

*Ali Gheissari*

## **In Memoriam**

### **Hossein Ziai: Professor of Iranian Studies**



Hossein Ziai, Professor of Iranian Studies at UCLA, passed away in Los Angeles on 24 August 2011. He was 67. Professor Ziai began teaching at UCLA in 1988, and he subsequently served as the Director of the Iranian Studies Program there. In 2008 he was appointed the inaugural holder of the Jahangir and Eleanor Amuzegar Chair in Iranian Studies at UCLA.

Ziai graduated from Yale with a BS in Mathematics and Physics in 1967, and earned his PhD in Islamic Philosophy from Harvard in 1976. His doctoral thesis focused on Shahab al-Din Habash Suhrawardi, founder of the Philosophy of Illumination in the twelfth century, and mainly dealt with the theory of knowledge and the rationalist dimension of the Illuminationist school of thought, a theme that remained a major focus in much of his subsequent work.

On completion of his doctorate Ziai returned to Iran and until 1981 taught at the Iranian Institute of Philosophy, Tehran University, and the Aryamehr (later Sharif) University of Technology, and offered classes in a diverse range of topics including comparative philosophy, Greek philosophy, primary sources in western philosophy, and logic. Among these was an innovative seminar on reading and analyzing *Cartesian Meditations*, an important text in the phenomenological philosophy of Edmund Husserl, focusing on its comparable grounds with Islamic philosophy.

During this period he also proposed the creation of the Iranian Center for the Study of Cultures and collaborated in founding it. In 1982 Ziai returned to Harvard and spent three years pursuing his research interests and teaching courses

on Islamic philosophy, Sufism, and Islamic philosophical texts. Before joining UCLA, Ziai served as visiting assistant professor of religious studies at Brown University for two years and one year at Oberlin College as assistant professor of religious studies where he taught courses on comparative religion, phenomenology of religion, and the introduction to Islamic thought and institutions in the medieval period.

In addition to Persian and English Ziai knew classical Arabic and French and also had a reading knowledge of German and classical Greek. In conjunction with his full time teaching and other academic duties, in 1998 in collaboration with Mazda Publishers (Costa Mesa, CA), Ziai began the *Bibliotheca Iranica: Intellectual Traditions Series*; a total of fourteen titles have been published in this series, the last one posthumously.

Ziai published extensively in both Persian and English, mostly on philosophical topics, including erudite introductions to his critical editions of primary texts in the Philosophy of Illumination. His books include *Anwariyya*, an early seventeenth century Persian commentary on Sohrawardi's *Philosophy of Illumination*, by Muhammad Sharif al-Hirawi, edited with introduction and notes (Tehran, 1979); *Philosophy of Mathematics*, edited and translated, with introduction, notes, and glossary of technical terms (Tehran, 1980); *Knowledge and Illumination: A Study of Sohrawardi's Hikmat al-Isbraq* (Atlanta, 1990); Shams al-Din Muhammad Shahrazuri's *Sharh-i Hikmat al-Isbraq, Commentary on the Philosophy of Illumination*, critical edition with English and Persian introductions (Tehran, 1993); Sohrawardi's *The Book of Radiance (Partow Nameh)*, a parallel English–Persian text, edited and translated with an introduction (Bibliotheca Iranica: Intellectual Traditions Series, No. 1, 1998); Arifi of Herat, *Ball and Polo Stick or The Book of Ecstasy*, a parallel Persian–English text, edited and translated with an introduction by Wheeler Thackston and Hossein Ziai (Bibliotheca Iranica: Intellectual Traditions Series, No. 3, 1999); *The Philosophy of illumination*, a new critical edition of the text of Suhrawardi's *Hikmat al-Isbraq*, with English translation, notes, commentary, and introduction by John Walbridge and Hossein Ziai (Provo, UT, 1999); Ibn Kammuna's *Al-Tanqihat fi Sharh al-Talwihat, Refinement and Commentary on Sohrawardi's Intimations: A Thirteenth Century Text on Natural Philosophy and Psychology*, critical edition with introduction and analysis by Hossein Ziai and Ahmed Alwishah (Bibliotheca Iranica: Intellectual Traditions Series, No. 9, 2002); *Addenda on the Commentary on The Philosophy of Illumination: Part I on the Rules of Thought*, by Sadr al-Din Shirazi (Mulla Sadra) (Bibliotheca Iranica: Intellectual Traditions Series, No. 13, 2010); and posthumously, *Nur al-Fu'ad (Inner Light): A Nineteenth Century Persian Text in Illuminationist Philosophy*, by Shihab al-Din Kumijani, edited with introduction and notes by Hossein Ziai and Mohammad Karimi Zanjani Asl (Bibliotheca Iranica: Intellectual Traditions Series, No. 14, 2012).

A memorial service was held at Forest Lawn Memorial Park in Los Angeles on Saturday 3 September 2011 with close to 700 in attendance. UCLA hosted a subsequent memorial gathering on Monday 26 September where several former colleagues and students spoke affectionately and a selection of Ziai's creative work—a series of calligraphies and water colors—was on view. Later tributes have further pointed to

the broad range of Ziai's interests and work (*Iran Nameh*, 26, no. 3–4, 2011; *Falsafeh*, 5, no. 50, 2011). Hossein Ziai is survived by his wife Mahasti Afshar, their son Dadali, daughter-in-law Stephanie, and grandchildren Malia and Acacia.

Ziai's scholarly works are listed in:

<http://www.hosseinzai.com/>

<http://www.nelc.ucla.edu/Faculty/Ziai.htm>

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