



LEXICOGRAPHY II. ALPHABETICAL DICTIONARIES

ii. Alphabetical dictionaries

The first Persian dictionaries were of the alphabetical type, and reputedly appeared soon after the earliest court poetry in New Persian. They were compiled by poet-scholars, with the object of clarifying their own or others' rare, figurative, or dialectal vocabulary – especially that of the court poets of [Bukhara](#) under the Samanid dynasty (819-1005), where literary New Persian was evolving. Early works, of which no trace remains, have been attributed, without strong evidence, to the 10th-century poet-musician [Abu Ḥafṣ Soğdi](#) (see [Dabirsiāqi](#), pp. 8-9; [Baevskii](#), pp. 30-31) and to the poets [Rudaki](#) (d. ca. 940) and [Farroki](#) (d. ca. 1037). The first reliably reported, though not extant, alphabetically-arranged defining dictionary was compiled by the 11th century poet [Qaṭrān](#), whose mother tongue was probably (pre-Turkish) Azeri ([Āḍari](#); for its development, see [Azarbaijan](#) vii-ix). [Nāṣer-e Kōsrow](#) (pp. 7-8) described how he glossed verses of two popular poets of Khorasan for this “good poet” who “did not know Persian very well” (see [Baevskii](#), pp. 32-42). The earliest extant dictionary, the *Loğat-e fors* (ca. 1066) by [Asadi Ṭusi](#), was compiled by an epic poet from Ferdowsi's hometown but, like that of [Qaṭrān](#), produced in Azarbaijan. It spotlighted a broader range of both Dari and archaic Pahlavi lexis in the poetical koinē. Differences in the title, text, and prefaces of various manuscripts suggest that this dictionary originated as a number of word-lists given by Asadi to his students to complete and to provide with verse examples



of usage (see [DICTIONARIES i. Persian Dictionaries](#)).

Asadi and his immediate followers in Iran arranged their entries alphabetically by final, not initial, letter; their works could thus be used additionally as dictionaries of rhyme. Over time this ordering, as well as its alternatives, became progressively more systematic, with second-level ordering by initial letter. Such was Moḥammad Henduśāh Naḵjavāni's larger *Şehāḥ al-fors* (ed. 'A.-'A. Ṭā'ati, Tehran, 1962), which was modeled on Jawhari's Arabic dictionary, *Şehāḥ al-loġa* and compiled in 1328. The third level of alphabetization, when introduced, used either the medial or the penultimate letter. Each new letter was flagged with a category word: at the first level *ketāb* or *bāb* "chapter" (e.g., *bāb al-jīm*; *bāb* in this usage was an Arabic calque on Middle Persian *dar* "gate, door; chapter"), and at subordinate levels with terms such as *faşl* "section." Later, Persian terms such as *ġuna* "sort" and *baķş* "part" were also used. Definitions varied greatly in completeness, from one or two synonyms to extensive explanations; since the poetical corpus included place and personal names, a personage in the *Şāh-nāma*, for instance, might merit a brief biography. Most compilers of dictionaries justified definitions and exemplified usage by quoting verses from earlier poets (*şāhed*, pl. *şawāhed* "witness"). Thus in general aims and structure, the classic Persian defining dictionary – not surprisingly – resembled its immediate predecessor and continuing partner in the marshaling of Islamicate literature, the Arabic dictionary.

Similarly based on Asadi were the *Majmu'at al-fors* of Abu'l-'Alā Jāruti, known as Şafī Kaḥḥāl, and Şams-e Faķri Eşfahāni's *Me'yār-e Jamāli wa meftāḥ-e Abu Eşḥāqi*. The former was compiled around 1300, and the cited poets range from [Ferdowsi](#) down to [Sa'di](#). The latter was compiled around 1344, and comprised the fourth part of the earliest treatise on Persian poetics. It is also the most important repository of Asadi's legacy.

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