Encyclopædia Iranica

Article by **Johannes Thomas Pieter de Bruijn**

Published: December 15, 1999
Last Updated: May 28, 2013

FICTION, I

FICTION.

i. TRADITIONAL FORMS

This article deals with all kinds of stories written for specifically literary purposes up to the time when narrative prose in the modern style, derived from the West, was introduced in Persia. Excluded from this survey are folklore and fairy tales, unless they play a part in classical works. The general Persian word for a narrative is *dāstān* (q.v.). In the *Šāh-nāma* the major stories are called *dāstān*s, and the same term serves in later narrative poetry to indicate the actual story as opposed to the introductory sections (usually designated as *āḡāz-e dāstān*). In modern usage the word came to mean a novel or a short story (*dāstān-e kūtāh*).

The Arabic words *ḥekāyat* and *qeṣṣa* are usually restricted to short anecdotes and tales which were used as illustrations in didactical works (on the original meanings of these Arabic terms see Pellat, p. 367). Other terms, like *afsāna* (most often used in the sense of a fairy tale) and *rewāyat*, were also used in classical literature, but without much consistency.

The concept of “fictionality,” in the sense of narrative not based on reality, was not much discussed in traditional criticism. However, in the literatures of the Muslims in general, a tendency may be noticed to disapprove of fiction if it could not be linked to what was considered to be historical fact, which of course included sacred traditions like the stories told in the Qurʾān, the lives of

prophets and Sufi saints, and legendary accounts of ancient history. In classical Arabic literature this led to the virtual exclusion of the narrative, although the Arabs did produce a rich novelistic literature of a semi-popular kind. In Persia, on the other hand, narration has always been fully accepted as a form of polite literature.

If the notion of fictionality is nevertheless taken into consideration here, this is because it is needed to distinguish properly between stories which should be discussed as specimens of classical Persian fiction and stories occurring in historical and biographical works in which accordance with real events and situations is a basic assumption. This distinction cannot always be made with absolute certainty. For instance, stories told in works which we now would classify as works of literary art may very well have been accepted as "true stories" by the writers and their audiences, even if their legendary nature is apparent to modern readers. This applies in particular to the epic, which in the past has probably been read as an account of history merely embellished by rhetorical art. The same problem arises with regard to works of the mirror for princesgenre. In this case, conformity to actual history was an essential precondition of the genre, because of the force this added to the exemplary function of the stories. In general, didactic literature cannot be left out of the discussion, for much Persian fiction was not meant to be merely *belles-lettres* but had a moral intent as well. The fact that serious meaning could be ascribed to stories, however frivolous they might seem to be, provided one of the best justifications for narration as a mode of high Persian literature.

Inevitably, there remain several borderline cases which are difficult to judge as far as their literariness is concerned. Balʿamī's adaptation of Ṭabarī's chronicle, for instance, turned a scholarly Arabic text into a Persian collection of historical tales with an unquestionable element of fiction. Even Bayhaqī's *Tārīḵ-e masʿūdī*, although it purports to give no more than historical fact and personal recollections, has been appreciated by later generations as an important landmark in the development of Persian narrative prose. Similarly, Farīd-al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār's *Taḏkerat al-awlīāʾ* and many other hagiographical works could be taken into consideration, if this would not stretch our subject too far beyond the limits of a meaningful definition.

Written and oral literature have coexisted in Persia throughout the Islamic period, constantly interacting and equally partaking of a rich and varied stock of narrative material. The antiquity of the oral tradition, reaching back far into the pre-Islamic past, cannot be doubted in spite of the scarcity of our

documentation. Throughout the history of Persia an epic tradition existed which was linked partly to the Zoroastrian religion, partly to the minstrel tradition of Iranian courts (see especially Boyce, 1957). Its survival until the early Islamic centuries, when it became firmly entrenched in written literature, presupposes the existence of a strong and continuous tradition of story-tellers. With equal probability it can be assumed that these narrators used prosodic forms, either as a mnemo-technical device, or as an embellishment of their performances, which must have been closely related to musical practice. Actually, some of the narrative texts in the Pahlavi books were composed originally as poems, although they were subsequently transmitted by the scribes as prose works. The best known example is the epic fragment *Ayādgār ī Zarērān* (q.v.; see Benveniste; Utas, 1972).

One of the most intricate problems of the early history of Persian literature is the survival of pre-Islamic oral art in the conventions of written poetry as we know it since the earliest period of classical Persian literature. As far as narrative poetry is concerned, this problem is closely linked to the origins of the *maṯnawī*. If the great importance of this form of rhyming couplets in Persian is compared to the very marginal role of its Arabic counterpart, the *mozdawej*, it seems plausible to regard the former as a continuation of an ancient indigenous form, as many scholars have done. This thesis was defended in particular by L. P. Elwell-Sutton, who stated that “in spite of the Arabic form of the name, the maṯnawī is purely Persian in origin and use, and owes nothing to Arabic versification” (p. 243). However, the prosodic formula for this type of poem is based strictly on quantitative metrics and has a specific pattern of rhyme as its main formal characteristic. Neither of these features are compatible with the prosody of Middle Persian verse as it is presently understood (cf. Shaked). With regard to the still unsolved question of its origin, no more is warranted than the hypothesis that the classical *maṯnawī* came into being as a mixture of oral Iranian traditions and Arabic prosody of the Islamic period (see further *EI2*, s.v. “Mathnawī”).

Although hardly any *maṯnawī* written before the beginning of the 5th/11th century has been preserved in its complete form, we do have some information about the subjects which were treated by the Samanid poets of the preceding century. The remnants of their works show that the *maṯnawī* was already well established, and that there was a wide variety of subjects from the very beginning. These remnants were first collected by Hermann Ethé (q.v.) and subsequently by several others, including Saʿīd Nafīsī (as far as

Rūdakī is concerned) and Gilbert Lazard.

The narrative material used by classical Persian writers of fiction was borrowed from many indigenous and foreign sources. Among them were ancient Iranian myths and legends, traces of which can be found in the Avestan books, the *Yašt*s in particular. Unfortunately, the pre-Islamic sources do not provide fully developed stories, but merely fragments of ancient epics, referred to in texts which themselves cannot be classified as epics. A synthesis of epic and historical material was made shortly before the Arab invasion in the *Xwadāy-nāmag* (see Nöldeke, 1920, pp. 13-15). The reflection of its content in historical and literary works of the Islamic period, makes it possible to reconstruct fairly accurately this royal Sasanian version of the epic. Tales of a more romantic nature, such as the story of *Vīs o Rāmīn*, supposedly of Parthian origin, also survived by various means into Islamic times. In the *Fehrest* of Ebn al-Nadīm (qq.v.), compiled in 377/987-88, a number of Arabic translations of stories from the Sasanian period are mentioned which were then to be found in Baghdad but have since been lost (Christensen, pp. 56-61). This narrative stock was the richest source of the Persian tradition as a whole, inspiring poets and prose-writers in high literature as well as in folklore.

As participants in the civilization of Islam, Persian poets and writers were quite familiar with Arabic literature. If the close link between the two traditions is taken into account, the number of Arabic stories adapted in larger Persian narratives is comparatively small. Most conspicuous are the bedouin love stories of the ʿOḏrītype such as those of Varqa and Golšāh, very early attested in the epic of ʿAyyūqī (q.v.), and Laylā and Majnūn, which soon replaced the former story and attained a far greater popularity. To the religious subjects of Arabic origin belong the legends of the prophets, the *Qeṣaṣ al-anbīyāʾ* and, above all, the love-story of Yūsof and Zolayḵā, derived from the “most beautiful story” in the Qurʾān (Sūra 12). The latter was treated in a number of *maṯnawī*s, particularly in the version wrongly ascribed to Ferdowsī (partly edited by Hermann Ethé in 1908; see also Storey/de Blois, V/2, pp. 576-84), and in Jāmī’s mystical allegory. Eventually, from the Safavid period onwards, the religious material dealing with the lives and martyrdom of the members of the Prophet’s family (especially Moḥammad, ʿAlī, and the other Imams of the Shiʿites) became the most prominent Arabic element in Persian literature. Far more numerous are the short tales and anecdotes from Arabic sources which were incorporated as *ḥekāyat*s in Persian prose and poetry.

The Greek Alexander romance (see ESKANDAR-NĀMA), which had its origins in Egypt during the 3rd century, was adopted quite early into the Iranian legend of the kings, probably through the intermediary of a Syriac translation (cf. Nöldeke, 1890). A Greek origin is also ascribed to the story of *Salāmān wa Absāl*, treated by Jāmī (see Rypka, *Hist. Iran. Lit.*, p. 287, with further references). From the novelistic repertoire of Hellenistic literature came the story of Vāmeq and ʿAḏrā, versified by ʿOnṣorī in a version which remains close to its model, the *Parthenope Romance* (see Utas, 1984-86).

According to traditional accounts, the main influx of Indian stories into Persia took place in the 6th century, at the court of the Sasanian king Ḵosrow Anōšīravān (r. 590-628). Many of the works then translated from Sanskrit into Middle Persian were subsequently rendered into Arabic and thus became available to Muslim Persian writers. The most successful was the book of fables known as *Kalīla wa Demna*, based on the Indian *Pañcatantra*; from Persia it spread to many different cultures. Rūdakī (d. 329/940-41) was the first to adapt the book in a Persian *maṯnawī*, based on the Arabic translation by Ebn al-Moqaffaʿ (q.v). Rūdakī also wrote a version of the *Sendbād-nāma*, the story of the ten viziers, which is usually held to be of Indian origin as well. It is remarkable that these subjects were later almost exclusively treated in prose works with the rare exception of the poetical version of *Kalīla wa Demna* by Qāneʿī, a 13th century poet in Konya. The Buddhist romance of Barlaam and Iosaph (q.v.) has only survived in a *maṯnawī* fragment by a Muslim author but copied in the Manichaean script (Henning, pp. 91-98). The *Ṭūṭī-nāma*, the source of which is the Sanskrit *Śukasaptati,* belongs to a later period. This prose version was written in India by Żīāʾ-al-Dīn Naḵšabī (d. 751/1350). The Indian influence went deeper than the mere transmission of narrative material. It also bequeathed to the Persian tradition the important tool of the frame story and inspired such imitations of Indian books as the *Baḵtīār-nāma* and the *Marzbān-nāma*. During the Mughal period many translations from Sanskrit literature were made in India, but they never became current in Persia and therefore did not exert a noticeable influence on Persian literature.

It would be futile to seek a source in a different cultural period for every piece of Persian fiction. During the Islamic period, much new material was invented either by literati or by popular story-tellers. Such autochthonous stories can be expected to be most numerous in the form of anecdotes, which frequently deal with people who lived in Islamic Persia (rulers and Sufi shaikhs in particular), popular tales, jests, fairy tales, and allegories.

Several narrative genres were created in Persian literature. The heroic epic, treating ancient Iranian lore both in prose and poetry, is attested from the earliest period, the time of the Samanids in Transoxania. After several attempts, of which only the section done by Daqīqī in *motaqāreb* meter and treating the life of the prophet Zarathustra has survived, the epic genre soon reached its apogee in the great work of Ferdowsī. The latter gave the style of the Persian epic its classical form, using the same meter as Daqīqī. From the point of view of the development of narrative art, the prominent role in the *Šāh-nāma* of elaborate stories, the *dāstān*s, was of great importance. They constitute large independent units within the chronological framework of the epic. They are particularly frequent in the first part of the poem (the stories about Żaḥḥāk, Zāl, Sīāvoš, Sohrāb, Bīžan and Manīža, etc.). Many of these stories recount the adventures of the central hero Rostam. Some are also incorporated in the dynastic history of the Sasanians (e.g. the stories of Ardašīr-e Pāpakān's foundation of the dynasty and of Bahrām Čōbīn's rebellion against Ḵosrow Parvēz). Also remarkable is the description of an entire reign, that of Bahrām Gōr, in a series of anecdotes about the king's hunting adventures and amorous affairs. Such parts of the poem reflect the kind of historical narrative which must have been popular in Sasanian times (cf. Yarshater, pp. 393 ff.). Ferdowsī used various devices to articulate the contents of his massive work. Many major stories are introduced by passages of a didactic, contemplative, or lyrical nature. The story about the tragic fate of Sohrāb opens with a meditation on the justice or injustice of an untimely death; that of Bīžan (q.v.) and Manīža with a description of the night when the poet received his inspiration from a "loving idol" who told him the plot of the story in a simple "Pahlavi" form; the succession of Hormozd IV, after the brilliant reign of Anōšīravān, is marked by a dialogue between the month of July (Tammūz) and a red apple, expressing nostalgia for the bygone days of spring. The repeated references to his spokesman, either a *dastūr* or a *dehqān*, is another characteristic of Ferdowsī's narrative style, whether it was meant as fiction or not.

A long succession of imitators of Ferdowsī's epic tried their hand at similar work. Some might have worked on authentic ancient lore left aside by Ferdowsī, but the majority of these epic writers merely elaborated certain features of the Ferdowsian repertoire. They were particularly interested in the tales about the heroes of Sīstān, the family of Rostam. The earliest and most successful of these imitations was Asadī's *Garšāsp-nāma* (written in 456-58/1054-56; q.v.), which deals with the earliest times of legendary history.

Most often these epics treat of the adventures of a descendant of Rostam's: the *Bahman-nāma* (q.v.), attributed to Īrānšāh b. Abi'l-Ḵayr (early 6th/12th century), tells about the revenge taken by the son of Esfandīār on the Sistanian heroes for Rostam's killing of his father. Rostam's own son is the leading character in the *Farāmarz-nāma* (q.v.); the son of Sohrāb in the *Borzū-nāma* (q.v.), which is even longer than the *Šāh-nāma*; and the son of Barzū in the *Šahrīār-nāma*, ascribed to the court poet ʿOṭmān Moḵtārī (fl. ca. 493/1100). Increasingly, the genre was applied to anonymous works belonging really to popular literature (see further Molé; Ṣafā).

The exploits of Alexander the Great (Eskandar), recounted already at length in the *Šāh-nāma*, became a separate subject of narrative poetry through Neẓāmī's choice of this topic for his two-volume *Eskandar-nāma*, devoted respectively to the hero's conquest of the world and his search for wisdom. The device of the reference to a spokesman, introduced by Ferdowsī in his epic, was stylized by Neẓāmī in the address to a cupbearer (*sāqī*) heading each section in the first *maṯnawī* and the address to a singer (*moḡannī*) in the second. Among the works written in emulation of Neẓāmī's poems, the most important are Amīr Ḵosrow Dehlavī's *Āʾīna-ye sekandarī*, focusing on the motif of the miraculous mirror of Eskandar, Jāmī's *Ḵerad-nāma-ye eskandarī*, as well as *Sadd-e eskandarī* by ʿAlī-Šīr Navāʾī, written in Chagatay Turkish (on these works see in particular Bertels, 1965, pp. 283-413). A specimen of a popular adaptation in Persian prose is the anonymous *Eskandar-nāma*, preserved in a unique manuscript, which is a fragment of a work composed between the 12th and the 14th centuries (ed. I. Afšār, Tehran, 1343 Š./1964; tr. by M. S. Southgate as *Iskandarnamah: A Persian Medieval Alexander-Romance*, New York, 1978). It was written in a simple style and makes abundant use of devices derived from fairy tales. In many respects, the plots of heroic poems like Asadī's *Garšāsp-nāma*, featuring travels of the hero to remote countries and meetings with Brahman sages, show the influence of Eskandar motifs on the heroic epic in general.

The romantic epic is hardly younger than the heroic epic, as is witnessed by a number of romantic stories incorporated in the *Šāh-nāma*, of which the story of Zāl's courtship of Rūdāba is the most famous specimen. Its formative period as an independent genre began, as far as is known, in the Ghaznavid period. ʿOnṣorī (d. 431/1039-40), the leading panegyrist at the court of Sultan Maḥmūd I, wrote a set of three *maṯnawī*s, according to ʿAwfī (*Lobāb* II, p. 32), *be-esm-eḵezāna-ye Yamīn-al-Dawla* ("in the name of the Treasure House of Yamīn-al-

Dawla"). Unless this phrase is to taken as merely a reference to a commission by Maḥmūd's royal library, it would constitute the first instance of such a collective title for a group of narrative poems in Persian literature. Apart from an adaptation of a Hellenistic novelette in *Vāmeq o ʿAḏrā*, this collection included *Ḵengbot o Sorḵbot*, based on a local tale connected with the Buddhist statues at Bāmīān, and *Šādbahr o ʿayn al-ḥayāt*, a story also rendered in Arabic by Bīrūnī (cf. Storey/de Blois, V/1, pp. 232-34). Of ʿOnṣorī's *maṯnawī*s only fragments have survived. This would make ʿAyyūqī's *Varqa o Golšāh* (ed. Ḏ. Ṣafā, Tehran, 1343 Š./1964) the earliest specimen of the genre still extant in a complete form, if the identification of the poet's patron with Sultan Maḥmūd of Ḡazna, proposed by Ahmed Ateş, is correct (see, however, the introduction to Ṣafā's edition of the poem, p. v; Storey/de Blois, V/1, pp. 77-80). A remarkable feature is the insertion of lyrical poems in this story, a device later followed by Neẓāmī and others poets. Gorgānī's *Vīs o Rāmīn* (written after 446/1054), an extensive tale of a tragic love affair, has been compared to the story of Tristan and Isolde. As the poet states, it was adapted to the poetic standards of his day from a simple version written in "Pahlavi" (by which, according to V. Minorsky, Middle Persian was meant; see Storey/de Blois V/1, pp. 161-67).

The Persian romance reached its mature form in Neẓāmī's *Ḵamsa*, a set of five poems written in the late 12th century, three of which can be regarded as the genre's most sublime specimens. In *Laylī o Majnūn* Neẓāmī transformed for the first time the disconnected Arabic *aḵbār* about this famous pair of Bedouin lovers into a coherent Persian romance. The unity of the narrative is enforced by means of descriptions of nature scenes (palm trees flowering in spring, the night, a garden in autumn) which symbolically highlight important stages in the plot. Neẓāmī also points to the exemplary value of his poem by the insertion of reflections on asceticism, the vanity of this world, the end of life, and, above all, love in its various forms, including mystical love. The subject of the poem was taken up again by a great number of poets who tried to emulate Neẓāmī's work. Whereas the model was followed as far as the meter and certain elements of the contents (especially of the introduction) were concerned, originality was sought in a different treatment of the story itself. Fairly successful imitations, or *naẓīra*s, were written by Amīr Ḵosrow Dehlavī (d. 725/1325); Jāmī (d. 898/1492); Maktabī, who wrote his poem in 895/1489-90; and Hātefī (d. 927/1520). Many others followed, not only in Persian but also in Turkish, Urdu, Kurdish, and Pashto (the imitators of Neẓāmī's poem have been listed by Levend; Bertels, 1962, pp. 275-300; Ateş, pp. 52 ff.; and Monzawī, *Nosḵahā* IV, pp. 3100-15)

Neẓāmī's *Ḵosrow o Šīrīn* recounts the love story of the Sasanian king Ḵosrow II Parvēz (r. 591-628) and the Armenian princess Šīrīn, the basic elements of which can be found in the *Šāh-nāma*. The choice of the meter *hazaj-e sālem* as well as certain general traits of the plot are reminiscent of Gorgānī's *Vīs o Rāmīn*. However, Neẓāmī provided a psychological finesse and a wealth of descriptive detail to his story, which distinguish it sharply from the work of his predecessor. A central theme of the poem is fidelity in love, typified in a very complex plot. Story lines running parallel to the main love story and involving both protagonists exhibit a variety of relationships: on the part of Ḵosrow, his diplomatic marriage to the Byzantine princess Maryam and the sensual affair with Šakar; on the part of Šīrīn, the Platonic love of the mason Farhād, which developed into a subject in its own right (cf. Duda). The poem also gives an idealized picture of the court of this late Sasanian ruler, which in the Muslim period stood as the prime example of royal splendor.

In *Haft paykar* (The seven images), the life-story of Bahrām Gōr (421-39) is told as the paragon of ideal kingship. Like *Laylī o Majnūn*, this poem was based on a corpus of disconnected anecdotes about Bahrām's adventures as a fabulous hunter and a lover. In this instance, one of the devices Neẓāmī resorted to was the application of an astrological design. The poem centers on a set of seven fairy tales told to Bahrām by seven princesses from the seven parts of the world. Each day of the week he visits one of the princesses, for whom he has built a pavilion decorated in the color of the planet governing that day as well as the part of the world from which she comes. In this construction all the correspondences recognized by the medieval Persian world-view are woven together with exquisite artistry. The seven tales are also remarkable for the use of folkloristic material. They include the story of Tūrāndoḵt, or Turandot, which inspired Western works of literature and music such as plays by Carlo Gozzi and Friedrich Schiller and the opera *Turandot* by Giacomo Puccini. The life of the king, which in a way serves as a frame story, also contains interesting narrative elements, of which the hunting-story of Bahrām and Āzāda, his slave-girl and harpist, has become particularly famous. In the best known imitation of this poem, Amīr Ḵosrow's *Hašt behešt* (The eight paradises), the tale of the slave-girl, named Delārām, is an eighth story added to the seven fairy tales which differ from those told by Neẓāmī. One of the new tales is that of the princes of Sarandīb (Sri Lanka) who find the truth through making fortuitous observations. This story reached Europe by way of an Italian adaptation (Cristoforo Armeno, *Peregrinaggio di tre giovani figliuoli del re di Serendippo*, Venice, 1557), and eventually gave rise to the word

"serendipity" in the English language (Wesselski; Bertels, 1965, pp. 64-65). Ḵᵛājū Kermānī (*Homā o Homāyūn*) and Jāmī (*Salāmān o Absāl; Yūsof o Zolayḵā*), as well as many other later writers, added to the repertoire of stories as it was inherited from Neẓāmī.

Historical epics dealt with real events but presented them in the style of the epic of the kings and the *Eskandar-nāma*. This was an attractive form to enhance the glory of the founder of a reigning dynasty or a contemporary monarch. The *Ẓafar-nāma*, written in 735/1335 by the historian Ḥamd-Allāh Mostawfī, provides a continuation of the *Šāh-nāma* up to the time of the Mongol rulers of Persia. Another very influential example was Hātefī's poem on Tīmūr Lang, the *Tīmūr-nāma*, written during the final days of the Timurids. It became a model for poets of the 16th and 17th centuries who, from the time of Esmāʿīl I onwards, made use of the same formula to celebrate the exploits of the Safavid shahs. The genre survived, not only in Ṣabā's *Šāhanšāh-nāma*, written in the early 19th century in praise of Fatḥ-ʿAlī Shah Qājār, but also in a number of historical epics dedicated to Reżā Shah Pahlavī (Machalski, pp. 27-29; on historical epics in general, see Ṣafā, pp. 343-76).

The style of the epic lent itself also to the poetic treatment of religious stories. In the *Ḵāwarān-nāma*, this style was adopted by Moḥammad b. Ḥosām (d. 875/1470) to describe the heroic deeds of ʿAlī as a champion of Islam. The anonymous *Ṣāḥeb-qerān-nāma*, dated 1073/1662-63, celebrates the fictitious adventures of the Prophet's uncle Ḥamza in India. The lives of Moḥammad, ʿAlī, and their descendants were treated by the Indo-Persian poet Moḥammad-Rafīʿ Bāḏel (d. 1123/1711-12 or 1124/1712-13) in the *Ḥamla-ye ḥaydarī*, by the Qājār court poet Fatḥ-ʿAlī Khan Ṣabā (d. 1238/1822-23) in his *Ḵodāvand-nāma*, and by many others. This genre exerted an influence on popular literature, which deals mostly with the tragedy of Karbalā (cf. Ṣafā, pp. 377-90; Storey, I/1, pp. 207-35).

Outside the sphere of Muslim culture, the life of the prophet of the Zoroastrians was described in the *Zarātošt-nāma,* shortly before 368/978 according to Christian Rempis (op. cit.). If this dating is correct, it would make this poem the oldestnarrative in *maṯnawī* that has come down to us in its complete form (but cf. Āmūzgār and Tafażżolī, p. 32). It is also the earliest of a small corpus of Zoroastrian works originally composed in Persian, to which an adaptation of the Pahlavī book *Ardā Wīrāz-nāmag* also belongs (*Ardā vīrāf-nāmāye manẓūm-e Zartošt Bahrām Pažḏū*, ed. R. ʿAfīfī, Mašhad, 1343 Š./1964; see also Rieu, *Persian Manuscripts* I, pp. 47-53; Ethé, *Catalogue*, pp. 1518-24). In

Judeo-Persian literature the *maṯnawī* form and the epic style were adopted and used to write epic versions of biblical narratives, in particular by two Jewish poets from Shiraz: Šāhīn, in the first half of the 13th century, and ʿEmrānī, who lived in the 16th century (qq.v.; see Rypka, *Hist. Iran. Lit.*, pp. 737-40; Fischel, with an extensive bibliography).

Equally susceptible to the impact of the heroic epics were the picaresque novels in prose, though they should properly be classified with anonymous folk literature since they are related to the art of the oral story-teller rather than to high literature. The most important works handed down in writing are the extensive novels *Samak-e ʿayyār* and *Dārāb-nāma* (q.v.), the latter being an extension of the *Eskandar-nāma*.

The Indian tales and fables belong to high literature, especially because they found a welcome among the writers of mirrors for princes, who were usually members of the bureaucratic class writing in a highly polished and Arabicized Persian prose. In some cases these sophisticated versions have survived next to the simpler texts which must have served as their raw material. This is particularly clear in the case of the *Baḵtīār-nāma*, which owed its classical form to Daqāyeqī (q.v.). *Sendbād-nāma*, *Kalīla wa Demna*, and *Marzbān-nāma* belong to the same genre. An early version of the last in the Ṭabarī dialect is known to have existed. These works are based on the principle of the frame story, which is filled in with fables as well as other stories and anecdotes from the stock of narratives drawn upon by poets and prose writers alike.

Nowhere is the relationship between popular and polite literature more in evidence than in the realm of short stories. It is impossible to say to what extent the classical writers and poets, who used them abundantly and in many different forms, drew directly upon oral traditions; but even if it is most likely that they mainly used written sources, this does not exclude the influence of modes of popular story-telling on their works. It should also not be forgotten that oral literature of previous times could only survive because, at some point, it was laid down in writing. This inevitably entailed an adaptation to standards of literary style to a greater or lesser degree. Undoubtedly most of the stories occurring in classical works should be postulated as having originated in the activity of narrators belonging to one of the various traditions of oral story-telling that existed in Islamic society. The relationship is complicated by the fact that polite literature also made an impact on popular literature, but this is a subject which falls outside the present survey (for an instructive model of the origin and development of popular stories,

applied to the *Arabian Nights*, see Gerhardt, pp. 39-46).

As written sources, a vast literature in Arabic and Persian should be taken into account. Apart from works intended to serve as sources of general erudition, usually subsumed under the heading of *adab* literature, it comprises many kinds of non-belletristic writings, e.g., commentaries on the Qurʾān, collections of canonical and apocryphal Hadith, books dealing with the lives of the prophets, Sufi hagiographies, and historical works. In Persian literature, the largest compilation of stories by far is Sadīd-al-Dīn Moḥammad ʿAwfī's *Jawāmeʿ al-ḥekāyāt wa lawāmeʿ al-rewāyāt*, which was completed in 625/1228 (on this work, which has not yet been published in full, see Nizamuddin). Disregarding their actual content, and without much authorial comment, the stories are arranged according to the cosmic, social, and ethical principles they are supposed to typify. Starting with the Creator, they then deal with prophets and holy men, ancient Persian kings and Islamic rulers, ministers, scholars and qadis, courtiers and poets. The stories in the second and third chapters illustrate virtues and vices respectively, and the morals of women; those in the final chapter are about slaves, the wonders of the sea and the earth, and animals.

The most important category of short stories are the anecdotes, i.e., stories with a historical or legendary (sometimes even mythical) background. They feature famous figures from the stock of tales about the ancient prophets and the Persian epic tradition (e.g., the prophets Ebrāhīm, Yūsof, Mūsā, and Solaymān; the ancient kings Eskandar, Ardašīr, Bahrām Gōr, Ḵosrow I Anōšīravān, and Ḵosrow II Parvīz), celebrities from Islamic history (notably the caliph Hārūn-al-Rašīd and Sultan Maḥmūd of Ḡazna), or famous sages such as Nūšīrvān's counselor Bozorgmehr (see BOZORGMEHR-E BOḴTAGĀN), the wise Loqmān, and the generous Arab Ḥātem Ṭāʾī. The great religious personalities of Islam comprise a special group: the Prophet and his companions, the *ahl-e bayt* (q.v.), and the Sufi saints.

The use of tales and anecdotes as parables is a particularly noteworthy feature of Persian literature. It occurs in all genres which are devoted primarily to didacticism. In works providing instruction on courtly behavior and statesmanship, such as Kaykāvūs b. Eskandar's *Qābūs-nāma*, Neẓām-al-Molk's *Sīāsat-nāma*, and Neẓāmī ʿArūżī's *Čahār maqāla*,anecdotes from early or recent history are preferred. In Saʿdī's famous prose work, the *Golestān*, the narrative has become the principal part of the text, relegating the moralistic commentary almost completely to poetical inserts. The short narrative also

found a niche in Sufi didactic poetry. In the *Ḥadīqat al-ḥaqīqa* of Sanāʾī (d. 525/1131), its function was still restricted to illustrating the poet's discourse, which consists of a continuing homily. In the earliest version of this *maṯnawī* most stories are told only in a few lines and hardly distinguish themselves from the imagery used by the poet (de Bruijn, 1995, pp. 79-93). ʿAṭṭār's *Asrār-nāma* is a didactical poem of a similar kind, and so is Neẓāmī's *Maḵzan al-asrār*, although in the latter work a fixed place in the tight pattern of the poem has been given to the narrative element, which is limited to one story in each chapter. In ʿAṭṭār's other didactical poems—the *Manṭeq al-ṭayr*, the *Moṣībat-nāma*, and the *Elāhī-nāma*—the importance of narratives is much greater than in Sanāʾī's poem. Even detached from their context, they still offer abundant material for a reconstruction of the poet's intellectual and social environment (Ritter, p. 32). To the latter group of poems ʿAṭṭār moreover applied the device of the frame story, which he must have borrowed from prose works belonging to the genre of mirrors for princes. In his *Maṯnawī-e maʿnawī* Jalāl-al-Dīn Rūmī combined the methods of Sanāʾī and ʿAṭṭār. Although narratives in his work are as dominant as they are in the poetry of ʿAṭṭār, he followed the method of the continuing discourse as it was used by Sanāʾī, omitting an encompassing narrative frame. Characteristic of Rūmī's approach to story-telling are the repeated interruptions by excursions to discuss mystical themes and the intertwining of major tales with shorter ones (cf. the analysis of a specimen of Rūmī's narrative style by Richter). The same mingling of narration and theoretical discourse was applied by Rūmī's son Solṭān Walad to his *maṯnawī*s, which describe the life and thought of his father. In Saʿdī's didactic poem *Būstān*, the abstract ideas are mostly implied in the stories or are expressed by one of the characters. Other important works in this tradition are Awḥadī's *Jām-e Jam* (written in 733/1332-33); Ḵᵛājū Kermānī's *Rawżat al-anwār* (743/1342-43), an imitation of Neẓāmī's *Maḵzan al-asrār*, and his *Kamāl-nāma* (744/1343-44); as well as Jāmī's three didactic poems (*Selselat al-ḏahab*, *Toḥfat al-aḥrār* and *Sobḥat al-asrār*), in which many narratives known from earlier works appear again in more or less adapted form.

Models for the use of allegory which could have influenced Persian writers are known both from the pre-Islamic literature of Persia and from Arabic literature. To the former belongs the Pahlavi text *Ardā Wīrāz-nāmag*, exemplifying the perennial motif of the spiritual journey to the other world; to the latter, a few brief philosophical allegories such as Avicenna's enigmatic *Ḥayy b. Yaqẓān* and Meskawayh's *Logēz qābes*, which was based on the Greek *Cebetis Tabula*, a dialogue pseudo-epigraphically ascribed to Plato. In Abu'l-

ʿAlāʾ Maʿarrī's *Resālat al-ḡofrān*, a fantasy of an ascent to Paradise was used as a device for literary criticism.

In Persian poetry, one of the earliest examples of allegory is a narrative *qaṣīda* by ʿAmʿaq Boḵārāʾī, a court poet of the Qarakhanids in the late 11th century, who related a heavenly journey by way of a satire (*Dīvān*, ed. S. Nafīsī, Tehran, 1339 Š./1960, pp. 141 ff.). A more serious work is Sanāʾī's short *maṯnawī*, *Sayr al-ʿebād ela'l-maʿad*, of the early 12th century, depicting a journey through an allegorical cosmos representing the physical and spiritual development of the narrator and culminating in a panegyric to a patron of the poet (De Bruijn, 1983, pp. 200-18). About the same time, ʿOṯmān Moḵtārī related in the *Honar-nāma* an imaginary encounter with an astrologer, who puts to the test the poet's talents in making riddles (*Dīvān*, ed. J. Homāʾī, Tehran, 1341 Š./1962, pp. 699-745). The aim of this topical poem was to advertise the art of the poet to prospective patrons. Allegories of a mixed spiritual and secular motivation were also written by Moʾayyad Nasafī (*Pahlavān-nāma* and *Nasīm al-ṣabā elā'l-sabā*; cf. Storey/de Blois, V/2, pp. 416-17), and by Ḵāqānī in the description of a journey to an imaginary Qohestān introducing his *Toḥfat al-ʿErāqayn* (ed. Y. Qarīb, Tehran, 1333 Š./1954, pp. 30-49). Ḵᵛājū Kermānī inserted the allegory of a visit to cosmological entities in his *Kamāl-nāma*. The best example in mystical literature is ʿAṭṭār's *Moṣībat-nāma*, which describes the quest of the "traveling thought" (*fekrat-e sālek*) through various spheres of metaphysical being. *Meṣbāḥ al-arwāḥ*, a mystical poem wrongly attributed to Awḥad-al-Dīn Kermānī, but probably written towards the end of the 12th century by Moḥammad b. Īl-Toḡān Bardāsīrī, also contains an allegory of the spiritual journey (see Utas, 1990).

In Persian prose the major writer of allegories was the philosopher and mystic Šehāb-al-Dīn Yaḥyā Sohravardī (d. 587/1191). Besides his theoretical works in Arabic, he left a number of imaginary tales such as *Āvāz-e par-e Jebrāʾīl*, about a visit to the realm of ideas, *ʿAql-e sorḵ*, giving esoteric explanations to the seven wonders of the universe (e.g., the legendary mountain Qāf, the Sīmorḡ, and the signs of the Zodiac), and *Loḡat-e mūrān*, twelve parables on the origin of the soul (ed. S. H. Naṣr and H. Corbin, *Oeuvres philosophiques et mystiques* II, Tehran and Paris, 1970 with an extensive introduction by Corbin).

From the 14th century onwards romantic tales were increasingly written as thinly disguised allegories. Some of these were based on existing stories, such as Jāmī's *Yūsof o Zolayḵa*; others tried to breathe life into personified abstractions. Remarkable examples of fully allegorized stories are *Ḥosn o Del*

and *Šabestān-e ḵayāl* by Fattāḥī (q.v.; for a survey of similar works see Ethé, 1895-1901, pp. 301-2 and Rypka, pp. 283-86).

There are several minor genres in which fiction plays a prominent part. In the 11th century Asadī wrote a number of strife-poems, or *monāẓarāt*, known already from pre-Islamic literature in the Pahlavi text *Draxt ī asūrīg* (q.v.; Ethé, 1882). ʿEmād-al-Dīn Faqīh Kermānī's *Maḥabbat-nāma-ye ṣāḥeb-delān* (ed. R. Homāyūn-farroḵ in *Panj ganj*, Tehran, 2537 = 1357 Š./1978, pp. 151-203) also belongs to this genre. In this short *maṯnawī* the theme of love is treated in a series of disputations between the soul and the body, and between entities belonging to the three kingdoms of nature. In the 12th century, the *qāżī* Ḥamīd-al-Dīn Abū Bakr ʿOmar b. Maḥmūdī Balḵī introduced into Persian an imitation of the *maqāmāt*, one of the few genres of fiction which had found a footing in classical Arabic literature, with his *Maqāmāt-e ḥamīdī* (ed. R. Anzābī-nežād, Tehran, 1365 Š./1986). After the medieval period, several types of brief narrative in *maṯnawī* form emerged both in Persia and India. They often bear stereotyped titles, such as *qażā wa qadar*, stories about the workings of fate, or *sūz o godāz*, containing descriptions of painful experiences in love. Under the title *Čāh-e weṣāl*, some poets dealt with a meeting of Majnūn and Laylī at the bottom of a well (Monzawī, *Nosḵahā* IV, p. 2754).

See also DĀSTĀN, DĀSTĀN-SARĀʾĪ, NAQQĀLĪ, QEṢṢA.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

(for cited works not given in detail, see "Short References"):

Ž. Āmūzgār and A. Tafażżolī, *Osṭūra-ye zendagī-e Zardošt*, Tehran, 1370 Š./1991.

A. J. Arberry, *Classical Persian Literature*, London, 1958.

A. Ateş, "Leylâ ile Mecnûn," *İA* VII, pp. 49-55.

A. Bausani, *Storia della letteratura persiana*, Milan, 1960 (especially "Il masnavî," pp. 579–777, and "La prosa," pp. 779–846).

E. Benveniste, “Le Mémorial de Zarēr: poème pehlevi mazdéen,” *JA* 220, 1932, pp. 245–93.

E. E. Bertels, *Izbrannye trudy:Nizami i Fuzuli* (Selected works: Neẓāmī and Fożūlī), Moscow, 1962.

Idem, *Roman ob Aleksandre i ego glavnye versii na Vostoke* (The Alexander Romance and its main versions in the East), in *Izbrannye trudy: Navoi i Dzhami*, Moscow, 1965, pp. 283-413.

M. Boyce, “The Parthian *Gōsān* and Iranian Minstrel Tradition,” *JRAS*, 1957, pp. 10-45.

J. T. P. de Bruijn, *Of Piety and Poetry*, Leiden, 1983.

Idem, “The Stories of Sanâ’î’s Fakhrî-nâme,” in *Pand-o Sokhan: Mélanges offerts à Ch.-H. de Fouchécour*, Tehran, 1995, pp. 73-95.

A. Christensen, *Les gestes des rois dans les traditions de l’Iran antique*, Paris, 1936.

H. W. Duda, *Ferhād und Shīrīn: Die literarische Geschichte eines persischen Sagenstoffes*, Prague, 1933.

L. P. Elwell-Sutton, *The Persian Metres*, Cambridge, U. K., 1976.

H. Ethé, “Über persische Tenzonen,” in *Verhandlungen des fünften internationalen Orientalisten–Congresses* II/1, Berlin, 1882, pp. 48-135.

Idem, “Neupersische Litteratur,” in *Grundriss* II, pp. 212-368.

Idem, ed., *Yûsuf and Zalîkhâ by Firdausî of Tûs*, Oxford, 1908.

W. Fischel, “Judaeo-Persian,” *EI2* IV, pp. 308-12.

M. Gerhardt, *The Art of Story-telling*, Leiden, 1963.

W. B. Henning, “Persian Poetical Manuscripts from the Time of Rūdakī,” in E. Yarshater and W. B. Henning, eds., *A Locust’s Leg: Studies in honour of S. H. Taqizadeh*, London, 1962, pp. 89–104.

A. S. Levend, *Leylâ ve Mecnûn hikâyesi*, Ankara, 1959.

F. Machalski, *La littérature de l'Iran contemporain* II, Wrocław, Warsaw, and Cracow, 1967.

J. Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, Princeton, 1987.

M. Molé, "L'épopée iranienne après Firdōsī," *La nouvelle Clio* 5, 1953, pp. 377-93.

A. Netzer, ed., *Pādyāvand* I, Costa Mesa, Calif., 1996.

M. Nizamuddin, *Introduction to the Jawāmi' ul-Hikāyāt*, London, 1929.

T. Nöldeke, *Beiträge zur Geschichte des Alexanderromans*, Vienna, 1890.

Idem, *Das iranische Nationalepos*, 2nd ed., Berlin and Leipzig, 1920.

C. Pellat, "*Ḥikāya*," *EI2* III, pp. 367-72.

Ch. Rempis, "Qui est l'auteur de Zartusht-Nâmeh?" in *Mélanges d'orientalisme offerts à Henri Massé*, Tehran, 1963, pp. 337-42.

G. Richter, *Persien Mystiker Dschelâl-eddin Rûmi: Eine Stildeutung in drei Vorträgen*, Breslau, 1933.

H. Ritter, *Das Meer der Seele: Mensch, Welt und Gott in den Geschichten des Farīduddīn ʿAttār*, Leiden, 1955.

Ḏ. Ṣafā, *Hamāsa-sarāʾī dar Īrān*, Tehran, 3rd ed., 1352 Š./1973.

S. Shaked, "Specimens of Middle Persian Verse," in M. Boyce and I. Gershevitch, eds., *W. B. Henning Memorial Volume*, London, 1970, pp. 395-405.

B. Utas, "On the Composition of the Ayyātkār-ī Zarērān," in *Monumentum H. S. Nyberg* II, Acta Iranica5, Tehran and Liège, 1972, pp. 399-418.

Idem, "Did ʿAdhrā Remain a Virgin?" *Orientalia Suecana* 33-35, 1984-86, pp. 429-41.

Idem, "A Journey to the Other World According to the Lantern of Spirits," *Bulletin of the Asia Institute,* N. S. 4, 1990, pp. 307-11.

A. Wesselski, "Quellen und Nachwirkungen der Haft Paikar," *Der Islam* 22, 1934, pp. 106-19.

E. Yarshater, “Iranian Common Beliefs and World–View,” in *Camb. Hist. Iran* III/1, pp. 343–58.