



GABR

GABR (*gabrak*, *gawr*, *gaur* “Zoroastrian”; *gabri*, *gabrakī* “Zoroastrianism”), a New Persian term deriving, in all likelihood, from Aramaic *GBR*’/*gabrā* (lit. man), which in the Sasanian period was used to indicate the free peasants in the region of Mesopotamia (Stayermanova, II, 25.2.1). The term is used in all stages of New Persian literature from the earliest period (e.g., *Šāh-nāma*, Moscow, I, p. 149; Bal’amī, ed. Bahār, p. 2; Sanā’ī, p. 368) as a technical term synonymous with *mōg* (magus), or the obsolete *ātašparast* (fire-worshipper), along with other religious denominations (e.g., Rūmī, *Ġazalīyāt*, p. 124). With the dwindling of the Zoroastrian community because of frequent proselytisations and the curtailment of their social rights, the term came to have a pejorative implication, which is the reason for its commutation to the respectable *zardoštī* (Zoroastrian) in recent times.

Several etymologies have been proposed for the term, none of which is convincing. Some scholars have suggested *mog-mard*/ *mgw-GBR*’ (magus), which is, however, untenable, for the element *GBR*’/*gabrā*, being an ideogram and a bound constituent of the compound, cannot appear in absolute form, nor may it be pronounced other than *mard* (man) in common parlance. The etymology suggested by Ebrāhīm Pūr-e Dāwūd, which has been received more favorably, is based on the supposed mispronunciation of the Arabic *kāfer* (unbeliever) by the Persians in early Islamic Period. But, although Persians still fail to articulate some Arabic speech sounds properly, there is no unusual sound in *kāfer* that would require phonetic modification. Moreover, although *gabr* has been sometimes used to denote infidel (*kāfer*) by semantic extension



(e.g., Rūmī, *Maṭnawī* II, p. 287, v. 177; Ḥasan Rūmlū, ed. Navā'ī, I, p. 384; Eskandar Beg, I, pp. 85, 87), *kāfer* as a generic word could hardly refer to a specific revealed religion such as Zoroastrianism. It, therefore, seems likely that *gabr*, used already in Sasanian times in reference to a section of Zoroastrian community in Mesopotamia, had been employed by the converted Persians in the Islamic period to indicate their Zoroastrian compatriots, a practice that later spread throughout the country. The term has also been used by the Muslim Kurds, Turks, and some other ethnic groups in modified forms to denote various religious communities other than Zoroastrians, sometimes even in the sense of unbeliever.

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