

## DAVID SAHID OF ISFAHAN AND ANWĀR-I SUHAILĪ

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The astonishing history of the numerous paths taken by the many translations and versions of the *Pañcatantra* is a well-known chapter in the history of Oriental studies (Hertel 1914). The purpose of this brief paper, dedicated to the memory of my sorely missed teacher, Professor Pentti Aalto, is to shed some further light on one particular sidepath of this network. After all, one of the things that I learned during the lectures given by Pentti Aalto in the 1970s was that the history of learning is really much more than a pastime of emeritus professors.

The earliest and most prominent source of the history of the *Pañcatantra* in the West was the 6th-century Pahlavi translation by Burzōe of an early Sanskrit recension of the work traditionally ascribed to the wise Pandit Viṣṇuśarman (the Bidpai or Pilpay of the Western translations), who originally composed it as a kind of *Fürstenspiegel*. Neither Pahlavi nor its Sanskrit origin have been preserved, although there are several later recensions extant in Sanskrit and other Indian languages. From the Pahlavi translation there later came the Old Syriac version and several Arabic versions, the most famous of these being the *Kalila wa Dimna*,<sup>1</sup> composed by ‘Abdullāh ibn al-Muqaffa‘ (d. 757) in the 8th century. The influence of this latter version was immense, but it is not necessary here to follow its various paths through Hebrew and Byzantine Greek to Europe or to trace its numerous versions in Semitic, Iranian, Hamitic, Dravidian, and Malayo-Polynesian languages.<sup>2</sup>

Several Persian versions were made of Ibn al-Muqaffa‘’s work. One of these, written by Abu’l-Ma‘ālī Naṣrallāh in the early 12th century,<sup>3</sup> became the basis of the poetic recast entitled *Anwār-i Suhailī*<sup>4</sup> and composed in the 15th century by

<sup>1</sup> Named after the two jackals in the frame story, Sanskrit Karaṅka and Damanaka.

<sup>2</sup> See Hertel 1914. In the West, Ibn al-Muqaffa‘’s Arabic text became known through Silvestre de Sacy’s edition (*Calila et Dimna, ou Fables de Bidpai*. Paris 1816). Cf. Brockelmann 1978: 503f.

<sup>3</sup> AD 1144 according to Wickens 1987.

<sup>4</sup> The name is traditionally translated in the West as ‘The Lights of Canopus’, but it also contains an important pun, as the word *suhailī* not only refers to the bright star Canopus, but also to Aḥmad Suhailī, the vizier of al-Kāšifī’s patron, Sultan Ḥusain Mīrā Baiqarā (Wickens 1987).

Ḥusain al-Wā‘īẓ al-Kāšifī. This was again translated and adapted into several languages, among them the famous 16th-century Turkish version, *Humāyūn Nāme* ('The Imperial Book') by ‘Alī Čelebi,<sup>5</sup> and several New Indo-Aryan versions. In this way the *Pañcatantra* returned home after its long travels.

In Europe the *Anwār-i Suhailī* became known at an early period of Persian studies in the West. In 1644 in Paris Gilbert Gaulmin and David Sahid published a French translation of this work entitled the *Livre des lumières ou la conduite des roys composé par le sage Pilpay*, known in brief as the *Fables de Pilpay*.<sup>6</sup> There was a second edition in 1698, followed by many others. On the title page, only the second translator is named, but while a mid-19th-century author claimed that David Sahid was only a pen-name of Gaulmin,<sup>7</sup> both are usually listed as translators. That the assumption of David Sahid as a pen-name was mistaken, will soon be demonstrated.

This was the beginning of the popularity of the *Anwār-i Suhailī* in Europe. From the French it was further translated into English (*The Fables of Pilpay*, by Joseph Harris. London 1679, with many new editions until the late 19th century). Especially in the U.K. the work attained great popularity, especially as the original Persian text became accepted 'like other popular aḳlāq [ethics] works... a standard examination text in the Indian Civil Service and the Indian Army during the days of British Rule'.<sup>8</sup>

There are further Swedish (1745), and German (early 19th-century) versions, but as these works are presently unavailable to me, it remains an open question, whether they were made from this or from Galland's *Humāyūn Nāme*.<sup>9</sup> In 1783 a small book was published in Vienna containing an anonymous translation of the fables of Pilpai made from French and published by Polyzoos Lampanitzotes

<sup>5</sup> This was translated into French by Antoine Galland (1646-1715) and posthumously published in Paris in 1724 (*Les contes et fables indiennes de Bidpai*). This was further translated into several European languages. Cf. Hertel 1914: 410, and Brockelmann 1978: 505.

<sup>6</sup> The name Pilpay, through many intermediate forms, ultimately goes back to Viṣṇuśarman.

<sup>7</sup> J.-M. Quérard, *Les supercheries littéraires dévoilées*, quoted in the *N.U.C.* Catalogue.

<sup>8</sup> Wickens 1987. The Persian text was edited by Captain Charles Stewart (1764-1837) and Moolvy Hussein Aly in Hertford in 1805 (there was also an Indian edition, Calcutta 1804) and by William Ouseley (1767-1842) also in Hertford in 1851. A fresh translation by E. B. Eastwick (1814-1883) appeared in 1854 and another by A. N. Wollaston (1842-1922) in 1877 (and many editions).

<sup>9</sup> Here the rather categorical claim of Wickens 1987 ('Several early French translations, often rendered into other western languages, are in fact based on Turkish versions rather than the original Persian') is perhaps correct, though not in the case of Sahid and Gaulmin and their English followers. In the 17th century a direct translation from Persian was no longer too difficult to accomplish. There were many travellers with linguistic knowledge obtained in the East and even the first Persian grammar in Latin, written by Louis de Dieu or Johan Elichmann and published by de Dieu appeared as early as 1639 (and the more modest work of Giovanni Battista Raimondi in 1611).

(Πολυζώης Λαμπανιτζιώτης).<sup>10</sup> But again I am unable to say whether it is actually founded on the *Anwār-i Suhailī* or on the *Humāyūn Nāme*. The Greek preface does not indicate the source.

Who were the two men to whom the French translation is commonly ascribed? It is not too difficult to find information about Gaulmin, he is included in major biographical reference works.<sup>11</sup> Gilbert Gaulmin or Gaulmyn was born in 1585 in Moulins (Bourbonnais) and died on 8th December 1665 in Paris. He was a lawyer, poet and a noted scholar of Greek and Oriental languages (Hebrew, Arabic, Persian, and Turkish). In addition to Pilpay he translated Byzantine literature and edited a Rabbinical Hebrew text with Latin translation (*De vita et morte Mosis libri III*. Paris 1629). His famous library contained i.al. no less than 558 Oriental manuscripts, which were annexed to the Royal Library in 1667.

It is more difficult to find any information about David Sahid d'Ispahan. The name indicates that he was from Iran, Dāwūd Sa'īd 'Isfahānī, who was apparently resident in Paris. It is merely a lucky chance that I am able to add something more to this. I was in fact looking for something else in an old journal, when I happened to notice a familiar name on the last page of the preceding article. In this way I found the interesting collection by Haig (1919) of Western epitaphs, which at that time could still be seen in the old Armenian cemetery in Isfahan. It contains many little known and some important names such as the Jesuit Father Alexandre de Rhodes (died 5.11. 1660) and the clockmaker Jacques Rousseau of Geneva (d. 29.3. 1753). And at the end of the collection (Haig 1919: 351f.) we find the family name Sahid.

The first epitaph runs as follows:

Dñs David Sahid olim Regis Galliae per  
6 an. postea Soc. Hollandicae per 34 ans  
linguarum interpres peritissims ac religio[ne]  
Cathoa zelo clarissims. Ob. 10. Dec. 1684 aet. 72.

<sup>10</sup> Μυθολογικὸν ἠθικο-πολιτικὸν τοῦ Πιλπαΐδος Ἰνδοῦ φιλοσόφου. Ἐκ τῆς Γαλλικῆς εἰς τὴν ἡμετέραν διάλεκτον μεταφρασθέν. Νῦν πρῶτον τύποις ἐκδοθὲν δαπάνῃ, καὶ ἐπιμελείᾳ, Πολυζώῃ Λαμπανιτζιώτῃ τοῦ ἐξ Ἰωαννίνων. ἀπγ'. ἐν Βιέννῃ [sic], 1783. Ἐκ τῆς Τυπογραφίας, Ἰωσήπου Βαουμειστέρου, τοῦ Νομοδιδασκάλου. From the Greek Encyclopaedia we learn that the editor was a scholar who hailed from Epirus (Ioannina) and worked between 1750 and 1796 in Venice and Vienna.

<sup>11</sup> See T\_d in *Biographie universelle*, XVI (Paris 1816): 579-581; *Nouvelle biographie générale*, XIX (1857): 665f., and Morembert 1980. A contemporary account with a full bibliography can be found in the *Gallia Orientalis* of Colomesius (Colomesius 1709: 230-235, 263-265). Colomesius' work is a curious collection of extracts of eulogies written by colleagues and, in addition to the published works, the bibliography carefully lists all works promised on some occasion, though never actually published (or even written?), by the author. The Pilpay book is not mentioned at all, but nevertheless Colomesius makes interesting reading.

As the epitaph tells, David Sahid met his end in his native Isfahan on 10th December 1672 at the age of 72 years. He is said to have been a most skilled interpreter of languages who spent six years in the service of the King of France and 34 years in the service of the Dutch East India Company. He was also 'distinguished by his zeal for the Catholic religion'.

Another stone contains the epitaph of Lady Helena Sahid, died 16.11. 1730 (in Armenian and Latin). A third member of the family was Simon Said, a Catholic (date of death not given). The first names indicate that the family was Christian, and of course Christians were always preferred in those times among people employed as interpreters. In two cases it is especially pointed out that they were Catholics, which is quite possible. At that time Roman Catholic Church had for centuries worked, with partial success, to bring the Oriental churches under its aegis.

At least one of the contemporary Western travellers visiting Isfahan knew our interpreter. This was the French goldsmith Jean Chardin (1643-1713) and his *Journal du voyage en Perse* (first published in 1686).<sup>12</sup> Commenting on 23rd September 1673 he relates that the interpreter of the Dutch Company was asked to translate into Persian the diplomatic letters brought by the French, Dutch and British envoys. He says that the man possessed an Arab, had lived a long time in Europe, and was a great talent in languages. He was capable of translating the French and Dutch letters, but did not know English.

Some six weeks later, on 5th November, he tells that the same interpreter accompanied him to the civil court of Isfahan, where an official acquittance of the jewels and gold articles sold by Chardin at the Persian court was made. After quoting the text of the receipt (in French translation) Chardin goes on to list the witnesses. Among them is David, son of Mahammed Said (Chardin 1811: 248ff.). Unfortunately, two problems remain. First, the man is not described as the Dutch interpreter, who is no longer mentioned at all, but as 'le contrôleur du grand-juge'. However, the name is identical with our interpreter, who *was* present on the occasion. Therefore it seems reasonable to suppose that Chardin had somehow mistaken his position. The second problem seems more important. Muhammad is a Muslim name, and in an Islamic country it was strictly forbidden for the son of a Muslim to renounce Islam. If David was a Roman Catholic, and the son of a Muslim, he could not live in Isfahan.

In conclusion, it is no longer possible to find out how the first Western translation of the *Anwār-i Suhailī* was actually accomplished. Perhaps it was translated by David Sahid, while Gaulmin supervised the work and perhaps helped to have it printed. However, now we at least know who this David Sahid was, the author of one of the first translations of a Persian classic in a European language.

<sup>12</sup> He is mentioned by Haig without exact reference. In the edition I have used the passage is found in volume 3 (Chardin 1811: 200f.). In the original 12° edition it is also found in vol. 3, but the page numbers are different.

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