



## DEŽ Ī NEBEŠT

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**DEŽĪ NEBEŠT** (Mid. Pers. *diz ī nibišť* “fortress of archives,” lit. “writing”), supposedly one of two repositories (the other being *ganj ī šāhīgān*, ms.: *špyk’n* “royal treasury”) in which copies of the *Avesta* and its exegesis (*zand*) were deposited for safekeeping. Five somewhat different versions of this legend are recounted in Pahlavi literature. In the *Dēnkard* (ed. Madan, I, p. 412; Nyberg, *Manual* I, p. 108) the vicissitudes of the Zoroastrian scriptures are reported this way: “Dārāy, son of Dārāy, commanded that two written copies of all the *Avesta* and *Zand*, even as Zoroaster had received them from Ohrmazd, be preserved, one in the royal treasury and one in the fortress of archives” (Zaehner, pp. 7-8; Shaki, 1981, p. 118; Bailey, *Zoroastrian Problems*, p. 230). In another passage (ed. Madan, I, p. 405; Nyberg, *Manual* I, p. 111), however, it is the original *Dēnkard*, an exposition of the Mazdean religion written down by command of Kay Wištāsp, that was deposited in the royal treasury; suitable copies were made and distributed, and one of them was sent to be preserved in the fortress of archives. “During the ruin that was brought upon the country of Iran by the sinister Alexander (q.v.) that which was in the fortress of archives was burnt” (de Menasce, 1973, p. 379; West, pp. xxx-xxxii). In yet another passage of the *Dēnkard* (ed. Madan, I, p. 437; Nyberg, *Manual* I, p. 110) it is reported that “whatever Zoroaster taught and partly wrote together with the *Avesta* and *Zand* Jāmāsp wrote in gold on cowhides and kept in the royal treasury” (ms.: *ganj ī xwadāyān*). In the *Šahrestānīhā ī Ērān* (Markwart, *Provincial Capitals*, p. 9) another depository is mentioned in the east: After Zoroaster announced the religion, King Wištāsp ordered 1,200 chapters (*fragard*) engraved in scriptural (i.e., Avestan) characters (*dēn dibīrīh*) on gold



tablets and deposited in the treasury of the Warahrān fire at Samarkand. On the destruction of the Zoroastrian scriptures it is reported in the *Ardā Wīrāz-nāmag*: “The accursed Alexander the Roman (i.e., Greek) . . . came to Iran with heavy tyranny . . . slew the sovereign of Iran and burnt . . . the whole of the Avesta and the Zand as written in liquid gold on prepared cowhides . . . and deposited in the *KLYT’ npst* in Staxr Pābagān” (Gignoux, 1984, pp. 37, 145; Vahman, pp. 76, 191; Bailey, *Zoroastrian Problems*, p. 152; Henning, 1944, p. 136; Nyberg, *Manual I*, p. 107). Both the reading and the interpretation of *KLYT’ npst*, the locality of the *diz ī nibišt*, have given rise to controversy. Contextual comparison reveals that *KLYT’ npst* in the *Ardā Wīrāz-nāmag* (see [ARDĀ WĪRĀZ](#)) cannot be any place other than the *diz ī nibišt* of the parallel accounts; the heterogram *KLYT’* stands for *diz* and the slightly miswritten *npst* for *npšt*, *nibišt*. H. W. Bailey, having identified *KLYT’* with *diz*, nevertheless unconvincingly interpreted it as Aramaic *QRYT’* “village” (*Zoroastrian Problems*, p. 151). H. S. Nyberg correctly rejected the reading *QRYT’* and proposed *qellaitā* “cell,” a plausible reading for depository. Although he cited *diz ī nibišt* three times (Nyberg, *Manual I*, pp. 108, 111), he nevertheless construed *npst*, *nipast* as depository, taken it as a gloss for *KLYT’* (Nyberg, *Manual II*, p. 141). Walter Belardi (pp. 27-28), having accepted Nyberg’s reading, considered *kellaitā* a technical term in Middle Persian and *nipast* a verbal adjunct; he thus read *pad kellaitā nipast nihāt estāt* “had been placed in a depository.” The term *diz ī nibišt* is preserved in Ṭabarī (I, p. 676), where the manuscripts have the corrupt forms *dr bšt*, *dr bbšt*, and *dr byšt*.

Another area of disagreement has been the location of the *diz ī nibišt*. W. B. Henning, in the introduction to his edition of inscription KNRm, identified *diz ī nibišt* with the Ka’ba-ye Zardošt, which he believed was referred to as *bwn BYT’* (interpreted as *bun-xānag*, “foundation house”) in the same inscription (KNRm 7 = KKZ 3; Back, p. 391). In discussing the relevant passage of the inscription KKZ, the present author questioned this proposition, linking *bwn BYT’* instead to the *ādurān* and *kardagān* “fires and religious rites,” and interpreted the phrase as “principal property, capital” (Shaki, 1974, pp. 334-35). To demonstrate the significance of the phrase and assess the purpose of the Ka’ba-ye Zardošt, we will recall the relevant passage where Kirdīr declares: “... and all of these fires and rites (*ādurān ud kardagān*), which have been mentioned in this inscription, were in a most profitable manner (*KN gwnktly*, *ōh gōnagtar*, cf. *Av. gaona*—“profit,” *AirWb.*, col. 412) entrusted to me as benefice (*wāspuhragān* “private property”) by Šāpūr the king of kings, ordering “Yours shall be these as principal property (resources; *YKt bwny BYT’*



ZHN 'yw YḤWWN), “do as you deem it best for the gods and us,” (KKZ 2-3; Back, pp. 390-91). From the tenor of the sentence it is evident that the royal grant concerns the resources (*BYT*) derived from the revenues of the fires and rites conferred on Kirdīr as a most profitable benefice for the administration of these religious foundations.

Architecturally the Ka'ba-ye Zardošt, like its prototype, the Zendān-e Solaymān, is a tower with a hardly accessible narrow chamber under the roof, situated in a funerary region beyond the compass of social and cultural life; it would thus be quite impractical as a depository, whether for regalia or for ritual objects, as suggested by R. N. Frye (p. 177 n. 14), or for documents, as proposed by Henning. There is therefore no point in looking for the *diz ī nibišt* in a tower like the Ka'ba, which was in all likelihood the mausoleum of Queen [Atossa](#) (Boyce, *Zoroastrianism* II, p. 117).

That repositories for documents did exist in Iran is attested in the Bible. In ancient Persia there were three houses of treasures (*bēt ginzayyā*) where books (*sép'ar*) and records (*dukranayyā*) were kept, analogous to the *diz ī nibišt* for royal archives: at Susa (Esther 6:1), at Babylon, and at Ecbatana (Ezra 5:17-6:2). From the Sasanian period only one such repository is known, the *ganj ī šāhīgān* “royal treasury.” It was not only a treasury but also a depository for documents, as is clear from the declaration by [Bozorgmehr-e Boktagān](#), the grand vizier of Kōsrow Anūšīravān (531-79), that he had deposited his *Ayādgār* (see [AYĀDGAR Ī WUZURGMIHR](#)) there for safekeeping (*Pahlavi Texts*, ed. Jamasp-Asana, p. 85).

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