



VULLERS, JOHANN AUGUST

VULLERS, JOHANN AUGUST (b. Bonn, 23 October 1803; d. Bonn, 21 January 1881, [Figure 1](#)), German Iranologist and orientalist. He was born to the cooper and wine-merchant Johann Theodor Vullers (1776-1846) and his wife Margarethe, born Pützfeld (1762-1851). In 1822, he started studying Catholic theology at the University of Bonn, but soon was attracted to the study of Oriental languages and cultures with the philosopher Karl Josef Hieronymus Windischmann (1775-1839), who also taught Indian and Chinese philosophy, and the renowned Arabist Georg Wilhelm Freytag (1788-1861). To the latter, Vullers presented his first publication in 1827, a study on the *qaṣida* of the pre-Islamic Arabic poet Ḥārīṭ b. Ḥeleza, which was considered one of the *mo'allaqāt*, the seven distinguished pre-Islamic Arabic poems.

He then went to Paris to continue his studies under Silvestre de Sacy (1758-1838), the “founder of Arabic Studies” in Europe and professor at the *École des langues orientales* and the *Collège de France*. De Sacy was the main reason why Paris was regarded as the center of Arabic and Islamic studies worldwide at that time. In Paris, Vullers could make use of a large collection of Oriental manuscripts, some of which he assiduously copied and excerpted for his further studies, together with equally gifted German fellow students like Heinrich Leberecht Fleischer (1801-1888; later Arabist in Leipzig) and Julius Mohl (1800-1876, later Iranologist in Strassburg; Babinger, p. 77).

Vullers returned to Germany in 1829 and spent some months in Berlin to work on Persian manuscripts and to study Sanskrit, and then went on to Halle, to pass his doctorate exam (1830). One year later, in 1831, he obtained his *venia*



legend (habilitation) from the University of Bonn in Arabic, Persian, and Turkic; the commission to which he delivered an inaugural lecture was headed by the well-known writer, literary translator, and (since 1818) professor of literary and art history, August Wilhelm von Schlegel (1767-1845). In the same year, Vullers published his *Fragmente über die Religion des Zoroaster* (Bonn, 1831), translated from various Persian sources, together with a biography of the Persian poet [Ferdowsi](#), culled from the *Taḏkerat-al-šo'arā'* of [Dawlatšāh Samarqāndi](#) (15th cent.), ten manuscripts of which Vullers had studied during his stay in Paris (Babinger, pp. 78-79).

From 1831 to 1833, Vullers taught at Bonn University. In 1831, he applied for an “Extraordinary Professorship” at the University of Giessen, but his application was declined. After the death of Heinrich Friedrich Pfannkuche (1765-1832), the Giessen Professor of “Greek and Oriental Languages,” Vullers applied again, this time successfully and was chosen to fill the vacant Oriental position in 1833. Two years later, in 1835, he was appointed full professor of Oriental studies.

Vullers was a very productive author throughout his life. After his appointment, he published an edition and translation of the part of Saljuq history in Mirḳvānd's *Rawzat al-ṣafā* in two separate volumes, titled *Mirchondi Historia ...* and *Mirchond's Geschichte ...* (both Giessen, 1837) and a grammar of Persian, written in Latin (*Institutiones linguae Persicae ...*, Giessen, 1840). The Mirḳvānd edition-cum-translation earned him renown from various academic institutions, for instance, he became a member of the Société Asiatique (Paris); the grammar was a highly original work, including also explanations on the evolution of Persian from Old Iranian. In 1839, Vullers obtained permission to buy more and better oriental types for the Giessen university library and printer, which enabled him to keep up the high quantity and technical quality of his publications using original types (Babinger, p. 81).

In 1838, Vullers decided to turn to the study of the field of medicine in his spare-time for several years. His motivation was to be able to improve his understanding of ancient Indian medical texts, and he published a study on ancient Indian obstetrics in the medical journal *Janus* (Vullers, 1846). In the same year, he was awarded an honorary medical doctorate, but it seems that, at this point, he left this field and concentrated on Oriental philology (Babinger, pp. 82 f.).

Vullers now turned to the Persian-Latin [dictionary](#) (*Lexicon Persico-Latinum*



..., Giessen, 1855-64), his magnum opus that was to win him renown for generations of scholars. For writing it, he made use, not only of Persian dictionaries such as the *Borhān-e qāte'* and of the few dictionaries in European languages available at that time (e.g., Meninski and Richardson), but also of a large amount of Persian literature of various genres, by extracting from which he could enrich many lexical entries. This dictionary, the result of forty years of assiduously studying and excerpting Persian literature, still holds its distinctive position to this day as a pioneering and masterwork of Persian lexicography (see the reviews by Karl Graf).

This work stands out against all other bilingual Persian dictionaries of the pre-20th century, due to its clarity, conciseness, and historical depth. It quotes the source for each meaning of every lexeme (including also articles from journals, etc.), states a large number of compounds and phrasal expressions for many simple lexemes, and tries to provide, wherever possible, an etymology of each lexeme (the last-mentioned part seems to be the most outdated one today).

The book was planned to be published in 1,200 pages in two years, in the course of which Vullers was able to excerpt more and more primary and secondary sources that had been published meantime. The dictionary, in effect, was broadened in scope and grew to a work of over 2,500 pages, whose publication from the first to the last fascicle took from 1855 to 1864, with a supplement volume (*Verborum linguae Persicae ...*) published in 1867. Vullers systematically excluded the Arabic part of the Persian lexicon in the beginning, but in the course of time, this principle was softened, especially for compound verbs, the nominal part of which was Arabic. He noted that they had become so clearly integrated into the Persian lexicon that they should be included in the dictionary.

With the publication of this monumental work, Vullers became acknowledged as a leading expert in Persian language and literature of his time, and various international honors and distinctions were conferred upon him, for instance, honorary memberships from the Société Asiatique (Paris) and the Kongelige Nordisk Oldskriftselskab (Copenhagen), and he was appointed "Geheimer Studienrat" by the Grand Duke Ludwig III of Hesse-Darmstadt in 1872. He now returned to the study of the *Šāh-nāma*, to which he had already devoted one publication in 1833 (*Chrestomathia Schahnamiana ...*), and published two volumes and parts of the third of an edition of the Persian national epic (in 1876-79). He died on 21 January 1881 before he could complete the third



volume; the edition was later completed by Samuel Landauer, and published as *Firdusii liber regum*.

Vullers published almost exclusively on Persian language and literature, but, at the same time, he covered much broader fields in teaching, including Arabic, Hebrew, and Sanskrit. His few students were mostly classicists or theologians who wanted to familiarize themselves with the elements of Arabic or Sanskrit grammar, more often than with Persian. In spite of his worldwide scholarly renown, Vullers does not seem to have had any students specializing in or aspiring for a scholarly career in Persian or Oriental studies. This was partly because Giessen had no significant Oriental library or collection of manuscripts that could have attracted students.

Vullers devoted most of his lifetime to scholarly work on Persian language and literature, leading a rather secluded life. Late in his life, he retired to an estate near Giessen, from which he dropped in to the city only to give classes; he was increasingly looked upon as an eccentric fellow. Little is known of his personal life; he was married twice, to Klara Elisabeth (born Karth), and, after she died, to Henriette (born Fohr), with whom he had a (probably step-) daughter, Laura; his wife and daughter moved away from Giessen shortly after Vuller's death (Babinger, pp. 87-88).

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Very little has been published on Vullers. All information cited here on Vullers' academic and private life has been retrieved from Babinger's article (see below).

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Haft Qulzum et Bahâri agam et persico-turcico Farhangi Schuûri confectum, adhibitis etiam Castelli, Meninski, Richardson et aliorum operibus et auctoritate scriptorum Persicorum adauctum: Accedit appendix vocum dialecti antiquioris, Zend et Pazend dictae, 2 vols., Giessen, 1855-64; repr., Graz, 1962.

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*Mirchondi Historia Seldschukidarum persice e codicibus mss: Parisino et Berolinensi nunc primum edidit lectionis varietate, instruxit et annotationibus criticis et philologicis illustravit Johannes Augustus Vullers. Giessen, 1837 (Saljuq history in Mirķ^vând's *Rawzat al-şafā*).*

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