In a brief note first posted on the Internet about Salmān Pāk (also Salmān Fārūqī), I explained that this enigmatic personality of early Islam played a pivotal role in Muḥammad b. ‘Abdallāh b. ‘Abd al-Muttalib’s prophetic career (c. A.H. 570-632). Firoza and Khojeste Mistree have often remarked to me about the striking similarity and assimilation of Mazdean doctrinal beliefs into Islam; hence, this elaborated version of my earlier posting for Zoroastrian Studies, Bombay, frahangestān hudem pad Hindūgān1, (School of the Good Religion in Hindustan).

Unlike pre-Islamic history where one is faced with a dearth of dateable material records, one faces a plethora of written material in the Islamic period where the student of historiography is hard put to flesh out accurate conclusions. Richard Frye rightfully stresses that if scholarship is meant to solve and not compound problems, simplicity and common sense should be our best guides, which I hope to apply here.

Salmān was one of the earliest non-Arab converts (sabiqūn) to Islam. There is debate about his name and Arabic reports mention him as either Māhūb or Rūzbēh b. Marzubān. The latter seems more probable and most of the sources agree that he was of a distinguished Persian background. In any case, the appellation Salmān is of Arabo-Aramaean origin and was attached to him after his celebrated conversion. Dates about his birth and death are also disputed. He is recorded in the “tradition” (hadith) known as the Knabar Salmān which is authentic despite having undergone several recensions. The earliest version is of Abū ʻIṣāq Sābī (c. A.D. 749). The cradle of major revealed faiths and assorted cults, the Near East in the seventh-century was in a messianic ferment as its inhabitants awaited a prophet foretold in Judeo-Christian scriptures. The question whether Salmān is the same famous Christian monk Sergios or Bahīra is too complex to be discussed here. This ex-Zoroastrian was of an ascetic, contemplative nature even during his early years and had converted to Christianity well before leaving Iran in his spiritual peregrinations.Having met Muḥammad and recognizing the predicted “signs” (ṣayṣ) of his mission, he accepted him as a messenger of God. Furthermore, it was Muḥammad and his early Arab companions (ṣaḥīḥa) that emancipated him from his captors. From then on until the prophet’s death, Salmān remained a life-long counselor and friend. For Persian (Shī) Muslims, Salmān is doubly significant because of the famous saying attributed to Muḥammad that, “Salmān is one of us [as] the people of the house” (Salmān minnā aḥī al-baṭ). Several complex factors are at work in the collusion and sanitization of the Qurān during the first three centuries of Islam as displayed in the seminal albeit controversial writings of Patricia Crone, Michael Cook and John Wansbrough. Likewise, in the case of Iranian transmissions into Islam which Shaul Shaked has notably examined in recent years.

No Dēnūr need be vilified as dēn-e pêtyarāqīn (accursed of the faith) — only a Salmān of Muḥammadan fame rests in a simple tomb near the Sasanid winter capital, Ctesiphon (al-madâ’in) in present-day Iraq. There, he is revered by Shīlī pilgrims among others as a “patron of handicraftsmen” (pīr al-mashāilkht). A long cherished Parsi nostrum ought to be laid to rest along with that.

1 Given the range of readership, bibliography and footnotes have been dispensed with in this overview.