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An Agenda for Persian Studies

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On welcoming participants from many parts of the world to our conference at Sydney, and in opening its proceedings, I intend in this introduction to suggest a working agenda for Persian Studies, that is, for studies of the kinds of culturo-religious issues we are addressing in our presentations. I do so, not as a Westerner presuming to dictate what cultural studies should entail for every thinker working in this field, but primarily in response to the range of topics being tackled by those reading papers to this seminar, and then also by imagining what a world-wide gathering of scholars might pose as key questions about the Persian heritage, for their better understanding of a rich and highly influential tradition. I will hereby reflect, in fact, on key issues that are hoary enough always to require rethinking by those within the arena of Persian scholarship, yet at the same time basic enough for non-specialists who seek clarification of Persia's importance in world history and affairs.

I do not hesitate to orient this working agenda chronologically, and it seems natural to begin with linguistics and religious foundations. Right from the start, however, we are forced to ask questions about the nature of scholarship itself. As a globalist working in a Western-originated Australian University far from central Asia, I am bound to be strongly affected by the European tradition of comparative, critical and phenomenological studies. Yet I do not want to be blinkered by this inheritance, and in an intellectual ambience at Sydney pressed to be 'post-modern' and 'post-colonial', let alone in the company of this symposium's eminent Persian participants, I seek to honour, learn from, and ask questions about traditions of high-level scholarship that have been established in Iran itself (and among the 'expatriate' Persians, from Indian Parsees onwards). To secure our bearing on questions of lingual and socio-religious antiquity, though, I will first defer to Western critical insights.

Since Friedrich Max Müller, a founding father of both comparative philology and religion, cautiously postulated the separation of north-western and south-eastern branches of Indo-European language family at ca. 3,000 BCE, it has always been of interest as to how close our earliest specimens of the ancient Avestan Language are to the as yet unplaced "original home of Aryan speech".¹ At the time Franz Bopp was working on a comparative grammar (during the 1810s), placing Sanskrit and Avestan in the same family as Greek and Latin and the Slavonic, Baltic, Teutonic and Celtic language groups of Europe,² an extraordinary amount of German philological and cultural attention became focussed on ancient India, and this was reflected in Müller's own career (and as a result the course of comparative religious studies generally).³ Certain German scholars were to make important contributions to the study of older Persian materials (consider von Spiegel, Haug and Geldner),⁴ but from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century, it was not Berlin but Paris where Persia received more spotlighting. Abraham Anquatil-Duperon was earliest in

¹ For Müller's mature position, *Biographies of Words and the Home of the Aryas* [1898], in *Collected Works*, London, 1905, vol. 10, pp. 80-103, cf. 88 (quotation).

² F. Bopp, *Comparative Grammar of the Sanskrit, Zend, Greek, Latin, Lithuanian, Celtic, German and Slavonic Languages* [first major edn., 1833-52] (trans. E.B. Eastwick), London, 1850-1856, 3 vols.

³ For background, G.W. Trompf, *Friedrich Max Müller as a Theorist of Comparative Religion*, Bombay, 1978, pp. 17-20.

⁴ Thus F. von Spiegel (ed.), *Avesta*, Vienna, 1855-63, 3 vols.; M. Haug, *Outline of a Grammar of the Zend Language*, Bombay, 1862; K.F. Geldner (ed.), *Avesta*, Stuttgart, 1886-96, 3 vols.

attempting a complete translation of the *Zend-Avesta* (in 1771) for international readership, and Eugène Burnouf and his circle at the Sorbonne were first to create something like a European school of Persian Studies which had ongoing consequences.⁵ Naturally it is part of the agenda to ask questions about the relative value of this scholarship, and to enquire into any scholarly comparabilities in the East or into the nature of interactions between Western *savants* and Eastern custodians. Now, in the 1990s, moreover, there are many substantive matters still to be clarified, especially concerning the antiquity of Avestan and its first expressers.

Part of the puzzle for our time is an archaeological one. Was there indeed a kind of Indo-European migration 'explosion', as Edinburgh's Professor Stuart Piggott has imaged it, and if so, how close did it occur to Iran (since it has been common, since Müller's cautious insistence, to place an Aryan 'homeland' in middle Asia)?⁶ The most crucial component of the jigsaw puzzle centres on Zarathustra (Greek: Zoroaster) as the traditionally accepted articulator of the older *Gâthâs* in the so-named *Zend-Avesta*. Disputes continue about the dates for Zarathustra (with estimates ranging between 2,000 and 500 BCE), and if his Gathic oracles were in a tongue closer or even older in time to the 'unauthorized' *Rg Veda* of India, then this would make him a much more ancient founder-figure than the other Indo-European reformers with whom he is often compared (the Buddha and Mahavira), and not part of the so-called axial age in which these reformers are set alongside China's Confucius and the great writing prophets of Israel.⁷ High on the agenda of Persian studies should be the attempt to settle the 'glotto-chronological relationship' between Avestan, Sanskrit and other ancient Indo-European tongues such as Hittite, as well as efforts to provide greater security for the date and context of Zarathustra.

Such work is important at this juncture if only because various competing scholarly claims keep being made about Zoroaster's place in the history of consciousness, and particularly religion, and it has become of pressing importance to sort out what the ingredients of his original message were and thus better assess its revolutionary character and its influence. Was Zarathustra the first known monotheist? is a question of some moment. Were the 'twin Spirits' of good and evil, light and darkness - Ahura Mazda and Angra Mainyu - coeval on his understanding, and was he therefore the teacher of a cosmogonic dualism (cf. *Yasna* 45)?⁸ Did he have in mind the transformation of the old Iranian pantheon into immortals subject under and reflective of the one Lord? with convenient ritual forms - for fire temples apparently preceded him - being deliberately recast to illustrate his reformism?⁹ Do we have in Zarathustra the earliest 'called' prophet, directed to convey to his

⁵ See R. Schwab, *La Renaissance orientale*. Paris, 1951, esp. pp. 312ff.; thus cf. A.K. Anquetil-Dupéron, *Zend-Avesta*, Paris, 1771, vols. 1-3 (newly reprinted, and ed. by R.D. Richardson Jr., New York, London, 1984) before Burnouf, and eg., C de Harlez, *Avesta, livre sacré du Zoroastrianisme*, Paris, 1887 (and other works) after him.

⁶ S. Piggott, eg. "Introduction", in *idem* (ed.), *The Birth of Civilization*, London, 1961, pp. 10, 14, cf. Müller, *op. cit.*, pp. 104ff, for the geographic estimate.

⁷ For some dating issues, M. Boyce, *A History of Zoroastrianism*, (Handbuch der Orientalistik 1/8), Leiden, 1975, vol. 1, ch. 1. Moses, for additional comparative purposes, is conventionally dated to be 1,260 BCE. The exaggeration of Zarathustra's antiquity to 6000 years before Xerxes, probably going back to the Persians themselves, is accepted in Greek literature by the (Pre-Herodotean) Ionian historian Xanthus [Frg. 29], *apud* Diogenes Laertius, *Vit. philos.*, proem 2, cf. L. Pearson, *Early Ionian Historians*, Oxford 1939, p. 118), long before Aristotle (Frg. 29). As for the paradigm of the Axial Age, it was popularized by Karl Jaspers, esp. in *Von Ursprung und Ziel der Geschichte*, Munich, 1949.

⁸ For background discussion, T. van Baaren, "A few Essential Remarks concerning Positive and Negative Relations Between Gods", in H.G. Kippenburg, with H.J.W. Drijvers and Y. Kuiper (eds.), *Struggles of Gods* (Religion and Reason 31), Berlin and New York, 1984, pp. 7ff.; W. Oxtoby, "Interpretations of Iranian Dualism", in, C.J. Adams (ed.), *Iranian Civilization and Culture*, Montreal, 1972, pp. 59ff.

⁹ For background, begin with, M. Boyce (ed.), *Textual Sources for the Study of Zoroastrianism*, Manchester, 1984, p. 10. For proto-Zoroastrian Fire Temples, see the chapter in these proceedings by G. Gropp, cf., on recent Bactrian excavations, eg., V. Sarianidi, *Zdye' Govril Zarâtûshtra*, Moscow, 1990, cf., pls. 25, 27; *idem*, "Temples of Bronze Age Magiana: traditions of ritual architecture", *Antiquity*, 68, (1994): 388ff; cf. V. Ionesov, "La formado de frupolitikaj rilatoj en la proto-Baktria civilizacio de la bronza epoko", *Scienca Revuo*, 45/2 (1994): 9ff. See also G. Gnoli, "Problems and Prospects of the Studies on Persian Religion", in U. Bianchi, C.J. Bleeker and A. Bausani (eds.), *Problems and Methods of the History of Religions* (Studies in the History of Religions 19), Leiden, 1996, pp. 67ff.

followers the first major revealed religion, a message of salvation through inward ethical choice that raises issues hitherto left unaddressed by what George Foot Moore described as the “natural religion(s)” of humanity?¹⁰ In presenting the demands for an ethical choice, was Zarathustra the first to teach a last judgement (cf. *Yasna* 44)? All these questions have become pertinent afresh with the recent publication of Norman Cohn’s *Cosmos, Chaos, and World to Come*, which argues - albeit controversially - that the Bible owes its monotheism, its Satan and its eschatology more to Zarathustra than to any other source.¹¹

Some of these questions cannot be resolved without further debate about the meaning of key words and phrases in the *Avesta*, and without better guidelines for detecting reactions of the Avestan material and their dates, exploring the possible rationale for the building up of hymnic and ritual texts around Zarathustra’s ‘original or ascribed’ *Gāthās*.¹² These and other related queries cannot be settled without also addressing the great chronological gap between Zarathustra’s context and the time the later, more systematizing *corpus* of Zoroastrian texts in the Pahlavi language was produced. The macroscopic vision of the *Bundahishn*, for instance, with its ‘cosmogony’, great-Age theory and Last Things, presents in texts as late as the sixth century CE, long after other expanding religious influences may have been felt in Persia.¹³ How do we fill up this chasm? A few texts - such as those of pseudo-Heraclides and Plutarch - give aid; but scholars also want to feel more secure about inferring lack from Pahlavi texts, to make up for the textual wreckage wrought by Alexander ‘the Terrible’ (certainly not for Persians ‘the Great’).¹⁴ It has not been pleasant for Zoroastrians to contemplate their fundamental spiritual history possessing ‘a dawn’ and ‘a twilight’, with little to learn about in between and with even the latter phase being marred by rather intolerant Zurvanist impulses under later Sasanian monarchs.¹⁵

The mention of kings bring to mind the ancient dynasties for which Persian is famed - the Achaemenid, Parthian, and Sassanid - and, considering rulers’ appeals to continuity with the Sasanians after the Islamic conquest, and their characteristic appropriation of the old title *Shah(anshah)* from the tenth century until the current revolution, Persia is often credited with the longest-lived of monarchical systems in world history.¹⁶ That, mind you, has been more a point of notoriety rather than fame in the West. For, given the long-term weight of the Greek classics on European intellectual life, the ‘great kings’ of Persia have become associated with tyranny - as a threat to the *polis* in the works of democratic-looking Herodotus and conservative Plato alike, or, under the Romans, as inimical to the better possibilities of *Romanitas*.¹⁷ Even defenders of European stable monarchies in the eighteenth century never imagined they were upholding institutions as bad

¹⁰ Moore, *The Birth and Growth of Religion* (Moore Lectures, 1922), Edinburgh, 1923, pp. 126ff.; and for discussion, Trompf, “Salvation and Primnal Religion”, in *Prudentia* (Suppl. Num.), Auckland, 1988, pp. 213ff.

¹¹ New Haven, 1993. For a valuable review, J. Griffin, in *New York Review of Books*, 41/21 (1994); 23ff.; and for another more restrained view presented at the same time, G. Hölscher, *Die Ursprünge der jüdischen Eschatologie* (Vorträge der theologischen Konferenz zur Gieben, Folg. 41), Stuttgart, 1993; Trompf, “When was the First Millenarian Movement? in A. Sharma (ed.) *The Sum of our Choices* (Eric J. Sharpe Festschrift), New York, 1996, pp. 230ff.

¹² Of seminal importance, eg., F.N. Nau, “Étude historique sur la transmission de l’Avesta et sur l’époque probable de sa dernière redaction”, *Revue de l’histoire des religions*, 45/2-3 (1929): 149-99. Note also I. Gerschevitch, *The Avestan Hymn to Mitra* (University of Cambridge Oriental Publications, 4), Cambridge, 1959.

¹³ For translations of important Pahlavi materials, see, *Sacred Books of the East* [gen. ed. Müller] vols. 6, 9, Oxford, 1879.

¹⁴ Cf. esp. J.H. Hinnells, “The Zoroastrian Doctrine of Salvation in the Roman World”, in E.J. Sharpe and Hinnells (ed.), *Man and his Salvation* (S.G.F. Brandon Festschrift), London, 1973, pp. 128-33.

¹⁵ I allude to R.C. Zaehner’s *The Dawn and Twilight of Zoroastrianism*, London, 1975 (the Parsis also having expressed annoyance that they have been conceived to be in a permanent twilight), cf., A. Christensen, *L’Iran sous les Sassanides*, Paris, 1936.

¹⁶ For a useful summary, see the article by L. Lockhart, J.A. Boyle and P.R.L. Brown in Boyle (ed.), *Persia: history and heritage*, London, 1978, under ch. 1.

¹⁷ Herodotus, *Hist.*, esp. VI-VII; Plato, *Leg.*, esp. III, 694Cff; Pompeius Trogus, *apud Justin, Epit.*, I-III; Orosius, *Hist. adv. Pagan.*, esp. II, cf. Trompf, *The Idea of Historical Recurrence in Western Thought*, Berkeley and London, 1979, vol 1, chs 1-2; E. Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian*, Oxford, 1989; A de Jong, “Traditions of the Magi: Zoroastrian in Greek and Latin Literature” (Doctoral dissert., Universiteit Utrecht), Utrecht, 1996, pp. 15ff.

as those of ‘oriental despotisms’, in a “Persia bleeding under the ferocious sword” or “where science is extinguished, agriculture decays, [and] ... the human race itself melts away”.¹⁸ After the removal of Ottoman rule from Greece itself, projecting the archetype of the ‘arrogant Persian dynasty’ was bound to receive some replay as, quite recently in an essay by the Athenian democrat and *savant* Angelos Blachos’ called *Ἡ Σκία τῶν βασιλέως* (The Shadow of the Kings).¹⁹

At this point, Westerners will be at a loss to accommodate the common Persian claim that Cyrus, conqueror and founder of the Achaemenid Dynasty, was the first ruler to draw up something like a charter of human rights for his subjects, no better illustrated than in the letter reproduced in the Bible allowing the Jews to rebuild their temple (ca. 538 BCE).²⁰ With the persisting drive towards liberal democracies, cultural forgetfulness has set in and total lack of appreciation in the West as to how such a society as Persia could be so long committed to monarchy. Various items loom on the agenda here. The task of re-appraising and contextualizing Cyrus is not unimportant and has suggestions of an Iranian contribution to the ‘global community’.²¹ Deconstruction of Greek imperialism in the Middle East will also have its role. It is salutary to contemplate Alexander ‘the Terrible’s’ awful destruction of Persia’s cultural achievements, and unlearn the old (Western-imbibed) legitimization of his invasion (333-2 BCE) as inevitable because the Persian royals and courtiers were “debilitated by an effeminacy and their minds corrupted”.²²

Not that Iranians have been and should be unrealistic and uncritical about their monarchical past, for the “lamentable, shameful ways” in which many a Shah ended his reign forces contemplation of a “quintessentially” tragic quality about the great land astride West and East.²³ This raises to mind the strange and tangled phenomenon of *Shah Nameh*, the “national epic of Iran” knit together by the compositions of Ferdowsi (ca. 935 - ca. 1026 CE).²⁴ To what should we liken this book? to Homer’s *Iliad*? or India’s epical poems? Is it critical that residual ancient elements reside in this work, as if, like old Caledonians supposed to lie behind the Scots’ Ossian, we can uncover some sadly lost ancient virtue in the world of royal courage, honour and firm resolve? Or is it more pertinent to see what mediaevals do to ancient traditions - as also in the case of *Hazar Afsanak* (*A Thousand Tales*) with the correct chronological ordering of things being quite subordinated to moral themes?²⁵ However these queries are resolved, the ethos of great rulers, warriors, negotiators and mighty deeds remains, and it is worth assessing as a social mythos and for its socially cohesive force or as an index to cultural, political and spiritual identity. It is thus also worth pondering in relation to political economy, or for that matter to the geographical interface (including the silk road) between a more stable China and a more changeable West (and south-west).

This symposium was organized to focus on *distinctly* Persian culture. Considering the massive impact of Islam, scholars looking for some sense of the ‘spread of Muslim Civilization’ in Iran may

¹⁸ Thus Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, [1790], Dolphin edn. Garden City, NY., 1961, pp. 141, cf. Montesquieu, *Les Lettres Persanes* [1758 edn.] (cf. ed. J. Starobinski), Paris, 1973; and see K.A. Wittfogel, *Oriental Despotism*, New Haven and London; 1963, ch 9; E. Said, *Orientalism*, London, 1985.

¹⁹ A.S. Blachos, subtitled. *559-330 π.Χ.*, Athens, 1991, esp. pp. 53ff.

²⁰ 2 Chron, 36:22-23, Ezr. 1:2-4 and also Isa. 45:1, and see M. Mallowan, “Cyrus the Great (558-529 BC)”, in Gershevitch (ed.), *Cambridge History of Iran*, Cambridge, 1985, vol 2, pp. 393ff., cf. R.D. Barnett “Anath, Ba’al and Pasargadae”, *Mélanges de l’Université Saint-Joseph* (Beirut), 45/25 (1969): 407ff.

²¹ Note that Persia or Persian Kings are not reflected in the Qur’an (*pace* Bastani-Parizi in the pages of this collection).

²² Thus the famous Scottish Enlightenment historian, William Robertson, *The History of Ancient Greece*, [1770s], Edinburgh, 1812, edn. p. 434, although he also acknowledged Alexander’s degeneracy “after the siege of Tyre” (pp. 468ff), cf. Sir J. Malcolm, *History of Persia*, London, 1815.

²³ Here I allude to R. Kapuscinski’s controversial, *Shah of Shahs*, London, 1988, p. 36.

²⁴ Cf., for the English translation provided by W.M. Pierce, the *Germania Orientalica* edn., Washington, DC., 1993. An earlier translation was made by Alexander Rogers (London, 1907).

²⁵ For background E.G. Browne, *A Literary History of Persia*, Cambridge, 1929, vol 1, ch. 10; and J. Rypka *et al.*, *Iranische Literatur* (ed. K. Jahn), Dordrecht, pp. 154ff., 663ff. Some interest also lies in the influence of Persian dynastic tales cross-culturally, eg. in India with the *Kamzanama* (and of course eventually on the West, with Matthew Arnold’s poem *Sohrab and Rustum* [1853]).

be disappointed. This is perhaps because, whatever intruding culturo-religious impulses came to be felt by (Zoroastrian-effected) Persia, the Persian recipients shared their capacities for 're-making' them, with important and fascinating developments resulting.

In papers that follow to do with Jewish, Gnostic and Christian strands of influence, we find signs of powerful Persian cultural 'claims' reacting to invasions from 'the outside'. If Mani was by birth from a Jewish-Christian Encratitic community, for example, his Persian followers turned him into a local prince.²⁶ As a foil to the unnerving dominance over their faith by Rome, Christians within or close to the Persian sphere of influence could react rhetorically, even credibly, that "Christ manifested himself first to the Persians (ie., to the three *Magoi*), and there are important Middle Eastern Christian approaches to the Zoroastrian tradition awaiting more careful analysis.²⁷ With important centres of learning between itself and a declining Byzantium - the remarkable Christian city of Nisibis during the sixth and seventh century being one, and Jewish schools at Sura and Pumbedita in the eighth century, being others - Persia was to be the conduit for architectural, medical and cosmological knowledge important for the future of the whole globe.²⁸

When it comes to Islam, we should not at all be surprised to find acculturative tendencies bringing the Qur'anic impetus and convenient Persian sensibilities into special syntheses. Thus it is that debates arise about the special qualities of Persian Sufism, or the profound inspirations of such a poet as Hafez (1325-90), with varying views as to how one decides the relative weight and impresses of 'incoming' or 'indigenous' spiritualities.²⁹ The issue is perhaps no better symbolized than in Persian rugs, which, considering the absence of anthropomorphic motifs, we usually associate with Muslim rules of art; yet as early as the fifth century BCE, when the Athenian general Themistocles was negotiating in the court of Artaxerxes I, he "likened a man's discourse to the beautiful figure and patterns of a rich Persian carpet".³⁰ This little touch reminds us all of a venerableness so many of us have been here too prone to forget: that of the 'distinctly Persian'.

Thus our agenda will make us acutely aware of the need to improve our knowledge of the Persian past. We should duly recognize the importance of the project to edit and translate such crucial essential historiographical texts as those of Tabari (ca. 839-923).³¹ It is also going to be of value to search out more obscure Eastern European and South Asian material revealing neighbouring impressions of the Persian region and its peoples.³² Not only the historical differences between the vital Shi'ite Schools require attention, but also the literature of minor sectarian strands (such as those

²⁶ Start with H.J. Klimkeit, "Manichaean Kingship: Gnosis at home in the world", *Temenos*, 29/1 (1982): 17ff., and S. Gero, "With Walter Bauer on the Tigris: Encratitic orthodoxy and libertine heresy in Syro-Mesopotamian Christianity", in C.W. Hedrick and R. Hodgson Jr (eds.), *Nag Hammadi, Gnosticism and Early Christianity*, Peabody, 1988, 287ff.

²⁷ See Matt., 2: 1-13, and eg., Julius Africanus [more correct Syrus] Frg. [*Narr. Pers.*]; and for a creed affirming Christ as a manifesting first this way, see the renowned Nestorian Stone. An important text deserving thorough scrutiny is ΕΕΗΓΗΣΙΣ ΤΩΝ ΠΡΑΧΘΕΝΤΩΝ ΕΝ ΠΕΡΣΙΑΙ, cf. E. Bratke (ed.), *Das Sogenannte Religionsgespräch am Hof der Sasaniden* (Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur 4,4), Leipzig, 1899, pp. 1ff.

²⁸ For guidance, see eg., J. Strzykowski, *Origin of Christian Church Art*, Oxford, 1923; and D.T. Rice, "Persia and Byzantium", in A.J. Arberry (ed.) *The Legacy of Persia*, Oxford, 1953, pp. 47-48 (architecture); S. Lieu, "The Benefits of Higher Education - University Life in the Rome East" (Inaugural Lecture, Macquarie University, 31 Oct 1996), Sydney, 1996; S.W. Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, New York, 1957, vol 5, esp. ch. 23; H. Corbin, *Histoire de la philosophie Islamique*, Paris, 1964, esp. ch 5.

²⁹ For recent stages of the discussion, L. Lewisohn (ed.), *Classical Persian Sufism: from its origins to Rumi*, London and New York, 1993; A. Schimmel, *Mystische Dimensionen des Islam: die Geschichte des Sufismus*, Munich, 1993; S.H. Nasr, *The Islamic Intellectual Traditions in Persia*, Richmond, UK, 1996.

³⁰ Plutarch, *Vit. Themist.*, xxix, 3 (or perhaps tapestry); and S.V.R. Cammann, "Religious Symbolism in Persian Arts", *History of Religions*, 15/3 (1976): 193ff. On iconic departure from strict Islamic rules, in any case, see eg., Boyle, *op cit.*, pp. 116ff.

³¹ For long term background eg., T. Nöldeke, *Geschichte der Perser und Araber zur Zeit der Sasaniden, aus des arabischen Chronik des Tabari*, Leiden, 1879.

³² For examples, note Adam Olearius, *Opisanje Púryshestviya v^e Moskovyó i Cherezy, etc.*, Warsaw, 1656 [French: *Relations du Voyage*, 1666] (and, closer to the start of the Russian side of the story, R.N. Frye, "Byzantine and Sassanid Trade with Northeast Russia", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 26 [1972]: 271ff); Riazul Islam, *Indo-Persian Relations*, Calcutta, [1950s].

behind the Bahais), and both the later texts and/or disappearing folk traditions of Zoroastrian, Kurdish and other distinct communities.³³

The complex history of the Persian culture and continuing tendencies within it should help to make us the better prepared to comprehend and address the issues of the present. Many of these issues are reflected in the pages that follow, and I will conclude by alluding only to a few. The ongoing tussle as to the proper character of Farsi, or the currently spoken and written Persian language, is without foreseeable end, given the entrenchment of the Islamic revolution in its Arabicizing tendencies in Iran itself and yet the recent independence of Tajikistan to the northeast, with its own new pretensions as a seat of Farsi-speaking culture.³⁴ And there are now pushes and pulls between those who are content to encourage openness of cultural expressions and those who stress the advisability of controlling them.³⁵ This symposium, as its organizers have envisaged it, consciously embraces the grand opportunity to celebrate and reflect on Iran's extraordinary cultural achievements, and do so independently of politics, in an international forum, and in beautiful Sydney where a thriving expatriate Persian community has been ready and willing to play welcoming host. Mehregan, one of those old yet ongoing Persian festivals and lively expressions of folk culture also worthy of research, was the splendid occasion.

³³ Cf., eg., W.M. Watt, "The Significance of the Early Stages of Imami Shi'ism, in N.R. Keddie (ed.), *Religion and Politics in Iran*, New Haven, 1983, pp. 21ff; D. MacEion, *The sources for Early Bâbi Doctrine and History*, Leiden, 1992; Mehavara Marzbani, Typed interviews with Shah Brahmen, 1994.

³⁴ For a rare Tajik book in English translation eg., Sadruddin Aini, *Pages from my own Story* (For. Lang. Pub. Hse. Trans.), Moscow, 1958.

³⁵ On resources for discussion, Bastani-Parizi, "Les Principes de l'évolution de le tolérance dans l'histoire de Kerman", *idem, Saaye-haa-yê kongerê*, Tehran, 1993, pp. 1ff.