



CHINESE-IRANIAN RELATIONS X. CHINA IN MEDIEVAL PERSIAN LITERATURE

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In medieval writings Čīn may mean either China proper or eastern Turkestan (Ebn al-Balkī, p. 94; Ebn Kordādbēh, p. 26; Ebn Qotayba, p. 667; Mas'ūdī, *Morūj*, ed. Pellat, I, pp. 154-73); when it refers to the latter China proper is sometimes called Māčīn (contraction of Skt. Mahāčīna “great China”; see Jovaynī, ed. Qazvīnī, I, p. 186 n. 3; cf. Banākātī, pp. 322, 340 = Mahājīn; Yāqūt, *Boldān* IV, p. 407 = Māh Jīn). Nevertheless, two passages in *Tārīk-e Sīstān* (p. 207) and Jovaynī (ed. Qazvīnī, I, pp. 6-7) suggest that the terms were sometimes confused. Less frequently Čīnestān was used instead of Čīn (e.g., *Ḥodūd al-ālam*, tr. Minorsky, pp. 51, 56, 61, 79; *Šāh-nāma*, Moscow, V, p. 32 v. 415). In Persian literature the rulers of Čīn sometimes bear the title *fağfūr*, originally from Sogd. *βaypūr* (< OIr. **baga-puθra*, lit. “son of god”; Gauthiot, p. 53; Pelliot, II, pp. 652-61). More often, however, they are called *kāqān* and their queens *kātūn*, both Turkish titles (see Doerfer, III, pp. 132-37, 141) widely used in Iranian languages (cf. Sogd. *xātūn*, Khotanese *hattuna*; Doerfer, III, p. 137). In the epic accounts of wars between Iranians and Turanians, or Turks, rulers of Čīn generally figure among the allies of the latter (e.g., *Šāh-nāma*, Moscow, IV,



pp. 162-63). According to Ebn Kaldūn (p. 16) and the author of *Hodūd al-‘ālam* (tr. Minorsky, p. 84, cf p. 227), however, the *fāgfūr* of Čīn was a son of Ferēdūn. In a story recounted by Jalāl-al-Dīn Rūmī (bk. I, p. 179 vv. 3541ff.) the Chinese are represented as the epitome of worldly attachment, but in a *matnawī* by Fattāhī Nīšābūrī (p. 43) China is depicted as the embodiment of eastern mysticism.

In medieval literature Čīn was particularly renowned for certain goods that it exported, above all silk and silk textiles like brocade (e.g., *dībā-ye Čīn*; *Šāh-nāma* [Moscow, I, p. 170 v. 531]), cinnamon (*dārčīn*), musk, and porcelain, particularly painted and overglazed wares in designs called *fāgfūrī* (imperial) or (*gol-*)*morġī* (bird-[and-flower]; see [ceramics](#) xiii, xiv; cf. xi, below). Chinese art was also highly esteemed, judging from the many references in Persian poetry to Chinese painters, sculptors, pictures, images, and carvings (see *Dehḵodā*, s.v. Čīn).

In Persian poetry “Chinese” beauty, especially as ascribed to the citizens of Tarāz (Talas) and Čegel in eastern Turkestan, vied with “Greek” (*rūmī*) beauty as the ideal. Chinese princesses thus appear among the characters in Persian romances, for example, the mistress of the sandalwood dome in Neẓāmī’s *Haft peykar* (p. 222 vv. 8-9). The poets generally used such conventional phrases as *bot* (idol; See also [buddhism](#) ii), *negār* (picture), *lo‘bat* (doll), and *delbar* (sweetheart) from Čīn (e.g., Gorgānī, pp. 107 vv. 140-41, 473 v. 26). Similarly, the phrases *bot-kāna-ye Farḵār-e Čīn* (idol temple at Farḵār in China; Farḵār < Sogdian *βṛγʾr*, an adaptation of Buddhist Skt. *viḥāra* “monastery,” which it also renders in translations of Buddhist texts; Gauthiot, pp. 52-59; cf. Gershevitch, p. 54 par. 362), *negār-kāna/negārestān-e Čīn* (picture gallery of China), *bot-kāna-ye Čīn* (idol temple of China), and *ārāyeš-e Čīn* (ornament of China) were metaphors for any place or town with good-looking inhabitants.

In medieval Persian sources Mani, the founder of Manicheism, was said to have become famous in China for his painting (*Šāh-nāma* VI, p. 167 v. 11; Gorgānī, p. 48 v. 42). This tradition was no doubt connected with the popularity of his *Ardahang*, in which he had illustrated his teachings. In Persian literature this book, called *Aržang* or *Artang-e Čīn*, served as a metaphor for any beautiful illustration or picture (e.g., Gorgānī, pp. 48 v. 42, 396 v. 31). Finally, according to a line added to the *Šāh-nāma* at a later date (I, p. 38 v. 44), Chinese handwriting was one of thirty scripts that Ahrīman taught to Tahmūrāṭ.



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