



MONCHI-ZADEH, DAVOUD

MONCHI-ZADEH, DAVOUD (Dāvud Monšizāda; b. Tehran, 28 August 1914; d. Uppsala, 13 July 1989), Iranian linguist and political activist. Davoud Monchi-Zadeh is mainly remembered for his contributions to Iranian linguistics, particularly to the study of Modern and Middle Iranian languages. However, he also led an active political life in Iran and abroad.

Monchi-Zadeh's family hailed originally from Shiraz, but during the reign of the Safavids the family moved to Yerevan (Armenia). His grandfather Karim Beyk and his father Mirzā Ebrāhim Monši-Zāda, both prominent officials in Qajar government, met their untimely demises through poison and bullets, respectively ('Azizi, pp. 37-8). After finishing his high school education at Amir Kabir High School in Tehran in 1932 (Duchesne-Guillemin et al., p. 367), Davoud was sent to France on a government scholarship. According to 'Azizi (p. 40, n. 2), Monchi-Zadeh also attended military school prior to his departure to Europe. Due to his anti-Pahlavi political activities in France, however, he was stripped of the scholarship but was able to continue his education independently and receive his degree in literature (*licencié ès lettres*) from the University of Dijon in 1937 (Duchesne-Guillemin et al., p. 367).

Monchi-Zadeh then moved to Germany, first attending the University of Munich and then the University of Berlin, where he studied with Walther Wüst (1901-93) among other German scholars. His fields of study included Iranian, Indian, and Islamic studies. The advent of World War II inevitably interrupted his studies, but he was finally able to receive his Ph.D. (Promotion) from the University of Berlin in 1945. He wrote a dissertation on *ta'zia* (q.v.),



which was eventually published in Sweden in 1967 (see “Bibliography”). He taught Persian language and literature at the University of Munich from 1947 to 1950. He, apparently, paid a short visit to Iran in 1948, but due to his pro-German activities during the War he was refused all positions in the Iranian government (‘Azizi, p. 44). Back in Munich, he married the daughter of one of his professors who bore him four children (‘Azizi, p. 45). From 1950 to 1951 he taught Persian language at the University of Alexandria in Egypt. In 1951, he moved to Tehran and was involved, primarily, with national politics until 1958. In 1951 (‘Azizi, p. 54), he founded the political party called SUMKA (Ḥezb-e sosiālist-melli-ye kārgarān-e Irān), which was modeled largely, in ideology and structure, after the Nazi Party. The party soon became famous for its anti-government and anti-Communist activities (‘Azizi, pp. 64 ff. and see below).

After the 1953 coup and the overthrow of Mosaddeq’s government in Iran, SUMKA’s fortune also waned. During the 1950s Monchi-Zadeh published his translations of the works of a number of European thinkers into Persian (see *Bibliography*). In 1954 he authored *Dar-be-dar dar pey-e behešt* (In desperate search of paradise), which is considered to be his autobiography. He lived in the United States during the period 1958-61, where he was affiliated with the Library of Congress (Duchesne-Guillemin et al., p. 367).

It is reported that in 1961 he was invited back to Iran by the politician Ḥasan Arsanjāni (q.v.) to become the mayor of Tehran; however, the promised position never materialized (‘Azizi, p. 99). He continued his literary and political activities in Tehran until 1963, but with his political aspirations unmet, he left Iran for Europe. Eventually, Monchi-Zadeh settled in Sweden where he was affiliated with the Universities of Uppsala (1964-80) and Stockholm (1967-80) in various capacities teaching Iranian languages and literature. It was in Uppsala that the late Bernfried Schlerath (q.v.), the eminent Iranist and Vedicist, established a close friendship with Monchi-Zadeh in 1966 (Schlerath, pp.198-207). In fact, according to Schlerath, it was Oscar Stig Wikander (q.v.) who introduced him to Monchi-Zadeh, saying that Monchi-Zadeh “is a Persian as well as an Aryan. Together with Karl Hoffmann (q.v.) we studied with Walther Wüst in Munich” (Schlerath, p. 198). Schlerath found Monchi-Zadeh to be quite “congenial and replete with antics,” as well as being an excellent chef, which was a welcome relief from the “terrible Swedish cuisine” (p. 207). In 1972 Monchi-Zadeh served as a visiting professor at Marburg University in Germany (Duchesne-Guillemin et al., p. 367).

After settling in Sweden, Monchi-Zadeh seems to have been somewhat less



distracted by politics and had become more concerned with academic publishing. His most notable publications on Middle and Modern Iranian languages are as follows: *Topographisch-historische Studien zum Iranischen Nationalepos* (Wiesbaden, 1975), a study of the historical topography in the Iranian national epic the *Šāh-nāma*; *Die Geschichte Zarēr's* (Uppsala, 1981); *Xusrōv ī Kavātān ut Rētak* (Leiden, 1982); and *Wörter aus Xurasan und ihre Herkunft* (Leiden, 1990), a lexicon of Khorasani terms published posthumously.

He retired from teaching at Uppsala and Stockholm in 1980. In 1987, he visited the United States for the last time, seeking, unsuccessfully, an academic position in Iranian studies (‘Azizi, p. 103). He died on July 13, 1989 in Uppsala, Sweden.

Political Life. It is a truism that a man’s politics is a darker shadow of his intellectual meanderings, and, judging by his proclivities and activities, early in his life Monchi-Zadeh was heavily influenced by at least two schools of thought, namely Nazism and the writings of the Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset (1883-1955).

According to *Le Monde* (apud ‘Azizi, p. 41, n. 2), Monchi-Zadeh was a member of the Hitler Youth and later joined the Sturmabteilungen (on the SA in general, see Siemens) and eventually the Schutzstaffel (SS). In 1942 he voluntarily joined the German military and was active on the Eastern Front fighting against the Soviet Union (‘Azizi, p. 43). Thanks to his proficiency in several languages he proved quite useful in dealing with the Soviet prisoners of war, who included a large number of recruits from the eastern parts of the Soviet empire. He was also an active contributor to the Nazi publication *Das Reich* and the Deutsche Verlag (‘Azizi, pp. 42-3). Additionally, he was active in the Persian broadcasts of Berlin Radio (‘Azizi, p. 42). Seven days before the end of active combat in Europe, he suffered a severe war-related injury and was hospitalized for two years undergoing “twenty-two operations” (‘Azizi, pp. 43-4). Schlerath, who met him over twenty years later, noted that Monchi-Zadeh still relied on a crutch due to the same injury (p. 207).

Monchi-Zadeh’s main political achievement in Iran was the founding of the *Ḥezb-e sosiālist-melli-ye kārghārān-e Irān* (Socialist-Nationalist Party of the Workers of Iran), SUMKA, in 1951 (Azizi, p. 54). An examination of the platform of SUMKA makes its kinship with the Nazi Party abundantly clear. The platform called, *inter alia*, for an anti-American, anti-Russian, and anti-



British policy; a ban on immigration of non-Iranians into greater Iran; a ban on miscegenation; advocating an anti-parliamentarian form of government; criminalization of the “Jewish ways” of conducting business; nationalization of factories which were run against national interests; revival of the middle class which had suffered at the hands of, *inter alia*, “Jewish traitors”; ban on child-labor; and opposition to all anti-national and immoral artistic and literary movements (‘Azizi, pp. 105-28).

Apparently, SUMKA’s anti-Jewish activities were severe enough to alarm the world Jewish organizations, which demanded from Prime Minister Mossadeq greater protection of Iranian Jewry (Friedman, p. 10). It should be added, however, that the Central Intelligence Agency, reportedly, provided some funding to SUMKA (Gasiorowski, pp. 267-70). Needless to say, the US support for SUMKA was aimed at undermining the communist Tudeh party and even the National Front movement, both of which were strongly opposed by Monchi-Zadeh’s party. Monchi-Zadeh’s infatuation with Nazism went beyond the doctrine and in fact he closely emulated Adolf Hitler’s mannerism and appearance (see [PLATE I](#)).

As for the influence of Ortega y Gasset, Monchi-Zadeh’s admiration led him to translate at least three works by the Spaniard into Persian, namely *Meditación de la técnica: ensimismamiento y alteración*, *La rebelión de las masas*, and *El hombre y la gente* (see “Bibliography”; Monchi-Zadeh’s translation of the last work mentioned has not been available to this author, but the title is suggestive of the work by the Spanish savant).

Based on recently published declassified files, it is clear that throughout his exile the secret service of the Pahlavi government kept a close watch on his movements and activities (‘Azizi, pp. 558 ff.).

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