

IN MEMORIAM

## Obituary

Bernard Hourcade and Houchang Chehabi\*

Boston University, Boston, Massachusetts, United States

**Corresponding author:** Houchang Chehabi, Email: [hchehabi@hotmail.com](mailto:hchehabi@hotmail.com)

(Received 16 August 2023; accepted 16 August 2023)

Christophe Balaÿ (1949–2022) died in Jaujac, a village in southeastern France where his family roots lay and he had been living for a number of years, on July 31, 2022, after a long illness.

After studying comparative literature at Paris-Nanterre and Persian at the National Institute for Oriental Languages and Civilizations (InaLCO) in Paris, he lived in Tehran as a researcher attached to the Institut Français d'Iranologie from 1979 to 1983, witnessing the difficult years of revolution and war. He was the first researcher at this institute to work on modern Iranian literature. Following early innovative publications on Jamālzādeh and Dehkhodā, he wrote his *Doctorat d'État* dissertation on the genesis of the modern Persian novel under the supervision of Charles-Henri de Fouchécour. He received his degree in 1988 and was appointed Professor of Persian Language and Literature at InaLCO.

Balaÿ's cultural intimacy with contemporary Iran was deepened thanks to his second long sojourn in the country, this time as director of the Institut Français de Recherche en Iran from 1998 to 2003. These were years of cultural opening, allowing Balaÿ to enlarge his professional and personal relations within academic and literary circles in Iran.

Until his retirement in 2014, Balaÿ prioritized his pedagogic activities over participation in research seminars and international conferences. At InaLCO, he profoundly reshaped the teaching of Persian by publishing textbooks and anthologies of modern Persian; his subtle understanding of Iranian culture had a deep impact of generations of students.

Beyond his publications on modern Persian prose literature and his impact as a teacher, his major academic legacy are his translations of modern Persian novels and novellas. His elegant translations into French of authors such as Mahmud Dowlatābādi, Zoyā Pirzād, Yadollāh Royā'i, and Hushang Golshiri contributed to giving Persian prose the international recognition it deserves, complementing Persian poetry, which has been well-known for a long time. These translations also acquainted the French public with the nuances and depth of contemporary Persian culture.

His final work, an erudite and systematic study of the history of modern Persian prose published in 2017, puts the emergence of this new component of Iranian culture in historical context. It constitutes his personal and academic testament.

Christophe Balaÿ's main academic publications include:

*Aux sources de la nouvelle persane* (Paris: Editions recherches sur civilisations, 1983) (with Michel Cuypers).

*La genèse du roman persan moderne* (Tehran and Paris: Institut Français de Recherche en Iran, 1998).

---

\* Translated by Houchang Chehabi

This article was updated on 20 December 2023

*Le persan au quotidien* (Paris: Asiathèque, 1991) (with H. Esmaili).

*La crise de la conscience iranienne. Histoire de la prose persane moderne (1800-1980)* (Paris: Harmattan, 2017).