Professor Ehsan Yarshater*

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Professor Ehsan Yarshater is an outstanding figure in Iranian studies, unique in his range of interests and achievements, and remarkable for the way in which he has joined profound devotion to Iran with scholarly objectivity, seeking always a balanced judgment and wide perspectives; a deeply cultivated scholar with a phenomenal capacity for work, who has sought tirelessly both to acquire knowledge and to disseminate it for the benefit of others.

He was born on April 3, 1920 in Hamadan of a family which originated in Kashan. His father, a businessman, had a bent for learning, read widely and taught himself Arabic and Esperanto. His mother, a lady of great refinement, had a deep love of nature and the fine arts. She herself possessed a beautiful singing voice, and played the *ney*; and she inspired in her son a love of music and literature, and impressed on him also the need to study hard and become a useful member of society. But she died young, when he was only eleven, and his father a year later—a heavy double sorrow. He went then to live in Tehran with his maternal uncle, a well-known philanthropist whose benefactions included the building and endowing of the Mithaqiyya Hospital. Ehsan Yarshater’s schooling had been interrupted; but in

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E.J. BRILL
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Professor Ehsan Yarshater
1934 he won a scholarship to the newly opened Normal School (Daneshsara-ye Moqaddamati). There the teacher of Persian literature, Mohammad ‘Ali Ameri, made a deep impression on him, and by encouraging him to memorize a great number of passages of excellent Persian poetry and prose, helped him to form his own pure and elegant style. From there a second scholarship took him to the Teachers’ College, Tehran University, where he studied Persian language and literature under such outstanding scholars as Ebrahim Pour-Davud, Mohammad Taqi Bahar, Ahmad Bahmanyar, Badi‘ al-Zaman Foruzanfar, Sayyid Kazem Assar and Abbas Eqbal Ashtiyani. Following their courses gave him a deep knowledge of Iran’s literature and history, although looking back he came to regret the lack of teaching in other languages and literatures. This gap he worked hard to fill for himself in later years.

In 1941 he obtained the degree of B.A. (Licence-es-Lettres), and began teaching at the ‘Elmiyya School in Tehran; and two years later he was appointed associate director of the Normal School there. While holding these posts he studied law, obtaining a second B.A. in that subject in 1944. He then proceeded with his literary studies under the supervision of ‘Ali Asghar Hekmat, and in 1947 was awarded a D. Litt. with distinction for a dissertation on “Persian poetry in the second half of the ninth century.” (This was published, with some revisions, in 1955.)¹ He was then appointed Assistant Professor of Persian in the Faculty of Theology; but was awarded in the same year a fellowship by the British Council to study educational methods in England. When in London he called on W.B. Henning, and, swiftly appreciating the depth of his learning, resolved to abandon other plans and study pre-Islamic Iranian languages and culture with him. His interest in this field had already been awakened by Pour-Davud; but at that time the teaching available in it in Tehran was at an elementary level. He enrolled accordingly for one of the courses created by Henning at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London University, in Old and Middle Iranian; and years of exacting study followed, during which he had to add English and German to his knowledge of French, and to absorb analytic and critical methods of handling texts. In addition, he set himself, with energy and discernment, to learn all that he could of Western art and architecture, painting and music, using part of the vacations to travel in other European countries for this purpose.

Henning himself was deeply interested at this time in the dialects of north-western Iran. In 1950 he had been able to make brief notes on one of them, to the southwest of Qazvin, and this, he thought, might prove to be a link in a long chain of related dialects, all in imminent danger of dying out.\textsuperscript{2} The evidence was too scanty, however, for this to be then more than a well-reasoned piece of deduction. With Henning’s encouragement, Ehsan Yarshater determined to undertake the search for such dialects, and this developed into his scholarly lifework. With it he was to make a major contribution to Iranian linguistic studies, recording and analysing dialect after dialect of what he came to term the Tati-Taleshi groups, and gaining a rich store of knowledge that fully substantiated Henning’s brilliant but tentative surmise. His work was much appreciated by Henning himself, who over the years provided Ehsan Yarshater with “enriching advice, friendship and support.”\textsuperscript{3}

In 1953 Ehsan Yarshater, having obtained the degree of M.A. by examination, returned to Iran to pursue this research; but there was much else there to claim his attention. He was at once appointed lecturer in ancient Iranian languages in the Faculty of Letters at Tehran University, and assistant to Pour-Davud. Some excellent students attended his classes, and he is gratefully remembered by them, as by numerous generations of their successors, for the clarity and detail of his teaching, his patience and evenness of temper, and his concern for their progress. (Thus once, when a strike closed the university, he continued quietly giving his courses at his own home rather than let their work be interrupted.) His standards were exacting; and conscious, with his own phenomenal memory, of the advantages of storing knowledge in the mind, he required his students to combine analytical work with some learning by heart, including passages from old Persian inscriptions.

Ehsan Yarshater found time nevertheless to embark on the first of his many field trips to study dialects; and these were to be the most enjoyable of his many scholarly undertakings, combining as they did the intellectual pleasure of discovery with the keen delight of travel to remote parts of Iran and the exploration of village life and traditions. Such travel involved, however, a considerable measure of physical hardship and hours of exacting work, during which his informants were apt to flag long before he wished to release them. In 1956 the Société de la dialectologie iranienne


was founded, with G. Redard, G. Morgenstierne and E. Benveniste as active members; and Ehsan Yarshater, as vice-president, was made responsible for supervising the recording of dialects throughout Iran.

This blend of teaching, administrative duties and strenuous research would for most scholars have made up a full working life; but during his years in England Ehsan Yarshater had been forming plans to fill gaps which he had come to perceive in the cultural life of Iran; and in 1954 he took the major step of founding the *Bongah-e Tarjoma va Nashr-e Ketab* (Institute for the Translation and Publication of Books). Under his direction this was to make a massive contribution in the following decades to the intellectual life of the nation. Its primary aim was to have foreign works of recognized worth translated into Persian by scholars of repute, the translations to be carefully edited and accurately printed. In the long run it was hoped that the venture would be largely self-supporting, but Ehsan Yarshater obtained initial funding from the Crown Properties. This was the first instance of his ability, as a practical visionary and skillful, patient diplomat, to obtain financial support for a nobly conceived plan. The series of translations was inaugurated with five books published simultaneously in 1955, and others followed in rapid succession, to be swiftly bought up by an appreciative readership. Although his own work lay in higher education, Ehsan Yarshater was deeply concerned with the intellectual development of children; and a year later he inaugurated three series of works for different age groups among the young, some of them translations, some original writings. These too were eagerly acquired.

In 1957 he persuaded a number of scholars, notably among them Iraj Afshar, to join him in founding the *Anjoman-e Ketab* (Book Society). Its purpose was to foster interest in good publications, and its main organ was the *Rahnema-ye Ketab* (Book Guide), which was launched by Ehsan Yarshater that same year as a quarterly journal, with Afshar and M. Moqarrabi as associate editors. From its second year it became a monthly journal, and was expanded to include as well as book reviews articles on Persian language and literature, accounts of rare manuscripts and, latterly, surveys of current research in Iranian studies. From 1965 Afshar was editor

“For a detailed account of the *Bongah* and its undertakings see E. Joseph, “*Bongāh-e Tarjomā wa Našr-E Ketāb*,” *Encyclopaedia Iranica* II, 351-55.  

in charge, and under his direction annual bibliographies were published of Persian printed books. The Anjoman-e Ketab also organized annual book exhibitions in Tehran, and sponsored exhibitions of Persian books abroad.

With all this activity even Ehsan Yarshater was fully stretched, working as has been his wont through much of his life, a twelve to fourteen hour day. Yet he managed during these years to write a number of learned and literary articles for the journals Yaghma, Mehr and Sokhan, as well as for the Bulletin of the Faculty of Letters of Tehran University. One day, meeting him in the Senate Library, Habib Yaghma’i pressed him for another article for his journal; whereupon Ehsan Yarshater, characteristically unable to refuse a friend, sat down and there and then wrote a piece which he called “The respected scholar” (Daneshmand-e mohtaram). This, published as the leading article in Yaghma, has been twice reprinted in anthologies, and is often quoted as an admirable piece of satirical humour. For all his deep seriousness, Ehsan Yarshater has a rich vein of wit and humour, is quick to make or appreciate a jest, and breaks readily into warm, delightful laughter.

Another striking facet of Ehsan Yarshater’s character is his apparently effortless calm and self-control, maintained in the teeth of all the harassments that inevitably beset a man who initiates far-reaching plans, and who in the course of fulfilling them has to persuade large numbers of people, with different temperaments and interests, to cooperate and be reasonable. With this calmness goes iron resolve, once a goal has been fixed upon, and enviable powers of concentration. These struck even German scholars during a visit Ehsan Yarshater paid to Gottingen to study dialect materials there. While others came and went during the day, seeking refreshment, fresh air or relaxation, he sat on at his library desk from early till late, oblivious alike of the outer world and the inner man, working with total absorption.

During the academic year 1958/59 he visited Columbia University, New York, as associate professor; and Columbia showed appreciation of his teaching by extending its invitation for a second year. Back in Iran during the summer of 1959 Ehsan Yarshater inspired the founding of a lending library by the Anjoman-e Ketab. This

came to contain some 3000 books, mostly in the humanities, which people were actively encouraged to borrow, and for a time small mobile collections of books were sent to some of the poorer districts of Tehran, as well as to townships round about.

When Ehsan Yarshater returned from Columbia in the summer of 1960, Pour-Davud had died, and he was appointed to succeed his former teacher as professor of Old Persian and Avestan. In that year he attended the International Congress of Orientalists in Moscow; and the oral examination was held there of his thesis on “The Tati dialect spoken to the south of Qazvin,” for which he was awarded a Ph.D. by London University. The examiners were W. B. Henning, E. Benveniste and I. Gershevitch.

In the following year Ehsan Yarshater had the happiness to marry Latifeh Alvieh. The two had become friends when he returned from his studies in England in 1953, and had come to discover much in common, notably a deep devotion to Iran and its culture, and an interest in education generally. Latifeh Alvieh was then acting as cultural advisor to the United States Information Agency in Tehran; and her voluntary work included organizing and directing summer camps for schools and university students, and the first youth conference in Iran. She was founder and president of the Shahnaz Girls’ Clubs, and a founding member of the National Council of the Women of Iran; and had represented various Iranian organisations at conferences in Germany, India, Ceylon and Turkey, as well as having studied for a year on a visiting fellowship in the United States of America.

After their marriage she and Ehsan Yarshater, as well as pursuing their own separate but complementary activities, created together a gracious and profoundly civilised home-life, dispensing a generous hospitality which many were to enjoy over the years.

Meantime Columbia University was expanding its Middle East department, and with financial help from Hagop Kevorkian had established a chair in Iranian Studies, which in 1961 Ehsan Yarshater was invited to occupy. After much hesitation, and prolonged discussions with his wife, he accepted and embarked thus on an even more arduous but richly productive period of his life. During it he worked immensely hard in New York for three-quarters of the year, and returned every long vacation to Iran to work immensely hard there. He retained the directorship of the Bongah-e Tarjoma, keeping in close touch from the United States with a succession of deputy directors; and he continued as president of the Anjoman-e
Ketab, the Rahnema-ye Ketab being mainly in charge of Iraj Afshar. Each summer, after a busy university session, he found awaiting him in Tehran a quantity of matters—scholarly, administrative and financial—which demanded his attention; and a press of people impatient to discuss with him, sometimes at great length, their own particular problems. Yet even in these circumstances his first act was always to set in motion arrangements for a field trip to study yet another dialect which he had identified as little known or insufficiently explored.

At Columbia University he was deeply engaged in developing undergraduate and graduate courses, teaching and supervising, and taking his full part in departmental and university duties. He was also planning volumes for a projected series of translations of Persian classical works called Persian Heritage Series. UNESCO had a similar project in hand, under the title of Persian Representative Works, but it was making little progress. In 1962 the UNESCO department concerned proposed that their undertaking should be merged with Ehsan Yarshater’s. This series was funded largely by the Bongah-e Tarjoma, with smaller contributions by UNESCO; and its agreed aim was to make “the best of Persian literary, historical and scientific texts available in the major world languages . . . not only to satisfy the needs of the students of Persian history and culture, but also to respond to the demands of the intelligent reader who seeks to broaden his intellectual and artistic horizons.” Under Ehsan Yarshater’s direction the publication of volumes in this important new series proceeded apace.

From 1964 to 1966 he was granted extended sabbatical leave, which he spent in Iran. The royal Pahlavi Foundation was established in 1964, and the prestigious Bongah-e Tarjoma was made one of its affiliates. “In editorial matters, however, the Institute continued to maintain essentially an independent stance, with the director exerting full discretion in the choice of works and the selection of authors, editors and translators in the series published under his general editorship.”

As well as devoting much time to the Bongah’s affairs during these two years, Ehsan Yarshater brought out in two volumes his own Naqqashi-e novin (Modern Painting). This he published under the pen-name Rahsepar, which he had used as art-critic over the years for the journal Sokhan (published by his friend P.N. Khanlari). His reason for seeking anonymity was that he regarded these writings as the fruit of an

amateur interest only; but *Naqqashi-e novin*, reprinted in 1975, remains the only substantial work of recognized merit in Persian devoted to this subject. Chapters from it have been prescribed for classwork, and others have been included, for the quality of their writing, in Jalal Matini’s *Nemunahha’i az nathr-e fasih-e Farsi-e mo’aser* (An Anthology of Contemporary Eloquent Persian Prose).

His dominant professional interest continued to be his dialect studies, and these two sabbatical years gave him further opportunities for intensive field work. His researches, which had begun in the 1950’s with southern Tati, had been extended during the intervening years; and down to 1979 he was able to work systematically over a wide area, which included Taleshi-speaking districts on the west Caspian coast, Khalkhal and Tarom in Azerbaijan, Kho’in and the Zanjan region, Rudbar, Kuhpayah and Alamut to the east of Qazvin and Ramand to the south of it, with the Sava and Kashan districts, and regions yet further south where Central dialects are spoken. In recording many largely unknown or ill-explored village dialects of this area Ehsan Yarshater has shown great exactness and analytical skill, and his attention to detail in both phonology and morphology makes his work outstanding among recent contributions to Iranian dialectology, setting him in the great tradition of Andreas and Mann, Zhukovsky, Christensen and Morgenstierne. He is never a reductionist, nor one to gloss over problems by superimposing a phoneme where there is variation; and with his care for detail he truly shows language at work. His descriptions are full of precise observations about differences in usage between speakers of different ages, and even between inhabitants of different quarters of the same village; and where documents exist he has studied the changes between earlier and modern speech. He sets this minute recording in a wider context by consistently noting similarities between dialects and dialect-groups; and he has traced changes (as for example in postpositional patterns) which may reflect usages in the Turkish superstratum. He observes moreover the ways of life and social interactions which tend to bring about linguistic interference such as by Turkic with Iranian, or by one form of Iranian with another. No description of an Iranian dialect offers a more delicate analysis of intricate relationships (such as morphological case, number and gender-marking in relation to the scales of animacy, reference and thematicity) than his study of southern Tati; and this makes it ideal for use in typological studies and general works on variation and language changes.⁹ Nor is there anything

comparable to his study of gender in the dialects of the Kashan area, with its admirable analysis of the multiple parameters, only a few of which have ever attracted the attention of researchers. The same precision and depth characterize his coverage of whole areas and his attention to minute differences between closely related dialects; and this has then enabled him to trace the network of linguistic change on a micro-scale.

On a larger scale his work has been nothing less than the rediscovery of the descendants of ancient Median, long thought wholly to have disappeared. He named his book on southern Tati “Median Dialect Studies I,” and convincingly justified this title by his masterly summary of what is known of the languages of Azarbaijan in the Middle Ages and pre-modern times. This study included in fact Greater Media with Media Atropatene; and in it he showed that it had been wrong to suppose that the Iranian dialects spoken within Azarbaijan were immigrant ones from other regions.” Instead he was able to establish that the dialects which he had studied reflect a linguistic continuum from Azarbaijan southward to where the Taleshi dialects join the northernmost Tati ones, with the southernmost Tati ones then linking up in their turn with those of the central dialects. He also discovered the importance within this continuum of the Iranian dialects spoken by local Jewish communities, which he studied extensively in Tehran, Hamadan, Isfahan, Kashan, Golpayegan and other towns, together with the “secret” Perso-Aramaic language which some of them used. His conclusion was that “the Jewish dialects and sub-dialects are the indicators of Median dialects long forced out from urban centers by Persian. In other words, whereas Persian is the intruder in Western and Central Persia (that is, the Median territory) the Jewish dialects are native.” “His researches as a whole led him to the major discovery that some western Iranian dialects are as conservative as some eastern Iranian ones, and that the traditional perception (based essentially on Middle Persian, Parthian and modern Persian with its variants) of a morphologically wanting western Iranian is misleading, this being in fact by no means typical. It seems very fitting that an Iranian scholar from Hamadan, once the capital of Media, should have discovered these remarkable facts, and should by his labours have thrown so much new light on the linguistic heritage of western Iran.


This important and prolonged research continued to be interwoven by Ehsan Yarshater with his work at Columbia University, to which he returned in the late summer of 1966. Soon afterwards he established a Center for Iranian Studies there, of which he continues to be the director; and the next year he organised a major conference on all aspects of contemporary Iranian life, together with an exhibition of Persian painting—the most extensive that had then been held. The conference papers were edited by him, and were published in 1971 under the title *Iran Faces the Seventies*. In 1968, Ehsan Yarshater was elected chairman of the Middle East department, and served in this capacity until 1973, when he resigned in order to be able to devote more time to developing the activities of the Center.

Meantime in Iran the *Bongah-e Tarjoma*, still under his direction, continued to be vigorously active. The first “Foreign Literature Series” (*Majmu' a-ye adabiyat-e khareji*) was in the end to contain 71 works, and the various series for children and young readers, together, 155 titles. To these had been added an “Iranology Series” (*Majmu' a-ye Iran-shenasi*), which consisted of translations of works by Western orientalists and classical writers, and by Muslim historians and geographers in Arabic. This comprised some 60 volumes. There was also a “Persian Texts Series,” devoted to critical editions of Persian texts which were either unpublished or available only in uncritical editions. This series, which reached 48 volumes, “represented the first attempt in Iran to publish Persian texts systematically. It adopted, under Yarshater’s general editorship, the common method of critical editions in the West, best exemplified in Iran by M. Qazvini, with the manuscripts clearly defined and the significant variants recorded in the footnotes.”12

A general knowledge series was also launched, which consisted primarily of works of popular science, and which reached 138 volumes; but after the early ones had appeared Ehsan Yarshater relinquished its general editorship to Mohammad Sa’idi.

Another important scholarly series was of bibliographies. This was initiated in 1958 with the publication of the “Bibliography of Persian Printed Books” (*Fehrest-e ketabha-ye chapi-e farsi*) by Khanbaba Moshar. A second volume appeared in 1961, and a three-volumed second edition in 1973. There were moreover a number of other series, for science, art, history and philosophy, which were begun later and so remained less extensive than the earlier ones.

In 1969 the Bongah adopted a proposal put forward by Ehsan Yarshater to translate into Persian the second edition of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, with supplementary articles to be specially commissioned to expand the entries on Iran. The first fascicle of the *Encyclopaedia of Iran and Islam* (*Danesh-nama-ye Iran va Eslam*) was published in 1975 with 112 original entries and 99 translated from the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*’s and eight more fascicles appeared during the next three years.

Meanwhile, in 1972, Ehsan Yarshater presented to the National Endowment for the Humanities, an American federal agency, through Columbia University, a proposal for an “Encyclopaedia Iranica” in the English language. This he conceived as a research tool, to meet the needs of scholars and students in Iranian studies and related fields by providing accurate and up-to-date presentations on “topics of archaeological, geographic, ethnographic, historical, artistic, literary, religious, linguistic, philosophical, scientific and folkloric interest,” over a stretch of time extending from prehistory to the present; and he suggested that it should aim at setting Iranian culture in a broad context, and showing reciprocal influences exerted on one another by Iran and its neighbours. The plan was a noble one, and its scope so huge that probably no individual scholar could have won a hearing for it other than Ehsan Yarshater, who already had so many massive achievements to his credit, and who was known not only for initiating but also for carrying through large undertakings. He was also a persuasive advocate; and not only did the National Endowment for the Humanities provide some funding but generous support was offered by the Iranian Plan Organization. Accordingly the great undertaking got under way, and the first contracts were signed with contributors in 1979.

Two years earlier Ehsan Yarshater and his wife had decided to use their private means to endow a foundation that would ensure that work on the *Encyclopaedia* and other major projects which he had initiated could continue after him. By 1979 the legal work had been completed, trustees were appointed, and the foundation was about to be registered with the Ministry of Justice when revolution broke out in Iran. The work of the *Bongah-e Tarjoma*, which was affiliated with the Pahlavi Foundation, was brought to an immediate halt.

Subsequently the new government took over the *Bongah*, and tacitly acknowledged the admirable work which it had been doing over the previous quarter of a century by continuing to operate it under its own name. Some works were published which
were already in the press (including two more fascicles of the *Encyclopaedia of Iran and Islam*). A fairly large number of the Bongah’s publications were moreover re-printed in the course of time, a further tribute to the excellence of its work. Its library was also expanded by the addition of that of the *Anjoman-e Ketab*, which, with its journal *Rahnemai-ye Ketab*, was closed down.” But in 1981 the Bongah itself was merged, with some other organizations, in a new “Centre for Scientific and Cultural Organizations,” renamed in 1986 the “Scientific and Cultural Publication Company” (*Markaz-e Entesharat-e va Farhangi*).

In the very year of the revolution Ehsan Yarshater had convened a meeting in England of the panel of consulting editors of the *Encyclopaedia Iranica*; and he found himself facing this meeting with funding for the project suddenly and drastically reduced, while he felt himself still with obligations to staff, printers and publishers, as well as to the large number of scholars who had been drawn into the undertaking, some of whom had already written contributions for it. Nevertheless, almost anyone else would have given up at this point, yielding to the force of large and unforeseen events. But for Ehsan Yarshater great odds seem only a challenge to still greater endeavour, when the cause is a worthy one; and he resolved to continue in the hope that he could raise new funding somehow. In this he was successful, thanks to his own qualities and achievements, and tenacity of purpose. But it is a continuing struggle, which swallows up all too much of his time and energy at the expense of purely scholarly pursuits.

From then on the complex and arduous work of compiling and producing the *Encyclopaedia* has been carried on at the Center for Iranian Studies, Columbia University chiefly with the continued support of the National Endowment for the Humanities. The first fascicles were published in 1982, and by the end of 1989 three bound volumes had come out, with ten more planned to follow over the years. The undertaking has benefited from the unremitting labours of a succession of assistant editors, notably among them M. Kashefi, who began working on the “Encyclopaedia of Iran and Islam,” transferring without break to the *Encyclopaedia Iranica*; and latterly P.O. Skjaervo; but the driving force and inspiration continues to be Ehsan Yarshater, who oversees its every aspect. For this, long experience has uniquely qualified him, both on the practical and scholarly sides; and his extraordinary width of

13After the *Rahnema-ye Ketab* ceased publication in 1979 its editor, I. Afshar, managed to continue “its format, rubrics and tradition” in *Ayanda*, a new journal under his editorship see Afshar, “Anjoman-e Ketab.”
knowledge is invaluable for the choice of rubrics and invitation of contributors. There are few Persian writers and men of learning of the twentieth century whom he has not known, few Iranists whose work he has not read and remembered, perhaps no aspect of Iranian history and culture to which he has not devoted some attention. The usefulness of the Encyclopaedia is generally recognized; and it is proving not only an indispensable source of knowledge, but is itself a stimulus to research and fresh thinking on the part of scholars who are invited to contribute, and who respond to the opportunities which it provides. The heavy burdens which it lays on its chief editor have unfortunately kept his own contributions relatively few; but they have ranged characteristically widely, with a number of entries on Iranian dialects, a vivid and sympathetic account of the village of Abyana, and a meticulously documented article on Afrasiyab. He has made moreover striking contributions from his own unique knowledge to articles by others, for example to that on the great modern Persian singer Banan.

Since all his labours on the Encyclopaedia have been in addition to his full-time professorial work at Columbia University, it seems incredible that even Ehsan Yarshater should have been engaged at the same time on another major task; but since the early 1970s he had been preparing, as general editor and contributor, the third volume of the Cambridge History of Iran, devoted to the Seleucid, Parthian and Sasanian periods. This massive work, in two parts, was planned to compass “every aspect of Iranian civilisation from the death of Alexander in 323 B.C. to the advent of Islam in the seventh century A.D.” There were 33 contributors, and their contributions came in irregularly over a number of years, with many delays and difficulties; and as they were assembled it became clear to Ehsan Yarshater that the enormous timespan and diversity of subject-matter were going to present problems for the general reader. Accordingly he went beyond what most would consider to be the call of editorial duty, providing the work with a long, lucid and deeply perceptive introduction, in which he provided guidelines to the whole; and he also set concise introductory pieces before each of the nine main sections into which it is divided. His own contributions comprised chapters on “Iranian common beliefs and world-view,” “Iranian national history,” and “Mazdakism.” The volume appeared in 1983; and the first print was sold out with the same rapidity that had marked the purchase of publications of the Bongah-e Tarjoma.
Just a little later yet another massive undertaking, which had been initiated by Ehsan Yarshater in 1971, began to bear fruit. This was an annotated English translation of Tabari’s “History of Prophets and Kings” (*Ta’rikh al-rusul wa’l-muluk*). Ehsan Yarshater had suggested this as a desirable enterprise to UNESCO, for consideration by its Arabic Commission; but since that Commission favored other tasks, he himself undertook it, with UNESCO’s approval, under the auspices of the Bongah. Only a few contracts had been signed with scholars when the Bongah was closed down, and funding had again to be sought elsewhere. It came to be provided by the National Endowment for the Humanities; and publication of the *History*, to be in 40 volumes, began in 1985. Seventeen volumes have by now appeared, with ten in the press. Ehsan Yarshater sometimes regrets his involvement in this work, more properly the domain of Arabists; but, again, it is not in his character to abandon a task once embarked on.

The work of the Iranian Center proceeded vigorously meanwhile, and was diversified. The publication of volumes in the multilingual, multinational *Persian Heritage Series* continued steadily; and the Columbia Iranian Lecture Series, founded and endowed by Ehsan Yarshater in 1979, brought a succession of Iranists from other universities in the States and abroad to give an annual set of lectures. This was fittingly inaugurated by the great Iranist H.W. Bailey, and his and three other sets of lectures have so far been published in book form. Subsequently in 1987, Ehsan Yarshater established an Iranian Seminar, whose meetings are regularly attended by Iranists from New York’s universities and those of neighbouring states, and often, by invitation or the chance of travel by others from farther afield. Both lectures and seminars are occasions for stimulating discussion and the fruitful sharing of knowledge.

With his capacities and experience, it was inevitable that Ehsan Yarshater should be elected member of a number of councils and committees, among them the Council of Corpus Inscriptionum Iranicarum (from 1954); the Iranian branch of the International Council for Philosophy and the Human Sciences (of which he was general secretary from 1957 to 1961); the National Translation Council, Columbia University (from 1976); and the American Institute of Iranian Studies (trustee from 1978).

One of Ehsan Yarshater’s special gifts was threatened with total neglect under the huge pressure of professorial, scholarly, editorial and administrative work, namely his writing of elegant Persian; but latterly his friend Jalal Matini has persuaded him to contribute
from time to time short notes (yaddashtha) to the journals Iran Nameh and Iran Shenasi, both edited in the United States; and these have given much pleasure to its readers.

All this vast amount of achievement could be accomplished only by long toil; and often after a hard day’s work Ehsan Yarshater returns in the late evening to his office at the Iran Center (which is interconnected with his apartment), to put in more hours of concentrated work at his desk there. He has been fortunate to have in his wife a lady who not only understands but supports such dedication, matching it indeed with hard work and idealism of her own. Once settled in the United States, she studied for a B.A. (1975) and M.A. (1981) at Columbia University, published articles, and applied her knowledge and experience through serving on numerous councils and committees; and from 1986 she has worked part-time at the Middle East Institute of Columbia University as coordinator of its Outreach Program, which aims at bringing accurate knowledge of Middle Eastern affairs to students, teachers and the general public.

Events in Iran in the past decade have brought deep personal sorrows to the Yarshaters, as to many other Iranian families. These they have borne with characteristic courage and dignity. Nor is life for them ever wholly toil. There is music, poetry and the visual arts to be enjoyed; and friends and colleagues treasure memories of their delightful hospitality, with wide-ranging talk, rich reminiscences, wit and laughter. He has always been a lover of sport and the open air; and in his student days he went on long mountain walks with friends in the Alborz, and later skied there. For a long time it was mainly his dialect studies which took him from his desk; but latterly a threat of ill-health from unremitting work has forced him out of doors again for recreation. He goes regularly on long walks with the Appalachian Mountain Club, adding enjoyment of American natural beauty to his recollections of that of his much loved motherland; and it is to be hoped that with retirement he will take to the mountain trails more often, thus keeping his health and strength, and being able to see to completion the formidable enterprises which he has in hand (notably among them the publication of many notes and texts gathered during his field-work in Iran, and still to be edited). He has already made profound contributions to Persian scholarship and letters, and Iran and Iranian studies owe him immense debts. May he live to increase that indebtedness, and to enjoy the satisfaction of large tasks fulfilled and new knowledge continually gained.