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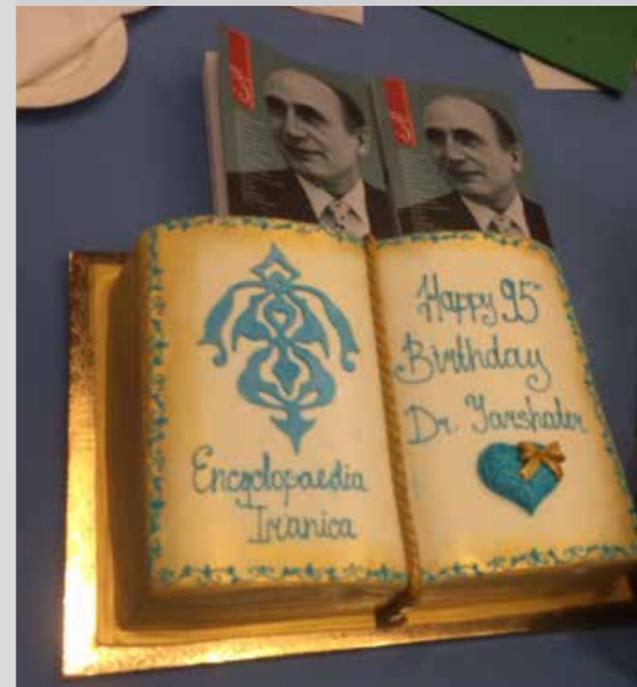
## CELEBRATION OF PROFESSOR EHSAN YARSHATER'S 95TH BIRTHDAY

**COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY, APRIL 17, 2015**

*Introductory Remarks by Mohamad Tavakoli*

A special issue of *Iran Nameh* is presented today to Professor Ehsan Yarshater in recognition of his prolific and multifaceted lifetime contribution to Iranian Studies as a wide-ranging field of academic inquiry. With a 1947 University of Tehran Ph.D. in Persian literature and a second Ph.D. in 1960 in Old and Middle Iranian from the University of London, he has served the field both as an exemplary scholar and as a pioneer. He has crafted the critical tools for the professionalization of Iranian Studies and for the dissemination and accessibility of scholarly research to both Persian and English language readerships. As Mary Boyce and Gernot Windfuhr noted in 1991, Professor Yarshater is “unique in his range of interests and achievements, and remarkable for the way in which he has joined profound devotion to Iran with scholarly objectivity, seeking always a balanced judgment and wide perspectives; a deeply cultivated scholar with a phenomenal capacity for work, who has sought tirelessly both to acquire knowledge and to disseminate it for the benefit of others.”

The outline of this unique lifetime contribution was already visible in Professor Yarshater's detailed report on a 1951 UNESCO conference on the topic “The Teaching of History as a Means of Developing International Understanding.” This vision of cultural-historical knowledge had been promoted by the Iranian delegates to the 1945 San Francisco conference, which concluded with the signing of the Charter of the United Nations. The commitment to an objective and well-documented cultural and literary history that promotes human understanding provides the foundation for the highly diverse scholarly efforts of Professor Yarshater. These include: his Iran-based efforts as the founding director of the Royal Institute of Translation and Publication, 1953-1961; his work on the UNESCO Council for Iranian Philosophy and Humanistic Sciences, 1954-1958; his Founding Editorship of *Rahnema-ye Ketab*, a journal of Persian language and literature, 1957-1979; his presidency of the Book Society of Iran, 1957-1979; and the editorship of the UNESCO Collection of Persian Representative Works, 1962-80. After two years of a visiting professorship, he moved permanently to Columbia University in 1961, as the Hagop Kevorkian Professor of Iranian Studies. He founded and has directed Columbia University's Center for Iranian Studies since 1966. Like the multi-armed Indian Deity Durga, while in New York Professor Yarshater initiated the Persian Texts Series in 1956, the Persian Heritage Series in 1962, the Persian Studies Series in 1966, the Modern Persian Literature Series in 1976, the al-Tabari Translation Project in 1977, the Columbia Lectures in Iranian Studies Series in 1981 and *A History of Persian Literature* in 2005. The famed *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, on which Professor Yarshater embarked in 1974, is only one of the many arms of this knowledge-producing and -disseminating *ustad* of Iranian Studies.



Seemingly driven by nuclear fuel, in addition to teaching at the University of Tehran and Columbia University, he has served, among others, as the Chairman of the Department of Middle East Languages and Cultures at Columbia, 1968-1973; as Chairman of the Columbia University Publications in Near and Middle East Studies, 1968-1976; and as the Secretary of the American Research Institute in Iran, 1968-1970. He has been a source of inspiration and was the first President of the International Society for Iranian Studies; he has served as the chief advisor for scholarly journals such as *Iran Nameh* and *Iran Shenasi*. Regularly attending the annual meetings of Middle East Studies Association (MESA) and the biennial conferences of the International Society for Iranian Studies (ISIS), he has been generous in reaching out to younger scholars and providing them with encouragement and critical support. Simply put, Professor Yarshater has been an exceptional scholar, a visionary academic administrator, and the pioneering founder of a number of significant scholarly publication series. In all these efforts, he has been a tireless advocate and a generous source of inspiration and support for many students and scholars in Iranian Studies.

The special issue of *Iran Nameh* honouring Professor Yarshater is available [here](#).

### THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF EHSAN YARSHATER TO IRANIAN STUDIES

*Remarks by Martin Schwartz*

Professor Yarshater, ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honor and pleasure for me to take part in the celebration of Ehsan Yarshater. I speak looking back on the years to the late 1960s when he, as chair of Columbia University's Department of Middle East Languages and Cultures, was my first boss. My present thoughts of Professor Yarshater and his indomitable devotion to Iranian Studies always bring up such words as 'lion,' 'hero' and 'champion.'

Today I'll address only a small part of his many contributions to the study of pre-Islamic Iran and to Iranian linguistics.

As for pre-Islamic Iran: Professor Yarshater's early publications had the virtue of making the field accessible to a Persian readership. Two interrelated books of his, each published in Tehran in 1957, won prizes: *Old Iranian Myths and Legends* (Dāstānhā-ye Irān-e bāstān) gained the Royal Award for best book of the year; and *Legends of the Epic of Kings* (Dāstānhā-ye Shāhnāma) earned a UNESCO prize.

Several of his articles address discoveries in the Middle Iranian articles of Central Asia: "Rostam in Sogdian" (Rostam dar zabān-e soghdi) is devoted to a remarkable manuscript in Sogdian from long before the *Shāhnāma*, with such paralleling details as Rostam's close relationship to his horse Rakhsh, his leopard-skin garment, and his battle against demons. Next, on the emergent study of the Choresmian or Khwarezmian language, the articles "Newly Discovered Choresmian Works" (Āthār-e bāzyfta-ye zabān-e khwārazmi) and "Some Remarks on the Choresmian Language" (Chand nokta dar bāra-ye zabān-e khwārazmi).

Professor Yarshater's English articles from 1953 to 1979 include "Nowruz – the New Year Celebration in Persia," "Pasargadae," "Avesta," "Iranian Religions," "Shapur," "Zoroaster," "Shapur II," "Chosroes I," and the important study "Were the Sasanians Heirs to the Achaemenids?." The latter article was followed by the thematically related "The list of Achaemenid kings in al-Biruni and Bar Hebraeus" which appeared in the *Biruni Symposium Volume*, edited by Yarshater and Dale Bishop (1976). Then, in 1979, "Ta'zieh and pre-Islamic mourning rites in Iran."

As we know, one of Professor Yarshater's great and abiding contributions was his founding of the *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, and his untiring editorial oversight of it. In its first fascicle, we have his "Abars'm", an account of an early Sasanian high dignitary (1982). In the same year, there appeared Volume III of the *Cambridge History of Iran*, for which Yarshater served as editor and wrote four articles: "Survey of Parthian and Sasanian History," "Iranian World View," "Iranian National History," and "Mazdakism." Next, another treatment of "Why the Median and Achaemenian Kings are not Mentioned in the Persian National Epic" (Cherā dar Shāhnāma az pādeshāhān-e mād o hakhāmaneshi zekri nist), this in the 1984 volume of *Iran Nameh*, the journal which today is honoring Yarshater with a special volume dedicated to him.

Further articles of his include three devoted to pre-Islamic mythological figures in the *Shāhnāma*: "Afrāsīāb," "Siyāwush," and "Zahāk (Zuhāk)," as well as "The feared child in Iranian Mythology" and "Mazdakism," and articles in *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (2005-2006): "Iranian History: an Overview," "Iranian History: A Chronological Table of Events."

Now for Professor Yarshater's contributions to Iranian linguistics. His early linguistic interest is shown by his Persian articles in the journal *Sokhan*, 1953. Under "Some Linguistic Notes" (Chand bahth-e zabānshenāsi), he published "Language and Civilization," "The Hittite Language," and "Relationships Among Non-Cognate Languages." To this should be added the 1958 survey prefacing *Loghatnāma-ye Dehkhoda*, "Iranian Languages and Dialects" (Zabānhā va lahjahā-ye irāni).

*Iranian Studies*, volume 48, number 3, 2014 has been published. This issue and the *Iranian Studies Journal* archives are available to ISIS members by logging into their account on the ISIS website [www.iranianstudies.com](http://www.iranianstudies.com)

It is Professor Yarshater's fieldwork on the minor languages of Iran which constitutes his most important linguistic contribution. The linguistic terrain of Iran has featured a multiplicity of local languages, conventionally referred to as "dialects." These have been eaten away by Persian (and in the instance of Taleshi and the indigenous languages of Azerbaijan, by Turkic) with the result of drastic change, and, increasingly, extinction. For this reason, in 1956, the *Société de la dialectologie iranienne* was founded by Georges Redard, Georg Morgenstierne, and Émile Benveniste, with Ehsan Yarshater as vice president supervising the recording of minor languages in Iran. The linguist Gernot Windfuhr and the famed late Iranist Mary Boyce praised Yarshater's skillful and patient work with informants, and its attention to local and chronological variation among informants, social contexts, etc.

Under Henning's influence, Yarshater's fieldwork began in Northern Iran and gradually included other regions. His studies showed, for example, that Iranian remnants in Azerbaijan presented the old local speech there and not transplants; and he showed much the same for the majority of local forms of Jewish speech.

Professor Yarshater's publications based on his fieldwork began with his reports on the Shāhrudi dialect of Khalkhāl, 1957 and 1959. These were followed by "The Dialect of Kaja," "The Tāti dialects of Rāmand," "The Dialects of Alvir and Vidar," "The Marāghi Communities of Alamut and Rudbār and their languages" (Marāghiyān-e alamut va rudbār va zabān-e ānhā), "The Use of Postpositions in Southern Tāti," "Distinction of Feminine Gender in Southern Tāti," "The Tāti Dialects of Tārom," and "Jewish Communities of Iran and Their Dialects".

From 1983 to 1989, Yarshater wrote a series of linguistic articles for the *Encyclopaedia Iranica*: "Abāzaydābādi," "Abyāna'i," "Āštiāni," "Āzari, the old Iranian Language of Azerbaijan," and "Bidgoli."

Further article on Iranian dialects up to the present: "The dialects of Āran and Bidgol," "The Dialect of Borujerd Jews," "The Taleshi of Asālem," "The Jewish Dialects of Kāshān," "The Xo'ini Dialect," "The Tāti dialect of Kalāsūr," "The Dialect of Karingān," and currently in press for the *Gnoli Memorial Volume*, with proofs to appear shortly "The Tāti Dialect."

This return to Tati leads me to some personal remarks. In 1969 there appeared Professor Yarshater's book *The Grammar of Southern Tāti Dialects*. Although, as the title indicates, this work is focused on synchronic morphology, and syntax, its potential interest for the languages of ancient Iran is implied in its subtitle, *Median Dialect Studies*. In fact, I noticed that among the book's rich lexical material, one word, *chali amberāz*, 'clothing', on hand is a prefixed cognate of Old Persian *brazman* – ritual, proper ceremonial form, which, I now stress, must be attributed to Median Origin, and on the other and is related to some Middle Persian and Parthian words, for which

Henning proposed the meaning 'clothing' as well as the more basic 'appearance, form, ceremony', to which I was able to relate to words in Sogdian and Khwarezmian with the underlying meaning 'appearance'.

I also showed that kindred with the Iranian are words for 'form, formula, ritual' in Vedic and Germanic (to which I would now add Celtic), so that an important lexical range is gained for an ultimate Indo-European root. All this I was pleased to publish in the 1990 volume "Papers in Honor of Professor Ehsan Yarshater."

For a final personal note, I have reserved until now mention of Professor Yarshater's 1977 article "The Hybrid Language of the Jewish Community of Persia." This was the first extensive account of the secret special vocabularies used, with regional variants, by Iranian Jews, only when outsiders were to be excluded from understanding. This article, together with relevant notes in Yarshater's 1989 "The Dialect of Borujerd Jews" remains the only scholarly source for this fascinating disappearing vocabulary. Using this material together with photoscans of a Shi'ite rogue's argot with Persian glosses in the margins of five pages of a 14th century manuscript in Tashkent, and together with 20th century data on the secret argot vocabulary used by Persian-speaking Gypsies and similar groups in Iran and Central Asia, I was able to confirm Professor Yarshater's speculation that the secret vocabulary of Jews in Iran lies behind what Classical Persian sources call *Luter(ā)*, like the term *Loterā'i*, etc, used by Jews, and that this has its chief source in Jewish Aramaic.

My long account of the Judeo-Iranian secret vocabulary and how it became part of underclass Persian speech with traces in today's Persian, may be found under "Loterā'i" in the *Encyclopaedia Iranica* online, and now in an expanded form in the recently appeared book "The Jews of Iran," ed. H.M. Sarshar, where I dedicated my article to Professor Yarshater as a token of the way his labors have opened new vistas for Iranian Studies.

