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Bibliographical Notes

Alexandre le Grand en Iran. Le Dârâb Nâmeh d'Abu Tâher Tarsusi traduit et annoté par Marina Gaillard. Persika 5, collection dirigée par Pierre Briant. Paris 2005. Éditions de Boccard, Pp 435. ISBN 2-7018-0175-3

This is a translation of a medieval Persian prose romance, of a somewhat deceptive title. While Dārāb, being a mythical transposition of the Achaemenian King Darius the First appears in the initial chapters of the book, its major part tells the deeds of the conqueror of Persian empire, Alexander the Great. Thus, in reality, the book is one of several New Persian versions of the Alexander Romance (*Eskandar-nāme*), and a continuation of a Middle Persian tradition originating from Alexander's legendary life-story by Pseudo-Callisthenes.

Several romances in early Persian prose are ascribed to Abu Tāher Tarsusi (also known as Tartusi and Tusi) but neither the exact dates nor the details of his life are known. Considering the peculiarities of his language, some hints in his text and some, much later biographical data, Gaillard tends to place him is the Ghaznavid or Saljuq (11th-12th century) East Iran, supposing his surname (*nesbat*) to be a reminiscence of his ancestors' participation in Muslim expeditions to Byzantine Asia Minor, which was the case with many Khorasani soldiers in the early Abbasid period. The book belongs to the literary genre of *dāstān* in prose which developed in pre-Monghol Iran as a sort of entertainment reading, generally supposed to have originated from oral story-telling. As Gaillard notices, the opinion on the inferiority of such works, widespread in 19th century European scholarship, is groundless, the medieval prose *dāstān*s being a genuine synthesis of Zoroastrian, Greek, Indian, Muslim and folk Persian elements, worked together into compact narrative structures by skilled story-tellers, some of whom decided to write down their repertoire. Tarsusi seems to be one of them.

The translation is based on the unique, so far, two-volume critical edition of Tarsusi's *Dārāb-nāme*, by Zabihollāh Safā, Tehrān 2536 (1977). Out of three manuscripts used in the edition, the most important one, now in the Bibliothèque

Nationale in Paris, came into existence in Zoroastrian circles in 16th century India which, according to Gaillard, explains some of its textual peculiarities.

In the introduction to his edition Safā considers *Dārāb-nāme* a combination of three, originally separate, *dāstāns*, telling the stories of Dārāb, Alexander and Burān-dokht. According to Gaillard's division (p. 24), Tarsusi's romance falls in two, unequal parts of which the first (being approximately one third of the whole), is a legendary history of what had been preserved in the Iranian collective memory of the Achaemenid dynasty. According to the legend, the son of mythical Esfandiyār, Bahman-Ardashir, and his daughter-and-wife Homāy were parents of Dārāb (historical Darius I) who, in turn, fathered Dārā (equivalent of Darius III) and Eskandar (Alexander), born from Dārāb's union with a Greek princess, sent back to her father Filqus (Philip the Macedonian) still before Alexander's birth. In Tarsusi's work their story serves as a kind of introduction to the main part of the romance.

The second and principal part of the book (about 2/3 of its whole), is devoted to the exploits of Eskandar, whose story develops in three consecutive stages: 1. from Eskandar's birth until his victory over his half-brother Dārā and his enthronement in Iran; 2. his wars against his Persian niece Burān-dokht, ending with their marriage; 3. Eskandar's travels around the world and his death.

Gaillard summarizes in several pages (pp. 93-96) the "Achaemenian" part of the *dāstān*, and limits her translation to the exploits of Eskandar. The text has been abridged in the sense, that some passages, considered less important, have been replaced by short summaries. As the translator explains (p. 85-86), her aim was to present to her readers the most famous episodes of the Oriental tradition on Alexander, in particular those which have their counterparts in other existing versions of Alexander's romance. On the other hand, she was anxious to give in her translation a revue of passages most typical of Persian medieval narratives (descriptions of battles and duels, adventures with supernatural beings and sorcerers, travels to exotic lands etc.), so that her reader could get a general idea of the literary genre in question.

The translator preceded her text by a large and substantial introduction. In its 80 pages Gaillard presents the work to her French readers. She discusses the history of the Alexander romance in Iran, its literary sources and existing versions, mythologized life stories and personalities of its protagonists, oral tradition on Alexander as one of Tarsusi's presumed sources, questions of the style and authorship of the text, and finally the translatory options chosen for its French rendering.

Much attention has been devoted, in the Introduction, to the literary images of Alexander and his rival (then wife) Burān-dokht, identified with Roxane (Roushanak) of Classical sources. While dealing with the complex and apparently inconsistent personality of Alexander /Eskandar as presented in the romance, Gaillard evokes two different and mutually contradictory traditions

on Alexander, which coexisted in Sasanian Iran: one coming from the Pahlavi version of Pseudo-Callisthenes romance, which saw in Alexander a half-Iranian and the lawful ruler of Persia, the other one, of Zoroastrian religious origin, generally hostile to him as a demonized persecutor of Zoroastrian faith. Gaillard follows the transformations of the Alexander legend in Sasanian and then Muslim Iran, putting stress on the process of Iranization of the hero, and on his new role as a religious champion, in Islamic versions of the romance. She presents the development of his image in classical Persian literature from Ferdousi's *Shāh-nāme* (turn of 10th-11th centuries) and the famous *Eskandar-nāme* by Nezāmi (12th century), through its consecutive implementations in classical Persian poetry and historical works, up to Jāmi's *Kherad-nāme-ye Eskandari* (end of 15th century).

In her presentation of the characters of the story Gaillard underlines a striking contrast between Eskandar, conceived as a man of weak character and of capricious, unstable temper, neither a strong ruler nor a good army commander, and his Persian half-niece Burān-dokht, having all the virtues of a gallant warrior (*javānmard*) and wise politician. Burān is presented as possessor of the secret knowledge of God's names and of the royal charisma of Persian rulers which Alexander lacks. Gaillard proposes two complementary explanations of such a "feminist" treatment of the subject in the medieval romance: first, after W.L. Hanaway, she perceives in Burān-dokht the features of an ancient female deity, most probably Anāhita (one should add that in some respects Burān also reminds us of Bibi Shahrbānu, Anāhita's Islamic continuation); then, she observes that, differently from Alexander, Burān is of pure Iranian blood and after the death of her father whose avenger she becomes, it is her who incarnates the true "Iranity" and an unbroken continuity of the legitimate royal power. It is mainly to Burān-dokht that Eskandar owes his victories after their marriage, and the question of his uncertain origin and doubtful right to Persian throne reiterates in his confrontation with her.

Another factor of Alexander's success, as highlighted by Gaillard, is his team of learned men of different origins, in particular Greek (Plato, Aristoleles) and Indian. Gaillard characterizes them as "philosophers-technicians", who invent various sophisticated "strategems" and tricks for Alexander, thus enabling him to dominate over his enemies. In Persian tradition Alexander himself, observes Gaillard, is much more of an explorer and searcher of immortality which he fails to acquire, than of a warrior and ruler. An important part of his romance is devoted to his naval expeditions, giving occasion for the descriptions of exotic lands and their marvels. This part of Alexander's story, the most extended of all, follows the patterns of ancient travel romances such as the *Odyssey*. The motifs of maritime travels to marvellous lands have long been known to Iranian tradition, judging by their traces in the *Avesta* already and then in early heroic epics such as Ferdousi's *Shāh-nāme* and *Garshasp-nāme* by Asadi Tusi (mid-11th century).

As the translator observes, the language of the original text is relatively simple, but includes many formulas and repetitive phrases due to the oral origin of Tarsusi's version. Besides, the diversity of styles and idioms occur in dialogues, in accordance with a speaker's social status and origin. Gaillard tries to preserve this diversity in her translation, while a "neutral" language ("un langage ni trop familier ni trop châtié", as she puts it) dominates the narrative. Some introductory formulas have been omitted and the dialogues, in which the text abounds, were broken up into lines according to Western principles, for easier perception. The translation can be considered a successful transposition of the Persian original into French. Due to its linguistic accurateness it meets the standards of a scholarly translation, at the same time being accessible to a non-professional reader.

The translated text is extensively supported by footnotes, it has been provided with a glossary of Persian terms, an index and a rich bibliography.

Anna Krasnowolska

Daniel M. Gurtner, Introduction to Syriac. Key to Exercises and English-Syriac Vocabulary. Bethesda 2006. Ibex Publishers. 114 pp. ISBN 15888140458

This is a companion volume to W.M. Thackston's Introduction to Syriac (Bethesda 1999, Ibex Publishers) which has been widely acknowledged as one of the best textbooks of Syriac but which, so far, had a certain relative weakness as it does not use vowel signs so that its use is quite a challenge for most students, including those studying with a help of a teacher. Now thanks to D.M. Gurtner we have not only a complete key to exercises (translations both from Syriac into English and from English into Syriac) with fully vocalized transcriptions but also transcriptions and translations of the 'Readings' authored by W.M. Thackston himself. There is also an English-Syriac vocabulary as a companion to the Syriac-English version available in Thackston's 'Introduction'. I wonder why Gurtner speaks about 'transliterations' and not transcriptions (p. I) – transliterations would be without vowels like the Syriac originals !

Thanks to this very practical 'Key' the value of Thackston's 'Introduction' has been greatly enhanced. I wish to emphasize the quality of English translations which are generally, thanks God, not literal. The value of the whole set (the 'Key' should be always published as a separate volume !) would be even greater if in a new edition more (actually there is very, very little !) linguistic and historical commentaries were added. Samples of vocalized texts would also do no harm.

In short: Thackston accompanied by Gurtner is already number one!

Andrzej Zaborski

Bruno Halflants, Le conte du portefaix et des trois jeunes femmes dans le manuscrit de Galland (XIVe-XVe siècles). Louvain-la-Neuve 2007. VII + 490 pp. Publications de l'Institut Orientaliste de Louvain 55. Peeters Press. ISBN 978-90-429-1874-0

This is a very valuable philological and linguistic contribution to the studies on Middle Arabic as used by Muslims since it contains a new edition of a part of the important manuscript of "Thousand and One Night" written in this language. The best edition by M. Mahdi (1984) did not pay due attention to Middle Arabic features and this edition by Halflants of "The story of a porter and three women" rectifies a lot. The main body of the publication contains the edited text (pp. 175-265) and its translation (pp. 267-401) with a critical apparatus and commentaries. There is also a detailed sketch of the grammar (including the presentation of spelling!) of the Arabic text (pp. 69-166) which is a must for all students of Middle Arabic. Appendix IV contains corrections to Mahdi's edition.

I do not think that literal translation is really 'scientific' and that it gives a better idea about the original to someone who does not know Arabic. The misuse of brackets is quite embarrassing when we take into consideration that so often the French translation without words and phrases in brackets would be just incomprehensible or sound like a kind of pidgin. Only grammatically and stylistically correct and beautiful translation into a target language can be a true equivalent of the grammatically etc. correct and beautiful original. Who wants to know how the Arabic original is must learn Arabic and not read 'Arabic-like' translationese.

Apart from the method of translation this edition is very solid, even exemplary.

Andrzej Zaborski

Enid M. Parker, English-'Afar Dictionary. Springfield 2006. Dunwoody Press. XIII + 322 pp. ISBN-13: 978-1-931546-23-2

This is the first modern scientific dictionary from a European language into the 'Afar language spoken in Djibouti, Ethiopia and Eritrea by some 1.5 million people. It is one of the most important languages in the region and it is of a great scientific interest as one of the 'oldest' Cushitic languages. It is the result of the authoress' activity as missionary and linguist in the field for more than half a century. She has been given the very well justified title of "Respected Lioness" by the 'Afar people who admired her work on the 'Afar language and culture.

Fortunately enough, in the title of the dictionary the 'international' spelling as 'Afar and not the native 'Qafar' which can be misleading abroad has been applied. This dictionary is primarily for the 'Afars to give them access to the English language. Nevertheless all the lemmata, viz. over 10.000 headwords contain examples of the usage of the headwords in sentences together with their translations so that the dictionary is also of great use for everybody who is interested in the 'Afar language. All the words translated from 'Afar into English in the 'Afar-English-French Dictionary published by the authoress together with R.J. Hayward in 1985 are included, plus additional words such as abstract and technical terms.

The unusual marking of stress (which is phonetically realized as high tone although 'Afar is not a tone language!) with grave accent sign has been preserved . This is just a convention. There is virtually no information on English grammar (e.g. on the forms of irregular verbs) which will make the dictionary less useful for 'Afars with a limited command of English.

The general evaluation of this pioneer dictionary must be quite positive. It must be recommended both for the 'Afars learning English and for foreigners, including linguists, studying the 'Afar language.

Andrzej Zaborski