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“The Cradle of Dari”: The Question of “Origins” in Modern Literary Historiography in Afghanistan

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“In our time literary history has increasingly fallen into disrepute, and not at all without reason,” writes Hans Robert Jauss in his celebrated essay *Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory*.

Its greatest achievements all belong to the nineteenth century. To write the history of a national literature counted [...] as the crowning life’s work of the philologist. The patriarchs of the discipline saw their highest goal therein, to represent in the history of literary works (*Dichtwerke*) the idea of national individuality on its way to itself. This high point is already a distant memory.¹

The reference of Jauss’s remarks is, of course, to European literatures. He makes no mention of the remarkable relevance and use of literary history in the genealogy of national imaginaries in most of the rest of the world, where the enterprise of literary historiography is by no means a “distant memory.”

As the case of Persian clearly indicates, non-European literatures have possessed indigenous traditions of writing literary history. Nevertheless, the initial task of imbuing a literature such as Persian with “the idea of national individuality” fell, not surprisingly, to Western Orientalists, who were trained in European philological scholarship but who also studied Persian literature intensely and with interest,

1. JAUSS, 1982, p. 3.

wrote about it with authority, and, more importantly, helped chart the subsequent disciplinary contours of Persian literary studies.

Notwithstanding the Orientalist contributions to Persian literary historiography, the concurrent emergence of Persian literature, both as a scholarly discipline and a national institution in the first half of the 20th century, resulted, among other things, in a serious turn towards the exploring and studying of Persian literary history from a decidedly “modern” perspective, this time by Persian-speaking scholars themselves. Significant endeavors were undertaken to produce comprehensive histories of Persian literature as an essential component of a broad “national” cultural heritage. Thus, simultaneous with the emergence of a powerful national imaginary during this period, scholarly compositions and compilations of Persian literary history to broadly reflect the continuity of “the idea of national individuality” turned into a project of singular importance.

It is important to point out that influential modern works of Persian literary historiography by Iranian scholars (or by Western/Orientalist scholars of Persian literature) nearly uniformly applied the term “Persian” in a restricted and restrictive sense. They reduced *Persian* literature to *Iranian* literature, with little consideration of the fact that “Iranian”—in its present-day rendering—has had a spatially limited, notoriously nationally bound, definition, while “Persian” has historically referred to a vast linguistic and literary tradition as well as to an expansive cultural heritage that exceed the modern boundaries of any specifically demarcated nation-state. Needless to say, precisely for the complications involved in writing Persian literary history from a nationally restrictive perspective, modern historiography of literature in Afghanistan, for its part, directly engages the implications, practical or otherwise, of the rather problematic use of “Persian” and/as “Iranian.”

Whereas the “patriarchs of the discipline” (to use Jauss’s term) in Iran, as well as their Western Iranologist colleagues, were consistently using of the terms “Iranian literature” and “Persian literature” interchangeably, in Afghanistan elaborate efforts were undertaken to actively contest this claim and, instead, to produce histories of Persian literature that, while in structure and method varying little from the works of their Iranian counterparts, nevertheless maintained the centrality and originality of the area that now constitutes Afghanistan in the creation of the grand corpus of literary writings in Persian (institutionally termed “Dari” in Afghanistan). Afghan and Iranian scholars, albeit from contrasting ideological and discursive perspectives, considered literary historiography to epitomize the magnificence and splendor of a culture whose enduring legacies can be successfully and conveniently utilized to further institutionalize literature and literary studies. The overall efforts (and general success) of Iranian scholars in this respect, as well as in claiming Persian literature in its entirety as Iranian literature, have been largely acknowledged.

However, some important contributions to Persian literary historiography by scholars from Afghanistan have remained mostly unexplored.

As a crucial component in the process of institutionalization of literature in Afghanistan, literary historiography has had to tackle the question of the origins and early development of Persian as a linguistic and literary tradition. In other words, how to deal with the question of the origin(s) of Persian language (and literature) has informed the discursive composition of the project of literary historiography in Afghanistan. But this question is pertinent as much to perceived historical beginnings as to geographical and spatial origins of Persian literature. It is significant not only to discover *when* Persian literature, as is conventionally known today, came into being; it is equally (if not more) important to find out *where* it started to flourish in the first place. Modern literary historians from Afghanistan have produced valuable panoramic overviews consisting of compendia of names, titles, styles, genres, periods, etc., that are deemed important for their projects. In this regard, they differ little from conventional works of literary historiography. Nevertheless, they have been determined, almost uniformly, to demonstrate and elaborate the undeniable centrality of the land that is Afghanistan in the rise and expansion of Persian literature during the formative first few centuries after the advent of Islam in the region. The implications—whether political, ideological, epistemological, or even aesthetic—of such a contention can be enormous, as the present article attempts to illustrate.

What follows presents a critical perspective on one of the principal works of Persian literary historiography produced in Afghanistan: Muhammad Haidar Zhubal’s influential *Tarikh-i Adabiyat-i Afghanistan* [History of literature of Afghanistan] (1336/1957).² It deals specifically with the early segments of the book, where various dimensions of the genealogy of Persian/Dari literary efflorescence *after* the advent of Islam are discussed. Zhubal was born in Kabul in 1304/1925 and, upon graduation from secondary school, attended the then newly established Faculty of Letters at Kabul University. He later enrolled in graduate studies courses in the humanities and philosophy at Princeton University. He was a member of the *Aryana Encyclopedia* [*Da’irat al-Ma’arif*] and served as the editor-in-chief of such influential journals as *Irfan* and *Aryana*. His extensive oeuvres included *Adabiyat az khilal-i rawanshinasi* [Literature through [the lens] of Psychology], *Naqd-i adabi wa rawabit-e an ba tarikh-i adabiyat* [Literary criticism and its relation to literary history], *Tarikh-i adabiyat-i Afghanistan* [History of literature of Afghanistan], the book under consideration here, *Nardban-i asman* [A Ladder to the sky], on the life

2. ZHUBAL, 1336/1957.

and poetry of Mawlana Jalal al-Din Balkhi or Rumi, *Nigahi ba adabiyat-i mu'asir-i Afghanistan* [A Glance at contemporary literature of Afghanistan], *Zaban-i Farsi va rawish-i tadrīs-i nawin wa mu'asir-i an* [The Persian language and new, contemporary methods of teaching it], and several shorter treatises, comparative literary investigations, translations, and short stories. Muhammad Haidar Zhubal was killed in a tragic airplane accident over the skies of Beirut, Lebanon, in fall of 1338/1959. Throughout his brief, but very productive, period of literary scholarship, especially in the pages of *Tarikh-i Adabiyat-i Afghanistan*, Zhubal—relying on historical, literary, and linguistic sources, as well as utilizing rhetorical and discursive strategies that characterize Afghan literary scholarship in general—painstakingly endeavored to establish and assert the significance of the territory of Afghanistan as the *cradle*, indeed *the point of origin*, of literature in Persian after the Islamic conquest of the vast Persian-speaking milieu.

The “origin(s)” of Persian/the “originality” of Dari

The question of origin(s) of Persian literature has permeated most discussions of literary (as well as linguistic) history in modern and contemporary Persian literary and linguistic scholarship. Much ink has been spilled on tracing the origins of Persian and, by implication, its originality. Muhammad Haidar Zhubal's *Tarikh-i Adabiyat-i Afghanistan* proved itself significant in the process of engendering and reinforcing the view that the land of Afghanistan—formerly called *Khurasan*—was the birthplace of what is generally considered the Persian literary renaissance and cultural revitalization after the Islamic conquest of Persian-speaking lands. *Tarikh-i Adabiyat-i Afghanistan* reflects the style and structure of most works of literary historiography produced in Persian at the time, whether in Iran or Afghanistan. It appears comprehensive in its content, sensible and uniform in its chapter divisions, chronologically streamlined, and organized with the purported aim of addressing and satisfying the curiosity of inquisitive reader. Nevertheless, as far as the present inquiry is concerned, it is in the early sections of the book, where the emergence and growth of Persian literature in the area that is Afghanistan today is the focus of discussion, that the real vigor of the volume lies. The latter parts, however, while still valuable in other respects, appear like a panoramic overview of the subject, something not entirely different from other such accounts produced elsewhere during this time, where emphasis was put on evolutionary progress—in terms of periods, schools, genres, subgenres, etc.—as well as on comprehensiveness, coherence, and organizational consensus of literary history.

Throughout *Tarikh-e Adabiyat-e Afghanistan*, Zhubal skillfully maneuvers between philology and history. The fact that the work is heavily philological is hardly

unusual, because in the recent tradition of written histories of literatures, philology has had a special place. According to Zhubal, largely because of Afghanistan’s geography and history, even well before the introduction of Persian language and Persianate cultural traits in the territory that is Afghanistan, the land had witnessed considerable literary, cultural, and intellectual activities. For instance, during “a period of a thousand years [that] Buddhism was practiced in Afghanistan,” writes Zhubal, “Buddhist temples were considered the principal scholarly, literary, and cultural centers in the country, where hundreds, nay thousands, of monks were engaged in various intellectual functions, acting as writers, poets, and scholars.”³ As Zhubal maintains, from the earliest of times, the cultural milieu of the land then remained significantly diverse. It is implied that this historical dynamism had had an enduring effect, as Afghanistan still remains a land of vast linguistic and cultural variety, diversity, and complexity. In part for this very reason, philology and historical linguistics become significant in Zhubal’s discussion of early cultural manifestations and literary creativity in Afghanistan. “The ancient language of Afghanistan,” Zhubal writes, “had its roots in Indo-European linguistic family”⁴ and the locale where these languages emerged was the land known as *Aryana Vaeja*, *i. e.* in and around “northern parts of Aryana or Afghanistan, in the Bactrian region.”⁵ Zhubal is keen to point to the centrality of Afghanistan—“on both sides of the Hindu Kush mountains”⁶—as the birthplace and point of origin of both Indian languages (Sanskrit Vedic) and Iranian languages (Avestan). Legends, epics, and semi-historical tales composed in Vedic and Avestan languages had a lasting impact on the history of literature in Afghanistan. More specifically, they had an impact on both Parthian Pahlavi *and* Sassanian Pahlavi—a distinction of central importance for the discourse of literary history in Afghanistan—which, in turn, influenced the production, since the third century after the advent of Islam, of several Dari *Shahnamahs* in Khurasan region, principally in such cities in Afghanistan as Balkh and Ghazna.⁷

It is worth pointing out that Zhubal distinguishes between Parthian Pahlavi (which he also calls “Northern” Pahlavi) and Sassanian Pahlavi (or “Southern” Pahlavi). “Parthian Pahlavi was the language of Khurasan (*i. e.* Afghanistan) and

3. ZHUBAL, 1336/1957, p. 18.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

Sassanian Pahlavi was the language of the Fars region.” Of the two, “the former [*i. e.* Parthian language and literature], precisely because of its longevity and its long-standing association with political continuity and cultural durability in the region, made a significant impact on the latter [*i. e.* Sassanian Pahlavi]. Parthian Pahlavi (also called Parthawi) was the language of most of the inhabitants of Afghanistan”⁸ at least till it was replaced by Dari, possibly in the 3rd century AD. Parthawi existed in north-western and western Afghanistan, and the best known extant literary work written in it is *Ayatkar-i Zariran*.⁹ Yet, it is Sassanian Pahlavi that, because of its association with the Fars region and the connection of Fars with the appellation of Farsi (*i. e.* Persian), has long been seen—erroneously, according to Zhubal and many other literary scholars in Afghanistan—as the precursor of Persian language and literature.

Historically, at the time that the Parthawi language dominated Afghanistan, the ruling Kushan imperial power was undergoing rapid decline. This situation opened the way for the Sassanian rule to expand eastwards into northern and western regions of Afghanistan. Soon thereafter, Sassanian (*i. e.* “Southern”) Pahlavi made significant inroads into Afghanistan.¹⁰ Although Sassanian Pahlavi did not become the common language of the country, its confluence with Parthawi affected the Dari language. By the time of the advent of Islam in the 7th Century AD, the influence of Pahlavi in Afghanistan had sufficiently spread, to the extent that poets and writers utilized Pahlavi materials in composing various *Gushtaspmahs*, *Shahnamahs*, etc. in the Dari language.

While it is not entirely clear how significantly Dari was related to Sassanian Pahlavi, its close affinity with Parthian Pahlavi (Parthawi), from which it assimilated many words, was beyond doubt.¹¹ In addition, the structure of Dari had close affinity with such languages as Soghdian and Tukhari, “languages that were current on and around the banks of Amu (Oxus) River in Bactria, Tukharistan, and Transoxiana several centuries prior to the coming of Islam.”¹² Not only was Dari indigenous to Afghanistan, its relevant determinants were also indigenous to the land. The principal point that Zhubal is driving at throughout is that, even if Sassanian Pahlavi appeared to be older than Dari, “the Dari language cannot be

8. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

9. *Ibid.*

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

said to have emerged *after* the [post-Islamic] demise of Sassanian Pahlavi.” In other words, Dari did not succeed Pahlavi but, rather,

Pahlavi and Dari were two languages that existed in parallel in Fars and Afghanistan, respectively. In some specific historical juncture, the two inevitably spread into the territories of each other. The main reason for the similarity and deep linguistic resemblance of the two languages is that they belong to the same language family as well as their contemporaneous inter-dissemination into each other’s areas of influence.

Nevertheless, as Zhubal is keen to point out, it was Dari that proved itself linguistically more developed and advanced than Pahlavi. Thus, it is implied here that it would be erroneous to assume that Dari simply replaced Pahlavi, as the latter disappeared from the scene after the coming of Islam. The eloquence as well as capaciousness detectable in extant texts from early post-Islamic Dari make it clear that Dari did not just spring into existence during the first couple of centuries after the coming of Islam, *i. e.* during the Saffarid and Samanid eras. It had existed at least since the 3rd Century AD and continued to take further shape in the midst of such other languages of the period as Soghdian, Khurasani Pahlavi, and (since the political ascendancy of Sassanids in the Khurasan region) Sassanian Pahlavi.¹³

While both Dari and Sassanian Pahlavi became subject to Arabic onslaught after the introduction of Islam, the latter declined in the territory of Iran within three or four centuries after Muslim conquests and generally disappeared there after the 6th century of Islamic era; the former (*i. e.* Dari)—obviously now influenced by the Arabic language—on the other hand, thrived in the Khurasan region (*i. e.* Afghanistan) and in Transoxiana, as many sophisticated, refined, and polished works, in verse and prose, penned by cultivated authors, were produced in the Dari language in these regions. It was in and around Afghanistan—“the cradle of the Dari language”¹⁴—that the post-Islamic Persian literary renaissance started to firmly take root and expanded to the rest of the Eastern Islamic lands, including what constitutes Iran today. In other words, with the fortunes of Sassanian Pahlavi rapidly declining in Iran after the Muslim invasions, it was the conquest of the land during the latter part of Samanid rule and early part of Ghaznavid rule (centered principally in Afghanistan) that paved the way towards the introduction of Dari in Iran to replace the crumbling Pahlavi, a process that eventually resuscitated

13. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

literary production there. The subsequent widespread efflorescence of Dari in Iran, principally in the province of Fars (hence the name *Farsi*), was largely due to this incorporation and reception of Dari there.

It should be noted that, in insisting that the present-day territory of Afghanistan is the rightful successor of what was once called “Aryana” in ancient times and “Khurasan” in the early Islamic period, Zhubal relies on the authority of one of the earliest of extant Persian prose works, *Hudud al-'Alam min al-Mashriq ila al-Maghrib*, an important text on historical geography whose authorship is still undetermined by scholars. Accordingly, the realm whose cities *Hudud al-'Alam* mentions is none other than Afghanistan. Thus, ancient Aryana or Islamic Khurasan are former names of the country that is now called Afghanistan, the country that can rightfully claim an ancient history, culture, and literature.¹⁵

The importance of Dari

According to *Tarikh-i Adabiyat-i Afghanistan*, as the advent and expansion of Islam led to the Arabicization of many other regions and resulted in the demise of many languages, it was Dari that successfully withstood the Arabic onslaught and thrived splendidly as the language of the court [*darbar*], following the founding of independent dynastic rulers in eastern Islamic lands. Dari also emerged as the language of sciences and letters, both in its place of origin (Afghanistan and Transoxiana) and, increasingly, in the Fars region of Iran where, as was discussed earlier, the first wave of Islamization had devastated the state of erstwhile “Southern” Pahlavi. In contrast, Dari not only survived Arab/Islamic conquests, its continued flourishing confirmed the centrality of Afghanistan to the re-emergence of Dari (Persian) literature after the advent of Islam and the Islamic conversions of the Khurasan region, Transoxiana, and (a little later) Persia proper.

Like most standard literary and cultural histories of the period, Zhubal's *Tarikh-i Adabiyat-i Afghanistan* considers the Islamization of the Persian-speaking areas a positive step, and not only because (as the story goes) Islam's “ethical values” promised to bring forth a more egalitarian society; the triumph of Islam in the Khurasan region resulted in a dialectical convergence of two different cultures and, as such, created a “civilizational” synthesis founded on a fundamentally new and powerful *Zeitgeist* (*ruh-e 'asr*, in Zhubal's words) throughout the Dari/Persian-speaking lands. For Zhubal, this was a resolution that made the Islamic achievement to appear not necessarily as “the victory for the Arabs” or “the

15. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

vanquishing of the Aryan people” in Khurasan, but rather, as it turned out, a victory for both sides,¹⁶ especially in terms of its effect on Arabic and Persian languages and cultures.

Conversion to Islam and the incorporation of the Arabic language greatly affected the mindset of the people of Khurasan and offered fascinating new contexts for expressing numerous novel ideas [*afkar*], sentiments [*awatif*], and meanings [*ma’ani*]. The “agile” and “flexible” intellectual capacity of the people of Aryana (the ancient name of Khurasan) enabled them to master Arabic so thoroughly that “within a century or so, they demonstrated their amazing ability to master [and internalize] the new *rub-e ‘asr* so completely that they [effectively] took over the grand position of leadership of all Muslims in terms of the rational sciences.”¹⁷ This development, as overwhelming as it was, facilitated, on the one hand, the Islamization of the region and the incorporation and reflection of the new religion in the culture and literature of the people of Khurasan; and, on the other hand, buttressed a sort of “psychological resistance” in some of the inhabitants of the large swaths of land hitherto known as Aryana and to be named Afghanistan centuries later. While “the *national* [sic] literature” initially faced a formidable challenge in the wake of Arab invasions and Arabic influence, attempts were made to acquire the religion *sans* the dissolution of the culture and language of the people of Khurasan into Arabic culture. This process produced long-term results that varied considerably from what seemed well underway in other regions within the expanding Muslim empire, where Arabic succeeded in eventually superseding local languages.¹⁸

In contrast, not only was Dari not as drastically affected by Arabic as some other languages, in fact, in some crucial ways, it rather exerted some strong effects on Arabic. To illustrate this point, while acknowledging that “on the surface, the extent of the influence of Dari on Arabic—as opposed to the influence and dominance of Arabic on Dari—might seem somewhat negligible,” Zhubal nevertheless asserts that

[even] when the children of the land of Aryana started to compose poetry in Arabic, they inserted their own Aryan spirit (*rub-i Aryayi*) into an Arabic-Semitic body. In appearance, the composition, diction, and meters seemed very Arabic, but the

16. *Ibid.*, pp. 30-31.

17. *Ibid.*, pp. 32-33.

18. *Ibid.*

thought, the imagery, and the literary genius were all Aryan and Dari [but expressed in Arabic].¹⁹

Yet, Zhubal avoids any palpable chauvinistic advocacy exhibited at the time by some of his contemporaries writing on the same subject. Describing the Dari-Arabic intermingling “a pleasant blending” [*ikhhtilat-i khush-ayand*] he put forward the view that the “broad influence on Dari of the Arabic language” was not a “travesty.”

Arabic language and literature bestowed a new life, power, and stamina upon the Dari language and provided it a new form coupled with [a sense of] Arabic beauty, succinctness, and musicality. As such, conditions were ripe for Dari to turn into an ever more powerful instrument for expression and conveyance of beauty.²⁰

I. e., a literature proper. Most of what is found to be praiseworthy in Dari is directly influenced by Arabic. In a vigorous, yet gradual process of Islamization, Arabic (as the language of the Qur'an) supplied Dari a “boundless, brilliant, and long-lasting [literary] reservoir.”

From a historiographical standpoint, Zhubal seems to deviate little from the hitherto conventional narratives of early Islamic history in the Persian speaking lands when he suggests that the ascendant Abbasid rulers in Baghdad owed their successful politico-military campaign against the Umayyads (750 AD) to their Khurasanid allies. The newly acquired Khurasanid dominance in the heart of the Islamic seat of power, therefore, made the circumstances much more conducive to “the establishment, from the early part of the 3rd and the 4th centuries of Islamic era, in various areas of ancient Aryana, of powerful states and polities that only nominally paid allegiance to Baghdad” and “who could no longer bear to submit to the [latter's] rule.”²¹ The appointment of Tahir of Pushang by the Abbasid Caliph Ma'mun to the governorship of Khurasan—and the subsequent establishment of Saffarid, Samanid, and Ghazanvid dynastic rulers—sealed the independence of Khurasan (or Afghanistan). These largely political developments coincided with the rapid rise of intellectual, cultural, religious, and literary movements among the people of Khurasan. “Not long afterwards, [Khurasanid] national traditions and customs were resurrected as the weakness and eventual decline of Arab rule became visible, after two centuries of supremacy.”²²

19. *Ibid.*, p. 33.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 34.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 38.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 39.

While avoiding slipping into the pitfall of chauvinism, Zhubal remains one of the early commentators, at least in the context of Persian scholarship in Afghanistan, who nonetheless connected the rise of Dari literature to the salient resurgence of *proto*-nationalist sentiments among the speakers of the language.²³ With the dismantling of the Umayyads and the establishment of the Abbasid Islamic Caliphate with the active assistance of the Khurasanid warriors,

a national movement [in what constitutes Afghanistan] today took shape and a national spirit was resurrected in its fullest strength. Once again, a luminous past overwhelmed all. New ideas of nationalism awakened, which led to the renewed interest in ancient languages. The process that had remained gradual and reserved for a long time suddenly broke open. The new movement, as was expected, created a new force, a new spirit. People’s imagination also started to rattle freely. As such, new ideas and new kinds of arts were born.²⁴

This time period can be said to constitute the starting point of two concurrent *national* developments in Khurasan: an independence movement in political-ideological terms *and* a resurgent movement in the arts, language, and literature. According to Zhubal,

a complete revolution in language took shape and resulted in new literary experiments and cultural activities. In short, this new spirit of the age [*rub-i zaman*] can be said to have led to the formation and preservation of the nation [*milliyat*] and national literature [*adabiyat-i milli*].²⁵

In other words, when “Khurasan (*i. e.* present-day Afghanistan) turned into the hotbed of national feelings, Dari language verse grew exponentially...”²⁶ In contending that “Khurasan (Afghanistan) was the cradle of Dari literature” Zhubal intends to pinpoint Afghanistan’s purported long, durable, and uninterrupted cultural continuity as well as its political and administrative centrality, unmatched by many other nation-states of the present. This gives credence to its claim as the core of production (and rightful inheritor) of the earliest manifestations of Persian literature in the post-Islamic period.

23. *Ibid.*, pp. 44-45.

24. *Ibid.*

25. *Ibid.*, p. 45.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 48.

On the basis of the above discussion, it becomes clear that, in Zhubal's presentation of the history of Persian literature in Afghanistan, *originality* and *authenticity* go hand in hand. The land that is Afghanistan turned out to be the *original* springboard for the Persian language and literature in the period immediately after the advent of Islam; its geography—consisting of mountainous regions far away from the center(s) of Arab/Islamic power—also provided it the capacity to closely preserve the *authentic* forms of the language.

Thus, original, pure, and most eloquent Dari emerged in the valleys of Afghanistan and then spread itself into Fars region [where] it was fused with neighboring languages and lost its authenticity. As such, one can find good, eloquent Dari usage still common in Afghanistan, and the country is still known as the nest of the Dari language.²⁷

Conclusion

Zhubal's *Tarikh-i Adabiyat-i Afghanistan*, in some crucial ways, reads like a reaction, or more precisely a response, to works of literary historiography produced by Iranian scholars, or by European Orientalist scholars of Iranian studies, which were modeled after the enormously influential 19th century European works of literary historiography. Most of these histories of Persian literature were premised on the hypothesis that the history of literature should reflect the progressive unfolding of a collective consciousness (the *Geist*, the soul or the spirit) of a unified Iranian people expressed in the Persian language from as early as the 9th and 10th centuries to the present. In other words, Persian literature has been illustrative of Iranian cultural identity, and a proper history of Persian literature becomes, in essence, a history of Iranian literary productivity. To Zhubal (and his colleagues), to suggest that Persian *embodies* Iran and Persian literature *is* Iranian literature was tantamount to a certain modern form of Iranian cultural hegemony and carried implications of enormous consequences. He seems to have been all too aware that, in the modern era where the nation-state form constitutes the distinctive criterion in the determination of collective identity, the above assertion may as well identify present-day Iran as the sole inheritor of Persian literary history and heritage and willfully exclude Afghanistan from claiming a deserving share in this heritage.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 40.

What seems to have concerned Zhubal most was the insistence of the proponents of the position that Persian literature *is* essentially Iranian literature that literary contributions of areas that historically lie outside of present-day Iranian territory—Afghanistan, for instance—were, essentially, part and parcel of what constituted a once much larger Iranian territory. As such, the logic of the argument goes, these “peripheral” territories should be recovered and reconnected to their present-day “core”—a point that finds more than sympathetic ears among Iranian nationalists who insist on reclaiming “lost” areas of a historically much more expansive Iranian geo-spatial and cultural-linguistic terrains. To counter this contention, an Afghan scholar such as Zhubal, in the pages of *Tarikh-i Adabiyat-i Afghanistan*, therefore, makes an effort, firstly, to point to the centrality of contributions from Afghanistan, both linguistically and in terms of the production of Persian literature, and, secondly, to contest the fantastic and exclusivist reading and representation of Persian literary past stemming largely from a modern Iranian nationalistic ideology.

A work of literary history can be no more than a compendium of dates, titles of texts, and names of authors unless one pinpoints its discursive, rhetorical formations and contexts. Zhubal’s work provides an excellent case study for the use of literary history as an indicator of collective cultural identity and historical continuity of Afghanistan. Admittedly, as the above discussion shows, his overall argument, as convincing as he wants to portray it, is problematic and his philological approach to literary history suffers from serious methodological shortcomings. Nonetheless, his work is of great value because it best exemplifies the discursive contours of literary historiography in Afghan scholarship, its promises, predicaments, and limitations. Furthermore, Zhubal wrote his *Tarikh-e Adabiyat* during the formative period when literature was emerging not only as an institution, but rather as a specifically *national* institution, not only in Afghanistan but throughout the Persian-speaking milieu. The text, along with some other works of similar content published in this period, proved influential both within the institutional framework of literary scholarship in Afghanistan as well as within the broader perception of what defines literature. These works played a significant role in the creation, consolidation, and dissemination of a particular form of literary tradition and cultural grounding that the nation-state of modernity was looking forward to have in Afghanistan. They may well have advanced an unquestioned and uncritical project of national memorialization under the pretext of historical inquiry, philological investigation, and literary-critical evaluation. Nevertheless, these endeavors, to a large extent, defined and reinforced the overall elaboration of the discourse of post-Islamic origins of Persian literary history in modern Afghanistan.

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Abstract: Persian literary has historically remained borderless, transcending any single polity or nationstate. In the modern period, however, nationalist reconfigurations of this literary tradition tend to ascribe to it a territorially bounded definition. Concurrent with the emergence of Persian as a scholarly discipline and a national institution in Iran and Afghanistan, Persian literary historiography has become a significant ground for contention and contestation. While Iranian scholars consider Persian literary history to epitomize the splendor of Iranian cultural heritage, Afghan scholars, in contrast, are keen to point out that the territory that constitutes Afghanistan can best claim to represent the “original” home of Persian literary efflorescence, the ground where Persian literary production emerged, developed, and came to full fruition. This paper offers a critical perspective on M. H. Zhubal’s *Tarikh-i Adabiyat-i Afghanistan*, a seminal and influential text of literary historical inquiry and philological investigation.

Keywords: Zhubal, literary history, philology, Dari/Farsi, Afghanistan.

« Le berceau du dari » : la question des « origines » dans l'historiographie littéraire moderne en Afghanistan

Résumé : La littérature persane est historiquement demeurée sans frontières, transcendant toute forme d'entité politique ou d'État-nation. Cependant, à l'époque moderne, les reconfigurations nationalistes de cette tradition littéraire tendent à lui attribuer une définition territorialement limitée. Parallèlement à l'émergence du persan en tant que discipline académique et institution nationale en Iran et en Afghanistan, l'historiographie littéraire persane est devenue un terrain important de controverse et de contestation. Alors que les chercheurs iraniens considèrent l'histoire littéraire persane comme l'incarnation même de la splendeur du patrimoine culturel iranien, les chercheurs afghans, en revanche, tiennent à souligner que le territoire qui constitue l'Afghanistan peut le mieux prétendre représenter le foyer « originel » de l'efflorescence littéraire persane, le terrain où la production littéraire persane est née, a évolué et a pleinement porté ses fruits. Cet article offre une perspective critique sur

Tarikh-i Adabiyat-i Afghanistan de M. H. Zhubal, texte fondamental et influent sur la recherche historique littéraire et philologique.

Mots-clefs : Joubal, histoire littéraire, philologie, dari/farsi, Afghanistan.

گهواره ی دری: مساله ی آغاز و بدایت در تاریخنگاری ادبی نوین در افغانستان

چکیده: ادبیات فارسی در درازنای تاریخ در سرزمین پریپهنایی آفریده شده که هیچگاه به یک قدرت مرکزی واحد، یا کشوری با مرزهای مشخص، محدود نبوده است. در روزگار نوین، اما، در سایه بینشی ملی گرایانه، تعریفی که این سنت ادبی گسترده را حدود و ثغوری سیاسی در جغرافیای معینی به دست دهد، سامان پذیرفته است. در ایران و افغانستان، با ظهور سازه هایی که ادبیات را هم به عنوان موضوع پژوهش و هم چونان بنیادی در راستای دیدگاه ملی گرایی فرهنگی نگاه می ورزد، تاریخ ادبیات فارسی از اهمیت ویژه ی برخوردار بوده است. ادبای اهل ایران بیشتر در پی آن بوده اند تا پیشینه ادب فارسی را نمایه یی از شکوه و بزرگی سنت ادبی در سرزمین ایران جلوه دهند و بزرگان ادبیات فارسی را یکسره ایرانی بخوانند. پژوهشگران اهل افغانستان، اما، پیوسته کوشیده اند تا بر مرکزیت سرزمین خود در شگوفایی فرهنگ فارسی (و فارسی دری) تاکید ورزند و افغانستان را زادگاه و پرورشگاه اصلی این فرهنگ پندارند. آنچه در بالا آمده است، نگاهی است بر کتاب اثرگذار و با ارزش تاریخ ادبیات افغانستان اثر زنده یاد محمد حیدر ژوبل. این نبشته آرای ژوبل را در زمینه های زبانشناسی تاریخی و تبارشناسی لغات به تحلیل می گیرد.

کلید واژه: ژوبل، تاریخ ادبی، علم اللغه، دری/فارسی، افغانستان