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DABESTĀN-E MAḌĀHEB

DABESTĀN-E MAḌĀHEB (School of religious doctrines), an important text of the Āḏar Kayvānī pseudo-Zoroastrian sect (see āẕar kayvān). It was written anonymously between the years 1055/1645 and 1068/1658 (Rieu, *Persian Manuscripts* I, pp. 141-43) and contains information particularly about the prevalent religions of India in the 17th century. The author refers to himself only as "the author" (*nāma-negār*) and "the writer of the acts" (*kerdār-gozār*), but from autobiographical references in the book he seems to have been born in Patna around 1026/1617, for he was about seven years old in 1033/1624, when he was taken to Agra (formerly Akbarābād). He subsequently lived in several different parts of India, particularly Kashmir and Punjab, until about 1063/1653, and in 1053/1643 he traveled to Kabul and from there to Mašhad.

Three different men have been identified as the author of *Dābestān-e maḏāheb*. In 1789 William Jones proposed Moḥsen Fānī Kašmīrī (d. 1081/1670), but subsequently Captain Vans Kennedy and William Erskine both independently rejected this identification. An entirely conjectural attribution to Āḏar Kayvān's son and spiritual successor Keyḵosrow Esfandīār was put forth in 1856 by an Indian Parsi, Keyḵosrow b. Kāvūs, and this suggestion has been reiterated by Raḥīm Reżāzāda Malek, editor of the most recent edition (see below; II, pp. 58-67, quoted from Cama Oriental Institute, Bombay, ms. 300). Some historians and authors of biographical dictionaries, including Ṣamṣām-al-Dawla Šāhnavāz Khan (I, pp. 226-27; II, pp. 76, 392), Serāj-al-Dīn ʿAlī Khan Ārezū (Rieu, *Persian Manuscripts* II, p. 1081), Āzād Belgrāmī (p. 22), and Raḥm-ʿAlī Khan Īmān (p. 179) identified the author as Mīr Ḏu'l-feqār Ardestānī

(ca. 1026-81/1617-70), better known under his pen name Mollā Mowbad or Mowbadšāh, and this attribution is now generally accepted.

In several manuscripts of various dates the author of the *Dabestān* is variously identified as Mīr Ḏu'l-feqār ʿAlī or Mīr Ḏu'l-feqār ʿAlī Ḥosaynī known as Mowbadšāh (Rieu, *Persian Manuscripts* I, p. 142), Ḏu'l-feqār Beg (Ivanow, 11, p. 1134), Mowbadšāh (Mawlawī, p. 127), Mowbadšāh Mohtadī (Bāḡdādī I, p. 442), and Mīr Du'l-feqār ʿAlī Ḥosaynī known as Hūšīār (Dāʿī al-Eslām I, p. 30). In a very old manuscript, apparently dating from the author's own time and currently preserved in the Ganjbaḵš library in Rawalpindi (Monzawī, II, p. 471), the name is given as Mīrzā Ḏu'l-feqār Āḏar Sāsānī known as Mowbad. A collection of Mowbad's verses (ca. 3,000 couplets) is preserved in the public library in Patna (ʿAskarī, pp. 85-104). Some fragments from these verses are quoted in the *Dabestān*, including the opening poem, which contains the word "Dabestān" in the first couplet and the pen name "Mowbad" in the last (ʿAskarī, pp. 90-91). Furthermore, most of the personal and place names mentioned in Mowbad's *dīvān* also turn up in the *Dabestān*, and the opinions and beliefs expressed in both books have much in common. For example, Mowbad praised Zoroaster and his religion, as well as the *Dasātīr* and the "Book of Mahābād" (ʿAskarī, pp. 90-104).

From evidence derived from both the *Dabestān* and the *dīvān* the author seems to have belonged to a Persian Shiʿite family and to have become a devotee of the Āḏar Kayvānī sect while still a child. He composed most of the *Dabestān* during the reign of Shah Jahān (1037-68/1628-57), traveling to various parts of India in order to study different religious creeds. In 1059/1649, probably to escape harassment from the *ʿolamāʾ* and the fanaticism of Islamic jurists, he moved to the remote Kalinga region on the eastern shore of India, where he remained until 1063/1653. From allusions in the *dīvān* to Shah Jahān's death, the accession of Awrangzēb (1068-1118/1658-1707) to the throne, and the murder of Dārā Šokūh (q.v.; ʿAskarī, p. 92), it is clear that Mowbad was still alive in 1077/1666.

Awrangzēb was a staunch upholder of the Šarīʿa (Muslim religious law) and its outward observance, and during his reign the propagation of any ideas deemed heretical was likely to carry the penalty of death. It is not surprising, therefore, that the author's name does not appear in the *Dabestān*. It seems probable that he himself, or perhaps a close friend or relative, deliberately expunged all references to his identity. Information on Keyḵosrow Esfandīār may have been included in the book but then deleted for the same reasons.

Nevertheless, the author's name and reputation were known to writers like the learned Deccani Ṣamṣām-al-Dawla in the subsequent generation.

The *Dabestān* consists of twelve chapters (*taʿlīm*, lit., "teaching"), further subdivided into several sections (*naẓar*, lit., "view"). Each of the chapters is devoted to the beliefs of a different religious group: respectively Parsis (not to be confused with Zoroastrians), Hindus, Tibetans, Jews, Christians, Muslims, Ṣādeqīya, Wāḥedīya, Rowšanīān, Elāhīya, Philosophers, and the Sufis. The account of the Parsis contains fifteen sections, the first three devoted to the beliefs of the Sepāsīān (or Yazdānīān, Ābādīān, or Āḏar Hūšangīān) and other sects in very nearly the same terms as in the *Dasātīr* and in other writings of the Āḏar Kayvānīs. The next ten sections are devoted to earlier Jamšāsbī, Samrādī, Ḵodāʾī, Rādī, and other communities and contains references to various imaginary persons and events. The beliefs attributed to adherents of these sectarian "communities" correspond closely to those of ancient Greek philosophers, Sabeans, and Hindus. Only in the last two sections of the chapter are the Zoroastrians proper and the Mazdakites treated; the author drew his information on Zoroastrianism from *al-Melal wa'l-neḥal*, written in the 12th century by Moḥammad b. ʿAbd-al-Karīm Šahrestānī, which contains traditions current among Zoroastrians, as well as from the *Dasātīr*, particularly the Persian commentary on Zoroaster and Mazdak contained there.

The other "teachings" in the *Dabestān* were either drawn from the original literature of the sects dealt with (e.g., the Noqṭawīān, included in chapter 8) or are adaptations or even copies of the works of other writers about these religions and schools; for example, the interpretation of the Prophet Moḥammad's ascension at the end of chapter 11 was extracted from the *Meʿrāj-nāma* attributed to Avicenna. Sometimes traditions and stories heard from the adherents of the various creeds provided the subject matter (e.g., material in chapter 5, on Christianity). The text throughout is interlarded with Āḏar Kayvānī ideas and modes of expression. The author's proselytizing attitude is especially apparent in the section on Islam, which is filled with distortions, fabrications, unwarranted interpretations, and even outright lies. Nevertheless, the *Dabestān* is not devoid of historical merit and contains useful information about intellectual and social conditions in India in the 17th century. For instance, the second chapter, on the popular beliefs and religious practices of the Hindus, incorporates a great many of the author's personal observations.

Dabestān-e maḏāheb was first published in Calcutta in 1224/1809 and has since

been reprinted several times in India and Persia. Francis Gladwin's translation of some of the "teachings" into English was published in *New Asiatic Miscellany* 1-2 (Calcutta, 1789). In 1843 David Shea and Anthony Troyer translated the entire book into English; it was published, with Troyer's extensive introduction, in Paris. The American Orientalist A. V. W. Jackson published a one-volume abridgment (New York and London, 1901) of this translation with a new preface. The *Dabestān* was also translated into Gujarati and published twice in Bombay, in 1815 and 1845. The most recent Persian edition was edited in two volumes by Reżāzāda Malek in Tehran in 1362 Š./1983; the first volume contains the text, the second annotations and explanatory remarks.

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(FathÂr-Allāh Mojtabāʾī)