



ABĀLIŠ

ABĀLIŠ, a Zoroastrian of the 9th century A.D. who apostatized to Islam (hence his epithets in Pahlavi, “accursed” [*gizistag/guḡastag*] and “heretic” [*zandīg*]). His original name was Day-Ohrmazd, and he apparently adopted an Arabic one after his conversion. Its precise form is disguised by the ambiguous Pahlavi spelling *’b’lš* (or *’b’lh*, etc.), which is transcribed in Pazand by the otherwise unattested “Abāliš.” Suggested explanations of the name include *Abā Layt (H. H. Schaeder, *Iranische Beiträge* I, Halle, 1930, p. 287, n. 2), Syriac *Yaballaha (J. P. de Menasce, *Škand-gumānīk vičār*, Fribourg, 1945, p. 244), and ‘Abdallāh (idem, *Une encyclopédie mazdéenne: le Dēnkart*, Paris, 1958, p. 11). Information about Abāliš is entirely derived from the small Pahlavi treatise *Gizistag Abāliš*. According to this text (ed. Chacha, p. 11), he was a native of Eṣṭakr. Once, while traveling, he went to a fire temple to “receive *bāḡ*” (Pahl. *wāḡ*), that is, to participate with the priests in the Zoroastrian “grace” formula and so share in their recompense (M. Boyce and F. Kotwal, “Zoroastrian *Bāḡ* and *Drōn*—I,” *BSOAS* 34, 1971, p. 70). But he was excluded and treated contemptuously, apparently because he was not known to the local priests or not qualified for religious services. He departed indignantly, and a passer-by persuaded him to convert to Islam. Later Abāliš went to Baghdad, where he met the caliph al-Ma’mūn (813-33 A.D.). In the caliph’s presence he held a religious disputation with the famous theologian and Zoroastrian leader, **Ādurfarnbag**, son of Farrozzād. Abāliš presented seven questions on Zoroastrian doctrine (e.g., dualism and its implications) and ritual and custom (e.g., use of cattle urine [*gōmēz*] for ritual purification and use of the sacred girdle [*kustīg*]). Ādurfarnbag’s replies won the caliph’s approval and victory in



the contest. Abāliš was consequently expelled from the court. It may be inferred that Abāliš (formerly a “good, soul-loving [*ruwān-dōst*] man”) had been a Zoroastrian priest. Such may also be the implication of the passer-by’s words, “a man like you” (*mard-ē čēōn tō*). His knowledge of Zoroastrianism seems more than that expected from a layman; and according to the text’s preface, he was victorious in debates with Zoroastrian, Muslim, Christian, and Jewish theologians of Fārs and Baghdad before his defeat by Ādurfarnbag. Neither the author nor the date of the *Gizistag Abāliš* is known; but it appears to be part of the large corpus of 9th to 10th century priestly literature. The oldest manuscript containing the text is K 20 (in the Copenhagen collection), which was copied in the 14th century. There exist also late Pazand and Parsi versions of the text.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

A. Barthelemy, ed., *Gujastak Abalish*, Paris, 1887 (with Parsi text).

H. F. Chacha, tr., *Gajastak Abālish*, Bombay, 1936 (with Pazand text).

Cod. Avest. Pahl. I, fols. 148r-52r.