



DAWĀNUS

DAWĀNUS, the name of a man seen in the other world by [Ardā Wirāz](#), as described in both the Middle Persian and the Zoroastrian Persian versions of the *Ardā Wirāz-nāmag* (Jamaspji Asa, pp. 63-64; ed. Vahman, pp. 204-5; ed. Kargar, pp. 54-55). A slightly different version of the Dawānus story is recorded in a few other works as well. In a more complete version quoted from the *Spand nask*, it is Zarathustra, not Ardā Wirāz, who visits Dawānus (*Šāyest nē šāyest*, 12.29; *Saddar naṣr*, 4.3-11).

Collating the various narratives found in the two versions of *Ardā Wirāz-nāmag* and those of the *Spand nask* and the *Saddar naṣr* presents the framework of an episode about Ardā Wirāz visiting a man whose entire body was in hell except for a single foot, which was not being bitten by reptiles (*xrafaster*). Soruš says to Ardā Wirāz: This is a man called Dawānus who had ruled over thirty-three countries for many years. He had never done a good deed because he was so lazy. He was a very cruel one. However, it happened that one day, when he was going hunting, he saw a sheep/cow which was tied up, and he kicked some grass near to it with one foot. Now, as the reward for that single good deed, that same foot is located outside of the Hell.

The name of Dawānus is also mentioned in *Yasna* 31, verse 10 and *Dēnkard*, the ninth book (*Dēnkard* II, p. 833).

There are some clues to the probable identification of Dawānus in historiographical works. Abu'l-Ḥasan Mas'udi (d. 957 CE), in a chapter regarding the kings of Babylon, Nabataeans, and so forth (known as



Chaldeans), relates: “Ma‘usā (Majusā in Pellat ed.) ruled for one year, and that has been recorded even less. Following him, Dāwnus (Dārius, in Pellat ed.) ruled for thirty-one years, and it has been said even more. After that, Kasrjus (Kasarkus, in Pellat ed.) ruled for twenty years” (Mas‘udi, ed. ‘Abd-al-Ḥamid, I, p. 217; ed. Pellat, sec. 526). It seems that the name Dāwnus changed to Dawānus by metathesis.

The earlier historian, Aḥmad b. Abi Ya‘qub (d. 904) wrote in a chapter on the kings of Babylon: “King Ma‘usā ruled for seven months, King Dāriuš for thirty-one years, and King Kasrḥuš for twenty years” (Ya‘qubi, I, p. 69, tr., I, p. 101).

Thus, it seems that the name of Dāriuš has been recorded in two distorted forms as Dawānus in the Middle Persian and Zoroastrian Persian texts of *Ardā Wirāz-nāmag*, and then as Dāwnus by Mas‘udi, which sounds closer to Dāriuš. It is possible that Mas‘udi had extracted the name of Dāwnus from Greek sources, or even from the works that had mentioned the name according to its Greek form, Darius. It is worth noting in this context that Mas‘udi recorded Kasrjus (ed. Pellat: Kasarkus) and Kasrḥuš and Ya‘qubi wrote Kasrḥuš as the name of the successor of King Dāryuš. Both these names seem to be the misread forms of Xerxes, the Greek rendering of Xšayāršan, the name of the son and successor of [Darius I](#), in which case they appear to support the idea that Dawānus and Dāwnus are the distorted forms of Dāriuš (Kargar, pp. 211-13).

According to *Spand nask* and *Saddar naṣr*, Dawānus ruled over thirty-three countries, but the number of the countries under Darius and Xerxes varies between thirty-one in the Xerxes inscription (XPh 19-28) to twenty-three in the Bisotun inscription of Darius the Great (DBI 12-17; Briant, tr., pp. 172-73; see [ACHAEMENID SATRAPIES](#)). The use of the number thirty-three in reference to Dawānus could be due to the fact that this number is considered a holy figure in Zoroastrian literature. For instance, the number of the gods is thirty-three (*Yasna* 1.1-23), and there are thirty-three roads leading to paradise in (*Saddar naṣr* 79.6-9).

Darius ascended the Achaemenid throne after he and his associates killed the imposter [Gaumāta](#) the Magus (Smerdis in Herodotus), who had usurped the throne by pretending to be [Bardiya](#), the son on Cyrus the Great (Herodotus 3.61-79; Diakonoff, pp. 391-400; Briant, tr., pp. 97-114). Afterwards, Persians commemorated this event with great festivity every year, during which the Magi, fearing for their lives, did not leave their homes (Herodotus, 3.79; see

MAGOPHONIA). In view of this event, it can be supposed that the Dawānus story might have been composed and initiated by Magians, from whose viewpoint Dawānus/Dāriuš “has never done a good deed, but has committed much tyranny, injustice and cruelty” (*Saddar naṣr* 4.6). There still remains the vague question of Dawānus’s single good deed, which defies reasonable significance: is it a general symbol of a good deed or a point highlighting the insignificance of his only good deed in a life spent in committing tyranny and injustice? (Kargar, pp. 218-20).

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