

Physicians in the First Academy of Iran (1935-1953)

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ABSTRACT

Over seven decades ago, as the result of endeavors of a group of leading literary and scientific figures the *Farhangestan-e-Awwal* (First Academy of Iran) was established in May 1935 and its activity continued until 1953. Presented here is a brief historical account of the establishment of the First Academy of Iran as well as a look at the biographical sketches of physicians at the academy.

KEYWORDS:

Iran; Academy; History of medicine.

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INTRODUCTION

The process of modernization in Iran began during the second half of the nineteenth century.¹ However, as Ebrahimnejad states, the moving force for the modernization within the military, the administration, education, and medicine was centralization during the Qajar period (1794-1925).² Thus, the first Western style higher education institution, named *Dar al-Fonun School* (House of Techniques) was founded in 1851 by Mirza Taghi Khan Amir Kabir (1803-1851), the open-minded Prime Minister of Nasser al-Din Shah, the fourth king of the Qajar Dynasty. The *Dar al-Fonun School* had a considerable impact on the introduction of the concepts of modern sciences in Iran.^{3,4} Between 1848 and 1896, a total of 1100 students were trained at the *Dar al-Fonun*³ and a group of its graduates continued their training abroad. In addition, it was the forerunner for the foundation of a medical school when, in 1918, the *Dar al-Fonun's* Department of Medicine became independent and was known as *Maddreseh-ye Tebb* (the Medical School) which in turn paved the way for the foundation of the School of Medicine at the University of Tehran.⁵

The School of Medicine of the University of Tehran was formally established in 1934 and afterwards was instrumental in the further propagation of modern sciences in Iran. In addition, between 1928 and 1935, a total of 640 government-sponsored

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students, which included 125 medical students were sent abroad for higher education.⁶ In due course, many of these European-trained graduates returned home and rose to prominent positions in Iran's modern scientific institutions,⁵ including the First Academy of Iran.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The establishment of the *Dar al-Fonun School* was a major step in the introduction of modern sciences in Iran and as Keddie wrote: "under the *Dar al-Fonun* auspices, various Western medical textbooks were first translated into Persian, the first Persian books published, and some government officials received their education."⁷ Initially, students of the *Dar al-Fonun* were mainly taught by Austrian teachers. However, after 1860 the medical teachers were from other European countries. According to Floor, from 1854 to 1875 in the field of medicine there were four teachers at the *Dar al-Fonun*: the Austrian physician, Dr. Jacob Eduard Polak (1818-1891); the French doctor, Dr. Joseph Desire Tholozan (1848-1887); the German physician, Dr. Albo and Dr. Johan Louis Schlimmer (1819-1881) from Holland, who wrote most of the books that were used as teaching materials.⁸ For instance, Polak wrote the first modern anatomy textbook which was translated into Persian by his student, Mirza Mohammed-Hossein Afshar.⁹ In 1855, Dr. Schlimmer also wrote several books. He published a dictionary of Persian equivalents for the common French medical terms entitled: "*Terminologie Medico-Pharmaceutique et Anthropologique Francaise-Persane*" in 1874 which was later published by the University of Tehran,¹⁰ Thus, the Iranians gradually became familiar with modern scientific concepts and terms through the translation movement which was initiated after the mid-nineteenth century,¹¹ and as Jazayeri states: "Persia's expanding contacts with the West led to an influx

of technological and other new concepts for which there were no existing Persian equivalents". To meet this need, prior to the establishment of the First Academy of Iran in 1935, several organizations made efforts to make the Persian equivalents for loan words.¹²

Finally, in 1935 the government approved the foundation of the First Academy of Iran, known as *Farhangestan-e-Awwal*, and accordingly it was officially inaugurated in May 1935. The first president of the academy was Mohammad Ali Foroughi (1877-1942), who was the Prime Minister at the time. Initially, the academy had 24 permanent and associate members. Permanent members were elected for life. Ultimately, the total number of members reached 41.¹³ Table 1 shows a list of the most renowned members of the First Academy of Iran.

The main objectives of the First Academy were the protection and promotion of the Persian language, with the aim to locate or make appropriate equivalents for popular foreign words, which included scientific terms. The first meeting for members of the Iranian Academy was held in May 1935. Three years later, in May 1938, eight committees were formed at the academy including one related to medicine. Each committee consisted of chair, a secretary and spokesman who were elected by the members.¹⁴

Most physicians in the medical committee of the First Academy were graduates of the *Dar al-Fonun School* and/or Tehran School of Medicine and had continued their training abroad prior to joining the faculty at Tehran Medical School. Until 1941, the major achievement of the First Academy was the designation of 2000 Persian equivalents for popular Arabic, Turkish, English and French words as well as medical scientific terms, most of which were gradually popularized in the Persian texts.¹⁵

However, nowadays in the era of the so-called "explosion of information" as Sadeghi wrote,

Table 1: The most renowned members of the First Academy of Iran (1935-1953)

Permanent members	Associate members
Mohammad Ali Foroughi (1877-1942)	Reynold Alleyne Nicholson (1868-1945, the eminent English orientalist)
Mohammad Taqhi Bahar (Malek-al-Shoara, 1886-1951)	Arthur Emanuel Christensen (1875-1945, an Iranologist from Denmark)
Ali Partou (Hakim Aazam, died in 1939)**	Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938, poet and philosopher from Pakistan)
Ali Akbar Dehkhoda (1879-1956)	Arthur Upham Pope (1881-1969, American archaeologist and historian of Persian art)
Badi-o-Zaman Foruzanfar (1903-1970)	Henri Massé (1886-1969, French professor of Oriental Studies)
Saeed Nafisi (1896-1966)	Jan Rypka (1886-1968, prominent Czech orientalist and professor of Iranology)
Abd-al-Azim Gharib (1879-1955)	Mohammad Husayn Haykal (1888-1956, Egyptian writer, journalist, politician and Minister of Education in Egypt)
Mahmoud Hesabi (1903-1992)	Mohammad Ali Jamalzadeh (1892-1997 well-known Iranian writer)
Gholam Reza Rashid Yasemi (1897-1951)	
Issa Seddigh (1894-1980)	
Sadegh Rezazadeh Safagh (1895-1971)	
Gholam Hossein Rahnama (1880-1946)	
Hossein Samii (Adib-al-Saltana)	
Hossein Gol-e-Golab (1875-1945)	
Valiullah Khan Nasr (1878-1945) **	
Ghasem Ghani (1893-1952) **	
Ebrahim Pourdawud (1885-1968)	
Ali Akbar Siassi (1907-1990)	
Abbas Eghbal Ashtiani (1896-1955)	
Mohammad Ghazvini (1874-1949)	
Jalal ad-Din Homaei (1899-1981)	

* Adapted from references 11, 12 and 21.

**Physician

we have to consider the point that “the rate of introduction of western, and particularly English loan words into Persian is such that any attempt to stop them is almost doomed to failure.”¹⁶ In addition to Persian equivalents that had been coined for foreign words, in 1943, the Academy also published a monthly periodical entitled “*Nameh-ye Farhangestan*” (Academy’s Letter; Figure 1).¹³ The first editor of this journal was Habib Yaghmaei (1901-1993), the poet and literary researcher.

The activities of the First Academy were terminated in 1953, and in 1967 a more organized academy, known as the *Farhangestan-e dowsom* (Second Academy) was established.

The activity of the Second Academy continued until 1979. The first and second academies were actually the forerunner of the third Iranian Academy that was established eight years after the Islamic Revolution of 1979. The Third Academy consisted of four separate organizations for *Farhangestan-e Olum* (Sciences, 1987), *Farhangestan-e Olum-e Pezeshk* (Medicine,

1989), *Farhangestan-e Zaban va Adab-e Farsi* (Persian Language and Literature, 1991) and *Farhangestan-e Honar* (Art, 1998).¹² The historical account of these academies is a topic for a future discussion.

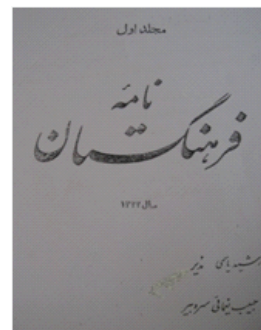


Fig 1: The front cover of the first issue of “*Nameh-ye Farhangestan*” (Academy’s Letter) published in 1943 by the First Academy of Iran.

Physicians in the First Academy

Below are brief biographical sketches of those physicians who were members of the First Iranian Academy.

Dr. Amir-Aalam

Dr. Amir-Aalam (1877-1961, Figure 2) was born in Tehran. He graduated from the Lyon School of Medicine and after completing his medical training in France returned to Iran in 1906 where he became a professor of Anatomy at the *Maddreseh-ye Teb* (Medical School).¹⁷ Later, he was appointed as the Chair of the Anatomy Department of Tehran Medical School and wrote an anatomy book that consisted of nine volumes. He was an active member of the *Majles-eHefz al-Sehheh* (the Council for Preservation of Health) which was founded in 1881 and reestablished in 1904.¹⁸ Dr Amir-Aalam became a permanent member of the Medical Committee of the First Iranian Academy in 1938.¹⁷



Fig 2: Dr. Amir-Aalam (1877-1961)

Dr. Valiallah Khan Nasr

Dr. Valiullah Khan Nasr (1878-1945, Figure 3) was born in Kashan and graduated from the *Daral-Fonun School* in 1912. He became a teacher at the



Fig 3: Dr. Valiullah Khan Nasr (1878- 1945)

Maddreseh-ye Tebb (Medical School) in 1924 and between 1928 and 1930, he was its director. Dr. Nasr was a permanent member of the First Academy of Iran.¹⁹

Dr. Ali Partou (Hakim Aazam)

Dr. Ali Partou (Hakim Aazam, died in 1939, Figure 4) was a graduate of the *Dar al-Fonun School* who continued his training in medicine at the Paris School of Medicine. He returned to Iran in 1908 and became a teacher at the *Maddreseh-ye Tebb* (Medical School) in 1911.¹⁷ He became the President of *Majles-eHefz al-Sehheh* (the Council for Preservation of Health).¹⁹ Dr. Partou was an influential physician who promoted public health measures in Iran. In 1926, he attended the International Conference of Public Health in Paris. He wrote a book on therapeutics, which was published after his death.²⁰ He was a permanent member of the First Iranian Academy.



Fig 4: Dr. Ali Partou (Hakim Aazam, died 1939)

Dr. Ghasem Ghani

Dr. Ghasem Ghani (1893-1952, Figure 5) was born in Sabzevar, Khorasan Province. He was a graduate of the *Dar al-Fonun School* who initially began his training in medicine at the American University of Beirut and then continued his studies in France. In 1937, he became Secretary of the Medical Committee of the First Academy. He was highly interested in Persian literature and wrote several literary works. In 1942 he was appointed as a professor of the History of Medicine and Medical Ethics at Tehran School of Medicine. In the same

year he became the Minister of Health. Dr. Ghani was the Iranian representative in the World Health Organization.^{17, 21} In 1942, seventeen new permanent members of the First Academy, including Dr. Ghani, were elected.¹²



Fig 5: Dr. Ghasem Ghani (1893-1952)

Dr. Nosratolla Bastan

Dr. Nosratolla Bastan (1903-1986, Figure 6) was born in Tehran. He initially studied at the *Dar al-Fonun School* and later enrolled at the *Madreseh-ye Tebb* (School of Medicine). He went to France in 1928 and became an ophthalmologist. In 1937 he returned to Iran. In 1940 he was appointed as a professor of Ophthalmology at Tehran School of Medicine. Dr. Bastan published several Persian textbooks on ophthalmology and otolaryngology.^{17, 21}



Fig 6: Dr. Nosratolla Bastan (1903-1986)

Dr. Mahmoud Najmabadi

Dr. Mahmoud Najmabadi (1903-2000, Figure 7) was born in Tehran. He was a graduate of the *Dar al-Fonun School* who became a

lecturer of the History of Medicine at Tehran Medical School. He was a member of the First Iranian Academy.²² Dr. Najmabadi wrote several books, of which his most famous work is a two-volume book entitled “History of Medicine in Iran after Islam” which has been published by Tehran University (Figure 8). Dr. Najmabadi was a member of the International Society for the History of Medicine (Paris, France). After the foundation of the Academy of Medical Sciences of Iran in the winter of 1990, Dr. Najmabadi was appointed as a permanent member of the Academy of Medical Sciences.



Fig 7: Dr. Mahmoud Najmabadi (1903-2000)



Fig 8: The front cover of the “History of Medicine in Iran after Islam” written by Dr. Mahmoud Najmabadi and published by the University of Tehran.

Dr. Hassan Mirdamadi

Dr. Hassan Mirdamadi (Figure 9) was born in Isfahan in 1901 and graduated from Tehran Medical School. He continued his training on serology in France, and in 1940 he was ap-

pointed as a professor. He wrote two books on microbiology and serology.¹⁷ Dr. Mirdamadi was elected as a member of the Medical Committee of the First Iranian Academy.^{14, 15}



Fig 9: Dr. Hassan Mirdamadi (b. 1901)

Dr. Ebrahim Ne'matolahi

Dr. Ebrahim Ne'matolahi (Figure 10) was born in Isfahan in 1903. A graduate of the Tehran Medical School, he was sent to France in 1928 and became a physiologist. In 1936 he returned to Iran. Dr. Ne'matolahi was initially appointed as an associate professor of Physiology; in 1941, he became full professor and the Chair of the Physiology Department at the Tehran School of Medicine. He was also Vice-chancellor of the Tehran Medical School between 1941 and 1944. Dr. Ne'matolahi published three books on physiology. He was ap



Fig 10: Dr. Ebrahim Ne'matolahi (b. 1903)

pointed as a member of the First Iranian Academy in 1941. In 1947 Dr. Ne'matolahi was appointed by Professor Charles Oberling, the Dean of Tehran School of Medicine, to be the General Inspector of the Amuzeshgah- Ala'i Behdari

(Medical Auxiliary Training Schools) in Iran.¹⁷ He was a member of the Medical Committee of the First Iranian Academy.^{14,15}

Dr. Mostafa Habibi Golpayegani

Dr. Mostafa Habibi Golpayegani (1904-1948) was born in Tehran (Figure 11). He graduated from the *Dar al-Fonun School* and in 1928, he was sent with a group of students to France by the Ministry of Education. In France, he initially spent a year at the Medical School of Boredeu and then transferred to the Paris Medical School. Finally, he continued his training in pathology and returned to Iran in 1936. On his return, Dr. Habibi was employed as an associate professor of Histology and Embryology. He established the first modern medical laboratory in 1936 in Tehran. In 1941, when Professor Charles Oberling became the Dean of Tehran Medical School, Dr. Habibi received the first full-time university professorship in Pathology. He was one of the founders of the first medical journal of Tehran University, as well as the *Amuzeshgah- Ala'i Behdari* (Medical Auxiliary Training Schools) in Mashhad (1941), Shiraz and Isfahan (1946). These schools were the forerunners of medical schools that were subsequently established in these cities. He also wrote medical books and published several papers on pathology and endemic diseases in Iran.²³



Fig 11: Dr. Mostafa Habibi Golpayegani (1904-1948)

Dr. Nosratolla Kasemi

Dr. Nosratolla Kasemi (1909-1995, Figure 12) was a graduate of the Tehran School of Medicine in 1935 who was appointed as a professor of Internal Medicine in 1946.¹⁷ From 1943 to 1948 he was the director and editor of the first academic Journal entitled “*Nameh Mahaneh-ye Daneshkadeh-ye Pezeshki*” (Monthly Letter of School of Medicine) in Iran which was published by Tehran School of Medicine.²⁴ Dr. Kasemi was also a poet and writer who wrote many literary works^{21, 25} as well as a medical English-Persian dictionary (Figure 13).



Fig 12: Dr. N. Kasemi (1909-1995)

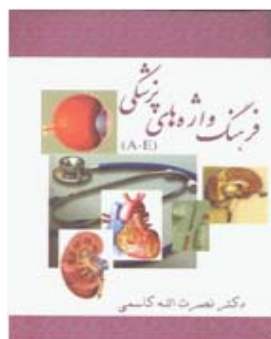


Fig 13: Medical English-Persian Dictionary by Dr. Kasemi

Dr. Mohammad Shahrads

Dr. Mohammad Shahrads was born in Gonabad, Khorasan Province. He graduated from the School of Medicine of Tehran and continued his training in 1931 in Paris, studying the history of medicine and medical ethics.

In 1934, he returned to Iran and in 1935 he was appointed as a member of the Medical Committee of the First Iranian Academy.

Dr. Hossein Gol-e-Golab

Dr. Hossein Gol-e-Golab (1875-1945, Figure 14) was employed as a professor of Plant Biology at the Tehran Medical School. He graduated from the *Dar al-Fonun School* in 1916 and continued his training in Tehran. He was a permanent member of the First Academy. Dr. Gol-e-Golab wrote several books on botany and medicinal plants.¹⁷ Dr. Gol-e-Golab was very influential in making the Persian equivalents for scientific terms.²¹



Fig 14: Dr. Hossein Gole-Golab (1875-1945)

In conclusion, the main achievement of the First Iranian Academy was the creation of Persian equivalents for many foreign words, including medical terms, of which several physicians played key roles in this academy.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest related to this work.

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