



ḤABIB EŞFAHĀNI

ḤABIB EŞFAHĀNI, Mirzā, Iranian poet, grammarian and translator, who spent much of his life in exile in Ottoman Turkey (1835-93; [Figure 1](#)). Born in Ben, in the Baḡ-tiāri region of Iran, in 1251/1835, he began his studies in Sāmān before leaving for Tehran. He later spent four years in Baghdad, studying Arabic literature and Islamic jurisprudence. He returned to Tehran in 1866, but was soon obliged to flee Persia apparently on account of a poem in which he satirized Moḥammad-Ḳān Sepahsālār and which earned him accusations of heresy (Sanjabi, p. 252). Arriving in Istanbul, he initially sought refuge in a French monastery, but soon he made the acquaintance of political and literary figures such as ‘Ali Pasha, the Şadr-e-A‘zam, and Aḥmad Vafiq Pasha, translator into Turkish of the works of Molière. With their help he was able to obtain employment at the Maktab-e Solṭāni in Galata as instructor in Persian and Arabic. Later he was appointed inspector at the Ottoman ministry of education. His literary achievements were recognized by his election to honorary membership of the Société Asiatique. He died and was buried in Bursa in 1893.

A prolific and versatile writer and translator in both Persian and Turkish, Mirzā Ḥabib is celebrated in particular for his Persian grammar, *Dastur-e Soḡan*. First published in Istanbul in 1289/1872, it is regarded as the first systematic grammar of the Persian language and has served as a model for many later works (Afšār, 1340 Š./1961, pp. 496-97). His other works on Persian grammar and language include *Dasturča-ye Fārsi* (Istanbul, 1293/1876), *Ḳolāşa-ye Rahnamā-ye Fārsi* (Istanbul, 1309/1891), *Momāresat-e Fārsiya*



(Istanbul, 1304/1886), *Rahbar-e Fārsi* (Istanbul, 1310/1892) and *Barg-e sabz* (Istanbul, 1304/1886). Among his translations are Persian renderings of Molière's *Le Misanthrope* (*Gozāreš-e Mardom-goriz*, Istanbul, 1292/1875) and *Gil Blas*, which was published as his own work by Moḥammad-Kān Kermānšāhi Kafri in 1904. However, Mirzā Ḥabib's main impact on Persian prose came through his imaginative rendering in Persian, in 1886, of James Morier's picaresque novel *The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Isfahan* (q.v.), which went through repeated printings in Calcutta, Lahore and Tehran (Sanjabi, p. 252). He also translated into Persian a work on national customs on the basis of its Arabic rendering by Refat al-Tahtāwi (*Ġarā'eb 'awā'ed-e melal*, Istanbul, 1303/1866). Mirzā Ḥabib also evinced an interest in Classical Persian literature by publishing the gastronomic poet Boshāq's (Abu Eshāq) *Divān-e aṭ'ema* (Istanbul, 1302/1885) and Neẓām-al-Din Maḥmud Qāri Yazdi's *Divān-e Albesa'* (Istanbul, 1303/1886). He also prepared an anthology of the work of 'Obayd Zākāni (*Montakābāt-e 'Obayd-e Zākāni*, Istanbul, 1303/1886; introduced by Henri Ferté) and selections from the *Golestān* of Sa'di (*Montakābāt-e Golestān*, Istanbul, 1309/1892). Mirzā Ḥabib's own *Divān* (ms. Bāyazid Library, Istanbul), in which he uses the *nom de plume* "Dastān," remains unpublished (Sanjabi, p. 268, n. 7), but some of his Persian poetry as well as a series of articles on the history of theatre were published in the newspaper *Aktar* (Afšār, 1340 Š./1961, p. 495). Mirzā Ḥabib also composed a humorous poem of twelve distichs in 1307/1889 on the occasion of the VIIIe Congrès International des Orientalistes in Stockholm. Originally published in the dinner program with the title, "Menu du diner offert au VIIIe Congrès International des Orientalistes," it was published again in both Persian and French in the journal *Āyanda* (Afšār, 1980, pp. 299-303). The Istanbul University Library also possesses a collection of twelve manuscripts of his works, written between 1300/1883 and 1309/1892, including *Majmu'a-ye aš'ār wa żorub-e emtāl*, *Sargodašt-e Ḥājjī Bābā*, *Majmu'a-ye aš'ār wa qawā'ed*, *Majmu'a-ye delgošā-ye zibā* (Afšār, 1375 Š./1996).

Mirzā Ḥabib's most important work in Turkish is his *Kaṭṭ va kaṭṭātān* (Istanbul, 1305/1888), a biographical dictionary of Persian and Turkish calligraphers. He also published a Turkish translation of *Gil Blas* as well as his *Divān* in Turkish and a versified history of the Ottomans.



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