Iran in the 20th Century
Historiography and Political Culture

Edited by Touraj Atabaki

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a powerful leadership is able to bring back the country's 'heroic and glorious Islamic or pre-Islamic past' and induce the much needed change and reform. At the same time, the messianic dimension of the Shiite exceptionalism helped to provide a fertile ground for such perception. In the post-1953 coup d'état period, with a major setback that the Constitutional Revolution had suffered, the call for an impeccable savior became more apparent, so much so that the intelligentsia saw no other option but to look once again for yet another redeemer. The architects of the Islamic Revolution of 1979 are greatly indebted to the contribution of the twentieth-century national historiography to the country's political culture.

The Nation’s Poet: Ferdowsi and the Iranian National Imagination

Afshin Marashi

At 4:30 p.m. on October 12, 1934, Reza Shah – the founding monarch of Iran's Pahlavi dynasty – arrived in the city of Tus, in northeastern Iran, to make a speech at the dedication ceremony for the newly built mausoleum of the poet Ferdowsi. Reza Shah's speech at Ferdowsi's mausoleum was in fact part of a series of ceremonies and events – including the convening of an international conference of Ferdowsi scholars – held in Iran during October and November of 1934. The month-long series of ceremonies, celebrations, and the conference itself, were all choreographed to mark the millennium of Ferdowsi's birth. By 1934, the Pahlavi state had come to see the importance of elevating the status of Ferdowsi as a cultural icon of Iranian national identity and of commemorating Ferdowsi's poetry as an important milestone in Iranian national history. Ferdowsi's tenth-century poetic masterpiece, the Shahnamah, an epic poem comprising over fifty thousand couplets chronicling the myth-history of Iran from its primordial beginnings to a poetic rendering of the Arab-Muslim conquest of the seventh century, had long been central to the pre-modern Persianate literary tradition. The Pahlavi state's interest in promoting the image of Ferdowsi as a public symbol, however – with all of the ceremonial trappings of state sponsorship and official commemoration – was by contrast something very new. By the 1920s and the 1930s, the Pahlavi state had very consciously taken up the task of identifying suitable elements from pre-modern Iranian culture and reshaping them to cohere to the newly universalized standards of the nation-state. Among the attributes characterizing the political-cultural form of the nation was a necessary pantheon of 'national heroes' who could be displayed and identified as embodying authentically national characteristics. The Pahlavi
state’s interest in elevating the status of Ferdowsi and staging the millennium celebration of 1934 was thus very much a part of an effort to place both Ferdowsi and the Shahnamah at the center of this newly established national pantheon. The numerous efforts of the Pahlavi state in this regard: the rebuilding of the Ferdowsi mausoleum as a suitable monument and site of national pilgrimage, the convening of the international conference of Ferdowsi scholars, the publication and circulation of abridged and now more widely accessible editions of the Shahnamah, and the increasingly ubiquitous presence of Ferdowsi’s image in the print and popular culture of Iran during the 1920s and 1930s, including through the new medium of film, all worked to ensure that by 1934 there was universal agreement that Ferdowsi was Iran’s national poet and that the Shahnamah was Iran’s national epic.

**BETWEEN ORIENTALISM AND NATIONALISM: THE ORIGINS OF THE FERDOWSI REVIVAL**

The work of recasting Ferdowsi in the role of Iran’s national poet had its origins – not in the Pahlavi period – but in the cultural, intellectual, and historiographic developments of the nineteenth century. Already by the mid-nineteenth century, as the increasingly globalized model of the nation worked to encourage emerging and would-be nations to tie a literary tradition to their political histories, the Shahnamah had been identified as worthy of canonization in the context of Iran’s national project. Initially in Europe and the subcontinent, but later increasingly within Iran as well, the production of manuscript, lithographed, and published editions of the epic – as well as works in emulation of Ferdowsi’s poetic style – began to accelerate from the early nineteenth century onwards. These nineteenth-century precedents came to herald later twentieth-century developments, when Ferdowsi and the Shahnamah would become the cultural and literary centerpieces for a rapidly crystallizing Iranian national imagination. Most significantly, it was the journals Kaveh and Iranshahr – the Berlin-based Persian-language journals published during the Great War and its immediate aftermath – that made the vital link between the nineteenth-century Ferdowsi cultural-literary that the two-volume Grundris der Iranischen Philologie (1896–1904), edited by Wilhelm Geiger and Ernst Kuhn, which was perhaps the most succinct and comprehensive work of its day summarizing European scholarly discoveries vis-à-vis Iran. The first volume was devoted entirely to philological scholarship regarding Iranian languages and included, among others, the writings of the noted scholar Christian Bartholomae (1855–1925) whose work was pioneering in the study of the Gathas and Avesta. Taqizadah summarizes these findings for his Iranian audience. He also summarizes the contents of the second volume, which he describes as focusing on Iranian history and civilization. Here he places emphasis on the history of the Sassanid period and Zoroastrianism. In another article concerning European who raised the banner of revolt against the tyrant Zahak. The journal was published in Berlin between January of 1916 and March of 1922 under the editorship of Hasan Taqizadah, the political veteran of the Constitutional Revolution of 1905–11, who by 1915 was carefully re-evaluating the direction of Iranian politics, and gradually coming to see the political virtue of charting a new nationalistic course for Iran. Taqizadah and his editorial colleagues – including such luminaries in the early twentieth-century intellectual history of Iranian nationalism as Muhammad Qazwini, Muhammad ‘Ali Jamalzadah, Hussain Kazimzadah-Iranshahr, Ibrahim Pardavud, and others – used Kaveh as a forum for reflecting on, not only the state of Iranian politics, but also for reflecting seriously about the cultural basis for a new Iranian national identity. The result was a journal which contained a remarkable range of articles, including political analysis of contemporary Iranian and international politics as well as cultural, historical, and literary articles referencing Iranian antiquity. It was within this nexus of analyzing Iranian politics while simultaneously reflecting on Iran’s literary and cultural history that the reconceptualization of Ferdowsi began to take place.

Most importantly, it is in the series of articles in the pages of Kaveh between 1918 and 1922 that the crucial reassessment of Ferdowsi can be identified. Taqizadah’s writing on Ferdowsi in the pages of Kaveh begins as part of a larger series of articles in which he comments on the importance of European orientalist scholarship for understanding Iranian history and culture. More than any of his nineteenth-century intellectual predecessors Taqizadah was steeped in the European historical and philological scholarship of his day. He includes no less than five major articles in Kaveh devoted specifically to summarizing the historical and philological findings of German, French, and British scholars of Iranian studies. He devotes one full article to the contents of the two-volume Grundris der Iranischen Philologie (1896–1904), edited by Wilhelm Geiger and Ernst Kuhn, which was perhaps the most succinct and comprehensive work of its day summarizing European scholarly discoveries vis-à-vis Iran. The first volume was devoted entirely to philological scholarship regarding Iranian languages and included, among others, the writings of the noted scholar Christian Bartholomae (1855–1925) whose work was pioneering in the study of the Gathas and Avesta. Taqizadah summarizes these findings for his Iranian audience. He also summarizes the contents of the second volume, which he describes as focusing on Iranian history and civilization. Here he places emphasis on the history of the Sassanid period and Zoroastrianism. In another article concerning European
Taqizadah’s articles on Ferdowsi in the pages of Kaveh were clearly inspired by a wide range of orientalist scholarship, the most important of which was Noldeke’s Das Iranischen Nationalepos. Taqizadah’s use of the scholarship of Noldeke and others as the basis of his Kaveh articles on Ferdowsi is clearly indicated by both the copious and detailed footnotes that he includes in the articles, as well as within the text of the articles themselves, where he directly references and comments on the work of the orientalist tradition. He writes at the beginning of the series of articles, that he had initiated his study of Ferdowsi by reading Edward Browne’s A Literary History of Persia, but he had come to realize that there were other important works on Ferdowsi which also needed consideration, and which needed to be presented to his readers. Accounting for this larger body of European scholarship on Ferdowsi led him to engage in, what he describes as ‘a vast investigation’ which comprised ‘several months of research and effort’. The result of these efforts is a series of articles which—beginning in the October 15, 1920, issue of Kaveh and continuing until the end of the journal’s life in March of 1922—presents to his Iranian readers an account of the literary history of the mythic and epic tradition in Persianate literature from its origins in the pre-Islamic period to the time of Ferdowsi.

Taqizadah’s use of this orientalist scholarship is more complex than a simple process of summarizing and translating the findings of Noldeke and others for his Iranian audience. Rather, as Taqizadah usually suggests, the contents of his Ferdowsi articles in the pages of Kaveh represent a synthesis of the collected findings of European scholars and my own humble investigations. Taqizadah’s false modesty elides the more crucial interplay between the scientific findings of the orientalist tradition and Taqizadah’s appropriation of that tradition to serve the interests of Iran’s national project. Taqizadah’s articles follow the form of orientalist scholarship, but at crucial points and in significant ways, the content of that scholarship is re-styled and re-ordered to make orientalist knowledge coherent to the demands of nationalist ideology. The similarities of form between Noldeke and Taqizadah’s writings suggest a shared historical epistemology between orientalist scholarship and nationalist ideology. This shared historical epistemology—what Mohammed Tavakoli has called their ‘discursive affinities’—is rooted in a common assumption of identifying and excavating a unique nation-subject as the object of historical knowledge. The affinities between orientalism and nationalism end, however, when the outward forms of orientalism’s scientific project of
cultural excavation transform into the political-ideological project of modern nationalism.

The outward forms of orientalist scholarship are easy enough to identify in Taqizadah’s writings. Following the structure of Nöldeke’s work, Taqizadah begins with a long series of articles tracing what remains of the textual evidence from the pre-Islamic period that would come to have an influence on Ferdowsi’s work. Following Nöldeke’s argument, as well as citing and quoting Nöldeke at length, Taqizadah argues that the Shahnāmāb is the culmination of this earlier tradition of epic literature. He uses evidence from the Avesta, as well as a substantial number of other texts and fragments found in Pahlavi, Greek, and Arabic to trace the transmission of the Persianate epic tradition from the earliest times down to the time of Ferdowsi.²⁵ Again drawing on the work of Nöldeke, in this case citing Nöldeke’s translation of Tabari’s writings on Iranian history, Taqizadah describes the process by which the texts of the pre-Islamic epic tradition were ultimately compiled and transmitted in the early Islamic period.²⁶

At the same time, however, Taqizadah’s interests in understanding the literary genealogy of the Shahnāmāb go beyond a mere scholarly or scientific interest of presenting an ordered classification of the linguistic and literary evidence for the study of the Shahnāmāb, or for that matter, of tracing the connections between the intertextual fragments of precursor Persianate epics. Significantly, Nöldeke’s scientific project of orientalist research ends with the rational ordering of texts. The science of orientalism, as practiced by Nöldeke and as suggested in his Nacionalepos, never ventured beyond the realm of the rational into the romantic.²⁷ Crossing this boundary is what Taqizadah accomplishes.

While using the form and structure of scientific scholarship, Taqizadah’s understanding of the Shahnāmāb is significantly different than his orientalist colleagues. Taqizadah approaches the epic as—not a mere scientific artifact—but as a cultural and ideological text. For Taqizadah, the Shahnāmāb is ultimately of primary importance for its cultural, political, and ideological significance. In discussing Nöldeke’s analysis of the precursor texts, Taqizadah not only presents the textual chain of transmission, but then goes on to say that these texts were instrumental in ‘resurrecting the spirit of the Iranian nation’ in the immediate centuries following the Arab-Muslim conquest.²⁸ At other points he refers to texts representing the ‘seed of this awareness’ and the ‘nationalist renaissance’ in analyzing the significance of texts produced in the Islamic period that showed an awareness of pre-Islamic Iranian myths.²⁹ In analyzing the significance of Ferdowsi, Taqizadah again presents the facts of Ferdowsi’s life following a scholarly scientific tone, drawing largely from Nöldeke’s presentation of the facts, but Taqizadah then goes on to describe Ferdowsi as...

the great lyricist who span Iranian history and the national story into a perfectly structured narrative, and by establishing this narrative he has created one of the causes of glory for the Iranian nation and has preserved the national story down until today.³⁰

Taqizadah’s articles on Ferdowsi therefore reflect the interplay between the forms of modern orientalist knowledge, on the one hand, and the imperatives of nationalist ideology on the other. The scientific findings of orientalist scholarship work to order his understanding of Ferdowsi and the Shahnāmāb but the subtext of his pronouncements in the pages of Kaveh seem to go beyond the mere scientific ordering of the text. In Taqizadah’s rendering of Ferdowsi, the historical, political, and ideological significance of the poet becomes amplified, Ferdowsi becomes more forcefully identified as the spokesman for the nation, and the Shahnāmāb becomes evidence, not only of a once-felt Iranian identity, but also becomes the blueprint for a new Iranian cultural renaissance.

The origins of the Ferdowsi revival in modern Iranian political culture can therefore be located in the intellectual encounter between the scientific project of German orientalism and the political project of Iranian nationalism. The role of Taqizadah’s Kaveh articles is crucial in making this link. The nature of that encounter was far from simple however. Nöldeke’s work provided the findings of the scientific-orientalist tradition and made those scientific findings available to Taqizadah, and others, in order to be repackaged in the form of nationalist ideology. Orientalism thus enabled nationalism by helping to excavate the deep reservoirs of pre-modern Persianate culture in order to find the nation-subject of a new national narrative. The intellectual work of transforming this excavated nation-subject into a political ideology was beyond the efforts of scientific orientalism, but instead was left to Taqizadah and the nationalists to accomplish. The result of this dynamic process of scientific excavation and ideological construction was that by the 1930s the image of Ferdowsi had become available as a national icon, suitable for manipulation and dissemination within the uniquely political project of the Pahlavi state.
Finding Ferdowsi: The Debates Over
The Location and Design of the Memorial

By the 1930s, the role of poets as national icons was becoming an increasingly
important part of public life in Iran. The rebuilding of the mausoleums of
Hafez, Sa’di, Khayyam, and others — and marking them as sites of national
pilgrimage — was one part of this pattern. The public fanfare and symbolism
surrounding Rabindranath Tagore’s 1932 visit to Iran was another example of
the newfound centrality of poets and literary figures as public-national figures.
Of all of these state-sponsored events it was the millennium celebration for
Ferdowsi which was the most important commemorative event elevating the status
of poets and poetry as constituent elements of Iranian national identity. The
month-long Ferdowsi celebration included an international conference attended
by Scholars from 17 countries, a major ceremony and speech given by Reza Shah
at the newly restored mausoleum of the poet in Tus — which was widely covered
in the national press — and other activities encouraging public participation in the
celebration, such as the showing of a newly completed biographical film based on
the life of Ferdowsi by the pioneering Iranian filmmaker Abdolhossein Sepanta.
The cultural and intellectual revival of Ferdowsi, which had gained momentum
with Taqizadah’s Berlin writings, had now clearly become much more than an
intellectual or historiographic project but had instead now come to shape the
political and cultural program of the Pahlavi state.

The idea to commemorate the millennium of Ferdowsi was conceived by
a semi-official group known as the Anjoman-e Asar-e Melli (The Society for
National Monuments). The Society was founded originally in 1922 by a group
of Iranian statesmen and cultural figures which included, among others, the
prominent court official Abdolhossein Teymurzad, the onetime Prime Minister
and member of the diplomatic corps Muhammad ‘Ali Furugh, the retired Majlis
deputy and historian of ancient Iran Hassan Piriya, and the Majlis deputy and
prominent member of Iran’s Zoroastrian community Kaikhosrov Shahrokh.26
Isa Sadiq recalls that it was in 1926, the year of Reza Shah’s coronation, that
the Society first conceived of the idea to restore and embellish the site of
Ferdowsi’s grave. Sadiq, then a member of the Ministry of Education, recalls
being asked to attend an informal meeting of the Society in Tehran. ‘The Society
for National Monuments’ he recalled in his memoirs, ‘asked me to help raise
private funds for the building of a mausoleum for Ferdowsi.’27 Sadiq also comments
that the location and condition of the original grave were only vaguely known
by the members of the Society when they began to seriously consider erecting a
modern mausoleum for Ferdowsi.

Locating the site of Ferdowsi’s grave had in fact already entered into the
discourse of Iranian nationalism. Prior to the discussions of the Tehran-based
Anjoman-e Asar-e Melli, both of the Berlin-based Iranian nationalist journals
— Kaveh and Iranshahr — had already discussed locating the site of Ferdowsi’s
gate and embellishing it into a suitable national monument. In the last of his
Ferdowsi articles in the pages of Kaveh, Taqizadah had already begun focusing
on the available evidence for where Ferdowsi’s grave may be located. He cites
evidence from medieval literature, as well as evidence from the travel writings of
nineteenth century Russian and British orientalists who had themselves already
set out to find the grave of Ferdowsi.24 Based on this evidence, Taqizadah argues
that Ferdowsi’s grave was most likely located just outside of the city of Tus
and argues that ‘until the middle of the last century the grave of Ferdowsi was still
intact and clearly visible.’25 Taqizadah does not go on to call for a rebuilding of
the gravesite nor does he call for the construction of a mausoleum for Ferdowsi.
His preoccupation for locating the site of Ferdowsi’s grave does, however, sug-
gest a newfound appreciation for the centrality of Ferdowsi’s position within an
emerging Iranian national imagination and for associating that national imagi-
nation with its physical and material remnants.

A number of articles in the other major Berlin-based Iranian journal,
Iranshahr, go even further than the writings of Taqizadah in calling for not only
a cultural-literary revival of Ferdowsi, but for the promotion of the image of
Ferdowsi as a suitable national icon. In the pages of Iranshahr the articles written
by Hassan Kazimzadah and a number of his Berlin-based Iranian associates are
noteworthy in this regard. Kazimzadah had been one of the activists and intel-
lectuals who had worked with Taqizadah in the publication of Kaveh. When that
journal ceased publication in the early part of 1922, Kazimzadah inaugurated the
journal Iranshahr later that same year. The articles in Iranshahr are less scholarly
and scientific in tone, and are instead much more overtly political and ideologi-
cal than the articles in Kaveh. The four years during which Kazimzadah was the
editor of Iranshahr (1922–6), overlapped with the gradual political assertiveness
of Reza Khan and the eventual establishment of the Pahlavi dynasty. The articles
in Iranshahr reflect this more assertive and didactic tone and seem concerned
with laying out a detailed, pragmatic, and prescriptive blueprint for an Iranian
cultural and political revival.
The status of Ferdowsi as a national icon fits precisely into this more assertive and didactic tone found in the pages of "Iranshahr." In the October 1925 issue of the journal, Kazimzadah includes a long article on the importance of elevating the status of Ferdowsi in the public life of Iranians. The article was published in the same issue in which the establishment of the Pahlavi dynasty was announced with great acclaim as "The History of Iran Has Been Renewed." The article, written by the Iranian architect Karim Tahirzadah, who would himself go on to participate in the building of the Ferdowsi memorial, set the nationalist tone for how the revival of Ferdowsi’s memory was to be understood. Writing about Ferdowsi’s importance for Iranian national identity, he writes:

Ferdowsi wrote at a time when, like a foul smoke, the land of Iran was overrun by Arabs. Ferdowsi was the first man who revived national feeling and took the first steps towards bringing back the rights and mores of the nation. Therefore for Iranians it is a source of shame that until today the gravesite of such a nurturer of national feeling has not been established.

He goes on to argue that building such a formal site in memory of Ferdowsi is necessary for instilling a sense of ‘national feeling’ in Iranians. He makes this point by contrasting Iran’s use of public statutory with that of Europe. ‘In Europe’ he writes, ‘children are taken to museums and to public squares and to ancient structures where they are shown statues of their great elders.’ Constructing sites of public statutory as places of national pilgrimage, he continues, are important for the national education of children. By seeing these statues, he continues, ‘children are taught their history and in this way they develop a sense of duty to achieve greatness in emulation of the elders.’ In contemporary Iran, by contrast, he goes on to argue that, such a sense of civic culture does not exist. ‘Children in Iran are entirely deprived of such encouragement,’ he argues. In order for Iran to rise up out of its persistent state of decline, he argues, civic mindedness must be instilled in the population, and the use of statutory and public monuments must be a central component of those efforts. He goes on to say, ‘I am convinced that if our leaders had already built statues in honor of our great elders and in this way had aroused the sense of duty in our children, that Iran would not have fallen into its present state.’

Next he makes a number of detailed suggestions for the building of the Ferdowsi memorial site. First, he argues that the effort to build a memorial to Ferdowsi must become a national effort that inspires the collective participation of all sectors of Iranian society. He suggests that in every city and town throughout Iran a committee be formed to raise public funds for the building of the site. In addition he calls for the production of a ‘very colorful’ poster of Ferdowsi to be produced and sold everywhere throughout Iran. In order to raise money for the building of the mausoleum and for the further encouragement of public participation in the project, he also calls for the establishment of a national lottery. The proceeds from the lottery were to go toward the cost of constructing the mausoleum and the winner of the lottery was to receive an illustrated manuscript edition of the "Shahnamah." He concludes by making a dramatic call for reviving the memory of Ferdowsi. Dear compatriots! Ferdowsi himself built a great palace in honor of the memory of the past and helped we Iranians to raise our heads among the nations of the world. We Iranians of today must also strive and build a mausoleum in his honor inside this great palace so that both his spirit and our own will be made to live and be proud among the nations and so that the next generation will likewise be made happy.

Kazimzadah goes yet further by proposing the actual physical shape and design of the Ferdowsi memorial itself. In another issue of "Iranshahr," Kazimzadah includes a discussion of a proposal for the design of the Ferdowsi memorial along with a hand-sketched reproduction of the proposed design. The sketch of the design was not Kazimzadah's, but was rather the proposal of Mirza Kazimkhan Tahirzadah Behzad, a Berlin-based Iranian architect who, as Kazimzadah describes, ‘received his education in architecture many years ago in Berlin despite the many difficulties of being outside of the homeland.’ Kazimzadah and Tahirzadah had worked closely together in Berlin in discussing the issue of Ferdowsi’s memorial and Tahirzadah would go on to play an important role in the final construction of the site. Kazimzadah gives a detailed description of the proposed design.

In this design is seen an inspiring garden at the center of which stairs ascend up to a central rounda with four pillars. Ferdowsi’s remains will be interred at the center of this rounda. Resting over the remains will be a statue of the great poet with a copy of the "Shahnamah" in his hand.
He also gives details of the other elements in Tahirzadah’s proposed sketch, including statues of knights, lions, and mythological angels positioned on the grounds of the proposed memorial. While the final design of the completed Ferdowsi memorial would be only partially influenced by Tahirzadah’s proposed design, other elements of Kazimzadah and Tahirzadah’s suggestions did go on to influence the work of the Anjoman-e Asar-e Meli.42

The plans for funding the project through public support was, for example, clearly patterned after suggestions made in the pages of Iranshahr. Following the suggestions of their Berlin compatriots, Sadiq and the other members of the Society publicized the fundraising efforts in order to mobilize popular participation and sentiment for the project. Sadiq writes in his memoirs,

The opinion of the Anjoman-e Asar-e Meli and the lovers of the homeland was that the national public should participate in this national duty so that the feeling of national devotedness will be more awakened and that the value and worthiness of their culture and the high status of Iran’s heroes will be appreciated.43

Among the efforts initiated by Sadiq and the Society was to enlist schoolchildren in the fundraising efforts. Sadiq recalls gathering the students of one school into its main quad and giving students instructions on how to go into neighborhoods and solicit donations for the building of the mausoleum.44 In addition to the use of schoolchildren, the Society also sponsored a national lottery to raise funds for the project. In 1932 large broadsides were posted throughout the cities to advertise the lottery. The image on the broadside was an artist’s rendering of the proposed mausoleum and an image of the mythical bird, the Simurgh, with a copy of the Shahnamah in its mouth. The advertisement included a caption equating participation in the lottery with a national duty: ‘For the completion of the mausoleum of Ferdowsi and for the celebration of his millennium the Anjoman-e Asar-e Meli invites all Iranians to buy tickets in the lottery as a way of showing gratitude to this reviver of the Persian language.’45

The cost of the mausoleum was ultimately 140,000 Tomans and was funded by a combination of public and private donations.46 Before construction could begin, the site of the mausoleum had to be secured. Kaikhosrow Shahrokh accomplished this with help from the governor of Khorasan and General Jahanbani.47 The three members of the Society located the traditionally regarded site of Ferdowsi’s grave just outside of Tus. By the time Shahrokh and Jahanbani made their way to the site for the first time in 1927, the original structure was in an extreme state of disrepair. The members of the society eventually negotiated with the owners of the land on which the grave was located to bequeath a portion of the land to the public in order to make a site large enough for the mausoleum and a surrounding park.48 Once the land had been secured the members of the Society had to select a design for the mausoleum and make arrangements for its construction. Sadiq recalls that Teymurshad was adamant in insisting that the design be in a neo-classical style akin to the tomb of Cyrus, which had, along with other archaeological sites then under excavation by European and American archaeologists, become recognized as a significant national monument.49 The original style of the now deteriorating Ferdowsi tomb was a traditional edifice reflecting the architecture of the Safavid and Qajar periods. In order to create a suitable neo-classical design the members of the Society turned to Ernst Hertzfeld and André Godard. Hertzfeld was a German-born archaeologist who was excavating in Iran under the sponsorship of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago. Godard was a French trained architect who spent almost thirty years in Iran and was intermittently Dean of the University of Tehran’s Faculty of Arts as well as the first Director of Iran’s Museum of Antiquities.50 The two men collaborated with the Iranian architect Karim Tahirzadah who drafted the original design for the memorial as published in the pages of Iranshahr.51 The final design was a cubic stone structure approximately thirty feet wide and fifty feet tall accompanied by inscriptions from the Shahnamah on all sides.52 The construction itself continued for over two years and was completed just before the beginning of the millennium celebrations and in time for the gala opening hosted by Reza Shah with the conference participants in attendance.

HEZAREH-YE FERDOWSI: THE MILLENNIUM CELEBRATION AND CONFERENCE
Among the series of ceremonies associated with the millennium celebrations was the international conference of orientalists convened at the Dar al-Fonun between October first and fourth, 1934. The four-day conference received wide coverage in the local press and was presented as an affirmation of Iran’s national culture by the world.53 News coverage of the event included announcements made at the conference of official telegrams received from foreign capitals wishing the conveners well. The German and Soviet embassies also presented
Muhammad 'Ali Furughi, who as Prime Minister and President of the Society for National Monuments was the convenor of the conference, with gifts to commemorate the occasion. The German gift was a special edition of the newly completed work by German orientalist Fritz Wolf indexing the usage of every word in the *Shahnameh*. The Soviets presented Furughi with an illustrated manuscript copy of the *Shahnameh* from a Russian museum. There were also profiles of conference participants published in the press and texts of interviews and speeches with conference attendees, as well as detailed descriptions of the conference itself and the papers presented. The profile of Arthur Christensen, for example, included an excerpt from his speech at the conference in which he lauded Ferdowsi and Iranian national culture. "The acts of aggression which have been perpetrated against the nation of Iran" Christensen is quoted as saying in the 1 November edition of *Errela't*, "however great and powerful, have not been able to diminish the sense of distinctiveness of Irananness from Iranians." The receipt of telegrams and gifts from foreign capitals and quotes such as Christensen's were an important part of the millennium celebration. The press coverage of these events worked to present an image of Iran as a national culture worthy of respect in the world. Iran's affirmation by foreign capitals and by the words of European orientalists reinforced this feeling of respect and affirmed Reza Shah's national project.

The speeches made at the conference by Muhammad 'Ali Furughi and 'Ali Asghar Hikmat echoed these same themes. Furughi gave the speech to begin the conference. He welcomed the participants and thanked them for making the long journey. He continued in Persian,

> You have honored us with your presence, but you have done this rightfully because even though Ferdowsi is of the Iranian people he is also in spirit a child of humanity and, if you will allow me, a father of humanity.

Hikmat, then Minister of Education, next took the stage and, speaking in French, elaborated on Furughi's theme,

> The interest shown in the millennium celebrations for Ferdowsi in all countries, and the fact that the nations have sent their most noted scholars to this country and to the tomb of the creator of the Persian epic shows that, despite apparent distinctions, there are no real differences between peoples... It is sometimes said that our century and our world are a century and world of materialism... It is for this reason that we emphatically affirm that where art and science are manifested the curtain of differences are removed and make apparent the one and true reality: that is to say the unity of peoples.

The speeches by Hikmat and Furughi, and the tone of the millennium celebrations in general, reflected this theme of placing the image of Ferdowsi simultaneously in both a national and international context. Ferdowsi was presented as an embodiment of Iranian national identity, as the promoter of Iran's language and a conveyor of the national memory. At the same time, however, the internationalizing of Ferdowsi's image and the emphasis placed on having Ferdowsi's importance recognized by international arbiters of cultural prestige suggests that Iran's national project was simultaneously aimed at two audiences. This pattern is suggestive of a duality inherent in the construction of national identity, especially in the extra-European world. In order for Iranian national identity to be affirmed it felt the need to be recognized within the world system. Nationalism in Iran, as in the colonial and semi-colonial world more generally, was not only an exercise in internal political consolidation and cultural homogenization, it was also an attempt to project an image outward to the world, declaring a nation's compatibility with and desire to join the new universalism of modernity. The authenticity or worthiness of a national culture was inherently measured in terms of its status in, or contribution to, world civilization. It was this same reasoning that made the Indo-European theory so attractive for Iranian nationalists in the nineteenth century, and it was this same reasoning that encouraged cultural bureaucrats during the Reza Shah period to find elements of Iranian tradition that would be deemed worthy by international standards. The subtext of the millennium celebrations for Ferdowsi, and the conference in particular, was thus to simultaneously elevate the status, not only of Ferdowsi, but of the Iranian nation as a whole, and suggest Iran's association and compatibility with modern values and standards.

This simultaneous attempt to affirm Iran's national project to both an internal and international audience culminated with the ceremony at the tomb of Ferdowsi on October 12, 1934. The ceremony took place in Tus at the site of the newly completed mausoleum of Ferdowsi several days after the conclusion of the conference. The dedication ceremony was to include a speech by Reza Shah at the tomb in the presence of the conference participants who had made the two-day journey by car to the site. News reports from the ceremony were thick
with description, detailing the activities of the participants at the ceremony and embellishing the historic importance of the event for the public: "Oh yes, yesterday will be recorded as one of those happy days in the life of the new Iran..." wrote the correspondent from Eteh'āt.

The ceremony itself began at 4:00 p.m. Attendants and staff from the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Education stood by dressed in formal uniforms as were members of the Majlis and the Cabinet who were also in attendance. The audience of some two hundred attendees and others - scholars from both East and West as they were described in the newspapers - were also in attendance waiting for Reza Shah's arrival. The audience was seated in rows of chairs facing the front of the imposing stone edifice, which at the beginning of the ceremony was shrouded in Iranian colors. At the base of the tomb was a table where Reza Shah was to stand and deliver his dedication comments. At approximately 4:30 p.m., Reza Shah arrived at the ceremony and ascended the steps leading to the table in front of the monument. There, standing before the audience, he gave the dedication speech for the memorial.

We are very pleased that along with the one thousandth birthday of Ferdowsi we can also accomplish one of the other enduring desires of the Iranian nation, that is, the establishment of this structure as a measure of our appreciation and gratitude for the pain which Ferdowsi bore to revile the language and history of this nation. Although the appreciation for this man had not been adequately expressed it was always the case that the people of Iran held the Shahnamah in their hearts as a memorial to him [Ferdowsi]. However, it was necessary to take some action and create an adorned structure which in a visual way will mark the public gratitude of this nation. It was with this idea that we gave the decree to create this historic memorial, this elevated structure which will not be harmed by wind, rain, nor circumstance [Ferdowsi] has already immortalized his name and this ceremony and monument are unnecessary, but appreciation for those who have given service is the moral duty of a nation and we must not back down from this responsibility.

Reza Shah's comments worked to give order to the mausoleum's meaning and assign a fixed set of associations with the memory of the poet. Ferdowsi thus became, in part, a symbol of Iranian national authenticity and the site of his mausoleum became a living reminder of the endurance of that authenticity. In this way both the structure itself and the comments by the shah emphasized, above all, the theme of national continuity. The Shah's comment that Iranians had always remembered the Shahnamah was partially true. Certainly the practice of reciting the Shahnamah from memory had long been part of the pre-modern oral tradition throughout the Persianate world. More importantly, however, is the novelty of the way in which this traditional memory was now being used. The image of Ferdowsi and the Shahnamah now became very public markers of political allegiance. By sponsoring the construction of the mausoleum and hosting the international celebrations, Reza Shah and the Pahlavi state now came to associate itself with the memory of Ferdowsi. National memory and political legitimation now went hand in hand through the use of Ferdowsi's image.

The frequency and ubiquity of references to Ferdowsi within the Pahlavi state's self-representation to a great extent helps to suggest this point. The image of the mausoleum, for example, became one of the most recognizable images of Iranian society and very quickly found its way onto the national currency. Statues of Ferdowsi also came to increasingly occupy public spaces throughout the cities. The first of these statues was a gift presented to Iran by the Parsi community of Bombay immediately after the millennium celebrations. The bronze statue was placed in the renamed Ferdowsi Square in Tehran. Later the statue was moved to the courtyard of the Faculty of Letters at the University of Tehran and a new, larger statue of the poet was placed in Ferdowsi Square. Streets were also renamed in honor of Ferdowsi immediately after the commemorative celebrations. One of the main thoroughfares leading into Ferdowsi Square was widened, lengthened, and named after the poet.

Also planned to coincide with the millennium celebrations was the publication of several new editions of the Shahnamah. Prior to 1934 printed editions of the Shahnamah were rare and expensive. During the nineteenth century there had been a growing print industry, mostly in India, which published Persian books including canonized foundational texts such as the Shahnamah. Until 1934, however, this print industry did not produce texts of the Shahnamah that circulated on a mass level. With the millennium celebrations, however, three new editions appeared, now published in Iran and under the encouragement and direct support of the Ministry of Culture. The first was an unabridged five-volume text edited by Abbas Iqbal. Said Nafisi and Sulaiman Haim also published a similar unabridged edition in 1935. Contemporaneous with these new editions, Muhammad 'Ali Furughli, the Prime Minister and a man of letters, edited an abridged version of the text containing twenty thousand couplets, or
less than half of the original text. This one-volume edition was inexpensive and allowed the *Shahnamah*, for the first time, to circulate widely throughout Iranian society. In magazines, journals, newspapers, and official school textbooks there was also a prolific amount of writing devoted to the image of Ferdowsi and the *Shahnamah* after the celebrations. The proliferation of the image of Ferdowsi also entered into the new medium of cinema. In 1936 the pioneering Iranian filmmaker Abdulhussain Sepanta completed a biographical film based on Ferdowsi’s life. In the sixty-minute film, Sepanta himself plays the role of Ferdowsi as the film dramatizes the traditional story of Ferdowsi’s struggles in composing the poem. Mahmud Ghaznavi, the tenth-century sultan who was the original patron of Ferdowsi’s efforts, is also depicted in the film. The final scene of the black and white silent film is of Ferdowsi on his deathbed as he recites lines of his poetry.

CONCLUSION

The speech made by Reza Shah at the newly built mausoleum and the array of cultural practices employed by the Pahlavi state during the 1920s and 1930s, all worked to assign a fixed set of meanings and associations with the image of Ferdowsi. The circulation of Ferdowsi’s image during these two decades worked to – not only associate the image of Ferdowsi with a revived sense of Iranianness but, more importantly, as the political sponsor of the Ferdowsi revival, the image of Ferdowsi now also became associated with the authority of the Pahlavi state. The sponsorship of the millennium celebration, the building of the new memorial, and the hosting of the international conference, were all designed to – not only reinvent the memory of Ferdowsi – but to associate that reconstructed national memory with the political authority of the Pahlavi state. From the point of view of the Pahlavi state, therefore, the Ferdowsi celebrations of 1934 were a technique designed to use a newly reconstructed national memory for the purpose of political legitimation.

The fixing of Ferdowsi’s image as a contingent element of the Pahlavi state’s self-definition was not pre-ordained from the time of the original Ferdowsi revival of the nineteenth century. The reconstruction and revival of Ferdowsi’s position within Persianate culture, as that process unfolded in the nineteenth century and later in the pages of *Khāṇbān* and *Iranbān*, had recognized the utility of Ferdowsi as part of a larger re-invention of Iranian national identity. However, there was nothing in the early intellectual reconstruction of Ferdowsi that implied the poet or the *Shahnamah* as being coupled with or affirming the legitimacy of any particular state or political authority. The use of Ferdowsi’s image during the 1930s can therefore best be understood as a process of appropriation and co-optation of Ferdowsi’s image by the Pahlavi state – and fixing a stable set of associations with that image. This fixing of Ferdowsi’s image subsumed the inherently complex, dynamic, and multi-vocal quality of the *Shahnamah*’s position within pre-modern Persianate culture, what Prasenjit Duara has described in another context as a cultural system made up of ‘a fluid network of representations’.

The fixing of Ferdowsi’s image and its association with the specific political project of *Pahlavi nationalism* was therefore something very new, never predetermined, and only one of Ferdowsi’s possible cultural-genealogical trajectories, a particular trajectory that was conditioned by the political history of the interwar period and by the cultural logic of nationalism during that time. Understanding the history of the Ferdowsi revival in this way – as the history of one possible cultural formulation from among an array of political-cultural and historiographic possibilities – is therefore the first step toward recovering Ferdowsi and redeploying him as part of the ongoing dynamic of Persianate identity. Ultimately, this historical understanding of Ferdowsi’s image can work to reposition Ferdowsi and the *Shahnamah* within the larger field of Persianate culture and identity, and make that image available for new political-cultural imaginings of Iranianness, and for those as yet unimagined.
6 THE NATION’S POET: FERDOWSI AND THE IRANIAN NATIONAL IMAGINATION

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4 For the journals Iranshahr and Kaveh see Kevandokht Ghahtari, Nationalismus und Modernismus in Iran in der Periode zwischen dem Zerfall der Qajar-Dynastie und der Machtergreifung Reza Schahs: Eine Untersuchung über die Intellektuellen Kreise um die Zeitschriften Kaveh, Iranshahr und Ayandeh (Berlin: Schwarz, 2001).


6 Kaveh (Berlin). The articles are from the following issues: April 15, 1918 (no. 25), 12–14; March 15, 1918 (no. 26), 7–8; April 15, 1918 (no. 27), 10–12; May 15, 1918 (no. 28), 8; and July 15, 1918 (no. 29/30), 14–15. This series of articles is not signed and may have been written collaboratively with other members of the editorial collective.

7 Kaveh, April 15, 1918 (no. 27), p. 11. See also Rüdiger Schmitt, ‘Grundrisse der Iranischen Philologie’, Encyclopädie Iranica (Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers).

8 Kaveh, May 15, 1918 (no. 28), p. 8.

9 Ibid. He is referring to the important works by these two authors at the Dar al-Fonun: Zuka al-Malik’s Tarikh-i Suriyani and Etemad al-Salatnā’s Tarikh-i Bani Askarshin. These two works were seminal texts in the modern Persian historiography of the ancient period. They are both largely derivative of Rawlinson’s texts, but are not strict translations.


11 For a discussion of Nöldeke’s place in the history of German orientalism see Rudi Paret, The Study of Arabic and Islam at German Universities: German Orientalism Since Theodor Nöldeke (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1968), pp. 11–15.


16 Ibid.
Notes to Chapter 6

17 Ibid.
18 Tavakoli-Targhi has described a similar process of dialogical cultural encounter. See Tavakoli-Targhi, Refashioning Iran, pp. 4–8, 18–23.
19 Ibid., p. 4.
21 Ibid., (no. 12), p. 8.
22 Noldeke was rigorous, careful, and conservative in his textual judgments, not prone to historiographic romanticism. Paret describes him as the greatest concern was to grasp and analyse facts. He called himself a rationalist... everything in his publications is subjected to strict objective criteria... if he is not sure of a fact he says so, or else leaves it out of the discussion altogether.’ Paret, The Study of Arabic and Islam at German Universities, pp. 12–15.
27 Sadiq, Yadegar-e Omur, p. 201.
30 Iranahab (Berlin), October 23, 1925, [Tehran: Iqbal Reprint edition], p. 705. I am indebted to Houchang E. Chehabi for this reference.
31 Ibid., p. 731.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid.
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid., p. 735.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid., p. 737.

Notes to Chapter 6

41 Ibid., pp. 611–613.
44 Ibid., p. 202; Shahrokh, Yaddashtha, pp. 164–165.
45 Afshar, Kitabehshenasi-ye Ferdowsi, p. 338
47 Shahrokh, Yaddashtha, pp. 161–162.
48 Sadiq, Yadegar-e Omur, p. 203; Shahrokh, Yaddashtha, p. 163.
49 Sadiq, Yadegar-e Omur, p. 203.
51 Grigor states that the original design for the Ferdowsi memorial was by Herzfeld and only later commissioned to the Iranian architect Tahiziradah only for him to be fired for incompetence, see Grigor ‘Cultivating “good taste”,’ Iranian Studies 37, 1 (2004): 37. Tahiziradah’s original design for the memorial, however, was proposed in the pages of Yadda in 1925 (August 23, 1925 issue; p. 612 of Iqbal Reprint edition). A comparison of Tahiziradah’s 1925 design with the final design proposed by Godard and Herzfeld suggests collaboration between Tahiziradah and Godard/Herzfeld.
52 Sadiq, Yadegar-e Omur, p. 203; Shahrokh, Yaddashtha, pp. 164–5.
53 The Tehran conference also coincided with other Ferdowsi conferences in London, New York, Berlin, and Moscow, which had been organized with the help of the Iranian diplomatic corps abroad. The Iranian press took interest in discussing the proceedings of these other conferences as well. See Ezel’s October 2, 6, 1934. The text of the Iranian ambassador to Nazi Germany, who attended the Berlin conference, was printed in the October 6 issue. "The celebration of the greatest Iranian national poet’s millennium… which has brought together eminent German orientalists… will hopefully affirm the spiritual and intellectual connections between Germans and Iranians." For the millennium celebration see also A. Shapur Shahbazi, "Ferdowsi IV Millenary Celebration," Encyclopedia Iranica (Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers).
54 Ezel’s, October 6, 1934; Glossar zu Ferdowsis Schahname remains a monumental concordance to the text. See A. Shapur Shahbazi, p. 16.
7 THE PAHLAVI SCHOOL OF HISTORIOGRAPHY

ON THE PAHLAVI ERA

1 The history textbooks of this period and their way of interpreting the Pahlavi era is a more complex issue that I have not dealt with in this paper.

2 In both cases the early issues of them Ghoshoun (Winter of 1922 to 1924) and Pahlavi (Summer 1923 to 1925). Unlike Ghoshoun, Pahlavi was not officially affiliated with the Army.

3 [Reza Shah Pahlavi], Sfarname-ye Khosrowan (Tehran: Matba’at Kol-e Ghoshoun [the Army Press], 1924).

4 Habibullah Nobakht, Sardar-e Pahlavi (Tehran: Matba’at Majles [the Parliament Press], n.d.).


6 For further information see the copies of related communications enclosed at the end of Nafisi’s Tarikh-e Mo’asir-e Iran (The Contemporary History of Iran) (Tehran: Ketab Foroughi Foroughi, 1960).

7 By the same title in 1944, by the name of Tarikh-e Shahriari Shahanshah Reza Shah Pahlavi in 1965 and also a new title – Tarikh-e Mo’asir-e Iran (The Contemporary History of Iran) – in 1966, as far as I know.

8 Malek-o-Sho’ara’ Bahar’s Tarikh-e Mekhtasaren-e Ahmadi Sabzi’i-e Iran (The Short History of the Political Parties of Iran) (Tehran: ?, 1944) and Hossein Makkah’s Tarikh-e Bist Saleh-e Iran (The 20 Year History of Iran) (Tehran: Ketab Foroughi Elmi, 1944) are the most important historical products of this period. For further information see Kaveh Bayat, ‘Tarikh-e Bist Salvar’ (The 20 Year History), in Gaz-e Gw, no. 7, Summer 1985, pp. 61–69.

Bazigaran-e Asr-e Toluki (The Actors of the Golden Age) a series of weekly pamphlets by Ibrahim Khajehnouri in early 1940s that was later published as a single volume (Tehran: ?, 1943) is a good example of the popular genre of historiography that took shape in those days.

For a collection of different anecdotes published in various newspapers and magazines in those years on Reza Shah see No’matollah Mehrikhah, Ketab-e Reza Shah Az Zaharan-e Rejal, Omm-e Lashgar, Novisandegian, Darbizar (Reza Shah as Narrated by Dignitaries, Army Generals, Writers, Courtiers) (Tehran: Chakhmeh-ye Sepaha, 1946; and also Khaterat-e Reza Shah Kabir (The Memoirs of Reza Shah The Great) (Tehran: Vol. 3, Iraz-e Chah-e Shohrat-e Mah, 1953–5) that is a collection of memoirs by a number of people about Reza Shah (and not his memoirs as the title suggests).

9 For the background of those developments that was mainly instigated by General Razzmaa see Khaterat va Asrar-e Sepahdari Haji’ali Razzmaa (compiled by Kamal Razzmaa And Kaveh Bayat) (Tehran: Entisharat Shurazd, 2003), pp. 186–198, Two books by Muhammad Reza Khalili Aragh – a protegé of Razzmaa – are a good indicator of the manner in which this publicity campaign was launched; Khaterat-e Safar-e Azarabaijan va Kurdistan (Memoirs of a Trip to Azerbaijan and Kurdistan) (Tehran, second Edition, Chakhmeh-ye Atesh 1949, and Bangash [Return], on the occasion of the 40th day of Reza Shah’s burial, Tehran: Chah Tahban, 1950.

Apart from some other official publications such as a booklet by the Police, titled Eynali az Tarikh-e Doustun-e Zamandari-e A’zamshar Reza Shah Shabahs-h-e Faghigh Reza Shah Kabir (A Short Review of the Reign of the Late Reza Shah) (Tehran: Shahrba-n-ni-e Kole Keshvar, 1950), the funeral of Reza Shah also gave rise to some sort of genuine nostalgic feelings as well. For example see Yousef Farsi’s Bajai’i-e Shah-e Sevom-e Espand 1324 (the February 21st 1945 Dream) an attempt to justify Reza Shah’s oppressive rule by a comparison between the orderly situation of his reign and the chaotic situation of his after his demise. (Tehran: Ketab Foroughi-e Elmi, 1947); see also Ayineh Sepas (the Mirror of Gratitude) a less elaborate attempt by Zabihollah Ghadimi (Tehran: Bongah-e Matbosi-e Emrooz, 1950).

10 Published by ‘Madreseh ‘Ali-e Zabani va Adabiyat-e Khajehi’ (The Advanced School for Foreign Languages and Literature), author unknown, Tehran: 1967.