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PLATE I

A BATTLE-SCENE IN THE *SHĀHNĀMA*

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TRANSLATIONS OF EASTERN POETRY AND PROSE

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IN MEMORIAM
CAROLI JACOBI LYALL
POESEOS ARABICAE ANTIQUAE
EDITORIS DOCTISSIMI
INTERPRETIS ET INGENIO ET ARTE
PRAESTANTISSIMI

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[More information](#)

PREFACE

THIS book, containing versions from about fifty authors, may be of use to some who are interested in the two great literatures of Islam—Arabic and Persian. Theology, law, philosophy, science and medicine are scarcely touched, but the reader will learn something of Islamic history and religion, morals and manners, culture and character; something, too, of the heathen Arabs to whom Mohammed was sent. I have not, however, selected with a view to instruction. All the poetry, and the chief part of the prose, has been chosen for its merit as literature; and my choice was guided by the belief that translators do best in translating what they have enjoyed. If the present collection appeals in the first place to lovers of poetry and *belles-lettres*, it has gained in solidity and range of interest by including passages from famous biographers and historians like Ibn Hishám, Mas‘údí, Ṭabará, and Ibn Khaldún. The extracts, which are mostly short and seldom run beyond the five pages allowed by such a good judge as Mr A. R. Waller, cover a period of a thousand years from the beginning of the 6th to the end of the 15th century A.D. The arrangement is chronological, and in order to preserve the connexion of Persian with Arabian literary history Persian writers (distinguished by asterisks) keep their place in the series instead of being grouped apart.

As a rule, the poetry has been turned into verse, which can give the artistic effect better than prose, though it cannot render the meaning so exactly¹. Yet the power of verse to

¹ Generally the verse-translations are faithful without being literal, but in one piece from Imra‘u ‘l-Kais and in a few from Ḥáfiz I have taken the same kind of liberty which FitzGerald used in his version of Omar Khayyám.

fulfil its aim is limited by circumstances. While any poem can be reproduced in metre, few Arabic or Persian poems are wholly suitable for English verse: we must decide what to translate, and especially what *not* to translate, before considering how it shall be done. I disagree with the opinion that success may turn on the existence in the translator's language of a native form and manner corresponding; but undoubtedly advantage should be taken of such models when possible. For example, it seems to me that parts of the *Sháhnáma* have much in common with Scott's metrical romances, and that a version which recognises this affinity and avails itself of these associations is more likely to please the English reader than one which ignores them. Rhyme is an indispensable element in Arabic and Persian poetry, and there are other reasons why it should not be abandoned willingly by translators who use English metres. For one thing, unrhymed couplets soon become tedious, while in unconfined blank verse every trace of the original form disappears. Now and then I have copied the monorhyme of Oriental odes, but it is not easy to do so in poems of any length, nor is it worth the trouble. Far more depends on the choice of a metre consorting with the tone, spirit, and movement of the original. The scholarly version of the *Sháhnáma* by A. G. and E. Warner fails, I think, here. Admitting that the task of the translators was heavy enough to justify their refusal of rhyme, every one acquainted with the Persian must feel the difference between their sedate and slow-marching verse and the lively, rapid, and resonant metre in which Firdausí wrote¹.

¹ Professor Browne has published several very good specimens of translation in alliterative verse (*Literary History of Persia*, vol. 1, pp. 140–150). I cannot help thinking, however, that this somewhat rude and archaic style is incapable of doing justice to the dignity and refinement of Firdausí's poem.

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

PREFACE

ix

Sir Charles Lyall, who, about a year before his death, honoured me by accepting the dedication of this book in token of my admiration for his renderings of the old Arabian poetry, has imitated the Arabic metres with peculiar skill; and some of my versions adopt the same method. These metres are quantitative while their equivalents in a European language must be accentual, so that the English measure can only suggest the Oriental rhythm. Perhaps the specimens given below will serve to indicate how the two are related to each other. As regards the method itself, experiment has convinced me that in Arabic, at any rate, a verse-translation is more apt to convey the right impression when the original form is partially reproduced in this way. Besides, as Sir Charles Lyall pointed out, the accentual types of the *Ṭawīl* and *Kāmil* metres now belong to English poetry, Browning having employed them both, sometimes regularly but oftener with variations, in *Abt Vogler* and *Mulékkeh*.

In selecting the five illustrations reproduced by Mr R. B. Fleming from manuscripts in the British Museum, I sought the help and advice of my friend Mr Edward Edwards, and I think it will be acknowledged that I have every reason to be grateful to him. The frontispiece (*Add.* 27,257, f. 445 *a*) depicts a battle between two Indian princes, Gau and Ṭalḥand (*Sháhnáma*, ed. Macan, iv, 1737 foll.), but suits almost as well the poem on p. 97 where 'Unṣurí describes a campaign of Sultan Maḥmúd of Ghazna, in which also elephants took part. Those numbered II, III and IV illustrate the same passages as the original miniatures (*Add.* 18,188, f. 183 *a*; *Or.* 1200, f. 29 *b* and f. 34 *a*). The first shows Rustam letting down a lasso to Bízhan in order to draw him out of his dungeon; on the left of Rustam stands Manízha, the heroine of Firdausí's tale. In III and IV we see an immortal character in Arabian fiction, Abú Zaid of Sarúj, whose

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

x

PREFACE

adventures were written by Ḥarīrī. The fifth illustration (*Or.* 4566, f. 6) is a portrait of the Persian mystic and poet, Farīdu'ddīn 'Aṭṭār. This has a remarkable individuality, and though it cannot be contemporary with 'Aṭṭār I should like to believe that there is some genuine tradition behind it.

I. The *Tawil* (Long) Metre.

āḳīmu | banī ummi | šudura | maṭiyīkum ||
fa'inni | 'ila ḵaumin | siwakum | la'amyalu.

Arise, O | my mother's sons, | and breast with | your steeds the night,

For truly | the love I bear | is kinder | to some less kin.

tasamma | sururan ja | hilun mu | takharriṣun ||
bi-fihī 'l- | bara hal fi 'l- | zamāni | sururu.

He gave to | himself the name | of Joy—fool | and liar he!

May earth stop | his mouth! In Time | is any | thing joyful?

II. The *Kāmil* (Perfect) Metre.

fa-waḳaftu 'as | 'aluha wa-kai | fa su'aluna ||
ṣumman khawa | lida ma yabi | nu kalamuha.

And I stopped to ask | whither gone are they?— | what avails to ask

Things hard of hear | ing and dark of speech | that abide unchanged?

III. The *Wāfir* (Ample) Metre.

fa-ma far'u 'l- | fatati 'idha | tawarat ||
bi-muftakirin | 'ila sarḥin | wa-ḍafri.

No need, when in earth | the maid rests cov | ered over,

No need for her locks | of hair to be loosed | and plaited.

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

PREFACE

xi

IV. The *Basīṭ* (Wide) Metre.

ma 'l-khairu ṣau | mun yadhu | bu 'l-ṣa'imu | na lahu ||
 wa-la ṣala | tun wa-la | ṣufun 'ala 'l- | jasadī.

Virtue is nei | ther a fast | consuming those | who it keep,
 Nor any off | ice of prayer | nor rough fleece wrapped | on the limbs.

V. The *Madīd* (Tall) Metre.

ḥallati 'l-kham | ru wa-ka | nat ḥaraman ||
 wa-bi-la'yin | ma 'alam | mat taḥillu.

Lawful now to | me is wine, | long forbidden:
 Sore the struggle | ere the ban | was o'erridden.

This rare measure is represented by a single example (No. 16), which does not correspond very closely with the original.

Many of the verse-translations have appeared before, and I wish to thank Messrs. G. Bell and Sons, J. M. Dent and Sons, T. Fisher Unwin, and the Syndics of the Cambridge University Press for permission to reprint them. Nearly all the prose versions are new; of those in verse twenty-five are now published for the first time: Nos. 7, 11-15, 19, 20, 25-29, 31, 34, 37, 38, 55, 63, 143-148. In an appendix I have supplied references to the Arabic and Persian texts from which the versions were made. Though specialists will find in this anthology much that is well-known to them, it includes comparatively few pieces that were already translated into English by other hands.

REYNOLD A. NICHOLSON.

December, 1921.

ALPHABETICAL LIST OF AUTHORS

- Abu 'l-'Alá al-Ma'arrí. *See* Ma'arrí
 Abu 'l-'Atáhiya (Nos. 36, 37)
 Abu 'l-Baḳá of Ronda (No. 149)
 Abú Nuwás (Nos. 27-35)
 *Abú Sa'íd ibn Abi 'l-Khair
 (Nos. 66-72)
 *Abú Zurá'a of Jurján (No. 59)
 *'Am'aḳ of Bukhárá (No. 117)
 'Amr son of Kulthúm (No. 9)
 *Anwarí (Nos. 118, 119)
 *'Aṭṭár (Nos. 120-122)
 *Bábá Kúhí of Shíráz (No. 73)
 *Daḳḳí (No. 60)
 Farazdaḳ (No. 26)
 Fári'a daughter of Ṭarfí (No. 38)
 *Farídu'ddín 'Aṭṭár. *See* 'Aṭṭár
 al-Find (No. 2)
 *Firdausí (No. 63)
 *Ḥáfíẓ (Nos. 150-163)
 Ḥarfí (Nos. 112, 113)
 Ibnu 'l-'Arabí (Nos. 127-131)
 *Ibnu 'l-Balkhí (No. 114)
 Ibnu 'l-Fáriḳ (Nos. 123-126)
 Ibn Hishám (Nos. 39, 40)
 Ibn Khaldún (Nos. 164-168)
 Imra'u 'l-Ḳais (Nos. 5-7)
 Jaḥdar son of Ḍubai'a (No. 3)
 Jáhiẓ (Nos. 41-44)
 *Jalálu'ddín Rúmí. *See* Rúmí
 *Jámí (Nos. 169-175)
 Jamíl (No. 23)
 Ka'b son of Zuhair (No. 21)
 Khansá (Nos. 19, 20)
 *Kisá'í of Merv (Nos. 61, 62)
 Labíd (Nos. 11-15)
 Ma'arrí (Nos. 74-111)
 Maisún (No. 22)
 *Masrúr ibn Muḥammad of Ṭalākán
 (No. 65)
 Mas'údí (Nos. 46-52)
 Muḥalhil son of Rabí'a (No. 4)
 *Mu'izzí (Nos. 115, 116)
 Murra of Shaibán (No. 1)
 Mutanabbí (Nos. 53-57)
 *Rúdaki (No. 58)
 *Rúmí (Nos. 132-141)
 *Sa'dí of Shíráz (Nos. 142-148)
 Šaffya of Báhila (No. 25)
 Shanfarà (Nos. 17, 18)
 Ta'abbāṭa Sharrà (No. 16)
 Ṭabarí (No. 45)
 Ṭarafa (No. 8)
 *Unṣurf (No. 64)
 Zuhair (No. 10)

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

PLATE

I. A battle-scene in the <i>Sháhnáma</i> ...	FRONTISPIECE
II. Rustam about to rescue Bizhan from the pit into which he was cast by Afrásiyáb	TO FACE PAGE 96
III. Abú Zaid preaching in the graveyard at Sáwa	„ „ 116
IV. Abú Zaid carousing in the tavern at ‘Ána	„ „ 122
V. Farídu’ddín ‘Aṭṭár	„ „ 133