



GREECE XIV. GREEK LOANWORDS IN MEDIEVAL NEW PERSIAN

It stands to reason that the number of borrowings from Greek into Persian should vary according to genres of texts and to disciplines of learning. Thus in contrast to Islamic religious scholarship (exempting the Qur'ān's Greek loanwords, which naturally passed into Persian) the secular or, by the Arabic term, "ancient sciences"—the syllabus of Aristotelian philosophy, medicine and its ancillary fields, and the occult disciplines—would seem to be primary loci of Greek terminology. Yet it should be pointed out that in the Islamic period, Persian learned literature was largely modelled upon Arabic antecedents and that these, whether (direct or indirect) translations from Greek or Arabic originals, strove to minimize foreign and unfamiliar-sounding vocabulary. This was contrary to the position regularly accorded to Arabic in Persian, in which non-Arabic technical terminology was, as a rule, replaced by calques and other loan-adaptations or at least by words of common, even if non-technical, currency. Numerous words of non-Arabic origin had, indeed, become entirely assimilated and were no longer perceived as foreign. Other channels by which Greek words entered Persian were commerce and administration. Eventually, most Greek elements to remain in Persian usage were proper names, especially of ancient authorities, and names of merchandise and of units of measure. In order to provide a balanced account,



it should be noted that basically any Greek word encountered in Arabic could be incorporated into Persian, whether simply as Arabic or correctly identified as to its Greek origin or intermediate Greek stage.

In addition to division by semantic fields, Greek lexical items in Persian can also be distinguished by trajectory and period of borrowing, considering the marked historical caesurae that delimited periods of potential contact and the fact that, for most of their history, the two linguistic areas of Iranian and Greek were not contiguous. The Muslim conquest and with it the demise of the Sasanian dynasty, and the linguistic shift in Iranian, and the ensuing period of literary latency of what subsequently emerged as New Persian represented a watershed in the introduction of Greek into Iranian. Here a few closely interrelated questions arise, in regard to the period of original borrowing and as to the subsequent destiny of the borrowed lexical items. A fundamental difference exists between the Greek words that entered Persian before the Muslim conquest and the Greek loanwords dating from the post-conquest period. The former passed either directly or via Aramaic from Greek into Pahlavi, while the latter inevitably had Arabic as their proximate origin before entering Persian. This holds true for most of the Greek terms of *materia medica* and pharmacy used in Persian (e.g., *tāfīsā* < Gk. *thapsia*, *Thapsia granica* L., and *qarābādin*, < Gk. *graphidion* “booklet”). There are, however, a number of notable exceptions that betray traces of an intra-Iranian passage from the Sasanian period into New Persian and are not restricted to use in medical contexts; examples are *yāra* (Gk. *hiera* “holy”), *teryāk* (Gk. *thēriakē* “treacle”), *stēr* (Gk. *statēr* “stater,” New Per. *sir*, a unit of weight), and *deram*, *derham* “dram, dirham,” q.v. (Gk. *drakhmē*). Conversely and in greater numbers, Greek medical and medicinal terms, first borrowed during the Sasanian or early post-Sasanian periods, at least before the final shift to neo-Persian, were falling into disuse in Persia. These terms, however, were taken over into Arabic and were later re-introduced from Arabic into Persian; examples are *qawlanj* (< Gk. *kōlik* “colic”) and the more common variant of the just-mentioned *yāra*, *iyāraj*, just to name two of many similar cases. From astronomy, examples of comparable late Middle Iranian Greek loanwords which first passed into Arabic before making their way back into Persian are the names *Baṭlamīyus* (Gk. *Ptolemaios*, “Ptolemy”) and *Majestī* (Gk. *Megisiē*, “Almagest”). Plausibly from the same late middle-Iranian period such Persian medical loanwords in Arabic as *bersām* and *sarsām* were derived, calques from Greek *pleuritis*, inflammation of the side, “pleurisy” and *phrenitis*, inflammation of the brain, “frenzy,” respectively.



As indicated above, proper names, mostly of authors, form another large group of Greek elements in Persian. These, however, mostly belong to disciplines of Greek excellence such as medicine and mathematics; Esmā'il Jorjāni's *Dakira-ye k̄vārazmšāhi* may be mentioned here as an outstanding medical source of Greek names in Persian.

The following is a very short, categorised list of some words of Greek origin that are commonly found in Persian:

Anthroponyms. (A) Pre-Islamic period: Alaksandar “Alexander,” Baḡlamiyus (see above); (B) Islamic period: Aristuṭālis “Aristotle,” Eskandar “Alexander,” Aflāṭun “Plato,” Faluṭin “Plotinus,” Boqrāṭ “Hippocrates,” Tāvon “Theo,” Jālinus “Galen,” and a whole panoply of the names of authorities in philosophy, science, and medicine, which, as indicated above, entered Persian via Arabic.

Toponyms. Islamic period (via Arabic): Atīniya “Athens,” Eskandariya “Alexandria,” Ankuriya “Ankara,” QaysĀāriya “Caesarea,” Rumiya “Rome,” Atrābolos “Tripoli”; (via Anatolian Turkish): Senub “Sinope,” Sivās “Sivas.”

Astronomy. Islamic period (via Arabic): Baršāvoš “Perseus,” Dalfin “Delphinus,” Qanṭuris “Centaurus,” Qiṭus “Cetus,” and Qifāvus “Cepheus.”

Biblionyms: *Abiḍimiyā*, < *Epidēmía* “the Epidemics of Hippocrates,” *Urgānun* < *Organon* “the Organon of Aristotle,” *Isāḡuji* < *Eisagōgē* “the Isagoge of Porphyry,” *Bāri Armāniās* < *Peri Hermēneías* “Aristotle’s *De interpretatione*,” *Tāwolujiyā* “*Theología*, Pseudo-Aristotle’s *Theology*,” < *Qaṭājānes* < *Kata genē Galen’s De compositione medicamentorum*.”

Administrative terms. Pre-Islamic period: *daftar* (register, account book) < *diphthéra* “parchment” (see xiii above); Islamic period: *barid* (the official postal and intelligence service of the Caliphate and early Islamic states) < *berēdos* “post-horse,” possibly borrowed directly from Greek into Arabic and then passed into Persian.

Units of currency and measure. Pre-Islamic period: *deram*, *derahm* < *drakhmē*; *dinār* < *dēnārion* (Lat. denarius); *pul* < *obolos*; *stēr* < *statēr* (see also xiii above); Islamic period (via Arabic): *derham* (by “retrograde derivation from Ar. quasi-pl. *darāhem*, see Spitaler), *qestĀ* < *xéstēs*, “pint,” *qerāṭ* < *kerátion* “carat.”

General terms. *eqlim* < *klima*, “clime,” *sābun* < *sápōn*, “rotten, putrid,” *manjaniq*



< *manganikón*, “pulley,” *buqalamun* < *hupokálamon*, “moiré cloth, etc.,” *qāmus* < *ōkeanós* “ocean,” *āb(a)nus* < *ebenos* “ebony,” *ṭumār* < *tomárion* “document, tract,” *qalam* < *kálamos* “reed,” *qerṭās* < *khártēs* “sheet of papyrus,” *qānun* < *kanōn* “straight-edge, rule,” *yāqut* “ruby” (retrograde singular from Arab. quasi-pl. *yawāqit*) < *hiákinthos* “sapphire, zircon, etc.,” *zabarjad* < *smáragdos* “emerald.”

Medical terms. In addition to Galen and other major authors of works on medicine in Arabic, Dioscorides’s classic on *materia medica*, known in Arabic as *Fi hayula ‘elaj al-ṭebb* and *Ketab al adwia al-mofrada*, provided a wealth of Greek medical terms. Not only was the text studied in Arabic translation, but it was also rendered into Persian. Thus the examples given below are just a few samples to permit a glimpse into a rich, existing repertoire: (a) Morbidity, etc.: *fanṭāsiya* < *phantasía*, “display; imagination,” *ilāvus* < *eileos*, “intestinal disease,” *farāniṭes*, *qarāniṭes* (by misreading of *fā’*) < *phrenitis*, “frenzy,” *māliḳuliā* < *melancholia*; (b) *Materia medica*: *anisū, anisun* < *anison*, *anēthon* “dill, anise,” *qulqās* < *kolokási-* “Egyptian lotus,” *qalqand(is)* < *kháلكanthon*, *khalkánthes* “copper sulfate solution”; (c) Pharmacy: *eyāraj*, *qarābāḍin*, *teryāq* (see above, and *teryāk* also in xiii above).

Philosophical terms. *hayulā* < *hulē*, “wood, timber; matter,” *faylasuf* (perh. by retrograde derivation from Ar. quasi-pl. *falāsefa*) < *philósophos* “philosopher.”

Alchemical terms. *eksir* < *xērion* “desiccative powder for wounds,” *ṭelasm* < *télesma* “payment, outlay,” *kimiā* < *khumeía* “melting; alchemy.”

Religious terms. *Eblis* < *diábolos* “slanderer; the Devil,” *Edris* < *Andre*, as, *enḳil* < *euangélion* “reward for good news; gospel.”

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