



'OLAMĀ-YE ESLĀM

'*OLAMĀ-YE ESLĀM* "The Doctors of Islam," title given to two medieval Zoroastrian polemical treatises written in Modern Persian. More precisely, the title of the second treatise is "Another Version of the Doctors of Islam" (Pers. *'Olamā-ye Eslām be-digar raveš*). The Bibliothèque National de France houses a manuscript (No. 1022/7) which includes the second treatise among other works in Persian collected by E. Blochet (Adkā'i, 1990, p. 344). The text of the second treatise was first published by J. Olhausen and J. Mohl (1829), but the full Persian manuscript including both treatises was later published by Unvala (1922, pp. 72-86); upon a closer examination it immediately becomes clear that Unvala's edition suffers from numerous scribal errors.

The title of the treatises is explained at the beginning of the second one, where we are informed that, in response to the inquiries made by Muslim doctors to the unnamed grand mobed of the time, he composed the work, and since then "they have called it the book of the Doctors of Islām" (Unvala, p. 80). The dates of the composition of the treatises are not known with certainty. Anquetil Duperron (apud Blochet, 1898, p. 23) had noted that the Parsis claimed the text to be "quite ancient" and that it was a report of a disputation which putatively occurred before the fourth caliph 'Ali in the seventh century CE, a date which Blochet accepted (1898, p. 24). It is, however, through the internal evidence that we may arrive at a less unreliable date. At the beginning of the second treatise, the anonymous author remarks that "six hundred years" after Yazdgerd III's accession to the throne (in 632 CE), the first treatise was composed. If one accepts this statement, as did Zaehner (1955, p. 409), the first



treatise was composed in the thirteenth century CE. The stylistic differences between the treatises, however, indicate that the second one was most likely composed at a later date (Adhami, 1999, p. 206).

Since their discovery, the focus of scholarly attention has been on the second treatise, and indeed the first one had, until recently, been somewhat neglected. According to Zaehner (1955, p. 409), J. A. Vullers provided the first translation of the second treatise in 1831. It was then followed by a rather poor translation of the first treatise, which was published in Reverend Wilson's queer and proselytizing work, *The Parsi Religion* (1843, pp. 560-63). E. Blochet (1898, pp. 40-49) published a more reliable French translation of the second treatise, and R. C. Zaehner, in the context of his study of Zurvanism (1955, pp. 409-18), provided an English translation of the same treatise. The first complete translation of both treatises, however, was carried out by Dhabhar (1932, pp. 437-57). In time, other Iranists translated several passages from each treatise, which clarified a number of difficulties in them; in particular one should mention the articles of Sh. Shaked (1980; 1987; for a full bibliography see Adhami, 1999, 2003).

Contents of the treatises. The first treatise begins with an account of the Mazdean religion and the “fact” that it has always been an essential part of Iranian history. The “historical” section is then abruptly terminated, and there begins a theological discussion on theodicy. The next topic is a description of certain analogies found between mankind and nature, and then the topic of worldly and spiritual pleasures is noted. Following that, we arrive at a segment which discusses the various names of God given by different religions. The next topic explicates the differences between Zamān “Time—” in the philosophical sense of the Movement of Heaven (Ar. *ḥarakat al-aflāk*)—and Ruzgār “Time” (in the natural world, human life, and history), which is then followed by a section on Ahriman and his functions in the universe. Next, the topic of the necessity of the prophets and religious leaders, a topic of equal interest to medieval Muslim theologians, is taken up, which is followed by a brief discussion of the Day of Judgement. The nature of the Divine is noted next, and whether His Essence is unique and simple (Ar. *basīṭ*) or not is discussed. The next topic is the Divine Will and God's relation to Ahriman. This section is followed by a brief discussion of “intellect” (*‘aql*) and its possible limits. Toward the end of the first treatise, our author returns to a discussion of eschatology and the final annihilation of the Antagonist. At the end of his work, he offers the sensible advice of not tangling oneself in an argument with

an ignoramus.

The second treatise begins with the only historical datum in the text, divulging the date of the composition of the (first) treatise, i.e., 13th century CE. The first questions put forth by the Muslim doctors concern how the Mazdeans understand and explain the Resurrection and whether they believe in it or not. The answers to these questions include what is now known as the Zurvanite account of the creation. The sections which follow provide an account of the capture and fate of Ahriman and his minions. The dimensions of the heaven and the 3,000-year cycles of the world are among the other subjects discussed here. Finally, the second treatise ends with the admonitions on avoidance of what has been proscribed by the Religion and the performance of what has been recommended.

As noted above, until quite recently the interest of scholars had been focused on the presence of what were considered to be the Zurvanite passages (especially Zaehner, 1955; Bianchi, 1979; Shaked, 1980, 1987). However, in three articles devoted to the first treatise the present author (1999, 2003, forthcoming), in addition to offering some corrections to the text of the first treatise, has suggested the possible presence of traces of two Platonic dialogues as well as certain allusions to the Qur’ān. From Plato, I have argued that our author borrowed a passage from the *Timaeus* (37c-38e) on cosmogony, and another one from *The Republic* (584e-585e) on worldly pleasures. W. Sundermann (2003, pp. 328-38), too, has recently examined the first treatise within the context of Manicheism. To this author’s knowledge, the only Persian article devoted exclusively to ‘*Olamā-ye Eslām* belongs to P. Adkā’i (1990), where he provides a critical edition of the second treatise in addition to a few descriptive remarks.

The treatises are valuable, as they represent the most important polemical works by medieval Mazdeans written in Persian at a time when their community was shrinking rapidly.



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March 21, 2006