



DAR-E MEHR

DAR-E MEHR, a Zoroastrian term first recorded in the *Persian Rivāyats* and Parsi Gujarati writings. Its use in the former is rare, with a variant *dar be-mehr*, unknown among the Parsis, occurring once. This variant form is regarded by the Irani Zoroastrians as belonging to their own special dialect (which is not usually written). The occurrences of the term in the *Persian Rivāyats* are as follows. In one passage (repeated three times with varying scribal errors) the “consecrated *dar-e mehr*” (*dar-e mehr-e yašte*) is added to the standard list of things from which a menstruating woman should keep her distance (*Persian Rivāyats*, ed. Unvala, II, pp. 230.9, 232.9, 447.17-18; tr. Dhabhar, p. 230). In a second passage (ed. Unvala, II, p. 71.1; tr. Dhabhar, p. 436) it is stated that, when a son is born, then at Mehragān in that year the family should sacrifice a *gōspand* and take the flesh to the *dar-e mehr*. Third, in reply to the question “How should the house (*kāna*) of a *dar-e mehr* be built?” the Irani priests say that the “place of the fire” (*ātašgāh*) should have four doors, and that the “priests’ room for worship” (*yazišn-kāna-ye dastūrān*) should be, as far as possible, “around and near the fire-house” (*pīrāmun va nazdīk-e ātaš kāna*; ed. Unvala, II, p. 18.1-4; tr. Dhabhar, p. 403). It is in one version of this passage (in the manuscript M55; see Bartholomae, p. 174) that the form *dar be-mehr* is uniquely written.

The first of these three passages indicates unambiguously that *dar-e mehr* was used for a fire temple, for this is a consecrated building, whereas a *yazišn-kāna* (more usually, *yazišn-gāh*) is not; only the separate ritual enclosures within it are consecrated anew for each ceremony. The third passage is not clear. In it



dar-e mehr can be understood to refer to both the “fire house” and the *yazišngāh* as parts of one complex.

During their early centuries in Gujarat the Parsis had only one sacred fire, that founded at Sanjan. Each of their settlements had, however, a *yazišngāh*, a small building in which rituals were performed. To this the priests daily carried embers from their own hearth fires to provide fire for the rites (Kotwal, p. 665). Fire was accordingly regularly but not continuously present in each *yazišngāh*. The Parsis called such a building either *dar-e mehr* or *agiary*, a Gujarati word meaning “house of fire” (Kotwal, p. 665; Mirza, pp. 30-31). Consecrated continuously burning fires were not installed in these buildings until the 17th century, and this has led modern Parsi scholars (*Persian Rivāyats*, Dhabhar, tr., p. 463 n. 4; Mirza, p. 30) to interpret *dar-e mehr* as referring originally to a *yazišngāh*, despite the literal meaning of *agiary*. Latterly the term has been used by the Parsis also for the place of a lesser sacred fire (a *dādgāh*) kept burning for ritual purposes within the precinct of an *ātaš bahrām*. In recent decades Zoroastrians who have settled in North America have consecrated fire temples and also erected buildings in which fires are kindled occasionally for religious ceremonies, and both alike are called *dar be-mehr* (romanized as *darb-e mehr*). This is because their foundation owes much to the munificence of an Irani Zoroastrian, the late Arbāb Rustam Guiv, who preferred the familiar dialect form.

Dar be-mehr is used constantly in the Irani dialect for a fire temple (see [ĀTAŠKADA](#)), but since for centuries in Persia the fire temple and the ritual precinct have been built together, this usage does not help to establish the original application of the term. A link has been seen between it and the much earlier attested Zoroastrian-Armenian *mehean* “temple,” if this is to be derived from Old Iranian **maithryāna* “place of Mithra” (so Meillet; see [Armenia and Iran](#), p. 434) or **mithradāna* (Gershevitch). A term *mithraion* also occurs uniquely in a 3rd-century B.C.E. Egyptian papyrus, apparently for an endowed Zoroastrian temple (Wilcken). The major Zoroastrian rituals were solemnized between sunrise and noon, the time of day especially under Mithra’s protection, but this would help to explain an expression “gate/court of/for Mithra” only if this referred originally to the ritual precinct. If it is also to explain *mehean* and *mithraion*, the extension to mean fire temple as well must have been very early, and the term *dar-e mehr* should have its origin in the Achaemenian period, despite its late attestation. Without more evidence, the matter remains problematic.



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