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Whereas Germany could vaunt Goethe's *West-östlicher Diwan* and Nietzsche's *Also sprach Zarathustra*, and England had FitzGerald's imaginative and free translation of *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*, French writers and critics had their own, manifold responses to the lure of Persia. At first they celebrated the ancient heroes (Cyrus, etc.); later, informed by reports of missionaries and travelers and by the *Thousand and One Nights* and Sa'di's *Golestān*, they used Persia chiefly as a means of social, political, and religious self-criticism, and they were interested in Zoroastrianism as "the most ancient religion." Later, the gradual acquaintance with other Persian poets inspired them to create new literary works. Furthermore, ancient Persia was praised as the country of truth, justice, and purity; the Persian poets were seen by some as masters of unconventional morality, while others were fascinated by Persian mysticism.

When Madeleine de Scudéry (1607-1701) wrote her novel *Artamène ou le grand Cyrus*, her source was of course Xenophon's *Cyropedia*, in which the



founder of the Achaemenid empire is depicted as an ideal king. Prosper Jolyot de Crébillon's (1674-1762) tragedy *Xercès* was based on Aeschylus' *Persae*. Pierre Corneille (1606-84) wrote his tragedy *Rodogune* (1644) about a Parthian princess and ten years later *Suréna, général des Parthes*, the conqueror of Crassus. Jean Racine (1639-99) in his *Mithridate* carried his praise of the Persian king to the highest level of eulogy. Their examples were followed by some subsequent writers. The outcome was some thirty tragedies on Persia.

Meanwhile, even before the end of the century of Louis XIV, the quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns had begun to divide French writers: should they continue emulating the ancients as they had done since the Renaissance, or seek other sources of inspiration including biblical and oriental material? Charles Perrault (1628-1703), who was among the Moderns, published in 1691-94 his *Contes de ma mère l'Oye* and in 1697 his *Histoires ou Contes du temps passé*, in one of which, entitled *Le Maître Chat ou le Chat botté*, the cat likes to call his master Marquis de Carabas. The reputation of Shah 'Abbās, notably as a great builder, who had sent letters to Henry IV and Louis XIII, must have spread deep enough in France for this name to be so altered. And he had another avatar in *la fée Carabosse*, a kind of female Ahriman opposed to Carabas-Ormazd, perhaps a reflex of the Iranian dualism known in France through Plutarch's *De Iside et Osiride*, Barnabé Brisson's (1530-91) *De regio Persarum principatu* (1590) and later, through Thomas Hyde's (q.v.; 1636-1703) *Historia religionis veterum Persarum eorumque magorum* (Oxford, 1700). Persia was described in *L'Etat de la Perse en 1660* by Père Raphaël du Mans (q.v.; 1613-96), and by Père N. Sanson, in *Estat présent du royaume de Perse* (1694), Jean-Baptiste Tavernier's (q.v.; 1605-89) *Voyages*, Jean Chardin's (q.v.; 1643-1713) *Voyage en Perse et aux Indes orientales* (1711). Sa'dī's *Golestān* was translated by André du Ruyter de Malezar as *Gulistan ou l'Empire des Roses, composé par Sadi, prince des poètes turc et persan* (Paris, 1634). It inspired Jean de la Fontaine (1621-95) in the composition of his *Fables*, although the only oriental model he acknowledges is "le sage indien Pilpay." This Pilpay or Bidpāy (from an Old Iranian *vaedyapaiti* "master of knowledge") was allegedly the author of a collection of tales translated from the Sanskrit *Pancatāntra* into Pahlavi, in turn rendered into Arabic in the 8th century by Ebn al-Moqaffa' (q.v.) and entitled *Kalīla wa Demna* (q.v.), thence into Latin and several modern languages, including the French version by Dāvūd b. Sa'īd Eṣfahānī (David Sahid d'Isphan, 1612-84; Richard, 1986-87, pp. 29-30), who had stayed in Paris in the 1640s, and Gilbert Gaulmin (1585-1665, Richard, *ibid.*, p. 30), entitled *Le Livre des Lumières ou la Conduite des Roys, composé par le sage*



Pilpay indien (1644), apparently known to la Fontaine, who, however, was also indebted to Sa'dī, for "The Dream of the Resident of Mogol" is taken from *Golestān* 2, 15 and "The Astrologer Who Fell into a Pit" is freely adapted from *Golestān* 4, 11. Moreover, the source of "The Shepherd and the King" is to be found in a tale Tavernier brought back from the court of Shah 'Abbās. *The Thousand and One Nights* was imitated by Jean-François Pétis de la Croix (1653-1713) in his *Mille et un jours* (see Pétis de la Croix, intr. by P. Sebag, pp. 7-31), and by Anne Claude Philippe, comte de Caylus (1692-1765) in his *Nouveaux contes orientaux*. Barthélemy d'Herbelot's (1625-95, q.v.) *Bibliothèque orientale* had several articles on Persia (Torābi, pp. 47-48).

About the year 1717 which saw the end of Louis XIV's long reign, Charles-Louis de Secondat, Baron de la Brède et de Montesquieu (1689-1755), probably began to write his *Lettres persanes*, which were published under a pseudonym in 1721 and had enormous success. Montesquieu's purpose was not, of course, to tell us about the Persians but to criticize the French, their beliefs and way of life, and ultimately to recommend—in a young magistrate's manifesto—tolerance, liberalism, humanism. The Persian he uses for this purpose, has left his country in order to widen his vision of things and men. The country he leaves behind is characterized by despotism, polygamy (with a rather frivolous emphasis on eunuchs), and bigotry. He praises the sultan for not expelling the Armenians, which would have deprived the country of their valuable talents, a veiled allusion to Louis XIV's Revocation of the Edict of Nantes. The "most ancient" religion of Persia is evoked with sympathy in the story of the Gabr in love with his sister, and pacific coexistence between religions is recommended. But the Christian mission in Persia is dismissed as senseless. Usbek the Persian has his doubts, notably about the impurity of pork, and a *mollā's* explanations are made to sound absurd. Another belief criticized is the one which reserves paradise for men only. Religious dogmas on both sides are compared unfavourably with the laws of physics (Newton, though not named, is clearly alluded to). Montesquieu's masterpiece was often imitated, for instance in the anonymous *Mémoires secrets pour servir à l'histoire de la Perse* (1745). In *L'Esprit des lois*, Montesquieu sees in Persina's despotism the cause of violence, bloodshed, and the reign of ignorance.

In Voltaire's (1694-1778) *Le Monde comme il va* (1746) references to Persia are mere disguises of French realities; Persepolis, which is to be chastised for its follies by the Scythians, stands for Paris. *Zadig ou la Destinée* (1747) dedicated to Sa'dī, tells the story of a sort of an idealized Persia free of all of Europe's



prejudices. To this narrative an appropriately exotic décor is provided by repeated references to Zoroaster, his breviary, the book of the Zend, Orosmada [sic], an evil person called Arimaze [sic], Media, the prince of Ispahan, the Zenda-Vesta [sic], the sacred fire, the magi, but there is more to it; the Scythians are the only honest people in the world. Such is the equity of Zadig, (Şādeq, “the veracious one”), that the laws he promulgates are deemed those of Zoroaster, in contrast to the Persians’ habit of having the culprits impaled. In *La Princesse de Babylone* (1768), the king of the Scythians is illiterate and his realm, which the Princess visits, has no cities, hence no civilized arts. It shows her how different men and governments are, and ever will be until some other, more enlightened people will gradually communicate light to them, after centuries of darkness, and some heroic souls will have strength and perseverance enough to change brutes into men. Thus are the Sarmatians, alias the Poles, governed by a philosopher-king, who however could be called the king of anarchy on account of the *liberum veto*, with one vote capable of blocking a whole measure.

Jean-Philippe Rameau’s (1683-1764) opera *Zoroastre* (1749), based on Thomas Hyde, was produced in a new version in 1756 with great success. Voltaire was interested in Zoroastrianism in that it provided him with a weapon against Christianity, a means to *écraser l’infâme*: Moses was not unique, truth could as well be found in a non-Christian religion. Anquetil Duperron’s (q.v.; 1731-1805) departure for India raised high hopes in the rank of the *philosophes*. But Anquetil, who remained attached to the religion of his fathers, gradually shattered the Encyclopedists’ hopes by refusing to see any potential ammunition against Christianity in the Avesta which he had translated in 1771. In the article on Zoroastre in the *Dictionnaire philosophique*, Voltaire stressed Anquetil’s courage and Hyde’s competence. And he avenged himself for his disappointment by his impertinent paragraph on “*L’abominable fatras que l’on attribue à Zoroastre.*” In 1761 and 1762, tales of Sa’dī, adapted by Diderot, were published.

Montesquieu, Voltaire, Diderot, and others had unwittingly paved the way to the French Revolution; but Sa’dī’s fame had outlasted the regime they had contributed to destroy. One of the revolutionaries, Lazare Carnot, a colleague of Danton and Robespierre, was so fond of the *Golestān* that he wished his descendants to be named after its author: his son Sadi Carnot (1796-1882) formulated the first principle of thermodynamics and later, the Third Republic had as one of its presidents one more Sadi Carnot (murdered in 1887).



The Romantics, who reacted against the century of Enlightenment, found in oriental literature an escape from classicism. Victor Hugo (1802-85) wrote in the preface to *Les Orientales* (1829), “in the century of Louis XIV one was hellenist, now one is orientalist.” His orient, which included Spain and Greece (only recently liberated from the Turks), scarcely extended beyond the Ottoman empire. However, four out of the 41 poems have as an epigraph a quotation from Sa’dī or Ḥāfeẓ. At the commencement of *La Captive* we read, freely adapted from Sa’dī’s *Golestān*, “On entend le chant des oiseaux aussi harmonieux que la poésie”; the epigraph to *Les Tronçons du Serpent* reads “D’ailleurs les sages ont dit: il ne faut point attacher son cœur aux choses passagères” and to *Novembre* which has one verse *A ce soleil brumeux les Pèris auraient froid*, yet again from Sa’dī, “Je lui dis: La rose du jardin, comme tu le sais, dure peu; et la saison des roses est bien vite écoulée.” To *Sultan Ahmet* the “quotation” is from Ḥāfeẓ: “Oh!, permets, charmante fille, que j’enveloppe mon cou avec tes bras.”

He wrote in the *Notes des Orientales*, “From the Arabs to the Persians the transition is abrupt: it is like a nation of women after a people of men,” a statement hardly supported by the quotations that follow from Jālāl-al-Dīn Rūmi, Farīd-al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār, and Ferdowsī. And what may have passed from these poems into his Persian poets must be considered as mere stimuli to his general imagination, a debt he once considered acknowledging on the title-page of *Les Orientales* which bears, in the manuscript, two further quotations from Sa’dī’s *Golestān*. So much for *Les Orientales*. Differently, in the *Légende des Siècles* (1859), a precise link may be detected between a *ḡazal* of Ḥāfeẓ and the biblical poem *Booz endormi*:

Et Ruth se demandait

Quel dieu, quel moissonneur de l'éternel été

Avait en s'en allant négligemment jeté

Cette faucille d'or dans le champ des étoiles.

may have borrowed the final metaphor from one of Ḥāfeẓ’s *ḡazals*,

Mazra‘-e sabz-e falak dīdam o dās-ē mah-e now

Yād-am az kešta-ye kviš āmad o hangām-e derow.



“I saw the green field of the celestial vault and the sickle of the new moon; I remembered my seed-bed and the time of the harvest.” In the unfinished poem *Dieu* revelations are made by birds as in Farīd-al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār’s *Manteq al-tayr*, translated in 1863 by Garcin de Tassy (q.v.). With Marceline Desbordes-Valmore (1786-1859), an early romantic whom Victor Hugo praised as “poetry itself,” roses culled from the title of Sa’dī’s *Golestān* had lent their perfume to her short poem “Les Roses de Saadi.”

‘Omar Ḳayyām, the author of the *Robā’iyāt* first translated into French in 1867 by Jean-Baptiste Nicolas with an introduction, and retranslated many times, was very much debated: was he a mystic, a free-thinker, an epicure? Théophile Gautier (1811-72), the founder of the school of art for art’s sake, had a sound, balanced appreciation of the scientist-philosopher-poet. His daughter Judith wrote *Le Second rang du Collier*, inspired by Sa’dī’s *Būstān* and much admired by her father.

Maurice Bouchor (1855-1929), author of *Le Songe de Khayyām*, declared himself one of the followers of the poet, “a flower of life, wisdom and intelligence.” And Ḳayyām was particularly praised by Princess Marthe Bibesco (1887-1973), author of *Les Huit Paradis* (1908).

The Parnassiens admired the formal perfection of Persian poetry and could consider it a model for their own *primacy of form*. Laconte de Lisle (1814-94) included in his *Poèmes tragiques* a poem, *Les Roses d’Ispahan*, inspired by Sa’dī’s *Golestān* and *Būstān*, as well as by Jāmī’s *Laylā wa Majnūn*.

In José-Maria de Heredia’s (1842-1905) admirable sonnets, *Les Trophées*, a battle between Romans and Parthians provides a rhyme:

Les soldats regardaient comme des feuilles mortes

Tourbillonner au loin les archers de Phraortes,

famous for shooting backwards, on horseback, the Parthian shot,” la flèche du Parthe.”

Armand Renaud (1836-99), a minor Parnassien, author of *Les Nuits persanes* published in 1865 and again in a revised version, in 1896, was haunted all his life by ‘Attār.

Jules Michelet (1798-1874) had in his *Bible de l’Humanité* a chapter on *La Perse*



which judged very favourably that ancient country, home of a religion of justice, Zoroastrianism. Gérard de Nerval (1808-55), in his *Voyage en Orient*, gives Persia as one of the destinations of the spiritual pilgrim, and his novel *Aurelia* the three sacred names of Shi'ism are inserted: Allāh! Moḥammad! 'Alī! Joseph-Arthur, Comte de Gobineau (q.v.; 1810-82) described in his *Nouvelles asiatiques* a corrupt regime, with generals pocketing the pay of their soldiers, etc.; on the other hand, in his *Religions et philosophies en Asie centrale*, and in his novel *Amadis* posthumously published in 1887, he not only portrayed ancient Persia as the paragon of the "Aryan race" but also, fascinated by Babism and Shi'ism and by several performances of *ta'zīa*, he prophesied the emergence, as in ancient Athens from the cult of Dionysos, of a new kind of tragedy. Gobineau as an admirer of Shi'ism was followed, in our time, by another enthusiast, Henry Corbin (q.v.), who taught both in Tehran and Paris and wrote, among other books, *Face de Dieu et face de l'homme*, 1983.

Maurice Maeterlinck's (1869-1949) *Oiseau bleu* was an avatar of the unattainable Sīmorḡ, and his symbolistic play *Pelléas et Mélisande* the story told in the *Šāh-nāma* (translated by Jules Mohl from 1838 to 1878) of Zāl and Rūdāba. And it was used by Claude Debussy (1862-1918) as the libretto for an opera first performed in 1902, a landmark in the history of modern music. Another great musician, Maurice Ravel (1875-1937) put to music *Scheherazade*, a poem by Tristan Klingsor (1876-1966), inspired by Ḥāfeẓ. And the musician Paul Dukas (1863-1935), in his choreographic poem *La Péri*, portrays this replica of the Avestan *pairikāsas* coveted by a man who forsakes his passion so that the seductress, who aspires to purity, may accomplish her destiny.

Both André Gide (1861-1951) in his *Nourritures terrestres*, and Henry de Montherlant (1895-1972) in his *Eventail de fer* laid out their debt to the "masters of Persia"; both found in Persian poetry a means of shaking off conventional morality; in particular, they were attracted, as homosexuals, to love poems which, owing to the ambiguity of the Persian language, can often not be said whether to be addressed to a girl or a boy. Pierre Loti (1850-1923), also a homosexual, in his fanciful *Vers Ispahan* pretends to have crossed the mountains at night on horseback from the Persian gulf to the Safavid capital and to have spoken Persian and to have seen roses everywhere.

Louis Aragon (1897-1982), for some time a surrealist and always a communist, was inspired, in his enthusiastic celebration of the madness of Love, partly by Saint John of the Cross but mainly by Jālāl-al-Dīn Rūmī, 'Aṭṭār, and Jāmī. He begins *Le Fou d'Elsa* with a hemistich translated from Jāmī's mystical poem



Salāmān & Absāl: 'ēšq-bāzī mīkonam bā nām-e ū, and ends up calling himself a heart-piercing arrowhead to Jāmī's bent bow.

The story of Zāl and Rūdāba told by Ferdowsī inspired Abel Bonnard's *Le Prince persan* (1908). It was also translated by Auguste Bricteux (1873-1937), who taught Persian at the University of Liège. In addition, the latter author made a blank verse rendition of *Roustem et Sohrab: épisode du Livre des rois* (Paris, 1938) and provided Jāmī's mystical love poem *Salāmān and Absāl* (*Salaman et Absal*, Paris, 1911) with an introduction on Islamic mysticism and Persian rhetoric and prosody. He dedicated his translation of Jāmī to the famous statesman Georges Clemenceau (1841-1929), who had written *Le Voile du Bonheur*, also inspired by Persia.

Persia continues to inspire contemporary poets and novelists. A faint echo of *Lettres persanes* reverberates in Fanny Deschamps' novel *Louison ou l'heure exquise* (Paris, 1987).

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