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DĒNKARD

DĒNKARD (lit., “Acts of the religion”), written in Pahlavi, is a summary of 10th-century knowledge of the Mazdean religion; the editor, Ādurbād Ēmēdān, entitled the final version “The Dēnkard of one thousand chapters.” This version, described by Jean de Menasce on the title page of his translation (1958) as a “Mazdean encyclopedia,” consisted of about 169,000 words, according to E. W. West (*Grundriss* II, p. 91). It was divided into nine books of unequal importance, but the first two and the beginning of the third are lost.

Ādurbād Ēmēdān, who is known to have left a *rivāyat* (ed. B. T. Anklesaria, Bombay, 1962), reconstructed a partially destroyed work compiled at the beginning of the 9th century by Ādurfarnbag ī Farroxzādān, who transmitted it to his son Zardošt. The only nearly complete manuscript, known as “manuscript B” (Bombay ms. no. 55; Dhabhar, 1923), is now in the K. R. Cama Oriental Institute in Bombay; it is dated 1659. It was brought from Persia to Surat in India in 1783 and lent by its owner to Dastur K. Rustamji, who returned it with a good number of folios missing. For the most part these folios have been restored from other copies (cf. Dresden, 1966, pp. 13-18). According to the colophons of B and other copies, the original manuscript must have been made in Baghdad and dated 1020. Manuscript B consists at present of 322 folios; the total number of the original must have been 392. The other manuscript that is important for the transmission of the text is K 43 in Copenhagen, which consists of two parts, on fols. 177-261 and 262-303 respectively (see CODICES HAFNIENSES). Among modern copies of manuscript B are DE (in the collection of Dastur Edalji Darabji Sanjana) and M 58 (Haug

ms. no. 13; Unvala p. 66), the latter dated 1866. Other manuscripts contain parts or extracts of the *Dēnkard*: DH, known for its text of the *Bundahišn* (in the collection of Dastur Hoshang Jamasp, fols. 250 ff.), and University of Cambridge mss. Add. nos. 328-29 (containing only the conclusion of the *Dēnkard*). For the reconstruction of the lost folios ms. no. 24 II in the Dastur Meherji Rana Library in Navsari and mss. nos. 10-13 (dated 1866-69) in the Mulla Feroze Library in Bombay are useful, as they contain copies of different books of the *Dēnkard* and the six missing folios (Dhabhar, pp. 10-11).

The text has been edited twice. The first edition was by Dastur Peshotan Bahramji Sanjana, who published eight volumes during his lifetime, between 1869 and 1897; publication of volumes IX-XIX was completed by his son Darab in 1928. D. M. Madan also published a complete text in two volumes (Bombay, 1911). In 1966 M. J. Dresden published a facsimile of manuscript B, with the addition of the missing folios.

The first translations were those of L.-C. Casartelli (some chapters of Book III, in 1881 and 1886) and West (the beginning of Book V and Books VII-IX, in SBE 18, 37, 47). More recently, Marijan Molé published a French translation of Book VII and part of Book V (1967), de Menasce a complete French translation of Book III (1973), and Shaul Shaked an English translation of Book VI (1979). Numerous fragments have also been translated and commented on, notably by H. W. Bailey and R. C. Zaehner. Nevertheless, it would be worth having more modern translations of certain books. Recently Aḥmad Tafażżolī and Žāla Āmūzgār have translated into Persian some parts of Books V, VII, and IX.

The *Dēnkard* is primarily an apology for Mazdaism. More specifically, Books III-V are devoted to rational apologetics, Book VI to moral wisdom, and Books VII-IX to exegetical theology. The work was the product of a Persian milieu already largely islamicized and was thus intended both as a reply to Muslim attacks upon dualism and as a compendium of what could be saved of the scriptures. The main task at such a late date was to produce an encyclopedia of the religious sciences as known in the 9th-10th centuries. The *Dēnkard* is not, however, a systematic treatment; it is, rather, a compilation of preserved materials, no doubt carried out under the direction of an official master. The compiler, who is named in the last chapter (420) of Book III, is said to have had information from the “ancient sages,” the *pōryōtkēšān*, clearly of the Sasanian period. According to de Menasce, Ādurfarnbag ī Farroxzādān may have been a contemporary of the caliph al-Maʾmūn (198-218/813-33), but the final redaction dates from the 10th century.

The original *Dēnkard* must have consisted of basic texts specifically related to the Avesta, along with glosses or commentaries on them (e.g., the Zand), the whole constituting what was called the *dēn* "the religion."

Book III, which comprises almost half the work, consists of more than 400 chapters, some of them very short, of varied content and without any overall plan (cf. the chapter titles in Pahlavi transcription in de Menasce, 1958, pp. 82-116). What lends it at least some semblance of unity is the polemic against the "bad religions," the practitioners (*kēšdārān*)of whichare explicitly identified when they are Manicheans or Jews but not when they are Muslims, an understandable precaution. Almost every chapter begins with the words "From the exposition of the good religion" (*az nigēz ī weh dēn*). This expression probably refers, not to a literary source, but only to a method of interpreting the revelation or Mazdean wisdom. De Menasce (1958, pp. 12 ff.) has recognized several distinct literary forms in this work, including numerous short chapters of two or three pages and rare long chapters on important subjects (e.g., chap. 80 on marriage to blood relatives, chap. 157 on medicine, chap. 123 on cosmogony). In accordance with the apologetic perspective that characterizes Book III, another series of chapters deals with good precepts (*andarz*), the counsels of Zoroaster or other leaders of the good religion, in contrast to evil precepts (*drāyišn*). De Menasce has argued that, although the presentation does not appear to conform to an overall plan, when all areas of faith, which are linked to myth, and of ethics, which are often dependent upon the laws of purity, are taken into account, they can be seen to be grouped, not haphazardly, but according to key words that serve as links. On the intellectual level, although Book III does not contain a systematic description of the revelation, it is arranged in order to develop the theme of cosmic dualism in a rational and philosophical manner and to explain the situation of mankind in the world of "mixture" (*gumēzišn*). On the social level it shows the complementarity of religion and kingship, and on the level of the individual it includes an analysis of the virtues and vices and the final destiny of the soul. Here and also in his discussion of Book VI (see below) de Menasce has clearly delineated the correspondences between the latter two categories, the play of which seems infinitely varied.

From the fifty chapters dealing with the refutation of false doctrines (a theme to which *Škand gumānīg wizār* of Mardānfarrox Ohrmazddādān, the book of polemics against Manicheism and Judeo-Christianity, is entirely devoted) those Islamic principles that were most disputed can be singled out: the notion of the

"seal of prophecy" claimed by Moḥammad, the debate over idolatry (veneration of the stars as sacred entities being no more idolatrous in the eyes of a Mazdean than the koranic claim that God had ordered the angels to adore Adam), and belief in an eternal hell, which contradicts the Mazdean belief in divine mercy and the separation of the principles of good and evil. The *kēšdārān* who professed these evil doctrines are described throughout Book III. The metaphysical and philosophical point of view is always predominant. In the chapter on medicine (cf. Casartelli, 1886, pp. 530-58; de Menasce, 1958, pp. 158-68), for example, different types of medicine; the qualities of a good physician, who must treat the soul, as well as the body; and definitions of illness and health, always from the perspective of man's destiny in this world and in the hereafter, are set forth, but there is no treatise on anatomy and the vital functions of the kind provided, for example, in chapters 29 and 30 of the *Wizīdagīhā ī Zādspram*, so valuable for the reconstruction of a history of the sciences in this period. The compiler of the *Dēnkard* assumed that these principles were known.

Book IV is the shortest, presented as a selection of sentences from the *Āʾīn-nāma*, a text dealing with customs, arts, and sciences. One chapter of Book III (142; de Menasce, 1958, p. 147) is of this same genre. Book IV seems particularly incoherent in its organization. It consists of a philosophical explanation of the "issuing" of the Amәša Spәntas from the first principle. The author also explained the role of the Persian sovereigns in the defense of Mazdaism, beginning with Darius III (336-31 B.C.E.), always the ancient starting point in later Pahlavi literature, and ending with Ḵosrow I (590-628 C.E.). Then the function of created beings is defined, which provides an occasion for speculations on time, fate, and action, that is, on determination and free will, on music, and on the more abstract concepts of metaphysics. De Menasce thinks that this mixture of metaphysics and history resulted from dislocations occasioned by condensation of a more detailed work, such that the original can no longer be reconstructed. The compiler then turned, without transition, to meteorological questions, then to observations of astronomers and data contained in the "Book of the measurement of the earth" (*Nibēg ī zamīg paymānīh*) and physicians' observations. Then he returned to the relationship between religion and royalty, to a digression on penal law, and to the four qualities of the elements: hot, cold, dry, and moist. Finally, he insisted on the essential role of Persia in the moral education of humanity, owing to Persian sovereignty over foreign peoples. An enumeration of scientific works from Greece and India (the *Almagest* of Ptolemy and works of logic, rhetoric,

astrology, and astronomy) reveals foreign influence from the 3rd century onward, and Book IV ends with considerations on the afterlife and the necessity for practicing the golden rule of Mazdaism, that is, the ethical triad of good thoughts (*humat*), good words (*hūxt*), and good actions (*huwaršt*; Gignoux, 1989).

Book V contains the replies of Ādurfarnbag (in a work entitled the "Book of the Daylamite") to a certain Yaʿqūb son of Ḵāled, who sought to inform himself about Mazdaism. The instruction that the first editor of the *Dēnkard* provided for a possible convert is not characterized by doctrinal rigor but is, rather, an abridged account of human history up to the time of Zoroaster and of his message, which is subsumed in the obligation to struggle against demons and to perform the worship due to the gods. This exposition is followed by a statement of the principal tenets of the Mazdean faith: belief in paradise and hell, rewards and punishments in the afterlife, the rites of confession of sins, purification, dietary laws, alms, endogamous marriage, feasts, and the protection of the four elements. All this material is clearly nationalist and Persian in orientation, expressing the hope of a Mazdean restoration in the face of Islam and its Arab supporters, and it is thus not of direct value to the historian of religions. It was also a necessary response to Manichean and other detractors, who, emphasizing the universalism of their own religion, reproached the Mazdeans for the parochial character of their own. The second part of Book V consists of thirty-three questions addressed to the Christian Bōxt-Mārā: eleven related to the metaphysics of existence and the operation of the evil principle; three treating the conditions of revelation, especially the oral teaching of the Avesta, evidence suggesting that the text was written down quite late (and that only a few copies existed in the Sasanian period); four dealing with worship; and thirteen devoted to ritual purity in response to objections raised by Bōxt-Mārā.

Book VI is a collection of *andarz*, a literary genre with antecedents in late Avestan literature, known through extracts from the *Bariš nask*. It is a book of practical wisdom said to have been inherited from the ancient sages. Shaked distinguishes two groups of aphorisms, respectively religious and profane in character (see ANDARZ i, p. 13). Those of *Dēnkard* VI are clearly of a more intellectual type than those in smaller, more popular collections, like the *andarz* attributed to Ādurbād ī Mahrspandān or the more clearly narrative texts that belong to the same literary genre (e.g., *Xusrō ī Kawādān ud rēdag-ē* and *Draxt (ī) āsūrīg*). Book VI is in fact a compilation, grouped into large

sections distinguished from one another by their initial formulas. A certain number of passages are repeated in the book, further evidence that it is not a homogeneous composition. Some collections have been extracted in later Persian and Arabic works (e.g., *Jāwīdān ḵerad*). Shaked has divided the book into six parts. The first, from the beginning to A6d, is devoted to religious subjects, with emphasis on personal piety and devotion to the gods. In the second, from B1 to B47, the creations of Ohrmazd and Ahriman, the two wisdoms, and proportion (*paymān*) and excess (*frēhbūdīh*) are contrasted; the probable source was the ethical principles of Aristotle. The third, from B48 to C47, is related to the second, in that it is devoted to the array of human qualities treated in a more practical manner. The fourth part, C48 to C83, deals with clusters of different qualities or activities, and the fifth, D1 to D12, includes the names of authors and morally edifying anecdotes. The last part, E1 to E45, is a conglomeration of aphorisms on various religious themes.

These *andarz* are seldom referred to doctrine but rather are devoted to human behavior, ranging from personal ethics to the interior vision of the soul. The necessity for self-knowledge is set forth; it requires questioning oneself about one's own origins, religious identification, and ultimate end. Education, the basis of knowledge, leads to wisdom. One thus arrives at correct conduct, fulfilling the duty of mankind, which is to repel demons from this world. The regulation of family relations is also dealt with, and education by means of writing is recommended. The views of good people must be solicited, and their company, like that of the sages, is praised, for they correspond in the material world to the gods in the spiritual world; what separates them is only a matter of degree, rather than of substance, for the soul of the just man is divine. Faith is indispensable to attaining the status of the just (*ahlawīh*), and religious observance is through the triad "thought, word, action." Religion assures man of happiness. Knowledge and recitation of the scriptures are said to be the means of realizing the *dēn*, but advice not to teach the Avesta, and still less the Zand, to everyone is doubtless evidence of the importance still accorded to oral instruction.

Shaked believes (1969, pp. 214 ff.) that he has found traces of esoteric belief in these texts, not of asceticism in general, for there is no deprecation of the things of this world but only encouragement to cultivate them with moderation in order not to encroach on the spiritual domain. It is necessary to preserve a balance between the two poles of human existence. Possession of material goods is a good thing, as are reputation and social status, but they

should be put to good use and not enjoyed only for themselves. Nevertheless, poverty, though not misery, is also praised, for it is possible to draw benefit from it. The poor must not, however, scorn the rich or complain of their own lot. The value accorded to poverty, conferring a certain spiritual sanctity, resembles that in the Judeo-Christian tradition. The problem of human liberty is also treated: The notion of fate (*baxt*, *brēh*) is ambiguous in Mazdaism, but, according to Shaked (1979, pp. xli ff.), it does not refer to Zurvanism, as some have tried to demonstrate (Zaehner, pp. 254 ff.). Finally, the conditions of human life are clearly summarized (D1a) as twenty-five functions, organized under five headings: destiny (*brēh*), action (*kunišn*), custom (*hōg*), substance (*gōhr*), and inheritance (*abarmānd*).

Book VII has for a long time been recognized as that of the "legend of Zoroaster," the content of which can be viewed as parallel to that of the beginning of book V and chapters 5-26 of the *Wizīdagīhā ī Zādspram* and chapter 47 of the *Pahlavi Rivāyat*. The Persian *Zardošt-nāma* echoes the same traditions. Book VII was first translated by West and more recently by Molé (who brought together the texts, including the *Wizīrkard ī dēnīg* but not the *Zādspram*; 1967, pp. 26-49); its chapters have been analyzed in broad outline by de Menasce (1958, p. 64): 1. on the prophet as repository of *xwarrah* since the reign of Gayōmard, through the line of the Kayanids; 2. on the genealogy of Zoroaster; 3. on his miraculous infancy until the first interview (*ham-pursagīh*) with Ohrmazd and on the sorcerers' vain attempts to kill him by fire, then by throwing him under the hooves of bulls and horses and into the lair of a wolf, and finally by means of a sorcerer's evil eye, as well as on the meeting with Wahman (the Aməša Spənta); 4. on revelations received during his seven encounters with Ohrmazd and miracles against the demons, the conversion of Wištāsp after the visit of the Aməša Spəntas, and a visionary experience, apparently shamanistic in nature (rather than an illumination of the sort that Paul received on the road to Damascus); 5. on Zoroaster's actions from the time of Wištāsp's acceptance of the religion until his own death, including the institution of ordeals, revelations on medicine (*biziškīh*), physics (*čihr-šnāsīh*) and other sciences, miraculous curing rituals, and so on; 6. on miracles after Zoroaster's death, including the appearance of Wištāsp on earth riding a celestial chariot; 7. on the history of Iran until the Arab conquest, highlighting several kings and celebrated religious figures; 8. on miracles up to the end of the millennium of Zoroaster and the advent of the first savior, his son Ušētar; 9. on miracles during the thousand years of Ušētar until the advent of Ušētarmāh; 10. on miracles during the thousand years of Ušētarmāh until the

advent of Sōšyans; 11. on miracles during the fifty-seven years of Sōšyans until the renewal (*frašgird*) of creation. The *Spand nask* and perhaps even the *Zand ī Wahman Yašt* have been suggested as sources for this book, though, owing to the late character of the latter and uncertainty over the existence of an antecedent Avestan *yašt* (cf. Gignoux, 1986), this connection is problematic.

Book VIII is particularly precious because it provides a summary of the contents of the Sasanian Avesta, which is partly lost, and the commentary on it. It probably consisted of three parts, each of seven chapters; the parts were entitled respectively “Gāhānīg” (seven *nask*s from the gathic texts), “Hadag-mānsarīg” (a collection of sacred formulas related to ritual), and “Dādīg” (devoted to juridical texts; for a table of contents of the Avesta, after Dēnkard VIII, see AVESTA, p. 37). This organization, which is believed to correspond to the twenty-one words of the prayer Ahunwar and may have had astrological connotations, perhaps represents the Sasanian archetype of the Avesta; it reflects the incomplete Pahlavi translation of the Avestan texts, though it may include Avestan texts that are only late compilations. Even so, it accounts for only about a quarter of the original Avesta. Besides, as Jean Kellens has argued (see AVESTA), what the priests of the Sasanian period knew about the old Avestan texts and the ancient *yašt*s has survived almost in its entirety. This book also provides information concerning penal and agrarian law, which is complementary to the laws of obligation presented in the *Mādayān ī hazār dādestān*.

Book IX is a book of *zand*, making explicit the content of the gathic *nask*s analyzed in book VIII: the *Sūtkar*, *Varštmānsar*, and *Bagnask*s, which are commentaries on the three great Mazdean prayers: Ahunwar, Ašem vohū, and Yeńhē hātąm. It concludes with a commentary on *Yasna* 54. Although the first two *nask*s are mythical or historical evocations in the midrashic style, the *Bag nask* is more a kind of meditation, serving as a gloss on the text. The teaching emphasizes the necessity for union between Zoroaster and the believer, between the master and the disciple, and with the Amәša Spәntas.

Although the *Dēnkard* as a whole contains a good number of historical allusions, they are most often shrouded in myth and thus of dubious reliability. For example, the report, in the last chapter of Book III, according to which Alexander burned a copy of the Avesta and another example fell into the hands of the Greeks, who translated it into their own language, has often been accepted as historical (e.g., Altheim), though it is now recognized that there was no written Avesta before the Hellenistic period and that the first

edition took place in the Sasanian period, at the earliest (AVESTA).

The style of this monumental work has often been considered difficult and full of pitfalls because of its conciseness and the fact that it often seems to consist of summaries. There is thus still much work to be done before the full richness of this impressive work can be understood in detail.

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