

# The Language of Heaven in Safavid Iran: Speech and Cosmology in the Thought of Āzar Kayvān and His Followers

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عالموں کی ساری تحقیق کا خلاصہ یہ ہے کہ نہ کوئی ساسان ہنجم تھا، نہ اس کی پیش  
کی ہوئی کوئی زبان تھی، نہ اس زبان کا کوئی لفظ تھا اور نہ اس لفظ کے کچھ معنی  
تھے۔

The conclusion of the whole investigation of our scholars was that there was no Sāsān the Fifth, nor was there any language introduced by him, nor did that language contain a single word, nor would that word have any meaning.

لیکن اسی ساری تحقیق کا خلاصہ یہ بھی ہے کہ ایک وقت میں کچھ معنی تھے جو  
بعض لفظوں سے ادا ہوتے تھے، اور یہ لفظ ایک زبان سے منسوب تھے، اور  
اس زبان کا تعارف ایک شخص نے کرایا تھا، اور وہ شخص خود کو ساسان ہنجم بتاتا  
تھا۔

However, the same investigation also concluded that, at one time, there were meanings which were expressed through certain words, and these words were ascribed to a certain language, and one person introduced this language, and that person called himself Sāsān the Fifth.

نیر مسعود، «ساسان ہنجم»، عطر کافور، ص ۱۶۲

Translated from the Urdu of Naiyer Masud, "Sāsān the Fifth," *The Essence of Camphor*, 162.

## I. Searching for Truth in Forgery

In a short story entitled “Sāsān-i Panjum” (“Sāsān the Fifth”),<sup>2</sup> the acclaimed translator of Franz Kafka and one of contemporary India’s leading Urdu-language authors and essayists, Naiyer Masud (b. 1936), relates a seemingly absurd history of an ancient Persian sage named Sāsān the Fifth.<sup>3</sup> This Sāsān, descended from four generations of men to bear the same name, traced his ancestry to the ancient kings of Iran. In Masud’s telling, Sāsān the Fifth was remembered as a wise man who transmitted a collection of extraordinarily

- 1 The author would like to express his gratitude to Patricia Crone, Sunil Sharma, Matthew Melvin-Koushki, Kevin van Bladel, Sadaf Jaffer, Robert Yelle, and Takeshi Aoki for their comments on different iterations of this paper.
- 2 Naiyer Masud, “Sāsān-i Panjum,” in *Ītr-i Kāfur* (Karachi: City Press, 1999 [First printing: 1990]), 157-162. A translation of the story was published by Jane Shum and Muhammad Umar Memon, “The Fifth Saasaan,” *Journal of Urdu Studies* 22 (2007): 162-65.
- 3 The name Sāsān the Fifth refers to the traditional narrative regarding the descendants of Dārā in the *Shāhnāma*. After Dārā is slain by Iskandar, only his son Sāsān survives, and for four more generations, each successive son is named Sāsān. The fifth Sāsān was married to the daughter of Pāpak with whom he sired Ardashīr, the future founder of the Sasanian dynasty.

ancient texts in a long-forgotten language, a language which he claimed was the parent of the languages of the world. Except through this book, no trace of Sāsān the Fifth's life was known. By preserving these texts, generations of sages recognized the ancient, arcane wisdom contained therein, and they pored over the language which Sāsān had preserved, employing its recondite vocabulary in their own learned speech. In time, Masud relates that scholars had finally made progress in deciphering the previously impenetrable ancient inscriptions of the world, which they had supposed perhaps to contain the same ancient language that Sāsān the Fifth had preserved countless generations ago. Yet no language deciphered through modern science corresponded to the language of Sāsān the Fifth. For Masud's fictional scholars, it became increasingly clear that the language of Sāsān the Fifth was no language at all; rather, it was simply a forgery – a joke – that generations of revered literary figures and respected lexicographers were simply dupes, and that we would simply be dupes to go along with them.

Naiyer Masud's story is a narrative which mourns the disenchantment of the modern world, a world in which ancient forms of meaning-making deemed incompatible with modern science obsolesce and are rendered meaningless. Yet Masud's story is not simply a work of fiction; it is rather a retelling of the debates which occurred at the beginning of the European study of Iranian philology relating to the mysterious figure known as Āzar Kayvān, the subject of this paper.<sup>4</sup>

As a result of their studies into the history of Indian religions through the then recently published Persian work entitled *Dabistān-i Mazāhib* (The School of Doctrines),<sup>5</sup> European scholars first came across the name Āzar Kayvān and the book he purported to contain the ancient scriptures of the Iranians, entitled the *Dasātīr-i Āsmānī* (The Celestial Regulations), attributed to the authorship of Sāsān the Fifth, a book composed in a supposedly ancient language with a commentary in pure Persian, devoid of Arabic loanwords. After the French traveller Anquetil du Perron returned to Paris from the city of Surat in Gujarat and

4 This has been termed "Orientalism's Genesis Amnesia" by Mohammad Tavakoli-Targhi, *Refashioning Iran: Orientalism, Occidentalism, and Historiography* (Palgrave: New York, 2001), 18-34. The memory of Āzar Kayvān in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in Iran and India is as of yet quite poorly understood, but it seems quite plausible that the ideas of language outlined in this paper might well have had a direct influence on the linguistic thought of Sirāj al-Dīn 'Alī Ārzū, which Tavakoli-Targhi argues may in turn have influenced Sir William Jones. In any case, Āzarī ideas became widespread in nineteenth-century Iran thanks to the efforts of the Parsi emissary to Tehran, Māneḳji Limji Hātariā, who on behalf of the Persian Zoroastrian Amelioration Fund began to correspond with many notable political and religious thinkers, including Jalāl al-Dīn Mīrzā, Mīr Faṭḥ 'Alī Ākhundzāda and Bahā'ullāh. Hātariā published several important Āzarī texts himself; he also commissioned a grammar of pure Persian: Hurmuzdān Hurmuzd Pārsī, *Furūgh-i Hūshang* (Bombay?: n.p., 1866); a history of ancient Iran: Mīrzā Ismā'īl Tūysirkānī, *Farāzistān* (Bombay: Chitra Prabhā, 1894); and the first archaeological survey of Iran: Muḥammad Nāšir 'Fuṛṣat' Shīrāzī, *Āṣār-i 'Ajam*, (Bombay: Maṭba'-i Nāširī, 1896). A detailed study of the revival and subsequent suppression of Āzarī thought in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries would be of great importance to understanding the development of Iranian historiography and its impact on Iranian identity in the wake of modernity.

5 Excerpts from the *Dabistān* were first published by Francis Gladwin, "The Dabistān; or School of Manners," *New Asiatic Miscellany* 1 (1789): 86-136. Nazar Ashraf printed the complete Persian text in Calcutta in 1809 at the behest of William Bayley. The first, and to date only, complete translation of the *Dabistān* into English was undertaken by David Shea and Anthony Troyer, *The Dabistān or School of Manners*, 3 volumes, (Paris: Madame Veuve Dondey-Dupré, 1843).

published the *Zend-Avesta* in 1771, the scholarly world was plunged into controversy as to whether the text which Anquetil had published could in fact be the authentic scripture of Zarathustra.<sup>6</sup> Sir William Jones, the renowned linguist of Calcutta, became Anquetil's most vociferous opponent.<sup>7</sup> On the authority of the *Dabistān*, Jones believed that the *Dasātīr*, rather than the *Avesta*, contained the authentic beliefs and ancient language of pre-Islamic Iran, those of Zarathustra. In his "Discourse on the Persians" (1789), Jones cites the Āzar Kayvānī version of Iranian history as he writes, "[T]he first monarch of Iran and of the whole earth was Mahābād . . . He received from the creator, and promulgated among men, a sacred book in a heavenly language, to which the Muselman author [of the *Dabistān*] gives the Arabic title of *desātīr*, or regulations."<sup>8</sup>

Yet when the *Dasātīr*, which Jones had never seen, was found and published by the Bombay Parsi priest Mullā Fīrūz in 1818, European linguists were quick to note that the language of the *Dasātīr* could not possibly be ancient; it was instead simply an unsystematic cipher of New Persian, probably developed during the sixteenth century by Āzar Kayvān himself.<sup>9</sup> These linguists argued that Jones, like those who believed in the antiquity of the *Dasātīr*, had been tricked.<sup>10</sup> As a result, since the early nineteenth century,

6 On the reception of Anquetil du Perron's *Zend-Avesta*, see Raymond Schwab, *Vie d'Anquetil-Duperron*, (Paris: Leroux, 1934), 85-104.

7 Jones famously published a jeering letter denouncing Anquetil du Perron's discovery, published as *Lettre à Monsieur A\*\*\* du P\*\*\**, (London: P. Elmsly, 1771), in which he denounced Anquetil's *Avesta* as being "a fabric of puerile exclamations" ("Toute votre *Zende Vasta* n'est qu'un tissu d'exclamations puérides," 39). On the life of Jones, see Garland Cannon, *The Life and Mind of Oriental Jones: Sir William Jones, the Father of Modern Linguistics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 42-44 and Michael Franklin, *Orientalist Jones: Sir William Jones: Poet, Lawyer, and Linguist, 1746-1794* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 74. Jones was given a copy of the *Dabistān* in 1787, which he described as containing "more recondite learning, more entertaining history, more beautiful specimens of poetry, more ingenuity and wit, more indecency and blasphemy, than I ever saw collected in a single volume . . . On the whole, it is the most amusing and instructive book I ever read in Persian" (William Jones *Asiatick Researches* 2 [Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1815], 365).

8 William Jones, "Discourse on the Persians," in *Discourses Delivered before the Asiatic Society* (London: Charles S. Arnold, 1824), 100. The figure Mahābād and the dynasty which succeeded him exists, for the followers of Āzar Kayvān, before the time of Adam, who is equated with Gayūmarš, the first king of Iran in traditional Iranian historiography. See David Livingstone, *Adam's Ancestors: Race, Religion, and the Politics of Human Origins*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press), 10.

9 The literature written in response to the publication of the *Dasātīr* is voluminous, but see in particular William Erskine, "On the Authenticity of the Desatir, with Remarks on the Account of the Mahabadi Religion Contained in the Dabistan," *Transactions of the Literary Society of Bombay* 2 (1819): 312-61, and Sylvestre de Sacy, "Compte-rendu de *The Desatir*," *Journal des Savans* January 1821, 16-31, and February 1821, 67-79. Mullā Fīrūz's responses to the attacks which appeared in the Indian press were collected in the Gujarati edition of the *Dasātīr* (Mullā Kekobād Mancerji, *Dasātīr Ketāb yāne Irāni Pegambaro upar Utarelā Pavitar Nāmāo* [The *Dasātīr*, i.e., the Holy Books which Descended to the Iranian Prophets] (Bombay: Daftar Āškārā, 1217 AY/1848 CE), 12-47.

10 Notably, the poet Mīrzā Asadullāh Khān 'Ghālib' was also sharply critical of words derived from the language of the *Dasātīr*. In a scathing review of the publication of the 17th-century Persian dictionary *Burhān-i Qāṭi'* (The Definitive Proof), entitled *Qāṭi'-i Burhān* (The Severance of Proof, in later editions titled the *Dirafsh-i Kāvīyānī*, The Banner of Kāva), Ghālib ridicules in particular the dictionary's presentation of *dasātīrī* words as authentic ancient Persian. Mīrzā Asadullāh Khān Ghālib, *Dirafsh-i Kāvīyānī*, ed. Muḥammad Bāqir, (Lahore: Punjab University, 1969).

Āzar Kayvān and his followers have received very little scholarly attention despite the fact that their works enjoyed renewed popularity amongst Muslim and Zoroastrian audiences in India and Iran, leading to the publication of numerous extant treatises between 1846 and 1909.

As a tribute to Wheeler Thackston, the man who taught me to appreciate the joys of language, whose linguistic feats and achievements continue to be the object of marvel, I offer this examination of the linguistic philosophy of Āzar Kayvān and his followers which underlies the production of the *Dasātr*. The man who called himself Āzar Kayvān (b. AH 942/1533 CE, d. 1027/1618) continues to elude us. Known primarily through his association with the most important primary source on the religions of the early modern Persianate world, the aforementioned *Dabistān-i Mazāhib* (completed by his disciple ‘Mūbad’ by 1068/1658),<sup>11</sup> Kayvān was held in high repute by many of the leading contemporary thinkers of Safavid Iran and Mughal India, who referred to him with such lofty titles as *zu’l-‘ulūm*, “Master of the Sciences,” and *quṭb al-muḥaqqiqīn*, “The Axial Saint of the Truth-Seekers.” By contrast, Āzar Kayvān has been described by modern scholars as a “Parsee high priest,” a founder of an “Eshraqī or Illuminative school,” and a man who wrote “gross absurdities, and claims, names and events born of fantastic imagination ... unintelligible gibberish,”<sup>12</sup> characterizations which illustrate that elucidating the principles of Kayvān and his followers has confounded the few who have ventured to try. Efforts to explain the beliefs of the Āzarī movement<sup>13</sup> solely with reference to the pre-

11 The authorship of the *Dabistān-i Mazāhib* has itself been the subject of controversy. On the basis of a note written on the endpaper of the Calcutta manuscript of the text, the authorship was ascribed to the Kashmirī poet Muḥsin ‘Fānī’ by early Orientalists including Sir William Jones and the English-language translators of the text, David Shea and Anthony Troyer. The modern editor of the text, Raḥīm Rizāzāda Malik, identified the author as Kaykhusraw ibn Isfandiyār, Āzar Kayvān’s successor as leader of the Āzarī movement. Yet it seems quite clear that the actual author of the text was a man who called himself simply “Mūbad,” whose *takhalluṣ* appears throughout the poetry of the *Dabistān* beginning with the very opening verses of the text. Moreover, a *dīvān* of Mūbad found in the Khudābakhsh Library in Patna by S. H. Askari contains clear references to the subjects of the *Dabistān*, and an intimate knowledge of Āzarī religious practice. See S. H. Askari, “Dabistan-i Mazahib and Diwan-i Mubad,” in *Indo-Iranian Studies Presented for the Golden Jubilee of the Pahlavi Dynasty of Iran* (New Delhi: Indo-Iran Society, 1977), 85-104. Certain library notes on manuscripts of the *Dabistān* refer to ‘Mūbad’ as Zu’l-Fiqār Āzar Sāsānī (cf. Faṭḥ-allāh Mojtabā’ī, “Dabestān-e Maḍāheb,” *Encyclopedia Iranica*. Āzar Sāsānī is apparently corrupted in some manuscripts to Ardistānī). Yet, as for all of the Āzariyān, who apparently kept two names, an exoteric Muslim name and an esoteric Persian name, the details of the life of Mūbad are elusive. A thoughtful treatment of what can be said of the life of Mūbad, contextualizing his project within Āzarī philosophy, was written by Aditya Behl, “Pages from the Book of Religions: Comparing Self and Other in Mughal India,” in *Notes from a Maṇḍala: Essays in the History of Indian Religions in Honor of Wendy Doniger*, ed. Laurie Patton & David Haberman (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2010), 113-49.

12 These three comments originate from Jivanji Jamshedji Modi, “A Parsee High Priest (Dastur Azar Kaiwan, 1529-1614 AD) with his Zoroastrian Disciples in Patna, in the 16th and 17th Century A.C.,” *Journal of the K. R. Cama Oriental Institute* 20 (1930): 1-85; Henry Corbin, “Āzar Kayvān,” in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982-); and Ehsan Yarshater, editorial note to “Āzar Kayvān,” in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*.

13 The extant Āzarī literature uses a number of synonyms to refer to their religious affiliation. These terms include, in addition to Āzarī, Yazdānī, Ābādī, and Sipāsī. In addition, the *Dabistān* refers to other “Persian” (*pārsī*) groups called Jamshāspī, Samrādī, Khudānī, Rādī, Shīdrangī, Paykarī, Milānī, Ālārī,

Islamic Zoroastrian textual corpus or to the Illuminationist writings of Shaykh Shihāb al-Dīn ‘al-Maqtūl’ al-Suhrawardī (549/1154-587/1191) have proven fruitless in explaining why a self-consciously ‘Persian’ (*pārsī*) and actively pluralist religious movement emerged in the heyday of the Persianate early modernity.

In this paper, I situate Āzar Kayvān’s linguistic thought within the diverse religious landscape of the first Safavid century, examining in particular his connections with contemporary Nuqtavism. I argue that Āzar Kayvān’s notion of the celestial language (*zabān-i āsmānī*) derives directly from earlier letrist thought (*‘ilm al-ḥurūf*) about divine speech which was circulating in Shiraz at the beginning of Kayvān’s career. Kayvān held that this celestial language contained the seeds of all the languages of the peoples of the world. Critically, Kayvān and his followers also believed that this meant that each of the religions of the world was a translation of the same fundamental truth, and that therefore the ancient prophets of world’s religious traditions were simply translations of one another. Finally, I argue that this belief in the underlying unity of the world’s religions engendered a form of religious practice in which Āzarī disciples were to treat members of different religious communities equally, a practice which seems to have been a direct antecedent for the Mughal Emperor Akbar’s policy of *ṣulḥ-i kull* (Universal Civility).<sup>14</sup>

## II. The Life and Times of Āzar Kayvān

The Safavid dynasty, which ruled Iran from 1501-1722, had its origins in a militant Sufi order centered in the city of Ardabil around the shrine of the founder of the order, Shaykh Ṣafī al-Dīn Ishaq al-Ardabīlī (1252-1334). In 1501, the thirteen-year-old head of the Ṣafaviyyah order, Ismā‘īl I, led armies of Turkmen Qizilbāsh into battle against the Āq Qoyūnlū dynasty of Iran, who reportedly ran into battle without armor, believing that they were protected by the sanctified power (*valāyat*) of their leader. The early Safavid period in which Ismā‘īl rose to power was characterized by a diverse religious landscape, as ideologies which we now identify as Imāmī Shī‘as, as well as Ḥurūfī, Nuqtavī, Nūrbakhshī amidst a sea of undifferentiated messianic forms of Sufism competed for legitimacy and political capital in the nascent empire.<sup>15</sup> Yet though modern distinctions have become

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Shīdābī, and Akhshī, which appear in their descriptions to be closely related movements to that of Āzar Kayvān. The *Dabistān* clearly distinguishes these groups from the better known Zardushtī religion (i.e., the “orthodox” Zoroastrian communities of Iran and Gujarat), which the Āzarīs claim does not understand the true esoteric meaning of the *Zend-Avesta*. In this paper, I have coined the term Āzarism to refer to the movement of Āzar Kayvān as distinct from “Zoroastrianism,” but I have occasionally resorted to the expression “the religions of the Persians” when the texts invoke this religious constellation.

14 I translate *ṣulḥ-i kull* as ‘Universal Civility’ (as opposed to the somewhat misleading translation ‘Universal Peace’) following the groundbreaking arguments of Rajeve Kinra made in a presentation in the “Was There a Reformation in India?” preconference at the Annual South Asia Conference, October 17, 2013. A useful summation of previous research on Akbar’s *ṣulḥ-i kull* is S. A. A. Rizvi, “Dimensions of *ṣulḥ-i kul* (Universal Peace) in Akbar’s Reign and the Sufi Theory of Perfect Man,” in *Akbar and His Age*, ed. Iqtidar Alam Khan (New Delhi: ICHR, 1999), 3-21.

15 On the complexities of the religious history of Iran during the Safavid period, see in particular Kathryn Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs, and Messiahs: Cultural Landscapes of Early Modern Iran* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002); Rula Abisaab, *Converting Persia: Religion and Power in the*

reified in secondary literature, the boundaries between even seemingly fixed groups were evidently quite porous.

It was into this complex religious topography that the man who came to call himself Āzar Kayvān was born. Though a number of works associated with his followers are still extant, and have been available in lithographed form since the nineteenth century, very little is known about the historical details of Āzar Kayvān's life.<sup>16</sup> What we can ascertain comes from two descriptive books, the *Shāristān-i Dānish va Gulistān-i Bīnīsh* (The Region of Knowledge and the Garden of Vision), conventionally referred to as the *Shāristān-i Chahār Chaman*, composed circa 1610 CE (henceforth SCC),<sup>17</sup> and the *Dabistān-i Mazāhib* (The School of Doctrines), composed by 1658 CE (henceforth DM).<sup>18</sup> According to the DM, Kayvān, like Sāsān the Fifth before him, was supposed to have been born in the ancient capital of the early Sasanians, the city of Istakhr in 942/1533. He attracted a school of followers in mid-century Shīrāz, where he composed a visionary treatise narrating an ascension through the heavens entitled the *Mukāshafāt-i Kayvānī*, which later received a commentary entitled the *Jām-i Kaykhusraw* by his successor Kaykhusraw ibn Isfāndiyār.<sup>19</sup> He likely traveled to India sometime before the year

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*Safavid Empire* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2004); and Azfar Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign: Sacred Kingship and Sainthood in Islam*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

- 16 These works include: 1) *Dasā'ir-i Āsmānī* (The Heavenly Regulations): Mullā Fīrūz ibn-i Kā'ūs, *The Desatir, or, Sacred Writings of the Ancient Persian Prophets* (Bombay: Courier, 1818); 2) *The Mukāshafāt-i Kayvānī* (The Revelations of Kayvān) and its commentary *Jām-i Kaykhusraw* (The Goblet of Kaykhusraw): Mīr Ashraf 'Alī, *Jām-i Kaykhusraw* (Bombay: Faḡl al-Dīn Khamkar, 1848); 3) *Shāristān-i Chahār Chaman* (The Region of the Four Meadows): Bahrām Bīzhan et al., *Shāristān-i Chahār Chaman* (Bombay: Maṭba'-i Muzaḡfārī, 1862); 4) *Dabistān al-Mazāhib* (The School of Sects): Raḡīm Rizāzāda Malik, ed., *Dabistān-i Mazāhib* (Tehran: Tahūrī, 1362/1983); 5) *Dīvān-i Mūbad* (The Anthology of "the Priest"), unpublished, Khudabakhsh Library Persian MS HL-3747; and 6) a series of short treatises collectively called by their editor the *Ā'in-i Hūshang* (The Custom of Hūshang): *Khīshṭāb* (The Self-Luminescent), *Zar-i dastafshār* (The Malleable Gold), *Zinda Rūd* (The Living River), and *Zawra-i Bāstān* (The Ancient Chapter): Mānakjī Limjī Hātariyā, *Ā'in-i Hūshang* (Bombay: n.p., 1878).
- 17 This work is more popularly known under the title *Shāristān-i Chahār Chaman* (The Region of the Four Meadows), so called because the work is divided into four sections referred to as *chaman*. However, despite this title, the fourth section is not extant. The editors of the second edition (1909) appended what they believed was the fourth *chaman* to the text, but which instead appears to be an eighteenth-century astrological treatise (the text refers to the astronomy of the Europeans (*ahl-i firang*), discusses the theories of Copernicus (erroneously copied *Qūbarzalqūsh*) and refers to Galileo (*Galiliyūs*) as having lived in Florence some 150 years before, pp. 675-6). The text is of course interesting in its own right, but apparently not related to the SCC.
- 18 As stated above, the *Dabistān* was published on several occasions in the nineteenth century. I make use here of the edition published by Rizāzāda Malik (1983), though as pointed out by Irfan Habib ("A Fragmentary Exploration of an Indian Text on Religion and Sects: Notes on the Earlier Version of the Dabistan-i Mazahib," *Proceedings of the Indian History Conference* 61 [2001]: 474-91), *Dabistān* manuscripts vary considerably in their content. A new critical edition making use of the current understanding of the *Dabistān* manuscripts is a major desideratum.
- 19 To date, the only study of this important text was published in Japanese by Takeshi Aoki, "ゾロアスター教神秘主義思想の形成 - イスラーム神秘主義の影響とゾロアスター教の伝統" ["The Formation of Zoroastrian Mysticism: The Influence of Islamic Mysticism and Zoroastrian Heritage"] *The Toyo Gakuho: Journal of the Research Department of the Toyo Bunko* 84:2 (2002): 23-51.

987/1579, and died in Patna at the age of 85 in 1027/1618.<sup>20</sup> He was an ascetic, a vegetarian, who began to engage in fasting and staying awake for lengthy periods at the age of five, who was reportedly able to reduce the amount of food that he ate to the weight of one dirham, and who lived in an earthen vat for twenty-eight years.<sup>21</sup>

Āzar Kayvān lived in a time weighted with millennialist expectations. The expectation of a renovator (*mujaddid*) or a messianic (*mahdī*) figure was connected with the Great Conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn, recurring every 960 years. Following the *Book of*

20 The date of Āzar Kayvān's migration is very difficult to determine. Takeshi Aoki ("The Role of Āzar Kayvān in Zoroastrian and Islamic Mysticism," in *K. R. Cama Oriental Institute Third International Congress Proceedings* [Bombay: K. R. Cama Oriental Institute, 2000], 263) notes that his disciple Farzāna Bahrām, the author of the SCC, attended a class of Shaykh Bahā al-Dīn al-Āmilī (b. 1546, migrated to Iran in 1559) in Shīrāz before joining Āzar Kayvān in Patna, where he had arrived in time to meet Faḥullāh Shīrāzī (who left the service of the Sultan of Bijapur in 1580) there. Moreover, if as the letter from Abu'l Faẓl quoted below indeed dates to the period before Abu'l Faẓl entered the court of Akbar as the letter implies, this would date it to before 1575. This said, it would appear that Āzarism persisted in Iran until at least the second accession of Shāh Sulaymān I (1667 CE), formerly called Shāh Ṣafī II. Seemingly re-enacting Shāh 'Abbās's ritual execution of the substitute Nuṭavī king Ustād Yūsufī Tarkashdūz, the French traveler Jean-Baptiste Tavernier reports that Shāh Ṣafī II, after falling ill, was advised by his physicians to appoint a substitute king during an inauspicious period. Tavernier describes this substitute as one of "the *Gaures* ... that pretend themselves descended from the *Rustans* [sic for *Rustams*], who were ancient kings of *Persia* and *Parthia*." This "Gauze" (Persian *gabr*) king was seated before a wooden idol, and "all the Grandees of the Court came and did him homage as their king." After the auspicious hour had arrived, "an Officer of the Court came behind and cut off the head of the wooden Figure, while the *Gauze* immediately took to his heels and fled. Presently the King appear'd in the Hall, upon whose Head they had put the bonnet of *Sophi*, and re-girt him with the Scimitar, he ascended to the Throne, and took the name *Soliman*. ... From that time the King recovering, and the Famine decreasing, the Physicians were in great repute, and the Astrologers were cast out of favour, except two or three of the most skillful." Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, *The Six Voyages of John Baptista Tavernier*, translated by J. P., (London: R. L and M. P., 1678), 201.

21 DM 20-21. Such ascetic practice reflects the purification practices that letter magicians would undertake before undertaking lengthy operations. For example, a contemporary of Āzar Kayvān, and a fellow Shīrāzī, Maḥmūd Dihdār (fl. 976 AH/1569 CE), describes a three-month operation for the subjugation of spiritual beings (*taskhīr-i rūḥāniyyāt*) which entails that one fast continuously (*ṣiyām-i payvasta*), eat only *ḥalāl* vegetarian food (*akl-i ḥalāl az ghayr-i ḥayvānī*), engage in prolonged isolation (*davām-i khalvat*), wear clean clothes (*libās-i tāhir*) and practice seclusion (*'uzlat*) (Maḥmūd Dihdār, *Zubdat al-Alvāḥ min Taṣnīfāt Maḥmūd Dihdār* (Bombay: Mīrẓā Muḥammad Ṣāhib Shīrāzī 'Malik al-Kuttāb,' 1301/1883), 19). Such practices are reflected as early as the writings of Sayyid Ḥusayn Akhlāṭī (d. 799 AH/1397 CE). My thanks to Matthew Melvin-Koushki for this reference and related discussion. The followers of Āzar Kayvān were reportedly strict vegetarians. The *Dabistān* relates that apparently others believed the Āzarīs ate meat but this was because "lamb (*barra*) was for them a kind of food made of mushroom [*znkw*, glossed in the text as *samārūgh*], and onager (*gūr*) was a kind of food made from cheese (*panīr*)" (DM 26). The word for mushroom in question may perhaps be vocalized *zingū*, derived from Chinese 香菇 *xiānggū* 'shiitake mushroom,' attested already prior to the 13<sup>th</sup> century as early as the Song and Yuan dynasties (my thanks to Dror Weil for the suggestion, Patrick Taylor for discussion, and Tineke D'Haeseleer for checking the history of attestation). There is still a variety of mushroom called *chengum* used in the cuisines of Shillong and Manipur (thanks to Meher Kelawala Mistry for this information), which refers to species of the genera *Bolestus*, *Lepiota*, *Termitomyces*, and *Tricholoma* (see R. P. Puryakayastha and Aindrila Chandra, *Manual of Indian Edible Mushrooms* (New Delhi: Today and Tomorrow's Printers, 1985), 224-225. Compare the modern phenomenon of meat substitutes like tofurkey.

*Conjunctions* of Abū Ma‘shar, this Great Conjunction was thought to issue in a new cycle of royal dispensation.<sup>22</sup> As the Arab polymath Ibn Khaldūn relates, “The great conjunction indicates great events, such as a change in royal authority or dynasties, or a transfer of royal authority from one people to another.”<sup>23</sup> It is into this context of messianism, and more specifically Persian messianism, that Āzar Kayvān must be understood.<sup>24</sup> Kayvān espoused what he called variously the Āzarī, the Ābādī, the Sipāsī, or the Yazdānī religion, claiming that it was the ancient religion of the Persians. In the Āzarī cosmology, largely derived from the writings of al-Suhrawardī, the world began as a series of emanations from God described as rays of light shining from the “light of lights” (*shīd-i shīdān*) and commencing with the First Intellect (*‘aql-i avval*), which is the angel Bahman, who is described as the pen with which God wrote the book of the material universe. Kayvān’s understanding of Suhrawardian cosmology was mediated through later transmitters of the Illuminationist heritage, notably Jalāl al-Dīn Davānī (d. 908 AH/1503 CE), who is cited frequently in Āzarī literature. Following Ibn Turka, Davānī substitutes the ontological status of letters (*hurūf*) for that of light (*nūr*), which Suhrawardī himself had substituted for existence (*wujūd*), thus providing a key link between Illuminationist and Lettrist thought that so permeates Āzar Kayvān’s own worldview. In Kayvān’s belief, the world is both pre-eternal and eternal. The souls which inhabit it transmigrate through mineral, vegetative, animal, and human states, a notion taken as commonplace after Ibn ‘Arabī.<sup>25</sup> Kayvān held that the world is governed by cycles of time in which each fixed star and planet governs the earth for the period of a millennium; at the end of the succession of planets, the world is renovated and beings similar in all ways but not identical to the beings of the previous cycles come again into this world. Unlike the “orthodox” version of Zoroastrian history, which holds a king named Kayūmars to be the traditional first king of Iran, Āzar Kayvān held a pre-Adamite figure called Mahābād, “The Great Ābād,” to be the earliest sage-king of the world in each cycle. In the elaborate Āzarī prophetology, all of the ancient Iranian kings are also prophets, each with their own divine revelation, until the coming of Zarathustra, at which point prophecy (*nubuvvat*) separates from sovereignty (*valāyat*). These revelations occur in the celestial language (*zabān-i āsmānī*) and are collected in the sacred text of the Āzarīs, the *Dasātīr-i Āsmānī* (The Celestial Regulations, henceforth DA) together with a commentary on the texts composed in Persian devoid of any Arabic

22 See Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, who writes on this subject at length.

23 Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, translated by Franz Rosenthal (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 1:213.

24 For more on Āzar Kayvān’s messianism and notions of astral kingship, see my forthcoming article “The Lord of the Planetary Court: Cosmic Aspects of Millennial Sovereignty in the Thought of Āzar Kayvān and His Associates” in *The Proceedings of the Princeton Islamicate Occult Sciences Workshop*, which builds upon arguments first made by Takeshi Aoki, “The Transformation of Zoroastrian Messianism in Mughal India: From the Advent of the Zoroastrian Holy Emperor to the Change of Zoroastrianism” *Orient* 37 (2002): 136-166.

25 On the doctrine of metempsychosis in Early Islamic Iranian religious history see Patricia Crone, *The Nativist Prophets of Early Islamic Iran: Rural Revolt and Local Zoroastrianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 303-310. The movements which Crone describes in her book very much set the parameters which later movements of Iranian religious expression, such as the Āzarīs, adopt, as Crone notes in her conclusion.

loanwords, attributed to the last pre-Islamic prophet of the Persians, Sāsān the Fifth, who is supposed to have lived before the reign of the Sasanian monarch Ardashīr I. It is to this language that I now turn.

### III. The Languages of Heaven and Earth

The Āzarīs held that all of the languages of the world were descended from a single, otherworldly language, which they referred to as the celestial language (*zabān-i āsmānī*). Further, this celestial language was the language of the primal revelation from God, as recorded in the *Dasātīr*. According to the belief of the Āzarīs, this celestial language comprises all the languages of the world. As we will see, those who have mastered the language were supposed to have been able to perform stupendous linguistic feats.<sup>26</sup> This celestial language was then split into the individual terrestrial languages which were assigned to individual peoples by the first king of each cycle of human history, Mahābād.

و یزدان بهر آباد نامه‌ای فرستاد دساتیر نام که در او هر دانش و همه زبان بود . آن مشتمل بر چندین دفتر و به هر لغتی چند مجلد . و در آن زبانی بود که به هیچ زبان فرودینیان نمی‌ماند و آنرا آسمانی زبان نامند . و مه آباد به هر طایفه زبانی داده به موضعی لایق فرستاد تا پارسی و هندی و رومی و امثال آن پدید آمد .

God sent Ābād a book called the *Dasātīr*, which contained all knowledge and all languages. It consists of several tomes, and there are several volumes in each language. In it was a language which does not resemble any language of the beings of the lower world, and it is called the heavenly language. Mahābād gave a language to each people, and sent each to a suitable place. Thus, Persian appeared, along with Hindi, Greek [*rūmī*], and the like. (DM 10).

The *Dasātīr* is composed in this celestial language, which indeed does not resemble any known language. Instead, the constructed language of the *Dasātīr*, though apparently unsystematically, appears to have incorporated elements from Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and Hindi.<sup>27</sup> The use of a constructed language by a mystical order in the Ottoman-Safavid-Mughal world was in fact not unique. A contemporary of Āzar Kayvān's, Muḥyī al-Dīn Gulshanī (1528-1604) is thought to be associated with a dictionary of an invented language

26 It is surely no accident that many of the leading poets of Āzar Kayvān's day had lettrist or Nuqtavī leanings, including Amrī, Fayzī, 'Urfī, Tashbīhī, Vuqū'ī, etc. See Aḥmad Gulchīn-Ma'ānī, *Kārvān-i Hind* (Mashhad: Mu'assasa-yi Chāp va Intishārāt-i Āstān-i Quds-i Razavī, 1990). Lettrist thinkers of the early modern Persianate world during this period were also considered masterful stylists and rhetoricians. The case of Ibn Turka and 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Biṣṭāmī is explored in Matthew Melvin-Koushki, *The Quest for a Universal Science: The Occult Philosophy of Ṣā'ib al-Dīn Turka Isfahānī (1369-1432) and Intellectual Millenarianism in Early Timurid Iran* (PhD dissertation, Yale University, 2012), 380-416. Paul Losensky has made brilliant efforts to rekindle interest in the ornate literary style of the Safavid and Mughal periods in *Welcoming Fighani: Imitation and Poetic Individuality in the Safavid-Mughal Ghazal* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 1998), especially 154-164.

27 An investigation into the language of the *Dasātīr* is currently underway at the University of Bonn. See also de Sacy, "Compte-rendu."

called Baleybelen, the *Kitāb Aṣl al-Maqāṣid wa Faṣl al-Marāṣid*, associated with Ottoman Ḥurūfīs.<sup>28</sup> Such an interest in constructed languages by lettrist thinkers reflects these thinkers' preoccupation with the divine speech, whether that reflected in the accepted works of divinely-revealed scripture, especially the *Qur'ān*, or in esoteric pseudepigrapha like the *Dasātīr* and the *Kitāb Aṣl al-Maqāṣid*.

According to Āzar Kayvān, unlike normal human speech, the Celestial Language is not expressed through the speech organs. Rather, God's speech occurs directly through the transference of meaning onto the mind. Moreover, God's speech has both a macrocosmic and a microcosmic aspect. For Kayvān, there are in fact two *Dasātīrs*: the macrocosmic *Dasātīr*, which is the two worlds, and the microcosmic *Dasātīr*, which is the Āzarī revelation.

کایستنی کارستنی هارستنی و ارستنی شالستنی سخن خدا و نامه خدا و فرشته خدا و فرسته خدا دانستی . سخن خدا نه بگلو و کام و زبان است و آن خواستی است و گفتی بی اینهمه که چون پرمود فرشته سالار بهمن بهستی پیوست و زین خامه بدست نیرو جهانرا نگاهشت . و یزدانی نامه دو است . نامه نخستین دوگیتی است و آنرا مهین نامه گویند و بزبان فرازآباد فرز دساتیرش نامند که مهین نامه یزدان باشد . و نامه دیگر دساتیریست که چم آنرا مه آباد و دیگر پیغمبران از مه آباد تا من یافته اند و آن آرشى است که بر دل تابد نه باد نوا . و این باد نوا آنرا کالبد است بهر شنوایدن و اینرا به فراتین نوا دریک دساتیر خوانند که کهن نامه یزدان باشد .

[Celestial Language] *Kāyistanī Kāristanī Hāristanī va Aristanī Shālīstanī*.<sup>29</sup>  
 [Persian] The speech of God, the book of God, the angel [*fīrishṭa*] of God, and the apostle [*fīrista*] of God [are] worthy of knowing. The speech of God exists not by means of the throat, the mouth or the tongue: it is a will and a speech without any of these. For when He commanded, the chief of angels, Bahman, came into existence, and with this pen [i.e., Bahman], he wrote the world with the hand of might. There are two divine books. The first book is the two worlds, and it is called *The Great Book* [*mihīnnāma*], and in the language of Farzābād, it is called the *Farz-Dasātīr*, that is, *The Great Book of God*. And there is another *dasātīrī* book, the meaning [*chīm*] of which Mahābād and the other prophets from Mahābād down to me have acquired, and it is a signification [*ārīsh*] which shines on the heart, not [comprehended through] the breath of the voice. This breath of the voice is a mere form [*kālbud*] for it in order to make it heard [*bahr-i shīnavānīdan*]. In the heavenly language [*farātīn navād*], it is called *Darīk Dasātīr*, which is *The Small Book of God* [*kīhīnnāma-i yazdān*].<sup>30</sup>

28 See Firestone Library, Islamic Manuscripts 3s265, as well as Sylvestre de Sacy, "*Kitāb aṣl al-maqāṣid wa faṣl al-marāṣid*, Le capital des objets recherchés et le chapitre des choses attendues, ou Dictionnaire de l'idiome Balaābalan," *Notices et extraits des manuscrits de la Bibliothèque Impériale* 9 (1813): 365-96 and Mustafa Koç, *Bāleybelen: İlk Yapma Dil (Muhyī-i Gülşenī)*, (Istanbul: Klasik, 2005).

29 Each passage from the *Dasātīr* begins with text in the celestial language.

30 *Dasātīr-i Āsmānī*, ed. Mullā Fīrūz (Bombay, 1818), 68-69. Compare also another passage from the

This notion of the nature of the divine speech is derived directly from contemporary lettrist thought.<sup>31</sup> Forms of lettrism, ranging from the antinomian Sufi-millennialist doctrines of the Ḥurūfīs and Nuqṭavīs to the theoretical science of thinkers like Ibn Turka and Jalāl al-Dīn Davānī, were commonplace in the early Safavid period. Āzar Kayvān and his disciples found themselves on this spectrum, predominantly leaning towards millennialist speculation rather than theoretical exposition, yet basic beliefs about the nature of language and letters were commonly held across all groups.<sup>32</sup> Ṣā'in al-Dīn Turka Iṣfahānī (1369-1432), the leading Timurid theoretician of 'ilm al-ḥurūf, discusses the divine speech at great length in his *Kitāb al-Mafāḥiṣ*. In it, he ascribes the following to the *Kitāb al-Khamsīn* attributed to the alchemist Jābir ibn Ḥayyān:

إن الكلام الأول لا يشبه هذا الكلام لأن الكلام عند النفس أتم وأوضح وأبين وأنور وأشرق على حسب ما هناك من جِمام التمييز ووفور أدوات العلوم لأنه بالكلّ ولأنّ الذي ههنا بالجزء ولأنّ ذلك غير مشوب بشيء وهذا مشوب بالكون .

The first speech does not resemble [our daily] speech; for speech at the level of the soul is more perfect – more explicit and clearer, brighter and more radiant – , gathering together as it does all the virtues of specification [*tamyīz*] and comprising the full range of the instruments [*adawāt*] proper to the sciences. It pertains to the All; [our speech] here pertains to the part. It is wholly unadulterated; [our speech] is adulterated with engendered existence.<sup>33</sup>

Indeed, the *Dabistān* attributes near-miraculous linguistic feats to Āzar Kayvān, who is able to manipulate his compositions in such a way that they can be read in multiple languages.<sup>34</sup> Though such feats of course seem incredible, one should note the impressive macaronic and lipogrammatic feats of Āzar Kayvān's contemporaries. The poet Fayzī, who corresponded extensively with Āzar Kayvān, for instance, composed a lengthy commentary on the *Qur'ān* in Arabic using only undotted letters, entitled the *Sawāṭi' al-Ilhām*.<sup>35</sup>

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*Dabistān*: متکلم است کلامش نه به حلق و زبان و کام است ولی عبارت و سکوت بر کلام او پیشی ندارد و خاموشی گردد آن . نگرده . "He speaks, but his speech is not through his throat, his tongue, or his palate" (DM 236).

- 31 On Ḥurūfī philosophies of language, see Shahzad Bashir, *Fazlallah Astarabadi and the Hurufis* (Oxford: Oneworld Books, 2005), 61-84.
- 32 This said, Āzar Kayvān's disciples still composed theoretical treatises. See the four texts which comprise the *Ā'in-i Hūshang*, ed. Mānakjī Limjī Hātariyā.
- 33 The edition and translation of the text are from Matthew Melvin-Koushki, *The Quest for a Universal Science*, 353-54, 541. I am extremely grateful to Matt for sharing this with me.
- 34 Writing on the use of magical language in ancient Indo-European poetic traditions, Daniel Heller Roazen writes, "The oldest literatures of the Indo-European traditions suggest, in striking unison, that the true masters of such obscure expressions, are divine." *Dark Tongues: The Art of Rogues and Riddlers* (Cambridge: Zone Books, 2013), 83. The practice alluded to here echoes the macaronic verse of Amīr Khusraw (on which see Sunil Sharma, *Amir Khusraw: The Poet of Sultans and Sufis* [London: Oneworld, 2005], 75), as well as the practice of *bhāṣāśleṣa* in Sanskrit poetry. See Yigal Bronner, *Extreme Poetry: The South Asian Movement of Simultaneous Narration* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).
- 35 Abu'l Fayz ibn Mubārak Fayzī, *Sawāṭi' al-Ilhām* (Lucknow: Naval Kishor, 1889). Reportedly, when Fayzī was accused of atheism (*ilhād*) for this composition, he repented by responding *lā ilāha illā 'llāh*

و نامه ها به آذر کیوان که سرکرده یزدانیان و آبادیان بود نوشتند و او را به هند طلبیدند. آذر کیوان از آمدن عذر خواست و نامه از تصانیف خود فرستاد در ستایش واجب الوجود و عقول و نفوس و سموات و کواکب و عناصر در نصایح پادشاه، مشتمل بر چهارده جزو. هر اول سطر آن پارسی بحت دری بود، و تصحیف آن چون میخواندند عربی میشد، چون قلب میکردند ترکی بود، و چون تصحیف آن میخواندند هندی میگشت.

They [Akbar and Abu'l-Fazl] wrote letters to Āzar Kayvān, the chief of the Yazdānīs, and asked him to come to India. Āzar Kayvān excused himself, and sent a book of his writings in praise of the Necessary Existent [*vājib al-vujūd*], the Intellects, the spirits, the heavens, the stars, and the elements, [written] in advice to the king, comprising fourteen sections. The beginning of each line was in pure court Persian [*pārsī-i baḥt-i darī*]. When they would read it by changing the diacritical points, it became Arabic. When they read it backwards, it was Turkish, and when they [again] changed the diacritical points, it became Hindi. (DM 300-301)

Since the world's languages were all derived from the same source, so too the world's religions all expressed the same fundamental truth.<sup>36</sup> By this line of reasoning, the religious institutions of the world were thus directly translatable from one religious tradition into another, since all derived from the supposed celestial language of the *Dasātīr*. Thus, Āzar Kayvān claims that the different schools of the Indian, Persian, and Islamic intellectual traditions all reflect a single essence.

آذر کیوان در آئینه سکندر که از تصانیف آن حضرت است آورده که اختلاف فریقین مذکورین در نام است چنانکه پندت سمارنک بهندی و موبد بفارسی و متکلم بتازی و سناسی بهندی و هیرید بفارسی و صوفی بتازی گیانی بهندی و فرزانه جويا و گویا و کلنا بفارسی و مشاعی بتازی و جوگی بهندی و فرزانه بینا و گشسپی بفارسی و اشراقی بعربی. تفاوت درینجاست و نه در آنجا چه آب و چه ما و چه سو و چه پانی.

Āzar Kayvān, in the *Mirror of Alexander*, which is one of the writings of that Master, has related that the difference of the aforementioned sects is in name only. Thus, [one says] Pandit Smāranik [Sanskrit *paṇḍita smāraṇika*, a teacher of *smṛti*] in Hindi, Mūbad [a Zoroastrian ritual priest] in Persian, and Mutakallim [theologian] in Arabic. Sanyāsī [renunciant] in Hindi, Hīrbad [a Zoroastrian priestly initiate] in Persian, and Šūfī in Arabic. Gyānī [*jñānī*, sage] in Hindi, Farzāna Jūyā Gūyā va

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*wa muḥammadu rasūlu 'llāh* (there is no god but God and Muḥammad is God's messenger), notably containing no dots.

36 Attempting to find equivalences between different religious traditions was of course nothing new. See Finbarr Flood, *Objects of Translation: Material Culture and Medieval "Hindu-Muslim" Encounter* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009). A generation before Āzar Kayvān, the Chishtī Sufi 'Abd al-Wāhid Bīlgrāmī (ca. 1566) composed the *Ḥaqā'iq-i Hindī*, an extensive catalogue of equivalences between the Indian and Islamic traditions. See S. A. A. Rizvi, *Hakāyek-e Hindī* (Kashi: Nāgarīpracārīnī Sabhā, 1957).

Kalnā [the seeking, speaking, *kalnā* (?) sage] in Persian, and Mashshā'ī [peripatetic] in Arabic, Jogī [yogī] in Hindi, Farzāna Bīnā va Gashaspī [the perceptive and splendid sage] in Persian and Ishrāqī [Illuminationist] in Arabic. The difference is here [in the signifiers] and not there [in the signified], just like [the difference between the following words for water] [Persian] *Āb*, [Arabic] *Mā*, [Turkish] *Sū*, and [Hindi] *Pānī*. (SCC 163-64)

As a result, each book of divinely revealed scripture contains truths valid for all systems of belief. The author of the *Dabistān* notes in particular that the people of India hold Sanskrit to be a celestial language akin to the language of the *Dasātīr*. As such, the Vedas reveal truths for all forms of religion and irreligion, irrespective of any apparent diametric opposition.

گویند کلام آسمانی آن است که یکی از آخشیجی پیکران بدان لغت متکلم نشود و قرآن اگر چه کتاب آسمانی است اما تازیانرا همان گفتار است و چهار بید که به زعم ایشان نامه سماوی است به لغت سنسکریت است که در هیچ شهری بدان زبان تکلم نکنند و سوی کتب این طایفه یافته نشود و گویند که این لغات کلام فرشتگان است . . . و از بید هر که خواهد دلیل مذهب خود تواند بر آورد ، به حدی که دلیل بر صحت حکمت و تصوف و موحدی و ملحدی و تقنید و اباحت و هندوی و یهودیت و نصرانیت و گبری و مسلمانی و تسنن و تشیع و امثال آن بر آید چه آن رموز رسا و اشارات والا است به نوعی که جمعی جویندگان از او بهره مند شوند .

[The Hindus] say that heavenly speech is that which is not spoken by those of elemental form. Though the *Qur'ān* is a heavenly book, still, the Arabs speak in the same language. The four Vedas, which according to them, are a heavenly book are in the Sanskrit language, a language spoken in no land, and which is found in no book except those of this group. They say these words are the speech of angels [compare Sanskrit *devavānī*]. . . . Whoever wants to can bring forth proof for his own religion from the Vedas, to the extent that sounds proofs appear for philosophy, Sufism, unitarianism, atheism, repression, latitudinarianism, Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, Islam, Sunnism, Shī'ism, and the like, since it conveys secrets and allusions in such a way that all seekers will benefit from it. (DM 133)

#### IV. Translating Prophethood

Of all the figures of Persia mytho-history, Zarathustra himself was perhaps the most challenging, if the most important, figure for Kayvānīs to incorporate into their prophetology. Synthesizing traditional Zoroastrianism with Ishrāqī and Sufī practices was no easy task, yet Kayvānī thinkers read the life of Zarathustra from the *Zarātushnāma* and other sources in innovative ways.

Kayvānīs held that Zarathustra's teachings were presented in the form of allegories (*ramz va ishārat*), and that the true meaning of these teachings could only be understood through mystical interpretation (*ta'vīl*) and gnosis (*'irfān*). The *Dabistān* states:

آبادیان گویند مدار شت زردشت به رمز و اشارات است از آنکه نزد عوام افسانه که در دور از عقل باشد شکوهمند است . و دیگر آنکه اگر نادانیرا از وجود و بینازی واجب الوجود خواهیم آگاهی دهیم نفهمد . و اگر از تجرد عقول و بساطت نفوس و فضل سپهر و کواکب گوئیم متحیر ماند ، و لذات و عقوبات روحانی درک نکند و حقیقت در نیاید و احکام رموز شریعت به افهام خواص و عوام میرسد . و هم‌را سود میباشد و آشکارا کردن آن سبب نیکنامی دنیا و آخرت میگردد و احوال حقیقت و طریقت و حکمترا که خواص فهم میکنند بیشتر عوام آنرا منکر میباشند . پس سخنان حکمترا در لباس شریعت ادا باید کرد تا همه کس از آنجا نفع خود بر دارند . [...] بدان که کیش آذر هوشنگیان یعنی یزدانیان بر آن است که اگرچه دین زردشت از گشتاسپ تا یزدگرد رواجی تمام داشت اما پادشاهان تأویل کرده آنرا با شریعت آذر هوشنگ یعنی مهاباد مطابق میساختند و هیچگونه به قتل زندبار فرمان ندادندی و کلمات زردشترا مرموز میدانستند . جایی که مخالف کیش آذر هوشنگ بود عمل نمیکردند و تأویل مینمودند .

The Ābādīs say: the central idea [*madār*] of *shat* [= *hažrat*] Zarathustra is [expressed] in allegory [*ramz va ishārat*], since tales [*aḥsāna*], though removed from reason, seem splendid to commoners. Also, if we were to try to explain to an ignorant person the existence and total independence of the Necessary Existent [*vājib al-vujūd*], he would not understand; and if we were to speak to him of the immateriality of intelligences and uncompoundness of souls, or the virtue [*faḏl*] of the celestial sphere and the stars, he would be confused. He could not perceive spiritual delights and punishments, and would not understand the truth. Allegorical expressions of the law [*aḥkām-i rumūz-i sharī'at*] can be understood both by the elite and the commoners, and all profit by it. Making it well-known brings fame in this world and the next. The elite comprehend the nature of the truth, the path, and wisdom, while most of the commoners object to it. Thus one must dress utterances of wisdom [*sukhanān-i ḥikmat*] with the garb of law [*libās-i sharī'at*] so that everyone can profit from it. ... Know that the sect of the Āzar Hūshangīs, that is, the Yazdānīs, agree that even though the religion of Zarathustra prevailed from Gushtāsp to Yazdgerd, still the kings interpreted it esoterically [*ta'vīl kardā*], and made it agree with the law of Āzar Hūshang, i.e. [that of] Mahābād. They never ordered that living beings be killed. They understood that the words of Zarathustra were allegorical. They never acted on any passage which opposed the sect of Āzar Hūshang, and they interpreted it esoterically. (DM 111-12)

The *Shāristān* reveals how mystical interpretations were given to the life of Zarathustra, who is said to speak only in enigmas and allusions, the interpretation of which reveals the same truth as Koranic passages.

در هماندم که زرتشت متولد شد بخندید چنانکه همه حضار مجلس خنده او شنیدند چون بزرگ شد بهمن یعنی جبرئیل آن حضرت از مُلک و ملکوت بر آورده فوق دایره جبروت رسانید و اسرار هستی برو مکشوف شد حضرت بخشنده بی منت اوستا و زند بدان والا نبی بخشید و هریک از ملائکه مقرب او را اندرز کردند و مراسم محبت بجا آوردند این نسخه آسمانیرا هیچکس از علما و فضلا نفهمیدی و درک معنی آن نکردی حتی جاماسپ یعنی والا دانا چون دقت و لطافت و فصاحت کلامی جز از کتب و صحایف منزله بسمع ایشان نرسیده پس بحقیقه فاتو بسوره من مثله بظهور پیوست آنحضرت فرمود که این کلام الهی بعقیده آبدیان یعنی ترجمه معلومات من جانب الله است بطریق رمز و اشارت و کسیرا یارای درک آن نبود جز از خدا و رسول او . چون همگی از درک آن و تفهیم معنی زند بل از قرات قاصر بودند مگر از تفسیری که بپازند مشهور و موسوم است .

At the very moment that Zartusht was born, he laughed, such that those present in the assembly heard his laughter. When he grew up, Bahman, i.e., Gabriel, lifted him out of the visible and invisible realms [*mulk va malakūt*] and conveyed him to the pinnacle of the orbit of the highest heaven [*fawq-i dā'ira-i jabarūt*], and the secrets of existence were unveiled to him. His Majesty, the generous, he without obligation, granted the Avesta and the Zand to that Exalted Prophet [*vālā nabī*]. Each of the angels of divine presence [*malā'ika-i muqarrab*] gave him advice and enacted the customs of affection. None of the learned people or worthies were able to understand this celestial book, and they were not able to perceive its meaning, except for Jāmāsp, that is, the Exalted Sage [*vālā dānā*]. Since no word [*kalām*] with such delicacy [*diqqat*], elegance [*laṭāfat*], and eloquence [*faṣāhat*] had ever been heard by them except from the books and pages which had been sent down, the truth of "Produce a *sūrah* like it!" [Qur'ān 2:23] became clear.<sup>37</sup> His Eminence said, "This divine word according to the belief of the Ābādīs, that is, the translation of known things, is from God, in the manner of symbols [*ramz*] and allusions [*ishārat*]. No one is able to comprehend it except for the Lord and his prophet, for everyone was deficient in comprehending it and understanding the meaning of the Zand except for simply reading it [aloud], except by a *tafsīr* which is well known, called Pāzand. (SCC 189-90)

Farzāna Bahrām, interested in what he believes to be the basic unity of the revealed religions, is particularly interested in the identity of Zarathustra with the prophet Abraham. For Bahrām, Zarathustra is simply a translation (*murād*) of Abraham. He explains:

37 The tradition of referring to the *Avesta* as inimitable goes back at least to the time of al-Mas'ūdī. See Travis Zadeh, *The Vernacular Qur'ān: Translation and the Rise of Persian Exegesis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press & the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2012), 24.

اما بعضی از متعصبان گویند که اگر نبوت زردشت بصحۀ پیوستی بایستی در قرآن مجید ذکر او صریح بودی. جواب گویم نزد شما مقرر است که پیغمبران صد و بیست و چهار هزارند و بعضی کمتر گفته اند هر گاه حقیقۀ هر کدام با اسم از شما پرسیم عاجز آئیند و شک نیست که در خاطر ندارید. سپس بقول ایشان شاید اینجمله انبیا که اسامی ایشان در مصحف نیست پیغمبر نباشند با آنکه اسم او معلوم بود و حال آنکه نزد اینجمع نامهای انبیا معلوم نیست الا قلیلی و دیگر آنکه وارد شده که نام همه انبیا پیغمبر نگفته چنانکه صوفیه و جمعی دیگر گفته اند که بعضی از انبیا مخفی بوده اند از حضرت عزت به پیغمبر استعلام آن کرده خطاب آمد **لئن لم تنته لامحون اسمک من دیوان النبوة** در مصحف آمده **رسلا قد قصصناهم علیک من قبل ورسلا لم تقصصهم علیک** و مع ذالک آمده که **ما ارسلناک من رسول الا بلسان قومہ**. پس در فرقۀ پارسیان پیغمبری باید و آن زردشت است و ازین آیه آنحضرترا میخواهد دلیل برای اسم او در مصحف آنکه مذهب پارسیان آنست که پسررا بدو نام خوانند نام سرگوشی که آترا جز از قابل کسی نداند ثانی بظاهر که بدان اورا میخوانند تواند بود که نام سرگوشی اورا خواندند در مصحف وارد شده باشد یا آنکه معربش مذکور باشد دیگر آنکه نام زردشت ابراهیم است تواند بود که در بعضی جا مراد از ابراهیم زردشت.

Yet, some zealots say, "If you really do hold the prophethood of Zarathustra to be sound, mention of him must appear in the Holy Qur'ān." I will respond. According to you, it is established that the prophets number 124,000, though some have said less. Yet whenever we ask you about each of them by name, you are incapable [to name them]. Doubtless you do not have them all in your mind. Thus, according to them, it may be that this group of prophets, whose names are not in the Qur'ān, are not in fact prophets, even if such a name is [in fact] known. Now, according to this group, the names of the prophets are not known, besides a few. So it has been adduced that the names of all the prophets have not been said, as the Sufis and have said, "Some of the prophets are hidden." 'Alī [*ḥaẓrat-i 'izzat*] asked the prophet about it, and a sermon came forth. "If you do not desist, I will surely erase your name from the register of prophecy" occurs in the *muṣḥaf*.<sup>38</sup> "And messengers about whom we have related their stories before and messengers about whom we have not related their stories to you" [*Qur'ān* 4:164] and along with this, it has come down: "we did not send you a prophet except with the language of his people" [*Qur'ān*

38 Though this is ascribed to the Qur'ān here, this is actually a non-Qur'ānic passage associated with traditions attributed to Wahb ibn Munabbih regarding the story of the prophet 'Uzayr. It is extensively quoted, for instance in the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* of Ibn 'Arabī, trans. R. W. J. Austin (New York: Paulist, 1980), 170. On the other hand, it is important to note that Āzarīs know a somewhat different version of the Qur'ān than the standard recension. The *Dabistān* states that some Shī'as believe that Abū Bakr threw away certain Qur'ānic *sūras* and proceeds to quote a text entitled *Sūrat al-Nūrayn* (The Sura of the Two Lights) (DM 244-247). A manuscript of the Qur'ān written with an interlinear Persian translation perhaps in the seventeenth century, which contained two additional *sūras* (*Sūrat al-Nūrayn* and *Sūrat al-Walāya*), was found in 1912 in Bankipore (Patna). See William St. Clair Tisdall, "Shī'ah Additions to the Koran," *Muslim World* 3 (1913): 227-241. It has been argued that the texts are forgeries from the sixteenth century (Todd Lawson, "Note for the Study of the Shī'ī Qur'ān," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 36 (1991): 279-295), in which case the texts should probably be interpreted in light of the Imamophilia and interest in *walāya* of sovereigns in the post-caliphal Islamic world.

14:4]. Thus, a prophet is necessary among the sect of the Persians, and he is Zardusht. And one can seek him from this sign. The indication for his name is in the Qur'ān, for in the sect of the Persians, it is such that they call a boy by two names: the whispered name [*nām-i sargūshī*], which no one knows besides those who are worthy [*qābil*], and a second, by which he is called openly. It could be either that they called him by his whispered name, and it would enter into the book that way; or, that his Arabized name [*mu'arrab-ash*] is mentioned. The second name of Zardusht is Ibrāhīm, so it could be that in some places, the object of "Ibrāhīm" is Zardusht. (SCC 193-94)

Important here is the interpretation of the Qur'ān 14:4 that prophetic revelation was sent down to all linguistic groups. In this interpretation, not just the "People of the Book" but members of all religious traditions have an equally valid claim to Divine Truth. If Zarathustra can be equated with the prophet Abraham, Zoroastrian revelation is made legitimate within an Islamicate worldview at the same time that Muslim revelation is legitimized within a Zoroastrian worldview. Āzar Kayvān and his followers thus equate seemingly incompatible religious systems both as a matter of belief and a matter of practice as a way to incorporate a plural world within a unitarian worldview stemming from a belief in the universal nature of divine speech.

## V. Sounds of the Absolute

حق تعالی چو بیعبارت و حرف با عدم گفت نکته‌های شگرف  
عدم آمد ز ذوق آن سخنان به فضای وجود رقص کنان

When God exalted, without signified (*'ibārat*) or sign (*ḥarf*),  
Spoke the sublime mysteries to nothingness,  
From the ecstasy of those conversations, nothingness came  
Dancing into the space of existence.<sup>39</sup>

In the above verse, the poet Jāmī poetically reflects upon the power of divine speech both to engender existence through signification and to annihilate it, to render it one with the divine, through speech consisting of non-signifying non-signs.<sup>40</sup> Likewise, Sufis could seek union with the divine and the extinguishing of the self through contemplation of the divine speech. Given the importance of language to Āzarī notions of cosmology, it is not surprising that in devotional practice, Āzarī disciples tried to free themselves from the shackles of terrestrial speech. They did this by adopting the Yogic practice of contemplating the *anāhata-nāda*, "the unstruck sound." In this respect, Āzar Kayvān likely draws upon the *Baḥr al-Hayāt* of Muḥammad Ghawṣ Gwāliyārī (d. 970 AH/1562 CE), a Persian adaptation of the Sanskrit *Amrtakuṇḍa*.<sup>41</sup>

39 Verse by Nūr al-Dīn 'Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī, from the *I'tiqād-nāma*, quoted in DM 236.

40 I am thankful to my colleague and office-mate Yulia Ryzhik for pointing out to me the two parallel roles that the divine speech plays in these texts. Her comments helped to shape the structure of this paper.

41 See the work of Carl Ernst, especially "The Islamization of Yoga in the 'Amrtakunda' Translations,"

لاجرم به ریاضت پرداخت . نخست گوش بر آوازی داشتی که آنرا به پارسی آزاد آوا به تازی صوت مطلق و به هندی اناهد سرایند . . . بعد از چندگاه مرا آئین توجّه تلقین فرمود که دل خود را به حضرت یزدان حاضر دار بیکسوت حرف و صوت تازی و پارسی و دل خود را از قلب صنوبر پیکر بر مدار . بدین روی آوردن کار من به جائی رسیده است که جهان و جهانیان در نظر سیاهی میکند و وجود ایشان را چون نمودِ سراب مبینیم .

[Āzar Kayvān ordered his disciple Sīdosh to] devote himself to ascetic practices, first listening to the voice called in Persian “the free voice” [āzād āvā], in Arabic, “the absolute sound” [šawt muṭlaq], and in Hindi, *anāhad* [Sanskrit *anāhata-(nāda)* ‘unstruck (sound)’] ... “After some time he enjoined me [another disciple named ‘Āshūr Bay Qarāmānlū] to turn towards initiation [*tavajjuh-i talqīn*], saying “Keep your soul in the presence of God, without letters and sounds, either Arabic or Persian, never removing your mind from [contemplating] the innermost substance of form [literally, the pith of the wood of form, *qalb-i šanawbar-i paykar*].” By following these instructions, I have come at last to such a state that the world and its inhabitants are but a shadow before me; and their very existence is like a mirage in the desert.” (DM 42, 45)

The ritual practice enjoined for Kayvān’s followers mimics Kayvān’s preparation for his own experience of the divine, which he narrates in his ascension narrative the *Mukāshafāt-i Kayvānī*, wherein he experiences visions of the celestial spheres and eventually reaches the divine presence.

نخستین تن خویش آراستم      بکیش پزشکی پیراستم  
 ز خود دور کردم بائین پیش      همه خواهش خود بهر راه و کیش  
 پس آنکه بگفتن بستم زبان      نگفتم بکس گفت سود و زیان  
 به تنهائی جای تاریک و تنگ      نشستم بدانجای کردم درنگ  
 خورش کاستم خواب برداشتم      باهستگی پیش بگذاشتم  
 نیاسودم از یاد یزدان پاک      جز زایزدم یکسره گشت آک

First I prepared my body and ornamented it with the doctrine of the physicians.  
 I abandoned my old religion, all my desires for paths and doctrines.  
 Then I ceased to speak; I spoke neither good nor ill to anyone.  
 I sat alone in a dark, narrow place, and I waited there.  
 I decreased my food, and ceased to sleep. I proceeded exhausted.

*Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 3rd ser. 13 (2003): 199-226. The same contemplation of the *anāhata-nāda* was adopted by later Chishtī Sufis. See Carl Ernst, “Chishtī Meditation Practices of the Later Mughal Period,” in *The Heritage of Sufism*, ed. Leonard Lewisohn and David Morgan (London: Oneworld, 1999), 3:355.

I did not rest from recalling God. Besides God, all my misfortune seemed the same.<sup>42</sup>

The author of the *Dabistān* interprets this passage as explicating another Āzarī practice, here called *ṣulḥ bā hama* (Civility with All). He explains:

موبد خداجوی در شرح موسوم به جام کیخسرو که بر متین منظومه شت آذر کیوان نوشته ، آورده است که رهسیر باید خودرا به پزشکی دانا نماید تا آنچه اخلاط برتر و بیشتر بود به اصلاح آرد ، پس همه عقاید دین و آیین و کیشها و راهها از خویش دور کند و با همه صلح گیرد و در جای تنگ و تیره نشیند و خورش به تدریج کم سازد .

Mūbad Khudājūy says in his commentary on the text of the poetic composition of Āzar Kayvān, called the *Jām-i Kaykhusraw*, that the traveller of the path must know the art of medicine so that one can bring whatever humors are dominant into harmony. Then one must banish all beliefs of religion, custom, doctrines, and paths from oneself, be civil with all [*bā hama ṣulḥ gīrad*], sit in a narrow and dark place, and eat less by degrees. (DM 27)<sup>43</sup>

This practice is further described in the *Dabistān*, here called *āmīzish-i farhang* and *mīzchār*:

و اکنون شمه از آئین آمیزش درویشان آبادیه با خلایق نگاشته کلک تحقیق میگرداند . این طایفه این طریقرا آمیزش فرهنگ و میزچار نامند . چون کسی از بیگانگان کیش ایشان به مجلس این فرقه آشنا شود اورا درشت نگویند و راه مذهب اورا ستایند و بدانچه گوید پذیرند و در تعظیم و تکریم دقیقه از دقایق فرو نهند بنابر اصل مذهب خویش که به هر دین به اعتقاد ایشان به خدا توان رسید . اگر جداگانه کیشان التماس پردازش که آنرا انکار نیز گویند کنند یعنی شغل در خواست نمایند تا بدان به حق قربت جویند دریغ ندارد ولی از کیشی که او در آن است اورا نقل نفرمایند و غیر از رفع رنج رسانیدن واجب نشمارند .

And now, a morsel regarding the mingling of the Ābādī dervishes with the various peoples shall be written with the pen of inquiry. This group calls this practice “The Mixing of Cultures” [*āmīzish-i farhang*] and “\*Table Manners” [*mīzchār*, perhaps “The Table Remedy”]. When someone foreign to their doctrine [*bīgānagān-i kīsh*] is introduced to the assembly of this group, they do not speak coarsely of him; they praise the path of his doctrine [*mazhab*], and they accept what he says, and do not overlook even a morsel of politeness and generosity, according to the principle of their doctrine. According to their belief [*i‘tiqād*], one can approach God [*khudā*] through every religion [*dīn*]. If those of another doctrine [*judāgāna-kīshān*] should present them with something with which they disagree, that is, they proselytize to them to approach God, they do not worry about it. Moreover, they do not command

42 *Jām-i Kaykhusraw*, 4.

43 Compare the commentary published in *Jām-i Kaykhusraw*, 4-8, which corresponds loosely to this account.

that one should change from the doctrine [*kīsh*] to which one belongs, as they do not consider anything besides the removing suffering as obligatory. (DM 47-48)

Such a practice (*ṣulḥ bā hama*) is immediately striking, as it is synonymous with Akbar's principle of *ṣulḥ-i kull* (Universal Civility), the intellectual history of which has never been firmly established. Since as we have seen above, a direct link between Āzar Kayvān, Abu'l Faḏl, and Fayḏī existed via correspondence, this is perhaps in fact the most likely source of Akbar's doctrine. It is also worth noting that according to the Āzarīs, those who achieve the highest stage of mystical attainment are referred to as the *ḥukamā'-i muta'allihīn* (Theosist Sages), derived from the same root as Akbar's *dīn-i ilāhī*.<sup>44</sup>

Despite this pluralistic outlook, this did not mean for Āzar Kayvān that every language, and by extension, every people were equal. Kayvān and his followers clearly asserted the superiority of the Persian language, the Persian people, and the Persian prophets and Persian revelation, which they held to be closer to the original revelation than the others. They were, in a way, a precursor of Persian chauvinism, proto-nationalists before such a category had developed. Like Gus, the overly-patriotic father in the film *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*, who insists that every word in the English language has a Greek etymology, Kayvān asserts that the world's religious places are in their origin Persian, and their names have been corrupted from their Persian forms in later times.

گویند مهآباد بعد از تعمیر هیکل استخر پارس که موسوم است به هفسور خانه‌ای ساخت و آنرا آباد نام نهاد که اکنون کعبه‌اش میگویند و فرمود تا سکنه آن سرزمین پرستش آن به جا آورند . و از پیکرها که در خانه کعبه بود پیکر ماه به غایت نیکو بوده . بنابراین آن خانه را مه که گفتندی یعنی مکان قمر و محل ماه . رفته رفته تازیان مکّه اش گفته اند .

It is said that Mahābād, after building the temple of Istakhr in Pārs, which is known as Hafsūr, built a house, and named it Ābād, which is now called the Ka'ba. He ordered that the inhabitants of that land devote themselves to it. And of all the images which were in the house of the Ka'ba, the image of the moon was of great

44 A Nuḡṭavī origin for the doctrine of *ṣulḥ-i kull* has already been suggested by Abbas Amanat, "Persian Nuḡṭawīs and the Shaping of the Doctrine of 'Universal Conciliation' (*ṣulḥ-i kull*) in Mughal India," in *Unity in Diversity: Mysticism, Messianism, and the Construction of Religious Authority in Islam*, ed. Orkhan Mir-Kasimov, (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 367-391. A thorough article contextualizing the treatment of the *dīn-i ilāhī* within the framework of the *Dabistān* was written by Gerald Grobbel, "Das Dabistān-i Maḏāhib und seine Darstellung der Religionsgespräche an Akbars Hof," in *Islamische Grenzen und Grenzübergänge*, ed. Benedikt Reinert and Johannes Thomann, (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007) 85-130. The term *ḥukamā'-i muta'allihīn* seems to have been coined in late Timurid Shirazi illuminationist circles. See Reza Pourjavady, *Philosophy in Early Safavid Iran: Najm al-Dīn Maḥmūd Nayrīzī and His Writings*, (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 18. The term is most famously later applied to Mullā Ṣadrā, the *ṣadr al-muta'allihīn*, who is designated as *ḥakīm-i muta'allih* by later thinkers. See Sajjad Rizvi, "Reconsidering the Life of Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī (d. 1641): Notes Towards an Intellectual Biography," *Iran* 40 (2002): 182, as well as his *Mulla Sadra and Metaphysics: Modulation of Being* (London: Routledge, 2009), 121. My thanks to Matthew Melvin-Koushki for a scintillating exchange of emails on this subject.

beauty. Therefore, that house was called *Mah Gah*, that is, the place of the moon, the lunar station. By and by, the Arabs came to call it Mecca. (DM 19)

Likewise, the text continues, Madina is in fact Mahdīnah, “the moon of the religion;” Karbala is Kār Bālā “lofty work.” Gayā, the site of the Buddha’s enlightenment, is similarly derived from Gāh-i Kayvān, “the place of Saturn,” and so too other sites including Najaf and Ardabil, Mathura and Dwarka. In this way, the Kayvānīs reshaped the religious topography of the world they inhabited to reaffirm their own beliefs.

According to Kayvān, “the children of Persia are the noblest of created beings [*abnā’-i pārs afzal-i makhlūqāt-and*]” (SCC 54); Persians are “more eloquent and intelligent than Arabs [*ishān az a’rāb afṣah va a’qal-and*]” (SCC 59). In order to prove this point, the author of the *Shāristān* launches into a long discussion of a debate held between scholars from the Indian court and the disciples of Kayvān on the relative merits of Persian and Arabic, in which those speaking in favor assert that Arabic is superior owing to it having a more extensive phonological inventory than Persian. Mūbad Hūsh, the disciple of Āzar Kayvān asserts that just because Persian lacks the emphatic consonants of Arabic does not mean that Persian is inferior to Arabic – by such logic, Tibetan with its extensive phonology would be the most superior language in the world. Rather, Hūsh argues that Persian is minimal in phonology and maximal in meaning (*qalīl al-laḥẓ va kaṣīr al-ma’nā*), and is thus a legitimate vehicle of divine revelation.

یکی از علما بعرض رسانید که عربی افصح است از آنکه فرقان عربیست و عجم نه بل در عجم صحیفه نباشد. هوش فرمود که چون صحیفه الهی نیست پس دساتیر و زند چیست چنانکه دیگر صحایف انبیا است دساتیر و زند همچنان است. ایشان انکار اینمعنی نمودند. هوش اثبات نمود چنانکه خواهد آمد. یکی از علما گفت عربی طویل است و اعراب فصیح. هوش گفت عربی را که اعلم العلماء میدانستند دیدم که گفت در بازار جلکنده فنج سیر فنه جرفتم یعنی در بازار گلکنده پنج سیر پنبه گرفتم. هر آئینه عجم از مکتوبات عرب با آنکه طویل است عاجز نیست. پس قصیده چندی که آذر کیوان بزبان عربی گفته بود بخواند ایشان متحیر شدند. مدعی گفت عربی طویل است و در عجم هشت حرف ازان نیست. هوش گفت پارسی قلیل اللفظ و کثیر المعنی است و ما قله و دله عبارت ازان است آنچه عرب بطول اقرار داده اند عجم باختصار رفتند چنانکه افراط و تفرید زشت است بنابراین عجم وسط اختیار کرده اند. . . . علما مدعی در ماندند و لاجواب گشتند. گفتند مصحف چرا بعربی نازل گشت. آنجناب فرمود که چون حق تعالی در ازل حقیقه دان عالم بود که هر قوم از عجم و جزء آن عادت بالسنة ضد خود تواند کرد الا عرب که ازان عاجز است فلهدا بعربی ارسال داشت و ترجمه آن بهر زبان نزد عرفا جایز است آنکه عرب افسق الناس بوده اند چنانچه از کتب شما معلوم میشود هر آینه برای هدایت شان پیغمبری از ایشان و کتابی بزبانشان فرستاد بعد ازان مدعی گفت هر آئینه فصیح است. آذر هوش گفت آنچه از جانب الله باشد بنوامیس باشد آنچه از ایشان است هر آئینه افصح بود چه خارق عادتشان است و این مخصوص زبان عربی نیست. اگر بلغته تبتی افصح از عربی و فارسی باشد چون ناچار گردید عجز اعتراف نموده.

One of the *‘ulamā* argued, “Arabic is the most pure language [*afṣah*], because the Qur’ān [*furqān*] is in Arabic and not in Persian. There is no divine book in Persian.”

Hūsh said, “If there is no divine book, then what about the *Dasātīr* and the *Zend*? The *Dasātīr* and *Zand* are just like the other books of the prophets.” They objected to this argument. Hūsh proved it, as will be shown. One of the ‘*ulamā* said, “Arabic is maximal [in phonology] and the Arabs speak purely [*faṣīḥ*].” Hūsh said, “There used to be a well-known Arab, the most learned of the ‘*ulamā*, who said once “*dar bāzār-i julkunda fanj sīr faṃba jiriftam*” – that is, “I bought five *sīrs* of cotton in the market of Gulkunda [*dar bāzār-i gulkunda panj sīr paṃba giriftam*].”<sup>45</sup> In any case, despite the fact that Arabic is maximal, Persians are not lacking in Arabic compositions.” Then he recited a few *qaṣīdas* that Āzar Kayvān had composed in the Arabic language and they were stunned. A plaintiff said, “Arabic is maximal [in phonology], and there are eight letters of it which are not in Persian.” Hūsh said, “Persian is minimal in phonology and maximal in meaning. The proof of what has been said and shown is that what the Arabs have established as excess, the Persians have abridged, since excess and uniqueness are ugly. The Persians have chosen moderation.” ... The inquisitive ‘*ulamā* were stunned and had no response. They said, “Why did the Scripture [*muṣḥaf*] come down in Arabic?” He [Hūsh] said, “Since God has known the reality of the world since pre-eternity, namely that the Persians and all others could learn the habits of languages besides their own, except for the Arabs, who were deficient in this, he sent it in down Arabic. According to the sages [‘*urafā*] its translation is permissible into every language. The Arabs were the most wicked of people, as is clear from your books. In any case, he sent as guidance to them a prophet from among them and a book in their language.” Then the plaintiff said, “All the same, it is pure language.” Āzar Hūsh said, “What comes from God exists by means of the law-givers [*navāmīs*]. What comes from them is most pure language [*aḫṣāḥ*] in any case, for it breaks with customary reality [*khāriq-i ‘ādat-ishān ast*]. This is not the special quality of the Arabic language. If, in terms of phonology, Tibetan is indeed more pure [*faṣīḥ*] than Arabic or Persian, then one would have no recourse but to acknowledge one’s impotence!” (SCC 63-66)

All the same, the Persophilism found in the Āzarī texts does not prevent their authors from striving to remove partisanship and bias from their works. At the conclusion of the *Dabistān*, Mūbad, the author of the text, reflects on his composition. He states that he should not be considered the author of the text, only a translator, one who reveals the fundamental truth of Universal Religion (*ḥaqīqat-i dīn*) through a non-partisan account of the religions of the world from the tongues and books of their followers.

پس از انجامیدن نامه باز نموده میآید که بعضی از اعزه میفرمودند که ملل و نحل و تبصرة العوام که در آنها عقاید و مذاهب باز نموده شده خالی از جانب روی نیست لاجرم حقیقت دین پوشیده میماند . دیگر آنکه بعد از ایشان بسی گروه بهمرسیده اند . بدین خواست به نوشتن این نامه پرداخت و در این کردارستان عقیدهآباد از اعتقادات فِرَق مختلفه آنچه نگاشته آمد از زبان صاحبان آن عقیده و کتاب

45 This is apparently a joke, mocking the perceived difficulty of Arabs in pronouncing the phonemes /g/ and /p/.

ایشان است . و در گزارش اشخاص در حال هر فرقه چنانکه مطیعان و مخلصان به تعظیم نام برند ثبت نمود تا بوی تعصب و جانبروی نیاید و نامه‌نگار را از این گزارش جز منصب ترجمانی نیست .

After completing this book, it remains to be explained that some of the excellent personages have said that the *Milal wa Niḥal* [of Shahrīstānī] and the *Tabṣīrat al-'Avāmm* [attributed to Murtaẓā b. Dā'ī Rāzī], in which doctrines and beliefs have been explained, are not without partisanship [*jānīb-rū'ī*], and the truth of Universal Religion [*ḥaqīqat-i dīn*] remains veiled. Moreover, many [new] groups were formed after them. With such a desire, [the author] set about writing this book. In this Land of Conduct of the City of Doctrine [*kirdāristān-i 'aqīda-ābād*], what has been written about the doctrines of the different sects comes from the tongues of the followers of that doctrine and their books. As for the account of the personalities of each sect, [the author] has recorded it just as their followers and sincere friends have sung their praises, so that the stench of zealotry and partisanship do not arise. The author deserves no rank in this account other than that of translator. (DM 267)

As I hope to have shown in this paper, the constructed language found in the *Dasātīr-i Āsmānī* was not simply a historical oddity, but rather a relic of a well-developed form of a particular strand of millennialist letrist thought which developed in Shiraz during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and which was exported to Akbar's India, serving as a major intellectual inspiration for Akbar's own millennialist project. The legacy of the Āzarīs was central to the early modern moment of Persian religious thought, one whose latter-day reflections can be seen in thinkers like Dārā Shikūh, and more distantly in the Persian writings of Rām Mohan Roy, which laid the foundation of the South Asian engagement with strands of European Deism and secularist thought in the nineteenth century.<sup>46</sup> It is thus truly a pleasure to offer this paper, about the mentor of a group of people who loved Persian to excess, as a small tribute to my own mentor and friend, Wheeler Thackston, a man who taught generations of students to love Persian.

46 The relation of Āzarism to the *Dīn-i Ilāhī* of Akbar, and a re-evaluation of Akbar's 'secularism,' is the subject of a forthcoming paper which I am currently engaged in preparing. On the latter reception of this discourse by Dārā Shikūh and its afterlife in the colonial encounter, see the groundbreaking dissertation of Supriya Gandhi, *Mughal Self-Fashioning, Indic Self-Realization: Dara Shikoh and Persian Textual Cultures in Early Modern South Asia* (PhD dissertation, Harvard University, 2011).

# *No Tapping around Philology*

A Festschrift in Honor of  
Wheeler McIntosh Thackston Jr.'s 70<sup>th</sup> Birthday

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*Wheeler Thackston dancing to a medley of "Give My Regards to Broadway" and "It's a Grand Old Flag."*

To Wheeler Thackston on His 70<sup>th</sup> Birthday.



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