

The Man Who Melted 2,500-Year-Old Treasure for a Paykan

TEHRAN -- In the late summer of 1933, at the edge of the ruins of Persepolis, a discovery was made that should have remained one of the proudest chapters in Iran's archaeological history. Instead, it would become one of its most heartbreaking.

Excavations at the Achaemenid capital were then under the direction of German archaeologist Ernst Herzfeld. When Herzfeld temporarily left Iran to secure funding in Germany, his assistant, Friedrich Krefter, found himself with an opportunity to test a lingering hypothesis.

Krefter had noticed cavities in the northwestern and southwestern corners of the wall of the Apadana Palace and suspected they had once held foundation deposits—objects ritually placed within monumental structures. If those corners had been looted in antiquity, he reasoned, perhaps the corresponding northeastern and southeastern corners still concealed something intact.

He ordered excavations beneath the opposite corners. What emerged from the earth was extraordinary.

In each corner lay a rectangular stone box, about 45 centimeters long and 15 centimeters wide. Inside each box were two tablets—one of gold and one of silver—measuring roughly 33 centimeters in length. Four precious tablets in total, each inscribed with a proclamation of Darius I, the Great King of the Achaemenid Empire.

The inscription, written in Old Persian, Babylonian, and Elamite cuneiform, declared:

"This is the kingdom which I hold, from the Scythians who are beyond Sogdiana to Kush, from India to Lydia, which Ahura Mazda, the greatest of gods, bestowed upon me. May Ahura Mazda protect me and my royal house."

Iranian archaeologist Muhammad-Taqi Mostafavi witnessed the moment of discovery and later documented it in detail. Photographs from the time show the young Krefter smiling—a man fully aware that his name would forever be linked to a singular archaeological triumph.

When Herzfeld returned to Persepolis, the tablets were presented to Reza Shah. Two—one gold and one silver—were transferred to the National Museum of Iran. The remaining two were retained by the Shah. Years later, they were displayed publicly at the Shahyad Tower Museum (today known as Azadi Tower) before eventually being moved, after the 1979 Revolution, into storage at the National Museum.

And there, the story darkens.

For years, little was publicly known about the fate of the two tablets that had once been kept at the royal palace. A brief and almost casual footnote by archaeologist Ali Mousavi hinted at uncertainty: he had been unable to see them and noted simply that their whereabouts were unknown. It was a passing remark that concealed a deeper and more disturbing reality.

In 1998, a young archaeologist named Shahrokh Razmjou was tasked with organizing the inscriptions in the National Museum's treasury. The storage conditions were chaotic; records were incomplete. As he worked through the Achaemenid holdings, he made a startling discovery: only two of the four original tablets were present.

Further investigation revealed that the missing gold and silver tablets had indeed been transferred years earlier from the Marble Palace to the museum. But where were they now?

The museum's former director of collections, Nosratollah Motamedi—an archaeologist who had previously excavated at Ziwiyeh and briefly served as director of the National



Ernst Emil Herzfeld at Persepolis.

Museum in the early 1980s—was summoned for questioning. Motamedi insisted the tablets were in the location he indicated. They were not.

As law enforcement entered the case and interrogations began, a confession emerged. Motamedi produced the silver tablet. But regarding the gold tablet, he claimed something almost unimaginable: he said he had melted it down years earlier and sold it—reportedly for one million toman—to purchase a Paykan automobile.

The statement stunned the cultural community. Could a trained archaeologist truly have melted a 2,500-year-old royal inscription—an artifact of immeasurable historical value—for personal gain?

Motamedi was imprisoned. Yet questions lingered.

Was the golden tablet truly melted? Or was it smuggled out of the country, its destruction claimed to conceal a more calculated crime? Some cultural heritage advocates remain skeptical, arguing that the full truth may never have been disclosed.

What is certain is this: the four Achaemenid foundation tablets discovered in 1933 are no longer four. One is gone.

Remembering Ali-Akbar Dehkhoda: Guardian of the Persian Word

TEHRAN -- February 26 in the Iranian cultural calendar marks the passing of one of the most influential figures in modern Persian language and literature: Ali-Akbar Dehkhoda.

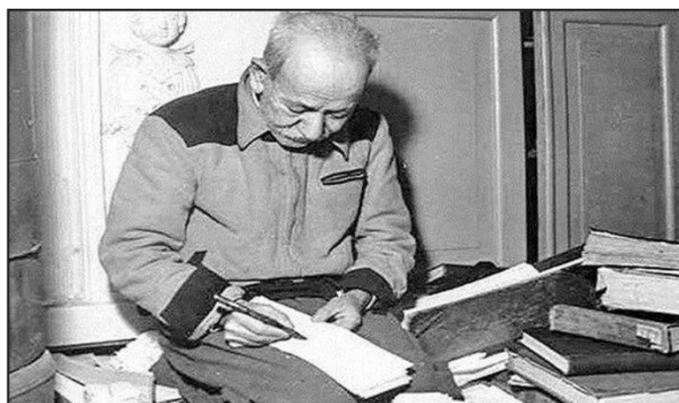
A poet, journalist, scholar, and tireless lexicographer, Dehkhoda's name is inseparable from the words, meanings, and national identity of Iran. His legacy, most enduringly captured in the monumental Dehkhoda Dictionary, remains the backbone of Persian-language research to this day.

Born in 1878 in Tehran, Dehkhoda came of age during a time of profound political and social transformation in Iran. He received a dual education: traditional studies alongside exposure to modern curricula, immersing himself in classical Persian literature and Arabic texts.

His fluency in French and familiarity with contemporary European thought broadened his intellectual horizons. This blend of tradition and modernity would define his later work—both the satirical prose that graced the pages of newspapers and the painstakingly compiled dictionary that codified centuries of Persian language.

Dehkhoda is perhaps best remembered for his work with the newspaper Sur-e Esrafil and his celebrated column Charand o Parand ("Nonsense and Rubbish").

Under the editorship of Mirza Jahangir



Khan Sur-e Esrafil, the publication became a principal platform for the voices of constitutional reform. Dehkhoda's writing merged wit, satire, and political critique, bridging the gap between educated elites and ordinary citizens.

His playful characters and streetwise idioms proved that Persian prose could be eloquent, popular, and politically potent at once. Through this experience, he honed a profound understanding of language: every word carried cultural weight, historical resonance, and social significance.

The suppression of the Constitutional Revolution forced Dehkhoda into exile in Europe, a difficult but formative period. Upon returning to Iran, his focus grad-

ually shifted toward a singular, lifelong project: compiling the most comprehensive dictionary of the Persian language.

The Dehkhoda Dictionary was not merely a lexicon; it was a vast literary, historical, and cultural encyclopedia. For each entry, Dehkhoda provided examples from classical and contemporary texts, tracing etymology, usage, and semantic shifts.

Thousands of handwritten notes were collected from poetry, prose, religious writings, and legal texts, making the dictionary a meticulous archive of Iran's collective memory.

Dehkhoda's work was undertaken at a time when Iran grappled with modernization, foreign linguistic influences, and

educational reform. He neither advocated the wholesale removal of foreign words nor ignored Persian identity.

Instead, his careful documentation provided scholars with authoritative evidence to navigate a rapidly changing linguistic landscape. His dictionary, in essence, became a strategic instrument in preserving national cohesion through language.

Beyond the dictionary, Dehkhoda contributed to education as a teacher at the School of Political Science and later at the University of Tehran. Many of his students and collaborators played key roles in continuing and expanding his lexicographical work, institutionalizing a project that remains active today.

His writing style—clear, precise, and elegant—bridged scholarship and accessibility, making his work invaluable to researchers, translators, and writers alike. Even today, consulting the Dehkhoda Dictionary is often the first step when confronting a difficult or archaic word.

Ali-Akbar Dehkhoda passed away on February 26, 1956, in Tehran. Yet his presence continues in the Persian cultural landscape. Each reference to his dictionary, each citation of his notes, keeps his intellectual legacy alive.

The anniversary of his death is less a commemoration of absence than a celebration of continuity—a reminder that one individual's dedication to language can safeguard a nation's cultural memory.

Exploring Imam Ali's Final Days in 'The Moon on Earth'



TEHRAN -- This Ramadan, Iranian audiences are invited to experience a fresh take on ritual theater with "The Moon on Earth", a production that seeks to illuminate the life and legacy of Imam Ali (PBUH) while appealing to a wide range of viewers beyond traditional religious audiences.

Written, produced, and directed by Amir-Ahmad Rahmati, the play unfolds over the final three days of Imam Ali's life, told through a series of flashbacks that traverse key events—from his caliphate and the raising of the Qur'an on a spear to confrontations with figures such as Talha, Zubayr, Amr ibn al-As, and Abu Musa al-Ash'ari. The narrative also highlights the historic event of Ghadir Khumm, combining historical

depth with theatrical creativity.

Rahmati emphasizes that the production is not solely a tragedy. While the final ten minutes focus on the martyrdom of Imam Ali, the overall tone is lively and engaging, blending humor with moments of reflection.

"We wanted the play to be both entertaining and historically grounded," Rahmati explains, "with laughter and levity alongside impactful moments of emotion."

The creative process was intensive: the script took roughly 15–20 days to write, followed by a week of revisions, and nearly three months of rehearsals—65 sessions of four hours each.

The performance features a cast of 23 actors and a crew of around 25, forming

a dedicated team of 50 people who bring the story to life.

Rahmati's goal is to expand the audience for ritual performances. "We don't want this play to be only for religious or politically affiliated viewers," he says.

"Even those who normally don't watch religious theater can come, engage with the story, and connect with the characters." He adds that cultural works like this can leave a lasting impression, even on viewers who might initially feel distant from religious narratives.

"The Moon on Earth" runs from March 1 to March 8 at 8:45 PM, with performances at the Amphitheater of Andisheh Cultural Center. Admission is offered as a "cultural offering", free to the public.

Banan: The Voice Behind Iranian National Music

TEHRAN -- On Friday, Iran remembered one of its most iconic and influential singers: Gholam-Hussein Banan.

His name is synonymous with the evolution of Persian traditional music, bridging centuries of cultural heritage with the disciplined sophistication of orchestral performance.

For generations, his voice has been a symbol of Iranian dignity, refinement, and national identity.

Born on May 1, 1911, in Tehran, Banan came from a family steeped in art and music. His father, Karim Khan Banān-od-Dowleh Nouri, was a calligrapher and musician, and his mother, Sharaf-ol-Saltaneh, daughter of a Qajar prince, played the piano.

From an early age, Banan trained under his mother, mastering the organ and piano, and began formal vocal training with Morteza Neydavoud at the age of eleven. He later studied with Zia-ol-Zakerin and Naser Seif, solidifying the foundation for a lifetime of musical excellence.

Banan began performing privately in 1927 but only entered the public sphere after joining government service in 1936. By 1942, he was at Radio Iran, collaborating with legendary composers such as Rouhollah Khaleghi. His voice first aired on the radio on May 21, 1942, marking the beginning of a career that would redefine Persian music.

He was the first singer to bring the concept of Iranian national music into a structured, orchestral framework through the "Golha" programs. These radio broadcasts transformed traditional music into a sophisticated, yet profoundly Iranian, art form.

Banan's voice—a rich baritone with unparalleled clarity and expressiveness—became a standard of musical taste and refinement from the 1930s to the 1950s.

Beyond singing, Banan was a disci-

plined and principled artist. He avoided commercial performances, insisting that music must move the heart rather than serve as a source of income.

"A song is not a job for me," he once said. "It must affect me. If I sing for money, I would never have become what I am."

His artistry is inseparable from collaboration with Iran's musical luminaries: Rouhollah Khaleghi, Abolhasan Saba, Ali Tajvidi, Hussein Tehrani, and Javad Maroufi, among others.

Banan's performances combined poetic sensitivity and technical mastery, giving life to works by Hafez, Saadi, and Shariar. Notably, he sang the patriotic anthem "Ey Iran", composed by Khaleghi with lyrics by Hussein Golgolab, a song that became a national symbol of pride and resilience, performed internationally and revered across decades.

Banan's life was not without hardship. In 1957, a severe car accident left him with lasting facial and ocular injuries, after which he always wore tinted glasses. Yet he continued performing, teaching, and shaping the musical landscape of Iran.

His repertoire—over 350 works including "Behar-e Delneshin", "Elahe Naz", and "Gol Rizan"—remains a reference point for musicians and listeners alike.

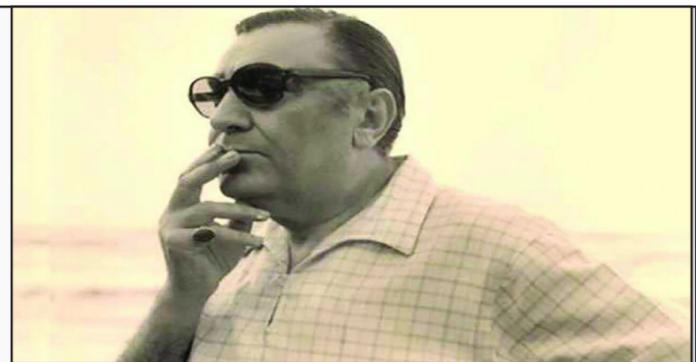
Critics, composers, and fellow musicians uniformly praise Banan's artistry. Khaleghi described him as "the only singer I never needed to control; he instinctively knew the phrasing, emotion, and structure better than anyone."

Violinist Mehdi Khaledi noted that Banan "lived the music rather than sang it," while Ali Tajvidi considered him the perfect harmony of poetry, melody, and expression. Muhammad-Reza Shajarian, another legendary vocalist, cited Banan as a lifelong

inspiration.

Banan passed away on February 27, 1986, in Tehran, leaving behind a legacy that transcends time. Each note, each recorded performance, continues to resonate in the soul of Iranian music.

His voice remains the benchmark of elegance, integrity, and artistic devotion—a reminder that true music, like culture itself, is both timeless and deeply human.



Picture of the Day



Early blossoms on trees in the historic garden city of Mehriz, Yazd, add a springtime touch to the desert region, showcasing a burst of color ahead of the official start of the season.

Photo by Mehr News