



SHAKI, MANSOUR

SHAKI, MANSOUR (Manṣur Šaki), Iranian philologist (b. Tehran, 21 March 1919; d. Prague, 22 March 2000), specializing in the field of Middle Persian studies with a focus on social, economic, and ideological issues of the Sasanian period.

Mansour's ancestors hailed from the Shaki tribe living on the Russian side of the [Araxes river](#), but his father, Shaikh 'Ali Khan, who was a military man, moved before the October Revolution (1917) to Iran, where his three sons were born. After finishing his high school education in Tehran, Mansour moved to England where he studied mathematics and physics at the University of Birmingham (*Répertoires*, p. 467). After graduation in 1942, he moved back to Iran, where he worked for a while for the [Anglo-Iranian Oil Company](#) in [Ābādān](#). Apparently, his anti-British activities led to his dismissal from the company (Šādegi, p. 2). Later, he began teaching English at a high school in Tehran.

In 1948, Shaki moved to Prague—the same year that the Communist Party took over Czechoslovakia, which may have been simply a coincidence. His earliest non-scientific publications, however, also show his Leftist leanings and often they deal with the Tudeh Party and its presumed goals, as well as exhibiting a didactic approach to the arts which is redolent of Socialist Realism. Additionally, he wrote on [Zurvanism](#) and Dahrism (see [DAHRĪ](#)), the first “materialist” schools of thought in ancient Iran. More light can be shed on his political activities only after his files in the former Eastern Block become available.



Ostensibly, Shaki's move to Prague was due to the prominence of the emerging field of crystallography in Czechoslovakia at the Mathematics-Physics Institute under the direction of Professor Václav Petržílka (1905-76). In 1950, he received his doctorate in natural sciences and soon published the results of his discoveries. He was, however, hospitalized with a pulmonary disease in 1953-54 and after his release, due to health concerns, he had to discontinue his laboratory research (Bečka, p. 85). Not discouraged by this setback, he changed fields and concentrated on Iranian linguistics. He received the degree of CSc. (Ph.D.) in Persian philology in 1961 from the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences in Prague (*Répertoires*, p. 467).

While in Prague, Shaki had already been introduced to the eminent Iranist Jan Rypka (1886-1968) through their mutual friend [Sadeq Hedayat](#) (Şādeqī, p. 2). Later on, he began to study Middle Persian on his own, and, as is the case in all fields, being an autodidact has its own accompanying pitfalls. Nevertheless, it is in this field that he left his most indelible marks.

Shaki worked at the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences in Prague for several years, and in 1966 he gained *venia docendi* at the Charles University, where he was the professor of Persian. At the same time, he also wrote poetry and continued to paint as well as authoring a number of essays on Persian painting and its evolution, although they often show a dogmatic and “engaged” approach to the topic.

Among Shaki's most important contributions to Middle Iranian studies, one can mention his works on the medieval encyclopaedia [Dēnkard](#), where he was able to offer reliable translations of some of the most convoluted passages devoted to philosophy and ancient sciences. Moreover, through his works on the Sasanian law digest, [Mādayān ī Hazār Dādestān](#), he contributed to our knowledge of late antique Iranian legal system. Shaki was a prolific contributor to the *Encyclopædia Iranica*, with more than twenty entries on various topics (see *Bibliography*), as well as its consulting editor for the field of Sasanian law and society (1995-2000).

Shaki, although an ardent nationalist, does not appear to have ever returned to Iran and remained in Prague until his death in 2000.



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