Zoroastrianism

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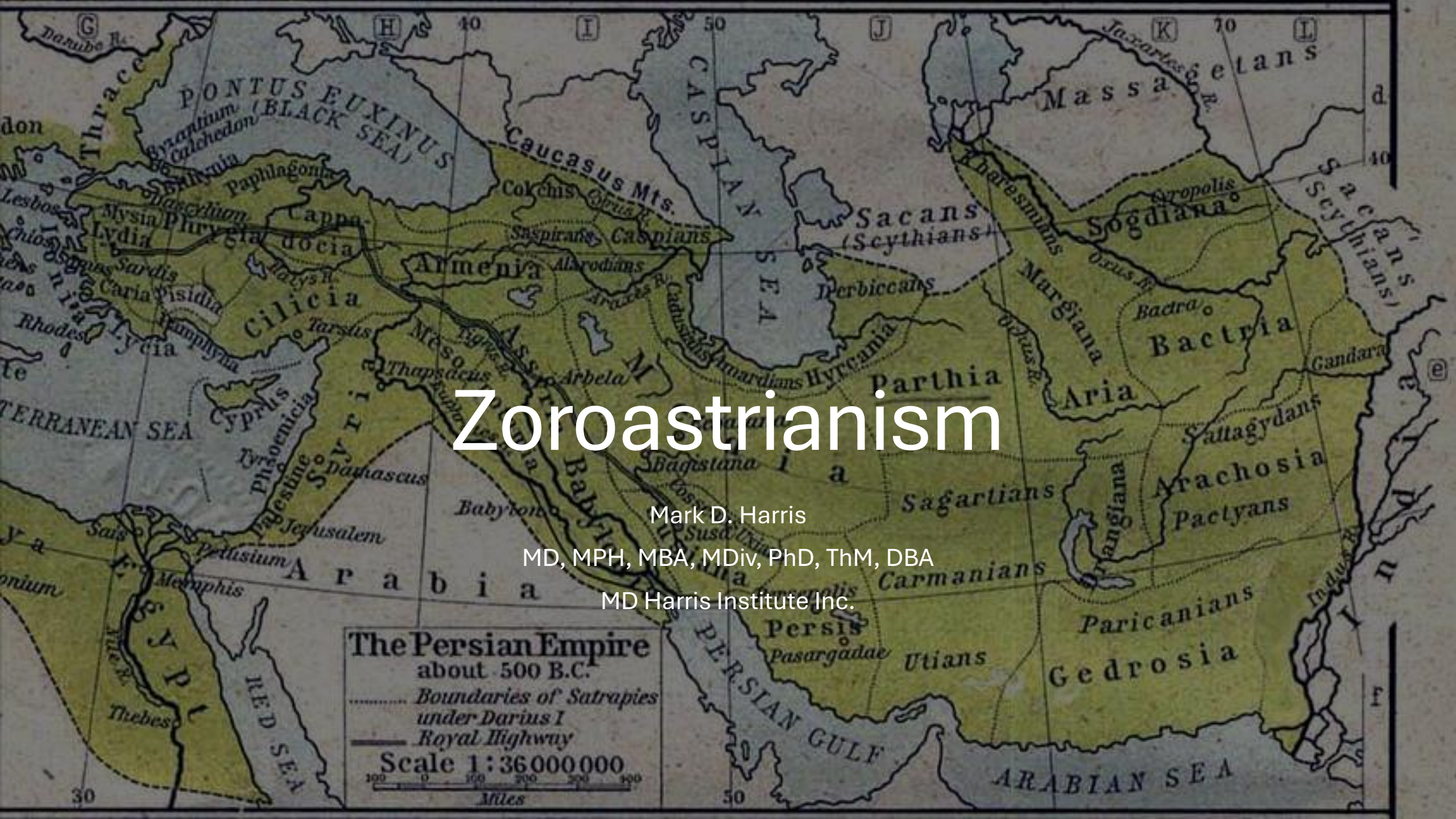


History

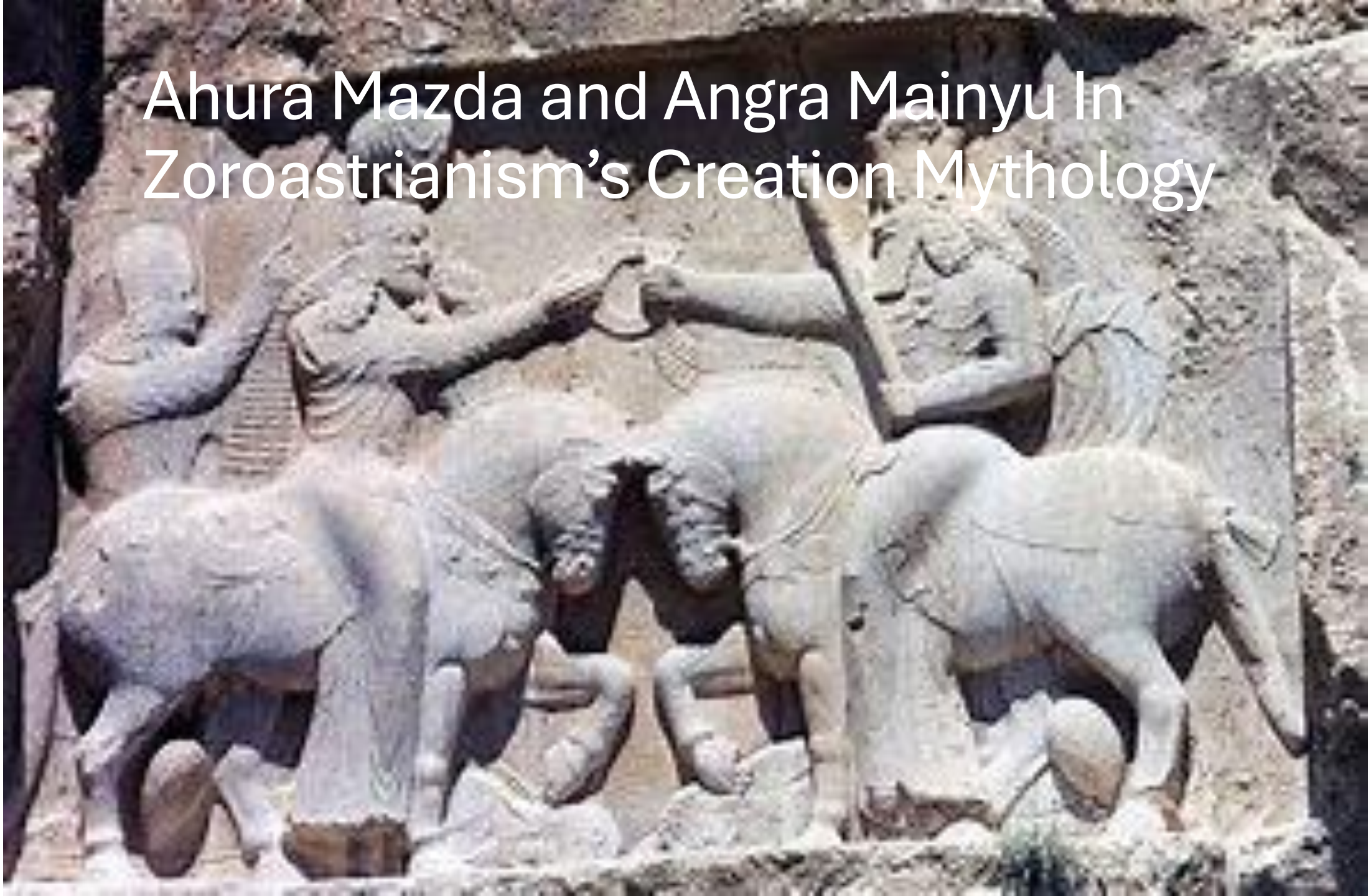
- Zarathushtra (c. 1300 BC) founded Zoroastrianism in Persia.
- After initial persecution, Zarathushtra persuaded the king of Persia to establish Zoroastrianism as the official religion of the empire.
- Achaemenid Empire (549-330 BC)
- Arsacid Empire (800 BC – AD 200)
- Sassanid Empire (AD 220 – 651) – Zoroastrian texts were compiled
- Islamic Control (651-present)
- Arab Muslim armies destroyed the Persian empire
  - Many Zoroastrians converted to Islam
  - Some Zoroastrians fled to India, where some converted to Hinduism

Zarathushtra

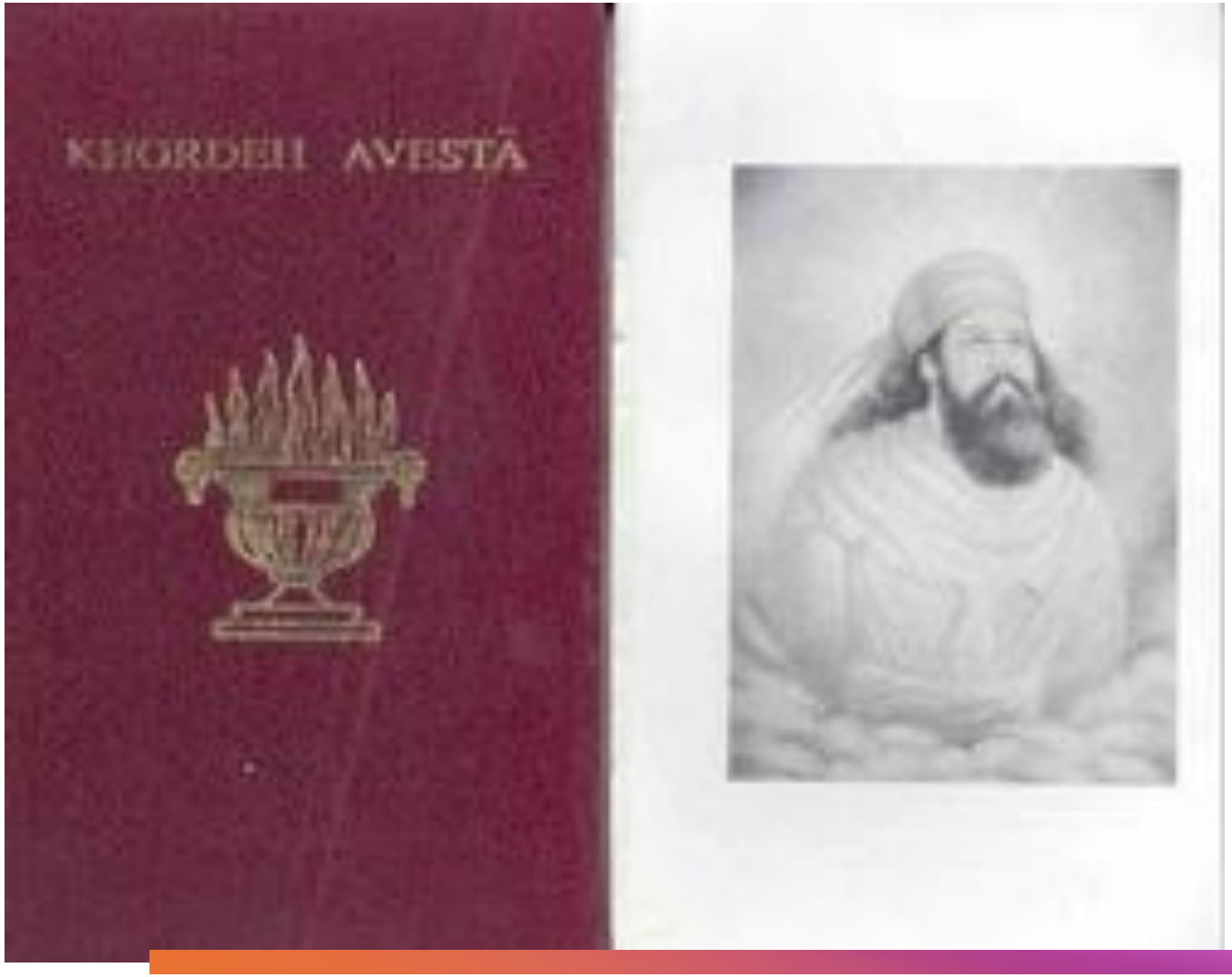
Zoroastrian Beliefs (1)

- Ahura Mazda is the one, good, eternal God. He is not omnipotent, however, and is locked in a cosmic battle with his brother, Angra Mainyu.
- Men can freely choose which side to support. Ahura Mazda will win when enough men support him.
  - The dead will be raised
  - A final judgment will occur
  - The good will go to heaven and the evil to hell
- Creation – Ahura Mazda created the universe. He lived in the realm of light and his brother in the realm of darkness.
  - Six beneficient immortals (Amesha Spenta) – govern material creation and communicate with humans
  - Preexistent souls (fravashis) – who chose to get bodies and fight for Ahura
  - Primeval Ox - killed by Angra Mainyu, animals and plants fashioned from dead body
  - Gayomart – first man, killed by Angra Mainyu, metal and humans fashioned from dead body
- Parts of creation to preserve – fire, earth, sky, water, human, cattle, and plants

Ahura Mazda and Angra Mainyu In Zoroastrianism's Creation Mythology



Zoroastrian Beliefs (2)



- Scripture – Avesta (Yasna, Yashts, Visperad, Vendidad, and Khordeh Avesta)
  - Earliest portion of the Avesta – Gathas, with sacred hymns covering worship, personal righteousness, cosmic order, moral freedom, and social justice.
  - Later portion of the Avesta – Law, liturgy, and doctrine
- Other sacred texts – *Bundahishn, Shayest Na-Shayest, Dadestan-I Denig, Menog-I Khrad*, and *Shkand-gumanig Vizar*

Zoroastrian Beliefs (3)

- God
  - Strict monotheism – Ahura Mazda is God and Angra Mainyu is powerful but finite
  - Monotheism with a cosmic dualism – both are gods, but Ahura Mazda is better
- Amesha spentas – 6 holy immortals through whom Ahura created the world.
  - Asha – spirit of highest law
  - Khshatra – spirit of holy dominion
  - Vohu mano – spirit of a good mind
  - Haurvatat – spirit of perfection and well-being
  - Spenta armaiti – spirit of benevolent devotion
  - Ameretat – spirit of immortality

SPENTA MAINYU
ASHA VAHISHTA
VOHU MANAH
SPENTA ARMAITI
KSHATHRA VAIRYA
HAURVATAT
AMERETAT

Zoroastrian Beliefs (4)

- Mankind – Humans have mind, consciousness, insight, wisdom, and desire. Each has an incarnate soul and a preexistant soul (*fravashi* – living, dead, not yet born) which will be resurrected for the final judgment. Human tasks are protecting the eternal flame and fighting demons.
- Sin – Violating the truth (Asha), which is rooted in Ahura's nature.
- Salvation – People must have good thoughts (*humata*), words (*hukhta*), and deeds (*huvarshta*). If the good outweighs the bad, the person goes to heaven. If not, he or she goes to hell, which is limited in duration.

Zoroastrian Beliefs (5)

- Afterlife – The soul stays near the corpse for 3 days after death. The body then decays, and the soul then walks across the Chinvat bridge until it meets a sword. Good people meet the broad side and pass into heaven. Evil people meet the sharp side and get cut up, falling into hell. Heaven and hell each have four levels. People with equal good and evil go to Hammistagan, a neutral place, and await the resurrection to judgment.

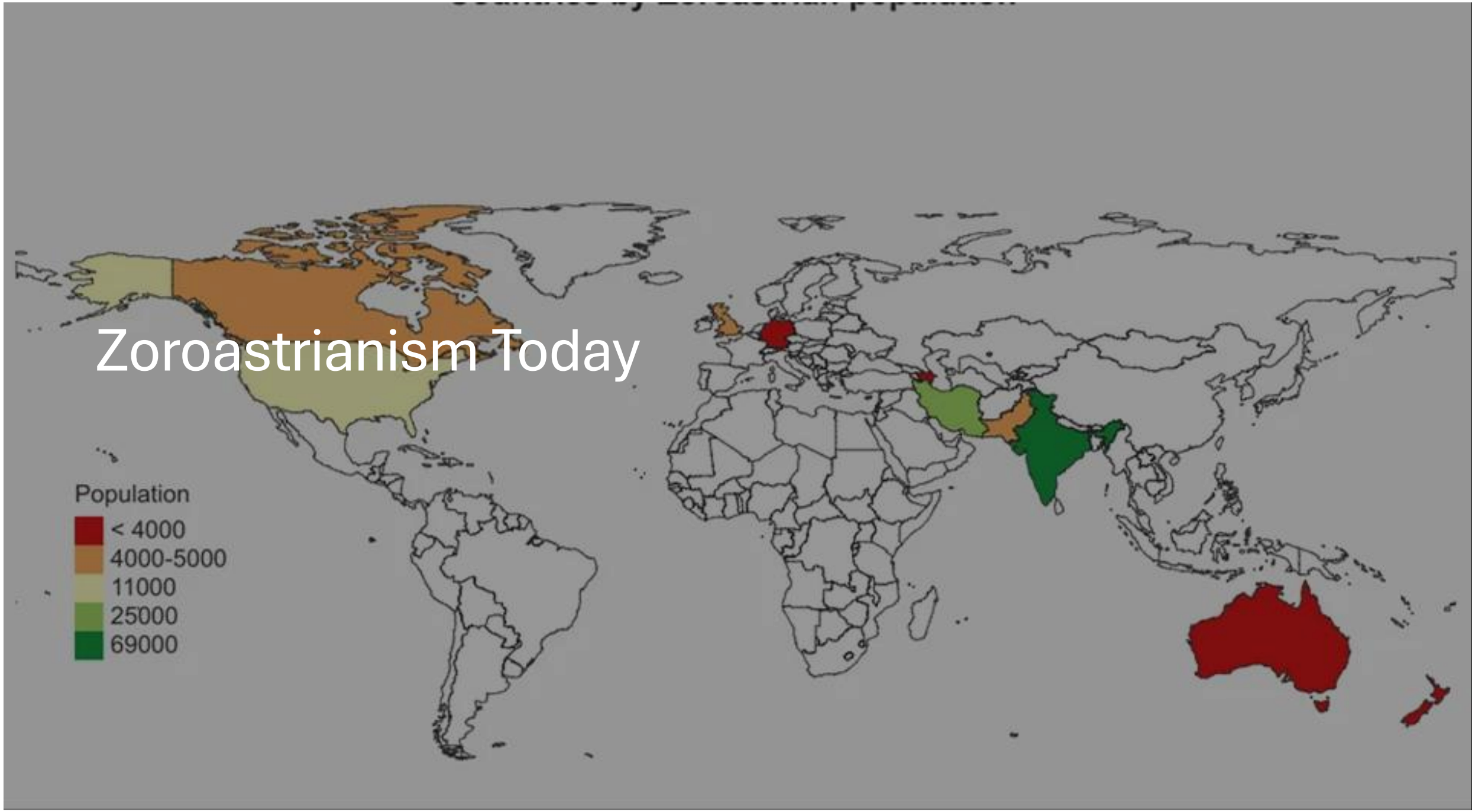
Zoroastrian distinctive beliefs

- Conversion – Zoroastrianism does not historically encourage converts.
- Nou Rouz (new day) – spring festival
- Gamhambars – activities emphasizing the relationship between humans and nature
- Haoma – sacred plant and ritual drink from that plant which is used in many rituals.
- Navjote – a ceremony to enter Zoroastrianism, ages 15 or younger
  - Sudre – white undergarment symbolizing purity
  - Kusti – cord of 72 strands of wool representing the Yasna and wrapped around the body three times.
- Sacred fire – a fire from heaven, intended to protect humans, which is kept alive in Zoroastrian temples and tended 1128 times per year.
- Jashan – memorial and thanksgiving ceremony to induce those in the spirit world to meet with living people
- Boi Machi – ritual performed 5x daily in temples. The priest places sandalwood and incense on a fire, walks around the fire and recites eight prayers.

Zoroastrian Beliefs (6)

- All humans are resurrected. A savior named Saoshyant will be born of a virgin. He brings about *Frashokereti*, the final judgment.
- Evil people will be annihilated. Angra Mainya will be cast into everlasting hell.
- On a new earth, finite time will merge into infinite time with Ahura Mazda and his righteous people.

Zoroastrian Temple ruins


Zoroastrianism Today
Population
< 4000
4000-5000
11000
25000
69000

Conclusion

Discussion

References

- H. Wayne House, Charts of World Religions, Zondervan, 2006