



## GARCIN DE TASSY

---

**GARCIN DE TASSY**, JOSEPH-HÉLIODORE SAGESSE VERTU (b. Marseille, 20 January 1794/d. Paris, 2 September 1878; [Figure 1](#)), French scholar of Persian, Hindustani, and Islamic culture. His surname combines his father's name, Joseph Jacques Garcin, a trade broker, with his mother's name, Claire Virginie Tassy. His first names, Sagesse ("wisdom") and Vertu ("virtue"), clearly indicate that he was born during the era of the French Revolution.

Garcin de Tassy began learning Arabic in 1814 with Gabriel Taouil, a Greek Orthodox priest, originally from Damascus, who had been appointed to a chair of colloquial Arabic in Marseille (Clavères, *passim*). In 1817, he moved to Paris for further studies in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish. For the first two languages, he was taught by Antoine Isaac Silvestre de Sacy (1758-1838), who encouraged him to study Hindustani. Beginning in 1828, Garcin de Tassy taught that language himself. Thanks also to the influence of Silvestre de Sacy, a chair of Hindustani was created for Garcin de Tassy at the *École des Langues Orientales Vivantes* in 1828. Most of Garcin de Tassy's research was devoted to Hindustani language and literature, with the monumental *L'histoire de la littérature hindouie et hindoustanie* (2 vols., 1839-47, expanded 2nd ed. in 3 vols. in 1871) as one of his most important works.

*Persian language and literature.* Although Persian was not Garcin de Tassy's prime focus of research, he nevertheless published several studies of Persian language and literature, including edition of texts and translations. In 1845, he published a second French edition of Sir William Jones' *Persian Grammar* (it was first translated into French in 1772). This was a



new edition, with corrections of errors that Jones had made about Persian; nevertheless Charles Defrémery (q.v.; 1822-1883) criticized it in his review in the *Journal asiatique* (November 1845, pp. 414-22), to which Garcin de Tassy responded in the same journal (January 1846, pp. 93-96). He also edited a few literary works from Persian, either as selections or in their entirety. He was most interested in the poetry of Farid-al-Din ‘Aṭṭār (q.v.), particularly his *Manṭeq al-ṭayr*. In 1855, he published an “Episode de la vie de San’an, d’après le poème persan de Farid Uddin ‘Attar, intitulé: Mantic uttair” in the *Revue de l’Orient*, and in 1856, he wrote a long article, “La poésie philosophique et religieuse chez les Persans d’après le Mantic Uttair ou Le langage des oiseaux de Farid-Uddin Attar et pour servir d’introduction à cet ouvrage,” in *La revue contemporaine*. His edition of the *Manṭeq al-ṭayr* appeared in 1857 and its French translation later in 1863. The introduction to his translation contains important textual information lacking in his earlier edition of the text. He mentions (p. vi) that he had based his text mainly on a manuscript dated 901/1496 which belonged to Ferrão de Castelbranco (now in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, as MS. S. Digby Or. 81). In the same introduction, Garcin de Tassy offers interesting details about his editorial approach: In order to establish a reliable text and spot erroneous variants, he checked the accuracy of the rhymes and scanned all the verses (pp. vii-viii); he also used the Hindustani and Turkish versions of the text (pp. viii-ix).

Garcin de Tassy also wrote long monographs or articles on three other Persian writers: Sa’di of Shiraz, Kamāl-al-Din Ḥosayn Wā‘eẓ Kāšefi and Omar Khayyam (qq.v). In 1822, he translated passages from a work supposedly by Sa’di (de Fouchécour, p. 145) in his *Exposition de la foi Musulmane, suivie du Pend-nameh, poème de Saadi*. In the preface to the book (pp. ix-x), he mentions the existing English translations of the *Pand-nāma*, including one by Francis Gladwin (q.v.) in his *Persian Moonshee*. In 1859, he translated the preface and eleven *hekāyāt* (exempla) from Sa’di’s *Bustān* (q.v.) into French prose, noting in his introduction that he also sometimes relied on the Hindustani version as an aid to his comprehension of the text. Already in 1843, he had devoted an article in the *Journal asiatique* to claim that Sa’di had composed verses in Hindustani, a notion disputed by Charles Barbier de Meynard (q.v.; 1826-1908) in his own translation of the *Bustān* (1880, p. xvi). As for Ḥosayn Wā‘eẓ Kāšefi, Garcin de Tassy included in the last pages of his *Exposition de la foi Musulmane* a translation of two *hekāyāt* from Kāšefi’s *Anwār-e sohayli* (q.v.). He also wrote a note on Kāšefi’s *Aḳlāq-e moḥseni* (q.v.) in the *Journal*



*asiatique* (July 1837), introducing the work to European readers for the first time. In 1857, he published ten quatrains by Omar Khayyam, translating them into French for the first time (see KHAYYAM vi. FRENCH TRANSLATIONS OF THE RUBAIYAT); he based his edition on the manuscript MS Ouseley 140 of the Bodleian Library, dating from 1460.

*Works on Islam.* Garcin de Tassy was also very interested in questions relating to Islam and wrote several books and articles on the subject. In *Doctrine et devoirs de la religion musulmane, tirés textuellement du Coran*, written in 1826, he analyzed the content of the Qur'an, with numerous extracts, cautiously drawing on Claude Étienne Savary's (1750-86) translation. He explains in the preface that he simply made the corrections he considered necessary (pp. ix-x). He also translated some books on Islam. In the same book where he translated Sa'dī's work in 1822, he translated into French *Exposition de la foi Musulmane*, a Turkish book written by Moḥammad b. Pīr 'Alī Bergavī (1522-73). In an article published in the *Journal asiatique* (May 1842), he edited the text of a "Chapitre inconnu du Coran" (a text praising 'Alī that some Shi'ites thought had been expunged from 'Oṭmān's recension of the Qur'an) and translated it, without any commentary. In his introduction (p. 433), he says that he found this text in the *Dabestān-e maḏāheb* (q.v.), which was at the time attributed to the Indo-Persian scholar Moḥammad-Moḥsen Fani Kašmiri (q.v.), mentioning also that Anthony Troyer (1769-1865) was preparing a translation of this book at the same time (Ernst, p. 48). In 1874, he published *L'islamisme d'après le Coran: l'enseignement doctrinal et la pratique*. It is referred to as the third edition. In fact, after an introduction quoting biblical passages on the coming of Islam, it is a collation of three other works that Garcin de Tassy had already published earlier, with corrections improving the first editions: *Doctrine et devoirs de la religion musulmane*, *Exposition de la foi Musulmane*, and *Mémoire sur les particularités de la religion musulmane dans l'Inde, d'après les ouvrages hindoustanis*. In these studies, as well as in his translations of Persian texts, Garcin de Tassy displayed a profound interest in Sufism, a point made by Edouard Laboulaye in his eulogy (1878, p. 145). Garcin de Tassy himself stressed this interest in his translations of the *Bustān* (1859, p. 7) and of the *Manteq al-ṭayr* (1863, p. i).

*Oriental literature and culture.* Garcin de Tassy published other works on Oriental literature and culture. In *Rhétorique et prosodie des langues de l'Orient musulman* (1873), he made a free translation of a Persian treatise on rhetoric and metrics, the *Ḥadā'eq al-balāḡa* of Mir Šams-al-Din



Faqir Dehlavi (q.v.), and supplemented it with his own research on the topic. For the first time, he gave examples in Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and Urdu to illustrate the metrical rules. With the same idea of embracing the four languages, he wrote two more books which also illustrate his importance as an ethnographer (Gaborieau, pp. 134-35): *Mémoire sur les noms propres et les titres musulmans, suivie d'une notice sur des vêtements avec inscriptions arabes, persanes et hindoustanies* (1878) and *Allégories, récits poétiques et chants populaires, traduits de l'arabe, du persan, de l'hindoustani et du turc* (1876).

*Place among the French orientalists of the 19th century.* Garcin de Tassy played an important role in the *Société asiatique* in Paris. He was one of its founders in 1822, and he was the secretary of its first meeting, at the end of which he was elected assistant secretary and librarian. He was succeeded in this position by Eugène Burnouf (q.v., 1801-52) in 1826. He was elected as a member of the Council in 1833 and as the president of the Society in 1876, a position he held until his death in 1878. He published numerous reviews in the *Journal asiatique*, the Society's journal. He was also a foreign member of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland. He was elected a member of the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres in 1838. His replacement by Eugène Burnouf, mentioned above, was linked to disputes among the French orientalists of the 19th century (McGetchin, p. 565). The members of the *Société asiatique* were divided into two camps, the *fleuristes* and the anti-*fleuristes*. The debate became particularly heated between 1825 and 1829. The term "*fleuriste*" was coined by Jules Mohl (q.v.; 1800-1876) to refer to the French orientalists who studied texts from an aesthetic rather than a philological approach. Garcin de Tassy was a *fleuriste*, while Burnouf was an anti-*fleuriste*. In 1826, a reaction among the members of the *Société asiatique* against the *fleuriste* party led to the election of Burnouf to replace Garcin de Tassy, the influence of the sinologist Jean-Pierre Abel-Rémusat (1788- 1832) prevailing over that of Silvestre de Sacy.

Garcin de Tassy died in Paris but was buried in Marseille. In accordance with his last will and testament, his library of 2,975 books was sold at a public auction. In connection with this, one of his students, François Deloncle (1856-1922), made a catalog of the books in this library "to allow his students and friends from all over the world to benefit from his work and have some reminders of him" as Garcin de Tassy's brother said (in Deloncle, inside cover). This catalog contains numerous works on Islam (pp. 36-41), on the Avesta (pp. 41-42), on Iranian languages and literature (pp. 141-54), on Middle Eastern



history (pp. 209-16), and on archaeology and epigraphy (pp. 220-29). The catalog ends with a list and description of the manuscripts belonging to Garcin de Tassy, including 32 Persian manuscripts (pp. 261-66).

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

---

Selected works by Garcin de Tassy on Persian language and literature (in chronological order).

*Exposition de la foi musulmane traduite du turc de Mohammed ben Pir-Ali Elberkevi, avec des notes, par M. Garcin de Tassy, suivie du Pend-Nameh, poème de Saadi, traduit du persan, par le même, et du Borda, poème à la louange de Mahomet, traduit de l'arabe, par M. le baron Silvestre de Sacy, Paris, 1822.*

“Du traité persan sur les Vertus, de Huçaïn Wâiz Kâschifi, intitulé *Akhlâqu-i-Muhcinî*,”

*Journal asiatique* ser. 3, 4, July 1837, pp. 61-81.

“Saadi: auteur des premières poésies hindoustani,” *Journal asiatique* ser. 4, 1, January 1843, pp. 5-27.

*Grammaire persane de Sir William Jones: seconde édition française, revue, corrigée et augmentée par M. Garcin de Tassy, Paris, 1845.*

“Episode de la vie de San’an, d’après le poème persan de Farid Uddin ‘Attar, intitulé: *Mantic uttair*,” *Revue de l’Orient, nouvelle série*, 2, 1855, pp. 362-67.

“La poésie philosophique et religieuse chez les Persans d’après le *Mantic Uttair* ou Le langage des oiseaux de Farid-Uddin Attar et pour servir d’introduction à cet ouvrage,” *Revue contemporaine* 24, February-March 1856, pp. 86-114.

*Mantic uttair: ou, Le langage des oiseaux, poème de philosophie religieuse, par Farid-Uddin Attar, Paris, 1857.*

“Note sur les Rubâ’iyât de ‘Omar Khaïyâm,” *Journal asiatique*, ser. 5, 9, June 1857, pp. 548-54.



“Le Bostan, poème moral de Saadi, analyse et extraits,” *Revue orientale et américaine* 1, 1859, pp. 259-78.

*Le langage des oiseaux, poème de philosophie religieuse, traduit du persan de Farid Uddin Attar*, Paris, 1863.

Selected works by Garcin de Tassy on Islam and Oriental culture (in chronological order).

*Doctrine et devoirs de la religion musulmane, tirés textuellement du Coran, suivis de l'Eucologe musulman, traduit de l'arabe*, Paris, 1826.

“Chapitre inconnu du Coran, publié et traduit pour la première fois,” *Journal asiatique*, ser. 3, 13, May 1842, pp. 431-39.

*Mémoire sur les particularités de la religion musulmane dans l'Inde d'après les ouvrages hindoustanis*, Paris, 1869.

*Rhétorique et prosodie des langues de l'Orient musulman, à l'usage des élèves de l'Ecole Spéciale des Langues Orientales Vivantes, 2<sup>nd</sup>e édition revue, corrigée et augmentée*, Paris, 1873.

*L'islamisme d'après le Coran: l'enseignement doctrinal et la pratique*, 3rd ed., Paris 1874.

*Allégories, récits poétiques et chants populaires traduits de l'arabe, du persan, de l'hindoustani et du turc, 2<sup>nd</sup> édition*, Paris, 1876.

*Mémoire sur les noms propres et les titres musulmans, 2<sup>e</sup> édition, suivie d'une notice sur des vêtements avec inscriptions arabes, persanes et hindoustanies*, Paris, 1878.

Secondary literature.

Charles Barbier de Meynard, *Le Boustan, ou Verger: poème persan de Saadi, traduit pour la première fois en français, avec une introduction et des notes*, Paris, 1880.

Gabriel Bergognioux, “L'orientalisme et la linguistique: entre géographie, littérature et histoire,” *Histoire Epistémologie Langage* 23/2, 2001, pp. 39-57.

Marie-Hélène Clavères, “L'enseignement de l'arabe au lycée de Marseille au



XIXe siècle,” Documents pour l’histoire du français langue étrangère ou seconde 2014, <http://journals.openedition.org/dhfles/2691> (doi.org/10.4000/dhfles.2691), consulted 30 Dec. 2022.

Charles-Henri de Fouchécour, *Moralia: les notions morales dans la littérature persane du 3<sup>e</sup>/9<sup>e</sup> au 7<sup>e</sup>/3<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris, 1986.

Laure Delisle, *Choix de lettres d’Eugène Burnouf, 1825-1852*, Paris, 1891.

M. F. Deloncle, ed., *Catalogue des livres orientaux et autres composant la bibliothèque de feu M. Garcin de Tassy ... suivi du catalogue des manuscrits hindoustanis, persans, arabes, turcs*, Paris, 1879.

Carl W. Ernst, “The Dabistan and Orientalist Views of Sufism,” in Jamal Malik and Saeed Zarrabi-zadeh, *Sufism East and West. Mystical Islam and Cultural Exchange in the Modern World*, Leiden, 2019, pp. 33-52.

Louis Finot et al., *Société asiatique: le livre du centenaire (1822-1922)*, Paris, 1922.

Marc Gaborieau, “Muslim Saints, Faquirs, and Pilgrims in 1831 according to Garcin de Tassy,” in Jamal Malik, ed., *Perspectives of Mutual Encounter in South Asian History 1760-1860*, Leiden, 2000, pp. 128-56.

Sayida Surriya Hussain, *Garcin de Tassy: biographie et étude critique de ses œuvres*, Pondicherry, 1962.

Edouard Laboulaye, “Éloge funèbre de M. Joseph-Héliodore Garcin de Tassy, membre de l’Académie,” *Comptes rendus des séances de l’Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* 22/3, 1878, pp. 145-47.

Roland Lardinois, *L’invention de l’Inde: entre ésotérisme et science*, Paris, 2007.

Douglas T. McGetchin, “Wilting Florists: The Turbulent Early Decades of the Société Asiatique, 1822-1860,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 2003, 64/4, pp. 565-80.

Ernest Renan, “Rapport annuel,” *Journal asiatique*, ser. 7, 14, July 1879, pp. 12-60.

Raymond Schwab, *La renaissance orientale*, Paris, 1950.