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Modern Iranian fiction in the Soviet Union: Translation and representation

Аннотация. За советский период на русский язык были переведены произведения 55 иранских прозаиков. В статье предложен аналитический обзор истории переводов иранской прозы XX в. на русский язык, выделены основные тенденции в ее репрезентации, прослежены этапы формирования и отмечены особенности отечественного пантеона современных иранских писателей. Интенсивность переводческой деятельности и тематика переводимых произведений были в основном обусловлены внутриполитической повесткой СССР и состоянием советско-иранских отношений. В целом переводы были призваны продемонстрировать, что иранские интеллектуалы осознают недостатки социального строя Ирана и пагубность ориентации на капиталистические государства. В довоенный период переводились произведения, способные служить источником сведений о социально-политической жизни Ирана. После войны, вплоть до оттепели в советско-иранских отношениях, переводилась преимущественно социальная сатира. В 1960–1980-е годы были изданы многие произведения крупнейших иранских прозаиков; в начале 1980-х переводы преподносились как источник сведений, способных объяснить причины исламской революции. Многие известные в Иране, но идеологически неприемлемые в СССР произведения не переводились и в большинстве своем остаются недоступными русскоязычному читателю.

Ключевые слова: история перевода, художественный перевод в СССР, современная иранская проза, персидская литература, паратекст, иранистика в СССР, культурные связи

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Modern Iranian fiction in the Soviet Union: Translation and representation

Abstract. During the Soviet era, the works of 55 contemporary Iranian authors were translated into Russian and published in the Soviet Union. Prefaces and afterwords, usually written by Iran scholars, provided the Soviet reading audience with a paradigm for perceiving the translated novels and short stories. This paper aims to offer an analytical survey of the history of the translation of modern Iranian fiction into Russian and to trace the major trends in the representation of the translated works. The thematic range of translated works correlated with the domestic political agenda and the changes in Soviet-Iranian relations, as well as with the current state of Soviet Iranian Studies. The influence of personal tastes and connections of certain Iran scholars engaged in the process of translation can also be detected. Generally, the translations of contemporary literature of Iran were to demonstrate that Iranian intellectuals were aware of the flaws of their society, and eager to choose the more humanistic values of the socialist countries. Before World War II, the translators were mainly interested in the socio-political aspect of the works. After the war and before the thaw in Soviet-Iranian relations, translators focused mainly on social satire. In the 1960s – early 1980s, many works of the most prominent Iranian writers of the period were translated into Russian. In the early 1980s, these translations were viewed as a means of understanding the reasons for the Iranian upheaval. The novels and short stories of Iranian modernists, as well as other ideologically inappropriate works, remained untranslated.

Keywords: translation history, literary translation in the USSR, modern Iranian fiction, Persian literature, paratext, Iranian studies in the USSR, cultural relations

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Introduction

The year 1921, one year before the Soviet Union was established, is usually considered the starting point in the history of modern Persian literature. It was the moment when Mohammad-Ali Jamalzadeh's short story "Yek-i bud yek-i nabud" was released. The works of 55 Iranian authors have been translated and published in the Soviet Union [Nikitenko 2020]. Some of these works were published only once, some of them have been continuously republished. Numerous works by Iranian writers were compiled into 31 short stories collections. Apart from those, there were 37 books that contained translations of specific authors (including only first editions).

However, to the best of my knowledge, there has not yet been an adequate study on the process of translation of modern Persian fiction into Russian.[1] This paper aims to partially fill this research gap by providing a chronological overview of modern Persian prose translation into Russian in its connection to the Soviet political agenda and the state of Soviet-Iranian relations. In order to ensure a better understanding of the place of modern Persian fiction on the Russian reading scene, we are also providing an analytical survey of the paratexts[2] demonstrating the perception paradigm for the translated novels and short stories. The main focus will be on peritext [Genette 1997: 5], in our case prefaces and afterwords, usually written by specialists in the field of Iranian studies. Several texts belonging to the category of epitext (textbooks on Persian literature, journal articles and letters) will also be covered by this research.

We must admit that, unlike classical Persian literature, modern Persian prose fiction and poetry never became a widely known concept among Russian-speaking readers. However, during the Soviet era, translations of modern Persian fiction were published a lot, becoming available to the general reader. We will trace some specific features of the list of the 'most prominent contemporary Iranian writers' introduced to the Soviet reading audience.

The history of translation of modern Persian prose into Russian can be divided into four clearly distinguishable periods: the early period (1920s–1930s), the first post-war years (till the end of the 1950s), the heyday period (1960s–1970s), and the years after the Islamic revolution in Iran and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan (1979–1991). Each of these four periods has its own specific traits

[1] For an attempt at a descriptive survey study, see [Nikitenko 2020: 4–26]. The bibliography compiled by Antonina Sverchevskaia, in the Russian language, only covers the period 1917–1965 [Sverchevskaia 1967]. The Persian-language "Bibliography of modern Persian fiction since the Constitutional revolution until 2010" (namely, the section dedicated to Russian translations) is incomplete and lacks accuracy [Razi et al. 2012]. The histories of modern Persian literature and Oriental studies in the USSR and Russia only deal with the subject occasionally. "Soviet and Russian Scholarship on Iran", by Muriel Atkin, concerns scholarly research only [Atkin 1987].

[2] According to Gerard Genette's definition, paratext is "a certain number of verbal or other productions" that "surround it [the text] and extend it, precisely in order to present it, in the usual sense of this verb but also in the strongest sense: to make present, to ensure the text's presence in the world, its 'reception' and consumption in the form (nowadays, at least) of a book" [Genette 1997: 1].

regarding the preferred topics and the number of works being translated, as well as the "paradigms of perception" demonstrated in the prefaces and afterwords to the translated texts.

The early period (1920s–1930s): the turn to the issues of the day

In the 1920s, the young Soviet State, having proclaimed the idea of the fraternity of all peoples, declared itself the leading force in the struggle against world imperialism and the greatest defender of the oppressed. The Soviet-Iranian Treaty of Friendship (1921) laid the foundation for cooperation at the official level. The Soviet Union also maintained close ties with Iranian communists.[3] Iranian political activists studied and taught at the Communist University of the Toilers of the East (KUTV)[4] and other Soviet universities.[5] The shared cultural heritage of Iran and some Soviet Republics accelerated their active incorporation into the cultural and scientific life of the country.

All of this stimulated interest in pre-modern and modern literature of the said region, and KUTV and the Leningrad A. S. Yenukidze Oriental Institute urged their staff members, Konstantin Chaikin[6] and Evgeniy Berthels[7] respectively, to work on textbooks on modern and contemporary Persian literature. In 1928, Chaikin published his "Brief Survey of Newest Persian Literature" [Chaikin 1928], and Berthels included an extensive account of modern Persian literature in his "Outline of the History of Persian Literature" [Bertel's 1928]. As Chaikin spent several years in Persia, working as an interpreter for RSFSR and USSR plenipotentiary representatives during 1921–26, he managed to provide a more detailed account, which seems to have influenced future generations of translators. Among the works of prose fiction under study in the "Brief Survey...", only "Yek-i bud yek-i nabud", and partly "Tehrān-e makhuf", succeeded in earning Chaikin's praise [Chaikin 1928: 119–133] and were translated into Russian in the 1930s; the others still remain untranslated.

In the 1920s, keeping up with the literary process in Persia was not an easy task. Due to political and economic problems, acquiring newly printed Persian books and journals was almost impossible for those not in Persia. The following remark, made in 1927 by Chaikin, is most characteristic of the situation: "It is a very unpleasant thing that we are absolutely cut off in what concerns obtaining books, newspapers

[3] For a history of communism in Iran, see [Chaqueri 1992].

[4] For the history of KUTV, see [Timofeeva 1976; 1979].

[5] For example, Abulqasem Zarreh (1899–1938) taught at KUTV and the Moscow Institute of Oriental Studies and authored the first Soviet Marxist account of pre-modern Persian literature, see [Vasil'kov, Sorokina 2003 (article on Zarre)].

[6] Konstantin Chaikin (1889–1938), a graduate of the Leningrad Institute of Oriental Languages (1916), specialized in the field of pre-modern Persian literature. Since 1927, he worked at the Moscow Institute of Oriental Studies in the capacity of an associate professor, in 1927–1929 he also was a research fellow at KUTV. In 1938, he was arrested on a false charge and executed (rehabilitated in 1957) [Vasil'kov, Sorokina 2003 (article on Chaikin)].

[7] On the life and works of Evgeniy Berthels (1890–1957), one of the most prominent Soviet Iran scholars, see [Zand 1989].

and journals from Persia" [Marr, Chaikin 1976: 20]. Consequently, no significant works of contemporary Iranian writers were translated into Russian until 1928.

It is no wonder that the first[8] example of contemporary Persian fiction was co-translated into Russian by Zakharii Khatsrevin (1903–1941), who was trained in the field of Iranian studies at the Leningrad Institute of Living Oriental Languages and worked in Iran in the second half of the 1920s.[9] This was a short story, "The Triumph of Abbas" ("Torzhestvo Abbasa") by Abulkasim Lauri, published in the "Bulletin for Foreign Literature" № 4, 1928 [Lauri 1928]. The second translator, Boris Lapin (1905–1941), spent at least several months in the Tajik SSR as a census-taker [Lapin 1930: 6].[10]

As for Abulkasim Lauri, very little is known about him. Actually, the identity of the first modern Iranian author translated into Russian is in doubt. The "Our Authors" section of the "Bulletin for Foreign Literature" says that he is a "young Persian writer who borrows his plots from the life of the poor" [Anonymous 1928]. The same short story appears in Khatsrevin's book, "Tehran. Short stories", under the name of "A Porter from the South" ("Nosil'shchik s iūga") [Khatsrevin 1933: 86–94].[11] This time Khatsrevin gives his readers somewhat more detailed information on Lauri. He states that Lauri was born in South Persia and spent several years of his youth with Bakhtiari tribes, and worked as a porter in Bushehr for some time. Khatsrevin also claims to have met Lauri in Tehran. Soon after their first meeting, Lauri departed for Shushtar but died on the way. We have not succeeded in finding more information on Abulkasim Lauri. There is a strong possibility that he never existed, the whole story being a hoax by Lapin and Khatsrevin, especially given that such a creative approach was not uncommon for Russian translations later, in the 1930s.[12]

In the 1930s, the first books with translations of modern Persian fiction were published. Their translators, Vladimir Tardov (1879–1938)[13] and Boris N. Zakhoder (1898–1960)[14], were pursuing their academic careers and simultaneously

[8] According to the "Bibliography of Iran", covering the period from 1917 until 1965 [Sverchevskaia 1967: 284]. The name of the journal is given in the "Bibliography..." incorrectly as "Inostrannaia literatura" ("Foreign Literature").

[9] See [Zonov 1975].

[10] Lapin and Khatsrevin co-authored several fiction and non-fiction works, including the Russian translation of a short collection of old ghazals and contemporary poems named "New Hafez" [Lapin, Khatsrevin 1933].

[11] Lapin is not mentioned as a co-translator in this book.

[12] See [Miller 1990; Zemskova 2018]. On the songs of Kazakh akyns, see [Kozitskaia 2022].

[13] Vladimir Tardov never studied anything connected to Oriental or Middle Eastern studies. Nevertheless, he mastered Persian when on a mission in Persia as a reporter for the newspaper "Russian Word" ("Russkoe slovo"). After the 1917 revolution he entered the civil service and spent the years 1921 to 1927 in Persia, first as a press attaché and then as Consul General in Isfahan. Although Tardov never had a university degree, he was employed in 1928 as a lecturer at the Moscow Institute of Oriental Studies. In 1938, he was arrested on the charge of espionage, terrorism and anti-revolutionary activities, and executed. He was rehabilitated in 1994. For more details, see [Kullanda, Sazonova 2001].

[14] Zakhoder specialized in pre-modern history of Iran and the Middle East, and his doctoral thesis (1941) was dedicated to Nizam al-Mulk and the history of Iran during the Seljuk period. For more details, see [Koraev 2018].

conducting research in other fields of Iranian studies. From that time onwards, only scholars qualified in Iranian studies, usually employees of Soviet universities and research institutes, are to be found among the translators of modern Persian fiction, with some rare exceptions.

The first modern Persian writer whose works were published in Russian as a separate book was Ahmad Khodadadeh. He authored the first Persian work of fiction dedicated to Iranian peasantry, "The Evil Day of a Worker" ("Ruz-e siyāh-e kāregar"). It was translated by Vladimir Tardov and published in Moscow as "Peasant's Fate" ("Krest'ianskaia dolia") in 1931, only four years after the Persian original.

It seems that Tardov's academic interests and the documentary value of Khodadadeh's book were crucial factors in the appearance of the translation. His field of study was Iranian history and the agrarian question in Persia; he published several works on the subject.[15] In the introduction to "The Evil Day of a Worker", a certain A. Shehri strongly emphasizes the uniqueness of this book in modern Persian fiction, saying that it was the first work of fiction to describe the hardships of Iranian peasants with all vividness and truthfulness, written by an author who himself had been a peasant ("raʿiyyat") [Shekhri 1931: iii]. "The study of the socioeconomic systems of the agrarian countries in Asia" was one of the major issues in the newly established Soviet Oriental studies [Kheifets, Shastitko 1983: 9], since Lenin saw the peasantry as the major driving force for bourgeois-democratic and national liberation revolutionary movements in colonies and half-colonies in the beginning of the 20th century [Ibid.: 10]. Tardov was eager to prove that constitutional reforms brought along no improvement of the Persian peasants' living conditions. He and those who shared his opinion used Khodadadeh's book as an argument to prove their point of view in heated debates. F. Rostopchin, in his review of the "Peasant's Fate", published in the "Bibliography of the East" journal, even called his opponents "turncoats" ("opportunists") [Rostopchin 1932: 84].

We also owe to Vladimir Tardov the Russian translation of the first Persian social novel, "Tehrān-e makhuf" by Morteza Moshfeq Kazemi, partly praised by Chaikin. The first volume of Tardov's translation was published in 1934 in Tashkent, after several years of failed attempts to print it.[16] The second volume was published in 1936, and from that time on "Tehrān-e makhuf" was republished more than once in the capital cities of predominantly Muslim Soviet republics: Ashgabat (1960, 1985), Baku (1967, 1979, 1984), Tashkent (1987, 1990), and Dushanbe (1992, after the actual breakup of the Soviet Union). This social novel, showing poverty, social injustice and the atmosphere of despair in Persia, was considered "an indicative example of a comparison between our prosperous republics and the colonial East" [Pinkhasik 1936: 3]. Its intended purpose was to remind the population of these republics how terrible their lives might have been had the October Revolution not come to their rescue.

[15] See [Tardov 1930a; 1930b].

[16] See Rostopchin's review: "'Krest'ianskaia dolia' is translated perfectly. We only wish that another work translated by V. G. Tardov is published as soon as possible, that is Kazemi's novel 'Tehran-e-Mekhuf' ('The Horrible Tehran'), that portrays the Persian city" [Rostopchin 1932: 84].

The "father of modern Persian fiction" was not left unattended by Soviet translators. Jamalzadeh's "Yek-i bud yek-i nabud" was partly translated and published in Moscow in 1936 [Dzhemal'-zade 1936]. Boris N. Zakhoder chose three short stories that gave a critical account of social and political life in Iran and of an unpleasant encounter with Russian Cossacks,[17] and omitted the stories focusing on the Persian language of the time, a mullah in love and freeloading.

1950s: the second first acquaintance

In 1941, after the Anglo-Soviet invasion and the abdication of Reza Shah, Iran experienced a period of unprecedented political freedom and cultural activity. In 1943, the Soviet-Iranian Society for Cultural Relations was founded on the initiative of Saʿid Nafisi and other Iranian intellectuals.[18] It was closely connected with the Iranian branch of the All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (VOKS), and most active in the years 1943–1953. In 1946, it held the First Congress of Iranian Writers that became a crucial event in the literary life of the time. Although the Iran-Azerbaijan crisis of 1946 alienated some of the Iranian intellectuals from the Soviet Union, and the Society lost many of its active participants due to the 1949 ban on the Tudeh party and subsequent persecution of party members, the Society served as a useful tool for establishing links between Iranian writers and Soviet translators-to-be.

However, during the Great Patriotic War and the first post-war years, no translations of modern Persian prose were published in the USSR. Apart from the War and the scholars' awareness of the dangers arising from specializing in the modern period, there could be another reason for this interruption. In the late 1930s — mid-1950s the attention of the Iran scholars was focused mostly on domestic issues as the campaign of Tajikization and Azerbaijanization of Persian classical heritage was run on the all-Soviet level.[19]

This interruption continued until 1955, when a collection named "Short Stories by Persian Writers"[20] was published in Moscow. It was compiled by Aleksandr Shoitov, at the time a young scholar who specialized in Persian literature of the 19th and 20th centuries.

The introduction to this book was written by the famous Evgeniy Berthels [Bertel's 1955], who referred to this short story collection as the first chance in a long time for the Russian reader to get a glimpse of the world of Persian literature — a world as yet unknown and very distant, difficult to access even for

[17] "Rajol-e siyāsi" was translated as "Politician" ("Politik"), "Bileh dig bileh choghondar" as "Unbelievable" ("Chudesa v reshete"), "Dusti-ye khāleh Kherse" as "In the Arms of the Northern Bear" ("V ob"iatiiakh severnogo medvedia").

[18] Soviet-Iranian Society for Cultural Relations (Anjoman-e ravābet-e farhangi-ye Irān va Ettehād-e Jamāhir-e Showravi), an Iranian organization supported by the Soviets. On its history, see [Āryānrād 2017].

[19] For more details, see [Chalisova, Nikitenko (forthcoming)].

[20] The book included nine short stories written by Iraj Aliabadi (Darya), Bozorg Alavi, Abdorrahim Ahmadi (A. Omid), Ali Mostowfi (Minu), Ehsan Tabari (Afshin), Sadegh Hedayat, some of them under a pseudonym.

experts. According to the introduction, specialists in the study of modern Persian literature faced the same challenges in the 1950s as in the 1920s: in Iran, new works of fiction were mainly published in literary journals that experienced many problems due to economic and censorial reasons. As Berthels states, "That is why it was so difficult, sometimes almost impossible to follow the approaching new wave of modern literature when not in Iran" [Ibid.: 5].

In his introduction to "Short Stories by Persian Writers", Berthels also suggested a perception paradigm for modern Persian fiction that met the requirements of the USSR's state ideology. Readers were encouraged to see one of the great advantages of modern Persian literature in its adherence to realism and the absence of "flowers of eloquence", so typical for classical Persian poetry and prose. Modern Persian fiction was to be considered a "window to Iran", an eyewitness account of the lives of the Iranian people and the country's literary life. The reader was supposed to look for a "realistic depiction of Persian realities", mostly in the short stories by Alavi, Tabari and Omid (Ahmadi), writers with leftist sympathies whose works could well be considered politically biased [Bertel's 1955: 6]. Berthels wrote: "Their strength is in a truthful and vivid depiction of the workers' fierce determination to fight for freedom and a better future" [Ibid.].

Speaking of Sadegh Hedayat (1903–1951) and his mastery in prose writing, Berthels tries to give the reader an idea of Hedayat's works by drawing parallels from Russian and Western literature. "Sag-e velgard" was inspired by Chekhov's "Kashtanka", and "Mihanparast" is Heinrich Mann's "Der Untertan" in miniature. Only "Hāji āqā" is characterized as "a brilliant satire" that gives the reader a set of vividly depicted human types [Bertel's 1955: 6]. Berthels also mentions "Buf-e kur", which is not included in the collection. According to him, the novel is reminiscent of the most frightening short stories by Edgar Allan Poe and "shows the frightening circumstances of the last years of Hedayat's life in his home country" [Ibid.: 5], that is after the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Iran, the failed assassination attempt on Shah Mohammad Reza (1949) and the subsequent banning of the pro-Soviet Tudeh Party.

Berthels' attitude is paralleled in the textbooks on modern Persian literature published in 1960–1970s, where Persian literature is represented as moving unevenly "forward, toward realism," in its attempts to catch up with the literatures of more culturally advanced countries [Braginskii, Komissarov 1963: 197].[21]

In 1956, Nikita Khrushchev officially announced the USSR's intent to support the Developing world in the common struggle against imperialism, colonialism and capitalism [Khrushchev 1956], and Anastas Mikoyan encouraged Soviet scholars to focus on political problems of the day [Mossaki, Ravandi-Fadai 2018: 433]. In the late1950s, short stories ridiculing various flaws of Iranian society gained a certain popularity in the Soviet Union. Five collections of short stories by Iranian authors were published in Moscow and one in Leningrad. One of these books was dedicated exclusively to Iran: "Funny Stories" [Shoitov 1958a].[22]

[21] See also [Rozenfel'd 1971: 62].

[22] It was, again, compiled by Shoitov and included 33 short stories by Mohammad Ali Afrashteh, Bachcheh Gilak, Jamalzadeh, Hosseyn Madani, Mohammad Amin Mohammadi

Most of the translated short stories were of a humorous and satirical nature, and priority was given to the works "strongly ridiculing the dark sides of the social life and everyday routine of present-day Iran" [Shoitov 1958b: 8].

The first modern Iranian prose writer whose works were translated in post-war USSR and published as a separate book, was, unsurprisingly, Sadegh Hedayat. Not only was he the most prominent Iranian author of the century, but he was also active in the Soviet-Iranian Society for Cultural Relations, and was a favorite of Daniil Komissarov (1907–2008),[23] one of the major Soviet authorities on modern Persian literature. Hedayat's "Selected Works" ("Izbrannoe") were published in 1957 on Komissarov's initiative and reprinted four times during the Soviet period, with some additions.

1960–1970s: the golden age

Iran's pledge to the USSR not to allow any foreign missile bases on its territory (September 1962) led to a thaw in Soviet-Iranian relations [Blake 2009: 137–138]. The Soviet-Iranian Friendship Society increased its activity.[24] In 1963, an agreement on economic and technical cooperation was signed, and in the late 1960s — 1970s bilateral relations reached an all-time high. The First International Congress of Iranian Studies held in Tehran in 1966 contributed greatly to the strengthening of academic ties between the two countries. However, as the Soviet delegation was instructed to avoid politically and ideologically sensitive topics [Mossaki, Ravandi-Fadai 2018: 442], no papers on the studies of contemporary Iranian literature were presented by its members.

In the 1960s–1970s, works of socially committed authors continued to prevail among the translations into Russian. These years were the most fruitful period of publishing the translations of modern Persian fiction.

In the 1960–1970s, short stories by Iranian writers were, as earlier, published in various "Oriental" short-story collections, and there were also several collections that included Iranian authors only.[25] Several new names were introduced

(also under a pseudonym, Tuti), Mahdi Soheyli, Abulqasem Halat, Parviz Khatibi and Sadegh Chubak. The other short story collections included the works of Sadegh Hedayat, Saʿid Nafisi, Mahdi Okhovvat, Bozorg Alavi, and Abulqasem Halat.

[23] Komissarov spent 6 years in Iran as a member of the diplomatic staff at the Embassy of the USSR in Tehran, where he became acquainted with many famous Iranian literati of the time. In 1950, he was summoned to the Soviet Union and arrested on a false charge. In 1952, after two years of solitary confinement, Komissarov was convicted to five years in a forced-labor camp. He was discharged in 1953 and rehabilitated in 1954. From that time on, he focused on his academic studies. His field of research was Persian literature of the 19th and 20th centuries, especially the life and works of Sadegh Hedayat, whom he considered the actual founder of modern Persian prose fiction and the originator of the short story genre in Persian literature. On his life and works, see [Miliband 2008: 669–670; Komissarov 2011].

[24] For more details, see [Mossaki, Ravandi-Fadai 2018].

[25] "Oriental Miscellanea" ("Vostochnyi al'manakh") published by Goslitizdat publishing house (since 1963 Khudozhestvennaia literatura), "Near Eastern Short Story" ("Blizhnevostochnaia novella") published by Nauka, and "Selected Works of Middle Eastern Writers" ("Izbrannye proizvedeniia pisatelei Srednego Vostoka") published by Progress, etc.

to the Soviet reader through such collections.[26] Apart from that, works of several individual modern Iranian writers were published separately by some of the most prominent Soviet publishing houses. The Soviet pantheon of contemporary Persian authors accessible to the general reader through translations was gradually taking shape.[27] In the 1960s, it included Jamalzadeh, Hedayat, Bozorg Alavi, Mahmoud Etemadzadeh, Morteza Moshfeq Kazemi, Saʿid Nafisi, Abdolhossein Nushin, and Sadeq Chubak. In the 1970s, the pantheon expanded to include the authors of novels newly translated into Russian and published in the Soviet Union: Simin Daneshvar, Jamal Mirsadeghi, Gholam-Hossein Saʿedi, M. Didevar (Mohammad-Ali Eslami Nodoushan), Khosrow Shahani and Fereydoun Tonekaboni. The last two authors owed their extraordinary success in the Soviet Union to Dzhakhangir Dorri (1932–2018), who wrote his thesis on humor and satire in Persian prose fiction, was a prolific translator, a member of the Union of Soviet Writers, and managed to republish his translations several times.

With the marked increase in the number of translations in the 1960s, the attitude of scholars and publishers also changed dramatically. There were no more complaints in the prefaces on the inaccessibility of modern Persian fiction or the lack of information on the literary situation in Iran. Instead, the authors wrote about the literary process in Iran from the standpoint of a well-qualified researcher. Simultaneously, several monographs and collections of lectures on modern Persian literature, as well as Russian–Iranian literary connections, were published.[28] We are going to examine the range of themes to which the readers' attention is drawn in the paratexts.

First of all, it is the realistic approach, psychological veracity, and attention to social problems that are unexceptionally considered the main advantage of modern Persian fiction. The works by Iranian authors are invariably recommended in the paratexts as the best way to get acquainted with the life of the country and its people. For example, "Hāji āqā," a social satire, was labeled as the key work of Hedayat [Komissarov, Rozenfel'd 1969: 8]. Saʿedi is praised for the psychological veracity of his characters and his deep knowledge of ethnographic details [Kondyreva 1975: 219], Shahani — for focusing on the salient problems of Iranian society (socio-economic, moral and cultural), and mirroring reality, everyday life, and the psychology of his characters with precision [Dorri 1974: 4]. Speaking about Simin Daneshvar's "Savushun", Komissarov remarks that "what makes her ideas more solid is the above-mentioned fact

[26] In the 1960s, they were Jalal Ale Ahmad, Abbas Chelipa, Mohammad Forouzan, Mohammad Hejazi, Amir Abbas Heydari, Jamal Mirsadeghi, Ali Asghar Mohajer, Abolghasem Payandeh, Homayoun Pak, Shin Partow, Rasul Parvizi, Iraj Pezeshkzad, Mohammad Ali Sepanlou, and Fereydoun Tavallali. In the 1970s, short stories by Mahshid Amirshahi, Nader Ebrahimi, Ebrahim Golestan, Houshang Golshiri, Ebrahim Rahbar, Khosro Shahani, and Fereydoun Tonekaboni were published for the first time.

[27] In the 1960s, it included Mohammad-Ali Jamalzadeh, Sadegh Hedayat, Bozorg Alavi, Mahmoud Etemadzadeh, Morteza Moshfeq Kazemi, Saʿid Nafisi, Abdolhossein Nushin, and Sadeq Chubak.

[28] See, for example, [Komissarov 1960; Osmanova 1961; Braginskii, Komissarov 1963; Iaukacheva 1964; Kor-Ogly 1965] for the 1960s, and [Konrad et al. 1970; Boldyrev 1971; Braginskiĭ et al. 1975] for the 1970s.

that the novel mirrors many of the real events of World War II; it can be justifiably reckoned among non-fictional, publicist works" [Komissarov 1975: 271].

The focus on the life of ordinary people (usually "the little man", sometimes "an ordinary toiler"), is also one of the most frequently emphasized merits of modern Persian fiction. The authors are praised for the humanistic approach taken in their works. For example, Peisikov notes that Behazin's sympathies are always with ordinary men ("the little man") [Peisikov 1961: 8]. Chubak's tendency towards a philosophical approach to the problems of life and his compassion for ordinary people in the dire straits of social and religious superstitions are underlined in [Komissarov, Osmanova 1965: 5]. Among the traits that Mirsadeghi's works share with those of Hedayat, Jamalzadeh, Behazin, and Chubak, Kliashtorina highlights his democratic approach, special concern for the lives of ordinary people [Kliashtorina 1971: 5–6]. According to Dorri, Shahani emphasizes the effect of the environs on his fellow countrymen's morals, unmasks the bureaucratic maze, unlawful actions of the secret police, corruption, and the spread of drug abuse [Dorri 1974: 4–6], because "the main aspiration in all his works is the endeavor to protect the human being, a simple and modest toiler, striving to keep his head above water and protect his human dignity in the ruthless world of capitalism" [Dorri 1974: 6].

Daneshvar's choice to focus on the fate of one man in "Savushun" and her lack of consideration for the laboring masses are considered a flaw by Komissarov. However, he praises Daneshvar's high esteem for humanism [Komissarov 1975: 271]. Chubak is praised for having managed to provide, in "Tangsir", a new approach to the legend of "the people's avenger", Shir-Mohammad, that emerged in the years when "the English enjoyed unchallenged control over Southern Iran and mercilessly exploited the locals": rather than focus on the hero's personal revenge, Chubak emphasizes the ties between the main hero and the people and the support on their part [Komissarov, Osmanova 1965: 9].

The authors feel somehow obliged to find excuses for, or at least explain, the pessimistic or even grievous tone of some non-satirical texts. For example, the tone of Saʿedi's works, unusually gloomy for Soviet readers, is also explained by the circumstances in which "many writers outside the USSR" live [Kondyreva 1975: 221]. As for the pessimistic tendencies of "Buf-e kur", by Hedayat, Komissarov and Rosenfeld justify them in their 1969 foreword by the "complicated historical circumstances" in 1935–1936 [Komissarov, Rozenfel'd 1969: 6].

Problems related to women do not usually receive much attention in the paratexts. The authors' skills in portraying women are sometimes highlighted in the broader context of their talent for depicting various social types. For example, speaking about the advantages of Behazin's works, Peisikov points to his having created "a colorful gallery of characters of simple Iranian women" [Peisikov 1961: 8]. The cliché of "the oppressed woman of the East" is sometimes reproduced in the paratexts. Rosenfeld notes that Behazin's novel, "Gereh-e kur", speaks against the oppression of women, "a traditional theme for modern Persian literature" [Rozenfel'd 1968: 8–9]. According to [Komissarov, Rozenfel'd

1969: 9], the best of Hedayat's works focus on the Iranian woman, "a victim of social injustice, ignorance, religious fanaticism and superstition." Interestingly, no issues related to women are dealt with in Komissarov's afterword to Simin Daneshvar's "Savushun", the first Iranian novel authored by a woman and having a female protagonist.

Sometimes the reader's attention is also drawn to the artistic merits of the works under discussion. Complimentary accounts of the simple writing style of some of the authors can be found in the paratexts. Peisikov contraposed Behazin's realistic approach to the works "of the feudal epoch with their flamboyant style" from the one side, and to the entertaining translations and pulp fiction from the other [Peisikov 1961: 5].[29] A sincere (in our opinion) eulogy to Saʿedi's unsophisticated style, devoid of "pathos and pretentiousness", his mastery of language, composition, and dialogue can be found in [Kondyreva 1975]. Some literary experiments meet the approval of Soviet philologists. Komissarov remarks that "some elements of artistic fiction, skillfully brought into the narrative (dream, fable, legend), advance a better understanding of the philosophical-ethical and historical message of the book" (of Simin Daneshvar) [Komissarov 1975: 271].

1979–1991: weakening of cultural ties

After the Islamic revolution in Iran, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and especially the beginning of the Iran-Iraq war of 1980–1988, Soviet-Iranian relations substantially deteriorated. Cultural and academic ties between the two countries weakened and broke, and no work of Persian fiction created after the Revolution was translated in the Soviet Union.

In the 1980s, several new Russian translations of novels and short stories by Iranian writers were published. These works included Iraj Pezeshkzad's "My Uncle Napoleon" (as "Diadiūshka Napoleon", Moscow, 1981, second edition 1990), Chubak's "The Patient Stone" and short stories (as "Kamen' terpeniia", Moscow, 1981), Ahmad Mahmoud's "The Neighbors" (as "Sosedi", Moscow, 1983), Jalal Al-e Ahmad's fiction (1986), Jamal Mirsadeghi's "The Winds Presaged the Change of Season" (as "Vetry, vozveshchaiushchie o peremenakh", Moscow, 1989), and also Ebrahim Golestan's short stories ("Izbrannye proizvedeniia", "Selected works", Moscow, 1990). Humorous and satirical short stories of Khosro Shahani and Fereydoun Tonekaboni continued to be republished, "Horrible Tehran" by Moshfeq Kazemi was republished in Baku, Ashgabat and Tashkent. Some works of Samad Behrangi, Ahmad Masoudi and Abbas Pahlavan were published in various collections for the first time.

The paratexts to the Russian translations demonstrate attempts to find some explanation for the Islamic revolution. In 1979, the new motif of unmasking

[29] The negative influence of Western literature on Iranian authors and the abundance of mass literature in Iran is also mentioned by other Soviet philologists. When Hedayat's "Buf-e kur" was translated and published among his other works in 1969, Komissarov and Rosenfeld noted in their foreword: "Although it is distinctively influenced by decadent Western literature, 'The Blind Owl' is an authentic work of art" [Komissarov, Rozenfel'd 1969: 6].

the "illusory prosperity" of Iran appears: "Neither the petrodollar boom nor the stockpiles of accumulated weapons are or can be the sources, the impetus for progress" [Khokhlov 1979: 4]. In her foreword to the "Modern Iranian prose", Levkovskaia sums up: "The finely decorated façade by which the shah's government and the elites that had got rich off the oil boom were trying to deceive the international community, has crashed down" [Levkovskaia 1980: 5]. She states that the book will help its reader understand the reasons behind the revolution, reveal the broad variety of the problems faced by the Iranian people, their everyday life and worldview [Ibid.].

Since the foreword to the "Modern Iranian Prose" outlines and expands the previous experience, let us provide a brief summary of its main ideas. According to Levkovskaia, the Iranian authors focus on the most challenging problems of the day. Their works are characterized by truthful depiction of the complicated life of their contemporaries. They describe the cheerless life of the poor, "the power of darkness", which means the spread of prejudice and superstition, the inferior status of women [Ibid.: 8]. Social satire is one of the dominant genres in modern Persian literature. It reveals the corrupting influence of the borrowed bourgeois morals and culture, of Americanization. However, there is also the motif of inner renewal and resistance to oppression, for example, in Ahmad Mahmoud's short stories. Forced growth of capitalism in Iran causes some psychological changes, and as a result the theme of alienation appears in modern Persian literature. Levkovskaia then adds that, unlike Western authors, Iranian writers see this problem from a humanistic perspective and consider it to be contrary to human nature.

In the 1980s, the new motif of the unique originality of modern Iranian literature emerges in paratexts. For example, Ale Ahmad (1923–1969), known for his anti-Western stance, was described as a "highly national" author who demonstrated great civic consciousness [Kondyreva 1986: 395]. In order to highlight Ale Ahmad's uniqueness, Kondyreva speaks against the tendency to label Iranian authors that was not uncommon "back in the day", when Hedayat was called "the Iranian Chekhov", and Chubak "almost the Iranian Gorky" [Ibid.].

Gaps and omissions

As the reader can see, there are quite a number of Iranian writers whose works are essential for understanding the literary process of modern Iran but who remained completely unknown to the wide audience in the USSR. We could name several reasons for that, the most obvious one being ideological impropriety, and first of all, inattention to social problems. For example, the popular trilogy "Homā" (1928), "Parichehr" (1929), "Zibā" (1930), focusing on the figures of Iranian women, was never translated into Russian. Although Mohammad Hejazi's "Zibā" won the praise of some literary critics, Komissarov criticizes all of Hejazi's novels for his lack of attention to urgent social problems "as if there were none in Iran at that time" [Komissarov 1999: 301]. Bozorg Alavi's most famous novel, "Cheshm-hā-yash" (1952), seem to share a similar fate (although H. Mirʿabedini [Mirʿābedini 2009] and M. R. Ghanoonparvar [2011] state

otherwise in their articles for the Encyclopaedia Iranica).[30] As one of the most prominent Iranian authors whose works belong to the literature of commitment, Alavi was widely translated into Russian and published in the Soviet Union in the 1950s and 1960s, with the surprising exception of his most influential novel. It is highly possible that the reason for such selectivity lies in the contemptuous attitude of Alavi's fellow leftists towards this novel. Alavi was criticized for the lack of ideological steadfastness; the novel's main heroine, Farangis, was labeled a superficial representative of the bourgeois class, who chose to join the leftist movement because she was bored by her monotonous life.

Since realism was declared the ultimate stage of literary development in the Soviet Union, the works of some of the prominent modernist Iranian writers did not receive much attention in the textbooks on Persian literature and remained untranslated, including "Yakoliyā va tanhāʾi-ye u", by Taqi Modarresi (1955), and "Malakut" by Bahram Sadeghi (1961).

Apart from ideological considerations, we must make allowance for the translators' and editors' personal tastes, as well as some technical nuances. Since almost all translators of modern Persian fiction were scholars by profession, their research work of course had priority over any other activities, including translation. Scholars did not have enough time to spare on translating, especially when it came to big works of fiction that could take years of scrupulous effort. This must be the main reason why such important novels as Ali-Mohammad Afghani's "Showhar-e Āhu Khānum" (1961), Mahmoud Dowlatabadi's "Kelidar" (1978–1984) and "Jā-ye khāli-ye Soluch" (1979), were never translated into Russian. The significance of these works was emphasized in textbooks on modern Persian literature: Dzhakhangir Dorri, for example, calls Dowlatabadi "the most prominent writer whose works are mainly dedicated to the lives of ordinary people" [Dorri 1999: 421].

Conclusion

Before World War II, Russian translations of modern Iranian fiction were only published occasionally. The translators were interested in the socio-political rather than artistic aspect of the works.

In the post-war Soviet period, Iranian fiction was also represented mainly as the best way to get acquainted with the country, its people, their customs and morals. Translations of contemporary literature of Iran were to demonstrate that Iranian intellectuals were aware of the flaws of their society, and eager to choose the more humanistic values of the socialist countries. Realistic approach, psychological veracity, humanism of the authors, and their attention to various social issues and the figure of an ordinary man were most frequently praised in the paratexts. The life and problems of Iranian women were not given much

[30] To the best of our knowledge, the only translation of Alavi's "Cheshm-hā-yash" in the Soviet Union was A. Kuranbekov's translation into Uzbek, published in 1981 by the Tashkent branch of the Progress Publishing House.

attention, although the cliché of "the oppressed woman of the East" was sometimes reproduced in the paratexts.

Before the thaw in Soviet-Iranian relations, translators focused mainly on social satire. In the 1960–1970s, many works of the most prominent Iranian writers of the period were translated into Russian. However, the works of Iranian modernists, as well as works classified as having been created under the influence of bourgeois morals, remained untranslated.

In the first years after the Islamic revolution, translations of Iranian fiction were represented as a means of understanding the reasons for the Iranian upheaval. As cultural and academic ties between Iran and the USSR weakened and broke after 1979, no work of Persian fiction created after the Revolution was translated in the Soviet Union. This gap has not yet been fully filled.

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