



ENŠĀ'

ENŠĀ' (composition), the process of creating or composing something as well as the result of this process and the rules of the art; it denotes a genre of prose literature, copies, drafts, or specimens of official and private correspondence. *Enšā'* collections are extant in Arabic, Persian, and Turkic (Ottoman and Eastern). The authors or compilers, when they are known, frequently were high officials: scribes, secretaries, (*kottāb*, *monšīs*) in the secretariat (*dīvān al-rasā'el* or *dīvān al-enšā'*; see DĪVĀN). Their aim in composing or compiling works of *enšā'* was to show what and how cultivated men should write to different individuals or groups on different occasions; thus, their readers may have been chancery clerks or anybody else who wanted to improve his prose style. Besides several big collections (some of which are enumerated in the bibliography) others, often more limited in scope, were made for private purposes. The compilers of these latter collections are mostly not known, the manuscripts are often listed under general headings like *monšā'āt*, *enšā'*, or others.

Since the collections were established with a literary view and not an administrative one, the texts included in them cannot be compared to "original" documents. All the formal characteristics of documents are lacking (e.g. the size of paper, margins). This makes the use of *enšā'* for diplomatics an uneasy task. Furthermore, in many cases, personal names, place names, dates and so on have been replaced by "so and so" (*folān*): for the author, not the individual case, but the stylistic way to treat it, was most important. This explains why the compilers included copies of documents and letters really



issued, written, or received as well as clearly fictitious texts. Only a very careful analysis of a given item can disclose to which category it belongs, the degree of generalization attained by deleting personal names and other individual features being a clue.

The part of “fictitious” or “ideal” texts as opposed to “real” ones seems to differ in the various collections, ranging from probably very high (Meyhanī’s *Dastūr-e dabīrī*) to probably very low (*al-Moktārāt men al-rasā’el*). Some works are restricted to stylistic directions or guidelines (how to address oneself to a person of a given standing), others seem to be copy-books of “real” documents, but mixtures of both are frequent. Yet, “fictitious” texts should not be disregarded, since they reflect the idea the authors had of procedures, offices, and social hierarchies.

The lack of original documents of historical value for some periods in the history of Muslim Persia has made historians turn to *enšā’* collections at an early date, at least since the times of Vasilii Barthold (q.v.). The focus has been on administrative history, and thus, on letters and documents written or issued on behalf of a ruler, “outgoing mail” from the view of the central administration. There is good reason for this, since chancery terminology and related issues can well be observed in *enšā’* texts. On the other hand, letters written to officials in the *dīvān* have been neglected. These are by no means what we would call “private,” but include the following subjects: complaints, letters of testimony for the good (bad) behavior of an official, thanks (for benefits), and petitions of all kinds. These texts are inserted because “incoming mail” was naturally part of any official’s job, and they themselves often had to compose “incoming” letters when they were on duty in the provinces. Thus, they offer important insight into the relationship between the ruling and the ruled, the center and the periphery. Real “private” letters form a third group, their subjects being congratulations, condolence, Nowrūz greetings and so on, but mostly the basic fact of all correspondence, namely the absence of the addressee. There is no clear boundary between the literary genres of *enšā’* and epistolography.

Persian *enšā’* was modeled on Arabic precedents, and the first *enšā’* collections of importance for Persian history are written in Arabic (for the Buyid period). In the Great Seljuq period, Persian was made the language of official documents, and from this time on, *enšā’* collections from Persia are generally in Persian. *Enšā’* style tended to become more ornate over time, following the general evolution; late 12th-century collections offer elaborate specimens of



ornate prose style (Bāḡdādī's *at-Tawassol ela'l-tarassol*, Rašīd-al-Dīn Vaṭṭvāt's *Nāmahā*). Besides Persia and Central Asia, Persian *enšā'* is useful for Asia Minor (Rūm Seljuqs and early Ottomans) and India. Most of the collections, even some of the most important ones, remain in manuscript. Research has concentrated on earlier collections (down to the Timurid period); works from the Safavid and later periods have received less attention.

See also [CORRESPONDENCE](#).

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