

IRĀNŠAHRI

IRĀNŠAHRI, ABU'L-ABBĀS MOḤAMMAD b. Moḥammad (fl. 2nd half 3rd/9th cent.),

mathematician, natural scientist, historian of religion, astronomer, philosopher, and author. He was from Nišāpur, the city known also as Irānšahr (Moqaddasi, pp. 299-300; Ebn Faqih, p. 321), hence his title Irānšahri. Nāṣer-e Ḳosrow mentions him as the teacher of Moḥammad b. Zakariyā Rāzi (b. 251/865), and Abu Rayḥān Biruni, who calls him an objective, reliable scholar, refers to him in connection with a solar eclipse in 259/873 (Biruni, 1958, tr., I, pp. 6-7; Minovi, pp. 32, 35-38). According to Abu'l-Ma'ālī, the author of *Bayān al-adyān*, Irānšahri considered himself a

prophet and had a book in Persian, which he claimed to be divine revelation, revealed to him by an angel called Hasti (Existence) to replace the Qur'ān (Abu'l-Ma'ālī, ed. Danešpažuh, pp. 306-7).

He believed in the unity of all religions and considered existing differences among them the results of special interests (*ḡarazū*) of their followers. He said that God took covenant from light and darkness on the days of Nowruz and Mehragān (Biruni, 1878, p. 222; ed. Adkā'i, p. 273),

which seems to reflect Zurvanite influence. According to Nāṣer-e Ḳosrow, Irānšahri had expressed philosophical concepts in religious terms in such books as *Ketāb-e jalil* and *Ketāb-e atir*, and had led people to the true religion and the understanding of monotheism (*tawḥid*). Irānšahri maintained that God was always a creator (*ṣāne*), and there was not a time when he was non-creative (*u-rā ṣon 'nabud*) before He turned into being creative. Since it is requisite that

He always be creator, then it is necessary for that in which His creation appeared to be eternal (*qadim*). His creation makes its appearance (*padid-āyanda ast*) in Matter (*hayulā*), and therefore, Matter, a sign of the apparent power of God, is eternal; and since Matter, which is eternal, requires the existence of Space (*makān*), it follows that Space should be eternal too. Irānšahri also said that time, world, and duration (*zamān dahr wa moddat*) are names whose meanings are derived from the same substance (*jawhar*). Time, a substance in motion and restless (*jawhar-e ravanda wa biqarār*), is the sign of God's knowledge, in the same way that Space is the sign of His power; motion is the sign of His action, and the being (*jesm*) is the sign of His ability, and every one of these signs is infinite and eternal. Void (*kalā*), that is Absolute Space (*makān-e moṭlaq*), is God's power, an apparent power that contains all potentials (*maqdurāt*; Nāṣer-e Ḳosrow, 1960, pp. 69, 72, 77; Minovi, pp. 36-38).

Iranšahri did not belong to any current religion of the time; he believed in the religion that he himself had contrived and advocated. He was the author of several books and treatises in Arabic and in Persian, some of which are mentioned in passing by Biruni and Nāṣer-e Ḳosrow, but they are all lost (e.g., *Masā'el al-ṭabi'a*, *Maqālāt*, *Jalil*, *Atir*; see Biruni, 1948, p. 15; idem, 1958, p. 4; Nāṣer-e Ḳosrow, 1923, p. 98). According to Biruni, he gave an objective, accurate account of Judaism and Christianity and of the contents of the Torah and the Gospels, and also provided a good description of the Manicheans and their doctrine, but his accounts of the religions of India and shamanism left a good deal to be desired (Biruni, 1958, pp. 2-6; Abu'l-Ma'ālī, ed.

Danešpažuh, pp. 306-7; Minovi, pp. 32-33, 35-36).

Given the positive remarks of Biruni and Nāṣer-e Ḳosrow, it is surprising that Irānšahri is hardly mentioned in later sources, including the works of Rāzi, who had been a student of Irānšahri and, according to Nāṣer-e Ḳosrow, had used Irānšahri's ideas in a distorted form to pretend that they were all his own (Nāṣer-e Ḳosrow, 1923, pp. 98, 102, 110; 1960, p. 72; Minovi, pp. 36-38). One may also speculate that Irānšahri had been the source of much of the information provided by Rāzi on the beliefs of Indians and sects such as Dayṣāniya, Mo-ḥammera, and Mannāniya (Moḥaqqueq, p. 19).

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