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EARLY ARABIC-PERSIAN LEXICOGRAPHY: THE ASAMI AND MASADIR GENRES

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1. Introduction

In the genesis and systematization of New Persian, the principal vehicle of Eastern Islamic literature from the fourth century A.H./tenth century C.E., the Arabic language sciences naturally served as models for the organization and metalanguage of their counterparts in Persian. Thus the metrical system of Classical Persian verse is described in terms of the feet and metres of the system of ‘arād attributed to al-Ḥalīl b. Ahmad, and continues to be studied and taught within this matrix even after detailed research by medieval scholars such as Sams-i Qays ar-Rāzi revealed, implicitly – and that of modern scholars has confirmed explicitly – that Persian metrics is by origin and nature quite different from Arabic, and the convoluted rules devised in order to derive many Persian metres from Arabic models are patently artificial\(^1\). Grammatical terminology, too, has been taken mostly from Arabic, and remains so in most modern textbooks, even though Persian is structurally much more akin to English than to Arabic. Happily, this sort of imitation has not kept Persians from appreciating and composing poetry in both traditional and modern modes without conscious reference to Arabicate schemes of scansion, nor are modern Iranian linguists intimidated from coining new terms where necessary to analyse Persian within novel matrices such as generative semantics. The traditional terms are labels, no more and no less useful within their domains than their Greco-Latin analogues such as ‘iambic’ or ‘gerund’ in English poetics and grammar.

\(^1\) See Efwell-Sutton 1976, esp. 57-82.
Where the needs of language are more important than the convenience or prestige of metalinguistic labels, reliance on Arabic models can be seen to be negligible. In the sphere of lexical borrowing, where the influence of Arabic on Persian is most immediately apparent, it has been shown that the morphological assimilation of Arabic etyma into Persian proceeds in accordance with intuitive Persian semantic categories, not by analogy with syntactically-conditioned variants or morpholexical patterns of Arabic; i.e., words ending in the phonologically ambivalent Arabic feminine marker -at(t) are definitively lexicalized in Persian borrowings as either -at or -a (both phonologically and orthographically), according to the extent to which they exhibit contrastive features such as mass noun/count noun, tangible/intangible, action noun/instance noun, etc. (Perry 1991.)

Lexicography is a field where one would expect an initial dependence on, and imitation of, Arabic models. New Persian does not appear in literary form (in Arabic script) for some two centuries after the Arab Muslim conquest of Iran; the early Islamic intellectuals of the region (including probable crypto-Zoroastrians like Ibn al-Muqaffā') wrote in Arabic. Not only were the early monolingual Arabic dictionaries prestigious achievements with no surviving analogue in earlier Persian, but several of them were compiled by ethnic Iranians (Ibn Qutayba of Marv, az-Zamaḥšari, al-Gawhari of Fārāb), some of whom also compiled bilingual Arabic-Persian dictionaries (az-Zamaḥšari, Abū Ġa'far al-Bayhaqi). This is not to argue that the vernacular spoken by such lexicographers (which in some cases was an Iranian language other than Persian) could have influenced their methodology; Arabic was the language in which they wrote -- and most likely thought -- and likewise the main object of their linguistic inquiries. It remains pertinent, however, that the early period of Arabic-Persian lexicography (ca. 1040-1280 C.E.) is contemporaneous with the middle period of a still vigorous and changing tradition of Arabic monolingual lexicography, involving some of the same scholars; and that several peculiarities of arrangement in Arabic dictionaries have their counterparts in Arabic-Persian dictionaries. It is the object of this preliminary inquiry to assess whether this similarity is the result of unthinking imitation, or a conscious adoption or adaptation of tried and trusted methods; and to what extent some quite different methods used were more suitable to Persian lexicographical needs.

The importance of early Arabic-Persian dictionaries to Islamic cultural history is considerable. Beginning as reference books for the bilingual writers of the Eastern Caliphate and its independent emirates, they increasingly become records and to some extent arbiters of the flood of Arabic loanwords and calques into Persian, recording the first stage in the formal and semantic processing such words underwent in their further journeys into Turkic, Indic and other languages of the cultural ecumene.

One example of Arabic-Persian lexicography is indisputably a straightforward adaptation, virtually a translation, of a monolingual Arabic work. as-Sīhāḥ of al-Gawhari, completed at Nishapur about 398/1007, was abridged as as-Surāh min as-Sīhāḥ by Abū l-Fadl Ṭāmīr ad-Dīn Muhammad Qarṣī at Kašgar in 681/1282. Using the same arrangement by rhyme and keeping the citations from the Koran, Ḥadīth and Arabic proverbs, Qarṣī dispensed with the verse ṣawāhid and glossed each of the 40,000 entries with a single Persian word or expression. It proved to be a continuing success, inspiring numerous editions and commentaries in Iran and, later, in India (Munzavi 1958, 306-309). It was acknowledged as the source of the material in several subsequent dictionaries, notably the popular Kanz al-lugāt of Muhammad b. Ma'rūf, written for the ruler of Gilān ca. 870/1465. Such obvious influence does not concern us here; more interesting is the possibility of creative imitation or adaptation of individual Arabic dictionaries, or of genres of dictionaries, where this is not acknowledged.

2. Goals and Techniques

The first Arabic dictionaries, of the 2nd-3rd/8th-9th centuries, were compiled by scholars for scholars. An outgrowth of the grammatical sciences inaugurated by Sibawayhi and al-Halīl, works such as the Kitāb al-ayn and al-Gamhara were arranged paradigmatically, according to
the morphological patterns assumed by the lexical radicals; they were re-
search tools for the lexicographer and his colleagues, whether phonolo-
gist, philologist or prosodist.

The earliest Persian monolingual dictionaries, appearing almost
three centuries later, were by poets for poets; eschewing subcategoriza-
tion, they arranged their vocabulary in alphabetical order of the final
letter, i.e., by rhyme. Despite their often bearing Arabic titles (a fashion-
able convention), Persian dictionaries confined themselves strictly to
native Persian vocabulary, and did not regularly include Arabic loan-
words until the seventeenth century. The first of them, early in the 5th/
11th century, is said to have been a farhang ('schoolbook', dictionary')
by the musician and reputed first New Persian poet, Abû Ḥaṣṣ Suğdî
(i.e., of Sogdia, in the region of Samarqand and the Pamir foothills);
some fifty years later (ca. 1050) appeared the Luğat-i fars of Asadî Tūsî,
and the now inextant Tafsîr (or Tafsîsîr) fi luğat al-fars of Qârân of

The timing and locations are significant. During the tenth century,
the Sâmâ´nid dynasty had established the dialect of New Persian known
as Darî as the court and literary language of their empire centred on
Bukhara. This dialect, though originating in the Old and Middle Persian
of southwestern Iran, was established on former Parthian territory and
had a substratum of vocabulary from indigenous northeastern Iranian
languages, chiefly Sogdian and Choresmian (Khwarazmian). The Persian
of southern and western Iran, known as Pârsî, remained closer to litera-
ry Pahlavi of Sasanian times, and included elements of other Iranian
languages such as (pre-Turkish) Azeri in the region of Tabriz2. The
prestigious Persian of the Sâmâ´nid court, a vehicle of translation from
Arabic (e.g., both the Tâvîb and the Tafsîr of at-Tabarî) and of original
poetry and prose, was expanding its domain westward during the 5th/
11th century, into Persian-speaking lands ruled by Iranian dynasts (the
Buwayhids) where, paradoxically, the court and literary language was
still Arabic. Abû Ḥaṣṣ and Asadî of Tūs were celebrating the vocabu-

lary of the fashionable poetry of their time, and teaching it as the vocab-
ulary of their own clime to the less fortunate poets of western Iran;
one of these was Qârân of Tabriz who, as we learn from Nâsîr Hûs-
raw, ‘could not speak Persian very well’ and was anxious to copy down
the Khurasanian traveller’s glosses on the vocabulary of the Sâmâ´nid
poet Dâqîqî – thus forming the nucleus of his dictionary3.

Persian monolingual dictionaries thus had adequate autochthonous
motivations for both their sociolinguistic function and their alphabeti-

' See Lazard 1975 and 1990.

Persian consonants not found in Arabic. Naṣāni also credited with the composition of al-Mīrqaṭ (also known as as-Sahā'if), a Persian-Arabic vocabulary for beginners divided topically into twelve chapters (Munzavi 1958:272). Similarly motivated, and independent of Arabic models, was the contemporaneous Tarāğān al-Qurān of the qāḍī Abū ‘Abdallāh Husayn az-Zawzanī (Zawzan lies between Herat and Nishapur). This was the first of many Persian glossaries of the Koran, which were generally arranged in order of sūras; they thus functioned more like commentaries or interlinear translations than true dictionaries, and probably owed their inspiration rather to the now universal science of tafsīr than to Arabic lexicography.

3. Asāmī and maṣādir: Arabic antecedents

During the same period there began to appear the first Arabic-Persian dictionaries using the terms asmā’ (plural of ism ‘noun’) or the double plural asāmī, and maṣādir (plural of maṣdar ‘verbal abstract, nomen actionis’) in their titles. For this there are precedents in the Arabic monolingual lexicographical and lexicological tradition. Abū ‘Ubayd in the seventeenth book of al-Garīb al-musannaf exemplifies sixty-nine bābs of nominal paradigms, and there are similar though shorter such sections on asmā’ in Ibn Qutayba’s Ādāb al-kāṭib and al-Gamhara of Ibn Durayd. The impetus for these separate listings seems to have been the desire to showcase unusual forms, such as the pattern fiʿil and the proper noun šurabīl in Abū ‘Ubayd; certainly these anomalies lend themselves less well to systematization under radicals. Such precedents may have led in the Arabic tradition to an elaboration where a single nominal paradigm is exemplified exhaustively, as in Kitāb mā gā’a min al-mabnī ‘alā faʿāl of ʿAli b. ʿIsā ar-Rabīʿî (d. 420/1029).4

4. Arabic-Persian asāmī

It thus appears that both asāmī and maṣādir came into their own as distinct and categorically sophisticated lexicographical genres only with Arabic-Persian bilingual dictionaries from the late eleventh century on. The two labels, like most grammatical terms, were lifted from Arabic, but the use to which they were put was more in keeping with Persian lexicographical needs than Arabic, though the appropriate evolution took some time.

In Nishapur in 1104, Abū l-Fadl Ahmad al-Maydānī, a prolific contemporary of az-Zamāḥšarī and al-Bayhaqī, produced as-Sāmī fi l-asāmī, 'The Sublime [Dictionary] of Nouns': this was arranged topically, under four kitābs: (1) religion, (2) animals, (3) the celestial, (4) the terrestrial. Interesting is that the Persian glosses are absent from some of the manuscripts; since the introduction and explanatory apparatus is in Arabic, and makes no specific reference to Persian, perhaps the work was conceived initially as a monolingual dictionary, and Abū l-Fadl’s son or another later retrofitted it as a bilingual Arabic-Persian dictionary. At any rate, forty years later his son, Abū Sa‘d Sa‘īd al-Maydānī, issued an expanded Arabic-Persian version under the appropriate title al-Asmā’ fi l-asāmī, with a Persian introduction (Munzavi 1958: 275). This work, surviving only as a fragment, thus marks an important stage in the rise of New Persian as a scholarly language in its own right, and anticipates the relegation of Arabic in the Islamic East to its post-Mongol status as a dead language – still essential as a key to the classics and a fund of vocabulary, but no longer the only acceptable medium of expository prose.

Approximately a hundred years later, during the thirteenth century, the Muhaddīb al-asmā’ by the qāḍī Maḥmūd b. ‘Umar (an Arab by descent, resident near Samarrqand), introduced further innovations. Dispensing with citations, it included particles, adjectives and collocations, arranged the material in 28 bābūs alphabetically by initial, and further subcategorized them (faṣl) by first vowel! This very modern and un-Semitic procedure was not widely imitated; other improvements were – notably the use of standard abbreviations such as ma‘rūf to designate a noun so common as not to need definition, and the letter ǧīm (for ǧāmī ‘plural’) (Munzavi 1958:301-303; Storey 1984:92). Some glosses comprise not native Persian words but assimilated Arabic loans: e.g., al-arab (‘need’) is explained as hāgāt, not as, say, niyāz, as might have been expected. The anonymous and roughly contemporaneous Tabdīb al-asmā’, also known as Tāğ al-asāmī, includes wordier definitions of its material in Arabic. It treats nouns only; these are likewise arranged in the first instance alphabetically by initial, but subcategorized by root final. This arrangement was to prove the most popular with later Iranian and Indo-Persian lexicographers until the eighteenth century, since it combined the best of both worlds – alphabetical by initial, for general reference of words (not roots), and alphabetical by final within this scheme, for use as a partial rhyming dictionary.

5. Arabic-Persian maṣādīr

Qāḍī Abū ‘Abdallāh Husayn az-Zawzānī (d. 1093) compiled several dictionaries besides the Koranic glossary already mentioned, including a (Kitāb) al-maṣādīr. This early model of the genre was not a user-friendly vernacular glossary, its 5,000 entries being arranged much like one of its Arabic precursors in order of morphological complexity of the infinitives and the characteristic vowels of conjugated forms (Munzavi 1958: 268; Storey 1984:80-81). However, it evidently sensed a need and anticipated a trend. Some fifty years later, Abū Ga‘far al-Bayhaqī (Bū Ga‘farak, to give him his familiar Persian form) expanded az-Zawzānī’s work, without acknowledgement, to 10,000 entries and arranged it in strict alphabetical order within the morphological sections. This Tāğ al-maṣādīr was an immediate success: since Bū Ga‘farak reputedly never left home except to visit the mosque, scholars flocked to his house in Nishapur to hear and memorize his dictionary. The author of the Tārīḵi Bayhaq claims to have memorized both az-Zawzānī’s and Bū Ga‘farak’s maṣādīr (Munzavi 1958:279-280; Storey 1984:84-85). The latter was published in a Bombay lithograph edition as late as 1301/1884.

The Tāğ was no dry listing of infinitives, but a compendium of Arabic verbal morphology and an illustration of the idiomatic disambiguation of polysemous action nouns. For example (p. 677 of the lithograph) under the entry hāf we read one example hāla‘a anhu yawbahu,

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both of these pioneering methodologies in dictionaries of various types that appeared during the centuries following their demise.

The popular Kanz al-lūgāt (ca. 1465) by Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Ḥāliq Maṭrūf took its material from the Surāh as-Siyāḥ, as already mentioned. In its arrangement, however, it is a combination of our two genres, segregating masādir from nouns and other words in each kitāb (Munzavi 1958:316-317). Maṭrūf tends to group together different masārs of the same root, as, e.g., in the prudishly unhelpful entry: al-muḡamī, waṣal-gimmā – maṭrīf. In this and most subsequent dictionaries that list alphabetically by initial then final (rather than second), strict alphabetical sequence is occasionally ignored in order (1) to list together words of identical paradigms such as maf'al, mus'ala, taf'il, etc., and (2) within this matrix, to group synonyms, sometimes having them share a gloss: e.g., al-muṣāqada and al-muṣāhada are glossed together before the entry al-muṣānāda. Thus in the Taq al-māṣādir, the Kanz al-lūgāt, the Muntahab al-luğati Śabōgābānī (1046/1636-7), the Farhang-i šir išaḵ (18th century) and several other Arabic-Persian dictionaries or Persian dictionaries that include Arabic loans and are arranged alphabetically by initial, the Arabic vocabulary that begins with formatives (especially mīm or tā) is prominently displayed in paradigmatic groups.

This is useful in the first instance to the original learner or scholar, who finds words not only easy to look up but, in the case of verbal nouns and participles, grouped according to prosodic and semantic type: a choice of, say, mus'ala words is available for the rhetorician to spice his sentences with rhymed synonyms and antonyms. In the second instance it is convenient for the modern researcher who may wish to make lexico-statistical or semantic comparisons. For instance, the total number of mus'ala words in az-Zawsanī's Kitāb al-māṣādir is 490; in al-Bayhaqī's expansion of this, 567; in the Kanz al-lūgāt, 505; in the Muntahab al-luğāt, 228, which is little more than the number used as loans in modern written Persian. The extent to which actual items in dictionaries of different periods correspond to eventual Lehnswörter, and the relative proportions of vocabulary from various lexi-co-semantic patterns as between Arabic words that remained outside the Persian lexicon

6. The legacy of asmā' and masādir

A few more Arabic-Persian dictionaries of the asmā' genre were produced up until the early eighteenth century in Turkey and Iran, but masādir-type dictionaries appear to have died out in the fifteenth. Neither genre is represented in the titles of dictionaries produced in India, where lexicographers of Arabic and Persian were the most active from the fourteenth century on. However, manuscripts of the best-known exemplars are common in libraries of the Subcontinent; and if we examine the material treated and its arrangement, we find more than a trace of

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8 Rybalkin 1990:38-39; al-Fārābī, Dīwān, Editor's introduction.
and eventual Persian borrowings, are some of the questions that may help to fill in our scanty knowledge of the process of Persian borrowing from Arabic.

It is evident that from the rise of literary New Persian, which was incorporating Arabic vocabulary at a furious rate, scholars realised the need to control and record this process. Vocabulary was being assimilated not in the form of abstract roots, grammatically-conditioned particles and finite verb paradigms, but almost exclusively as substantives (including verbal participles and, especially, infinitives or mašādārs). These latter were especially valuable in building up the intellectual vocabulary: already by the Middle Persian period, the primitive verb stock had become seriously impoverished, so that denominal derivation of new verbs was common even before the arrival of Arabic. Henceforth synthetic coinages like gānatidān 'to plunder' and fahmīdan 'to understand' and, increasingly, analytic forms with auxiliaries, as taqdim kardan 'to propose, proffer' and the examples already quoted from mašādār collections, were to continue to enrich Persian.

The intricately categorized, over-determined Arabic dictionaries which Iranian scholars had played a considerable part in elaborating for the purposes of Arabic philology were of little use in overseeing the transfer of actual substantives and nomina actionis into Persian. So by progressively simplifying the excesses of categorization, by arranging the material by rhyme or by initial consonant (of the word, not necessarily the root), and by restricting it to those word classes most in demand, bilingual lexicographers formed a bridge between Arabic and Persian monolingual dictionaries. As already noted, two of the early works of asāmī and mašādār produced by Iranian scholars of Khurasan (al-Maydānī and al-Bayhaqī) may have been drafted originally in Arabic only, and were later adapted as bilingual glossaries. The labels asmāʾ-asāmī and mašādār were lifted from their lexicographical precursors, but the form and content of the new genres had little in common with the fringe phenomena once studied for the sake of Arabic philology, and everything to do with the Arabicization of the Persian lexicon. By the seventeenth century, when ʿAbd ar-Raṣīd Tattāvī introduced his Muntāḥab al-luğāt-i Șāhībānī (with the hybrid syntax of its title) to the cultivated Muṣāl court, as the first comprehensive dictionary of Arabic prose for students and general readers, the listing of nominal and verbal substantives had been amalgamated into what was, though ostensibly still an Arabic-Persian dictionary, in effect an alphabetical record of Arabic Fremdwörter (loans available) and LehreīmERT (loans in use) in Persian. It is significant that Persian monolingual dictionaries of this same period, such as the Būḥānī qāṭī and Tattāvī's own Farhang-i Rašīdī, were beginning to include assimilated Arabic loanwords in their entries.

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Unattributed remarks on the content of particular dictionaries are based on the author's examination of various manuscripts.

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