

Iran & Historiography in Comparative Perspective

International Conference convened by the Iran Heritage Foundation and the Institute of Iranian Studies, University of St Andrews, with the support of the British Institute of Persian Studies.

University of St Andrews – 10-13th September 2009

Iran and Persianate civilization represent one of the great literary and historical cultures of the world. Yet the depth of this contribution is rarely appreciated within the broader discipline of historical studies and the field of historiography in particular. Trends in historiography as understood in the West, the method and ideas behind the writing of history have likewise rarely been applied to Iranian historical writing. Between 10-13th September 2009, the Institute of Iranian Studies at the University of St Andrews and the Iran Heritage Foundation convened a conference on *Iran and Historiography in comparative perspective*, in an effort to bridge this intellectual gap and to raise questions about the position of Iranian historiography. The aim was to look at developments in Iranian historiography in comparative perspective drawing in particular on the Western tradition and broader developments within historiographical theory.

Consequently the conference began with three keynote presentations looking at broader aspects of historiographical thought. Professor Michael Bentley explored the ‘view from the West’ and the impact, and potential impact, of specific forms of Western historical writing on modern historical writing in Iran. He was followed by Professor Bert Fragner who examined some of the principal distinctions between Arabic and Persian historiography in the Classical period, noting the literary style in Persian histories and their popularity as works of entertainment and edification at various courts. Professor Chris Lorenz traced the development of comparative historical writing over the last century, focusing on its role in countering nationalistic interpretations of the past. The conference then proceeded with panels looking at specific themes and/or chronological periods. A variety of papers looked at particular texts, the writing of specific historians and modern interpretations of the past. Professor Robert Bartlett produced a 12th century European text which included a section on the Parthians, while Professor Pistor-Hatam analysed the ways in which the history of the Mongol invasions had been presented in recently-published Iranian academic studies.

Professor Abbas Milani delivered a keynote lecture on the problems of biographical writing with reference to his current work on Mohammad Reza Shah. Professor Milani outlined the difficulties of researching a subject which is at once familiar yet remains opaque and riddled with conspiracy theories. Overall there were over thirty papers delivered at what proved to be a diverse and intellectually stimulating conference, drawing together historians and historiographers, Iranists and non-Iranists. A selection of the papers will be published in an edited volume for the IHF series, ‘Iran and the Persianate World’, published by I B Tauris.

Ali Ansari (University of St Andrews)

List of Participants

Speakers (alphabetical with papers)

Pejman **Abdolmohammadi** – ‘History, National Identity and Myths in the Iranian Contemporary Political Thought: Mirza Fathali Akhundzadeh (1812-1878), Mirza Agha Khan Kermani (1853-1896) and Hassan Taqizadeh (1878-1970)’ [University of Genoa, Italy]

Lindsay **Allen** – “The New Crusade”: pictorial reportage and America’s archaeological mission to Iran in the 1930s’. [King’s College London]

Rob **Bartlett** – Persia in the mediaeval imagination [University of St Andrews]

Michael **Bentley** – Historiography and Iran; the view from the West [University of St Andrews]

Stephen **Blake** – ‘History and Chronology in Early Modern West and South Asia: The Safavid Mughal, and Ottoman Empires’ [University of Minnesota]

Touraj **Daryaee** – Aspects of Sasanian Historiography [University of California, Irvine]

Bert **Fragner** – Persian Historiography [Austrian Academy of Sciences]

Sanjay **Garg** – Safavid-Mughal Relations: the numismatic evidence [National Archives of India]

Carole **Hillenbrand** – Persian and Arabic historiography on the Great Seljuqs of Iran [University of Edinburgh]

Mohammad **Imanpour** – ‘The Growth of historical nationalism and new trends in historiography of Iranian in early 20 century: the Case of Pirniya’s Ancient History’ [The Ferdowsi University of Mashad, Iran]

Robert **Irwin** – Gobineau and the construction of Aryanism [School of Oriental and African Studies]

Farhang **Jahanpour** - Persia in the Western imagination: Translations of Persian Poetry from 18th-21st centuries [Oxford University]

Shahram **Kholdi** – ‘Politics of Memory and the Historiography of the 1979 Revolution’ [University of Manchester]

Pedram **Khosronejad** – The Ethnography of Sacred Defence Literature [University of St Andrews]

Lloyd **Llewellyn Jones** – The Representation of the ‘Persians’ in Hollywood, from *Intolerance* to *300*. [University of Edinburgh]

Chris **Lorenz** – Comparative historiography [Free University of Amsterdam]

Rudi **Mathee** - *Na Gharbi, na Sharqi, Irani*: The Historical roots of Iran’s Quest for Self-Sufficiency. [University of Delaware]

Menachem **Merhavy** – ‘From “The Great Civilization” to “False Cyrus” – Legacy of ancient Iran as reflected in Pahlavi discourse’, [Tel Aviv University]

Abbas **Milani** – The Shah: Methodological Problems of a Biography [Stanford]

Lynette **Mitchell** – Herodotus’ Persians and political freedom [University of Exeter]

David **Morgan** – Persian and non-Persian historical writing in the Mongol Empire
[University of Wisconsin-Madison]
David **Motadel** – ‘Evolution and Transfer of the Term “Aryan” in Modern Intellectual
and Political History’ [University of Cambridge]
Andrew **Newman** – Safavids on Safavids: The Changing Discourse of Late-Safavid
Historiography [University of Edinburgh]
Anja **Pistor-Hatam** – ‘History and Its Meaning in the Islamic Republic of Iran: The Case
of the Mongol Invasion and Rule’ [Christian-Albrechts- Universität, Kiel]
Lloyd **Ridgeon** – Sufi’s in Safavid Iran [University of Glasgow]
Elisa **Sabadini** – ‘Persia in the western imagination: From reign of freedom to land of
oppression: 17th century Persia through Italian eyes’ [Università degli Studi di Milano]
Yadullah **Shahibzadeh** – ‘The Implications of Recent Historiographical Trends in Iran’
[University of Oslo, Norway]
Peter **Sluglett** – Writing the History of 20th century Iraq [University of Utah]
Saeed **Talajooy** - ‘Myth and History in Contemporary Iranian Theatre’ [UCL]
Mohsen **Zakeri** – ‘From “Two Centuries of Silence” to “The Dawn of Islam”. A new
approach for writing the early Islamic history of Iran’ [der J. W. Goethe Universität,
Frankfurt]

Chairs

Ali M Ansari [University of St Andrews]
Tim Greenwood [University of St Andrews]
Paul Luft [University of St Andrews / BIPS]
Steve Murdoch [University of St Andrews]
Andrew Pettegree [University of St Andrews]
Bernard Struck [University of St Andrews]

Administration

Paul Churchill – administrator
Chris la Rossa – senior assistant
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Nicholas Boles - assistant