

*Nasrin Rahimieh*

## Guest Editor's Introduction

This special issue of *Iranian Studies* has its roots in the Alborz Conference, a day-long international forum held on 10 October 2009 at the Samuel Jordan Center for Persian Studies and Culture at University of California, Irvine. The conference brought together scholars from across the globe to explore the legacy of a school for boys founded in 1899 by Dr. Samuel Martin Jordan (1871–1952) under the name of the American College of Tehran over which he presided until 1940. Jordan's efforts were part of the Presbyterian mission in Iran and were deeply rooted in his own commitment to laying the foundation of a strong modern educational system in Iran. The school was subsequently nationalized and was renamed the Alborz High School and continues to exist and operate today. Since its inception Alborz has enjoyed a remarkable reputation as Iran's foremost high school and its graduates have been among the most renowned men of erudition and scientific achievement both in and outside Iran. Particularly noteworthy in the history of the school is the smooth transition from the American to the Iranian visionaries who oversaw its development. The legacy of the American founder of the school, Samuel Jordan, was superbly preserved by his Iranian successor, Dr. Mohammad Ali Mojtahedi (1908–97), who took it upon himself to expand the school and to enhance its curriculum. It is the study of this dual legacy that informed the conference and is reflected in the essays included in this special issue.

The idea behind the international conference came from men of letters and scholars who had received their education at the Alborz High School and have retained enormous respect and love for Dr. Mojtahedi and the institution he helped fashion. Homa Katouzian, an Alborz alumnus and the editor-in-chief of *Iranian Studies*, made the link between a conference devoted to the Alborz High School and a university center dedicated to the memory of its American founder. Aware of the fact that the Samuel Jordan Center for Persian Studies and Culture had been created in 2006 with the support of an Alborz graduate, Fariborz Maseeh, Homa Katouzian suggested that the Center at University of California, Irvine would be an ideal site for such a conference.

The vision that had guided Fariborz Maseeh in the creation of a center for the study of Iranian history, literature, culture and the arts was informed by a dual desire to improve teaching, research and dissemination of knowledge about Iran and to recognize a particularly instructive chapter in the history of collaborative cultural and educational efforts between Iran and the United States. As a graduate of Alborz, Maseeh was steeped in admiration for Dr. Mojtahedi and he was curious about the history that

predated the visionary Iranian educator's achievements. As an Iranian-American who had benefited equally from the best of the Iranian and the American educational opportunities, Maseeh found it befitting to honor the memory of the American founder of a school that exemplified Iranian and American collaboration in educational endeavors. A similar spirit informed the Alborz Conference in 2009, which set out to explore the history of the school from its earliest days to its development under Dr. Mojtahedi. Honoring the memory of the two founders of the school who drew on philanthropy to support the school, a group of Alborz alumni from across the United States generously funded the Alborz International Conference. Alborz alumni also played a significant role in naming a state-of-the-art auditorium after their school. The idea, initiated by Fariborz Maseeh, was warmly received by countless Alborz alumni who contributed to the naming of the Alborz Auditorium in close proximity to the Samuel Jordan Center for Persian Studies and Culture at University of California, Irvine, echoing the manner in which Dr. Jordan's name continues to live in the annals of modern Iranian history.

The ten essays in this special issue are divided between the two phases of the history of the American College and the Alborz High School. Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet's essay sets the stage for understanding the history of American missionaries in Iran and offers a critical analysis of their work in the broader context of religion and diplomacy. Her essay helps readers understand the vexed history of political relations between Iran and the United States. Thomas M. Ricks' essay focuses on Dr. Jordan's educational mission and his contribution to the process of modernization in Iran. Ricks provides detailed knowledge about the men and women Dr. Jordan recruited to fulfill his mission and explores the synergy between the American College's educational contribution and Iran's own transformation into a modern nation. John Lorentz continues on this theme and analyzes the American College's role in the creation of a modern educational system which would eventually also make way for women. Michael Zirinsky's essay focuses on the path the work of the American missionaries paved for a dialogue between the Iranian and the American civilizations. Delving into the specific contributions made by the school's curriculum under Dr. Jordan's leadership, he presents a personal reflection on the values with which he, as an American, was inculcated in the mission schools in Tehran. Ali Gheissari's contribution presents a treasure trove of images culled from a school album owned by his father, who, like Gheissari, attended Alborz. These rare images capture the culture of the school and the passion with which the pupils adhered to it.

The remaining five essays in this issue are devoted to the Alborz High School under Dr. Mojtahedi's directorship. Houchang Chehabi's essay is focused on the concept of diversity and its deployment at Alborz. His examination of diversity takes into account gender, ethnic, religious and racial diversity as reflected in the student body as well as among the teachers of the Alborz High School. Chehabi's analysis also focuses on the question of educational diversity in the school's curriculum. In the next contribution, Farzin Vahdat examines the curriculum's focus on scientific knowledge and a positivist approach that emphasized techno-scientific knowledge and instrumental reason. Vahdat's analysis explores the link between the school's near singular curricular

focus on science and technology and the underdevelopment and undervalorization of other types of rationality in Iran's modern educational system. Homa Katouzian's essay recalls the school's teachers, revives their memory and captures the mood of the school during the years in which he attended Alborz. In the next essay, Bahram Bayani offers a detailed biography of Dr. Mojtahedi and situates it within the context of the social and political movements of the time. In his exploration of Dr. Mojtahedi's life, Bayani engages in a critical review of existing sources on Mojtahedi's life, beliefs and values. The final essay in the special issue is by Mehdi Zarghamee and is devoted to Dr. Mojtahedi's role, beyond his contribution to the Alborz High School, in the founding of Iran's preeminent university of technology.

Perhaps there is no better manifestation of the legacy of a school dedicated to the education of young men than to have the female director of a university center named after its founder edit a special volume of this journal devoted to the study of the history and legacy of that school. Equally noteworthy is the fact that at a time of discord between Iran and the United States, there exists a vibrant scholarly exchange that looks beyond the current political impasse.

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