

Iran's Literary Becoming: Zoka' ol-Molk Foroughi and the Literary History That Wasn't¹

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The most salient marker of character, the instrument of national distinction, the basis upon which a nation becomes distinct and distinguishable from other nations is language, and the soul of language is literature²

Depending on context, there could be two radically different readings of the above passage. If one were to find it in Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, it would read as a critique of a national imaginary rooted in linguistic and cultural difference. If one were to

¹I am grateful to Kevin Schwartz, Alexander Jabbari, and Amir Vafa for their critical comments. My thanks also go to Farzin Vejdani for answering my inquiries about Foroughi.

²In Persian: *Avval 'alamat-e tashakhhos ya 'ni asbab-e shakhsiyat-e mellat ke mayeh-ye emtiyaz va joda kardan-e an melal az sayer melal mishavad zaban ast va ruh-e zaban adabiyat mibashad.* Mohamad Hosayn Foroughi, *'Elm-e badi'*, compiled and prefaced by Abol Hasan Foroughi and Mohamad 'Ali Foroughi (n.p: Matba' -e Mirza 'Ali Asghar, 1916-17). Copy available at the National Library and Archives of Iran (Cat. No. 13157). I will later explain why I refer to this work as "literary history." My analysis here is based on the lithograph available at the National Library and Archives of Iran. All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

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encounter it in a late-twentieth-century literary textbook, it would read as a bold declaration of romantic nationalism and its obsession with cultural singularity. The first reading relies on a critical knowledge of the role that language has played within the discourse of romantic nationalism in order to strip it down to its most basic impulse: the production of distinction. The second reading frames the passage as an effort to raise language and literature as identitarian fixtures tied to a national imaginary, one that operates through the production of distinction. I will revisit this intriguing ambivalence in my conclusion.

Although this passage may be relevant to both contexts, it did not appear in either one. It was extracted from Mohamad Hosayn Forughī's *Literary History*, written with astonishing clarity between the 1890s and 1910s, lithographed posthumously in 1916–17, but never distributed widely or published using later print technologies. This source may be familiar to scholars of late Qajar Iran, but its significance remains largely unexplored outside of that subfield. Precisely because it has not been extensively analyzed or even critically introduced, it can generate a host of unaddressed questions about the social processes by which literary nationalism took shape in the late nineteenth century, particularly for scholars who research different iterations of nationalism in the Middle East.³

My purpose here is to introduce this important literary and historical source and meditate on what its “rediscovery” in the twenty-first

³For a cogent analysis of Mohamad Hosayn Forughī's role in the creation of history as a social enterprise, see Farzin Vejdani, *Making History in Iran: Education, Nationalism, and Print Culture* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015), 35–54. Vejdani shows that Forughī had an ambivalent relationship with the Qajar court and was a more independent actor than many other courtiers. Vejdani's dissertation offers a lengthier biography of Forughī and his father, Mohamad Mahdi Arbab Isfahani. See “Purveyors of the Past: Iranian Historians and Nationalist Historiography, 1900–1941,” (PhD diss., Yale University, 2009). For an examination of the rise of Persian literary history as a genre, including a brief analysis of Forughī's work, see Manzar Soltani, “Tahlil-e sayr-e tazkere'ha va tarikh-e adabiyat'ha-ye Farsi dar Iran az 1258/1880 (*mashrute*) ta 1332/1953,” (PhD diss., Tarbiyat Modares University, 1999). Forughī's *Literary History* has received passing references in Persian-language periodicals, but it has not been analyzed in a standalone article in English or Persian. I am not able to verify this claim when it comes to scholarship on Persian literature in other European languages.

century means for the field of Persian and Iranian studies. This article is the result of my ongoing dialogue with Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak about the emergence of literature as a social institution in the Persian-speaking world. The path to becoming a scholar is more than just a matter of earning academic credentials. Along the way, what shapes a young scholar's intellectual and human development is the presence of a community who fulfills different but complementary roles: teacher, friend, peer, champion, and mentor. In the past five years, Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak has mentored me, championed my work, and treated me as a peer. It is only appropriate in writing an article in his honor that the focus should be on an astounding literary figure who shaped debates and trends in the field of Persian literature and literary history.

This article comprises three methodical vignettes centered on Mohamad Hosayn Forughî's life, his little-known *Literary History*, and the broader cultural context to which it belonged. The brief biographical section places the author in the emerging ecosystem of literary institutions and journals in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, illustrating his liminal position in the Qajar court and his role in creating a national pedagogy based on which generations of Iranian students were educated. The second section focuses on introducing his *Literary History* by outlining its different sections, explaining what they mean and why they were important to the formation of literary history as a modern genre. The last vignette addresses the common historiographical impulse of overestimating works of prominent intellectuals by demonstrating how Forughî's *Literary History* belonged to a much broader social context in which similar ideas were in circulation. Ultimately, this article hopes to raise relevant and unaddressed questions that speak to the gestation of Persian literature as an academic discipline in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.⁴

⁴See Mahmud Futuhi Rudma'nji, *Daramadi bar adabiyat-shenasi: Rahnema-ye osul-e amuzesh va parvareh dar adabiyat-e Farsi* (Tehran: Pazhuheshgah-e 'olom-e ensani va motale'at-e farhangi, 2017).

The Figure: Zoka' ol-Molk Forughi

This section introduces Forughi's biography and demonstrates his centrality to the political, cultural, and literary life of nineteenth-century Qajar Iran. The details of his life highlight a period of social change that witnessed an itinerant merchant enter the Qajar court and shape how modern-day Iranians understand and celebrate a certain past as their own. Mohamad Hosayn Forughi (d. 1907) was born in 1839 in Isfahan, the son of Mohamad Mahdi Arbab Isfahani.⁵ Forughi was a prominent Qajar-era litterateur, translator, educator, and advocate for constitutionalism.⁶ In 1894, he was given the royal epithet *Zoka' ol-Molk*, in praise of his intelligence (*Zoka'*), which he put in the service of the Qajar political domain (*molk*).⁷ He received a madrassa education in Persian and Arabic in Isfahan. Encouraged by his father, the young Forughi paused his education and became a merchant in the Persian Gulf and India.

After fourteen years, he returned to his life of learning by working as a poet in the court of Kerman's ruler Esma'il Khan Vakil ol-Dowle Nuri. In 1872, Mohamad Hasan Khan E'temad ol-Saltane (d. 1896), who directed the Publication and Translation Bureaus (*Dar ol-teba'a*, *Dar ol-tarjome-ye homayuni*), hired Forughi as a translator in the court of Naser ol-Din Shah (r. 1848–96).⁸ Forughi entered the court as a merchant and man of learning, not on the basis of aristocratic pedigree or background in bureaucratic or administrative work. As an outsider, he maintained a liminal position vis-à-vis the Qajar dynasty. Farzin

⁵For a biographical essay on Mohamad Mahdi Arbab Isfahani, see Jalal ol-Din Homa'i, "Khandan-e Forughi," *Yaghma* 66 (AH 1332/AD 1953): 361–65. Most notably, Arbab was the first Iranian to produce a lithographed edition of the *Shahname*.

⁶For biographical information on Forughi, please see Manouchehr Kasheff, "FORUGI, MOHAMMAD-HOSAYN Khan Doka'al-Molk," in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 2012, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/forugi-mohammad-hosayn>; Baqer 'Aqeli, *Zoka' ol-Molk Forughi va Shahrivar-e 1320* (Tehran: AH 1367/AD 1988); Edward Granville Browne, *The Persian Revolution* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1910), 404–5.

⁷That is in addition to "Forughi," an epithet that was bestowed on him by Naser ol-Din Shah after he composed a *qaside* on the occasion of tree plantation. Kasheff, "Forugi," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*. He shared this epithet with the distinguished Qajar-era poet 'Abbas Forughi Bastami (d. 1857). The two Forughis are unrelated.

⁸For a description of his exact duties at the court, see Kasheff, "Forugi," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*.

Vejdani writes, “This liminal position may explain why, despite being a Qajar bureaucrat, Muhammad Husayn Furughi supported constitutional change and moved in circles critical of the ruling dynasty.”⁹ Thanks to his knowledge of Arabic, French, and English, combined with his mastery of Persian prose and rhetoric, Forughi produced important literary textbooks and translations and edited canonical works of Persian literature. In doing so, he played a major role in the proliferation of print culture and the promotion of a nationalist historiography that valorized the study of the past.¹⁰

In the mid-1890s, Mohamad ‘Ali Tarbiyat founded Iran’s first independent newspaper, called *Tarbiyat* or *Education* (1896–1907), thanks in no small part to newfound political freedoms that followed the assassination of Naser ol-Din Shah in 1896. *Tarbiyat* was published by an eponymous library in Tehran, which was among the new sites for the reading and the distribution of literary production that had proliferated in late-nineteenth-century Tehran. Forughi served as *Tarbiyat*’s editor.¹¹ In its first issue, released on December 16, 1896, Forughi boldly declared that the difference among people and societies boiled down to only their education.¹² As Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet has noted, “Most newspapers published in the late Qajar period heralded the virtues of education in shaping a civilized and progressive society—ideals to which a beleaguered Iran aspired.”¹³ *Tarbiyat* represents only one example of Persian-language newspapers, many of which remain unexamined, that aimed to cultivate a normative national subject in the early twentieth century.

⁹Vejdani, *Making History in Iran*, 41; Kasheff, “Forugi,” *Encyclopaedia Iranica*.

¹⁰Abbas Eqbal Ashtiyani, “Zoka’ ol-Molk Forughi,” *Adabiyat va zaban’ha* 163 (AH 1340/AD 1962): 517–22.

¹¹H. Ma’sumi Hamadani, “Zoka’ ol-Molk Forughi va ruzname-ye Tarbiyat,” *Nashr-e Danesh* 4 (AH 1363/AD 1984): 5–19.

¹²Zoka’ al-Molk Forughi, “Aqaz-i sukhan,” *Tarbiyat*, no. 1, (11 Rajab 1314/17 December 1896), 1–3; quote on p. 2; digitized archive of Universität Bonn, Abteilung für Islamwissenschaft und Nahostsprachen (accessed September 29, 2017).

¹³Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet, *Frontier Fictions: Shaping the Iranian Nation, 1804–1946* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), 291.

For Forughī, the idea of literature—which he understood as a nationally enshrined corpus of prose and poetry—was a major pillar of education. Since print capitalism was understood as an instrument for the production and dissemination of literature, he wrote a series in *Tarbiyat* about the history of printing in Europe. Another important series in that newspaper was called *adabiyat*, a novel concept that needed extensive contextualization for uninitiated readers in the late 1890s, since in its premodern iteration, *adabiyat* referred to *adab*-derived sciences such as *balagha* (rhetoric).¹⁴ Mid- and late-nineteenth-century thinkers like Forughī invested a great deal of intellectual labor toward bringing *adabiyat* into close alignment with the nineteenth-century French notion of *littérature*, a national culture in possession of a singular and distinct literary tradition.¹⁵

In *Tarbiyat*, Forughī featured biographies of poets like Hafez and ‘Omar Khayyam to highlight the literary achievements of New Persian.¹⁶ The inclusion of Persian poets’ biographies in *Tarbiyat* was novel not only in its radical rewriting of the *tazkere* genre or biographical dictionary (more commonly transliterated as *tadhkira* or *tazkira*, and also translated as *commemorative biographical compendia* by Mana Kia), but also for mass producing it for a nationally imagined readership in the format of periodicals.¹⁷ Kevin Schwartz has conceptualized the *tazkeres* of Persian poets as a “transregional library” in that the genre forged imagined literary communities with competing poetics and geographical centers of gravity.¹⁸ Forughī’s literary history and his columns in *Tarbiyat*

¹⁴*Adab* is a discourse of humanistic inquiry centered on civility and self-conduct. For more on the term and idea of *adabiyat* and *Tarbiyat*’s role in reframing it, see Aria Fani, “Becoming Literature: The Formation of *Adabiyat* as an Academic Discipline in Iran and Afghanistan (1895–1945)” (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2019), chap. 1.

¹⁵Another example is Fath ‘ali Akhundzadeh, who wrote that “*literatur* consists of any composition whether in prose or poetry,” leaving the French term untranslated in Persian. *Maktubat* (n.p.: Mard-e Emruz Publications, 1985), 10.

¹⁶For instance, the newspaper featured a biographical series of Johannes Gutenberg (d. 1468), the inventor of the movable-type printing press; on Hafez, see *Tarbiyat*, no. 255 (1902): 14.

¹⁷Mana Kia, *Persianate Selves: Memories of Place and Origin before Nationalism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2020).

¹⁸Kevin L. Schwartz, “A Transregional Persianate Library: The Production and Circulation of

can then be understood as an “autobiography” for Qajar Iran at a time when romantic nationalism—the idea of one nation, one language—had become the cultural and cognitive center of gravity for most late-nineteenth-century intellectuals.¹⁹

Forughī taught at premier schools of higher education in Qajar Iran, notably Tehran’s School of Political Science (est. 1899), which he directed until his death in 1907.²⁰ I insist on the political qualifier “Qajar” to describe Forughī’s Iran to reduce the risk of collapsing the multitude of political, cultural, and social experiences that existed in different regions of mid-nineteenth-century Iran. Forughī also directed the Education Committee or *Anjoman-e ma’aref*, wherein he helped to develop a literary curriculum based on different components of Perso-Arabic rhetoric (*balagha*), including textbooks on *ma’na*, *bayan*, and *badi’*, as well as manuals on rhyme and prosody.²¹ His lithograph on Persian literary history includes materials that he used for teaching at the School of Political Science. ‘Abbas Eqbal Ashtiyani (d. 1956), a literary historian at the University of Tehran, claimed that “Zoka’ol-Molk was the first in Iran to systemize the history of Persian poets in the style of European writers and [also] add literary criticism to [this European-inspired system].”²²

Tadhkiras of Persian Poets in the 18th and 19th Centuries,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, no. 1 (2020): 1–27.

¹⁹I have borrowed this phrase from Charles Kingsley, one of the pioneers of English literature, who in 1848 declared that “literature of every nation is its autobiography.” Charles Kingsley, “On English Literature: Introductory Lecture Given at Queen’s College,” in *The Works of Charles Kingsley*, vol. XX, *Literary and General Lectures and Essays* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1880), 257.

²⁰Majid Tafrishi, “Madares-e ‘ali-ye hoquq va ‘olum-e siyasi dar Iran az ebteda ta ta’sis-e daneshgah-e Tehran,” *Ganjineh-ye asnad*, no. 1 (1991): 53–81.

²¹Depending on the discipline in which it is encountered, *ma’na* can mean different things. To highlight the absence of an English equivalent or close approximation, Alexander Key has proposed the deliberately unfamiliar phrase “mental content.” See Key, *Language between God and the Poets: Ma’na in the Eleventh Century* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018). *‘Elm-e bayan* broadly refers to a branch of Perso-Arabic rhetoric concerned with eloquence. The term *bayan* denotes manifestation, lucidity, and clearness. *‘Elm-e badi’* as a branch of rhetoric is concerned with figures of speech and innovation in language.

²²Ashtiyani, “Zoka’ol-Molk Forughī,” 520. It is important to note that premier schools of higher education in Iran, such as Dar ol-Fonun and the School of Political Science, were not only sites of

This important assertion lends itself to the observation that *balagha* was an integral component of a rising literary culture centered on literature and its ties to a national imaginary. Eqbal Ashtiyani's note about arranging the biography of poets in the style of Europeans is what is identified today as a new mode of historiographical production, in other words a new discourse of literature. His mention of *tanqid-e adabi* or literary criticism denotes new approaches to writing about Persian literary works, therefore a new discourse on literature. Maintaining such distinction opens new avenues of inquiry for a deeper understanding of these two literary discourses: one creates literature (*adabiyat*) as a conceptual category, while the other provides a system of approaching its object of critique (*naqd*).

Like many in his generation, Forughī also composed poetry, and his *takhallos* or pen name was *adib*. His *divan* or collected poems was lithographed in 1900, when Forughī was in his early sixties; it has received passing mentions and very little scholarly attention. His *divan* opens with a note about the importance of *adabiyat* for the nation and the education of its body politic, once again demonstrating how the topic remained at the forefront of Forughī's mind:

I have said this a number of times, but I will repeat it once more: literature (*adabiyat*) is a page or a text that must bear the imprint of all sciences (*tamam-e 'olum*). We must understand that a container will die away without its content. Let me be more clear: the education of a nation lies in literature (*tarbiyat-e mellat dar adabiyat ast*). That is the reason why I have undertaken this task for fifty years. I will not yield to the enemies' disapproving taunts, I will not deviate from the straight path (*sirat al-mustaqim*), and I will not abandon my way.²³

This passage indicates that the notion of literature, even as early as the nineteenth century, was not limited to works of literary history. Followed

teaching and learning for *'olum-e jadid*, or the new sciences, but also sites for groundbreaking innovation in humanistic inquiry that paved the way for the formation of the humanities decades later.

²³Mohamad Hosayn Forughī, *Divan* (n.p., 1900).

by Forughī's preface to his *divan*, there appears a biographical note written by Shams ol-'Olama in the flowery style of Qajar-era courtly writings, which reads like a *manaqeb*-style hagiography, short on factual information and full of laudatory epithets and rhyming phrases.²⁴ A part of Forughī's translation of E. Abkarius's *Rayhanat ol-Afkar* is appended to his *divan*. This is a curious addition given that the work is framed as the "*divan* of Zoka' ol-Molk" and not an anthology of his writings. Forughī's poetry mainly consists of *qasides* that eulogize the prophet of Islam, his daughter, the imams (which he composed during his time in Najaf and Karbala), and his patron Naser ol-Din Shah. Also included are *roba'is* with spiritual themes and a versified narrative on love interspersed with prose. His *divan* is a little over six hundred pages and contains more than five thousand lines of poetry.

In the course of his extraordinarily productive career, Forughī helped to set in motion a new discourse of (and on) literature and nationalist historiography. His legacy has shaped the careers of many intellectuals who came after him. The memoirs of scholars who were taught and mentored by Forughī are a testament to this claim.²⁵ Mojtaba Minovi (d. 1977), the distinguished scholar of Persian literature, recalls that when he was receiving his secondary education in Tehran, he studied textbooks that had been produced primarily by Mohamad Hosayn Forughī and his son Mohamad 'Ali.²⁶ During his lifetime, Forughī's work was known in elite circles familiar with or invested in Persian literature.²⁷ For instance,

²⁴According to the *divan*, the biography had been originally intended for inclusion in *Name-ye daneshvaran*. *Manaqeb* is a genre focused on the praiseworthy deeds and memorable sayings of saints.

²⁵Abbas Eqbal-Ashtiyani, "Mohamad Hosayn Zoka' ol-Molk," *Yaghma* 14/11 (AH 1340/AD 1962): n.p., 517–22; Qasem Ghani, *Yaddashtha -ye doktor Qasem Ghani*, ed. S. Ghani, 12 vols. (London: n.p., 1980–84); Habib Yaghma'i, "Asar va talifat-e marhum Mohamad Hosayn Forughī," *Yaghma* 19/3 (AH 1345/AD 1966): appendix.

²⁶Mojtaba Minovi, "Rejal: Jaryan-shenasi-ye rejal dar tarikh-e mo'aser-e Iran (Zoka' ol-Molk Forughī)," *Ravesh-shenasi-ye tarikh-e shafahi* 41/42 (AH 1375/AD 1996): 81–100.

²⁷Forughī's *Divan* includes laudatory prose and poetry—poems mostly in Arabic, prose in Persian—about different Arab leaders of the late Ottoman Empire, including Muhammad 'Ali of Egypt (d. 1848) and Muhammad III as-Sadiq (d. 1882). Forughī noted having met Muhammad III as-Sadiq and given him his biographical dictionary of poets, *Tabaqat ol-Sho'ara*. See *Divan*,

in 1926, Ömer Halis Bıyıktay (d. 1939) translated into Turkish a primary-school textbook on Iran's history that Forughî had coauthored with his Mohamad 'Ali.²⁸ Forughî's success is not only a recognition of his intellectual force but also a clear indication that the discursive tools with which he was engaged in late Qajar Iran were in global circulation.

The Text: Forughî's *Literary History*

Forughî's intellectual capital helped to create literature as a social enterprise in late Qajar Iran. He did not operate within ready-made conceptual categories that had been imported wholesale from Europe; instead, he cultivated a set of discursive toolkits with which to rewrite and realign literary concepts in Persian literature. Forughî was part of a network of global intellectuals who were politically, socially, and cognitively preoccupied by the idea of the nation and its cultural properties. In order to fully substantiate some of these assertions, this section examines Forughî's *Literary History* in a detailed and focused fashion.

I first learned about this work in a footnote in the journal *Daneshkade* (1918–19).²⁹ I could not locate Forughî's *Literary History* in any university library in the United States or Europe. This is because the work was catalogued under the title '*Elm-e badi*', denoting a branch of Perso-Arabic rhetoric that deals with innovations and beautification of literary style. This is because the Forughî sons gathered their father's disparate writings (or his *mosavvades* or rough drafts, as they called

121–39. There is a need for a critical biography of Forughî, one that would take into consideration his cultural exchanges and travels.

²⁸Mohamad Hosayn Forughî and Mohammad 'Ali Forughî, *Büyük İran Tarihi: Safavi, Afşar, Zend, Kaçar şahları ve kayı-i tarihîyesi*, trans. Ömer Halis Bıyıktay (Istanbul: Matba'-i Askeri, 1926). The Persian original was titled *Tarikh-e mokhtasar-e İran* (Tehran: Sherkat-e Matbu'at, AH 1309/AD 1930–31) or *The Abridged History of Iran*, originally published in 1905. I am grateful to Farzin Vejdani for bringing this translation to my attention.

²⁹It was in 'Abbas Eqbal Ashtiyani's column "Tarikh-e adabi" ("Literary history"), *Daneshkade* 1 (April 1918): 8. His footnote stated: *Tarikh-e adabiyat-e marhum Zoka'ol-Molk Forughî*. Eqbal Ashtiyani (d. 1956) was among the first in early-twentieth-century Iran to introduce "literature" and "literary history" as conceptual categories to Persian-language readers.

it), slapped them together under the title '*Elm-e badi*', and printed it.³⁰ Its posthumous production gives the text an uncertain status and provenance. Was it intended to be a literary history? More importantly, what did it mean for a work to be read as such in the 1910s when literary history was not yet a bounded and institutionally recognized category?

Similar to Forughī's position in the Qajar court, his *Literary History*—or one that wasn't—also occupies a liminal position in the field of Persian studies. It is the work of a scholar who gave the idea of literature arguably its clearest expression in the nineteenth century, yet it is a largely forgotten text. Despite its unique and original ideas—ones that would preempt a generation of scholars—by a twist of fate, it never came into being as a clearly expressed literary product in the author's lifetime. It has subsequently slipped through the cracks of publishing houses and later generations of scholars and editors. Now, my task is to make sense of the work, its rhetorical novelty, and its discursive logic at a time when Persian literary history has been automatized as a mythologized narrative mapped onto an ethno-geographical entity called Iran. For those reasons, the most sensible approach to understanding it will be through intentional ambivalence.

Because I was searching for Forughī's work under the title *Tarikh-e adabiyat*, I did not realize that a copy was held by the library of my own home institution at the University of California, Berkeley until I had graduated and left California.³¹ Curiously, the lithograph copy held at Berkeley is different from the copies my colleagues Alvand Bahari and Shahla Farghadani sent me from the National Library and Archives of Iran and the Library of the Academy of Persian Language and Literature respectively. The Berkeley version has 124 pages of notes on '*Elm-e*

³⁰In a parenthetical note, the Forughī sons wrote, "In full disclosure these biographies, as stated in the preface by the publishers, consisted of disorganized and incomplete rough drafts for teaching at the School of Political Science" (Mohamad Hosayn Forughī, *Tarikh-e adabiyat-e Farsi*, compiled and prefaced by Abol Hasan Forughī and Mohamad 'Ali Forughī [n.p: Matba'-e Mirza 'Ali Asghar, 1916–17], 242, 310). The contemporary Persian term to describe class notes, used as study guide for exams by students, would be *jozve*.

³¹Mohamad Hosayn Forughī, '*Elm-e badi*' (Tehran: Matba'ah-i Mirza 'Ali Asghar, AH 1335/AD 1916).

badi' along with samples of Persian and Arabic poetry that elucidate different aspects of Perso-Arabic rhetoric; the copies held in Tehran do not include those pages. The Berkeley version has two systems of pagination: the notes on *badi'* run from pages 1 to 124 followed by the section analyzed in this article, which runs from pages 1 to 353. This is yet another indication that the work was put together with haste and lacks clear organization.

The task of introducing Forughī's work begins with clarifying its unusual publication status. It was lithographed, but its number of print runs is unknown. Besides the three copies currently held in Tehran and Berkeley, I do not know of another copy.³² Also unknown is whether it was intended to be sold or handed out informally amongst scholars of Persian literature. The only mention of a publisher is on the last page of the copy, bearing the stamp of Mirza 'Ali Asghar's Press (*matba' e-ye Mirza 'Ali Asghar*), who was a grand vizier to three Qajar monarchs.³³ The last page also bears information about the scribe, simply identified as Malek ol-Khattatin or "the Chief Scribe," and one of the book's patrons, 'Abdol Vahab Nezam ol-Molk (d. 1917), a Qajar administrator who occupied different positions inside and outside the court. Finding clear answers to these questions would provide a better understanding of the context in which Forughī's work was disseminated.

The second challenge is how to precisely name this work. His sons, Mohamad 'Ali (d. 1942) and Abol Hasan (d. 1959), classified it as '*Elm-e badi'*', writing in their introductory note that they had compiled class notes that their father had designed for his literature classes at

³²The Berkeley copy has been digitized by HathiTrust Digital Library, accessible here: <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.b5069901>. *Encyclopaedia Iranica* lists the two works separately as '*Elm-e badi'*' (AH 1333/AD 1915) and *Tarikh-e adabiyat* (AH 1335/AD 1917). Kasheff, "Forugi," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*.

³³This must be a reference to Mirza 'Ali Asghar Amin ol-Soltan, in whose stable Forughī took refuge to escape from the wrath of the shah, who had been led to believe that Forughī had written for the dissident newspaper *Qanun* (Vejdani, "Purveyors of the Past: Iranian Historians and Nationalist Historiography, 1900–1941," 149). On Mirza 'Ali Asghar's biography, see J. Calmard, "Atabak-e A'zam, Amin-al-Soltan," in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 2011, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/atabak-e-azam>.

Tehran's School of Political Science.³⁴ Those notes primarily consisted of biographies of Persian poets and samples of their verse. Forughī never had the chance to produce a final version for dissemination or publication beyond the classroom, as he may have intended.³⁵ Two of his biographies were featured in the newspaper *Tarbiyat*, demonstrating an overlap in audience. The Forughī sons stated that it was their father's unfulfilled goal to compose a "Persian literary history in the style of European literary texts" which would "mitigate our shame among educated nations who have studied the history of our literature and knowledge."³⁶

Could we then call it a literary history? This article refers to Forughī's work as a literary history with the following caveats: In the 1890s, the first literary histories of Persian had not yet been published, no less translated into Persian. For instance, the first volume of Edward G. Browne's *A Literary History of Persia* appeared in 1902, and Shibli's multivolume *Shi'r ul- 'Ajam* was published in Urdu between 1908 and 1918. The University of Tehran's Faculty of Letters, which became a major site of scholarly production, was not founded until 1935. Therefore, literary history did not yet exist in the late nineteenth century as an institutional fixture. But Forughī exhibited the language, if not the entire structure, that marked the beginning of literary history's gestation, as this section will show.

Alexander Jabbari has illustrated how the genre of Persian literary history was the result of a long and uneven process of repurposing and refashioning the *tazkere* genre.³⁷ Jabbari has analyzed the rhetorical

³⁴Forughī, *Tarikh-e adabiyat-e Farsi*, 1, 3.

³⁵In his entry on Hafez, Forughī mentioned that he was writing a Persian literary history. *Tarikh-e adabiyat-e Farsi*, 349.

³⁶Forughī, *Tarikh-e adabiyat-e Farsi*, 1.

³⁷Alexander Jabbari, "The Making of Modernity in Persianate Literary History," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, no. 3 (2016): 418–34; Alexander Jabbari, "Late Persianate Literary Culture: Modernizing Conventions between Persian and Urdu" (PhD diss., University of California, Irvine, 2017); Alexander Jabbari, papers presented at "The World of the Tazkirah: Sources for Study of the Premodern Persianate Lands" conference, University of California, Irvine, 5 February 2016, <https://sites.uci.edu/tazkirah>.

devices and discursive innovations used by Persian- and Urdu-language scholars like Shibli Nu'mani (d. 1914) and Mohamad Taqi Bahar (d. 1951) that set in motion a new mode of historiographical production across national and linguistic boundaries. His analysis of how Persian translations of Urdu-language texts helped to define the domain of literary history in Iran and Afghanistan helps disrupt anxieties of originality and influence that surround the study of Persian-Urdu literary dynamics in the twenty-first century. As the earliest instance of literary history (yet) in the Persian language, Forughī's work bears a formative connection to the *tazkere* genre in that it is chiefly organized by biographies of Persian poets. Unlike *tazkeres*, it lucidly articulates *adabiyat* as the cultural possession of a national historical subject called Iran.³⁸

Forughī's literary history, lithographed in the *nasta'liq* script,³⁹ contains 353 pages and is made up of the following five sections:

1. Note by the Forughī sons, 4 pages
2. Preface, 12 pages
3. Introduction: On the Essence of Literature, Its Influence and Quality, 9 pages
4. The Definition, Subject and Benefit of Literature, 51 pages
5. Biographies of Persian Poets, 282 pages

The *dibache* or preface is on the nature and importance of literature for the nation. The preface mainly delves into the nature of linguistic interplay, particularly regarding Persian and Arabic. Forughī reminds readers that “no language is pure,” an astonishingly progressive declaration for a nineteenth-century nationalist intellectual.⁴⁰ For Forughī, Arabic elements in Persian do not constitute a linguistic or

³⁸Fani, “Becoming Literature,” chap. 1.

³⁹Alexander Jabbari has analyzed the importance of formal conventions such as script in making Persian literature appear modern in the early twentieth century. He writes: “Lithography, which allowed for the inexpensive reproduction of handwritten *nasta'liq* script, helped popularize printed books among Iranians, who preferred *nasta'liq* over *naskh*.” See “Late Persianate Literary Culture,” 72.

⁴⁰Forughī, *Tarikh-e adabiyat-e Farsi*, 3.

cultural “flaw or shortcoming” (*asbab naqs va ‘eyb*).⁴¹ Forughī’s view shows that not all forms of Iranian linguistic nationalism were accompanied by ideological hostility toward the Arabic language and literature.⁴² Not showing racial or ideological hostility toward Arabic does not prevent Forughī from asserting that in all the works of Arabic poetry, he does not find a single poet who equaled Ferdowsī’s *Shahname*.⁴³ Writing more than a century before Forughī, Sir William Jones (d. 1794) praised Ferdowsī’s *Shahname*, but decided that it was ultimately no match for the works of Homer.⁴⁴ Although they belong to different time periods, both assertions are rooted in an evaluative notion of literature with the nation as its uncontested unit of analysis.⁴⁵

For Forughī, Arabic elements in Persian stand as historical remnants of a time when Arabic was the dominant language of scientific and literary production in Persian-speaking lands.⁴⁶ Yet Forughī implies that while it may have made sense for “our forefathers” (*niyakan-e ma*) to borrow their lexicon and aesthetic norms from Arabic, it is no longer appropriate for modern-day Iranians to do so.⁴⁷ He may not flag Arabic elements in Persian as inherently problematic, but Forughī does consider them fundamentally foreign. In fact, his preface reads as a clear declaration of Iranian cultural singularity, with Persian as its most enduring symbol, an idea largely upheld by many in the field of Iranian studies today.⁴⁸

⁴¹Forughī, *Tarikh-e adabiyat-e Farsi*, 5.

⁴²The Qajar Prince Jalal ol-Din Mirza (d. 1872) was an example of an Iranian nationalist who was ideologically hostile toward Arabic. See Afshin Marashi, *Nationalizing Iran Culture, Power, and the State, 1870–1940* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011).

⁴³Forughī, *Tarikh-e adabiyat-e Farsi*, 9.

⁴⁴Sir William Jones, “An Essay on the Poetry of the Eastern Nations,” in *The Collected Works of Sir William Jones*, vol. 4 (London: Printed for John Stockdale, Piccadilly, and John Walker, Paternoster-Row, 1807), 544.

⁴⁵Jones’s claim can be understood within a civilizational—as opposed to national—discourse in which Greek literature was being framed as “Western,” though the term *Western civilization* did not yet exist in the time of Sir William Jones.

⁴⁶Forughī, *Tarikh-e adabiyat-e Farsi*, 8.

⁴⁷Forughī, *Tarikh-e adabiyat-e Farsi*, 8–13. He writes, “*zur-e tāzi bar Pārsi becharbid va kalamāt-e loḡhat-e ‘Arab na yek yek balke dah dad va sad sad dākhel mohāverāt va resāel mā gasht zirā ke tamām-e estelāhāt-e ‘elmi rā bāyad az ‘Arabi farā-girim.*”

⁴⁸Aria Fani, “The Allure of Untranslatability: Shafi’i-Kadkani and (Not) Translating Persian

Language does not only serve as an identitarian symbol for Forughī. He is equally preoccupied with the idea of transforming Persian into a linguistic vehicle capable of producing different types of knowledge, both humanistic and scientific. This transformation primarily requires a simplified, exact, and clear prose style that Forughī thematizes in his own diction. His preface lauds the work of the Académie française (est. 1634) (or *Anjoman-e adabiyat-e Faranse*, as he called it), for systematically coining new words based on industrial and scientific needs (*hajat-e 'elm va san'at*) while not giving in to the idea of purging “foreign words” (*loghat-e ajnabi*) from its lexicon.⁴⁹ According to Forughī, the French language was historically in need of borrowing words from Latin and Greek because the latter were languages of knowledge production, similar to the interplay of Persian and Arabic during the advent of Islam. However, the nineteenth century is the time for Persian to step into the age of knowledge production by strengthening its literature, the “true distinction of being Iranian” (*emtiyaz-e haqiqiyye Irani budan ya 'ni adabiyat*).⁵⁰ He bemoans the absence of literary associations and individuals who would light up such assemblies (*na anjomani na anjoman-ara'i*).⁵¹ Here, Forughī anticipates and calls for the establishment of the Academy of Persian Language and Literature (est. 1935), which now houses a copy of his literary history.⁵²

The following section of Forughī's text is titled “On the Essence of Literature, Its Influence and Quality” (*Dar haqiqat-e adabiyat va asar va khasiyyat-e an*). He writes that speech was assigned to human nature (*nahad-e bani Adam*) by the “Creator” (*afarinande*) and its quality

Poetry,” *Iranian Studies* (forthcoming).

⁴⁹Forughī, *Tarikh-e adabiyat-e Farsi*, 3.

⁵⁰Forughī, *Tarikh-e adabiyat-e Farsi*, 12.

⁵¹Forughī, *Tarikh-e adabiyat-e Farsi*, 11.

⁵²Forughī's entry on Hafez includes a note on Hafeziye, the poet's resting place, and all the changes that different dynasties made to it throughout history. This note is in the context of enshrining Hafez as part of a pantheon of Iran's seven most distinguished luminaries. In doing so, Forughī also anticipates the foundation of *Anjoman-e asar-e melli* or the National Heritage Society, which set out to build mausoleums for Persian poets, transforming their resting place into a site of national memory and pilgrimage. Forughī, *Tarikh-e adabiyat-e Farsi*, 349–50.

transcends ethnic difference, whether “Iranian, Roman, Indian, or Chinese.”⁵³ For Forughī, *balagha* is the “soul of literature” (*ruh-e adabiyat*); the key term is often translated as *rhetoric*, here with the caveat that it defies self-evident and easy translation.⁵⁴ Throughout his literary history, Forughī employs a constellation of terms centered on Perso-Arabic rhetoric whose semantic domain in this period remains underexplored: *balagha* or *belaghat*, *fesahat*, *sokhan-vari*, *sokhan-sara'i*, and terms that pertain to its evaluative or critical domain like *sokhan-sanji* and *sokhan-dani* (some of these terms are defined by Forughī below). In fact, Forughī was insistent on classifying literature—and by extension rhetoric—as a science (*'elm*) whose study is indispensable for national education. He writes, “Some have assumed that poetry and prose composition (*ensha'*) are a matter of national amusement (*omur-e tafannoni-ye mellal*) and pastime while that is decidedly not the case; eloquent poetry and prose (*nazm-e fasih va nasr-e baligh*) constitute an essential part of rational sciences (*'olum-e ma'qul*), beneficial wisdom (*hekmat'ha-ye nafe'*), honorable ethics (*akhlaq-e hamide*), and desirable attributes (*owsaf-e pasandide*).”⁵⁵

In the same section, Forughī expresses his idea with precision, writing “Let me be more clear: literature (*adabiyat*) transmits the true nature of knowledge (*'elm*) through the language of people (*be zaban-e 'avam*).”⁵⁶ This passage should be read in the context of an era whose central ethos was the cultivation of a national readership, designated by Forughī as an undifferentiated entity called *'avam* or the commoners.⁵⁷ The task of

⁵³Forughī, *Tarikh-e adabiyat-e Farsi*, 14.

⁵⁴Forughī, *Tarikh-e adabiyat-e Farsi*, 15. The field of literary studies has begun to pay more critical attention to the importance of *balagha* in the conceptualization of literariness in non-European and American cultural contexts. The project “Global Literary Theory: Caucasus Literatures Compared” at the University of Birmingham is focused on the role of *balagha* in Arabic, Turkish, Persian, and Georgian literature. The project, which includes extensive bibliographies in those languages, may be accessed here: www.birmingham.ac.uk/schools/lcahm/departments/languages/research/projects/globalit/index.aspx.

⁵⁵Forughī, *Tarikh-e adabiyat-e Farsi*, 15.

⁵⁶Forughī, *Tarikh-e adabiyat-e Farsi*, 15.

⁵⁷Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak, “Language Reform Movement and Its Language: The Case of Persian,” in *The Politics of Language Purism*, ed. Björn H. Jernudd and Michael J. Shapiro (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1989), 81–104.

literature was to transform the language of commoners and edify their conduct. He writes: “It is important to discern which linguistic register will prevail and prove durable as an instrument of safeguarding language; there are no doubts that the vulgar and reprehensible register of commoners (*zaban-e zesht va rakik-e ‘avam*) and the grossly weak language of the merchant class (*‘ebarat-e sost va sakhif-e mardom-e bazari*) lack the stature to prevail and [in turn] deliver durability to the masses.”⁵⁸ If literature embodied the highest character of the nation, then the formation of an Iranian national subject for Forughī necessarily meant being versed in canonical works of Persian literature like Sa‘di’s *Golestan*, the only work he mentions under its own subheading.⁵⁹

Forughī goes one step further and asserts that a nation’s own durability lies chiefly in the rhetorical force of its literature: “What lands have been conquered by a pithy expression (*yek ‘ebarat-e abdar*) and what armies have been broken by an eloquent word (*yek kalame-ye baligh*).”⁶⁰ He then lauds the works of Nezami and Ferdowsi for capturing the imagination of people living in “climes of knowledge” (*aqalim-e ma‘refat*).⁶¹ A survey of the most salient ideas of this section raises two questions. Generally, in order to better understand the processes of *adabiyat*’s formation as a new discourse of literature, its discursive ties to forms of knowledge related to *adab* and the role played by *balagha* therein must be critically examined. More specifically, it is equally important to analyze the way Forughī fashions a crisp and clear prose style to set in motion a new model of literariness.⁶² Consider the following example:

⁵⁸Forughī, *Tarikh-e adabiyat-e Farsi*, 16.

⁵⁹Forughī, *Tarikh-e adabiyat-e Farsi*, 334–35. For the ways in which *Golestan* was read in the Mughal milieu, see Mana Kia, “Adab as Ethics of Literary Form and Social Conduct: Reading the Gulistan in Late Mughal India,” in *No Tapping around Philology: A Festschrift in Celebration and Honor of Wheeler McIntosh Thackston Jr. ʾs 70th Birthday*, ed. Alireza Korangy and Daniel J. Sheffield (Wiesbaden, DE: Harrassowitz, 2014), 281–308.

⁶⁰Forughī, *Tarikh-e adabiyat-e Farsi*, 19.

⁶¹Forughī, *Tarikh-e adabiyat-e Farsi*, 19.

⁶²For the use of colloquialisms in nineteenth-century Persian prose, see Afshin Marashi, “Print Culture and Its Publics: A Social History of Bookstores in Tehran, 1900–1950,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 47 (2015): 89–108. See pages 94–95.

طول نمی‌دهم و پاک و پوست کنده می‌گویم انسان بعد از خوب فهمیدن محتاج بخوب گفتن و خوب نوشتن می‌باشد تا بتواند مدرکات صحیح و سالم خود را مدلل و ثابت کند و الا خوب فهمیدن او غالباً لاطایل و بیحاصل می‌شود پس سخنرانی بیش از هر چیز طرف احتیاج است و این دولت احدیرا چنانکه باید و شاید دست ندهد مگر بمدد ادبیات یعنی احاطه در نظم و نثر استادان سخن و بزرگان اهل فن و بصیرت و وقوف کامل در طرق کلام و خبیرت و اطلاع از آغاز تا انجام.

I will cut to the chase: in addition to good comprehension, people need good speaking and writing [skills] so that they can realize and demonstrate their sound and robust intellectual faculties, otherwise their good comprehension will prove futile. Therefore, more than anything, one needs [the ability] to discern eloquence (*sokhan-dani*). This government can extend a hand to [its] people only through literature—[literature] meaning a command of the prose and poetry of literary masters and [the work of] notables of science and wisdom, and a comprehensive knowledge of and dexterity with the paths of speech [or syntactic constructions], from its inception to conclusion.⁶³

Forughī's prose style varies throughout the work. In certain passages, it reads as flowery and creative, as exemplified in his entry on Sa'di's *Golestan*.⁶⁴ In other instances, it adopts a more informative rather than creative register, as exemplified in the above passage. The pioneers of literature as a social enterprise in the early twentieth century possessed distinctly different prose styles. Understanding their stylistic and rhetorical variation will help us better distinguish their approaches to meditating on and writing about works of literature. This refers to the generation of scholars who overlapped with and succeeded Forughī, scholars like 'Abdol 'Azim Qarib Garakani (d. 1965), Mohamad Qazvini (d. 1949), Mohamad Taqi Bahar, Eqbal, and many others. Broadly put, the question of style has not been fully examined in the formation of various modes of literary production in early-twentieth-century Persian literature.

⁶³Forughī, *Tarikh-e adabiyat-e Farsi*, 22.

⁶⁴Forughī, *Tarikh-e adabiyat-e Farsi*, 334–35.

Other points in this passage demand critical attention. Perhaps the most salient one is the way Forughī defines the notion of literature. He does not see it as a corpus of writing consisting of prose and poetry regarded to possess a certain aesthetic and imaginative quality, as rendered by most dictionaries in the latter part of the twentieth century. Instead, Forughī refers to literature as a type of literacy tied to a particular literary canon. He understands *adabiyat* as an evaluative, skill-based outcome, not merely an expression of national and literary achievement. Writing in the early twentieth century, ‘Ali Akbar Dehkhoda similarly defined *adabiyat* as “knowledge pertaining to *adab*” and “literary works,” containing both valences present in Forughī’s literary history.⁶⁵ *Adabiyat*’s discursive ties to *adab*, as understood in the nineteenth century, are the main reason we cannot accept the term *literature* as its clear-cut and self-evident English translation and the anxiety of influence with which it comes. Analyzing these ties will clarify the processes of *adabiyat*’s conceptual realignment from a plural designation for knowledge linked to *adab* into a singular term primarily denoting the concept of literature in modern European literary cultures.⁶⁶

The next section of Forughī’s work is titled “The Definition, Subject and Benefit of Literature” (*Ta’rif va mozu’ va fayede-ye adabiyat*). In the first paragraph, he lays out his critical vocabulary. It demands critical attention because it illustrates the ways in which Forughī aims to realign these terms linguistically and conceptually:

Adab has been translated in Persian as culture (*farhang*); the composite term *farhang* consists of *farr* meaning honor and glory, and *hang* meaning understanding and intelligence. *Adab* and *farhang* are both essentially related to knowing the limits and extent of any subject. Therefore, one can refer to *adab* or *farhang* as knowledge (*danesh*) which is not that different from science (*‘elm*). According to the terminology of the learned of the age of

⁶⁵ ‘Ali Akbar Dehkhoda, Mohamad Mo’īn, and Ja’far Shahidi, *Loghatnameh* (Tehran: Daneshgah-e Tehran, 1949), 6:1545.

⁶⁶ One instance of *adabiyat* denoting sciences related to *adab* is Mohamad Amoli’s fourteenth-century *Nafa’ es ol-fonun fi ‘Ara’ es al-‘oyun*, ed. Abol Hasan Sha’rani (Tehran: Islamiya, 1957), 16.

science (*odaba* 'ye 'asr-e 'elm) *adab* denotes the knowledge of poetry (*nazm*) and prose (*nasr*) which in Persian is called *sokhan-sanji*. Whomever is in possession of this knowledge may be called a discerner of literary discourse (*sokhan-sanj*); its Arabic equivalent is *adib*. Literature (*adabiyat*) refers to expressions that will render students and any human prosperous through a profitable acquaintance with knowing (*shenasa* 'i) and a shining light of awareness (*agahi*). Everyone knows that literary discourse (*sokhan*) is of two types: metered and unmetered (*mowzun va ghayr-e mowzun*). Metered speech is called poetry and unmetered is called prose; poetry has [different] types which are known in Arabic as *qasida*, *ghazal*, *taghazul*, *musammat*, *qit'a*, *ruba'i*, and *mathnawi*; these types [of poetry] in Persian are called *chame*, *chakame*, *setayesh-name*. Arabs call poets *sha'ir* or *nazim* while Persians ('*ajam*) call them *chame-sara* and *chakame-sara*, a prose writer is called *munshi* in Arabic and *dabir* in Persian . . .⁶⁷

To many twenty-first-century readers, this passage may read like a vocabulary lesson given the extent to which the notion of literature has become automatized in Persian literary culture, treated as a given. In the late nineteenth century, however, this passage played a vital role, rhetorically and discursively, in bolstering Forughî's twofold agenda: turning Persian literature into an object of scholastic inquiry and mythologizing it as a fixture of Iran's national patrimony. For instance, outlining the discourses of *farhang* and *danesh* in parallel to the Arabic *adab* and 'elm indicates the interplay of Persian with Arabic, but it also shows Forughî's insistence on the idea of Iranian cultural singularity expressed through a facile bifurcation of Arabic and Persian concepts and terminologies.

According to Forughî, the subject of literature is prose and poetry, and the science of literature ('*elm-e adabiyat*) is tasked with forming a knowledge of and doing an evaluative assessment of literary discourse

⁶⁷Forughî, *Tarikh-e adabiyat-e Farsi*, 23.

(*az hays-e dorosti va na-dorosti va khubi va badi*).⁶⁸ *Adab* has two types: *adab-e nafs* and *adab-e dars*.⁶⁹ The former includes forms of knowledge like philosophy that bring about moral conduct and self-refinement, while the latter includes academic subjects like geometry, medicine, and geography “whose knowledge has little bearing on perfecting the self (*kamalat-e nafsani*).”⁷⁰ Both forms of knowledge, rational and orally transmitted (‘*aqli va naqli*), fall under those two types of *adab*.⁷¹ Changing his tone, Forughī then laments the poor state of education in Qajar Iran, writing that “in our age, visions are so impaired that the sun’s appearance would not be sufficient proof of its existence.”⁷² In other words, the importance of literature is far from self-evident and needs enforcement in the form of national education.

The remainder of this section draws extensively on the works of Persian poets to establish various points. Lesser-known figures include Maktabi Shirazi, ‘Am‘aq Bokhari, Mokhtari Qazvini, Azraqi Heravi, Seyyed Hasan Ghaznavi, Adib Saber Termezi, Saba-ye Kashani, and Fada'i Ardestani. Forughī’s poetic selection speaks to different themes, but he frames them to articulate a single message: One cannot cultivate a national subject through geometry and medicine alone; literature is what instills in people a sense of cultural singularity and moral conduct, while language secures their political autonomy from other nations. The poems do not merely illustrate the points that Forughī made in prose. They embody the rhetorical force with which he wishes to reconfigure the Persian language for its newly imagined role: mass education. Following that point, Forughī writes, “The heart of the speech lies in rhetoric (*sokhan-dani*) and if what I am saying is not right, then burn it after reading, or wash it off, and say whatever you wish.”⁷³ There remains a substantial amount of analysis left to be done on the discursive entanglements of literature, rhetoric, and philosophy in nineteenth-centu-

⁶⁸Forughī, *Tarikh-e adabiyat-e Farsi*, 24.

⁶⁹Forughī, *Tarikh-e adabiyat-e Farsi*, 24.

⁷⁰Forughī, *Tarikh-e adabiyat-e Farsi*, 25.

⁷¹Forughī, *Tarikh-e adabiyat-e Farsi*, 26.

⁷²Forughī, *Tarikh-e adabiyat-e Farsi*, 26.

⁷³Forughī, *Tarikh-e adabiyat-e Farsi*, 69.

ry Iran, which also holds the key to a deeper understanding of Forughī's conceptual vocabulary and the ways in which he maps them onto newly emerged semantic domains.

The bulk of Forughī's literary history delves into the biography of Persian poets, opening with a brief note on the rise of New Persian literature—or *zaban-e Farsi-ye haliye*, as Forughī called it—in the western edges of the 'Abbasid political realm.⁷⁴ He writes: "Persian literature, particularly poetry, began in the ninth century during Iran's Islamic era, which is also the period that we are in."⁷⁵ He notes that Umayyad rulers in Iran did not pay attention to Persian, leading to the lack of literary production in that language. Here, Forughī invokes Persian as an undifferentiated language, not specifying to which variation of Middle or New Persian he is referring. Perhaps this context does not necessitate any linguistic or historical differentiation as Forughī mainly aims to locate the origins of a literary tradition that best captured the essence of Iranians—another undifferentiated entity—as a people. As New Persian emerged as a medium for literary production, Forughī writes, "our lands (*mamalek-e ma*) became a fertile field for the sprouting of knowledge and excellence."⁷⁶

The main section of the book is the biographies of Persian poets, which includes a brief overview of lesser-known Samanid poets such as Abu Salik Bokhari, Abu Sha'ib Heravi, and Esteghna'i Nayshaburi and samples of their poetry. Following this section, he provides an extensive biography for several Persian poets, starting with Rudaki of Samarqand (d. 941) and ending with Hafez of Shiraz (d. 1390).⁷⁷ Forughī's work is uniquely different from most literary histories of Persian writing that

⁷⁴Forughī, *Tarikh-e adabiyat-e Farsi*, 301.

⁷⁵Forughī, *Tarikh-e adabiyat-e Farsi*, 70.

⁷⁶Forughī, *Tarikh-e adabiyat-e Farsi*, 71.

⁷⁷The full list is Rudaki, Ferdowsi, 'Onsori, Farrokhi, 'Asjadi, Manuchehri, Abu Hanife, Eskafi, Mas'ud Sa'd Salman, 'Omar Khayyam, 'Attar, Sa'di, and Hafez. The last four poets were not included in Forughī's class notes, but are included in the lithograph copy compiled by his sons (Forughī, *Tarikh-e adabiyat-e Farsi*, 310). Also, the entry on Rudaki is primarily about Ferdowsi and his *Shahname* and does not include much information about him (Forughī, *Tarikh-e adabiyat-e Farsi*, 83–127).

were developed later in the twentieth century in that it does not place the biography of Persian poets within a political and dynastic history.⁷⁸ Instead, the biographies are organized chronologically. Forughī alludes to his sources mostly in the body of the text and does not cite, with the exception of Jules Mohl’s introduction to the *Shahname*, his European sources. This is in stark contrast to some of his counterparts writing in other languages—for instance, Mehmet Fuat Köprülü (d. 1966), whose essay “Methods in Turkish Literary History,” published in 1913, is replete with references to European scholars and literary historians.⁷⁹

Persian literary history is a highly composite genre, and Forughī’s *Tarikh-e adabiyat* is no exception. By composite, I am referring to the ways in which literary history draws on and radically rewrites different types of historical and literary production composed across linguistic and geographical boundaries.⁸⁰ In Forughī’s case, these modes include *tarikh* (history), *tazkere* (biographical dictionary), hagiography, various kinds of anthologies, periodicals, rhetorical treatises, dictionaries, literary studies, and the received literary taste and judgment of his period.⁸¹ Forughī synthesizes these elements into a work that poses as singular, functioning as greater than the sum of its parts.

⁷⁸For instance, Badi’ozzaman Foruzanfar wrote *Sokhan va Sokhanvaran* (Tehran: Sherkat-e sahāmi-ye entesharat-e kharazmi, 1971), which reads more like a *tazkere* in the way it has a brief preface followed by biographical sketches of poets and selections of their work. The same scholar also wrote *Tarikh-e adabiyat-e Iran: Ba’d az Eslām ta payān-e Taymuriyān* (Tehran: Sazman-e chap va entesharat, Vezarat-e farhang va ershad-e eslāmī, 2004), which is organized not by poets’ biographies but by a dynastic and political history of Iran. Yet both are often classified as works of literary history because they were produced in the same time period.

⁷⁹Mehmet Fuat Köprülü, “Method in Turkish Literary History,” trans. Gary Leiser, *Middle Eastern Literature*, no. 1 (2008): 53–84. I am thankful to Selim Kuru for introducing me to Köprülü’s work.

⁸⁰Sunil Sharma was among the first to place Persian literary history within a multilingual and transnational framework of historiographical production. See “Redrawing the Boundaries of ‘Ajam in Early Modern Persian Literary History,” in *Iran Facing Others: Identity Boundaries in a Historical Perspective*, ed. Abbas Amanat and Farvin Vejdani (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 51–64.

⁸¹The following offer one example of each mode of writing used in Forughī’s *Literary History*: *Tarikh-e bayhaqi* (*tarikh*), *Tazkera tol-sho’ara* (*tazkere*), *Chahar maqale* (hagiography), *Majma’ al-fosaha* (*tazkere*/anthology), *al-Hilal* (periodical), *Tarjoma tol-balaghe* (rhetorical treatise), *Borhan-e qate’* (dictionary), Jules Mohl’s introduction to his edition of the *Shahname* (literary studies), and Azad Bilgrami’s *Subhat al-marjan* (literary judgment).

Let us return to the notion of *adabiyat*, which lies at the center of Forughī's cultural undertaking. I argued that *adabiyat* prior to the nineteenth century served as a designation for a body of knowledge related to *adab*. In the mid-nineteenth century, Persian-language intellectuals such as Fath'ali Akhundzade (d. 1878), Mirza Aqa Khan Kermani (d. 1897), and Forughī set in motion an epistemological break from an *adab*-oriented definition of literature by bringing *adabiyat* into close alignment with a nineteenth-century colonial concept of literature as a canon of literary works that encapsulates the essence of a racialized people.⁸² In light of this conceptual realignment, there was a shift in emphasis from *balaghat* to history as the social status and meaning of literature changed from a subject to be learned through cultivating *adab*—using tools like *balaghat*—to a historical artifact to be studied and enshrined. *Adabiyat*, a plural concept, was made singular during a time when romantic nationalism set out to collapse concepts such as origin, ethnicity, homeland, and language with multitudes of meaning and relationships into a singular entity that poses as homogeneous.

Forughī's *Literary History* is an important source that needs to be extensively analyzed alongside other late-nineteenth-century works. If literature, then a new and unfamiliar concept, had found such a cogent expression in the 1890s, then it means that decades prior to the compilation of Forughī's *Literary History*, these ideas must have been discussed and debated in elite circles in Qajar Iran. But the field of Persian studies is largely left to imagine how such ideas entered literary circles and poetry salons in early-nineteenth-century Iran, a period before the proliferation of print culture and the establishment of literary journals. In that light, there is a need for more analysis or even brief critical introductions of Qajar-era literary sources, both well-known works such as *Name-ye daneshvaran* and *Majma' ol-fosaha* and lesser-known anthologies and treatises that have yet to receive careful study. Forughī's lithograph helps place the gestation of a new discourse of literature earlier than previously thought,⁸³ but its rise cannot be attributed to a single

⁸²Fani, "Becoming Literature," chap. 1.

⁸³William L. Hanaway, "Is There a Canon of Persian Poetry?" *Edebiyat*, no. 1 (1993): 3–12.

work of literary history. Therefore, it is important to place *Literary History* within a macroscopic framework.

Framing Forughī's *Literary History* as the only earliest instance of an emerging mode of new literary knowledge can be problematic if not also teleological.⁸⁴ It is important to understand and appreciate *Literary History* through its own discursive logic. I am referring to its biographical structure (as opposed to periodization based on national political history); its varied conceptualizations of literature, which include *adabiyat* as a science encompassing all forms of knowledge expressed through human speech; and its definition of *adabiyat* as a form of literacy. These features constituted alternative scenarios of literary modernism that did not become a normative part of the genre of literary history. In fact, today these features of Forughī's work would be labeled by many in Iran as "traditional," an assessment informed by a presentist vision of literary history. More inquiries into the distinct ways in which Forughī and nineteenth-century European scholars like Browne viewed the concept of literature will deepen our understanding of local forms of knowledge that existed prior to the proliferation and co-options of orientalist interventions that were linked to the "colonial matrix of power."⁸⁵ In short, there are more questions than answers, and there is more ambiguity than certainty in our understanding of Persian literary historiography.

The Context: Literature as a Social Enterprise

In his lifetime, Forughī put a great deal of intellectual labor into creating

⁸⁴One example is Naser Qoli Sarli's recent book *Dowre-bandi-ye adabi* (Tehran: Nashr-e khamush, AH 1397/AD 2018). On page 19, Sarli writes: "the tradition of literary historiography in Iran has still not released itself from the model of *tazkere* writing which is based on the biography of poets and writers in sections that are self-contained and unrelated to one another. [This model] does not pay much attention to the history of literary change and the trajectory of literature on its terms. In this vein, accounts of literary history by Orientalists are closer to the concept of literary history [than the tradition of literary historiography in Iran]." Sarli's purity test ignores the fact that the ideas of literary history and literature are both modern inventions. The discursive ties of Persian literary history with the *tazkere* genre need to be further analyzed, but certainly not in light of anachronistic criteria uncritically set by modern-day understandings of literary history.

⁸⁵Rita Felski and Susan Stanford Friedman, ed. *Comparison: Theories, Approaches, Uses*, (Baltimore, ML: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013).

an Iranian national imaginary closely tied to the rise of New Persian literature. He spent his career writing, translating, teaching, and building institutional sites of national education and literary production. The ideas he produced and promoted were both aligned with and subversive to Qajar state politics. He did not achieve his goal of producing what could have been—and may still be dubbed as—the first literary history of Persian. His lithographed *Literary History*, compiled by his sons, may remain largely unknown, but the ideas he expressed in it reached a transregional readership through the newspaper *Tarbiyat* from the 1890s to the 1910s. For instance, his definition of *adabiyat* and his biographies of Hafez and Khayyam were first printed in the pages of *Tarbiyat*. In fact, the main vehicle for the creation of a new discourse of literature in Persian was periodicals that sprang up in the early twentieth century.⁸⁶ In other words, the format through which the novel idea of *adabiyat*—and by extension literary history—took form was decidedly the small magazine.⁸⁷

Early-twentieth-century newspapers and journals created a new literary ecosystem. The ecosystem metaphor refers to a specific literary context wherein certain ideas and behaviors germinate. It operated, in this case, through an interconnected network of ideas with symbolic and binding values: nation, ethnicity, land, origin, race, culture, history, language, literature, and many other notions with which the nation-state rendered itself distinct and complete.⁸⁸ The literary ecosystem nourished a

⁸⁶Fani, “Becoming Literature.” For a list of these periodicals, see Edward G. Browne and Mohamad ‘Ali Tarbiyat, *The Press and Poetry of Modern Persia: Partly Based on the Manuscript Work of Mirzā Muhammad ‘Ali Khān “Tarbiyat” of Tabriz* (Los Angeles: Kalimāt Press, 1983); Mohamad Mohit Tabataba’i, *Tarikh-e tahlili-ye matbu‘at-e Iran* (n.p.: Mo’assese-ye entesharat-e bes‘at, 1987); Mohamad Sadr-Hashemi, *Tarikh-e jara‘ed va majallat-e Iran* (Isfahan: Entesharat-e kamal, 1948). Sadr-Hashemi’s four-volume dictionary of Persian-language periodicals, printed in Iran and its diaspora, is a work of encyclopedic scope. It even includes periodicals printed in Afghanistan although the title suggests otherwise.

⁸⁷I speculate that one of the main reasons Foroughi’s *Literary History* remains unpublished is the fact that the ideas he tried to promote in the nineteenth century have become normative and prevalent in the twenty-first century.

⁸⁸Mana Kia has convincingly attempted to restore our pre-nation-state imagination by analyzing such concepts as origin, place, and land in eighteenth-century Persian-language sources from West and South Asia. See *Persianate Selves*.

constellation of agents who were in one way or another connected to it: publishers, readers (students, educators, semi-literate readers, listeners), distributors, writers, translators, patrons (the state, merchants, etc.), and many other actors. It gave an institutional form and authority to the multiple sites of power and literary production operative within it: administrative bureaus, national schools, literary associations, language academies, reading rooms or *qera'at khane*, universities, national libraries, and many others. This literary ecosystem was in no way bounded by language or political territory; in fact, it survived through cross-pollination with other literary cultures, regardless of the fact that each national context had its own center of gravity. The most lasting outcome of this literary ecosystem was the constitution of literature as a culturally authoritative and socially prevalent enterprise—in other words, literature as an institution.

Unless Forughī's *Literary History* is placed squarely within this expansive literary ecosystem, we run the risk of rendering it a standalone work, thus necessarily overvaluing it. The same conclusion can be applied to other towering figures such as Edward Browne and Mohamad Taqī Bahar, the authors of *A Literary History of Persia* and *Sabk-shenasi* respectively. Both scholars have rightly been credited for setting in motion a new model of literary historiography. In Browne's case, this model was a literary history of a people called Iranians based on a system of political periodization. Bahar's model forged four different historiographical categories—*Khorasani*, *'Eraqi*, *Hendi*, and *Bazgasht*—based on a study of stylistic differences.⁸⁹ Both figures have undoubtedly left their mark on the formation of Persian literature as an academic discipline. However, the literary ecosystem within which

⁸⁹Forughī mentioned the idea of *Sabk-e Hendi* or the Indian Style of Persian poetry, curiously in the context of Hafez's poetry, a poet whose oeuvre is thought to have predated the rise of the Indian Style. Forughī's mention of *Sabk-e Hendi* is also one of the earliest instances, to the best of my knowledge, of this idea. This questions the tendency to single-handedly attribute the idea of *sabk* to Bahar. *Tarikh-e adabiyat-e Farsi*, 348. For a critical examination of *Bazgasht* as a historiographical category, see Kevin L. Schwartz, *Remapping Persian Literary History, 1700–1900* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020).

their works were produced and read is rarely included in critical assessments of their work.⁹⁰ This omission has led to an overestimation of their work.

One study that critically contextualizes the rise of national historiography is Farzin Vejdani's *Making History in Iran*. Among other topics, Vejdani analyzes the ways in which two generations of Iranian intellectuals became involved in researching and writing Iran's national history from the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries. In other words, it tells the story of how history writing became a social enterprise, a profession culturally enshrined and socially institutionalized. Vejdani convincingly demonstrates that there is no single pole from which a new historical and literary knowledge is transmitted, disrupting the tired narrative of an undifferentiated entity called the East passively receiving knowledge from a transhistorical entity called the West. Vejdani does that partially by highlighting the idiosyncratic nature of the writings of Iran's prominent historians. Whether considering history or literature

⁹⁰The following studies exemplify this paradigm: Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, "Stranger in the City: The Poetics of *Sabk-i Hindi*," *Annual of Urdu Studies* 19 (2004): 1–94; Rajeev Kinra, "Writing Self, Writing Empire: Chandar Bhan Brahman and the Cultural World of the Indo-Persian State Secretary," (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2008); Mostafa Vaziri, *Iran as Imagined Nation: The Construction of National Identity* (New York: Paragon House, 1993). His polemical and dismissive assessment of Bahar notwithstanding, Faruqi inaccurately claims that the term "*Sabk-e hendi*" was coined by Bahar (although he was right in adding the qualifier "perhaps" to his claim). As Foroughi's *Literary History* proves, the term "*Sabk-e hendi*" was in use well before Bahar's career started. Kinra largely attributes the nationalist ideas produced in early twentieth-century Iran to Bahar and a select group of orientalists. More importantly, both Faruqi and Kinra treat *Sabk-e hendi* as a bounded and stable category of description when in reality that was not the case in early twentieth-century discussions of stylistic variations in Persian literature. Mostafa Vaziri attributes the rise of literary nationalism in Iran entirely to Edward Browne. The ways in which we have understood the role of literary institutions in ushering in a new conceptualization of Persian language and literature also exhibits the same impulse to overestimate. These institutions were the outcome of decades-long social processes—that included debating and networking—that gave rise to their establishment. One article that critically examines the role of the Academy of Persian Language and Literature is Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak's "Language Reform Movement and Its Language: The Case of Persian." For Karimi-Hakkak, the establishment of the Academy was only the culmination—and not the originator—of language reform in its cultural and conceptual sense.

as a discourse, the social processes that led to the formation of new ecosystems—or as Vejdani puts it, a “Republic of Letters”—must be analyzed.⁹¹ The alternative is to treat literature as a derivative discourse.⁹²

It is worth clarifying my critique of influence as a category of analysis. I do not deny that nineteenth-century Europe was a major source of inspiration for the transmission of a new mode of literary knowledge. In fact, most late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century Middle Eastern intellectuals who nationalized their literary curriculum also professionally translated works of European literature and history into Turkish, Arabic, and Persian.⁹³ But the rise of literary nationalism was not the inevitable outcome of translation. Instead, it was the result of a non-linear process of network and institution building that allowed certain ideas to take anchor in different Middle Eastern cultural contexts, setting in motion new conceptualizations of language and literature in the age of romantic nationalism. Influence as a rubric is rarely ever defined, woefully overused, and closely linked to colonial forms of knowledge; thus, it is incapable of elucidating the nuances involved in the emergence of literary nationalism in the Middle East.⁹⁴

By way of conclusion, I will address the ambivalence formulated in this article. Writing in the late nineteenth century, Forughī aimed not only to create a new mode of literary knowledge, but also to cultivate a normative literacy required to understand and respond to it. This literacy was defined by the positivist impulse of modern historiography

⁹¹Vejdani, *Making History in Iran*, 147.

⁹²The edited volume *History of Iranian Literature* represents this trend. In it, Kubičková (a collaborator on Rypka’s book) writes, “The knowledge of European languages and literatures, western education, with its opening of new possibilities in technology, natural sciences, and the social sciences, and the reflection of all this in everyday life, is for Iranian literature a discovery in the light of which truths accepted as immutable for thousands of years collapse and the existing social order appears as what it is - a mediaeval survival.” Jan Rypka, *History of Iranian Literature*, ed. Karl Jahn (Dordrecht, NL: D. Reidel, 1968), 362.

⁹³Vejdani, “Purveyors of the Past: Iranian Historians and Nationalist Historiography, 1900-1941,” 148.

⁹⁴See the “Introduction” to Hamid Rezaei Yazdi and Arshavez Mozafari, ed., *Persian Literature and Modernity: Production and Reception. Iranian Studies* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2019).

and was inseparable from the ethos of romantic nationalism, the idea that each nation is in possession of a singular literary tradition that renders it unique and complete.⁹⁵ The intellectual force and clarity of his ideas notwithstanding, Forughī's work is also marked by its inbetweenness: not a *tazkere*, but not quite a literary history; printed, but not distributed widely; linked to the courtly discourse of power, but also independent from and vulnerable to it. Therefore, it is important not to erase the text's ambivalent status in the historical journey that marked the gestation of literary nationalism in Iran. Effortful ambivalence can produce the type of analysis that dispels the false assumption that Iran's literary becoming was the predestined and inevitable outcome of a pure contact with Europe.

By writing that the most salient marker of a people is their language and literature, Forughī set out to bring Qajar Iran into closer alignment with elite global networks that were constructing and adopting a new set of symbols and myths that resulted into a new imagined community. For Forughī, the production of distinction was an outcome that he was seeking to achieve. For twenty-first-century readers, particularly in the institutional setting of the university, the production of distinction is only a means to better understand how elite Iranians created a national imaginary in the early twentieth century. The growing body of scholarship on different aspects of nationalism has enabled us to read Forughī's passage with intentional ambivalence, opening a vital space in which the myths that bind us are subject to the process of humanistic inquiry, as opposed to unquestioned devotion. What may emerge as a result of valorizing ambivalence as a conscious part of humanistic inquiry is a new literary map of our worlds, one no longer beholden to the idea of cultural singularity.

⁹⁵Forughī's critical attitude toward *tazkere* writers, seen in many parts of his *Literary History*, is a function of this positivist impulse.

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