



# FEHREST II. MIDDLE PERSIAN TO ARABIC TRANSLATIONS.

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## ii. IRANIAN MATERIAL IN THE *FEHREST*

The *Fehrest* gives ample testimony to the knowledge of pre-Islamic Persia and its literature in classical Islamic civilization, but unfortunately only a minute sample of the numerous Persian books listed by Ebn al-Nadīm is extant.

In the chapter on languages and scripts the author quotes, among other things, a passage from Ebn al-Moqaffa' (q.v.) about the languages of the Persians (Ebn al-Nadīm, ed. Tajaddod, p. 15; all subsequent textual references are to this edition), followed by a description of their various styles of script, some of them illustrated by tables, unfortunately hopelessly corrupt in the existing editions (pp. 15-16). Ebn al-Moqaffa' is apparently also the source for an accurate description of the Middle Persian system of ideograms (p. 17), illustrated by the Pahlavi spellings BSLY' (for *gōšt*, "meat") and LḤM' (for *nān*, "bread"). The same chapter contains descriptions of Manichaean (p. 19) and Sogdian (p. 20) scripts, both illustrated by their alphabets.

In the chapter on scribes and bureaucrats there is a biography of Ebn al-Moqaffa' and a list of the Persian books that he translated into Arabic, among them *Ḳoḏāy-nāma*, *Ā'īn-nāma* (q.v.), *Ketāb Mazdak*, *Ketāb al-tāj fī sīrat Anūšerwān* (p. 132). This is followed by a shorter entry on Abān Lāḥeqī, and the books that he translated into Arabic rhymed couplets, among them *Kalīla*



*wa Demna*, *Sīrat Ardašīr*, *Sīrat Anūšerwān*, *Belawhar wa-Būdāsaf* (see [BARLAAM AND IOSAPH](#)). The author returns to Abān Lāḥeqī in the chapter on poetry (p. 186), adding to the previous list of translations the titles *Ketāb Sendbād* and *Ketāb Mazdak*.

At the beginning of the chapter on philosophy Ebn al-Nadīm gives, mainly from Abū Sahl b. Nawbak̄t and Abū Mašār Balkī (qq.v.), a for the most part legendary account of the scientific knowledge of the ancient Persians and of how some primeval Persian writings on occult matters had recently been unearthed in Isfahan (pp. 299-302). This is followed by a somewhat more factual account of Persian translations of Greek books made during the Sasanian period and of how some of the books on logic and medicine which had formerly been translated into Persian were later rendered from Persian into Arabic by Ebn al-Moqaffa‘ “and others” (pp. 302-3). A few pages later (p. 305) there is a long list of those who translated from Persian to Arabic, but with few details of titles. Some books translated from Persian, or from “Indian” via Persian, are mentioned at the end of the chapter on medicine (p. 360).

The chapter devoted to what the author rather dismissively calls “bed-time stories” (*asmār*) and “fables” (*korafā*) contains a large amount of Persian material. Ebn al-Nadīm begins (p. 363) by mentioning *Ketāb hazār afsān* (q.v.; “Book of the thousand stories”), evidently the ancestor of the *Thousand and One Nights*, and gives a summary of its well-known frame story about Queen Šahrāzād. Several other books of similar nature are named. Concerning *Kalīla wa Demna* and *Ketāb Sendbād al-ḥakīm* Ebn al-Nadīm says that it is debated whether they were composed by the Indians or the Persians; of the latter he knew two versions, a long one and a short one (p. 364). There follows a list of ten books of “Persian bed-time stories,” including *Ketāb hazār dastān* (sic; different from the aforementioned *Hazār afsān*); *the remaining titles are otherwise unknown. The next section gives titles of books dealing with lives of Persian kings, including a book about Rostam and Esfandīār* (q.v.), translated by Jabala b. Sālem; *one about Bahrām Čōbīn* (q.v.), from the same translator; *a book about Šahrīzād* (read: Šahrbarāz?) and *Abarwēz*; *a Ketāb kārnamaj fī sīrat Anūšerwān*; *a story about Dārā* (see [DĀRĀ\[B\] ii](#)) and the golden idol; *one about Bahrām* (see [BAHRĀM iii](#)) and *Narseh*; and some of the titles already mentioned in the section on Ebn al-Moqaffa‘. Under the following heading “books of the Indians about fables” etc., he again discusses *Kalīla wa Demna*, saying that it was “interpreted” by Ebn al-Moqaffa‘ “and others” and rendered into



*Arabic verse by Abān Lāḥeqī and one ‘Alī b. Dā’ūd. Then he adds that “the poets of the Persians (al-‘ajam) have reworked this book in poetry and translated it into the Persian language in Arabic (script?),” referring, no doubt, to Rūdakī; this appears to be the only explicit reference to Neo-Persian literature in the whole of the Fehrest. The Indian list continues with reference to the long and short versions of the book of Sendbād, the book of Būdāsaf and Belawhar, etc.*

In the chapter on anonymous works of assorted content there is a section on “Persian, Indian, Byzantine, and Arab books on sexual intercourse in the form of titillating stories” (p. 376), but the Persian works are not separated from the others; the list includes a “Book of Bahrām-doḡt on intercourse.” This is followed by books of Persians, Indians, etc. on fortune telling, books of “all nations” on horsemanship and the arts of war, then (p. 377) on horse doctoring and on falconry, some of them specifically attributed to the Persians. Then (pp. 377-78) we have books of wisdom and admonition by the Persians and others, including many examples of Persian *andarz* (q.v.) literature, e.g., various books attributed to Anūšervān or to Ardašīr (q.v.).

The chapter on non-Muslim sects, after detailed accounts of the Ḥarrānians and Manichaeans, discusses various religious movements with their roots in the Iranian past, among them Ḳorramīya and Mazdakites (pp. 405-6), the followers of Bābak Ḳorramī (pp. 406-7) and of Abū Moslem Ḳorāsānī (pp. 407-8; qq.v.).

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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given in the text.