

that similar studies are undertaken. These future studies may emphasize an approach more specifically focused on various groups before their traditional knowledge becomes extinct.

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IRAN

EHLERS, JÜRGEN. *Die Natur in der Bildersprache des Šāhnāme*. Beiträge zur Iranistik, Band 16. Wiesbaden: Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 1995. xii + 282 pages. Photograph, bibliography, appendix, list of key terms. Cloth DM 84.—; ISBN 3-88226-831-X. (In German)

This book is a welcome addition to a series of European scholarly works on the imagery of Persian poetry (such as those of C.-H. DE FOUCHÉCOUR or A. SCHIMMEL, to name a few). To cover the vast length of FIRDAUSI's epic (52,707 pair verses in Mohl's edition), which contains the mytho-historical account spanning four millennia of Iranian history from the creation of the first man, Kayōmarth, up to the end of the history of the pre-Islamic Iran in the seventh century, Ehlers made good use of Fritz WOLFF's monumental glossary, a classical and indispensable instrument in any critical study on the *Shāhnāme* (1935). Indeed, Ehlers has dedicated his work to the memory of Fritz Wolff (1880–1943), an outstanding Jewish German Iranologist who was martyred in Auschwitz.

While Ehlers's work is not without predecessors concerning the depiction of nature in the *Shāhnāme*, his critical study is by far the most systematic and exhaustive on the topic to date. Starting with the Bibliography (xi–xii) and Introduction (1–5), the main body of the book consists of three large chapters, or parts (*Teil*).

Part A (7–111) “The world of the animals and parts of the human body” (*Tierwelt und menschliche Körperteile*) has been divided into seven (rather miscellaneous) sub-divisions: 1. Mammals; 2. Dragons, serpents, and crocodiles; 3. Birds; 4. Other animals; 5. Good and bad spirits, the Devil (*Teufel*) and Death; 6. Animal products (*Tierprodukte*); 7. Animal and human body parts. There is also section on “Other” (*Sonstiges*).

Part B (113–91) is about the plants (*Pflanzen*) and has been also divided into seven sub-divisions: 1. Flowers (*Blumen* and *Blüten*); 2. Plants and plant products; 3. Trees; 4. Tree parts, like leaves, fruits, seeds, roots, etc.; 5. Garden plants and cultured plants and their products; 6. Gardens and parks (*gartenähnliche Anlagen*). Paradise and spring (*Frühling*); 7. Other plants (*Gewächse*) and landscapes.

Part C (193–268) “The inanimate (*unbelebte*) nature” has four subdivisions: 1. The heaven and the celestial bodies; 2. Wind, air, clouds, and fire; 3. World, earth, and water; 4. Precious stones, minerals, and metals.

The closing chapter (*Schlusskapitel*; 269–78) is a modest effort to offer aesthetic observations on the analyzed data.

Ehlers's work is a valuable study on the phraseology and the imagery of the Persian epic that will benefit students of Iranian philology and other specialists as well as any interested reader of literary criticism, rhetorics, and style. But the line between the actual creatures in the individual stories and the symbolic use of their names in rhetoric figures of speech and various set phrases is not clearly drawn in the text. It is indeed typical of the language of Firdausi that some words, such as dragon (*aždahā*), or sometimes lion (*shīr*) are used figuratively, meaning simply a ferocious or rather monstrous animal. Even more often, the words

for “lion” (*shīr*; *hizhabr*) and “elephant” (*pīl*) are consistently used as synonyms for heroes (cf. 26). It would have been helpful to discuss such figurative uses in a separate chapter.

The author fortunately also expounds materials of folkloristic interest, though not systematically enough. Folkloristic materials are included mostly in Part A, which mentions some mythic animals under the heading “lion” (to which they are compared; cf. 26. and 32), and in the second subdivision which includes a detailed description on dragons. Subdivision five briefly offers insight into the “supernature” of the epic, but not much of an attempt is made to provide a coherent picture. The whole Part A could have been tremendously enriched by a more conscious effort to add a separate section on mythic animals, which are presently scattered under various headings. They could be perhaps incorporated into subdivision five which in its present form is rather meager.

Here I have some other critical comments to make which I find pertinent to the topic. The word *parī* “fairy” is used by Firdausī—as it seems from Ehlers’s and Wolff’s data—only figuratively, meaning simply “beautiful woman.” In my opinion, its actual meaning was transposed or incorporated into the seductive figure of *zan-e jādū* (sorceress) of the epic who appears in desolate places with the intention of leading astray righteous heroes, like Rustam, Isfandiyyār, and Bahrām Chūbīne.

Also, generally speaking, according to the *Weltanschauung* of Firdausī’s epic, benevolent beings could be clearly contrasted with sinister ones. For example, the bird Sīmurgh and the horse Rakhsh, the wondrous helpers of the hero Rustam, or in the later Sāsānian cycle the white horse which emerges from a spring (i.e., a benevolent water-spirit) to kill the tyrant and heretic King Yazdagird, as well as the mountain goat as the incarnation of Royal Glory in the episode of Ardashīr Bābakān and the cow which nursed the future King Farīdūn, are all from the sphere of the Good. However, the onager (*gūr*) can function as a demonic animal guide (e.g., in the episode concerning the beginning of the rebellion of Bahrām Chūbīne). Also, the ape-lion (*shīr-e kappī*) which was slain by the same Bahrām Chūbīne, or the wolf (killed by prince Gushtāsp) and the various dragons, as well as the innumerable demons (*div*) who were defeated by Rustam, Isfandiyyār, and other royal and popular heroes, of course, all belong to the sphere of the Evil.

To sum up, Ehlers’s book is useful and richly informative, but the role of the supernatural in the Iranian epic certainly would merit a separate analysis of its own.

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