

## ORALITY HAS ITS OWN PLACE IN ANCIENT CULTURES

Dr. Kersey Antia, Mar 1, 2020; updated Mar 20, 2020

Such comments about the inferiority of oral tradition versus the written tradition lowering the scale for Zoroastrianism *vis-a-vis* scriptural religions is nothing new. Such issues were raised even during the Sasanian period when it was the dominant religion. While the Christians tended to undermine Judaism for its oral tradition, the Jews too tended to be critical of the Zoroastrians for their dependence on oral tradition, though obviously they could not do so as vehemently as the Christians. As Reuven Kiperwasser and Serge Ruzer comment: “Whereas both Jews and Christians are inclined to present the exclusively oral culture as 'lower', the Jews are less extreme about this, allowing even in an explicitly polemical context, for a greater measure of interconnection between the written and oral paths of learning – in accordance with their notion of the two Torahs complementing one another.” “When interacting with Persian culture, Jewish self-perception focuses on the written nature of its religious heritages as opposed to when it faces Christianity and embraces the self-image of an orality-oriented tradition.” (*Jews, Christianity and Zoroastrians in a Sasanian Context*, edited by Geoffrey Herman, Georgias Press, 2014, pp. 91-121). The more ancient a faith is the more it has to depend on orality but at the same time it necessarily tends to take measures to safeguard its accuracy on which it bases its ritual efficacy. No wonder therefore the British examiners were so surprised by their Brahmin or Dastur examines reproducing their texts verbatim. Thus orality can compensate for cultures too ancient to have the advantage of written scripts. And, as I have shown in this context, even when books are available, distortion can still happen quite often.