Modern Asian Studies (2022), **56**, 959–992
doi:10.1017/S0026749X21000494

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Exercises in peace: Āẕar Kayvānī universalism and comparison in the *School of Doctrines*

Daniel J. Sheffield

Department of Near Eastern Studies, Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey, United States of America
Email: djs5@princeton.edu

(Received 25 February 2021; revised 9 August 2021; accepted 10 August 2021)

Abstract

In 1650, an encyclopedia of comparative religion known as *Dabistān-i Maẕāhib* (the *School of Doctrines*) was completed near the city of Hyderabad. Asserting that the religions of the world are reflections of a single inner truth, its author Mīrzā Ẕu'l-fiqār Āẕarsāsānī, known by the poetic penname 'Mūbad', travelled widely across India to record encounters with diverse religious figures. This article re-examines the composition and legacy of the *Dabistān* in light of new manuscript evidence relating to its author and the world he inhabited. It argues that the *Dabistān*'s universalist project reflects a widely held theory of the interrelatedness of the macrocosm, in which sociality with diverse populations was understood to be a spiritual exercise leading to saintly perfection in the same way that venerating the cosmos and ascetic bodily practices were. The article provides a close reading of the *Dabistān*'s shortest chapter on the religion of the Tibetans, the earliest such description in Persian. Situating the *Dabistān* within the diverse expressions of 'Universal Peace' (*ṣulḥ-i kull*) during the Safavid and Mughal periods, it argues that the *Dabistān*'s project of recovering a universal theology that was attributed to ancient Iran and India led to expressions of dual religious belonging—to particular religions of revelation as well as to the universal religion of the philosophers—parallel to and connected with what Jan Assmann has termed the '*religio duplex* phenomenon' in early modern Europe. Finally, the article briefly traces the legacy of the *Dabistān* into the modern period.

> The free do not think of religion, doctrine, and spiritual guidance—
> Those shackled by seeking liberation are not truly free.
> For how long must we wander the alleyways of religion and nation?—
> There is no highway through the land of verification (*taḥqīq*) besides heresy (*ilḥād*).
> —'Mūbad' Mīrzā Ẕu'l-fiqār Āẕarsāsānī (fl. 1060s AH/1650s CE)[1]

[1] *rastagān-rā fikr-i dīn u maẕhab u irshād nīst / ān-ki ū dar band-i āzādī-st ham āzād nīst. chand dar paskūchahā-i maẕhab-u millat dawīm / shāhrāh-i kishvar-i taḥqīq juz ilḥād nīst.* From *Dīvān-i Mūbad*, Khudabakhsh Library, Patna, MS 3727, fol. 21r.

Keywords: Comparative religion; Safavid Iran; Mughal India; Zoroastrianism; Tibet

Introduction

Completed in its first recension near the city of Hyderabad in the year 1060 AH/1650 CE, *Dabistān-i Maẕāhib* (the *School of Doctrines*) is a work that describes the religions (*adyān*) of the world in commensurable, rather than polemical, terms. Rejecting the binary between notions of true religion (*dīn al-ḥaqq*) and false religion that characterize many earlier Islamic works of heresiography, the *Dabistān* instead seeks to investigate the 'true nature of religion' (*ḥaqīqat-i dīn*) as it is found within diverse forms of outward religious expression.[2] Written in a style that is at times erudite and philosophical, at times bawdy and humorous, and filled with the illustrative Persian verse characteristic of tasteful prose composition, the *Dabistān* was read widely across the eastern Islamic world into the colonial period. Yet, in spite of more than 200 years of modern scholarship on the text, confusion about even its most basic characteristics remains. Recently identified manuscripts allow us to speak with greater certainty about the circumstances in which the *Dabistān* was composed, the life of its author, and his connections to contemporary developments in religious thought in the Islamic world. By placing the *Dabistān* in its historical context, I seek to understand the method and aim of its author's comparative research, the regime of comparatism[3] he refers to as *taḥqīq* ('independent verification')[4] through which seemingly distinct religious ideas are translated into a single universalist framework.

The author of the *Dabistān*, Mīrzā Ẕu'l-fiqār Āẕarsāsānī, known by the poetic penname 'Mūbad' (Magus), was born in Patna in 1618, during the reign of the Mughal emperor Jahangir.[5] At an early age, he was connected to a secretive group of mystics, followers of an Iranian gnostic known as Āẕar Kayvān (942–1027 AH/1533–1618 CE), who claimed to derive their practices from the ancient Persians. According to Mūbad's own account, several groups attributing their beliefs to pre-Islamic Iran 'exist throughout Iran and Turan going

[2] The term *ḥaqīqat-i dīn* appears to invert the Quranic identification of Islam as the Religion of Truth (*dīn al-ḥaqq*). As discussed at length in Moin's framework article in this special issue, the term *dīn al-ḥaqq* appears in the Sūrat al-Tawba of the Quran (9:33) to denote the priority of the dispensation of Muḥammad over all religion: 'It is he who sent his messenger with guidance and the religion of truth to make it prevail over all religion, although those who associate others with God dislike it' (*huwa lladhī ʾarsala rasūlahu bi-l-hudā wa-dīni l-ḥaqqi li-yuẓhirahu ʿalā d-dīni kullihi wa-law kariha l-mushrikūna*).

[3] Drawing attention to reflections upon and processes of comparison, rather than the act of comparison itself, see the essays in Renaud Gagné, Simon Goldhill and Geoffrey Lloyd (eds), *Regimes of Comparatism: Frameworks of Comparison in History, Religion and Anthropology* (Leiden: Brill, 2019).

[4] Matthew Melvin-Koushki proposes that a new investigation of the tension between *taḥqīq* and *taqlīd* ('independent inquiry' and 'blind imitation') should be the foundation of a new early modern intellectual history. See Matthew Melvin-Koushki, 'Taḥqīq vs. Taqlīd in the Renaissances of Western Early Modernity', *Philological Encounters* 3, no. 1–2 (2018), pp. 1–45.

[5] On past misunderstandings regarding the authorship of the *Dabistān*, and the decision to render *mūbad* as 'magus' rather than as 'Zoroastrian priest' in English, see below.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X21000494 Published online by Cambridge University Press

about dressed as Muslims (*ba libās-i musalmān*), but secretly walking the path of their own religion (*nihān rah-sipar-i kīsh-i khwīsh-and*)'.[6] The Āẕar Kayvānīs promulgated a work of scripture known as *Dasātīr-i Āsmānī* (*The Celestial Laws*), which presented occult, devotional, and philosophical texts as revelations transmitted from ancient Iranian prophet-kings, rather than as texts grounded more immediately in the contemporary Islamic tradition. Drawing upon a widely held theory of macrocosm, in which the heavens, society, and the human body were understood to be closely linked, Āẕar Kayvān enjoined his followers to cultivate harmony at each of these three scales, through venerating the celestial bodies, mingling with diverse communities, and adopting strict regimens of dietary and bodily practice. These practices were understood to be steps towards saintly perfection, whereby the perfect saint, in imitating Āẕar Kayvān himself, could hope to ascend through the heavens to reach a state of union with God and the cosmos (*taʾalluh*). This liberation of the soul through the acquisition of divine knowledge and union with God was understood by Āẕar Kayvān's followers to be the universal goal of human life, a belief they saw everywhere, from ancient Greece to contemporary Tibet.

Organizing his book according to the metaphor of a schoolhouse (*dabistān*), Mūbad laid out his table of contents as a syllabus in which each of the religious traditions he knew is presented as a lesson leading readers to the goal of apprehending the true nature of religion (*ḥaqīqat-i dīn*). Though the *Dabistān* draws extensively on older writings on religion, Mūbad insists that his project was not merely an imitative update, but instead was something unprecedented.[7] In the years leading up to the completion of the *Dabistān*, Mūbad travelled widely. In combining older accounts with the oral testimony of contemporary practitioners and excerpts from diverse religious texts, Mūbad invented an ethnographic genre of writing about religion in Persian.[8] In

[6] Karīm Najafī Barzgar (ed.), *Dabistān-i maẕāhib: chāp-i ʿaksī-i nuskha-yi khaṭṭī-i sāl 1060 H./1650 M.* (New Delhi: Dāʾirat al-Maʿārif-i Īrān va Hind, 2010), fol. 149r–v; Raḥīm Riżāzāda Malik (ed.), *Dabistān-i maẕāhib* (Tehran: Ṭahūrī, 1983), p. 188.

[7] Mūbad writes, 'Some dear friends have said that the (books) *Milal wa-Niḥal* and *Tabṣirat al-ʿAvāmm*, in which doctrines and beliefs have been explained, are not devoid of partisanship (*jānib-rūʾī*), and the truth of religion (*ḥaqīqat-i āʾīn*) remains veiled. To rectify this, I set about writing this book': Najafī Barzgar (ed.), *Dabistān-i maẕāhib [α recension]*, fol. 301r. The β recension of the *Dabistān* adds 'Moreover, since the time (of those books), many (new) groups have formed': Riżāzāda Malik (ed.), *Dabistān-i maẕāhib [β recension]*, p. 267. On Mūbad's repurposing of Shahrastānī's schematization of religion to suit his universal framework, see Carl Ernst, 'Concepts of Religion in the Dabistan', in his *It's Not Just Academic! Essays on Sufism and Islamic Studies* (New Delhi: Sage Publishing, 2018), pp. 441–46. On his relocation of Shahrastānī's descriptions of Presocratic philosophy to describe ancient sects and on the sources for the interreligious polemic invoked in the religious debates at Akbar's court, see Gerald Grobbel, 'Das Dabistān-i Maḏāhib und seine Darstellung der Religionsgespräche an Akbars Hof', in *Islamische Grenzen und Grenzübergänge*, (eds) Benedikt Reinert and Johannes Thomann (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007), pp. 100–01, 122–26.

[8] On Mūbad's method, see, in particular, Aditya Behl, 'Pages from the Book of Religions: Encountering Difference in Mughal India', in *Forms of Knowledge in Early Modern Asia: Explorations in the Intellectual History of India and Tibet, 1500–1800*, (ed.) Sheldon Pollock (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), pp. 210–39.

certain respects, Mūbad's approach to the religions of India paralleled the work of Abū Rayḥān al-Bīrūnī some 600 years before him, but while Bīrūnī's work on the religions of India began from a position asserting the fundamental difference between the religious systems of India and Islam,[9] Mūbad instead comes to the conclusion that, although religions differ in outward manifestation, they reach the same goal.

Throughout the text of the *Dabistān*, Mūbad insists upon what he views as the essential translatability of religion and its subcategories. At the conclusion of the text, Mūbad likens his work to that of a translator. Summarizing his method, he writes:

> In this Land of Conduct and Abode of Doctrine (*kirdāristān-i ʿaqīdat-ābād*), what has been written about the doctrines of the various sects comes from the tongues of the followers of those doctrines and their books. As for the accounts of the notable persons of each religion, they have been accorded respect in the same way that their followers and sincere friends describe them, so that not even a whiff of zealotry and partisanship should arise. The author deserves no rank in this account other than that of translator (*manṣab-i tarjumānī*).[10]

Indeed, Mūbad's regime of comparatism is premised on a notion of interreligious translatability which is deeply embedded in Āẕar Kayvānī thought more broadly.[11] The *Dabistān* thus can be seen as a counterpoint from the Islamic world to the early modern works on the religion of the ancient Egyptians highlighted by the German intellectual historian, Jan Assmann. Extending his earlier work on the break between ancient cosmotheism and monotheism,[12] Assmann argues that in Renaissance Europe, the renewal of

[9] While avoiding theological polemics, Bīrūnī's book on India famously begins with the statement that Indians 'differ from us [Muslims] in everything which other nations have in common' (*yubāyinūnanā bi-jamīʿ mā yushtarak fīhi l-ʾumam*): Edward Sachau (ed.), *Alberuni's India: An Account of the Religion, Philosophy, Literature, Chronology, Astronomy, Customs, Laws and Astrology of India about A.D. 1030* (London: Trübner, 1887), p. 13. On Bīrūnī's approach to comparative religion, see, most recently, Mario Kozah, *The Birth of Indology as an Islamic Science: Al-Bīrūnī's Treatise on Yoga Psychology* (Leiden: Brill, 2015); Rushain Abbasi, 'Islam and the Invention of Religion: A Study of Medieval Muslim Discourses on Dīn', *Studia Islamica* 116, no. 1 (2021), pp. 1–106.

[10] *darīn kirdāristān-i ʿaqīdat-ābād az iʿtiqādāt-i furuq-i mukhtalifa ānchi nigāshta āmad az zabān-i ṣāḥibān-i ān ʿaqīda va kitab-i īshān ast va dar guzārish-i ashkhāṣ va rijāl-i har firqa-rā chunānki mutbiʿān va mukhliṣān nām barand ba-taʿẓīm s̱ abt nimūd tā bū-yi taʿaṣṣub va jānib-rūʾī nayāyad va nāma-nigār-rā az īn guzārish juz manṣab-i tarjumānī nīst*. Najafī Barzgar, *Dabistān-i maẕāhib [α recension]*, fol. 301r: Riżāzāda Malik, *Dabistān-i maẕāhib [β recension]*, p. 367.

[11] Daniel Sheffield, 'The Language of Heaven in Safavid Iran: Speech and Cosmology in the Thought of Āẕar Kayvān and His Followers', in *No Tapping around Philology: A Festschrift for Wheeler Thackston's 70th Birthday*, (eds) Alireza Korangy and Daniel Sheffield (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2014), pp. 161–83.

[12] In *Moses the Egyptian*, Assmann argued that the Abrahamic religions broke away from the ancient notion that diverse 'cosmotheist' religions shared a common ground and were thus translatable. By contrast, what Assmann termed the 'Mosaic distinction' characterized a rupture at the emergence of monotheist beliefs from a universal worship of the cosmos to a specific belief in a

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X21000494 Published online by Cambridge University Press

interest in a perennial ancient theology (*prisca theologia*) was sparked by the circulation of writings attributed to Hermes Trismegistus and Zoroaster. This led to an understanding of Egyptian religion as twofold (*religio duplex*), characterized by an outer official religion, the 'religion of revelation', as well as an inner universal religion, 'the religion of nature.' Assmann argues that these interests led early modern thinkers to begin to connect their constructions of the ancient theology of Egypt and Persia with Western Christianity, rechannelling this synthesis into articulations of a universal natural theology parallel to Christian revelation.[13]

In what follows, after briefly reviewing the history of the study of the *Dabistān*, I outline the rhetorical contestations of religious toleration during the period immediately preceding Mūbad's life. These contestations hinge around the term *ṣulḥ-i kull* ('Universal Peace'). This term, which originated during the reign of the Mughal emperor Akbar, connects ideas about the well-being of the body politic with macro- and microcosmic harmony—ideas attributed to ancient Iran.

I then contextualize Mūbad's project in relation to broader ideas about universal peace as an extension of the spiritual exercises[14] of the followers of Āẕar Kayvān. With roots stretching back to Late Antique Neoplatonism,[15] the philosophers' goal of perfecting the soul and attaining theosis (*taʾalluh*) required the adoption of a way of life dedicated to the cultivation of wisdom. Kayvān encouraged his followers to spend their time living among diverse religious communities, along with adopting a regime of specific bodily practices and celestial venerations. These exercises were connected to a widely accepted theory of macrocosm, in which the cosmos, society, and the body were understood to be connected realms in which to cultivate harmony. What was perhaps unique about Āẕar Kayvān's movement, however, was its emphasis on living among diverse religious groups and even adopting their prayers for private devotion, a practice which Kayvānī texts refer to as *āmīza-yi farhang* ('the mixture of cultures').

single divinity wherein all other forms of religious belief were characterized as false. It should be said that such a stark schematization no doubt oversimplifies the Mosaic faiths' historical encounters with religious Others and makes no attempt to account for Islamic history.

[13] Jan Assmann, *Religio Duplex: How the Enlightenment Reinvented Egyptian Religion*, (trans.) Robert Savage (Cambridge: Polity, 2014), p. 8.

[14] Throughout the article, the term 'spiritual exercises' is used in the sense coined by the historian of Neoplatonism, Pierre Hadot. Hadot writes of Classical philosophical schools that each 'practices exercises designed to ensure spiritual progress toward the ideal state of wisdom, exercises of reason that will be, for the soul, analogous to the athlete's training or to the application of a medical cure. Generally, they consist, above all, of self-control and meditation.' Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, (trans.) Arnold I. Davidson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), p. 59. My understanding of Hadot is informed by Sajjad Rizvi's insightful application of Hadot to early modern Islamic philosophy in S. Rizvi, 'Philosophy as a Way of Life in the World of Islam: Applying Hadot to the Study of Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī (d. 1635)', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 75, no. 1 (2012), pp. 1–13.

[15] See, for instance, the classic study of Gregory Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul: The Neoplatonism of Iamblichus* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X21000494 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Mūbad was one of the last documented disciples of Kayvān's order, who speaks of his predecessors but mentions no followers or successors. Considerable confusion has arisen within Western scholarship about how to characterize Mūbad. In the second half of this article, I attempt to trace the contours of his career from extant sources, which, in addition to the *Dabistān*, include a *Dīvān* of poetry compiled sometime during the early reign of Aurangzeb and numerous letters and short compositions originating in the late Quṭbshāhī court of Hyderabad. I then present an analysis of the *Dabistān*'s shortest chapter on the religion of the Tibetans, to illustrate some aspects of Mūbad's method and aims. In the final section of the article, I consider again the question of the 'identity' of Āẕar Kayvān and his followers. I argue that they represent a parallel and connected development in the Islamic world to the early modern European construction of what Jan Assmann terms *religio duplex* ('dual religion'), the practice of maintaining and reflecting upon commitments both to the exoteric native religions of revelation and to an esoteric universal religion of the philosophers which can traced back to pre-monotheist Antiquity. The article concludes with a few examples of the survival of this notion into the colonial period.

Studying at the *School of Doctrines*

The *Dabistān* has long been recognized as an important, if idiosyncratic, record of a pivotal moment in Indian history, memorialized in popular memory as an age of interreligious harmony cultivated by the Mughal state under the banner of 'Universal Peace' (*ṣulḥ-i kull*).[16] The *Dabistān* records, for instance, the earliest outsider description of the Sikh (*nānak-panthī*) community,[17] and it provides a lengthy account of the religious debates that took place at the court of the Mughal emperor Akbar, which, though fictionalized, nevertheless reflects a contemporary understanding of what might have been at stake for the various parties who participated in such activities.[18] Mūbad was evidently well-connected to the philosophical circles which joined together Safavid Iran and the various Muslim states of India, and he provides first-hand accounts of meetings with a cast of characters ranging from monarchs and theologians to revolutionaries and tribesmen on the frontiers of the Mughal state.

Beyond the interest in the *Dabistān* for the historical moment it records, the text exerted considerable influence in the centuries following its composition.[19] It seems to have become popular immediately after the completion of

[16] This simplistic understanding of *ṣulḥ-i kull* has been challenged, most recently by Rajeev Kinra, 'Handling Diversity with Absolute Civility: The Global Historical Legacy of Mughal Ṣulḥ-i Kull', *The Medieval History Journal* 16, no. 2 (2013), pp. 251–95 and by several of the contributions to this special issue.

[17] See Irfan Habib, 'Sikhism and the Sikhs, 1645–46: From "Mobad," *Dabistān-i Mazāhib*', in *Sikh History from Persian Sources: Translations of Major Texts*, (eds) J. S. Grewal and Irfan Habib (New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2001), pp. 59–84.

[18] An annotated German translation of the account of these debates is given in Grobbel, 'Das Dabistān-i Maḏāhib und seine Darstellung der Religionsgespräche an Akbars Hof'.

[19] See Carl W. Ernst, 'The Dabistan and Orientalist Views of Sufism', in *Sufism East and West*, (eds) Jamal Malik and Saeed Zarrabi-Zadeh (Leiden: Brill, 2019), pp. 33–52.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X21000494 Published online by Cambridge University Press

its first draft, going through two recensions during the author's lifetime—the first completed in 1650, and a second by 1658.[20] The *Dabistān* was praised for its 'ancient style' (*ṭarz-i bāstānī*) by contemporary readers at the Quṭbshāhī court in Hyderabad—one contemporary reader wrote that 'the elegant pen of its composition had drunk the milk of divine secrets from the breast of spiritual and worldly mysteries' (*qalam-i bāligh-i raqm-ash az pistān-i rumūz-i anfusī va āfāqī shīr-i asrār nūshīda*).[21] The *Dabistān* was widely copied across India and Iran during the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and found its way into the libraries of Europe soon thereafter.[22] In 1787, the Calcutta Orientalist Sir William Jones described it 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.'[23] For Jones, the work seemed to confirm Isaac Newton's notion of a primordial monotheism, the pure religion of Noah from which all postdiluvial religions were descended.[24] A partial English translation of the first chapter of the *Dabistān* appeared in 1789, followed by a full English translation in 1843.[25] The text then became an important source for Orientalist scholarship on Indian religion—late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century European scholars adopted its framework to varying degrees.[26] The *Dabistān* was frequently printed in Persian throughout the

[20] The earlier recension is that published in facsimile by Najafī Barzgar in 2010, which was anticipated 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), pp. 474–91. The later recension was most recently published as Riżāzāda Malik, *Dabistān-i maẕāhib [β recension]*. See also Sudev Sheth, 'Manuscript Variations of Dabistān-i Mazāhib and Writing Histories of Religion in Mughal India', *Manuscript Studies* 4, no. 1 (2020), pp. 19–41.

[21] Mūbad is mentioned in several contemporary letters from the Quṭbshāhī court of Hyderabad. Regarding the favourable reception of his writing style quoted here, see the letter by Naẓīr al-Mamālik Ḥājī ʿAbd al-ʿAlī Tabrīzī to Mīrzā Muʿīn describing his attempts to obtain copies of Mūbad's compositions, British Library MS Add. 6600, 100v–101r. On the intellectual milieu of late Quṭbshāhī Hyderabad, see Hundy Bandy, 'Building a Mountain of Light: Niẓām al-Dīn Gīlānī and Shīʿī Naturalism Between Safavid Iran and the Deccan', PhD thesis, Duke University, 2019.

[22] A comprehensive survey of the dozens of surviving *Dabistān* manuscripts is much desired.

[23] John Shore Teignmouth, *Memoirs of the Life, Writings and Correspondence, of Sir William Jones* (London: Printed for J. Hatchard, 1806), Vol. 2, p. 293.

[24] See Bruce Lincoln, 'Isaac Newton and Oriental Jones on Myth, Ancient History, and the Relative Prestige of Peoples', *History of Religions* 42, no. 1 (2002), pp. 1–18; Urs App, *William Jones's Ancient Theology*, Sino-Platonic Papers 191 (Philadelphia: Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations, University of Pennsylvania, 2009).

[25] Francis Gladwin (ed.), *The New Asiatic Miscellany* (Calcutta: Joseph Cooper, 1789), pp. 86–136; David Shea and Anthony Troyer (trans), *The Dabistan, or, School of Manners* (London: Oriental Translation Fund of Great Britain and Ireland, 1843). This translation, which remains the only complete study of the text in any European language, is unfortunately seriously handicapped by its translators' lack of familiarity with Islam.

[26] See Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, *Refashioning Iran: Orientalism, Occidentalism, and Historiography* (New York: Palgrave, 2001); Urs App, *The Birth of Orientalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010); Ernst, 'The Dabistan and Orientalist Views of Sufism'.

nineteenth century, first in a lead-type edition printed in Calcutta (1809) and subsequently in lithographed editions printed in Bombay (1846), Tehran (1850), and Lucknow (1877), each undergoing several reprints. A Gujarati translation of the *Dabistān* became the first book printed by a native-owned press in Bombay (1815);[27] an Urdu translation was completed by the Sanātanī Hindu revivalist Pandit Shraddha Ram Phillauri in 1881 and published posthumously in Lahore in 1896.[28]

In spite of the *Dabistān*'s great popularity, basic questions remain about the context of its composition. The leading twentieth-century German-American scholar of Indian Islam, Annemarie Schimmel, described the *Dabistān* as 'a strange work on comparative religion' and 'utterly confused'.[29] Polemics aside, scholars do not agree what motivated Mūbad to adopt a seemingly non-partisan, even-handed approach to religion, one which he contrasted with the genre of Islamic heresiography even while repurposing it for his own agenda. Basic questions regarding the authorship and the intent of the work continue to occupy considerable scholarly attention. Just who was the author of the *Dabistān*? Was he Muslim or Zoroastrian, Sunni or Shiʿi, part of a Sufi network or an eccentric outsider, a forerunner of liberal toleration or a reviver of ancient wisdom? To answer these questions, we must first step back to the period of Mūbad's forebears, Āẕar Kayvān and his followers, and the Safavid and Mughal worlds that they traversed.

The poetics of peace

The decades before Mūbad's birth are today regarded as high points of both the Safavid and Mughal states. In popular accounts, a contrast is frequently drawn between the putatively tolerant rule of the Mughal emperor Akbar and the 'ruthless' reign of the Safavid Shah ʿAbbas, the two monarchs who reigned over northern India and Iran in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the peak of Āẕar Kayvān's career. In such narratives, Akbar's tolerant attitude is frequently attributed to an ethos of *ṣulḥ-i kull*,[30] while ʿAbbas's intolerance is linked with his attempts to impose Twelver Shiʿi orthodoxy onto a religiously diverse population.[31] In order to gain perspective on this discourse of toleration, let us turn to a revealing exemplar of imperial correspondence between the two courts.

During the latter part of the sixteenth century, Safavid Iran was in the midst of a civil war, as contending factions among the religiously heterodox Qizilbāsh tribes, who had previously provided the military support of the Safavid state,

[27] Fardunji Marzbānji (trans.), *Dabestān ketābni tālim pehli: Irāni lokonã mazhab* (Muṃbai: Mobed Fardunji Marzbānjinã Kārkhānā, 1815).

[28] Pandit Shraddha Ram Phillauri (trans.), *Uṣūl-i Maẕāhib: Dabistān-i maẕāhib kā Urdū tarjuma* (Lahore: Maṭbaʿ-i Mitravilās, 1896).

[29] Annemarie Schimmel, *Islam in the Indian Subcontinent* (Köln: E. J. Brill, 1980), p. 101.

[30] For a critique of popular accounts of Akbar's reign, see Kinra, 'Handling Diversity with Absolute Civility'.

[31] See Rula Abisaab, *Converting Persia: Religion and Power in the Safavid Empire* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2004).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X21000494 Published online by Cambridge University Press

vied for influence at the fragile court of Muḥammad Khudābanda. With the accession of Khudābanda's young son ʿAbbās to the throne in 1588, the new king began to systematically stamp out the bases of Qizilbāsh support while promoting the consolidation of Twelver Shiʿi orthodoxy under the aegis of the Safavid state. Famously, in 1592–93, ʿAbbas campaigned against groups identified as Nuqṭavī heretics associated with the Qizilbāsh elite, gruesomely putting many of their leaders to death.[32]

A year later, the Mughal emperor Akbar wrote a letter to ʿAbbas to chasten him for his severe response. Akbar had well-known sympathies for individuals derided as Nuqṭavīs and was himself accused of adhering to the doctrine.[33] In his letter to ʿAbbas, Akbar writes,

> Today, when the land of Iran is quite depleted of sages who look to the future, it behooves the man who is the quintessence of his noble ancestors to strive greatly to manage the kingdom and to cure the affairs of all mankind [...] In putting men to death and in destroying this divine structure, he must exercise complete caution [...] The sections of humanity, which are the wonders of the deposits of the divine treasury, must be regarded with the eye of compassion, and you must strive to unite their hearts. Realizing that the all-encompassing divine mercy comprises all nations and sects (*milal va niḥal*), you must strive as completely as possible to bring yourself into the eternal spring garden of Universal Peace (*ṣulḥ-i kull*).[34]

In this carefully crafted letter which draws upon the tradition of ethical philosophy (*akhlāq*), Akbar chides ʿAbbas for neglecting his duty as king to maintain social harmony. The passage begins by likening the role of the king to that of a physician in providing a cure (*iltiʾām*) for the affairs of mankind. Just as divine love and compassion are universal, extending to members of all races and religions, the king's duty extends to all sections of society. Thus, Akbar enjoins ʿAbbas to lay aside religious persecution and apply an ethic of universal kingship.

While Akbar's letter to Shah ʿAbbas has been well known to historians since the nineteenth century, Shah ʿAbbas's responses to it are less familiar. In 1598, emboldened by military and administrative successes, ʿAbbas sent a delegation to the court of Akbar. In preparation, he commissioned a draft of a letter in

[32] The *Dabistān*'s account of these events may be found in the chapter on the beliefs of the Vāḥidīs, the text's term for the group conventionally called Nuqṭavīs.

[33] See Abbas Amanat, 'Persian Nuqtawis and the Shaping of the Doctrine of "Universal Conciliation" (*Sulh-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), pp. 367–91.

[34] ʿAbd al-Ḥusayn Navāʾī, *Shāh ʿAbbās: Majmūʿa-yi Asnād va Mukātabāt-i Tārīkhī* (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Bunyād-i Farhang-i Īrān, 1973), Vol. 3, pp. 353–54. Cf. the translation in Henry Beveridge (trans.), *The Akbarnāma of Abu-l-Faẓl* (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1899), Vol. 3, pp. 1008–14. The text is preserved in numerous sources, including the *Akbarnāma*, *Mukātabāt-i ʿAllāmī*, and several other collections of *inshāʾ*. See Riazul Islam, *A Calendar of Documents on Indo-Persian Relations* (Karachi: Institute of Central and West Asian Studies, 1979), Vol. 1, pp. 123–24.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X21000494 Published online by Cambridge University Press

which he would respond to Akbar's chastisement. In the draft, ʿAbbas boasts that his campaign against the Uzbeks would continue until the names of the 12 imams were minted on the coins of Bukhara and the ritual cursing of the first three caliphs was uttered in every sermon in the Uzbek realm. ʿAbbas then alludes to his rooting out of heresy, stating that:

> Some queries (*kāvishī chand*) were made regarding religion and sect of a group of little conviction and turbid morality. Although it does not much conform with pleasantry (*maẕāq*) and Universal Peace (*ṣulḥ-i kull*), nevertheless, as has been confirmed in heavenly scriptures and well-attested reports, every single one of the prophets and possessors of divine resolve have commanded in endless injunctions from the pinnacle of divine magnificence that one should wage war against evildoers (*ashqiyāʾ*). [...] (Arabic:) Kingship and religion are twins (*al-mulk wa-l-dīn tuʾāmān*). If not for them, security (*al-amān*) would not arise. (Persian:) The conduct of the king lies in strengthening the religion (*taʿqīd-i dīn*), as both the ancients and the moderns say: Be the protector of religion and of wisdom, / if you do not want your days to go badly for you. Religion is in its place on the royal throne. / Without religion, rule is unsound. They are each other's sentinels, / as though they lie beneath a single sheet.[35]

For Shah ʿAbbas, fulfilling the commandment to wage war against evil-doers (*ashqiyāʾ*), though it is incompatible with the ethic of toleration suggested by Akbar, is one of the foundations of kingship. The term *ashqiyāʾ* indeed evokes the enemies of the Imam Ḥusayn at the Battle of Karbala, thus adding a distinctively Shiʿi interpretation. Rather than drawing on Shiʿi texts to support this claim, though, ʿAbbas instead cites the widely known aphorism that kingship and religion are twins, attributed to the ancient Iranian king Ardashīr (the so-called *Testament of Ardashīr*) in both its Arabic rendition and in its Persian verse transmission from the *Book of Kings*.[36]

Taken together, these two carefully crafted works of diplomatic correspondence capture two distinct political theologies, each of which is ultimately attributed to an ancient Iranian origin. That of ʿAbbas is enshrined in the *Testament of Ardashīr*, in which kingship and revealed religion exist on a level playing field, each of which serves the other. That of Akbar is enshrined in

[35] This unpublished text may be found in Tehran University Library MS 4864, pp. 54–55; the text in the British Library India Office MS Islamic 379, fol. 52r introduces many mistakes. On this letter, and the possibility that it was never sent, see Riazul Islam, *Indo-Persian Relations: A Study of the Political and Diplomatic Relations between the Mughul Empire and Iran* (Tehran, 1970), pp. 63–65; Islam, *A Calendar of Documents*, Vol. 1, pp. 128–29. The verse at the end of the passage is taken from the *Shāhnāma*. See Djalal Khaleghi-Motlagh (ed.), *Shāhnāmah* (New York: Bibliotheca Persica, 1987), Vol. 6, pp. 229–30.

[36] On the *Testament of Ardashīr*, see Mario Grignaschi, 'Quelques spécimens de la littérature sassanide conservés dans les bibliothèques d'Istanbul', *Journal asiatique* 254 (1966), pp. 1–142. For a translation of the Arabic text from which this quotation is drawn (itself reflecting a lost text of the Sasanian period), see Shaul Shaked, 'Esoteric Trends in Zoroastrianism', *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities* 3, no. 7 (1969), pp. 214–19.

the notion of *ṣulḥ-i kull*, the universal peace transcending religious boundaries, in which the person of the king ennobled by divine splendour is placed above revealed religion as the physician of the body politic. While ʿAbbas seeks to enforce the distinction between true and false religion, Akbar seeks to abolish it, reinforcing his own role both as sacred king and as the sovereign of an religiously and ethnically diverse empire.

As we see in this correspondence, the term *ṣulḥ-i kull* implies nonsectarian tolerance and is poetically likened to an ideal state of things—an 'eternal spring garden'. Contemporary poetry allows us further to understand the semantic contours of the term. In a famous verse, the fourteenth-century Persian poet Ḥāfiẓ speaks from a position outside the boundaries of sectarian belonging, commanding his audience to forgive all those engaged in religious struggle. Referring to the tradition (*ḥadīth*) attributed to the Prophet Muḥammad that his followers will be divided into 73 sects, only one of which will attain salvation, Ḥāfiẓ imagines the struggle of the 72 condemned sects as a war (*jang*), saying: 'Forgive them all in the war of the seventy-two sects— / since they did not see Truth (*ḥaqīqat*), they plundered superstition (*afsāna*).'[37] Already here, sectarianism is contrasted with truth and likened to myth.

As poets of the early modern period sought fresh imagery to build on the inheritance of the past, they expanded upon the topos of the war of the 72 sects to infer that peace (*ṣulḥ*) with the 72 sects was a prerequisite for knowledge of the divine. In an anonymous verse, sometimes attributed to Ḥāfiẓ, the poet says, 'Do not enter the circle of the wanderers of the tavern / until you make peace with the seventy-two sects.'[38] Though the topoi to which the term *ṣulḥ-i kull* was eventually applied had existed in Persian poetry for centuries before the Mughal period, poets do not seem to have used the phrase until the reign of Akbar, after which it spread very rapidly across the Persian-speaking world. While not exhaustive, my attempts to scour the corpus of Classical Persian poetry suggest that some of the earliest literary uses of the phrase *ṣulḥ-i kull* originate with Akbar's poet-laureate Fayżī, who uses the term in a *ghazal* only once, but in prose on several occasions.[39] Likewise, Fayżī's

[37] *jang-i haftād u du millat hama-rā ʿuẕr bi-nih / chun nadīdand ḥaqīqat rah-i afsāna zadand*. See Ghazal 179:4 in Parvīz Nātil Khānlarī (ed.), *Dīvān-i Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad Ḥāfiż* (Tehran: Farhangistān-i Adab va Hunar-i Īrān, 1980), pp. 374–75.

[38] *dar ḥalqa-yi rindān-i karābāt may-ā / tā ṣulḥ bā haftād u du millat nakunī*. See Aḥmad Kitābī, 'Jilvahā-i madārā dar shiʿr-i Ḥāfiż', *Iṭṭilāʿāt*, 27 November 2013, http://www.ettelaat.com/?p=30605, [accessed 20 August 2021]. The line imitates a well-known poem of fourteenth-century poet Khwājū Kirmānī.

[39] *ṣulḥ-i kull dar raqm-i nāṣiya dārī fayżī / ki ṣalīb-i tu dar-īn butkada miḥrābī būd*. Ghazal 412:9 in E. Ṭ. Arshad (ed.), *Kullīyāt-i Fayzī* (Lāhaur: Intishārāt-i Idāra-yi Taḥqīqāt-i Pākistān, 1967), p. 369. Also worth noting is Fayżī's use of the phrase *mukammil al-ʿawālim wa-muṣallih al-kull* ('Perfectioner of the Worlds and Universal Peacemaker') to gloss the Quranic *rabb al-ʿālamīn* ('Lord of the Worlds'), in Fayżī, *Sawāṭiʿ al-ilhām fī tafsīr kalām al-malik al-ʿallām*, (eds) Murtaẓā Āyatullāhzāda Shīrāzī and ʿAbdullāh ibn Muḥammad Riḍā Shubbar (Qom: M. al-Shīrāzī, 1996), Vol. 1, p. 49. See also Carl W. Ernst, 'Fayzi's Illuminationist Interpretation of Vedanta: The Shariq al-Ma'rifa', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 30, no. 3 (2010), pp. 356–64.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X21000494 Published online by Cambridge University Press

brother, the chief minister and chronicler Abu'l-Fażl uses language similar to the letter quoted above when introducing the purpose for describing the diverse populations of the realm in his encyclopedic account *Āʾīn-i Akbarī*.[40]

Soon after, the topos of the gnostic who had made peace with the 72 sects became widespread in poetry. By this point, this peace was referred to as 'Universal Peace' (*ṣulḥ-i kull*). Thus, the Safavid cleric-philosopher Shaykh-i Bahāʾī (d. 1621) writes: 'Be my enemy, or look at me with kindness! / I have made Universal Peace with all humanity.'[41] Abū Ṭālib Kalīm (d. 1651), the poet laureate of Shāhjahān, could say of his poetic beloved, 'He is always on the verge of war with us, o Kalim, / even though we have made Universal Peace with the seventy-two sects.'[42]

A further extension of the topos of 'Universal Peace' extends the notion to the cosmos and to the ascent of the soul. The poet Ṣāʿib Tabrīzī (d. 1676), court poet to the Safavid king ʿAbbas II, writes: 'The gnostics are free from the influence of auspicious and inauspicious stars, o Ṣāʿib—/ they have made Universal Peace with the fixed stars and planets of the firmament.'[43]

From the foregoing examples, we can see that Akbar's ethic of *ṣulḥ-i kull* had a wide currency by the seventeenth century. First used in political contexts, the term positioned the king, as the perfect man, as God's intermediary, maintaining the diverse sections of the body politic as God maintains the cosmos and man maintains his body. The term was also applied more broadly in discussions of sainthood. The Kashmiri poet Mīrzā Bayg Akmal, known as Kāmil (d. 1719), provides a narrative account of the perfection of the saintly soul in his ode entitled *Mukhbir al-asrār* (The Announcer of Secrets). Upon reaching the highest realm of existence (*jabarūt*), the poet declares 'Infidelity and faith both vanished in that state of isolation— / I taught Universal Peace to the seventy-two sects.'[44] Here the term is used in a narrative text, rather than, as in the other examples, lyric poetry. For Kāmil, *ṣulḥ-i kull* is a stage reached during the process of the soul's perfection. Indeed, as we will see, the term occurs in a similar context in commentaries on Āẕar Kayvān's own narrative of his spiritual ascent and in Mūbad's descriptions of spiritual exercises of his followers.

[40] See H. Blochmann (ed.), *The Ain-i-Akbarī* (Calcutta, 1872), Vol. 1, p. 3.

[41] *ṣulḥ-i kull kardīm bā kull bashar / tu ba mā khaṣmī kun u nīkī nigar. Nān va Ḥalvā*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Acc. 1999.157, p. 22.

[42] *bar sar-i jang ast bā mā bī-sabab dāʾim kalīm / garchi ṣulḥ-i kull ba haftād u du millat karda-īm.* Ḥusayn Partaw Bayżāʾī (ed.), *Dīvān-i Abū Ṭālib Kalīm* (Tehran: Khayyām, 1957), p. 280.

[43] *ʿārifān ṣāʿib zi saʿd u naḥs-i anjum fārigh-and / ṣulḥ-i kull bā ṣābit u sayyār-i girdūn karda-and.* Ghazal 2486:8 in Muḥammad Qahramān (ed.), *Dīvān-i Ṣāʾib Tabrīzī* (Tehran: Shirkat-i Intishārāt-i ʿIlmī va Farhangī, 1985), p. 1221.

[44] *kufr u dīn har du ʿadam mānad dar ān khalvat-zār /ṣulḥ-i kull yād ba haftād u du millat dādam.* Girdhari L. Tikku, *Barguzīda-ī az Pārsī-sarāyān-i Kashmīr* (Tehran: Anjuman-i Īrān va Hind, 1963), p. 59; Girdhari L. Tikku, *Persian Poetry in Kashmir, 1339–1846: An Introduction* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1971), p. 130.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X21000494 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The cacrocosm of the Magi

Āẕar Kayvān is said to have been born in the city of Istakhr, near the ruins of Persepolis, in 1533.[45] By the middle of the sixteenth century, he had attracted a school of followers in nearby Shīrāz. After refusing a series of invitations from the Mughal emperor Akbar to take up employment at the Mughal court, Āẕar Kayvān eventually left Iran, travelling from Shīrāz via Zābulistān and Bukhara, capital of the Shaybanid Uzbeks, to Lahore. He died in Patna at the age of 85 in 1618. According to the hagiography circulated by his followers, Āẕar Kayvān followed a regime of spiritual exercises his whole life, from childhood to old age, premised on a theory of macrocosm that linked the celestial spheres with realms of human society and the human body.

One can briefly summarize the salient features of Āẕar Kayvān's doctrine according to the *Dabistān* as follows: everything in the cosmos originates from a series of divine emanations from a single source; existence is eternal and souls transmigrate after death; all that exists bears the same relationship to God as rays of sunlight do to the sun; God is to be worshipped by venerating intermediary emanations, especially the planets; the earth was populated for millions of years by human beings who lived before the time of the traditionally acknowledged First Man; vegetarianism is virtuous; God's revelation to the prophets, comprising the *Dasātīr-i āsmānī* (*The Celestial Laws*), was universal and the celestial language within it contains all languages; and human beings should strive for perfection through exercising the spirit which will allow them to obtain divine knowledge and their souls to find liberation and join the angelic beings of the heavenly spheres.

Beyond this, little is known about the background of Āẕar Kayvān. Though he is often described as a Zoroastrian priest in modern secondary literature, there is no evidence that he had any of the ritual or textual knowledge that a Zoroastrian priest of the sixteenth century would have had. None of the doctrines in the preceding paragraph were expressed by other Zoroastrians of this time, and the salient features of Zoroastrianism as they are expressed throughout the Zoroastrian textual corpus are altogether absent from Āẕar Kayvān's system.[46] Indeed, other than a few Āẕar Kayvānī appropriations of Zoroastrian nomenclature, and a familiarity with the traditional narrative of the life of Zarathustra, hardly any aspect of Āẕar Kayvānī religious life overlaps with the Zoroastrian tradition.[47] For this reason, it is helpful to consider Āẕar Kayvān alongside other historical figures from the Muslim world who presented their ideas as emanating from ancient Iran. To borrow a term of ancient

[45] On the sources for establishing the contours of Āẕar Kayvān's life, see 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), pp. 259–77.

[46] This point was exhaustively demonstrated by Sheriarji Dadabhai Bharucha, *The Dasâtîr* (Bombay: Fort Printing Press, 1907).

[47] Indeed, Āẕar Kayvān's followers themselves carefully distinguish between themselves (referred to as *āẕarī*, *ābādī*, or *sipāsī*) and Zoroastrians (referred to as *bihdīn*, *gabr*, or *zardushtī*). Similarly, Āẕar Kayvān's followers cite dozens of texts written by Muslim authors but hardly any Zoroastrian texts.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X21000494 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Iranian origin from Western Neoplatonism to refer to this phenomenon, I suggest that 'magus', rather than 'Zoroastrian', might better describe the nuance of Āẕar Kayvān's invocations of ancient Persia.[48]

One forebear to whom there is a clear link is the twelfth-century philosopher Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī. Much of the Āẕar Kayvānī scripture *Dasātīr-i āsmānī* (*The Celestial Laws*) consists of word-for-word Persian translations of the Arabic-language devotional works composed by Suhrawardī. He too had claimed to be reviving an ancient Persian philosophy in putting forth his system, encapsulated in *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq* (*The Wisdom of Illumination*). Already by Suhrawardī's time, the memory of ancient Iranian religion had filtered through many lenses of the Hellenistic, Late Antique, and Islamic periods. Little is known about the reasons that lay behind Suhrawardī's Iranism—his distinctive presentation of his philosophical system as a revival of ancient Iranian philosophy—but in his time, it seems to have been perceived as encapsulating a compelling and potentially dangerous political doctrine.[49] In the Mongol and post-Mongol period, the idea of Iran as the ancient and eternal locus of sacral kingship only increased, as the legacy of Suhrawardī's formulation of the emanation of kingly splendour (*kiyān khwarra*) from the light of lights spread[50] to such an extent that it was incorporated directly into the introduction of Abu'l Faẓl's *Āʾīn-i Akbarī*, the definitive account of Akbar's empire.[51]

Āẕar Kayvān's spiritual preparation for divine union was recorded in a verse narrative emulating Suhrawardī's allegorical accounts of the soul's ascent, entitled the *Mukāshafāt-i Kayvānī* (*The Revelations of Kayvān*).[52] In the text that

[48] See E. M. Butler, *The Myth of the Magus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948); Michael Stausberg, *Faszination Zarathushtra: Zoroaster und die Europäische Religionsgeschichte der Frühen Neuzeit* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1998). For the more general memetic appropriation of aspects of Zoroastrianism, Stausberg suggests the term 'Parazoroastrianism'. See Michael Stausberg, 'Para-Zoroastrianisms: Memetic Transmission and Appropriations', in *Parsis in India and the Diaspora*, (eds) John Hinnells and Alan Williams (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 236–54.

[49] See Hossein Ziai, 'The Source and Nature of Authority: A Study of al-Suhrawardī's Illuminationist Political Doctrine', in *The Political Aspects of Islamic Philosophy: Essays in Honor of Muhsin S. Mahdi*, (ed.) Charles Butterworth (Cambridge, MA: Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Harvard University, 1992), pp. 304–44; Henry Corbin, *En islam iranien II: Sohrawardî et les Platoniciens de Perse* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971); John Walbridge, *The Wisdom of the Mystic East: Suhrawardī and Platonic Orientalism*, SUNY Series in Islam (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001).

[50] On the influence of Illuminationism in Mongol and post-Mongol formulations of sacral kingship, see, in particular, Stefan Kamola, 'Beyond History: Rashid al-Din and Iranian Kingship', in *Iran After the Mongols*, The Idea of Iran Book 8, (ed.) Sussan Babaie (London: I. B. Tauris, 2019), pp. 55–74; Sajjad Rizvi, 'Practicing Philosophy, Imagining Iran in the Safavid Period', in *Safavid Persia in the Age of Empires*, The Idea of Iran Book 10, (ed.) Charles Melville (London: I. B. Tauris, 2021), pp. 185–210.

[51] 'Kingship is a light (*furūgh*) emanating from the peerless creator and a ray emanating from the world-illuminating sun, the index of the tomes of all virtues, the receptacle of all aptitudes. In contemporary language it is called *farr-i īzadī* and in the ancient tongue it is called *kiyān khwarra*.' H. Blochmann and H. S. Jarrett (trans), *The Ain i Akbari* (Calcutta: printed for the Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1873), Vol. 1, p. 2.

[52] This text was first published in the nineteenth century and has subsequently been reprinted. See Mīr Ashraf ʿAlī (ed.), *Jām-i Kaykhusraw va sharḥ-i mukāshafāt-i Āẕar Kayvān* (Bombay: Faẓl al-Dīn

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X21000494 Published online by Cambridge University Press

must have been composed during the 1560s or early 1570s, Kayvān narrates his visions of the celestial spheres and ultimately his apprehension of existential unity. The text begins by narrating Āẕar Kayvān's preparations:

> First I prepared my body and adorned it according to the physicians' creed.
> I abandoned my former religion, all my desires for rites and doctrines.
> Then I ceased to speak; neither good nor ill did I speak to anyone.
> In a dark, narrow place, I sat and abided.
> I lessened my food, ceased to sleep—
> I proceeded exhausted.
> Never did I rest from God's memory.
> Besides Him, my misfortune seemed all the same.
> I saw so many lights, and yet
> only a little—just a thousandth—shall I recount.[53]

Here we see how the microcosmic level of the body, the mesocosmic level of society, and ultimately the macrocosmic level of the cosmos relate to one another at the level of the spiritual exercise of the saint. The passage describes Kayvān preparing his body according to the physicians' creed (*kīsh-i pizishkī*). Perhaps what is meant here is the widely held belief in Galenic humoral theory, an aspect of natural philosophy.[54] Further, Kayvān adjusts his diet and practises wakefulness. He abandons any form of religious partisanship and, indeed, speech itself. Bodily and social ascetic practices thus prepare him for his vision of the celestial spheres, ultimately ascending to the divine presence.

A commentary on the *Mukāshafāt* quoted in the *Dabistān* explains the passage as follows:

> the traveller of the path must know the art of medicine so that he can bring whatever humours are dominant into harmony (*iṣlāḥ*). Afterward, he must banish from himself all beliefs of religion, custom, sects, and

Khamkar, 1848). A brief English summary of the text was published by Nowroji Dorabji [Khandalavala], 'A Parsi Ascetic', *The Theosophist* 1 (1880), pp. 194–96. Further, see Carl Ernst, 'Poetry and Ishraqi Illuminationism among the Esoteric Zoroastrians of Mughal India', in *Faces of the Infinite: Neoplatonism and Poetics at the Confluence of Africa, Asia and Europe*, Proceedings of the British Academy, (eds) Stefan Sperl, Trevor Dadson and Yorgos Dedes (London: British Academy, forthcoming).

[53] Mīr Ashraf ʿAlī (ed.), *Jām-i Kaykhusraw va sharḥ-i mukāshafāt-i Āẕar Kayvān*, p. 4.

[54] The phrase recalls the famous chapter of the *Kalīla wa-Dimna* attributed to the late Sasanian physician Burzōy, who, being unable to cure human suffering by medical means, set about investigating every religious group he could find in order to discover secure knowledge of the hereafter, and yet, 'In not one [religion] did I find that degree of rectitude and honesty which would induce rational persons (*dhawu l-ʿaql*) to accept their words and be satisfied with them [...] I will limit myself to those deeds which all men recognize as good and which the religions agree on (*tuwāfiq ʿalayhi l-adyān*).' See François de Blois, *Burzōy's Voyage to India and the Origin of the Book of Kalīlah Wa Dimnah*, Prize Publication Fund (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1990), Vol. 23, p. 26. The translation is from the important new article by Thomas Benfey, 'A Secular-Religious Distinction in Late Sasanian Iran', forthcoming.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X21000494 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> paths (*hama-yi ʿaqāʾid-i dīn va āʾīn va kīshhā va rāhhā*). He must partake of peace with all (*bā hama ṣulḥ gīrad*), sit in a narrow and dark place, and eat less by degrees.[55]

Here, the equilibration of the four bodily humours (*iṣlāḥ-i akhlāṭ*) is directly linked to the practice of peace with all (*ṣulḥ bā hama*) and, ultimately, to the harmony of the celestial spheres.

Perfecting the self through cultivating bodily, societal, and celestial harmony was not a new idea in Āẕar Kayvān's time. Throughout the medieval Islamic world, philosophers widely subscribed to a theory of macrocosm, wherein the interior of the human body, the world, and the cosmos were interconnected and directly correspond to one another. This idea, attributed to the ancients (in particular to Hermes Trismegistus and Plato), had particular importance for the development of a universalist Islamic ethics during the post-Mongol period. Indeed, the theory that a perfect human being (*insān-i kāmil*, imagined as a prophet, saint, and/or king) was necessary to regulate societal harmony (*iʿtidāl*) in parallel with macrocosmic harmony was a crucial element of Islamic political theology during the early modern age.[56]

The influential Persian-language treatise on ethics, the *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī*, composed by Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī (1201–1274 CE) on the eve of the Mongol sacking of Baghdad, had already compared the social ills of the world to the ailments of the human body. The role of the ideal king, as the regulator of the world (*mudabbir-i ʿālam*), is thus akin to that of a physician. In the years surrounding the rise of the Safavid dynasty, a great deal of ethical literature derived from Ṭūsī was composed in Iran. One of the most influential scholars of the early modern period, Jalāl al-Dīn Davvānī, who died in Shiraz in 1502, expanded upon Ṭūsī's notion of the just ruler as physician in his *Akhlāq-i Jalālī*:

> The king is the physician of the world. Just as there is no choice for the physician but to know about sickness, the causes of pain, and the methods of cure, likewise, it is necessary for the sultan to know the sickness of the kingdom and the means of its cure. Since the term 'civilization' (*tamaddun*) is given to a general assembly of different peoples, then as long as every one of these peoples sticks to its own position and remains in the task assigned to it, and receives the share of riches and honours, i.e., of station and property, which is appropriate to them, then the temperament of the civilization is in a state of equilibrium (*iʿtidāl*) and its affairs are at the pinnacle of organization. [...] For it is established that the source of every state is the consensus of a population who in their cooperation resemble the organs of a single body. In this manner, it is

[55] Najafī Barzgar, *Dabistān-i maẕāhib [α recension]*, fols 22v–23r; Riżāzāda Malik, *Dabistān-i maẕāhib [β recension]*, p. 27. Compare the lengthier commentary on the passage from Mīr Ashraf ʿAlī (ed.), *Jām-i Kaykhusraw va sharḥ-i mukāshafāt-i Āẕar Kayvān*, pp. 4–8.

[56] For a broader discussion of the place of *akhlāq* in Mughal governance, see the classic study by Muzaffar Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam: India, 1200–1800* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X21000494 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> as though they are a single person whose collective power is greater than that of the population.[57]

Just as Muslim physicians, as heirs to the tradition of Galen, understood illness to be caused by the disproportion of bodily humours and temperaments, likewise, for ethical thinkers like Davvānī, social illnesses are caused by imbalance. It is the duty of the king to promote an ideal state. Despite the fact that society is comprised of diverse populations, it is the king's job to promote equilibrium and to harmoniously adjust for these differences so that different classes of people might serve one another, just as the organs of a body do. For Davvānī, then, the ideal state functions as a united whole, single body, whose combined power is greater than the sum of its parts.

Philosophers of the early modern period understood ethics to be a universal science. The ideal lawgiver (*ṣāhib-i nāmūs*) regulates the world through the application of universal regulations (*qavānīn-i kullī*). Such regulations made no distinction between Muslim and non-Muslim. Indeed, as the prolific early Safavid philosopher Ghiyāṯ al-Dīn Manṣūr Dashtakī (1462–1541) writes, the principles of ethics unfold from the universal idea of the First Source (*mabdaʾ*), not from a particular scriptural source. For Dashtakī, sages of every religion and in every age are united in the philosophical quest deriving from an investigation of the First Source:

> There have been different peoples and opposing nations in every age and every era of every single religion, yet no sage has ever registered opposition to the existence of the First Source (*mabdaʾ*). On the contrary, the impossibility of its contradiction is precisely what defines it. [...] Love pervades universally, and its rule extends over all (*ʿishq dar kull sārī va ḥukm-ash bar hama jārī-st*). The beginning proceeds from Him and the end is with Him, since everything is Him.[58]

Just as divine love is universal, since the entirety of existence is equated with God by thinkers in the tradition of Ibn ʿArabī, the ethical principles which Dashtakī outlines are similarly universal. Writings on ethics of the early modern period offered a theory of direct correspondence between the human body, society, and the universe. The ideal state for each of these was a state of equilibrium or harmony—in the case of the body, a harmony of humours and temperaments; in the case of society, a harmony of the interests of different societal groups; and in the case of the universe, the harmony of proportions which characterizes the orbital motions of the spheres. Moreover, the philosophers of the early modern period argued that such principles were universal,

[57] Muḥammad ibn Asʿad Davvānī, *Akhlāq-i Jalālī*, (ed.) ʿAbdullāh Masʿūdī Ārānī (Tihrān: Intishārāt-i Iṭṭilāʿāt, 2012), p. 255. See also the discussion of this passage in Shahab Ahmed, *What Is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), pp. 467–71.

[58] Ghiyāṯ al-Dīn Manṣūr Dashtakī Shīrāzī, *Akhlāq-i Manṣūrī*, (ed.) ʿAlī Muḥammad Pushtdār (Tihrān: Muʾassasa-yi Intishārāt-i Amīr Kabīr, 2007), p. 225.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X21000494 Published online by Cambridge University Press

shared by ancients and moderns, by non-Muslims and by Muslims. In the following section, we will explore how these ideas in turn shaped the idea of an ancient universal religion of humanity that runs throughout the Āẕar Kayvānī scripture and the compositions of later generations.

The Celestial Laws as the Persian *Prisca Theologia*

The Celestial Laws (*Dasātīr-i Āsmānī*), the scripture of Āẕar Kayvān and his followers, consists of several liturgical hymns dedicated to the luminaries and planets, along with other texts drawn from the corpus of Muslim philosophy. The *Dasātīr* is composed in an artificial language—the language of heaven (*zabān-i āsmānī*)—which is accompanied by a commentary in pure Persian, written without the use of any Arabic words.[59] As I have shown elsewhere, these hymns are word-for-word translations of the Arabic hymns associated with the philosopher al-Suhrawardī.[60] In form, these hymns (*taqdīsāt*, literally 'sanctifications') belong to a genre that has its roots in Neoplatonic theurgical liturgies from Late Antiquity,[61] though the chain of transmission of these texts to Suhrawardī is difficult to trace. Each hymn begins with salutations and praise of the planetary body, then describes its relation to the chain of emanation, before concluding with a request for divine apprehension, the removal of evil, and a gift of blessings upon the reciter. Just as Suhrawardī described his own philosophy as a revival of the ancient theology of Persia,[62] the *Dasātīr* too describes its religion as originating with the pre-Adamite king Mahābād and ascribes each of its hymns to a succession of ancient Iranian kings continuing down to the Muslim conquest of Iran.

Little is known at present about the transmission of the devotional materials of Suhrawardī into early modernity, which might shed light on the

[59] For an exploration of the idea of the language of heaven in light of Āẕar Kayvānī ideas of language, see Sheffield, 'The Language of Heaven in Safavid Iran'.

[60] See Daniel J. Sheffield, 'Zoroastrian Scripture or Illuminationist Theurgy? On the Sources of the *Dasātīr-i Āsmānī*', forthcoming. On Suhrawardī's devotional materials themselves, see the comprehensive work of Łukasz Piątak, 'Between Philosophy, Mysticism and Magic: A Critical Edition of Occult Writings of and Attributed to Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī (1156–1191)', PhD thesis, Warsaw University, 2018. See also his remarks on the similarity of the *Dasātīr* to the prayers of Suhrawardī (p. 511). See also John Walbridge, 'The Devotional and Occult Works of Suhrawardī the Illuminationist', *Ishraq: Islamic Philosophy Yearbook* 2 (2011), pp. 80–97; Shihāb al-Dīn Yaḥyā Suhrawardī, *L'archange empourpré: quinze traités et récits mystiques*, (trans.) Henry Corbin (Paris: Fayard, 1976).

[61] See Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul*; Yochanan Lewy, *Chaldaean Oracles and Theurgy: Mysticism, Magic and Platonism in the Later Roman Empire*, (ed.) Michel Tardieu (Paris: Institut d'Études augustiniennes, 2011; 3rd edn).

[62] 'There was in Persia a people (*ummatan*) guided by truth and doing justice according to it. They were virtuous philosophers not at all resembling the Magi (*ghayr mushabbah bi-l-majūs*), to which bore witness Plato and the philosophers who preceded him. We have breathed life into their noble enlightened philosophy in the book entitled *The Philosophy of Illumination*.' Translation adapted from Walbridge, *The Wisdom of the Mystic East*, p. 60. See Ragıp Paşa MS 1480 f. 207v, cf. Shihāb al-Dīn Yaḥyā al-Suhrawardī, *Three Treatises*, (ed.) Najafqulī Ḥabībī (Lahore: Institute of Persian Studies, 1977), p. 117.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X21000494 Published online by Cambridge University Press

background of Āẕar Kayvān. As Giancarlo Casale discusses in this special issue, there was considerable interest in this material at the Ottoman court under Mehmed the Conqueror, to whom three manuscripts of Suhrawardī's devotional works are dedicated.[63] Mehmed similarly had commissioned a copy and an Arabic translation of extracts of the *Nomoi* (*Laws*) of the fifteenth-century late Byzantine Neoplatonic revivalist George Gemistos Pletho, along with the *Chaldaean Oracles* which he had compiled himself and attributed to Zoroaster. There has been considerable discussion as to whether Pletho might have directly known of the writings of Suhrawardī.[64] As Maria Mavroudi concludes, while the question of the direct influence of Suhrawardī on Pletho is difficult to prove, the convergence of the Byzantine and Islamic reception of Late Antique theurgy in elite Ottoman circles is noteworthy in showing that an early modern Muslim audience might have understood the projects to be commensurable.[65] It is worthwhile noting here that Pletho's principal detractor, George Gennadios Scholarios, described Pletho's putative teacher Elissaios as 'ostensibly a Jew but in fact a Hellenist', as having been 'an adherent of Averroes and other Persian and Arabic interpreters of Aristotle's works', and as having 'expounded to Gemistos the doctrines of Zoroaster and others'.[66] The reception of Pletho's writings in Renaissance Florence set off an interest in uncovering the *Prisca Theologia* (*The Ancient Theology*), attributed to Zoroaster and Hermes Trismegistus, which in turn shaped the early modern European ideas about *religio duplex*.[67]

It is certainly tempting to see a connection between Pletho's *Nomoi* and Āẕar Kayvān's *Dasātīr-i Āsmānī*. The parallels between the two texts and their receptions are striking—both project a Neoplatonic cosmology onto ancient Iranian figures; both texts comprise theurgical litanies dedicated to the celestial bodies to be recited on the corresponding days of the week; and both texts emerged in contexts connected to Suhrawardī and resulted in an esoteric interest in ancient theology.

The interest in the recovery of an ancient perennial theology during the early modern period extended across the Islamic world, from the Ottoman domain to Mughal India. There is at least some evidence to draw a connection between the theurgy of the *Dasātīr* and the *Dīn-i ilāhī* (Divine Religion) of the Mughal emperor Akbar. Āẕar Kayvān's student Bahrām ibn-i Farhād writes:

[63] These are MSS Ahmed III 3377, 3183, and 3217. For full discussion, see Maria Mavroudi, 'Pletho as Subversive and His Reception in the Islamic World', in *Power and Subversion in Byzantium*, (eds) Dimeter Angelov and Michael Saxby (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2013), p. 188.

[64] Most recently, see the debate between Siniossoglou and Hladký. Niketas Siniossoglou, *Radical Platonism in Byzantium: Illumination and Utopia in Gemistos Plethon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Vojtěch Hladký, *The Philosophy of Gemistos Plethon: Platonism in Late Byzantium, between Hellenism and Orthodoxy* (London: Routledge, 2014).

[65] Mavroudi, 'Pletho as Subversive and His Reception in the Islamic World', p. 189.

[66] C. M. Woodhouse, *George Gemistos Plethon: The Last of the Hellenes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 24.

[67] Jan Assmann, *The Price of Monotheism*, (trans.) Robert Savage (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), pp. 76–84; Stausberg, *Faszination Zarathushtra*, Vol. 1, pp. 35–92.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X21000494 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> We know the account of Shaykh Abu'l Fażl, because he requested a reference manual (*dastūr al-ʿamal*) from [Āẕar Kayvān] the Lord of Sciences about the worship of the stars and the like. [...] When the Friend of the Divine Religion (*dūstkām-i yazdānī kīsh*) [Āẕar Kayvān] came to India, Shaykh Fayżī and Abu'l Fażl learned from him the rites of worshipping the sun and the other planets. [...] Afterwards, they obtained favor (*navāzish*) from the Emperor.[68]

It is possible that the reference manual (*dastūr al-ʿamal*) referred to in this passage as being sent to Akbar's closest advisers is none other than the *Dasātīr* itself, as suggested by the etymological connection between the singular *dastūr* and the plural *dasātīr*. At any rate, it seems likely that the steady stream of migrants from Iran to India played an important role in Akbar's 1583 decree instituting the *dīn-i ilāhī* and the adoption of *ṣulḥ-i kull* 'Universal Peace'.[69]

The *Dasātīr* laid the foundation for a universalist project claiming both a common source and a common end for the exoteric religious traditions of the world. Manuscripts of the *Dasātīr* reveal further evidence of this perennialist project. One manuscript of the *Dasātīr*, which is unique among the many extant manuscripts of the text, contains an appendix after the conclusion of the text[70] which contains a supplement of invocations in a variety of languages, including Avestan and Pazand (both are referred to as *zand*), 'Samrānī', Sanskrit, 'Hindavī', Turkī', and Arabic. Each of these texts is transcribed phonetically in Arabic script and accompanied by a Persian translation.[71] Technical details aside, the inclusion in a single text of liturgical material drawn from Zoroastrian, Bhakti, Turkic Shamanic, and Muslim philosophical traditions sheds light on the eclecticism of the followers of Āẕar Kayvān. The *Dasātīr* is itself a kind of perennialist anthology, a convenient tool whereby a devotee could incorporate the results of a comparative enterprise into their regime of spiritual exercises—indeed, the result of independent verification (*taḥqīq*). And in fact, such multilingual practices by the followers of Āẕar Kayvān are also described by the *Dabistān*. In 1638/9 CE, Mūbad mentions

[68] Bahrām ibn Farhād, *Shāristān-i Chahār Chaman*, (eds) Bahrām Bīzhan et al. (Bombay: Maṭbaʿ-i Muẓaffarī, 1862), pp. 244–45.

[69] See Amanat, 'Persian Nuqtawis and the Shaping of the Doctrine of "Universal Conciliation" (*Sulh-i Kull*) in Mughal India'.

[70] British Library MS Or. 11967. The manuscript must have been written before 1138 AH/1725–1726 CE, as this is the date found on one of its ownership seals.

[71] Of these, the identification of the 'Zand' and the Arabic source texts are certain—the 'Zand' texts consist of the Zoroastrian liturgies *Xwaršēd Nyāyišn* (f. 52r–54v) and the *Āfrīn ī Zarduxšt* (f. 55r–56r); the Arabic, of al-Suhrawardī's *Wārid taqdīs al- aʿlā li-kull yawm* (f. 58r–v). The other prayers are not immediately identifiable. The Sanskrit and the Hindavi texts are generally comprehensible as invoking a series of epithets common to the language of *bhakti*, while the 'Turki' text, which invokes Tengri, the sky-god, is composed in a bizarre language containing some genuine archaic Turkic forms alongside what appears to be numerous invented forms. What language the 'Samrānī' text is composed in is a mystery—from the Persian translation, it is clear that the contents of the text correspond to the description of the 'Great Man' of the macrocosm found in the *Dasātīr* in the Book of Jamshīd quoted above, though the 'original' language of the passage is apparently artificial, with discernible word elements of Indic origin.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X21000494 Published online by Cambridge University Press

meeting a sage in Lahore by the name of Hīrbad ('Archmagus') who prayed in several languages. He describes him as someone who

> busied himself with ascetic practice (*riyāżat*), and he lived alone and chaste. He spent his time reciting prayers (*adʿiya*) in Persian, Hindi, and Arabic about the greatness of the Light of Lights (*nūr al-anvār*), the Archetypal Lights (*anvār-i qāhira*), and the Planets (*kavākib*). He understood the *qibla* to be the luminous bodies (*ajsām-i furūgh-bakhsh*), and he knew the compositions of Shaykh-i Maqtūl (Suhrawardī) well.[72]

Āẕar Kayvānī texts frequently refer to the notion that all languages, and by extension all religions, were derived from a common source and were thus ultimately translatable, at least in their inward meaning if not their exoteric practice. This idea is again ascribed to ancient Persian doctrine, negating exclusive, non-universal claims to truth. In or around 1618, Bahrām ibn Farhād, who had studied in Shiraz before he came to follow Āẕar Kayvān, completed a lengthy work entitled the *Shāristān-i Dānish va Gulistān-i Bīnish* (*The Region of Knowledge and the Garden of Vision*), better known as the *Shāristān-i Chahār Chaman*, a text which provides extensive contemporary descriptions of Āẕar Kayvān, his followers, and their interactions with the intellectual circles of Iran and India, interspersed throughout a history of ancient Iran. As a major source cited throughout the *Dabistān*, the *Shāristān* is a crucial link between the writings of Āẕar Kayvān himself and those of Mūbad. Among other things, the *Shāristān* cites extensively from texts associated with Āẕar Kayvān that are no longer extant. In one such text, Āẕar Kayvān identifies philosophical schools as a universal aspect of religion

> Āẕar 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 priest of higher rank than a Mūbad] in Persian, and *Ṣūfī* in Arabic; *Gyānī* [*jñānī*, sage] in Hindi, *Farzāna jūyā gūyā va **kalnā* [the seeking, speaking, ? sage] in Persian, and *Mashshāʾī* [peripatetic] in Arabic, *Jogī* [*yogī*] in Hindi, *Farzāna bīnā va gashaspī* [the perceptive and illuminated sage] in Persian and *Ishrāqī* [Illuminationist] in Arabic. The difference occurs in the signifier and not in the signified, just like [the following words for water]: [Persian] *āb*, [Arabic] *mā*, [Turkish], *sū*, and [Hindi] *pānī*.[73]

Subscribing to a view of language that languages differ only in their signs, not in their signification, Kayvān implies that religions too differ only in their

[72] Najafī Barzgar, *Dabistān-i maẕāhib [α recension]*, fol. 274v; Riżāzāda Malik, *Dabistān-i maẕāhib [β recension]*, pp. 337–38.

[73] Bahrām ibn Farhād, *Shāristān-i Chahār Chaman*, pp. 163–64.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X21000494 Published online by Cambridge University Press

outward signs, not in their inward signification. As such, all were reflections of a single entity, much as water remains water no matter what it is called.

Developing this idea further in a later passage, Bahram ibn-i Farhād likens the religions of the world to a tree:

> '[Arabic:] Mankind was a single community. Then God sent prophets bearing good tidings and warnings to them (*Qurʾān* 2:213). Then they formed differences. As your Lord willed, he created mankind as a single community.' [Persian:] On account of this, it is established that one can find the Lord in all religions (*ba jamīʿ-i adyān*) and reach him by every path (*ba har rāh*). There is no path which does not end there. After all, a tree has one root even if its branches are many. There exists one inner meaning (*ʿibārat*), which is the fruit of this tree: in all religions, which are like the branches of a tree, this fruit does not differ in taste.[74]

The passage begins with an exegesis in Arabic of a well-known Quranic passage understood to describe humanity sometime in the period between Adam and Noah. While it is normally interpreted to explain man's fall into error from the Religion of Truth and the necessity of prophets to restore humanity to God's law, here the passage is instead taken as a statement approving of religious diversity. Bahrām uses the metaphor of a tree as a model of divergence to explain seeming difference. Yet although the branches of the tree appear separate from the root, Bahrām states that the fruit of each branch, here understood to be the inner meaning (*ʿibārat*) of religion, is the same no matter which branch it is picked from.

The *Shāristān* speaks approvingly of the practice of befriending members of diverse religious communities as a way to avoid partisanship. Bahrām relates an anecdote in which a Sufi came to Āẕar Kayvān, who contrasted the behaviour of a saint with that of the jurists. In a statement redolent of the religious persecutions of the Safavid state, Bahrām claims they are complicit in murder:

> A knowledgeable and truth-seeking Sufi came to the master of the sciences [Āẕar Kayvān]. He used to say, 'The Sufi believes that one must not be partisan (*mutaʿaṣṣib*), and that one should act in the same manner with fellow travellers of all different kinds. Just as one spends time with Muslims, one should also befriend Hindus, Jews, Zoroastrians (*gabr*), and Christians. Therefore, one cannot act according the decrees of the jurists of the age (*fuqahāʾ-i ʿaṣr*), for they are complicit in *jihād* and murder (*bar jihād va qatl murtakib*) and thereby deny the obligatory (*az vujūb inkār-and*).'[75]

Bahrām ibn-i Farhād was an important early influence on Mūbad, whom he met in Lahore in 1638 CE, when Mūbad was 20 years old. His *Shāristān* became a major source for Mūbad's description of the life of Āẕar Kayvān. But while

[74] Ibid., p. 327.
[75] Ibid., p. 412.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X21000494 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Bahrām's composition focused almost exclusively on the circles of Āẕar Kayvān and his followers, Mūbad's project would take him across the Indian subcontinent and beyond in search of religious knowledge.

The peripatetic Magus

Now that we have shed light on some of the ideas that contributed to the composition of the *Dabistān*, we can return to Mūbad himself. Assembling information on the life of Mūbad from various sources into a coherent narrative is no easy task. Though the *Dabistān* often provides dates for Mūbad's encounters, the text is by no means arranged chronologically. Surveying the dates given throughout the text in aggregate, however, does seem to reveal consistent patterns in Mūbad's movements throughout India.

Briefly summarized, during the early part of Mūbad's life (1028 AH/1618 CE–1047/1637), he moved from Patna in Bihar to the area around Agra and Kashmir.[76] During this early period, he seems primarily to have met other members of the Sipāsī order, many of whom had followed Āẕar Kayvān during his lifetime, and who were evidently quite old when Mūbad met them.

Mūbad's own description of the followers of Āẕar Kayvān highlights the group's tolerance of religious difference:

> Now, a bit about the mingling (*āmīzish*) of the *Ābādī* dervishes with the diverse peoples shall be written with the pen of inquiry. This group calls this practice 'The Mixing of Cultures' (*āmīza-yi farhang*). When someone foreign to their sect (*kīsh*) is introduced to the assembly of this group, they do not speak coarsely of him; they praise his path and religion (*rāh va maẕhab*), and they accept what he says, and do not overlook even a morsel of politeness and generosity, according to the principle of their sect (*aṣl-i maẕhab-i khvīsh*), namely that in their belief (*i'tiqād*), one can reach God (*khudā*) through every religion.[77]

The theme of openness to outward religious difference runs throughout Mūbad's accounts of meetings with members of diverse religious groups. So too does the theme of concealing one's inner beliefs from the non-initiated—at one point, Mūbad even tells us that Āẕar Kayvān once said, 'If you want to keep your religion a secret everywhere you go, hide it even from your coreligionists, for they might expose you to make their path look strong.'[78]

[76] The *Dabistān* indicates that he was born around 1028 AH (1618 CE) in Patna, the year after the death of Āẕar Kayvān in the same city. At the age of five (1033 AH), he met another follower of Kayvān stationed at the royal court in Agra, Mūbad Hūshyār. Three years later (1036 AH), he visited Kashmīr. He was still in Kashmīr in 1040 AH. In 1046 AH, he reports briefly having been in Bangash in present-day Afghanistan, but he was back in Kashmir in 1047 AH, where he met several Sipāsī saints.

[77] Najafī Barzgar, *Dabistān-i maẕāhib [α recension]*, fol. 41r; Riżāzāda Malik, *Dabistān-i maẕāhib [β recension]*, pp. 47–48.

[78] Najafī Barzgar, *Dabistān-i maẕāhib [α recension]*, fol. 28v; Riżāzāda Malik, *Dabistān-i maẕāhib [β recension]*, p. 33.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X21000494 Published online by Cambridge University Press

During the middle part of his career (1047/1637–1055/1645), Mūbad was active primarily in Punjab and Afghanistan.[79] At this time, he was evidently associated with several figures at the court of the Mughal emperor Shāhjahān and began to report meeting Hindu and Muslim figures more frequently. Especially noteworthy during this period are Mūbad's accounts of his meetings with the Sikh gurus Hargobind (1595–1644) and Har Rai (1630–1661), the latter described as a 'good friend' (*bisyār āshnā*) to the author.[80]

In the last documented portion of his life (1055/1645–1069/1659) he travelled south via Gujarat to the area around Hyderabad, the domain of the Quṭbshāh sultans.[81] The first recension of the *Dabistān* was copied for Mūbad's disciple Muḥammad Amīn in Potlacheru (modern Patancheru) near Golkonda in 1060, who checked the copy with Mūbad himself. In 1061 and 1063, Mūbad was in Srikakulam on the Andhra coast. By 1062, elite readers in Hyderabad were mentioning the *Dabistān* in their letters. A second recension of the *Dabistān* was completed between 1063–1068 AH/1653–1658 CE.[82] According to contemporary (though undated) letters, at some point he seems to have served as a chancery officer in the employment of the long-reigned ʿAbdullāh Quṭbshāh (r. 1035/1626–1083/1672). ʿAbdullah was a man of notably eclectic taste, who brought together at his court a wide range of natural philosophers, physicians, astronomers, and occult practitioners. Mūbad seems to have thrived in this context—one letter records that his honesty was so unimpeachable that his testimony in court counted for that of two Muslims.[83] Following the period of the Hyderabad letters, when he would have been around the age of 40, we lose track of Mūbad, though we know from his poetic *Dīvān* that he was still active after 1069/1659 when he composed poetry mourning the loss of the Mughal prince Dārā Shukōh at the hands of his brother, the newly crowned emperor Aurangzeb.

[79] By 1048 AH, Mūbad had come to the imperial city of Lahore, where he met Farzāna Bahrām ibn-i Farhād, the author of the *Shāristān-i Chahār Chaman* (*The Region of the Four Meadows*). Later in 1048 he travelled with the physician Mihrān back to Kashmir, where he stayed into 1049. By the end of that year, at the age of 21, Mūbad more frequently began to report meetings with Hindu sages rather than fellow devotees of Āẕar Kayvān. In 1050, he was in Wazirabad and later in Gujrat in Punjab. By 1052, Mūbad stopped at Rawalpindi en route from Lahore to Kabul. In 1053, he travelled to Mashhad in Iran for pilgrimage and returned via Kabul to Kiratpur in Punjab, where he met the Sikh guru Hargovind. In 1054, he was in Multan. By 1055, he reports that he was already writing the *Dabistān*, during which time he moved between Gujrat and Peshawar.

[80] For this section, see the excellent translation in Habib, 'Sikhism and the Sikhs, 1645–46: From "Mobad," *Dabistān-i Mazāhib*'.

[81] In 1056, he was in Dotara, near Jodhpur, in Rajasthan. In 1057, he came first to the port of Surat and then to Hyderabad, where he met the poet Sarmad. A composition of Mūbad's from 1057 (Majlis Library, Tehran, MS 5138 f. 643r) praises the Quṭbshāhī king ʿAbdullāh in pure Persian. In 1059, he briefly returned to Gujrat in Punjab before returning to the Quṭbshāhī domain.

[82] The latest date given in the text in 1063 AH, while the author reports being in Srikakulam. Since the *Dabistān* speaks of Dārā Shikūh as still alive, the text was most likely completed before 1659 CE.

[83] Mentioned in a letter addressed to Sayyid Jaʿfar. British Library MS 6660, f. 103v–104r: *mūbadā ki bā vujūd-i yagāna būdan manzala-yi du shāhid-i ʿadl mītavānad būd:* 'Mūbad, who on account of his singular nature can stand in for two witnesses.'

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X21000494 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The picture that emerges of Mūbad, then, is not one of a man aloof from politics, as some authors have tried to depict him, but rather of a figure who was never far from a royal court in spite of his many travels. Much of his early career must have been spent close to the Mughal court, and it is possible that he was in some way connected to the Mughal state apparatus, though at present there are no known documents that allow us to connect him to the court with certainty. When he completed the *Dabistān*, it appears that he was in the imperial service of the Quṭbshāh court.

Unlike the earlier *Ā'īn-i Akbarī* of Abu'l-Fażl, which provided accounts of Indian learning from the perspective of the imperial court,[84] the *Dabistān* was not explicitly linked to an imperial project—no patron is ever mentioned in the text and Mūbad presents the project as his own initiative. Nevertheless, the ideals of sainthood presented in the text were closely tied to ideals of sacral kingship. Similar activities exploring the metaphysical richness of religious diversity, while asserting absolute political authority, legitimized through the notion of maintaining the harmony of the body politic, such as those of the contemporary Mughal prince Dara Shukoh, were acts of royal self-fashioning and instruments of political authority.[85] What I think the *Dabistān* allows us to state with certainty is that the ethics of toleration enshrined in the idea of *ṣulḥ-i kull* and the universality of the pursuit of religious truth were not merely instruments of the royal court but were understood more broadly in early modern society to be virtues leading to self-perfection and spiritual liberation.

'Those who have been silenced by love have another language'

The *Dabistān* is filled with descriptions of encounters between its author and members of diverse religious groups. The descriptions, often difficult to evaluate, are of religious figures and groups who are not mentioned elsewhere in the early modern Persian textual corpus. A modern reader might wonder what actually transpired in Mūbad's encounters with a follower of the seventh-century Arab rebel prophet Musaylima in seventeenth-century Mashhad or a group of Mazdakites claiming to possess an otherwise unknown scripture of a sixth-century Persian heretic. Such seemingly implausible narratives are mixed freely with first-hand accounts of much better-known figures. Throughout the text, first-person accounts are embedded in broader philosophical and hagiographical narratives, leaving the reader little context to understand what brought Mūbad into contact with the figures he describes.

Certain accounts, like the short chapter on the Tibetans (*tabatiyān*),[86] which is presented below, contain enough linguistic specificity to leave little room for doubt that Mūbad indeed spoke with Tibetans about their religion and took

[84] See Audrey Truschke, *Culture of Encounters: Sanskrit at the Mughal Court*, South Asia across the Disciplines (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), pp. 142–66.

[85] See Supriya Gandhi, *The Emperor Who Never Was: Dara Shukoh in Mughal India* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2020).

[86] Strangely, the β recension of the *Dabistān* refers to the Tibetans as *qarā-tabatiyān* or 'black Tibetans', a term which in later periods refers to speakers of the Tangut rather than the Tibetan language, but perhaps here indicates Baltistan.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X21000494 Published online by Cambridge University Press

great care in transcribing their language. Mūbad does not record when or where he encountered Tibetans but one might well assume that the encounter took place while he was based in Kashmir, where he spent a considerable amount of time in the early phases of his life.[87] One might even guess that the encounter took place during the period of the Kashmīr governor Zafar Khan's raids on Baltistan ('little Tibet') in 1637. During his discussion of the Tantric Shaivite Gosain Tirlochan, Mūbad mentions in passing that when Zafar Khan's wife had become a devotee of Tirlochan, Zafar himself requested assistance from the saint in obtaining victory over the Tibetans, promising him alcohol and women in return for his blessing.[88] At any rate, Mūbad's chapter on the Tibetans does not seem to draw on any earlier source in Persian, and as such provides an opportunity to investigate briefly the programme of comparison and translatability which underlies the *Dabistān*.

Like most chapters in the 1650 manuscript of the *Dabistān*, the description of the beliefs of the Tibetans begins with an invocation written in *naskh* script at the top centre of the folio—an equivalent to the Arabic *bismillāh* specific to the religious tradition being described.[89] In this case, the Tibetan word for God (*könchok*) is transcribed in large letters in Arabic script (*kujaq*). The chapter then commences with a distinctly Islamic-Neoplatonic description of the Tibetan Buddhist view of God. This immediately serves to establish Tibetan religion within the universal framework of the *Dabistān*:

> They call God *kujaq* [Tibetan *dkon mchog*], and they consider him to be incorporeal (*mujarrad*), uncompounded (*basīṭ*), and omnipotent (*tavānā*). They assert that he manifests himself in three forms, just like the Hindus do. They say that if someone should apprehend God and can speak with him without mouth or tongue, this is the station of prophethood (*pāya-yi nubuvvat*).[90]

After introducing the Tibetan view of God in familiar terms, Mūbad proceeds to compare the doctrine of the Tibetans to that of the Hindus, apparently

[87] For lucid accounts of the broader history of the events leading up to Tibetan-Mughal war, see Johan Elverskog, *Buddhism and Islam on the Silk Road* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), pp. 220–28; Luciano Petech, *The Kingdom of Ladakh: C. 950–1842 A.D.* (Roma: Istituto italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1977), pp. 57–80.

[88] Najafī Barzgar, *Dabistān-i maẕāhib [α recension]*, fols 117v–118r; Riżāzāda Malik, *Dabistān-i maẕāhib [β recension]*, p. 169. See also the discussion in Habib, 'A Fragmentary Exploration of an Indian Text on Religion and Sects: Notes on the Earlier Version of the *Dabistan-i Mazahib*'.

[89] These invocations, found only in the α recension, include the Persian phrase *ba nām-i īzad-i bakhshāyanda-yi bakhshāyishgar* to introduce the religions of the Persians; the Sanskrit phrase *śrī paramātmāya namaḥ* to introduce the religions of the Indians; the word *kujaq* to introduce the religion of the Tibetans; the phrase *dīʾūs* [Latin *deus*]—*bismil-ab wa-l-ibn wa-l-rūḥ al-quds allāh wāḥid* to introduce Christianity; *bismillāh al-raḥmān al-raḥīm wa-bihi nastaʿīn* to introduce Islam; *yā allāh maḥmūd fī kull fiʿālihi / asaʿīn bi-nafsiki alladhī lā ilāha illā huwa* to introduce the Wāḥidī/Nuqṭavīs; *allāh nūr al-samāwāt waʾl-arḍ* to introduce the Rawshanīs; *allāh akbar* to introduce the Ilāhīs; and *ilāh yā nūr al-samāwāt wa-l-arḍ yā nūr al-anwār yā munawwir al-nūr yā wājib al-wujūd* to introduce the philosophers.

[90] Najafī Barzgar, *Dabistān-i maẕāhib [α recension]*, fol. 170v; Riżāzāda Malik, *Dabistān-i maẕāhib [β recension]*, p. 213.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X21000494 Published online by Cambridge University Press

likening the Buddhist doctrine of the 'three jewels' (dkon mchog gsum)—the Buddha, the *dharma*, and the *sangha*—to the Hindu belief in the 'three divine forms' (*trimūrti*)—Brahma, Viṣṇu, and Śiva—which he had previously described in the chapter on Vedanta. Mūbad then states that individuals who have attained divine gnosis communicate directly with God and in this respect are like the prophets of Islam, described by Muslim authors as receiving revelation directly in their hearts rather than through conventional means.[91]

After establishing Tibetan doctrine about the nature of divinity as something familiar, indeed uncontroversial, Mūbad proceeds to describe the specifics of Tibetan belief about the human soul and its rebirth reported from a religious expert:

> They say that the soul (*rūḥ*) is pre-eternal (*qadīm*), and that souls are sent down (to this world). If the soul recognizes itself and God, it enters the upper world; if not, it remains in the world of dust. The author of this text has heard from one of their Perfect Masters (*kāmilān*) that when the rational soul (*nafs-i nāṭiqa*) is separated from the body, it goes to the upper realm and passes through the heavens. [β recension: In the upper world,] there is a sea, and in that sea, there is a mountain upon which God Exalted sits. If that spirit were a doer of good deeds, God Exalted appears to him in a beautiful form, such that by witnessing it he obtains profound pleasure, which no one can express by means of the tongue, and for all eternity, he is blessed and fortunate to witness it. If he were a doer of bad deeds, God presents himself in a strange and terrible form, nothing uglier and more hideous than which exists. With dread, he casts himself down from the heavens, and he becomes imprisoned by the dust.[92]

Mūbad devotes considerable space to describing Tibetan beliefs about the transmigration of souls. Indeed, the question of transmigration, which was a point of contention among early modern thinkers is discussed in most chapters of the *Dabistān*. Several followers of Suhrawardī attributed to him a positive view of the doctrine of the transmigration of souls.[93] The *Dasātīr* likewise presented the doctrine of transmigration as part of ancient Iranian belief. However, the influential philosopher Mullā Ṣadrā (1571–1636) came to criticize both the doctrine of the pre-existence of the individual soul and that of transmigration. Here, the account of the intermediate state of the soul between life and death echoes Tibetan teachings about the state of *bardo* as found in texts like the so-called *Book of the Dead*.

After outlining the basic doctrinal orientation of the Tibetans, Mūbad moves on to describe Tibetan hagiography. He writes:

[91] See William A. Graham, *Divine Word and Prophetic Word in Early Islam* (The Hague: Mouton, 1977); Sheffield, 'The Language of Heaven in Safavid Iran'.

[92] Najafī Barzgar, *Dabistān-i maẕāhib [α recension]*, fol. 170v; Riżāzāda Malik, *Dabistān-i maẕāhib [β recension]*, p. 213.

[93] Sabine Schmidtke, 'The Doctrine of the Transmigration of the Soul According to Shihāb Al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī and His Followers', *Studia Iranica* 28 (1999), pp. 237–54.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X21000494 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> There is a man among them called *pūn lupa* [slob-dpon 'teacher'], a man of extraordinary piety. Among his miracles (*khavāriq-i ʿādāt*), it is said that he once leapt from one stone to another, and the imprint of his foot was impressed upon it. Nowadays they perform pilgrimage (*ziyārat*) to that place. There is another perfect individual (*kāmil*), about whom they say that when he reaches (the end of) his natural lifespan, he assembles people and selects someone. In their presence, he entrusts that person with his books and personal belongings and says, 'I shall come to your house.' Then, he breaks away from his body, and they bury him according to their custom. Afterwards, the wife of his executor will give birth to a son. After one year or even less, he will begin to speak, and seek out witness, and in their presence, he will take the things which were accounted to him and then entrust them to him again. [β recension: Then he will not speak again until the (customary) age of speech (*hangām-i nuṭq*). When he reaches adolescence, he will take up the path of poverty (*darvīshī*).] They say that this Perfect Man comes to perfect the deficient (*takmīl-i nāqiṣān*).[94]

Here and above, the specific details of Tibetan belief regarding miracles and monastic reincarnation are related as reported speech. The chapter on the Tibetans in the *Dabistān* is noteworthy for not naming any individual interlocutors, nor even saints. As such, it is unclear who Mūbad is referring to in these two examples. Nevertheless, the accounts consist of recognizable tropes associated with the reborn incarnations (*tulku*) of high-ranking Tibetan lamas.

Next, the text proceeds to describe essential details of Tibetan worship and society:

> They have idol-temples (*butkhāna*) which they call *chahtarīn* [mchod rten], and they venerate these places. Their statement of faith (*kalma*) is *umānī beme hum* [oṃ mani padme hūṃ]. The custom is for anyone who has two sons to commit one of them to mendicancy (*darvīsh kunad*) on the path of God. Even if the king himself has two sons, he commits one to mendicancy. They believe that there are two abodes (*ʿimārat*)—the otherworldly (*ākhirat*) and the worldly (*dunyā*). The mendicant son is responsible for the otherworldly abode and the son who is attached to worldly concerns (*ahl-i taʿalluq*) earns a worldly income. [β recension: When their mother and father's bodies become infirm and crippled from old age, the worldly son serves them, but when the souls of their parents are separated from their bodies, they receive help from the mendicant son.] When many of these young mendicants assemble, then the son of the king or the son of another leader becomes the leader of this group, and they set out to Lhasa (*usāng* [dbus-gtsang]), which is their great shrine (*maʿbad*). When they return from pilgrimage, they become lāmas, i.e., pilgrims (*ḥājī*).[95]

[94] Najafī Barzgar, *Dabistān-i maẕāhib [α recension]*, fols 170v–171r; Riżāzāda Malik, *Dabistān-i maẕāhib [β recension]*, p. 213.

[95] Najafī Barzgar, *Dabistān-i maẕāhib [α recension]*, fol. 171r.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X21000494 Published online by Cambridge University Press

This passage briefly describes basic aspects of Tibetan ritual practice before giving a more detailed account of Tibetan monasticism. Emphasized here is the bifurcation of society into worldly and religious spheres—the people of attachment (*ahl-i taʿalluq*) and mendicants (*darvīsh*)—echoing descriptions of the religious elite found in other chapters. The terminology employed here brings Sufi mendicancy immediately to mind. The passage continues to discuss the behaviour of the *lamas*:

> The *lāmas* abstain from animal (flesh) and women, and they do not set about doing any worldly activity. They wear their hair dishevelled, and they eat from human skulls. They carry joints of human hands strung together instead of rosaries (*subḥa*), and they keep human femurs as trumpets (*shākh-i nafīr*). They say, 'We are dead, and the dead have no use for the things of the living.' [β recension: **Couplet**: We have departed and taken up in the corner of a shrine / so our bones should not be a burden to anyone [couplet by Ṭālib Āmulī.] This group (*ṭāʾifa*) are without peer in magic (*siḥr*), sleight of hand (*shuʿbada*), spells (*afsūn*), and even botany (*najāt*), medicine (*ṭibb*), and surgery (*jarrāḥī*).] If their king's mother is not of royal descent, they call him *arghūn* [argon] and they do not recognize him as worthy of (true) kingship. The worldly members (α: *dunyādārān* β: *ahl-i taʿalluq*) of this nation are not wary of killing and eating animals and flesh foreign (*bīgāna*) to their religion. [β recension: They eat in the company of any man.][96]

Here Mūbad describes in some detail the bodily practices of the lamas. Like the followers of Kayvān, they practise vegetarianism. The description of Tibetan *kapala*—the ritual implements made of human skulls and bones, perhaps shocking to the urbane audiences of the *Dabistān*—is rendered more palatable by the inclusion of a witty verse composed by the court poet of Jahāngīr Ṭālib Āmūlī. The passage then briefly describes the various strengths of Tibetan knowledge of the sciences, and other aspects of the bifurcation of Tibetan society into the religious elite and lay classes.

Throughout the *Dabistān*, Mūbad appears to have been able to speak to most of his informants directly, presumably in Persian or in Hindavī. However, at the conclusion of the chapter, Mūbad confesses to having been unable to converse in great detail with his Tibetan informants since he had to work through a translator. This perhaps explains the lack of named individuals or books given in the chapter, though Mūbad's careful transcriptions of the spoken Tibetan language into the Arabic alphabet reveal an attempt to accurately record what he heard.

> Since the author held conversation with their learned men through the mediation of a translator, whenever subtle details came up, the translator

[96] Najafī Barzgar, *Dabistān-i maẕāhib [α recension]*, fol. 171r; Riżāzāda Malik, *Dabistān-i maẕāhib [β recension]*, pp. 213–14.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X21000494 Published online by Cambridge University Press

was unable to offer a translation. [β recension: **Verse**: Those silenced by love have another language.][97]

It is ironic that Mūbad, who describes his role in the *Dabistān* as like that of a translator, was unable to inquire further into details regarding Tibetan beliefs, owing to the failure of translation. Perhaps to make this conclusion less jarring, Mūbad adds an elegant verse to the end of the chapter, to highlight the Tibetans' inclusion in the universal framework of the *Dabistān*—though unable to freely communicate with them, still Mūbad recognizes the commonality of their pursuit of liberation.

Ṣulḥ-i kull and the global memory of Āẕar Kayvān

Throughout all of his compositions, in spite of the detailed attention he gives to minute matters of religious doctrine and practice, Mūbad carefully conceals his own identity in ambiguity. His very name, Mīrzā Ẕu'l-Fiqār Āẕarsāsānī, references the sword of ʿAlī, the first Shiʿi imam in the first element, and descent from the pre-Islamic Sasanian dynasty in the second.

The difficulty in characterizing Mūbad as belonging to one or another religious group is perhaps the aim of the universalist framework of comparison of the *Dabistān*, based in the social practices of the followers of Āẕar Kayvān. Even as Mūbad defines seemingly distinct religious communities in his work, he consciously and consistently blurs the boundaries between them through constant comparison of one to another, all positioned towards what he viewed as universal philosophical concerns. While the many saintly figures described in the *Dabistān* are identified as belonging to one or another group, it is clear that Mūbad saw in them an affinity, a shared human pursuit of liberation through truth. It is this phenomenon, a balancing of the exoteric religion of revelation with the esoteric religion of humanity, mediated through the act of translation, that distinguishes Mūbad's programme of comparison.

The *religio duplex* phenomenon associated with the *ṣulḥ-i kull* moment of the mid-seventeenth century continued after the composition of the *Dabistān*. In Iran, *ṣulḥ-i kull* was sometimes associated with Sufism and imbued with the negative connotations that Shah ʿAbbas had already described in his response to Akbar. The polemicist Mullā Muḥammad Ṭāhir Qummī wrote in a treatise against the Sufis composed in 1659 that 'the Sufis have not acknowledged anyone to be evil and have practiced peace with every existent being (*ṣulḥ bā kull kāʾināt karda-and*)'.[98] But in poetry, the topos of Universal Peace grew more and more common with each generation. During this period, though we know little by way of specific details, manuscripts related to the Āẕar Kayvānī must have circulated widely—today, a relatively large number of manuscripts of these texts survive across South Asia and Iran.

[97] Najafī Barzgar, *Dabistān-i maẕāhib [α recension]*, fol. 171r–v; Riżāzāda Malik, *Dabistān-i maẕāhib [β recension]*, p. 214.

[98] Mullā Muḥammad Ṭāhir Qummī, 'Radd Bar Ṣūfiya', in *Mīrāṯ-i Islāmī-i Īrān*, (eds) Rasūl Jaʿfariyān and Sayyid Ḥasan Islāmī (Tehran, 1996), Vol. 4, p. 147.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X21000494 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The *Dasātīr* became newly popular when a manuscript purchased from a Muslim bookseller in Iran was brought back to Bombay by the Parsi Zoroastrian priest Mullā Fīrūz ibn Kāʾūs.[99] Though Mullā Fīrūz was, unlike Mūbad or Āẕar Kayvān, a recognized authority figure for orthodox Zoroastrians as the High Priest of the Dadyseth Atash Behram in Bombay, he nevertheless identified strongly in his philosophical leanings with the universal religion of the *Dasātīr* and the *Dabistān*. In 1810, an English observer noted that Fīrūz claimed not to believe in the basic tenets of Zoroastrianism and instead to be a philosopher, in spite of his status as the highest religious authority of the Zoroastrians of Bombay.[100] Working together with Governor Jonathan Duncan, Mullā Fīrūz published the *Dasātīr* in Bombay together with an English translation in 1818.

A few decades later, the Delhi-based poet Ghālib declared his history of the Indian uprising of 1857 to constitute a new section of the *Dasātīr*, and that he himself was like the Sixth Sāsān, the successor to the ancient transmitter of the *Dasātīr*.[101] Ghālib claimed to have studied in his youth with a 'Zoroastrian' tutor bearing the Muslim name ʿAbd al-Ṣamad along with the secret Persian name Hurmuzd. As noted in Moin's framework article in this special issue, Ghālib's biographer Ḥālī declared his religion to be that of *ṣulḥ-i kull*.

As increasing numbers of Āẕar Kayvānī texts were printed in India to be sold across the Persian-speaking world, the influential Parsi representative at the court of Nasir al-Din Shah, Māṇekji Limji Hāṭariā, who styled himself *darvīsh-i fānī* ('The Dervish of the Transient World') shared his enthusiasm for Āẕar Kayvān with a broad network of thinkers within the elite classes of Qajar society. As modern European ideas of nationalism, language, and race took hold in Iranian society, a secularized reading of Āẕar Kayvānī texts tantalized a young generation of nationalists with a vision of a perennial Iranian philosophy seemingly distinct from Islam. Hataria himself, though charged with representing the interests of Iranian Zoroastrians at court, found himself supporting the Bahāʾī cause, encouraging Bahāʾullāh to write in pure Persian and introducing him to the prophetology of the *Dasātīr*. Ultimately, many of the intellectuals who helped to shape the Iranian Constitutional Revolution

[99] On Mullā Fīrūz, see Daniel Sheffield, 'Iran, the Mark of Paradise or the Land of Ruin? Approaches to Reading Two Parsi Travelogues', in *On the Wonders of Land and Sea: Persianate Travel Writing*, (eds) Roberta Micallef and Sunil Sharma (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), pp. 14–43.

[100] 'In a hall or large room in front, we were received by Mulna [sic] Perose, the Parsee priest, who was educated fourteen years in Persia, and is not without information and agreeable manners. He showed his usual anxiety not to be suspected of believing any part of his Thirty-nine Articles [the tenets of the Church of England, here applied to the beliefs of Zoroastrianism]. He repeated what he said last year, that he was of the *pheilosuf lok*, or "philosophical people".' Sir James Mackintosh, *Memoirs of the Life of Sir James Mackintosh* (E. Moxon, 1836), Vol. 2, p. 47.

[101] 'Thus I am always in demand / I am the fountain of celestial secrets. My book forms a portion of the Dasātīr / I am Sāsān the Sixth in experience': *z-īn sān ki hamīsha dar ravāʾī māʾīm / sar chashma-yi rāz-i āsmānī māʾīm. lakhtī az dasātīr buvad nāma-yi mā / sāsān-i shashum bi-kār-dānī māʾīm.* Mirza Asadullah Khan Ghalib, *Dastanbū* (Lahore: Maṭbūʿāt-i Majlis-i Yādgār-i Ghālib, 1969), p. 56. On the context of Ghalib's interest in the *Dasātīr*, see Mehr Afshan Farooqi, *Ghalib: A Wilderness at My Doorstep* (Gurgaon: Penguin Random House India, 2021), pp. 206–26.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X21000494 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of 1906 were familiar with the narrative and the strange, pure Persian language of the *Dasātīr*. Though it became a cause of embarrassment for later generations of Iranian nationalists, the *Dasātīr* and the *Dabistān* helped to shape an idea of an eternal Iran that still persists to this day.[102]

As a final example of the global legacy of the Āẕar Kayvānīs, in 1886, a young Shiʿi poet by the name of Mirza Muhammad Hadi 'Ruswā', who would go on to write the first well-known Urdu novel *Umrāʾo Jān Ādā*, wrote a letter from his home in Lucknow to the town of Osceola, Missouri in the United States. As a young man, Ruswā published a monthly magazine about philosophy which he called *Ishrāq*. Through the auspices of Henry Steel Olcott, president of the Theosophical Society, Ruswā was encouraged to write to Thomas Moore Johnson, editor of the Missouri-based Neoplatonic revivalist journal *The Platonist*, which was engaged in publishing the works of Plotinus, Proclus, and Iamblichus for an American audience. In his first letter to Johnson, Ruswā describes himself as a 'Musalman Platonist' with a 'great mind to come to America' and offered to translate works of Oriental Platonic philosophy for the journal.[103] Johnson seemed supportive, at least at first, to the idea of bringing Ruswā to America, publishing an editorial in his journal calling on readers to seriously consider a plan to found a 'School of Philosophy' 'on American soil' in which 'the wisdom of the Orient, and even Oriental teachers, may be brought here'.[104] This plan seems to have gone nowhere, but for the next year, Mirza Muhammad Hadi would go on to publish a serialized English translation of the *Dasātīr* for the readers of the *Platonist*.[105] Though Ruswā seems to have given up on his plan to relocate to America shortly thereafter, throughout his literary career he continued to publish works on the legacy of Suhrawardī. His magisterial Urdu translation and commentary of Suhrawardī's magnum opus *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq* was published in 1925, a few years before his death.[106]

Scholarship of recent decades has done much to bring to light the roots of the discipline of comparative religion within early modern European intellectual history[107] and has encouraged looking beyond the paradigms inherited from colonial-era scholarship to other archives of comparison. As a work which weaves the notion of the transability of religions together with an

[102] On Hataria, see Sheffield, 'Iran, the Mark of Paradise or the Land of Ruin'. For the relationship of the *Dasātīr* to the history of Iranian nationalism more broadly, see Tavakoli-Targhi, *Refashioning Iran*; Reza Zia-Ebrahimi, *The Emergence of Iranian Nationalism: Race and the Politics of Dislocation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).

[103] Patrick D. Bowen and K. Paul Johnson (eds), *Letters to the Sage: Collected Correspondence of Thomas Moore Johnson. Volume One: The Esotericists* (Scotts Valley, CA: CreateSpace, 2016), pp. 443–45.

[104] Thomas Moore Johnson, 'A School of Philosophy', *The Platonist* 3 (1887), pp. 278–79.

[105] Mirza Mohamed Hadi, 'The Celestial Desatir', *The Platonist* 3 (1887), pp. 296–308, 660–70; 4 (1888), pp. 48–56, 102–06, 136–44, 183–95.

[106] Mīrzā Muḥammad Hādī Lakhnavī, *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq maʿ khulāṣa-i sharḥ* (Hyderabad: Osmania University, 1925).

[107] See Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions, or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Lynn Avery Hunt, Margaret C. Jacob and W. W. Mijnhardt, *The Book That Changed Europe: Picart & Bernard's Religious Ceremonies of the World* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2010); App, *The Birth of Orientalism*.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X21000494 Published online by Cambridge University Press

ethic of toleration, and which intersects with nascent colonial forms of knowledge, the *Dabistān* provides an important counterpoint to Eurocentric accounts of the history of the study of religion, as Sanjay Subrahmanyam has already noted.[108] What I find striking about these later examples of the reception of Āẕar Kayvānī thought is the reflexive foregrounding of a twofold religious identity consisting of an outward commitment to an exclusive religion of revelation and an inner commitment to a more universal pursuit. Mullā Fīrūz was simultaneously a Zoroastrian high priest and a philosopher; the poet Ghālib presented his tutor ʿAbd al-Samad as a Muslim and an authority on ancient Persian religion and language; Hataria was an Indian Zoroastrian and a promoter of a universal Persian national identity; Ruswā was a 'Musalman Platonist'.

Speaking of his own religion, Mūbad writes at one point in his *Dīvān:*

> The Turanians think I am from Iran.
> The Iranians say I'm not one of them.
> The Sunnis think that I am Shiʿi.
> The Shiʿis think I must not be Muslim ...
> I am outside of all religions.
> I am the ultimate sage of the Lord.
> A man who met his goal does not travel.
> I have obtained union with all souls.
> I am the most knowledgeable of the sages of the nature of Truth
> I am the archmagus of God.[109]

While the poem is undated, it is tempting to view it as expressing Mūbad's achievement in the years he spent composing the *Dabistān.* After years of living among and learning from diverse religious groups, Mūbad claims to have achieved gnosis and spiritual liberation. In this article, I have argued that the composition of the *Dabistān* was an extension of the spiritual exercises of Āẕar Kayvān, which aimed at cultivating the perfection of the soul through actions taken with respect to the cosmos, society, and the body. These exercises, reflecting the broader early modern ethic of *ṣulḥ-i kull*, were understood to belong to the practice of the ancient Persians, leading saints to pursue what they understood to be a universal human goal while maintaining the appearance of belonging to particular religious communities. For a man who spent much of his life travelling to document religious diversity, it is noteworthy that in the poem above Mūbad claims that those who have attained the goal of liberation need no longer travel. By striving to put the notion of peace

[108] See Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Europe's India: Words, People, Empires, 1500–1800* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), pp. 103–43.

[109] *nazd-i tūrāniyān zi īrān-am / nazd-i īrāniyān na īshānam. sunniyān shiʿa-am gumān dārand / shiʿiyān mahż nā- musalmān-am. ... man az īn jumla-yi kīsh bīrūn-am / ʿārif-i muṭlaq-i khudāvand-am. mard-i manzil-shināṣ rah na-ravad / kāmyāb az viṣāl-i jānān-am. aʿraf-i ʿārifān-i ẕāt-i ḥaqq-am / mūbad-i mūbadān-i yazdān-am.* Dīvān-i Mūbad, Khudabakhsh Library, Patna, MS 3727, f. 64v.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X21000494 Published online by Cambridge University Press

with all religions into practice through the composition of his *School of Doctrines*, Mūbad claims to have reached a higher truth.

Acknowledgements. I would like to thank a number of colleagues whose assistance and insightful comments have contributed substantially to the ideas in this article. These include Azfar Moin, Giancarlo Casale, Mana Kia, Ali Nadeem Rezavi, Alexander Bevilacqua, Carlos Cañete, and the two anonymous reviewers of *MAS* for their comments on various iterations of this article; and N. Wahid Azal, Yaser Malekzadeh, Hunter Bandy, Patrick Bowen, and Ursula Sims-Williams for their generosity in sharing difficult-to-obtain manuscript sources.

Competing interests. None.

Cite this article: Sheffield, Daniel J. 2022. 'Exercises in peace: Āẕar Kayvānī universalism and comparison in the *School of Doctrines*'. *Modern Asian Studies* 56 (3), pp. 959–992. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X21000494