

of a retelling of the myths, legends and history of the kings and warriors of pre-Islamic Iran. Over the past centuries, the *Shāhnāme* has been subjected to numerous translations, interpretations and commentaries. Studies of Ferdowsi's epic vary from biased exposés to prove the authenticity of its contents to well-balanced literary analyses. Other works may deal with specific themes. Examples are Khaleghi-Motlagh's book about women in the *Shāhnāme* or Ehlers' about the poem's metaphorical treatment of nature.<sup>1)</sup> There are also works of an even more factual nature, consisting of the names of places or persons that appear in the *Shāhnāme*, listed alphabetically in a comprehensive glossary. A combination of the latter two categories, an explanatory glossary pertaining to a particular theme, is perhaps the best way to classify Fatemeh Hamidifard-Graber's *Von Ackerwinde bis Zypresse. Das Pflanzenreich im "Königsbuch" des Ferdousi*. Originally the author's PhD-dissertation, the book gives an overview of all the plants and trees that are mentioned in the *Shāhnāme*, as well as any other type of vegetation.

Although the aptly chosen title *Von Ackerwinde bis Zypresse* translates literally as 'From bindweed (*khou*) to cypress (*sarv*)', the book's first entry is *ābnōs* (ebony) and the last one is *zeitūn* (olive). As the variety of these four names suggests, the glossary covers the plant world in its broadest sense. One encounters not just specific plants, flowers and trees, but also types of fruit, grains and wood, as well as general names for blossoms, grasses, branches and other kinds of greenery. In all, the glossary takes up 107 pages and consists of 103 entries. They are listed in alphabetical order on the basis of their Persian names. These are accompanied by their German translation and, where appropriate, their Latin botanical term. Just a few of the 103 entries contain no commentary but refer to a name that is dealt with elsewhere in the book and that is more or less synonymous. All the other entries include a mention of the number of times the word appears in the *Shāhnāme*, an explanation of its meaning and of its function in the poem, whether literally or metaphorically, and one or more *Shāhnāme* verses by way of example. If a particular term has two or more different interpretations, the entry includes more examples and the commentary correspondingly is longer.

It should be noted that the Persian names are given only in transcription. If one is not familiar with the in German more commonly used transcription of certain consonants, the looking up of certain names is not always easy. The glossary would have been more user-friendly if each name had been accompanied by its equivalent in the Arabic script.

As becomes clear from the author's introduction, she made an effort to ensure that no plant name in the *Shāhnāme* would be missed. After gathering all the plant references in Wolff's *Glossar zu Ferdosis Schahname* (Berlin, 1935), she looked these up in several editions to verify their context. She supported her findings with a range of works that deal with various aspects of botany and herbal medicine. She explains (p. 13) that scholars sometimes have widely divergent interpretations of certain plant names in the *Shāhnāme*, which meant that an in-depth study of botanical works was necessary, in order to provide all of the Persian terms with a plausible identification.

#### IRANICA

HAMIDIFARD-GRABER, F. — *Von Ackerwinde bis Zypresse. Das Pflanzenreich im "Königsbuch" des Ferdousi* (Islamkundliche Untersuchungen, Band 294). Klaus Schwarz Verlag, Berlin, 2009 (23,5 cm, 149). ISBN 978-3-87997-368-2. € 38,-.

Arguably the most famous work of Persian literature is Ferdowsi's *Shāhnāme*. Completed a millennium ago, in 1010, it is an epic poem of some fifty-thousand couplets, consisting

<sup>1)</sup> Djalal Khaleghi-Motlagh, *Die Frauen im Schahname* (Freiburg, 1971) and Jürgen Ehlers, *Die Natur in der Bildersprache des Šāhnāme* (Wiesbaden, 1995).

The text of reference used for the quotes in *Von Ackerwinde bis Zypresse* is the Moscow edition (Bertels' *et al.*, 1963-70). It is a pity that Hamidifard could not rely fully on the most recent and on the whole better edition by Khaleghi-Motlagh (New York, 1988-2008), since at the time of her research only the first five volumes of a total of eight had appeared. Khaleghi-Motlagh's text is therefore only referred to here and there in the book to give certain complementary information. Other editions, notably Mohl's (Paris, 1838-78), are referred to where necessary, to note any important variants.

The quotations all appear in translation. The author herself is responsible for these translations, which, she explains (p. 13), are rendered as literally as possible, with the aim to do justice to the text's original meaning. Although Hamidifard probably had to make an editorial decision to present only the translated text, one misses its Persian original. In order to gain a proper understanding of the manner in which each of the plant names have been used in their Persian context, one still will have to look them up in the text of the *Shāhnāme* itself. Luckily, each quotation is accompanied by detailed references. A final problem deriving from the quotes appearing only in German, all the more because a translation cannot always be completely literal, is that it is not always immediately obvious which of the words in the verse represents the term discussed in the present entry. This problem could easily have been avoided by for instance underlining the word in question.

On the whole, *Von Ackerwinde bis Zypresse* is very informative. One learns how wide a variety of vegetation is mentioned in the *Shāhnāme*, to what purpose each piece has been included in the poem and in what kind of context. Some of the entries in the book go beyond merely describing the use of the plant, fruit or piece of wood in the *Shāhnāme* and contain an additional explanation. They may include references to works by authors that were contemporary to Ferdowsi or they may place a particular word or phrase in a cultural context. Hamidifard for instance explains certain Zoroastrian practices, as well as includes mentions about the use of certain herbs or plants in present-day Iran or gives examples of expressions that are nowadays still part of the Persian language.

Rather unexpectedly, it turns out that the *Shāhnāme* deals with quite a few practical matters. Different kinds of crops and trees are used in the poem as food, as building materials or for making wine, clothes, soap, perfume or weapons. It is further noteworthy that a large number of the examples in *Von Ackerwinde bis Zypresse* are taken from the *Shāhnāme*'s historical section that deals with the Sasanids. They for the greater part tell of the construction of buildings, the cultivation of crops or the provision of seeds. Hamidifard does not pin-point this prevalence of the historical section, nor gives any reason for this, but it probably is simply because the Sasanid part of the *Shāhnāme* went back on near-contemporary chronicles that will have included a certain amount of factual information on Sasanid daily life.

Besides their practical purposes, the majority of the shrubs, flowers, fruits, herbs and other kinds of greenery appear in the *Shāhnāme* in a metaphorical sense. *Von Ackerwinde bis Zypresse* gives the reader insight into how Ferdowsi made use of the imagery of different kinds of vegetable objects to describe his characters' appearances, characteristics or dispositions. Particular pieces of vegetation are likened to certain body parts, notably ones pertaining to the head and face,

to a person's stature or his or her state of mind. A beautiful face may for example be likened to blossoms, especially of the orange tree (*bahār*), and a tall warrior is often compared to a cypress (*sarv*). Ferdowsi compares a person's cheeks to a lemon (*bādrang*) in order to express them turning pale upon the reception of sorrowful news. Many of the examples derive from the poem's famous love stories, such as the episodes of Khosrow and Shirin, of Bizhan and Manizhe and, from which the book seems to quote most often, of Zāl and Rudābe. These stories provide the glossary with a wide range of metaphorical meanings of different kinds of fruits and flowers, especially those that describe the beloved. The use of narcissus (*narges*), tulips (*lāle*) or pomegranates (*nār*) to make a comparison with the beloved's eyes, lips or cheeks, to name a few examples, is known from classical Persian poetry. Interestingly, as Hamidifard notes (p. 110), Ferdowsi, contrary to lyrical poetical practice, does not use a hyacinth (*sonbol*) to describe a woman's dark curls. The flower is used only in a literal sense, in relation to the appearance of springtime.

The glossary further shows that the *Shāhnāme* also includes metaphors that pertain to other kinds of circumstances or human interactions. The accusation that one's enemy is as weak as a reed (*ney*) can for instance be found in battle scenes. A rose (*gol*) as the expression of happiness may be contrasted to thorns (*khār*) that denote life's disagreeableness. Further examples are the comparisons of a man's offspring to his seed (*tokhm*), of blood to the red flowers of the Judas tree (*arghavān*) or the falling of an unripe lemon (*toranj*) to the untimely death of a young man, as famously has been done in the opening verse of the story of Rostam and Sohrāb.

*Von Ackerwinde bis Zypresse* has a rather short introduction (pp. 8-13). Whilst the latter three pages consist of an overview of the editions used and the author's methodology, the contents of the first three could have been extended: these three pages give only the most basic information on the possible sources of the *Shāhnāme*, as well as the poem's layout and its concept. Hamidifard rightly notes (p. 10) that an important theme in the poem is man's fate and the strengths and weaknesses of human existence, which theme has been clothed in didactic lessons about justice and morality. But she also repeats the cliché of the poem being a pillar of Iran's cultural identity and acting as a timeless constant in Iran's national consciousness,<sup>2)</sup> without giving any further specification. The explanation she gives for this statement seems rather inadequate. She merely says that the simplicity of the work's style makes it relatively easy to read and understand even today.

Hamidifard further argues why the *Shāhnāme* may be regarded as unique. She states that Ferdowsi has given a rendition of the Iranian myths, legends and history, without ever losing sight of his personal ideology, in a clear language and all the while making use of the many facets of natural symbolism. Through this latter statement, Hamidifard has arrived at her own book's central theme. She falls somewhat short in explaining how this theme may connect to her research. She factually leaves the reader uninformed about her motivations. She merely states, as noted above, that not all authors

<sup>2)</sup> 'Das Monumentalwerk Ferdowsis bildet eine tragende Säule der kulturellen Identität Irans und wirkt als zeitlose Konstante im Nationalbewusstsein der Iraner fort' (p. 10).

agree on how certain plant names in Ferdowsi's epic should be interpreted (p. 13); this seems a rather meagre justification for her research.

What is especially missing from the introduction is a discussion on the research into the plant world in Persian literature that has been performed to date. Even though *Von Ackerwinde bis Zypresse*'s bibliography, in addition to the footnotes throughout the glossary, show that previous scholars have occupied themselves with this subject, the book gives no information on how the subject has been treated. Hamidifard does not make it clear how her research stands in the context of other works on nature in Persian literature. She for instance several times cites not just Fouchécour's book about nature in the works of several Persian lyrical poets, but also Ehlers' aforementioned work on the metaphorical use of nature in the *Shāhnāme*:<sup>3</sup>) it would have been instructive to know to what extent *Von Ackerwinde bis Zypresse* fills any gaps these two authors may have left or how the book otherwise is complementary.

To a certain extent, this lack is compensated in the chapter that follows the glossary, entitled *Schlussbemerkungen*, 'final remarks' (pp. 122-31). This chapter places the natural theme that permeates through the *Shāhnāme* in a wider literary context. By projecting human characteristics onto plants and using images from nature in his metaphors, Ferdowsi stood within the wider tradition of the poets of his days, around the early-eleventh century. Hamidifard makes a comparison between Ferdowsi's work and that of his contemporary, the lyrical poet Farrokhi Sistāni (d. 1037). The appendix (pp. 132-8) includes a table in which the occurrence of plant names in the *Shāhnāme* and in Farrokhi's opus are compared, in terms of frequency. The most obvious difference between the two poets is that the plant, or rather flower, that Farrokhi mentions most often, as one would expect from a lyrical Persian poet, is the rose (*gol*). In Ferdowsi's epic, where the rose takes up second place, the most frequently occurring name of a plant, not surprisingly for anyone familiar with the set description of a warrior's or beloved's tall stature, is the cypress (*sarv*). This additional chapter is a reminder of how the information given in the glossary on the metaphorical use of many of the plant names appearing in the *Shāhnāme* may be applied to other works of poetry. Ferdowsi's metaphors of the cypress or of fruits and flowers to describe aspects of a beloved are all figures of style that other poets also employed.

The *Schlussbemerkungen* in addition include a summary overview of different kinds of figures of speech (pp. 126-31). Their classification is based on the earliest known work on rhetoric in New Persian, of 507/1114, by Moḥammad b. 'Omar Rādūyāni.<sup>4</sup>) These six pages factually consist of an introductory crash course in metaphorical poetry. As the overview is applicable to a wider genre of Persian poetry, it may serve as a useful guide for any student of early classical poets. Since several of the terms that are explained on these pages are also mentioned in the commentaries to some of the

<sup>3</sup>) Charles-Henri de Fouchécour, *La description de la nature dans la poésie lyrique persane du XIe siècle* (Paris, 1969): chapter IV (pp. 51-94) deals with the different kinds of vegetation mentioned in the poems of 'Onṣori, Farrokhi and Manuchehri. Ehlers, *Die Natur in der Bildersprache des Šāhnāme*: part B (pp. 113-91) pertains to the vegetation occurring in the *Shāhnāme*.

<sup>4</sup>) Moḥammad b. 'Omar Rādūyāni, ed. Ahmet Atesh, *Tarjomān al-balāgha* (Istanbul, 1949).

entries in the preceding glossary, it would not have been out of place to include this overview earlier in the book, directly after the introduction.

Leaving any minor aspects of her book's organisation aside, by discussing the use of metaphors in the *Shāhnāme* in the context of the poetry of Ferdowsi's contemporaries, Hamidifard has placed her research in a wider framework. In this manner, she has allowed *Von Ackerwinde bis Zypresse* to be employed on different levels. The principal purpose of the book is of course to give insight into the use of plant terms in the *Shāhnāme*. In view of her thorough methodology and the comprehensiveness of the glossary, it can only be said that in this purpose Hamidifard has succeeded well. At the same time, her work may also be of use to a researcher of Persian poetry in general, on the subject of metaphors: it may provide a tool by which one can try and place Ferdowsi's epic amongst the poetry of his time, by investigating to what extent the metaphors in his work agree or differ to those used by near-contemporary lyrical poets.

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SEYED-GOHRAB, A.A., and S. McGLINN — *The Essence of Modernity. Mirza Yusof Khan Mustashar ad-Dowla Tabrizi's Treatise on Codified Law (Yak Kaleme)*. Second, revised edition. (Iranian Studies Series 1). Rozenberg Publisher, Amsterdam, 2008. Purdue University Press, West Lafayette, Indiana. (22 cm, 114), ISBN 978-90-5170-899-8. € 24,50.

This small book contains the English translation of a very important essay completed in 1871 and published a decade or more thereafter, which essay had a major impact on the adoption of modern constitutional ideas among the Persian intelligentsia at that time. The booklet contains both the Persian text as well as an English translation, which is supported by relevant explanatory footnotes where necessary. The translators further provided a short biography of the essay's author Mirza Yusof Khan (d. 1895) as well as a very short appreciation of his essay. I have not seen the first edition and therefore do not know in what respect this second edition was revised.

Mirza Yusof Khan was a Qajar government official, who was first based in Astrakhan, St. Petersburg, and Tiflis (between 1853 and 1867) and later in Paris as chargé d'affaires (1867-70). Based on his three-year experience in Paris and four visits to London, he became impressed by "the discipline of the army, the prosperity of the country, the wealth of the people, the abundance of skills and educational institutions, and the welfare and the freedom of the people," in those two countries. On his return to Tehran, in late 1870, he wrote down his thoughts about why the West (and to a much lesser extent Russia) had developed so much, both politically and economically. In his essay, written in 1871, he contrasted European progress with Persian stagnation. He saw as the solution to Persian backwardness the application of 'one word' (*yek kalameh*), i.e., the rule of law or *qanun*. Mirza Yusof Khan tried to show that modern European constitutional legal principles

were part and parcel of Islamic tenets and faith. In fact, the alternative title of the essay is *Ruh al-Islam* or the 'Spirit of Islam.' Therefore, he submitted that there was no need to translate the French constitution; one only had to adopt its essential principles, which he submitted were 21 in number, and then correctly apply and understand the text of the relevant suras of the Quran and the Traditions to arrive at the same result. For example, he justified parliament by referring to a Tradition that requires rulers to consult others, and the separation of state and religion by referring to the alleged separation of duties of *muftis* and *valis* in the early Islamic period. Because of presenting Western notions of constitutional law as being in fact Islamic concepts the essay had an enormous influence on the political discussions in Iran.

Unfortunately, the translators' introduction is somewhat short on analysis, although it refers the reader to most of the relevant literature on this subject. However, those readers who, after having read the essay, want to know about its impact will have to read those referenced works to satisfy their curiosity. The translators limited themselves to mention the most important issues in their evaluation section of the essay. They mention, in particular, the influence of Malkum Khan's writings on Mirza Yusof Khan's essay as well as the criticism by Akhundzadeh, according to whom Islamic tenets were incompatible with European legal principles. However, the translators' evaluation does not mention Kamal al-Dowleh's criticism, for example, who like Akhundzadeh argued that Islam discriminates against women and non-Moslems, and dictates what people have to believe and therefore, its principles are contrary to ideas of equality and liberty. Also, the 'friend' referred to in the essay could indeed be Malkum Khan or Akhundzadeh given their writings and contacts, but the 'friend' might also be simply a literary device rather than a real person, with whom the author had a dialogue. It is further of interest that the authors note that this work still has relevance for the political discussion in contemporary Iran as indicated by the fact that the essay after its first publication in Tehran since 1907 was immediately banned in 1984. Therefore, for those who want to understand the forces that shaped the movement that brought about the Constitutional Revolution in Iran in 1906 this book is a must. Also, those involved with the development of Islamic thought, in particular in modern times, will find this an important source and link in the further development of later Islamic thinkers.

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