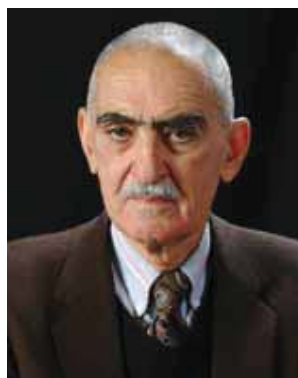


History of Medicine in Iran

In Memory of Iraj Afshar (1925 – 2011), A Renowned Scholar of Iranian Studies

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“He, who lived with love, never dies.”
Hafez, the Iranian poet (ca. 1315 – 1390).



Iraj Afshar (1925 – 2011)

Abstract

On March 9th, 2011, the eminent scholar of Iranian studies, historian, bibliographer, Persian manuscript expert, journalist, biographer and writer, Iraj Afshar passed away at the age of 85 in Tehran. His demise was a great loss to Iranian culture. He edited or wrote around 300 books in various fields of Iranian studies, including the history of medicine in Iran and published more than 2000 papers in local and international journals. The late Afshar was considered as a world-class Iranologist who promoted Persian culture for over five decades and had profitable mutual worldwide connection with famed scholars in the field of Iranian studies and pertinent international societies. Herein is a brief look at his life and career, with special focus on his works in the field of the history of medicine in Iran.

Keywords: history of medicine, Iran, Iranian studies

Introduction

Iraj Afshar was the son of Mahmoud Afshar (b. Yazd, 1893 – d. Tehran, 1983), who obtained his doctorate in political and social sciences from Lozan (Lausanne) University, Switzerland in 1919 and returned home in 1921. Dr. Mahmoud Afshar was an influential Iranian intellectual, writer and poet who was deeply interested in Iranian literature and culture, and published several books. In 1925, he founded a cultural, literary and social journal named *Ayandeh* (Future). In the same year, Dr. Mahmoud Afshar established the *Madreseh-ye Tejarat* (School of Business) and became its director. Later, he worked at the Ministries of Justice and Culture. In 1958, he donated the major portion of his personal fortune for cultural and Persian literature promotion through the publication of invaluable literary and historical books, and awards for outstanding researchers. He was the founder of a cultural organization in Tehran known as the Dr. Mahmoud Afshar Foundation.¹

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From the beginning of its foundation in 1958 until 2011, the Dr. Mahmoud Afshar Foundation published around 150 books in the field of Iranian literature and history, and during the past 19 years has given an annual award to an eminent scholar in the field of Iranian studies. Accordingly, nineteen Iranology scholars from Iran and several countries, including Tajikistan, Afghanistan, India, Egypt, Pakistan, China, Japan, France, England, USA, Holland, and Austria have received this annual award from the Dr. Mahmoud Afshar Foundation.²

Iraj Afshar: life and career

Iraj Afshar was born in Tehran on October 8th, 1925. He attended Shāpour and Firouz Bahrām High Schools between 1933 and 1945. In 1945, he married Miss Shayesteh Afsharieh. He enrolled at the University of Tehran and began his academic studies at the Faculty of Law from which he graduated in 1949. His thesis title was “Minorities in Iran”. Between 1956 and 1957, he attended the UNESCO Educational and Practical Library Science Training course in Europe.³ The vast academic and scientific activities of Iraj Afshar can be categorized as follows:

1. Teaching activities

Initially he was employed by the Ministry of Culture and Education (Vezerat-e Farhang va Maaref) in 1950 as an educator at Sharif and Gharib High Schools in Tehran. Eight years later (1958–1969), he became the Educator of Library Science at Dāneshsarāy-e Alee (Higher Education Training Center) affiliated with the University of Tehran. From 1965 to 1973, he taught history at the Social Sciences Faculty (Dāneshkadeh-y-e Olum Ejtemāee) of the University of Tehran. In due course, between 1969 and 1979, he became an Associate Professor and later full Professor of History at the Faculty of Literature and Human Sciences of the University of Tehran. He also taught at Bern University in Switzerland in 1989.³

2. Journalistic efforts

The late I. Afshar started his journalistic career in 1944 as Manager of Ayandeh, the cultural and literary journal founded by his father. Then, he continued the following journalistic efforts³⁻⁵:

- Between 1946 and 1955, he collaborated with Jahān-e Now Journal (New World Journal where the Editor-in-Chief was Mr. Hossein Hejazi). At the same time, from 1952 to 1953, he was Editor-in-Chief of Mehr Journal.
- In 1952, he founded the Farhang-e Irānzamin Journal (Culture of Iran) in association with Mohammad-Taghi Danesh-Pajouh, Manouchehr Sotoudeh, Mostafa Mogharrabi, and Abbas Zaryab Khoyee. Afshar was the Managing Editor of this journal.
- From 1954 to 1956, he was the Editor-in-Chief of an Iranology journal named Sokhan, which was founded by Parviz Natel-Khanlari, a Professor of Literature at Tehran University.
- Between 1955 and 1961, he was the Director of Ketābhāy-e Māh (Books of the Month) Journal, published by the Society of Publishers with cooperation of the former Franklin Publishing Corporation.
- From 1958 to 1979, he was the Managing Editor of Rāhnamāy-e Ketāb Journal (Bibliography Guide Journal) established by Ehsan Yarshater, a former Professor of Literature at Tehran University.
- Afshar was the founder of Nashriyeh-y-e Noskhehāy-e Khatti (Journal of Persian Manuscripts), which was published in collaboration with Mohammad-Taqi Danesh-Pajouh from 1961 to 1979.
- Between 1969 and 1972, he was the Director of Iranshenāsi Journal (Iranology Journal), an official publication of the Faculty of Literature and Human Sciences of the University of Tehran.
- From 1966 to 1979, he founded Ketābdāri (Library Science) Journal, a publication of the University of Tehran Central Library. Afshar was on the advisory council for the Iranian Studies Journal.

3. Working as a librarian

He worked as a librarian in several academic and scientific centers, including:

- Library of Law Faculty at the University of Tehran from 1951 to 1960.
- Director of the Library of Dāneshsarāy-e Alee between 1961 and 1962.
- Afshar was one of the founders of the National Library of Iran. In 1962 he was appointed as its Director when he established the Departments of Iranian Studies and Bibliography of Iran, and began indexing the library's manuscripts with the aid of Abdollah Anwar, an expert on Persian manuscripts.
- Director of the Central Library and Document Center of the University of Tehran from 1965 to 1979.

• In 1969, he was appointed Director of the National Book Center, which was related to the UNESCO National Commission.

• He cataloged Persian manuscripts at the Austrian National Library in Vienna in 1998.

• At Harvard University, he was the chief bibliographer of Persian books.³

4. His books and papers

Aside from teaching, his journalistic efforts, and working as a librarian in several academic centers, he was a prolific writer who wrote and edited around 300 books and over 2000 papers. These included 58 papers in English, French, and German on Iranian manuscripts, culture, history, and literature in prestigious international journals devoted to Iranian studies.⁵ From 1984 onwards, he began to publish Nāmavāreh-y-e Dr. Mahmoud Afshar, which continued with the same title for 11 volumes, after which its title was changed to Pajouhesh-hāye Irāni (Persian Researches). He was the author of Fehrst-e Maqalat-e Farsi (Index Iranicus), which contained details of all published Persian papers regarding Iranian studies, of which seven volumes were published before his death.³ He was an active writer up to the last months of his productive life. Afshar was an active man and over a period of 50 years, he traveled to different parts of the country to identify undiscovered data related to Iranian history and culture, and subsequently wrote his observations and memories. His detailed descriptions are both positive and critical. His travel books and papers were very informative and appreciated by readers. In addition to his professional and educational endeavors, between 1956 and 1963, he was the Acting Managing Director of Bongāh-e Tarjomeh va Nasher-e Ketāb (Institute for Translation and Publishing of Books) and the co-founder of Bāshgāh-e Ketāb (Book Club) later named Anjoman-e Ketāb (Book Society) in which he was its director from 1958 to 1979.³

5. Iranian studies

Professor Afshar played a significant role in the development of the field of Iranian studies during the second half of the 20th century. He attended many international meetings on Iranian studies and had close contact and mutual collaboration with Iranologists throughout the world. From 1979, he was one of the most authoritative members of the European Society of Iranian Studies (Societas Iranologica Europaea).⁶ From 1989 onwards, he was an Honorary Member of the Institute of Central and West Asian Studies in Karachi, Pakistan. In 1997, he became an Honorary Member of the Society of Iranian Studies in the USA. In 2001, he joined the Council of Guardians of the Eurasian Studies Journal in Italy. Since 1993, he was the consulting editor of the well-known Encyclopedia Iranica at Columbia University. He attended many international meetings on Iranian studies and organized several similar scientific gatherings at Tehran, Tabriz, Mashhad, and other Iranian universities with the collaboration of Iranian and international scholars (Figure 1).³ Professor Minobu Honda, a Japanese scholar of Iranian Studies and a graduate of Cambridge University in 1957¹ founded Japanese historical studies on Iran and in 1975 when appointed as Professor at the Department of West Asian History at Kyoto University, he invited Afshar to teach.⁷ In 2006, I. Afshar received the first Lifetime Achievement Award by the International Society of Iranian Studies as the most outstanding scholar in the field of Iranian studies from Iran.



Figure 1. Iraj Afshar delivering a lecture at the First Congress of Iranology, Tehran University, 1971.⁵



Figure 2. Professor Minobu Honda (left). The Late Iraj Afshar (right).⁵

His personal library

He had a unique personal library consisting of valuable published Persian or foreign books in various fields of Iranian studies in addition to rare Persian manuscripts, which he collected over 50 years. In 1999, he entrusted his 35000 books and costly collections of numerous letters of outstanding contemporary scholars, which included foreign Iranologists, literary, and cultural figures in addition to around 10000 photos, including portraits of famous people, Iran's historical sites and landscapes of Iran to the Great Islamic Encyclopedia Centre in Tehran. He dedicated them to all researchers and scholars of Iranian studies.⁸

His works on the history of medicine in Iran

Professor Afshar wrote a number of papers on the history of medicine in Iran. Additionally he edited and published several works in this field, which can be categorized as:

a. History of medicine in Iran in previous centuries

• *Hedayat al-Motaallemin fi-Tebb* (the Students' Guide in Medicine) is the oldest known medical treatise in Persian language written by Abubakr Rabi-ibn Ahmad Akhawayni Bukhari around 373AH/983-4 CE. In 2008, a facsimile edition of the Bodleian manuscript was published in Tehran, which was edited by I. Afshar, M. Omidsalar, and N. Mottalebi-Kashani. This work contained a comprehensive codicological commentary by I. Afshar as well as an informative preface written by Dr. Reza Bonabi (Figures 3 and 4).^{9,10}



Figure 3. The first (right picture) and last page (left picture) of the Bodleian Library's manuscript of *Hedayat al-Motaallemin*, which was written in Persian in 478 AH/ 1085 CE.⁹



Figure 4. Facsimile edition of the Bodleian Library's manuscript of *Hedayat al-Motaallemin* published in Tehran in 2008, edited by I. Afshar, M. Omidsalar, and N. Mottalebi-Kashani.⁹

• The Persian medical text, *Zakhireh-ye Kharazmshahi* (The Treasure of Khvarazm Shah) written by the great Iranian physician, Ismail Jorjani (1040 – 1136 CE) and edited by the eminent Persian manuscript expert, Mohammad Taghi Danesh Pajouh (1911 – 1996) and Iraj Afshar was published between 1955 and 1959 in two volumes, and republished in 2005. The manuscript was written by Abu-Mohammad ibn-Mohammad ibn-Benyamam Hamadani and dated the first half of 7 AH/13th CE (Figure 5).¹¹

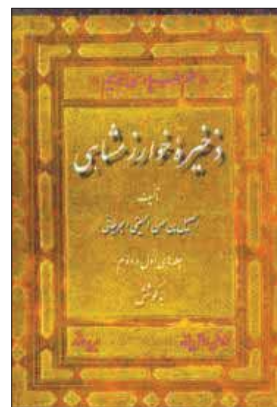


Figure 5. *Zakhireh-ye Kharazmshahi* (The Treasure of Khvarazm Shah), edited by M. T. Danesh Pajouh and I. Afshar, and republished in 2005.

• Saydaneh, a book on pharmacy and matria medica written in Arabic by Abū-Rayhān Mohammad Bīrūnī (973 – 1048 CE), a Persian scholar of the 11th century AD. The Persian translated manuscript, edited by Dr. Manouchehr-e Sotoudeh and I. Afshar was published in 1990 and republished in 2008 in two volumes by Shahid Beheshti University in Tehran (Figure 6). The edited manuscript dated from the first half of the 8th century AH/14th AD and was translated into Persian by Abu-baker Ali ibn-Osman-e Kasani (Figure 6).¹²

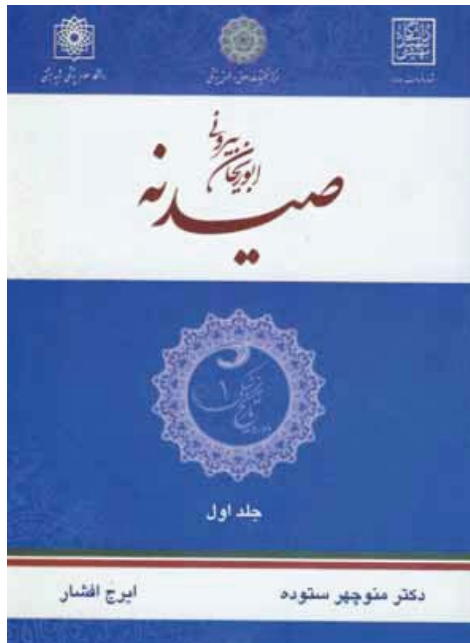


Figure 6. Saydaneh in Arabic written by Bīrūnī. The Persian translated manuscript was edited by Dr. Manouchehr Sotoudeh and I. Afshar. The first edition of Saydaneh was published in Tehran in 1980 and it was republished by Shahid Beheshti University in 2008.¹¹

• Hobaysh Tiflisi was a Persian scholar and physician of 6th century AH/12th AD who wrote 27 books including several Arabic and Persian treatises in medicine.¹³ He was born in Tiflis (in present Georgia) and spent most of his life in Konya (in Turkey).¹⁴ The late Afshar wrote his biography and reviewed his works, which included his medical treatises. He also edited and published one of his Persian non-medical works, entitled Bayan-e Senaat (Profession's Description), which was published in 1957.

• Kitab al-Abniy an Haqayiq al-Adwiya (Book on the Basics of Remedies) written by Abu Mansur Muwaffaq bin Ali al-Hirawi dealt with the properties of drugs (matria medica) and was arranged alphabetically in 29 chapters. In 2009, a facsimile version of the original manuscript, which dates back to the 5th century AH/11th AD (available at the Austrian National Library in Vienna) was published in Tehran. The book contains Persian and English introductions. The Persian introduction was written in two parts, of which the first part was written by I. Afshar. He wrote that Kitab al-Abniy an Haqayiq al-Adwiya was the oldest known dated Persian text important in the history of medicine in Iran, in the field of pharmacology.¹⁵

b. History of contemporary medicine in Iran

The late Afshar wrote the biographies of several Iranian physicians in various journals, including Ayandeh. His book

Nadereh-e Karan was published in 2002 (Figure 7) and contains biographies of 609 famed contemporary Iranian figures and non-Iranian scholars in the field of Iranian Studies from 1925 to 2001. The book contains biographies of several Iranian physicians from recent decades, particularly the Faculty of Medicine at Tehran University, such as Drs. Mohammad Hossein Loghman Adham, Ghasem Ghani, Mehdi Malekzadeh, Yousef Mir, Nosratolla Bastan, and Mohammad Hossein Adib.¹

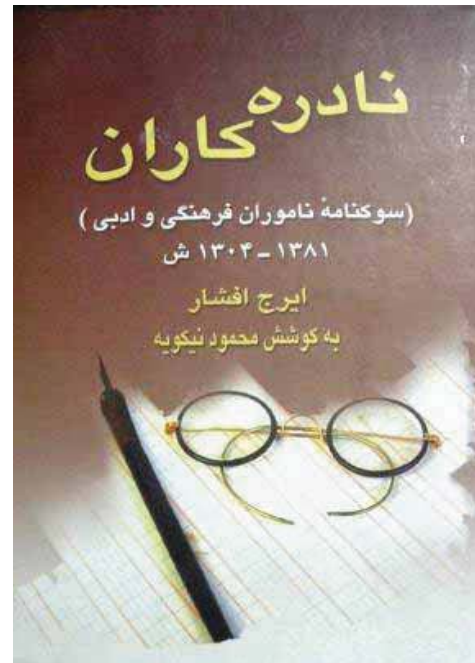


Figure 7. The front cover of the book Nadereh-e Karan written by I. Afshar which contains the biographies of 609 famed contemporary Iranian figures, including several contemporary Iranian physicians (2002).

Iraj Afshar was a well-recognized scholar who did not survive to receive his honorary doctorate in history from the University of Edinburgh in September 2011.¹⁶ On March 9th, 2011, after nearly a half century of hard work and a fruitful life, he passed away in Tehran due to leukemia, however, he is survived by his great works on Iranian studies and his love for Iran. His memory will always be alive for all Iranian researchers. Afshar was an efficient and experienced educator who believed in being generous and kind. He was engaged in a lifelong effort to promote culture and knowledge in his homeland. On his death, Ehsan Yarshater, PhD of Persian literature at Columbia University wrote: "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 deeply surprised at the vastness and the variety of the services that he rendered to Iranian studies."¹⁷ Therefore, he is a precious model to serve as an example for younger generations.

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Lar National Park, around 70 Km far from Tehran, Iran (Photo by: M. H. Azizi MD)