

أَسَاطِيرُ (Asāṭīr)

vi, 25 ; viii, 31 ; xvi, 26 ; xxiii, 85 ; xxv, 6 ; xxvii, 70 ; xlvii, 16 ;
lxviii, 15 ; lxxxiii, 13.

Fables, idle tales.

We find the word only in the combination أساطير الاولين "tales of the ancients", which was the Meccan characterization of the stories brought them by Muḥammad. Sprenger, *Leben*, ii, 396 ff., thought that the reference was to a book of this title well known to Muḥammad's contemporaries, but this theory has been combated in Nöldeke-Schwally, i, 16 ff.,¹ and its impossibility becomes clear from a passage in Ibn Hishām, 235, where Naḍr b. al-Ḥārith is made to say—"By Allah, Muḥammad is no better a raconteur than I am. His stories are naught but tales of the ancients (أساطير الاولين) which he writes down just as I do."

The Muslim authorities take it as a form سَطَرَ from أَفَاعِل from سَطَرَ to write, considering it as a plu. of أسطورة or اسطارة (Sijistānī, 10), or the plu. of a plu. (LA, vi, 28). The verb سَطَرَ, however, as Fraenkel has shown (*Fremdw*, 250), is a denominative from سَطَرٌ, and this itself is a borrowing from Aram. ܣܬܪܐ, ܣܬܪܐ (Nöldeke, *Qorans*, 13). It is possible but not probable that أساطير was formed from this borrowed سَطَر.

Sprenger, *Leben*, ii, 395,² suggested that in أساطير we have the Gk. *ιστορία*, a suggestion also put forward by Fleischer in his review of Geiger (*Kleinere Schriften*, ii, 119), and which has been accepted by many later scholars.³ The objections to it raised by Horovitz, *KU*, 70, are, however, insuperable. The word can hardly have come into Arabic directly from the Greek, and the Syr. ܐܫܬܘܪܝܐ occurs only

¹ See also Hirschfeld, *New Researches*, 22, 41 ff., on Sprenger's *Suhuf* theories.

² Vide also his remarks in *JASB*, xx, 119, and see Freytag, *Lexicon*, sub voc.

³ Vollers, *ZDMG*, li, 312. See also Künstlinger in *OLZ*, 1936, 481 ff.