



# CHODŹKO, ALEKSANDER BOREJKO

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**CHODŹKO, ALEKSANDER BOREJKO** (b. 30 August 1804, in Krzywicz, Poland in the Russian Empire [the city is now in Belarus], d. Noisy-le-Sec, near Paris, 19 December 1891), Polish poet and diplomat, the first European scholar to work on Persian folklore. Between 1820 and 1823 he studied at the university of Wilno/Vilna, the main center for Oriental languages and literatures in Poland. After being arrested in 1823 for membership in the Society of Philarets, a secret association of student patriots dedicated to Polish independence from foreign rule, he went to St. Petersburg, where he studied languages (Arabic, Persian, Turkish) at the Oriental Institute from 1824 to 1830. He then entered the Russian diplomatic service and was sent to Persia, where he served as translator and interpreter at the Russian missions in Tabrīz and Tehran and as consul at Rašt.

He remained in Persia until 1257/1841, then traveled in Greece and Italy; in 1842 he joined the Polish émigré community in Paris, where he came under the influence of the romantic poet Adam Mickiewicz (1798-1855), whose activities had already captured his interest while he was a student in Wilno. Like Mickiewicz, he became an adherent of the mystical and messianic thought of Andrzej Towiański, based partly on reverence for Napoleon Bonaparte. In 1844 Chodźko resigned from the Russian diplomatic service and in 1847 married Helena Jundzill in Switzerland. In the latter year he also applied for the chair of Persian at the Collège de France and the chair of



Turkish at the Bibliothèque Royale. Between 1852 and 1855 he worked for the French foreign ministry as an expert on Oriental affairs. In 1857, he applied for the chair of Persian at the École des Langues Orientales in Paris, but the post went to Charles Schefer (d. 1898; Léger, p. 493). In the same year Chodźko succeeded Mickiewicz as professor (*chargé de cours*) of Slavic studies at the Collège de France, where he remained until he retired in 1883; during this period he was unable to pursue his Oriental studies as actively as before, but, toward the end of his life, he returned to them.

In April 1858 [Farroḡ Khan Amīn-al-Dawla](#) placed under Chodźko's guardianship forty-two Persian students, including the painter Mozayyen-al-Dawla Ġaffārī and future mathematician Mohandes-al-Mamālek Ġaffārī, who had been sent to France for advanced education (Sarābī, p. 7; Thieury, p. 30). Eighteen of the younger Persian students were placed at the Collège de Dieppe in Normandy (Thieury, pp. 37-38). According to [Amīr\(-e\) Neẓām Garrūsī](#), then Persian ambassador in Paris, he fulfilled his trust so well that he deserved to be given extra fees from the divan to help support his family. Chodźko wanted to send his two sons, at that time fourteen and sixteen years old and gifted at languages, to Tehran to serve the Persian government (see Sohaylī Ḳvānsārī, pp. 7, 129-30, where Chodźko is referred to as His Excellency [‘Alījāh] Mīrzā Aleksander).

Opinions of his character and morals varied. The British viewed “M. Khodzko, Chancellor of the Russian Mission [at Rašt]” as a “shrewd and persevering intrigant” (memorandum by J. Campbell, Public Record Office, FO 50/37, 1835). After General Isidore Borowsky, a Pole by birth, had been killed fighting with the Persians at the siege of Herat in 1253/1838, General Barthélemy Semino married his widow and adopted his two sons. Semino accused Borowsky's testamentary executors, Chodźko and Édouard Goutte, also Polish by birth and first dragoman at the Russian mission in Tehran, of having embezzled most of Borowsky's heritage with the help of Borowsky's former employee Mīrzā ‘Abbās (Semino's private papers; copy in possession of J. Calmard; in this correspondence Chodźko is called either Alexandre Chodikoff or A. Khodzko, and Borowski is spelled Barowski; for a vague allusion to this case see Bāmdād, *Rejāl* II, p. 129; see also Utas, pp. 175-76). Nevertheless, Chodźko was decorated with the Order of the Lion and Sun (grand cordon, in diamonds) by Moḡammad Shah. Louis Léger—Chodźko's successor at the Collège de France—considered that “he had an admirable knowledge of Persian language and literature.” He was affable and hospitable toward his students and “is



remembered as a poet of refinement, a conscientious professor, an excellent man.”

Chodźko’s scholarly work on the Orient was concentrated primarily in Persian and Turkish studies. In his poetry, too, he, like many of his contemporaries, was influenced by Persian motifs and language, as in *Poemat wschodni—Derar* (An oriental poem—“The pearls”), St. Petersburg, 1829; repr. Paris, 1836. His earliest publication on Persian traditions and folk literature was *Specimens of the Popular Poetry of Persia, as Found in the Adventures and Improvisations of Kurroglou . . .*, London, 1842; 2nd ed., London, 1864. It was partly translated by George Sand under the title “Les aventures et les improvisations de Kourroglou, recueillies par Alexandre Chodzko, en Perse,” in *La revue indépendante* 6, 1843, pp. 71-84; 7, 1843, pp. 358-77. Chodźko himself, with the collaboration of A. Breulier, also translated the work into French as “Aventures et improvisations de Koûroglou, héros populaire de la Perse septentrionale,” in *La revue orientale et algérienne* 4/1, 1853, pp. 73-94, 4/2, 1853, pp. 205-35, and *La revue de l’Orient, de l’Algérie et des colonies* 1, 1855, pp. 349-66, 2, 1855, pp. 57-65; 3, 1856, pp. 107-26, 4, 1856, pp. 269-84; 5, 1857, pp. 194-214, 6, 1857, pp. 41-62, pp. 215-23. A Persian translation appears in Moḥammad-‘Alī Şawlat-e Neẓām Qūrḵān Kūčekī, *Noḵba-ye sayfīa*, ed. M. Etteḥādiya and S. Sa’dvandīān, Tehran, 1360 Š./1981, pp. 89-97 (on various editions and translations of “Kūroḡlū” in Turkish, Kurdish, Russian, Tajik, and other languages, see R. Ra’īs Niā, *Kūroḡlū dar afsāna wa tārik*, Tabriz, 1366 Š./1987). This work was followed by a series of articles on popular lore and songs that appeared in the journal *La revue orientale et algérienne*: “Le Khorāçan et son héros populaire Buniād Hézaré,” 2/2, 1852, pp. 169-87; “Chants populaires turcomans, traduits des dialectes turkoman et turk oriental,” 2/3, 1852, pp. 360-73; “Chants populaires perso-turcs,” 2/4, 1852, pp. 465-73; “Chants populaires de la Perse,” 3/2, 1852, pp. 204-21; “Chants populaires des côtes méridionales de la mer Caspienne, dialectes ghilek, taliche et mazandérani,” 3/4, 1852, pp. 441-65; “Chants historiques de l’Afghanistan en langue puchte,” in *La revue de l’Orient, de l’Algérie et des colonies* 1, 1855, pp. 440-47. In 1859 he published *Padyszach i czterech derwiszow* (The padishah and the four dervishes) in Krakow (tr. by him as “L’amour d’une fee,” *Le moniteur universel* (Paris), 25 November 1856, p. 3, 27 November 1856, p. 3, 28 November 1856, p. 3). Articles on other aspects of daily life in Persia include “Code de la femme chez les Persans” in *Le correspondant* 40 (N.S. 4), 1857, pp. 46-65.



Chodźko was especially interested in Persian theater and published “Le théâtre en Perse” in *La revue indépendante* 15, 1844, 161-208; and “Le théâtre en Perse” in *La revue de l’Orient* 6, 1845, pp. 119-35. He possessed a manuscript containing the texts of thirty-three *ta’zīa* plays, which he had acquired in Tehran in 1833; it is now ms. pers. 993 in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris. He edited, described, and translated some of these plays in several different publications: “Théâtre persan. La tête de l’Imam Hussein . . .,” *La revue de l’Orient* 6, 1845, pp. 239-62; *Djungui Chehâdet*, Paris, 1852; *Théâtre persan. Choix de téaziés ou drames*, Paris, 1878; repr. Tehran, 1976. The last contains translations of five of the plays. (For editions and French translations based on this manuscript, see Virolleaud, pp. 10, 44ff.; several of the plays have been edited by Eqbāl and Maḥjūb).

Among Chodźko’s works related to his diplomatic career and his travels in Persia were “Souvenirs diplomatiques,” which appeared in *La tribune des peuples*, the radical journal edited by Mickiewicz in Paris, between 1 and 14 September 1849: 89, p. 1, 90, pp. 1-2, 93, p. 13, 94, pp. 1-2, 96, pp. 1-2, 97, pp. 1-2, 98, pp. 1-2, 101, pp. 1-2, 102, pp. 1-2; “Le Ghilan, ou les marais Caspiens,” *Nouvelles annales des voyages* (Paris), 1849, 4, pp. 257-71; 1850, 1, pp. 193-215, 285-306, 2, pp. 61-76, 200-09, 3, pp. 68-93; repr. Paris, 1850 (tr. S. Sahāmī as *Sarzamīn-e Gilān*, Tehran, 1354 Š./1975); “Excursion aux Pyles Caspiennes,” *Nouvelles annales des voyages*, 1850, pp. 280-308; “Les adoreurs du feu et les sources de naphte de Baku,” *Le moniteur universel*, 3 August 1856, p. 3; “De la lithographie en Perse,” *Le moniteur universel*, 21 September 1857, p. 4. While in Persia he seems also to have taken a particular interest in silkworm cultivation there: “Perse. Industrie séricole,” *La revue de l’Orient* 1, 1843, pp. 326-32; *De l’élève des vers à soie en Perse*, Paris, 1843; repr. Paris, 1851.

Among his works on eastern languages and philology were *Grammaire persane ou principes de l’iranien moderne*, Paris, 1852, rev. ed. Paris, 1883; *Le drogman turc*, Paris, 1854; and “Études philologiques sur la langue kurde (dialecte de Soléimanié),” *JA*, sér. 5, 9, 1857, pp. 297-356.

Other literary works and translations include “Le déisme des Wahhabis expliqué par eux-mêmes. Mémoire extrait du manuscrit des voyages de Mirza-Mohammad-AliKhan, dernier ambassadeur de Perse en France,” *JA*, sér. 4, 11, 1848, pp. 168-86; “Le Déçâtir, code religieux des Mahabadiens,” *La revue orientate et algérienne* 2/3, 1852, pp. 257-80; “Pend-namé. La lettre des conseils . . . par Hassan Ali Khan” in *La revue orientate et américaine* (Paris) 6, 1861, pp. 69-78; “Contes en vers de Kaani . . . ,” *La revue orientate et américaine* 7, 1862,



pp. 165-73; “L’enseigne d’un boucher sentimental en Perse . . . ,” *Bulletin de l’Athénée orientale* (Paris) 1, 1881, pp. 168-86; “L’aventure du vizir du Khan de Lenkeran” in *Bulletin de l’Athénée orientale* 3, 1883, pp. 81-101 (after W. H. D. Haggard and G. Le Strange, *The Vizir of Lankuran. A Persian Play*, London, 1882).

Chodźko’s numerous translations of folk tales, poetry, and dramas from Persian, Turkish, and various dialects were drawn from a great variety of manuscripts that he collected in Iran (some of them were actually copied for him as “Mīrzā Aleksander”); these manuscripts are now available at the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris. Although the merits of his pioneering works were seldom recognized by his colleagues (contemporary authors and diplomats like J. A. de Gobineau, J. B. Nicolas, A. Querry, and A. Barbier de Meynard do not mention him), Jules Mohl praised his contributions on Persian theater (see *JA*, 1845, pp. 41-42; repr. in Mohl, *Vingt-sept ans d’histoire des études orientales*, Paris, 1879, pp. 183-84). Further evaluations of Chodźko’s contributions on *ta’zīa-k’vānī* have been made by Ernest Renan in “Les téaziés de la Perse,” *Le journal des débats* (Paris), 9 July 1878, p. 3 (repr. in Renan, *Nouvelles études d’histoire religieuse*, new ed., Paris, 1899, pp. 185-215) and recently by J. Calmard (*Le monde iranien et l’Islam* 2, 1974, p. 88; idem, “Muharram Ceremonies and Diplomacy (a Preliminary Study),” in E. Bosworth and C. Hillenbrand, eds., *Qajar Iran*, Edinburgh, 1983, p. 217; and P. J. Chelkowski, “Bibliographical Spectrum,” in Chelkowski, ed., *Ta’ziyeh. Ritual and Drama in Iran*, New York, 1979, pp. 259-69. The most controversial of Chodźko’s works remains his *Grammaire persane*. A rather favorable review by Étienne Quatremère (*Journal des savants*, 1852, pp. 696-707, 1853, pp. 370-82, 631-47) was severely criticized by Mirza Kasem Beg (*JA*, sér. 5/2, 1853, pp. 79-85, sér. 5/3, 1854, pp. 82-89; see also Chodźko’s response, *JA*, sér. 5/3, 1854, pp. 538-48).

Chodźko, who is sometimes confused with his cousin Leonard Borejko Chodźko (1800-1871), librarian at the Sorbonne and author of numerous works on Poland, was a correspondent of the Academy of Krakow and vice-president of the Society of Polish History. In Paris he was one of the founders of the Société de linguistique and a member of the Société asiatique; he was named Chevalier de la Légion d’Honneur in 1861. His publications in the field of Slavic studies are mostly on lexicography, folklore, and legends.



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Further biobibliographical data on Chodźko may be found in the archives of the Collège de France; in Semino’s private papers; in correspondence kept at the Bibliothèque Nationale (catalogues of new acquisitions, 1946-57. Manuscripts collected by Chodźko include (numbers refer to Blochet, *Supplément persan* \*\*) those given by Chodźko on 20 March 1873: nos. 993 (33



*ta'zīa* dramas), 994 (*Kūroglū-nāma* with Persian translation copied for Mīrzā Aleksander in 1250/1834), 995 (75 letters addressed to Chodźko, apparently while he was Russian consul in Tehran), 996 (popular songs of Khorasan with Polish translation and notes), 997 (poems and songs in Gīlānī, Āzerī, and other dialects). Also collected by Chodźko but purchased by the library from a bookseller on 22 February 1892 were nos. 1125-35 (various manuscripts of classical poetry, popular songs, tales, mystical works, official correspondence, and so on) and 1135 (233 folios, containing papers relative to Chodźko, as well as some Safavid documents (see [carmelites](#)).