

# SHOJAEDDIN SHAFI

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Qom 1918 – Paris 2010

## Biographical Datas

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Man of letters, historian, journalist and Iranian diplomat, he was born on December 4, 1918 at Qom (Iran). After studying literature in Tehran, then in France, in Lebanon and Italy, he began a career as a journalist, before devoting himself to writing.

He led by his writing and his official duties. Director of Information under the Mossadegh government, Vice-Minister of the Imperial Court for Cultural Affairs, Spokesman of His Majesty Mohammad-Reza Shah Pahlavi. Concurrently, he was Ambassador of Iran for Cultural Affairs, Director-General of the Pahlavi Library, Secretary-General of the Imperial Cultural Council, and Secretary-General of the International Union of Iranologists.

He published his first translation of poems by Lamartine at the age of 18.

Through his love of French culture, he endeavored to disclose its literature, which was so little known in Iran, with his translations of major works. Lamartine, Anna de Noailles, Hugo, Chateaubriand, Musset ; Les Chansons de Bilitis de Pierre Louÿs ; L'Iran dans la littérature française.....

His classic and refined style was taught in schools and universities before the Islamic revolution.

For this, he received the “Palme Académique”, the Order of Commander of “Arts et Lettres” which was presented to him by Mr. André Malraux, and the “Légion d'Honneur” at the grade of Officer by Général de Gaulle, who offered him the blue-white-red collection of his “Mémoires de Guerre”.

He was *Doctoris Honoris Causa* of the Universities of Rome and Moscow.

To the Persian reader, he also introduced all the great classical authors: Dante, Nietzsche, Goethe, Heine, Milton, Byron..... in a flourishing literary work of 64 titles and 24 volumes.



He wrote Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi's speeches and was the sovereign's pen for: « The White Revolution », 1963, and « Towards the Great Civilization », 1977.

He suggested to the Shah the Celebrations of the 2500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Persian Empire, and was involved in the only cultural events related to these celebrations. Noteworthy, in 1971, he founded with Pr. Duchesne-Guillemin the renowned publication *Acta Iranica*, which currently has about fifty volumes.

One of his key projects was the Cultural Encyclopedia of Iran: "The World of Iranology « *Jahan-é Iranshenassi* ", 3,000 years of influence of Iranian culture in the world". The first volume appeared in Tehran in 1976. The events of 1979 stopped the publication of the following volumes. Only one was published in Huelva (Spain) in 2000, "From Persian to Muslim Spain", where he demonstrates how Persian culture has influenced ancient, Muslim and modern Spain, and thereby Western culture. In Spanish and in Persian.

Another of his initiatives was the project to build the National Library of avant-garde, which was interrupted by the events of 1979, after an international competition in which 600 architectural firms had participated. A few years later, he welcomed Unesco and Egyptian government's proposal to implement the functional project in the « Biblioteca Alexandrina ».

Publishing Director of the "*Gâhnâme, panjha sâle Shahinshahi Pahlavi*". 5 volumes. Tehran, Pahlavi Library, 1976.

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In 1979, he naturally sought refuge in France, his second homeland at heart. Then began his struggle, which lasted 30 years against 14 centuries of Shiite obscurantism in Iran. His books, which denounced the weight of political and religious traditions and the realities they conceal, are experiencing a great success.

His penultimate book was in French, and aimed to depict in increments the disturbing face of the Shiite clerical regime in Iran and its foundations.

His final book is a research on the trilogy of the Abrahamic religions and the origins of the Koran (posthumous).

Deceased in Paris, on April 17, 2010.

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### Honours

- Imperial Grand Prize for Literature, Iran (1956)
- Doctor Honoris Causa of the University of Rome (1967)
- Doctor Honoris Causa of the University of Moscow (1969)
- Honorary member of the Royal Academy of History of Spain (1971)
- Honorary member of the Hammer-Purgstall Academy of Vienna (1971)
- The International Grand Prize of Florence (1971)
- Imperial Grand Prize of Iran (1971)

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### Decorations

- Argentina : *Libertador San Martin*

- Austria : *Ehrenzeichen für Verdienst*
- Belgium : *Royal Order of Leopold*
- Brazil : *Ordem Nacional do Cruzeiro do Sul*
- Denmark : *Order of Dannebrog*
- Ethiopia : *Imperial Order of Menelik*
- France : *Légion d'Honneur*
- France : *Palmes Académiques*
- France : *Arts et Lettres*
- Germany : *Grosses Verdienstkreuz*
- Great Britain : *Royal Order of Victoria*
- Hungary : *Magyar Neptoztarsasat Zaszlorend*
- Iran : *Taj (Order of the Crown)*
- Iran : *Homayoun*
- Italy : *Al Merito della Repubblica*
- Malaysia : *Paglima Setia Mahkota*
- Morocco : *Royal Order of Alaouite*
- Poland : *Polonia Restituta*
- Sweden : *Kungliga Nordstjärneorden*
- Thailand : *Maha Parama pon Shang Phuok*
- The Netherlands : *Order of Orange Nassau*
- Tunisia : *Al-jumhurrya (Order of the Republic)*
- Vatican : *Gregorius Magnus*



### 1-Works published in Persian before the Iranian Revolution of 1979

Lamartine's poetic songs  
 Goethe's *West-Eastern Divan*  
 Byron's best poems  
 Heinrich Heine's best poems  
 Victor Hugo's best poems  
 Alfred de Musset's best poems  
 Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*  
 Countess de Noailles' best poems  
 Pierre Louÿs's Songs of Bilitis  
 Anthology of Greek Poetry  
 Anthology of Chinese Poetry  
 Anthology of American Poetry  
 Anthology of Western poems on Iran  
 Masterpieces of world poetry  
 Golden pages of world literature  
 Poets

Iran in French literature  
Edgar Allan Poe's Tales of Mystery and Imagination  
Short Stories by Great Writers (8 vol.)  
Théophile Gautier's *The Mummy's Foot*  
Ernest Hemingway's *The Snows of Kilimanjaro*  
George Bernard Shaw's *Candida* and *The man of Destiny*  
The Tale of Gods  
Jean Finot's *Know Thyself*  
Gustave Le Bon's Thoughts and Beliefs  
The Enamoured (a collection of 6 stories)  
Thirteen articles on historical questions  
Eighteen articles on literary questions  
Four articles on artistic questions  
Dante's *Divine Comedy* (3 vol.)  
Milton's *Paradise Lost*

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#### *Acta Iranica*

Publication founded in 1971 by Shojaeddin Shafa, Director-General of the Pahlavi Library.  
Editor-in-chief : Pr. Jacques Duchesne-Guillemin  
50 volumes

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*The World of Iranology*, an encyclopaedia of 3,000 years of Persian Civilization  
And its contribution to World Culture  
(22 vol.) Uncompleted

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## **2 - Works after the 1979 revolution**

Principes politiques, philosophiques et religieux de l'Ayatollah Khomeiny. Edition originale en français. Editions Hallier/Albin Michel, Paris, 1979. Translated in 8 languages.

De Persia a la España musulmana. La Historia recuperada. Universidad de Huelva, 2000.  
(What we owe to Iranians : Iranian Legacy to Western Culture and Civilization through Muslim Spain"). Published in Spanish.

Human Rights, lex testicularum and the A-bomb. Iran : A revolution confiscated.  
The true face of Islam in the Ayatollahs' country. 2008. Unpublished.

## **3. Works published in Persian after the 1979 revolution**

Iran at the Crossroad of Destiny

The fight against evil. 14 centuries of poems in Persian about religion

Responsa, from Koleyni to Khomeini, answers to thousand-year-old questions

Crime and Punishments. A review of the first obscurantist revolution in History  
(4 vol.)

*De Persia a la España musulmana : la historia recuperada*

Tavalodidigar. A Rebirth. Iran in a new millennium

About Tavalodidigar. Five analysis

Thirty open letters

1.400 years (2 vol.)

Lights in darkness

A selection of articles published in various medias after the 1979 revolution

Human Rights, lex testicularum and the A-bomb.

The Koran's Enigma (posthumous book)

Iranshahr Newspaper, Paris 1371-1373/1993/1994

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#### TRIBUTES

Shafa is one of the men of the spirit who are fully conscious of their real duty towards science and letters. He encourages us to know ourselves better, and to better serve universal understanding and accord. In this noble but daunting task the honour goes by right to those whose aim is to tighten the links of universal understanding and entente. Shafa is one of these men. It is for this reason I salute in him the personification of an ideal, of a conception of positive and creative humanism.

**Giuseppe Tucci**

It is a pleasure to pay homage to the work of Shojaeddin Shafa, knowing as we do its importance and its quality. **André Malraux**

Like many other Frenchmen who know Mr. Shafa and his work, I cannot but admire his profound knowledge of French culture, his erudition, his sincerity and natural courtesy. We wish him with all our hearts the greatest success in his pursuit of a task so fruitful for our cultural values. **Henri Massé**

I willingly associate myself with the homage paid by many Frenchmen to Mr. Shafa for his great service to French culture in Iran, as well as for Iranian culture in France. I am pleased to see the strengthening of cultural links between France and Iran and I am very much aware of the role that Mr. Shafa has played to this end. **André Maurois**

I render sincere homage to Mr. Shafa for his literary work, which has not only served the ancient culture of Iran, but also “culture” in general. **Jules Romains**

I salute in Mr. Shafa a worthy friend, an eminent man of letters, a sincere servant of human culture. **Jan Rypka**

We see in our friend Shafa, Doctor Honoris Causa of our University, one of the links in the long chain of understanding and spiritual accord between peoples. **University of Rome**

We pay you homage as worthy representative of the cultural impulse of modern Iran, an impulse which inspires the profoundest respect among those throughout the world who have links of any kind with Iranian culture. **Harvard University**

We salute in Mr. Shafa the skilful translator of many American works of literature ; but we honour him also as a master builder of understanding and friendship, the symbol of the union of our two cultures. **Princeton University**

The publication of *The World of Iranology* constitutes an academic event. It is perhaps superfluous to say just now how much we are aware of the quality of a work whose importance is already fully evident, not only for the scientific quality of its research but also for international understanding. **UNESCO**

The publication of this work (*The World of Iranology*) of such major importance, will be greeted as an event by all those who know Iran and study its history. **French Academy**

This encyclopaedia is destined to become the working tool of all the world’s specialists in Persian studies. **Collège de France**

To pay homage to the work of Mr. Shafa is to honour an admirable literary achievement. We owe to him among other works his so widely appreciated and admired translation of the Divine Comedy. **Dante Alighieri Society**

A gigantic work of literature distinguished by an admirable beauty of style, throughout impregnated with a refinement of spirit and the poetry appropriate to Persian literature. **Asiatic Society of Paris**

**During the memorial ceremony, on July 13, 2010, at the Ministry of Culture and Communication, Mr. Frédéric Mitterrand paid tribute to him in these words:**

“A few weeks ago, at the Cannes Film Festival, I was extremely shocked that the Iranian Director, Jafar Panahi, detained in prison in his country, was prevented from joining this prestigious international jury, as a most expected members. This absence suggests the duality of a country, torn between its millennial calling to an open and innovative culture, and the reactionary forces that seek to hinder its momentum, and fortunately, without ever managing to stop it.

I have long nourished a profound admiration for this ancestral country, still mysterious, for this land steeped in history and culture, which has continued to fascinate France in particular and its Orientalist travelers, such as Jean Chardin, its great Enlightenment philosophers like Montesquieu and his immortal *Persian Letters*, or more recently, great minds like Louis Massignon, by its tradition of curiosity eager to foster this culture that continues even today in our universities and our greatest educational institutions, such as the Collège de France. This French tradition meets in Iran a string of great minds, of which Shojaeddin Shafa has been one of the most iconic and most memorable ones.

So it is my great honor to pay tribute today, in my personal capacity, but also on behalf of France, his second homeland at heart, and in the presence of Her Majesty Farah Pahlavi, to Shojaeddin Shafa, this great humanist of the Iranian and universal culture, who was at once a scholar, a writer, a man of letters, a diplomat, an advisor to the monarch, a grand minister of cultural affairs, and one of the most faithful servants of the Iranian State.

In one of his wonderful poems, one of these famous “ghazals” which have quite marked the Western culture, the Grand Persian poet Hafiz wrote that “the palace of hope is surprisingly fragile”. Yet, Shojaeddin Shafa never lost hope, and continued to carry its values, inseparable from those of learning and of knowledge, which are always, in their very essence, a basis for the future. In this future which claims the work of scholars and poets, it is as if borders are abolished by the numerous bridges that are thrown by the love of words, rare emotions and partaking of ideas. Shafa was truly a unique courier between East and West, and particularly, between France, Europe and Iran. Translator of poetry, and even poet of translation, to the Persian reader he introduced Lamartine, Hugo and Anna de Noailles, but also Heine, Goethe, Milton and Dante. These are milestones of our culture, and he laid the groundwork for this enabled meeting, and for the markers of hope.

His extraordinary erudition to being open to the world, has nonetheless been deeply and almost physically rooted in a love of Iran, and in all strata and all alluvium that formed its face over the centuries. His insatiable thirst of knowledge and love is embodied in an exemplary manner in his mammoth project of *Monde d'Iranologie*, a cultural encyclopedia of Iran, irreplaceable reference for all lovers of this ancient land. This encyclopedia, regrettably unfinished due to circumstances, was unanimously hailed worldwide as the most extended and most comprehensive painting of the eternal Iran, a mirror of its subtle beauty and sophisticated treasures.

But he knew that humanism is not just a job, but also a battle, and the scholar knew how to transform himself into a polemicist, against the declared excesses of the theocracy. Through novels and essays which are uncommonly daring, with a sharpness mixed in with elegant melancholy, the personal depth of this work brings to light the forces of isolationism.

Through his books that have been passed around in secret for more than thirty years, this Ambassador of Iranian culture has acted as an essential counterpoint to the official culture, allowing an entire young generation of Iranians to pick up the threads of the past of its country and its people.

The influence of this grand emissary of the culture will continue to assert itself as his works get translated into different European languages that he mastered. Gradually, the face will emerge, «such that in itself, finally eternity changes it», the face of this herald of a renaissance interrupted, the face of this tireless Erasmus of modern Iran. He will embody more each day, the enlightened minds and hearts facing this barbarity and this “radiance of moonlight which tears the dark clothing at night”, as sung by Omar Khayyam.