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JĀḤEẒ, ABU ʿOṮMĀN ʿAMR B. BAḤR (b. *ca*. 160/776; d. 255/868-9), the leading Arabic prose writer of the 9th century. His father, who may have been of East African descent, was a client of the Arab tribe of Kināna. Jāḥeẓ grew up in Baṣra, where he studied with a number of leading scholars, including the Muʿtazilite theologian Abu Esḥāq Ebrāhim b. Sayyār al-Naẓẓām (d. between 220/825 and 230/825, q.v.) and the philologists Abu ʿObeyda Maʿmar (d. 209/824-25, q.v.) and al-Asmaʿi (d. 213/828). His essays on the imamate brought him to the attention of the Abbasid caliph al-Maʾmun (r. 198-218/813-33), who invited him to Baghdad. Jāḥeẓ joined the caliph in condemning literalist scholars of the Hadith (the statements and opinions attributed to the Prophet Muham-mad, see HADITH) as anthropomorphists and wrote several polemical tracts against them (al-Qadi). Under the caliphs al-Moʿtasem (r. 218-27/833-42) and al-Wāṯeq (r. 227-32/842-47), he enjoyed the patronage of the vizier Ebn al-Zayyāt (d. 233/847), the Muʿtazilite judge Ebn Abi Doʾād (d. 240/854), and the latter's son Abu'l-Walid Moḥammad (d. 239/854). In 237/851, the caliph al-Motawakkel (r. 232-47/847-61) reversed his predecessors' anti-Sunnite stance; but Jāḥeẓ, now under the protection of the courtier al-Fatḥ b. Ḵāqān, continued to attack the literalist Hadith-scholars. After his protector was assassinated in 247/861, Jāḥeẓ returned to Baṣra, where he apparently remained until his death. The Arabic sources flesh out his biography with a number of anecdotes. Reportedly, he was strikingly ugly: the name Jāḥeẓ means 'pop-eyed.' He is said to have sold fish for a time in Baṣra during his youth, and to have paid rent to booksellers in order to be allowed to spend the night reading in their shops. Several sources report that he died of a stroke,

but tradition claims that he was killed by a collapsing bookshelf.

Jāḥeẓ has been credited with up to 245 works, although the true total may be closer to 190. Approximately 90 of his works have survived, either completely or in fragments (Montgomery, p. 234). Many take up theological issues, notably the createdness of the Qurʾān, or political controversies, particularly the nature of the imamate. The largest surviving works are *al-Ḥayawān* ('Living creatures'), ostensibly on zoology, but full of miscellaneous religious, scientific, and literary observations; and *al-Bayān wa al-tabyin* ('Clarity and clarification'), on language and eloquence, especially as manifested in Arabic. Of his other works, the most famous include *al-Boḵalāʾ* ('The Misers'), *Manāqeb al-Tork* ('The virtues of the Turks'), *Resālat al-qiān* ('Epistle on singing slave women'), and *Faḵr al-sudān ʿalā al-biżān* ('The boasting of blacks over whites'). As a stylist, he is famous for his incessant quotation of sources, his evident delight in arguing both sides of a question, his penchant for *reductio ad absurdum*, and his love of digression. His works constitute a rich source of information on contemporary opinions and practices, including those of the Persians. This information is, however, scattered throughout several works, all of them in one way or another polemical, and none of them devoted to Persians as such. One must therefore beware of insisting upon a particular interpretation of his attitudes toward Persians or any other ethnic group. Only in connection with certain religious and political topics does he appear to be speaking in his own voice and to be entirely serious. Otherwise, he makes a point of concealing his opinions behind a farrago of citations, many of them humorous.

Jāḥeẓ was familiar with what he calls the 'books of the non-Arabs' (*kotob al-ʿajam* or *al-aʿājem*), that is, the Middle Persian writings that had been available in Arabic translations since the first half of the 8th century. He condemns the books of the Manicheans (*zanādeqa*), which, despite being most impressively decorated, speak of nothing but "light and darkness, coupling demons, rutting devils," and other "nonsense" (*Ḥayawān*, I, p. 75). Yet he has great respect for those works he calls *ādāb*, a term which—to judge by his comments elsewhere—refers to well-expressed observations about man and the world, insightful arguments about intellectual matters, and practical advice for improving one's lot in life. For all its beauty, Arabic poetry, he claims, contains no wisdom that cannot be found in the works of the Persians (*Ḥayawān*, I, p. 75). His citations from the Persian tradition include a definition of eloquence attributed to Ebn al-Moqaffaʿ (d. *ca*. 757, q.v.), the famous translator of Middle

Persian (*Bayān*, I, pp. 115-17); and the comments of Sahl b. Hārun (d. 215/830), the well-known Shuʿubite (Šoʿubi), to the effect that audiences are often more impressed by a shabby and ill-favored orator than by an elegant and comely one (*Bayān*, I, pp. 89-90). In other cases, Jāḥeẓ alludes (usually without specifying the source of his information) to practices characteristic of the Persians, such as their kings' love of hunting (*Ḥayawān*, II, p. 140) or their favorite foods (*Boḵalāʾ*, p. 179).

Despite his generally laudatory comments about Persian literature, Jāḥeẓ takes a dim view of those whose reading extends to nothing else. In an epistle entitled *Ḏamm aḵlāq al-kottāb* ('A condemnation of the character of secretaries'), he sketches a portrait of a typical Abbasid bureaucrat—one whose learning is thoroughly Persian in character. Such learning, says Jāḥeẓ, consists of the aphorisms of Bozorgmehr (see BOZORGMEHR-E BOḴTAGĀN), the testament of Ardašir (r. ?-242 C.E., see ARDAŠIR I), the *adab* of Ebn al-Moqaffaʿ, the epistles of ʿAbd-al-Ḥamid b. Yaḥyā b. Saʿd (d. 132/750, q.v.; the secretary to the last Umayyad caliph Marwān II b. Moḥammad [r. 127-32/744-50]), the *Book of Mazdak* (or *Mardak*), and *Kalila wa Demna* (q.v.). The secretaries who have mastered these texts feel qualified to speak with authority on all subjects, including scriptural exegesis, Islamic law, philosophy, and Arabic style. Full of confidence in their own judgment, they impugn the language of the Qurʾān and express doubt about the authenticity of the Hadith. The common people, dazzled by the secretaries' air of learning, revere them (*Rasāʾel*, II, pp. 187-209). This polemic against the secretaries seems contrived: elsewhere, Jāḥeẓ claims—with greater plausibility—that the common people revere *ḥadiṯ*-scholars, not secretaries (e.g., *Rasāʾel*, III, pp. 298 and 300).

In his epistle on the virtues of the Turks—by which is meant their usefulness as soldiers in the caliph's army—Jāḥeẓ describes three groups of Persians, or Persianized Arabs and Arameans, associated with the Abbasid dynasty. These are the *banawi*s (the descendants of the *abnāʾ al-dowla*, the first Abbasid revolutionaries), the *mawlā*s ('clients,' pl. *mawāli*), and the Khorasanis (people from Khorasan). The *banawi*s boast of their ancestors who brought the Abbasids to power. They also speak of their own ability to fight in trenches, on bridgeheads, at gates, in alleyways, and in prisons—a claim that suggests that they served as an urban police force (*Rasāʾel*, I, pp. 25-28; Crone). The *mawlā*s, for their part, pride themselves on their long-standing and intimate connection to the ruling family but also of their ability to understand the

common people (*Rasāʾel*, I, pp. 23-25). They are thus probably to be identified with the Iranian or Persianized Aramean class that supplied the Abbasid dynasty with its scribes and viziers. The Khorasanis, finally, appear to be the partisans of the "second call to allegiance," that is, the warriors recruited by al-Maʾmun to overthrow the caliph al-Amin (which they did in 198/813). Like the *banawi*s, the Khorasanis claim descent from the original partisans of the Abbasids. In the speeches Jāḥeẓ attributes to them, they vaunt their skill in battle and their spectacular record of victory over the enemies of the caliphate. They describe themselves as having long hair, curling mustaches, and broad shoulders; and as riding into battle with drums, banners, curved swords, clubs, battleaxes, and daggers. They were "created to topple dynasties" and the sound of their shouting is enough to cause a miscarriage (*Rasāʾel*, I, pp. 14-23).

Jāḥeẓ's work *al-Boḵalāʾ* ('Misers') contains a good deal of detail—real or invented—about the famous penny-pinchers of Khorasan. Khorasanis eat alone instead of sharing meals (*Boḵalāʾ*, pp. 24-26); they pretend not to recognize old friends in order to avoid treating them (*Boḵalāʾ*, p. 22, with the miser's final remark given in Persian; see further Mahdavi-Dāmḡāni, p. 250); and they walk for three months on their heels and three months on their toes in order to save shoe leather (*Boḵalāʾ*, p. 28). In one anecdote, a man from Marv (Merv)—a town famous for its misers—refuses to help pay for lighting oil, so his friends blindfold him in order to deny him the benefit of the lamp (*Boḵalāʾ*, p. 18). In another yarn, a Khorasani refuses to lend his frying pan to a neighbor but then regrets his refusal when he learns that the neighbor planned to fry meat and would therefore have returned the pan with a layer of grease on it (*Boḵalāʾ*, p. 23). These anecdotes, along with the epistle in defense of penny-pinching ascribed to the Shuʿubite Sahl b. Hārun (d. 215/830; *Boḵalāʾ*, pp. 9-16), have led some modern critics to conclude that the *Misers* ridicules Persians by contrasting their supposed stinginess with the proverbial generosity of the Arabs (Pellat, 1953, p. 229). Yet it is not the Persians but rather the Khorasanis—some of whom were or were considered to be Arabs—who are collectively described as misers. Of the other figures in the book, some are Persians, some—including the caliph Hešām b. ʿAbd-al-Malek (r. 105-25/724-43)—are Arabs, and many are simply unidentified (*Boḵalāʾ*, introd., p. 33). The work does contain a complaint, attributed to a miser, that Arabic poetry has declined because of the ascendancy of the *ʿajam* (non-Arabs; *Boḵalāʾ*, p. 177), but the likeliest conclusion is that the speaker means the Turkish soldiery of Samarra.

Jāḥeẓ has much to say about the Shuʿubites, that is, those of his contemporaries who argued that Persians were superior—or at least not inferior—to Arabs. Some may have advocated the view that Persians of noble lineage should enjoy the same privileges as the Arab elite (Mottahedeh), or at least maintain some of the privileges they enjoyed before the Arab conquest (Enderwitz, pp. 16-25). The Shuʿubites reportedly mocked elements of traditional Arab culture, saying for example that the Arab orator's staff was a crude prop and that the ancient Arabs lacked even the most basic weapons and military tactics. Jāḥeẓ devotes a long section of his *Bayān* to rebutting these attacks, citing poems and other testimony to show that the Arabs could indeed use saddles, fight at night, and the like; and that the staff is a noble and useful implement (*Bayān*, III, pp. 5-124). Although it contains a good deal of information on Shuʿubite arguments, the discussion says relatively little about Persian culture itself. The exceptions are the claims (attributed anonymously to the Shuʿubites) that the most gifted orators are the Persians in general and the people of Fārs in particular; that the most fluent and masterful speakers come from Merv; that the most eloquent speakers of Dari and Pahlavi (qq.v.) languages come from Ahvāz; that "the intonation of the herbeds and the language of the mobeds" may still be learned from "the interpreter of the *zamzamah*" (*sāḥib tafsir al-zamzama*, apparently a transmitter of the Zand); and that eloquence may be attained from reading a work called the *Book of Kārwand* (*Bayān*, III, pp. 13-14).

To these claims Jāḥeẓ responds by saying that, while the Persians have their orators, all their productions are the result of long study and preparation, while Arab eloquence is spontaneous. He adds that the best-known works of Persian literature may well have been invented by those who, like Ebn al-Moqaffaʿ, claim merely to have translated them (*Bayān*, III, pp. 27-29). What he most deplores, in any case, is the tendency of the Shuʿubites to criticize not only Arabs but also Islam. In *al-Ḥayawān*, he declares that a major cause of resentment is *ʿasabiya*, 'group feeling.' The Shuʿubites begin by hating the Arabic language, then they come to hate Arabia and finally renounce Islam because it was brought by the Arabs (*Ḥayawān*, VII, p. 220). "You will never see any people more miserable than these Shuʿubites, nor any more hostile to their own religion," as a result of jealousy and resentment (*Bayān*, III, pp. 29-30). In the essay *Fi al-nābeta* ('On the upstarts'), however, he strikes a more conciliatory note. After attacking the arguments of those clients (*mawāli*) who use specious logic to claim that they are superior to Arabs and Persians both, he describes ethnic chauvinism as corrosive and pernicious. He also hopes

that a certain (now lost) work of his will put the clients in their place while nevertheless giving them their due (*Rasaʾel*, II, pp. 20-22).

Among the works attributed to Jāḥeẓ is one devoted to the rights of kings according to the Persians. This work, entitled *Ketāb al-tāj* (‘Book of the crown’), consists of a list of precepts, each of which is illustrated by one or more historical reports about the Sasanian kings, the caliphs, or both. The list of principles and the Sasanian examples come from unspecified “books of the non-Arabs” (*kotob al-aʿājem*) and “the lives of their kings” (*siar moluke-hā*; *Ketāb al-tāj*, pp. 138 and 163). The principles have mostly to do with the various forms of deference one should display toward the king (riding behind him, not taking medicine on the same day he does, never telling him the same story twice, and the like), although some have to do with the king’s duties toward his subjects (for example, forgiving their drunkenness and pilfering). The work contains a number of Sasanian historical legends, such as the tale of Bahrām Gur (see BAHRĀM v.) and his manhandling of two lions (*Ketāb al-tāj*, pp. 164-67). It describes Sasanian administrative practices, including the ranking of courtiers (*Ketāb al-tāj*, pp. 23 ff.), the giving of gifts on the days of the festivals of Mehregān and Nowruz (qq.v.; *Ketāb al-tāj*, pp. 146 ff.), and the king’s annual reception of petitioners (*Ketāb al-tāj*, pp. 159-63). It also contains some examples of Persian language, including two sentences (*Šab bešod* and *Ḵorram ḵoftār*) purportedly spoken by Sasanian kings as a signal that they wanted to go to bed (*Ketāb al-tāj*, p. 118).

The *Ketāb al-tāj* appears to have been composed during the reign of al-Motawakkel (r. 232-47/847-61), whose immediate predecessor, al-Wāṯeq (r. 227-32/842-47), is the last caliph to be named (p. 153). Even so, the work is almost certainly not by Jāḥeẓ. He doubtless agreed with its premise, namely that “the felicity of the common people consists in obedience to the sovereign while the felicity of the sovereign consists in obedience to God” (attributed to Ardašir Bābakān [see ARDAŠIR I]; *Ketāb al-tāj*, p. 2). As is clear from his known works, however, he supported an Abbasid imamate that made exclusive claims to religious authority. Accordingly, he had no particular reverence for the ancient Iranian kings, and none at all for the Umayyad caliphs. On stylistic grounds, too, the work is unlikely to be his (Moḥammadi, pp. 209-28). In his surviving works, no matter what their subject, he relies on arguments that are clever, sometimes to the point of perversity; and all his known works ramble and digress. The *Ketāb al-tāj*, by contrast, is focused and systematic; and it never swerves from its tone of earnest servility.

Even when the *Ketāb al-tāj* is dropped from the list, the works of Jāḥeẓ remain among the richest available sources of information on the cultural history of the Iranian peoples in the 9th century. His systematic interest in comparing different peoples has been attributed to his desire to see them united in one community under a single imam. He is said to have welcomed the unique contributions of each ethnic group to the totality of knowledge available to the Muslim community. Nevertheless, he supposedly had little patience for the Shuʿubite attempt to revive Sasanian traditions (which, it is argued, they did not necessarily make as a reaction to Islam but rather as part of an effort to maintain aristocratic privilege; Enderwitz, pp. 5-13, 16-25, 178). Whether or not this characterization of his opinions is accurate, it should be remembered that his remarks on Persian culture and traditions do not in the first instance constitute documentary evidence of lived reality. Rather, they reflect attitudes adopted by Arabs and Persians alike in the course of 9th-century arguments over the meaning of God's decision to divide the human race into distinct ethnic groups.

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