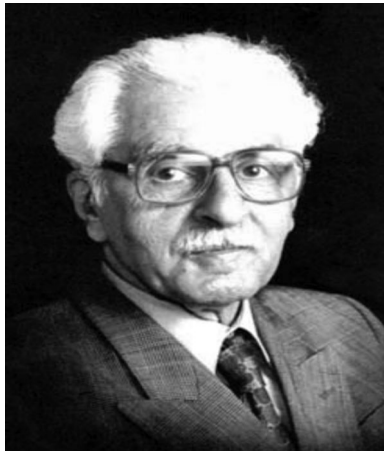


In Memoriam

Sayyed Mohammad Dabirsiyāqi (24 February 1920–8 October 2018)
Educator, Writer, Editor, and Scholar of Classical Persian Literature

From Qazvin to Tus: A Personal Memoir



The name of Dr. Sayyed Mohammad Dabirsiyāqi has lingered in my mind ever since the day I came to know books, and began to read the poetry of Manuchehri and Farrokhi and memorize their long *qasidas* in my youth. Of course, in those years I was studying in the corner of some county in south Khorasan. I never could have imagined that, one day, I would become a colleague and confidant of the owner of that name: how could I ever think myself deserving of his special friendship, kindness, and affection? Some time later, when I could use dictionaries and would see the *Loghat al-Fors* and the *Ānandrāj* in the libraries, once again the name of Dabirsiyāqi shone out; let's say that I still didn't understand the phrase "through the efforts of" (*be ehtemām*) very well.

Years passed, and my path took me to the Dehkhodā Lexicon Institute in Tehran. If I am not mistaken, it was in that very Institute that I first saw that open face and high forehead. I had gone to the Institute to obtain the volumes of the *Loghat-nāmeḥ* when I saw, written on the back of the door to the Deputy Office of the *Loghat-nāmeḥ*, "Dr. Sayyed Mohammad Dabirsiyāqi." I went inside on some pretext and said "hello"; with this, a bond of friendship, initiated by the one side, was firmly established between us.

To the soul of the great Dr. Gholām-Hosayn Yusofi, who expended such efforts to set up and advance doctoral studies in Persian language and literature, my greetings! A source of that effort is connected with the topic of our discussion, namely Dr. Dabirsiyāqi. The matter is as follows: after the initial doctoral program in Persian Language and Literature that was founded at Tehran University, the doctoral program in Mashhad was established through the boundless efforts and perseverance of the late Yusofi in the year 1355 (1976). In that inaugural year, one of Yusofi's ideas for elevating this program—to the enormous benefit of the students—was to invite some famous professors from Tehran to lead seminars in their respective fields of specialization. I remember such luminaries as Ahmad Ārām, Iraj Afshār, Ahmad Tafazzoli, Hosayn Karimān, and Mohammad Dabirsiyāqi, among others, being part of that program. Each one of them stayed at our university one week, and every day, for a number of hours, they would give talks to the students on some topic or other. I, too, having joined the faculty the previous year, sat in and audited these classes and benefited from those scholars' generous presence. I remember that Dr. Dabirsiyāqi, who was the Deputy to Dr. Shahidi at the Dehkhodā Lexicon Institute at the time, gave it his all and discussed Persian dictionaries and lexicography every day over the course of the entire week. I truly learned lexicography—its meaning, its importance, its sources—from Dabirsiyāqi.

Those were the years—before the Moscow *Shāhnāme*—that the edition by Dabirsiyāqi formed the basis of *Shāhnāme* studies; I too, having become familiar with this edition in my high school courses, would refer to it in all of my works and studies related to the *Shāhnāme*. When I had become totally absorbed in the world of the *Shāhnāme*, Dabirsiyāqi's two-volume concordance came out in 1348 (1969), and ever since then it has been like an extension of my hand in referring to the text. There were not the computerized systems and Internet searches back in those years that we have now.

In Ordibehesht 1385 (April-May 2006) we rolled up our sleeves and organized a large conference in the Ferdowsi Cultural Center (*Farhangsarā-ye Ferdowsi*), which I had recently established as an NGO, with the participation of all the world-renowned *Shāhnāme* scholars under the title “*Shāhnāme* Textual Studies: from Shiraz to Tus.” Dabirsiyāqi, with his chic clothes and impeccable tie, was there in our gathering, sitting next to M.-N. Osmanov (Russia), Iraj Afshār, Mohammad-'Ali Eslāmi-Nodushan, Djalal Khaleghi-Motlagh, Mahmoud Omidsalar, Chander Shekhar (India), 'Ali Ravāqi, Mir Jalāl al-Din Kazzāzi, Rasul Hādizādeh (Tajikistan), and dozens of other well-known faces. Dabirsiyāqi spoke about the editing of the *Shāhnāme* and proudly defended the national identity of Iran.

In the last years of his life, Professor Dabirsiyāqi abandoned the dystopia of Tehran to seek repose in Qazvin, his beloved birthplace. By means of the friendship that, from Rasht and Qazvin to Tehran and Mashhad, had been “performing the walk of Safa and Marwa” between us, I was kept apprised of his health, and letters were in constant exchange. In the last days of 1388 (2010), Bayhaqi's *History*, edited by myself and my friend Mahdi Sayyedi, with notes and detailed commentary in two volumes, came out. I had not sent it to him, but he procured the book from somewhere and, with his friends, carefully investigated many of its subjects. I had invited him to participate

again in an annual conference in honor of Ferdowsi in Mashhad; then, in Farvardin of 1390 (March–April 2011), a long letter from Dabirsiyāqi arrived at my address, written in an elegant hand and bearing many compliments. After the pleasantries, he had written:

Following my greetings and submission of friendship and gratitude for the invitation to the celebrations in Tus and to visiting the *Āstān-e Qods-e Rezavi*, and with regrets for my inability to travel due to age and indisposition; if I might trouble you with a few points about the *History* and your valuable work in the two-volume edition. I read both volumes carefully and praised its newly-discovered insights and comprehensive, useful explanations. For the last fifteen years, we have been hosting a weekly meeting on Wednesday afternoons with a group of university professors and local scholars (both ladies and gentlemen), where we have systematically read the *Shāhnāmeḥ*, then the *Golestān* and *Bustān*, then *Vis and Rāmin* and the masnavi of Shāh Dā'i-Allāh Shirazi; in the last two years, we have carefully read Bayhaqi's *History* in turns, along with the necessary explanations, for which your edited copy—along with previous editions by the late Dr. Fayyāz, the late Dr. Sa'īd Naficy, 'Abd al-Hosayn Ehsāni, and the late Ahmad Adib Peshawari—was consulted. Although some in that gathering insisted that there are points in your edition that need to be revised and should be published in a journal or periodical, I refused; for the work of editing these days has mostly become a venue for nit-picking and pedantry, not guidance and correction. Your efforts on Bayhaqi's work carry such value that only some points in need of amendment will be noted so that they could be rectified in the next printing, and that's enough.

After that, he brought up in detail a great number of issues concerning both typos and errors, some of which we had been aware of ourselves, with such generous patience and accuracy that it elicited the reader's praise and admiration. Whether authoring *The Vanguard of Persian Poetry (Pishāhangān-e shē'r-e fārsi)* or editing and publishing the divans of the outstanding poets of the Ghaznavid era (Farrokhi, Manuchehri, and 'Onsori), Dabirsiyāqi had few peers in the study of the literature of Khorasan.

After reading the letter, and comparing the topics with the text, I immediately called him and thanked him for all his insight, precision, and equanimity. At the same time, I firmly insisted that he publish these views and critiques anywhere he deemed appropriate, or that he allow me to take them to be published somewhere. With complete humility, he declared that he had written these matters for me purely with the aim of correcting them, and there was absolutely no need to publish them. I was humbled and said, "he lays the fruit-laden branch upon the ground."¹ I included all of his suggestions in the notes of the revised edition in order to acknowledge and thank him. When I went to Qazvin on 26 Mordad

¹This is a quote from Sa'īd's *Bustān*, chapter 4 (line 2471 in Yusofi's edition), when 'Umar goes out of his way to apologize for a slight offense; in this way, remarks the poet, do the great humble themselves before their inferiors.

1397 (17 August 2018), I sought to call on Dabirsiyāqi, but I was told that he was in absolutely no state for visitors. Never will that handsome appearance and engaging grin of his, which I believe he had inherited from his fellow Qazvinis ‘Obayd Zākāni and ‘Ali-Akbar Dehkhodā, be far from my thoughts, until ...

Alas, that “the event happens before you think!”²

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Translated from the Persian by Cameron Cross
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²From Forugh Farrokhzād’s poem *Imān biyāvarim be āghāz-e fasl-e sard*. The passage reads: “I told my mother: ‘It’s all over now.’ / I said, ‘It always happens before you think / We must put our condolence notice in the paper’” (trans. by Hasan Javadi and Susan Sallée, Mage, 2010).