Editing Problems of Persian Classical Texts and the Respect to Manuscript Authenticity

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At present, the oldest known dated and unaltered manuscript of a Persian text is *al-Abbāya 'an haqīqat al-adwiyā*, dated 447 (beg. 8 April 1055), belonging to the National Library of Austria. This manuscript was copied about one hundred years after its compilation. This manuscript owes its importance not only to its age. The name of the scribe Asadi-yi Tūstī, the composer of the *Gharbāb-Nāma* and the *Lughat-i Fars*, lends special weight and importance to the manuscript, as it was copied by a learned person and a philologist poet.

The next oldest manuscript is a fragment of the *Shurḥ-i Ta'arruf* of Abū ʿĪbrahīm Ismāʿīl b. Muḥammad Mustamali Bukhārī, dated 473 (beg. 22 June 1080), and belongs to the National Museum of Karachi. It is followed by the manuscript of the *Hidāyat al-muta'allimin fi al-tibb* of Abū Bakr Rabiʿ b. Aḥmad Bukhārī, dated 478 (beg. 29 April 1085), which is preserved in the Bodleian Library (Oxford). These three texts have been published in a careful and scholarly manner. Generally, the editors of these texts, when transferring the original manuscript into the printed text, have reproduced the orthographic variations they found by using the four letters that are particular to the Persian orthography (ғғ, ْج ْس). In the manuscripts, the first three letters were mostly written with one dot, and the fourth with three dots either over or underneath the oblique stroke. The indicated changes and alterations in the punctuation and paragraphing of the text are a manifestation of the difficulties and problems of transforming any Persian text from the handwritten manuscripts of past centuries into useful and scholarly editions.

In the texts published in Iran over the last sixty odd years, careful editors, in their introductions, have made known and described the manuscripts they used, indicating the order in which they transferred and edited the text. They have also described the emendations they undertook when editing the manuscripts, and they have especially pointed out the particular characteristics of the handwriting of the manuscript each chose as their exemplar manuscript. These experiments, taken as a whole, may lead us to decisive results about the strengths and weaknesses of the prevailing editing practice. The main characteristics and problems which were discussed in most of these introductions can be categorized as follows.

1. Each manuscript, even if we compare two manuscripts from the same century and period, features its own copying style. Even if there are several copies by a single scribe, they do not show likeness and unity in their calligraphy.
Variations and differences are sometimes seen in consecutive lines even within the same page, which demonstrates that no scribe considered himself bound to a uniform orthography. As mentioned above, differences of copying style are not only related to the changes in handwriting over time, but even within the same period, the orthography varied from region to region. It is equally important to note that the reflection of dialects in the manuscripts is related to the peculiarities of the region the scribe hailed from, which may be different from that of the author. A good example is the boyâdî (notebook) of Tâj al-Dîn Ahmad Vazir, which he compiled in 782 (beg. 7 April 1380); there are writings from eighty contemporary scholars and learned men all of whom were residents of Far (one of the southern provinces of Persia), but each with a style of writing peculiar to himself.  

2. Among modern scholars, all the qualities related to the copying style and orthography of manuscripts have been referred to as *nasm al-khâfi* (handwriting). But I believe that the copying style of old manuscripts should be divided into two elements. One is the general and common form of writing, such as the joining and separating of words; the indication of vocalization and diacritics; the use of other punctuation marks; and the use of Arabic orthography in Persian. The second element is the manner of writing letters, like the various representations of 1 and especially the four particular letters of Persian (qāf, qâf, zâ, ayn), which are not found in the Arabic alphabet. In addition, in old manuscripts and in the pronunciation of the period, there is a letter similar to kâf, which was probably pronounced somewhere between kâf and kâf (kâf). This category also includes dotted  ê after a vowel, such as in  ê ê ê ê, or attaching marks to similar forms of letters, because they were once accompanied by such marks, and those marks have now even completely abandoned, such as  ê ê ê ê ê ê ê ê ê ê. Perhaps this type of peculiarities may be called *nasm al-khâfi* (the spelling of letters).  

3. The absence of diacritics in manuscripts is one of the causes of incorrect reading which particularly affects lost geographical and historical proper names, as well as scientific terms, especially in pharmacopoeias and their like, and creates great difficulties. An example of a Persian text with very few diacritics is the *Libb al-bisâb* written in the seventh/eighth century, which was published in a facsimile edition in Tehran (1368 sh./beg. 20 March 1989).  The lack of diacritics is not due to carelessness: according to Muhammad b.  'Abd al-Khâliq Mayhâni, the author of the *Dastûr-i dâhiri* in 585 (beg. 19 February 1189), the absence of diacritics is part of good writing style, because the reader of the letter should not be charged with ignorance. As Mayhâni put it,  

One should not put vowels and diacritical points and dots except at amiss places [i.e., at places where a different diacritic would normally be expected]. However, providing diacritics and vocalization without any excuse is charging the addressee of a letter with ignorance.  

4. Regarding the four Persian letters, a particular rule cannot be derived from a comparison of the old manuscripts. Sometimes three dots were used to distinguish  kâf,  qâf,  zâ, and  ayn. This has been mentioned before. The author of the *Dastûr-i dâhiri* put it as follows:  

And there are few letters in the Persian language which are not found in Arabic, such as  ê ê ê ê and  ê ê ê ê [The first three always feature three dots so that it does not give rise to mistakes].  

He has another rule, too, for the letter  ê ê ê ê in words beginning with  ê ê ê ê [the letter 'k' marked with the vowel point "dammah" (') in order to avoid pronouncing it incorrectly, correct pronunciation is emphasized by the insertion of (or replacement by)  ê ê ê ê. As an example, he added that  ê ê ê ê  ê ê ê ê is written  ê ê ê ê ê ê ê ê.  

5. The punctuation in the middle and end of paragraphs is very limited in Persian manuscripts (as it is in Arabic), but nowadays in the printing of old texts, a European-based punctuation is used for the ease of reading and in order to separate the phrases from each other. The crucial point in this regard is that none of the editors has until now clarified which punctuation marks or dots were found in the manuscript itself and which ones were added by the editor himself. Often the editor, according to his understanding of the text, inserts a full stop which results in separating phrases in a way that the author did not necessarily intend. A practical way of distinguishing the editor's punctuation from that of the copyist has not yet been devised.  

6. Paragraphing is one of the necessities which should now be implemented in all the old texts. In this regard, too, the editors do not indicate what the original condition of the manuscript was, and what form it has taken in the printed text.  

7. The variations of pronunciation and letters in the manuscripts are of great importance both from the viewpoint of linguistics and for demonstrating the style and quality of the copying of manuscripts. Examples are  ê ê ê ê and  ê ê ê ê (Arabicized) and  ê ê ê ê (Persian);  ê ê ê ê and  ê ê ê ê (it is certainly written thus reflecting

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13. The genealogy of the various manuscripts of a text is generally determined on the basis of the date when they were copied, but perhaps it is necessary to make a distinction between them if they belong to different cultural areas. For instance, the manuscripts that were written during the period of the Seljuks of Anatolia in areas of Sivas and Arzanağ (Erzincan) show differences from the viewpoint of "ram al-khabat" in comparison with the manuscripts written by Seljuq copyists from Kömür and Isfahān during the same period.

The Persian texts which have survived from the Samānīd period (more than a thousand years ago) have been copied over the centuries in the prevailing scripts of each cultural region and with the changes that occurred in the orthography over the centuries. Unfortunately, most of the time there is a gap of many years between the compilation of the work and the date of the oldest extant manuscript, and we are entirely ignorant of the author's orthography. For instance, the composition of the Shabnam was completed in 400 (beg. 25 August 1009), but the oldest known manuscript of this book is dated 614 (beg. 10 April 1217), and even this only became known some twenty years ago. Hence the editors who produced various editions of this epic from the fourteenth century onwards and until the discovery of the 614/1217 copy by Jalal Khāliqi Muṣṭaq, had to use manuscripts dating from the eighth century onwards.

Texts which were copied in calligraphy before the death of the author are rare; among these is the Khamīṣ al-gharib 'ub Khāqānī (renowned as Tahfīzat al-Tāriqān), which was penned two years before the death of the poet. This manuscript, which is dated 593 (beg. 24 November 1196), is part of the uncatalogued collections of the National Library of Austria, and remained unknown until recently.6

Undoubtedly the most significant difficulty in presenting an emended, definitive text that strives to retain the orthography used by its author is the absence of authentic manuscripts, or the fact that they remain unknown. If a manuscript copied from the autograph is not available, a copy close to the author's time must be used. Therefore one must expend great effort to find and use reliable and correct manuscripts for the purpose of the authoritative editing of the words of any classic author. This list could be easily prolonged. It may suffice here to point out that the problems and questions the editor of Persian manuscripts is faced with are endless, and decisions need to be taken at each step to make the edition both meaningful and accessible. In the second part of this paper, I shall highlight a few of the achievements.

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6 Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Khaliq al-Mayḥani, Dastavīd-e dakhīrī, p. 5.
7 See the catalogue, vol. 5, p. 228, and the preface of the Tārīkht-i Shāhīd Bihārī, translated by Johannes Baptist van Loon, s'Gravenhage, 1954.
It is instructive to chart the development of authoritative editions of New Persian texts over the past two centuries, first under the efforts of orientalists, and later, Iranian scholars. While difficulties and problems existed, there are instances of excellent work as well.

The copying of manuscripts in respect to handwriting style is subject to the time and region where the copy was produced. Jalāl Matīnī, in his outstanding research, has specified three periods and has found some variations and differences in the handwriting style of each of these periods. Differences between several copies of a text are due not only to date; there may also be variations between several manuscripts of the same period if they were copied in different regions. Such differences may be found for instance among the copies of the Divān of the poets of the Safavid period which were produced in Iran and India.

During the millennium in question, the first eight hundred years are the period of handwriting, whereas the last two centuries witnessed the rise of print. These two centuries, in which copyists published classical texts from old copies in the form of edited books, started in India, where M. Lunsmen published the first volume of the Shāhnāma in 1811 (1225) in typography and Nastaʾlīq script; thirty years later the Līsān al-Ḥaṣām by Shūʿārī was published in Constantinople in 1255 (beg. 17 March 1839). Following that, numerous texts were printed in India, whether by the Asiatic Society under the supervision of individuals like Sir William Jones and W. Nassau-Bees, or by publishers like Nawalkhishore, and others.

After this initial period begins the era of editing Persian texts by orientalists in European countries. Among this generation, the names of Étienne Quatremère, Jules Mohl, Johann August Vullers, Il'ya Nikolaevich Berezin, Paul Horn, Louis-Amédée Sedillot, P.R. Seligman, Georg Graf, Albin de Biberstein-Kaziminski, Reynold Alleyn Nicholson, Valentin Alekseyevich Zhukovskii and Edward Granville Browne may be mentioned by way of example.

At about the same time lithography became prevalent in Iran, the publishing of literary texts like the Shāhnāma, collected works (kahliyat) of Sa'dī, the Maḥnāvī of Rūmī and the Divān of Hāfiz were particularly regarded with favour. During the last twenty years of the Naṣīrī period (1875-1895), particular attention was paid to the correctness of the text. The critical notes which Amir Niẓām Gārūsī added on the margins of the Kitāb va Dimna printed in Tabriz (1886) are examples of this. It is probable that Amir Niẓām, who was a governor and an eloquent writer and calligrapher and who lived in Paris as an ambassador for some time, was acquainted with the orientalists (including Biberstein Kaziminsky) who were familiar with the Persian language and the scientific method of editing texts.

A few years earlier, in 1880, on the order of the army commander Muhammad Rahīm Khān ‘Alī al-Dawla, and with the efforts of a learned man named Mirzā Tāhir Baṣīr al-Mulk Shāybānī, a lithograph edition of Mawlawī’s Maḥnāvī was published (Tehran, 1882); this edition consisted of the Komšīl al-abkāt (alphabetic index of couplets), and this kind of presentation was novel.

In 1862, an edition of the Tāriḥ-i Bahānqāh was edited and supervised by Ahmad Adī Pishāvari, a first rate poet of this time, and published in Tehran. Of course, before that, W. Nassau-Bees’ edition was published in 1862 in Calcutta as a volume of the Bibliotheca Indica, but the advantages of Adī’s explanatory and marginal notes in the new edition would attract the attention of future scholars. I should also mention the famous edition of the Shāhnāma which was published by the order of Husayn Pasha-khan Amir Bahādur-Jang by Muhammad Ẓādī Adī al-Manālik Farahānī (the famous poet) and ‘Abd al-‘Alī Muḥād Bīdūl (a writer and poet who aimed at pure Persian writing) in the year 1907, and quickly gained renown.

Though some work has been done on these four works which shows some interest in the correctness of the text, and although there has been no taint of commercialism in their publication, they cannot be considered as completely scholarly publications, because they did not mention the exemplars on which the edition in question was based.

Perhaps by chance, it was at about the same time that in Ottoman Turkey Mirzā Ḥabīb ʿĪṣahānī, who was an Iranian scholar and a man of letters, published two important texts, the Divān-i ama by Bushāqi Shirāzī (Galata: Chāhpkhānā-yi Ābu al-Ziyā, 1884) and the Divān-i aḥāfīz by Muḥāmid Niẓām Qārī-yi Yazdī (İstanbul: Chāhpkhānā-yi Ābu al-Ziyā, 1885), following the copies he had seen in Istanbul. Similarly, the French orientalist H. Ferté, too, surely with the cooperation of Mirzā Ḥabīb, published a selection of Ubayyīd Zakānī’s Divān the same year (1884). These three texts have been a source of reference for scholars ever since, though they lack the qualities of a critical edition.

The scholarly and critical editing and publishing of Persian texts commences with the activities of Muhammad Qazvīnī in Europe. Initially working with Edward G. Browne, and then independently, he edited various texts; by publishing the three volumes of the Tāriḥ-i Bahān-gūshät by Aṭā Malīk Juwaynī in the Gibb Memorial Series, Qazvīnī proved his scholarly ability and critical sense and provided an example that later editors have tried to emulate. It is after the publication of the first works of Qazvīnī that scholars like Naṣīrullāh Taqāvī, Muhammad ‘Alī Fatūḥī, Muhammad Taqī Bahār, ‘Abd al-ʿĀzīz Qarib, Muḥāmad Bahirīyār, Jalāl Tīhrānī, Hasan Vahīd Dastgahī, ‘Alī ‘Abd al-Rasūlī, Ḥabīb Ẓādī, Ghalīm-Rūz Rashid Yāsāmī, Saʿīd Nafīsī, ‘Abbās ʿĪṣālī, Muhammad Taqī Muḥarrīṣ Raṭāvī, Jalāl Humā‘ī and Muḥājabān Mīnūvī embarked on publishing texts with attention to introducing the manuscript exemplar, copies, and variant traditions. Of course, the editing methods differ slightly from one scholar to the next.

After this group, a large number of their students started publishing texts, a practice which has continued from generation to generation until now. At this
stage, the names of the late Yahya Mahdavi, Zabiullah Safa, Muhammad Mu'in, Parviz Nafiel Khani, Sadegh Gawharin, Muhammad Taqi Danishpazhuhi, Mahdi Bayani, Jalal Al-Din Muaddith, Ahmad Gulchin Maani, Ahmad Ali Raji and Ghulam-Husain Yusefi should not be forgotten.

In conclusion of this brief account, which I believe was not fruitless for general knowledge, it is necessary to mention that although the Intisharat-i Kalala-i Khavas, the Idris-i Nigarsh-i Vizarat-i Farhang and Tehran University took the lead in publishing texts, the first important and thoughtful step was taken by the Bungabi-Tajuma va Nasiri Kitab (Bureau of Translation and Publication of Books) by producing a collection of Persian texts under the supervision of Ehsan Yarshater; this series includes more than forty titles published between the years 1966 and 1978.

There are several collections which have become available through the Bureau-i Farhang-i Iran (Foundation of Iranian Culture) under the supervision of Parviz Nafiel Khani between the years 1966-1978, in several different series such as Tarih-i va jughras-i Iran, Zaban va adabiyyat-i Farsi, Farhanghe-yi Farsi, and others. Currently, the Mu'assasa-yi Mirathi Maktub have taken charge of publishing the texts of classical authors. Since 1994, it has published about a hundred titles and also publishes a magazine named A'in-i Mirathi whose articles are concerned solely with introducing manuscripts, methods of editing texts, and criticism of published texts.

In the field of scholarly editions, which is based on the editor's intention to follow the exemplar while criticizing the various copies, certain difficulties in the editing of Persian texts have become gradually evident. In order to address one of these difficulties, a study of the gradual development of the evolution of Persian handwriting was carefully carried out. Any practical and accurate solution must include a method of addressing this orthography that takes into account both current linguistic rules and the special requirements of the Persian language, and efforts were made to find and apply an orthography that was suited to this age.

At the outset, Ahmad Bahmanyar in 1944 and then Mustafa Mugharabi on the initiative of Parviz Nafiel Khani in that year, and following them Jalal Humai, presented their suggestions on Persian orthography. After them, other views were presented and some scholarly institutions proposed and introduced their particular orthographic style.

Recently the Farhangsatin-i zabarin va adab (The Persian Language and Literature Academy) has presented a new Sihwa-nama devoted to this purpose. In Juya Jahanabkesh's treatise, which he had written for the Dastar-i Mirathi Maktub (Bureau of Written Heritage) on the guidelines for the editing of texts, one section is allocated to this very subject.

Without doubt the new methods which have been produced in these ways have naturally influenced the editing of texts and their orthography, and generally the problem which disturbs the minds of editors is to what extent the manuscript, i.e., the old handwriting, should be followed, and to what extent it is necessary to apply more modern methods of orthography which facilitate the reading and printing of the text.

Whether one should completely surrender to the style of old manuscripts, as happened in the editions of the Astar al-taubih (1896) and Sadaf al-mahdij (1926, posthumously) by Zhukovski, and render all the letters in the same way as they are found in the original copy, is debatable. Mohi in his edition of the Shabnam (1) in 1880, and Fritz Meier, in the Ferdows al-murshidiyah (Leipzig, 1948), e.g., held that the traditional orthography in the manuscripts should be abandoned and the pronunciation of contemporary Iranians and their recent way of writing should be adopted as the basis. Several text editors were inclined to advocate that the use of phrases and words remain faithful to the old manuscripts. Almost all the Iranian editors have followed this practice.

The need to apply consistent standards in editing the texts resulted in the translations of books on this subject by Gottfried Bergstrasser (from Arabic into Persian), 'Abd al-Salam Hariri and Sialat al-Din al-Munajjed (from Arabic into Persian), though these three books are based on the study of Arabic texts and manuscripts and not Persian ones. Fortunately, before them, Jalal Matini had presented his scholarly research on the development of the handwriting of Persian manuscripts, and Najib Mayil Haravi has published the two useful and comprehensive books Neqad va tashbih-i mutan ( Mashhad, 1389/1999-9), and the Tarih-i naskhabardazi va tashbih-i iniqad-yi naskhabar-yi bhatti (Tehran, 1380/2001-2002), describing the stages of codicology and the methods of editing Persian manuscripts. Most recently, the treatise Rahnama-ya tashbih-i mutan (Guide to text editing) by Juya Jahanabkesh on the order of the Dastar-i Mirathi Maktub has also become available.

The editors have seen most of these instances in the manuscripts. The differences between the manuscripts are so great that it has made the uniformity of method a difficult task. Even my own paper did nothing but discuss the difficulties and problems of editing Persian manuscripts. I conclude my paper with the words of Muhammad Qazvini, the first of the great 20th century editors:

The writer of these lines has generally placed the old manuscripts as the basis of text and placed the rest of the important substitutes of the manuscripts in the margin, and entirely overlooked the innumerable unimportant substitutes which do not change the meaning and are subject to the carnal desires of the scribes like "ra'yi"a"ra'yi"a"ra'yi"a"ra'yi"a"ra'yi"a"ra'yi"a and so on, because no line and rather no word in this introduction is free of difference in reading and has no use except for wasting the time of the reader and painlessly filling up the space.9