

Preface

The papers of the present volume deal with a difficult and hitherto largely neglected area of research in Iranian philology, the transition from Middle to New Persian, covering approximately the 7th to 10th centuries CE. The difficulties result mainly from the fact that the Arab-Islamic conquest of most of Iran during the 7th century caused a major cultural break and interrupted the use of Persian as an official state language for almost three centuries. Persian continued to be used, and even to thrive, as a “church language” of the Zoroastrian community of Iran during that time. The long history of text transmission, of copying and re-copying, and the quite late date of most Zoroastrian manuscripts that have survived to the present make it difficult, however, to obtain from these texts a consistent picture of the living Persian language of that time.

It has long been known that Judaeo-Persian, with its earliest attestation in the 8th, and with further texts again from the 10th century onwards, constitutes an important link between Middle and New Persian and throws much light on the evolution of the latter. It was not until 1968, however, that LAZARD in an important article clarified the relation between Judaeo-Persian and both Middle and New Persian in more precise terms and pointed to the fact that the archaic features of Judeo-Persian may be due less to chronological than to dialectal features.

The transition from Middle to New Persian provides a good example of the fact that linguistic change is hardly ever steady and linear, and that the chronological progression is always complicated by dialectal and other factors (e.g. questions of language status). Besides, a bird’s eye view on the development from the Middle Persian of the 3rd to the New Persian of the 21st century CE shows how arbitrarily the linguistic boundary between Middle and New Persian is drawn, and how much it is due to extralinguistic factors: grammatically, the mainstream (Muslim) New Persian of the 10th century is in many ways closer to the Middle Persian of the 6th or even 3rd, than to the New Persian of the 21st century.

The conference on which the present volume is based grew out of a joint project on Early Judaeo-Persian (EJP) texts initiated by SHAUL SHAKED and LUDWIG PAUL in 1997. This project aimed to collect, edit, translate, comment upon, and analyze grammatically all known EJP texts (a large part of which is still unpublished). In the course of the project, we increasingly felt it would be important for specialists in the field of historical Iranian philology to appreciate the importance of the new EJP texts. Since there are too few specialists working on Early Judaeo-Persian proper, a small conference dealing with a broader range of linguistic subjects

around the Judaeo-Persian of the 8th to 11th centuries was organized, including as many contemporary variants of Early New Persian (Christian, Manichaean, Zoroastrian etc.) as possible. From the outset, this also included “late” forms of Middle Persian – be they from pre-Islamic or Islamic times – which, as explained above, cannot be clearly separated from Early New Persian.

As for the papers contained in this volume, it is a pleasure for me to observe that a large part of them deals with the presentation and analysis of previously unavailable material. Early Judaeo-Persian proper is the subject of the papers written by GINDIN, MACKENZIE (†), PAUL, SHAKED and SHAPIRA; I should like to briefly mention here that the papers of GINDIN and SHAKED considerably expand our knowledge of various as yet unpublished EJP Bible translations (*tafsirs*).

The studies of MAGGI and ORSATTI are about unpublished Christian (Syriac) Early New Persian documents. The most extensive new linguistic material is presented by SUNDERMANN in his edition of an important Manichaean New Persian text. The other papers deal with grammatical features of “late” Middle Persian (DURKIN, JOHANSON, WEBER), or with the transition from Middle to New Persian (LAZARD). Three special studies investigate Early New Persian poetics (JEREMIAS), the contribution of Pazand to the recent Zoroastrian tradition (DE JONG), and a possible lexical influence of Early New Persian on the language of the Maldives (GIPPERT).

It is my pleasure to express our gratitude to the various persons and institutions that were instrumental in making the publication of this conference volume possible. MARIA MACUCH (Berlin) consented to having it published in the renowned IRANICA series. CLAUDIUS NAUMANN (Berlin) solved in admirable fashion all the technical problems that accompanied the preparation of the final manuscript. SILVIO BENETELLO (Göttingen) painstakingly corrected most of the papers, going well beyond what would usually be expected from a *studentische Hilfskraft*, and thereby spared the authors several minor and major mistakes. The various institutions that lent financial support to the printing of this volume have been listed following the title page.

I would like to dedicate this volume to the memory of my late teacher and friend DAVID NEIL MACKENZIE who passed away in October 2001, and whose loss will be felt keenly not only by all who knew him, but also by all who are involved in the study of Iranian languages. His article in this volume, for which he familiarized himself with Early Judaeo-Persian totally anew after over 30 years, and which he himself would probably have considered only an *aperçu*, bears impressive witness to the philological accuracy, judgement, and mastery of which NEIL was always capable.

Göttingen, December 2002

LUDWIG PAUL