



BLOCHMANN, HEINRICH FERDINAND

BLOCHMANN, HEINRICH (Henry) FERDINAND, a German Orientalist and scholar of Persian language and literature who spent most of his career in India. He was born on 8 January 1838 in Dresden, the son of the owner of a printing workshop. From 1855 to 1857 he studied Oriental languages at the University of Leipzig with H. L. Fleischer. After a short stay in Paris he went to England, where he enlisted as a soldier in order to travel to India. After his discharge from the army he sought ways to make a living as a civilian in Calcutta. His knowledge of Persian brought him into contact with Captain W. Nassau Lees, then principal of the Calcutta Madrasa, an institution of higher education for Muslims that had been founded by Warren Hastings in 1782. For some time Blochmann was attached to the teaching staff of the madrasa. In 1862 he became a teacher of mathematics and physics at Doveton College, a post he retained while continuing his own studies at Calcutta University from which he received the M.A. degree in 1865. He was then reappointed to the madrasa as assistant professor. When Nassau Lees retired a few years later, Blochmann became acting principal; in 1875 he was confirmed in the position. He died at Calcutta on 13 July 1878.

During the last ten years of his short life Blochmann was astonishingly active. Beside his work at the madrasa, which flourished under his direction, he served as philological secretary for the [Asiatic Society of Bengal](#) from 1868 until his death, overseeing routine administration, the library, the collections,



and the publications of the Society. He also found time for intensive research in two different fields. The first was Persian philology, in particular lexicography and prosody. An early plan to compile a Persian-English dictionary was not realized, but Blochmann's preliminary investigations were published in the still valuable "Contributions to Persian Lexicography" (*JASB* 37, 1869, pp. 1-72). This essay contains an annotated list of the major dictionaries compiled in India and critical remarks on the Persian-Latin lexicon of J. A. Vullers (Bonn, 1854). Blochmann also commented on Persian usage in India (*este'māl-e Hend*), which he regarded as closer to the early "Turanian" form of the language than the "Iranian" Persian of the 19th century. *The Prosody of the Persians* (Calcutta, 1872) is a textbook based on treatises on meter and rhyme by Sayfī and Jāmī, which he had edited in 1867. He added notes from other works and explanations of the most important technical terms. Together with Āḡā Aḥmad-'Alī, a teacher at the madrasa and a close collaborator (cf. Storey, I/2, pp. 905-06), he published *A Treatise on the Rubā'ī Entitled Risālah i Tarānah* (Calcutta, 1867). In this little work a simplified pattern for description of the *robā'ī* meter was proposed; it took almost a century to become generally accepted (see F. Meier, *Die schöne Mahsatī*, Wiesbaden, 1963, p. 4; L. P. Elwell-Sutton, *Persian Metres*, Cambridge, 1976, p. 59). He also edited the posthumous publication of an unfinished work by Aḥmad-'Alī (*The Haft āsmān or History of the Masnawī of the Persians*, Calcutta, 1873) that had been intended as the introduction to a *taḍkera* on writers of *maṭnawīs*.

Blochmann's second field of research was the history of India, in particular Bengal, during the Islamic period. His major contribution was an edition of Abu'l-Faḡl 'Allāmī's *Ā'īn-e aḡbārī* in *Bibliotheca Indica* (1867-77), accompanied by an English translation of the first volume (1868); the two other volumes were translated by H. S. Jarrett (cf. Storey, I/1, p. 550). Numerous short articles about related manuscripts, inscriptions, and coins appeared in the *Proceedings* and the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* between 1868 and 1878.

