



# ŠĀH-NĀMA TRANSLATIONS XIV. INTO RUSSIAN

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The first translation of the *Šāh-nāma* into Russian dates from 1849 when V. Zhukovski (d. 1852), the great Russian poet and translator of the *Iliad*, inspired by Fr. Rückert's verse translation of the story of Rostam and Sohrāb, wrote his poem *Rustem and Zorab* (Zhukovski, 1849), which became part of Russia's "Golden Age" poetry.

Subsequent poetic translations of the epic developed in two directions. On the one hand, philologists translated fragments of the poem directly from Persian into Russian verse. On the other hand, prominent poets composed their own abridged versions of the *Šāh-nāma*, relying on (usually anonymous) literal translations. The first Russian translation from the original Persian text (Vullers ed.) dates from the beginning of the twentieth century. S. Sokolov, a specialist in Iranian philology, published a translation of the first part of the poem, from the beginning through the reign of Manučehr (Ferdowsi, 1905), followed by the story of Rostam and Sohrāb (Sokolov, 1915), both fragments composed in unrhymed iambic hexameter. The next translation of the epic was published in 1934 when many academic and popular publications appeared in connection with the millennium of Ferdowsi. M. Lozinski, famous for his Russian translations of *Hamlet* and *The Divine Comedy*, produced a verse translation of selected episodes from the *Šāh-nāma* (The Reign of Kayumart, The Killing of Siyāmak, The Story of Žaḥḥāk and Kāva, Zāl and Rudāba, The Death of Sohrāb, The Reign of Bahrām Gur), accompanied by a



prose summary of other episodes (Ferdowsi, 1934). Lozinski worked from line-by-line translations provided by F. Rosenberg, a specialist in Sasanian history who had used the *Šāh-nāma* as an historical source and who possessed a thorough knowledge of the text. F. Rosenberg wrote the introduction and commentary to Lozinski's translation; he also advised the translator to use amphibrachic tetrameter with a truncated final foot and masculine rhyme as the closest equivalent to the eleven-syllable *motaqāreb* meter of the *Šāh-nāma*.

In 1935 an influential, albeit short, translation of two episodes from the *Šāh-nāma* was published by M. Diakonov, the first Russian scholar to make a direct translation of the epic from Persian into Russian verse since S. Sokolov. Diakonov, a renowned specialist in the history of ancient Persia and Media, published translations of the episodes “Biḡan and Maniḡa” (from the Vullers ed.) and “The Revolt of Mazdak” (from the Mohl ed.), together with papers devoted to Ferdowsi's anniversary by other scholars, in the *Vostok* anthology (Ferdowsi, 1935). Diakonov's translations preserve the rhyme scheme of the original text and use the amphibrachic tetrameter introduced by Lozinski. A gifted poet and a fine scholar, M. Diakonov produced translations of the *Šāh-nāma* (see also “Gov and Ṭalḡand” in Orbeli-Trever, 1936) that proved to be both good poetry and faithful to the original. Despite their brevity, Diakonov's renditions of the *Šāh-nāma* had a serious impact on the stylistic strategy of subsequent Russian translations of the poem. Popular editions of the *Šāh-nāma* addressed to the general reader began to appear in the early 1940s. These translations included the best-known episodes and were authored by poets such as I. Selvinski, Vl. Derzhavin, and S. Lipkin, all renowned for their translations of poetry from the Soviet Union's national republics, because Ferdowsi's *Šāh-nāma*, like many of Persia's other “golden poems,” was considered a classic of Tajik literature. The most complete translation of this sort was made in 1964 by Vl. Derzhavin and S. Lipkin (Ferdowsi, 1964). Both poets used line-by-line translations edited by M.-N. Osmanov, who was at that time compiling a new critical edition of the poem. Verse translations of short fragments from the *Šāh-nāma* were also published in various anthologies of Persian poetry (see A. Sverchevskaya, pp. 266-68).

A complete verse translation of the epic finally appeared in a six-volume edition that was published intermittently between 1957 and 1989. This edition, which possesses both scholarly and poetic merits, deserves special attention. The inspiration and chief organizer of the project was the Persian poet Abu'l-Qāsem Lāhuti (1887–1957), who emigrated from Iran to the USSR in 1922.



According to the translator of this edition, Cecilia Bānu-Lāhuti (Abu'l-Qāsem's wife), the poet thought that "integrity and solidity created the principal charm of this epic, and picking out separate fragments of it was like butchering live flesh" (C. Bānu-Lāhuti, "A short history of creating," vol. 6, Moscow, 1989, p. 578). The source text chosen by Lāhuti and C. Bānu-Lāhuti for their translation was the edition of Nafisi-Vullers (Tehran, 1934-36). Bānu had read the entire poem twice, guided by her husband, and recorded his commentary on each verse. In a sense, A. Lāhuti should be considered the co-author of the translation, since he proposed numerous new interpretations of the original verse and interesting hypotheses concerning obscure or damaged lines (C. Bānu. "Translator's notes," I, p. 598). The poet managed to edit only the first of the six volumes (from the beginning through the reign of Key Kāvus), which first appeared in 1957 on the very day of his death.

Many famous Russian scholars participated in this long-term project. Y. Bertel's became the chief editor of the first volume. A. Starikov composed detailed scholarly comments for the first two volumes; his instructive article "Firdowsi and his poem *Shah-name*," included in the first volume (pp. 459-592), was later translated into Persian and published in Tehran as a monograph (tr. Āḍarākṣī). Specialists in many aspects of Iranian studies, such as A. Azer (classical poetry), V. Lukonin (art history), A. Boldyrev (literature), N. Osmanov (textology of the *Šāh-nāma*), and L. Lāhuti, Abu'l-Qāsem's daughter (linguistics), edited and annotated the next four volumes. In addition to the Nafisi-Vullers edition, vols. 2-6 of the Bānu-Lāhuti translation also used the oldest London manuscript (thirteenth century), as well as the Paris edition (Mohl) and the Calcutta edition (Turner Macan). Vols. 5 and 6 also make use of the Moscow edition of the critical text (Ferdowsi, 1961, vols. 8-9). The translators' goal was to render both the form and the spirit of the original as completely as possible. The whole poem was translated in rhymed couplets, observing the amphibrachic tetrameter already successfully used by Lozinski and Diakonov. If some idioms of the original acquired a different lexical expression in poetic translation, the commentary typically cited the literary translation of the line. The basic principles of the approach to the text were set forth by C. Bānu in her article "Translator's notes" (vol. 1, pp. 593-98). Concerning the chosen meter, she writes that it is the closest approximation to the energetic meter of the poem; it also suits all the melodies that Bānu used to hear when folk singers performed the *Šāh-nāma* (ibid, p. 596). Poetic semantics received equal attention. "We attempted to preserve the original imagery in the translation, even though it may sound strange and unnatural to the



Russian reader – e.g., the comparison of the army with an ornate bride or a spring garden” (ibid, p. 595). Along with conventional imagery, the translations of many verses also reproduce the traditional figures of poetic embellishment such as internal rhyme, assonance and alliteration, composite rhymes (*radif*), and various types of syntactic parallelism. A second edition of the first four volumes of the Bānu-Lāhuti translation (through the reign of Dārā) was published in 1993 (vol. 1) and 1994 (vols. 2-4), commemorating the millennial anniversary of the completion of the poem.

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