



Bachelor of Arts in Persian Studies

On Monday April 21, 2008 the Senate of the University of Maryland unanimously approved two proposals submitted officially by the School of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures (SLLC) and put before the University Senate by the College of Arts and Humanities (ARHU); they propose to offer major and minor courses of study in the two fields of Arabic Studies and Persian Studies. This was the culmination of a sustained effort spearheaded by the Center for Persian Studies and the Arabic Program and supported enthusiastically by SLLC and ARHU, and much hard work had gone into it over the years. So, all our colleagues and students – even our alumni – welcomed the approval wholeheartedly. Our heartfelt thanks for shepherding the proposals through the process of approval go to our SLLC Colleagues Dr. Lauretta Clough and SLLC Director Michael Long, and to Professor Elizabeth Loizeaux and ARHU Dean James F. Harris.

The major, requiring the completion of at least 36 credits of courses on Persian language and literature or Persian language and culture, features what

amounts to a two track structure, both supporting a high level of language proficiency. The first track is directed ultimately toward expertise in the literature of the Persian language which is a shared heritage of Persian-speaking peoples in Iran, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan as well as the growing Persian diaspora. The other track combines language proficiency with expertise focused on the contemporary culture of Iran. As with all academic programs, there are prerequisites and individual skills to take into account, as we anticipate a diversity of backgrounds, abilities, and approaches in our students. It is imperative, therefore, that interested students, while guided in general by the rules and regulations governing majors and minors at the University of Maryland, should seek advisement from our Center colleagues. We strongly recommend that all those who have an interest in learning more about the new and exciting opportunities presented by these new academic offerings to visit the web site of the Roshan Institute Center for Persian Studies and send their inquiries to us, to the SLLC, and to the University of Maryland's Office of Undergraduate Admissions.

Continued on page 3

A Message from the Dean

The Board of Regents recently approved the proposals for the major and minor; we now await approval from the Maryland Higher Education Commission this summer. While one can never predict an outcome, I am confident that by fall 2008 both the minor and the major will be fully operational.

This development marks a very substantial step forward, especially at a time when a significant number of public and private universities in the United States are closing entire departments of language. I am firmly convinced that, in our current world, the combined study of language, literature and culture is more important than ever before, and I am proud of the leadership that the College of Arts and Humanities has shown in this area.

Establishing new curricula in any field, especially in language and culture, is not easy. Funding is necessary and student interest must be strong. On both counts, we have been extremely fortunate.

Student demand for Persian studies courses on campus is high, and we have benefited enormously from the strong financial support of the Roshan Cultural Heritage Institute, led by Dr. Elahé Mir-Djalali Omidyar. The new minor and major would simply not have been possible without the support of Dr. Omidyar and the Roshan Institute.

During the past year, the College of Arts and Humanities conducted a search for a new faculty member at the full or associate professor rank in Persian studies. While the search did not reach a successful conclusion, we are planning on reconfiguring the search goal and will reopen the process over the summer.

As dean, I find enormous pleasure in the success of the Roshan Cultural Heritage Institute Center for Persian Studies under the able leadership of Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak. In addition to Persian studies classes, a host of cultural activities—from films to conferences to guest speakers—enriched the lives of students, faculty and staff on campus during the past year. These activities also drew great interest from the wider community. The momentum is carrying us forward: 2008–09 promises to be an equally stellar year in Persian studies at the University of Maryland.

James F. Harris, Dean
College of Arts and Humanities

The Center for Persian Studies Receives Major Gift; Is Renamed Accordingly

2

The Center for Persian studies received a generous boost last fall, thanks to a \$3 million leadership gift from the Roshan Cultural Heritage Institute. The private nonprofit foundation, based in Honolulu, supports cultural and educational activities that promote Persian language and literature and Iranian Culture and Civilization. In recognition of the gift, the Center was renamed the Roshan Cultural Heritage Institute Center for Persian Studies, or more simply, the Roshan Institute Center for Persian Studies (RICPS).



Dr. Elahé Mir-Djalali

Focusing on the Persian-speaking cultures in Iran, Afghanistan and Central Asia and communities throughout the Persian-speaking diaspora, the center will see its faculty, programs, research and scholarships significantly expand as a result of the gift. “This gift is the largest we’ve ever made in pursuit of the institute’s goals, and it reflects our commitment to cultural understanding,” said Dr. Elahé Mir-Djalali Omidyar, president

and CEO of the Roshan Cultural Heritage Institute.

Specifically, the institute’s gift covers the following endowments named for the institute:

- Chair in Persian Language and Linguistics
- Graduate Fellowship for Excellence in Persian Studies
- Undergraduate Scholarships for Excellence in Persian Studies
- Endowment for Programs and Events

Last year Provost Nariman Farvardin, who is one of the nation’s highest-ranking university officials of Persian background, had expressed the hope “to create a full-fledged minor and major in Persian studies.” This past April the University Senate approved the proposal by the College of Arts and Humanities to institute the major in Persian Studies, as you will read in this Newsletter. The move means that the curriculum will expand to feature new Persian language instruction, new courses in Persian literature, and further explorations of the social and

political dimensions of Persian culture. As one of very few universities in the United States offering a major course of study in Persian, the University has seen student interest in Persian studies nearly double in recent years.

“This awakening reflects more than the coming of age of second-generation Iranian-Americans seeking to explore their family’s cultural heritage,” says Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak, founding director of the center. “About half of our students have had little or no previous connection with the subject. Some are lured by the headlines and want to develop skills in a critical language, but many others feel the timeless resonance of Persian culture.”

A diverse group of Maryland students is exploring Persian studies. History major Adam Fried, who transferred to Maryland to enroll in Persian studies courses, says, “Not only do they give non-Persian students the opportunity to learn about an area that is often misunderstood and misrepresented, but the program also provides Persian students with a cultural center--sort of a home away from home.”

[Continued on page 3](#)

From the Dean The Role of Gift Giving

Clearly, the \$3 million leadership gift from the Roshan Cultural Heritage Institute came at a fortuitous time. In addition to the growing student interest in Persian studies we have witnessed on campus in recent years, and headlines remind us daily that we should be doing more in understanding many long-neglected areas of the world.

Since its inception in 2004, the Roshan Institute Center for Persian Studies has played a leading role in a burgeoning academic field that illuminates 3,500 years’ of cultural history. The Roshan Institute, under the leadership of Dr. Elahé Mir-Djalali Omidyar, has made a significant leadership gift that positions us to make considerable progress in the development of the Persian studies program. The Institute’s support provides us with the resources to engage in a wide variety of activities that would otherwise not be possible.

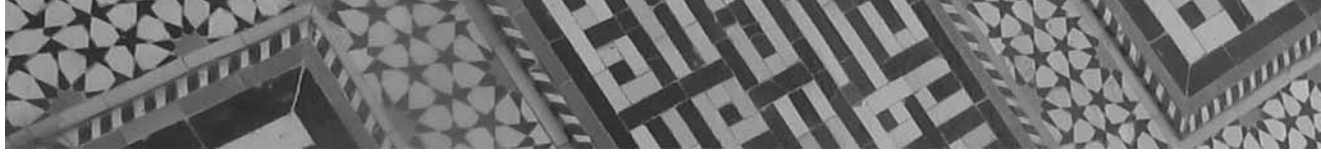
First and foremost, the generosity of the Roshan Institute will enable us to enrich many program components in concert instead of piecemeal. A crucial link in the development of a major and a minor is to have adequate faculty in place. Work is under way to fill two positions—an assistant professorship and the endowed chair—that will offer the center’s director, Dr. Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak, vital support in the development of courses and programs.

The Center has quickly achieved a national reputation thanks to its high-level conferences, drawing together experts in many fields from around the world. The International Conference on Rumi, held last fall, investigated the enduring influence of the 13th-century mystical poet. Look for the Center to collaborate this fall with the Meyerhoff Center for Jewish Studies to co-present “The Iranian Jewry: From Past to Present,” a groundbreaking international

conference examining cross-cultural connections between the Persian and Jewish peoples. Such collaborations effectively draw on the extensive resources of the university in investigating common areas of inquiry and lead to a richer study of the complex mosaic that is the Middle East, the effects of whose history we are only beginning to understand.

As Dean of the College of Arts and Humanities, I find nothing more intriguing than the emergence of new disciplines, new knowledge, and new ways of looking at the world. As a citizen of the world, I find nothing more enriching and valuable than our pursuit of cross-cultural understanding. The Roshan Center exemplifies the critical role higher education plays in achieving a greater appreciation and knowledge of the Persian Culture. I remain deeply grateful to Dr. Mir-Djalali for supporting this inspiring vision.

--James F. Harris



Continued from "Major Gift" page 2

Art history and French major Neda Khalili says she enrolled in Persian studies "for self-enrichment and a closer connection to my own culture." As a first-generation Iranian American, she explains that education, culture and heritage are very important to her family. Khalili is one of 10 students in the Persian language cluster who live in Language House, a special immersion dorm where all communications within her cluster speak Persian.

Maryland's growing leadership in Persian studies and the study of other Middle Eastern cultures is strengthened by the commitment of donors like the Roshan Cultural Heritage Institute.

"I'm helping pioneer this new academic concentration because cultural understanding and appreciation are essential to effective communication," says Omidyar, [and it is] "essential to the development of non-antagonistic and more productive relationships."

Note: Article was adapted from "Persian Studies Receives Major Gift" by Denise Young in the Dec. 18, 2007, issue of Outlook, the faculty/staff newspaper.

Continued from "Bachelor" page 1

The effort to institute a major and minor in Persian studies has been in the works ever since the Center for Persian Studies was established in September 2004. Several drafts had been made and revised with the help of colleagues familiar with the intricacies of new programs at the University. Our students, although by and large very patient, have been inquiring repeatedly about the progress of the work. It is indeed heartening to report that, beginning the first day of instruction in September 2008, UMD students can declare Persian Studies as their major or minor fields of study, or – what appears to be more and more popular these days among students – double major in Persian Studies and their other favorite field. The degree of Bachelor of Arts in Persian Language and Literature or in Persian Language and Culture must be considered a first in US universities. For our part, we look forward to a small but immensely meaningful addition to our University's undergraduate offerings, as it takes important historic steps to take its rightful place among research institutions of the first rank.

Efforts Underway...

As PERSIPHONY goes to print, efforts are underway – but not final yet – to schedule quite a few events other than the ones listed here. In this section, we are presenting in summary form a list of such events and ask you to please check their status periodically on the RICPS web site at the following addresses:

www.persian.umd.edu
www.ricps.umd.edu
www.lanauges.umd.edu/persian

- Ameretat Productions is working with the UMD's Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center to stage a musical event, featuring artists Faramarz Aslani and Babak Amini for July 26, 2008. RICPS is pleased to have facilitated this event and will place the poster and other promotional material related to it on its web site as soon as we receive them. For more details you may also call 1-301-405-ARTS or visit the web site of the Clarice Smith Center at the following address:
<http://claricesmithcenter.umd.edu/2007/c/performances/calendar>

- Meridian International Center in Washington DC is organizing a US visit by a number of Persian-speaking writers and poets, including Tajiks and Afghans, possibly for October 2008. They will be visiting Persian-related departments on four US campuses, including the UMD's Roshan Institute Center for Persian Studies. Should the planning proceed as expected, the guests will attend a public event at each university to present their work and discuss their ideas. In all likelihood, the event will be organized as a panel discussion and will include open exchanges on the situation of the writing and publishing community in each country. For more information, please call Meridian International Center at or visit their web site at the following address: [<http://www.meridian.org>]. We will also post the information on our web site as we obtain it from Meridian.

- Poet Esmail Khoi, one of Iran's leading poetic voices in exile, is planning a trip to the US and we are trying to take advantage of his stay in our area to organize a retrospective on his life and impressive achievements as a poet. While the details of time and place are still being worked out, we hope to be able to bring Khoi to the RICPS in the fall. Long time RICPS friend Mr. Samsam Kashfi is assisting in this effort and we'll post the information on our web site, www.persian.umd.edu. as it becomes available.

- We have invited Dr. Roksana Bahramitash, noted Iranian sociologist, to give a lecture on her recent research projects in Iran and she has given us the tantalizing title of "Moving Away from Orientalism: Political Economy of Iranian Women's Employment Trend." Dr. Bahramitash, Chair of Canadian Research on Islam, Pluralism, and Globalization at the University of Montréal, is one of only a few scholars who are keeping track of women's activities in Muslim countries, and we are anxious to hear the results of the recent research projects has been conducting in Iran.

- Iran's encounter with the forces of the modern world must be traced to the second half the 19th century when some of its intellectuals attempted to formulate a conceptual framework for understanding the modern world which served as a model for practical aspects of various modernist projects of the twentieth century. Professor Farzin Vahdat of Vassar College, a sociologist interested in notions and conditions of modernity and their applications to Iran, Islam and the Middle East, has proposed to take up this research topic in a lecture under the title of "The Intellectual Foundations of Iran's Experience of Modernity" by. Plans are in place to invite Professor Vahdat, author of *God and Juggernaut: Iran's Intellectual Encounter with Modernity* to enlighten us on Middle Eastern intellectuals' earliest relations to some of the essential hallmarks of modern world.

We urge you to visit our web site from time to time to keep up with the flurry of activities we are hosting to create a better climate of understanding between American and Iranian peoples.



The Ulrike And Jamshid Amouzegar Undergraduate Scholarship

The Roshan Institute Center for Persian Studies is pleased to announce the first round of competition for the prestigious Ulrike and Jamshid Amouzegar Undergraduate Scholarship in Persian Studies. As you may have read in PERSIPHONY II or on our website, H.E. Dr. Jamshid Amouzegar has funded a scholarship at the undergraduate level at the UMD's College of Arts and Humanities in commemoration of his beloved late wife Mrs. Ulrike Amouzegar. We are now prepared to accept applications from eligible UMD students for this competition, which includes a monetary award of \$5,000 per year.

As specified in the Memorandum of Understanding, the funds in the endowment "shall be used to provide scholarships for freshman and sophomore students who are seeking a double major, major, or minor in Persian Studies at the University." To be eligible, applicants must "speak, comprehend, read, and write the Persian language at an advanced level." This would be inclusive of all variants of the language, such as Dari and Tajiki, as well as Persian, the standard language of modern Iran.

Happily, the announcement of the first round of the Amouzegar scholarship coincides with the approval of our major and minor in Persian studies, a fact that makes this scholarship a most timely addition to our Center's sources of funding. Beginning on the first day of instruction this fall semester (September 2, 2008), students may fill out the application forms at the Center offices (1220 Jimenez Hall) and schedule the language test that determines their eligibility. Once again, we are deeply grateful to Dr. Amouzegar and hope to be able to report the awarding of the first Amouzegar Scholarship by the end of the current calendar year, both on our web site and in the next issue of this Newsletter.

A Growing Family of Scholars



Dr. Ali Abasi, Nahal Akbari and son Keon

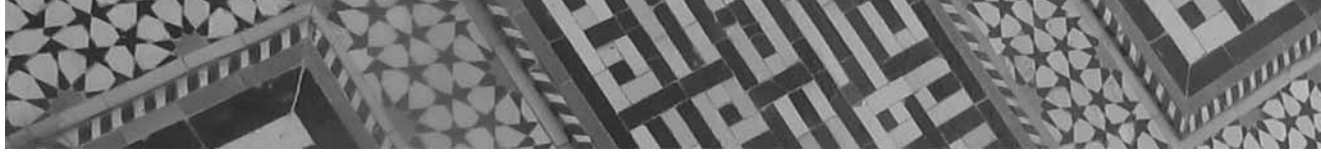
We are happy to welcome a brand new faculty member to the RICPS. Dr. Alireza Abasi did his undergraduate education in Iran and completed his graduate education in Second Language Education at the University of Ottawa, receiving his Ph.D. in 2008. His dissertation, titled "Writing under the gaze: Plagiarism policies and international ESL students patchwriting in graduate school," which has been nominated for the University of Ottawa Distinguished Dissertation Award, is a critical investigation of the Modernist authorial ideology dominant in North American academia as well as the educational consequences of university plagiarism policies for second language student writers from non-Western backgrounds studying at North American universities. His latest publication titled "Reconsidering the role of the pedagogical context in ESL student writers' transgressive intertextuality," has just been published in *English for Specific Purposes*.

Over the past two years or so, Dr. Ali Abasi and his wife Ms. Nahal Akbari were working at UMD's National Persian Flagship Program at the School of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures. During that time, although Dr. Abasi maintained close collegial relations with the Center for Persian Studies, he was not officially part of our Center. Now, with Persian Studies Major and Minor in place and the Center ready to admit a larger number of applicants, Dr. Abasi has joined the Center as a tenure-track Assistant Professor of Persian language education. In that capacity, under the direct supervision of the Center Director, he will lead language curriculum development and coordinate Persian-language course offerings at the undergraduate level with the objective to keep our Center at the leading edge of instruction and scholarship into the Persian language pedagogy among all the leading American universities.

The photograph shows Dr. Abasi with his wife Nahal Akbari, a lecturer at the UMD's Persian Flagship Program, and their son Keon, in all likelihood a future language pedagogue in his own right. They are all one welcome addition to the growing family that is RICPS.

Cultural Diplomacy: A

On May 16, 2007, the Center for Persian Studies (CPS) and the National Capital Area Chapter of the Fulbright Association presented a panel discussion on the future of cultural diplomacy with Iran. In addition to the CPS Director, the panelists included Mr. Bruce Laingen, former American hostage in Iran and Past President of the American Academy of Diplomacy, and the Honorable Kenton Keith, former US Ambassador to Qatar and Senior Vice-President of the Meridian International Center. Mrs. Harriet Fulbright, wife of the late Senator J. William Fulbright, was also in attendance and made moving opening remarks and very important closing observations. About 150 intensely interested students and community members, many of whom concerned about the deteriorating situation of official rela-



Hamid Naficy, Neorealismo and Post-Revolution Iranian Cinema

Professor Hamid Naficy, the John Evans Professor of Communication, at Chicago's famed Northwestern University, gave a fascinating talk at the RICPS titled "The Poetics and Politics of the Desired and the Dreaded: Women's Presence in Iranian Cinema." The talk charted the evolution of the representation of women in the postrevolution cinema, from effacing women immediately after the revolution to their powerful inscription within a decade. The event, held in the evening of Saturday October 6, 2007, was an addition to Professor Naficy's presence at a UMD workshop on Neorealismo, held at the UMD's Language House October 4-5, 2007.

At the workshop too professor Naficy presented a remarkable paper on Iranian cinema's part in the evolution of this filmic genre. In it, Professor Naficy argued that at its point of origin – i.e., post-WWII Italy – Neorealismo was marked by characteristics such as Geographic and temporal boundedness, the existence of masters (Roberto Rossellini, Vittorio De Sica, Cesare Zavattini, Luchino Visconti) and disciples (Luigi Zampa, Pietro Germi, Renato Castellani, Giuseppe De Santis), and the formation of a set of rules (location shooting, long takes,

invisible style of filming and editing, predominance of medium and long shots, use of contemporary true-to-life subjects, open-ended plots, working class protagonists, non-professional cast, vernacular dialogue, implied social criticism). In Iran, however, the textual and authorial features present in Dariush Mehrjui's *The Cow* (1969) became influential guideposts for the New Wave movies, where directors employed realism, surrealism, representational acting, and invisible style of continuity filming and editing to create genres that were at once similar to and different from their Italian progenitors. Thematically, too, Iranian films dealt with ordinary peoples' lives, religious and popular beliefs, pervasive fear and anxiety, social criticism, hostility and intolerance toward outsiders, and the often disturbing and destructive impact of strangers and intruders on society. In terms of authorial formation, the liminal position of Iranian filmmakers kept them between rocks and hard places—the state that supported them, the public that demanded political commitment, and the film industry that was bent on maximizing profits.

Professor Naficy, whose English language books include *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (Princeton University Press, 2001), *Home, Exile, Homeland: Film, Media, and the Politics of Place* (edited, Routledge, 1999), *The Making of Exile Cultures: Iranian Television in Los Angeles*, (University of Minnesota Press, 1993), *Otherness and the Media: the Ethnography of the Imagined and the Imaged* (co-edited, Harwood Academic, 1993), *Iran Media Index* (Greenwood Press, 1984), and whose forthcoming book is *Cinema, Modernity, and National Identity: A Social History of a Century of Iranian Cinema* (Duke University Press, 2009), also met at the RICPS with SLLC's Professors Joseph Bami and Eric Zakim who, along with the RICPS Director, are spearheading the effort to establish a graduate program in Cultural Studies at the UMD. He made insightful comments on the proposed program and on new directions in which the UMD can move as it attempts to expand its film and cultural studies programs at both the undergraduate and graduate levels.

A Persian Flamenco Ensemble

On Monday August 27, 2007, in collaboration with the UMD's Meyerhoff Center for Jewish Studies, the RICPS presented a special musical performance titled "A Musical Pilgrimage to Iran," featuring local artist of national renown Roya Bahrami (www.royab.com) and her ensemble. The multi-cultural Roya Ensemble performed original music from her recently released album *Roya* in which the mysticism of Persian melodies and poetry blend with Spanish flamenco. The concert also featured improvisations in Persian modes, Jazz and flamenco. Introducing the program, Ms. Bahrami gave a brief lecture on the roots of Persian music dating back to 7th Century BC and how the music of Eastern and Western musical traditions have influenced each other over time emphasizing the important role of music in bridging cultural gaps. The concert, held in conjunction with a conference, titled "Jews and Muslims in Islamic Lands: Conflict, Coexistence, Confluence" and sponsored by the Meyerhoff Center on the theme of interactions between Jews and Muslims through history, demonstrated the cultural roots of traditional, spiritual Persian music and its reach and influence outward. Besides the featured artist who is a multi-talented composer, santur player, and



Roya Bahrami, composer and vocalist

vocalist, the occasion brought to the beautiful Gildenhorn Recital Hall of the UMD's Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center three talented American artists, Harry Appelman at the keyboards, Richard Marlow at the flamenco guitar, and percussionist Jon Seligman. The performance was free of charge and open to the public who filled the hall to full capacity.

Roundtable Discussion

tions between Iran and the US, attended the event. Almost all speakers mentioned the essential imperative of diplomatic relations between the two countries and underlined the importance of cultural diplomacy by non-governmental academic and civil society organizations like the Center for Persian Studies and the Fulbright Association. The Roshan Institute Center for Persian Studies expresses its appreciation to the Fulbright Association, to the panelists and participants and to Dr. Hassan Ashktorab for working hard to make this event an important occasion for free and frank exchanges of ideas on this matter, one of immediate concern for the Iranian-American community as well as the academic communities in both countries.



Rumi: An 800th Birthday Bash

6

Jalal ad-Din Mohammad Balkhi (1207-1273), known in the West as Rumi, is the Persian mystic poet with a universal vision of the human condition that has through the centuries grown far and wide beyond his birthplace, environment and native language and culture. In the past thirty years, his poetry and worldview have taken the United States by storm. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) declared 2007, the 800th anniversary of the poet's birth, as the International Rumi Year. The International Conference envisioned by the University of Maryland's Roshan Institute Center for Persian Studies was designed to explore Rumi's works and ideas, as well as his continued relevance to our world.

The Conference, held in the Howard Frank Auditorium of the UMD's Robert H. Smith School of Business over three days (September 28-30, 2007), brought together more than twenty leading Rumi scholars from all over the world to examine Rumi's life, works, and lasting legacy. Even though English was the designated language of the gathering, after receiving numerous requests for a special session to be conducted in the Persian language for the benefit of those who do not function in English sufficiently to enjoy the Conference, we added an extra panel in the afternoon of Sunday September 30, mentioned often as the day of Rumi's birth. The session, featuring two of the most prominent living Rumi scholars, provided much intimate insight into the man's life and art, and proved immensely popular with the Persian-speaking community. Throughout the three days of the conference, its proceedings were simultaneously web cast through the facilities of the UMD, making it possible for viewers across the globe to participate in the conference proceedings from the comfort of their homes.

The Conference was organized thematically and historically, with an emphasis on Rumi as a poet and his two major works, *The Spiritual Couplets* and *The Divan*, as its

twin focal points. In six sessions over three days speakers explored diverse historical and aesthetic backgrounds to Rumi's life works and ideas, and discussed his position in the modern world. We also held a series of cultural and artistic events in conjunction with the Conference. Roshan Cultural Heritage Institute in Honolulu, Hawaii, The Persian Cultural Foundation (PCF) of Clifton, New Jersey and Texas-based Ahoora Foundation provided major funding for the Conference; additional contributions were also made and are acknowledged in the official Conference Program in accordance with donors' wishes. To view a copy of the Program Book, please visit [<http://www.languages.umd.edu/persian/C-Rumi-state.php>].

In his message to the Conference, UMD President Dr. C. D. Mote said:

Rumi's message of tolerance and peace across difference has been heralded by philosophers, politicians and humanists around the world. That his vision of the human condition continues to be relevant to contemporary struggles even 800 years after his birth, speaks volumes about the sophistication of his work. His counsel that humans work to transcend differences in place, language and ethnicity is a lesson that is applicable to countless contemporary conflicts.

Our University's newly appointed Provost Dr. Nariman Farvardin and Dean James Harris of the University's College of Arts and Humanities reiterated that sentiment in brief remarks at the reception held to welcome the speakers and Center patrons and supporters and launch the proceedings.

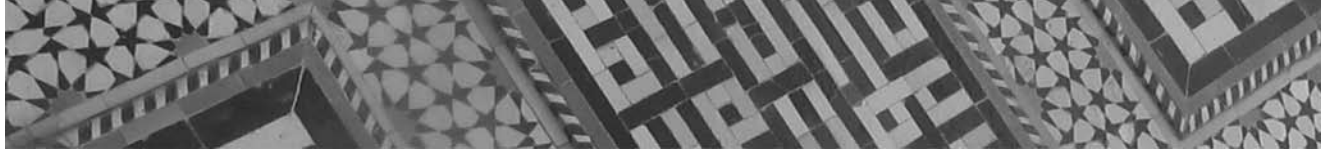
The opening session on Friday morning, graced by the presence of H.E. Mr. Said Tayeb Jawad, Afghanistan's Ambassador to the US, was made even more special when the guests reported having heard Rumi's poetry discussed and recited in the original Persian on NPR's "Morning Edition;" we thank Ms. Davar Ardalan for this important timely reminder of our Conference.

In welcoming the campus colleagues and community members to the Conference, Dean Harris noted how active the Center has been on campus and how impressed he has been by the enthusiastic turnout at various outreach events. As he presented the first Persian Studies student essay award, the dean mentioned the level of support the Center has received from the leaders in the Persian-speaking community, and named H.E. Dr. Jamshid Amouzegar, Dr. Ehsan Yarshater, Dr. Akbar Ghahary, and the Amirsaleh family. Finally, Dean Harris announced the \$3 million naming gift from the Roshan Cultural Heritage Institute and thanked its President, Dr. Elahe Mir-Djalali for her extraordinary generosity. Dean Harris then introduced Provost Farvardin and invited him to the podium.

In his remarks, Provost Farvardin described the historical significance of the Conference, more specifically of the caliber of attending scholars, in these words:

Perhaps not since Rumi sat in his small chamber in Konya some 750 years ago working on his magnum opus *The Masnavi* has there been such coming together of mental energy and intellectual curiosity gathered under one roof as I see here. The life of that man, born on the eastern side of the Persian-speaking world of his time and taking up residence on the western edge of that world, at the intersection of the East and the West, is comparable to our situation in another important sense as well. Today, every one of us is a seeker, out on a search for something meaningful, and every great university strives to provide an arena for guiding our searches and satisfying our intellectual curiosities to the extent possible.

He concluded by thanking the Iranian community for stepping forward in such substantial and meaningful ways to support the University's efforts, expressed the hope that "the many scholarly and community gatherings that have marked the 800th anniversary of Rumi's birth this year will con-



tribute to the emergence of future dialogues and discourses that promise a more peaceful and prosperous world,” and once again welcomed everyone to the Conference.

The first day’s morning session featured presentations by Professors Jawid Mojaddedi of Rutgers University, Ahmet Karamustafa of Washington University in St. Louis and Mehdi Tourage of Colgate University, as well as one by Safoura Nourbakhsh, Ph.D. Candidate at the University of Maryland. Of special interest was the Friday afternoon session titled “Living Rumi: A Visual Feast” organized by Jadid Media of London and moderated by Jacki Lyden of the National Public Radio. Consisting of two parts, the session featured presentations by Jadid Media Director Baqer Moin and Nusrat ul-Ghani on Rumi’s works and storied life as reflected in the new media, as well as a talk and video presentation by Sibohat Qosim, lead actress of Aharoun Theater Ensemble in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, which has produced and staged two world-famous dramatic presentations based on Rumi’s works titled *Yusof-i Gumgashla* (The Lost Joseph) and *Dajjal* (The Antichrist).



Professors Ehsan Yarshater (left) and Amin Banani (right)

Friday evening marked a visit to the Embassy of Afghanistan at the invitation of Ambassador and Mrs. Jawad. From the start, the organizers had envisioned the Rumi Conference in such a way as to accord with the poet’s unitarian and universalist vision of humanity. Much care had been taken to avoid associating Rumi with a particular country. Because he was born in the city of Balkh, located in a region that is now part of the country of Afghanistan, the organizers had thought it only fair to give the modern country of Afghanistan due credit as a bastion of culture and learning in Rumi’s time. Graciously, Ambassador Jawad and his wife extended an invitation to conference speak-

ers and Center supporters to a banquet at the Embassy of Afghanistan. The evening, a marvelous occasion for togetherness and mutual understanding, culminated in exchange of brief remarks on the living legacy of the man claimed by so many cultures. Delightful Afghan and Iranian food was served, followed by a cake especially prepared for the occasion with the words “Happy 800th Birthday Rumi.”



The second day of the conference featured presentations by scholars Franklin Lewis of the University of Chicago, Mohammad Borghei of Strayer University, Fatemeh Keshavarz of Washington University in St. Louis, and Nasrollah Pourjavady of the University of Tehran, culminating in a keynote event presided over by Professor Ehsan Yarshater, Emeritus of Columbia University and featuring an address by Professor Amin Banani of the UCLA as keynote speaker. Professor Banani’s address titled “Rumi, the Reluctant Poet” contained a masterful argument in favor of rewriting the history of Persian poetry with Rumi as at its very center. The evening featured “Fire of Love,” a unique musical tribute to Rumi led by Maestro Hossein Omoumi of the University of California at Irvine and featuring celebrated musicians Mehrdad Arabi, Kourosh Taghavi and Jessica Kenney. Student volunteers of the Center had prepared an impressively beautiful stage set-up at the Inn and Conference Center’s plush Auditorium.



Fire of Love artists (from left) Mr. Kourosh Taghavi, Dr. Hossein Omoumi, Ms. Jessica Kenney, and Mr. Mehrdad Arabi

Sunday morning’s presenters included Professors Paul Losensky of Indiana University, Ahmad Kazemi-Moussavi of the University of Maryland, Michael Beard of the University of North Dakota and Munira Shahidi of Tajik State University. As mentioned above Sunday afternoon had been added later at the request of the Persian-speaking community. We were fortunate to be able to secure presentations by Dr. Abdolkarim Soroush and Mr. Daryoush Ashouri, two leading public intellectuals of their generation with important viewpoints on Rumi and the mystical tradition in medieval Persian literature. Their presentations, respectively titled “Poeticity in the *Spiritual Couplets* and *Divan of Shams*” and “The Transformation of Poetic Discourse from Rumi to Hafez,” made in a session moderated by UMD’s Professor Arjang Assad, capped what by common consensus was the most important gathering the world over to celebrate Rumi’s work and world of ideas. We cannot properly thank all those who contributed in so many ways to make our



Persian panel participants Mr. Daryoush Ashouri (left), Dr. Arjang Assad (middle), and Dr. Abdolkarim Soroush (right)

Rumi Conference the superb occasion that it was. Certainly all the speakers and moderators, scholars and artists deserve to be appreciated for the quality of their labor of love. Center colleagues gave selflessly for months of their time and energy to organize the conference, and the administration of the University of Maryland, led by SLLC Director Michael Long, ARHU’s Dean Harris, and Provost Farvardin ensured the success of the conference with their unflinching support and encouragement. Above all, our student volunteers and SLLC and UMD colleagues, our community leaders and supporters each played a part in making this memorable event happen. We acknowledge them and thank them all most sincerely.

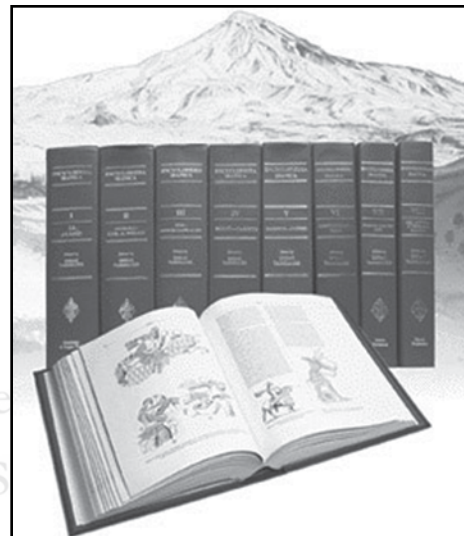
Iranica-Heirloom: A Cultural Celebration at the UMD Nobel Laureate Speaks at UMD, Again

As part of a worldwide series of celebrations in appreciation of *The Encyclopaedia Iranica* Project, spearheaded at Columbia University's Iran Center, the Roshan Institute Center for Persian Studies (RICPS) and Friends of *The Encyclopedia Iranica* in Washington DC hosted a memorable event at the UMD. Among others, 2003 Nobel Peace Laureate Shirin Ebadi and UMD Provost Dr. Nariman Farvardin spoke at the event about the historical significance of this monumental scholarly endeavor headed by Dean of Iranian Studies, Professor Ehsan Yarshater.

An historical undertaking, *The Encyclopaedia Iranica* aspires to be an inclusive, if not exhaustive, compendium of the facts of the history and culture of the Iranian world, most broadly defined. The project began thirty-five years ago and is approaching the halfway mark on its way to completion. For more than three decades, it has pulled all the necessary resources together to record the genesis and evolution of an important Middle Eastern civilization in a spirit of fairness and objectivity, adhering to the strictest standards of accuracy and reliability. It has

encouraged international cooperation, drawing on expertise of first-rate scholars from leading institutions the world over.

The UMD celebration, while part of a worldwide series of events collectively known as "The Encyclopaedia Iranica Week," was unique in several respects. Friends and supporters of *Iranica* all over the world held similar events in major cities of Australia, Japan, Europe, Canada and the United States. The distinguishing aspect of the University of Maryland celebration was that it featured Shirin Ebadi, 2003 Nobel Peace Laureate, among its speakers. Held 3-6 PM on Saturday May 3, 2008, the event opened with words of welcome by the Center Director and Ms. Mona Khademi on behalf of the Friend of Iranica in Washington. Dr. Farvardin too welcomed the packed house, and the University's guest of honor Dr. Shirin Ebadi, and alluded to the three reasons that made the gathering a joyous occasion; he mentioned the major gift the University has received from the Roshan Cultural Heritage Institute in furtherance of its mission and the renaming of the Center, the ratification of Persian Studies major and

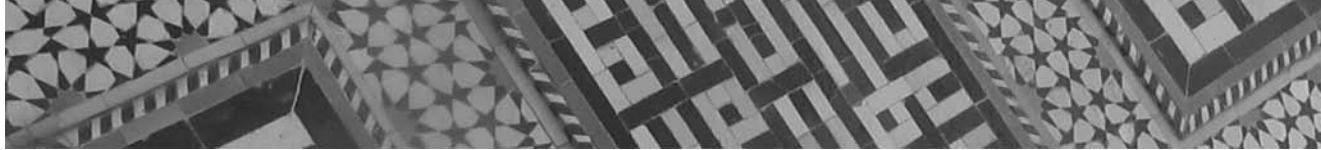


minor by the UMD Senate, and the importance of honoring scholarly efforts such as the *Iranica* Project. A laudatory yet humorous introduction to Dr. Yarshater's unique scholarly accomplishments by Mr. Andrew Omid Omidvar, a leading supporter of *The Encyclopaedia Iranica*, capped the preliminaries.

Then came a scholarly panel discussion by Art Historian Professor Marianna Shreve Simpson of the Universities of Maryland and Pennsylvania, Historian of Iran Professor Ernest Tucker of the US Naval Academy, and Center Director Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak. Dr. Simpson spoke of the history of art forgeries and how, in the case of the Indo-Iranian miniature tradition, certain forgeries of high art can be viewed from another angle as works of art in their own right. Then in an informative and entertaining presentation, Dr. Tucker spoke of using *Iranica* as a source reference to teach Iranian culture and history to Americans. Recounting a humorous exchange on a visit to Iran, he underlined the importance of placing the unfamiliar in the context of the familiar as an effective pedagogical tool in teaching other cultures and histories. In his talk Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak spoke more generally about the challenges of academic research when it confronts the task of debunking widespread urban legends and well-established myths in the search of assertions that are based in verifiable fact, rather than on hearsay.



Right to left: Mrs. Hoveida Farvardin and Dr. Nariman Farvardin, Ms. Mona Khademi, Dr. Shirin Ebadi, Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak



In her speech, Dr. Ebadi spoke of *The Encyclopaedia Iranica*, as a document that has been in the works not just for the past thirty-five years, but for thirty five hundred years, in that it provides contemporary Iranians with a verifiable identity card that is at once solidly factual and something rightfully to be proud of. Switching to more topical issues, she reiterated the point that she often makes, that there is no reason for Iran and the United States to be enemies or even opposed to one another; the two nations can have mutually beneficial relations, if only

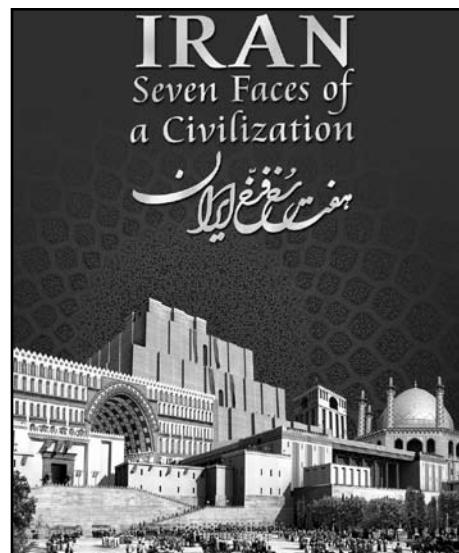


Drs. Ernest Tucker and Marianna Shreve Simpson speak at the Iranica celebration.

they look at one another not just through the distorting lens of the politics of the moment, but through the dynamics of their cultural histories. Addressing the Americans in general as well as the present audience, she concluded, “Judge us not by the last three decades of our political history, but by our three-thousand-year-old civilization.”

The reception that followed provided ample opportunity for socializing, picture taking and informal discussions of *Iranica*. The Center would like to extend its sincere thanks to all those who worked so hard to make “Iranica Heirloom” such a meaningful occasion. Our first thanks go to those student and community volunteers and Center colleagues who worked hard to prepare for the event. The luminaries who graced the event with their presence and their words of wisdom, the community leaders who expressed their appreciation of culturally enriching projects, and the scholars who illuminated aspects of the research involved in works like *The Encyclopaedia Iranica* all earned our respect and deserve our gratitude. “Iranica Heirloom” was indeed the capstone to a year of tremendous outreach activities at the Roshan Institute Center for Persian Studies.

The Seven Faces of Iran



In the evening of Thursday November 8, 2007 Iranian documentary filmmaker Farzin Rezaeian showed his new film “The Seven Faces of Iran” to an enthusiastic gathering of UMD students and their parents who had come to the Multipurpose Room of the Language House in St. Mary’s Hall to see the director’s new take on Iran’s multifaceted history and civilization. Rezaeian’s last film “Persepolis Recreated,” had been screened at the CPS four years ago, so this was the director’s second visit to our Center. In the new film, Rezaeian draws on historical and archeological evidence imaginatively to reconstruct 7,000 years of Iranian history through a focus on Iran’s architectural ruins. The film’s advanced animation techniques bring ancient wonders to life, giving an unprecedented look at Iran’s historical and cultural achievements. Copies of the film were available for purchase and the interest the audience showed can be taken as an indication of the level of interest on the part of expatriate and second-generation Iranian-Americans.

This time our University was the first stop on Rezaeian’s promotional tour, with the University of Chicago, Stanford University, Columbia University, and several others coming in the wake. After the screening of the film Rezaeian spoke about his

technique in filmmaking and his take on Iran’s ancient and eventful history. Students and community members present engaged the director in a lively discussion on his ideas and on architectural ruins as signs of a civilization’s greatness or grandeur. He closed by informing the audience that he was making another film, this one on the mystic poet Rumi, and promised once again to make UMD first stop on his return tour within a year or two. We would welcome him and his move from Iranian architecture to Persian poetry and other aspects of Iran’s long and rich civilization and art history.

Dirt, A Play Against Prejudice



With the help of the Roshan Institute Center for Persian Studies (RICPS), Washington Theater Group staged this pithy play on issues important to all those who wish to see an end to racial and ethnic prejudice and discrimination. The play was followed by an in-conversation session with the audience.

Dirt, originally written by Austrian playwright Robert Schneider after the Gulf War of 1991 and translated into English by Dr. Paul Dvorak in the aftermath of September 11, 2001, is a disturbing psychological self-portrait of Sa`d, a desperate Iraqi citizen and an illegal immigrant who finds himself on the fringes of existence in a German-speaking environment. In his melodramatic narrative, juxtaposing images of the whole-

continued from "Dirt" page 9

some life he has lived back home with the latent xenophobia and blatant racism he faces in the country of his residence, Sa'd tells his story as he hawks roses to eke out a living and gradually loses his ability to preserve his human dignity.

The play, directed by American director David Levin and powerfully presented by Iranian-American veteran actor Shahi Shakibi brings home to Western audiences a viewpoint that can only be dramatized by a Middle Easterner familiar with the ideals of Western Civilization and can interrogate his host culture about the way those ideals are translated into the drab reality of daily life.

As acted by Shakibi, Sa'd's heart-wrenching monologue becomes, in part at least, a powerful story in a world where individuals are judged not by how hard they are trying but by who they are and what part of the world they come from.

The play on the protagonist's name – which means "of good fortune" in Arabic and "sorrowful" in English, helps to drive the point home in this beautifully rendered English version of the play. It tackles issues of identity and self-worth and brings to life Sa'd's psychological self-portrait. The allegory that thus emerges is as highly relevant today in the US as it was when originally performed in Europe following the first Gulf War. Issues of identity, anti-foreign sentiment, and self-worth are brought hauntingly to life through the character's self-portrayal.

Shakibi's moving performance was followed by a Question-and-Answer session between the a full-house audience visibly moved by the story and the play's English translator, its director, and its actor, moderated by the Center Director. The Roshan Institute Center for Persian Studies would like to thank Washington Theater Group and the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center and Mr. Nicholas Roberts above, Mr. Shahin Shakibi for making it possible for us to bring home this timely play and the timeless message it communicated so powerfully to our faculty, staff and students.

Retrospective on Alam's Diaries

Over the past two decades or so, Dr. Alinaghi Alikhani, a former Minister of Economic Affairs (1963-69) and Tehran University Chancellor (1969-71), has been hard at work editing the monumental 7-volume work (with the 7th volume due to appear next year) titled *Yaddashtha-ye Alam* (Alam's Diaries); last year the book was published is available at the publisher's site [<http://www.ibexpub.com>].

On March 8, from 3 to 5 PM, the RICPS held a book launch to explore that work and the significance of the light it sheds on recent Iranian history, particularly the last decade of the late Shah Mohammad-Reza Pahlavi's rule. Because the book was in Persian, that language had been envisioned as the language of the proceedings.

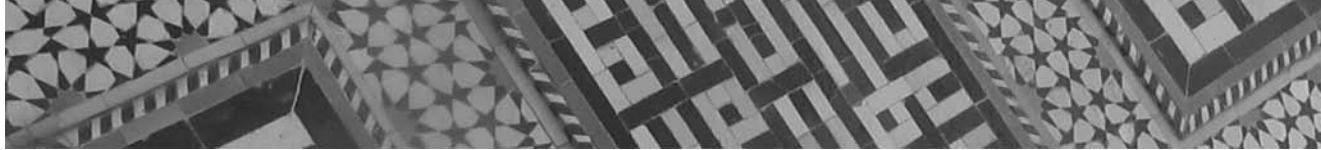
Alam's Diaries is often compared to the 19th-century *Khaterat* (Memoirs) of Hassan E'temad as-Saltaneh, the most trusted advisor to Nasser ad-Din Shah Qajar, another long-ruling Iranian monarch. There are of course important differences between them as Alam was a far larger player in late-twentieth-century Iran's domestic and foreign affairs than his 19th center peer. Also, the significance of Alam's work surpasses that classical work of insider's political history in its immediate relevance to such epoch-making events as the demise of Iranian monarchy and emergence of Islam as the central guiding principle for rulership in Iran. The book's publisher, IBEX, was there to offer the book for purchase.

Originally Dr. Alikhani, now 79 years old, was scheduled to speak on the project, take questions and answers, and sign copies of the book. Due to his frail state of health, however, Dr. Alikhani was unable to be with us. In his absence a TV interview, which he had granted to the VOA Persian News Network, was replayed, followed by a free discussion session on the book and the impact of its publication on contemporary views on the waning days of Iran's monarchy.

Dr. Alikhani has graciously agreed in principle to appear in person sometime over the coming academic years for a live discussion of the book and his work on it. We thank Dr. Alikhani for his continued support and look forward to the occasion. For more details visit the RICPS web site at: [www.Persian.umd.edu].

A Scholar and a Novelist Discuss Iranian Women

On April 5, 2008 we had an exciting and insightful panel discussion on the theme of "Reading and Misreading Iranian Women," featuring a most prominent scholar and a highly accomplished novelist. The panel revolved mainly around the nineteenth-century Iranian poet and pioneering woman, Tahereh Qorrato'l'Ayn. Farzaneh Milan of the University of Virginia and novelist Bahiyyih Nakhjavani discussed the historical and topical aspects of the subject and took questions and comments from the audience of over 100 in St. Mary's Multipurpose Room. The venue, where UMD's Language House is located is where nine students live in the Persian Cluster, one of about a dozen such language communities there. The event opened with the Center Director's words of welcome and brief introduction of the panel's first speaker Dr. Farzaneh Milani. A professor of Persian and Women's Studies at the University of Virginia, Professor Milani is author of several volumes and tens of scholarly articles on women in general and on Iranian women. She approaches this topic with historical perspectives, but focuses her work on women in contemporary Middle East and Muslim majority societies. In her talk, Milani contextualized the life and poetry of Tahereh, not only within the Iranian historic and literary contexts, but also the larger context of literature and the struggle for women's rights around the world. To that end, she compared the Seneca Falls Convention, held in the United States in 1848, and the conference in Badasht, held just a few weeks earlier in Iran.



Following Professor Milani, Ms. Bahiyih Nakhjavani, author of two highly acclaimed novels, *Paper* and *The Saddlebag*, took the podium and mesmerized the audience with a brief synopsis of her new book, *The Woman Who Read Too Much*, a novel/biography of many perspectives on the life of Tahereh. Nakhjavani read sections of her innovative book that expands on the multi-faceted life and poetry of Tahereh and not only provides a necessarily complicated biography of this controversial figure, but in so doing interweaves the history of Iran in the nineteenth century and struggles of artists in the world today. The panel concluded with a question and answer session with an engaged and engaging audience.

RICPS Co-Sponsors Library of Congress's Iranian Film Series

A four-part Iranian film series was screened at the Library of Congress's beautiful and cozy Mary Pickford Theater as a collaborative effort between our Center and the African and Middle Eastern Division and the Motion Picture, Broadcasting & Recorded Sound Divisions of the Library of Congress. The program was curated by Christel Schmidt, film series curator and by Hiran Dinavari, reference librarian. Each of the four films screened at 7 PM in late April and early May 2008 were introduced by a University of Maryland student involved with academic and cultural the activities of the Center. Hiran Dinavari, Iranian world reference librarian also gave an introductory talk and PowerPoint presentation with short film clips as an overview on the history of Iranian Cinema, as part of the film series.

In order of screening, the series featured Abbas Kiarostami's *Through the Olive Trees* [(1994) introduced by Sahar Allamezade, Comparative Literature, UMD], screened on Friday April 25; Majid Majidi's *The Color of Paradise* [(1999), introduced by Anousha Shahsavari, Second Language Acquisition, UMD] screened on Tuesday April 29; Mohsen Makhmalbaf's *Kandahar* [(2001), introduced by Safoura Nourbakhsh, Women's Studies, UMD], screened on Thursday, May 1; and Usama [(2003), produced by Barmak Films of Afghanistan/Ireland/Iran/Japan, introduced by Jake Benson, Persian Studies, UMD], screened on Friday May 2.

We at the RICPS are very happy about this inaugural joint venture with the Library of Congress and look forward to our future cooperation on the Conference on Iranian Jewry: From Past to Present (look for the news in this Newsletter). In the meantime, we invite you to visit the following relevant departments in the Library of Congress: http://www.loc.gov/rr/amed/pdf/Iranian_Film_Series_Part_One.pdf http://www.loc.gov/rr/amed/pdf/Iranian_Film_Series_Part_Two.pdf <http://www.loc.gov/rr/mopic/pickford/> <http://www.loc.gov/rr/mopic/pickford/pickford-current.html>

Jaleh Esfahani Commemorated

The late Jaleh Esfahani, known affectionately by her first name of Jaleh, accomplished much in her lifetime of 86 years. RICPS commemorated her achievement as a poet in the afternoon of Saturday February 16, 2008 at the Tyser Auditorium of the Robert H. Smith School of Business. The event had originally been scheduled for April 2008 as a celebration to be held in the presence of the poet herself. Alas, Jaleh did not survive to be with us, passing in London on November 29, 2007.

Reconfigured as a commemorative event,

the gathering was held in the presence of the poet's son Mr. Bijan Badi and a group of over 150 community members, including members of a Virginia-based Iranian-American Cultural Association known as the Kanoon-e Dustdaran-e Farhang-e Iran, or Kanoon for short. The ceremonies began with a film by Babak Gharadaghi on the poet's life and ideas followed by a presentation by RICPS Director on the place of Jaleh's poetry in the modernist poetic tradition in Iran. Jaleh Esfahani began her poetic career in Tehran in the mid-1940s, but was soon driven to life in exile in the Soviet Union due to her progressive and leftist tendencies. She returned to Iran after the Iranian Revolution of 1978-1983, but soon found it necessary to leave the country once more, this time to settle in London where she lived the rest of her life.

As part of the commemorative ceremonies,

leading Persian poets like Simin Behbahani in Iran and Esmail Khoi in exile, in a film made by Kaveh Rezaei, expressed their condolences at Jaleh's passing and recalled her free spirit and forward-looking vision as well as the caring nature she had preserved throughout her life. Several members of the audience recited poems by Jaleh and a local musical group led by Artpars's Dara Shabahang and Mahvash Vatan performed one of her best-known poems, which they had put to music. In the end, the audience was treated to a light reception. The event, which began at 3:15 PM ended around 6 PM. RICPS would like to thank the members of the Iranian-American community who worked so hard to make this event possible, with special thanks going to Parivash Jalaie and Zohreh Movahed for their tireless efforts to make the gathering such a meaningful and memorable experience for all those present.

Ehsan Yarshater Lecture Series II, Scheduled for April 2009

12

Our Center will host the second Ehsan Yarshater Biennial Lecture Series, featuring historian Ervand Abrahamian in April 9-12, 2009. The series, established in 2005 as an endowment generously funded by the Persian Heritage Foundation and named for the most prominent scholar in the field of Persian and Iranian Studies, is designed to bring to our campus an outstanding scholar for about a week to give a series of talks and be available for consultation to faculty and students. The lectures thus given will then be compiled into a monograph and published by the Center. The first series, given in March 2007 featured a total of four superb lectures given by professor Ali Banuazizi of Boston College on the topic of "Martyrdom in the Political Culture of Iran and the Middle East;" the book-length monograph based on them is due to the press next fall.

The new series are similarly structured and promise to attract just as much attention, as they relate to an eventful and momentous time in modern Iranian history, leading to a watershed event that still affects the relations between Iran and the United States. The lectures are scheduled as follows (venues to be announced later):

"Origins of the Oil Crisis," 3-5 PM, Tuesday April 9, 2009;

"The 1951-53 Oil Crisis," 3-5 PM, Wednesday April 10, 2009;

"The 1953 Coup," 3-5 PM Thursday April 11, 2009;

"The Legacy of the 1951-53 Crisis," 3-5 Saturday April 12, 2009.

In the first lecture, Professor Abrahamian will explore the reasons for the rise of the movement for the nationalization of the oil industry. He will argue that its potency came more from the national aspiration for full sovereignty than from economic grievances. It paralleled the struggle for political independence in other parts of the Third World.

The second lecture will argue that U.S. attempts to settle the dispute were doomed to fail mainly because they did not address the main problem: who was to have ultimate control over the oil industry in Iran: Iran itself or Britain and the Western oil companies.

The 1953 Coup, the topic of the third lecture, will challenge the conventional wisdom that places the coup in the context of the Cold War. The lecture will argue that it should be placed more in the context of First versus Third World, North versus South, imperialism versus nationalism.

Finally, the lecture on the legacy of the 1953 coup in Iran will discuss not only the obvious legacies of the crisis on Iran and on US-Iran relations, but also the continued issue of who should control oil production: sovereign states or Western oil companies.

The Center would like once again to express its gratitude to the Persian Heritage Foundation and Dr. Yarshater, and to thank Professor Abrahamian for accepting our invitation. Our colleagues and students, who have read Professor Abrahamian's Classic of twentieth-century Iranian history, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, will have much to look forward to.

Iranian Jewry: From Past to Present

An International Conference

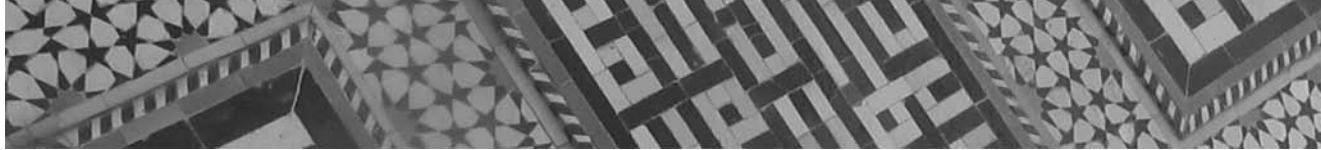
The Joseph and Rebecca Meyerhoff Center for Jewish Studies
The Roshan Cultural Heritage Institute Center for Persian Studies
University of Maryland, College Park

and

The Hebraic Section and Near East Section, African and Middle Eastern Division
Library of Congress

November 1-3, 2008

Beginning with the Achaemenid period and lasting beyond the emigration of a portion of Iran's Jewish population to the State of Israel in 1950s, Jews have had a complex interaction with the Persian state and culture. The Jews of Iran comprise not only one of the oldest populations of Jews in the world, but also one of the most ancient threads in the multifarious fabric of the ancient Iranian community. While recent events in the Middle East have raised the relationship of Jews and Israel to the Islamic Republic in the news as fodder for political scientists and pundits, the rich history of intertwined Jewish and Persian cultures and of Muslim and Jewish Iranians has received little, if any, attention from scholars and other investigators. In deed, it remains one of the enigmas in both Jewish and Iranian Studies that the Jews of Iran stand, still, as one of least studied, least known subcultures of world Jewry.



This interdisciplinary conference encourages investigations not only with an eye on contemporary socio-political dynamics, but further, and more importantly, with the aim gradually to fill some of the lingering gaps in our knowledge about Iranian Jewry, ultimately to enrich both fields of Iranian and Jewish studies. In this spirit, the conference welcomes a broad range of investigations into previously unexamined or under-explored historical and cultural contributions of Iranian Jews to Persian and/or Jewish cultures. These might include, but are not limited to, inquiries pertaining to the concept of religious impurity (*nejāsāt*) and forced or voluntary conversion; considerations of the role of Iranian Jews in 20th-century Iran; explorations of contemporary Iran-Israel relations; and investigations into what it has meant to be Jewish-Iranian before 1948 and after inside and outside Iran.



Tentative Program

Saturday, November 1 UMCP

Welcome Reception 7:30-10:00 PM

Sunday, November 2 UMCP

Opening Ceremony: 9:30-10:00 AM

Welcoming Remarks:

Dr. Nariman Farvardin, Provost, UMCP

Dr. James Harris, Dean, Arts and Humanities, UMCP

Opening Remarks:

Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak, Roshan Center

Hayim Lapin, Meyerhoff Center

Conference Principles and Procedures;

Houman Sarshar, Convener

Session I: Jews and Persians in Ancient Iran (10:00 AM-12:00 noon)

Chair: Hayim Lapin, University of Maryland

Shaul Shaked, Hebrew University

“Mard ī ahlaw in Zoroastrianism and the Righteous in Judaism”

Yakov Elman, Yeshiva University

“Interrelations between Rabbinic and Sassanian Law in Late Antiquity”

Miriam Macuch, Free University of Berlin

“The Sassanian Legal System and the Babylonian Talmud”

Lunch Break: 12:00 noon-1:00 PM

Session II: Jews in Medieval Persian Cultures (1:00-2:45 PM)

Chair: Antoine Borrut, University of Maryland

Parvaneh Poursbariati, Ohio State University

“Jewish Participation on Over-Land Trade in Late Antique Iran: A Preliminary Assessment”

Maria Subtelny, University of Toronto

“The Jews at the Edge of the World: The Islamic Ascension Narrative as

Missionary Text in Medieval Iran”

Vera Moreen, independent scholar

“Neglected Sources: The Riches of Judeo-Persian Manuscripts”

Coffee Break: 2:45 PM -3:15 PM

Session III: Jewish-Persian Relations in the Nineteenth Century(3:15PM-5:00PM)

Chair: Madeline Zilfi, University of Maryland

Daniel Tsadik, Hebrew University

“Some Notes on the Jews in the Pre-Constitutional Years (1896-1906)”

Haideh Sabim, Hofstra University

“The Herat War and the Expulsion of the Jews”

Nahid Pirnazar, University of California, Los Angeles

“Simantov Melamed’s Hayāt al-Rūh in the Context of Iranian Literary Tradition”

Evening Program: A Musical Performance by the Bukharan Jewish Musicians of New York at CSPAC, 7:30 PM

Monday, November 3

Whittall Pavillion

Library of Congress

Session IV: Jewish Culture in Twentieth Century Iran (9:30 AM-11:00 AM)

Chair: Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak, University of Maryland

Orly Rabimian, Ben Gurion University

“The Image of Jews in Iranian Cinema”

Jaleb Pirnazar, University of California, Berkeley

“Post-Revolutionary Jewish Iranian Literature”

Session V: Jewish Material Culture and Folk Art (11:00 AM- 12:45 PM)

Chair: Leah Baer, independent scholar

Judith Goldstein, Vassar College

“Muslim Rulers and Jewish Holy Men: Oral Tradition and the Imagination of Political Agency”

Shalom Sabar, Hebrew University

“Persian-Jewish Amulets: Shapes and Images, Texts and Social Function”

Evan Rappaport, New York University

“Bukharian Jewish Musical Life and Its Relationship to Judeo-Persian Culture”

Lunch Break: 1:00 PM-2:00 PM

Session VI: Iran and Israel in the World Today (2:00 PM-3:45 PM)

Chair: Saul Sosnowski, University of Maryland

David Menashri, Tel Aviv University

“Iran and Israel: A Couple at Odds”

Trita Parsi, National Iranian American Council

“Iran and Israel: Can a Modus Vivendi Be Achieved?”

Daniel Levy, The Century Foundation

“Iran and Israel in a Regional Context”

Session VII: Roundtable Discussion The State of Scholarship on Judeo-Iranica (4:00 PM -5:00 PM)

Chair: Houman Sarshar

Discussants:

Peggy Pearlstein, Library of Congress, on holdings there

Vera Moreen, on the Encyclopedia of Jews in the Middle East?

All the speakers



RICPS Hosts Leading Islamic Scholar, a First at UMD

Last summer, a generous grant from the Alavi Foundation of New York, matched equally by University of Maryland funds, made it possible for our Center to select and invite to the UMD campus our first Visiting Scholar. We seized on the opportunity at hand to strengthen our offerings in one of the areas of Islamic Studies sorely understudied in many American universities, namely the historical evolution, textual richness, and lasting impact of Sufism, or Islamic mysticism, on contemporary Islamic ideas in many Muslim-majority countries, particularly that of modern Iran.

Our final choice, Dr. Nasrollah Pourjavady, a full Professor at Tehran University, is a most prominent scholar of classical Persian literature, particularly the mystical strain in it. Over the past three decades, he has emerged as a leading voice in contemporary studies of Persian mysticism and the history of Sufi thought and expression. In the process, he has amassed an impressive record of publications both in Persian and English, especially in preparing lesser-known Sufi

texts in attractive scholarly editions far more appealing to the younger generations of students and general readers than ever before.

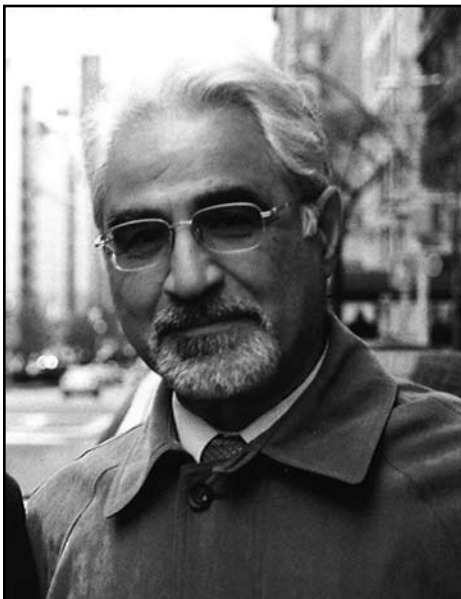
The original time-frame called for the term of residency to begin in September 2007, but various factors beyond our control complicated Dr. Pourjavady's travel arrangements and he was not able to join us for fall semester 2007. Once we made the necessary adjustments and Dr. Pourjavady arrived on our campus in February 2008, he found a whole class of undergraduates waiting to take his courses and things began immediately to take shape for us to have a wonderful resource scholar in Islamic Studies available to our faculty and students throughout our campus.

As a leading scholar of Islamic philosophy and mystical literature in Persian, Professor Pourjavady taught PERS 441 Islam in Iran this spring semester and PERS 251 Modern Iran in the first summer session of 2008. At the same time, several of our graduate and undergraduate students took PERS

499 Directed Studies in Persian, with him. In addition, beginning in April, he held a series of weekly free discussions open to all interested individuals where he expounded quite a few classical texts of the vast mystical literature in Persian. Because these sessions were free of charge, open to all, and unencumbered by formalities of registration and initial or final assessments, participants were almost always individuals with an abiding interest in the topic, a fact that made the sessions all the more attractive. Finally, while at the UMD, Dr. Pourjavady was invited and gave talks to a number of other universities and institutions, including the University of Chicago, Harvard, Asia Society, and The Library of Congress. In short, the visit went a long way to enhance our understanding of the doctrines, history and significant achievements of Persian mysticism.

Early in June, Jake Benson, an undergraduate PS major who had taken advantage of Dr. Pourjavady's presence to take his courses and engage him in various discussions, sat for an intimate interview with Dr. Pourjavady. Here is the transcript in full:

Knowing Iran From Within An Interview with Dr. Nasrollah Pourjavady by Jake Benson



RICPS First Visiting Scholar Professor Nasrollah Pourjavady

Q: Is this the first time that you have taught courses in the US?

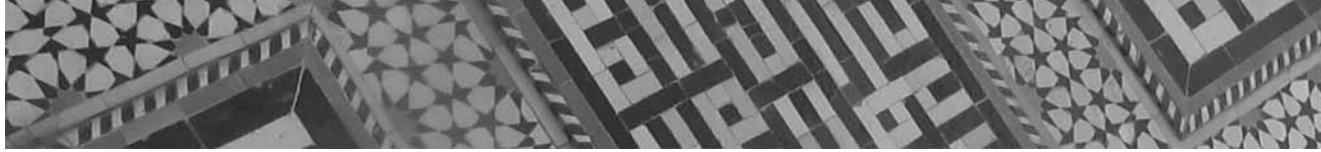
A: In the fall of 2002, I was the NEH (National Endowment for the Humanities) Professor in the Department of Philosophy and Religion at Colgate University where I taught two courses; one on Islamic Philosophy, and the other on Islamic Mysticism.

Q: How did you first hear about the RoshanCenter for Persian Studies (RICPS)?

I first heard about the establishment of the Center from Dr. Karimi-Hakkak during his visit to Tehran in 2003 and I was glad to hear that a center for Persian studies was being established in this part of the country; a center that would reach out beyond the world of academia.

Q: Have you had any previous interactions with the RICPS?

A: In February 2007, I was invited to give two lectures at the Center: one in English entitled "Literary Contests in Classical Persian Literature: a Forgotten Genre", and the other in Persian entitled "Zabān-e hāl dar adabiyāt-e Fārsi", which was about an important literary device, a kind of personification, in Persian literature. Then I was invited to participate in the Rumi conference convened by the RICPS in September 2007. I delivered a paper entitled "Philosophy and the Philosophers in Rumi's *Masnavi*", and as the title indicates, I described Rumi's views on philosophy.

**Q: What classes have you taught at the RICPS?**

A: During the Spring semester 2008, I taught the course Islam in Iran, which was an introductory historical survey of Iran during the Islamic period until recent times. We covered the rise and spread of Islam in Iran, and the establishment of Shi'ism as the state religion during the Safavid period. We also covered more recent times: the events that led to the Iranian Revolution, the downfall of the Pahlavi Dynasty, and how Islam became politicized as a result. Recently, I have offered a weekly lecture series on various Persian mystical literary figures that represent different genres such as Ahmad Ghazzali and the Illuminationist figure Shehaboddin Sohrawardi. Currently, I am teaching a summer course called Modern Iran.

Q: What sort of students took your course Islam in Iran?

A: There were some students who were familiar with Iran, such as Iranian and Muslim students from other countries, as well as Americans who were not as familiar with Iran or Islam. The students taking the course majored in many different areas. They brought to the class a high level of interest and appreciation, and a desire to obtain a broader, more nuanced view of Iran from someone who is from the culture.

Q: Why do you think students in America are interested in Islam today; this interest did not exist when you yourself were a student here in the 1960's, did it?

A: Yes, In the 60's, some interest in Islam began to develop among a few Americans, but that was mainly in Sufism. Even I, who had come from Iran, became interested in Islamic philosophy and mysticism in those years, when I was an undergraduate student in San Francisco. The interest in Islam today, however, is for a different reason and is on a much larger scale. Today the students in America are interested in Islam for two main reasons: the first is the Islamic Revolution in Iran. They want to understand the ideology of the people who later took of the Islamic Revolution, and who later took Americans as hostages. They also want to comprehend the Iranian government's ambitions to pursue a costly nuclear program, an issue that makes the country the focus of attention in world politics today. The second reason is clearly the events of September 11th 2001. Americans want to know why the individuals responsible would perpetrate such a heinous crime. They want to understand why suicide bombers kill so many innocent people every day in Iraq. In short, Islam has unfortunately become the ideology of killing, hatred, and terror; while in the 60's, Islam, particularly Islamic mysticism and Sufism, was represented as the ideology of love and peace.

Q: But Iranians were not responsible for the September 11th attacks, and even in Iraq, the majority of suicide bombers appear to be Sunni Muslims?

A: Yes, that's right; no Iranian was among those who perpetrated the crimes of September 11th. In fact, Iranian people were just as dismayed, sad, and shocked as any other people in the world when they watched that horrid scene of the World Trade Center towers burning on television. Mind you, the Shia Iranians themselves have been subject to the terrorism by organizations such as al-Qa'ida. For example, the bombing of the Imam Reza Shrine in Mashhad on June 20th 1994, caused the deaths of almost a hundred people. Ramzi Yusuf, who is currently held imprisoned here in the US for his role in the first World Trade Center bombing, confessed to have planted that bomb. Iranians, as Shi'i Muslims, think of al-Qa'ida, who are Wahhabis, as their enemies and will have nothing to do with them. In addition, Iran also suffered injustices committed by the Taleban regime in Afghanistan when a number of Iranian diplomats were brutally murdered there on September 10th 1998.

Q: Hasn't the Islamic Republic been aggressive, tough, and even repressive? Aren't they considered to be a state sponsor of terrorism by the US government?

A: The Revolution was not supposed to turn out this way. That revolution was started because the Iranians thought that the Shah's government was corrupt and therefore unable to address the problems facing the nation at that time. We thought that spirituality was the answer to the materialism and militarism that the world was facing. We thought it was Islam that could transform the culture of consumerism and materialism and replace that with a more humane and compassionate one. The Shah was violating human rights, and we thought that an Islamic Republic would endorse and support such rights. We thought that the Shah was negligent towards the environment, and it was Islam that would save the environment; Islam for us was "green". The Shah's ambitions included a nuclear program, and I recall that some of revolutionaries in those days, who are right now active in the government of the Islamic Republic, were highly critical of the Shah's nuclear program, but somehow things changed. I hope, however, things will change for the better and a more positive image of Islam will be presented to the world by my country.

Q: Were you able to discuss these points in your class?

A. Yes, more or less; and I'm glad, I should say, to see such interest among students in clarifying history.

Q: Why do you think Muslim students in particular took your course?

A: Their motivations were mixed. Some thought that it would be an easy course for them since they were already familiar with Islam and they thought that they could make an easy grade; however, I don't think that this proved to be the case, because they all had to work just as hard as non-Muslim students. In fact, an American student earned the best grade in my class. Others took the course to attain a better understanding of Islam, and some really wanted to confirm their belief that terrorist acts carried out in the name of Islam are not really Islamic. In fact, one of the papers in this class was on this very topic. It demonstrates how Muslim students in America are uncomfortable with this prejudicial view of Islam that unfortunately exists today.

Q: What is your view of the cultural exchanges that have taken place between Iran and the US over the last decade? Have they been helpful?

A: Not as much as they could have been. If you recall, it was during the Clinton Administration and that of President Khatami in Iran that both countries expressed an interest in having improved ties; this led to a series of cultural exchanges between the two countries. Both nations sent scholars and academics to each other's countries, but I don't think that it has really worked as well as it should. This is mainly due to prevailing political obstacles. Both countries should have made more vigorous efforts in these exchanges. In the long run, improved cultural ties and academic cooperation, such as those of visiting professors, will be for the benefit of both countries. Such exchanges can also play an important role in solving the political problems between the two nations.

Q: What do you think about the current state of Persian studies in the US today?

A: I think that in recent years there has been more of an imbalance in favor of current events and socio-political issues, and even modern literature over historical periods and classical literature. Iran did not become a nation only with the advent of the Constitutional Revolution of 1906; it has a very long history that has resulted in an important cultural legacy for the entire world. While some programs have shied away from more classical subjects in favor of contemporary issues, I think that this is a mistake. For example, even if a student wants to focus only on modern Persian literature, it is imperative for her or him to study the classics as modern works can rely very heavily on earlier themes.

Q: What was your overall impression of the RICPS?

A: While the center is still very young, it holds a great deal of promise for the future. There are few places where students can pursue research in Persian language and literature. There are few American universities that offer courses in Iranian studies, and even fewer that offer courses in classical Persian literature. In terms of faculty and students, the center is still developing, but it is fortunate to have Dr. Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak at the helm, as he understands and is intimately familiar with not only the Iranian world, but with both classical heritage and modern Persian literary genres as well.

Rishabh Parmar, RICPS's Graduate Assistant 2007-08, Bids Us Adieu

As he was leaving RICPS where he had served as a GA, Rishabh Parmar asked to record his impressions and we welcomed the offer. Here are his words:



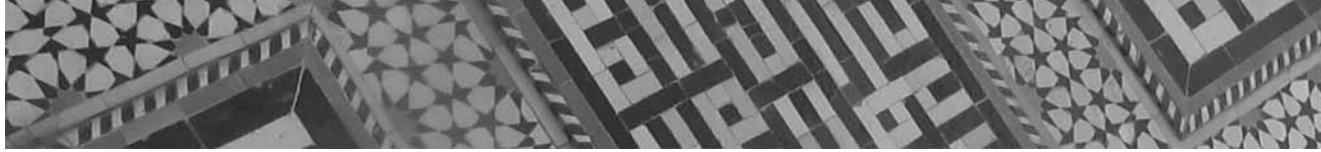
RICPS's 2007-08 Graduate Assistant Rishabh Parmar

"I received my Bachelors of Science degree in Electronics and Communication from India in 2006 and have just completed my Master of Science degree in Telecommunications and Management from the University of Maryland, specializing in Network Planning and Engineering. During my last year at the University, I was lucky enough to be appointed as Graduate Assistant at the Roshan Institute Center for Persian Studies (RICPS). I found the School of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures (SLLC) and the RICPS within it, a diverse world of languages and cultures within the UMD. The RICPS in particular is a lively hub of intellectual activity and an academic home for students of different background and interests.

Born and raised in multilingual India and having become proficient in telecommunication networking, database management, web designing and administration, I worked at RICPS as graduate assistant from August 2007 to May 2008, where my work involved web administration and server management as well as various administrative chores. I found the experience of working at the Center, which is blessed with hard-working

and caring professors and friendly students, captivating from start to the end. The culturally rich events that the RICPS organizes nourished my soul with poetry, music, and movies that were both beautiful and immediately relevant to my cultural background. Whether absorbed in my work as the Center's web administrator or doing my job updating the website and the servers, making and uploading flyers that announced various cultural events, or handling other administrative duties, I worked with the Center Director closely enough to see him work around the clock for the center, and to learn great things from him. I would like to close by saying that the RICPS is a wonderful place to learn and explore the wondrous world of Persian culture with knowledgeable and talented professors who are always there for anyone who cares to learn from them. I know I will always look back on my experience here with tremendous fondness and I wish the Center all the best. "





Hossein Amirsaleh Undergraduate Essay Award

As PERSIPHONY III goes to press, we are getting ready to award the second annual Hossein Amirsaleh student essay award.

You may recall from the RICPS Web site and from PERSIPHONY II that this award is designed to recognize outstanding scholarship by UMD undergraduates. Endowed in 2005 with funds from the Amirsaleh family in the name of Iranian-American industrialist and philanthropist Mr. Hossein Amirsaleh, the award consists of a citation and a monetary prize of \$1,000.

Last year, Aaron Cordova, Junior, Computer Science major was the recipient of the first Amirsaleh Student Award in Persian Studies. His paper, written for PERS 441 Islam in Iran, had been nominated for the award by his professor. Dr. Ahmad Kazemi-Mousavi, along with five other papers submitted for consideration by various UMD professors. The committee, consisting of Professor Pierre Verdaguer and Dr. Ali Abasi, as well as the Center Director, read Aaron's paper, titled "Infallibility and Islamic Authority," evaluating it overall as the best. It assessed Aaron's paper as "well-researched," "coherent," and "informative," and judged the author as "quite familiar with the topic" and "advancing a sustained line of argument."

Once again, we encourage all UMD undergraduates taking the growing number of Iran- or Persian-related courses offered on our campus, either by the Center or by other departments to compete for this award. To be eligible, the paper must relate, wholly or in substantial part, to Persian Studies, inclusive of the modern countries of Iran, Afghanistan, and Persian-Speaking Central Asia, as well as Iranian and Persian-speaking diaspora communities. All academic disciplines, from language and literature or other humanistic field to social science studies qualify for consideration. The paper must also be in English and be nominated by the instructor to whom it was submitted in partial fulfillment of a regular course's requirements. For more information, please check the RICPS web site at [www.persian.umd.edu].



Roshan Institute Center for Persian Studies gratefully acknowledges the support and assistance of the following charitable organizations and community leaders:

Roshan Cultural Heritage Institute, Honolulu, HI
The Foundation for Iranian Studies, Bethesda, MD
The Alavi Foundation of New York, New York
The Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars, Washington, DC
The Persian Heritage Foundation, New York
The Persian Cultural Foundation, Clifton, NJ
The ILEX Foundation, Boston, MA
Roshan Cultural Heritage Institute, Washington, DC

Dr. Gholamreza and Mrs. Mahnaz Afkhami, Chevy Chase, MD
Mr. Cyrus Amir-Mokri, Esq., New York, NY
Mr. and Mrs. Mahyar Amirsaleh, Secaucus, NJ
H.E. Dr. Jamshid Amouzegar, Chevy Chase, MD
Mr. Jamshid Ansari, PARSA Community Foundation
Professor Arjang Assad, Robert H. Smith School of Business, UMD
Dr. Shaul Bakhash and Dr. Haleh Esfandiari, Potomac, MD
Mr. Fred Farshay, Bethesda, MD
Dean Nariman and Mrs. Hoveida Farvardin, UMD
Dr. Akbar Ghahary, Persian Cultural Foundation, Clifton, NJ
Ms. Noosheen Hashemi, The H.A.N.D. Foundation, Menlo Park, CA
Mr. and Mrs. Babak Hoghooghi, Potomac, MD
Ms. Mona Khademi, Washington, DC
Mr. Abbas Kiarostami, Tehran, Iran
Mr. and Mrs. Hassanali and Taraneh Mehran, Potomac, MD
Dr. Elahe Mir-Djalali, Honolulu, HI
Ms. Shirin Neshat, New York
Mr. and Mrs. Khosrow Semnani, Salt Lake City, Utah
Professor Ehsan Yarshater, New York

Special Thanks to the Following UMD Departments and Colleagues:
The Joseph and Rebecca Meyerhoff Center for Jewish Studies, UMD
The Art Gallery at the University of Maryland
Robert H. Smith School of Business
The Iranian Students Foundation (ISF)
The Persian Cluster at the UMD's Language House
Radio College Park

Professor Nasrollah Pourjavady, Dr. Ahmad Kazemi Moussavi, Dr. Ali Abasi, Mr. Mohammad Esmaili, Ms. Nahal Akbari, Ms. Negar Assari-Samimi, Ms. Laila Ahmadpanah, Ms. Anousha Shahsavari, Ms. Sahar Allamezade, Mr. Rishabh Parmar, Mr. Behrad Behbahani, Mr. Jake Benson, Mrs. Behnaz Razavi

The Meftah-Assad Cultural Enhancement Fund

18



Mrs. Derakhshandeh Meftah-Assad and her son, Professor Arjang Assad

To those more closely involved with the four-year record of the Roshan Institute Center for Persian Studies, the name of Arjang Assad must have a familiar ring. He was a friend and supporter of the Center even before the Center was established, providing counsel on its vision and mission, informing the community about the University's strategic decision on the move, and otherwise supporting the idea every step of the way from inception to fruition in 2004.

In the early days of the Center's life, he patiently coached us on the many intricacies of outreach activities on our campus, and on ways of reaching out to those in the community likely to appreciate the importance of an academic unit with an ethnic and cultural anchor. As we began to look for venues on the UMD campus suitable for purposes of our programming, he did all he could to make Van Munching Hall a prime location for our events and was a constant presence at those events. Close to four years later, Dr. Assad's relations with us have deepened substantially. He has played a role in our events when we needed one, housed

our guests in his home when we have needed local hosts, introduced and moderated panel discussions, and even served as *ad-hoc* interpreter when called upon. All we had to do was to ask him!

Last year, after Dr. Assad's mother passed away at the age of 86, he expressed his intention to set up an endowment in the name of his mother -- Derakhshandeh Meftah-Assad-- who passed in March 2007 after a long illness. He agreed to devote the proceeds to the category we needed most; to provide annual support for cultural enhancement at the discretion of the Center director. The Derakhshandeh Meftah-Assad endowment established at the College of Arts and Humanities in the 2007, and earmarked for the RICPS, will form a cornerstone of our community programming and will doubtless help us in funding community-directed events for which we may not have regular items in our budget. We would like to take this opportunity to register our profound gratitude for this meaningful way of culminating the relations between us.

Dr. Assad has been on the faculty of the University of Maryland for 30 years. He recently completed a term as Senior Associ-

ate Dean of the Robert H. Smith School of Business. In August 2008, he will take up the position of Dean of the School of Management at the University at Buffalo. While we are going to sorely miss his cheerful constant presence, his unfailingly supportive guidance, and his wise day-to-day counsel, we feel enhanced by his friendship, cherish the memory of his selfless personality, and feel certain he will find ways of keeping his connections to the Center he has had so many interactions with. We are profoundly grateful to him.



Shirin Neshat

Shirin Neshat is AiR at UMD

Internationally acclaimed visual artist Shirin Neshat will be Artist in Residence (AiR) at our university in Spring 2009. Ms. Neshat was originally invited to take up the position last year, but her engagements in Europe prevented her from coming to us at that time. While here, the Iranian-born, New York City filmmaker will conduct an artist's residency for the University of Maryland community, culminating in a film screening and a public talk on Thursday, April 9th, 2009, currently scheduled for 6pm in the Hoff Theater in the Stamp Student Union.

Ms. Neshat is a widely screened and exhibited film and photographic artist whose works explore the complexity of life in her homeland and elsewhere as it comes to terms with modernity and globalization. Her works span both documentary and narrative traditions and address the often contradictory requirements of these two modes of filmmaking. Among the many venues that have screened her films are the Sundance Film Festival, the Tribeca Film Festival, New York City's Museum of Modern Art, Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg, Russia, the Kunsthalle in Vienna, the Walker Art Center, and the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

Neshat has been awarded the Lillian Gish Prize, International 1st Prize – Venice Biennale, a New York State Council on the Arts Grant, the International Center for Photography Infinity Award and a Tiffany Foundation Grant. The Roshan Institute Center for Persian Studies (RICPS) is proud to sponsor this important artistic event along with the University of Maryland's College of Arts and Humanities and the Department of Art. For more information and possible changes in the schedule of events related to this visit, please see [www.persian.umd.edu].



Students reciting Simin Behbahani's Poems from left to right: Parnia Ashktorab, Shahrooz Shokraei, Behnaz Razavi, Mehrnoush Karimian, Tina Mohammadi, Alireza Jazayeri

This year Iranian poet Simin Behbahani was the first recipient of Stanford's recently instituted Bitá Prize for

People's Poet Simin Behbahani

Literature and Freedom. The \$10,000 prize is part of the Daryabari Persian Studies Fund endowed by Bitá Daryabari to support and promote teaching, research and scholarship relating to Iran, and people of Iranian or Persian heritage. The award ceremony was held on Tuesday, March 11 at Stanford University and included a rousing speech by Behbahani titled "Iran Today: A Poet's Vision."

The University of Maryland's Roshan Institute Center for Persian Studies (RICPS) seized on the occasion of the poet's presence to host an event featuring her on Saturday March 29. The Iranian community, in turn,

showed the depth of its affection for this living spirit of Persian poetry by gathering to celebrate Simin's lifetime achievement and to listen to the lady who embodies all that is noble and creative in our culture.

Born in 1927 in Tehran, Behbahani started writing poetry at age 12 and published her first poem at 14. In a career spanning over six decades, she has expanded the range of traditional Persian verse forms and has produced stunning works of the 20th century Persian poetry. While many poets of her time embraced free verse, Behbahani expressed her modernism not through poetic forms, but through the development of iconic images that impress themselves on the reader's mind to educate and edify, touch and move, and haunt and capture it. Thus, while formally focusing on the traditional form of *the ghazal*, she took it to new lyrical heights or social depths — often with a modern twist in perspective and voice. For all her innovations, Behbahani was nominated for the Nobel Prize in literature in 1997 and was awarded a Human Rights Watch-Hellmann/Hammett grant in 1998.

On March 29, in what must have been one of her stellar performances, Simin appeared before an overflow audience of about 400 to read her poems, express her views on Iran's government and culture, move people to tears with the emotional impact of her compositions, and bring them back to laughter with jokes

that were at once original and highly illuminating. She was in turn surprised when six undergraduate students of Persian literature, having memorized her poems, recited them most effectively in her presence. Visibly touched, she exclaimed: "now I can die knowing that my words have found their place in the minds of future generations of Iranians the world over."

The event also included a brief introduction to Simin Behbahani's poetry by Professor Farzaneh Milani of the University of Virginia who, along with Dr. Kaveh Safa, has translated *A Cup of Sin*, the only book-length English-language translation of Simin's poetry. A second crescendo occurred when Ms. Behbahani's

old friend of over sixty years, now in his 90s, appeared unannounced, bringing the audience to their feet in spontaneous applause. Pushed in his wheelchair, Mr. Nosratollah Amini, Tehran's mayor during the rule of Dr. Mohammad Mosaddeq in the early 1950s, had defied ill health to come to greet his old friend and Iran's leading poet.

The event came to a close with another brief talk by a UMD student who had recently visited Iran. Kowsar Jamshidi, who had set up a photography exhibition outside the lecture hall, spoke about the various activities that Iranian women undertake, in the face of the restrictions imposed on them by the current state. In response, Ms. Behbahani bravely took the government of Iran to task for such restrictions, another gesture of defiance that brought the audience to its feet.

By all measures, the March 29 event constituted a watershed in RICPS's outreach activities. We express our deepest gratitude to Professor Abbas Milani, Director the Program in Iranian Studies at Stanford, who allowed us to host Ms. Behbahani at the UMD, and we thank our colleagues, students and community members who so generously support our efforts by attending our events. The undergraduate students who recited Behbahani's poems and all the other who lent a helping hand in organizing the event deserve special gratitude. Thank you all!



The Persian Cluster, Year 3

By Dr. Phoenix Liu, Director, the Language House



Students of Persian Cluster 3: Left to right (seated), Joe Paulson and Amir Parhangi; (half seated) Elnaz Ahmadi, (standing) Iman Fahimi, Shahrooz Shokraei, Saba Hamidi, Mina Jafari, Mona Ghias, Neda Khalili, Nadia Khalili

The Persian Cluster was added to the Language House in 2005 and has hence strived to be the most active cluster in the House. In the Fall 07 semester, *Fox TV*(9/25/07) and *Washington Post*(11/8/07) reporters came to interview our Persian Cluster students about their view of American-Iranian relationship. In Spring08, *Voice of America*(5/20/08) also invited one of our Persian-speaking students to talk about American presidential candidates.

Many students of the Persian Cluster are also members of Iranian Students' Foundation (ISF). As a result, the Cluster has been introducing the Iranian culture to the stu-

dents on campus as well as working hard to reach out to the community. For example, the Cluster offered a Persian New Year Celebration (3/14/08) in the House, and the event was open to the public; the Cluster also organized a Nowruz Festival (3/23/08), which means "a new day," to help more than 500 people celebrate the first day of spring.

The Persian Cluster started in 2005 as a small cluster with only five members. In Fall07, the cluster expanded to a ten-member cluster. A picture is enclosed to show this lively group.

Why Persian Studies? *Why not!*

The University of Maryland has established an undergraduate major and minor and two post-BA degrees in Persian Studies, a field of inquiry that covers historical developments in the language, literature, and culture of Persian-speaking countries, including Iran, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan, as well as the surrounding cultures and the emerging Persian diaspora the world over.



Here's an image of RICPS's informational brochure on Persian Studies Major and Minor, as post-BA opportunities at the UMD. For a hard copy, please send a request with your postal address to our office or to [persianstudies@umd.edu].

The Roshan Cultural Heritage Institute
Center for Persian Studies
1220 Jimenez Hall
University of Maryland
College Park, MD, 20742
USA

301.405.1891 TEL
301.314.9752 FAX
Persianstudies@umd.edu
www.persian.umd.edu

Return Service Requested



UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND
College of Arts and Humanities
School of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures