



BEHĀFARĪD

BEHĀFARĪD, Zoroastrian heresiarch and self-styled prophet, killed 131/748-49. His name is given variously as Behāfarīd b. Farvardīnān, “Behāfarīd the son of Farvardīn” (K̅vārazmī, *Mafātīḥ al-‘olūm*, p. 38; Bīrūnī, *Āṭār al-bāqīa*, p. 210). ‘Awfī (fol. 213b) mentions him among false prophets and mistakenly identifies him as Māhāfarīn but elsewhere (fol. 336a) speaks of him as Behāfarīd (see also Ebn al-Nadīm, p. 407; Ṭa‘ālebī, *Ġorar*, p. 34; and Gardīzī, ed. Ḥabībī, p. 119). In *Haft kešvar* (p. 91), he is called Behzād-e Majūs (Behzād the Magus), which, since the name Behzād is synonymous with Behāfarīd, makes it likely that the author interpreted an Arabic translation of the name as the Persian Behzād (Sadighi, p. 115 n. 4). The name Behāfarīd is not unprecedented among Iranians (cf. Ṭabarī, II, p. 813, the lineage of Ardašīr Bābakān; *Tārīk-eSīstān*, p. 8). Only Šahrestānī (I, p. 238) calls him Sīsān and his followers Sīsānīya and Behāfarīdīya. Zūzan in the K̅vāf district is generally acknowledged as the place where Behāfarīd was born, and raised (Bīrūnī, Ṭa‘ālebī, and Gardīzī, p. 119), though Ebn al-Nadīm (p. 407) gives the village Rūy of Abaršahr, i.e., Nīšāpūr. According to K̅vārazmī and Bīrūnī, Behāfarīd began his crusade in the township of Sīrāvand in the K̅vāf district (*rostāq*) of Nīšāpūr. Gardīzī and Šahrestānī also record K̅vāf, and Majd K̅vāfī (p. 280) mentions the province of K̅vāf and the village Zāva (present-day Torbat-e Ḥaydarīya) as the place where Behāfarīd began his crusade. These places are all located close to one another in the K̅vāf area (Yāqūt [Beirut], II, p. 399, III, p. 158; Zūzanī, introd., pp. *panjāh-haftād o šeš*, Jonayd Šīrāzī, p. 539; Ebn Baṭṭūṭa, I, p. 252). Behāfarīd’s Zoroastrian background is confirmed by both his own name and that of his father as well as by the report that Zūzan was the site of a



fire temple (Yāqūt, III, p. 158; Maqdesī, *Bad'* IV, p. 26; Ebn al-Nadīm; Ṭa'ālebī; Baḡdādī, p. 214; Gardīzī; Šahrestānī). Behāfarīd's birth date, however, is not recorded in the sources. Bīrūnī and Majd K̄vāfī record that at the outset of his mission, Behāfarīd vanished for seven years, staying in China. Ṭa'ālebī states that he went to China as a trader; on his return he brought back wondrous objects with him, among which was a shirt of green silk and a matching robe that were so sheer and soft that they could be folded so as to fit in the palm of the hand (on China and the green color of this garment, see Amoretti, p. 513). Ṭa'ālebī (*Ġorar*, p. 34) relates that Behāfarīd used the shirt and the robe during a resurrection he staged to support his claim of prophethood, telling people that they were heavenly garments and that he would reveal to them what he had learned when he was in the next world. After his resurrection, many people in the area became Behāfarīd's followers. (Bīrūnī's account is slightly different.) After Behāfarīd made his views known, many Zoroastrians gravitated to him.

Various accounts indicate that the period of Behāfarīd's activity occurred between the revolt of Abū Moslem against the Omayyads (129/747) and the date Abū Moslem left Marv for Nīšāpūr (131/748-49; Ṭabarī, III, p. 3). Spuler (p. 196) considers 127/745 to be the beginning of Behāfarīd's movement. The sources (K̄vārazmī, Bīrūnī, and Šahrestānī) also state that Behāfarīd wrote a book in Persian in which he expounded his views and practices to his followers and which has not survived. From what can be gleaned from the sources, Behāfarīd has the following credenda: He accepted Zoroaster as a prophet, but rejected some of the practices of contemporary Zoroastrians (Bīrūnī; Majd K̄vāfī, p. 281; *Haft kešvar*, p. 91). This affirmation combined with Behāfarīd's exposition of innovative views causes one to speculate: Did Behāfarīd consider himself above Zoroaster, a prophet charged with the completion of his mission, or did he consider Zoroaster's followers to have strayed from their prophet's teachings? What is likely is that he approved of those Zoroastrian beliefs about which he did not express an opinion (Sadighi, p. 123). As Bīrūnī, Ṭa'ālebī, and Gardīzī make clear (and as indicated by references in K̄vārazmī and Šahrestānī to Behāfarīd's scripture), Behāfarīd claimed to be a prophet and to have received revelation. According to one source, he prescribed five daily prayers facing the left side of the *qebla* but without full prostration (Ebrāhīm Šulī apud Ebn al-Nadīm, p. 408). Most sources, however, mention seven prayers, a number which seems more correct in view of the importance of the number seven to Behāfarīd: namely, seven years in China; the tithing of one-seventh of his followers' wealth for



public works and welfare (cf. Amoretti, p. 515). The prayers, whose times were not specified, were devoted to: 1. affirmation and worship of the one god; 2. the creation of the heavens and the earth; 3. the creation of animals and their sustenance; 4. death; 5. resurrection and the day of judgment; 6. the inhabitants of heaven and hell and their fates; and 7. extolling the inhabitants of paradise (Bīrūnī; Gardīzī, p. 120). Prayers were to be performed facing the sun and kneeling on one knee (Bīrūnī, Ṭa'ālebī, Gardīzī, Šahrestānī). Behāfarīd also called for: abandoning fire-worship (Šahrestānī, I, p. 238); giving up the practice of *zamzama*, ritual droning during meals (Bīrūnī; Šahrestānī, I, pp. 238-39; on *zamzama* see M. Mo'in, *Mazdayasnā wa ta'tīr-e ān dar adabiyāt-e fārsī*, Tehran, 1326 Š./1947, pp. 254-57); a ban on eating the flesh of dead animals (Bīrūnī; Ṭa'ālebī; Gardīzī, p. 120; Šahrestānī, I, p. 238) and of animals not slaughtered in the proper manner or not hunted (Sadighi, p. 126); prohibiting the killing of animals before they became old and weak or reached a specified age (Šahrestānī, I, p. 239); banning marriage with one's mother, daughter, sister, niece, nephew, and maternal and paternal aunts (Bīrūnī; Ṭa'ālebī; Gardīzī, p. 120; Šahrestānī, I, p. 238); limiting the marriage portion to 400 dirhams (Bīrūnī; Ṭa'ālebī; Gardīzī); letting their hair grow long (Bīrūnī; Šahrestānī, I, p. 238); prohibiting wine (Bīrūnī; Šahrestānī; Ṭa'ālebī *damm-mastī*); not burying corpses (Sadighi, p. 129); the one-time tithe of one-seventh of one's wealth for bridge and road repair and caravanserai construction (Bīrūnī; Ṭa'ālebī; Gardīzī; Šahrestānī); nursing the sick, helping the needy, and other charitable acts (Sadighi, p. 126). A precedent for the last practice was found among Zoroastrians, who tithed one-third of their wealth to help the needy, repair bridges, dredge rivers, and develop the land (Maqdesī, *Bad'* IV, p. 28).

Several points emerge from these prescriptions. From the disruptions and splits that were taking place among the Zoroastrians of the time Behāfarīd sensed the necessity of reform, especially reform of those parts of the Zoroastrian rite which were the subject of the most criticism (e.g., incest). Moreover, the similarity between some of his beliefs and those legislated in Islam (e.g., prohibition of incestuous marriages, of wine, of eating the flesh of dead animals, and calling for donating a measure of one's wealth for the public good) has prompted the view that Behāfarīd intended a kind of synthesis between the rites of ancient Iran and those of Islam (cf. Sadighi, p. 127 n. 2; Spuler, p. 196; Sourdél, p. 1209; Zārrīnkūb, 1352, pp. 142-43; idem, *Camb. Hist. Iran* IV, p. 33; and Amoretti, pp. 489-90). Behāfarīd's indirect borrowings from Islamic teachings and the ascendancy of the practical and



social over the spiritual and philosophical aspects of his beliefs has caused scholars to assert that his movement was at root social in nature (Sadighi, pp. 117, 122, 127). This view is supported by the fact that the beginning of Behāfarīd's movement coincided with the troubles Naṣr b. Sayyār, the Omayyad governor in Khorasan, was having with Ḥāret b. Sorayj (Ṭabarī, s. aa. 127-28), the struggle against Joday' b. 'Alī Kermānī, and the insurrection of [Abū Moslem](#) in Khorasan (Yūsofi, pp. 161-62). Thus Behāfarīd's actions at this juncture signify his grasp of the proper moment for political and social change. One cannot also rule out such priorities as shoring up the defenses of his coreligionists and fellow countrymen or such personal incentives as ambition and the quest for fame (Sadighi, p. 117). That, according to most sources, in a relatively short period of time he attracted many followers testifies to the speed with which his cause progressed, and it is likely that the anti-Omayyad political and social atmosphere of Khorasan at the time aided this progress. Some authors have also suggested that the fact that Behāfarīd offered a scripture in Persian played a role in attracting the masses and that perhaps the decrease in the marriage portion and the allocation of one-seventh of one's wealth to public works caused the poorer elements of society to gravitate toward him. Another factor which speeded the progress of Behāfarīd's movement was the internal dissension among the Zoroastrian priests. In general scholars have seen Behāfarīd's actions as a revolt supported by farmers and the poor against the traditional Sasanian-Zoroastrian power (Amoretti, p. 490). Muslims, of course, would have naturally opposed Behāfarīd, and the Zoroastrians soon realized the danger his movement presented. Given their belief in a 12,000-year world cycle and in the appearance of Zoroaster at the end of the ninth millennium and of a prophet at the end of each millennium, Behāfarīd's claim of prophethood in the year 129/747 was unacceptable, and thus they branded it heresy. In order to eliminate the danger he represented and to redress the blow and insults they had received at his hands, the Zoroastrians were not even loathe to turn to Abū Moslem, the Muslim standard-bearer of the 'Abbasid cause in Khorasan (Spuler, p. 196). Thus a group of priests (*mowbad*) and religious masters (*hīrbad*) went and complained to Abū Moslem that Behāfarīd was destroying Islam and Zoroastrianism. Abū Moslem charged Šabīb b. Wāj (Ebn al-Nadīm has Dāḥ but Wāj is correct, see Sadighi, p. 127 n. 3) and 'Abd-Allāh b. Sa'īd (Bīrūnī, Ṭa'ālebī, 'Awfī, and Majd K'āfī, who probably perpetuated a scribal error, have 'Abd-Allāh b. Šo'ba) with the task of overthrowing Behāfarīd. 'Abd-Allāh advanced on Zūzan with an army, captured Behāfarīd in the mountains of Bādġīs and brought him to Nišāpūr where he was hanged at the Bāb al-



Jāme' (Šahrestānī, I, p. 239); his followers were also put to death (131/748-49). According to Ebn al-Nadīm, Šabīb and 'Abd-Allāh gave Behāfarīd the chance to affirm his faith in Islam, and he accepted but his confession was not accepted on grounds of auguring (according to one account for apostasy) and thus he was executed. Bīrūnī and Šahrestānī (I, p. 239) write that Behāfarīd's servant and followers claimed that he mounted a golden horse and flew to heaven, and would return quickly to get even with his enemies. Scholars have explained Abū Moslem's motives in destroying Behāfarīd in several ways: as his taking advantage of an opportunity presented by the Zoroastrians to involve himself in their affairs (Spuler, p. 196); an attempt to attract the Zoroastrians of Khorasan to his cause with actions that were more advantageous to them than to the Muslims (Zarrīnkūb, 1352, pp. 132, 144; idem, 1343, p. 470); a form of mobilizing anti-Arab forces against the Omayyads (idem, *Camb. Hist. Iran IV*, p. 33); and as a coincidence of sentiment in the two religious movements, i.e., just as the guardians of the Zoroastrian rite were opposed to Behāfarīd, so too would Abū Moslem, as the Muslim champion, have been opposed to him (Frye, p. 30).

Despite its limited duration, Behāfarīd's movement survived his death by several centuries. According to Spuler (probably based on Gardizī, pp. 124-25) the revolt of Ostādsīs (150/767) during the time of the 'Abbasid caliph al-Manšūr (136-58/754-75) attracted remnants of Behāfarīd's supporters. Ebrāhīm Šūlī (d. 243/957-58) as quoted by Ebn al-Nadīm (p. 408) confirms that in this day a group in Khorasan were followers of Behāfarīd (for other references see Maqdesī, *Bad'* I, tr. p. 164; *Hodūd al-'ālam*, p. 94; tr. pp. 105, 238; Bīrūnī, *Ātār al-bāqīa*, pp. 210-11; Ṭa'ālebī, *Gorar*, p. 35; Šahrestānī, *al-Melal wa'l-nehal* I, p. 239). Baġdādī (pp. 214-15) classifies the Behāfarīdīya among the four Zoroastrian sects: from among these a Muslim is forbidden to take a wife, and he is not allowed to partake of the flesh of an animal slaughtered by them; he also did not consider collecting the head tax (*jezya*) from them to be permitted, because their doctrine was an innovation that appeared after Islam.



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