



IRAJ AFSHAR (1925-2011)

The vacuum that has been left in Iranian Studies by the passing of [Iraj Afshar](#) has no equivalent in the living memory. When one reviews what he accomplished during a mere lifetime, one cannot help being deeply surprised at the vastness and the variety of the services that he rendered to Iranian Studies.

His father, Dr. Mahmoud Afshar, was a scholar deeply in love with Iran and the Persian language. He founded the journal *Āyandeh*, a literary, social and historical publication that paid special attention to Persian language. He left an endowment for the promotion of Persian language and publication of Persian works of merit.

Iraj Afshar carried out with the assistance of some scholarly colleagues the wish of his father and not only published a number of books, but also arranged for the endowment to honor some of the outstanding scholars of Iranian Studies by inviting them to Iran for giving lectures and receiving a prize. Among these scholars were Nazir Ahmad, Professor of Persian Studies at Aligarh Muslim University in India, Richard N. Frye, Professor of Iranian Studies at Harvard University; J. T. P. De Bruijn, Professor of Persian literature at the University of Leiden, and also Manouchehr Sotoudeh, whose detailed description of the Caspian provinces from Āstārā to Astarābād and their monuments in 5 volumes are well-known.

After finishing the Firouz-Bahram high school in Tehran, Iraj Afshar entered the Law School of the University of Tehran and graduated in 1949 and was



employed as a teacher of Persian in the high schools Sharaf and Irānshahr. A year later he was appointed the librarian of the Faculty of Law of the University of Tehran, a position that Dr. Mohsen Saba, a dedicated bibliophile, had advocated.

In 1945 he married Shayesteh Afsharieh who bore him four sons Babak, Bahram, Kooshiar and Arash.

His first venture in book publishing was in 1951 when he published *Ferdows al-Morshediyya fi Asarār al-Samadiya* by Mahmoud b. Othman.

In 1953 he was asked by Majid Movaqqar, the publisher of *Mehr* journal to edit this journal. At about the same year he embarked on an important undertaking by founding together with Mohammad Taqi Daneshpazhuh, Abbas Zaryab Kho'i, Manuchehr Sotudeh and Mostafa Moqarrabi *Farhang-e Irānzamin*, a periodical that focused on publishing manuscripts of treaties and short books, edited either by himself or by another scholar. This valuable publication continued as long as Afshar lived, ending with the 27th issue. Many works of historical literary, scientific, etc. value were published in this periodical.

I became acquainted with him after I returned from England in 1953 in semi-regular meetings at the office of *Sokhan* journal, attended by, among others, Parviz Khanlari, the publisher of *Sokhan* journal, Iraj Afshar, Ehsan Naraghi, and some of the contributors of the journal.

In 1954 at the invitation of Dr. Parviz Khanlari he helped with the editing of *Sokhan*. A year later, Afshar was asked by Homayoun San'atizadeh, a friend of his high school days and the director of Franklin Publications in Iran, to publish *Ketāb-hā-ye Māh*, the journal of the Persian Publishers' Society.

In 1956 when I received a grant to visit the United States for six months and again in 1958 when I was invited to teach at Columbia University, Afshar agreed to direct the *Bongāh-e Tarjomeh va Nashr-e Ketāb* (The Institute for Translation and Publication, BTNK) in my absence. By this time Afshar was a noted Persian scholar with vast experiences in different fields.

In 1957 he finished a one-year course on librarianship organized by UNESCO in France. After this date he became an active advocate of library science, an interest that he continued to nurture to the end of his life.



In 1957 I founded with the assistance of Iraj Afshar, Abdol-Hossein Zarrinkub, and Mostafa Moqarrabi the journal *Rāhnamā-ye Ketāb* (Guide to Books) for reviewing books and promoting good reading. At the same time, I founded *The Book Society of Iran* in association with the above named and Prof. Mehri Ahi, Prof. Hafez Farmanfarman, and two of my colleagues from BTNK, namely Abdollah Sayyar (an expert in printing) and Esmā'il Ashtiany. *Rāhnamā-ye Ketāb* was named the organ of *The Book Society* with Iraj Afshar as its editor. Of my associates the one who helped most was Iraj Afshar, who gradually became the administrator of *The Book Society* and the editor of the Journal. In 1958 when I left Iran to teach at Columbia University the journal was left to him to run, and it became a mirror of Afshar's good taste, focusing on topics that he was particularly interested in, such as Persian language, Persian manuscripts, Qajar Iran, besides of course book reviews.

Afshar also organized on behalf of *The Book Society* the first annual exhibition of Persian printed books in 1957, a practice which continued for six consecutive years, after which it was taken over by the government agencies. Among other functions of *The Book Society* was the annual selection of best books and running a lending library in Tehran with the view of encouraging and facilitating good reading and doing away with the cumbersome procedures that surrounded the borrowing of books from public libraries. Afshar also published the first annual bibliography of Persian books, published by *The Book Society*, a venture that he continued for several years.

Afshar also kept up his advocacy of library science, and in 1958 he began teaching a course on the subject at Tehran's Teachers College. In 1961 he was appointed the head of Teachers College's Library and a year later the head of National Library, where he organized a number of undertakings, including the indexing of the Library's manuscripts.

From 1965 to 1979 he was the head of the University of Tehran's Central Library and its Center for Documents. Under Afshar the Center made a strenuous effort to collect photocopies of important Persian manuscripts found in collections abroad, particularly in Turkey and the Sub-Continent.

One of the great innovative undertakings of the enterprising Afshar was his publication of *Index Iranicus* or the listing with necessary details of all the articles concerning Iranian Studies published in Persian. The first volume was published in 1961 and other volumes followed. All together seven volumes had been published by the time of Afshar's passing. The volumes have been a great



tool for researching the progress of Persian Studies in Iran.

In 1979 *Rāhnamā-ye Ketāb* ceased publication, but Afshar immediately revived *Āyandeh*, a journal that his father had founded, and began to publish it with the same style and contents of *Rāhnamā-ye Ketāb*. The revived *Āyandeh* continued until 1993, when Afshar's occupation with many other researches and publication projects and also the difficulties of providing paper for the journal caused him to abandon the continuation of *Āyandeh*.

Nonetheless, his readers were not deprived of his periodic contribution to Iranian Studies. He began "*Tazeh-hā va Pāreh-hā-ye Irānshenāsi*" (Tidbits of Iranian Studies) in *Kelk* journal, and later in *Bukhara*, both edited by Ali Dehbashi. These "tidbits" were to my mind the most readable and the most informative section of *Kelk* and *Bukhara*. In them Afshar drew from his wealth of knowledge to inform his readers of what had come to his notice concerning Iranian Studies, particularly outside of Iran, often informing his readers about newly published books and articles without refraining from expressing his critical evaluations and providing guidance for corrections and additions where necessary, the great teacher that he was! He told me that there was a plan to publish all the "*Tazeh-hā va Pāreh-hā-ye Irānshenāsi*" in a separate volume. I hope this plan will be carried out.

Afshar and Mohammad-Taqi Daneshpazhuh were the best experts on Persian manuscripts. When the latter passed away, Afshar was the greatest authority in the field. His reputation, his trustworthiness, and the facilities for publishing at his disposal made many people who possessed manuscripts, documents, or interesting historical letters trust him with such written material, and this enabled Afshar to publish important letters of historical interest. For example, he published *Nāmeḥ-hā-ye siyāsi-ye Dehkhodā* (Dehkhoda's political letters, 1979); *Khāterāt va ta'ammolāt*, by Dr. Mosaddeq (Memoirs and Musings of Dr. Mosaddeq, 1985); *Nāmeḥ-hā-ye Tabriz: az Theqat al-Islam be Mostashār al-Dowleh* (Letters from Tabriz: from Theqat al-Islam to Mostashar al-Dowleh, 1999), *Nāmeḥ-hā-ye Paris az Qazvini be Taqizadeh* (Paris Letters from Qazvini to Taqizadeh, 2006); and *Nāmeḥ-hā-ye Landan*, consisting of Taqizadeh's letters from London during his ambassadorship in England (1996).

The books and manuscripts that Afshar has published are so numerous that it is impossible to mention even the most important of them, and yet one cannot refrain from mentioning *Yaddāsh-t-hā-ye Qazvini* (Notes and remarks by



Mohammad Qazvini, 1960) in five volumes, *Ruznāmeḥ-ye Khāterāt-e E'temād al-Saltaneh* (a diary about Nasser al-Din Shah and the events of his time, 1966), and *Zendegi-ye Tūfāni* (an autobiography by Taqizadeh, 1989, with additional notes and appendices, 1992). Fortunately his capable and book-loving sons Babak, Bahram, Kooshar, and Arash, have published a list of his publications (Los Angeles, 2003). It amounts to a book of 161 pages.

Afshar was a well-built man, fairly tall, with a pleasant face, simple in his dress, with an even temper and a dry sense of humor. He was extremely hardworking and well organized, always carrying out several parallel projects. In my collaboration of a lifetime with him I never saw him losing his temper. He was forever encouraging the younger scholars and giving them a helping hand, if they needed it.

He was particularly attached to his hometown, the city of Yazd and Yazd province, and he published a number of manuscripts and books about Yazd, including *Yadgārhā-ye Yazd*, about Yazd monuments (1968-1975) and *Yazd-nāmeḥ* (Yazd book, 1992), beside several pre-modern texts such as *Jāme'-e Mofidi* by Mohammad Mofid Mostowfi (1961) and *Eskandar-nāmeḥ* (1964).

Two Festschrifts in appreciation of his achievements were published in 1998: one entitled *Iran and Iranian Studies: Essays in Honor of Iraj Afshar*, edited by Kamiz Eslami, (Princeton, 1998) and the other *Arj-nāme-ye Iraj* in two volumes in more than 1,300 pages edited by Mohammad-Taqi Daneshpazhuh and Abbas Zaryab Kho'i and published by Mohsen Baqerzadeh (Tehran, 1998).

His love of Iran and his insatiable curiosity made him an avid traveler on foot in Iran, often with his friend, Manouchehr Sotoudeh, and sometimes with others such as Zaryab Kho'i, Shafi'i-Kadkani, and even Ebrahim Pourdavoud. He visited most of the villages and settlements in Iran, always making notes of historically interesting remains from kabutarkhāns to old cisterns and tombstones with an inscription.

Afshar was well connected with most centers of Iranian Studies in Europe and in the United States. He catalogued Persian manuscripts of Widener Library of Harvard University (1966) and the Austrian National Library and the Austrian State Archives in Vienna (2003).

The number of societies in which he was a member and the number of institutions he helped to found and the conferences he organized were most



numerous. He was always in demand and he hardly ever refused to assist and to guide. The volume of his correspondence was enormous. His letters were always handwritten and free of idle talk. He published in 2009 the letters that Jamalzadeh, who was a great believer in Afshar and a close friend, had written to him (*Nāmeḥā-ye Genève*).

In 2005 the International Society for Iranian Studies decided to give an award for lifetime achievements to a scholar of Iranian Studies living in Iran and a scholar living outside Iran. To select a scholar in Iran was easy and simple. It was immediately clear that Afshar was the choice.

Although Afshar has left this world, unbelievable as it is, his model of working tirelessly to promote Iranian Studies and his love of his homeland will remain and will no doubt inspire many young scholar to achieve some of his many accomplishments.

Ehsan Yarshater
Columbia University

View the [Persian text](#) of the memorial (now in publication).