitābkhāna* (library) existed. Its collection soon outgrew its original space, and in 1906, Jamshedji Kavasji Dastoorji Meherjirana erected an ancient aristocratic building which was further expanded by the family of Rustomji Hormasji Kolah in 1967. Even this premises was found insufficient for the students of Navsari as they flocked to the library for their various projects. Hence the library was further extended with the important donation from the Sir Dorabji Tata Trust to erect a new building in 2009, in which the present Conference is now held.

Though the library has been operating continuously during the last 140 years, there remains much work to do as the library adapts to the twenty-first century. We are in the process of restoring our ancient heritage, the manuscripts which form the core of our library's collection. These manuscripts are being carefully preserved with the help of the Indian Conservation Institute, which has been possible through a donation from the F. E. Dinshaw Trust. We owe our sincerest gratitude to the various donors who make it possible to operate this Institution in its many activities. Our sincerest thanks to the

coordinators of this conference, the trustees, the local managing committee members, and the librarian for making this wonderful conference possible. Whether you have visited the First Dastoor Meherjirana Library before, or whether this is your first of what we hope are many visits, it is my pleasure to welcome you to Navsari on behalf of the Board of Trustees of the First Dastoor Meherjirana Library.

Sincerely Yours,



Ms. K.K. Antia, Chairperson of the Board of Trustees,
The First Dastoor Meherjirana Library, Navsari

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Dear Ms. Katy Antia,

UNESCO Parzor first visited the Meherjirana Library on a field trip over 10 years ago. It was then that we discovered the wealth of history, not just of the Zoroastrians but of the Mughals, as well as a good deal of the socio-cultural and medical riches that this invaluable Collection contained.

I would like to remember with gratitude the late Vada Dasturji Kekobad Meherjirana's support to our Project, which aimed to restore and make available this important collection to researchers across the world. Today, as researchers from some of the finest educational Institutions of the world gather at the Meherjirana Library for this International Conference, it gives me great satisfaction to see the progress that has been made.

I would like to congratulate Katy Antia, Chairperson and the Trustees of the First Dastoor Meherjirana Library and in particular the Librarian, Bharti Gandhi who have worked with great devotion to preserve, improve and make freely available this library collection to all those interested in the Heritage of Humanity.

Navsari has produced great Parsis who have done much for the Indian Nation and have contributed to its economic, social and cultural growth. This was only possible because of the stress on education, both religious and secular, which was emphasized by the Dastoor's of the Meherjirana family who founded this Institution from their personal collection of Manuscripts.

One has to appreciate the vision of the Founders as well as hope that under the guidance of the current team, this vision will enable a physically small but intellectually immense library to continue at the forefront of Zoroastrian and Indian research as a Centre of Excellence for generations to come.

May this be the first of many international gatherings and academic exchanges in the future.

With best wishes,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Shernaz Cama".

Dr. Shernaz Cama
Director,
UNESCO Parzor Project

PARZOR FOUNDATION

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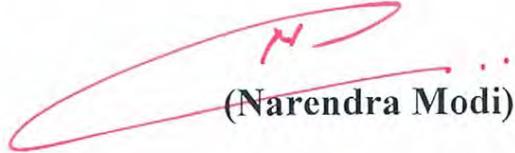


Date: 09-10-2012

Message

It is a pleasure to note that as a gesture for establishing and enhancing religious & cultural linkages between foreign scholars and the youth of Gujarat, the Parsi Samaj of Navsari have enthusiastically taken up the task.

I really appreciate the step to conduct International Conference on Zoroastrian religion by The First Dastoor Meherjirana Library, Navsari. I convey my best wishes for such interactive initiative for religion, history, art and culture, also for the souvenir being publish on this occasion.


(Narendra Modi)

To,
Miss Katy K. Antia,
The First Dastoor Meherjirana Library,
Tarota Bazar, Navsari-396445.

Narendra Modi
Chief Minister, Gujarat State



सत्यमेव जयते

Dr. Sandhya Bhullar I.A.S.

Collector & District Magistrate, Navsari.



1st Floor, Jilla Sava Sadan, Junathana,
Navsari. - 396 445, Gujarat.
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Date : 30-11-2012

I am glad to know that The Dastoor Meherjirana Library - Navsari is holding an international conference on Zoroastrianism, its History, Art and Culture in January, 2013.

I heartily congratulate the management, the Trustees, local Managing Committee members and staff of First Dastoor Meherjirana library on this occasion for bringing out 26 foreign scholars and 10 national scholars to take part in this conference.

The souvenir to be published on this occasion will always remain a remembrance in the history of the library.

I Congratulate the library trustees and management for taking the library to greater heights by organizing an international conference on Zoroastrianism.

I offer my best wishes to all involved in the conduct of this conference for its success.

Ms 30/11/12
(Dr. Sandhya Bhullar)
Collector & D.M.
Navsari

To,

Ms. K.K.Antia
Chairprson/Trustee,
The First Dastoor Meherjirana Library- Navsari
Tarota Bazar, Navsari - 396 445



રમણલાલ વોરા
મંત્રીશ્રી,



ટેલીફોન : (૦૭૯) ૨૩૨૨૩૦૮૦, ૨૩૨૩૮૦૭૩
૨૩૨૫૭૭૬૨, ૨૩૨૫૭૮૬૧

ફેક્સ : (૦૭૯) ૨૩૨૫૭૭૬૬

મંત્રી,

શિક્ષણ (પ્રાથમિક, માધ્યમિક, પ્રૌઢ), ઉચ્ચ અને
ટેકનિકલ શિક્ષણ

બ્લોક નં. ૧, ૮મો માળ, સરદાર પટેલ ભવન,
ગાંધીનગર-૩૮૨ ૦૧૦.

તા ૧.૧૦.૨૦૧૨

—:: શુભેચ્છા સંદેશ ::—

નવસારીના આંગણે ઈ.સ.૧૮૭૪માં સ્થાપવામાં આવેલ પહેલા દસ્તુર મહેરજીરાણા ગ્રંથાલય દ્વારા આગામી જાન્યુઆરી-૨૦૧૩માં જરથોસ્તી ધર્મ, તેનો ઇતિહાસ અને સંસ્કૃતિ પર આંતરરાષ્ટ્રીય સંમેલનનું આયોજન નવસારી ખાતે કરવામાં આવેલ છે તે જાણી આનંદ થયો.

ઈ.સ. ૧૬ મી સદીમાં નવસારીમાં મહેરજી રાણા નામના એક સંત પુરુષનો જન્મ થયો તેની યાદમાં ઈ.સ.૧૮૭૪માં સ્થાપવામાં આવેલ આ લાઈબ્રેરીમાં જરથોસ્તી ધર્મપુસ્તકોનો અમૂલ્ય ખજાનો છે. અવસ્તા, પહેલવી, પાઝંદ અને ફારસી ભાષામાં લખાયેલ અમૂલ્ય હસ્તપ્રતો સાચવવા માટે માઈક્રો ફિલ્મ બનાવવાનો પ્રોજેક્ટ પણ હાથ ધરવામાં આવ્યો છે તે ખુબજ અભિનંદનીય અને ભગિરથ કામ છે

આગામી જાન્યુઆરીમાં યોજાઈ રહેલ આંતરરાષ્ટ્રીય સંમેલનની સફળતા માટે હાર્દિક શુભકામનાઓ સાથે ગુજરાતના ગૌરવ સમી આ ઐતિહાસિક લાઈબ્રેરીના સ્થાપક, સંચાલક અને અત્યાર સુધીના તમામ ટ્રસ્ટીશ્રીઓને અભિનંદન પાઠવું છું.


રમણલાલ વોરા

પ્રતિ,
શ્રીમતી કે. કે. અનિતા,
ચેરપર્સન, પહેલા દસ્તુર મહેરજીરાણા ગ્રંથાલય,
નરોટા બજાર, નવસારી.

The First Dastoor Meherjirana Library

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Mrs. Veera F. Choksey

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Sanjay D. Parmar
Parvati D. Patel
Tina D. Patel

Conference Committee:

Dr. Shernaz Cama (Delhi University)
Dr. Daniel Sheffield (Princeton University)
Mr. Dinyar Patel (Harvard University)

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Navsari

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Navaz Desai
Thrity Suraliwala
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Kerman Marolia

The First Dastoor Meherjirana Library: A Short History

The First Dastoor Meherjirana Library has been continuously serving the people of Navsari, as well as the Parsi and scholarly community, for 140 years. In 1872, a wealthy Mumbai Parsi, named Navsariwala Seth Burjor Bamanji Padam, commissioned a building to be erected on his own land, known as Lakkad Falia, and, with a fund of Rs. 225, the First Dastoor Meherji Rana Library was born.

The library is named for one of the most significant figures in the history of the Parsi community. In 1534 AD (905 AY), a boy was born in Navsari into a priestly family from the Kaka Pahlan pol. This boy was given the name Mahyar, the son of Rana Jesang, and he came to be known as Mahyar (Meherji) Rana. Meherji Rana, who was adopted into the priestly lineage of his paternal uncle (kākā) Vaccha Jesang, was a man renowned for his piety and learning, and his fame was widespread. According to a Persian biography in the library's possession, the Māhyārnāma (Manuscript F-81), Meherji Rana was chosen by the Mughal governor at Surat to have an audience with the Emperor Akbar to explain the Zoroastrian religion. During his stay at the court from 1578-9 AD, Meherji Rana impressed the emperor so much that according to the Mughal courtly historian 'Abd al-Qādir al-Badā'ūnī, the emperor ordered his vizier Abu 'l-Fazl to keep a fire burning day and night at the court. According to the traditional account found in the Māhyārnāma, Meherji Rana thwarted the sorcery of a Hindu priest called Jagatguru, who, according to the story, had caused a plate to levitate into the sky appearing like a second sun. Before Meherji Rana left the court, he was presented with a jāgīr or land grant by the emperor, receiving property in an area called Ghelkhadi, near the modern town of Navsari.

Meherji Rana's presence in Akbar's court was a great historic incident for not only the Parsis of Navsari, but for the whole Parsi community. Appreciating this, when he returned to Navsari, all the priests accepted him as the head of the Navsari priests, and for the first time the title of high priest (vaḍā dastur) was bestowed. Therefore, he became famous as the First Dastoor Meherji Rana, beginning a priestly lineage which continues to the present day. For almost 50 years (1960-2010), the Navsari community was served by Marhum Dastoor Meherji Kekobad Dastoor Meherji Rana, the sixteenth member of the Meherjirana family to bear the title Dastoor. On January 25, 2010, Kaikhushroo Navroze Dastoor was chosen as the seventeenth Dastoor Meherji Rana.

After the construction of the first library building in 1872, a formal trust deed was drawn up in 1874, and a committee was formed for the management of the library. From its very beginning, the Library has been cosmopolitan and has served all the communities of Navsari. The library was visited by international scholars interested in Zoroastrianism from a very early date, and to this day, the library's guestbook is virtually a "Who's who" of Zoroastrian studies. As the library's collections grew, the original building was found too small, and in 1906 Jamshedji Kavasji Dastoor Meherji Rana gifted the present building, located near the Navsari Atash Behram, to the library. In 1967, a famous merchant of the Kolahji family Seth Rustomji Hormusji Kolah provided the funds for annex to be built. In 1999, the entire library structure and interior were renovated with

funds donated by Sir Dorabji Tata Trust to provide its patrons better amenities. In March 2008, another hall was constructed above the 1967 annex with the library's own funds. In September 2009, a new annex building was constructed from funds donated by Sir Dorabji Tata Trust wherein various modern facilities have been incorporated, including a new reading room, a conference hall, apartments for visiting scholars, and a laboratory for the preservation of the library's many rare books. The present international conference is the first of what we hope will be many conferences to come.

Conference Schedule

SATURDAY, JANUARY 12

8:00-8:30 AM	Participants assemble at Colaba YMCA (Mumbai) for departure to Navsari.
9:00 AM	Bus departs from Colaba YMCA for Navsari.
12:00 PM	Lunch en route to Navsari.
~ 2:00 PM	Estimated arrival in Navsari. Guests will be taken to their accommodations, where they will be greeted by conference liaisons.
4:00 PM	Conference registration begins at Meherjirana Library. The bus will provide shuttle service for guests from their accommodations to the library.
6:00 PM	Conference Inauguration by Katy Antia (Chair of the Board of Trustees, First Dastoor Meherjirana Library), Bharti Gandhi (Librarian, First Dastoor Meherjirana Library), Dr. Shernaz Cama (Delhi University, UNESCO Parzor Project) and Dasturji Firoze M. Kotwal .
6:30-7:00 PM	Inaugural Address by Dasturji Dr. Firoze M. Kotwal : <i>A Historical Overview of the Parsi Settlement in Navsari and Its Rise as the Bastion of Zoroastrianism.</i>
7:15 PM	Dinner.
8:30 PM	Bus shuttles participants to their accommodations.

SUNDAY, JANUARY 13

- 8:00 AM Shuttle service to library begins.
- 8:00-9:00 AM Breakfast for participants.
- 9:00-10:30 AM **Panel 1. *A Fortress of Writing: Approaches to the Study of Zoroastrian Manuscripts.*** Chair: Almut Hintze
- **Alberto Cantera** (University of Salamanca): *Illuminated Avestan Manuscripts.*
 - **Ervad Parvez Bajan** (Mumbai): *Transmission, Propagation and Preservation of Avestan-Pahlavi Literature through Manuscript Traditions.*
 - **Leon Goldman** (School for Oriental and African Studies, London): *The Sanskrit Yasna.*
 - **Shervin Farridnejad** (George-August University of Göttingen): *Artistic Aspects of Avestan and Pahlavi Manuscripts: Some Points on Codicology and Palaeography of Zoroastrian Manuscripts.*
- 10:30-10:45 AM Refreshment break.
- 10:45-12:15 PM **Panel 2. *Sea of Poppies, City of Dreams: Parsi History in Gujarat and Mumbai.*** Chair: Daniel Sheffield
- **Meher Mistry** (University of Mumbai): *Bharuch and the Kabiseh Controversy.*
 - **Dasturji Khurshed Dastoor** (Iranshah Atash Behram, Udvada): *Historical Chronology of Kisseh-i-Sanjan and the Iranshah Atashbehram.*
 - **Simin Patel** (Oxford University): *“The Shoe Question:” Self and State Fashioning in Colonial Bombay.*
 - **Marzban Giara** (Independent Scholar, Mumbai): *Parsee Prakash: A Chronicle of Important Events in the Growth of the Parsee Community in Western India.*
- 12:15 AM-1:45 PM Lunch break.
- 1:45-3:15 PM **Panel 3. *Reassessing the Study of Zoroastrianism.*** Chair: Jamsheed Choksy
- **Götz König** (Free University of Berlin): *The Forgotten Codices.*
 - **Takeshi Aoki** (Waseda University, Tokyo): *A Study of Zurvanite Zoroastrianism.*

- **David Buyaner** (Free University of Berlin): *Penance of Sins in the Avesta and Pahlavi Literature.*
- **Pooriya Alimoradi** (Concordia University): *Zoroastrian Clergy Dealing with Rebellions in 8th-9th-Century Iran according to the Eschatological Texts.*

3:15-3:30 PM

Refreshment Break

3:30-5:00 PM

Panel 4. *The Ways of Our Forebears: Zoroastrian Traditions and Rituals in India and Iran.* Chair: Götz König

- **Khojeste Mistree** (Zoroastrian Studies, Bombay Parsi Punchayet): *The Recital of the Namgrahan and the Preservation of the Bhagaria Fehrest System: Its Historical and Socio-Religious Links.*
- **Sarah Stewart** (School for Oriental and African Studies, London): *The Navsari Ātash Bahrām in Literature and Song.*
- **Anton Zykov** (School for Oriental and African Studies, London): *Nasusalars and Khandias in the Zoroastrian Communities of Iran and India.*
- **Ervad Ramiyar Karanjia** (Dadar Athornan Institute, Mumbai): *Ritual reflecting life: Life and society as reflected from some lesser-known invocations of Bāj-dharnā.*

5:00 PM

Shuttle service begins.

6:30-7:30 PM

Performance of a Parsi Gujarati play (*nāṭak*) by Yazdi Karanjia and troupe.

7:30-10:00 PM

Gala Dinner

MONDAY, JANUARY 14

- 8:00 AM Shuttle service begins.
- 8:00-9:30 AM Breakfast for participants.
- 9:30-10:30 AM **Plenary address by Amitav Ghosh**, recipient of the Dan David Award (2010) and the Padma Shri (2007), author of *In an Antique Land*, *The Glass Palace*, and *The Ibis Trilogy*.
Title: *The Parsi Presence in Canton in the 19th Century*.
- 10:30-10:45 AM Refreshment break.
- 10:45 AM -12:30 PM **Panel 5.** *The Shaping of Parsi Modernity: Reform, Nationalism, and Identity among Indian Zoroastrians*. Chair: Sarah Stewart.
- **Afshin Marashi** (University of Oklahoma): *The Life and Work of Dinshah Irani and His Collaboration with Iranian Intellectuals in Reviving Zoroastrianism in Iran*.
 - **Dinyar Patel** (Harvard University): *The Banaji and Mehta Families: Forging the Parsi Community in Calcutta*.
 - **Sadaf Jaffer** (Harvard University): *Zoroastrianism beyond Blood: Dastur Dhalla's Transformational Autobiography*.
 - **Pranoti Chirmuley** (Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi): *Change in Religious and Cultural Identity among Bombay and Delhi Parsi Zoroastrians*.
- 12:30-2:15 PM Lunch.
- 2:15-3:45 PM **Panel 6.** *New Approaches to the Avesta*. Chair: Alberto Cantera
- **Almut Hintze** (School for Oriental and African Studies, London): *Avestan manuscripts and digital scholarship: Towards a new edition of the Yasna*.
 - **Miguel-Ángel Andrés Toledo** (Free University of Berlin): *The Role of the Manuscripts of The First Dastur Meherjirana Library in the Transmission of the Vīštāsp Yašt*.
 - **Kianoosh Rezania** (Georg-August University of Göttingen): *Circumambulation: An Old Zoroastrian Ritual Practice?*
 - **Smita Sahgal** (Lady Shri Ram College, University of Delhi): *Paths Tread Together: The Quest for Commonality in the Traditions of the Avesta and the R̥gveda*.
- 3:45-4:00 PM Teatime break.
- 4:00-5:30 PM **Panel 7.** *Zoroastrianism and Islam in the Persianate World*. Chair:

Dinyar Patel

- **Iris Colditz** (Free University of Berlin): *A New Project on Processes of Interaction and Transfer between Zoroastrian and Islamic Law in Post-Sasanian Iran (7th-11th c.)*
- **Ervad Dr. Rooyintan Peer** (Mumbai): Topic TBA.
- **Murali Ranganathan** (Independent Scholar and Journalist, Mumbai): *Early Persian Newspapers of Mumbai*.
- **Daniel Sheffield** (Princeton University): *The Loss of the Persianate and the Recovery of the Iranian: Parsi Philologists in 19th-Century Bombay*.

5:30 PM

Shuttle service begins.

7:00-10:00 PM

Dinner.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 15

- 8:00 AM Shuttle service begins.
- 8:00-9:30 AM Breakfast for participants.
- 9:30-10:30 AM **Panel 8. Zoroastrianism in the Contemporary World.** Chair: Afshin Marashi
- **Jamsheed Choksy** (Indiana University): *The Zoroastrians of Colonial Ceylon and Independent Sri Lanka.*
 - **Shernaz Cama** (University of Delhi, UNESCO Parsi Zoroastrian Project): *Cultural Memory: Intersecting Narratives in the Contemporary World.*
 - **Dasturji Cyrus Dastoor** (D. N. Modi Shahenshahi Atash Behram, Surat): *A Short History of the D. N. Modi Shahenshahi Atash Behram, Surat.*
- 10:30-10:45 AM Refreshment break.
- 10:45 AM-12:15 PM **Panel 9. Preserving Heritage: Art, Archaeology, and Zoroastrianism,** Chair: Katy Antia
- **Homi Dhalla** (World Zarathushti Cultural Foundation) and **Rukhshana Nanji** (Independent Archaeologist): *The Archaeology and Conservation of Sanjan and Bahrot.*
 - **Reza Hosseini** (University of Delhi): *The Nawroz Festival in Delhi Sultanate: an Issue of Convergence in Heterogeneous Court of Sultans.*
 - **Dasturji Peshotan Mirza** (Iranshah Atash Behram, Udvada): *Reverence to Stars in the Zoroastrian Religion.*
- 12:15-2:00 PM Lunch.
- 2:00-3:15 PM **Roundtable Discussion followed by Questions and Answers,** led by Daniel Sheffield and Dinyar Patel.
- 3:15 PM Shuttle service begins.
- 3:30-5:30 PM Walking Tour of Navsari.
- 7:00-10:00 PM Closing ceremony and dinner.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 16

8:00-9:30 AM	Breakfast.
10:00 AM	Bus departs Navsari.
1:00 PM	Lunch en route to Mumbai.
4:30 PM	Participants dropped off in Colaba, Mumbai.

Abstracts of Presentations Received
(listed in alphabetical order by last name of presenter):

POORIYA ALIMORADI (Concordia University, pooriya_alimoradi@yahoo.com)

Zoroastrian clergy dealing with rebellions in the 8-9th century Iran according to the eschatological texts (Panel 3)

Not long after the Arab invasion, Iranians, like most of the other conquered nations, started to rise against the new rulers. Amongst the list of the major revolts, I focus on those who had directly or indirectly used pre-Islamic identity to gain more attention between Iranians, namely: Spāhbad Xorshid, Ostād Sis, Ishaq Turk, Bābak, Māziār, Bēh Āfarid, Hamza Āzarak, Rāvandis, Sinbād the Magus and Al-Muqanna'. But the question is while we expect that the Zoroastrian clergy would welcome any revolt against Arabs as such, this did not happen. As we can see in the Middle Persian sources, most of these revolts were perceived as horrible events.

In this article I am trying to show that the Zoroastrian priesthood, as the custodians of the *Dēn*, had persuasive reasons to compromise on Arab supremacy. After the Arab invasion of the Iranian plateau, most social structures remained the same. New rulers, not familiar with the requirements of managing this vast empire, needed ex-officers to operate the huge administrative system. Finding themselves unable to defeat the new power, compromising with the new rulers enabled the defeated former nobility (*mōbeds*, *āzādān*, *dehqāns*, etc.) to retain their status at the top of the social pyramid of their communities.

From another point of view, revolts often lead to devastation, demolition, destruction and massacres. Large numbers of people (including Zoroastrians and their clergies) died and many fire temples were demolished. So, in this situation, the Zoroastrian clergy preferred to have a powerful, more stable government – even though non-Zoroastrian – to guarantee their safety, despite the fact that they had to pay *gaziya* (*jizya*). The same attitude is visible among Shi'ite 'Ulama to prefer a pagan government over a cruel one.

MIGUEL-ÁNGEL ÁNDRES-TOLEDO (Freie Universität Berlin, maat@zedat.fu-berlin.de)

The role of the manuscripts of The First Dastur Meherjirana Library in the transmission of the Vīštāsp Yašt (Panel 6)

In contrast with the Avestan texts of other liturgies, like the *Yasna*, *Vīspērad* or *Vīdēvdād*, the less-known Avestan text of the Vīštāsp Yašt is scarcely preserved in a few manuscripts around the world, most of them belonging to The First Dastur Meherjirana Library in Navsari. The impressive collection of this library provides the researcher with the most important manuscripts not only to edit and interpret this text, but also to understand its written transmission in India.

TAKESHI AOKI (Waseda University, Tokyo, ace79810@snow.odn.ne.jp)

A Study on Zurvanite Zoroastrianism (Panel 3)

A Persian treatise entitled '*Ulamā-ye Islām*, whose origin is supposed to be the Pahlavi Edict by the Sasanian Prime Minister Mihr Narseh (5th CE) to force Armenian Christians to convert to Zoroastrianism at that time, i.e. Zurvanism, is the only surviving work from

a Zurvanite point of view. Although the Persian text has been published in lithograph and print since the 1820s, no critical editions exist thus far. To address this situation, I have collected independent manuscripts of this treatise both already known in Mumbai (3) and Navsari (1) and unknown in Tehran (2) and Hyderabad Deccan (1), and have prepared the stemma codicorum of *'Ulamā-ye Islām* and established an Urtext that could account for the variants.

This process generated a number of findings, not confined to detailed textual issues, but including religious history. The Zurvanite thought expressed in this Urtext strikingly resembles Manichaeism in its Cosmology, Anthropology and Eschatology rather than the Dualistic Zoroastrianism in Pahlavi Books written between the 9th and 10th centuries. If Zurvanism is allowed to speak for itself, it can tell us a great deal about the religious history of Early Sasanian Persia, in particular about Zurvanism's unexpected influence on Manichaeism, in its historical context.

ERVAD PARVEZ BAJAN (Mumbai, pmbajan@gmail.com)

Transmission, Propagation and Preservation of Avestan-Pahlavi Literature through Manuscript Traditions (Panel 1)

The texts of the Avesta have been handed down from generation to generation through oral transmission, by word of mouth, since ancient times. Besides these, there were also written Avestan texts (*Apastāk u Zand*) in Sasanian times specially meant for scriptural studies. Hence the Avestan texts have been handed down by a double transmission; oral and written. The Pahlavi Literature records this double tradition of the oral and the written transmission of the Avestan texts.

The Pahlavi language in varied forms and dialects, flourished with ups and downs for about twelve centuries – from the 3rd Century B.C. upto the 9th Century A.C. It was the state language of the Parthians and Sasanians. It was also the religious language of the Zoroastrians in the Parthian and the Sasanian times; and even during post-Sasanian times up to the end of the 9th Century.

The Zoroastrian priests composed and compiled books and treatises in Pahlavi on religious, historical, legal and other secular subjects in the 9th Century, based on the older sources available in those days.

These manuscripts, written by Iranian and later Zoroastrian Scribes on hand-made paper, parchment, and other materials centuries ago need to be restored and preserved as they reflect the Zoroastrian tenets, customs and manners practiced then. These manuscripts are a valuable asset and precious heritage of the Parsi community and are preserved at present in the public and private libraries of Europe and India.

DAVID BUYANER (Freie Universität Berlin, david.buyaner@gmail.com)

Penance of sins in the Avesta and in Pahlavi literature (Panel 3)

The paper focuses on the varieties of usage of the Pahlavi word *patit* in Pahlavi literature by considering the relevant passages of the Avesta together with their parallels in Pahlavi sources. The questions to be elucidated thereby are as follows:

1. What is the relationship between Phl. *patit* and Av. *pa(i)tita-*, *pa(i)titi-*, usually regarded as its source?
2. What are the semantics of Phl. *patit*? May a constant meaning preserved throughout different texts be established, or there was some semantic development? If so, what were its stages?
3. What suggestion can be made, on the basis of the relevant sources, as regards the probable date and cultural context of the rise of penitential practice in medieval Zoroastrianism?

SHERNAZ CAMA (University of Delhi, shernazcama@hotmail.com)

Cultural Memory: Intersecting Narratives in the Contemporary World

Cultural Memory reflects diversity and similarity but is endangered by globalization. Each of us ‘lives at the intersection’ of many narratives (Lyotard: *The Postmodern Condition*), but the hybrid heritage of the Parsi Zoroastrians requires attention from culture specialists for it reflects how four cultures – Iranian, Chinese, Indian and European – create a special heritage of humanity.

Both in material and intangible heritage, the core culture of the Parsi Zoroastrians remained strong until recent times; it is suddenly being lost. There is need for urgent study from culture specialists and all those interested in history to try and document as well as stem this decline. It was primarily through oral traditions that Zoroastrian heritage descended. In later times, it was protected through an identity created by the Parsi Gujarati dialect adopted in India, the monajats of childhood and oral teaching. A complex and ancient cross-cultural craft heritage too was inherited through orality.

This paper examines both intangible and tangible heritage with audio-visual support through the brief examination of two monajats and 29 slides. It studies the meaning of the craft of Kusti-weaving as well as embroidery symbolism drawn both from the *Bundahišn* as well as oral narrative. Reflected in all Zoroastrian cultural memory is environmental consciousness and joy in *Spenta*, bountiful creation. This core consciousness in cultural memory is examined, through material symbols as well as intangible traditions engrained first in childhood.

It is hoped that academic research in the material culture as well as intangible traditions of the Parsi Zoroastrians will be stimulated by this presentation.

ALBERTO CANTERA (University of Salamanca, acanter@usal.es)

Illuminated Avestan Manuscripts (Panel 1)

JAMSHEED CHOKSY (University of Indiana, jchoksy@indiana.edu)

The Zoroastrians of Colonial Ceylon and Independent Sri Lanka (Panel 8)

Maritime trade was a major impetus for resettlement of Zoroastrians as merchants from the Parsi community of India and also from Iran to colonial-era Ceylon. Other Zoroastrians came as bankers, attorneys, and skilled and unskilled workers. Their descendants still live in Sri Lanka—as the island is now know—worship at a fire temple staffed by a *mobed* or priest from India, perform *navjote* or initiation, wedding, *jashan* or

prayer, and other ceremonies, and bury their dead in an *ārāmgāh* or place of repose. This presentation examines their faith and society in a historical context from the late sixteenth century to the present. It also looks at the challenges they faced and the adaptations they made to their religious and communal practices to accommodate both modernity and minority status. Images will be shown as well.

IRIS COLDITZ (Freie Universität Berlin, iriscolditz@gmx.de)

A new project on processes of interaction and transfer between Zoroastrian and Islamic law in post-Sasanian Iran (7th-11th c.) (Panel 7)

In this paper, a new research project, as part of a Collaborative Research Centre (CRC) “Epistemology in Movement” at the Free University Berlin, Germany, shall be presented. The focus of this Centre is on the process of knowledge transition in European and non-European cultures from the ancient world to the early modern era. The aforementioned project shall analyse processes of interaction and transfer of knowledge between Zoroastrian law and early Islamic law in post-Sasanian Iran from the 7th to the 11th c. In this period, Zoroastrian communities continued to apply their own legal system inherited from Sasanian time for internal affairs. At the same time, the Islamic law passed an important state of development, where Šī‘ite law separated more and more from the Sunnite one. Some striking similarities between legal concepts of Zoroastrian and especially Šī‘ite law (for example in family law) point to possible interactions between both legal systems. The project shall make a contribution to the reconstruction of the legal history of Iran and the development of its legal terminology.

DASTURJI CYRUS DASTOOR (D. N. Modi Shahenshahi Atash Behram)

A Short History of the D. N. Modi Shahenshahi Atash Behram, Surat (Panel 8)

DASTURJI KHURSHED DASTOOR (Iranshah Atash Behram, Udvada)

Historical Chronology of Kisseh-i-Sanjan and the Iranshah Atashbehram (Panel 2).

HOMI DHALLA (World Zarathushti Cultural Foundation, wzcf@bom8.vsnl.net.in) and RUKSHANA NANJI (Independent Archaeologist, rukshana.nanji@gmail.com)

The Archaeology and Conservation of Sanjan and Bahrot (Panel 9)

Sanjan and Bahrot are two of the earliest known Zoroastrian / Parsi settlements on Indian soil. The *Kisse-i-Sanjan*, a Persian quasi-historical poem written in 1599 CE, records the migration of Persian Zoroastrians to India, their settlement at Sanjan and the their forced abandonment of the site centuries later when it was invaded. The history of this community has been studied and recorded on the basis of historical, literary and other sources by historians and scholars. However, no attempt had been made to verify this historical information through any archaeological and scientific work. The World Zarathushti Cultural Foundation undertook excavations at the site of Sanjan between 2002 and 2004, bringing to light a large and prosperous port settlement which had played a crucial role in the trans-oceanic trade of the Indian Ocean during the Early Medieval period. Scientific analysis of the archaeological material, Radio Carbon and AMS dates and analysis of the human remains from the Dakhma have provided invaluable information and have put Zoroastrian / Parsi history in perspective.

The Bahrot caves which housed the Holy Iranshah for twelve long years when the Zoroastrians fled from Sanjan have been in dire need of conservation. The WZCF has been pursuing this matter with the relevant government departments and authorities. Explorations around the caves have revealed other archaeological remains which require investigation. Several factors, administrative as well as natural, have proved an impediment. Despite these hurdles, the WZCF has pursued the matter and has achieved commendable success in this direction.

This paper presents a brief overview of the findings of the excavations at Sanjan and the present status and conservation work at Bahrot.

SHERVIN FARRIDNEJAD (University of Göttingen, s.farridnejad@phil.uni-goettingen.de)

Artistic aspects of Avestan and Pahlavi Manuscripts. Some points on Codicology and Palaeography of Zoroastrian Manuscripts (Panel 1)

MARZBAN GIARA (Independent Scholar, Mumbai, marzbang@gmail.com)

Parsee Prakash: A Chronicle of Important Events in the Growth of the Parsee Community in Western India (Panel 2)

In this presentation, the important work of reference *Parsee Prakash* will be discussed. This compilation gives in a chronological order the details of the lives and doings of those who had in some special manner contributed to the development of those characteristics – loyalty, love of truth and justice, liberality, and mercantile enterprise – which distinguished the community. Their rapid development from a state of obscurity and poverty into opulence and social and political importance is especially worthy of note. It would be an instructive as well as an interesting task to trace the causes, which have tended to give the Parsees a prestige for unfeigned attachment to their rulers, magnanimity and benevolence and an ardent desire for advancement.

LEON GOLDMAN (School for Oriental and African Studies, London, lg13@soas.ac.uk)

The Sanskrit Yasna (Panel 1)

In 12th century India, the Mobed Neryosangh Dhaval undertook to produce a Sanskrit translation of the Yasna – the central liturgical text of the Zoroastrian religion. Neryosangh's work however, was not based directly upon the original Avestan language version of the Yasna, but rather, on the Middle Persian translation and commentary of it produced in Iran during the first millennium CE. As such, it affords unique insights into the development of Zoroastrian ideas, showing how the base text came to be interpreted and reinterpreted in two different historical and cultural contexts.

This presentation will consider such aspects of the little-studied Sanskrit work as its written transmission, its style of language and the translation technique employed by its creator, once dubbed by the Iranist Helmut Humbach as the 'forgotten founder' of Indo-Iranian comparative philology and linguistics.

ALMUT HINTZE (School for Oriental and African Studies, London, ah69@soas.ac.uk)

Avestan manuscripts and digital scholarship: Towards a new edition of the Yasna (Panel 6)

Over the past years, chiefly thanks to the efforts of Professor Alberto Cantera and his team, a considerable number of new Avestan manuscripts in both India and Iran, including the Meherjirana Library, have come to light and are now available in electronic form on the website of the Avestan Digital Archive. Moreover, he and Miguel Ángel Andrés-Toledo have demonstrated that the Avesta edition of Karl Friedrich Geldner, now more than one hundred years old, is no longer satisfactory. In addition to these electronic textual resources, a variety of sophisticated technologies and tools for encoding, genealogically analyzing and text editing manuscripts are now available.

This paper presents the method that underlies the work on a proposed new edition of the Yasna. The project, called Digital Yasna, proposes to create a web-based electronic platform of Avestan, Pahlavi and Sanskrit Yasna manuscripts encoded in Extensible Markup Language (XML) according to the fifth version of the Guidelines of the Text Encoding Initiative (TEI P5). The TEI Guidelines constitute a *de facto* standard format for encoding texts in a variety of languages and are also at the heart of several successful research projects concerned with manuscripts and text editions, such as the International Greek New Testament Project (IGNT, <http://www.igntp.org/>). However, they have never been brought to bear on the texts of the Zoroastrian tradition. The Digital Yasna project has the ambitious objective of exploiting the XML format technologies of Digital Humanities for the benefit of Avestan manuscript studies, thus taking the subject into a new field of enquiry.

SADAF JAFFER (Harvard University, sadaf.jaffer@gmail.com)

Zoroastrianism Beyond Blood: Dastoor Dhalla's Transformational Autobiography (Panel 5)

The autobiography of Dastur Dr. Maneckji Nusserwanji Dhalla (1875-1956), the high priest of Karachi, provides his nuanced recollection of the transformations that took place both in his own life as well as in the South Asian Zoroastrian community over the course of nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Originally a self-professed orthodox priest, Dhalla eventually comes to the conclusion that ritual practice is not as important as an ethical understanding of religion, yet he maintains that there is a pristine core of Zoroastrianism and it is this core that should be the focus of a united community. In this paper, I argue that the transformation Dhalla highlights within his personal philosophy is one of progress from outdated customs to a religion of reason and ethics, which has powerful implications for Zoroastrian practice, belief and community boundaries.

ERVAD RAMIYAR KARANJIA (Dadar Athornan Institute, Mumbai, ramiyark@gmail.com)

Ritual reflecting life: Life and society as reflected from some lesser-known invocations of Bāj-dharnā (Panel 4)

GÖTZ KÖNIG (Freie Univesität Berlin, goetz_koenig@yahoo.de)

The Forgotten Codices (Panel 3)

Since the emergence of Avestan studies, it was the endeavor of the scholars to create an "Avesta", a coherent book, out of the very different codices. The results produced by this endeavor were quite different (cf. Anquetil and Westergaard/Geldner). In contrast to these (older) Avestan studies, it was the prevailing practice in the Pahlavi philology (and also the practice of the Avestan philology in the 20th century) to 'cut' texts out from the codices. Here and there, the codex as an entity was widely neglected. The question arises whether the Zoroastrian codices are arbitrary compilations or intentional compositions.

KOTWAL, FIROZE M. (

A Historical Overview of the Parsi Settlement in Navsari and Its Rise as the Bastion of Zoroastrianism (Inauguration)

In this lecture, an overview of the history of the Parsi community in Navsari will be presented beginning with the earliest evidence for Zoroastrians in Western India and tracing the development of the community over the course of centuries. In particular, the presentation will focus on the development of the Parsi priesthood and religious institutions in Navsari. I will describe the formation of the *pols* of Navsari and discuss the five *panthaks* of Parsi priests. I will then trace the history of Navsari's *Vadi Dar-i Mihr* and its *dakhma* and relate the bringing of the Atash Behram from Sanjan during the time of the influential Desai of Navsari, Changa Asha. I will then discuss the establishment of the Dasturship of the Meherjirana family in the time of the Mughal Emperor Akbar. Finally, I will discuss the religious conflicts which lead to the removal of the Sanjan Atash Behram from Navsari to Udvada, and will conclude with the establishment of the Atash Behram of the Navsari Bhagarsath Anjuman in 1765.

AFSHIN MARASHI (University of Oklahoma, afshinmarashi@gmail.com)

The life and work of Dinshah Irani and his collaboration with Iranian intellectuals in reviving Zoroastrianism in Iran (Panel 5)

This presentation will examine the life and work of Dinshah Irani (1882-1938), a prominent Parsi scholar, lawyer, and philanthropist who was a key intellectual intermediary between the Parsi community of Bombay and the intellectual community of Iranian nationalists during the 1920s and 1930s. The presentation will detail the role played by Irani in patronizing the publication of Zoroastrian-themed printed works in Bombay that were intended for export to the reading market in Iran. In particular the talk will highlight the collaboration between Irani and Ebrahim Purdavud, an Iranian scholar of Zoroastrianism and the first translator of the Zoroastrian texts into modern Persian. By focusing on these issues, the talk will detail the important role the Parsi community of Bombay played in the revival of Iranian antiquity during the early twentieth century among Iranian intellectuals. The article also highlights the transnational cultural and intellectual history of Iranian nationalism during the Reza Shah period.

DASTURJI PESHOTAN MIRZA (Iranshah Atash Behram, Udvada)

Reverence to Stars in the Zoroastrian Religion (Panel 9).

KHOJESTE MISTREE (Zoroastrian Studies, Mumbai, zstudies@vsnl.com)

The Recital of the Namgrahan and the Preservation of the Bhagaria Fehrist system, its Historical and Socio-Religious Links (Panel 4)

In this paper an attempt will be made to trace allusions to the *namgrahan* in the Gathas, to establish both its antiquity and subsequent continuity and usage in modern times. It is suggested that the *namgrahan* list has helped to preserve over the centuries a historical memory and reflects the ancient agnatic system as followed by the priests.

It will be argued, that the various *fihrists* or registers maintained in the Bhagaria tradition within the structure of the faith, are not only a primary source of priestly record in the community but their maintenance allowed the co-sharing system to function equitably and in turn proved to be invaluable in matters of disputes. The right of priests to include a name in the *namgrahan* and the controversy surrounding the taking of such names in recent times will be examined.

MEHER MISTRY (University of Mumbai, mehermistry76@gmail.com)

Bharuch and the Kabiseh Controversy (Panel 2)

The *Kabiseh* or “Calendar intercalation” controversy that arose in the mid-18th century led to a violent conflict at Surat and Bharuch. It split the Parsi community into two sects: Kadmis and Shehenshahis. The prominent leaders of the contending sects in Surat, namely Dhunjeeshah Munjeeshah and Muncherji Khurshedji Seth, were men with political connections and economic clout who involved the local and European powers to assert their stand on the dispute. The political history of Bharuch was inextricably involved in this dispute, and it finally led to the capture of Bharuch from the Nawab by the English in 1772. It also led to a severe riot among the Parsis at Bharuch in 1781 A. D. This paper attempts to study the ramifications of the controversy at Bharuch with the help of some rare manuscripts of the Meherjirana Library corroborated with the Surat and Bharuch English East India Factory Diaries.

RUKSHANA NANJI (Independent Archaeologist, rukshana.nanji@gmail.com)

The Archaeology and Conservation of Sanjan and Bahrot (Panel 9)

See abstract above under **Homi Dhalla**.

DINYAR PATEL (Harvard University, dinyar.patel@gmail.com)

The Banaji and Mehta Families: Forging the Parsi Community in Calcutta (Panel 5)

The Calcutta Parsi community was unique in many ways: it was one of the earliest and largest settlements outside of western India, and it produced numerous individuals who exercised great political and economic influence on Bengal, eastern India, and the subcontinent in general. This paper will trace the evolution of the community by examining two of its most prominent families, the Banajis and the Mehtas, paying special attention to Rustamji Dhanjibhai Mehta (1849-1930) who helped establish an *atash adaran* that celebrated its hundredth year in 2011. Peering into the histories of these two families helps us understand the intertwined relationships between commercial success, political influence, and community leadership; it also might help us answer why Calcutta had two functioning fire temples for several decades.

SIMIN PATEL (Oxford University, siminpatel@yahoo.com)

“The Shoe Question:” Self and State Fashioning in Colonial Bombay (Panel 2)

MURALI RANGANATHAN (Independent Scholar, Mumbai, murali.ranganathan@gmail.com)

Early Persian Newspapers of Mumbai (Panel 7)

While the study of the history of print culture in India is at a nascent stage, languages like Persian, moribund in India, have been all but ignored in this narrative. Persian newspapers of the nineteenth century, especially the first half, played an important role in the development of the Indian public sphere – to a certain extent, they continued in the vein of the pre-British *akhbars*, while on the other hand, they gradually took on the character of a modern newspaper. Mumbai, for historical and geographical reasons, emerged as a centre of Persian language activity during this period and its rapidly burgeoning printing infrastructure facilitated the development of Persian, as a language for books and newspapers. Using a range of contemporary government records and newspapers, an attempt is made here to reconstruct the history of these early Persian newspapers. Over a dozen Persian newspapers are identified, most of them for the first time; a preliminary attempt is made to understand the impact of these newspapers and the motivations of their editors – Parsi, Hindu and Muslim.

KIANOOSH REZANIA (University of Göttingen, rezania@phil.uni-goettingen.de)

Circumambulation: an Old Zoroastrian ritual practice? (Panel 6)

Space is, like time, one of the fundamental dimensions of any religious system. It can be viewed in different fields: cosmic, social as well as ritual. In the ritual field one is concerned not only with the characteristics of ritual architecture but also with the specific movements of the ritual priests and the ritual utensils.

If not the most important aspect, still one of the most important ones of Zoroastrianism is its ritual. This has been the means by which the Zoroastrian priests were able to hand down their religious knowledge from the oldest era of Zoroastrianism until today. Therefore, ritual seems to be a significant area of this religion to represent its concept of space.

Zoroastrianism is known as a conservative religion, especially regarding its rituals. However, one cannot rule out developments and changes in the practice of the Zoroastrian rituals in the long life of this religion. Constant in its basic structure, the study of the older ritual literature of Zoroastrianism and its comparison with the modern executions of it show that some ritual acts are eliminated from the *Yasna* ritual as the basic Zoroastrian liturgy, while some others are added.

In the core of the *Yasna*-text, in the Old Avestan passages, one can find some references to ‘circumambulation’. The paper will investigate the philological references to this ritual act besides the archaeological evidence for that. The known ritual buildings from the Achaemenian and Parthian periods, as well as the better-studied Sasanian ritual architecture will be consulted. Taking into account the archaeological and philological indications in Zoroastrianism for circumambulation, the paper will answer the question whether there has been such a ritual act in the course of the main Zoroastrian liturgy,

which is now forgotten. In addition, evidence for that in other Iranian religions, i.e. Yezidism and Ahl-e Haqq, will be considered. According to these, the possibility of the postulation of circumambulation as a Proto-Iranian ritual act will be examined.

SMITA SAHGAL (Lady Shri Ram College, University of Delhi, smitasahgal16@yahoo.com)

Paths Tread Together: Quest for Commonality in Traditions of the Avesta and the Rgveda (Panel 6)

The study of religious trajectories represented by the *Zend-Avesta* and the *Rgveda* is rooted in a fundamental curiosity about possible overlaps in the genesis and evolution of ancient cultures that belonged to the biggest linguistic group of the world; the family of Indo-European languages. The *Avesta* and the *Rgveda* or *Rksamhita* to be precise, are considered the most archaic and oldest of texts of the Iranians and the Indo-Aryans respectively.

The purpose of the paper is to undertake a comparative study of religious beliefs, concepts, cults and practices of the people of the *Avesta* and that of the *Rksamhita* and also look at the rationale for the commonalities. At the same time we can also look for points of divergence within the two traditions. This would necessitate an enquiry into the milieu of the cultures: their geographical horizons, tribal social stratification, material environment, ensuing cultic practices, pantheons [if there were] of goddesses, gods, demons, deification of animals and so on. Somewhere along the line, related issues such as who the Aryans were and if there was any connection with the two traditions, will also be touched upon.

DANIEL SHEFFIELD (Princeton University, djs5@princeton.edu)

The Loss of the Persianate and the Recovery of the Iranian: Parsi Philologists in 19th-Century Bombay (Panel 7)

For the Parsi Zoroastrian community of Western India, colonialism can be characterized as an experience of loss and recovery. As the community increasingly migrated from Gujarat to Bombay, traditional structures of religious authority and learning were disrupted, while new forms of education available in the metropole replaced older Indo-Persianate forms of knowledge and the cosmopolitan literary culture that had accompanied it. Yet, at the same time, the rediscovery of ancient Iran, stemming from the newly introduced sciences of philology, ethnology, and archaeology facilitated the recovery of an "ancient" pre-Islamic Iranian identity, which drew its inspiration from the pillars of Persepolis rather than the traditional Zoroastrian centers of Gujarat and central Iran.

This talk, then, is a meditation on the experience of Parsi modernity, focusing on the works of two individuals whose careers illustrate this period of transition, namely Mulla Feroz (1758-1830) and Sorabji Shapurji Bengali (1831-1893). The Parsi intellectual world of nineteenth-century Bombay, and its connections to the European and colonial scientific worlds, presents difficulties to the researcher who seeks to study interactions between traditional and colonial forms of knowledge. In his 1978 *Orientalism*, Edward Said famously stated that "philology problematizes – itself, its practitioner, the present. It embodies a peculiar condition of being modern and European, since neither of those two

categories has true meaning without being related to an earlier alien culture and time.” The philological approach to religion eventually adopted by the Parsi community was indeed one of the principal technologies by which Parsi modernity came to be defined, yet the politics of philology in nineteenth-century Bombay are complicated by the competing ideologies of different philological practitioners: among the Europeans, there existed different groups of missionaries and Orientalists, among the Parsis, different reformist and traditionalist organizations. All claimed to accurately represent textual knowledge, yet they produced different readings of the textual corpus in support of different agendas.

SARAH STEWART (School for Oriental and African Studies, ss7@soas.ac.uk)

The Navsari Ātash Bahrām in Literature and Song (Panel 4)

ANTON ZYKOV (School for Oriental and African Studies, London, anton.olegovich.zykov@gmail.com)

Nasusalars and khandias in the Zoroastrian communities of Iran and India (Panel 4)

This talk is based on an unfinished Masters thesis entitled "Nasusalars and khandias in the Zoroastrian communities of Iran and India" at Oxford University. The work is mainly focused on two major problems connected with the conductors of the Zoroastrian funeral rituals: their origins and their social status throughout the history of Zoroastrian communities in Iran and India.

The ancient tradition of disposing dead bodies is still observed only in the communities of Parsis and Iranian Zoroastrians in few Indian cities, namely Bharuch, Bombay, Navsari, Pune and Surat. The sacred ritual book, the *Vendidad*, contains a precise description of the procedures that precede the funeral, as well as the purifying ceremonies that should be conducted in its aftermath. It specially focuses on the role of *nasusalars* or the corpse bearers, scrupulously defining their duties. However, neither in the ancient literature, like *Vendidad*, nor in Pahlavi or Persian *Rivayats* or in any of the more contemporary writings we find information about the origins of this profession, i.e. how *nasusalars* were selected, or were they selected by the community at all?

The very term “*nasusalar*” among the majority of the Parsis, and the *Athornan* class in particular, became a synonym of stigma attached to a person involved in this profession, who is often regarded as unclean or even polluted. *Nasusalars* and *khandias* usually have no opportunity to marry inside the community, they are denied entrance to *agiaris*, and other members of the community usually avoid physical or any other contact with them. In practice, all this equates *nasusalars* with untouchables, traditionally linked only with the Hindu community, but in reality present in all other historic religious communities of the subcontinent. Thus, the question remains whether the Parsis in India inherited the status of corpse-bearers from ancient Persia or acquired it during their more than a thousand years stay in the subcontinent being influenced by the hierarchical logic of the caste system?