
TEXTS AND MANUSCRIPTS: DESCRIPTION AND RESEARCH

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THE *ṬŪṬĪ-NĀMA* AND THE PREDECESSOR OF NAKHSHABĪ: ON THE QUESTION OF INDO-IRANIAN CULTURAL LINKS

It is known that Ḍiyā al-Dīn Nakhshabī, the author of extremely popular *ṬŪṬĪ-nāma*, who was born in Nakhshab, as his *nisba* tells, moved in his youth to the city of Badāwūn in India. There, in 730/1329—30, he completed a work which he called the *Hikāyat al-dirāyat* (“Tale of Acumen”). As it happened, the author's title did not take hold, and the work was fated to gain fame and spread across the

Muslim East under the popular, if less elegant, title *ṬŪṬĪ-nāma*, the “Book of the Parrot” [1].

Interest in this work, which tells of the tricks and intrigues of women, their craftiness and cunning was great and remained unchanged as the centuries passed [2]. Nakhshabī himself explains the reasons which spurred him to take up the *qalam* and create his work as follows:

“I was once telling a story of love from the time of my youth, a tale of grief which captivates [my] heart from the time of early youth, when one grandee said to me: ‘Not long ago, a book which contains 52 stories was translated from one language to another, from the Indian language to the Persian language. In this [translation], the steed of speech was let loose in the field of prolixity and the exposition was granted excessive length. The basic demands of good taste and elegance were not observed in full. The beginnings and endings of the stories were moved about and omitted. The compiler treated all rules of elegance with utter disregard; thus, the reader cannot attain his aim in reading — that is, pleasure. And from the listener escapes that delight for which he strives. If you took this work, which is from among the Indian books, and laid it out in an abbreviated edition, in a coherent re-working, if you gave it worthy form and put it in fitting order, then the readers and listeners of this work would have to consider themselves immeasurably indebted to you ...’ I quickly obeyed the order of this grandee, who commanded my heart, and submitted to his will, which my soul accepts. And although it was said on the matter of eloquence that excessively long speech should be abbreviated while too short speech should be extended, the words of this servant are not so artless and prolix that the grandee should refuse to read them, or so artful and terse that the simple people should not wish to hear them out. No, I have followed the command to choose the middle road, for the Prophet — may peace be upon Him — uttered: ‘The middle is the best of all matters’.

I drew up 52 stories in a new version; I composed new parables and tales. If the stories lacked coherence, I gave them coherence. I adorned and varied the introductions and conclusions of each one. Certain tasteless tales I replaced with others, thus embellishing by my hand this paradisiacal bride of elegance, this matron on the throne of wit, in order to gladden the lords of the art of speech” [3].

The following moments draw our special attention in the passage from Nakhshabī cited above: (i) before Nakhshabī, a translation into Persian was made of a certain book “from among the Indian books”; (ii) this translation contained 52 *dāstāns*; (iii) Nakhshabī did not indicate the name of the author-translator in his foreword; (iv) Nakhshabī altered the work of his predecessor, retaining the number of *dāstāns*, but abbreviating them substantially (writing new ones to replace those he had excluded and changing the introductions and conclusions of the tales which frame each night). We do not, however, find in Nakhshabī's text anything to indicate that he “re-worked it in accordance with the Indian sources” [4].

It is surprising that only W. Pertsch took seriously the remarks of Nakhshabī cited above, where the latter notes that he “drew up 52 stories in a new version”, adding significant authorial revisions to a translation made by an unknown individual not long before him [5]. Nearly all other specialists, with the exception of A. Alimardonov,

who were examining Nakhshabī's work before and after W. Pertsch's research, considered Nakhshabī's *ṬŪṬĪ-nāma* to be a direct Persian translation from Sanskrit or Hindi of an extant Indian collection of stories, the *Śukasaptati*, for example. They regarded Nakhshabī to be the first translator to undertake this work [6].

One can explain this fact by supposing that they evidently viewed Nakhshabī's remarks simply as a literary device intended to intrigue the reader and excite in him interest in the text. But the matter is that Nakhshabī had no need to resort to such a device, as such a translation already existed, in fact. It may be said that all subsequent versions [7] and translations [8] of the *ṬŪṬĪ-nāma* can be traced to this original translation. It suffered a difficult fate: it seems that, not long after [9], Nakhshabī's masterfully reworked version, the famed *ṬŪṬĪ-nāma*, a work which met the literary tastes and standards of its time, displaced the basic translation and the latter was in fact forgotten by succeeding generations. But the first translation