



FĀL-NĀMA

FĀL-NĀMA, a book of presages and omens (see [DIVINATION](#)). The narrower and more common use of the term, equivalent to “bibliomancy,” is confined to texts used as material for divination by the reader directly or through a fortune-teller. These texts may also contain their own manuals of interpretations, a kind of users’ guide. More loosely, the term sometimes appears on the titles of manuals of different kinds and techniques of divination. Three examples of this general use of the term in relation to some of the different forms of divination will be enumerated briefly before examining bibliomancy itself in greater detail (for other manuals used in other forms of divination like *jafr* and *raml* see under their individual entries and the references in the bibliography given below).

FĀL-NĀMAS AND GENERAL METHODS OF DIVINATION

1. Astrological manuals. This is the broadest category of all, with a vast literature of its own (see [ASTROLOGY AND ASTRONOMY IN IRAN](#); [EQTĪĀRĀT](#)). Ebn al-Nadīm (q.v.), for example, mentions several books with *Fāl* as part of the title, including Abū Sahl b. Nawbakht’s (q.v.) *Ketāb al-fa’l al-nojūmī* (Ebn al-Nadīm, ed. Tajaddod, p. 333; tr. Dodge, II, p. 651). Horoscopes, of which there are some finely executed specimens including the personal horoscope of the Timurid ruler Eskandar b. ‘Omar Šayk (r. 812-17/1409-14) called *Ketāb-e walādat-e Eskandar* (Keshavarz, pp. 396-402) are similarly excluded here, although the distinction between horoscopes and books of omens is often a fine one. Astrological lore and planetary figures were also used in bibliomancy, as in the case of the illustrated *fāl-nāma* discussed below.



2. Ornithomancy (*zajr* and *taṭayyor*), i.e., divination through the observance of the pattern of flight and behavior of birds. This itself is part of the wider category of divination through the behavior of animals in general (see Fahd, "Iyāfa," for an account of the semantic development of these terms). In Persian usage *taṭayyor* became a general synonym for an ill omen. In his list of works on omens, Ebn al-Nadīm refers to a *ketāb zajr al-fors* (Ebn al-Nadīm, ed. Tajaddod, p. 376; tr. Dodge, II, p. 736). The best known *Fāl-nāmas* in this category are the two short satirical tracts by Obayd Zākānī, *Fāl-nāma-ye ṭoyūr* and *Fāl-nāma-ye woḥuṣ* (Maḥjūb), which can be described as mock-auguries poking fun at auguries and those naive enough to be duped by them, just as a third tract that he composed on planetary divination, *Fāl-nāma-ye borūj*, has been called an "anti-horoscope" (Sprachman, p. 236). It should be added that even now itinerant fortune-tellers often carry along with them sparrows and budgerigars in small cages and train them to pick a card inscribed with a *fāl* (usually based on some verses from Ḥāfeẓ) with their beaks from a selection, each placed individually in small envelopes.

3. Scapulimancy or omoplatoscopy (Ar. *ʿelm al-katef*, *ʿelm al-aktāf*, *maʿrefat al-aktāf*; Pers. *kat-bīnī*, *šāna-æenāsī*, *ʿelm-e šāna*, *fāl-e šāna*; see Fahd, "Katif"), i.e., divination using the shoulder blades of sheep or goats. One of the earliest references to this practice is in the anonymous *Mojmal al-tawārīk waʿl-qeṣaṣ* composed in 520/1126 (ed. Bahār, p. 103). A chapter is also devoted to it in Abū Bakr Moṭahhar Jamālī Yazdī's *Farroḳ-nāma*, dated 580/1185 (pp. 243-48); and four manuals of uncertain date on *ʿelm-e šāna* are listed in Storey (II/3, p. 493). Recent scholarship on medieval Arabic and Latin manuscripts has done much to clarify the lines of transmission of manuals of scapulimancy in the medieval world and the scattered allusions to it in writers and regions as wide apart as Jāḥeẓ and Chaucer and Central Asia and Andalusia (Burnett, no. XIII, p. 32 n. 7).

FĀL-NĀMAS AND BIBLIOMANCY

Even within this more specific use of *fāl* and *fāl-nāma*, a distinction must be made between sacred and poetic texts, sometimes appended by explanatory material for their use in divination, and books and pamphlets designed solely for divination. The simplest method, practiced in the west with copies of Homer, Virgil, and the Bible (*sortes Homericae*, *Virgilianae*, and *biblicae*) and in Persia with the Qurʾān and Ḥāfeẓ, was by opening the book at random and drawing guidance or inspiration for divination from the first verse or passage on the page.



Bibliomancy with the Qur'ān. As in most questions relating to divination, particularly when sacred texts were also involved, religious opinion differed on what was or was not permissible in Islam. In the case of the Qur'ān, seeking guidance from God on specific issues (*estekāra*) was usually regarded as licit, but using the Qur'ān as a device for augury (*tafa''ol*) was disapproved of (Omidsalar, p. 441; for Christian parallels, see von Dobschütz, p. 611; Donaldson, p. 197). But the border-line between augury and resorting to the Qur'ān in search of personal consolation is often blurred, as in the account of the *tafa''ol* on the Qur'ān by the famous Il-khanid minister, Šams-al-Dīn Jovaynī shortly before his execution in 683/1284 (Maḥmūd b. Moḥammad Āqsarāī, *Mosāmerat al-aḳbār*, ed. O. Turan as *Mūsāmeret ül-Ahbār: Mogollar Zamanında Türkiye Selçukları Tarihi*, Ankara, 1944, p. 144).

There is a great variety of koranic *fāl-nāmas*, both in verse and prose (e.g., the following manuscripts in the Central Library of Tehran University: nos. 4360 and 8846 in verse and 4995/2 in prose; see also Storey I/1 p. 55-56). There is a full description accompanied by illustrations from a 19th century koranic *Fāl-nāma* in the Nasser D. Khalili Collection (Savage-Smith, 1997, p. 156). The text provides descriptions of different forms of *estekāra*, including one attributed to the 19th century Shi'ite *mojtahed* Ḥājj Mirzā Ḥasan Āštīānī (q.v.). Some printed editions of the Qur'ān have a *fāl-nāma* appended to them, and some merely indicate whether the particular page is auspicious or not by inserting 'good' or 'bad' or 'in between' at the top of the page.

Bibliomancy with the Divān of Ḥāfezā. Although bibliomancy using poetical works is now closely associated with the *Divān* of Ḥāfez, the tradition was long-established before his time. Abu'l-Faḥ Bostī (q.v.), for example, describes how he opened at random (*ketāb-ī . . . bāz kardam*) a volume of poems in Arabic by way of divination (*bar sabīl-e tafa''ol*) to see whether he should proceed on his journey (Abu'l-Šaraf Nāṣeḥ Jorfādaqānī, *Tarjama-ye Tārīḳ-e yamīnī*, ed. J. Še'ār, Tehran, 1345 Š./1966, pp. 25-26). Moḥammad 'Awfī cites the *divān* of Sayyed Ḥasan Ġaznavī (see AŠRAF ĠAZNAVĪ) being used for bibliomancy ('Awfī, *Lobāb* I, p. 59) and there is a manuscript of a *fāl-nāma* of the *Robā'iyāt* attributed to Abū Sa'īd Abi'l-Ḳayr (q.v.) in the Mar'ašī Library in Qom (no. 7341/3).

One of the earliest references to the use of Ḥāfez in bibliomancy occurs in Abū Bakr Ṭehrānī's *Ketāb-e Dīārbakriya*, written between 875/1469 and 883/1478 (ed. N. Lugal and F. Sümer, 2nd ed., Tehran 1356 Š./1977, preface, pp. 5-6, text, pp. 363-64) where the epithet *Lesān-e ḡayb* ("the Tongue of the Unseen") is



used about him. In his account of Ḥāfez, Edward G. Browne gives a succinct description of different methods of bibliomancy used in the case of the *Dīvān*, including the use of numerical tables, and provides examples of historically famous instances of auguries drawn from the *Dīvān* (Browne, *Lit. Hist. Persia* III, pp. 311-19). A list of manuscripts and printed editions of *Fāl-nāmas* of the *Dīvān* may be found in Mehrdād Niknām's *Ketāb-æenāsī-e Ḥāfez* (Tehran, 1367 Š./1988, index).

WORKS DESIGNED SPECIFICALLY FOR DIVINATION

Illustrated Fāl-nāmas. A poetic simile by the famous Ḡaznavīd panegyrist Manūčehrī (p. 3), comparing the birds in the trees to fortune tellers (*fālgūyān*) spreading in front of them their manuals, filled with images (*por az taṣwīr daftarhā*), suggests that pictorial *Fāl-nāmas* may have had a long history. Most surviving examples, however, are from the Safavid period and are extant only in fragmentary form. There are, however, a few notable exceptions, some of which have been published in recent years such as the 16th century *Fāl-nāma* now in the Museum voor Volkenkunde, Rotterdam (Ros). An account of this manual, written before it was acquired by the Museum, includes an inventory of its 35 illustrations with their accompanying explanatory verses (Kahl, p. 120). Taken together, they show the syncretic nature of the pictorial tradition. The seven planets each have their individual illustrations; five pictures deal with miraculous episodes in the life of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭāleb (Plate I; see 'ALĪ B. ABĪ ṬĀLEB ii. 'ALĪ AS SEEN BY THE COMMUNITY), two are on the eighth Imam, 'Alī al-Rezā (q.v.), referred to in the verses accompanying the illustrations solely by his epithet, "Šāh-e Korāsān" (Plate II). Most of the remaining illustrations deal with episodes taken from the Qur'ān as elaborated in the *Esrā'īlyāt* or *qeṣas-al-anbīyā* (stories of the prophets) literature (Plate IV). There are also single illustrations of the Day of Judgment (Plate III), the Ka'ba, and the plight of the hapless lover, Majnūn. Most of the verses accompanying the pictures are of course intended to instill optimism, but certain images, like that of Joseph in the well, or the planet Saturn (Kahl, p. 124, pp. 138-39), provide convenient occasions for advice on fortitude in the face of predicted calamities. Another, similar, example is the Dresden *Fāl-nāma* (Rühdranz).

Fāl-nāmas and their "authors." Like other forms of arcane literature, in order to enhance their prestige and credibility, books of oracles often claimed mythical or historical figures as their author or progenitor. One example is the *Fāl-nāma-ye Dāniāl* (see DĀNĪĀL-E NABĪ), with a preface written by 'Alī-Rezā Monajjem Šīrazī in 1064/1636 (MS. Qom, Mar'ašī Library, no. 7016/2).



Bozorgmehr (see [BOZORGMEHR-E BOĞTAGĀN](#)), the legendary Sasanian vizier, is claimed as the author of *Zamīr-e kosrowānī* (Storey II/3 pp. 493-4). The British Library manuscript (Add. 6591) of this work, written in 884/1480 is probably the oldest extant manuscript of a *fāl-nāma*. The same volume also includes a koranic *fāl-nāma* supposedly by Imam Jaʿfar al-Šādeq (Donaldson, p. 196). Its preamble describes how the Imam had spent fifty years composing it and how it had been highly prized by the caliphs before being presented to Sultan Maḥmūd, who resorted to it constantly (Rieu, *Persian Manuscripts* II, pp. 800-801, fols. 1-18; 122-25). There are other copies of the same *fāl-nāma* attributed to Imam Jaʿfar al-Šādeq in various collections (see *al-Darīʿa* XVI, p. 98, no. 85). There are also *fāl-nāmas* attributed to historical figures, including one supposedly prepared for the Caliph Harūn al-Rašīd by his vizier, Yaḥyā Barmakī (Storey II/3 p. 495 no. 4.) However, the greatest number of the extant manuscripts are attributed to the Shiʿite Imams. The list of *fāl-nāmas* in standard bibliographical sources (e.g., Storey and *al-Darīʿa*) should be supplemented by lists and references in recently catalogued collections (Keshavarz; Savage-Smith, 1997).

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Plate I. While still in his cradle, the infant ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭāl eb slays a dragon. The poet comments on this and adds the reassuring comment that success and victory will be on the side of the reader since ‘Alī has looked favorably upon this fāl. After Kahl, p. 131, no. 19; courtesy of the Museum voor Volkenkunde, Rotterdam.

Plate II. The poem informs the reader that since the shah of Khorasan, “the



supreme leader of mankind and the jinn” (i.e., the Eighth Imam, & #191;Alī Reżā), has appeared in his fāl, his enemy, even if of the stature of a dīv, will be destroyed at once. After Kahl, pp. 125-26, no 10; courtesy of the Museum voor Volkenkunde, Rotterdam.

Plate III. This illustration depicts the Day of Judgment and is therefore cautionary in tone. The picture contains many symbols associated with the theme of the day of reckoning, including Gabriel weighing human deeds in the Scales of Justice (mīzan-e ‘adl). The Prophet, with ‘Alī and his two sons, Ḥasan and Ḥosayn, sit at the sides ready to intercede on behalf of those being judged. The reader is advised that since the Day of Judgment has come up in this fāl, journeys should be avoided and an attitude of penitance and patience adopted in order to avoid potential disappointments and regrets. After Kahl, pp. 137-38, no. 30; courtesy of the Museum voor Volkenkunde, Rotterdam.

Plate IV. Moses striking the giant ‘Ūj (the biblical Og) with his staff on his anklebone and killing him, as elaborated in the “stories of the prophets” (cf. Ṭabarī, tr., III, pp. 81-83). The verses convey a comforting message to the reader: The fact that Moses and Og have appeared in your fāl confirms the wretched plight of your enemies. Follow God and the religious path, and you will never be afflicted by sorrow. After Kahl, p. 135, no. 25; courtesy of the Museum voor Volkenkunde, Rotterdam.