



DARĪ

DARĪ, name given to the New Persian literary language at a very early date and widely attested in Arabic (e.g., Eṣṭakrī, p. 314; Moqaddasī [Maqdesī], p. 335; Ebn Ḥawqal, p. 490) and Persian texts since the 10th century. The Persian translator of Ṭabarī's *Tafsīr* (between 350/961-62 and 365/975-76; I, p. 5), Abū 'Alī Moḥammad Bal'amī in his continuation of Ṭabarī's *Tārīḵ* (352/963-64; Gryaznevich and Boldyrev, p. 53), Keykāvūs Rāzī in his *Zarātošt-nāma* (before 368/978, according to Rempis), and Ḥakīm Meysarī in his *Dāneš-nāma* (367-70/978-81; apud Lazard, *Premiers poètes* I, p. 182) all claimed to be writing in *darī*. Ferdowsī (*Šāh-nāma*, ed. Moscow, VIII, p. 254), in his account of the origins of *Kalīla wa Demna*, reported that the Arabic version had been translated by Bal'amī into *darī* on the order of the Samanid Naṣr II (301-31/914-43). The term *darī* also referred to a spoken language as early as the time of Jāḥeẓ (mid-9th century; p. 13); Arabic historians and geographers of the following century also used it in that sense (e.g., Mas'ūdī, p. 78; Moqaddasī, p. 335).

Darī was contrasted to Pahlavi, sometimes when the latter term designated literary Middle Persian, as in the *Zarātošt-nāma* (p. 2) and the *Šāh-nāma* (Moscow, VIII, p. 254), and sometimes when it referred to Medo-Parthian dialects, as in Mas'ūdī (p. 78) and probably also in the *Šāh-nāma* (I, p. 44, in connection with the word *bīvar* "ten thousand"). It was sometimes also distinguished from *pārsī*. Moqaddesī (p. 259) mentioned *darī* as one of the Iranian dialects "that together are known as *pārsī*." A century later Keykāvūs b. Eskandar (in ca. 475/1082-83; p. 208) advised letter writers to avoid the use



of “pure *pārsī*” (*pārsī-e moṭlaq*), that is, free of Arabic words, “for it is displeasing, especially *pārsī-edarī*, which is not usual,” implying the existence of other kinds of *pārsī*. *Darī* thus seems to have been a variety of *pārsī*, as is confirmed by the expression *pārsī-e darī* (Ar. *al-fārsīya al-dārīya*) frequently found in early text. The variant *pārsī o darī*, which also occurs in Persian manuscripts (e.g., *Šāh-nāma* VIII, p. 254), is a distortion, as Parvīz Kānlarī correctly noted (p. 273).

The original meaning of the word *darī* is given in a notice attributed to Ebn al-Moqaffa’ (Ebn al-Nadīm, ed. Tajaddod, p. 15; K̄vārazmī, *Mafātīḥ al-’olūm*, pp. 116-17; Ḥamza Eṣfahānī, pp. 67-68; Yāqūt, *Boldān* IV, p. 846). This notice, which probably reflected the linguistic situation in Persia at the end of the Sasanian period, includes mention of *pahlavī*, literally, “the Parthian language” (or the dialects that grew out of it), *pārsī*, and *darī*. According to Ebn al-Moqaffa’, *pārsī* was “the language spoken by the *mowbeds* (priests), scholars, and the like; it is the language of the people of Fārs.” It is obvious that this language was none other than Middle Persian, traditionally known as Pahlavi. As for *darī*, “It is the language of the cities of Madā’en; it is spoken by those who are at the king’s court. [Its name] is connected with presence at court. Among the languages of the people of Khorasan and the east, the language of the people of Balk is predominant.” This notice has given rise to considerable discussion. The etymology given for the name is clear: It is derived from the word for *dar* (court, lit., “gate”). *Darī* was thus the language of the court and of the capital, [Ctesiphon](#). On the other hand, it is equally clear from this passage that *darī* was also in use in the eastern part of the empire, in Khorasan, where it is known that in the course of the Sasanian period Persian gradually supplanted Parthian and where no dialect that was not Persian survived. The passage thus suggests that *darī* was actually a form of Persian, the common language of Persia. If that conclusion is correct, what was the relationship between *pārsī* and *darī*, and how did the latter term come to be applied specifically to literary New Persian at the time of its emergence?

On the basis of Moqaddasī’s report (p. 335) that *darī* was the chancery language in Bukhara, it has been thought that it was from the beginning a kind of formal Persian. Kānlarī (pp. 280-81) put forth the hypothesis that *darī* had been an official and administrative language of the Sasanian court, had become established in the east by officials of the Sasanian kingdom, and had thus become the chancery language of Khorasan. There is no doubt, however, that the official and administrative language of the Sasanians was not *darī* but



Middle Persian (so-called Pahlavi). Ebn al-Moqaffa's account clearly indicates that *darī* was a spoken language, and it is obviously as a spoken language that it spread to the east. The founders of Persian literature, who were poets, rather than prose writers, naturally resorted to the language that they spoke. Moqaddasī's statement was made at a time when *darī* had already been in literary use for nearly a century.

New information on the dialectology of Persia at the beginning of the Islamic period now permits a clearer understanding. It is known that ancient Judeo-Persian texts, probably originating in southern Persia (cf. Lazard, 1968), represent local dialects clearly different from those of Khorasan and Transoxania, from which literary Persian originally developed. The recent discovery in Mašhad of a manuscript of the *Qor'ān-e Qods*, a translation of the Qur'ān into a Persian dialect related to early Judeo-Persian, confirms the dialectological significance of details already known from the latter. The work apparently originated in Sīstān in the 11th century. One of the most interesting features common to this *Qor'ān* and early Judeo-Persian is the abundance of words that were well known in literary Middle Persian and unknown in literary New Persian, evidence that there were important differences between the common language spoken in the south and that in use in the north. The former, as represented by literary Middle Persian, retained most its ancient form; the latter evolved from the same Persian language, which had spread throughout the north, but evinced the influence of the dialects that it had supplanted there, particularly Parthian. It thus diverged noticeably from the original form. Both were called *pārsī* (Persian), but it is very likely that the language of the north, that is, the Persian used on former Parthian territory and also in the Sasanian capital, was distinguished from its congener by a new name, *darī* ([language] of the court). It was only natural that several centuries later literary Persian, based on the speech of the northeast, bore the same name.

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(GILBERT LAZARD)