



GREAT BRITAIN XIII. THE BRITISH INSTITUTE OF PERSIAN STUDIES

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The Institute was founded in the spring of 1961, thanks to the vision and commitment of a small group of scholars in Britain, each of whom had a special interest in the arts and letters of Persia. Three individuals were especially active in this regard: Sir Maurice Bowra, the President of the British Academy and Warden of Wadham College, Oxford, Sir Mortimer Wheeler, the Secretary of the British Academy, and Professor (later Sir) Max Mallowan, a noted authority on ancient Iran and Mesopotamia. When Wheeler found the British interest in the foundation of a new Institute was reciprocated by a number of scholars in Iran, he took steps to appoint an archaeologist, David Stronach, as the British Academy Archaeological Attaché in Iran. Stronach, who had recent experience of excavation in Turkey, Iraq and Pakistan, took up the new post in September 1960.

On February 15, 1961 the Council of the British Academy appointed the members of the Governing Council of the Institute and named Mallowan as President (McCall 2001, p. 181). The prospects for the new Institute became



even more of a reality on March 3, 1961 when, at the time of the visit of Queen Elizabeth II to Iran, Dr. Aḥmad Farhād, the Chancellor of Tehran University, announced that the University would be willing to meet the cost of the rent of the Institute's prospective premises (on Kōršid Street, near the campus of Tehran University) for a period of two years.

Early in April Stronach was appointed Director of the Institute, a position he was to hold for the next 19 years. A few months later Brian Spooner, an anthropologist from the University of Oxford, was made Assistant Director. Dr. Spooner's appointment underlined the intention that this seventh "British School" (the oldest being that founded in Athens in 1886) should not become a haven for archaeological studies alone. Instead, partly in keeping with the new concept of Area Studies that was beginning to emerge in the early 1960's, but in deference also to the unusually rich and varied nature of Persian culture, the new Institute was designed, in Max Mallowan's elegant phrase, to provide facilities for the study of Persian civilization "in all its length and breadth, from the remote past to present times, in many aspects, in different disciplines" (McCall 2001, p. 182).

In concert with this precept the more than three hundred members of the Institute in Britain partake of a regular program of lectures in London, which continues to cover a markedly wide range of subjects. It is possibly also true to say that the Institute in Tehran evolved into a somewhat unusual academic center. Based on the presence of its always expandable dining table, its comprehensive library, and a lively program of lectures and exhibitions, it became known for its international and inclusive character – one in which scholars from Persia and many other countries joined in formal, and still more often informal, exchanges of knowledge.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH

Within the first two decades of its existence the Institute acquired an international reputation for its archaeological work. Warm and fruitful cooperation with the Iranian Centre for Archaeological Research and with other archaeological missions working in Persia was a hallmark of this interval. The sites connected with the Institute's main archaeological expeditions – Pasargadae, Sirāf, Tepe Nush-i Jan (Nuš-e Jān) and Shahr-i Qumis (Šahr-e Qumes) – shed light, variously, on the Median, Achaemenid, Parthian, and Early Islamic periods of Iran's millennial past.



At Pasargadae, where Stronach directed three seasons of excavation from 1961-63, particular attention was given to the chronology of the building program of Cyrus the Great (559-530 B.C.E.). It was confirmed for example that, while Cyrus was in a position to introduce prestigious Lydo-Ionian masonry techniques from ca. 546 B.C.E. onwards, he was still not able to complete the fabric of his latest palace, Palace P (Stronach 1978); accordingly, this task fell to his near-successor, Darius I (522-486 B.C.E.). Against expectation, moreover, it turns out that it was Darius, not Cyrus, who erected the cuneiform inscriptions at Pasargadae. At the core of the site the work also demonstrated that the inner palaces, Palace S and Palace P, were designed to be framed by well-watered gardens – a hitherto unprecedented innovation in the annals of ancient Near Eastern palace design. Furthermore, an elegant garden with stone water channels which stood directly in front of Palace P can now be seen to represent the probable prototype of the *čahārbāg* (q.v.) or “fourfold garden” – a core element which recurs in Persian gardens down to the present day.

The Institute’s next major excavation, directed by David Whitehouse from 1966 to 1973, took place at the once renowned port of Sirāf on the Persian Gulf. Near the base of the deposit the work revealed the remains of a substantial, approximately square Sasanian fort of the 4th century C.E. Built directly on top of the fort, and also facing the sea on one side, is the oldest focal structure of the early Islamic township: namely, the Great Mosque. This important building was apparently constructed ca. 800 C.E. and continued in use, subject to various restorations, for perhaps a further 500 years (Whitehouse, 1980). Adjacent to the mosque, and apparently introduced at the same time was an extensive bazaar, which also survived into the 13th century. Other significant early Islamic structures came to light in a major residential quarter, where elegant houses of the 9th and 10th centuries underscore the wealth that attached to the merchants of Sirāf at a time when Sirāfi ships traded as far afield as East Africa and the Far East. Elsewhere the excavations revealed a series of sometimes rock-cut cemeteries, the location of the town’s considerable defences, and a palatial residence (Whitehouse 1974). Over all, the work at Siraf remains a signal model for future research on the early Islamic period.

In 1965 Stronach joined T. Cuyler Young, Jr. in an attempt to locate hitherto unidentified settlements of Median origin in the broad vicinity of the former Median capital, Hamadān. One product of the survey in question was the discovery of the isolated *Ḳaraqān* tomb towers, dated to 460/1066 and 486/1093



respectively (Stronach and Young 1966). Another was the identification of Tepe Nush-i Jan, near Malāyer, as a site with surface pottery of 7th century date. Stronach's subsequent excavations at Tepe Nush-i Jan began in 1967 and continued for five seasons until 1977. By the close of the work it was evident that the compact summit of the natural mound had been occupied by at least four well-preserved monumental mud-brick buildings of the 7th century B.C.E. These included a Central Temple with a still intact fire altar, an imposing Fort, a Columned Hall, and a very conceivably second religious structure referred to as the "Old Western Building" (Stronach and Roaf 1978). As far as the later history of the site is concerned, special interest attaches to the filling and blocking of many areas – an unusual phenomenon which may prove to be related to a rapid concentration of power in Hamadān following the overthrow of Assyria in 612 B.C. (Stronach 1985, p. 837).

Finally, in the interval between 1967 and 1978, four seasons of excavation took place at the site of Shahr-i Qumis, near Dāmḡān. The work was co-directed by John Hansman and David Stronach, under the joint auspices of the National Geographic Society and the Institute. At a site which largely consists of a vast, 7 x 4 km spread of surface pottery, attention was concentrated on a number of widely separated, prominent mud-brick buildings that had chanced to resist flash floods and other forces of erosion. Intriguingly, a number of these structures showed signs of having been converted to secondary, funerary purposes in the waning days of the Parthian settlement. In one converted building the recovery of a hoard of Parthian silver drachmae (Hansman and Stronach 1970a) suggests that the abandonment of the site took place in the early 1st century B.C.E. – a circumstance which fortifies the likelihood that Shahr-i Qumis is to be equated with the long lost Parthian capital, Hecatompylos (q.v.). However this may be, this strategic location on the Great Khorasan Road also enjoyed a more restricted Sasanian occupation (Hansman and Stronach, 1974b) and a similarly restricted Saljuq occupation (Stronach, 1979).

It might be added that the Institute was also able to facilitate a wide range of other field work in Persia. Even if no direct sponsorship was involved, the Institute often served as a base for one or another archaeological expedition (Lamberg-Karlovsky, 1986, p. 1); on occasion, it proved possible to lend vehicles and other forms of equipment to specific projects. Colleagues whom it proved possible to help in various ways included Dr. Clare Goff, who conducted substantial excavations at the site of Baba Jan Tepe in Luristan on



behalf of the University of London during the 1960's and 1970's (Goff, 1978), Dr. Georgina Herrmann, whose field studies in the 1970's set a new standard for the documentation of Sasanian rock-cut reliefs in Iran (Herrmann, 1980/81), and Miss Elisabeth Beazley, A.R.I.B.A., whose detailed study of the character of vernacular architecture in Persia culminated in the publication of a comprehensive and timely monograph on this significant subject (Beazley, 1982).

FELLOWSHIPS

One enduring contribution over the past 40 years has been the Institute's regular provision, on a competitive basis, of annual Fellowships to graduate students and others. Here it may be of value to list a representative selection of Institute Fellows, together with the topics which they elected to pursue. In accord with the Governing Council's decision, especially in recent years, to award a number of grants to established researchers, some of these awards are listed as well.

Anthropology: Peter Andrews (study of nomad tents), David Brooks (ethnography of the Bakhtiāri; q.v.), André Singer (ethnography of the Timuri of Khorasan), Richard Tapper (ethnography of the Šāhsavand).

Archaeology: James Allan (grant, the history of steel in Iran), Warwick Ball (rock-cut monuments south of Bušehr), Martin Charlesworth (ivories in the Muza-ye melli, Tehran; participation in excavations at Ziwiye), Vesta Sarkhosh Curtis (grant, catalogue of the Sasanian coins in the Muza-ye melli), Clare Goff (excavations at Tall-i Nokhodi; survey in Luristan), Rosalind Howell (survey in the Malāyer plain), Edward Keall (Parthian architecture; excavations at Qal'a-ye Yaz-digird), Paul Luft (grant, Qajar rock reliefs), Peter Morgan (Far Eastern ceramics in the Persian Gulf), Stuart Swiny (survey in Kurdistan), Andrew Williamson (early Islamic trade routes in southern Persia).

Architecture: Robert Hillenbrand (Islamic tomb towers), Bernard O'Kane (Timurid architecture), Susan Ross (wind towers of Yazd).

History: Stephanie Cronin (grant, Iran in the time of Reza Shah), Edmond Herzig (economic history of Safavid Iran), Charles Melville (natural hazards in Iranian cities), Isabel Miller (history of Yazd, 1335-1501), David Morgan (Mongol rule in Iran), Vanessa Martin (the role of the Ulema in the Constitutional Revolution, 1905-1909), Alexander Morton (Qajar historians).



Literature: Michael Loraine (the poetry of Bahār), Robert Wells (the life and works of Jelāl-e Āl-e Aḥmad).

Philosophy: John Cooper (the semantics of Shi'i osÂul al-fiqh and falsafa).

Religion: Robert Gleave (grant, religion and society in Qajar Iran), Sarah Stewart (devotional life of the Zoroastrians), Christopher Weightman (Aḥl-e Ḥaqq communities in western Iran).

IRAN

The principal organ for the regular publication of the Institute's own researches and other important scholarly work has been the journal *Iran*, which first appeared in 1963. From the outset it has maintained a high standard in the quality of its material and presentation. The contents cover the full range of the Institute's interests and include reports on excavations, surveys of standing monuments, and specialist articles on many aspects of Iranian history and culture. The area covered is extensive and variable, including, as it does, all topics within specific periods ranging from the Palaeolithic down to modern times.

Contributors to *Iran* have been correspondingly diverse. But it may nevertheless be apt to mention the extent to which former Presidents of the Institute have authored important articles. Sir Max Mallowan, who always insisted that preliminary reports on fieldwork should be given every opportunity to appear at the earliest possible moment, was himself a notable contributor, as was his successor, Mr. Basil Gray. The Institute's third President, Sir Denis Wright, continues to be one of the journal's most reputed and productive authors. Another distinguished contributor is Professor A. K. S. Lambton, whose first article in the journal, "The Evolution of the Iqta in Medieval Iran," was published in 1967 and whose latest to-date, on Sir John Malcolm and *The History of Persia*, was published in 1995.

While each issue of the journal normally includes a range of material, including, whenever possible, accounts of current work and excavation in Iran, one volume, XXI, was dedicated to the publication of Michael Roaf's doctoral dissertation on "Sculptures and Sculptors at Persepolis." This departure reflects both the significance of this innovative study – and the Institute's longstanding interest in the Achaemenid impact on the ancient world.



The founder Honorary Editor of *Iran* was Dr. Laurence Lockhart, who designed the journal's attractive and practical format. His breadth of scholarship enabled him, single-handedly, to cover the wide field of the journal's interests during the first four years of its existence. He was succeeded by Professor Edmund Bosworth, formerly Professor of Arabic at the University of Manchester, who, almost 40 years later, continues, most fortunately, to act as the Honorary Editor for articles connected with the Islamic period. The pre-Islamic and archaeological material was originally the responsibility of Dr. Georgina Herrmann, who played a large part in establishing the international reputation of the journal over a period of 17 years, and, from 1983, the same charge has fallen to Dr. Vesta Curtis, who not only continues to serve as yet another Honorary Joint Editor of distinction but who was also, for a time, the Institute's Honorary Secretary as well.

Work continues towards the publication of the Final Reports on the Institute's excavations at Sirāf and Nush-i Jan. Those fascicules that have appeared to-date are *Siraf III: The Congregational Mosque* by David Whitehouse (1980); *Nush-i Jan III: The Small Finds* by John Curtis (1984) and *Siraf XV: The Coins and Monumental Inscriptions* by Nicholas Lowick (1985). Several further Sirāf fascicules are expected to appear very shortly, as will *Nush-i Jan I: The Major Buildings of the Median Settlement* by David Stronach and Michael Roaf.

CONCLUSION

While there have been restrictions on the Institute's activities in Iran since the Islamic Revolution, and while there has been no resident Director since the last holder of this post, Martin Charlesworth, returned to Britain in 1987, it is striking that the Institute's purpose-built building in Alvand Street, in Golhak (to which the Institute moved from its previous long-term premises in Taḳt-e Jamšid Avenue in 1977), is nonetheless in active use. Designed by the respected Iranian architect, Rezā Khāzeni, the new building includes a handsome auditorium and ample space for the Library. Under the expert oversight of the current Honorary Secretary and Honorary Librarian, Dr. Robert Gleave, and under the immediate care of the Institute's Librarian, Mrs. Mahbanou Adle, the books in the library continue to be supplemented by new books from abroad – and the collection as a whole continues to attract regular users. In addition, the recently refurbished hostel once again offers accommodation for visiting scholars and students.

It is only appropriate to add that, during the years of reduced activity in Iran



members of the Institute in Britain made every effort, through a variety of means, including lectures given at universities, museums and schools, and through the more recent introduction of major research projects and sponsored conferences and workshops, to underline the continued importance and usefulness of Persian studies. In this regard a particular debt is owed to the successive officers of the Institute in London including, most recently, the late Mr. Desmond Harney, who is now succeeded as President by Professor James Allan. Finally, it should not escape notice that in 2001, for the first time in many years, the Tehran Institute was again home to a program of public lectures – a program in which Dr. John Curtis and Professor Robert Hillenbrand both participated.

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