

## In Memoriam



EHSAN YARSHATER  
(1920–2018)

The passing of Ehsan Yarshater, the Hagop Kevorkian Professor Emeritus of Iranian Studies at Columbia University, on 2 September 2018 in Fresno, California, was a tremendous loss not just for Iranian studies but for the scholarly world.

Yarshater was born in Hamadan, Iran, on 3 April 1920. Orphaned at a young age, he moved to Tehran to live with a maternal uncle. He resumed his education in 1934 after obtaining a scholarship to attend the newly opened Danesh-sara-ye Moqaddamati high school, graduating at the top of his class. He went on to attend the Teachers Training College (Danesh-sara-ye ‘ali), later part of the Faculty of Letters at the University of

Tehran, and the Faculty of Law at the University of Tehran. He received a D.Litt. degree in 1947 with a dissertation on Timurid poetry (published in 1955). Yarshater received a fellowship from the British Council in 1948 to study educational methods, but after arriving in London he became a student of Iranian philology with Walter Bruno Henning at the School of Oriental and African Studies.

Upon his return to Iran in 1953 to conduct research for his dissertation on southern Tati dialects, which conclusively demonstrated their connections to Median, he taught ancient Iranian languages at the University of Tehran and founded or helped found the Institute for the Translation and Publication of Books

(Bongah-e Tarjoma va Nashr-e Ketab), the Book Society (Anjoman-e Ketab), and the journal *Rahnema-ye Ketab*. With the recommendation and support of Henning, Yarshater received a visiting position at Columbia University in 1958, and, in 1961, was appointed to the new Kevorkian chair in Iranian studies there, which he held until his retirement in 1999. In addition to chairing the Middle East Studies department for several years, Yarshater also revived the Center for Iranian Studies at Columbia in 1968 and served as its director until 2016. In recognition of his many years of contributions to academic life at Columbia, the center was endowed and renamed the Ehsan Yarshater Center for Iranian Studies in August 2018.

Yarshater's scholarly interests were every bit as diverse and accomplished as his life story would suggest. His own books and articles included studies not only on linguistics, dialectology, and many periods of Persian literature but philosophy, painting, history, religion, ethnology, music, and other topics. Among them are many works of significance for the membership of Middle East Medievalists, notably his edition of volume III of the *Cambridge History of Iran* (including his own important entries on Mazdakism, the "Iranian World View," and "Iranian National History") and thought-provoking and seminal articles such as "Theme of Wine-Drinking and the Concept of the Beloved in Early Persian Poetry," "Textual Aspects of the *Andarznama*," "Were the Sasanians Heirs to the Achaemenids?," and "The Persian Presence in the Islamic World."

Yarshater's contributions, however, go well beyond his own monographs. He continued the love of books and talent

for publication he had shown in Iran while at Columbia, even establishing for a while his own press (Bibliotheca Persica). Under his direction, the Columbia Center sponsored six series of publications, producing over a hundred titles including translations of Persian classics, scholarly monographs in Iranian studies, editions of texts (including a new edition of the *Shah-nama*), and illustrated works on Persian art and architecture as well as publication of lecture series he had helped found at SOAS, Harvard, UCLA, and the Collège de France. Yarshater tirelessly promoted the work of other scholars by organizing conferences and symposia, compiling editing volumes, and sponsoring monographs. Moreover, he was responsible for creating and raising funds for two private foundations dedicated to the promotion of Iranian studies and culture, the Persian Heritage Foundation and the Encyclopaedia Iranica Foundation, that have the means to carry on his work indefinitely. There are few scholars in the field who are not in his debt directly or indirectly for help with publication, letters of recommendation, financial support for projects, and the like.

Finally, one must make a special acknowledgement of what Mary Boyce called Yarshater's "genius in envisaging ends and securing means," as it applies to conceiving, organizing, and producing major collaborative scholarly projects. Yarshater was not only the principal investigator and general editor for the longest continually funded NEH project, but also the only scholar to supervise three major NEH projects simultaneously, all of them of particular interest for members of MEM: the forty volume Tabari translation (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1985–2007); the three volume translation of Bayhaqi's

*History* (ILEX/Harvard University Press, 2011), and the *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (ongoing, London: I.B. Tauris, 2008- ). The *Encyclopaedia Iranica* remains unfinished,

as does another major project, *The History of Persian Literature* series, but thanks to Yarshater's foresight and planning, they can continue to progress.

— Elton L. Daniel  
*University of Hawaii*  
(edaniel@hawaii.edu)