

The long road to a critical text of the *Shahname* by Djalal Khaleghi-Motlagh

Traditionally, the editing of texts in Iran had the following procedure: The so-called editor procured himself a number of manuscripts of one text, compared these, and took from each manuscript what pleased him the most. Whatever he considered unsuitable or incomplete, he replaced or corrected with his own wording, without accounting for what he himself had formulated and what had a basis in the manuscripts.

Most editions of Persian manuscripts are products of more or less similar procedures, unless they originate from the author's time or slightly later. The best example in our time of such editorial effort is the edition by Waḥīd Dastgerdī of Nizāmī's *Kamse*. In the introduction to his edition Dastgerdī rejects the Western method of textual criticism as a means of establishing a text, preferring instead to use his 'sound taste' (*dauq-i salīm*) as the only criterium for distinguishing the faulty (*ḡalaṭ*), the correct (*ṣaḥīḥ*) and the more correct (*aṣaḥḥ*) readings¹.

This procedure as practised by Persian editors and copyists — perhaps corrupters of texts is the better term — can be best observed with the example of the *Shahname*.

From its creation till the present day, the *Shahname* has had a wide audience of both readers and listeners, not only in the nobility and amongst intellectuals, but also, and foremost, under the vast masses of the population. It is a text that has been subjected through the centuries to the level of education, tastes and the idioms prevailing at each period, and its size has been increased with numerous new stories that were never adopted by the author. Because of this, not even the most ancient or the best codex of the work has remained free from interference.

In this perspective, the objections of Waḥīd Dastgerdī are justified insofar as he considered the procedure of following the *optimus codex* in a mechanical way only, the method of Western scholars and also that of Moḥammed Qazwīnī, to be unsound. However, the 'sound taste', as he believed it could be employed, was equally unfit as a criterium for purging the text from alien elements. This can only be accomplished according to the principles of philological methodology, together with the use of the editor's critical judgment, and by providing the text with a critical apparatus. Among all the editions produced by Persian

scholarship so far, no text can be singled out which satisfies all of these requirements.

The first attempt at producing an acceptable text of the *Shahname* was undertaken by M. Lumsden in Calcutta in 1811. Only one volume appeared, however. Somewhat later Turner Macan continued the project and published the entire *Shahname* in four volumes in Calcutta in 1829. This edition has been reprinted several times, both in and outside Iran, and has served as the basis for later editions. The next step was made by Jules Mohl, whose edition-de-luxe appeared, together with a French translation, in Paris in 1878 in seven volumes. At the same time a new edition was being prepared by Joannes Augustus Vullers, who used the editions by Macan and Mohl as a basis. Vullers completed only two volumes: the third volume was completed by Samuel Landauer. The three volumes appeared in print in Leiden at the publishing house of Brill between 1877 and 1884. This work was still unfinished, however, and was completed independently by several scholars, e.g. by F. A. Rosenberg, Fritz Wolff and Sa'īd Nafīsī. The latter's work only was published in Tehran in 1314/1934 by the publisher Berūkīm at the occasion of the millennial commemoration festivities for Firdawsī.

We may safely and with almost complete certitude assume that all aforementioned editors produced their texts not according to the requirements of their 'sound taste', but exclusively on the basis of manuscripts. Lumsden and Macan are said to have used twenty-seven manuscripts, and Mohl even more than thirty. Since we have no apparatus with variant readings at our disposal, we unfortunately lack precise information concerning editorial details. We should not, therefore, differentiate too much between this method and the traditional Iranian way of editing. The same can be said for Vullers' edition, although he does inform us of those variant readings in the editions by Macan and Mohl that originate from unknown manuscripts. However, it was an absurd assumption of his to think it feasible to produce a critical edition out of two uncritical editions.

The first step towards a critical edition of the *Shahname* was taken in the Soviet Union. In the course of the 1950s a team of Soviet scholars under the guidance of E.E. Bertel's began preparing an edition of



خداوندی زده ای کای زده بر شده گوهر سنت کی او و وار نام و ار جاکاه همان راست کی میند همی در دینه سخته کی کجند و کفار و کسان بلیسوی	خدا کلام خندان دجای ز نام و نشان و کان بر توست بدادش به یزید بنی راه خرد که سخن بر کردی خردا جان را می بخند و مستش باید کی خستیشوی	لوز بر تو اندیشه بر کرد و زنده ماه و ناهید و شو ببینی بر جان میند ناید سده جان خرد بمان بد کی با لذت قنبت شود از غده را کی توان	نام خداوند جان خرد مندان کوان کرد مندان آن زنده همه جمع بر کفران کرد پسندند کس آن جوینست بغالبی جان و کوان
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بزرگی و عاقل کردن نگاه همتی بر دینه دین قنبت کی دان کفار او بر خورد هر دست کس ز هر روی ای بناستد همی تا دان کند زمان کشته خردای دارد نمک نگهبان جان و ناس	بر سنده باش و جویند راه زین بره بر سوزن کار بستن کف از کمان و سناش خرد را می خردد لکشی خرد نیز ز مردوشن توان انزلی هر روی ای از همند مخمس از پیش خردا شناس	در جا که گفتند خورد دانش دل به تو کرنا بود کف از کمان و سناش خرد را به از راه داد دقت خردی هم زو کینت همان کجاست و اند و خردم شادان جان خرد	لین خردمند مرد خرد تا با او هر در انا بود چه کس از سخن کوی مرد خرد خرد را به چه بود داد زویا دانی و دهر دینت مشاور دیوانه خواند و را هر چشم جاست نکر سب
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the *Shahname*, which appeared in nine volumes in Moscow between 1960 and 1971. The first three volumes of this edition are based on the following four manuscripts:

1. MS London, British Library, Add. 21103. The manuscript dates from 675/1276².

2. MS Leningrad, State M.E. Saltykov-Shchedrin Public Library, No. 329³. The manuscript dates from 733/1333.

3. MS Leningrad, Oriental Institute, Academy of Sciences of the USSR, No. S. 1654⁴.

4. MS Leningrad, Oriental Institute, S. 822⁵. The manuscript is undated, but stems from the 9th/15th century.

From the fourth volume onwards a fifth manuscript, the one preserved in Cairo, Dār al-Kutub, dating from 796/1394, was used as well. To this should be added the Arabic translation of the *Shahname* by Faṭḥ b. 'Alī Bondārī Eṣfahānī, which dates from 620-1/1223-4. When this project was completed a second edition was undertaken for which two more manuscripts were used:

1. MS Cairo, Dār al-Kutub, *Tārīkh-e Fārsī*, No. 49, presumably dating from 710/1310⁶.

2. MS Istanbul, Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Kütüphanesi, H. 1479.⁷ The manuscript dates from 731/1330. Only two volumes of this second edition have appeared (Tehran 1971 and 1973).

In Iran itself an Institute with the name *Bonyād-e Šāhnāme-ye Firdawsī* was founded in 1351/1972. There a number of Iranian scholars have been working under the guidance of Muḡtabā Mīnowī on the critical edition of the text of the *Shahname*. Up to the present day only three stories from the book have appeared in this edition: *Rostam o Sohrāb* (Tehran 1352/1973), *Forūd* (Tehran 1354/1975), and *Siyāwūš* (Tehran 1363/1984).

In establishing the text of the first two volumes of the Moscow edition (which was produced during Bertel's lifetime) the Soviet scholars leaned far too heavily on the contents of Bondārī's Arabic translation without a preliminary and precise test of this translation. Consequently, many genuine verses of the poet, which had been omitted by Bondārī in his rather free translation, were skipped in the Moscow edition as well. From the third volume onwards, however, they distanced themselves from this method and established their text more stringently on the basis of their most ancient manuscript, namely the MS London of 675/1276. The editors of the *Bonyād-e Šāhnāme* observed even more closely the literal text of the London manuscript — although the number of their manuscripts was twice the number of those on which the Moscow edition was based — and thereby have obtained an even more uncritical result. True, they had more expert knowledge of reading manuscripts than their Soviet colleagues, but they lost most of this advantage when

they decided to omit part of the variant readings, and to tuck away the remainder at the end of the book.

In the following I would like to recapitulate the main shortcomings of the Moscow edition in five points. On the whole they are more or less valid for the work of the Iranian scholars of the *Bonyād-e Šāhnāme* as well:

1. The Moscow edition is based not only on too few manuscripts, but these were selected without a preliminary evaluation of the existing manuscripts. As a result, only what was easily available was actually used, as can be seen from the fact that three manuscripts originate from collections within the Soviet Union itself.

2. The editors have disregarded close to one thousand verses of the *Shahname* which have been recorded as isolated quotations in books from the 5th-7th, 11th-13th centuries, nor have they given due attention to those works that in part go back to the *Shahname* or its sources, as e.g. the *Ġorar as-Siyar* by Ṭa'ālebī, the *Zayn al-aḡbār* by Gardīzī and the *Moḡmal at-Tawārīḡ wa 'l-Qiṣaṣ*.

3. The editors, at first, overestimated the value of Bondārī's Arabic translation, and then, instead, underestimated it.

4. From the fourth volume onwards, the editors have followed the London manuscript in an uncritical, even slavish, way. With numerous examples I have demonstrated in previous research on the text of the *Shahname*, and most recently in my paper read at the 32nd International Congress of Asian and North African Studies in Hamburg, that such an uncritical approach is ill-advised, to say the least, even with the MS Florence of 614/1217, which is not only more ancient but also on the whole of a decidedly better quality than the London manuscript.

5. Both in the reading of the manuscripts and the registration of the variant readings have the editors let numerous mistakes slip in.

These are the most serious shortcomings of the Moscow edition. For fairness' sake it should be conceded, however, that such shortcomings are often inevitable in any first attempt to produce a critical edition.

I have tried to avoid these shortcomings in particular in my own efforts to produce a critical edition of the *Shahname*, with which I have occupied myself for many years. In the first place I began by inspecting a great number of manuscripts for this purpose. In the course of ten years I have succeeded in researching forty-five manuscripts of the *Shahname*. A similar daring is unprecedented in the study of the *Shahname* or any other Persian text. I have published a description and an evaluation of these manuscripts in the journal *Iran Nameh*⁸ Out of these forty-five I have selected for my own edition fifteen manuscripts which I considered as most suitable:

1. MS Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Ms.

C1. III. 24. The manuscript was discovered in 1978 by Professor A.M. Piemontese. It dates from 614/1217 and is presently the oldest known manuscript of the *Shahname*. Unfortunately, it contains only the first half of the text⁹.

2. MS London, British Library, Add. 21103. The manuscript dates from 675/1276¹⁰.

3. MS Istanbul, Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Kütüphanesi, H. 1479¹¹. The manuscript dates from 731/1330.

4. MS Leningrad, State M.E. Saltykov-Shchedrin Public Library, No. 329¹². The manuscript dates from 733/1333.

5. MS Cairo, Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, No. 6006 S¹³. The manuscript dates from 741/1341.

6. MS Cairo, Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, No. *Tā'riḫ Fārsī* 73¹⁴. The manuscript dates from 796/1394.

7. MS Leiden, University Library, Or. 494, dating from 840/1437¹⁵.

8. MS London, British Library, Or. 1403. The manuscript dates from 841/1438¹⁶.

9. MS Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Suppl. persan 493¹⁷. The manuscript dates from 844/1441.

10. MS Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Ms. Pers. 118¹⁸. The manuscript dates from 848/1444.

11. MS Leningrad, Oriental Institute, Academy of Sciences of the USSR, No. S. 1654¹⁹. The manuscript dates from 849/1445.

12. MS Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ms. Pers. C. 4. The manuscript dates from 852/1448²⁰.

13. MS London, British Library, Add. 18188. The manuscript dates from 891/1486²¹.

14. MS Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Ms. Or. fol. 4255. The manuscript dates from 894/1489²².

15. MS Istanbul, Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Kütüphanesi, H. 1510.²³ The manuscript dates from 903/1498. In addition to these I am making use of the Arabic translation by Bondārī. For the second half of the *Shahname* the Karachi MS, which dates from 752/1351, was also used. Since the Florence MS contains only the first half of the text the total of manuscripts used for the edition of the entire text remains fifteen.

I have established the edition of the text along the following lines: For the first half of the text I have followed the Florence MS, but not indiscriminately. I have, instead, chosen for different readings whenever this seemed necessary to me on objective grounds. The cases when this has been done may be summarized in the following nine points:

1. Wherever the text is evidently corrupt. This is particularly the case when rhyme and metre are faulty, as well as when there are clearly lacunae and contradictions.

2. Whenever the reading in one or more manuscripts shows unequivocal elements of language and style which are more ancient than the reading in the Florence MS.

3. Whenever the Florence MS has one simple read-

ing of its own, whereas all other manuscripts agree in another reading, equally simple, but different from that in the Florence MS, and when neither reading can be preferred over the other on linguistic, stylistic or thematic grounds. In such cases I assume that the reading agreed upon by fourteen manuscripts from different textual traditions and origins is less likely to be corrupt than the one and single different reading in the MS Florence. In this connection I have made three observations. Firstly, I have observed that whenever in such cases the Moscow edition shows that its oldest manuscript (that is, the London MS of 675/1276) is in opposition to all other manuscripts, and if these agree with one another, this reading is not corroborated by the Florence MS, but by the others. This is the more important when we realize that the MS Florence agrees more with this London MS than with any of the others. Secondly, it can be observed that wherever Bondārī gives in such instances a literal translation, he also agrees with the other manuscripts, and is different from the isolated reading in the older manuscript. My third observation is that this is confirmed by a few examples, which I found among the scattered quotations from the *Shahname* occurring in books of the 5th-7th/11th-12th centuries.

4. All verses that are lacking only in the Florence MS and that are preserved either in the Arabic translation or in isolated quotations from the *Shahname* are considered as lacunae in the Florence MS, and are therefore incorporated into the text, unless it can be proven that they are spurious.

5. All verses that are only available in the Florence MS are considered as intercalations, unless it can be proven that they are authentic, e.g. if without these the flow of the narrative is evidently interrupted and if they are free from more recent linguistic and stylistic elements. In such cases the beauty of the verses or even a certain archaic touch in wording or style alone are not sufficient proof of their authenticity.

6. What has been said above under 4 and 5 is equally valid in the case of the Florence MS having an isolated order of verses of its own.

7. When, along with a number of other manuscripts, the Arabic translation by Bondārī, together with a number of manuscripts, disagrees in the positive sense (with that I mean: not in incorrect readings but in the case of the availability of a reading) with the text in the Florence MS, I assume that Bondārī's translation is a literal one which follows its exemplar. Since the Florence MS and Bondārī's translation date from approximately the same period, I do not use here the argument of the oldest codex' when I have to decide whether or not a reading will be accepted in the edition.

8. When, along with some of the other manuscripts, a considerable amount of material from the Pahlavi literature and other books that are based on the *Shahname* or its sources disagree with the Florence

MS, there is a case for not following the reading in the Florence MS.

9. It happens, albeit seldom, that I consider a reading, several verses or even a whole story, that are not only available in the Florence MS but also in all other fourteen manuscripts, to be unauthentic. In such cases I mainly base my judgment on unequivocal philological grounds, on the Arabic translation, on other manuscripts of the *Shahname*, on isolated quotations from the *Shahname*, on the *Shahname* itself, or on books that are based on its sources.

In all these cases I deviate from the text contained in the Florence MS. In all other cases I do not indulge in illusions and remain faithful to what still remains our oldest and best *codex*.

It must be the goal of every critical edition to attain, by means of critical judgment, a text that is closer to the lost original than the oldest or best *codex* known. This must be done with clear arguments that can be verified by colleagues in the field. An exaggeratedly critical and scientific approach, that may very easily lead to reverie and deceptive argumentation, will almost certainly lead to the very contrary of what the editor seeks to achieve.

Since the Florence MS lacks the second part of the *Shahname*, the London MS which dates from 675/1276

takes its place. The value of this manuscript, however, is much less than that of the Florence MS. The cases in which I think fit to deviate from the London MS will therefore — and also because of the experience gained during my work on the first half of the text — be more numerous.

All variant readings, as well as the important orthographic peculiarities, are registered in the apparatus. I have chosen for a semi-positive apparatus, as it is my experience that a negative apparatus, which only mentions the readings different from that in the text, is not an entirely sure method since the manuscripts are riddled with lacunae. With a positive apparatus the editor not only resolves this problem, but also considerably facilitates the efforts of the critical reader; at the same time he verifies the correctness of his own registration. It is not necessary, however, to mention every manuscript that agrees with the text for every variant reading, however trifling it may be. That would only burden the apparatus, and that is why I have opted for a semi-positive apparatus.

I have divided the entire text of the *Shahname* into six volumes. To these, two volumes of commentary should be added. Of these six volumes the first one is about to appear in print²⁴, the second one is in the press and the third one is in preparation.

NOTES

¹ Waḥīd Dastgerdī, *Ganḡīne-ye Ganḡawī*. Tehran 1335/1956 (2nd edition), pp. 73 ff; *Maḡzan al-asrār*. Tehran 1334/1955 (3rd edition), p. w.

² Charles Rieu, *Catalogue of the Persian Manuscripts in the British Museum*, vol. 2 (London 1881), pp. 533-4.

³ *Catalogue des manuscrits et xylographes orientaux de la Bibliothèque Orientale Publique de St. Pétersbourg* (St. Pétersbourg 1852), pp. 316-7. See also: L.T. Gjužal'jan & M.M. D'jakonov, *Rukopisi Sach-Nama v. Leningradskich sobranijach* (Leningrad 1934), pp. 1-5.

⁴ Gjužal'jan & D'jakonov, *op. cit.*, pp. 14-18. The manuscript dates from 849/1445.

⁵ Gjužal'jan & D'jakonov, *op. cit.*, pp. 22-26.

⁶ See for doubts on the authenticity of this date: Iraḡ Afšār, *Ketābšenāsī-ye Firdawsī*. Tehran (2nd edition) 1355/1976, p. 211.

⁷ Fehmi Edhem Karatay, *Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Kütüphanesi Farsça Yazmalar Kataloğu* (Istanbul 1961), pp. 126-7.

⁸ 'Mu'arrifī wa-Arziyābī-yi Barkī az Dastnawīsha-yi Šāhnāma', in: *Īrān Nāmeḡ* 3 (1984-5), pp. 378-406 and 4 (1985-6), pp. 16-47.

⁹ See for bibliographical details my description in *Īrān Nāmeḡ* 3 (1984-5), 380-1.

¹⁰ Rieu, *op. cit.*, pp. 533-4.

¹¹ Karatay, *op. cit.*, pp. 126-7.

¹² *Catalogue des manuscrits et xylographes orientaux de la Bibliothèque Orientale Publique de St. Pétersbourg* (St. Pétersbourg 1852), pp. 316-7; Gjužal'jan & D'jakonov, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-5.

¹³ *Fihris al-Maḡtūḡāt al-Fārisiyya allatī taqtanīhā Dār al-Kutub ḡattā 'āmm* 1963, vol. 1 (Cairo 1966), p. 310, No. 1371.

¹⁴ *Fihris al-Maḡtūḡāt al-Fārisiyya allatī taqtanīhā Dār al-Kutub ḡattā 'āmm* 1963, vol. 1 (Cairo 1966), pp. 309-10, No. 1370; Naṣr Allāh Mubaššir al-Ṭirāzī, *al-Fihris al-Waṣfī li-al-Maḡtūḡāt al-Fārisiyya al-Muzayyana bi-al-Šuwar wa-al-Maḡfūza bi-Dār al-Kutub* (Cairo 1968), pp. 5-8, No. 2.

¹⁵ R.P.A. Dozy, *Catalogus Codicum Orientalium Bibliothecae Lugduno Batavae*. Vol 2 (Leiden 1851), p. 108.

¹⁶ Rieu, *op. cit.*, pp. 534-5.

¹⁷ E. Blochet, *Catalogue des manuscrits persans*, tome 3 (Paris 1928), p. 2, No. 5162.

¹⁸ Ettore Rossi, *Elenco dei manoscritti Persiani della Biblioteca Vaticana ...* (Citta del Vaticano 1948), pp. 126-7.

¹⁹ Gjužal'jan & D'jakonov, *op. cit.*, pp. 14-18.

²⁰ See my description of the manuscript in *Īrān Nāmeḡ* 3 (1984-5), pp. 397-8.

²¹ Rieu, *op. cit.*, p. 535.

²² *Illuminierte islamische Handschriften*. Beschrieben von Ivan Stchoukine, Barbara Flemming, Paul Luft, Hanna Sohrweide. Wiesbaden 1971 (*Verzeichnis der orientalischen Handschriften in Deutschland*, vol. 16), pp. 39-46, No. 10.

²³ Karatay, *op. cit.*, p. 131.

²⁴ The edition is published by State University of New York Press with an introduction by Ehsan Yarshater. (*Bibliotheca Persica*, vol. 1).