



## DAYR

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**DAYR** (monastery), in early Islamic Arabic and Persian literature usually a building in which Christian monks (*rāheb*) lived and worshiped. The term eventually took on a number of metaphorical and symbolic meanings as well.

Most *dayrs* were located in rural regions, in deserts or on mountaintops (Yāqūt, *Boldān*, Beirut, II, p. 495), and provision had to be made for defense, as well as for safe travel of visitors and supplies. Some monasteries thus consisted of strongly fortified buildings, surrounded by large estates comprising farms, orchards, water sources, and irrigation channels. In some contexts, however, *dayr* means the isolated and austere abode of a single hermit or a small group of hermits. In the larger monasteries numbers of monks lived a communal life and spent their time in worship and performing work for community needs: farming, shepherding, manufacturing, even buying and selling. Usually the monastery was dedicated to an angel or saint of the Christian religion or to the memory of the founder.

Christian monasteries had been established throughout the Sasanian empire; in the eastern domains of the caliphate they persisted until some time after the fall of the 'Abbasids, or even longer. At the time of the Arab conquest in the mid-7th century there were numerous monasteries in the northwestern and western provinces of the Sasanian empire, from the vicinity of Madā'en ([Ctesiphon](#)) to that of Naṣībīn on the present border between Syria and Turkey; some maintained schools in which mainly Christian theology was taught, in Syriac. As some visitors and students chose to settle permanently nearby, monasteries often evolved into large villages or small towns, some



with commercial or strategic importance.

Many early place names included the word *dayr*, suggesting that they had originally been the sites of monasteries, even though often no trace of such structures survived by the time they were first mentioned in chronicles: Dayr A'war on the outskirts of Kūfa, where the Persian general Rostam-e Farroḳzād camped for a short time on his march from Madā'en to Qādesīya (Ṭabarī, I, p. 2255); Dayr Ka'b between Madā'en and Kūfa, near which the Arabs defeated a Persian force under the command of Naḳīrajān (Balāḍorī, *Fotūḥ*, p. 262); [Dayr-e Gačīn](#) near Qom, reputedly built on the order of Ḳosrow I Anōšīravān (531-79; Qomī, p. 26; cf. Dayr Kardašīr, mentioned in Yāqūt, *Bold'an*, BeirutII, p. 529) or, according to another source, dating from the time of the Kayanids (*Mojmal*, ed. Bahār, pp. 54, 463); [Dayr al-'Āqūl](#) southeast of Baghdad, near the site of which caliphal troops defeated the army of the Saffarid Ya'qūb b. Layṭ in 262/876 (Mas'ūdī, *Morūj*, ed. Pellat, V, p. 109); Dayr Mēkrān (Mēknār?) in the Bagratid territory in Armenia, mentioned by the poet Ḳāqānī as “my final refuge” (p. 45; for its location, see Minorsky, p. 144); and Dayr-e Aflāṭūn near Konya, where Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī and his followers visited (Aflākī, I, pp. 284, 551). According to Ebn Ḥawqal, there was a Christian monastery at Vazkarda near Samarkand in the 10th century (p. 498; cf. Le Strange, *Lands*, p. 465). Among villages in modern Persia are Dayr-e Mawlā near Sanandaj, Dayr-e 'Alī near Salmās, and Dayr-e Mīr in the Mamasanī district (Pāpolī Yazdī, p. 270).

At the larger monasteries celebrations of Christian festivals were often attended by citydwellers, including Muslims, who took the opportunity to drink wine and to talk to Christian boys and girls without fear of being questioned by the *moḥtaseb* (guardian of public morals; see [CITIES iii](#)). Not a few such pleasure seekers were poets and men of letters. For this reason, in the minds of many Muslims the word *dayr* acquired the connotation of a convivial meeting place or a tavern. It was also applied to the temples of Zoroastrians and Hindus in expressions like *dayr-e Moḡān* (monastery of the Magians) and *dayr-e Barahmanān* (monastery of the Brahmins). Ḥāfez and other poets frequently used the expression *dayr-e Moḡān* symbolically, with mystical overtones. Like the Christians, the Zoroastrians had protected (*demmi*) status in the realm of Islam and were permitted to make and consume wine; Muslims often went to Zoroastrian quarters to find what they euphemistically called *dayr-e Moḡān* (or *sarā-ye Moḡān* “palace of the Magians”), meaning a tavern. Wine and goblets were also called *mey-emoḡāna*. On the other hand, *dayr-e Barahmanān* was used by only a few poets, notably



Ḳāqānī (Dehḵodā, s.v. *dayr*), generally referring to the cells of Hindu ascetics who lived in forests (Geden, p. 803). In fact, of course, a Hindu ascetic's cell did not resemble a Christian monastery, but Ḳāqānī's mental picture of a "Brahman monastery" must have been derived from stories that he had heard.

In Sufi literature *dayr* metaphorically represents the universe and the unity of existence (Bāḵarzī, pp. 244-45) or occasionally the material world (*nāsūt*; *Mer'āt al-'oššāq*, p. 150; cf. 'Erāqī, p. 414). In Sufi parlance *dayr-e Moḡān* referred to an assembly of mystics and saints (Hedāyat, p. 39). The fact that Christian monasteries served as hostleries, providing temporary lodging for pilgrims and travelers, gave rise to literary uses of the word *dayr*, by itself or in constructs, as a metaphor for the transitory life of this world, comparable to *falak* (revolving firmament) and *čark* (the wheel of fortune). Such examples as *dayr-e kākī* (earthly), *dayr-e sepanjī* (transient), *dayr-e šešjehatī* (six-sided), *dayr-e kohān* (decrepit), and *dayr-emīnā* (enamel) are listed and explained in dictionaries (e.g., Dehḵodā, s.v. *dayr*).

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