



ARABIC LANGUAGE IV. ARABIC LITERATURE IN IRAN

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Arabic literature in Iran comprises the works of the early Arab conquerors and those of the Persians who wrote in Arabic. The latter, by far more numerous, ensured Iran a major role in the development of Arabic letters from the 2nd/8th century. Even after the rise of New Persian literature in the 4th/10th century, Arabic remained the major language of scholarship and official communications until the use of Persian became widespread in all literary and scholarly domains. After the Mongol invasion of the 7th/13th century, Arabic was confined more and more to purely philosophical, theological, and jurisprudential works, where its use continued down to the present century. Some modern Arab historians of literature who are motivated by nationalist aspirations have tended to describe as Arabs many of the great Persian Muslim authors who wrote key works in Arabic. Thus, the grammarian Sibawayh (Sibūya, d. ca. 166/782), the traditionist al-Boḡārī (d. 256/870), the historian and religious scholar al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), the philosopher Ebn Sīnā (Avicenna, d. 370/428), the scholar al-Bīrūnī (d. 442/1050), and the theologian al-Ġazālī (d. 505/1111) are often taken to be Arabs. In fact, we frequently find Persians in early and medieval Islamic times who wrote in Arabic and Persian with equal facility. This was because Arabic



had developed into the literary medium of communication for the learned all over the Islamic world, more or less as Latin had in Western Christendom. It was not unusual in medieval times to find Iranians who used Arabic for scholarly works and Persian for poetical or other literary purposes, as we see, for example, in the case of the Sufi poet Jāmī (d. 898/ 1492), who wrote extensive Persian poetry but also used Arabic to express his opinions in various fields of scholarship.

Most of the Arabic literature produced in the early period came from Khorasan, which, as the major region for *ḡhād* in early Islam, was where Persians and Arabs began to fuse both ethnically and culturally. In Khorasan, the focal points of education were, as elsewhere, the Koranic schools for children, the homes of religious scholars, and the mosques where studying Arabic was pursued from early childhood; later, the religious college (*madrassa*) would make its first appearance there, subsequently spreading out over the rest of the Muslim world. Arab-Persian cultural synthesis continued in Khorasan throughout the Omayyad period, and by the end of the 1st/7th century, the Arabs no longer had an exclusive monopoly on their own literary tongue; non-Arabs had staked their claims on the language (C. A. Nallino, *La littérature arabe des origines à l'époque de la dynastie umayyade*, tr. Ch. Pellat, Paris, 1950, p. 211). Moreover, most of the Arabs in Khorasan knew Persian, as is evident, for instance, in the case of the poet Ebn Mofarreḡ (d. 69/689), who has left behind one of the first Persian verses to be registered in Arabic literature (JĀjāḡez, *al-Bayān* I, p. 143). The geographer Moḡaddasī (d. 390/1000) tells us that, in his day, the Khorasani used the purest Arabic he knew (p. 32); at that point Persian scholars and belletrists had a very long history of mastery over classical Arabic, whereas in the Arab world dialects had arisen and the use of the classical language, no longer widespread, was confined to the learned classes.

Responsibility for the reshaping of Arabic prose goes principally to the early *kottāb* (chancery secretaries) from whose ranks rose viziers who played such important roles in the formation of Islamic civilization. Most of the scribal families, like the famous Barmakids and Sahlids of 'Abbasid days, were Persians, who were at home in the Arab-Persian culture then coming into existence and who had a guiding hand in forming it. Their importance to Arabic shows that the nationalist tendency of the Persians to glorify their own past at the expense of the Arabs (see *šo'ūbiya*) was simply a temporary reaction with literary and cultural manifestations; in reality, the ethnic



conflict was settled by the rise of the Islamic civilization of 'Abbasid times, which integrated into its religious framework the most diverse ethnic elements. Among these Persian culture had the greatest structural influence. Persians, as the products of an ancient urban civilization, could bring the refinement of learning to bear on the vigorous religion given to them by the Arab nomads, as Ebn Kaldūn's theory on the interrelationship between sedentary and nomadic cultures explains. Islamic civilization was indeed a harmonious mixture of Persian and Arab elements.

Two great Persian scribes, 'Abd-al-Ḥamīd b. Yaḥyā (q.v., d. 132/750) and Ebn al-Moqaffa' (d. ca. 142/759), show the influence that the *kottāb* had on the development of Arabic prose. As the personal secretary to the last Omayyad caliph, 'Abd-al-Ḥamīd was the originator of the prose genre called "the epistle" (*resāla*); before his time, epistles of a certain literary value had been written, but he is said to have given the epistolary art a new orientation. A famous remark that has echoed down the centuries would have it that the art of writing epistles "began with 'Abd-al-Ḥamīd and ended with Abu'l-Faḥr Moḥammad b. 'Amīd" (d. 359/969-70), the vizier to the Buyid Rokn-al-dawla; but whereas 'Abd-al-Ḥamīd wrote in a clear, straightforward fashion, as we see in his famous epistle to the *kottāb* (M. Kord 'Alī, *Rasā'el al-bolaḡā*, Cairo, 1374/1954, especially p. 225), Ebn al-'Amīd wrote in the ornamented rhymed prose then coming into vogue, which indeed spelled the end of the epistolary evolution. Ebn al-Moqaffa', a contemporary of 'Abd-al-Ḥamīd, wrote lucid, simple epistles in Arabic on such things as friendship and manners in general which are amongst the earliest specimens of the newly-launched genre called *adab* (q.v.). He is, however, best known for his *Kalīla wa Demna*, the Arabic translation of the Pahlavi version of a Sanskrit animal story book called *The Fables of Bidpai*. The book, which puts wisdom and clever remarks into the mouths of animals, eventually became a classic of Arabic literature because of its fine prose. Both of these prose masters broke new ground in their works and, together with the other Persians who wrote after their days, gave to Arabic a much greater flexibility in both form and content. The mastery of Arabic possessed by the scribes moved Jāḥeẓ to extol them for having developed the most exemplary rhetorical style (*Bayān* I, p. 137). As a class, they could easily influence not only Arabic prose but also the structures of institutional Islam, for the vizier, who was of greater rank than the generals, was but the chief of the *kottāb* (A. Mez, *The Renaissance of Islam*, Patna, 1937, p. 89).



Persians also made their presence felt in poetry. Not long after the conquest of Khorasan we hear of the first Persians who mastered the intricate rules of Arabic prosody, and their number gradually increases as time goes by. Eventually, such poets as Baššār b. Bord (d. 167/783-84), a blind Persian of humble Khorasani origin, and Abū Nowās (d. 198/813), a half Persian master poet in handling Arabic poetical forms and inserting Persian words into them, would lend their weight to the modernist movement seeking to reform the Bedouin themes inherited from pre-Islamic times. Abū Nowās is considered as one of the greatest masters of Arabic poetry; his ascetical poems (*zohdīyāt*) alternate with his much better known wine poems (*kamrīyāt*), the latter being of course his real contribution to Arabic literature (M. Mīnovī, “Yakī az Fārsīyāt-e Abū Nowās,” *MDAT* 1/3, 1332 Š./1953, pp. 62-77). Outstanding among later Persian poets who wrote in Arabic is Mahyār Daylamī (d. 428/1037), a Shiʿite poet with a wonderful command of prosody. This capacity of the Persians to excel in the creation of Arabic odes of rare beauty and depth continued well into medieval times. We have only to recall the famous *Lāmīyat al-ʿAjam* (“The Ode of the Persians Rhyming in ” L”) of the Isfahani poet and vizier of the Saljuqs, Abū Esmāʿil Ḥosayn Toḡrāʿī (d. 515/ 1112-22), which is an ode describing the hard times of his day in masterful Arabic; it was composed at a time when New Persian, by producing monumental works such as *Šāh-nāma*, had long established itself as the medium of poetry throughout Iran. It has the same kind of aphoristic wisdom that we find in the *Lāmīyat al-ʿArab* (“The Ode of the Arabs Rhyming in ” L”) of the pre-Islamic Bedouin poet Šanfarā. Saʿdī (d. 691/1292), the renowned author of the *Golestān* in Persian, also left behind a number of Arabic odes, but they do not show the genius of his Persian compositions. After his days it is rare to find Persians who can write Arabic poetry with any degree of inspiration, perhaps due to the thoroughness with which Persian letters had taken over the culture of Iran, leaving very little for Arabic to do.

Persians also had a hand in other literary genres. Thus, Ebn Qotayba (d. 276/889-90), a great master of Arabic belles-lettres, wrote his *ʿOyūn al-aḵbār* (The sources of stories), an anthology of anecdotal narratives drawn from both Persian and Arabic materials, as an example of a work that went beyond the exclusivism of both Arabs and Persians. He wrote it in a simple but strong literary style, somewhat like the one he uses in *Adab al-kāteb*, which in later generations became one of the basic texts for mastering Arabic. Ebn Qotayba defended the Arabs against the *šoʿūbiya* of his fellow Persians; though the question of the *šoʿūbiya* would exercise a number of individuals’ pens after his



days, he went a long way in creating a literary reconciliation between the two cultures.

Among anthologists we find the famous Shi'ite scholar from Isfahan, Abu'l-Faraġ Eṣfahānī (q.v., d. 356/966-67), author of the *Ketāb al-aġānī* (The book of songs, q.v.), a fundamental work in Arabic literature in many volumes that embraces pre-Islamic and early Islamic poetry. Not only does it give an excellent selection of poetry, but every poem is accompanied by anecdotal historical observations replete with chains of authority, and since the poetry was meant to be sung, there are a certain number of musical notations for the accompanists. When giving biographical or other details in his work, the author's style is fast-paced, as is the dialogue between the principal actors under consideration; indeed, his conversational style is one of the liveliest and most realistic in the Arabic literary tradition. His aim was to entertain the reader, not to burden him with needless literary devices or serious types of poetry. Hence, he pruned his literary style down to the bone and eliminated the more religious or ascetical or mystical forms of poetry, which gives to his book a worldly touch, a piquant quality that he expressly sought. When his anthology was presented to the Buyid vizier Ṣāḥeb b. 'Abbād, an eminent Persian master of Arabic prose, the latter ceased traveling with a caravan full of books, as had been his wont, and began instead to take with him the *Ketāb al-aġānī*, which sufficed him.

Another important anthology compiled by a Persian, Abū Maṣṣūr Ṭā'ālebī (q.v., d. 429/1038) of Nīšāpūr, is *Yatīmat al-dahr fī maḥāsen ahl al-aṣr*, which gives us a very good idea of the state of Arabic letters in eastern Iran at the time of the Samanids. Practically all of the poets cited in it were Persians, some of whom excelled in both Arabic and Persian. While not all of them can claim to be inspired, enough of them wrote well enough to permit us to say that Arabic literary culture in the area was effervescent and fairly strong, and this at a time when Persian letters had come into their own. The *Yatīmat al-dahr* would have a number of imitators and continuators in other lands and future generations as time went by, thus establishing it as a sort of prototypal work.

Versatility in both Arabic and Persian literature was not unusual among cultivated Persians of the 4th/10th century. One of those Persians who mastered both mediums of expression is the famous creator of the literary genre called the *maqāmāt* (assemblies), Aḥmad Badī'-al-Zamān Hamadānī (d. 398/1007), who was also known for his extraordinary skill in improvisation, moving from one tongue to the other with great facility. His fame, however,



reposes on his *Maqāmāt*, a series of adventure stories in rather ornate rhymed prose dealing with a wandering, clever, and unscrupulous hero who lives by his wit, his flashes of rhetorical brilliance, and his learning. The hero is constantly running across his narrator, who describes the hero's adventures. Each *maqāma* is an independent piece containing prose and poetry; its sole object is not so much to narrate an adventure as to tell it with superb Arabic rhetorical art. Hamadānī's *Maqāmāt* became the model for later creations by other authors, the one written by the Arab poet and philologist al-Ḥarīrī (d. 516/1122) being the most famous of all and one of the masterpieces of Arabic letters. The rhymed prose used by Hamadānī had already become fashionable, as we see in the compositions of Abū Bakr Ḳ̣vārazmī (d. 383/993), and was the literary equivalent of a certain opulence that had come over the Muslim world as a whole. It was a far cry from the simpler belletrist compositions of earlier times by such writers as 'Abd-al-Ḥamīd b. Yaḥyā.

In the historical genre, some of the finest works in Arabic come from the Persian masters: Abu'l-'Abbās Aḥmad Balāḍorī (d. 279/892) has left us his famous *Fotūḥ al-boldān* on the early Muslim conquests, a work still read nowadays. Abū Ḥanifā Dīnavarī (d. ca. 290/902) wrote a brilliant account of Persian history called *al-Aḵbār al-ṭewāl* (The long narratives), revealing in the author a rare mastery of the Arabic language in its purest form. But the greatest Muslim historian and surely one of the greatest scholars of all time is Moḥammad b. Jarīr Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), whose vast universal history, *Ta'rik al-rosol wa'l-molūk* (The history of the messengers and the kings), arranged in chronological order, is a mine of information in scrupulous detail, and easily the foremost historical work in Arabic. Using the annalistic approach the accounts are based, for the most part, on eyewitnesses whose narrations are transmitted to the author by a chain of authorities. Important variations are also given with the same scrupulousness, replete with their own chains of authorities. The whole book, composed of many volumes (ed. M. J. de Goeje et al., 15 vols., Leiden, 1879-1901, repr., 1964), themselves the summary of an earlier and much greater work now lost, is an amazing storehouse of documents. Ṭabarī makes no attempt to give any unity to this vast assortment of facts and data beyond their temporal framework: Like many earlier and later historians, he offers no solution to given events, but merely presents the documentary materials without interpretation or evaluation, leaving it to the reader for judgment, a trait, in Muslim historiography that has often drawn fire from Western critics.



Somewhat different in perspective as a historical work is the *Tajāreb al-omam* (The experiences of nations) by the Persian historian and moral philosopher, Abū 'Alī Aḥmad b. Moḥammad Meskawayh (Moskūya, d.431/1040). He was a courtier under the vizier Ebn al-'Amīd, who was himself, as mentioned, a great prose stylist. Meskawayh's work is also a universal history, the coherence of which improves as it approaches his day, for it relies then on contemporary documents and his personal experiences and contacts within the Buyid administration. It is a brilliant history written in an objective, scholarly style, even in its latter part, where the author deals with his own times and the persons he knew.

Persians have been prominent as well in the fields of Arabic grammar, philology, and lexicography. The greatest name in Arabic grammar belongs to the Persian Sibawayh (Sībūya) Bayzāwī (fl. 180/796), whose work, *al-Ketāb* (The book), remains to the present day the most authoritative exposition of Arabic grammar. He belonged to the school of Baṣra, which along with its philological rival of Kūfa had set out to analyze the literary and oral resources of Arabic in order to arrive at the laws of the language. Not quite as prestigious a grammatical text, but still quite important, is the *Mofaṣṣal* of Abū'l-Qāsem Maḥmūd Zamaḳṣarī (d. 538/1143-44), one of the most learned scholars of his day; his lexicographical work, the *Asās al-balāḡa* (The foundation of eloquence) is still valuable. But Persian lexicographers in Arabic were active in developing dictionaries from the days of Esmā'īl Jawharī (d. 392/1002), who wrote the *Ṣeḥāḥ*, until long after Zamaḳṣari's time, when Abū'l-Ṭāher Moḥammad Fīrūzābādī (d. 817/1415) compiled his *Qāmūs*, the largest Arabic dictionary after that of Jawharī. In the religious disciplines connected with the Hadith literature and Koranic commentary (*tafsīr*), the principal figures are Persians. The significance of the contribution made by Persians may be judged by the fact that the authors of fundamental collections of Hadith, or what the Sunni tradition calls the Six Books, are all Persians (Boḳārī, Moslem, etc.). Since the Hadiths are second only to the Qur'ān in importance for the Islamic tradition, the Persians' preeminence is amazing. The methods used by Boḳārī (d. 256/870) and the others was based on the principle of *esnād*, or the chain of authorities connecting the compiler with a particular companion of the Prophet who heard the Hadith. Boḳārī examined hundreds of thousands of Hadiths, rejected the immense majority of them, and incorporated into his collection only those that passed his strict standards.

Further, not only was the imam Abū Ḥanīfa (q.v., d. ca. 150/767), founder of



the Ḥanafī school of jurisprudence, a Persian, but so were most of the great commentators of the Qur'ān who, by stressing the immediate signification of words and verses and not their mystical or allegorical meanings, keep alive the traditional message of the Qur'ān. One of the most prestigious commentaries was written by the previously-mentioned Ṭabarī, who founded his own school of jurisprudence, the Jarīriya. His commentary, *Jāme' al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qor'ān*, contains detailed and meticulous expositions of the Koranic verses along historical and linguistic lines, and continues to be authoritative in our own days. A scholar's working tool for understanding the literal meaning of the Qur'ān in the light of tradition, it leaves out mystical or spiritual interpretations that may be found elsewhere, especially among the Sufis or the philosophically-minded interpreters. Nevertheless, generation after generation has resorted to Ṭabarī's great work because of its profusion of details and the mass of materials included in the many volumes. Another commentator, Zamaḡṣarī (d. 538/1143-44), who was previously mentioned in the fields of grammar and lexicography, using a somewhat different approach, wrote an authoritative work entitled *al-Kaššāf 'an ḥaqā'eq al-Qor'ān*. The commentary, though colored here and there by Mu'tazilite tendencies, is outstanding; so much so that its mine of information and details has been worked over by a number of other, more orthodox exegetes. One of them is 'Abdallāh b. 'Omar Bayḏāwī (d. 685/1286), a Persian religious scholar of immense prestige in the Sunni world because of his *Anwār al-tanzīl wa asrār al-ta'wīl* (The lights of revelation and the secrets of interpretation), a commentary on the Qur'ān that is still widely circulated at the present day and considered one of the orthodox jewels of the faith; yet, it was based in part on the *Kaššāf* stripped of most of its Mu'tazilite tendencies. The *Anwār al-tanzīl* owes its popularity to its hermeneutical approach, which is neither strictly literalist nor purely allegorical, but somehow combines both in a thorough exposition that is neither too long nor too greatly detailed.

That these Persians wrote in Arabic, rather than in Persian, was owing to the prestige that Arabic had acquired as an international language of learning for the Islamic community in general. Sa'd-al-dīn Mas'ūd Taftazānī (d. 791/1389), perhaps one of the best many-sided Persian Muslim scholars, wrote all of his works in Arabic, including his well-known and still authoritative *Šarḥ al-'aqā'id al-nasafiya*, a commentary on the *al-'Aqā'id* of his fellow Persian Najm-al-dīn 'Omar b. Moḡammad Nasafī (d. 537/1142). Taftazānī's contemporary and rival, 'Alī b. Moḡammad Jorjānī (d. 816/ 1413), author of the famous work on definitions called the *Ta'rīfāt*, also wrote all of his works in Arabic. These men



knew Persian, to be sure, and by their time numerous scholarly works in Persian existed, so that they could have written in that language. But they preferred Arabic.

While all of the above-mentioned authors are Sunni, the Persian Shi'ite writers in Arabic have also left behind a mass of religious literature of great importance for the Shi'ite tradition. In the field of Hadith literature, for example, the important early works were the *Oṣūl al-kāfi* of Kolaynī (d. 329/941), the *Man lā yaḥzoroho 'l-faqīh* (For those without access to a religious teacher) of Ebn Bābawayh (Bābūya, d. 381/991-92), and the two works of Ṣayḫ al-Ṭā'efa Abū Ja'far Moḥammad Ṭūsī (d. 60/1067), the *Tahdīb al-aḥkām* and *al-Estebṣār*. All four of these works have become mainstays of Shi'ism. The only difference between the Shi'ite and Sunni Hadith collections is that the former are transmitted by the Shi'ite Imams and therefore contain their remarks too, for they function as guardians over the Imamate inherited from the Prophet by the Imam 'Alī, at least in the view of Shi'ite theologians. In any case, it is remarkable that the principal collections of Hadith both in the Sunni and Shi'ite world were all made by Persian Muslims.

When we turn to the domain of Arabic Sufi literature, we soon realize that here too Iran has been instrumental in establishing the foundations of Islamic spiritual doctrines. The early Sufis are to be found mostly in Khorasan where a strong religious fervor had been created by the Holy War in the early days of Islam. Of those first Khorasanian Sufis, such as Abū Yazīd Beṣṭāmī (d. 261/874), we have only brief statements dispersed in later Sufi anthologies. Soon, however, there appeared important formulations of Sufism, as we can discover in the many works of Abū 'Abdallāh Moḥammad Ḥakīm Termeḍī (d. 285/898). One of his books, the *Ḳatm al-welāya* (The sealing of sanctity), is an important Sufi doctrinal text, written in a much more analytical manner than we find in other early Sufis; it shows already the extent of Greek influence on the thought patterns of mystically-inclined Muslims, especially those who had a penchant for speculations. The book spells out in some detail the question of sanctity as it relates to saints, sages, and prophets, and it discusses the important question of the "sealing of sanctity," his identity, functions, and the like. Termeḍī's influence on the intellectual formulations of later Sufis was considerable.

While the works of Termeḍī have an abstract, speculative cast to them, the *Ketāb al-loma' fi'l-taṣawwof* of Abū Naṣr Sarrāj (d. 378/988) and the *Ta'arrof le-maḍhab ahl al-taṣawwof* of Abū Bakr Kalābādī (d. 390/1000) are written in



standard expository form, very much like the religious literature of the time, although both authors have a lively yet sober style of writing that is at the same time charming. The *Loma'*, which has become one of the great manuals in the Sufi tradition, sets forth the teachings of the mystical path based on the Qur'ān and the Sunna, with numerous citations from earlier masters on the different virtues and conditions of the spiritual way. The *Ta'arrof*, by contrast, is a bit more popular in its presentation; its use of anecdotal materials to explain Sufi spiritual perspectives endeared it to the reading public from the very moment of its appearance. The authors of both works were anxious to show the orthodoxy of the eminent Sufis of the past and to explain how Sufism fit into the structures of the Islamic religion. Simplicity of outlook on their part contributed to the eventual success of their works, which have lasted down to our days as important texts for the understanding of the Islamic mystical way.

Much more brilliantly written than the aforementioned works is the famous *Qūt al-qolūb* (The nourishment of the hearts) of Abū Ṭāleb Makkī (d. 386/996), who was of Persian birth though of Meccan upbringing. The *Qūt* is an outstanding milestone in the history of the relations between the mystical dimension of Islam and its Law (Šarī'a). It is indeed the first all-out endeavor to reconcile Sufism with the Šarī'a. Its language is incredibly beautiful and powerful, yet simple and unadorned with any of the literary devices popular in the 4th/10th century. The book has always been considered a deep account of Sufism, much more so than the *Loma'* of Sarrāġ. It had a great impact on the thinking of Ġazālī (d. 505/1111), whose *Ehyā' 'olūm al-dīn* contains whole sections that are recapitulations of the *Qūt*, but amplified in different ways.

Different in style and content is the biographical work called the *Ṭabaqāt al-šūfiya* (The categories of the Sufis) of Abū 'Abd-al-Raḥmān Solamī (d. 412/1021), a Persian Sufi from Nīšāpūr. This was the first of the biographical works on the Sufis to appear; in later times, many others would be composed by various Sufi authors, both in Persian and Arabic. Although Solamī wrote a number of works, he is best known for this one, which would influence later Persian hagiographers, such as Anṣārī, 'Aṭṭār, and Jāmī. The *Ṭabaqāt* limits itself to a brief biographical notice on each Sufi within the different categories, and then proceeds to give whatever statements on Sufism they transmitted to later times through various authorities. These are observations on their part that are meant to be pondered by the reader for some time before their rich contents can be absorbed.

Also famous, but much more vast and diverse, is the ten-volume work *Helyat*



al-awliā' (The ornament of the saints) by Abū No'aym Eṣṣafahānī (d. 430/1038), a Sufi, historian, and traditionist. Only tangentially can it be said that his work is biographical. It is really a collection of the sayings of the early ascetics, saints, and Sufis of Islam, beginning with the Companions of the Prophet and running for some three centuries thereafter. Thousands of names appear, each one followed by some remark or statement on the spiritual life, with an appropriate chain of transmission for each statement. It is not concentrated on the Sufis, for it also deals with numerous non-Sufi ascetics; but enough material on the Sufis is included so that it came to be considered in due time as an important Sufi work. Since the author only relates sayings or observations, beyond making occasional pithy remarks he does not embark on any doctrinal exposition of Sufism.

While the *Loma'* and the *Qūt* are important manuals in the Sufi tradition, the one that was destined to become the key work is the celebrated *Resāla* (Treatise) of Qoṣayrī (d. 465/1074), the Persian Sufi from Nīšāpūr. The *Resāla* is written in a simple style; the author investigates therein the different aspects of Sufism, its technical terms, its relations with the *Šarī'a*, and its goals, citing many authorities of earlier times and revealing the nature of the Sufi tradition with great vigor and clarity. As time went by, its formulations and definitions became almost standard, and are echoed and re-echoed constantly in later works. In reality, the *Resāla* represents a kind of legalistic Sufism that steers clear of those Sufis who seem to break the *Šarī'a* at every turn and who are barely mentioned in the text. It is for this reason that the work has gained a strong footing, not only in Sufi circles, but also in pious, ascetic milieus of the Sunni world.

Whatever might be the deserved praise given to the previous work, it cannot match the glory attaching to the *Eḥyā' olūm al-dīn* (The revival of the religious sciences) of Ġazālī, one of the great Sufis and theologians of Islam. An Ash'arite in his theology, Ġazālī was born in Ṭūs, and after getting his religious diplomas, was appointed to a professor's chair in Baghdad, where he composed his famous *Tahāfot al falāsefa* (The incoherence of the philosophers), in which he opposes rationalistic tendencies on the part of the philosophers in discussing the dogmas of Islamic faith. Then came his spiritual crisis, which he would talk about in his celebrated *al-Monqed men al-żalāl* (The redeemer from error), and he abandoned his career to follow the Sufi way for many years, at the end of which he reached interior peace through illuminative knowledge. The greatest literary fruit of that spiritual



enlightenment was the *Ehyā' olūm al-dīn*; consisting of a number of volumes on the *Šarī'a* and Sufism, it is written in a fine, charming, lucid, and well-organized manner, containing innumerable colorful stories drawn from Hadith literature, accounts of the saints, and other sources, all of which illustrate the different theses of the author. It is a masterful reconciliation between the demands of the *Šarī'a*, on the one hand, and the spiritual obligations of the Sufi Path, on the other, with Ġazālī clearly stating that the illuminative knowledge gained through the Sufi way is the summit of the Islamic spiritual life. Time and again, he warns the doctors of the *Šarī'a* to confine their activities to the domain of the Law, and to leave the contemplative or spiritual life to the teachers of the Sufi way. His work would be a model of systematic treatment that other religious authorities would follow in their writings in later times. Probably no one figure in the Sunni world can equal Ġazālī in this reconciliatory mission that he set out to accomplish in writing his *Ehyā'*, which remains to this day a kind of definitive exposition of the duties of the intelligent Muslim, as seen from both the legal and mystical perspectives.

After Ġazālī's day, more than a century passed before another classic Arabic work on Sufism by a Persian appeared. This is the famous manual, *'Awāref alma'āref* (The gifts of gnosis) by Šehāb-al-dīn Sohravardī (d. 632/1234), who must not be confused with his namesake, the one executed in 578/1191 and known as al-Maqtūl (the martyr). The author of the *'Awāref* was the founder of the Sohravardīya, and this accounts for the special perspective of the book, which in essence is a manual for Sohravardī teachers. But since he discourses therein on a number of topics that are to be found in all Sufi manuals, the *'Awāref* became subsequently one of the better-known texts on the mystical life in Islam. Written without any fancy rhetoric, it gets to the point immediately when treating of the virtues, the states and stations of the Sufi path, or the remarks made by earlier Sufi teachers. Wherever the Sohravardīs have gone, the *'Awāref* has gone with them as a kind of basic text in that order, which ensured the book's diffusion in the eastern regions of the Muslim world before its fame spread to the western parts.

Beyond the above-mentioned fundamental works in Sufism, there are many Arabic compositions in both prose and poetry by other Persian Sufis. The collected poems of Maṣū'ir Ḥallāj (d. 309/921), for instance, are among the finest spiritual poetry in the Arabic tongue, written with great force and simplicity, and revealing the pure soul of this Sufi who was crucified for



making apparently blasphemous statements, such as his famous *Ana 'l-ḥaqq* (q.v.). For mystical insights, his poetry rivals that of the Arab Sufi, Ebn al-Fāreż. We should also include in the ranks of those who occasionally wrote in Arabic the names of such Persians as 'Abdallāh Anṣārī (q.v., d. 481/1088), author of the famous *Manāzel al-sā'erīn*, a work that examines the different stages of the mystical path; Shah Ne'matallāh Walī (d. 834/1431), who wrote scores of treatises on the Path in both Persian and Arabic; and 'Abd-al-Raḥmān Jāmī (d. 898/1492), whose production includes many Arabic works on Sufism, exegesis, philology, and the like, in addition to his magnificent Persian works. These few names represent only the more outstanding personalities among innumerable Persians in each century, at least up to the time of Jāmī, who wrote something on Sufism in Arabic.

In the domains of philosophy, cosmology, and the allied disciplines Iran has been a principal contributor to the intellectual history of Islam. From Moḥammad b. Zakarīyā Rāzī (d. 313/925) to Ḥājj Mollā Hādī Sabzavārī (d. 1295/1878), Iran has made great contributions to the development of Islamic philosophy. Most of the works are written in Arabic, no doubt because this language developed early into a fine vehicle for abstract speculations: The precision and flexibility of its terminology and its capacity to express philosophical notions have been instrumental in preserving its use among Muslim thinkers of Persian origin. Among the many writers in this field Abū Naṣr Moḥammad Fārābī (d. 339/950), a half Persian, should be given prime consideration because he is sometimes thought of as one of the founders of Islamic philosophy: Seeking to reconcile philosophy with faith, he wrote numerous works wherein he set forth his metaphysical notions and tried to produce an original synthesis of philosophical and gnostic ideas. In *al-Madīna al-fāzela*, one of his better-known works, he attempted to combine the political ideas of Plato, the ethical standards of Aristotle, and the Islamic notions on the State into an overall view of an "ideal commonwealth." More of a moral philosopher than a metaphysician, the previously noted historian Meskawayh also wrote a number of treatises on philosophical, primarily ethical, matters. His *Tahdīb al-aqlāq* and *Jāvidān kerad* (in Arabic in spite of its Persian origin and title, see [Andarz](#)) are works that attempt to combine Platonic, Aristotelian, and Islamic moral teachings in a synthetic whole that is most successful. His work would be emulated in later times by K'āja Naṣīr-al-dīn Ṭūsī (d. 672/1273), whose *Aqlāq-e Nāṣerī* became one of the classics of Persian literature.

With Bīrūnī (d. 442/1051), we encounter perhaps the finest investigative mind



in the history of Islamic thought. A native of K̄vārazm , he was led away to Ġazna in 407/1017 by the conquering army of the Ghaznavid Sultan Maḥmūd; once there, he spent years studying the land, people, and religions of India. The results of his research he put into his brilliant work on India called *Tahqīq mā le'l-Hend*, a comparative study of Hinduism of great value and exactness. In his *al-Āṭār al-bāqīa 'an al-qorūn al-kālīa*, Bīrūnī turns his keen mind to the chronologies of different nations with precision and objectivity.

The works of Ebn Sīnā (d. 428/1037) reveal a world view that integrates cosmological sciences and philosophy in an intellectually satisfying manner. Initially a Peripatetic philosopher, he turned more and more, as time went by, to Neoplatonism and visionary teachings. He wrote well over two hundred works, but his most famous compositions are the *Qānūn* (Canon), a vast compendium of the medical sciences, and the *Šefā'* (Remedy), a real encyclopedia of Aristotelian philosophy. The *Šefā'* is divided into four books dealing with logic, natural philosophy, mathematics, and metaphysics. It became a classic and has been studied down to recent times. It is only in his *al-Ešārāt wa'l-tanbīhāt*, his final great work written in excellent Arabic, that we see his visionary recitals, in which philosophy and mystical vision combine to reach the transcendent realities.

One of those who would be influenced by Ebn Sīnā was Šehāb-al-dīn Sohravardī, known as “al-Maqtūl” (d.578/1191), the *Šayk-e ešrāq*, who was executed by the Ayyubids at Aleppo on charges of pantheistic heresy. He wrote numerous books on Illuminationist philosophy, wherein he combined Sufism and philosophical speculation. His key work is *Ḥekmat al-ešrāq* (The wisdom of illumination), which preaches intellectual illumination that transcends the limitations of rational knowledge. With him was launched the Illuminationist philosophical tradition in Islam.

After Sohravardī, two great figures stand out in 7th/13th-century Iranian philosophical thought, Faḫr al-dīn Rāzī (d. 606/ 1209) and K̄vāja Naṣīr-al-dīn Ṭūsī (d. 672/1273). The former was a Sunni philosopher, theologian, and commentator on the Qur'ān whose questioning mind was responsible for his impressive Arabic production. His principal work, *Mafātīḥ al-ḡayb* (The keys of the invisible), has the form of Koranic commentary, but in reality it is a roving philosophical and theological work of outstanding intellectual brilliance; it has been criticized for containing everything but a commentary on the Qur'ān. As for Naṣīr-al-dīn Ṭūsī, he was a Shi'ite philosopher, theologian, and astronomer, whose many Arabic works revealed his encyclopedic mind. He was one of the



founders of Twelver Shi'ite theological thinking and his *Tajrīd al-kalām*, on philosophical and religious issues, is one of the most important intellectual works in Arabic.

It is difficult to follow a philosophical thread between Naṣīr-al-dīn Ṭūsī's day and the dawn of the Safavid epoch in Iran, but in Safavid times a new philosophical school arose in the Shi'ite world whose protagonists wrote most of their works—and, in some cases, all of them—in Arabic. Whether we examine the writings of Shaikh Bahā'-al-dīn 'Āmelī (d. 1030/1621) or of Mīr-e Dāmād (d. 1040/1630) or of the latter's pupil, the famous Mollā Ṣadrā Ṣīrāzī (d. 1050/1640), or of later sages, we find that they used Arabic. Mollā Ṣadrā's most famous book is his *Asfār*, in several volumes, which is a philosophical synthesis of Neoplatonism, Sufism, and other forms of Islamic thought. It is the mainstay of this Shi'ite philosophical school and is still used as a text to this day.

In later times Arabic continued to be used in Iran for philosophical, theological, and religious purposes. It was cultivated by the religious scholars and other learned people because of its intimate association with Islam as a faith manifesting itself in the Arabic revelation of the Qur'ān, not to mention the sayings of the Prophet and of the imams after him. Consequently, it is not surprising that Mollā Moḥammad-Bāqer Maḥlesī (d. 1111/1699-70) wrote his vast collection of Hadith, *Beḥār al-anwār*, in Arabic. And in the 14th/20th century, the Persian Shi'ite philosopher and theologian, 'Allāma Moḥammad Ḥosayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī, wrote his twenty-volume commentary on the Qur'ān, *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qor'ān*, and [Āqā Bozorg Ṭehrānī](#) his monumental bibliography *al-Darī'a elā taṣānīf al-šī'a*, in Arabic, thus attesting to the perennity of that language in Iran for traditional scholarly and intellectual purposes.

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