



ABĀN B. 'ABD-AL-ḤAMĪD

ABĀN B. 'ABD-AL-ḤAMĪD B. LĀHEQ, called LĀHEQĪ, late 2nd/8th century poet. He was of a Persian family, originally from Fasā, which had settled (probably at an early date) in Baṣra. Abān was born there, and he flourished in the period of the Barmakīs. By his own account, he was of average and graceful stature, with a handsome face and lank beard. He was well versed in the learning and culture of Baṣra, including mathematics, grammar, rhetoric, and literature. His fellow citizen, Jāḥeẓ, thought highly of his sagacity, a trait that distinguished him in the Basran clique of intellectuals to which he attached himself.

It might have been this kind of close association as well as contemporary rivalry that caused Abān to be accused of heretical and Manichean tendencies. On the other hand, another stream of *revāyas* (stories) depicts his observance of prayers and almsgiving, his reciting of the Qur'ān, and his good knowledge of *feqh* (law). The truth lies somewhere between these two extremes; he said about himself, "I am neither a dedicated ascetic nor a shameless dissolute." In fact, during the Basran period, he wasted most of his poetical talents on lampooning his neighbors, his fellow poets, and certain songstresses. To that period also belong two long poems which deserve comment. One deals with Fasā, a fact which suggests that he retained nostalgic feelings toward old family ties. The other poem is an elegy for a Basran judge, Savvār b. 'Abdallāh. In contrast with most of his work in this period, characterized by frivolous poems about certain local incidents, this elegy reveals his capacity for analytical and vivid narrative poetry and indicates his later poetical



development.

Abān migrated from Baṣra to Baghdad sometime before 176/792. Still an unknown provincial poet, he considered himself immensely lucky in attaching himself to the Barmakīs, the greatest patrons of literature in those days. Before long, he replaced a certain Aḥmad b. Sayyār Jorĵānī as the official arbiter of poets at the Barmakī court (Jahšīārī, *Ketāb al-wozarā' wa'l-kottāb*, Cairo, 1938, pp. 192, 211). This function gained for him increased antagonism from his fellow poets, especially from Abū Novās, who wrote satires against him, labeling him a heretic.

In the Baghdad period, his poetical activities developed along two lines: composing panegyrics dedicated to his patrons, Yaḥyā, Faḏl, and Ja'far, and to Caliph Hārūn al-Rašīd, and the versifying of prose books and the writing of topical verse. His talents for narrative and huge rewards from his patrons encouraged him to prefer the second line, which eclipsed his real ability for more durable poetry. Directed by his own choice or the preference of the Barmakīs, he selected books related to Persian, Indian, and sometimes Greek culture. Ebn al-Nadīm (*Fehrest* [Tehran¹], pp. 132, 186) mentions *Kalīla wa Demna*, *Belawhar wa Būdāsf*, the *Book of Sindbad*, the *Book of Mazdak*, and the biographies of Ardašīr and Anūšīrvān as books that Abān put into couplet form (*mozdavaĵ*). But Jāḥeẓ (*al-Borsān*, ed. M. M. Kūlī, Cairo, 1972, p. 89) states clearly that Abān versified *Kalīla wa Demna* and some parts of the *Book of Logic*. The latter was put partly in couplet and partly in *moḳammas* form. The difference between these two versions suggests that, by the time of Ebn al-Nadīm, some versifications were falsely attributed to Abān because of his fame in that field. Samples of the versified *Kalīla wa Demna*, which in the original comprised 14 thousand lines composed in less than five months and which earned Abān 10,000 dinars, occur in Šūlī's *Ketāb al-awrāq* (see bibliog.). His success in this line encouraged Abān to compose some verse narratives of his own. One of them is *Dāt al-ḥolal*, which deals with the creation of the world and different aspects of life (Mas'ūdī, *Morūĵ* I, pp. 391-92, where the lines quoted deal with medical advice). Šūlī also has kept some parts of another poem about prayer and fasting (*Awrāq*, p. 51). Even when these versifications are excluded, Abān is considered a very prolific poet. A shrewd critic like Jāḥeẓ, when comparing Abān's poetry to that of some of his contemporaries, equates him with Baššār in originality and avoidance of mannerism. It is not known whether Abān lived to witness the tragic end of Ja'far Barmakī (187/802) or the ignominious death of Yaḥyā (190/805). If he did, then it is



strange that he left no elegy about his most meritorious patrons, unless our sources are incomplete.

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