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Classical New Persian Literature In Jewish-Persian Versions

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JEWISH-PERSIAN LITERATURE is like a flower in the desert, a symbol of inward power and outward luxuriance. Inhabiting an area from China in the east across India to Hamadān and the Persian Gulf on the west, Persian speaking Jews created and handed down an extensive literature not only in Irān but also in Bukhara and Samarkand and in Fīrūzkūh, the capital of the Afghan Ghurids.¹ Scattered studies in scholarly literature, and bibliographical entries in the catalogues of various museums and libraries are only scant testimony to what must have been a very virile literary tradition.

This literature consisted of translations of Jewish religious works, an original literature which bears comparison with the best products of general Persian literature and a large body of Persian (non-Jewish) works transliterated into Hebrew script. To this last named category belong numerous versions of classical Persian literature. The texts selected for transliteration indicate that the Jewish readers for which they were intended possessed rather sophisticated literary tastes. We do not know when Jews first began rendering Persian works into Hebrew character. Theoretically they could have begun doing so at a very early stage, as far back as the period of Rūdakī. Judeo-Persian existed as a written language in the earliest Post Islamic period (Dandān Uiliq, Tang-i Aza). (Cf. Gilbert Lazard, *La langue des plus anciens monuments de la prose persane*, Paris, 1963, p. 31).

The absence of detailed studies of this transcribed literature and the rather random way in which manuscripts have been acquired preclude, at least for the present, anything more than a fragmentary and inadequate survey of its scope. The following list, chronologically arranged, therefore, does not in any way aim at completeness. It should be viewed as an expansion of the shorter descriptions of this literature which had been previously given by Wilhelm Bacher² and Walter J. Fischel.³

1. FIRDAUSĪ (10th–11th century). The highly developed epic tradition, represented by Šāhīn (fourteenth century) and Imrānī (sixteenth century), leads to the assumption that the non-existence of transliterations of Firdausī's Šāhnāme is merely accidental. Šāhīn's indebtedness to Firdausī is beyond doubt, even if he does not refer to him by name.⁴ It is, at any rate, quite evident that the author of the Judaeo-Persian *Daniel Nāme* presupposed a general familiarity with Firdausī. He even states in his postscript that for him it will be sufficient reward to hear his friends exclaim after reading his work: "It reminds me of Firdausī!"⁵ Thus, it is not surprising to discover that Joseph Wolff in 1831 in Mašhad heard "a sort of Judaized Sufis" reciting "in plaintive strains the poetry of Hafiz and Fir-

dusi —,”⁶ and that Simon Hacham, the famous translator and editor of Jewish-Persian literary texts, also used “*the metre of the Šāhnāme*” (שהו נאמה).⁷

2. BĀBĀ ṬĀHIR (11th century). Referring to the Jerusalem edition of the ספר הייאה אלרוח (published in 1898 by the Schauloff brothers from a MS which was at that time about 120 years old), Bacher⁸ states that several pieces of varied contents were added at the back of the book “zur Ausfüllung der leeren Blätter.” One of them (fols. 189b–190b) is quite clearly part of Bābā Ṭāhir’s *Dīvān*. The question raised by Bacher (“ob dieses in so unerwarteter Umgebung auftretende Gedicht eines der ältesten neupersischen Dichter auch anderweitig bezeugt ist”), then, must be answered in the affirmative. The poem opens up with the verse:

דלי דירום זעשקת גיגויגי
מגה בר הם זנם כונאבה ריגי

(with *zamm* above the first ג, כ, and the second ז)
“A heart I have (= *dāram*); for love of thee it is giddy
and bewildered (= *gīj u vīj ast*).
When I strike my eyelashes together, tears of blood
pour out (= *rīzad*, 3. sing.)”⁹

This verse is identical with the version contained in the Bombay lithograph (A.H. 1297, No. 45)¹⁰ and in a rather primitive printed edition (no year indicated) of 139 rubays acquired by me at the tomb of Bābā Ṭāhir in Hamadān in September 1966 (p. 19, No. 51). As the last verse the Jerusalem print has:

במן ¹¹וֹאֵן נְרָא בִי נָאֵם נִנְגִי
הֶרָאֵנְכֶם עֲאֻשְׁקֶסְתָּ ¹²נֶשׁ נָאֵם נֶשׁ נִנְגִי¹³

(with *zamm* above the second and third ז)
“To me they say: “Why are you without reputation
and honour?”
What is reputation and honour to one who is in love?”

which is to be found neither in Heron-Allen nor in the Hamadān print. It corresponds to No. 55, p. 30 in the Vaḥīd Dastgirdī edition of 1306:

Hame vāžan bamu (= *ba-man*, as in the Jewish-Persian
printed edition) *bī nām u nangī*
Kasī ke ʿāšiqe (= *ʿāšiq-ast*) *če-š nām u če-š nang*,

but has closer affinity to the rendering *bamu vāfī ʿerā bī nām u nangī* from the Riyāzu’l-ʿārifin, *The Gardens of the Mystics*, of Rižā-Qulī Kān (cf. Dastgirdī 1306, p. 30).

3. ʿOMAR KHAYYĀM (11th–12th century). It is a well-known fact that the popularity of ʿOmar Khayyām in Europe is due more to Edward Fitzgerald’s charming rendition than

to the poetical genius of the poet. In the Orient his reputation is much higher as a mathematician and an astronomer than it is as a great poet. This explains why 'Omar Khayyām's *Rubā'iyāt* did not interest the Jews of Iran. The only example of a Judaeo-Persian transliteration of the *Rubā'iyāt* still seems to be the modern (1958) version (47 folios) by Mirzā Yuhannā Dā'ūd "from the famous Persian manuscript in the Bodleian Library, Oxford," from which "the admirable English version of Fitzgerald was made."¹⁴

4. FARĪDU'D-DĪN ʿAṬṬĀR (12th–13th century). Bacher¹⁵ mentions some stories from the Teheran MS 40 of the Adler Collection.

5. NIZĀMĪ (12th–13th century). Judging from the number of extant manuscripts, this poet, the prototype of many imitations in Persian literature, was very much appreciated by the Jews. From his *Hamse*, ḤUSRAU U ŠĪRĪN seems to have been the favorite,¹⁶ but transliterations from the *Haft Paikar* exist.¹⁷

6. SAʿDĪ (13th century). Adler found several Saʿdī MSS in Teheran and Bukhara. His poems were widely read (Teheran MSS 4 and 21, Bukhara MS 36), but also his famous *Gulistān* is represented (Teheran MS 27).¹⁸ The illustrated (5 miniatures, on fols. 8b, 28b, 30b, 46b, and 69b) MS 776 of the Gaster Collection in the British Museum (= Or. 10194)¹⁹ has א גֹל שֵׁךְ סַעְדִי on fols. 26a, 26b, 31a, 31b, 32a, 32b, 34b (גֹל שֵׁךְ סַעְדִי), and 38b (סַעְדִי).

7. RŪMĪ (13th century). The Teheran MS 4 of the Adler Collection has 8 ghazals by this poet,²⁰ and a further example is supplied by the above-mentioned MS 776 of the Gaster Collection which contains שֵׁם חֲבֵרִי גֹיִד (fols. 37b and 56b).

8. ḤWĀJŪ-I KĪRMĀNĪ (13th–14th century). MS 776 of the Gaster Collection: נִפְתָּח כְּרַמָּאֲנִי גֹיִד – כְּאֲנִי (fol. 53a). The opening lines are:

נִפְתָּח בְּרֵאן מֵאָה
כֹּתֵן יָד בֹּסֶה בִּכְש
אֶכֶר בְּמֵן

9. SALMĀN FROM SĀWE (14th century). Salmān's skill expressed itself in different forms of verse (especially the *Qaṣīde*) and in such a way that his "eminence has been certified by the great *Hāfiẓ*"²¹ and fully acknowledged by the Oriental biographers, e. g., Dawlatšāh, The Ātaš-kade, Mīr ʿAlī Šīr Navā'ī,²² Jāmī's *Haft Aurang*²³ and Bahāristān.²⁴ Among his literary remains are two long *mathnavī* poems, the *Firāq-nāme* and the *Ĵamšīd u Ḥuršīd*, but of the latter manuscripts seem to be relatively rare. It has been omitted even from collections in which the *Firāq-nāme* is included.²⁵ Nevertheless *Ĵamšīd u Ḥuršīd* is the only Salmān-poem that hitherto is known to exist in a Jewish-Persian version, viz., in the MS Add. 17 in the Royal Library of Copenhagen. The MS is not quite intact, as part of its beginning is wanting. It consists of 65 bound and 3 loose folios (19,8 x 14,5 cm.) with 19, in some cases 20 lines to a page and undoubtedly represents a sound manuscript tradition, which, however, because of the very numerous section titles appears to follow its own,

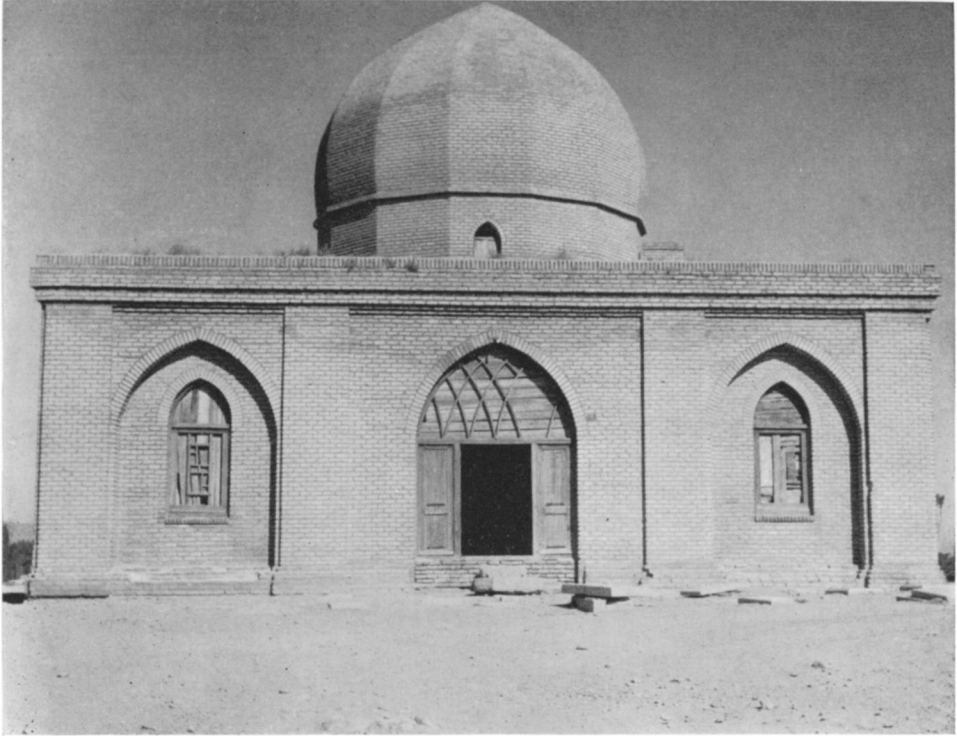


FIG. 1. THE TOMB OF BĀBĀ ṬĀHIR IN HAMADĀN, SEPTEMBER 1966.



FIG. 2. FOL. 62A OF THE SAME MS.

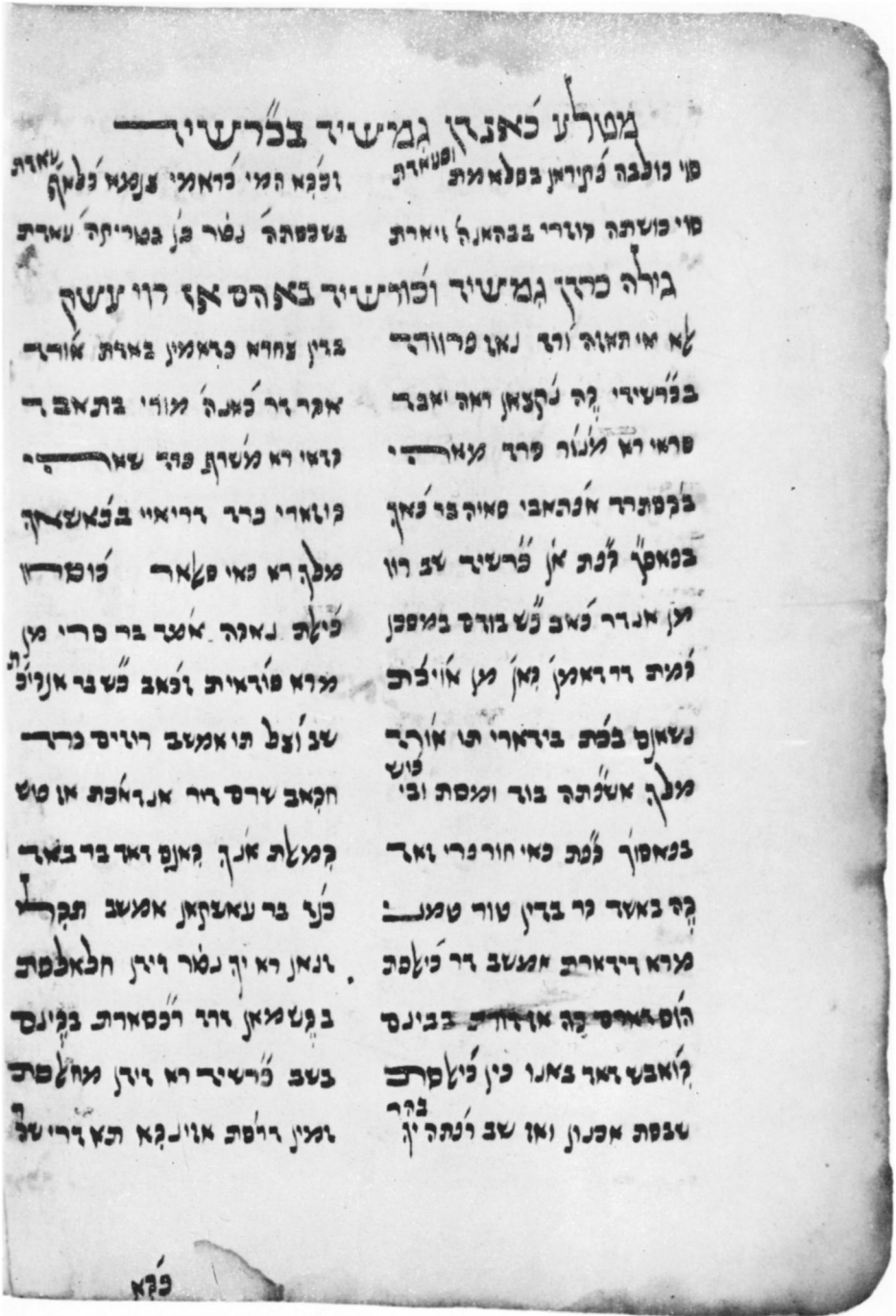


FIG. 3. FOL. 61B OF THE Jewish-Persian Salmān MS, Add. 17, of the Royal Library of Copenhagen.

perhaps locally limited, lines. The *Huršīd u Jamšīd* MS Add. 27314, British Museum, in Arabic Script, for example, goes its own way but MSS 17, Add. 7755 (British Museum, in Arabic script) and Ethé 1243: I.O. 407 (Indian Office Library, margin columns, in Arabic script) show rather close affinities in terminology (e. g., the use of *fayfūr* (= פֶּפֶּרוֹר, emperor (of China), and the phrase *γazal guftan* — *az zabān* אִז זַבָּאן — קוֹל נוֹפֶתֶן). Besides the usual entries such as *γazal* (קוֹל), *rubācī* (רַבְּאַעִי) *mathnavī* (מַסְנוּוִי), *fard* (פֶּרֶד), *ayžan* (אֵיזָן), “as before, ditto,” etc., Add. 17 contains 131 headings of 2 to 19 words, in several cases followed by only a single text line (as for instance in the “descriptions” (šifat) of toilet-articles fols. 64b–65a *āyine* (אֵיִינָה), *šāne* (שֶׁאֵנָה), *nīl* (נִיל), *vasme* (וֹסְמָה), *surme* (סוֹרְמָה), *surx-āb* (סוֹרְכָאֵב), and *safid-āb* (סַפִּידֶאֵב).

10. ḤĀFĪZ (14th century). Represented by Or. 4745²⁶ (British Museum) 470 ghazals and other poems including the *Sāqī-nāme*, Or. 10194 (= Gaster Collection 776; 4 ghazals (גוֹל חֶאפֶּט), fols. 16b, 23b, 24a, and 24b), and Add. 16 of the Royal Library of Copenhagen (a fragment comprising 171 ghazals and other pieces together with the *Sāqī-nāme*; it is bound together with a fragment of the *Faḥ-nāme* of *Imrānī*).

11. IBN-Ī YAMĪN (14th century). Three ghazals from a MS of the Adler Collection²⁷ (אִבְנֵן יַמִּין).

12. SĀH NIḤMATU’LLĀH VALĪ (14th–15th century). Cf. Jan Rypka, *Iranische Literaturgeschichte* (Leipzig, 1959), pp. 273 f. One qasīde in T 4.²⁸

13. JĀMĪ (15th Century). Six ghazals in the Teheran MS 4 from the Adler Collection.²⁹ It is no matter of surprise that of Jāmī’s works especially the romance of *Yūsuf u Zulayḥā* from his *Sabʿa* (“Septet”) or *Haft Aurang* (“Seven Thrones”) attracted the attention of the Persian Jews. It is found in MS 77 from Teheran in the Adler Collection.³⁰ According to Margoliouth (*loc. cit.*) the British Museum MS Or. 2453 contains *inter alia* a fragment of this work of Jāmī. Much, however, speaks in favour of its being part of the *Book of Genesis* by the great Šāhin of Šīrāz.³¹

14. VAḤŠĪ (וַחֲשִׁי) OF BĀFQ (16th century). One ghazal in the Teheran MS 4.³²

15. MUḤAMMAD ʿURFĪ (עֶרְפִי) OF ŠĪRĀZ (16th century). One ghazal in the same MS according to Bacher (*loc. cit.*). Edward G. Browne has a fine section on this poet and his circle in Vol. IV of his *A Literary History of Persia* (Cambridge, 1930, pp. 241 ff.). The MS H (Hamadān) 17 in the Hebrew Union College Library (Cincinnati) contains a considerable part of his *Divan*.

16. BĀBĀ FĪYĀNĪ (d. 1519 in Mašhad). About half of his *Divān* is in the Hebrew Union College MS mentioned above.

17. ʿABDU’R-RAḤMĀN MUŠFIQĪ OF MARV (16th century). It seems to be out of question to think of anybody else than this Mušfiqī, an attendant of Akbar, when מוֹשְׁפִיקִי is referred to as the author of a ghazal in a MS acquired by E. N. Adler in Bukhara in 1897.³³

18. MĪRZĀ MUḤAMMAD ʿALĪ ŠĀʿIB OF ISPHAHĀN (17th century). Though highly esteemed in Turkey and in India, where he spent some time at the court of Šāh Jahān, Šāʿib never won full admiration in Iran. Among the Persian Jews, however, he seems to have received the recognition to which his originality entitles him. The Teheran MS 19 of the Adler Collection (apparently from the eighteenth century), consists of about 250 ghazals from his *Divān*. In the Teheran MS four versions of seventeen of his ghazals are to be found.³⁴

19. QULĪ SALĪM OF TEHERAN (d. 1647). A poem, *Qazā u qadar*, "Fate and the Divine Decree," in the Teheran MS 4.³⁵

20. ABŪ ṬĀLIB KALĪM OF HAMADĀN (17th century), poet-laureate to Sāh Jahān in India. Ten ghazals and "ein Gedicht in 14 fünfzeiligen Strophen" in the same Teheran MS.³⁶

21. MUḤAMMAD RIẒĀ NAV'Ī (d. in India in the beginning of the 17th century). Part of the small epic *Sūz u Gudāz*, "Burning and Melting," is preserved in the frequently quoted MS 4 from the Adler Collection.³⁷

It must again be stressed that the above list has been prepared on the basis of the material that libraries outside Iran possess, and is thus obviously incomplete. The fact that the MSS often contain names of poets who because of an adverse fate have fallen into oblivion,³⁸ or who are infrequently mentioned in Persian literature, clearly shows, how wide the repertoire of the Persian Jews had been, and how strongly they had taken part in the intellectual life outside their own circles.

NOTES

¹ Walter J. Fischel, "The Rediscovery of the Medieval Jewish Community at Firūzkūh in Central Afghanistan," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, LXXXV (1965), pp. 148-153, where all relevant literature (especially Gnoli and Rapp) is listed.

² *JE*, VII, p. 320.

³ *The Jews. Their History, Culture, and Religion*, Third edition, edited by Louis Finkelstein, pp. 1162 f.

⁴ W. J. Fischel, "The Beginnings of Judeo-Persian Literature," *Mélanges d'orientalisme offerts à Henri Massé* (Téhéran, 1963), pp. 146 f.

⁵ *אור* 4743, fol. 65a, line 9b. The use of the pronominal suffixes (with -aš as subject and ט = *man rā*) seems to be extraordinary. On the vocalization of 3 pers. sing. suffix see Gilbert Lazard, *La langue des plus anciens monuments de la prose persane* (Paris, 1963), p. 246, §282.

For reference to *Daniel Name* see Reuben Lévy, "Danial-Nama: A Judaeo-Persian Apocalypse," *Studies in Memory of George A. Kohut, 1874-1933*, ed. Salo W. Baron and Alexander Marx (New York, 1935), p. 424.

⁶ Fischel, *op. cit.*, p. 1163.

⁷ W. Bacher, "Zur jüdisch-persischen Litteratur," *ZfHB*, XIV (1910), 49.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

⁹ Cf. Roubène Abrahamian, *Dialectes des Israélites de Hamadan et d'Ispahan et dialecte de Baba Tahir* (Paris, 1936), p. 168.

¹⁰ Cf. *The Lament of Bābā Ṭāhir Being the Rubāʿiyāt of Bābā Ṭāhir, Hamadānī* (Uryān), The Persian Text Edited, Annotated and Translated by Edward Heron-Allen and Rendered into English Verse by Elizabeth Curtis Brenton, London, 1902, p. 46. Divergent versions are Heron-Allen, No. 38, p. 45.

and No. 169, p. 47 in the edition of Vaḥīd Dast-girdī, Teheran 1306 (=p. 35 in the 1333 edition).

¹¹ I. e., *vāžan*, from *vātan*, Parthian *vāxtan*, *vāč*-, "speak, say," cf. Abrahamian, *op. cit.*, p. 168.

¹² I. e., *čē* with 3. sing. suffix, cf. Abrahamian, *ibid.*, p. 165.

¹³ Cf. Abrahamian, *ibid.*, p. 156.

¹⁴ *Temporary Handlist of Persian Manuscripts Acquired 1895-1958* (typewritten), pp. 20-21.

¹⁵ "Zur jüdisch-persischen Litteratur," *JQR*, xvi (1904), pp. 537-538.

¹⁶ W. Bacher, *JE*, VII, p. 320; E. N. Adler, "The Persian Jews: Their Books and their Ritual," *JQR*, x (1899), 600 (Teheran MS. 78); MS. 966 in the *Ben Zvi Institute*, the Hebrew University, Jerusalem (חכאייח כוסרו ושיריין).

¹⁷ G. Margoliouth, *Catalogue of the Hebrew and Samaritan Manuscripts in the British Museum*, Vol. III, p. 273 (Or. 4730).

¹⁸ W. Bacher, *JE*, VII, p. 320 and *JQR*, xvi (1904), p. 554.

¹⁹ Described in the handwritten *Catalogue of Hebrew and Samaritan Manuscripts* (Gaster Collection), Dept. of Or. P. B. & MSS.

²⁰ W. Bacher, *JQR*, xvi (1904), p. 555.

²¹ Edward G. Browne, *A Literary History of Persia*, III (Cambridge, 1951), p. 260.

²² Cf. the sixteenth century Persian translation of the *Majālisu'n-nafā'is*, ed. by Ali Asghar Hekmat (Teheran, 1945), p. 353.

²³ Cf. E. E. Berthels, "Die persische Litteratur in Mittelasien," *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Orientalforschung*, III, Heft 2 (Berlin, 1955), p. 211.

Dr. A. Ḥayyāmpūr's *Farhang-i suḥunvarān* (Tabrīz, 1340), pp. 274-275 has a list of references to Salmān in classical and modern works.

²⁴ Teheran 1340/1961 (Reprinted from the Vienna edition of 1846), pp. 98-99.

²⁵ Cf. e. g., Wladimir Ivanow, *Concise Descriptive Catalogue of the Persian Manuscripts in the Curzon Collection Asiatic Society of Bengal*. Bibliotheca Indica Work No. 241, pp. 175-176 (No. 228).

²⁶ G. Margoliouth, *loc. cit.*

²⁷ W. Bacher, *JQR*, xvi (1904), p. 553 (T 4).

²⁸ W. Bacher, *ibid.*, p. 555.

²⁹ Bacher, *ibid.*, p. 553.

³⁰ Bacher, *JE*, VII, p. 320.

³¹ Cf. Bacher, *ibid.*, p. 321.

³² Bacher, *JQR*, xvi (1904), p. 555.

³³ See W. Bacher, "Der Dichter Jūsuf Jehūdi und sein Lob Moses'," *ZDMG*, LIII (1899), p. 423. In the same article (pp. 422 ff.) Bacher mentions a number of non-Jewish poets, represented in the MS, but otherwise unknown.

³⁴ See W. Bacher, *JQR*, xvi (1904), pp. 551 and 554.

³⁵ Bacher, *op. cit.*, p. 555. Cf. H. Ethé, "Neupersische Litteratur," *Grundriss der iranischen Philologie*, II, p. 309.

³⁶ Bacher, *op. cit.*, p. 553. See Browne, *A Literary History of Persia*, IV (Cambridge, 1930), pp. 258 ff.

³⁷ Bacher, *op. cit.*, p. 555. Cf. Ethé, *op. cit.*, p. 254.

³⁸ Bacher, *JQR*, xvi (1904), pp. 553 ff., gives some examples.