



MOHL, JULIUS

MOHL, JULIUS (Fr., Jules Mohl), German orientalist, editor and translator of the *Šāh-nāma*, and professor of Persian at the Collège de France (b. Stuttgart, 25 October 1800; d. Paris, 4 January 1876; [Figure 1](#))

The orientalist Julius Mohl was born on 25 October 1800 in Stuttgart. He was the second son of Ferdinand Mohl, a senior official in the Kingdom of Württemberg (southwestern Germany), and his three brothers, Robert, Moritz, and Hugo, were respectively a jurist, a political economist, and a botanist. In 1818, Jules Mohl went to Tübingen for pastoral studies and developed an interest in Hebrew. He was assigned to a Lutheran parish in 1822 but preferred to continue his studies instead. In 1823, he settled in Paris. Extremely interested in oriental languages, he took Arabic and Persian courses with Antoine-Isaac Silvestre de Sacy (1758-1838) and Chinese courses with Jean-Pierre Abel-Rémusat (1788-1832) at the Collège de France. He was appointed Professor of Oriental Languages at the University of Tübingen in 1825, while simultaneously continuing his studies in Paris. In 1833, he resigned his chair (Müller, 1879, p. XIV; or in 1831, as indicated in Renan, 1876, p. 19) in Tübingen without ever having taught.

In 1826, the French government entrusted Mohl with the task of editing and translating Ferdowsi's *Šāh-nāma* (qq.v.). In 1829, while preparing for the task, in collaboration with Justus Olshausen (q.v.; 1800-1882), he published *Fragments relatifs à la religion de Zoroastre*, in which there is a study of the Persian manuscripts kept in the Bibliothèque du Roi in Paris. In 1830-31, he traveled to England, and sojourned in Oxford and London, to work



on the East India Company and the British Museum manuscripts. Returning to Paris, he translated from Latin into French two Chinese books brought by the Jesuits, the *Confucii Chi-king, sive Liber carminum* (1830) and the *Y-King, Antiquissimus Sinarum liber quem, ex Latina interpretatione P. Regis* (1834-39).

In 1844, he was elected fellow of the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, one of the five academies of the Institut de France in Paris. He became professor of Persian at the Collège de France in 1847. In 1852, he succeeded Eugène Burnouf (q.v.; 1801-52) in becoming Inspector of Oriental Typography at the Imprimerie Nationale (Simpson, 1878, p. 302).

Mohl played an important role in the Société Asiatique of Paris (created in 1822). In 1824, he was elected a fellow of the Society, and became *commissaire des fonds* in 1833. In 1840, Burnouf, who had been the secretary of the Society since 1829, asked Mohl to replace him in writing the annual activity reports. Mohl subsequently became deputy secretary between 1841 and 1852. When Burnouf passed away in 1852, Mohl filled the vacancy and became secretary, then president in 1867; a post he occupied until his death in 1876. He wrote all the annual activity reports from 1840 to 1867, which were all collected after his death in a volume called *Vingt-sept ans d'histoire des études orientales* (1879). In these reports, Mohl treated every subject with accuracy and thoroughness and carefully chronicled an account of important publications of all the branches of oriental scholarship.

Mohl also started the *Collection d'ouvrages orientaux*. He encouraged publications in all fields of oriental studies, and he himself published *Lettres de M. Botta sur ses Découvertes à Khorsabad, près de Ninive* (1845). To celebrate Mohl's scientific contributions, Ernest Renan (1823-92) wrote a long and vibrant tribute in his memory (1876, pp. 12-27).

As part of understanding Mohl, it is important to take note of his friendships and enmities. About his professors, Jules Mohl felt closer to Abel-Rémusat than he did to Silvestre de Sacy, even though he later specialized in Persian. In 1824, he met Jean-Jacques Ampère (1800-1864), with whom he shared the same house from 1831 to 1847, the year Mohl married Mary Clarke (1793-1883). He was also very close to Burnouf, as proven by the latter's correspondence; Claude Fauriel (1772-1844); Fulgence Fresnel (1795-1855); as well as Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859). He had frequent contacts with German philologists of his time, such as August Wilhelm Schlegel (1767-1845), Franz Bopp (1791-1867), and their students, Christian Lassen (1800-1876), Adolf Friedrich



Stenzler (1807-87), and Friedrich Rosen (1856-1935).

As stated in one of Burnouf's letters (in Delisle, p. 65), Mohl created the appellation *fleuristes* ("florist school") to name the French orientalists who studied texts with a more aesthetical than philological approach, in ironic reference to *Fleurs de l'Inde* by Guerrier de Dumast (1796-1883). Burnouf was the leader of the anti-*fleuristes* group and became professor of Sanskrit at the Collège de France after the death of Antoine-Léonard Chézy (1773-1832), who was considered a *fleuriste*. In his correspondence, Burnouf wrote several times that there was a real agreement with Jules Mohl on this topic. For instance, he wrote in a letter "quand je n'aurai plus Mohl pour me moquer des *fleuristes*, que deviendrai-je?" ("when Mohl will no longer be there to laugh at the *fleuristes* with me, what will I become?"; in Delisle, p. 78).

As mentioned earlier, Jules Mohl was put in charge of editing and translating the *Śāh-nāma* into French, and it became the work of his life. The first volume was published in 1838, the same year that Mohl became a French citizen. The second one appeared in 1842, the third in 1848, the fourth in 1855, the fifth in 1866, the sixth in 1868, and, when Mohl died in 1876, the seventh and last volume was two-thirds completed. It was later finished by Mohl's student, Charles Barbier de Meynard (q.v.) and was published in 1878. This edition was not the first one of the *Śāh-nāma* in its entirety. Turner Macan (1792-1836) had already edited the text in Calcutta in 1829. Macan based his edition on 21 manuscripts, about which he gave very little information, only indicating dates of 11 manuscripts from the 15th to the 17th century. Mohl was aware of the existence of this edition since 1831, at the time of preparation of the publication of his first volume (see Mohl, 1841, pp. 338-39). Even though Mohl's edition is not the first one, it was the first time Ferdowsi's work was entirely translated into a European language, and not just some extracts of it. His translation is literal, due to his aversion to the manner of the "florist school" (see "Preface," I, p. lxxxvi). To the present day, it remains the sole complete translation in French, as the one by Gilbert Lazard (1920-2018), published in 1979, consists in reediting extracts of Mohl's translation. The few corrections Lazard made were mainly based on the progress made on the knowledge of Ferdowsi's work. In the preface of each volume, Mohl indicated the other translations available in other European languages, even though they were all incomplete. In the introduction of the first volume, after presenting Ferdowsi's biography, he detailed the manuscripts he used (pp. lxxxiv-lxxxv): eight from the Bibliothèque royale de Paris (the current



Bibliothèque nationale de France), thirteen from London (India Office Library), five that he himself possessed, and some other manuscripts that eminent people made available to him. In the same preface, he added that he tried to draw up the *stemma codicum* of all these manuscripts and regretted that it was impossible to classify them. The first edition of the seven volumes presented the Persian text of the *Šāh-nāma* and its French translation on the opposite side. The edition proved to be too expensive for students and scholars to afford. For this reason, his widow Mary Clarke reedited the translation only, leaving out the Persian text, between 1876 and 1878.

His contemporaries, scholars and writers, praised his work. Renan noted that Mohl's works are "d'un rare mérite" (1876, p. 26). According to Jean-Jacques Ampère, Mohl was able to successfully bring to completion this vast task (p. 442). Barbier de Meynard was also extremely laudatory in the preface of the seventh volume.

The only criticism came from Antoine-Chrysostome Quatremère de Quincy (1755-1849) after the publication of the first volume (1841). He did not understand the need for a new edition after the one by Macan. He also suggested that the French translation was impossible for Ferdowsi's work and noticed some clumsiness in Mohl's translation. He also deplored the lack of critical apparatus. Mohl responded to each point raised by de Quincy, and, as he highlighted, his edition was very different from that of Macan (1841). He also reminded de Quincy that he intended to write the critical apparatus, but this would have delayed the publication. As mentioned in the preface of the first volume (pp. lxxxv-lxxxvii), he preferred to add an appendix, after completion of the edition of all the volumes, in which he wanted to indicate the complete list of the manuscripts he used, the variants they present, and some other philological and literary explanations. Unfortunately, Mohl passed away before providing such an appendix.

Thanks to his wife, Mary Clarke, Mohl was in contact with the Parisian literary circles. As mentioned earlier, Mohl married Clarke in 1847. Mary Elizabeth Clarke (known as "Clarkey") was born in Westminster, but after her father's death, her family settled in Paris where she grew up. She was a close friend of Juliette Récamier (1777-1849), who was very famous for her Parisian *salon*. After frequenting Madame Récamier's *salon* for a while, Mary Clarke opened her own *salon* on Rue du Bac, and for nearly forty years it housed one of the most renowned literary circles in Paris. She enjoyed a privileged relationship with many poets and writers, such as François-René de Chateaubriand



(1768-1848), Prosper Mérimée (1803-70), and Benjamin Constant (1767-1830). Jules Mohl was familiar with Claude Fauriel and François Désiré Roulin (1796-1874), an intimate of her *salon* from the 1820s (O'Meara, 1886, p. 31). It is difficult to establish with any degree of certainty whether Mohl's work was talked about during the receptions held at her *salon*. But, given his standing in Mary Clarke's *salon* before and, of course, after they married, it is almost inconceivable that it was never brought up for discussion. While one cannot ascertain that Victor Hugo read Mohl's translation, he used characters such as *Dive*, *Chosroès*, and *Gour* from the *Šāh-nāma* in his work *La légende des siècles* (1859-83). He also quoted Ferdowsi himself in the verse: "Autrefois, j'ai connu Ferdousi dans Mysore" ("I knew Ferdowsi in Mysore, long since ..." ["Les esprits" in *La légende des siècles*]). However, it is certain that Alphonse de Lamartine (1790-1869) used Mohl's translation to write Rostam's life in the first volume of *Vie des grands hommes* (1856), and it is noteworthy that Rostam is described in a book on real people: Homer, Socrates, and Cicero. The translation of Mohl allowed for the familiarization of the cultured French readership with Ferdowsi and constituted an exciting step forward in the West's understanding of the East.

The last years of Mohl's life were perturbed by the Franco-Prussian War of 1870. When the conflict broke out, he was in England with his wife for their annual trip. They decided to extend their stay in fear of being held in contempt under the suspicion that he rejoiced over the German victory (O'Meara, 1886, pp. 233-235). Mohl returned to Paris after the peace treaty was signed and his wife waited until the Paris Commune events were over before joining him. In 1874, he became an Officer in the National Order of the Legion of Honor. Mohl died in Paris on 4 January 1876 and was buried at the Père Lachaise cemetery.

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