



SCHEFER, CHARLES-HENRI- AUGUSTE

SCHEFER, Charles-Henri-Auguste (b. 16 November 1820, Paris; d. 3 March 1898, Paris), orientalist and academic administrator, as well as minister plenipotentiary and bibliophile. Schefer combined a brilliant career in the French Foreign Ministry (*Ministère des affaires étrangères*) with a productive life in scholarship. He was appointed professor of Persian at the Ecole des langues orientales in 1857, and served as its president from 1867 until his death (FIGURE 1, FIGURE 2).

Life and work. Schefer's father Frédéric-Chrétien came from the west-German duchy Nassau, which from 1806 until 1813 had belonged to the Confederation of the Rhine, established by Napoleon I (1769-1821). He worked for the royal treasury in Paris, and married the Alsatian-born Madeleine Hertz. Charles was the first of their four children. In 1833 he entered the prestigious Collège Louis-le-Grand, where one of his classmates was Charles Baudelaire (1821-67). Schefer enrolled in his school's Arabic, Turkish, and Persian courses for prospective translators (*jeunes de langues*). In 1838 he was admitted to the Ecole des langues orientales vivantes, and his instructor of Persian became Etienne Quatremère (1782-1857).

After graduation in 1840 Schefer lived for two years on Crete, at that time still a part of the Ottoman Empire. He was in the service of the family of Moḥammad 'Ali (1769-1849), who in 1805 had established his family's



hereditary rule of Egypt. Schefer returned to Paris, and in 1843 he was appointed as instructor (*maître-répétiteur*) at the Ecole des langues orientales, but nonetheless decided to enter the diplomatic service. From 1843 until 1857 he was stationed in various cities in Egypt and in the Ottoman Empire. After his first assignment as translator (*drogman*) in Beirut, he served as *drogman-chancelier* in Jerusalem, Izmir, and Alexandria. In 1849 he was promoted to the same post in Istanbul, where he worked closely with the French embassy on the preparation of the Treaty of Paris (signed 30 March 1856) that ended the Crimean War (1853-56).

Schefer returned to Paris in 1857. In February, the Foreign Ministry promoted him to the rank of *Premier secrétaire interprète pour les langues orientales*, and in November he was elected as Quatremère's successor and became professor of Persian at the Ecole des langues orientales. Despite his teaching obligations he continued his work for the Foreign Ministry until 1862. The French government recognized Schefer's services with several high decorations, and in 1862 he was made a commander of the *Légion d'honneur*. In 1867 Napoleon III (1808-73) appointed Schefer as the administrative head of the Ecole des langues orientales, and the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres elected him in 1878 as the successor of the Indologist Joseph Garcin de Tassy (1794-1878).

Schefer's brother Jules (1830-86) was also educated at the Collège Louis-le-Grand. Like his older brother, he graduated from the Ecole des langues orientales vivantes, entered the Foreign Ministry, and later served as minister plenipotentiary in the Middle East.

Schefer was married twice. He had two sons with Faustine Robinet, a daughter of the chemist Stéphane Robinet (1799-1869), who was a member of the Académie de Médecine. Their younger son Gaston Schefer (1850-1921) was born in Istanbul, and fought in the French army during the Franco-Prussian war of 1870. He became a print specialist at the Bibliothèque d'Arsenal in Paris, while publishing poetry, plays, and criticism. Schefer had a third son from his second marriage with Léonie Boursier. In 1886, Schefer purchased the Château de la Croix-Saint-Alban in Savoyen, in the French Alps. He restored the estate where he moved his library of about 13,000 volumes from his first home in the rue d'Ingrès in Passy, Paris' exclusive XVIth arrondissement. Schefer died after a short illness in 1898, and his library and art collection were auctioned in spring of 1899 (see the sales catalogues listed below).



Islamic manuscripts. Today Schefer is best known as a very discerning collector of Islamic manuscripts (Richard, pp. 65-66). He traveled widely, and as a high-ranking diplomat, made the personal acquaintance of many well-known Ottoman bibliophiles, receiving manuscripts as personal gifts (ibid., p. 65). He also corresponded with the orientalist Gottlieb William Leitner (1840-99) and [Henry Ferdinand Blochmann](#) (1838-78) while they were stationed in Lahore and Calcutta, respectively. Since Schefer published many papers about his rare manuscripts, he opened new avenues of research for his colleagues (e.g., Blochet, 1903; Hillenbrand; see [BLOCHET](#)). At the time of his death his library included more than 800 manuscripts, and the historian [Charles Barbier de Meynard](#) (1827-1908), in his capacity as president of the Société asiatique, petitioned the Bibliothèque nationale to purchase the Islamic manuscripts in their entirety (Blochet, 1900, pp. II-V). This unique manuscript collection comprises 276 Arabic, 276 Persian, and 239 Turkish manuscripts, and includes not only exceptionally illuminated books and bindings but also many rare texts. As Francis Richard has pointed out, the history of Schefer's library remains to be studied, and not all Islamic manuscripts, once owned by Schefer, are today in the Bibliothèque nationale.

Chrestomathie persane. After more than 20 years of teaching experience at the Ecole des langues orientales, Schefer became the first French orientalist to publish a two-volume anthology of Persian literature. Each volume is divided into a Persian text and a French commentary with index. His objective was to introduce his students to a wide range of literary genres, from [historiography](#) and [chronograms](#) to fables and letters (see [ENŠĀ](#)), covering the 10th to 18th centuries, though he focuses on prose. Schefer drew on his private manuscript collection, and justified in the introduction to the first volume (I, pp. V-XI) his use of hitherto unknown and unpublished works, though he did not discuss the already available chrestomathies that had appeared, during the first half of the 19th century, in India, England, Germany, and Russia.

The first volume (1883) comprises eight chapters.

(1) *Zafar-nāma* is attributed to [Avicenna](#) (980-1037), and contains a dialogue between the legendary vizier [Bozorgmehr](#) and his king [Kosrow I Anōšīrvān](#) (r. 531-78). Schefer presents the complete text of a 15th century manuscript (cf. the edition by [Ġ. Ĥ. Šadiqi](#), Tehran, n.d.).

(2) *Ādāb-e salṭanat o wezārat* is a short mirror-for-princes. Its author is unknown, and the work originated at the end of the 10th, the beginning of the



11th century. Schefer offers the complete text of a 16th century manuscript.

(3) *Tāriḳ-e Boḳārā* is a local history of Bukhara by the otherwise obscure Samanid author Moḥammad b. Jaʿfar Naršaḳi (fl. 940-50). In 1892 Schefer published the complete work, which represents a much revised 12th century Persian translation, but here Schefer focused on passages about the river Muliān, the city’s economy and its division into fortress, markets, and suburbs.

(4) *Faḏāʿel-e Balḳ* is a description of [Balḳ](#), and the Arabic work by Abu Bakr ʿAbd-Allāh b. ʿOmar b. Dāwud Balḳi (13th century) is preserved in a 13th century Persian translation (cf. the ed. by ʿAbd-al-Ḥayy Ḥabibi, Tehran, 1971). Schefer relied on a 16th century manuscript, and cites excerpts from two chapters, focusing on historical traditions and the city’s particular characteristics, respectively.

(5) *Laṭāʿef al-ṭawāʿef* is an anthology of anecdotes about the different social groups of late Timurid and early Safavid society, compiled by Faḳr-al-Din ʿAli Ṣafī b. Ḥosayn Wāʿeḟ Kāṣefī (1463-1532 or 1533; cf. the edition by A. Golčīn Maʿāni, Tehran, 1957). Schefer focused on material about poets, but opened his selection with a section about astronomers.

(6) *Bayān al-adyān* by Abuʿl-Maʿālī Moḥammad b. ʿObayd-Allāh b. ʿAli (fl. 1090-1100) is the oldest work on religions and sects written in New Persian. Schefer selected four of the treatise’s five chapters (cf. the edition by H. Rāzi, Tehran, 1963).

(7) *Resāla-ye Ḥātamiya* is an account of the generosity that immortalized the legendary 6th century Arab courtier Ḥātām Ṭāʿi as the epitome of generosity. Schefer included the complete treatise by Ḥosayn Wāʿeḟ Kāṣefī (d. 1504 or 1505), as preserved in a 16th century manuscript (cf. the ed. by M. R. Jalāli Nāʿini, Tehran, 1941).

(8) *Rāḥat al-ensān* is a short anthology of versified moral precepts, composed by the otherwise unidentified poet Šarīf. Schefer cites the complete work, which he dates to the beginning of the 11th century.

The second volume (1885) comprises six chapters.

(1) *Tāriḳ-e āl-e Barmak* is a history of the [Barmakids](#), a well-known family of secretaries and viziers during the early ʿAbbasid caliphate. ʿAbd al-Jalīl Yazdī compiled the work in the 14th century, and Schefer selected passages from



two manuscripts, dated to the 14th and 16th century, respectively.

(2) *Tāriḳ-e elċi-ye Neẓāmsāh-e Dakani* was written by Ẕvaršāh b. Qobād Ḥosayni (d. 1565), who, as the envoy (see [ELĊI](#)) of Burhān Shah b. Aḥmad (r. 1509-54) the head of the Nizamshahi principality on the Deccan plateau, stayed for more than a year at the Safavid court of Ṭahmāsb (r. 1524-76). From this Safavid chronicle (cf. the ed. by M. R. Nāširi and K. Haneda, Tehran, 2000) Schefer selected passages from the sixth section about minor Persian dynasties in India.

(3) *Tāriḳ-e jahāngošā* was composed by the Ilkhanid governor ‘Aṭā-Malek Jovayni (1226-83). From the well-known Mongol chronicle (cf. the ed. by M. Qazvini, 3 vols., Leiden, 1912-37), Schefer included a passage which covers the conflict between Čengiz Khan (d. 1227) and the Khwarazmshah Sultan ‘Alā’-al-Din Moḥammad (r. 1200-20) and the subsequent Mongol conquest of Nishapur. For the text Schefer collated three manuscripts, one of which was dated 680/1283 (II, pp. 152-53).

(4) *Marzbān-nāma* is a collection of Persian fables which the otherwise obscure Sa’d-al-Din Varāvini (13th century) translated from the local dialect of Ṭabarestān (cf. the eds. by M. Qazvini, Tehran, 1932, and by M. Rovšan, Tehran, 1976). The popular work comprises nine chapters, but Schefer limited himself to selections from the first three. His source were two manuscripts from the 15th and 17th century, respectively.

(5) Letters and dispatches, written between the 12th and the 18th centuries, are drawn from 13 different sources. Schefer called the section on its Persian title page *Majmu’a-ye rasā’el o makātib* (II, p. 201).

(6) *Aš’ār-e motanawwe’a* comprises Schefer’s personal anthology of Persian poetry. Nine examples of longer poems from the early 11th century are followed by a selection of short poems, in particular *qeṭ’a* and *robā’i*, from the 14th and 15th centuries. The section concludes with 30 chronograms. The commentary for this section (II, pp. 240-59) is combined with the notes about the correspondence samples (II, pp. 212-40), and not listed as a separate chapter in the volume’s table of contents (II, p. 293).

Editions and translations. Schefer’s work as the translator and editor of historical sources related to Iranian history documents a remarkable breadth of scholarship. He published *Relation de l’ambassade au Kharezm* by the Qajar



politician Hedāyat Reżā Qoli Khan (1800-71), as well as Seljuq sources and 16th- and 17th-century German and French travelogues about contemporary Persia (see [SAFAVID DYNASTY](#)). Schefer's publications about the *Siāsat-nāma* by Neẓām-al-Molk (ca. 1018-92) can be regarded as his most influential contribution to the study of Islamic historiography (see the reviews by Lane-Poole, Nöldeke, and Gabrieli), in addition to his discovery of the *Rāḥat al-sudūr* by Rāwandī (fl. 1180-1200) and the above-mentioned *Bayān al-adyān*.

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