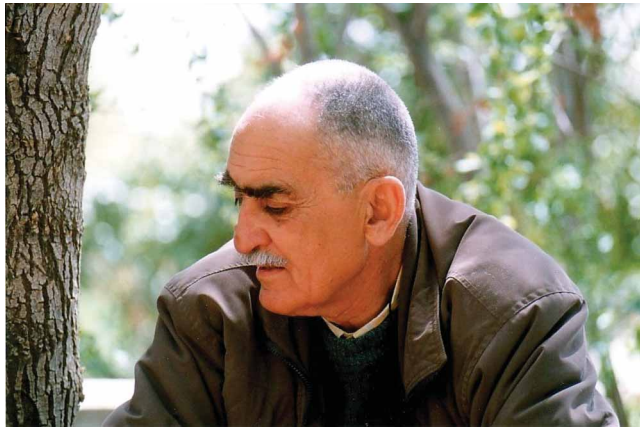


Ehsan Yarshater

Obituary

Iraj Afshar (1925–2011)



The vacuum that has been left in Iranian Studies by the passing of Iraj Afshar has no equivalent in living memory. When one reviews what he accomplished during a mere lifetime, one cannot help being 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 periodical that paid special attention to Persian language. He left an endowment named by Iraj Afshar as Dr Mahmoud Afshar Yazdi's Endowment (*Mowqūfāt-e Dr Mahmoud Afshar Yazdi*) for the promotion of Persian language and publication of Persian works of merit.

With the assistance of some of his scholarly colleagues, Iraj Afshar carried out 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 to give lectures and receive prizes. Among these scholars were Nazir Ahmad, Professor of Persian Studies at Aligarh Muslim University, Richard N. Frye, Professor of Iranian and Central Asian 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 five volumes are well-known.

Iraj Afshar was born in Tehran on 8 October 1925. After completing Firouz-Bahram high school in Tehran, Iraj Afshar entered the Law School of the University of Tehran, from which he graduated in 1949 (Judicial Branch). Subsequently he 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 recommended.

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 time he embarked on an important undertaking by founding, together with Mohammad Taqi Daneshpazhuh, Abbas Zaryab Kho'i, Manouchehr Sotoudeh and Mostafa Moqarrabi, *Farhang-e Irānzamin*, a periodical that focused on historical and literary research, introducing unpublished Persian manuscripts and publishing medieval and pre-modern Persian treaties and short books, edited either by Afshar himself or another scholar. This valuable publication continued as long as Afshar lived. Altogether 30 issues were published.

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

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

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) on my behalf. By this time Afshar was a noted Persian scholar with vast experience in publishing and in the administration of cultural organizations.

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, with the assistance of Iraj Afshar, Abdol-Hossein Zarrinkub and Mostafa Moqarrabi, I founded 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 Persia in association with the above named and Professor Mehri Ahi, Professor Hafez Farmanfarman and two of my colleagues from BTNK, namely Abdollah Sayyar, an expert in printing, and Esma'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 and the administrator 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 scholarly interests, focusing on topics that he was particularly involved in, such as Persian language, Persian manuscripts, Qajar Iran, historical research, besides, of course, book reviews.

Afshar also organized on behalf of The Book Society the first annual exhibition of Persian printed books in 1957, 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 a view to encouraging and facilitating good reading and doing away with the cumbersome procedures that surrounded the borrowing of books from public libraries.¹ Afshar also produced the first annual bibliography of Persian printed 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.

In 1964 he was appointed the director of the University of Tehran Press, a position that had been held for several years by Dr Parviz Khanlari.

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 strenuous efforts to collect photocopies of important Persian manuscripts found in collections abroad, particularly in Turkey and the Sub-Continent.

One of Afshar's great innovative undertakings was his publication of *Index Iranicus* or the listing with relevant details of all the articles concerning Iranian Studies published in Persian. The first volume was published in 1959 and other volumes followed. Altogether seven volumes had been published by the time of Afshar's passing. The volumes have been great tools for researching the progress of Persian Studies in Iran.

In 1979 *Rāhnamā-ye Ketāb* ceased publication, but Afshar immediately revived *Āyandeh*, the journal that his father had founded, and began to publish it with the same style and contents as *Rāhnamā-ye Ketāb*. The revived *Āyandeh* continued until 1993 when Afshar's involvement in many other research and publication projects and also the difficulties of obtaining paper for the journal caused him to terminate *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 its successor, *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

¹For other actions of The Book Society that were generally administered by Afshar, such as selection of the best book in each year in several fields, see I. Afshar, "ANJOMAN-E KETAB," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, Vol. II: 88–86.

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 “Tidbits” in a separate volume. I hope this plan will be carried out.

Afshar and Mohammad-Taqi Daneshpazhuh were the foremost experts on Persian manuscripts. When the latter passed away Afshar was left as 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 to entrust such materials to him and this enabled Afshar to publish important documents and 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 too numerous to cite in full even the most important of them, and yet one cannot refrain from mentioning *Yaddāshthā-ye Qazvini* (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* (A Stormy Life, an autobiography by Taqizadeh, 1989, 2nd edition with additional notes and appendices, 1992). Fortunately his capable and book-loving sons, Babak, Bahram, Kooshar and Arash, have compiled 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 a lifetime of collaboration with him I never saw him lose his temper. He was forever encouraging younger scholars and giving them a helping hand, if they needed it.

He was particularly attached to his hometown, the city of Yazd and the Yazd province, and he published a number of manuscripts about Yazd, and wrote some himself, including *Yadgārhā-ye Yazd*, about Yazd monuments, in three volumes (1968–75), and *Yazd-nāmeḥ* (Yazd Book, 1992), beside publishing several pre-modern texts such as *Jāme’-e Mofidi* by Mohammad Mofid Mostowfi about Yazd (1961) and *Eskandar-nāmeḥ* (1964).

Two Festschriften in appreciation of his achievements were published in 1998: one entitled *Iran and Iranian Studies: Essays in Honor of Iraj Afshar*, edited by Kambiz Eslami (Princeton, 1998) and the other *Arj-nāme-ye Iraj* in two volumes of 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 in Iran and abroad. He covered the majority of Persian villages and settlements on foot,

often with his friend, Manouchehr Sotoudeh, and sometimes with others such as Zaryab Kho'i, Shafi'i-Kadkani and even Ebrahim Pourdavoud, always making notes of historically interesting remains from *kabutarkhāns* to old cisterns and tombstones with inscriptions.

Afshar was well connected with most centers of Iranian Studies in Europe and in the United States. He catalogued Persian manuscripts of the 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 and societies he founded or helped found and the conferences he organized were too numerous to list. The Iranology Conferences (*Kongere-ye Iranshenasi*) in Iran, which met in different cities, owed its existence and its continuation to him. His respect for his father resulted, among others, in a 12-volume Memorial Volume *Nāmvāre-ye Dr. Mahmoud Afshar*.

No matter how many times one thinks that one has covered Afshar's major achievements one is reminded of yet another great accomplishment. Some of his important achievements are bound to be left unmentioned.

He was always in demand and he hardly ever refused to offer assistance and guidance. 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 (*Nāme-hā-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. 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 scholars and students.

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