



KABISA

KABISA, Arabic adjective (and substantive, pl. *kabā'es*) used in calendrical context; “intercalary,” “embolismal,” according to tradition (Kvārazmi, *Mafātiḥ al-'olum*, p. 130; Biruni, *Tafhim*, p. 222; *Qānun*, p. 89) from the Syriac feminine passive past participle *kbišta* “stuffed,” “pressed,” “intruded.” It comes into Persian and other Persianate languages through expressions like *sana kabisa* “intercalary year,” “leap year,” or *nawbat al-kabisa* “intercalary turn,” along with other constructs containing forms (*ayyām al-kabs*, *dawr al-kabs* “intercalary days,” “intercalary cycle”) from the root *kbs*, similarly referring to an intrusion, a compression, a stuffed insertion. As a substantivized adjective it constitutes the compounded transitive verb *kabisa kardan*.

Verbal forms from the root KBS and the expression *amr al-kabs* indicate: (1) the intercalation and the use of the leap year in the Christian calendars (Biruni, *Ātār*, pp. 32-33, p. 241); (2) the embolismal month of Jewish and Indian calendars; (3) the intercalation of the pre-Islamic Arab calendar calculated by a hereditary group termed *qalāmes* (Biruni, *Tafhim*, pp. 224-25; on the epithet, cf. “al-Ḳalammas,” in *EI*² IV, p. 472); (4) the periodical intercalation of a day in the Islamic lunar calendar (Biruni, *Tafhim*, p. 223); (5) the 5 days of Epagomenae of the Iranian and Coptic calendar (Biruni, *Qānun*, pp. 74-76; Mollā Moḡaffar, *Šarḥ-e bist bāb*, bāb 2, section 3), in this way being in Iranian context a synonym of *ḳamsa-ye mostaraqa* and *andargāh*; (6) several readjustments that occurred in the Iranian solar calendar (*Nowruznāma*, pp. 11-12) up to the *kabisa-ye malekšāhi*, that is, the leap of 18 days ordered by the Saljuq sultan Malekšāh (r. 1072-92) to initiate the Jalāli era (Mollā Moḡaffar,



Šarḥ-e bist bāb, bāb 2, section 4; see “The Jalali calendar” under [CALENDARS ii](#)). This last usage relates particularly to the readjustments for shifting Andargāh along the year of the “Zoroastrian” calendar, but it does not indicate the displacement of Andargāh that occurred in the Iranian Yazdegerdi solar calendar in 1006 CE (Biruni, *Qānun*, p. 76; the same Biruni, *Qānun*, p. 142, referring to the reform proposed by the Abbasid caliph, states that “some people call the *kabisa* of al-Mo‘tazed [r. 892-902] the *kabisa* of the Persians”). (7) The term is also applied to the calendar change performed by Parsi Indian communities in the 12th century (so among modern scholars; Coorlawalla, 1918).

The usual translation of *kabisa* as “intercalation,” that is, insertion of day(s) *tout court*, is therefore inadequate. Muslim scholars giving notices on the *kabisa* of the Persians were conditioned by two axioms: (1) the idea of Arabic *kabisa* (on which see A. Moberg, “*Nasī*,” in *EI*² VII, 1993, pp. 977-78) as duplication in turn of all months (Biruni, *Ātār*, pp. 62-63); (2) the Zoroastrian religious unacceptability of forced insertion of one day (cf. Biruni, *Tafhim*, p. 222). From these, perhaps, derives the theory of an entire one-month insertion every 120 years duplicating the whole of the months in turn. The first source dealing with the *kabisa* of the Persians in these terms, along with the shifting of Andargāh, is the *Zij al-jāme‘* by Kušyār b. Labbān al-Jili (Ideler, pp. 547-48 tr.; pp. 624-25 text). This idea has been subsequently accepted by many astronomers, among them Biruni (*Ātār*, p. 11, p. 44). This pure mathematical-astronomical theory of intercalations is devoid of documentary evidence, but attracted the mathematicians in particular (de Blois, p. 40). In modern times it has been developed, firstly by A. von Gutschmid (pp. 1-9), into the theory of the double Iranian calendar (“religious” and “civil”; Taqizāda, particularly pp. 13-16, 231).

Some sources later than Kušyār and less exploited deal with practices of a different kind, which possibly clarify the question. While the idea and the formula of an ‘intercalary’ turn persist, they refer, not to any insertion, but to mere shifting of Andargāh to serve as a sort of indication of imminent Nowruz, the beginning of the year. According to the *Zij al-mofrad* (11th century) by Abu Ja‘far Moḥammad b. Ayub al-Ḥāseb al-Ṭabari (Ms. O.1.10 Browne of the Cambridge University Library, fol. 3a): “The calculation (*šomār*) of *kabisa* by the Persians in antiquity was a month in every 120 years, and now that practice has been left behind. . . . Their practice was the following: when the Sun reached the First Point of Aries in the first month of Dey, they



called this month Āḍar-māh and Ābān the month of Āḍar. And the five stolen days [scil. Andargāh] were counted at the end of [this] month of Ābān. . . .” For this author the *kabisa* of the Persians implied only a shifting of Andargāh along with a ‘renaming’ of all the months (Cristoforetti, pp. 46-47). According to Zakariyā’ al-Qazvini (*Ajāyeb al-makluqāt*, p. 82): “There exists divergence on this, some people asserting that the *kamsa al-aḳira* [scil. Andargāh] pertains to *abān-māh* and some people asserting that the *kamsa al-aḳira* pertains to *aḍar-māh*.”

A precise echo of this “practice” may be found in *Montahā al-edrāk fī taqāsīm al-aflāk* by Abu Bakr Moḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Ṭābeti al-Ḳaraḳi (Ms. Or. 110 of the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana in Florence, fol. 93b): “The Saturday, 12th of the month of Rabi’ II in the year [52]5, year 500 in the era of Yazdegerd, the turn of the *kabisa* returned to the month of Ordibehešt, and therefore we held *kabisa* in the month of Farvardin (*fa-kabasnā farvardin-māh*), and we added the 5 epagomenal days to its last days, and so its days numbered thirty-five.” The stated operation explicitly relates to the month of Farvardin, which becomes “stuffed” (*makbus*). So at this time (12 Rabi’ II 525/14 March 1131/1 Ordibehešt 500 Yazdegerdi = vernal equinox) Andargāh was shifted to the end of Farvardin. The same information is to be found as a prediction of the next calendar adjustment in Šahmardān b. Abe’l-Ḳayr Rāzi’s *Rawzat al-monajjemīn* (ms. Or. 4° 848, mutilated, of the Staatsbibliothek in Berlin; cf. Taqizāda, p. 20, n. 41, and p. 234).

The persistence of this practice is confirmed by observations in the modern calendars of at least two regions of the Iranian world: in the Pamir region (in many centers of Badakhshan such as Āvšān and Šoḡnān and surrounding areas) there are three Nowruzcoexisting today: the ‘regular’ Nowrūz of 1 Farvardin, one preceding 17-18 February (end of Bahman), and one following Ordibehešt (Karamšāhyef, pp. 687-88). For Iran, we have the following report on the usages of the area of Ṭalaḳān (Gilān province): “Panje days begin from 25th of Farvardin of every year called ‘Panje Pitok’ in Taleghan and its surrounding villages. Like people of other cities, people of Taleghan calculated every month for thirty days which totally became 360 days in every year. By this calculation, there were five days that belonged to none of the months” (Vakilian, p. 202).

Probably around the 20s of the 12th century—when, in a calendrical system which still remained solar and vague, Nowruz was behind by roughly a month with respect to the beginning of Spring—Andargāh and Nowruz were



displaced by a month, thus giving birth to a calendar with Nowruz on the first of Ordibehešt and Andargāh immediately before, that is, at the end of Farvardin (putting into practice the ‘intercalary’ method mentioned in *Montahā al-edrāk*). We can see an indication of another occurrence of a shift of Andargāh, to a position between Dey and Bahman, in the five-day discrepancy between Bar-sada and Sada festivals (Cristoforetti, p. 56). But we also have various hints at a popular custom (*šab-e esfand*) of shifting Andargāh to a position between Bahman and Isfand (idem, p. 49).

The Parsi Zoroastrians appear to have applied a kind of *kabisa* similar to the one described in the *Zij al-mofrad*, paraphrasing which, one could describe it in the following manner: when the Sun reached the First Point of Aries on the first of Ordibehešt, they called this month Farvardin, and Farvardin became Esfandārmaḍ. In spite of a prevailing hostility to changes in the calendar in Zoroastrian quarters, rather than think of the *only* effective insertion of a supplementary month in the entire history of the Iranian calendar (Boyce, p. 20; de Blois, p. 50), it is preferable to conceive of it as something that is amply testified as widespread throughout the Iranian world.

In conclusion, the mechanism defined by Islamic astronomers as *kabisa* was extremely simple, but gave rise to various confusions. There was no true intercalation, but rather a periodic readjustment. This practice is attested on the popular (provincial) level, but was officially enacted only once, in the Sasanian era, when Andargāh seems to have moved to a place following Ābān. (Baliński, p. 101, hypothesizes two displacements of Andargāh: one in the Parthian and the other in the Sasanian age.) The eventual renaming of the months illustrated by *Zij al-mofrad* possibly creates another parallel calendar, thus casting light on the issue of the ‘double’ Iranian calendar first hypothesized by A. von Gutschmid and later analyzed by Ḥ. Taqizāda. At the beginning of the 11th century, something similar was done, displacing Andargāh until after Esfandārmaḍ, and during the whole Islamic age we can observe similar, although less thoroughly welcomed, practices.

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