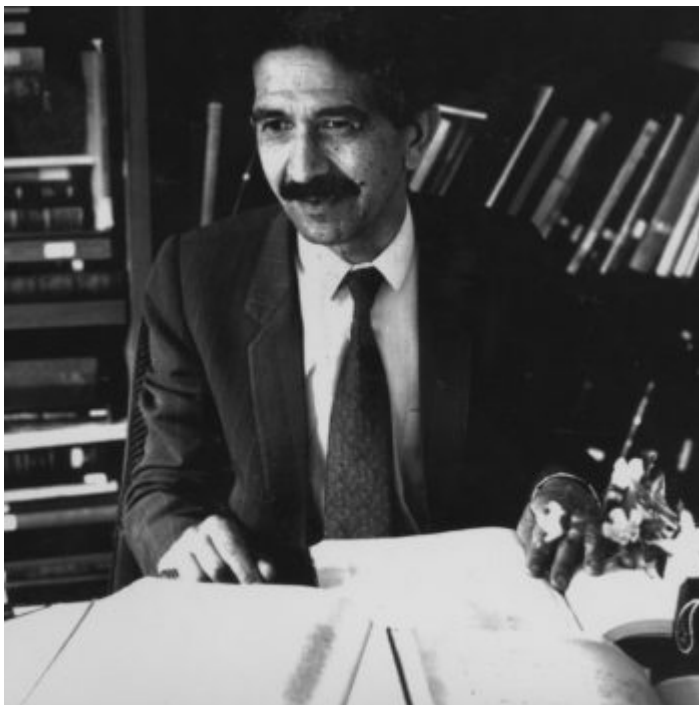




TAFAZŽOLI, AḤMAD



TAFAZŽOLI, AḤMAD (b. Isfahan, 16 Ādar 1316 Š./7 December 1937; d. Tehran, 24 Dey 1375/13 January 1997, [Figure 1](#)), a prominent scholar and philologist in the field of Middle Iranian studies.

Tafazzoli's father, a rug merchant, moved with his family to Tehran when Aḥmad was six years old. Aḥmad was the eldest child and had two brothers and two sisters. He married one of his cousins. He received his elementary and secondary education in Tehran. After graduating from Dār-al-Fonun High



School in 1956, he entered the Faculty of Letters (Dāneškada-ye adabiyāt) at the University of Tehran. He graduated with a B.A. degree at the top of his class in 1959 and almost immediately registered for the postgraduate studies that would lead to a doctorate degree at the same university. In 1961 he moved to London, where he spent four years studying and eventually getting an M.A. degree in Old and Middle Iranian at the School of Oriental and African Studies, under the guidance of [Walter Bruno Henning](#), an outstanding scholar of Iranian studies.

On his way back to Iran, he stayed for a few months in Paris, where he conducted research and made acquaintance with Father Jean de Menasce (q.v.), a noted scholar in Iranian studies, whom he later assisted in his translation of the third book of *Dēnkard*. He returned to Tehran and completed his doctoral thesis in ancient Iranian languages in 1965 under the direction of Professor Šādeq Kiā. Unfortunately, he never published his dissertation, which was titled “Taṣḥiḥ va tarjama-ye Sutgar nask va Varšt-mānsar nask az *Dēnkard*-e 9 va sanješ-e in do nask bā matnhā-ye avestā’i.” Besides Persian, which was his native tongue and which he used with great skill, he had mastered English, Arabic, French, and German and could also use Russian for his research.

Tafazzoli served for eight years (1958-66) in the Bureau General of Fine Arts (Edāra-ye koll-e honarhā-ye zibā), the department of popular culture (Edāra-ye farhang-e ‘amma), and then for two years (1966-68) as a researcher at the Iranian Culture Foundation ([Bonyād-e Farhang-e Irān](#)). It was during this period that he compiled and published his *Glossary of Mēnōg Ī Xrad*. In 1968 he joined the Faculty of letters (Dāneškada-ye adabiyāt) of Tehran University as an assistant professor of ancient Iranian languages and cultures. In 1973 he became associate professor, and finally full professor in 1357/1978. During those ten years, along with his teaching and research activities, he also presided over the Association of Foreign Students of the Faculty of Letters. In 1991, he was appointed a permanent member of the Iranian Academy of Persian Language and Literature (Farhangestān-e zabān va adab-e fārsi), and he served as its deputy chairman for science and research from 1994.

His friendship with Jean de Menasce and Philippe Gignoux led to close collaboration with these two scholars. Being relieved of his teaching responsibilities in 1970, he spent a year in France by the invitation of de Menasce, who was finishing the translation of *Dēnkard* III. He completely revised de Menasce’s translation, which is gratefully acknowledged in the



introduction of the book (pub. 1973). He twice went to Paris in the summer time of 1989 and 1990 to work with Philippe Gignoux on preparing the edition of *Wizīdagihā ī Zādspram*, which was published in 1993 as *Anthologie de Zādspram* and was awarded the prize of the international book of the year in 1996 by the Iranian government. Tafazzoli also received in 1994 the Ghirshman Prize from the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, Paris, in recognition of his scholarly works on Middle Persian, especially his *Zādspram* book.

Tafazzoli was a member of a number of scholarly societies, including Société Asiatique, Paris; Corpus Inscriptonum Iranicarum, London; International Committee of Acta Iranica, Liège; Scientific Council of the Great Islamic Encyclopaedia; and Consulting Editor to the *Encyclopaedia Iranica* as well as a frequent contributor to it. He was several times invited by prestigious universities all over the world to deliver a speech or to teach as a visiting professor, including Sorbonne University in Paris, where he taught at the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes in spring 1992 on the topic “The warlike function and the vocabulary of weapons in the Pahlavi literature” (*Annuaire* 100, pp. 181-82). In the Summer of the same year, he was in China delivering lectures at the invitation of the University of Beijing. He also gave a lecture at Columbia University on “Entertainers in Sasanian Society” during the spring of 1996, when he had come to the United States at the invitation of Harvard University to teach there as a visiting professor. In the same year he was awarded an honorary doctorate degree by St. Petersburg University. In 1975, he spent his sabbatical leave in Germany, perfecting his linguistic skill in the German language and becoming acquainted with the German scholars. He spent the summers of 1984 and 1985 in Copenhagen on the invitation of Professor [Jes P. Asmussen](#) and was in Japan during the fall of 1988 on the invitation of Tokyo University. His last teaching activity outside Iran was in spring 1996 at Harvard University as a guest visiting professor.

Tafazzoli’s scholarly activities and output were appreciated several times by various institutions in the form of official statements of appreciation and awards, two of which have been mentioned above (from the French Academy and from the Islamic Republic of Iran). Among others, mention must be made of the selection as the book of the year his translation of Arthur Christensen’s *Le premier homme et le premier roi* (1990) and later his *Tāriḳ-e adabiyāt-e Irān-e piš az Eslām*, which was published posthumously in 1997 by his colleague Žāla Āmuzgār.



Tafazzoli was a very gentle and friendly man respectfully loved by his students and colleagues. He was passionately devoted to teaching and conducting research on the cultural history of pre-Islamic Iran. Unlike many of his countrymen, he remained in Iran after the Revolution of 1978-79 and continued dedicating all his time and energy to teaching and research. His tragic, untimely death happened on 15 January 1997, when he was returning home. Uncertain whether his death was a homicide, authorities ruled it as a result of a hit-and-run accident, but it was not investigated. Two memorial volumes (2000, 2004) were published in his honor in Tehran and Costa Mesa, California. He was survived by his wife and two children.

Works. Tafazzoli's most important works deal with lexicography and the edition of Pahlavi texts. He was especially interested in Iranian mythology, most of which, he noted regretfully, is lost. He wrote a large number of articles on Iranian philology and, in collaboration with Žāla Āmuzgār, works on history and a manual of the Pahlavi language. His doctoral dissertation on *Dēnkard IX*, was never published. He left nearly a dozen books, more than a hundred articles, and many book reviews (Āmuzgār, pp. 18-25). In 1969, he published in Persian glossary (*Vāža-nāma*) of the Pahlavi treatise *Mēnōg i xrad*, and six years later published his Persian translation of the text. He also translated into Persian Arthur Christensen's book *Le premier homme et le premier roi*, and *Persian Mythology* by John Hinnells. In the footsteps of Marijan Molé, who gathered Pahlavi texts on *La légende de Zoroastre* (Paris, 1967), Tafazzoli, in collaboration with Žāla Amuzgār, translated passages from *Dēnkard VII*, and IX. They were published in a book titled *Oštura-ye zendagi-e Zardošt*, which also includes chapters 5–25 of the *Wizīdagīhā ī Zādspram*, chapter 47 of *Pahlavi Rivāyat*, the *Wizārkard ī dēnī*, the *Zardušt-nāma*, and a selection from Šahrastāni's *al-Melal wa'l-neḥal*. Philological notes accompanying these translations make them an improvement over those published before.

Especially useful to students and scholars is the *Zabān-e Pahlavi* (with Āmuzgār), an excellent pedagogical tool that did not previously exist in Persian. After an introduction on the Middle Iranian languages, epigraphic Middle Persian, Book Pahlavi sources and scripts, there is a detailed discussion of the grammar followed by a selection of texts and a complete glossary. This book and the *Anthologie de Zādspram* can be considered Tafazzoli's most significant contributions to Iranian studies. The *Anthologie de Zādspram*, which was prepared in close collaboration with Philippe Gignoux, is the first



modern translation into French of this extensive treatise. Besides cooperating closely on the translation and interpretation of the text, he also copied by hand the entire text and its critical apparatus. The significance of Tafazžoli's overall collaboration in the preparation of this book has been acknowledged by Philippe Gignoux in the introduction (p. 7): "This work would not have achieved the degree of perfection that I hope can be recognized in it without the great competence of Tafazžoli, both in Iranian philology and in classical Persian culture."

The following two posthumous works reflect Tafazžoli's indefatigable pursuit of scholarly endeavor: *Tāriḵ-e adabiyāt-e Irān-e piš az Eslām*, and the translation of *Dēnkard V*. The former begins in the distant past, evoking Median, Old Persian, and Avestan culture, then the Arsacid period (Parthian inscriptions) and Sasanian (rock and funerary inscriptions: papyri, parchments, ceramics, silverwork, coins, seals). Pahlavi literature occupies the largest space in this work (pp. 111–331): translations from Avestan, Zand, all the great Pahlavi texts, *andarz*, including those of the Islamic period (pp. 202 ff.) and *rivāyats*; texts translated from Pahlavi to Arabic; Pahlavi manuscripts to which Tafazžoli added several pages on Manichean literature, Sogdian, Saka, K̄vārezmian, and Bactrian (pp. 331–69). A bibliography and table of contents (pp. 369–452) complete this book, which comprises the fullest picture of pre-Islamic Middle Persian literature in Persian. The translation of *Dēnkard V* was prepared for publication by Žāla Āmuzgār with the assistance of Philippe Gignoux. This is the first successful translation of this very difficult text with a complete glossary (pp. 127–71) into a European language. The old translations of Edward W. West in the series Sacred Books of the East are no longer useable.

Tafazžoli's numerous articles were published in various Iranian and Western journals, Festschrifts, and the *Proceedings* of international congresses. In the field of lexicography, he touched on all ancient Iranian languages: Old Persian (1981); Sogdian (1974, 1997); Pāzand (1996); on Pahlavi he wrote several series of articles: "Notes pehlevies I-II" (*JA*, 1970, 1972); "Pahlavica I-III" (1971, 1974, 1990), and studies of individual unidentified words: "Ābsālān" (1966), "Ṭin al-mak̄tym" (1975), Bārbad (1988), "An Unrecognized Sasanian Title" (1990), "Harzbed" (1994), "Kawi Waēpā" (1995). He also wrote on words in New Persian and their Middle Persian or Pahlavi origin: "Rāzījar" (1966), "Some Middle Persian Quotations" (1974), "Some Classical Persian Words" (1985), and two articles on some technical vocabulary (1974, 1993). He also published



studies of *andarz* texts (1972, 1992) and articles on mythology and dialectology. He regularly contributed to the Academy's new journal, *Nāma-ye Farhangestān*, of which he was on the editorial board during the last years of his life. Tafazzoli had a lively interest in Sassanian epigraphy and published his studies of funerary inscriptions: Kāzerun (1991, 1994), "Two Funerary Inscriptions from Fars" (1994–95). He also wrote a good number of entries for the *Encyclopedia Iranica* and the *Dā'rat al-ma'āref-e bozorg-e eslāmi*.

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